Patzer

The magazine for the club chess player

Nigel Short is wrong about everything

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editors Derek Roebuck derek_roebuck@hotmail.com
Rich Wiltshir

✉ Patzer Chess
P O box 957
Subiaco 6904
Australia

ABN 81 316 037 926

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Hard as I try not to, I find Nigel Short quite unlikeable, and I am by no means alone in this. I'm not sure exactly what it is, but perhaps the photograph of the grandmaster at the beach on the cover of this issue of **Patzer** contains some clues. Or maybe it's his juvenility. Short once described an arbiter as a "ginger-haired moron" who was "lucky not to have been physically assaulted" by the grandmaster (*New in Chess* 2016; (7): 44-45). Normally, I would avoid passing judgment on someone I have never met, but Nigel doesn't hold back himself, and I'm sure he must be used to a little criticism by now, so on pages 40 to 61 you will find my thoughts on the Englishman who was at one time, according to Britain's *Daily Mail* (30 April 1992, p.7), "bigger than Madonna" in some places. (If his supporters can resort to hyperbole like this then so can I, which explains the somewhat exaggerated title of the article.)
I've tried to emulate the great grandmaster columnist in another respect too – the article is mostly about me. The chess part centres around detailed analysis of two of my own correspondence chess games. In doing this I hope to show that CC is not (quite) dead. If you disagree with this assertion, please feel free to write in and share your opinions with the readership.
I don't think many CC players rate Nigel Short's point of view very highly. If you would like to read some better thought out opinions, take a look at:

https://en.chessbase.com/post/correspondence-chess-and-correspondence-database-2018

and the ensuing discussion at:

https://en.chessbase.com/post/correspondence-chess-and-correspondence-database-2018#discuss

Our series on simple knight endings continues on page 67 with a look at those rare situations where a player with a solitary knight can play for a win. There are a couple of diagrams that look a bit complicated – don't let that put you off. They are only there to remind you that the knight can stand on many squares and still win.

Coming up in the next issue is another openings articles disguised as a book review, and the latest instalment of our look at the rules from the club player's point of view.
We hope you enjoy reading this issue as much as we enjoyed writing it.

Nigel Short is wrong about everything

A bit of a rant by Derek Roebuck

GM Nigel Short MBE

As I said in the editorial, I find Nigel Short a difficult man to like. He is still a very strong player: he was ranked 55th in the world at the time I started the first version of this article. He has recently given up his column in *New in Chess* magazine to pursue chess politics, and is now Deputy President of FIDE, the International Chess Federation.

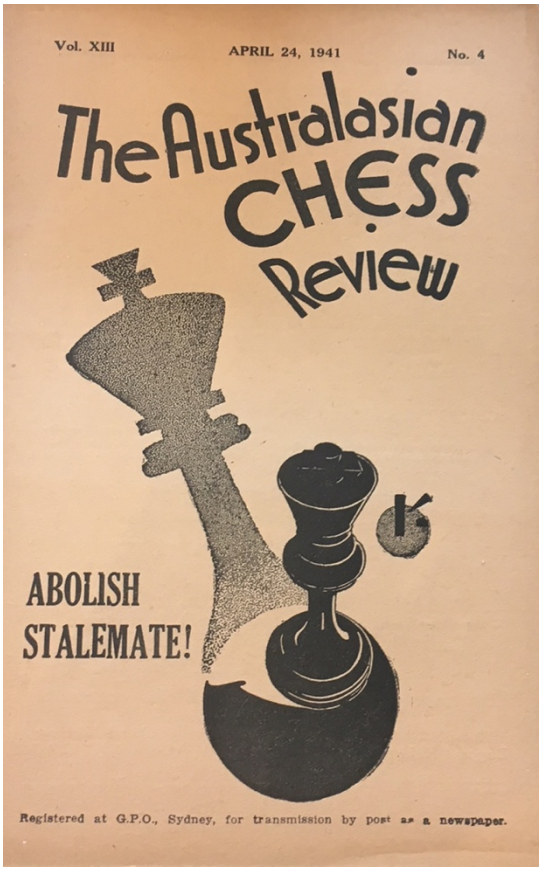
Short has a long history of expressing controversial opinions. Some of his writing has been understandably rather unpopular. The most notorious example was his disgraceful obituary of GM Tony Miles in the *Sunday Telegraph* of 18 November 2001. http://streathambrixtonchess.blogspot.com/2011/11/ten-years-ago-this-week.html

If you do read this awful piece I urge you to remember that Short was 36 years old when he wrote it, not 16. Sometimes I wonder if some of his fellow grandmasters are hoping to live long enough to write *his* obituary.

Other Short opinions are not offensive, although they could be said to reveal something of his personality. When he suggests that stalemate should be a win for the player not on the move we can surmise that he doesn't understand or care about the 99% of chess players who aren't grandmasters, who are not troubled by the number of draws in their games, and who are perfectly happy with the rules the way they are, thank you very much. I suppose you don't get to (quite near) the top in anything without a certain degree of self-obsession. Paul Lillebo has written a very nice explanation of why Short's idea is even dumber than it appears at first sight:

http://en.chessbase.com/post/stalemate-the-long-and-the-short-of-it

To be fair to Short, he's by no means the first person to come up with this bad idea.



Short's views on women's ability to play chess (first published in *New in Chess*, but also available online at http://en.chessbase.com/post/vive-la-diffrence-the-full-story) have been widely derided, in some quarters perhaps a little unfairly, and it seems possible that some of his harshest critics didn't actually read what he had written. You can find a supremely balanced summary of the arguments on both sides at David Smerdon's excellent blog:

http://davidsmerdon.com/?p=1668

But there's no doubt that Short likes controversy. Which brings us to CC…

Short and correspondence chess

"Correspondence chess is just pushing buttons"
Nigel Short in commentary on the London Chess Classic 2014

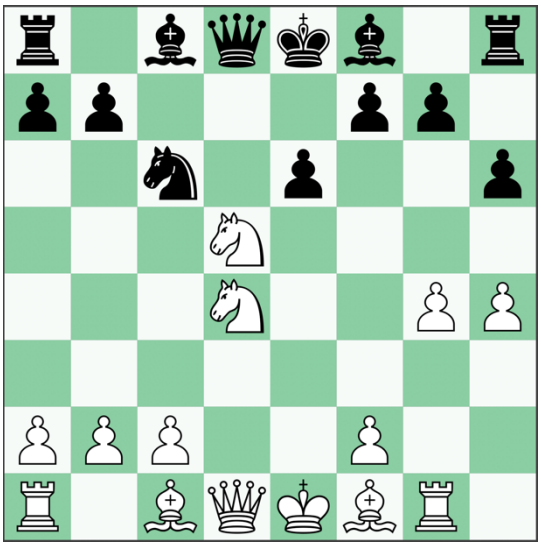
"Correspondence chess should have been politely buried decades ago"
Tweet by Nigel Short

There are other similar comments by the grandmaster out there in cyberspace, but you get the drift. The most accessible record of Short's views is an interview with Gordon Dunlop, available at www.cawa.org.au/information/Short%20Discussion.doc. This contains various other throw-away comments about CC, but no genuine argument to support his contention that *"correspondence chess is not really chess"*.

There is no doubt, of course, that chess engines have affected CC. The question is whether they have made it a completely worthless endeavour. In my opinion, the answer is "not yet", although that day may not be far off. Let me show you, however, that it is still possible to play an entire game of CC at a reasonably high level without even switching your engine on. (It still won't count as *real* chess, of course.)

D.J. Roebuck (ICCF 2321)
J. Rivas Maceda (ICCF 2383)
corr. 2016/17
Pacific Area Team Tournament 7
Sicilian defence, Scheveningen variation, Keres attack (B 81)

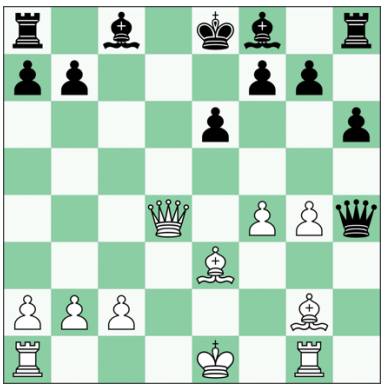
1. e4 c5 2. ♘f3 e6 3. d4 cxd4 4. ♘xd4 ♘f6 5. ♘c3 d6 6. g4 h6 7. h4 ♘c6 8. ♖g1 d5 9. exd5 ♘xd5 10. ♘xd5



▶10

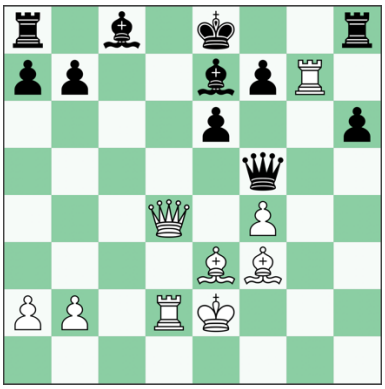
10...exd5

Another game in the same event continued 10...♕xd5 11. ♗g2 ♕e5+ 12. ♗e3 ♕h2 13. f4!? ♘xd4 14. ♕xd4 ♕xh4+



variation

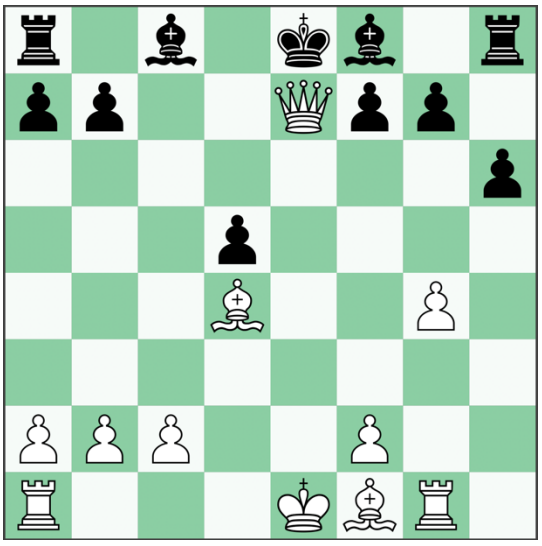
15. ♔e2 ♕xg4+ 16. ♗f3 ♕f5 17. ♖ad1 ♗e7 18. ♖xg7 ♕xc2+ 19. ♖d2 ♕f5



variation

20. ♖xf7 ♔xf7 21. ♕xh8 ♕g6 22. ♕e5 ♕f5 23. ♕c7 ♔e8 24. b4 ♕f7 25. ♗c5 ♗f6 26. ♕d6 ♗e7 27. ♕e5 ♗f6 28. ♕h5 ♗d7 29. ♕xf7+ ♔xf7 30. ♖xd7+ ♔g8 31. ♗xb7 ♖e8 32. b5 ♖d8 33. ♖xd8+ 1:0 D.J. Roebuck – D.H. Lozano Kafure, corr. 2016/17. (I needed the computer's help with that one.)

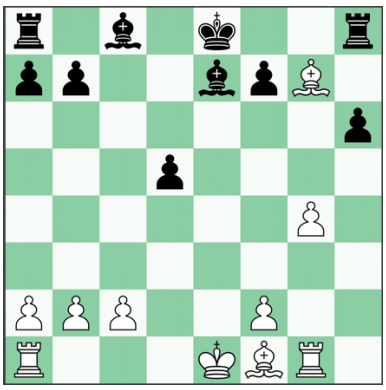
11. ♗e3 ♕xh4 12. ♕e2 ♘xd4 13. ♗xd4+ ♕e7 14. ♕xe7+



▶14

14...♔xe7

At first glance, this seems better than 14…♗xe7 15. ♗xg7


analysis

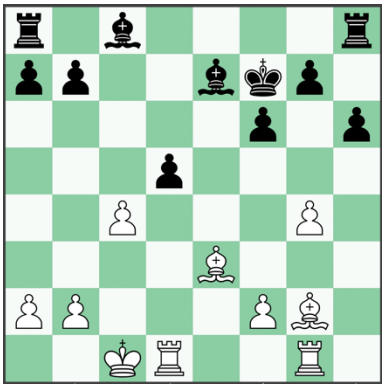
Black is struggling after either 15…♖h7?! 16. ♗c3!? with ♗d3 to follow, or 15…♖g8 16. ♗b5+ ♔d8 17. ♗xh6 ♖xg4 18. 0-0-0.

15. 0-0-0

As I write these words my engine is chugging along happily, spitting out "= (0.00)".

15…♗e6?!

Lukacs and Hazai, writing in *New in Chess Yearbook* 131 (2019), suggest that the immediate 15…f6!? is an improvement. R. Baskin – M. Czopor, Warsaw 2018 continued 16. c4 ♔f7 17. ♗e3 ♗e7 18. ♗g2.

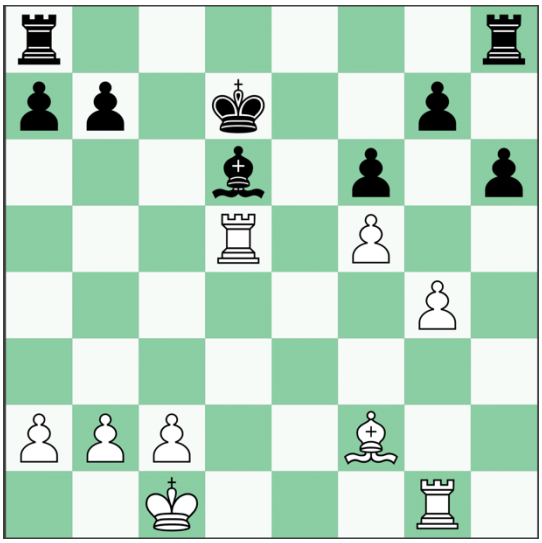

analysis

Now 18…dxc4 19. ♗d5+ would have left white with reasonable compensation for a pawn, but no more. Instead, white could win the pawn back with 16. ♗e3 ♗e6 17. ♗g2, but there is no real edge for him there either.

16. f4 f6 17. ♗f2 ♔d7 18. ♗g2 ♗d6

18…b6!? is probably fine for black.

