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THE SURVIVAL GUIDE TO COMPETITIVE CHESS

JOHN EMMS

EVERYMAN CHESS
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Introduction

There comes a time when every chessplayer will look at himself and ask: 'Am I performing to the best of my ability? Do my results really match my understanding of the game? Why am I drawing games I should be winning, and losing games I should be drawing? Why am I making silly mistakes? And why is my rating not improving or, even worse, going down?' This has certainly happened to me on more than one occasion, and most recently I realized that some new action was needed. The results are within these pages.

The Survival Guide to Competitive Chess is largely based on my over-the-board experiences. In most cases I can recall what my exact thoughts were during the course of a game, and for a book of this type I felt it was important to have this knowledge. Clearly such information cannot always be guaranteed when you study games in which you were not involved. That said, I'm sure that many of my thoughts during games mirror those of other players. I guess some could argue that grandmasters generally make good 'grandmaster-type' moves and also bad 'grandmaster-type' mistakes, but I'm not sure this is necessarily the case. Look through these pages and you'll soon notice that many games are riddled with moves you could hardly call 'grandmasterly'! With this in mind, I hope that this book will be of use to players of a wide range of levels.

In Chapter 1 I deal with the tricky subject of calculation, but with an emphasis on how to make the most of what calculating powers you already possess. I focus predominantly on fairly straightforward tactics and combinations, and avoiding blunders. In Chapter 2 I move on to the results business: playing for a win and playing for a draw. (I confess I've omitted 'playing for a loss', but I didn't think much advice was needed here!)

Chapter 3 covers the perennial problem of time trouble, while Chapter 4 deals
with openings and preparation: choosing lines which suit you; dealing with opening surprises; making the most of a wide and flexible repertoire; and finally using computers to study and for specific preparation.

Occasionally I've decided to highlight various rules from the FIDE handbook; for example those that affect clock issues, the recording of moves, draw offers and draw claims etc. Put simply, a familiarity with some of the finer points of the rules will gain you points.

Finally, I would like to thank Richard Palliser, Andrew Greet, Chris Ward and Joseph Quinn for providing some material and thoughts.

Without further ado, let's prepare for the battles ahead!

John Emms
Hildenborough, Kent
June 2007
Chapter One

In the Heat of Battle

For the majority of this chapter I’d like to provide some thoughts on calculation during a game: how to make the most of tactical opportunities and how to minimize blunders.

**Something’s Changed**

*It’s far more important not to do anything stupid than to create brilliant combinations.*

Larry Evans

Every move your opponent makes changes the position. There, I’ve said it. Okay, ‘stating the obvious’ comes to mind, but looking through many games (mainly my own), I’ve noticed that this little ‘pearl of wisdom’ is very often forgotten, especially in the heat of battle. I believe players lose more games simply by forgetting this fundamental than by any breakdown in calculation in tricky tactical positions.

The following game provides two pretty good examples of failing to spot what, in the cold light of day, was an overwhelmingly obvious threat. Perhaps it’s worthwhile looking at the build-up play in a bid to understand the circumstances leading up to my blunders.

This was a last-round encounter in an open tournament. Only 7½ points or more would secure a good prize, so given that my opponent and I were on 6½/8, we were both in a ‘need to win’ situation (I assumed my opponent was, although of course you can never be sure because factors other than prize money do come into play). I had the disadvantage of the black pieces, but this was offset to some extent by the fact that my opponent would be going for it.

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R.Seger-J.Emms
Gent Open 2005

1 e4 c5 2 c3!
Yes, really 'going for it'! Joking aside, the solid and reliable c3 Sicilian was the correct choice for this occasion simply because it was my opponent's one and only weapon against the Sicilian. I don't believe playing something he was unfamiliar with would have increased my opponent's winning chances, even if it did happen to lead to sharper positions (there's more about opening choices in Chapter 4).

2...d5 3 exd5 wxd5 4 d4 c6 5 f3 g4

A few years earlier I had played 5...f6 against the same opponent, but I felt justified in employing a different line – one which I knew fairly well – in order to escape any specific preparation he might have done. This also gives White the opportunity to play a dangerous pawn sacrifice, which was fine by me given the tournament situation.

6 e2 cxd4 7 cxd4 e6 8 h3 h5 9 0-0

Going for the solid option. 9 c3 a5 10 d5 exd5 11 d4!? is the pawn sacrifice mentioned in the previous note.

9...f6 10 c3 a5 11 e3 d6 12 a3

0-0 13 b3 ab8 14 fd1

After a reasonably quiet opening, things are beginning to take shape. The idea of White's latest move was to force through d4-d5, which would turn out well for him; my next move prevents this in the most straightforward way.

14...d5 15 xd5 exd5

Of course 15...xd5 is also possible (16 c4 f5! is okay for Black), but given that this was a must-win encounter, I was unwilling to offer a trade of queens to enter into an endgame with very limited chances to play for the full point.

16 g4!

This weakens the kingside, but it also breaks the pin on the f3-knight and thus allows White's next move. I was happy that my opponent was beginning to show some signs of ambition, as in turn this would hopefully offer me more chances of creating counterplay.

16...g6 17 e5

I had seen this coming (capturing twice on e5 allows xd5).
White's idea – or, more accurately, White's main idea – is to trade on g6 and then nurture the very small advantage the pair of bishops promises; for example 17...£f6d8 18 £xg6 hxg6 19 £f3 etc. Given the tournament situation, defending a slightly worse position with very few winning prospects was the last thing I wanted. I was directing all of my energy into avoiding this scenario, and I suspect that this fact – added to some last round nerves – was to a large extent connected to my vigilance being lowered. The result was...

17...£e4??

A very clever nuance, or so I thought. It's true that White can still force the exchange of this bishop with 18 f3 £g6 19 £xg6 (19 f4 £e4 was part of my idea), but following 19...fxg6! the point of 16...£e4 is fully revealed: by inducing f2-f3 Black has not only prevented White from following up with £f3, but he has also severely weakened White's position on the kingside. Black plans to follow up with ...£ae8, ...£f4 etc. with excellent play.

Going back to the position after 17 £e5, Black has a more than satisfactory solution in the form of 17...£xe5 18 dxe5 d4! (this just didn't occur to me during my ruminations) after which White should probably play 19 £f4 instead of allowing 19 £xd4 £xd4 20 £xd4 £xe5; in the latter case, if anything Black is a bit better due to White's weakened kingside.

It goes without saying that White's next move came as a total shock...

18 £d7!

Oops! A fork of my two rooks – the kind of simple tactic you would show to a novice.

I now had to put on my best poker
face (see later in the chapter) and pretend that this was planned, but I could see that my opponent was not impressed.

In fact due to White’s airy kingside I do get some undeserved compensation for the material deficit.

18...\textit{Wd8l} 19 \textit{Qxf8 Wh4!}

So far making the best of it. Black must play against White’s weaknesses on the kingside.

20 \textit{Qf1!}

White mustn’t be too greedy here. After 20 \textit{Qd7?? Wh3} suddenly there is no defence to the threatened checkmate: 21 \textit{f3 h2+ 22 Qf2 Qg3+ 23 Qg1 Wh2+ 24 Qf1 Wh1+ 25 Qg1 Wh3 mate.}

20...\textit{Qxf8} 21 \textit{Qg2}

21...\textit{h5??}

Having already committed one howler, that kick up the backside really should have put me on red alert for the rest of the game. Instead I became despondent, perhaps subconsciously thinking that the game was already over and that I deserved to lose because of my earlier blunder. Here the same mistake is repeated: the failure to recognize the threat installed by White’s previous move (\textit{Qxe4} followed by \textit{Wd5}, attacking d6 and e4 – this is hardly rocket science!).

Recognizing White’s threat would have certainly helped me find a move that only vaguely occurred to me, one that would have caused my opponent quite a bit more trouble: 21...\textit{Qa5l} 22 \textit{Wb5 Qc4!} is a good practical chance, with White having to remain very careful due to his shaky kingside. After 23 \textit{Qxe4??} Black continues with 23...\textit{Qxe3l}, when suddenly White is in big trouble. Instead White can hold things together and keep a clear advantage with 23 \textit{Qe1}, e.g. 23...\textit{Qxg2} 24 \textit{Qxg2 h5} 25 \textit{Wxd5 hxg4} 26 \textit{hxg4 Qxg4+ 27 Qf1.}

22 \textit{Qxe4 dxe4} 23 \textit{Wd5}

Game over. 23...\textit{hxg4} 24 \textit{Wxd6 gxh3} isn’t getting anywhere after 25 \textit{Qg3} so Black loses another pawn, and White’s queen also reaches the kingside.

23...\textit{Wf6} 24 \textit{Qxe4 hxg4} 25 \textit{Wxg4 Qb8} 26 \textit{Qac1 Qe8} 27 \textit{Qc5 Wd6} 28 \textit{Qg5 g6} 29 \textit{h4 Qe7} 30 \textit{h5 Qd5} 31 \textit{Qg2 Qxe3} 32 Qxe3 \textit{Qxe3} 33 \textit{hxg6 f5} 34 \textit{g7 Wx6} 35 \textit{Qf1 Qe2} 36 \textit{Wf3 Qxb2} 37 \textit{Qc1 Qc7} 38 \textit{Qh5 Qb6} 39 \textit{Qc8+ Qxg7} 40 \textit{Wxb7+ 1-0
There are three conclusions I can draw from this game, the first one being the most important for our purposes at the moment:

1) Always examine the changes in the position caused by your opponent’s move. Check to see what new possibilities are available to both sides. Check to see whether your opponent has an obvious threat.

2) Try to keep clear, objective thoughts, regardless of the tournament situation and the importance of the game (I accept this is not easy!).

3) Assuming that it doesn’t immediately conclude the proceedings, any blunder or oversight you make should encourage greater vigilance for the rest of the game, rather than despondency or fatalism. The idea is to tell yourself: ‘I’m lucky to still be in the game after that blunder; let’s make doubly sure it doesn’t happen again.’

I think it’s safe to say that ‘1’ and ‘2’ are connected in that when emotions take over you have to fight harder to keep doing good simple things that will win you the majority of games.

Looking at point ‘3’, perhaps I should distinguish between blunders and oversights. A blunder is simply a very bad move which clearly changes the assessment of the position for the worse (e.g. winning to drawing, drawing to losing etc.). A move based on an oversight doesn’t necessarily have to be a blunder – often it is, but occasionally a fortunate tactic emerges which saves the day (see my game against Lawrence Trent on page 33).

Let’s look at another example where for some reason I failed to consider a possibility, this time a ‘positional’ threat, introduced by my opponent’s previous move. We’ll also go through the process I could have used to maximize the chances of avoiding this mistake.

As we’ll see, perhaps the psychological block I experienced could in some part be explained by the fact that the move in question accepts some temporary weaknesses.

J. Emms - I. Upton
British League 2005

I had been slowly building up, was planning to double rooks on the e-file, and felt my pressure on the kingside justified some sort of edge. White’s bishop on e5 is a strong piece, so I wasn’t totally surprised when my opponent played...

21...\(\text{d5}\)

**Question:** What does this change? Are there any threats?
22 aae1?

My thoughts after 21...d5 were: ‘Okay, an exchange of bishops; the only question is, do I capture on g7 or allow Black to capture on e5? I quite fancy a rook on e5, and his king on g7 would protect some vulnerable squares.’ Basically, regarding Black’s move I saw no further than the idea of introducing a bishop trade (to my credit, I suppose I did at least see that!). So I was a bit shocked when I saw Black’s next move.

Answer: 22...f6!

Of course, 21...d5 introduces the possibility of ...f7-f6. Simple really! It’s less a question of deciding whether this move is good or not (it is!), than why I completely overlooked the idea. As I mentioned earlier, perhaps psychologically it’s easy to miss a move that creates weaknesses in its own camp.

To overcome such psychological oversights, ideally White should be considering after 21...d5:

1) Where can the knight go from d5?
2) What possibilities has it opened up for other pieces (White and Black)?

The answer to the second question is: for White, g7; for Black, bishop moves to f6 and a capture on e5; queen moves from e7-h4; and two advances with the f-pawn. This process, which should only take a few seconds, would have immediately alerted me to the possibility of ...f6. Indeed, having realised the importance of it, I suspect I would have actually gained time on the clock because this would have led to a capture on g7 without much thought instead of contemplating who should exchange bishops.

Returning to the game, I was taken aback by this oversight and, seeing the game was about to shift heavily in Black’s favour, quickly played...

23 g3

…and offered a draw, which my opponent accepted. This was a case of offering a draw in the hope that your opponent doesn’t realize things are turning in his favour (more about this in Chapter 2). After the logical sequence of moves 23...e5 24 dc2 wf7 25 e4 c6 26 e7 27 b3 f5 28 xc6 xc6,
White is really beginning to suffer for not trading bishops on g7 (look at that miserable bishop on g3 – it’s in real danger of being trapped), and delaying the draw offer until this stage would of course have been too late.

**M.Hebden-R.Palliser**
British Rapidplay Championship, Halifax 2005

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**Deep Fritz-V.Kramnik**
Bonn (2nd matchgame) 2006

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**Question:** In this position, White played 24 $\text{xf7}$. What should Black do here?

**Answer:** He should ask what has changed in the position. In answer to this, the rook now has some moves along the seventh rank (as well as $\text{f8??}$), while for other pieces it has freed up the possibilities of $\text{g6}$, $\text{e6}$ and $\text{f5}$. The game continued...

24...$\text{e5??}$

24...$\text{d5!!}$ prevents White’s threat.

25 $\text{x}b7+$! $\text{xb7}$ 26 $\text{a5}$ $\text{f6}$ 27 $\text{xb7}$ $\text{xh5}$ 28 $\text{xd8}$ 1-0

Again we are not talking about miscalculating and misassessing the variations after 25 $\text{xb7+}$ – this happens all the time and you can’t constantly beat yourself up about it. As with the previous two examples, it’s more important to make sure you ‘see’ that the idea exists by asking what has changed after 24 $\text{xf7}$.

Check out this example:

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Here the game continued 33...$\text{xc1}$

34 $\text{xf8}$

**Question:** What possibilities have arisen after 34 $\text{xf8}$?
**Answer:** Amongst others, \( \text{Wh7} \) mate!

If you saw that checkmate you did better than Kramnik, who continued with 34...\( \text{We3??} \). After some hesitation by the operator Mathias Feist, who perhaps for a horrible moment suspected some sort of clerical error rather than a blunder by the World Champion, 35 \( \text{Wh7 mate} \) was played on the board and headlines were made all around the world.

![Chess Diagram](image)

To be fair to Kramnik, 34...\( \text{We3} \) was almost certainly part of his calculations from a few moves earlier. That is, clearly 34 \( \text{Qxf8} \) is forced after 33...\( \text{Qxc1} \), so Kramnik would have been looking at these possibilities on Black’s 33rd move or even earlier. On the other hand, this provides a strong argument for spending a few moments after every move looking at the position ‘fresh’, well at least when there is a queen and knight – allegedly the most powerful attacking force – hovering around your king!

Two more arguments have been put forward for the World Champion’s amazing blunder. The first is that this checkmating pattern (knight on f8, queen on h7) is actually quite unusual and thus not necessarily in the ‘memory bank’ of mating patterns (the knight ‘retreat’ to h7 is the difficult bit to register). There is no way Kramnik would have missed the more common matting idea of \( \text{Wh7} \) had the knight been on f6 or g5. The second point to remember is that even the world’s elite have found it difficult to play with total objectivity against computers. For example, Kasparov resigned a drawn position against Deep Blue in 1997; I find it difficult to imagine he would have done this against a human player.

Given that computers are playing at 2900-3000 level these days, I don’t see too much point in giving advice on how to counteract the second point (stick to playing humans!). As I touched upon earlier, there would be more chance of finding this somewhat uncommon mating pattern by looking at the position fresh after 34 \( \text{Qxf8} \) and asking, ‘what has changed?’

**Calculation**

Much has been written about the incredibly complex subject of chess calculation. One of the first books I read was Alexander Kotov’s *Think like a Grandmaster*, which became an inspiration to a great number of aspiring chessplayers (I remember Grandmaster Joe Gallagher telling me that he took this book with him to every chess tournament he went to), and if you can still find a copy of this classic it’s a very enjoyable read. Essentially Kotov covers the sophisticated subject of analys-
ing candidate moves and producing trees of analysis. More recently some of Kotov's ideas have been questioned, and I think if you got a room full of modern-day grandmasters there might well be divided opinions about how best to use your time in complicated tactical positions.

This is not supposed to be a book devoted to chess calculation, especially not in complex positions. For players of high levels wishing to tackle this subject I can highly recommend reading Jonathan Tisdall's *Improve Your Chess Now*, and there are other good books out there too. My own opinion, which I touched upon earlier, is that at many levels of chess the ability to spot fairly straightforward one- or two-move tactics is more important than trying to figure out the best way to deal with mind-boggling complications.

That said, for simpler positions I would like to share with you a technique that I worked out many years ago when my calculation abilities were suffering and I was overlooking numerous relatively basic tactics. It would be misguided for me to prescribe this method to players of all levels and styles as a universal answer. All I can really say is that it worked for me; it led to a major breakthrough both in results and confidence when tackling tactical situations. I can also say that many of my tactical oversights in games since then have simply been down to the indiscipline of either not employing the technique properly, or failing to do so completely.

**Check Every Move!**

The 'check every move' method (sadly I can't find a snappier name, but let's shorten it to CEM) is just that: the idea is to look for every single move! I know, I know, I admit it does sound daunting to begin with, but in practice I haven't found this to be the case.

In essence the idea of this technique is to make absolutely sure you are aware of every single possibility that exists, and in many cases I would argue that this is more important than the actual calculation process. The reason I say this is that I suspect many, many combinations fail due to a player simply 'missing' an opponent's move, and quite often it's the first move! Let's try to minimize this problem. There's no point being able to do – or trying to do – all the difficult stuff (analysing trees of variations with numerous long branches), if your opponent's best move isn't even on that tree! Let's stick to the simpler stuff and win some points.

**High Reward and High Risk**

The technique can be applied, at least to some extent, in all positions, but in my experience it clearly works better in some situations than it does in others. I think it perhaps works best when you have seen the 'main line' of a reasonably straightforward combination (I must emphasize that 'straightforward' is subjective here; the level of combination will change depending on players' strengths) and you have established that it works – that is, you gain from
the combination, whether it is a pawn or your opponent’s king. If this is the case you have reached a ‘high reward’ situation. But it may well also be true that you are in a ‘high risk’ position in that playing the move in question compromises your position, either positionally or by a loss of material through a sacrifice. That is, after playing the first move of the combination you go past the point of no return – if for some reason the combination fails you find you are in big trouble.

In these instances, which are essentially critical positions, I’ve found it really does make sense to invest time on the clock and implement this mechanical procedure to make absolutely sure all the variations and sub-variations work. After all, if everything does work it’s very possible you won’t have to think much – if at all – for the rest of the game!

It’s very difficult to articulate the CEM process in words so instead I’ll try to make things clearer by looking at a few examples, starting by one where the procedure works very well. The position we are most interested in arises after Black’s 15th move, but I’ve included the earlier moves because there is some practical interest and I think it’s worth seeing the build-up to the critical position.

J.Emms-B.Kelly
British League 2005

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 c4 c5 4 exd5 exd5 5

\[ \text{gf3 cxd4 6 c4 d6 7 0-0 f6 8 b3 c6 9 bxd4 xd4 10 xd4} \]

We’ve reached one of the most theoretical lines of the entire French Defence, and this position has been debated in countless games at all levels. Black’s four pawns on the kingside offer great protection; indeed in general his pawn structure offers good long-term chances (greater central control). As those who play this line with either colour recognize, however, White’s lead in development allows him to drum up an early initiative. In principle I believe Black’s position should be sound, but there’s often very little margin for error in the next few moves.

10...a6 11 e1 c7 12 e2

The tactical complexity – as well as the overly-theoretical nature – of this variation is illustrated by the ‘main line’: 12 b3 d6 13 f5!? xh2+ 14 h1 0-0 15 xg7 d8 16 f3 xg7 17 h6+ g6 which I believe experts have analysed out to a forced draw! This is a practical point that Black players have to bear in mind when playing this
variation, but there are reasonable alternatives at moves 10 and 11.

12...c5 13 c3 0-0 14 g5 d5

After this move I was on my own from a preparation point of view, but was quite happy because I knew the type of position well. The game I remembered was J. Speelman-J. Nogueiras, Barcelona 1989, which continued 14...xd4 15 cxd4 d5 16 ac1 when I quite like White's position (although objectively speaking White is probably only slightly better); this is what initially attracted me to the 12 We2 variation.

In some lines of the ...xd5 Tarasch, Black can often allow his kingside pawn structure to be compromised with xf6 gxf6 in the knowledge that a quick ...h8, ...f6-f5 and ...g8 will not only bolster the defence, but offer counterplay on the g-file to go with the positional acquisition of the bishop pair. This, however, is not one of those occasions – it seems that White is too quick. For example, 14...b5 15 d3! b7?? (15...d5!) 16 xf6 gxf6 17 xh7+

17...xh7 18 h5+ g7 19 g4+ h7 20 e3 followed by h3 mate. This type of variation was another reason for playing 12 We2; practically it's a good decision to play lines where your opponent's conditioned responses aren't necessarily the best ones.

15 ad1

After a trade on d4 I wanted to be able to recapture with a rook, which could then transfer itself quickly to the kingside.

15 e7?

Black wishes to release the pressure to some extent with an exchange of minor pieces; generally this is the right idea, but it just so happens on this occasion there's a tactical flaw. The chance of Black playing ...e7 first occurred to me when I was considering 15 ad1. I became aware that there was a real tactical possibility on e6 (those playing this line as White or Black keep sacrifices on e6 very much in mind). I didn't fully analyse the possibility (i.e. employ the CEM method) before playing 15 ad1 for two reasons: firstly, if Black didn't play 15...e7 this would
be precious time wasted; secondly, even if my combination didn’t work I would have been reasonably happy with my position after 15...\textit{e}e7 16 \textit{xe}7 \textit{xe}7, and there are other options as well as 16 \textit{xe}7. In short, 15 \textit{ad}1 is a good move regardless of whether the tactic works.

In contrast, now (after 15...\textit{e}e7) was a crucial time to determine whether the sacrifice on \textit{e}6 worked; had I decided that it didn’t work, I might have searched for a better move than the admittedly reasonable 16 \textit{xe}7.

\textbf{An Example of CEM}

Okay, I’ll try to recreate my thoughts and calculation processes at this actual point of the game (it’s not as easy to do this as I first imagined!). As I mentioned earlier, I had already ‘seen’ the combination and had sensed that it worked. I now worked out and assessed what I considered to be the main line (but only the main line), with positive results – I would win a pawn and reach a position with very good winning chances. Given this, I believed that it was definitely worthwhile investing the time to use the CEM method to make sure that the whole combination worked.

Note that below the moves in bold represent the ‘main line’ in my calculations after 15...\textit{e}e7, not the actual moves played in the game. Also I haven’t written down every single possibility for Black that went through my head – I’ve avoided ones where, say, he simply puts his queen en prise – but I hope you get the overall picture.

Here we go!

\textbf{16 \textit{xe}7}

It’s easy to see that king, rook, bishop and pawn moves are no good for Black (this took about a second).

Queen moves: 16...\textit{xe}7?? is the only real option, but this loses a piece after 17 \textit{xd}5 due to the pin on the e-file. Let’s just check: after king, rook, bishop, pawn and pawn moves, the bishop on \textit{d}5 can simply retreat and the position is stable with White having the extra piece.

Knight moves: ones that a worth analysing are 16...\textit{b}6 (hitting \textit{c}4),

18
16...\textit{\texttt{Qf4}} (attacking the queen, and 16...\textit{\texttt{Qxe7}}. After 16...\textit{\texttt{Qb6}} White can simply capture on f8; 16...\textit{\texttt{Qf4}} is met by 17 \textit{\texttt{We5}} when a trade of queens leaves White a piece ahead; and capturing on \textit{\texttt{c4}} or \textit{\texttt{e7}} allows \textit{\texttt{Wxf4}} – this stabilizes and White is winning. This brings us onto Black’s main option:

\begin{center}
\texttt{16...Qxe7 17 Qxe6!}
\end{center}

White’s pieces protect each other so it’s very difficult for Black to create a meaningful threat. Here it’s easy to see that after king, queen, rook, knight or pawn moves (excluding the main move, 17...\textit{\texttt{fxe6}}) White has a minimum of 17 \textit{\texttt{Qxc8}}, stabilizing the position with an extra pawn.

Bishop moves: 17...\textit{\texttt{Qd7}} is nonsense, so that leaves us with 17...\textit{\texttt{Qxe6}} 18 \textit{\texttt{Qxe6}}. Now anything other than queen moves allows 19 \textit{\texttt{Qxc7}} while after any black queen move (check vertically, horizontally and diagonally!) White has a minimum of 19 \textit{\texttt{Qxf8}}, reaching stability. Thus Black plays 18...\textit{\texttt{fxe6}} and after 19 \textit{\texttt{Wxe6+}} we have transposed to my main line – no need to analyse further.

\begin{center}
\texttt{17...fxe6 18 Qxe6}
\end{center}

Rook, knight, king and pawn moves: all are answered by 19 \textit{\texttt{Qxc7}}. Bishop moves: 18...\textit{\texttt{Qd7}} is answered by 19 \textit{\texttt{Qxc7}}; 18...\textit{\texttt{Qxe6}} is the main line.

Let’s move onto queen moves, files and ranks followed by diagonals:

a) 18...\textit{\texttt{Qc6}} 19 \textit{\texttt{Qxf8}} threatens \textit{\texttt{Wxe7}} or \textit{\texttt{Qe6}}, stabilizing. Running through Black’s moves, only 19...\textit{\texttt{Qh3}} delays the stability, but after 20 \textit{\texttt{gxh3}} \textit{\texttt{Qxf8}} White has a minimum of 21 \textit{\texttt{Qe6+}} (note that 21 \textit{\texttt{Qxe7}} is objectively stronger).

b) 18...\textit{\texttt{Qb6}} 19 \textit{\texttt{Qxf8}}, threatening \textit{\texttt{Wxe7}} and \textit{\texttt{Qe6}}; similarly for 18...\textit{\texttt{Qa5}} 19 \textit{\texttt{Qxf8}} and 18...\textit{\texttt{Qb8}} 19 \textit{\texttt{Qxf8}}.

\begin{center}
\texttt{18...Qxe6 19 Qxe6+}
\end{center}
Let’s look at 19...\textit{h}8 20 \textit{xe}7. Now rook, pawn and king moves can all be met by \textit{xc}7. With any queen moves (say, 20...\textit{b}6) White has a minimum of the rock-solid 21 \textit{e}2, with stability (even after 20...\textit{a}5 21 \textit{e}2 – not the best move – 21...\textit{xa}2 White remains a pawn ahead).

\textbf{19...\textit{f}7 20 \textit{d}7}

Anything other than queen moves can be dismissed in about a second. Let’s look at queen moves, vertical, horizontal and then diagonal:

\begin{enumerate}
  \item a) 20...\textit{c}6 21 \textit{xe}7 with two extra pawns and stability.
  \item b) 20...\textit{c}8 21 \textit{xe}7 is very similar to note ‘a’.
  \item c) 20...\textit{c}5 (my main line; let’s do a final check) 21 \textit{xe}7 (threatening \textit{xf}7) 21...\textit{xf}2+ (21...\textit{af}8 22 \textit{xf}7 \textit{xf}7 23 \textit{e}2 and stability) 22 \textit{h}1 \textit{af}8! (against pawn moves, king moves and rook moves other than \textit{af}8, White has a minimum of \textit{xf}7+; queen moves not giving check can be met by \textit{xf}7+; that leaves 22...\textit{f}1+ 23 \textit{xf}1 – the rook is pinned! – and 22...\textit{xe}1+ 23 \textit{xe}1 \textit{xe}7 24 \textit{xe}7, winning) 23 \textit{h}3 (preventing back rankers; 23 \textit{xb}7?? loses to 23...\textit{xe}1+! 24 \textit{xe}1 \textit{f}1+).
  \item d) 20...\textit{xd}7 21 \textit{xd}7 and stability.
  \item e) 20...\textit{f}4 21 \textit{xe}7 \textit{xf}2+ transposes to 20...\textit{c}5 (or 21...\textit{af}8 22 \textit{xf}7 \textit{xf}7 23 \textit{xe}2 and stability).
  \item f) 20...\textit{b}8 21 \textit{xe}7.
  \item g) 20...\textit{a}5 21 \textit{xe}7.
\end{enumerate}

That’s it! The best that Black can hope for is a pawn-down ending (notes ‘c’ and ‘e’), and it’s possible that White can improve on this later down the line. It’s time to play 16 \textit{xe}7!

The game continuation followed the main line, the only difference being that my opponent took the route via
17...\textbf{\textit{x}}e6 and 20...\textbf{\textit{w}}f4: 16 \textbf{\textit{x}}xe7 \textbf{\textit{xd}}7 17 \textbf{\textit{xd}}7 \textbf{\textit{x}}e6 18 \textbf{\textit{xd}}7 \textbf{\textit{xf}}6 19 \textbf{\textit{we}}6+ \textbf{\textit{e}}7 20 \textbf{\textit{xd}}7 \textbf{\textit{w}}f4 21 \textbf{\textit{xe}}7 \textbf{\textit{xf}}2+ 22 \textbf{\textit{h}}1 \textbf{\textit{af}}8 23 \textbf{\textit{h}}3 \textbf{\textit{h}}6 24 \textbf{\textit{xf}}7 \textbf{\textit{xf}}7 25 \textbf{\textit{d}}d1 \textbf{\textit{h}}7 26 \textbf{\textit{we}}4+ \textbf{\textit{h}}5 27 \textbf{\textit{xf}}5+ \textbf{\textit{xf}}5 28 \textbf{\textit{d}}d6 \textbf{\textit{b}}5 29 \textbf{\textit{b}}4 \textbf{\textit{e}}5 30 \textbf{\textit{b}}6 \textbf{\textit{e}}1+ 31 \textbf{\textit{h}}2 \textbf{\textit{c}}1 32 \textbf{\textit{xb}}7 \textbf{\textit{xc}}3 33 \textbf{\textit{a}}4 \textbf{\textit{b}}3 34 \textbf{\textit{b}}6 \textbf{\textit{g}}8 35 \textbf{\textit{g}}4 \textbf{\textit{f}}7 36 \textbf{\textit{h}}4 \textbf{\textit{g}}6 37 \textbf{\textit{a}}5 \textbf{\textit{h}}5 38 \textbf{\textit{g}}5 \textbf{\textit{b}}7 39 \textbf{\textit{f}}8 40 \textbf{\textit{b}}5!...

...and Black resigned on account of 40...\textbf{\textit{axb}}5 41 \textbf{\textit{a}}6 followed by \textbf{\textit{a}}7, \textbf{\textit{b}}8+ and \textbf{\textit{a}}8\textbf{\textit{w}}.

Looking at it now, given that the combination consisted of not much more than capturing on e6 and then playing \textbf{\textit{xd}}7 to regain the piece, those previous two pages do seem to add up to a considerable amount of analysis! On the other hand, many of the variations are fairly straightforward. What really helped, and what made this whole process manageable for me, was the fact that White only had one obvious move at each juncture. There was no list of candidate moves for White to draw up, consider and evaluate.

I did recalculate at moves 17 and 23. On the first occasion it could be argued that I should have been confident enough with my calculations at move 16 not to have to expend more time checking the same lines, but in this particular situation I had so much time left on the clock I felt it was okay to check the combination with the position one further move down the line. By the time I got to move 23, I was checking to see whether White had improvements on the main line (23 \textbf{\textit{xf}}7 \textbf{\textit{xf}}7 and only then 24 \textbf{\textit{h}}3 is a possibility, which does at least rule out the idea of 23 \textbf{\textit{h}}3 \textbf{\textit{we}}1+).

\textbf{Minimum Moves and Stability}

Throughout the account of my thought processes in the previous example, I was referring to 'minimum' moves and stability. Let’s look back at note ‘a’ to White’s 18th move, after 18...\textbf{\textit{wc}}6 19 \textbf{\textit{xf}}8 \textbf{\textit{h}}3!? 20 \textbf{\textit{gxh}}3 \textbf{\textit{xf}}8. Here it could be said that White has a ‘minimum’ of 21 \textbf{\textit{we}}6+ which forces the trade of queens and thus enters an endgame with a decisive material advantage. After the continuation 21...\textbf{\textit{xe}}6 22 \textbf{\textit{xe}}6 Black cannot create
any immediate threats; the position has stabilized and it doesn’t take too much to reach an assessment of completely winning for White. (In fact there were quite a few cases in this example of White exchanging major pieces to reach stability).

For the purposes of deciding on whether to play the combination, if you see the winning 21 \textit{We6+} there is no need to expend further time considering and assessing the more complex 21 \textit{We7}; it’s better to reserve your energy for the more critical lines. Of course once you reach the diagrammed position in the game it’s easy to change your mind and play the objectively stronger 21 \textit{We7} as soon as you realize that Black has a check on g6 but no good follow-up.

Now there follow three examples where for one reason or another I failed to carry out the correct procedure; twice I was punished severely, while in the third example I managed to bail out by offering a draw, even though this wasn’t the desired result.

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{chess_board.png}
\caption{Diagram of the position after 21 \textit{We6+}.}
\end{figure}

This would have been the ideal situation to employ the CEM method, but due to something (complacency, laziness?) this just didn’t happen, or at the very least it wasn’t carried out properly.

26 \textit{Ze6??}

I had seen quite a few lines, even 26...\textit{Ad8} 27 h3 \textit{Ad1+} 28 \textit{Ah2} when White covers checks on c7 and d6, and Black is left facing the threats of \textit{Ax}c6 and \textit{Be}8+. There was 26...\textit{Wa}4 27 b3!, when the queen cannot stay connected to the e8-square (27...\textit{Ad8} again only delays things after 28 h3); I’d dismissed 26...\textit{Wc}8 on account of 27 \textit{Be7} \textit{Wg}8 28 \textit{Wxg}8+ \textit{Wxg}8 29 \textit{Wxb7} winning a second pawn, and 26...\textit{Wc}5 on account of 27 \textit{Be}8+. But what about the obvious move? (Of course I realized my mistake as soon as I played 26 \textit{Ze6} – does this sound familiar?)

26...\textit{Wxc}4! 27 \textit{Ze8+} \textit{Wxe}8 28 \textit{We}8+

Here I had simply overlooked...

---

\textit{J.Emms-A.Hugaert}

\textit{Gent 2005}
28...\texttt{g8}!

I had visualized the position after 28 \texttt{xe8} but had just said to myself, 'checkmate!'. If only I had carried on the technique to the end I would have thought: 'King moves: none; queen moves: ...g8!'

One psychological explanation for missing ...g8 was that in the position after 16...\texttt{xc4}! there are two white pieces blocking the black queen's route to g8, but carrying out the CEM process would have got round this problem.

Stunned by this setback, I took stock, fought hard and almost created serious winning chances again but, alas, it was not enough.

\begin{align*}
29 \texttt{d7} & \texttt{b8} 30 \texttt{g3} \texttt{h6} 31 \texttt{g2} \texttt{b6} 32 \texttt{d5} \texttt{c7} 33 \texttt{b4} \texttt{h7} 34 \texttt{h4} \texttt{a5} 35 \texttt{b5} \texttt{e7} 36 \texttt{a4} \texttt{d4} 37 \texttt{d3}+ \texttt{g8} 38 \texttt{d8}+ \texttt{h7} 39 \texttt{xb6} \texttt{e4}+ 40 \texttt{h2} \texttt{xa4} 41 \texttt{c6} \texttt{g6} 42 \texttt{c5} \texttt{e4} 43 \texttt{b6} \texttt{a4} 44 \texttt{h5}+ \texttt{h7} 45 \texttt{c8} \texttt{f3} 46 \texttt{b7} \texttt{xf2}+ 47 \texttt{h3} \texttt{f5} 48 \texttt{c6} \texttt{f1}+ 49 \texttt{h4} \texttt{b1} 50 \texttt{g6}+\texttt{h7} \texttt{h8} \\
\end{align*}

After 50...\texttt{h8} 51 \texttt{e8}+ \texttt{h7} White has nothing better than perpetual check – after 52 \texttt{b8??} one queen beats two with 52...\texttt{h1} mate.

In this next example, time trouble played a part and the procedure broke down in a major way.

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure}
\caption{example figure}
\label{fig:example}
\end{figure}

\textbf{J.Emms-D.King}

Staunton Memorial, London 2003

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure}
\caption{example figure}
\label{fig:example}
\end{figure}

A few moves earlier I had agreed to play an ending a pawn down, believing – correctly – that my active pieces and the clamp on the kingside offered enough compensation. My opponent had just
played the move 32...\xa8d8-d5, and here I missed 32 \xa8b1! \xa8g2 33 \xa8g3, winning a piece (although it's still very unclear as Black gets three pawns after 33...\xa8x5 34 \xa8xg2 \xa8xg5+ 35 \xa8f3 \xa8a5). Instead I opted for a bishop ending, but I was justifying the simplification by what turns out to be a massive miscalculation.

32 a4

34 \xa8e4??

I was expecting 34...\xa8c4 (Black must avoid the exchange, right?), and saw the 'main line' 35 \xa8c6 d3? (35...\xa8d5!) 36 \xa8xd3 \xa8xd3 37 \xa8e3 \xa8f5 38 \xa8d4 \xa8f8 39 \xa8c5 when it's White who has all the winning chances. Looking further, 39...\xa8e7 40 \xa8b4 \xa8d8 41 \xa8a5 \xa8c7 42 \xa8a6 \xa8b8 43 \xa8e8 may well be decisive. Instead I was in for an unpleasant surprise...

34...\xa8f8!

32...\xa8xb5

During the game I thought this move was a blunder, and excitement levels rose.

33 \xa8xb5 \xa8d5

I had seen that White was winning after 33...\xa8f8?? 34 \xa8e4!.

Unbelievable. Somehow, in my mind the d5-bishop had to move; I simply overlooked that Black could just leave it on d5. Had I used CEM I would have forced myself to consider king moves for Black, and thus wouldn't have fallen into this disaster.

After 34...\xa8f8 Black is winning. The game concluded:

35 \xa8f3

Black also wins after 35 \xa8d3 \xa8e7 36 \xa8g3 \xa8d8 37 \xa8f2 \xa8c7 38 \xa8e1 \xa8b6 39 \xa8d2 \xa8c5 40 \xa8e2 \xa8c4, and 35 \xa8xd5 \xa8xd5 36 \xa8f3 \xa8e7 37 \xa8g4 \xa8d7 38 \xa8g3 \xa8c7 39 \xa8f4 \xa8b6 40 e6 fxe6 41 \xa8e5 \xa8xb5 42 \xa8f6 e5 43 \xa8xe5 a5 44 \xa8xd5 a4
45 \texttt{\textit{\textbf{xd4}}} a3 46 \texttt{\textit{\textbf{c3}}} a4!.

\textbf{35...e7}

\textbf{36 \texttt{\textit{\textbf{xd5}}}}

Or 36 \texttt{\textit{\textbf{f4}}} d7 37 \texttt{\textit{\textbf{f3}}} c7 38 \texttt{\textit{\textbf{f4}}}
\texttt{\textit{\textbf{xe4}}} 39 \texttt{\textit{\textbf{xe4}}} \texttt{\textit{\textbf{b6}}} 40 \texttt{\textit{\textbf{xd4}}} \texttt{\textit{\textbf{xb5}}},
when the outside pawn decides matters.

\textbf{36...exd5 37 e2 e6 38 d2 xe5 39 d3 f6 40 gxf6 xf6 41 xd4 e6 42}
\texttt{c4} \texttt{dxc4} 43 xc4 d6 44 d4 g5 45
\texttt{e4} \texttt{c5} 46 \texttt{f5} \texttt{xb5} 47 \texttt{xg5} a5 0-1

Going back to move 32, White can obviously avoid swapping rooks (as I
mentioned previously, there’s \texttt{\textit{\textbf{b1}}!}),
but even after this trade the game only
turns with 34 \texttt{\textit{\textbf{e4}}?}. Had I realized its
obvious flaw, I might have spotted that
it was not too late to salvage a draw
after 34 \texttt{\textit{\textbf{g3}}}! (admittedly not the first
move that comes to mind; despite
appearances White’s king is heading for
the queenside) 34...f8 35 \texttt{\textit{\textbf{f2}}} e7 36
\texttt{\textit{\textbf{e2}}} d7 37 \texttt{\textit{\textbf{d2}}} c7 38 c4! dxc3+ (other-
wise White plays c5) 39 \texttt{\textit{\textbf{xc3}}} \texttt{\textit{\textbf{b6}}} 40
\texttt{\textit{\textbf{b4}} (see following diagram). Despite the}
extra pawn it’s quite obvious after
checking out some variations that
Black cannot make any progress and
has to settle for a draw.

I believe that the ability to calculate
at a given moment is often affected by
what has already happened during the
game in question. In this next example
I was surprised by my opponent’s
choice of opening, spent quite a bit of
time mulling over the first 15 or so
moves, and wasn’t quite in the right
frame of mind when the critical posi-
tion was reached. Somehow I suspect
that a smoother introduction – like
with my game against Brian Kelly
where I was familiar with the opening
– would have led to clearer thinking at
the vital time. The counter-argument is
that, having already thought so much
about the opening moves, my calculat-
ing abilities should have been suitably
sharpened by move 16!

