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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, brilliancy 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, your 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-

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

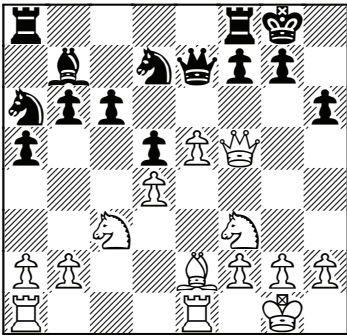
Another possibility is that you chose an inaccuracy, and played it too quickly. This can be very common in the opening if a player saves time by relying on “natural moves”, and the problems come later. I have had to remind myself that it is no bad thing to spend ten minutes in the opening, rather than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

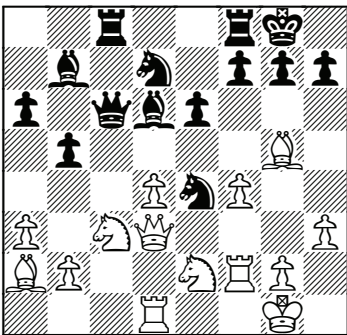
Test Six

6.1 Black to play



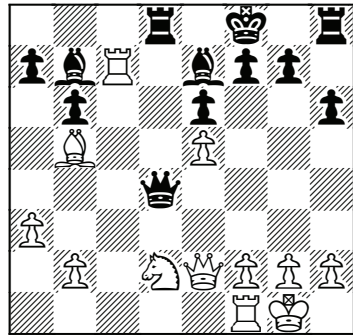
- A) 17... ♖e6
- B) 17... ♗fe8
- C) Something else?

6.2 White to play



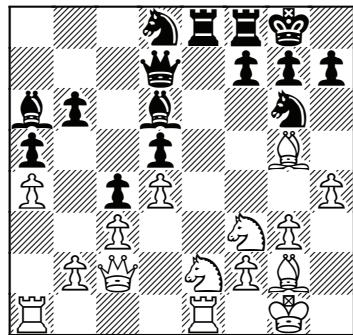
- A) 18 ♘xe4
- B) 18 d5
- C) Something else?

6.3 Black to play



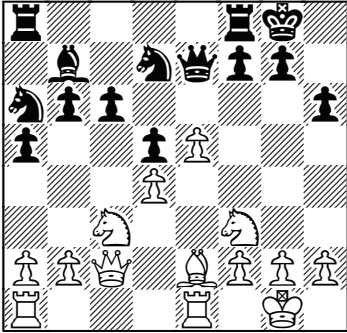
- A) 18... ♖xd2
- B) 18... ♖xb2
- C) Something else?

6.4 Black to play



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

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



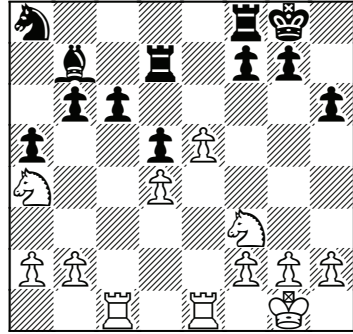
As we saw in Test 3.3, White has a better pawn structure, and started to set up pressure with his pieces, with **17 ♖f5**.

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

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

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

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



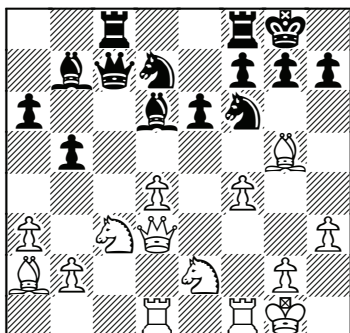
Black should have played with much more grit, with **17... ♜fe8!** (B), with the defensive idea of ...♘f8 and ...♙c8. The other knight, when given the opportunity, can join in with ...♘c7. White's edge is negligible. I would like to think that had I been in better health, I would have easily seen this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

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

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

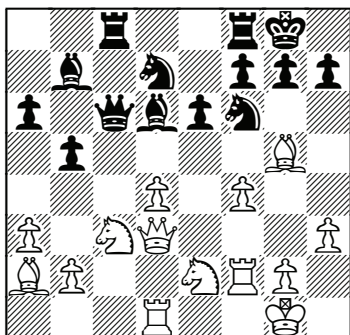
Continuing from Test 5.1, my plan is highly ambitious, with thoughts of a pawn breakthrough with either d5 or f5.

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



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

So **17 ♗f2**.



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

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

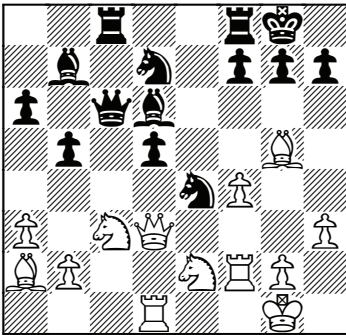
Black instead played the more direct and obvious **17...♗e4**. Now I should have played the drawish **18 ♖xe4 (A) 18...♖xe4 19 ♖xe4 ♗xe4 20 d5 ♗xd5 21 ♗xd5 exd5 22 ♗xd5 ♗c6**, and quite probably Black would have been happy with a half-point.

