

Cyrus Lakdawala

Clinch it!

How to Convert an Advantage into a Win in Chess

New In Chess 2018

Contents

Introduction – Converting an advantage	7
Chapter 1 Exploiting a development lead	13
Chapter 2 Exploiting the attack.....	59
Chapter 3 Defense and counterattack.....	119
Chapter 4 Accumulating advantages.....	177
Chapter 5 Converting favorable imbalances	221
Index of players	251
By way of a bibliography.....	253

Introduction – Converting an advantage

So you have achieved a favourable or winning position. What will you do now? Astonishingly enough, most of us don't have a good answer to this simple question. There is more to being a chess player than openings, middlegames and endings knowledge. How good are you at bringing in the full point, without incident, when you hold a clear advantage or are just plain winning?

The fact that I'm in my late fifties and still have ambitions to play decent chess does sound – even to me – like an extraordinary conceit. In the alteration from youth to old age, that which was casually natural now only comes with strained effort. One of the glaring factors I see with aging is my inability to win favorable and won games, when in the past I could do so. When the opponent is clearly worse or losing, everything his psyche fears lives here: uncertainty, loss, failure – and so they are on high alert. A busted player is entitled to impossible dreams and the most dangerous opponent we face is the one who plays with purpose, combined with a disregard for consequences. So there is no rational reason for the winning side not to be worried!

Each week I probably go over 30 games by students. I estimate that about 35% of their favorable winning positions are, for one reason or another, not won. It's almost a universal constant. Wins consistently turn into draws or losses. It happens to us over and over again. We have the opponent totally busted and think to ourselves: 'Winning this game should be a trivial affair for a man of my talents!' And then – you guessed it – we go into Three Stooges mode and completely bungle it. Then after the game we complain: 'I should have played that way instead and then I would have won!' We are all so wise with the benefit of perfect hindsight, after the fact and with our 3200 rated comp turned on. Does this sound familiar?

Losing, unlike ingesting gradually increasing doses of a toxin, doesn't make us immune to its pain. We never really get accustomed to it. When we lose a chess game it doesn't die according to the atheist's belief that we cease to exist, as if never born. Instead, the memory of our losses lives on in our psyches, as a microscopic version of the death of a loved one. If chess is merely a philosophical abstraction of real war, then why does it hurt so much when we turn a win into a loss, or even a draw?

Clinch it!

This book is an attempt to understand why so many of us so often throw away games which should be ours. We ask ourselves: 'When is the happily ever after part going to happen?' The problem is, our game doesn't win itself.

The purpose of this book is to get point A to point B, without veering off to C or X. One reason we don't win is that when our opponents are busted, a kind of feral cunning kicks in, making the losing side ten times more dangerous than when he merely stood worse. Our desperate opponent is on high alert, while we foolishly relax. In a sense they, not us, have the advantage. The anarchist tends to frustrate the efforts of those who seek stability. It's just a lot easier to blow something up rather than build it.

Instead of being overjoyed by the fact that we have a clear advantage or are winning, we should see our situation for what it really is: a tedious chore. We have a lot of work and also potential frustration ahead of us before we are allowed to break open the champagne and celebrate. It isn't easy for us to convert our favorable position into a win without making a fool of ourselves for at least one or two moves. But these one or two moves we flub is all that is required to flip the potential from a win to a draw, or – *Caissa forbid* – a loss.

When you don't know how to proceed, then obey your nature. But when the sensible course of action goes against your stylistic inclination, then go with the former. Above all, try and win without embellishment, always choosing 'clear' over 'elegant'.

Universal constants of why a commanding position degenerates

It's so painful to be climbing to the top of the ladder, only to mess it up and find yourself at the bottom rung. The disillusionment we feel is the same as when a child hears from his schoolmates that Santa Clause isn't real. Like Oprah Winfrey, your writer is a font of useful information which makes life happier for the chess playing reader. Here is a list of universal constants on why we blight our would-be success, for your contemplation. Originally I had around 300 of them, but then, not wanting the entire intro to this book to be a long list, I wisely decided to cut back to just a few in the book's introduction, and weave the remainder into the book in italics, so you can identify them:

1. Calculation error.
2. Miscalculation. The key here is: when confronted with a choice of two murky lines, go with the one with better lighting.
3. Incorrect plan.

