

Chapter One

Spring 2009

The next few games were in fact played while writing up my previous book, *Why We Lose at Chess*, and at one stage I was thinking of using these games as an addendum to my earlier selection of 2006 games. I was of course hoping that I would be able to prove that my play had improved dramatically as a result of my homework, and that I could produce faultless play. This turned out not to be the case, and I hurriedly decided instead to provide a sequel, saying in effect that chess is difficult, and it takes years, rather than a few months, to perfect your game. Chess is most certainly a difficult game.

It so happened that my opposition in 2009 was on average weaker than in 2006, when I played a few masters and even a few grandmasters. I was by this stage playing for the Braille Chess Association, and represented them in the British 4NCL league, as well as in Braille international events. I would only have played in the bottom division of the

4NCL, and I was worried that I would be playing too weak an opposition, hoping that before long we would gain promotion. In the end, it proved more interesting than I expected, not least because some other clubs were themselves interested in building a strong team, and chances of promotion.

I was also playing for Drunken Knights in the London League, and before my stroke I was for a while playing on top board in the top division. I was still offered top board just after my stroke, but I was quickly asking whether there were players who were by now stronger than me, to take over the top board. Over the years, I soon went down a few boards, not because my play was getting any weaker, but rather because younger players were interested in playing in a strong and sociable team.

I was also playing for Harrow, my local club, where there are quite often fifty players turning up on Thursdays,

including around twenty juniors. It seems puzzling that so many clubs are finding problems in keeping going, and recruiting new members. Quite probably we are moving to fewer but bigger clubs. Internet chess is of course now very popular, and you can sit at home playing chess, but what is the attraction of playing chess in a hall of a few dozen players? If there are already thirty people present, potential new members can see that there is a buzz, something is happening. It remains to be added that organisation is important. In the teams I am playing in, Nevil Chan has shown considerable energy in expanding both Harrow and the Drunken Knights, and Alan Marshall has devoted considerable experience to club and league chess. There are of course many others.

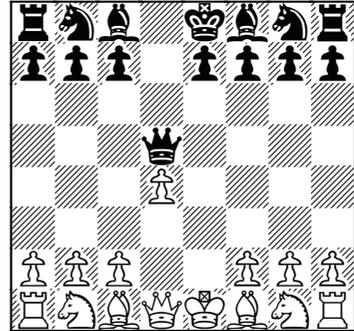
Game 1

I.Reynolds-C.Crouch British League (4NCL) 2009 Scandinavian Defence

This was played at the tail end of the 2008/09 season, with team respectability being very much at stake, but no prospects of promotion. I played three games that weekend, but I am publishing only one of them, concentrating entirely on where I went wrong. It would be easy enough for readers to find the other two games, one of which was a quick draw (I was tempted as

Black), and a quick win, after a known good plan for White in the opening. For me, I was more interested in finding out exactly where I went wrong in my other game.

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 ♖xd5 3 d4



3...♘c6

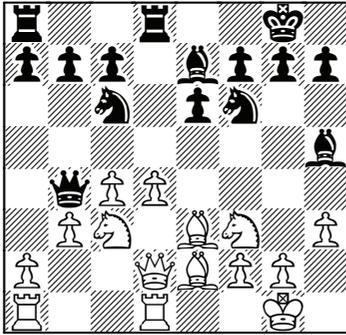
No comment when I wrote my post-game notes in 2009, simply regarding this move as the most promising, after doing some home analysis.

Probably this is indeed the most accurate, but over the coming months I suppose I became slightly lazy. I started to try 3...♘f6 a few times, but White often has slight chances of an edge with c4, rather than ♘c3.

4 ♘f3 ♙g4 5 ♙e2 e6 6 0-0 ♘f6 7 h3
♙h5 8 c4 ♚d6 9 ♙e3 ♙e7 10 ♘c3 0-0
11 ♚d2 ♜fd8 12 ♜fd1 ♚b4 13 b3

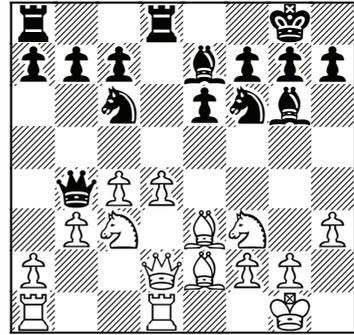
We are now at the end of the opening phase. Both players have castled, and each has brought his rook to a central file. This is, almost by definition, the start of the middlegame. Here I began to handle the position extremely

badly, at one of my first attempts in this line. I was finishing writing *Why We Lose at Chess*, and it was disconcerting that I was still perpetrated such mistakes early in the game. My next move was bad.



chessplayer, would suggest that they are good.

13...♙g6!? is the best of the quiet lines, covering squares on b1 and c2, and of course the long diagonal in general.



If by any chance there are no tactics by move 13, then there is likely to be a tactical explosion afterwards, when all the pieces are coming into play. This is known as the middlegame.

Possibly the best approach in challenging the reader is to ask what you, in this position, would do next. Much as in *Why We Lose at Chess*. I do not mind if you are 'cheating' a little, using the computer. Sometimes the human player may improve on the computer's analysis.

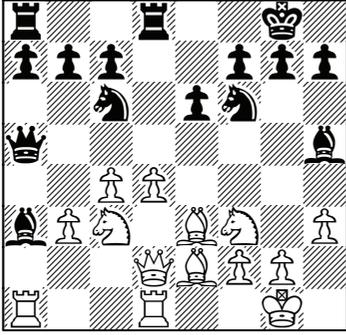
If we do 'cheat', we will learn something. Black's position is close to equality, but he has not yet fully equalized. Insignificant looking moves such as 13...♖ac8, 13...a6, or 13...h6 (some of the lines suggested by the computer) are probably not catastrophically bad, but neither the computer, nor a good

White no longer has any tactical threats with 14 a3?! ♖xb3, as the queen is no longer trapped with 15 ♗ab1??. However, White still has slightly the more active development with, for example, 14 ♙f4 ♙d6 15 ♙g5 ♙e7 16 ♖e3. Black has not quite equalized, and therefore I did not really want to play 13...♙g6, unless other moves would tend to be worse. I suspect that many cautious positional players would want to try this line, but, rightly or wrongly, I wanted to aim for full equality and the hope for more.