19. f5 ♗f7 20. ♗xd5 ♗xd5 21. ♖xd5


▶21

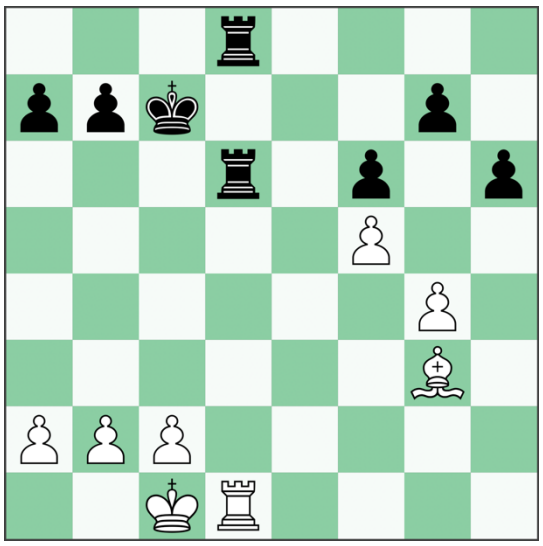
21…♔c7??

An easy mistake to make. Black should play 21…♔c6 or 21…♖ad8 and accept that white still has a minimal edge.

22. ♖gd1 ♖hd8

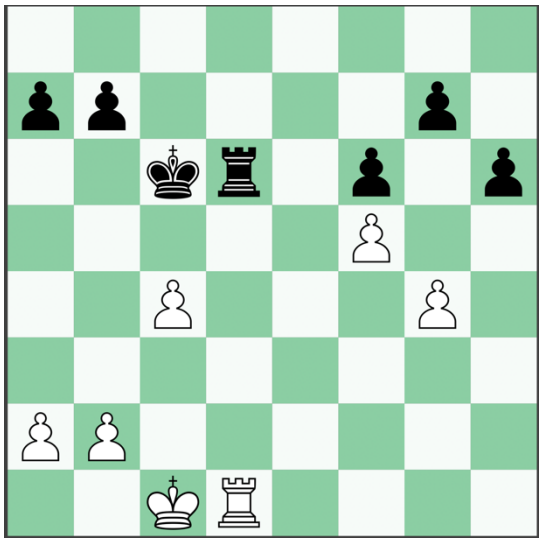
It is not too hard for a human to work out that the inevitable pawn ending is won for white. *Stockfish 10* takes a little while, but gets there in the end.

23. ♖xd6! ♖xd6 24. ♗g3 ♖d8



▷25

25. c4! ♔c6 26. ♗xd6 ♖xd6



▷27

27. b4!

This is possibly the move that *Stockfish* underestimated earlier. It's still old-fashioned "book", quite literally, as in "I found the whole thing in a book that was sitting on my bookshelf" (Parimarjan Negi, *1. e4 vs the Sicilian III*, Quality Chess, 2016). I can assure Mr Short that I pushed no buttons and consulted no databases in the execution of this game. White has a simple win.

27... ♖xd1+ 28. ♔xd1 ♔d6 29. ♔d2 h5 30. gxh5 ♔e5 31. ♔e3 ♔xf5 32. ♔d4 ♔e6 33. c5

1:0

Good opening preparation will be the key to maintaining a competitive edge in CC for a few years yet. But there is more to CC than winning a competition – sometimes we just want to play a cracking game of chess. At the time of writing my FIDE rating is about 1600. I am really bad at OTB (that's what CC players call real chess), and like most patzers I ruin most of my games with stupid errors. CC gives people like me a chance to be creative, while avoiding those pathetic one-move blunders.

Short and the Morra gambit

"…a belief in the existence of Santa Claus is more rational than imagining White has adequate compensation after the unwarranted 3. c3?"
Nigel Short
New in Chess Magazine 2011; (8):47

The Morra Gambit (1. e4 c5 2. d4!? cxd4 3. c3!?) is one of those openings that is looked down on by many highly rated players, without a particularly good justification. It is often stated that black can force a draw, and this may well be true. But, as all of us who play the white

side of the open Sicilian in CC must reluctantly admit, black seems to have forced draws in many of the conventional lines too. It is difficult, for example, to show any advantage at all after 2. ♘f3 ♘c6 3. d4 cxd4 4. ♘xd4 ♘f6 5. ♘c3 e5, or 2. ♘f3 d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. ♘xd4 ♘f6 5. ♘c3 a6 6. ♗g5. The much-maligned Morra has a very important advantage over the mainlines. In OTB chess black will probably not know the theory, and might well succumb to a nasty tactic. If you are interested, you will find plenty of nice examples of this in Marc Esserman's brilliant book *Mayhem in the Morra* (Quality Chess 2012). And in CC black might just try for a win, especially if he or she is higher rated than white:

D.J. Roebuck (ICCF 2321)
D. Chocenka (ICCF 2426)
corr. 2016/17
Australia – Lithuania friendly match
Sicilian defence, Morra gambit (B 20)

1. e4 c5 2. d4 cxd4 3. c3 dxc3

My opponent outrates me by over 100 ICCF points and more than 550 FIDE points, so he understandably wants to win. Less ambitious black players can glide towards a draw with 3…♘f6, which is why I've stopped playing the Morra against lower-ranked opposition. One of my less interesting games went 3…♘f6 4. e5 ♘d5 5. ♘f3 ♘c6 6. ♗c4 ♘b6 7. ♗b3 d5 8. exd6 ♕xd6 9. 0-0 ♗e6 10. ♘a3 dxc3 11. ♗xe6 ♕xd1 12. ♖xd1 fxe6 13. bxc3 g6 14. ♘g5 ♖d8 15. ♗e3 ♖xd1+ 16. ♖xd1 ♗h6 17. ♘xe6 ♗xe3 18. fxe3 ♔f7 19. ♘c5 ♖d8 20. ♖xd8 ♘xd8 21. ♔f2 ♔f6 22. c4 ♔e5 23. ♔e2 ♔d6 24. ♘d3 ♔d7 ½:½ D.J. Roebuck – J.A. Kragten, corr. (Australia – Netherlands friendly match) 2015.

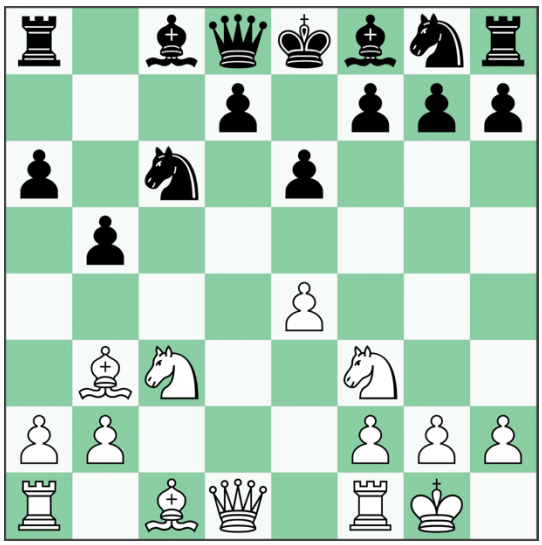
4. ♘xc3 ♘c6 5. ♘f3 e6

5…d6 6. ♗c4 a6 7. 0-0 ♘f6 8. ♗f4 ♗g4 9. h3 ♗h5 is another safe defence for black. White can try 10. g4 ♗g6 11. e5 dxe5 12. ♘xe5 ♘xe5 13. ♗xe5 ♕xd1 14. ♖fxd1 e6 15. ♗e2 ♘d7 16. ♗g3 ♘b8 17. ♖ac1 ♘c6 18. ♗f3 ♗e7 19. ♘e2 ♖d8 20. ♖xd8+ ♗xd8 21. ♘f4 ♔d7 22. ♖d1+ ♔c8 23. ♘xg6 hxg6 24. ♗xc6 bxc6, as in D.J. Roebuck – J.R. da Costa Assunçao, corr. (9th Interzonal Team Tournament) 2017/18, but I suspect this continuation is inevitably sliding towards a draw.

6. ♗c4 a6 7. 0-0 b5

I think black can probably force a draw here with 7…♘ge7 8. ♗g5 h6 9. ♗e3 b5 10. ♗b3 ♗b7 11. ♖e1 ♘a5 12. ♘e5 ♘xb3 13. ♗b6 ♕c8 14. ♕f3 ♘f5 15. axb3 ♗d6 16. ♕g4 ♗xe5 17. exf5 h5 18. ♕h3 ♗c7 19. ♗e3 ♔f8 20. ♖ac1 ♔g8 21. ♗g5 ♕f8 22. ♘xb5 ½:½ D.J. Roebuck – B. Jones, corr. (9th Interzonal Team Tournament) 2017. There may be improvements for white here, and I could be wrong – have a look for yourself.

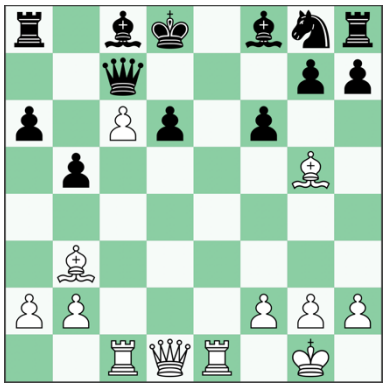
8. ♗b3



▶8

8...♗b7

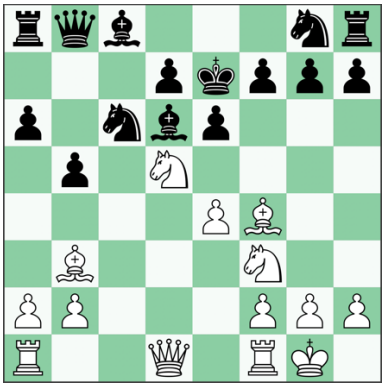
If black tries 8...♕c7 white can play 9. ♘d5! straight away. In a recent game black accepted the sacrifice and lost horribly: 9...exd5? 10. exd5 ♘a5? [10...♘d8!?] 11. ♖e1+ ♔d8 12. ♘e5 [12. ♗d2! is better] d6 13. ♗g5+! f6 14. ♖c1 ♕b7 15. ♘c6+ ♘xc6 16. dxc6 ♕c7



variation

17. ♕f3 h5 [17...♘e7 18. ♗xf6!] 18. ♗f7 ♗e7 19. ♗xh5 ♘h6 20. ♖xe7 ♕xe7 21. c7+ ♕xc7 22. ♖xc7 ♔xc7 23. ♕xa8 fxg5 24. ♗f3 ♘f5 25. g4 ♘d4?? 26. ♕a7+ ♔d8 27. ♕xd4 ♔c7?? 28. ♕xg7+ 1:0 B. Clouston – B. Dekic, Australia (ANU Open) 2019.

9...♕b8 is better, but white maintains a clear advantage after 10. ♗f4 ♗d6□ [black can't avoid this with 10...e5 11. ♗e3! ♗b7 or 10...d6, because in either case white plays ♖c1 with an irresistible attack] 11. ♘f6+! ♔e7 12. ♘d5+



analysis

12...♔f8 [12...♔e8 13. e5! ♘xe5 14. ♘xe5 ♗xe5 15. ♗xe5 ♕xe5 16. ♖c1 looks even worse] 13. ♗xd6+ ♕xd6 14. ♘b6 ♕xd1 15. ♖fxd1 ♖b8 16. ♘xd7+ ♗xd7 17. ♖xd7 gives white a nice initiative without even having to sacrifice material.

9. ♗f4!?

Black is intentionally delaying ...♘ge7. This move order makes it a little tricky for white – where should he put his dark-squared bishop? I'm not sure this is the best move, but 9. ♘d5 doesn't work here because white has no immediate threat, so black can simplify with 9...♘a5!?.

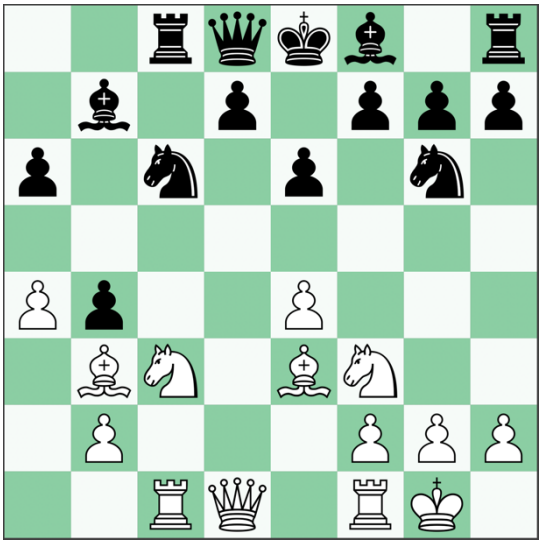
9...♘ge7 10. ♖c1

Stockfish 10 flirts with 10. h4!? here, but it turns out that ♖c1 is much more useful in the long run.

10...♖c8

The computer likes this, but fairly soon black will be regretting not playing 10…♘g6 and 11…♗e7.

11. ♗e3 ♘g6 12. a4 b4



▷13

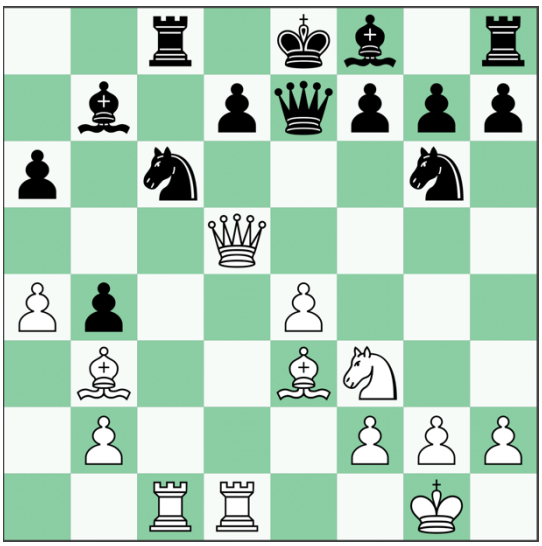
13. ♘d5!

