GAMBIT

The Seven Deadly Chess Sins

Scotland's youngest grandmaster discusses the most common causes of disaster in chess

Jonathan Rowson

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D i c tion:
To my father, for his efforts to make the world more beautiful and showing me the futility of worry.

Contents

Symbols

+	check
++	double ch e k
#	chec k ate
!!	b r liant move
!	g o d move
!?	interesting move
?!	dubious move
?	bad move
??	blunder
+—	White is winning
±	White is much bett e
;	White is slightly better
=	equal position
:	Black is slightly bett e
∓	Black is much better
—+	Black is winning
Ch	ch a pionship
1-0	the g a e ends in a w i for White
½-½	the game ends in a draw
0 1	t e g a e ends in a win for Black
(D)	see next diagram

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Extended Preface: The Map, But Not The Territory

In chess, one realizes that all education is ultimately self-education.
GERALD ABRAHAMS, The Chess Mind

This extended preface is useful background reading to help you to understand the chess sins that follow. It includes my thoughts on the nature of chess and the sources of error, most of which, I think, are built in to the way the game is constituted.

Of course, any sort of theorizing about chess is a sticky undertaking, and not really knowing where to start such a book, I begin with obscurity. It is my hope, however, that she will be the midwife of clarity. Consider the following situation:

There you are, writing down your moves, pressing your clock, moving your pieces.

Or moving the pieces?

Well there you are, your brains, your emotions, and your entire nervous system.

Your ego and your rating.

And your opponent.

The adrenaline rushes past; did you feel it?

Was it just me? ... But didn't you see it, that line with...

And all these variations, tick tock, tock tick.

It just doesn't feel right, but I know this moment will never come again.

Now think, think, I've got to think, I think. I can count but that's never enough.

The tide is turning and I'm losing it; I must try harder.

Who's tocking? Who's in charge here?

Really? - Does he know this?

Oh he forgot! What do you mean he changes every day? So who took over?

Oh they did, did they? Well we'll sort them out...

What do you mean we can't?

They're where? The nature of the game? But it's urgent; how can I reach them?

What do you mean they are always present? Why can't I see them?

I can?

There you are again, winding down your moves, pressing your clock, moving your pieces.

And so it goes on...

Chess Theology

It is true that we cannot be free from sin, but at least let our sin not always be the same.
ST TERESA OF AVILA

Sin, and lots of it, that's where this book is heading, but how do you understand this word 'sin' and which sort of sins do you think are most prevalent in chess? Well, all of the chess sins I have selected are implicit in the above outburst and I trust you will identify them once you've read the book. However, although I believe an understanding of each sin will illuminate your understanding of your own mistakes, a prior understanding of what I mean by 'sin' in chess is perhaps even more important.

It is tempting to delve into a protracted theological discussion at this stage, but I will spare your scruples and simply state my own interpretation. **(Chess) sin is a misreading of (chess) reality.** The following is not intended to be in any way religious, and is surprisingly useful for an understanding of chess.

According to The Lutterworth Dictionary of the Bible: '"Sin' represents an intrusion into creation and into human experience. It does not belong; it is a surd in the human equation, it has no ground, no place, no rationale... It is a corruption of the human condition and a impairment of the human possibility... It roots in prideful self-centredness and comes to expression through a misguided will and value system.

If affects al persons, individually and co r o-rately..." Also, the most common word for sin in the Old Test a ent c a es the prim a y notion of "missing the m a k or way or goal" Sin in this sense means 'failure', 'fault' and 'e r or'. In the Gospel of John, sin is the opposite of k owledge, and 'grace' is the remedy for sin. The use of the term 'sin' usu a ly suggests a sin-f l condition, not simply a sinful act.

So f om all this (and more) it seems that to use that gl o my shadow of a claim: 'we a e all sinners' is not to say that we a e all 'bad', 'im-moral' and habitu a ly evil but just that some-how we 'don't get it'. Our relation to reality is one of f nd a ental ignorance rather than moral corruption. Our attitude to this predicament needn't be one of sh a e and guilt but an accep-tance of our limita t ons and a des i e to make the most of ourselves in spite of them.

Much more could be said here, but let's imagine the re a ity under consideration is 'the reality of the chess g a e' Some may say that to 'misread' chess is to t eat it as an **art** when it is really a g a e, or vice versa. Perhaps mis-reading chess may also be playing much too quickly, because somehow t e essence of the g a e is distorted if we don't think. However, the 'what is chess?' question is somewhat tire-some and probably a complete waste of t me. I suspect that there is little to be g a ned by seek-ing a neat catego r of human expe r ence where this pursuit could feel at home. I can't accept that chess has an 'essence' of any sort and thi n it is destined to rem a n slippe r and nomadic if it is forced unwillingly into a cage of de f ni-t ons, which more o f en than not tu r s out to be **a** labyrinth in any case. That s a d, there is much to be gained by loo k ng closely at why we a e so f a cinated by chess and why we keep com-ing back for more. This approach may not tell us of 'the reality of the chess game', a suming t at there is such a thing, but it can tell us of our experience of this reality, which is at least the only reality we know, and maybe the only real-ity there is.

First of a l, I think we all feel that chess s mehow makes us happy or at least helps us to escape f om suffering. So said Dr T a nsch: " hess, like love, like music, has the power to m a e men happy." However, few know of the context of this claim, which is much more help f l here: "Chess is a fo r of intellectual pr o uctiveness, therein lies its peculi a ch a . Intellectual productiveness is one of the g eat-est joys - if not the greatest - of human exis-tence. It is not everyone who can write **a** play, or build a bridge, or even make a good joke. But in chess everyone can, indeed must, be intellec-tually pr o uctive and so can sh a e in this select delight."

I'm not saying that chess *is* 'intellectu a pro-ductiveness', but don't you think there is some-thing compelling about T a nsch's claim? I mean we can be 'intellectually pr o uctive' in o u p u uit of victory, in our love of chess b au t, in our devoted prep a ations, in our beery post-mortems. And what a e the no r al prerequi-sites for this intellectual productiveness to take place? A chess set, a clock, a score-sheet and a pen, an opponent and, prim a ly, ourselves. Ourselves. We a e the main instruments of the chess reality. We make it happen. It is through our thoughts, emotions, nerves, hopes, fe a s, judgements, plans, vision and much more that chess a fords us the opportunity to be intellec-tually productive.

And here is my point. If **sin is a misreading** of **reality and we are the main instruments** of **the chess reality, it is through a better under-standing** of **ourselves that we come** to **under-stand 'sin' in chess.** We create the g a e of chess through the process of playing but the process of playing calls upon, principally, our thoughts and o u emotions. **If** we a e to b less 'sinful' in our chess games we need to watch our thoJghts and emotions, the i symptoms and the i sources, ve r c a efully i deed. Firstly, b-cause thoughts and emotions by their very na-ture a e inclined to 'go by themselves' and secondly because when we a e playing chess we *are* our thoughts and emotions. The qu a ity of these, and their appropriateness, dete r ines your chess s t engths on any given day.

Given that this is a plausible account of the role of 'sin' in chess, what a e we to make of the title of this book? Well, to be honest its main at-traction is that it's quite catchy and hopefully appealing to a wide readership, but beyond that it's a bit m sleading because the Ch r stian t adi-tion has tended to refer to the sins in question (pride, greed, lust, gluttony, envy, anger and sloth) as 'capital' rather than 'deadly' sins. In

this context, 'capital' does not imply 'mort a' sins worthy of death or capital punis h ent. Rather, as Thomas Aquinas suggested, its sense is "principal, leader, director" and the capit a sins a e sources or fountains of other sins, l a gely because the i ends such as wealth a e so at t active and require other sins for their realization.

OK, so how is t s going to help your chess?

The Seven Sins and What Makes them so Deadly

Before pr o eeding, I recommend that you look at the beginning and end of the following seven chapters to have some idea of what each sin refers to.

I a quite sure that there a e many ways in which chess-players can be considered sin f l in the convention a usage of the te r . For st a ters there's a fair a ount of 'pride' and 'envy' related to a player's opinion of his playing s t ngth with respect to others; this is related to ***Egoism.*** 'Gluttony' is in evidence, if not in beer and cu r y consumption t en only t h ough ***Materialism*** on the chessbo a d. 'Greed' h a s i l a i t e s with ***Perfectionism***, 'lust' in ***Wanting***, and maybe 'anger' when we lose the plot (***Looseness***), or perhaps just when we lose.

However, this is not 'sin' as I understand it. Assuming we can make sense of a 'sin f l condition' in life then there should be way to apply this suitably to chess. My t a k is therefore to show the ways in which we a e pathologically inclined to sin in chess, even if we don't actually commit any sinful acts. **The sins stem from a condition we are all in, but they are the sources of error rather than errors as such. So the seven deadly chess sins, if I've selected them well, ought to be the types of psychological failings that lead to further errors on the chessboard in the overwhelming majority of chess games.**

In any case, I have come to think that the seven 'sins' below have a lot to answer for.

I don't think it's fully possible to t ace a l error in chess back to these serpentine seven, but I do think that the vast majority of mistakes, blunders and c a es of erroneous re a oning stem f om certain psychological pathologies that we a e **all** prone to. You may i m ediately identify yourself with one or more of the sins in pa r icul a and this will be related to your p a ticul a personality and attitude to chess. However, I believe that the sins detailed below are contained in the ve r nature of chess and the way we have come to understand it. Therefore my aim in this book is to suggest ways in which we can become more aw a e of our predicament, and take measures to prevent our sinful condition leading to mistakes. In other words, I believe that there is no way you can avoid these seven sins to some degree as long as you play competitive chess, but it's my job to give you a better understanding of precisely how such 'sinful chess' comes about, and what you can do about it.

Sin	Common Symptoms	Main Antidote
1: **Thinking**	Confusion, patte r li m tations, lack of faith in intuition, 'bureaucracy'	Intuition
2: Blinking	Missing key moments, lack of 't end sensitivity' and 'moment sensitivity'	Sensitivity
3: Wanting	Attachment to results, c a elessness, 'chalking it up', expectation	Gumption
4: **Materialism**	Misevaluating, lack of dyn a sm, oversights	Pl u a ism
5: **Egoism**	'Forgetting' the opponent, fe a, impracticality	Prophylaxis
6: **Perfectionism**	Time- t ouble, 'j a lust', 'moralizing', 'copy-cat cr i e'	Con f dence
7: Looseness	'Losing the plot', dri f ing, 'neural hijackings', 'tension t ansfere nce'	Concen t ation

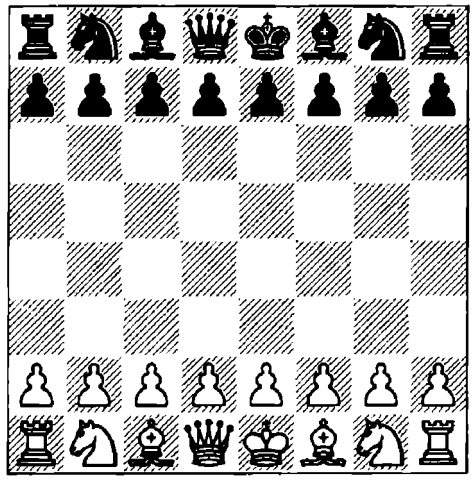
Fin a ly, I should say that my main di f culty in writing this book has been t ying to keep these sins distinctive. I t ink they a e distinct, but it seems to me that chess e r ors rarely, if ever, o cur for a y single reason and so a single mis t e can often be at t ibuted to more than one sin.

So, for ex a ple, too much ***Thinking*** may be seen as ***Perfectionism***, m ssing key moments (***Blinking***) can lead to d f ing (***Looseness***) and so on. Hopefully the ex a ples and explanations given will allow you to identi f each sin cle a ly and distinctly but I'm sure you will also see that the sins a e s t angely complement a y. Problems arising f om your emotions and thought-processes seem to be rather incestuous, and the b i ths of many m stakes on the chessbo a d are delivered f om an orgy of sin.

Caissa's Grace

Nothing happens. Nobody comes, nobody goes. It's awful.
SAMUEL BECKETT, *Waiting for Godot*

Look at that battle you are involved in; you are caught in it: you are it.
J. KRISHNAMURTI



I guess you've seen this posi t on before.

What do you think? Any thoughts? Does it s t ike you that nothing is happening, that the position is absolutely static? Nothing is happening! Of course if we move a few pieces and integrate the forces we can observe some 'action' on the b a d. I don't know about you, but even then, when I strive to disentangle myself f om the ideas and look at the bo a d, there's a s t a ge feeling of inertia. When I reach to m a e a move I feel there is a signi f cant event t ng place, but when I forget I'm a chess-player and just ***look*** the re seems to be nothing more than a mere con f guration of wood. All the action is created in my head by rules and judgements that have become habitual over the ye a s. In ma a ng th s realization I feel some emotion and, as usual, this emotion leads to further thought.

you do. Computers have no sense of the signi f-cance of the contest. You do. Computers don't have egos, don't feel fe a , don't feel time-pressure, but you do. Computers don't enjoy chess but, I hope, you do.

So, back to the diagram, and the con f guration of wood it symbolizes. Let me borrow a Taoist idea to explain why this position is so fascinating. It is called ' t e value of the inde f-nite' and, suitably, is conveyed by considering an uncarved block of wood. Such a block has not been made into any p a ticular object and serves no de f n te function. It has no distinctive shape and o f ers no obvious aesthe t c value. So if it's useless and plain you might suppose it's not worth much, that it lacks value. The only way to make use of it is to c a ve it in a ce r ain way, paint it, varnish it, make something of it, right? No. Give the matter fu r her consideration and you see immense value in this unc a ved block of wood. When you c a ve it, you gain something, but some t ing else is lost. It may become one t ing, but it loses its original po-tential for b ing an in f nite number of di f erent things. So, as Santo and Steele put it, in their *Guidebook to Zen and The Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*: "A valuable actuality is gained, but an even more v a uable reservoir of potenti-ality is lost".

Do you see where t is is going? Think of the starting position, and think of yourself. What if the block of wood could be given a de f nite fo r *and* keep its in f ni t po t ntiality. Then you could have the value of both the chosen fo r and the limitless abundance of fo r s. Is this possible?

With the bl o k of wood? No. D u ing a chess game? No. With the game of chess? Yes. With yourself? Yes. We will return to this idea, but for now just t nk of the many ways it applies to chess. Consider the condescending quip that "pawns don't move backw a ds", for example. When you play 1 e4 to improve the scope of your bishop and queen, you a e i r ep a ably weakening the e-pawn and the squ a es f3, f4, d3 and d4 (they lose t e suppo r of the e-pawn). Of course the ultimate agony for the would-be Taoist is zugzwang; the equivalent of an axe-man forcing you, on pain of death, to c a ve the block of wood. What would you do in the cir-cumstances?

Putting that to one side, I think two main things would s t ke the alien who found himself observing a chess to u n a ent. The f rst is that the output of eve r game is di f erent because the input of the players v a ies every time. The second is that the exte r al process seems ex-actly the same. The astonishment is this: thou-sands of earthlings spend thousands of ho u s toiling over this squ a e bo a d with c a ved blocks of wood and see m ngly without reason, and, what's worse, j ust when it seems this f it-less task has been exhausted, they come back later, set up t ese pieces into what looks like a starting position, and do it all over again!

I trust a sympathetic alien would come to ap-preciate the delights of such absurdity. They may also be touched by t at aspect of the g a e which has become even more mesmerising in this computer age: the fact that chess, despite much fe a to the con t a y, appe a s to be inex-haustible. This has always s t ck me a magic a given the f nite number of squ a es and pieces, and the f xed r les of chess. But I think even more inspiring is the human dimension of the g a e - the way that we feel compelled to ret u to this 'unc a ved' chessbo a d with the u ge to give the game a de f nite fo r . Of course this analogy is not perfect - analogies never a e - but my answer to the axeman would be a c a e-fully c a ved chessboard and pieces.

More seriously, it is what we bring to the chess struggle that determines the outcome of the game, both in terms of the qu a ity of the contest and the f nal result. The 'shape' you give to the chess position is an external mani-festa t on of what is going on inside you. If you like, t e starting position is your bl o k of wo o , a block that the game allows us to ret u to. Your thoughts and emotions are your scalpel and v a ish. The dance of yo u pieces in front of you is your work in progress and you have a de f nite fo r to your wood when a result is agreed. What interests me, and what this book is about, is how we can make best use of our scalpel and v a ish. Whatever your s t ength a a player, it is the way in which you h a ness your thoughts and emotions that matters. So forget, or rather put aside, the impo r ance of tactical sharpness, opening prep a ation, 'pawn power' and all the technical ways of improving your chess. Of co u se there a e limitless ways to

improve your understanding of the game, but this book is about helping you to recognize the sources of error as they arise in your thoughts and emotions. It is about promoting self-awareness and challenging our conventional ways of thinking. So I am asking: how are we shaped by the chess struggle, and how should we shape the chess struggle in return?

Chess and Personality

Grandma to Grandson: "Why are you scratching yourself?"
Grandson: "Because nobody else knows where I itch."

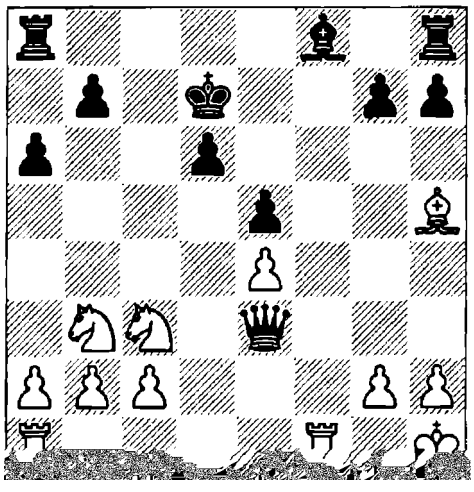
So if your chess moves are an external manifestation of who you are at a given point in time, there may be a useful relation between types of personality and types of chess mistakes. Moreover, since this book is about sin as the source of error, it would seem that different personality-types would be more inclined to certain sins. In this respect a 1400 player who tends to suffer from *Perfectionism* and *Looseness* may have more in common with a 2400 suffering from the same sins than with a fellow 1400 who is constantly guilty of *Blinking* and *Egoism*.

Me? – Kasparov?

Daydream, Edinburgh 2000

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 ♘f6 4 ♘c3 cxd4 5 ♘xd4 a6 6 ♗e3 e5 7 ♘b3 ♘g4!?/? 8 **♗c4 ♘xe3 9 fxe3 ♗e6 10 ♗d5 ♕b6 11 0-0 ♘d7 12 ♕h5 ♘f6 13 ♗xe6 ♕xe3+ 14 ♔h1 ♘xh5 15 ♗xf7+ ♔d7? 16 ♗xh5** *(D)*

B



I reached this position while throwing around a few pieces in time to some music. I forget what I was listening to, but I'd guess it was fairly random, probably some sort of jazz. In any case, I had just finished reading an interview with David Bronstein in which he was talking of his sadness at the lack of creativity at the higher levels of chess these days. Having a great deal of respect for Bronstein's views, I began to daydream that I was beating Kasparov with Bronstein watching in approval, hailing the delights of my creative genius. However, I have perhaps even more respect for Kasparov's chess and so in a strange feat of simultaneity I somehow felt that I was also Kasparov, and that he would approve of my play too. Anyway, it's all a bit dreamy and confusing, but when I played the unusual and highly suspect 7... 1 g4 I was Black and Kasparov was pulling faces of amused contempt, while I was pleased to b defying conventional wisdom about controlling the d5-square. Then after 13 ♗xe6 (actually an error, as 13 ♖xf6 wins) I was definitely White and Kasparov looked confident that he had found and played White's idea while also looking distinctly worried that Black may soon be mated by a relative unknown like me. This train of thought was disturbed by a phone call after White's 16th move, and 'Kasparov' was let off the hook. Dreams can be wonderfully obscure, but I digress.

The main function of this little dream scenario is to provoke a response from the reader, and consider what this response suggests about your personality and its relation to chess. Many would deem it irrelevant and unhelpful, others might find it vaguely amusing but rather contrived. In any case, your reaction will be a judgement based on your personality, so please take this chance to think of your chess judgement in general, your attitude to the game, and how it is shaped by your personality. To make the most of this book, it will be helpful for you to take a while to consider whether you are inclined to 'think' or 'feel' your way to solutions in daily life. Do you take responsibility for your actions? In what ways are you self-deceptive? Do you generally get upset about details or obsessive about getting things right? Whatever your answers, the way you approach chess can tell you a lot about who you are, which is a good thing, assuming it's something you want to know.

Personally, I improved my chess a lot when I considered my personality and how it has changed. In general I a inquisitive, restless, ide a is t c and hopelessly impractical. In a chess sense this manifests itself in an acute sense of why I make the mistakes I do, but it a so gives r se to a lack of competitive drive for I am o f en too interested in ideas to be a serious chess f ghter. Moreover, when playing I have a very g o d sense of how the g a e m ght develop and thus evaluate well, but the result of the contest is not always my main concern so I often lack resoluteness at critical moments and·am prone to losing t e plot when the g a e ceases to follow my idea of how it ought to b .

Rethinking Chess Psychology

We must begin with the subjective.
J.P. SAR T E

I must confess that I may be getting out of my depth in what follows. I have no form a t aining in psychology or neuroscience and the ideas I put fo r a d here should be considered with due c a e. Nevertheless, I feel con f dent enough to sh a e them, and hope the reader will be ch a itable in his inte r retation of what follows.

Chess has long been of great interest to psychologists because it provides a rela t vely f xed system in which to analyse human thought. However, as f a as I can tell, most of t e major acade m c studies of chess miss much that is essential to the ways that a chess-player thinks and feels. The following make up a l a ge part of the most widely documented psychological re- s a ch into chess: Dj akov, Rud . and Pe t ovs k (1927), Abrahams (1951), De Groot (1966), Chase and S i on (1973), Holding and Reynolds (1982) and Robbins et a . (1996). I don't intend to consider them as a group, nor to downplay some of the ex t emely valuable insights into the chess mind that their work produced, but I think they a e guilty of thinking of chess as a a most exclusively cognitive pursuit, where moves a e chosen and posi t ons understood only on the basis of mental patterns a d inferences. Most of the work concerns the recons t ction of bo a d positions, the role of memory, the impor t nce of pattern-recognition and empirical considerations about the development of intuition or 'vision' in chess. Much of this work is interes t ng and use f l for under- s t nding the wor k ngs of the human mind, but I feel that in neglecting to consider the ways in which p a ticipation in t e hum a s t ggle in- f uences cognitive func t on, these authors over- l o k a most crucial fea t re of the chess contest: **emotion.**

To b fa i , they all make some mention of the role of emotion in chess; for example, the S o viet study of 1927 includes 'disciplined emotions', 'self-con t ol' and 's t ong nerves' in the i list of 'Im p r ant Ch a acteristics for Success at the Higher L vels of Chess'. Even so, emotion seems to be considered somehow separate f om the way in which the chess mind f nctions. It is su r rising that this has remained the case for so long because Blumenfeld's writings in the 1930s showed that a chess-player's thin k ng h a a exception a emotion a content comp a ed to other types of thin k ng. Even K ogius's cl a - sic ***Psychology in Chess*** (1976), which m a es considerable men t on of emo t on a d devotes a chapter to 'Emotions in Chess' declines to develop any systematic theory of the relations h p between 'chess emotion' and 'chess thin k ng'. A few anecdotes a e given, but it seems that emotion is assumed to b a tempor a y and f eeting phenomenon t at we should con t ol when neces s a , rather than something that is con- s t n t y present a d integrated with o u thin k ng pr o esses.

In Chapter 5 of ***The Psychology of Chess***, H a ton and Wason give an excellent ove r iew of most of the psychological rese a ch given above ut then make an important qu a i f ca- t on: "It seems to us that the theo r es a s o iated with bo a d reconst r ction experimen t represent an ide a ized pict u e of master chess which may be m sleading. Playing chess (at any level) is not just the cerebr a activity of unconscious se a ch, guided by 100,000 patte r s in the long- te r memory. So o f en, as any player will agree, it is hopes and fe a s which seem to in f uence Lhe choice of a move. Notoriously, t e weaker player w i l tend to exaggerate both his advan t ges and his disadvan t ges, t n k ng that he has a win in a go o posi t on, and a loss with a b a one. This emotional liability seems less obvious at higher levels..."

My f rst thought here is related to what this might mean for the abilities needed to play

chess well. With perhaps the same thought, GM Jonathan Levitt, in his original and engaging book *Genius in Chess*, devises an equation: your chess rating, given many years of intense effort, will tend to approximate to ten times your IQ plus a thousand. This is nothing if not controversial, and if it's not fundamentally mistaken then it's at least incomplete. Like the above authors, Levitt acknowledges that some degree of emotional control is essential for chess success but then more or less ignores it in his equation. He does say that "Concentration and the ability to resist emotional forces are traits that are strongly linked to intelligence" but surely not IQ? I don't know of any IQ test where your ability to stay calm is measured. No, if the Levitt equation is to work at all, and we certainly shouldn't dismiss such a brave formulation out of hand, then other aspects of intelligence must be included, in particular, **'emotional intelligence'**.

This term became widespread after the massive success of Daniel Goleman's book by the same name in 1995, with the subtitle *Why it can matter more than IQ*. Many know of the concept of IQ, and have tried to link it to chess but 'EQ', emotional intelligence, is a relatively new concept and one which has great value when we come to consider the common causes of chess error. In fact I have come to think that there probably is some sort of a link between chess ability and 'intelligence', but we need a much more inclusive and fluid idea of intelligence if we are to make the notion plausible. Moreover, as I hope my illustration of the seven deadly chess sins will demonstrate, there is reason to think not only that your ability to recognize and utilize your emotions is every bit as important as the way you think, but that the two, thinking and feeling, are inextricably linked.

As well as Goleman, Damasio (*Descartes' Error, The Feeling of What Happens*), Le Doux (*The Emotional Brain*), Greenfield (*The Private Life of the Brain*) and many others have begun to argue that **all thought** h a **some emotional content**. Dr Damasio, for example, proposes that there is no single chemical for emotion, and that emotion is made up of a whole landscape of chemicals and processes throughout the physical body that mesh with associations laid down all over the brain. This proposal was based on a study of patients with a certain type of brain damage (prefrontal amygdala circuit) that didn't directly affect cognitive abilities or IQ. These people were in some ways rather like *Star Trek*'s Mr Spock, the ultra-rational half-Vulcan, who could reason brilliantly, but suppressed all emotions. The curious thing suggested by Damasio's work is that the real life Spock would have problems making decisions and might be a liability to the Starship Enterprise.

Despite the intact intelligence of Damasio's patients, they made disastrous choices in their business and personal lives and would agonize unbearably over simple decisions like when to make an appointment. Dr Damasio argues that their decisions are so bad because they can no longer call upon their 'emotional learning' which is stored (largely) in the prefrontal amygdala. Without this source of feeling, everything presented to consciousness takes on a sort of dull neutrality and we have no emotional prompts that allow us to feel preference or inclinations. Evidence along these lines led Damasio (and others since) to the counter-intuitive position that **feelings are typically indispensable for rational decisions**. These feelings point us in the proper direction, where dry logic can then take over. So the bottom line is that the emotional brain is every bit as involved in reasoning as the thinking brain.

To reinforce this point, consider that experiments have shown people to be utterly averse to drinking juice from a brand new sterilized urine collection bottle, that you couldn't pay people to eat fudge baked in the shape of dog faeces, and that although saliva is not disgusting as long as it is in our mouths, most people won't eat from a bowl of soup into which they have spat. We are not nearly as rational as we tend to think we are, and in general we are led by our feelings. Many of us invent rationalizations to explain our actions or decisions to ourselves or to others because we don't want to think of ourselves as being at the mercy of feelings. Indeed, we pejoratively refer to such people (which is, in fact, all of us) as 'irrational'.

If this thinking is on the right tracks, it means that every time you think a thought over the chessboard you also feel some emotion, and

this shouldn't be surprising! Given that chess, we think, was devised to simulate warfare, it is entirely consistent that we should feel emotional in the heat of battle. Indeed, I believe this gets to the heart of what's misguided about these psychological studies, which is that they are abstracted from this battle. A chess-player doesn't 'think' in the same way when he is removed from the emotional strain of the contest because his circumstances do not compel him to 'feel' the same emotions. The mistake these psychologists made is to think that cognitive function operates entirely separately from emotion, and therefore much the same in an experiment as over the board, but in fact there is every reason to think that a chess-player's thinking is drenched in emotion. So, to whoever it was that depicted chess as a 'paradise of rationality', I would answer that such a utopia may exist, but it is built upon emotional foundations.

Old Habits; New Solutions

Everything in the universe is within you. Ask all from yourself.
RUMI

We have come to the end of this preface, but we are just at the beginning of the chess book.

I have suggested that a good way of thinking of the value of chess is as an opportunity to experience the pleasures of 'intellectual productiveness'. I further suggested that we are the instruments of this productiveness and we bring character to the game of chess by our personal thoughts and emotions. Because of the complex nature of the game, and the even more complex nature of ourselves, we are all in a 'sinful condition' in that we don't have a clear or conclusive conception of the game and how we should approach it. This condition gives rise to certain sins that are the sources of error in chess. Our relative liability to these sins is related to our personality, but we share the fact that we all have a mind/body constitution that reaches chess decisions on the basis of both thought and emotion.

The following chapters are about these thoughts and emotions. For most, if not all, readers, decision-making processes will be largely habitual and resistant to change. So my emphasis will not just be on learning to think and feel differently, but on **unlearning** those processes that are clearly detrimental to playing good moves. To be effective, this will require an open mind and honesty on behalf of the reader. Consequently, I hope the following chapters will give you a good map to navigate your way through your thoughts and feelings as they relate to chess, but I do not know the territory, which of course is entirely your own.

1 Thinking

Modern man likes to pretend that his thinking is wide awake. But this wide-awake thinking has led us into the mazes of a nightmare in which the torture chambers are endlessly repeated in the mirrors of reason.
OCTAVIO PAZ, *The Labyrinth of Solitude*

Thinking is a very messy process, and it leads to all sorts of errors. Indeed this sin is the most fundamental of the seven, and the most important to be aware of, but it's also the most difficult to explain. If your first reaction is to think that there is no way you can play this game without thinking and that to think can't possibly be a sin, I refer you to my interpretation of sin in the Preface, without which the following might be rather confusing. I am not saying that it's 'wrong' or 'bad' or 'blameworthy' to think, rather it is because of the fact that we do think, and the way we do it, that error occurs. It is the nature of our thinking that leads to mistakes, and so it is well worth examining how we think, and the ways in which thinking might limit us.

The most striking problem with 'thinking' is that it involves so many different things. You are thinking as you read this page, but you are also absorbing, considering and assessing. You are thinking when you cook, but you are also creating, inventing and experimenting. You are thinking when you walk, but not about your walking; you're more likely to be imagining, worrying, foreseeing and navigating. Basically you are thinking all the time, you can't stop; it's in your nature to think.

You are thinking when you play chess too, but in doing so you are evaluating, remembering, judging, analysing, comparing, intuiting, searching, doubting, timing, gauging, provoking, understanding, orientating, complicating, simplifying, planning, pre-empting, wondering, wandering, and so on. As we saw in the Preface, thinking is also inextricably linked with emotion, in which case you may also be worrying, fearing, trusting, hoping, regretting, self-recriminating, panicking, over-heating, etc.

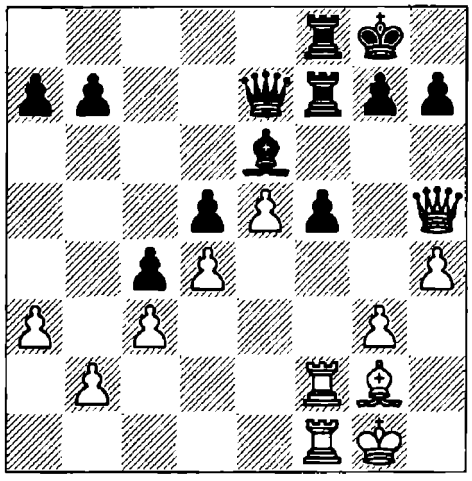
So when you *think* in chess, what do you do? I think you do so many different things that we should be careful with our usage of this generic term. If this were just a semantic matter it would be incredibly tedious, but it's much more than that and has considerable practical value. When you realize that 'thinking' means so many different things, your ability to understand your own thought is significantly enhanced. So the first aspect of this sin is the inclination to limit ourselves with the view that chess is all about 'thinking', seen as a coldly rational and fairly simple process at which some are better than others. This mistaken view leads to a misunderstanding of why we err and a misguided view of what we need to do to improve. Perhaps i we could somehow see the command 'Think!' as a command to *choose* a means of thinking, it would open up a world of possibilities on and off the chessboard.

This chapter will include a discussion of many different ways of thinking in chess, with primary reference to the role of pattern-recognition in chess ability and the emotional aspects of thought. I will develop an argument to suggest that although your store of chess patterns may largely determine your chess understanding, your ability to 'think' in different ways can be significantly developed. Moreover, I will suggest that *all* chess thinking is ultimately evaluative and that we should therefore face up to the fact that we should be making more use of our intuition by 'thinking' less and 'feeling' more. This in turn involves trusting your unconscious mind.

This chapter is a long and difficult journey. I must confess at the outset that clarity is not its defining feature and there are few easy answers or certainties here. I have done my best to keep the reader on board, but since I had difficulty understanding the subject matter myself, lucidity was hard to come by. I can only hope that

what follows remains interesting and instructive, given that it concerns a confusing, but vitally significant subject.

W



Rozentalis – Appel
Bundesliga 199314

T ink about **this position.**

It's White to play; w h t comes immediately to mind? (White's e5-pawn? Black's bishop?)

Why do you have those thoughts and not others? (Pattern-recognition? Experience?)

How are you thinking? (Passive absorption of whole position? Active search for ideas?)

Where did you begin your thoughts? (Assessment? Search for imbalances? Look for tactics?)

When Only joking; there is no relevant 'when' question.

Just take a few more moments to gather your thoughts, consider what White might do, and then consider this...

25 a4!?

This move looks a bit strange but all will be revealed. Were you looking for tactics on the kingside? Perhaps there are ways to make g4 work; maybe play 25 ♗h3 hoping for (expecting? anticipating?) 25...g6. But what about 25...♕d7 – then what? If d5 is the only significant permanent weakness, you may need to look for ways to create a second one (the 'principle of two weaknesses': you try to tickle their left rib and they cover, still with a hand to spare; so you go for the right rib and they cover that too, but by then they are so rigidly defensive that you can do whatever you want; if you felt like it you might even punch them on the nose – that would surprise them) – but is f5 really the second soft spot you're looking for?

25...♕d7

Black is unsuspecting and remains so for the next few moves.

26 ♕d1

Did you think the queen was well placed on h5? Why? Maybe it could be of more use elsewhere...

26...♖c8 27 a5!

Looks like a bit of a lone ranger, but Black's b-pawn is a little nervous.

27...♖cf8 28 ♕a1!!

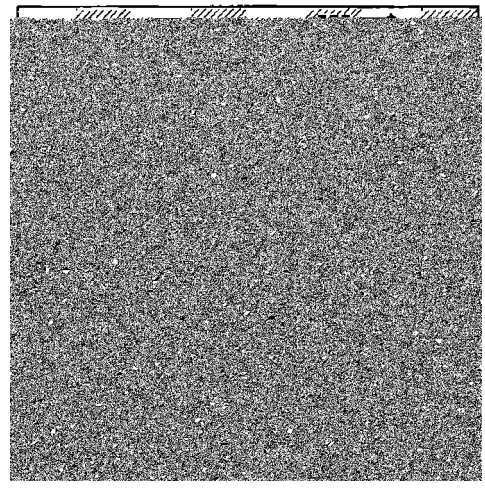
The lone ranger gets a telegram from his queen, telling him he's not alone. But why the exclamation marks?

2 ...♕e7

Just in case he wants to play 29 ♕a3. I suppose Black's dark squares would look a little weak then.

29 ♕a3! *(D)*

B



White's queen is a very considerate lady. Not only did she look after the a-pawn from afar but now also tries to remove Black's most threatening piece. In the process she is working for the rooks, granting them the b-file, which can b used to create new possibilities for the king and bishop as well.

29...♕xa3

This looks extremely cooperative but otherwise White's new-found control of the f8-square would create tricks based on g4 and there are also ideas of ♕d6 and ♕c5 to be considered. Even so, 29...♖d8! looks more tenacious, when White may consider 30 ♖a1, intending b3.

3 **bxa3**

If you l o k at just the a-pawns you won't see the i value. You need to see the a-pawns as pa r of White's position. You can only make sense of the merits of a pawn-structure with reference to the pieces. The a-pawns a e not weak, b - cause Black h a no means of showing that they a e. Black may point to them and say: ..Look! Weak pawns; doubled and isola t d!" but this is a bit like pointing to a mole on Cindy Crawford's face and saying "Look! Black spot; obvious and pro t uding!" As with any face, you m ss much if you look at the p a ts as separate f om the whole.

30...♖d8 31 ♖b2 ♖c7 32 ♖b5

You see, d5 and b7 a e vulnerable but the a-pawns a e completely s a e.

32...♖dd7 33 ♔f2!

Where's he o f to?

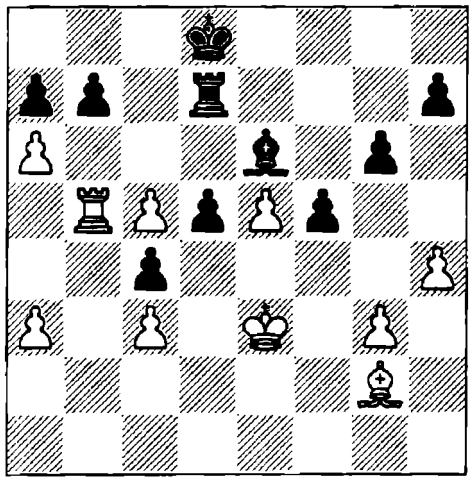
33...g6 34 ♔e3 < g 35 ♖fb1 ♔f7 36 ♖c5!! ♔e7 37 ♖bb5 ♖xc5 38 dxc5!

The white king is very grate f l and t e pawns a e happy to oblige.

38...♔d8 39 a6! *(D)*

I've seen weaker pawns...

B



39...♔c8 40 ♖b6!! ♗g8 41 ♖f6 ♖d8 42 ♔d4 bxa6 43 ♖d6 1-0

Superlative, m nd-exp a ding play f om Rozentalis. The idea of exch a ging queens (♕g5? - doesn't seem to help as Black takes and may t en f nd counterplay wi t ...g6, and ...h6 when his king could b come active via h6 and g5) and opening the queenside (b3? - **OK,** we may need to open the queenside because we seem to have r ached a dead end on the kingside, but at the moment the weaknesses created on c3 and a3 will be just as signific a t as those on b7 and d5), the willingness to 'weaken' his queenside pawns (' h5-dl-where?-to a l ... and then?), the timing of the a-pawn pushes (25 a4! - otherwise 25...b5 would short-circuit the plan; 27 a ! - b7 is the target we a ess; 39 a6! - just b - fore .. 5 c7 plugs the gaps), the involvement of the king (33 ♔f2 and 34 e3 - what's it doing there? Heading to f4 and g5? But ...h6 will stop that ... 38 dxc5! - aha) and the t ansfo r ation of static to dyn a ic advantages (29 ' a3!, 36 : cs!!, 40 : b6!!) persist in m a ing a profound impression on me, however many times I see this g a e.

How can we explain how he found these ideas? Perhaps we can't, but this ex a ple is a good testing-ground for ex a ining the variety of ways that we can approach a position and how much of our thinking is consciously in o u con t ol.

I asked Rozen t lis to explain how he de v sed this conception and it's very instructive to he a his account: "I was t inking, how to use my s t ategic advantage and penetrate into Black's position. Position was closed, so I wanted to open the queenside. That's why I put my queen back to d1. I played a2-a4 in order to win some space. My f st plan was to imply b2-b3. But I decided that could give Black good counterplay on the c- f le. So I changed my pl a and t ed to penetrate with my queen. I think that the swap of the queens on a3 was the decisive mistake, a White gained the open b- f le. The a-pawns could never be attacked and moreover t ey could attack the black b-pawn. Black should r - f ain from ... ' xa3. However, White could try to play further ' c5, or even ' d6. Playing 29 ' a3, I had in my mind the g a e Smyslov-Reshevs k , World Ch, The Hague / oscow 1948 (26 ' h4!)."

Note that Rozentalis immediately saw the main issue. White has s t ategic advantages but has to open the position to demons t a t t em. If you began by looking for combinati o a break- t oughs on the kingside, you made it much more di f cult for yo u self to see the position as a whole. This type of problem, where our m nd f xes on something and can't get past it, is v e y typical of the way we think. We a e at t acted to something and then it pulls us in like a magnet

before we can think of anything else. The only solution for t is is self-control. Before you look deeply at one line or idea ask yourself if there ae other features of the p sition which you should be awae of. This is simil a to Kotov's idea of selecting c a didate moves, but it works less formally in most positions a d is usu aly just a question of getting your bearings in the position fom a macroscopic p rspective, before delving into a y micro-lines. This is an a- p ct of intuition, and I thank Jonathan Gr a t for verbalizing it in this way.

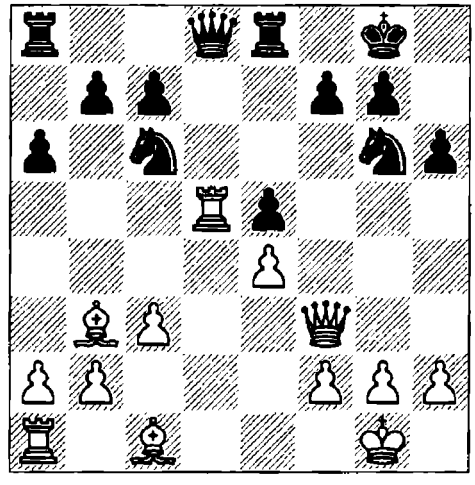
Rozentalis's last point is particularly im p r- t nt because it poin t to the im p rtance of patte r -recognition a d it so hap p ns that Garry Kasp a ov h a made some ins t ctive co m ents on the classic game to which Rozentalis refe r ed. Note how different the two games ae and yet how Rozentalis recognized the common theme. This suggests that f nding interesting ideas should not just b res t icted to your openings because there ae many important middlegame ideas which defy ECO-type categorization and will only b seen if you look beyond games played within your own opening systems.

Quotations fom Kasparov ae taken fom ChessBase Magazine.

Smyslov – Reshevsky

World Ch, The Hague/Moscow 1948

1 e4 e5 2 t f3 l c6 3 i b5 a6 4 i a4 d6 5 c3 t ge7 6 d4 i d7 7 i b3 h6 8 t bd2 t g6 9 l 4 i e7 10 0-0 0-0 11 l 3 i f6 12 l dS : e8? 13 dxe5! i xe5 14 t xeS dxe5 15 . f3 i e6 16 : d1 i xd5 17 : xd5 *(D)*



"The cen t alized rook feels good because it cannot be pushed away" - G a y Kasp a ov. Note the way Kasp a ov describes the posi t on of the rook : it 'feels' (intuitive) 'good' (evaluative). The note could also be read as saying that the rook itself feels good (see later idea of 'talking with your pieces'). The explanation: "because it cannot be pushed away" relates to the idea that thinking comes together with feeling, but that somehow the explanation, b a ed on thought, follows rather than leads the feeling. Moreover, Kasp a ov's note assumes t at Bl a k will now play 17... . e7 - relating to the idea that the s t ongest players a ways f o us on the strongest moves (see 'Vision' on page 34 and 'Evaluating Value' on page 36).

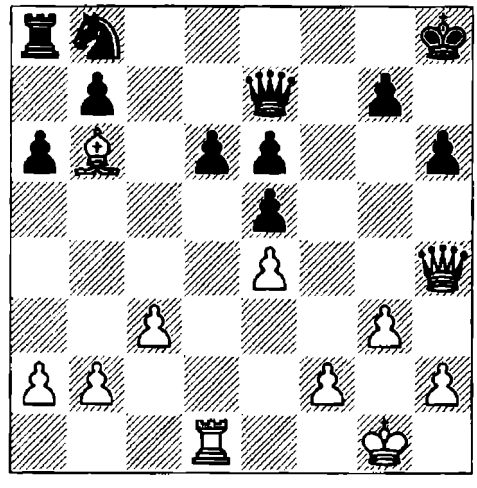
17... . e7 18 . f5! t f8 19 i e3 t e6 20 : ad1 l ed8 21 g3 : d6 22 : xd6 cxd6 23 • g4! h8

"The black king wouldn't *f*eel comfortable [italics mine] on the other side: 23... f8 24 i b6 : e8 25 h4 and what next?" - Kasp a ov. Note again the way Kasp a ov seems to consider the king as a piece with p rsonality.

24 i b6! l b8

24... : c8 25 l d2! t b8 26 ' il : c6 (26... l 5 27 i c2 : c6? 28 i xc5 dxc5 29 l d8+) 27 i a7 t d7 28 . d5 : c7 29 . xe6, etc. - Kasp a ov.

25 i xe6! fxe6 2 ' h4! *(D)*



The break t rough. Black loses a pawn and White wins an ins t uct ve rook ending. Note the simil a i t es and differences with Rozentalis's 29 . a3. This is how patte r -recognition works: the patte r is absorbed and becomes f a , a d ten t e main t eme of t e patte r c a be seen in an unfamiliar posi t on.

2 ...♕d7 27 ♕d8+ ♕xd8 2 ♗xd8 ♘d7 29 ♗c7 ♘c5 30 ♖xd6 ♖c8 31 ♗b6 ♘a4 32 ♖xe6 ♘xb2 33 ♖xe5 ♘c4 34 ♖e6 ♘xb6 35 ♖xb6 ♖xc3 36 ♖xb7 ♖c2 37 h4 ♖xa2 38 ♔g2 a 39 h5 a4 40 ♖a7 ♔g8 41 g4 a3 42 ♔g3 ♖e2 43 ♔f3 ♖a2 44 ♔e3 ' if 45 f3 ♖a1 46 ♔f4 a2 47 e5 ♔g8 48 ♔f5 : n 49 ♖xa2 ♖xf3+ 50 ♔g6 ♔f8 51 ♖a8+ ♔e7 52 ♖a7+ 1-0

These two games have shown the thoughts and moves of strong grandmT

head. Is there any way we can transcend our patterns, or is our thinking completely bound by our previous chess experience? At the risk of being metaphysical, there seems to be a question of free will at the heart of the chess thinking process.

We'll leave that for now, and think a little more about the way these patterns work.

For example, in the Rozentalis game above, assuming it made some sort of impression on you, your brain will 'connect it' in some way to whatever chess patterns it has available. So if you've never played a closed position in your life, your brain will have a hard time making use of this example because it won't have anything to link it to. You may be interested in the queen manoeuvre if it's explained to you, but you are unlikely to see why it is so impressive and necessary (I don't see another convincing way to improve White's position) because your brain has no pattern from previous experience to acknowledge whafs going on. In this case you'd probably forget the example fairly quickly and it would slip out of your pattern net forever, unless, of course, you made a conscious effort to store the position (e.g. 'positional sketches' - more on this later).

Perhaps if you've played the French Defence you may relate to the blocked nature of the position and Black's bad bishop, but you wouldn't necessarily have any prescription for what to do as White. Indeed, you may have strong recollection of a winning bishop ending arising from a French Defence from one of your own games and assume that the best way to approach this position is to get a similar type of ending, but then you would probably look in vain for ways to exchange all the major pieces (although, ironically, the treat of this is what made Black resign). Or it may be that you've recently been impressed by a position where one side securely blockaded a passed pawn (albeit with a knight, but you may not have the patterns to appreciate the relevance of that) and then made good use of its own pawn-majorty (even though that was on the queenside, with the king in no danger from the pawns advancing). In this case, you may consider the above example as an exception to this theme and your brain will latch onto it in reference to the existing example. The result would then be a more balanced view of protected passed pawns versus pawn-majorities.

I hope these examples make some sort of sense; the point is that **your brain will use what it has to make sense of what it is given.** If you have hundreds of thousands of patters, a new pattern will be easy to place, and to interpret. If you have only a few patterns, the brain will struggle to absorb new ones because there will be no suitable way of 'hooking it up'.

What's more, if your existing patterns are rigid ('bishops good in open positions, knight in closed ones'), mistaken ('two rook are always better than a queen'), entrenched ('I've been playing chess for fifty years, but I never castle; I've always thought that castling must be a mistake') or unstable (what exactly is prophylaxis?) then new patterns may actually be forbidden entry by the old, or distorted by your existing pattering system. This is not to say that old dogs can't tle a new tck, butjust that we ned to b realistic about chess improvement Not only do you need new patters to improve, but to make use of these new patters you need to dismantle some old ones. And that's not easy.

You see the problem is not so much the patters you're exposed to, but the order in which you take them in. The self-organizing system has to make sense of things ateach moment and so the sequence of arrival of the information determines the way it is to be arranged. Clearly the best possible arrangement of information would be independent of the ordering of it arrival and so the way we arrange information is always less than the best possible way. This, and the following quotaton, are ide a of thinking **guru** Edward de Bono: "Once information has 'settled' into fxed patters on the memory surface then new arrangement can only occur if they are directly derved from these paters. Only such tal arrangement of information are alowed a would b consistnt with the s background patterns. Anything else is dismssed at once. Yet if (somehow) a diferent arrangement of info r ation could ab t

responsibility is to suggest what this 'somehow' is in a chess context. Perhaps we do have freedom to choose a way of thinking on the chessboard. My first step towards showing this is by an exploration of that elusive concept: intuition.

Introducing Intuition

Don't think. Feel.
BRUCE LEE

That last section may have seemed a little pessimistic so I will begin this one on a more positive footing. I want to show how **pattern-recognition** can lead to improvements in your play in a conventional manner, but in the process I aim to introduce the jovial but entirely serious notion of **talking with your pieces**. I have come to think of it as an exemplar of the type of thinking that can help to override existing patterns. These next two games should be considered as a pair. I trust my notes will explain why.

Karpov – Spassky
Candidates match (game 9), Leningrad 1974

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 d6 6 ♗e2 ♗e7 7 0-0 0-0 8 f4 ♘c6 9 ♗e3 ♗d7 10 ♘b3!

This is now standard theory, but it's worth saying that this is also simple prophylaxis. The intention behind Black's last move was to take on d4 and put the bishop on c6, thus relieving some of Black's congestion. Then there would also be pressure on White's e4-pawn and Black needn't fear the push e4-e5 because he would have a choice of squares for his knight.

10... a **11 a4!**

Again this seems obvious in some ways, but having played over this game several times I begin to feel that Black is already struggling here. Karpov doesn't give Spassky any opportunity for active play.

11...♘b4

It is very likely that Karpov was aware of the way that Geller handled these positions with White and in considering two of Geller's games we can see a close connection to the patterns in the present game: 11...e5 12 ♔h1 ♘b4 13 ♗f3 ♖c8 14 ♖f2! ♖c4 15 fxe5 dxe5 16 ♖d2 ♕c7 17 ♕g1! ♗d8 18 ♖ad1 ♗c6 19 ♗c5 ♖e8 20 ♕f1! won the exchange in Geller-Reshevsky, Interzonal tournament, Palma de Mallorca 1970. Note the moves 14 ♖f2 and 17 ♕g1, with reference to our current game.

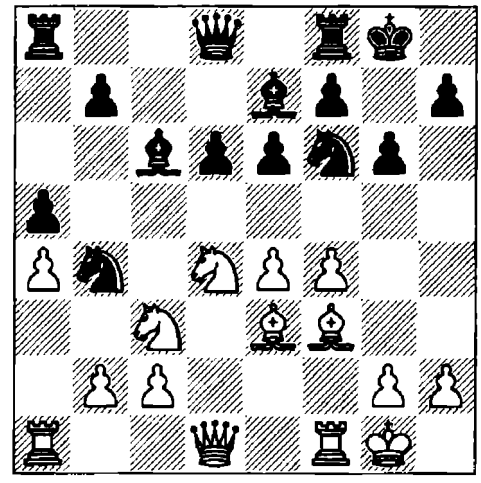
12 ♗f3 ♗c6!?

12...e5 13 ♔h1 ♗c6 14 fxe5 dxe5 15 ♕e2 ♕c7 16 ♕f2 ♘d7 17 ♖ad1 ♔h8 18 ♗g4 gave White a slight advantage in Geller-Polugaevsky, Portorož 1973. Note the ♗g4 theme, which occurs in the main game too.

13 ♘d4!

Mainly just improving the knight, but also directed against the idea of ...d5 and ...♘e4.

13...g6 *(D)*



What does this move suggest? Black wants to play ...e5 without allowing ♘f5. Now, given that ...e5 is likely to be Black's next move, what should we play?

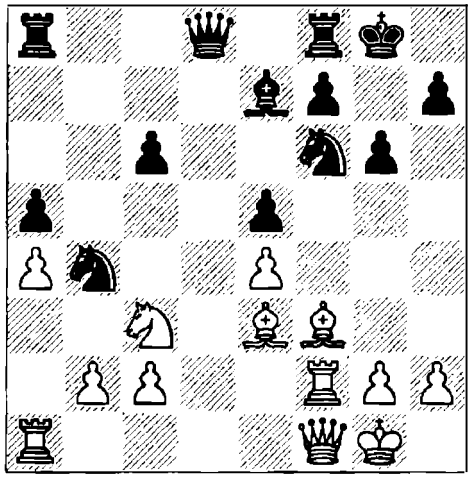
14 ♖f2!

A wonderful move which is also commonplace these days. Karpov has foreseen the likely structure arising out of ...e5 and sees that in the resulting position the c4-square will be a useful square for the queen; it can now get there via f1. Moreover, the rook does a splendid job of defending c2 on the second rank and White will have the opportunity to double rooks, on the d- or f-file, depending on which is the more important.

When I demonstrated this game in a lecture to Edinburgh Chess Club, many members wanted to play 14 f5, which does make a certain amount of sense: e6 is attacked and the f1-rook and e3-bishop are given a new lease of life. However, such a push does not consult the white

position a a whole. The f1-rook would want the f3-bishop out of the way, but the e4-pawn would want it to stay put. Furthe r ore, the a1-rook isn't ready and the queen is also a little b - mused, not really knowing what role she is supposed to play in this 'attack'. Hence I believe that 'talking to your pieces' would lead to the feeling that the position isn't ripe for f5. To confirm this feeling, the v a iation 14...e5 15 t xc6 bxc6 16 g4 d5 may come to mind - then whose king is the more vulnerable?

14...e5 15 ♘xc6 bxc6 16 fxe5 dxe5 17 ♕f1! *(D)*



The strategic scene is set. Basically White wants to attack **f7,** perhaps by re-routing his light-squ a ed bishop to c while Black wants to exchange d a k-squ a ed bishops.

17...♕c8 18 h3!?

An important moment. In ***The Art of Chess Analysis*** Timman says this: "A typical K a pov move. There was no actual threat of 18... t g4 b cause of the reply 19 . xg4 ' xg4 20 ' ♗c4, but, just to be sure, he removes any possibility of it. Perhaps he is dreaming of getting his bishop to c4 and doesn't want to have to exchange it on g4. 18 l d1 should also be considered."

K a pov may also have felt that his king was a little uncomfortable on g1. Many of the players at Edinburgh Chess Club, when seeing that there was little concrete reason for playing 18 h3, couldn't understand why K a pov would 'weaken' g3 like t h s. I had a ready explained that K a pov's e a lier f4 had slightly we a ened the king because it now had only two pawns to shield it, while Black's king has three. Given this, it was h a d to explain why Karpov would 'we a en' his king's position further. This is curious b cause I think a lot of players have dif f - culty with the idea of 'we a esses'; g3 is only theoretically weakened here. Not only can Black do nothing about it, but in a moment Karpov covers this squ a e with his king. It is important to understand that weaknesses, like pawn-st r ctures, should not be considered in abs t ct. In this position, g3 and b6 are 'weaknesses' of sorts but they are largely irrelevant to proceedings. On the other hand c2 and **f7** a e very relevant we a nesses, even though they a e both covered. However, when all is s a d and done, 18 h3 may not b objectively best, given that Spassky missed an opportunity on the next move. Even so, I'm not at all s u e there is anything objective about a chess s t ggle. 18 h3 proved to be the right move at the right time. The fact that it may not have been the right move at another time need not detract from its value in t is given instance.

18... t d7?

A big mistake. Spassky w a ts to play ... i c5 but Karpov's next move prevents this and the exchange of White's relatively bad bishop for this knight leaves Black with no plan and, a Timman puts it, "a strategically ruinous position". Spassky seems to be guilty of ***Blinking*** here and perhaps also shows a bit of ***Looseness.*** He had to dig deep and fo r ulate a workable strategic operation. Exchanging dark-squ a ed bishops would take a lot of pressure o f , so the idea of ...h5, ... t h7 and ... i g5 should have been preferred.

Timman implies that Black is OK after 18... g7!? 19 l c1!? (in t nding i e2-c4) 19...**h5** 20 i e2 t h7 21 i c4 f5!?, but 22 exf5 gxf5 23 J d2 still l o ks good for White to me. However, 18...h5!?, with the s a e idea, may well be adequate for Black.

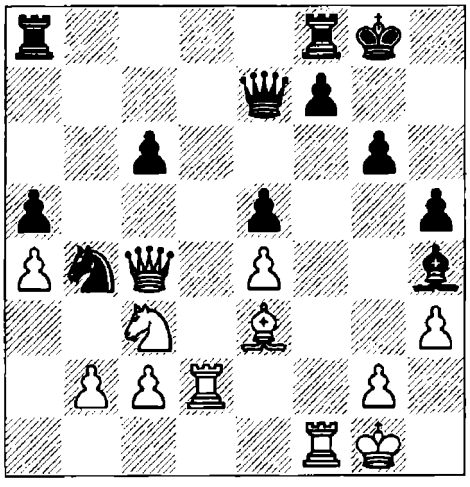
19 ♗g4! h5 20 ♗xd7 ♕xd7 21 ♕c4!

Preventing ... ' ♗e6, after which Black would have no problems. Now it is di f cult for him to f nd a role for the maj or pieces. Again a small question of patterns is raised here because there a e many ins t ctive examples of doubled isolated e-pawns being very valuable in Sicilian positions and so it may not be so obvious to some that 21... ' ♗e6 22 ' ♗xe6 fxe6 is entirely bad for Black. It is, and mainly because t ese

pawns do a most no t ing to res t ict the scope of the white pieces, while they a e vulnerable to attack. If t e black c-pawn were on b7 this may be slightly different because the ex t a control of d5 would be a relevant factor, but given that c6 controls d5 w,yway and the f5-squ a e is not so relev a t, having a doubled pawn on e6 is no great achievement a d a rather sign i c a t vulnerability.

21... J h4 **22 ♖d2 ♕e7 23** l **f1!** *(D)*

Using all his pieces. 23 J c5 obviously h a to be considered but b fore calculating v a ations, it would be worth consult i g t e al-rook about this o p ration; he may well feel a little left out. After 23... ' ♗g5 24 l d7 t xc2 25 : n t e3 26 . xe3 ' ♘xe3+ 27 h l h8! 28 l dxf7 **♖xf7** 29 ' xf7 l g8! Black is OK. The question is, would you look for this line before rejecting 23 . c5 or would you stay away from it on intuitive grounds? I suspect K a ov just 'felt' that this line wouldn't be favourable for him. Few of us a e blessed with K a pov's 'feeli[illegible] would-y eok f ly



because it can later go to f2 or d2. That's why Karpov put it there, I think.

27...♖f8

For a while I wondered why Spassky didn't set up a more active defence with 27...♖d7 but then I realized that after 28 ♘d2 ♖ad8 (bad, but nothing else makes much sense) 29 ♘b3! Black faces an immediate catastrophe.

28 ♘d2 ♗d8

28...♗e7 may have been slightly better. Then White has various ways to improve the position, but I have a penchant for 29 ♘b3 ♕c7 30 ♘c1!? followed by ♘d3 and maybe b4. I don't see a plan for Black.

29 ♘f3 f6 30 ♖d2!

Karpov's subtle rook switching makes a profound impression. Such a comment usually indicates that the author doesn't really understand what's happening but in the given instance I suppose this is just a fairly obvious move which is better than 30 ♖d1 because now White has pressure on the d- and f-files.

30...♗e7 31 ♕e6!

With all his pieces where he wants them, the tactics begin.

31...♖ad8 32 ♖xd8! ♗xd8

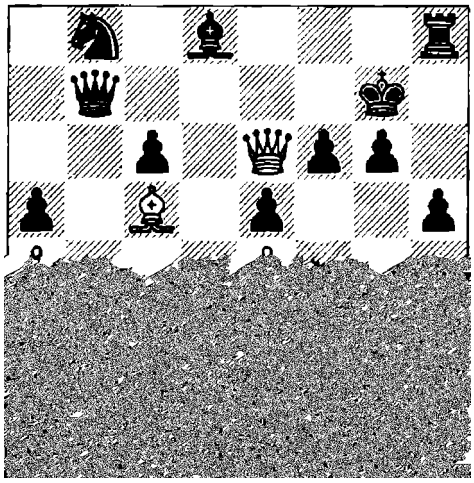
32...♖xd8 33 ♘xe5 ♕c7 34 ♕f7+ ♔h8 35 ♕xe7!.

33 ♖d1!

Black's rook is tied to the d8-bishop, the knight was forced to the rim and the queen had to defend it. White's pieces, however, have retained their flexibility and now Black is helpless against their unstoppable momentum.

33...♘b8 34 ♗c5 ♖h8 *(D)*

W



35 ♖xd8! 1-0

A crisp finish. After 35...♖xd8, 36 ♗e7 decides. If you this is not immediately clear to you, Tartakower's claim that **"three pieces is a mate"** may be a helpful consideration. It is a rare king indeed who can withstand three attacking pieces by itself. Note, however, the following point: this final combination only works because of the position of White's king. If it were still on g1 Black could play ...♖d1+ and ...♘d7. For some reason this gives me a chill up my back, as it were a revelation of true genius. But of course it might just be good luck.

Rowson – Kulaots

Danish open junior Ch, Lyngby 1996

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 a6 6 f4 ♕c7

I suspect that 6...e5 is the most accurate move here.

7 ♕f3 ♘c6 8 ♘xc6 bxc6 9 ♗d3!

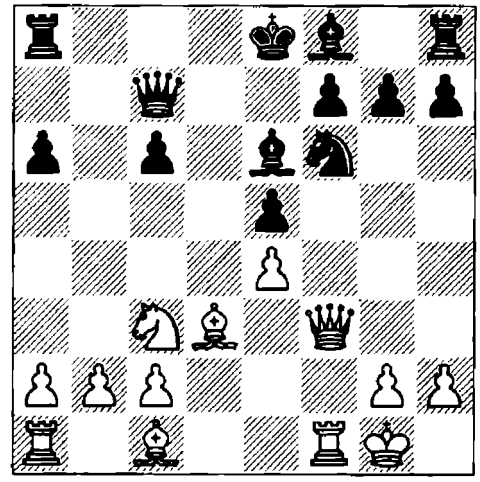
The exclam is for the anticipation of what was to come. I think this was a novelty at the time. White had previously tried something with b3, ♗b2 and 0-0-0 but White's king is not so comfortable on the queenside because of the half-open b-file and watchful a-pawn.

9...e5 10 fxe5

Otherwise Black may take on f4 and make use of the e5-square.

10...dxe5 11 0-0 i e *(D)*

W



Do you see the pattern? Although the opening was rather different, we have the same structure as in the previous game and many similar piece relationships. While playing, I had no conscious memory of the Karpov-Spassky

game, but somehow I had a strong feeling for t e most important factors in t e position: the c4-squ a e, t e placement of the white king, Black's plan to exchange dark-squ a ed bishops, and the role of the maj or pieces on the f- and d- f les. I think this is a good ex a ple of pattern-recognition in action and I think I would have played much less well had the above g a e not been p a t of my chess ex p rience.

12 ♔h1!

My king wasn't comfortable on g1 and my other pieces were happy to wait for the opp o nent to provide suggestive signals for where they should go.

12... i e7

GM Paul Motwani suggests that Black had to t something more active here, viz. 12... g4!? 13 h3 h5. T h s shows a good sense o f t ming and an awareness of t e dangers of ***Blinking*** by s t iving to halt t e unfavourable trend. Black's problem in this game was that his a tivi t c a e too late. All the s a e, White seems to be better here. Perhaps just 14 4 a d b3, intending a eventual exchange of light-squared bishops. Black's pieces a e more active, but I don't see any cons t uctive plan.

13 b3!

Controlling c4 and pre-empting any h a sle on the b- f le.

13...0-0 14 ♘a4!

This seemed like 'home' for the knight. It eyes b6, con t ols c5 and may later come to c4 via b2. It is useful to play this before developing t e c1-bishop because a though I was almost certain where my knight would go, the development of my bishop will b 'reactive' to his plan.

Other moves are less e f ective: 14 i b2?! 0 7; 14 i e3 l fd8 15 t a4 c5 16 t b2 ' ĸc6.

14...♘d7

14...c5 can be met by 15 c4!?. This l o ks bad until you see the idea of t c3-d5, which will happen before Black can exploit the weaknesses on t e d- f le.

15 ♗e3!

Preven t ng ... t 5.

15...♕a5

I showed this position to a promising Scot- t sh junior after demons t ating the main ideas of Karpov-Spassky. He saw that Black w a ted to play ... t c5 and looked for ways to prevent it.

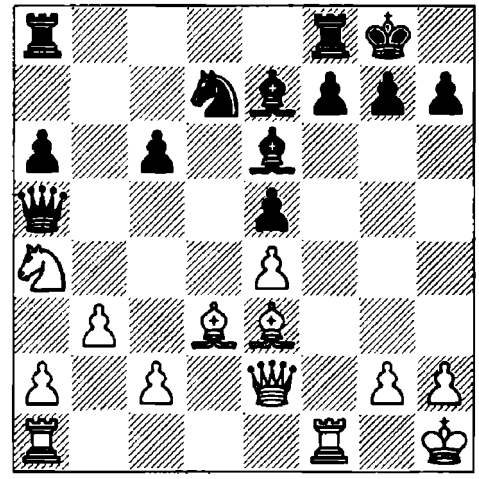
16 ' ġ3!? w a his f st idea. But I t ink K a- pov wouldn't like t is because it upsets t e 'wholeness' of his position. Once the t h eat of i h6 is p a ed t e queen h a no r le on g3 a d there is no kingside attack. 16... h8!? - then what?

16 ' if w a t en suggested; t is very cle a ly preven t ... l c5. However, it's not clear what W h te's plan t en is, and 16... ' ib !?, 16... i b4 and 16... l fd8 all leave White with no p a ticul a place to go.

16 ♕e2! *(D)*

What we need is a move that both prevents Black's strategic o p ration and ins t gates one of our own. This move prevents ... c5 and intends i c4: prophylaxis in action.

B



16...♗b4!?

This looks a bit obtuse but it came a ter a deep think and is actually quite clever. Black wants to meet J c4 by captu r ng and then playing ... ' b5. In the present position this would be fully adequate so the question is what White can do to improve the position before playing i c4. 17 l ad1 sugges t i t elf but then t e a- pawn is we a ened. It t o k me a few minutes to see my opponent's idea but I didn't dwell on my response. If you talk to the white pieces here, there is clearly one piece screaming for attention. So I re a s u ed the a2-pawn and went a b ut my business.

Instead, 16... l c5 can be answered by 17 i xc5 i xc5 18 t xc5 (or 18 i c4!?) 18... ' ĸc5 19 i xa6.

17 ♖ad1!

Just as with the K a pov g a e, my positional su p riority is l a gely a result of the relative activity of my rooks.

17...♘c5

Consistent, and the speed at which it was played suggested that my opponent had seen quite deeply into the position. Now I have a choice of winning the a-pawn but losing certain positional advantages and swapping some pieces o f while keeping the initiative.

18 ♗xc5

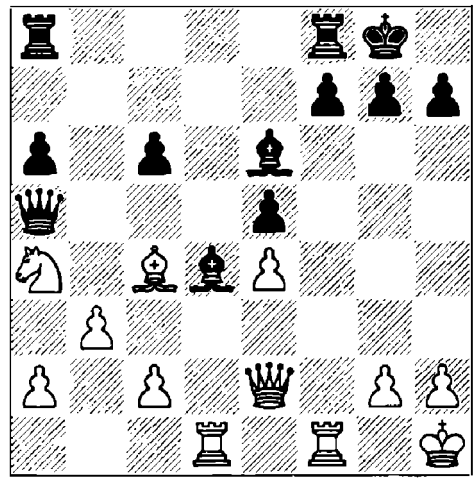
18 a3 i xa3 19 l al wins material, but I'm not sure it promises more than the move played.

18...♗xc5 19 ♗c4!

19 l xc5 ' xc5 20 i xa6 would b ***Materialism*** in broad daylight. Like K a pov in the above g a e, I didn't look too deeply at lines where my opponent had counterplay as long as I had an alte r ative where I kept a signi f cant advantage. This does win a cle a pawn but it also gives Black something he hasn't had so f a in this g a e: a huge amount of **choice**. Alekhine once observed that when the world's best players win a pawn they inv a iably look for the f st opportunity to convert it into a positional advantage which is much easier to play with than an ex t a pawn. Given t at I already had the positional advantage, it didn't seem that winning a pawn but d a aging my position was the co r ect way to pr o eed. This : ill ho p fully be cle a er once you've read my thoughts on ***Materialism***. For those of you who like v a iations to j ustify such comments, I suppose the following may be of interest: 20... 1 a5!? 21 i c i xc4 22 ' xc4 ' b5! 23 ' xb5 cxb5 24 l d5 and now 24...b4!? and 24... l xa2 both look annoyingly active. Of course White is better here, but Black has good drawing chances and a famili a type of position, whereas before he had a dif f cult and p a sive position which was much more dif- f cult to play. I didn't see these lines at the time, but I decided against 20 i xa6 on intuitive grounds, by which I mean that the patterns to which it gave rise didn't meet with my sense of what the position demanded.

19...♗d4 (D)

The key moment of the game. I thought for about twenty minutes here b cause I knew that this decision would be pivo t l for the game's outcome. It is hard to retrace my thoughts exactly but they went something like this:



The exchange of light-squ a ed bishops is almost inevitable. In principle my knight should be better than his rem a ning dark-squ a ed bishop because it has nothing to attack on the d a k squ a es while my knight can probe his queenside pawns. However, whether I take on e6 or he takes on c4, he has the move ... 1 b5, which is likely to be quite awkward in both cases: in the f rst case my back rank is weak and in the second he threatens to mess up my pawns by t ng on c .

Of course, before these thoughts I had an emotional 'tug' telling me to take on e6 and mess up his pawns but t en my king gave me a nudge and reminded me that he wasn't back-rank proof. However, it w a h a d to stop my brain going 20 i xe6 fxe6 21 1 c hitting e6 and c6. I quickly realized that he would then play 21... 1 b5 as I had foreseen, and what s t uck me more than anything was that reg a d- less of the pawns I might munch, his bishop was cle a ly dominating my knight on the rim, which played no real p a t in my escapades on the kingside. However, my brain still pulled me into 22 ' xe6+ h8, when the materialist wanted to play 23 c4. I'd imagine most readers would have reached this position quite quic k y. In some ways this position is what Hartston a d Wason refer to as 'quiescent' You c a stop here a White h a won a pawn a d there are no threats to the back rank. But stopping here would be a mist a e because the pawn is actually not so relevant. Ask the guy on b3 if he feels proud of himself and he'll be drowned out by the dis- g r ntled knight and neglected king.

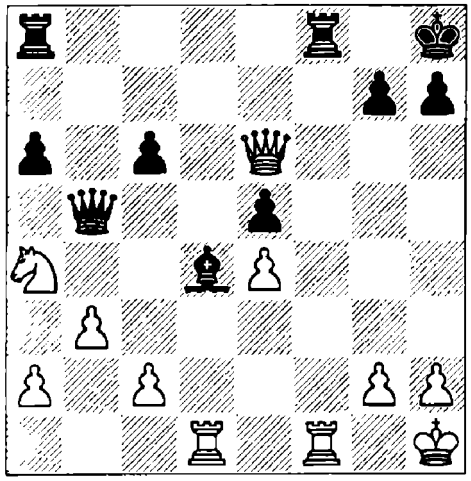
However, this variation gave me a sense of what I wanted to achieve: f eedom for my knight

and safety for my king. I looked at v a ious combinations of c3, i xe6 and ' c4 but I kept coming back to the same problem - my king. He was cle a ly, to borrow a Scottish expression, ' t e dude in the chair'. I don't know if my following move is necess a ily best, and I'm sure there a e other ways to re t n t e advan t ge, but what I l i ed a b ut it was the ***gestalt*** factor - that I t eated my position a a whole. I can't be sure of t e in f uence of K a pov-Spassky on this decision but l o k ng at h3 and h2 in the previous g a e suggests there was some patte r -recogni- t on going on too. So it seems I found this move both on the basis of previous experience and my ability to t ink in certain non-conventional ways.

20 g3!?

Improving my king, so that my other pieces can m a e t e most of t emselves. If I used 'intuition' to f nd 20 g3, t en there were two aspects of intuition involved: the f rst w a a general appraisal of the position as a whole based on the chess patterns I have available (bishop dominating k ight, back-rank tricks, wandering queen) and the second was a more active se a ch for the key to the position (what ***feels*** most important). It might be said that in t e former c a e I was 'seeing' and in the latter c e I was 'thin k ng'; an important distinction which we'll return to.

Let's consider the position after 20 i xe6 fxe6 21 i c4 ' b5 22 ' ixe6+ h8 *(D)* in more d tail.



23 c4? is indeed dangerous for White after 2 ... i b4 24 ' xc6 I xf1+! (24... ' d2 25 Wxa8) 2 :x n I f8 26 I b1 ' d2 27 ' id6 ' f 28 h3 h6. I think I'd rather be Black here, despite Whi t 's extra pawns. P a ly because of t is line, I originally gave 20 g3 two exclamation marks, and wondered if it may be the best move I'd e ver played, but then when I showed it to Dvore t k , he helped to p r ne my appr a sal because when viewed dispassionately, it seems that in the dia g a position 23 ' c4! gives me a better ending than the one I would have re a hed in the game had my opponent not let me exch a ge on e6. Black has to take on c4 and then White has an ex t a pawn a well as a l the positional advantages described in the note to Black's 20th move. I simply didn't see this retreat, which may have something to do wi t associating the capture on e6 as the a ternative to t e endg a e a ter ... ' ixc4 in gener a . Nonetheless, I don't think this detracts too much f om the value of 20 g3, of which I am still proud, and it may even have been strongest from a practical point of view because I could sense t at my opponent wanted me to t e on e6 a d wouldn't play into the ending a ter 20... i xc4.

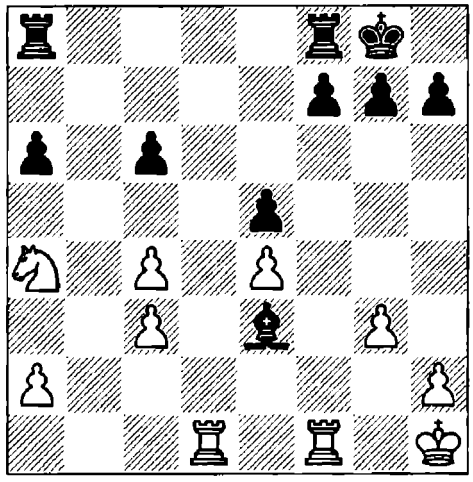
20...Ead8?!

20... i h3 21 :x n :x n 22 ' h5 was 'a good omen' When trying to play intuitively (though it's better not to try if possible; just play if you c a) you should also look out for 'omens' which usually manifest themselves as surprising tactical v a ations that work in your favour. Of course you don't play 20 g3 just because 20... i h3 d o sn't work but if it's the move you want to play anyway, and such a v a iation is there, it often means you are on the right lines and should support faith in your judgement.

20... i xc4 21 ' xc4 ' b5 is critical. This is the line which may initially make you feel t at you missed the boat by not tak ng on e6 but looking more closely suggests that White may be better. Just as it was in the K a pov game at a simil a stage, superior mobilization is the key factor. I have two rooks in the g a e and Black's bishop h a nothing to attack. Play could then continue 22 c3 ' xc4 (22... i e3!?) 23 bxc4 i e3 *(D)*.

My feeling was that White would be better here and I also felt that my opponent wouldn't be too comfortable with such a line (he wanted me to take on e6 to let his f8-rook breathe!). If you don't agree that White is better here, there a e ways of thinking which might lead you to

W



that conclusion. Jeremy Silman's notion of **'imbalances'** is p rhaps the most help f l t inking technique **in** this res p ct. For a f ll explanation of this idea see ***The Amateur's Mind***, which is a wonderful book for anyone under 2 0 0 (Elo) strength, but I myself le a ed a g eat deal f om it. The most important imbalance here is the scope of the rooks, which is cle a ly in White's favour. There is, however, a question of pawn-s t cture, which would seem to favo u Black, but then when we consider the k ight vs bishop imbalance this may not be so cle a. The c-pawns a e actually very useful for limiting the bishop and my knight has plenty of sco p to come to cS and b6 because I use my development to divert the bishop off the g l-a7 diagonal, or if necessa r I can play c5.

From my point of view, the interesting t ing about the way I a sessed this position w a that I used an idea by Aleksei Kosikov, w h ch I read in ***Opening Preparation*** by Dvoretsky and Yusupov (page 248): ..In an o p n position where both sides have weaknesses, the knight may prove stronger than the bishop Imagine an endgame without kings; White has a knight, and pawns on a2, c2, e2 and g2; Black has a d a k-squ a ed bishop, and pawns on b7, d7, **f7** and h7. By attacking the enemy pawns, the knight will most probably drive them onto the same colour squ a es as the bishop, which will thus b come a 'bad' one." I had read about this idea a few weeks before playing t is game and it made quite a profound impression. The curious thing is just how seemingly unrelated this position is to that abstract idea. But this is an o p n position and Black does have we a esses so may b it's not so s t ange. Perhaps it is t rough such subtle connections that patte r s are developed and strengthened.

When all is said and done though, it tu r s out that this p sition is probably not better for White after all. This was a bit of a blow for me to discover, because it undermined the value of t e 20 g3 idea, but the following variations suggest that Kosikov's wisdom may be mistaken when there a e rooks on the bo a d:

a) 24 ⋮d3 g5 (24... a7 25 ♗d7!) 25 ⋮d6!? looks promising but then a little tempor a y p a sivity d o sn't seem to h a m Black: 25...⋮ac8 26 ♗b6 ♗c7 27 d7 ⋮es and the trend may soon turn in Black's favour.

b) 24 ⋮d7 ⋮ad8! 25 ⋮fxf7? (during the g a e this idea gave bo t players the impression that White would b better, but t at's probably just because of 'role play' - until now White h a been applying pressure so when such a su p r f cially att t active idea ap p a s we assume it favo u s the side with the initiative) 25...♗xd7 26 ♗xd7 ⋮n+ 27 g2 ⋮n+ 28 h3 ♗xa2 and Black wins.

The t th hurts, and all the more so since I had w r tten the long explanation above before I discovered it. I don't see a signi f cant improvement for White here but all the s a e I kept the annotation, which has some educational value reg a dless of its relevance. A further cu r osity is how t is relates to t e section on 'The Trappings of Analogy' below because in so f a as I w a mis t ken, the mistake w a that I consciously applied Kosikov's reasoning in the wrong c i cumstances, ra t er than just t ke the given position at face value and t ust my unconscious, which included the knowledge of Kosikov's idea.

21 ♗xe6

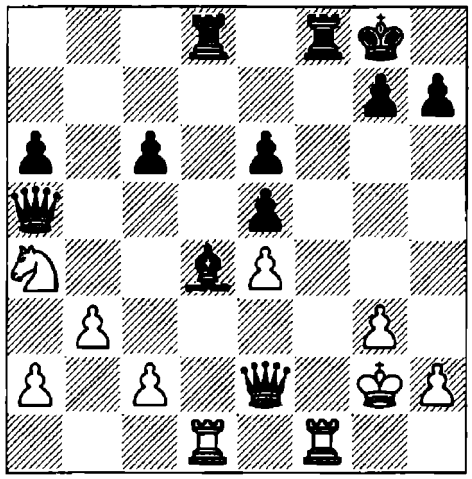
21 ♘xa6 is met by 21...h5! 22 c4 g4 23 ♕d2 b6 24 ♕xa5 ♘f3+. OK, I admit it, that one is Fritz's, but I didn't even think about 21 ♘xa6 b cause I already had a good idea behind 20 g3, and when you have a good idea you should often just play it (see 'Bread, Butter, and Jam' in Chapter 6).

21...fxe6 22 ♔g2! *(D)*

Now I have it al. The better s t cture, a safe king, the prospect of pawn-hunting with my queen and the idea of f eeing my knight with c3 if and when the time comes.

22...♕b5 23 ♕g4!

B



The exclam is a bit self-indulgent, but I like the way it all holds together.

23...♔h8 2 **c3**

24 ♕xe6? ♕e2+ would not be a good day out.

2 **...♗e3**

24...♖xf1 25 ♖xf1 ♗e3 26 ♖d1! also gives White a huge advantage. If the rooks come off I'm probably technically winning and 26...♖f8 is the game (at move 25).

2 1 +

25 ♖f7 was tempting, but it somehow didn't seem consistent with the position of my knight. Since I saw nothing resembling a knockout here I preferred to continue more technically. 25...♗h6 26 ♖dd7 c5! is a case in point. It's not that 25 ♖f7 is bad, but before going on such an escapade it is well worth consulting any pieces which are not part of the plan. To borrow Seirawan's phrase, it is an important aspect of successful attacks that you **'invite everyone to the party'**.

25... 1 2 **♕f3! ♗c5 27 ♘xc5!**

Given that almost all strategic operations up until now have depended on the relationship of these two pieces, I enjoyed moving into the 'new game' which now begins.

27...♕xc5 28 b4! ♕e7

Or 28...♖xf3 29 bxc5 ♖f8 30 ♖d6.

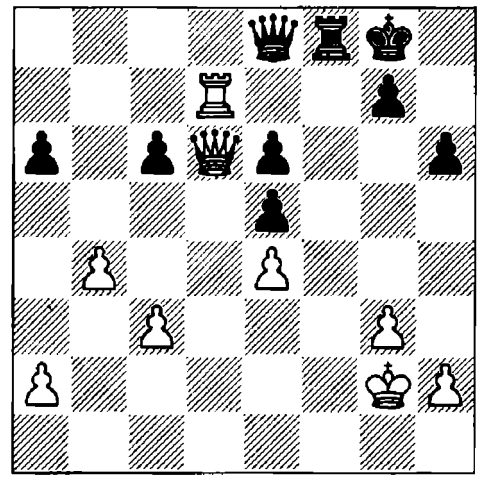
29 ♖d7! ♕e8 30 ♕d3

Of course White is clearly better, but it's still important to talk to your pieces. Even if you win the whole queenside, the king is a little worried that there may be an accident on the f-file.

30...h6 31 ♕d6 ♔g8 *(D)*

32 ♔g1!

W

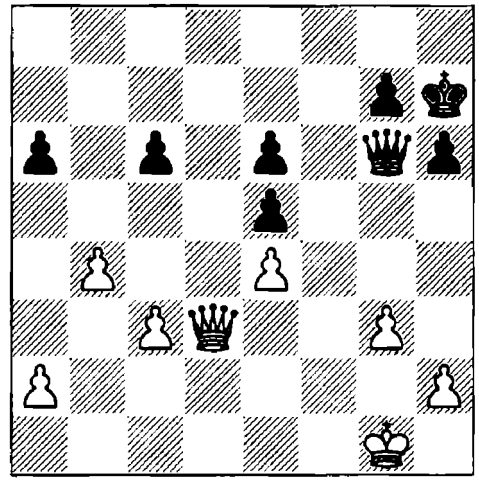


A strange move, but consistent with my previous play. I decided that I would win the queen ending, and so I was just waiting for his queen to move so that I could exchange rooks on d8. There are other ways of playing, but for the whole game I have been 'playing for two results' (more on this in Chapter 3) in that my opponent has had little sight of winning chances. If I gobble pawns I may be winning, but if I let his queen become active I introduce a third result into the equation and there seemed to be no need for that, especially given the proximity of the time-control.

32...♕g6 33 ♖d8!

The point is that there is no longer a check on

s ntre es'air ian



leave the remaining moves for your interest. I'm not saying it's easy to win but I think most of the moves speak for themselves.

35...h5 36 ' if ♕g5 37 ♕e3 ♕d8 38 ♔e2 h4 39 gxh4! ♕xh4 40 h3 ♕f6 41 a4 ♕g6 42 ♕f3 ♔g8?! 43 ♔d3 ♕g1 44 ♔c4 ♕a1 45 a5 ♕a4 46 ♔c5 ♕b5+ 47 ♔d6 c5 48 bxc5 ♕xa5 49 c6 ♕d8+ 50 ♔xe6 ♕c7 51 ♔d5 ♕d8+ 52 ♔xe5 a5 53 ♕f5 a4 54 ♕d7 ♕g5+ 55 ♔d6 ♕d2+ 56 ♔c7 ♕xc3 57 ♕e6+ ♔h7 58 ♔d8 ♕a5+ 59 c7 a3 60 ♕d5 ♕xd5+ 61 exd5 a2 62 c8♕ a1♕ 63 ♕c6 ♕f1 64 d6 ♕xh3 65 ♕e4+ g6 66 d7 ♕c3 67 ♔e8 ♕h8+ 68 ♔e7 ♕g7+ 69 ♔e6 ♕g8+ 70 ♔d6 ♕b8+ 71 ♔e7 ♕c7 72 ♔e8 ♔g7 73 ♕e7+ ♔g8 74 ♕f7+ 1-0

These two games highlight many aspects of 'intuition' in chess. Firstly I think it shows pattern-recognition in action, as there were many common features: the role of the c4-square, attention to the white king, avoiding unnecessary complications, the vulnerability of f, the long-term weakness of the black queenside. However, it should be stressed that my play in Rowson-Kulaots was not based on the conscious recollection of the Karpov-Spassky game. I had somehow assimilated the main features of that contest but, if asked about Karpov-Spassky, I would probably have remembered only that the opening was a Modern Scheveningen, and that Karpov played a stunning ♘b1 at some point. Still, although I cannot be sure, I think that my unconscious knowledge of Karpov-Spassky helped me to navigate myself through the main ideas in the position (it gave me a 'feel' for the position), and thus gave me a sense of what to look for. This example of where intuition comes from is consistent with the idea of the brain as a self-organizing patterning system and seems to accord with most of the relevant writings that I've come across. However, we still haven't pinned down exactly what intuition is or how (whether?) it can be developed.

Krogius (*The Psychology of Chess*, Chapter 2) seems very clear that intuition is "definitely a component of thinking" which is distinct from creativity, can be recognized by the relative speed that decisions are made (all quite quick, with exception of 20 g3) by sudden appropriate insights into the position (the extent of Black's potential counterplay), by the accompaniment of strong emotional support (20 g3!? – felt more comfortable about my king) for the idea and by a player's sense of timing (move 20 as key moment). I recommend Krogius's chapter for its descriptive content but I'm not sure that his advice on intuition extends beyond the truism that if you work hard on all aspects of chess, your feel for the game will improve.

Gufeld (*Intuition: The Cornerstone of Chess Art*) writes in a more inspiring tone about intuition and remarks that "The accumulation of experience develops his positional and combinative intuition. Somewhere deep in his subconscious is all the necessary information which seems at times to be forgotten but which, at the necessary moment, appears to prompt the right decision in non-standard positions." Very well, but again, it seems that you'll only have good intuition if you have a plentiful store of relevant patterns. I don't know about you, but I don't *feel* very comfortable with that; it seems threatening somehow, like you are defined by your past, and cannot escape it. Surely intuition is not just chess baggage. We do talk of 'using' your intuition after all, by which we usually mean going with your gut feeling, or something similar. Thus it is possible to think of intuition, as well as being our 'chess unconscious', as a type of 'muscle' that can be exercised. **Indeed, it seems that what chess-players want is not just to improve their intuition, but to become more intuitive.**

Vision

Every time I see a kid making a mistake and ask him why he played that move his reply starts with the words 'Well, I thought...'. 'Don't think' I reply, 'look'.
RICHARD JAMES, author of *The Complete Chess Addict* and Chess Teacher

If only we could pull out our brains, and use only our eyes.
PICASSO

Gufeld and Krogius are, however, entirely in synch with mainstream chess psychology on this matter. Many trees have fallen to explain the basis of this idea; which is that what distinguishes a strong player from a weak one in

chess is 'vision' (or visualization) and that this 'vision' is based upon chess experience. The following claim is particularly significant: "The m a ter do e n't calculate more than the expert. Rather, he sees more, e pecially the more important things." – De Groot. Abrahams (1951) built a book around 'vision' and defined it as "the unforced intuition of possibilities in the mind's eye". Levitt (*Genius in Chess*) refers to the relevant experience as a player's 'intuitive database', which is the store of chess patterns a player uses as the basis of his thought-processes.

In so far as there is evidence for this perspective, Dutch psychologist De Groot provided the basis of it in an experiment in 1944, which was updated and refined by Chase and Simon in 1973. Using a technique based on board reconstruction, these experiments suggested that the stronger you were, the more likely you were to view positions in 'chunks' (e.g. castled position, group of coordinating pieces, etc.) and that these chunks were seen by the stronger players on the basis of a vast store of analogous positions with the same types of chunks. Whereas relative beginners can only take in a piece or two at a time and very slowly grasp the ways in which the pieces are interacting, the stronger player can quickly assimilate lots of different constellations of pieces and their role in the position as a whole. So, for example, if the 'action' is all on the queenside, and both sides have castled kingside, the master doesn't really consider the pawns on h2, g2 and f as separate units but rather as 'a chunk'. More generally, if t e h-pawn were to be on h3 rather than h2 he would not consider the placement of the h-pawn as significant as such but rather that the whole kingside constellation has changed. So in a sense when he moves a pawn, he is moving a whole group of pawns. Perhaps we can say that when Karpov played h3 in the above game, it wasn't so much that a pawn on h2 had moved to h3, but rather that 'g2/h2' had become 'g2/h3'.