13...♖a5!? is a more combative quiet move, with the threat of ...♙b4. White should sacrifice the pawn with 14 a3! ♙xa3, and I was not too sure what was going on.

I was a pawn up, certainly, but I could not see a clear way for Black's

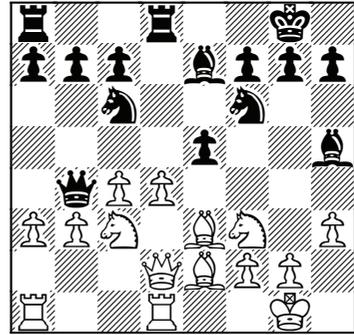
pieces to unravel themselves, while still keeping the extra pawn.



Black's bishop on a3 is dangerously pinned. If I had more of a gambling streak, and perhaps if I had been younger, I might have tried this, on the basis that if I were unable to find a good refutation, or partial refutation, of White's play, then neither would White be able to find his own refutation.

One possible try for White is 15 b4 ♖xb4 16 ♗fb1 ♕f8 17 ♗xb7 ♖a5, and with the exchange on f3, Black is ahead. Instead, 15 ♗a2! causes concern (also, maybe, 15 g4!? ♗g6 16 ♖h4), and if 15...♗xf3 16 ♗xf3 e5 17 ♗xc6 bxc6, then White has an unexpected second pin with 18 ♕d3! exd4 19 ♖b1. Black can survive, with the help of a counterpin, after 19...♕e5 20 ♗xd4 ♕f4 21 ♖xa3 c5 22 ♕e3 ♕xe3 23 fxe3 cxd4 24 ♗xd4 ♗xd4 25 exd4, and White has slightly the better pawn structure in the resultant rook and knight endgame. All this was of course beyond my field of vision.

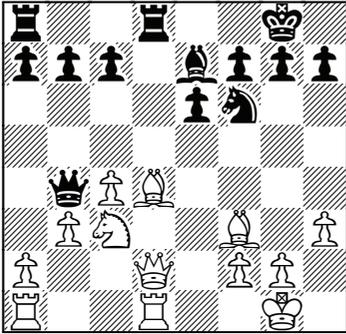
I did not quite believe any piece sacrifices on d4, and so I landed on the bad idea of 13...e5?, plausible enough, but tactically badly wrong. White now has 14 a3!, and Black was now in full retreat.



If 14...♕xb3? 15 ♗db1, and the queen is trapped. The attempted counterplay with 15...♖a5 16 ♗xb3 ♖xb3 17 ♕b2 ♖xa1 does not rescue the line, since 18 dxe5 wins for White.

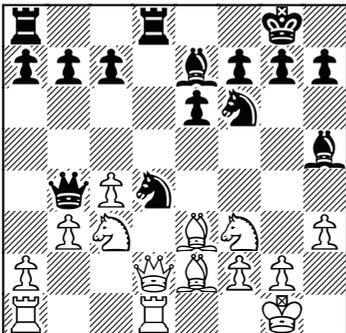
I had an uncomfortable time after 14...♕d6 15 d5 ♗xf3 16 ♗xf3 ♖b8 17 b4 ♕d7 18 c5, and I should have lost. Instead, he was grateful, unnecessarily so, in showing that he could force a draw against an IM opponent. A bit more work, and he could have had a full point. Those interested in the rest of the game will be able to find it in the main databases.

So what else should I have done? If we go on the basis that the first priority for Black is to ensure that he is not going to be worse, then after 13...♗xf3 14 ♗xf3 ♖xd4 15 ♗xd4 Black has done well out of the opening.



Either of the continuations 15...c5 16 d5, or 15...e5 16 d5 would eventually equalize. I would expect that against GM or IM opposition, I would have aimed for the drawing line, reasoning that against strong opposition, one cannot win every time from such positions.

Could Black play more ambitiously? I had only momentarily considered, and then immediately rejected 13...xd4!?



Surely, one might have thought, White should not be allowed to capture on d4 with a knight. However, it is entertaining, and might well be worth

trying if one feels that the opponent is not fully confident with his play, but ultimately, this line should end up as a draw after 14 dxd4 c5, and maybe 15 a3 b6 16 da4 wa6 17 exh5 dxh5 18 we2 cxd4 19 exd4 ef6 20 exf6 dxf6. The trouble is that White's pieces are fractionally better placed after, for example, 21 exd8+ exd8 22 ed1. There is certainly no realistic option for Black to play for more.

Sometimes as Black one has to accept, reluctantly, that a position is only equal, and that the best option is to maintain safe equality. I rejected both the safe draw, and various positions where I was slightly worse, but with tense play for both sides. Unfortunately, I seriously miscalculated the line I chose, and ended up with a losing position.

After my 4NCL long weekend, I had a win and two draws, but:

Total games: 3
 Points lost through mistakes: 0
 Average grading points lost: 0

Although I made a big mistake in this game, I did not lose any points or half-points as a result. My position was at best level, and the final result was a draw, so I had not given away any extra points. However, my opponent had a winning position, but gave away a draw, and so he had dropped half a point.

Game 2
S. Munson-C. Crouch
Middlesex vs. Suffolk 2009
 Veresov Attack

This was played somewhere out in the sticks, a neutral venue on a factory, somewhere between Middlesex and Suffolk, so therefore Essex. Or at least this was a London perspective. So many match games these days, not least in the 4NCL, tend to be played somewhere between London and the West Midlands, which is 'central', so long as people are not travelling from too far north. But Middlesex versus Suffolk is not such a long distance, although some Middlesex players needed to calculate their train journeys carefully.

My opponent soon started to play gambit chess. This was by no means his original intention, or mine. It just so happened that he made a mess in the opening, and the only practical way of keeping his play alive was to give up some material, in order to set up an unclear counterattack. Usually if you are in a good position, and your opponent gambits, you will still be in a better position after the gambit, but the game tends to become much less clear, with plenty of opportunities to go wrong for the victim of the gambit. This is what unfortunately happened to me.

For examples of extremely high-level gambit play, see a recent book of

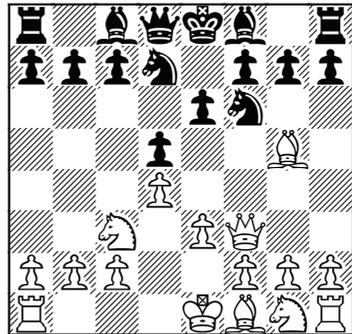
mine, *Chess Secrets: Great Attackers*. Clearly I was unable to learn everything about gambit play, but I faced a reminder that gambit play can be unusually difficult.