This is how you have to play to beat a skilful CC opponent armed with a powerful engine. You need to find ideas that don't pay off until further in the future than your opponent and his or her program can "see". Would I have played this move in an over-the-board game? Probably yes. I would certainly have looked at it, because it is the thematic sacrifice in this type of position. (If you want to learn more about this, once again you should read *Mayhem in the Morra*.) In any case, once you have looked at all the unappealing alternatives, 13. ♘d5 is almost obligatory. Nearly all of the follow-up comes from the engine, however, and there's no possible way I could have worked it out in OTB chess.

13…exd5 14. ♕xd5 ♕e7

The engine says "= (0.00)", and I'm a piece down, so it's fair to say that all three results are possible.

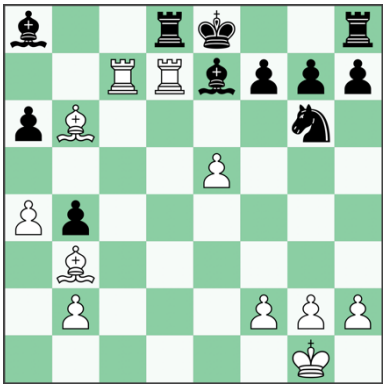
15. ♖fd1



▶15

15… ♖b8?!

When I played 13. ♘d5 I had been expecting my opponent to play 15…♖d8 here, and I think that may have been a better move. Now 16. ♕d2 ♘ce5 17. ♘xe5 ♕xe5 18. ♗b6 ♕f4 19. ♕d4 ♕f6 20. e5 ♕f4 21. ♖c7!? ♕xd4 22. ♖xd4 ♗a8 23. ♖dxd7 ♗e7



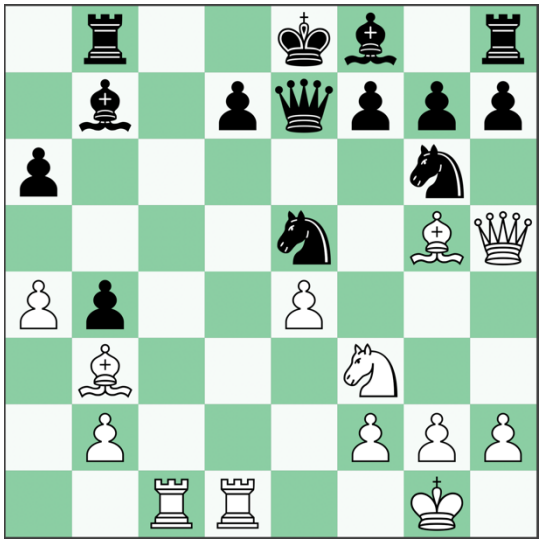
analysis

24. ♖xd8+ ♗xd8 [24…♔xd8?? 25. ♗xf7] 25. ♗xf7+ ♔f8 26. ♗c5+ ♘e7 27. ♗xe7+ ♗xe7 is all very forcing, but looks like a draw. I would have tried 16. ♘g5!? ♘ge5 17. f4 h6 18. ♘h3 and reached a position that, even with the help of an engine, is very difficult to assess.

16. ♕h5 ♘ce5?!

Alternatives for black include 16…h6 and 16…♘d8! Now white can provoke a weakness, and for the first time since move 2 the engine's evaluation is starting to agree with the gambiteer's instinct.

17. ♗g5!



▶17

17…f6

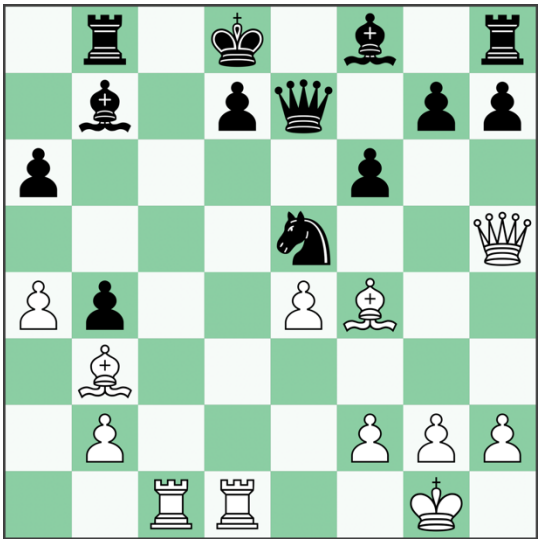
It's not immediately obvious that 17… ♘xf3+? is bad, but after 18. gxf3 ♕e5 [19…f6 self-pins the knight on g6, allowing 20. ♗f4!] 19. f4 ♕xb2 white can play 20. ♕g4!, and black has no good way to defend d7, for example 20…♗d6 [hoping to castle] 21. ♗xf7+! ♔xf7 22. ♕xd7+ ♗e7 23. ♕f5+ ♔e8 24. ♖c7! and white is winning.

18. ♗f4 ♔d8

Black would love to be able to play 18…d5 here, but now 19. ♗xe5 fxe5 20. ♗xd5! is very strong, and if 20…♗xd5 white plays 21. ♖xd5 and 22. ♘xe5. That little move 17…f6 has spoiled everything.

19. ♘xe5 ♘xe5

Black has no choice: 19…fxe5?? 20. ♗g5

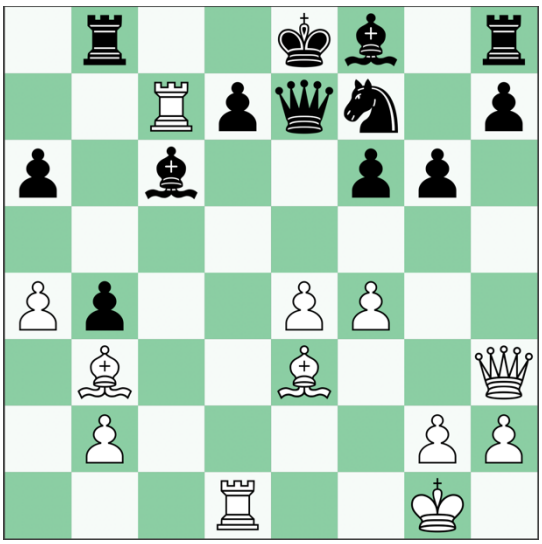


▷20

20. ♗e3! g6 21. ♕h3 ♔e8 22. f4 ♘f7

I wondered whether black might try 22…♘c6 here. White's best is probably 23. e5 ♖d8 and now 24. exf6!? looks good, although the engine also likes 24. ♗d5.

23. ♖c7 ♗c6□



▷24

24. ♔h1

No rush. The engine initially likes 24. ♗a7!? here, but why force black to play a move he is going to make anyway? 24. ♗f2!? is also quite interesting.

24...♖d8 25. ♖c1!

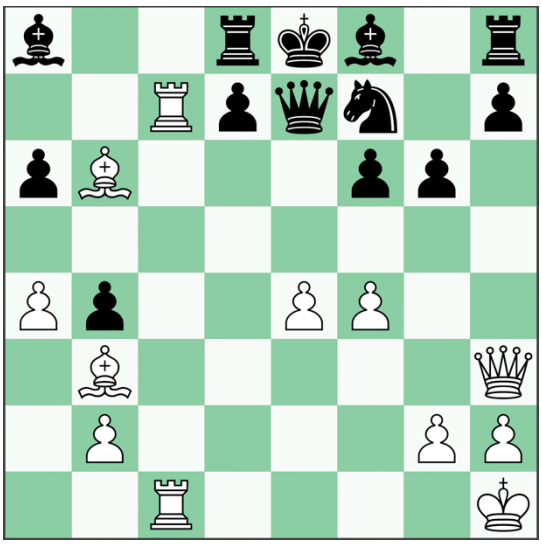
This is the kind of move I need an engine to find. White is threatening to play 26. ♗c5. In an OTB game I probably wouldn't have looked past 25. ♗b6?!, threatening ♖xc6, but black can parry this with 25...♘d6.

25...♗a8!

A much more tenacious defence than 25...♗xe4? 26. ♗c5 ♘d6 27. ♖d1, when white is probably already winning.

26. ♗b6

This is probably the crucial moment of the game.

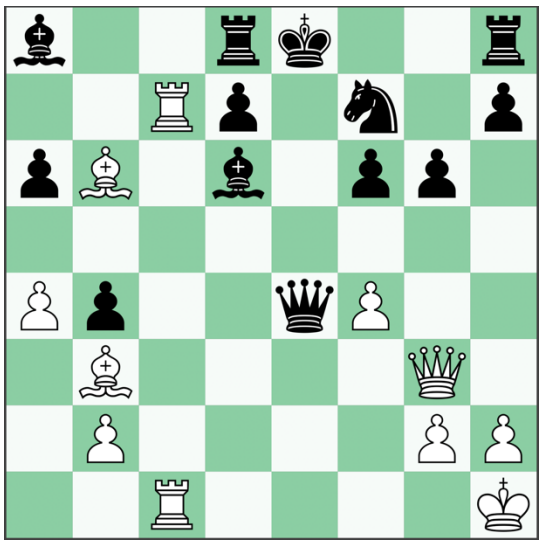


▶26

26...♕xe4!?

It was at around this point that I started to realise how difficult it was going to be to win. White has to be very careful to avoid simplifying into an ending where he has a material advantage but where black can hold a draw. For example, after 26...♗h6 27. ♖c8?! [27. ♖f1!] ♗xf4 28. ♖xd8+ ♘xd8 29. ♖c8 ♗b7 30. ♖xd8+ ♕xd8 31. ♗xd8 ♔xd8 32. ♗d5 ♗xd5 33. exd5 white is winning, according to the engine, but a resourceful opponent may well be able to organise a defence. Black also has another alternative here. He can sacrifice the exchange with 26...♘d6!? 27. e5! fxe5□ 28. ♖a7! ♗b7!?, although this is probably not enough to save him from the coming attack.

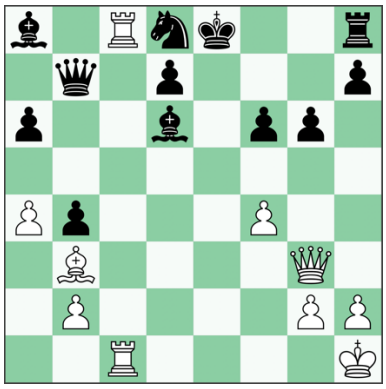
27. ♕g3 ♗d6



▷28

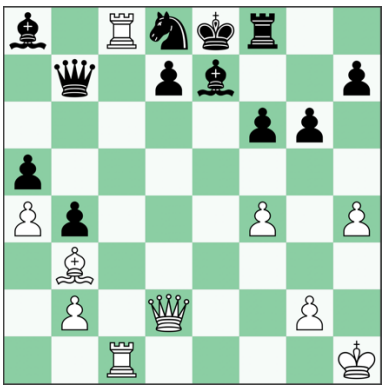
28. ♖e1

This is the obvious move, but I spent a long time looking at 28. ♖7c4, just in case. Black's best is probably 28…♕b7, when white continues 29. ♗xd8 ♘xd8 30. ♖c8.



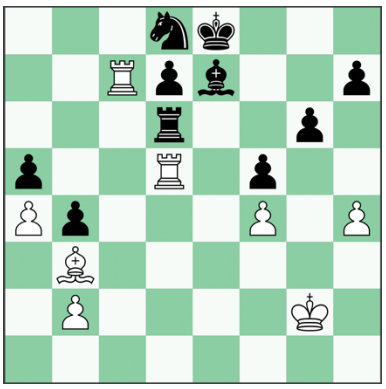
analysis

Now after 30…♕xg2+ 31. ♕xg2 ♗xg2+ 32. ♔xg2 ♗xf4 33. ♖1c4 ♗e5 34. ♖xb4 ♔e7 35. ♖b6 ♗xb2 36. ♔xa6 white is winning, so black should play 30…a5. I wasn't sure how to make progress here, especially in view of the weakness on the h1-a8 diagonal. The engine suggests 31. h4 ♖f8 [poor black's options are rather limited here] 32. ♕e1+ ♗e7 33. ♕d2.



analysis

White threatens ♖8c7, which forces …♕xg2+, and black can't avoid this with 33…♕a6 because after 34. ♖xa8! ♕xa8 35. ♖c7 he will have to give up his queen to prevent mate on d7. The game might have continued 33…f5 34. ♖8c7 ♕xg2+ 35. ♕xg2 ♗xg2+ 36. ♔xg2. The threat to d7 mandates 36… ♖f6□, and after 37. ♖d1 ♖d6 38. ♖d5!? black has no good way to protect the pawn on a5.



analysis

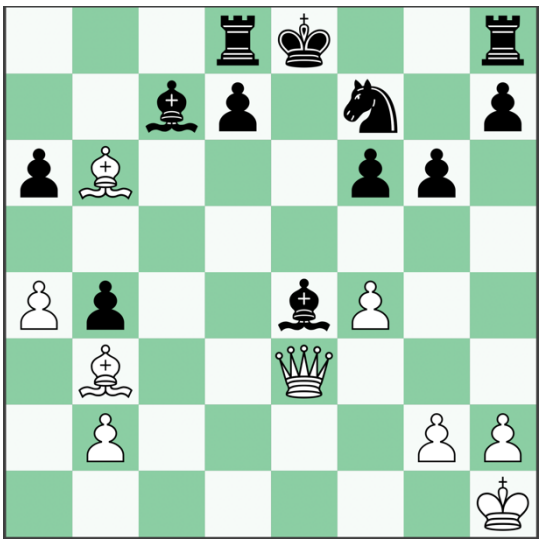
38… ♖xd5 39. ♗xd5 ♗xh4 40. ♖a7 should be winning for white, but in the end I decided that 28. ♖e1 was the better option after all.

28…♗xc7 29. ♖xe4+ ♗xe4

White has finally regained the material he sacrificed 16 moves earlier, but it's still fiendishly complicated.

30. ♕e3

The obvious 30. ♗xc7 runs into 30…♖c8 31. ♕e3 ♖xc7 32. ♕xe4+ ♔f8, reaching a similar kind of position to that seen in the game.