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

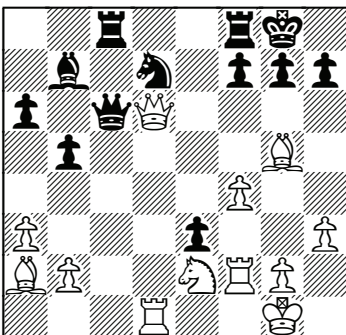
While he was thinking about his taking the knight on f2, I wondered what would happen after **18...exd5**, which at first seems like a blunder.

I had thought that everything was

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



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



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

♜xc6 exf2+ 22 ♜xf2 ♜xc6.

If White wants to move the rook instead, the only try is 21 ♜f3 ♜xd6 22 ♜xd6 ♜xf3. Black should win, although it may take time, after either 23 gxf3 ♜c2 24 ♜xd7 ♜xe2 25 ♜e7 ♜xb2 26 ♜xf8 ♜xf8 27 ♜xf7+ ♜e8 28 ♜f5 ♜xa2 29 ♜e5+ ♜f7 30 ♜xe3 ♜f6 (level material, but White's king and pawns are dreadful), or 23 ♖d4 ♜c1+ 24 ♜h2 ♜h5 25 ♜xd7 e2 26 ♖xe2 ♜xe2 (exchange up, and Black can squeeze the bishop with ...♜c4, after 27 ♜e7 ♜e8).

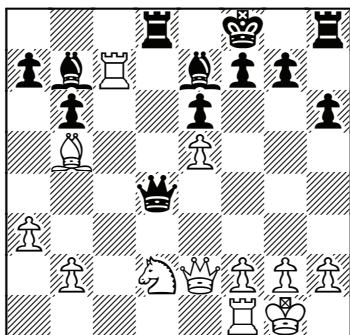
But I won the game. Was I 'lucky', in the sense that he missed his chance of winning, or 'unlucky' in that while I calculated an interesting line in advance, there was an unclear tactic many moves on? It depends on the strengths of the two players. At very top grandmaster level, all this would have been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

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

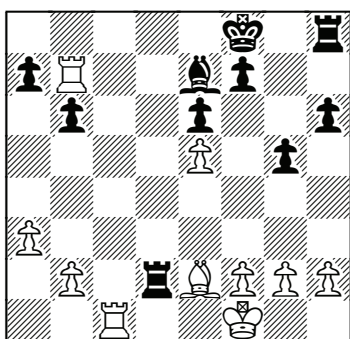
Despite earlier events (see Test 5.4), my position should not collapse. Unfortunately it did. I would have suspected that I had done something wrong, but I still have play, having a useful bishop-

Why we Lose at Chess

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



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

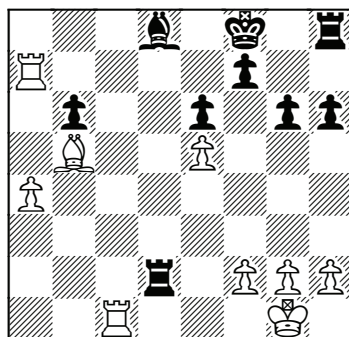


Now I missed a critical pin after **22...♖xb2?? 23 ♕h5!**, and I immediately resigned (1-0), in view of 23...♕c5 24

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

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

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

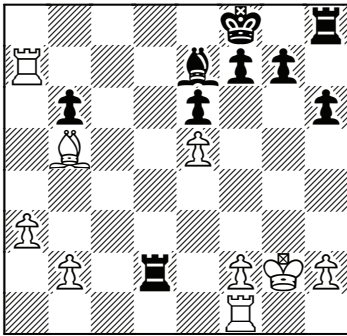


Can Black hold this? Offhand, I do not know. In practical terms, White would be more than happy to carry on trying to chip away for several hours, or, in a quickplay finish (as here), waiting for Black's position to collapse. Even if Black manages to finally completed his development, with ...♕g7 and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

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

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

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

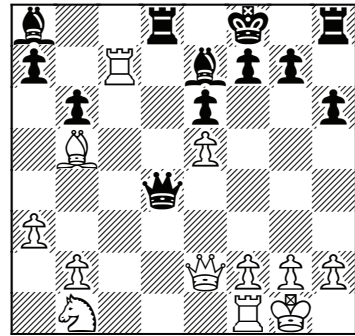


Clearly Black will not be able to take the pawn (21...♖xb2?? 22 ♖a8+), and so we now have a more dynamic pawn structure, with strengths and weaknesses on both sides. White will have excellent chances of creating a dangerous passed pawn on the queenside, while Black will need to set up counterplay on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