4. Hesitancy and doubt.
5. Psychological collapse.
6. Fear of entry into the unknown. Just remember that a blind person can also be a killer. So when the position calls for us to enter a mess, then do so if the mess is in our favor.
7. Overestimation of our position.
8. Underestimation of our resources.
9. Botching a king hunt.
10. Bungling defense when up heavy material.
11. Collapsing nerves, which is related to number 5 on the list.
12. Lack of courage to undertake risky yet decisive action.
13. Recklessness. Planning and chaos don't work well together. Be aware that reckless abandon rarely triumphs over logic and common sense, unless you are Tal, which most of us are not.
14. Paranoia. It's okay to take reasonable precautions, but don't allow your position to slip into their growing shadow.
15. Unable to consolidate material wealth.
16. Unable to consolidate strategic wealth.
17. Mistiming action.
18. Missing a combinational pattern.
19. Refusing to be impervious to a little pain to gain a far greater reward.
20. Lack of mental flexibility.
21. Refusing to follow principles.
22. Refusing to break principles when an exception occurs.
23. Allowing disharmony to creep into our position.
24. Altering our belief system.
25. Refusing to alter our belief system.
26. Oversimplification.
27. Refusing to simplify by inappropriately complicating.
28. Misjudging short-term gains versus a long-term perspective.
29. Mixing up explicit versus implicit threats.
30. Basing our decisions upon our internal timeline, rather than current board conditions.
31. Doing nothing and waiting for the win to come to us, as if brought by a waiter on a plate, garnished with parsley and an orange slice.
32. Pushing it too hard and going off the cliff's edge.
33. Nobody's perfect, so factor in mistakes. In this way we don't get rattled when we make one. We are unable to alter history, so stop dwelling on past mistakes and start working to alter the present.
34. Don't live an aimless existence. When we are planless, we are like a person who is perpetually on his or her way somewhere. But just

where that 'somewhere' is, nobody can say. Play without a clear plan and first comes wobbly uncertainty, then follows discomfort and finally, outright pain. Keep it simple and avoid the situation when our complex, multi-tiered plan is humiliatingly dismantled by our opponent's simple response, which everyone in the room saw, except one person: you.

35. Misremembering our opening. An overload of information is just as dangerous as not enough of it. It's a dangerous thing when memory mingles with imagination and the line you 'memorized' comes out as something entirely different than your home prep.

Psychological errors

And then there is the huge category of psychological errors. No, your writer is not a psychologist, but don't worry: having once read *The Portable Jung* in high school, I am now an authority on psychological errors on the chessboard, mainly since I have been guilty of committing every single one of them at some point in my career!

1. A setback isn't the same thing as a defeat. When we blunder in a winning position, yet still retain a winning position, we often botch it, since our perfectionist subconscious whispers: 'You don't deserve to win anymore, since you spoiled a once beautiful thing with a blunder.' Remember this: if plan A didn't work out as expected, then stop fretting and get to work on plan B. Keep in mind that you are still better or winning, even after your blunder.

2. Don't jump into a bloody final Armageddon battle and expect to emerge completely unscathed and intact. If you inflicted more damage to your opponent than he did to you, then you came out ahead.

3. When deception fails, then try truth. Stop trying to swindle your opponent if an honest means to victory exists.

4. Assess what is real and what isn't. Don't magnify the opponent's non-existent counterplay in your mind.

5. Don't allow your attack or initiative to get out of control. If my wife Nancy goes shopping unsupervised, I would need to write another chess book, just to pay off what she bought that day. So I lurk behind and monitor her movements like a detective following a client's suspected unfaithful spouse.

6. Be ready to overturn your previous belief. The mind of a true believer is a place of stagnation, since new facts which contradict the belief are not proof enough.

7. Override unconscious selectivity with conscious choice.

8. When we proceed the way our opponent expects, then expect him or her to respond exactly opposite to what we expected.

9. Remember that you are not clairvoyant. Our prediction doesn't have to match the observable result with 100% accuracy.

10. Obey a necessary evil.

11. Don't advertise your intentions, until you are forced to do so.

12. If you desire to learn a position's truth, then discard pre-conceived notions.

13. Our fears may be irrational, yet they affect our coming move choices. We dream that we are grievously injured; when we awaken our body is whole and uninjured, yet the imprint of the trauma may remain on our psyche.

14. Ask yourself: 'Why do I begin acts of folly, even when every one of our plausible arguments falls short?'

15. Review a single issue from opposing perspectives, yours and your opponent's, since looking at the problem exclusively from our own narrow perspective tends to point to the conclusion we want to see.

16. Don't make the assumption that your opponent knows something you don't, because if you do, paranoia begins to creep in. Instead, weaponize your opponent's paranoia, since, as we all know, the threat is stronger than its execution.

17. Avoid ambivalence, since entering a line with mixed feelings tends to divide our energy.

18. Don't hand over a valuable asset for a vague promise.

19. Seek proportionality to the opponent's provocation. Don't be so certain that your assessment is 100% correct. When your opponent is desperate and his or her survival is on the line, factor in that instinct tends to trump the cold reason of intellect. So expect the unexpected.

20. If we begin to bungle our once winning position, which is now reduced to the state of merely promising, there is no sense in wasting energy on our past errors. The past is a dead thing and our only concern should be our present and future.