Phase 1: I quickly equalized, and soon had an edge

1 d4 ♘f6 2 ♙g5 d5 3 ♘c3 ♗bd7

This seems the simplest option for Black against the Veresov, aiming for good chances of equality, while keeping some tension.

4 e3 e6 5 ♕f3



I had not examined this before, and indeed I had no particular reason to have done so. The queen move looks artificial. Maybe 5 f4, with a Stonewall set-up, makes more sense. Probably I would have tried 5...♙b4.

White could of course have developed using standard play with, for example, 5 ♙d3 or 5 ♘f3.

5...♙b4

With an immediate counterattack. Naturally it is a little too early as Black

to think of an edge, but I have options of taking the initiative if White makes any slips.

6 ♖ge2

Logical enough, in that White does not want to have his queenside pawns weakened. White has not developed his kingside pieces very effectively though. Where will he put his bishop?

6...c6

With ideas of attack, with ...♖a5 followed by ...♗e4.

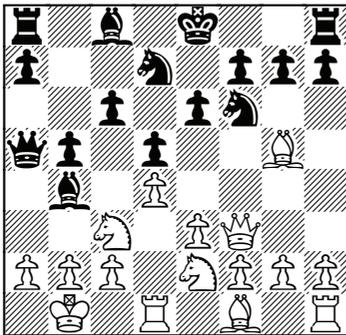
7 0-0-0 ♖a5 8 ♔b1

If 8 a3, play would transpose to an alternative line, 7 a3 ♖a5 8 0-0-0:

a) The sacrifice with 8...♗xa3?! 9 bxa3 ♖xa3+ is tempting, but it is not convincing: 10 ♔d2 a5 11 ♖g3 b4 12 ♗b1 ♖b2 13 ♗d3 gives Black compensation for the exchange, but he would have liked something clearer.

b) 8...♗e7 looks simple. White's push of the a-pawn then leaves a target for an attack with ...b5 and ...b4.

8...b5



I felt happy here.

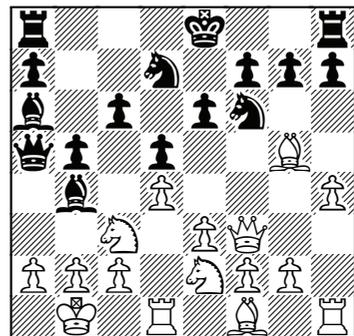
9 h4

After some thought. The idea is not so much a kingside attack, but rather to provide protection for the bishop on g5, in case of a later ...b4, followed by ...♗e4.

9 e4 is unsatisfactory, as Black wins a pawn after 9...♗xc3 10 ♗xc3 b4. If White tries to complicate with a knight sacrifice, with 11 exd5 bxc3 12 dxc6 ♗b6, Black is happy.

9 a3! is possible, but 9...♗e7 is comfortably equal. I considered briefly, but not in depth, 9...♗xa3. Learning from Tal (in my book, *Great Attackers*), it is often best to play an initial quiet move, keeping the opponent sweating, rather than aim for a quick sacrifice. Or as Nimzowitsch used to say, 'the threat is stronger than the execution'. White would have to calculate every move whether Black is going to sacrifice on a3, or to make a pawn push with ...b4. White will end up short of time.

9...♗a6!?



Black develops.

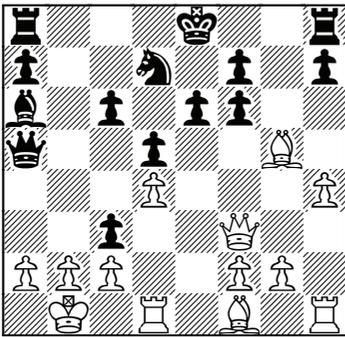
I looked at the more direct 9...♗xc3 10 ♗xc3 b4 11 ♗e2, but White soon

uncovers his pieces with ♖c1 and ♗b3.
10 e4?

This I would regard as a clear mistake. I was starting to build up some pressure, but it is too early to give away two pawns so quickly.

A more natural choice is 10 h5, with threats on h6. After 10...h6 11 ♙f4 ♜c8 12 e4 dxe4 13 ♘xe4 ♗xe4 14 ♚xe4 ♖f6 15 ♚f3 ♙e7 Black has a reasonably comfortable Caro-Kann set-up, but without any obvious edge.

10...♙xc3 11 ♗xc3 b4 12 e5 bxc3 13 exf6 gxf6



Surely my opponent has not overlooked 14 ♙xf6?? ♗xf6 15 ♚xf6 ♚b4, and White is about to be mated?

14 ♙h6

No! He keeps the position alive, even two pawns down.

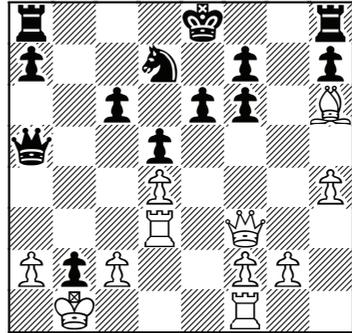
14...♙xf1 15 ♜hxf1 cxb2 16 ♜d3!

A good move. Now he keeps his pieces active.

Phase 2: converting the position into a clear win

You would like to think you are win-

ning, but sometimes you can get it wrong.



The position is highly complicated, and once Black resists the temptation to start an all-out storm against the king, it will become clear that the tension will continue for several moves. White's position is not going to fold, not while Black's king remains uncomfortable.

The basic strategic point for Black is that he can feel confident that he has done nothing wrong, while some of his opponent's play has been opportunistic, rather than convincing. If Black does nothing wrong over the next few moves, he should be better, maybe even winning. If, however, Black finds a couple of poor moves, the position can swing around quickly.

I have several possible good moves here. There might also be bad moves, as well. Often the danger is of being too passive, and hoping the game can be won without having to think. The other main danger is of miscalculation.

16...♜b8?

This is where Black starts to go wrong. If we look at the position a few moves along the line, we see that Black has to move the rook again, White's bishop attacking it from f4. This is an indication of a loss of tempo. The rook has moved to a not-so-good square.