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\textit{British League 2005}

\textbf{1 e4 c5 2 \texttt{\textit{\textbf{f3}}} c6 3 c3 e5?!}

Certainly not what I was expecting,
so this was a good practical decision
from my opponent.
4 \textit{c}4 \textit{e}7 5 \textit{d}4 \textit{cxd4} 6 \textit{exd4} 7 0-0 \textit{f}6

8 \textit{e}5

Following a few relatively straightforward moves, I played 8 \textit{e}5 after quite a bit of deliberation, a sign that my opponent’s choice of opening was justified. At first I thought that 8 \textit{c}xd4 would lead to a straightforward edge for White, as 8...\textit{d}xe4 9 \textit{f}5! is strong (9...0-0 10 \textit{g}4!). However, it eventually dawned on me that after 8...0-0, the natural 9 \textit{c}3 is met by the typical trick 9...\textit{d}xe4!. Then 10 \textit{d}xe4 \textit{d}5 11 \textit{c}xc6 bxc6 looks fine for Black. Indeed, White has to be careful: 12 \textit{d}3? dxe4 13 \textit{d}xe4 \textit{a}6! and Black wins material after either 14 \textit{c}6 \textit{xf}1 or 14 \textit{e}1 \textit{b}4.

8...\textit{e}4 9 \textit{d}5 \textit{c}5 10 \textit{e}1 \textit{e}6 11 \textit{a}3 \textit{d}6 12 \textit{exd6} \textit{xd6} 13 \textit{xe6} \textit{xe6} 14 \textit{b}5 \textit{d}7 15 \textit{f}xd4 \textit{xd4} 16 \textit{xd4} \textit{xd5}

Due somewhat to my unfamiliarity with the opening, I had already spent much more time than I would have liked to reach this position. That said, I still had plenty of time left to reach move 40 (the time limit was 40 moves in 2 hours; I had just under an hour left).

I felt that we were now reaching a critical point of the game and that White’s choices over the next few moves would be vital. However, perhaps subconsciously affected by the time situation (I wanted to avoid time trouble), I didn’t reach into the depths of the position; instead my thinking was superficial and muddled – not a great combination!

During the game I gave up on the enticing 17 \textit{g}5 after not being able to get 17...\textit{f}6 18 \textit{h}5+ \textit{g}6 to work. Looking at the position again through fresh eyes, it doesn’t take very long to spot 18 \textit{f}4! when Black already has to be careful. He wants to play 18...0-0? but then White has 19 \textit{xe7!} \textit{xe7} 20 \textit{f}5! followed by 21 \textit{xd5} and 22 \textit{e}7+. Not that difficult really if someone is thinking straight.

17 \textit{h}5?! 0-0 18 \textit{f}5 \textit{f}6

Like a criminal who doesn’t remember his misdemeanour, I’m a bit
hazy about my recollections here.

Suffice to say, that any rational calculation had long since disappeared. Here I lunged out with...

19 \textit{He7?}

...and at the same time impulsively offered a draw, which my opponent, disadvantaged by 250 rating points, accepted after not much thought.

Giving in to the temptation to play the flashy 19 He7 was based on the flimsy 19...\textit{xe7??}

20 \textit{Wg4!} when Black must give up his queen.

Clearly I hadn’t used CEM; you only have to consider rook moves before discovering that 19...\textit{fe8!} (or 19...\textit{ae8!}) completely refutes White’s idea (and there are other good replies too). Following 20 \textit{He8+ fe8} 21 \textit{He3} (21 \textit{He3 fe5!}) 22...\textit{c6} it’s clear White’s in real trouble:

Black’s bishops are menacing and how do you develop the queenside?

My draw offer was also impulsive and certainly not planned. Perhaps subconsciously I realized there was something drastically wrong with 19 He7; this was not enough to actually physically prevent me from making my move, but it came accompanied with a seemingly mistimed peace proposal – He7 is certainly not the move to make if you’re feeling peaceful! In fact it turned out to be very fortunate in its timing: without this I’m sure my opponent would have thought for a while before playing ...\textit{He8!}, and it would have been far too embarrassing to offer a draw after that.

So basically, an analytical disaster. Perhaps I could be just about forgiven for missing 17 \textit{Wg5} f6 18 \textit{Wf4!} 0-0? 19 \textit{He7!}, but there was really no excuse
for playing such a committal move as 19 \( \text{\textalpha}7 \) without checking out all of Black’s replies.

Just for completion, a much better move for White in the diagram above is 19 \( \text{\textalpha}d1! \), threatening \( \text{\textalpha}xd5! \) followed by \( \text{\textalpha}h6+ \). Black, however, can still use the weakness of White’s back rank and is okay after 19...\( \text{\textalpha}e8! \), planning to meet 20 \( \text{\textalpha}e3?! \) with 20...\( \text{\textalpha}e5! \) 21 \( \text{\textalpha}xd5 \) \( \text{\textalpha}xd5! \).

Let’s try just one more example. I’ll give the opening moves leading to the critical position because I think it helps to understand the flow of the game:

\[
\begin{align*}
1 & \text{e4} \text{e5} \\
2 & \text{\textalpha}f3 \text{c6} \\
3 & \text{\textalpha}c3 \text{f6} \\
4 & \text{d4} \text{exd4} \\
5 & \text{\textalpha}xd4
\end{align*}
\]

The Scotch Four Knights. Normally Black plays 5...\( \text{\textalpha}b4 \) here, but the text move is also reasonable.

\[
\begin{align*}
5...\text{c5} \\
6 & \text{\textalpha}xc6 \text{bxc6} \\
7 & \text{\textalpha}d3 \text{d6} \\
8 & 0-0 \text{\textalpha}g4!
\end{align*}
\]

In my opinion this is stronger than 8...0-0 9 \( \text{\textalpha}g5! \), when Black has a very awkward pin to contend with. Added to this there’s the practical value that White might just miss the threat of 9...\( \text{\textalpha}h4 \), which would be immediately decisive!

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{9 h3} & \text{\textalpha}e5 \text{10 \textalpha}e2 \\
\text{If White wishes to avoid the possibility of Black’s next move, he could try} \\
\text{10 \textalpha}a4 \text{\textalpha}b6 and only then 11 \text{\textalpha}e2.
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{10...a5} \\
\text{This is ambitious: Black is reckoning on} \text{\textalpha}c3-a4 and wishes to keep his strong dark-squared bishop so he provides a retreat square on a7. The quieter way to proceed is 10...0-0 11 \text{\textalpha}a4 \text{\textalpha}b6. After 12 \text{\textalpha}xb6 axb6 13 f4 \text{\textalpha}d7 Black will probably follow up with} \\
\text{...\textalpha}b7, ...c5, ...\text{\textalpha}e8 with a solid position and counterplay against White’s e4-pawn.}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{11 \textalpha}h1
\end{align*}
\]
Perfectly logical, because White wants to expand with f2-f4 and so he needs to break the pin on the f-pawn. But it allows Black to play an incredibly tempting move:

11...\textit{Wh}4

Of course! Not only is there the clear threat of 12...\textit{xf}2, but Black is also intending a devastating 12...\textit{xh}3!. Then 13 \textit{gxh}3 \textit{Wxh}3+ 14 \textit{g}1 leaves Black with the absolute minimum of a perpetual check with 14...\textit{Wg}3+ 15 \textit{h}1 \textit{Wxh}3+, but in all likelihood much more than this (15...\textit{xf}2 looks good, while a move earlier 14...\textit{h}5!, intending ...\textit{g}g4, might be even stronger).

12 \textit{f}4

![Chess position]

Okay, put yourself in Black’s position here. White’s last move (12 \textit{f}4) attacks the knight on e5 but appears to do little about the threat of ...\textit{xh}3. Did White forget to check how the position changed after 11...\textit{Wh}4?

\textbf{Question:} What should Black do?

\textbf{Answer:} Apologies for the deliberate ambiguity, but I didn’t really mean, ‘what move should Black play’, but rather ‘what technique should he employ for calculation?’

It’s pretty clear Black’s potential rewards are very high here – if 12...\textit{xh}3 works, it is likely to win immediately. Because of this, it’s an excellent practical decision for Black to invest some time here. Let’s go through CEM:

12...\textit{xh}3

Black’s threat is simply to move the bishop back to say g4, uncovering the queen and giving checkmate. Let’s just check there’s no defence by looking at all of White’s options:

Pawn moves: 13 \textit{gxh}3 \textit{Wxh}3 mate; 13 \textit{f}xe5 \textit{g}4 mate; 13 \textit{g}3 \textit{Wxg}3 – threatening mate – 14 \textit{g}1 and now Black has a minimum or 14...\textit{xg}1 15 \textit{Wxg}1 \textit{Wxg}1+ 16 \textit{Wxg}1 \textit{g}6 (or 16...\textit{g}4) with stability and a decisive material advantage.

Rook, bishop and knight moves: all can be met by a minimum of ...\textit{g}4.

Queen moves...

13 \textit{We}1!

![Chess position]

That’s it! Using CEM we have discovered a potential defensive resource, one that might easily have been missed.
otherwise, even if we had constructed a list of, say, five or six candidate moves for White.

The hard part – being aware of the possibility – is done. It only remains to analyse and assess the position, and it soon becomes clear that not only is 13 \textit{We}1 a serious consideration, but in fact it completely refutes 12...\textit{Ax}h3: Black has two pieces en prise and loses one of them after 13...\textit{Wxe}1 14 \textit{Ax}e1; there is no good follow-up after the piece sacrifice 13...\textit{Axg}2+ 14 \textit{Wx}g2; and 13...\textit{Wh}6 14 fxe5 attacks the queen again and is losing for Black – 14...g5 15 \textit{Af}6!.

So Black swallows the disappointment of the realization that 12...\textit{Ax}h3 is losing rather than winning and moves the attacked knight (12...\textit{Ad}7, intending ...\textit{Af}6, looks reasonable). A flashy win would have been nice, but at least by going through the process Black certainly avoids a nasty shock after 13 \textit{We}1! and, more importantly, a losing position!

Going back to the position after 11 \textit{Ah}1, I should point out that there’s an argument for Black to go through the procedure at this stage. It would be slightly more complex because the position is one move further back, but on finding 11...\textit{Wh}4 12 f4 \textit{Ax}h3 13 \textit{We}1 Black could then weigh up whether it is even worth playing 11...\textit{Wh}4 at all, or whether to retreat the knight immediately.

**Blumenfeld’s Rule**

The Russian master Benjamin Blumenfeld was perhaps best known for his daring opening counter-gambit for Black (1 d4 \textit{Af}6 2 c4 e6 3 \textit{Af}3 c5 4 d5 b5!?), but he also created a technique aimed at trying to avoid blunders:

When you have finished your calculations, write down the move you have decided upon on the score sheet. Then examine the position for a short time ‘through the eyes of a patzer’. Ask whether you have left a mate in one, or left a piece or a pawn to be taken. Only when you have convinced yourself that there is no immediate catastrophe for you should you make the planned move.

Blumenfeld

The first thing I should point out is that recently FIDE (the World Chess Federation) decided to change their rules to prohibit the recording of your own move before you have played it on the board (some have claimed that writing your intended move down is equivalent of making notes, and thus a mild form of cheating). So anyone playing under the FIDE rules and trying to implement Blumenfeld’s method would have to do so without that step. I don’t think this is a major obstacle for this technique, though.

I’ve certainly used Blumenfeld’s rule before, normally to prevent myself from playing too quickly when becoming excited in clearly winning positions. Here I think it’s totally justified because a blunder is usually the only way to lose half or even a whole point (a few second-rate moves is less likely to alter the outcome), and Blumenfeld’s rule is a good method to employ to calm yourself in the final stages.
In other situations its relevance is less obvious. Grandmaster Nigel Davies, for example, argues that due to its mechanical nature, the process is inefficient and stilted, and I guess this could adversely affect your general play. I think a lot depends on the strength and style of the player in question. With very strong players I suspect that this process is only used at certain moments during a game, as detailed above. At much lower levels, though, I can definitely see the advantages of using Blumenfeld’s rule more often, if only because leaving pawns and pieces en prise seems to be a much more common occurrence, and it’s these blunders that usually make all the difference between winning and losing. If you find yourself regularly leaving pieces en prise (or allowing mates!) then from a practical point of view it makes sense to try out Blumenfeld’s method.

Avoiding High Risk/Low Reward Tactics

As I already mentioned earlier, calculating precisely in complex positions is an art that even very strong players find difficult to master, and as this isn’t really a book about calculation as such, I’m not delving too deeply into this here. One practical aspect I’d like to mention, though, is the idea of trying to avoid moves entering tactical complications with a high risk factor but a low potential gain. Say, for example, you enter into a combination where you are unable to calculate everything to the end. But you establish that in the ‘good’ variations you are checkmating your opponent, and if things go pear-shaped you end up slightly worse. Now depending on the assessment of the original position, this sounds like a risk that might be worth taking since the reward is so high and the risk is fairly low. Taking another case, if the best-case scenario is a slight improvement in your position, but your opponent has many enticing possibilities that you can’t work out but they could lead to disaster for you, then it’s probably a poor practical decision to go ahead with the combination, unless your position is so bad that you don’t have a worthwhile alternative.

One high risk/low reward situation that I’ve come across time and time again is when a player offers a sequence of trades. The opponent has the advantage of making the first capture, then it’s capture, capture, capture, capture... we count up the pieces at the end and seem to have one fewer than our opponent! Okay, usually it’s not quite as simple as that but I think you know what I mean.

Let’s look at an example from practical play, where one of my students was tempted into entering a high risk/low reward situation.

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J.Quinn-D.Wertjanz, European Union Junior Championship, Mureck 2006

1 e4 c5 2 c3 d5 3 exd5 wxd5 4 d4 f6 5 f3 g4 6 e2 e6 7 h3 h5 8 0-0 c6
cause the bishop on h5 was the only black piece which was undefended. 17...\(\text{Qxe3}\), attacking d1, also works out well for Black – I’ll leave you to work out the details. The only capture Black must avoid is the risky-looking 17...\(\text{Qxe5}\)!, which indeed allows White the possibility of 18 dxe5 \(\text{Wxe5}\) 19 \(\text{Qxd5 exd5}\) 20 f4! \(\text{Wf5}\) 21 g4!, winning material.

18 \(\text{Qxe2}\)

After 18 \(\text{Qxc6 Qxd1!}\) (the advantage of capturing first!) 19 \(\text{Qxe7+ Wxe7}\) 20 \(\text{Qxd1}\) Black is an exchange ahead, while 18 \(\text{Qxe2 Qxe5}\) 19 dxe5 \(\text{Wxe5}\) leaves Black with an extra pawn.

17...\(\text{Qxe2}\)!

This is the most obvious capture be-
win material.

18...\textit{\textsf{\textlangle}xc3!

18...\textit{\textsf{\textlangle}xe3 is also good.

19 bxc3?

White's best is 19 \textsf{\textlangle}xc3 \textit{\textsf{\textlangle}xe5 20 \textit{\textsf{\textlangle}}f4!, although after 20...\textsf{\textlangle}c6! 21 \textit{\textsf{\textlangle}}xe5 \textsf{\textlangle}xc3 22 bxc3 \textit{\textsf{\textlangle}}xa3 Black is a clear pawn ahead in the ending.

19...\textit{\textsf{\textlangle}xe5

The pin on the d-file is decisive, especially as 20 \textit{\textsf{\textlangle}}f4 can be met by 20...\textit{\textsf{\textlangle}}f3+! 21 gxf3 \textsf{\textlangle}xf4.

20 \textsf{\textlangle}ed2 \textit{\textsf{\textlangle}}c4

...and Black, with an extra piece in the bag, went on to win.

Going back to the position after 16...b5, it become apparent that White has to settle for something more mundane. 17 \textit{\textsf{\textlangle}}xd5! is not the sort of move that will get the pulses racing, but in this position it's the best White has. In fact it's quite effective and has good practical value. The point is that after the desirable 17...\textsf{\textlangle}xd5 (to keep pressure on d4 Black would prefer to have a piece on d5 rather than a pawn) 18 \textsf{\textlangle}xd5 \textsf{\textlangle}xd5 19 \texti{\textsf{\textlangle}}c2!,

White exploits the negative feature of 16...b5 – the c6-knight lacks protection and is no longer stable – to take control of the c-file. Black is forced to concede ground by retreating the knight, because 19...\texti{\textsf{\textlangle}}c8?? is really asking for trouble and does indeed lose material after 20 \textsf{\textlangle}dc1 \textsf{\textlangle}d6 21 \textit{\textsf{\textlangle}}f4!.

\textbf{The Lucky Oversight}

Chess is primarily a game of skill without any chance factors (for example, you don't have to rely on the roll of the dice or a good hand in cards), but most would agree that there are elements of luck, and these cannot be ignored. Luck in chess comes in a few forms, but the one that stands out in my mind is the 'lucky oversight': you miss a clear tactic but cannot be punished because of a previously unseen resource (conversely, this translates as bad luck when it happens to your opponent). The presence of a saving resource means that not only is the oversight not a blunder, but it can even turn out to be a very good move both objectively and, perhaps more importantly, on a practical level. This can especially be true if neither side sees the resource until later on in the sequence, after which it can be too late for the player trying to exploit the oversight.

In this following example, approaching time trouble I made a horrendous tactical oversight, only to be saved by a scarcely-deserved resource. Although I can't be certain, I suspect that my opponent's subsequent play was adversely affected by my obvious stroke of luck.
J. Emms-L. Trent
British League 2006

1 e4 e5 2 d4 f6 3 c4 c6 4 d3 cxd3 5 0-0 d6 7 c3 e6 8 0-0 d5 9 w2 e8 10 d1 a5 11 a4 a6 12 f1 d7! 13 g3?!

13 g5 is stronger. I had underestimated the strength of Black’s next move.

13...d4!

Now Black is fine.

14 cxd4 xa4 15 b3 b5 16 dxe5 17 xe4 dxe4 18 exd6 exf3 19 xf3 xd6 20 f4!

20 xb7?? allows Black to trap the queen with 20...c6.

20...d7!? 21 g3?

This was poor play. With xc7 and e5 possibilities in the air, I thought I was maybe even a bit better here, but I’d totally overlooked Black’s next move.

21 xb7! looks incredibly risky, but Shredder is happy to take the loot and defend White’s position following

21...c6 22 wxc7 w5 23 f3 e2 (threatening 24 xg2+) 24 f1!. Black can win the f4-bishop with 24 w4+, but this leaves c6 en prise.

21...e6!

This is a very strong move. Suddenly White has some problems with ...g6 and ...c6 targeting g2, or even just ...ae8. The momentum has definitely swung in Black’s favour but with careful defence over the next few moves, I was just about able to keep everything under control.

22 e1

After the greedy 22 xc7?! perhaps Black should simply build up the pressure with 22...ae8, when White has to tread very carefully; for example, 23 f4? g6 24 h4 g4 and Black wins.

22...g6 23 w3 h5!? 24 g3 a4 25 w5 h4!? 26 xh4 c6 27 g3 xd3 28 da1

This time I had seen Black’s ...e6 but couldn’t come up with anything better.

28...e6!

Without this trick Black would actually be worse, but now it’s White
who still has to be vigilant.

29 h3 \(\text{h}x\text{e}1+\) 30 \(\text{h}x\text{e}1\) \(\text{w}d2\)

Recapping events, so far I had underestimated 13...\(\text{d}d4\), and completely missed the possibility of 21...\(\text{e}6\). In both instances my position had worsened, but not by a dramatic amount.

Both players were running fairly short of time and there were still ten moves to make to reach 40. My main concern was Black’s possibility of playing ...a4-a3, which is basically his major winning try. With time pressure on both players I didn’t like the idea of passive defence. In particular I didn’t fancy giving my queen an extra job of defending my rook by playing 31 \(\text{c}c1\), but in the cold light of day it looks as if Black can’t really exploit this. For example: 31...\(\text{w}xa2\) 32 \(\text{b}x\text{a}4\) \(\text{w}xa4\) 33 \(\text{x}c7\); or 31...a3 32 \(\text{c}c2\) \(\text{d}1+\) 33 \(\text{h}2\) when Black’s a-pawn is just as weak as White’s.

Returning to the actual game, it was time for another oversight – a major one – but it came with a huge slice of luck.

31 \(\text{e}7(\text{!})\)

My idea with 31 \(\text{e}7\) was to answer 31...a3 with an attack on the black king. I certainly hadn’t seen everything, but the lack of a black h-pawn gave me hope of inflicting some damage. One possible line is 32 \(\text{f}5\) \(\text{f}8\) 33 \(\text{e}5\) \(\text{a}2\) 34 \(\text{x}g7\)! (34 \(\text{g}5\) \(\text{b}1+!\) 35 \(\text{h}2\) \(\text{w}7\) defends) 34...\(\text{x}g7\) 35 \(\text{g}5+\) with perpetual.

Of course I knew I was leaving my back rank somewhat exposed. I had even checked 31...\(\text{d}1+\) 32 \(\text{h}2\) \(\text{f}1\) 33 \(\text{f}3\) and was satisfied everything was in order. As soon as I had pressed the clock, however, Black’s patently obvious reply finally came to me.

31...\(\text{a}xb3\)

Disaster! White has to capture that pawn on b3 but then Black can line up both his major pieces on the eighth rank and it’s game over: 32 \(\text{a}b3??\) \(\text{a}1+\) 33 \(\text{h}2\) \(\text{d}1\) 34 \(\text{f}4\) \(\text{h}1+\) 35 \(\text{g}3\) \(\text{x}g2+\) 36 \(\text{h}4\) \(\text{h}1\) etc. It seemed for a few seconds that I should simply resign, but then came the fortune as I realized I had a saving resource, one that suddenly makes 31 \(\text{e}7\) a good move!

32 \(\text{w}f5\)!
The point is that regardless of how Black defends the threat of \( \text{xf7}+ \), he can no longer set up his queen and rook on the eighth rank. For example, after 32...\( \text{d5} \) 33 axb3 \( \text{a1}+? \) 34 \( \text{h2} \) \( \text{d1??} \) 35 \( \text{e8} \) it's Black who gets mated. Lucky!

My opponent used up quite a bit of his remaining time trying to find a win, but there was nothing there.

\textbf{32...\( \text{d1+} \) 33 \( \text{h2} \)}

\textbf{33...\( \text{d5?} \)}

A mistake. It was finally time to force the endgame after 33...\( \text{d5!} \). Black is a tiny bit better after 34 \( \text{xd5} \) \( \text{xd5} \) 35 axb3 c5 but the result should be a draw.

\textbf{34 axb3}

Suddenly, and really for the first time in the game, White has the advantage, and it's big. Black's king is the more vulnerable of the two, especially in view of \( \text{e5} \) and \( \text{g5} \) ideas (this is why Black needed the queens off the board).

\textbf{34...c6 35 \( \text{e5!} \)}

I felt very confident at this stage as I couldn't see a defence for Black. In fact 35...\( \text{d2} \) just about stays in the game, but this is not a position for Black to play in time trouble.

\textbf{35...\( \text{f1?} \) 36 f3 \( \text{f8} \) 37 \( \text{g5} \) f6 1-0}

...and my opponent resigned before I could deliver mate on g7.

I don't think I can confidently offer any advice on how to maximize your chances of playing lucky oversights (!), but what is important is how you react to them – both yours and your opponents'.

Playing a lucky oversight should serve as a kind of wake-up call, leading to greater vigilance for the rest of the game. On a psychological level it can actually provide some positive energy. You can say to yourself, 'I got away with that; let's make the most of my good fortune', or simply 'It's my lucky day!'

When you are on the receiving end of a lucky oversight, you have to try to swallow the disappointment and injustice, and to remain as objective as possible. In the game above, for example, it's possible that Black's decision to play 33...\( \text{d5?} \) was influenced by what
had just happened. It’s as if Black ‘de-
serves’ to be winning so he should con-
tinue playing for a win. Had we
reached the position after 33 \( \mathord{\text{h}2} \) un-
der normal circumstances (i.e. without
my oversight), I believe there is a very
good chance that the stronger 33...\( \mathord{\text{d}5}! \)
would have been played.

I should just add that Lawrence
didn’t have to wait too long for his re-
venge. A few weeks later I made an-
other oversight when two pawns
ahead in the ending. Not so lucky this
time: it allowed a mate in one.

**Bluffing**

Chess certainly doesn’t have the same
kind of bluff element as poker, and in
most cases the best move in a given
position remains the best move regard-
less of the strength of the opposition.
But chess is still a practical game; bluff
exists and is used to some extent by
players of all levels. For example, say
you have two available moves. If you
play the objectively best move you
suspect your opponent will react cor-
correctly. The other move available is not
as strong – it could even have a sub-
stantial flaw to it – but you think there
is a good chance your opponent won’t
punish this, and if this is the case you
end up with a stronger position than
had you played the objectively best
move.

What do you do in these situations?
I think a lot depends on the strength of
your position and practical considera-
tions: the character of your opponent
and time concerns.

The following game sticks in my
mind; firstly because it’s a painful de-
feat resulting from one dreadful move;
and secondly because it illustrates the
dangers of bluffing in the wrong situ-
tion and against the wrong opponent.
Essentially it provides a very strong
argument for not bluffing when there
is nothing wrong with your position,
and when your opponent calling your
bluff considerably weakens it.

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**J. Emms-B. Katalymow**  
Bad Wörishofen 1996

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I suspect that my terrible play in
this game (or more precisely, my awful
decision on move 13; as far as I can see
there were no second chances after
that) was influenced at least to some
extent by my psychological state before
and during the game. I was on a good
score (5/6) and playing well in a tough
open tournament. In the seventh round
I found out I was facing someone
whom I’d never heard of before, de-
spite his high FIDE rating of 2450. This
was a little unusual, but nothing too
strange given that it’s hard to recognize
every name amongst the multitude of
very strong players around these days.
However, it was bizarre that I could
find absolutely no games of his on my
computer database. I couldn’t work out
how someone could get such a high
rating without having any published
games, and somehow I found this ‘un-
known’ factor unsettling (I must have
owned a pretty incomplete database at
that point; checking today I’m able to find many of his games from before 1996).

Oh yes, one further thing to mention: it was also my birthday. In fact this painful defeat inspired me to write an article for *Kingpin* entitled ‘Happy Bloody Birthday!’ in which I declared that playing on your birthday could seriously damage your chess. By the way, those who are unfamiliar with *Kingpin* are missing out on a real delight: there are many good chess magazines around, but in my opinion *Kingpin* is the best out there.

Anyway, without further ado, let’s delve into the action:

1 e4 c5 2 ∇f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ∇xd4 ∇f6 5 ∇c3 ∇c6 6 ∇c4 ∇d7 7 0-0 g6 8 h3 ∇g7 9 ∇e1 0-0

Via a slightly unusual move order we’ve reached a line of the Sicilian Dragon. I certainly wasn’t unhappy with this, because an early ∇c4 with short castling was – and still is – my favourite system against the proper Dragon move order (1 e4 c5 2 ∇f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ∇xd4 ∇f6 5 ∇c3 g6 6 ∇c4 ∇g7 7 0-0 0-0 8 ∇e1 ∇c6 9 h3 ∇d7 would have been a more typical way for me to reach this position).

**10 ∇g5 ∇c8**

Later it was discovered that 10...∇xd4! 11 ∇xd4 h6! pretty much solves Black’s problems, as the discovered attack on White’s queen can be used to good effect. For example:

a) 12 ∇h4 g5 13 ∇g3 ∇h5 and Black will follow up with ...∇xg3 and ...∇c8.

b) 12 ∇d2? ∇g4 13 ∇d3 ∇e5 14 ∇e2 was a game of mine against the Luxembourg Grandmaster Alberto David (Cappelle la Grande 1997), which continued 14...∇xc4? 15 ∇xc4 ∇e8 16 ∇d3 ∇c8 17 ∇d5! ∇xb2 18 ∇ab1 ∇g7 19 ∇xb7 and I enjoyed some advantage. I remained blissfully ignorant of how fortunate I had been for three years, and then the following happened in a game between Luke McShane (playing White) and the Danish Grandmaster Sune Berg Hansen (Copenhagen 1999):

14...∇xh3!! 15 gxh3 ∇c8, when the double attack on c4 and h3 left White in all sorts of trouble. Of course these days Fritz or any other half-decent en-
gine finds 14...\texttt{b}xh3 in a flash, and this sort of incident is a great advert for preparing openings with the help of computers.

\texttt{11 \texttt{b}3 \texttt{h}6}

White’s idea is to answer 11...\texttt{a}5 with 12 \texttt{d}d5!, stepping up the pressure on \texttt{e}7 and \texttt{f}6. This knight move is a typical theme in this line, perhaps explaining my over-eagerness to play it under any conditions.

\texttt{12 \texttt{e}3 \texttt{a}5}

As well as ...\texttt{c}4, 12...\texttt{a}5 introduces the very real possibility of ...\texttt{x}c3 followed ...\texttt{x}e4 – a typical Dragon exchange sacrifice. The obvious solution is 13 \texttt{d}d3, dealing with both of Black’s ideas as well as preparing \texttt{d}d5; after this White can hope for a small but safe edge. Somehow this move escaped me, which maybe goes some way to explaining my willingness to play my next move (there’s no obvious alternative to 13 \texttt{d}d3).

\texttt{13 \texttt{d}5??}

Played after very little thought. The difference from the previous variation is that the e4-pawn is hanging. I knew this of course; I was simply bluffing. As I half-jokingly wrote in \textit{Kingpin}: ‘He just won’t take that e-pawn. My opponent should ponder the consequences of taking the pawn for a couple of minutes, decide it’s way too complicated and defer to my grandmasterly judgement. I just look calm and furiously pretend to analyse 13...\texttt{x}d5 as if it’s the only legal move. Why is he thinking so long? Oh please don’t think, just move!’

While my opponent was doing exactly what I should have done on the previous move, i.e. calculating, it gradually dawned on me how disastrous 13 \texttt{d}d5 was. I can’t remember exactly if I had analysed any variations at all after 13...\texttt{x}e4; probably not. Anyone can make an oversight in calculations; not bothering to calculate when leaving a crucial centre pawn en prise is simply criminal here.

\texttt{13...\texttt{x}e4!}

Absolutely why not? Of course there looks to be a bit of risk involved, but it soon becomes apparent that Black has enough resources. Someone
(I can’t remember who offhand) once said it’s worth a bit of suffering to win a central pawn; already I was beginning to agree with this sentiment.

14 \text{\textit{Wf3}}

I spent much more time on this move than I did on 13 \textit{\textit{Cd5}}; I think that says something about my decision making in this game.

White can regain the pawn with the crude 14 \textit{\textit{Axh6 Axh6 15 Aexe4}}, but that’s hardly a justification of 13 \textit{\textit{Cd5}}. Following 15...e6 16 \textit{\textit{Cc3 d5}} 17 \textit{\textit{Be1 Ag7}} White is really beginning to miss his e-pawn. 14 \textit{\textit{Af4}} would be a more logical attempt to try to refute 13...\textit{\textit{Axe4}}, but Black has more than one way to deal with White’s threat, e.g. 14...\textit{\textit{Abxb3}} 15 axb3 \textit{\textit{Ac5}} (or even 15...\textit{\textit{Axf2}} 16 \textit{\textit{Axf2 e6}} when d5-knight moves are met by ...e5, while 17 \textit{\textit{Ad6}} is hit by 17...\textit{\textit{Wh4+!}}) 16 \textit{\textit{Cc4 f5}}! and now 17 f3 e5! 18 fxe4 exf4 19 exf5 is met by 19...\textit{\textit{Xd5}}! 20 cxd5 \textit{\textit{Wb6}}, e.g. 21 \textit{\textit{Be4 Af5}} 22 \textit{\textit{Axf4 g5}}!.

14...\textit{\textit{Axb3}} 15 axb3 \textit{\textit{f5}}! 16 \textit{\textit{Axa7}}

The lost pawn has been reclaimed, and White’s position looks a bit threatening. In reality, however, there’s no answer to Black’s pawns taking over the operation in the centre.

16...\textit{\textit{e6}} 17 \textit{\textit{Af4}}

Or 17 \textit{\textit{Cc3 e5}} 18 \textit{\textit{Adb5 d5}} and ...d4.

17...\textit{\textit{Web8!}}

Now White has no really good answer to the threat of ...e6-e5 -- the knights get in each other’s way and one of them has to be given up. A few accurate moves from Black after 13 \textit{\textit{Cd5}} and he’s rewarded with a winning position.

18 \textit{\textit{Ab7 e5}} 19 \textit{\textit{Xxd7 Wxd7}} 20 \textit{\textit{Xg6 exd4}}

Black only has to avoid 20...\textit{\textit{Af6}}?? 21 \textit{\textit{Afxf5}}!.

21 \textit{\textit{Afxf8 Wxf8}} 22 \textit{\textit{Af4 d5}} 23 \textit{\textit{Wd3 Wc6}} 24 \textit{\textit{f3 Ac5}} 25 \textit{\textit{Wd2 d3!}}

Black continues to play well – there is no way back for White now.

26 \textit{\textit{b4 Ae6}} 27 \textit{\textit{cxd3 Axf4}} 28 \textit{\textit{Wxf4 Wf6}} 29 \textit{\textit{Wh2 Ac8}} 30 \textit{\textit{Ac2 Af8}} 31 \textit{\textit{Wg3+ Ah7}} 32 \textit{\textit{f4 Ad6}} 33 \textit{\textit{Wc3 Ac7}} 34 \textit{\textit{g3 Axb4}} 35 \textit{\textit{Wf3 Wd4}} 36 \textit{\textit{Wh5 Xd3}} 37 \textit{\textit{g4? Wxe2+}} 0-1

So when is it a good time to bluff? As I mentioned earlier, much depends
on the strength of your position and also considerations such as clock times and the style of your opponent, not to mention your own style of play. For example, if your position is clearly worse or losing, you obviously have less to lose if your bluff is called, and thus its overall strength as a practical weapon increases. Also, if for example you know for sure that your opponent is very reluctant to accept pawn sacrifices, even if the acceptance is totally correct, then there’s an argument to play on these factors.

I know one grandmaster, an endgame expert, who has been quite happy to offer the exchange of queens even if objectively it’s not the best move and it leads to an inferior endgame. Of course you could argue that this is a good practical decision as he is simply steering the game to the phase in which he excels, but I believe there is also an element of bluff. Opponents might themselves avoid the exchange of queens in the belief that the grandmaster would hardly offer this endgame unless he thought that the resulting position was objectively okay for him. I’ve seen players allowing their position to deteriorate by avoiding queen trade after queen trade. Usually the punishment is eventually being forced to exchange queens in any case, and often into a completely lost endgame!

In the following game I decided to bluff after weighing up time considerations and taking into account my opponent’s previous move. On this occasion I believe my bluff was certainly more justified than in the Katalymov game above, but given the assessment of the position at the time (I was okay) I can understand why some would argue against the idea of offering your opponent the chance to play a winning move!

G.Swathi-J.Emms
Gibraltar 2004

1 e4 c5 2 d4 f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 xd4 e6
5 c3 d6 6 e2 f6 7 0-0 e7 8 e3
9 f4 0-0 10 w1 xd4 11 xd4 b5
12 a3 b7 13 f3 d7! 14 g3 e5!

This equalizes.

15 fxe5 xe5

16 h1

16 xe5 dxe5 17 xe5 f6 gives Black good compensation for the pawn. If nothing else, there’s the option of shattering White’s queenside with ...xc3.

16...f6 17 ad1 e7 18 h5?!

This only encourages Black to play something that was quite desirable in
any case. I was expecting the immediate 18 \( \text{Ke}2. \\
\text{18...g6 19 Ke2 Kg7 20 Hf2 Kc6 21 Kf1} \\
Wb7 22 Ke3!? Kxe4 23 Kxd6 \\
White would like to grab the e4-bishop because it’s a much better piece 
\text{than the c3-knight, but 23 } \text{Qxe4 } Wxe4 \\
\text{24 } \text{Kxd6 } Qg4! \text{ wins a pawn.} \\
\text{23...c6 24 Wh4} \\
\begin{center}
\begin{figure}
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{chess-board.png}
\end{figure}
\end{center}

Time for an assessment. I was 
happy with the outcome of the opening and the early middlegame. Black has a 
slight edge here: his pieces are well 
placed, there’s pressure down the long 
a8-h1 diagonal and his king is safer. A 
typical continuation would be 24...\text{Kae8} 
25 \text{c5 f5!}, massing the pieces on the 
kingside and adding the possibility of 
...\text{Qg4}. My choice is also logical – it 
prepares to chase the knight away with 
...b4 – but I had totally overlooked a 
tactic, one that became apparent to me 
as soon as I pressed the clock (why is 
this so common?). 

Small advantages don’t usually de- 
cide games; big mistakes do! 
\text{24...a5 25 Kc5} \\
A huge sigh of relief, as my oppo-
nent misses capturing on b5 followed 
by \text{Kb6}. Only later, when I had the 
comfort of Fritz and a warm cup of tea 
beside me did I realise that I had made 
a lucky oversight at the board rather 
than a blunder. Analysis shows that 
Black has sufficient resources after ei-
ther capture on b5: 

a) \text{25 } Kxb5? Kxb5 26 Kb6 Wd7! 27 
Kxb5 Kg4 28 Kd2 (or 28 Kf3? Qxe3 29 
Kxe3 Kh3! and Black wins due to a 
‘back ranker’) 28...We8! 29 Wxg4 Kh3 
30 bxc3 Wxb5 and Black comes out an 
exchange for a pawn ahead. 

b) \text{25 } Qxh5 Qxh5 26 Kb6 Qc8! 27 
Kxb5 Kg4 28 Kf3 Qxe3 29 Kxe3 Wxc2 
and Black has regained his pawn. 

Returning to my actual thoughts 
during the game (as opposed to the 
analysis produced by the pure calculat-
ing ability of Fritz – something very 
different!), I now had a practical deci-
sion to make. Unfortunately I can’t re-
member the exact clock positions here 
but I seem to recall that both my oppo-
nent and I were already down to our 
last 20 or 30 minutes to reach move 40 
(the time control was 40 moves in 120
minutes). In my view I had been given a lifeline, but the capture on b5 was still very much on the agenda and it also seemed sensible to move the rook from f8 to avoid any discovered attacks by the bishop on c5. The only way I could see to prevent a capture on b5 for sure was with 25...\[f8, when both 26 \[xb5?? \[xb5 27 \[b6 \[c7 and 26 \[xb5?? \[xb5 27 \[b6 \[c7 lose a piece.

There was, however, something preventing me from playing 25...\[f8: quite simply I didn't like the look of it (aesthetically it looks a bit odd having the rooks on a8 and b8 but in reality there's nothing wrong with it at all). Given the clock situation, I also didn't want to expend considerable time at this stage to check whether capturing on b5 was still on after the move pair \[c5, ...\[e8. So I gambled and played my next move very quickly, hoping that if she saw the capture on b5, there would be some defence for Black!

25...\[e8?(!)

I've awarded a question mark for the move's objective merit and an exclamation mark because quite possibly it won me the game.

26 \[d1?

The bluff works! 26 \[xb5? loses after 26...\[xb5 27 \[b6 \[c7 28 \[xb5 \[d7!, once again exploiting the back rank, but 26 \[xb5! is very strong and wins a pawn for nothing. The main point is that 26...\[d7 (which would otherwise be a very strong move) can be answered by 27 \[xf7!, as 27...\[xf7 28 \[c4+ \[f8 29 \[f6 is mate. Given that I had spent so little time on 25...\[e8, I had seen neither of these variations. Had I used half of my remaining time on my 25th move, maybe I would have spotted 27 \[xf7 and felt obliged to play 25...\[f8. Or maybe I would have alerted my opponent to the possibility of capturing on b5 and yet still played 25...\[e8 – the worst case scenario.

26...\[c8! 27 \[d5 \[xd5 28 \[xd5 \[c6 29 \[fd2 \[c4 30 \[xc4 \[xc4

Now Black is fine; better in fact because of White's weaker king (31 \[xc4?? loses to 31...\[e1+) and targets on the queenside. The game concluded:

31 c3 \[ab8 32 \[g1 \[xb2! 33 \[d6 \[b5
34 \text{b6?} \text{xb6!} 35 \text{xb6} \text{xd2 0-1}

Black wins after 35...\text{xd2} 36 \text{h3} \text{d1+} 37 \text{h2} \text{e5+} 38 \text{g3} \text{d4!} 39 \text{xd4} \text{e2+}.

So was this bluff completely justified? Judging by the final result, yes it was. Otherwise it really is difficult to say with any certainty. How many players of a similar standard and in exactly the same situation would find 26 \text{xb5} for White? What would have happened had I played 25...\text{b8}? As far as I can see, it’s simply impossible to answer these questions. Still, I do hope I’ve managed to point out one or two factors to look out for when deciding whether bluffing is a good idea.

\textbf{The Poker Face}

Something that is related to the previous topic is the question of whether to hide your emotions; whether to keep a ‘poker face’. Garry Kasparov was often quite bad at doing this; his various facial expressions of anguish (at his position deteriorating) or more usually contempt (at his opponent’s moves) provided much entertainment for the spectators throughout his career. Not that his rivals seemed to benefit from the information he gave away, although this probably had something to do with him being arguably the best player in the history of chess. In fact you could argue that Kasparov’s expressions worked for him – some opponents probably found it difficult to recover from his disdainful reactions to their inferior moves!

That said, in general I think you have more to gain if you are able to hide your emotions and keep an expressionless face. Chess is a game of information, and any information you are able to withhold from your opponent is useful. Likewise, anything you are able to glean from your opponent’s demeanour is going to be helpful, at least to a small degree. The only possible exception is when an opponent is deceitful; for example, clutching their head in anguish after making an apparent blunder, only for you to find out after making the obvious reply that it was all an elaborate hoax and in fact it was you who had just blundered. This ruse sometimes works in games between inexperienced players, but stronger players tend to be wary of such acting.

Playing someone who looks exactly the same whether he is winning easily or about to resign can actually be quite disconcerting, as our opponent is giving away no clues as to how he feels about the position on the board. Say you reach a clearly drawn endgame against a lower-rated player. If you are desperate to win, you perhaps offer yourself the best chances by playing on and on (and on!), but doing so with an expressionless face, not one that somehow gives away that the position is dead drawn. By not being able to find this approval that the game is completely drawn, it’s possible your opponent will become nervous (‘why is he playing on and looking serious; perhaps I’m losing, not drawing!’), see ghosts that don’t exist, and then with
the pressure building make a mistake on the board offering you genuine winning chances.