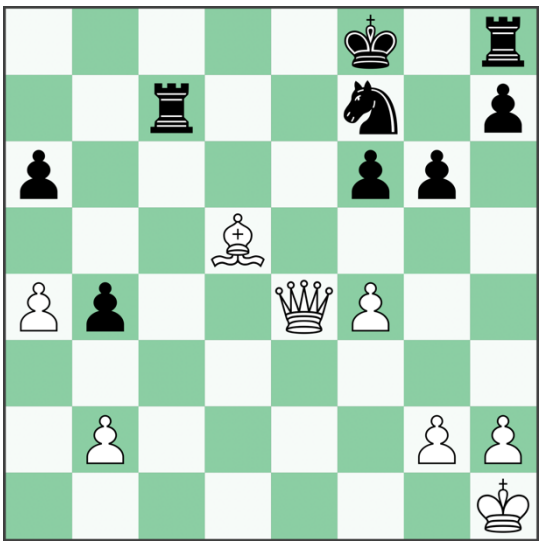


▶30

30…d5!

30…♗xb6 31. ♕xe4+ ♔f8 fails, but not to 32. ♕xb4+? ♔g7 33. ♗xf7 [33. ♕xb6?? actually loses after 33…♖b8] ♔xf7 34. ♕xb6, which is one of those tricky queen versus two rooks endgames, where the engine evaluation is, of course, =0.00. Instead white has to find 32. ♕d5! ♘h6 33. ♕d6+ ♔e8 34. ♕xf6!, forking the rook on h8 and the bishop on b6.

31. ♗xc7 ♖c8 32. ♗xd5 ♖xc7 33. ♕xe4+ ♔f8

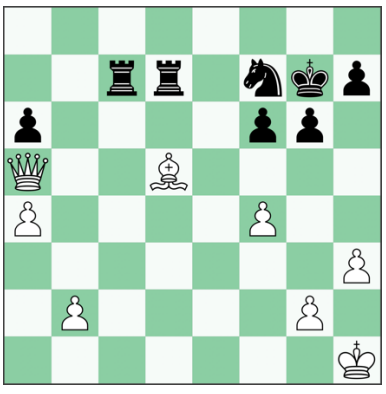


▷34

The key to understanding this position is, remarkably, one of the black pawns. White must prevent his opponent from simplifying to a fortress draw with queen versus rook and pawn on g6.

34. g4!

White sidesteps a little pitfall. There is a pawn capture with check here, but 34. ♕xb4+? is a bad idea. After 34…♔g7 35. h3 the engine wants black to play 35…♖e8, but I think 35…♖d8 is more precise, and might even be equal, for example after 36. ♕a5 ♖dd7.



analysis

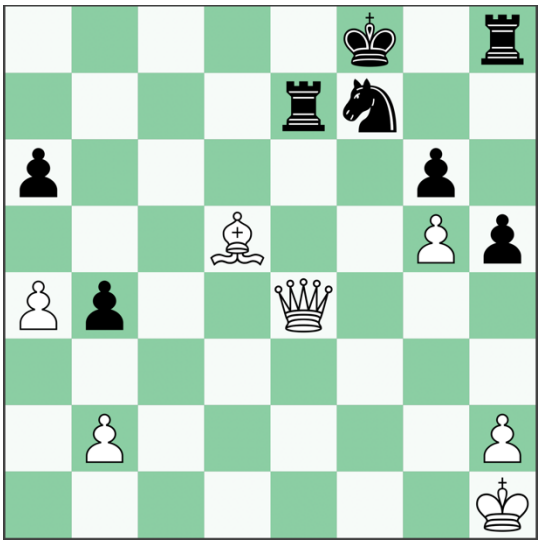
Now the engine's best efforts all seem to head towards tablebase draws. There may be a forced win for white, but it wouldn't be easy.

34...h5 35. g5 fxg5□

35...f5? would be bad, because white could play 36. ♕xb4+ with a great position.

36. fxg5 ♖e7!

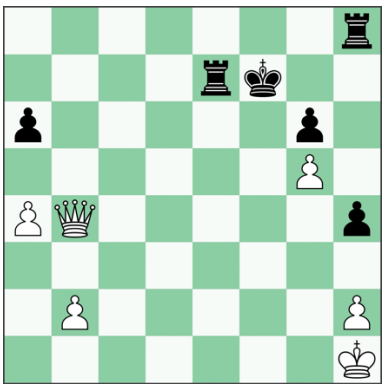
Black can't defend the b-pawn with 36...a5? because 37. ♗xf7! ♘xf7 38. ♕xg6 safely captures the vital g-pawn: 38... ♖g8 39. ♕d6+ ♖e7 can be met with either 40. g6 or 40. h4.



▷37

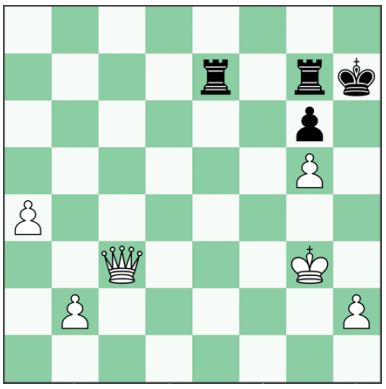
37. ♕d4

37. ♕xg6? would be premature, because 37... ♖g8 rescues black. 37. ♕xb4?! is the obvious move, but 37...h4! 38. ♗xf7 ♔xf7 leads to another one of those difficult queen versus two rooks endgames.



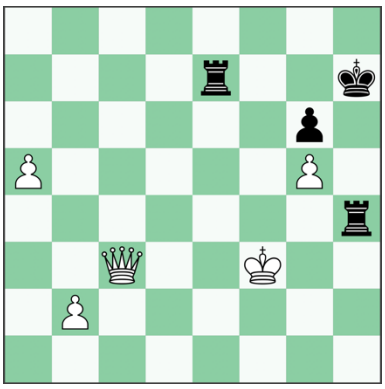
analysis

Can white win? After 39. ♕b6 ♖h7 40. ♔g2 h3+! 41. ♔g3 ♖g7 42. ♕xa6 ♔g8 43. ♕c8+ ♔h7 44. ♕xh3+ ♔g8 45. ♕c8+ ♔h7 46. ♕c3 it looks as if black has been throwing away his pawns, but he intends to establish, as a fallback position, a fortress based on that pawn on g6, which he has cunningly retained.

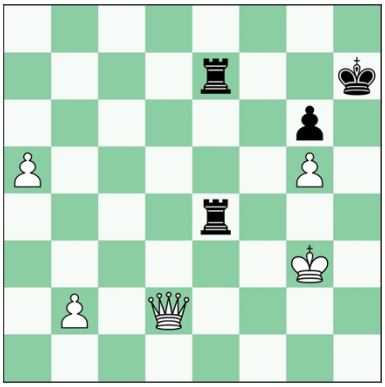


analysis

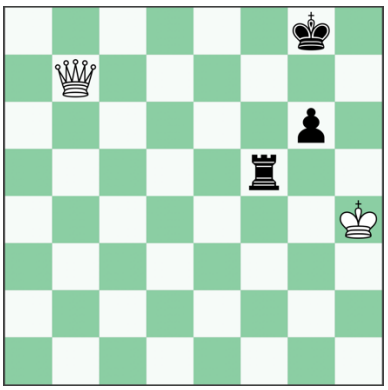
Now black changes his defensive set up from a horizontal barrage (rooks doubled on rank 7) to a vertical one with both rooks on the e-file: 46... ♖e2 47. a5 ♖ge7 48. ♔f3 ♖2e5!? 49. h4 [49. a6? ♖f7+ 50. ♔g4 ♖fe7! 51. a7 ♖e4+ 52. ♔f3 ♖a4 mops up the a-pawn] ♖f7+ 50. ♔g4 ♖e4+ 51. ♔g3 ♖fe7 52. ♔f3 ♖xh4, and although white's connected passed queenside pawns look scary, black is still holding on.


analysis

Now 53. ♔g3 ♖he4 draws, and 53. ♕c5 allows 53…♖h3+ 54. ♔f4 [the only square to avoid the king being trapped in a cage in the bottom right hand corner of the board] ♖f7+ 55. ♔e4 ♖b3 56. ♕e5 ♖d7 with a draw. 53. ♕d2!□ is best, but black still has a chance after 53…♖h3+ 54. ♔f4□ ♖h4+ 55. ♔g3 ♖he4, when white's king is trapped in the cage.


analysis

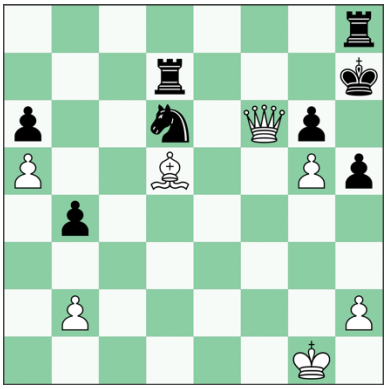
56. b4!? ♖e2! Now all of the engine's winning ideas involve giving up the a- and g-pawns to promote on b8. Unfortunately for white, this will be a draw if black is careful. 57. ♕d5 ♖2e4 58. b5 ♖4e5 59. ♕h1+ ♔g8 60. ♕c1 ♔h7 61. b6 ♖xa5 62. ♕h1+ ♔g8 63. ♕c6 ♖xg5+ 64. ♔h4 ♖ge5! 65. b7 [65. ♕xg6+ ♔f8 is only a draw] ♖xb7! 66. ♕xb7 [66. ♕xg6+ ♖g7 draws] ♖f5 is the fortress mentioned earlier.


analysis

White can make no progress here. Back to the game…

37…♖d7 38. a5 h4

The engine also suggests 38…♔g8, which looks a bit strange to a human. The game might continue 39. ♔g1 ♔h7 40. ♕f6 ♘d6.

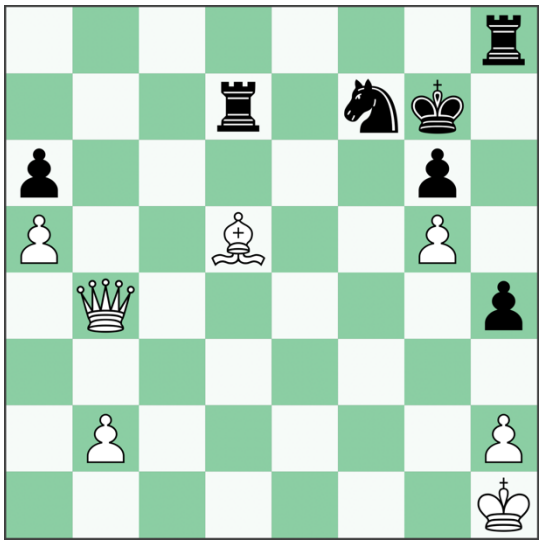

analysis

41. ♗c6! ♘e8□ 42. ♕f3! [42. ♕xh8+ ♔xh8 43. ♗xd7 might also win, but why take the chance?] ♖e7 43. ♗e4 ♖e6 44. ♕xh5+, and white should be winning.

39. ♕xb4+ ♔g7

Black can try 39…♖e7, allowing another transition to queen versus two rooks after 40. ♗xf7 ♔xf7, but here his rooks are not as well coordinated as in the previous example, and white can exploit this

with 41. ♕f4+ ♔g8□ 42. ♕f6!, winning material.

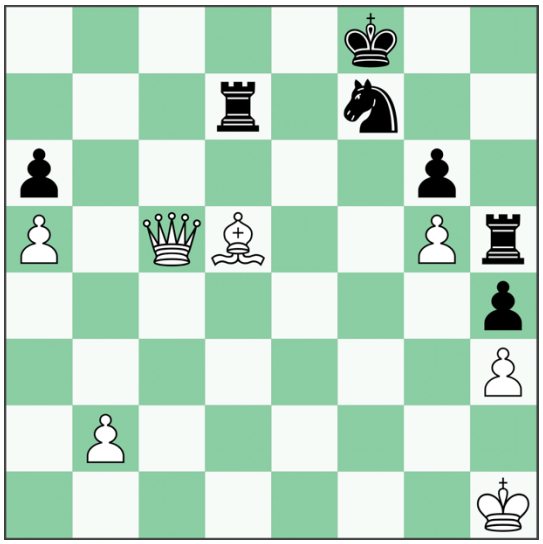


▷40

40. ♕d4+ ♔f8 41. h3

White has two plans, to push the b-pawn, and to exchange on f7 and win the g-pawn. Black cannot stop both of them.

41... ♖h5 42. ♕c5+



▶42

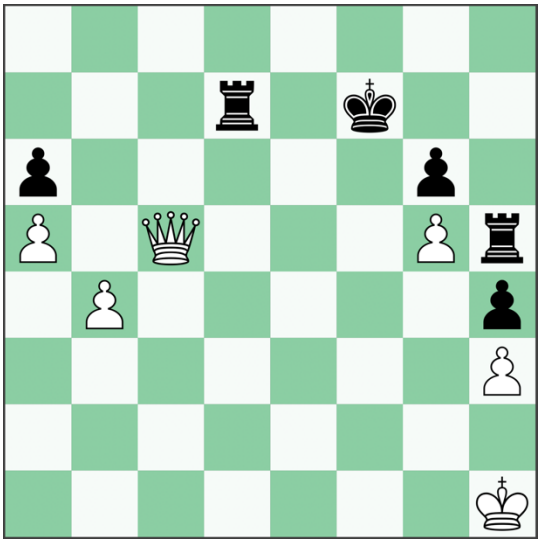
42... ♖e7□

The alternatives lose. 42...♔e8 43. ♗c6, 42...♔g7 43. ♕c6! with the idea of ♕f6+, 42...♖d6 43. ♗xf7, and 42...♘d6 43. ♗e6! ♖d8 44. ♕c7! ♔e8 45. ♗d5! (with the idea of ♗c6+) are all hopeless for black.

43. ♗xf7 ♔xf7

White has reached the inevitable queen versus two rooks ending on ideal terms, because black's rooks are not working together at all.

44. b4 ♖d7



▷45

45. ♕e5!

White heads for black's defensive weakness – f6. 45. b5 ♖h8 46. ♕c6 ♖hd8 47. ♕f6+ ♔e8 48. ♕xg6+ ♖f7 49. ♕e4+ is also winning.

45... ♖h7 46. ♕f6+ ♔e8 47. ♕xa6 ♖hf7 48. ♕c8+ ♔e7 49. ♕c3 ♖f5

There is no escape with 49...♖f1+ 50. ♔g2 ♖dd1 because white has 51. ♕c5+ ♔d8□ [or white forks the rook on f1] 52. a6.