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

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

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



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

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

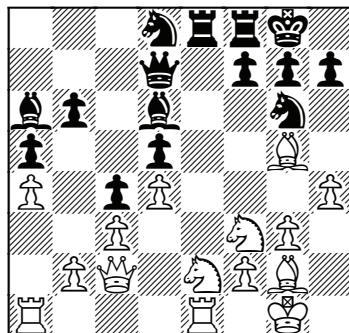
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24 ♖f4 g5 25 ♖h4, Black holds the position with 25...♙c7!. Once this has been appreciated, 23 ♙g1! is quickly seen as a good move, and if 23...♙xb2? (but other moves are not very good) 24 ♖f4 f5 25 ♖h5 ♙e7 26 ♙d8+, and mate next move.

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

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

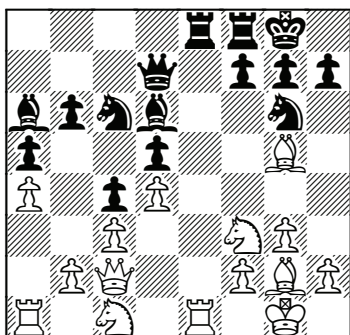
slight pressure for the last few moves, but my next move,



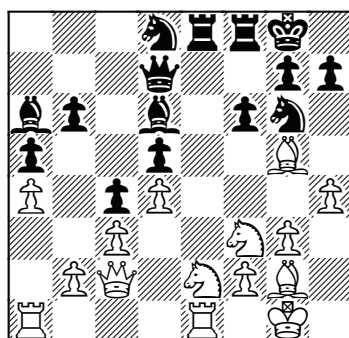
18...h6?! (A), is highly compromising: a pawn weakness. Before too long, Black decides he has to play ...f6 as well as ...h6, and then he has light-squared weaknesses in front of the king.

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

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



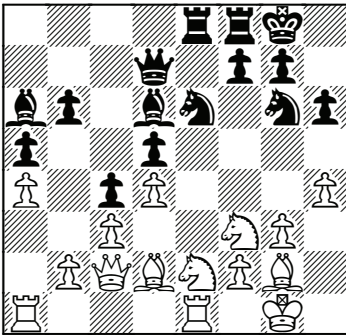
We resume play from 4.1 with 17 ♗e2 ♘d8 18 h4. I have been under



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

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

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



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.

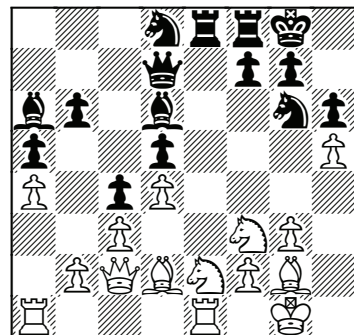
There are two basic problems with Black's pawn structure. First, Black is suffering from covering what is in effect an isolated pawn in the centre. His c-pawn has moved too far, and cannot defend the d5-pawn, nor even do anything to attack White's pieces and pawns. Black is forced to work out how to 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...♗b7**, in part to cover the d5-pawn, also perhaps to try **...♗c6** 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.

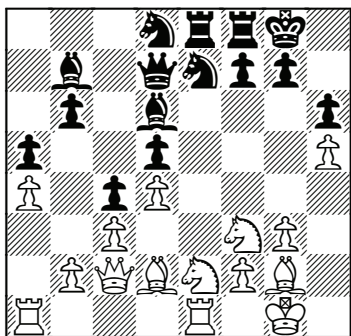
19...♗e6 is more relevant, and if **20 h5 ♗e7 21 ♗e5?! ♗xe5 22 dxe5 ♗c5**, and Black soon maintains the balance with his pieces. **21 ♗h4!?** keeps a slight edge for White, though.

Lauterbach played **20 h5**.



I played **20...♗h8?!**, 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

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



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

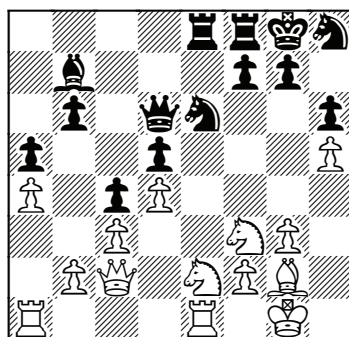
On specifics, after 20...♞e7, if White plays 21 ♙f4 ♞e6 22 ♙xd6 ♜xd6 23 ♞e5?!, following the idea of the main line, then Black equalizes with 23...♞c6, a good argument for the ...♞e7 approach. 23 ♜ab1! keeps White an edge though, forcing Black to work out how he has to face b3 (or b4), or ♞e5, or, after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

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

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

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

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



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

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

After her knight advance, I played

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

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