I believe that when a player studies the body language of his opponent, a calm exterior is often translated to quiet confidence. In general this is a very good impression to give. Even if your position on the board is a poor one, a calm and confident manner can provoke apprehension in an opponent (‘I thought I was doing well, but my opponent looks confident – maybe I’m worse!).

I’ve faced a few grandmasters that are particularly good at hiding their emotions. Michael Adams and Keith Arkell come to mind, but the player I’ve had most problems with in this respect in Mark Hebden, whose tricky and speedy style of play – often inducing time trouble for his opponents – is complemented well by his ability to give away no information and to look extremely calm and confident. I’ve suffered due to this on more than one occasion, none more so than when paired against him in what was essentially a last-round tournament decider:

![Chess Diagram]

I figured that if I could reach move 40 without any disasters I would have reasonable practical drawing chances, especially if I could swap queens. And that in turn would probably mean a share of first prize.

Just need four good moves...

37 †e7

Perhaps understandably I was nervous about the prospect of ...h4-h3, so I decided to prevent it.

37...e4 38 †b3!

A good time-trouble move, improving my queen and maintaining the annoying pin on the c4-rook.

38...h7

---

**J.Emms-M.Hebden**

Hastings 1995/96

We pick up the action in a position that had already gone wrong for me in the middlegame. I had been forced to give up a pawn and was now fighting to reach the time control (move 40) without any further accidents (I was in some time trouble; Mark wasn’t).
39 h4

Another good practical move: on h4 the bishop is less vulnerable and it also protects f2.

39...d4

In the cold light of day this isn’t actually very threatening, but I can assure you that as I was contemplating my 40th move I was seeing a lot of ghosts. One more move needed...

40 d1 e3?!)

The reason for both the question mark and the exclamation mark will become apparent soon.

After the expected 42...xf3! the game was effectively over. The sad conclusion was 43 xf3 (43 e1 c1!) 43...gxf3 44 fxe3 xe3+ 45 f2 f4! 46 b1 c2 47 h3 h2+! 48 xh2 xf2 49 g1 xe2! 50 c1 (or 50 b4 f2+! 51 xg2 e1) 50...xb2 51 a1 f6 52 c1 e5 53 h4 d4 54 a1 c3 0-1.

**Question:** Going back to the diagrammed position, can you see a good move for White after 40...e3? (try using CEM)

**Answer:** Queen moves... 41 xe3!! And suddenly Black is struggling!

Time control reached, and with it despair. My final move before time control had allowed a big tactic (41 fxe3 is met by 41...xe3+ 42 xe3 xd1+) and Mark sat impassively, as if his successful hustle in my time trouble was simply a natural progression of the game. I thought for quite a while here – I’m not sure for how long exactly but I definitely didn’t move quickly. I think most of the time was spent berating myself for having allowed 40...e3.

In the end I could see nothing better than 41 d3+?! g7 42 e2??, and certainly the endgame arising after 41...xe3 42 xd5 is unappealing. Black is better advised to keep the queens on, but it’s definitely White who is in the ascendancy.

Okay, awarding two exclamation marks to this move is a bit over the top. Then again, no one would argue against the fact that there’s a big difference between sitting at home and looking for a good move you know exists, and finding the same move over the board when in your mind it has no right to exist!
I'm sure Mark’s poker face was a key factor in my overlooking 41 \( \text{W}x\text{e}3 \) (and 42 \( \text{W}x\text{e}3 \) for that matter – what made it worse is that I even had a second chance!), but I suspect there are some related reasons that played a part. Firstly, I really should have taken a break from the board after the time control, which might have enabled me to look at the position with a degree of freshness and objectivity. Secondly, my position had been worse for quite a while; it felt at the time as if the moves played after 40...\( e3 \) were simply the logical conclusion to the game. Finally, having ‘allowed’ 40...\( e3 \) in time trouble (which was played quickly and confidently), I simply ‘believed’ my opponent and that the move was winning – I just wasn’t even looking for an answer.

Of course maintaining a poker face is easier if, unlike with Mark Hebden in the previous example, you are unaware of your blunder. In this particular case it could be said that ignorance is bliss. Let’s look at where I got lucky in a previous round (perhaps in this particular tournament I had already used up my share of fortune by the time I got to the final round).

Instead, in my opponent’s time trouble I was enticed by variation 35 \( \text{B}f6 \text{c}1+ 36 \text{h}2 \text{x}f2 37 \text{xh}7+!! \text{x}h7 38 \text{g}8 \text{mate}. So the game continued:

\[ 35 \text{f}6?? \text{f}7?? \]

I remember feeling disappointed that my opponent hadn’t allowed the pretty finish from the previous note.

\[ 36 \text{g}5! \]

Now the threat of 36 \( \text{W}g8+ \) is decisive. Graeme tried a desperate bishop sacrifice, but there is no perpetual.

\[ 36...\text{xf}2+ 37 \text{xf}2 \text{c}5+ 38 \text{f}1 \text{c}4+ 39 \text{g}1 1-0 \]

Without further ado I put this game
to bed as I prepared to do battle with Mark. It was a few days later when I inputted the moves of the game into ChessBase. Everything seemed logical until I reached the position after 35 $\text{Qf6}$.

![Chessboard diagram]

At this point, Fritz was going crazy for 35...$\text{Wc1+}$ and I just couldn’t see why. Surely the computer’s horizon wasn’t so low as to miss my cunning trick? I decided to keep inputting the moves: 36 $\text{Wh2}$ $\text{Qxf2}$ 37 $\text{Wxh7+}$ $\text{Qxh7}$, but here the annoying program just wouldn’t physically allow me to play 38 $\text{Qg8}$ mate. After trying unsuccessfully two or three times to move my rook to g8, only then did it dawn on me that the move I was attempting to make was actually illegal – 37...$\text{Qxh7}$ had come with a big check!

**Know the Rules!**

I know this seems to be stating the obvious again, but these really need to be learnt. I’m not talking about the ‘bishops move diagonally’ sort of rules, but instead the small but important ones that will help you to survive and prosper. Use them to your advantage and to make sure you’re not exploited in tournament games. 99% of your opponents will play fair but there will inevitably be one or two who try to bend the rules, even if ever so slightly. Be ready because in this case knowledge most definitely equates to power. Just recently I watched a soccer game in the Champions League between Manchester United and Lille, and in the final few minutes of the game the French team conceded a goal simply because they were unaware of the rules. And this is sport at the highest level! Don’t let this happen to you.

A copy of the FIDE laws of chess can be freely downloaded from their website (www.fide.com). I should warn you that one or two national federations (notable the US) have a few rules which conflict with FIDE’s, so this can cause some confusion (for US Chess Federation rules, check out their website at uschess.org).

The wording of some of the laws can be quite complex, so inexperienced players should if possible try to get anything they are not sure about clarified by someone they know – an arbiter or a friend who’s clued-up on the rules. It does no harm to question something within the rules that doesn’t seem right or logical. In fact the website Chesscafe.com even has a regular column where the international arbiter Geurt Gijssen, who has been chief arbiter at more than one world championship match, answers all sorts of reader queries connected to the vagaries of chess rules.
Knowing the ins and outs of some of the basic tournament rules will gain you advantages. I certainly don’t intend to go through them here with a fine-tooth comb. After all, rules are always liable to change so what I say here might be out of date by the time this book is published! I would, though, like to go through a few examples.

Article 9.1 (a) from the latest FIDE rules states:

A player wishing to offer a draw shall do so after having made a move on the chessboard and before stopping his clock and starting the opponent’s clock. An offer at any other time during play is still valid, but Article 12.6 must be considered. No conditions can be attached to the offer. In both cases the offer cannot be withdrawn and remains valid until the opponent accepts it, rejects it orally, rejects it by touching a piece with the intention of moving or capturing it, or the game is concluded in some other way.

(Article 12.6 states: It is forbidden to distract or annoy the opponent in any manner whatsoever. This includes unreasonable claims or unreasonable offers of a draw.)

Knowing this rule is of real practical value. Firstly, it is of course important to be familiar with the correct procedure for offering a draw. Secondly, it can be understood from the wording that if your opponent offers you a draw while it is his move, you have every right to see your opponent’s next move before deciding whether to accept the offer, as the offer remains valid until you make your next move, and of course this is an advantage. By rejecting or accepting the draw offer straight away you only lose options, so this should be avoided. Unless of course you are totally satisfied the position is dead drawn, or if your opponent has a mate in one – note the words, ‘or the game is concluded in some other way.’ Actually, I’ve just realized that, with there being a current movement towards the possibility of eventually banning draw offers, there’s a minor possibility this last paragraph might be obsolete by the time you read it!

Let’s just check out one or two more rules from the FIDE Handbook and determine some of their implications:

5.1a: The game is won by the player who has checkmated his opponent’s king. This immediately ends the game, provided that the move producing the checkmate position was a legal move.

5.1b: The game is won by the player whose opponent declares he resigns. This immediately ends the game.

5.2a: The game is drawn when the player to move has no legal move and his king is not in check. The game is said to end in ‘stalemate’. This immediately ends the game, provided that the move producing the stalemate position was legal.

5.2b: The game is drawn when a position has arisen in which neither player can checkmate the opponent’s king with any series of legal moves. The game is said to end in a ‘dead position’. This immediately ends the game, provided that the move producing the position was legal.
5.2c: The game is drawn upon agreement between the two players during the game. This immediately ends the game. (See Article 9.1)

6.8a: During the game each player, having made his move on the chessboard, shall stop his own clock and start his opponent's clock. A player must always be allowed to stop his clock. His move is not considered to have been completed until he has done so, unless the move that was made ends the game. (See Articles 5.1, and 5.2)

6.10: The time between making the move on the chessboard and stopping his own clock and starting his opponent's clock is regarded as part of the time allotted to the player.

Except where Articles 5.1 or one of the Articles 5.2 (a), (b) and (c) apply, if a player does not complete the prescribed number of moves in the allotted time, the game is lost by the player. However, the game is drawn, if the position is such that the opponent cannot checkmate the player's king by any possible series of legal moves, even with the most unskilled counterplay.

Articles 5.1 and 5.2 explain the ways in which a game can be won and drawn (I've omitted the more complex drawing possibilities involving the same position appearing three times and the 50 move rule), while Articles 6.8a and 6.10 describe some rules of the chess clock. From these a few things could be said; for example:

1) (from 5.2b) If you are left with a bare king against your opponent's king and bishop, the game is immediately drawn. Note that you don't have to offer a draw or claim the draw – the game is actually completed and drawn once this position arises because there is no way to set up a checkmating position. If, however, you have a knight to go with your king (i.e. king and knight against king and bishop), the game is not yet finished because it is possible for at least one of the players (in this case both) to checkmate his opponent's king with a series of legal moves. Those of you not sure how this is possible might want to have some fun trying to set up the checkmating positions before looking at the diagrams below.
In I guess 99.9% of all cases both players would be happy to agree to a draw once this material situation arose (unless of course, there was an immediate mate in one to reach something like the diagrammed positions!). If, however, you were playing an obstinate and – most would agree – unsporting player, you would have to try to obtain a draw by other means: the 50-move rule (where each player has made at least 50 moves without capture or any pawn move); or, in a quickplay finish, by claiming your opponent was making no effort to win the game by normal means.

2) If you checkmate your opponent and then as you move to stop the clocks your flag falls, you have won the game. This is because the game has officially completed after the checkmating position has arisen, so the later flag fall is irrelevant. The same applies if your opponent resigns. Likewise, if stalemate or a ‘dead position’ (5.2b) occurs, or if the players agree a draw (5.2c), a flag falling at a later stage (i.e. before the clocks are stopped) is irrelevant and the game is drawn.

3) Say the first time control is 40 moves in two hours. You make your 40th move and in the motion of pressing your clock your flag falls. In this event you have failed to make your 40 moves in the allotted time, because the move is only completed once the clock is pressed. In this case you lose unless the game has already been decided (via checkmate, stalemate, ‘dead position’ etc.).

Here, very briefly, are three randomly picked rules from the many that are worth knowing (I’ll mention one or two more in Chapters 2 and 3):

Any player who arrives at the chessboard more than one hour after the scheduled start of the session shall lose the game unless the rules of the competition specify or the arbiter decides otherwise. (6.7)

Useful to know if you are stuck in traffic or you just can’t tear yourself away from watching a crucial football match on TV.

A player may stop the clocks only in order to seek the arbiter’s assistance, for instance when promotion has taken place and the piece required is not available. (6.13b)

If you are pretty sure that you have a valid reason to seek the arbiter’s assistance (for example, claiming a draw) then in many cases it’s a better bet to stop the clocks than to leave yours running while you search for an arbiter. This is especially the case if: 1) there is a shortage of available arbiters; and 2) you don’t have much time to play with!

It is forbidden for anybody to use a mobile phone in the playing venue by the arbiter (13.7a)

I’ve played in many events where if your mobile phone goes off during a game you automatically forfeit. I believe that former FIDE Champion Ruslan Ponomariov is the highest-profile player to become a victim of
this rule. On quite a few occasions I've also heard mobile phones ringing when an arbiter wasn't present. This happened to someone I know (his opponent's mobile rang but no arbiter was there), but he - or anyone else present - couldn't bring himself to snitch on the person ('Arbiter! Arbiter! My opponent's mobile phone rang!') He admitted after the game - which he only drew against a much lower-rated player - that he was put off by the thought of this dilemma, much more than the actual phone going off.

Aside from these, there are many little rules that are useful to know, so it's worth investing some time going through the rulebook. This really is a case where knowledge equals power.
In this chapter I’d like to talk a little about the specifics of playing with the result very much in mind. It’s quite possible you play your best chess when external factors (e.g. the influence of the result) are the last things on your mind. Those ‘lucky’ players who always seem able to immerse themselves into the position, get ‘into the zone’ and to some extent dismiss all thoughts of what the result would mean, have a big advantage. But unsurprisingly most humans are unable to play chess like robots, and even the world’s top players are prone to mistakes through either ‘wanting’ a particular result too much, or simply from nerves.

Getting a Result
Football managers often talk about ‘getting a result’ (‘If we can go up to Old Trafford and get a result against Manchester United, it will give the lads a hell of a boost for the rest of the season...’). In these situations ‘getting a result’ doesn’t always mean winning the game, it means coming away with a result you’re happy with. Indeed most teams in the Premiership would view a draw at Manchester United’s home ground as ‘getting a result’. Similarly in chess, while one player might desperately need a win, his opponent’s aim may be solely to achieve a draw. In fact, I would go as far to say that this is a common scenario in a competitive game, for a number of reasons. For example, it might be the final round of a tournament where one player needs the full point to win the tournament whereas his opponent, half a point ahead, only needs a draw. Or it might be a team match where, because of results on other boards, your captain tells you to go all out for the win; or to play for a draw; or, most unhelpfully, to ‘play for a win but keep a draw in hand’. Other factors such as rating performance and achievement come into play as well. Against a much stronger
opponent, a player might get into the mindset of focusing primarily on achieving a draw. Conversely, the stronger player might adopt a ‘win at all costs’ approach even if there is no prize to fight for.

Recently I had a look again at some of the most famous ‘must win versus must draw’ encounters. One example that sprung to mind was Kasparov’s final-round win over Karpov in their 1987 World Championship match in Seville (Kasparov needed a win to retain the World Championship; Karpov needed a draw to win back the title).

This game is very well known and has been analysed to death, with oodles of variations proving how Black could have drawn, or how White could have won more quickly. Just sticking to the bare facts, this is what happened:

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**G.Kasparov-A.Karpov**  
World Championship (Game 24), Seville 1987

1 c4 e6 2 d f3 d f6 3 g3 d5 4 b3 e7 5  
g2 0-0 6 b6 7 b2 b7 8 e3 bd7 9  
c3 e4 10 e2 a5 11 d3 f6 12  
w c2 axb2 13 wxb2 d6 14 cxd5 exd5  
15 d4 c5 16 fd1 c8 17 f4 xf3 18  
exf3 w e7 19 ac1 f d8 20 dxc5 ecx5  
21 b4 axb4 22 wxb4 wa7 23 a3 f5 24  
hb1 xd1+ 25 xd1 wc7 26 d3 h6 27  
c1 e7 28 wb5 f5 29 a4 d6 30  
w b1 wa7 31 e5 xa4 32 ecx8+ ecx8  
33 w d1 e7 34 w d8+ h7 35 xf7  
g6 36 we8 e7 37 wxa4 wxf7 38  
e4 g8 39 b5 f8 40 wxb6 w f6 41  
w b5 w e7 42 g2 g6 43 a5 g7 44  
w c5 wf7 45 h4 h5 46 wc6 we7 47 d3  
w f7 48 w d6 g7 49 e4 g8 50 c4  
g7 51 we5+ g8 52 wd6 gd7 53 b5  
g8 54 c6 wa7 55 w b4 wc7 56 w b7  
w d8 57 e5 wa5 58 ce8 c5 59 f7+  
h8 60 a4 wd5+ 61 h2 wc5 62 b3  
wc8 63 a1 wc5 64 c2 1-0

I will just point out the reason for Karpov’s resignation, as given by Kasparov in Chess Informant: 64...wb4 65  
f3 wc5 66 e4 wb4 67 f3! (67 xg6?? allows a stalemate trick after 67...xg6 68 wxg6 wb7+ 69 h2 wg2+!!) 67...wd2+ 68 h3 wb4 69 xg6  
xg6 70 wxg6 w xh4+ 71 g2!. White avoids the stalemate, wins the h5-pawn and with it the game.

More recently exactly the same situation arose in the 2004 World Championship match between Kramnik and Leko. This time it was Kramnik needing to win the final game to retain his title, and Leko needing a draw.

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**V.Kramnik-P.Leko**  
World Championship (Game 14), Brissago 2004

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 f5 4 h4 h6 5 g4  
d7 6 d2 c5 7 dxc5 e6 8 b3 xc5 9  
xc5 wa5+ 10 c3 xc5 11 f3 e7 12  
d3 bc6 13 e3 wa5 14 cd2 g6 15  
d4 xd4 16 cxd4 wxd2+ 17 xd2  
f4 18 ac1 h5 19 hgl c6 20 gxh5  
wh5 21 b4 a6 22 a4 d8 23 g5 e8  
24 b5 f4 25 b6 xd3 26 xd3 c8 27  
xc8+ xxc8 28 ac1+ c6 29 xf7  
xh4 30 d6+ d8 31 g1 h3+ 32

54
\(\textbf{\#2} \textbf{\#3} \textbf{\#xg7} \textbf{\#xa4} \textbf{\#f4} \textbf{\#a2+ \#35} \textbf{\#f3} \textbf{\#a3+ \#36} \textbf{\#g4} \textbf{\#d3} \textbf{\#37} \textbf{\#f5} \textbf{\#xd4+ \#38} \textbf{\#g5} \textbf{\#exf5} \textbf{\#39} \textbf{\#f6} \textbf{\#g4} \textbf{\#40} \textbf{\#c7} \textbf{\#h4} \textbf{\#41} \textbf{\#f7+ 1-0}

What I found impressive about both Kasparov and Kramnik’s attitude was their refusal to panic and to attack at all costs. Kasparov, for example, didn’t choose a particularly sharp opening, but it was one which wouldn’t lead to an early release of the tension; one where he could fight for an advantage and a long-lasting initiative. He was also unafraid of exchanges and of course backed his ability to win in simplified positions (he was happy to offer a queen trade with 56 \#wb7).

Kramnik didn’t try to avoid the endgame that arose after only seventeen moves, even though he realized that with exact defence Black should be able to hold this position. Kramnik knew that Leko would have to work very hard for the draw, and for a long time too, and in practice defending a slightly worse position accurately for a long period of time can be more difficult than trying to negotiate a storming attack which lasts only a few moves.

Of course it would be wrong to suggest that the ‘all guns blazing’ method doesn’t have value, but I think it’s important to remember that it’s not the only way to approach do-or-die tournament situations. When all is said and done, your approach should depend on your style of play, the type of opponent you are playing, and the type of position you reach from the opening.

If, for example, you are playing White in the Poisoned Pawn Variation of the Sicilian Najdorf, you won’t find me advising you to swap off all the pieces and to play the ending!

Winning with Black when your opponent only needs a draw is hard work, and it gets harder as the strength of the players increases. The problem is that White generally dictates the play, and in certain situations he can sacrifice some of his theoretical advantage in order to channel the position into one where winning chances for either side are negligible. At the highest levels, where technique is so good, it’s quite rare for players to be successful as Black in must-win games. At lower levels this isn’t such a problem because the assessment of the position is likely to fluctuate more and defensive techniques aren’t so polished.

One successful must-win game as Black that sticks in my mind was Nigel Short’s against Mikhail Gurevich, in the final round of the Manila Interzonal. Had Short not won this game, he wouldn’t have had the opportunity to go on to beat Gelfand, Karpov and Timman in Candidate matches and earn the right for a tilt at Kasparov’s title in 1993.

\underline{M.Gurevich-N.Short}
\underline{Manila Interzonal 1990}

1 \textbf{d4} e6 2 e4?!

Am I trying to rewrite opening theory? Not really. Of course objectively 2
e4 is a good move, but from a practical viewpoint this was a surprising decision because Gurevich specializes in 1 d4 and hardly ever plays 1 e4. Normally Gurevich would have played for an advantage with 2 c4!, but on this occasion he sacrificed the chance for an edge in his usual opening and instead tried to take all the life out of the game by playing the Exchange French. Sadly, as many have found out before and since, it’s not so easy for White to do this.

2...d5 3 exd5 exd5 4 Qf3 Qg4!
An excellent decision. Short plays a slightly unusual move (4...Qf6 and 4...d6 are more common), and the only real way for White to try to exploit this is by reacting energetically. But of course if White wanted to play with more ambition he wouldn’t have chosen 3 exd5 in the first place!

5 h3 Qh5 6 Qe2?! 
This timid move totally justifies Black’s opening play. The way to attack here is with 6 Ke2! Ke7 (6...Ke7 7 Kb5+! Qc6 8 Qe5! is annoying for Black) 7 Ke3 Qc6 8 Qc3 followed by long castling, as shown by Kasparov in a later game as White against Short (Tilburg 1991). But I repeat, Gurevich was not looking to play the Exchange French in an aggressive way.

6...Qd6 
I already prefer Black because if both sides develop ‘normally’, it’s easier for him to find active squares for his pieces.

7 Qe5 
This move, which is undoubtedly part of a simplification plan, has been criticized. But to be honest I’m finding it difficult to come up with an idea which doesn’t involve playing Qe5 after 7 0-0 Qe7 8 Qd2 0-0.

7...Qxe2 8 Qxe2 Qe7 9 0-0 0-0 10 Qf4 
Qe8 11 Qg4 Qxe5! 12 Qxe5 Qg6!

Short isn’t afraid of some simplification – he realizes that there are still going to be enough pieces and enough play for Black to make White’s quest for a draw a difficult one. In his notes to Chess Informant he assessed this position as slightly better for Black. Not bad after only 12 moves!

13 Kg3 Qd7 14 Qd2 Qf6 15 Qf3 c6! 16
\textbf{\textit{\textit{b3 \textit{\textit{b6!}}}}}

Given the pressure-cooker tournament situation, Short’s play is unnervingly composed. There must have been a great temptation to keep the queens on the board, but clearly by this stage Short felt that his advantage would become significant in an endgame, where White’s ‘bad’ bishop on g3 finds it increasingly difficult to fulfil a useful role.

17 \textit{\textit{\textbf{x}b6 \textbf{axb6}}}

And of course in hurrying to trade queens White makes another concession: giving Black a semi-open a-file.

18 \textit{\textit{\textbf{a}3}}

Short prefers 18 a4, and this does have the advantage of slowing down ...b6-b5 ideas.

18...\textit{\textit{\textbf{e}4!}}

Again Black is not afraid of some more simplification. 18...\textit{\textit{\textbf{h}5}} is more complex, but it’s perhaps revealing that at this stage Short was preferring to tie his opponent down to passive defence rather than looking for ways to make the game more complicated (as he was doing with 4...\textit{\textit{\textbf{g}4!}}). He was confident that his slight advantage would be long lasting and that there was every chance White would crack under the pressure of having to resist for a long time.

19 \textit{\textit{\textbf{x}e4 \textbf{xe4}} 20 \textbf{f}f1 \textbf{f}6 22 \textbf{f}3 \textbf{e}6 23 \textbf{e}1 \textbf{f}7 24 \textbf{xe}6 \textbf{xe}6 25 \textbf{e}1+ \textbf{d}7 26 \textbf{e}2?!}

This move, along with the failure to play 18 a4, is indicative of Gurevich’s over-cautious approach to the whole game. Short suggests either 26 \textit{\textit{\textbf{h}2}} (or 26 \textit{\textit{\textbf{f}2}}) with the idea of meeting ...26...h5 with 27 g4!.

26...\textit{\textit{\textbf{h}5!}}

With the idea of playing ...h5-h4, gaining space on the kingside and fixing White’s pawn as a target on g2. 27 h4 would prevent this, but at a cost of moving yet another pawn onto the same square colour as the bishop.

There is no doubting Black’s advantage now.

27 \textit{\textit{\textbf{d}3 \textbf{h}4 28 \textbf{h}2 \textbf{e}7}}

Black utilizes his bind on the kingside in order to perch the knight happily on f5 without worrying about the possibility of it being harassed by g2-g4.
29 $e4$ $\text{f5}$ 30 $\text{d2}$ $b6$!

Obvious and strong. The only way to make progress is by arranging $...$c6-c5.

31 $\text{e2}$ c5 32 $\text{e3}$ b4!

Keeping up the pressure with a temporary pawn sacrifice. In this position 33 $\text{dxc5??}$ loses immediately to $33...\text{bxa3}$ 34 $\text{bxa3}$ $\text{xa3}$+ 35 $\text{d2}$ $\text{xe3}$ 36 $\text{xe3}$ $\text{xe3}$ 37 $\text{xe3}$ $\text{bxc5}$ with a winning pawn ending, so White’s reply is forced.

33 $\text{axb4}$ c4+! 34 $\text{c3}$ $\text{d6}$!

Planning $...$b5+ followed by $...$a2 or $...$a4. That bishop on e3 is looking unhappier by the move.

35 $\text{e1}$

Against 35 b3 Short gives 35...$\text{a2}$, threatening 36...$\text{b5}$+ 37 $\text{d2}$ $\text{cxb3}$ and planning to meet 36 $\text{bxc4??}$ with 36...$\text{a3}$+ followed by 37...$\text{xc4}$+ to win the bishop on e3.

35...$\text{a4}$ 36 $\text{d2}$?!

Worn down by having to defend for a number of moves, Gurevich finally ditches passive defence in favour of counterattack, but it smacks of desperation and is too little, too late. Short offers 36 $\text{b1}$?? $\text{b5}$+ 37 $\text{d2}$ $\text{xb4}$ 38 b3 as White’s last chance for survival.

36...$\text{xb4}$ 37 $\text{a1}$?

37 $\text{b1}$ had to be played, although after 37...$\text{a4}$ White is in for a lot of suffering.

37...$\text{xb2}$ 38 $\text{a7}$+ $\text{e6}$ 39 $\text{xe7}$ b5!

Ultimately Black’s queenside pawns will be too strong, and much quicker than anything White has on the kingside.

40 $\text{f2}$ b4 41 $\text{c1}$ c3! 42 $\text{xe4}$ $\text{f5}$ 0-1

After 43 $\text{g4}$, 43...$\text{e3}$ followed by $...\text{xc2}$+ is decisive.

To me that was almost the perfect game by Short under the circumstances. I suspect that Mikhail Gurevich’s approach to the opening wasn’t right, and this seemed to set the tone for the rest of the game. I’m sure under more normal circumstances a player of his undoubted calibre wouldn’t have thought twice about playing moves such as 18 a4, and later 26 $\text{f2}$ or 26 $\text{h2}$, but perhaps his over-cautious play in the opening transferred itself to the queenless middlegame, and led to uncertainty. By this stage he was being
forced to defend a slightly inferior position and the momentum was very much with his opponent.

Going into the final round of the 2005 British Championship, the defending champion Jonathan Rowson was leading with 8/10 and there were four players tied on 7/10, one of which was me. As the other three had already played the leader, it was now my turn. Basically the situation was that Jonathan needed a draw to win the title; I needed a win to share first place. A draw would give me a reasonable prize and a loss virtually nothing, so I wasn’t quite at the ‘win at all costs’ position. In fact to some extent I had the advantage of playing ‘with a draw in hand’ – unless completely winning, Jonathan was always likely to accept a draw at any stage.

I had the disadvantage of the black pieces, and during preparation the main problem I found was choosing an opening variation that would keep the position ‘alive’. As you will see, I failed quite miserably!

\[\text{\textbf{J.Rowson-J.Emms}}\]
\[\text{British Championship, }\]
\[\text{Douglas 2005}\]

1 d4 \textit{f6} 2 c4 e6 3 \textit{c3} \textit{b4} 4 \textit{wc2}!

This was a very good practical choice because:

1) 4 \textit{wc2} was Jonathan’s normal move against the Nimzo-Indian.

2) 4 \textit{wc2} has a good theoretical standing – White has reasonable chances for an edge.

3) 4 \textit{wc2} is undoubtedly White’s best move if he is happy for the game to result in a draw.

Regarding the final point, Black gets no chance to create a long-term imbalance in the position by inflicting doubled c-pawns on White. Also, in some of the more tactical variations White often has the option of choosing lines that lead to pretty drawish positions. A case in point is the move 4...d5, which I have played many times. This can lead to some incredibly sharp lines, but I was afraid that Jonathan would instead choose something like 5 a3 \textit{xc3+} 6 \textit{xc3} \textit{e4} 7 \textit{wc2} c5 8 dxc5 \textit{c6} 9 e3 \textit{a5+} 10 \textit{d2}. This is probably a tiny bit better for White, although certainly not enough to discourage Black from playing this line in general. The problem is that because the position simplifies quite quickly, it offers Black very few winning chances; certainly fewer in my opinion than in the Exchange French.

4...0-0 5 a3 \textit{xc3+} 6 \textit{xc3} b6 7 \textit{g5}
7...d6?!

In order to have a fighting chance of reaching a position in which I could go for a win as Black, I felt it necessary to play something a little bit different. I think that mainline theory tends to favour the White player when he is intent on making a draw. We’ve already seen this with 4...d5 and a similar comment could be applied to lines such as 7...b7 8 f3 h6 9 h4 d5 10 e3 Bd7 11 cxd5 Bxd5 12 xxd8 Bxc3 13 h4 Bxd5 14 f2. In principal I believe I made the right decision (to play something slightly different to the main line), but sadly I just made the wrong choice of move. It would have been better to play either 7...a6 or 7...c5.

The point behind playing 7...d6 is to keep development options open, delaying the decision on whether to play ...a6 or ...b7 until White has committed himself further. Black’s delaying tactics were justified in the game L.Ljubojevic-V.Kramnik, Monaco (blindfold) 2000, and after 8 f3?! Bbd7 9 e4 c5! 10 dxc5 bxc5 11 Bh3 h6 12 Bxf6? Bxf6 13 0-0–0 e5! 14 g4 Bb8 15 f2 Bb6 16 Bd2 We7 17 Bd1 xe6 and here Black was left with a very pleasant position.

Jonathan took quite a few minutes before replying to 7...d6 – time very well spent as he spotted a flaw in Black’s idea. I guess I could claim that I was a bit unlucky in that it’s not everyday you expect to get punished for following one of Kramnik’s ideas (albeit one he played in a blindfold game and has yet to repeat!).

8 f3!

This is an excellent practical move, not because it virtually forces the exchange of queens (we saw in Gurevich-Short that this doesn’t guarantee a draw), but because it does so without diminishing White’s small advantage. That is, White is making no concessions in the simplifications. It’s even possible that 8 f3 is objectively White’s strongest move, although if White were desperate to win there would a case for keeping more tension in the position.

8...c6 9 e3 Bb7
10 ]**xf6!**

The right time for this exchange, after Black has committed his bishop to b7 (to protect c6) and just before Black has had a chance to play ...**bd7. I had been hoping, but certainly not expecting, 10 ]**d3 ]**bd7! when Black is happy and can play for ...c6-c5. For example, 11 ]**e2 h6 12 ]**h4 ]**c7 13 0-0 c5 14 ]**h3 and here 14...**e4!, trading off one of White’s bishops, leaves Black comfortably placed and still with plenty to fight for.

10...**xf6

The tournament situation didn’t quite call for 10...gxf6? (I’m not sure what situation would call for this move) and I really don’t fancy Black’s chances of survival after 11 ]**d3 and ]**h3-f4 etc.

11 ]**xf6 gxf6 12 ]**e2!

White continues to play with great accuracy. The knight is much better placed on f4 or c3 than it would be on f3. On f4 it patrols d5 and there’s the option of annoying Black with ]**h5, while on c3 there’s the possibility of ]**e4 (see later!).

12...]**d7 13 ]**c3 ]**fd8?!  
I must admit that by this stage I was feeling rather disheartened because I was defending a slightly inferior ending with virtually no possibilities of creating winning chances.

13...c5 is not very good in a positional sense due to 14 d5, and in a tactical sense due to 14 ]**b5!. But after 13...f5!, planning ...]**f6, White’s edge can be kept to manageable proportions. White can play in boring fashion with ]**e2-f3, whereas Jonathan suggested the promising idea of h2-h3 followed by g2-g4.

14 ]**e4!
Seizing the moment – now White is clearly better. I thought for a while before playing the forced...

14...d5

...and offered a draw, which Jonathan accepted. In a different situation White could certainly play on with no risk after 15 cxd5 (the immediate 15 \( \mathcal{d}d6 \) also looks promising) 15...cxd5 16 \( \mathcal{d}d6 \)\! when after, say, 16...\( \mathcal{c}c6 \) 17 \( \mathcal{c}c1 \) \( \mathcal{b}b8 \) 18 \( \mathcal{b}b5 \) it’s clear that White is having all the fun available in this position.

A disappointing game as far as I was concerned, not so much because it was drawn but because I never reached a position – even a worse position – where I had the slightest chance to fight for a win. But I was impressed by Jonathan’s decision making in this game. Firstly, his choice of opening was undoubtedly the right one. Secondly, rather than quickly choosing a typical developing move after the unusual 7...d6, he wisely invested some time searching – and then finding – a move that virtually assured White of at least a draw. Finally, on moves 12-14, he realized the importance of playing the most accurate moves, really turning the screw and killing off any remote chances Black had.

**Last Round Nerves**

I don’t think anyone is immune from nerves in critical last-round games. I’ve been involved in and seen enough battles to realize that these games are often twitchy affairs. Players tend to demonstrate great battling qualities, a never-say-die attitude, but often there are also irrational decisions and a tendency for many mistakes from both sides.

There often seems to be added psychological pressure in the final round, for a number of reasons. No matter how well you’ve played in the previous rounds, your overall reflections – at least the initial ones – are usually to some extent based on what happened in your final game. You may have a great tournament, beat some strong players, gain rating points etc., but if you lose your final game and miss out on a prize because of this there’s naturally going to be some disappointment. Even if you have a middling performance, winning the final game will make it better than average, while losing it will make it a poor one. And disregarding everything else, winning your final game may give you confidence going into your next tournament. All of these factors add up.

The following game I think illustrates a typical last-round encounter in which play suffers due to nerves. In the previous ten rounds I had played some very good chess, won a couple of games against strong grandmasters, and had gained numerous rating points. This was by a distance my worst game of the tournament.

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**E.Liss-J.Emms**

*Copenhagen 1996*

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Both players were on 7/10, and a win would mean a share of second prize or, depending on other results, possibly even a share of first place.
1 e4 e5 2 d3 c6 3 b5 a6 4 a4 f6
5 0-0 b5 6 b3 c5

Although these days the Møller Variation is a well known defence to the Ruy Lopez, at the time of this game it was still a fairly new weapon. This was one of the reasons why I believed it to be a good practical choice, and my judgment was confirmed when my grandmaster opponent thought for a while before making a rather unfortunate move.

7 xe1?!

If White wishes to play for c2-c3 and d2-d4 then the immediate 7 c3 is fine. 7 xe4 is deemed too risky on account of 8 e2 d5 9 d3 f6 10 d4 or even the immediate 8 d4!, so instead Black continues 7...d6 after which 8 d4 b6 is one of the main lines.

Perhaps unsettled by 6...c5, my opponent opted to 'play it safe' by defending the e4-pawn, but in fact he ran into immediate difficulties.

7 g4!

I couldn't resist playing this move, which does make 7 xe1 look a bit silly. That said, if White reacts accurately, as far as I can see he doesn't actually lose anything. Of course there's nothing wrong with continuing as normal with 7...d6 8 c3 0-0 9 d4 b6 or 7...d6 9 c3 b7 9 d4 b6, reaching typical main lines.

8 xf1!

Calmly played. Admitting a mistake is not the easiest thing to do and it would have been very tempting for my opponent to try to justify 7 xe1. This, however, may have led to disaster:

1) 8 d4? (hoping for 8...exd4 9 g5! but...) 8...xd4! 9 xd4 (or 9 xf7+ xf7 10 g5+ e8 11 xg4 xc2) 9...wh4 10 xf3 xd4 11 xf7+ d8...

...and Black is winning.

2) 8 xe2 xd4?! 9 xd4 xd4 looks more than okay for Black. 10 c3?? loses immediately to 10...wh4!, while I'd be quite happy to play Black's position after 10 h3 xf2?? 11 xf2 xf2+ 12 xf2 wh4+ 13 f1 xe4 14 d3 wf5+ 15 g1 b7.

Going back to the position after 8 xf1, I was unsurprisingly trying to find a way to punish my opponent for his xf1-e1-f1. Trouble was, nothing obvi-
ous sprang to mind, and in many lines my knight on g4 was proving to be a liability. For example:

a) After 8...d6 Black has to be watchful of \( \text{d5} \) ideas (e.g. 9 \( \text{d5} \) \( \text{b7} \) 10 \( \text{d4} \)), or 10 \( \text{c3} \) and \( \text{d2-d4} \), so it makes sense to delay this for at least one move.

b) 8...\( \text{b7} \) 9 \( \text{c3} \) and again Black must be careful; for example, 9...d6? is bad on account of 10 \( \text{d4} \) \( \text{b6} \)

\[ \text{xf7+} \text{xf7} 12 \text{g5}+ \text{wxg4}. \]

This illustrates another problem of having the knight on g4.

c) 8...0-0 is more natural, and after 9 \( \text{h3} \) \( \text{f6} \) 10 \( \text{e1} \) d6 11 \( \text{c3} \) \( \text{b7} \) 12 \( \text{d4} \) \( \text{b6} \)

we have reached a fairly normal position in which Black can be reasonably happy that White has expended a tempo on the only semi-useful h2-h3. A powerful illustration of Black's chances in this line is seen in the game I.Morovic Fernandez-M.Adams, Santiago 1997: 13 \( \text{e3}? \) \( \text{e5}! \) 14 \( \text{c2} \) \( \text{c4} \) 15 \( \text{c1} \) d5! 16 b3 dxe4 17 \( \text{xe5} \) \( \text{xe5} \) 18 dxe5 \( \text{d7} \) 19 \( \text{f4} \) \( \text{wh4} \) 20 g3 \( \text{wh3} \) 21 \( \text{xe4} \) \( \text{xe4} \) 22 \( \text{xe4} \) \( \text{c5} \) 23 \( \text{e2} \) \( \text{ad8} \)

and White decided to throw in the towel because ...\( \text{d3} \) is arriving with devastating effect.

It should be said that this game arrived via a more conventional move order (i.e. without \( \text{e1} \) \( \text{g4} \); \( \text{f1} \)). More importantly, though, with our move order White has no need to rush with h2-h3. Instead 9 \( \text{c3}! \) d6 10 \( \text{d4} \) \( \text{b6} \) 11 \( \text{g5} \) gives White good chances of keeping some advantage because I can't see a better move for Black than 9...\( \text{f6} \).

d) Bearing all of this in mind, I'm quickly coming to the conclusion that Black's best bet is to play the outwardly paradoxical 8...\( \text{f6}! \), immediately going back to the mainline position reached after Black's 6th move and asking White to start again (after 9 \( \text{e1} \) there would be no need to repeat the position if Black didn't want to; he could simply play 9...d6). I think if I reached this position again, this is what I would do!

After analysing these variations, it could be concluded that 7 \( \text{e1} \) is a 'lucky oversight' (see Chapter 1). Its psychological effect was immediate, as shown by my next move.
8...\textcolor{red}{b6}?

This terrible move was the result of some major over-finessing on my part. Fearing \textcolor{red}{\textbf{d}5}, I didn't wish to commit to ...\textcolor{red}{d}7-\textcolor{red}{d}6 too early, and I also didn't want to commit to castling either. So in anticipation of c2-c3 and d2-d4 I decided to retreat my bishop. I was soon regretting this decision.

My idea was something like 9 c3 d6 and to answer 10 \textcolor{red}{\textbf{d}5} with 10...\textcolor{red}{\textbf{b}7} 11 d4 \textcolor{red}{\textbf{f}6}, although upon reflection even this is a bit better for White after 12 \textcolor{red}{\textbf{g}5}!. However, my thinking was clearly muddled because as soon as I played 8...\textcolor{red}{\textbf{b}6} I realized that it gave White the attractive possibility of 9 \textcolor{red}{\textbf{c}3}!? after which \textcolor{red}{\textbf{d}5}, hitting b6, is in the air. My opponent surprised me with something even stronger:

9 d4!

\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{chess_board.png}
\end{center}

Panic! Only nine moves into the game, I was worse and in a completely foreign position. And this was after having surprised my opponent at moves six and seven!