50. a6 ♖d1+ 51. ♔g2

1:0

51…♖xg5+ 52. ♔f2! and it's over.

Just "button pushing"?

Perhaps one day soon it will be possible for a player with no knowledge of chess, but who runs an engine on a powerful computer, to draw at will with any CC player in the world. I have often wondered what would happen if you set up a dummy membership on the ICCF website and played every game using only the engine's first-choice move (after an arbitrary analysis time). What rating would you end up with?

For now, however, to succeed at CC you need to outwit the engine. To do this well you should know four important weaknesses of all the usual chess programs.

(1) Engines are pretty hopeless at openings, so you can often out-prepare your opponent.

(2) You can exploit the horizon problem (see above and below).

(3) Your opponent may not realise that an engine assessment of "= (0.00)" is not the same as "equal", especially in the opening and at the transition between the middlegame and endgame (phases in which the engines are relatively weak), but also when one side has sacrificed material.

(4) The engine often gives wildly optimistic assessments in positions that are objectively drawn.

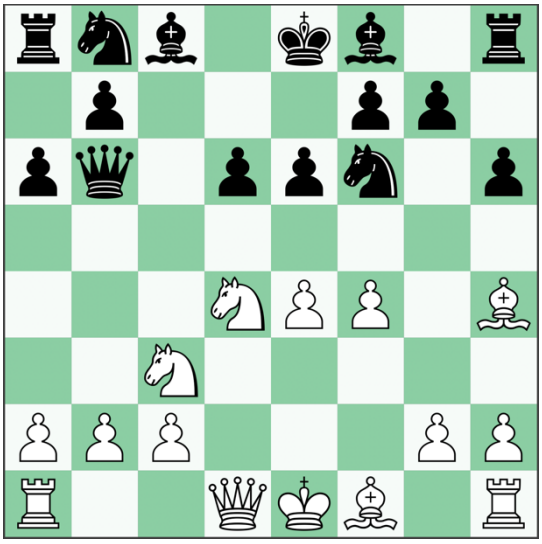
Here's another example of how it is possible to win from an opening position that the engine confidently assesses as = (0.00):

D.J. Roebuck (ICCF 2353)
D. Bobarnac (ICCF 2314)
corr. 2017/19
2017 Champions League division C
Sicilian defence, Najdorf delayed poisoned pawn variation (B 96)

1. e4 c5 2. ♘f3 d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. ♘xd4 ♘f6 5. ♘c3 a6 6. ♗g5 e6 7. f4 h6

This move was once very much the poor cousin of the mainline 7…♗e7 and 7…♕b6, but has gained a new lease of life as a delayed version of the poisoned pawn variation.

8. ♗h4 ♕b6

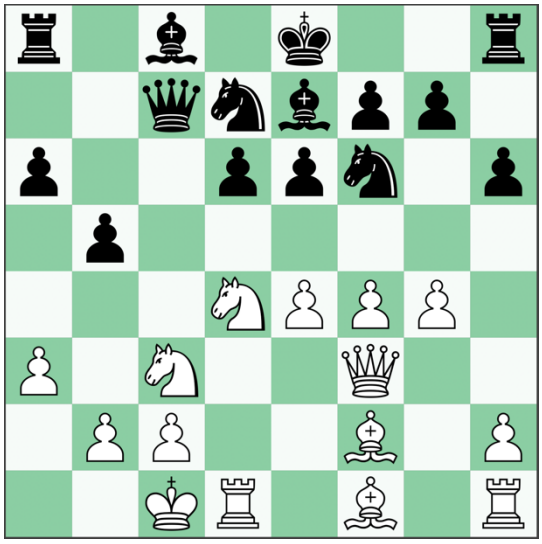


▷9

9. a3

White can always transpose to the poisoned pawn variation with 9. ♕d2, but in correspondence chess this is overwhelmingly likely to be a draw.

9...♗e7 10. ♗f2 ♕c7 11. ♕f3 ♘bd7 12. 0-0-0 b5 13. g4



▶13

13...♗b7

The other option here is 13...g5.

14. h4

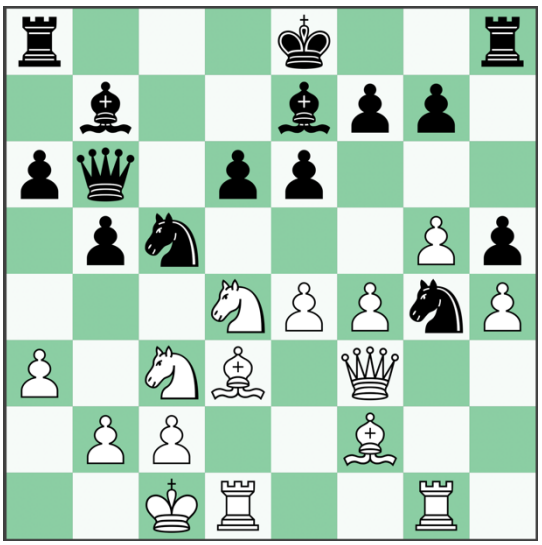
14. ♗g2 is perhaps more popular.

14...♘c5 15. ♗d3 h5

Why not just take the bishop here? V. Anand – M. Vachier-Lagrave, St Louis (Sinquefield Cup) 2018 went 15...♘xd3+ 16. ♖xd3 d5 17. e5□ ♘e4 18. ♗e1! and now black unexpectedly went for 18...0-0-0?!, but managed to draw in the end. The engine, however, does like 15...h5.

16. g5 ♘g4 17. ♖hg1 ♕b6

Recommended (<u>after</u> black had already played it!) by GM Michael Roiz at chesspublishing.com. 17... ♖c8!? doesn't seem to have been tried yet, but 17...g6!? is an interesting alternative here.



▷18

18. ♖xg4!

As I've already said, this is the kind of long-range plan you need to beat an opponent armed with a modern engine. White isn't going to get his material back for 30 moves, well past the computer's "horizon", so it comes as no big surprise to see that its evaluation is "= (0.00)", which in this case is siliconese for "you're on your own, mate". Note that 18. ♔b1 b4 19. axb4 ♕xb4 20. ♖xg4 is not as good, and indeed after 20...hxg4 21. ♕xg4 ♖b8 22. ♘a2 ♕a4 23. ♘c3 ♕b4 24. ♘a2 ♕a4 25. ♘c3 ♕b4 a draw was agreed in another Sinquefield Cup game (A. Grischuk – M. Vachier Lagrave, St Louis 2018). For some reason I feel an irresistible urge to remind the

reader that I played this move in 2017, in other words long before GM Grischuk came up with it. Maybe some of Nigel Short's legendary vanity has rubbed off on me.

18...hxg4 19. ♕xg4 e5

19...b4 [any takers for 19...0-0?] 20. axb4 ♕xb4 leaves white a pleasant game after 21. g6, for example 21...♖b8 22. gxf7+ ♔xf7 23. e5!?

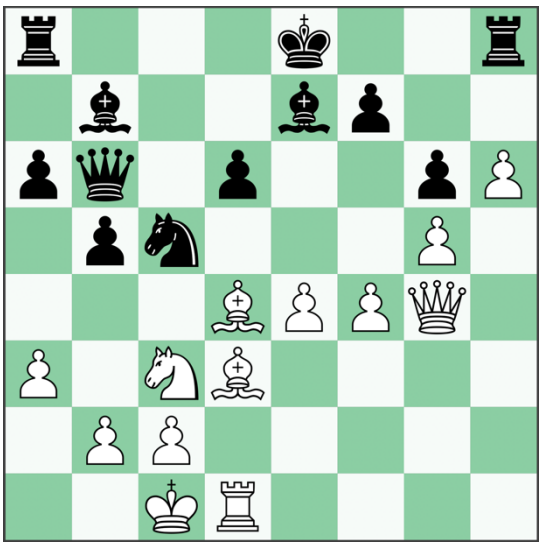
20. h5 g6

After 20...exd4?! 21. ♗xd4 black is temporarily a rook up, but it's all going horribly wrong for him after 21...♗f8 22. h6! or 21...♖g8 22. g6!

21. h6 exd4

It wasn't too late for 21...♘xd3+!?, as Roiz (subsequently) pointed out.

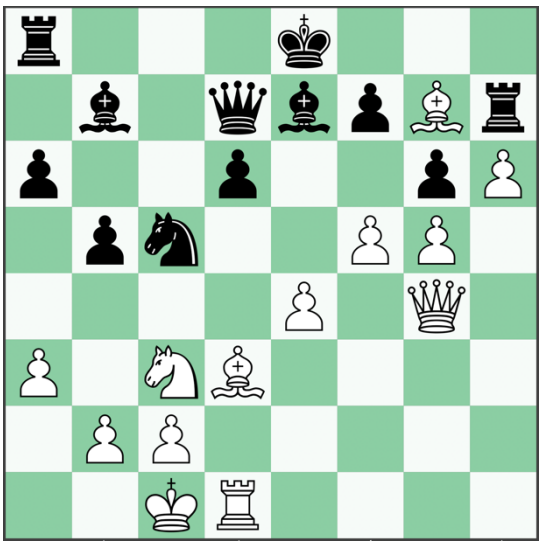
22. ♗xd4



▶22

If you're the kind of OTB player who gets nervous when you're a rook down with no obvious way to get it back, then you are going to have a lot of draws in CC.

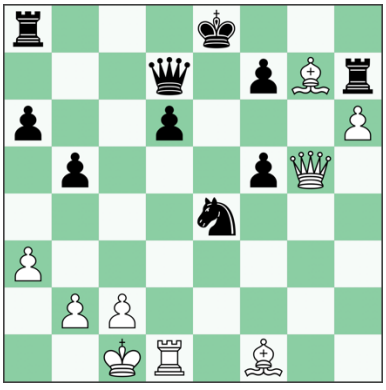
22...♖h7□ 23. f5! ♕c6 24. ♗g7 ♕d7



▷25

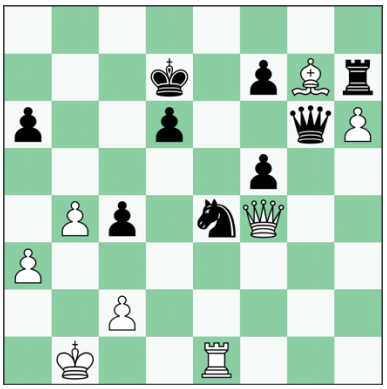
25. ♕f4

White must choose carefully here, and ignore the computer. The problem with 25. ♗e2 is that after 25...0-0-0 white would probably rather have had the bishop on f1. Maybe it can go there straight away? Indeed, 25. ♗f1 is the engine's first choice: 21...♗xe4 26. ♘xe4 gxf5 27. ♘f6+ ♗xf6 28. ♕g2 ♗xg5+ 29. ♕xg5 ♘e4.



analysis

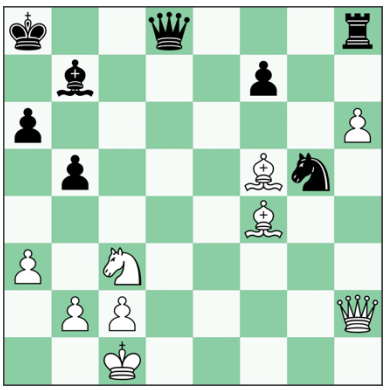
30. ♕f4 [30. ♖e1!?] ♕e6□ [black can't play 30…d5 because of 31. ♗h3!] 31. ♖e1 ♖c8□ 32. ♗g2 [32. ♗h3!? ♖c5 33. b4 is also worth a look] ♕g6□ 33. ♔b1 ♖c5 34. b4 ♖c4 35. ♗f1 ♔d7 36. ♗xc4 bxc4


analysis

Although the engine has been showing a healthy advantage for white for some time now, the inevitable rook versus knight ending is almost certainly a draw in CC. White wants more.

25...♕c7?!

I think this is where black first went wrong, possibly led astray by the engine's lazy assessment of =0.00. Both 25...♕d8 26. f6 and 25...♘xd3+ 26. ♖xd3 look a bit grim, so perhaps he should have played 25...0-0-0 26. ♗f1 ♕c7 27. ♗h3 [white could also look at 27. ♘d5!? and 27. ♔b1!?] ♔b8 28. e5 gxf5 29. exd6 ♗xd6 30. ♖xd6 ♖xd6 31. ♗e5 ♘e6 32. ♕h2 ♕d8 33. ♗xd6+ ♔a8 34. ♗f4 ♖h8 35. ♗xf5 ♘xg5.

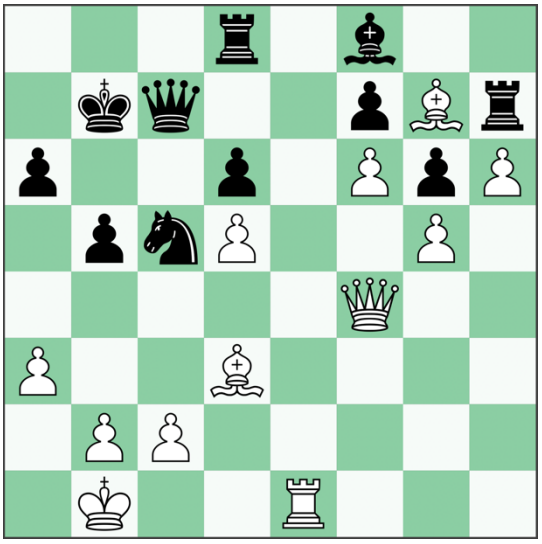

analysis

This line isn't completely forced, and white still has chances to press for a win here, but it might have been better for black than what actually happened.

26. ♘d5! ♗xd5 27. exd5 0-0-0!

The engine still says =0.00. Note that it really is too late now for 27…♘xd3+, because after 28. ♖xd3 black's king will have nowhere to hide.