So the way a chess position is perceived differs markedly among players of different strengths. I have consulted lots of people on the matter of chess perception, asking them about the board in their head and whether it is a static image, whether it moves, has shape, is limited i size, etc. I have also asked about this image during chess thought-processes and, although the answers were varied, there is a common thread. This has not been a closed and careful experiment but I found a very interesting pattern which I will ultimately use to explain the limitations of 'thinking' in chess. It comes down to this general claim: the stronger the player, the more abstract t e visu a image.

I was excited by this discovery, even though I didn't know what to do with it. This claim is not new, but there are several different conclusions that one can draw from it. What struck me most was the difference in the way the board is envisaged by a strong chess-player who sees a chess set as if it were a prop in a play and the way he sees it when he starts thinking of the moves. In the first case it has a size and shape and two colours in a larger context (e.g. on a table) but in the latter it becomes an amorphous haze of implicit rules and ideas, without form or substance. I began to wonder whether this was just like all knowledge; the more you use it, the more unconscious it becomes. Try consciously thinking about walking or breathing, for example, and you'll be surprised how difficult it is. But then it occurred to me that just a the chess set will have a role in the play, it does not have a role as such in the chess thinking process. Maybe we only see what we consider to be relevant and perhaps only what seems relevant is of value to us.

This is no more than suggestive, but to support this idea I would like to mention an Art student in Edinburgh called Roland who had just started playing. He told me that in his head bishops were always fluorescent pink and the knights were emerald green, for both sides, and, although I can be gullible, I'm sure he wasn't joking. He uses chess as inspiration for his art work and so such vivid visual imagery had great value for him. And then when I asked my favourite non-chess-player, she just replied: "I don't have a chessboard in my head; why would I? If I want to see a chessboard I'll just look at one."

There are problems here of course, and these musings are not philosophically air-tight. For instance, as soon as you stop to think what you're thinking, you are no longer thinking in the same way. But I wonder whether this vision

thing can really help us make sense of how we think. Maybe it's just a blind alley, as it were. Speaking of which, if such vision is entirely abstract, is it the vision of a blind man? Are we 'seeing' without our sense of sight? And if we don't see a visual image, what is it that we look for when we think in chess? What is guiding the search?

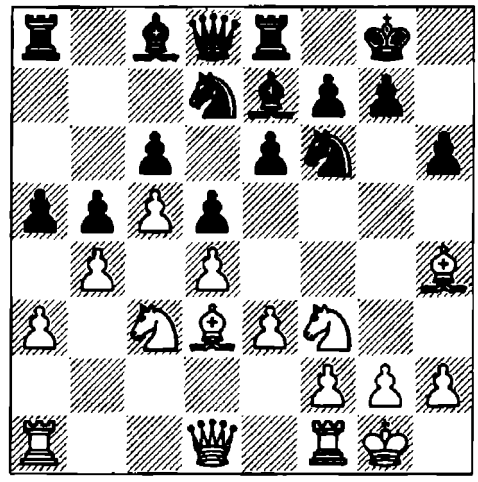
I had hoped that conversing with blind chess-players would help me to clarify this issue, but it seems that blind players 'think' in a very similar manner to sighted chess-players. Indeed, according to Stan Lovell, the Chairman of the Braille Chess Association for the UK, the principal problem for blind players is blundering because they somehow forget to 'look' (sometimes in memory, usually through touch) at a particular chunk or constellation of pieces. This is often associated with the tiredness which comes from trying to retain a changing image in your head without an external reference point for that image. However, what struck me most from these conversations was a comment by Graham Lilley (Britain's strongest blind player) that first and foremost he 'sees' an idea, usually as a familiar pattern, and only then checks it by means of analysis. He is also guided by his sense of value. Moreover, he claims to have no visual image whatsoever in his thinking processes. When he says that he first and foremost 'sees' an idea, he means it in the sense of recognition rather than sight. He moves from one position to another on the basis of where his thoughts go, and as far there is a direction to these thoughts he says that he heads towards, as far as possible, 'what works'.

Evaluating Value

What is good phaedrus, and what is not good. Need we ask anyone to tell us these things?
ROBERT PIRSIG, *Zen and The Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*

So we know that stronger players are inclined to see board positions by means of 'chunking' and we think these chunks are seen because they are familiar patterns. Most beginners will try to visualize the whole board and will often need to orientate themselves one piece at a time. This much is now well established, but probing more specifically it is very curious what chess-players see because it seems to me that they see what they think to be of value to them. Professor Susan Greenfield (*Brain Story*) supports this point: "We are far from being passive cerebral sponges. It turns out that we humans see not with our eyes but with our brains ... your attentional system provides for where your eyes move. So ... if something happens in my visual field that is interesting, I'll move my eyes there. But why would you move your eyes there? Only if your attentional system indicated the need to move there ... what we see must depend on the unique contents of our personalized brains." These 'unique contents' may include that elusive x-factor, 'talent', but I suspect it's largely a question of personal history. What is interesting to us, what is valuable to us, is related to who we are, and who we are is mainly a question of genes and experience.

Our chess 'vision' has almost nothing to do with our eyes, and lots to do with our sense of value. A few examples may help to make sense of this idea. Please pay special attention to the words I have placed in italic.



Minders (1061) - **Gonzalez** (1466)
U.S. Amateur West 1993

I have taken this example from the chapter 'The Curse of the Mindless King Hunter' in Jeremy Silman's hugely instructive book *The Amateur's Mind*. Silman's comment is very revealing here (italics are mine): "White was *blind* to *the fact* that his fortunes were tied to his extra queenside space and central possibilities.

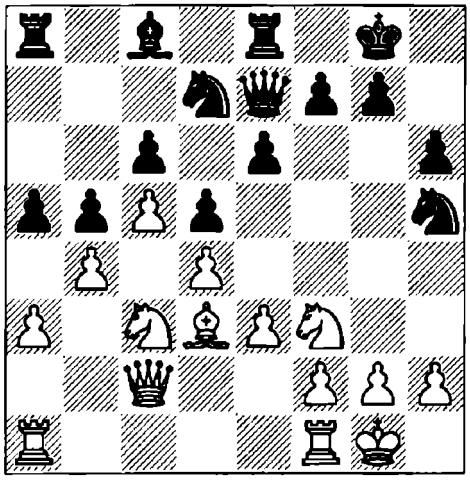
Instead, he decided that a kingside attack was *in order*. Why? My guess is that *he likes* to go after kings and thought that this was as *good* a time to do it as any. Needless to say, this is not the way to play good chess!" This strikes me as a fairly normal occurrence and it isn't always a bad thing to play the moves you want to play.

13 ♘e2?

"White *thinks* that a knight on g3 will help h m create a kingside attack simply because he has an extra piece on that side of the board. However, you should lead your pieces to squares where they have a future. Once the poor horse reaches g3 it will be badly posted since it can't go to e4, f5 or h5!"

Another of Silman's students adopted a similarly 'desire-based' approach from the given position: 13 ♕c2 ♘h5 14 ♗xe7 ♕xe7 *(D)*.

W



Now the thoughts of the white-player, rated around 1600: "I *want* to mate Black on the kingside. How do I get there? His h5-knight is *awkward* so I *don't want* to chase it back into play. I have a knight on c3 that's *doing nothing* so I should re-position it and make it more active. My e3-pawn keeps his knight on h5 out. *I want* to break in the centre, though, and occupy d6. To do this *I must* get counterplay in the centre. By playing e3-e4, I get play in the middle but give his knight access to f4."

Silman's despair amused me: "My heart sank when he said he wanted to mate Black on the kingside! What justification does he have for this, other than desire?" Silman also despairs at the "fear of ghosts" shown in the worry about allowing ...♘f4, taking two moves to trade knight for bishop.

In both cases what stands out for me is the emotional content of the thought and the way in which the thinking proceeds along evaluative lines. The players didn't just 'compute' their way to a decision, they were led to their choice by an evaluation, but not an 'objective' evaluation, rather an evaluation based on desire, fear and aspiration; their sense of value was processed in very human terms. White *wanted* to attack the black king in both cases. It wasn't that they *thought* that the best way to play was a kingside attack at all. Their evaluation of the position was flooded with emotional content. When the 1600 noticed the possibility of the knight coming to f4, he didn't stop to think whether it was a dangerous idea; he just had a feeling that such a turn of events was not to his liking. The reader's first impression may be that this just shows why these players are rated some 1000 points below the world's best but let me show you the thoughts of a player with those (roughly) extra 1000 rating points and see what you make of the difference.

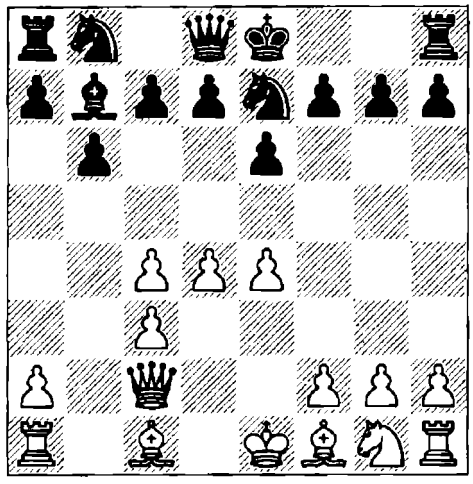
Speelman – Miles

British Ch, Morecambe 1975

1 c4 b6 **2 ♘c3** J b7 **3** e4 e6 4 d4 J b4 5 **♕c2** J x c **6** bx c l 7 *(D)*

In his preface to his notes to this game Jon Speelman says the following: "One of the biggest psychological problems in playing chess is to strike the proper balance between the moves one *wants* to play, and those which one believes one *ought* to play. Certainly, one should aim to be *as objective as possible* at all times. But in the heat of the battle this is, of course, *extremely difficult*. This is one area in which the difference between strong players and weaker ones is particularly marked I have a rather clear memory of *the feelings* – though of course not the exact calculation – which led me to *lash out* at move seven. My decision was the result of *a heady cocktail* of respect for my opponent combined with an *under-estimation* of my position. When I started to think at move seven, I *felt* that it should be *rather good* for me; but then I began to have *doubts*. If Black can get in ...f5 successfully, then he may have a *good* game. At some point the *extreme* idea of h4 occurred to me. And presumably the more I looked at it, the

more I *wanted* to play it. *Eventually, I decided to give in to my cruder instincts.*"



"This is where the f tn st a ts. I *liked* my centre but *got nervous about* ...f5. So:"

7 b4!?

I love the way Spess says "so", as if **7 h4** followed deductively from his feelings about the position. Comp a e this to something like: "When one side has the two bishops he must strive to demonstrate the superiority of the bishop without a counterpart. Speelman aims to weaken Black's d a k squares by pushing t e **h**-pawn to **h6, thus** improving the scope of his dark-squ a ed bishop. The move has a further bene f t in that there may a possibility of developing the king's rook to h3. Moreover, if Black is to stop the h-pawn f om going to h6, he will have to move his own h-pawn, thus providing future t a gets for White's dark-squared bishop and weakening the g6-squ a e in the event of Black playing ...f5. Perhaps S p elman had also foreseen v a ations with tactical problems based on t e a8-**h**1 diagonal and felt it p r dent to remove his rook from the diagonal of the b7-bishop. The move has a further crucial b ne f t in that Black's most na t ral continuation, **7**...f5 8 exf5 t xf5, can be met with the developing move **9** . g5." This is my own interpretation, as provided by my le f cortex.

Which gives a truer account of Speelman's decision: the fun, the liking and the nerves or the invented verb a explanation?

7**...0-0 8** l h3!?

"Once loosed from the fetters of playing 'properly', I carried on playing the moves I *wanted* to!"

Why did he 'want' to play these moves? **Presumably** this rook-li f is quite consistent with the previous move, but did **he** ' t ink' **his way to** these two moves? Not in any **conventional** sense; I think **it** would be **accurate** to say that he 'felt' his way there, but even that would be misleading, b cąuse, as we saw in the Preface, thought and feeling a e not as separate as we tend to assume.

8...d6 9 . d3 e5 **10** f4!?

"Although this is **consequent,** it is also extremely *provocative.* Presumably **7 h**4 and 8 . h3 had caused *a serious rush of adrenaline.*" Crazy juice is drenching the bo a d. I wonder if Speelman **had** seen this **position when he chose 7** h4. I doubt it; in **fact I have a suspicion** that he probably **played** all of **his** moves from **7** to 10 rather slowly **and each** of them took **up** a great deal of nervous energy. **Indeed,** he **admits that** he had already **used an** ho u and ten minutes **by** this stage.

There **is** much **to** be **said here.** My thoughts on objectivity will **be** elaborated on in **Chapter** 5 but for now **I should say** that during **a** g a e I don't think it is possible for **a chess-player** to b absolutely **objective. This is why Speelman's "objective as** far a possible" is noteworthy, a is his claim that even this is "ext emely di f - cult". I think objectivity in thought in general may be possible, for example in **analysing a** pawn ending **which was** not your own, but even there it doesn't come naturally because you will usually have certain preconceived opinions about what the evaluation should **be and** will tend to direct your thoughts tow a ds the lines which f t your evaluation. More to the point, your **evaluation will** be related to desire; you will want to see cert a n things and you **will look** in accordance with your emotional reaction to the position. In o t er words your though t always have emotional content.

More sp e if cally, **the role of desire in decision-making** has been **somewhat** neglected. Perhaps t is can be best **understood** with some sort of t eory of chess aesthetics but our at t action to **certain moves** may also work in a si m l a way to sexual attraction. **I'll only make** the most tentative dip into this, **the** deepest of **waters,** but **there may be some mileage here** because in both **cases the** at t action can b ra t er inexplicable, inducing emotions we cannot f lly

r tionalize and perhaps in both c a es we a e also motivated by some sense of 'survival' Leaving the sex to one side, the idea of evaluatons being fo r ed on the b a is of p evious experience may be in some sense D a inian.

A grandmaster reaches his present fo r over the course of hundreds of thousands of games (years) in the chess jungle. D u ing this time they have slowly but imperceptibly improved (adapted, become 'f tter') and in deciding on a move over the board they a e unconsciously calling on the experience of their past defeats a d victories (ancest y, memes) to reach a decision which will m a imize their chances of avoiding defeat (survival) and achieving vicl r (procreation). Please don't quote me on all this though, even though I'm w r ting it in my own book.

My real aim is to t to explain and explore l e idta that all ch e s thinking is ev a ua t ve. I have come to the opinion t at evaluation is not a s p a ate thought-pr o ess which we suddenly switch into when deemed impo r nt, but an int gral one which is the pilot of o u thoughts, and not just the pilot, but the co-p i ot, stew a dess, meal, and view out the window. It's the whole watermelon, it's ever-present, it's the r d thread of our thinking, without which we wouldn't think at all.

When we calculate, plan, think abs t actly, wo r y, make judgements, check for blunders, comp a e pieces and pawn-s t uctures we a e always thinking about the relative value of t ings. This move is ' b tter' than t at one (more v lue). I don't ' t st' this line (suspicious a b ut its value) I need to exchange r o ks (my position would have more value if the rooks c a e o f . T s may seem counterintuitive at f r st b ause we generally think of evaluation as something you stop to do, p rhaps after calculating or a f er a change in pawn-structure. But if you l o k at your thoughts closely you'll realize that you a e making some sort of value judgement all the t me. In most players this might b a largely unc nscious process but the r is def nitely some s rt of 'pre-intellectual awareness' in your c ess though t . You gauge the likely value of d f erent positions and ideas before you stop to make sense of them; your conscious and uncons ious evaluations may change but the fundamental process underlying your thoughts is always there. You may or may not re a ize it, but you a e evaluating these words as you read them.

Here is the rub: all thought in chess is evaluative. What is being sought is value. The 'vision' of the s t ongest players is abstract b cause value has no visible fo r . You cannot 'see' value any more than you can think it. Our appreciation of value is ultimately a question of feeling.

I think this is something like what Julian Hodgson meant when he told me that chess at the higher levels is "like a r ve r ' in which you "go with the f ow". You follow the value. It's not that you look at several di f erent things, stop after each of them and evaluate; but rather your sense of value will determine what you l o k at and how long you look at it. When I played a six-game match with Michael Ad a s I was amazed at how little he saw. Yes, that's right, shock ho r or g a p! - he's only world top ten. But seriously, I actually think I saw more i general but what I saw was of relatively little value whereas Mickey followed the river; he knew where his thoughts should go. Mickey b at me ve r convincing}y: 5 (quali t) – 1 (quantity). Indeed, after the match, when we were discussing chess, Mickey fully admitted not seeing very much in general; "that would have b en an eye-o p ner for you", he said, with his eyes wide open.

At the time I could only blink, but I think I now have a cle a er idea of what he means. At the risk of overdoing the metaphors, the evaluation doesn't hap p n when the train inspector checks the tickets, the evaluation is the t ain driver without which you wouldn't move at all or know how to get to where you want to go. And just like the tr a n, you almost never see t e dr ver. Most of what yo u brain processes is unseen in that you are evaluating unconsciously and using this unconscious to reach your assessments.

This reminds me of a g a e I played against Julian Hodgson in which I found a very creative idea that almost had a huge hole but still worked well because of a fairly stunning resource. I'm sorry I can't t ace the actual position but I remember Julian con g atulating me on the idea and saying he especially liked the fact that he couldn't do X because of Y. Then

when I told him that although I was vaguely aware of X I didn't think I'd seen Y he assured me that I had seen it, but just didn't realize it because "most calculaton is unconcious". I'm not saying that unconscious calculation is the same as evaluation but certainly the two seem to operate together somehow.

The reason I mention the idea of all thought being evaluative in the context of emotion is that evaluation is, at least partly, some sort of emotional process. When you say "it doesn't feel right", you are expressing what might best be called an 'emotional thought'. And this of course links back to the Preface, where I suggested that all thought had some sort of emotional content. Chess thinking is evaluative because evaluation is what happens when thought and emotion get together. And thought and emotion are always together.

I was delighted to discover that I shared this idea with the late but legendary Jan-Hein Donner, who writes as follows in *The King* (page 336): "A chess-player's thinking – in so far as it is a mental activity – is indeed mainly preoccupied with calculation. When he is pondering his next move, there is little else going on his mind than a constant 'if I do this then he'll do that' and so on. This is primarily experimental by nature, since he is not allowed to touch the pieces and is forced for this reason to move them in his head. *But this silent musing is based on a kind of sniffing – tactile, or tactile-mental activity of a totally different, largely unconscious nature; a background heavily laden with emotions, a form of perception rather than of thinking, since it is essentially purely evaluating by nature. For all this calculation must start from certain evaluations, otherwise it would not even know when to stop.*"

One reason that players may resist this idea is because it's easy to be bound by a popular duality, namely that there are two ways of playing chess – the positional and the tactical. Many assume that the former is based on pattern-recognition and 'feel' while the latter is just random computation, flashy tactics and a question of who can calculate better. It is considered by many to be a significant divide. But this is nonsense, and that's being polite. A good move is a good move before it is any particular type of move and a good position is a good position before it is any particular type of position. Our appraisal of quality always precedes our identification of types. Both these types are pattern-based in any case. Moreover, it is extremely rare to find a good positional idea that doesn't include an important tactic, and rare that tactics appear contrary to the spirit of the position.

Cultivating Intuition

Ask yourself: How does a man learn to get a 'nose' for something? And how can this nose be used?
WITTGENSTEIN, *Philosophical Investigations*

So what do we do now? All chess thinking is evaluative; whoopee-do. How will this help 1800Joe become Joseph2000? Or Savage, the mindless king-hunter, become mindful Sagave?

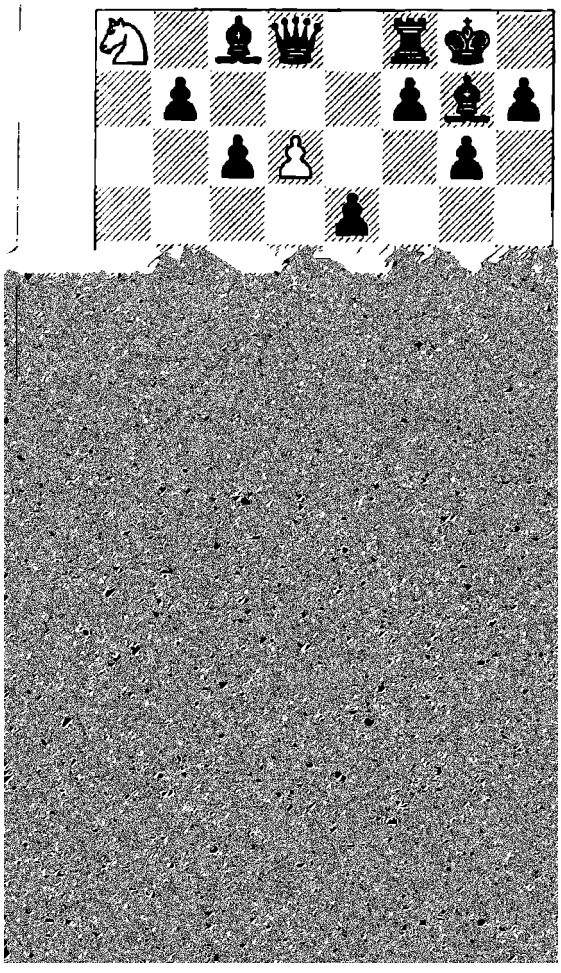
I have no easy answer, but my first suggestion is to take the idea of 't king with your pi e es' seriously. When you talk to your pieces, you can bring unconscious value judgements to the surface of your thoughts and let your pieces 'tell' you what they 'think' about how to proceed. The idea is closely related to 'the value of the pieces', which we will discuss in Chapter 4, but for now there is a more basic point. Once you realize that evaluating well is the key to playing good moves, you need to learn to evaluate. Simple in one sense, but there's a grave danger that if you evaluate in the conventional sense (stop and weigh imbalances, etc.) you will slip into your old conscious 'thinking' patterns with all its rules, memories and painful impressions. Sometimes it is better to take a fresh look at the position, and talking to your pieces can be a very effective way to do it.

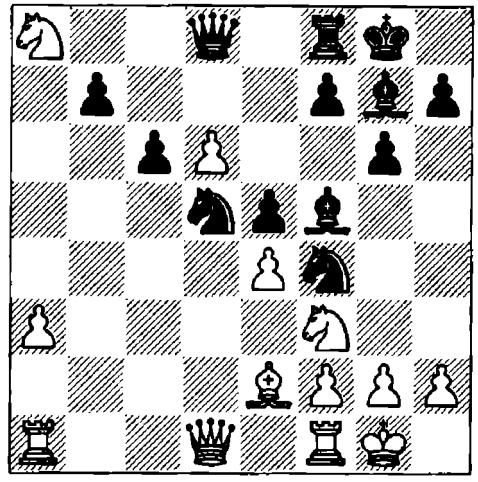
If this sounds way too wacky for a 'serious' game like chess, maybe you'd believe a more 'serious' writer. How about Nimzowitsch? Pawn-chains, blockaders, prophylaxis, whatever; Nimzowitsch did something very much like talking with his pieces too: "It may seem strange, but to me the chess pieces have living souls; they have wishes and desires, slumbering in their subconscious, to be understood only by me. They want something without understanding why. I don't understand either, but I know

what they want." (*My System*). Donner seems to agree, and suggests that "anyone doing manual work, in whatever field, even if it were only with the pen, will immediately recognize the experience." Moreover, Donner seems to consider this type of awareness of the "desires" of inanimate objects as part of "a finely tuned perceptional system" (*The King*). Let's consider the following game and see how this idea fits in. My notes are somewhat superficial, partly because I didn't want to distract from Tiger's 'conversation', and also because a full analysis would take several pages without lending itself to verbal explanation.

P.H. Nielsen – Hillarp Persson
Politiken Cup, Copenhagen 1998

1 c4 g6 2 d4 i g7 3 **e4** d6 4 M l f6 S i e2 0-0 **6** l f3 eS 7 0-0 l c6 8 dS l 7 9 **b4** a 10 i a f S 11 **c5** a b4 12 i xb4 l f4 13 l bS c6 14





w r ting he is around 2550 and a grandmaster who, in my opinion, has not reached his p ak. Most of that improvement can b attributed to copious a ounts of hard work and pattern assimilation. His intuition has been improved in this way but, to parap h ase Desc a tes, it's not enough to have good intuition, one must also use it well.

It seems that the idea of talking with your pieces has helped Tiger to do this. Here's what he had to say when I asked him to elaborate on his liking for the technique:

"I think it's connected to the concept of 'weak squ a es', though not exclusively. When you ask your knights what they want, as k ng for the general direction of their ye a nings, you will get a different view of the situation on the board; it especially helps me when I'm getting too - how do you say it - exact; when calculation takes up too much of my thinking. If you play a very sh a p opening and then suddenly f nd yourself in a s t ategically di f cult position where the tempo is no longer of the greatest importance, then it's a very good idea to change ge a by as k ng your pieces where they'd like to be. I use this t ck a lot. In endgames I talk continually to my pieces. I guess this is what all strong players do, to some extent; at least it's a very good explanation of what one is really trying to do in the endgame when f nding the optimal constellation of the pieces.

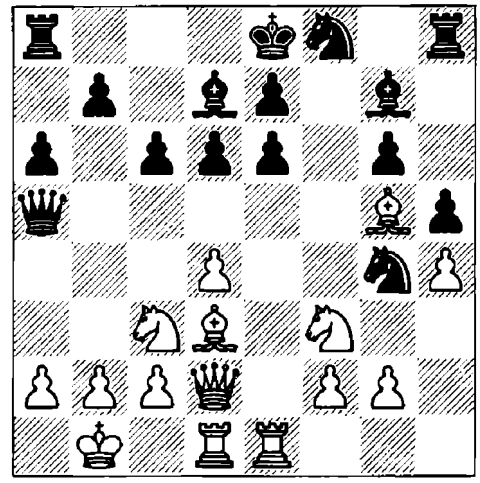
"As well in the middlegame as in the end- g a e it's a good way of f nding out which pieces to exchange and which to keep; a piece that has no will, that f nds no meaning in roaming the bo a d, should immediately be exchanged.

"The concept of 'talk ng to your pieces' can be stretched in f nitely, but I usually u e it to 'decomputerify' my though t and make chess more a n mated."

If the above game wasn't enough to show t is appraisal in action, consider the following gem:

Hodgson – Hillarp Persson
Erevan OL 1996

1 d4 d6 2 e4 g6 3 l c3 i g7 4 i e3 a6 S i d2 l d7 6 h4 hS 7 l f3 l gf6 8 eS l g4 9 e6 fxe6 10 . d3 l f8 11 0-0-0 . d7 12 l he1 c6 13 . gS ' aS 14 b1 (D)


B

Put yourself in Black's sh o s. You've played a provocative o p ning and your opponent has replied classically, centralizing his pieces and, by means of a positional pawn sacri f ce, has rendered yo u pieces rather passive. In such situations you may feel uncomfortable generally but it is important to put your f nger on the source of the discontent. In this case I think the black king is a little uncom f ortable in spite of his weighty pawn shield mainly because of the supe r or scope of the white rooks and the proximity of the weaknesses on g6 and g5. But is the king really the issue? Talk to your k ight on f8 and he'll tell you that his hands are tied. You tell him that he's doing a good and important job and that you need him to stay there, gu a ding e6 and g6. But of course this con f icts with the de- s i es of the rooks, which would like access to f8 in order to use the half-open f- f le. Also, you would l i e to castle queenside but e7 hangs. So the problem boils down to the superiority of White's rooks and the diff culty in using your own r o ks. How are you going to deal with this?

Talk with your aS-rook. He'll probably tell you that he's happy where he is, because he wants to 'cover' the king by keeping the ...0-0-0 option and he may also be brought to life by advancing one of the queenside pawns at some stage. Your h8-rook is rather less sure of its dharma because as long as the knight is on f8, the ...0-0 option is unavailable. So what can you do? Have a good chat with the guy on h8 and see what you come up with...

14...l h7! 15 ' e2 i h8! 16 i d2 l f7! 17 l e4 ' b !

An important move, keeping an eye on d4 and b2. White's king may feel ever so slightly

perturbed now. After all, that d4-pawn is all that's preventing ... ♕xb2#. A computer may not register that, but humans tend to sense these things acutely. And now the f7-rook may remove the defender on f3 and there is some sort of hidden pressure on f2 too. Black's queen, knight and rook all have an eye on it.

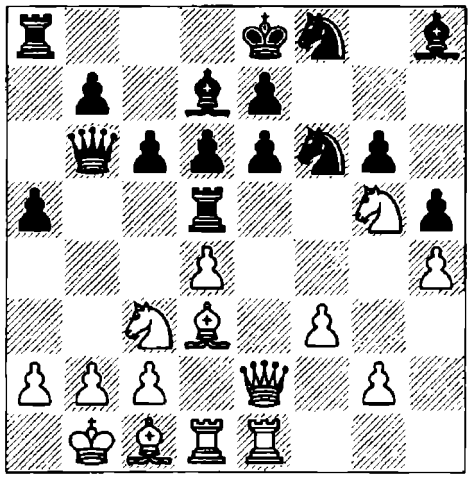
18 ♗c1

Hodgson is known for his fearsome attacks, but if you look at his games more closely, he is very protective of his soft spot, and very conscious of the safety of his own king.

18...a5!?

A little mysterious, but gaining space (something Black needs) and perhaps the a8-rook can come into play via a at some point.

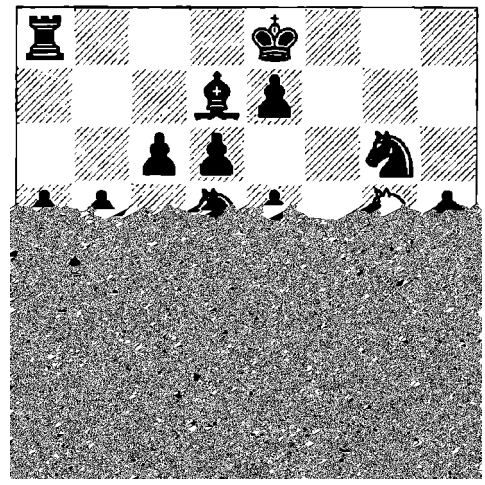
19 ♘fg5 ♖f5! 20 f3 ♘f6 21 ♘c3 ♖d5! *(D)*



Fantastic chess. To be able to play in such a manner you have to be relatively resistant to ***Materialism*** (see Chapter 4). For now, look back to move 14 and compare the value of the h8-rook to the c3-knight. Now look at the value of the rook on d5 and consider that it can only be taken by improving Black's coordination and losing the d4-pawn.

22 ♘xd5 ♘xd5 23 ♕d2 ♗xd4 24 ♗xg6+ ♘xg6 25 ♕xd4 ♕xd4 26 ♖xd4 e5 27 ♖d2 b5! (D)

A difficult position to assess. I'd imagine it's about equal, but I like Black's centre and it would be more fun to be Black given that he was the main instigator of the turn of events which led to this position. On a more technical point, in such cases where one side is the exchange up but there are opposite-coloured bishops on the board, the material imbalance can be



hard to understand. If there is nothing on the board but rook, bishop and king, against bishop, knight and king where the bishops are of opposite colours, GM Keith Arkell tells me that the side with the extra exchange can force a win something which he couldn't do if the bishops were of the same colour. However, when the position is relatively closed, like it is here, the opposite-coloured bishops can favour the side without the rook (it is difficult to play g4, for example, and c2 is vulnerable). Perhaps it's similar to opposite-coloured bishops in general, in that they tend to favour the side with the initiative.

28 g3 b4

Somehow I prefer 28...a4!?, which seems to secure the knight on d5. After **29** a3 (**29** b3 b4!?) **29**... . f5 30 1 e4 < d7 it is not clear how White will make use of his bishop.

29 ♖d3 ♗f5 30 ♘e4 ♔d7 31 ♔a1

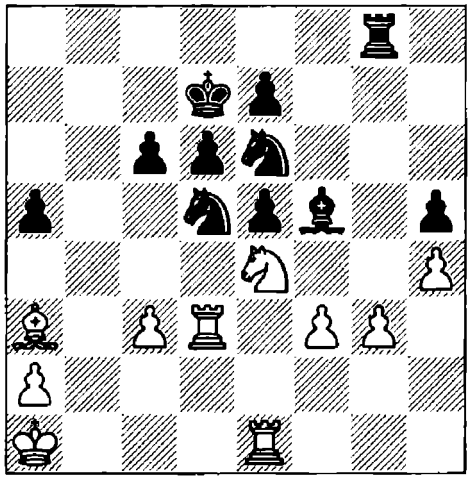
Now you should talk to your pieces again. Which is most urgently in need of attention?

31...♘f8! 32 c4 bxc3 33 bxc3 ♘e6 34 ♗a3 ♖g8? *(D)*

I have the impression that this was played rather quickly; Tiger is usually in time-trouble around this stage. The rook seems to want to go to g8 but perhaps there was a more urgent consideration because now White's position springs to life.

34... 1 b6!? or 34... c7 35 c4 t f6!? keeps Black in control. Black might even be clearly better, or more; if White can be prevented from playing c4 and g4 then Black's position will just keep on getting better. This type of position, where the advantage looks small, but the trend may be irreversible, is more common than

most authors realize. P a of me wants to say that Black is slightly better and part of me wants to say that he's winning; the next chapter tries to resolve this type of problem.



35 c4! i xe4 36 l xe4 t b4 37 i xb4 axb4 38 J xe5 J xg3 39 J a c5 **40** J a7+ l c7 41 **a3** c6!? 42 a b4 cxb4 43 b2 eS!?

Tiger is clearly trying to make full use of all of his pieces in this game. It was also possible just to go for the h-pawn.

44 l b3 e4 45 l e3 e x 3 **½-½**

A draw was agreed here, which is just as well in a sense because both players missed 46 ♖e7, which appears to win on the spot, and somehow this result would be displeasing, given Black's superlative conception earlier in the game.

To add further weight to the idea of talking with your pieces, Emanuel Lasker based his theory of chess aesthetics on the idea of 'achievement', or more specifically 'the achievement of the pieces'. Lasker's ideal is for the pieces to achieve a task of vital importance when there is only one way for them to do so. In a sense this is what talking to your pieces is all about; you consult with your forces very deliberately and 'ask' them how they will make the most of themselves for the common good.

So it is my opinion that 'talking with your pieces' is an effective way to cultivate your intuitive abilities. I also think that 'humour' is an incredibly important quality for a chess-player to have, and we'll come to this shortly. However, for now I would like to recommend two training techniques from the Dvoretsky/Yusupov school of thought.

The first is simply to 'guess' more often (see Chapter 4, *Attack and Defence*). When playing through a game or seeing a new position, make a quick judgement about the position and how play may develop and then compare this to the given analysis and/or your more considered opinion having looked at the position for a longer period of time. This will give you some sense of your intuitive abilities and should help you to make more successful guesses and eventually to trust your first impressions more.

The second is the idea of 'positional sketches' (see Chapter 3, *Training for the Tournament Player*), which basically involves the sketching of instructive positions on a card and making sense of it to yourself in your own words. Although I haven't used this technique for a while, I feel it was instrumental in my passage from IM to GM. The technique is based on the idea that it's not just the number of positions you have in your 'intuitive database' that counts, but how well you understand them and how you can adapt them, usually unconsciously, to your problems over the board. For example, if you are making the same type of error again and again in chess, it can be quite cathartic to draw out the positions where you went astray and see them together in all their 'glory'.

The Trappings of Analogy

The charm, one might say the genius, of memory is that it is choosy, chancy and temperamental; it rejects the edifying cathedral and indelibly photographs the small boy chewing a hunk of melon in the dust.
ELIZABETH BOWEN

At what level do we stop just repeating what we have remembered and genuinely start to understand why we're playing the move? At my level, it's almost entirely memory, mostly taken out of context.
RICHARD JAMES, Chess writer and teacher, rated around 2000

A note of caution. Pattern-recognition is not usually a conscious process. There is a difference between 'feeling' the right moves from the basis of an unconscious intuitive database and trying to copy a half-remembered position from

your memory banks and pasting it onto a new one. There is nothing wrong with analogous reasoning in chess if it is done properly, as we saw, for example, in the Rozentalis game at the start of this chapter, but there is a danger in that type of positions which make an impression on you may not be absorbed as 'purely' as you think. Another reason I like the technique of positional sketches is that the time and care then helps to prevent the sort of mistaken reasoning we see in what follows.

Speelman – Rowson

Mind Sports Olympiad, London 1999

1 ♘f3 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 b4 d6 4 ♗b2 **e5** 5 **d3** ♗g7 6 g3 0-0 7 ♗g2 a?!

Control of c5 does not fully compensate for White's structural superiority in the queenside.

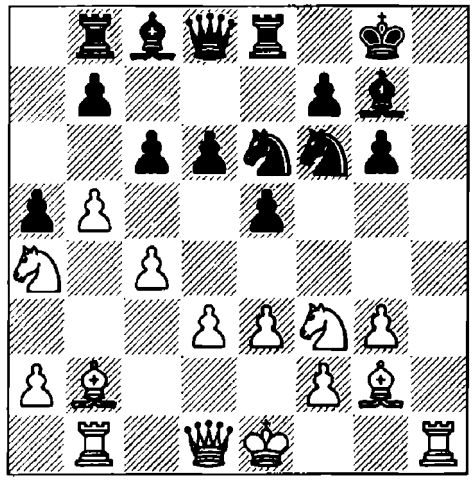
8 b5 ♘bd7 9 ♘fd2 ♘c5 10 ♘c3 ♗e8 11 ♘b3 ♘e6 12 ♘f4 h5! 13 e3! h4

After 13...c6!? 14 bxc6 bxc6 15 ♗xc6 ♗d7 16 ♗xd7 ♕xd7 17 ♘d2 ♖ab8 18 ♕c3 I didn't see a convincing way for Black.

14 ♘f1! ♘b8?!

14... ♘g5 is more combative.

15 ♘**f3!** hxg3 16 hxg3 c6 17 ♖b1 *(D)*



17...c5?

Looking at this position now, I am struck by the overwhelming ugliness of this move. Yet at the time I played it quickly and confidently. I have enough understanding to see that closing the centre, weakening d5 and ceding the light squares is an horrific positional blunder and yet during the game I was sure that this was the correct move in the given position.

18 ♘d2 b6 19 ♘c3 ♘c7 20 ♕c6!

Only now did I sense that something was amiss. White is clearly better, or at least clearly in control, and went on to win. Why did this happen? The answer is in the following game, played six years earlier, annotated by Tiviakov in *New In Chess* no. 1, 1994. All four comments are Tiviakov's.

Hodgson – Tiviakov

PCA Qualifier Groningen 1993

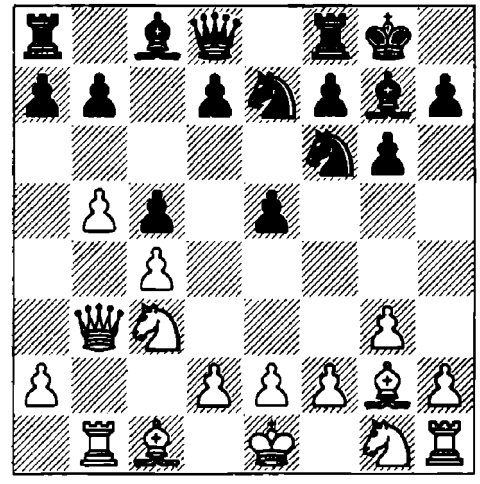
1 c4 e5 2 g3 ♘f6 3 ♗g2 g6 4 ♘c3 ♗g7 5 ♘b1 ♘f6!

"To my mind this move is stronger than the frequently played 5...d6 6 b4, etc., because Black has a lead in development and must try to save as much time as he can."

6 b4 0-0

"The most important thing for Black is to refrain from ...d6."

7 b5 ♘e7 8 ♕b3 **c5!** *(D)*



"A very important move, which is made possible by the fact that the d-pawn is still on d7, and after the exchange on c6, Black can take with the d7-pawn."

9 bxc6?!

"It was better to refrain from exchanging on c6, and to develop the knight (9 ♘f3), or to play 9 d3 or 9 e4. The position is equal, as Black controls the centre and White cannot make any further progress on the queenside."

9...dxc6

Black is slightly better here and after various adventures went on to win a game which qualified him for the PCA candidates matches.

Tiviakov's ...c5 was an excellent move and my ...c5 was a lemon. The positions are entirely di f erent and yet I decided to apply what I thought was the same idea. What made a p a ticul a impression on my memory in the Tiviakov game was his claim that a f er any normal 9th move by White the position became equal because of Black's central control and White's inability to do anything on the queenside. At f st I assumed White could make use of the d5-square but when I realized that this didn't come to anything signi f cant I was really impressed by t e idea.

Remembering this concept, I was keen to play ...c5 against S p elman but wanted to wait until White could no longer castle queenside, thus mak ng the h- f le less wo r ying. Then when he played 17 l b1 I thought 17...c5 would a so lead to an equal position and that I may even be b tter because he had nowhere sensible to put his king. But of course this reasoning is painfully mistaken. White's con t ol of the h- f le is not likely to lead to mate in a hurry but it's still a signi f cant factor in the position, and whereas Black's e7-knight does a good job of controlling d5 while having the possibility of coming to f5 in the Tiviakov game, my c7-knight is much more passive. Perhaps most signi f cantly, my b6-pawn is very weak.

I suppose I have only myself to blame in this instance but I think this example further high- ligh t the role of emotion in chess, in this case with its relation to memory. It wasn't that I thought the reasoning behind Tiviakov's ...c5 could be applied to my game, it was that I very much liked the concept of keeping the queenside closed and not worrying about the weakness on d5. My memory played a t r ck on me and threw me a poisoned pattern. Such is the danger of reasoning by analogy. So be c a eful with ideas t at you 'like', because you may use them inappropriately.

There is support for this claim in 'gestalt' psychology which suggests that past exper- ence does not always help with problem-solving and may even be disruptive. Luchins (1942), for example, had this to say: "Habituation creates a mechanized state of mind, a blind attitude towards problems one does not look at the problem on its own merits but is led by a mechanical application of a used method." Rich a James gave an amusing and highly instructive example of this phenomenon which begins with a young junior player blaming h i for a defeat. "You made me lose!", exclaimed the youngster. When he showed the game, it became clear what was at the root of the accusation. The previous week, the club lesson had been about a t ctical theme in games beginning with 1 e4 e5, for example after 2 l f3 l c6 3 l c3 i c5?! 4 l xe5! l xe5 5 d4. Such a patte r comes as quite a s u rise when you see it for the first time, and it is likely to appeal to you so much that you want to t y it again soon. The young boy's g a e began 1 e4 e5 2 l f l c6 3 i c4 i c5 and guess what White played now? 4 l xe5? l xe5 5 d4 l xc4 and a piece had gone west. "So much for that idea!", he must have t ought.

Such extreme cases a e rare, and of course we do not have to fall prey to this problem, but many chess-players are sticklers for old certainties and cannot break out of their own patterns. The princip a problem with relying on a conscious interpretation of a dimly remembered idea is precisely that it is conscious and therefore uses only the surface of the mind. This is also an aspect of the Thinking sin, that when we just think on the surface of the mind we call upon only a fraction of o u resources. This is one of t e many things which can lead to confusion.

Confused about Confusion?

The m in d i f ul t of thinking is conf sion. We t r to do too much at once. Emotions, information, logic, hope and creativi t all crowd in on us. It is like juggling with too many balls.
EDWARD DE BONO

We have already discussed the way in which your brain is naturally inclined to m a e and recognize connections between patte r s and now it's time to show why this leads to confusion b- ing such a co m on phenomenon on the chessboard. Basically, your mind, left to its own devices, uses cliches and repea t ble patte r s to 'think' Over the course of time such cliches come to seem a lot l i e 'rules': a knight on t e rim is dim, never t a e a b-pawn with your queen, queen and knight are better than queen

and bishop and never ever invite a vampire into your house. Yet chess positions and ideas frequently resist the imposition of r les for explanatory purposes.

Although there a e useful guidelines in chess, it seems that there a e almost no rules other than those which constitute the basic ins t ctions. Watson does an excellent job of explaining this concept in ***Secrets of Modern Chess Strategy*** and he calls the phenomenon 'Rule Independence' Cl a sical chess strategy was based a ound certain precep t like 'play on the side of the board on which you a e stronger', 'a wing attack should be met with an attack in the centre' and so forth, but as chess s t ategy became more and more 'dynamic' it becam e cle a that there were many exceptions to these rules and even the strongest players were seen to be break ng them. So much so in fact, that these ' r les' began to look somewhat i r elevant, even misleading. So chess skill became less a matter of applying universal general rules and more a matter of the co r ect appraisal of the specif cs of a given position. This is well summarized by the guru of dynamic chess s t ategy Mihai Suba with his saying: "In chess, the golden rule is that there are no golden rules".

Another way of looking at the matter is to acknowledge that the purpose of rules in general is to make sense of 'complex systems', such a chess. However, where rules cannot be formulated mathematically they must be stated in natur a language and since language is essentially simple (easily understood), and chess is essentially complex, the rules a e not going to ' f t' in any sort of exact way. It doesn't mean that rules are useless, but just that we cannot rely on them exclusively to lead us to the corr ct decisions.

This is problematic for the chess-player because in many ways these rules were candles in the darkness; if there are no such candles, how a e we to make sense of this mysterious game? Given the unfathomable number of possible ideas in any given position, how a e we to fnd t e most suitable ones, if we don't have rules to guide us?

Well actually w e do have 'rules' to guide us, but these rules a e by no means absolute, and a e therefore more like 'guidelines' which we ought to absorb, forget about, and use unconsciously as part of thinking. Above all these ' r les' should guide rather than dictate. The hyper-intellectual English chess-player Stephen James put it succinctly when he said that in chess, "rules are a wonderful servant but a terrible master" Clearly, rules can easily be misused b cause it is up to us to inte r ret them. H a tston and W ason imply exactly this in ***The Psychology of Chess***: "The beginner is taught certain maxims, precepts (or technically heuristics) of positional play which enable him to cope with app a ent disorder, e.g. 'seize open files', 'occupy the 7th rank with a rook', 'avoid isolated pawns', 'put your pawns on opposite coloured squ a es to those of your bishop', etc. However, skill is marked, not by the application of such precepts, but by the correct assessment of their competing claims, or by know ng when to violate them."

The problem with this being the case is that it is the very opposite of what comes naturally to the brain. In a self-organizing patterning system, cliches, r les and heuristics are cherished and adored. Indeed, the mind is a cliche-making and cliche-using system. Established patterns get l a ger and larger, i.e. individual patterns are s t ng together to give a longer and longer sequence which is so dominant that it constitutes a pattern of its own. There is nothing in this system which breaks up such long sequences; you have to do it yourself. At the risk of oversimplifying, we might say that the chess mind is torn, because chess is rule-independent while the mind is dependent on rules.

So in many chess positions we will look in vain for a way to apply our r les. Yet we fnd it very di f icult to escape such rules. How often do you hear expressions like 'This shouldn't work', 'I rejected that on principle', 'This is outrageous!'. I he a them frequently, and I feel quite sympathetic when I do. It is entirely possible to 'follow all the rules' and lose to an opponent who breaks them. This is hard for us to be a , because most of our chess understanding was built upon such rules. Moreover, what are chess teachers to do without the old certainties? When I think of this predicament I am reminded of the famous Catholic reaction to the publication of D a win's ***Origin of the Species***:

"Let us hope that it is not true, and if it is true, let us hope that it does not become widely known"

Our rule-bound sense of chess leads directly to confusion because our rules lead us to ask questions of positions that don't yield any comforting or convincing answers. In most cases, all you will hear in reply to a question like 'How should I respond to a wing attack?' is the inner echo of your own voice, or, more likely, a bemused oracle tirelessly repeating 'It depends on the position.' Hartston and Wason put the point like this: "Confusion is caused by the non-existence of a concrete answer to the questions of the position." This is another good reason to talk with your pieces: because the type of questioning and answering going on is less exact, more tactile, and less likely to lead to confusion.

Confusion is also caused by what I like to call 'bureaucratic thinking'. We often see the right move very quickly but then look for a way to justify our feeling that this move is the correct one. Our justification often takes the form of rule-based reasoning. 'I want to play this move but he just broke such and such a rule and so it doesn't seem to fit here. It's only logical that having broken such and such a rule, I should use this other rule to punish him. And so I should play this other move, which doesn't feel so good, but seems more logical.' This type of problem has similarities with Pe rectionism but is actually more about an over-reliance on reason than trying to play the perfect move. It is very important to be aware of such 'red t pe' in your thinking. If a move strikes you as correct, it needn't require an explanation and even if you feel it does, it won't be needed until after the game. This is also an important aspect of trusting your intuition and sufficiently relevant to 'thinking' to merit an example.

Rowson – McDonald

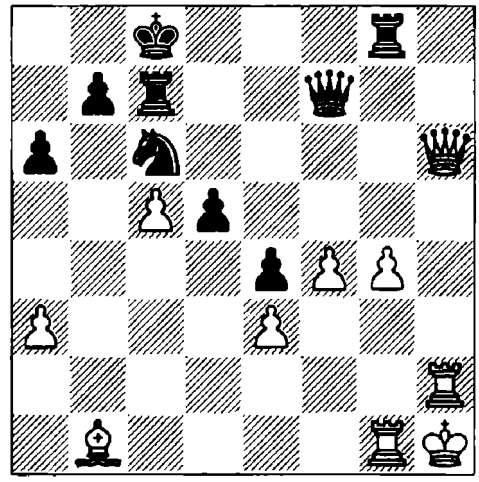
L ndon 1998

l l f3 dS 2 c4 c6 3 d4 l f6 4 cxdS cxdS 5 M l c6 6 i f4 a6 7 l eS i d7

7...e6!.

8 e3 e6 9 . d3 . e7 10 g4! • b6 11 0-0! h6 12 **Ic1** l d8 13 l a4 ' a 14 l xd7! l xd7 15 a3! l eS 16 b4 ' d8 17 l cS l xcS 18 bxcS i gS 19 i g3 i h4 20 l b1 i xg3 21 hxg3 l c7 22 f4 " e7 23 l f gS 2 ' f3 g 4 **25** g 4 l g8 26 l g2 ' f6 27 i f <td8 28 <h1 c8 29 l bg1 ' g7 30 l h2 f6 31 ' h4 eS 32 dxeS fxeS 33 ' ix 6 e4 34 i b1 f f7 (D)

W



So far so good; if I may say so I played rather well up to here, though perhaps I took a little too long doing so. Now I think I panicked a bit. I was hoping to make my final GM norm in this tournament and perhaps put too much pressure on myself. When showing the game to Jon Speelman afterwards I think he said, "All you have to do here is relax and let yourself win this position". I was probably a little tense and also not sufficiently focused to calculate carefully.

35 f bS?!

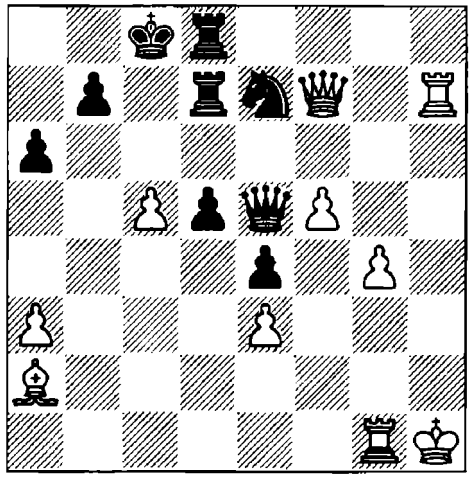
Not sure about this one; it's not obvious that my queen was so badly placed. I think it was time for 35 ♗a2!, when ♕h5 is some sort of threat. When I annotated this game for myself after the tournament at this point I inserted: "Don't fo r et **to talk with** your piec e ! Clearly the bishop had a much stronger case than the queen." After 35...♘e7 36 ♕h7 there could follow 36...♖g7 37 ♕h8+ ♖g8 38 ♕d4 or 36...♕e6 37 f5 with domination in both cases.

35...**♕e6 36** . a l e7 37 **f5**

OK, but such a push should only be made with a concrete follow-up in mind.

37... \ eS 38 ' f7 l d8 39 l h7 l cd7 (D)

The crunch moment. GM Neil McDonald, annotating in Chess magazine, describes my thought-processes rather well: "Jonathan felt instinctively that 40 ♕g7 was the correct move, but decided to test his intuition with some analysis and in his head came up with ... [see below]"



W

40 ♕e6?!

It's true actually; I had seen 40 ♕g7 ♕xg7(?) 41 ♖xg7 ♘xf5 and was a little wary of allowing tactics in any shape or form. I then justified my safer move with the bogus variation 42 ♖xd7 ♖h8+ 43 ♔g2 ♘h4+ 44 ♔g3 ♔xd7 which I considered 'unclear' because 45 ♖h1? is met by 45...♘f5+. But of course 45 ♗xd5 wins very easily here. This last point, which Krogius would no doubt include under cases of **'the retained image'** is a curious but instructive one. For so long my bishop has been struggling for a role and d5 has been overprotected that I just couldn't imagine it would be so easy for it to come back into the game like this. Somehow my brain couldn't shake the image of a blunted bishop on a2.

McDonald went on to say that **"Every chess-player, weak or strong, has to decide whether as a rule he should trust his intuition when it disagrees with his calculation..."** In so far as this is true, I recommend that you trust your intuition a a rule but you do need both to play chess well so don't make your trust in intuition an excuse for lazy calculation!

Indeed it is true that strong chess-players should try to have good calculation and strive to improve it. However, I think we should consider the idea that **perhaps 'calculation' is overrated**. I was surprised when I first heard this idea from GM Matthew Sadler, a player generally considered to have phenomenal calculating powers. I didn't speak at length about this with him and I'm not sure how to develop this point without misleading the reader, but Matthew seemed to be suggesting that among the many important features of a chess-player's strength, tactical quickness and capacity for ideas (pattern spotting) were much more important.

I'll restrict myself to two simple claims here: very few chess decisions are made on the basis of clear and exact calculation and in so far as calculation is a conscious process, it is useful only if it is directed by a sense of value (appreciation of ideas and where to look for them), which tends to be unconscious. Still, this sense of value is more important than the formal tool. In this respect we should be aware that computers can only calculate after humans have installed an evaluative function (see Chapter 4).

I think most GMs have read Kotov's classic Think Like a Grandmaster but the majority of them, including myself, not only don't seem to think in his prescribed manner, but wouldn't do a good job of explaining the details of the technique if they were to be asked. More likely I think, as with most of our chess knowledge, Kotov's technique has become part of our chess unconscious; we often know when to use it without being prompted and many players use a refined version of the technique even though they have no idea that this is what they are doing. Much successful 'calculation' is very fuzzy. Indeed, I have come to think more generally that **'fuzzy thinking' is often a virtue in chess and makes use of a variety of thoughts and thinking processes, conscious and unconscious**.

As I have already said, thinking is a very messy process at the best of times. Looking at the more sophisticated appraisals/critiques of the Kotov technique like Krasenkow's (in Dvoretsky and Yusupov's Attack and Defence), Nunn's (Secrets of Practical Chess) and Tisdall's (Improve Your Chess Now) you will see that calculation needn't be synonymous with structure and clarity and if this is the case with an aspect of thinking we consider to be most austere, but use quite rarely, think of how fuzzy your thinking might be in general. But don't think this need be a problem; just consider whether you agree with me and if so what this means for developing your chess strength.

It is often thought that the stronger your play, the clearer your thinking, but personally I see no justification for that view. Closer to the truth seems to be 'the stronger your play, the fuller

your thinking', whereby fullness might be a measure of diversity, appropriateness, depth and accuracy. Much as I love surrealism, any link with Dada is entirely accidental. However, after writing this I remembered that Marcel Duchamp, the great artist who was also a fairly strong chess-player, gave up art around 1928 and described chess as the quintessence of what Dada had intended. There is certainly a lot to be said for the idea that chess is surreal. But I digress.

In the game continuation above, I calculated very badly but it's not clear if this is because I can't calculate well, or I had some relevant desire preventing me from seeing things clearly. Perhaps I had enjoyed being in control of this game so much that I was loath to risk losing control and therefore afraid to look at complications at all. I couldn't pretend that they weren't there, however, and so I found a convenient line that allowed me to cease my search. In any case, I drew three lessons here:

1) Learn to calculate better but accept that calculation can never stand separate from other aspects of thinking.

2) If you can't make a decision based on good calculation, play the move you are intuitively more comfortable with. Realize in the process that 'fuzzy thinking' needn't be a bad thing.

3) If you think you see a line which refutes the move you want to play and feel to be correct, ask yourself if you really believe it (in this case such a simple question would have overridden my nervous impulses and would have helped me to see 45 ♗xd5 at the end).

40... i xe6 41 fxe6 : c7 42 . n l e8 43 : el

I was relying on 43 l f d8 44 ♗xd5? but this loses to 44...♘xd5 45 ♖d7+ l eS.

43... : g8 44 h2 b8 45 h3?

I may still be winning after 45 . n , but this is by chance rather than design.

45... . rs 46 : r7 : h8+ 47 < g3 : h6 48 . xe7 l xe7 49 . xd5 : f6 50 l c3 : f3+ 51 ' h4 : h7+ 52 ' g5 : g7+ 53 < h4 l h7+ ½-½

Looking back at this game, I think my primary fault was over-susceptibility to fear, lack of faith in my intuition and making calculation a slave to my nervous tension. It is difficult to calculate well when your head is not clear, but our heads are very rarely 'clear' so we often just have to make the best of our fuzzy thinking.

Humour and Hedonism

Perhaps the most important trait a player needs is a warped sense of humour
GM TONY MILES

Humour is by far the most sign i cant be h v-iour of the hu m n mind.
EDWARD DE BONO, *I* am Right, You are Wrong

We should tackle realit in a slightly joking way; othe r ise we miss its point.
LAWRENCE DURRELL

Have you ever noticed how many players smile and laugh when they are analysing chess positions? Have you ever been attracted to a particular line of play because it appealed to your sense of humour? Have you ever thought that a surprising move in chess may be rather a lot like a punchline in a joke? I would answer all three questions affirmatively because I have come to believe that Miles's quote is not just a joke unto itself but a profoundly important insight into the workings of the chess mind. When I asked Tony Miles if he could point me in the right direction about the above quotation he said that, with regret, he could only point me in the direction of a circle, for which he recommended that I turn left and keep on going. He did add though, as a vital afterthought, that it had something to do with 'unexpected punchlines'

This is helpful because in general there does seem to be a strong overlap with the things that we find surprising and things we laugh at. If you've ever tried to entertain young kids you'll know that you often need to do little more than pull out their teddy bear from behind your back and you're guaranteed a few chuckles. Of course when we get older, we become conditioned to expect almost everything around us and it's therefore more difficult to make us laugh by surprising us. Even so, surprise is a big component of humour. We often r ad about the virtues of surprising the opponent, but if what I've said about patte r -recognition and vision makes sense, then it may be more impor t nt for us to surprise ourselves. Indeed if we are to avoid being slaves to our patterns, we need somehow to look beyond what

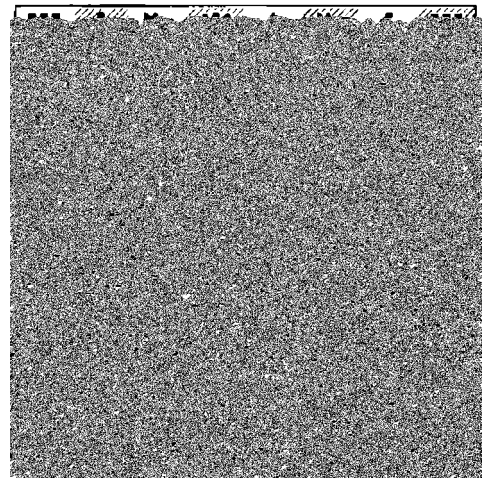
we naturally see and I would like to suggest that looking for 'jokes' is one good way to do this.

This may become more plausible when you consider that timing is another important aspect of humour, and, of course, it is in chess. Zwischenzugs are typically humorous in that what makes them so significant in chess is that they are unexpected along the main line of thought, and their 'timing' forces you to think again. Furthermore, if timing and surprise aren't suggestive enough, Miles's quote above reminded me of de Bono's quote and so I was interested to see how his thoughts on humour may relate to chess.

According to de Bono, humour arises from the asymmetry of the patterns which form in our brain. This excited me because an unexpected break with 'symmetry' is by no means unusual in chess. Symmetry as a concept comes quite naturally to chess-players; most of us spend at least a year playing games which start exclusively with **1** e4 e5. We seem to be fixed into this pattern in the first year or so of our chess lives and can hardly envisage a game starting in any other way. Perhaps **1** d4 d5 when we're feeling daring, but never, God forbid, 1 c4 or 1 **1** f3 - why would you want to play a move like that? Moreover, go into a junior chess club and you'll see many, if not most, games beginning with something like 1 e4 e5 2 f3 **1** c6 3 **1** c3 **1** f6 4 · c4 · c5 5 **0-0** **0-0** 6 d3 d6 **7** h3 h6 **8** a3 a6 9 · e1 · es until the dramatic suspense becomes unbearable and somebody gives away material. Thus when 1 e4 e5 becomes the dominant track in our thoughts about how a game should develop, and the other side-tracks are usually suppressed. If a hardened **1 e4** e5 player (with both sides of course) were to notice a clubmate playing **1** g3 or 1 b3, before learning about the concept of a fianchetto, he'd probably think his clubmate was being at least a bit funny, if not downright odd.

As I understand it, if our patterns were formed symmetrically we would think only in terms of rules based on the comparisons of straight-line tracks. There would be no side-tracks, breaking the symmetry. So we would see that **1** c4 d6 2 b was different from 1 f4 e6 2 g4 but our appreciation would only extend to the fact that in one case we are pushing our kingside pawns and in the other, our pawns on the queenside; they would not be related as patterns. The fact that 1 f4 e6 2 g4 allows the possibility of 2... · ♕h4# would be seen, I think, as purely incidental. I certainly don't think it would raise any smiles. Yet isn't there something amusing about the way that the knight and bishop cannot get themselves organized to block the check and that the king has nowhere to move? It's funny because it's not what we have come to expect; it's not symmetric with the relatively normal queenside pattern. Similarly with a rook trapped in the middle of the board, a knight which covers all of a bishop's available squares or a pawn three squares from queening which cannot be stopped by a queen. Our brain related them to familiar patterns and finds them exceptional; and this, at least partially, is the basis of humour.

W



This looks a lot like the first diagram in the book, but with a slight and hugely significant twist. If it were the same position then your recognition of the pattern would be symmetric but with the twist, your mind forces the pattern in an asymmetric way, and an opportunity for an unexpected punchline presents itself:

1 c4!? Freeing the bishop.

1...cS Freeing the bishop.

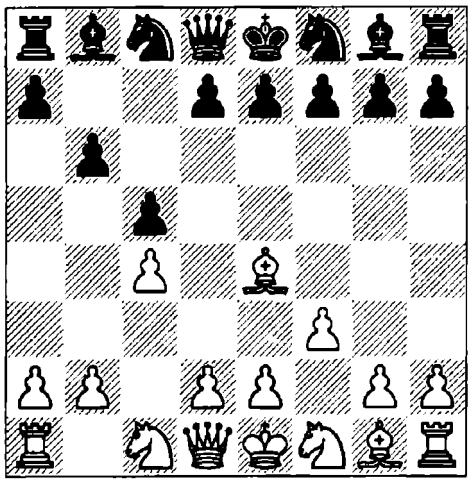
2 f3 Attacking c5.

2**...**b6 Defending c5.

3 . e4 (D) Winning material.

These are extreme examples, but I think something very similar takes place at all levels of chess. I remember another conversation with Julian Hodgson in which he said that the outstanding feature of the strongest players, most

B



notably Kasparov, was their appreciation of the finest subtleties of a position; the zwischenzugs, the scorpion's sting in the tail (Lombardy-Fischer, game 25 in ***My 60 Memorable Games*** – 17... h4+!), the paradoxical assessment, the subtle move which changes the paradoxical assessment and so on. In all these cases, what is being seen is something away from the main track - the type of thing that induces a smile in the post-mortem. This phenomenon may arise directly from the structure of our brain.

Forgive me for being so speculative, but I'm hoping my inferences may improve your chess. Even Krogius, who doesn't strike me as a humour fanatic, suggests that "one must train oneself to look for paradoxical situations, to search for exceptions to rules and to develop concrete thinking". I think this 'search for paradox' is basically a search for humour. When you think of a joke you like, I'd imagine what makes it funny is that the punchline contains something of a surprise. Most jokes take you a long way down a straight track and then tell you at the end that you missed an important turn-off earlier in the joke. Indeed, most of the time we laugh, we are laughing at something that stands out in some way or which our conditioning mass finds exceptional. For example: a man is observed constantly waving his hand across his face. When asked what he is doing, he explains that he is driving away elephants. "But there are no elephants here," the questioner exclaims, to the reply: "You see, it works".

A crude attempt, I know, but I'm suggesting that in this joke, as in many others, there is a short-circuiting of common sense and that the absurdity can jolt us into a reflection about how we think.

This is highly applicable to chess. If you are not susceptible to the 'funny' side of a variation then you will probably miss lots of those vital subtleties and paradoxes that you need to play chess well. Two minor and vaguely supportive points come to mind. Firstly, I have analysed with lots of foreign players who spoke good, but not native, English and they very frequently describe moves or positions as 'funny'. Secondly, think of all the exclamation marks we use to denote good moves. It seems that we frequently let good moves pass without punctuation but when we do award a ! or a !! it is because the move is in some sense unusual, witty or surprising. The following game is rather well known, and most people find it rather funny, but few people realize that it may have been a good sense of humour which won White the game. The game has been annotated in many places so I'll concentrate on its funniest aspect.

Short – Timman

Tilburg 1991

1 e4 tf6 2 e5 td5 3 d4 d6 4 lf3 g6 5 .c4 lb6 6 .b3 .g7 7 'e2 lc6 8 0·0 0-0 9 h3 a5 10 a4 dxe5 11 dxe5 ld4 12 lxd4 ixd4 13 le1 e6 14 ld2 lS 15 lf3 ic5 16 ie4! ib4! 17 .c4 lb6 18 b3! lxc4 19 bxc4

In some ways you need a sense of humour to allow your pawns to be wrecked in such a way but then to see the 'punchline', which is that you are much better in spite of it.

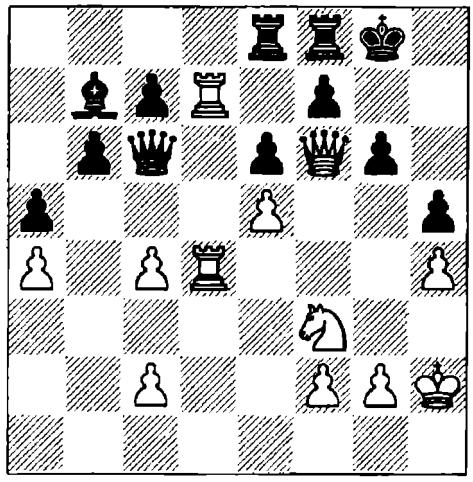
19... le8 20 ld1 ic5 21 ih4 b6 22 .e3! ic6 23 .h6 .h8 2 ld8 .b7 2 lad1 .g7 2 l8 7! **Ef8** 27 ixg7 xg7 28 l1d4 lae8 29 'f6+ g8 3 h4 hS

Nigel tells me that many chess fans have almost come to identify him with what follows but that the commentators all fail to mention what was really going on here. Rather than seeing this as one of his best games, Short felt that he was in poor form and had been playing this game very slowly. At this stage he just made a useful move because he only had two minutes left to reach move 40.

31 h2!' (D)

This may be the beginning of the joke; there are some vague ideas of g4 but he's really just

B



putting his king on a slightly better square. For example, he didn't like the idea of ... • xa4 followed by a check on the back r a k. Note t e similarities to this and K a v's h2 in the Spassky g a e on p.25. At this point there was no real in t ntion b hind 31 h2 a djust a r he played it, he wondered what on e a h he would do in reply to 31... · c8. I wonder whether Short's unconscious had 'seen' the following k ng-m a ch? We will never know of course.

31... l c8?

This loses. Short saw the punchline i m ediately: "it's just mate".

In most c a es, White's 31st move would b a signal that White wishes to play g4 to at t k t e black king but doesn't feel comfortable doing so with his king on g1. Indeed, usually g4 would be played to open the g-f le and a rook would t en use the g1-squ a e vacated by t e k ng. This would be a stand a d pattern with which most of us are famili a. The following illustration comes from Short's annotations in Jnjormator: 31... · c8! 32 g4! hxg4 (32... · xd7 33 gx h gxh5 34 • g5+) 33 l g5 g3+! (33... · xd7 34 h5; 33... · b7 34 f3) 34 fxg3 (34 xg3 · xd7 35 h2!! +- Speelman) 34... 1 b7 35 l e4 · xa4 36 h5 · xc2+ 37 l t gxh5 (37... ' f5 38 hxg6!) 38 l d3 · e4 39 l d2 • b1 40 l d l • c2 41 l 7d2 ' xc4 42 l d4 and White wins. This is relatively stand a d stu f in spite of the unique features of t e position.

However, in spite of these lines, Shor t inks it very unlikely that he would have played 32 g4 in the circumstances; probably he would have prefe r ed a safer move like 32 l e7 or 32 l d8.

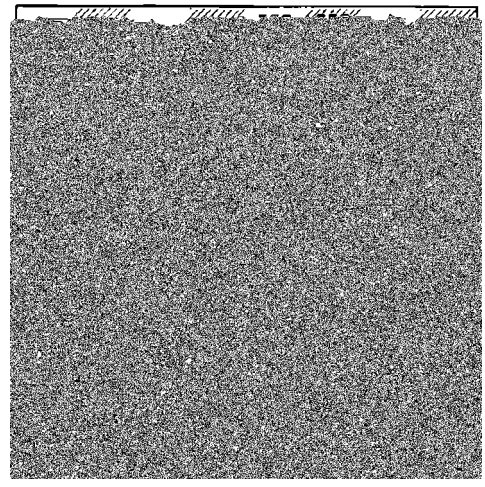
In playing 31... l c8 Ti m an sees the main t ack (g4) a d prevents it by keeping his queen and bishop attacking f, but Short has seen a twist to this p a ticul a c a e and pr o eeds to deliver the unexpected punchline:

32 g3!

I asked Short if he was amused by t is idea d u ng t e g a e, to which he replied: "Yes, very. Now I was really enjoying myself."

32... l c 8 (D)

W



33 4! · c8 3 gS 1-0

What a used Shor most w a that in this f-nal position he was all ready to meet 34... h7, not with t e prosaic 35 l x f + but instead with 35 • xg6+ h8 36 ' h6+ g8 37 f6!. "I w a really going for that!", said Shor ... "On h6 the I ng's a little safe; somehow it's too easy, but on f6 I'm right in the he a t of his position and there's nothing he can do." When I told him of my idea about t e role of humo u in chess, and of 32 ' g3 as t e unexpected punchline, Short t ought there may b something to the idea and seemed very interested. But when I tried to back up my cl a m with the Miles quote above about the impo r ance of a warped sense of humour, he just quipped, "that's just because he has one!"

How many chess-players would fail to laugh at the idea of t e king coming to h6 in spite of the number of pieces on the bo a d? I would imagine very few. Although I cannot develop the idea in full here, this may b because chess a fords us an excellent opportunity to create 'jokes' on the bo a d. Jokes a e often ' t aps', I suppose, but they can a so be more subtle. Any-t ing which demonstrates a recognition of patterns in an asy m e t ic way can be said to be humour. Which is why, I suppose, t at we use

the word 'funny' to denote peculiar events as well as t ose which make us smile and laugh.

A fur t er reason to think that there may be a signi f cant role for humour in chess is t e role of 'the victim' in the majority of jokes, which for chess-playing purposes is the opponent. There is ve r little vic t mless humour, although the victim is often disguised as the person to whom you a e telling the joke. Perhaps as well as the asy m e t of patterning, we also f nd certain moves funny because of the problems they create for ' t e victim'. In o t er words, the jokes we f nd on the chessbo a d a e o f en at our opponent's expense! Steven Pinker's (***How the Mind Works***) suggestion t at another signi f - cant fea t e of humour is t e "descent in dignity" is supportive here, because the 'joke' you play on your opponent can make him or his pieces l o k much less digni f ed.

So am I saying that chess is pre-verbal humour and all chess-players a e frustrated comedians? Partly yes, but I am also serious in my conviction t at s t iving to see the f nny side of chess can signi f cantly widen your ho r zons. This may at times amount to little more t an the advice 'look twice', b cause you missed something exceptional the f rst time, but even if that's all I'm saying, putting it in a humorous context m a es it more likely that you will do it! In other words, 'look for the laughs'. More to the point, in looking for the humorous angle you a e unconsciously delving into all your previous patterns, looking for the ones on the board which 'match' and being struck by t ose which don't. This is pretty much what your intuition does anyway, so you're really just giving it an extra nudge while not allowing yourself to be limited by it.

If you f nd this idea a bit 'funny', then I rest my case, but if you are totally unconvinced then you may be more sympathetic to a watered-down version. Would you accept that some form of 'hedonism' (pleasure see k ng) is essential for good chess? From ***Secrets of Spectacular Chess*** by Levitt and Friedgood (highly recommended) I le a ned of a theory of Austria's Ernest Mach which p a tly expl a ns this. In so far as a human is able to use his intelligence to s u ive, t e hum a brain has to b come very quick to recognize patterns, repetitions and sy m e t es. This ability to discover 'order' is crucial for adaptation to the environment and the chessboard contains many of the types of geometry and dimensions which a e found in a typical environment. Using familiar patterns to help resolve and sort out a chess position causes pleasure since the tension created by the (initially chaotic) position is reduced. This reminds me of the time GM Neil McDonald felt physic a ly sick on b ing shown a chaotic position with f ve kings as p a of a psychology experiment. His explanation w a : "I couldn't t a e it; it was just too random"

In so far a a lesson can b infe r ed from this, pay extra attention to the moves that you f nd pleasing. If you need hedonism to see the important patterns then you need humour to see the exceptional ones. I'm not sure about this, but certainly we a e inclined to stay interested in t at which is pleasurable or amusing, and anything which helps you to look at a position in a di f erent light can only b ne f t your appreciation of t e game, your motivation, and consequently your playing s t eng t .

The Tao of Chess Thi

what you 'see', whereas your yang strength will be related to your ability to think; how you 'look' I have suggested that all thinking is evaluative, so the value you seek might be thought of as Tao, which is prior to Yin and Yang.

Douglas Hofstadter's idea of "jumping out of **the system",** explained in his monumental work Godel, Escher Bach, is closely related to the idea of 'yang' strength and is, I think, an excellent idea to help chess-players improve without forcing them to spend days on end assimilating new patterns (needed for yin strength): . It is an inherent property of intelligence that it **can** jump out of the trick which it is performing, and survey what it has done; it is always looking for, and often finding patterns. Now I said that an intelligence can jump out of its trick but that does not mean that it always will. However, a little prompting will often suffice." Of course it is difficult to draw a clear line between 'inside' and 'outside' the system and this idea's validity also depends a lot on what 'the system' **is**. In this case I want to suggest that your chess patterns are your system, that if you 'think' along normal lines you will not be able to break free from 'inside' the bondage of these patterns. **If** you are 2850 it's no great trauma to be caught 'inside' your system and you could still dispose of 99.99% of chess-players with your intuition. But if you are weaker, and aspire to be stronger, you can 'jump outside' of your system by thinking in unusual and provocative ways; talking to your pieces, or looking for 'jokes' for example.

When all is said and done though, there is a considerable amount of truth in Norwood's saying. 'Thinking' causes a lot of problems, only some of which you can solve, and the first step to improving your results is to apply yourself to the maximum while you are at the board.

Remind me, why is Thinking a Sin?

1) 'Thinking' is much more complicated than we tend to think it is, and therefore we give the wrong reasons for the errors we make.

2) 'Thinking' in a conventional sense is limiting, because it leaves us stuck in our old patterns and habits.

3) 'Thinking' tends to be based on rules and justification, which leads to confusion given that chess is largely rule-independent and often inexplicable.

4) 'Thinning' casts feyour intuition, which is more suited to the omnipresent task of evaluation.

So, what can you do?

1) Realize the importance of abstract knowledge and try to assimilate as many new patterns as possible.

2) Try to 'unlearn' old thinking habits as well as learning new thinking techniques, but don't treat any as exclusive.

3) Talk with your pieces!

4) Don't assume that 'fuzzy thinking' is always bad. It's often guided by your unconscious and can be the best way to find good moves.

5) Try to see the funny side, and enjoy yourself!

6) Be aware of the way you habitually think, and find suitable ways to 'jump out' of these where necessary.

2 Blinking

Mankind always sets itself only such problems as it can solve ... it will always be found that the task itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution already exist.
KARL MARX, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*

If you're getting root canal work from your dentist, it's a good idea to be desensitized, but if you are playing chess it can b fatal. In fact, I suspect that the main problem with 'thinking' as opposed to 'feeling' is that it undermines your ability to sense the key momen t critca positions in a game. Such moments occur in positions where your choice of move is pivotal for the direction of the contest.

Notice already that we tend to refer to key *moments* and critical *positions*. We consider these almost synonymously, but it was partly a reflection on this distinction that led to this chapter in its present form. The former lends itself to the personal, subjective arena and the latter to objective identification. It's little good filling in your score-sheet with the comment that after, say, move 29, the position was critical, unless you consider why, at this key moment, you didn't think of the position as critical and sense that this moment had more 'weight' than all the others. It seems to me that somehow you need to sense that it's a key moment before you can see that the position is critical. This chapter is an attempt to consider how we might try to do that.

The first obstacle to doing so is that it is very di f cult, if not impossible, to give any clear def nition of what a key moment, or critical position, actually is, I have given a few pointers below, but I must admit that key moments are more easily felt subjectively than defined. Indeed, when all is said and done, I fear that there is no good substitute for experience in such matters. However, there is still much that the average player can do to improve his ability in this area.

Since I can't think of a useful definition of the focal point of *Blinking*, there is some value in limiting our subject area and then generalizing where necessary. In this respect, the types of key moment I wish to concentrate on are the tu r ng-poin t in a game, positions where we fail to capit a ize on an advantage and understanding the importance of tra n fo r a t o n in general. However, the reader should know that 'key moments' also manifest themselves as positions where, for example, we need to sense danger, where we need to make a short-term plan, where we need to snap out of a defensive mindset or where we have to choose between playing for a win or a draw. That said, I think these and various other types of moments are usually reducible, at least partly, to the chosen aspects above.

I have called this sin 'blinking' mainly because that's all you have to do to miss these moments. Moreover, often you can only see them with hindsight. To miss such moments can be considered essentially 'sinful' in that it usually r ult f r m a b a ic m under t d ng of the na t re of chess a s e smen t and how they can and do change. By most definitions they arise not more than three times during a contest but usually there is at least one.

Spassky claimed that this was Fischer's only weakness, though of course this is relative to his other strengths. In any case, I think it is a difficult sin to remedy partly because there is no clear consensus on what such moments look like and partly because they are felt in different ways by different players. In order to make more sense of this sin I have made some speculations about the nature of 'the advantage' in chess. This is quite dense and theoretical in places so some readers may prefer just to read the game notes. However, I do think that the theory will illuminate key moments better and help you to know what to do with them, so I recommend that you have a good think about all parts of the chapter.

The Importance of Being Trendy

"Are you lost, Daddy?" I asked tenderly.
"Shut up," he explained.
RING LARDNER

In most sport, the competitors have a clear indication of the relative importance of each moment. Little sensibility is needed to call on extra attention when it is 'set point' in tennis, a difficult putt on the 18th hole in golf or for a centre-forward who is through to the penalty area and just has the keeper to beat in a soccer match. There are many more such examples in other pursuits, but not so in chess. The rules of the game give no indication of which positions are more susceptible to errors than others, or which moves matter the most. Somehow we have to work it out for ourselves.

Certainly, a chess-player's ability to 'sense the moment' is not really something you can reduce to a formula, but I'd like to think that there is a useful answer to the question 'What do we miss, when we miss a key moment?' In so far as it is possible to answer, I would say that we miss the nature of the given assessment and its propensity to change. This happens at least partly because of our assumptions about the building-block that make up a single game.

Most strong players feel a little irritated when a non-chess-player says something like "you may beat me, but I bet I could last an hour". This of course misses the point, because it is no reflection on the relative quality of the players if one of them sits and thinks for an hour before, let's say, falling for Scholar's Mate. You then want to say "OK, so you managed to last an hour, but I beat you in four moves! It's not the amount of time a game lasts, but the number of moves that matters: If any of you are nodding your head, I ask you to think again, and consider whether the building-blocks of a game, although not adequately accounted for in minutes or hours, are really best thought of as individual moves. Perhaps you might break the moves in half, and consider the number of positions, but it's still not clear that this is the best way to look at it.

What if the real building-blocks of a game were thought to be groups or clusters of moves and positions? This would fit neatly with the idea, which we considered in the last chapter, that stronger players see positions as a collection of 'chunks' or constellations. The stronger you become, the more you are attuned to the different chunks within the game as a whole as well, whereas weaker players will only see individual positions. So the more lucidly you see the chunks, the more illuminated are the 'gateway positions' that link them.

This curious parallel with the idea of 'chunking' (see ***Thinking***) may not be accidental. Maybe it's an essential feature of the chess mind or just intelligence in general. Perhaps it is the nature of growing intelligence to group things together, whether they are scientific laws, languages, or pawn-structures. Indeed, maybe the ultimate intelligence is that which has expanded so far that it sees everything as one big 'chunk'. Maybe that's what they mean by enlightenment. But I digress. For now let's consider whether a game between Walter (local club champion) and Barry (beginner), ending in Scholar's Mate, might be thought of not as four moves but, for example, six moments.

1 e4 e5

Moment one. Symmetry is established without thought by either player.

2 . c4

Moment two. Walter decides on the Bishop's Opening after a brief pause to disarm the opponent. The f vulnerability is spotted by Walter, but not appreciated by Barry. However, Barry now thinks for almost half an hour and Walter regrets having agreed to play.

2... l c

Moment three. Barry allows Walter to treat him mate in one. Walter considers this a favourable occurrence and a golden opportunity to get out of this ordeal as quickly as possible.

Barry, bless his cotton socks, is oblivious to the moment.

3 ' hS

Moment four. You might call this a key moment, and with hindsight it was certainly the critical position. Walter smells blood but commits himself to a move he knows should be bad. He plays it after ten seconds and quite casually. Having sensed on moments two and three that Barry was a beginner, he doesn't want to jolt him out of his established patterns of thought.

Walter, the old fox, reveals himself to be an optimistic risk-taker.

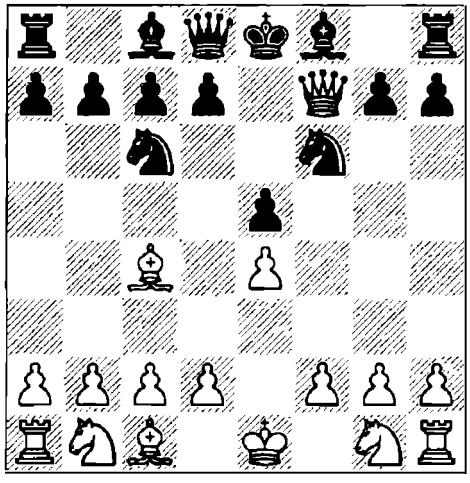
3... l f6

Moment f ve. B a y decides that his knights a e the prettiest pieces, and having t a ing a long time to le a n how to move them, enj oys pointing t eir heads tow a ds each other. He feels quite strongly that by looking at each other they'll gain a certain strength. In his defence, it should be said that he is tempted by the alternative 3...g6. Indeed he vaguely recalls some conception his old schoolmate had told him about by the name of 'siancheddo', or something like that, but doesn't t ust himself to implement it properly, and so a ter half an hour decides to play it safe and bring another piece into battle. Walter is inwardly j ubilant and relieved, while B a y enj oys the look of his knights on the sixth rank.

4 ♕xf7# (D) (1-0)

Moment six. Checkmate. B a y looks surprised and tries to t a e the queen, thin k ng of it as a gi f, but Walter points to the supporting bishop on c4 and B ary, after a f ve-minute pause of sheer dis b lief, reluctantly resigns.

B



This is an extreme example, but the point is that there is more than one **way** to 'chop up' a game of chess. In a game of four moves there may be six moments, or fewer, or more, but certainly there is little scope for l a ge-scale t ends. In most games, however, which are much longer, the type of moments I touch on above are usually felt to be much more long lasting, incorporating several moves at a time. This is p a t of the wisdom behind the conventional way we dissect a g a e into three stages: opening, middleg a e and endg a e. But as well as these three stages there seem to be what I think of as 'periods' during the game where you begin with one type of position and then f nd yourself with another, without being able to identify on which move the position seemed to change beyond recognition.

Indeed, often it feels like there are several gam e within one game. The reason I mention this is because the way we 'cut up' chess games, whether into moves, phases, duration, positions, stages, peri o s or whatever, is crucial in getting to the he a t of why we a e so prone to the sin of ***Blinking.*** It would be too messy to consider all these di f erent ontologies but we can make big s t ides if we reduce it to just two ways of looking at a game: as a collection of positions which we view one at a time, and a a series of trends which we can only see a few moves at a time.

In almost every chess magazine, book or monograph we are exposed to ***positional*** assessments. The symbols we are most famili a with, like those denoting 'slightly better for White' or 'equal', always refer to single positions and so we become accustomed to f aming our evaluations around single positions. But t ere is a lot to be said for the idea that a single position, when seen by itself, is stripped of its true nature if it is seen in abstract, and not as p a t of a moving, changing whole. This is not just a psychological matter, with our view of positions distorted by memories of good positions past and visions of glo r ous victo r in the future. It is also a fund a ental question about t e way that chess actu a ly is. Indeed, it seems to me that all chess can be sensibly ch a acterized as a g a e with positions that a e cons t ntly changing.

Given that this is the case (more on this later), t e fr st and foremost thing you need to do to deal wi t ***Blinking*** is to t y to attune yourself to t e tren d of a g a e. During the game it is help f l to have an assessment of the position and a feeling for how that assessment has changed over the course of the g a e. Whether your a sessment is of the form 'equal - slightly better - cle a ly better - winning', '0 pawns = equality; 2 pawns = winning', 'White is e f ectively 1.23 pawns up' or 'I'm comfo r able with my position' to 'I like my position' doesn't

matter crucially. The main thing is to have a way to gauge the ch a g ng nature of **a** ch e s 1ame, how it ebbs and f ows. If you always have some idea for the f ow of a position and t e d i ection of the trends, you will f nd it much easier to notice at which points the trends t u significantly - t ese will usually b the key moments. Paradoxically, the result of paying at- t ntion to a sessments is that you come to hold t em much less rigidly, because you quic k y s e that they are inclined to change. The games in this chapter should reveal the nature of t ends, and I am suggesting that part of the r a on we 'blink' **is** because we often see po- stions where we should see t ends, and t ends where we should see positio n . The key to tackling ***Blinking*** then, is to improve your 'trend sensi t vity' ***and*** 'position se n i- t vity'. This is not easy, but I'll do my best to suggest how it might be done.

Transformations: Signs, Signals and Sensitivity

Once upon a time, I, Chuang Tzu, dreamt that I was a butterfly, flying around and enjoying myself. I had no idea I was Chuang Tzu. Then suddenly I woke up and was Chuang Tzu again. But I could not tell, had I been Chuang Tzu dreaming I was a butterfly, or a butterfly dreaming that I was now Chuang Tzu? However, there must be some sort of difference between Chuang Tzu and a butterfly! We call this the transformation of things.
The Book of Chuang Tzu

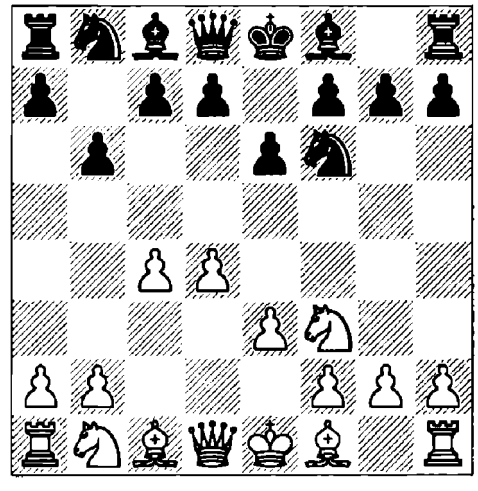
One of the few certain things about a g a e of chess is that the game position wiJJ change. Paradoxical though it may be, the position is constantly changing. If you w a t to play chess, a d have no particular fetish for threefold repe- t tions, then you cannot avoid this fact. How- ever, 'change' has many faces and the most s t king of all is transformation. Most strong players a e s t ong partly because of the ***variety*** of positions they can play. This not only gives t em f exibility in the o p ning but widens their horizons for t e whole game. So if a promising attack must lead to a technical endgame, then **so** be it. If you have to give away your material advantage and instead sacri f ce material for t e initiative then so be it. You just have to accept t at the position will transfo r f om one thing into another. The key question is whether the transformation will be favourable. In the context of ***Blinking***, we often fail to act on the key moments because we don't take responsibility for making the necessary t ansformation or at the key moment we unwittingly make a big t ansfo r ation when we just needed to keep the position more or Jess as it was. So, another way to become more sensitive towards key momen t is to be aware of the centra l ty of tr a sforma t ons in chess. These take the form of things like piece exchanges, changes in pawn-s t cture, or a movement from one ph a e of the g a e into another. Look out for them in the g a es below.

One f nal pointer before the f n starts is that although nobody will tell you when you a e loo k ng at a key moment, t ere are cer t in signs rela ing to the features of the position and the amount of choice you have. There are o f en sig· nals too, which usuaJJy relate to your opponent's previous move(s). However, above all else you need to be sensitive to t e changing trends of t e position.

Farrell – Redpath
Edinburgh 2000

1 d4 / f6 2 c4 e6 3 / f3 b6 4 e !? (D)

B



An under-rated system that is not so easy to play against, especiaJJy if you a e seeing it for the f st time.

4... i b7 5 i d3 c5 6 0-0 i e7

6...g6!?.

7 l c3 0-0?!

7...cxd4 8 exd4 d5 is one of the main lines.

8 d5!

