Colin Crouch

WHY

we lose
at chess
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Preface

While writing up reports for various magazines, I have been thinking about the idea of ‘ordinary chess’, of games which are not technically perfect, but may still be of interest to players, spectators, and hopefully to readers. For this to work well, the writer has to take the annotations seriously. The idea is that while the game is interesting anyway, just think of what spectacular ideas might have been thought of if the player could have found the occasional improvement. Often in chess, brilliance is just around the corner.

I have used a similar perspective in this book, but with a different, almost opposite perspective. I am writing up ‘ordinary games’, my own, with the thought of systematically going through them, spotting any mistakes of my own (and there are several), and finding better moves. I am aiming to find ways of cutting out mistakes, thereby improving both my play and that of the reader.

Many games have been played in local and national league events, and I dedicate this book to those who continue to keep chess clubs going, in what is often quite a difficult time. These days I am cautious about playing in long tournaments, and also quickplay tournaments, sometimes travelling from one end of Britain to the other. It is good to play in my local club, Harrow, where there are often fifty chess players in a single evening, sometimes close to sixty if there are visiting teams. My thanks to colleagues.

Colin Crouch,
Harrow Weald,
April 2010
Introduction

This is a book of my own games. It is definitely not a compilation of my best wins, attempting to impress the reader. On the contrary, what I am trying to do is to identify all my serious mistakes over a period of several months. I am not quite sure whether this exercise has been tried in public. Attempts have certainly been made to analyse the losses of great World Champions, such as Capablanca and Fischer, but there seems to be very little published autobiographical work of a player's own losses.

We can feel sure that strong grandmasters will have analysed their games in depth, in order to examine any weaknesses in their own play. It is a matter of survival at top level. If you do not find your own weaknesses, you opponent will be more than happy to demonstrate what you have done wrong. Of the earlier World Champions, one can imagine that Mikhail Botvinnik would have been extremely methodical in going through his post-mortem analysis, uncovering both his own mistakes and his opponent's mistakes, and learning from all this. It is enough to remember that he was World Champion from 1948 to 1963, a formidable stretch, and that while he lost matches against Smyslov and Tal, he successfully won the return matches. He was also a great teacher, and a pioneer of ideas in computer chess.

At lower levels, one might argue that games at purely amateur strength might be of only minor interest, since there are often many mistakes, but a player might not understand why some moves are weak, and other moves are better. Of course, in saying this, my aim is not to try to condemn amateur chess. I am hoping to provoke interest into trying to encourage ordinary amateur players and ambitious
young players to think about how to play better.

I am somewhere between the amateur level and the strong grandmaster level. I am an International Master, with a good understanding of the basic ideas of chess, but also the ability to make serious mistakes over the board, even against much weaker opponents. A Dutch IM once characterized me as “a chess artist, rather than a practical chess player”, a reasonable comment, but it would be nice to discover how to be practical. Possibly in writing this book, it would help me to be more practical. But is this an excuse, or is it more a case that while I have learnt how to write a decent game of chess, I have not really learnt how to play a good game of chess?

In terms of life and death in chess, as player and writer, there is something even more important to me. It is a matter of chance that I am still alive, in 2010, rather than dead. It is a matter of chance that I am merely partially sighted, rather than blind. It was going to take a lot of hard work to recover after my stroke in 2004, and I still have only partially recovered. I could not read for some time, although now I can read slowly, preferably on large print.

Fortunately, I could see a chess board, just about, and I could therefore play chess after my stroke. My thought processes were still slow after brain damage, and at first I felt doubtful as to whether, if I played, I could play at over FIDE Elo 2000 strength (about 175 ECF rating). My memory was however largely intact, although it was going to be a lot of time before I could connect different thoughts. Aphasia is still a problem. I can understand what is being said by others, but I could not always string the words together when trying to read.

I needed to keep my mind active, and learn to think constructively again, in chess or in anything else. If anything, my thought processes became much more focussed, as I felt that I could not waste time. It is difficult enough that I found I had to take naps in the afternoon, and that my thoughts were no longer able to fizz. I needed to think carefully about what to do next.

Chess was by now much more important in my life, even though I was playing much less. I could no longer think in terms of playing lots of weekenders all over the country (Scotland and Wales, as well as England), and I have become increasingly reluctant to play two games in a day. My games mentioned in this book, at Bury St Edmunds and Kidlington, give good examples as to why. Creativity is useful, but if you want to be successful, you need to focus on good technique, and you have to respect tiredness.

I still wanted to show I could play good chess. Playing a standard nine-round tournament was slightly beyond what I was capable of doing with comfort, but maybe in time I could try this again? I have to admit that almost five years after
my stroke, I still have not summoned my courage in playing a nine-rounder, apart from playing the occasional Braille event, and a small Middlesex versus junior international in London. I got too tired.

I also wanted to get back into writing, and for a while I did not even go through my own games afterwards. It was so embarrassing. I had to tell myself that this was the result of tiredness, because of concentrating on my books, rather than a sudden deterioration in my brain. At the time, I was working on my book on Tal, Kasparov and Stein, and I felt confident that while I probably did not analyse completely accurately in any position (who can?), I was not yet gaga. So I continued writing, while hoping that my playing strength could improve again.

I had a gap in my calendar in 2006/2007, before attempting serious chess analysis on top grandmasters, and in this gap I was writing up my own games, maybe for publication, but primarily for my own interest, and learning again how to play good chess, and how to write. Essentially the result is this book, although I was able to revise my comments in 2009, not just because my earlier play and understanding might not have been as good as I would have liked, but also, more importantly, because this was only an initial draft.

**Back to Playing Chess**

Clearly I wanted to play chess again, but I was not seriously out of touch enough to think that I would be able to reach my peak in chess. My hope was that I could still play chess, and not decline too fast. I had in fact lost almost a hundred Elo points just before my stroke, and this was at the time a mystery for me. Now, though, it is all very clear. There was accumulating damage to my brain before the stroke.

Even so, I wanted to show that with constructive thinking I could recover most of my peak, despite the slowing down of age, and other problems. I am not too surprised that I have not fully achieved this yet.

Other readers, looking to improve their chess, will inevitably be thinking in different ways. In particular, the young player, having reached a degree of experience, will calculate quickly, and learn openings speedily, but will not yet have the detailed knowledge of positional accuracy. These days I would not be able to calculate lines a dozen moves deep, with sub-variations, but an ambitious teenager would see this as the core to chess improvement. If you can calculate quickly, when your opponent can calculate less quickly or deeply, you have a clear practical edge.

For those over thirty, the player will have to modify thought processes. The general procedure would tend to be that, now you cannot calculate everything, it is best to use your knowledge and experience to cut out extraneous thought proc-
Why we Lose at Chess

esses. For me, I have been forced to take a slightly more extreme approach, as brain damage means that I am not able to think quickly.

This is recognized in this book. I have tended much more than before to cut down the number of moves to try to analyse, and concentrate instead on thinking about just a few moves, systematically. In other words, do not try to think of a long list of possible moves beforehand, trying to assess each position, but start off with a couple of moves to consider at first, while keeping a quick note of other lines. The idea is to examine two moves first, normally the most plausible moves. Naturally if there is an immediate tactic which must be calculated, then examine it. If it can be rejected immediately, move on to other lines. What I am thinking about is, for example, a double piece sacrifice which brings the king out into the open, but can quickly be seen as unsound. If, however, there might still be possibilities, then look at it again. You never know, you might have a brilliancy.

Once we have made a quick scan of immediate checks, captures, and other brilliances, also cutting out any immediate big threat by the opponent, we probably have a few moves to be considered. These might be attacking moves, or defensive moves, or positional moves. You need to keep your eyes open.

For simplicity, in this test book, we give three alternatives; move A, which I am regarding as the most obvious, then move B, the main alternative. If there are two moves to be considered, and other moves are irrelevant, that makes life simple. One must, of course, keep in mind that there are also possible alternatives, starting with ‘Something Else’, move C, and then maybe D onwards.

Even if you feel you cannot analyse in great depth over the board, you still have to make a decision what you are going to play. Usually it is best to concentrate on the most natural move, A. If you are confident that it is a good move, and any other move (C) seems senseless, you should play it without spending too much thinking time. If, however, you decide that your initial move is not fully satisfactory – maybe because you feel that it is promising, but that there should be something better, or maybe because it is ultimately bad – then you need to think of alternatives.

Remember that for much of the time, the first move you think of is often the best. This is because you have already been thinking about that idea when looking at the previous position. Maybe your opponent has played the reply that you have expected, or maybe there was a slightly unexpected alternative, but your possible reply might well seem good and natural. Or maybe there might be something better.

Think of choice B next anyway, but remember that you must retain your assessment of the evaluation of choice A. Is your first move ending up as slightly bet-
ter for you? Or just equal? Or, perhaps the most common assessment, slightly worse, or at least making you feeling uncomfortable? Or is your initial thought quite simply bad?

Then analyse B, but with a quick flick though to see whether moves C, D, or maybe even beyond could be worth trying later. As some guidance, if you are thinking of analysing a fourth move, or even beyond, you are at risk of entering time trouble, sooner or later. If you are juggling six possible moves in a given position, you will have to calculate much more than three times as much than when there are only two moves to be considered. You have done your basic calculations, and you must decide whether A or B is better, and then, for example, whether B or C is better, then perhaps B or D. In the final stage, when you compare B and E, what you would really not have wanted in retrospect is to find that B is better, and that in trying to analyse lines D and E, maybe also F as well, you have wasted time on the clock.

It is a matter of judgement to decide whether moves D and E should be ignored. Maybe D looks interesting at first, but a couple of moves later, your pawn structure is shattered, and you do not think that it is worth defending the line. On the other hand, E might be genuinely tactically interesting, and requires more thought. We must not forget, either, that an F try might well be worth examining, even though first time round it did not seem so effective.

Quite clearly there are difficult decisions to be made. It is difficult to generalize on how players should find the best thought processes, and find the best move. The ideal is that a player should be able to calculate with complete accuracy, but of course a human player cannot achieve this in over-the-board play. If anything, it makes chess far more interesting if the human player has to find good, or indeed excellent, moves without the help of a computer. It is an exercise for the mind, and top players should quite properly be accorded great respect when finding accurate play and inspired brilliancies.

Most of us have great imperfections in our chess, but we do not give up the game in response to them. We need to develop strategies to find ways of finding good moves when we cannot calculate everything, and when we do not have full understanding of positional chess. I do not pretend that I have found the answer. All I can do is to try to pinpoint ways in which mistakes, and indeed my own mistakes, are made.

This is a preliminary investigation. I have indicated in this book 60 mistakes over several months that I have made. The main point is that most of these mistakes are not the result of highly complicated and difficult play. Just because I am a master, I can still play rubbish chess. At least half of these mistakes could easily
have been avoided by better thought processes. This is easy enough to establish, to the extent that in the test positions, A, B, and ‘something else’ (C), I give improvements on each of my own games.

**List of Exercises**

1.1 Crouch-Oryakhal (White’s 5th)  
1.2 Crouch-Radovanovic (White’s 6th)  
1.3 Nurmohamed-Crouch (Black’s 7th)  
1.4 Wall-Crouch (B7)  
2.1 Buckley-Crouch (B9)  
2.2 Crouch-Rose (W11)  
2.3 Wall-Crouch (B10)  
2.4 Crouch-Radovanovic (W12)  
3.1 Nurmohamed-Crouch (B12)  
3.2 Crouch-Peacock (B12)  
3.3 Morris-Crouch (B12)  
3.4 Crouch-Lewis (W13)  
4.1 Lauterbach-Crouch (B13)  
4.2 Crouch-Gait (W14)  
4.3 Sen-Crouch (B14)  
4.4 Sowray-Crouch (B14)  
5.1 Crouch-Hutchinson (W15)  
5.2 Crouch-Granat (W16)  
5.3 Crouch-Peacock (W16)  
5.4 Hebden-Crouch (B16)  
6.1 Morris-Crouch (B17)  
6.2 Crouch-Hutchinson (18W)  
6.3 Hebden-Crouch (B18)  
6.4 Lauterbach-Crouch (B18)  
7.1 Crouch-Peacock (W19)  
7.2 Crouch-Lewis (W20)  
7.3 Sowray-Crouch (B20)  
7.4 Crouch-Peacock (B21)  
8.1 Buckley-Crouch (B21)  
8.2 Pert-Crouch (B21)  
8.3 Wall-Crouch (B22)  
8.4 Nurmohamed-Crouch (W22)  
9.1 Crouch-Cox (W24)  
9.2 Crouch-Gait (W25)  
9.3 Crouch-Granat (W25)  
9.4 Randall-Crouch (B25)  
10.1 Morris-Crouch (B25)  
10.2 Nurmohamed-Crouch (B26)  
10.3 Lauterbach-Crouch (B26)  
10.4 Crouch-Gait (W27)  
11.1 Crouch-McKenna (W27)  
11.2 Crouch-Okike (W27)  
11.3 Buckley-Crouch (B27)  
11.4 Pert-Crouch (B27)  
12.1 Crouch-Cox (W28)  
12.2 Crouch-Roberson (W28)  
12.3 Cutmore-Crouch (B30)  
12.4 Crouch-McKenna (W31)  
13.1 Randall-Crouch (B31)  
13.2 Gregory-Crouch (B32)  
13.3 Crouch-Granat (W34)  
13.4 Gregory-Crouch (B34)  
14.1 Morris-Crouch (B35)  
14.2 Cutmore-Crouch (B35)  
14.3 Crouch-Roberson (W37)  
14.4 Crouch-McKenna (W38)  
15.1 Crouch-Granat (W39)  
15.2 Buckley-Crouch (B46)  
15.3 Crouch-McKenna (B48)  
15.4 Pert-Crouch (B50)  

This table is not merely a brief contents page; it is also a summary of research, and a starting point for further examination. There are 60 identified mistakes in
this book, and no doubt I have overlooked some further points. I have not bothered
giving every single slip in each game if I played particularly awfully, for example,
in my horrible game against McKenna (he had so many chances of beating me), or
even in the later stages against Pert, when I made so many bad moves around the
time control, but arguably the worst of these mistakes was missing an unexpected
chance of finding a fortuitous draw in the endgame.

**Ready to start?**

We have 60 exercises for the reader to consider. It is important to remember that
this is not a quiz. We are not asking you to try to dig out your memory.

More to the point is asking readers to think about new and original positions,
to try to find the best move, and to avoid identifiable mistakes. I am setting out
my own errors, at master level, and you are invited to make improvements. Also,
at another level, you can think about how you can take full advantage of mistakes
by your opponent. Not all mistakes get punished. Quite often there could easily be
half a dozen slips in normal play. If one of the players wins quickly, that often
means that the opponent’s mistake is so serious that a reasonable player should
be able to move quickly.

When playing through the games, take them seriously, but not excessively so.
Trying to analyse in great depth, with the help of your own brain and computer
suggestions, can be extremely absorbing. Some of the positions in this book are
analysed in great depth, sometimes spilling over extra days. The writer likes to aim
for perfection, but of course this does not always happen. The reader might by
daunted by the thought that it takes a couple of pages of intense analysis to show
that one interesting move eventually turns out to be better than another. The
point is, though, that over the board one can only see a fraction of what could
have happened, and quite often it is possible to say that a player is “lucky” if the
critical move turns out to be good, and “unlucky” if an obscure move turns out to
be an unexpected refutation. A player who loses may feel he is unlucky, but it is
still a loss and it is important to cut down your unluckiness by working out how to
avoid mistakes.

For the reader, think about seeing a new position in a game at the board. It is
just an ordinary position, so we are not asking you to find a brilliant sacrifice. We
are asking you to find a good, ordinary move, avoiding any pitfalls.

At an initial glance, you will quickly decide whether you think your position is
better, or equal, or worse. Or maybe you just won’t know what is happening and
will need to look further before you can make any sort of judgement. Once you
have sorted out your background information, you can try to decide what your
next move is going to be. If there is genuinely only one sensible move to make, you can play it immediately. Most of the time, you have to think, which is hard work.

You are being asked to find a good move, and for the first part of the exercise, to make a decision quickly. What would you play if you had to do something in the next fifteen seconds? In this exercise, you have three options, although the third option is given as “something else”, which might be a choice of half a dozen reasonable alternatives, particularly in “quiet” positions. Or, on the other hand, there are no reasonable alternatives, and it is really only a choice between A and B. As far as possible, I have tried not to give a big clue about the best move. Of the three options given, A, B and C, one is the move I actually played, but was a mistake. The other suggested option is a natural move, which may have been right or wrong. You need to bear in mind that there is a third possibility, which might or might not be good.

For the initial assessment, decide which move you would play, and write it down. We are not yet asking you which move you would decide to play in a tournament. You will have more time to think later. What you are being asked for now are your first impressions.

The next stage is to decide which move you would play in a tournament game. If you genuinely think that you have decided on your choice after a couple of minutes, write down your move. In run-of-the-mill positions, you would have on average three minutes, or less, to decide anyway. In critical and difficult positions, you will want to think for much longer. It often happens that a player makes moves quickly early on in the game, and then suddenly slows down. In a critical position, a player will be aware that the best move may keep an advantage, while a second-best move leads to only equality, and a worse move, attractive but leading to a tactical oversight, may end up as being bad. Take your time, but do not waste time. The clock ticks, and it does not help if you are spending 40 minutes on a move if you then have to make your last ten moves before the time control in only one minute. In a tournament, at some stage you will have to make a decision, and it is often best, if not necessarily desirable, to save some time for thinking later.

Use whatever time you want in this exercise, then make a decision and write your move down. Do not be worried if you have changed your mind since your initial assessment. It may well be that you have given yourself extra time to allow extra clear thinking. Maybe you have decided that the initial assessment was wrong, inaccurate, or unsubtle, and you have corrected your thought processes. A more worrying aspect might well be that you have chosen the correct move immediately, but after some more thought you have introduced an extra error through over-sophistication. Indeed, on the day after I finished the initial draft, I
made precisely this mistake.

Another possibility is that you chose an inaccuracy, and played it too quickly. This can be very common in the opening if a player saves time by relying on “natural moves”, and the problems come later. I have had to remind myself that it is no bad thing to spend ten minutes in the opening, rather than play the first ten moves in a couple of minutes.

After going through the exercises, the next stage is to read closely through my annotations, in which I have made use of computer engines and of course a considerable amount of hindsight. I think I have learnt a lot from playing through my own games, and I hope that you will learn a lot in playing through them too, poor though they may be when judged at the top level. After that, it is up to you to start thinking about your own games, and to work out how to improve your play in later encounters.

Good luck!
Test One

1.1 White to play

A) 5 cxb5
B) 5 e3
C) Something else?

1.2 White to play

A) 6 e3
B) 6 e5
C) Something else?

1.3 Black to play

A) 7 ... c5
B) 7 ... e7
C) Something else?

1.4 Black to play

A) 7 ... f6
B) 7 ... a6
C) Something else?
Why we Lose at Chess

**Test 1.1**

C.Crouch-J.Oryakhal  
Hillingdon League 2006

My opponent, and for a time a club colleague, is what could be described as a 'natural' player, or an 'experimental' player. He has shown little interest in the opening, or in studying the endgame, but can at times be dangerous in tactical middlegames, and many club members have suffered quick losses to him.

It was disconcerting that I was already worse as White, within half a dozen moves.

1 d4 e6 2 c4 c6!? 

This is by no means a bad line for Black, and if I develop with 3 \textit{\&c}3 or 3 \textit{\&f}3, Black can quickly move into a Semi-Slav with 3...d5. I do not know whether he would have tried something else, although I suspect he would have done.

My instinctive response was 3 e4, so that if 3...d5 4 cxd5 cxd5, then 5 e5 leads to a French Advance where Black has exchanged prematurely, compared with 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 c5 4 c3. After 4...exd5!, however, even the World Champion of the time could not find a convincing edge in M.Tal-A.Bisguier, Bled 1961. Following 5 e5 \textit{\&a}6 6 \textit{\&c}3 \textit{\&c}7 7 \textit{\&ge}2 \textit{\&e}7 8 \textit{\&f}4 \textit{\&f}5 Black seems to have comfortably equalized, but Tal later ground his opponent down in the endgame. This was reached via a Caro-Kann move order (1 c4 c6 2 e4 e6 3 d4 d5, etc).

So 3...d5 is playable, but Oryakhal found something more original. He played 3...\textit{\&a}6!? in Basman style, but perhaps even more effective than the 1 e4 a6 2 d4 b5 St George's Variation.

4 \textit{\&f}3

It's not so easy for White to set up any clear advantage, and indeed the computer gives only a plus of '0.19'. All I can sensibly do is develop my pieces, and try to ensure that I will be able to keep a plus. No heroics.

4...d5

This cannot be bad, developing the knight to a solid square. However, 4...
a4?, to prevent Black from playing ...b5, would be an over-reaction. White would have weakened his b4-square. Black naturally plays 4...b5, leading to our first test position.

I played 5 â€³e3? (B) rather carelessly, and after 5...bxc4 6 â€³xc4 (maybe 6 e5 d5 7 exd6 â€³xd6, but Black is still equal) 6...d5! 7 exd5 cxd5 8 â€³b3 I started to appreciate that while my pieces were better developed, Black has the better pawn structure, and should be at least equal. Unaccountably Black then tried 8...h6?, with a clear loss of tempo, and then after a few later inaccuracies White was able to play for an edge, and later won.

White should instead have made a clear decision over his c-pawn.

I did not enjoy the thought of giving away an extra tempo with the pawn before exchanging, namely 5 c5 d6 6 cxd6 â€³xd6. After 7 â€“c2 â€³b7, however, Black’s ...c6 move has got in the way of his pieces. So 5 c5! (C) is an improvement, possibly with a slight edge.

There’s also 5 cxb5 axb5 (A), which I slightly distrusted at the time, with Black keeping the extra pawn in the centre (the c-pawn, as opposed to White’s a-pawn). However, Black has various slight pawn weaknesses on the queenside, making the assessment finely balanced. Black may well want to play ...d5, but it needs to be well timed.

Flipping my assessment during the game, I would now prefer 5 c5 (C) to 5 cxb5 (A), but either move would be preferable to 5 â€³e3?! (B).

The rest of the game is of less interest, from my point of view, as my opponent did not play accurately, and I quickly went from a slight disadvantage to equality, then an edge and a win, with 9 0-0 â€³f6 10 â€³e5 â€³d6 11 f4 0-0 12 â€³d2.

Test 1.2
C.Crouch-J.Radovanovic
London Open 2006

One of those slight slips in the opening which is easily missed – here by both sides. The trouble is that both players will want to play quickly in the opening, to avoid the danger of time pressure later on, but if the players do not slow down as soon as something unusual happens, one player will unexpectedly be worse, even after only a few minutes.

Play started with 1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 â€³f3 â€³f6 4 â€³c3 dxc4 5 â€³a4, and then 5...â€³g4, instead of the usual 5...â€³f5.
Since my stroke, a couple of years earlier, I had not re-examined this position, and was taken slightly by surprise. I played the natural 6 e3? (A), but 6 ♖e5! (B) is more effective, avoiding the pin. Of course, I was well aware of the knight thrust, but was concerned that I would be caught in a main line which I had not revised.

My opponent played 6...e6?, which suggests that he too was not fully aware of the theory. We will see how play continued in Test 2.4.

Instead 6...e5! is fully equal. I am sure that had I quickly skimmed through some likely lines before my move, I would have decided that since we are still in standard opening play, 7 ♖xc4 ♖xf3 8 gxf3 (8 ♗xf3?! exd4 loses a pawn, without sufficient compensation) 8...exd4 9 exd4 should be at least playable for White, and would not have analysed much further. After all, saving five or ten minutes in the opening can often be useful later on.

I doubt whether I would have wanted to think, in advance, of playing 7 dxe5 ♗xd1+ 8 ♗xd1 ♗xd7 9 ♖xc4 ♖xf3 10 gxf3 ♗xe5 11 ♕e2, since Black is slightly ahead in development. If my opponent had played the best move, I might in the end have tried this line, but it leads to no advantage.

**Test 1.3**

*S.Nurmobahmed-C.Crouch*

*Thames Valley League 2006*

This was the start of a nightmare game in which my mind was not in focus, I became dizzy, and made several mistakes. Fortunately I became more alert during the end of the session, woken up by the thought that I could easily lose, and was able to negotiate some defensive tactics when he had opened up lines against my king. There was no possible doubt, however, that during the later stages, he had a clear chance of a win.

The opening moves started 1.e4 c5 2 ♗f3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♗xd4 ♗f6 5 ♗d2 (too quiet) 5...♗c6 6 ♗f3 ♗c7 7 c3.
White has lost a lot of time with his knights. Should Black already be playing for an edge? This seems a little too early. White has played ineffectively, but he starts off with the advantage of the first move, and it often takes more than a couple of quiet moves by White to allow Black to be already better. Usually the most practical approach as Black in such a scenario is to play quiet but forceful moves early on, and to allow the opponent to try to prove that he is equal.

Instead, I quickly played the naive attack 7...c5?! (A). It’s a developing move, but it can hardly be expected that my opponent will be unable to find a good defence to cover the f2-square. As we will see in Test 3.1, a few moves later, I soon found out, in the main line and in a few variations, that the bishop is too exposed, and that White can create counterplay with one of b4, b3, or (after ...d5) a pawn exchange on d5, and if Black recaptures with the knight, then e4. Black would not necessarily be worse, but he has lost his initiative.

A reality check helped by using the computer is that the position after 7 c3 is close to equal. The human player might well want to argue that Black still keeps the initiative, though, by playing a Scheveningen set-up, with 7...e7 (B), and ...d6, when Black is solid in his centre and his pieces can develop quietly and securely. White’s pieces cannot be more effectively placed here than in standard openings. Possibly White can still equalize, or possibly Black with sensible play can demonstrate an edge. Who knows? What is more certain that Black has played better than White in the opening.

So 7...e7 is the suggested main line, but 7...d6 or 7...d5 are fully acceptable too, under ‘something else’ (C).

We shall return to this game later.

Test 1.4
G. Wall-C. Crouch
British League (4NCL) 2007

After 1 e4 c5 2 f3 e6 3 c3 f6 4 e5 d5 Wall played the slightly unusual 5 a3.

Going through with the computer a few days later, I saw that he had tried this before. Maybe there is a lesson here? Or maybe not. If I had taken the opportunity of quickly using the oracle an hour before the game, I could have
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tried to work out a possible improvement. Usually I prefer not to bother. Chess is a tiring game, and I prefer not to turn a four-hour session into a five-hour session, through pre-game analysis. In Swiss tournaments or team events, it is not possible to examine in leisure the openings a day before. An extra hour resting in bed, or a gentle stroll is often better than pre-match preparation.

Play continued 5...d6 6 c4 dxe5 7 cxe5, and here I had to decide over the board what to play next.

Here the chance of preparation in advance would possibly have helped me to the extent that I would not have been too anxious of a check on the a4-e8 diagonal. Indeed, the computer indicates that this check is not too dangerous, and that Black could quite simply have developed.

I played 7...a6?! (B), aiming to consolidate in the centre, but also giving away a tempo with a pawn move. Black is close to equality, nevertheless, as we will see in Test 2.3, but it would have been useful to end up with complete equality.

7...e7 (C) is the most natural developing move, after which I probably would have been slightly worried by 8 b5+ d7 9 d4 0-0 10 0-0. White keeps slightly more space in the centre, and probably a small but irritating edge after, for example, 10...cxd4 11 xd7 xd7 12 xd4. In a 4NCL encounter several years earlier, Wall played more directly in the centre, with 8 d4 0-0 9 c4 cxd4 10 xd4 f6 11 d3 c6 12 e4, and his pieces in the centre were irritatingly effective in G.Wall-N.Davies, British League 2000.

7...d7 (C) is also playable and natural, but after 8 xd7 xd7 9 e5 d6 10 xd7 xd7 11 d4 White is better placed in the centre, even if only slightly.

Sometimes it may be acceptable for Black, even very early on, to take the initiative and play for an edge, even when there is no obvious serious mistake by White. This might well happen, for example, if the player with White tries slow manoeuvring in the opening, and Black sets up some well-timed counterplay.

The computer suggestion is 7...f6! (A), and if 8 b5+ then, as a second choice, 8...e7!. I am sure that had I been a teenager, I would have seen this as the obvious and natural line, but as one gets older, the inclination is often to try to cut out the more bizarre ideas, since quite often they turn out to be
wrong. Strange moves still need to be considered, though, as well as natural moves, and it is best not to eliminate too quickly some promising ideas.

If then 9 ♗g4 e5 10 ♗e3 e4 11 ♗xd5+ ♘xd5 12 ♘e2, and Black is happy with his position. Once his king has taken the time to escape to f7 after 12...♕e6 (though not immediately 12...♕f7?? 13 ♗c4), his other pieces and pawns will be more active.

White therefore can think about aiming for a sacrificial attack, with 9 d4!? Then perhaps 9...♖a5 (there are other tries) 10 ♗d3!? fxe5 11 ♗g5+ ♘e8 12 ♗xe5 g6 13 ♕f3 ♘c7 14 0-0-0 (or maybe 14 ♗b5+ ♗c6 15 0-0-0 first), and we reach a familiar sacrifice of knight versus pawn, where Black’s king is in the open and his pieces are not yet fully developed.

A possible line is 14...cxd4!? 15 ♗he1 ♗xc3 16 bxc3 ♖xc3+ 17 ♗b1 ♖b4+ with a perpetual, and this is a natural way of finishing. However, here 16...♖a3+? 17 ♗d2 ♖xc3+ 18 ♗e2 would have been unwise, as White’s king is much safer than Black’s, with rooks and minor pieces now being level.

Black could try instead 14...♖d6 15 ♗b5+ ♗c6, and the position would seem to be more or less incalculable over the board after 16 ♗d8 ♖g7 17 ♗xc6 ♗d7. Try it! However, players are allowed to accept sacrifices, and the simple 16...♖xd8 17 ♕f7+ ♗e8 18 ♗xe8 hxe8 19 ♗b1 ♗d7 is good for Black.

There are many other lines to be considered from move 9. Earlier, White also has 8 ♕a4+.

I leave this as an exercise in annotation for the reader, whether with the traditional aid of board and set, or with the help of the computer.

A possible line is 14...cxd4!? 15 ♗he1 ♗xc3 16 bxc3 ♖xc3+ 17 ♗b1 ♖b4+ with a perpetual, and this is a natural way of finishing. However, here 16...♖a3+? 17 ♗d2 ♖xc3+ 18 ♗e2 would have been unwise, as White’s king is much safer than Black’s, with rooks and minor pieces now being level.

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There are many other lines to be considered from move 9. Earlier, White also has 8 ♕a4+.

This time 8...♖e7?! takes things too far, since White has 9 ♕h4!, and if 9...g5 10 ♗g6+!. So instead 8...♗d7 9 ♗xd7 ♖xd7, and in my previous notes, I suggested that there is “comfortable equality for Black”. This is a shorthand way of saying that Black may already have gone beyond equality, and be
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slightly better, but there is no real point in analysing every line in depth. Here, for example, 10 \textit{b5} \textit{xb5} 11 \textit{xb5+} \textit{d7} 12 \textit{xd7+} \textit{xd7}, and 10 \textit{e4} \textit{d6} 11 \textit{d4} \textit{f5} 12 \textit{e2} \textit{cxd4} 13 \textit{xd4} \textit{f6} both seem promising for Black.

In summary, 7...\textit{f6}! seems the best, or at the very least the most promising, although Black must be aware that extreme tactical complications may arise. With best play, Black should end up with an edge, but we need to remember that few players can play perfect chess in a long and intense battle, and the likelihood is that the better player will win.
Test Two

2.1 Black to play

A) 9...cxd4
B) 9...e7
C) Something else?

2.2 White to play

A) 11 We2
B) 11 a3
C) Something else?

2.3 Black to play

A) 10...wc7
B) 10...e7
C) Something else?

2.4 White to play

A) 12 Qxg6
B) 12 0-0
C) Something else?
Play started with 1 \textit{d}4 \textit{\texttt{f}}6 2 \textit{c}4 \textit{e}6 3 \textit{\texttt{f}}3 \textit{b}6 4 \textit{a}3 \textit{b}7 5 \textit{\texttt{c}}3. Fairly standard so far. The next few comments were written at the time.

\textit{5...e4}  
“Here I realized that I had not played this variation since my stroke, and I was hazy with my opening. Never mind, I remembered the knight exchange was the move I had previously played, and I recalled that there was some slight problem (in retrospect, it was that White had too easy a time to keep the draw). I just played a move quickly. 5...\textit{e7} is standard. A quick flick through the next couple of games suggests that 6 \textit{w}c2 \textit{c}5 7 e4 is reasonable, and has been played several times. I looked at this, and felt that maybe White has a slight edge, nothing spectacular, but I was happy to simplify.”

\textit{6 \texttt{xe4 xe4 7 e3}}

Here I played \textit{7...c5}, and I commented that “7...\texttt{e7} appears to be more common. Then after 8 \texttt{\texttt{d}3 xd3 9 w}xd3 0-0 White can play 10 e4 \textit{c}5 with possible inter-transposition with my main line, although White has an extra recapture on d5 after 11 d5 exd5 12 exd5, with a slight edge for White. My thought with an early \textit{c}5 is that if White plays e4, Black keeps the option with ...\textit{cxd4}. It might not be needed, but it is there!”

The computer suggests that there might have been several equalizing choices at the diagram position. I chose what seems to me the most natural.

Play continued \textit{8 \texttt{d}3 \texttt{xd}3 9 w\texttt{xd}3}.

We have now reached the position in the test. It is so important as Black to find a clear equalizing move in the opening, if given a chance. There is often a great temptation for the higher-rated player as Black to try to keep the tension alive, but so often the player with White has the chance to keep a modest edge. After that, it would take much more work to try to win a game.
than if the position is equal. Whatever happens, the only way of playing for a win is to rely on some sort of mistake from the opponent, landing him or her with a slight inferiority. If the opponent is slightly better, it would take a larger technical error to end up worse, than if the opponent is only equal, and even a microscopic slip becomes more significant. In a quiet and accurate position, the lesson would seem to be that it is generally best to play quiet and accurate moves.

9...cxd4! (A) is simplest and best, but probably only to a slight extent. Then 10 cxd4 c6 should be equal, and could easily transpose later to the stem game – see Test 8.1.

9...e7?! (B), as I played, is more provocative. My notes at the time suggested that 10 d5 exd5 11 cxd5 d6, followed by ...f6, might give White a slight edge, but not of any great significance. Looking at the position later, 10 dxc5! is uncomfortable for Black. If 10...bxc5, Black’s pawns are difficult to mobilize, while 10...xc5 involves a loss of tempo with the bishop. After 11 0-0 Black’s bishop will probably have to return to e7 at some stage. White is slightly better.

In the opening Black is usually slightly worse, with White having more options thanks to the advantage of the move. It is often best for Black to try to simplify the central pawn structure, to try to cut down the opponent’s options.

Test 2.2
C.Crouch-M.Rose
Kidlington 2007

We start with standard King’s Indian play with 1 d4 d5 2 c4 g6 3 c3 g7 4 e4 d6 5 f3 0-0, then 6 e3.

This is not quite the main line, but could easily transpose into 6 e2 e5 and then 7 e3!? , which I had tried a few times, just before my stroke. This line is still fashionable, and partly as a result of this, I wanted to switch my play slightly, not engage in opening theory. Apart from anything else, I could barely read in the previous couple of years.

He played 6...e5, and I could then transpose, if I wanted, into mainstream theory with 7 e2!. Then if 7...g4 8 g5 f6, all of 9 h4, 9 d2 and even 9 c1 have been tried. Again, I could not remember why, three years earlier, I had decided which of these was best.

Another line, experimented by Bent Larsen many years ago, is 7 dxe5 dxe5 8
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\[ \text{xd8 xxd8 9 d5}, \text{but the slightly} \]
\[ \text{unlikely 9...d7! equalizes easily.} \]

So I tried 7 d5, and for what it is worth, the computer gives this as a reasonable edge for White. Also, we are starting to go beyond mainstream opening theory.

After 7...a6, it is possible that my reply, 8 d3, was inaccurate. There are, however, alternatives later on which might still give White chances of a slight edge, so perhaps it is too early to give question marks. The bishops on e3 and d3 look good and imposing in the centre, except of course that Black's knights will hit back with ...b4 and ...g4. Black naturally starts with 8...g4, then 9 g5 f6.

Here I probably should have played 10 h4!?, slowing down the ...f5 push. This move is well known in analogous positions, with the light-squared bishop on e2 rather than on d3. It would take things too far to analyse this in detail, but a possible computer-generated line runs 10...e8 11 0-0 f5 12 exf5 gxf5 13 e1 e4 14 h3 g6 15 xe4 xb2 16 b1 fxe4 17 xe4 g7 18 hxg4 xg4 19 c2 f6 20 xf6 xf6 21 h2 h5 22 b3!?, keeping an edge. In other words, my opening might have been unusual, but it was certainly not daft. There is an important distinction between playing a completely bad opening, and making a slip slightly later.

I played instead the inferior 10 d2, which is plausible but no more than equal. It allowed Black's pawn push, 10...f5, to come too quickly.

Then I completely misjudged the tempo of play, with 11 a3?? (B). A few natural developing moves by White and after 11...c5 12 c2? (White needed to give away the bishop-pair), my position collapsed. He exchanged with 12...xe4, then came 13 xe4?! Battle-weary, I now saw the sacrifice on f2, but I could not see any way to avoid it. 13 xe4 provides more resistance, but even here 13...xf2! 14 xf2 xe4+ 15 xe4 h4+ 16 g3 (16 e3 leads into the game) 16...e4 will not allow White to last for long.
Black exchanged again with 13...\texttt{\textbackslash dx}e4 14 \texttt{\textbackslash dx}e4...

...and now 14...\texttt{\textbackslash dx}f2!.

Perhaps the gentlemanly finish would have been to allow the queen sacrifice with 15 \texttt{\textbackslash dx}xf2 \texttt{\textbackslash w}h4+ 16 \texttt{\textbackslash e}e3 \texttt{\textbackslash h}h6+ 17 \texttt{\textbackslash d}d3 \texttt{\textbackslash w}xe4+ 18 \texttt{\textbackslash w}xe4 (18 \texttt{\textbackslash c}c3 lasts only a little longer after 18...\texttt{\textbackslash d}xf3+ 19 gxf3 \texttt{\textbackslash d}d4+ 20 \texttt{\textbackslash c}c2 \texttt{\textbackslash f}5+ 21 \texttt{\textbackslash c}c1 \texttt{\textbackslash w}xc4+, and mate next move) 18...\texttt{\textbackslash f}5 mate.

Instead, I wanted to keep some hopes alive. Not for long, though. After the moves 15 \texttt{\textbackslash g}g5 \texttt{\textbackslash d}xd1 16 \texttt{\textbackslash dx}d8 \texttt{\textbackslash dx}b2 17 \texttt{\textbackslash c}xc7 \texttt{\textbackslash f}4 18 \texttt{\textbackslash d}d2 \texttt{\textbackslash xc}4 19 \texttt{\textbackslash c}c2 \texttt{\textbackslash dx}d2 20 \texttt{\textbackslash dx}d2 \texttt{\textbackslash f}2+ it was time to resign (0-1).

So what should I have done at move 11? It was a matter of pride to try to prove that, a couple of rounds later, against Andrew Lewis, my opening was okay, and that it was only a silly miscalculation on my part that led me to a loss. Indeed, I could have improved a move earlier, with 10 \texttt{\textbackslash h}h4! (instead of 10 \texttt{\textbackslash d}d2). Or, of course, I could have tried one of the several 11th-move alternatives. So against Lewis, I played 11 \texttt{\textbackslash w}e2 (A), but I later lost the thread of this game too, and then lost.

\textit{Test 2.3}
\textbf{G.Wall-C.Crouch}
\textbf{British League (4NCL) 2007}

Not, this time, a question of sharp tactics, but rather one of finding the best move order. We resume the Wall-Crouch game (1.4), with 8 d4 \texttt{\textbackslash d}d7 9 \texttt{\textbackslash g}5.

At the time I felt White’s move was probably too direct, and I was more worried about his gaining the bishop-
pair with 9 \(\text{cxd7}\) \(\text{cxd7}\) 10 \(\text{xe5}\) \(\text{cxd4}\) (10...\(\text{e7}\) 11 \(\text{h5}\) 0-0 12 \(\text{dxc5}\) \(\text{xc5}\) 13 \(\text{d3}\) is promising for White) 11 \(\text{cxd7}\) \(\text{hxd7}\). Black has a few local difficulties on the kingside, so maybe he can switch to the queenside after 12 \(\text{xd4}\) 0-0-0?!: for example, 13 \(\text{e2}\) \(\text{c7}\) 14 0-0 \(\text{d6}\) 15 h3 \(\text{h2+}\) 16 \(\text{h1}\) \(\text{e5}\) 17 \(\text{a7}\) \(\text{b8}\) 18 \(\text{xb8+}\) \(\text{xb8}\). The bishop-pair is to be respected, but Black’s knight, bolstered by his pawn on a central square, may hold the balance.

Play continued instead with 9...\(\text{xe5}\) 10 \(\text{dxe5}\), and now I had a choice to make.

I played 10...\(\text{e7}\)?! (B), which is of course a natural developing move, but there are a couple of small problems. First, if Black later plays ...\(\text{c7}\), he cannot cover f7, and second, in delaying the bishop move, he can try instead to play ...\(\text{c4}\) and then ...\(\text{c5}\), without loss of tempo.

10...\(\text{c7}\)! (A) is more accurate, and if 11 \(\text{f4}\) \(\text{c4}\) 12 \(\text{h5}\) \(\text{g6}\) 13 \(\text{g4}\) I have not committed myself to ...\(\text{e7}\). Indeed, I can defend on the queenside first, and only then go ...\(\text{c5}\): for example, 13...\(\text{b5}\) 14 \(\text{e2}\) \(\text{b7}\) is comfortably equal, and indeed White could have to face a few problems on the ‘Meran diagonals’, with open bishops on b7 and c5.