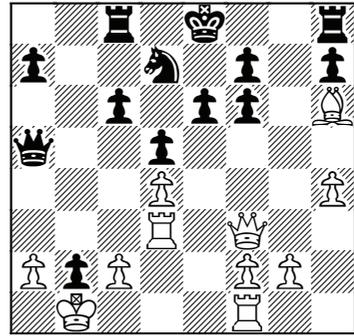
We do not doubt that there will be quite a few good moves for Black. I do not wish to go through all the possible tactical ideas. What is of more interest is finding a good way a player can handle the position over the board, using positional ideas. There are two basic strategies. Either maximization, trying to find the very best moves, and if necessary striding through great complications, with the idea of a quick win. Or instead being satisfied with steady play, aiming for a clear edge, without having to be worried about any obscure tactical problems.

I went for the greedy maximalist approach, wanting above all to keep my passed pawn on the seventh secure. But what happens in other geographical parts of the board? Black is two pawns ahead, and he can happily drop the exposed pawn on the seventh, so long as his other pawns are safe, and above all, his pieces active, and his king safe. Black has no need to protect his b-pawn. What is much more important is to set up counterplay on the c-file.

16...c5 17 c4!? is good for Black, but complicated. A possible improvement is to bring another piece into play, waiting to push with ...c5 later. And

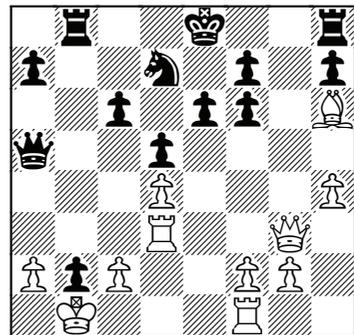
what will Black want to do before playing ...c5?

The answer soon fits in: 16...♖c8!



White has no fully satisfactory plan. If he tries to follow the main line in the game, with 17 ♖g3 c5 18 ♗fd1 cxd4 19 ♗xd4, Black is better placed for attack, and can continue with, for example, 19...♙c5 20 c4 ♘b6. Any attack by White with 21 ♖g7 ♙e7 22 ♗f4 ♘xc4 23 ♖xf6+ ♙d6 does not last for long. This happens only because Black was able to attack before White's attack could become dangerous.

17 ♖g3



White now has pressure, particu-

larly on the dark-squared diagonals, and down the g-file. The queen has of course the advantage of using the ranks and files for the attack, along with the diagonals. For the next few moves I need to pay close attention to the possibility of ♖g7. We are moving closer to the tactical phase.

17...c5

I was starting to feel uncomfortable about recent events, and I could not see a convincing way of playing with only my pieces. If, for example, 17...♔e7?! 18 ♙f4 ♜hg8?? 19 ♙d6+ would have been disastrous, and if 18...♞bg8 19 ♙d6+, Black certainly has not helped coordinate his pieces.

The computer suggested manoeuvring the black queen to c4 with, for example, 17...♞b5 18 ♞fd1 ♞c4, but 19 ♙f4 ♞b5 20 ♞g7 ♞f8 21 ♙d6 allows White to win the exchange, and the immediate reaction for Black is that the position is at best unclear. This is not what Black would have wanted.

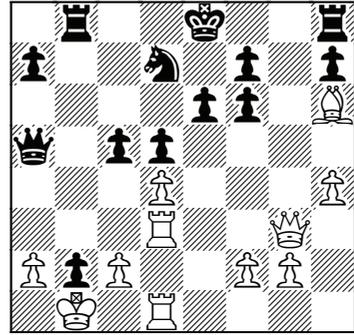
The trouble for Black is that he has slightly mistimed his pawn push. He has waited for White to go ♞f3-g3 (after Black's ...♞a8-b8), before opening up the play. White's queen is now on a better square.

18 ♞fd1

White is now attempting to aim for a quick, outright attack.

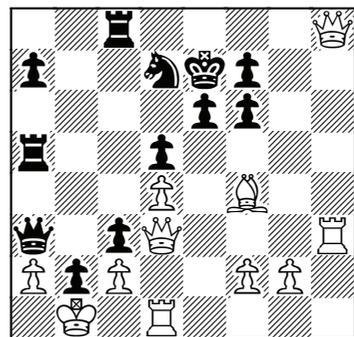
Phase 3: I think I might have done something wrong.

Now how can I keep an edge?



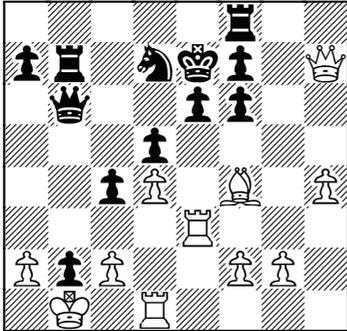
18...cxd4

Play is more complicated than it should have been, now that my rook is exposed on b8. It is easy enough to see the danger of White playing ♞g7, and if for some reason Black cannot defend the rook with ...♔e7, and has to play ...♞f8, then White will take the h-pawn, and then charge through with his own passed h-pawn. There would be an extremely delicate balance, or imbalance, after, for example, 18...c4!? 19 ♞a3 ♞b6 20 ♙f4 ♞b7 21 ♞g7 ♞f8 22 ♞xh7 ♔e7 23 h5?! ♞b4 24 ♞h3 c3 25 h6 ♞c8 26 ♞d3 ♞b5 27 h7 ♞a5 28 h8♞ ♞a3.



Black wins. But who would try to

calculate all this in advance, with the certainty that at least one of the players would deviate at some stage? Go back a few moves, and instead of the pawn push, 23 h5?, White can coordinate his pieces, with 23 ♖e3!, centralizing.



The game is of course highly complicated. One line for Black, a computer suggestion, would be 23...♖c8 24 c3 ♖a5. How confident would a human player be when trying to analyse 25 ♗xe6+! ♕xe6 26 ♖e1+ ♘e5, with tactics and sacrifices? Perhaps Black is still better.

23 ♔g7!? is another possibility, maybe retreating to g3 after a long journey to take the pawn on h7 and back. White keeps a passed pawn, and pushes it, but it is not quite as clear what Black does.

In earlier notes, I had been critical about my 18...cxd4, but now this seems not so clear. My main mistake was the careless 16...♖b8?, with an unnecessary loss of tempo.