9...\textcolor{red}{\textbf{exd}4}

Forced. 9...\textcolor{red}{\textbf{exd}4} 10 \textcolor{red}{\textbf{xd}4} hits the knight on g4, and 10...\textcolor{red}{\textbf{h}4} is answered by 11 \textcolor{red}{\textbf{x}f7}+! \textcolor{red}{\textbf{xf}7} 12 \textcolor{red}{\textbf{f}3} \textcolor{red}{\textbf{xf}2}+ 13 \textcolor{red}{\textbf{h}1} followed by \textcolor{red}{\textbf{d}5}+.

10 \textcolor{red}{\textbf{g}5}!

This move highlights the folly of 8...\textcolor{red}{\textbf{b}6}. Had the bishop still been on c5 then ...\textcolor{red}{e}7 would have been a strong consideration. As it was I had to give up castling rights and by now I was beginning to feel very uncomfortable.

10...\textcolor{red}{\textbf{f}6}

10...\textcolor{red}{\textbf{f}6}? loses immediately to the reply 11 e5.

11 \textcolor{red}{\textbf{f}4}

Black's position is a bit of a shambles. White will follow up either with h2-h3 or the sequence c3, ...dxc3; \textcolor{red}{\textbf{xc}3} when his compensation for the pawn is plain to see. The force was with my opponent and I was very much on the back foot here, just trying to hang in there.

11...\textcolor{red}{\textbf{ge}5} 12 \textcolor{red}{\textbf{d}5}

Also interesting, and possibly stronger, is 12 \textcolor{red}{\textbf{xe}5} fxe5 13 \textcolor{red}{\textbf{xe}5}! \textcolor{red}{\textbf{xe}5} (perhaps 13...\textcolor{red}{\textbf{f}6} 14 \textcolor{red}{\textbf{xc}6} dxc6 keeps White's advantage manageable) 14 \textcolor{red}{\textbf{h}5}+ \textcolor{red}{\textbf{f}8} (14...\textcolor{red}{\textbf{g}6} 15 \textcolor{red}{\textbf{d}5}! is
White’s idea) 15 \texttt{\textbackslash Wxe5} \texttt{\textbackslash Wf6} 16 \texttt{\textbackslash Wg3} \texttt{\textbackslash b7} 17 \texttt{\textbackslash Cd2.}

12...\texttt{\textbackslash Bb8} 13 \texttt{\textbackslash Dxex5} \texttt{\textbackslash fxe5}

Not 13...\texttt{\textbackslash Dxe5?} 14 \texttt{\textbackslash Dxe5} \texttt{\textbackslash fxe5} 15 \texttt{\textbackslash Wh5+} and White wins.

14 \texttt{\textbackslash Dxc6} \texttt{\textbackslash exf4} 15 \texttt{\textbackslash Wh5+} \texttt{\textbackslash f8} 16 \texttt{\textbackslash Dd5} \texttt{\textbackslash We7} 17 \texttt{\textbackslash e5}

17...\texttt{\textbackslash Db7?} 18 \texttt{\textbackslash f5+} \texttt{\textbackslash e8} 19 \texttt{\textbackslash Dxb7} \texttt{\textbackslash Dxb7} 20 \texttt{\textbackslash Wxf4}

White is clearly better: Black has problems with his king, the ‘fianchettoed’ rook on b7 and also some pawn weaknesses.

20...\texttt{\textbackslash Dd8} 21 \texttt{\textbackslash Dd2} \texttt{\textbackslash Dc8} 22 \texttt{\textbackslash a4}

22 \texttt{\textbackslash Df3!} keeps more control, and after 22...\texttt{\textbackslash Df8} 23 \texttt{\textbackslash Dd4} \texttt{\textbackslash e6} 24 \texttt{\textbackslash a4} Black’s position is beginning to fall apart.

22...\texttt{\textbackslash Df8} 23 \texttt{\textbackslash Dd4}

We’ve reached a crucial moment of the game. Here 17...\texttt{\textbackslash c6!}? 18 \texttt{\textbackslash Db3} \texttt{\textbackslash c7} looks very risky because for the time being the bishop on c8 is dormant, but at least this sequence forces White to continue energetically and so it might well have been the best choice. 19 \texttt{\textbackslash Be1?} \texttt{\textbackslash d5!} is the idea, using the pin on the e-file to uncover the c8-bishop and, just as significantly, block out White’s bishop on b3. Instead 19 \texttt{\textbackslash Dd2} (19 \texttt{\textbackslash g3?!}) 19...\texttt{\textbackslash Dxe5} 20 \texttt{\textbackslash De1} \texttt{\textbackslash d6} 21 \texttt{\textbackslash Df3} \texttt{\textbackslash g6} 22 \texttt{\textbackslash Wh6+} \texttt{\textbackslash g7} is a line that sees Black surviving.

White has other possibilities but there is pressure on him to make something of his initiative before Black consolidates.

In contrast, the move I chose offers White a risk-free and rather large advantage – not the best practical decision ever made.

17...\texttt{\textbackslash Db7} 18 \texttt{\textbackslash f5+} \texttt{\textbackslash e8} 19 \texttt{\textbackslash Dxb7} \texttt{\textbackslash Dxb7} 20 \texttt{\textbackslash Wxf4}

At this point I thought the only chance was to confuse the issue, hoping that the random element of the position might bring about a mistake from my opponent.

23...\texttt{\textbackslash Wd4!} 24 \texttt{\textbackslash Df3} \texttt{\textbackslash bxa4}

This is a better randomizing attempt than 24...\texttt{\textbackslash Wxb2?}, which I didn’t consider. After 25 \texttt{\textbackslash Dfb1} \texttt{\textbackslash Dc3} 26 \texttt{\textbackslash axb5} \texttt{\textbackslash axb5} 27 \texttt{\textbackslash e6!} Black is on the precipice, for example 27...\texttt{\textbackslash dxe6} 28 \texttt{\textbackslash Wxe6+} \texttt{\textbackslash b8} 29 \texttt{\textbackslash Dd5.}

25 \texttt{\textbackslash e6!} \texttt{\textbackslash Wd6!}

I didn’t want to face the consequences of 25...\texttt{\textbackslash dxe6} 26 \texttt{\textbackslash Wxe6+} \texttt{\textbackslash b8} 27 \texttt{\textbackslash Dd5.}

26 \texttt{\textbackslash exd7+} \texttt{\textbackslash Wxd7}
29 \textit{c}4 ensures that White wins the a4-pawn, but 29...\textit{c}5 30 \textit{xa}4 \textit{f}6 gives Black counterplay based on the idea of ...\textit{e}6-e2 and ...d4-d3.

Having managed to claw my way back into the game, I now had a major rush of blood. With hardly any thought (and I wasn’t in time trouble), I sacrificed both of my a-pawns! Sadly, this just leads to a virtually losing position. Given that White will be better if he is allowed to capture on a4, I should have paid serious attention to the possibility of 29...\textit{a}5!, which looks ugly but has excellent nuisance value. Black plans to regroup with ...c7-c6 and ...d8-f6, so White cannot reply leisurely. One possible line would be 30 \textit{fe}1 (30 \textit{a}2 \textit{c}5 31 \textit{fa}1 regains the pawn, but 31...a3! 32 bxa3 \textit{d}6 illustrates a point of 29...\textit{a}5 – Black is better here) 30...a3!? 31 bxa3 (or 31 b3 c6 32 \textit{e}8+ \textit{d}7 33 \textit{g}8 \textit{d}6!) 31...c6 32 \textit{e}8+ \textit{d}8 reaching a very unclear endgame.

29...\textit{c}5! 30 \textit{xa}4

30...\textit{e}7?

Played a tempo. Okay, it’s true White is better, but after 30...a5! there is
still a lot of work for him to do.

31 \texttt{Exa6} \texttt{Exb7} 32 \texttt{Ea4}!

Of course White has to prevent ...\texttt{c4}. The plan is to put the rook on \texttt{c4} and then to slowly unravel.

32...\texttt{Ee2} 33 \texttt{Ec4} \texttt{g5} 34 \texttt{g4!} \texttt{Ef6}

After some thought, I suspected that rather than tie my rook to the defence of \texttt{c5}, the best chance to create drawing chances was to give up another pawn. After 34...\texttt{Ed5} White plays 35 \texttt{Ea1} followed by \texttt{Ef1}.

35 \texttt{Exc5+} \texttt{Exc5} 36 \texttt{Exc5} \texttt{Eb6}

Black's only chance is to win the \texttt{c2}-pawn and use the \texttt{d4}-pawn to create counterplay.

37 \texttt{b4} \texttt{Ec6} 38 \texttt{Exc6+} \texttt{Exc6} 39 \texttt{Ed1} \texttt{Ee4}

39...\texttt{Ed5} is met by 40 \texttt{c3}!.

40 \texttt{f3} \texttt{Ef4} 41 \texttt{Ef2} \texttt{Eb5}

42 \texttt{Ee2}?

I was on the verge of accepting defeat but after this move I suddenly became interested again! White gives up a pawn to activate his rook, but this gives Black undeserved drawing chances. I was expecting 42 \texttt{Eb1}! when Black eventually runs out of ideas. For example, 42...\texttt{Ff8} (42...\texttt{Ec4} 43 \texttt{Eb3}!

stops the king in its tracks and prepares \texttt{b4-b5}) 43 \texttt{Ee2} \texttt{Ec8} 44 \texttt{Ed3} \texttt{Ec3+} 45 \texttt{Exd4} \texttt{Exc2} 46 \texttt{h4! gxh4} 47 \texttt{Eh1} \texttt{Exb4} 48 \texttt{Exh4} \texttt{Ec7} 49 \texttt{f4} and it's all over.

42...\texttt{Xxb4} 43 \texttt{Eb1+} \texttt{Ec3} 44 \texttt{Eb7} \texttt{Xc2} 45 \texttt{Ec7+} \texttt{Eb3} 46 \texttt{Exh7}

46...\texttt{Ff8}?

After 46...\texttt{d3}+ 47 \texttt{Exd3} \texttt{Ef3+} 48 \texttt{Ee2} \texttt{Ff8} 49 \texttt{Eh5} \texttt{Eg8} 50 \texttt{Ed3} White wins easily with \texttt{Ee4-f5}. However, after the game Liss showed me 46...\texttt{Ec4}! when Black must be prepared to go 3-0 down on the kingside but in many variations his dangerous d-pawn provides enough counterplay to ensure a draw. One possible line runs 47 \texttt{Ec7+} \texttt{Ed5} 48 \texttt{Eg7} \texttt{Ff8}! 49 \texttt{Exg5+} \texttt{Ec4} 50 \texttt{h4} (50 \texttt{Ec5?!}) 50...\texttt{d3}+ 51 \texttt{Ed2} \texttt{Exf3} (51...\texttt{Ec8} 52 \texttt{h5} \texttt{Ec2}+ 53 \texttt{Ed1} \texttt{Eh2} probably also draws) 52 \texttt{Ef5} \texttt{Hh3} 53 \texttt{Ef4}+ \texttt{Ed5} 54 \texttt{g5} \texttt{Eg3}! 55 \texttt{Ee3} \texttt{Ec5} 56 \texttt{Eh6} \texttt{Hh3} 57 \texttt{Eh6} \texttt{Ef5} 58 \texttt{g6}\texttt{Ee6} 59 \texttt{h5} \texttt{Eg7} 60 \texttt{Eh7+} \texttt{Eg8} 61 \texttt{Ed2} \texttt{Eg3}! 62 \texttt{Ed7} \texttt{Eg5} 63 \texttt{Eh7} \texttt{Eg3} and White can make no progress.

47 \texttt{Ec7}!

Cutting off the king. White is winning again and this time my opponent showed great technique and no mercy.
47...b4 48 h3!

Not 48 d3 xf3+ 49 xd4 f4+.

48...b5

Or 48...h8 49 d3 xh3 50 f7 c5 51 f5+ d6 52 xd4 e6 53 e4.

49 d3! xf3+ 50 xd4 xh3 51 c5+ b6 52 xg5

At the time of this game 9...a5 had only been played once or twice (nowadays it’s quite common), but Mark Hebden had showed me a few ideas for Black and I felt quite confident unleashing it at the board.

This is a theoretically winning endgame for White because Black’s king cannot get back in time.

52 c7 53 e5 d7 54 f6 e3 55 f5 e7 56 g5 e8 57 g6 e1 58 g7 e2 59 g6 e1 60 h7 h1+ 61 g8 e1 62 h5 e2 63 g7 h2 64 xh2 1-0

My nerves held out better in the following game, ironically at the same place but a few years earlier. On this occasion first prize in the tournament was at stake.

R.Lau-J.Emms
Copenhagen 1992

1 e4 e5 2 f3 c6 3 d4 exd4 4 xd4 f6 5 xc6 bxc6 6 e5 e7 7 e2 d5 8 c4 b6 9 d2 a5!

10 e4 g6 11 d3 a4!!

Planning to bring the knight from the miserable b6-square to the centre of the action on e6. This idea really appealed to me, although objectively Black probably does better with 11 g7 12 0-0 0-0.

12 0-0

In a tournament just a few days later, my opponent showed that he had
done some homework on this line when we met up for a second time. There he discouraged the ...\[c5 idea with 12 \[b3!, and after 12...g7 13 0-0 0-0 14 e1 b7 15 b1 White was a bit better in R.Lau-J.Emms, Copenhagen (rapid) 1992.

12...\[c5 13 e2 g7 14 f3 e6!

15 h4?!  
Ambitious, but White should be content with simple centralization and play 15 d2 0-0 16 fe1.

15...0-0 16 h5 d6!

Normally I would have been reluctant to weaken my pawn structure like this, but White’s two tempi spent on h2-h4-h5 had encouraged me to open the position as quickly as possible.

17 hxg6 hxg6 18 exd6 \[d6! 19 d1 f4 20 xf4 xf4 21 e4 xe4 22 xe4 b8!

Objectively I believe this position is equal, but in practice I think it is slightly more difficult for White to play because of the long-term worry of having to face the two bishops. Certainly during the game I was very happy with the outcome of the first 22 moves.

23 ab1xb1 24 xb2 \[xb2 25 xc6 f5 26 d5 c3 27 b5?!

White should play 27 d4!.

27...d8! 28 b7 d1+ 29 h2b4!

The c7-pawn is protected indirectly due to the check on d6. I was beginning to feel that, with White’s a-pawn being vulnerable to attack, a win was now very much a possibility.

30 g3 d6 31 d5 g7 32 a7?

Under pressure, my opponent blunders. White should give the f2-pawn some much needed protection with the move 32 g2, even though Black can maintain the pressure with 32...a4 intending to continue ...a3. Here Black
need not fear an attack on f7 with 33 \( \text{g}5 \). In fact he can ignore it and continue with 33...a3 as 34 \( \text{xf7?} \) is met by 34...\( \text{xd5!} \), and 34 \( \text{xf7?} \) by 34...\( \text{e7!} \).

\[ 32...\text{xf1!} \]

[Diagram]

Horrified, my opponent realized that 33 \( \text{g}2 \) is answered by 33...\( \text{xf2+!} \) 34 \( \text{xf2 c5+}, \) winning back the rook. White had to go into swindle mode.

\[ 33 \text{c5 xf2+ 34 g1 xg3!?} \]

Black has other good moves in 34...\( \text{xf3} \) and 34...\( \text{xc5} \), but I was attracted by the sudden mating ideas based on ...\( \text{h3} \).

\[ 35 \text{xc7!} \]

The only chance.

\[ 36 \text{xf7+ h6 37 b3!} \]

I had seen that 37 c6 \( \text{h3} \) pretty much leaves White defenceless: 38 \( \text{h1 d6} \) 39 \( \text{f6 g2+} \) 40 \( \text{g1 c5+!} \).

\[ 37...\text{xc5 38 g2 d6 39 f6 c7 40 f2 c3} \]

Finally time control had been reached (both of us had been in mild time trouble). Black’s extra pawn coupled with the bishop pair should be enough for victory, but there is still a bit of work to be done.

I remember being very focussed for the rest of the game, trying to play the best moves in order not to let White off the hook, but also managing the time on the clock wisely.

\[ 41 \text{f8 b6+ 42 g3 c5! 43 f7 e4 44 g4 d6!} \]

The immediate threat is 45...\( \text{f5+} \), and 45 \( \text{d2} \) allows mate after 45...\( \text{g3+} \) 46 \( \text{h4 g5} \).

\[ 45 e6 e3! \]

Chasing the bishop. White is slowly running out of squares for his pieces (46 \( \text{b3} \) loses to 46...\( \text{f5+!} \).

\[ 46 c8 d5 47 f6 \]

The only square left on the f-file...
47...\texttt{c7}
...but ...\texttt{g7} is coming. White is helpless.
48 \texttt{d2} \texttt{g3}+ 49 \texttt{h4} \texttt{d3}!
Threatening ...\texttt{xd2} and ...\texttt{d8}.
50 \texttt{f5}

50...\texttt{d4}+!
There was still time to go wrong with 50...\texttt{xd2}?? 51 \texttt{xg6}+ \texttt{h7} 52 \texttt{g2}+
51 \texttt{h3} \texttt{g5}! 0-1
Winning two pieces! My opponent resigned and finally I could relax and reflect on a job well done.

Comparing the two games, in the Liss game I think my overall play was shaken by what happened in the opening, even though I did manage to get back into the game for a few moves. Some players react well to reaching unknown territory in the opening but this is perhaps not one of my strongest points, and in view of this I probably should, when possible, aim not to stray off the beaten track (7...\texttt{d6} and 8...\texttt{f6} would have both been good practical decisions, for example). In my game against Lau things ran much more smoothly in the opening and this set the tone for the rest of the game, which I felt I was able to play with quite a lot of confidence, and I was particularly pleased with my determination to grind out a win over the last ten moves.

\textbf{Converting Winning Positions}

\textit{Good positions don’t win games, good moves do.}

Gerald Abrahams

There are no secrets recipes for success here. When reaching a winning position I’ve found that victory is only assured if you continue to play good moves! Other than drifting into time trouble, which never helps, I’ve identified three obstacles that have sometimes caused me – and others I’m sure – to mess up winning positions.

\textbf{1) Poor trading}

When material ahead there is a natural tendency to trade pieces so as to emphasize your advantage. This seems logical purely on the basis of mathematics, i.e. 3 versus 2 is a better ratio than 4 versus 3, and likewise 2 versus 1 is a better ratio than 3 versus 2, although it’s clearly not as straightforward as that.

There’s also a general rule that when ahead on material you should exchange pieces; when you are behind you should exchange pawns. Taking an extreme case to illustrate the point, if you have two bishops versus one bishop in an endgame, swapping off all the pawns will leave you with a draw! If, however, you have an extra pawn and one bishop
each, the exchange of bishops, leaving a pawn ending, is likely to increase your winning chances.

A common mistake, which I think happens at all levels to some extent, is to accept concessions when exchanging. This also applies to players aiming to draw as well as those aiming to win (see the Gurevich-Short game, where each exchange seemed to slightly favour Black). If your advantage is absolutely overwhelming (a huge material plus, for example), then one or two concessions may not matter that much, but in many cases such trading can actually complicate the winning task.

In the following game I paid the price for exchanging too readily, and was only able to draw despite having an extra queen!

The plan with 8...b6 followed by ...b7, ...bd7 and ...c8 etc. is perfectly okay if White plays more slowly with 8 h3 or 8 b3, but here it is dubious because of tactical reasons.

9 g5 b7 10 d5! bd7?

The natural follow-up, but there’s a move out of the blue for White that is virtually winning!

If he doesn’t want his kingside pawns to be compromised Black must play 10...e6!, which limits White’s advantage after 11 xf6+ xf6 12 xf6 xf6 13 c3 (13 b5 c6 14 xd6 fd8 should probably be avoided).

11 a6!!

J. Emms – A. Summerscale
Hastings 1997/98

1 e4 c5 2 f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 xd4 f6
5 c3 g6 6 c4 g7 7 0-0 0-0 8 e1 b6?!

I must confess that this stunning move wasn’t my own work. If my memory serves me correctly, I had seen Bogdan Lalic spring this trap on Julian Hodgson at the London Mind Sports Olympiad a year earlier.

11...xa6!

Although after this Black is forced to give up his queen, it might well be Black’s best move, at least in a practical sense. It certainly did the job in this game.
There is no way on earth I would have usually considered a move such as 18 \ $\textit{\texttt{\textbf{\textsf{x}}}f6}, so why should I play it just because I'm material ahead?

2) \textbf{Cashing in too quickly?}
When you have a large positional advantage, there often comes a moment when you have a choice between maintaining this advantage and trading all or most of it for material gain. I must admit that this can be a tricky decision and there are no easy answers. Each example has to be judged on its own merits. What I would say, though, is that this is an important moment in the game, and when reaching a position like this it's worth investing some time to help you to reach the right decision.

When you cash in all your positional advantages for material gains, it alters the dynamics of the position. You are no longer necessarily dominating; instead you are in the process of trying to convert your extra material. Your opponent, who may have been under the cosh for a long time, might no longer be burdened by continual defence. He might even suddenly gain some counterplay which, even if it comes to nothing, still has to be dealt with. On the other hand, if you fail to cash in and take the material on offer, there's the worry that your positional advantage isn't that great after all; your opponent will manage to consolidate; and you'll have lost the chance to win material. Decisions, decisions!

In the following game I was too eager to cash in and win a pawn. Had I thought for a bit longer I would have realized that it was far more profitable to keep all of my other advantages.

\textbf{J.Emms-L.McShane}

\textit{British Championship, Hove 1997}

![Chessboard Diagram]

I had already blown a big advantage earlier in the game, and all the signs were now pointing towards a draw. But I was about to get a second chance.

28 $\textit{\texttt{\textbf{\textsf{xf}}}6$ $\textit{\texttt{\textbf{\textsf{c}}}5$?

After 28...$\textit{\texttt{\textbf{\textsf{g}}}7$, it's unlikely that White's more active rook will be enough to cause Black any real worries.

29 $\textit{\texttt{d}7$ $\textit{\texttt{d}4$ 30 $\textit{\texttt{b}3

Now Black has major problems with back rank mates. In any case, the bishop on d4 is not as well placed as it initially appears, especially in view of $g2$, f2-f4 ideas. I was starting to feel confident about winning here.

30...axb3 31 axb3 h6

Black is seeking to play ...$g6$-g5, after which the king can escape its prison with ...$h7$-g6. It's difficult to suggest
another idea for Black:

a) Approaching the white rook doesn’t help: 31...\&f8 32 \&g2 \&e8 33 \&d5 and White can choose between \&xe5 and f2-f4.

b) Playing 31...b4 means that \&d5 no longer attacks two pawns, but the fact that the b-pawn is now fixed on a dark square gives Black another problem — that pawn suddenly becomes a real weakness in a bishop ending. One line that illustrates this is 32 \&f1 \&c3 33 \&e2 h5 34 f3 \&f8 35 \&d8+! (appearing to release the tension, but...) 35...\&xd8 36 \&xd8 \&e8 37 \&a5 and Black has no good solution to the threat of \&d3-c4 followed by \&xb4.

32 \&d5 \&e8

A critical moment. I was aware of more than one enticing possibility, but somehow I couldn’t resist the idea of cashing in my advantages to capture on b5.

33 \&xb5?

The trouble is, after this move much of the momentum of White’s position disappears — I realized this as soon as Luke played his next move. Of course White is left with a pawn advantage, but it’s a far from easy procedure to convert this into a full point.

Conversely, after 33 \&g2!, planning f2-f4, White has Black in a horrible bind. Also, as well as being objectively lost, this position is incredibly difficult for Black to play over the board (and lots of fun for White!). Variations demonstrate how Black can get slowly but surely crushed. For example, 33...g5 34 f4! gx4 35 gx4 \&c8 36 f5! (keeping the mating net, although of course 36 fxe5 isn’t bad either!)

36...b4 37 \&d7 (the white king will advance) 37...h5 38 \&g3 \&c3+ 39 \&h4 \&f2+ 40 \&g5 \&g3+ 41 \&h6 \&e3+ 42 \&xh5 \&xh3+ 43 \&g4 and it’s over.

33...\&g5!

Suddenly Black threatens to chase the bishop away with 34...\&e6 and then follow up with ...\&c6-c2, hitting f2 and justifying the bishop’s placement on d4. The flow of the game has changed, as it so often tends to once a player cashes in his positional advantage for material gains.

34 h4 gxh4 35 \&xh4 \&g7!
It's difficult to see what White does with the h4-bishop after 43 g5. It's interesting that since 33 \textit{\textbf{xb5}} Black's bishop has overshadowed its counterpart, which for a long time was the dominant force.

\textbf{43...\textit{\textbf{xh5}} 44 \textit{\textbf{g3}} \textit{\textbf{g6}} 45 \textit{\textbf{g8+}} \textit{\textbf{h7}} 46 \textit{\textbf{b8}} \textit{\textbf{g6}} 47 \textit{\textbf{f3}} \textit{\textbf{f5}}}!

Forcing another pawn trade. The draw is now in sight.

\textbf{48 \textit{\textbf{exf5+}} \textit{\textbf{xf5}} 49 \textit{\textbf{f8+}} \textit{\textbf{e6}} 50 \textit{\textbf{e8+}} \textit{\textbf{f5}} 51 \textit{\textbf{f8+}} \textit{\textbf{e6}} 52 \textit{\textbf{e4}} \textit{\textbf{xb5}} 53 \textit{\textbf{h8}} \textit{\textbf{b4}} 54 \textit{\textbf{h6+}} \textit{\textbf{d7}} 55 \textit{\textbf{h7+}} \frac{1}{2}-\frac{1}{2}

3) \textbf{Avoiding tactics}

On occasions I've been guilty of trying to convert winning or advantageous positions with the complete avoidance of tactics, even ones that appear favourable to me. It's true that some games can be won without using any tactics, but this is rare between players of similar standards. Furthermore, trying to avoid tactics for the sake of it is a dangerous mindset to get into, especially if this means passing up winning opportunities, which is exactly what happens in the following game.
1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 c2 d2 c5 4 exd5 exd5 5 g3 c6 6 b5 cxd4 7 xd4 d7 8 f3 f6 9 0-0 e7 10 xc6 bxc6 11 e5 c8 12 xd7 xd7 13 f3 g4 14 xg4 xg4 15 f5 f8 16 h3 f6 17 b3 e4 18 b2 f6 19 c4 f7 20 ac1 c5 21 cxd5 cxd5 22 d4 hd8 23 f3 xd4+ 24 xd4 c5? 25 fd1!

I had envisaged bringing my king up, trading all the rooks and then winning the king and pawn ending by creating an outside passed pawn on the queenside. See, no tactics! I was sadly deluded.

27 e1+?!

I wanted to avoid 27 f2 d4!, but this would have been the better choice.

27...d6 28 f2 e8!

Suddenly Black is better because White can’t get his king to the d-file. Around this time I was analysing 26 c6 to a forced win and really kicking myself (I know, very poor practice, but who hasn’t done this before?). Eventually I got back to the depressing thought of having to save a worse ending.
Grinding out Endgame Wins

It doesn’t matter what style of chess you play, or which openings you employ. You may play as aggressively as Tal or Shirov, but on occasions you’ll still end up with ‘boring’ technical positions. Sometimes they simply cannot be avoided, especially if your opponent is White and chooses to play in a certain way.

If you are looking to beat a lower-rated opponent from a quiet position, patience is important. You have to be prepared for the long haul. One thing that’s worth remembering and repeating to yourself during a game is that a lower-rated player may match your standard of play for many moves, or even outplay you, but the odds are at some point a mistake will come, even if it is 20 or 30 moves down the line, and then you must be ready to pounce. Also, I don’t think you need to fear going into endgames which you suspect with best play should end up as a draw. This is simply because ‘best play’ is one thing that can never be counted upon! Furthermore, when you study endgames you soon realize that in many positions there is a lot more going on than you would first imagine, and still plenty of scope to outplay your opponent. The following game qualifies as a typical endgame grind:

L.Eckhardt-J.Emms
Gibraltar 2004

1 d4 Nf6 2 Nf3 e6 3 c3 c5 4 cxd4 5

Black’s d8-rook cannot move off the back rank or else 27 Ne5+ would win material. So 26...Re8 27 Bxd5 wins a pawn. This position scared me a little on account of the pin on the c-file and also the immediate possibility of 27...Bf4, but this is a perfect position to use CEM (see Chapter 1). After 28 fd7+ it can be shown that Black has no good way to continue and White stabilizes: 28...Bf8 29 Bc4!; 28...Bxe6 29 Bxd2!; or 28...Bg6 29 Bc4!. Also, after 27...c7 there is 28 Bc4! Bxe8 29 a5 – not that difficult to see really.
exd4 e7 6 d3 b6 7 f3 b7 8 bd2 d6 9 0-0 0-0 10 e2 bd7 11 fe1 e8 12 a4 a6 13 h3 c7 14 e4

This e4 idea is typical; White attempts to swap off some minor pieces in a bid to simplify the position. There’s a temptation to prevent White from doing this by playing 13...d5 but this would be a poor decision. Apart from blocking the b7-bishop, this move allows White an easy plan beginning with 14 e5 and then massing his pieces for a kingside attack.

14...h6 15 f4 xe4 16 xe4 xe4 17 xe4 f6 18 d3 b7 19 d2 b5

The first stages of the so-called minority attack. Black’s long-term plan is to create pawn weaknesses on the queenside by advancing the pawn to b4.

20 e4 xe4 21 xe4 xe4 22 xe4 d5! 23 e2 ec8 24 axb5 axb5 25 ee1 g5 26 d2

Despite the reduced material, there’s still quite a bit going on here. It’s possible for Black to build up slowly with ...g7-g6 etc. but after the text move White is forced, really for the first time in the game, to make one or two difficult decisions.

26...b4! 27 cxb4

There’s an argument here for White to allow Black to capture on c3, because it might be easier to patrol a lone weakness on c3 rather than ones on d4 and b2.

27...ab8

Now 28 a4 c4! regains the pawn.

28 ec1!

It makes sense to trade a pair of rooks, as White’s task is very difficult in a double rook ending. For example, 28 ed1? xb4 29 xb4 xb4 30 d2 cc4 31 ad1 b3! and White is completely tied down. Yes there are drawing chances, but this would be an incredibly difficult position for White to play over the board.

28...xc1+ 29 xc1 xb4 30 c2 xd2 31 xd2 g7

Despite first appearances (and the saying that ‘all rook endings are drawn’), there’s still plenty of play left in this position. White has the outside passed pawn but at the moment it is more a weakness than a strength, and White’s rook on d2
is currently tied down to its defence. The value of the b-pawn will only increase once it can be supported by the king. Indeed White has a plan: moving the king to c3 and following up with b2-b4, b2-b4-b5! etc. So...

32 ♘f1! ♙g6

Black’s king also rushes to the scene of action. If it could reach the e4-square then things would really begin to look rosy for Black.

33 ♜e2 ♙f5 34 ♘d3! f6

I decided that to make progress I should play ...f7-f6 and ...e6-e5, trying to create a strong central pawn duo. It seems a shame to rid White of his d4 weakness, but it’s unclear how else Black should proceed in the face of ♘c3 and b2-b4. 34...♗b3+ is tempting, but after 35 ♘c2 ♗b4 36 ♘c3 ♗c4+ 37 ♘d3 Black hasn’t really achieved very much, and now White plans b2-b3.

35 ♘c3!

So far, very good play from my opponent. He hadn’t let anything deter him from the main plan of trying to advance the b-pawn.

35...♗c8+

36 ♘d3!

Another good move. Black’s rook has been shifted from the b-file to the c-file so b2-b4 is on the cards. It’s tempting to carry on with 36 ♘b4 in order to further support the b-pawn, but White must be careful that his king doesn’t get cut off from the action in the centre and Black now creates a dangerous passed pawn of his own. After 36...♖c1 37 ♘a5 e5! 38 b4 exd4 39 ♘xd4 ♘e5 40 ♘d2 d4 41 b5 ♘d5! 42 b6 ♘c4 43 b7 ♕b1 44 ♘a6 d3 White is in some trouble. The problem is that if both rooks sacrifice themselves for the passed pawns, in the ensuing pawn ending Black’s king is nearer the kingside pawns. For example, 45 ♘a7 ♘c3 46 ♘a2 d2 47 ♘xd2 ♘xd2 48 b8♕ ♘xb8 49 ♘xb8 ♘e2 and Black wins easily.

36...e5

The only way to make progress. 36...♖c1 37 b4 ♕g1 is far too risky given the potential of White’s b-pawn. Instead 36...♖b8 is of course possible, but White can play 37 ♘c3! after which Black is struggling to come up with anything better than repeating moves.
37 $e_3$?
Finally my opponent makes a mistake. Perhaps he was reluctant to give me two connected and unopposed pawns in the centre, but 37 $\text{dxe5! fxe5}$ and then 38 $\text{b4!}$ intending $\text{xb2}$ was a more consistent follow-up to White’s previous play, and I think this leads to a draw with best play. For example, 38...$e_4$! 39 $\text{d4 c4+ 40 xd5 xb4}$ 41 $\text{a2 b1 42 a8 d1+ 43 c5 d2 44 f8+ g6 45 g4 d3 46 a8 xh3 47 a6+ g7 48 d5 e3 49 fxe3 xe3 50 a7+.$
37...$e_4$!

This pawn causes White a lot of grief, and now Black simply plans to gain more ground with ...$\text{b8-b3}$. It’s not clear whether Black’s objectively winning at this stage, but his practical winning chances have just increased significantly.

38 $\text{f3}$
The problem with 38 $\text{b4?}$ now is that 38...$\text{c3+! 39 e2 b3}$ simply picks up the pawn.
38...$\text{exf3 39 xf3}$!
The best move, even though White’s king is suddenly back on the kingside despite having been on c3 a few moves ago!
39 $\text{gxf3 b8}$ followed by ...$\text{b3+}$ and then ...$\text{f4}$ would decide the game immediately in Black’s favour.
39...$\text{b8}$!

40 $\text{e2}$?
Under pressure, a second mistake follows, and by this stage I was totally confident of winning. White has to take the opportunity presented to force the black king backwards by playing 40 $\text{g4+!}$ even though Black maintains good chances after 40...$\text{g6}$ based on the idea of ...$\text{b3}$ and pawn breaks with ...$\text{h6-h5}$ and ...$\text{f6-f5}$. One possible continuation is 41 $\text{g2 b4 42 f3 h5 43 g3 f5}$ etc.
40...$\text{e4! 41 d1}$
White’s king rushes back to the queenside but this time Black’s kingside pawns, supported by his dominant king, hurry down the board to ensure victory.
41...$\text{f5 42 c2 h5 43 c3 c8+!}$
But not 43...$\text{f4?? 44 e2+ f5 45 e5+!}$. 

82
44 b4 f4 45 b3 g4 46 hxg4 hxg4

47 e2+
Otherwise ...f4-f3, ...e3 etc.
47...xd4 48 d5 f3 49 gxf3 gxf3 50 d2+ e4 51 b4 f8 0-1
Black wins after 52 b5 f2.

I was able to play this endgame with confidence because I had experienced quite a few similar positions before: with White as a youngster trying - usually unsuccessfully - to draw with higher-rated and more experienced players; and later on with Black trying to win against lower-rated players. Here's a game played eight years before the one above, and the similarities are quite revealing.

C.Rice-J.Emms
St. Albans 1996

1 d4 f6 2 f3 e6 3 g5 c5 4 e3 cxd4 5 exd4 b6 6 b2 b7 7 d3 e7 8 0-0 0-0 9 e1 d6 10 c3 bd7 11 c2 c8 12 e4

Again White opts for the simplify-

12...g6 13 xf6+ xf6 14 xf6 ef6 15 e2 e8 16 a6 c7 17 xb7 xb7 18 d2 b5
The same plan: Black goes for a minority attack, not concerned about a final minor piece trade on e4.
19 e4
There's a case for playing 19 a3!? here because after 19...a5 followed by ...b5-b4 White is able to trade the a-pawns and have one less weakness to worry about.
19...xe4 20 xe4 xe4 21 xe4 b4!

I think this is more accurate than 21...a5 22 a3 (see the note above).
22 \textit{Be}3

Or 22 \textit{cxb4 d5} 23 \textit{Be}2 \textit{Mc4}, regaining the pawn and keeping an edge after, say, 24 \textit{Md1 Ec8} (threatening 25...\textit{Exd4}!) 25 \textit{f3 Exb4}.

22...\textit{Mc4} 23 \textit{Mc1 bxc3} 24 \textit{bxc3 Eb8}

White’s defence is long and difficult. Clearly the presence of the a-pawns increases Black’s winning chances.

25 \textit{Wf1 Ef8} 26 \textit{We1}

White continues as in the previous game – the king rushes to the queenside to help to defend the weak pawns. However, this is a much more difficult task when there are two black rooks buzzing around instead of one, and 26 \textit{We2?} loses a pawn to 26...\textit{Eb2+} 27 \textit{Wd3 Ea4}.

26...\textit{Aa4} 27 \textit{Me2 d5} 28 \textit{Wd1 We7} 29 \textit{Mc2 Wd6} 30 \textit{Aa1}

31...\textit{e5} 32 \textit{dxe5+ fxe5} 33 \textit{Mb1 Exb1+} 34 \textit{Exb1 We4}!

A tortuous way to set up a rook trade with \textit{Wc1} and \textit{Mb1}. White succeeds in this task, but the time it takes allows Black to get going in the centre.

30...\textit{f6}!

Again Black goes for ...\textit{e5}.

31 \textit{Wc1}

White should probably try 31 \textit{f4}, the idea being to exchange an extra set of pawns after ...\textit{e5}. However, 31...\textit{h6} followed by ...\textit{g5} looks like a promising way for Black to continue, If 32 \textit{h4}, then 32...\textit{e5} 33 \textit{dxe5+ fxe5} 34 \textit{fxe5+ Wxe5} leaves White having to defend \textit{h4}, and 35 \textit{g3 Wf8!} keeps up the pressure.

31...\textit{e5} 32 \textit{dxe5+ fxe5} 33 \textit{Mb1 Exb1+} 34 \textit{Exb1 We4}!

White is worse off than in our previous example as Black already has two impressive central pawns supported by a king and this time there is no passed b-pawn to act as counterplay. Because of this, Black’s rook is free to roam and attack White’s pawns.

35 \textit{Wb2 Wc5} 36 \textit{Wb3 We1} 37 \textit{Ed2 Wh1} 38 \textit{h3 Wg1} 39 \textit{f3}

39 \textit{g3} is met by 39...\textit{g5}, when White has to worry about ...\textit{Wh1}.

39...\textit{We1}!

Now that \textit{f2-f3} has been induced, Black has two further possibilities: the creation of a passed pawn with ...\textit{e5-e4}, and the idea of ...\textit{We3} followed by ...\textit{d5-d4}.

40 \textit{Wc2}
White feels obliged to concede ground by moving his king, but the alternatives are depressing: 40 a4 \(\text{e}3\) 41 \(\text{c}2\) d4 42 \(\text{c}1\) dxc\! 43 \(\text{x}c3+\) \(\text{x}d4\); and 40 \(\text{d}3\) \(\text{e}2\).

40...\(\text{c}4!\)

This must be winning for Black now.

41 \(\text{f}2\) \(\text{e}3\) 42 \(\text{b}2\) \(\text{d}3\)

42...\(\text{x}c3\) 43 \(\text{e}2\) \(\text{d}3\) 44 \(\text{xe}5\) \(\text{d}2+\)

45 \(\text{b}1\) \(\text{x}g2\) is also good enough.

43 \(\text{f}4\) \(\text{d}4\)

44 \(\text{xd}4\)

Or 44 \(\text{f}xe5\) \(\text{d}xc3+\) 45 \(\text{b}3\) \(\text{xe}5\) 46 \(\text{f}3+\) \(\text{d}2\) 47 \(\text{f}2+\) \(\text{e}2\) 48 \(\text{xe}2+\) \(\text{xe}2\) 49 \(\text{xc}3\) \(\text{f}2\).

44...\(\text{exd}4\) 45 \(\text{b}3\) \(\text{e}2\) 46 \(\text{f}3+\) \(\text{e}4\) 0-1

Black wins after 47 \(\text{f}1\) \(\text{d}3\) 48 \(\text{g}4\) \(\text{d}2\) 49 \(\text{d}1\) \(\text{d}3\) and ...\(\text{e}1\).

**Draw?**

I remember a well-known grandmaster once saying that knowing when to offer a draw is a skill that can add a significant number of points to your rating. I agree with this, and I definitely think this subject deserves a few words.

Draw offers are of significant practical importance. They are not merely a way of saying you are happy with a draw. In fact in certain cases the player offering the draw is not happy at all with the thought of a draw! Grandmaster Nigel Davies has said that he’s found draw offers to be of good practical value when his opponent ‘has the better position but is not handling his clock too well. In this case a draw offer is a way of asking if he wants to roll the dice, and thinking about this question (i.e. using more clock time) can tip the odds further against him should he decline.’ I’ve certainly used this technique before, and I know countless others who have too.

Talking of offering draws at the right time, a skill which I’ve already touched upon in Chapter 1 is the ability to offer a draw just before your opponent realizes how good his position is. In certain cases the position in which the draw offer is made may initially look difficult to assess, but after a few more natural moves are played out it becomes clear what is happening, so
timing here really is important.

In the following game I suspect that my draw offer (on move 32) came just in time. Let’s first of all see some of the build-up play.

J. Emms-B. Connell
London 1992

24...\textit{d}7!

This forces an endgame which on first sight looks equal, but on closer inspection Black enjoys some winning chances.

25 \textit{d}2!

The only move to avoid losing material.

25...\textit{x}d2+ 26 \textit{x}d2 \textit{xe}5!

It’s important to saddle White with an isolated pawn.

27 \textit{xe}5!

White can choose to keep the rooks on the board with 27 fxe5 but after 27...\textit{d}7 the Black king will sit very nicely on e6, both attacking White’s e5 weakness and defending f7. After, say, 28 \textit{d}3 \textit{e}6 29 \textit{e}4 \textit{d}8! Black also has control of the d-file and it’s becoming more and more obvious that White has a long, defensive and possibly fruitless task ahead.