In the game, play instead continued with 10...\(\text{e7}\) 11 \(\text{e5}\) \(\text{g6}\) 12 \(\text{g4}\) \(\text{c7}\) 13 \(\text{f4}\) \(\text{c4}\) 14 \(\text{a4}\)!? (preventing ...\(\text{b5}\) 14...\(\text{d7}\), and it is clear that Black is developing much slower than in the alternative line. Black is still not far away from equality, nevertheless, as we will see in Test 8.3.

This all might seem very technical to the reader, but the accumulation of minor technical points may quickly accumulate to points on the board.

**Test 2.4**

**C.Crouch-J.Radovanovic**

*London Open 2006*

We have discussed this position before (1.2). Normally Black will have played ...\(\text{f5}\) rather than ...\(\text{g4}\).

The game continued 7 \(\text{xc4}\) \(\text{b4}\) 8
\[ \text{White:} \text{a5} \text{e5} \text{h5} \text{d5} \text{f4} \\]

with White having good chances of keeping a slight edge, with attacking flexibility in the centre. Still, 10...\text{d6} keeps play in reasonable balance. Black tried instead 10...\text{d6} and I replied 11 \text{f4}.

11 \text{d6} was tempting, but would not have led to much after 11...\text{d6} 12 \text{e4} \text{d6} 13 \text{ca2} \text{d5} 14 \text{d2} \text{f7}.

Black played 11...\text{g6}, reaching the quiz diagram, and the first serious mistake, though there have been a few minor slips in the earlier play.

12 \text{e2}?! (A) is a remarkably lazy move, saying in effect that “I have done my job, I’ve gained the bishop-pair, now I can rest on my laurels.” As play went on though, it became obvious that White had great difficulties on the kingside, with most of his main pieces being temporarily stuck on the queenside, and Black quickly being able to pressurize White’s kingside.

12 0-0 (B) is the obvious alternative, not allowing Black the open line for his rook on the h-file. White safely castles, although Black can set up some slight pressure with 12...\text{c7}.

12 \text{d2}?! (C), followed quickly perhaps by \text{c1}, seems the most accurate. There will be some tense manoeuvring to follow by both sides. White should be able to keep an edge, but certainly no more than on move 1.

Instead, after 12 \text{xg6} \text{hxg6} 13 0-0?! \text{g5}! White faces unnecessary problems on the h-file.

The immediate problem is the g8-h2 diagonal. I played 14 \text{e2} (14 \text{f4} immediately is probably better) 14...\text{d6} 15 \text{f4} (15 \text{g3} at the time seemed to passive to me) 15...\text{b4} 16 \text{d2} \text{c7} 17 \text{e1},

...
starting to set up the barriers on the kingside. The reader will no doubt have the impression that I am not happy with most of my moves in this game, but somehow my pieces work together.

Radovanovic continued his development by bringing his rooks into play immediately with 17...0-0-0?, no doubt thinking about doubling on the h-file, but he could have improved.

Indeed, White is under pressure after 17...b5!, and if 18 g3 e4. White is so busy, understandably so, in cementing his pawns on the stonewall dark squares that he has great difficulty covering the light squares. It’s not pleasant.

I was fortunate, after he castled, to find a way of aiming for a quick perpetual by way of 18 g3 h5?!

(18...gxf4! still leaves Black better) 19 fxg5! xg3 20 hxg3 xg3 21 xf7 h2+ 22 h1 (23 f1?? xf7+) 22...g3+ 23 g1 h2+ 24 h1

and a draw with 24...g3+ (½-½).
3.1 Black to play
A) 12...bxc3
B) 12...\textit{b7}
C) Something else?

3.2 White to play
A) 13 \textit{f2}
B) 13 \textit{d2}
C) Something else?

3.3 Black to play
A) 12...d4
B) 12...a5
C) Something else?

3.4 White to play
A) 13 \textit{exf5}
B) 13 0-0-0
C) Something else?
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Test 3.1
S.Nurmohamed-C.Crouch
Thames Valley League 2006

Readers will have recognized the opening moves of the game (from Test 1.3). We start from move 7.

Black has just played the inaccurate 7...c5. Then White plays the natural 8 d3. I vaguely considered 8...g4 9 0-0 c5 10 xe5 xxe5, but this seems anti-positional. After 11 c2 Black has no attack to carry on with, and White will develop quickly.

Instead 8...d5, or 8...0-0 9 0-0 first, and then 9...d5, is playable, with good equalizing chances, but unexciting after White’s previous slow play.

I wanted more, and overpressed with 8...b5?!, a second doubtful move.

White quietly played 9 0-0. I had hoped to provoke him with 9 xb5!? xf2+ 10 xf2 b6+ 11 d4 xd4 12 cxd4 xb5 13 e5 d5 14 e4 0-0 with unclear, and maybe equal, play, but he was evidently not interested.

After he quietly castled, I continued my bad-brain day with 9...b4?! There is no point in opening up lines on the queenside, especially as the queen on c7 is on an awkward square if White’s c-pawn is exposed. 9...a6 is more thematic, waiting to consolidate the pawns on the queenside, and developing the pieces.

Nurmohamed played natural developing chess, with gain of tempo, with 10 b3 b6 11 d2, and it is now my pawn that is under attack on b4, rather than mine attacking his. I tried to keep my pawns together, with 11...a5. After 11...bxc3 12 xc3 b7 Black’s position is playable, but I have lost time with the b-pawn. White has a slight edge here.

Then 12 c1, adding pressure to the b-pawn.

12...bxc3? (A) was another miserable move, allowing my opponent to open up lines. A pawn exchange a move earlier might just about have been acceptable, but now Black has lost a tempo by inserting ...a5.
Yes, I can get tired in the evenings, but I should all the same play logically and imaginatively. That said, 12...\textit{b7}? (B) 13 \textit{cxb4 axb4 14 \textit{xb4 \textit{xa2 15 \textit{a3 leaves the rook stranded, and is not to be recommended either.}

Instead 12...\textit{d6} or 12...\textit{a7} (C) would have stopped the position moving out of control, although undoubtedly White keeps a slight edge.

After the exchange on c3, and 13 \textit{xc3 \textit{a7 14 \textit{e5 \textit{xe5 15 \textit{xe5 White clearly had a substantial edge.}

For some reason, I had not expected that after 15...\textit{b7}, he had 16 \textit{f3}!. I suppose that I had vaguely expected that White would have wanted to play \textit{e5}, and then of course the queen on f3 would have self-pinned the pawn, but of course the queen has itself become highly mobile with, for example, attacks with \textit{g3}, or, more immediately, working with \textit{xf6} to win a pawn. I felt I had to cover the threat on f6, with 16...\textit{a4 17 \textit{d2 \textit{d4}.

I had expected, or perhaps hoped, that White would allow the exchange of bishops with 18 \textit{g3 \textit{xe5 19 \textit{xe5 0-0 and perhaps a minimal edge for White, but White sacrifices a pawn instead, with excellent compensation after 18 \textit{d6}!. It is difficult to say why I did not consider this sacrifice, which keeps the black king stuck in the centre. The pawn dropping on \textit{b2} was only of secondary importance. More likely perhaps was that I was so intent on trying to take control of the long diagonal that I missed the significance of another dark-squared diagonal.

Even here, I was not yet worried, and in any case all I could do was grab the pawn, 18...\textit{xb2}, and see what was going to happen. Taking the pawn, with gain of tempo, is useful, but at least as important from my point of view is that, with the help of a later...\textit{a3}, I can keep the bishop on the long diagonal.

I doubt whether I genuinely believed at the time that Black was fully equal. It was more the case that I knew I had done something seriously wrong, but that it was no time to resign, and I was playing on as effectively as possible, and waiting for any slight slip by my opponent.

White played vigorously with 19 \textit{c7 \textit{c8 20 \textit{xc8+ \textit{xc8 21 \textit{c4 a3. Even here I felt I had chances of holding, and playing for more, and it so happened that I was later able to win after scrambling through some tactics. For the next test (8.4), I will ask how later White should have won.
Play started with a sharp theoretical opening, 1 d4 ∆f6 2 c4 e5 3 d5 e6 4 ∆c3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 e4 g6 7 f4 g7 8 ∆b5+ ∆fd7 9 a4 a6 10 ∆d3 ∆h4+.

White intends to ram through the centre, with a quick e5. This line is extremely dangerous, and has often led to a Black collapse. Indeed, for many years the Modern Benoni with 2...c5 and 3...e6 had become deeply unfashionable. Black, if wanting this system, has generally played 2...e6, and if 3 ∆f3, only then 3...c5, avoiding any quick f4 system. If 3 ∆c3, Black would be unable to justify the Benoni or the Queen’s Indian. This leaves only the Queen’s Gambit, or the Nimzo-Indian, 3...∆b4. Half of Black’s repertoire has been cut out.

For a decade before my illness, I do not think I had encountered the critical line. Plaskett tried it against me once (British Championship, Hove 1997), a draw which could have gone either way, but that was about it. Then suddenly, when I started to resume play, the Modern Benoni seemed fashionable again, and I started to recognize that Black’s play was again of interest. Certainly my bash-bang attack against Peacock was less than productive.

I played 11 ∆f1, something of a novelty according to the database, but in fact I had tried this many times in weekend congresses during the 1980s. The usual move is 11 g3, but I wanted to avoid the weakening of the kingside pawn structure. I tried this move three times in a few months, each time with 11...0-0 12 ∆f3, a sure sign that the Modern Benoni is again fashionable.

Arguably the most sophisticated of these openings was the 12...∆d8!? of C.Crouch-N.Povah, British League 2006. This at first looks like a complete loss of tempo, but White needs to think about where he is going to place his king; the f1-square should only be used temporarily.
The natural answer is 13 $f2$, but Povah demonstrated why he returned with the queen to the starting square. Not 13...$b6?, as White gains space quickly with 14 a5!, but rather 13...$c7! 14 $e1 c4 15 $c2, with an extremely unclear position. He tried arguably the safest option, first 15...$b6+, and then immediately offered a draw.

I thought about this for a long time, looked at all the other games, but really I was only going through the motions. So a draw.

Very few players, at below the 2700 level, are capable of playing a fully accurate game against relentlessly good play by the opponent, and mature players are fully aware of it. A normal IM might be devastating against a 2000 opponent, but would be likely to lose against a 2700 opponent. The 2000 player will tend to make far more mistakes than an IM, while a 2700+ GM would wipe out most of the errors that an IM will produce. If a player offers a draw in a wild position, that means he is fully aware that he is capable of making a mistake, beyond which he could be capable of understanding over the board. The opponent (myself) would be wondering whether he can set up a good position, or whether his opponent can play with complete accuracy. Also, he is unsure whether he is capable of playing with complete accuracy himself. Sometimes it seems wisest to take a draw, and a safe half point.

If the impression might be given that it is only the ‘ordinary’ IMs, and players at lower levels, who quickly acquiesce to a draw, then take a note of two exceptional World Champions of attack, Tal and Kasparov, who played against each other only rarely (the chronology was wrong), but had some wild games, and then suddenly agreed draws, just when play was about to become even sharper.

Maybe it is not even a question of fear, either. A full-blown struggle is often physically exhausting, and ultimately the players decide to conserve their energies.

I looked at the final position in some detail, both during the game and at home, and decided first that perhaps I should have reached a slight edge, after 16 $f1! (16 $g3 $f6 17 h3 $h5+ 18 $h2 was considered by both sides, and seems wildly unclear, with no convincing attack for Black, but no obvious way for White to find full security either) 16...$e8 17 a5, and Black’s queen is slightly out of position.

But maybe Black could have tried
something better on move 15? Or maybe not? I leave this as open-ended, and to the theorists.

Back to the Crouch-Peacock game, and 12...\(\texttt{We7}\).

Here I mistimed my play, aiming to consolidate on the kingside with 13 \(\texttt{f2}\)! (A), but allowing Black to consolidate with 13...\(\texttt{d4}\)†! 14 \(\texttt{xd4}\) cxd4 15 \(\texttt{e2}\). We will consider this position later – see Test 7.1.

It is only because of the \(\texttt{f2}\) move that Black can play with effect, and a check, after ...\(\texttt{d4}\). Therefore White should have continued his development on the queenside, with 13 \(\texttt{d2}\)! (B) (13 \(\texttt{wc2}\)! is to be considered too, but is less promising), and White keeps an edge.

The aggressive 13...\(\texttt{f5}\) 14 exf5 gxf5 15 \(\texttt{g5}\) damages Black more than it damages White. The quiet 13...\(\texttt{b6}\) leaves Black more flexible, and if 14 \(\texttt{f2}\)! Black can again equalize with 14...\(\texttt{d4}\)†. There are several possibilities for White, according to the computer, and it hardly seems worthwhile to examine a dozen moves. 14 \(\texttt{wb3}\)! seems sensible, putting pressure on the b6-pawn, and hence making it difficult for Black to bring his knight on d7, and therefore develop the other queenside pieces. A slight edge to White would be the conclusion.

**Test 3.3**

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

After 1 \(\texttt{f3}\) \(\texttt{f6}\) 2 c4 \(\texttt{b6}\) 3 \(\texttt{c3}\) \(\texttt{b7}\) 4 d3 e6 5 e4,
games, and therefore preferred to keep the position fairly open. In Hedgehog set-ups, there is often plenty of close-range manoeuvring, with both players having to make detailed calculation of whether the position should suddenly be opened up, or whether the tension should be kept. Notoriously, the breakthrough in the centre sometimes only takes place well after the first time control. Not really what I would have wanted.

After some thought, my opponent in the game tried 6 \texttt{Wa4+?!}, but I was not worried about playing ...c6, especially if White spends a tempo provoking it.

Maybe 6 cxd5 exd5 7 e5 might be met by 7...\texttt{Qfd7} 8 d4 \texttt{Qe7} 9 \texttt{Qd3} \texttt{Qf8?!}, followed by ...\texttt{Qe6} or ...\texttt{Qe6}. I am, however, not wildly enthusiastic about this line as Black.

After White’s check, both players developed with 6...c6 7 \texttt{Qg5} \texttt{Qe7} 8 \texttt{Qe2} 0-0 9 0-0 \texttt{Qbd7} 10 \texttt{Qfe1} h6 11 \texttt{Qh4} \texttt{Qc5} 12 \texttt{Wc2}.

No detailed comments need to be made, except to say that each player would have thought about whether either player could gain something by altering the central pawn structure, either with an exchange, or a pawn push with e5 for White or ...d4 for Black. So far, neither player would have seen any significant improvement.

Unfortunately just here I became lazy. I played 12...a5?! (B), aiming to consolidate the knight on c5 (White’s pawn can no longer go to b4), but there were other ways of pushing away the knights, with 13 e5 \texttt{Qfd7} 14 \texttt{Qxe7} \texttt{Wxe7} 15 d4 \texttt{Qa6}, and then a pawn exchange with 16 cxd5, keeping a clear edge. Indeed, Black’s queenside pawns later became weakened, as a result of my ...a5 pawn push, as we will see in Test 6.1.

Careless. Instead, Black should play the superior 12...d4! (A).

Now 13 \texttt{Qd1} a5 is basically equal, but with the likelihood of a tense positional struggle, rather than a quick draw.

Of the ‘something else’ moves,
12...dxc4?! 13 dxc4, or the corresponding exchange on e4, gives White the better placed bishops and pawns in a symmetrical pawn structure. This is no encouragement for Black.

The computer suggests 12...g5! (C), which I have to admit I had not really considered.

![Chess Diagram](image)

It seems at first to weaken Black’s pawn structure on the kingside. Then 13 g3 d4 14 d1 would, of course, transpose into the possible line 12...d4 13 d1 g5 14 g3. Black’s idea then is 14...fxe4!, and if 15 dxe4 d3, which is maybe equal, or maybe Black could even try to claim an edge with the two bishops. Instead, 15 e5 leads to possible sharp play after, for example, 15...f6 16 xd4 fd7 17 g3 f5. The computer suggests it is equal, but my instincts favour Black slightly. I leave it to the reader to decide.

Certainly this line is entertaining, and it offers several chances for the opponent to play inaccurately. Unfortunately it was I who made the first serious inaccuracy.

**Test 3.4**

*C.Crouch-A.Lewis*

Kidlington 2007

We reach, by transposition, the opening of the Crouch-Rose game (2.2) two rounds earlier, 1 d4 f6 2 c4 g6 3 c3 g7 4 e4 d6 5 f3 0-0 6 e3 e5 7 d5 g4 8 g5 f6 9 d2 f5 10 d3 a6. I now tried 11 we2!?, avoiding the disastrous 11 a3?? c5 12 c2 fxe4, with a quick win for Black.

After 11...c5 12 c2 a5, I had the choice between sharp or steady chess.

![Chess Diagram](image)

Probably the simplest way of handling the position is 13 exf5 (A) 13...xf5 (Black does not want to keep these bishops on the board) 14 xf5 gxf5 (14...xf5 15 0-0 seems to give White a slight edge, but not 15 h3? xf2! 16 xf2 e4 17 xe4 h4+ 20 g3 xb2, and Black is better; a familiar, if more complicated line than in the Crouch-Rose game) 15 h3 f6, with unclear play to follow. The likelihood is that Black is at least equal, with some of White’s
light squares needing attention.

13 0-0 (C) 13...fxe4 14 \textit{\#xe4 \textit{\#xe4 15 \textit{\#xe4 \textit{\#f6} is safe enough for White, but is only about level. Quite probably there are other ways of keeping equality. The computer gives about a dozen alternatives, but it is unlikely that many of these lines would be considered as good by critical human analysis. We could, for example, disregard without analysis such moves as 13 \textit{\#b1, 13 \textit{\#c1} or 13 \textit{\#d1}, all highly unconstructive waiting moves.

13 0-0-0?! (B) is entertaining and constructive, but it also leaves weaknesses on the queenside, in front of the king. It breaks open the positional balance, and while it is not clear that White is necessarily worse, White also needs to play very accurately – which I failed to manage.

In the game Lewis played 13...a4, then I tried 14 \textit{\#d1, again ambitious, opening a square on d1, and thinking about advances with the g- and h-pawns. Then some clarification in the centre with 14...a3 15 b3 fxe4 16 \textit{\#xe4 \textit{\#xe4 17 \textit{\#xe4}, and I felt that I was probably not better, but at least I was not doing worse, provided I can cement the e4-square. However, I now had a massive shock.

Indeed, after 17...\textit{\#f4} I did not play well, as we will see in Test 7.2. Somehow such an exchange sacrifice is much easier to see for the sacrificer than it is for the defender.
**Test Four**

4.1 Black to play

A) $13...\text{d}7$
B) $13...\text{c}8$
C) Something else?

4.2 White to play

A) $14...\text{d}3$
B) $14...\text{g}5$
C) Something else?

4.3 Black to play

A) $14...\text{c}5$
B) $14...\text{c}8$
C) Something else?

4.4 Black to play

A) $14...\text{b}5$
B) $14...\text{e}5$
C) Something else?
Physically, I was in considerable pain, as that morning I misjudged the stairs at the hotel, and tumbled down a dozen steps. This was one of my more unwelcome problems resulting from the loss of sight in one eye. The resulting damage to my legs, after this and dozens of other falls and slips, plus further fear of falling again, has reduced my mobility quite significantly in the last few years.

This game has been the occasion that I was in my most severe physical pain I faced in those years, but the real agony was after the game. Yet while I was actually playing, I was able to concentrate. It was only afterwards that I could not function, and I was fortunate that my match captain was able to give me a lift home, as otherwise it would have been an extremely uncomfortable evening.

I made my mistakes during the game, but I did not make the sort of string of almost incomprehensible moves that I have made in occasion, notably against McKenna (11.1) in this book, and on many other occasions before and after. The really bad games were through drowsiness rather than through pain. If your body wants to sleep, your brain needs to regenerate, and there is no pain, just a snooze.

My first discernible slip, in terms of chess, was minor; no big blunder, but inaccuracies can soon add up to problems.

The opening started with 1 e4 c5 2 d3 e6 3 d4 c6 4 g3 d5 5 bd2 ed6 6 g2 ge7 7 0-0 0-0 8 c3 a5 9 a4 b6 10 e1 a6 11 wc2 g6.

I felt comfortable with my position here, avoiding any possibility of the thematic advance by White with e5. Possibly Black could have considered 11...wd7!? immediately, White being unable to create pressure after 12 e5 wc7. Either way, Black should be equal.

White exchanged pawns with 12 exd5 exd5, then 13 b3. Black now has to decide what to do with the queen and rooks. Black has started off with the standard opening plan of developing with bishops and knights, plus of course some appropriate pawn pushes, and then castling into safety. This means that quite often the last pieces to move are the queen and the queen’s rook. If anything, the classic plan is to move the queen first, and then to de-
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cide later which square the rook should move to.

On this occasion, the queen move, 13...\textit{\textsc{d}7!} (A), is indeed best. The rook would then probably move to e8, challenging the open file. Or maybe Black makes a second queen move beforehand, as White has to consider the possibility of ...\textit{\textsc{f}5}. 14 d4 is therefore a possibility, but after 14...c4 15 \textit{\textsc{bd}2} \textit{\textsc{ae}8} Black is ahead in development, and indeed is a tempo ahead when compared (see below) with the game.

13...\textit{\textsc{f}6} (C), again with the idea of ...\textit{\textsc{f}5}, is not as effective, as 14 d4 leaves Black's queen unexpectedly on the edge, with even a big threat of \textit{\textsc{g}5}.

13...\textit{\textsc{ce}5} (C) 14 \textit{\textsc{xe}5} \textit{\textsc{xe}5} is entertaining, with thoughts of an exchange sacrifice on the long diagonal with 15 \textit{\textsc{xd}5} \textit{\textsc{xd}3} 16 \textit{\textsc{d}1} c4 17 \textit{\textsc{xa}8} \textit{\textsc{xa}8} 18 \textit{\textsc{d}4}. White could avoid this with 15 c4 dxc4 16 dxc4, with a slight edge.

After not looking through all the alternatives, Black played lazily with 13...\textit{\textsc{c}8?!} (B). I was presumably vaguely thinking about weaknesses on the long diagonal, and I wanted to hit White's pawns with ...d4 or ...c4, but as the game showed, this never really happened, and I lost time with my rook. She played 14 \textit{\textsc{g}5} \textit{\textsc{d}7} 15 \textit{\textsc{d}4!}, taking the initiative. I was surprised at first, but soon I appreciated that my central pawns had been weakened. White has successfully covered the strategically important d4-square, with the help of two sturdy knights. Sometimes a player can forget the basics, counting up the number of pieces attacking, and the number of pieces defending.

I played 15...\textit{\textsc{c}4}, with some reservation as I did not like blocking the queenside pawns and leaving a backward d-pawn. I did not like alternative pawn structures either, the usual isolated pawn or hanging pawns being potentially weak.

15...h6!? 16 \textit{\textsc{e}3} \textit{\textsc{b}4} is a more imaginative way of handling the position, and after 17 \textit{\textsc{d}2} \textit{\textsc{d}3} 18 \textit{\textsc{ed}1} c4 19 \textit{\textsc{c}1} \textit{\textsc{xc}1} 20 \textit{\textsc{dxc}1} the pawn struc-
ture is the same as in the main game, but a knight on either side has been exchanged. When analysing this variation just after the game, I assumed that this idea for Black was not very effective, as I had exchanged my active knight for White’s passive knight. Now I am of the opposite point of view. Black has a backward pawn on d5, which requires protection, and generally it is easier to defend with one knight against one knight, rather than two knights against two. Black should be close to level.

Maybe this is one to be added to the list of test positions? The trouble is that if I were to try this conscientiously, I would have to question this game every third move or so, and this is potentially misleading. The game is not as bad as it looks, and my opponent has deserved the praise of outplaying me in the early middlegame, rather than the suggestion that I have played a whole string of bad moves.

Play continued with 16 Қc1, then in reply 16...ӝc8.

If I had thought about it at the time, this would be an admission that Black had lost a tempo with his earlier ...懿a8-c8. Over the board, however, you must take things move by move.

We go under the microscope later (Test 6.4). It is worth remembering that so far, play has been close to equal throughout, although neither player has approached fully accurate chess. My opponent, for example, has allowed me to equalize in the early opening with little difficulty.

Test 4.2
C. Crouch-P. Gait
Hillingdon League 2006

We opened with a Semi-Slav, with 1 ԁd4 ԁd5 2 ԛc4 ԛc6 3 ԛf3 ԛf6 4 ԛc3 ԛe6 5 ԛe3. I briefly thought about the wild stuff with 5 ԛg5, and then 5...dxc4 (or, quite often these days, 5...h6) 6 ԛe4 ԛb5 7 ԛe5 ԛh6 8 ԛh4 ԛg5, but then I realized that I had not looked at this properly for nearly twenty years. It seems unlikely that he had looked at this in detail either – one only looks at such lines so eagerly in their teens or twenties – and this would probably have been quite safe on my part. 5 ԛg5 is something of a gamble.

With age and declining speed of thought, I eventually decided that I would not want to go for the sharpest lines. So it’s ‘only’ to be a Meran.

After 5...ԛbd7, I accordingly contin-
ued with the quiet line, $6 \text{c2}$, avoiding the tempo loss with $6 \text{d3} \text{dxc4} 7 \text{xc4 b5}$, which is still highly theoretical, and complicated.

Then $6...\text{d6}$. Now White’s usual choices would be the ultra-quiet $7 \text{b3}$ and $\text{b2}$, or the gambit line with $7 \text{g4}$. But after my illness, I have not had a chance of updating much of my opening repertoire, and so have relied on lines I had tried many years earlier. Thus I went $7 \text{d2}$, followed by queenside castling. As I wrote at the time, “I can’t pretend that I was thinking for too long to make my decision. I just played natural moves.”

After the opposite-castling sequence $7...0-0 8 0-0-0$ Black has tried $8...\text{c5} 9 \text{e4} \text{cxd4} 10 \text{xd4} \text{dxc4} 11 \text{xc4}$, and even the gambit $8...\text{b5}$. Either seems possible. My opponent played solidly instead, keeping his pawns intact with $8...\text{e7}$. Then $9 \text{b1}$, taking the king away from the centre. Neither player quite seems ready to open up the centre just yet. Play continued with $9...\text{e8} 10 \text{h3} \text{a6}$.

In my notes, I queried the next move, $11 \text{e4}$, probably on the somewhat superficial basis that the computer suggested that $11 \text{g4}$ was slightly better, while my own move was only equal. The computer only gives guidance, rather than any certainty, and indeed if one were to wait a little longer, it would give $11 \text{e4}$, as played in the game, as better, whereas $11 \text{g4}$ is only equal. For example, $11...\text{dxc4} 12 \text{g5} \text{d5} 13 \text{xc4} \text{b5} 14 \text{xd5} \text{cxd5} 15 \text{d3} \text{f8}$, A.Kakageldyev-S.Mohammad, Asian Team Championship 2000, when Black may even have been slightly better, before losing a minor piece endgame.

So my own move was acceptable. Black exchanged in the centre with $11...\text{dxe4} 12 \text{xe4} \text{xe4} 13 \text{xe4} \text{e5}$, and now it is time for the question.

I played $14 \text{d3}$? (A), with little thought, partly because of an uncomfortably quick time limit, and also partly because I was too busy with other things, like rescuing a club which was about to collapse (and I am not
talking about my current local club, Harrow).

Of course, ultimately my mistake is mine. The problem is that after
14...f6 15 Wh4 (15 g5 xe4 16 xe7 xf2 17 xd6 e4! wins material
for Black) 15...e4 16 He1 Black has
16...d8!, which I missed when trying
to calculate earlier, and which my op­
ponent missed altogether.

Now that the e-pawn is no longer
pinned, White’s bishop and knight are
both forked. Another pin would follow
after 17 xe4 xe4 18 xe4 f5!. Instead,
17 c2 exf3 18 g5 xe1 19 xe1 is an attempt to gain some coun­
terplay against the king, but the sim­
plest way to add more geometry is
19...f5! 20 xf5 Wa5, keeping the
extra piece in comfort.

White could attempt an improve­
ment with 17 c5, with the idea that if
17...c7, Black will no longer have the
option of playing ...f5 and ...wa5. This
may well still be playable, but a simpler
option would be to help defend the
kingside with 17...f8. Then if 18 c2
exf3 19 xe8 xe8 20 g5, and Black
again uses the ...f5 resource, with
20...e2 21 xf6 f5!. When just after
my stroke, a couple of years before this
game, I was trying to rethink all my
chess thoughts, I soon recognized
again, but with better emphasis per­
haps, that chess is not just the art of
calculation, it is also the art of geo­
metry.

Finally, 17 g5 exd3 18 xf6 gxf6
19 xe8+ xe8 20 xf6 e7 soon wins
with comfort for Black. White has no
geometry with the bishops.

Instead of entering all these tactics,
in favour of my opponent, I should
have considered 14 g5 (B) 14...f8 15
dxe5 xe5 16 xe5 xe5 17 Wh4 c5+
18 d3, with equality. Or perhaps 14
dxe5 (C) 14...xe5 15 c3 xf3 16
xf3 b4, again about equal.

14 He1!? (C) is probably the best of
all, even though it would appear at first
to involve too many successive moves
with king and rook. White is, how­
ever, adding pressure to the e-file, and this is
difficult for Black if he cannot continue
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his development quickly.

14...exd4 15 w2 w8 16 xe8+ xe8 17 d3 leaves White better, his development being more advanced; he will soon recover the pawn. Or 14 .f6 15 w2 e4 16 g5 w8 17 d2 f5 18 b3, with a tense middlegame and an edge for White.

Sadly my opponent was close to his last year in active chess, his physical mobility deteriorating rapidly. This would have been a memorable, final good win against IM opposition had he seen the queen retreat in time. He still later won, but after further errors, no doubt not helped by the quick time limit. We consider the next stage in Test 9.2.

Test 4.3
S.Sen-C.Crouch
London Open 2006

The opening is reasonably well known, an English with 1 f3 f6 2 c4 b6 3 g3 b7 4 g2 c5 5 0-0 e6 6 c3 e7 7 d4 cxd4 8 xd4 c6. Possibly 8...d6 could be considered as slightly more accurate, with a Hedgehog set-up, with ...bd7.

White’s queen retreated with 9 d3. Maybe 9 f4 is more threatening, as attempts to try to equalize quickly with a queen exchange, with 9...w8, are not fully convincing after 10 d1.

My game continued with 9...0-0 10 d1 b4! This should be equal. After 11 w2, Black equalizes with 11...w8 12 b3 d5 13 a3 a6 14 cxd5 x5 15 b2 xc3 16 xc3 d8, and a dull draw after, for example, 17 d4 c5 18 g5 xd4 19 xd4 xg2 20 xg2.

He played instead 11 w1? and I began to sense that I could play for rather more than a quick half point. His c-pawn was weak, and so I played 11...w8 12 a3 a6.

He re my opponent thought for a long time, and I started to appreciate that he could already be in difficulties. He gave up a pawn with 13 f4! to activate his pieces.

While he was thinking, I had ex-
pected 13 \texttt{wa2!}, keeping the pawn on c4 safe, and also the queen. This should end up in symmetrical equality again, after 13...d5 14 cxd5 \texttt{exd5} 15 \texttt{ad2} \texttt{xc3} 16 \texttt{xc3} \texttt{d5} 17 \texttt{b1} \texttt{c5}. There are other possible quiet alternatives, such as 13 \texttt{g5} h6 14 \texttt{xf6} \texttt{xf6} 15 \texttt{c2} \texttt{d8}, maybe slightly favouring Black (one usually wants to keep the bishop-pair in an open position), or 13 \texttt{d3} \texttt{c5} 14 \texttt{c2} \texttt{ce4} 15 \texttt{b3} d5 16 \texttt{xe4} \texttt{xe4} 17 \texttt{b2} dxc4 18 bxc4 \texttt{c5}, but again White has to work hard to gain full equality.

White played 14 \texttt{c1}, leading to the quiz position. The question is one of careful and accurate defence, and alas my calculation skills soon folded badly.

Black’s problem is that his queen is under pressure, with no quick escape from the c-file. He needs to sort this one out as soon as possible. 14...\texttt{b3}?? (C), the only immediate escape from this file, is worse than useless, as 15 \texttt{d2} leaves the queen trapped.

14...\texttt{c8}?! (B) is just about playable, but after 15 \texttt{d5} \texttt{xd5} (15...\texttt{d8} 16 \texttt{xf6}+ \texttt{xf6} 17 \texttt{g5} \texttt{g5} 18 \texttt{xb7} leaves White material up) 16 \texttt{xc8} \texttt{xc8} 17 \texttt{d2} White’s queen slightly outweighs Black’s rook, knight and pawn. This is, of course, the first line for Black to be considered while analysing, but it should only be played in emergency, and only if any other move is even worse.

14...\texttt{b8}?! (C) is almost the last non-blundering move that a player might expect, and this retreat may be possible, but is unlikely to be the best. If 15 b4, Black must avoid 15...d5?? 16 \texttt{d2}
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\[ \text{\#a6 17 b5 \#a5 18 \#b3, and the queen is trapped, in favour of 15...a5 16 bxa5 \#xa5 17 \#xb6, which is level. I doubt if many players would want to examine this line over the board, but these days if the computer suggests something, it is worth considering.} \]

14...\#c5! (C) is better and the correct choice, pointing the queen in another direction, with the escape line being to either h5 or f5.

Then 15 \#d5?? \#xd5 16 \#h4 \#e4 is just an illusion.

The somewhat superior 15 h3! cuts down Black's queenside options. Black can then simply play 15...\#f5 16 \#xf5 exf5 17 \#d4 \#xg2 18 \#xg2 (18 \#xf5 \#xh3 favours Black) 18...g6, and this is more than enough to demonstrate that 14...\#c5! is better than any alternative. Black is not worse, but could well be better. His extra pawn is not looking threatening, but looking closer, one sees that White might have a few weaknesses on the c-file and the light squares on the queenside.

Possibly Black could even press a little more with 15...\&fc8, and if 16 b4 \#f5 17 \#xf5 exf5 18 \#d4 \#xg2 19 \#xg2 g6, when White's queenside has been weakened a little further than in the previous line.

I played instead 14...\#c5? (A), but this is poorly thought through.

The computer at first suggested that this was good, so it is not a totally ridiculous idea, but on further analysis, it then shows the refutation, admittedly far from instantly, that I missed. My opponent alas saw it, playing 15 b4!.

If now 15...\#b3? 16 \#e5, and White wins material.

If 15...\#xf3 16 \#xf3 \#b3 17 \#d5! exd5 18 \#xc4 dxc4 19 \#xa8 \#xa8 20 \#a2, and White is ahead on material, with queen versus two knights and two pawns. The material disadvantage is still relatively slight, and perhaps this is the best chance for Black to set up a rearguard action. He has an advanced c-pawn which can be protected by another pawn with 20...d5, so White has to work hard.
Instead, I played the move I previously intended, 15...\(\text{c}e4?!\). He played 16 \(\text{e}5\), and tactically Black’s position is no longer under control.

If, for example, 16...\(\text{dxc}3\) 17 \(\text{e}xc4\) \(\text{xb}1\) 18 \(\text{xb}7\) \(\text{ab}8\) 19 \(\text{g}2\) d5 20 \(\text{b}2\), and Black’s knight is hopelessly trapped, much as in the game.

Instead, 16...\(\text{wc}3\) 17 \(\text{xc}3\) \(\text{xc}3\) 18 \(\text{d}3\) \(\text{xg}2\) 19 \(\text{xg}2\) \(\text{cd}5\) 20 \(\text{d}2\) is the best of a bad batch, with rook, knight and pawn for the queen, theoretically level material. Black’s minor pieces are, however, poorly coordinated, blocking each other, and potentially under attack from the e4 push. Moreover, Black’s extra pawn is ineffective in attacking terms. I should have played this, but my position is not good.

16...\(\text{wd}4?!\) hastened the collapse. After 17 e3 \(\text{xc}3\) 18 exd4 \(\text{xb}1\) 19 \(\text{xb}7\) \(\text{ab}8\) 20 \(\text{g}2\) my knight is again trapped.

Afterwards I felt slightly guilty about not resigning quickly against my young opponent, but against this, there was a quick time limit, and he was already slightly (but not seriously) short of time.

I carried on with 20...\(\text{xa}3\) 21 \(\text{xa}3\) a5 22 \(\text{d}3\) \(\text{bc}8\) 23 \(\text{ac}3\) \(\text{xc}3\) 24 \(\text{xc}3\) axb4 25 \(\text{b}3\) \(\text{c}8\) 26 \(\text{xb}4\) \(\text{c}4\) 27 \(\text{d}3\) \(\text{xd}4\) 28 \(\text{e}3\) \(\text{c}4\) 29 \(\text{xb}6\), but it was essentially a matter of time. White’s extra bishop, when given the opportunity, would chew up some of Black’s remaining pawns, and I had to give up on move 43 (1-0).

Test 4.4

P. Sowray - C. Crouch
London League 2007

I give no analysis of the opening moves, just to say instead that I felt reasonably happy in the opening, with 1 e4 c5 2 \(\text{f}3\) e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 \(\text{xd}4\) \(\text{f}6\) 5 \(\text{c}3\) d6 6 g4 h6 7 h3 a6 8 \(\text{g}2\) \(\text{c}7\) 9 \(\text{e}3\) \(\text{bd}7\) 10 f4 \(\text{b}6\) 11 \(\text{we}2\) \(\text{c}4\) 12 0-0-0 \(\text{d}7\) 13 \(\text{f}2\) \(\text{c}8\) 14 \(\text{d}3\).

This has been played before, but not very often. Among the ‘something else’
options in this quiz, one of the possibilities here is ‘draw agreed, M.Katona-E.Kovacs, Hungarian Team Championship 1995’. This does not help us very much, neither in theoretical terms nor, since Sowray did not offer a draw, in practical terms. I was on my own, trying to find a decent move.

I played 14...b5?! (A), a natural Sicilian move, but here it is not precise. In many lines it is an immediate response for Black to push the knight on c3 to a worse square, and in so doing, to soften the defence of the e4-pawn. Here it does not do all that much, and wastes time.

Black has been careful not to have played ...â³e7 early on, so that if the centre opens up quickly, jumping with the bishop over the currently blocked d6-pawn, Black has chances of gaining a tempo with the bishop to b4 or c5, or even sometimes as far as a3. Indeed, 14...e5! (B) is clearly the best, and then 15 fxe5 (if 15 â³f5, then simply 15...exf4) 15...dxe5 16 â³b3 (16 â³f5 â³a5 with advantage to Black) 16...â³b4 17 â³e1 (17 â³d5 â³xd5 18 exd5 â³b5 favours Black) 17...â³xc3 18 â³xc3 â³b5 leaves Black’s pieces far better coordinated than White’s.

In the game, Sowray lined up the thematic knight sacrifice on the e-file, with 15 â³e1?! , as we will see in Test 7.3. 15 b3 was also good. White has gained, either way, some extra time for his initiative. However, if I had played my best move more quickly, I would have gained the initiative myself.
Test Five

5.1 White to play

A) 15 \text{\texttt{Nad1}}
B) 15 \text{\texttt{Nfe1}}
C) Something else?

5.2 White to play

A) 16 \text{\texttt{b3}}
B) 16 \text{\texttt{d4}}
C) Something else?

5.3 White to play

A) 16 \text{\texttt{xd4}}
B) 16 \text{\texttt{e1}}
C) Something else?

5.4 Black to play

A) 16...\text{\texttt{xb2}}
B) 16...\text{\texttt{d8}}
C) Something else?
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Test 5.1
C.Crouch-N.Hutchinson
Bury St. Edmunds 2006

1 d4Lf6 2 c4 e6 3 lLlC3 ?b4 4 e3 0-0 5 
?d3 c5 6 ?ge2

At this stage, I was not really up to playing standard theoretical chess, and I was often worried that I had quite simply forgotten much of my opening knowledge. Here I had played this move a few times, a few years ago, but I was aware that I had decided that I was planning to abandon this line, with no real chance of playing for an edge. 5 ?f3 would have given more options.

Play continued, with approximate equality, after 6...cxd4 7 exd4 d5 8 0-0 dxc4 9 ?xc4 a6 10 a3 ?d6 11 h3. White avoided 11 ?g5? ?xh2+, but it is clear that White will sooner or later want to play ?g5.

Black now used the queenside long diagonal with 11...b5 12 ?a2 ?b7 13 ?g5, and he continued his development with 13...?bd7 14 ?d3 ?c8.

Now I had to decide what to do with my rooks. Assuming that White does not want to block the other rook, the basic choice here is (from left to right) 15 ?ac1, 15 ?ad1, 15 ?fd1 or 15 ?fe1. Quite possibly the other rook will develop in the centre soon after, or quite possibly White has other plans.

The most natural plan is to develop with ?ac1 and ?fe1, but which comes first? In my earlier notes, I suggested 15 ?fe1 (B), but there is a slight degree of inflexibility in that if White were quickly to play ?b1 (for instance, in one line the computer suggests 15...?b6 16 ?b1!?), then the rook on a1 has been blocked out of play. Probably this will not be a significant defect, and White still keeps a slight edge, but even so, if given the option, it is best to keep flexibility.

Therefore 15 ?ac1! (C) is better, and Black still has to demonstrate complete equality.

Moving one of the rooks to d1 is positionally uninspiring if the pawn centre is closed. Thus I was not impressed with 15 ?fd1. It is now generally accepted that the defence of the isolated d-pawn should be covered lightly, so that the other pieces remain active.

I decided to play the other rook to d1, 15 ?ad1?! (A), with the intention in the main line of tactical play with the pawn to d5. It is imaginative, but as so often with imaginative tactical ideas, a hidden resource may suddenly emerge.
for the defender. In Test 6.2 we shall see what happens later. In the meantime, it might be of interest to the reader to consider what the plans and counter-plans would be after 15...\(c7\) 16 \(f4\).