18...♕e7 19 ♖f4 ♗bg8 20 ♖d6+ ♔d8

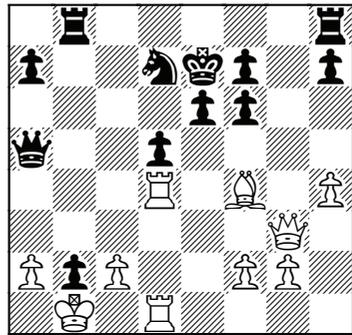
21 ♗f3 c4 is not a bad idea for Black, and seems to keep an edge, but again the ...♖b8 move has slowed him down.

19 ♗xd4 ♕e7

I felt happy, with my second rook soon to be in play on the queenside.

20 ♖f4

But it is not so easy. White's pieces are on good attacking squares, and my king is about to be pushed back.



20...♖bc8?

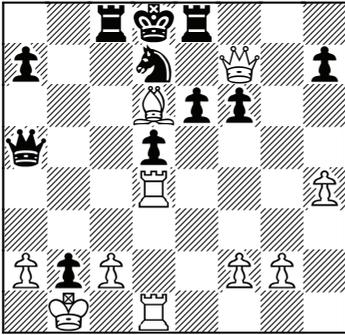
This is a second clear error of judgement with the unfortunate rook. My main choice is between 20...♖b6 and 20...♗bg8, although other moves could also be considered. 20...e5? would, however, have been a blunder, in view of 21 ♗xd5.

20...♗bg8 21 ♖d6+ leaves Black's pieces placed awkwardly, but Black could try to examine the position further. I was not impressed.

If, however, a player is contemplating giving back two pawns, with 20...♖bc8, what is wrong in giving up the exchange instead? Thus 20...♖b6! 21 ♖c7 ♗c8 22 ♖xb6 ♘xb6, and Black

has a workable edge, with little opportunity for White to unbalance the game. This is a very reasonable option for Black. He might not have a forced win, but it is still a good plus.

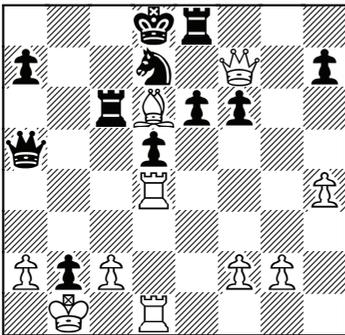
21 ♔d6+ ♕d8 22 ♖g7 ♜e8 23 ♗xf7



This might still be good for Black, but is it *safe*? Only a slight error for Black may see him worse, while White has easy attacking options.

23...♞c6

I was still hoping for a win. Instead, 23...♞b6 24 ♔g3 ♜e7 25 ♗g8+ ♜e8 26 ♜f7 is a likely draw.



24 ♔b4 ♗c7

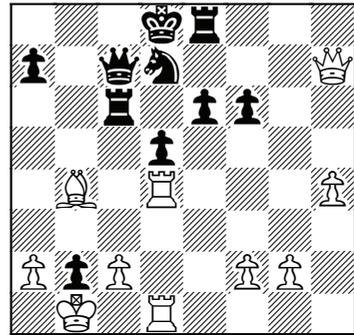
At last, I felt, all my pieces were co-

ordinated, but this is coordination only for defence. I cannot create an attack.

25 ♗xh7

Phase 4: Again, I think I have done something wrong.

It is now a battle, and I need to fight on, just hoping that I am at least equal
Safe? Well, by now his h-pawn is vastly more effective than my b-pawn.

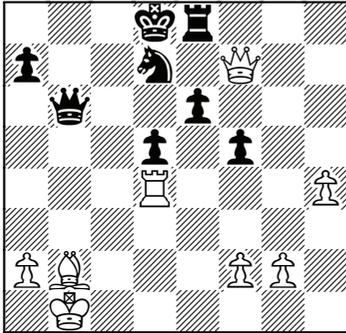


25...a5?!

This is an ineffective waste of time. I have been scared of the bishop for quite a long time, and I wanted to push it to his side of the board, but by now this is unnecessary.

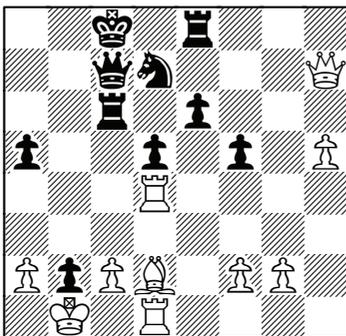
25...f5! is much better, and finally Black can attack the c-pawn. I was playing too timidly, getting worried about being battered by White's pieces, and forgetting about his own king weakness. The computer then suggests that 26 ♔d2 is best, with a slight edge for Black, but Black has a few tactics after 26...♞xc2, then 27 ♗f7 (threatening 28 ♔g5+) 27...♞c1+! 28 ♞xc1 bxc1♗+ 29

♙xc1 ♚b6+ 30 ♙b2.



Quite possibly I was worried about this position (I cannot remember by now), with all my opponent's pieces being active, provided he can unpin his bishop. White also has the dangerous passed pawn. The computer now gives this as equal in several lines, but do not be fooled. There is not a simple repetition, and play will continue. Perhaps I can leave this to the reader to decide what is going on.

26 ♙d2 ♚c8 27 h5 f5



It had to happen sooner or later, but in the meantime, White's h-pawn has advanced a move further.

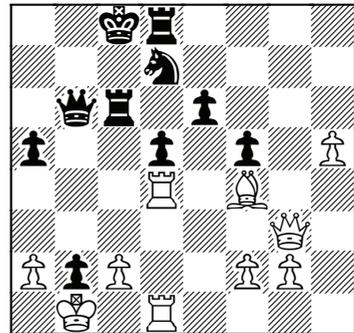
The position remains complicated. If I were writing up notes between the very top grandmasters, I would try hard to analyse every move in depth, trying to learn about every twist and turn. But instead, this was just me and my opponent, both players trying to make a few reasonable moves, and with any luck a few good moves, before the time control.

For the next few moves, the computer verdict veers slightly between equality, and a slight edge to White. I am interested, at the moment, only in big swerves.

28 ♙f4 ♚b6 29 ♚g6

Regrouping, although 29 c4! seems strong.