Now Black is forced into a dodgy Benoni where both his bishops a e passive.

8...exd5 **9 cxd5** d6

A fer 9... l xd5 10 l xd5 xd5 11 xh7+ xh7 12 ' xd5 l c6 13 d2 Black's king is v lnerable and White has good cen t al con t ol.

10 e4 l bd7

This is not such a bad move, but J o didn't consider any alte r atives. It c a be dangerous to play the opening in f rst ge a , even if you know the moves quite well, because your constitution will not be prepared for serious concen t ation when you need it, and you a e less likely to be sensitive to the key moments when they arise. I a not suggesting that you 'dither' over your opening moves or play deliberately slowly but it is very important to build up your concen ta-tion, and for this purpose it can be useful to ponder fairly obvious moves at the opening s t ge, especially if you are unfamili a with the o p ning at hand. Even better of course, is to **be** f lly 'tuned in' before the game s t ts, but cir-cumstances don't a ways allow this.

A er 10... a6!? 11 xa6 l xa6 12 e5 W te is better as it turns out, but just considering this v a iation can help enliven your sense of danger.

11 l d2 a6 12 a4 l e5 13 e2 l fd7?!

There a e t aces of Egoism here. Joe could think of nothing but getting his bishop to the a1-h8 diagonal but in doing so overlooks the s t eng t of White's natural build-up. After White plays f4 it's go o to have press u e aga i st **e4** so it would have been b tter to anticipate t is and m a e use of some other pieces.

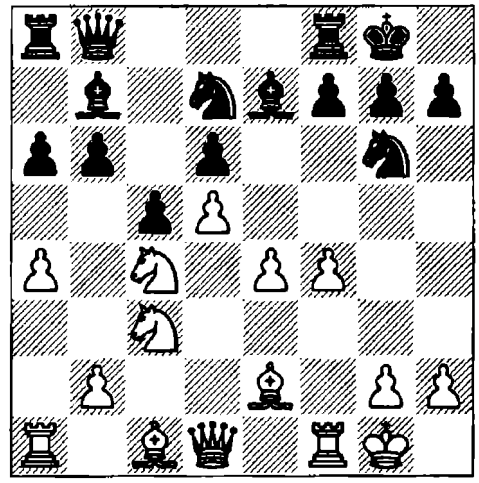
13... : e8!? 14 f4 l g6 15 l c4 (15 g3! is better) 15... f 16 f l h4 involves some co-opera t ve play by White, but is not such an im-plausible line. Black is comfortable here because it will be di f cult for White to force through e4-e5.

14 f4 l g6 15 l 4 ' b8 *(D)*

Here we have all the classic symptoms of a key moment:

1) Signs. Black h a some clumsy pieces a d vulnerable squ a es (knight on g6, bishop on b7, pawns on b6 and d6).

W



2) Sign a . His last m ove looked somewhat awkward (rooks still not connected, qu e n de-cen t alized).

3) Sensitivity. Counterplay is threatened: ...b5 is p nding because a fer the pawns a e ex-changed on b5 White's a1-rook has to capture on a8 and Black c a recapture with the bishop, thus defending b5. Moreover, by protec t ng d6, Black has in t o uced the idea of ... f6-d4.

4) Sensitivity/Sign. There is no 'obvious continuation' (comp a ed with l d2 when l 4 was the obvious follow-up) and thus the favour-able t end b ginning with 8 d5! has reached its natur a end. Something signi f cant is c a led for.

16 g3?

Insensitivity. The m oment passes and Black gets into the game. While White may have b en enj oying the upw a d t end that beg a on move 8, he doesn't appreciate that this pa ricul a t end h a ' d ed up' and t at Black now t reat-ens to change t e di ecton of the t end in his fa-vour. W hte needs to **see** that this is a 'gateway position', which links two p r o s of the game. To keep it simple we could say that the o p ning has ended and the middlegame is about to be-gin. In the r ddlegame the players will have roughly equal chances, but White has reached the middlegame a move before Black and for just one m oment he has t e chance to punish Black for loitering in the opening.

16 g4! is a surprisingly s t ong move, which is almost decisive. It's not es p cially 'norm a' a d therefore easy to overlook or un-deres t ate. Most players have le a ed a set-up based on f , with g3 if necess a y and it's h a d to 'jump out' of this patte r when you need to. In this case the necessity a r ses f om

the unique importance of the moment. Just for one move, Black's forces ae fa t ly uncoordinated. 16... i c8 (the only move; there's no other way to defend b6 a d protect d7) 17 £ xd7! (given the light-squ a ed weaknesses in White's posit on this is a so not such a 'no r al' move) 17... i xd7 18 f5!. Normally you break t ough with e5 but in the given instance Black's lack of con t ol over e5 gives White a st ong attack. Now:

a) 18... l h8 loses to 19 i f4 f6 20 ' b3.

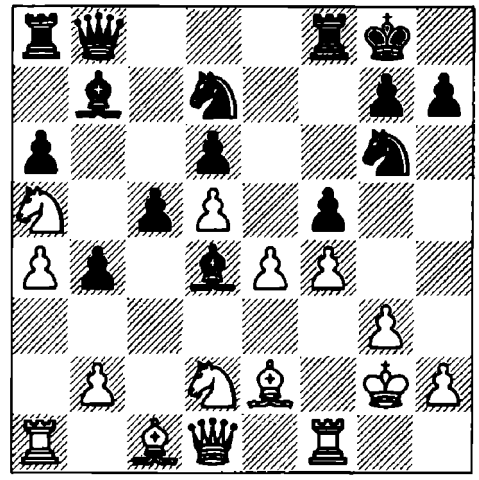
b) 18... c e5 is more to the point: 19 l xe5 dxe5 20 d6! (20 ' h5 intending l f3-h3 also looks good) 20... i xd6 (20... ' xd6 21 ' xd6 i xd6 22 l d1) 21 l f l. It can b fun using computers for such positions. ***Fritz*** doesn't get it of course; Black is a pawn up with two bishops after all. Still, most humans will see that White's kingside attack is imminent a d overwhelming. White will have t e f5-pawn, a rook on g3 or h3, a queen on h5 or g4, a knight coming to d5, a bishop ready to sacrif ce on h6, a r ok coming to d1 or f l. It's way too much f e- p wer for the black king to su vive. 21...c4 is t e most active way to deal with the threat of l d3. Then 22 : h3 i c5+ 23 h1 ' d6 24 ' i h6 25 l g3! gives Whi t a fe a some attack. All of White's pieces have a ch a ce to get involved while too much is being asked of the black queen, e.g. 25... i f2 26 i xh6 i xg3 27 i xg7 xg7 28 ' g5+ h7 29 f6 and wins.

c) 18...b5! is the most tenacious defence. Then White's most obvious Jines seem to fall short but there is still a path to what looks like a cle a advantage: 19 axb5 i xb5 (19... a b5 20 l xa8 ' xa8 21 l b6) 20 fxg6!? (20 xb5 a b5 {20... i xb5 21 l a3} 21 l xa8 ' xa8 22 fxg6 bxc4 23 l xf7 l x f 24 gxf7+ xf7 25 ' fl+ i f6 26 ' xc4 ' a1) 20... i xc4 21 gxh7+ h8 22 l f3 a d now ... i f6 is always met by l xf6 and White will endeavour to bring his c1-bishop to the a1-h8 diagon a. W ite is not quite winning here but if we comp a e this to the g a e, White cle a ly missed quite an appealing b at.

16...b5! 17 l a5 b4 18 l b1 i f6 19 l d2 i d4+ 20 g2 f5! (D)

This is typical of the mess that can o cur when you miss your moment. The position is uncle a.

21 dc4 l a7 22 xb7 l xb7 23 5 fxe4!



W

A combative o fer of the exchange which W te does well to decline.

2 l c6 ' e8??

A **bad** blunder. A er **24**... ' a8 25 xd4 cxd4 26 ' xd4 l 5 it's anyb o y's game.

25 i xa6 l b6 2 i c4 i f6 27 a5 l b8 28 xb8 ' xb8 29 l e1 l e8 3 ' a4 1-0

Emms – Webster

British Ch, Scarborough 1999

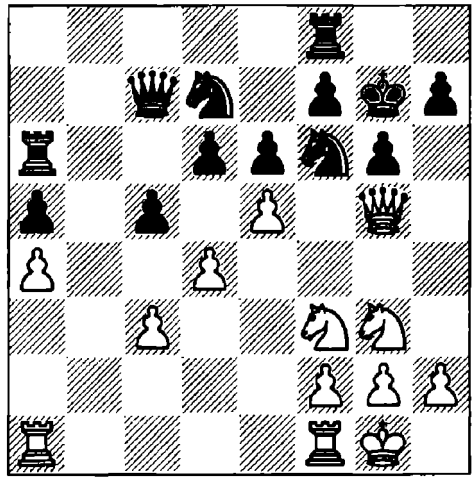
1 **e4** g6 2 d4 i g7 3 c3 c6 4 i e3 d6 5 ' id b5 6 f3 l d7 7 i d3 i c7!? 8 0-0 g f ! 9 a4!?

Since Black has not played ...a6 he d o sn't lose a t mpo when he protects the b-pawn with ... a so p rhaps there was something to be said for the i m ediate 9 i h6!?.

9...**b4** 10 e2 a 11 **c3** i a6

11...bxc3 12 bxc3 g4!?.

12 i xa6 : a6 13 g3 bxc3 14 bxc3 0-0 15 i h6 **c5** 16 i xg7 xg7 17 1 g5 e6! 18 e5 (D)



B

18... t g8

18... l d5 19 l h5+ h8 20 ' h6 l g8 21 l g5 l fB 22 c4 is a perilous continuation for Black.

Key moment:

1) White has many options but no obvious continuation; the 'f ow' of the game has stop p d (sign/sensiti v ty).

2) Black's counterplay is pending and in general the future belongs to Black because of weaknesses on e5 and a4 (sensitivi t).

3) Black's last move was p culi a and places him behind in 'time' That White can force such a move suggests that the position could be favourable for him if he can persist with the pressure (sign a).

4) White's advantages a e somewhat tempor a y and so this suggests White needs to s t ke quickly (sensiti v ty).

19 **Ife1?!**

A lazy move, after which t e t end b gins to turn against White. John had lost a long game the previous day and doesn't play with his usual energy. Until now the t end h a been in his favour but he needs to see this position as separate from the trend (position sensitivity) and initiate a new t end in which his slight advantage might a sume more signi f cant proportions.

19 h4! is crying out to b played. Then 19...h6 20 f e3! (so that ... l c4 isn't so e f ective and so that ...g5 isn't with tempo, as would b the c a e a f er 20 i f4; this move also gives White certain 1 e2, 1 d3 options and doesn't bl o k the f-pawn) 20...cxd4 (20...d5? is a strategic e r or; with no pressure on the centre there is no re a answer to White's k ngside attack: 21 h5 g5 22 l h2!) 21 cxd4 dxe5 22 dxe5 l e7 23 h5 t d5 (23...g5 24 l xg5) 24 1 e2! l c6 25 hxg6 fxg6 26 l d4 l b6 27 1 g4 t c5 28 . ac l . f4?? 29 l h5+ was Rowson-Redpa t , practice blitz g a e, Edinburgh 2 0 0

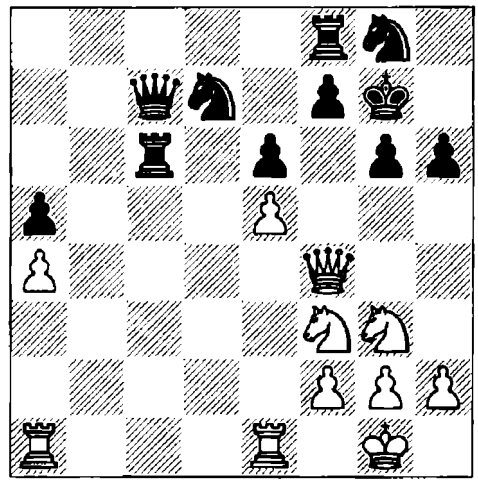
19**...h6 20** 1 f4?!

20 1 e3 still seems b tter, although it makes 19 l fe1 look even more redundant.

20**...**cxd4 21 cxd4 d e5 22 d e5 **Ic6!** (D)

Black may be better already. There a e lots of poten t ally go o squ a es for the knights and e5 is a long-te r weakness. A slightly more subtle point, revealed in the v a iations, is that b cause of the pawn-s t ucture and the position of t e pieces, a4 is weaker than a .

23 h4?!



W

This move suggests that White was oblivious to the unfavourable trend that has been evident for t h ee moves - poor ' t end sensitivity'. The advance of the h-pawn, a though generally a good idea, giving some 'luff to the king and planning h5, doesn't meet the more i m ediate demands of the position. We have already seen that White has some potential problems but this is the moment before they become r al. White has to **see** that his advantage has gone, and look for a way to keep the balance. Possible ideas:

a) 23 l ad1 l e7 24 l d4 l c4 25 t xe6+? fxe6 26 l xd7 l fxf4 -+.

b) 23 l ac1!? 0 7 still l o ks go o for Bl a k.

c) 23 l d4 l c4 24 l b5 l xf4 25 l xc7 l b8 is also no comfort; a4 and e5 remain weak.

These three lines suggest that White's problems a e related to one piece in p a ticul a . Talk with your pieces; which is the most obvious under- p rfo r er?

d) 23 l e4!? (all the other pieces can con- t bute to the s t uggle at a moment's notice but this k ight has to be forcibly involved; a bit like t e shy guy who can't f nd the courage to grace the dance f oor) 23... l c4 24 l ec l (the queen on f4 and knight on e4 want rid of t e pressure on the four t rank and t e a1-rook is needed to protect the a-pawn) 24... l c8 25 l xc4 ' xc4 26 1 e3 1 d5 still leaves Black's position easier to play and e5 continues to be a problem. My f st impression of this position was that White has good d awing chances if he c a keep his forces coordinated and perhaps dis t act Black with a few suggestive k ight hops. However, I think this position is even better for Black than it looks. Indeed it is a good example of a 'space disadvantage'. It's not just that e5 is we a but

also because there ae so many vulnerable s u a es in White's camp that it is ex t emely dif- f cult for him to hold all of the te r itory. What matters is not space but capaci t . Black has less space but plenty of capacity for his pieces while White has lots of space and not enough pieces to cover it all. We might say that White b a a huge castle but only a few soldiers while Black has the same num b r of soldiers and uses al the empty spaces in the castle a posts to at- tack the white a y. However, t e p r ay sig- nific a ce of t is st r cture, in my view, is that whereas the most natural squa e for a white k ight is e4, t ere is no ' a chorage' (pawn sup- p r) there, whereas a black knight on d5 is not only ex t emely effective, but a so invulnerable. Knights, because they can't easily run away, often need pawn support to ensure the i sur- vval. Play could continue 27 l 3 (27 t ed2!? Ac2 doesn't look like the answer and after 27 6 : c5 28 l e l t e7 it's not at all clear what White should do next) 27... W 3 28 t b5 (28 Ac l t e7 and Black is f i ly in con t ol) 28... ' ke3 29 fxe3 : 5 30 l fd4 t b6 31 l b3 . xe5 32 t x a t xa4! 33 . xa4 . xb5 with a p obably lost endgame for White.

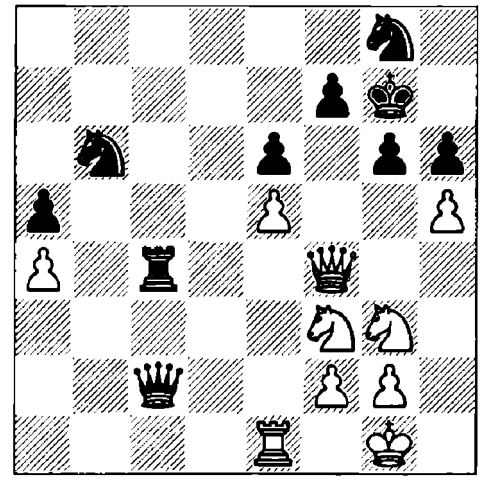
So in looking at all these moves you may feel t at the t end is turning inexorably against White and yet looking at the position after move 22 s t ongly suggests that White should at l a t be no more t an slightly worse. These are t e moments where you have to plunge espe- cially deeply to f nd a way for White to buck the unfavourable t end. Given that all the normal- l oking moves do little to change t is, we have to step back and look at t is position a f esh. We b ve already established that we need to in- volve the g3-knight but it seems that it is vul- n rable on e4 and c3 and unsupported on d6. Is t ere another way?

e) 23 t e2!? is a rather s t a ge move but on r fection it makes good sense. On d4 this knight will b in f uential and also protected; it con- I ls f5, prevents Black from attac k ng e5 with _ J e7-c6 and contains the possibilities of (b5-d6 and t b3 where des i able. I think t at I s may be the only solution to White's prob- l ms but it's the sort of move you'll only appre- c ate if you a e sensitive to the trends of a p sition. White *had* to dig deeply in *this* posi- t on. It is here that things begin to go steadily downhill, and once the t end has set in, it can b ex t emely h a d to reverse. Now 23... t e7 (there a e other moves, but the nature of the position doesn't seem to change fundamentally) 24 t ed4 t d5 25 ' d2 l c4 leads to a fairly bal- anced position. I think I still prefer Black but White has promising ideas based on h4, l e4- h4, t b3 or b5. In any case White has halted the unfavourable t end and is no longer playing in a purely reactive role.

23... 1 c4 **24** : e4 l eS 25 l d l : c1 26 l eel l xdl 27 l xdl t b6 28 h5 ' c2 29 . el

29 l d4 may have been a more tenacious defence.

29... 1 c4 ***(D)***



W

Now Black is f mly in con t ol. Note how ef- fective the knight has been on g8. In some ways it is 'better' than the knight on g3 because it perfo r s a useful function of protecting f6 a d has excellent prospects on c6, d5 or f5. Mean- while, White's g3-knight does ve r little to con t ibute to the struggle and l a gely because of the ine f ectiveness of t is piece, White f nds it di f cult to coordinate t e a y as a whole.

30 ' e3 t d5 31 ' a7 . xa4 32 hxg6 \ xg6 33 l c l h5 34 \ d7 . b4 35 l d8 t ge7 **36** ' xa5 h4 37 t n l g4 38 t e l ' g5

Alternatively, 38... t f4 39 t e3 (39 \ a8 t e2+) 39... l e2+ 40 f l l xc1 41 ' a3 h3 is also very go o for Black.

39 \ d2 ' e5 40 t f3 ' f6

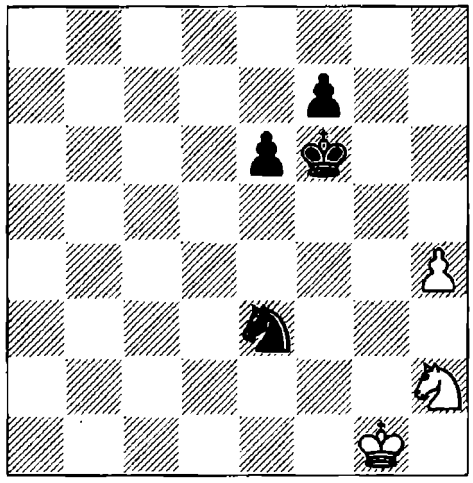
Black is a safe pawn up and White's king is vulnerable. The rest of the game is a technical matter but White never managed to reverse the unfavourable trend that began with 19 l f e l and was compounded by 23 h4.

41 ♘1h2 ♖f4 42 ♕e2 ♘c3 43 ♕d3 ♘cd5 44 g3 hxg3 45 fxg3 ♖a4 46 : n ♘f5 47 ♘h4 ♖xh4 48 gxh4?

48 l xf5 offers White better drawing prospects.

48...♘de3! 49 ♕xe3 ♘xe3 50 ♖xf6 ♔xf6 *(D)*

W



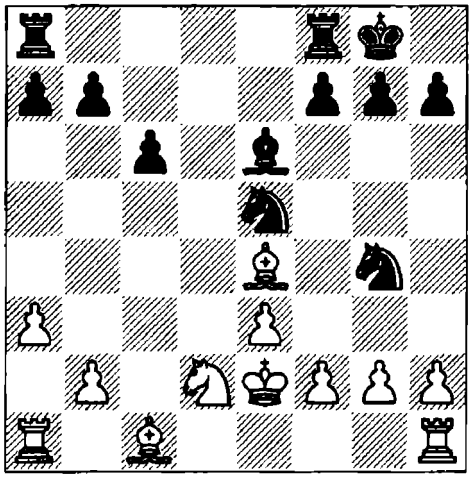
White is tot a ly lost because the h-pawn must fall. Even if White could somehow hold t is pawn in t e sho r term, he could only do so by placing his knight on a square where it could ultimately be harassed by a black pawn. Black won on move 85.

Botvinnik – Tal

World Ch match (game 1), Moscow 1 9 1

1 c4 ♘f6 2 ♘c3 e6 3 d4 ♗b4 4 e3 0-0 5 ♗d3 d5 6 a3 dxc4 7 ♗xc4 ♗d6 8 ♘f3 ♘c6 9 ♘b5 e5 10 ♘xd6 ♕xd6 11 dxe5 ♕xd1+ 12 ♔xd1 ♘g4 13 ♔e2 ♘cxe5 14 ♗d5 c6 15 ♗e4 ♗e6 16 l *(D)*

B



Key moment:

1) White's last move w a 'peculi a' **(signal)**.

2) White has counte r lay pending in t at if he can complete his development t e two bishops will give him a long-te r advantage **(sensitivity)**.

3) As is oft n the case wi t such moments; one side has short-te r promise and the o t er has long-te r potential **(sensitivity)**.

4) Black has many plausible continuations but none t at is self-evident y co r ect **(sign/sensitivity)**.

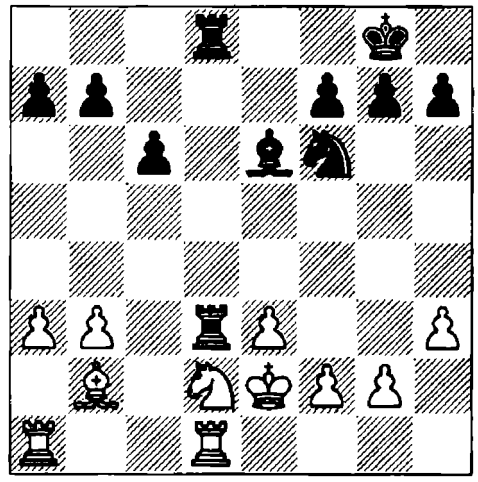
Ta f a led to sense t e urgency of the t k and played a routine move, after which the t ends begin to change.

16...♖ad8?!

16...f5! was called for; t ing to 'develop' the rook from f . This move would give Black ext a con t ol over **e4,** the p ssibili t of a timely ...f4 and pressure ag a nst e3 if White ever plays f . Botvinnik suggests that Black would have m a ntained t e ini t a t ve after this move but he still h a to play vigorously to prevent White f om consolidating. A plausible v a ation **is** 17 i c2 l ad8 18 b3 l d5!? 19 h3 : cs 20 : a2 l lf6 21 l d1 l d5 22 t b l l c3+ 23 l xc3 : xc3 24 i d2 : xc2 25 l xc2 ♗xb3.

17 h3 ♘f6 18 ♗c2 ♖d7 19 b3 ♖fd8 20 ♖d1 ♘d3 21 ♗xd3 ♖xd3 22 ♗b2 *(D)*

B



Now the trends a e beginning to ch a ge. If you've watched attentively you'll have sensed t at Black's initiative has b en squashed and that he is b ginning to r n out of ide a . It is **crucially** important that Black 'wakes up' to this **turn** of events but it see m t at Tal didn't s nse

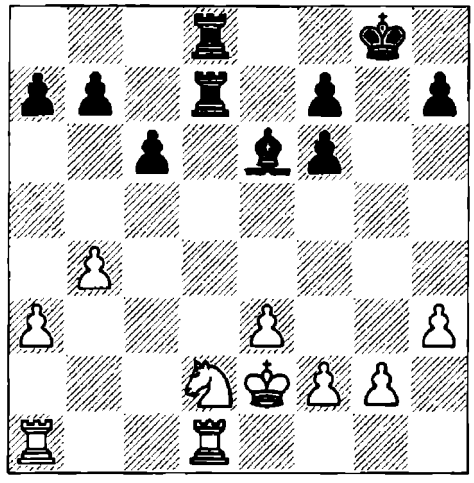
any danger and seemingly considered this posi- t on no different from any other.

22...♖3d7?

22...c5! w a needed. By f xing the weakness on b3 Black can keep the white pieces some- what bott ed up a d if White pr o eeds to capture on f6 he won't be able to unravel his position.

I suppose it's about equal after 22...c5 then, wi t l ac1-c3 looking like a re a onable idea for White.

23 ♗xf6! gxf6 24 b4! *(D)*

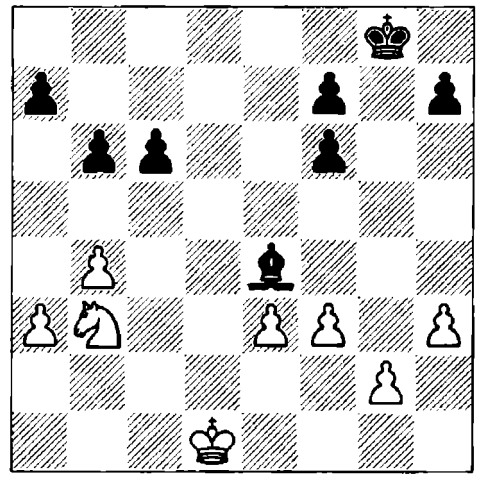


Now Black is worse and the fact he was re- cently better makes it all the more dif f cult to adjust to the new circumstances. If White can exchange r o k there will b little for the bishop to do while t e knight c a readily attack Black's v lnerable pawns. In my opinion it is crucial t at Black keeps one pair of rooks, p a tly to have something to con t ol t e d a k squ a es, but mainly so that White cannot advance his king into the black posi t on quite so readily or push pawns without leaving weaknesses. I think t is p sition is a good example of how bishop and rook can coo p rate b t er t an rook and knight. Perhaps t e best way to see it is not so much as a matter of knight vs bishop but that when t e rooks come o f it's knight and k ng vs bishop and king, with the for mer wor k ng very well to- gether. By keeping the rooks on, Black could prevent the white knigh t ng combination f om l king shape.

24...♗f5?!

Botvinnik recommends 24...R d5 "to cut down t e mobility of the knight" This also has t e b ne f t of making it more di f cult for White to exchange rooks.

25 ♘b3 ♗d3+ 2 **♔e1 b6 27 ♖ac1 ♗e4** 2 **f3 ♖xd1+ 29 ♖xd1 ♖xd1+** 3 **♔xd1** *(D)*



Tal's play gives the impression that he had no idea what was going on. In the last few moves he has weakened the queenside and ex- changed a l t e rooks, coo p rating ideally wi t White's plans.

30...♗d5 31 ♘d4 c5 32 bxc5 bxc5 33 ♘b5 a6 34 ♘c7 ♗c4 35 ♘e8 f5 36 h4 ♔f8 37 ♘d6 ♗f1 38 g3 ♔e7 39 ♘xf5+ ♔e6 40 e4 ♔e5 41 ♔d2 1-0

The above three games should ho p fully have highlighted some common features to key/critical moments. As I've s a d, there is no magic fo r ula to help identify these moments but it should help to be aw a e of the signs and signals above. There is not even a cle a divide be t een what is a sign, what is a signal and what it is that you a e supposed to be sensitive to, but generally speaking we have seen t at the typi- cal indications include:

1) Pending counterplay: you see the oppo- nent's idea(s), even though it hasn't happened yet.

2) The prevailing trend seems to have stopped. There is no obvious way to continue t e t end or increase the advantage naturally.

3) An abundance of choice. You have lots of reasonable moves, but none that seem to be ou t tanding.

4) Your opponent's last move was some- how unusual or peculiar. There is no cle a way to de f ne 'unusual' in t s context of course, but it will no r ally be a move that de f es conven- tion in some way.

Resolving to be Resolute

It is not because things are d i fcult that we do not dare; it is because we do not dare that things are d i fcult.
SENECA

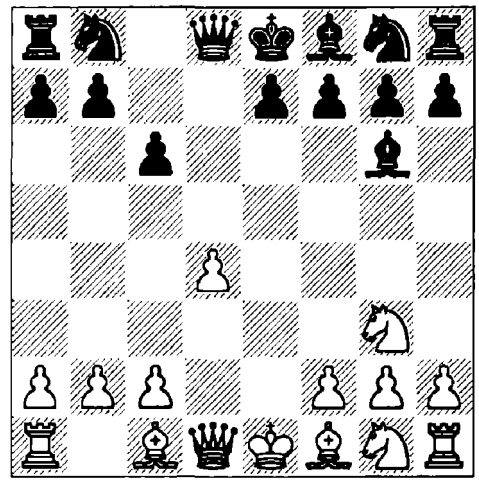
Most readers will have he a d of the aphorism of Steinitz (and Lasker) that the side with the advantage must attack or else watch that advantage disappe a. I should say that this is not always the case; for ex a ple, sometimes when you have a decisive materi a advantage you have to defend for several moves before you make use of it. So perhaps we could rephrase this maxim to something like: the side with the initiative must play vigorously, or else watch that initiative dwindle. The following two games show the importance of having faith in your c a culation at key moments. Not in the sense of making a decision based on calculation as such, but in the realization that there a e some positions in which you must calculate. However, it is usually cle a that the position is critical before you calculate and so your realization that the position is critical often comes hand-in-hand with the feeling that complications cannot be avoided. It is then a question of judgement and courage, rather than form a c a culation, which will lead you to the necess a y line of play. Thus in this sense **we need calculation to help us make the necessary transformations, but more important is our judgement about which transformations are necessary.**

In any case the following two g a es sees your author guilty of Blinking. I had the advantage in both cases, but failed to sense the urgency of t ansfo r ing it and so saw it dissolve into nothing and less.

Rowson – B. Lalić

British League (4NCL) *1998/9*

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘c3 dxe4 4 ♘xe4 ♗f5 5 ♘g3 ♗g6 *(D)*



6 f3!?

This move-order r a ely has any independent signi fcance but it can o f er White a promising twist if Black wants to play the lines without ... l d7. In passing, I o f er the following g a e as an o f f eat way to play the white side of the Classic a C a o-Kann; it's unlikely to cause Black nightm a es, but I think it deserves more attention.

6 h4 h6 7 l f3 l d7 8 h5 h7 9 d3 xd3 10 ' ♔d3 e6 11 f4 l gf6 12 0-0!?. Normally W h te castles queenside here, but I no t ced GM Nick de Firmian c a tle kingside in this line a d realized that it made some sense. Most v a iations in this line revolve around whether the h5-pawn gives White an imposing space/s t uctur a advantage on the kingside or whether the pawn is actually just a long-te r liability. It has long been assumed that White should keep the rook on h1 to protect h5 but given that Black cannot force the win of this pawn quickly for tactic a reasons there is another way of looking at the position. If Black castles queenside White can pawn-sto r him there without fe a of exposing his own king and if he castles kingside, the h5-pawn is very useful for attacking purposes. 12... e7 13 c4 0-0 14 l fe1 l e8 15 l bd l ' ia 16 a3! b5 (16... l xh5 17 d2) 17 l e5 bxc4 18 ' xc4 l xe5 19 dxe5 l d5 20 c1 " ♭b6 21 t g4 f8 22 l d3 c5 23 l e2! l ad8 24 b l e7 25 l f3 c5 26 xh6! gxh6 27 l xf7+ xf7 28 ' g6+ f8 29 ' ♔h6+ g8 30 l e4 l f6 31 exf6 xf6 32 l g4+ 1-0 J.Rowson-J.Grant, Aberdeen 1998.

6...♘f6 7 ♘e5!?

7 h4 h6 8 l e5 (afer 8 h5 h7 9 d3 xd3 10 ' ♔d3 e6 Black can consider playing ...c5 and ... c6, when his queen's knight will be more active than it is on d7) 8... h7 9 d3 xd3 10 ' ♔d3 e6 **11** d2 is the cu r ent m a n line, which I know little about.

7...♘bd7 8 f4!?

This is a somewhat doubtful idea, because it weakens the kingside and the central light squares, but I wanted to try to 'punish' his move-order (*Perfectionism*). At the time this game was played I was oblivious to the recent fashions mentioned above. This ignorance, and the confidence it gave me, led me to overestimate my position, but such false confidence is often a great blessing and I proceeded to mobilize my forces quickly and confidently.

8...e6 9 ♗c4 ♘xe5 10 fxe5 ♘d7!?

10...♘d5 is more obvious but then Black doesn't threaten ...c5 as quickly because of the reply ♗b5+. Thus: 11 0-0 ♗e7 12 ♗b3 0-0 13 c4.

11 0-0 ♗e7 12 ♗e3 ♕b6 13 ♕e2

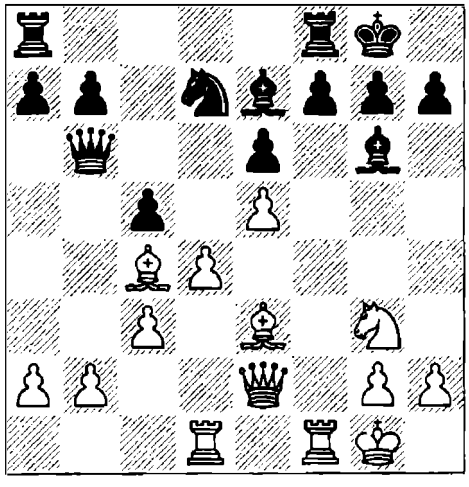
13 ♗b3 is met by 13...♘xe5.

13...0-0

I guess Bogdan refrained from 13...♕xb2!? for 'psychological reasons'; he didn't want to cede the initiative so soon. However, as far as I can tell White has no convincing continuation here and given that White's position now begins to improve this may already have been a critical moment where the trend turns in White's favour. A possible continuation is 14 ♖ab1 ♕xc2 15 ♖xb7 ♕xe2! (15... l b 16 l x f ! ♔xf7 17 ♕f3+) 16 ♗xe2 ♘b6 17 ♘h5 ♖g8 18 ♖c1 ♗e4.

14 c3 c5 15 ♖ad1 *(D)*

B



I was quite content here. I have an active position and all my forces are mobilized. However, I think the position is still equal since all Black's pieces have potential and it's not easy for White to create any weaknesses. That said, the trends somehow felt favourable because my position is quite easy to play and I think I liked my position more than Bogdan liked his.

15...♖ad8 16 ♗f2

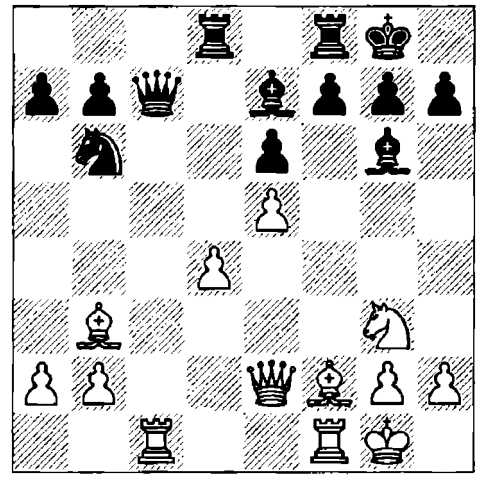
Intending d5 or ♘e4.

16...♕c7 17 ♗b3!?

17 ♗d3 is another plan; exchanging off Black's main kingside defender and planning to give the knight pride of place on e4. However, such a strategy is double-edged because if my kingside attack doesn't succeed, my bishop will be relatively passive and it won't help me to defend all the light squares I've weakened. Moreover, I prefer not to exchange pieces when I have a space advantage; I am fearful of counter-attacks of the type we saw in Emms-Webster above.

17...cxd4 18 cxd4 ♘b6 19 ♖c1 *(D)*

B



19...♕b8?

GM M.Gurevich thought this was an outrageous move, and I myself found it rather surprising. After 19...♕d7! Black is at least equal. Bogdan was afraid of 20 ♘e4 ♘d5 21 ♘c5 ♗xc5 22 dxc5, when White seems to have a big advantage, but as Gurevich had seen, 22...♘b4! or 22...♘f4 poaching on d3 leaves Black in control. This line shows the value of centralization and trusting your feelings. I find that it often happens this way; the most obvious move which keeps your pieces centralized works well but by *Thinking*, you find some way to justify a much more obscure move. I think in the given case this was related to the trends; Bogdan felt a little pressure because of the confidence of my play, convinced himself that he'd better be careful, and then manufactured a line to be careful about. This is speculation of course, but

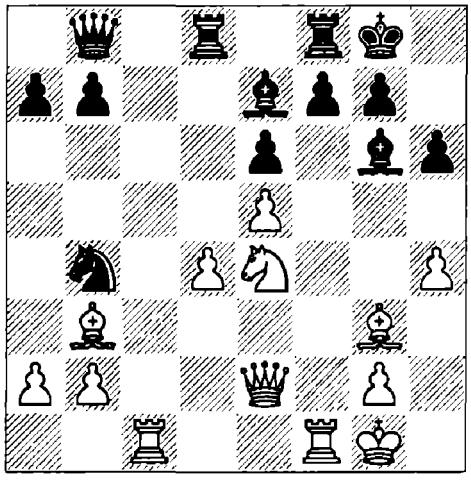
I think it's not so implausible. Black's 'position' on the chessbo a d a fer my 19th move was absolutely fine but his 'position' with reference to the contest was not so easy.

20 ♘e4 ♘d5 21 h4!

Tick l ng his kingside and hassling the bishop. It's also useful to control g5 in case there is an annoying combination of ... g5 and ... t e3 at some moment.

21...h6 22 g3 ♘b4 *(D)*

W



Key moment.

23 ♖cd1?

"You were not enough resolute!", said Bog- d a . Indeed I was in 'con f dent autopilot' mode a d didn't realize that it was time to shi f ge a . Yet had I looked closely I would have seen all the indications: 19... ' b8 was a strange-looking move **(signal)**, the upw a d trend I felt while playing the natural moves has reached an impasse and I have to re-energize my position **(sensitivity)**. 22... l b4, putting a strong cen- t alized knight tempor a ily on a silly squ a e, might also suggest that I need to s t ke **(signal)**. Moreover, if I talk to my pieces they a e all screaming for action and whereas the c1-rook has to be dragged kicking and screaming to the passive d l-squ a e, my e4-knight is pleading for an advance into d6 **(sign).**

This was a serious opportunity to win the game. Since I saw 23 l d6 but didn't look be- yond t e fact that Black wins material, I was guilty of ***Materialism***, but t at wasn't the main issue. Rather I didn't realize that this move de- manded a different type of attention to all my previous moves, which have b en rather easy to f nd. Had this been a puzzle or had somebody told me it was a key moment I'm sure I would have found the solution but without realizing that t h s moment has ex t a 'weight' it's very hard to justify s p nding lots of energy on a long complicated line when up to this point I have built up a good position without ve r much ef- fort. 'If it ain't broke don't f x it', I suppose, but I've always felt that line is just an excuse for la- ziness.

This gets to the heart of the blinking prob- lem. You will only begin to recognize these key moments if you are highly sensitive to t ends. Prior to 22...♘b4 there was a cle a upward t end for White, with an obvious way to continue this trend with 23 l d6. But after 22... l b4 it's not so easy to continue this t end and after my half-he a ted move the t end is reversed, where- upon Black begins to equalize. So if you can see your favourable t end blossoming by itself then that's great but if your opponent f ghts h a d you will have moments where you are 'stuck' and can't see a way to continue the t end. Those will no r a ly b the key moments where you have to dig deep.

23 l d6! more or less missed the sc a ner, but this is what I had to t y if I was serious about causing my opponent problems. The following maze is a necess a y evil, to show that concen- t ation at key moments can be rewarded with fascinating insights to a position. It's t ken me a fair few hours to create the mess below, and this is a rare oppo r unity in this book to plunge in and get your hands dir y:

a) 23... l xd6 24 exd6 xd6 25 xd6 ' ẋd6 26 e5! **±.**

b) 23... xd6 24 exd6 d3 25 i g4 xf l 26 e5! a d now:

b l) 26...g6 27 xe6 **+−** d3 (27... h7 28 l c7 d3 29 ' f3) 28 d7 ' a8 29 l c8 l c6 (29...h5 30 i f4 l c6 31 l xc6 fxe6 32 i h6 l f l+ 33 h2 and checkmate follows sho r ly) 30 l xa8 l xa8 31 i f3 with a large advantage to White.

b2) 26...f6 27 l c7 l f7 28 xe6 and White crashes through.

c) On seeing 23... d3, I assumed I couldn't play 23 t d6 and didn't think any more about it, but if I had p a d more attention to the t ends, I would have realized that in a sense I ***have*** to play it, or consent to the revers a of the game's direction. White then has 24 ' g4!:

c1) 24... . xd6 25 exd6 h5 (after 25... - xfl 26 J e5 g6 27 l xfl White is cle a ly b tter, if not winning) 26 . g5 . xfl 27 . e5 f6 28 . xe6+ winning.

c2) 24... . xfl 25 l xf7! (25 l xfl . xd6! 26 exd6 . xd6) 25... . d3 (25... J e l 26 ' xe6 doesn't help Black because t e g6-squ a e is weakened; 25... l xf7 26 ' ke6 . df8 27 • xe7 l c6 28 . xf7+ l x f 29 ' kf7+ xf7 30 e6+! +—) 26 . xe6 (26 ' ke6 l de8! seems to be b tter for Black) and here:

c21) 26... l xf7 27 . xf7+ a d then:

c211) 27... h8 28 l c3! (28 e6 l xd4 is not so cle a) 28... . h7 (there a e other moves, but I don't think the combined threats of e6 and a3 can b met) 29 e6 and Black seems to be losing in all lines.

c212) 27... xf7 is met by 28 e6+.

c213) 27... h7 28 l c3! (28 e6 is met by 28... . xd-) 28... - bl 29 e6 ' a8 30 . e5 g6 gves White an att active win by 3l . xg6+! . xg6 32 **h5** . g8 33 hxg6+ . xg6 34 , f5 ' f8 35 . c8!.

c22) 26... h7 27 a3! and here:

c221) 27... l 28 ' d1 . g6 29 l xd8 . xd8 30 ' f3 l c7 31 . f5 . xf5 32 Wxf5+ h8 33 e6 and White wins.

c222) 27... l c6 28 d5 . xf7 29 dxc6 . fl+ 30 . xfl . xfl 31 . f5+ g8 32 e6 J d6 33 Wg6 . xg3 34 ' h7+ f8 35 1 h8+ e7 36 Wxg7+ d6 37 ' xg3+ xc6 38 . e4+ c5 39 e7! i xg3 **40** exd8W ' e3+ 41 xfl Wxe4 42 ' if + with a winning queen endg a e.

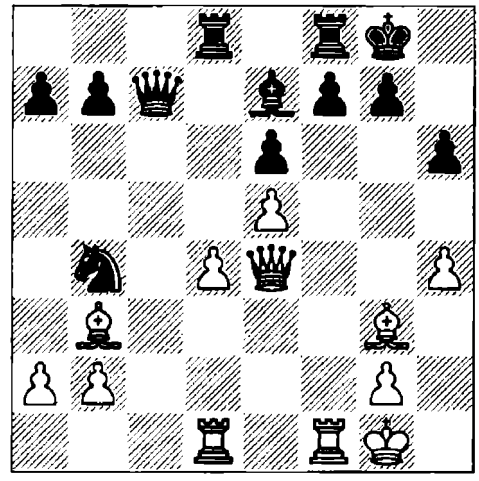
c223) 27... l c2 and now 28 ' d l l xd4 29 l xc2 . g6 30 ' hd4 . xc2 31 l d6 J g6 32 h2 gives White a promising position, while 28 d5!? l de8 is f arly uncle a , but I b lieve in White's attack.

Al t ough these lines a e not comprehensive, t ey do seem to f ow elegantly in the direction of t e prevailing t end. It would asking f a too much to see all the lines after 23 l d6 to the end, but it's not as k ng too much to look f a enough to confirm the belief that this is the r ght move. It may well be that there's a f aw in the above analysis and that Black can defend a f er this move, but this wouldn't change my view that 23 l d6 had to be played. Indeed I **am** reminded of Miles a notating a g a e in which h s opponent sacri f ces a piece for two pawns in a quiet but complex position where he notes: ··No !s or ?s for t is move. It's just necessary." Sometimes it's more impo r ant to keep the momentum of the game than to think whether a certain move is objectively good or bad.

23...♗xe4!

A well-timed exchange. Black would have played this b fore but it only works when W ite can be prevented from lining up the queen and bishop on the b l-h7 diagonal.

2 **♕xe4 ♕c7!** *(D)*



25 ♖c1?!

I dido't sense that the t end was turning away f om me. This was probably my last chance to keep some so r of advantage, by 25 a3 i c6! 26 ' xc6 l xc6 27 **d5** . c5+ 28 h2 exd5 29 l xd5 . d4 30 . b5 J b6! 31 e6 fxe6 32 . xe6+ h7 but even then, there don't seem to be enough pawns le f to make much use of the two bishops. All the s a e, White should have a pull for some moves to come.

25...♕d7 2 **♖fd1**

I doubt if I'm in any way better here.

2 **...** . c8 **27** a **♖xc1** 2 **♖xc1 ♘d5 29 ♔h2 ♗d8!** 3 : n **♗b6 31** : n **♗c7?!**

Bogd a o f ered a draw here, but Bogdan offers so many draws t at I tend to reject them on principle, often at the cost of half a point; a small p r ce to pay for the pleasure it gives me. In fact his move was somewhat inaccurate and I was quite right to decline, not that I realized why.

32 ♔h1 f5 33 exf6 ♗xg3 34 ♖xg3?

34 ' g4! looks ve r good for White.

34...♖xf6 35 ♕e5 ½-½

White is more active, but Black's k ng is safer. I o f ered t e draw back, before the t end t u ed away beyond equality.

B. Lalić – Rowson
Isle of Man 1999

1 c4

I now realize that before the g a e there is something to be said for thinking about what you are playing for. On the one hand I want to f ght in all my games but you must either resolve to do this at all times or else be pragmatic and decide before each game, considering form, tourn a ent situation, colour and opponent. One of the main reasons I lost this game is that I hadn't resolved in my own mind how I would react to an e a ly draw offer. For a further consideration of such issues, see Chapter 3.

1...g6

After about f ve minutes' thought. I didn't feel very focused for some reason so I used the f rst few moves to acclimatize.

2 e4!?

Played with the air of a cunning question. Bogdan knows my repertoire quite well and, like most Gr nfeld players, I have some move-order issues to deal with after 1 c4 or 1 t f3. I had the feeling that he would be ready for any funny business based on ...e5 but I didn't really have a choice because I don't understand e a ly ...g6 lines or t e King's Indian nearly well enough to play them against such a theoretical monster.

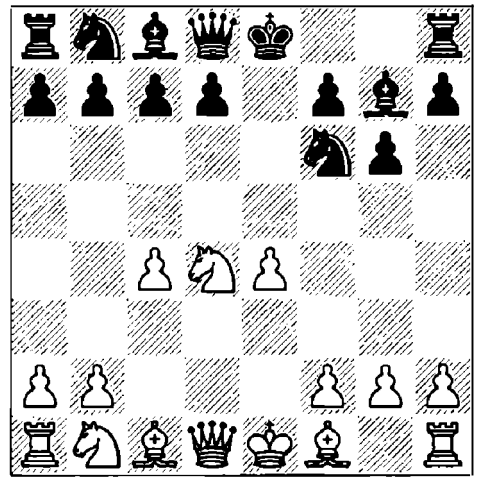
2...e5!?

OK, show m e what you've got.

3 ♘f3

3 d4 t f6 4 l f3 . b4+ 5 . d2 . xd2+ 6 xd2 (6 l bxd2 d6 7 dxe5 dxe5 8 l xe5 ' e7 9 f4 t bd7 10 t xd7 i xd7 11 e5 0-0-0 with good compensation, Polugaevsky-Tal, USSR Ch, Moscow 1973) 6... ' e7!? 7 dxe5 l xe4 8 ' e3 b + 9 t bd2 t xd2 10 ' xd2 ' xd2+ 11 xd2 b6!? with a comfortable ending for Black, Poluliakhov-Sutovsky, Koszalin 1999.

3... i g7 **4 d4 exd4 5 ♘xd4 ♘f6** *(D)*



Again I hesitated to play this move. Not having had t is exact position before, I wasn't sure what would happen after 6 e5.

6 e5!?

I was su r rised when Bogdan paused before this move, but sometimes this is just a ploy of well-prepared players to make you think that they a e on new territory too, so I was still quite tense here. 6 t c3 0-0 7 i e2 Ae8 8 f3 c6!?, with the idea of playing ...d5 without pausing for ...d6, is generally thought to be comfortable for Black. If White wants an advantage here he probably has to try 9 t b3!? with the idea of 9...d5 10 cxd5 cxd5 11 i g5, as suggested by Lautier. 11...dxe4 12 xd8 l xd8 13 t xe4 t b7 14 l d1 l e8 15 t d6 l e6 16 ' t and White has an enduring initiative. 9...a5!? may be Black's best reply. Then 10 a4 (10 . f4 a4 just looks good for Black) 10...d5!? (this is not mentioned by Lautier, but it seems to make it dif f cult for White to castle) 11 cxd5 cxd5 12 . g5 (12 exd5 ' b6 looks like go o compensation) 12... ' b6!? 13 . xf6 xf6 14 xd5 l d8 is not so clear because White's knights have a lot of potential, but I suspect Black has enough compensation for the pawn.

6...♘e4

I played this a ter roughly f ve minutes of dithering over 6... ' e7, which unfortunately doesn't have an obvious refutation - making it di f cult to discard under the circumstances (***Perfectionism***). I still felt like I was somehow walking a tight rope. 7 ' e2 t h5 8 t f (this looks simplest) 8...d6 9 exd6 ' xe2+ 10 . xe2 cxd6 looked to me like some sort of theory, but given that I have no real compensation for the s t cture I didn't want to go there.

7 ♘f3

7 ' e2 t c5 is likely to end up with White having problems on the e- f le.

7...d6

Now I felt more comfo r able. My opponent was thinking too, and he didn't look totally content.

8 ♕d5 f5!

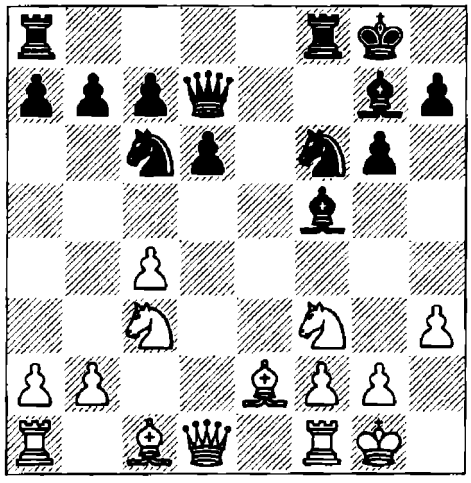
This seems to give Black a very easy game. Now I was quite enjoying myself. I suppose

we've just had some sort of theoretical battle a d given that this is Bogdan's fore, I was pleased to have come out on top.

9 **exf6 ♘xf6 10 ♕d1 0-0**

Now I st a ted playing quickly. It looks like **an** upw a d t end for Black h a been established. White has lost some time with his queen and Black has comfortable posts waiting for a l his pieces.

11 ♗e2 ♘c6 12 ♘c3 . rs **13 0-0 ♕d7** 14 **h3** *(D)*

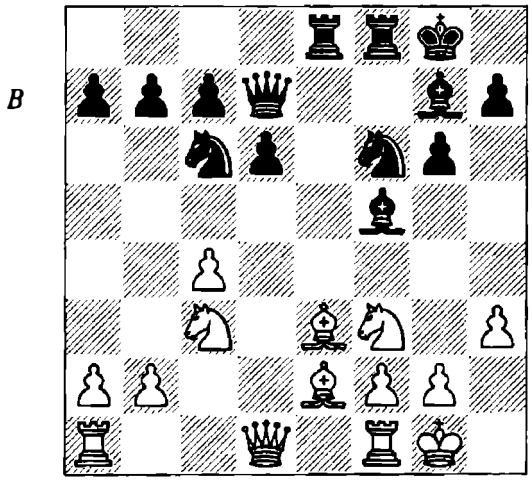


Here Bogdan o fered a draw - and a very t cky o fer it is. Aside from the position, the tournament context was on my mind. This was t e penultimate round; 1 out of 2 gives me a reasonable prize, **1½** a good prize and 2/2 would be f st ou t ght. A te r ble thing to think at such a moment! But who is completely resis- t nt to such thoughts? There a e aspects of Wanting and Egoism here. Whatever the ev a u- ation of the cu r ent position, it is cle a that I have been experiencing an upw a d trend after r ding the storm just out of the opening. It is also cle a that Black's position is not worse, and White's last move is in some ways encour- aging because it accentuates Black's develop- ment advantage. A f r er issue is that I have an obvious move to play (14... l ae8) and yet I have no obvious plan for preserving and transform- ing t e favourable trend.

So in many ways I **am** fully justi f ed in de- clining the o fer, but to some extent the offer undermined my concentration because when you feel that your opponent is going to f ght to the death for victory, you tend to feel suitably tense and attentive to his ideas and their relation to your own. But once you a e offered a draw, there is a tendency to feel that this offer is of **a** general nature a d not speci f c to the position. My problem here was that I concluded that t s offer was 'on the table' and generalized that 'Bogdan is happy with a draw' In actu a fact Bogdan, though usually happy with a draw, was distinctly unhappy with his opening play, and fe a ing he may be worse a d sensing t e unfavourable trend, he t ied to halt Black's progress by ending the game immediately. Since he was a h a f-point behind and values the alleged advantage of the white pieces, a draw was by no means a success for him. **So it is dangerous to think that an early draw offer means your opponent is generally happy to draw.**

If you do this, there may be a tendency to avoid the transformations you need to make be- cause as long as the position seems the same, you may think you have an opt-out clause, but if the position is totally different, you lose the safety-valve that you think the offer has af- forded you. So, largely because of the o fer, I decided to try to outplay him slowly but this is a big m st a e, because White's ex t a pawn for his king shield and grip on the d5-square gives him certain positional advantages and if I play a 'slow game', as the Russi a s say, there is a dan- ger that I could become worse. The point is that I didn't acknowledge this danger because I al- ways thought I had a draw available if the posi- tion seemed to be turning.

14...**♖ae8** 15 **♗e3** *(D)*



Critical moment. If White is given time to connect and centralize his rooks then he will be

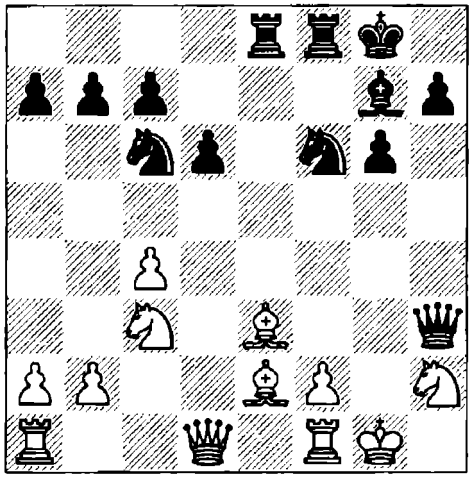
better, so Black needs to play with some controlled urgency. I decided against sacrificing on h3, not because of any particul a line, but just because after such a big change in the position, I feared I would be playing for a 'third result' rather than just two - a draw or a win (see Chapter 3). Given that I knew I had to do something, but didn't like 15... i xh3, I decided on the most natural move without c a efully calculating White's likely response.

15...♘e4?!

Now White is at least equal. Other ideas:

a) For a long time after the game I assumed that I missed my only chance to keep the initiative with 15... i xh3. Indeed, both players concluded that Black has good practical chances and should have played this way to keep the pressure on White. After 16 gxh3 ' ixh3 17 l h2! *(D)* (not 17 l g5?! ' ih4) we didn't f nd anything in particul a for Black, but assumed t at this must b the way for him to go because otherwise White was never worse, and this seemed counter-intuitive given the amount of time he had lost. Moreover, Bogdan suggested that such a sacrif ce wasn't even such a big r sk because Black already has two pawns and a big initiative. However, a closer look suggests that this line just doesn't work for Black:

B



a1) 17... l e5 18 l d5! and now if Black takes, White recaptures with check and brings the queen to g2. If Black doesn't take, White can either bring the k ight to the kingside with l f4 or start a counterat t ck with l xc7. I don't see anything promising for Black here.

a2) 17... l e7!? is a curious echo of the suggested 23 l e2!? in Emms-Webster but after 18 i g4! Black's best is to play an inferior ending after 18... l xg4 19 ' ixg4 ' ixg4+ 20 l xg4 h5 21 l 2 i xc3 22 bxc3 l f5.

a3) 17... l e5!? 18 i f3! and now I don't see a ything convincing, as 18... l f5 19 l 5! leaves White in control.

There is a theme to al these lines: Black's development advantage is based on the superior activity of his rooks, but it seems there is no way to exploit this after 15... i xh3. White's queen was very well placed on d1, suppo r ing f3 and g4 and the position of Black's king gives White some annoying regrouping possibilities. What does this suggest? Talk with your pieces. Your f6-knight has been he a d and your f5-bishop is calling, but is there a sound from any other qu a ter? Which piece could be improved before the forces become integrated? Thus...

b) 15... h8! is a very st ong quiet move, with a prophylactic f avour. Black keeps t e option of both ... l e4 and ... i x 3, both of which will b stronger wi t the k ng on h8. More importantly, this circumvents White's most natural continuation and so makes it di f cult to f nd a suitable reply. Then:

b1) 16 ' id2 i xh3! 17 gxh3 ' ixh3 is now, I think, good for Black because the insertion of ' id2 and ... h8 deprives White of all the main defensive resources that we saw in line 'a':

b11) 18 l h2 l e4! 19 ' ic2 {after 19 l xe4 l xe4 the superio r ty of the rooks is very cle a, and Black has a decisive attack, e.g. 20 i g5 l d4 21 l be1 l f3!) 19... l x f ! 20 . x f i e5 21 l g4 l d4! gives Black decisive threats.

b12) No better is 18 i f4 l h5 19 i h2, when Black is winning; for ex a ple, 19.. J he2 20 ' ixe2 l xf3 21 ' e8+ : ts 22 ' ie3 ' ig4+ 23 h1 ' ixc4.

b13) 18 l g5 ' ih4 19 g2 l g4 leaves Black with a huge initiative. After 20 l h3 i e5! 21 ' e1 J 5 White might be able to survive, but Black has plenty of attac k ng ideas.

b2) 16 l cI!? gives Black two promising options:

b21) 16... i xh3 17 gxh3 ' ixh3 I8 l h2 / 4! 19 l d5 (after 19 i g4 ' ih4 20 i f3 l xc3 21 bxc3 ' ixc4, I guess Black is a bit better: he has three pawns for the piece, White's remaining pawns a e weak, and the white k ng will always b draughty) 19... . e5 20 l g4 h5 (20... l g3 21 fxg3 ' xg3+ 22 h1 ' h3+ 23 g1 ' g3+) 21

xe5 l xe5 and the threat of ... l ff5 followed by ... l g5+ looks unstoppable.

b22) The quieter option is also instructive: 16... t 4 17 l xe4 (17 t d5 . xb2 18 l b1 l g7 seems to lead to favourable complications) 17... . xe4 18 d4 (18 b3 i b2 looks like quite a safe material-grab, while 18 wd2 i xf3 19 . x f l x f 20 gx f ' xh3 is winning) 18... xd4 19 . xd4 . xd4 20 wxd4+ ' g7. This is the type of slight edge I was looking for. Black is usually a bit b tter in such endings b cause the pawn on c4 leaves the white queenside a bit ex- p sed and in this case Black h a the more useful bishop and a more active king.

b3) 16 : e1 may be White's best move but Black retains some initiative: 16... l e4 (after 16... . xh3 17 gxh3 xh3 18 . n White should stave o f the attack) 17 xe4 . xe4 18 d4 ' d8!? (improving the queen's prospects and setting a little trap) 19 xc6 (not 19 wd2? xg2! 20 xg2 l xe3 21 fxe3 wg5+ 22 . g4 t xd4) and here:

b31) 19...bxc6!? 20 . d4 c5 2I . xg7+ q xg7. Black has chances to b better in such an ending b cause the 'we a ' black a-pawn can be used to make the white b-pawn even weaker and the position of the kings means that White's king-side majority is unlikely to cause any problems.

b32) 19... . xc6 20 . d4 l h4! gives Black some initiative.

16 xe4 . xe4 17 gS!

I didn't think he could do this, but perhaps t at's just because I had programmed myself to think that he was playing for a draw and so such tactical lines missed the scanner.

11... . rs

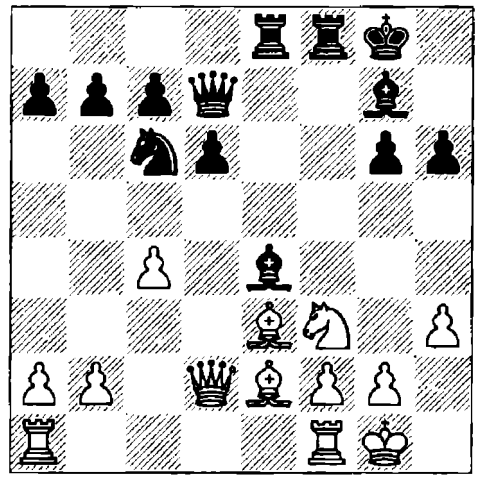
Not 17... . xb2? 18 xe4 . xal 19 ' d5+ ' n 20 : xal wxd. 21 cxd5 (I think I'd missed that he was attacking c6 here) 21.. J he4 22 dxc6 bxc6 with a winning endgame for White.

18 ' d2 h6?!

A nervous and we a ening move. The knight looks threatening on g5 but it's actually not very well placed. 18... e5!? was better. Then after 19 f4?! (there's no need for White to be provoked in this way; 19 Afe1!? and 19 l ad1!? both look comfortable for White but Black is much better off having not we a ened the k ngside and the position looks more equal than anything else) 19... c6 20 . f3 : xe3 21 . xc6 xc6 22 ' xe3 ' xc4 Black seems to be b tter. The two bishops a e not worse than the rook and knight and Black has an extra pawn.

19 f3 . e4 *(D)*

W



I o f ered a draw back here, thinking I was still slightly better but sensing that my favourable trend was withering. In fact after White's next move I am a bit worse and the e ffect o f the draw o ffer being declined placed me in a very di f cult predic a ent. Not only do I have to f ght, when I didn't think I had to, but I have to face up to the possibility of defeat, which seemed out of the question a few moves ago. Such situations a e considered more closely in ***Wanting.***

20 h2!

Now White has consolidated his position and connected the rooks. In the meantime I have achieved little but a weakened kingside. White is slightly better and has established a favo u able trend. To his credit, Bogdan plays the rest of the game very well. Instead after 20 . xh6? i xf3 21 . xf3 l xf3 22 gxf3 ' xh3, White's king is not a happy bunny.

20... ' e7 21 : adl wr6 22 b3 g5 23 . h5 . g6 24 . f3 . e4 25 . h5 . g6 26 l d5+ < b7?

The king is vulnerable here. White's repetition had undermined my sense of danger. 26... : f7! is best, when I am close to equalizing. I guess psychologically we don't like to pin our own pieces, but here there is little that White can do to trouble me, e.g. 27 . xg6 wxg6 28 ' b5 l b8!. It's quite simple really: I have no real wea k esses and the threat of ... l f5 will allow my b8-rook to be reactivated soon.

27 . f3

With the i r itating t h eat of l b5.

27... a6 28 c5!

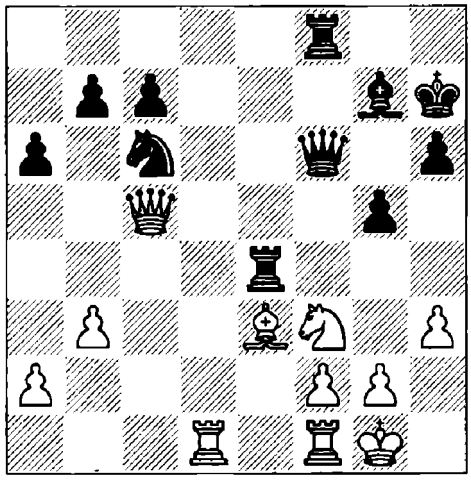
Opening the position while my coordination is bad and making c7 a potential we a ness.

28...dxcS 29 xeS . e4

I didn't like to abandon his highness l i e this but . xc6 in conjunction with l d7 was a serious positional threat.

30 . xe4+! l xe4 31 l f3! *(D)*

B



I was a little dazed a ound now. My position is basic a ly still OK but there a e v a ious threats based on taking on g5, c2 or l d7 and it was all a bit much to take in while short of time. At f st I wanted to play 31... l e7 but I felt that my pieces looked a bit clumsy then. After a bit more rumination I decided that exchanging queens would help and, without stopping to consider my opponent's reply, I played:

31... ' e7??

This is a good case of 'looseness' brought about by the feeling of helplessness when the trends seem to be turning relentlessly against you. I was fa too 'loose' to calculate any tactics accurately but on a better day I may still have been able to hold with 3I... l n !. I think I saw some combination of ' c2 and . xg5 and ruled this one out. It's easy to overlook t e critical lines when you have already tacitly assumed that t ere should be a simple solution to your problems. Bogdan demonstrated the import a t and impressive line 32 i xg5 ' g6 33 t c2 l xf3! 34 gxf3 l g4+! after the game. It's true that it's not so diff cult to see now, but when the tense emotions of the moment direct your thoughts, it is ex t emely di f cult to perceive such a line cle a ly. I guess my blunder was caused by 'tension transference', considered under ***Looseness.***

32 ' ke7!

Of course! I have no good way to recapture. Having decided that a queen exch a ge favoured me in general, I didn't stop to look at the speci f c implications of this obvious move. 32 ' c2 also looks strong. I think I had some t ing in mind a ter this and I presume Bogdan saw whatever it was too, but looking at it now, this looks absolutely decisive because of the combined threats of l d2 and . c5. A f er 32... l b 33 ' bl h8, White has 34 . c5! - I think we both missed this f nal detail.

32... l xe7

32.. J he7 is met by 33 . c5.

33 l d7 ' g6

Or 33... l f5 34 . xg5.

3 l xc7 l dS 35 l xb7 l xe3 36 l e1!

An accurate move. White has so me technic a problems after 36 fxe3 l xe3 37 l b l f6.

36... . d4 37 l xd4 l xd4 38 l be3 l dl+ 39 h2 l x f 40 l b6+ fS 41 l xh6 ' f4 42 l e8 1-0 .

Contradiction at the Heart of Chess?

Do I contradict myself? Very well then, I contradict myself.
WALT WHITMAN

Has it ever s t ck you how c r de chess s y bols a e? In one position in my last book I t ed to say that 'Black has an unclear advantage' but John Nunn objected that t is was con t adictory: if Black has the advantage in the position then that's a cle a assessment; the position cannot also b uncle a . In a sense you cannot fault t is logic and indeed I felt obliged to change the assessment to something like 'the position is fa i ly unclear but I prefer Black'. I sup p se the distinction is that one is an objective claim and the other a subjective opinion, but I'm not at all convinced that this distinction should be seen as important. Whatever the case may be, this episode made an impression on me and since then I've wondered to what extent our appreciation of chess is res t cted by the symbols we a e exposed to in almost every chess book we read.

Without words, we co m unicate with t e following: sligh t clear/decisive advantage to

either side (six assessments), equal, uncle a , compensation, counte r lay, initiative, attack, time-trouble, development (plus a few others) and in most books we are not even exposed to anything beyond the first seven or eight, the rest b ing verbalized by the au t or. What interests me is which signs are mutually exclusive and why? Presumably the position can be uncle a with one side having an attack, or equal with one side having compensation for mate r al. Can it be such that the side with the slight advantage is also under attack? Can the side with a cle a disadvantage also enjoy a development advantage?

Of course they can, but these pairs don't rest easy, do they? Somehow we like to attach extra weight to the assessment and all other details are given a subordinate role. For example, we often read that White is better ***because*** of development or that the position has become uncle a ***because*** of counte r lay, etc. There may be a very good reason for this. Whereas the frst eight symbols can b applied to one position at a time, the others refer to events in progress, those ephemeral, dynamic aspects of the position that a e somehow more intangible and less precise (we think) than the basic assessments. It seems to me that the former (positional assessments) place a value on the given position as it stands, but the latter gives an indication of the direction of the game. But why don't we place a value on the d i ection? Might it not b , that, because of the direction of the g a e, the side with t e advantage must inevitably become worse?

Surely not! Surely that would just mean that t e initial assessment was inco r ect? That would be a convenient answer, but I've come to think that it may not be t e. I f eely admit that the alternative is highly counter-intuitive, but I hope t e reader will give it a fair he a ing in any case. Sometimes it seems that you can look at a position from the perspective of the given moment without 'movement' and place a value on it that contradicts the value you place on it under the p rspective of where the game has come from and where it's likely to go. What is more, this does not seem to be a purely psychological matter. I think this sort of crazy contradiction may b built into the he a t of chess. There may be some positions where one side is better and worse, depending on whether you look at the position at hand or the direction of the game.

In case you think this is a just an academic matter, think again. How often have you felt that you had a good position, don't k ow where you went wrong, and lost? I'm sure it has happened quite a lot, and I am suggesting that in such cases you may not have made a m stake as such at all! It may just have been that your assessment of the position as favourable, although not strictly false, may have been too one-dimensional. You need to a s e s not o ny the position a it stands, but the posi t on a it h a changed and how it is likely to continue to change.

Understanding this idea is impo r nt for appreciating ***Blinking*** as a deadly sin. To demonstrate this, and to rescue us from this abyss of abs t ac t on, please consider the following game:

Shaw – Rowson
Edinburgh 2000

1 e4 c5 2 l f3 d6 3 . b5+ l d7 4 d4 l gf6 5 l c3 cxd4 6 xd4 eS 7 d3 h6 8 i e3 i e7 9 0-0 a6!?

Ambitious. 9...0-0 10 . c4 l b6 11 . b3 . e6 is supposed to be slightly better for White, but it's a simil a advantage to the one we see in the g a e.

10 . c4 c7 11 a4 l cs 12 i xcS ' ixc5 13 l h4 . e6 14 i a2!

A good move, and a big improvement over the tempting 14 i xe6 fxe6 15 l g6 l g8, when White has a draw at best. 16 l ad1 r f7 17 l xe7 (17 ' g3!? l h5 18 ' ig4 l f6 19 g3 l h5) 17... ' xe7 18 r h1 l af8 19 f4 exf4 20 J xf4 l d7 and Black was slightly better in the game Shaw-Rowson, Glasgow Alle g o 2000. 14 i b3!? is also worthy of attention.

14... i xa2 15 : xa2 g6 16 g3

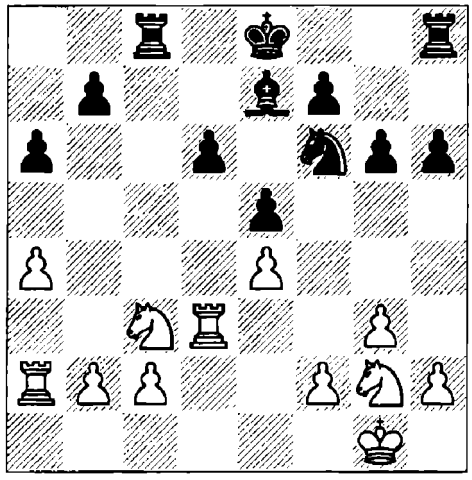
16 l f3!? is worth considering. The idea is to play J a3-b3 quickly and, if possible, l a1, a , : a4 and 2-c4. It's asking a lot, I k ow, but since Black should almost never exchange knights on d5, there may be little point in both knights controlling this squ a e.

16... : cs 17 l g2 ' id4 18 : d1 xd3

The attempt to change the direction of the game by 18... l xc3?! is asking too much: 19 bxc3 (19 ' ixd4 exd4 20 bxc3 l xe4 21 l el

t xc3 22 l b2 b5 23 axb5 axb5 24 l b4 and White is better) 19... ' xe4 20 l b l ' c6 21 l ab2 with a cle a advantage to White.

19 ♖xd3 *(D)*



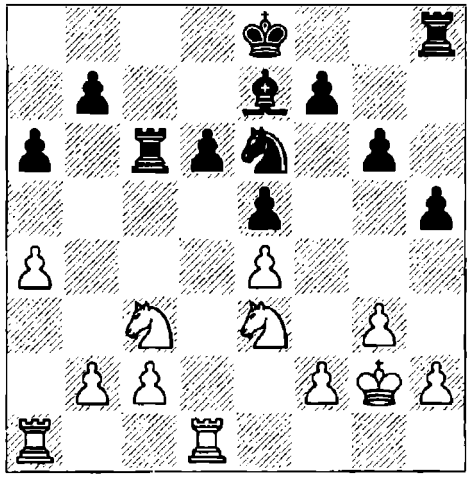
I hesitate to call this a critical position but in some ways it is the most interesting moment of the game. Until John's strong 14th move I had felt an upw a d trend because I was consistent in my choice of opening, and didn't anticipate any big improvement from White. After 14 . a I had a deep think and it slowly dawned on me that I had nothing better than to accept a position simil a to the one we have here. However, whereas John didn't have to s t uggle internally to get here, I a rved with open eyes and a determination to m a e the most of my position. This reminds me of Lasker's insightful comment: "He who has a slight disadvantage plays more attentively, inventively and more boldly than his antagonist, who either t a es it easy or aspires a ter too much. Thus a slight disadvantage is very frequently seen to convert into a good, solid advantage." I guess I was a bit more attentive than usual, and John was ta k ng it easy, but my advantage was a long time in coming.

I had he a d various stories about the worst bishop being better than the best knight and I decided it was time to see if they were t e. So although I had been experiencing a downw a d trend from the 14th move, I was very conscious of the danger of the letting t e position slide t o wards defeat, and resolved to reverse the trend slowly but surely. I suspect John was just happy with his position and didn't see any need to do anything other than slowly try to improve it. The most signi f cant idea in the position is that one of the white knights is super f uous in that they both want to be on d5. Black has to give up the fight for the d5-squ a e and play a ound it. Rather than dwell on a long-term plan that would never come to pass, I decided on the short-term idea of bringing my knight to e6, where it has good prospects on c5, d4 and g5 and doesn't dis r pt the bishop in any way.

The relevant question for our purposes is, "Is W h te b tter?" The answer must surely be yes. We can point to the relative inactivity of the black bishop, the weakness of the d6-pawn, the d5-squ a e a a base for s t ategic operations and the possibility of increasing the pressure with b4-b5 or f4 when the time is right. Given this, an assessment of 'slightly better' or 'cle a ly better' seems in order. On the other, often neglected, hand, White's position is extremely di f cult to improve beyond a certain point and given Black's control of the half-open c- f le, the potential of the ...b5 and ...f5 bre a s and the future for the bishop if the position ever opens up, we might say that Black's position has more dynamic potential. GM Danny King has a great deal of experience in such s t ctures and he thought Black was f n , but mainly because it will t a e White so so

Maybe the knight is not so well placed here. Since the d5-squ a e is the only home of the c3-knight and l c4 is di f cult to achieve, there was something to be said for keeping it on g2 for the t me b ing. There may be some moment when f4 and l xf4 becomes possible or l e1-f3-d2-b3-a5 should be considered. 20 b4l? is radical, but maybe White has to m a e use of the development advantage and keep the black knight on a sub-optimal squ a e. Then 20... c4 21 l b2 h5 22 l el h4 23 l f3 hxg3 24 hxg3 l f8 25 t d2 l c8 26 l d5 i g5 27 c3 i xd2 28 l xd2 [illegible]

W



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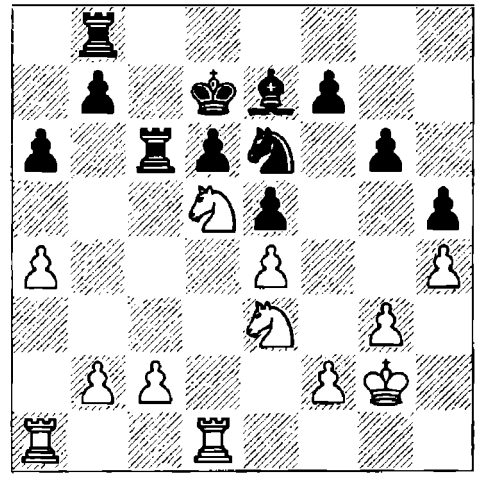


where my favourable trend threatens to extinguish his advantage. John looked at the position and found a reasonable move, but if he'd been aware of the trends he could have retained the advantage. I can see why White wants to play l c4 here but now the queenside is weakened and it's difficult for White to remove the black knight from d4. 26 b4! was my opponent's recommendation when we talked about the g a e a couple of months after it was played. In itself it looks very weakening but since the white knights control the weakened squ a es c2, c3 and c4, and Black doesn't want to exchange knights at all, this strong move threatens to overstretch Black's forces with the combined threats of a well-timed b5 and/or f4. Then:

a) 26... i d8 is compliant, and allows White to show the full force of his idea. 27 c3 e8 and now:

a1) 28 h3!? was John's suggestion. Then 28... l g7 29 f4 (29 l a2) 29...exf4 30 gxf4 l e6 31 f5 gives White a cle a advantage, but 28...a5!?, to f ght for the c5-square, looks like the best chance for counterplay. 29 b5 l cc8 30 f3 is still a bit b tter for White though; certainly it's hard to see how Black could become better here.

a2) It seems even better to fix the queenside immediately with 28 a !, when White has the positional threat of h3 and f4, which looks very h a d to stop. After 28... l g7 29 ' h3 f5 30 f3 White can try to play for an eventual f4 by placing the rooks on f1 and e1.

b) There are problems reverting to the quick ...f5 idea too: 26... l f8 27 b5! axb5 (otherwise White will make go o use of the b-f le and the a6-pawn will be weak) 28 axb5 l c5 29 c b6+ and White is winning.

c) 26... a !? is another attempt to be combative and Black probably should try this, but he doesn't seem to b very well organized and White can develop some initiative. 27 l abl is now just slightly better for White, but of course that's not so much the point; it's more important that White has the feeling of making some progress.

Instead, 26 a l f8! gives Black time to create counterplay and highlights the strength of 26 b4.

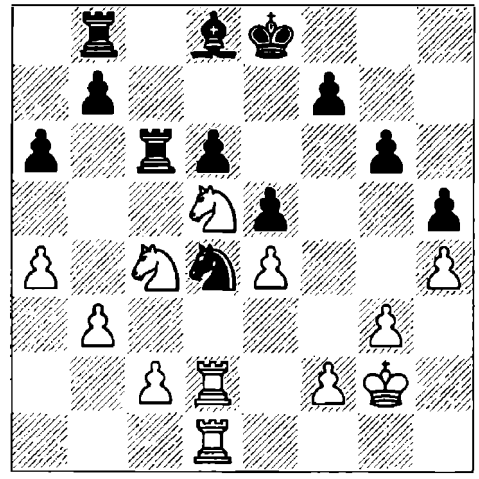
2 ... e8 27 l d2 l d4! 28 l ad l i d8!

John said that he felt he was beginning to lose control a ound this point. But in some ways I think he lost control long ago. He needed to grab the position by the scruff of the neck on move 19 and realize that some creative transformation was required. The idea of b is a little counter-intuitive and the idea of f4 seems unnecess a ily complicated, but even so t ese are the tools with which to seek victory. It often happens that when you try too hard to avoid counterplay, you end up inviting it.

29 l c4 *(D)*

29 l hd4! exd4 30 l xd4 was probably the best continuation for White at t is stage. However, given the initial assumption that White was much b tter, it's diff cult to see the 'need' to sacri f ce the exchange. In general I t h nk the position is then about equal, although it's easier to play White. However, 30... i b6! seems to equalize i m ediately: 31 l xb6 l xb6 32 l c4 l c6 33 l xd6+ ¢ e7 34 l c4 l d8. Once the rooks come off White has no real winning chances and it is risky to try for more, e.g. 35 c3 b5 36 axb5 axb5 37 l e3 l xc3 38 l d5+ l xd5 39 l xd5 l xb3 with a rook ending which Black can 'play', while White has to 'draw' (see Wanting).

B



This is a critical position, where I ag a n paid too much attention to the t end, and not enough to the opportunities in *this* position. Throughout this game I have shown good 'trend sensitivity' but poor 'position sensitivity'

29...b5!?

Although this is very tempting, it may not b the best move. The reader should b a in mind that the time-control was at move 36 and so adrenaline was in the driving seat. At a less tense moment, with more time, I would have

preferred 29... l bc8!?, simply threatening to sac r fice the exchange on c4. Most of us a e loath to sacrifice material when short of time, but this is just another aspect of ***Materialism.*** Given the choice between the obvious and natura l 29...b5, kicking away an active knight, and a non-forcing move (Krogius states that we t nd to seek out only forcing lines when short of time, perhaps to minimize uncertainty and therefore ease a xiety) that only m a es sense if I'm willing to give away mate r al, it is not sur-p r sing that I chose the former, but it's a so not very admirable. Indeed, on missing this moment, I allow my opponent to halt the trend of t e game, which was st a ting to go in my favour. After 29... . bc8, we have the following lines:

a) 30 a ? is a mis t e, but in some ways the most likely move in the circumstances. After 30.. J hc4 31 bxc4 l xc4 even ***Fritz*** thinks Black is better. The weakness of White's pawns a d the activity of the black pieces are much more important than 'the exchange', which seems a rather spurious concept in such posi-t ons (see ***Materialism***).

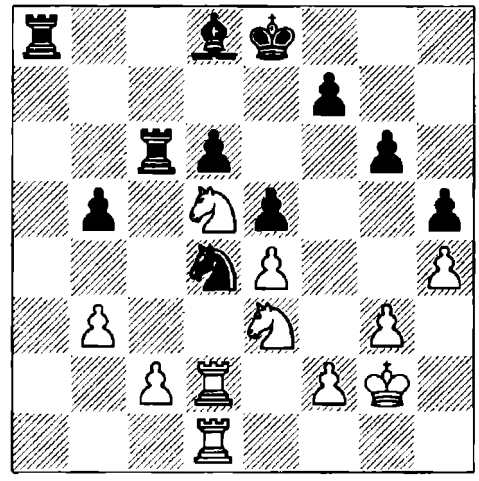
b) 30 l al !? b5 (30.. J hc4 31 bxc4 i a5 32 Add! l xc4 33 l abl b5 34 axb5 axb5 35 l al is just a sample line that shows the type of counterplay that I fe a ed when deciding not to give up the exchange) 31 axb5 axb5 32 t ce3 l xc2 33 t xc2 Axc2 34 Axc2 l xc2 35 l a6 seems to equ a ize for White (at least) but this line is by no means forced, and White would only play the prophylactic move 30 . al if he was highly sensitive to the trends.

c) 30 l xd4! is a very strong move, but very few would play it in the circumstances. To do so, you would have to be very resistant to both ***Blinking*** and ***Materialism.*** 30...exd4 31 l xd4 b5 32 axb5 axb5 and now 33 t a3! is the move t at makes sense of the conception, and yet you would only evaluate it co r ectly if you could somehow sacrif ce material dispassionately. Many players would see 30 l xd4, get to the position after Black's 32nd move, see that 33 l e3 i b6 was nothing special a d reject 33 t a3 on gener a grounds: "You mean I have to give up an exchange and put a knight on the r m? Forget it!" The point is that you will only b able to gauge the co r ect moves in accordance with your willingne s to think ou t ide of your conven t onal pa t e r . Your wi r ng is likely to m a e you strongly resistant to this line of play because of the ' r les' that it breaks, but it seems to be the b st line of play in any case, and the only way to put Black under pressure. After 33... l b8 34 c3!? I prefer White. Perhaps the best way to look at the position is not to ask 'what is the compensation?' but just to com-p a e White's a my with Black's. In doing so, I'm sure you'll a g ee that the rook, two knights and six pawns a e worth more than Black's two rooks, bishop and five pawns. This is not the case if you 'add it up' of course, but if you look for quality you'll see what I mean (see ***Materialism***).

30 axb5

Such was my opponent's disa r ay that he had intended 30 l b4 in reply to 29...b5, forgetting that my c6-rook is protected by the d4-knight. As is typical when trends st a t to turn, I was gaining in con f dence while John w a susceptible to confusion. Indeed my opponent said he expe r enced a 'dodgy moment' here.

3 ...axb5 31 t ce3 l a8! ***(D)***



I assumed I had played correctly up to here, but I underest i ated the signif cance of the we a ness on b5, which is rather acute once my knight is removed f om d4.

32 b4! l a3 33 c3 l e6 34 t c2

White understandably wants to put some f a es out, but my activity was little more than visual, so there was no rush to exchange the a3-rook.

34... l a8 35 : a t?! l xa l 36 t xa l l a6

Last move before the time-control and again I failed to act on my hunch that this was a

critical position. However, I should have followed my intuition, which told me that this was a good time to play 36... r c7!. Then:

a) 37 l c2 l xd5 38 l xd5 l xc3 39 r e3 i b6 40 <f3 <d7 41 l bb5 <c6 42 l d5 f5! is clearly b tter for Black.

b) 37 l xc7+ i xc7 and now:

b1) Black is better after 38 l d3 l a6 39 l c2 l a2 40 r e3 i b6!.

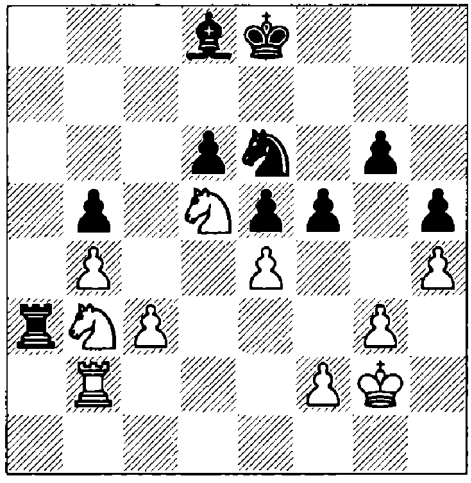
b2) 38 l d5 put me o f playing 36... l c7, but I didn't look far enough because after 38... l xc3 39 l xb5 <d7 I only 'saw' that the st r cture had changed unfavourably and fe a ed that I would b strategically lost if the knight reached d5. Of course, White's pieces are awful and so Black is much better. This is also typical of time-trouble in that we tend to overestimate static features of the position.

37 l b3?!

37 l c2!? l a2 looks annoying but after 38 f l I can't make use of the pin and White's knight is on a better circuit.

37... l a3 38 l b2 f5! ***(D)***

W



This was a long time in coming, but it arrives with considerable e f ect.

39 l d2

39 f3 is answered by 39...f4! (see the note to White's 24th move).

39... l c7!

This is a good moment to contest d5. White has few active possibilities now.

40 l xc7+ i xc7 41 exf5!

Sensibly relieving the tension b fore the advance of my king improves my reactive possibilities.

41... g f5 42 c4

Another key moment. The trends have b en going in my favour but White has not buckled and the position is increasingly demanding precise calculation. If I can hold back the b-pawn, activate my king and mobilize the centre I w i l achieve my strategic objective and have great winning chances, but of course it's not so easy, and there was little time to make this key decision.

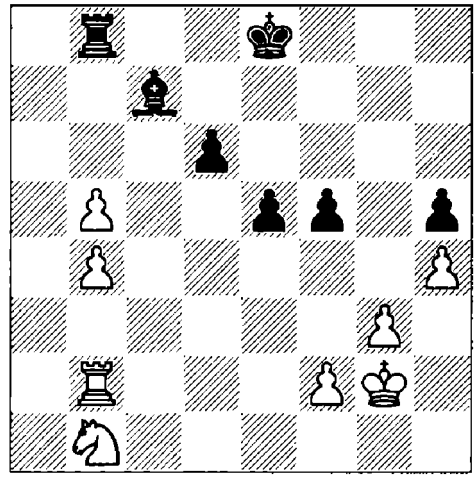
42... l a8?!

This looked wrong and felt wrong, but I played it since it's reasonably safe and I didn't see a convincing alte r ative. Moreover, although I had foreseen the following, I was rather hoping my opponent would miss the key idea of t bl (see 'Inter-subjectivity' under ***Egoism***).

42...**d5!** looks like the solution: 43 cxb5 (43 cxd5 l d3 44 l f l!? <d7 is at least slightly better for Black because of his extra space, the bishop vs knight advantage and the we a ess of b4) 43...e4! 44 l f l (44 l b3 i e5 45 l bl d4 leaves Black f rmly in the driving seat: ...l a2 and ...e3 will soon be a dangerous th eat) 44...d4 45 l c2 l c3! 46 l xc3 dxc3 47 l e3 i b6 48 l c2 <d7 49 <m <e6 50 <e2 <d5 51 l 3+ <d4! (zugzw a g) 52 l xf5+ <c4 53 <d1 <b3 54 <c l i x f and Black is winning.

43 cxb5 l b8 44 t bl! ***(D)***

B



44**...** i b6?

This shows a failure to adjust to the new trend, and now suddenly White has serious winning chances. That said, it's understandable that I wanted to stop l c3. 44... l xb5 45 l c3 l b7 46 l d5 {this position appears very dangerous for Black but a closer look shows this to be an illusion) 46... f7! actually gives Black

chances to be better. Now White's b st may be to simplify to a rook ending:

a) 47 Cxc7 l xc7 48 b5 ' e6 49 b6 : b7 50 f3 looks promising for White at f rst glance because Black cannot take on b6 as long as White has a t h eat of g4 followed by queening the h-pawn. However, there's not a great deal that White can do in the meantime, while Black can relatively easily push the centre pawns. As long as Black's king doesn't go beyond the d-f le White's potentially passed h-pawn can still be stop p d by the k ng.

b) 47 l c2 and then:

b1) 47... . d8 48 . c8 e6 49 l xd8 xd5 50 . h8 l xb4 51 . xh5 f4 with an equal ending.

b2) 47... . b8!? is a winning t . Although it looks suspicious, Black is still playing with an 'extra king' so it's wo r h a t y. 48 . a2!? ' ie6 49 : a may now be the most sober reaction, when it's hard for Black to make progress.