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**Test 5.2**

*C. Crouch - R. Granat*

British League (4NCL) 2007

Black played a slightly unusual, but playable, opening with 1 \(d4\) \(d5\) 2 \(c4\) \(\Delta f5\) 3 \(cxd5\) \(\Delta xb1\).

I immediately played 4 \(\Delta xb1?\)!, and then almost immediately regretted it. 4 \(\Delta a4+\) is more accurate, and only then 4...\(c6\) 5 \(\Delta xb1\). 4...\(b5\)? 5 \(\Delta xb5+\) \(c6\) 6 \(dxc6\), of course, gives nothing.

I have decided not to give the diagram position as one of the tests, because if the reader is already alerted that something is amiss, he or she will look more carefully and find the more accurate move. The problem for the player over the board is to spot whether the obvious move, here a re-capture, is automatically the best.

After 4...\(\Delta xd5\), I cautiously played 5 \(a3\). There are a few games, I later found out, in which White collapsed after 5 \(\Delta a4+\) \(c6\), and if 6 \(\Delta f3\) \(e5\) 7 dxe5 \(\Delta b4+\) 8 \(\Delta d2\) \(\Delta e4\) (gaining a tempo with the attack on the rook) 9 \(\Delta d1\) 0-0-0. It was not difficult for me to work this line out in advance, but after my quieter move, White’s advantage of the first move has gone.

Black was not interested now in hitting the b1-rook, with ...\(\Delta a2\) or ...\(\Delta e4\), and instead developed quickly with 5...\(\Delta c6\) 6 \(e3\) \(e5\). I was relieved that I was able to exchange the queens with 7 dxe5 \(\Delta xd1\) 8 \(\Delta xd1\) 0-0-0+.

I very vaguely remembered that I had reached this position before, again with the slight error on move 4. On checking up later, I found the game C. Crouch - I. Sakovich, Decin 1996, with probable equality after 9 \(\Delta d2\) \(\Delta xe5\) 10 \(\Delta f3\) \(\Delta d6\) 11 \(\Delta xe5\) \(\Delta xe5\) 12 \(\Delta e2\) \(\Delta f6\) 13 \(\Delta f3\) \(\Delta he8\) 14 \(\Delta e2\). I could try to pretend that my bishop-pair leaves me slightly
better, but in fact it is not so significant. I later won, but this was far from forced.

Several years later, I played 9 glas, then came 9...æxe5, with possible threats with ...g4. This was difficult to assess. My general preference in such positions would be to prefer the bishop, but in compensation Black is slightly ahead in development. Probably the position remains equal with best play on both sides, but any slight slip on either side would start to change the balance. It is not an 'easy' equality.

I played 10 02. There have been other games in which White has tried 10 f3 or 10 h3, but this seems slow. I considered 10 f3, but was a bit worried about 10...g4, continuing with 11 f4 xf2 12 0e4 13 0e5 0h6 14 xf7 xf7 15 xf7. Equal, probably.

Over the next few moves, both players develop and consolidate with 10...0f6 11 0h3 h6 12 b4 0d6 13 0b2. The computer suggests that early on Black is slightly better, but that later the position is equal. I would suspect that the last few moves were equal throughout. There followed some more quiet manoeuvring with 13...#e8 14 #bd1 #fd7 15 #f4 g6, and we have now reached the quiz position.

Black’s last couple of moves have seemed almost random, at least from White’s point of view, and I started to feel more confident. It is often around this stage that a player might relax his vigilance. So it proved.

My assessment was that it was a good time to move one of my pieces, rather than trying to push a kingside pawn. 16 #b3? (A) looks natural, but I overlooked or underestimated 16...a5!, attacking White’s queenside pawns. I did not like the idea of allowing an isolated pawn on b4, and so played 17 bx a5 0c6 18 0d5. Now Black gains a tempo with check, with 18...#xa5+, as a result of White’s unfortunate king move. So a retreat, 19 0a2 0e5, and Black has set up a useful passed pawn on the c-file, while also neutralizing White’s bishop-pair.
While this is far from decisive, I was starting to feel under pressure, and later made mistakes. We shall return to this exercise at a later stage (Test 9.3), with an accumulation of minor errors, plus a time trouble blunder, leading to a clear loss.

So what possible improvements could there be for White? This all seems open-ended, with several possible ideas ending up reaching a position of likely equality.

One natural possibility is **16 b1!?**
(C) 16...b6 17 d5 bc4 18 xe5 xe5, equal. At the time, I wanted more.

**16 d5** (C) puts some slight pressure on the opponent, but with quiet play, for example, 16...c6, it is unclear that White can achieve anything concrete.

Maybe the best move is **16 d4!** (B), preparing to play the other rook, either to d1, doubling, or to set up pressure on the c-pawn with c1.

There are various quiet moves for Black, maybe with equality, or maybe with a fractional edge for White. 16...a5 would still have been possible, as in the game, but after 17 bxa5 c6 18 d2 xa5 19 hd1 White is ahead on tempi, and possibly with a slight edge.

Thus many of the ‘something else’ moves are playable, and quite likely to be better than the move I actually played, but my preference is for 16 d4.

**Test 5.3**

C. Crouch-M. Peacock
Kidlington 2007

Returning to a game we considered back in Test 3.2, here Black played 15...c5.

I played the natural **16 xd4?** (A), but this soon allows Black to equalize with **16...xe4+ 17 xe4 xe4 18 f3 g4.** We continue this exercise at a later stage – see Test 7.1.

**16 e1!** (B) is more accurate. If 16...xe4+ 17 xe4 xe4, I had only considered 18 xd4?! xd4+ 19 xd4

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\[ \text{d7, with equality, since both d-pawns drop, with a symmetrical opposite-coloured bishop position. However, 18} \text{c3! substantially improves. After 18...f5 19} \text{xd4} \text{White’s comfortably centralized queen causes problems for Black.} \]

I was also concerned with 16...g4, but 17 a3 xe4+ 18 xe4 xe4 19 \[ \text{xd4} \text{xd4} 20 \text{xd4} \text{leaves White with the more active pieces in a queenless endgame.} \]

The best line for Black is 16...h4+! 17 g1 xd3 18 g3 f2 19 gxh4 xd1 20 xd1 g4 21 f2 d7 22 xd4 f5.

\[ \text{White is a pawn up, but this is only a doubled isolated h-pawn, which has little impact. Black still has to take some care in holding the game, but after 23 c3 a5 24 a3 fxe4 25 xe4 xe4 26 xe4 f5 27 g3 d1 28 g5 d2 29 c5 holds the balance for Black.} \]

At least this way it is Black who has to keep equality. With my own move for White, I had to work hard myself to achieve the same goal.

Test 5.4
M.Hebden-C.Crouch
Metropolitan Open 2006

The final round of a weekend tournament, with chances of equal first, and some prize money, though much less, in real terms, than in the seventies or eighties.

I did not relish the thought of playing a second game in a day, given the likelihood of dizziness, and tiredness during the end of the session. A prolonged game ending up in a blitz finish would have been a nightmare for me, so I wanted to play quickly, trying to eliminate any elaborate play. My opponent has always believed in playing quickly himself, finding decent moves, if not necessarily the best. He makes his mistakes, like all of us, but it is often very difficult for his opponent to find any refutation when the time ticks on.

My psychological mistake in this game was to play too quickly against quick but provocative play.

1 d4 f6 2 f3 b6 3 g5 b7 4 bd2 c5

Some thirty months earlier, playing against the same opponent elsewhere (M.Hebden-C.Crouch, Coventry 2004). I avoided this pawn exchange, playing instead 4...e6 5 e4 h6 6 xf6 xf6 7 d3 d6 8 e2 e7 9 0-0 g6 10 e5 g7 11 fe1 0-0 12 c3 d7 13 a6 xa6 14 xa6 dxe5 15 xe5 xe5 16 dxe5, with perhaps a minimal advantage for
Thinking back to the earlier tournament, it seems such an incredibly long gap between ‘before’ and ‘after’, with a stroke intervening. It seems so strange that after playing in Coventry, first equal, then a hundred-mile walking holiday, then playing another tournament in Oxford, my health was in such a sudden collapse. And indeed the physicians were puzzled too. There were some extremely elaborate diagnoses, quite often contradictory. I do not want to discuss in great depth what was happening at the time, as this is something of a digression of analysing two games of chess. I tried hard to understand what was going on in the thought processes and degree of understanding of the medical doctors, and I was looking for contradictions and possible mistakes. A difficult process, but necessary. After all, medics, like chess players, can often make mistakes, and I wanted to assess early on whether a mistake was being made.

We can add that economists and politicians too are highly capable of making serious mistakes, something fairly clear these days for the general public. Does anyone believe that we are in a stable economy now?

Anyway, play carried on with \( 5 \text{ c3 e6 6 e4 h6 7} \text{ } \text{xf6} \text{ } \text{xf6 8 d3 cxd4 9 cxd4} \text{ c6 10 e5} \text{ } \text{d8 11 a3 d6 12} \text{ } \text{e2 e7} \text{ 13 o-o,} \) and if anything, I might well have played better in 2006 than in 2004.

This has, of course, been played before. In an earlier game, I.Rausis-J.Plaskett, Port Erin 1998, Plaskett played 13...0-0, not the sort of move that I would generally want to consider myself, not really liking castling when moving the king towards the risk of immediate attack. Black was better, and later won, after 14 \( \text{e4 g6 15} \text{e3 g7 16} \text{e4 dxe5 17} \text{dxe5} \text{ } \text{d5 18} \text{f6?!} \text{b3 19} \text{ac1 ad8,} \) but 18 \text{c3 is equal.}

I chose 13...\text{dxe5}, and if Plaskett’s immediate castling looks to me slightly strange, then my own plan would to many others seem even more unusual, allowing the possibility of my king having to stay in the centre. Quite often it is not a question of whether a player thinks that one type of move is ‘better’ or ‘worse’ than the other, but rather a case of half-remembered experiences of encounters from many years ago. I tend not to like going into early middlegames where my king gets stuck in the corner when I do not have extra pieces defending. Moreover, I tend to
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feel uncomfortable about my king getting forced away from the back ranks. I have had a few bad experiences in the past.

My plan was 14 dxe5 ♞d4 15 ♞xd4 ♟xd4, so far, equal throughout.

I had expected 16 ♜b5+ ♝f8 17 b4 reckoning this as a draw, and maybe this is objectively the best. Instead Hebden gave away a pawn, with 16 ♞ac1?!.

Over the years, indeed over the decades, Hebden has developed the tournament strategy of playing reasonable moves quickly, hoping his moves are okay, and above all, making sure that he does not allow himself to be in time trouble. This can be an effective way of playing, especially in weekend games, when his opponents get tired and short of time, and he himself remains fresh for the second game of the day.

Hebden’s last move was played quickly, and I had simply not expected it. Worse, I had decided beforehand that if my opponent was going to play quickly, I would do the same. I did not want to get too tired, especially when getting short of time. The nightmare would have been that, as has occasionally happened, I was to reach a position where he had an hour on the clock, and I had five minutes for the rest of the game. In better years I could have handled it, but right now, I couldn’t. It did not help that on the Saturday beforehand, I had received a phone message ‘urgent’ concerning a club event. This was spectacularly non-urgent, and I should have ignored it. Any match captain will know about this type of stress before a game.

So the general picture was that I was out of sorts, and that I would have been more than happy, especially as Black, to find a comfortable way of finding quick and steady equality. And maybe this was at the root of the psychological error I made, quite a common one.

I played 16...♗d8? (B), aiming for equality, but ending up worse.

White played 17 ♜b5+ ♝f8 18 ♞c7, and I was starting to struggle, as we will see further in Test 6.3. Usually I have a
counterattacking style of play, not aiming for quick solidity as Black, but instead keeping a sharp eye (these days, alas only my left eye) for any possibility of taking over the initiative after anything that seems slightly inaccurate.

In more normal circumstances, I would have gobbled the pawn, 16...\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{blue}{\textbullet}}xb2!} (A), without much hesitation.

Black is better. To continue the attack White has to play 17 \textit{\textbf{\textcolor{blue}{\textbullet}}c7} \textit{\textbf{\textcolor{blue}{\textbullet}}d5} 18 \textit{\textbf{\textcolor{blue}{\textbullet}}b5+} \textit{\textbf{\textcolor{blue}{\textbullet}}f8}, but his attack seems speculative. If, for example, 19 a4 \textit{\textbf{\textcolor{blue}{\textbullet}}d8} 20 \textit{\textbf{\textcolor{blue}{\textbullet}}d7} \textit{\textbf{\textcolor{blue}{\textbullet}}g5} 21 f4 \textit{\textbf{\textcolor{blue}{\textbullet}}d4+} 22 \textit{\textbf{\textcolor{blue}{\textbullet}}h1} \textit{\textbf{\textcolor{blue}{\textbullet}}xf4}, and White cannot go any further.

Instead, 19 \textit{\textbf{\textcolor{blue}{\textbullet}}fc1} adds another attacker into play. The computer suggests 19...f6!? and 19...\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{blue}{\textbullet}}c5}!? as possibilities for an edge, and both moves look reasonable enough. Moreover, if I wanted a quiet and safe equality, 19...\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{blue}{\textbullet}}xa3} would have done. Then 20 \textit{\textbf{\textcolor{blue}{\textbullet}}c7} (20 \textit{\textbf{\textcolor{blue}{\textbullet}}c8+} \textit{\textbf{\textcolor{blue}{\textbullet}}d8} 21 \textit{\textbf{\textcolor{blue}{\textbullet}}xa8}?? \textit{\textbf{\textcolor{blue}{\textbullet}}xc1+} ) 20...\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{blue}{\textbullet}}b2} (20...\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{blue}{\textbullet}}b4}?? 21 \textit{\textbf{\textcolor{blue}{\textbullet}}d8+} \textit{\textbf{\textcolor{blue}{\textbullet}}d8} 22 \textit{\textbf{\textcolor{blue}{\textbullet}}xa8} wins for White, now that Black does not cover the c1-square) 21 \textit{\textbf{\textcolor{blue}{\textbullet}}1c2} \textit{\textbf{\textcolor{blue}{\textbullet}}a1+} 22 \textit{\textbf{\textcolor{blue}{\textbullet}}c1} \textit{\textbf{\textcolor{blue}{\textbullet}}b2 repeats.
Test Six

6.1 Black to play

A) 17...\text{\$e}6
B) 17...\text{\$e}8
C) Something else?

6.2 White to play

A) 18 \text{\$xe}4
B) 18 d5
C) Something else?

6.3 Black to play

A) 18...\text{\$xd}2
B) 18...\text{\$xb}2
C) Something else?

6.4 Black to play

A) 18...h6
B) 18...f6
C) Something else?
**Test 6.1**  
**C. Morris-C. Crouch**  
British League (4NCL) 2006

As we saw in Test 3.3, White has a better pawn structure, and started to set up pressure with his pieces, with 17 \( \text{Wf5} \).

Here I played 17...\( \text{We6?} \) (A), which I described at the time as “a weak and lazy move.” Certainly I was feeling very tired that day, and could not even contemplate, on Remembrance Day, walking almost next door to the old Coventry Cathedral, heavily bombed during the War.

In the position itself, I was too worried about pressure on my kingside, and underestimated my possible queenside pawn weaknesses. After 18 \( \text{d3 Wxf5 19 xf5 ad8 20 ac1 c7 21 xd7! xd7 22 a4 a8} \) my position was crumbling.

There were twists and turns later on, and I was even briefly able to get back into the game, if temporarily, just before the time control, before ultimately losing. The remaining moves will be considered later in Test 10.1.

![Chess Diagram]

Black should have played with much more grit, with 17...\( \text{We8!} \) (B), with the defensive idea of ...\( \text{f8} \) and ...\( \text{c8} \). The other knight, when given the opportunity, can join in with ...\( \text{c7} \). White’s edge is negligible. I would like to think that had I been in better health, I would have easily seen this idea.

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

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

Continuing from Test 5.1, my plan is highly ambitious, with thoughts of a pawn breakthrough with either d5 or f5.
Either it works or it doesn’t. To the best of my calculating capability, I felt I was doing well, but I missed a resource several moves later in a critical position. It turns out that there were good alternatives for Black anyway, so my earlier play was too ambitious.

Black played 16...\textbf{wc6}. It would be premature to break the diagonal by force with 17 d5?, as after 17...\textit{exd5} 18 \textbf{cxd5} \textbf{c5}+ 19 \textit{h1} \textbf{cxd5} 20 \textbf{xd5} \textbf{xd5} 21 \textbf{xc5} 22 \textbf{xd5} \textbf{b6} the pawn structure is roughly symmetrical, but Black’s pieces are far better placed, and so he has an advantage.

So 17 \textbf{f2}.

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

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

Black instead played the more direct and obvious 17...\textbf{e4}. Now I should have played the drawish 18 \textbf{xe4} (A) 18...\textit{xe4} 19 \textit{xe4} \textit{xe4} 20 d5 \textit{ad5} 21 \textit{xd5} \textit{e5} 22 \textit{d5} \textit{c6}, and quite probably Black would have been happy with a half-point.

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

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

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

If White wants to move the rook instead, the only try is 21 fx3 \(\text{x}d6\) 22 \(\text{x}d6 \text{xf3}\). Black should win, although it may take time, after either 23 gxf3 \(\text{c}2\) 24 \(\text{x}d7 \text{xe}2\) 25 \(\text{e}7 \text{xb}2\) 26 \(\text{xf}8 \text{xf}8\) 27 \(\text{xf}7+ \text{e}8\) 28 \(\text{f}5 \text{xa}2\) 29 \(\text{e}5+ \text{f}7\) 30 \(\text{xe}3 \text{f}6\) (level material, but White’s king and pawns are dreadful), or 23 \(\text{d}4 \text{c}1+\) 24 \(\text{h}2 \text{h}5\) 25 \(\text{xd}7 \text{e}2\) 26 \(\text{xe}2 \text{xe}2\) (exchange up, and Black can squeeze the bishop with ...\(\text{c}4\), after 27 \(\text{e}7 \text{e}8\)).

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

\(\text{xc}6 \text{xf}2+ 22 \text{xf}2 \text{xc}6\).

\(\text{Test Six}\)

\(\text{M.Hebden-C.Crouch}\)

\(\text{Metropolitan Open 2006}\)

Despite earlier events (see Test 5.4), my position should not collapse. Unfortunately it did. I would have suspected that I had done something wrong, but I still have play, having a useful bishop-
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pair, a good open file, and an active queen. That said, I also have obvious disadvantages, with my kingside pieces being clogged up, and White having a rook on the seventh.

Again, I played too quickly, and made the obvious capture, 18...\textbf{wx}d2? (A), assuming that I was at least conformably equal. I missed something a few moves along the line. White won after 19 \textbf{xb}7 \textbf{xe}2 20 \textbf{xe}2 g5 (better is 20...g6, but White is still on top after 21 b4) 21 c1 d2 22 f1.

Now I missed a critical pin after 22...\textbf{xb}2?? 23 h5!, and I immediately resigned (1-0), in view of 23...c5 24 xc5! bxc5 25 xb2. 23...xa3 24 c8+ g7 25 xf7 mate is even quicker.

Black has to try to improve. My immediate reaction afterwards was to try to find an improvement with 18...\textbf{xb}2 (B) 19 xb7 \textbf{xd}2, swiping the b-pawn (not though 19...\textbf{xd}2? 20 b8+ d8 21 xd8+, with a cross-pin). White is still much better, however, after 20 \textbf{xd}2 \textbf{xd}2 21 c1 g5 22 cc7 d1+ 23 f1 xa3 24 xa7 c5 25 xf7+ e8 26 fb7. Black is a tempo down after taking the b-pawn, and White again keeps a strong attack with two rooks and bishop.

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

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

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

Black can also try to set up a different pawn structure in the endgame, with 18...\text{xg2!?} (C) 19 \text{xg2} \text{xd2} 20 \text{xd2} \text{xd2} 21 \text{xa7}.

Clearly Black will not be able to take the pawn (21...\text{xb2??} 22 \text{a8+}), and so we now have a more dynamic pawn structure, with strengths and weaknesses on both sides. White will have excellent chances of creating a dangerous passed pawn on the queenside, while Black will need to set up counterplay on the kingside. It is important to recognize for Black that he must not just sit on the extra pawn on the kingside, but that he needs to play actively. Therefore 21...g5 22 b4 (saving the pawn, and also preventing ...\text{c5}) 22...g4! 23 \text{b7} \text{d8} 24 \text{c1} \text{g7} 25 \text{c6} (25 \text{c8} \text{g6} is comfortable for Black) 25...\text{h4} 26 \text{cxb6} \text{xf2+} 27 \text{g1} \text{a2} 28 \text{xe6} \text{a2+}, with a draw, following a reasonable degree of accuracy by Black.

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

There is another way for Black, keeping material on the board with 18...\text{a8} (C) 19 \text{b1}.

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
% Chessboard diagram
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

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

Then 21...\text{e3} 22 \text{xe3} \text{xb5} is an attempt to break the natural course of play, and if the natural 23 \text{fc1} \text{xb2}
24 \text{f4} g5 25 \text{h4}, Black holds the position with 25...\text{c7}! Once this has been appreciated, 23 \text{g1}! is quickly seen as a good move, and if 23...\text{xb2}? (but other moves are not very good) 24 \text{f4} f5 25 \text{h5} \text{e7} 26 \text{d8+}, and mate next move.

Black can try instead 21...a5 22 \text{c3} \text{d4} 23 \text{d1} \text{h4} 24 \text{xd8+} \text{xd8} 25 \text{d7}, and White keeps a steady edge.

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

\text{Test 6.4}
\begin{center}
\text{I.Lauterbach-C.Crouch} \\
\text{British League (4NCL) 2007}
\end{center}

We resume play from 4.1 with 17 \text{e2} \text{d8} 18 \text{h4}. I have been under slight pressure for the last few moves, but my next move,

![Chess Diagram]

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

![Chess Diagram]

Black will be able to keep the pawn on h7. Any h5-h6 push by White can usually be countered quite easily. No detailed analysis here. Just play through the game, and imagine what would have happened if Black had delayed ...h6.
Another possibility is $18...\text{e}6?!$ (C), with a trap. If $19 \text{f}5 \text{c}8?!$, $20 \text{x}d5? \text{c}7$, and the queen is unexpectedly about to be trapped. $21 \text{x}c4$ is the only move, but $21...\text{a}6$ skewers the knight. An attractive variation, but the simple $20 \text{h}5$ keeps an edge for White.

In the game, White quietly retreated with $19 \text{d}2$.

Black does not have any immediate problems just yet, and the computer gives it as equal, but there are will be difficulties ten or twenty moves along the line. In other words, this is a positional battle, with advantage to White, rather than a tactical struggle.

There are two basic problems with Black’s pawn structure. First, Black is suffering from covering what is in effect an isolated pawn in the centre. His c-pawn has moved too far, and cannot defend the d5-pawn, nor even do anything to attack White’s pieces and pawns. Black is forced to work out how to defend the d5-pawn. Second, White has gained space on the kingside, with pawns as well as pieces. This suggests that Black is forced to defend his kingside structure as well as the central pawn. White can think of a possible attack against the king.

I played $19...\text{b}7$, in part to cover the d5-pawn, also perhaps to try ...\text{c}6 later, to cut down any manoeuvring by White’s queen and rook. It seems a slightly lazy move. I was in pain suffering after a nasty fall, as well as longer-term illnesses, and I was not playing energetically. Of course the only way of losing a game of chess is to make bad moves, and so somehow the chess player, when under pressure, still has to work hard. Lauterbach played better than I did in the middlegame.

$19...\text{e}6$ is more relevant, and if $20 \text{h}5 \text{e}7$ $21 \text{e}5?! \text{x}e5$ $22 \text{d}xe5 \text{c}5$, and Black soon maintains the balance with his pieces. $21 \text{h}4?!$ keeps a slight edge for White, though.

Lauterbach played $20 \text{h}5$.

I played $20...\text{h}8?!$, which may seem strange and unnatural, placing the knight into a passive corner. It is not as bad as it looks, and I did not like
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the alternative. Black's mistake came later. I felt the knight was, in several respects, worse with 20...\text{\textgreek{e}7} than on h8, blocking the e-file.

There is also the question of manoeuvrability. The knight on e7 can go to c8, but then what next? At least on h8, Black can find a better square with ...f6 and ...\text{\textgreek{f}7}. But, remembering earlier comments, Black would have done much better with 18...f6! (kicking the bishop out), rather than 18...h6?!

On specifics, after 20...\text{\textgreek{e}7}, if White plays 21 \text{\textgreek{f}4} \text{\textgreek{e}6} 22 \text{\textgreek{xd}6} \text{\textgreek{xd}6} 23 \text{\textgreek{e}5}?! , following the idea of the main line, then Black equalizes with 23...\text{\textgreek{c}6}, a good argument for the ...\text{\textgreek{e}7} approach. 23 \text{\textgreek{ab}1}! keeps White an edge though, forcing Black to work out how he has to face b3 (or b4), or \text{\textgreek{e}5}, or, after 23...\text{\textgreek{c}6}, then 24 \text{\textgreek{h}4}.

I suspect that I might instead have been worried about 21 \text{\textgreek{e}5} \text{\textgreek{xe}5} 22 \text{\textgreek{dxe}5}, opening up a square for the knight on d4. This does not seem all that effective after 22...\text{\textgreek{f}5}!. If 23 \text{\textgreek{h}3} \text{\textgreek{d}4} 24 \text{\textgreek{xd}4} \text{\textgreek{h}3} (threatening the h5-pawn) 25 \text{\textgreek{f}5} \text{\textgreek{c}8} 26 \text{\textgreek{xh}3} \text{\textgreek{xh}3} 27 \text{\textgreek{f}3} \text{\textgreek{d}7}, and Black should equalize, with the idea of ...f6.

So the obvious 20...\text{\textgreek{e}7} is better than 20...\text{\textgreek{h}8}, but only because of a self-pin with ...\text{\textgreek{f}5}, not so obvious. I could easily have added this as a test position, but there would be too many interruptions if there are questions to be asked on each successive move, for each minor slip. We need to keep the flow going. Without the ...\text{\textgreek{f}5} self-pin, Black's knights would have been clumsy, the knights on d8 and e7 not working well together, and not helping the other pieces. This was what I remember being worried about at the time.

Back to the main line. Lauterbach played 21 \text{\textgreek{f}4}, exchanging off Black's better bishop. Then 21...\text{\textgreek{e}6} 22 \text{\textgreek{xd}6} \text{\textgreek{xd}6} leaves White with a slight, but annoying, edge.

She played 23 \text{\textgreek{e}5}, which instinctively surprised me. As Nimzowitsch used to say, “the threat is stronger than the execution”. The knight is not attacking anything, apart from the easily cov-
tered \( \text{ex}c4 \), and Black can hit back, later on, with \( \ldots f6 \) followed by \( \ldots \text{gf}7 \). Probably White should leave the knight at home, allowing Black to decide whether to try \( \ldots f6 \), without any tempo gain, and have to decide whether it is playable or bad. 23 \( \text{ab}1! \) would be a way to test her opponent. Looking at this now, 20 \( \text{gh}8 \) was over-elaborate, and does not do the job, so deserves its ‘?!’.

After her knight advance, I played 23...\( \text{fe}7 \), then came 24 \( \text{dd}2?! \). Maybe 24 \( \text{g}4! \) \( \text{fe}8 \) 25 \( \text{de}3 \) would have more effectively justified White’s \( \text{e}5 \), keeping an edge. I was not sure what White was doing with her queen move. Obviously White is not worse after the text, but she could have achieved even more.

Play continued with 24...\( \text{fe}8 \) 25 \( \text{f}1 \) \( \text{f}6 \) 26 \( \text{g}4 \), and at last I felt I was fully equal. We shall resume the game later in Test 10.3.
Test Seven

7.1 White to play

A) 19 \texttt{Ra3}
B) 19 \texttt{g5}
C) Something else?

7.2 White to play

A) 20 h3
B) 20 \texttt{Ad1}
C) Something else?

7.3 Black to play

A) 20...\texttt{a3+}
B) 20...f6
C) Something else?

7.4 White to play

A) 21 h3
B) 21 \texttt{wd4}
C) Something else?
Following on from Test 5.3, this is an extremely difficult position to try to assess. I played 19 $\text{La}3$ (A) over the board, after some thought, but found this unsatisfactory.

My initial idea was 19 $\text{Le}1$ (C), but after 19...$\text{xf3}$ it looked as though Black was doing well.

19 $\text{g5}$ (B), a suggestion by the computer, looked good, and on seeing this, I regretted that I did not look at it more closely. That said, looking at it again, it is not so convincing. These are the three most active options, but the quieter continuations might turn out to be more effective, if the more combative moves do not impress. The one really clear assessment is that 19 $\text{d4?? xf3}$ is a blunder, losing a piece.

The position is to be regarded, at least initially, as ‘unclear’. It is unlikely that anyone is clearly worse, as there are strengths and weaknesses for both sides. If the position is genuinely unclear, the implication is that unless either player makes a mistake from this position, the final result should end up in a draw, with neither player being able to force a win. This is much as at the start of the game. The one way of losing is to make a mistake. The best way of avoiding loss is to avoid mistakes.

Caution, not aggression, is therefore the watch-word. Let us go through the position in greater depth, after the initial assessment, and consider 19 $\text{Le}1$ (C) 19...$\text{xf3}$. My notes at the time examined only 20 $\text{gxf3}$, keeping the queens on the board. After 20...$\text{f5}$ 21 $\text{d4 d7}$, White has slightly more activity than Black with the pieces, but his pawn structure is badly damaged. “Equal, but no more”, I wrote earlier, and without trying to analyse in extreme depth, this seems fair enough.

It is interesting that in my notes at the time, I did not even mention 20 $\text{xf3}!\text{?}$, protecting the pawn structure.
White is then slightly better after 20...\(\mathcal{W}xf3+?!\) 21 \(\mathcal{W}xf3\), moving towards a favourable endgame. I feel sure that I would have assessed this position correctly. I have no fear of a queen exchange. Indeed, I would almost certainly have decided that 20...\(\mathcal{W}d4+!\) is best, and highly unpromising if White is thinking of playing for an edge. After, for example, 21 \(\mathcal{A}e3\) \(\mathcal{W}xb2+\) 22 \(\mathcal{G}g1\) \(\mathcal{A}e8\) 23 \(\mathcal{A}ab1\) \(\mathcal{W}c3\) White will later recover the pawn on b7, but this will lose time, and Black’s knight will reach good central squares after ...\(\mathcal{A}d7\). There is a clear danger that White could easily end up worse, and this is exactly what I wanted to avoid.

We move next to the line I actually played, 19 \(\mathcal{A}a3?!\) (A) 19...\(\mathcal{A}d7\) 20 \(\mathcal{H}e1\) (but not 20 \(\mathcal{H}e3?\) \(\mathcal{W}xf4\) 21 \(\mathcal{A}e7\) \(\mathcal{W}f5\), and Black wins a pawn). Then 20...\(\mathcal{W}b4!\) proved uncomfortable for me.

Sometimes it is better to use a completely new perspective. I had been assuming that I needed to bring the rooks into play quickly, giving myself the chance of actively developing the bishop. I took it for granted that the knight was pinned, and that at some stage Black would exchange on f3, if required. But maybe the knight can have an impact?

It took me a long time to think about 19 \(\mathcal{G}g5!?\) (B), even after the game, and even with the help of the computer.

If 19...\(\mathcal{A}xd1?\) 20 \(\mathcal{A}xe4\) \(\mathcal{A}c2\) (20...\(\mathcal{A}b3?\) 21 \(\mathcal{A}a3\) wastes time) 21 \(\mathcal{A}xd6\) with a big plus for White. Black needs to improve, with 19...\(\mathcal{W}f5\). Then perhaps 20 \(\mathcal{W}d4\) (20 \(\mathcal{W}b3\) \(\mathcal{A}c8\) is much slower) 20...\(\mathcal{A}e8\) 21 \(\mathcal{H}h3\) \(\mathcal{C}c2+\) 22 \(\mathcal{G}g3\) \(\mathcal{A}f5\) 23 \(\mathcal{W}f6\) \(\mathcal{W}d3+\) 24 \(\mathcal{H}h2\) \(\mathcal{W}xd5\) 25 \(\mathcal{A}d1\) \(\mathcal{A}d7\) (25...\(\mathcal{A}xd1??\) 26 \(\mathcal{W}xf7+)\) 26 \(\mathcal{W}xg6+\) \(\mathcal{H}xg6\) 27 \(\mathcal{A}xd5\). Even here, 27...\(\mathcal{A}c5\) is slightly better for Black. White’s bishop still remains undeveloped, and his rook still obstructed.

This suggests, as an alternative, 19
\( \text{\textit{e3}} \) (C), but after 19...\( \text{d7} \) followed by \( \text{f6} \), the knight suddenly reaches a good square.

There are various other possibilities for White, including 19 a5, 19 b3 and 19 \( \text{f1} \), but none seems completely secure. Black quickly plays \( \text{d7} \).

By now, it is easy to see that analysis can easily run around in circles. After some thought, I played what seems to be the natural move, having found nothing better over the board. It looks like that there ought to be an improvement for White, but even in later analysis, I cannot find a clear drawing line, let alone a win. So perhaps I was worse? Around the roundabout, White’s original exit, 19 \( \text{a3} \), now looks the best, but I had to find good moves later on.

**Test 7.2**

Colin Crouch – Andrew Lewis

Kidlington 2007

As we saw in Test 3.4, Lewis has offered an exchange sacrifice, but how now do I respond? In the end, I played 18 \( \text{c2!} \), which I described as a “wimp out” in an earlier set of analysis. Play continued with 18...\( \text{f6} \) 19 \( \text{c3} \) \( \text{d7} \), which was critical, and the point at which White needed to improve. We shall examine this below, although of course the conscientious and thorough reader will already have examined this.

Sometimes it is appropriate to grab the exchange, but sometimes it should be delayed. It is always a difficult decision to make. White certainly needs to consider 18 \( \text{xf4!} \)? \( \text{exf4} \) 19 \( \text{h3} \) \( \text{f6} \) (maybe the simple 19...\( \text{e5} \), with reasonable compensation for the exchange), and indeed I considered it, and rejected it.

This game was played a few years back, before my writing on Tal, Stein and Kasparov, and also my book on wins by 2700+ players in Modern Chess: Move by Move. I would like to think that by now I would have been more fully aware of the idea that even in the wildest positions, the best play by both sides should end up in a draw, unless of
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course one of the players is already better. What this in practical terms would mean is that if your position feels okay before the opponent’s attempted sacrifice, and if you see no clear advantage for your opponent, then you are at liberty to accept the sacrifice, however dangerous the opposing sacrifice might appear. ‘Fortune favours the bold’, and bold defending, as well as bold attacking, should be praised.

Black has no win after 19...\textit{W}f6?!., which sets up an apparently extremely dangerous attack, but it turns out that Black has no more than a draw after 20 h\textit{x}g4 \textit{W}a1+ 21 \textit{B}b1 \textit{W}xg4 (he has to aim for \ldots \textit{f}5) 22 \textit{d}d1 \textit{b}2+ 23 \textit{c}c2 \textit{c}3 24 \textit{c}1 \textit{b}2+ 25 \textit{c}1. And, second, that the sneaky 24 \textit{c}1!! gives White an unexpected advantage after 24....\textit{f}5+ 25 \textit{d}1 \textit{x}b1 26 \textit{w}e6+ \textit{h}8 27 \textit{w}f7. This line would have been extremely difficult to foresee for either side.

So 18 \textit{xf}4 is extremely promising, but 18 \textit{c}2?! \textit{w}f6 19 \textit{c}3 \textit{d}7 is also fully playable, provided I play accurately.

I have avoided the tactical battle, but now I have to consider the positional battle. I should not be worse, but my next move is poor.

I played 20 \textit{d}d1? (B), but I soon was forced to appreciate that the rook was on an unfortunate square, and that after 20...\textit{xf}8 21 \textit{h}3?! (mistimed, but even here 21 \textit{he}1 \textit{xf}3!? 22 \textit{gx}f3 \textit{wxf}3 23 \textit{wxf}3 \textit{xf}3 24 \textit{d}3 \textit{xf}2 clearly favours Black) 21...\textit{h}6 22 \textit{d}d2 \textit{f}5 23 \textit{e}1 \textit{d}4 my position was gradually falling apart. There was not much to be done after 24 \textit{x}d4 \textit{ex}d4 25 \textit{d}3 \textit{h}6 26 \textit{b}1 \textit{e}8 27 \textit{w}d1 \textit{f}e4 28 \textit{f}3 \textit{e}3 29 \textit{c}1 \textit{f}5 30 \textit{xa}3 \textit{xf}3 31 \textit{dd}1 \textit{g}3 32 \textit{a}7 \textit{x}g2 33 \textit{xb}7 \textit{ee}2 34 \textit{wb}8+ \textit{f}8 35 \textit{wxf}8+ \textit{xf}8 0-1.

During the game, I was regretting that 20 \textit{h}3!? (A) would have been more accurate, so that after 20...\textit{h}6, White has a wider choice, other than 21 \textit{d}d1?!, in reply. 21 \textit{e}1 would certainly have improved, trying to bolster the e4-square, but Black is still better: for example, 21...\textit{f}5 22 \textit{d}2 \textit{d}4 23 \textit{x}d4 \textit{ex}d4 24 \textit{e}4 \textit{w}e5 25 \textit{d}3 \textit{f}5 26 \textit{f}3 (26 \textit{c}2 \textit{xe}4 27 \textit{xe}4 \textit{xe}4 28 \textit{xe}4 \textit{d}3 29 \textit{xd}3 \textit{g}5+ favours Black) 26...\textit{xe}4 27 \textit{fxe}4 (27 \textit{xe}4? \textit{d}3 28 \textit{xd}3 \textit{a}1+ 29 \textit{d}2 \textit{xa}2+) 27...\textit{af}8 28 \textit{hf}1 \textit{xf}1 29 \textit{xf}1 \textit{xf}1+ 30 \textit{xf}1 \textit{g}5+ and White is uncomfortable. In such lines, Black has excellent play on the dark squares, with opposite-coloured bishops, but White has no corresponding play on the light squares, his own pawns blocking his bishop and queen.
So what else is there? Clearly I need to bring my pieces into play, but in the game I soon had to give protection with $\text{d}2$, thereby losing time. This suggests an improvement, with 20 $\text{f}1!$ (C).

Suddenly White’s quiet play with $\text{c}2$ and $\text{c}3$ makes more sense. If he has time to regroup with, for example, 20...$\text{f}8$ 21 $\text{h}3$ $\text{h}6$ 22 $\text{e}4$ $\text{f}5$ 23 $\text{d}2$, White has finally consolidated his centre, with perhaps a slight edge.

However, 20...$\text{w}8!$, a suggestion from John Emms, is an improvement for Black.

The point is not just that Black now has a flight square for both knight and rook, but also that the e5-pawn is no longer pinned. If, for example, 21 $\text{h}3$ $\text{e}4$ 22 $\text{x}e4$ $\text{x}c3$ 23 $\text{hxg}4$ $\text{e}8$ 24 $\text{g}5$ $\text{f}xe4$ 25 $\text{xe}4$ $\text{w}f4+$, and Black ends up with a winning advantage. There are various other possibilities for White, but while the knight is on g4, and creates pressure, White faces problems.

The best way for White, it seems, is to kick the knight out immediately, with another ‘something else’ move, namely 20 $\text{h}3!?$ (instead of 20 $\text{d}1$ or 20 $\text{f}1$), and then 20...$\text{h}6$ 21 $\text{f}1!$. The only problem is that my intention was to avoid pushing the knight away to a better central square.

If then 21...$\text{f}5$, White would probably be quite happy to break the central tension with 22 $\text{g}3$ $\text{d}4$ 23 $\text{x}d4$ (23 $\text{xd}4$ $\text{x}f3$ 24 $\text{e}4$ $\text{xb}3!$ favours Black) 23...$\text{xd}4$ 24 $\text{xf}4$ $\text{dxc}3$. This might not necessarily be the most critical position where there is a choice of several moves, but it is certainly one of them. Thinking in terms of a player trying to analyse this position over the
board, the natural inclination would be to think that Black is better, despite being the exchange down. Black has two advanced pawns on the queenside, whereas White has a weakened pawn structure there, making it difficult for White to bring his pieces into play. If the bishop moves, for example, ...c2 would be a reflex reply.

If the reader is finding it confusing over the intricate changes in move order, and the sudden emergence of tactics, then me too. I still feel that it is almost a matter of principle that White ought to be able to keep some sort of edge in the King’s Indian, with the advanced central pawn structure, but this turns out to be extremely difficult to prove. Every time that White feels that he has a secure edge, there always seems to be some unexpected way for Black to hit back.

Positional chess is so often extremely delicately balanced, particularly when it involves sharp positional play. It might often be the case that a player might have four natural moves with which to carry out a manoeuvre, but it is far from clear which precise move order needs to be played, given the case that the opponent might also have four possible manoeuvres. Of course, at any stage one of the players might well change the balance of play, possibly ending up with tactics, or possibly with a slightly varied new strategic plan. A move not only puts a piece on to a new square, but also removes a piece from its previous square.

For the moment, playing against complicated King’s Indian openings, I have been playing the Torre (1 d4 d6 2 f3 g6 3 g5), before trying again something more ambitious.

**Test 7.3**

**P.Sowray-C.Crouch**

London 2007

This position ought to be fully playable for Black, one might think, but after a few more moves White started to emerge ahead, and later won. It was important for me to try to work out how and where I went wrong. My assumption during my initial analysis was that I defended far too cautiously, and that I should have fought fire for fire. After further scrutiny, I now have come to the view that the next few moves for Black were correct, ending up with a slight but tenable disadvantage. The attempt for Black to play for an advantage, in many lines, would
have ended up as an advantage for White, often after tactical play.