29...♚d8 30 ♚g3



30...♙c5

When I saw my opponent's reply, I was horrified that this was the wrong move on my part, and that 30...♙f6, with the option of a threat on e4, would have been more accurate. Sometimes the problem is not the move itself, but rather the fear that you have

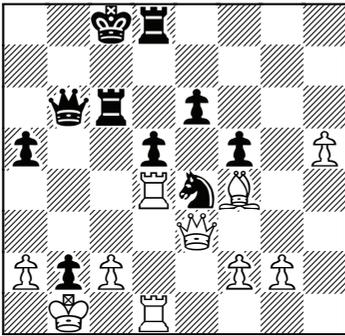
just made a mistake.

31 ♖e3? ♕b7?

And this was the result of fear.

White's last move was not especially threatening, and 31 ♖e3 ♕b7 32 f3 would probably have left White slightly better.

The game move was unexpected, and I suppose I assumed that he had a refutation ready after the natural reply, 31...♘e4!. Ghosts. There was nothing for him, and Black is better:

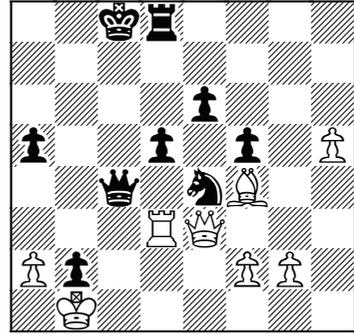


a) If White sacrifices with 32 ♖xe4?!, Black is winning after 32...dxe4!, and if 33 ♕xb6? there is an intermediate check with 33...♗xd1+.

b) 32 ♗d3?!, with the idea of a repetition with 32...♘c5?! 33 ♗d1, is not so effective, as 32...♕c5! gives excellent chances of an edge for Black. If 33 c4 ♗e8!, with advantage.

c) The one real chance for White to hold is 32 c4! ♕b4 33 ♗d3 ♗xc4 34 ♗xc4+. Now the computer suggests that either recapture is level, and indeed 34...dxc4 35 ♗xd8+ ♕xd8 36 ♕d4+ ♕e8 leads to a quick perpetual.

34...♗xc4!, however, leaves Black with excellent central control, and gives him an edge:



c1) If 35 ♗d4, Black's best idea is 35...♘c3+ 36 ♕xb2 ♕xa2+ 37 ♕xc3 ♕d7!!, a quiet king move opening a space for a winning check. Even here, White can fight on with 38 ♕d3 ♗c8 39 ♕d2 ♕b3+ 40 ♕e2 ♗c2 41 h6 ♗xd2+ 42 ♕xd2, and Black still has to work out how to defeat the passed h-pawn.

c2) 35 ♗b3 again leads to complicated play:

c21) After 35...♕d7 (aiming for ...♗c8) 36 ♗b7+ ♕e8 37 ♕xb2 ♗c8 38 h6 d4 39 ♕f3!! White ends up with a winning position. Amazingly, there are no good checks for Black after 39...♕c2+ 40 ♕a1.

c22) 35...♕f1+ 36 ♕xb2 ♕xf2+ 37 ♕xf2 ♘xf2 38 h6 is not fully reliable for Black either. After 38...♕d7 39 h7 ♗h8 40 ♕g3! (40 ♕e5?! allows Black a saving knight check on d3 after 40...♗xh7) 40...♘d1+ 41 ♕c1 White wins.

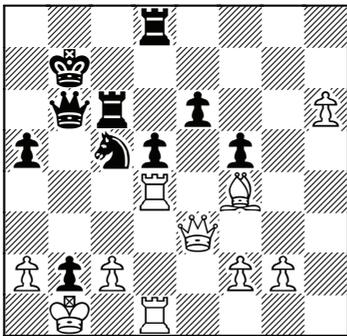
c23) So Black has to be careful. The safest and most reliable move is

35...d4! 36 ♖e1! ♘c3+ 37 ♙xb2 a4 38 ♜xc3 dxc3+ 39 ♖xc3 ♜xc3+ 40 ♙xc3 ♜h8 41 h6 e5 52 ♙xe5 ♜xh6, and after an annihilation of pieces, White can just hold the draw.

Incredibly complicated. And of course Black fell at the first hurdle, while quite probably White would not have lasted for longer if Black had played accurately.

When considering lines such as this, it is a great advantage for a player who is young and quick-witted. It is best to be on the younger side of thirty when trying to find a long string of moves under pressure. I was nowhere near fast enough.

32 h6



Another pawn move, and the danger is that it is going to be difficult for Black to cover the h8 queening square.

32...♜d7

I was starting to feel panicky. I felt I needed to cover the only light square in front of the h-pawn, and if necessary blocking on h7 with the rook, but it can hardly be surprising if my position

would eventually fold, with the loss of the rook to passive play.

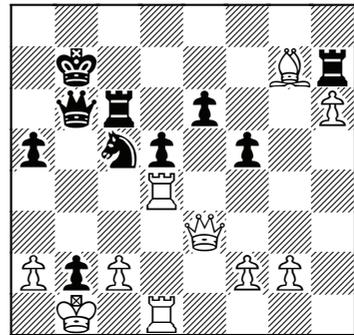
32...♘e4 does not help, since White would be more than willing to sacrifice the exchange with 33 ♜xe4 fxe4 34 ♜xb6+ ♜xb6 35 ♙e5 ♜d7 36 ♙g7, and White will sooner or later win.

32...♜dc8 is certainly worth considering, ignoring White's h-pawn, but aiming for counterplay along the c-file, and trying to hit the king. There are some interesting variations, but the simple 33 h7! causes problems. If 33...♘e4 34 ♜xe4 fxe4 35 ♜xb6+ ♙xb6 36 ♙e5 ♜xc2 37 h8♚, and White queens in time.

Finally, 32...♜h8 would transpose to the main line, after 33 ♙e5 ♜h7.

33 ♙e5 ♜h7 34 ♙g7

Phase 5: How do I hold this?



34...♜b5?!

Again, I was much too nervous about his protected passed pawn. After 34...♘e4!? 35 ♜xe4 fxe4 36 ♜xb6+ ♙xb6 37 g4 ♜c7 38 ♙xb2 ♜hxg7 39 hxg7 ♜xg7 Black is, if anything, slightly

better, although 35 ♖1d3 ♘c5 (35...f4 36 ♙e1!) 36 ♖a3 keeps him under pressure.

35 f3

Time to prevent ...♘e4, finally.

35...♙a6

Keeping the king out of the way.