21. Don't get overconfident, because when you do, you become like a bank robber who successfully pulls off a heist and then proceeds in celebration to get drunk in the bar and boast about it.

The book's format

I dislike chess books which are pharmacopeias with lists of lines, directions for use and their side effects. Instead, chess books should give the reader the idea that he is in a study session with a higher rated friend. So with this book I tried to do just that. Reading a chess book as if it is

Clinch it!

a college text book is a passive form of learning. I found through four decades of teaching that a student's comprehension and insight tends to rise dramatically if learning is an interactive process, where the student also attempts to solve problems on his or her own. The book consists of game fragments, which focus directly on the beating heart of the position. I have tried to make it as interactive as possible, so you are challenged with quizzes and asked questions over and over again. Most of the games in the book demonstrate the way to win the favorable positions. In a smaller percentage we reverse the polarity with a disastrous loss or draw from a position which should have been won, with a kind of 'Don't do this, don't do that' narrative in the negative mode.

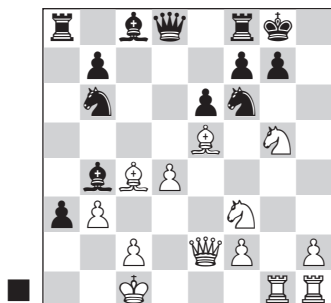
So we have listed all the reasons why we don't win. In the book, let's figure out what exactly we need to do about it!

Cyrus Lakdawala
San Diego, August 2018

Game 38

Mikhail Tal**Tigran V Petrosian**

Moscow ch-URS 1973 (15)



position after 20.♖dg1!?

Strategists seek to control a position, while tacticians seek complications which, in a way, control them. Petrosian threatened 20...♙c3, followed by ...a3-a2, which Tal just ignored with his last move! It's not possible to repent when you refuse to admit to the earlier sin. About here Tal's heart probably skipped and leaped with false hope, since he concocted a diabolical strategic cheapo.

Exercise: Should Black play 20...♙c3? Or should he play instead 20...a2? One line is far stronger than the other.

Answer: 20...a2!!

The pawn push is the stronger version. When you deal with an inherently dishonest person, you would be wise not to give him the benefit of the doubt. Giving Tal his queen sacrifice by 20...♙c3? allows him back into the game after 21.♗e4! a2 22.♗xc3 a1♙+ 23.♙d2.

While White may be in the midst of a financial crisis, at least his monster attack on the kingside thrives and the final result isn't so clear at all.

21.♙b2 ♗xc4+!

This move distracts White's queen away from Black's king.

22.♙xc4

22.bxc4?? ♙b6! (threat: 23...♙d2+, followed by 24...♙c3 mate) 23.c3 ♙xc3+! 24.♙xc3 ♖a3+ 25.♙c2 ♙b3+ 26.♙d2 ♙c3+ 27.♙d1 a1♙#.

22...♗d5!

Threatening both 23...♙c3+ and also 23...f6.

23.♗e4

23.♙xg7 ♙c3+ 24.♙xc3 ♗xc3 25.♙a1 (Black survives 25...♙e5 a1♙+ 26.♖xa1 ♖xa1 27.♖xa1 f6) 25...♙xg7 26.♗xe6+ ♙f6 27.♗xd8 ♖xd8 and White has no compensation for his missing piece.

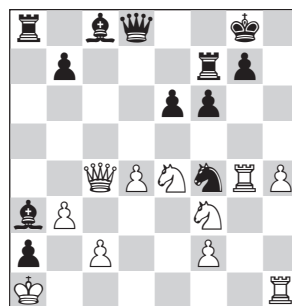
23...f6 24.♙f4!?

24.♙g3 f5! 25.♙e5 ♖f7 is also hopeless for White since the e4-knight can't move.

24...♙a3+ 25.♙a1

Tal hopes to shield his king behind Petrosian's advanced a-pawn.

25...♗xf4 26.h4 ♖f7 27.♖g4



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Exercise: You don't always need to knock down the defender's wall. Sometimes it's easier to burn the warehouse of their food supply. White could resign if the queens were removed from the board. And in fact, Petrosian found a way to do just that, putting to rest Tal's dreams of attack. How?

Answer: 27... ♖a5! 0-1

The threat of 28... ♗b2+! and 29... a1♖+ forces the queens off.

Game 39

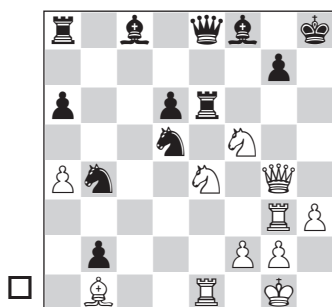
Garry Kasparov

2800

Anatoly Karpov

2730

Lyon/New York Wch m 1990 (20)



position after 28... ♗c8

This position arose from one of the K vs K Ruy Lopez battles.