I played 15...e5!? , a move later than I should have done, as we saw in Test 4.4. Black’s ...b5 proved to be unnecessary. Instead, Black could have tried taking up the challenge with 15...b4 16
\[ \text{d}5 \text{exd}5 17 \text{exd}5+ \text{d}8 18 \text{c}6+ \text{xc}6 19 \text{dxc}6. \]

Such minor piece sacrifices in the Sicilian are extremely scary, and I felt I wanted to avoid this. Black is not threatened with checkmate yet, so there is still some time for flexibility, and the chance to play 19...\[ \text{wa}5! \]. Then a quick and unexpected repetition with
\[ 20 \text{d}4! \text{b}6 21 \text{e}5! \text{c}4! 22 \text{e}2 \text{b}6, \]
difficult to envisage a few moves in advance. Instead, 20 \[ \text{d}4? \text{xa}2 21 \text{xf}6+ \text{xc}7! 21 \text{b}3 \text{a}3 \] would have lost quickly for White.

A third possibility is the simple developing approach with 15...\[ \text{a}7!? \] 16 b3, then either 16...b4 or 16...\[ \text{a}3, \] with tough play, probably ending up around equal. Black’s quiet move would perhaps have been the way to play for a win, but it would take a considerable amount of hindsight to think about this line.

I felt comfortable with my central pawn push, but 16 b3!! took me out of my comfort zone.

The big problem from Black’s point of view is that he weakens the e-file if he captures on d4. White then can open up the e-file, with e5 or \[ \text{d}5, \] when he is taking the initiative. I did not expect my opponent’s move, but now what can I do?

This was a difficult choice. For a long time, I concluded that my reply, 16...\[ \text{exd}4, \] was a mistake, but it looks okay, and it was the next move that was my mistake.

The computer suggests, after a bit of prodding, that 16...\[ \text{a}3 17 \text{d}5 \text{d}8 \] gives an advantage for Black, but this seems unlikely. Computer analysis tends to concentrate on trying to avoid the loss of a piece, but strong human players will want to keep the attack going, overriding loss of material. Indeed, 18 \[ \text{d}2 \text{exd}4 19 \text{xd}4 \] leaves
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Black uncomfortable, for example after 19...e6 20 b2 b4 21 xf6 gxf6 22 wxa6.

16...wa5 is slightly more accurate,

in the sense that after 17 bxc4 bxc4, White can only choose between 18 f3 and 18 g3, and cannot play 18 e3? in view of 18...exd4. This may be compared with 16...exd4 17 xd4 wa5 18 bxc4 bxc4, when White has the choice between 19 e3, 19 f3 and 19 g3. Even so, 19 g3 e7 20 g5 hxg5 21 xg5 wa3+ 22 d1 still keeps an edge for White.

Anyway, after my immediate capture on d4, he took back with 17 xd4.

All sorts of pieces were flying around in my mind, and eventually I decided that it was too risky for me to try to keep the extra piece and win. I was more worried that I would end up losing. So I blocked the e-file with 17...e5! 18 fxe5 dxe5 anyway, and later lost. My later reaction after the game was that returning the piece was a mistake, leaving me with a positional disadvantage. Surely I could have played more ambitiously, with an unclear position, and with chances of keeping the extra piece?

Of course, one cannot make an assessment completely abstractly, and precise evaluation of pieces and variations needs to be considered. In home analysis, I examined several lines, both from this position, and in earlier positions. I decided that in the end Black had gone wrong on move 17, with the possibility of a complicated perpetual. I also decided that even with best play, Black has not got an objective advantage. I cannot play too ambitiously.

It was only a long time later that I started to look again at the quiet line of the game, deciding in the end that with an improvement, Black’s play would have led to close equality. In other words, my assessment in the early part of the game was correct (apart, of course, from the imprecise 14...b5), but that there was a serious mistake later on. We shall consider the improvement soon, but first it is time to examine the wilder lines.
It is, of course, a bad defensive mistake to retreat meekly with 17...\texttt{b}6. White crashes through in the centre with 18\texttt{e}5. Black needs to play actively, either returning the extra piece, or using it in a counterattack against the white king. So 17...\texttt{a}5! needs to be examined.

We may quickly reject 18 \texttt{d}5 as premature: 18...\texttt{xd}5 19\texttt{exd}5+ \texttt{d}8 20\texttt{bxc}4 \texttt{xc}4 is safe for Black, and he has an edge. White’s king is not so safe.

18\texttt{e}5?! is the most immediately aggressive line, but Black again has quick counterplay, with 18...\texttt{a}3+ 19 \texttt{d}1 \texttt{b}2+ 20 \texttt{d}2. Then 20...\texttt{xd}3? would be too greedy, in view of 21\texttt{fxe}6+ \texttt{e}5 22 \texttt{exe}5 \texttt{exe}5 23 \texttt{xe}5+ \texttt{e}6 24 \texttt{fxg}7, with advantage to White. Instead, 20...\texttt{dxe}5 21 \texttt{exe}5+ (Black is better after either 21 \texttt{exe}5+ \texttt{e}7, or 21\texttt{fxe}5 \texttt{c}4 22 \texttt{xd}3 23 \texttt{xd}3 \texttt{c}xg4), and it is becoming even sharper.

The computer suggests two winning moves, but 21...\texttt{c}d3? is in the end far too entertaining to be wise: 22 \texttt{d}6+ \texttt{e}6 23 \texttt{xe}3 \texttt{xe}1 24 \texttt{xf}8 \texttt{g}2 25 \texttt{g}7 \texttt{xf}4 26 \texttt{f}3 \texttt{xc}3 27 \texttt{f}4 is good for White.

21...\texttt{e}6! is much better, and good, but a nightmare for a player trying to analyse over the board. Or, for the Tal school of attacking chess, many would take a positive delight in playing through such lines, knowing that when neither player can analyse to a clear result, artistry in chess prevails over mere calculation. Play might continue with 22\texttt{f}5 \texttt{xd}3 23 \texttt{xd}3 \texttt{d}8 24 \texttt{c}6+ \texttt{e}7 25 \texttt{xf}6+ \texttt{g}6 26 \texttt{d}5+ \texttt{d}6 27 \texttt{g}3+ (27\texttt{fxe}6 \texttt{c}6 28\texttt{e}7 \texttt{xe}7 wins for Black) 27...\texttt{xc}6 28 \texttt{c}7+ \texttt{xd}5, which eventually leaves White running out of checks.

It would take far more than a quick glance for Black to convince himself that his king is safe in the centre, but he has some defensive ammunition though having an extra rook plus two extra bishops. Also, perhaps even more significantly, White’s king is on an open and exposed square, with checks and a discovered check by Black’s king cutting down White’s options. If, for
example, 30 c4+ bxc4 31 bxc4+ d4 32 f4+? (but 32 xd8+ d6 is also a win for Black) 32...c5+, and yes, this is a counter-check, so White is not allowed to play f2+.

The mistake took place much earlier in this line. Back to 17...a5, and now 18 bxc4!.

By recovering the piece quickly, White slows down his attack, and also his opponent’s attack. We are now in a sharp positional set-up, rather than all-out tactics. The computer suggests that the position is equal, but after further examination, White keeps an irritating edge. Black is not equal, and the move I actually played, 17...e5!, was closer to full equality.

Here 18...xc4 does not work, as White has a resource with 19 e5 xd4 20 exf6+ d8 21 xd4 xc3 22 e3!, choking Black’s counterplay. Therefore, 18...bxc4 (or 18...a3+ 19 d1 bxc4), but White still keeps an edge after either 19 e3 or 19 g3 e7 20 g5 hxg5 21 xg5, a side-line we have noted before, after a transposition.

I was understandably concerned that I had done nothing to develop my kingside pieces since move 5, and that my king was still stuck in the centre. I was greatly relieved that I could gain a tempo with 20...a3+? (A), and then castle quickly. This unfortunately proved to be a serious mistake. After 21 b2 xb2+ 22 xb2 0-0 23 d6 c5 24 d2! (a quiet queen move which I had underestimated), White has excellent central control, and an advanced and dangerous passed pawn. Black has none of the usual Sicilian counterplay on the queenside, although of course I tried for some. We return to the finish later.

20...f6! (B) is not so far from being level. Black keeps his bishop in play,
making it far more difficult for White to advance his passed pawn.

Perhaps it would be only just for White to be able to keep a slight edge, given that he is better developed, and has a good passed pawn. So 21 $c3! \text{ } a3+ 22 b1 d6 23 xc8+ xc8 24 d1 0-0 25 a1 d7, and the struggle is likely to continue after the adjournment. Black has not yet equalized. A computer suggestion gives 26 h4 e8 27 g5 f5, and it is not so clear that White has broken through after either 28 gxh6 xh6, or 28 h5 e4.

It is time to return to the main line, after 24 d2.

The next few moves were played at some speed, with 25 d7 xd8 26 xd6 b4 27 d1 a5 28 c6 b6 29 e2 c5 30 d3 h5 31 gxh5 f5 32 e4 xe4 33 xe4 f5.

I have managed to keep up some counterplay, hoping that there is going to be an inaccuracy by my opponent during the time scramble, maybe due to some pressure in front of his king, and above all, pushing the two passed pawns in the centre. I did not expect my position to hold, but White was clearly nervous of my pawns.

34 c4+! xc4 35 bxc4 slaloms through with White's second pawn. Both players have two connected passed pawns, but it is not difficult to work out that White's pawns are further ahead, closer to promotion. For example, 35...f4 36 c5 f3 37 d1 f4 38 c6 c4 39 e1 e4 40 xe4 xe4 41 c7 ee8 42 dxe8 xe8 43 xd8.

White played instead 34 wh4?! which gave me a little encouragement, but once White has the opportunity of attacking with h6, Black is likely to run
out of time. Then 34...e4 35 d1 led to my final mistake, which is worth recording for psychological interest, but not really worth giving as an exercise.

35...a4? 36 bxa4 gave away a pawn for nothing. White has to capture of course, as otherwise ...a3+ is likely to be winning. There are so many examples in chess of giving up a pawn to break up the opponent's pawn structure (including 30...h5 in this game), and sometimes such moves can be played almost automatically. Here, all I managed to achieve was to weaken my b4-pawn, while giving my opponent a passed a-pawn.

I was annoyed afterwards with my misjudgement, but in the end it did not make much difference to the final outcome. The tactics remain the same. Play continued 36...e5+ 37 b1 (see diagram) 37...f4, and 1-0.

The liveliest line is 37...e3 38 c4+ h8 39 e6 g3 40 h6 gxh6 41 d4+ g8 42 b6, and White wins.

Test 7.4
C.Crouch-M.Peacock
Kidlington 2007

Following on from Test 7.1, I was
understandably nervous about this position, my pieces all being on the edge, except for the pinned knight and the exposed king, whereas Black’s pieces are on good positions or on open lines. My position is not yet drastically bad, but I need to be careful, and certainly I am not better.

Somehow I need to activate my pieces, or to exchange some material. I chose the second idea, playing the simple 21 h3?! (A) 21...\texttt{xf3} 22 \texttt{xf3} \texttt{fe8}, but my position was worse, and I was fortunate that he eventually decided to take a perpetual when he was better, but short of time. The problem with the move I tried to defend with is that it is using up another pawn move, when really I needed to concentrate on bringing my pieces together.

Even 21 \texttt{g3}!? (C) is a possibility, inviting Black to exchange on f3, while also moving the king to a safer square quickly.

There is no check on the g1-a7 diagonal, and also the less obvious point that setting up an extra defence on f4 can be useful. If, for example, Black were to carry on with the line of the game, with 21...\texttt{xf3} 22 \texttt{xf3} \texttt{fe8}, White now has 23 \texttt{fe3}!, and the f-pawn is safe. 21...\texttt{f5} 22 \texttt{ae3} also keeps White’s pieces in play.

\textbf{21 \texttt{wd4}!} (B) is a much simpler line, indeed almost too simple if White is still hoping to outplay his opponent.

The queens come off immediately, with 21...\texttt{xd4} 22 \texttt{xd4}, and then 22...\texttt{f6} 23 \texttt{b3} \texttt{fe8} 24 \texttt{xb7} \texttt{xe1} 25 \texttt{xe1} \texttt{xd5} 26 f5!, and once White’s bishop is in full play, he comfortably holds the balance.

\textbf{21 \texttt{wd2}?!} (C) is worth considering, especially if Black is not interested in steady equality. If 21...\texttt{xd2}? 22 \texttt{xd2}!, White suddenly jumps to good squares with the knight, but 21...\texttt{c5}+ 22 \texttt{g3} \texttt{xf3} 23 \texttt{xf3} \texttt{f6} is about equal. There is a third option. Instead of immediately exchanging, or escaping with the queen, Black can keep the tension with 21...a5!, when he seems slightly better.

There are then a couple of dubious gambit ideas. If 21 \texttt{d2}? (C) 21...\texttt{xb2
Why we Lose at Chess

22 b3 a2, the queen is on the edge, but then what next? 23 xb7 xf3 24 gxf3 c5 wins the exchange for Black.

Or 21 ae3?! (C) 21...xf4 22 e7 f5, and White does not have quite sufficient compensation for the pawn.

There were clearly quite a few alternatives to consider, but offering to exchange the queens with 21 d4 looks the best and safest.

We return to the position as discussed on move 22, and then 23 xe8+ xe8.

White is ‘almost’ close to being equal, but it turns out that he is not quite there. I had misjudged this position, and none of my pieces are on a good square. The only hope, I felt, was to try to take control of the long diagonal, with 24 b3, then b2, when given the chance. Black played 24...f6 (24...c5 is also promising, and if 25 b2 xa4), and then came 25 g3?!

On other moves, he will soon win a pawn. I was hoping that Black would not be able to find a winning plan after 25 e1 26 c2 h1 27 c8+ g7 28 b2 e1+ 29 f2.

Both kings look to be in trouble, but a critical attacking piece in either side is pinned.

My opponent thought until the last minute. As the earlier minutes ticked by, I started to feel more relaxed. If he could find a win instantly, then so be it. If he has to take a few extra minutes, he would not be able to find a more complicated win. Eventually he decided it was time to take the draw with 29...e3+! 30 f3 e1+ 31 f2 ½-½.

I still had the feeling that I should probably have been losing, and in later analysis I was able to find something, with the help of an endgame zugzwang. But who would be able to find the line, the first part of the process, and then spend the extra time to confirm that the critical line is indeed a zugzwang?

The critical line is 29...f1! (or, after repetition, 31...f1) 30 xf6+ xf6 31 h8+ e7 32 d4, when the king and pawn endgame is equal if the queens and rooks are exchanged.
However, it turns out that Black can still win with 32...h5!!.

If then 33 \textit{\texttt{h2}}??, Black wins with a cross-pin after 33...h4+ 34 \textit{\texttt{h2}} \textit{\texttt{xf2}}.

If instead, 33 a5 h4+ 34 \textit{\texttt{f3}} \textit{\texttt{d1}}+ 35 \textit{\texttt{xd1}} \textit{\texttt{xd1}} 36 \textit{\texttt{g4}} \textit{\texttt{xd5}} 37 \textit{\texttt{hxh4}} \textit{\texttt{xa5}}, and Black will eventually grind away for a win in the pawn-up rook ending. Even the inoffensive a-pawn ends up in a zugzwang trap.

Or if 33 h4 a5, and White’s pawns are now blocked, and he will lose to zugzwang in a king and pawn ending after 34 \textit{\texttt{d2}} \textit{\texttt{xf2}}+ 35 \textit{\texttt{xf2}} \textit{\texttt{xf2}} 36 \textit{\texttt{xf2}} \textit{\texttt{f6}} 37 \textit{\texttt{f3}} \textit{\texttt{f5}} 38 g3 f6 39 \textit{\texttt{e3}} g5 40 fxg5 fxg5 41 hxg5 \textit{\texttt{xg5}} 42 \textit{\texttt{f3}} \textit{\texttt{f5}}, and a pawn drops. A long variation, but also elementary.

This leaves 33 \textit{\texttt{f3}}. Instead of looking for complications with another zugzwang, there is a simple line with 33...\textit{\texttt{d1}}+! 34 \textit{\texttt{xd1}} \textit{\texttt{xd1}}, when a pawn drops, and Black eventually wins the rook endgame.

This would have been an excellent win for my opponent, except that he missed it.
8.1 Black to play

A) 21...g8  
B) 21...f5  
C) Something else?

8.2 Black to play

A) 21...a5  
B) 21...a7  
C) Something else?

8.3 Black to play

A) 22...d7  
B) 22...f8  
C) Something else?

8.4 White to play

A) 22...b4  
B) 22...g3  
C) Something else?
Continuing from Test 2.1, White has just castled, and Black now castled himself, 10...0-0. Both moves seem a bit too automatic, and indeed lazy. As discussed earlier in this game, White should try d5, or even dxc5, if given the chance, and Black should have avoided this by exchanging on d4. I had the higher Elo rating, and so in theory it is more likely that he would make a slight mistake at some stage than I would. This edge is, however, slight if the position is drawish, with little chance of making mistakes. The stronger player therefore has the incentive to try to keep the position lively, but it is easy to overpress. What happens, for example, if the opponent does not make mistakes? Quite often he will keep a slight edge, when with best play the position will remain equal at best.

White himself makes another minor inaccuracy, with 11 e4. Clearly this does not make his position worse, but the point is that White still had prospects of keeping an edge. 11 d1!? seems promising. If then 11...cxd4 12 wxd4, and White has gained a clear tempo when compared with d1 instead of e4, the pawn push being of little relevance.

Black, of course, has alternatives, but after, for example, 11...d6, White is now better placed for 12 e4, and if 12...cxd4 13 xd4 d7?! there follows 14 c6 and White wins a pawn. Black has to find something else, but he is not equal.

In the game, I decided it was high time to exchange, with 11...cxd4 12 xd4 c6. Black is happy now after 13 xc6 dxc6 14 e2 c7, and could think of aiming for an edge, so White develops with 13 e3. Then 13...c8, showing Black’s intention is to focus on White’s slightly weakened ‘English pawn’ on c4.

After 14 ac1, I had several reasonable alternatives, many of these ending
up as equality. I tried 14...\textit{c}7, telling myself that there was no reason to move the knight just yet.

Even so, the immediate knight exchange, 14...\textit{xd}4, and only then ...\textit{c}7, is a safer way of equalizing.

The computer also suggests 14...f5, which I admit I had not seriously considered. After 15 exf5 \textit{xd}4 16 \textit{xd}4 \textit{xf}5, Black has too many 'pawn islands', and White is slightly better. So maybe I was correct in not analysing deeper on this over the board.

My opponent too developed quietly, with 15 \textit{fd}1, with equal play. Perhaps though he should have tried for a slight edge with 15 \textit{b}5 \textit{b}8. Then not 16 \textit{xd}7?? \textit{fd}8, and the queen is trapped, but 16 \textit{fd}1 or 16 f4 might still give White a slight push, provided he can keep his pawns secure.

By now I had weighed my opponent up, and decided that he would have been more than happy with a secure draw. This gave me slightly more opportunities to push for a slight break of the symmetry. Before long, play became lively, continuing with 15...\textit{xd}4 16 \textit{xd}4 (maybe 16 \textit{xd}4!?, probably equal) 16...\textit{f}6 17 \textit{d}2. Now I saw the glint of an initiative with 17...\textit{e}5, simultaneously attacking two pawns.

Then 18 \textit{d}4 \textit{xe}4 (if 18...\textit{xd}4 19 \textit{xd}4 \textit{xd}4 20 \textit{xd}4 with a slight edge for White, but 18...\textit{g}5 can be considered) 19 \textit{xf}6 \textit{gx}f6. I felt reasonably confident here, reasoning that it was now up to White to prove that he could keep the balance. He thought for a long time, and I saw nothing more fearful than 20 \textit{xd}7 \textit{xc}4 21 \textit{xa}7, and then I saw 21...\textit{d}4!, with a likely draw after 22 \textit{b}1 \textit{c}5 23 \textit{b}4 \textit{c}7 24 \textit{xc}7 \textit{xc}7.

I have to admit that I had no sense of real danger, but 20 \textit{c}3! aimed for checkmate, and forced me to think hard. If, for example, 20...\textit{xc}4?? 21 \textit{g}3+ \textit{h}8 22 \textit{wh}6, which is the end of game. 20...\textit{c}5 21 \textit{g}3+ \textit{g}5 22 \textit{g}5+ \textit{fx}g5 23 \textit{hg}5+ \textit{h}8 24 \textit{f}6+ \textit{g}8 25 \textit{h}3 \textit{xc}4 26 \textit{d}4 \textit{c}1+ 27 \textit{h}2 \textit{c}7+ 28 \textit{g}3 also wins for White.

I was briefly horrified until I realized that the king could slip away with
20...\textcolor{Blue}{\textbf{h8!}}, avoiding the rook check. A close escape.

There is not much that needs to be noted, except that 22...\textcolor{Red}{\textbf{xc4??}} 23 \textcolor{Red}{\textbf{e7}} leads to a quick checkmate, and that 22...\textcolor{Red}{\textbf{fd8}} 23 \textcolor{Red}{\textbf{f1}} leaves White more than comfortable. If pawns are not necessarily the soul of chess, chewing up your opponent’s pawns provides good nutrition.

Buckley instead tried 22 \textcolor{Blue}{\textbf{e7?!}} \textcolor{Blue}{\textbf{e5}}, and the crisis had passed. Play was sharp, and I later had a strong attack, without either player handling the position particularly well. We resume the analysis later in Test 11.3.

Earlier, Black should have tried 21...\textcolor{Red}{\textbf{g8!}} (A)

White tried 21 \textcolor{Blue}{\textbf{xd7}}, and I was still hoping to try to play for a win.

Instead 21 \textcolor{Red}{\textbf{g3}} \textcolor{Red}{\textbf{g8}} (the reason why Black must move his king first) 22 \textcolor{Blue}{\textbf{xd7}} could easily transpose into 21 \textcolor{Blue}{\textbf{xd7}} (see later), with, for example, 22...\textcolor{Red}{\textbf{e2}} 23 \textcolor{Red}{\textbf{f1}} \textcolor{Red}{\textbf{xg3}} 24 \textcolor{Red}{\textbf{hxg3}} \textcolor{Red}{\textbf{f8}} 25 \textcolor{Red}{\textbf{xa7}} \textcolor{Red}{\textbf{xb2}}. Black’s position is slightly uncomfortable, but it seems to hold.

21 \textcolor{Blue}{\textbf{h6}} \textcolor{Blue}{\textbf{g6}} 22 \textcolor{Blue}{\textbf{gxg6 fxg6}} 23 \textcolor{Red}{\textbf{xd7}} \textcolor{Red}{\textbf{fd8}} 24 \textcolor{Red}{\textbf{xd8+}} \textcolor{Red}{\textbf{xd8}} 25 \textcolor{Blue}{\textbf{f1}} is a straightforward draw if both players play sensibly.

In the game, Black now jumped too quickly for the attack. After 21...\textcolor{Red}{\textbf{f5?}} (B), there was more a sense of relief, that I was not getting checkmated, rather than the pleasure of wild attack. I had not really thought about dropping pawns, maybe on the basis that ‘I was a pawn up, everything goes up and everything goes down, life goes on.’ But 22 \textcolor{Red}{\textbf{xa7!}} is now quite simply good.

White is simply a pawn ahead, and a second is about to drop.
22...\*g3 (22...\*g3 \*gd8!? 23 \*xd8+ \*xd8 24 \*xd8+ \*g7 25 \*c1 \*e2 26 b4 \*b2 27 \*cd1 \*xa3 should draw) 22...\*xg3 23 hxg3, with a position we have discussed above. Then 23...\*f8 24 \*xa7 \*e2 25 \*fl \*xb2 26 \*e7 \*g7 keeps the balance.

**Test 8.2**

**N.Pert-C.Crouch**

Bury St Edmunds 2006

Some quiet play early on, with 1 d4 \*f6 2 \*f3 b6 3 c4 \*b7 4 \*c3 e6 5 a3 \*e4 6 \*xe4 \*xe4 7 \*f4 \*e7 8 e3 0-0 9 \*d3 \*xd3 10 \*xd3 d6 11 0-0 \*d7 12 \*ad1 c5 13 \*g3 \*c7, then 14 b4!? I had expected 14 d5, and this seems to give a slight edge for White, after either 14...e5 15 e4, or 14...exd5 15 \*xd5.

Play continued with 14...\*xb4 15 axb4 \*a5.

Now Pert played 16 c5, which I was impressed with at the time, and which I awarded an exclamation mark in my notes just afterwards. The trouble is that it is not all that effective after accurate play by Black. Play continued 16...\*xb4 17 cxd6 \*xd6 18 \*c1 \*b8 19 \*b5 \*g3 20 hxg3 \*b7.

![Chess Diagram]

So White recovers the pawn, and Black is stuck with an isolated pawn. It is difficult, however, to take the second pawn, and if Black can keep it, and protect it with care, White will have to watch out for the pawn being advanced, and/or one of the open lines for the black rooks being a threat.

White played 21 \*b1. Now I took the wrong plan, with 21...\*a5!? (A) 22 \*xb4 \*e4?! The problem is that Black is moving his pieces far away from the weak isolated pawn, and he is going to have to work hard to cover the pawn. Black cannot attack very hard on the kingside, and so White soon keeps the initiative.

There are two basic methods of defending against positional pressure. One is to set up counterplay, where the opponent is weak. The other is to consolidate, as firmly as possible (‘overprotection’), so that the defender covers all
weaknesses on his own part of the board, with later thoughts of his own counterplay. On this occasion, since White has no genuine weaknesses on the kingside, Black should have overprotected on the queenside.

Therefore, (B) 21...\textit{a7}! (and indeed there may be others, such as 21...\textit{f}c8 or 21...\textit{a}2) 22 \textit{x}b4 \textit{f}a8, and Black's pieces are tightly compacted, but with chances of springing out again.

The knight protects the isolated pawn, the queen and rook cover the knight, and either the queen or rook could bounce back into play, and none of Black's pieces is confined to passivity.

Carrying on, with for example 23 \textit{e}c1 \textit{a}1 24 \textit{b}c4 \textit{a}8a5 25 \textit{c}6 \textit{x}c1+ 26 \textit{x}c1 \textit{c}xc6 27 \textit{c}xc6 \textit{a}1+ 28 \textit{h}2 \textit{f}8, Black can find simplification, and even the better pawn structure. After all, if Black can keep his passed b-pawn, and White's king is a long way from the queenside, it is Black who has the better chances. In addition, White's doubled pawns are often a slight weakness, and maybe something more significant. It would be rare in an endgame for pawns on f2, g2 and h2 (or h3) to be less useful than pawns on f2, g2 and g3.

Back in the main line, and play continued with 23 \textit{e}7 \textit{d}5 24 \textit{a}1 \textit{f}6.

In my contemporary notes, I suggested that “Black has played actively, and the position should probably be a draw.” This now seems wildly optimistic. Compare this diagram and the test position, and it is clear that Black has gone downhill. I now made several slight mistakes before the time control, and these all added up to a losing position. Then unexpectedly he missed something, in the quickplay finish, and suddenly I had the chance of holding the draw, but I was too short of time to see this. So there are still some more questions to follow in Test 11.4.

After playing through several lines, it seems that Black is slightly worse, and will have to work hard and accurately to hold the balance.

After 25 \textit{e}5, I played the weak...
25...\texttt{a5}?! , and soon fell into difficulties after 26 \texttt{xa5 bxa5} 27 \texttt{a1} , when my pawn soon fell, and I had to scra­bble around for any sort of compensation. Possibly I could have tried to re­engage my pieces with 25...\texttt{dd8} , but even here White is standing well after 26 \texttt{fc1 d5} . Then after 27 \texttt{wb7} ! White has taken control of the seventh rank, and this is why Black should have tried 21...\texttt{a7} much earlier.

\begin{center}
\textbf{Test 8.3}
\textbf{G. Wall-C. Crouch}
British League (4NCL) 2007
\end{center}

We have seen this position before in Test 2.3. Both players have played slightly inaccurately, but it is now about equal.

I continued to develop with 14...\texttt{d7} , which at first might look a slightly pas­sive set-up for the bishops, but White’s bishops have even less development opportunity. Black needs to get his rooks working together as soon as possible.

White continued his plan of attack­ing on the kingside, with 15 \texttt{h4} . I have needed to conserve my energy in terms of brain power. Translation: I played lazily, because of my health at the time. If there is a natural and obvious move, I would play quickly. Often this is by no means a bad idea, for any player, but it is important to have a sixth sense of feeling that on certain occasions the player must slow down, whether it is a sense of danger, or whether, as here, there is an advantage to be gained from finding the less obvious move. Here I played 15...\texttt{h6} , pushing the attackers quickly away, and gaining some time to try to develop on good squares.

I suspect that in my younger days, I would have preferred 15...\texttt{f5}?! 16 \texttt{xf6 xf6} , quickly opening up the centre, and counterattacking. Both kings are still in the centre, but the important difference, in terms of trying to take the initiative, is that Black is able to castle quickly, bringing the rooks into the centre, whereas White’s bishops are blocking the rooks and kings.
Here 17 ∇xe6? CellStyleבד d6 18 f5 gxf5 19 CellStyleห5+ CellStylee7 favours Black, but 17 ∇e4 CellStylee7 18 h5 leads to sharp play. Black could continue either with hand-to-hand pawn fighting with 18...e5, or consolidate his kingside with 18...g8. Either seems reasonable.

My notes at the time stated that: “My regret is not so much that I did not play this, more that I did not even consider it.” Probably the alternative move is interesting, but not necessarily better.

The game continued with quiet positional play, with 16 ∇e4 c6. I sensed that if I was trying to overprotect myself by defending the pawn on c4, I would lose momentum with my pieces.

If now 17 c4 b6 18 d3 xa4, and Black may have a slight edge.

So instead 17 e2, and now it is time to protect the c-pawn with 17...b5. White simplified with 18 axb5 axb5 19 xa8+ xa8 20 g3 h5.

All the pawns on both sides are well covered, and there is unlikely to be a pawn rush on either side. This suggests that for the time being, the emphasis will be on the pieces. The knights on both sides are on good squares, but I can only take advantage of this after careless play by the opponent. I was more interested in terms of taking the initiative, with the queen and bishops, and making use of the a8-h1 and a7-g1 diagonals. What I did not like, though, was the positioning of my king. If Black were to be castled kingside, White could possibly regenerate a pawn attack, with g4. If my king did not move, then obviously I could not bring the rook into play. This leaves the possibility of bringing the king to the queenside, probably safe enough, but also losing time.

First, both sides continue their development, with 21 g2 c6 22 0-0, reaching the quiz position, and now it was time for me to decide what to do with the king.

22...0-0 (C) keeps the king away from the open queenside, but after 23 g4 hxg4 24 xg4 g7, followed by ...h8, Black has partially covered...
White's attack. White can, of course, try to continue the attack with 25 h5 \( \text{g8} \) 26 hxg6 \( \text{h4} \) 27 \( \text{g4} \) fxg6 28 \( \text{g5} \), and he is better. This is the sort of position that I was worried about, and decided to avoid.

So it is a simple king move, but where?

22...\( \text{f8} \)! (B) is best, and then defending with ...\( \text{g7} \).

Black has now gained a full tempo for manoeuvre when compared with ...\( \text{g7} \) and ...\( \text{h8} \), and is safe, with chances of an edge. If, for example, 23 \( \text{d1} \) \( \text{g7} \) 24 \( \text{e3} \) \( \text{xe3} \) 25 \( \text{xe3} \) \( \text{d8} \), and Black is happy, although at the moment it is too early to claim an edge.

My text move, 22...\( \text{d7} \)! (A), is bad, and it gets even worse when Black continues with the king manoeuvre to b7. It is not so much that the king’s final square is necessarily worse, but rather that Black has foregone two decent moves with other pieces. At the end of his plan, White ends up with a significant advantage.

After 23 \( \text{d1} \), Black could have played 23...\( \text{a8} \), still with equality, but instead continued wasting time with the king, with 23...\( \text{c8} \), and then 24 \( \text{h2} \) \( \text{b7} \)! (maybe 24...\( \text{d8} \)!, although White is now better). I had completely missed the force of 25 \( \text{b3} \) \( \text{xb3} \).

Now he tried 26 \( \text{c4} \)!, and it looked highly effective, but the quieter 26 \( \text{b2} \)!, with a positional grind, seems better in the long term, with 26...\( \text{a8} \) 27 \( \text{xb3} \) \( \text{a4} \) (otherwise c4 for White) 28 \( \text{g5} \) \( \text{xg5} \) 29 hxg5, and Black will have to work hard to hold the balance.

Play continued with 26...\( \text{xc4} \) 27 \( \text{xc4} \), and now Black’s king is exposed to the pieces.
I had to defend the b-pawn with 27...\textit{\texttt{b6}} for as long as possible, otherwise my position would collapse. I was hoping that maybe I had chances of scrambling for a draw. It was now White, rather than Black, who started to take the initiative on the long diagonal, with 28 \textit{\texttt{c3 d8}} (if 28...\textit{\texttt{b2?}}, then simply 29 \textit{\texttt{xb2}}).

This is a typical sort of frustration position for the attacker. There are many obvious choices to play for a win, but nothing quite seems to work, with the position fizzling out to a draw on best play. Wall goes for the apparently decisive final effort – and loses!

White must remember he is a pawn down, and so he must move quickly. 29 \textit{\texttt{d3??}} leads to tactical play, but soon ends up in a drawn endgame after 29...\textit{\texttt{b2}} 30 \textit{\texttt{xb2}} \textit{\texttt{xb2}} 31 \textit{\texttt{xsd5Bexd5}} 32 \textit{\texttt{bd3+ c7}} 33 \textit{\texttt{xc6+ dxc6}} 34 \textit{\texttt{xb2}}. Black cannot afford to lose the isolated d-pawn, but White is unable to force the pieces away. An opposite-coloured bishop endgame with rooks.

There is no obvious improvement, so this position seems at least playable for Black. Now 29 \textit{\texttt{xd5 exd5}} led to a critical position.

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

White can try 30 \textit{\texttt{xd5}}, and if 30...\textit{\texttt{b2??}} 31 \textit{\texttt{xb5!!}}. Entertaining visual chess. Instead, 30...\textit{\texttt{xd5}} 31 \textit{\texttt{xd5+ xd5}} 32 \textit{\texttt{wd5+ c8}} 33 \textit{\texttt{xf7 b2}} 34 \textit{\texttt{c4+ b7}} 35 \textit{\texttt{e4+ b8}} 36 \textit{\texttt{xb2+ xb2}} 37 \textit{\texttt{h3}}, and various assorted checking lines, leaves White under pressure, with only two pawns versus the bishop. Maybe White can still hold on, or maybe not, but it is difficult.

The best line is the ultra-positional 30 \textit{\texttt{wd3!!}}, which probably neither player would have considered over the board, ignoring Black's two isolated passed pawns. White's pieces are now far more centralized than Black's, and his extra kingside pawn is much more effective than Black's pawns, even though he is a pawn down. Black would be unable to keep both isolated pawns together, and when one drops, White would still keep the positional advantage. Black would suffer the problem of the isolated pawn, while White would
still be able to take advantage of his extra kingside pawn, with e6 and/or f5 pawn breaks.

Instead, Wall blundered with 30 \( \text{Qxd5?} \), and now 30...\( \text{Qxd5!} \) 31 \( \text{Qxd5 b2} \), winning for Black (and indeed 31...\( \text{Qxf2+} \) 32 \( \text{Qh3} \) \( \text{Qf3} \) is even quicker). The most likely explanation for White’s blunder, perhaps, was that he saw both of his captures on d5 as leading to a likely advantage for him after a double-exchange (indeed a triple-exchange), but missed that in playing the wrong move order, his opponent had the opportunity of an intermediate move. A common blunder, which we have seen many times in this volume. Here Wall loses the game.

After 32 \( \text{Qxb2} \) \( \text{Qxb2+} \) 33 \( \text{Qh3} \) \( \text{b1} \) \( \text{Qh2} \) \( \text{e1} \), White’s rook cannot move, and Black can capture the exchange at leisure, staying the exchange up. On 35 \( \text{b3+} \) \( \text{c7} \) 36 \( \text{d1} \) \( \text{f2+} \) 37 \( \text{h3} \) \( \text{xd5} \) 38 \( \text{xd5} \) \( \text{g1} \) I knew that I would be given a long string of checks, but I felt I would survive the perpetual and win.

So it proved, although naturally it took a long time for Black to take complete control. Play eventually finished with 39 \( \text{c4+} \) \( \text{b6} \) 40 \( \text{b3+} \) \( \text{a5} \) (40...\( \text{c5} \) is more efficient) 41 \( \text{c3+} \) \( \text{b5} \) 42 \( \text{d3+} \) \( \text{a5} \) 43 \( \text{d2+} \) \( \text{b4} \) 44 \( \text{d8+} \) \( \text{a4} \) 45 \( \text{d7+} \) \( \text{a3} \) 46 \( \text{d3+} \) \( \text{b2} \) 47 \( \text{e2+} \) \( \text{c3} \) 48 \( \text{f3+} \) \( \text{d4} \) 49 \( \text{c6} \) \( \text{f1+} \) 50 \( \text{h2} \) \( \text{e2+} \) 51 \( \text{h3} \) \( \text{g4+} \) 52 \( \text{h2} \) \( \text{e6} \) 53 \( \text{c2} \) \( \text{c4} \) 54 \( \text{f2+} \) \( \text{d5} \) 55 \( \text{f3+} \) \( \text{e6} \) 56 \( \text{b7} \) \( \text{a5} \) 57 \( \text{b1} \) \( \text{e7} \) 58 \( \text{b7+} \) \( \text{c7} \) 59 \( \text{a6} \) \( \text{b6} \) 60 \( \text{a8} \) \( \text{c5} \) 61 \( \text{h3} \) \( \text{g1} \) (now Black’s king finds breathing space on g7) 62 \( \text{f3} \) \( \text{f8} \) 63 \( \text{g4} \) \( \text{hxg4+} \) 64 \( \text{xf4} \) \( \text{f1+} \) 65 \( \text{h2} \) \( \text{e3} \) 0-1

Test 8.4
S.Nurmohamed-C.Crouch
Thames Valley League 2006

Following on from Test 3.1, this time the puzzle is to find the winning idea for my opponent. I have played dreadfully so far, and he should be able to find good chances of a substantial
advantage just with good and logical play. There might well be a forced win somewhere, though, without any chance of Black wriggling out.

Nurmohamed immediately played for a direct attack against my king, with 22 \( \texttt{\text{\text{\text{d4?!}}}} \) (A), and it looks extremely threatening, but Black was able to squeeze out with 22...\texttt{\text{\text{\text{a4!}}} 23 \texttt{\text{\text{\text{d6+ \texttt{\text{\text{f8, and now White has no time for a winning discovered attack, as White's bishop is threatened.}}}}}}} \)

After 24 \( \texttt{\text{\text{c5 \texttt{\text{c6}}} 25 \texttt{\text{e3 \texttt{\text{g8}}} Black has covered the immediate danger, and was even able to win, after some tense play.}}}} \)

We return to this later in Test 10.2. White is clearly not worse, but as play continued, any slight mistake by White could easily turn matters around.

Perhaps the easiest way of demonstrating how Black has gone wrong over the last few moves is by showing what is happening after the best move, 22 \( \texttt{\text{\text{g3}}} \) (B).

The queen and bishop are no longer tied down, allowing them to maintain maximum flexibility. Black's king is stuck in the centre, whereas on \( g8 \) rather than \( e8 \) the king is much safer. It is not just solely the question of the king.

What would finally decide after 22 \( \texttt{\text{g3}} \) is that Black cannot protect his \( g7 \)-pawn. If White invades there, the rest of Black's position crumbles. 22.g6 23 \( \texttt{\text{xb2 axb2} 24 \texttt{\text{e5, for example, takes complete control for White on the b2-h8 and b4-f8 diagonals, with the black king being stuck in the middle. Or 22...\texttt{\text{g8} 23 e5 \texttt{\text{d5} 24 \texttt{\text{\text{xh7, and White joins in on a different diagonal.}}}}} \)}} \)

Let us return to the main line, and
Why we Lose at Chess

the diagram after 25...\texttt{g8}.

Then he played 26 e5?, natural enough, but I had expected 26 \texttt{b5! a8} and now 27 e5, which is more accurate timing. White then doesn't have to worry about the bishop on c5.

Black has a couple of alternatives here, but neither holds the balance.

If 27...d5, the move I was thinking of, then 28 \texttt{f3 f5} 29 exf6 \texttt{x6}, but now 30 \texttt{c1!}, and Black is effectively in zugzwang. Or 27...g4 28 \texttt{g5 h5} 29 \texttt{e7!} (29 \texttt{xf7?!} is good for entertainment, but after 29...a6 30 \texttt{xh8 x5} 31 \texttt{g6 xf1 32 e7+ h8} 33 \texttt{h5+ h6} 34 \texttt{xf1 e4} \texttt{e4} Black holds) 29...xe5 30 f4 \texttt{d5} 31 fxe5 \texttt{xc5+} 32 \texttt{h1}, and White has a clearly winning advantage.

It could be argued that since White was winning anyway after either 22 \texttt{b4?!} or 22 \texttt{g3}, why should the annotator be criticizing either move? In the long run, Black is dead. The question is really one of practical aesthetics. The player with a winning advantage needs to convert it into a win as quickly and clearly as possible. If the attacker messes around, Black can mess around himself, muddying the waters. Then there might be chances of counterplay. In practical terms, Black would lose very quickly after 22 \texttt{g3}, and would have slight practical chances after 26 \texttt{b5}, if somehow White miscalculates, but in the game, with 26 e5?, the position was suddenly messy.
Test Nine

9.1 White to play

![Chessboard](image1)

A) 24 b5
B) 24 e2
C) Something else?

9.2 White to play

![Chessboard](image2)

A) 25 e5
B) 25 f1
C) Something else?

9.3 White to play

![Chessboard](image3)

A) 28 d3
B) 28 c4
C) Something else?