35...♘a4 does not do all that much, since 36 ♖h4 keeps the c3-square covered.

36 g4?!

Allowing an unexpected tactical response – and yes, I did not see it.

36 ♖h4 still keeps an edge, as do various other quiet moves.

36...fxg4?

36...♘a4! holds the balance, the point being that 37 ♖f4 (he can no longer play ♖h4) 37...♖xh6! 38 ♖xa4 ♖g6 is level. The rook on f4 blocked the diagonal between the queen and bishop.

37 ♖xg4

Finally White is firmly in control. I made it to the time control, but not much longer.

37...♖c7 38 ♙d4 ♙b7 39 ♖g7 ♘a4 40 ♙e5 ♖hxg7 41 hxg7 ♖c8 42 ♙b3 ♙xb3 43 axb3 1-0

Games played: 4

Points lost through mistakes: 1

Average grading points lost: 25

The figures look horrendous – an average of 25 ECF points lost, and it could easily have been even worse. I was not feeling confident.

Game 3

T.Chesters-C.Crouch

Thames Valley League 2009

Queen's Indian Defence

“For me, this was the sort of junk that I was occasionally playing around 2005 or 2006, when my mind and eyes were still very dizzy, after my stroke. In my companion volume, and indeed in many other games, I often found myself in a losing position, or close to it, in the opening. Often what happened would have been that I knew I needed to think, but I was tired or out of condition, and so I played quickly, with the excuse that maybe I needed to avoid time pressure.”

This was written just after the game, but close to a year later, I sense that I was making excuses. I had by then mostly learnt how to avoid sudden crashes in my ability to think, and I had allocated times to have cat-naps during the day. It is easy if you are writing books at home. I am also no longer playing two games in a day, and I am being cautious about entering nine-round events, the fear of being too tired after about round 5. I have belatedly decided to cut out quickplay finishes in evening chess, a first time control, then 15 minutes for completion, as it has proved too stressful for me, having two time controls in such a brief period of time. Both my eyes and my brain need to focus.

No, my main problem was that I was simply out of focus in my play. I did not particularly want to admit it.

1 d4 ♖f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♗f3 b6 4 ♗c3 ♙b7 5 a3 d5

Normally I have played here 5...♗e4 6 ♗xe4 ♙xe4, but this can end up drawish. I wanted to keep the tension alive, and to try moves I hadn't played for a decade or more, as both White and Black.

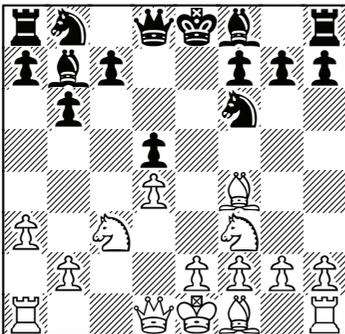
6 cxd5 exd5

Many of Kasparov's opponents in the late 1970s or early 1980s played the arguably more natural 6...♗d5, opening up lines on the long diagonal. It quite probably is the best for Black, but Kasparov was able to find quick wins after slightly inaccurate play.

In Staines that evening, I did not feel that I wanted to try to remember old theory. In other words, I was being lazy, preferring natural play, rather than working out theory.

7 ♙f4

I was more familiar with 7 g3.



7...♙e7?!

And it shows. This quiet bishop move looks solid enough at first, but White with correct play can set up pressure on the c7-square, which forces Black to defend.

The simple 7...♙d6 is far more natural, although Black has very few chances of playing for an edge, after either 8 ♙xd6 or 8 ♙g3. The problem for Black is in trying to do anything active with the extra pawn on the queen-side. This is a familiar theme, and we shall soon see what problems might be involved, with the dark-squared bishops still on board. The basic trouble is that after an eventual ...c5, and a pawn exchange, Black has two 'hanging pawns' on c5 and d5, on which White can create pressure. Or alternatively an isolated d-pawn.

8 ♖c1! c6?!

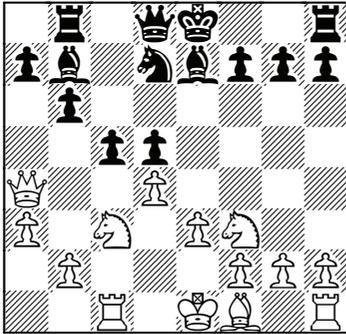
I did not like playing this pawn move, but if 8...0-0?, White wins a pawn after 9 ♗g5.

8...c5 is more interesting, and at least avoids being stuck with a pawn structure, a7, b6, c6, and d5. White can of course set up hanging pawns with 9 dxc5 bxc5, or simply develop his king-side with 9 e3 or 9 g3. In each of these cases, White keeps a slight edge. These are fairly standard ways of playing.

I would also have been worried about attacks on the a4-e8 diagonal with, for example, 9 ♙xb8 ♖xb8 (9...♗xb8? 10 ♗a4+ gives White a clear advantage) 10 ♗a4+ ♗d7, but this

hardly seems worth being bothering about. 11 ♖xa7? ♙c6 12 ♖a6 wins a pawn, but 12...c4! then forces 10 ♗xd5 to avoid losing the queen.

11 e3! is, however, annoying, and indeed gives White a clear edge.



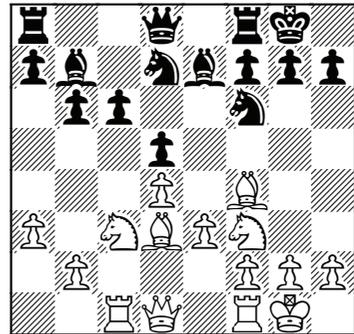
If Black wants to try to escape with tactics, 11...a6 12 dxc5! bxc5 13 ♖d1 (breaking open the hanging pawns) 13...d4 (13...♙f6 14 ♗xd5 ♙xd5 15 ♖xd5 ♖xb2 16 ♙d3 is good for White) 14 exd4 ♙xf3 15 gxf3 ♖xb2 16 dxc5 ♙xc5 17 ♗e4 gives White a large edge. Is this lucky for White? Not really. He starts off with the better pieces, and ends up with the better pieces after the interruption tactics on either side. A normal result.

Even so, it seems strange that Black should have a bad position after a quiet developing move such as 7...♙e7. Could there still be an improvement a move later?