28. ♔b1 ♔b7 29. f6 ♗f8 30. ♖e1


▶30

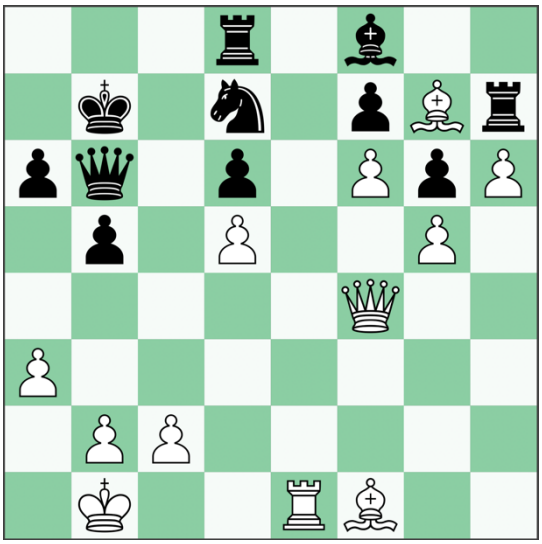
An unusual position, to be sure, but there is even better to come.

30…♕b6?!

This weakens e7 and may well be inaccurate. I thought black would play 30…♔a8!? here, and wait for me to do something. My plan was 31. ♗f1, but I wasn't sure how best to proceed if black simply continues to wait with 31…♔b8!? It turns out, however, that white has 32. ♖e3!?, feinting at a rook transfer to the queenside, while preparing the ungainly doubling of major pieces with ♕f2-e1. The threat would then be ♖e8.

31. ♗f1 ♘d7

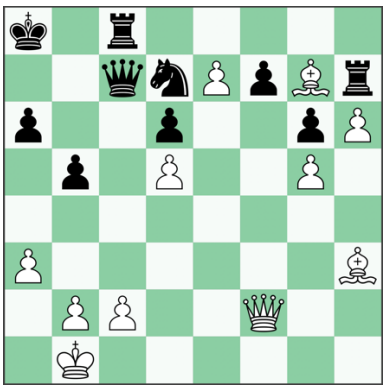
Now white has to prevent …♘e5.



▷32

32. ♖e7! ♗xe7 33. fxe7 ♖c8 34. ♕xf7!

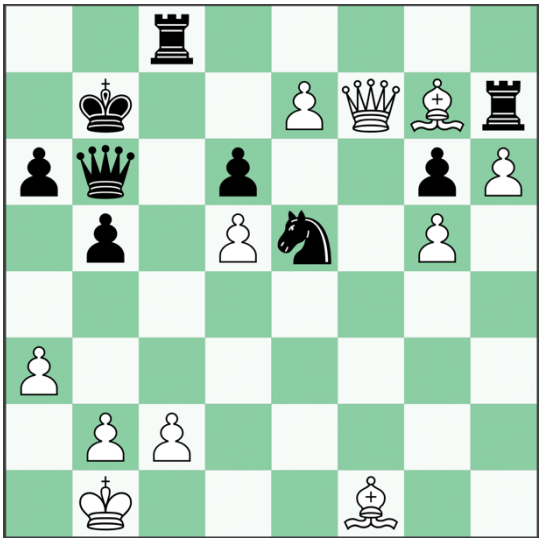
Forget button-pushing – I had to ignore *Stockfish 9* here, because it recommends the bizarre 34. ♗h3 ♕c7 35. ♕f2 ♔a8□ 36. ♗g4 ♔b7□ 37. ♗h3 ♔a8, when it says white has a winning advantage (+3.96).



analysis

It goes on with 38. ♔a1 ♔b8 39. ♕f1 ♔a8 40. ♕f3 ♔b8 41. ♕f4 ♔a8 42. ♕f1, but I think you get the drift. Our current engines just aren't very good at assessing certain positions.

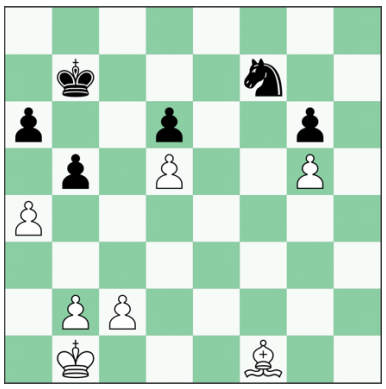
34…♘e5□



▷35

35. e8♕+!?

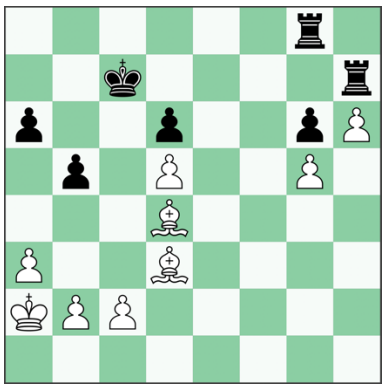
Stockfish 9 rates this as about equal to the forcing sequence 35. ♕f8?! ♕c7 36. e8♕ ♖xe8 37. ♕xe8 ♖xg7 38. hxg7 ♕xg7 39. a4 ♕f7 40. ♕xf7+ ♘xf7.


analysis

White might winning here, because regardless of whether or not black captures the g5 pawn immediately he will at some point be able to force the exchange of the g-pawns, and then penetrate with his king, using zugzwang if necessary. But this is nowhere near as much fun as the actual game.

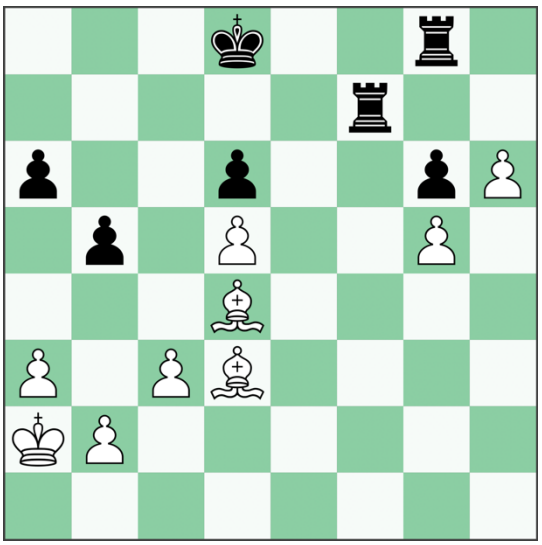
35...♘xf7 36. ♕xf7+ ♕c7 37. ♕xc7+ ♔xc7

After another forced series of moves black has a choice. The other recapture is also losing: 37... ♖xc7 38. ♗d4 ♖c8 39. ♗d3 ♖g8 40. ♔a2 ♔c7.


analysis

41. b3!? and white will win in the same way as in the main line.

38. ♗d4 ♖f7 39. ♗d3 ♖g8 40. ♔a2 ♔d8 41. c3



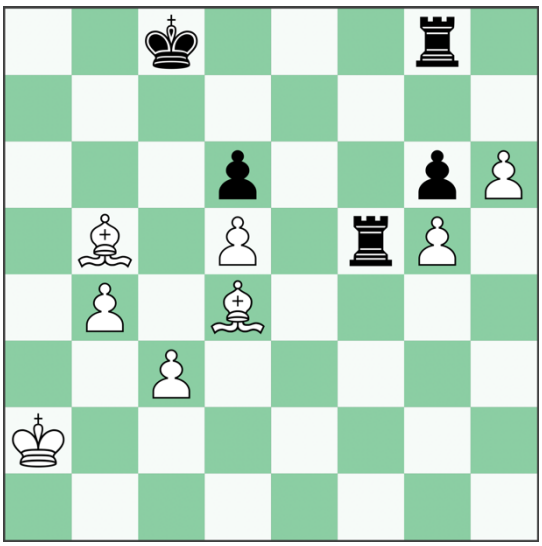
▶41

This is an amazing position, isn't it? White sacrificed on move 18, and is still material down 23 moves later, but his bishops completely dominate black's rooks. GM Short thinks that CC isn't real chess, but problems and studies aren't real chess either. We enjoy them because they pose an interesting intellectual challenge. For as long as that remains the case, patzers like me will keep on playing CC.

41... ♖b7 42. b4

Note that this is not one of the engine's top three choices, Mr Short. I must have been thinking for myself.

42... ♖f7 43. a4 ♔c8 44. axb5 axb5 45. ♗xb5 ♖f5

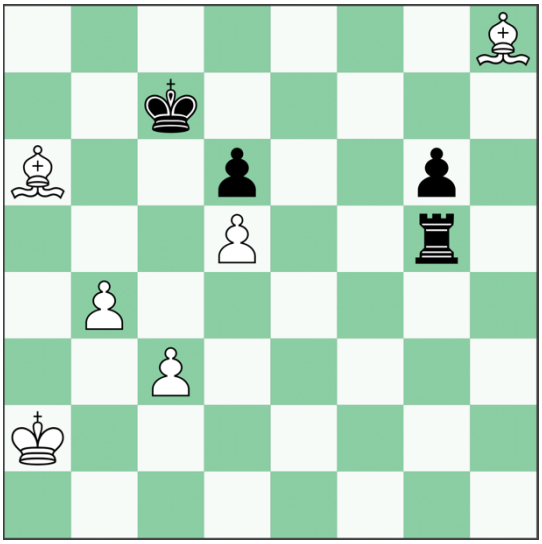


▷46

46. h7 ♖gf8 47. h8♕ ♖xh8 48. ♗xh8 ♖xg5

48... ♖xd5 is no better. 49. ♗a6+ ♔c7 50. ♗f6 shuts down any hope of counterplay, and permits the unimpeded advance of the b-pawn.

49. ♗a6+ ♔c7

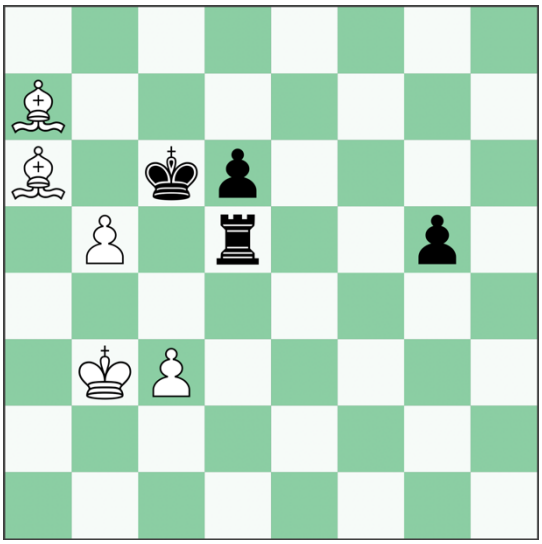


▷50

50. ♗d4!?

50. c4 is also winning, of course.

50... ♖xd5 51. ♗a7 ♔c6 52. ♔b3 g5 53. b5+



1:0

White will deliver checkmate with either his fourth or fifth queen.

So, there you have it. Nigel Short's opinions are often poorly thought through, and sometimes frankly offensive. He is wrong about correspondence chess (for the time being), the stalemate rule and the Morra gambit. He is at least partly wrong about women's abilities when it comes to chess. In his defence, he has sometimes been aggressively criticised by people who appear not to have read what he actually wrote. And he may not be the cliché his photograph suggests – according to an old profile I found (*British Chess Magazine* 2014; **134**(1): 46) he has never voted Conservative in his life. Also, Gordon Dunlop says he is a nice guy. So maybe I should wait until I meet him in person before forming a definite opinion.

Games

David Sedgwick (ECF 171, FIDE 2091)
Alex Bourke (ECF 152 ≈ FIDE 1840)
England (London League) 2000
Pirc defence (B 07)

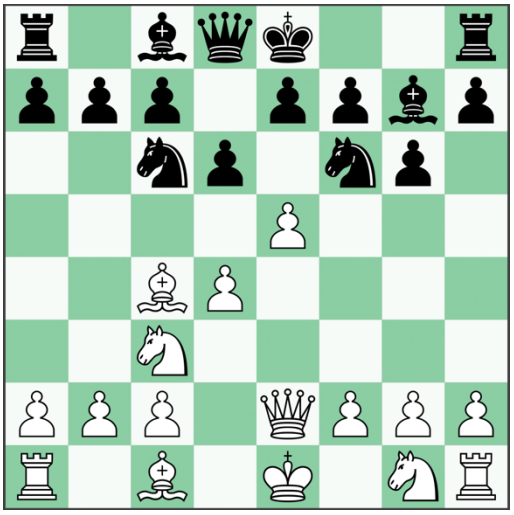
[Bourke]

1. e4 d6 2. d4 ♘f6 3. ♘c3 g6 4. ♗c4 ♗g7 5. ♕e2

Holmov's system is one of the most aggressive lines against the Pirc.

5...♘c6 6. e5

Swamp!



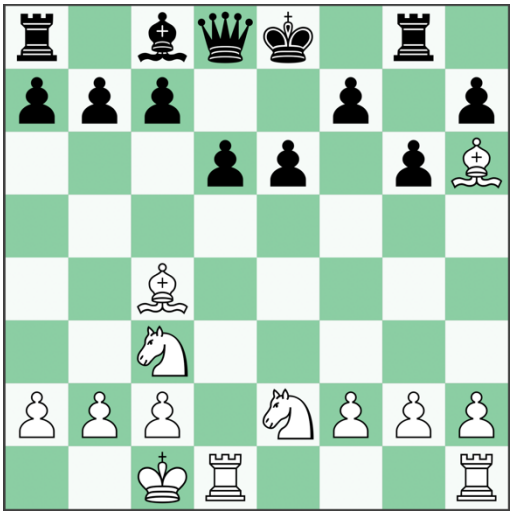
▶6

6...♘xd4

Swamp to you too, pal! This variation is ideal for an out-rated black player. It turns out that the best moves are hard to find for both sides, thereby helpfully maximising the randomness.

7. exf6 ♘xe2 8. fxg7 ♖g8 9. ♘gxe2 ♖xg7 10. ♗h6 ♖g8 11. 0-0-0 e6

Apparently strong-pointing f7, e6 and d5, but black is actually threatening to fork white's bishops with …♕h4. The correct move now is 12. h4.



