

Chapter Six

Cure your Time Trouble

“There are no heroes in time trouble, everyone plays badly.” – Victor Korchnoi

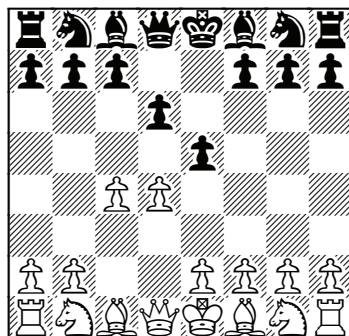
Habitual time trouble can be a major issue for a chess player, hobbling their results severely. So many games are thrown away because of a shortage of time, ruining hours of patient work. There are countless examples of time trouble disasters, but let's look at just one:

Game 27
C. Matamoros Franco-J. Klinger
World Junior Championship,
Gausdal 1986
English Opening

1 d4 d6 2 c4 e5

I quite like this defence for Black against the English. 3 dxe5 dxe5 4 ♖xd8+ ♔xd8 is harmless because

Black's misplaced king is compensated for by a slight compromise (c2-c4) in White's pawn structure; and 3 ♘c3 exd4 4 ♕xd4 can lead to White losing time with his prematurely developed queen.



3 ♘f3 e4 4 ♘g5 f5 5 f3 ♘f6

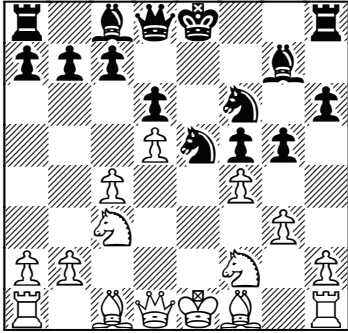
5...♗e7 would be my choice, gaining time for development by attacking White's advanced knight.

6 ♘c3 ♘c6

And here, too, I would prefer 6...♗e7,

keeping the option of setting up a pawn chain in the centre with ...c7-c6 and ...d6-d5; while if 7 fxe4, Black has 7...h6 8 h3 e4 9 e4 fxe4, threatening 10...exh3 and 11...e4+.

7 g3 h6 8 e3 g5 9 e2 exf3 10 exf3 e7 11 d5 e5 12 f4

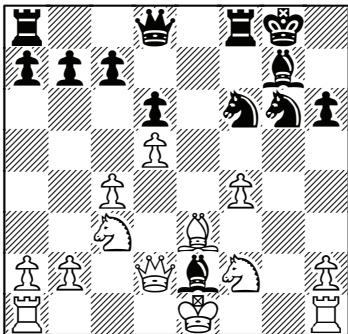


Now I like White's position because of his space advantage and Black's weakened kingside.

12...gxf4 13 e4xf4 e6g6 14 e3e3 0-0 15 d2 f4

Trying to drum up complications in a worsening position. At least he succeeds in getting White to think.

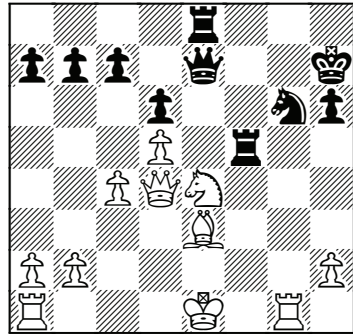
16 gxf4 e4g4 17 e2e2 e2e2



18 e2e2?!

18 e2e2 would have been better, keeping firm control over the e4-square. After 18...d7 19 0-0-0 e4xf4 20 e4xf4 e4xf4 21 e4hg1 White would have had strong pressure.

18...e7 19 d4 e4e4 20 e4e4 e4xd4 21 e4xd4 e4ae8 22 e4g1 e4h7 23 f5 e4xf5



24 e3g3?

And here White should have hurried to get his king of the e-file. Both 24 d2 e4e4 25 e4af1 and 24 0-0-0 e4e4 25 e4g3 would have kept some pressure. In fact both players start to slip up at this point, which suggests the onset of mutual time trouble.

24...e4f4 25 e4d2

25 e4xa7 e4xc4 would leave White's king in a most precarious position.

25...e4xe3+ 26 e4xe3 e4xe3+ 27 e4d2 e4e7?!

27...e4ef3 is much stronger, with threats that include 28...e4xc4 and 28...e4f2+.