We all have relatives who we love, but don't really like. Some of our openings are that way as well. I would gladly meet 1.e4 with 1...e5!, if only all my opponents agreed to exclusively play the white side of the Ruy Lopez. But they refuse to cooperate and also toss in the Scotch, the Max Lange and other undesirable open games, which I

hate, so 1...e5 is closed for your open position-hating writer.

Kasparov's army looms menacingly over Karpov's kingside, which threatens to turn into a Hieronymus Bosch hellscape. But just remember that attacks bring with them as much pain, as joy, when we botch them. Let's get this one right.

Exercise: Come up with White's strongest attacking plan.

Answer: 29. ♖h4+!

Step 1: Transfer the queen to h4.

29... ♖h6!?

Karpov's move is like a sluggish man who just consumed a 3,000 calorie Christmas dinner, to the manic energy of the junkie, who just scored a hit of angel dust.

His last move is made with the **philosophy:** An amputation is better than immediate death to the entire body. This is obvious desperation. But be careful. When our opponent is busted, fanatical resolve is all he has left as a weapon.

29... ♗g8 was hopeless due to:

Step 2: 30. ♗h2! with the deadly and unstoppable threat of 31. ♗g5!.

30. ♗xh6 gxh6 31. ♗h2!

Threat: 32. ♗f6!.

31. ♖e2! was even more deadly, according to the comp.

31... ♖e5

31... ♖a7 32. ♗f6 ♖f7 33. ♖e8! and the threat 34. ♖xh6+ forces mate.

32. ♗g5!

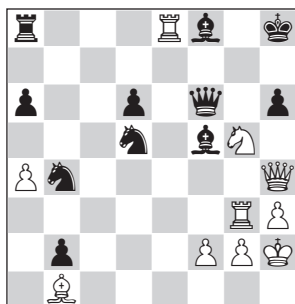
Threatening a fork on f7.

32... ♖f6 33. ♖e8!

The finish is ruthless, even by Kasparov's brutal standards. The

beautiful threat is 34. ♖xh6+! and 35. ♘f7 mate.

33... ♙f5



34. ♖xh6+!?

A fired bullet doesn't always lodge where the shooter intended. If you want to go from A to C, you better make certain you don't skip a step. The text move is startling, but less effective than 34. ♘f7+! ♖xf7 35. ♖xh6+ ♙h7 36. ♖xa8. There is no way to cover the f8-bishop, with mate to follow.

34... ♖xh6 35. ♘f7+

Now Black must vomit pieces to stave off mate.

35... ♙h7 36. ♙xf5+ ♖g6 37. ♙xg6+

Kasparov continues to loot unhindered and to his heart's delight. 37. ♖xg6! forces mate.

37... ♙g7

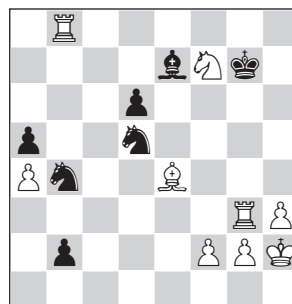
There is a world of difference between preventing something and postponing it. Yes, Karpov has slipped out of mate, but that is a hollow victory, since Kasparov has a very easy technical task ahead.

38. ♖xa8

So Kasparov is up two rooks for only one black piece. His last hurdle is to pick off Black's b2 imp,

which, when alive, offers Black hope to dream.

38... ♙e7 39. ♖b8 a5 40. ♙e4+!



This trick wins the b2-pawn, Black's last hope, at the low price of a piece.

40... ♙xf7 41. ♙xd5+ 1-0

The end of Hope often arrives with relief. Karpov was probably glad to get this game behind him and resign. If 41... ♘xd5 42. ♖xb2 and Karpov's last weapon has been placed into storage.

Game 40

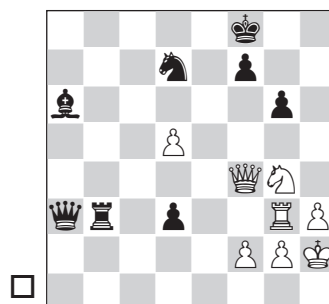
Garry Kasparov

2740

Anatoly Karpov

2705

London/Leningrad Wch m 1986 (16)



position after 33... ♖xa3

Shakespeare's advice to 'neither a borrower or lender be' is generally

Clinch it!

ignored by anyone who plans to launch a sacrificial attack. Kasparov gave up a piece to get here.

Compared to the previous game, appearances suggest that things are looking rosy for Karpov. After all, he is up a piece and his king looks defensible. But again, Kasparov had seen deeper into the attack's core.

White is actually winning by force and it may shock you to know that Komodo has Kasparov up by +17.14, the equivalent of White being up a queen, rook and a few pawns!