27...\textit{xe}5 28 fxe5 \textit{d}7

Heading for e6.

29 \textit{e}3 \textit{g}6!

30 \textit{g}4!

I realized this move was forced, even though I felt uneasy about the possible pawn weakness on h5.

After 30 hxg6 fxg6 Black has the potentially decisive possibility of creating an outside passed pawn on the kingside, and this was something I was definitely trying to avoid. A sample line runs 31 \textit{e}4 \textit{e}6 32 a4 (32 g4? h5! 33 gxh5 gxh5 is an illustration of how it can go horribly wrong for White – the h-pawn will be used as a decoy and Black’s king will devour White’s pawns on the queenside) and now Black can draw if he wants by just playing ...\textit{e}7-e6, but 32...c5! is much stronger. The problem is that White could easily run out of useful moves. For example, 33 b3 b6 34 c3 (or 34 c4 g5! 35 g4 a6 and White is in zugzwang)
34...a6 35 b4 c4! 36 f4 (after 36 b5 a5! 37 d4 h5 38 xc4 xe5 39 d3 d5 40 c4+ c5 again the ability to create an outside passed pawn is decisive) 36...d5 37 g4 b5 38 a5 e6! 39 e4 h5! and Black wins.

30...gxh5 31 gxh5 e6 32 f4

Without being able to calculate the endgame through to the end, I was now beginning to feel that the position was either drawn or a win for Black with best play. Here I offered a draw, which after a bit of thought my opponent accepted.

At first sight the position looks difficult to assess and some might even argue that White has the more active king, but after a bit more thought and trying out some variations it becomes clear that it's Black who has the real winning chances based on the following two factors:

1) The ability to play ...f7-f6 or ...f7-f5 at the most suitable moment.

2) The vulnerability of White's advanced h-pawn after the exchange of the e- and f-pawns.

This second factor is very important for the assessment of many variations. Move both the h-pawns one square towards White's first rank and it would then be Black in trouble.

After the game I was able to fully analyse the position and I suspect with best play the result is a draw. However, Black can put White under pressure to find some 'only moves' after 32...c5!.

For example:

a) 33 e4? (natural, but...) 33...f6! (as I mentioned above, Black has the major advantage of being able to choose when to release the e- and f-pawn tension; here is the right time) 34 exf6 xf6 35 f4 (after 35 d5 g5 36 xc5 xh5 the outside passed pawn decides) 35...c4! and White finds himself in zugzwang: 36 b3 cxb3 37 cxb3 b5 38 a4 (or 38 b4 a6!) 38...b4! 39 a5 a6! 40 g4 e5 and White's king is 'squeezed' after 41 g3 f5 42 h4 f4 43 h3 g5 etc.

b) 33 c4? a5! (again this leads to zugzwang) 34 a4 (or 34 b3 f6! 35 exf6 xf6 36 a4 b6!) 34...f6! 35 exf6 xf6 36 b3 b6
37 ℄e4 (or 37 ℄g4 ℄e5 38 ℄g3 ℄f5! 39 ℄h4 ℄f4 40 ℄h3 ℄g5, winning) 37... ℄g5 38 ℄d5 ℄xh5 39 ℄c6 ℄g4 40 ℄xb6 h5 and the h-pawn is too fast for White.

c) 33 a4! draws, although White must still show some care: 33...a5 34 b3! (34 c4? f6; 34 c3? c4 35 ℄e4? f6! 36 exf6 ℄xf6 37 ℄d4 ℄g5 38 ℄xc4 ℄xh5 39 b4 ℄g4!; and finally 34 ℄e4? f6! 35 exf6 ℄xf6 36 ℄f4 c4! are all winning for Black) 34...f6 35 exf6 ℄xf6

36 c3! (after 36 c4? b6! White is again in zugzwang) 36... ℄e6 37 ℄e4! ℄f6 38 ℄f4! and White finally earns his draw.

Here's another example, and on this occasion it was my opponent whose timing was just right.

A.Vyzmanavin-J.Emms
Benidorm 1993

1 d4 ℄f6 2 c4 e6 3 ℄f3 c5 4 d5 d6 5 ℄c3 exd5 6 cxd5 g6 7 e4 a6 8 h3 b5 9 ℄d3 ℄g7 10 0-0 c4 11 ℄c2 0-0 12 ℄f4 ℄e8 13 ℄e1 ℄b7 14 ℄c1 ℄b6 15 ℄e3 ℄a5 16 a3 ℄bd7 17 ℄d2 ℄c7

Trying to summarize this position in a nutshell: White has a very strong centre and some chances to attack on the kingside; Black's counterplay is based on his extra space on the queenside.

18 ℄d4 ℄c5 19 ℄f3 ℄fd7 20 ℄f4!

Now that the knight has left f6, this move is possible. It certainly makes sense to deprive Black of the possibility of ...℄d7-e5 and then a knight landing on d3, as this would promise Black serious counterplay.

With that avenue closed, I tried to find more activity on the queenside.
20...\textit{\texttt{a8}} 21 \textit{\texttt{f2}} \textit{\texttt{a8}}!

Planning to activate the rook via ...b5-b4. Of course this is a double-edged idea as it leaves both the a6- and c4-pawns isolated, but with a semi-open b-pawn and pressure against b2 this seemed to me like a good trade.

22 \textit{\texttt{f3}}?

Planning to get rid of the powerful Benoni bishop with \textit{\texttt{f2-d4}}, after which Black's kingside defences are weakened and his queenside pressure lessened. Actually, this provides a strong argument for White playing \textit{\texttt{d4}} instead of \textit{\texttt{d4}} on move 18.

22...\textit{\texttt{b4}}! 23 \textit{\texttt{xb4}} \textit{\texttt{xb4}} 24 \textit{\texttt{d4}}?

I remember thinking that this pawn sacrifice was a good practical decision. I was certainly less afraid of White playing defensively with 24 \textit{\texttt{b1}} \textit{\texttt{eb8}} 25 \textit{\texttt{d1}}.

24...\textit{\texttt{xd4+}}

Here Black can play 24...\textit{\texttt{xb2}} 25 \textit{\texttt{xg7}} \textit{\texttt{b3}}! (I had been concerned about lines such as 25...\textit{\texttt{xg7}} 26 \textit{\texttt{d4+}} \textit{\texttt{g8}} 27 \textit{\texttt{d1}} \textit{\texttt{b4}} 28 \textit{\texttt{e3}} and \textit{\texttt{g4}}, highlighting my kingside weaknesses) 26 \textit{\texttt{e3}} \textit{\texttt{xc1}} 27 \textit{\texttt{xc1}} \textit{\texttt{xc2}} 28 \textit{\texttt{xc2}} \textit{\texttt{xg7}} when White's centre provides some compensation for the pawn, but I certainly would have gone for this option had I noticed 25...\textit{\texttt{b3}}!.

25 \textit{\texttt{xd4}} \textit{\texttt{xb2}} 26 \textit{\texttt{e5}}!

\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=0.8\textwidth]{chess_board.png}
\end{center}

White is a pawn down but he is beginning to motor in the centre and I was naturally concerned about discovered attacks on the b2-rook. During the game I was feeling under some pressure here and I was aware of the need to find some accurate defensive moves just to stay in the game.

26...\textit{\texttt{dxe5}} 27 \textit{\texttt{xe5}}! \textit{\texttt{xe5}} 28 \textit{\texttt{fxe5}} \textit{\texttt{b6}} 29 \textit{\texttt{b1}}!

29 d6? \textit{\texttt{d7}}! would offer Black welcome relief via the exchange of queens.

29...\textit{\texttt{xb1}} 30 \textit{\texttt{xb1}} \textit{\texttt{c7}} 31 \textit{\texttt{xc4}}?

Now there is the very real threat of 32 \textit{\texttt{e4}} (this is also the response to 31...\textit{\texttt{xe5}}?) but fortunately I had found a resource that uses the piece pile-up on the c-file to my advantage instead of White's.

Both players missed the strength of 31 \textit{\texttt{b4!}}, threatening to capture on c4 under even more favourable circumstances. The point is that after 31...\textit{\texttt{d7}}
(31...\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{x}e5}}}} loses to 32 \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{x}c4}}) White has the powerful reply 32 \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{a}4!}} when things are really becoming quite desperate for Black (that bishop on a8 hardly helps!). White might just capture on d7 and follow up with the enticing \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{e}4-f6+}}.
\texttt{31...\texttt{\texttt{c}8! 32 \texttt{\texttt{e}1 d7!}}}

Finally I was breathing much more easily.
\texttt{33 \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{w}x}c7 \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{x}c7 34 e6}}}}
Against 34 \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{e}3?}} Black doesn’t play 34...\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{x}e5??}} – on account of 35 d6! – but 34...\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{x}d5!}}.
\texttt{34...\texttt{\texttt{f}xe6 35 dx}e6 \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{f}6 36 e3?}}}
Objectively, it was time to bail out with 36 \texttt{\texttt{e7! \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{x}c3 37 e8\texttt{+ \texttt{\texttt{x}e}8 38 \texttt{\texttt{x}xe8+ \texttt{\texttt{f}7 39 \texttt{\texttt{x}xa8 \texttt{\texttt{x}c2 40 \texttt{\texttt{x}a6 when there’s nothing else to do but to agree a draw.}}}}}}}}
\texttt{36...\texttt{\texttt{f}8! 37 \texttt{\texttt{b}3 e7}}}
And now my opponent played...
\texttt{38 g4}
...and offered a draw. After a little bit of thought – though not much – I accepted. There are two factors that influenced my decision:
1) My opponent out-rated me by nearly 200 rating points.
2) I had been under quite a bit of pressure for much of the game, so I was keen to get my ‘reward’.

Later on I showed the game to Mark Hebden, who was competing in the same tournament. I think I was keen to show off my 31...\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{x}c8, 32...\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{d}d7 idea, but in the final position Mark felt I should have played on, and I must admit this thought had been nagging at my mind just a little bit.}}}}

At first sight the final position looks quite complex, and certainly not dead drawn. But after looking at it more closely it become clear that Black holds many aces, and is in fact clearly better: White’s apparently strong passed pawn on e6 is well blocked and could become a liability; although it’s not obvious at first, Black’s pieces are better placed than their counterparts; White’s king finds it difficult to effectively get into the game; and finally Black’s outside passed a-pawn is a real asset.

Once you begin playing through sample variations it becomes apparent
that Black should definitely play on. For example, 38...\textit{c}5! (preventing g4-g5) 39 \textit{h}2 a5! 40 \textit{d}3 (40 \textit{g}3?? \textit{x}c3! is a major problem White faces) 40...\textit{c}6! 41 \textit{e}3 g5 42 \textit{g}1 a4!? (42...h5, keeping the tension, is also possible)

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43 \textit{x}a4? (43 \textit{x}a4 \textit{x}c3 44 \textit{x}c3 \textit{x}a4 45 \textit{c}7+ should probably draw) 43...\textit{c}1+ 44 \textit{h}2 \textit{h}1+ 45 \textit{g}3 \textit{e}4+ 46 \textit{g}2 \textit{d}2+ 47 \textit{f}2 \textit{h}2+ 48 \textit{e}1 \textit{x}b3 49 \textit{x}b3 \textit{a}4 and Black wins. Okay it's true this wasn't the best defence for White, but the fact that we're debating White's best defence is an indication that Black is the one pushing. Vyzmanavin's draw offer was very well timed here. For many moves it was White who had been pushing for the win, and even the final move – 38 g4 – looks aggressive enough to cause Black some concern. Added to this it only becomes clear that Black is in the driving seat once a few more moves are played. Had my opponent delayed a few moves I would hope that I would have been able to work that out. For my part I probably should have spent a bit more time considering the draw offer and asking obvious question such as: 'Why is my higher-rated opponent offering a draw in a position that is still quite complex?' I would like to think that in a similar situation I would now play on.

This next example – a high profile one – is a bit different from the previous two in that it had nothing to do with the timing of a draw offer. White basically conceded a draw after trying to win for quite a few moves, and coming to the conclusion that a win didn't exist. Let's join the action a few moves before the draw was agreed:

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P.Svidler-V.Anand
Dos Hermanas, 1999

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It had already been quite an eventful game, with Svidler producing a brilliant piece sacrifice in the opening. A vicious attack followed, and Anand was only able to stave off a quick defeat by giving back the piece and bailing out to a lost ending. One or two
inaccuracies complicated Svidler’s task, who then decided to give up a piece again in return for a number of pawns. In this position White is still pressing but the result is balanced between a win and a draw.

A passed rook’s pawn is notoriously difficult for knight to deal with (a knight’s nightmare?), and this is what gives White winning chances here. The black king cannot stray far from the kingside because otherwise White’s f- and h-pawns will storm up the board. But can White make progress?

\[ 53 \text{a7 } \text{a5 } 54 \text{f4 } \text{c8} \]

Black can only sit and wait. Of course 54...\text{axf4} is impossible because there is no stopping the h-pawn after 55 h6.

\[ 55 \text{f3 } \text{d5 } 56 \text{e3 } \text{c7}! 57 \text{d2} \]

Planning to meet 57 \text{d4}? with 57...\text{b5+}. White’s king must find another route.

\[ 57...\text{f6 } 58 \text{c2 } \text{f5 } 59 \text{b3}! \]

Now the idea is \text{b4-c5-c6}, winning. Black must react by advancing the d-pawn.

\[ 59...\text{d4 } 60 \text{c4 } \text{f6} \]

The d-pawn is immune because of \...\text{b5+}, but using zugzwang White can hope to bring his king to e4 and then advance his kingside pawns further.

\[ 61 \text{d3 } \text{f5 } 62 \text{e2 } \text{f6 } 63 \text{f2! } \text{f5 } 64 \text{f3} \]

Zugzwang! Black must concede some ground.

\[ 64...\text{a8 } 65 \text{e2! } \text{c7 } 66 \text{d3 } \text{f6 } 67 \text{e4 } \text{f7 } 68 \text{f5 } \text{f6}? \]

I haven’t been able to find any criticism of this move, but I actually think it’s a mistake which changes the assessment from ‘drawing’ to ‘winning for White’. I’ll explain why later.

\[ 69 \text{h6 } \text{f7} \]

At this moment the players suddenly agreed a draw! Outwardly this seems surprising because it looks as if White has been making some progress over the past 15 or so moves.

Svidler clearly analysed as deeply as he could and came to the conclusion that there was no way to win. However, there is a win here – albeit a brilliant study-like win – and had Svidler just made one or two more moves over the board, it’s possible that it would
have come to him. It’s also possible it still might have eluded him, but is White really losing anything by playing 70 \textbf{x}xd4 and a few more moves over the board?

\textbf{70} \textbf{x}xd4!

As we saw, this was no good earlier on, but with White’s kingside pawns a further square forward there is a big difference.

\textbf{70...b5+ 71 c5!}

71 e5 xa7 72 f6 c6+ 73 f5 d4+ 74 g5 f3+ is a draw.

\textbf{71...xa7 72 b6!}

What’s this? Why is the king marching to the barren queenside?

72 d6, threatening 73 d7! b5 74 h7 g7 75 f6+ xh7 76 f7 g7 77 e7, looks like the main winning attempt. But Black can survive with 72...b5+!

73 d7 d4! 74 h7 g7 75 f6+ xh7 76 f7 g7 77 e7 f5+.

\textbf{72...c8+ 73 c7!}

I haven’t been able to find a win for White. For example, 69 d3 (or 69 xd4 b5+ 70 e5 xa7 71 e6 c6 72 f6+ h6) 69...g8! (this is the idea; 69...f6? 70 h6 f7 71 xd4! wins as described above) 70 h6 (Black draws after both 70 f6 f7 71 xd4 b5+ 72 e5 xa7 73 h6 c6+ 74 f5 d4+ 75 g5 e6+, and 70 c4 g7!) 70...h7 71 xd4 b5+ 72 d5 xa7 73 f6 xh6 74 e6 c6 75 f7 d8+. 

\textbf{Draw by Reputation}

Something that is very common is the
scenario where a player in a difficult position offers a draw to his lower-rated opponent. In effect he is saying something like, 'you have the better position, but I have the rating advantage.' The lower-rated player is invited to 'cash in' his hard work leading to an advantage over the board in return for the hard currency of a draw against a stronger player. And the stronger player is basically trying to use his high rating as either a reward (rating points) or a warning ('if you play on, I might turn the tables') in order to obtain a draw without having to dig himself out of the difficult position over the board. In some quarters this has been termed as a 'draw by reputation'.

Of course the lower-rated player may refuse, and often he does. If this happens two things can be said: firstly, in some ways the lower-rated player has gained because he has received a clear acknowledgement from his opponent – if he needed it – that his position is superior, and this can add to confidence. On the other hand, he is now playing under the psychological burden of proving his advantage against a stronger player in the knowledge that a draw offer has come and gone, and might not come back a second time! Of course some players won't be affected by this at all, but others, perhaps less confident, might be.

Etiquette
Even though draw offers can be used as tactical weapons, there is also a certain accepted code of behaviour when it comes to offering and accepting draws. Here are just a few points to bear in mind:

1) The rules state that you should offer a draw immediately after making your move and before pressing your clock.

2) If you wish to decline a draw the rules state that you can do so by simply making your next move. But it's polite to decline verbally just before you make your move by saying something brief such as, 'no, I'd like to play on'. If you don't say anything, your opponent might think that you didn't hear the draw offer in the first place. You could also (or instead) initially respond to the draw offer with something like, 'I'll think about it', just to confirm that the offer is being considered.

3) It is simply bad manners to offer draws in totally lost positions; or to offer them continually move after move (this is more likely to occur in junior tournaments, where perhaps players are getting used to the novelty of being able to offer draws).

4) If you have been defending a difficult position (a worse endgame, for example) for a long time, but the draw is now in sight, it's polite to wait for your opponent to offer a draw.

Draw by Repetition
Basically this rule allows a player to claim a draw if the same position arises three times during a game. I guess one of the major reasons it was devised was so that an official way existed of finishing a game that would otherwise go on
indefinitely (for example, when one player has a straightforward perpetual check).

It's probably quite useful to see what's actually written in the FIDE rulebook:

(9.2) The game is drawn, upon a correct claim by the player having the move, when the same position, for at least the third time (not necessarily by a repetition of moves)

(a) is about to appear, if he first writes his move on his scoresheet and declares to the arbiter his intention to make this move, or

(b) has just appeared, and the player claiming the draw has the move.

Positions as in (a) and (b) are considered the same, if the same player has the move, pieces of the same kind and colour occupy the same squares, and the possible moves of all the pieces of both players are the same.

Positions are not the same if a pawn that could have been captured en passant can no longer in this manner be captured or if the right to castle has been changed temporarily or permanently.

Even though the commonly acknowledged term in chess circles is 'a draw by repetition', it should be clarified that it's the repetition of the position that's important, not necessarily the repetition of the moves – there's a slight difference. So, for example, if the same position occurred after White's 26th, 32nd and 44th moves, Black would be able to claim a draw after White's 44th move regardless of all the different moves played in between the first occurrence and the third occurrence of the position – basically there is no limit to the range of moves. In practice, though, it's more usual for the same position to be reached three times in short succession (e.g., after White's 26th, 28th and 30th moves).

I should add that this rule is also sometimes referred to as 'threefold repetition', but you could argue that this term really is ambiguous and even misleading. Many would say, with some justification, that for a position to occur three times it only needs to be repeated twice!

As well as its obvious uses, a practical player will utilize a draw by repetition in other ways that may benefit him. One common psychological ploy, used especially by grandmasters when they have the opportunity, is to repeat the position once, as if to offer their opponent a glimmer of hope that a draw is on the way, but then to cruelly diverge when the second repetition is looming. By doing this a player is emphasizing his control over a position, as well as gleaning some information – that his opponent is happy with a draw. Another, less sadistic, tactic is to repeat the position in order to gain time on the clock or, more precisely, to get a couple of moves nearer the time control without using up much time. Of course a little care needs to be taken, and under real time pressure you have to remember to count correctly, something I didn't do in the following example.
M. Chiburdanidze–J. Emms
Münster 1995

Black’s queen and knight truly are a great attacking force here, and Black should win. The only problem was that I, as well as my opponent, didn’t have very much time to reach move 40. The game continued...

36...h3 37 c1 f2+ 38 g1 h3+ 39 h1 f2+(?) 40 g1 h3+(?) 41 h1 f4! 42 g1 h5 43 h4 h7 44 wg5? w:e1+ 45 h2 f2+ 46 h1 e2!

...and Chiburdanidze resigned. The only way to deal with the threat of...g3+ is by playing 47 g2, but that drops the h-pawn.

Only after the game did I discover that I had repeated the position twice. The same position had been reached after 37 c1, 39 h1 and 41 h1, and so my opponent could have claimed a draw! If I remember correctly, Chiburdanidze quickly played 41 h1, perhaps wanting to play an ‘extra’ move to make sure she really had reached the time control. Because of this her opportunity to claim a draw had passed. Check out rule 9.2a above: to correctly claim a draw she would have had to write down 41 h1 on her scoresheet and claim the draw, without actually physically make the move.

Misunderstandings and oversights regarding the repetition rule are probably not as rare as one would imagine. I can think of one or two high-profile instances of players inadvertently allowing a draw by repetition (Spassky against Fischer in 1972 comes to mind).

Something similar – but not quite the same – happened in the middle rounds of a recent British Championship. Given that Jonathan Rowson went on to claim first prize, it could be argued that this incident was one of the pivotal moments of the tournament.

A. Greet–J. Rowson
British Championship,
Douglas 2005

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This position should be winning for White. A sensible way to continue would be 27 \textit{w}c4 \textit{ex}d7 28 \textit{wh}1!, preparing c2-c3 and a trade of rooks on the d-file (the immediate 28 c3?? runs into 28...\textit{df}3+!). Andrew Greet chose a more spectacular and equally good continuation.

27 \textit{xf}6!? \textit{xf}6 28 \textit{ff}1+

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28...\textit{ff}5

The only chance. 28...\textit{g}7 loses to 29 \textit{wx}e5+ \textit{hh}6 (or 29...\textit{gg}8 30 \textit{we}8+) 30 \textit{ff}7 (threatening, amongst others, 31 \textit{wf}4+) 30...\textit{ex}d7 31 \textit{wg}7+!.

29 \textit{ex}f5 \textit{ex}d7 30 \textit{fxg}6+ \textit{hxg}6 31 \textit{we}6+ \textit{g}7 32 \textit{xe}5+ \textit{gg}8 33 \textit{we}6+ \textit{g}7

White is a pawn ahead and just as significantly Black’s king is lacking cover. Added together these should constitute a winning advantage for White. Andrew was on the point of playing 34 \textit{h}3 but then decided that because he was down to his final couple of minutes, it would be a good idea to repeat the position first so as to gain two extra moves in his pursuit to reach the time control at move 40.

34 \textit{we}5+ \textit{gg}8 35 \textit{we}6+

At this moment Jonathan Rowson wrote down the move 35...\textit{gg}7 on his scoresheet and indicated his intention to claim a draw by repetition. Describing how he reacted in the UK magazine \textit{CHESS}, Andrew confessed: ‘I was utterly shocked – “how could I be so stupid?”... I looked to see how many times my \textit{we}6+ and his intended ...\textit{gg}7 had occurred. Sure enough, there it was, clear as day. Moves 31, 33 and 35: \textit{we}6+ \textit{gg}7. Feeling absolutely mortified, I reluctantly shook Jonathan’s hand and stopped the clock.’

The players went through the game afterwards, with Jonathan doing his best to comfort Andrew with stories of how he had accidentally allowed draws by repetition in the past. But later that evening both players suddenly realized something: it’s not a draw by repetition after all!

Let’s go back to the three positions in question: after 31...\textit{gg}7, 33...\textit{gg}7 and the proposed 35...\textit{gg}7. Notice anything unusual? Eagle-eyed readers can award themselves some star points for spotting that in the first position (after
31...\textit{g7}) there is something extra on the board – a black pawn on e5! So in reality the position in question only actually occurs twice (after 33...\textit{g7 and 33...\textit{g7}), not three times! The point of realization for Andrew occurred when he glanced at his score-sheet and noticed the \textit{'x'} in 32 \textit{wx}e5+, and he admitted that this discovery made it difficult for him to sleep that night.

I think in the heat of battle, and especially under time pressure, you have to concede that these types of miscalculations are going to happen occasionally. To combat this to some extent, I think a general guideline can be applied: \textit{if your opponent claims a draw by repetition in a position in which you are reluctant to concede a draw, and especially if you are caught off guard by the claim, wait for the arbiter to verify the claim before agreeing to the draw.} This takes the pressure off you – the arbiter should be experienced at handling such things – and there’s less likely to be a mistake. Plus under FIDE rules there’s the added bonus that if your opponent’s claim turns out to be false, he suffers from time penalties!

I’m sure that sometimes the option of a draw by repetition causes players to overlook more promising continuations. For example, in the following game I’m certain that my opponent, rated 200 points lower than me, would have found the path to victory had there not been the safety net of a perpetual check available.

\begin{center}
J.Emms-J.Ryan
Port Erin 2003
\end{center}

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\begin{tikzpicture}
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\end{center}

This was the final round game in a rather forgettable tournament for me. White’s position is already nothing to write home about, but after my next move things really begin to go downhill.

\textbf{25 \textit{a}4??}

With the grand idea of \textit{c}5, but this knight never actually manages to move again.

\textbf{25...e5!}

Of course! Without the pressure the knight was exerting on d5 this move is now possible, and with the knight stuck on a4 I was playing a piece down where it really mattered – on the kingside.

\textbf{26 \textit{dx}e5 \textit{xe}5 27 \textit{h}3 \textit{h}5!}

Another good move, and White is totally busted. My only remaining hope was that my opponent was drifting into mild time trouble.

\textbf{28 f3 \textit{x}g3 29 hxg3}
29...\(\text{Qxf3+}\)!

This is winning, although it turns out that 29...\(\text{Qxf3!}\) is even stronger: 30 \(\text{gxh}3\) \(\text{Qxf3+}\) 31 \(\text{Qg2}\) (or 31 \(\text{Qh}1\) \(\text{Qxg3}\) 32 \(\text{Qh}2\) \(\text{Qxh}2\) 33 \(\text{Qxh}2\) \(\text{Qf3+}\)) 31...\(\text{Qg6}\), and ...\(\text{Qxg3+}\) will be crushing.

30 \(\text{gxh}3\) \(\text{Qxg3+}\) 31 \(\text{Qg2}\) \(\text{Qxf3}\) 32 \(\text{Qd3}\) \(\text{Qg4}\) 33 \(\text{Qf2}\) \(\text{Qxg2}\)!

After 33...\(\text{Qe4}\)? 34 \(\text{Qxf6}\) \(\text{Qxf6}\) 35 \(\text{Qc3}\) \(\text{Qxd3}\) 36 \(\text{Qxd3}\) White is back in the game.

34 \(\text{Qxg2}\) \(\text{Qf1+}\) 35 \(\text{Qh2}\) \(\text{Qh4+}\) 36 \(\text{Qh3}\)

I’d let my opponent find the wins if they were there). I did suspect at this point that there might be more than one way to finish the game in Black’s favour, but I just got up from the table and wandered around the other boards while waiting for my opponent to make his move. I was in for a bit of luck...

36...\(\text{Qf4+}\)

36...\(\text{Qe1}\)! wins, as there is no good defence to ...\(\text{Qh1}\) mate (the best that White can do is to reach a hopeless ending with 37 \(\text{Qxh6}\) \(\text{gxh6}\) 38 \(\text{Qc3}\)).

37 \(\text{Qg3}\) \(\text{Qh4+}\)

And here 37...\(\text{Qf3}\)! wins as White can do nothing about the threat of 38...\(\text{Qh4+}\) 39 \(\text{Qg1}\) \(\text{Qf1}\) mate.

38 \(\text{Qh3}\) \(\text{Qf4+}\)

38...\(\text{Qe1}\)!

39 \(\text{Qh3}\) \(\text{Qh4+}\) ½-½

39...\(\text{Qf3}\)! would have again forced resignation. At this moment I was grateful to be able to claim a draw, as the same position (after 39...\(\text{Qh4+}\)) had occurred for the third time.

**Dealing with Bad Positions**

Trying to survive or overturn losing or clearly inferior positions is one of the most difficult things to do. The problem is that even if you play the best moves, there’s still a good chance that you are going to lose the game.

But you must always fight to the bitter end and never give up – this surely must be one of the secrets of survival. Just think back to some of the winning positions you have failed to convert when you have met stubborn...
defence. There is no reason to believe that the same thing can’t happen to your opponents.

One of the reasons it can be difficult to defend bad positions over the board is psychological: you keep thinking back to how you got yourself into trouble in the first place ('If only I had played 36 ...c5, things would have been so different...').

Here’s a little trick: why not imagine that it wasn’t you who played the first part of the game; instead the disaster was someone else’s doing. Now someone has put the resulting position in front of you, and you have been given the opportunity of cleaning up the mess. I’ve found that this pretence has sometimes helped me in the grim battle ahead.

You may also have to do a bit of recalibrating with the result. Say you reach a position where you are clearly worse and can only draw at best – a win is out of the question even if your opponent blunders horribly. In this situation it is sometimes helpful to remind yourself that, purely for this stage of the game, a loss equals a loss but a draw equals a win! It’s not easy, but you have to try to isolate the challenge and forget the bigger picture for a while (especially if the bigger picture is a best case scenario of a draw against someone rated tons of points below you).

In the following example I botched a promising middlegame position, blundered a pawn, and by the time control I was probably losing. After this I managed to dig in, hang on for a few moves, and then I was able to seize upon a tactic to force a pawn-down ending which I was eventually able to hold.

Here are both stages of the game:

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**Z.Almawi-J.Emms**

European Team Championships, Batumi 1999

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The position is complex but overall I was fairly happy. There are weaknesses on d6 and e6, but counterplay on the f-file and the a-file (my previous move had been 26...b8-a8, preparing ...a5-a4) is promising for Black. Here Almawi played 27 ...c2 and offered a draw. This peace proposal was tempting given that I was out-rated by around 100 Elo points, but I felt confident with my position and after a bit of thought declined the offer. 27...a4! 28 Wh3 Xe8 29 Xac1

White wishes to double his rooks on the d-file, but to do this he must first vacate the a-file or else face conse-
quences after ...axb3 (29 d2? axb3 30 \(\text{\textit{xb3}}\) \(\text{\textit{d5!}}\) 31 \(\text{\textit{xb4}}\) \(\text{\textit{xb4}}\) 32 \(\text{\textit{xxb4}}\) \(\text{\textit{d3!}}\)).

29...axb3 30 axb3 \(\text{\textit{a2}}\) 31 \(\text{\textit{d3}}\)?

In view of the opportunity Black has on his next move, White should play something like 31 \(\text{\textit{wd3}}\)!. Then 31...f8 32 \(\text{\textit{d2}}\) \(\text{\textit{d5}}\) is unclear, with both d6 and b3 acting as targets.

31...\(\text{\textit{h8}}\)?

With 31...\(\text{\textit{h8}}\) I was lining up the move ...f8 but I completely missed the strength of playing it immediately. I guess the thought of allowing a vital pawn (e6) to be captured with check prevented me from analysing the move fully. White is in some trouble after 31...f8!, as the following variations illustrate:

a) 32 \(\text{\textit{wxe6+}}\) is the critical response, but after the calm 32...\(\text{\textit{h7}}\) White’s queen is on an unfortunate square and is prone to ...\(\text{\textit{d4}}\) tactics. The variations are all winning for Black: 33 \(\text{\textit{f3}}\) \(\text{\textit{xc2}}\) 34 \(\text{\textit{xc2}}\) \(\text{\textit{xf3}}\) 35 gxf3 \(\text{\textit{d4}}\); 33 \(\text{\textit{e3}}\) \(\text{\textit{d4}}\)! 34 \(\text{\textit{xd4}}\) \(\text{\textit{xd4}}\) 35 \(\text{\textit{f1}}\) \(\text{\textit{axf2}}\); and 33 \(\text{\textit{d2}}\) \(\text{\textit{d4}}\) 34 \(\text{\textit{wh3}}\) \(\text{\textit{xc2}}\) 35 \(\text{\textit{dxc2}}\) \(\text{\textit{xc2}}\) 36 \(\text{\textit{xc2}}\) \(\text{\textit{wd4}}\)!

b) 32 \(\text{\textit{f3}}\) \(\text{\textit{xf3}}\) 33 \(\text{\textit{xf3}}\) \(\text{\textit{a5}}\) leaves White under some pressure, while \textit{Shredder's} cold-blooded 32...\(\text{\textit{f8}}\)?! might be even stronger.

(c) 32 \(\text{\textit{d2}}\) \(\text{\textit{d4}}\)! also leaves Black on top after 33 \(\text{\textit{d3}}\) \(\text{\textit{xc2}}\) 34 \(\text{\textit{xc2}}\) \(\text{\textit{xf2}}\)!! 35 \(\text{\textit{xf2}}\) \(\text{\textit{a1+}}\) 36 \(\text{\textit{f1}}\) \(\text{\textit{xf1+}}\) 37 \(\text{\textit{xf1}}\) \(\text{\textit{e3}}\), or 33 \(\text{\textit{e3}}\) \(\text{\textit{xc2}}\) 34 \(\text{\textit{xc5}}\) dxc5 35 \(\text{\textit{dxc5}}\) \(\text{\textit{a3}}\) 36 \(\text{\textit{b2}}\) \(\text{\textit{d8}}\) followed by ...\(\text{\textit{d3}}\) with some real grinding chances.

\(\text{32} \text{\textit{f3}}\)!

Preventing ...\(\text{\textit{f8}}\).

\(\text{32...\textit{g8}}\) 33 \(\text{\textit{g4?}}\) \(\text{\textit{a7}}\)?

A horribly defensive move. Around this time I had lost some confidence in my position and that, coupled with time trouble, caused a deterioration of my play. Black can still play 33...\(\text{\textit{f8}}\)! with variations almost identical to the notes to Black’s 31st move – it makes little difference that White’s queen is on g4 instead of h3.

\(\text{34 \textit{cd1!}}\)

At this point I realized that my intended 34...\(\text{\textit{d7}}\) could be met by the rather nasty 35 \(\text{\textit{d5}}\) (35 \(\text{\textit{g6}}\) is also strong).

\(\text{34...\textit{f7}}\) 35 \(\text{\textit{1d2!}}\)
The tide is turning, and with time running out I panicked. I just couldn’t see anything better than my next move, even though it did hang a crucial pawn.

35...\(\text{f}6\)?

35...\(\text{h}8\) is more resilient, as 36 \(\text{xd}6\)? allows 36...\(\text{d}4\)!

36 \(\text{xe}6\) \(\text{h}8\)

The next few moves were played quickly, as both sides had little time to reach move 40.

37 \(\text{e}3\) \(\text{f}6\) 38 \(\text{d}5\) \(\text{wb}6\) 39 \(\text{g}3\) \(\text{c}8\) 40 \(\text{g}2\) \(\text{cf}8\)

![Chess Diagram]

Finally time control had been reached, and I now had the time to survey the wreckage. The previous seven or eight moves had completely changed a complex but promising position into one which was objectively losing.

41 \(\text{b}5\) \(\text{c}7\)!

The best practical chance.

42 \(\text{f}3\)

After 42 \(\text{xb}4\)! White goes two pawns ahead, but I can understand why my opponent was reluctant to allow any swindling chances. Now 42...\(\text{f}7\) (42...\(\text{xb}4\) 43 \(\text{xb}4\) \(\text{f}7\) 44 \(\text{ee}2\) defends everything) 43 \(\text{d}3\) \(\text{d}4\) 44 \(\text{b}4\) \(\text{f}3\) 45 \(\text{xd}6\) \(\text{xb}3\) (45...\(\text{xe}3\) loses to 46 \(\text{xe}5\) 46 \(\text{xe}5\) \(\text{xf}2\) 47 \(\text{xf}2\) \(\text{xf}2\) + 48 \(\text{h}3\) (Almawi) is winning for White. That said, there is no obligation for Black to go all in with 44...\(\text{f}3\). Instead he could carry on with 44...\(\text{h}5\)?. Objectively, it’s not enough – in fact it’s not nearly enough – but I can see how over the board White might have some nervous moments here, and so it’s quite understandable that my opponent preferred a one-pawn advantage and complete control instead of two pawns.

42...\(\text{b}8\) 43 \(\text{d}5\) \(\text{e}7\) 44 \(\text{d}3\) \(\text{c}6\) 45 \(\text{ee}2!\) \(\text{a}8\)

![Chess Diagram]

It’s difficult to speak of the best moves for Black here because the position is losing whatever he plays. 45...\(\text{f}7\)!, hitting \(\text{f}3\), prevents White’s possibility on the next move, but this can always be prepared with 46 \(\text{f}2\). It’s true that 46...\(\text{f}8\) does hold up White for a bit. Only a bit though, and 47 \(\text{d}5\) \(\text{c}7\) 48 \(\text{d}1\) followed by \(\text{a}1\) looks good enough.
46 \(\text{f}2\)

Missing a chance to move or less put the game to bed. 46 \(\text{e}3!\) eyes the juicy d5-square and Black doesn’t really have a decent answer. 46...\(\text{d}4\) 47 \(\text{d}5\) \(\text{d}8\) 48 \(\text{xf}6\) \(\text{xe}2\) 49 \(\text{xe}2\) \(\text{xf}6\) 50 \(\text{d}3\) followed by \(\text{d}2\) gives Black little chance of survival. Probably I was going to play 46...\(\text{e}7\) but then 47 \(\text{a}2\) \(\text{a}8\) 48 \(\text{f}2\) leaves Black a pawn down and also clearly on the defensive.

I suspect my opponent was basically trying to avoid having to deal with any lines where Black is allowed to play ...\(\text{d}4\), but this meant that one or two strong moves for White were discarded. I think this counts as a similar mistake to the one I was guilty of against Bjorn Tiller (see page 78).

46...\(\text{b}7\) 47 \(\text{e}3\) \(\text{a}2!\)

With an active rook on a2 (it never should have left this square!), for the first time I was beginning to feel I had chances to steal something from the game.
48 \(\text{d}5\) \(\text{h}7\) 49 \(\text{d}3\) \(\text{b}2!\) 50 \(\text{c}5?!\)

The wrong idea (50 \(\text{d}2!\) keeps control), as now the rook on f6 is released from its defensive duties. I was really beginning to believe there would be some reward for battling away in a lost position.

50...\(\text{d}5\) 51 \(\text{xc}5\) \(\text{e}7!\)

White has lost some control and now has to be careful. For example, 52 \(\text{c}4?\) \(\text{d}6!\) 53 \(\text{e}3\) \(\text{a}5!\) suddenly puts White on the back foot, as 54 \(\text{xb}4??\) blunders material to 54...\(\text{c}6!\).

52 \(\text{c}4?\)

[Diagram]

White could have kept some advantage with the subtle 52 \(\text{d}5!\) \(\text{d}6\) 53 \(\text{c}4\), but my opponent saw no reason to give me the free tempo ...\(\text{f}6\)-d6.

Now I saw a real opportunity arise – a chance to reach a pawn-down rook ending which I felt should be drawn. It was time to employ CEM (see Chapter 1).

52...\(\text{xb}3!\) 53 \(\text{xc}6\) \(\text{c}3!\) 54 \(\text{xb}4\) \(\text{xb}4\)
55 \(\text{xb}4\) \(\text{fxc}6\) 56 \(\text{xc}6\) \(\text{xc}6\)

Now I felt much happier. It’s not quite as straightforward as a normal ‘rook and four versus rook and three’ ending because Black’s pawn on e5 is a weakness, but I still felt fairly confident of holding the position.
57 h4 h5 58 d2 g6 59 d8 f7!
White’s idea was f8-f5.
60 h8 g6 61 h7+ e6 62 g4
The only way to make progress.
62...hxg4 63 fxg4 c2+ 64 f3 c3+ 65
e2 c2+ 66 e3 c3+ 67 d2 h3 68
g5
White’s idea is to bring the king to
g2 and then play g7. I responded by
getting my king active.
68...d6! 69 e2 c5 70 f2 d4

71 g2
After 71 h6! Black has to work
harder, but I still believe the draw is in
sight after 71...xe4 72 g2 a3 73
gx6 f4 74 g8 e4, when the e-pawn
should save Black. For example:

a) 75 f8+ g4 76 g6 a2+ 77 g1
a7! 78 f7 a1+ 79 f2 a2+ 80 e3
h5 81 g7 g2 82 xe4 h6 with a
draw.

b) 75 g6 g3+ 76 f1 (or 76 h2
g4 77 h5 h4+ 78 g2 xh5) 76...f3+
77 e1 e3+ 78 d2 d3+ 79 c2 d7!
80 f8+ (80 g7 g4 81 h5 g5! draws)
80...g4 81 f7 d8 82 g7 g8 and
again it’s a draw.
71...a3 72 h6 a6
72...xe4 73 xg6 transposes to the
previous note.
73 f3 b6!
73...a3+? is one check too far, and
now White can win after 74 g4 a6 75
h5! gxh5+ 76 f5! a1 77 d6+ e3 78
g6 – the g-pawn is too strong.

74 h8
After 74 h5 b3+ 75 g4 gxh5+ 76
xh5 (76 f5 f3+) 76...xe4 77 g6
b1 78 g5 g1+ 79 f6 f1+ 80 g7
g1 81 h7 f4 82 g7 e4 Black will
sacrifice his rook for White’s pawn and
White will be forced to do the same
with his rook, just as in the game.
74...b3+ 75 g4 xe4 76 g8 b6 77
h5 gxh5+ 78 ♂xh5 ♗b1 79 g6 ♗g1 80 ♗e3 81 ♗h6 e4 82 ♗e8 ½-½
82...♗d3 83 g8♗ ♗xg8 84 ♗xg8 e3 is a draw.