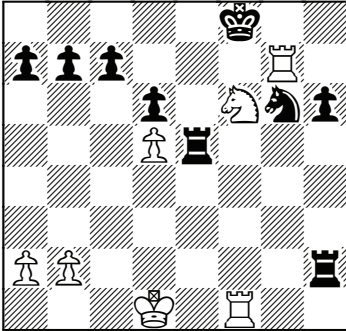
28 e4af1 e4xc4 29 e4h5! e4h4 30 e4f5 e4xh2+ 31 e4d1 e4e5?

31...e4xb2 was the right move, when

32 ♖f6+ ♔g7 33 ♜h5+ would lead to a draw by perpetual check.

Now Black should lose, providing White can play the right moves before his flag falls...

32 ♖f7+ ♔g8 33 ♜g7+ ♔f8 34 ♖f1+ ♔e8
35 ♜f6+ ♔f8 0-1



Here, in terrible time trouble White touched his knight, saw that could have won with 36 ♖xg6, thought he was about to lose the rook on g7, and resigned. But with 36 ♜h5+ ♔e8 37 ♜f6+ ♔f8 (37...♔d8 38 ♜g8+ ♔e7 39 ♖e8+ ♔f7 40 ♖xe5 ♜xe5 41 ♜g4+ wins the rook), he could have simply repeated the position and then played 38 ♖xg6.

So, when horror stories like this abound, why do people allow themselves to run short of time? I believe that the main reason is simple procrastination: they cannot bring themselves to make certain decisions quickly enough at an earlier stage of the game. This itself can have several causes; for example, not understanding the posi-

tions well enough to be able to form a plan. Other reasons include an excess of perfectionism or a fear of making mistakes. Another can be that a player's approach to chess was cultivated mainly in correspondence chess: when the luxury of having vast amounts of thinking time is applied to the hurly burly of the over-the-board game, correspondence players frequently find themselves the victims of time trouble.

Let's consider each of these ideas in turn:

The issue of lacking chess understanding and planning ability can stem from studying chess in the wrong way; for example, studying the openings in a self-contained fashion without relating them properly to the middlegame. A way to iron this out is to try and learn the openings within the context of complete games, and most modern openings books take this approach.

This can be taken a stage further by studying the games with a chess set and trying out different possibilities. Most readers will do anything rather than actually analyse the material for themselves; they want the book to tell them what to do, rather than use it as a tool through which they develop their own reasoning and imagination.

It can also be of great benefit just to play through lots of games from a variety of openings so as to acquire a greater knowledge of chess patterns in

general. The same ideas often crop up in totally different variations, and trying to be too specific about the kind of positions that one studies can miss this effect. Obviously it takes many thousands of hours of study and practice to acquire a Grandmaster's intuitive feel for the game, but substantial progress can be made by any player as long as he or she sets about it in the right way. During my teenage years, for example, I studied the games collections of just about every great player I could lay my hands on and was the strongest player in my town after a couple of years. This practice can be even more effective if the games are annotated by the great players themselves because you gain an insight into how they thought about chess. Once again this is a rare way of studying because it takes the kind of time that very few people are willing to spend.

Moving on to reason number two, a player can be so concerned about making a mistake that he is unable to bring himself to spread his available thinking time over the entire game. Players who do this often try to cure themselves by putting notes on the scoresheet, for example indicating how many moves they have left or how much clock time they are allowing themselves to reach a particular stage of the game.

While these efforts are well meaning I doubt they have much effect. The problem is that there is often has

deep-rooted psychological cause; for example, a time-trouble addict might have found himself criticized excessively as a child. As such it can be a very difficult problem to address, perhaps the best approach being to delve into one's inner realm through practices such as meditation. Other forms of health improvement can also help if they address someone's general anxiety levels which then carry over into the chess-playing process. I will examine this more closely in the final chapter.

A special form of perfectionism can be cultivated by correspondence chess, especially if a player relies on this exclusively. Perfectionism is actually a positive trait for correspondence games because small mistakes are likely to be exploited, but if this is then applied to over-the-board games it can result in consistent time shortage. So if you do want to make the over-the-board game your main sphere of combat, do not rely too heavily on correspondence chess for training.

The following two games are from someone who did this and serve as a good, if painful, illustration. Alexander Shalamanov came to me because he wanted to improve his over-the-board play, but his background in correspondence chess had left its mark. In both these games he showed a good general understanding, but then blundered away his queen in time trouble.