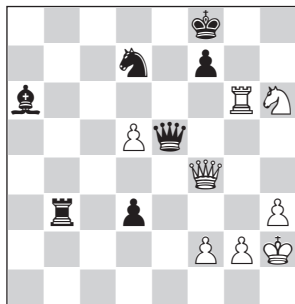
34. ♖h6!

Threatening mate on f7.

34... ♜e7 35. ♖xg6

Threatening mate again on g8.

35... ♜e5



The queens are coming off the board. Surely now Black is winning, right? Wrong. Karpov may have expected a sumptuous meal and instead gets gruel, the favored food of Trappist monks and Dickens workhouse orphans.

Exercise: Work out the steps of Kasparov's winning combination.

Answer: 36. ♖g8+

Step 1: Drive Black's king to the unfavorable e7-square.

36... ♜e7 37.d6+!

Attraction. This geometric incongruity feels for Black the same as attending a funeral on a beautiful sunny day. It is Kasparov's diabolical point, as his intent comes out from the shadows into the open. Every dodge or capture loses.

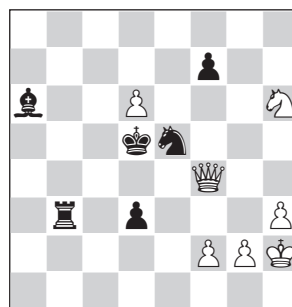
37... ♜e6

This loses the queen, as do all other tries:

A) 37... ♜xd6 38. ♖xf7+ forks;

B) 37... ♜xd6 38. ♖f5+ is another fork. Did you try to play 38. ♜xf7 mate? That's an illegal move, since White's queen is pinned!

38. ♜e8+ ♜d5 39. ♖xe5+ ♖xe5



A condemned man teetering on the scaffold still has hopes for a last-minute reprieve from the governor. Karpov prays he can extract energy from his passed d-pawn, but it's impossible to light a fire from the cold dead ashes of an old one.

Exercise: How did White end his opponent's hopes in a single move?

Answer: 40.d7!

Attraction.

40... ♖b8

40... ♖xd7 41. ♜xf7+ picks up Black's rook next move.

41. ♖xf7 1-0

41... ♖xf7 allows 42. ♖xb8, and if 41... ♖xd7, 42. ♖d6+ picks off the knight.

Game 41

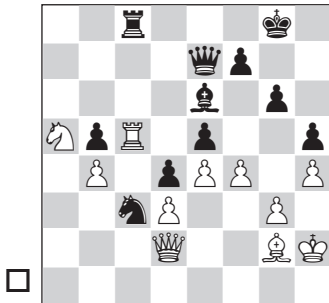
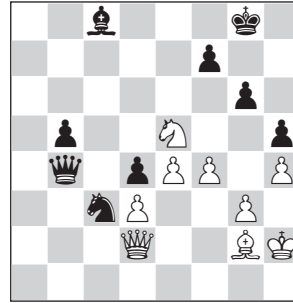
Magnus Carlsen

2822

Sergey Karjakin

2773

St Louis 2017 (2)



position after 31... ♖c8

Exercise: Is it better for White to take e5 with his rook, or is it better to swap rooks? Evaluate the two lines and pick the better one.

Answer: 32. ♖xc8+

Swapping on c8 gives White the better position, since it drives Black's queen away from her king. 32. ♖xe5?! allows Black to remain at least even after 32... ♖xb4 as if 33. f5 ♖d6! Black will win the exchange and stand no worse.

32... ♖xc8 33. ♖c6!

With a double attack on e7 and e5.

33... ♖d6

Black must win the b4-pawn to compensate for the loss of his e-pawn.

34. ♖xe5 ♖xb4

If Karjakin hoped to plunder, then he didn't get away with all that much. His passed b5-pawn is clearly slower than Carlsen's attack.

Exercise: How did Carlsen achieve a winning position?

Answer: 35. f5!

Line opening.

When negotiations fail, it's time to engage the biceps and throw a punch.

Black's king is surprisingly difficult to defend against White's queen, knight and f-pawn combination.

35... ♖d6?

Right piece, wrong square. Karjakin begins to wander from the essential point. Black has better chances to survive after 35... ♖e7 36. ♖f3 b4 37. fxg6 fxg6 38. ♖xd4.

36. ♖f3 gxf5!?

Now Karjakin's kingside structure looks like one of those apartments in the poor side of town which has newspapers for curtains.

Black's play on the queenside is a move too slow:

A) 36... b4 37. ♖g5 b3 38. fxg6 b2 (if 38... fxg6 39. e5 ♖b6 40. ♖e7 is decisive) 39. gxf7+ ♖xf7 40. ♖e5+ ♖f8 (40... ♖xe5 41. ♖xe5 b1 ♖42. ♖xh5+ ♖e7 43. ♖c5+ ♖d8

Clinch it!

