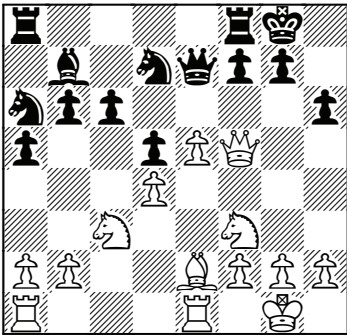


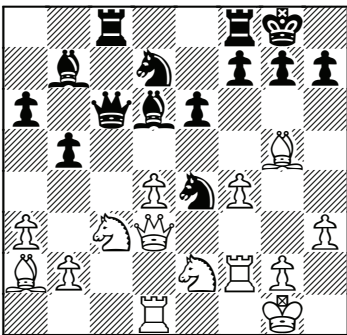
Test Six

6.1 Black to play



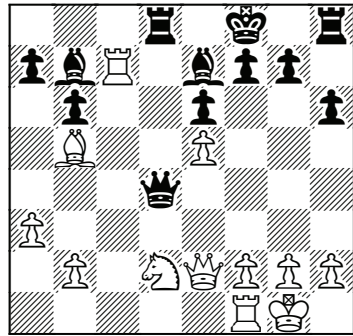
- A) 17... ♖e6
- B) 17... ♗fe8
- C) Something else?

6.2 White to play



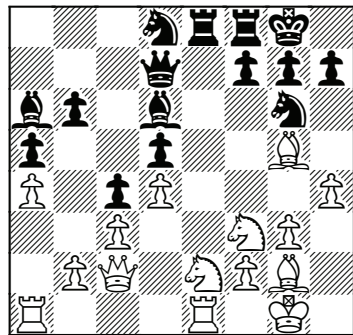
- A) 18 ♘xe4
- B) 18 d5
- C) Something else?

6.3 Black to play



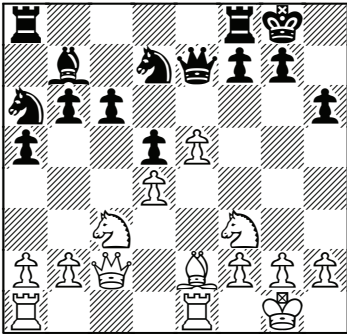
- A) 18... ♖xd2
- B) 18... ♖xb2
- C) Something else?

6.4 Black to play



- A) 18...h6
- B) 18...f6
- C) Something else?

Test 6.1
C.Morris-C.Crouch
 British League (4NCL) 2006



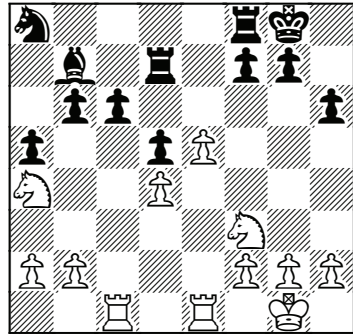
As we saw in Test 3.3, White has a better pawn structure, and started to set up pressure with his pieces, with **17 ♖f5**.

Here I played **17... ♜e6?** (A), which I described at the time as “a weak and lazy move.” Certainly I was feeling very tired that day, and could not even contemplate, on Remembrance Day, walking almost next door to the old Coventry Cathedral, heavily bombed during the War.

In the position itself, I was too worried about pressure on my kingside, and underestimated my possible queenside pawn weaknesses. After **18 ♘d3 ♜xf5 19 ♘xf5 ♜ad8 20 ♜ac1 ♘c7 21 ♘xd7! ♜xd7 22 ♘a4 ♘a8** my position was crumbling.

There were twists and turns later on, and I was even briefly able to get back into the game, if temporarily, just

before the time control, before ultimately losing. The remaining moves will be considered later in Test 10.1.