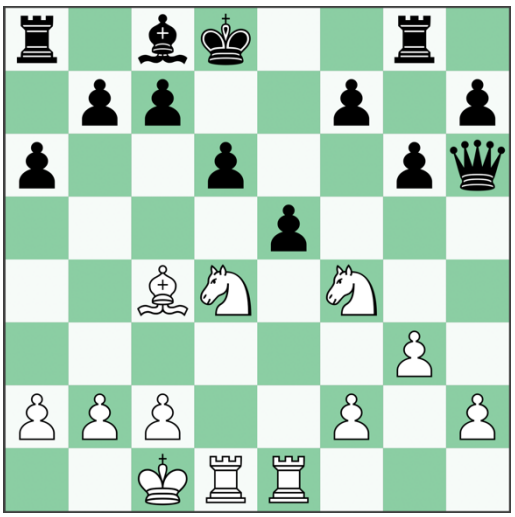
▷12

12. ♘f4?? ♕h4!

Now white is losing material, but he has a very active position, whereas black's is as dozy as a midwinter bear. With three pieces out of play, black is effectively material down, and so white now has a duty to attack, mix it, try to wrongfoot black, and thereby maximize the chances of an open board mate.

13. ♘b5 ♕xh6 14. g3 ♔d8 15. ♖he1 a6 16. ♘d4 e5?

Black's still winning, of course, but 16…♗d7 might have been better.



▷17

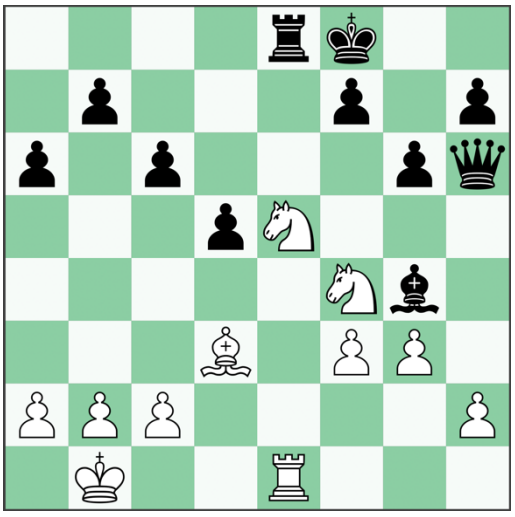
17. ♖xe5!

Oh cripes, now I can't recapture because of 18. ♘f5+, winning my queen.

17...♖e8

17…g5 18. ♗xf7 gxf4 19. ♖h5 ♕g7 20. ♗xg8 ♕xg8 21. gxf4 ♕f7! also wins, if black avoids 22. ♖e5!? dxe5?? 23. ♘c6+!

18. ♖xe8+ ♔xe8 19. ♔b1 c6 20. ♘f3 d5 21. ♖e1+ ♔f8 22. ♗d3 ♗g4 23. ♘e5 ♖e8 24. f3



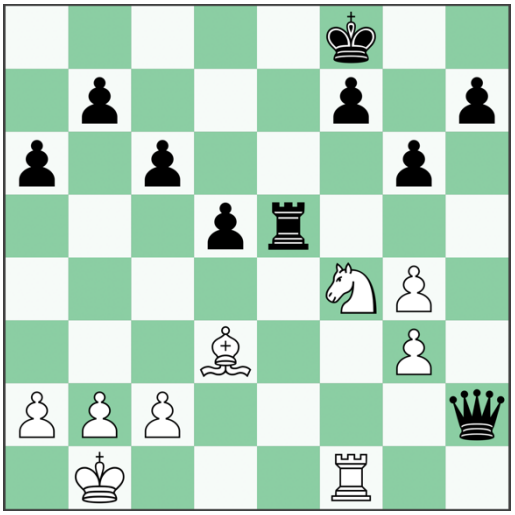
▶24

The white knight is pinned, and the position becomes really tricky because white's back rank is so vulnerable. See if you can guess black's next three moves. The white rook has to defend e5 and the first rank and is therefore overloaded, allowing...

24...♕xh2!

Q. What does this position have in common with a tunnel under the Manchester Airport runway extension? A. Swampy!

25. fxg4 ♖xe5! 26. ♖f1



▶26

26...♕f2!

Incredibly, the engine prefers 26…♕xg3 here, which tells you all you need to know about silicon.

27. a3 ♖e1+ 28. ♖xe1 ♕xe1+ 29. ♔a2 ♕xg3 30. ♘e2 ♕xg4

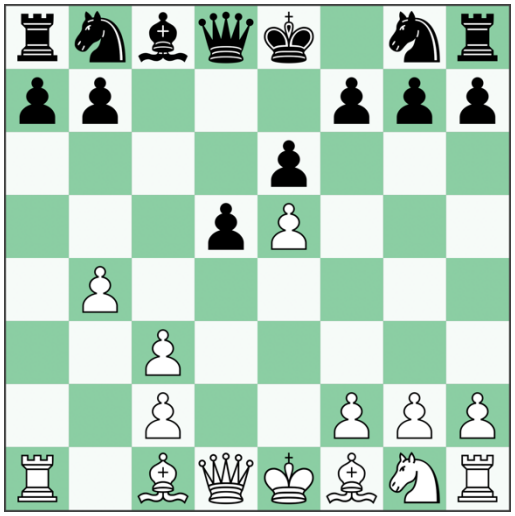
0:1

Aiden Brady (ACF 1610, FIDE 1591)
Charles Fotinos (ACF 1401)
Australia (North Qld Open) 2019
French defence, Winawer variation (C 17)

[Roebuck]

1. e4 e6 2. d4 d5 3. ♘c3 ♗b4 4. e5 c5 5. a3 cxd4 6. axb4 dxc3 7. bxc3

This is a well-known sideline in the Winawer variation. White often plays 7. ♘f3 here, planning to follow up with ♗d3, 0-0 and perhaps ♖e1. 7. ♕g4!? is another good idea. The engines are happy enough with 7. bxc3 though: white's two bishops more than compensate for the slightly unfavourable pawn structure.



▶7

7...♘e7 8. ♘f3 ♕c7 9. ♗d3 ♕xc3+?!

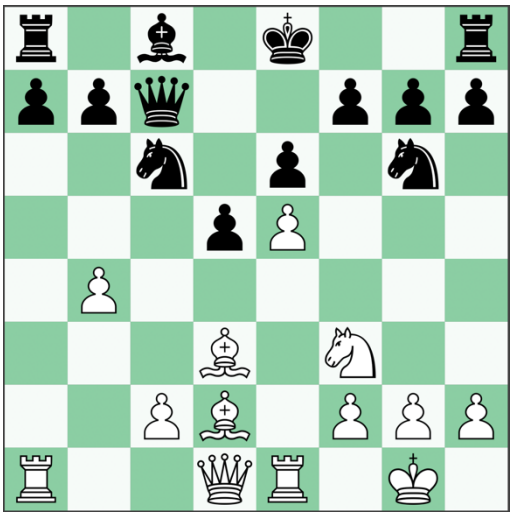
Black chooses to live dangerously – he could have had a peaceful game after 9...♘bc6!?

10. ♗d2 ♕c7 11. 0-0 ♘g6

Stockfish 11 likes 11...♘d7 until you actually play it, when it notices that the obvious rejoinder 12. ♖e1! is actually rather good.

12. ♖e1 ♘c6?

This knight probably needs to go to d7.



▷13

13. b5!

In D.T. Guy (2010) – H. Gardarsson (1984), Malente 2004, white chose the passive13. ♕e2?! The game continued 13...♗d7?! 14. b5 ♘ce7 15. h4 h5 16. g3?! [white clearly wants to play ♗b4 without meeting ...♘f4, but perhaps 16. ♕e3!? was better] ♘f5 17. ♗b4 ♕b6 and now 18. ♗xf5! would have been an improvement on 18. ♔h2?!, which led eventually to a draw.

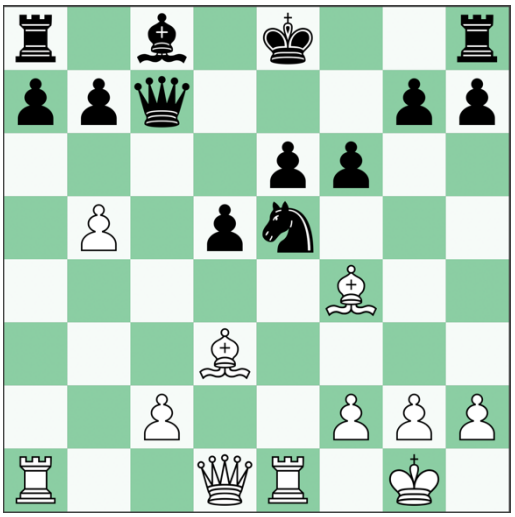
13...♘cxe5

Black can't really afford this, but after 13...♘ce7 white can go for a direct attack on the king with 14. h4, and if 14...f6 then 15. exf6 gxf6 16. h5 or 15. c4 dxc4 16. ♖c1.

14. ♘xe5 ♘xe5 15. ♗f4?!

15. b6! wins immediately, because the dual threats of ♗f4 and ♖xa7!, are impossible to meet. 15...♕d6 16. ♗f4 f6 17. ♖xa7! would be one possible continuation.

15...f6



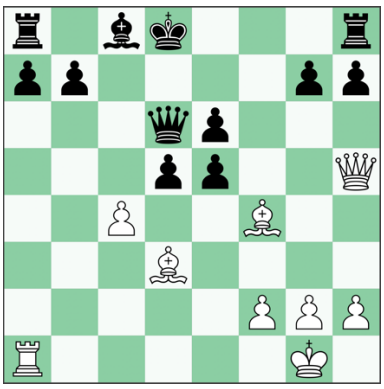
▷16

16. b6! ♕xb6

Black's alternatives are not great either. 16...♕c5 [16...♕f7 17. ♖xa7] 17. ♖xe5! fxe5 18. ♕h5+ g6 19. ♗xg6+ is totally winning for white.

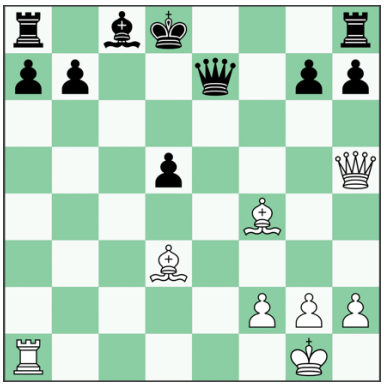
17. ♖xe5! fxe5

17...♕d6!? [17...g6 18. ♖e3 with ideas of ♖b1 and ♗h6] is a trickier reply, but proves to be inadequate after 18. ♕h5+ ♔d8 [if 18...♔f8 then 19. ♗c1! with the idea of ♗a3] 19. c4! fxe5.



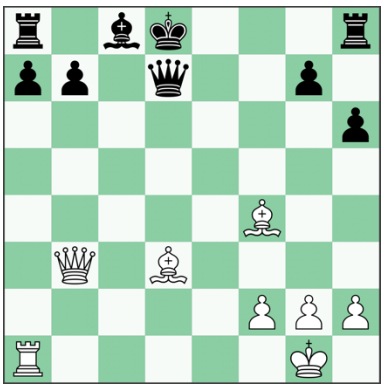
analysis

20. ♗xe5! ♕e7 21. cxd5 exd5 22. ♗f4!



analysis

22...h6 [22...♖f8 is also met by 23. ♕xd5+] 23. ♕xd5+ ♕d7 [23...♗d7 24. ♗f5 with ♖d1 to follow] 24. ♕b3!?



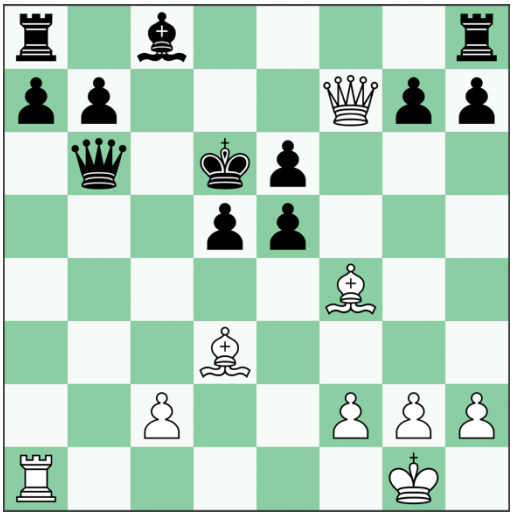
analysis

Here black is helpless in the face of white's many threats, for example 24...♖f8 25. ♗g3 [now ♖d1 is coming] ♖f6 26. ♗b5! ♕e6 27. ♖d1+ ♔e7 28. ♕b4+ ♔f7 29. ♗c4 and wins.

18. ♕h5+ ♔d7

It looks completely wrong, but black had to try 18…♔f8, although it's hard to see how he can survive after 19. ♗xe5 ♗d7 20. ♕g5!

19. ♕f7+ ♔d6



▷20

20. ♗xe5+!

An irresistible move for a human, although *Stockfish 11* prefers the ridiculous 20. ♗g3!

20…♔c6?

20…♔c5?? 21. ♕e7+ is a quick mate, so 20…♔xe5 was the only move. White had presumably intended to follow up with 21. ♕e7!!, when black can only avoid mate after c3 and ♖e1 by giving up material: 21…♖e8 22. ♖e1+ ♔d4 23. ♕xe8, when white's attack continues.

21. ♗b5+?!

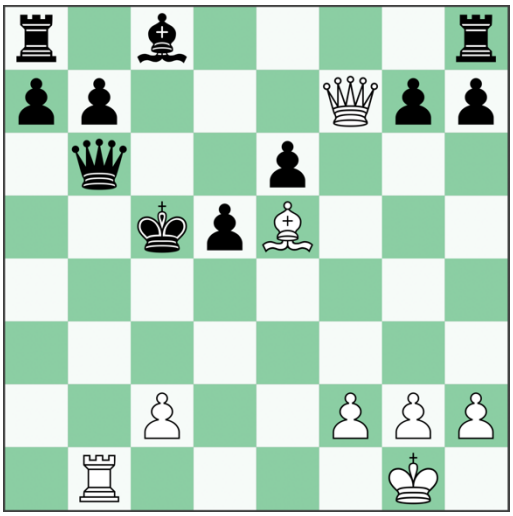
21. c4! or 21. ♖e3! are both mate in 10 according to the engine, but once again this is a human move.

21…♔xb5

White mates after 21…♔c5 [21…♕xb5?? 22. ♕c7#] 22. ♖b1 d4 23. ♗xd4+.