44. ♖xd4+ wins) 41. ♗c4 ♖b8
 42. ♗xb2 ♖xb2 43. ♖c5+ – Black’s
 bishop falls and he is busted;
 B) 36... ♗g7 37.e5 ♖b6 38.f6+ ♗h7
 39. ♗g5+ ♗g8 40. ♗e6! (clearance)
 40... fxe6 41. ♖h6 ♖c7 42. ♖xg6+
 ♗f8 43. ♗c6! (threatening mate on
 e8) 43... ♖f7 44. ♖h6+ ♗g8 45. ♗e8!
 ♖h7 46. ♖g5+ ♗f8 47. ♗g6 ♖c7
 48. ♖xh5 ♗g8 49. ♗e8! ♖h7 50.f7+
 forces mate.

37. ♖g5+ ♗h7 38.e5!?

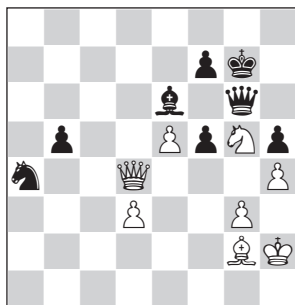
Carlsen decides to assert himself
 along the kingside dark squares,
 which leak like broth through a
 sieve.

38. exf5! ♖h6 39. ♖e7 ♗g8 40.f6 ♖f8
 41. ♗xd4 with a winning position.

**38... ♖g6 39. ♖d8 ♗e6 40. ♗g5+
 ♗g7 41. ♖xd4**

This queen has virtually
 circumnavigated the entire board.

41... ♗a4



Exercise: The pulse for Karjakin’s
 position is faint and uneven.
 Find the correct plan and Black’s
 resistance ends.

Answer: 42. ♗h3! 1-0

Transfer the knight to f4, which
 reduces Black’s queen to a state of
 total powerlessness. 42... ♗g8 43. ♗f4

♖h6 (for Black’s bound queen, this
 was how Samson felt when he heard
 the temple pillars beginning to
 break apart) 44. ♖b4 ♗d7 45. ♖e7 is
 hopeless for Black since 45... ♗e6 is
 met with 46. ♖e8+ ♖f8 47. ♖xb5.

Game 42

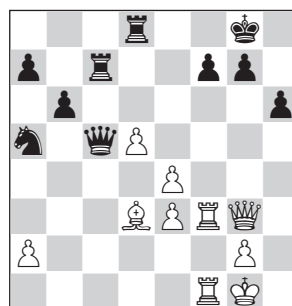
Levon Aronian

2809

Wesley So

2810

St Louis 2017 (6)



position after 28... ♖c5

The only thing which stands out
 in this position is its ordinariness.
 There isn’t much to notice, except
 one detail: most of Black’s pieces
 have wandered away from the
 kingside, where White’s forces loom
 ominously.

Exercise: How did Aronian
 continue his attack?

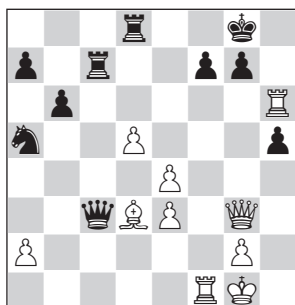
Answer: 29. ♖f6!

Annihilation of defensive barrier.
 We sense unfavorable feng shui for
 Black. White threatens 30. ♖xh6.

29...h5

29... ♗f8?? is met with the crushing
 30. ♖g6! ♖c3 31. ♖xg7! ♖xg7 32. ♖xc7
 when Black can resign.

30. ♖h6! ♔c3



Exercise: Should White move or protect his loose bishop, or should he not worry about it and sacrifice by chopping h5?

Answer: 31. ♖xh5!

The position continues its slide from a free society to a totalitarian state, ruled by White.

As it turns out, Aronian isn't abusing his expense account. White's bishop is safe since Black doesn't have time to take it.

31...g6

It becomes clear that Black is no longer the decider of his own fate.

31... ♗xd3? allows mate after 32. ♗h4 f6 33. ♖h8+ ♕f7 34. ♖xf6+! ♕e7 (34...gxf6 35. ♗h7#) 35. ♖e6+ ♕f7 36. ♗f4#.

32.e5!

Interference, cutting off Black's queen from the defense of her king, who stands out like a lone accidental chocolate chip on a cake with vanilla icing.

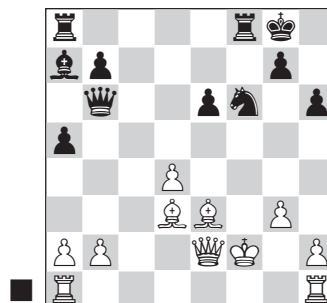
Black resigned, since after 32... ♗xd3 33. ♖h3! there is no defense to either 34. ♗h2 or 34. ♗h4. If 33... ♕f8 34. ♗g5! forces mate.