45 Ca3 . d4 **46** : e2 d7 47 . e6 l e8

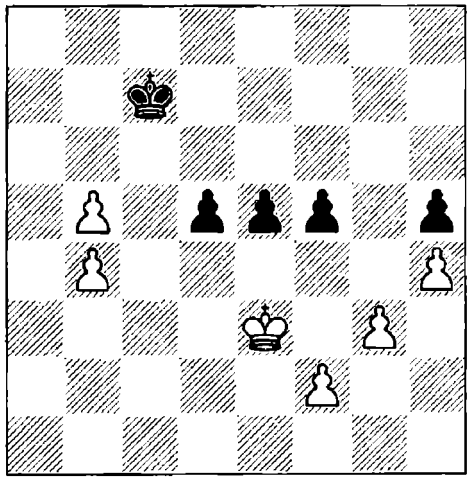
Not 47... . b6?! 48 . xb6 . xb6 49 Cc4 . d4 50 b6 c6 (50...d5 51 b7 r c7 52 Cd6 +) 51 b5+ winning.

48 : xeS xeS 49 Ce2!?

Tentatively, White heads for the king and pawn ending. However, White seems to have b tter winning chances a ter 49 Cc4 c7 50 **f3 d5** 51 b6+! r c6 52 b7 c7 53 Cd6.

49... . a7 50 f3 ' e7 51 Ce3 . xe3 52 xe3 d5 ***(D)***

W



For a while I thought this ending was very interesting and subtle but a f er a while it dawned on me that it was a fairly cle a draw. The following is not an exhaustive analysis, but it does give the main themes.

53 f3

After 53 e2, Black draws by 53... b7. An amusing detail is that 53... ' ib6? loses to 54 f4! e4 55 g4, since after both sides have queened, White plays the cheeky ' b8#.

The kings can instead dance a ound for a while but it doesn't seem to change much. As long as Black doesn't put the king on b6 at the wrong moment (i.e. when White can **start** a promotion race after which he can play ' b8#) and doesn't push ...d4 prematurely (allowing ' id3 and f4) it's hard for White to do anything. White can queen the h-pawn first after f3 and g4 but when Black queens just a f er, there won't be any winning chances in the queen ending due to the reduced num b r of pawns. However, White should be c a eful not to play f with his king on the second rank because in some cases ...e4 is a s t ong reply. Then if f4 Black plays ...d4, and even when White puts the king on e3 (with the pawn on f3) there is no threat of g4 due to the reply ...d4+.

53... b

A bad square for the king in general, but it doesn't seem to matter here.

54 g4

White loses a f er 54 f4? e4 55 g4 hxg4 56 h5 g3 57 h6 d4+!.

54...d4+ 55 ' if hxg4 56 h5 d3 57 fxg4

It doesn't make much di ference whether White takes here, but I thought White's dile m a might gain me some important cl o k time.

57...fxg4 58 h6 d2

I o f ered a draw here, having seen the forced variation. To my surprise, it was declined.

59 e2 g3 60 h7 g2 61 h8 ' id l ' i+

61...g1 ' ?? 62 ' b8# must have been my opponent's secret ho p .

62 ' ixd l gl ' i+ 63 e2

Now he o f ered the draw back, but I decided to punish him since he had less than a minute left. However, he then proceeded to force the exchange of queens and made a draw o f er I couldn't refuse.

Drums without Symbols

So far as the laws of mathematics refer to reality, they are not certain. And so far as they are certain, they do not refer to reality.

ALBERT **EINSTEIN**

Everything is vague to a degree you do not realize until you have tried to make it precise.
B E T AND **RUSSELL**

The g a e we have just examined made a deep impression on me because I was so sure I was worse, fairly con f dent that my opponent didn't do anything much wrong, and found myself at fr st equal (move 2) and then better (move 38). We may be tempted to explain this with reference to the latent dynamism in Black's position. As a result of this we should reassess the position after move 19 as ... what? Equal? But look at it! Doesn't everything you've learned about chess tell you that White is b tter?

Only very rarely can you enjoy a go o position without allowing it to change. Like Chuang Tzu, we call this the t ansformation of things. We tend to accept this, but think that unless someone m a es a mist a e the change will be a matter of valueless transformation; as if so much could be quantitatively di ferent and yet r main qualitatively the same. Don't we place a higher value on a man than a butte r y? What if a good position has to change, a d can only change for the worse? Do we say that it's not a good position after all?

Perhaps, but there's a con f ict here because it's di f cult to measure (evaluate) a moment at the same time as momentum. For a long time we've focused on the former to the neglect of the latter and this is only beginning to be attended to. In assessing a position purely as = or ;;or whatever, we do chess a great disservice. Our fallacy is to apply f xed values to dynamic events. It's a bit like trying to measure snow **as** it f als from the sky. With some care you can capture a snow f ake, acknowledge its uniqueness and then compare it to other snow f akes you've caught before. Yet however f ne your appreciation of this p a ticul a snow f ake, it won't tell you which way the wind is blowing the snow or how much more snow there is to come. For that you need to look at the sky, but then you t e your eye o f the snow f ake.

A chess position is almost always an event in progress. Not without good reason do we refer to the demons t ation of beautiful g a es as 'poe t y in motion'. The position a d our relation to it is always ch a ging and is always essentially unpredic t ble. Indeed, as I've said, the de f ning feature of a chess position is its pro p nsity to change. Thus the adhesion of static labels is invariably doomed to come unstuck. There is a transforming force that permeates the soul of the game, and there's no good re a on to think that this force is ambivalent, consistent or predictable. The position constantly changes, and this can't be helped, but I think the evaluation is constantly changing as well. How could it fail to? I may be missing some t ing, but it seems to me that at some s t ge we have made certain assumptions like "a 'slightly b tter' assessment shouldn't lead to victory unless the opponent makes a mistake" or "you were clearly better and now you're slightly worse so you must have made a mis t ke,. without a y real justi f cation.

Tal may have been on to the slippery problems these assumptions have caused for he claimed that "There a e only equal positions and winning positions, nothing in between." From a abs$ol in1t

T

a b ut if we a e to have any chance of overcoming our propensity to blink.

The main point is that it seems very misl e ding to consider any position in abstract and to attach a label to it a if it made sense in i t own right. Of course, whenever an annotator says 'slightly better for White' there is a tacit acknowledgement of the plans and ideas of both sides and often an explicit recommendation for how the g a e will develop. But I wonder if this is like looking at a wheel when station a y and talking about how well it moves. You compliment the rubber, the spokes and shape, but then when it st a ts to move round and round you can no longer see these aspects of the wheel; all you see is the movement.

I was pleased to see something simil a to these ideas expounded in Yermolinsky's ***The Road to Chess Improvement***. I have had a close look at his chapter on 'Trends, Turning-Points and Emotional Shifts' and still don't fully understand it. However, he seems to be saying that the direction of the g a e matters every bit as much, if not more, than the assessment at a given point in time: "In a game

it strikes me that no one seems to have made an explicit link between the increased importance of trends and the prevalence of dynamism in modern chess. Now that we play chess in a way which tends to include respect for the opponent and their competing ideas, the idea of chess as a conceptual battle is becoming ever more acute.

The point here is that concepts cannot be seen by looking at individual positions but rather at the way they unfold over a (usually) short series of moves. Whereas you can assess a single position with a symbol like ± you cannot do justice to the conceptual battle with such a crude tool. To do this you need to add the trend aspect and the direction of the game, which is like a barometer of the conceptual battle. For example, in my game with John Shaw on move 19 he may have had the concept to exchange a pair of knights to get a clear good knight vs bad bishop position but my conception was to avoid this and accept that I'm lumbered with a bad bishop while leaving him lumbered with a superfluous knight. Thus at this point I am slightly worse when you look at the position seen on move 19 but when you look at the conceptual battle after 19...♘d7! I have achieved some sort of favourable direction, or at least halted the negative trend caused by losing the conceptual battle in the opening, when I didn't want to exchange light-squared bishops but was forced to.

So although a full discussion of these theoretical matters is not sufficiently relevant to be considered here, it seems that we should be wary of assessing a position with only one 'eye' We need to see it both under the aspect of the position as it stands and as it is developing (conceptual battle). The curious thing is that we cannot really do both at once. We can assess the position by weighing strategic factors in a given position and we can gauge the trends by considering the conceptual battle over a period of moves. We have to decide which is more appropriate in any given instance and, where possible, to keep both in mind. Whatever you make of the above, it seems undeniable that the importance of switching from dynamic to static considerations is not adequately reflected in our current chess symbols.

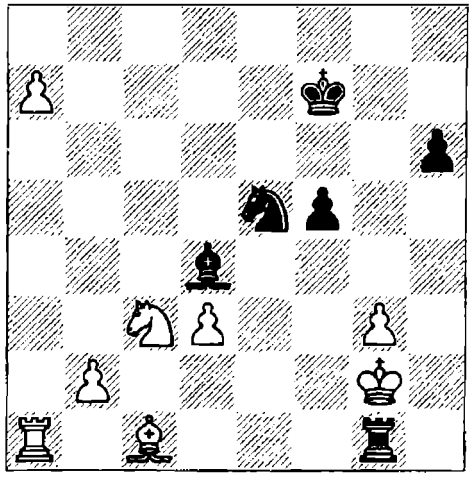
There are some striking parallels with quantum theory in the way of viewing chess outlined above, particularly Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle (the more accurately one measures, for example, the position of a particle, the less accurately one can measure its momentum) and Bohr's Principle of Complementarity (wave and particle theories not mutually exclusive). There may well be some value in exploring these parallels, but that's way beyond the scope of this book, and, I must confess, the scruples of this author.

Conclusions

Blinking occurs when we miss key moments or critical positions which lead to a change in the direction of the game. There are various signs and signals we can try to recognize, but the most important skill to develop is your sensitivity to the changing trends in a game. With improved 'trend sensitivity' and 'position sensitivity' you are much more likely to spot 'gateway positons', which are the turning-point between one trend and the next. There is reason to think that these trends are as important for assessing a position as the strategic factors that we tend to weigh to make our conventional assessments. If this is so, the sin of *Blinking* is related closely to the way we habitually assess positions. We may need a whole new set of symbols to do justice to the dynamic nature of modern chess.

3 Wanting

The best fighter is not ferocious.
DENG MING DAO



de Firmian – Hillarp Persson
Politiken Cup, Copenhagen 1996

We join the game just as the time-control has been reached. Black is outrated by about 200 points and although tense and uneven, the game has been going the favourite's way. White may have missed a win shortly before the time-control but now has to reconcile himself to a draw after 43 ♔h3 ♖h1+ 44 ♔g2 ♖g1+, etc. GM Jonathan Tisdall gives excellent annotations to this game in *New in Chess* magazine, concluding with the ironic but highly suggestive note: "Now, Nick used some deductive reasoning. He should win this game, and so perpetual check must be avoided..."

43 <h2?? f3+ 44 h3 Ah1+ 45 g2 l h2+ 0-1

Black mates on f next move. It's peculiar that a 2600 GM should lose a game in this way, especially after the time-control. I have no doubt that if the same player were shown the same position in a different context, he would see in little more than one second that the move 43 ♔h2 allows checkmate. It's certainly not a difficult combination to see, unless you are somehow blinded by other considerations. So we could look at this as a freak accident and laugh it away, but I prefer to see it as an extreme but instructive example of one of the main causes of error in chess: the spectre of the result and how it affects our play.

Chess differs from most competitive endeavours in this crucial respect. You can lose a set in tennis or a goal in soccer and recover, because you still compete on equal terms after the event. But a significant mistake can be fatal in chess because it leads you to lose control of the game. Sometimes you can even perform perfectly after the error, and yet there is no way back. This puts enormous pressure on the chess-player. One slip and you could be heading inexorably to defeat or one careful move, and victory is assured. Donner puts it like this: "It is mainly the irreparability of a mistake that distinguishes chess from other sports. A whole game long, there is only one point to score. Just one mistake and the battle is lost, although the fight may go on for hours. Surely mistakes also occur in tennis or in soccer but there the scoring continues and the players may start again with a clean slate. A chess-player however, remains bound for hours by a small lapse from a distant past. That's why mistakes hit so hard in chess."

Moreover, we often think and talk about chess with reference to the result: "That's losing" "I just need to be careful; I'm sure it's a draw" "If I've calculated this correctly then I'm winning" Indeed, there seems to be a sense, at least unconsciously, in which we are face to face with the ultimate outcome at every single moment of the chess game. It is only natural then that our judgements, calculations and plans should be infused with and coloured by our thoughts about the likely and desired outcome of the game.

A striking example of this 'sin' in top-level chess was the Kasparov-Short PCA World Championship Match in 1993. Short often played the opening and early middlegame very

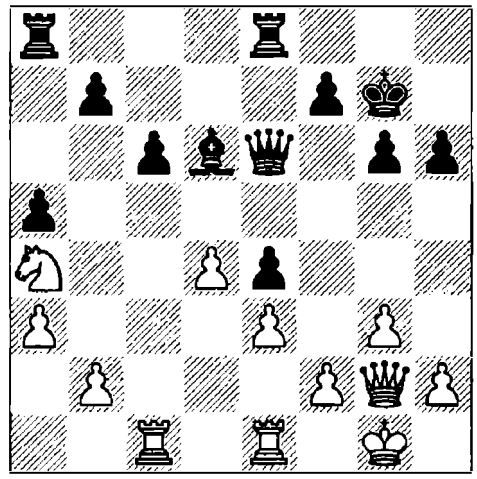
powerfully with White but from several winning positions he only earned one victory. After the game in which he did win, he looked back on his missed opportunities with these words: "I had forgotten what it was like to beat Kasparov. However, I had an advantage in this game because I didn't know I was going to win until the game was almost over." Indeed, at the risk of sticking my neck out, I think Short's second biggest problem in this match was his susceptibility to *Wanting* (the biggest problem was the strength of his opponent!).

His thoughts during the games were polluted by his desire to win. Whereas Kasparov could just play and implicitly play for victory, feeling nothing unusual in beating his challenger, Short was not used to having winning positions against Kasparov and so had problems adapting from 'playing' to 'winning' since the two do not go hand in hand unless victory seems normal.

My concern here is to look closely at the ways in which thoughts and feelings about the result can lead to errors in perception. I also want to suggest some remedies that will enable you to play chess with an optimal relationship to this perennial feature of the game. But first I present an example to highlight the importance of recognizing and treating this sin. Although White is somewhat stronger than his opponent, both are GMs, and Black's loss can, I believe, be largely attributed to *Wanting*.

Miles – Arkell
Isle of Man 1995

1 d4 t f6 2 . g5 d5 3 . xf6 exf6 4 e3 . d6 5 . d3 g6 6 l f3 0-0 7 l bd2 f5 8 0-0 t d7 9 c4 l f6 10 cxd5 t xd5 11 t c4 . e7 12 l cl c6 13 a3 a5 14 1 d2 . e6 15 l 1 l e8 16 . fl t f6 17 ' t2 . dS 18 t cd2 . d6 19 g3 1 e7 20 . c4 . xc4 21 t xc4 . c7 22 t ce5 t d5 23 l el . d6 24 1 c4 g7 25 1 n h6 2 \ g2 t e6 27 t d3 t f6 28 t d2 t e4 29 l xe4 fxe4 30 t c5 1 e7 31 t a4 \ e6 *(D)*



Nothing much has happened until now, and to my understanding the position is about equal. There's ample scope for 'pottering around' on both sides of the board, but it would seem that unless something drastic happens, it will be difficult for either side to 'play for a win' without doing something rather contrived.

32 l c3 h5 33 h4 \ g4 34 t c5 l e7 35 l ecl a4

With hindsight this may look like a mistake, but the idea of 'trapping' the c5-knight is actually quite reasonable. After ...b5 White cannot attack the 'weakness' on c6 because his knight is blocking the rooks and has nowhere to go.

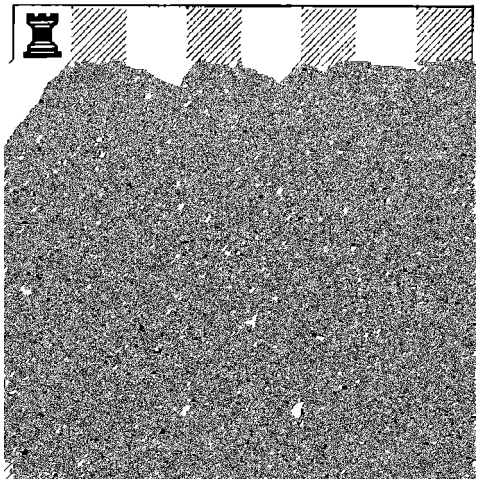
36 l c4 b5 37 l 4c2 f6 38 fl g5

On first impressions Black may even seem to be a little better now because White can't do anything on the queenside and Black has some kingside initiative. However, now we see one drawback to the ...a4, ...b5 idea, which is that Black would like to bring his a8-rook to the kingside but it has to keep guard of a6 to contain the white knight. Thus Black's activity, although it was probably felt as significant by the players, is in fact somewhat superficial. Indeed we seem to have another example of the phenomenon described in the previous chapter whereby the side that seems to have the advantage may soon become equal or even worse, without making any obvious errors.

39 1 h1 f7 40 c el c g6?!

Keith's post-mortem scribbles mention the possibility of 40...♗c7! with a slight advantage to Black. This is a good prophylactic move, preventing the wandering king from hiding behind new walls. Moreover, it's not at all easy to suggest what White should do after this. Perhaps 40...♔g6 is an 'obvious error' then, but it's curious to think that such a neutral-looking move can be the difference between holding the initiative and drifting into difficulties. Perhaps Keith fell prey to *Blinking* here.

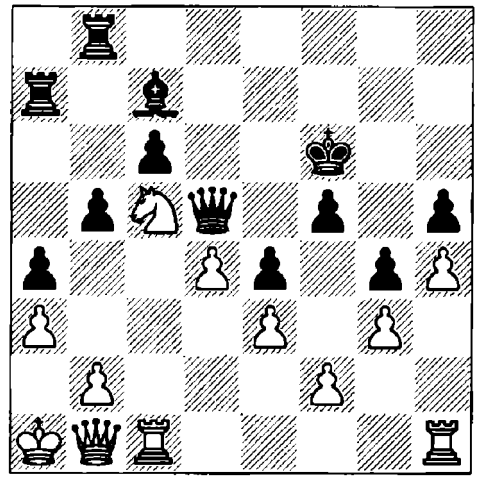
41 d2 1 f5 42 \ n t d5 43 \ e2 . c7 44 l h1 . a5+ 45 cl g4 *(D)*



After closing the kingside the game quietens down. It doesn't seem like long ago that White's monarchs were separated; the king playing nomad and the queen consigned to the corner. How things change. But the position is still equal, isn't it? Yes it is, but no doubt Orwell would tell us that some positions are more equal than others. Here I think White is 'more equal' than Black, which I suppose is another way of saying that it's easier to play his position.

46 bl lea7 47 al i c7 48 l ccl l b8

There was something to be said for finding a plan and sticking to it here, which can put some pressure back on your opponent when your new-found conviction enables you to play quite quickly. There is not a forced draw of course, but in such closed positions where few surprises are on offer, I often find that it's a good idea to have one deep think, and thereafter to play with some consistency.



Black needs to anticipate the idea of ♕a2 followed by b3 and should also play to restrict the knight as far as possible. Thus the following set-up looks promising: keep the rooks on a8 and a7 to be ready for an eventual b3 and stop a knight jump to b7 or a6. Put the bishop on d6, to allow the a7-rook to cover d7, and retain the threat of taking on c5 when the time is right. Play ...f5, just because otherwise you'll waste at least ten seconds a move thereafter thinking about playing it and White can probably force it with ♕c2 in any case. Cover e6 with the king, initially from f6 to prevent any tricks when the queen lands on a2. When her majesty does arrive, we intend a mutual stand-off to keep the tension and force her to 'come any

a2 after which the crucial pawn-bre a , b3, will creak open the position, rather as if it were an old door leading to a haunted room.

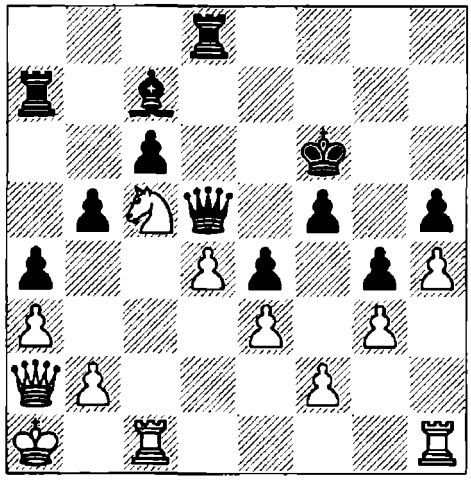
Keith saw the nibbles; he is also excellent in such positions, and would know how to maximize problems for the black-player. But he adm ts that he began to over-conce r himself with his opponent's ideas rather than just calmly playing good moves. Sadly, there was now an agenda to which he was a reluctant party. Alt ough the position may be equal, the roles a e no longer, for he was playing to draw and Miles was playing to win.

It was no longer possible just to think of the moves and plans in abstract; they now contained an ever-present threat of the previously unthinkable thought, namely defeat. Perhaps Miles was a little angry too b cause in his own way he's been trying to win for a long time. Keith didn't really think of this until the draw w a declined and even felt a little guilty for not understanding his opponent better.

Although I say that Miles was 'playing to win' I suspect it's more accurate to say that he is just playing, and that implicit in 'playing' is that your ultimate aim is to checkmate the opponent. Thus, whereas Miles didn't need to concern himself explicitly with thoughts of the result, Keith could not escape them. Moreover, in looking at the asymmetry between the relative quality of the players moves b fo r a d after the draw offer, I am reminded of an interview with Kr a nik for ***KasparovChess.com***, in which he said: "You know, chess game has this phenomenon that when one player starts to play worse, his opponent starts to play better."

51... . d8 *(D)*

W



I can't help but think that Keith played this phase more passively than he might have done had the fear of losing not have been sown so strongly.

52 l c2 r e7 53 . hc l i b6 54 bl l d6 55 b3! axb3 56 l xb3 l a4?! 57 l c5 ' xa2+ 58 r xa2 : a7

Black's pieces a e a little clumsy now and Miles makes full use of his chances:

59 b2 : as 60 t b3 d7 61 . c3 . a7 62 l 1c2 l aS 63 l c l!

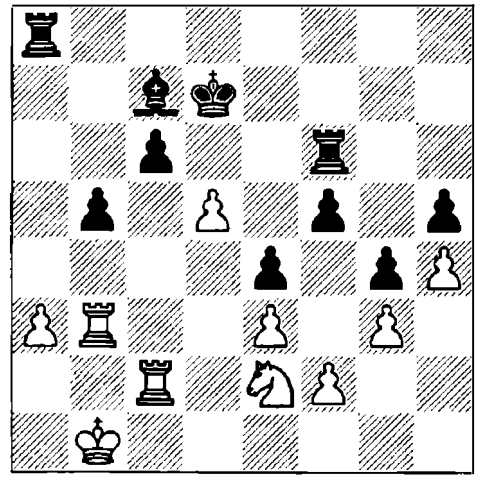
This late excursion to the kingside overstretches Black. I'm su r rised Keith didn't try to prevent this.

63... . 6 64 l e2 i c7

64... i a5 with equality was another idea 'fresh' from Keith's score-sheet, but I don't see the idea after 65 l b3.

65 r b1 i a5 66 l b3 i c7 67 d5! *(D)*

B



The breakthrough. Black loses a pawn by force but suddenly has a signi f cant a ount of activity. If Keith had just been 'playing' here, he might have created some drawing chances, but given that he was still reeling from the rejection of his draw o f er, he couldn't f nd the gumption to cause problems for the opponent.

67...cxd5 68 l d2 l b 69 4 c3 ' e6 70 l xd5 b4 71 axb4 i eS 72 : c5 l ba6?

After 72... i xc3 73 . cxc3 l ab8 74 l c4 I sus p ct Black should lose slowly but surely, because at some point 'the second we a ness' on **h5** will become relev a t. However, K ith suggests that 72... l d8! would give Black very real drawing chances and, in so f a as we can be objective about such matters, this does appear to be t r e.

73 cl . al+ 74 . bt l ta3 75 c2 l d8 76 b5 i xc3 77 l xc3 l a2+ 78 b3 l x f 79 b6 l g2?

79... l fd2 offered better drawing chances, but somehow it doesn't seem fair that White should b the o:ly side with a passed pawn, and so Black effectively proclaims: 'I want one too!'

80 b7 l b8 81 c4 l g3 82 l b6+

Compare the h a mony in the positions.

82... d7 83 <d5 . g1 84 l d6+ e7 85 l c7+ e8 1-0

What are You Playing For?

Watching strong players in post-mortems can t ach you much more than reading their books or annotations. At the Isle of Man last ye a , I was casually propped against the wall, spying on the post-mortem b tween Russian GM Sergei Shipov (rated 2650+) and English player Adrian Jackson, rated a ound 2250. Shipov w a Black and, coincidentally, was playing the s e system against the Tromp that we saw in t e previous g a e. As you can see there, it's no e y matter for either side to generate winning chances, but I think he had some sort of small a vantage when I started to watch. I remem b r Jackson proposed a creative line for Black that would complicate the position considerably, b t couldn't b readily assessed. Shipov looked intrigued but detached and I was struck by the lucidity of his reaction. "I can do this, but then I **am** playing for one, two, three results!", his in- f ection rising constantly until it hit ' t ree' as if it were an outrage.

I think he meant that it wasn't his intention to invite the possibility of losing. He wanted to play from a solid position where he was out of danger, but had chances to cause problems for his opponent. It's funny that when you a e touched by an insight like this, you tend to be- come more aware of it wherever you look. In- deed in many of the post-mortems I've been involved in since t en, especially w th Russian or ex-Soviet players, you o f en he a expressions like: "Now we will play for only two results" (after simplifying the position to a superior ending perhaps) or "He is the type of player who a ways plays for t h ee results" (e.g. a risky player who likes double-edged attacks).

It seems to me that this way of thi n ng about the competitive side of chess has considerable practical value. For ex a ple in my second g a e against Lalic, given in the last chapter, I t u ed down the draw and pr o eeded to play for two results (win or draw) but this was inappr o priate for the position in that one of my re- sources was to sacri f ce a piece on h3, which almost inevitably creates the possibility of a third result (defeat). I didn't have this thin k ng tool at hand, but it could have helped me to gauge the appropriateness of my relatively thoughtless play. Indeed, in general I think t s is an excellent way to cl a ify your relation to the result of the g a e. Before and during the g a e it can b good to ask yourself: how m a y r sul t am **I** pla y ng for?

If you are in a must-win situation then it would seem that you are playing for only one result, but I don't think this is quite how the question operates. It is directed at the consider- ation of the position and its direction rather than just your desire. So it's not so much that you'd say: "I need to win, so I w ll go a l-out for victory" but rather, "If I play the Petro f he has the option of 'playing for two results' and will m a it di f cult for me to create chances of the third result (a win for me), but if l play the Lat- vian G a bit I might surp r se him, and he'll b forced to play for three results."

Indeed, you may maximize your chances of victory in a must-win situation if you 'play for t h ee results' because if a loss is as bad as a draw then you don't necess a ly add to the risk of not winning by creating t e possibility of de- feat. On the other hand, if a d aw is all you need, say to win a tournament, then as nu mer- ous writers have suggested, you may be unwise just to 'play for a draw' The point here seems to be that in restricting yourself to 'one result' you a e likely to m sassess or ignore lo t of ideas which are related to the other two results, and thus play in some sense blinkered. But perhaps it's not so silly to 'play for two results' in the sense that you will t y to entert a n t e possibil- ity of victo r , but keep the draw in hand. Then you may not look so closely at the risky lines, but your willingness to win will make you more attentive to your opponent's mistakes.

But isn't there something to be said for just playing? A f er all, as everyone's nursery school

teacher knows (but every younger brother denies), 'it's not the winning, but the taking p a t that counts'. And can't you just sit down and think of the moves, 'for t e love of the g a e'? D o you have to b e so concerned with the outcome? Doesn't this cause more problems than it solves?

These are pertinent questions to which I don't fully know the answer. Somehow we have to realize that chess can be a very competitive game, and that if we are to improve our results we need to play with some constructive relation to the pros p ctive outcomes, without letting t ese outcomes dominate our thoughts. Thus, ideally, I think we're look ng for a state of mind whereby we can 'just play' but which contains an understanding, however subtle or unconscious, that we are playing for a result.

Go with Flow

In the middle of the match, I felt a strange calmness I hadn't experienced before. It was a t p e of euphoria. I felt I could run all day without tiring, that I could dribble through any o r all of their team, that I could almost pass through them physically. It was a strange feeling and one I had not had before. Perhaps it was merely co n dence, but I have felt conf dent many times without that strange feeling of invincibili t .
PELE (world-renowned Brazilian footb aler)

Such an ex p rience has been called many things. Baseball players tend to call it 'the zone', M a low c a led it ' p ak experience', some know it as t e ' r nner's high', 'being in the groove' or 'tuned in' and recently psychologists have refe r ed to it as 'f ow'

Daniel Goleman, in Emotional Intelligence, describes it thus: "Flow is a state of self-forgetfulness, the opposite of rumination and wor r : instead of being lost in nervous preoccupation, p ople in flow are so absorbed in the task at hand that they lose all self-consciousness... In this sense moments of f ow are egoless. Paradoxically, p ople in flow exhibit a masterly control of what they are doing, their responses perfectly attuned to the changing demands of the task. And although people perform at their peak while in flow, they are unconcerned with how they a e doing, with thoughts of success or failure - the sheer pleasure of the act itself is what motivates them."

Wow. What do you think? Perhaps it's never happened to you, or you're one of the lucky ones to whom it happens regularly. Personally I have had some experience of 'f ow' but only quite rarely, and all I can con f m is that there is de f nitely some sort of 'self-forgetfulness', an increased pleasure in activity combined with diminished conce r for t e outcome. I remember feeling this way in the second p a t of my g a e against Nigel Sho r at the British Ch a pionship in 1998 where I defended a bad position against the odds and even created some winning chances.

Whatever you think of 'f ow', it is a good starting point for considering the 'form' of a chess-player and how and why it f uctuates because I think 'flow' is really just what happens when you're in your peak form. So now ask yourself when you felt you were playing your best chess. In most cases I think you'll f nd that it was a time when you were very much enjoying the game, and somehow it seemed to come naturally to you. It may have been after a period of chess study or even just a big change of lifestyle or location; anything that might give you a new hunger and appreciation for the game. Then think of your worst periods, where nothing seemed to be going r ght. I suspect in these cases you had no particular hunger for the game, were playing with reference to external factors like points or rating, but without real love for the g a e as such.

This is a bit s p culative of course, and won't apply to everyone, but I hope it rings true for most readers, at least to some extent. It is certainly my own personal experience and these days I see a direct co r elation between my enjoyment of chess as a g a e, and my competitive success. On those occasions where I did well, I almost always felt a little nervous before the g a e or tourn a ent, not in a fearful way, but in the sense that the forthcoming challenge really mattered to me. And mattered not just because of the potential outcome, but because I somehow identified myself with the forthcoming s t ggle and w a in no way resist a t to the fact that I was about to play chess. On the other hand, when I've played chess just because

of some prior commitment to do so or because I didn't have the imagination to think of something better to do, I found that my lack of enthusiasm manifested itself in an unhealthy disregard for the details of t e g a e, c a eless-ness and more :oncern for the result than the process.

What I'm suggesting is that there may be a signi f cant relationship between your form and t e extent to which t e result matters to you relative to the ta k ng p a . I'm not interested in the 'chess as art or sport?' issue here, and I'm not saying there is anything wrong with playing chess for purely compe t tive reasons. My point is just that to have any chance of playing your b st chess, or reaching 'f ow', you need to c a e about the process itself. As a crude ex a ple, if you're trying to win a tourn a ent it's a good sign if you are disappointed when your opponent doesn't turn up, because it suggests that t e '1' in the score ch a t is not all t at matters to you.

The most important point here is that 'the outcome' and 'the process' needn't be mutually exclusive. It is fully consistent to love playing chess and to love winning. But the di f cult question is how to t ink during the g a e when you want to win, but fe a that if that's a l you want you'll jeop a dize your chances of doing so.

Two of my Dutch league team-mates know t is well. IM Jan Guftasson and Lucien van Beek tell me that they never enjoy losing, with Lucien adding that t e thing he enjoys most about chess is the moment when it becomes cle a that he's going to win, or at least that he's not going to lose. I suspect t ese sentimen t a e sh a ed by many and I'm reminded of GM Michael Ad a s saying some t ing like t e following when I spoke to him in M a ch 2 0 0 "I've never understood these players who lose but then say they enjoyed it b cause it was an interesting game... I mean, chess is a competitive game, and the result is what you play for. If I lose then I'm not happy." Even in these cases, which may be the no r in chess, it is not t e t at t ey play only for the result. Indeed, I think you'll f nd that the tourn a ents in which t ey played best weren't necess a ily those which t ey wanted to win the most but rather those where they identi f ed with themselves as chess-players the most and sat down at the bo a d to play their g a es and enjoy t e s t g-gle without many t ough t of the result.

Lev Polugaevsky h a written about this so r of thing in great det a l. For the interested reader I strongly recommend the book Grand m ster Pe ror m nce, p a icul a ly the chapter on 'Psychology of the Chess S t uggle'. His notes to a crucial, 'must-win' encounter with Po r isch a e invaluable: "Should I cultivate a calmly indifferent attitude to the coming battle ... or should I a ouse in myself a feeling of maximum competitive aggression? Neither of t ese w a really suitable - the f st b cause it inclined towards a rather quiet g a e, the second since it was very easy to 'overheat'. What w a needed was a synthesis of t ese two conditions - enormous energy plus cool re a on, but how w a it to be att a ned?"

How indeed? Polugaevsky gives an interesting anecdotal answer but no t ing f om which we can generalize. This is my conce r here: not just what sort of state you need for a must-win situation, but how you can internally prep a e yourself for each g a e to yield maximum chances for success.

Gumption

First see *to* it that you, yourse l are all righr, then think of defeating the opponent.
The Way of the Spear

The problem with f ow is that it seems to b some t ing t at 'just happens' and is all or no t -ing. What we need is something we can work tow a ds ourselves, and will give us a chance of reaching f ow. Here I would say that if what you need to make t e most of your ability could be summed up in one word, that word would b 'gumption'; a colloquial Scots word from the 18th century with a v a iety of meanings and uses.

There is no exact de f nition, no one knows its precise origin, and most diction a es give a poor interpretation of the way it is most often used in the language. I am currently w r ting a book on the concept and hope that there will come a time when it is as familiar a word a 'enthusiasm', 'composure' or 'practic a ity' Indeed it might be considered as a cocktail of

t ese three things, as well as being a bit more. Unlike fow, we can feel relative levels of gumption, and when we feel full of it, we can say we a e 'gumptious' In any case, it is my conviction that we need gumption for our spirits every bit as much as we need water for our bodies and neurons for our brains.

So how does it apply to Wanting? The quote above is p rtinent b cause it refers to prep a ing yourself internally for t e battle a ead. You a e t ying to cultivate some t ing like 'psychic gasoline' which will fuel you throughout the ups and downs of t e for hcoming challenge. When you feel gumption for a task (g a e of chess) you identify with the task at hand and somehow feel untroubled by any resistance you may experience, knowing that that is p a t of the process. A gumptious player could 'just play' chess and not b distracted by thoughts of how he's doing, or what he should be doing instead. He brings himself directly to the experience without imposing any stale opinion about it. He is ready to create and he is ready to react, without any prior judgement of which should come f rst. You can recognize gumption as t at quality of mind where you feel you are doing the r ght t ing in the right place at the right time.

In this respect, what I f nd t agic is to see children being forced to play chess by p a ents when they have no p a ticul a love for the game. This is sure to kill their gumption for chess because gumption tends to happen when we personally identify with what we're doing, and you'll never feel it if you spend your time in a pursuit that doesn't allow you to be who you a e. Similarly, you have little chance of feeling gumptious if all you care about is gaining a p a ticul a result because then you're liable to resent the fact that you have to sit down at the bo a d for however many hours. Then, rather than identify yourself with the chess struggle, you'll think only about the position wi t reference to the result you a e seek ng, and thus won't feel any identi f cation with the position at all; it will seem alien to you. Furthermore, lack of gumption may be one of t e symptoms of Looseness, which we'll consider in Chapter 7.

There a e many ways to cultivate gumption, but the main way is simply to be silent for a while. In a practical sense this would involve a pre-game walk or a iving at the bo a d a bit e a ly. The aim is somehow to combine yo u desire for victory with t e love of t e contest and the silence helps to remind you that t ey both come from yourself. Gumption is also created when we have a bre a from chess and return to it with freshness and enthusiasm or when we have the f ush of pride in ourselves after a great result, and we wish to repeat the expe r ence.

I am now going to consider three scen a os and t e potenti a 'gumption traps' they en t il. These a e situations which o cur as a direct result of Wanting and threaten to sever the links between desire and combat. The f rst is when you are hoping to win a g a e but the position seems very drawish and you're getting frustrated, the second is where you are much worse or completely lost and can't f nd the will to put up any resistance, and the third is where you a e much better or winning and just wish your opponent would resign.

'Plus Equals Mode'

L ck of patience *is* p r bably the most common reason for losing a game, or drawing a game that should have been won.
GM BENT LARSEN

In my ex p rience, most chess lessons have to be le a ned twice to be fully absor b d. I once lost a g r elling seven-hour g a e against GM Jonathan Speelman in which I was 'almost equal' for about four hours, completely equal for one move, in which I made a mistake, and then cle a ly worse after miscalculating wi t a soggy brain in the f f t hour. I then su f ered and lost a di f cult rook ending after two further hours. This was at a crucial stage of the 1998 British Championship in which a draw would almost have gu a anteed my f nal OM no r . The co f ee and panc a es I sh a ed with my opponent after t e game didn't fully make up for the pain of defeat, but toge t er wi t my opponent's chess wisdom, I felt as t ough life wasn't really so bad.

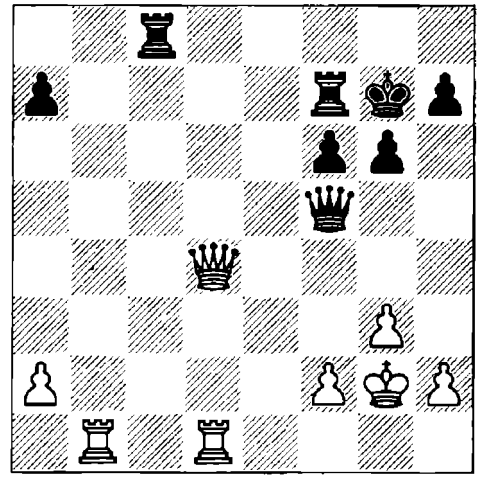
The key insight to my defeat was a way of playing which Speelman calls 'plus equals mode'.

Despite what I said about the danger of such symbolism in the previous chapter, if properly

understood the idea of playing only for 'a slight advantage' (;;or + if Black) for a prolonged period can be very awkw a d for the opponent at the other side, especially if he w a ts only to draw, and not to play. The player in 'plus equ a s mode' seeks only to maintain a he a thy position and ve r gradu a ly to improve it. Such a strategy is only possible when the position is rather simple, but this is often the case when your opponent is trying to force a draw. Tr a sformations of the tiny advantage are an integr a p a t of this strategy, but the emphasis is on keeping psychological pressure on the opponent even if your position is only minutely b tter.

Your search is not so much for lines which cause signi f cant problems for your opponent's position, but ways to preserve 'the ;;factor' The neatest formulation of this idea, which I he a d in another context entirely, comes from one of GM Lev Psakhis's p arls of wisdom: "The best way to get a big advantage is to play for a small advantage." The advantage is largely psychological, persistent, and can lead to the type of disorientation that we saw in Miles-Arkell above. **A** si m l a ty p of technique is 'Time of Possession', which is Ye r olinsky's patent (see New In Chess mag a ine, 1996, no. 1) and differs in that there you just 'pound your opponent with meaningless moves until they make a mistake' regardless of whether you have the advantage.

The following game is well known to those who have read t e light-hearted but instructive classic Chess for Tigers by IM Simon Webb. Since that book is a little dated now (1978) and in some ways peculiarly British, I will remind readers of the following gem with my own comments, based loosely on Webb's in the above b o k (see following diagram).



B

Miles – Webb
Birmingham 1975

It's forgivable to think that the position is equal, but Black didn't do himself any favours by thinking of the position as 'drawn' The problem wi t t is thought is that if yo u opponent doesn't agree t en you start to worry that you might somehow have to 'draw the drawn position' ra t er than just play good moves. Indeed if your dominant thought is that the position is 'drawn', you may be inclined to search for moves which force an immediate cessation, and if they are not there, waste a lot of time and energy which may lead you to m a e some small concessions which will encourage your opp o nent. This is why I call this sin Wanting, **be**cause the desire for a result distor s your thinking pr o esses and leads to m st a es.

I don't know what the momentum was like in t is g a e, but we join it sho r ly after Miles had tu r ed down a draw o f er. In the given position his queen is more centralized and Black's kingside is rather more open than White's, t us m a ing the seventh and eighth ranks a little slippery.

23... . c2 24 a3

How is White going to win this position? There is little chance of forcing material gain, but somehow he might try to give his pieces a bit more energy than Black's, which as we'll see in Chapter 4, is some sort of 'material' advantage. So I suppose White would like to tie Black to the a7-pawn and then probe the kingside. Note that although Miles is 'playing for a win', he doesn't resort to any t ing drastic like g4 or h4. The key to 'plus equals mode' is the insight that the responsibility for winning a g a e is not entirely in your hands. You have to believe in your opponent's fallibility and just enjoy playing the position wi t out putting yourself under excessive pressure 'to win' This reminds me of a crude but profound insight made by Hartston and Wason in The P s chology of Chess: "The **task** of the player is twofold: to induce errors from the opponent and to avoid errors himself."

24... ' c5 25 l b3 ' xd4?!

Black is still objectively equal after this move, but from a subjective point of view this is a crass blunder. Now Miles cannot be prevented from doubling rooks on the 'open past a3' a- fle, which will confne Black's rooks to the seventh rank. This matters because it gives White something tangible to refuel his gumption tank. Now he knows that his opponent is not immune to m a ing concessions and perhaps more importantly we have 'role play' again: we m ght say that White is 'pressing' and Black is 'holding'

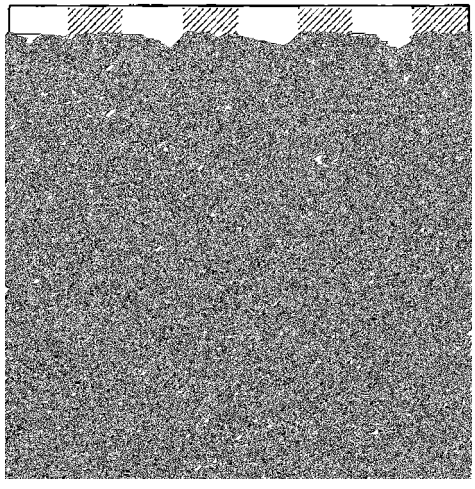
25... l c7! is more active and less compliant. Then 26 1f3 ' ic6 is not progress for White and 26 ' ixc5 l 2xc5 27 . d4 I a5 doesn't give any ground.

26 1xd4 I e7 27 l a4 f7 **28** l a6

With the cheeky threat of I f3. When small threats like this st a to appe a, they help to keep the pressu r on your opponent and suggest that 'plus equals mode' is in full f ight.

28... . ce2 29 . b4 . d7 30 . ba4 I ee7 31 g4! (D)

B



Black should have played ...h5 a long time ago to prevent this gain of space. Now f6 is a little tender.

31...h5?

Black may have had some 'fe a of being passive' here but in lashing out he just compromises his position. It's h a d to see what White can do if Black just sits tight. However, for those who have never t ied it, 'sitting tight' can be excruciatingly di f cult because it's our natural tendency to want to 'do something'. After 3I... < g7, 32 h3 r n 33 h4 q g7 34 f3 r f? 35 q g3 < g7 36 l 4a5 q f7 37 h5 (37 g5 fxg5) 37... r g7 38 hxg6 hxg6 39 g5 seems to be the maximum White can extract, but I don't see a way to make f u her progress after 39...f5, e.g. 40 l c5 ♖c7 41 l d5 1cd7 42 l c5 l c7 43 1xc7 l xc7 44 r f4 l e7. Still, White could operate in 'plus equals mode' even here, because Black is still the only side wi t losing chances.

32 g h5 gxh5 33 l 4 a g6 34 h4 l c7?

Black loses patience and misses White's threat. 34... l f 35 l g5+ r h6 should still be a draw but no doubt Miles would f nd a way to keep on playing.

35 . g5+ n 36 I xh5

It's not totally clear that White is winning here, but l o king at White's cle a upward trend it's h a d to see Black reasse r ing himself. Indeed White won on move **64.**

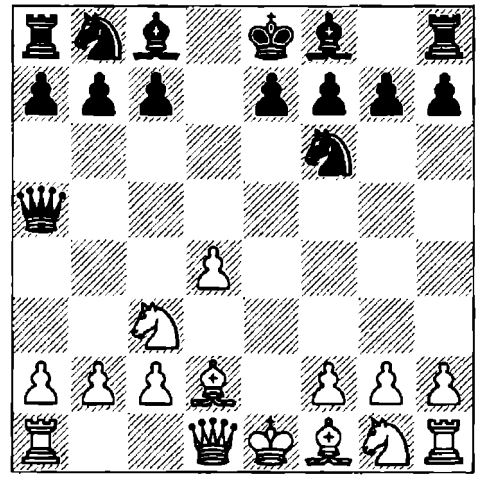
Now I present the 'second lesson' I mentioned above. A f er this defeat, I really felt that 'plus equals mode' is an enormously important part of a chess-player's a senal.

Rowson – Hodgson

York 1999

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 ' xdS 3 c3 ' ia5 4 d4 f6 5 . d2!? (D)

B



I had a suspicion that Julian might t y the Scandinavian in this game and decided to t y a new idea, which I saw in Kasp a ov-Van Wely, Wijk aan Zee blitz **1999.** I would have played something more critical, but I got confused by all the move-order tricks in the main lines and wanted to see if this of f eat idea made any sense.

5...c6 6 i d3!? ' d8!

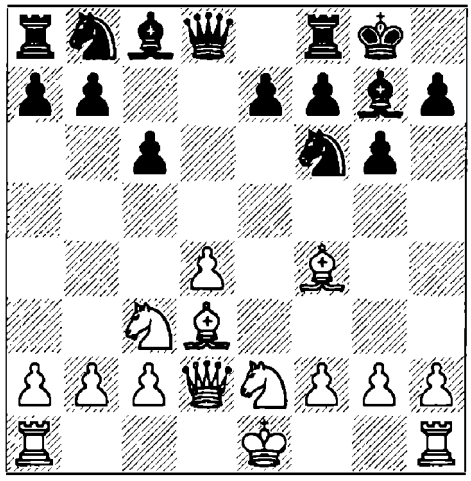
6... i g4 **7** e4!? is one of the ideas, which t anspired in Kasparov-Van Wely, but Julian's excellent move seems to equalize easily. There is no convenient way to defend !he d-pawn.

7 l ge2

7 f3 is met by **7**... i g4, but **7** i e3!? to be followed by ' d2 and l f3 may be better. However, Julian didn't look too convinced and called it "an improved Banker" for Black, the 'Banker' being 3... ' d8 followed by ...c6 and ... f .

7...g6 8 i f4 i g7 9 ' d2 0-0 *(D)*

W



10 0-0?!

I lacked the energy to play the critical move here, and my intent was fuzzy. I wanted to keep **a** slight edge but my thoughts were tainted by ghosts. Given that I'm following Kasparov's idea, I might have asked what he would do here, a d cle a ly he would have castled queenside. So the problem was not only lack of gumption (second half of the tournament, looking forward to Christmas, played Jules lots of times, cold and dark outside) but also a lack of clarity about my obj ectives. I lost this game more because of what I didn't do before the game than what I did during it. Had I realized that I really wanted to 'play for two results' I probably wouldn't have played 1 e4 and if I had asked myself if I was 'ready for a tussle' I would have r alized that some internal maintenance was needed because really I had no hunger for this g a e.

As I said, there a e many ways to 'f ll yours lf with gumption' before a game. Reminding yourself why the g a e in general or this game in particular matters to you may help, or speaking to a friend honestly about your confidence levels, turning up at the board early to soak up the atmosphere. More mundane activities like tidying your room, washing the dishes or the well-known 'walk to cle a your head' can also help.

10 0-0-0! was the only way to put pressure on my opponent. In a sense I was guilty of Blinking here because after this moment the trends turn in my opponent's favour. It is by no means clear that White is better a f er 10 0-0-0 but the struggle would be much more tense and White has a relatively cle a plan of opening the h-f le while Black still has some problems wi t his c8-bishop. 10... l g4!? was my 'pseudo-justi f cation' for not going this way, but this is typical of self-deception on the chessboard in that you o f en only see what you want to see. I didn't castle kingside because I thought it was the right move, rather I did it because I wasn't psychologically ready to play a sh a p position. Had I been more gumptious I would have seen 11 e4 f5 (11... i f5 12 h3 i xe4 13 hxg4 i xg2 14 l h2 i f3 15 i h6 is extremely ris k for Black and in a more con f dent state of mind I would have realized that Julian would never play it; I think I actually saw this line but didn't give it an assessment - I just decided that giving away material wasn't on the agenda that day) 12 h3 fxe4 13 i c4+. 10...b5 and other vague attacking gestures also seemed unpleasant to me, but t at's only because I wasn't in the mo o to subject my king to any hassle whatsoever.

10... bd7 11 Ead1

Vague, but for some reason I didn't see what was coming.

11...cS!

Now I may already be slightly on the back foot. As Julian put it, "Your position doesn't have any point."

12 i h6 ' b6

12...cxd4 13 xd4 ' b6, with a slight but chunky edge for Black, was an improvement according to my opponent. Given that Black has an extra pawn to defend his king and ultimately to batter White's f-pawn, it makes sense to keep the queens on, especially given that my pieces a e getting in each other's way. Those of you l o king at the c8-bishop should l o k fo r ard

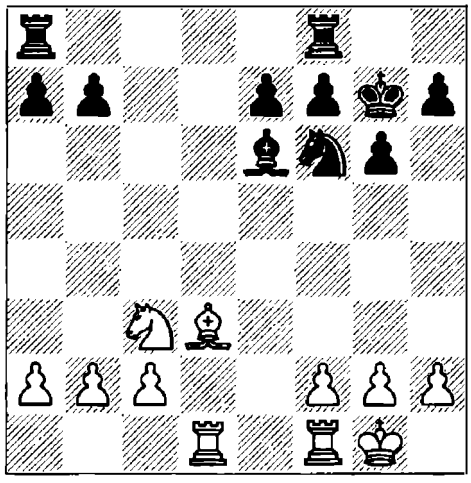
a couple of moves because Black only needs to play ... l e5 or ... l 5 before it jumps to life.

13 i xg7 xg7 14 l a4

I played this after about twenty minutes, during which time I realized t at I was st r ggling to equalize. Julian said he was 'sad' when I went into this ending because he didn't think I would have the serenity to accept that I was worse.

After 14 d5?! ' xb2 Black has all the dark squ a es and I have little to show for t e pawn.

14... ' c6 IS l xcS l xcS 16 dxcS ' xcS 17 ' c3! ' xc3 18 xc3 i e6 *(D)*



This is a good moment to pause for t ought. I think Black is slightly better. The position of t e kings means that my majority is vulnerable to his rooks and so long as there are rooks my three pawns should be thought of not as a queenside m a o r ty but as a potential we a ess. I had assumed I would be able to exchange at least one rook but this is not so easy. My possession of the d- f le is useless because t ere are no entry points there. Black's k ng has a quick and natural route to the cen t e (f6-e5) whereas it will be di f cult for me to centralize my king without making some weakness on the kingside. So basically it's easier to play Black here. But of course White shouldn't lose if he plays well and even has some winning chances if Black overpresses. Exchanging knights is in White's favour because even if things go wrong on the queenside, the 4 vs 3 position would give White good drawing chances. However, I could sense that Julian really wanted to play out this game and so I kept some tension in the position to encourage him to overpress.

19 l d2?!

19 i e2, to re-route the bishop and unblock t e d- f le, is what my intuition wanted, but t en I started to think, and somehow came up with the uninspired and mundane idea of doubling r o ks on a useless f le.

19... l ac8 20 l fd l l c5!

"The rook is good on c5 because it controls a lot of squ a es." Julian says this sort of thing quite regularly these days. Apparently he made a breakthrough one day when he realized just how simple chess is, but he hasn't let me in on the secret.

21 a3?!

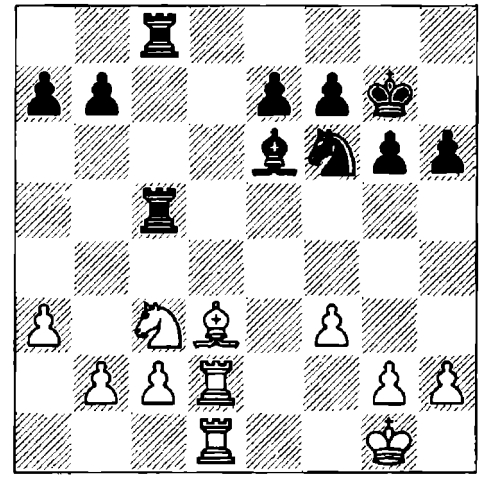
Not tragic, but a second minor mistake, a er which my queenside pawn-structure loses some f exibility.

21... l fc8 22 f3?!

A bit ugly, but I was still hoping to make my own winning chances and my king wanted a bit of the action. However, if I'd listened closely I may have heard the cries of t e h2-pawn, which can be attacked by ... l h5, the fe a of the f3-pawn being 'chiselled' by ...g5-g4 and a haunting echo on the e3-squ a e, which proves to be my downfall.

If I wanted to draw it would have b en easier after the knight exchange, but even after 22 e4 xe4 23 i xe4 b6 I have some problems, basically b cause Black's 'extra pawn' is more useful than mine. Black will try to grab some space on the kingside (maybe ...h5-h4!? and ...g5), provoke c3 to make the white pawns even more rigid, and then eventually advance his e- and f-pawns. White should hold of course, but the pressure is endur ng.

22...h6! *(D)*



Very patient. Julian played this g a e with a great deal of composure. After the g a e he said he was a little bit surprised at how easy it all seemed, because there was a time when he would have lashed out with ...g5 or ...b5 prematurely. This is what I was hoping for of course, but it turns out that Black has f a more 'little tweaks' to improve his position than White d o s, and so the trend continues to accrue quietly in Black's favour. The main strength of this move lies in the fact that when he 'hit' me with ...g5 I wasn't ready for it.

23 l e2 . c4

I had been hoping for this exchange, which somehow frees my position, but I overestimated the tactical problems with which I now chain myself.

23...b5!?, intending ... i c4 and ...bxc4, is also pro m sing but 24 b4!? then h a to be reckoned with.

24 i xc4 . xc4 25 c3?!

I had intended 25 l c3 but then Black has a move which Julian hadn't seen and I had overestimated: 25... l e8!?, with the slow but sure intention of attacking b2. If you have a cle a head this won't seem like a dangerous move, but it l o ks awkw a d for White if you're stuck in a passive mindset. Indeed, I can deal with it easily with just a little activity, viz. 26 . d7 l 4c7 27 l xc7 l hc7 28 l d2 t d6 29 t d5 l d7? 30 l xe7!.

Whatever I t ought of 25... l 8 I should have played 25 l c3 anyway because 25... l 8 is not so obvious (or strong!) and, from a psychological point of view, 25 c3 is very encouraging for Black. Moreover, from a purely positional point of view it leaves b2 very weak and if the black knight gets to c4 or a4 I could be in big t ouble.

Julian was very sympathetic to my plight here: "Basically, in a position like this you're going to regret whatever you play." Presumably the logic is that when defending a slightly worse 'quiet' position, every move has a drawback, and can later be shown to be a concession. This is one of the primary di f culties in playing against 'plus equals mode'

25...e6!

Another strong and patient move, securing **d5** for t e knight.

2 f gS!

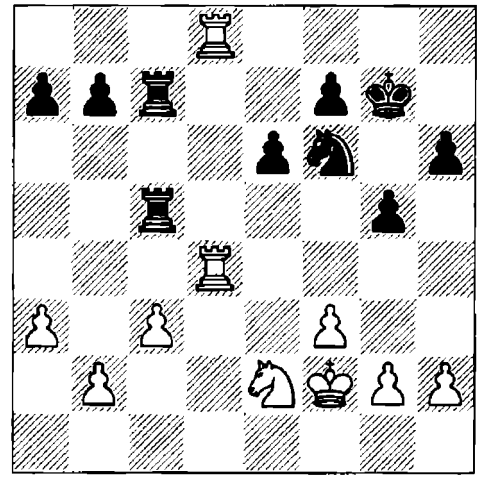
Now I have to concern myself with the t reat of ...g4 on almost every move but there is a more subtle t reat, t ee moves deep, of which I was only dimly aw a e: ...**Ød5**, ...f5 and ...f4 securing e3 for the knight.

27 : d8 . Sc7!

Black is wise to keep the rooks because t ey a e the pieces which give me concerns over b2 and potential kingside weaknesses.

28 ! Ud4 l 4c5! (D)

W



29 l g3

29 t c1!? was the move I wanted to play, to improve my knight. The interesting t ing is that I was afraid of him 'doing something' now, viz. 29...e5?!, whereas he doesn't really want to do anything much other than slowly improve his position. After 30 : d2 e4 31 l e2 Black's position hasn't improved. It's curious t at almost all my bad moves in this ending a ose out of fe a of a concrete idea which wasn't remotely t h eatening on the most minor of inspections. It's almost as if I wanted to prevent the very idea that he could threaten me directly. Again after 31... l e7 32 . d l I don't t ink Black's position has improved; it's just that he's more active. But the problem with activity in such simple positions is that it can f zzle out, and leave you with none of the potential activity which made your position so promising. Julian does eventually strike in this g a e, but only when t e i on is piping hot.

29**...** l b5 3 l b4 l dS!?

Doubling White's pawns by 30... l xb4 31 **axb4** is a big positional g a n for Black because I would be losing in the king and pawn endings. However, in the given position I am very active

and if Black tries to force t e issue he runs into a galloping horse: 31... l d7 32 . xd7 l xd7 33 l e4! ' f8 34 l d6, a d my activity is ra t er annoying for Black.

31 I xdS?! l xdS 32 I a4!?

After 32 . d4 l b6 33 l d2 t c4 34 . c2 l c6 it looks like White will lose a pawn.

32... l f4!

The key to this ending has been t e relative strength of the knights; this is especially evident here.

33 l d4

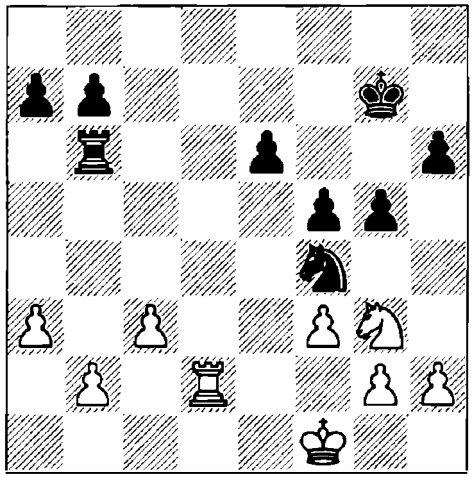
After 33 l xa7 t 3+ 34 ' e2 l xb2 35 l e4 l c4 Black is f y in con t ol.

33... l c 34

34 l fl l b6 35 l d2 . xb2 36 l xb2 l d3+.

34... 1 b6 35 l d2 fS! *(D)*

W



Black's kingside majority f n a ly announces its presence with deadly e f ect. I cannot stop ... l d5, ...f4 and ... l e3 with 36 f b cause of the 36... l xb2 t r ck and so I am already f ghting to stay alive.

36 l e2

I didn't have any const r ctive way of passing, which I would like to do in order to meet ... l d5 with f2 and then ...f4 with t fl.

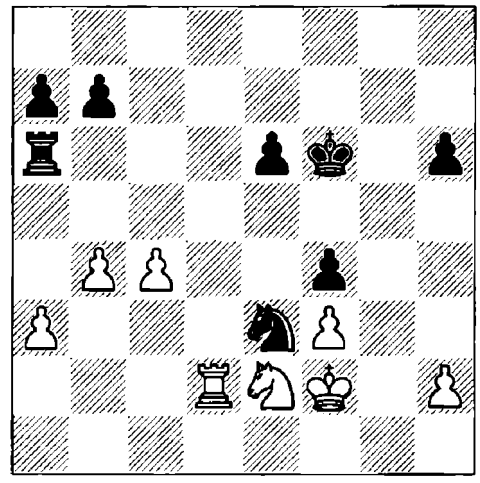
36... t d5 37 ' f f4 38 g3

It's generally a good idea to exchange pawns when defending a di f cult ending and here it is useful to soften up f4.

38... 6 39 g f4 g f4 40 b4

The 40th move is o f en a bad one but I don't feel I had any t ing better on this occasion; indeed, I t ink I am in c

W



m a gin can be in chess. Despite lots of dubious moves, from an obj ective point of view I still had good drawing chances. However, we cannot escape from the subjective during play (see Chapter 5).

42... c4 43 . d7 l b a !

A risk-free a d disp i iting move. I was hoping for the more ambitious 43...b5, which gives me certain counter-chances after 44 . b7 l xa3 45 l d3.

44 l xb7 l eS 45 l hS+ g6 **46** l g7?

This is a bad miscalculation and again a sign that I'm trying too h a d to force the draw and am unwilling to play a bad position. 46 l f4+ f5 47 l e2! had to b tried. Jonathan Tisd a l's advice on 'The **art** of playing bad positions' led me to this conclusion. In such seemingly hopeless situations, it can b helpful to ask 'what's good about my position?' and I think t e only p sitive aspect is the activity of my rook and t e possibility of attacking Black's a-pawn. So I should head for b5 with my knight, although it seems that I'm still losing with best play: 47...l xf3+ 48 ' g2 l a3 49 l d4+ ' f6 50 l b5 l a2+ 51 g3 t c6. Now Black is probably winning with or without rooks because the e-pawn is too f a from the white h-pawn for the white king to stop the e-pawn queening while protecting the h-pawn, but it's close enough for Black to home in on the h-pawn without leaving the e-pawn vulnerable to attack. It seems rather unfair that Black can 'have it both ways' in this res p ct, but this is no surprise, given that chess seems more often to be surprising than fa i !

46... . 3+

Now all t e tactics a e sweet for Black.

47 e2

Or: 47 g2 l f7 48 l b5 . xg7 49 l xeS f6+; 47 ' el l f 48 l b5 l f3+.

47.. J f7 48 . bS

48 l h f xf7 49 l h5 l c6.

48... t c ! 0-1

The Theory of Infinite Resistance

Never give in. Never. Never. Never.
WINSTON CHURCHILL

A second gumption trap, in which the spec t e of the result can prevent you from making the most of your chances, is t e lost position. Such positions a e often accompanied by depression, defeatism and even self-des t ctiveness. How can you feel gumptious in such situations?

Well, we st a t from a simple premise: a lost position is not a hopeless position. To ret a n your inner composure in a lost position, you need to forget t e idea of losing and focus on the hope. The c r x of the solution is given by 'the theory of in f nite resistance', originally devised by an Australian player called Bill Jordan. GM Ian Rogers describes it thus: "It is a theory designed to encourage players to fully utilize the defensive resources av a lable in a bad, or even strategically lost position. The theory postulates that when a player makes a serious mistake or reaches a bad position, if he or she continues to t y to f nd the best possible moves thereafter he or she can put up v i tually in f nite resistance and should not lose... Of course some positions a e beyond even perfect defence but their number is f a smaller th a imagined."

If you examine your own g a es closely, you may see some evidence for this theory. It is not at all easy to win won positions if your opp nent d o s not cooperate. Thus if you can f nd the will, your last line of defence can be made extremely di f cult to break down.

However, f nding this will-power is in some ways the most di f cult aspect of t e theory, es- p cially in passive positions which seem to offer only the tiniest chance of a draw and no chances of victory. My aim is to encourage you to feel gumptious even in these situations and t e following is a compendium of t ings to do to keep your spirits up in lost positions.

1) The Goalkeeper's Glory

One way to create enthusiasm for the draw is to compare yourself to a soccer goalkeeper trying to save a pen a ty. Your aim is in one sense purely negative. You don't 'gain' anything by saving the goal and you might think that your role is merely to prevent your adversary from gaining. But actually if you save the penalty, you could say that you win and the striker loses, even though in actual fact t e score of t e game remains exactly the same. The key thought-shift is to limit the contest to that precise m ment. Your te a may already be 2-0 down but

that is irrelevant to the goalkeeper's purpose; he has to abstract his task from the game at hand and do his best in the given situation. In his effort to save the penalty he is 'playing for a win' It's just that he's not playing a soccer match as such but playing goalkeeper vs penalty taker; the penalty taker has an aim (1 goal) and the goalkeeper has an aim (no goal). Similarly when you have that 'depressing' position, your task is to 'keep the same score', i.e. to draw, and to see the value of this you have to forget the game as a whole and what you wanted out of it. So it's like both players have an internal contest over two results. The defender fights over ½ and 0 and the adversary over ½ and 1. The winner is the player who gets their favoured result. So you can still play for a 'win' in a lost position!

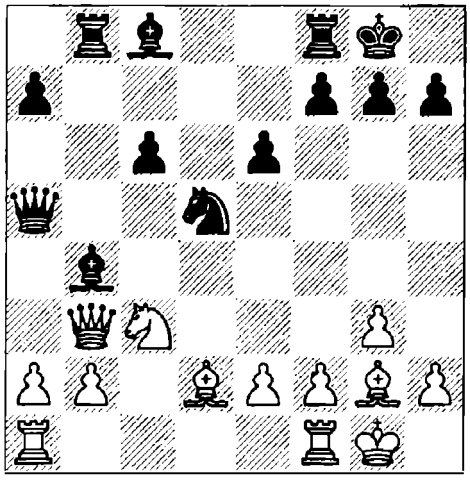
2) **Cause Some Trouble**

This is quite a subjective notion but crucially important for playing bad positions. Basically you have to play on your opponent's fears. Most players are guilty of some degree of Wanting and so when they get their winning position they will become attached to the idea of victory and cling to this result, becoming fearful of losing it in the process. So they won't want any 'trouble', by which I mean active pieces in their territory, unpredictable developments, vague threats to their king and so forth. It's not so important for you to cause actual problems for your opponent on the board, but it's very important to make him feel that you potentially could and in doing so you will [illegible]

off now, I'm clearly worse) 13...♘xc3 14 ♕xc3 ♕xc3 15 bxc3 ♗a6, when the position is about equal, and between players of similar strengths a draw is extremely likely.

On realizing this, I fell guilty to Wanting because, having had good fortune against the same opponent earlier in the tournament (it was a double-round tournament), I wanted a complex game in which he would really have to 'sing for his supper' On seeing that the most obvious move could lead to a very drawish position, I assumed there would be a good alternative for Black, but there isn't. My er r r was to think that somehow there is something w r ng with the position i it doesn't f t in with my de*sire* to play it in a certain way, r ther than see- i g the error as my own misplaced desire.

12...♖b8?? *(D)*



Nunn's dictum 'LPDO' (Loose pieces drop off) would have helped to avoid this slip. It is easy to make big mistakes like this when you fall prey to **'script writing'**, as I did in this game. I decided that this game was going to be a long tough fight in which my opponent would have to sweat it out for his GM title. Then when the position didn't comply with my script I didn't question the script but rather manipulated my thoughts to fit it. This is another classic case of self-deception – you see what you want to see.

13 ♘xd5 cxd5

I offered a draw here, putting my cards on the table and turning myself in: "Guilty as charged officer, completely lost position, no good excuse, but please give me a draw; it would b too embarrassing to lose like this. It's a good deal: you get your GM title and I get a lucky break, whaddya say?"

14 a3

"I guess that's a 'no' then; I don't suppose it would help if I said please? Bugger. I've done it again", I thought. What a plonker. The day before I had bungled a shockingly winning position (two extra connected passed pawns for no compensation) against Sutovsky and only drew. So here I was 'bungling' again and a grievous 'poor me' mindset was creeping in from every corner. I am completely lost now. At best I lose an exchange for nothing in a position where he can use the c-file for his rooks and a7 is weak. I didn't know what to do, but I was sure I wasn't going to resign. Two comforting thoughts gave me a glimmer of hope. The first was the previous day and the disbelief that accompanied my failure to win: 'perhaps if I can screw up that position, it's conceivable that he can screw up this one'. The second was the gruff wisdom of a former club-mate from Aberdeen called John Ewen. Whenever we'd look at a position and one side was losing the exchange, he'd say something like, "It doesn't matter, you lose one [a rook] and you get one back [a bishop or a knight] and the game goes on."

14...♗xd2 15 ♕xb8 ♗d7

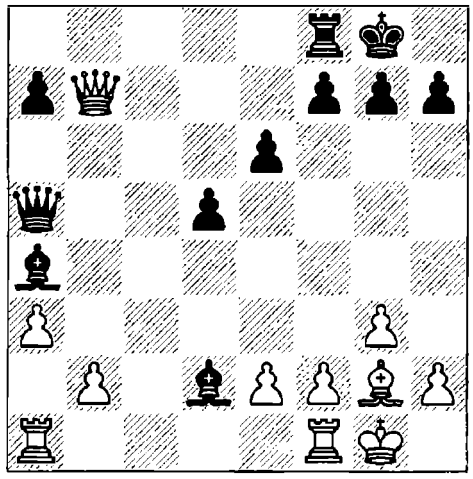
The position has stabilized. Black's position is bad, but he is still breathing. I resolved to play the best moves from here until the end of the game. What kind of moves are 'best' in such a lost position? Almost anything that disturbs the opponent and makes him fearful. My d2-bishop is no doubt an annoyance for White because he can't use the c-file so it's important to try to keep this **'annoyance factor'** or at least extract some concession if we have to let it go. White has no real weak points, but Black can 'cause some trouble' by eyeing up f, perhaps eventually by putting the bishop on b6 and playing ...f5. Also, White's g2-bishop is not really contributing. This entails the answer to the question 'what is good about my position?'. In this case it's my central control and dark-squared bishop, which has no counterpart. Not only should I strive to prevent the rooks from coming easily into the game, but I also need to prevent e4 if possible or at least have a good answer in return – like ...d4. White should still b winning after this, but it's a concession and not

something White really wants. You may think the idea of counterplay against f is a complete fantasy, and I suppose you'd be right, but no one is completely immune to the fear of ghosts and I have to have something to 'threaten' my opponent with, if only to keep my gumption levels high.

16 ♕b7!?

An irritating move, preventing ...♖c8 but probably not best. 16 ♕e5! asks the question as to where my d2-bishop is going to go, and also threatens e4. 16...♖c8 is then possible and is what I intended. Now, on the bright side, all my pieces are playing. Then 17 e4! ♗a4! 18 exd5 (18 b4 ♕a6 19 exd5 ♗c3 should still be winning for White, as he will emerge a clear pawn up, but this line is exactly the type of thing which doesn't appeal to you when the position seems to be winning without tactics) 18...♗b3 causes some trouble and thus White may not be inclined to go in for this, but it's winning quite easily after 19 ♗e4!, e.g. 19...♖d8 20 ♕d4 exd5 21 ♗xh7+ ♔xh7 22 ♕d3+. These lines indicate the following crucial point: you have to play not only on your opponent's fallibility, but on their own awareness of their fallibility.

16...♗a4! *(D)*



By controlling d1 I help to keep the bishop locked in position on d2. This is not the main thing though; what matters most is that my bishops are 'in his face' in the sense they are irritating him and as far as possible I am imposing my will on the opponent. I think he was now planning 17 b4 ♕b6 18 ♕xb6 axb6 but despite the exchange of queens, this is a favourable transformation for Black. ...♗c3 and ...d4 will help to keep the rooks out and White's queenside pawns are not going anywhere in a hurry. White is probably still winning, but that's not the point. 19 ♖a2 ♗c3 20 ♖c1 ♗b3 is the type of scare that's likely to keep him away from this type of position.

17 ♖a2 ♕c5!

The hassle continues. Now White's coordination is a little strange.

18 b3

18 b4 ♕c3 19 ♕xa7 ♗b3 20 ♖aa1 (20 ♖xd2!? is possible, but Black has some chances due to his active queen and because White's bishop remains ineffectual) 20...♗c4 21 ♗f3 e5! is an important line, mainly because the more of my prospects for counterplay he sees, the more likely he is to doubt himself and feel the risk of losing. Indeed, I think it was this sort of vision in my opponent's head which led him to make a compromising queen exchange later.

18...♗c6 19 ♕c7 ♗g5!

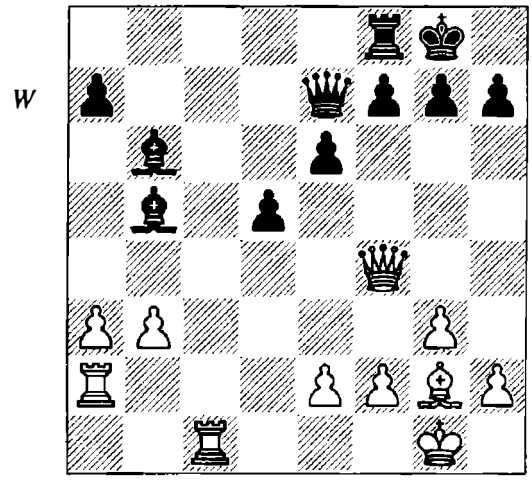
It's time for the bishop to go to its natural home on b6. Note that although he has succeeded in getting the bishops 'out of his face', I have extracted a concession in the form of a slightly weakened queenside and an improvement in coordination.

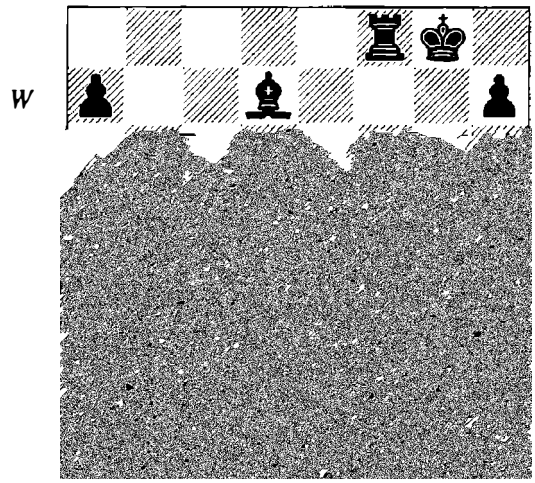
20 ♖aa1 ♗d8! 21 ♕f4 ♗b5!

I'm still preventing a 'clean' e4 break. 21...♕e7 is met by 22 e4!. Note that it's very important to resist the trappings of Materialism, of which 21...e5? 22 ♕xe5! ♗f6 23 ♕f4 ♗xa1 24 ♖xa1 is a good example, so please forgive me for being tangential here. If a rook is worth 5 points, a pawn 1, and a bishop 3, then we've improved our position by 1 point. However, it's obvious our position hasn't improved, firstly because Black's position has no quality any more – there's nothing good about it, and secondly we would now b playing 'for two results' – the slim possibility of a black win has vanished and not only is White winning, but his position has become very easy to play.

22 ♖fc1 ♕e7 23 ♖a2 ♗b6 *(D)*

Now I am still losing, but I've definitely enjoyed an upward trend. Somehow my position looks more respectable now. More to the point, it has been almost ten moves since the catastrophe and White still hasn't shown the superiority of his rook over my dark-squared bishop, nor is it especially easy to do so.





24 ♕b4?

A sign of impatience and anxiety; my uncertain counterplay against f must have unnerved Barsov considerably. To be fair, this is a quite a pragmatic move for my opponent in the circumstances because with the queens off he has almost no chance of losing and is thus assured of his GM title with still some chance for a win. However, this is a very significant achievement for Black and I already felt that the draw was in sight.

24 ♕d2 allows 24...f5 but after 25 e3 it's hard to believe in Black's attack. It's not one-way traffic, but I think White can soak up the pressure, especially given the useful defensive idea of a4-a5 with tempo.

24...♕xb4 25 axb4 f5!

An excellent if obvious move, which my opponent had missed. Now I am very close to equality. The b6-bishop is well-placed and stable, so there will be no threats to my queenside and White cannot do anything with his extra pawn there. Moreover, my visions of counterplay against f have come to pass and if I were playing a weaker player I might almost fancy my chances of winning with Black!

26 e3 g5!

Played quickly and confidently – I knew he wouldn't like this. Anything else may have given him time to orientate himself.

27 ♗f1 ♗d7! *(D)*

The white bishop is not especially productive while my own morsel on d7 acts a spiritual guardian of my centre and keeps out those nasty rooks. At this point, I broke with chess etiquette and offered a draw again, thinking that I had improved my position enough to justify it. Barsov thought for a while, remembered that this would finally give him the coveted title and then accepted with a mixture of bemusement and relief.

½-½

28 ♖ca1 ♖b8 29 ♖xa7 ♗xa7 30 ♖xa7 ♗b5 31 ♖e7 ♗xf1 32 ♔xf1 ♖b6 33 h3!? seems to be White's best course, but Black has excellent drawing chances.

I have to say that this draw gave me immense satisfaction, much more than most of my victories. I think this can only be because I began **a new game** on move 14 and felt like I had won that game.

Putting the Ball in the Back of the Net

Chess games are won *not* by good positio n but by good moves.
GM JAN-HEIN DONNER

The final gumption trap that I wish to consider is the nervousness that can accompany a winning position. Whoever said that there is nothing more difficult than winning a won position was doubtless exaggerating, but it is certainly true that it often seems to be no simple matter. The problem begins with the very idea of 'winning' "Are you sitting? (Yes) Are you playing? (Yes) I see you are you laughing; have you been drinking? (Yes) Are you winning? ..." Well it's not so clear what the question means, even if you haven't been drinking.

I don't want to be too pedantic, but I think that present participles have a lot to answer for.

Normally an '-ing' word denotes some sort of ongoing process which can be identified by observing an activity, but in chess we often say that such and such is 'winning' or 'losing' or 'drawing' without realizing the difficulties involved. In passing, I wonder if this is less of a problem for those whose first language doesn't feature continuous tenses – it would be quite a revelation if your native language turned out to be a chess handicap!

In any case, when we think we are 'winning' we run the risk of thinking that there is some sort of objective process going on, akin to playing or moving, but actually we're just playing and we have made the assessment that if nothing too drastic happens we will win. 'Winning' is not a type of 'playing' at all, but our own judgement about what the result of the game should be. So the danger is that once you start to think that you are 'winning' you will erroneously change the way you are 'playing' and move from a relatively undisturbed and natural mindset to a state of mind where you feel self-imposed pressure to play in accordance with your judgement about what the result should be.

I find it hard to explain this idea, but basically I'm suggesting that **it's a mistake ever to think that you are 'winning'** because the very word puts pressure on you. It's better just to be very keen on your position and continue playing, with the tacit knowledge that playing chess includes the aim of checkmating your opponent.

This slightly strained thought has been confirmed in my own experience of talking with top-class GMs. Indeed, in post-mortems with Gulko, Rozentalis, Speelman, Hodgson, Miles and others I have often tried to provoke a definitive assessment about a position but rarely does the answer take any definite form. Questions like "Is this position winning with best play?" just don't seem to register with them and they'll usually just reply with something like "Well, there are good chances to win", which is a small but very significant difference. Moreover, see Speelman's comment to my game against Neil McDonald in Chapter 1 (Thinking). In this game I was paralysed by the thought that I was winning and therefore felt an enormous responsibility to win, but in doing so I made things very difficult for myself. It's one thing to be playing with good winning chances but once you feel that you are 'winning', you are stuck by your value judgement and your thinking can lose its previous fluency and flexibility. Another way of putting this, with yet another piece of Hodgson chess lingo, is not to **'chalk it up'** before the score-sheets are signed.

If this idea doesn't grab you then I recommend 'Selbstgesprach' which is German for 'conversations with yourself'. If you have trouble staying calm when you have a winning position, get into the habit of talking yourself through your own doubts: "Now it's important to stay calm, I mustn't overestimate his counterplay, there's nothing difficult or unusual about winning this game, so let's just make it happen." This is a little at odds with my previous comments about 'just playing' and won't work for everyone, but it still has its uses.

A more radical idea is the **'pre-time-trouble sprint'**, which was the suggestion of GM Tiger Hillarp Persson. It seems that many games reach their climax just before the time-control and this is often when our worries about winning reach their height. Tiger suggests that when you have about fifteen minutes left to make the time-control (often around move 30 at international level) you just go for a little run outside to relieve nervous tension! When you return, so the theory goes, you are less prone to the 'baggage' caused by earlier events in the game and more able to focus and adapt to the crucial tasks at hand when they arise. Moreover, the oxygen hit does wonders for your concentration. It goes without saying that this technique won't suit everyone, but it's well worth bearing in mind.

My main practical suggestion is just to **try to enjoy the process of winning**. It seems crazy that we put ourselves through such inner turmoil at the times when our positions are at their best. So enjoy those moments when you can demonstrate your position's superiority. Not only should you not rush to finish the game, but savour these positions and don't doubt that you'll win them. After all, the pressure should be on your opponent!

Conclusion

Wanting is evident when we make mistakes because of our thoughts about the result of the game. Rather than play just for a result, and

estrange yourself from the process of playing, try to enjoy the contest and see the result as an integral part of it, but not its defining feature. Be watchful of your 'gumption' levels before and during the game and be aware of the extent to which you identify with the task at hand. Look out for 'gumption traps' based on the game not heading towards the result you desire, and try to use some of the techniques suggested above to keep your gumption for chess high. This allows for the possibility of experiencing 'flow' – the ultimate high for any competitor.

4 Materialism

Too many people spend mone they haven't ea r ed, to buy things th e don't want, to impress people th e don't like.
WILL ROGERS

Shortly after learning how the pieces move, we are told of their relative worth. Thereafter our judgement is severely handicapped. We need many tools to navigate through chess complexity, but faced with a thick jungle of muffled answers, we cry out for something tangible, a single weapon to cut down the thickets of confusion that swarm all around us. But we choose a knife with an uncertain blade. This uncertain blade is material; something we can see, weigh and count. But in cutting only parts of the jungle, it leaves others untouched, and some even more threatening than before. We have here the most commonplace of sins, rife throughout humanity, and tempting to the core.

Although it seems we are all prone to Materialism, that is not to say that we are all 'materialistic' This term normally refers to the style of a player who delights in grabbing material, defending for a while, and then converting the material advantage at a later stage. Also, there are many players who love to sacrifice material, and although they do play with a knowledge of the value of the pieces, we tend not to think of them as 'materialistic'. Materialism is a bit different, because it refers to a condition that afflicts almost all of us, bar Kasparov, and perhaps a few dozen others. This is a condition in which material is the axis around which our thinking processes rotate. It is formed by the ways in which we learn chess, cultivated by our early experience of the game, and reinforced by chess language and symbolism.

I considered the following game in the process of working with a student. The aim was to learn how to play the white side of the King's Indian Sämisch, but it turned out to be even more useful for highlighting the problem of Materialism.

Tal – Soloviev
Riga *1955*

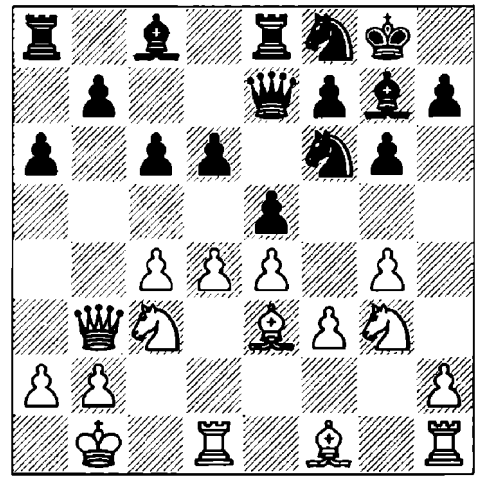
1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 ♗g7 4 e4 0-0 5 ♗e3 d6 6 f3 e5 7 ♘ge2 c6 8 ♕b3 ♘bd7 9 0-0-0 ♕e7?!

Since there is no pressure on e4, the queen would be better placed on a5, where it at least has a few lustful thoughts about the white king and can support ...b5.

10 ♔b1 ♖e8?!

Another 'half move' Kasparov is fond of this term, which tends to denote moves which are vaguely useful but don't really get to the heart of the position.

11 g4 a6 12 ♘g3 ♘f8? *(D)*



Black's last three moves contain an interesting idea: to play ...♘e6-d4. However, there are aspects of Egoism here because clearly White is not going to wait for this to happen.

13 d5!

Of course, now that Neddy on f8 is far from optimally placed.

13...♘6d7 14 h4 c5?

Another error; Black intends queenside 'counterplay' with ...b5 without asking whether such play will really counter White's ideas.

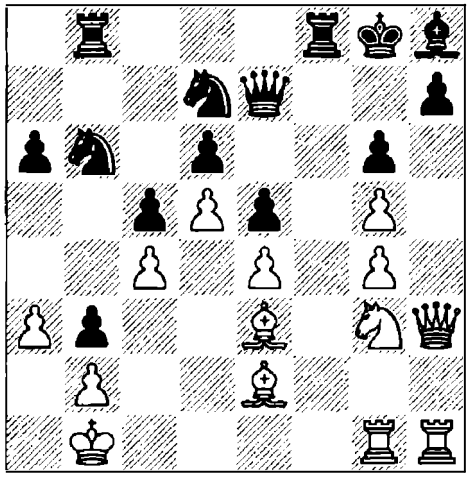
15 ♗e2 ♖b8 16 ♖dg1 b5 17 h5 b4 18 ♘a4!?

An interesting moment. In general if you have a space advantage it is better to avoid the

exchange of pieces. The reason is related to 'capacity', as I learned from Michael Stean's classic Simple Chess. In the given instance Black's pawns provide enough space for about four or maybe five pieces to live comfortably, which makes things rather cramped for the eight who have to live there now. By allowing the exchange of one of Black's pieces, Tal concedes some lebensraum (living room) to his opponent and seems to make it easier for him to organize a defence to the pending kingside attack (for another example of 'capacity', see Emms-Webster in Chapter 2).

So why did Tal choose this instead of retreating his knight and moving it towards the kingside? The short answer is that I don't know, but perhaps he was attracted to the relative simplicity of the game continuation and maybe it's a matter of 'too many cooks spoil the broth' in that there are already enough attackers on the kingside. In any case, Joe Redpath, a promising Scottish 14-year-old, with a rating around 2000 heading upwards fast, preferred 18 ♘d1, partly to keep Black cramped but also with aggressive intentions based on ♘f2, g5, ♘g4, etc. We then looked into this line to see if we might understand Tal's reasoning. I took the black pieces, and although we didn't understand Tal's decision any better, Joe soon displayed some interestingly 'sinful' thoughts. We continued 18...♘b6 19 ♘f2 ♗d7 20 ♕d1 b3 21 a3 ♖ec8 22 ♕c1 ♗e8 23 hxg6 fxg6 24 g5 ♗d7 25 ♘g4 ♗xg4 26 fxg4 ♘fd7 27 ♕f1 ♖f8 28 ♕h3 (28 ♘f5!?) 28...♗h8 *(D)*. We can quibble with many of these moves, but none of them are ridiculous and only now does the position reveal something important about Materialism.

W



Play continued 29 ♖g2? ♖f4! 30 ♖gh2? ♘f8, and stopped here because I felt White had gone astray. Taking on f4 is undesirable, so it is not clear what White should do next. Indeed I prefer Black now, as White has run out of steam and g5 is very weak. What went wrong for White?

Missing the key moment (Blinking) on move 29 was caused by Materialism. To begin with, Joe didn't see the idea of 29...♖f4 at all, presumably because it seems to lose an exchange. And yet this is clearly Black's only idea! We might add the sin of Egoism here because Joe was so involved with his own ideas that he forgot Black could do anything creative.

29 ♘f5! is the way to do it, after which Black is completely lost. Joe considered this move, and I could see him thinking about it, but in the absence of a forced win he couldn't bring himself to sacrifice material. To my mind 29 ♘f5 is absolutely crying out to be played. If I had set up the position after 29...gxf5 30 gxf5 and asked for an assessment, I'm sure Joe would have thought White was at least clearly better and probably winning, but somehow he didn't allow himself to make such an assessment before sacrificing the piece, preferring to think of the position as unclear. Yet after the space invaders inevitably land on f6 and g6 and White's unopposed light-squared bishop has its way, Black will be mated.

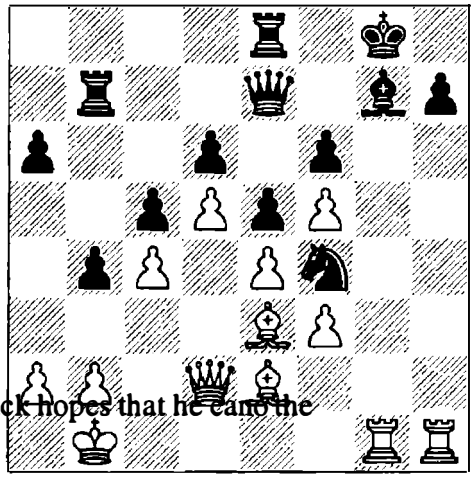
"I don't like sacrificing material", said Joe, as an attempted explanation. Not an untypical view, but I think I managed to convince him that playing 29 ♘f5 was clearly the correct move, and essential in that 29...♖f4 allowed Black back into the game (though then 30 ♘f5 is still good for White). What's more worrying, and indicative of the stubbornness of our chess patterns and personal habits in general, is that I'm not sure Joe could bring himself to play 29 ♘f5 even if he had the opportunity again, and this is also not untypical.