22. ♖b1+ ♔c5

I think it's worth remembering here that white's FIDE rating was 1591. He finishes the game in style:



▷23

23. ♕e7+! ♔c4 24. ♕h4+!

Very precise.

24…d4 25. ♖xb6 axb6 26. ♕xd4+ ♔b5 27. c4+ ♔b4 28. ♗d6+ ♔b3 29. ♕d3+ ♔b2 30. ♗e5+ ♔c1 31. ♕c3+ ♔d1 32. ♕b3+ ♔e2 33. ♕c2+

1:0

Mating with knight against pawn(s)

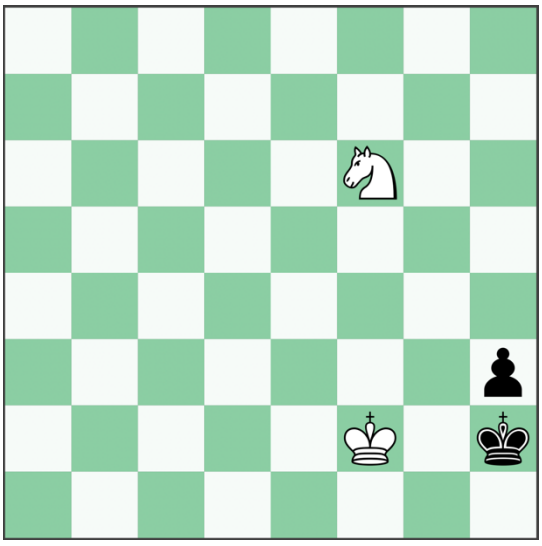
♘♙ 0/b-c

Derek Roebuck

In the last issue we looked at positions where white (arbitrarily assigned the knight) had to battle to draw against black's solitary pawn. In the second part of this article the tables are turned. In certain (admittedly very rare) positions, white can play for a win.

The "simple" mate on f2

The most extreme circumstance arises when the black king is already trapped in front of an advanced h-pawn (diagram 1).

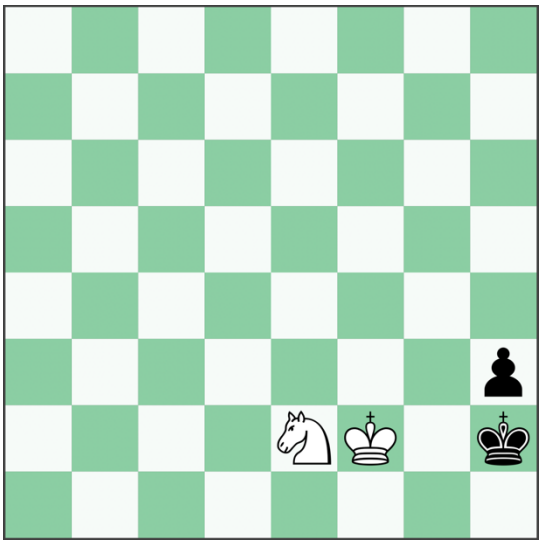


1 Mate on f2 ▷

1. ♘g4+ ♔h1 2. ♔f1 h2 2. ♘f2#

The "simple" mate on g3

If the knight starts on e2 (diagram 2) instead of f6 it must give mate on g3.



2 Mate on g3 ▷

1. ♘c3!

1. ♘d4! ♔h1 2. ♘f5 ♔h2 3. ♘e3 ♔h1 4. ♘f1 h2 5. ♘g3# is the other route to the same destination.

1...♔h1 2. ♘e4!

The crucial move, gaining time to get the knight to f1.

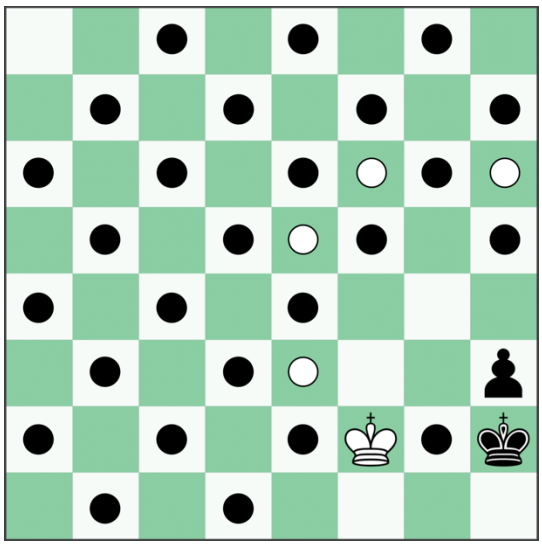
2...♔h2

2...h2 3. ♘g3#

3. ♘d2! ♔h1 4. ♘f1 h2 5. ♘g3#

So, with the black pawn on h3 and this configuration of the kings (diagram 3), on what squares can the knight stand in order for white to have a forced win?

The winning technique



3 The white king is on f2 ▷

The squares marked with a "○" or "●" are the ones from which the knight can force checkmate. If it stands on the others, the game is drawn. *Don't try to memorise this pattern* – you only need to understand the winning method, in case this ending ever crops up in one of your games.

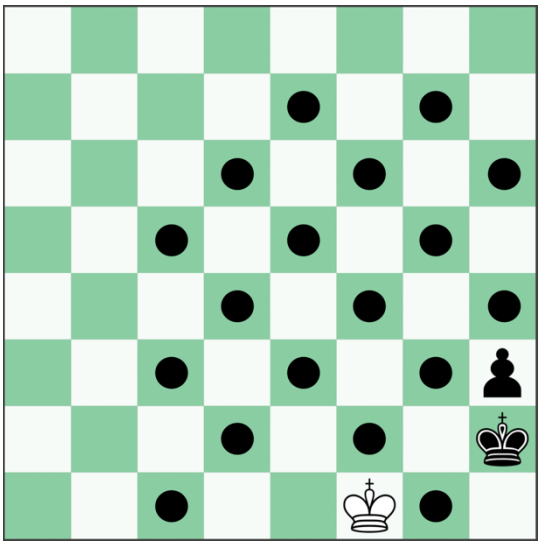
1. Black is threatening to play ♔h1 and h2, stalemating himself, so you have to get it right the first time.

2. Mate can only be delivered from f2 or g3, and in the former case white has to play ♔f1 first, to make way for the knight.

3. Black must be forced to play …h2 on the move before mate, and for this to happen the knight must be on g4 (for mate on f2) or f1 (for mate on g3), because otherwise black will just play ♔h2 instead. (This sounds complicated, but it's just a description of the two paths we saw the knight take to deliver mate in diagrams 1 and 2.)

4. The ♘f2 system only works if white can play 1. ♘g4+ (diagram 1), because this is the only square from which the knight controls both h2 (to prevent 2…♔h2) and f2 (to play 3. ♘f2 mate). This means the knight must be on e3, e5, f6 or h6 ("○").

5. In the ♘g3 system, white wins if his knight is on e4 (1. ♘d2!) or f5 (1. ♘e3!), or can get there in exactly two moves (in time to play 3. ♘g3 mate if needed). This means it can stand on any of the unoccupied white squares on the board, except a8 (too far away), h1 (1. ♘g3 is stalemate), and f1, f3 and g4 (illegal position). These squares are marked "●". So if the knight stands on b5, for example, white wins after 1. ♘c3! ♔h1 2. ♘e4!, as in diagram 2.



4 The white king is on f1 ▷

White's options are more restricted if his king is on f1, because he has to prevent the black king escaping via g3. He does this by moving the knight to e2, e4 or f5, and therefore the winning squares are those marked with a "●".

Imagine the knight is on c1. The game might finish:

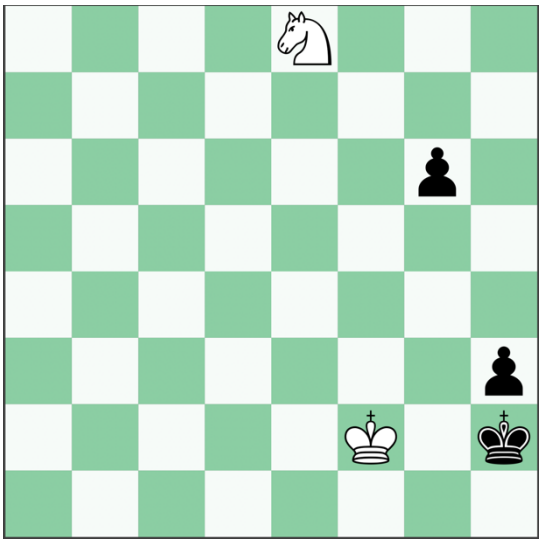
1. ♘e2 ♔h1 2. ♘g3+

2. ♔f2 ♔h2 3. ♘d4 ♔h1 4. ♘f5 is the same thing.

2...♔h2 3. ♘f5 ♔h1 4. ♔f2 ♔h2 5. ♘e3 ♔h1 6. ♘f1 h2 7. ♘g3#

If the knight is not on one of these squares, 1. ♔f2 will never work, because black has 1...♔h1, with the idea of playing 2...h2 and stalemate if white then moves the knight, or repeating moves if white plays 2. ♔f1.

More pawns



5 Salvio 1634 ▷▶

You will recognize that this ancient study is very similar to diagram 1. If you don't even think of the possibility of winning here, you won't find it. But once you do, the win is easy.

1. ♘f6 g5

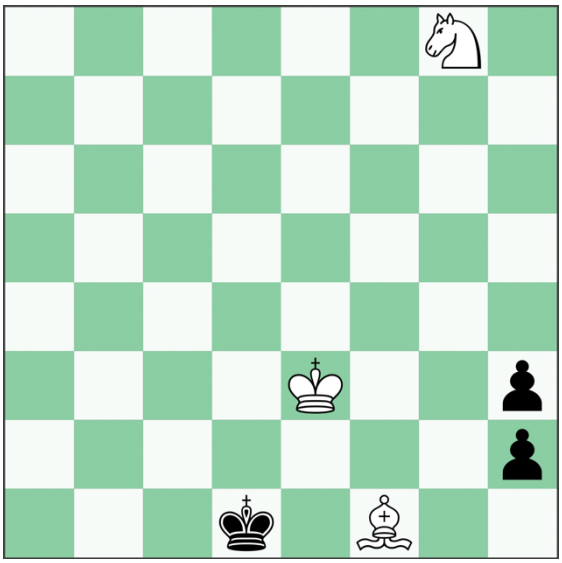
1...♔h1 2. ♘g4 g5 transposes.

2. ♘g4+ ♔h1 3. ♔f1 h2 4. ♘f2#

Even if black were to move in diagram 5, white would still win: 1...g5 [1...♔h1 2. ♘f6 ♔h2 3. ♘g4+ ♔h1 4. ♔f1 g5 5. ♔f2 h2 6. ♘f6 g4 7. ♘h5 g3+ 8. ♘xg3#] 2. ♘f6 g4 [2...♔h1 3. ♘g4 h2 4. ♘f6 g4 5. ♘h5 g3+ 5. ♘xg3#] 3. ♘xg4+ ♔h1 4. ♔f1 h2 5. ♘f2 mate.

Practical example

Is this ever going to be of any practical use? Actually, these ideas might crop up in positions with more material...



6 Paoli 1961 (♘♗ 8/b) ▷

The first two moves for white are obviously forced.

1. ♗e2+ ♔e1

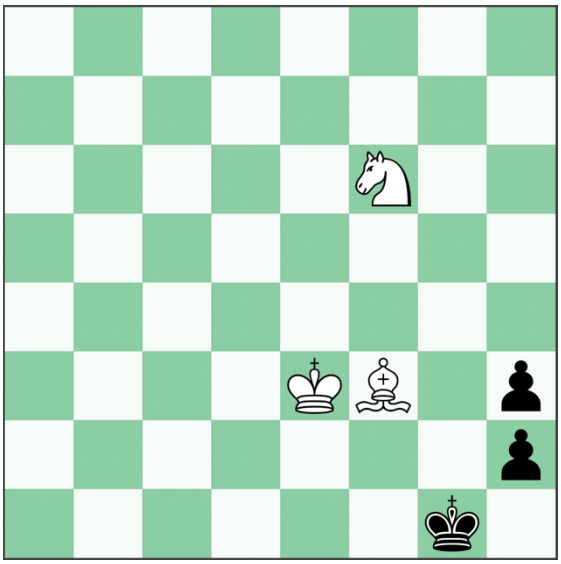
Actually, black can make it more difficult by going the other way, but after 1…♔c2 2. ♗f3 white captures both pawns and mates with bishop and knight. (You do know how to do that, don't you?)

2. ♗f3 ♔f1 3. ♘f6!

This is the critical move. 3. ♘e7? h1♕ is only a draw: 4. ♗xh1 h2 [or 4…♔g1] 5. ♘f5 ♔g1 6. ♘g3 is stalemate.

3…♔g1

Black could also try 3…h1♕ 4. ♗xh1, but now 4…h2 5. ♘g4 ♔g1 6. ♘f2 and 4…♔g1 5. ♘e4! are just transpositions to the lines below.



6a Paoli 1961
▷

4. ♘e4

White is heading for the mate on g3 from diagram 2.

4…h1♕ 5. ♗xh1 ♔xh1

5…h2 6. ♘f2 ♔f1 7. ♗f3 is a bishop and knight mate where all the hard work has already been done because the black king is already in the right corner: 7…h1♕ 8. ♘xh1 ♔e1 9. ♘f2 ♔f1 10. ♘h3 ♔e1 11. ♘f4 ♔f1 12. ♗e2+ ♔g1 13. ♔f3 ♔h2 14. ♔f2 ♔h1 12. ♔g3 ♔g1 13. ♘h3+ ♔h1 14. ♗f3#.

6. Kf2 Kh2 7. ♘e2 Kh1 8. ♘f1 h2 9. ♘g3#

Summary: how to mate with knight against h-pawn

1. The king must be trapped by its own pawn on h3, and your king on f1 or f2.

2. You may need to use the threat of immediate checkmate to prevent your opponent from stalemating himself with …♔h1 and …h2.

3. To mate on f2 the knight must come from g4 (the only square where it controls both f2 and h2).

4. To mate on g3 the knight must come from f1.

In the next issue we will look at knight versus two pawns.

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