Game 43

Carl Wagner

Cyrus Lakdawala

San Diego 1991



position after 20... ♗d3

Exercise: What is the most efficient way for Black to pursue his attack?

Answer: 20...e5!

Pin/line opening/discovered attack.

Several students suggested the inferior 20... ♗g4+?. This line is superficial and clearly not the best way to exploit Black's advantage:

21. ♕g2 ♗xe3+ 22. ♗xe3 ♗xb2+

23. ♕h3 ♗xd4 24. ♗xe6+ ♕h8

25. ♖ad1 when Black barely even stands better.

21. ♕g2 ♗c6+ 22. ♕h3

A queen block on f3 is met with the push of Black's e-pawn.

22... ♖ae8

Principle: Mobilize ALL available forces before striking with your attack.

23.d5?

It's unwise to try and purchase peace, since the aggressor tends to simply accept your tribute payment and then later demand more. This attempt to prevent ...e5xd4 is inefficient. 23. ♗c2 was a more resilient defense.

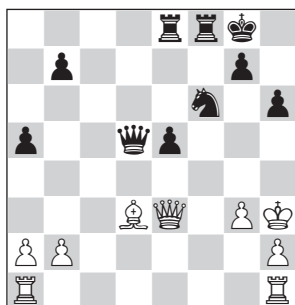
Clinch it!

23... ♖d7+ 24. ♔g2 ♙xe3 25. ♚xe3
♚xd5+

The queen gazes upon White's king with a peculiar expression and a twinkle in her eye.

26. ♘h3

26. ♘g1 ♗g4 27. ♚e4 ♚c5+ 28. ♘g2
♗e3+ 29. ♘h3 ♚c8+ 30. g4 (if 30. ♘h4
♚f4+! forces mate) 30... ♚f4! is a
game ender.



Your writer's majestically large nose is admirably constructed for sniffing in contempt. I was tempted to do just that at my opponent's last move.

Exercise: Black will squander his attacking capital with even a single indifferent or lethargic response. We sense a crushing shot for Black, but where?

Answer: 26... ♗g4! 0-1

Attraction/mating net.

The thing I learned from the Dothraki in Game of Thrones (although GOT wasn't even there in book form when this game was played) is that if you unite a band of nomadic tribes, they become a nation.

27. ♘xg4 ♚e6+ 28. ♘h4 g5+ 29. ♘h5
♚h3+ 30. ♘g6 ♚e6#.

Game 44

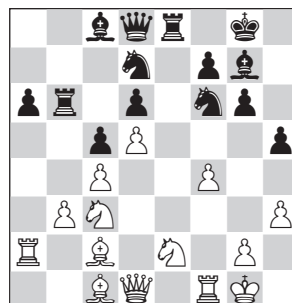
Cyrus Lakdawala

2545

Dionisio Aldama Degurnay

2555

San Diego rapid 2014



position after 17... ♗ed7

The rejection of a good woman's love really hurts. I tried my best for decades to get the hang of the white side of Benoni structures and failed miserably. Then, out of frustration, when Black played ...e6xd5, I began to recapture with my e-pawn, rather than the traditional recapture with the c-pawn, and my results improved dramatically, as in the case of the diagrammed position.

Exercise: Black's g6-point has been weakened by his previously overly optimistic ...h7-h5 push. Is it in White's best interest to play 18.f5, which hands Black control over the e5-square?

Answer: 18.f5!

This is clearly the correct moment to go into winner-take-all mode. Handing Black control over e5 is a trivial concession when compared to the damage White inflicts with the f4-f5 push.

18... ♗f8!

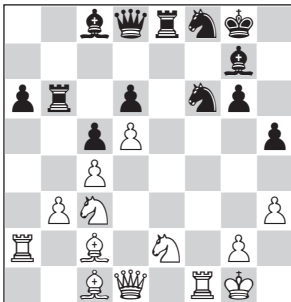
Black reacts well to the crisis. At first sight it appears as if he unnecessarily agrees to an austere penance, when there was no need. But if Black plays his knight to e5 he gets into huge trouble: 18...♘e5? 19.fxg6 fxg6 20.♘f4. When there are two claimants to a single square, it becomes clear that both are not going to occupy it simultaneously. g6 falls in all lines. For example:

A) 20...♗h7?? 21.♘xg6! ♘xg6 22.♖d3 is crushing;

B) If 20...♗f7?? 21.♘xg6! ♘xg6 22.♖xh5 wins;

C) 20...♙f5?? 21.♙xf5 gxf5 22.♘e6 ♖b8 23.♗xf5 ♗xb3 24.♘xg7 ♗xg7 25.♙h6+! ♗xh6 26.♖d2+ ♗h7 27.♗xf6 with an unstoppable attack.