9.4 Black to play

![Chessboard](image4)

A) 25... xh1
B) 25... c2
C) Something else?
Why we Lose at Chess

Test 9.1
C.Crouch-J.Cox
London League 2006

There is plenty of sharp and unusual play in this opening, and inevitably both players make mistakes, especially given that we were playing an evening game in the London League, where time limits are quick. Quite possibly a deep theoretical analysis may pinpoint a suggested improvement in the opening part of the game. There was always a suspicion in this game, after all, that in a complicated line White was quite often in danger of ending up worse, and this should not happen. It is Black, not White, who has to work hard to equalize.

I do not wish to concentrate on Nimzo-Indian opening theory with much depth, trying to assess sub-variations in move A121, or whatever, on move 8 or 11 or 14. This book is concentrating far more on searching for any clear mistakes that players should be capable of avoiding over the board. The more interesting question, from our point of view, is not opening theory, but rather, what mistakes are made over the board, and how such mistakes can be eradicated.

We start with a Nimzo-Indian, with

1 d4 \(\text{\textit{d}}\)f6 2 c4 e6 3 \(\text{\textit{c}}\)c3 \(\text{\textit{b}}\)b4 4 e3 c5 5 \(\text{\textit{d}}\)d3 \(\text{\textit{x}}\)xc3+ 6 bxc3 d6 7 \(\text{\textit{e}}\)e2 e5 8 0-0 e4 9 \(\text{\textit{c}}\)c2 \(\text{\textit{e}}\)e6.

Cox was playing quickly, so I was sure that he had experience in this position. In contrast, this was new to me. Clearly he was deliberately provoking my d5 push, and I decided that here I should be provoked, in return setting up counterplay on e4.

So, 10 d5 \(\text{\textit{f}}\)f5, and here I immediately played 11 f3\(\text{?}\). My opponent suggested afterwards that White could effectively gain a tempo with 11 \(\text{\textit{g}}\)g3\(\text{?}\) \(\text{\textit{g}}\)g6 12 f3 \text{exf3} 13 gxf3. This would certainly be so if Black were to exchange on c2, but if he were to wait, he can try something different, maybe 13...\(\text{\textit{w}}\)a5\(\text{?}\).

In the game, Black played 11...\text{exf3}. My original intention was 12 \(\text{\textit{w}}\)xf5 fxe2 13 \(\text{\textit{w}}\)xe2, with a good bishop-pair – except that when I looked more closely, I started to wonder what I was going to do with the dark-squared bishop, and also how White could prevent Black from moving the knight to a strong square on e5. So I changed my mind, preferring to keep the pawn structure more flexible with 12 gxf3 \(\text{\textit{x}}\)xc2 13 \(\text{\textit{w}}\)xc2 \(\text{\textit{d}}\)bd7.

We have very close to an equal posi-
I like the extra pawn in the centre, but I am worried about the doubled isolated pawns.

I am not too worried about the slight exposure of White’s king, but I am not quite sure what to do with the bishop. I played 14 \texttt{g3}, which might or might not be fully accurate. I do not know. The computer suggests that 14 e4, 14 \texttt{b1} and 14 \texttt{b3} are also equal. Any of these might also be equally good, very slightly better, or very slightly worse. Probably, as we shall soon see, 14 e4 would lead to a transposition.

For myself, it hardly seems worthwhile examining extremely subtle differences when analysing afterwards. Most players will tend to gain more from looking for more basic mistakes, and trying if possible to cut down on similar types of error.

If I were to reach this position again, I suspect that I might well be thinking of 14 \texttt{b1}!? instead, forcing Black to consider what to do with his b-pawn. This is a reasonable possibility, not necessarily a clear improvement.

Black tried 14...g6, to cover any \texttt{f5} attack. Then 15 e4 \texttt{e7}. Of course there could be a transposition with 14 e4 \texttt{e7} 15 \texttt{g3} g6, and this in many ways looks the more natural way of playing it, but it would end up the same.

White now has an obvious way of taking the initiative with 16 f4. This seemed so obvious and natural a way of playing such a move, that I did not consider any alternatives. The 4½ pawn push in the centre looked good, provided I do not create too many extra weaknesses for my king.

A reality check suggests that, according to the computer, there are at least a dozen alternatives, probably at least equal, and in some cases even better. 16 \texttt{b1} is suggested as a slight improvement, forcing Black to decide what to do with his b-pawn. If 16...\texttt{b6}, then 17 a4!, and if 17...\texttt{xc4}?! 18 \texttt{b3} \texttt{b6} 19 a5, with advantage to White. Maybe at about the fourth attempt of analysing this position, this seems the best, with chances of keeping an edge. Backtracking a couple of moves, maybe Black could have developed more solidly with ...\texttt{c7}, rather than ...g6 and ...\texttt{e7}. Who knows?

Cox plays combatively, with 16...0-0-0!? There are several other choices, maybe castling on the other side, with 16...0-0.

Now there is an obvious possibility of the centre blowing up with a pawn sacrifice on e5. Or maybe White can
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hold the balance, perhaps only temporarily if he has a better occasion to break with e5.

I did not have to think about this position too hard. 17 e5! is a highly thematic central pawn sacrifice, in such lines as the Modern Benoni and the Four Pawns Attack in the King’s Indian. White gives up a pawn, winning Black’s d-pawn, but losing his e- and f-pawns, quickly bringing his bishop and rook into active play, and setting up a strong passed d-pawn. Quite often there is a question of timing in such pawn explosions. If you don’t sacrifice or gambit immediately, it is often best not to do so at all. I did not like the idea of Black restraining White’s e-pawn with ...de8 or ...fe8 or ...g4; and earlier, the only sensible continuation to my f4 push was an e5 push. So it has to be done immediately.

Several months later, I wondered whether I could have improved my game, by developing with 17 b1. The idea is that when Black too plays a quiet move, White’s rook is now on an active file, and he can play e5 with an extra attacking piece in play. This seems to make sense until one realizes that if Black can prevent or reduce the impact of e5, White would then be under pressure. Therefore 17...h5!, a useful move in the game as well. Whether White exchanges on h5, allowing Black the open g-file, or whether he allows the exchange on g3, White is under positional pressure. If he cannot find any good gambit play on e5, his e4-pawn is weak, once the knights have gone.

So again, White has to gambit immediately, or not at all.

Back to the sacrifice, and 17...dxe5 18 fxe5.

Now the captures on e5 seem far too dangerous, and I expected a knight move. Indeed, 18...xe5? gives White far too big an attack after 19 f4 e7 20 wa4. We see an example of the ‘4½ pawn attack’, the standard four pawn attack, but with a fifth doubled pawn on c3. This pawn covers the d4-square against the queen, making fewer escape routes from e5.
Here I was expecting 18...\(\text{\texttt{g4}}\), to which I planned to play 19 \(\text{\texttt{e4}}\) \(\text{\texttt{gxe5}}\) (19...\(\text{\texttt{dxe5}}\) 20 \(\text{\texttt{g5}}\) \(\text{\texttt{f6}}\) 21 \(\text{\texttt{xf6}}\) \(\text{\texttt{xf6}}\) 22 \(\text{\texttt{xf6}}\) transposes) 20 \(\text{\texttt{g5}}\) \(\text{\texttt{f6}}\) 21 \(\text{\texttt{xf6}}\) \(\text{\texttt{xf6}}\) \(\text{\texttt{gxf6}}\). I assumed this was going to be slightly better for White, although now it seems that it is only equal. For example, 22...\(\text{\texttt{h8}}\) 23 \(\text{\texttt{af1}}\) \(\text{\texttt{xf6}}\) 24 \(\text{\texttt{xf6}}\) \(\text{\texttt{f8}}\) 25 \(\text{\texttt{d6}}\) \(\text{\texttt{d8}}\) 26 \(\text{\texttt{xf8}}\) \(\text{\texttt{xf8}}\) 27 \(\text{\texttt{a4}}\) \(\text{\texttt{f3+}}\) 28 \(\text{\texttt{g2}}\) \(\text{\texttt{h4+}}\) 29 \(\text{\texttt{g1}}\), and Black would be advised to take the draw. 19 \(\text{\texttt{f4?!}}\) is also to be considered.

Instead, Cox went for counterattack with 18...\(\text{\texttt{h5?!}}\).

Now 19 \(\text{\texttt{xh5}}\) \(\text{\texttt{gxh5}}\) 20 \(\text{\texttt{f4}}\) \(\text{\texttt{xe5}}\) 21 \(\text{\texttt{xf5+}}\) \(\text{\texttt{d7}}\) 22 \(\text{\texttt{ae1}}\) is probably equal, for example, with 22...\(\text{\texttt{hg8+}}\) 23 \(\text{\texttt{h1}}\) \(\text{\texttt{w4}}\) 24 \(\text{\texttt{e4}}\) \(\text{\texttt{e6}}\) 25 \(\text{\texttt{xf6}}\) \(\text{\texttt{xf6}}\) 26 \(\text{\texttt{e2}}\). I chose the more aggressive idea, 19 \(\text{\texttt{e4!}}\).

White keeps a slight edge after 19...\(\text{\texttt{xex5}}\) 20 \(\text{\texttt{g5}}\) \(\text{\texttt{f6}}\) 21 \(\text{\texttt{xf6}}\). Black tried instead 19...\(\text{\texttt{xe5?!}}\), when he admitted afterwards that he had missed my next move, 20 \(\text{\texttt{g5!}}\).

This is the high point of my attack. I win the exchange because of the unstoppable knight threat on \(\text{\texttt{f7}}\). Also, take note of the position of the black queen, on an apparently open board.

The only way the queen can move is backwards, thanks in part to White’s doubled pawns. Black would, of course, welcome the chance of a queen check from \(\text{\texttt{g4}}\), but there is no way to attack that square, even in two or more moves. White’s pieces and pawns are well coordinated.

Cox thought for a long time, and decided that while the rook has to go, he needs to keep the extra pawn, with 20...\(\text{\texttt{f5}}\) 21 \(\text{\texttt{f7}}\) \(\text{\texttt{f6}}\) 22 \(\text{\texttt{xh8}}\) \(\text{\texttt{h8}}\).
We have just gone through a phase of sacrifice and counter-sacrifice, with the initiative swinging from one side to the other. White has sacrificed a pawn, in return obtaining good piece activity; Black has returned the exchange, eliminating White’s more attacking pieces. Now Black has the more effective piece and pawn formation, even though he is down in material. White is not under immediate attack on the kingside, but he has to be careful about what might happen in the future.

I played the natural developing move, $23\, \textbf{b1}$?, trying to create pressure on the queenside. I underestimated his reply, $23\ldots\textbf{a6}$!, when Black has covered all his queenside pieces, and threatens to take the critical c4-pawn, and with all likelihood, White’s open lines in the centre and kingside.

At the time, I felt no real option other than to block the c4-a6 diagonal with $24\, \textbf{b5}$ (A), which at least squeezes Black’s queen to the edge, but it looked far from convincing.

If at all possible, the defender needs to centralize, covering kingside, queenside and centre. Indeed, $24\, \textbf{e2}$! (B) is best. Black’s queen is on the edge, so White can create counterplay on the rest of the board. I was worried that Black was about to gain time by attacking the queen, with $24\ldots\textbf{h6}$, but $25\, \textbf{e1}$! covers the immediate threat. If $25\ldots\textbf{e8}$??, then obviously $26\, \textbf{xe8+}$.

White is fighting the pressure, not merely defending.

Instead, if $25\ldots\textbf{e4}$ $26\, \textbf{b3}$ (there are alternatives, probably ending up level) $26\ldots\textbf{b6}$ $27\, \textbf{a3}$ $\textbf{xc4}$ $28\, \textbf{xc4}$ $\textbf{xc4}$ $29\, \textbf{xa7}$ $\textbf{b8}$ $30\, \textbf{a4}$ $\textbf{b5}$ $31\, \textbf{f4+}$ $\textbf{b7}$ $32\, \textbf{b1}$ $\textbf{b6}$ $33\, \textbf{xe4}$ $\textbf{fxe4}$ $34\, \textbf{xb5}$ $\textbf{c8}$ $35\, \textbf{b3}$, with a likely draw.

Should we be disappointed that White cannot find an edge? Probably not. The position is starting off as finely balanced, and if both players keep the delicate balance, then the proper result should be a draw. It is not too difficult to appreciate that in my analysis later, I have tried several possible alternatives, either to keep an edge for White, or if not, then clear equality. This is the best line I have tried, and it keeps play simple.

Probably we should add that a move earlier (omitting $23\, \textbf{b1}$ $\textbf{a6}$), $23\, \textbf{e2}$!? is certainly a choice for White. Possibly Black could try $23\ldots\textbf{e5}$ $24\, \textbf{e3}$ $\textbf{b6}$?, followed by a later $\ldots\textbf{f4}$, with reasonable compensation for the exchange sacrifice.

We now return to the main line, and $24\, \textbf{b5}$?! $\textbf{e8}$.
It is starting to be difficult for White to coordinate his pieces, especially as Black is intending to play ...\textit{e}4. I decided it was time to set up a counter-exchange sacrifice with 25 \textit{f}2, and a possible \textit{x}c5+. Black played 25...\textit{hf}6?! , which is natural and logical enough, centralizing a knight on the edge.

Even so, inaccuracies are starting to creep in on both sides, in the last ten moves before the time control is reached.

25...\textit{e}4! would have been highly effective, taking control of the fifth rank, with an attack of the pawn on c4, a possibly nasty check on g4, and also an effective defence against \textit{f}4. The rook’s remit goes further after 26 \textit{x}c5+ \textit{xc}5 27 \textit{xc}5+ \textit{d}7 28 \textit{b}5+? (28 \textit{a}3 \textit{b}6 is better, but Black is better) 28...\textit{xb}5 29 \textit{xc}5 \textit{a}4, cutting open White’s pawns.

Then 26 \textit{f}4!? was a difficult decision, and, of course, time was getting short. The bishop is on a good diagonal, but it can also be threatened and kicked out.

The alternative is an immediate exchange sacrifice, with 26 \textit{x}c5+ \textit{xc}5 27 \textit{xc}5+ \textit{d}7! (rather than 27...\textit{b}8 28 \textit{f}4+ \textit{a}8 29 \textit{c}7, when White is at least equal, and quite likely somewhat better).

If now 28 \textit{f}4, we see a good reason why Black has delayed ...\textit{e}4. He plays 28...\textit{c}8, knocking out White’s queen and bishop attack, winning a doubled pawn. White can try instead 28 \textit{a}3, but he still has not got a genuine attack, and after 28...\textit{g}4 Black is better, with thoughts of ...\textit{e}3 or ...\textit{e}5. Before too long, White will notice the lack
of the g-pawn, whether in a middle-game, or, with the passed f-pawn coming through, the endgame.

After the text move, Black blocked off White's queenside attack by 26...b6, avoiding any sacrifice on c5. 26...\( \text{\&}e4 \) would have been too combative, and would lose after 27 \( \text{\&}e1 \) g5? 28 \( \text{\&}xe4 \) \( \text{\&}xe4 \) 29 \( \text{\&}xc5+ \) \( \text{\&}xc5 \) 30 \( \text{\&}xc5+ \) \( \text{\&}d7 \) 31 \( \text{\&}c7+ \) \( \text{\&}e8 \) 32 \( \text{\&}c8+ \) \( \text{\&}f7 \) 33 \( \text{\&}xf5+ \).

White played 27 \( \text{\&}g3 \), with the none-too-subtle thought of placing the queen in front on the diagonal, and trying to give mate.

I did not like the idea of giving up a few pawns with 27 \( \text{\&}e1 \) \( \text{\&}xe1+ \) 28 \( \text{\&}xe1 \) \( \text{\&}xa2 \) 29 \( \text{\&}e6 \) \( \text{\&}xc4 \) 30 \( \text{\&}c6+ \) \( \text{\&}d8 \). There might be a couple more checks, but then what? If, for example, 31 \( \text{\&}c7+ \) \( \text{\&}e8 \) 32 \( \text{\&}d6+ \) \( \text{\&}f8 \) 33 \( \text{\&}d6+ \) \( \text{\&}g7 \) 34 \( \text{\&}e7+ \) \( \text{\&}h6 \), and White runs out of checks. Also, if 31 d6 \( \text{\&}e8 \), and again the king escapes.

In the game, Black forces the removal of White's queen, with 27...\( \text{\&}e4 \), but where should the queen move to? This is Test 12.1

Test 9.2
C. Crouch-P. Gait
Hillingdon League 2006

As we saw in Test 4.2, my opponent had just missed a winning opportunity, which I only belatedly saw myself. We are now back into normal play, with 17 \( \text{\&}c2 \), and I was slightly better, in terms of technical chess analysis. The psychology of the game was highly against me, though, as I was ultra-nervous throughout the rest of the game, worried that every move I had to think about was a blunder, and that every move, good or bad, was on an eggshell. I was able to convince myself, though, that the first move was fine.

He played normally with 17...h6, then came a few reasonable moves, with 18 g4 \( \text{\&}g6 \) 19 g5 hxg5 20 \( \text{\&}xg5 \) \( \text{\&}h7 \) 21 \( \text{\&}xe4 \) \( \text{\&}f6 \). Clearly we are now in a phase of tactics. I have won a pawn, but it will take time to consolidate, given the openess of the centre, and the tension on the b1-h7 diagonal.
In my notes just after the game, I was critical of 22 f3, missing the idea of his next move. 22 hxg6! hxg6+ 23 fxe4 is certainly easier to play for White. Whether it is 'objectively' better, in the sense that it is the best outcome after the best moves by both sides, is not so clear.

Gait sacrificed the exchange with 22...exf3! 23 fxe4 e7, creating confusion in the position. I am material ahead, and I have the bigger pawn centre, but I now have problems with my minor pieces, with my knight being precariously pinned. It is possible too that one of White’s central pawns will drop, allowing Black to continue the counterplay elsewhere.

The position is extremely difficult to handle, and I recognized this at the time. My next move, 24 a1, seems correct, escaping any pins and checks on the light-squared diagonal, but my follow-up move was a mistake.

Instead, 24 f1 looks promising, but after 24...xd4 25 b4 xg5 26 xh7+ xh7 27 xd4, Black keeps in touch with an unexpected combination of fork and skewer, with 27...c5! 28 xc5 xe3, keeping the material balance. Not, of course, 29 d5?, allowing a fork with the other bishop with 29...xe4.

There is also another possible bishop fork, with 24 g1 xd4 25 b4 xg5 26 xh7+ xh7 27 xd4 xe3!, level. Clearly it is not a straightforward win after Black has given up his rook.

After 24...xg5, we have reached the test position. The next move ended up in the difference between an advantage and a quick loss.

I played 25 e5? (A), overlooking that after 25...f5, the geometry is again in favour of Black after 26 f1 xh3! 27 xg5 xh4 28 xh4 xh4. Nominaly, Black’s material advantage is slight (two bishops versus rook and pawn), but the two bishops are powerful, with no good way of combating them, and no doubt the passed g-pawn will eventually push through.

So I changed mid-stream with 26 xg5 xg5, when I am worse, but with still a chance of making a battle. My
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next move was a blunder, though, which forced me to resign quickly, as we'll see in Test 10.4.

Earlier, **25 \( \text{f1} \) (B) is much better, with a clear advantage for White after **25...\( \text{xd4} \) 26 \( \text{xg5} \) \( \text{xg5} \) 27 \( \text{xg5} \) \( \text{xc4} \) 28 e5! (better than the obvious **28 \( \text{d8}+ \)). Black has only a pawn in return for the exchange, and his bishop is ineffective, while White's major pieces, plus a possible advance with the h-pawn, create great problems.

Again, after my earlier big mistake, I got nervous, and made further mistakes and blunders.

**Test 9.3
C.Crouch-R.Granat
British League (4NCL) 2007

Continuing from Test 5.2, there followed some obvious development plans with the next couple of moves, with **20 \( \text{c1} \) c6 21 \( \text{hd1} \) \( \text{xb2} \) 22 \( \text{xb2} \).

His next move, **22...\( \text{b8} \), is again obvious, but perhaps not quite accurate, involving a slight loss of time. White's knight on d5 looks strong, but does not immediately threaten anything, and so there is no need to kick it out just now.

**22...b6! improves, with the idea of **23 \( \text{b7} \) (a more active square), and **23...\( \text{c5} \). If White were to try **23 \( \text{b4} \), hitting the c6-pawn, then after **23...\( \text{c5} \), Black has clearly gained time in comparison with the line in the game. This pawn move may at first look anti-positional, weakening the queenside pawn structure (especially the pawn on c6), but sometimes pawn pushes can create more than compensating strengths. Black's king and two knights work well together, with the help of the two pawns covering squares on the fourth rank.

In the game, White had to move the knight, **23 \( \text{b4} \), and Black played the useful but less aggressive **23...\( \text{b6} \).

Looking on the computer afterwards, I felt slightly mystified that White is given an edge here, whereas earlier on Black is given the edge. Maybe the position is in the end about equal, although over the board I was starting to get worried, as his knights are moving to good and dangerous squares, notably with **23...\( \text{a4}+ \). Black still, of course, has his passed pawn, a worry if we reach an endgame. I became over-cautious over the next few moves, and this affected a critical choice a few moves on.

We go quickly towards the test position, with **24 \( \text{c2} \) \( \text{c7} \) 25 \( \text{d3} \) \( \text{bc4} \) 26 \( \text{a4} \) \( \text{b6} \) and now **27 \( \text{b2} \), so that the
knight covers both a4 and c4.

Then 27...d5. I was perhaps too highly concerned with the idea of Black being able to reach b4 with a knight, so I tried to cover with 28 d3? (A), with the hope perhaps that he would finish with a draw, with 28...b6 29 b2.

He was more than happy, though, to try to play for a win with 28...b6!, with his knights and pawns coordinating well for both attack and defence. We shall examine the rest of the game later in Test 13.3.

28 c4! (B) would have been much better, even giving chances of a slight edge for White. It is well known that a pair of bishops will often work better together than bishop and knight. In the game, for example, White would have enjoyed having the bishop-pair, covering squares of both colours (imagine a bishop on b2, for example, rather than a knight). What is often less fully examined is the knight-pair. Sometimes it can be useful for the knights that between them they can press against squares of both colours, as in the rest of the game. The intention for White here should have been to exchange a pair of knights.

If now, for example, 28...xc4 29 xc4, the bishop has good play, whereas Black’s knight accomplishes little. Black might try instead 28...b4+ 29 b2 b6 30 xa5 bx a5 31 c4 xd1 32 xd1 e7, but he has lost coordination with his queenside pawns, and White has the better minor piece. White in fact has a slight edge, because of Black’s loss of time on move 22.

There are, of course, possible alternatives for Black, but it is not easy to find quick equality.

At the time, I asked myself, “Why did I reject my simple and direct move? Partly because his knight on a5 was so much on a limb that it looked crazy to try to exchange it. But his knight is useful in that White always needs to cover the b3- and c4-squares. Exchange that knight, use the light-squared bishop again, and White can start becoming active. Or at the very least he is not hoping for repetition.”
Why we Lose at Chess

Test 9.4
R.Randall-C.Crouch
London League 2006

I was still feeling very unwell, slightly less than two years after my stroke. I needed both physical exercise and mental stimulation to try to bring myself back to life.

For the London League matches that year, I generally walked three miles to Edgware to catch some exercise, took a bus into town and then walked a further mile or so to the British Museum. On the bus, I would catch up on some Sudoku puzzles. The bus journey from Edgware to Baker Street was about the right length of time to complete the exercise, although occasionally I would make a mistake, based on an incorrect assumption. This, of course, was frustrating.

On that day, I noticed I could not concentrate on the puzzle, suggesting perhaps that I was unlikely to be on form in my chess that evening. I am reasonably happy with my early moves, but sure enough I made a couple of ridiculous blunders later on.

Play started with 1 e4 c5 2 d4 cxd4 3 cxd4 f6 4 d6 c6 5 c3 d6 6 g4 h6 7 h4 a6 8 g2 g6 9 g5 hXg5 10 xg5 e7 11 d2 bd7 12 0-0 e5 13 b3 b5 14 f3 b7 15 b1 b4 16 e2 a5 17 h3 a6, when Black was doing fine, though I have yet to prove an advantage.

White played 18 c3?, a common positional error – and I am sure I have done this myself many times. Black is intending to rush his queenside pawns quickly, and that can indeed be frightening. White has to remember that Black is not thinking of promoting his pawns, but rather he is aiming for pawn-versus-pawn contact in front of the king, aiming to open up lines. Unfortunately, White’s pawn push accelerates the battle, in favour of Black.

18...xd7+! would have been better,

and if 18...xd7? 19 xf6 xf6 20 c5, winning the exchange, but 18...xd7 19 hgl is about equal.

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I had the luxury of setting up a minor piece sacrifice in order to break up White’s centre pawns, with 18...a4 19 \( \text{bxc1} \text{xe4} 20 \text{fxe4} \text{xe4+} 21 \text{a1} \text{c5}. \)

Black’s attack is massive. 22 \( \text{cxb4} \) is the only move. Instead, 22 \( \text{xe7} \text{b3+} 23 \text{xb3} \text{axb3} 24 \text{a3} \text{a8} \) would have forced mate on the a-file. The problem of White’s c3 push is not just that Black has opened up the \( ...\text{b4xc3} \) pawn exchange, although in some cases it might have proved useful. The much bigger problem is that White has badly weakened his b3-square, allowing potentially winning tactics with \( ...\text{b3+}. \)

So I continued with 22...\( \text{b3+} 23 \text{xb3} \text{axb3} 24 \text{a3} \text{a8} \), with a mating threat on a3, and also the threat of winning the rook on h1. Then White has to play 25 \( \text{c1}. \)

My original intention was naturally to capture the rook, 25...\( \text{xh1} \) (A), with thoughts of a significant plus. But my eyes were dim, and I could only see with half of one eye, and occasionally do not ‘see’ things in my mind. Probably the biggest single problem for me when starting to resume playing chess after my stroke was that I was unable to see the whole board, both visually and metaphorically. Occasionally I saw phantoms, thinking maybe that one or two of my pieces or pawns were on different squares, rather than where they were actually at. I could not see the whole board, and because of restrictions of my vision, I could not see the bottom right-hand square. I had to rely on memory.

My biggest blind spot was on the bottom right-hand corner, and here of course my queen on a8 was absolutely critical to my calculations. In earlier years, I would have been able to see the position as a whole. In 2006, though, all I could do was remember that my queen was on a8, simultaneously cov-
Why we Lose at Chess

... ering both the h1-square and the a-file.
It was difficult at the time to cover both
the long diagonal plus a-file, as well as
what was going on in the rest of the
board. Indeed, I was unable to visualize
the whole board. I could see part of the
board, and such visualization is, of
course, extremely important for chess
players. I was unable as yet to find
ways to visualize and see different
parts of the board, but later I was able
to learn how to improve on this.

What I ‘saw’ was 25... \( \text{txh1} \) 26 \( \text{wc8+} \)
\( \text{xc8} \) 27 \( \text{xc8+} \) \( \text{d8} \) 28 \( \text{xd8} \), mate.
Except this is a complete illusion. He
cannot move his rook to c8. He can
move his queen, \( \text{wc1-c8} \), but he cannot
move the rook as well, \( \text{c1-c8} \), in a sin­
gle move. The queen and rook are not
doubled on the c-file. Logically this is
absurd, since the queen is firmly an­
chored on c1, to protect the sacrifice on
a3, and there is no rook coverage on
the c-file, just behind the queen.

Maybe for some readers this might
at first be of relevance only to partially-
sighted players. Try though to think of
a complicated combination, when you
have to think of possibilities half a
dozen moves in advance, when some of
the pieces on either side have moved
on, and other pieces and pawns have
disappeared. The player would not be
able to see the position in advance, as
the pieces are not yet there. What is
important is to try to ‘visualize’, to
imagine with clarity what the position
is a few moves along the line.

My problem with my eyesight was
certainly a significant problem in this
game, but ultimately the decisive prob­
lem is visualization, and this was some­
thing I clearly had to work hard on.

I played 25... \( \text{c2??} \) (B), inexplicable,
until you know the full thought proc­
ess. I felt I had to cover the c-file, but
this was irrelevant and wasted pre­
cious time.

In the game, White played 26 \( \text{d2} \),
with advantage, and my bishop on c2
was not even very effective. Alas, there
were blunders on both sides before
White later won. We return to the
game later in Test 13.1.

The natural 25... \( \text{hxh1} \), as noted, is
good, while preparing this with 25... \( \text{f6} \)
(C) 26 \( \text{e3} \) \( \text{hxh1} \) 27 \( \text{h1} \) d5 might
even be fractionally better (avoiding
25... \( \text{hxh1} \) 26 \( \text{xe7}!?)\).
Test Ten

10.1 Black to play

A) 25...g6
B) 25...d7
C) Something else?

10.2 Black to play

A) 26...g4
B) 26...d5
C) Something else?

10.3 Black to play

A) 26...g5
B) 26...d7
C) Something else?

10.4 White to play

A) 27 g4
B) 27 g3
C) Something else?
Why we Lose at Chess

Test 10.1
C.Morris-C.Crouch
British League (4NCL) 2006

As we observed in Test 6.1, White is clearly better, Black having queenside weaknesses. He tried 23 \texttt{Ae3}?!. This keeps an edge but I was more anxious at the time about 23 e6?!: for example, 23...\texttt{Ae7} 24 \texttt{Axf7+ Axf7} 25 h4 g6 26 \texttt{Axg7 Axd7} 27 \texttt{Axc3}. It is not quite as impressive as it earlier looked, though, and White only has a slight edge.

Maybe there is another improvement? 23 \texttt{Ah4}! looks better.

It might seem anti-positional at first, placing both knights on the edges, but the knights both threaten to move into the centre. If Black decides later that he has to play ...b5, then the two knights on c5 and f5 will be mighty. Black can try 23...g6, but after 24 f4, White is starting a kingside pawn roller. White is much better.

I was still under pressure in the game, and eventually hit on the plan of 23...\texttt{Ae7}! 24 \texttt{Ah4 Ac8}!, covering the f5-square. Black would not, of course, have had the time to defend in this way if White had tried 23 \texttt{Ah4} a move earlier.

White played 25 \texttt{f4} (not 25 \texttt{Axc6?? Ad7}), and on my next move, I quickly undid my previous defensive play.

\texttt{25...g6? (A)} was a serious concession, and should only have been played if absolutely necessary. Before too long, I was being ground down, after 26 \texttt{Ab3 b5} 27 \texttt{Ac5 Ac7} 28 \texttt{Af3 Ah7} 29 f5 gxf5 30 \texttt{Ab3}. There were a couple of twists to follow, though, which we shall see later in Test 14.1.
Black should earlier have played 25...d7! (B), instead.

Somehow he has unravelled his pieces after an extremely unpromising start. Just an extra half-tempo, a logical but slightly lazy move by the opponent, can sometimes make a big difference.

Play might continue with 26 f5. Then Black can try active counterplay with 26...c5 27 c3 c7 (27...cxd4 28 xd5) 28 e2 c4 (28...cxd4 29 xd4 b5 30 h3 with a slight edge for White) 29 g3, and White’s kingside pawn push is more effective than Black’s queenside pawn push. Black’s king is in danger after a sacrifice on g5 after, for example, 29...e8 30 f6 g5 31 f3.

26...c8! is a tighter defence, with the hope that if White’s kingside initiative can eventually be slowed down, Black can at some stage set up counterplay with ...c5. Black is obviously not better, but it is not so clear that he is substantially worse. There is a possible draw by repetition after 27 c3 c7 28 a4 a8, but White could still try for more.

This is a difficult line and Black still has to defend carefully, but the alternative is the danger of a positional loss.

Test 10.2
S Nurmohamed-C.Crouch
Thames Valley League 2006

The good news from Test 8.4 is that now I have a reasonable position, having been in severe trouble. Over the board, I felt I had reasonable chances, especially if he made any further slips in a complicated position. The computer analysis suggests that of the two main lines for Black (26...d5 and 26...g4, both hitting the queen on e3), one is equal after best, and complicated play, while the other is also complicated but there is a win for White. In a quick time limit, I would not be expected to calculate the critical positions in depth. It would always be a case of positional sense, instinct, and about as much as you could analyse given the context of the ticking clock.
So which is better? I concentrated on thinking of where the best counter-attacking and defensive move for the knight is. I felt at the time that 26...\(\texttt{g}4?!\) (A) looked best, with the aim of taking White’s bishop on c5.

The alternative was 26...\(\texttt{d}5!\) (B), aiming to take the knight to one of the four central squares a move earlier. This seems to be a draw. I was almost certainly worried about 27 \(\texttt{g}5\) g6 28 \(\texttt{e}4!\), and it looks like Black’s king will be swallowed after the central knight has gone.

There are two saving resources for Black, ending up as a draw. Either 28...h6 29 \(\texttt{x}d5\) hxg5 30 \(\texttt{x}c6\) \(\texttt{x}e5!\), and Black has time to give a perpetual with \(\texttt{x}h2+\). Or 28...\(\texttt{x}c5\) 29 \(\texttt{x}d5\), seemingly terminal, but Black holds with the help of a couple of pins, with 29...f6! 30 \(\texttt{xf}6\) \(\texttt{xd}6\) 31 \(\texttt{c}1\) \(\texttt{f}8\) 32 \(\texttt{xf}8+\) \(\texttt{xf}8\) 33 \(\texttt{x}c8+\) \(\texttt{g}7\) 34 \(\texttt{h}8\) \(\texttt{h}8\) 35 \(\texttt{b}7\) \(\texttt{x}e5\) 36 \(\texttt{c}8\) \(\texttt{g}7\) 37 \(\texttt{x}d7\) \(\texttt{f}6\), ending up with a quiet draw in an opposite-coloured bishop ending.

27...f6 is another possibility, with less bite for Black than in the similar set-up in the main line with ...\(\texttt{g}4\). There is a quick draw after 28 \(\texttt{h}5\) g6 29 \(\texttt{x}g6\) \(\texttt{xc}5\) 30 \(\texttt{e}8\) \(\texttt{g}7!\), forcing a perpetual after 31 \(\texttt{f}7+\) \(\texttt{h}6\) 32 \(\texttt{h}5+.\) White could also try 30 \(\texttt{h}6!\) (threatening \(\texttt{f}7\) mate), and then 30...\(\texttt{xd}6\) 31 exd6 hxg6 32 \(\texttt{x}g6+\) \(\texttt{f}8\) with unclear play, with queen and pawn versus three minor pieces. My instinct is to favour Black slightly, as White does not have much ammunition to favour the queen. The perpetual would seem preferable.

26...\(\texttt{d}5\) therefore gives three ways of maintaining the balance, which would clearly have been progress for me after my poor opening.

We now consider the game’s 26...\(\texttt{g}4?!\), ambitious but not quite as steady. Then there is forced play with 27 \(\texttt{g}5\) f6.

Now Nurmohamed aimed for a tactical flourish with 28 \(\texttt{h}5?\) g6 29 \(\texttt{x}g6\), but I had seen this before playing ...\(\texttt{g}4\).
Sometimes, especially in time trouble, it is easier to envisage tactics on either side, rather than to consider quiet positional chess. Here 28 \( \text{wxg4} \) \( \text{wxc5} \) 29 \( \text{e8}! \) gives White a clear advantage. Then 29...\( \text{we7} \) 30 \( \text{xf6+} \) \( \text{f8} \) 31 \( \text{h7+} \) \( \text{g8} \), with several ways of keeping the upper hand, for example, 32 \( \text{we4} \).

I managed to escape, with 29...\( \text{xe5} \), covering the f7-square.

White could still force a draw with 30 \( \text{e4} \) \( \text{wxc5} \) 31 \( \text{we8+} \) \( \text{g7} \) 32 \( \text{we7+} \) \( \text{g8} \) 33 \( \text{we8+} \), but he was still aiming to force a win. There is also a more imaginative draw after 30 \( \text{xh7+!} \) \( \text{g7} \) (30...\( \text{xh7?} \) 31 \( \text{we8+} \) \( \text{g7} \) 32 \( \text{f5+!} \) exf5 33 \( \text{f8+} \) \( \text{g8} \) 34 \( \text{h6} \) mate) 31 \( \text{e8+} \) \( \text{xe8} \) 32 \( \text{we8} \) \( \text{xc5} \) 33 \( \text{g8+} \) \( \text{h6} \) 34 \( \text{h8} \) \( \text{f7} \) (34...f5!?) 35 \( \text{g8} \) \( \text{e5} \), which would have been on just about the edge of my thought processes.

Instead he tried 30 \( \text{f7+} \) \( \text{g7} \) 31 \( \text{e3} \), playable but more complicated. It is now White who has to find a way of holding the draw after 31...\( \text{h6}! \), as seen well in advance.

All Black’s pieces around his king are suddenly extremely well covered. And yes, I played much better in the second half of the game than in the first half.

White lost co-ordination after 32 \( \text{e8+?} \) \( \text{f8} \) 33 \( \text{g6} \) \( \text{e7} \) 34 \( \text{g7} \) \( \text{b7} \), adjourned but White resigned before the resumption, (0-1).

Instead, he could still have kept a draw with 32 \( \text{d1!} \) (protection for the knight) 32...\( \text{b7} \) 33 \( \text{xh6+} \) \( \text{xh6} \) 34 \( \text{e8+} \) \( \text{h7} \) 35 \( \text{xf6+} \) \( \text{g7} \) 36 \( \text{e8+} \) \( \text{h7} \) 37 \( \text{f6+} \).

**Test 10.3**

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

As soon as I felt I had made myself comfortably equal, as we saw towards the end of Test 6.4, I made a comfortable but lazy move, and found myself worse. Sometimes it is difficult to readjust when a player has moved from being level to being worse. It is difficult
to work out whether a player should then aim for careful equality, or whether it is possible to play for more. Here I got it wrong.

Perhaps the tightest plan for both sides is a quick repetition of moves with 26...\textit{\textbf{d7}} (B) 27 \textit{\textbf{h3 \textcolor{white}{c6} 28 \textcolor{white}{g2 \textbf{d7}}. This, over the board, would have been an unexpected finish, but it is also logical enough. White needs to keep the bishop on the line of the queen, while Black wants to escape from the bishop.

There are other examples of to-ing and fro-ing in this type of closed position, and another repetition would be 27 \textit{\textbf{e3 \textbf{g5} 28 \textbf{f4 \textit{\textbf{e4} 29 \textbf{c1} (29 \textbf{xe4?! \textbf{xe4 favours Black) 29...\textit{\textbf{c6} 30 \textit{\textbf{f1 f5} 31 \textit{\textbf{h3 \textbf{g5} 32 \textbf{g2} (32 \textbf{xf5? \textbf{xe3 wins material for Black) 32...\textbf{g5.}

I wanted to block out Black's bishop, with 26...\textbf{g5?} (A), but in the geometry of chess, a knight cannot simultaneously defend both the light squares and the dark squares, and White was able to take over with 27 \textit{\textbf{f4}! If now the queens get exchanged, Black's d5-

After 29 \textit{\textbf{f5}, there was a quick
simplification with $29...\text{d}2+ 30 \text{xd}2 \text{xf}5 31 \text{f}4$, and the prospect of further simplification. The trouble is that the backward pawn on d5 will continue to be weak, before simplification, and perhaps even more dangerously, after simplification.

Finally, we find $31...\text{xe}1+ 32 \text{xe}1 \text{xe}1+ 33 \text{xe}1 \text{xe}1+ 34 \text{xe}1 \text{e}4 35 \text{xe}4 \text{xe}4 36 \text{e}6+ \text{f}8 37 \text{xc}4 \text{d}6$, and Black is a clear pawn down) $33 \text{d}7 \text{xe}1+ 34 \text{xe}1 \text{e}4 35 \text{d}1 \text{f}5 36 \text{e}6 \text{c}6$, when Black already has problems on the light squares, and White can speed up his simplifying attack with $37 \text{xd}5 \text{xd}5 38 \text{xe}1 \text{xe}1+ 39 \text{xe}1 \text{wh}5 40 \text{e}8+ \text{h}7 41 \text{g}2!$, with a nasty little zugzwang ($41...\text{g}6 42 \text{e}7$).

Or $31...\text{c}6 32 \text{h}3 \text{g}5 33 \text{xe}7 \text{xe}7 34 \text{e}1$, which again leaves White clearly on top. The knight in the corner has still not developed.

Likewise, $31...\text{d}7 32 \text{xe}7! (32 \text{h}3 \text{xe}1+ 33 \text{xe}1 \text{xa}4 34 \text{e}6+ \text{f}7 35 \text{xd}5 \text{xd}5 36 \text{xd}5 \text{g}5 37 \text{e}7+ \text{h}7 38 \text{e}2$ is not so clear) $32...\text{xe}7 33 \text{e}1 \text{xe}1+ 34 \text{xe}1 \text{f}7 35 \text{h}3 \text{f}5 36 \text{g}6$, and White is heading for a win.

I belatedly appreciated that Black was in serious trouble. Quiet play, I decided, was losing. If, for example, $31...\text{f}7 32 \text{h}3 \text{g}5$ (or $32...\text{xe}1+ 33 \text{xe}1 \text{xe}1+ 34 \text{xe}1 \text{e}4 35 \text{xe}4 \text{xe}4 36 \text{e}6+ \text{f}8 37 \text{xc}4 \text{d}6$, and Black is a clear pawn down) $33 \text{d}7 \text{xe}1+ 34 \text{xe}1 \text{e}4 35 \text{d}1 \text{f}5 36 \text{e}6 \text{c}6$, when Black already has problems on the light squares, and White can speed up his simplifying attack with $37 \text{xd}5 \text{xd}5 38 \text{xe}1 \text{xe}1+ 39 \text{xe}1 \text{wh}5 40 \text{e}8+ \text{h}7 41 \text{g}2!$, with a nasty little zugzwang ($41...\text{g}6 42 \text{e}7$).