Two things went wrong here, both related to Materialism. Firstly he paid inadequate attention to a move which sacrificed material largely because he didn't 'want' to sacrifice or at least because he lacked the courage to do so, not seeing any single clear line which led to mate or the return of the material. The other issue is perhaps more significant though. Most GMs would see that 29 ♘f5 is not only correct but also

'timely' because Black threatens ...♖f4. The two ideas are linked. But Joe didn't see ...♖f4 at all. I believe he 'missed' this in much the same way that he 'missed' illegal moves like ...♖b8-g7. His chess experience just didn't give rise to such an exchange sacrifice, in the same way that it didn't give rise to illegal moves. His brain hadn't seen any such pattern before. Similarly, he didn't see 29...♕e6 or 29...♗f6. Not that they are illegal, but they give away material too, and so they are unconsciously eliminated from the available options. In case you don't see why White can't just win material after 29 ♖g2? ♖f4 30 ♖gh2? ♘f8, consider the line 31 ♗xf4 exf4 32 ♘f1 ♘bd7, and focus on the thematic positional compensation. It's not too much to say that Black is winning here. The g5-pawn is terminally weak, b2 is vulnerable, the f-pawn is a major asset and e4 is en prise (although it's not clear if Black wants this pawn since it opens a file for the white rooks). To my slight annoyance, 32...♘xc4! is actually even more decisive, but less instructive, and it's important to appreciate that Black is positionally winning regardless of this tactic (33 ♗xc4 ♕xe4+ 34 ♗d3 ♕e1#).

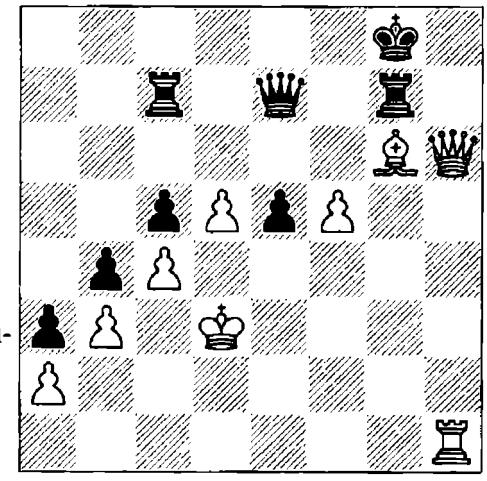
18...♘b6 19 ♘xb6 ♖xb6 20 ♕d3 ♖b7 21 ♕d2 f6 22 hxg6 ♘xg6 23 ♘f5 ♗xf5 24 gxf5 ♘f4 (D)

22...hxg6 23 ♗d3 leaves Black horribly tied up, and after ♕h2 White will have threats including some sequence of



W

Black hopes that he can do the king's posi-



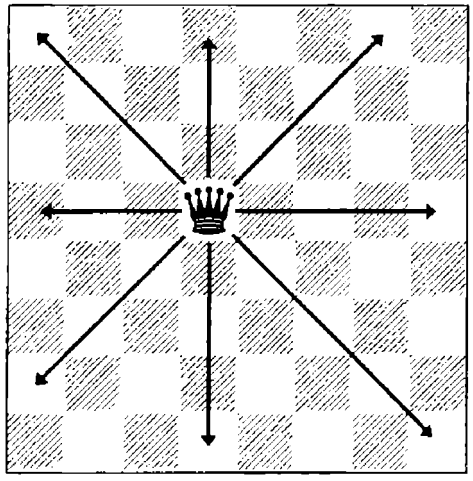
to prevent Black from taking on e5 with the queen. On returning to h1 it finds it has two new allies in the form of deadly passed pawns and the threat of f6 in particular.

1-0

In view of 53...♔f8 54 ♕h8+ ♖g8 55 f6! ♕d6 56 ♕h6+.

One of my main aims in this chapter is to get the reader away from thinking of the pieces in terms of 'points' and instead looking at them all in the light of their unique characteristics. I will do this with every piece at different places throughout the chapter. Here I offer my thoughts on the queen, a piece that played a very important role in the game we've just considered.

The Queen



Why are we so attached to the queen? Reuben Fine, in his dogmatic Freudian critique of chess, The Psychology of the Chess-player argued that we associate the queen with our mothers. Since chess, he tells us, is basically all about patricide (murdering the father = checkmating the king) we want to keep the queen so that we may have our way with her, after 'the father' dies. But I think this is just nonsense, and as Hartston and Wason suggest, the only evidence in its favour is the utter vehemence with which chess-players deny it! Even so, many of us do show a reluctance to sacrifice our queens or even to swap them. This may partly explain why an attack on the queen is considered a 'half check' which compels, if not forces, us to move or cover her. Furthermore, GM Neil McDonald tells me that when working with very young players he often hears them say things like "He won my queen, but I won his queen too"; they rarely mention winning other pieces, and the milder idea of 'exchanging' queens comes later. Certainly some explanation for this type of attachment seems called for, but I can't think of anything to compete with the audacity of Fine's approach.

Perhaps our attachment is simply based on the fact that the queen is the most powerful piece. We move it a lot when we learn the moves of the game, perhaps enraptured by the elegance of her effortless mobility, being able to cover vast distances and all directions in a single move. In the centre she controls no fewer than 27 squares. This is a lot in itself, but we rarely consider the dynamic aspects of the pieces when we ask how many squares they control and it could be argued that the queen controls a great many more squares because of her mobility.

Indeed, if we imagine an exposed king on h2, which perhaps only has an h3-pawn to cover it, in a single move the queen can give check on e5 and suddenly controls another 16 squares or a check on d2 and that's another 14, not to mention the checks or attacks that follow these. So you might say that any piece on a stray square accessible by the queen from e5 or e2 was also attacked by the queen, because of the position of the king. This applies to all pieces of course, but especially to the queen, because she is so mobile. I thank GM Julian Hodgson for this insight.

However, I think the defining feature of the queen is not her strength but her vulnerability. She is perpetually stalked wherever she goes, and because she is the most famous and glamorous piece, she makes me think of a Princess hunted by the paparazzi. Thus I am inclined to think of the queen as the late Diana, Princess of Wales. I wonder what Reuben Fine would make of that.

Early Learning

Old habits die hard.
PROVERB

One of my earliest chess memories was watching my brother, Mark, play and lose to our Egyptian neighbour when I was about six. At

some point there was an issue of 'winning' two rooks for a queen. My brother went for it, and later couldn't understand what went wrong, only to be told that he was simply mistaken to think that the queen was worth nine points, because actually it was worth ten! This was something of a revelation of course, because we, in the 'Rowson school of chess' had assumed that material values were fixed and universally accepted. Like almost every other chess-player, one of the first things we learned was something like the following:

Piece	Value (points)
King	Infinite
Queen	9
Rook	5
Bishop	3 (or 3.5)
Knight	3 (or 3.25)
Pawn	1

These values are slightly different sometimes, bishops and knights are often just 3, the queen is sometimes 10, etc., but whatever values you learn, they tend to be fairly non-negotiable at the time. In any case, we didn't ever stop to ask what 'a point' referred to, nor did it bother us that teachers at school would adjudicate the game when it was time to pack up (we didn't use chess clocks or adjournments in primary school). The reason it didn't bother us is because it seemed to be an objective process that could be performed by any numerate person. It was thought to be entirely fair that the player who had taken more 'points' off the opponent should be called the winner. So you just had to look at the side of the board.

With a bit of simple arithmetic you would see that since Jack had captured a rook, a knight and three pawns (5 + 3 + 1 + 1 + 1 = 11) while Stewart had only taken two rooks (5 + 5 = 10) then Jack was the clear winner. This is a deliberately implausible imbalance, which suggests a highly unusual position. We didn't really consider the position though, just the material, and at the time we didn't even call it material, it was just 'points'. Come to think of it, it wasn't even 'points', just numbers. Curiously, this process was made even easier by the fact that we tended to line up the pieces we had taken in a very orderly and elegant manner. What was off the board was considered even more significant than what was on it, and we'd spend half our time admiring our collection of the opponent's pieces, while anxiously looking at the opponent's collection of ours.

Sound familiar? This may not be quite how it happened to you, but I am sure that the vast majority of chess-players have similar stories, and memories of just how materialistic our understanding of chess was just after we learned how to play. In any case, it seems indisputable that **a dominant pattern of thinking in chess is to start with a material count and then move outwards from there.**

Material is the conceptual homeland to which we naturally return, but it is something which never leaves us on the chessboard, however far from home we may venture. Material is like a womb that forms and structures our thinking processes and largely determines our approach to the game. Since we are all born into the chess world by the teaching of similar rules and basic guidelines, very few of us are immune to this type of habit formation. It's time to consider how this came about, and why it matters.

What's the Point?

A cynic is a man who knows the price of everything but the value of nothing.
OSCAR WILDE

It is a tired truism that the no scale of value can be relied upon in every type of position. We tend to be comfortable with this, and the implicit claim that although these values hold in general (a rook is worth a minor piece and two pawns, a queen is worth a rook, minor piece and pawn, etc.) there will be exceptions to these values, and so we shouldn't adhere to them too rigidly.

My first problem with this state of affairs is that we have taken it for granted that there is a single unit of value in chess. The point system is built upon a little-known but seriously shaky

axiom. In almost all scales, the point, that building-block of the numerical labels we assign to all the pieces, is the pawn. When you say that a queen is worth 9, you are really saying that it is worth nine pawns. The pawn is the unit of value. Why is this?

We have seen that chess is *a* complex s stem, inhospitable to simple rules, but it is also **a closed system**, in that the relative values within the game cannot be given a value from outside the game. It's meaningless to say that a pawn is worth one pound, or one cabbage, or one kiss, but no less so to say that it's worth one point, unless you can show what a point is within the closed system. You could say that a point is worth one minute, because time is part of the closed system, but no one is likely to believe you unless you're playing blitz.

More likely you'll seek to latch onto the simplest, most numerous, predictable aspect of the game and use that as a measure of all the other aspects. Our 'forefathers', going back before Staunton, felt there was only one sensible way to do it, and, understandably, they chose the pawn as the smallest unit of value. Thus they drew up a material contract to which we all tacitly sign shortly after we learn the moves. But there is a hidden clause. What we have agreed to is not the table above but something like the table below:

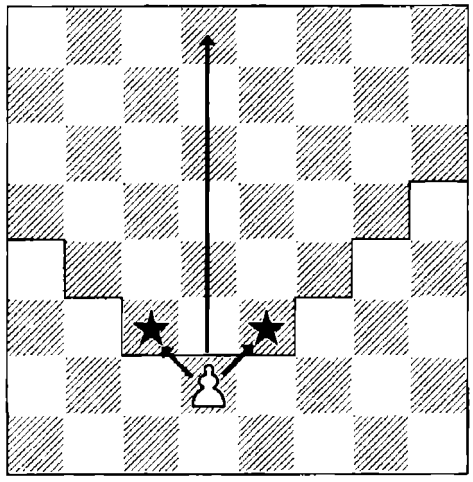
Character	**Pawns**
Pawn	1 Pawn
Knight	3.25 Pawns
Bishop	3.5 Pawns
Rook	5 Pawns
Queen	9 Pawns
King	Infinite Pawns

This is bonkers. How can you compare nine pawns with a queen? What do we learn from the fact that a pawn is worth a pawn? Are we to think that two rooks are better than a queen because ten pawns are better than nine? The questions abound, and they don't rest easy. It seems that they stem from a mild form of **incommensurability**.

Suppose you enjoy lasagne and eat it every day. Let's say you are also a gangster film fanatic who spends all his time watching gangster movies. Then one night, after years of eating lasagne and watching gangster movies, you make the mistake of eating late and therefore having too much cheese before bedtime. So you have a nightmare. There is a Sicilian gangster holding a gun to the temple by your left ear and demanding an answer to the question you never thought would be asked: what is the relative value of the only two things in your life? Now what you want to say is that it depends on the quality of the film, or the taste of the lasagne, right? But this gangster is a bit of a punk, and he's fiercely determined to force a definite answer. He wants to know not only which you prefer, but by how much you prefer it. So his gun effectively compels you to say how much of one you would give for the other, because you have no idea how to evaluate anything outside of lasagne and gangster movies. You wrestle furiously with your problem, but you hit the same impasse. In this strange world there are only two things of value: lasagne as the source of nourishment and the films for entertainment. You need the lasagne to stay alive, but there would be nothing to live for without the gangster movies. It's not so much that you couldn't imagine life without either because the gangster is not threatening to take anything away, but you just can't think of how to compare them... on feeling a little extra pressure on your temple, you wake up in a cold sweat.

Your problem was that you had incommensurable values. If you had the same question about lasagne and money, there would have been no such problem because you buy the lasagne and therefore know what one is worth in terms of the other. But here you couldn't even compare the lasagne and films in terms of price, because there is no money in your value system. There is a problem of incommensurability in chess too because we are asked to compare pieces with vastly different 'personalities' and which we value in different ways in different positions not only amongst themselves but also, ultimately, to pawns. We will be able to make an informed comparison later, when we look at the personality of all the pieces, but for now it is worth considering the uniqueness of the pawn.

The Pawn



The humble pawn. This is the morsel against which we unwittingly compare the others. One might assume that this would make the pawn very charismatic, containing aspects of the characters of the pieces that it measures, but this doesn't seem to be the case. The only way in which this is true is that the pawn has the unique characteristic of being able, potentially, to become any of the other pieces (other than the king), but beyond that it has quite a limited personality. In this respect he's a bit like someone whom you feel has lots of ideas and could be very interesting, but is shy to the point of paralysis and prone to live a life of 'quiet desperation', never becoming who he might have been.

However, it is noteworthy just how much potential a pawn has, and it didn't strike me until I embellished the diagram above. In some ways he's like a hitch-hiker who walks down a straight road but is always on the look-out to go somewhere else.

That said, he is rather feeble. He only controls two squares at once, and when he's on edge, not even that. He is generally worth more when he is centred, but that's just because we tend to assign higher values to centralization for every piece, other than rooks, perhaps. The most significant dynamic that the pawn qua pawn has is that it tends to become more dangerous for the enemy the further it ventures down the board (most computer programs acknowledge this in their evaluation function, e.g. white pawn on e2 = 1, white pawn on e5 = 1.3 but of course there are many exceptions so the computer often gets it wrong). Indeed, the pawn contains the threat of a complete change in personality from a rather limited 'straightforward' guy, to a near omnipotent lady who can travel anywhere in theory, and often very fast.

On the other hand, the further it advances, the fewer potential squares it can control, and so it leaves many 'gaps' in its wake. It also becomes more vulnerable, because it is less likely to be supported by its fellow pawns and cannot cover itself from any direction beyond the two squares it controls. We tend to think of the pawn as a foot soldier, which seems reasonable given that it is the lowest rank in the chess army, but it's a limited view because it doesn't tell us anything of the pawn's character.

This shouldn't be taken too seriously, but if we are to understand how to make good use of our pawns, and give them an appropriate value, it may be worth having a slightly more acute view of their chess 'personality' You may wish to choose your own model, but I tend to think of the foot soldier as a civilian too, and in this respect he is a shy and vulnerable hitch-hiker. Before you latch onto this idea (I wish!) please consider that **it's not wise to bring such a notion to practical play**. I am only considering these things in abstract because I want to make better sense of *Materialism*. In so far as this might benefit your game, my aim is to dislodge entrenched patterns in your brain with alternative models, and thus give you a little more freedom to think for yourself.

Now the main point of all this is to consider the absurdity of comparing a pawn to the other pieces when they have such utterly different characters. This will become clearer as the chapter progresses, but for now we have an instructive example showing the pawns in action and the dubiety of traditional material values (*see diagram on following page*).

Most readers will know the general 'rule' that two pawns on their sixth rank beat a rook. In this position, based on Saidy-Jansa, Polanica Zdroj 1968 (where the same position arose, except that White's pawn was on h3 rather than h2), the pawns are only on their fourth rank, but the black king supports them and it is not so easy for the white king to come back in time. Moreover, it's not totally clear at this stage which side the h-pawns help because both have a chance to win the opposing h-pawn at some

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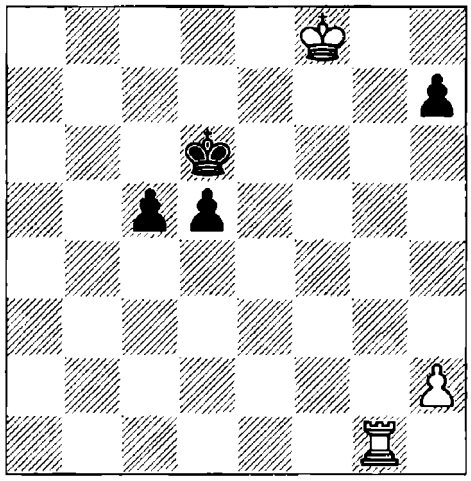


based on **Saidy – Jansa**
Polanica Zdroj 1968

point. Whatever you think, clearly the material factor is not the most important. The rook may triumph, but not because it is worth three extra pawns. What matters more is time - the value of the material is basically a function of speed here, not on the clock but on the board. It's a question of tempi. Later we will consider whether time may be every bit as important as material in chess, but for now the question is: will the passed pawns become deadly before White gains control?

1...c4?

1...d4! is the way to do it. The seemingly irrelevant distinction is highly instructive. Then:

a) 2 ♔g7, with the idea of winning the h-pawn, is not going to win unless Black can be stopped from queening a pawn and this doesn't look likely with the wayward king on h7. 2...d3 (2...c4? 3 ♔f6! transposes to the note to Black's 2nd move) 3 ♔xh7?! (this makes it tricky to draw; 3 ♔f6 is line 'b') 3...c4 4 ♖d1 (4 ♖g8 ♔d5 is no improvement for White) 4...♔e5 5 h4 ♔e4 and now White has to be a little careful to hold the draw. Perhaps the most thematic line to illustrate this is 6 h5 c3 7 h6?! (7 ♖xd3! ♔xd3 8 h6 c2 9 ♔g7 c1♕ 10 h7 is a simple draw) 7...c2 8 ♖h1? (8 ♖xd3 c1♕ 9 ♖d7 and 8 ♖e1+ ♔d5 9 ♖c1 d2 10 ♖xc2 d1♕ 11 ♖c7 are both theoretical draws) 8...d2 9 ♔g7 d1♕ 10 ♖xd1 cxd1♕ 11 h7 ♕d7+ 12 ♔g8 ♔f5 13 h8♕ ♔g6 with a well-known finish where White cannot prevent mate despite material equality.

b) 2 ♔f7 d3!!. I found this move, which justifies the importance of 1...d4, highly revealing. To avoid losing, Black has to use the king and the two passed pawns as an allied force. It is essential that each of the three finds a role that complements the others. I think the majority of players would intuitively feel that 2...c4? (when 3 ♔f6! transposes to the note to Black's 2nd move, and so wins) was the correct move, because we want the pawns to support each other and we all have the established pattern/rule of 'two pawns on the sixth beats a rook' pulsating in our neural pathways. But here we have to 'jump out of the system' and get to the heart of the matter. Black needs to stop the white king from reaching the e-file and he can only do that with his king on the d-file. The d-pawn advances, partly because it wants to be a queen, but also to provide squares for the king. This allows 'the big guy' to hold off 'the bad guy', who would gladly gobble the foot-soldiers. As for the c-pawn, he is patient and doesn't feel the need to compete with his advanced colleague. As long as the white king is not close enough to smell him, he's happy where he is for now. 3 ♔f6 ♔d5! (3...c4? 4 ♔f5 ♔d5 5 ♔f4 ♔d4 6 ♖g8 {or 6 ♖g7} demonstrates another key element of pushing the d-pawn as far as it can go: Black doesn't generally want to put his king on a square where it blocks the pawns because this places him in danger of zugzwang; in the given instance, Black can no longer stop the king reaching the e-file so White wins after 6...♔c3 7 ♔e3 ♔c2 8 ♖d8 ♔c3 9 ♖d4) 4 ♔f5 ♔d4! (4...c4? loses to 5 ♔f4 ♔d4 6 ♖g7 ♔c3 7 ♔e3 ♔c2 8 ♖d7) 5 ♔f4 d2! and then:

b1) 6 ♖g7!? ♔c3 (6...♔d3 should be met by 7 ♖d7+, drawing, and not 7 ♖xh7? c4 8 ♖d7+ ♔e2 9 ♖e7+ ♔f2!, when Black is winning) 7 ♖d7 ♔c2 8 h4 h5! 9 ♔e4 c4 10 ♔e3 c3 (10...d1♕ is also a draw) 11 ♔e2 ♔b1 12 ♖b7+ ♔c1 13 ♖d7 ♔c2 is a typical drawn position. White can only shuffle the rook on the d-file while Black moves his king between c1 and c2.

b2) 6 ♖g8 ♔d3! 7 ♖d8+ ♔c2 (the alternative 7...♔e2 also leads to a draw) 8 ♔e4 c4 9 ♔e3 d1 ' 10 ♖xd1 ♔xd1 11 ♔d4 ♔e2 is a draw because the white king is close enough to stop Black's h-pawn.

2 ♔f7 ♔e5

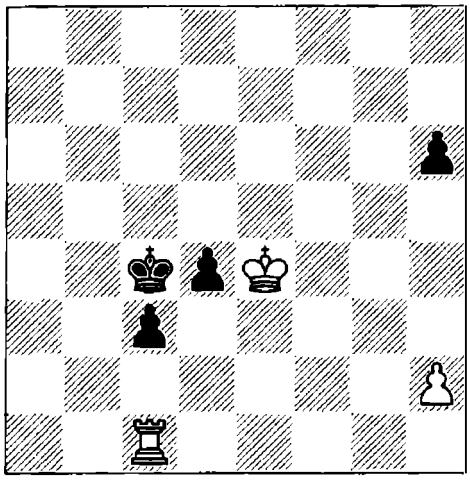
This is a reasonable attempt to accomplish the same aim of keeping the white king out, but it doesn't make good use of Black's pawns at all,

and so the black king becomes over-burdened with responsibility. The alternative is 2...d4 3 ♔f6!:

a) White's task is relatively straightforward if Black tries to push the d pawn: 3...♔d5 (3...d3 4 ♔f5 ♔d5 is equivalent) 4 ♔f5! d3 5 ♔f4! ♔d4 6 ♖g8 ♔c3 7 ♔e3! ♔c2 8 ♖d8 ♔c3 9 ♖d4! and White wins.

b) 3...c3! is the most challenging move. After 4 ♔f5 ♔d5 White has to be very accurate in order to win. 5 ♖c1! ♔c4 6 ♔e4 h6 *(D)* and then:

W



b1) After 7 h4? h5! White finds himself on the wrong side of the reciprocal zugzwang which is really the key to this ending. The position is drawn. In the original Saidy-Jansa game, where the pawn was already on h3, White would have had nothing better than this, implying that both 1...d4 and 1...c4 would both have drawn in the actual game. However, the pawn being back on h2 gives White a vital extra possibility...

b2) 7 h3! h5 8 h4! d3 (8...♔b3 9 ♔xd4) 9 ♔e3 wins for White, which suggests that there is indeed a qualitative difference between pushing the d- or c-pawn in the modified starting position.

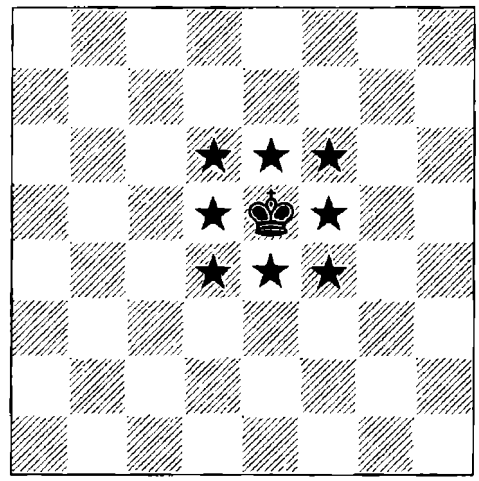
3 ♖g5+!

White is aiming to attack the 'tail' of the pawn-chain.

3...♔e4 4 ♔e6 d4 5 ♖g4+ ♔e3 6 ♔e5 d3 7 ♖xc4 d2 8 ♖d4

White wins. Without the h-pawns the position is drawn, but since the black king is so far from f8, White's king will take his h-pawn for a walk to h8, disposing of the enemy *en route*.

The King



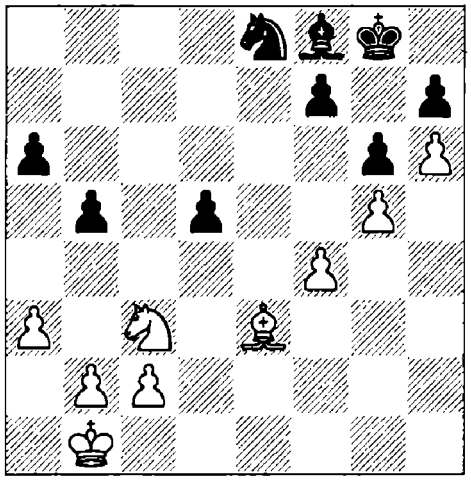
The previous example saw an interesting struggle for supremacy between the kings, and so it's worth pausing to consider the features of this piece, which we generally consider to be 'priceless' in the sense that we don't attach any number to it. Curiously, just after I learned that 'priceless' meant 'so valuable that you can't put a price on it', as an impressionable 9-year-old, I confused it with 'worthless', which may be indicative of materialism generally in that I had come to associate worth with price (no price, no worth). Anyway, one day when trying to impress my classroom sweetheart, I told her that she was worthless to me! She didn't know what I meant, which was fortunate in a sense, but as fate would have it the teacher was nearby at the time and she sensed that I couldn't possibly have meant what I said. When she explained the difference between priceless and worthless to the two of us, needless to say I was rather embarrassed, but as I remember my (very) *petite amour* was by no means upset and we returned to building sandcastles, closer than ever before.

To avoid such confusion, let's just say that the king is of infinite value. This is of course true in that when you lose the king, you lose the game. However, it does rather obscure the fact that the king can and does function in much the same manner as the other pieces, and in the endgame, when it is less vulnerable to attack, it can be every bit as valuable as a minor piece, if not more so. It is also worth stressing that it's not just in the endgame that the king has some material value, since it often does an important

job of defending weaknesses in the middlegame too, or, as we saw in Short-Timman, can even be an important attacking piece. So it is very easy to misjudge the value of the king, because we don't tend to assign it a material value, and yet it *matters* in the sense that it contributes like any other piece.

I tend to think of the king as 'The Boss', ever since reading an article by IM Richard Forster about kings being used in attacks entitled 'When the Boss Takes Over'. He is like a boss in the sense that he is demanding and much of our attention is based on what he will 'think' of our 'work' on the board (is he in danger? are we neglecting him?). He is also like a boss in the sense that his concern is the work of the other pieces while they are, say, at the office, but then he only starts to work himself when the office becomes much quieter. In any case, I offer the following example of how easy it is to underestimate 'The Boss'

B



Rowson – Van Delft
Apeldoorn rpd 2000

This position arose on move 34 in a fairly informal game within a four-player rapid event organized by Dutch chess enthusiast Karel van Delft. I misplayed the opening and was pleased to reach a relatively safe haven in the endgame. Indeed, it now seemed to me that I was going to win this game, partly because on balance I felt I was the stronger player and had experienced a favourable trend since the opening, but mainly because it seems that I'm going to win a pawn. However, in thinking of the material I forgot about the quality, and didn't realize that I am actually in danger of becoming worse in this position.

34...f6!

This is absolutely forced. After 34...♘c7? 35 ♗b6 White has complete control. This attempt to hold on to the material was, of course, the line I saw first.

After 34...f6 it looks like Black's king will become active very quickly and g5 will be weak. A moment before I had thought of Black's king as 'boxed in' and the h7-pawn as weak; how things can change in a move! This is an example of the problems we saw in *Blinking*. I was guilty of looking at the position, but missing the movement (bad 'trend sensitivity'). The position before 34...f6 looks good for White, but after this move it's far from clear. However, during the game I just assumed that I was still better, because after all I will be a fairly clear pawn up in an ending. This was related to *Wanting*, in that my desire for victory seriously clouded my judgement.

35 ♘xd5 fxg5 36 fxg5 ♔f7

Compare the kings. I may have an extra pawn, but Black is effectively 'a piece' up!

37 ♘b4

At the time I assumed this was an error because it leaves me with no winning chances, but actually it's my best chance for equality!

37 c4!? is an alternative, urgently trying to use my king. After 37...bxc4 38 ♔c2 I have swapped material for some quality but after 38...♔e6 the weakness of my kingside pawns is still the most significant factor in the position.

37...♗xb4

Or 37...♘c7!?:

a) After 38 ♗f4 ♘e6 the knight is not very well placed, because it gets in the way of Black's main asset – the king. However, it does seem enough for equality: 39 ♗e3 ♘c7!.

b) 38 ♗b6 ♗d6 39 ♗xc7 ♗xc7 40 ♘xa6 ♗f4! leaves Black in no way worse, despite being two pawns down. His 'quality' (see page 135) is much higher than White's and soon he will have two connected passed pawns.

38 axb4

I was surprised at just how badly my pawns are compromised here and also struck by the pain of not being able to control the light squares, in particular c6. The biggest problem with the pawn-structure is that the pawn fixed

on b4 limits the scope of my bishop and will need to be defended when I play c4.

38...♔e6!

However, the main issue is the strength of Black's king. It was probably through considering such positions that some players (GMs Ian Rogers and Julian Hodgson come to mind) have said that **the king is 'a four point piece' in the endgame**. This means that, other things being equal (which they never are!), a king is better than a minor piece but worse than a rook, assuming it is invulnerable to mating attacks. I suppose the reasoning is that it can hassle a knight and control squares a bishop cannot, but it has to submit to a rook, which can cut down its scope across a file or rank.

However, I'm trying to get you away from thinking of pieces in terms of points! I mention this point value as it helps to highlight just how important the king is in the endgame. Also, the reason we often underestimate just how important it is, is that we don't have a material value for it, and so unconsciously assign it to the domain of 'les autres' which are considered 'beneath' material considerations. There are better ways to avoid doing this than giving it a point value, but for now it still seems a useful piece of information and it certainly helps to highlight the problems that I faced in this game.

39 b3 ♔d5 40 ♔b2 ♘c7 41 ♔c3 ♔e4 42 ♗c5 ♘d5+

This was accompanied by an entirely reasonable draw offer. I should have accepted, but played on through obstinacy because I was still hung up about the 'winning position' which I had assumed I had a few minutes before. The next few moves are embarrassingly bad but they give a good example of 'losing the plot':

43 ♔d2 ♘c7 44 c4 ♘e6 45 ♗e3 ♘d8 46 c5? ♘c6 47 ♗f2 ♘xb4

Here I offered a draw, but he declined. Then he exchanged all the queenside pawns and I blundered by allowing a knight fork.

Exceptional Chess

To generalize is to be an idiot.
WILLIAM BLAKE

I tend to leave the quotations to speak for themselves, but this one calls out for qualification. Although harsh in itself, it might draw your attention to the distinction between what is generally the case in chess, and the utter uniqueness of each and every position. Let's just say for a moment that it is true that, *in general*, the (pawn) point system above applies to chess quite accurately and basically does us a good service. Does this mean that it's a question of averages, so that a rook may be worth 7 in some positions and 3 in others, but when you average it all out it comes to 5? This would make for what I call 'stretchy' material values and then you could start talking about 'a material advantage' when you're the exchange down, because your wonderful knight in the given instance is worth 5 pawns, while your opponent's useless rook is worth only 3. However, this seems strange to us, and we'd rather say something like: the side with the knight has 'more than enough compensation for the exchange'.

This much is convention, but it's problematic. It would seem from the examples in this chapter and elsewhere that a rook is not always equivalent in value to five pawns, and in some positions a pawn can be more valuable than a knight, even though a knight is meant to be worth three pawns. We tend to consider such examples as exceptions rather than the norm, and so we feel it safe to generalize about the value of the pieces, as long as we're on the lookout for these exceptions. Yet there is great danger in such generalizations, because they tend to become the dominant patterns in our thinking (see Chapter 1). Moreover, general advice can distract your attention from the specific context in question. It doesn't matter whether a rook is better than a knight *in general* while you are playing your game; what you do need to know is whether *this* rook is better than *this* knight in the position at hand.

Yet our understanding of chess was formed on the basis that 'in general' these material values hold and since our outlook on the game was established on this basis, we tend to conform to the generalization. Stronger players are often capable of seeing when the old values aren't appropriate, but what we have underestimated is that **it is extremely difficult for most players to separate the general from the specific**.

I know of many players who have an incredibly hard time even considering going into

positions in which they are material down, because **they wrongly associate material loss with error**. They may understand that in a certain position it is correct to sacrifice material because there are other important things going on, but they have enormous difficulty spotting such instances, and even when they do, they seem to lack courage, and so they stick to the safety of the general. But this is a huge handicap, because, as we will see, there is more to chess than material.

The biggest issue here though is that positions in which the point system accurately reflects what's going on are few and far between. It is actually quite rare to see a position in which one side has, say, a knight, which is worth exactly the same as the opponent's knight. I don't know how rare of course, and I'm not sure how you might test this empirically, but in my experience of chess, and not just in my own games, **there are more exceptions than rules when it comes to value of the pieces**. Forgive the cliché, but it does not seem wrong to say that 'it all depends on the position' The point seems to be that chess, as a rule, *is* exceptional, in the crucial sense that **we play one game at a time**. This is why generalizing is so perilous; every game has rules of its own, especially with regard to the value of the pieces.

There is also a deeper sense in which 'it depends on the position', which is that the value of a piece in any given position will never be separate from its function with relation to the other pieces. So the d- and c-pawns both make each other 'worth' more than they would when considered by themselves and a knight can be better than a rook, perhaps because of a certain pawn-structure, or because the rook is pinned by a bishop. So to generalize about the value of a piece as if it could be given a value all by itself is 'idiotic' for this reason too, because the piece is never by itself in a real game, there are usually lots of other pieces and pawns in your own position which affect the value of the piece, and there are always relationships to your opponent's pieces too. It's a bit like the way we tend to emphasize different parts of our personality, depending on who we are talking to. So the value of every piece is related to the position as a whole, including factors like piece relationships, harmony and coordination and thus the saying that **'the whole is more than the sum of its parts' applies very acutely to chess**.

Die-hard materialists may not even want to engage in such talk, and could argue that the material is always worth the same amount regardless of the position, but somehow other factors can override material considerations. This would make those who generalize 'idiotic' not because they can't separate the general from the specific, but because they are not very good at gauging compensation.

It could be that after the 29...♖f4 sacrifice in the note to White's 18th move in Tal-Soloviev (at the start of this chapter), Black is 'material down', and it's just that other factors are more important in the given instance. It could also be true that the h8-bishop is 'worth' just as much before White captures on f4 as after. In Saidy-Jansa, the black pawns are all worth one point and no more, despite the fact that two of them are connected, passed and far advanced, while the third is isolated and vulnerable. Strange though this may seem, there may be nothing logically incoherent with such a view.

I suppose material values could be the constants in a game of variables. It strikes me as peculiar though, to say that a white pawn on the seventh rank about to queen is still worth the same as its former self on the second rank, even given the qualification that we place a separate (high) value on the white position as a whole instead because it is about to gain material. It may just be a question of preference as to how the total value of the position is added up. A pawn could remain one point, and then your advantage may be based on the extra bonus points you gain for 'queening potential', or whatever. As Scots poet Robert Burns would say in support of the contention, "For awe that, and awe that, a pawn's a pawn for awe that"

On this view, Soloviev's h8-bishop may be worth three points regardless of whether or not there's a pawn on e5 blocking the way, and it's not that your knights are worth more because you suddenly have the e5-square and can attack b2; the knights are still worth three, it's just that you have new value in the form of 'attacking potential', 'passed pawn' or whatever.

But this does violence to common sense. Theoretical perspectives can do a lot of damage and this is a classic example. You may never

have thought about it or felt you needed to, but **the whole notion of 'compensation' strongly implies that material values are not only the most important values in a position, but that they are constant values, and this is blatantly not the case!** 'Compensation' is considered to be that variable factor which you look at after you've counted the material balance, but this is very dangerous. Indeed it creates the corrosive habit of thinking of positions in terms of material first and then quality second. The time factor tends to be thought of as another realm, which we usually dismiss as 'tactics' but is often considered only in relation to how it affects the material balance (see 'The Four Dimensions of Chess' below).

This is understandable in a sense, because all we visibly see are the pieces on the board (material) and so it's only natural that we should assign the visible a value. You can point to a knight and say 'three' because that's what we've learned and assumed, but what do you point to when you want to show that you have full compensation worth 'three'? It's difficult because in one sense compensation is 'invisible', and therefore tricky to label with any number.

In order to stick to numbers you can either give numerical values to things like important diagonals, king safety, pawn-structure, etc., in which case it would be almost impossible to assign the correct value to each, or else you can knock points off the value of the pieces and say that their values are not constant after all, which is also a problem because it creates the possibility of the nonsensical situation in which you are a queen down, but material ahead! However, we do say things like 'my bishop is better than yours' 'I have a better pawn-structure' Yet if one piece is 'better' than another, in what sense are they worth the same?

It seems that whatever way we look at it, we see that there is more than material to consider in our chess assessments. The problem we have at the moment is that we have no way to give them a numerical value, and so we are highly prone to give disproportionate value to material because we can count it, and underestimate or overlook other factors, because they are much less tangible, and there's no way to count them. This is another problem of incommensurability: how can we compare the tangible with the intangible? Instead of exploring this with lasagne and gangsters, I offer the following game.

Mercs – Rowson
Sheffield 1999

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 c5 4 c3 ♘c6 5 ♘f3 ♗d7 6 ♗e2 ♘ge7 7 0-0 ♘g6 8 ♗e3 ♕b6 9 b3 ♗e7 10 a4 cxd4 11 ♘xd4 ♘xd4 12 cxd4 0-0 13 ♗d3 ♖ac8 14 g3 ♗b4 15 h4 ♘e7 16 ♘d2! ♗c3 17 ♖b1 ♘f5

Black should avoid 17...♗xd4 18 ♘c4! dxc4 19 ♗xd4 ♕xd4? 20 ♗xh7+.

18 ♗xf5 exf5 19 ♘f3 f4! 20 ♗xf4 ♗h3

So I win the exchange. This was the first round of a weekend tournament, and I'm playing an opponent rated more than 500 points lower than me on the Elo scale. Although it was very naughty of me, I did make the mistake of 'chalking it up' at this point and thinking that the game would soon be over. 20...♗f5!?, with massive light-square 'compensation' for the pawn, and the chance to win the exchange at will, would have posed more practical problems for my opponent.

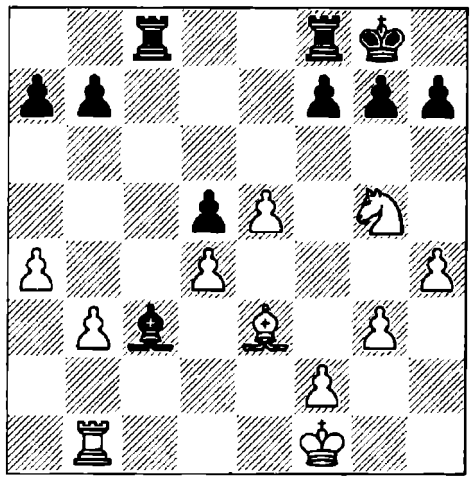
21 ♗e3 ♕a6?!

This may have been a good moment for 21...f6!? but in second gear I was more than happy to win the exchange and exchange material, thus falling back on ingrained habits and the typical recipe 'when you are material up, exchange pieces' This was actually one of the first 'rules' I learned at school. However, I would have been better off with the queens on here, because that would make it much riskier for White to create kingside counterplay and it would be easier to protect d5 and attack b3. For example, 21...♗b4!? 22 ♘g5 ♗xf1 23 ♕xf1 ♗e7 24 ♘h3 ♖c3 25 ♘f4 ♖d8 26 ♕g2 ♖xb3.

22 ♘g5 ♗xf1 23 ♕xf1 ♕xf1+ 24 ♔xf1 *(D)*

'And the rest is a matter of technique', as they say; but when they say it they often forget that good technique requires some very hard thinking, rather than just a leisurely finishing off. Black is material ahead, but White has much more quality in his position. The d5-pawn is very weak and easily attacked by the knight, which may force me to defend it passively with a rook. White's space advantage and kingside pawn-majority give him a fairly clear plan of

B



generally advancing on the kingside, while it is quite difficult for my rooks to do anything. White's king is also the more useful of the two. So it really is a battle between quality and material. Black has to show that his material advantage means something while White wants to keep the aspects of the position that make the material less significant. And what will determine who wins this little battle? Tim. Will Black be able to do anything with his rooks quickly enough to undermine White's quality and stop it from becoming more and more significant?

F : we have an example of the phenomenon we'll see later. There are three dimensions to this position, only one of which is material. While playing this game I was rather blind to the quality and time aspects and assumed my material advantage would somehow prevail of its own accord. It's true that for various reasons I was very tired during this game, but my rather pedestrian play which follows is a natural result of thinking that the position was already won because of the material advantage.

2 ...♗b4?

Clearing the c-file and allowing my rook to enter c2, but this was not a priority because the rook does nothing on c2. Let's consider other ideas:

a) 24...f6!? was possible, but I didn't want to complicate matters in any way. This is understandable given that I thought my material advantage was the only significant aspect of the position, but unforgivable when you consider the quality and time aspects. This move improves the quality of my king and diminishes the quality of White's extra pawn and space advantage. Then:

a1) 25 ♘f3 ♔f7 puts Black in control. White's main asset, the knight, is on a bad route and has nowhere significant to go. This change in structure following 26 exf6 gxf6!? doesn't harm Black because White is unlikely to be able to attack these pawns. More important is to control e5 and render White's majority insignificant. Quickly guess what White should now play – look for quality and check for time... 27 ♘g1!? is the best try in a bad position. The knight 'wants' to be on f4, but is it going to happen? 27...♗b4! 28 ♘e2 ♗d6! (no! White understood the quality aspect, but so did Black, and because of the time aspect, White cannot realize his plan, thus leaving material as the most significant aspect of the position; White can only improve the quality of his knight by exchanging bishops but this weakens d4 and allows Black's rooks to enter the position) 29 ♗f4 ♔e6!? 30 ♖e1 ♔d7 31 ♗xd6 ♔xd6 32 ♘f4 ♖fe8.

a2) After 25 exf6 ♖xf6 (25...gxf6 26 ♘e6 ♖fe8 27 ♘f4 looks at least playable for White) 26 ♘h3! ♗b4 27 ♘f4 ♖d6 Black is better, but there is still some quality in White's position and Black remains tied to d5. This is perhaps slightly better for Black, although the trend is in White's favour.

b) 24...b5!? looks plausible. I want to protect d5 with an active rook on b5, but there are a few tactical issues which would discourage most players, including myself, who wanted a quiet way to convert the extra material into victory. After 25 axb5 ♖b8 26 e6 fxe6 (26...f6 27 ♘h3 ♖xb5 28 ♖c1!) 27 ♘xe6 ♖fc8 28 ♖c1, it seems that 28...♖xb5 is possible, but it's hard to imagine wanting to play this way in the circumstances. Following 29 ♗d2 ♖e8 30 ♘c7 ♗xd2 31 ♖d1 ♖xb3 32 ♘xe8 ♗a5 Black has achieved a satisfactory transformation into a better ending.

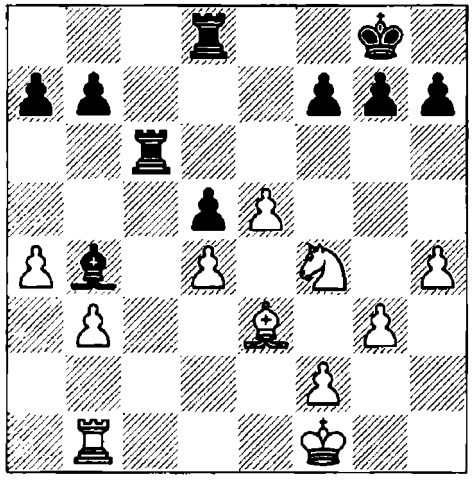
So from considering these options, it seems that I do have some advantage in this ending, but it is quite a small advantage, and not so easy to convert into victory. Yet somehow because it is a material advantage, and not any other type, we are more inclined to think that it should ultimately be decisive. This was my problem during the game. I didn't sense the urgency of the situation. It felt like a static material advantage but once the knight arrives on f4 we could say

that W ite has a quality advantage. So I should have used my short-term time advantage to make a favourable transformation before this quality advantage was established. We tend to think of such quality and time aspec t as 'com- p nsation' but this, I think, distorts o u perception. Indeed it implicitly says that material is the ultimate reference point for assessment, and t us m a es us lose sight of, or at least underestimate, the other elements we should consider, which a e often more important than material.

25 ♘h3! ♖c6

To prevent e6 ideas a d maybe to play ... ⁝ b6 later.

26 ♘f4 ♖d8 *(D)*



Is the d8-rook better than the f4-knight?

27 ♔g2!

Now I should have woken up to the fact that I needed a plan, but I just assumed that the mate- r al would ultimately prevail, so I continued to play thoughtless moves.

27...♔f8?! 28 ♔f3 ♔e8 29 g4!

I could see that my opponent was beg i ning to enjoy himself and I began to feel some unpleasant pressure. Moreover, I no longer see a y reason to t ink that Black is b tter.

29...♖d7

I did have some sort of plan. I wanted to improve the quality of my position by bringing my king to a more useful squ a e on the queenside. Possibly to b4 eventually, but maybe just to c6, after ... ⁝ c2. The di f culty was p a ly Egoism, in that I didn't acknowledge my opponent's ideas but also that I misjudged t e time aspect. White's kingside play is rather too i m inent for such grand ideas.

30 g5 ♔d8

30...g6 looks solid, but it allows White to o p n the h- f le for his rook. Moreover, after the exchange on g6 (hxg6 hxg6), White might play e6, followed by winning Black's g-pawn and threatening to queen his own.

31 ♔g4!

Freeing the f-pawn and trying to provoke ...g6.

31...♖c2 32 ♘h5 i f 33 ♘f4!?

White could have been more ambitious, but now that the threat of ... i d2 is gone, he simply asks what r m going to do next.

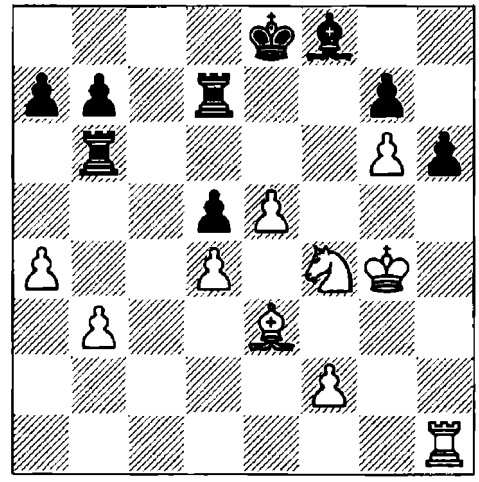
33...♔e8

Hm m . Well it can't be that bad, and my king began to feel unco m ortable on d8. Moreover, you've guessed it, the time-control was loo m ng.

34 h5 ♖c6 35 ♖h1!? ♖b6 36 g6! fxg6

Opening the h- f le looked too dangerous, and I didn't like the look of a knight on g6 a er 36...h6 37 gx f +.

37 hxg6 h6 *(D)*



A critical position.

38 ♖c1?

Sloppy. As we saw in Chapter 2, when you have such an abundance of choice, it's i po r nt to sense that the moment h a added 'weight' W ite h a played very well up to here, but didn't talk to his pieces and showed a lack of 'position sensitivity' The k ight wants some action but the g6-pawn is we a . The rook wan t a unopposed c- f le. Which piece can help to make all this happen? 38 f5 ! suggests i t elf. Given that t a ing on b3 is pe r lous, I felt du r ng the g a e that I would be close to lost here. My only real

a set is my protected passed h-pawn, but that's far from being relevant. Even though Black is material up, White's position has much more quality. That said, it seems that Black can probably hold on after 38... l c6 (the drawback to the king b ing on f5 is t at it's h a d to move it away without losing g6 and thus difficult to use the f-pawn; not 38... l xb3? 39 l c l l b6 40 e6 : dd6 41 l c8+ l d8 42 l c7, which looks like trouble for Black, as 5 is a big threat) 39 l e6 l e7!:

a) 40 xf8 xf8 and now 41 l c1!? (not 41 i xh6? gxh6 4 2 l xh6 l f7+!) is a move many players would be inclined to miss, since in general we shouldn•t exchange rooks when we a e the exchange down. This is p a tly because we need a piece to compete on the f les and ranks, but also because the side with two rooks often fnds that one of t em is supe r uous. Then:

a1) 41... l ec7 42 l c5 l xc5 43 dxc5 (t s is an interesting t y, but now the h-pawn does matter and Black may even be b tter) 43... e7 **44** e6 (44 f4 l c8 45 g4 e6 46 · d4 l f8 a d it looks like Black is in control) 44... l c6 45 · d4 l xe6 46 · xg7 l e2 47 f4 h5 is an interesting position for analysis, but somewhat beside t e point given the s t ngth of 41... l xc1.

a2) 41... l hc1 42 i xcl is, I t ought at frst, very promising for White because of the idea of putting the king on e6 and adv a cing the f-pawn, but there is an important detail which was h a d to see at t is stage: 42... l c7 43 i a3+ e8 44 l e6 l c3 45 f4 l xb3 46 i d6 l g3! 47 f5 h5 a d here I don't see a way to mobilize the white pawns before (or even immediately after) the bishop has to sacri f ce itself for the h-pawn.

b) 40 f4 looks good, but maybe is not so decisive in view of 40... l d7, but White is cer- t inly better in that he has the option of forcing a draw, and some promising alte r atives. I sup- p se White must somehow use the rook, viz. 41 : e l!? l dc7 (after 41... l xc1 42 i xcl the weakness of d5 makes it di f cult for Black to use his remaining rook, and the knight does a good job of t a ing the h-pawn, which is an exception to the rule that knights are no go o at dealing with rooks' pawns: 42... l c7 43 i e3 l d7 44 l e6 and White is cle a ly b tter) 42 l c5!? (this is radical, but as we saw in Chapter 2, White may need to 'resolve to b resolute' if he is to win this game; it's one thing not to ' b lieve' such moves, but many have g eat dif- f culty seeing t em at all, precisely because of ***Materialism***) 42... · xc5 43 dxc5. It's not at all clear that the rooks a e better than the minor pieces here, a d Black is in some danger of b - ing squashed:

b1) 43...d4 44 i xd4 l d7 is a winning try for Black, but White is probably b tter after 45 e4 **a5** 46 e6 l e7 47 ' i f5.

b2) 43... l xc5! gives back some mate r al to improve the quality of the black position. After 44 · xc5 l xc5 45 e6 l c3!? 46 xg7+ 1 e7 47 f4 it's hard to be sure, but although White looks better, it seems to be a draw: 47...d4 48 e4 (48 h5 d3 49 g7 l c8! 50 f6 d2) 48...d3 49 f5+ f8 50 e6 l c6 51 e7+ (51 g7+ g8 52 e7 l e 6 53 xd3 h5 54 d4 h4 55 ♔d5 l e1 looks drawn, though I suppose White c a play for a while) 5 l ... e8 52 g7 l g6 53 xd3 h5 54 e4 h4 55 xh4 l xg7 56 f5 l g6. White is not worse, but it looks like Black h a escaped in t is p a ticular line.

38...♖c6

Maybe my opponent missed this, or perhaps he was just wo r ied about losing his b3-pawn.

39 l b l?!

I doubt if the rook was very happy about this.

39... i e7!

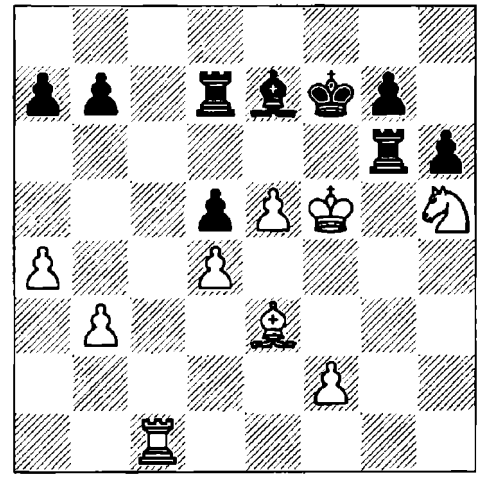
Upward trend - ... i g5 is threatened.

40 ♘h5 ♖xg6+

I was not displeased to remove this thorn from my side, but maybe I was again guilty of 'chalking it up .

41 fS f7 **42 ♖c1** *(D)*

B



Now I should be winning, but it's still not simple because White's pieces a e very active

and I cannot challenge the c-file. At the time I thought there was a neat tactical solution, but it turns out to be flawed.

42...♖g5+?

This looks like quite a cute idea, and I even double-checked it, but I fell prey to ***Materialism***, and missed a rather crucial detail. 42...♗b6! is better, and although it allows some activity, it looks like Black should win. Here is one possible line: 43 ♔f4 g6+ 44 ♔g4 ♕g7 45 ♖e6 ♗d8 46 ♗c7 h5+ 47 ♔f3 ♔f6 48 ♖xg6 ♔xg6 49 ♗he7 ♗f8+ 50 ♔e2 ♔f6 51 ♗h7 ♔xe6 52 ♗xh5 ♗xb3.

43 ♗xg5 g6+ 44 ♔g4 gxh5+ 45 ♔f5!

Of course. The h5-pawn is fairly useless, but since it is a pawn, and there's no other way to win material on that move, I just didn't consider anything other than 45 ♔xh5 when I chose 42...♗g5+. It's also a basic psychological/cognitive problem that we tend to forget which aspects of the position have changed. Playing 43...g6+ was accompanied by the emotional feeling of pleasure and relief because I was pushing the king back. I had no intention of ever allowing it back to f5 and somehow felt I had finished with that sort of thing. But then on a different level of thought I saw this flashy tactic, and broke with all the cautious feelings and the patterns that go with that feeling. You might simply say that when I took the g6-pawn I lost my sense of danger.

45...♗xg5 46 e6+?

Careless. The likely explanation for this blunder is that it was now almost 11 o'clock in the evening, and my opponent had been working all day. However, even here I feel we see ***Materialism.*** White was so attracted by the idea of winning a rook with a mere pawn that he seemed to forget that any other move was possible. After 46 f4! · ♔xf4 47 ♔xf4 ♔e6 48 ♗g1! White is not worse.

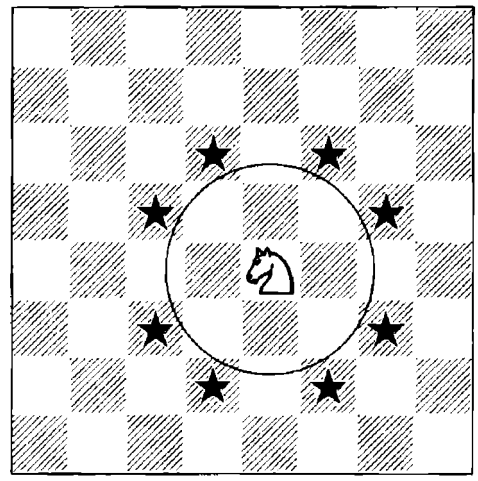
46...♔e7 47 ♖c8

47 f4 · ♔xf4 48 ♔xf4 ♔xe6 is now at least clearly better for Black but was a better defensive **try.** Even after all I've said about ***Materialism***, it's usually a good idea to win a piece when you can.

47...♖d8 48 ♖c7+ ♔d6 49 ♖xb7 ♖f8+ 0-1

The main thread of this game was the struggle between rook and knight, which was very nearly decided in the knight's favour. Rather than compare the two pieces in terms of points, there is value in looking at the pieces with fresh eyes, and allowing yourself to see new things. I reiterate that such caricatures are not models to be emulated, but just examples to provoke a new way of looking at the pieces on the board, and to understand their unique needs and desires.

The Knight



I once asked GM Paul Motwani, "If you were a chess piece, which would you be?" Paul replied that he'd be a knight, because it can get everywhere, albeit slowly. This is perhaps why the knight, which controls far fewer squares than a bishop in the centre of the board (8 compared to 13) is considered to be of similar value, because it is limited only by its relative mobility, which is slow, rather than its ability, which is essentially unlimited. Of course it may also be related to the knight's ability to 'jump', especially over pawns which can block much mightier pieces.

The most important feature of a knight from a tactical point of view is that the way it moves is not related at all to any of the other pieces and so it can attack as many as eight squares without being anacked by any piece on those squares in return. It's also worth remembering that a knight attacks squares of an opposite colour to that on which it sits.

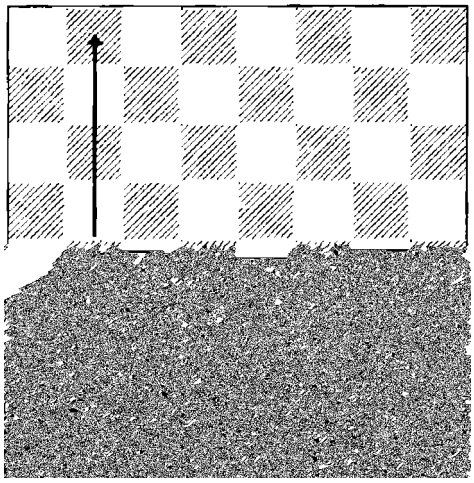
That said, to see the unique value of the knight we need a geometrical perspective. If we try to imagine chess without knights, we find an impoverished game with lines, squares, files,

r nks and diagonals, but no curves. **We should be thankful to the knights, for they are the curvy pieces that bring a circular aspect to an essentially linear game.**

Judging by Donner's account in The King, t ere was a rather heated dispute in Dutch chess a ound the e a ly 1970s conce r ing the geometry of t e knight. Some saw t e knight as the bi- s ctor of the bishop's diagonal and the rook's line, but t is, according to Donner, overlooks t e fact t at the knight makes such a short j mp. The correct appraisal of the knight in Donner's eyes is that it "moves along a circle". T e circle can b seen, with a sympathetic eye, on the diagram above. The sense in which it .moves" is related to its "essenti a in f niteness" ... "For it is the p a adox of this piece that while it is the most jumpy, it is by nature also t e most static" "Every other piece not played for t enty moves or more is a poor thing, but the opposite g o s for the k ight: a knight often cannot fnd t e place where it b longs."

With this in mind, I tend to think of the k ight as a l a y cowboy on top of a horse which can move, but does so only in short bursts, and u u a ly with some coercion. The cowboy s t nds in the middle of a f eld with a lasso, and is capable of controlling the circle around it by virtue of the threat of reining in any of the opponent's pieces that would dare step into that circle. Thus to my mind the knight is a fascinating piece with an intriguing personality.

The Rook



The rook, by contrast, I fnd a little dull. I have placed it on b4 as it has the unique feature of controlling the same number of squares (14) from any square, a d so we don't add to its s t t- ure by placing it on a central squ a e. This may seem obvious to you, but I only realized this on a conscious level after I bec a e a GM! It doesn't matter crucially of course, but it does tell us something about t e rook's ch a acter, which is f a-reaching, but tangibly two-dimensional.

Its main problem is that because it can only move in s t aight lines, it takes at least two steps to reach most squ a es, and usually more when there a e pawns a ound. I have a somewhat Freudian feeling in this respect, which is that rooks seem to have some so r of 'bishop envy'. The rook cannot help but comp a e itself with the queen, but in doing so it feels inadequate because the queen 'has a bishop', in that it can move along diagonals, while t e rook feels this absence. If this leads you to wonder why a rook and bishop a e not generally thought to be worth a queen, it's mainly because the queen, b ing able to shi f from one colour complex to another, has a type of 'deluxe bishop' ('hermaphrodite' - see page 130), which d o sn't have t e limitation of only being able to control half the diagonals.

Another important aspect of rooks is that they tend to need space in which to work. Indeed, in many positions in which one side is said to have a 'space advantage', it's just that the rooks a e more e f ective t an their counterp a ts. Moreover, rooks excel on open f les or when they can access their seventh rank. Perhaps the greatest value of the rook though is the way in which it can 'cut off' an opposing k ng or hold back pawns along a rank. Finally, I tend to think of the rook as 'sliding' rather than 'moving' because t ey can travel such long distances so fast. If forced to m a e a c a icature of the rook, I'd say he was an envious ice-skating beginner (can only move in a straight line; happy on the edge), and I apologize if that's not going to help you win your club championship!

Are We More Materialistic than Computers?

The real question is not whether machines think, but whether men do.
B.F. SKINNER

Watching an analysis module like *Fritz* or *Hiarcs* wade through chess variations, it is striking just how much value they seem to place on material in their evaluative functions. More to the point, when we play these programs, we are invariably crushed viciously if we give away material. Computers take pawns we would barely think of taking and show us time and time again that there are far fewer limits to materialistic thinking than we had thought. Thus we come to the conclusion that chess computer programs are more materialistic than humans. Indeed, there are those who delight in 'tricking' the computer by giving them positions that we know they will misevaluate because they will give a disproportionate value to material.

Recently I was fortunate to have the chance to speak with GM Joel Benjamin about his time working with *Deep(er) Blue* for six months prior to its victory against Kasparov in May 1997. Benjamin was keen to stress that there are fewer limitations on chess computer programs than we might imagine and he also dispelled a lot of disinformation wielded out as propaganda against the IBM team. In the following I will use *Deep(er) Blue* as the paradigm chess computer, even though it is in fact rather exceptional. Some commercial PC software makers think their evaluative functions are better than *Deep(er) Blue*'s and that the main strength of the computer that beat Kasparov was that it was excellent at meeting anti-computer chess, largely because Joel Benjamin worked on it for so long, and he may be the best anti-computer player on the planet! In any case, different chess programs don't always 'think' alike, but the basic process of using an evaluative function to select moves is, I think, common to them all.

The key insight is that the way a computer thinks tends to be much more 'holistic' than we might imagine. So there is no notion of 'priorities' that would make a computer 'decide' to retreat a bishop attacked on g4 after h3 instead of capturing the knight that it was pinning. It's not a single question for the computer at all. When it makes that decision, the computer looks at every aspect of the given position, 'sees' millions of variations and then 'goes with the numbers' in that it will select the move which leads to positions with a relatively high point score.

So it is not that computers are taught to favour bishops over knights or anything of the sort (although some programs give it a slightly higher static score, maybe by 0.1). The computer will consider the decision, not on priorities but on prospective numerical outcomes.

The relevance to this chapter is that in 'going with the numbers', the computer doesn't just go with material. **Unlike humans, computers have numerical values for non-material considerations too.** There is no 'preference' for material over other factors and the computer, of course, doesn't even consider 'material' in abstract at all. What is true is that in most evaluative functions the programmers give high numbers for material and relatively low numbers for factors like pawn-structure, mobility, king safety, etc. Furthermore, in most programs the pieces will have fixed values. Say a knight is worth 30. This will be part of a total score of maybe 150 in which positional considerations are also assigned values and included in this total. Now if this knight were badly placed, the computer doesn't give fewer points to the knight itself, but will give a 'penalty' to the side which might bring the total down to 1450 or a 'bonus' if it's well placed, in which case the total may be 1530.

The value in considering this is that it seems computers are, in one sense, quite 'blessed' not to see chess from a materialistic perspective. In having only numbers to compare, they are not blinkered by material judgements. Unlike ourselves they don't look at material 'first' and then look at other factors when they evaluate, rather they consider all the different aspects in a position, such as material, mobility of material, king safety, pawn-structure, two bishops, queening potential, etc., *simultaneously*.

This is one of the reasons why they seem to 'see' tactics so much faster than us; they don't have to 'pause' to count the material as the vast majority of human players do and *then* get their bearings about the other aspects of the position. Thus it is not only fairly meaningless to call computers 'materialistic', it is also somewhat hypocritical. So at the risk of being provocative, I would say that **human players are *more* prone to *Materialism* than computers, because computers 'think' exclusively with numbers, while humans artificially divide**

their thoughts into numerical and non-numerical aspects.

A few days before sending of the manuscript, Dave Gombo, from Edmonton, Canada, an expert on chess computer evaluative functions, whom I had asked to check over this section, advised: "This isn't strictly true - often a program will look at material, and maybe one or two of the biggest positional terms, and decide 'is it at all likely that even if everything else is my way, that this position will be better than what I've already found I can achieve?' And sometimes the answer is no. It's just like if you calculate from a position that is dynamically balanced, and you look at a line where you end up a queen down... you go 'Is it realistic that I could have compensation for that?' and if the answer is no, you reject that continuation and look elsewhere. The main difference with computers is that they look at terrible lines all the time, because they look at so many in total, so it is actually effective to have this test present." This is an important caveat that slightly undermines my argument. Even so, the main point, that computers 'go with the numbers' and that these numbers do not exclusively concer material, still stands.

I will point out, as far as I understand it, how computers differ from humans in their evaluaton of material in the last few games of this chapter but first of all I present a game which reveals some of the many original ways in which Garry Kasparov looks at material and I will compare this to a computer's perspective where the comparison seems useful. Notes are based on Kasparov's in ***New In Chess*** magazine no. 3, 1997 and his notes in ***Informator*** 69.

Shirov – Kasparov
Linares 1997

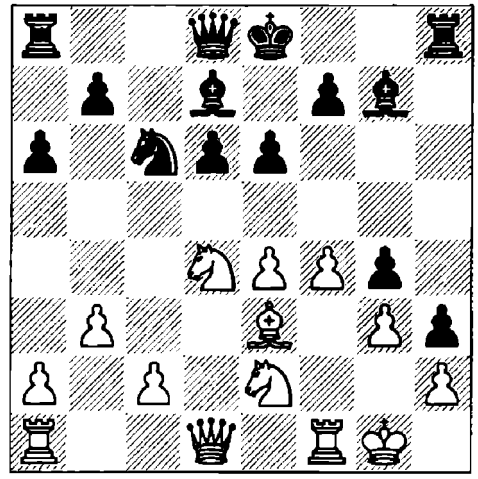
1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 a6 6 ♗e3 ♗g4 7 ♗g5 h6 8 ♗h4 g5 9 ♗g3 ♗g7 10 ♗e2 h5 11 ♗xg4 ♗xg4 12 f3 ♗d7 13 0-0 ♘c6 14 ♗f2 e6! 15 ♘ce2

"I immediately felt this move was not very good, as it creates a certain dishamony among the white pieces. I found a nice way to prove my assessment." - GK. 15 ♗xc6 ♕xc6 16 ♕d4 ♕e5! **=.**

15...♘e5 16 b3 g4! 17 f4 h4! 18 ♕e

18 c4 g3 19 hxg3 ♗g4 gives Black a strong attack against an unprepared king.

18...h3 19 g3 ♘c6 *(D)*



"The future importance of the long diagonal (a8-h1) is not yet clear, but from my experience I can guarantee that the white king is potentially in a much worse position than his black colleague. Any further opening of the long diagonal or the appearance of the queen on the second rank will create a deadly threat on g2. In fact, **the pawn on h3 can be seen as a material advantage for Black, because it is so important that you could value it as a whole piece.** It not only helps the queen to create mating threats, but in most endgames, this pawn will also guarantee Black a winning edge because of the threats that Black can create against the h2-pawn, when the black h-pawn is very close to the promotion square." - GK.

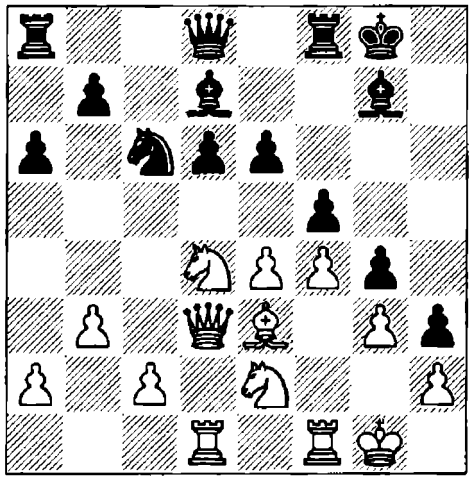
This is a remarkably instructive comment from a very human perspective (though of course he's exaggerating a bit). GM Joel Benjamin tells me that ***Deep(er) Blue*** did have a 'patterr' to recognize this type of far-advanced rook's pawn, but I'm quite sure that its numerical value would not have been anywhere near the equivalent of a piece! Moreover, Dave Gombcfunher advises me that, while he can't speak from first-hand knowledge of ***Deep Blue's*** evaluation function, strong programs would indeed assess this kingside structure as favourable for Black. However, it wouldn't be in the form of patterr-recognition that humans are familiar with. Instead, "The computer would deduct points for White's poor king safety and the colour complex weakness: White's pawns

are fa fom t e ' f -g2-h2 in f ont of a king on g l' idea ['the box'! - see page 175]; worse - Black has a solid grip on g2 and f , and g2 is adj acent to White's king. To compound the problem further, White doesn't even have a light-squ a ed bishop to t y to limit the damage with. Still, de p nding on the program, the penalty terms may only k ck into high gear when the pro g a c a see Black b ginning to exploit these factors within its se a ch horizon, by which time it may well be too late for the program to do anything about it."

I suspect Kasp a ov's understanding of the value of this st r cture is l a gely based on memory, which of course computers also have, but their memo r es have no emotional content. It is quite likely that Kasp a ov has seen or played many g a es in which this type of s t ucture le f a favourable or unfavourable impression, inducing feelings of con f dence or fe a . Moreover, a human feels uncomfortable with the feeling that this pawn (on h3) will ***always*** be an issue, while a computer sees the pawn in the same way in every position. Kasp a ov also k ows how psychologically unpleasant this is for White in general, as is revealed by the emotive te r 'alien', which he later uses to describe the pawn on h3.

20 ' d3 **0-0 21** l a d l **f5!** *(D)*

W



22 c4

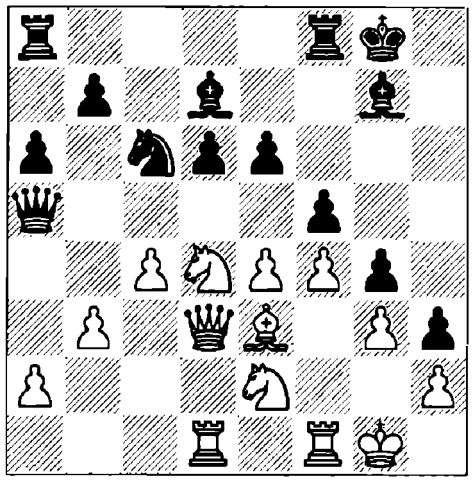
22 l xc6 i xc6 23 exf5 (23 ' xd6 ' xd6 24 l xd6 i xe4 25 c4 e5 "immediately, to avoid the exchange of d a k-squared bishops" is slightly b tter for Black according to Kasparov; note the value Kasparov places on the two bishops) 23...exf5 24 i d4 i e4 25 ' d2 d5 was given by Kasparov as slightly better for Black. Many players would see the IQP, t e 'bad bishop' on e4, and the 'we a esses' a ound Black's k ng, but it's important to get these t ings in perspective. The main feature of the position is still the long-term weakness of the white king and Black's 'material advantage' in the kingside s t cture. It is conceivable that White's queenside may become weak too (queen coming to a3, advance of a-pawn, half-open c-file). It will be ex t emely hard to attack or win d5 because of the monster bishop on e4 and so there is really nothing 'weak' about this pawn, Indeed, the structure is basically good news for Black due to t e extra space and the half-o p n c-file.

22...♕a5 *(D)*

Commenting on the position after 22 c4, Kasparov gives an excellent insight into his resistance to ***Perfectionism***: "A fter t e text Black has to make some further choices. I felt that I had to play quickly and went 22... ' a5." This move makes a lot of sense: it attacks a2 a d connects the rooks if nothing else. However, his notes in ***Informator 69*** mention 22... ' e8!? without comment, which is also a very tempting move, heading for f7 or g6, where the queen will secure the kingside a d operate on light squ a es - White's more vulnerable complex. This would also have avoided Shirov's equalizing opportunity that he didn't play in the g a e (23 ' d2). What I f nd ins t c t ve is that it seems Kasparov felt t inking was not appro p r ate here. He just made a choice on intuitive grounds and put the ball back in his opponent's court. Reading between the lines, it seems that the fact that Sh i ov had no time to compose himself for what might happen next was more important than being completely accurate on the chessboard.

23 ♘c3?

Kasp a ov calls this a very bad mistake, p a tly because the knight is "indirectly hanging" (due to the aS-queen and g7-bishop) and also because it fails to t a e the oppo n unity to exchange queens. The black queen has more prospects to cause White problems than vice versa and this, according to Kasparov, is because "... the white k ng has a strong alien in his camp, i.e. t e h3-pawn. White has to be very careful as the first check to his king may very well be the last one." This last line is rather



poetic, but many players might be surprised that Kasparov seems so unconcerned with his own king. The fact is, however, that it is perfectly safe, as White cannot create any serious t reats a ound it. So the 'rule' t at you shouldn't move pawns in front of your king needn't dominate your thoughts. The key is not to think of t e rule, but to shake yourself out of your preconceptions and just look at t e position.

White should have played 23 "ẗd2!. "Surprisingly, Shirov did not even look at this move. He probably did not want to exchange queens; but this exchange would have given him a normal game." Remember what I said about att chment to the queen? It seems that even the g at S h ov is not i me. 23... "ẋd2 24 l xd2 l f7 and now:

a) A fer 25 l fdl i f8 26 l c3 l e8 27 exf5 **exf5** 28 l d5 i g7 I prefer Black, and Kasp a ov p ints out that the two bishops and advanced kingside s t cture make up for the weaknesses on the d-f le.

b) 25 l xc6 i xc6 26 l xd6 i xe4. ''The p wn on e6 is h a dly hanging, because after 27 l xe6 Ad8 Black occupies the d-f le and can face the future with great optimism." - Kaspa- r v. 27 i d4 is met by 27... i f8!, as avoiding t e loss of the two bishops is more important t an keeping the e6-pawn. This again shows a profound understanding of material. 28 l xe6 l d8 gives Black at least 'good compensation' for the material, and it would certainly be easier lo play Black. It's also worth mentioning that ***Deeper Blue*** didn't assign any higher value to bishop than knight, but it did give bonus points for the two bishops. We will consider this in more detail when we look at the bishop.

23... l ae8

The rest of the game is rather thematic, though not wi t out a few e r ors f om both sides. In any case it has been annotated elsewhere and there's just space for the moves now because this g a e has been m lked for more than enough material.

24 Ife1? e5! 25 ♘xc6 ♗xc6 26 b4 ♕a3?! 27 b5 exf4 28 ♗xf4 axb5 29 cxb5 ♕c5+ 30 ♗e3? ♕xc3 31 bxc6 ♕xc6 32 ♕xd6 ♕xe4 33 ♕d5+ ♕xd5 34 Ixd5 ♗c3 35 Ie2 Ie4 36 f Ife8 37 Id3 ♗f6 38 Ied2 Ixe3 0-1

'Angst'

When the only tool you have is a hammer, every problem begins to resemble a nail.
ABRAHAM MASLOW

It seems that ***Materialism*** is so deeply imbedded in our chess minds that we are inclined to feel uneasy when we **are** material down, almost regardless of other features of the position. In fact a major aspect of this sin is the failure to make go o use of promising sac r fces because we 'cash in' much too quic k y. In this respect GM E f m Geller makes an instructive insight while commenting on t e reasons for his opponent's loss in game 19 of ***The Application of Chess Theory***: "Black was let down by the purely subconscious desire to restore material equality at the f rst opportunity. It so o f en happens that, a f er sacrificing a pawn, a player aims not to obtain t e initiative for it, but to regain the sacri f ced material. This is a typical mistake, but it is instinctively co m itted by s t ong and experienced masters."

It is 'instinctive' because we are so prone to ***Materialism***. It seems that our early ex p rience of chess has created certain psychological dispositions that we f nd h a d to shake. I'm not sure about you, but back then a material disadvantage was associated with defeat, regret and hope that you will soon win the material back. When I was playing for my school it was even associated with guilt, because at times my team-mates would look at the side of the board, see that I was material down, and then look at me with conce r .

Whether it's because of these early experiences or just because of the tangibility of

material, it seems that many players do ex p rience a certain amount of **'angst'** when they a e material down. This feeling in turn leads to another - the desire to remove the angst by restoring material equality. This attitude places huge res t ictions on the v a iety of problems you can cause for an opponent. Moreover, it's not so easy to be material up either! Indeed in those cases we tend to feel some a gst too. In p a ticular we st a to think in te r s of 'technique' in a way we don't when we have an advantage in time or quality, and also we fear that we will lose our material advantage, and never find anything to replace it.

Ukrainian GM Romanishin has spent much of his chess c a eer be i g a pawn down in sharp lines of the Catalan. He claims that his opponents tend to feel very uncomfortable when they have extra material, because the unbalanced material makes it di f icult for them to play 'no r ally'

Again it comes back to the fact that t ere is much more in a position th a just the material situation. So if we take an example like the Benko Gambit Accepted (1 d4 l f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 g6 6 c3 J xa6), the white-player seems to be a safe pawn up for a long time but unless you are a strong player who has studied this line c a efully it is ex- t emely diff cult to avoid drifting planlessly with the vague aim of 'converting yo u extra pawn'. Partly because of this type of diff culty, m a y strong players are quick to give back the material t ey win in favour of other types of adv a tage which a e easier to play with and more i m ediately unpleasant for the opponent. Being able to m a e these types of t ansformations, whereby you may win material but give it back and then sacri f ce, win material again but this time in the ending, etc., is a crucial aspect of a chess-player's arsenal. This relates to something a little beyond the scope of this chapter, n a ely the importance of the initiative, but the basic idea is that we would do well to relinquish our emotional attachment to material, and move tow a ds thinking of chess in a pluralistic way.

The following game shows your author quite willing to trade material for other advantages, but then handicapped by a feeling of angst at a crucial moment.

Rowson – Yuneev
Wijk aan Zee 2000

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 d6 6 g4 ♘c6 7 g5 ♘d7 8 ♘db5 ♘b6 9 ♗f4 ♘e5 10 ♕h5 ♘g6 11 ♗e3 a6 12 ♘d4 d5!? 13 0-0-0!? ♗b4 14 ♘de2 ♘c4 15 exd5 ♕a5! 16 ♔b1 ♘xb2 17 ♔xb2 ♕a3+ 18 ♔b1 ♗xc3 19 ♘xc3 ♕xc3 20 ♖d3 ♕b4+ 21 ♖b3 ♕e4 22 ♖g1 ♕xd5 23 ♗g2

Durng the g a e I felt that White should have more than enough compensation here, but perhaps I was a bit over-con f dent because Black h a very few we a nesses to latch onto and my options a e limited b cause of the we a ness of my own k ng.

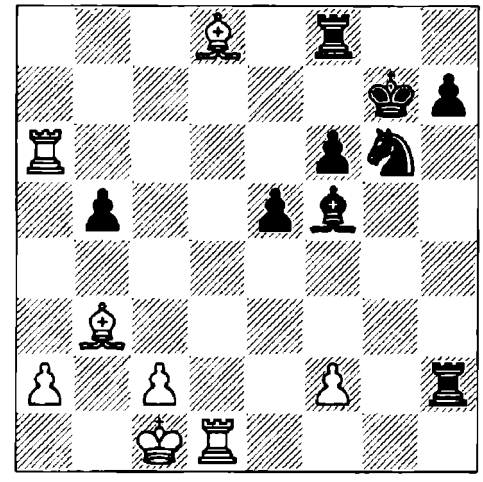
23...♕c4 24 ♗c1!? e5 25 ♗f1! ♕h4! 26 ♕xh4 ♘xh4 27 ♗a3 b5

I became concerned that I might be worse here and I think this took the pressure off my op p nent, if only on a psychologic a 'telepathic' level. I wrote the following in my post-g a e notes: "When things prove to be more di f cult than you thought they would, it is important to retain balance/con f dence a d remember that your opponent is feeling the pressure too."

2 ♖e3! ♗e6 29 ♗e2! ♘g6 30 ♖d1! f6!? 31 gxf6 gxf6 32 ♗f3 ♖a7 33 ♗c5 ♖c7 34 ♗b6 ♖c4 35 ♖a3 ♗c8! 36 ♖ad3!? ♔f8!?

36...e4! leaves White s t ggling to f nd su f - cient d a k-squ a e compensation, but the position is still tense.

37 ♖d6 ♔g7 38 ♗d5 ♖b4+ 39 ♔c1!? ♗f5 40 ♗d8! ♖f8 41 ♗b3 ♖h4!? 42 ♖xa6 ♖xh2 *(D)*



This critical position arose just after a wee time-scr a ble in which it subjectively felt like

I gained the upper hand. I have been a pawn down for most of the game, but during that time I have had a signi f cant initiative based on the two bishops and a development advantage. Even so, just a my opponent w a wo r ed about some killer tactic in t at time, I have been wor- r ed about my initiative drying up and b ing le f **a** pawn down against a Russian; not for t e f st t me either! So when I saw my chance to win 'my' material back while keeping the two bish- ops I considered it the logical outcome of my play up to this point, and went for it whole- he a tedly. I didn't really pause for thought much, because it seemed inconceivable that t ere would be anything better than this. Yet had I thought less about the material balance, and more a b ut the position as a whole, I could have put my opponent under serious pressure.

43 ♖dd6?!

However tempting this may have been, I really should have seen that this was heading for a drawish position. Somehow I assumed a pair of rooks would come off, which would probably allow my king to cover the h pawn, a d of course I was generally very keen to get r d of all the potential queens on the kingside. I had a g o d alte r ative though, which keeps much more tension in the position: 43 l a7+! h6 44 i b6!. Now I a still material down, but a quick 'quality check' would have put me at ease. Black's coordination has b en se r ously distorted; his king is uncomfortable and his h- pawn is bl o ked. Black's h2-rook, which d o sn't cooperate with the rest of his a y, looks espe- cially silly. Moreover, he will f nd it ve r h a d to defend the b5-pawn and so I should soon have equal material as well as everything else. All in all, I t ink White is clearly better.

43... l x

After 43... l xd8 44 l xd8 l x f 45 l g8+ h6 46 l xf6 White has all t e winning chances.

44 ♗xf6+ ♔h6!

44... l xf6!? is promising. During the game I even saw a consistent line of play which ends in Black's favour: 45 l xf6 h5 (Black's small a my works very well toge t er; when there a e so many imbalances, conventional mate r al values a e of limited importance) 46 l f 6?! (46 a4!? bxa4 47 i xa4 h4 4 8 i e8) 46...h4 47 l b7+ l h6 48 l xb5 h3 49 l xe5 h2 50 i d5? l xc2+ 51 d1 l c5 and Black wins.

45 ♗xe5 ♔g5

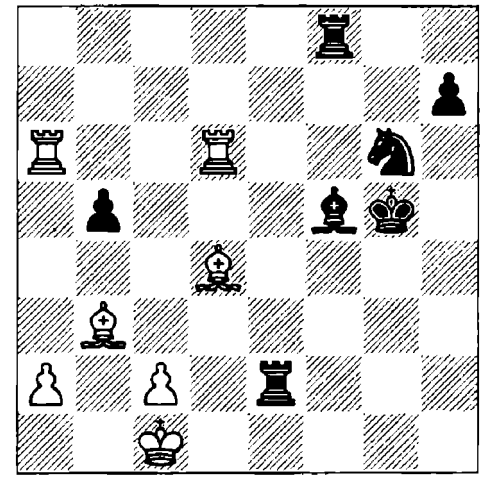
The position is beginning to stabilize, but now Black's position is very well coordinated while the strength of his h-pawn and the sup- porting k ng is a important as the two bishops.

46 ♗d4

46 i f6+ g4 47 l d2!?.

46... l e2!? ***(D)***

The rook is well placed on the second rank, mainly because it limits the activity of my b3- bishop. However, this does lose some time, so there was something to be said for keeping the momentum. I haven't made a conclusive analy- sis of this position, but it seems in general that although the position is 'uncle a ', it should eventually lead to equality. In most lines White will have to give up a bishop for t e h-pawn but Black will lose his b-pawn. This will leave Black with an extra piece but no pawns to m a e anything of it. However, there is plenty of scope for e r or, as the following line suggests: 46... l f1+ 47 d2 h5 48 l ab6 (48 l d5 h4 49 · c5 l b8 50 · d6 l e8 51 l xb5 h3) 48...h4 49 l xb5 h3 50 i e3+ l f4 51 l d4 h2 52 i d5 f d8 53 · e4 l xd4+ 54 i xd4 l 6! and White h a to b very c a eful not to lose.



W

47 ♖ab6 h5 48 ♖xb5 h4 49 ♔d1! ♘f4! 50 · g7

Maybe there is something better for White a ound here, but t e nervous tension of the f st half of the game had worn me out and I didn't have t e energy to l o k, never mind f nd, a con- vincing line. Even now t ere seem to b a lot of blind alleys for White; the h-pawn remains the most import a t aspect of the position.

50...♖fe8 51 ♗f6+

51 ♖f6 looks promising, but there doesn't seem to be a knockout, and it's emotionally difficult to allow Black to keep that potential queen on h4. 51...♖e1+ 52 ♔d2 ♖1e5 53 ♖xe5 ♖xe5 54 ♖f8 ♖e2+ 55 ♔d1 h3 56 ♗h6+ ♔xh6 57 ♖xf5 ♖f2 is winning for Black, to give a fairly plausible example.

51...♔g4 52 ♗xh4

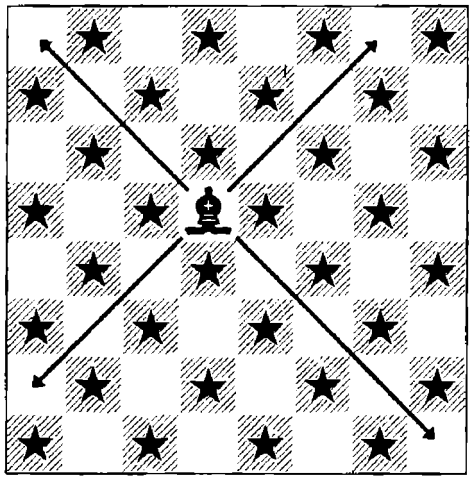
It was a good practical decision to take the h-pawn. This allows me to play for 'two results' while keeping up some pressure. However, my experienced opponent was up to the challenge.

52...♖h2! 53 ♗f6 ♖ee2 54 ♔c1

My draw offer was timely in that I could barely think any more. Black has a few scary tactical tricks, and in any case best play seems to lead to a draw: 54...♗xc2 55 ♗xc2 ♖xc2+ 56 ♔b1 ♖xa2 57 ♖b2.

½-½

The Bishop



When I think of the bishop I am reminded of Aristophanes, the famous comic poet who appeared as a character in Plato's *Symposium*, who contended that men and women were originally hermaphrodites with eight limbs, back to back, complementing each other perfectly. These hermaphrodites became so strong and vigorous that they tried to attack the gods. Zeus decided that the only way to end their wickedness was to weaken them and thus he bisected them, leaving men and woman. Legend has it that they have been searching for each other ever since.

Although there is no supporting historical evidence, I cannot but feel that the bishop-pair were originally a single glorious piece, majestically patrolling all the squares on the board.

Indeed there is something tragic about the bishop by itself, but this is best appreciated in light of its virtues: in the centre it controls 13 squares and two corners. It has the benefit of being a long-range piece, which, for example, controls a8 as well from h1 as it does from b7. Moreover the bishop can still control a8 on any square on this diagonal before a8, when it looks back on itself and sees h1. This gives the bishop an ability that the knight does not have, namely that it can continue to protect or attack some of the squares it controlled before it moves (I hadn't thought of this explicitly until I read it in Steve Mayer's excellent book *Bishop vs Knight: The Verdict*).

Moreover, the bishop was given its current numerical value before the fianchetto was common practice. This mode of development often utilizes the bishop's long-range strength so effectively that in overlooking one of the most important roles a bishop can play, they may not have understood the bishop well enough to give it an accurate value.

However, no matter how well placed or effective it may be, the bishop is cruelly and fundamentally limited. You might say it's visually impaired, for it can only see half the board.

This lies at the heart of the value of 'the two bishops', which I only began to appreciate quite recently. We all know that the two bishops are supposed to b an asset, but it's useful to have some understanding for why this may be. In this respect it's no exaggeration to say that I learned more about the two bishops from Plato than I have from any chess manual.

Firstly, consider that the two bishops in the centre of the board (the hermaphrodite) control a massive 26 squares, only one less than a centralized queen, and arguably the same as two rooks, who cannot help but control two of the same squares twice. The point is that they complement each other perfectly, just like, allegedly, men and women. All the strong points of the bishop remain but the shortcomings are not in evidence if you see 'the two bishops' not as *two* pieces but as *one*. This is the reason why the fabled 'two bishops' are spoken of in a way in which the 'two knights' are not. Although the pair of knights can be very effective, we don't

s p ak of them as 'a pai' b cause there is no t - ing one k ight can do that the other can't in p rnciple and so there is no great change in either of them when seen as a pair. It doesn't make sense to talk of t e knight-pair any more than it does to talk of a 'rook-pair' or 'queen-pair'. The 'pair' aspect is redundant. There may be something good a b ut 'the two k nghts' in a particul a position, but this is purely accidental, for there is no reason in principle why a pair of them should be more than the sum of their p a ts. On the o t er hand, one bishop makes up for the shortcomings of the other, ***and takes care of its own shortcomings in the process.***

So what hap p ns when you capture the opponent's bishop is not only that you remove one piece of value, but that you 'weaken' t e other bishop too. Whereas b fore it was p a t of a pai that in principle could attack and control anything, now it is 'alone' and utterly impotent on half the bo a d. Therefore it is ***less threatening in its own half too,*** b cause t e 'inhabitants' of the bishop's colour complex know that they can move to a safe haven on the other colour complex when t e need a ses. To impose such a thing on your opponent is a signif cant achievement, almost as if you gain material in the process. This may lie behind Tony Miles's comment to the effect that the bishops a e an advantage you can win with.

Thus any sceptics who think that ' t e two bishops' is just an invention to give annotators some t ng to w r te about should think again. In support of t is point, it's wor t pointing out t at John Watson concludes a statistical survey of the two bishops with these words: "While it be a s repeating that the streng t of t e bishops or knights is dependent upon the p a icular featu r s of the position, it is also t r e that in a majority of actually a ising positions, the two bishops will beat either the knight-pair or a bishop or knight." Moreover, computer chess progr a s have long set the point equivalent for a bishop and a k ight to b identical or ne a ly so, and aw a ded a sep a ate bonus for possessing the two bishops.