Earlier on I talked about the dilemma a player with the advantage often faces: whether or not to cash in his positional advantages in return for material gains. Conversely, when you are defending an inferior position, there is sometimes a chance to sacrifice material to relieve some of the pressure. Opportunities like this shouldn’t be discarded without thought. It may not necessarily alter the assessment of the position, but it may at least change the flow of the game and ask your opponent different types of questions. If he has been in a position of dominance for a considerable number of moves, it’s always possible he may not react well under the new set of circumstances.

Take the following game. After a reasonably level opening I gradually drifted into a difficult position. Perhaps bogged down too much with a defensive mindset, I missed not one but two opportunities to sacrifice a pawn and alter the course of the game.

![Chess Diagram]

The main line runs 4 e3 ♗xf3+ 5 ♗xf3 g6 followed by ...♗g7, ...d6 and ...♗f6 or ...♗h5-f5. Against 4 ♗e5, perhaps today I would choose 4...♗c7 or even the cheeky 4...♗c6!? Even so, I did manage to reach a reasonable position out of the opening.

4...d6 5 ♗a4+ ♗d7 6 ♗xd7 ♗xd7 7 ♗d1 e6 8 e3 ♗c6 9 d4 ♗xd4 10 exd4 d5 11 ♗xd5 ♘xd5 12 ♗b5 ♗b4 13 0-0 ♗e7 14 ♗a4 ♗d6 15 ♗e3 0-0 16 ♗c1 ♗c7 17 g3 ♗f5 18 ♗e1 ♗e8 19 ♗d3

B.Lalic-J.Emms
Thames Valley Open 1996

1 ♗f3 c5 2 c4 ♗c6 3 ♗c3 ♗d4 4 ♗e5!?  
For those unfamiliar with 3...♗d4, I admit it does look a bit unusual to move the knight twice in succession.
19...\(\text{\(Q\)}x\text{e3}\)!

This is a bit impatient: there is no hurry to trade on e3 – White’s bishop isn’t going anywhere – and I should have played a useful move like 19...g6. If White then carries on with the thematic 20 \(\text{\(Q\)}c5\)?, the value of leaving the knight on f5 is demonstrated by the tactic 20...\(\text{\(Q\)}xd4\)! 21 \(\text{\(Q\)}xd4\) (or 21 \(\text{\(Q\)}xe8 \(\text{\(Q\)}f3+\)!\) 21...\(\text{\(Q\)}xe1+\) 22 \(\text{\(Q\)}xe1 \(\text{\(Q\)}xd4\) 23 \(\text{\(Q\)}xd4\) \(\text{\(Q\)}xc5\), winning a pawn. It’s true that White does better with 20 \(\text{\(Q\)}c3\), but then 20...\(\text{\(Q\)}xe3\) 21 \(\text{\(Q\)}xe3 \(\text{\(Q\)}xe3\) 22 \(\text{\(Q\)}xe3\) \(\text{\(Q\)}b6\) is comfortable enough for Black.

20 \(\text{\(Q\)}xe3 \(\text{\(Q\)}xe3\) 21 \(\text{\(Q\)}xe3\) g6 22 \(\text{\(Q\)}c5\)!

Now this move is playable, and good. A minor shift in the assessment leaves White with a small but definite advantage due to the impending weakness on c6.

22...\(\text{\(Q\)}xc5\) 23 \(\text{\(Q\)}xc5\) \(\text{\(Q\)}d8\) 24 \(\text{\(Q\)}xc6\) bxc6 25 b4

A crucial moment in the game. All I could think about was White’s idea of \(\text{\(Q\)}c3\) followed by b4-b5, so I decided to go into defensive mode.

25...\(\text{\(Q\)}b7\)!

The idea was to answer 26 \(\text{\(Q\)}c3\) with 26...\(\text{\(Q\)}d6\) without b4-b5 being a threat. But this is all horribly passive.

The best practical decision here, and also – after some analysis – the best move objectively, is 25...\(\text{\(Q\)}d7\). The idea is that Black should be seeing further than the defence of his c-pawn and aim for counterplay based on ...\(\text{\(Q\)}e8\) – note that with White’s rook on c5, he is in no position to contest the e-file. For example, after 26 \(\text{\(Q\)}g2 \(\text{\(Q\)}e8\) 27 \(\text{\(Q\)}c3\) \(\text{\(Q\)}e6\) the rook is ideally placed on e6, being able to defend c6 and attack on the kingside at the same time; Black is not worse here.

True, the c-pawn goes missing after the critical 26 \(\text{\(Q\)}c3\) \(\text{\(Q\)}e8!\) 27 \(\text{\(Q\)}xc6\), but now the dynamics of the position have changed and following 27...\(\text{\(Q\)}e2\) Black’s compensation cannot be discounted.

White suddenly has to deal with a considerable number of possibilities for Black (28 a4?? \(\text{\(Q\)}f5!\) is just an illustration that Black is suddenly creating threats – a decisive one in this case). Surely over the board White would prefer to have total control even without the extra pawn?
Analysing the position after 26...\textit{h}e2 is good fun, as both kings can become vulnerable. A critical line runs 28 \textit{c}c8+ \textit{g}7 29 \textit{w}c5 \textit{w}f5! (both sides are going for mate!) 30 \textit{w}f8+ \textit{h}6 31 \textit{c}c6+ \textit{g}5! (Black’s king happily marches up the board) 32 \textit{w}d8+ (32 \textit{h}4+?? \textit{h}5 leaves White with no more checks and facing mate) 32...\textit{f}6! 33 \textit{h}4+ \textit{g}4 and now the plausible 34 \textit{xf}6?? loses to the brilliant 34...\textit{h}3!!.

when Black’s king march brings about the ultimate reward – it’s White who will be mated. Instead White has to play 34 \textit{w}xf6! and here 34...\textit{w}e4! 35 \textit{h}2! (35 \textit{c}c1?? \textit{h}3!) 35...\textit{w}e3! 36 \textit{g}2! \textit{w}e4+ 37 \textit{h}2 leads to a draw by repetition.

Black to the game, an altogether more depressing experience...

\textbf{26 a3 \textit{h}5!}

I wanted to create the option of ...\textit{h}5-\textit{h}4 and also give my king another square (\textit{h}7). During the game I thought this was logical, but interestingly Bogdan believed it to be weakening. Overall his view proved correct, but I do miss another chance on my next move.

\textbf{27 \textit{g}2!?}

In general these ’tidying up’ moves (26 a3 and 27 \textit{g}2) make some sense. At some point the position will open up and White is using the time available at the moment to improve his pieces and pawns for this eventuality. However, just at this moment I believe White’s king is actually better placed on \textit{g}1!

I was planning to answer 27 \textit{w}c3? with 27...\textit{d}6! followed by ...\textit{e}6 – something that, as mentioned earlier, White should avoid. The move 27 \textit{h}4 would be the typical way to kill any ...\textit{h}5-\textit{h}4 ideas, but perhaps the clearest way to exploit White’s superiority is with 27 \textit{w}e5! (aiming for the juicy \textit{f}6-square; with a queen on \textit{d}7 Black would just play ...\textit{e}8, but sadly that is not possible here) 27...\textit{d}7 28 \textit{f}6 \textit{c}8 29 \textit{c}3 when Black remains totally under the cosh with an incredibly difficult position to defend over the board.

There is a good practical point behind the ‘waiting’ 27 \textit{g}2 in that the tempting response 27...\textit{d}6?, planning ...\textit{e}6, loses to 28 \textit{w}e8+ \textit{g}7 29 \textit{b}5! \textit{cxb}5.
- what else? – 30 \( \text{c8} \), when Black can only avoid mate by giving up his queen. This partially explains the reasoning behind my next move, which costs me the game – another practical point behind 27 \( \text{g2} \)!

\[ \text{27...h7?} \]

I wanted to play \( \text{d6} \) without allowing \( \text{e8}+ \), but there’s a massive tactical flaw. Unsurprising really given that there are now two vulnerable pawns – \( \text{f7} \) as well as \( \text{c6} \) – and losing \( \text{f7} \) would be a disaster.

I actually missed my second big chance here. It’s still not too late to switch back to counterattack with 27...\( \text{d7}! \). Then \( \text{e8}-\text{e6} \) is back on the agenda again, and after 28 \( \text{c3 h4!} \) 29 \( \text{xc6? h3+! 30 \text{f1 e8} \) the pawn on \( \text{h3} \) offers Black sudden counterplay and serious mating ideas.

(see following diagram)

In fact White must actually be very careful here and it’s easy to see him going wrong in an over-the-board encounter.
White is threatening to win immediately with 33 \textit{\texttt{We3}} \textit{\texttt{xf6}} 34 \textit{\texttt{Wh6}} \textit{\texttt{ff7}} 35 \textit{\texttt{We8+}} and mate next move. To prevent this I had to give up a pawn.

32...\textit{\texttt{xf6}} 33 \textit{\texttt{We3}} \textit{\texttt{wd6}} 34 \textit{\texttt{xa7}} \textit{\texttt{ff7}} 35 \textit{\texttt{We8+}} \textit{\texttt{ff8}} 36 \textit{\texttt{xb5}} \textit{\texttt{ee6}} 37 \textit{\texttt{dd3}}

Threatening \textit{\texttt{xa6}}.

37...\textit{\texttt{we4+}} 38 \textit{\texttt{xe4}} \textit{\texttt{dxe4}} 39 \textit{\texttt{d5}} \textit{\texttt{dd8}} 40 \textit{\texttt{xe7}} \textit{\texttt{xd5}} 41 \textit{\texttt{xe4}} \textit{\texttt{gg7}} 42 \textit{\texttt{h4}} \textit{\texttt{dd3}} 43 \textit{\texttt{a4}} \textit{\texttt{a3}} 44 \textit{\texttt{ff4}} \textit{\texttt{g5}} 45 \textit{\texttt{hxg5}} \textit{\texttt{gg6}} 46 \textit{\texttt{ff6+}} \textit{\texttt{hxg5}} 47 \textit{\texttt{aa6}} \textit{\texttt{h4}} 48 \textit{\texttt{gxxh4+}} \textit{\texttt{hh4x}} 49 \textit{\texttt{a8l}} \textit{\texttt{gg5}} 50 \textit{\texttt{a5}} \textit{\texttt{gg6}} 51 \textit{\texttt{a6}} \textit{\texttt{gg7}} 52 \textit{\texttt{a7l}}

The easiest way: the f-pawn acts as a decisive decoy. I did have one final swindle attempt, which was never likely to work against someone of Bogdan’s class.

52...\textit{\texttt{fa4}} 53 \textit{\texttt{ff4}} \textit{\texttt{fa5}} 54 \textit{\texttt{ff5}} \textit{\texttt{fa2+}} 55 \textit{\texttt{f3}} \textit{\texttt{fa3+}}

56 \textit{\texttt{ge2! 1-0}}

\textbf{Question:} After 56 \textit{\texttt{gf4?! \texttt{gf7}?}}, which move should White avoid at all costs?

\textbf{Answer:} The tempting 57 \textit{\texttt{fh8??}} falls foul of the devilish trick 57...\textit{\texttt{xa7!!}} 58 \textit{\texttt{h7+ \texttt{ff6}}}, when capturing the rook with 59 \textit{\texttt{xa7}} gives stalemate!

After 56 \textit{\texttt{ge2}} the rest is easy:

56...\textit{\texttt{fa2+}} 57 \textit{\texttt{dd3}} \textit{\texttt{fa3+}} 58 \textit{\texttt{gc2}} \textit{\texttt{fa2+}} 59 \textit{\texttt{gb3}} \textit{\texttt{xa1}} 60 \textit{\texttt{f6+}} and White wins after 60...\textit{\texttt{xf6}} 61 \textit{\texttt{h8+}} and 62 \textit{\texttt{a8w}}, or 60...\textit{\texttt{f7}} 61 \textit{\texttt{h8! \texttt{xa7}}} 62 \textit{\texttt{h7+}} and 63 \textit{\texttt{xa7}}.

Tony Miles, Britain's first grandmaster and an inspiration to a whole generation of chessplayers in the UK, was a renowned fighter at the board. He was excellent at grinding out and converting small endgame advantages. Also, as I found out to my cost in the following game, he was equally good at seeking out swindling chances in losing positions.

\textbf{A.Miles-J.Emms}

\textit{Ostend 1992}

1 \textit{\texttt{d4}} \textit{\texttt{f6}} 2 \textit{\texttt{f3}} \textit{\texttt{e6}} 3 \textit{\texttt{c4}} \textit{\texttt{c5}} 4 \textit{\texttt{d5}} \textit{\texttt{d6}} 5 \textit{\texttt{c3}}

\textit{exd5} 6 \textit{\texttt{cxd5}} \textit{\texttt{g6}} 7 \textit{\texttt{d2}} \textit{\texttt{g7}} 8 \textit{\texttt{e4}} 0-0 9

\textit{\texttt{e2}} \textit{\texttt{a6}} 10 0-0 \textit{\texttt{c7}} 11 \textit{\texttt{a4}} \textit{\texttt{b6}} 12 \textit{\texttt{e1}}

12 \textit{\texttt{c4}} is more common.

12...\textit{\texttt{b8}} 13 \textit{\texttt{f4}} \textit{\texttt{e8}}

56 \textit{\texttt{ge2!}}

\textbf{Question:} After 56 \textit{\texttt{gf4?! \texttt{gf7}?}}, which move should White avoid at all costs?

\textbf{Answer:} The tempting 57 \textit{\texttt{h8??}} falls foul of the devilish trick 57...\textit{\texttt{xa7!!}} 58 \textit{\texttt{h7+ \texttt{ff6}}}, when capturing the rook with 59 \textit{\texttt{xa7}} gives stalemate!

After 56 \textit{\texttt{ge2}} the rest is easy:

I found out later that this position is more often reached via the King’s In-
dian Four Pawns Attack: 1 d4 ♞f6 2 c4
g6 3 ♞c3 ♞g7 4 e4 d6 5 f4 0-0 6 ♞f3 c5 7
d5 e6 8 ♞e2 exd5 9 cxd5 ♞e8 10 ♞d2
♗a6 11 0-0 ♝c7 12 a4 b6 13 ♞e1 ♞b8. In
any case, I was quite pleased that my
opponent had opted for the aggressive
f2-f4 because I was confident this
would give Black more chances of
counterplay than in the quieter lines
with 12 ♞c4. More chance of getting
squashed in the centre too, but that’s
always a risk you take if you choose to
play the Modern Benoni.

14 ♞f3 ♞a6!

Preventing ♞c4, so White decides
upon another way to activate this
knight.

15 ♞db1?

This undevelopment looks bizarre,
but the knight is coming to a3 and per-
haps b5, and there is nothing too dis-
ruptive Black can do in the meantime.
Even so, I believe Black should be fine
here.

15...♕d7 16 ♝a3 ♝c4 17 ♞c2

This is risky because it allows Black
to play ...♕c5, after which ...♕d3 is on
the cards. 17 ♝cb5 ♝xb5 (actually
17...♕c5 is still interesting, although in
this case Black must be prepared to
sacrifice his a7-pawn) 18 axb5 c3 19
♗b1 cxb2 20 ♝xb2 ♝xb2 21 ♝xb2 ♝f6
22 ♝c2 ♝c5 was roughly equal in
B. Malich-G. Tringov, Sarajevo 1965.

17...♕c5 18 ♝b4 ♝b7 19 ♝e3 ♝a6! .

Getting rid of the b4-knight so that
d3 becomes available. I was beginning
to get quite excited about my position.

20 ♝c6

The only choice – White has to un-
balance the position. 20 ♝xa6 ♝xa6
followed by ...♕d3 is horrible, and 21
♗xc5 bxc5, releasing the b8-rook,
doesn’t improve matters.

20...♕c6 21 dxc6 ♝d3 22 ♝e2

22...♕ab4!

22...♕xb2 was tempting, but I didn’t
want to give Tony a chance to seize
the initiative with the exchange sacrifice 23
♕xb2 ♝xc3 24 ♝d4 ♝xb2 25 ♝xb2, es-
pecially since the text move is so
strong. Now Black is threatening to
capture on c6 with a winning position,
so White must continue to complicate.

23 ♝b5 ♝xc6 24 e5 ♝d5 25 ♝d6 ♝xe5!

I had seen this before playing
22...\(\text{Qa}b4\), and was now definitely thinking about the possibility of winning!

\[26 \text{fxe}5 \text{Qxe}5\ 27 \text{Qb}5\ a6\ 28 \text{Qa}3\ \text{Qxb}2\ 29 \text{Qd}2\ \text{Qd}3\]

![Chessboard Diagram]

Black has four excellent pawns for a piece, plus a monster knight on d3. This should be winning, but now Tony moved into ‘swindle mode’.

\[30 \text{Qf}1!\]

Of course the rook had to move as it was vulnerable on a1, but massing all the pieces to the kingside was good swindling technique.

\[30...\text{b}5?\]

Shredder likes 30...\(\text{Qe}7!\) 31 \(\text{Qc}2\) \(\text{Qe}8\). This didn’t occur to me during the game but it does seem to tie White up in knots, and the threat of 32...d4 is hard to meet.

\[31 \text{axb}5\ \text{axb}5\ 32 \text{Qc}2!\]

Again, all of White’s pieces gather towards the kingside. Now I was left with many enticing options, but annoyingly I couldn’t quite work out a forced win. And time trouble was looming (the time control was 40 moves in 2 hours).

![Chessboard Diagram]

\[32...\text{d}4\ 33 \text{Qh}6\ \text{Qxe}2\ 34 \text{Qxe}2\ \text{Qxh}6\ 35 \text{Qxh}6\]

Black is still winning, but note that the two trades have left him a bit light on the kingside. I started to see ghosts (\(\text{Qxf}7\) ideas), and this caused another mistake.

\[35...\text{Qe}5?\]

35...\(\text{Qc}5\) is stronger, because 36 \(\text{Qf}4\) (36 \(\text{Qxf}7\) \(\text{Qxf}7\) 37 \(\text{Qxh}7+\) \(\text{Qf}6\) leaves White without a follow-up) can be met by 36...d3! 37 \(\text{Qxf}7+\) \(\text{Qh}8\) 38 \(\text{Qxd}3\) \(\text{Qxd}3\) and Black should win. But the very fact that this variation is not that easy to calculate means that White’s swindling attempt is a good one.
36 \( \mathbb{w}f4 \)

Now White is right back in it, and I still had to make five moves...

36...\( \mathbb{d}3 \) 37 \( \mathbb{x}e5 \) \( \mathbb{d}xe2 \) 38 \( \mathbb{x}e2 \) \( \mathbb{d}d5 \) 39 \( \mathbb{h}1 \) \( \mathbb{b}4 \) 40 \( \mathbb{e}7! \)

A nasty move to face right before time control.

40...\( \mathbb{b}3? \)

A final mistake, and now Black is lost. Black has to play 40...\( \mathbb{b}7! \).

41 \( \mathbb{e}3! \)

Winning the c4-pawn, and White is able to stop the b-pawn. The rest was misery.

41...\( \mathbb{w}b7 \) 42 \( \mathbb{x}b7 \) \( \mathbb{x}b7 \) 43 \( \mathbb{x}c4 \) \( \mathbb{b}4 \) 44 \( \mathbb{e}2 \) \( \mathbb{f}5 \) 45 \( \mathbb{g}1 \) \( \mathbb{f}7 \) 46 \( \mathbb{b}1 \) \( \mathbb{g}5 \) 47 \( \mathbb{d}3 \) \( \mathbb{b}5 \) 48 \( \mathbb{b}2 \) \( \mathbb{f}4 \) 49 \( \mathbb{c}1 \) \( \mathbb{c}5 \) 50

\( \mathbb{x}b3 \) \( \mathbb{b}5 \) 51 \( \mathbb{b}1 \) \( \mathbb{g}6 \) 52 \( \mathbb{d}2 \) \( \mathbb{d}5 \) 53 \( \mathbb{b}6+ \) \( \mathbb{f}5 \) 54 \( \mathbb{c}4 \) \( \mathbb{d}4 \) 55 \( \mathbb{d}6+ \) \( \mathbb{g}4 \) 56 \( \mathbb{h}3+ \) \( \mathbb{h}5 \) 57 \( \mathbb{f}7 \) \( \mathbb{h}4 \) 58 \( \mathbb{h}6 \) \( \mathbb{d}5 \) 59

\( \mathbb{h}2 1-0 \)

Perhaps I should have politely allowed 59...\( \mathbb{a}5 \) 60 \( \mathbb{a}5+ \) \( \mathbb{x}xf5 \) 61 \( \mathbb{h}6 \) mate, but I wasn’t in the best of moods.

Of course swindles come in numerous guises, but what struck me about this game was the way White massed all his pieces on the kingside. Instead of trying to deal with Black’s onrushing pawns – in fairness this would have been impossible – Miles sought out swindling chances by concentrating on one side of the board, the side where he wasn’t weaker. And it worked: I got unnecessarily nervous when a couple of my kingside defenders were exchanged, and this led to uncertainty and then mistakes.

Here’s another example where massing pieces on one side of the board plays a crucial role in creating a successful swindle.

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V.Ikonnikov-R.Palliser
Port Erin 2005

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Black is in some trouble here because his queenside is about to collapse. Rather than trying to defend grimly – this simply doesn’t work – his only hope is to try to create some confusion on the kingside.

21...\( \mathbb{e}8! \) 22 \( \mathbb{x}c7+ \) \( \mathbb{h}6! \)

A very good practical (and psycho-
logical) move in the circumstances because it gives White more to think about. Richard felt that his king, surrounded by a few pieces and pawns, should be relatively safe, or at least that White would have to play precisely to exploit its position.

Had the king gone back to g8 White would have captured on b7, tightened up defensively, and the queenside pawns would have eventually done the business. Now, though, there is a temptation – almost a psychological burden – to go for mate. This is exactly what Ikonnikov went for, but he ends up using much of his remaining time and the mate never arrives.

23 \( \text{\underline{h}3} +! \)

A good move. White wishes to play \( \text{\underline{c}3} \) (threatening \( \text{\underline{g}7} +! \)), so first of all all the g4-rook is deflected from attacking g2.

23...\( \text{\underline{h}4} \) 24 \( \text{\underline{c}3} \)

24...\( \text{\underline{e}5}! \)

To have any hope of creating swindling chances Black has to – for the moment at least – keep all the pieces on the board. Allowing simplification with 24...\( \text{\underline{e}7} \) makes White’s winning task much easier.

25 \( \text{\underline{x}b7} \) \( \text{\underline{g}4} \) 26 \( \text{\underline{h}1}! \)

So far so good for White. The move \( \text{\underline{x}g2} \) is no longer a threat on account of \( \text{\underline{h}3} +! \), and the e5-rook dare not move in view of \( \text{\underline{g}7} +! \). Still, it’s not all over as Black introduces sacrificial \( \text{\underline{f}4-\underline{f}3} \) ideas. In the cold light of day this doesn’t amount to much, but over the board it’s enough to keep White thinking for a few more precious minutes.

26...\( \text{\underline{f}4}! \)

27 \( \text{\underline{c}7} ? \)

Ikonnikov can’t resist going for glory, but there’s no mate and after this move the win becomes more difficult. In fact there is a win available through a direct attack with 27 \( \text{\underline{c}8}! \), threatening \( \text{\underline{f}8} +! \). The main difference is that the resource \( \text{\underline{f}5} \) is no longer available to Black – a trade of queens inevitably signals the end of his chances – and 27...\( \text{\underline{f}5} \) 28 \( \text{\underline{h}8}! \) is decisive as Black’s queen doesn’t have a useful square.

When going for a swindle like this you can’t worry too much about the
consequences of moves like 27 \texttt{wc7} or 27 \texttt{wc8}!. You just have to hope these variations work for you; or if they don’t, that your opponent avoids them; or even better, that he expends time analysing and then still avoids them!

Richard was rather more worried about the cold-blooded 27 \texttt{xf7}! which both rules out ...\texttt{f4-f3} tricks and prevents ...\texttt{wxf5}. After 27...\texttt{wh4} 28 \texttt{h3} all swindling attempts have vanished and Black would have to resign.

If playing White you saw 27 \texttt{xf7} early on, and especially if time was an issue, there would then be no good practical reason to try to calculate the consequences of 27 \texttt{wc7} or 27 \texttt{wc8} here. 27 \texttt{xf7} wins – so play it!

27...\texttt{wxf5}! 28 \texttt{wh7+ \texttt{g5}}

Now White, for the first time really, has to think seriously about defence because Black is threatening to win by playing 29...\texttt{wc2}! 30 \texttt{wh3} (or 30 \texttt{gg1 \texttt{wang2}+!}) 30...\texttt{we3}!.

29 \texttt{wh3}?

Seemingly countering all of Black’s ideas (...f4-f3, ...\texttt{wc2}, ...\texttt{we4} etc.) but Richard had seen something paradoxi-
cal a few moves earlier and now had the chance to carry it out. Richard gives 29 \texttt{e7} as White’s best move, and continues with 29...\texttt{we4} 30 \texttt{xe5+ \texttt{dxe5}} 31 \texttt{wh3 \texttt{xd5}}. With Black’s e-pawn preparing to advance up the board, White still has some work to do here (much more so than after 27 \texttt{xf7}), but the three extra queenside pawns should eventually be decisive.

29...\texttt{e3}!

Virtually forcing a rook ending. In normal circumstances this would have been suicidal given White’s three-pawn advantage, but the passed e-pawn coupled with Black’s active king – a reward for 22...\texttt{h6}! – offers very serious counterplay.

30 \texttt{xe3 \texttt{fxe3}} 31 \texttt{xf5+ \texttt{xf5}} 32 \texttt{e7}!

Ikonnikov now used up virtually all his remaining time (the time control was at move 40) to try to find a win in this position. This must have been a disheartening experience given White’s dominant position a few moves ago, especially since in some lines it’s Black who ends up winning! For example, 32 \texttt{g1}? (the obvious try, but the king
isn’t quick enough) 32...\textit{c4!} 33 \textit{f7+} (33 \textit{f1} is also met by 33...\textit{e4!}) 33...\textit{f4} 34 \textit{b6} (or 34 \textit{f1} \textit{e2} 35 \textit{e1} \textit{e3!}) 34...\textit{d3} 35 \textit{f1}? (35 \textit{b7} draws after 35...\textit{c1+} 36 \textit{f1} \textit{xf1+} 37 \textit{xf1} \textit{d2} 38 \textit{b8\textit{f2} e2+} 39 \textit{f2} \textit{e1\textit{f+} 40 \textit{f3 e2+} 41 \textit{f4 e5+} with perpetual check) 35...\textit{e2} 36 \textit{e1 d2!}

37 \textit{f2} (after 37 \textit{xe2+ xe2} there is no time for 38 \textit{b7} because of 38...\textit{c1 mate, so Black’s rook gets back in time to stop the pawns) 37...\textit{f4+} 38 \textit{g3} and now 38...\textit{f8} is sufficient, but Black can even win with the pretty 38...\textit{xe1!} 39 \textit{xf4 f2} 40 \textit{b7 e1\textit{f}} because it’s mate after 41 \textit{b8\textit{f e5+} 42 \textit{g4 f5+} 43 \textit{h4 h5 (Palliser).}}

\textbf{32...\textit{e4!} 33 \textit{g4+!}}

In the end it’s White who has to play accurately to force the draw, something that isn’t achieved after 33 \textit{f7+? e5} 34 \textit{f1} due to 34...\textit{e2} 35 \textit{e1 f4!} and ...\textit{e3.}

\textbf{33...\textit{f4} 34 \textit{xe4+ xe4} 35 \textit{g2 d3} 36 \textit{b6 e2} 37 \textit{b7 e1\textit{f 38 b8\textit{f}}}}

White’s king cannot escape perpetual check and the players soon agreed a draw.

\textbf{38...\textit{e2+} 39 \textit{g3 e3+} 40 \textit{g2 e2+} 41 \textit{g3 e3+} 42 \textit{h4 h6+ ½-½}}

\textbf{Never Resign!}

Well, okay, in some positions – you’ll know the ones I mean – resigning is the only thing you can do. On the other hand, you should never resign if you are pretty sure you are losing but you cannot find a cast-iron win for your opponent. Even then there’s no harm in making him ‘prove it’.

Occasionally I’ve seen players resign positions and then spend the post mortem searching for variations to justify their resignation! I’ve searched for reasons for this behaviour. Is it a psychological thing? Perhaps it’s a final chance in defeat to show your opponent you know more about the game than him: ‘I may have been losing but at least I was the first to realize this!’

If you get into the habit of resigning early, it’s more than likely that at some point you will resign in a position which is either theoretically drawn, or one which your opponent would have messed up had you chosen to continue.
It’s simply the laws of probability.

Even the strongest players in the world have been known to resign in drawn positions. I guess one explanation is that they – more than most players – are likely to try to calculate these positions right to the end. If they come to an assessment of ‘losing’, they will trust their judgement – even if incorrect – and this may possibly lead to a resignation if they trust in their opponent’s abilities too. But sometimes I think it’s just better to play some moves and see what happens...

Kramnik had just played the move 49 \( \text{c6-b7} \) when something strange happened: Svidler offered a handshake. Kramnik was sure he hadn’t yet offered a draw, and it took him a few moments to realize that Svidler was actually resigning.

Looking at the position, it’s true that Black cannot avoid the loss of the a-pawn, but there are always drawing chances associated with opposite-coloured bishop endings, and in fact here Black’s task is relatively straightforward. The bishop stays on the a7-g1 diagonal and combined with the black king it prevents the c-pawn crossing c4 and the a-pawn crossing a6. Black’s king has one other job to do, and that is to prevent the white king from penetrating the position via b7 (by playing \( \text{c7} \)) and via e4 (by playing \( \text{e5} \)). If Black sticks to these defensive tasks there is nothing White can do to force a win – there is simply no way through the fortress. One possible continuation runs 49...\( \text{g1} \) 50 \( \text{xa5} \) \( \text{f2} \) 51 \( \text{d5} \) \( \text{g1} \) 52 \( \text{a6} \) \( \text{c7} \) (to stop \( \text{b7} \)) 53 \( \text{b5} \) \( \text{d6} \) (to stop \( \text{c4-c5} \)) 54 a5 \( \text{f2} \) 55 a6 \( \text{g1} \) 56 \( \text{b4} \) \( \text{f2} \) 57 \( \text{c3} \) \( \text{g1} \) 58 \( \text{d3} \) \( \text{e5} \) (to stop \( \text{e4} \)) and so on.
Time management is an important aspect of practical chess. In fact, with the current movement towards faster time limits in a large number of tournaments, there’s a case for saying that the art of clock handling is becoming even more important than it has been in the past. In any case, I think this subject deserves a chapter of its own.

The Perils of Time Trouble
The fact that a player is very short of time is, to my mind, as little to be considered an excuse as, for instance, the statement of the law-breaker that he was drunk at the time he committed the crime.
Alexander Alekhine

Time trouble is a real problem, and undoubtedly the reason for many lost points. If you are in time trouble, it’s safe to say you are no longer in complete control of the game, no matter how good your position is on the board. You have a certain number of moves to make in a small amount of time, and you must do it without making too many errors or any real blunders. Not easy.

I imagine nearly every chessplayer could tell a few tales of woe, in which perfectly good games were ruined by time-trouble induced horror shows. The following game was a particularly painful experience for me:

J.Emms-S.Tiviakov
Gausdal 1992

(See following diagram) White has a promising attack on the kingside. Actually, this is being too respectful – with best play the attack is winning. The problem was that I had already spent an incredible amount of time earlier on in the game. In the opening I had been surprised by Tiviakov’s 2...e5!? in reply to 1 e4 c5 2 c3 (usually he played 2...d5). The normal move for
White is 3 \( \text{\textit{d}f3} \) but I spent half an hour(!) deciding whether or not to try out the King's Gambit-style 3 f4!?.

Threatening simply to capture on f7. 26...\( \text{\textit{x}h6} \) allows mate in two after 27 \( \text{\textit{w}h4}+ \) \( \text{\textit{g}7} \) 28 \( \text{\textit{x}h7} \), so Black's reply is forced.

26...f6 27 exf6+ \( \text{\textit{xf6}} \) 28 \( \text{\textit{h}4} \)

In the end I went for it, and I did manage to reach a nice position from the opening. But that long contemplation set the tone for the rest of the game, and further deliberations meant that I was already down to an average of thirty seconds per move to reach the time control at move 40.

24 \( \text{\textit{f}5}! \) \( \text{\textit{d}8} \)

Forced, as 24...\( \text{\textit{w}e6} \) 25 d\( \text{\textit{d}3d4} \) \( \text{\textit{w}e8} \) 26 \( \text{\textit{d}d6} \) wins the exchange for White.

25 \( \text{\textit{h}6}+ \) \( \text{\textit{g}7} \)

Now the threat is 29 \( \text{\textit{h}f7}! \) \( \text{\textit{xf7}} \) (or 29...\( \text{\textit{w}d7} \) 30 \( \text{\textit{w}h6}+ \) \( \text{\textit{g}8} \) 31 \( \text{\textit{xf6}} \) 30 \( \text{\textit{xf7}} \) \( \text{\textit{xf7}} \) 31 \( \text{\textit{w}xh7}+ \) and White crashes through.

28...c7!?

This move looks disastrous – surely all White has to do is to chase the c5-knight away and then there's a massive family fork on e6?

29 b4!

This is winning, but I was down to my final three minutes.

29...\( \text{\textit{h}5}! \)

The only chance.

30 \( \text{\textit{xf8}} \) \( \text{\textit{xf8}} \) 31 bxc5 \( \text{\textit{h}6} \) 32 \( \text{\textit{e}6} \)

Is this the end?

32...\( \text{\textit{e}7}! \)

No! Tiviakov fights doggedly and forces White to play one or two more accurate moves. In all fairness I had previously seen this possibility, but of course it did mean I had to spend a few more precious moments working out a
reply.

33 ♜d4!

Threatening 34 ♜d2+ (or 34 ♜e3+) followed by ♘xc7.

33...♘c6 34 ♜d2+ g5 35 ♘d4

Game over, surely?

35...♗f6!

No! Tiviakov continues to defend heroically, and I must confess that this resource came as a shock.

White is still winning but I was now down to my final minute, and the realization of missing 35...♗f6 was a further blow to recover from. Panicking, I lashed out:

36 h4

This is good enough to win, but my calculating ability had disappeared and I missed the possibility of...

36...♗g3+

'Check! Where to move the king? Not quite sure. Let's attack the knight...'

37 ♖h2??

Black has no option but to resign after 37 ♖g1! ♖g7 38 ♘xe6!.

37...♗f1+!

Disaster! I had simply overlooked this possibility.

38 ♘xf1??

It didn’t help my mood much when I later realized that 38 ♖g1! ♖xd2 39 ♖xe7, with a probable draw, would have at least saved the second half-point.

38...♖xf1 39 ♖e6 ♖f5 40 hxg5+ ♖g6

The time control had finally been reached, and now I had a good opportunity to repent at leisure. White is totally lost in this position, and I played a few token moves before throwing in the towel.

41 ♖f4+ ♖f7 42 ♖h3 ♖e5+ 43 ♖h1 ♖f1+ 44 ♖g1 ♖e4 45 g6+ ♖xg6 0-1
Trying to Avoid Time Trouble

If you find yourself continually getting into time trouble, and losing lots of points because of this, there are one or two things you can do to try to eliminate the problem, or at least make sure it happens far less regularly:

1) Only play openings you are comfortable with; ones where you know some theory and have some experience of the resulting positions. If you are a time trouble addict you’re getting off on the wrong foot playing a completely new opening and spending an hour on the first ten moves. If you wish to change an opening, make sure you do a lot of homework on the new opening (learning the theory, playing practice games etc.) before you try it out in a competitive game.

2) There’s a saying that goes ‘long think, wrong think’, and I believe there is certainly a grain of truth in this. Sometimes while studying a position and deciding upon your next move, you reach a saturation point where any more thinking just isn’t going to help. In fact you might end up playing a worse move because of thinking too long (I recall quite a few occasions in some of my own games where too long a think has resulted in a bad move or even a blunder). In, say, a time control of 40 moves in 2 hours, you shouldn’t really spend over half an hour on one move, even in the most complicated of positions. When calculating long variations you should trust your judgement, and go for it.

3) Be practical. Do you want to win or do you want to play 20 perfect moves followed by another 20 moves in three minutes? There are many positions in which there are two or more reasonable moves, and their values are relatively close – whether you choose one or the other really won’t affect the assessment of the position a great deal. One example that comes to mind is which rook to move to a certain square – the king’s rook or the queen’s rook. Don’t agonize for too long over these calls. When you have a decision to make in a quiet position, it’s worth putting a mental marker on the clock (say five or ten minutes), and forcing yourself to make the judgement by that time.

4) Concentrate on the position while it is your opponent’s move. This should cut down on your own thinking time and keep you focussed.

In certain positions you’ll have a very good idea of what your opponent is going to play, and on these occasions there is no excuse for only starting to think of your reply once your own clock is running. In other situations you may have less of an idea of what your opponent will do, and if you wish to take breaks from the board (players do like to have short breaks and these can be beneficial) then it makes more sense to do it on these occasions. Of course concentrating during your opponent’s thinking time becomes more important when playing faster time controls.

Keep It Simple, Stupid! (KISS)
Assuming you stick to all the advice above, and yet you still find yourself in time trouble (of course this will be un-
avoidable with certain time limits), is there anything that can be done?

I think that the situation which is really worth looking at is the one in which you have most to lose: where you are winning or have a clear advantage but are in some time trouble. In these positions it's worth sticking to the KISS principle – keep things as simple as you possibly can. Now this may sound like fairly obvious advice, but I've learned from bitter experience that it's often hard to resist the temptation of complications, even when in time trouble, and especially when you see some nice variations leading to immediate wins. You must try to be strict with yourself though. If your opponent sees through the tricks – and you must assume he will – you may end up losing control over the board as well as on the clock. This is exactly what happened in the next two examples:

Black is an exchange for a pawn down, but after...

28...\texttt{\textit{b3!}}

...White has no way of saving the d-pawn, and with the prospect of two connected passed pawns marching down the middle, I was very confident of winning the game despite having only 10 minutes or so to reach move 40. The game continued...

29 \texttt{\textit{c7}} \texttt{\textit{xa4!}}

The d3-pawn is not going anywhere, so Black has time to grab the a-pawn too, which in turn leaves White's b-pawn vulnerable.

30 \texttt{\textit{f1}} \texttt{\textit{b3}} 31 \texttt{\textit{xa7}} \texttt{\textit{f8!}}

I was pleased with this move, which does show how difficult White's position is. With f7 securely defended, Black is ready to pick off both b5 and d3, and there isn't much White can do about this.

32 \texttt{\textit{b7}}

\begin{center}
\textbf{D.Walker-J.Emms}
\end{center}

\begin{center}
British Championship, Norwich 1994
\end{center}

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}[scale=0.7]
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I was just on the verge of playing the automatic 32...\texttt{\textit{xb5!}}, and this is certainly what I should have done. After, say, 33 \texttt{\textit{c1}} \texttt{\textit{xd3}} 34 \texttt{\textit{xd3}} \texttt{\textit{xd3}} Black has every chance of winning, and
with the queens off the board Black’s is in complete control, his position is easy to play and there is much less chance of a swindle. This is just the sort of situation over the board you need if you are in time trouble. One possible continuation is 35 \( \text{d1} \) e4 36 \( \text{xb6} \) \( \text{e2} \) 37 \( \text{e1} \) d3, when it’s highly unlikely that White would survive.

However, I was all of a sudden seduced by the prospect of an immediate win with the trick 32...e4 33 dxe4?? \( \text{xf3} \) 34 \( \text{xf3} \) \( \text{xe4} \), forking both the rooks. I was attracted by this ‘easy fix’, and somehow convinced myself that there was a chance that my opponent – also in a bit of time trouble – would fall for this. I also reassured myself that my position would still be winning in any case.

32...e4 (?!)

33 \( \text{d1} \)!

The best defence. Now I realized that the enticing 33...\( \text{xd1} \) 34 \( \text{xd1} \) e3 35 \( \text{b4} \) followed by \( \text{xb6} \) wasn’t clear-cut at all, and I was berating myself for forgoing the easy-to-play lines after 32...\( \text{xb5} \). I did have a very strong alter-}

native available, but the position was becoming tactical and in time trouble this inevitably brings a randomizing element to the play.

33...\( \text{xd3} \) 34 \( \text{xb6} \)

The passed b-pawn gives White potential counterplay, and this puts pressure on Black to play precisely over the next three or four moves, something which I was unable to do.

34...\( \text{e8} \)!

34...e3! 35 \( \text{b4} \) \( \text{xd1} \) 36 \( \text{xd1} \) \( \text{d8} \) is winning for Black. I think that I was worried about the b5-pawn in lines such as 37 \( \text{d6} \) \( \text{xd6} \) 38 \( \text{xd6} \), but here Black’s pawns are too quick (38...d3!).

35 \( \text{f4} \) \( \text{c4} \)!

One way or another, with White’s b-pawn now being a factor, I had convinced myself that I needed to keep the queens on the board. 35...\( \text{xd1} \) 36 \( \text{xd1} \) e3 is still better for Black.

36 \( \text{c1} \)!

I had missed this. Now I realized that trading queens would give White a much better version of the endgames previously noted. After 36...\( \text{xc1} \) 37 \( \text{xc1} \) e3 38 \( \text{bc6} \), the white rooks are
working well together and the b-pawn is genuinely dangerous (and 38...d3?? loses to 39 \textit{b}c8! \textit{xc}8 40 \textit{xc}8+ \textit{h}7 41 \textit{xe}3).

In view of this, I felt obliged to give up my h6-pawn but I was certainly no longer feeling quite so confident, and trying to work out the complications was eating into my final minutes.

36...\textit{wb}3 37 \textit{xe}h6

White is right back in the game now because there are some dangerous ideas on the kingside (for example, 37...\textit{e}5? 38 \textit{x}g6+! \textit{fxg}6 39 \textit{c}6!), most of which I was unaware of until they occurred. And I still had four moves to make to reach time control.