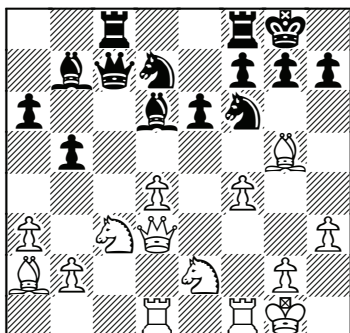
Black should have played with much more grit, with **17... ♜fe8!** (B), with the defensive idea of ...♘f8 and ...♘c8. The other knight, when given the opportunity, can join in with ...♘c7. White's edge is negligible. I would like to think that had I been in better health, I would have easily seen this idea.

The queen exchange was a disaster for Black. Exchanging queens can be useful in defending the king when under attack, but is often less than useless when defending weak pawns. I needed to defend on the kingside with my pieces, rather than exchange my queen.

Test 6.2
C.Crouch-N.Hutchinson
 Bury St Edmunds 2006

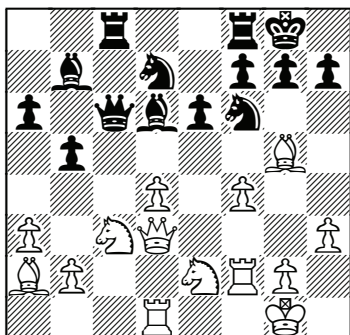
Continuing from Test 5.1, my plan is highly ambitious, with thoughts of a pawn breakthrough with either d5 or f5.

Either it works or it doesn't. To the best of my calculating capability, I felt I was doing well, but I missed a resource several moves later in a critical position. It turns out that there were good alternatives for Black anyway, so my earlier play was too ambitious.



Black played **16...♖c6**. It would be premature to break the diagonal by force with **17 d5?**, as after **17...exd5 18 ♖xd5 ♗c5+ 19 ♔h1 ♖xd5 20 ♗xd5 ♖xd5 21 ♖xd5 ♗xd5 22 ♗xd5 ♖b6** the pawn structure is roughly symmetrical, but Black's pieces are far better placed, and so he has an advantage.

So **17 ♗f2**.



Black could now have considered the ultra-solid **17...h6!?** **18 ♗h4 ♗fe8 19 f5 e5 20 dxe5 ♗xe5 21 ♖d4**, followed by finding one of the good queen replies. I have to admit that White's kingside looks far too loose, and that I would have needed to work hard to try to hold the position. Black's kingside is extremely safe, despite White's attempt to start an attack on that side.

There are, as we shall see, two good moves for Black, and therefore I cannot justifiably claim that I am 'unlucky' in having chosen the line starting with **15 ♗ad1**, and with the unexpected counterattack later on. Instead, I misjudged the position, making both positional and tactical errors.

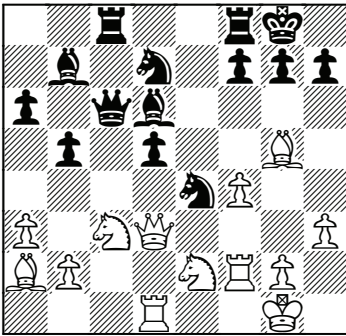
Black instead played the more direct and obvious **17...♗e4**. Now I should have played the drawish **18 ♖xe4 (A) 18...♖xe4 19 ♖xe4 ♗xe4 20 d5 ♗xd5 21 ♗xd5 exd5 22 ♗xd5 ♗c6**, and quite probably Black would have been happy with a half-point.

I had prepared, imaginatively but incorrectly, **18 d5? (B)**, and play seemed smooth enough for me after **18...♖xf2? 19 dxc6 ♖xd3 20 cxd7 ♗c5+ 21 ♔h2 ♖xb2 22 dxc8 ♖xc8 23 ♗d2 ♖c4 24 ♗xc4 bxc4 25 a4**, and I eventually won with my extra knight versus two pawns.