To sum up, there is much to be said for t i n - ing of t e bishop as **'half' of a powerful piece more than twice its value**. This will help you to appreciate its unique st engths and weaknesses. I see the logical problem with this of course, but that just makes me like it all t e more.

Blocks of Wood or Bundles of Energy? The E = mc² of Chess

But if every gram of material contains this tremendous energy, why did it go so long unnoticed? The answer is simple enough: so long as none of the energy is given off externally, it cannot be observed. It is as though a man who is fabulously rich should never spend or give away a cent – no one could tell how rich he was.
ALBERT EINSTEIN

The fact that the mass of a particle is equivalent to a certain amount of energy means that the particle can no longer be seen as a static object, but has to be conceived as a dynamic pattern, a process involving the energy which manifests itself as the particle's mass.
FRITJOF CAPRA, *The Tao of Physics*

When you play against Kasparov, the pieces start to go differently.
GM EVGENY BAREEV

It is time to consider ways in which we might st ive to overcome our propensity to ***Materialism.*** My two main suggestions a e quite di fer- ent, but they both contain the idea that there is always more to b seen in a chess position than just material, if you know how to look. My f st suggestion is to borrow f om science and look at how t e stupendous equation $E = mc^2$ is relevant to chess. The simplicity of the equation easily lends itself to disto r ion and so my aim is merely to consider its essence, which is that mass (material) and energy (what a piece can do) a e, in a sense, the s a e thing, without pretending that this can f t chess in any comfortable or scienti f cally valid way. If you're willing to roll wi t me for a while though, it seems that a creative application of this equation can help us break f ee f om t e shackles of ***Materialism.***

The st a ting point is t at chess is a universe unto itself, and just like our universe, it contains energy and matter. My idea is to m ke a suggestive link between 'material' in chess and

'matter' in physics. If you'll go with me this f a, then given that 'mass' is the fundamental ch a cteristic of a body (chess piece), determined by the a ount of matter (mate r al value) it contains, we begin to see that when we a e discussing what a chess piece is worth, the physical analogy suggests that we a e asking how much mass it has. Now, $E = mc^2$ tells us that mass, when multiplied by a constant (large) number, is equal to energy. Are you still with me? Good. If you accept that ***Materialism*** is a problem in chess, maybe we can solve this problem by looking at the subject of the problem (matter) in a different way. **The key is to see the pieces not as blocks of wood, but as bundles of energy.**

When we refer to an ***'active'*** king, or any other sort of ***activity***, what do we mean? It seems to me that we a e implicitly refe r ing to some so r of **energy**. Now 'energy' means m a y di f erent things, but the most basic de f nition is that energy is ***the ability of a system to do work***. Looking at the C apra quotation above from a chess pers p ctive, and replacing mass with material value, p a ticle with piece, and energy with the ability to do something use f l in a position, we get this: "The fact that the material value of a piece is equivalent to a certain amount of energy means that the piece can no longer be seen as a static object, but has to be conceived as a dynamic pattern, a process involving the ability to do something useful in the position which manifests itself as the piece's material value."

This suggests that we should look at chess positions from the perspective of material (the mass or quantity of the pieces) **and** energy (what they can do). Now this is no revelation, and to an extent we do this anyway, but in a chess context we have a te r ible time seeing material and energy as equivalent. Indeed, we invariably look at the pieces f rstly as mass (point count) and only after as energy (what they do). Einstein's quotation above helps us to see why we do this. The energy, unlike the m a s, 'cannot be observed'. In other words what you see is what you get. We know that a knight can f uctuate in value, depending on its location and prospects, but we still see a knight on the bo a d as mass, rather than energy. In thinking of it as a f xed mate r al value we neglect t e fact that this mass is also energy, and signif can t y, that its mass is conve r ible to energy. We a e fixated by our vision, but in being so we a e half blind.

Now if mass and energy a e basically equivalent, you might think that one side's 'capacity to do work' depends on how much material it has, and so the more material you have, the more likely it is that you'll achieve your aims (work) on the chessbo a d. This is the truth, but it's not the whole t th and when you look at it from the p rspective of energy you get a rather di f erent view. One side cannot have any more material (mass) than their capacity for work (energy) allows. So on seeing a position in which one side has an extra bishop and three pawns (for instance), you might think that that side has a much greater capacity to do work, but then if you look at t e position and see that the side with less material has a winning attack, it seems that this is not the case at all. The only relevant work is stopping the pending mate, and the side with the extra m terial doesn't have the ability to do that work. It doesn't have the energy. The material, when seen from the perspective of energy, is not matter at all. Quite literally, it d o sn't matter.

So it's almost like what we thi n of as the 'smaller' mass, which is about to deliver mate, is over f owing with energy while the 'larger' mass looks like it has no energy at all. But t is a disto r ion because when you apply $E = mc^2$ the amount of the mass depends on the amount of energy. From a scienti f c perspective, it d o sn't matter which you look at 'f rst' b cause the whole point is that they a e both there and neither precedes the o t er, but in a chess context it matters hugely because **'the ability to do work' is all that counts and in this sense, energy is more important than matter in chess.** Abstract material values (mass considered as separate from energy) may or may not be useful from a theoretical perspective, but they are hugely misleading when you look at chess move by move because they won't point you in the direction of the work that needs to be done. If t e material values could 's tetch' de p nding on the i capacity to do work, then we would b - gin to look at mate r al in a much more f exible way, and would perhaps be less susceptible to some of the problems that we have seen in this

chapter. Or maybe even better would be to do away with material values altogether, but I wouldn't want to suggest that without offering a convincing alternative. It seems to me that the best thing to do is just to have lots of different perspectives and look for *good* moves rather than rely on any theoretical model to do your thinking for you.

A further creative analogy is that energy has two main aspects: kinetic (energy in motion, or simply what the pieces are doing in the position at hand) and potential (what the pieces are capable of doing in certain foreseeable circumstances). So when you say that your pieces have considerable energy (ability to do work) you could be referring to what they are doing in the given position and/or what they are capable of doing in the future. Thus in a typical Hedgehog position, the material and energy aspects may be perfectly balanced, but the tense equilibrium can be understood by seeing that although White has lots of kinetic energy, and is seemingly more 'active', in an important sense Black is every bit as active, because his position has a huge amount of potential energy. This has the same relation to mass (material) as the 'more active' but only kinetically energetic white pieces.

When considering whether to use these ideas in the book, I was concerned that it may seem too abstract or contrived for most readers and hard to apply to their real games. However, then I was reminded of the Bareev quote above, and I felt compelled to proceed. One of the biggest gaps between stronger and weaker players is that the stronger players have more ways of looking at a position. So even if I'm not making any sense, or if you only partly understand what I'm saying, the main thing is to have the courage to look at chess with new eyes. For now I'm just saying that when you view the pieces as energy rather than mass, they do indeed 'start to go differently' and that's just what many players need – a new start.

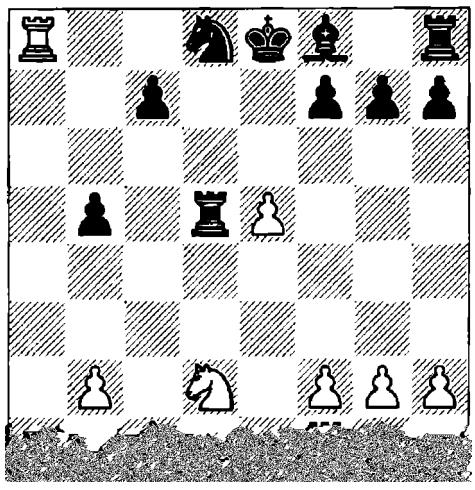
When all is said and done though, I am not radically undermining what we have known for a long time: **material is a hugely important aspect of the game and often the most important one**. Indeed, one of the most significant aspects of $E = mc^2$ is that it says we need a massive amount of energy to create a little bit of mass (c^2, the speed of light squared, although constant, is a huge number). This might suggest that there is good reason to look at material before 'energy' because the cases when there will be enough relevant energy will be few and far between. However, this is too easy an escape because there is no real constant (c^2) in chess, other than the fact that for every move one side plays, the opponent gets another. This suggests to me that the relevant c^2 in chess would be a rather small number, perhaps simply one, to reflect the constant fact that 'one move' involves a move by both sides. 'The speed of light squared' may loosely refer to the speed at which we can do things, and that is related to the fact that we can only make one move at a time.

This may be pushing it too far, but if I'm right to think that the c^2 in chess is best viewed as one (so that material and energy can be viewed as exactly equal) then it reflects the time (initiative) aspect of the game too because the relationship of mass and energy in a given position will depend on one side's use of the material on the available move, and the prospective response. This links us to the next section, because if what I'm saying makes sense then I could tentatively suggest that E (quality) = m (material) × c^2 (time) would be the way in which chess 'fits' the world's most famous equation. The fourth dimension would merely be that in which we wrestle with the equation above. However, for now let's get our heads out of the clouds and put our feet on the ground with an instructive example of my basic point; which is that you should see your pieces as mass and energy.

Capablanca – Em. Lasker
St Petersburg 1914

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♗b5 a6 4 ♗a4 ♘f6 5 0-0 ♘xe4 6 d4 b5 7 ♗b3 d5 8 dxe5 ♗e6 9 ♘bd2 ♘c5 10 c3 d4 11 cxd4 ♘xd4 12 ♘xd4 ♕xd4 13 ♗xe6 ♘xe6 14 ♕f3 ♖d8 15 a4 ♕d5 16 ♕xd5 ♖xd5 17 axb5 axb5 18 ♖a8+ ♘d8 (D)

I took this example from Purdy's *The Search for Chess Perfection*. Purdy is keen to express that all we really mean by 'dynamic play' is play with the pieces. He suggests that we should picture the game as "a hand to hand struggle



between the pieces" and that "The woodshifter, as the name implies, sees the pieces as blocks of wood, whereas the real player ... sees them as units of energy which he can combine in beautiful ways, just as the musical composer can build up bewitching melodies out of scales of mere sounds, each in itself no more interesting than a wooden chess figure." Crucially, he goes on to say: "Don't look at chess in this way because it's romantic. It is, but look at chess this way because it is a way to win."

In any case, what do you think you would play in this position if you had not been told that there was something special to see? Tarrasch, in the book of the tournament, says that 99% of players would play 19 ♘f3. This estimate is by no means implausible and I certainly doubt that I would be one of the 1% 'savants' who saw beyond this conventional knight hop. The attraction to this move is that it's so natural and obvious; you defend your e5-pawn, develop your knight to a reasonable square and open the way for your bishop. What more could you ask of a single move? Perhaps you couldn't ask for more. In fact the key, in a sense, is to ask for less.

Purdy suggests this with the lucid and instructive insight that "the fallacy in this reasoning – truly a popular one – is that the pawn needs defending." I think most players would just take this for granted. The e5-pawn is attacked, White has no particular combinational opportunities, so the e-pawn must be defended. This is quintessential *Materialism.* Your thoughts on material values shape your perception of what is happening in the position and your primary concern is the material balance. Capablanca's genius was to see that White's problem was not so much that he was threatened with loss of material (mass), but that he was threatened with the loss of the ability of his pieces to do anything significant (energy). It can be very foolish to hold on to your material (mass) when this mass has very little energy. Indeed, the most important question here is how to maximize the energy (effectiveness) of your remaining material (mass).

The great Cuban saw the first two reasons for moving his knight, to develop it and free the bishop, but his vision was not limited by the trappings of material. Purdy's insight is again revealing: "Capablanca rebelled against the tyranny of the pawn and looked at the position from the viewpoint of the pieces. Undoubtedly the knight should move, ... but where to? What square gives him the most power?" In other words, Capablanca has no fear of losing material when the energy of his pieces is improved and doesn't want to limit the energy of his pieces by making them hold on to material.

19 ♘e4!

This is a very strong move which maximizes the energy in White's position. Purdy, unsurprisingly impressed with this move, goes on to give the impression that White is now clearly better and that Black is under enormous pressure, but this is highly misleading. Looking at the variations, it seems to me that Capablanca's 19 ♘e4! showed a deep understanding of the relative quality of the positions before his 19th move. If White just plays 'normal moves' Black has an excellent position based on White's pawn weaknesses on e5 and b2 and the light-square weaknesses generally. What is paradoxical is that 19 ♘e4 is not so much an attacking move, but a highly creative defensive effort. It's only because Lasker responded badly that White looked like a swashbuckling hero.

After 19 ♘f3 ♗e7 20 ♗e3 ♔d7!? (20...0-0!?) 21 ♖c1 ♖e8 Black is significantly better. White has no convincing plan and is in severe danger of drifting. Black's knight will soon be well placed on e6 while White's knight doesn't have any particular ideas. White's bishop is restricted by the fact that there are two pawns on dark squares. Black's rook is excellent on d5, where it defends b5, controls the d-file and ties White down to e5 while White's rook on c1

seems to be where it should be but somehow looks a little go n less. Black's king is not in any serious danger and the relative activity of the kings (potential and actual) almost r les out a double rook exchange for White. Black has a very heal t y queenside majority w hle W hte's kingside majority is crippled. All in all, things are highly unpleasant for White, who desperately needs a const r ctive plan. Now:

a) 22 f1? is a natural move that would show a lack of 't end sensitivity' Things go f om bad to worse if you don't face up to the direction of the trends and it's time for White to seek a t ansformation. After 22... l e6 23 : xeS xeS 24 e2 d7, wi t everything stabilized, the above com m ents about Black's positional advantages can be seen even more cle a ly. White should not lose with best play, but it's extremely di f cult to play the b st moves with such a lifeless position. White's problem is not that he has fewer pieces but that these pieces are not as e f ective as their counterpa r . If you look at mass f rst, you'll assume equality is ne a by, but if you look at energy, and what both sides can do, it begins to look like White will have to do something very creative in order not to lose.

b) 22 l d4! is called for: after 22... : xe5 (22... l e6!?) 23 · a5! i f6!? (Black has to return the pawn, and this seems the best way to do it) 24 : xb5 : xb5 25 l xb5 l e6 (given what we k ow about the king as 'a four-point piece', you'll understand why White is not tot a ly out of the wo o s here: the essence of the position is that b2 is signi f cantly weaker than c7 b cause of the positions of the kings, so in the relevant a ena, where all the action is, Black is effectively a piece up, but it feels as though White has good chances to hold this position all t e same) 26 l c3 · b8 27 : d1+ ' c6 2S i c1 i xc3 29 bxc3 · b3 30 i d2 l c5, Black still has some initiative and White will have to defend well for a while.

19...♖xe5 20 ♖d1 ♗e7 21 f3 ♖f5?

The beginning of a collapse, seemingly caused by the desire to keep the extra pawn. In any case, I suspect Black missed White's next move, which is somehow p culiar-looking. Alternatively:

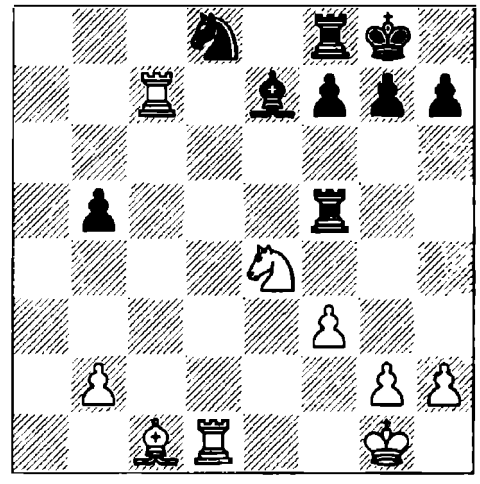
a) A fer 21...0-0 22 i f4 : f5 23 i xc7 l e6 24 : a7 White retains some initiative due to the activity of his pieces, but it looks like Black should hold.

b) 21...c6! looks like crass materialism, but actually Black just wants to dilute some of White's dynamism by making him exchange rooks in the pr o ess of winning t e pawn back. Following 22 i f4 : d5 23 · xd5 cxd5 24 l c3 (after 24 l d6+ i xd6 25 i xd6 d7 Black should emerge with a cle a extra pawn a fer untangling with ... : e s or ...f6 and ... l f7) 24...0-0 25 l xd5 (25 l xb5 l e6 26 : xf8+ ' xf8 is equal too, although there is still some play in the position) 25... i c5+ 26 W f1 l e6 27 ♖xf8+ ' xf8, it looks dead equal.

22 ♖c8!

A di f cult move to see. Somehow the **a8**-rook seems to belong on t e eight r a now, so you don't expect it to come back to c7. Maybe it's just me who f nds t is strange though?

22...0-0 23 ♖xc7 (D)



B

White has a serious initiative, based on his pieces having more energy than Black's (somewhere between slightly and cle a ly better for White). This persisted until move 100, when Black managed to draw.

The Four Dimensions of Chess

As you've probably ga t ered by now, I a keen to look at positions in terms of quality (positional aspects) and time (initiative, tactics) as well as material. T h s idea of looking at chess in a plural way (several aspec t), rather than a m e nist way (material) has been with me in theo r if not in practice for a long time and I ori g nally le a ned about it from no less a player th a

G a y Kasparov. However, I know of few chess thinkers other than Kasparov, even those as brilliant as Nimzowitsch, Suba and Watson, who have tackled chess at what I would call an ontological level. Ontology is just a question of what there is. So to ask about chess ontology, is to ask about how we might reduce this enormously complex pursuit to its most basic aspects. I don't believe in creating theoretical models or algorithms for chess, because the g a e is simply too rich and f ll of wonder and p a adox to be trapped by theory in this way. However, there is some utility in saying what chess is not, so that at least if you cannot protect players from the chaos and complexity of the game, you can at least save t em from the doom of dogmatism. Look ng at chess from t e t ee basic as p cts above is not rigid or overly formulaic, but it's very useful for seeing an ontological alternative to the idea that chess is all about material: "I call chess the game of th ee dimensions b cause you deal with three different subjects: material, time and quality. Material is understood by any beginner ... you know you a e one pawn up, or a piece up, or one rook down; that is how every amateur - and every computer - is anticipat ng the posit on. But then if you grow then you le a n to calculate the time factor as well: 'if I have a very strong attack, and I sacri f ce this piece then my passed pawn will be promoted' There you have to comp a e time and material. Many players c a deal with t ese two factors, but then you go to the most dif f cult factor, which is quality. Now you have a strong knight, or you have a pai of bishops, or better pawn-structure, now you have to deal wi t three dimensions. 'If I sacrifice this pawn now I will be two tempi behind but I have a better pawn-structure for the end-g a e, and I have a ve r go o piece here' ... this is also a major problem for computers. Computers cannot operate in such an unexplained subject as quality, and this is also a problem for most chess-players, even top players ... how to understand quality, because quality doesn't have an exact relation to every position. And that's why if you play in these three dimensions, in every game you can have your moment of inspiration." (G a ry Kasp a ov, interview with Brian Redhead - *Kasparov's Winning Moves* 1993).

These are precious words (though I think he's wrong about computers) from an ingenious mind and we should t eat them with great respect. What astonished me is that they seem to have received no attention. Players seem more interested in the latest novelty in the Dragon than in what chess is all about at the most fundamental level. However, although I le a ned an eno r ous amount by considering these words, I felt there was something missing.

We have le a ned that we live in a four-dimensional universe wi t t ee dimensions of space: up/down; left/right; backw a ds/forw a ds and a fourth dimension which is different in ch a acter from the other three, but not essentially sep a ate - time. Now this suggested to me that Kasp a ov's insight, though brilliantly lucid, could perhaps be made more complete by adding a four h dimension. Just as we navigate ourselves through the three dimensions of space, we navigate ourselves th ough material, time and quality. But movement in the th ee dimensions of space ta k s place within the four h dimension of time. Simil a ly, we consider the com p ting claims of material, time and quality with the clock ticking - a crucial p a t of the game a d one that we constantly have to weigh against the other t ee dimensions. From an objective perspective, Kasp a ov's three dimensions make a lot of sense, but I think this ontology is best applied to chess as a subjective contest with an underst a ding t at a player actually has to deal with four 'subjects' during the g a e: material, time, quality and what I would now like to call 'ticking'.

The following g a e is well known, but even if you've seen it before, I'd like it to be the frst game you consider with t e idea that chess is a game of fo u dimensions.

Kasparov – Shirov
Horgen 1994

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 ♘c6 6 ♘db5 d6 7 ♗f4 e5 8 ♗g5 a6 9 ♘a3 b5 10 ♘d5 ♗e7 11 ♗xf6 ♗xf6 12 c3

Re-routing this wayw a d knight is a priority. White is not certain where the bishop should go, or whether he might castle, but what is cle a is that t is k ight should not stay on a3. I demonstrated this g a e to the Edmonton chess club

in Canada, and most of the audience were desperate to get castled, as if they felt guilty for •neglecting development'. However, there is almost no prospect of the position opening quick y, and we really have a man o uvring contest on our hands, so the placement of our pieces (quality) matters more than the number of them in play (time). The other interesting t ing is that some members of the club, having accepted that improving the knight is a p rority, were quite tempted by the idea of playing 12 c4?!, so as to re-route the knight with gain of time by attacking b4. The problem with this move is that it e r oneously gives time priority over quality, in a position where time is not such a crucial factor. Black plays 12...b4 13 l 2 (13 t xb4 1 a5; 13 ' a4 i d7 14 t xb4 t 4 with huge compensation) 13... l b8 and now the outpost granted to the black knight on d4, and the d a k-square weaknesses generally, would be a maj or quality concession for White, es p cially since he has no dark-squ a ed bishop to cover these weaknesses.

12...♗b7

Based on my comments to the previous move, one of the more ex p rienced players in t e audience, F M Jack Yoos, suggested that since Black's plan with this move involves the following unorthodox knight manoeuvre, and that 12... i b7 is not an essential p a t of this plan, Black might consider 12... t b8!? intending the same idea, but avoiding the problems associated with having the bishop on b7, and keeping the option of moving it elsewhere, probably e6. This left me rather speechless, and so impressed that I asked Jack to b my p a tner in the doubles tourn a ent a few days later. If we follow the traditional recipe we a e left hungry for more because after 13 t c2 t d7 14 a4 bxa4 15 l xa4 l c5 16 l b4 whatever Black chooses, I'm sure it wouldn't be 16... · b7 and in any case I rather like Black's position.

Black's lack of development after 12... t b8 does raise a few metaphorical (bushy) eyebrows though, and although these eyebrows were no use at the time, t ey now help me see that after all I said about c4 not being a go o idea 'in this type of position', 13 c4! is a rather convincing antidote, because Black no longer controls b4. 13... l c6!? 14 cxb5 t d4 is an amusing g a bit, but I suspect that White will have the last laugh. This is a good case of 'jumping out of the system' - despite c4 being generally bad, you should understand the reasoning why this is the case, and then b alert for the exception to this ' r le' You won't be able to do this within your established patterns, b - cause they will 'censor' 13 c4 as 'bad'; you have to le a n to 'jump out', and this requ i es some original thinking and looking at the position as it is, rather than as you see it with your established patterns. This is what I failed to do during the lecture but all the same I didn't regret playing doubles with Jack, who taught me a great deal in the pr o ess.

13 ♘c2 ♘b8!?

Players with experience in Sicilians with ...e5 will appreciate the idea b hind this move, but those who have never played this opening must think that this move is some sort of wind-up. As I have said, the most important dimension in this position is quality and so Black doesn't mind spending time improving his pieces. The key squ a e is d5 and almost everything revolves a ound this squ a e. On c6, the knight not only fails to challenge for this sq u e but prevents the b7-bishop from doing so. However, it is not so much that Black wants to make exchanges on this squ a e, but rather that he needs to organize his forces around it so that it cannot be used to signif cant e f ect. Moreover, the knight has few active possibilities for itself on c6 but on d7 it can come to f6 or b6 to help f ght for d5 or, more likely, go to the c5-squ a e and apply some pressure on e4. Indeed there a e some similarities wi t this move here and 19... t d7 in Shaw-Rawson in Chapter 2. The c2-knight and f1-bishop can be seen as 'su- p r uous' in that they a e under-performing on any squ a e other than d5. Hence, Black wants to remove the knight from a squ a e where White might be able to exchange it and in doing so keeps some 'curviness' in his position.

14 a4!

A timely advance. Black's regrouping d o s improve his quality, but there is some cost in time, and so Kasp a ov hu r es to exploit this. In an ideal world Black would continue ... t d7-c5, ...0-0, ... i g5, ...g6 and ...f5 wi t good play. In the absence of the a4 pawn-break, which Black's knight manoeuvre threatens to prevent, it's not cle a what White should do. By the way, I think

it's fair to say that Black has a small material advantage here, in that he has the hermap h o-dite (two bishops). White has 'compensation' for the material in the form of better quality (more f exible structure, good outpost on d5, a4 break) and time (can generate t e t quickly).

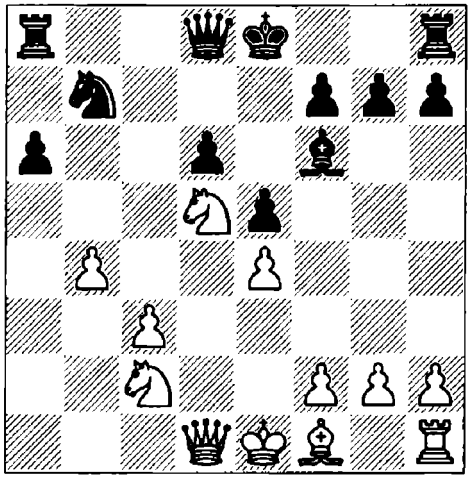
14...bxa4 15 ♖xa4 ♘d7 16 ♖b4!?

This was a novelty at the time. Kasp a ov aims to exploit his early initiative (time) by irritating Black before he can establish quality in his position.

16...♘c5?!

The most consistent move, defending the bishop and begging the question of why Kasparov has wasted so much time with his rook. From a theoretical p rspective Black is t ought to be f ne after 16... . b8!?. At this point in the l e ture I asked the audience to suggest a continuation, with the condition that I would only accept a two-move idea, and that a single move wasn't enough because it could easily be a guess. Many members of the club thought of the move played, but couldn't t ink of a 'continuation' of the sort they were looking for.

B



de unassailable d5- k ight. However, Benj a n doubted if any computer program would find enough relevant factors to compensate for the loss of the material, and I agree. However, 9 .9999% of human chess-players wouldn't underst a d t is position either, until it was explained to them, and even most grandmasters found Kasp a ov's idea something of a revela- t on.

By the way, the f rst two-move suggestion f om the audience was 17 l xb7 followed by 18 ♘cb4 threatening, albeit vaguely, to jump in with the k ights before Black can organize h mself. This is fairly typic a of t e type of con- t nuation we look for when we sacrif ce mate- r al. In our 'angst' we look for tactic a -loo k ng moves which show some promise of winning material back. However, when you view chess as a game of four dimensions this s e uence of moves is not properly called a sacrif ce, but a cansfo n ation. White has l aded material for quality and some time. Moreover, by seizing the initiative (psychologically if not on the b a d) and forcing the opponent into unch a ted a d uncomfortable territory, White is liable to g a n t i e on the cl o k too. Thus, although White loses in one dimension (material), he is gaining in all the other three.

If these moves s t ll don't make sense, we can a so view Kasp a ov's idea from the pers p ctive of $E = mc^2$. All of White's remaining pieces (matter) a e full of 'ability to do work' and thus have more energy, while Black's pieces have few claims to any such ability. Although Black seems to have more mass on the point system, f om the $E = mc^2$ p rspective he is not material up at all.

I don't want to overload this explanation, but t is last point seems rather important because no matter how much some players appreciate a l of the above, they a e left with the feeling that they couldn't imagine playing this way themselves. As one guy put it to me: "I see that t e knight on b7 is bad, and I can see that Black is the exchange up. Now that b7-knight can move, b t how is White going to win back the exchange?" The f st p a t of the answer is not to look for compensation, but to consider all the dimensions but even if you cannot get beyond your material 'angst' then it's impor t nt to see that White's 'compensation' is not a matter of 'time' in that he's going to st ike while that k ight is bad but rather a question of quality, which will last for the foreseeable future and extends beyond t e bad placement of one piece. You need somehow to see the whole position rather than just think of the material and then look for t e com p nsation. I'm not pretending t is is easy, but it has to be done.

18... i g5

If Black had castled, White would have played 19 L ce3 with the intention of 20 L c4. I deliberately told the audience that Black's last move prevented t s idea (of bringing the k ght to c4) and I was am a ed that they a most all b - lieved me! Virtually nobody saw that it could a so get to c4 via a3. There was a huge handicap based on the fact that the knight doesn't l o k at all good on a3. The ' k ight on the rim is dim' cliche simply closed off a whole idea because one step of the application ran contr a y to es- tablished patterns. What I liked more was t at a ound four people mentioned this moment to me, with a huge a ount of excitement as if t ey had surprised themselves with their own blind- ness and could see their folly for the f st t e. When you see that the knight wants to be on c4 it's no problem to go there via a3 but for many players the desire to put their knight on a go o squ a e has much less of a hold on them t an ' r les' which t ey've k own for sever a ye a s.

19 ♘a3! 0-0 20 ♘c4 a5!?

Quite a big decision for Black because this move weakens b5 and gives White a passed pawn.

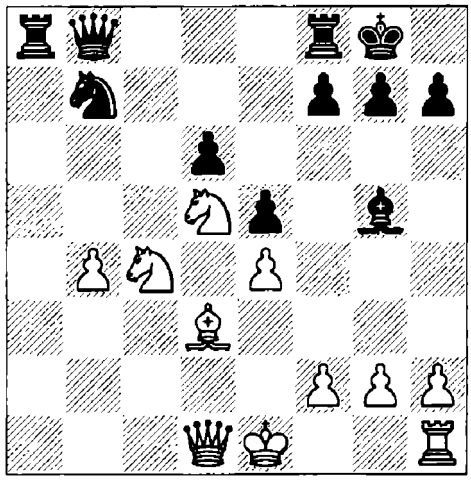
20...f5!? looks more threatening for White, but according to Kasparov White is cle a ly b tter after 21 · d3 f4 22 ' g4.

21 ♗d3 axb4 22 cxb4 ♕b8 (D)

The pseudo-active 22... l a2?! d o sn't ac h eve much after 23 0-0 ' a8 24 L cb6 ' a3 25 i c4 l d2 26 ' g4, when White has a co m anding position and Black's minor pieces still look a bit lost.

22... · h6!?, as suggested by Kasp a ov, may be Black's best try to gain a playable position. After 23 0-0 1 g5 Black's qu a ity has improved somewhat, and a t ough his knight h a been ne- glected, his queen and bishop prevent White from doing anything on the kingside and the rooks can see each other for the f st time.

23 h4!



A very important move in terms of keeping White's upward trend. Kasparov gives us a good example of 'moment sensitivity' that we saw in Chapter 2. Black's last move, vacating d8 for the knight and threatening ... • a7-d4, gives a typical 'sign' in terms of pending counterplay. The change in queenside structure has also left d4 as a post for Black's pieces so White must show some controlled urgency to prevent the trend from turning in Black's favour (sensitivity). The last move also had a drawback, however, in that it weakened a lot of squares (especially e7) and temporarily places the queen on a funny square (signal).

There is a simple point to Kasparov's move. On g5 the bishop controls two useful diagonals (h6-c1 and h4-d8) and thus controls a lot of squares. This move forces it to give up one of the diagonals and thus gives White useful information for deciding on the best way to proceed. This shows Kasparov is highly attuned to the time as pect of the game.

The pedestrian 23 0-0? allows Black to coordinate by 23... d8! 24 b6 ♗a7!, when Kasparov even thinks that Black is slightly better, perhaps because 25... e6 and 26... · d8 threatens to push White back and there is no obvious plan for White. Personally, I would still rather be White here but I agree that the position has gone downhill.

23... · h6

A difficult decision. Black weakens e7 and f6 but offers hope to the b7-knight, who can still find a new life for itself past the shores of d8.

After 23... · d8 24 g3! (simple - White wants to castle, and in the absence of... d8-e6, Black has no particular threat that has to be attended to) 24... · a7 25 0-0 • d4 26 ♕b3 White is again clearly better. The proud queen on d4 has no support and even though Black can exchange rooks with 26... ♖a1 27 ♖xa1 • xa1+ 28 ♔g2, Black remains utterly planless and has no way to use his remaining rook, while White can slowly try to creep his queen into the queenside to annoy the crippled black knight.

24 ♘cb6! ♖a2 25 0-0!

At last. Many would find it unbearable to have a king in the centre in the presence of such a menacing-looking major piece as the rook on a2, but when looked at calmly you'll see that Black's prospects for counterplay are really rather limited. Moreover, only now, when White has used the pieces in action to keep Black uncoordinated, is it necessary to think about using the rook.

Note that instead 25 ♘d7 is met by 25... · a7, attacking f.

25... ♖d2 26 • r3 • a7 27 ♘d7?

The following analysis by Kasparov suggests that White missed a chance to transform the nature of his advantage here: 27 · b5! ♘d8 28 ♘d7 ♘e6 29 ♘e7+! (29 ♘xf ♗xf8 30 ♖e1 ♕b8 is just equal, because Black is well organized) 29... ♗h8 30 ♘xf8 • xe7 31 ♘xe6 and now:

a) 31...fxe6? 32 ♖e1! (32 · a1 g6 33 ♖a8+ ♗g7 34 • a3 • xh4 35 • a7+ ♗f6 36 · es ♖d1+ 37 · f1 ♔g5 is uncle a according to Kasparov) 32... · d8 (Kasparov doesn't mention 32...g6, but presumably 33 ♗c8+ ♗g7 34 · c4 th eatening · xe6 is convincing because 34... ♗c2 35 · xe6 ♖xc8 36 · xc8 ♕xh4 37 b5! is winning) 33 ♗c6 and White is clearly better.

b) 31... · xe6 32 · c6 is given a only slightly better for White by Kasparov but such a position is horrible to defend and White's better bishop and passed pawn are enduring features that mean that Black will be under pressure for a long time.

27... ♘d8?

Shirov should have played 27... ♖a8! 28 ♘7b6! (28 ♘e7+ ♔h8 29 • xf7 ♗xd3 30 ♘f8 • a2 31 • f5 g6 32 ♘fxg6+ hxg6 33 • xg6 • d2 34 • n · g7 35 ♘f5 · f8 36 • h5+ and White has to settle for perpetual check) when Kasparov gave 28... ♗f8, transposing back to the game (at move 26), but Nunn points out 28... · a3! ∓.

28 " xf8 ♔xf8 29 bS!

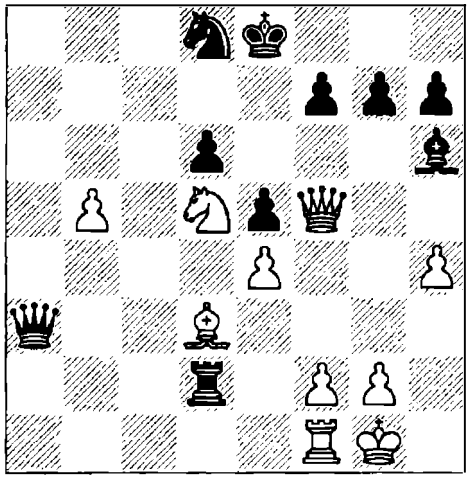
The hitch-hiker wakes from a long sleep by the side of the road, and decides that he's going to make something of himself. One of the less spoken about features of this game is the vigour with which Kasparov played the technical phase. Many of us might relax now that we've got our material back and kept some positional advantages, but Kasparov notices that Black has some problems with time too, and he takes full advantage of all available tactics to use this time advantage to gain material.

29... i a3

Black missed a way to make things more difficult for White with 29...♕d4!. Kasparov's analysis begins with 30 ♖d1! (30 ♕f5 ♔e8) 30...♖xd1+ 31 ♕xd1 ♘e6 32 b6 ♘c5 33 ♗c2 ♕xd1+ 34 ♗xd1 ♔e8 35 ♗g4 but now his line continued 35...♘d7(??), although this is a straightforward blunder, since 36 ♗xd7+ (rather than 36 b7?, which he gave followed by a very long variation) 36...♔xd7 37 b7 wins trivially. 35...♘a6(??) has been given in some sources, but is just as disastrous in view of the equally simple 36 ♘c7+. Therefore, 35...♔d8 is necessary, when 36 ♘b4 is given as winning for White by Kasparov, but 36...♘e6 then looks most resilient. White is of course much better, but I don't see an immediate knockout. 37 ♗h5 g6 38 ♗e2 looks promising, however.

30 ' f5! < e8 (D)

W



30...♖xd3 is met by 31 ♕d7, and White is winning.

31 . t c4 : c2

31...♕c5 32 ♕xh7! ♔d7 33 ♕f5+ ♔e8 34 ♗b3 ♖b2 35 ♗d1 is winning for White – Kasparov.

32 i xh7! : xc4 33 ' g8+ d7 34 l b6+ ' e7 35 t xc4 ' cS

Even now there are some technical problems and it's entirely possible to cause a trend turn from winning to clearly better if White plays anything less than the best move here. Still, talking to your pieces should give a clear answer. Which piece has been modestly watching the proceedings but is now needed as reinforcements for Her Majesty?

36 : at! ' d4

36...♕xc4 loses to 37 ♖a7+ ♔e6 38 ♕e8+.

37 : a3! ♗c1 38 t e3! 1-0

A pleasingly harmonious move to end a superlative game.

Summary and Suggestions

Materialism is a multi-faceted sin. It is based on the fact that there is a conceptual flaw in the ways in which we assign values to material. It limits our imagination because material factors are so entrenched and inflexible in our thoughts that we often cannot see good moves which involve giving it up. Material values may hold 'in general' but chess is exceptional and we play exceptional positions, one game at a time. We tend to suffer from angst when material down, and instinctively associate material loss with error. I suggest three main ways to try to overcome this predicament.

1) Try thinking of all the pieces as unique characters rather than just a certain number of points.

2) Think of the pieces as 'bundles of energy' to be judged on their ability in a given position rather than 'blocks of wood' with a static value that never changes.

3) See chess as a game of four dimensions, only one of which is material.

5 Egoism

The desire to get rid of ego implies a contest: ego is *charged with killing ego; ego battles with ego; ego wins!*
CHERI HUBER

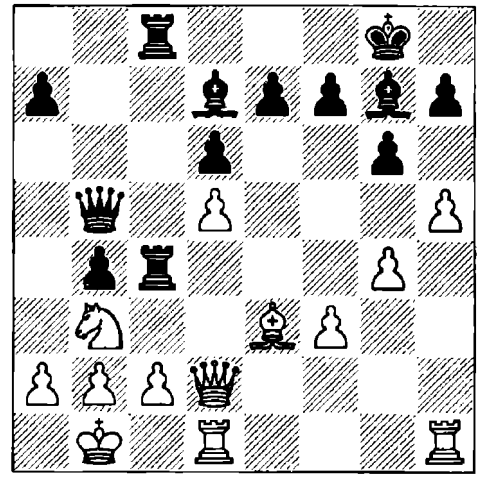
'Ego' is not just about Muhammad Ali prancing around the ring and proclaiming he's the greatest. Nor is it just about thinking you are much better than you actually are. Ego is there every time you think of yourself as yourself and feel the presence of an 'I' Chess is about my 'I' against your 'I'; it's 'me' against 'you'. It's one ego against another.

We all have egos, and chess without ego is unimaginable.

The sin of *Egoism* thus encompasses all those errors that stem from your ego: lack of 'objectivity', failing to think of your opponent's ideas as carefully as your own, feeling fear, self-doubt, feeling 'over-awed' by your opponent's rating, being aware of people watching your game, thinking of how great your play is during the game and so on and so on. The essence of this sin is captured by GM Jonathan Tisdall (*Improve Your Chess Now*): "We prefer to think about what we want to do, and often forget to give our opponent his proper status in our reckonings", while the significance of *Egoism* is expressed by Jeremy Silman (*The Amateur's Mind*): "The most common error that the amateur makes (in any situation) is to ignore the opponent's possibilities. Only when a direct threat (real or imagined) appears on the board do they respond, though this response tends to be filled with panic."

I will touch on some of these aspects more than others. My main aim in this chapter is to highlight the fact that we play chess from an unavoidably 'subjective' viewpoint, and that striving for 'objectivity' is not necessarily helpful. I will look at what this means for our chances of outwitting the opponent, and then focus on two main ideas designed to tame the worst excesses of our *Egoism*: 'responsibility' and 'prophylaxis'. I begin with a striking example that brings out many aspects of *Egoism*.

W



Jansa – Bilek
Polanica Zdroj 1968

It's White to move and there is an important question concerning the c2-pawn. Does Black threaten to take here? If you've absorbed my suggestions from the previous chapter, you'll do more than see the line whereby White gains two rooks for queen and pawn, and thus, after a quick calculation (9+1 = 10 = 5+5), conclude that it's nothing to worry about. Surprisingly, this was precisely the reaction from many of those to whom I have shown this position. So if you do fall into that leaky boat, consider the quality in the positions after that exchange and you'll notice the awesome mobility of Black's queen, the weakness of the kingside pawns and the uncertain future of White's king. Not to mention the hermaphrodite, and the initiative being entirely in Black's hands.

So either we defend c2 or else we put the ball in the back of the net on the kingside. The latter option looks unlikely at this stage, and although it is worth checking out 1 hxg6 or 1 ♗d4 before proceeding, you'll find that they don't stop the main threat. Hence, those who have enough awareness of their opponent will probably resign

themselves to the awkward-looking rook-shift 1 ♖c1, but in fact there is another solution.

1 ♘a1!

Chess humour? There you were, all kitted-out in your caveman outfit ready to give mate on the kingside, and the best move turns out to be a retreat to what looks like the least attacking square the board. When I tried to solve this puzzle in Hort and Jansa's classic, *The Best Move*, I didn't even consider such a retreat and was startled to find that it was there at all. I settled for the sub-standard 1 ♖c1 only to read that: "This [1 ♘a1] is much better than 1 ♖c1 because the rook is needed for attack, not defence!" Though a simple statement, this is quite a profound insight, and, together with the move, it relates closely to some of the issues we've seen in the previous chapters. First of all, it considers the character of the pieces and their role (what they 'say') in the given position; secondly, it treats the position as whole (*gestalt*) – the knight looks dreadful on a1, but the rest of the army are enormously grateful to the knight for accepting such a claustrophobic post. Finally, and most significantly, White's moves and plans are considered not in abstract, but directly in relation to Black's.

I suspect that most players, assuming they saw it, could never bring themselves to play such a move just because they would only see the knight on a1, and not consider it as part of the whole position. However, although Black's queenside play looks rather imposing, it really only has two objects – the c2-square and chasing the knight with ...a5-a4. So with this one move White effectively holds up a whole army. Moreover, whereas the knight had no particular way to attack the black king, the d1-rook is very useful where it is, in that it's more difficult for Black to move his e-pawn (d6 weakness) and it can also come to the h- or e-file if necessary.

This is prophylaxis at its best, but it's very difficult for us to see this type of move because most of the time we are too absorbed in our own plans to be willing to play such a 'compromising' move to halt those of our opponent. *Egoism* could manifest itself either in not seeing the strength of ...♖xc2, deceiving yourself into thinking that there was no need to defend immediately (trying 1 ♗d4 or 1 hxg6), seeing the need to defend but not looking closely enough at your opponent's ideas and how they relate to your own (1 ♖c1), or seeing 1 ♘a1 but feeling that it's too submissive a move and refusing to allow your opponent to make you play such 'passive' chess (maybe 1 ♖h2).

The following lines are my own interpretation of why 1 ♘a1 was called for:

a) 1 hxg6 ♖xc2! 2 gxf7+ ♔xf7 3 ♕xc2 ♖xc2 4 ♔xc2 ♕e2+ 5 ♗d2 ♗a4 with overwhelming threats.

b) 1 ♗d4 ♖xc2! 2 ♕xc2 ♖xc2 3 ♔xc2 ♕e2+ and White will lose at least three pawns.

c) 1 ♖h2 ♖xc2! 2 ♕xc2 ♖xc2 3 ♖xc2 gxh5! and White's position crumbles.

d) 1 ♘d4 ♕xd5 2 ♘f5 ♕xd2 3 ♘xe7+ ♔f8 and Black wins.

e) 1 ♖c1!? a5 2 hxg6 (2 ♕h2 g5! 3 ♗xg5 f6 4 ♗e3 ♕xd5 is a bit messy but I think Black is better) 2...fxg6 3 ♕h2 h5! 4 gxh5 (after 4 ♘d2 ♕xd5! 5 ♘xc4 ♕xc4 the hermaphrodite and queenside play give Black the better prospects, e.g. 6 gxh5? ♗e6! –+) 4...♗f5 5 ♘a1 (5 ♘d4 ♖xd4 6 ♗xd4 ♗xd4 7 hxg6 ♗g7 is clearly better for Black) 5...b3! 6 axb3 a4! and Black's attack arrives first.

1...e6

1...♗e5 "is more promising", according to Jansa and Hort, who add: "but even then White can maintain his advantage; e.g., 2 hxg6 fxg6 3 f4 ♗c3 4 ♕h2 h5 5 bxc3."

This is sloppy analysis and much is unsaid. Let's look a little deeper. 1...♗e5 2 hxg6 and now:

a) 2...hxg6 3 ♕f2 e6 4 ♕h4 exd5 5 ♗g5 +– is consistent with their assessment.

b) 2...fxg6 and then:

b1) After 3 f4 ♗g7! (3...♗c3? is a gratuitous error) it seems to me that Black can hold the kingside and even claim some advantage, e.g. 4 ♕h2 h6 5 f5 g5.

b2) 3 ♕f2 looks like an improvement, but then the sober 3... : t ! 4 ♕h4 ♖f7 leaves White struggling to equalize, e.g. 5 ♘b3 ♗f5!.

In fact, much as I admire 1 ♘a1!, and would like to hail it as a winning move, it's more a question of damage limitation, just like 19 ♘e4! in Capablanca-Lasker in the previous chapter. Such a consideration may detract from the romance of 1 ♘a1 but it serves to highlight its strength as the move the position needed. Such a surprise can often turn the prevailing trend,

and, as the alternatives revealed, without the 'humble' 1 ♘a1, White could have been crushed very quickly.

This is another aspect of *Egoism* – the difficulty in accepting that your good moves don't necessarily leave you with a good position. As someone wise and witty once put it, "your opponent also h a the right to exist".

2 hxg6 hxg6 3 ♕**h2** exd5 4 i h7+ ♔**f8** 5 . h6

Positional carnage on top of everything else. Black must have 'lost the plot' after 1 ♘a1, probably in line with 'Nunn's hangover theory' – see Chapter 7 (*Looseness*).

5... . xh6 6 Wxh6+ We8 7 ' h8+ q e7 8 ' h4+ f6

8...♔e8 9 ♖de1+ ♗e6 10 ♖xe6+ fxe6 11 ♕h8+ and wins.

9 l hel+ <d8 **10** ' xf6+

White has a winning position.

Subjects and Objects

It is an illusion to think that the subjective decision does not really exist – that once the objective truth is established, there will be a smooth transition to subjective acceptance. This illusion is rooted in a profound ignorance of the nature of personal decision-making, and a desire to shirk the anguish of subjective choice.
SØREN KIERKEGAARD, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*

The erasure of subjectivity in order to be objective is itself a subjective act. What else can it be?
R. D. LANG, *What's the Matter with Mind?*

The point of view that we can be without a point of view is a point of view... The new physics, quantum mechanics, tells us clearly that it is not possible to observe reality without changing it.
GARY ZUKAV, *The Dancing Wu Li Masters*

Why does the word 'subjective' have such negative connotations? We don't seem to have a problem with being 'subjects', and rightly object to people treating us like 'objects', but when we make decisions from a 'subjective' viewpoint we tend to think that we are making some sort of mistake, and should strive instead to be 'objective' This seems peculiar, and since *Egoism* stems from our subjective perspective, there may be some value in trying to understand it.

The most concise description of objectivity in chess I have seen comes from GM Paul Motwani's lively and instructive *H.O.T. Chess*: "By this [objectivity] I mean the ability of a player to assess positions accurately. This quality of being able to see things the way they really are is extremely valuable to a person, and not only in chess. It can be very tempting to view things the way one wants them to be, instead of seeing them the way they actually are."

I think Paul is saying that you are capable of being objective in so far as you are capable of seeing the position without any desire for it to be a certain way, as if you were to have the eyes of a third party. This would indeed be a useful quality, but although striving for such a perspective is well-motivated, I have my doubts as to whether it is possible during practical play. Indeed, it seems to me that during a game we can only be objective from a subjective perspective.

I am not only saying this because it accords with my personal experience, but to see things as they 'actually are' would be an enormous achievement which goes against the grain of human perception. This discussion could easily become more philosophical than useful so I'll limit myself to referring the reader back to *Thinking*, and reiterating that humans by their very nature are enormously self-deceptive, will only see that which experience has shown them to be there, cannot help but want the position to be a certain way and will always see the position from a background of emotional memories and pre-established patterns.

I mention this now because in the context of *Egoism*, it's important to realize that you cannot escape your subjective perspective during the game. This is not to say that subjectivity is unambiguously a good thing, but just that you may simply confuse or limit yourself if you try too hard to be 'objective' 'Objectivity' is a very important quality after the game, when you try to determine what was happening during play. If you genuinely and dispassionately want to understand a game in isolation from the psyches of the contestants, then some sort of objectivity is attainable, and desirable if you

are to annotate the game well. But during play you are locked in to your own thoughts and feelings. You want certain things. You are scared by some moves and pleased to find others. Most of all you are sitting opposite another subject. There is an object, and this is the chessboard, but it lies in wait between two subjects, longing for interpretation. Neither player can see the board as it is, but only with their own, subjective eyes.

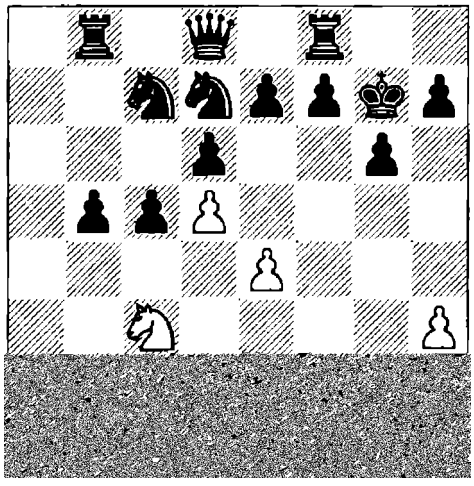
This subjective perspective leads to a lot of mistakes, as we see in the next two examples:

Speelman – Hartston

The Master Game, London 1975

1 d4 ♘f6 2 ♘c3 c5 3 d5 d6 4 e4 g6 5 ♘f3 ♗g7 6 ♗e2 ♘a6 7 0-0 0-0 8 ♗f4 ♘c7 9 a4 ♗g4 10 ♕d2 a6 11 h3 ♗xf3 12 ♗xf3 ♘d7 13 ♗e2 ♖b8 14 ♗h6 b5 15 axb5 axb5 16 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 (D)

W



This game was played with one hour each on the clock and the commentary was recorded after the game, for presentation on British television, so this was not a hugely serious contest, but the comments are revealing all the same. The two subjects (players) give a report on their thoughts about the object (the game). Notice how many times the pronoun 'I' is used:

Speelman: "I'll attack on the queenside with pawn to b4. If I don't do that he'll attack me there, and I would much rather be the aggressor." Speelman's motivation comes from an awareness of his opponent's intentions but it is supported by a personal preference.

17 b4

Hartston: "Yes, I was worried about that. I wanted to push my b-pawn but he's prevented me expanding on that side. If I take the pawn he can check and win it back. Still, I must take. I'm under some pressure here." Hartston is also aware of the opponent, but rather than make an objective assessment of the form 'White is slightly better' he makes the assessment from his own perspective.

17...cxb4

Speelman: "I suppose I could play queen check but I think I'll play knight back and then try to retake with the knight and get it to the nice square c6." This is a good example of *Egoism*. For one move Speelman 'forgets' about his opponent, and doesn't consider his opponent's likely reaction nor compare the options in any non-subjective way. It sounds a bit harsh, but basically he followed the dictates and desires of his ego. Many players would like the look of their knight on c6 and also try to get it there, but it's important to ask whether your desire can b realized, given that your opponent also has desires.

18 ♘a2

Hartston: "Well, that's a pleasant surprise. I can exchange this horrible knight on c7 when he takes the pawn back. Wonder why he didn't give the queen check."

18 ♕d4+ ♔g8 19 ♕xb4 ♘c5 20 ♖fe1 looks slightly better for White. Note that Hartston is constantly trying to get inside his opponent's mind. The use of 'horrible' also indicates a very human perspective.

18...♘a6! 19 ♘xb4 ♘xb4 20 ♕xb4 ♘f6

Black is very close to equality now.

21 ♗xb5 ♘xe4 22 ♕xe4 ♖xb5 23 ♖a7 ♖e8

Black offered a draw in this position. Speelman declined, thinking he was slightly better, and not wanting to play another game that day, but he made an unsound pawn sacrifice in the process of overpressing, and lost.

N. Thomas – Redpath

Edinburgh 2000

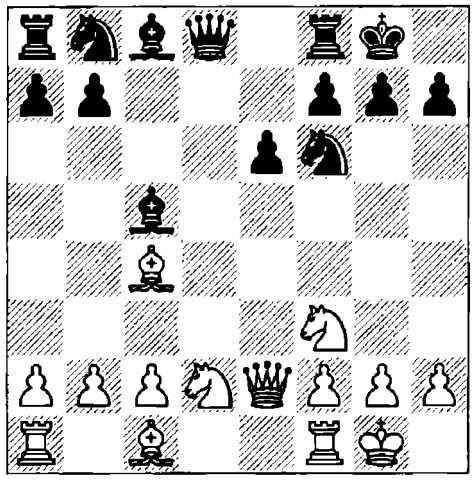
White is rated around 2065 and Black is the promising junior I mentioned in the notes to the first game of the last chapter.

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘d2 c5 4 exd5 ♕xd5 5 dxc5 ♗xc5 6 ♘gf3 ♘f6 7 ♗c4 ♕d8

7... · c6! is thought to be f ne for Black from a theoretic a point of view.

8 0-0 0-0 9 ♕**e2** (D)

B



This position reminds me of a f a ous game Nunn-Levitt, Lloyds Bank Masters, London 1983, annotated in detail in ***Secrets of Grandmaster Chess***. Nunn makes an instructive comp a ison with the main lines where Black plays ...cxd4. In the process of regaining the pawn on d4 in those lines Black exchanges o f the c6-knight (l b3-d4) which is not a particularly important piece for Black, but here White can exchange off the f6-knight (l e4), which could leave the black king without any defenders.

White's most e fective plan is b3, · b2, centralizing the rooks and playing l e4 at a suitable moment, to remove the main kingside defender. Black's problems stem from lack of development and poor control of the e5-squ a e, which prevents him from developing his bishop or challenging White's piece dominance in the centre.

9...♗e7?

Egoism. Black has his own idea of how his position should develop, i.e. by ...b6, ... · b7, ... l bd7 and ... · c7, but pays insu f cient attention to what White might do in the meantime. Joe shows a good sense of where the pieces belong in this respect, especially because the f6-knight needs to be 'replaced' by the other knight. However, in seeing a drawback to the i m ediate i plemen t tion of the idea, he didn't stop to ask whether his position was good enough to allow for such a set-up without making any concessions to the opponent. The problem is that what is best for Black is entirely dependent on what White will do, and thus we need to look at the position from the point of view of White's intentions if we are to discover how Black should proceed.

Looking at the position after the game, and not as one of the players, I can approach something like an 'objective' assessment, but during play it is often better just to be more aware of your opponent. In this respect Joe saw the reaction to the move he wanted to play, but did so from his own perspective; "I want to do this, but then he'll do that, so I'll do this instead, and then ... well, he has no obvious reply". As an essential complement to this way of thinking, we need also to think something like: "His main idea is this; how do I relate to that?".

In the given position, a close look at White's plans would reveal that Black's biggest problem is lack of time. If you only see Black's side of the bo a d you won't see this, but once you ac k owledge the s p ed of b3, · b2 and l e4, losing more time with 9... · e7 would not be on the agenda.

Black should play 9...b6! (9... l bd7!? 10 b3 b6 11 l e4 is similar), but Joe didn't like the look of 10 l e4!, and didn't see a suitable answer, but despite the strength of this move, he simply had to persist in trying to get t e pieces out, viz. 10... t bd7! 11 t xc5 t xc5. It's not pleasant to give away the bishop-pair like this, but in return Black is almost fully mobilized. Egoism **often manifests itself in this way – the refusal to make concessions to your opponent, even when they are necessary.** Moreover, it takes a strong player to know how to play with White now and most would mistakenly attack on the kingside. He can choose between:

a) 12 b3 · b7 13 · b2, and now Black d o s best to choose 13... · c7!. The queen looks 'safer' on e7 but it doesn't in any way contribute to the cen t al struggle and l d4-f5 may be i r itating. It's important to realize that · xf6 is rarely a positional threat in such positions. Again it's a question of trade-o fs. You double your pawns and slightly weaken your king, but your opponent loses the he r aphrodite and unopposed bishop. Just as we saw in Chapter 2, it's a question of the ways in which advantages and disadvantages a e transformed. However, **when you suffer from** Egoism **you tend to see**

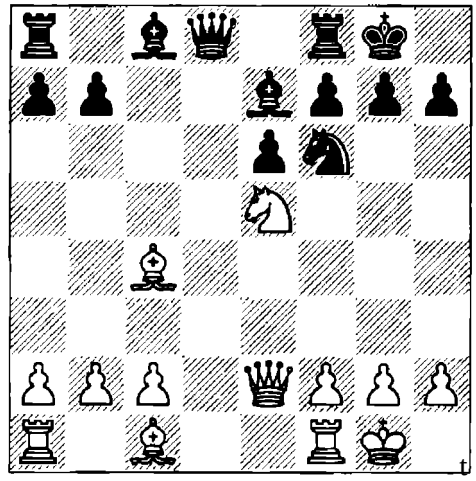
the position exclusively from your own point of view. Thus you wouldn't be willing to give up the two bishops by allowing ♘xc5, because you'd be blind to what your opponent was trading in return. Similarly you wouldn't want to allow ♗xf6 because you would feel the concessions in your position much more intensely than your opponent's. In this position White is perhaps slightly better, but Black can face the future with some confidence because his forces coordinate well and there's a good chance that White will overestimate his position and fail to find a good role for the c4-bishop. Following 14 ♘e5 (14 ♕e5 looks better, but Black is quite active, and after 14...♖ac8 15 ♕xc7 ♖xc7 16 ♗e2 ♘d5! he has the easier game) 14...♖ad8, Black might continue with ...♘fe4-d6 and maybe a timely ...f6 and ...e5, reminding White that he also has a trump in the form of an extra centre pawn.

b) 12 ♖d1!? ♕c7 13 ♕e5! ♕xe5 14 ♘xe5 ♗b7 15 f3! is the way to do it – the so-called Steinitzian restriction method. You prevent the knights from gaining any good squares and slowly gain space while keeping your bishops as long-rangers, well away from any tactical inconveniences. White can follow up with ♗f1, ♗e3 and then a gradual advance of the queenside pawns with a significant but by no means overwhelming advantage. This would have been a consistent line of play. Another aspect of Egoism is the propensity to assume favourable assessments are attainable more quickly than they actually are ('I want it all, and I want it now!'). In the given instance Black had 'no right' to look for equality on move 9, because he was Black and had already made a mistake (7...♕d8). With best play Black probably shouldn't lose from such a position, but if he tries to equalize too quickly he is liable to make his position worse.

10 t eS

This seems to help Black develop and leads to the exchange of the queen's knight rather than the more important horse on f6. It's not such a bad move, but I prefer the simple 10 b3!, followed by ♗b2, ♖ad1 and ♘e4, which would bring considerable pressure to bear. Black is several tempi behind and White will start to attack before Black is ready to defend.

10... t bd7 11 t df3 t xeS 12 t xeS (D)



Black is by no means out of the woods here but it's still not easy to develop the c8-bishop. Given White's advantage in time, Black is probably obliged to trade in a little quality ♕ke

two bishops are almost worth a pawn - it will certainly take your opponent a long time to show o t erwise) 17... ' ixd6 18 t g6 ' ib4 19 t x f : xf8 and the opposite-coloured bishops m a e a draw the most likely result. One has to be very resistant to *Egoism* to make this ty p of t ansfo r ation. What you have to see is that although b ing a pawn down is no great pleasure for you, being a pawn up in an opposite-coloured bishop position would seem like a poor trade for your opponent, given his prior optimism concerning his development advantage. When we have an advantage, most of us want to exploit it quickly. So o fering your opponent a long di f cult ending, even if it's bad for you, may well divert him from the strongest line of play.

13 : d l : d8 14 i e3?

I f nd that such impulsive-looking moves a e often related to the desire to win a spectacul a game. This desire is of course related to the ego's need for recognition. The di f cul t lies in thinking too much about self-satisfac t on after the game, and not enough about your opponent's possibilities during it. White was impatient for satisfaction, and in looking to the 'glory beyond' he made a simple miscalculation.

Instead, 14 : xd8+ ' ixd8 15 i g5 keeps the initiative. White will remain cle a ly better until Black manages to solve his development problem.

14... ' ixb2 15 i cS? l xd1+ 16 : xd1 i xc5 17 : d8+?

White should play 17 t d3!? i x f +! 18 ' ix f ' ib6 19 c5, when he at least retains some swindling chances.

17... i f8 18 g4 ' ib6 19 ' id3 ' c7 20 g5 l dS 21 l e8 ' ixe5 22 ' ia3 ' ie1+ 23 g2 ' ib4 0-1

It might seem that the mistakes made in these games were caused by a lack of objectivity, but I think this is only p a tly true at b st. It certainly seems that the players were, at times, highly subjective, and too egocen t ic to f nd the best moves, but it doesn't follow that the antidote to this is to be more objective. To maximize your chances of competitive success, it is essential to be aw a e of your opponent's likes and dislikes and all their human fallibilities. You must remember that you are a subject playing another subject. Consequently, to view t e position objectively is to miss an eno r ous reservoir of insights into the ways in which the g a e is perceived during play.

To be 'objec t ve' is to treat **as** an object that which is p r imarily a battle f eld between subjec t . As we saw in the Preface, the object has no character until we give it one. It is useful to be 'objective' away from the heat of battle, but during play you a e an ego up against another ego. To wrench yourself out of this context and try to view the game dispassionately f om a third-p a ty perspective may cause more problems than it solves. Not only do you disturb your natural inclination to be subjective and by-pass the rhyme and reason of your own sensibilities, but in doing so you unde r ine your capacity to sense your opponent's subjective perspective, and miss opportunities to exploit this.

I certainly think I held back my own chess development by trying too hard to be objective. For a long time I was told by var ous t ainers and chess f iends that I should 'be more objective' but in t ying to do so I de f nitely lost some of my competitive edge. I beg a to view chess more as a series of intellectual problems than a f ght, and thus behaved more like an academic than a wa r ior. I also felt that this aim of becoming more objective was some sort of burden that sti f ed my enjoyment of the game. In fact, the s t enuous e f o r s I made to be 'objective' made me increasingly aw a e of my subjective point of view.

The 'objective side' of the g a e is not without interesting features, but the pursuit of beauty and t uth is incidental to the battle between psyches over the bo a d. In con t ving to escape from my subjective perspective during play I lost my sense of balance at several crucial moments. In g a es against grandmasters I found that they were almost never asking 'is this move true?' but rather 'will this move work?' Somehow we have to strive to feel strong in our subjective perspective du r ng play, w thout forgetting that there **is** a di f erence between what we would like to happen, and what is likely to happen. Being subjective has its problems, but so does being objective. It seems we need an alte r ative ou t ook.

'Inter-subjectivity'

A problem shared is a problem halved.
PROVERB

Perhaps the most reliable way to overcome our own subjective predic a ent is to share it with the opponent! You do this formally in any case of co u se, but I a suggesting that we can b ne-f t by being more conscious of our oppo n nt as a subject and an ego and incorporating an aw a e-ness of this into our over-the-bo a d decision-m a ing. Thus our aim is not to look at the game a an object and be 'objective', but to play with a full aw a eness of ourselves as a subject, and an equal aw a eness of the subject sitting oppo-site. I have coined the te r 'inter-subjectivi t ' to ch a acterize this p rspective, which is like a 'third way' in that it refuses to be either entirely subjective or entirely objective, but instead seeks to ret a n the best of both.

I was prompted to think of this perspective a er my six-g a e match with GM Michael Ad-ams in 1998. I 'celebrated' my 21st bi r day the day the score tu r ed 3-0 a d Mickey later told me that he was surprised I was so young: "I didn't realize you were so young Jon; if I'd known I might have played a bit di f erently. At your age you tend to see things just from your own point of view, but when you get a bit older you st a t to see it from both sides." This com-ment made a deep impression on me, and the cu r ent chapter is an attempt to make sense of it.

If you've ever had the pleasure of playing through the g a es of Tal, or reading his a nota-tions, you may have been s t uck by the way he seems to be acutely aw a e of his opponent's sensibilities and the magic a way he seeks to exploit them. I certainly was when I began to acquaint myself with Tal as an impressionable 14-year-old and I remain captivated today. There is a sense in which Tal was completely oblivious to the claims of objectivity, as is sug-gested by many successful at t cks that were re-futed in 'objective analysis' after the games. However, there is a more subtle sense in which he was deeply 'objective', not in the conven-tional sense of considering the position without personal prejudice, but in a full and considered awareness of how his opponent is thinking and feeling about the position. It wasn't that Tal just followed the dictates of his ego and passion-ately sacrificed to please the crowd, it was rather than he was acutely aware that just as he had fe a s, emotions, regrets, doubts, desires and confusing thoughts, so did his opponent.

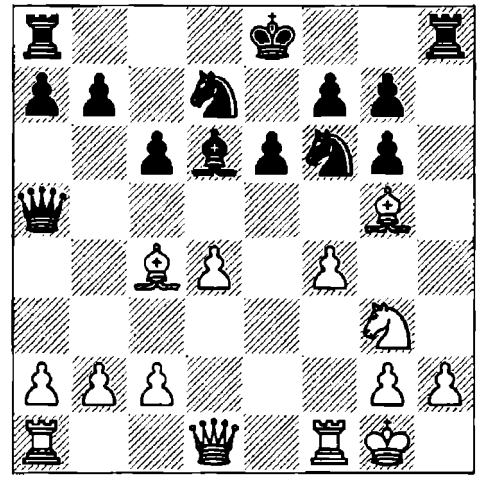
Donner puts it like this in *The King*: "Tal has put paid to all that... There is no system, there is no correctness or inco r ectness, there is only success. This way of thinking without no r s, ap a t from the infallibility of the self, d o sn't stand a chance in eve r day re a ty, where it will founder inevitably. But in the game of chess it is the greatest source of inspiration. That is why it is wrong to reg a d T a as a swindler. He just realizes that although self-criticism and self-knowledge a e necessary, objectivity at the chessboard is a f ction."

The following g a e includes selected in-sights from Tal's wonderfully lucid annotations in his book on the 1960 World Ch a pionship. I think they form an excellent basis for the idea of 'inter-subjectivity' in action.

Tal – Botvinnik
World Ch match (game 17), Moscow 1960

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 t c3 dxe4 4 t xe4 ♗f5 5 t g3 . g6 6 . c4 e6 7 l le2 t f6 8 l f4 i d6 9 t xg6 h g6 10 i g5?! t bd7 11 0-0?! . a l 12 f4 (D)

B



Tal: "'Te r ible.' 'Anti-positional.' 'Incredi-ble.', etc., etc. - White's last move was adorned by all the commentators, without exception, with such epi t ets. It might be supposed that the player who had White was absolutely unfa-mili a with any chess book that writes about the game from White's point of view and it is

actually impossible to play like this since 12 f4 weakens the dark squares, shuts the g5-bishop out of the game, and puts the white king in a dangerous and compromising position. I think the reader will not consider me immodest if I say that I took all of this into consideration during the game."

Tal continues to describe his train of thought, stressing the problems with retreating the bishop (inconsistent), exchanging it (no gain whatsoever), 12 ♕d2 (drawish), 12 ♕c1 (passive) "...and the move 12 f4 is simply bad. Thus all the continuations seem to be negative. And finally, my roving eye again fell on 12 f4 **The advantages of this move are less obvious [than it drawbacks], but they are nevertheless there, even though they may not lie within the realm of the 64 squares of the chessboard.** First of all, this move will have to be refuted, which should entail the possibility of a double-edged tactical struggle, which, judging from Botvinnik's style of play in this match, would not be desirable for him. Secondly, the weakness in White's camp can only be exploited by breaks in the centre, but after the moves ...c5 and ...e5, the strength of White's bishops significantly increases. And finally, Black will only be able to attack the kingside after castling long, and then White's pawn-mass on the queenside can be set in motion. It is possible that Black should simply have answered 12...0-0, but this is not a refutation."

There is a lot to take in here, but what stands out for me is the resistance to what anybody else might think of this move. Tal was fully aware that he would be considered 'weak' for playing it, but follows his own lead, rather than the superficial pointers of others. Another outstanding feature is that he thinks of 12 f4 not 'objectively' (when it seems rather bad), but with a full awareness of the alternatives he (subject) perceives, and how his opponent (subject) will react to each of them. In the end he decides that since there is no way to apply positional pressure, he will apply psychological pressure because Botvinnik is given the responsibility to refute this move, and, as we will see, this is not easy.

12...0-0-0 **13 a3 ♕c7**

"More than half an hour was spent on this, and this is good. It seems that it is not so simple to immediately refute 12 f4." Tal again reveals an acute awareness of his opponent. The words "this is good" show a recognition of the frustration caused by a fruitless search and the build-up of tension this causes in the opponent.

14 b4 ♘b6 15 ♗e2 ♗e7 16 ♕d3

"White's moves are obvious enough and therefore it is now easy for him to play. At the same time, Black has a wide selection of tempting continuations, but he has to find only one, that which is objectively the strongest which at the same time should conform to the creative attitude in which he is playing." Poor Botvinnik! So many good moves available but he can only play them one at a time. Tal has enough good moves to keep the psychological equilibrium, but is not under any pressure to play them because they are all so obvious. Such factors should not be underestimated. Regardless of how the position looks 'objectively', it is seen by the contestants during the game with a brain which has already been exerted, excited, confused and disappointed. The longer the game lasts, and the more tension in each and every move, the more difficult it is to see the position as it really is. Botvinnik's position on the board may be better here, but there is more pressure on him because he has to prove something.

16...**♘fd5**

"With the text move, Black attains a definite positional advantage, since after the exchange of the dark-squared bishops, the weakness on f4 becomes noticeable, but psychologically, White would have another chance: it turns out that one of the 'drawbacks' of the move 12 f4 – the locking-out of the g5-bishop – is not a drawback at all." Again Tal reveals just how subjective our thought-processes are. It would indeed seem like a small victory for White to exchange this wayward bishop and a concession for Black, who couldn't exploit it. Such little battles are only won or lost in our own head, but they are hugely significant in shaping the mood of the contestants. Botvinnik's shaky play before the time-control can, I think, be traced back to the tension caused by the little conceptual defeats at this early stage. After 16...c5 17 bxc5 (17 c3 c4 leaves White without counterplay) 17...♖xd4 18 cxb6 ♖xd3 19 bxc7 ♗c5+ 20 ♔h1 ♖xg3 21 ♗xf6 gxf6 22 ♗f3 White "shouldn't lose" according to Tal.

17 i xe7 ' xe7 18 c4 t f6

Botvinnik was obliged to spend some important time evaluating a tempting piece sacrifice here: 18...♘xc4 19 ♕xc4 ♕h4 20 ♖f3 ♘xf4 21 h3 ♖xd4 22 ♕c5 – it turns out that the bishop is better than the three pawns. Once again a little tension is built into Botvinnik's psyche regardless of the fact that all his moves have been very strong. Indeed, Tal seemed to underestimate the danger he faced here, and made a small but significant mistake.

19 l abl?!

Too slow. Tal states that the immediate 19 a4 was preferable but that he didn't like the look of 19...♕xb4 20 a5 ♘xc4 due to 21 ♖fbl(??) ♕d2 22 ♕xc4. His analysis went on 22...♕xd4+(??) 23 ♕xd4 ♖xd4, when it might appear that Black has the initiative, but he points out that 24 ♗f3! denies Black time for 24...♖xf4 in view of 25 a6 and so White can regroup with ♘e2, after which the position is about equal. However, he missed that 22...♕e3+! wins by force; therefore White has nothing better than 21 ♕xc4. Despite the popularity of Tal's annotations, later in his career he admitted that they were a source of embarrassment for him because they contained so many mistakes. Still, a striking feature of this game is the way that Tal steers clear of all the drawish lines. Despite his position being 'objectively' worse, it seems he thinks this is less important than the psychological predicament of both players.

19... ' d7! **20** l bdl

Inconsistent, but there was nothing better: 20 ♖fd1 ♖h4 21 ♕e3 ♕c7 22 ♖f1 ♕d7.

20... b8 21 ' b3?!

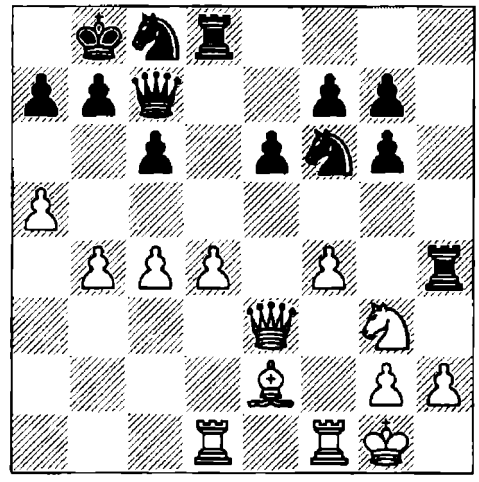
21 a4!? ♘xa4 22 ♕a3 ♘b6 23 ♖d2 followed by ♖a1 gives White reasonable compensation and was probably an improvement on this sluggish move, which loses a lot of time.

21... ' c7 22 a4 l h4 23 aS l c8 **24** ' e3 (D)

"The situation has changed somewhat. Now Black has strengthened his position with natural moves and White is forced to solve a difficult problem, as well as handle the joyless task of defending his weaknesses. The position remains extraordinarily complicated and the decisive moves will occur in mutual time-pressure."

It seems that Tal places much more emphasis on the fact that the position is complicated than whether one side is better or worse. During a game both sides experience and respond to the complexity, but a judgement of the form 'Black is slightly better' is really rather meaningless in a game where the tension is felt so acutely, and errors are likely at any time. This reminds me of something GM Peter Wells told me of a post-mortem with GM Stuart Conquest in which Peter asked "Did you think you were better here?", to which Stuart replied: "I don't have such thoughts during the game. I just look for ideas." This is a little at odds with my suggestion in Chapter 2 about having some feel for whether your position is getting better or worse, but it is a valuable insight all the same. Certainly in games which are exceptionally tense, like last-round games for example, you might do more harm than good by trying to keep track of the 'objective' assessment because the errors which decide the outcome will be more closely related to the tension than to the assessment.

B



24... l e7 25 ' ėS : hh8 **26** bS

"Objectively a risky continuation but I did not see any other means of strengthening the position. Black intended to play 26...♘f5 and after 27 ♘xf5 exf5 a rook would quickly go to e8. Therefore White decides, ignoring the weaknesses of the position, that he cannot wait any longer to open up lines on the queenside." Tal is determined not to give Botvinnik the initiative. Part of playing from an inter-subjective perspective is that you t r to keep your opponent under some sort of pressure all the time, whether it be psychological, clock related, or just in the position.

26...cxb5 27 ' ẖbS

"Now the b-file has been opened and the white bishop obtains some freedom of movement

along the diagonal. But this was achieved at an expensive price: the weakness of White's pawns take on a catastrophic character." Tal seems to know that what he is doing is a little risky from an objective perspective, but allowing his opponent to settle down and assume the initiative is also risky, albeit from a more subjective perspective.

27...a6

If 27...♘c6 then 28 ♕b2. Tal was quite willing to give up the a-pawn and Botvinnik seems to be in no hurry to take it. During play it is impossible to be sure of when or whether Black should take this pawn. All that is clear to both players is that it is double-edged and so whenever it is taken, the psychological tension will rise.

2 ' b2 **♖d7**

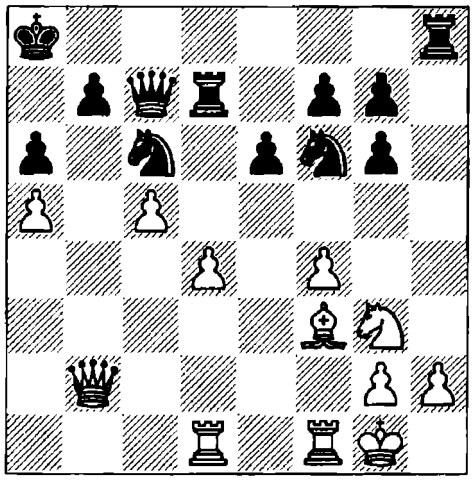
This rook does an excellent job of overprotecting the b7-pawn and threatening to double on the d-file. Black seems to be stifling all of White's counterplay and so to prevent the trend from slipping away, White decides on a drastic measure.

29 cS!?

Ceding the d5-square and fixing the structure, but continuing the attack. From a psychological perspective it's important that White doesn't allow Black to feel immune from danger and this cannot be done without a few compromising moves. Botvinnik will see the new-found outpost on d5, but he will also be acutely aware that the dangerous c-pawn is one step closer to his king, and that the worrying idea c6 should be attended to, whether it is really a 'threat' or not.

29...♔a8 **30 ♗f3** 1 c6 (D)

W



"Now White's position is extraordinarily difficult to improve and the d-pawn gets weaker and weaker. It is interesting that the opposing knights on g3 and f6 will be there almost until the end of the game. The knight on f6 does not allow his white counterpart to go to e4 and then to d6, and in view of this, it does not allow itself the possibility of occupying the solid square d5. On the other hand, it is not to White's advantage to withdraw the knight, since on e2 it would have a passive position. To make the position more lively, White goes in for still another positional sacrifice."

Tal's comments about the knights are very instructive. I kept on thinking that if I were White, improving this piece would be my first priority. Here's where the inter-subjective viewpoint is very useful because when you look at the knights from both sides you see that they are actually in some sort of mutual stand-off. In any case, Botvinnik has played very well, but has taken a long time over his moves and the game has been very tense. Moreover, his king position is still a little precarious. Howbvis♔rttr

to play ...♘d5 (to cover b6) because this would free the knight on g3.

32... ' ♗4! 33 l fd3! l c8

33...♖hd8 34 ♘e2 ♘d5 followed by a gradual preparation of ...f6 and ...e5 may have been stronger. Botvinnik has shunned several sharp lines and now, with no clear way to improve his position, he decides to grab the a-pawn. To do so he first needs to cover the c6-square.

34 l bl ♕xa5?!

"It is possible that this capture is appropriate, since Black's defensive resources are very great, but nevertheless, it is very risky in time-pressure." I suspect that both players knew that it was perfectly sound to take this pawn from an 'objective' point of view, but at the moment it was taken I'd imagine Botvinnik felt a tinge of regret, and Tal a jolt of optimism.

35 l b3!

35 ♖a3 ♕d8 and after ...♖c6 Black covers everything.

35... ' ♗7 36 ' ♗3 a7 37 l b6

"The concluding phase of this game is quite characteristic of play in time-pressure. White basically sets up a double threat. Now Black cannot continue 37...♘d5 in view of 38 ♘e4, besides which 38 c6 is also threatened." Regardless of objective threats, it can't have felt too comfortable for Black to be looking at this rook on b6. At such moments we are inclined to look at the variations as if we were looking over our shoulder checking there is nobody behind us.

37... ' ♗x4 38 l e2

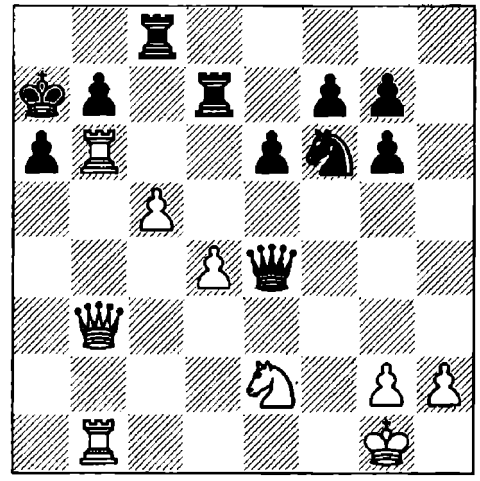
"Probably White would have got sufficient counterplay for a draw in the variation 38 ♕b4 ♕xd4+ 39 ♕xd4 ♖xd4 40 ♖xb7+ ♔a8 41 c6, but now there is a different outcome!" Tal doesn't indicate whether he saw this drawing option but decided to play for more, but it wouldn't surprise me if he did. It seems that Tal was motivated not so much by what he 'should' do from an 'objective' perspective, given that his position is worse, but rather what he 'should' do from an inter-subjective perspective, given that his opponent was nervous and running short of time.

38... ' ♗4 39 ' ♗3 (D)

39...♕d5??

"In the time-scramble, Botvinnik did not find the only defence to the threat of ♖xa6+,

B



which is 39...♔a8. I do not maintain that then White would have a strong enough attack to save himself, but in my opinion, there would be many tactical resources in the position. Possible, for example, would be 40 h3 or 40 ♖b4. After both continuations, the position would be very sharp. Now the game is over very quickly."

When I loaded this game from ChessBase's Mega Database the only annotation given was 39...♔a8 –+, which I saw after I had read Tal's notes. At first I wanted to check the position to discover which was closer to the truth, but then I realized that this was missing the point. The interpretations are not in fact at odds, it's just that they come from different perspectives. From an objective point of view, Black would remain two pawns up after 39...♔a8 and since White has no convincing way to continue the attack, we would have to conclude that with best play Black's position is winning. I suspect Tal would agree with this, and his note seems to do so implicitly. However, from an inter-subjective point of view, it is highly unlikely that anyone, even Botvinnik, could play the best moves from here until the end of the game after such enormous nervous tension during the course of the game and in a position full of tricks, so to call the position 'very sharp' is also a reasonable assessment.

40 l xa6+! ♔**b8** 41 " ♗4 1-0

Responsibility

The greater part of all the mischief in the world arises from the fact that men do not sufficiently understand their own aim.

GOETHE

Tal's precarious sacrifices weren't always 'objectively' sound. By this I mean that third-party analysis frequently showed that stronger defensive play would have shown them to be erroneous. Yet during play his opponents often collapsed inexplicably, as if they had been knocked off balance by the sudden change of course the game had taken. This was far too common an occurrence to attribute simply to Tal's good fortune and many have spoken in general terms about the practical difficulties in defending against such attacks. However, by far the most acute insight I have read on this matter comes from an idiosyncratic book called *Dynamics of Chess Psychology* by Cary Utterburg.

According to Utterburg, the key concept for understanding the success of Tal's 'psychological sacrifices' is existential responsibility. Utterburg argues that the human mind possesses the capacity to understand chess 'existentially', i.e. in a manner which defies any objective, well-defined formulation. So in the normal course of things we are 'existentially responsible' for the course of the game and feel ourselves, as subjects, to be conscious co-creators of the game and therefore responsible for its outcome. This 'existential state' is, I presume, much like that which I described as 'just playing' in Chapter 3. The claim is that Tal's psychological sacrifices dislodged opponents from a perspective where they could 'just play' because his sacrifices were often so outlandish as to make the opponent feel like they were no longer a co-creator.

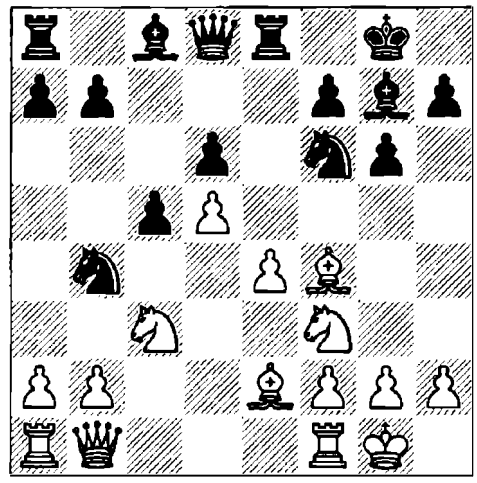
Now I'm not sure what you make of all that and I know that the very word 'existential' is enough to put many people off, but maybe you'll have more sympathy for the idea in the context of the following:

Averbakh – Tal
USSR *Ch, Riga 1958*

1 d4 l f6 2 c4 e6 3 l c3 c5 4 d5 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 e4 g6 7 e2 g7 8 l f3 0-0 9 0·0 e8 10 ' c2 l a6 11 f4 l b4!? 12 ' b1 *(D)*

"Black's next move is ultimately incorrect, but it's interesting from a practical point of view because it seizes sole existential responsibility for the nature of the struggle; whereas

B



White has been implementing ideas of his own thus far, now they're irrelevant since Tal has essentially redefined the game along his own lines." – Utterburg.

12... l xe4

"Objectively better was 12...♛e7, leading to a position with dynamically equal chances. Nevertheless, with a psychological sacrifice, Tal has disoriented his opponent by seizing responsibility for the game; since White is a modern master whose existential understanding is grounded in the recognition that he's responsible for the game, Tal's sacrifice has severed an essential component from his opponent's psyche."

This last line struck me as highly pertinent. Tal does indeed take something away from the opponent when he sacrifices in this way and it may be best thought of as the opponent's ego. Indeed it seems that he confiscates his opponent's ego, only to hand it back in a bruised state after the 'shocking' complications are over. In doing so, he shows us how difficult it is to play chess well without our egos; without the feelings of responsibility, confidence and personal power it gives us.

Have you ever felt that you were marching to your opponent's tune during a game, only to 'wake up' after resigning and realize that you were barely conscious at the board? More simply, do you ever find yourself complying with your opponent's ideas and never creating any of your own? Even more generally, do you ever finish a game and say something like: "I just wasn't there tonight"? All of these cases seem to stem from a failure to take responsibility for your actions. This is why I think Utterburg's

insight is so compelling – a close look at Tal's games does seem to suggest that for several moves his opponents are playing perfectly normally and then suddenly they seem to lose their balance and allow Tal to walk all over them. Although it may seem abstract, the perspective of existential responsibility makes better sense of this than any other explanation I have read. We don't need the 'existential' to take this idea on board. All you need to appreciate is that it is hugely important that you feel responsible for the direction and outcome of the game, that you don't let your opponent take this responsibility from you, and that you strive, whenever possible, to take it from your opponent.

13 t xe4 . f5 14 t fd2 t xdS 15 . xd6?

Kholmov recommended instead 15 ♗g3 ♕e7 16 ♗f3 ♖ad8 17 ♖e1!.

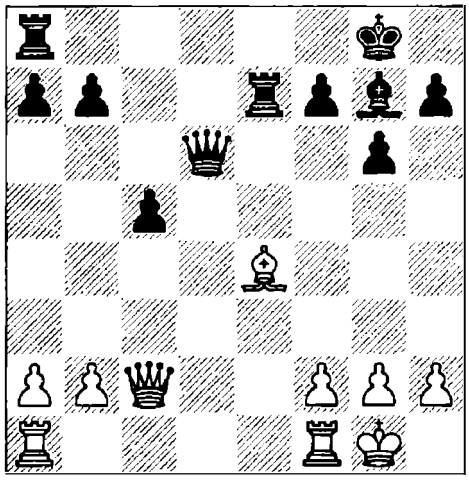
"Tal's psychological sacrifices tended to estrange his opponents from their sense of responsibility, leaving them in a temporary state of disorientation similar to that which weaker players encounter every day." Averbakh was a strong grandmaster and however obvious this defence may look now, it would be irresponsible(!) of us not to place ourselves in the context of the game, which is when the decisions had to be made.

1S... t f6 16 . f3

Or 16 ♗xc5 ♘xe4 17 ♘xe4 ♗xe4 18 ♕d1 ♕g5!.

16... t xe4 17 t xe4 . xe4 18 . xe4 ' xd6 19 ' c2 . e7 (D)

W



The rest of the game is not hugely relevant to this chapter, but it is quite instructive and enjoyable. Black's extra pawn is not so significant in itself because with opposite-coloured bishops it is hard to create a passed pawn that could advance to light squares without being taken. The real advantage of the extra queenside pawn is that it enables Black to attack on the kingside! The extra pawn has huge value in that it provides an 'anchor' for the bishop when it arrives on the d4-square. This blocks the d-file and makes it difficult for White to exchange rooks. Moreover, Black's bishop will have an influential and secure post while White's bishop will have little to do. White is vulnerable on h2 and f2 in particular, and has no way to compete with Black on these squares.

20 . f3 . ae8 21 . ad1 . d4 22 a4 b6 23 b3 l e5 **24** l d2 h5!

Black anticipates g3 and brings another unit into the attack.

25 . e2 : e2 **26** xe2 h4 27 ♔h1 f4 28 g3 ' f6 29 ' d1 l d8 30 . g4

30 ♔g2 looks more stubborn at first glance, but Black wins by force with the following elegant manoeuvre: 30...♗c3 31 ♗d3 (otherwise ...♖d2) 31...♕c6+ 32 ♔g1 h3! 33 f3 ♕d6! 34 ♗e2 (or 34 ♗c2 ♕e7 35 ♕c1 ♕e2) 34...♕e7 35 ♕c2 ♖d2 36 ♕xc3 ♕xe2, etc.

30... . x f ! 31 ' e2 l d2! 32 ' e8+

Or 32 ♕xd2 ♕c6+.

32... g7 33 gxh4 ' d4 34 . h3 ' d3! 35 . g2 . d1!

These last two moves remind me of a rule (or guideline) suggested to me by GM Neil McDonald ('McDonald's Rule'): when one side has domination of one colour complex, the winning breakthrough invariably takes place on the other colour complex.

0-1

After 36 ♕b5 ♖xf1+ 37 ♗xf1 ♕e4+ 38 ♗g2 ♕xh4 the two extra pawns and ever-present danger to the white king ensure victory.

To support further the idea of 'responsibility', Utterburg considers the difficulties for a subject playing against the opponent's initiative: "Why should anyone be troubled by the fact that his opponent has seized the initiative (assuming that he has enough material 'in the bank' to balance the chances)? Under the model of [existential responsibility] an opponent's initiative is less firmly grounded than one's own,

causing it to seem more chaotic and unmanageable (my responsibility is closer as a subject than other people's responsibility...)"