Black would need strong nerves to play 8...a6!?, with the idea that he could later try ...c5, without a loss of tempi with the c-pawn, and can cover squares

on the a4-e8 diagonal. White still has the normal slight edge, even with quiet play. The combination with 9 ♙xc7 ♖xc7 10 ♗xd5 ♗xd5 11 ♖xc7 ♗xc7 12 e3 needs further investigation. The computer prefers White, who has queen and two pawns versus rook and two minor pieces. Neither Black's assorted pieces, nor White's extra central pawns, seem to dominate in the struggle. Possibly White keeps a slight edge.

Back to the game, which continued with 9 e3 0-0 10 ♙d3 ♗bd7 11 0-0. Maybe 11 h3!? could have been a slight improvement.

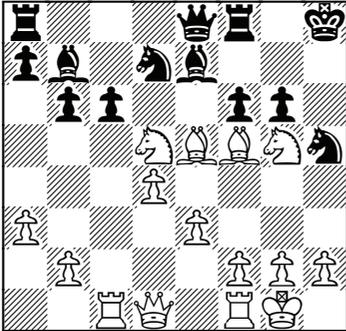


From many years back, I remembered the then young Tony Miles grinding Boris Spassky drastically, after Spassky set up positions with ...c5 (without the ...c7-c6-c5 loss of tempo, and without White having played a3). This discouraged me. I felt I had drifted into a bad position.

I had quite simply lost my confidence in my position. Miles had carefully flicked in h3, to provide an escape square for the bishop, and there was a

good reason for this.

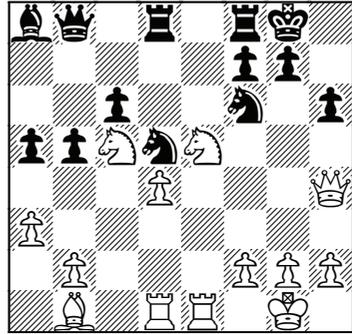
Indeed, I had the chance to play 11...♘h5!, with equal play. If White wants to go for tactics, Black needs to keep his cool after 12 ♙e5 f6 13 ♘g5?! ♚e8 14 ♙xh7+ ♔h8 15 ♙f5 (15 ♚c2!? might be about equal) 15...g6 16 ♘xd5.



But then, I would not have had the confidence these days of embarking in such a sharp struggle. Black cannot take all White's minor pieces at once! Still, 16...cxd5 17 ♙xd7 ♚xd7 18 ♖c7 ♚e8 19 ♖xb7 fxe5 20 ♘e6 ♖f6! is good for Black.

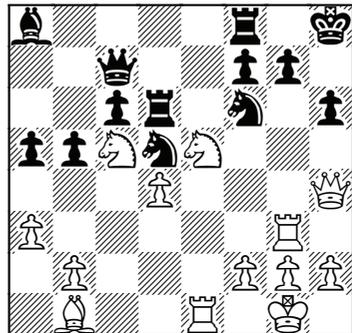
I missed the opportunity, and hoped instead to start a little queenside counterplay with 11...b5?. It was daft, too slow.

He played a well-timed 12 e4, and my play was in danger of subsiding. Over the next few moves, my best chance to hold my defences together would seem to be, after 12...dxe4 13 ♘xe4 ♘d5 14 ♙d6 ♘f6 15 ♙xe7 ♚xe7 16 ♘c5 ♖ad8 17 ♖e1 ♚c7 18 ♘e5 ♙a8 19 ♚f3 ♚d6 20 ♖cd1 a5 21 ♙b1 ♚b8 22 ♚g3 h6 23 ♚h4,



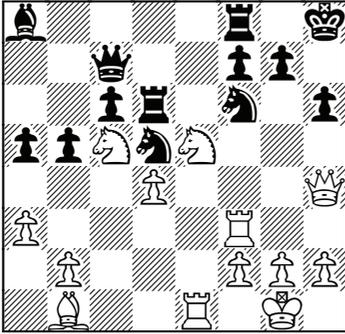
to try resolute centralization with 23...♖fe8!. There is a tactical point that after 24 ♖d3 (the actual move played), Black can equalize with 24...♘d7!, the knight on e5 being pinned. This slows White down, but naturally my position was unpromising.

Instead I tried, less subtly, to add a defensive piece on the kingside, with 23...♖d6, but my pieces were soon shooed away with 24 ♖d3 ♚c7 25 ♖g3 ♔h8.

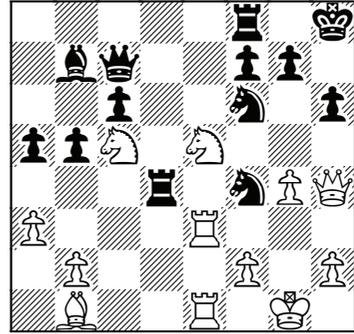


Completely unexpectedly, it was my opponent who found a big blunder when my position was about to collapse.

26 ♖f3! was the most accurate, allowing White to play g4, without giving Black the opportunity of ...♗f4.

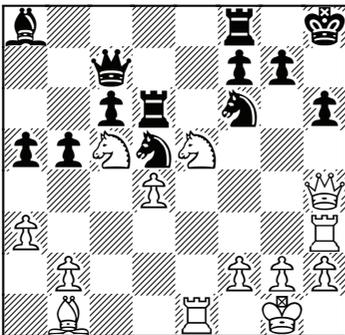


blunder time. 27 ♖f3 is still good, but he played 27 g4??, and suddenly I was winning after 27...♗f4 28 ♖he3 ♖xd4



Also, there is a pin after 26...♗g8 27 ♗g6+!, winning the exchange. Sooner or later, Black's position will fold.

Instead he played 26 ♖h3, visually attractive, aiming for the king, but not really so effective.



I played 26...♗b7, and then it was

29 ♗b3 c5 30 ♗xd4 cxd4 31 g5 dxe3 32 ♖xf4 exf2+ 33 ♖xf2 ♖c5+ 34 ♖f1 hxg5 35 ♖xg5 ♖g8 (avoiding the discovered check) 36 ♖e2 ♖d5 37 ♖f2 ♖h1 38 ♗d3 ♖d8 39 ♖f4 ♖c8, and several blitzed moves (0-1).

He could probably have defended slightly better towards the end, for example on move 36, but this was an evening knock-out, and we were down to the last few minutes.

Definitely, though, a game I should have lost.

Games played: 6
 Points lost through mistakes: 1
 Average grading points lost: 17