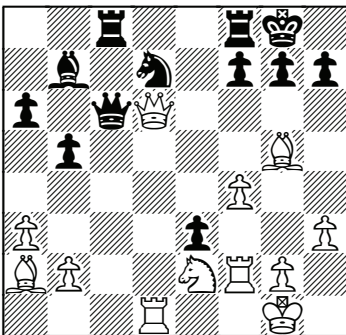
While he was thinking about his taking the knight on f2, I wondered what would happen after **18...exd5**, which at first seems like a blunder.

I had thought that everything was

covered, and I had not really considered that there could be a danger for me, but then I saw a possible problem just before he made a move, and back at home I saw that it would have been a major problem, and that I could have lost two games (the other against Gregory – Test 13.2) on the same birthday.



I could have had a slalom run with 19 ♖xe4 dxe4 20 ♜xd6, when I felt I was safe a piece up, but Black has lethal counterplay with 20...e3!!.



I had missed that! And of course he missed it too. White is a clear exchange down, without compensation, after 21

♜xc6 exf2+ 22 ♖xf2 ♙xc6.

If White wants to move the rook instead, the only try is 21 ♜f3 ♜xd6 22 ♜xd6 ♙xf3. Black should win, although it may take time, after either 23 gxh3 ♜c2 24 ♜xd7 ♜xe2 25 ♙e7 ♜xb2 26 ♙xf8 ♖xf8 27 ♜xf7+ ♙e8 28 ♜f5 ♜xa2 29 ♜e5+ ♖f7 30 ♜xe3 ♖f6 (level material, but White's king and pawns are dreadful), or 23 ♖d4 ♜c1+ 24 ♖h2 ♙h5 25 ♜xd7 e2 26 ♖xe2 ♙xe2 (exchange up, and Black can squeeze the bishop with ...♙c4, after 27 ♙e7 ♜e8).

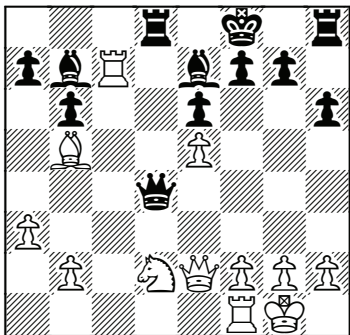
But I won the game. Was I 'lucky', in the sense that he missed his chance of winning, or 'unlucky' in that while I calculated an interesting line in advance, there was an unclear tactic many moves on? It depends on the strengths of the two players. At very top grandmaster level, all this would have been a string of blunders, and of course I am aware of that. For the time being, I had the excuse of illness, and few things can be worse than brain damage for a chess player. But I am starting to run out of excuses now...

Test 6.3
M.Hebden-C.Crouch
 Metropolitan Open 2006

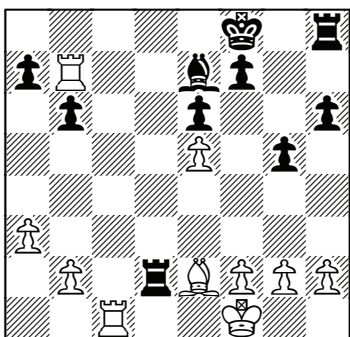
Despite earlier events (see Test 5.4), my position should not collapse. Unfortunately it did. I would have suspected that I had done something wrong, but I still have play, having a useful bishop-

Why we Lose at Chess

pair, a good open file, and an active queen. That said, I also have obvious disadvantages, with my kingside pieces being clogged up, and White having a rook on the seventh.



Again, I played too quickly, and made the obvious capture, **18...♙xd2?** (A), assuming that I was at least conformably equal. I missed something a few moves along the line. White won after **19 ♖xb7 ♗xe2 20 ♕xe2 g5** (better is 20...g6, but White is still on top after 21 b4) **21 ♖c1 ♗d2 22 ♕f1.**

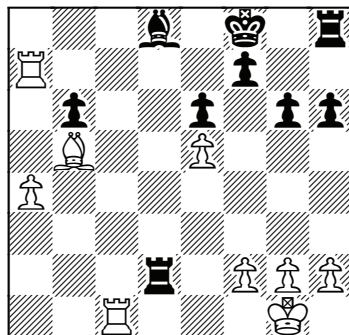


Now I missed a critical pin after **22...♖xb2?? 23 ♕h5!**, and I immediately resigned (1-0), in view of 23...♕c5 24

♖xc5! bxc5 25 ♖xb2. 23...♕xa3 24 ♖c8+ ♕g7 25 ♖xf7 mate is even quicker.