There seems to be a lot of truth in this and many a dodgy attack succeeds because the attacker felt responsible for having started it and therefore wants to see it conducted well, while the defence is placed in that situation *involuntarily* and doesn't feel the same responsibility for defending well. Bearing this in mind, I am reminded of two players who scored very well against Tal: Korchnoi and Polugaevsky. Both of these players had very strong characters and worked enormously hard both at the board and away from it. They both identified themselves with their chess games and thus had no problems taking responsibility for all aspects of their games against Tal.

If you still have some doubts about the value of the idea of responsibility in chess this essay will

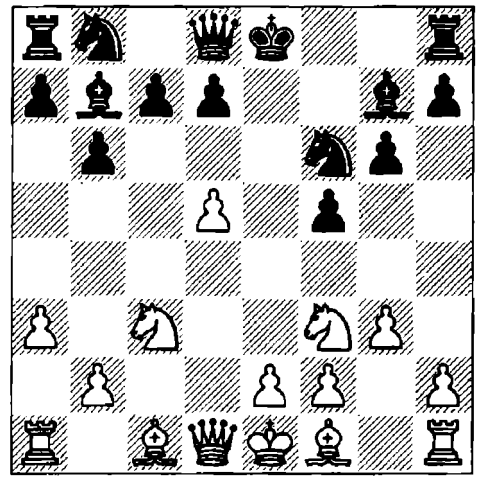
1985) in the Taimanov with 8...d5 was an exquisite demonstration of the power of prophylactic thinking. I suspect that this game can easily be found elsewhere by readers so I will just single out the following moves, all of which strike me as being "deeply prophylactic": 17...h6, 18... b !, 21...g5!!, 23...♘d7!, 24...♕f6!, 27...♗g6! and 28...g4!.

Yusupov was also keen to stress that prophylaxis should not be seen as in any way defensive or passive, but rather as a very active, even aggressive way of looking at chess. This was a particularly interesting insight because another aspect of the average player's thoughts on prophylaxis is that it tends to lead to highly profound but usually quite defensive moves, and of course this may not appeal to your average 1800 hacker. The truth, however, is that prophylaxis is every bit as important in attack as it is in defence. It's all about seeing chess as a struggle between subjects. Prophylaxis is 'active' in the sense that every aspect of a battle is ultimately about defeating the opponent. The attackers who are most likely to succeed are those who acknowledge the opponent's right to defend himself. They strive to work around these defences that they have seen ahead of time, and always make plans for themselves with reference to the opponent.

I felt the best way to 'popularize' prophylaxis here was by talking my way through a few of my own games. Hopefully an account of my own thought-processes, and consideration of my opponent's, will reveal just how ubiquitous prophylaxis is, and that it's not an especially difficult notion when you allow yourself to become aware of your opponent's intentions.

Rowson – L. Cooper
Walsall *1997*

1 c4 b6 **2** d4 e6 3 t c3 J b7 4 **a3** fS 5 dS t f6 6 g3 g6 7 t f3 exdS?! **8** cxdS i g7 (D)



So, nothing startling so far, you might think; "just get castled as quickly as possible and take it from there". That's fine as a stalsg

11 0-0 l a6 12 b4! a b4 13 axb4 c5

This looks like a big mistake in hindsight, but it's not so easy for Black to play with such passive queenside pieces, e.g. 13...♕e7 14 ♗f4 ♘e4 15 ♘xe4 fxe4 16 d6! and White is on top.

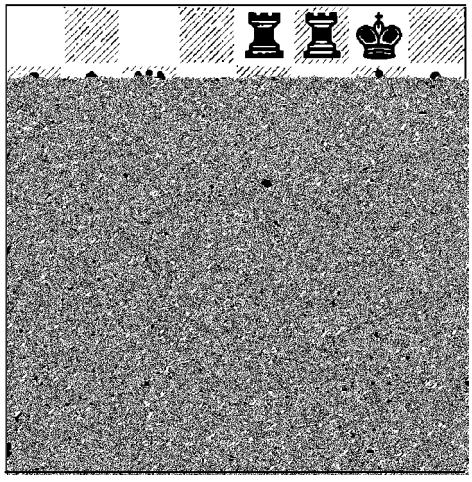
14 dxc6 dxc6 15 t d4! ' d7 16 ' b3+ h8 17 l e6 l 8 18 l xg7 xg7

White is clearly better due to the two bishops, Black's weakened dark squares and vulnerable queenside pawns. I won on move 43.

Rowson – Motwani
Scottish Ch, Edinburgh *1999*

1 l f3 dS 2 c4 c6 3 e3 l f6 4 ♘c3 g6 5 d4 i g7 6 i e2 0-0 7 0-0 i g4 8 cxdS t xd5 9 h3 i xf3 10 i xf3 e6 11 e4 l b6 12 e5 l 8d7 13 t e4 ' c7 14 i g5 f5 15 exf6 l xf6 16 t c5 ae8 (D)

W



A tricky position. Black is fully mobilized and has a variety of ideas including ...♘fd5-f4 and ...e5. Although ...e5 will 'open up the position for the two bishops' it will also give Black's rooks considerable activity, which is not ideal given my lack of development. Moreover, the pawn-structure allows Black to have a very well anchored knight on d5, which in most cases is at least as good as my light-squared bishop. For these reasons I was keen to prevent ...e5 and my thoughts revolved around this aim. I also realized that if I could prevent ...e5, Black would be rendered very passive, and e6 could become weak.

17 e1!

Not such a difficult move of course, but I wasn't very comfortable about weakening f2, and the battle for the ...e5 break is not yet over.

17... ' f7

The queen no longer covers e5, but Black has a somewhat ominous presence on the f-file and ...♘fd5 and ...e5 is still pending. 17...e5 18 dxe5 ♖xe5 19 ♘e6 is a very important tactic here.

18 i h4!

This is the key prophylactic move and is a good example of what I was saying about prophylaxis being a very 'active' notion. This move overprotects f2 and thus comforts my king, and the main aim is to cover e5 from the g3-square. These are all 'negative' aims, in the sense that I'm just preventing the opponent's plans, but only by doing so can I allow myself to implement my own plans successfully, and part of the plan is to threaten to cause trouble by landing my versatile bishop on d6. 18 ♗f4 (also strong) didn't seem so clear to me after 18...♘c4. I didn't like the vulnerability of my bishop on f4, and the most forcing line seems to end in Black's favour: 19 b3 (19 ♕e2!?) 19...e5 20 dxe5 ♘h5 21 ♗xh5 ♕xf4 22 ♘d3 ♘b2 23 ♘xf4 ♘xd1 24 ♘xg6 hxg6 25 ♗xg6 ♖e6.

18... l fd5 19 . g3!

Black's plans have effectively been stopped and it's hard to make sense of his position. On the other hand, White has threats of ♗g4 and ♗d6. It often happens this way with prophylaxis: that when you 'plug' your opponent's intentions, your own plans flood into the position.

19...e5!

An excellent practical decision. Those who know Paul will not be surprised to hear that I consider him relatively resistant to *Egoism*! Here this manifests itself by having the serenity to accept that he is worse and making a fight of it by starting a new type of game.

20 dxeS l f4 21 xf4 ' xf4

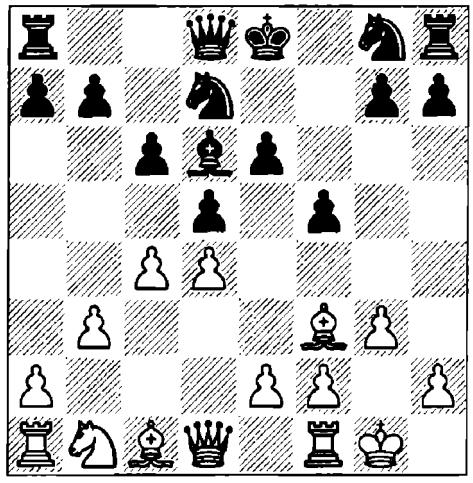
Now there are various ways to keep the extra pawn, but the presence of opposite-coloured bishops and the difficulties in coordinating White's position mean that the battle is far from over. Paul fought tenaciously, but his position on the board and the clock were too bad to allow for a full recovery, and I won on move 41.

Cummings – Rowson
British League (4NCL) *1997/8*

1 l f3 dS 2 g3 i g4 3 i g2 l d7 4 d4 e6 5 0-0 i d6 6 b3 c6 7 c4 i xf3!? 8 i xf3 fS (D)

Essentially we now have a Stonewall Dutch with Black having carried out the task of the elaborate manoeuvre ...♗d7-e8-h5 followed by ...♗xf3 in two moves instead of four. I already prefer Black's position, if only because I have the advantages of a Stonewall (space, kingside attacking chances, solidity) without the disadvantages (finding a role for the c8-bishop, dark-square weaknesses, White's e5 outpost). That said, the position is still about equal because there's nothing much wrong with White's position, and the two bishops should ultimately count for something.

W



9 i a3?!

This is a significant positional error. In the Stonewall it is generally favourable to exchange these bishops, and often in this way, because White can try to exploit the dark-square weaknesses in Black's position and hope to show the remaining light-squared bishop to be 'bad'. But here I have no bad pieces remaining, and have no problems covering the dark squares with my knights. Indeed, I have space for all my pieces and I feel sorry for White's remaining bishop on f3 which has, according to the appropriate cliché, to bite on granite. However, the main reason this move is mistaken is that it gives away the hermaphrodite, which was the only positive feature of White's position. As was suggested in the previous chapter, this is equivalent to giving away material. I suppose my opponent fell victim to the conventional idea that since my pawns are on light squares, exchanging my dark-squared bishop must be an achievement, but this is only one aspect of the position, and not the most significant one.

It seems clear that dropping the bishop back to g2 will be a good idea sooner or later, allowing for f3 intending e4, or maybe to put a knight on f3; and since it's not yet clear where the other pieces should go, 9 ♗g2!? seems to be the best move. Moreover, it is useful to know where Black will put his king's knight before developing the queenside pieces, and this move-order prevents 9...♘h6. After 9...♘gf6 10 ♘d2 0-0 11 ♗b2 ♕e7 12 ♖b1 !? (to keep the bishop with ♗a1 after ...♗a3) 12...a5 13 ♕c2 the game is balanced.

9...**♘df6!**

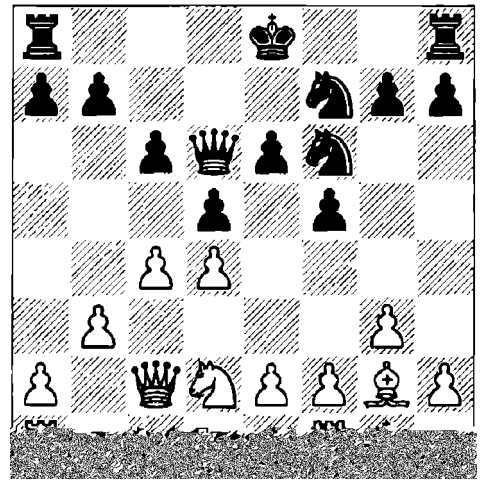
The closed position means that there is no rush to develop the g8-knight and, in any case, after 9...♗xa3 10 ♘xa3 the knight is on its way to its ideal square, d3. This is already prophylactic thinking – I am aware of where my opponent's pieces should go. On d3 the knight covers c5, e5 and f4, and can support b4 as well. Since it's not in my interest to help the knight get there, I decide how I relate to my opponent's intention and in doing so I find the optimal development for my pieces.

10 ♗xd6 ♕xd6 11 ♘d2 ♘h6 12 ♗g2 ♘f7

The knight is well placed here, covering e5 and sometimes coming to g5.

13 **♕c2** (D)

B



What does White want here? I decided that White's plans were based around making use of his bishop, either with f3 and e4 or else a gradual advance on the queenside and bringing the bishop into play on the f1-a6 diagonal. To keep the bishop at bay, it is in my interest to keep the centre closed, so I wasn't too keen on plans involving central pawn-breaks like ...e5 or ...c5. I

could just castle and play ... a but that seemed a bit vague and wouldn't test my opponent in any way. In the end I decided that my threesome on the f-file indicate that I should seek play on the kingside, and my h8-rook was very quick to agree.

13...h5!?

The main idea of this move is prophylactic in that by targeting g3 I discourage the idea of f and e4 and by threatening to soften the kingside I oblige the bishop to stay near the king. The other idea is actually to trap the bishop! I want to push the bishop to h1 with ...h3 and then play ...g5-g4 after which, in theory, it is trapped because even f3 and e4 cannot change the structure in any way which would allow the bishop to move. I didn't really think I would find time to achieve this, but I enjoyed the idea all the same. Moreover, I remember showing this idea to IM Luke McShane a few days later when, after a momentary glance to check that the bishop would indeed be trapped on h1, he couldn't contain his laughter! ('the unexpected punchline' – see *Thinking*). This was my main idea, but it's important not to be too rigid, and there is some chance that an attack down the h-file might transpire if White is too slow with his counterplay.

14 **cxd5 cxd5** 15 l ac1

Intending ♕c7.

15...♔**d7**

Preventing ♕c7 and connecting the rooks.

16 ' d3

Intending ♕b5+.

16...a6

Preventing ♕b5+.

17 b4!

b5 does not seem to be such a huge threat because I can just leave it, and while White is working out what to do next I will probably play ...♘g5 intending ...♘e4 or nasties down the h-file. ♘b3-c5 is a more serious idea because I don't want to weaken the c6-square by playing ...b6, if only because b5 and ♖c6 would then be dangerous. I had quite a deep think and saw that even if the knight gets to c5 there was a way I could try to remove it, so I went ahead with my main idea.

17...h4 18 l b3

After 18 b5!? ♘g5!? I still prefer Black, but I must admit that it's quite unclear.

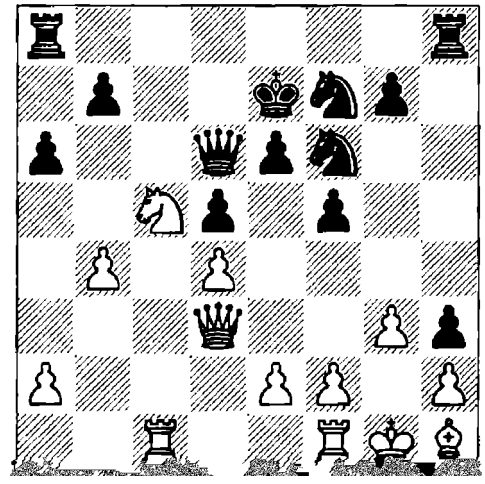
18...h3?!

There comes a point where you have to commit, and I decided that h-file action was less likely to succeed than the slower plan of playing against White's bishop. Moreover, as we saw in the last chapter, such an 'alien' in White's camp is such a significant positional feature that it can be considered as a material advantage for Black. However, in a few moves I suffer from lack of kingside counterplay, so I suspect that this was not the right time to play this move.

19 l c5+ r e7 20 h1 (D)

When I showed this game to GM Dharshan Kumaran, he raised his eyebrows at this point, and suggested that White should prefer 20 ♗f3 intending e3 followed by re-routing the bishop. After 20...♖a7 21 e3 ♖ha8, Black will play ...b6 and then probably ...g5 and maybe ...g4, to keep the bishop from breathing.

B



The text-move (20 ♗h1) is not so kind to the bishop, but it keeps the rest of White's position healthy and I have to stay on guard against f3 and e4.

20... : a7!?

I was pleased with this move, which makes creative use of my rooks. The main idea is just to play ...♖ha8 and then ...b6. Without this move, it is difficult to remove the knight from c5, which is by far White's most effective piece in this position.

21 f3?!

I suspect this is too ambitious, though it is admirable that White should try to strike while his knight on c5 is still hot. 21 a4!, intending to fix the queenside structure with a and thus

keep the knight on c5, looks like a b tter way to cut across Black's plans (prophylactic thinking). White can afford to be a little slow now that the k ngside is closed. Even if I succeed in trapping the bishop with ...g5-g4 t ere is too much happening in the position for this to b a decisive g a n. I have to admit t at I think White is objectively a bit better after 21... l ha8?! 22 a5!, because it is dif f cult for Black to use his roo k , but in a real g a e the position would b felt to be more uncle a than anything else, and there a e still plenty of chances for both sides.

21...b6!

This is more accurate than 21...f4 because t is gives White the murky option of 22 e4 fxg3 23 e5 gxh2+ 24 x 2 l xe5 25 dxe5 f xeS+ 26 f4, when things a e rather uncle a , and the a7-rook looks a bit bewildered.

22 l a6 f4! 23 g4

23 gxf4 b5 24 l c5 ' xf4 gives Black a dangerous attack, while 23 e4? fails to 23...dxe4 24 fxe4 fxg3 25 e5 l xe5.

23...b5!

Freeing the knight, but making use of the r o ks.

2 l c5 l xa2 25 l a l

The more pieces that a e exchanged, the more signi f cant is the 'burial' of the bishop on h l, so in p r nciple W h te may have b en better off without t ading rooks: 25 f xb5!? l b8 26 t b7! ' d7 27 ' c5+ (after 27 ' ixd7+ l xd7 28 l a5 l d8! Black is in con t ol) 27... e8 28 l a l xe2 29 l c6 l a8 30 l c2 l xc2 31 ' xc2 l c8 32 b5 t d6, with a messy position.

25... l ha8 **26** l xa2 : a2 27 1 xb5 ' c7!

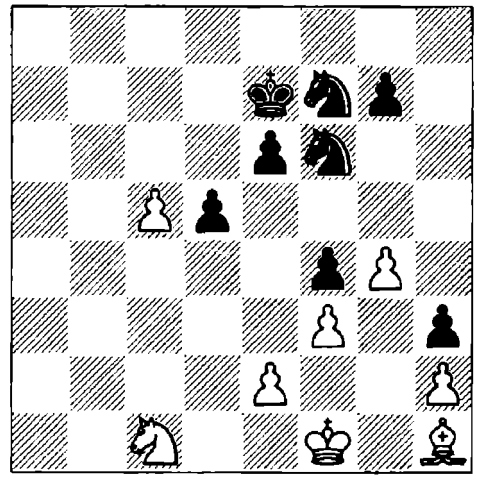
Freeing d6 for the knight, covering b7 and intending ... ' a7-a3.

2 l cl ' a7 29 **♔f1?**

This is a big m stake which clari f es the situa t on in Black's favour. White has lots of alternatives, most of which leave the position uncle a . From a practical point of view I would always prefer to play Black in such a position, if only because it must be hard for White to adjust psychologically to that bishop on h l. It's like a corpse, which is there in body but not in spi r t or like the brain death of a f a ily member over whom we cannot grieve. Although it may 'awaken' at any time, I can't help but feel that the position wouldn't b so di f erent if the white king were to nudge it o f the bo a d.

29... l a l **30** t b3 l xcl+ 31 l xcl ' xd4 32 ' c5+ ' xcS 33 bxcS (D)

B



T h s is not as easy to win as it looks b cau s White's knight a d c-pawn fo r an annoying pair and it's not easy to defend the f4- and h3-pawns. All the same, I eventually prevailed on move 60.

Other Faces of *Egoism*

1) 'Luck'

It is often said that there is no such thing a luck in chess, and that this is one of the things t at makes our g a e so noble. Yet there do seem to be times when we feel luck is on our side, and there a e certain players whom we refer to a 'lucky'. In my opinion, the luc k est playe r tend to be the most con f dent players who play the most inter-subjective chess. There may even be a correlation between the degree of 'egocen t icity' a player shows and his propensity to 'luck' but I've no idea how you m ght test this. I certainly think there is some truth in Benko's claim that games lost through 'bad luck' were actually lost because of 'bad psychology'. All I can suggest in this respect is that with a he a thy supply of self-con f dence and a robust ego that knows its limits, 'luck' can b attained in large me a ures.

2) 'Fear'

"Fear has big eyes" according to a Russian proverb a d all chess-players expe r ence fear. This fear is o f en ego-related in that we don't just feel that a piece or king is under attack; more o f en th a not we think "/ am under attack", so

fe a is often felt as a response to a t h eat to the ego. It would foolish to say 'have no fe a ' because fe a is actually very useful in chess and life in giving us that vital sense of danger which helps us to stay alive. However, you mustn't let fe a dominate your thoughts or be the cause of your decisions, and if you a e afraid, t y to est blish whether your fears a e well grounded or whether they a e based on emotional memories or exte r al factors like losing out on prize money. Ra t er than run from yo u fear, or let it ove r helm you, incorporate it into your intersubjective perspective during play. Once again, the best way to deal with your psychological problems is to 'sh a e' them with your opp o nent! The following quotation from Tal is inst uctive in this respect: "Later I b g a to succeed in decisive games. Perhaps because I realized a very simple truth: not only was I worried, but also my opponent." It is important to realize t is, in order to cope with the nervous t nsion we expe r ence du r ng a g a e. Rather than b to t ly absorbed in your own a x eties, remember that your opponent has problems t o .

3) 'Role Playing'

This is often related to status or rating and o c u s when one player a sumes a 'role' du r ng a game, e.g. the weak player b ing outplayed by t e club ch a pion. Sometimes players just exp ct to lose and t en when t ey f nd they have the worse position they just take it as normal and wait for the inevitable. This is related to ***Egoism*** in that a big factor with ego is 'self identity' a d you will tend to try to play out that identity in your chess g a es. This can also o cur to s t onger players who a sume their role is to b at a weaker player and then get f us t ated and play badly when it turns out not to be so easy. The key here is to see yourself a a d i ferent person before every game. Don't identify yourself with any la b l or role. Dig deep into your own resources and t y to exploit your opponent's expectations of how the game should develop.

4) 'Performing'

This is related to the last point about identity and reveals itself in those posers who think about how spectacul a or impressive their play is during the g a e, and hope that people a e watching as they play a certain cunning move. It can also reveal itself in 'premature annotations' for those who write a lot about chess. I myself have suffered from this on a few occasions, where I st a ted verbally describing my moves and the i logic to myself before the g a e was even f nished!

'Performing' can also make you more a f aid of ' b ing outplayed' than losing, since where a you can normally f nd an excuse for losing, it is a direct attack on your ego if your opponent demons t ates a superior understanding of chess. The day I re a ized that I had this problem was t e day I lost the game to Julian Hodgson shown in Chapter 3. It made me laugh, and thankfully I think I've overcome it now.

Above all else, 'performing' is very bad for concen t ation, and is liable to take your mind o f the more important task of playing good moves. The only advice I can o f er is that if impressing people matters to you then you are much more likely to do this by being yourself and concen t ating on the g a e. Only then a e you likely to play chess wor t y of attention.

Conclusion

Egoism is a multi-faceted sin which is the source of all e r ors ste m ing from our awareness of ourselves as subjects during play. The best way to try to overcome it is to adopt an 'inter-subjective' perspective, whereby you acknowledge yo u own responsibility as a subject tow a ds the outcome of the game and remain fully aw a e of the presence of your opponent from a psychological (responsibility) and positional point of view {prophylaxis).

6 Perfectionism

Perfection is spelt p-a-r-a-l-y-s-i-s.
WINSTON CHURCHILL

This, the most noble of the sins, lies at the heart of the chess-player's favourite excuse – time-trouble. Yet time-trouble is not really a sin in itself, but rather a result of certain thinking processes. So it seems more useful to look at this type of thinking in all its aspects before making general claims about why we run short of time.

Perfectionism manifests itself as the desire to find the best move on each and every occasion, but it is more than this in its essential character. The perfectionist looks to an ideal, a model of perfection, and then tries to play in a way that resembles such a model. Perfectionists thus strive to play chess not as the chess-player they are, but as the chess-player that they assume themselves to be when they are most perfect.

I will focus on three faces of *Perfectionism*: 'Moralizing' (punishing the opponent), 'Copycat Crime' (trying to emulate another player), and 'Jam lust' (asking too much of your position). Only then will we be in a good position to look more closely at time-trouble and the related problem of indecision. My central claim in this chapter is that *Perfectionism* results primarily from lack of confidence, and that most perfectionists are players who don't feel at ease with their current playing strength.

Moralizing

Judge not, lest thee be judged.
R.E.M., *New Test Leper*

There are many players who have developed a good understanding of chess from strategic guidelines outlined in books and many more who have detailed knowledge of the do's and don'ts of certain opening lines. Such players should be very careful when playing because there is a great temptation to 'moralize' about how certain positions should be played. This is especially so when you have formed your views on chess more from reading books and listening to teachers than from playing, because you tend to look at moves with regard to whether they make sense with reference to what you have learned, rather than whether they are strong from a practical point of view. There is sometimes a temptation to think along the lines of 'he shouldn't be able to do that', 'that's not the way you're supposed to play such a position', 'in this type of position that sort of idea is wrong and must be shown to b wrong' This is some sort of hangover from seeing chess as a rule-governed activity. It is a typical problem for perfectionists who strive for the ideal of perfect chess and feel any deviation from this perfection as something to be treated very seriously. This 'd e ire to pu n sh' is very corrosive, and leads you to see **all** sor t of proble m and solutions that aren't there.

The problem manifests itself by thinking of yourself as some sort of moral authority who can and should judge the validity of chess ideas. This is liable to lead you to spend copious amounts of time looking for non-existent retributions for alleged immoral acts on the board and/or being blind to your own mistakes, because in assuming the role of moralizer, you forget your own failings. I will explore these ideas throughout the following game, in which I was up against a phenomenally strong player with the black pieces. I was determined to play well, but somehow I felt I could only do this if I made sense of his moves with reference to mine. I anticipated that most of his moves would be 'perfect' and thus I felt I had to react very severely to any move which didn't adhere to this standard, for I may not have another chance. This disastrous state of mind led to some comical thoughts, but they are not so unique and I believe many players have this problem of 'moralizing' Once you have decided that the game 'ought' to be played in a certain way it is very difficult to make sensible assessments.

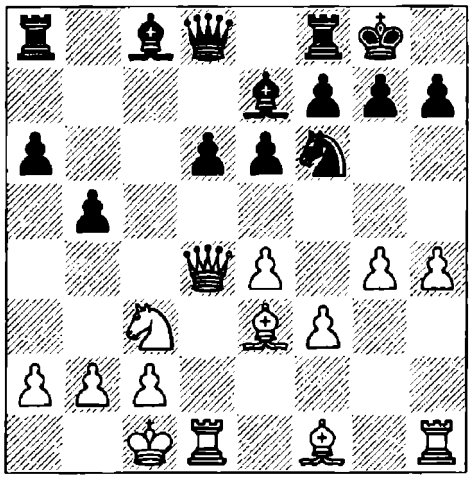
Morozevich – Rowson
British League (4NCL) 1999/00

1 e4 cS 2 l 3 d6 3 l c3 l f6 4 d4 cxd4 S l d4 a6 6 . e3 e6 7 f3 . e7 8 ' id2 0-0 9 0-0-0 t c6 10 g4 t xd4 11 \ xd4

This move is under-rated and probably no worse th a 11 · xd4.

11...bS 12 h4!? (D)

B



Although I now say that **11** ' xd4 is under-rated, during the g a e I decided that there must b a way to show that it's not as good as 11 · xd4. 11...b5 was not a diff cult decision, but then I expected 12 g5 l d7 13 h4 with a normal-looking game. This is actually a quasi-t ansposition to a Keres Attack with 6... t c6 where White h a chosen to play the semi-relevant 13 f3 instead of the s t ong move 13 h5!, which was discovered by GM Paul Motwani.

This comp a ison was ple a ing for me, and **I** felt that this made some sense of why 11 1 xd4 wasn't played more often. But then Morozevich, after thinking for about three minutes, kept his g-pawn back and advanced the h-pawn. Since this was not what he was ***meant*** to play to f t in wi t my plans, I immediately felt that this move-order could not be the most accurate, a d set about t ing to exploit it. The only way to do this is to t r to take advantage of the fact that my knight is still on f6 and a I looked at the v a iations **I** was pleasantly reminded of some ideas from the Richter-Rauzer lines shown to me when I first le a ned to play the Sicilian by **FM** Donald Holmes.

So already **I** had assumed t e role of moralizer in that I judged 11 \ xd4 and 12 h4 to be inaccurate moves in need of 'punishment'. This is utterly idiotic of course, because they a e both perfectly good moves, but for some s t a ge reason I felt it was my responsibility to show my super-s t ong opponent t at he couldn't get away with m ssing these sm a l details and so I set about t ying to show him the error of his ways.

12...e5

This w a my attempted 'punishment' Inter ∓ I h

so dangerous with the knight so far away. This seems crazy now, and only makes sense with reference to my 'moralizing' mindset. Other moves:

a) 14 d5 xd5 15 'ixd5 ie6 is good for Black.

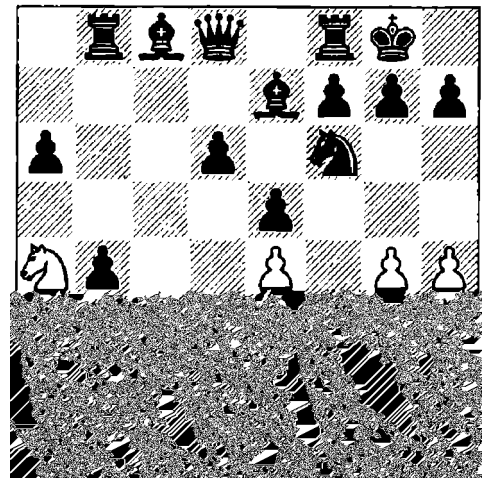
b) 14 le2 'a and then:

bl) 15 a3 is met by 15...1b8. It's stange that I gave this much attention; a3 is rarely a good move in such situations. I suppose I was woried I would miss such a move. This suggests, despite my moralizing, a basic lack of confdence.

b2) 15 bl ie6 16 l ld5!?. I tied hard to force this type of position b cause it had made a stong impression on me a a youngster. I especially liked the way that Black gained space and time with tempo (simila ideas ae seen in the Rauzer with ...a6 and ...h6). Things never seem so easy when you're sitting opposite a 2750 though, and Morozevich demonstated that White is not worse even here: after 17 g5 d4 18 ·xd4! lxe4 (18...exd4 19 gxf6 ixf6 20 f4 looks slightly better for White, because d4 is weak and it will be difcult for Black to avoid the exchage of light-squaed bishops) 19 fxe4 exd4 20 ih3 ic4! 21 'ixd4 ib5 White's extra pawn and centa control seem to outweigh Black's st ctural and bishop advtage.

The big problem here was that my moralizing prevented me from seeing the position with any clarity. Assuming that such a line would b good for me wa wrong and tying to force it even when it wasn't remotely forced wa wong. I wrote in my post-game notes: "This dangerous pathology of t ing to navigate yourself towads a line that appeals to you is well worth eradicating." Such a phenomenon is faily typical of ***Perfectionism*** in that you think there is a way the game ***ought*** to develop and then when your opponent deviates (shows himself to be 'deviant') there is a temptation to think that he is 'guilty', rather than question your own misplaced 'morality'

14...1b8 (D)



W

Now I was happy, content to have sidelined the knight and looking forwad to attacking it. This is very poorjudgement. Its t ck me after the g a e that I have some sort of problem of a more general nature with the idea that a kingside attack cannot succeed with a waywad piece on the other side of the boad. This is interesting with regard to the relatonship between dynamics and statics in that when seen by itself the knight is indeed statically bad on a4 b caus it has little scope and is difficult to defend, but in fact the knight is by no means misplaced on a4. GM Danny King made the point very lucidly when he said that this one piece holds up my queenside play, and since the main teme in the position is competing attacks, the knight is a hero of the white amy and an iritation for Black. Thinkng dynamically, I should ony reach this position with some concrete vaations in mind with regard to attacking this kight. Moreover, I think I kidded myself into thinking this was OK because I badly ***wanted*** to play the line with 14 le2. I also wanted to tae advtage of h4 instead of g5 and thinking tat I deserved to assume the initiative clouded my judgement.

15 g5 ld7?

Played quickly, still under the illusion that I was OK adlokingfor adto... ib7-c6. I rejected other moves because they didn't seem consistent with the idea of punishing him:

a) 15... le8 looks unimpressive, but is probably better than what I played. Then 16 h5!? 'ia 17 b3 Jd7 18 g6 Jxa4 19 bxa4 favours White.

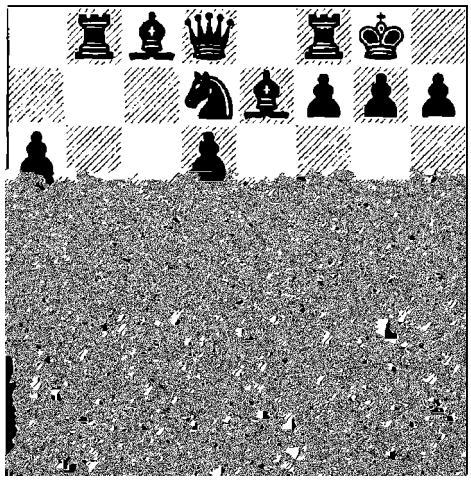
b) 15... lh5! is bst. It holds up the kingside and makes 12...e5 look respectable. Morozevich described this as 'normal'. After 16 ic4, all I could think of was that it was impossible to make progress on the queenside and that it would be difcult to attack the a4-knight wit ...Jd7 because of the tactical resource lc5. This was ***Egoism*** as much as ***Perfectionism***

because I didn't stop to think of how the respective positions looked from my opponent's point of view. However, my failure to evaluate these lines correctly had more to do with my 'desire to punish', which I could only fulfil if I could exploit that wayward knight on a4. After 16...♗d7!? (16...♗e6 17 ♗b3 ♕c7 is also comfortable for Black) 17 ♘c5 (17 ♗b3!? ' ia 18 ♘c5) 17...♗b5 18 ♗xb5 ♖xb5 19 ♘b3 White is no more than slightly better, if that, because his knight is on a bad route and will soon be hassled by the a-pawn. These lines suggest that 12...e5 wasn't really so bad after all, but the spirit in which it was played was woeful.

16 b3! (D)

A strong waiting move, which removes any worries White may have over his wayward knight. "I just wanted to show you that you had nothing", said my opponent. Indeed it is already very difficult for Black to find an adequate answer to the inevitable pawn-storm on the kingside.

B



16... . b7

Played with a certain amount of confidence, given that I had assured myself that taking on b4 was not good for White (17 ♕xb4 d5 gives Black strong counterplay). It was fairly stupid even to think that my opponent might grab such a pawn but the fact that he couldn't take it safely made me feel quite 'righteous' about my strategy.

17 hS fS?!

I played this with some vague notion that I was now making sense of all my pieces. Although it is a good idea to talk with your pieces, it is important not to become too dogmatic about it. Whatever I may have thought about my own pieces working well together at the time, it is clear to me now that all of White's pieces are better than mine. At the time I was too busy 'moralizing' to think that I might myself be making some 'immoral' judgements. This is fairly typical of people who moralize; they rarely stop to question their own fallibility. The fact that I might be totally lost hadn't occurred to me at all and yet this now seems to be the case. 17...♗c6 would have been better, but 18 g6 still looks very nasty indeed.

18 . c4+!

It is shocking to think that I was pleased to see this (because he could no longer take en passant). In my warped state of mind I considered this good news since he now has to sacrifice a piece to attack my king. This is typical of what happens when your chess becomes 'idealistic' – you think in overly general terms about adherence to rules and forget about the position in front of you.

18... h8 19 g6

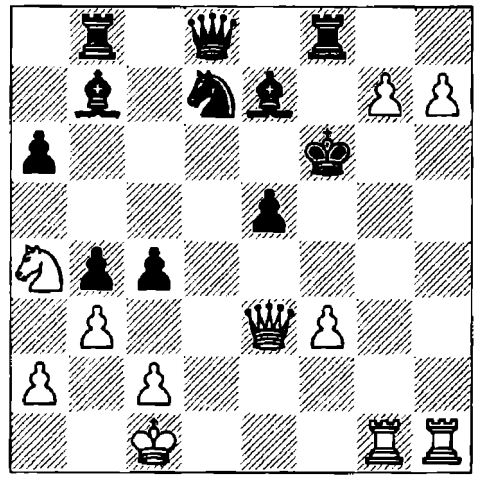
Only now did I appreciate the finality of the threat of h6. My position is completely lost, and as Nigel Short so kindly put it after the game, it looks like the type of position he would expect to get in a simultaneous display.

19...h6

19...f4 20 h6! is the end, and due to this there is no way to hold Black's position. 19...fxe4 20 h6 isn't any better.

20 . xh6! fxe4 21 l dgl! e3 22 1 xe3 **d5** 23 J xg7+ xg7 24 h6+ f6 25 g7 dxc4 26 h7 (D)

B



1-0

The fnal position deserves a diagram. I guess I didn't quite succeed in punishing him a ter all.

The moral (!) of the story is not to mor a ize during a chess game. Nobody plays perfect chess and you are liable to make your chess much more imperfect if you strive to 'punish' your opponents for t eir imperfection. In par· ticular, don't a sume a move you hadn't ex· pected is bad; often it's just a sign that you should look at the position more closely to see what else you haven't seen.

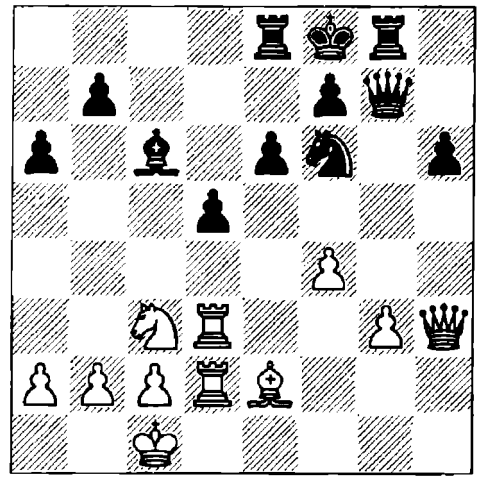
'Copy-Cat Crime'

Follow that *will* a n that *way which experience confirms to be your own.*
CARL JUNG

The 'crime' here is to play your moves in accor-dance with what you think a player you admire would do in the s a e situation. This leads to very simil a problems to those we saw in 'The Trappings of Analogy' in Chapter 1 and t is sort of 'cut and paste' approach to chess inv a i-ably f a ls to make best use of your abilities. Be-fore we consider why this m ght be the case, please be cle a that I a not saying you should ***never*** think of how, e.g. Shirov, K a pov, or Petrosian would play the position you have in f ont of you, because it can often be an excel-lent way to 'jump out' of your patterns. There a e de f nitely times when this is useful, but most of the time I think it will lead you as t ay.

The most important thing is not to use this type of technique as a matter of course. The player(s) you adm i e have developed their style over several ye a s based on unique personal ex-perience and study. What you think of as their 'style' is unlikely to be an accurate reflection of what their style actually is, and they will usu-ally be s t ong enough to 'jump out' of their nor-mal way of playing when the position requires it. What's more, it may well b such a position you a e consider ng when you try to 'copy' them. I mention this in t e context of ***Perfec-tionism*** because it is consistent with t e idea of creating an 'ideal' against which to base your efforts. It is dangerous not only because the 'ideal' is not a ways as p rfect as you t ink it is, but we are liable to misunderstand the ideal in a y case, and since reaching it may be beyond us, even t ying to get there may b mis t ken.

B



Bryson – Rowson
Aberdeen 1998

I sensed that this was a key moment in t e g a e and knew the time was ripe for some so r of t ansformation. I would have placed this ex-ample in Chapter 2 had it not been for the way I went about deciding on my move. Shortly prior to this g a e I had f nished my six-game match with GM Michael Adams. I learned a great deal in the pr o ess of preparing, playing and analys-ing for the g a es with Ad a s and had b gun to feel that I had some idea of how 'Mickey' plays chess. So, after a little bit of personal rumina-tion about how to proceed didn't yield any-t ing, I asked myself what Mickey would play here. At f rst I thought he would play a move which just improves the position without changing it much, because he's rather good at that sort of thing. I couldn't see such a move though, so I assumed he would c a mly re-route the f6-k n ght to c5 and slowly probe White into making a mistake. However, looking at this more closely didn't convince me of its merits. In general I wasn't keen to swap the g3-pawn for the h6-pawn, so it's not cle a that my knight is any better on c5 than it is on f6. A f er **28...** t d7!? **29** J d1 t c5 30 l d4 ' k g3 31 i xh6+ I am still a pawn up, and no doubt better, but it's not clear what the future holds for my k ng.

Therefore I f gured he would do something else. **28...** l e4 is cle a ly an i<ea but I wasn't

happy to relieve the tension so soon. Then, perhaps unconsciously, I had something like a visual image of Mickey playing t e move 28...♘e4 and without much further ado, convinced myself t at there was nothing better. What I fmd a little bit eerie is the absence of any real justi f cation for this move, other than the fact that I t ought Mickey would play it. I couldn't understnd why this t anspired, and still don't fully, but the i age of Mickey playing a st ong ...♘e4 must have been lodged in my memory banks with some emotional content because in g a es 3 (21... l xe4) and 5 (22... l e4) of our match it was this move that hastened my downfall and even now I can picture him playing these moves. This is rather speculative of course, but to my mind it seems the most compelling explanation. The lesson to be drawn from this is that what we think a strong player would play is not a ways related to an understanding of that player, but rather some memory of that player doing some t ing which made a particular impr e sion on us.

28... l e4?

I was so sure that this was the moment where I missed a chance to assume a decisive advantage that I showed it to GMs Julian Hodgson a d Bogdan Lalić at the end of the event. Julian agreed that this w a 't e moment' and, like me, wondered what Mickey would play here. He didn't know, and was also a little unsure about how Black should proceed. Bogdan, on the other hand, just t h ew himself into the position and discovered quite a surprising solution.

28...e5! 29 fxeS l xeS seems at f rst sight very we a ening, but when you l o k at the posit on without prejudice you see that Black's position now re a ly comes alive a d al that is bad about White's position comes to the fore. After loo k ng at this position for a bit it was cle a to all of us that White w a faced with big problems a d had no signi f cant counte r lay. W ite's king is quite uncomfortable, and there's no comforting move that will make it less so. 30 J f3 'ĝS! reve a s the st ength of the idea, which is to have a safe squ a e for the king on g7 and exploit White's jumbled pieces. Black is in total con t ol of the g a e and it's su r risingly di f cult to make White's king feel any safer. I f nd it an especi a ly pleasing p a adox that opening up t e position i creases the secu r ty of my king. Julian was quick to point out that much as he appreciated 28...e5, "it's not a very Mickey move". Bogdan couldn't re a ly say why 28...e5 looked right to him, but he felt that the awkward position of the white king was a significant positional factor.

Loo k ng at t is ex a ple again a couple of years on, it st r kes me that had I been thinking of Speelman instead of Ad a s I may have looked at a move which I didn't consider during the g a e or a ter it. Speelman is renowned for somewhat manic chess where he brings positions to life in the most surpris i g ways. He is also excellent at justifying the crazy-l o king moves he comes up with, both verbally and with v a iations. So when I asked myself what he would play, I thought of 28... J b5!? 29 t xb5 (allowing the bishops to be swap p d leaves me with no problems because I can play ...hS, ... 'ĝ4 and ... g7, if nothing else) 29...axb5. By exchanging my least active piece and removing one of my opponent's most t oublesome, I improve the h a ony of my remaining pieces. There is a cost in terms of the struc t al d a age on the queenside, but the dynamics seem to make up for this. Given the relative 'safety' of Black's advantage on move 28, it seems st ange to compromise the queenside like this, but a closer look again reveals that White is poorly coordinated and Black's remaining pieces all have signi f cant roles to play. Moreover, ... l 4 is now a big threat which can only be sensibly stopped by 30 J f3 (not 30 l b3 l e4 31 l dd3 l f) 30... l a8 31 bl 'xg3 32 'xh6+ e7, when Black's excellent piece coordination leaves White in signi f cant di f culties.

So it seems that both 28...e5 and 28... J b5 would lead to a decisive advantage for Black, but neither of these moves c a e f om thinking about how Michael Ad a s would play the position. Come to think of it, Mickey would almost ce r inly have played one of these moves, if only because he so rarely misses oppo r unities, but they a e not the type of move that one would derive f om a consideration of his style, and therefore it was a mis t e to think of what he would play in this given ins t nce.

29 l e4 dxe4 30 l c3 f5

White's pieces have considerable f eedom and I've exchanged o f my king's most reliable

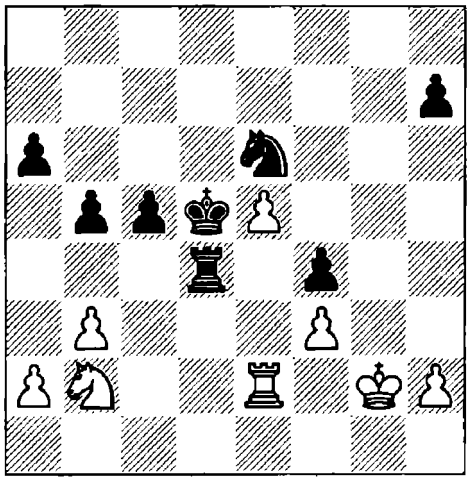
defender. I may well be better even here, but with the time-con t ol approaching everything bec a e a bit random and we both overlooked chances before finally agreeing a draw on move 46.

Bread, Butter, and Jam

You've got bread. You've got butter ... and you want jam!?!
GM JULIAN HO D SON.

These words should be borne in mind by all players prone to ***Perfectionism.*** The b a ic problem is asking too much of your position, or not being content with what you have, even when it's more than enough to reach the required result. I like to think of this as 'j a lust' because it usually occurs when we a e a l eady quite excited about our promising position (bread a d butter), but get so excited that we can't con t in our passion to make the position even better (we want j a on it too). It is a fairly typical p r-fectionist t ait, because most perfectionists feel that a g o d position (bread and butter) is not adequate (suboptimal) and they will only be satisf ed with 'a perfect position' (optimal), for which they need j a too.

B



Karpov – Short
Candidates match (game 3), Linares 1992

Black has a commanding position, with ex-t a space, a potential passed pawn and superior pieces. Moreover, White's e5-pawn is weak, and the b2- k ight is short of squares. Perhaps more signi f cantly, Sho r had been making visible progress with every move and no doubt wanted this t end to continue.

44...h5

"Short forgets where his pawn-maj ority is, and instead st a ts on some gr a d plan of encirclement, the net result of which is to allow White to exchange h-pawns, thus easing his defensive task." - IM Crouch (writing in ***Chess Monthly***). This seems a little h a sh, given that Black is still winning after this move, but it d o s seem that the t end now turns in Ka r v's favour. Short must have liked his position very much, but perhaps didn't feel that it w a enough to slay the mighty Karpov, so he went in search of something to add a little 'flavour' to t e p sition.

Sho r 's aim is to advance the h-pawn to h3, thus leaving White with even less space for his pieces. Given that he already had bread and butter, such a desire seems like a classic c a e of 'jam lust'. The m a n point is that the bread and butter was more than enough to win the g a e, and the time t a en to get the j a out of the cu bo a d and spread it on his bread gives K a v some breathing space to organize his position.

Short's notes in ***Informator*** just give **44**...c4! 45 bxc4+ bxc4 46 l a4 (otherwise ...c3 wins the k ight) 46... l d3 "with the idea of ...c3" and the assessment that Black is winning. **A** little analysis by IM Colin Crouch con f ms this to be t e case: 47 l b2 l e3 48 l d2+ (48 ♔f2 ' d4 wins too) 48... l d4 49 i dl l e2+ 50 l xe2 t xe2 51 f i e1 or 47 l c2 i d4 48 l c3 l xc3 49 t xc3+ xeS.

45 n h4 46 g2 l gs 47 f h3 48 l c2 l e6 49 e2 xeS SO l d3+ d6 51 ♘f2 ♖d5 52 l c3 c6 53 i xh3 l bS 54 l C . xh2 55 n

K a pov has defended calmly and now his pieces a e quite well coordinated. White is still lost due to Black's superior activity, space advantage and ex t a pawn. However, the t end has turned in White's favour and unless the new t end is stopped by some incisive play by Short, K a pov has good drawing chances. Short did indeed miss a few wins, although nothing ve r simple, and eventually drew on move 94.

The above manifestations of ***Perfectionism*** a e, I think, more widespread than we tend to

i agine, but I'm sure most chess-players would single out the greatest and most prevalent problem with Pe rectionism to b that old chestnut, time- t ouble. My aim now is to consider why we are so inclined to fall short of time. I will treat the issue fom a sli g tly unusual p rspective and so the interested reader may like to consult further reading on this matter, for which I recommend Krogius, Psychology in Chess (Chapters 5 and 6) and Nunn, Secrets of Practical Chess (pages 59-61).

The Causes of Time-Trouble (and a few remedies)

T e clock is just as much a part of the game as the board and pieces, and losing because of time-trouble is no d i ference to losing because of weak play - it's still a ze r on the score-sheet.
GM JOHN NUNN

It may seem that the following list d o sn't describ issues related to Pe rectionism but in fact most of them do, if we look at Pe rectionism broadly as the desire to follow a certain m o el towards which you aspire. After considering this Jist I draw some more general conclusions about time- t ouble, and what to do about it. My bottom line, however, is that it is not always 'sin f l' to run into time-trouble and we shouldn't always blame ourselves for doing so. What is important is that you realize just how important a p a t of the game the cl o k is, and if you liked what I said in Chapter 4, it may b help f l to see it as one of four dimensions of the g a e, to be treated with as much attention as the other three.

1) Complexity of the game

Some g a es a e fuJJ of di f cult, time-consuming decisions that require bo t players to use a lot of time to f nd the right moves. The more complex the position, the more you will need to use intuition to make decisions. A con f dent player w il just t st his gut feeling and accept that further thinking won't make the decision any easier. However, there a e undoubtedly some games where 'time-trouble (less than a minute per move is the standard, but not l i iting, de f nition) is almost unavoidable. When you are up against a player who poses o r ginal problems, you will need some time to solve them. Kasparov, for example, f equently ran short of time when playing Karpov, and now does so against Kramnik, although in general he is fairly resistant to running short of time. Michael Adams has stated that one of his main strengths is avoiding time-trouble, but even he gets sho r of time when up against the ve r b st players.

2) Deliberately running short of time

This normally occurs when a player has a bad position and wants to 'blitz' the opponent or just begin some sort of psychological warfare by playing quickly (and often noisily). In my experience the players who do this tend to be quite 'macho' and love the drama and adrenaline rush of hand-to-hand combat under pressure. I would say "don't do this!", but I don't see how that's going to help, especi a ly because m a y players enjoy being in time-trouble. The 'hit' you get from those ten to twenty minute periods where big decisions are made very quickly is, for many players, a big at t action of the g a e.

3) Poor theoretical preparation

T is can lead to a doubtful mindset. If you begin the game slowly and cautiously, t is can undermine your con f dence for the rest of the game. O p ning preparation has as much to do with general con f dence a getting a good position out of the opening and, although it's asking a lot, I would simply suggest that you get your openings sorted out! Indeed if you don't know your openings well, don't have time to prepare something, or aren't suited to playing o f beat lines then it's ve r di f cult to avoid giving your opponent the psychological advantage early in the game. Moreover, I f rmly believe that the seeds of slow play later in the game are sown in the opening. I don't think it's wise to play the opening super-quickly because then it will be hard to adjust when you have to think for yourself, but in general you shouldn't s p nd more than half an hour for your f st ten moves. l f you are doing this you either need to study your openings, or prepare yourself for the game psychologically so that you a e more con f dent on ar r val.

4) Lack of practice

When you are 'rusty' you just don't see things as quickly as you do when you are well practised. Moreover, your awareness that you are below par is liable to lower your self-confidence. The only thing that might help here is to solve some combinational exercises or have a few blitz games against a computer before playing. However, a little twist was pointed out to me by English IM Jonathan Parker, who has no problems playing at over 2500 level despite long periods of inactivity. The irony is that you get short of time because you are rusty, but then the rustiness doesn't show itself as much in time-trouble because you can just play on your judgement and experience. Indeed Jonathan even said that getting into time-trouble is the best cure for rustiness! Interesting stuff, but don't try this at home.

5) Doubts concerning analysis

This leads to the constant checking and rechecking of variations because you don't trust yourself to get it right the first time. Normally this stems from a lack of confidence and excessive fear of making a mistake. It also tends to afflict players who don't like to calculate much and so when they have to do it, they don't do it very well. My simple advice would be to face up to the fact that mistakes are inevitable. Just allow yourself to make mistakes - it's no crime! The biggest mistake is constantly to be afraid of making a mistake. It's much better that you just trust yourself; even if you do make a few little mistakes, because then at least you'll stop making this big one.

6) Fear of opponent/seeing ghosts

If you are informed that your opponent is a brilliant tactician you may be inclined to spend time looking for non-existent tactics or if you are up against a stronger player you may doubt your judgement. The key is to be confident of your own abilities, and know your strengths and limitations. It's also wo n remembring that your opponent is not infallible, and whatever their abilities, he can't change the rules of the game. As Julian Hodgson once put it when consoling someone about to play a stronger player: "Don't worry! For every move he gets, you get one back".

7) Crucial game; extra tension

Last rounds, grudge matches and crunch te games all lead to games where the result increases in importace and errors seem twice asignificant. Unless you are very confident of playing well under this pressure, you will take extra time and care to be accurate. The bstway to garner this confidence is pre-game preparation where you think carefully about the psychological aspects of the battle at hand, including the tension, before you arrive at the board. Visualization is a useful technique here, but anything that you think will make you feel more 'at home' during such games should be considered.

8) Time-wasting thoughts

Examples include looking back at what might have been if you had played a different move, thinking of variations in the game next to you, thinking of rating points you'll gain when you eventually win, etc. You are less likely to do this if you are confident that thinking of your own position will yield helpful insights. Also, as we'll see in the next chapter, there are many different ways to look at a position, and this can help solve the boredom caused by seeing the same thing again and again.

9) Fear of the unknown

If you lack experience in certain types of position, you may be wary of entering them, and pause looking for alternatives that either aren't a good, or just aren't there. This may involve a 1d4 player being scared of Sicilian structures, a general fear of sacrificing material, or maybe even a fear of the endgame in general. Here you just have to believe in your own creative ingenuity and general understanding. Just because you haven't been exposed to that type of position before, doesn't mean that you can't play it well. All I can recommend in such situations is to find the courage to go ahead, because only by embracing new territory do we learn new things.

10) Attraction to complex positions

Some players seek out positions that require a lot of thinking time, hoping to prob the i opp-

lost in random t i e-scr a bles, someth ng needs to be done. The solution may be to navigate your way th ough the complexity with your intuition and b confident, trust your feelings and k ow that t is is as reliable an approach as 'think ng' yo u way to a solution. However, as we saw above, time-t ouble is not always avoidable.

11) General indecision

You can't make up your mind. The 'which rook?' question is a classic example. If you dither for twenty minutes over Rfd1 or Rad1 then you are letting yourself down. Just get on with it! At such moments it is worth asking yourself if you will need this time more later than you do now, and more often than not, the answer is yes! In such situations you are paralysed by your choices and lack the conf dence to make an educated guess. In this respect I a g eat b liever in John Nunn's advice: "Chess is all about making decisions. Postponing a decision doesn't necessarily improve it. Try to get into the habit of asking yourself: is further t ought actually going to be bene f cial." Another question to ask is: "is this problem solvable, and if so how long will it t a e me?" O f en the answer w l b no, in which c a you just have to make a good guess; and if the answer is yes, but it will t a e a long time, you have to gauge whether you can a f ord the time to work it out, b cause it might just be more practical to guess.

12) Excessive attention to detail

Spending many minutes on the possible signi f cance of ve r minor matters that, deep down, you know to be fa i ly i r elevant. Just face up to the fact that chess resul t are rarely decided by such small matters. Most games include a plethora of e r ors on both sides, and the biggest ones, the ones t at really matter, often occur when you're short of time.

13) Excuse provision

Many players simply can't handle losing on the bo a d and fail to take responsibility for their moves in time-trouble or the fact that they got sho r of t me. I have absolutely no sympathy for t is. Time-trouble may b an explanation for a certain decision, but it is never a go o excuse. This is what S a t e would call *'mauvaise foi'* (bad faith) in that you don't face up to your f eedom in relation to your circums t nces. Lack of con f dence to compete over the board leads to the 'poor me, I got short of time' mindset, which is, I think, pathetic.

14) Going 'walkabout'

Some tournaments have the toilets miles away from the playing hall, and the cafeteria is understa f ed. In these c a es you can s p nd a long time away from the board while your clock is ticking. You can also end up talking to fr ends, or being engrossed by someone else's position, or just generally wande r ng a ound. I do all these things myself and know t at t ey a e one cause of time-t ouble. However, I am not sure I could counsel ag a nst doing this sort of thing, basically because it tends to be f n! In so fa as there is a remedy, le a to gauge when you think your opponent will use a lot of thinking time, and limit your 'walkabouts' to two or th ee a g a e. Cu r ously, Jonathan Parker, p r-haps the s t ongest IM in the world (now a GM), considers 'walkabout' to be the main cause of his time-trouble problems.

Fu r he r ore, Michael Adams told me that his results improved considerably when he conquered his 'walkabout' problem, and that lots of players let themselves down by wande r ng around. I suggested that stretching legs, going to the toilet or getting refreshments were essential for some players, to which he replied that he used to think that too, but one day he realized that he was deceiving himself and his main motivation for leaving the board was actually to alleviate b redom! If you t e chess at all seriously, it's h a d to accept t is as a go o reason. Indeed Mickey now leaves the bo a d very rarely and usually only when he feels he has seen all that's worth seeing for the time being. The advice here is to try h a der at t e bo a d. Mickey's advice boiled down to "just s t y at the board and don't miss things". Indeed, if you have to miss some t ing, it's better to miss it t ough lack of ability than lack of e f ort. Conquering t e boredom factor will be touched upon in t e next chapter.

15) Deep thinks

This can be problem if you habitually t a e more than twenty minutes for a move more than

twice a game. In my ex p rience, it is very rare for a think of more t an twenty minutes to lead to a go o move. Normally if you think for this long, or longer, you just end up confusing yourself, and forget which line is which.

There may be a psychologica l neurological basis for this. For s t rters, Krogius writes: ''It is possible to detect in players who experience a limited range of attention, a relative backwardness in their understanding of the dynamics of play over the entire bo a d, which is revealed in their tendency to m a e a painstaking and productive analysis of only one particular idea or varia t on. Probably such players a e a fected by an effort to be excessively conscientious; they a e striving for the best way in which to penetrate an appealing idea as deeply as possible." In this regard, psychologists spe a of 'the unitary nature of attention' which is descri b d by Edward de Bono like t is: "It is in the nat u of a self-organizing patterning system to have a single a ea of s t bilization. If there are two competing are a at a time, the l a ge one will expand and the lesser one will disappear even if the di f erence is very slight. This arises d i ectly f om the wiring of the system a d is not an imposed condition. It leads to one area of attention at a time."

Having these deep thinks may be mist a en, on this view, because you may not be thin k ng about a much as you imagine. It's more likely that you'll be going round in circles on the s a e line and there is some reason to think that this a ises because of the nature of your brain. Moreover, if you use the same neural pathway over and over, there is a chance that this pathway will become 'drenched', as neurologists put it, which means that more is by no means always b tter when it comes to thinking.

That said, GM Emil Sutovsky once co r mended me for having a h a f-hour t ink during a critical moment in our game which led to a co r ect decision in a complicated position. He explained that Russian GM Bareev had told him all about 'The Lin a es guys' and how they use their time, which made a big impression on him. App a ently, if you watch the world's best playing live, you see a sequence of moves played fairly quic k y followed by a substantial pause. They know all about the dangers of Blinking and so use their time in these critical moments, but don't wo r so much about small details at o t er moments and t st the i f a t tic judgement.

This suggests that deep thinks may not b such a crime, but that you should b c a e f l E 'you

17) Failure to make adequate use of opponent's thinking time

This is a very common sho r coming and I t ink it's related to boredom. To tac k e this problem we need to learn how to concen t ate better, which I discuss at the end of the next chapter.

18) Attention seeking

The most ridiculous cause of tim e- t ouble is the shocking desire of some players to attract attention by being sho r of time. This is somewhat absurd, and the only remedy I might suggest is to use other ways to grab people's attention, like wearing a funny hat, though preferably choose one that won't unduly disturb the opponent.

Pragmatism

Do or do not. There is no try.
YODA

Telling a h a dened perfectionist to be 'pragmatic' is a bit like telling a dog to be cat - it's asking a bit much, even in these days of genetic engineering. Yet this is the type of advice that the time-troubled perfectionist tends to hear. "You just need to be more practical", "don't forget about your cl o k", "don't leave less than ten minutes for your last ten moves", "never use more t an 20 minutes for a move", "turn up on time", "stay at the board", "play the opening quickly" and so on ***ad infinitum***. Even though such advice is perfectly sound and well intended, it r a ely helps. Pragmatism simply comes more easily to some people than others. Those who are not t oubled by the desire to play the uniquely co r ect move a part of a perfect game are in some ways rather blessed, but it's wrong to assume that perfectionists can sh a e such habits (dreams?) at the drop of a hat.

The perfectionist may lose many games through lack of time but they will also win some spectacul a games by digging deeply into a position that the pragmatist may only have understood super f cially. Moreover, I think it's limited to assume that the only aim of a chess game is to win. While it may be true that the pragmatist gets better results in general, we shouldn't assume that this is the model for everyone to follow. Indeed, some players prefer to win one beautiful game and lose two normal games t an to win t ee no r al games, but create nothing particularly memorable.

However, for those of you who would like to be a bit more pragmatic, and feel this to be attainable, I hope the following game will give a good example of pragmatic thinking.

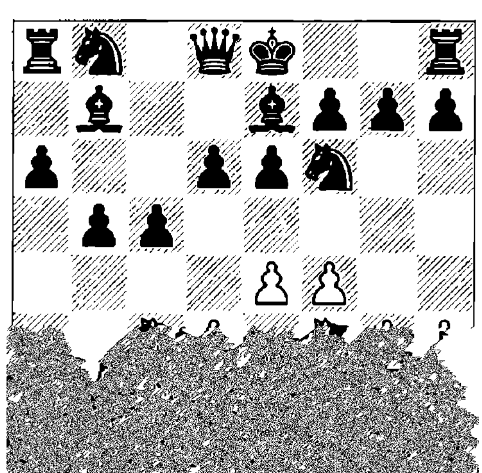
Rowson – Gardner
Edmonton 2000

1 **e4** cS 2 l c3 d6

A f er a four-minute thi n . This made me feel good about my opening choice. Now my opponent took at least two minutes for each of the following t ee moves.

3 f4 a6 4 l 3 bS 5 d3 . b7

Not so bad in itself but there are other developing moves which a e more f exible, and which should perhaps have been played f rst. The bishop is not well placed to aid queenside play with ...b4 or for the central push ...e6 and ... t b K two ed f ... tn icd e e sh ... e n



12 d4 (this is an improved version for Black, since I don't usually want to play i e3 so soon) 12...cxd4 13 l xd4 l xd4 14 · xd4 ' c7 I think Black is comfo r able, if only because White's king is a little weak in the long term, without pawns on the second rank to protect it. This reminds me of an elderly gentleman from Aberdeen (I don't remember the details; it was, as they say, 'a long time ago in a f a-away land') telling me not to open the king's 'box' in this way. He explained that when the box is closed (f2, g2, h2) the precious jewel (king) is safe from harm. He may get a little claustrophobic in the b x and need a little breathing space, so to move one pawn in f ont of the king is OK. Howev e, he felt that if you moved more than one of these pawns, the 'box' could no longer protect the king with any reliability. This may be a good way to think of why we generally shouldn't move pawns in front of our castled king: they are the 'box' which protects our most vi t l a set from the dangers of the ou t ide world.

10 eS

I could have kept t e tension with something like 10 e1, which is also playable, but the text-move gains space and makes it easier to f nd a sequence of good moves. Once you start thinking of alternatives to 10 e5 you are almost certain to lose a fair chunk of time for no re-w a d. 10 e5 gives bread and butter; there is no need to look for j a at this stage.

10... l fd7 11 d4

I had the option of allowing him to play ...d4, which would allow me to use the e4-squ a e, but I didn't see any good waiting move and so no need to spend much time looking for it because I already had a promising option.

l l... l c6 12 l e2!

Since the d5-pawn is going nowhere in a hu r y, the scope of this knight had to be improved at some point. Now there are two potentially favourable outcomes: either I get time to hold the cen t e with c3, or there will be a good knight on d4. Black's position is still perfectly healthy, but I was already more than twenty minutes up on the cl o k. If we do think of chess as a game of four dimensions, then we can p r-haps comp a e these dimensions and assign them some sort of relative value. If so, I'd imagine twenty minutes is worth about a third of a pawn, a move, or a wee bit of quality.

12... ' b6

A reasonable move, preparing to castle queenside and pressurizing d4, but now I was ple a ed to fortify my cen t e.

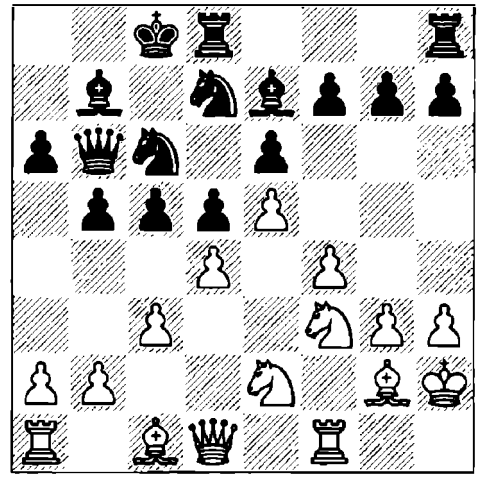
13 c3! 0-0-0?!

My opponent took a good while over t is move, which I sensed he wanted to play since he had shown no interest in castling kingside. The black king's 'box' is even more stretched than mine! I was aware that there was now going to be some sort of race, so I improved my most valuable piece f rst, and waited for a signal from my opponent as to what I should do next.

13...a5! looks like a good waiting move, supporting ... b and planning to activate the bishop on a6. On the one hand this will make t e queenside even less safe for the black king, but on the other hand it's not cle a how I should continue. Every developing move seems to have a drawback. 14 f5 is double-edged because of the ... l xe5 ideas. 14 i e3 d o sn't nullify ... l xe5 tricks, and a f er 14 h2, intending f5, Black plays 14...g6!, when 15 g4 is needed to keep the momentum but this is met by 15...h5!, when my king has emba r assed himself.

14 h2! ***(D)***

B



I played this one quickly. My king didn't feel too comfortable being eyed up by the black queen and now my position is both solid and f exible. I am ready to play a simple move like i e3, but ideas like f5 (and l f4) or a4 a e already in the air.

14...fS?

This is a significant e r or that gives me many ways to gain the advantage. Black cle a ly

intends ...h6 and ...g5 with counte r lay but this is slow and I have many ways to cross the plan. From a psychological point of view, the move I feared most w a just 14... ' ŧ7!?, eyeing up my king from afar again, and freeing b6 for the knight. This would have been especially unpleasant if played quickly because I hadn't yet decided what I was going to do with my position. However, 15 a4 b 16 · d2 looks re a onable in this res p ct.

14...h6 looks more f exible, but then my opponent may have been wo r ed about 15 f5 exf5 16 l f4 l f 17 dxc5, when I have some initiative.

15 l gS!

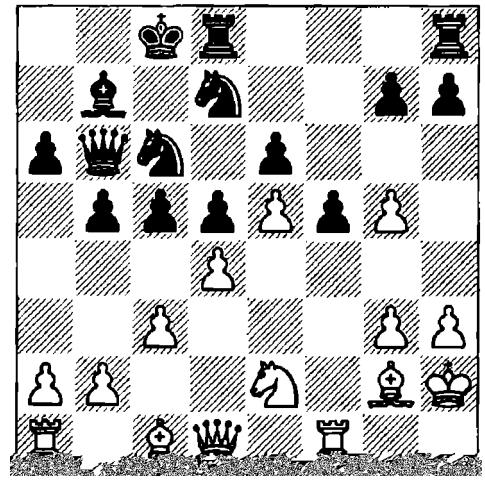
With hindsight this may not have been the best move, but I give t e exclamation m a k for pragmatism and speed in that I played this in about three r inutes. Black's last move gave me a lot of choice and it would have b en easy to spend h a f an hour or more at this juncture and still b en unsure which was best. I quickly saw that this move gave some advan t ge, even if it's of a slow, s t ategic nature. I also saw that capturing on c5 or f6 may be **good,** and was aware t at a4 can b considered too. I almost felt 'the desire to punish' here in that I could sense there should be a way to get a clear advantage with one of these lines, but t en I just asked myself if there was any chance that I would play anything other than 15 l gS after further thought and the answer was a resounding 'no'! I was aw a e that I may have been missing out on some j a , but I decided it wasn't worth the wait, and went on munching my bread and butter. The alternatives are:

a) 15 exf6 gxf6! (other captures look better for White, but this is highly murky and Black now has a positional t h eat of ...f5 followed by ... l f6-e4) 16 f5 doesn't help to cl a ify things after **16**...e5! 17 dxe5 l dxe5 18 l xe5 l xe5 **19** l f4. This may be better for White but what's the point in looking further here, in a position where my opponent has counterplay, when I can have at least as big an advantage more certainly and without risk?

b) 15 dxc5 was the main contender; I can st a t a queenside attack quite quickly here. 15... xc5 (15... · xc5 16 l g5 l de8 17 b · f 18 a4) **16** · e3 ' ŧ7 17 · xc5! (I don't want that knight coming to e4 and it's important to keep the momentum) 17... i xc5 18 b4 looked very promising at the time, and is almost forced too. I will soon put a knight on d4 and play a4, after which Black's b7-bishop is bad and his king will be exposed. However, it is much less cle a than t e g a e continuation and is suf f ciently murky to make it a 'three results' position in the sense that a little slip is all it would take for Black to assume the initiative. Indeed, although I seem to have an overwhel m ng initiative, I a very we a on the dark squares and I don't l i e the look of ...g5 and ...h5 coming my way. Given that I don't see a reasonable line for Black here, this may have been stronger than 15 l gS but I still prefer the move I played, p a tly b cause it a sures me of a l a ge and safe advantage, and because in playing it quic k y I kept the psychological pressure on my opponent.

lS... . xgS 16 fxgS (D)

B



Black's position is not fundamen t ly sound without his d a k-squared bishop, and it is far from clear where his counte r lay will come f om. I can play on the queenside with a4 or the kingside with g4 and l f4. Another bene f t of such a line is that it is quite depressing for Black. Unl i e ta k ng on c5 and giving him the dark squares, there is really ve r little to make Black happy here. M oreover, to play well now he has to move out of the counter-attacking gear that l e to ...0-0-0 and ...f5 and t to keep his position **as** f exible as possible f om a purely de fensive point of view.

16...c4?

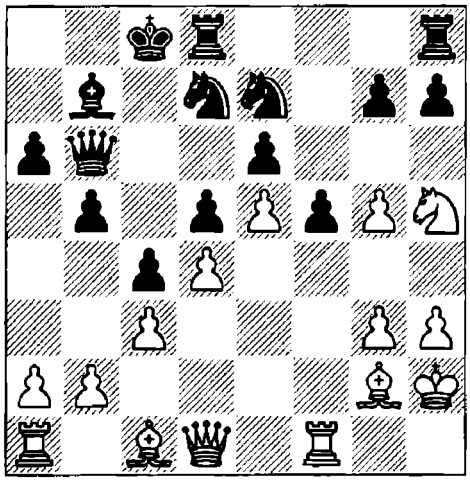
This m a es it diff cult for me to attack the black king and removes any wo r es Black may

have had about dxc5, but on the other (l a ger and more signi f cant) hand I have no weaknesses to wo r about any more. Also, although the position looks blocked, I have t ree pawn-bre a to prise it open (b3, a4 and g4). My opponent played this move quite quickly comp a ed to his other moves but this was actually a moment where some deep thin k ng would have helped. Indeed, **after a major exchange of pieces or change in pawn-structure it is generally a good idea to take a fresh look at the position. It takes your thoughts and emotions a while to catch up with the positional changes** so there is a danger that you will apply an outdated aggressive mindset (for example) to a new po,sition in which you need to be, for example, defensive (see L oseness).

16...cxd4 17 cxd4 seems on a super f cial level to expose Black's king and open the posi- t on for White's bishops but much more signi f - cant is that White has to defend d4 and Black has at least some scope for his rooks down the c- f le (remember that the main feature of a space advantage is that it tends to make your rooks better than the opponent's). Moreover, Black's b7-bishop can live again on a6 after ...b4 and ...a5 whereas White's g2-bishop, although fo r ally 'good', is actually a bit short of ideas. White is still clearly better, but Black is not wi t out chances to hold.

17 " f4! " e7 18 l 5! *(D)*

B



This knight manoeuvre leaves Black tied up and has the bonus of overprotecting g3.

18... l **dg**8 **19 b3!**

The unopposed prelate threatens to breathe f re on the a3-f8 diagonal. Notice that it's an unmoved piece t at can now go to a3. It's not in a hu r y to go there because it does a good job of discouraging ...h6 where it is, but for the first time in the game it seems cle a on which diag o nal t is bishop b longs and that's why it hasn't moved until now.

19...♘g6 20 a4!

As a consequence of this move, Black's p a - sive bishop is brought to life. But this bishop also does a good job of defending Black's king, so in the new circumstances of t ing to at t k t e black king, this bishop is not so 'bad' at all.

20...♗**c6** 21 **axb5** ♗**xb5** 22 **bxc4** i **xc**4

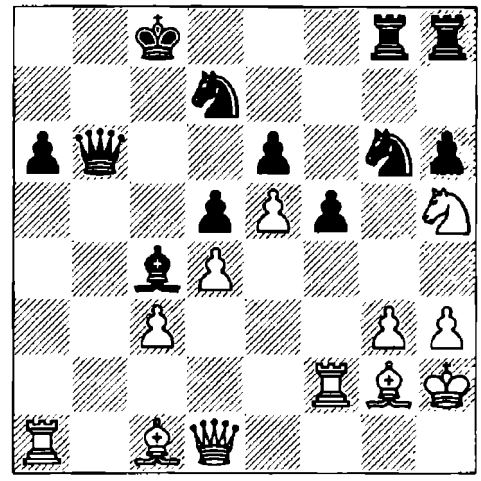
I was ple a ed to be relatively resistant to j a in this game. A part of me wanted to o p n t e queenside *and* leave him with his bad b7- bishop, but then I realized there wasn't much reason why his b7-bishop was any worse t an mine on g2 (indeed it's actually more relevant to the position) and so I brought it out to c4 with the intention of exchanging it.

23 ♖f2 h6

Or 23... " gxe5 24 l b2.

24 **gxh6 gxh6** *(D)*

W



25 ♗**f1!**

This is much more thematic than 25 l b2 or 25 i a3, which were also occupying my attention. My wo r y was that ... " xe5 might happen somehow - but this d o sn't seem to be a pro b lem and attacking Black's king is the name of the game.

25...♗**b3**

Ironically Black needs to keep this bishop. 25... ' c6 is met by 26 i xc4 ' xc4 27 l f a " b8 (27... r b7 28 : xa6 ' xa6 29 : xa6 < xa6 30 ' a4+) 28 ♖**a5**!.

26 'ie2 **a5?**

26... i c4 27 1 el 'ic6 28 · xc4 'ixc4 29 l fa2 b7 is more stubborn. However, 30 : xa6 1 xa6 31 l ba6 xa6 32 l f6 then looks ve r strong. **A** pure material count is not so encouraging, but White's queen is in her element here due to the exposed king (see Chapter 4) and Black's knights look a bit stray. I don't see a defence for Black to the asso r ed ideas of 'ie2-h5, i a3 and c4.

27 'ia6+ 1 xa6 28 i xa6+ c7 29 : Xa5

White now has a clear extra pawn as well as positional advantages.

29... l a8 30 l a3 i c4 31 i xc4 : xa3 32 i x d c4 33 l g7! l g 8 34 g4! fxg4 35 i x 8 g3+ **36** xg3 : gs

A creative defensive **try:** Black wants to t a e on **f8** a d g7, and then t y to hold t e r o k ending, but it turns out that I can keep my extra piece.

37 l f7 c6 38 i d6 l b6 39 < f3 l dS 40 l xe6 l xc3 41 l f4 1-0

Confidence

Conf dence is a preference.
BLUR, Park L ie

So, the perfectionist may do well to be more pragmatic, but such trite advice is not going to help very much. In so far as there is hope for t e p r ectionist, it comes from the fact that Pe rectionism seems to be caused, in many ways, by some sort of lack of conf dence, and I think it's easier to become more conf dent than it is to b - come more pragmatic. The latter requires that you change your character but the former merely asks you to believe in it.

There will be exceptions to this claim, but players who a e so desperate to get things perfect o fen give the impression that t ey are not f ly at e a e with their current playing s t ength, and aspire to bigger and better things. Those who are more pragmatic tend to be more at e a e with themselves. They don't need to strive for **an** ideal b cause they don't need to show themselves that they are worthy of it.

This can be seen at the highest levels of chess with (at some stage in their careers) GMs like Glek, Wells, M otwani and even Korchnoi, all of whom give the i pression of understanding chess better than their ratings or results would suggest. Perfectionists also tend to study chess away f om t e bo a d a lot and so inevitably compare the clarity and thoroughness of study to t e confusing mesh that typi f es practical chess, but c r cially without drawing a clear line between the two. In any case I f nd that many perfectionists are essentially a piring and bring their desire to b b tter to their games. This aspiration makes it difficult to be practical because they want to 'play well' almost as much a they w a t to win.

There seems to be a strange vicious circle in this respect. Some perfectionists aren't su f - ciently sure of themselves to t ust their intuition, think long and hard and outplay players higher rated, feel conf dent, mess it up in time-trouble, which undermines their conf dence, st a t again a little unsure of themselves, play slowly and so it goes on. I have seen this with many players and it has made me think that the p rfectionist's problem, before lack of pragmatism, is lack of basic self-belief. Now I use the word 'basic' for go o reason because many chess-players seem more conf dent than they actually are, many more are self-deceptive in that they think they are conf dent when they a en't and still more are contingently conf dent and quickly become less sure of themselves in unfamili a te r tory.

If you're t a ing ages to make your moves it suggests t at you a e **terrified** of making a mistake. But why be so te r i f ed? You m a e mistakes anyway, and so does your opponent, right? To my mind, basic self-belief is not about thinking you will never go wrong, but rather knowing that you can and will go wrong, but that these mistakes don't de f ne you. As John B a ton once said: "Nothing splendid has ever been achieved except by those who dared believe that something inside them was superior to circumstance." You have to see that it's OK to make mist a es. **Part** of being a strong practical player is having the serenity to know that you will make mist a es, and that al t ough you are responsible, in one sense it could be said that it's not your fault because chess is such a di f cult game and no one can play it for long without making mist a es. I mention Barton's quote because it's impo r ant to have t e conf - dence that even if a mist a e messes up your position (circumstances), you are still a good

enough player to fight back. **The confidence I'm talking about is the durable confidence that you will do well in spite of your errors, not the fragile confidence that you won't make any at all.**

The problem for the perfectionist is that he finds this very hard to take and feels highly sensitive about being the cause of error. If you can't face up to this you are liable to spend minutes on end doubting yourself over and over: "have I got it right?", "could I do better?". Now such thoughts are often quite stimulating, but if you have too many of them, doubt becomes your dominant mindset and that's when Churchill's quotation at the start of this chapter kicks in. We tend to think of doubt as something cognitive, but it can hold us in its clutches so firmly that it seems like an emotion. Indeed, 'doubtfulness' seems to be the defining characteristic of the perfectionist during the game.

Now I can't really give advice about how to be more confident, but I do think that confidence is often a matter of choice. If it doesn't come to you naturally I suggest that you take some time before your games to remind yourself that it's OK to make mistakes and that you believe in yourself enough to risk making them. It is difficult to prove any of the above but I hope the following game, based on the annotations of a self-confessed perfectionist, will bring some of these issues to light. Notes are based on (and include some quotations from) those by GM Peter Wells in *ChessBase Magazine*.

Wells – Ibragimov
Pulvermühle 2000

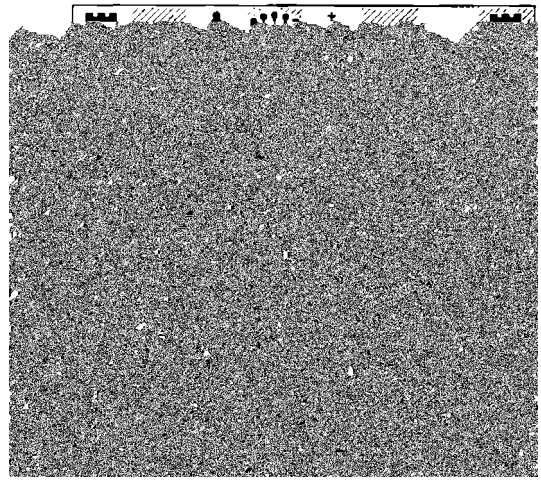
1 e4 e5 2 **♘f3 ♘c6 3 d4 exd4 4 ♘xd4 ♗c5 5 ♘xc6 bxc6**

This is provocative, and probably not very good, but such moves invite punishment, and therefore lure the opponent into the snare of Pe rectionism.

6 ♘c3 ♘e7 7 ♘a4!? ♗d6

Further provocation. It is conceivable that Ibragimov, knowing of Pete's propensity to get short of time, deliberately played moves that would lead his opponent to think. It's more likely that this was prepared though, and if so White's next move puts Black's system in some doubt. 7...♗b6 8 ♘xb6 axb6 9 b3 looks slightly better for White.

8 h4! *(D)*



"I like this move. Since the advance ...f5 involves definite risks, Black's only real hope to coordinate his awkwardly placed minor pieces rests on playing ...♘g6 followed by ...♗e5 or ...♗e7. The text predicts this, and offers excellent prospects of keeping Black tied up." This is indeed a strong move, but it took a fair amount of time and energy for White to convince himself that it was correct.

8...**0-0**

8...f5?! 9 ♕d4! (threatening e5) 9...fxe4 10 ♕xg7 ♘g6 11 ♗g5 ♗e7 12 ♘c3 ±.

9 h5!

Preventing ...♘g6 and threatening to cause at least a little mess by advancing still further.

9...h6

9...f5?? 10 ♗c4+ ♔h8 11 h6 g6 12 ♕d4+ is catastrophic for Black.

10 g4!

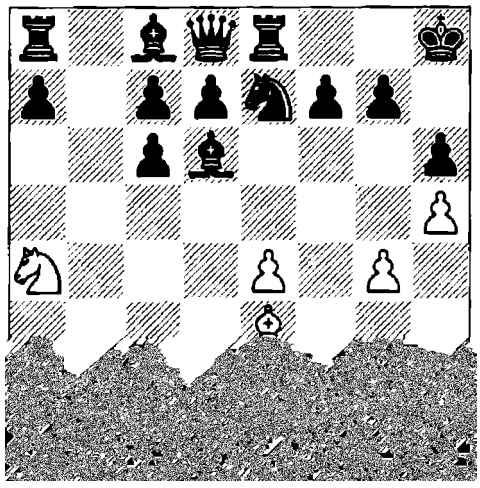
Another strong but unusual move. White's play is to be commended, but these moves work due to the specifics of the position and are not in any way stereotypical, so it's entirely natural that Pete spent a fair amount of time on them.

10...♖e8 11 ♗e3

"A classicist at heart, I felt it was about time to develop some pieces." – Wells. This is an instructive remark for what comes later. White's early advances have given him a large amount of territory and have made it very difficult for Black to mobilize. If White just completes development he will have a significant positional advantage.

11.. . b8 (D)

W



Black intends to play ...♘g8, move the bishop from d6 and then play ...d5. This is quite slow and shouldn't trouble White. Now, White has the attractive option of immediately attacking Black's king with g5, attacking f7 but loosening the white position or just getting his pieces out and playing on his positional advantages (better structure, more space). Pete now spent a long time trying to find an immediate kill with one of the first two options. This is a good case of 'jam lust' in that White already had his bread and butter and has played well to get it, but now his appetite got the better of him and, from a practical point of view, he made a big mistake.

12 ♗d3!

This is not the mistake; in fact this is a perfectly good move that strengthens the centre and gets another piece out. The mistake was not to play it sooner. It was quite right for White to have a look at 12 g5 and 12 ♗c4 but I think he should have opted for the 'bread and butter' option as soon as he realized that the complications from these 'jam moves' were quite difficult and by no means clear. There is a question of confidence here because if you fear that you'll only get one opportunity in a game, you are inclined to dwell on your decisions more than you should. This is especially true when you are already behind on the clock. Black wasn't playing especially fast either but it's bad to be short of time regardless of your opponent's time when you have the advantage because if you reach a mutual time-scramble, as they did in the game, the game will be very random and the position will matter less than the clock. Let's have a closer look at White's alternatives:

a) 12 g5!?. "Every 'chessical' bone in my body told me (and continues to tell me) that this is the right move. It was, also, unsurprisingly, the one my opponent was most afraid of." My intuition is at odds with Pete on this one, although it's not surprising that Black was afraid of the most aggressive move. My hunch is that it's too early for White to develop a significant attack, but that White's long-term positional advantages are very significant indeed. While thinking over his 12th move, Pete spent a long time trying to find a convincing follow-up after 12...♘g8, but there doesn't seem to be one.

a1) 13 ♕d4 hxg5 14 h6 ♕f6 15 hxg7++ ♔xg7 seems quite OK for Black.

a2) After 13 ♕d2 ♖xe4 14 ♘c3 ♖xe3+! (14...♗b4!?) 15 ♕xe3 ♕xg5 I prefer Black, because of the bishops and the ragged structure.

a3) 13 ♗d3!? – see the next note.

a4) 13 gxh6 ♘xh6 and then:

a41) 14 ♗g2!? ♕f6 15 ♕d2 probably favours White, but the position is full of complexity and it's easy for both sides to make mistakes. White is 'playing for three results' here whereas in the game he had a chance to play for just two.

a42) Pete felt that 14 ♗d3 ♕f6 (Pete doesn't mention 14...♗f8!? in his notes, but it looks more combative to me; with White's king in the centre, ...d5 could cause some problems) 15 ♕d2 was White's best try, and by implication, that 12 g5 was the right move, but I'm not so sure. With the knight on a4 and the long-term structural weaknesses, White is relying on his early initiative to bring in the jam, but such a position looks more unclear than anything else to me. Black can play ...♗f8 and ... d quickly, and there's always a ...♘g4 irritation in the air, like insects on your jam.

b) Pete also considered 12 ♗c4 "at some length" but saw nothing too encouraging after 12...♘g8 13 ♗xf7 ♖xe4 14 ♘c3 ♖e7 (14...♗b4 15 ♗g6 ♖e7) 15 ♗g6 ♗e5 when Pete felt that the white position was "a bit loose". Indeed, Black's pieces coordinate well and ...♖b8 and ...d5 will make things even better.

12... t g8 **13 ♕d2**

"Again it is difficult to make the 'violent' things work." 13 g5 hxg5 14 ♕d2 ♗e7! and now:

a) 15 h6 t xh6 16 0-0-0 d5 17 l dgl dxe4 18 l xg5 exd3 (18... i xg5 19 i xg5 f6 20 i xh6 exd3 21 i xg7++ xg7 22 ' h6+ is a draw) 19 l xg7?! ' xg7 20 i xh6+ g6 doesn't seem to work for White. The wayw a d position of the knight on a4 is most keenly felt in such lines.

b) 15 0-0-0 d5 16 h6 l xh6 17 i d4 i f6 and Black defends.

13... i f !

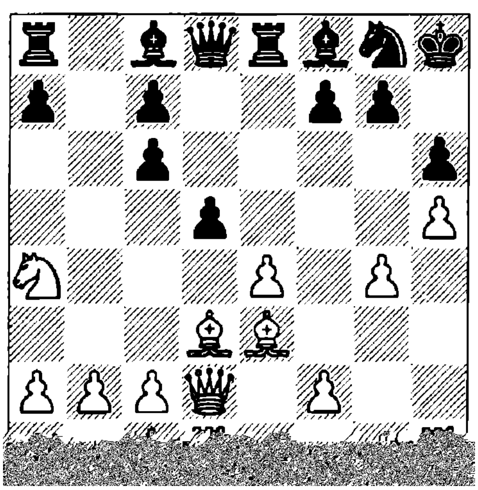
Overprotecting h6 and freeing the d-pawn.

14 **0-0-0**

14 g5 d 15 f3!? is given as sligh t y better for White by Pete. I f nd it curious that he's so keen to make g5 work. Personally, I a reluctant to we a en White's s t cture in this way, but maybe I'm just not aggressive enough.

14...d5 (D)

W



15 exd5?!

"Such a moment in the game, when the initiative is cle a ly slipping, presen t very severe psychological problems." Pete ad m tted that he was generally very "doubtful" here; doubting he was b tter any more, doubting he ever w a better, doubting if he'd make the time-control, doubting if he should let the queen out like this. In such a doubtful state it's very h a d to see things cle a ly. In fact it seems to me that White has been much better and is now, but t e advantage is more positional than dynamic and so White should pretty much t r to keep things as they are.

With 15 f3! White keeps some space advantage, re t ins long-te r attacking chances against the black king and enj oys a structural edge on the queenside. The a4-knight does a good j ob of con t olling c5. White may only have bread and butter, but it's a big f esh loaf and t e butter is newly churned. I'm sure if you'd shown this position to Pete as a third p a ty he would agree that White is better and that 15 f3 is the b st move and I think he would make these judgemen t very quickly. But curiously Pete told me that he w a only dimly aware of 15 **f3** as a possibility during the g a e. I suspect this is due to the 'hyper-drive' state he put himself in with those pawn advances and looking at all those complex variations where he doesn't quite **mate** the opponent's king. Pete was still p r m a ly looking at the position f om the point of view of mating Black and then lost the plot when there was no answer to the question he was as k ng the position. The ending after 15...dxe4?! 16 i xe4 ' xd2+ 17 l xd2 shows White's advantages in their pure form, but even if Black fals to cooperate on move 15, White has plenty of ideas, including ' c3, ' ia , i c5 and also g5.

15... i xg4! 16 l dgl ' xd5!

Black wins a pawn and develops his pieces. Pete does extremely well to stay in the g a e now.