My pawn structure was even worse than before, but at least my pieces were reasonably active, and I was hop-
ing that I could squeeze a draw. This indeed happened after 35 \( \text{xe1? xe1+} \) 36 \( \text{xe1 xf7} \) (now Black can hold) 37 \( \text{f3 f5} \) 38 \( \text{e2 e6} \) 39 \( \text{d2 f5} \) 40 \( \text{e2 c6} \) (maybe 40...\( \text{e6} \) and offer a draw?) 41 \( \text{g4 b1+} \) 42 \( \text{g2 e4+} \) 43 \( \text{xe4 dxe4} \) 44 \( \text{e2 d5} \) 45 \( \text{h3 f5} \) 46 \( \text{h4 g6} \) 47 \( \text{h5+ f6} \) 48 \( \text{e8 e7} \) 49 \( \text{g6 f6} \) 50 \( \text{e8 e7} \) 51 \( \text{g6 f6} \) \( \frac{1}{2}-\frac{1}{2} \). White had simplified a little too far.

Instead, 35 \( \text{f4!} \) is winning for White, as my opponent noted after the game.

The queen threatens to invade with \( \text{d6} \), chewing up the weak b6-pawn. If then 35...f5, the timing is right for 36 \( \text{e1 xe1+} \) 37 \( \text{xe1 e6+} \) 38 \( \text{d2} \), and White has a classic good bishop versus bad bishop win.

35...\( \text{c2} \) would be an attempt to counterattack, but White can, of course, grab the pawn with 36 \( \text{xe6} \). Black runs out of play after 36...\( \text{f7} \) (36...\( \text{xb2} \) 37 \( \text{g6+} \) 37 \( \text{c1 e2} \) 38 \( \text{xc2 xc2} \) 39 \( \text{b1} \), and Black's rook gets trapped after 39...\( \text{c6} \) 40 \( \text{f3 e6} \) 41 \( \text{d2 d3} \) 42 \( \text{e1 d3} \) 43 \( \text{e2} \). Lauterbach should certainly have won this game.

Chess is an absorbing game, and while I was feeling niggling pain after falling down a long set of stairs at the hotel, I was still able to play a reasonable game of chess, not having, for example, a losing position after the first dozen moves. White, however, played better than me.

**Test 10.4**

C. Crouch-P. Gait

Hillingdon League 2006

I have mercifully made very few one-move blunders, where I make a move with a piece and he just takes it, or I miss that he was attacking my piece. Perhaps one of my more memorable, or forgettable of my games, was in a quickplay at Richmond a few years back, when playing against Rasa Noekieviciute. I moved my king to an adjoining file, and immediately she stopped the clocks, and she went up to the arbiter. I simply could not begin to understand what was going on. It was a few minutes later, when the arbiter had arrived, that I saw what the problem was. I had moved my king into check, along a file, and I could not see the gap between her rook and my king. This was a bizarre finish.

It was not just a question of my very poor eyesight at the time, but rather
that my brain was clearly not in full focus on chess. Young children may occasionally try to move a bishop or queen on a diagonal, and may try to switch from a light square to a dark square, or vice versa. I was making a similar mistake with the rook, seeing her rook moving from the c-file to the b-file.

The end result was a draw, after a time penalty for my illegal move. I was amazed that I had got away with it, thinking that if I make a mistake, she should be allowed to take my piece in a quickplay finish. Apparently though the arbiter was correct. This was a quickplay finish, not an actual blitz game.

Back to the Gait game. Not a one-move blunder, but a two-move blunder.

I tried 27 \textit{g4}? (A), seeing my opponent’s move, but missing that after the exchange he has a win the following move, with 27...\textit{xg4} 28 \textit{hxg4} \textit{c2}, trapping the rook. White resigned (0-1).

White could have fought longer with 27 \textit{g3} (B) 27...\textit{h5} 28 \textit{b1} \textit{h6}, but one can feel certain that Black would eventually win. Black’s bishop-pair is extremely strong.
Test Eleven

11.1 White to play

A) 27 €xh6
B) 27 $xa8
C) Something else?

11.2 White to play

A) 27 fxg6
B) 27 $xh6
C) Something else?

11.3 Black to play

A) 27...e5
B) 27...g5
C) Something else?

11.4 Black to play

A) 27...c2
B) 27...h5
C) Something else?
Test 11.1
C.Crouch-J.McKenna
London Open 2006

There are several other ways of playing the position for a comfortable win for White, but not the casual 27 \( \text{Qxc6?} \) (C) 27...\( \text{Qxc6} \) 28 \( \text{Qxc6} \) \( \text{Qxe3} \) 29 fxe3 \( \text{Wg3} \), for example, allowing Black too much counterplay. After 30 \( \text{Qe7} \), there is a perpetual with 30...\( \text{We1+} \) 31 \( \text{Qh2} \) \( \text{Qg4+} \) 32 h\( \text{xg4} \) \( \text{Wh4+} \) 33 \( \text{Qg1} \) \( \text{We1+} \) 34 \( \text{Qh2} \).

The other capture on c6 is also unclear after 27 \( \text{Qxc6} \) (C) 27...\( \text{Qxe3} \) 28 fxe3 \( \text{Qxc6} \) 29 \( \text{Qxc6} \) \( \text{Wg3} \). It is possible that one or two lines for White might still keep some sort of edge after delicate manoeuvring, but White should be aiming for something simpler and clearer.

All this suggests 27 \( \text{Cc7!} \) (C), blocking Black’s diagonal to the kingside.

Black’s rook and knight have some activity, but Black’s queen and bishop now do nothing. With care, White should win comfortably.

The next question is why I blundered with 27 \( \text{Qxa8??} \) (B). Part of this was that I would have been frustrated by not finding anything to set up a win.
with an immediate capture on c6, and decided that it was time to eliminate the bishop on a8. Partly too I would have lost concentration. I have a winning position, my opponent is clearly on the lower half of the board, so why should I use up energy in such an easy position? The trouble is that an easily winning position plus lack of concentration adds up to the loss of grading points.

I played my sacrifice, and then after 27...\(\texttt{\#xa8}\) I suddenly noticed that not only have I given up the exchange, but I have allowed Black to control the a-file.

All this broke my equanimity. I set up a couple of passed pawns with 28 \(\texttt{\#xc6 \#xe3 29 \#xe3 \#xe3 30 \#xa8 \#xd4}\), but Black too had strong passed pawns, and after another bad move, which we’ll see in Test 12.4, I was losing.

Instead, if I could have found a way of regaining my composure, I would still have had chances of keeping a slight edge with 28 \(\texttt{\#xc3!}\).

I had still clearly not recovered from my stroke, and was still making many serious blunders, mainly through poor vision, both metaphorically and literally. Here I forgot that Black could attack on the a-file once White’s rook was no longer on a7.

**Test 11.2**

C.Crouch-D.Okike
Thames Valley League 2007

White to play. It is not difficult to work out that this was a Nimzo-Indian, with the well-known doubled c-pawns. Those pawns can at times end up as weak, but here it is not so clear that Black can take any advantage of the slight positional defect. On the contrary, White is better, with more space for his pieces, and has excellent chances of attack on the kingside, Black’s pieces being constrained on the last two ranks.

The next few moves run smoothly, beginning 20 \(\texttt{\#g5 f6 21 \#e3}\), forcing a pawn to advance in front of the king,
setting up a new weakness. The problem for Black is not so much the weakness of g6 itself, but more the threat of a sacrifice on h6, forcing Black’s king into extremely open play.

He tried, maybe with great anxiety, 21\ldots g5, covering the g6-square, but also an open invitation for White to sacrifice, or a dangerous pawn exchange with h4. The computer explores the idea of defending with 21...\texttt{c8}, but after 22 \texttt{f3 f8} 23 g3 w7 24 w4 w8, there is a sacrifice on a different square with 25 xg7+ xg7 26 xh6. White ties things up after, for example, 26...w6 27 e3+ g8 28 h8+ f7 29 xh6 w8 30 h7+ f8 31 h8.

For the next few moves, White quietly undermines Black’s kingside with 22 h4 xg8 23 f3 g6 24 h3 g7.

![Diagram]

Now I played 25 e2. This was something of a waiting move, aiming for a better diagonal for the bishop when the storm arrives. There was a possibility of combinative play with 25 hxg5 hxg5 26 xh6 xh6 27 xg5 g6, but I could not find any further breakthrough. With rooks on the board (28 xxe7 xg4 29 xdx6 g6), or with the rooks off (28 xh7+ g8 29 xxe7 xxe7 30 xxe7 xg4 31 xdx6 g6 32 c7 a6, and Black is better), Black can at least hold. White’s bishop-pair does not cooperate. This was a disappointment for me, as I had pressed my attack as far as I could.

I played the bishop move, aiming for a later g4, but now my e-pawn was slightly weakened. Maybe instead 25 h1?, as suggested by the computer. The computer then suggests holding moves, such as h2 or h2, waiting for the opponent to create a weakness. A more constructive plan would perhaps be hxg5 followed by h3, when at least we can see what White is aiming for.

In the game, Black should have tried 25...h8!, avoiding any unnecessary concessions. White can try for an edge with 26 w6 xxe6 27 dxe6, but there is no great chance of certainty for an edge in over-the-board play. A steadier line might be 26 h1 w8 27 d3, still perhaps keeping an edge, but White is circling around with his pieces.

Over the last few moves, White has never quite been able to make his breakthrough. What is surprising is that it is Black who opens up the position, with 25...f5 26 exf5 xf6.

There are tactics for both sides, with White’s queen and rook being threatened, and Black’s rook and two of the pawns in front of his king are about to be stripped away. It is now time for
Why we Lose at Chess

White to calculate with clarity. Unfortunately I did not do this well.

27 \( \mathbf{Axh6!} \) (B) is straightforward, making sure that White can get at the black king without any pawn obstructions. 27...\( \mathbf{Axg4} \) 28 \( \mathbf{Axg6+} \) \( \mathbf{Af7} \) 29 \( \mathbf{Axg4} \) drops White's queen, but he has a rook, bishop and two pawns in return, more than sufficient compensation, especially as White keeps a serious attack against the king. Indeed, 29...\( \mathbf{Ag8} \) 30 \( \mathbf{hxg5} \) \( \mathbf{Axg6} \) 31 \( \mathbf{Ah7+} \) \( \mathbf{Ag7} \) 32 \( \mathbf{Axg7+} \) \( \mathbf{Axg7} \) 33 \( \mathbf{f6+} \) \( \mathbf{Wxf6} \) 34 \( \mathbf{gxf6+} \) \( \mathbf{Wxf6} \) soon wins for White, with his extra piece.

Instead I made a bad stumble, with 27 \( \mathbf{fxg6?} \) (A) 27...\( \mathbf{Axg4} \) 28 \( \mathbf{Axg4} \).

Time trouble was approaching, this being an evening match, and my opponent tried the natural 28...\( \mathbf{Axg6?} \), but I was soon able to gain a winning advantage with 29 \( \mathbf{hxg5} \) \( \mathbf{Af7} \) 30 \( \mathbf{gxf6} \) \( \mathbf{Ah7} \) 31 \( \mathbf{Af5+} \) \( \mathbf{Ah8} \) 32 \( \mathbf{Ag3} \) \( \mathbf{Ag8} \) 33 \( \mathbf{Axg8+} \) \( \mathbf{Axg8} \) 34 \( \mathbf{Af2} \) e4 35 \( \mathbf{Ac6} \) \( \mathbf{Ah7} \) 36 \( \mathbf{Ah4} \) \( \mathbf{C7} \) 37 \( \mathbf{Af5+} \) \( \mathbf{Ag8} \) 38 \( \mathbf{h7+} \) \( \mathbf{Ag7} \) 39 \( \mathbf{h8W+} \) \( \mathbf{Axh8} \) 40 \( \mathbf{h7+} \) 1-0.

Instead, 28...\( \mathbf{xc4!} \) keeps play complicated. Maybe White should eventually end up winning, but it would be more due to luck than judgement. White had a much clearer option.

My notes at the time suggested that I was probably thinking of 29 \( \mathbf{Axg5?!} \), but then after 29...\( \mathbf{hxg5} \) 30 \( \mathbf{Ah7+} \) \( \mathbf{Axg6} \) 31 \( \mathbf{xe7} \) \( \mathbf{xe7} \) Black has recovered much of his ground.

Instead, 29 \( \mathbf{Axh6} \) \( \mathbf{d8?!} \) 30 \( \mathbf{Ah7+} \) \( \mathbf{Axg6} \) 31 \( \mathbf{Axg5} \) \( \mathbf{xd5} \) 32 \( \mathbf{Ad7} \) \( \mathbf{Gg8} \) (32...\( \mathbf{we4?!} \) 33 \( \mathbf{Af3} \) \( \mathbf{Axg4} \) 34 \( \mathbf{Af6+} \) leads to an attractive checkmate, with 34...\( \mathbf{Axh5} \) 35 \( \mathbf{Ah7} \) mate) 33 \( \mathbf{Gg3} \) \( \mathbf{Wh8}! \) 34 \( \mathbf{Ac1} \) \( \mathbf{Wh4} \) 35 \( \mathbf{Ah5+} \) \( \mathbf{Af5} \) \( \mathbf{Af3+} \) \( \mathbf{Be6} \) 37 \( \mathbf{Ah7} \) \( \mathbf{We1+} \) 38 \( \mathbf{Af1} \) \( \mathbf{Wxf1+} \) 39 \( \mathbf{xf1} \) eventually leads to a win for...
White, but who can doubt that White, and indeed Black, could have played it so accurately?

This was one of many club games I played against David Okike over a few years, playing against Kings Head and Hayes. I won most of them, but he has scored a win and a draw against me. The strangest encounter was a few months after this one.

I walked through Oxford Circus before the start of a London League match, then realized that I was starting slightly late, so I got up the stairs at the venue, quickly made my way through the dimly lit room, made my first move as Black, ...c7-c5 on the dark squares, pressed the clock, sat down, then suddenly noticed that I had played closer to the edge, light square to light square, 1 e2-e4 b7-b5??, instead of the intended 1...c5.

My opponent briefly wondered what I had planned with my unexpected opening move, when it suddenly became clear from my shock that I had blundered on move 1, a mixture of poor eyesight (I am only partially sighted) and being distracted by having to rush to the venue. I did not ask for the game to be restarted at the beginning, and I suspect that it would have been improper for me to do so. My opponent sportingly suggested that we could start the game at the beginning anyway, being aware that I was barely able to see, and that he would rather have an interesting game rather than a hollow win.

Much later, when looking through my games for this book, I made the second big visual blunder in this game, pressing the wrong button on my computer (no, it wasn’t a ‘C’ button – too long to explain, but I’m sure that the memoirs of Grandmaster James Plaskett will give the full story). Anyway, what happened is that I managed to delete my game. Almost certainly it would be possible to retrieve it, but I have not got round to this. I was able to remind myself that I managed to get a good position in the 1...c5 opening, or a Sicilian, then misplayed the queenside, then he misplayed it, and then finally a win for me.

A long shaggy dog story.

There are, of course, many more anecdotes from events for blind and partially sighted players. Alas, such things are inevitable if half the players cannot see, and the other half can barely see, and can easily bump into obstructions. The classic question is what happens when a blind player plays a deaf player. My own nightmare is that my brain damage not only makes me only partially sighted, but also that I suffer from a degree of aphasia. I can usually understand what is being said, but it can be very difficult to bring my words together, and I am terrified of saying the wrong move, and making a big mistake. To make a move over the board, Afe1, is easy enough, and it is easy enough also to write it on the scoresheet, but then to have to say
‘Rook Hector Eva One’ takes more time, and the international German Braille version, ‘Turm Hector Eva Eins’, takes several seconds to work out. By the end of all this, I cannot remember what I have written down on my scoresheet.

Fortunately, Braille players know their own allowances. After all, every player has his or her own disability.

**Test 11.3**

D.Buckley-C.Crouch

British League (4NCL) 2006

Continuing from Test 8.1, Black’s kingside attack is threatening, but far from decisive, and if White is able to keep an extra pawn, and perhaps an extra passed pawn later, then the onus for Black is to keep the balance.

Here White played slightly nervously with 23 h3?! , with no discernible intention other than to create an escape square for the king on the back row. Black is not threatening anything on the end rank though, and White’s pawn push weakens his overall kingside pawn structure.

If he was worried about the back row, a much simpler option was 23 f4!? 24 c5+, and then after either recapture, White would try 25 d7. White has a clear edge in the double rook and pawn endgame, Black’s pawn structure being weakened. If White was worried about counterattacks, then surely forcing an advantageous endgame was the safest way of not losing the game in a complicated middlegame.

23 xxa7? can still be tried. Then 23...cd8 24 f1 f4 25 xb6 b8 26 c6 xb2 27 d3 will give no mating attack for Black, just a little pressure, whereas White still has two threatening pawns.

After this reprieve, I threatened to set up an attack with 23...f4, also keeping the queens on the board. Maybe, after 23...a5, I would have been worried about 24 d5, but after 24...g7 25 d7 f4, Black has reasonable chances of holding the balance.
He now tried $24 \text{d}7$, doubling on the seventh. It is possible that he had previously considered trying $24 \text{d}5 \text{g}7 25 \text{g}5 \text{h}6$, but this seems messy. If $26 \text{b}5 \text{g}6$, White’s best option is $27 \text{g}5 \text{h}6$, with repetition, as $27 \text{xa}7? \text{g}8 28 \text{b}7 \text{c}d8!$ is extremely dangerous, with threats of ... \text{b}1+ and ...\text{d}1, and mate on h1. If $29 \text{c}1 \text{d}5 30 \text{g}4$ (otherwise mate on g2) $30...\text{fxg}3 31 \text{cxd}5 \text{gxf}2+$, soon checkmating. So White definitely has to play carefully.

The other option is an immediate capture with $24 \text{xa}7$, and this looks good, even though White has lost time. $24...\text{e}2 25 \text{cd}3 \text{xb}2 26 \text{e}7!$ has drawn Black slightly out of play with his pieces. Then $26...\text{g}7 27 \text{d}8 \text{g}8 28 \text{xc}g8+ (not, of course, 28 \text{xc}8?? \text{xc}g2 mate) 28...\text{xc}g8 29 \text{b}7$ is deceptive. It might look as though the pawn on g2 is seriously weak, but as long as Black can do nothing to add extra pressure (for example, $29...\text{g}6$ when $30 \text{d}7 \text{e}5 31 \text{e}7$ prevents ...\text{e}4), he can do nothing with his pieces, and White can gradually improve.

After the move actually played, the computer suggests several options for Black, including keeping the a-pawn safe with $24...\text{a}6$ or $24...\text{a}5$. The aggressive counterplay, with $24...\text{ce}8 25 \text{h}4 \text{f}5$, looked to me far more appealing, not least because my king was now safe. I felt that maybe I was better, and that it was up to him to prove otherwise.

His next move $26 \text{b}4!$, was unexpected, a quiet move on the queenside, before the kingside storms.

$26 \text{xa}7$ is the more direct way of setting up a queenside pawn advantage. Then after $26...\text{g}8 27 \text{f}3 \text{b}1+ 28 \text{h}2 \text{xc}2+ 29 \text{xc}2 \text{g}8+ 30 \text{g}3 \text{e}4+ 31 \text{g}1 (31 \text{f}1 \text{b}1+ also leads to perpetual) 31...\text{xc}3+ 32 \text{xc}3 \text{e}1+$, with a draw by perpetual. Here the computer suggestion, $27 \text{h}2?$, is deeply unconvincing after $27...\text{g}5! 28 \text{d}7 \text{h}5 29 \text{g}4 \text{xc}3+ 30 \text{xc}3 \text{g}8$.

I carried on with the attack with $26...\text{g}8$, when probably the only sensible reply for White is $27 \text{g}4! \text{xc}3 28 \text{xc}3$, clearly with at least a draw for Black after, for example, $28...\text{xc}3+ 29 \text{xc}3 \text{b}1+$, but with no obvious winning plan. Instead, $27 \text{xa}7? \text{b}1+ 28 \text{h}2 \text{f}1 29 \text{f}6+ \text{g}7 30 \text{g}4 \text{f}2+ 31 \text{h}1 \text{e}1+ 32 \text{g}2 \text{d}2+ 33 \text{f}1 \text{d}8$ is not safe. White’s king is under pressure, and Black has no need to repeat.

White missed a tactic here with the move $27 \text{h}2?$, and then I missed a good reply.
Why we Lose at Chess

27...e5? (A) is solid enough, but as Keith Arkell pointed out, 27...\texttt{\textbar}g5! (B) is very strong, with a winning queen sacrifice after 28 \texttt{\textbar}xf7 \texttt{\textbar}eg8!! 29 \texttt{\textbar}xf5 \texttt{\textbar}xg2+ 30 \texttt{\textbar}h1 \texttt{\textbar}g1+ 31 \texttt{\textbar}h2 \texttt{\textbar}eg2 mate. Sometimes the spectator has the best view. And I think that neither player was seeing the game well anyway.

White can, of course, avoid the immediate checkmate, playing defensively with 28 \texttt{\textbar}f3 \texttt{\textbar}eg8 29 \texttt{\textbar}f2 \texttt{\textbar}xg2+ 30 \texttt{\textbar}h1 \texttt{\textbar}g1+ 31 \texttt{\textbar}h2 \texttt{\textbar}eg2+ 32 \texttt{\textbar}xg2. Then 31...\texttt{\textbar}b1! seems the best way to prevent White’s rooks from coordinating properly, and White still has defensive problems.

One would not expect White to be able to hold the draw after 28 g4 \texttt{\textbar}xg3+ 29 \texttt{\textbar}xf2+ 30 \texttt{\textbar}h1 \texttt{\textbar}eg8, but he can struggle on in a rook and pawn ending, with 31 \texttt{\textbar}d4+ 32 \texttt{\textbar}d4 \texttt{\textbar}xg3 33 \texttt{\textbar}d3 \texttt{\textbar}g3 34 \texttt{\textbar}d7 \texttt{\textbar}h3+ 35 \texttt{\textbar}g2 \texttt{\textbar}xa3 36 \texttt{\textbar}xf7. White is going to be a pawn short of safety, though, once the queenside pawns are eventually exchanged.

After my less accurate move, missing the tactic, White kept an edge with 28 \texttt{\textbar}cd3 \texttt{\textbar}e6 29 \texttt{\textbar}d8 \texttt{\textbar}eg6 30 \texttt{\textbar}xg8+ \texttt{\textbar}xg8 31 \texttt{\textbar}d8+ \texttt{\textbar}g7, and should have carried on with 32 \texttt{\textbar}d5! instead of 32 \texttt{\textbar}d6?!, equal, but later a loss. Yes, it has to be admitted that the play in this game has been for the most part extremely unexciting, with too many mistakes on both sides. Unfortunately it doesn’t get better, as we’ll see in Test 15.2.

Test 11.4
N.Pert-C.Crouch
Bury St Edmunds 2006

From the end of Test 8.2, White has a 5-4 pawn advantage on the kingside, while Black has an isolated pawn on the queenside. The danger is, of course, that Black is going to lose the a-pawn. Naturally Black will not be able to win, but he should have good chances of holding the game. White’s extra pawn on the kingside is a doubled pawn, and sometimes the pawns can get in the
way of each other. Visualize a position where White takes the a-pawn with his rook, Black plays \( \text{...} \text{\textit{w}}\text{d1+}, \) then \( \text{\textit{h}}\text{h2 \textit{h}}\text{h5+} \) and a perpetual, and the point is easily made.

I played very poorly over the next few moves, quite simply losing concentration. \text{27...h5? (A)} was bad. I noted at the time that “I see from my scoresheet that I played this more or less immediately, with 29 minutes to go until the time control on move 36. No time shortage therefore, but I was conscious that there was going to be a quickplay finish coming up. I should have thought much, much harder, and made White work hard to try to win the pawn.”

Usually I am reasonably good at time pressure, making it a rule for myself that I try to keep at least five minutes for the last few moves, to ensure that I have some time, if necessary, to think about the last couple of moves. Sometimes, as here, I speed up too early before the time control. There is no general rule to deal with this type of question, as different people genuinely think differently, and there are many players who can think superbly with the flag about to fall, while others prefer to take their time, and can get flustered by having to move instantly.

On this move, I got ‘pre-flustered’, just making a move, hoping to set up some sort attack against White’s kingside, and vaguely thinking that at least I am opening up a flight square for my king. It loses a tempo, and my opponent makes much better use of it.

I should have thought and planned at this moment, deciding how to handle the rest of the game. My pawn moves are almost irrelevant. I cannot improve anything with my pawns, so I need to concentrate on my pieces. Clearly my king and rook are stuck to defence, so that leaves moving my queen and knight into better play, and preferably making them work together rather than separately.

This immediately suggests \text{27...c2! (A)},

\begin{center}
\includegraphics{chess_board.png}
\end{center}

so that if \text{28 \textit{x}xa5??}, Black wins immediately with \text{28...e4!}. The queen on c2 is superbly placed, putting pressure on f2, and the second rank as a whole, and reminding White that he needs to cover his back rank. Once Black has seen this, all that White can hope for is to keep equality.

Instead, \text{28 d7?! \textit{x}d7 29 \textit{x}d7 \textit{c}c3} keeps Black’s a-pawn safe, and it would be up to White to hold the position.
Why we Lose at Chess

The correct 28 \textit{\texttt{Wc}}5 is safe, and then 28...\textit{\texttt{Vxc}}5 29 dxc5 \textit{\texttt{Aa}}8 30 \textit{\texttt{Cc}}4 \textit{\texttt{Ff}}8 31 \textit{\texttt{Axa}}5 (maybe 31 \textit{\texttt{Dxa}}5!?, keeping the rooks, but Black should still hold) 31...\textit{\texttt{Axa}}5 32 \textit{\texttt{Dxa}}5 \textit{\texttt{Ee}}8 33 f3 \textit{\texttt{Dd}}7 34 \textit{\texttt{Fe}}2 \textit{\texttt{Cc}}7 35 \textit{\texttt{Cc}}4 \textit{\texttt{Dd}}7 36 \textit{\texttt{Dd}}6 f5 37 \textit{\texttt{Ee}}8+ \textit{\texttt{Dd}}8 38 \textit{\texttt{Xg}}7 \textit{\texttt{Xc}}5.

Black is a pawn down, but it is difficult to envisage any realistic winning chances for White, given that Black’s pieces and pawns are well coordinated, and that White’s doubled pawns give little chance of setting up a passed pawn.

Almost certainly I would have been suspicious of allowing the queen exchange on c5, but small-scale maneuvring with the king and rook on the same part of the board makes it difficult for White to create any significant advantage, even with the extra pawn.

The simplest plan, 27...\textit{\texttt{g4}}? (C) 28 \textit{\texttt{Xg}}4 \textit{\texttt{Xg}}4, is an alternative possibility, and then 29 \textit{\texttt{Aa}}7 \textit{\texttt{Cc}}8 30 \textit{\texttt{Xa}}5 h6. Black would have good chances of holding the position if the queens are off the board, but if White were to keep the queen in active play, the chances are that he would be able to find a win.

27...\textit{\texttt{d5}} (C)

is another try, trying to keep the queen and knight working together, but 28 \textit{\texttt{b7}}! keeps White’s pieces the more active.

With my own misguided move, I was thinking in terms of exchanging pawns with ...h4, with a 4-3 defence. However, exchanging a good pawn of my own, for a doubled pawn, is not a good option, especially as I was losing time.

Play continued 28 \textit{\texttt{c7}}! (stopping ...\textit{\texttt{c2}}) 28...h4 29 gxh4 \textit{\texttt{xh}}4 30 \textit{\texttt{f3}} \textit{\texttt{e4}}
31 axa5 d5 32 a7. My play continued to fall apart after 32...g6?! (weakening my pawn structure) 33 d7 g7?! (incredibly, I was thinking of opening up the h-file for queen and rook) 34 d6 f6 35 e5, and when I started to recognize that the queen exchange would lose, if not necessarily quickly, I retreated with the queen, without much hope, trying 35...c2?!.

Then after 36 g5 f5, the last move before the time control, I decided that I had to undo the retreat, as otherwise the pin on the knight on f6 would lose quickly.

A disastrous finish before the time control, and really I would expect to lose this quickly. There is, however, a sequel, as we will see in Test 15.4.
Test Twelve

12.1 White to play

A) 28 \( \text{Wh4} \)
B) 28 \( \text{Whc2} \)
C) Something else?

12.3 Black to play

A) 30...\( \text{ac8} \)
B) 30...\( \text{c6} \)
C) Something else?

12.2 White to play

A) 28 \( \text{f5} \)
B) 28 \( \text{Wxc7} \)
C) Something else?

12.4 White to play

A) 31 \( \text{b7} \)
B) 31 \( \text{b3} \)
C) Something else?
Continuing from Test 9.1, I played 28 \(\text{Wf4}\) (A), pointless, as there will be no checkmate on c7. Indeed, Black was able to obtain an edge.

Somehow I need to create some sort of edge on the queenside, and with files rather than diagonals. A few months after this game, I gave a double exclamation mark for 28 \(\text{Wc2!}\) (B), mainly because of the paradoxical effect of playing \(\text{Wc2-f2}\) and then unexpectedly \(\text{Wf2-c2}\). Maybe one exclamation mark.

The critical line would seem to be 28...\(\text{Wxg3}\) 29 \(\text{hxg3}\) \(\text{Qf6}\) 30 a4! (White needs to attack quickly) 30...\(\text{We3}\) 31 a5 \(\text{Qxd5?!}\) (31...\(\text{Qe4}\) 32 axb6 \(\text{Qxg3+}\) 33 \(\text{Qh2}\) axb6 34 \(\text{Wb2}\) favours White; Black cannot find a way to shift the queen from a6 to the h-file) 32 \(\text{Qxf5!}\) (32 \(\text{Qg2?!}\) allows Black to wriggle out with advantage after 32...\(\text{Qc7}\) 33 axb6 axb6 34 \(\text{Qb3}\) \(\text{Wxc4}\) 35 \(\text{Qxb6}\) \(\text{Wd3}\); note Black’s central control in this end position) 32...\(\text{gxf6}\) 33 \(\text{Wxf5+}\) \(\text{Qb8}\) 34 \(\text{Qxd5}\), and White holds the draw. There is the obvious practical objection that no player could be able to calculate this over the board. Maybe so, but it is useful for players to sharpen their positional instincts in complicated positions. Who knows, if you can find the best move, the rest might follow.

I was momentarily impressed with 28 \(\text{Wb2?!}\) (C), but 28...\(\text{Wa4!}\) allows the queen to squeeze out, or rather to exchange. After 29 \(\text{Wb3}\) (otherwise ...\(\text{Wxc4}\) 29...\(\text{Wxb3}\) 30 \(\text{Qxb3}\) (30 axb3? \(\text{Qxc3}\) 30...\(\text{Qd2}\) the knight forks two rooks, and also an important pawn (31 \(\text{Qa1}\) \(\text{Qxc4?!}\)). So White does not want to allow Black to invade the a4-square.

In the game, after 28 \(\text{Wf4}\)...
Why we Lose at Chess

28...\textit{Q}e5! 29 \textit{Q}e1 \textit{Q}xg3 30 \textit{Q}xe5 \textit{Q}e2+!
(seen after the game!) 31 \textit{Q}xe2 \textit{Q}xe2 32 \textit{W}d6 \textit{W}xa2 is good for Black, if you have
time to think about it.

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
  \node at (0,0) {
    \begin{board}
      \pawns{b8\textit{Q}}{b7R}{b6}{b5}{b4}{b3}{b2\textit{Q}}{b1R} \n      \pawns{a8\textit{Q}}{a7}{a6}{a5}{a4}{a3}{a2}{a1} \n      \n      \n      \n    \end{board}
  };
  \node at (1,0.5) {29 \textit{Q}e1 \textit{Q}xg3 30 \textit{Q}xe5 \textit{Q}e2+!};
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

I played 31 \textit{B}bb1!. This is a critical
defensive plan for White, win, draw or
lose. It was also difficult to find over
the board, although it looks obvious
afterwards. Shifting the rook to a1 is
the only chance. The desperate sacrifice
with 31 \textit{Q}fb1 \textit{W}xc4 22 \textit{Q}xb6 axb6 is not
worth thinking about. After either re-
capture on b6, Black sets up a swarm of
winning checks with ...\textit{W}g4+.

Then 31...\textit{W}xc4 was natural and
good. Instead, 31...\textit{Q}f3+? 32 \textit{Q}h1 \textit{Q}e2
33 \textit{W}c6+ \textit{Q}d8 34 \textit{Q}d6+ \textit{Q}e8 35 \textit{W}c6+ \textit{Q}f8, and
meanwhile the time is ticking. Re-
member too that this is five moves
down a sharp line. In practical terms,
there was no reason for Cox to want to
touch this line.

In the game, after Cox exchanged, I
recaptured with 29 \textit{W}xg3, covering the
squares next to the king. 29 h\textit{x}g3 \textit{W}xa2
30 \textit{Q}d1 \textit{Q}e2 31 \textit{Q}f1 \textit{Q}e5 would instead
put White under pressure.

Black collected his second pawn,
with 29...\textit{W}xa2, with every chance of
winning a third pawn. I decided that
my only chance was to play actively,
with 30 \textit{W}d6. I felt that my queen was
moving through the trap door, but
what else could I have done? The trap
was closed with 30...\textit{Q}e5.

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
  \node at (1,0.5) {30...\textit{Q}e5};
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

It would take a lot of time for a
player to convince himself that Black
could demonstrate that he eventually
can win after, for example, 33 \textit{W}c6+
\textit{Q}d8 34 \textit{W}d6+ \textit{Q}e8 35 \textit{W}c6+ \textit{Q}f8, and
meanwhile the time is ticking. Re-
member too that this is five moves
down a sharp line. In practical terms,
there was no reason for Cox to want to
touch this line.

In the game, after Cox exchanged, I
recaptured with 29 \textit{W}xg3, covering the
squares next to the king. 29 h\textit{x}g3 \textit{W}xa2
30 \textit{Q}d1 \textit{Q}e2 31 \textit{Q}f1 \textit{Q}e5 would instead
put White under pressure.

Black collected his second pawn,
with 29...\textit{W}xa2, with every chance of
winning a third pawn. I decided that
my only chance was to play actively,
with 30 \textit{W}d6. I felt that my queen was
moving through the trap door, but
what else could I have done? The trap
was closed with 30...\textit{Q}e5.
Instead, he started with checks, with 32...\(\text{g}4+\) 33 \(\text{h}1\) \(\text{e}4+\) 34 \(\text{g}1\), and quietly improved his pieces with 34...\(\text{b}7\). This time, White's sacrifice gives nothing, after 35 \(\text{xa}7+\) \(\text{xa}7\) 36 \(\text{c}7+\) \(\text{a}6\) 37 \(\text{a}1+\) \(\text{b}5\), and the king escapes to c4.

I fought on with 35 \(\text{f}e1\), and the casual 35...\(\text{f}3+?\) 36 \(\text{f}2\) even gives White an edge after 36 \(\text{f}2\) \(\text{c}2+\) 37 \(\text{xf}3\) \(\text{xc}3+\) 38 \(\text{f}2\) \(\text{d}4+\) 39 \(\text{f}1\).

So 35...\(\text{g}4+\) 36 \(\text{h}1\) \(\text{f}3+\) 37 \(\text{g}1\), and to my considerable surprise, he offered a draw.

Here 37...\(\text{xc}3\) would have been a win for Black, after the adjournment, to be played at some later date. Few players enjoy a second session in evening games, with time being precious, although there are others who like a quickplay finish even less, with everything decided in a time scramble close to 10pm after a long working day. For myself, I felt I had to avoid a quickplay finish, which was my right in the league, not least through respect to my team colleagues. I did not want to lose for the team in what could have been a critical match, as a result of tiredness and dizziness. My opponent clearly did not want to have a second session, and I apologized before the start that I could not play a quickplay finish. At the end of this particular session, he decided he wanted to force a draw on the evening. Had he sealed a move, I felt sure that I would have gone home and analysed the position, and decided that it would not have been worth playing on, and would have resigned.

An explanation then for an unusual result: an unusual situation. I do not know what is happening in other countries in evening league matches. In England there is often considerable debate about quickplay versus slow-play.

The late Lev Polugaevsky noted, well before computers were good at chess analysis, that adjournments in international events would at some stage become obsolete, because players with a good database or engine would have an unfair advantage compared to the player with less computer help. It is now generally agreed that games should be finished in one session, for morning or afternoon events.

In evening games, computer analysis often cuts down second sessions, because one of the players would see that it is not worth playing one, either because it is a clear draw, or because one of the players is losing. The few adjournments that do carry on,
though, are often of great interest, and enjoyable for the players.

**Test 12.2**

*C. Crouch - P. Roberson*

British League (4NCL) 2007

From a Modern Benoni. White has clearly been able to push his central pawns safely, and can create a passed pawn, but his position is not quite as overwhelming as it looks. He still has to think; he cannot play fully automatically.

After some thought, I decided to exchange the pawns on d6, keeping an isolated but advanced passed pawn on d5, helped by rook and bishop. I played 24 \textit{\textbf{e4}}.

24 e6 \textit{\textbf{e7}} is the obvious alternative, and who could resist a well-protected passed pawn on the sixth? It is unclear, though, how White can make progress in such a blocked position. After, for example, 25 \textit{\textbf{d2}} \textit{\textbf{g7}} 26 \textit{\textbf{a2}} \textit{\textbf{f5}} 27 \textit{\textbf{f2}} b5 28 \textit{\textbf{c1}} c4 29 b4 \textit{\textbf{ac8}} 30 axb5 axb5 31 \textit{\textbf{b1}} \textit{\textbf{g7}} 32 \textit{\textbf{e3}} \textit{\textbf{fe8}} 33 \textit{\textbf{c2}} \textit{\textbf{a8}}, it is still pleasant for White, but what next? Black too has a protected passed pawn.

In the game, Black defended on f6, with 24...\textit{\textbf{g7}}. 24...\textit{\textbf{xf4}} 25 \textit{\textbf{xf6}} looks much too dangerous for his king, so he must try to hold his position.

I now continued my planned pawn exchange, 25 \textit{\textbf{exd6}}. It is again possible, but slightly illogical, to try 25 e6. Black can snatch a pawn with 25...\textit{\textbf{xa4}}, now that White’s knight has moved away. 26 \textit{\textbf{c3}} \textit{\textbf{b4}} 27 \textit{\textbf{a2}} \textit{\textbf{a4}} is a drawing possibility, although Black could try for more with 27...\textit{\textbf{wa5}}.

Instead, 25 a5! is seriously to be considered, and might well be best, but leads to complications and counter-complications. I would have considered it, but would probably have decided that the move I played was simpler, and gives White a clear edge. I would have been happy with my move avoiding any possible sharp play.

After 25 a5 fxe5 26 fxe5 b5 27 exd6 cxd4 28 \textit{\textbf{xc5}} \textit{\textbf{b5}} 29 \textit{\textbf{xb7}} \textit{\textbf{xb7}}
dxc7 White has a comfortable extra passed pawn. It is possible that I would have been concerned about whether I would have a genuine advantage after the more natural 27 e6 wxe6 28 a2 c4, and decided in retrospect that maybe 29 fxe7 f5 30 xd6 xd6 31 xd6 xd5 did not give White much of an edge.

In the end, I went for the simpler option. This was by no means bad, but was still sub-optimal, and it turns out that I soon made a mistake even in the 'simple' line.

Play continued with 25...xd6 26 xd6 xe7. Here Black could try 27...xf4 28 e4 f5, but White is doing well after 29 d6+ h8 30 e3 f4 31 dxc7 xc4 32 xd7 g8 33 xd6. However, 29 g4? would be more speculative, and after 29...xf3 30 xd3 xd3 31 xd3 f7 32 xd6 xd5 Black is better after, for example, 33 c4 f8 34 e6 d8 35 xf6? xd6.

Black instead played 27...ad8.

Now I over-egged my play with 28 f5? (A), hoping to gain a tempo by bringing the bishop quickly into play with g3.

Instead, 28 xc7 (B) 28...xc7 29 d6+ would have been simpler and more natural. Then 29...f7 30 xf7+ (30 e5? fx5 31 xf7+ xf7 32 xd8 xd8 33 fx5 is over-elaborate) 30...xf7 31 e5!. Black cannot take the knight, as the pawn is pinned, 31...fxe5? 32 xd8. So after 31...ff8 32 c4 b5 33 axb5 axb5 34 a5 White has finally obtained that safe positional edge that he has been trying to achieve for a long time. The next stage of development is to bring the bishop to f2, and then aim for the queening square on d8, via b6.

Instead, I lost a tempo after 28...xe7 29 xe7 (29 d6+? f7 30 xf7+ xf7 31 dxc7 xd1 32 xd1 xc7 leaves Black a pawn up) 29...xd5.

I no longer had time for xc7. Indeed, I was a pawn down, and had to readjust myself to staying a pawn down, but with good bishop activity, after 30 e2 fe8 31 xe8+ xe8 32 f2 gxf5 33 g3. I even later had
Why we Lose at Chess

slightly the better of a draw in the end-game, but after a mistake by either side just before the time control, I missed a chance of winning. We resume the position later in Test 14.3.

Much earlier, my superficial original intention had been 28 \( \text{wx}d6 \) (C) 28...\( \text{xd}6 \) 29 \( \text{e}7 \), but after 29...\( \text{f}7 \) Black holds, and may be better. My tactical vision was clearly not very good yet.

**Test 12.3**

M.Cutmore-C.Crouch

Kidlington 2007

We rush through the early part of the game, and zoom to my blunder. As readers will have appreciated by now, my tournament at Kidlington was a treasure-house of my own mistakes. Two years after my stroke, I was concentrating on trying to regain my fitness as quickly as possible, doing lots of walking, and playing lots of chess. I was playing confidently, but unfortunately at that stage my brain was not working properly, and I could not quickly analyse the difference between good moves and mistakes. I gave my opponents plenty of opportunities.