Black has to try to improve. My immediate reaction afterwards was to try to find an improvement with **18...♗xb2** (B) **19 ♖xb7 ♗xd2**, swiping the b-pawn (not though 19...♖xd2? 20 ♖b8+ ♕d8 21 ♖xd8+, with a cross-pin). White is still much better, however, after 20 ♗xd2 ♖xd2 21 ♖c1 g5 22 ♖c7 ♗d1+ 23 ♕f1 ♕xa3 24 ♖xa7 ♕c5 25 ♖xf7+ ♕e8 26 ♖fb7. Black is a tempo down after taking the b-pawn, and White again keeps a strong attack with two rooks and bishop.

Here 21...♕d8 provides more resistance. Then 22 ♖xa7 g6 23 a4.

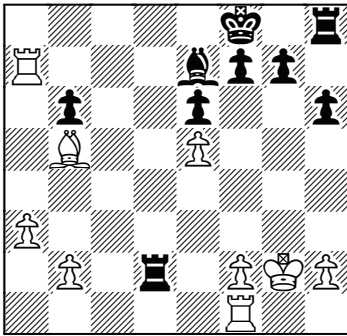


Can Black hold this? Offhand, I do not know. In practical terms, White would be more than happy to carry on trying to chip away for several hours, or, in a quickplay finish (as here), waiting for Black's position to collapse. Even if Black manages to finally completed his development, with ...♕g7 and a rook move, he still has problems with his pawns on f7 and g6 (also e6, if

Black's king is on g7), and his bishop is not mobile.

This, however, is a first impression. If Black were to try 23...♖d5! 24 ♖d7 (24 f4?! g5 gives counterplay) 24...♗xd7 25 ♙xd7, with the first pair of rooks gone, Black increases his possibilities of holding. He is of course not equal yet.

Black can also try to set up a different pawn structure in the endgame, with **18...♙xg2!?** (C) 19 ♙xg2 ♚xd2 20 ♚xd2 ♖xd2 21 ♖xa7.

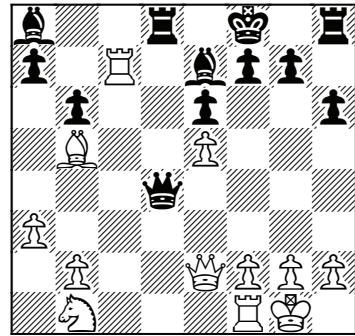


Clearly Black will not be able to take the pawn (21...♖xb2?? 22 ♖a8+), and so we now have a more dynamic pawn structure, with strengths and weaknesses on both sides. White will have excellent chances of creating a dangerous passed pawn on the queenside, while Black will need to set up counterplay on the kingside. It is important to recognize for Black that he must not just sit on the extra pawn on the kingside, but that he needs to play actively. Therefore 21...g5 22 b4 (saving the pawn, and also preventing ...♙c5) 22...g4! 23 ♖b7 ♙d8 24 ♖c1 ♙g7 25 ♖c6

(25 ♖c8 ♙g6 is comfortable for Black) 25...♙h4 26 ♖cxb6 ♖xf2+ 27 ♙g1 ♖a2 28 ♖xe6 ♖a2+, with a draw, following a reasonable degree of accuracy by Black.

This would seem to be the most accurate line for Black, boldly aiming for equality with counterplay, rather than hoping that the opponent cannot find a way of keeping a slight edge.

There is another way for Black, keeping material on the board with **18...♙a8** (C) 19 ♙b1!



