

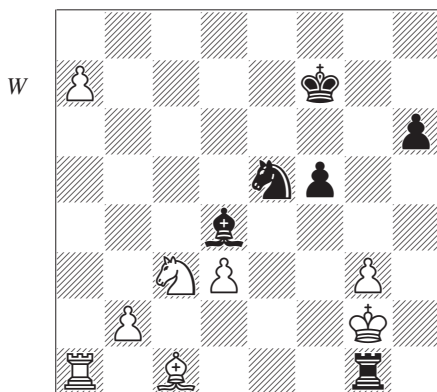
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3 Wanting

The best fighter is not ferocious.
DENG MING DAO



de Firmian – Hillarp Persson
Politiken Cup, Copenhagen 1996

We join the game just as the time-control has been reached. Black is outraged by about 200 points and although tense and uneven, the game has been going the favourite's way. White may have missed a win shortly before the time-control but now has to reconcile himself to a draw after 43 ♖h3 ♜h1+ 44 ♖g2 ♜g1+, etc. GM Jonathan Tisdall gives excellent annotations to this game in *New in Chess* magazine, concluding with the ironic but highly suggestive note: "Now, Nick used some deductive reasoning. He should win this game, and so perpetual check must be avoided..."

43 ♖h2?? ♜f3+ 44 ♖h3 ♜h1+ 45 ♖g2 ♜h2+ 0-1

Black mates on f2 next move. It's peculiar that a 2600 GM should lose a game in this way, especially after the time-control. I have no doubt that if the same player were shown the same position in a different context, he would see in little more than one second that the move 43 ♖h2 allows checkmate. It's certainly not a difficult combination to see, unless you are

somehow blinded by other considerations. So we could look at this as a freak accident and laugh it away, but I prefer to see it as an extreme but instructive example of one of the main causes of error in chess: **the spectre of the result** and how it affects our play.

Chess differs from most competitive endeavours in this crucial respect. You can lose a set in tennis or a goal in soccer and recover, because you still compete on equal terms after the event. But a significant mistake can be fatal in chess because it leads you to lose control of the game. Sometimes you can even perform perfectly after the error, and yet there is no way back. This puts enormous pressure on the chess-player. One slip and you could be heading inexorably to defeat or one careful move, and victory is assured. Donner puts it like this: "It is mainly the irreparability of a mistake that distinguishes chess from other sports. A whole game long, there is only one point to score. Just one mistake and the battle is lost, although the fight may go on for hours. Surely mistakes also occur in tennis or in soccer but there the scoring continues and the players may start again with a clean slate. A chess-player however, remains bound for hours by a small lapse from a distant past. That's why mistakes hit so hard in chess."

Moreover, we often think and talk about chess with reference to the result: "That's losing". "I just need to be careful; I'm sure it's a draw". "If I've calculated this correctly then I'm winning". Indeed, there seems to be a sense, at least unconsciously, in which we are face to face with the ultimate outcome at every single moment of the chess game. It is only natural then that our judgements, calculations and plans should be infused with and coloured by our thoughts about the likely and desired outcome of the game.

A striking example of this 'sin' in top-level chess was the Kasparov-Short PCA World Championship Match in 1993. Short often played the opening and early middlegame very

powerfully with White but from several winning positions he only earned one victory. After the game in which he did win, he looked back on his missed opportunities with these words: “I had forgotten what it was like to beat Kasparov. However, I had an advantage in this game because I didn’t know I was going to win until the game was almost over.” Indeed, at the risk of sticking my neck out, I think Short’s second biggest problem in this match was his susceptibility to *Wanting* (the biggest problem was the strength of his opponent!).

His thoughts during the games were polluted by his desire to win. Whereas Kasparov could just play and implicitly play for victory, feeling nothing unusual in beating his challenger, Short was not used to having winning positions against Kasparov and so had problems adapting from ‘playing’ to ‘winning’ since the two do not go hand in hand unless victory seems normal.