The game was a Nimzo Indian, 1 \( \text{d}4 \) \( \text{f}6 \) 2 \( \text{c}4 \) \( \text{e}6 \) 3 \( \text{c}3 \) \( \text{b}4 \) 4 \( \text{f}3 \) \( \text{f}5 \) 5 \( \text{a}3 \) \( x3+ \) 6 \( \text{bxc}3 \) 0-0 7 \( \text{e}3 \) \( e8 \) 8 \( cx5 \) \( exd5 \) 9 \( \text{d}3 \) \( c5 \) 10 \( \text{e}2 \) \( b6 \) 11 0-0 \( \text{a}6 \) 12 \( \text{g}3 \) \( c8 \) (all known so far) 13 \( \text{f}5 \) !? \( \text{c}7 \) 14 \( \text{e}1 \) \( c6 \) 15 \( \text{b}2 \) \( a5 \) 16 \( e4 \) \( c4 \) 17 \( \text{c1} \) \( g6 \) 18 \( \text{h}3 \) \( c8 \) 19 \( \text{g}5 \) \( xh3 \) 20 \( \text{xf}6 \) \( \text{f}4 \) 21 \( \text{e}5 \).

Play is level, in the sense that it is unlikely that either player will have a clear advantage. The position is, however, dynamic. A slip by either side can end in a quick collapse. My biggest problem is that if White can get his queen to h6, then that is the end. My hope for salvation is that White has several weaknesses in the centre.

I retreated my bishop, 21...\( \text{e}6 \). The computer initially suggests that this was a mistake, and that 21...\( \text{e}3 \) would have been good for Black, but retracts when it becomes clear that 22 \( \text{e}2 \) \( \text{h}6 \) 23 \( \text{c}1 \) would have been good for White, as if 23...\( \text{xg}2 \) 24 \( \text{g}3 \), winning a piece. I feel sure that I would have seen this.

Play continued with 22 \( \text{a}2 \) \( \text{ec}8 \) 23 \( \text{e}2 \) \( \text{e}3+ \) 24 \( \text{h}1 \).

Both sides now have apparently set up some dangerous threats, but nothing is going on at the moment. If either side breaks open the balance, it is the aspiring attacker who loses the backfire. Essentially the only forcing move is
\[ \text{Test Twelve} \]

\[ \text{C.Crouch-J.McKenna} \]
London Open 2006

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\text{\textcopyright\textregistered\textsuperscript{\textregistered} For White, with an exchange of queens, but this is a simplification rather than a mating attack.}

\[ \text{\textcopyright\textregistered\textsuperscript{\textregistered} 24...h5 was played, giving a flight square for the king, but also perhaps weakening the pawn structure. There are several alternatives over the next few moves. Then came 25 h4 cxd4 26 cxd4. If Black were to try for checkmate after 26...\text{\textcopyright\textregistered}\textsuperscript{\textregistered}f2? 27 \text{\textcopyright}\textregistered\textsuperscript{\textregistered}\textsuperscript{\textregistered}c1 \text{\textcopyright}\textsuperscript{\textregistered}e3 (27...\text{\textcopyright}\textsuperscript{\textregistered}\textsuperscript{\textregistered}h3 28 \text{\textcopyright}\textsuperscript{\textregistered}\textsuperscript{\textregistered}\textsuperscript{\textregistered}c3 \text{\textcopyright}xg2+ 29 \text{\textcopyright}\textsuperscript{\textregistered}\textsuperscript{\textregistered}h2 wins a piece for White) 28 \text{\textcopyright}\textsuperscript{\textregistered}\textsuperscript{\textregistered}c3 \text{\textcopyright}xa2 29 \text{\textcopyright}xe3!, then it is actually White who gives mate.}

\text{So it was still time for quiet manoeuvring with 28...\text{\textcopyright}\textsuperscript{\textregistered}\textsuperscript{\textregistered}a5 27 \text{\textcopyright}\textsuperscript{\textregistered}\textsuperscript{\textregistered}g3 \text{\textcopyright}h6 28 \text{\textcopyright}\textsuperscript{\textregistered}\textsuperscript{\textregistered}g5 \text{\textcopyright}f8 29 \text{\textcopyright}d3 \text{\textcopyright}\textsuperscript{\textregistered}\textsuperscript{\textregistered}c4 30 f4.}
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Here, short of time, I tried to squeeze too much with 30...\text{\textcopyright}\textsuperscript{\textregistered}\textsuperscript{\textregistered}ac8? (A), threatening a skewer with ...\text{\textcopyright}\textsuperscript{\textregistered}\textsuperscript{\textregistered}c3.

The more thematic move, 30...\text{\textcopyright}\textsuperscript{\textregistered}\textsuperscript{\textregistered}c6! (B), gives Black a substantial edge. He does not lose time with an unnecessary developing move with the rook, but immediately puts pressure on the centre.

In the game, Cutmore tried to defend the third row with 31 \text{\textcopyright}\textsuperscript{\textregistered}\textsuperscript{\textregistered}e3, but Black had won time with 31...\text{\textcopyright}\textsuperscript{\textregistered}\textsuperscript{\textregistered}c6. Of course, both players were by now short of time, and White had clear counterplay with 32 f5, as we'll see in Test 14.2.

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\text{\textcopyright\textregistered\textsuperscript{\textregistered} Test 12.4}

\text{\textcopyright\textregistered\textsuperscript{\textregistered} C.Crouch-J.McKenna}
London Open 2006
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Continuing from Test 11.1, I pushed the passed pawn, with 31 b7? (A), but, of course, the bishop gets stuck in the corner.

I asked myself, rhetorically, “when was the last game I played this badly?”
Certainly like all of us, I have lost some games incredibly quickly, but, beyond beginner and minor level, this would generally be the case of one ridiculously bad move, completely misunderstanding what was going on, and perhaps a couple of slight slips, based on a misunderstanding of the big error. Alas, after my illness I managed to lose quite a few of these miniatures, some of which have been published in this book. This game, though, is different, and arguably worse. There must have been well over half a dozen serious mistakes in this game, and I am only giving a few sample exercises, to avoid making the reader feel bored. “Yes, I see the point. Now give up the pawn on b7, and your bishop will escape. You do not have to make a meal out of this.”

Statistically, there are likely to be more blunders in a poor game of 50 moves than in a game of 15 moves.

I was stunned by my previous blunder in this game, giving away an exchange for nothing when I had a winning position. I was disorientated, but then felt a sense of relief that I still had the two united passed pawns. If I had thought more closely, I would have seen that the pawns were useless, and that it is time to simplify and aim for equality.

Indeed, 31 b3! (B) was best. If 31...c2, there would have been a temptation to bring White’s bishop into proper play, with 32 c6?!, but as Emms pointed out much later, 32...e4! happily picks up the extra f-pawn. If, for example, 33 b7 xf2+ 34 b1 g3 35 c1 xc5 36 xd5 d7, followed by ...f4. Surprisingly, my position is not so dreadful after 32 f1, and in some lines Black has to be careful not to be worse.

Instead, after the dreadful 31 b?? e5, my bishop was stuck in the corner, my knight was tied to the opponent’s passed pawn, and my two proud passed pawns could not break the blockade on c7 and d6. A mess.

\[ 32 f1 c2 33 b3 d7 \] is heading for a win for Black. 33...e4 is also good, and if 34 c6? d2+ wins a queen. Instead, 34 f2 holds the balance to some extent, it not even being important whether White’s c-pawn stays or drops.

Then 34 c6 c5 35 c1 set up passed pawns for each player, and defended against queening threats. We continue the discussion next time in Test 14.4.
Test Thirteen

13.1 Black to play

A) $31\ldots \text{hx}d5$
B) $31\ldots \text{f}7$
C) Something else?

13.2 Black to play

A) $32\ldots \text{fx}g3$
B) $32\ldots \text{f}3$
C) Something else?

13.3 White to play

A) $34\ldots \text{h}8$
B) $34\ldots \text{xd}5$
C) Something else?

13.4 Black to play

A) $34\ldots \text{h}8$
B) $34\ldots \text{xd}5$
C) Something else?
We have seen this position before in Test 9.4. Now there was a whole cluster of blunders. I was feeling groggy, and my opponent was no doubt surprised and nervous when suddenly reaching a clear and good position after a blunder by his IM opponent. In time trouble, both players made errors, and mine was the most ludicrous of them.

I tried to regain the initiative with 26...f6 27 e3 e4,

understandably enough, since I am a piece down, and if I play quietly, I will lose. Even so, maybe 27...f5 would have been better, keeping my pawns active.

He replied 28 c3! xb4 29 d5, making my pawn snatch look extremely inconsequential. His knight is now on the best square on the board.

All I could do was to set up a pin on the long diagonal, with 29...b7, with, one would expect, my best chance being that he would lose on time by thinking too hard against very minor complications.

Here the simplest way is 30 g2, gaining a tempo, in view of the threatened discovered check with xf6+. If 30...e4, the straightforward plan is 31 xc2 bxc2 32 xc2, when White is slightly ahead on material (bishop and knight versus rook and pawn), and his position is totally secure, whereas Black’s pieces are insecure. If 32...xd5? 33 c8+, and White will be a full piece ahead.

It is difficult to know what was going on in his mind some years later, but
whatever happened, the line he tried was not a massive blunder, contrary to what I thought afterwards. He played:

30 \( \text{bxc2!} \) 30 bxc2 31 \( \text{Wxc2!} \) 31 \( \text{g2} \) or 31 \( \text{h3} \) also gives an edge.

I now played extremely quickly in time trouble, and a few seconds later, I noticed that I could have taken the knight: 31...\( \text{Wxd5!?} \) (A) could have given a massive shock to my opponent. Or, on the other hand, White might have analysed this right through, but had missed that after 32 \( \text{Wc8+} \) \( \text{f7} \) 33 \( \text{Wxa6} \) Black was no longer in check, and so had time to win the rook, staying a bishop up, with 33...\( \text{Wxh1+} \).

It was years before it was pointed out to me that, in fact, my opponent could have forced a win with 32 \( \text{Wxg6+} \) \( \text{f7} \) 33 \( \text{h7+} \) \( \text{f8} \) 34 \( \text{h6+} \) \( \text{xh6} \) 35 \( \text{xh6+} \) \( \text{g7} \) 36 \( \text{c1} \), and White has a winning attack after 36...\( \text{a8} \) 37 \( \text{g1} \).

Or, since everyone loves a queen sacrifice, we have 32...\( \text{d8} \) 33 \( \text{c1} \) \( \text{b7} \) 34 \( \text{e4!} \) \( \text{a8} \) (34...\( \text{xe4} \) 35 \( \text{c8} \) mate) 35 \( \text{c8+} \) \( \text{xc8} \) 36 \( \text{xc8} \) \( \text{xc8} \) 37 \( \text{c4+} \) \( \text{b7} \) 38 \( \text{b5+} \), winning the rook. Here 33...\( \text{a8} \) sets up a counterattack with the threat of ...\( \text{xa3+} \), but White deflects the rook with 34 \( \text{b6+!} \) \( \text{xb6} \) 35 \( \text{f5} \), with a catastrophe on c8 or d7.

After the most spirited play, White has to find a couple of little combinations, and a player might miss these in time trouble. The computer did not find the win instantly, although it did not think for all that long. The clear implication is that I was so shocked that I had earlier given away a piece for nothing, that even a couple of years later I do not know how deeply my opponent had examined all this. It would have been more entertaining for the spectators if I had seen that I could ‘safely’ take the knight. And, of course, there would have been a slight chance for me to escape.

Play finished with 31...\( \text{f7} \) (B) 32 \( \text{g1} \) \( \text{f5} \) 33 \( \text{xf5} \) \( \text{gxf5} \) 34 \( \text{xe7} \) \( \text{e4} \) 35 \( \text{xc7} \), when I resigned (1-0), perhaps a touch prematurely (35...\( \text{e6} \) forces him to show the win), but ultimately fair enough. For the record, 32...\( \text{g5} \) would have been best, so that White cannot open the g-file, but Black would be unlikely to hold for too long.

Test 13.2
S.Gregory-C.Crouch
Bury St Edmunds 2006

Not a particularly happy day for a significant birthday celebration.

Play started steadily, with 1 e4 c5 2
Why we Lose at Chess

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\[ \text{f3 e6 3 d3 d5 4 \text{bd2} c6 5 g3 d6 6 g2 ge7 7 0-0 0-0 8 \text{e1 c7 9 we2 b6 10 f1 a5 11 d2 a6}, equal, with perhaps Black having slightly the better chances. White's play is not very aggresive. Black's idea in the early part of the opening was, with ...d6 and ...ge7, to prevent White from gaining a tempo with e5, by avoiding ...f6.}

White readjusts, playing the standard kingside attacking plan with h4-h5, and f3-h2-g4, but without e5. He played 12 exd5 exd5 13 h4 h6 14 \text{h1d2} d7 15 h5, and Black might well start to think that White has overpressed. Then 15...ae8 16 f1.

I played 16...f5, which I am not sure that I like now, and judging by my earlier notes, I did not really like at the time. I am gaining space, with pawns and pieces, but the pawn push also creates weaknesses for my opponent to exploit, and these are arguably unnecessary. I would prefer nowadays 16...c8!, keeping the pieces highly coordinated, and stopping White even thinking about h3.

My idea in the game was that after 17 h3?! d4, as played, White has been lured into a now redundant h3, and Black's ...d4 push is all the better, now that the bishop is not on g2.

Instead, 17 e2!, doubling on the e-file, looks uncomfortable, with Black having pressure on the a6-f1 diagonal. No doubt it is on this basis that neither player would have examined this closely. There is, however, the tactical point that after 17...c4 18 ae1 cxd3 19 cxd3 d3 (19...c8 is equal) 20 xe7 White is suddenly ahead on material. 17...f4 18 g4! again might look ugly for White, but he is still slightly better.

Back to the game, with 18 h4. Now 18...d5, trying to win White's h-pawn, may be slightly premature after 19 g2 d7 20 xc6! xc6 21 g6 xe1 22 xe1 b8, and White has kept equality. So I brought the bishop into play with 18...e5!? 19 d2 f3 f6 20 f4, and now it was time to try to win the h-pawn with 20...d5 21 g2 (if 21 c7, one possibility is to call the opponent's bluff with 21...c8!?) 21...f7!
This wins the pawn, but as so often the hard work is yet to come, as the opponent has chances of gaining time. He tried 22 \texttt{g6} \texttt{xg6} 23 \texttt{hxg6} \texttt{wxg6}, keeping his pieces better coordinated. Then 24 \texttt{d6} \texttt{e7} 25 \texttt{c7}.

When playing through this position much earlier, I was highly critical of my next move, 25...\texttt{b5}, as the game ended up much later on with a weakened queenside pawn structure. I preferred instead 25...\texttt{d8}, trying to keep the pawn structure tight. My comments at the time now seem over-elaborate, and the move I played was fine. It is only later that I started to make mistakes.

25...\texttt{d8} is playable, but after 26 \texttt{xd8} \texttt{xd8} 27 \texttt{h4} \texttt{d6} 28 \texttt{e2} White has well-placed pieces, and it is far from easy for Black to break down White’s pawn structure. Black’s missing pawn is only an h-pawn on the edge, and it cannot contribute directly to the central struggle, nor is it about to help start a pawn advance. Black can try ...\texttt{f4} in some lines, but \texttt{g4} would be a standard response, taking control of the kingside light squares.

I was also critical of my next few moves, after 26 \texttt{e2} \texttt{d8} 27 \texttt{xd8} \texttt{xd8} 28 \texttt{ae1} \texttt{d6}, but I still keep an edge, and surely there is nothing wrong with that. It is only if I am losing, equal, or with a substantially smaller edge than before that I have gone wrong. Here I should be reasonably happy. White still has active pieces, but he is not breaking through, and Black still has the extra pawn. It was later that I started to make mistakes.

White started by keeping control on the e-file, with a knight exchange, 29 \texttt{e5} \texttt{xe5} 30 \texttt{xe5}.

Looking at this diagram position, it can become understandable why I became highly critical of my ...\texttt{b5} move, and indeed if White were still to have a pawn on h2, he would have a clear edge. But the position is as it is. White has weakened his kingside, and so 30...\texttt{f4} seems highly sensible. Then 31 \texttt{e4} \texttt{g4} (31...\texttt{f7}!? is also worth considering) 32 \texttt{g2}, and we have reached the test position.
32...f3? (B) was poorly judged, and, as I admitted at the time, this was “really the start of where I was about to go wrong”. In other words, other slips are at best minor, possibly nonexistent. “For some reason”, I noted, “I felt I could just batten down the f-file, but now of course Black has no real kingside advantage.” I had blocked up the f-file, when in reality it was essential to keep it open. Then 33 \( \text{Wh1} \) covered all Black’s threats, and now White had lines for his own pieces, as we’ll see further in Test 13.4.

32...fxg3 (A) 33 fxg3 \( \text{c8!?} \) instead leads to tense play. I am not convinced, though, about the computer’s suggestion that Black has a clear advantage.

### Test 13.3

**C.Crouch-R.Granat**

British League (4NCL) 2007

As we saw in Test 9.3, Black has, very reasonably, just declined a draw by repetition. He has a supported passed pawn, not yet immediately impressive, but a threat later on. Also White has to try to keep his isolated a-pawn safe.

I decided it was about time to make use of the long diagonal, with 29 \( \text{Af3} \). I was surprised by his reply, 29...f5?! , and indeed with his ...g5 pawn push later. There are certainly legitimate minority attacks in the late middlegame, usually to create a weakness in the majority pawns, but this is not one of them. Before too long, White has a good and safe passed pawn, although, of course, Black keeps his passed pawn as well. Maybe equal? I had expected instead 29...c5, followed by ...\( \text{Af6} \), and I would feel slightly uncomfortable as White. At the very least, it should be White, not Black, who has to work hard, and spend time, to make use of his kingside pawn majority.

White continues his piece development, and Black advances his pawns, with 30 \( \text{b2 g5} \). I cannot keep the half-open files with 31 \( \text{a3?} \), in view of 31...\( \text{xe3} \) 32 fxe3 \( \text{xe3} \) 33 \( \text{c3 g4} \).
Therefore I needed to add an extra pawn defence on the kingside, with 31 h3, and then came a counterattack with 31...d6 32 g4! fxg4 33 hxg4.

White should now be at least equal, but, of course, Black had no need to allow White a passed e-pawn.

We were now reaching time pressure, and few players can then play with complete accuracy in complicated middlegame positions. It is easy to see that some of the next few moves are slightly inaccurate, but it is far more difficult to find the very best moves over the board. Both players have to assess whether to play a move instantly, or to think for 30 seconds, or whether to decide to think longer at a critical position, at the risk of hurrying later. It is much easier, of course, to determine the best move if the reader or annotator has a computer, a fresh cup of coffee, and, above all, some time to think.

33...b7?! is recognisably a time pressure move. Black sees a couple of ideas, then argues that he will have no time to assess or analyse the next few moves, and so he quickly makes an unobtrusive move, which he hopes holds the balance, or maybe more if the opponent does nothing more than hold the balance.

33...f6! is a more constructive move. If White tries to attack, with 34 b4?, a natural enough move, Black hits back hard with 34...xd1 35 xd1 c4+ 36 b3 e5.

White has to improve earlier. The computer suggests 34 c2 ed8 35 c3, not easy to think of while being short of time, as Black's last couple of moves look almost random. The computer implies that the position is close to deadlocked, and equal, since White cannot break Black's pressure on the d-file, while Black cannot create extra pressure, and he will not want to release the pressure himself. Black might still create a slight edge, though, with 35...c5 36 cd1 c6!, and the knight is back in play. If 37 c2, hoping for a repetition, Black keeps an edge with 37...e8.

Back to the game; it is White's turn.
I sensed that Granat’s play was inaccurate, and felt I could even play for a win. I played perhaps too hastily to take the initiative, overlooking my opponent’s reply. 34 e4 (A) looks good, but this proved to be deceptive, as after 34...\( \text{xf6!} \) it was Black who was starting to create pressure.

This I found to be an unexpectedly difficult middlegame to analyse, and therefore an interesting test position, I hope, for the reader. Of course, the test is one of positional sense, rather than tactics.

To cut down a couple of pages of analysis, I give only a brief outline.

34 e4 was not a positional mistake. It is equal. My mistake was only on move 40, just before the time control.

Instead, 34 \( \text{b4!?} \) (C) 34...\( \text{sf6!} \) 35 \( \text{xd5 xf2+} \) 36 \( \text{c2} \) is equal.

And 34 \( \text{e1!?} \) (B) 34...\( \text{sf6!} \) 35 \( \text{c2 b4} \) 36 \( \text{c3 d5} \) 37 \( \text{c2 b4} \) is a repetition. I was fascinated by the thought that here White could have tried 37 \( \text{c1!?} \), a remarkable zugzwang idea.

We have seen this position before, but with Black to move, rather than White. The computer suggests that it is better for White if it were Black to play here rather than White to play. If so, this would have been a remarkably delicate zugzwang, with nine pieces and pawns on either side.

Every one of Black’s moves, except only for 37...\( \text{ef8!} \), leads to a worsening of Black’s play. The final result should end up as a draw, after 38 \( \text{xd3 xf2+} \) 39 \( \text{a3 cxd5} \) 40 \( \text{xd5 e8} \) 41 \( \text{d7+ b8} \) 42 \( \text{c3} \), and if 42...\( \text{xe3} \) 43 \( \text{d8+ b7} \) 44 \( \text{d7+ b8} \), with a draw by repetition. 44...\( \text{a6?} \) would have been far too ambitious, as White has a big mate threat after 45 \( \text{xe3 c4+} \) 46 \( \text{b3 xe3} \) 47 \( \text{d3} \). But how many players would have seen all this in advance?

Back to the game, and I delete a few earlier criticisms on my next few moves, with 35 \( \text{g2 f4} \) 36 \( \text{xf4 xf4} \) 37 \( \text{f3 b7} \) 38 \( \text{c3 b7} \).

Sensible so far, but the next move was not good, as we’ll soon see in Test 15.1.
In Test 13.2 we have seen a psychologically dangerous part of the game, when a player feels he has been in control for most of the time, and then something unexpected happens, close to the time control. There is little chance to readjust emotionally, no time to wander around or take a tea, no time just to chill out for five minutes. The player has been happily playing for a win, then a few seconds later, he does not know whether his position is better or worse, or whether he should attack or look for a draw. Quite often, a mistake in time trouble can easily lead to a second, maybe worse, slip the next move or the second move. This happens shortly in this game.

33...c4 was reasonable. I can do nothing immediately threatening, and so I bring my more active pawns into play, and hope to open something up for the bishop.

Then he gave a check, 34 d5+, with three reasonable replies. There are two opposing weaknesses when playing in time shortage. Either the player sometimes plays like a jelly, just dribbling through to an endgame, and hoping to regain composure after the time control. Or, alternatively, it is possible to play the sharpest move, with the hope that it is best, and in any case one can hope that the opponent will make a mistake under pressure.

But here, which plan is better? There are two choices, sacrificing the exchange, and quietly moving the king. This takes time to reflect, and I got it wrong.

Almost without thinking, I sacrificed the exchange with 34...xd5?? (B). I felt sure that there was something there for me, but there wasn't. After 35 xd5 cxd3 36 cxd3, if 36...b7, then White has 37 h5!, easy enough to miss, and he wins. The desperate sacrifice 37...xg3+ 38 fxg3 f2+ 39 f1 does not work.
I struggled on with 36...b4 37 ♕h4 ♖xh4 38 gxh4 ♕xd3 39 ♕xd4 ♧e2 40 ♤c1 ♦f6 41 ♨g4 g6 42 ♦c5, and played a few more moves, but he did not lose on time, and so he won.

Instead, 34...♕h8 (A) should be a draw, although perhaps slightly the worse of the draw. For example, 35 ♤e8 ♦d8 36 ♤xd8 ♤xd8 37 ♤xf3 ♤g5 38 ♤h5 ♤xh5 39 ♤xh5 cxd3 40 cxd3 ♤c8 41 ♦g6 ♦b7, a small edge to White as the bishop on g6 is uncomfortable.

Alternatively, 35 ♤e4 ♤g6 36 ♤xf3 ♤xf3 37 ♦e8+ ♦h7 38 ♤g8+ ♦h8 39 ♦f7+ with perpetual. Or in this line, 35...♕c8 36 dxc4 bxc4 37 ♤xd4 c3 38 b3 ♤f5 39 ♤xf5 ♤xf5 40 ♦e4 ♤xd4 41 ♤xf5 ♤d1+ 42 ♦h2 ♤xh1+ 43 ♤xh1 g5, and the position is blocked after, for example, 44 ♦e4 ♦e2, probably ending up as an unusual draw.

There is still some life in the game, so even the quiet and uninspiring move can blossom into interesting play.
Test Fourteen

14.1 Black to play

A) 35...g8
B) 35...e4
C) Something else?

14.2 Black to play

A) 35...e4
B) 35...d1+
C) Something else?

14.3 White to play

A) 37 g5
B) 37 xd5
C) Something else?

14.4 White to play

A) 38 xc2
B) 38 b8
C) Something else?
As we saw in Test 10.1, I am in trouble here, with several pawn weaknesses, and some holes for my opponent’s pieces after my pawns have been forced to advance. After some thought, I found a way to keep my position alive, giving away a couple of pawns, while creating some much needed pawn activity.

I tried 30...a4 31 \textit{Ta}5 (31 \textit{Sc}5 is solid enough, and keeps an edge, but does not attack any of the pawns), and now the pawns went over the top with 31...c5!.

It is an important defensive principle that if your pawns are in poor health anyway, and some will drop before too long, it is a good idea to ensure that when the opponent starts picking up the pawns, you can create piece complications while the opponent spends time chewing up the pawns. I was fortunate that I had an opportunity to keep some counterplay.

Obviously 32 dxc5 \textit{Axe}5 allows Black to recover the pawn, and Black’s pieces are now active, with the rook being an annoyance. Therefore my opponent took the other way, with 32 \textit{Bxc}5?! \textit{Be}6, but now Black suddenly has tactical resources.

‘Therefore’ is a dangerous word in chess, and White should probably have played 32 \textit{Sc}6! \textit{Be}6 33 \textit{Bxc}5 instead. Black no longer has the ...\textit{Be}6 option. After 33...\textit{Da}6 34 \textit{Cc}1 \textit{Dd}7 Black is a pawn down, while White’s pieces are solid. Perhaps there is no quick win for
White, but he should eventually prevail.

Instead, after the text move, the position is still alive.

If now 33 $\texttt{xb5}? \texttt{xd4}$, forking the two rooks, and Black is ahead.

There is, it has to be admitted, an element of bluff in attempting to escape from such defensive break-outs, and to some extent I was relying on the thought that 33 $\texttt{xd5}$ looks risky for White, when previously he had such a safe edge. Who wants to take risks when you are already ahead? I could not try to pretend that I had calculated through to a satisfactory conclusion, but then there is a reasonable probability that most players would be unable to find a totally clear advantage either.

Here 33 $\texttt{xd5} \texttt{c7}$ (also maybe 33...$\texttt{xa7}$) 34 $\texttt{xf5} \texttt{c1+} 35 \texttt{f2} \texttt{c2+} 36 \texttt{e3} \texttt{xb2}$ would undoubtedly add to a touch of fear for White to think about, and if 37 $\texttt{h3} \texttt{c7} 38 \texttt{h6+} \texttt{g8} 39 \texttt{c5} \texttt{xf5} 40 \texttt{xc7} \texttt{xa2}$, when White, although maybe better, has to deal with the implications of two connected passed pawns for the opponent. In practical terms, considering Black's earlier dreadful position, this is a success.

So White tried instead 33 $\texttt{xf5} \texttt{a7}$ 34 $\texttt{xb5} \texttt{g5}$, when arguably White's position is even more critical.

White has two extra pawns, certainly, but both his rooks and his knights are under attack, or potentially under attack. I was in with a chance, whereas a few moves previously, I had felt my position was close to resignable.

Then in the hotel, the alarm bell went. This for many years has been almost a traditional entertainment on the last days of various tournaments in England, maybe through malice. There have been several other occasions in recent years in the 4NCL, but these, as far as I know, have had innocent explanations. In a big hotel, with so many people wandering around, especially after most of the games are finished, accidents happen. The story on this occasion is that one of the players propped his elbow on the bar on one of the counter ledges, which had been
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shut, and the alarm was set off. In other words, a complete accident.

There was not much chance to concentrate with a noisy fire alarm. When all the players had to escape from a crowded room I am sure that many players would have been extremely disrupted during the last few minutes of the time control. But what can be done?

Upon resumption, I completely lost my thread of thought, and lost even before move 40, starting with the blunder 35 f4 e4?? (B), overlooking that he could take the central pawn after 36 d6 (or 36 xd5 immediately) 36...a6? (a quick loss, but 36...xd6 37 exd6 e6 38 b7 only slightly delays the result) 37 xd5 d3?? (another blunder) 38 xe4 1-0.

This was sickening. I could have had no complaints if I had lost as a result of my poor earlier play, but losing as a result of a fire alarm, when I was back in the game after much effort... Well, this was tough.

After the bell, 35...g8! (A) was, of course, much better.

Then 36 g3 (Black was threatening ...h3+) 36...e6 37 h4 c7, and I am reasonably certain that I had considered this position in advance, but the chaos of evacuation disrupted me, and my confidence evaporated. A possible and likely drawing line would be 38 xd5 c1+ 39 f2 c2+ 40 e3 xb2 41 f5 gxg2 42 xh6+ g8 43 e7+ g7 44 f5+, repeating. The computer suggests 43 g3, and if 43...xa2, White has a good escape route with 44 d6!, then e4-d5, but 43...cc2! leads to a draw.

There is much to be explored in analysis. In practical terms, White would have had to find good moves in a complicated position up to move 40.

Test 14.2

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Kidlington 2007

From Test 12.3, clearly the position is about to open up, on both sides. Play continued 32...xd4 33 b1 xf5 34
I played 35...\textit{\textcolor{red}{g}4??} (A). In my notes, I said that, “as so often, a panicky reaction, short of time, makes things worse. My last few moves appear to have been correct, but my king is suddenly exposed. Oh dear, help, bring another piece closer to the king, and hope for the best – but this is not good chess thinking! I have played attacking defence, and should carry on with this, forcing White to go on the defensive. That way I can keep the balance and even more.”

I should have played 35...\textit{\textcolor{red}{d}1+} (B) 36 \textit{\textcolor{red}{h}2 \textcolor{red}{d}4}, gaining a tempo to bring extra pieces into play, the knight, and the rook on c8. It still looks fragile, but White’s queen must move, and cannot find a good way to attack the rook on d1. Then 37 \textit{\textcolor{red}{f}2 \textcolor{red}{c}1} 38 \textit{\textcolor{red}{e}1 \textcolor{red}{e}1} 39 \textit{\textcolor{red}{x}c1 \textcolor{red}{x}c1} 40 \textit{\textcolor{red}{x}d4 \textcolor{red}{w}e7} 41 g3 gives an advantage to Black, but it will be difficult to force the extra pawn to a win.

Instead, 35...\textit{\textcolor{red}{e}7} (C) 36 \textit{\textcolor{red}{x}e7 \textcolor{red}{c}1+} 37 \textit{\textcolor{red}{h}2 \textcolor{red}{x}e7} 38 g3 \textit{\textcolor{red}{d}d1} 39 \textit{\textcolor{red}{x}h5} d4 40 \textit{\textcolor{red}{e}4 \textcolor{red}{h}1+} 41 \textit{\textcolor{red}{g}2 \textcolor{red}{c}1+} is a draw.

After my panic, Cutmore played the simple and natural 36 \textit{\textcolor{red}{f}6!}, and I was in trouble. 36...\textit{\textcolor{red}{g}6} 37 e6 was unenticing for Black: for instance, 37...\textit{\textcolor{red}{e}7} 38 \textit{\textcolor{red}{x}f7+ \textcolor{red}{x}f7} 39 \textit{\textcolor{red}{x}e7 \textcolor{red}{c}1+} 40 \textit{\textcolor{red}{h}2 \textcolor{red}{x}f6} 41 \textit{\textcolor{red}{x}d5+ \textcolor{red}{h}8} 42 \textit{\textcolor{red}{x}h5+ \textcolor{red}{g}8} 43 \textit{\textcolor{red}{d}5+ \textcolor{red}{h}8} 44 \textit{\textcolor{red}{d}8+ \textcolor{red}{g}8} 45 \textit{\textcolor{red}{h}7+}, picking up the queen.

So, 36...\textit{\textcolor{red}{d}4} 37 \textit{\textcolor{red}{x}h5 \textcolor{red}{g}7}.

My position was close to resignable, but my opponent made two mistakes in a row, in time trouble, starting with 38 \textit{\textcolor{red}{g}3?}, overlooking my reply, or at the very least overlooking my follow-up.

38 \textit{\textcolor{red}{x}g7!} was simple enough, then 38...\textit{\textcolor{red}{x}g7} 39 \textit{\textcolor{red}{x}h2 \textcolor{red}{c}6} 40 \textit{\textcolor{red}{g}3 \textcolor{red}{g}6} 41 \textit{\textcolor{red}{x}g6 \textcolor{red}{x}g6} 42 \textit{\textcolor{red}{x}g5}, keeping an extra exchange, with White’s queen and rook being highly active. Straightforward chess, but unspectacular, and my opponent was presumably wanting a quick checkmate, or a win of the queen.

I squirmed on with 38...\textit{\textcolor{red}{f}5!}, somehow holding on with sticking tape. If 39 \textit{\textcolor{red}{x}f5 \textcolor{red}{x}g3} 40 \textit{\textcolor{red}{x}h5 \textcolor{red}{g}7}, level. With care, White can still keep a highly sig-
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nificant edge, though, with, for example, 39 e4f3 d4 40 d3 c6 41 xg7 xg7 42 f2.

Instead, however dire my position was, I suddenly had counterplay after 39 g5?? c1+ 40 h2 c5.

I have at least a draw! Naturally, I could not expect more. However, after 41 xg7+ g7 42 g1+ 43 h3 c3+, there was the biggest oversight of all, with

44 g4?? d1+ 45 f4 d4 mate (0-1).

An embarrassing result, even for the winner.

Instead, 44 g3 h1+ 45 h2 f1+

46 g2 is a draw by perpetual. There is nothing more after 46...f5+? 47 xf5 xf5 48 f2.

Test 14.3
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British League (4NCL) 2007

By the end of play in Test 12.2 Black was two pawns up, but he had isolated doubled pawns on the f-file, and it looked more than likely that at least one of his queenside pawns could fall, with his minor pieces being under threat, and therefore being unable to cover his pawns. I felt relieved that I had recovered from my earlier mistake, and I was hoping that I could try to play for an edge.

Black immediately returned the doubled pawn, with 33...f4 34 xf4 e6. This is not the only line, but seems to be the most sensible. The computer suggests 33...xe2+ 34 xe2 c4+ 35 f2 d5, 'equal', but if White can regroup his pieces to more effec-
tive squares, Black would have to be careful after 36 a5 f4 37 \( \text{Ah}2 \) b5 38 \( \text{Q}d2 \).

In the main line, White played 35 \( \text{Ke}3 \). Black's bishop is now under attack again.

In my contemporary notes, I implied that Black, with his extra pawn, should be comfortably equal, and that he should have chances of being better. Therefore I gave 35...\( \text{Ad8} \) a query, but defending the bishop is a natural enough idea, with chances of holding the draw. Instead, any bishop move would allow a quick \( \text{Ad6} \), with chances of chewing up Black's queenside pawns.

It turns out that Black is slightly worse in other lines, except for one, so perhaps ...\( \text{Ad8} \) is a '?' move rather than a '?' move.

The best line for Black is 35...\( \text{Cc7} \), and then if 36 \( \text{Af4} \ \text{Ce6} \), repeating. White has choices, for example, 36 a5 bxa5 37 \( \text{Axc5} \) f5!, but no real advantage.

Instead, 35...\( \text{xf3}?! \) 36 gxf3 (best) 36...a5 37 \( \text{Ad6} \) g5 38 \( \text{Cc4}+ \) f8 39 \( \text{Af1} \) gives White a clear edge. The point of the interpolated check is soon seen after 39...b8?! 40 \( \text{xb6} \) \( \text{xb6} \) 41 \( \text{Axc5}+ \), and Black's queenside collapses.

Another attempted spirited line is 35...\( \text{b3} \) 36 \( \text{Ad6} \) \( \text{Cc7} \) 37 \( \text{xb6} \) \( \text{xe3} \) 38 \( \text{Ab8}+ \) (38 \( \text{xe3}?! \) \( \text{Ad5}+ \)) 38...\( \text{Cc8} \) 39 \( \text{xb3} \), but Black's four isolated pawns will be far less effective than White's two connected sets of pawn pairs. In this line, 36...\( \text{xa4} \) 37 \( \text{Cc4} \) f7 38 \( \text{xb6} \) \( \text{b5} \) 39 \( \text{xb5} \) axb5 40 \( \text{xb5} \) f5 41 b3 is also difficult to defend for Black.

Back in the game, I tried 36 \( \text{xa6} \), having noted that 36 \( \text{xd5}? \) \( \text{xd5} \) 37 \( \text{Cc4} \) \( \text{Ad6} \) 38 \( \text{Af4} \) \( \text{Cc6} \) 39 \( \text{Ad5} \) f7 40 \( \text{Axc6} \) \( \text{xf4} \) gives no advantage for White, and leaves him a pawn down. So this sacrifice needs to be shelved.

Now it is time for a double-blunder, close, of course, to the time control. He was very short of time, a few moves to make in the last minute, while I had a few minutes to spare. I never particularly enjoy time scrambles, seeing this
as the most stressful part of the game. These days, I have the fear of my eyesight suddenly deteriorating, or possible dizziness when short of time, and so I felt I needed to pace my play. However, if you have five minutes left, it is sometimes useful to use part of that time to find the best move.

Here he made a tactical blunder with 36...f5??. Even with plenty of time on the clock, it is difficult to find the most accurate defensive move, as if he moves his bishop, the rook exchange is favourable for White, but if he does not move the bishop, his pieces remain tied up.

The computer suggestion, 36...h5!, looks irrelevant at first, but compare 36...g7 37 g4!, and the point is quickly made. Black needs to avoid being pressed down on his kingside pawns. After 36...h5, the computer gives the line 37 b4 f6 38 a5 f7 39 d3 cxb4 40 axb6, with perhaps a slight edge for White.

What, however, is the problem with the other pawn move, in the game? The answer is that Black has made a slight weakness in his pawn structure, the f-pawn no longer defending the e5- or g5-squares. I had looked at xd5 on move 36, a move earlier. I did not attempt to analyse the position a move later. I had already spent time analysing it the previous move, and did not want to eat up extra time on the clock. As a result, I missed a chance of winning.

I had the chance of playing 37 xd5! (B) 37...xd5 38 c4 d6 (38...c7 39 f4!) 39 f4 c6 40 g5!, which is now winning.

Maybe the moral is that you should not completely abandon the sacrifice you have rejected. Who knows, a little pawn tweak, or a small, quiet piece move, could alter one’s perspective quickly.

37 g5?? (A) was an awful move anyway. Black has now found good squares for his pieces, with 37...d4!. After 38 f4 h6 39 f3, I suddenly noticed that 39...a8! was strong for Black.

Fortunately, a second or two later, another piece landed, with 39...xf3!. I finally made the exchange sacrifice with 40 xd5! xd5 41 c4 e5. Then 42 xd5+ f8 43 e3, and I had hopes of keeping a slight endgame edge with two bishops versus bishop and knight. It was not to be, and he played accurately with 43...e7 44 b3 d6 45 g8 e7 46 g3 c6 47 e1 d6 48 g3+ d7 49 f4 e5 50 h2 c6 51 c4
A frightful number of years ago, I won the British Under-18 Championship with a string of minor endgames, solely on the basis that I was able to understand such endgames better than my opponents, who made mistakes. Nowadays the young defenders seem to play more accurately!

Test 14.4
C.Crouch-J.McKenna
London Open 2006

Following on from Test 12.4, Black played 35...c7. 35...f8 followed by ...e7 would transpose if he tries ...c7 then ...e6. There was, however, the more worrying prospect of 35...d4 followed by ...d3, and a severe danger of being zugzwanged.

Therefore I was relieved that he played quietly, and I saw the opportunity of grabbing Black’s advanced c-pawn, with 38 e2 f8 37 d2 e7. Excellent, I thought, take the pawn, ‘job done’. Except that the highly natural 38 xc2?? (A) was a serious mistake. After 38...d6,

Black is not only sitting next to the passed c-pawn (he cannot, of course,
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take it yet, as White would reply with 
b8\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{w}+)}}, but more significantly, the king 
is now protecting the d5-pawn, so that 
any breakout sacrifice with b8\texttt{\texttt{w}} followed by c7 no longer allows White to 
win Black's d5-pawn.

My last legitimate chance to save 
the game was \textbf{38 b8\texttt{\texttt{w}+!}} (B) \textbf{38 ... \texttt{\texttt{x}xb8} 
39 c7 \texttt{\texttt{e}e4+} 40 \texttt{\texttt{xc2} \texttt{xc7} 41 \texttt{\texttt{xd5} \texttt{xf2}}, and although Black is a pawn up, 
his position is totally unwinnable, with 
no passed pawns, no pawn weaknesses, and with opposite-coloured 
bishops, leaving no chances of a 
zugzwang.

In the game, after Black played 
38...d6, White somehow convinced 
himself that he was a pawn up, and 
therefore had no reason to worry about 
losing. A big mistake. It was time to 
grovel by sacrificing the passed pawn on 
the seventh, bringing the bishop back 
into play, although he still has to work 
hard to try to set up a draw.

\begin{center}
\textbf{Diagram 165}
\end{center}

Instead, \textbf{39 a2? a6 40 c3 b8} 
was by now a clear win for Black, even 
though White has two advanced 
pawns.

\begin{center}
I tried \textbf{41 b5+ xc6 42 xc7 xc7}, 
with the expectation that I was going 
to resign in a few moves. After all, 
White's bishop and pawn are immo-
bile, and Black's knight has no incen-
tive to move, so in effect Black is a 
pawn up in a king and pawn endgame.

We'll see what happened later in 
Test 15.3, with a surprising result.
Test Fifteen

15.1 White to play

A) 39 \textit{d4}
B) 39 \textit{h1}
C) Something else?