The knight retreat is unexpected, and indeed it was pointed out to me by computer. The knight soon bounces back though, and after ♙c3 later, Black has no control of the d5- and e6-squares. White is better, Black still having problems with his development. There are several tries for Black here, but none seems to equalize. For example, Black can start with 19...♗d5 (19...♙c5 20 ♙c3 squashes Black's counterplay) 20 f3 ♙c5+ 21 ♙h1.

Then 21...♙e3 22 ♖xe3 ♚xb5 is an attempt to break the natural course of play, and if the natural 23 ♖fc1 ♚xb2

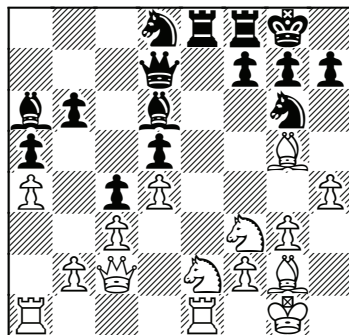
Why we Lose at Chess

24 ♖f4 g5 25 ♖h4, Black holds the position with 25...♗c7!. Once this has been appreciated, 23 ♖g1! is quickly seen as a good move, and if 23...♖xb2? (but other moves are not very good) 24 ♖f4 f5 25 ♖h5 ♗e7 26 ♗d8+, and mate next move.

Black can try instead 21...a5 22 ♘c3 ♖d4 23 ♗d1 ♖h4 24 ♗xd8+ ♖xd8 25 ♗d7, and White keeps a steady edge.

The test position is more complicated than it looks, and time pressure was beginning to be a problem. I did not have time to analyse in depth, and found one of the worst moves. 18...♙xg2! is the best, although this would take good nerves. 18...♖xb2 is playable, but not 18...♖xd2?, when I did not see a tactic later on.

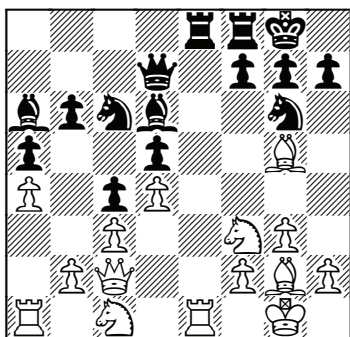
slight pressure for the last few moves, but my next move,



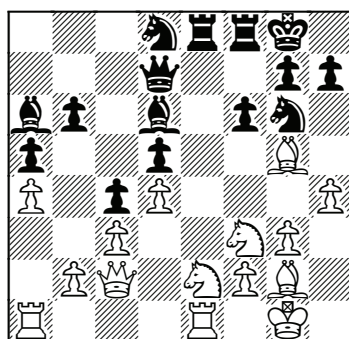
18...h6?! (A), is highly compromising: a pawn weakness. Before too long, Black decides he has to play ...f6 as well as ...h6, and then he has light-squared weaknesses in front of the king.

18...f6! (B) is much better, and is about equal.

Test 6.4 I.Lauterbach-C.Crouch British League (4NCL) 2007



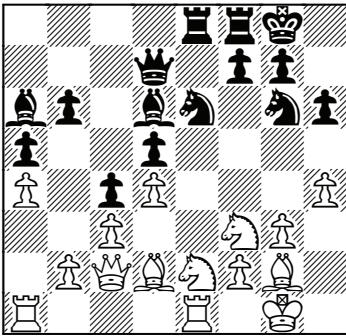
We resume play from 4.1 with **17 ♗e2 ♘d8 18 h4**. I have been under



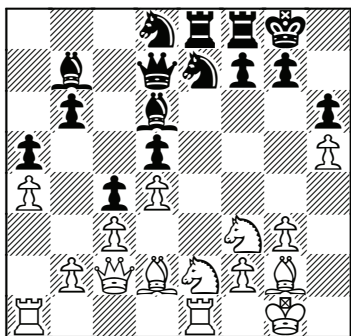
Black will be able to keep the pawn on h7. Any h5-h6 push by White can usually be countered quite easily. No detailed analysis here. Just play through the game, and imagine what would have happened if Black had delayed ...h6.