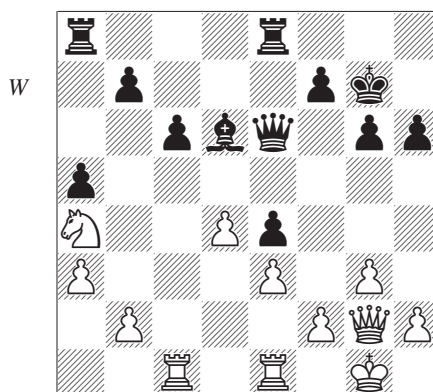
My concern here is to look closely at the ways in which thoughts and feelings about the result can lead to errors in perception. I also want to suggest some remedies that will enable you to play chess with an optimal relationship to this perennial feature of the game. But first I present an example to highlight the importance of recognizing and treating this sin. Although White is somewhat stronger than his opponent, both are GMs, and Black’s loss can, I believe, be largely attributed to *Wanting*.

Miles – Arkell

Isle of Man 1995

1 d4 ♘f6 2 ♙g5 d5 3 ♙xf6 exf6 4 e3 ♙d6 5 ♙d3 g6 6 ♘f3 0-0 7 ♘bd2 f5 8 0-0 ♘d7 9 c4 ♘f6 10 cxd5 ♘xd5 11 ♘c4 ♙e7 12 ♖c1 c6 13 a3 a5 14 ♗d2 ♙e6 15 ♖fd1 ♖e8 16 ♙f1 ♘f6 17 ♗c2 ♙d5 18 ♘cd2 ♙d6 19 g3 ♗e7 20 ♙c4 ♙xc4 21 ♘xc4 ♙c7 22 ♘ce5 ♘d5 23 ♖e1 ♙d6 24 ♗c4 ♙g7 25 ♗f1 h6 26 ♗g2 ♗e6 27 ♘d3 ♘f6 28 ♘d2 ♘e4 29 ♘xe4 fxe4 30 ♘c5 ♗e7 31 ♘a4 ♗e6 (D)

Nothing much has happened until now, and to my understanding the position is about equal. There’s ample scope for ‘pottering around’ on both sides of the board, but it would seem that unless something drastic happens, it will be difficult for either side to ‘play for a win’ without doing something rather contrived.



32 ♖c3 h5 33 h4 ♗g4 34 ♘c5 ♖e7 35 ♖ec1 a4

With hindsight this may look like a mistake, but the idea of ‘trapping’ the c5-knight is actually quite reasonable. After ...b5 White cannot attack the ‘weakness’ on c6 because his knight is blocking the rooks and has nowhere to go.

36 ♖c4 b5 37 ♖4c2 f6 38 ♙f1 g5

On first impressions Black may even seem to be a little better now because White can’t do anything on the queenside and Black has some kingside initiative. However, now we see one drawback to the ...a4, ...b5 idea, which is that Black would like to bring his a8-rook to the kingside but it has to keep guard of a6 to contain the white knight. Thus Black’s activity, although it was probably felt as significant by the players, is in fact somewhat superficial. Indeed we seem to have another example of the phenomenon described in the previous chapter whereby the side that seems to have the advantage may soon become equal or even worse, without making any obvious errors.

39 ♗h1 ♙f7 40 ♙e1 ♙g6?!

Keith’s post-mortem scribbles mention the possibility of 40...♙c7! with a slight advantage to Black. This is a good prophylactic move, preventing the wandering king from hiding behind new walls. Moreover, it’s not at all easy to suggest what White should do after this. Perhaps 40...♙g6 is an ‘obvious error’ then, but it’s curious to think that such a neutral-looking move can be the difference between holding the initiative and drifting into difficulties. Perhaps Keith fell prey to *Blinking* here.

41 ♙d2 ♗f5 42 ♗f1 ♗d5 43 ♗e2 ♙c7 44 ♖h1 ♙a5+ 45 ♙c1 g4 (D)