15.2 Black to play

A) 46...\textit{e4}
B) 46...\textit{f8}
C) Something else?

15.3 Black to play

A) 48...\textit{b8}
B) 48...\textit{fxg4}
C) Something else?

15.4 Black to play

A) 50...\textit{d2+}
B) 50...\textit{f2+}
C) Something else?
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Test 15.1
C.Crouch-R.Granat
British League (4N CL) 2007

Following on from Test 13.3, I blundered here, losing a pawn with 39 \( \texttt{d4} \) (A). I was conscious that my other pieces were not very active, and so I wanted to bring my king into play, overlooking that I would lose a pawn with 39...\( \texttt{a8} \) 40 \( \texttt{a1} \) \( \texttt{c5} \). Black threatens a knight fork on b3.

Clearly if I had had the chance of thinking before the time control, I would have seen this tactic in advance. It would have taken much more time to find a wholly convincing way to equalize, though, Black’s pieces being better placed than White’s.

39 \( \texttt{h1} \) (B) 39...\( \texttt{f6} \) 40 \( \texttt{h2} \)! is best, putting the rooks into what seems to be a blind corner on the h-file, but White is also doubling on the only effective file. If, for example, 40...\( \texttt{c5} \) 41 \( \texttt{h1} \) \( \texttt{e6} \) 42 \( \texttt{a1} \), and Black can make no real progress. Black could try instead

41...\( \texttt{xa4} \)+ 42 \( \texttt{b4} \) \( \texttt{c5} \) 43 \( \texttt{xh6} \) \( \texttt{xh6} \) 44 \( \texttt{xh6} \) \( \texttt{d3} \)+ 45 \( \texttt{c3} \) \( \texttt{f4} \) 46 \( \texttt{f1} \), but White should be able to hold.

All this was quite a surprise for me when I resumed my analysis while writing this book. I had assumed that while I knew that my 40th move was a losing mistake, I was in a bad shape already, but it turns out that I was equal.

Instead, after the pawn dropped, Black won with 41 \( \texttt{e3} \) \( \texttt{xa4} \) 42 \( \texttt{f1} \)? (a lack of confidence, following my error; the only chance was to attack, with 42 \( \texttt{h1} \) \( \texttt{f6} \) 43 \( \texttt{e5} \) \( \texttt{e6} \) 44 \( \texttt{f4} \) \( \texttt{xf4} \) 45 \( \texttt{xf4} \) \( \texttt{f8} \)+ 46 \( \texttt{g3} \) \( \texttt{b5} \) 47 \( \texttt{h5} \), when Black should be winning, but he would have had to work hard) 42...\( \texttt{b5} \) 43 \( \texttt{e2} \) \( \texttt{af8} \) 44 \( \texttt{h1} \) \( \texttt{f6} \) 45 \( \texttt{h3} \) \( \texttt{e6} \) 46 \( \texttt{d1} \) \( \texttt{b2} \) 47 \( \texttt{b3} \) \( \texttt{d6} \) 48 \( \texttt{e2} \) \( \texttt{d3} \) 49 \( \texttt{e6} \) \( \texttt{xe4} \)+ 50 \( \texttt{xe4} \) \( \texttt{xh3} \) 51 \( \texttt{f5} \) \( \texttt{c4} \) 52 \( \texttt{a7} \)+ \( \texttt{b6} \) 0-1.

Test 15.2
D.Buckley-C.Crouch
British League (4N CL) 2006

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White is still better after mediocre play by both sides. I had missed a clear win a few moves ago, as we saw in Test 11.3, and now he is on top. He has a clearly better queen and rook ending. It is easy enough for him to create a well-guarded passed pawn on the queenside, whereas Black's extra pawn on the kingside may be vaguely useful, but is unlikely to do anything constructive.

My opponent immediately threw away half his advantage, by offering the exchange of rooks, with 32 $\text{d6}$?, instead of trying to strangle the queenside with 32 $\text{d5}$.!

Indeed, White soon lost the whole of his advantage, as Black now fully equalized with 32...$\text{f3}$ 33 $\text{txg6+ hxg6}$ 34 $\text{d5}$.!

The position is now equal, but I was still hoping to squeeze an edge, out of sheer pride. Or perhaps punch-drunk chess. We quickly reached the time control with 37 $\text{g2}$ a5 38 bxa5 bxa5 39 $\text{e3}$ $\text{d5}$+ 40 $\text{h2}$ $\text{f6}$. As I noted earlier, "A wrong change of direction, ... and eventually I had to find a way to return the king to g7. I had vaguely thought that I could pressurize White by trying to exchange the queens, but White's queen was too active to allow Black to attack."

There is the further danger that White has the possible threat of the outside passed pawn, if given the chance of h4, g4, h5, and then Black's king would be seriously displaced if White could create a passed pawn.

Play continued 41 $\text{b6}$+ $\text{e7}$?! (still the wrong direction) 42 $\text{h4}$. 

We were approaching the time control, and I sensed that the psychological initiative was now slightly in my favour, and so tried 34...$\text{f4}$+, instead of the simple drawing line 34...fxg2 35 $\text{xg2}$ $\text{g5}$+ 36 $\text{f1}$ $\text{c1}$+.

Then came 35 $\text{g3}$ $\text{d4}$, on which I commented: "The best move, but at the time I thought it was a blunder... 36 $\text{xf3}$ ...as I had missed this." Still, it wasn't too bad as I could immediately regain the pawn with 36...$\text{xc4}$. It was disconcerting, all the same, that I had not seen his simple capture.
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There is still some life in the game. If 42...\textit{d}d4 43 \textit{xd}d4 \textit{exd}4 44 \textit{g}g2 \textit{e}e6 45 g4 f5, and there are several ways, as far as I could see, to draw, one being 46 g5 f4 47 f3 (but not 47 \textit{f}3?? d3, and White is in zugzwang) 47...\textit{d}d5 48 \textit{f}f2 a4 49 \textit{e}e2 \textit{e}e6 50 \textit{d}d3 \textit{d}d5 51 \textit{e}e2, when neither side can make progress.

I also felt vaguely uncomfortable after 42...\textit{f}f8 43 \textit{f}f6, but maybe this was a safe level draw.

My 42...\textit{d}d2 was also possible,

but now it was his turn to think about playing for more, with 43 \textit{b}b7+ \textit{e}e6 44 \textit{c}c6+ \textit{e}e7 45 \textit{g}g2 \textit{e}e1 (45...\textit{f}f8? 46 \textit{c}c5+ loses a pawn, so the king stays in the centre a little longer) 46 g4, and I still have to play accurately.

The position is, of course, equal. The only likely way of losing such a position, with either colour, would either be to overpress, trying for a win, or by a blunder. Somehow, though, both players managed to go wrong.

I played the unnecessary 46...\textit{e}4? (A), which vaguely makes possible some dangerous checks on f3, but also makes weaknesses on Black's own squares.

It was much more precise to play 46...\textit{f}8 (B), covering the opponent's potential passed pawn. If 47 h5 gxh5 48 gxh5 \textit{g}g7 49 h6+ \textit{h}h7 50 \textit{f}f6, and the position might look scary, but Black is fine after 50...\textit{e}e4+ 51 \textit{f}f1, and then a perpetual after 51...\textit{b}b1+. Here 51 \textit{h}h2 keeps the play going, but the pawn ending is a draw after 51...\textit{f}f4+ 52 \textit{xf}4 exf4 53 \textit{h}h3.

Buckley's queen move, 47 \textit{c}c4?! , was a square too far. He missed his big chance to create some pressure, with 47 \textit{c}c5+!, which forces the king to an un-
desirable square. There would be some uncomfortable zugzwangs later on. Black’s queen looks good at first, and I was relying on this, but while the queen is on an advanced square, it has little impact further behind. There is only one square, on e1, to protect both the e4- and a5-pawns, and this is the reason why there could be zugzwang problems.

Here 47...\(\text{e8?}\) 48 g5 \(\text{d7?}\) 49 \(\text{f8 e6}\) 50 \(\text{e8+ f5}\) 51 \(\text{xf7+ g4}\) 52 \(\text{g6 e2}\) 53 \(\text{e6+ xh4}\) 54 \(\text{f5}\) will sooner or later queen a pawn for White. Therefore Black cannot move the king again here, and so has to rely on a queen move, 48...\(\text{e2!}\). Then 49 \(\text{xa5 g4+ f1 xh4}\). Maybe it should eventually end up as a draw (though there is an element of doubt), but Black has to work hard. There would be much manoeuvring by White to try to squeeze a slight edge after 51 \(\text{e5+ d7}\) 52 \(\text{f6 h3+ e1 b3}\) 54 \(\text{d4+ c7}\) 55 a5 \(\text{c2}\). Of course, if I had played precisely on move 46, it would have been a very simple draw.

Could Black play better with 47...\(\text{f6}\), with a draw if White allows the king to the corner? I was worried about 48 \(\text{f8 e2!}\) 49 g5+ \(\text{e6}\) 50 \(\text{e8+ d6}\) 51 \(\text{d8+ c6}\) (51...\(\text{e6?}\) 52 \(\text{f6+}\), winning a pawn with gain of tempo) 52 \(\text{xa5 g4+ f1 xh4}\), but it is likely still to be a draw.

In the game, I played 47...\(\text{f8}\) with a sigh of relief. He tried 48 \(\text{c5+}\), a move too late. Then 48...\(\text{g8}\) 49 \(\text{e3}\).

I now saw his idea, that with the obvious queen exchange, White ends up winning after 49...\(\text{xe3??}\) 50 fxe3 \(\text{f6}\) 51 g5 fxg5 52 hxg5 \(\text{f7}\) 53 \(\text{g3 e6}\) 54 \(\text{f4 d5}\) 55 a4. But one of the most basic positional rules of the endgame is never to be absolutely certain of what is going on in a pawn endgame, as there is so often such a small gap between winning, drawing and losing. There is more latitude in piece endgames, and so I kept the queens on, 49...\(\text{a1}\). I doubt whether I could have concealed that I was starting to feel tired, and so instead of offering a draw, he made a last winning try with 50 \(\text{h5 e5}\).
And now he was the one to blunder, with 51 h6?? (51 hxg6 fxg6 is, of course, a draw) 51...g5, and Black soon pocketed a pawn. After 52 f3 exf3+ 53 xf3 e6 54 h3 h7, there was an even bigger surprise. I was about to be a pawn up, but it was not clear that I genuinely had a winning advantage. My opponent was thinking hard, while I was trying to think of ways of making progress, and gearing up to having to play against quick moves from my opponent, short of time. But then he just thought and thought, and lost on time.

I was confused. Had he made move 60 or not? Had I got the time control wrong? Had I misread the digital clock? Quite possible when I could see with only half an eye. Or, most unlikely of all, did he not notice that he had lost on time? After a brief gap, I pointed to the loss on time, still slightly confused. Here, the traditional flag-fall would have been clearer, but with a digital clock, I had so many bits and pieces to look at. To my relief, David agreed that this was, indeed, a loss on time, so 0-1.

Following on from Test 14.4, all I could do was to move my king, plus a few weakening pawn moves. It is a simple win for Black, the sort of exercise that you would use to teach children. All that Black needs to do is to concentrate on the king and passed pawn, and White’s king will gradually have to give way, because of zugzwang. Then after a few more zugzwangs, the d-pawn will be promoted, with a win for Black.

I played a couple of token moves, waiting for the opponent to demonstrate that he showed he knew how to do it. I did not expect this to last for long. I centralized with 43 d3 d6 44 d4. There was still a glimmer of hope
when he played 44...\texttt{c6+?}!, still winning, but not so direct, since Black will have to play the knight back to b8 at some stage. The most direct plan for Black would have been 44...f6. The computer still initially suggests that White is better, but this is clearly mistaken. After, for example, 45 \texttt{d3} h5 46 \texttt{d4} c6 47 f4 h4 48 e3 c5 49 d3 d4 50 e4 c4 51 f3 c3 it is easy to see that the pawn will queen.

After 45 \texttt{e3} f5, I could have continued playing rather longer with 46 b8\texttt{f+}! ? \texttt{xb8} 47 f4 d7 48 g5, although Black eventually wins with ...e5 and ...f6. I played the opponent here, rather than the board. I reasoned that if he wanted to ‘activate’ the knight, rather than squash the passed pawn, then let him. Amazingly, it worked. After 46 f4 c5 47 g3 c4 48 g4, Black blundered.

Most reasonably sensible moves win, the most thematic being 48...\texttt{b8}! (A), in effect a simple king and pawn ending.

Astonishingly, he tried 48...fxg4?? (B) 49 hxg4, and White will soon have two passed pawns, with enough counterplay to equalize. Play suddenly finished 49...c5 50 f5 gxf5 51 gxf5 d6 52 f6 e6 53 b8\texttt{f} \texttt{xb8} 54 f7 xf7 55 xd5+ \texttt{\textfrac{1}{2}}-\texttt{\textfrac{1}{2}}.

There have been many dreadful games in this collection, and I am not hiding losses, even when I did not have the physical strength to be able to find good moves. My play was dreadful that evening, and if he did not win it, then there is criticism of his own play. If this seems ungenerous to my opponent, who achieved a draw against a much higher-rated opponent, the point is that he had the chance of beating an IM opponent on his plate, and he missed it.

\textbf{Test 15.4}
N.Pert-C.Crouch
Bury St Edmunds 2006

We have just reached the time control, and I had played dreadfully, as we
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saw in Test 11.4. My position is, of course, losing. At the time, I noted that “maybe I did not quite have the strength to aim convincingly for the draw”. To which we can add that in a weekend tournament, with five long games, sometimes even six, in two-and-a-half days, even the young and physically stronger players can become tired, and make mistakes. I used to play many weekenders, from the late 1970s onwards. Nowadays, it becomes more difficult.

What is interesting is that for most of the finish, my opponent, a grandmaster and the younger player, actually played worse than me in the next part of the game. This can be proved, and is not a matter of opinion. Just now, he has a clearly winning position, but at a later stage I had the chance of forcing a draw. The trouble is that I had only a couple of minutes before the flag-fall, and I missed the opportunity.

Play continued 37...<br>

\[
\text{g8 (37...<br>}
\text{b1+ 38 h2 g8 39 f3! should nevertheless eventually win for White; here 39 xf6?? b8+ is Black's trap) 38 xf5 gx5 39 h2 h7 40 f3 g7 41 e5 g5 42 f3 h8+ 43 g1 f8 (back again).}
\]

Now 44 f1?! started to move in the wrong direction. The king moves into open play, and Black has chances of giving a check with the rook.

In quickplay finishes, the subtleties of a delicate zugzwang play may be missed. Correct was 44 b7!, and if 44...a8, then 45 f4 e4 46 xf7+ g8 47 e7 a1+ 48 h2! (which explains why White avoids f1) 48...e1 49 xe6 xe3 50 d5, and White has two extra pawns, while his king is safe. Pert’s choice gives Black much better chances of holding.

Then came 44...g8 45 e2 b8. Now White’s king is exposed, and Black has drawing chances. He played 46 f4 to my surprise, giving Black’s knight an active square, but how else is White to make progress? Maybe starting again with 46 f2.
I counterattacked, or at least aimed for a perpetual, with $46...\textcolor{red}{\text{e}}4\textcolor{blue}{\text{g}}7\textcolor{red}{\text{xf}}7\textcolor{blue}{\text{xb}}2+48\textcolor{blue}{\text{e}}1\textcolor{red}{\text{xb}}1+49\textcolor{blue}{\text{e}}2\textcolor{red}{\text{xb}}2+50\textcolor{blue}{\text{d}}3$.

Now I missed a draw, by playing $50...\textcolor{blue}{\text{d}}2+?$ (A).

There was a draw with $50...\textcolor{red}{\text{f}}2+!!$ (B) $51\textcolor{blue}{\text{c}}4\textcolor{red}{\text{c}}3\textcolor{blue}{\text{xx}}g2$ (or $52...\textcolor{red}{\text{e}}4+53\textcolor{blue}{\text{b}}4\textcolor{blue}{\text{xx}}g254\textcolor{blue}{\text{e}}7\textcolor{blue}{\text{xb}}2+55\textcolor{blue}{\text{a}}5\textcolor{blue}{\text{b}}356\textcolor{blue}{\text{xe}}6\textcolor{blue}{\text{xe}}357\textcolor{blue}{\text{e}}8+\textcolor{red}{\text{g}}758\textcolor{blue}{\text{d}}5$ with broadly similar types of position) $53\textcolor{blue}{\text{e}}7\textcolor{red}{\text{e}}4+54\textcolor{red}{\text{c}}4\textcolor{red}{\text{c}}2+55\textcolor{red}{\text{b}}5\textcolor{blue}{\text{c}}3$, and then there was a time scramble. I cannot remember the finish in detail, but a plausible finish might have been something like $56\textcolor{blue}{\text{xe}}6\textcolor{blue}{\text{xe}}357\textcolor{red}{\text{c}}6\textcolor{blue}{\text{h}}358\textcolor{blue}{\text{e}}8+\textcolor{red}{\text{g}}759\textcolor{blue}{\text{e}}7+\textcolor{red}{\text{g}}860\textcolor{blue}{\text{d}}5\textcolor{blue}{\text{h}}461\textcolor{red}{\text{g}}6\textcolor{red}{\text{g}}462\textcolor{red}{\text{e}}5\textcolor{blue}{\text{xx}}g663\textcolor{red}{\text{xf}}5$, and White wins, which he certainly did in the game: $1-0$. 

Test Fifteen
No attempt is given to suggest what sort of percentage scores should be expected for players of particular grades or ratings. This would be slightly artificial. By definition, every move I made was, in the end, a mistake, with a 0% score. I am sure that any reader would have made a better percentage, even a reader who has not played chess before. By sticking a pin on the board, the player cannot stick far below 30%, which my own score seems by contrast puny.

The reader, aiming to improve his or her game, should try to think about the exercise games, and should try to analyse and learn. A reader who scores more than 70%, considerably in advance of the random result, is doing well, but there are possibilities of improvement on even this. After all, even a 70% score would suggest that on each position, there is a 30% chance of a mistake on these critical positions, and a score of 30% error would be a worry for most strong players.

**How to Audit Your Results**

Players want to improve their grading scores. An extra point per ten games over the year would mean 10 extra points in terms of the English grading system (this is very easy to calculate!), or approximately 72 extra points in Elo terms. All this would mean a substantial increase in grading terms.

I have, of course, calculated my results of the 2006/7 season, as analysed in this book, and we shall turn to this later. In the meantime, I have gone through the games played in the few months since I wrote this book, to see whether I have improved my accuracy.

Between May 2009 and September 2009, I played 18 tournament or match
games, but not in international events. I wanted to concentrate on this book! There were 18 games, mainly but not entirely against considerably lower rated opposition.

My results were: +12 =4 -2, which makes 78%.

The scores were inflated by six easy wins in the British Braille Championship. My seventh opponent, Chris Ross, was a much stronger opponent, and drew against me.

The interesting question is whether I could have scored considerably more if I had avoided mistakes. Clearly if I had avoided my two losses, I would have scored at least an extra point. In fact, in one of these games I could have won with accurate play. Of the four draws, I could have found a win against Graham Morrison.

What should have happened then would have been: +14 =4 -0, which makes 89%. Thus just avoiding three slips could have created an 11% increase in performance.

Maybe this is the one part of the game, the avoidance of errors, that makes the biggest difference in improving one’s performance. My challenge for the season is to halve this 11% slippage.

It is perhaps important to recognize that you should avoid double-counting. If you make a mistake, and reach what should have been a losing position, but later won, then congratulations, but you are lucky. What is more important, in terms of results, is to remember the games you have lost, or only drawn after having had a winning position.

**Using the Computer**

In this book, I have used the computer in analysing my own games, and the recommendation for the reader is, of course, to take advantage of the computer. Do not overestimate the computer though, but use it as a tool.

I was relatively late in making use of the computer, partly being suspicious of computer assessments. I have been suspicious of reading computer-based assessments which have clearly been wrong, and have preferred my own analysis, with board and pieces. The computer is important in generating ideas quickly, but even here the human reader should treat everything with suspicion.

It is still important to take advantage of making brain-power in analysis. After all, in a proper game, the player is not allowed to use the computer, and the human needs to practice in thinking about the game.

**And Finally...**

Except, of course, chess is not final. Even after the last melting of the polar icecaps,
there will still be chess being played, and new Noahs will still be enthralled by the
game. It is, of course, quite possible that theory has gone so deeply that almost
everything has been studied in depth, and that new versions of chess, maybe
based on western chess, or eastern chess, could be tried, maybe a fusion of rules
with ideas from western and eastern chess. This would be a long way ahead. For
the next half-millennium, we still have the current chess of Greco and Ruy Lopez.

For individual players though, any chessplayer is mortal. A player might have
learnt the game, become fascinated, learnt so many ideas of chess strategy and
tactics, maybe becoming a strong player, maybe hoping to become an even
stronger player. Then perhaps before the final push, at the peak of the player’s
strength, chess ability starts to decline. It is now reasonably well established that
for a professional player, the peak strength will be around the mid-thirties, and
will start to decline slowly. For me, I really only seriously started studying chess at
the time that theoretically I should have been starting to decline. I have played a
lot of chess, but did not have time to study hard. Perhaps I can still add to the
game, but not through my playing strength. I have continued to study the game,
but can contribute more to the theory of the game, rather than through playing
over-the-board chess. As the old saying goes, I have forgotten more about chess
than most players have even learnt.

A Summary of Games, in Chronological Order
Note: See the list of exercises at the end of the introduction for all the test games.
This list is used partly as a research tool, to help to indicate when and why bad
moves have been played. There being relatively few games in this book, all played
by myself, that it hardly seems worthwhile to add a second alphabetical list.

All games were played in England.

September 2006
Buckley-Crouch, 0-1 (win)

October 2006
Hebden-Crouch, 1-0 (loss)
Crouch-Cox, ½-½ (draw)
Gregory-Crouch, 1-0 (loss)
Crouch-Hutchinson, 1-0 (win)
Pert-Crouch, 1-0 (loss)
November 2006
Nurmohamed-Crouch, 0-1 (win)
Morris-Crouch, 1-0 (loss)
Randall-Crouch, 1-0 (loss)
Crouch-Gait, 0-1 (loss)

December 2006
Sen-Crouch, 1-0 (loss)
McKenna-Crouch, ½-½ (draw)
Crouch-Oryakhal, 1-0 (win)

January 2007
Crouch-Radovanovic, ½-½ (draw)
Crouch-Okike, 1-0 (win)
Crouch-Roberson, ½-½ (draw) [see also Crouch-Povah, ½-½, November 2006, given in the notes]
Lauterbach-Crouch, ½-½ (draw)

February 2007
Crouch-Peacock, ½-½ (draw)
Cutmore-Crouch, 0-1 (win)
Crouch-Rose, 0-1 (loss)
Crouch-Lewis 0-1 (loss)

March 2007
Crouch-Granat, 0-1 (loss)
Wall-Crouch, 0-1 (win)
Sowray-Crouch, 1-0 (loss)

A substantial majority of the remaining games in this period were wins, although it is possible that a small number of games may have been mislaid, a problem of being partially sighted.

24 games have been analysed in this collection, of which 7 were wins, 6 were draws, and 11 were losses, a score of 45%.

Once you have gone through your games, the next stage, if you want to improve your playing strength, is to go through your statistics. Altogether in the main part of the season up to late March, I have recorded 56 games. A few of the games might have dropped out of the system, sometimes because with poor eye-
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sight, I could not read the scoresheet. Also, I should perhaps have added the final game of the season, a London League loss against IM John-Paul Wallace, when I should probably have been better. I beat him the next time around, to level the scores, sealing a match win against the formidable Wood Green team, previously unbeaten for close to ten years.

I have no doubt that in the 56 games I have recorded, there will be unrecorded mistakes, often slight inaccuracies. In 24 of my games, I found identifiable inaccuracies. As an approximation, I won, or occasionally played a solid draw, in half my games, and I have no reason to analyse these in much detail. The other half is of much more interest. These are the games I need to focus on to cut out mistakes, and to increase my percentage scores.

So: 56 games (100%) were played, of which 32 games (57%) seem to be ‘clean’, including two wins against IMs, and indeed a win against a GM.

Many of my opponents were of considerably weaker strength, and therefore did not force me to have to play under pressure, so it would be unrealistic to claim that I necessarily played well.

The remaining 43% (24 games) is of more interest. This included: 7 wins (12.5%), 6 draws (10.7%), and 11 losses (19.6%).

Clearly at the very minimum, I would have gained 10.7 percentage points by avoiding losses, if I had turned losses into draws. The theoretical maximum of turning bad moves into wins would by 31.1 percentage points, but this, of course, would be unachievable, in that we cannot claim that my opponent would have made mistakes if I had played the best moves.

So we need to examine, move by move, what the most likely result would have been had I avoided the mistakes, and found the best moves.

Starting with the Losses

The obvious starting point is cutting down the losses. If there are players of roughly equal strength, but not players of top grandmaster strength (where draws are more likely as there are few mistakes), a typical score might be +40% =20% - 40%.

As an illustration, let us assume that a player improves, and can cut out a quarter of his losses. This might turn out next season with a result of +50% =20% - 30%, an end percentage score of 60% as opposed to 50%. For simplicity, we call this an increase of 10 English (ECF) grading points.

It is, of course, unlikely that a player will turn all his or her losses into wins. A more likely assumption will be that half the reduction of losses will turn into draws, and the other half will turn into wins. The previous draws would, after a
year of improvement, turn into wins.

10 grading points (an approximate equivalent of 72 Elo points) is quite a big jump. Even here, the player is far from cutting out losses, and this is far from perfect play. It is, however, progress. A fast improving junior, absorbing the ideas of chess rapidly, may often show an increase of 25 English grading points, with a score of +65% =20% -15%, and perhaps the implication that it would be time to play stronger and more testing opposition.

For more established players, it is difficult to gain 25 grading points a year, or even a decade, or ever. All you can do is to chip away at the margins. If your mind is befuddled when trying to calculate complications, then sadly you will not be able to calculate ten moves deep, and, of course, there are other physical limitations.

Therefore one can not have unusually high expectations. If you can cut out even a tenth of your losses, this is an improvement, and maybe if you start to feel encouraged, you can try again next time around. This is perhaps a more pessimistic, but certainly realistic, view than in the main argument of the book. After all, one of the main thrusts of the argument is that if the reader can learn to cut out a few basic and not so esoteric weaknesses, you can improve your chess substantially. Just cut out a few silly blunders, and there can be a substantial gain.

It is time to consider the perspective of the Elo rating system, rather than the English rating system, a ladder system rather than one of finding the average. Two good and useful rating systems, but with highly different perspectives. In the Elo system, we start off with the rating of the two players, and calculate in an individual game or tournament how many points may be gained or lost in a particular game. If two players may be of roughly similar strength, then we can imagine that one of the players might gain 20 Elo points over 20 games without gross blunders, through better understanding of the game. This is a slow progress. Under the current system of the Elo international rating system, a player can suddenly drop in a move from a gain of 10 points to a loss of 10 Elo points, a total drop of 20 points.

**The Dumbest Moves**

Maybe it is time to consider the worst moves, and kick them out of the way quickly. I should perhaps note that in the previous few years, the effects of brain damage has had relatively little damage to my understanding of the game, but a much greater impact in my speed of thought, both in terms of speed of calculation, and lack of clarity of eyesight. Also dizziness and tiredness have tended at times to make it difficult for me to think clearly, and I have at times been unable to concentrate on playing anything other than the most superficial analysis.
There have in fact been much worse periods of play in chess terms, particularly at times when I have been actively working on writing books. A complaint for many other chess writers, but probably worse for me, since my physical ability over the board has led to a deterioration in play. Just after my stroke, I gloomily wrote that I had probably gone down to 175 (about 2000 Elo) in playing strength, but fortunately I have consistently reached 200 ECF, and stayed well over 2350 in Elo terms. My target ambition is to get back to 2400, but any loss will tend to go down the greasy ladder, so I need to plan exactly which tournaments to play.

The general conclusion is that I am still quite likely to make serious and unexpected mistakes, and my hope is that I can cut down the blunders to a rating I would be happier to reach.

Time now to look through the most horrendous blunders; the single moves that with even the smallest of thought I could have recovered my score.

The Very Worst Games

1. Crouch-McKenna
Drawn. I should have won easily, but I displayed a lack of concentration, then made several bad moves, and I should have lost. Half a point lost.

When I think of all the bad games in that year, this is the one which I remember the most readily. I feel confident I could have won it easily with better health.

2. Randall-Crouch
A loss, which should have been a win, with a strong attack for me. I had the chance of taking a rook, but I worked out that if I had taken this, he had the chance of pushing two major pieces to a winning back row check. In fact there was only one check, and I would have had everything covered. To make it worse, I had the simple opportunity of taking a rook, after he too had made mistakes, but I rejected it, not noticing that after he won a rook in reply, I could then take the rook with check. A full point lost.

Again, with my mind functioning properly, I should have won easily.

3. Nurmohamed-Crouch
By common consent, the venue at this club was not the most attractive place to play. We were playing in a hut, in the winter, with inadequate heating. I played the opening embarrassingly badly, losing concentration after quickly gaining an edge, and before long I had a losing position, but recovered to some extent, and even later won after my king somehow wriggled out of an attack.
4. Buckley-Crouch
This was one of those nightmare games where both players exchange mistakes, neither player is able to find a knockout, and eventually my opponent found an auto-blunder, when even I could find an easy way to win a pawn. Even worse, he ran out of time after a lot of thought. It was a dreadful game, although if one of the players had played even very slightly worse, the opponent would have won quickly. No points lost for me, as I won.

5. Wall-Crouch
An awful game, with serious mistakes on both sides. My king move, when I attempted to bring it towards safety, was quite simply bizarre, bringing it into the open. My opponent later made a serious miscalculation.

One-move Shockers
In each of these cases, I feel I played well, or reasonably, in the opening, then lost concentration, playing a superficial move quickly, not calculating as far as I should have done. I have played sharply with good effect, but suddenly when the game became critical, I played limply.

1. Sen-Crouch
Good opening play, and with the chance to snatch a pawn as Black. Then, at a later stage of the opening, I needed to think of the one move for my queen to escape to a good square, admittedly difficult to find a few moves ahead, and instead played a ‘simpler’ line, which soon ended in collapse. I lost, and instead should have been better.

2. Hebden-Crouch
I trusted him when he offered a pawn, to keep the initiative. I shouldn’t have. It would have been better to grab the pawn, with the aim of breaking open the queenside. I lost, and with good play it should have been a reasonably comfortable draw.

3. Crouch-Rose
An experimental opening to avoid mainline theory. The opening itself looks playable, if not especially dynamic, but I missed a big tactic, which I should have seen in advance. I lost, although the opening was about equal.
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4. Crouch-Lewis

I wanted to prove that the Crouch-Rose game was not really so bad, and so overnight I aimed to find improvements. Maybe the opening was not so bad in analytical terms, but I was under the psychological pressure of proving that my idea was good, and lurking behind is the thought that if anything had gone wrong again, I would have been extremely anxious about my play. This was the wrong way to start a game.

I thought I was doing reasonably well in the opening, but a ‘Petrosian exchange sacrifice’ knocked me back. Analysis showed that, slightly beyond my game horizon, I could have satisfactorily found a draw after taking the exchange, but the position was scary, and I tried to play around the sacrifice, rather than accept it. I lost, when I had probably a clear draw.

Four losses, then, when by playing better moves on four critical moves, my expected score would have been 2½/4.

Over-playing the Opening

The last four games indicate a lack of confidence, and I lost heavily. Quite often, though, there is a tendency in my game for over-confidence in the opening, and there are a few examples to be considered. Of course, the best way is to find the correct level, but it is extremely difficult to find it. Of ‘my 60 forgettable mistakes’ in this book, a quarter are uncovered on move 16 or earlier. The next quarter move us only to just beyond move 20. The opening is the most difficult part of the game, because the vast possibilities of chess still remain, and on every move the player has to assess not only what sort of position is likely to arise (attack, positional play, complications, or simplifications), but also what possibilities need to be gradually eliminated. It is only several moves later that it becomes clearer as we move past the opening.

In the next few games, I pressed the position much too far, aiming for attack, but with no real chance of finding a way to safety. It is do or die, but before too long I would be highly relieved if I could escape to a draw.

When I played at Kidlington early in 2007, I clearly decided that I wanted to play imaginative chess, with the confidence that spring was about to come. There were too many bad games as a result.

1. Crouch-Peacock

I played far too imaginatively, and I cannot realistically claim that, even after some modest improvements, I had anything more than the advantage of the first move.
My play went out of control, and I was fortunate that my opponent went for a perpetual, when he could have gone for a winning endgame. *A lucky draw.*

2. Crouch-Gait
Without thinking in great length, I developed my bishop with gain of play, by threatening a big check with the queen and bishop. Had I thought for longer, I would have appreciated that he could defend the threat with counterplay, and that a move later I could have been much worse. He missed it, but my equilibrium was disturbed, and I made mistakes later. *A loss, but I was slightly better out of the opening.*

3. Crouch-Hutchinson
I could not claim much of an edge, and it should have been very close to equal as White. I found a complicated way of playing for an advantage, but this was an illusion, and with accurate tactical play by the opponent, I would have been much worse. He missed it, and ended up losing. *A win, but I overpressed. I should have lost.*

4. Crouch-Radovanovic
I was still out of touch with my opening theory, and I improvised. My opponent missed a well-known opportunity to give Black a slight edge, and then later I made a bad knight versus bishop exchange on g6, allowing Black a semi-open file leading towards h2. I had to work hard for a draw, although there were improvements for him. *A fortunate draw.*

**Simple Tactical Slips in the Middlegame**
Everything seems to be going smoothly. I am heading for, I hope, a winning edge, then suddenly a miscalculation, or more probably, a slip in my thought process, when I assume something, but tactically it doesn’t work.

1. Gregory-Crouch
This seemed smooth enough during the game, but while I won a pawn, it was difficult to convert it into a serious edge, as his pieces were active. Becoming short of time, I immediately sacrificed the exchange, to eliminate a dangerous bishop, but I did not have the compensation that I was expecting. I should instead have quietly moved the king away. *A loss, rather than a draw.*
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2. Crouch-Roberson
I was able to keep a stable positional edge, with a passed d-pawn against a Benoni. I was then lazy in my calculations. *A draw, rather than a win.*

3. Crouch-Okike
I had to give up a queen for assorted play, but I did it the wrong way round, and he could have improved. *I still won, but I could have played better.*

4. Crouch-Cutmore
A defensive mistake, rather than a tactical mistake. I was better, in a sharp position, but I soon made the big mistake of playing too slowly in a sharp position of attack and counterattack. Before too long, I was clearly losing, but then he handled the attack badly, perhaps surprised that he was suddenly in a winning position against an IM. He allowed me a sudden checkmate. *I won, but I very much deserved to lose.*

Getting Ground Down
It happens, and players hate it. With very best play, one cannot, of course, lose a game from the beginning, but sometimes even the slightest mistake, almost invisible, will decide the game. This in fact very rarely happens except at the highest level – in my previous book, I am thinking, for example, of Kramnik-Leko, Dortmund 2006. Usually what will happen, if the players play well but not totally accurately, is that there will be a series of minor slips, the defender gradually slipping away, or the attacker losing his advantage.

The examples I give tend in the end not to have been relatively subtle errors, and there is therefore the chance of being able to learn more from the errors.

1. Lauterbach-Crouch
Even the less experienced player would quickly have seen that my knight was bad on h8. After a few slips, I should have lost, but she avoided the best move, and I was able to hold for a draw. Of course, I did not particularly want to move the knight to such an uncomfortable square, but my mistake came earlier. To kick out White’s bishop on g5, I should have hit the bishop with ...f6, rather than ...h6. I needed my pawn on h7. *A fortunate draw.*

2. Morris-Crouch
I again managed to find one of the knights in the corner, this time on a8 rather than on h8. This was a result of placing my pawns carelessly, creating weaknesses
on the queenside. I wanted to advance my pawn to a5, to prevent my opponent pushing forward with b4 to attack the knight on c5, but in the end my knight had to retreat to a8 much later. There was the strange incident of the fire alarm just before the time control, but even so, I deserved to be losing anyway. A loss, even though I seem to have equalized earlier on.

**Messing up the Endgame**

There are surprisingly few examples of losing in the endgame, or throwing away a win. My biggest fear after returning to playing chess was that I would be so tired, and my eyes dizzy, that I would completely lose the thread of things in the endgame. This in fact has not happened so often, mainly because if I was not feeling in good health that day, I would probably have gone wrong much earlier, in the opening or the middlegame. Nevertheless, in earlier years I often managed to lose concentration in the endgame in the fifth hour, making ridiculous errors from good endgames, and then losing. Such disasters stick in the mind, but, of course, often it was my opponent who made the silly losses, and usually I have forgotten about those games.

In general, I do not particularly fear the endgame as such, but I do fear being short of time, and I do fear tiredness.

I have already noted the poor play against both Buckley and McKenna. In both cases I ought to have been holding the draw, rather than under the illusion of trying to squeeze an endgame advantage, but both my opponents managed to play even worse.

Also:

1. **Pert-Crouch**

I got tired in round 5 in a critical weekender, and as I drifted from a late middlegame into an ending my position became worse and worse. My opponent did not play particularly accurately, and to my regret I managed to miss a chance of a draw. *A loss, but I could have recovered half a point.*

2. **Crouch-Granat**

A difficult queenless middlegame and then endgame, where I started with the bishops and he started with the knights. Neither player handled this with complete positional confidence, but in the end I handled things worse than he did. *A loss, but with good chances perhaps of a slight edge at various stages.*
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Two Difficult Games to Interpret
Sometimes it is difficult to understand what is going on during a game, and also difficult to understand at the post-mortem, or afterwards with the computer. If the game is played at relatively quick time limits, there are almost certain to be mistakes, quite possibly on both sides. The good news, for both players and spectators, is that at least the games are interesting.

In the two London League games I am covering, I managed a draw and a loss, but I could easily have ended up with two wins, or two losses. In my earlier analysis, I must have questioned over half a dozen of my moves, but later I have decided that most of my moves seem to have been okay, and only a relatively small number eventually seemed questionable. So both players played reasonable chess in difficult positions.

1. Sowray-Crouch
I probably had a slight edge as Black in a Sicilian, but I wasted a move with ...b5, normal enough, but here a waste of time. It is difficult to believe that Black was worse, and even significantly worse, but almost everything I tried in my later analysis ended up as bad. The Sicilian is so often on a knife-edge for both players. Eventually I found that the ‘natural’ check with gain of tempo (with ...\texttt{\textasciitilde}f8-a3+ followed by castling) was a serious mistake, and that the ‘unnatural’ ...f6, defending the e-pawn, appears to equalize. At least a draw, probably more, from the opening, but I lost my way later.

2. Crouch-Cox
Even more complicated, and a draw, but with opportunities for a win for either side. He had the more direct winning chances just before the time control. I would have needed to have found much more complicated options, and I very much suspect that I would not have found the best options even if (the standard excuse) my health was better, with a clearer mind. The difficulties for both sides were based very much on the question of finding the right balance between positional advantage and material advantage, with both sides at times having to consider sacrifice and counter-sacrifice. A complicated draw.

And a Little Curiosity

Crouch-Jamshid
My concentration lapsed in an unorthodox opening, and I was already worse after my fifth move. Before too long, I recovered my edge again. A win.
Assessments
My calculations suggest that I dropped ten points as a result of serious mistakes, mainly through dropped half-points, rather than losing from a winning position. This necessarily involves some degree of approximation, as it is difficult to establish early on what the result would have been if I had played the game more accurately. I have tried to err to the side of the draw.

In terms of statistics, the most meaningful assessment in practical terms would be to say that with accurate play, I could have gained 10 points out of 52 games, purely through active play, and avoiding serious mistakes. This is a score of 19.2% that I have lost.

If I had been able to play more accurately, my ECF grading would have jumped by 19 points. It is difficult to make a reliable Elo calculation because of the various methods by which Elo ratings are calculated, depending on the K-factor and the number of games (as well as the average rating) being played. We are, however, dealing with a ball-park figure of around 140 extra Elo points.

Naturally no player can cut out their weaknesses instantly, but even half an elimination of clear weaknesses would, on this basis, give about 10 extra ECF points. Some of the errors in this book may well seem extremely obscure and complicated to many readers, while others might be regarded as simple mistakes, which most reasonably strong players should be able to avoid much of the time.

The basic question for the reader is to think whether you are capable of avoiding at least some of the errors given in the exercises, and if so, whether you will be able to improve in your games. Good luck.

I am going through my new games to see whether I can improve on my play. Maybe at some future date we can compare and contrast our efforts?

The computer these days allows the player to indicate where possible improvements are to be found. Go through the lines and work out what is going on. Don't bother so much about trying to learn opening theory. Just learn, paying equal attention to the different parts of the game: opening, middlegame and endgame; attack and defence; strategy and tactics. And above all, make fewer mistakes.
WHY we lose at chess

The main reason we lose at chess is no great secret: we all make unnecessary mistakes! However, simply acknowledging this fact won’t be enough to help us improve. The key question is how can we eliminate, or at least keep to a minimum, the worst mistakes from our play – those which really cost us vital points?

In this book Colin Crouch tackles this important subject head on. Drawing on his vast experience of tournament play, he analyses critical moments from his games where mistakes occurred and examines how to recognize the danger signals and thus improve decision-making. The reader is challenged by 60 carefully-planned exercises – providing perfect tactical training for real over-the-board battles.

- Essential training to eliminate mistakes and blunders
- Advice on how to spot critical moments
- Covers opening, middlegame and endgame play

Dr Colin Crouch is an International Master, a tremendously experienced tournament player and a highly regarded chess writer. His previous books for Everyman Chess include Queens Gambit Declined: 5 Bf4!, which has been highly acclaimed for its thoroughness and originality, with one reviewer describing it as “the opening book of the year”.

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