Another possibility is **18...♖e6?! (C)**, with a trap. If **19 ♖f5 ♗c8!?** **20 ♖xd5? ♘c7**, and the queen is unexpectedly about to be trapped. **21 ♖xc4** is the only move, but **21...♗a6** skewers the knight. An attractive variation, but the simple **20 h5** keeps an edge for White.

In the game, White quietly re-treated with **19 ♗d2**.



the alternative. Black's mistake came later. I felt the knight was, in several respects, worse with 20...♞e7 than on h8, blocking the e-file.



There is also the question of manoeuvrability. The knight on e7 can go to c8, but then what next? At least on h8, Black can find a better square with ...f6 and ...♞f7. But, remembering earlier comments, Black would have done much better with 18...f6! (kicking the bishop out), rather than 18...h6?!

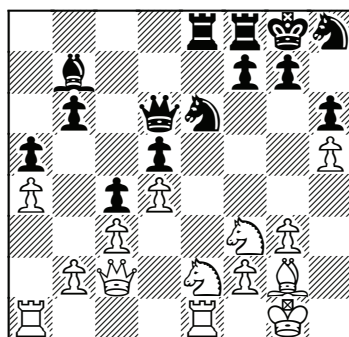
On specifics, after 20...♞e7, if White plays 21 ♖f4 ♜e6 22 ♙xd6 ♜xd6 23 ♜e5?!, following the idea of the main line, then Black equalizes with 23...♞c6, a good argument for the ...♞e7 approach. 23 ♜ab1! keeps White an edge though, forcing Black to work out how he has to face b3 (or b4), or ♜e5, or, after 23...♞c6, then 24 ♞h4.

I suspect that I might instead have been worried about 21 ♜e5 ♙xe5 22 dxe5, opening up a square for the knight on d4. This does not seem all that effective after 22...♞f5!. If 23 ♙h3 ♜d4 24 ♜xd4 ♜xh3 (threatening the

h5-pawn) 25 ♜f5 ♙c8 26 ♜xh3 ♙xh3 27 f3 ♙d7, and Black should equalize, with the idea of ...f6.

So the obvious 20...♞e7 is better than 20...♞h8, but only because of a self-pin with ...♞f5, not so obvious. I could easily have added this as a test position, but there would be too many interruptions if there are questions to be asked on each successive move, for each minor slip. We need to keep the flow going. Without the ...♞f5 self-pin, Black's knights would have been clumsy, the knights on d8 and e7 not working well together, and not helping the other pieces. This was what I remember being worried about at the time.

Back to the main line. Lauterbach played 21 ♙f4, exchanging off Black's better bishop. Then 21...♜e6 22 ♙xd6 ♜xd6 leaves White with a slight, but annoying, edge.



She played 23 ♜e5, which instinctively surprised me. As Nimzowitsch used to say, "the threat is stronger than the execution". The knight is not attacking anything, apart from the easily cov-

ered Nxc4 , and Black can hit back, later on, with ...f6 followed by ... Nf7 . Probably White should leave the knight at home, allowing Black to decide whether to try ...f6, without any tempo gain, and have to decide whether it is playable or bad. $\text{23 } \text{Qab1!}$ would be a way to test her opponent. Looking at this now, 20...Nh8 was over-elaborate, and does not do the job, so deserves its '?!'.

After her knight advance, I played

23...Qe7 , then came $\text{24 } \text{Qd2?!}$. Maybe $\text{24 Ng4! Qfe8 } \text{25 Ne3}$ would have more effectively justified White's Ne5 , keeping an edge. I was not sure what White was doing with her queen move. Obviously White is not worse after the text, but she could have achieved even more.

Play continued with $\text{24...Qfe8 } \text{25 } \text{Kf1 f6 } \text{26 Ng4}$, and at last I felt I was fully equal. We shall resume the game later in Test 10.3.