37...\textit{e}3 38 \textit{x}g7 \textit{xg}7 39 \textit{c}5!

Another move I had failed to spot, and suddenly I understood that there was a danger of something nasty happening on the kingside. My fear at the time was allowing a perpetual check, but looking at the position in the cold light of day Black should be happy with such an outcome!

I quickly discounted 39...d3 due to 40 \textit{d}4+ \textit{g}8 41 \textit{g}4, when \textit{x}g6+ would guarantee White at least perpetual check. My attempt at avoiding this led to disaster:

39...\textit{wb}2?? 40 \textit{d}5?

After 40 \textit{x}g6+! \textit{fxg}6 41 \textit{c}7+! \textit{h}8 42 \textit{f}4! there is no defence for Black against the threats of 43 \textit{h}6+ and 43 \textit{f}6+, although I think this line is difficult to see over the board. No matter, as my final move before time control offers White another chance.

40...\textit{e}7??

Did I really think my rook and bishop would be able to hold out against a rampaging queen and two rooks while my central passed pawns pushed up the board towards promotion? Time trouble does funny things to your objectivity!

Black can still draw by playing 40...\textit{e}2, which forces White’s hand: 41 \textit{x}g6+ \textit{fxg}6 42 \textit{d}7+ \textit{h}6 43 \textit{h}3+ \textit{g}7 44 \textit{d}7+ is perpetual check.

Having reached 40 moves, and thus with time to reflect, my opponent discovered a killing move.

41 \textit{g}5!

I think it was only now that I real-
ized the true extent of White’s attacking chances, but it was far too late to bail out. White threatens 42 \( \text{Wxe7} \), 42 \( \text{Bxg6+ fxg6} \) 43 \( \text{Wxe7+} \), and finally 42 \( \text{Bxf7+} \), 43 \( \text{Bxg6+} \). There is no defence.

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\begin{tikzpicture}
\begin{chessboard}
\end{chessboard}
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

41...\( \text{Bxe6} \) 42 \( \text{Bb7!} \) 1–0

The threat is 43 \( \text{Bxf7+} \), and after 42...\( \text{Bg8} \) 43 \( \text{Bxf7} \) there is nothing that can be done about \( \text{Wd8+} \).

Fast-forward a few years to a game that I had to win to have any chance of qualifying for the World Championship finals.

**I. Efimov-J. Emms**  
**Andorra Zonal 1998**

Black’s extra pawn – the strong passed pawn on d3 – guarantees a big advantage. However, it’s not all plain sailing because the king on f8, while fairly well protected, is still a concern, as is finding a role for the rook on g8. And of course there were still 12 moves to make before reaching the safety of time control.

My opponent played 29 \( \text{Qe2!} \), which caused me to use up some time because Black has more than one option here. The first thing I realized was that 29...\( \text{dxe2!?} \) 30 \( \text{Bxd4} \) \( \text{Qxf3} \) 31 \( \text{Wxf3} \) \( \text{Bxf3+} \) 32 \( \text{Qxf3} \) \( \text{Bxd4} \) 33 \( \text{Bxe2 Qe7} \) gives Black a good pawn-up endgame, but in view of the opposite-coloured bishops, I wasn’t entirely sure whether I had significant winning chances.

I knew that the practical choice would have been the simple retreat 29...\( \text{Bd6!} \) and had seen that 30 \( \text{Qf4} \) could be answered by 30...\( \text{Bc5!} \) when White is forced to relinquish any ambitions of trying to snatch the d3-pawn. Following 31 \( \text{Bee1 Qg7} \) (or 31...\( \text{Bg8} \)) Black maintains complete control. However, I then realized that after 29...\( \text{Bb4} \), the natural 30 \( \text{Qf4??} \) would lose immediately due to 30...\( \text{Bxb3!} \) 31 axb3 \( \text{Bc2+} \) followed by 32...\( \text{Bxd1} \). After having spent some time on both 29...\( \text{dxe2} \) and 29...\( \text{Bd6} \), I suddenly, without much thought, plumped for the third option, even though something in the back of my mind was telling me that moving the rook to an off-
side position wasn’t the way to go. 
29...\(\text{b4}?(\)

I had completely overlooked this idea, and with my d3-pawn about to be captured I was now really regretting the decision to play 29...\(\text{b4}\. I tried to find a defence, but with very little time remaining, I couldn’t think clearly and unsurprisingly my play collapsed. 
31...\(\text{xe5}\?? 32 \text{xd3} \text{b5} 33 \text{xe5} 1-0

30 \(\text{c1}!

My opponent played this move immediately and I suddenly wished I could take back my previous move and replace it with the solid 29...\(\text{d6}\. Time was now getting really short and so I played my intended follow-up. 
30...\(\text{b6}

I was expecting 31 \(\text{ee1}, when my plan was to bring the rook back to where it belonged by playing 31...\(\text{d4} (basically admitting that 29...\(\text{b4} was just a cheapo). I was about to be shocked...
31 \(\text{xe5}(\)

Here my time ran out. I couldn’t see any defence after 33...\(\text{xe5} 34 \(\text{d7}?, but in fact Black can save himself here with the unlikely 34...\(\text{e2}+ 35 \text{h3} \text{exh2}! 36 \text{xh2} \text{f2}+ when strangely White cannot escape perpetual check: 37 \text{h3} \text{f1}+ 38 \text{h4} \text{h1}+ 39 \text{g5} \text{c1}! and now 40 \text{f4}?? loses to 40...\text{h6+ 41 f6 \text{xb2}, 40 f6 \text{xb2+ doesn’t help either, so White must concede a draw with 40 h4. However, instead of 34 \(\text{d7 White can win by playing 34 \text{g5! (threatening \text{d8+)} 34...\text{e2}+ 35 \text{h3} \text{e8 36 \text{g7! \text{f8 37 a4+ \text{e7 38 d7+}}.}}})

\textbf{Question: } Going back to the position after 31 \(\text{xe5}, does Black have a better defence?

\textbf{Answer: } 31...\(\text{xb3} is one attempt, but following 32 \text{xb3 \text{xe5} 33 \text{xd3 it’s White who is on top, especially in}
view of the line 33...\texttt{f6??} 34 \texttt{de5! xe5} 35 \texttt{d7}.

Amazingly, though, Black can completely turn the tables with the brilliant move 31...\texttt{h4!!}.

![Chess Diagram](image)

White’s queen has no squares, and after 32 gxf4 \texttt{g8+} 33 \texttt{h1 f2+} White has no good way of preventing \texttt{g2 mate} (the same applies after 33 \texttt{h3 f2}). So White has to make do with giving up his queen, but following 32 \texttt{xh4 xh4} 33 \texttt{dxd3} (33 gxf4 \texttt{g8+} is still winning) 33...\texttt{e7} Black has every chance of converting his material advantage.

Does this discovery mean I was right to play 29...\texttt{b4} after all? Well no, that would only have been the case had I been able to calculate all the way through to 31...\texttt{h4!!} before playing 29...\texttt{b4}, a tough ask and also a major time investment given how little I had left available. No, 29...\texttt{b4} was just a poor practical decision. Once I had eliminated 29...\texttt{dxe2} and seen that 30 \texttt{c1} was an easy defence to 29...\texttt{b4}, I should have played 29...\texttt{d6!} without any further thought.

The bottom line is, if you see a move that is simple and keeps all of your advantage, play it!

**Exploiting Your Opponent’s Time Trouble**

Firstly, if you have a winning position or a very big advantage then you shouldn’t do anything different to normal. I’ve seen too many players in these situations blitzing their opponents, and trying to induce a mistake, only to end up blundering themselves despite having loads of time on the clock. Don’t do this! You should ignore your opponent’s time trouble and simply concentrate on playing good moves – if your advantage is big enough then you should win the game by normal means.

If you are only slightly better, equal or worse, then there are ways to try to swing the position in your favour over the board.

Many players trying to exploit an opponent’s time trouble decide, wherever possible, to create threat after threat – a long series of ‘one-movers’. In my experience this approach often doesn’t work particularly well. Players in time trouble are generally in a very alert state, and they tend to react well to obvious threats. Player A thinks for a few minutes and creates a threat; Player B, in time trouble, has already spotted how to deal with the threat in his opponent’s thinking time and reacts instantly. Player A, who had made no provisions for this defence, settles down for a few more minutes and pro-
roduces another threat; Player B has again seen this very early and replies straight away. This has happened a few times in my experience, and usually Player B escapes. Indeed, sometimes Player A compromises his position in the process, and on other occasions he spends so much time he ends up joining Player B in time trouble!

Players in time trouble tend to react less well when it’s not clear whether a threat exists. This brings to mind an amusing quote from Siegbert Tarrasch: ‘The opponent is threatening... nothing. This is the most terrible threat, because it cannot be evaded.’

In his excellent book *Chess for Tigers*, Simon Webb described an approach – the ‘barrage technique’ – which I’ve seen many players use to good effect. With the barrage technique you study a position for quite a long time, working out all the possibilities, and then play two or three moves very quickly. The idea is that your time-troubled opponent then doesn’t benefit from being able to think in your time, and on the second or third move that you play your opponent reaches a position he has perhaps not considered at all during your initial think. In these circumstances a mistake in time trouble is more likely.

Of course you must be careful during the initial think to have everything worked out (it’s easier if your opponent’s replies are virtually forced). Also, if your opponent plays something unexpected, you should end the barrage and reassess the position (before possibly creating another barrage).

Here’s an example from one of my games where I was able to induce a mistake using the barrage technique.

**J. Emms-C. Weidemann**

Münster 1995

![Chessboard Diagram](image)

White is more active but Black’s position is pretty solid – the bishop on d5 is a very good piece – and he needs only one or two more moves to consolidate completely. I sensed that with ‘normal’ play (for example, 33 \(\text{a1} \text{c8}
34 \text{xc8} \text{wxc8}
) White’s slight initiative on the kingside would soon disappear and I would be left with very few, if any, winning chances. In view of this I thought that now – with my opponent only having a few minutes to reach move 40 – was the moment to lash out. I suspected that with best play Black would be able to defend, but I did realize that even in this case the position would still be equal, and probably drawn. So I wasn’t really risking anything, and of course he could make a mistake!
In line with the barrage technique, I thought for quite a while here about the position we would reach after 35 h5 and then played my next three moves very quickly.

33 \( \text{\textit{\&f6+}} \text{\textit{\&g8}} \)

33...\( \text{\textit{\&h7}} \) 34 g4 \textit{h}xg4 35 h5 is worse for Black because with his king on h7, the move \textit{hxg6} comes with check.

34 \textit{g4}?

Here we go!

34...\textit{hxg4}

My opponent played this quickly. It’s difficult to suggest another move, as allowing \textit{gxh5} certainly wouldn’t be desirable.

35 \textit{h5}!

White’s idea is based on the fact that 35...\textit{gxh5}?? loses to 36 \( \text{\textit{\&g5+}} \). Now my opponent suddenly had to make a quick decision in a position that he wouldn’t have necessarily envisaged before I played 33 \( \text{\textit{\&f6+}} \). Luckily for me, he made the wrong choice:

35...\textit{\&d7}?

Intending to defend along the second rank after an exchange of pawns on g6, but this is a mistake. It’s true that Black should move his rook away from being attacked by White’s queen, but 35...\textit{\&c8}! is the way to go. Then White doesn’t have anything better than 36 \textit{hxg6 fxg6} 37 \( \text{\textit{\&xg6+ \&g7}} \), which is equal.

What’s interesting is that White has a few good ideas but doesn’t have a crushing threat after 35 h5 – indeed Black survives after 36 \textit{hxg6 fxg6} 37 \( \text{\textit{\&xg6+ \&g7}} \). There is nothing that Black can focus upon and perhaps this contributed to my opponent’s error. 36 \( \text{\textit{\&c1}} \! 

I’m sure my opponent overlooked this – I guess he must have been expecting a capture on g6. The problem now for Black is that in some lines the white rook comes to c8, and that means 36...\textit{gxh5} still loses after 37 \( \text{\textit{\&g5+ \&g7}} \) 38 \( \text{\textit{\&c8+}} \). What’s worse, again White has no overwhelming threat. Indeed, it looks like Black’s best here is to make a ‘nothing’ move such as 36...a5, and after 37 \textit{hxg6 fxg6} 38 \( \text{\textit{\&xg6 \&g7}} \) Black is still in the game, even though White has good winning chances if he continues with 39 \( \text{\textit{\&h5.}} \)
I admit that being able to make a ‘nothing’ move in this pressure situation requires very strong nerves, and in the game my opponent made a second mistake:

36...f3?

Introducing the idea of ...d1+, but Black’s bishop was required on d5 to protect the e6-pawn.

37 hxg6 fxg6 38 hxg6?

This was careless – I nearly messed up my previous work. I’m unsure why I didn’t play 38gxh6 hxh8 39 xxe6. Perhaps I was hallucinating about a black queen or rook coming to the h-file and getting to h1.

38...d8?

The endgame after 38...xf6 39 exf6 d1+ (or 39...d8 40 c7) 40 xd1 xd1 41 g2 e5 42 g3 is winning for White. Black’s last chance was 38...d5, after which there is still a bit of work to do.

39 f7+!

Now it’s all over.

39...f8 40 xxe6+ xxf6 41 exf6 d8 42 c7+ a5 43 f7+ e8 44 g7 d1+ 45 h2 h1+

White would just have to make sure after 45...g3+ to capture with the king!

46 g3 h8

47 g8+! 1-0

After 47...xg8 White plays 48 f7+!.

Blitzing

When in time trouble, players understandably get annoyed when opponents fail to keep their scoresheet up to date even though they have enough time on their clock (over five minutes normally) that they should, by the rules, do so. This is often referred to as ‘blitzing an opponent’ and it’s illegal. If your opponent does this you are justified in calling up the arbiter.

But what constitutes keeping the scoresheet up to date? It’s worth taking a quick look at the exact wording in the FIDE rulebook. Here is part of Article 8.1:

In the course of play each player is required to record his own moves and those of his opponent in the correct manner, move after move, as clearly and legibly as possible, in the algebraic notation (Appendix E), on the ‘scoresheet’ prescribed for the
competition. It is forbidden to write the moves in advance, unless the player is claiming a draw according to Article 9.2 or 9.3.

A player may reply to his opponent’s move before recording it, if he so wishes. He must record his previous move before making another.

The second paragraph is interesting because it means that a small amount of ‘blitzing’ does appear to be legal. I’m not sure I agree with this rule, or whether many players realize it exists.

Let’s take an example. If White opens 1 e4 it looks like Black has every right to bash out 1...c5 before writing any moves on his scoresheet. However, after White plays 2 d4 Black would have to write down a minimum of ‘1 e4 c5’ before playing his second move.

In general play I think it makes more sense to write your opponent’s move down before replying – you are far less likely to mess up your scoresheet if you keep it totally up to date. However, this rule of being able to reply before recording your opponent’s move – as long as you have recorded your previous move – is useful to know when utilizing or facing the barrage technique.

**Reaching the Time Control**

Once you have reached the time control, I think it’s a good idea if possible to take a complete break from the position, to get up from the board and have a walk around for a minute or two. I think it’s particularly beneficial to do this if you have just played through a time scramble. Adrenalin will still be high, and it might be useful to have a cooling down period.

Many mistakes are made on the first move after time control, and this is often because a player is still caught up in the emotion of the preceding time scramble – this can be avoided if you take a break. (Mistakes also occur when a player is not completely sure whether he has reached the time control so he quickly makes an extra move just in case).

Another point to bear in mind is that the position changes very quickly in a time scramble. Having a break and then looking at the position ‘fresh’ may generate possibilities that you hadn’t considered earlier. This is something I certainly didn’t do in the following game.

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**J.Emms-L.Riemersma**

Gausdal 1993

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![Chessboard](image)

Both players had only a few minutes left to reach move 40, and the position is very complicated (although Black does seem to be winning).
31 \(b4\)

Threatening both 32 \(xg4\) and also 32 \(b5\) followed by \(f6\) mate — that would be a nice finish! I must confess I was a bit concerned — rightly it seems — about moving a piece away from covering c1, but in view of the threat to the d4-knight alternatives were scarce, and continuations such as 31 \(b3\)? \(d5\) 32 \(e3\) \(xg5\)! 33 \(xg5\) \(xf6\) clearly had to be avoided.

31...\(d5\)?

This is the move I expected (32 \(f5??\) can now be answered simply by 32...\(xf5\)!). I was prepared for 31...\(xf6!\) 32 \(xf6\) c1\(w+b\) 33 \(xc1\) w\(xc1+b\) 34 \(h2\), but it seems that both of us missed the winning zwischenzug 32...\(de8\)!

32 \(f4\) \(xg5!\)

The point of Black’s previous move.

33 \(xg5\) \(xf6\) 34 \(xg4\) c1\(w+b\) 35 \(xc1\) w\(xc1+b\) 36 \(h2\) w\(h6+b\) 37 \(g1\) w\(c1+b\) 38 \(h2\)

Was Riemersma happy with a draw?

38...\(c7+b?\)

No. He was repeating the position in order to get a couple of moves closer to the time control. Desperately short of time and faced with a change of direction, my response wasn’t the best:

39 \(h3?\)

39 \(g1\) or 39 \(f4\) would have been okay for White.

39...\(xd4!\) 40 \(xd4\) \(f7?\)

With his flag hanging, and with just one final move to make, my opponent decided not to risk 40...\(xf2\)!. White doesn’t get anywhere after 41 \(d7\) \(c3+b\), or 41 \(e6+b\) \(f7\)!. That said, I can certainly understand the principle behind this decision. There was simply not enough time for Black to be sure it was safe to grab on \(f2\), and with time control reached White would enjoy all the time in the world to find a refutation if one existed.

![Chess board](image)

After 40...\(f7\) was played both players realized that the time control had been reached (the next stage was another 20 moves in an hour). A two or three minute break and then returning to the position fresh would have no doubt led me to playing 41 \(d2\)!, after which nothing much is happening in the position and a draw would have been a very likely outcome. But this
didn’t happen. Instead I remained firmly planted in my chair. Still buzzing from the time scramble, I lashed out with...

41 \text{d7}?

Even now I can’t remember whether I didn’t see the possibility of 41 \text{d2} until later or I just missed Black’s next move. I do recall considering the variation 41...\text{wxa2} 42 \text{wdx4} \text{e7} 43 \text{d8+} \text{f8} 44 \text{d7}, which is a draw.

On this occasion with plenty of time to think, my opponent wasn’t about to pass up another chance to grab on f2.

41...\text{xf2}!

\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{chess_board}
\end{center}

It soon dawned on me that 42 \text{w6+} comes to nothing after 42...\text{f7}, for example 43 \text{d8+} \text{g7} 44 \text{e5+} \text{f6}. The best I could come up with was to transpose to a pawn-down rook ending after...

42 \text{d4} \text{xd4} 43 \text{xd4}

Normally I would have backed myself to hold this position, but perhaps still shaken by my 41st move, I missed several drawing opportunities — even after losing a second pawn — and finally lost the game. Here is the rest:

43...\text{f5} 44 \text{d8+} \text{g7} 45 \text{d7+} \text{f7} 46 \text{d6 a5 47 a6 f5 48 g3 h5 49 g4 f3+ 50 g2 a3 51 gxh5 gxh5 52 f2 h4 53 g2 f7 54 h6 xa2+ 55 h3 a4 56 h5 e6 57 h6+ \text{d5} 58 h5+ \text{c4} 59 \text{hxh4+} \text{b3} 60 \text{h5 a1 61 g2 a4 62 f2 a3 63 b5+ a2 64 e2 b1 65 d5 b2 66 d2+ b3 67 d3+ a4 68 d4+ b4 69 d8 a2 70 d3 b3 0-1}

I should add that when considering taking a break, a lot depends upon what the next time control is. If you are playing a classical time limit (say, 20 moves in the next hour, as in the game above) then I think a two or three minute break is a good investment. If it is a quickplay finish with all your moves in 15 minutes, then there is less of an argument for a break — in effect you are still in some time trouble! Even here, though, just getting up from your board for a few seconds might be beneficial. And of course if you are playing Black you can hopefully do this while your opponent is considering his move.

The only time when it might be a good idea to move quickly after the time control is if you are losing. In this case you can hope that your opponent will reply quickly as well (maybe because he is yet to get out of ‘time scramble’ mode, or indeed if he wants to make sure he has made the right number of moves). In this case there might be a chance that your opponent blunders, something that would be less likely if you took plenty of time on your move because he would have more time to regain his composure (or work out that he has definitely made the time control).
Chapter Four

Opening Play

Openings undoubtedly play an important role in competitive chess, and this is for a number of reasons. Firstly (and, I admit, rather obviously), if you reach a good position from the opening your chances of success have already increased (it’s easier to win from a good position than a bad one!). Secondly, from my experience a good opening gives you confidence and often sets the tone for the quality of your play for the remainder of the game (look back at some of my games from the previous chapters). Finally, not knowing your openings very well means that you usually have to spend more time on your moves in the early stages of the game, and this can leave you short of time for critical moments later on.

Building a Repertoire

Too many players flit from opening to opening without ever building up a proper repertoire. A player might spot a nice win from Topalov, for example; he’ll try out the same opening Topalov played in one or two of his own games, but as soon as he discovers a ‘problem’ with the opening he’ll ditch it. Then Kramnik wins a nice game with a different opening so the player decides to try that, and so the cycle continues.

The key to success is to have a plan. You need to build a cohesive and trustworthy repertoire. And after this you need to maintain it properly, keep faith with the lines that bring success or show promise, and gradually weed out openings that are unsuitable.

When building an opening repertoire there are a number of factors that you need to bear in mind:

1) Do you enjoy tactical battles or are you primarily a positional player? Or maybe a bit of both?

2) Do you have a good memory?

3) Do you like openings that lead to a wide variety of positions; or do you prefer opening systems, where your developing moves tend to be pretty
similar regardless of how your opponent responds?

4) Do you prefer open or closed positions?

5) How much time do you have available to study openings?

After answering these questions you will be in a better position to understand which openings will suit your needs.

Let's take an example. Let's suppose you are a 1 e4 player deciding what to do against 1...c5 – the Sicilian Defence. If you enjoy tactical positions, and you have got a great memory and lots of time to studyopening theory then there's every chance that playing 2 Ñf3 and 3 d4, and employing the sharpest lines of the Open Sicilian is the way forward. If you prefer quieter positions with less theory, but ones which are open rather than closed, then the c3-Sicilian (2 c3) may be the best choice. If you like playing 'systems' and you excel in closed positions, then the Closed Sicilian (2 Ñc3 followed by 3 g3) could well be the answer.

How about a defence to 1 e4? Many 1...e5 openings, plus the Dragon, Sveshnikov and Najdorf Sicilians would suit tactical players with good memories and time to burn. The Caro-Kann (1...c6) and the Scandinavian (1...d5) would be good choices for those who like systems of development. The Alekhine Defence looks like a good choice for tactical players who don't have much free time to keep up with theory. The French Defence (1...e6) is perfect for those who are happy to play blocked positions. I admit in parts this may be a little bit simplistic, (for example, the French doesn't always lead to closed positions), but it's a reasonable starting point.

**Winning the Same Game Twice**

There are obvious benefits of persevering with an opening. As your practical experience and study of that opening grow, you'll find that your understanding of the typical resulting middlegame positions increases. When reaching these positions in a competitive game, the plans will become clear-cut; you'll have every chance of outplaying your opponent; and you'll probably be able to play fairly quickly too, keeping time for the critical positions that lie ahead and avoiding the dangers of time trouble.

Once you have played quite a few games in a particular opening, you may find you can directly use experience and study from previous battles in order to win subsequent games. In effect, you can more or less win the same game twice (or possibly even more). Some might argue that there's not much creative satisfaction in winning games like this, but a practical player will always value a win that doesn't require too much energy. During a tournament of, say, nine games there will be enough occasions where you will have to demonstrate creativity in unfamiliar positions, so why not the occasional easy point?

In Chapter 2 I showed you a game (against Aaron Summerscale) which I failed to win despite managing to land
a huge trick. Four and a half years later I had another chance to play exactly the same trick, and luckily this time I did manage to convert my winning position:

J.Emms-I.Gaponenko
Ghent 2002

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♗f6 5 ♗c3 g6 6 ♘c4 ♗g7 7 0-0 0-0 8 ♘e1 b6?! 9 ♘g5 ♘b7 10 ♗d5 ♘bd7? 11 ♘a6!! ♗c5

My game against Aaron had continued 11...♘xa6 12 ♘c6 ♗e8 13 ♘c7 (see page 73).

12 ♘xb7 ♘xb7 13 ♘c6 ♗d7 14 ♘xe7+ ♘h8 15 ♘xf6 ♘xf6 16 ♘xf6 ♗xe7 17 ♘d5 ♗e5 18 ♘c3 ♘c5 19 f4 ♗g7 20 ♘f3 ♘ae8 21 ♘e2 ♘f6 22 ♘ae1 ♘f7 23 h3 ♘ff8 24 ♗h2 ♗f7 25 c4 ♘ff8 26 ♗c3 ♘e6 27 b4 ♘b7 28 ♘e3 ♘fe8 29 h4 ♘d8 30 g4 ♘f8 31 g5 fxg5 32 hxg5 ♘xc3 33 ♘xc3 ♘c6 34 ♘g3 ♘c8 35 ♘a3 ♘g7 36 ♘a6 ♘f7 37 b5 ♘e7 38 ♘xa7 ♘xc4 39 ♘h1 1-0

In this following game I was able to utilize my happy experiences of a previous encounter together with a bit of analysis I had done after that. The result was a win without really having to think over the board:

J.Emms-S.Joachim
German League 2000

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♗f6 5 ♘c3 d6 6 ♘c4 e6 7 0-0 ♘e7 8

منتجات

*e3 0-0 9 ♗h1 a6 10 a4

I enjoyed some success with this system (♘c4 coupled with a2-a4). Theoretically speaking it’s not that dangerous, but it’s a little bit off the beaten track and so Black has to come up with some answers over the board rather than rely on established theory.

10...♗c7 11 ♗e2 ♘d7 12 f4 ♘ac8 13 ♘a2 ♘a5

There’s a great temptation to carry out the typical plan of ...♘a5-c4, especially since it appears to be the most ambitious way for Black to play the position, but things are a bit deceptive.

In the same year I played this line against Alexander Grischuk, and he demonstrated a safer way for Black to continue: 13...♗xd4! 14 ♘xd4 e5 15 ♘e3 ♘e6 (J.Emms-A.Grischuk, Esbjerg 2000).

14 ♘ad1! ♘c4 15 ♘c1

Black has a few problems here. The c4-knight, attacked by both the queen on e2 and the bishop on a2, can become a liability and a problem for Black in some of the tactical lines. It would be nice for Black to be able to play ...b7-b5,
but this proves difficult to arrange.

My first game from this position, J. Emms-S. Shipov, Hastings 1998/99, provides an illustration of the problems Black faces: 15...fxd8 16 g4! wC5? (Black must play 16...e5, which keeps White's advantage to manageable proportions after 17 Qxf5 Qxf5 18 gxf5 exf4 19 Qxf4, or 17 fxe5 dxe5 18 Qf5 Qxf5 19 Qxd8+ Qxd8 20 Qxf5) 17 g5 Qe8 18 f5!

16 e5! dxe5 17 fxe5

17...Qe8?

17...Wxe5? loses a piece to 18 Qxc4, and the main point of 16 e5 is that 17...Qxe5? can be met by 18 Qb3 Wc7 (forced) 19 Qf4!, which wins after 19...Qfg4 20 h3 or 19...Qd6 20 Qxd6! Wxd6 21 Qxe5 Wf7 22 Qxf6 gxf6 23 Qd5!.

Black's only chance lies with 17...Qd5! but even here White has some tempting possibilities. For example, 18 Qf5!? (18 Qxd5 exd5 19 c3 is a good alternative) 18...Qxc3 (18...Qfe8 allows 19 Qxg7!, when 19...Wxg7 20 Whg4+ Wh8 21 Whh7+ Qf8 22 Wh4 Qg7 23 Qxg7 Qxg7 24 Wh6+ Wh7 25 Qxd5 is crushing) 19 bxc3 exf5 20 Qxd7.

18 Qf5! 1-0

After 18...exf5 19 Qxd7 Black actually loses a piece. For example: 19...b5 20 axb5 axb5 21 b4! Wxb4 22 Qd5; or 19...Qh4 20 Qxc4 Wxc4 21 Wxc4 Qxc4 22 g3!.

Guarding against Complacency

When you begin to play a new opening, at first during games you may oc-
casionally struggle trying to recall the theory or deciding upon the best plans in the middlegame. This problem, though, is often negated, at least to some extent, by the energy and enthusiasm one tends to experience when playing something new and exciting.

Further down the line, after some more games and study, if things go to plan you reach the ideal situation: knowledge of the theory, experience of resulting positions, and still bags of enthusiasm and energy when playing the opening in a real game. At this point there’s a good chance your results with the opening in question will reach a high point.

All well and good, but as you become more and more experienced you must guard against complacency. This complacency comes in two forms. Firstly, a player may start to believe he now knows everything he needs to know about the opening, and slacks off on study. The main problem with this is that opening theory (and ideas) tends not to stand still, and knowledge gained a few years ago slowly loses its value year by year – for it to be really useful it needs to be topped up every so often.

The second form of complacency arises during games. Of course it’s beneficial to be able to draw upon previous experiences, but you also have to guard against playing on ‘automatic pilot’, without the energy required to deal with concrete problems during the game. This was something I was certainly guilty of in the following game:

```
R.Bates-J.Emms
British League 2000

1 d4 d5 2 f3 e6 3 c4 c5 4 d3 d6 5 c3 exd5 6 cxd5 g6 7 h3
```

This little move has been played quite a bit in recent years. The idea is to prevent ...g5 (it’s difficult to find a good role for this bishop so Black is happy to trade it off) and, more specifically, to avoid the line 7 e4 a6 8 a4 g4!.

```
7...a6 8 e4
```

8 a4 preventing ...b7-b5 is the alternative, but then White has to be prepared to face 8...e7 when he has to do without an early e2-e4.

```
8...b5 9 d3 g7 10 0-0 c4!
```

When I began playing this line (around nine years earlier) I noticed that Modern Benoni experts Lev Psakhis and Mihai Suba had played this move. I think that influenced me, and in my games I’ve generally preferred 10...c4 over the more popular 10...0-0. However, I do admit there is
something to be said about delaying this advance and thereby not allowing White to use the d4-square. The point of playing ...c5-c4 so early is to make sure White doesn’t have the option of playing \( \texttt{\&d3-f1} \) (after \( \texttt{\&e1} \)), but in most positions the bishop is probably better placed on c2 in any case.

\( 11 \texttt{\&c2} \ 0-0 \ 12 \texttt{\&f4} \texttt{\&e8} \ 13 \texttt{\&e1} \texttt{\&b7} \ 14 \texttt{\&wd2!} \)

This move was new to me. I’d faced 14 a3, preventing any ...b5-b4 possibilities, three times before, but forgoing this prophylactic move makes some sense because it gives White extra time to coordinate his forces.

\( 14...\texttt{\&wb6} \)

Necessary if Black wishes to play ...\( \texttt{\&bd7} \) without the d6-pawn dropping off. I briefly looked at 14...b4 but rejected it because I thought that after 15 \( \texttt{\&a4} \) a5 Black might struggle to hold his queenside together. Even so, it’s not entirely clear and I can understand why previous opponents opted for 14 a3.

\( 15 \texttt{\&h6!} \)

This is very direct. White wishes to trade the bishops, after which Black will suffer from having weak dark squares around his king. I decided to keep the bishops on (just like Dragon players, Benoni players always feel safer with their dark-squared bishop on the board), but the price I was forced to pay was moving the bishop to an inferior square.

\( 15...\texttt{\&h8} \ 16 \texttt{\&e2!} \)

This move came as a shock, but it’s actually very logical. White wants to move his knight away from c3, so that the black pawns on the queenside hit ‘thin air’ when they advance. Furthermore, the knight comes to g3 where it can participate in a kingside attack.

One reason I hadn’t considered 16 \( \texttt{\&e2} \) as an option was that it’s usually impossible due to an attack on e4. However, I soon realized that in this situation capturing on e4 was near suicidal. A potential line after 16...\( \texttt{\&xe4} \) runs 17 \( \texttt{\&xe4} \) (17 \( \texttt{\&g3!?} \) \( \texttt{\&f6} \) 18 \( \texttt{\&f5} \) also looks promising) 17...\( \texttt{\&xe4} \) 18 \( \texttt{\&g3} \) \( \texttt{\&xel+} \) 19 \( \texttt{\&xe1} \) \( \texttt{\&d7} \) 20 \( \texttt{\&f5!} \) \( \texttt{\&f6} \) 21 \( \texttt{\&e7+} \) \( \texttt{\&h8} \) 22 \( \texttt{\&g5} \) when I suspect that Black’s chances of survival are minimal.

\( 16...\texttt{\&bd7} \ 17 \texttt{\&g3} \texttt{\&ac8?!} \)

I confess that this move was the result of some truly lazy thinking. Black really has to play precisely over the next few moves, and simply can’t rely on superficial moves. In reality, the rook doesn’t do anything positive on c8, and it even prevents a possible defensive resource in ...\( \texttt{\&b7-c8} \).

Looking for improvements, 17...\( \texttt{\&c5} \) frees up the possibility of ...\( \texttt{\&fd7} \) and makes White think twice about \( \texttt{\&f5} \) ideas because the e4-pawn would be
hanging (after the immediate 18 \( \mathcal{Q} f5? \) \( \mathcal{Q} fxe4! \) White has no tricks). White keeps a small advantage after 18 \( \mathcal{A} e3 \) \( \mathcal{Q} f d7 \) 19 \( \mathcal{A} d4 \) \( \mathcal{A} x d4 \) 20 \( \mathcal{W} x d4 \) \( \mathcal{D} e5 \) 21 \( \mathcal{Q} x e5 \) dxe5 22 \( \mathcal{W} e3 \), but there is still plenty going on. Another option for Black is to keep his knights defending on the kingside and to slowly advance his queenside majority by playing 17...a5!? 18 \( \mathcal{A} e3 \) \( \mathcal{W} c7 \) with a possible follow-up of ...b5-b4 and ...\( \mathcal{A} a6 \) etc. 18 \( \mathcal{A} e3 \) \( \mathcal{Q} c5 \) 19 \( \mathcal{A} d4 \) a5??

If 17...\( \mathcal{A} a c8 \) was careless, this move is incredibly sloppy. I simply didn’t take my opponent’s possibilities on the kingside seriously enough, and was rightfully punished for my lack of attention.

19...\( \mathcal{W} d8! \), offering f6 protection and thus preventing \( \mathcal{Q} f5 \), is better for White. It’s not by a huge amount, though, and Black is certainly still kicking.

20 \( \mathcal{Q} f5! \)

But now Black is lost. White threatens not only to gang up on the d6-pawn with \( \mathcal{W} d2-f4 \), but also to attack the weak f7-pawn with \( \mathcal{Q} f5-h6+ \) followed by \( \mathcal{Q} f3-g5 \).

20...\( \mathcal{W} d8 \)

20...gx5 21 \( \mathcal{W} g5+ \) \( \mathcal{Q} f8 \) 22 \( \mathcal{A} x f6 \) \( \mathcal{A} x f6 \) 23 \( \mathcal{W} x f6 \) \( \mathcal{Q} x e 4 \) 24 \( \mathcal{A} x e 4 \) fxe 4 25 \( \mathcal{D} d 4 \) is also horrible for Black.

21 \( \mathcal{D} h 6+ \) \( \mathcal{Q} f 8 \) 22 \( \mathcal{A} g 5 \! \! \! \! \! \! \! \!

An important pawn goes and the rest of Black’s position does too. As I’ve learned from experience, once your position ‘goes’ in the Benoni, there’s no coming back!

22...\( \mathcal{H} c 7 \) 23 \( \mathcal{A} x f 6 \) \( \mathcal{A} x f 6 \) 24 \( \mathcal{A} x h 7+ \) \( \mathcal{Q} g 7 \)

25 \( \mathcal{A} x f 6 \) \( \mathcal{W} x f 6 \) 26 \( \mathcal{Q} g 4 \) \( \mathcal{W} d 8 \)

Or 26...\( \mathcal{W} x b 2 \) 27 \( \mathcal{W} h 6+ \) \( \mathcal{Q} g 8 \) 28 e5!.

27 \( \mathcal{W} h 6+ \) \( \mathcal{Q} g 8 \) 28 \( \mathcal{W} f 4 \) \( \mathcal{Q} g 7 \) 29 e5! dxe5

30 \( \mathcal{A} x e 5 \) \( \mathcal{A} x e 5 \) 31 \( \mathcal{W} x e 5+ \) \( \mathcal{Q} g 8 \) 32 d6 \( \mathcal{A} c 6 \)

33 \( \mathcal{Q} h 6+ \) \( \mathcal{Q} h 7 \) 34 \( \mathcal{A} x f 7 \) 1-0

An excellent game from my opponent, but there’s no doubt I helped with one or two very poor decisions.

Looking at my results with the Modern Benoni over the period 1991-2003 is quite revealing. My performance in the first 20 games was average, probably slightly less than I would have hoped for. I then went through a purple patch of 25 games where I had
excellent results (my rating performance with the Benoni during this time was considerably higher than my average published rating, and of course you have to bear in mind Black usually performs worse than White). In my final 15 games, however, results dipped quite dramatically, and looking back now I admit that complacency was one of the reasons for this.

If complacency starts to creep into your games, there is an argument that you may be suffering from staleness with regard to that opening. One possible solution would be to refrain from playing it for a while, or keep playing it but combine it with another option to keep things fresh. Of course I should add that this staleness problem is much more likely to affect someone who plays 50 competitive games a year rather than someone who plays only 20, and is only likely to get a particular opening two or three times during that period.

Beware of a Little Knowledge!
Say you spot an opening idea, perhaps something that worked well and led to a nice win in a game published in a magazine. The move looks unusual, maybe even unnatural, and it’s certainly not the first move that you would have thought of playing. But the attraction of repeating that ‘winning’ idea is enticing and it rests in your memory banks.

Alternatively, you browse through an opening encyclopaedia and spot a concise ‘refutation’ of a certain line. Again this ‘refutation’ certainly isn’t what you would have played had you reached the position yourself without knowing the theory. But hey, it’s in an openings encyclopaedia so it can be trusted, right?

Be careful! Always be wary of moves that either don’t look natural or appear to carry some risk. If you intend to play a move like this in one of your games, make sure you study it at home first. Also, don’t rely on vague recollections during the game, or try to fit the same idea into slightly different positions without thinking very carefully.

Here are a couple of cautionary tales:

\[ \text{C. Ward - I. Rausis} \]
Le Touquet 1992

\[
1 \text{ d4 d5 2 c4 } \text{ f5 3 b3}
\]

This is a direct attempt at refutation, although there’s nearly always some risk involved when you go pawn-grabbing with the queen. Chris Ward admitted that 3 \text{ } \text{ b3} wouldn’t have been his choice in a normal situation,
but he had come across a game reference where White had achieved a good opening advantage with this move.

Without knowing any 'theory' White would probably choose either 3 cxd5 or 3 InProgress. Both of these are perfectly good moves that are likely to lead to an advantage.

3...e5! 4 cxd5 exd4 5 f3 c5!

The game that Chris had been hoping to follow continued 5...e4?! 6 xdx4 xdx5 7 e3+ e7 8 c3 f6 9 xxe7+ xxe7 10 g5 e6 11 e4 c6 12 xex6 fx6 13 c4 e5 14 e2 with a nice endgame advantage for White, S.Gligoric-K.Schiffer, Berlin 1971. No such comforts in this game!

6 xdx4 xdx4 7 a4+ c6! 8 xxc6 b5! 9 xb5 e7 10 e3 b8 11 e2 0-0!

At this point Chris had already used up more than an hour on his clock, while Rausis had taken only two minutes. Looking at the situation on the board, Black has developed his entire army whereas the only white piece developed is the queen. And even the queen is not ideally placed, as it blocks in the f1-bishop. This is certainly not what White is looking for when playing 3 b3!

12 c3

12 exd4 xxc6 gives Black tremendous play. This piece sacrifice was actually part of Rausis’s impressive preparation, hence his speed of play over the board.

12...xc6 13 g4?

Not a great move, although admittedly White is some trouble in any case.

13 xc3+ 14 bxc3 e4 15 g1

Or 15 f3 f6!.

15...e5 16 g2 d3+ 17 f1 xc1 0-1

After 18 xc1 Black pins the queen with 18...d3.

J.Emms-M.Palac
Toulouse 1990

1 e4 c5 2 c3 f6 3 e5 d5 4 d4 cxd4 5 f3 e6 6 cxd4 d6 7 a3 d7 8 d3 c6 9 0-0 d7 10 e1 e7 11 c2?

Normally I would have never considered such a move, but I was influ-
enced by a nice win by White which had been annotated in *Chess Informant*. I wasn’t 100% certain I had the move order exact; I just remembered that White answered ...\textit{d}e7 with \textit{w}c2, and after ...h7-h6 the queen immediately went to e2, having induced a weakness on Black’s kingside.

The game in question had actually gone 9...\textit{d}e7 10 \textit{w}c2!? h6 (maybe Black should still consider 10...\textit{d}d7?) 11 \textit{w}e2! \textit{d}d7 12 \textit{d}d2 0-0 13 \textit{w}e4! (the point of inducing ...h7-h6 is revealed: 13...g6 drops the h6-pawn) 13...\textit{d}f6 14 exf6! \textit{x}e4 15 fxe7 \textit{w}xe7 16 \textit{x}e4 and White’s three minor pieces outweighed Black’s queen in S.Smagin-S.Semkov, Yerevan 1988.

Soon after playing 11 \textit{w}c2 I suddenly felt uneasy about a possibility available to my opponent. Sure enough...