17 t c3 ' d7 18 l h4 i f5 19 l d4 ' c8 **20 Πf4** i xd3 21 ' xd3 ' e6 22 l e4

The black queen is given no rest and White does have some compensation now due to Black's broken structure and the sensitivity of the pawns on f7 and g7.

22... ' h3 23 ' c4!

There was a brilliant idea b hind this move.

23... ' xh5

Black shows a good sense of danger, and now the position heads tow a ds equality. The b autifully geometric sequence 23... l xe4 **24** t xe4 ' xh5? 25 t g5! hxg5 26 ' xc6 +- **was** White's intention. Whenever Pete shows me such ideas, often in the context of a game he lost on time, I can't help but feel that he's often too creative for his own good.

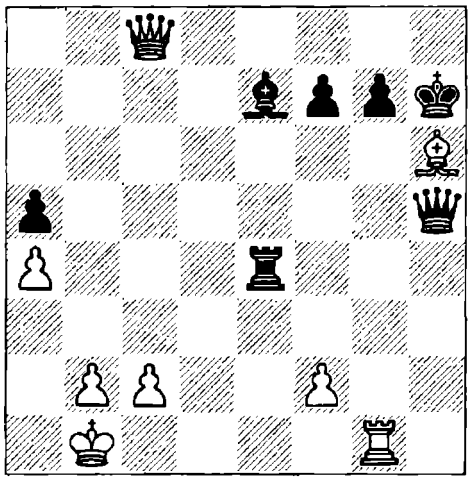
24 ' xc6 t f6 25 l xe8 AxeS 26 ' xc7 a 2 a4

It's tricky to play such a position in mutual t me- t ouble. This move is desirable in gener a but not especially urgent. Pete suggests that White should o cupy the key diagonal wi t 27 i d4!, when 27... ' h4 28 l d1 leaves White's pieces slightly more actively placed.

27... h7 28 b1 t e4?! 29 l xe4 **Πxe4 30** ' c8!

"Already with the following tactical shot in mind. Unfortunately I failed to realize that it prepares a tactical blow in two pa r , and without the follow-up Black will recom p se himself and White's king is suddenly the more vulnerable."

30... i e7 31 i xh6! (D)



A sensational blow, especially given that Pete's f ag was hanging. However, it's often diff cult to continue after such a move (cf. 32 ♘d5! in Rowson-Benj a in in the next chapter) because it makes you so excited that you lose your norm a sensibilities. Indeed it would be good to have a commercial break at such moments to give you time to marvel at the move, and also take in the position as a whole. I'm not sure if this applied to Pete in the given instance, but the problem is that your thoughts a e overwhelmed by the move, and you t a e it out of context, forgetting there's still a game to be played.

31... i f6 32 i e3?

A trage dy for Pete, who didn't have time to f nd 32 i g5! with simil a tactical motifs. A f er **32...** i xg5 33 ' f5+ ' g6 34 J xg5 ' xf5 35 J xf5 J xa4 36 . xf7 ± White would have excellent winning chances, assuming he could have made four more moves before his f ag fell; always a traumatic 'if' to have in a good position.

32... . xa4

Material equality, but Black's bishop at t cks and defends, while White's does neither.

33 ' c6 l h4 **34** ' a6

I tried to f nd an improvement for White here, but I would have lost on time.

34...a4 35 ' d3+ g6 36 ' d7 g7 37 l d1 J b4 38 i d4? ' xd1+ 0-1

A painful g a e to lose given that Pete played so many excellent moves.

Conclusion

Perfectionism manifests itself in many di f erent ways, principally time-trouble.

It would be naive to think that time-trouble can be avoided altogether, but it happens to some players much more than it should. Players falling shor of time would do well to think deeply about their self-con f dence, as only from this basis do they have a chance of becoming more pragmatic.

7 Looseness

In walking, just walk. In sitting, just sit. Above all, don't wobble.
YUN-MEN

This final sin, although distinctive, includes shades of all those we have considered thus far. It can be described as that state where you are prone to fall prey to all of the sins at one time, as if overwhelmed by a cascade of misplaced thoughts and feelings. More precisely, 'looseness' refers to the feeling that you are not in control of the game, whether you are drifting, overwhelmed by nerves, or tricked by emotional memories ('echoes'). The name of the sin was chosen in recognition of that general feeling of 'looseness' when you don't feel together somehow and lack focus or the ability to concentrate.

This is the sin that underlies that seemingly inexplicable phenomenon – 'losing the plot', or 'losing the thread' as they call it in North America. I prefer the former description and will use it here, mainly because the idea of an unfolding story in which we, the main characters, have to keep track of the plot and contribute towards it, appeals to me, and also because it seems more emotive. Indeed, I associate 'plot' with drama and suspense, but 'thread' makes me think of woolly jumpers.

Nunn (Secrets of P r ctical Chess, page 15) suggests that losing the thread/plot is mainly a result of carrying over an inaccurate evaluation from one position to another. The idea, consistent with my argument in Chapter 1, is based on the fact that humans tend to evaluate at some level before calculating. As a result, they will tend to look at variations and assess their relevance with reference to their initial evaluation, which is, thinks Nunn, inherently unreliable because it is not based on concrete analysis of the position in question. I will refer to this as 'Nunn's hangover theory' because it is based on a mistake you make at one moment 'hanging over' to cause problems in the next moment, just as too many drinks at night hang over to cause problems the next morning.

Nunn's insight is useful, and this type of thinking can indeed lead to problems of a plot-losing character (although it's also extremely useful in rapidly cutting down on the lines we feel compelled to consider as well, as Nunn points out). However, I have always felt that 'losing the plot' is a much more multi-faceted phenomenon, and has as much to do with emotions and memories as thinking processes. So although I will come back to 'Nunn's hangover theory', I also want to look at the role of nerves in chess, what happens when we collapse, why we drift without direction and how our memory plays tricks on us. I believe all of these contribute to that feeling of 'looseness' which every chess-player knows only too well.

'Tension Transference' and 'Neural Hijackings'

T e mode r chess game requires such tension. It's impossible. Jor a normal human to withstand.
GM VIKTOR KORCHNOI

How often do you feel totally out of control? How often are you so overwhelmed with anger, lust, joy, excitement or anxiety that you can't think straight and feel strangely detached from your actions? It happens more than you might think, and recent studies in neuroscience suggest that we can quite literally lose our rational faculties as they are swamped by emotion.

These emotional avalanches have been called 'neural hijackings' and their reality and importance has been uncovered in the research of Dr Joseph Le Doux, presented in his book T e Emotional Brain (1998). The evidence suggests that at these moments a centre in the limbic brain proclaims an emergency, recruiting the rest of the brain to its urgent agenda.

The 'hijacking' occurs almost instantaneously, t ggering the reaction c r cial moments before the 'neocortex', the thinking brain, has had a chance to get to grips with what's happening, and even longer before it ge t round to deciding if the relevant stimulus is threatening. The defining feature of t ese 'hijacks' is that once the moment passes, those p ssessed have the sense of not knowing what came over them. It's like our brains detect emergencies without our consent and have a neural shortcut that allows the ' a ygdala' (a cluster of interconnected structures above the brain stem, thought to be the brain's 'emotion specialist') to t a e control of o u response while the ne o ortex is still coming to a decision. This, of course, has huge su r ival value in evolution a y terms because it allows us to react to danger before we a e consciously aw a e of it.

In chess terms too, it can have some b nef- cial e fects in that you will steer cle a of certain lines t at a e considered unfavourable by your emotional memory. However, much of the t i e these 'hijackings' are the cause of us losing the plot, which in tu r can be t e cause of us losing the g a e. Indeed, at p aticul a ly tense moments, chess-players are inclined to 'lose it' in a way very simil a to the outcome of 'neural hijackings'. When Kasp a ov lost to Ivan Sokolov in Wijk aan Zee 1999, for example, t e game, although still theoretical, w a unusually sharp and tense before K a p a ov went w ong with 21..J u h7 instead of 21... f , which was the move favoured by theory. After the g a e Kasp a ov could only say: "It was a complete collapse of my nervous system not to play 21...♔f8" and t is expression "complete collapse of my nervous system" resonated well with many of my own experiences of losing the plot.

The relationship between the nervous system and the amygdala is not ent i ely cle a , but the idea of the nervous system collapsing intuitively seems a lot like b ing f o ded with emotion. Certainly the more 'steely' your nerves, t e less likely you a e to be 'hijacked' This reminds me of something Spassky sad on his loss to Fischer in Reykja v in 1972. I don't remember the exact words but it was something to the e f ect that at the st a t of the match his he a th w a in excellent shape but his ne r es were in tatters, and that this we a nervous system w a the principal cause of his defeat. It would b interesting to look again at this match with the aim gauging how often Spassky was 'neurally hijacked'!

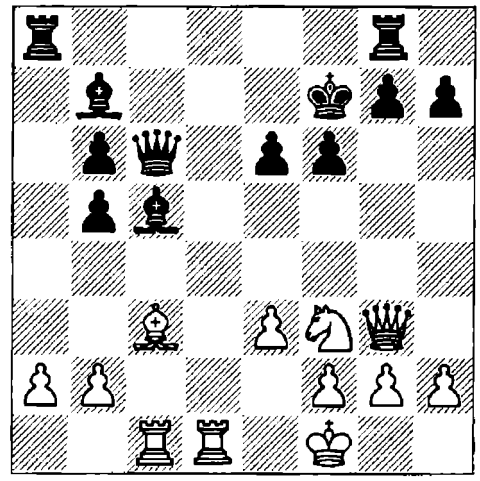
It should be stated that these hijackings are quite rare under no r al c i cumstances. In general, the thinking brain is like the manager of your thoughts, but when you unconsciously detect an 'emergency' in any shape or form, the hijack mechanism comes into play and makes your decision for you. It should be said that such 'emergencies' are also t iggered by extreme positive emotions. So a state of overwhelming excitement can also give your system such a shock that it feels the need to 'hijack' your brain and protect you from this ext eme state, whether there's really any threat at hand or not. However, a chess contest is not really a normal situation by human standards and we f r quently find ou r elv e feeling a degree of tension that leads the brain to the conclusion that an emergency is imminent.

Moreover, other brain scientists have shown that in t e f rst few milliseconds of our perceiving some t ing (e.g. a new position) we not only unconsciously comprehend what it is ('check!') but we also decide whether w e like it or not ('it's just a check'). It seems that the cognitive unconscious presents our aw a eness with not just the identity of what we see, but an opinion about it too. Our emotions literally have a mind of their own, and it can form and hold views inde p ndently of the thinking mind.

Not all feelings take a direct route to the a ygdala, but those that do include the most ch a ged and basic like fe a and anxiety. These are the ty p s of feelings which chess-players are exposed to dur i g a g a e, and much as this may cause you to e r on the chessboard, I'm not sure I can o fer much advice ag a nst billions of ye a s of evolution which have led to your existing neural circui t . I could pr o laim the v i tues of 'staying calm', but I doubt if that would help. However, there is no reason to be defeatist - we just have to understand how to use these emo- t ons intelligently, without pretending it will be easy.

Given that this type of hijacking is most likely to occur in important g a es where you are short of time, a slightly more useful piece of a vice is to suggest t at you expect, or at le a t

prepare yourself for, the unexpected. They say you conquer fe a through knowledge, and so you can deal with your fe a by facing up to the fact that you a e not under threat of any physical h a m during a game and that since your opponent can't change the r les of the game, he's limited in the types of surp r se he can pull. Moreover, at the end of the day, if you lose you lose, and life g o s on. However important the game may **be,** it's use f l to get this into perspective before you st a t playing. Then when the game becomes really tense, you'll be able to keep a healthy distance, and won't be such an att active host to the 'hijackers'.



Talking of tension, I have noticed that there is an interesting issue of 'transference' in this respect in that we often seem to release tension on the bo a d a a means of relieving the tension that we feel o u selves. Indeed I've noticed that players who a e capable of keeping the tension on the bo a d for a long time (e.g.

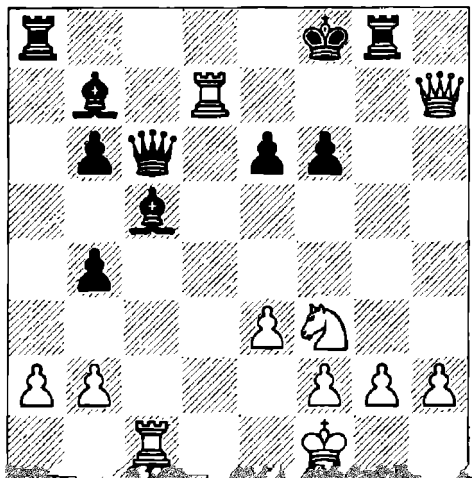
mutual time-trouble, with both of us having about five minutes to reach move 40.

31... g f6

Or 31...♔xf6 32 ♕g5+ ♔f7 33 ♘e5+.

32 ♕xh7+ ♔f8 33 ♖d7 (D)

B



Now I knew I was completely winning but I think I was already susceptible to the hijackers as a result of my highly excitable state. Julian looked disgusted with himself, and admitted later that 31 ♗xf6+ was a complete surprise. He put on his best grisly face, looked left, then right, saw there was only one sensible thing he could do in the circumstances, and got on with the game.

33...♕xd7 34 ♕xd7 ♗d5

Now that all happened a little fast and I must admit that my heart rate was probably not at a particularly healthy or sustainable level. Winning this match was suddenly a distinct possibility and as a 19-year-old who had read about Hodgson in magazines from a young age I'm not sure I was ready for such an achievement. In any case, the tension was becoming unbearable, and my nervous system was screaming for relief. In an effort to remove the tension from my body, I yielded to it by quickly playing a line that seemed to release the tension on the board. In fact only his most cooperative response leads to the end of the game but it seems that the decision was enacted by my emotional brain before my thinking brain could catch up and overrule.

Another curious thing about this position is that when we looked at it after the game, Julian felt that it wasn't so clear and thoughtfully massaged his bishops as if to say that they shouldn't be underestimated! They certainly make a strong visual impression and when you're short of time that counts for a lot. However, Black is completely lost and I have a choice of fairly simple wins. Julian is well known to be quite an optimistic player and it seems this can do your nerves a lot of favours! I find it very instructive that whereas I was giving myself a heart attack with the thought 'I'm winning! I'm winning!' Julian didn't have any thought like 'I'm losing'. Instead he just did what he had to do at the time, and enjoyed the more pleasing aspects of his position.

35 e4??

I can't really explain what this was all about, but since my first thought was 35...♗xe4 36 ♕xe6 with overwhelming threats, it's like my nervous system was saying, 'OK, OK, looks good... whatever, you're winning in any case, just hurry up and finish.' More generally, this is a fairly typical mistake in time-trouble; to have a one-track mind about certain variations and be over-prone to assume forcing moves like checks and captures are best. 35 ♕h7! with the principal threat of ♘h4-g6 looks like the cleanest kill.

35...♖g7!

Ah. I didn't expect that one, and he played it very fast. I now saw a promising ending and used a good chunk of my remaining time deciding whether to keep the queen.

36 ' bS

I would have played this more quickly had I seen 35...♖g7 coming, but I suddenly felt a little worried that I might blow this position (this match was full of missed opportunities) and was distracted by a safe alternative. The clock kept ticking, as clocks do, and by the time I had played 36 ♕b5 I experienced a cocktail of regret (35 e4?), anxiety (more mistakes to come, little time left), confusion (weird position, how to clarify), impatience (the game is lasting longer than it should have, let's get it over with) and all this was shaken and stirred with more than a capful of adrenaline. Julian, on the other hand, was beginning to look less dejected and could sense that this might be his lucky day.

After 36 ♕xg7+ ♔xg7 37 exd5, 37...♖xa2! is actually good for Black, but I spent most of my time musing over 37...exd5 38 ♖a1! followed by ♘f3-e1-d3, which gives White a very promising ending with little risk.

36...♗xe4 37 ♕c4?

Given my sh a y state of mind, I should now have taken this chance to cl a ify the situation, even if it lessens my advantage somewhat. 37 l xc5 bxc5 38 ' ĸcS+ f7 39 ' ĸb4 i xf3 40 gxf3 l xa2 41 h4 would have brought me to the time-con t ol safely, and given me a position which I cert a nly shouldn't lose, and have good chances of winning (it's very di f cult to coordinate t e rooks).

37...♗d5

For some reason I had missed this retreat, and t is oversight only served to make me more 'loose'.

38 ♕h4 ♔e7 39 ♘e1

Not p a ticul a ly bad, since it's no longer easy to clarify the situation. I wanted to preempt the t h eat of ..J ag8.

39...♖xa2 40 ♘d3?

A big mistake, but it's hard to play quiet moves when short of time and my emotion a brain w a doing **all** t e 'thin k ng'

40...♗xg2+

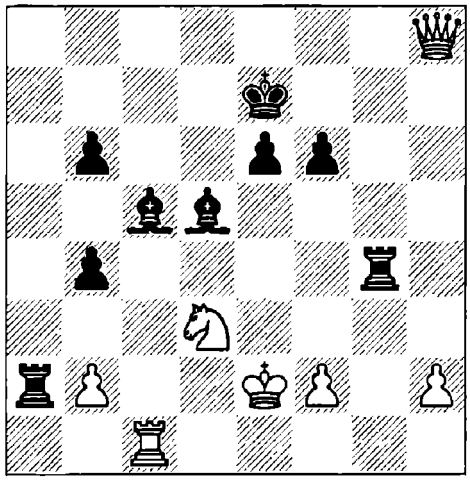
I'll never forget Julian's face **as** we re-played these events in the post-mortem: he munched this pawn with a long a m action, smiled, and said something like "Well I thought ' t anks', I'll keep taking them if you don't mind."

41 ♔e2

I've managed to coordinate my pieces but at the huge cost of three pawns. I doubt if Black is worse any more, and even if he were, it wouldn't matter too much because by this point we were both nervous wrecks. Nei t er of us could quite b lieve what had just happened and we b th anticipated fu r her errors to come.

41...♗d5 42 ♕h8 ♖g4 *(D)*

W



This was accompanied by the practical suggestion that we should call it a day. I was bit surprised by this draw o f er and accepted ve r quickly. I had forgotten, in a l my anxiety, that my opponent didn't experience this game without emotion either. Moreover, although Black has experienced a favourable trend, my post-crisis walkabout (in those days a common occu r ence) had calmed me down. In any case, my queen suddenly looks like rather a strong piece.

½-½

A Quick Survival Guide to Time-Trouble

Either this man i s dead or my watch has stopped.
GROUCHO MARX

Given t at the looseness in the game we have just examined occu r ed, as it o fen does, in time-trouble, this is a good moment to consider b r e f y how to avoid this type of collapse when you fall into time-trouble in your own g a es. Time- t ouble may occur because of *Perfectionism* but once you are in time-trouble you a e much more liable to be 'loose' than to str ve for perfection. Some think the solution is simply not to get into time-trouble in the f rst place, but I f nd this f a too utopian, and as I said in the last chapter, getting into time-trouble is often justi f ed.

The f rst thing to be aw a e of is that **time-trouble makes you highly prone to go for all 'the old certainties'** such as checks, captures, queen moves, forcing moves, simpli f cation, materialism, king safety - all the things we were attracted to when we learned the game. This is a ty p of defence mechanism whereby your nervous system wants to minimize tension by eliminating the uncertainty of non-forcing or non-simpli f ing moves. All you can re a ly do is be aware of this propensity and consciously try to ove r ide it when it seems misplaced.

The second point is that **time-trouble is very different from blitz despite the superficial similarities.** There a e lots of players who play well in one and hopelessly in the other and vice versa. The reason for this is linked to memory, which, as we'll see later, plays a big

role in our thinking processes. Basically, your t oughts in a g a e a e always linked to prior events in the g a e and so the decisions you make a e not ' fesh' as t ey are in blitz, but **are** full of baggage from e a lier p a ts of the g a e. The relevance of this is that the position o f en changes ve r fast in time-trouble, and it's di f - cult to snap out of some ideas and evaluations you've held for such a long time. The key is to keep conscious evaluation to a minimum during time-trouble and just look for effective ideas.

The t d issue is that **nerves make you very 'jumpy'** and it's di f cult to look at a var ation long enough to reach a f r conclusion because b fore you know it you've 'jum p d' to l o king at something else. For this reason, K ogius rec- o m ends t at you 'regulate the attention' and s tictly don't allow yourself to look at new moves until you have at least a working hypothesis about the value of the others. Also, in general you a e less likely to be 'jumpy' when you a e attacking than if you're defending because the cos t of a m s t ke a e r a ely as high. Indeed, in general it is easier to attack than to defend when short of time.

Finally, **don't forget your opponent!** You may be wrapped up in anxiety, but if all you think about is your inte r al confusions, you lose your sense of balance and miss the chance to exploit your opponent's shaky emotional state. F u hermore, because time-scr a bles are highly inter-subjective, momentum is even more impo r nt than no r al. All that I said about trends in Blinking is even more true in time-trouble. It d o sn't matter so much if your position is worse, what matters is that during the emotional t auma of time-trouble you concen- t ate on improving it. As you saw in the g a e above, your opponent (in this case me!) will often gift you further opportunities if you can somehow get some favourable momentum going.

Drifting and 'Slippage'

Be not af r id of going slowly, be af r id only of standing still.
CHINESE PROVERB

It is very easy to **drift.** It only t a es a couple of moves where your concentration fades a little, a d your intent dwindles, for you to f nd yourself in a compromised position. **Drifting often takes the form of playing several moves that individually make a lot of sense, but don't add up to anything significant.** For ex a ple, I used to practice my French over blitz sessions wi t a f iend called Emmanuel Urien, who seemed to be a ound 17 0 strength, but yo-yoed in that he could perfo r well above and well below this (he would sometimes demonstrate a game he lost to a 15 0 and then could pr o eed to outplay me in blitz!). I mention t is because we had many blitz g a es (5 minutes to 1) which began in the same way: 1 e4 c5 2 t f d6 3 d4 t f6 4 t c3 cxd4 5 t xd4 a6 6 i e2 e6 7 0-0 t bd7 8 i e3?! b5 9 a3?! i b7 10 f3 i e7 11 ' d2 0-0 12 l adl l c8 a d Black has an excellent position. From moves 8 to 12 all of White's moves look quite re a onable, but at the end of the sequence White has very few prospects to take the initiative.

This was a type of drifting on Emmanuel's p a t. He used to think quite h a d over each of these moves, and couldn't f nd anything w ong with them a he considered them one by one. 8 i e3 is a perfectly sensible-looking developing move, then he keeps his knight centrally p sted, then protects his cen t e pawn, then connec t his rooks, then brings a rook to the half-open f le - how can we blame him? Perhaps all we can say is that he play e move by move with no real sense of direction. He would have been better o f pausing at one of these moments to look beyond the i m edia e move and m a e some sort of plan for the middlegame.

Drifting is also caused by what K ogius calls **'dispersal of attention'** whereby you l o k a little at everything but focus on nothing in p a icul a . A consequence of this is that when faced with a v a ety of plans we don't choose at all, but rather mix plans that may be incompatible and thus implement neither of them e f ectively. This is also caused by the mistake of getting your questions in the wrong order. **It's important to ask 'what should I do?' before asking 'how should I do it?'** – otherwise your moves will resemble the r a blings of a headless chicken.

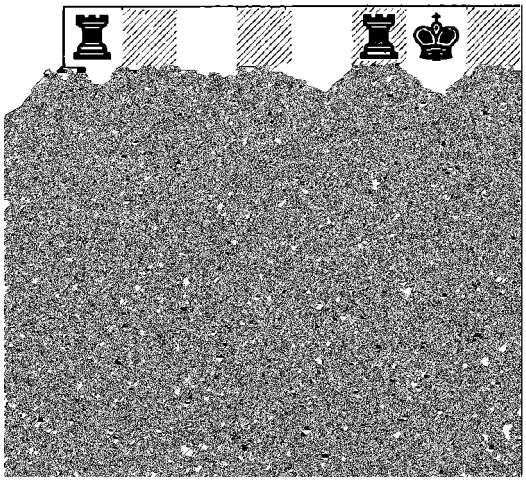
The basic antidote to drifting is, of course, planning. Yet so many trees have fallen to explain the importance of having a plan that I am

reluctant to dwell upon it here. Suffice it to say that long gone are the days when a plan lasted for several moves on end, and was implemented without hitches. These days plans refer to little strategic operations over the course of one, two or three moves at a time, rarely more, and they usually contain one or two strategic ideas rather than a grand strategy for the game as a whole. Thus to avoid misunderstanding over the word 'plan' it may be better to say that the antidote to drifting is, rather, to **think schematically**.

Thinking schematically basically means to think of 'schemes' or ideas, rather than just moves. If you find yourself playing one move at a time with no real sense of what might happen next, you will almost certainly feel a state of **'slippage'**, by which I mean a subjective feeling that the game is falling out of your grasp. I think the only way to avoid this slippage is to make sure you have some idea of what you are trying to achieve on the board at all times. We look at this more closely below, but for now I offer the following game to show how drifting and slippage can come about, and to give an example of 'Nunn's hangover theory' in action. White is a Scottish grandmaster and Black is a strong English IM, needing to win for a GM norm in the last round of a closed tournament.

McNab – Gormally
Oakham 2000

1 ♘f3 ♘f6 2 c4 c6 3 g3 d5 4 b3 ♗g4 5 ♗g2 ♘bd7 6 ♗b2 e6 7 d3 ♗d6 8 ♘bd2 0-0 9 0-0 ♕e7 10 a3 e5 11 h3 ♗xf3 *(D)*



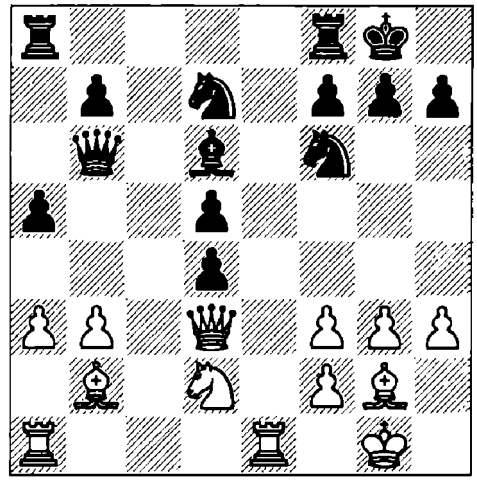
12 exf3!?

Danny was pleased to see this odd-looking move at the time because there is no obvious continuation after 12 ♘xf3, when White is probably just a little better due to the bishops. However, Colin McNab is extremely experienced in this type of line, and this idea of doubling the pawns followed by playing d4 has been seen before. From a psychological perspective Danny was 'relieved' in that it is difficult to win such quiet positions when you are so tense, but after 12 exf3 the game becomes more dynamic.

12... a **13 ♖e1 ♕d8 14 ♕c2 ♕b6 15 d4 exd4 16 cxd5 cxd5 17 ♕d3** *(D)*

Gormally suggested 17 f4!?.

B



This is a difficult position to assess. White's 12th move looked peculiar and now his position seems a bit clumsy. Black is well centralized, is temporarily a (passed) pawn up, and seems to have good scope for his pieces. However, Chapter 2 reminds us to look at the trends as well as the position, and here we see that the last few moves have not been unkind to White and that White's position has a great deal of potential. b5 is a significant light-square weakness; White will soon play f4 and has good chances of regaining the d4-pawn. Black may be better, but the position has too much dynamism to make that assessment in the absence of variations. Danny already felt that he had a large advantage, perhaps partly because 12 exf3 makes a dubious impression and he has played sensible moves since then, but also because it is his move and he thought he would make good use of it. Indeed he now saw a combination that was consistent with his assessment and assumed it would lead to favourable transformations.

This is quite a good example of Nunn's account of why we lose the plot. After making an evaluation based on no lines in particular in a fairly complex position with many imbalances, it is very difficult even to see lines that contradict the assessment, never mind look for them. So here the favourable tactic is assumed to be 'the main line' even though it would actually be extremely cooperative of White. White's alternatives are not treated 'equally' in terms of right to be heard and are not considered improvements, but they are rather just 'other moves' which are not significant enough to change the assessment. When one of these 'others' is actually played, we carry the same assessment over to the new position, not questioning whether we had it right before, or looking closely at whether the new position warrants a new assessment. However, assuming I am being fair to Danny's thought-processes, I should say in his defence that it is very difficult (virtually impossible) to be anything other than highly subjective in a game where the rewards for one subject are potentially so much higher than for the other.

17...♘e5!? *(D)*

This is the beginning of the neat tactic that Danny saw. In so far as Black had a 'plot' for this game, it was to play well, win, and get the GM norm. This move certainly seems to be part of playing well, and if White follows 'the main line', or rather the line most consistent with Black's plot, then the second and third aspects are not far away. That said, Danny tells me that he didn't expect 18 ♕xd4? at all, and why should he when it's so obviously bad (see below for details)? However, there is a certain emotional attraction to this line, and the fact that it was favourable was one of the factors in Danny thinking he was better. This is important because after White's reply it turns out to be almost irrelevant to the position and yet Danny's evaluation stays the same.

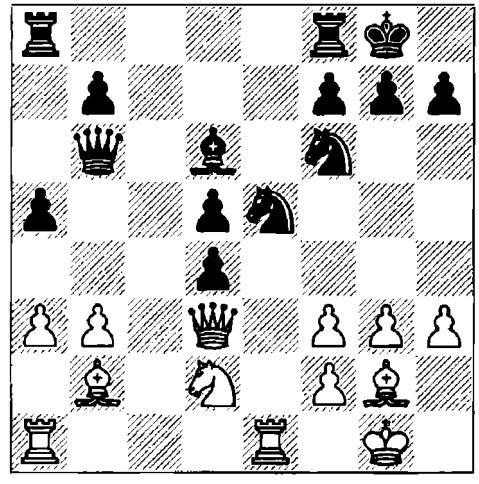
Since Black's knight sortie doesn't seem to improve his coordination, there is something to be said for a quieter approach: 17...♖fe8!? 18 f4 ♖xe1+ 19 ♖xe1 ♕a6!?. This line looks strange when you start with the assumption that Black is much better, but then it's also a bit strange to start with that assumption! Then White has the following options:

a) 20 ♕xa6 ♖xa6 21 ♗f1 ♖c6 (21...♖a8 22 ♖c1!) 22 ♘f3 ♖c2 23 ♖e2 d3 (23...♖xb2 24 ♖xb2 ♗xa3 25 ♖c2 ♗c5 26 ♗b5 looks better for White; the most significant value of the extra exchange here is the variety of pieces that White has – Black has little to do with his two knights in such a position while each of White's pieces has a unique role to play) 24 ♖xc2 dxc2 25 ♗d3 ♘e4 26 ♗xc2 ♗c5 27 ♘d4 ♘b8!? with a drawish, but not drawn position.

b) 20 ♕xd4 ♗c5 21 ♕c3 ♕d6 is, I guess, about equal, but I quite like Black since there is no convenient way to defend a3.

After considering these lines, which I proposed to him, Danny still felt that 17...♘e5 was the best practical try under the circumstances, even though it doesn't make the most of his position against best play. I'm not sure I agree because 17...♘e5 raises the nervous tension in a game where Black is likely to be unpleasantly tense already.

W



18 ♕f5!

Avoiding 18 ♕xd4?, when 18...♗c5! 19 ♕xe5 ♗xf2+ 20 ♔f1 ♖ae8 21 ♕g5 h6! is simple, pretty and very effective; Black's queen will enter the white position decisively, e.g. 22 ♕h4 ♗xe1 23 ♖xe1 ♕b5+! 24 ♔f2 ♖xe1 25 ♔xe1 ♖e8+. No wonder it felt as though things were going Black's way!

After Colin McNab's actual choice, Danny, still thinking he ought to be doing well, was attracted to 18...♘c4, but seeing that this led to some murky positions he assumed there must be a simpler way to preserve his 'advantage' Danny said that if he'd known he was in any danger of being worse, he wouldn't have played

18...♖fe8 and would have preferred the complications of 18...♘c4. He also said that during the game, because he thought his position was better in general, he had the feeling that he could do almost anything he wanted. The interesting thing from my point of view is that even over a week after the game, which is when we first spoke about it, Danny was under the impression that 18...♘c4 gave him an "unclear advantage" (! – see Blinking), and yet although it is quite unclear, if anyone is better at the end of the complications it seems to be White, mainly because Black's light squares are so weak.

18...♖fe8 *(D)*

The drifting starts here and from now on Black's position goes rapidly downhill, even though it's not actually bad at this stage. 18...♘c4 is the critical line:

a) I remember Danny showing me 19 ♗c1 as if it were forced, but now when I look at the position, it seems that White should just take the knight. When you assume you are better, there is often a tendency to think that all tactics favour you. So in the given instance I'd imagine Danny just assumed this was better for him. 19...♘e3! looks good for Black, since after 20 fxe3 ♗xg3 21 ♖e2 dxe3 22 ♘f1 ♗f2+ 23 ♔h1 d4! he has more than enough compensation for the piece. However, just as we saw with 18 ♕xd4?, **the most interesting line is not always the most important** and there is no reason for White to allow this. Danny saw this idea before playing 17...♘e5 and felt it was right, but somehow didn't like the fact that it was so unclear. Given his earlier assessment, he felt there ought to be a simpler way than this. He may have been right on this last point, but perhaps he should have decided this before committing himself to 17...♘e5.

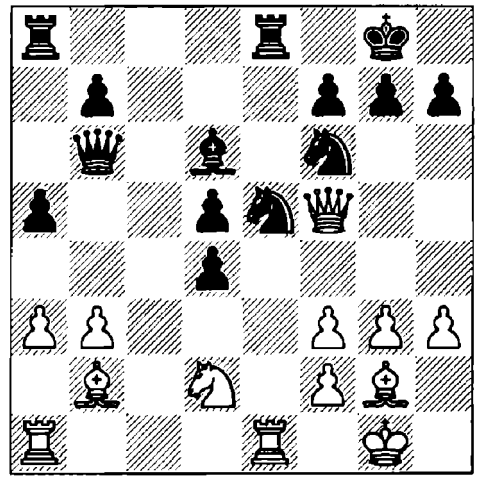
b) 19 bxc4! ♕xb2 20 ♖ed1! was apparently pointed out by Colin after the game. Given the material equality and White's damaged structure, Black would be forgiven for thinking that he's not worse. However, White's pieces are much better coordinated and whereas Black's d4-pawn and White's pawns on f2 and f4 shield White from dark-square problems, the opposite-coloured bishops leave Black with some problems on the light squares. Then:

b1) 20...♖fe8 21 cxd5 ♖e5 22 ♕d3! b5 (if 22...♖xd5, then 23 ♘c4 ♕b5 24 f4 ±) 23 ♘e4! ♘xe4 24 fxe4 appears better for White, but the most forcing line, 24...♖ee8 25 ♖ab1 ♕xa3 26 ♖b3 ♕a2 27 ♖xb5 ♖eb8 28 ♖xb8+ ♖xb8 29 ♕xd4 ♖b1 30 ♖xb1 ♕xb1+ 31 ♔h2 ♕b4!, looks drawish.

b2) 20...♗xa3! and now:

b21) 21 ♖ab1 ♕a2 22 ♖a1 ♕b2 23 ♖ab1 invites a repetition, which in the circumstances Danny would not have allowed, and so may have ventured the speculative 23...♕c3!? 24 ♖b3 ♗b2 25 ♖xc3 dxc3 26 ♘f1 d4!, when, although White is probably winning, Black has an eager a-pawn and it will be hard for White to keep his cool.

b22) 21 cxd5 ♖fc8 (Gormally suggested 21...♕b4!?, when after 22 ♖ab1 ♕a4 23 ♗f1 ♗b4 24 ♘e4! ♘xe4 25 fxe4 the potential kingside attack looks more significant than Black's extra pawn, but both sides have winning chances) 22 ♗f1 ♕c3 (22...d3!? 23 ♗xd3 ♗c5 24 ♖ab1 ♕d4 25 ♘e4 ♘xe4 26 fxe4 g6 27 ♕f4 looks better for White) 23 ♘c4 ♖xc4 24 ♗xc4 ♕xc4 25 ♖xa3. Black's remaining pawns are vulnerable and so White is better.



W

19 **♗f1!**

Covering d3, eyeing up b5, and threatening to take control with f4. White's intentions are fairly clear – to play f4 and ♕d3-b5. Although Black shouldn't be worse yet, he needs to find 'a scheme', and fast.

19...a4?

But this is the wrong scheme! This pawn is now very weak in the long term and since Black cannot use the c4-square this is just a mistake. I suspect this move is some sort of **'activity hangover'** from the emotions caused when

considering 17...♘e5 and all the associated complications. 19...♘c6 looks like a reasonable move. Then:

a) After 20 f4 Black still needs a 'scheme' 20...h5! looks like the solution. White can't play 21 ♘f3 due to the weakness on b3 so one way or the other White's kingside will be weakened. At the moment ...h4 is a threat because the reply g4 runs into ...♘e7! followed by ...♘g6 and various dark-square nasties. 21 h4 is not a move White wants to play since it weakens g4 and removes the option of chasing the f6-knight with the g-pawn. This seems to leave only 21 ♕d3 but then after 21...h4 22 ♕b5 ♕a7!? Black threatens to bring a rook to the e3-square with considerable effect. So, it seems that the position after 20...h5 is at least promising for Black. However, to get there Black must voluntarily retreat from e5 the proud knight that had occupied his attention for several minutes in the sharp variations above and have some sense of what White is trying to achieve (f4, ♘f3).

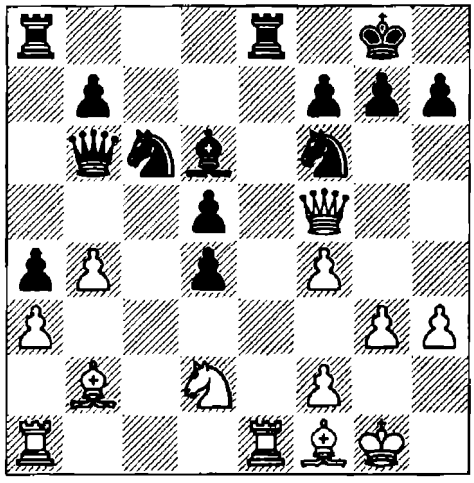
b) White can probably improve with 20 ♕d3 but then 20...h5! is still strong because White needs to play h4 to hold the kingside together a n f4 to develop his own position. 21 h4 ♕c7!? 22 f4 ♕d7!? 23 ♘f3 ♖e4 looks about equal, though I think I'd prefer to play Black because White is tactically a little vulnerable, e.g. 24 ♘xd4? ♗xa3 ∓.

20 f4 ♘c6

20...♘e4 was given as a 'missed win' by some commentators, but this seems to be far from true. After 21 ♘xe4 ♘f3+ 22 ♔h1 dxe4 (22...♘xe1 23 ♘g5) 23 ♖xe4 ♕xb3 24 ♖xe8+ ♖xe8 25 ♕b5 White is indeed struggling to hold on but 21 ♖xe4! dxe4 22 fxe5 ♖xe5 looks more difficult for White than it actually is. Once again Black has problems on the light squares. 23 ♕d7! (23 ♘c4 ♖xf5 24 ♘xb6 ♖d8 25 ♗xd4 axb3 26 ♗e3 ♗c5 looks good for Black) 23...♖e6 (how else to defend against ♘c4?) 24 ♗c4 ♖e7 25 ♕g4 (White is definitely not worse here and should soon assume the upper hand) 25...♖ae8 26 ♖e1 and now it's not clear if Black has a good move, as 26...h5 can be met by 27 ♕g6!? ♗c7 28 ♕xh5 e3 29 ♘f3 g6 30 ♕h4!. It's all a bit of a mess, but White is much better since Black cannot really do anything due to the various pins.

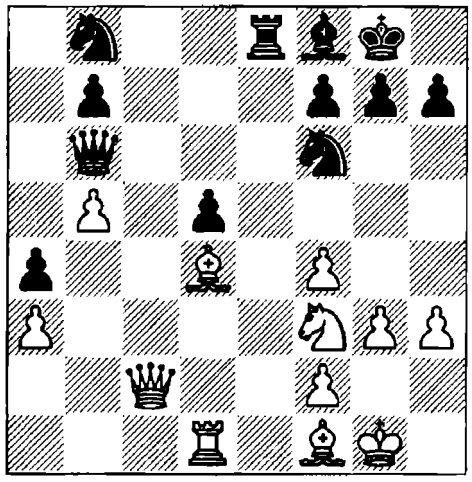
21 b4 *(D)*

B



White is now in control of the game and the two bishops are potentially very strong. Black needs to have a good think now and try to stop the unfavourable trend. Danny admits that he had 'lost the plot' and t rabe losl

B



29...♕xf6 30 ♖xd5 ♖d8

Or 30...♗xa3 31 ♖e5 ♖f8 32 ♘g5 g6 33 ♕c3! ♕d6 34 ♘xf7!.

31 ♘g5 1-0

Finding the Plot

Fall seven times, sta n up eight.
JAPANESE PROVERB

In so far as losing the plot is related to premature (and mistaken) evaluation, as it was in the above game, the solution may lie in some of my suggestions in Thinking and Blinking. There I emphasize that our conscious minds need to be supported by our unconscious, and that all our thinking is ultimately evaluative. I also suggest that we don't really know what it means to have an advantage. I think there is no simple solution to the type of problem Danny had above, but it probably helps if the evaluation is fairly unconscious (so that we are not blinded to certain moves because of the dominance of a blanket assessment) and flexible (may be better here, but trend unclear). We somehow need to evaluate so that we know which type of moves/positions to look for but also think of our assessments with an open mind. One way to do this is to think of your assessments as if they were part of a legal system; in other words 'innocent until p r ven guil t '. The knowledge that your assessment could be wrong, together with the working assumption that it's correct, should go some way towards helping you avoid losing the plot. Of course it's not so easy to keep your judgements open-ended, but, just as in life, we do ourselves less damage that way.

On a related point, if you find that you are in danger of drifting, or wake up to the fact that you've lost the plot, all is not lost. There is always a way to find some sort of 'plan' and it is much better that you should play with a mini-plan, or silly plan, or over-zealous plan than with no plan at all. That said, sometimes the best plan is to do nothing at all so what I really mean by having a plan is this: **if someone were to ask you 'what are you trying to do?' that you should have an answer.**

The above game suggested that we often begin to drift just after a sequence of moves that don't go quite as we intended. However, even when the position is unclear or favourable for you, there are moments where it is extremely hard to know what to do next. The following two examples show the type of thinking required to avoid drifting, and show that even if you never really had a plot, it is possible to find, or create one.

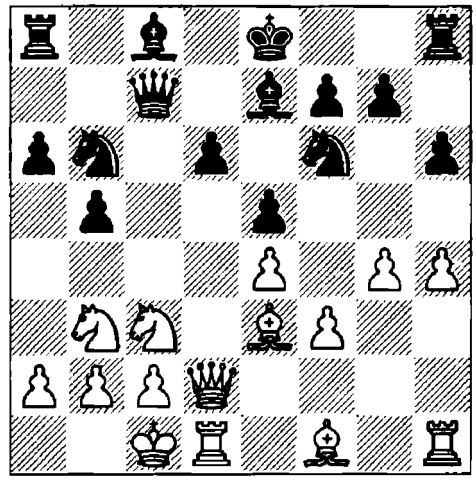
Van Delft – Vink

Dutch U n er-20 Ch, L iden *1999*

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 a6 6 ♗e3 e5 7 ♘b3 ♗e7 8 f3 ♘bd7!? 9 ♕d2 ♕c7 10 g4 h6 11 h4 b5 12 0-0-0 ♘b6? *(D)*

Black's opening set-up is a little unusual, but not obviously bad. 12...b4!? could be tried here.

W



13 ♕f2?!

13 g5! hxg5 14 hxg5 ♖xh1 15 gxf6 ♗xf6 16 ♗xb5+ is very strong for White, as pointed out to me by Merijn van Delft. This idea is also possible on the next move.

13...♖b8?! 14 ♔b1?! ♗e6 15 ♗d3?! ♘a4 16 ♘e2 d5

Merijn has not played the first part of the game well, and his passive moves have given Black the initiative. However, White began to wake up here, sniffed out the unfavourable trend and looked for ways to counter it.

17 ♘g3 dxe4

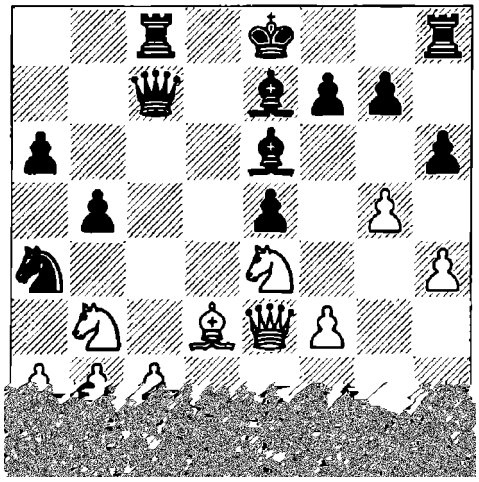
17...d4 18 ♗c1 g6!? was the sober suggestion of IM Jan Gustafsson after downing his third beer. Black seems to have good control of the game, but 19 g5 is awkward.

18 ♘xe4 ♘d5 19 g5!?

Giving away the bishop is a significant concession. Merijn felt the most important thing was to be combative, and not let his opponent settle down to a comfortable advantage. 19 ♗c1 ♘b4 is not pleasant for White but after 20 ♗f1 Black still has to demonstrate an advantage.

19...♘xe3 20 ♕xe3 ♖c8 *(D)*

W



This move implies ideas of ...♘xb2 if the e4-knight ever moves, but beyond this, it's not clear that Black has any particular plan. Although he has certain positional advantages, there is a question mark over his king. White sensed that this was a turning-point and now had a deep think. There are many 'normal' moves like 21 ♖hg1, 21 g6, 21 ♖he1 and 21 gxh6, but in all cases Black has sufficient resources and retains certain positional advantages. Merijn decided that exchanging light-squared bishops was a good idea and so wanted to enact the manoeuvre ♘g3 and ♗f5. This is a reasonable aim because Black cannot easily play ...g6, and Black won't be able to move the bishop from e6 because of the c8-rook. However, there are problems with tactics on the pawns on c2 and b2 that prevent this idea at present, so White needs to deal with this issue first. Merijn's next move, although not especially strong from a positional point of view, can almost be considered the winning move because it was here that Merijn effectively said "This is what I'm up to; what are you going to do about it?", and Black didn't find an adequate answer.

21 ♕c1!

Prior to this move, Merijn had a keen awareness that he had been playing badly and said to himself: "If I carry on like this, I'm just going to lose." This prophylactic move, based on an awareness of the opponent's likely resistance to the idea he wants to implement, is the start of the 'comeback'. White has been rather plotless up to this point, but with this move he is thinking schematically for the first time and intends a particular strategic operation rather than just drifting move to move. A further thought at this point went something like: "I've played badly, but I won't buckle, and I will win this game." I have to say that 21 ♕c1 is not such a 'good move' in the conventional sense that it improves White's position, but rather in the intersubjective sense that White took responsibility for the game. The unfavourable trend was acknowledged and with this retreat it began to be reversed because White became more 'conscious' of the direction of the game, and his responsibility for it. His opponent, who had played the better chess up to this point, was left to think for himself. In some ways it's more of an achievement to play a move like 21 ♕c1 at a crucial moment in a game of uncertain quality than to play a generally good game. Alternatives include:

a) 21 ♘g3 ♘xb2! 22 ♔xb2 ♕c3+ 23 ♔b1 ♗a3 24 ♗xb5+ axb5 25 ♕xc3 ♖xc3 and Black is much better.

b) 21 gxh6 ♖xh6 (21...gxh6!? 22 ♖hg1 f5 23 ♘f2 ♘xb2) 22 ♖hg1 ♔f8! with a clear advantage to Black.

c) 21 g6 is met by 21...f5! 22 ♘f2 ♘xb2.

d) 21 c3!? ♘b6! 22 ♕g1 ♔f8 gives Black some advantage but the position is still tense.

e) After 21 ♕g1! ♔f8 22 ♖h2 I think I still prefer Black, but White has an annoying threat of ♖g2, and it's not clear how Black will respond.

21...♘b6

In the absence of tactical tricks, this knight is a little redundant on a4, so it's understandable that Black wants to re-route it. However, it is now difficult to prevent White's main plan, so Black may have been able to improve here, and keep some advantage, for instance by 21...♖d8!? (after ♕c1 the rook does little on the c-file and this move also anticipates ♘g3 by giving the king a {relatively} safe haven on c8) 22 ♘g3 hxg5 23 hxg5 ♖xh1 24 ♖xh1 g6 25 ♖h8+ (25 ♘e4 ♔d7!?) 25...♔d7 26 ♖xd8+ ♔xd8 27 ♕d2 ♔c8, when the two bishops and weak pawn on g5 give Black a little advantage.

22 ♘g3! ♘d5

22...g6 doesn't quite hold here, or elsewhere it seems. 23 gxh6 ♗f8 24 h7! ♖xh7 25 h5 ♗h6 26 hxg6 ♗xc1 27 gxh7 and White wins.

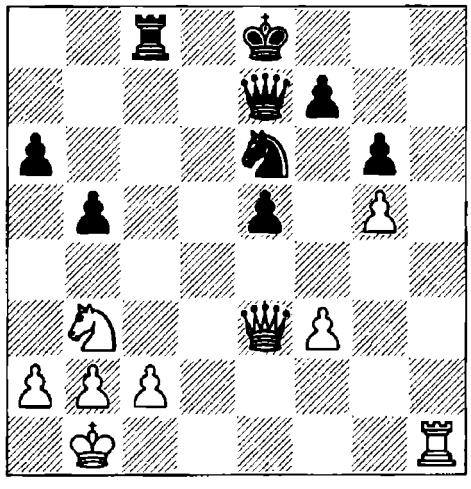
23 ♗f5 ♘f4 24 ♗xe6 ♘xe6 25 ♘f5

Now although there's not much wrong with Black's position, White has clearly enjoyed a favourable trend and was feeling very confident at this stage.

25...hxg5 26 hxg5 ♖xh1 27 ♖xh1 g6 2 **♘xe7 ♕xe7 29 ♕e3** *(D)*

White's activity is partly balanced out by the weakness of g5 but, as I've said, it's easier to attack than defend when you're approaching the time-control, and Black's position goes downhill quite fast. 29 ♖h8+!? is a good alternative.

B

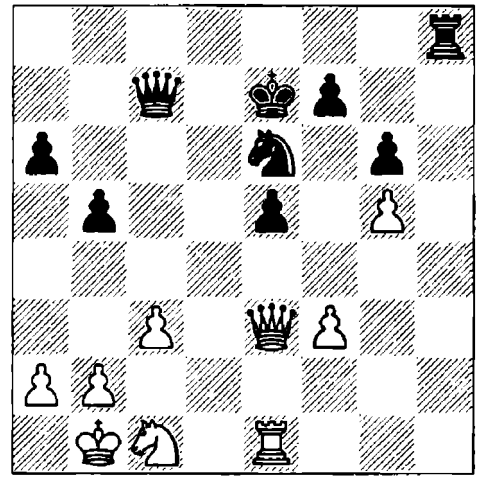


29...♕c7?!

Now White takes the initiative by sophisticated means. The critical line is 29...♕xg5! 30 ♕b6! (White has other queen moves, but Black has counterplay based on ...♕g2, ...♖xc2 and the weakness of the back rank; White should certainly avoid 30 ♖h8+? ♔d7 31 ♕d3+ ♘d4 32 ♘xd4?? ♕g1+) 30...♕g2 (after 30...♕f5 31 ♕d6 ♘f8 32 ♘c5 ♕xf3 33 ♕xe5+ ♘e6 34 ♖e1 ♕f2 35 b4! White is not worse) 31 ♖h8+ ♘f8 32 c3, when Black has to force a draw with 32...♕xf3 33 ♕d6 ♕f5+ 34 ♔c1 ♕f1+ 35 ♔c2 ♕f5+ 36 ♔c1 ♕f1+, etc.

30 c3!? ♔e7 31 ♖e1! ♖h8 32 ♘c1! *(D)*

B



This is a good move, which shows the value of centralization. Black's king will feel the presence of this knight, which was doing little on b3.

32...♖h4?

32...♖h5! 33 ♘d3 ♖xg5 34 ♘xe5 ♔f6! and Black seems to hold on.

33 ♘d3 e4 34 fxe4 ♖g4 35 ♘b4! ♕c5 36 ♘d5+ ♔f8 37 ♕h3 1-0

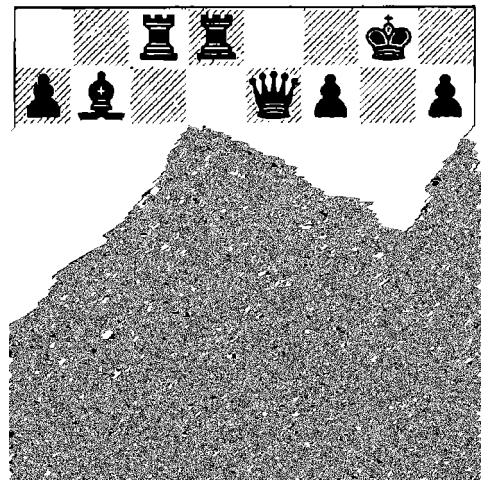
White's play after 21 ♕c1 was admirably direct.

Portisch – Christiansen

London 1982

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘f3 b6 4 a3 ♗b7 5 ♘c3 d5 6 cxd5 ♘xd5 7 ♕c2 ♗e7 8 e4 ♘xc3 9 bxc3 0-0 10 ♗d3 c5 11 0-0 cxd4 12 cxd4 ♘c6 13 ♗b2 ♖c8 14 ♕e2 ♗f6 15 ♖ad1 g6 16 h4! ♕e7 17 h5 ♖fd8 *(D)*

Portisch's games are often very instructive and here he shows us how it is possible to formulate plans when there seems to be no obvious continuation. When I first saw this game I was still courting the Grünfeld and since this position is a lot like a Grünfeld, from my biased perspective I assumed that Black may have some advantage here. I was therefore all the



more impressed when White played a sequence of strong moves that highlighted all that was bad about Black's position. If you were playing White, what would you be trying to do here? This is not an easy question to answer because the pressure on the centre makes it difficult to start anything serious on the kingside (e.g. with ♘h2-g4) and Black seems to be very well coordinated in general. In such situations it can be a good idea to focus on one particular positional aspect and see if you can build a plan around that. It's important not to become blinkered by this single feature, but **focusing your attention on something specific can lead to new insights that you may not see if you look at the position too generally**.

Let's look at Black's king, our ultimate target. There are a few weak squares around it and it's only really protected by the f6-bishop. However, this prelate is difficult to exchange because White is not yet ready to advance in the centre. White can play h6 at some point, which would tend to signify threats to the g7-square, but we are still faced with the problem of exchanging the bishop in this regard. However, another feature of playing h6 is that Black's king is suddenly short of air and if White were ever to get 'round the back' then he'd be most uncomfortable. But how can we ever do that when Black's rooks are such good guardians of the back rank and pressurize the centre? Exchange them! In fact, this thought reveals that Black's rooks are currently out-performing their counterparts in any case.

So what we're saying is something like this:

Black is too well coordinated to allow for a frontal attack on the king or an advance in the centre at this stage but since we have no play on the queenside we need another approach. h6 is a useful move in the long term but it's not going to trouble Black seriously unless we can somehow create mating threats. His f6-bishop cannot be readily exchanged and his rooks currently prevent us from invading the seventh or eighth ranks. It seems that exchanging rooks would at least give us something to hope for, so let's try to do this. What's he going to do in the meantime? He'll probably play ...♘a5 intending ...♘c4 or ...♘b3 but this just helps us to exchange on the c-file. Anything else? Well he might just double his rooks but then he will have to weaken himself on either the c- or d-file.

18 ♕e3!

The first step in the plan. This defends d4 but weakens c4. Sometimes in these positions White plays e5 to gain even more space and try to exploit the weakened dark squares on the kingside, but Portisch's strategy looks much more convincing. Black is quite cooperative in this game but even if your plan is not especially threatening for the opponent, having some sense of where you are going enables you to play quickly and confidently.

18...♘a5?!

This turns out badly even though it's hard to believe that it's a mistake. Black probably didn't appreciate that White wants to exchange rooks, and if he had realized that this worsens his position, he may have preferred something like 18...♖c7!, when Black keeps pressure on the centre and intends to double rooks one way or the other. 19 ♖c1 is then consistent. I prefer White after 19...♖dc8 20 ♖c2!? because the pressure has been taken off d4 and it will be difficult for Black to avoid the exchange of rooks. However, things are not so clear after 19...♖cd7! 20 e5 (this seems necessary now; 20 ♗b5 is met by 20...♘xd4! 21 ♗xd7 ♘xf3+ 22 ♕xf3 ♗xb2 23 ♖c2 ♗xa3) 20...♗g7 21 ♗b5 ♖c7 22 a4 with a tense position.

19 ♖c1! a6?!

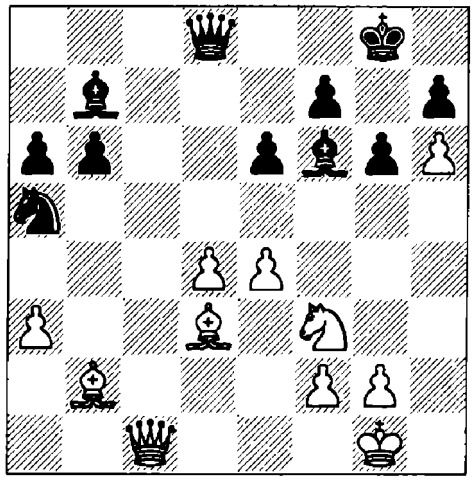
Understandably, Black wants to play ...b5, but he underestimates the long-term danger to his king.

20 ♖xc8 ♖xc8 21 ♖c1 ♖xc1+ 22 ♕xc1 ♕d8

Probably designed to stop ♘e5.

23 h6! *(D)*

B



This 'alien' pawn has made a rather big appearance in this book! Once again it causes a lot of problems. Black already has difficulty meeting threats of ♕f4 and d5.

23...♕c8

There seems to be no way back after this, but maybe it's lost already, e.g. 23...b5 24 d5! exd5 25 ♗xf6 ♕xf6 26 ♕c7 or 23...♘c6 24 ♗xa6 ♘xd4 25 ♗xd4 ♗xa6 26 ♗xf6 ♕xf6 27 ♕c7.

2 **♕f4 ♕d8 25 ♘e5 b5**

Such drastic measures as 25...g5!? may be necessary. I don't then see an obvious way through, although White is still much better.

26 ♗c3! ♘c4?!

This loses by force but the alternatives don't look much better: 26...♘b3 27 d5 exd5 28 ♘c6 ♗xc6 29 ♗xf6 ♕e8 30 ♗c3 d4 31 ♕f6 ♕f8 32 ♗b4; 26...♘c6!? 27 ♘xf7! (27 d5 ♘xe5 28 ♗xe5 ♗g5) 27...♔xf7 28 e5 looks devastating.

27 ♗xc4 bxc4

Now White has a winning combination, but the seeds for this were sown on move 18 when White decided to exchange rooks.

2 **♗a5! ♕e7 29 ♘d7! 1-0**

There's no way to prevent decisive entry to the back rank with ♕b8.

'Echoes'

Tanzan and Ekido were once travelling together down a muddy road. *A* hea v rain was still falling. Coming around a bend th e met a lovely girl in a silk ki m no and sash, unable to cross the intersection. "Come on girl", said Tanzan at once. L iting her in his arms, he carried her over the mud. Ekido did not speak again until that night when th e reached a lodging temple. Then he could *no* longer restrain himse l "We monks don 't go near females ", he told Ta man "especially not young and lovely ones. It *is* dangerous. Why did you do that?" "/ lef the girl there; ", said Tanzan, "are you still car r - ing her?"

Zen Flesh, Zen Bones

What is the difference between a lion in the zoo and a lion in your backyard? For most people, only one of them is perceived to be a threat. Now let's suppose the lion were to do something horrific in your backyard, like mauling you within an inch of your life; would you then be in hurry to see a lion at the zoo? No, in fact thereafter you would associate lions with this defining experience and you would probably be terrified of them, even if you were just to see them on television, or at the zoo. Similarly, if you have lost more than one important game by falling for a back-rank trick, you are likely to feel a certain 'pang' whenever your back rank is even remotely vulnerable. Moreover, you are liable to be more inclined than most to prevent back-rankers in future, and will play moves like h3, g3 or whatever, possibly not even being conscious of why you are doing it. What we call judgement is often based on unconscious preferences such as these, and these unconscious preferences are formed by emotional memories.

This much is implied by what we know about patterns, as we saw in T inking, but only recently did I realize that emotional memories not only shape our judgement in general, but that within a single game, we often make decisions based on emotional memories of earlier parts of the same game. Indeed, **a chess game cannot be understood unless it is considered as a totality where one phase of the game leaves an emotional imprint on the next**. The players can rarely see the position in front of them without visions of positions from the recent past and, more importantly, these past visions are often full of emotional content. Consequently, we are prone to overlook certain moves and prefer others because we want to rekindle or avoid former feelings that we had earlier in the game.

After a major transition, for instance from the middlegame to the endgame, you can mentally

adapt to the new circumstances without emotionally adapting, so if you've been defending your king for several moves, it will be difficult to bring yourself to activate it in the endgame. Although your thinking brain will tell you it's called for, your feeling brain will pull you away from anything that resembles the unpleasant memories, such as those where your king was under threat. The problem is that emotional memories are often faulty guides to the present.

In so far as there is a solution, **we have to make an extra-special effort to move from one phase of the game to another mentally and emotionally**; otherwise we end up like Ekido, weighing ourselves down with images that are no longer relevant. This can be done by going for a walk after a major transition or just consciously trying to process the emotion you've felt up to that point. Here some 'selbstgesprach' (self-talk) can b very useful; for example, "OK, it's the endgame now, things have changed; I don't need to worry about being mated any more. It's important to look at this position with fresh eyes..." You'll know best how to do it for yourself, but since transitions are such a big part of chess, it is hugely important that you are emotionally ready to play the position at hand, rather than playing the new position with old, inappropriate emotions.

I think of this type of problem as a manifestation of *Looseness* because it tends to take you away from the here and now, and undermines your ability to think clearly about the position in front of you. It is partly because of this phenomenon that I think a game of chess is invariably better understood by the participants themselves than any onlookers, even if the onlookers have a better understanding of chess.

I learned a huge amount from the following game (notes partly based on those I wrote for Chess Monthly), where almost all my mistakes stemmed from being trapped by emotional memories from previous stages in the game. I like to call memories from a prior part of the game **echoes** because it gives the sense of something that happened in the past being tangibly felt in the present. When I realized that these echoes were the principal cause of my errors in this game, I discovered, from looking at my other games, that I'd been making mistakes because of echoes for years!

Rowson – Benjamin

Edmonton 2 0 0

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♗b5 a6 4 ♗a4 ♘f6 5 0-0 ♗c5 6 c3 b5 7 ♗c2 d5!? 8 d4! dxe4 9 dxc5!? ♕xd1 10 ♗xd1 exf3 11 ♗xf3 ♗b7 12 b4!

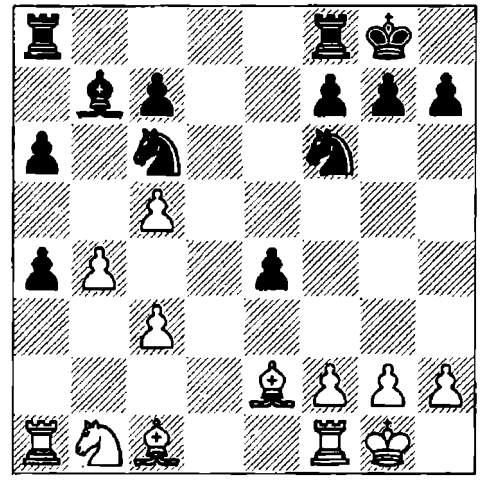
This is a significant novelty, suggested by Wedberg in ChessBase Magazine. White will crack open the queenside only after fixing it. 12 a4 b ! 13 ♖e1 0-0-0 14 ♗xc6 ♗xc6 15 cxb4 ♘d5 16 ♗d2 f6 17 b3 ♘e7! was about equal in de Firmian-Benjamin, USA Ch, Salt Lake City 1999.

12...e4!?

12...a5 13 ♘a3 axb4 14 ♘xb5 0-0 15 cxb4 e4 16 ♗e2 ♘xb4 17 ♘xc7 is clearly better for White due to the bishop pair and passed c-pawn.

13 ♗e2 0-0 14 a4 bxa4 *(D)*

W



I began to doubt Wedberg's idea at this point, and felt somewhat nervous about my lack of development. I have certain long-term advantages based on pawn-structure and dark-square control but for a while I couldn't see any way to keep Black's activity at bay. After a deep think I discovered, I think, the only way to keep the initiative. Nonetheless, this was a defining moment for the rest of the game because to some extent I was already playing to Black's tune and thoughts of his active threats were planted in the uppermost reaches of my mind. By the end of the game they fizzled out, but they colour much of what is to follow.

15 ♖d1!

I wanted to prevent ...♘d5 and discourage Black from challenging the d-file. After 15 ♖xa4 ♘d5! my coordination is bad and I have

no especially natural way to complete my development. Focusing on this line before looking at any others didn't do my confidence any favours. Although my moves were good, my thoughts were already a bit 'loose' and overtly defensive in nature.

15...♘e5

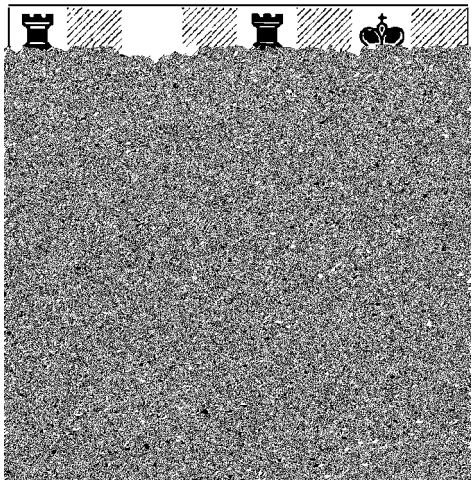
After 15...♖fd8 16 ♖xd8+ ♖xd8 17 ♗g5 I would have enjoyed inflicting further structural damage and serious black counterplay will be a long time in coming.

16 ♗f4

An interesting example of the benefits of developing your pieces in the right order. This bishop may have gone to g5, f4 or e3 depending on Black's move and my knight may yet go to a3, d2 or maybe even c3 so 15 ♖d1 had the extra benefit of forcing Black to give me something to react to.

16...♖fe8 17 c4! (D)

B



An important, but far from obvious move. The idea is to control the key d5-square with the pawn and then to bring my knight to as influential a square as possible, which in this case is c3, where it controls d5, attacks a4 and covers e4 and e2. Although this move looks good, it did take a considerable amount of nervous energy. To play another non-developing move when already so far behind in development against a player with considerable tactical prowess is not easy on the nerves and, however much my thinking brain applauded this move, my emotional brain was by no means at ease.

17...♖e7?!

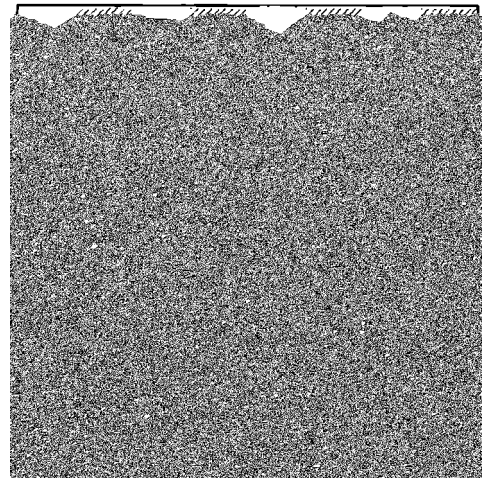
This seems to concede defeat from a conceptual point of view and in a sense Benjamin was guilty of Blinking here. However, it's not totally clear if Black's more active option, 17...♘d3 18 ♗xd3 exd3, was fully adequate either. Then 19 ♗xc7! (19 ♘c3!? ♘e4 20 ♖xd3 a5!) may look like gross Materialism, but in fact by removing the c7-pawn I not only take '1 point' from Black's army, but significantly increase the value of my own queenside pawns, which threaten to become a connected duo. 19...♖ac8!? (this poses an awkward question to my wayward bishop and perhaps is just enough to keep the balance; 19...♘g4!?, with the possible threat of ...♘xf2, doesn't seem sufficiently scary to deter me from 20 b5!, after which I think White takes control) 20 ♗b6 (20 ♗d6 ♘e4 21 ♘d2 ♘c3 looks dangerous for White) 20...♘g4! and now:

a) 21 b5 axb5 22 cxb5 ♗d5 23 ♘c3 ♗c4! and Black seems to keep the balance.

b) After 21 ♘c3 ♘e5! 22 ♘xa4 ♘xc4 23 ♖xd3 White's extra pawn is the most significant factor, but Black has a good deal of activity and my king is anxiously waiting for my minor pieces to come back before it's too late. The opposite-coloured bishops make it difficult to make something of the passed pawn, but they also make an attack against White's king fairly plausible. Objectively I suppose White is better, but, as I suggested in Chapter 5, objectivity in chess can cause more problems than it solves.

18 ♘c3 ♖ae8 19 ♗e3! (D)

B



A sensible move, trying to make the e-file less relevant for the rooks. Perhaps I could have played this more quickly, but I certainly had no idea he was going to play what he did and because of my earlier worries I was still in an

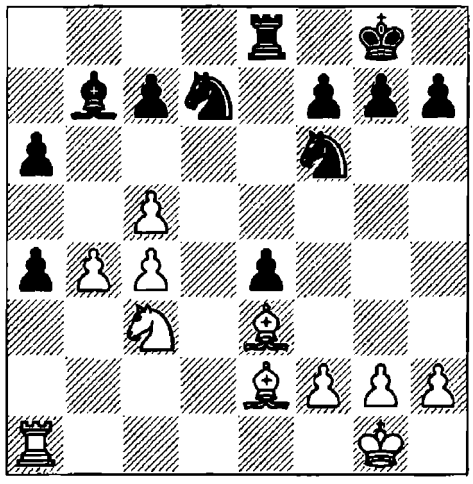
overly cautious mindset, double and triple checking his various knight hops.

19... . d7?!

This is needlessly compliant, but my opponent's switch to defensive mode shocked me so much that my play goes rapidly downhill from here. I had expected something more threatening but I suppose my position is now sufficiently organized to rebuff any irritants. At this stage, I couldn't work out if my opponent was going to be passive for a long time or if there was still some residual initiative that I should be looking out for. I knew 19...♘eg4!? 20 ♗xg4 ♘xg4 21 ♖xa4 ♘e5!? 22 b5! was promising for me, but it may just be winning because Black's queenside will be fatally compromised one way or another. After 19...♘d3, 20 ♖db1!? keeps Black's counterplay to a minimum and after winning my pawn back I can take my time about dealing with the pretentious octopus on d3.

20 . xd7 t exd7 *(D)*

W



21 b5!?

It's strange that I didn't see his reply to this even though it's totally forced (Black certainly can't allow me to fix the c7-pawn with c6). There was something to be said for delaying b5 by 21 ♖xa4, when Black can reply 21...c6!? and organize himself in preparation for b5 but then again this will limit his possibilities in other respects and I can consider improving my position with ♖a1-d1 and maybe g4 and ♔g2-g3 before playing b5.

21...c6

This threw me back and made me think that 21 b5 was careless, but why should I have been in any way worried about my position? It's still extremely good. I think the most compelling explanation is that my dominant mindset was the one I held from moves 8-19, which was primarily cautious and directed against preventing my opponent's counterplay. Moreover, in such a mindset you are determined to avoid any unpleasant surprises and so a surprise of any sort is inclined to bother you, regardless of its objective strength. So the unpleasant feeling I experienced on seeing 21...c6 was much the same as when I saw the variation with 15 ♖xa4 ♘d5! even though the positions are totally different.

22 l xa4

I spent about twenty minutes on this move, which is every bit as good as 22 b6 but leaves both players with more to think about. The crazy thing is that thinking was never likely to help me reach a decision. I should have quickly realized that both moves were possible, and followed my intuition, which told me to capture on a4. I guess I fell prey to Pe i ection ism here, mainly in the form of 'jam lust'. This type of difficult decision is typical of those which lead to 'echo effects' later in the game. You invest a lot of emotional energy and still can't make up your mind, so when the issue re-emerges, perhaps in a totally different context, you are instinctively resistant to dealing with the same problem again, even if the position has changed considerably. Indeed, from an emotional point of view the easiest option is to keep the option open, and leave it unresolved for the whole game!

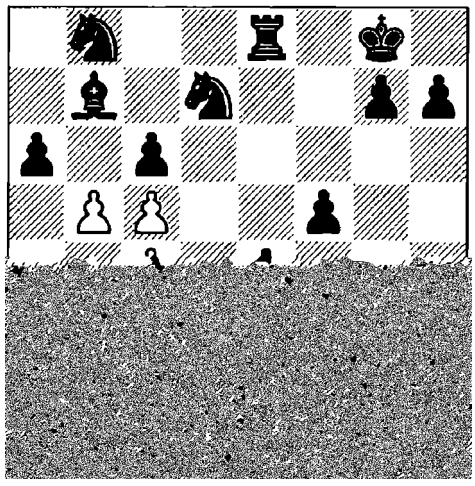
22... t b8 **23** ♖a l t fd7 2 l dl?

I was guilty of dr i ing for a few moves here. For instance, the d-file turns out not to be too relevant here, yet because of the 'echoes' from earlier, when I was worried about the d-file just out of the opening, I still felt some emotional urgency about controlling this file. The superior scope of my bishops suggest that I should be playing on both sides of the board, so the obvious move is 24 g4! but I think I was somehow worried about weakening f3, which is another echo of my careful mindset of earlier in the game. This move gives some breathing space to my king and prevents/discourages ...f5. If shown this position fresh, I would certainly have played this move. Strangely, my reasons

for not playing 24 g4 have little to do with the given position and lots to do with the position ten or so moves ago!

24...f5! *(D)*

W



After the game Benjamin said that this was a significant achievement for Black, and that he now felt an upward trend in his favour. I was a bit vague in general, hoping that this could somehow be shown to be weakening, while simultaneously wishing that I had prevented it!

25 ♘a4?

This is another 'half move' which fails to make sense of itself. There is an idea of ♘b6 that doesn't happen and I should have decided at this point whether it was a good idea. Simply 25 h3, intending ♔h2 and g4 as in the game, would keep a substantial advantage.

25...♘e5 26 ♘c3?!

I was concerned that Black's extra control of c6 made capturing on b5 plausible now but almost any transition favours White. There is another echo here: I wanted to keep the option of b6 because my difficult decision on move 21 was never quite resolved and made me feel that if I wasn't going to play b6, I should at least have the option of doing so. Better is 26 ♘b6!? axb5 (not forced, but White threatens to improve his position further with h3 and g4) 27 cxb5 cxb5 28 ♗xb5 ♗c6 29 ♗e2 ±.

26...♘bd7

This was accompanied by a draw offer, which was timely since things are looking up for Black and I haven't exactly shown myself to be in control of events over the last few moves. However, he's still clearly worse and on this occasion the offer turned out merely to shake me from the lack of resolve which had haunted me over the last few moves.

27 h3!

At last I have a scheme (g4) and now I felt my confidence growing. The trend begins to turn again.

27... l c8 2 b6 l e8 **29** l d6

A strange infiltration, one idea of which is to have my rook as 'space invader supervisor' a-ter I play the ♘d5 sacrifice. The other motivation was to have ♗d4 after ...f4, again without blocking the rook, but this is a much less compelling justification. Both players suffered from the same illusion here, namely that I should strive to keep my c5-pawn so that my asset on b6 is protected. But if Black ever swaps his f-pawn for my c-pawn, all that happens is that I end up putting my second c-pawn on c5 and activate my light-squared bishop. Our mutual blindness in this respect may also have something to do with 'role play': Black is the trickster, who is reliant on swindles because his position is bad. He therefore, somehow, 'deserves' to have a serious claim to activity here, namely with the 'threat' of ...f4.

29...♘f8 30 g4! ♘f7 31 ♖d1

31 gxf5!? ♘xd6 32 cxd6 c5 is not stupid, but just as with the ♖xa4 vs b6 decision earlier, it's often more important to play a good move rather than to waste time trying to find the best move. Given the error I make in a few moves because of lack of time, wasting a minute here is about equivalent to blundering a pawn. The continuation 33 ♗xc5 ♘d7 34 ♗d4 ♖c8 35 c5 ♔f8 36 ♗g4 h5 37 ♗xh5 ♘xc5 38 f6 ♘e6 39 fxg7+ ♘xg7 40 ♗g4 ♖d8 is all very interesting to look at now, but with around five minutes to get to move 40, some pragmatism was called for. As I suggested in Chapter 6, lack of pragmatism tends to be linked to insufficient confidence and in this case, I mistakenly lacked confidence i 31 ♖d1.

31...g6 **32 ♘d5!** *(D)*

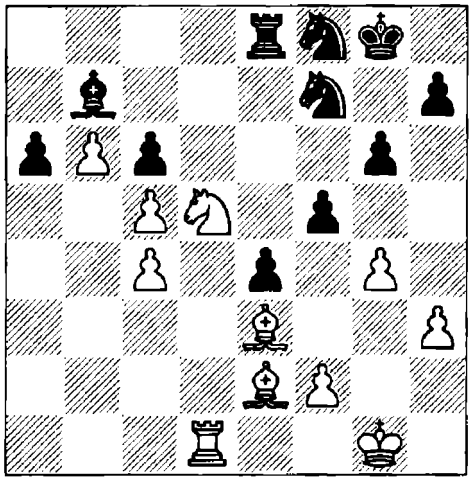
This looks decisive and I didn't see an answer, but rather than look at the crowd and think of their reaction (Egoism) I should have concentrated better.

32...♘d7!

After 32...cxd5 33 cxd5 I will win at least a piece back and retain positional advantages.

33 gxf5! gxf5 34 ♘c7

B



Or 34 ♔h2 cxd5 35 cxd5 f4.

34... : e7 35 : a1?

Not only is this decentralizing, but it messes up the coordination of my whole army and grants Black counterplay. This served to multiply the nerve factor and stole my composure. I sensed that this was a crucial moment and I was aware that I had some knight jumps, but didn't look carefully enough and fell prey to Materialism. As I said, when you are short of time you always look for the old certainties like material and checks; the more obscure ideas tend not to provide the comfort that a shaky nervous system seeks. Despite my sloppy play I could still have won the game here with 35 ♘e8! +—. A lack of creativity under pressure, patchy confidence and fragile composure prevented me from seeing this move. After 35...♔f8 (35...♘xb6 36 ♘f6+ ♔g7 37 ♘h5+) 36 ♘d6 ♘xd6 37 cxd6 ♖g7+ 38 ♔h2 ♔f7 (38...c5 39 ♗h6) 39 c5 White has a decisive positional advantage.

I considered 35 ♘e6!? (strange that I saw this, but not 35 ♘e8!) but didn't see a follow-up. However, this is better than what I played; I badly needed to 'jump out of the system' here, for which I should have talked to my pieces. My worry was that knight hops in general would lead me to regret not taking the key a-pawn while I had the chance ('fear of regret').

35...♘fe5

Part of the reason I was attracted to 35 ♖a1 was that 35...♘b8? 36 ♗f4 ♘e5 37 ♗xe5 ♖xe5 38 ♖d1 seemed consistent with his previous play and was clearly winning for me. This is another example of 'the desire to punish' but in a slightly different context. I guess my mistake was to assume that Joel would always prefer to be passive just because he had surprised me with this earlier – yet another misleading echo!

36 l xa6 t d3!

A good move from the point of view of confusion; I had been concerned directly with my king and so only considered 36...♘f3+ 37 ♗xf3 exf3 38 ♘c7 ♖g7+ 39 ♔h1 + -, when there is no evidence of a black counter-attack.

37 xd3?!

Maybe a little risky in the circumstances, but having expected 36...♘f3+, when I would take, I didn't pause to consider the difference. Basically I just wanted the horse out of my face – a purely emotional, but understandable reaction. 37 ♘c7! was stronger, but we tend to like exchanging in time-pressure and for some reason I didn't see that Black could protect his d3-pawn.

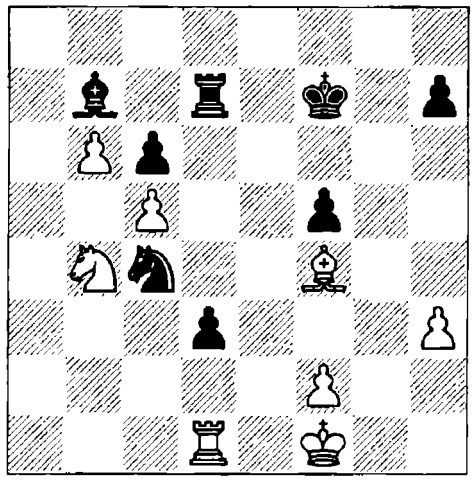
37...exd3 38 l b4 l e5

I somehow missed this, or at least it took me a fair while to adjust to the tricks it brings.

39 ' !

It took two heart-burning minutes to find and play this, probably because I'd decided I

I tot!. l♘h7



rooks on the board I have ideas of ♖a1-a7 or possibly ♗d6 followed by ♘e5 at some moment. For example, 43 Wg2 ♗b7 44 f3 ♔f6 45 Wf2 ♖d5 46 h4 ♖d7 47 ♖e1! ♖xd3 48 ♗g5+ ♔g6 49 ♖e6+ W f 50 ♖e7+.

42... J xd3 43 t xd3 e6 44 t b4

Other things being equal, this ending should be winning, but my poor coordination and lazy king might give Black just enough counterplay to draw. For instance, my knight doesn't want to be on b4, but it's the only way to prevent Black's king from infiltrating. Given the scares I felt just before the time-control, part of me was pleased to be playing for just 'two results' but I was also aware that the desired result was further away than it had been for most of the game.

44... t e5! 45 . xeS?!

This appears promising, but relieves the tension too soon. I didn't like the look of Black's knight hopping all over me, but I keep winning chances for longer with both minor pieces on the board. That said, the fact that my decision was mistaken is as much bad luck as bad judgement, given that he only survives due to a surprising tactical trick that neither of us had yet seen. The correct line was 45 ♔e2 ♘d7! 46 ♗e3 f4! 47 ♗d4 ♔f5 48 f3 ♘f8! 49 ♔d3 ♘e6 50 h4 ♘f8! 51 ♘c2 ♘g6 52 h5 ♘h4 53 ♔e2 ♗a6+ 54 ♔f2 (Black is annoyingly active in such positions, but perhaps a bit of patience would have enabled me to see that White's position can still be improved in this sort of situation) 54...♔e6 55 ♘b4 ♗b7 56 ♔e2 ♘f5 57 ♔d3 ♘g3 58 h6 ♘f5 59 ♗g7 ♘g3 60 ♗f8 ♔e5 61 ♗d6+ ♔f5 62 ♘c2 ♔g5 63 ♘d4, when Black's position is beginning to feel the strain.

45... xeS 46 e2 Wd4 47 l d3 ♗c8

Joel seemed very unperturbed by this ending, which is strange given how close he is to being lost. Clearly I cannot mobilize my knight without losing the b6/c5 wedge but I had thought that I could win his h-pawn, and queen my own h-pawn before he could bring his king back to the h-file. This is a reasonable idea with only one serious shortcoming. 47...f4!? was also possible, but seemingly unnecessary.

48 f4 . a6 49 Wd2 . b7 50 h4 . c8 51 c2 c4 52 d2 Wd4 53 hS h6! 54 ' c2

54 ♘e5 ♔xc5 55 ♘f7 ♔xb6 56 ♘xh6 ♗e6! – this is the rub; Black will only let me capture the h-pawn on h6, after which my knight is trapped and Black wins with his extra c-pawn. After the game Joel laconically remarked: "Yeah, the bishop usually dominates the knight in this type of situation". Maybe Joel had more patterns than me to make sense of this ending, which brings us full circle back to *Thinking*.

½-½

The Art of Concentration

Those who reach greatness on earth reach it through concentration.
Upanishads

Just as I feel that lack of confidence is essentially the problem with *Perfectionism*, so I think that *Looseness* stems from poor concentration. Whether you are drifting, feeling slippage, making a sloppy evaluation, feeling very emotional, or feeling trapped by the past, the essential problem is a lack of *presence* in the here and now. I have suggested various ways that you can combat *Looseness* on a micro-level, but if you want to build up your immunity, it would be helpful to have a macro-solution – a technique that would keep your mind from wandering all over the place. That said, it is no easier to help a person concentrate than it is to build their confidence; both are highly subjective experiences, accessible only from within. There are, however, a few basic pointers to help keep your mind fresh and present, which is just what you need to keep *Looseness* at bay.

1) Variety

To remain attentive for any significant period of time we need to break the monotony of thinking

or looking at the same thing. You may not be able to move the position around, but if you are to stay concentrated you need to look at the position from several different perspectives and think in several different ways. This may mean asking different questions of the same position and moving fluently from tactical to strategic considerations. It may also mean looking at the pawn-structure in abstract and wondering how the king and pawn ending would be, or thinking of which pieces you'd like to exchange or where you would put your pieces if you had a choice. Then after such thoughts you might return to calculate a few lines and so on. I'd like to think that my recommendation of 'talking with the pieces' and treating them as distinctive characters may also help to keep your attention levels high. Above all, just as in life, variety is an excellent cure for boredom. So before you go 'walkabout' because you are bored and think there's nothing more to see, consider whether you can look or think about the position in any other useful way.

2) Switching

Concentration is also aided by switching from thoughts of your own to trying to get into your opponent's mind. Sometimes it's even worth literally switching, and getting up and looking at the position from your opponent's side of the board. This has helped me to see otherwise hidden aspects of the position on more than one occasion, but it's important not to disturb your opponent in the process.

3) Balance

It's not humanly possible to retain maximum concentration for the whole game. Just as with any other activity, there will typically be an adjustment period when you settle into the game followed by a period of optimal concentration, followed by a weakening of concentration due to tiredness. While you will need to apply maximum concentration at certain key moments, it is perhaps even more important that you never let your concentration fall below a minimum threshold where you are vulnerable to Looseness, or even to simple blunders. What you need is some sort of balance whereby you hold yourself back from concentrating too hard at some moments and consciously exert yourself at others. Judit Polgar alluded to this indirectly when she said that in some positions it's not worth wasting energy you'll need later, especially when the opponent has so much choice. So going for a walk is sometimes the best thing for your concentration, and I often find that ideas come to me concerning the position even when I'm not thinking about it consciously.

4) Breaks

Talking of which, breaks are essential for maintaining concentration. The physiological reason is that your brain needs oxygen and you can increase the oxygen levels in your brain by a short walk. It's also true that we have limited attention spans and since most of us can only concentrate to optimal capacity a few minutes at a time it can be good to 'dip in and out' of thinking so that when you do think it's not too sloppy. Moreover, even if you are not so good at visualizing the position without the board and pieces in front of you, there are times when trying to see the position in your head can bring to light certain aspects to which you may be blind when looking with your eyes – so taking your eyes off the board can also aid concentration if done intelligently. Tiger Hillarp Persson's 'pre-time-trouble sprint', mentioned in Chapter 3, should also be considered if you feel up to it, and was 'designed' by Tiger, precisely to increase concentration and reduce nerves just before the time-control.

Conclusion

Looseness is more readily experienced than described, but it refers to a mental/emotional state where you don't feel yourself to be in charge of what's happening in the position. When it strikes, you are more vulnerable to all the other sins, and it is especially likely to strike in time-trouble. The main manifestations covered here are 'Nunn's hangover theory', 'tension transference', 'neural hijackings', 'drifting', 'slippage' and 'echoes' You can lose the plot as a result of any of these but when you do there are ways to recover, in particular with 'schematic thinking'. To build up immunity to Looseness, it's important to learn the (difficult) art of concentration.

Conclusion: The Author's Redemption

Nothing more can be attempted than to establish the beginning and the direction of an infinitely long road. The pretension of any systematic and definitive completeness would be, at least, a self-illusion. Perfection can here be obtained only in the subjective sense that he communicates everything he has been able to see.
GEORG SIMMEL

The Seven Deadly Chess Sins reveal that we need to reconsider much that has become habitual. The game of chess, as outlined here, rewards those who are able to feel as well as think, be sensitive to defining moments, love the contest as well as the result, view the game from a pluralist perspective, harness their ego and acknowledge their opponent, be confident and willing to make a mistake, while concentrating intelligently at all times.

Although this book may seem intense or even evangelical in places, I ask the reader to take the occasional inconsistency or apparent incoherence lightly. The endeavour is not to create a system, nor have I gone out of my way to be an anarchist. Rather, I've tried to write about chess as I have come to understand it: a complex and rewarding game that lies, tantalizingly, beyond the full grasp of the human intellect.

There are problems and solutions in this book, and I don't pretend that there are more of the latter than the former. There is no virtue in giving easy answers to the questions posed by a difficult game. The best we can do is to enjoy trying to work things out, and not take ourselves, or the game, too seriously. As I said in the Preface, theorizing about chess is a sticky undertaking.

Index of Players

When a player's name appears in bold, that player had White. Otherwise the first-named player had White. Numbers refer to pages.

Index of Openings

Numbers refer to pages; codes are ECO codes.

GAMBIT

Everyone loses chess games occasionally, but all too often we lose a game due to moves that, deep down, we knew were flawed. Why do we commit these chess-board sins? Are they the result of general misconceptions about chess and how it should be played? And how can we recognize the warning signs better?

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- Blinking (missing opportunities; lack of resolution)
- Wanting (too much concern with the result of the game)
- Materialism (lack of attention to non-material factors)
- Egoism (insufficient awareness of the opponent and his ideas)
- Perfectionism (running short of time; trying too hard)
- Looseness ("losing the plot"; drifting; poor concentration)

Jonathan Rowson became Scotland's third grandmaster in late 1999, within months of graduating from Oxford University. He was runner-up in the 1997 European Junior Championship, Scottish Champion in 1999 and winner of the Canadian Open in 2000. Rowson's first book, *Understanding the Grünfeld*, has been highly praised for the quality and originality of his writing, and freshness of approach.

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