\textbf{11...\textit{c}c8!}

Of course! There was no way on earth Palac was ever going to play 11...h6 when there was the opportunity of putting his rook on the same file as my queen. The big difference between this and the Smagin game is that Black’s extra ...\textit{d}d7 (facilitating ...\textit{c}c8) is much more useful than White’s \textit{xe}1. The more I looked at the position in front of me, the less I liked it. I was also wondering why Black hadn’t played this way in the Smagin-Semkov game (without at this stage realizing there was a subtle difference between the two games).

\textbf{12 \textit{x}h7}

Although I played this reluctantly, to me there seemed to be no going back. 12 \textit{c}c3 blocks the c-file, but after 12...\textit{x}c3 13 bxc3 Black has the option of ruining White’s kingside pawns with 13...\textit{x}f3 – another problem of moving the queen to c2. Admitting the mistake with 12 \textit{w}e2 may be objectively better, but it’s at the very least a wasted tempo, and perhaps more (White wouldn’t usually bother playing \textit{d}1-e2 in this line).

\textbf{12...\textit{d}xe5!}

\textbf{13 \textit{d}d3}

After 13 \textit{c}xe5 \textit{c}xe5 14 dxe5 it’s safe for Black to play 14...g6!. Following the forced sequence 15 \textit{d}xg6 fxg6 16
\( \text{gxg6+ d7} \) White's three pawns nowhere near compensate for Black's extra piece, and White could even face a devastating attack after ...\( \text{g8} \) etc. (the black king can always hide on b8).

If White wishes to maintain his centre then he has to play 13 dxe5, but I was worried about 13...\( \text{c5} \) with ideas of ...\( \text{a4} \), and it's difficult here for White to retract the bishop from h7. For example, 14 \( \text{d3?} \) loses to 14...\( \text{b4!} \) 15 axb4 \( \text{xd3} \) 16 \( \text{d1} \) \( \text{xf3} \), and 14 b4 14...\( \text{a4} \) 15 \( \text{wb2} \) \( \text{xh7} \) 16 bxc5 \( \text{xc5} \) left Black with a great position in Ayas Fernandez-S. Semkov, Sitges 1992 (17 \( \text{xb7??} \) allows Black to trap the queen with 17...\( \text{b8} \) 18 \( \text{a6} \) \( \text{b5} \)).

13...\( \text{exd4} \) 14 \( \text{xd4} \) \( \text{f6!} \) 15 \( \text{xc6} \) \( \text{xc6} \) 16 \( \text{d1} \) \( \text{d4}! \).

Threatening immediate devastation with ...\( \text{wh4} \). Black is very active here – just look at his rooks. In fact, he is probably already winning.

17 h3 \( \text{f6} \) 18 \( \text{e2} \) \( \text{xh3!} \)

A nice combination eventually leading to a decisive material advantage.

19 \( \text{gxh3} \) \( \text{xc1} \) 20 \( \text{c3} \)

Or 20 \( \text{xc1} \) \( \text{g5+} \) 21 \( \text{h2} \) \( \text{e5+} \).

20...\( \text{f4} \) 21 \( \text{f3} \) \( \text{xe1+} \) 22 \( \text{xe1} \) \( \text{xh3+!} \) 23 \( \text{g2} \) \( \text{f4+} \) 24 \( \text{f1} \) \( \text{xd3} \) 25 \( \text{xf6} \) \( \text{xf6} \) 26 \( \text{e2} \) \( \text{xc3} \) 27 \( \text{bxc3} \) \( \text{c5} \) 28 \( \text{e3} \) \( \text{b2} \) 29 \( \text{h3} \) \( \text{c4} \) 30 \( \text{h8+} \) \( \text{d7} \) 31 \( \text{f8} \) \( \text{f5} \) 32 \( \text{f7+} \) \( \text{c6} \) 0-1

**Facing a Surprise in the Opening**

It doesn’t matter how well you know your openings, and how much study you do, during some games you are going face an opening surprise: either an opening variation you just didn’t expect your opponent to play, or a ‘novelty’ you haven’t previously considered.

The most important thing is don’t panic! I’ve seen examples of players replying impulsively to an opening surprise, perhaps to give the impression to their opponent that it was no surprise to them after all. Whilst I can see some psychological value to this, I think on this occasion the actual strength of your reply (objectively and practically) is far more important than any sort of attempt at bluff. So remain calm and take your time.

If the surprise is something different to the normal ‘book’ move, don’t assume that because of this it’s either very strong or very weak. On most occasions, that is in positions which are not overly tactical, it’s likely to be somewhere in between. So don’t spend an hour trying to work out a direct refutation that probably doesn’t exist. Likewise, don’t spend the same amount of time because you think such a ‘brilliant’ novelty deserves a lengthy consideration. Be practical!
If your opponent's choice of opening is not the one you expected, then a lot depends on the flexibility of your opening repertoire. If you have a very narrow repertoire (i.e. only one line against everything) then generally it's best to just stick to what you know. It's true your opponent might have something specific lined up against this, but you can rely upon your greater general understanding of the positions – something that will increase in importance once any preparation from your opponent runs out.

If you do have a wider repertoire and a reserve option against the move your opponent plays, it might be a good practical choice to use this. In this way you meet his surprise with one of your own. This could negate all or most of your opponent's preparation, and still lead to positions in which you generally have more experience.

In the following game I was surprised as early as move one:

J.Emms-M.Olesen
Politiken Cup, Hillerød 1995

1 e4 e5

This came as a real shock: I had seen many games from my opponent where he had played the Sicilian Dragon, but never 1...e5. At the time I was almost exclusively playing the Ruy Lopez (2 ²f3 ³c6 3 ³b5). But without any idea whatsoever about which line he would choose, or even if he would allow it (2...²f6; 2...d6), and also with the suspicion that he would have no doubt done some specific preparation for this game (it was a tournament in which players knew their opponents well in advance), I decided to switch to an opening that I hadn't played recently but still had plenty of experience with over the years. This was basically to avoid any unpleasant surprises from my opponent's preparation, and to try to reach a position in which I had the greater experience. In the end it proved to be a good practical choice, as I achieved a very nice position.

2 ³c4(!)

Another positive on choosing the Bishop's Opening is that it's not very theoretical, so any further surprises would be unlikely.

2...²f6 3 d3 ³c5 4 ³c3 d6 5 f4

5...a6

Computer engines suggest 5...²g4 but 6 f5! ³f2 7 ²h5 is fun for White. For example: 7...0-0 8 ²f3 ³xh1 9 ³g5 with a winning attack; 7...²d7? 8 ³e6 ²e7 9 ³d5 g6 10 ²h6 (J.Emms-A.Jackson, Port Erin 1999); or 7...g6 8 ²h6 ³xh1 9 ³g5! f6 10 fxg6! fxg5 11 g7 ²d7 12 ²e6+ ³c6
13 \textsf{\texttt{\textcopyright}} d5+! \textsf{\texttt{\textcopyright}} d7 14 \textsf{\texttt{\textcopyright}} f7+! \textsf{\texttt{\textcopyright}} c6 15 \textsf{\texttt{\textcopyright}} b5+! \textsf{\texttt{\textcopyright}} b6 16 \textsf{\texttt{\textcopyright}} e8!! \textsf{\texttt{\textcopyright}} xe8 17 \textsf{\texttt{\textcopyright}} b3+ \textsf{\texttt{\textcopyright}} a6 18 gxh8 \textsf{\texttt{\textcopyright}} xh8 19 \textsf{\texttt{\textcopyright}} b5 mate.

6 \textsf{\texttt{\textcopyright}} f3 \textsf{\texttt{\textcopyright}} c6 7 f5 h6 8 a3? \textsf{\texttt{\textcopyright}}

8 \textsf{\texttt{\textcopyright}} d5 is playable but I wanted to be able to retain my bishop after \ldots \textsf{\texttt{\textcopyright}} a5.

8...\textsf{\texttt{\textcopyright}} e7?

After 8...\textsf{\texttt{\textcopyright}} d4! 9 \textsf{\texttt{\textcopyright}} xd4 \textsf{\texttt{\textcopyright}} xd4 10 \textsf{\texttt{\textcopyright}} f3 White is only a bit better.

9 \textsf{\texttt{\textcopyright}} d5! \textsf{\texttt{\textcopyright}} xd5 10 \textsf{\texttt{\textcopyright}} xd5 \textsf{\texttt{\textcopyright}} d7 11 c3 0-0-0

12 \textsf{\texttt{\textcopyright}} e2 g6

Black must break this bind on the kingside.

13 b4! \textsf{\texttt{\textcopyright}} b6 14 fxg6 fxg6 15 \textsf{\texttt{\textcopyright}} e3 \textsf{\texttt{\textcopyright}} xe3

16 \textsf{\texttt{\textcopyright}} xe3

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White has a clear advantage: he castles kingside and enjoys the very straightforward plan of lunging his pawns forward on the other wing. At this moment I was certainly happy I had chosen 2 \textsf{\texttt{\textcopyright}} c4.

\textsf{\texttt{\textcopyright}} b8 17 0-0 \textsf{\texttt{\textcopyright}} df8 18 a4 c6 19 \textsf{\texttt{\textcopyright}} c4

\textsf{\texttt{\textcopyright}} f4 20 b5 \textsf{\texttt{\textcopyright}} e6 21 bxa6 \textsf{\texttt{\textcopyright}} xa6 22 \textsf{\texttt{\textcopyright}} xa6!

bxa6 23 \textsf{\texttt{\textcopyright}} ab1 \textsf{\texttt{\textcopyright}} c7 24 \textsf{\texttt{\textcopyright}} b6 c5 25 \textsf{\texttt{\textcopyright}} fb1

\textsf{\texttt{\textcopyright}} hf8 26 \textsf{\texttt{\textcopyright}} xa6 \textsf{\texttt{\textcopyright}} f6 27 a5 \textsf{\texttt{\textcopyright}} d8 28 \textsf{\texttt{\textcopyright}} ab6

\textsf{\texttt{\textcopyright}} c8 29 \textsf{\texttt{\textcopyright}} d2 \textsf{\texttt{\textcopyright}} f7 30 c4 \textsf{\texttt{\textcopyright}} a7 31 \textsf{\texttt{\textcopyright}} b3

\textsf{\texttt{\textcopyright}} f7 32 \textsf{\texttt{\textcopyright}} d2 \textsf{\texttt{\textcopyright}} a7 33 \textsf{\texttt{\textcopyright}} a1 g5 34 g3 \textsf{\texttt{\textcopyright}} f2

35 \textsf{\texttt{\textcopyright}} xd6+ 1-0

\section*{Openings According to Your Opponent}

In general I believe you should play your own game, and only stick to openings that you know and feel comfortable with. Although it’s occasionally justified, I’ve learned from experience that it’s usually the wrong decision to play an opening you know nothing or very little about. If you want to stick to a narrow repertoire, you should work to keep it watertight and maintain your trust in it.

If on the other hand you do have a wider repertoire, then you should try to exploit this and choose the right opening for the right opponent.

For example, if you know that your opponent is a mad tactician, you may wish to choose a quiet opening; if he knows all the sharpest theoretical lines inside out, then perhaps choose a line where understanding ideas is more important than memorizing variations.

Even if you don’t personally know your opponent’s repertoire, you can sometimes make generalizations that will influence your choice of opening. For example, junior players are more likely to be good at tactics and will know certain openings — usually mainline openings — very well. In the following game, for example, my young opponent knew the opening just as well, if not better, than I did. I was unable to put him under any pressure, and in the end I was struggling for equality despite being White and not making any major mistakes.
The Survival Guide to Competitive Chess

J. Emms-B. Connell
London 1992

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 £d2 dxe4 4 £xe4 £f5
5 £g3 £g6 6 h4 h6 7 £f3 £d7 8 h5
£h7 9 £d3 £x d3 10 £xd3 £gf6 11
£f4 £a5+ 12 £d2 £c7 13 0-0-0 0-0-0
14 £e4 e6 15 g3

18 £f4 e5 19 £xe5 £xe5 20 £xe5 £xd1+ 21 £xd1 £d8!

22 £e1?!?

22 £xd8+ may well be best, even if it's only equal after 22...£xd8. In the game Y. Kruppa-I. Khenkin, Minsk 1990, White instead played the mysterious-looking 22 £f1 but Black was fine after 22...£e7 23 £e1 £e6 24 b3 £d4.

22...£e8

22...£d4! might be even stronger.

23 £f4 £a5 24 a3 £d7!

...and we reach the position - a good one for Black - that was discussed on page 86.

I realize this is a simplification, but young players tend not to fare so well against less theoretical openings. A major reason for this is a general observation: some openings are both played and studied; others are only played.

Say you enter the Sicilian Dragon as White against a junior player. You can be sure that this opening, which is very
sharp and great fun to analyse, would have been at the forefront of any chess study your opponent had done. You are basically playing into his strength by choosing an opening he both plays and – just as crucially – studies. Now, let’s say you instead play the Closed Sicilian. Because this isn’t a sharp theoretical opening (or perhaps one that a young player would be enthusiastic about studying), it’s likely that your opponent wouldn’t have paid much attention to this. Instead, most of his understanding of this opening would be likely to arrive via experience in competitive games – in fact this would be true of many players. And his experience might well be limited because he is so young (and probably much more accustomed to facing Dragon lines over the board).

Looking back at some games of mine from when I was in my teens, it becomes clear that while I had very good knowledge of some mainline openings, there were also major gaps in less theoretical lines. In the following game this lack of knowledge was exploited ruthlessly.

\[ \text{J.Plaskett-J.Emms} \\
\text{British Championship, Southampton 1986} \]

1 d4 \( \text{d6} \) 2 \( \text{f3} \) e6 3 \( \text{g5} \)!

An excellent decision. I must admit my recollection of my thoughts during this game are a bit hazy given the time that has elapsed, but I’m sure I would have been disappointed that my opponent hadn’t played the ‘normal’ 3 c4.

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Despite having acquired a FIDE rating of 2305, quite a bit of experience at international tournaments, and many games with 1...\( \text{d6} \) and 2...e6 (my repertoire included the Nimzo-Indian and Queen’s Indian), it’s clear from looking at this game I really had no idea at all about what to do against the Torre Attack. Up to this point I must have done very little or no study at all against what is arguably a mainline opening! From what I remember I took an extraordinary amount of time over these first few moves. The time limit in those days was 40 moves in a massive 2½ hours and yet I still drifted into serious time trouble!

3...\( \text{d5} \) 4 \( \text{e3} \) \( \text{e7} \) 5 c4!

From a practical point of view, Jim Plaskett’s choice of opening was already justified, as instead of my Nimzo- or Queen’s Indian I had unwittingly allowed a transposition to the Queen’s Gambit Declined. Actually at the time I thought that, although this wasn’t particularly desirable, it also
wasn’t a complete disaster because I had played the QGD as Black when I was younger, albeit at a much lower level.

5...h6 6 h4 0-0 7 c3 e4 8 g3!

This turned out to be another excellent practical choice, as the little experience I possessed had been with the main line 8 xe7 xe7.

I was now in a position where I neither knew the theory nor the typical plans, and this proved to be my undoing. Black should now play 8...c5 or 8...xc3 9 bxc3 c5. I only realize this now because my general understanding of such positions is better than it was 20 years ago, not because of ‘theory’.

8...xc3 9 bxc3 c6?

Showing my inexperience in an unfamiliar position - the knight is not well placed in front of the c-pawn. I had ideas of ...f6, ...e8 and ...e6-e5, but I must admit I wasn’t too hopeful.

10 c2 e8 11 b1 f6 12 cxd5

Scupping Black’s idea.

12...exd5 13 d3 a5

I was finding it incredibly difficult to come up with an active plan, perhaps because there isn’t one. White slowly begins to take control.

14 0-0 c6 15 d2 g5 16 be1 b6 17 f4! e7 18 f3! f6 19 e5 c5 20 h7+ f8 21 e2? a6?!

I didn’t want to give Jim the opportunity to sacrifice with 21...g6 22 xg6+ (or 22 f5 xf5 23 xf5!) 22...fxg6 23 xg6, although given Black’s position perhaps this is the best practical chance.

22 h5 a7??

23 d3??

It’s amazing what you can discover going through old games with the help
of a computer engine. Here both players were blissfully unaware of a queen sacrifice and mate in two with 23 \texttt{Wxf7+!! Xxf7 24 Qg6 mate!}

23...\texttt{Aae7} 24 \texttt{Af3 Bd7} 25 \texttt{Ae1 b5} 26 \texttt{Wf5 Axd3} 27 \texttt{Wxd3 Aa8}

Giving up a pawn, and effectively the game, but I didn’t relish the thought of allowing \texttt{Wh7}.

28 \texttt{Wxa6}

The rest was easy.

28...\texttt{C4} 29 \texttt{Ab1 Ab7} 30 \texttt{Wb5 Aexe5} 31 \texttt{fxe5 Ae6} 32 \texttt{Af2 Wd7} 33 \texttt{Axd7 Axd7} 34 \texttt{Af2 Ab7} 35 \texttt{Ab5 Aa7} 36 \texttt{Axd5 Aa6} 37 \texttt{Ad8+ Ah7} 38 \texttt{D5 Ag6} 39 \texttt{Ad7 h5} 40 \texttt{Axf7 Ag4} 41 e6 1-0

You can make opening choices not just dependent on what your opponent plays but also on how you are feeling leading into a particular game. For example, if you are right in the middle of the tournament, playing very well and feeling sharp, you might be just in the right mood to tackle head on your opponent’s favourite line, even if it’s sharp and very theoretical. If, however, it’s your first game for quite a long time and you’re feeling rather rusty, it might be more prudent to ease your way back by choosing a quieter option. This was the feeling I had immediately after losing the following game, played in the first round at Hastings. It was played just a few days after Christmas, I hadn’t played for a while, and I was only just about recovering from the holiday festivities. In view of all of this, perhaps my opening choice wasn’t the most practical.

J.Emms-M.Lyell
Hastings 1995/96

1 e4 e5 2 Af3 Ac6 3 Ab5 f5(!)

Looking for a nice, quiet positional game against someone rated over 200 points lower than me, this really wasn’t the move I wanted to face. Going into the game, I didn’t know which line Mark Lyell played against the Lopez, but I was sloppy with my detective work. I really should have suspected that the Schliemann would arise given that in one of our earlier encounters he had played 1 e4 e5 2 Ac4 f5!

In the past I had played the quiet 4 d3, but more recently I had changed to the critical main line with 4 Ac3, so that is what I went with:

4 Ac3 fxe4 5 Aexe4 d5 6 Aexe5 dxe4 7 Axc6 Wd5(!)

Previously I had only faced 7...Wg5. Now I was forced to recall oodles of theory in a very sharp line I had never faced in practice, and one that I had only looked at briefly a long time ago.
8 c4 \( \text{\#}d6 \) 9 \( \text{\#}xa7+ \text{\#}d7 \) 10 \( \text{\#}xd7+ \text{\#}xd7 \)
11 \( \text{\#}h5+ \) g6 12 \( \text{\#}e5+ \)

18 \( \text{\#}a3! \)

So far I was doing a good job of remembering the theory, albeit at a cost of some time on the clock. Meanwhile my opponent was blitzing out his moves.

The immediate 18 \( \text{\#}xd8 \) is weaker, and after 18...\( \text{\#}xd8 \) 19 \( \text{\#}a3 \) \( \text{\#}d3 \)! 20 0-0-0 \( \text{\#}g4 \) White has some problems to solve, something he failed to do in the following miniature: 21 \( \text{\#}xg7 \text{\#}xg7 \) 22 \( \text{\#}d1 \text{\#}e5 \) 23 \( \text{\#}c2 \text{\#}e2 \) 24 \( \text{\#}e1? \text{\#}g4! \) 25 f3 e3! and White resigned in A.Waltemathe-R.Mallee, correspondence 1970, as Black runs riot after 26 dxe3 \( \text{\#}xe3 \) 27 \( \text{\#}g1 \text{\#}xa2 \).

18...\( \text{\#}d7 \) 19 \( \text{\#}d6+ \text{\#}e6 \) 20 \( \text{\#}xd8 \)
20 \( \text{\#}xb7?? \) was once assessed as winning for White in Chess Informant, but 20...\( \text{\#}xd2 \) has been the rather obvious (and devastating) reply awaiting anyone who believed this (I managed to find a couple of examples on my database).

20...\( \text{\#}xd8 \) 21 \( \text{\#}xb7 \text{\#}c7 \) 22 \( \text{\#}c5+ \text{\#}f7 \)

I was now definitely at the end of my theoretical knowledge. I knew that theory assessed this as ‘better for
White', and it's true that White does have a sizeable material advantage (two rooks and three pawns for the queen), but somehow I wasn't at all comfortable with the rather random-looking position in front of me. Even though I had been able to recall 22 moves of theory, I didn't have any feel for the position at all. It was as if someone had thrown a few pieces onto the board and we were told to start the game from that position. And now I was out of book, my play disintegrated very quickly.

23 \&b1?

23 0-0? is no good because of 23...\&g4!, but White should keep some advantage, albeit in a complicated position, after 23 \&b2!.

23...\&f4! 24 h3

I felt I needed to rule out ...\&g4 once and for all.

24...\&h5! 25 0-0?

Clearly I didn't see the danger in the position; otherwise I'm sure I would have been very reluctant to castle into such an attack.

25...\&e5 26 g3 \&f3!

Capturing on g3 is not a threat at the moment because fxg3 would exploit a pin on the f-file. But the idea of ...\&d4 must be dealt with. 27 \&b2! just about keeps White in the game. One possible line runs 27...\&f4!? (threatening 28...\&xg3) 28 \&d7! (preparing to respond to 28...\&xg3?? by playing 29 \&e5+! \&xe5 30 fxg3 winning the queen, and to 28...\&g8? by playing 29 \&e5!) 28...\&e6! 29 \&c5+ \&f7 (29...\&f5!!) 30 \&d7 with a rather unusual draw by repetition.

My calculations went as far as 27 \&be1 with the intention of meeting 27...\&d4? with the clever 28 \&e3!. But there was a rather dramatic flaw...

27 \&be1?? \&f4!

I must confess that I hadn't even considered this idea in similar positions (i.e. without \&ae1). With the move \&ae1 thrown in it's an absolute killer.

28 gxf4 \&xf4 0-1

I was forced to resign because by playing 26 \&ae1?? I had ensured that there was no defence to 29...\&h2 mate!

Going back to the opening, I proba-
bly should have thought a bit more about which type of game I wanted to play, and also what I wanted to avoid. In this case I might have opted for 4 d3. Or earlier on I might have chosen 2 c4 or 3 c3. I had reasonable experience with both of these moves, and against them Black struggles to find something quite as exciting as the Schliemann, unless he is willing to take even further risks.

Using Computers
There’s no doubt that computers have revolutionized the way many people play and study chess, and there are three main reasons why this is so:

1) Commercial chess-playing programs can now more than hold their own against the world’s greatest players – in the most recent high-profile man versus machine match, Deep Fritz defeated World Champion Vladimir Kramnik by the score 4-2. A chess-playing program is an excellent study tool for players of all standards. Firstly, it can act as a sparring partner (there are many different playing levels, so you wouldn’t have to face such a difficult challenge as Kramnik did if you didn’t feel up to it!), against which you can keep sharp and try out new openings. Secondly, it can analyse your games (or anyone else’s), pointing out all your tactical mistakes and suggesting improvements.

2) There are software packages available that create and manage databases, and these databases are able to hold an enormous amount of chess information. For example, one database I own (Mega Database 2007 from ChessBase), contains over three million chess games, some of which are annotated by grandmasters. Using chess databases makes it much easier to study virtually every aspect of the game; for example openings, endgames, tactics etc.

3) Chess is one game that has benefited immensely from the emergence of the Internet. If you visit an online chess club you are able to play at any time of the day, seven days a week, against opponents of all levels from all over the world. You can also follow online battles between the world’s best players as they happen, move by move, and sometimes with commentary from a leading grandmaster. Another option for players is online coaching, and you can also download databases of games – this is all incredibly useful for the serious player.

Recently I co-authored a book (with Byron Jacobs and Jacob Aagaard) called Chess Software: Users Guide. In my sections I covered how to make the most of your computer when it came to chess databases, learning openings and specific preparation for games. Here I’ll attempt to briefly summarize my advice:

1) Create a database of your own games
If you only have a limited time for chess study (and let’s face it, that goes for the majority of us!), I think that this time is best spent studying and making notes on your own games. Every game
you play is a vital learning experience, but the benefits can easily be lost should you choose to ignore the experience. So input all of your games into a database, and then analyse each game, adding variations and verbal notes on suggestions for improvements on your play.

2) Analyse your games with a chess-playing engine
Once you have analysed a game, it makes sense to check your analysis with that of a chess-playing engine (for example, Fritz). A chess-playing engine will soon point out any major errors you made during both the game and your analysis. It will guide you through complex variations and will come up with worthwhile suggestions for both sides. Going through my own games with a chess-playing engine I’m constantly amazed by some of its discoveries (see, for example, 23 \(\text{xf7}+!!\) in my game against Plaskett earlier in the chapter).

3) Use databases to study openings
Using chess databases is an excellent way to study openings. One of the reasons for this is that programs such as ChessBase have fantastic search facilities. Say you input the first few moves of an opening you were considering playing. At the touch of a key the program will be able to give you an enormous amount of useful information. This includes the number of times that position has occurred on the database; all the moves that have been played from that position, plus how many times they have been played, and how well they have scored. It will show you the most popular plans, and list grandmasters that have played the position, and even their rating performance! It’s true that all this information is of a statistical nature (it would be well complemented by a good book or coach explaining the ideas), but there is no doubt it’s very useful to have.

4) Practice new openings against a chess-playing program
When you are learning to play a new opening, it’s clearly beneficial to be able to have some practice games with it, just so when you unleash it in a competitive game you can hit the ground running. If you have a regular training partner then it is a good idea to play lots of rapidplay or blitz games in the same opening line in order to build up familiarity. It’s also worth briefly going through each game afterwards to identify the critical points in the opening. However, you won’t always have a training partner at hand, and if this is the case a good substitute is a chess-playing program. One advantage of playing a chess-playing program over, say, some random opponents at an online chess club, is that you can simply set up the opening position and then take it from there, so you can dictate which opening who wish to concentrate on.

In programs such as Fritz, your games are automatically saved into a database. So if you have access to large
databases, after the game you can compare what you and Fritz played with previous games in the opening. You can check to see where you made mistakes (Fritz will tell you) and where you deviated from the established main line – all useful stuff to know.

5) Perform a statistical survey on your results
Every so often it makes sense to create a statistical survey of your results from all the different openings you play and the varying types of positions that you reach in your games. If you have a database of your own games in a program such as ChessBase, then this type of survey can be done at the touch of a button.

Sometimes you have to be wary of statistics because they can easily be skewed by other factors, but at the same time I don’t think they can be ignored. Thus if over quite a number of games in the same opening you find that you have scored only 25% and played well below your rating, maybe that opening really doesn’t suit you and it’s time to move on. Actually, performing a statistical survey may provide some enlightening results. Often our perceptions of how good we are at a particular opening are distorted somewhat by the memory of a brilliant win in that opening, or equally a devastating loss. Some cold statistics might reveal that you aren’t as good (or bad) in that opening as you previously believed.

Specific Preparation
Chess databases and chess-playing programs can also help with specific preparation in tournaments. If your database includes games from a potential opponent, you will no longer need to guess which openings he plays – the information will be there! And this information may help you to decide your choice of opening and how you approach the game.

Chess engines excel at pointing out serious tactical flaws in variations, and this is really the main reason why they should be used when studying opening lines, especially if you are investigating something slightly away from the ‘book’ continuation.

Had I been able to use a chess-playing engine back in 1991, the following calamity would never have occurred:

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J.Emms-J.Calvo
Benidorm 1991

1 e4 d6 2 d4 ♕f6 3 ♗c3 g6 4 ♖f3 ♗g7 5 ♗e3 c6 6 ♙d2 b5 7 ♘d3 ♘bd7 8 ♙h6 0-0 9 ♙xg7 ♙xg7 10 e5 dxe5 11 dxe5 ♗g4 12 ♙f4

12 ♙g5 ♘c5 was played in A.Ivanov-J.Ehlvest, New York 1990.
12...♗xe5!

This little trick ensures Black a comfortable position.

13 ♗xe5 ♙d6
The pinned knight on e5 cannot be protected, so Black is able to regain his sacrificed piece. 14 ♕xg6 fxg6 15 ♙xd6
exd6 16 0-0 had been assessed as equal by Alexander Ivanov in Chess Informant.

With a simple double attack on g4 and b2. Shredder’s evaluation of this position is -4.10 (over four pawns advantage for Black!).

\[16 \text{xe}3 \text{xb2} 17 \text{d}2 \text{ad8!}\]

Threatening \[18...\text{x}d3+ 19 \text{x}d3 \text{d}8+.\] The rest is very easy for Black, as straightforward threats are good enough to win the game.

\[18 \text{ad1 f}5! 19 \text{he}1 e5 20 f3 b4 21 \text{a}4 \text{a}3! 22 \text{c}5 \text{c}3+ 0-1\]

Here’s an example of some specific preparation using both databases and chess engines. The game was played at 2 o’clock in the afternoon, and I spent quite a bit of the morning preparing a line against an opponent I thought I had a good chance of playing (this was confirmed only at 1 o’clock). I could have instead reserved energy before the game and opt for the far less theoretical \[2...g6.\] However, I just couldn’t resist trying to find a good line in an opening variation that seemed to promise Black lots of fun. Did I make the right decision? The result would indicate yes, but the ‘preparation versus rest’ argument must always be considered. Of course there are always so many factors and different sets of circumstances to consider, so I think it would be pointless to generalize here.

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D.Wheeler-J.Emms
British League 2005

\[1 e4 c5 2 f4 d5 3 exd5 \text{f}6 4 \text{b}5+ \text{d}7 5 \text{x}d7+ \text{x}d7 6 c4 e6 7 \text{e}2 \text{d}6 8 f5\]
0-0 9 fxe6 fxe6 10 dxe6 ♕c7

Searching my database I had found a previous game from my opponent where Black played 10...♕e8 (the game went 11 ♖f3 ♖c6 12 0-0 ♕h5 13 ♖h3 ♖ae8 14 ♗c3 ♗d8 15 ♗d3 ♗xe6 16 ♗e4 ♗e5 17 ♗e3 ♗f4 18 ♗xf4 ♗xf4 19 ♗b3 ♗xe4 20 dxe4 ♕g6 21 e5 ♕g3 22 ♕e1 ♗xe5 23 ♗xe5 ½-½ D.Wheeler-R.Eames, British League 2004). I decided to go for 10...♕c7, partially because I wished to deviate from this game at the earliest moment, but also because it does look quite strong.

11 ♖f3 ♖c6 12 ♗c3 ♖ae8 13 ♗d3

The idea was to meet 13 0-0 with 13...♗d4! Instead 13 ♗b5 is tempting, but after 13...♗b8 14 0-0 a6 15 ♖xd6 ♕xd6 Black has ideas of ...♖xe6, ...♕g4 and ...♕d4 etc., and so White still has some problems to solve.

13...♗d4 14 ♖xd4 ♕xd4 15 ♗b5 ♗b4+

I was still in my preparation here, and there had been some previous games reaching this position; for example, 16 ♗d1 ♕b6 17 ♗f4 ♕xe6 18 ♕f3 ♕f8 with a strong initiative for Black, A.Maier-M.Kunze, Munich 1992.

16 ♗d2 ♗xd2+ 17 ♗xd2 ♕b6 18 ♕e5

This was pretty much forced in view of the threat of 18...♕e6, which can now be met by 19 ♕xd4!.

18...♖xe6 19 ♕xd4 ♗e4+

This was still preparation.

20 ♕c2

Or 20 ♕c1 ♕f2! 21 ♕xb6 axb6 22 ♕d2 (or 22 ♕f1 ♕e2! 23 ♗d4 ♗d3+ 24 ♗d1 ♕xg2! 25 ♕xf8+ ♕xf8 26 ♖b1 ♕g1+ 27 ♗c2 ♖b4+) 22...♕xh1 23 ♕xh1 ♕f2+ 24 ♗c3 ♕ee2 and Black went on to win, V.Chernov-S.Bouaziz, Bucharest 1992.

20...♕f2+ 21 ♕c1 ♕c5

Threatening 22...♕ee2.

22 ♗b4 ♗xd3+! 23 ♕xd3 ♕ee2
Now the threat is 24...\(\text{h6}\) + 25 \(\text{b1}\) (or 25 \(\text{d1}\) \(\text{d2}\)+) 25...\(\text{b2}\) mate.
24 \(\text{d1}\) \(\text{f6}\)!

Still preparation! Now 25 \(\text{b1}\)? \(\text{f1}\)+! was the abrupt end of M.Sutaw.Schoen, Budapest 1994.

25 \(\text{d5}\+)

Against 25 \(\text{d4}\) (the best defence), aided by my computer engine I had analysed 25...\(\text{d2}\)+! 26 \(\text{xd2}\) \(\text{xa1}\)+ 27 \(\text{c1}\) \(\text{xa2}\) 28 \(\text{c3}\) \(\text{b3}\)+ 29 \(\text{e1}\) \(\text{c2}\) 30 \(\text{e3}\) \(\text{xc3}\)+ 31 \(\text{xc3}\) \(\text{xc3}\) 32 \(\text{d2}\) \(\text{xc4}\) when Black has excellent chances of winning the endgame.

25...\(\text{h8}\) 26 \(\text{c1}\)

I remembered that the computer's suggestion as White's best defence after 25...\(\text{h8}\) had been 26 \(\text{c3}\), although 'best' is relative because after 26...\(\text{e8}\)! White cannot adequately deal with the threats of ...\(\text{d8}\) and ...\(\text{xc3}\) and Black should win.

After my opponent played 26 \(\text{c1}\) I was in a strange situation, one I had never experienced before. I was 99% sure this position was totally winning for Black because I had only a few hours earlier checked the position after 25...\(\text{h8}\) with a computer engine. As I mentioned, 26 \(\text{c3}\) was the computer's best move, but even this move carried an assessment of -2.0 (i.e. winning for Black). 26 \(\text{c1}\) was further down the list of suggestions, and so it was reasonable to assume that Black was winning here too, but I hadn't had time in the preparation to check out its refutation. When 26 \(\text{c1}\) was played it was basically the equivalent of being given a 'Black to play and win' puzzle. It wasn't a normal situation because I knew a solution definitely existed.

Try as I might I was unable to come up with the goods. Perhaps I had left all my energy in the preparation...

26...\(\text{xg2}\)!

Black wins by playing 26...\(\text{xa2}\)! (threatening 27...\(\text{f1}\)+) 27 \(\text{e1}\) \(\text{f1}\)! (I had missed the strength of this move, which threatens 28...\(\text{xe1}\)+ 29 \(\text{xe1}\) \(\text{f2}\)+ 30 \(\text{d1}\) \(\text{e2}\) mate) 28 \(\text{d4}\) (28 \(\text{c5}\) \(\text{xe1}\)+ 29 \(\text{xe1}\) \(\text{e6}\)+ is similar) 28...\(\text{xe1}\)+ 29 \(\text{xe1}\) \(\text{e7}\)+ 30 \(\text{f1}\) \(\text{e2}\)+ 31 \(\text{g1}\) \(\text{g2}\) mate.

27 \(\text{c3}\)?

Now Black is winning again. After 27 \(\text{d6}\)! \(\text{ef2}\) 28 \(\text{f7}\)+! \(\text{xf7}\) 29 \(\text{xf7}\)
\( \text{xf7 30 c2! White would be right back in the game.} \)

27...\( \text{ef2!} \)

Threatening 28...\( \text{f1+} \) and mate on the following move.

28 \( \text{e1 f3+!} \)

\[ \text{Diagram} \]

29 \( \text{e2?} \)

29 \( \text{xf3} \) allows a pretty mate with 29...\( \text{d2} \), but during the game I was still trying to figure out a sure-fire win against 29 \( \text{e2!} \). The main line runs 29...\( \text{g1+} 30 \text{d2 f4+ 31 c2 (31 d3 f3+) 31...xc1+! (I had only been looking at 31...\( \text{xc1+ 32 b3 f3 33 xxb7, when Black is better but it's certainly not all over) 32 b3 h6! 33 e8+ h7 34 g8+ g6 35 e6+ h5 36 e8+ f7, and Black should win.} \)

29...\( \text{xe2!} 30 \text{d8+} \)

30 \( \text{xf3 d2 is still mate!} \)

30...\( \text{e8+ 0-1} \)

Chess engines do have their limitations. In some positions I've found them to be unhelpful, and it can even be damaging to trust their assessments. For example, I've come across one or two engines that tend to overestimate compensation after pawn sacrifices (ironically in the past computers were accused of being too materialistic – maybe some programmers have over-compensated!). In a position in which there are no tactics, it's very possible that two chess engines will reach quite different assessments, so in these situations it's clear their usefulness is limited.

As I mentioned earlier, they are at their best when checking out concrete tactical lines, as in my games against Wheeler and Calvo. A word of warning though: in extremely complex tactical positions sometimes it takes a while for them to find the truth. Don't just take the computer's initial assessment as gospel: if you have any reservations, give it some more time to reach a verdict. Occasionally you might find that the initial assessment is actually overturned.

In his preparation for the following game, World Champion Vladimir Kramnik trusted a computer's initial assessment of 'winning for White'. Unfortunately for him, after a few minute's thought the computer changes its mind and it's 'winning for Black'! On a more positive note, it did at least lead to a fantastic game.

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V.Kramnik-P.Leko
World Championship (Game 8), Brissago 2004

1 e4 e5 2 f3 c6 3 b5 a6 4 a4 f6 5 0-0 e7 6 e1 b5 7 b3 0-0 8 c3

In the three previous games Kramnik had avoided contesting the Mar-
shall Gambit by playing 8 h3.

8...d5 9 exd5 Qxd5 10 Qxe5 Qxe5 11 Qxe5 c6 12 d4 Qd6 13 Qe1 Qh4 14 g3
Qh3 15 Qe4 g5

Preventing Qh4, which would be White’s answer to both 15...f5?? and
15...Qf5??. The pawn is immune on g5 for the moment because 16 Qxg5??
runs into the double attack 16...Qf5!.

16 Qf1

This move was clearly a surprise for Leko, as he spent over 50 minutes on
his reply.

16 Qe2 had previously been considered the main line, but this changed
after the game R.Ponomariov-V.Anand, Linares 2002: 16...f5 17
Qxd5+ cxd5 18 Qe6 f4! 19 Qxd6 Qg4 20
Qf1 Qxf1+! 21 Qxf1 Qae8 22 Qd2 Qh3+
23 Qg1 fxg3 24 hgx3 Qe2 25 Qe3 Qxe3!
26 fxe3 Qf1+ 27 Qh2 g4 28 Qxd5 and the
players agreed a draw as it’s perpetual
check with ...Qf2 and ...Qf1. A remark-
able piece of high-level (and almost certainly computer-assisted) prepara-
tion from the Indian GM.

16...Qh5 17 Qd2 Qf5 18 f3 Qf6 19 Qe1
Qae8 20 Qxe8 Qxe8 21 a4 Qg6

Having left ‘book’ at move 16, by
this stage Leko was down to his final
twenty minutes to reach move 40, a
factor that probably influenced Kram-
nik’s decision over his next move.

22 Qe4 is the safe option, which
Kramnik rejected due to the drawish
nature of 22...Qxe4 23 fxe4 Qxe4 24
Qxg5 bx a4, when White should play 25
Qc4 as 25 Qxa4?? loses to 25...Qb8!. In-
stead Kramnik thought for only a min-
ute (he wanted to give Leko as little
thinking time as possible) before taking
the plunge with...

22 axb5 Qd3 23 Qf2?

Played instantly – Kramnik was still
in his preparation! Objectively it seems
that White should settle for 23 Qd1 and
accept a repetition of moves after
23...Qe2! 24 Qc2 Qd3 25 Qd1.

23...Qe2

24 Qxe2

Another move played quickly. This
was Kramnik’s idea – to give up the
queen for a large assortment of mate-
rial (Black must sacrifice the light-
squared bishop to stop the pawn
promoting, right?). Later in Chess Informant
Leko provided some analysis refuting White’s alternative way of sacrificing the queen. There are some wonderful variations, but here’s just his amazing main line: 24 bxa6!? axf2 25 xf2 Wh5 26 g1 xg3! 27 hxg3 Wh3 28 a7 Wxg3+ 29 h1 g4!! 30 a8w+ g7 31 wb7 we1+ 32 g2 gxf3+ 33 xf3 wh1+ 34 g3 d5h5+ 35 h4 wh1+ 36 g4 wg2+ 37 hxh5 wh3+ 38 h4 de2+ 39 g5 wg4 mate.

24...xe2 25 bxa6 wd3!!

It was only at this stage that Kramnik really began to think. I put Shredder on this position and revealingly its initial assessment is +7.50 (i.e. it gives White an advantage equivalent to 7½ pawns!). It’s only after thinking for a few minutes that it radically changes its assessment to ‘winning for Black’. Similarly, in the position after 25 bxa6, initially 25...wd3!! doesn’t even appear as one of Black’s top six options. Only after a few minutes does it jump to the top of the pack with an assessment of 3.50 in Black’s favour.

26 f2

I’m sure 26 a7 would have been Kramnik’s original intention, but over the board it must have dawned on him that Black can allow White to queen with check and still win: 26...we3+ 27 g2 xfe3+! 28 xf3 we2+ 29 g1 dg4! 30 a8w+ g7.

Despite having an extra rook and bishop there is no defence, for example
31 xcx6 xf2+ 32 h1 xf1+! 33 dg1 df2 mate.

26...xf3! 27 xfe3 de4+ 28 e1

Or 28 g2 we2+.

28...xc3!

This is winning.

29 bx3 wxc3+ 30 f2 xa1 31 a7 h6!
32 h4 g4 0-1

A stunning performance from Leko, but also a powerful illustration of how much players have come to rely upon computer analysis in preparation.
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