19.fxg6 fxg6



Blisters begin to form on Black's structure, the most notable of which is g6.

20.♙g5!
This pin will be difficult to break. The less accurate 20.♘f4 allows Black to muck it up a bit with 20...♘g4!.
20...♗e5 21.♖d2 ♙d7 22.♘g3
Intending to transfer one of my knights to e4.

22...♗e7 23.♘ce4

Initiative over material. I refused his exchange sacrifice which gives him some hope of dark-square counterplay after 23.♙f4 ♘6h7 24.♙xe5 ♙xe5.

23...♘8h7

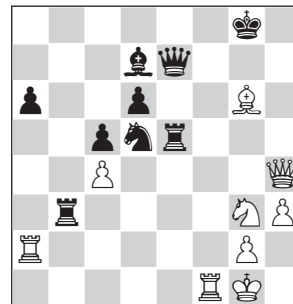
I calculated 23...♘xe4 24.♘xe4 ♖e8 25.♘f6+ ♙xf6 26.♙xf6 ♗e2 27.♖h6 ♖e3+ 28.♖xe3 ♗xe3 29.♙d8!. Black begins to drop pawns.

24.♘xf6+ ♙xf6 25.♙xf6 ♘xf6

26.♙xg6 ♗xb3 27.♖f4 h4

Complete desperation. 27...♗g7 28.♙f5 ♙e8 29.♙c2! with dual threats: to b3 and a knight fork on f5.

28.♖xh4 ♘xd5



The agile mountain goat leaps from crag to crag. Lucky breaks are not lucky breaks if you allow them to pass. Be alert for opportunities to immediately end the game when your opponent blunders under the strain of a difficult defense. Most of our attacks tend to be mere abstractions until the moment of the combination, where they become all too real, and demand to be clothed with direct action. Aldama banked on this trick, which fails. The black king's

Clinch it!

unprotected state virtually invites an assassination attempt.

Exercise: White to play and force mate.

Answer: 29. ♖f8+! 1-0

Attraction/removal of the guard.

29... ♖xf8 30. ♖h8#; 29... ♖xf8

30. ♖h7# or 29... ♖g7 30. ♖h7+ ♖xf8

31. ♖h8#.

Game 45

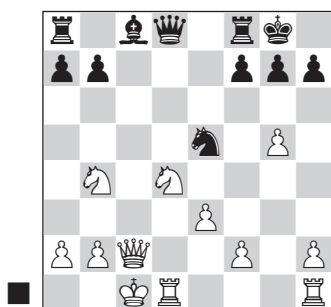
Stevan Djordjevic

2366

Cyrus Lakdawala

2527

San Diego rapid 2016



position after 16. ♗xb4

We went opposite wings and I gave up a pawn for the faster attack.

Exercise: How can Black regain the invested material, with interest?

Answer: 16... ♗g4!

Double attack. Black simultaneously threatens 17... ♖c8, and also 17... ♗xd1, so White must hand over an exchange.

When we lose patience with the negotiations, our carrot tends to become smaller, while our stick simultaneously grows larger and more menacing.

17. ♖e4

Those born to a life of ease and privilege don't tend to do well when destitute and thrown into a job market. White's queen is roused from her perch.

After 17. ♗e6?? ♖a5 18. ♗xf8 ♖c8

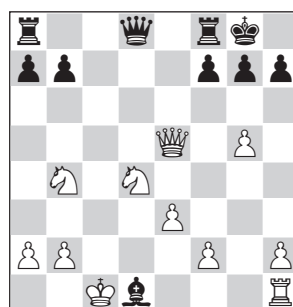
19. ♖xc8 ♗xc8 20. ♗d5 ♖xf8 Black is up too much material and has an attack to boot.

17... ♗xd1

So Black won the exchange for a pawn. But it's too early to celebrate since the job is only half done.

18. ♖xe5!?

The queen points ominously at g7. I expected 18. ♖xd1 ♗e8.



18... ♗g4

I bestowed a wise, knowing and indulgent smile at my opponent's attempt to create shenanigans upon my king, based on ♗f5 tricks. I was happy to hang on to my uncontested bishop, which may later rule the light squares. I posted the bishop on g4, since it covers the f5-square there.

19. ♖b1 ♗e8 20. ♖f4 ♗h5 21. ♖a1 a5 22. ♗d3

I thought he would play it to c2.

22... ♗g6 23. ♖d1!

He avoids my trap 23. ♖e5?? ♔d5!
(double attack) 24. ♗ef3 ♜e4 25. ♗g3
♜xd4! (overloaded defender)

26. exd4 ♙e4 when the pin costs
White a piece.

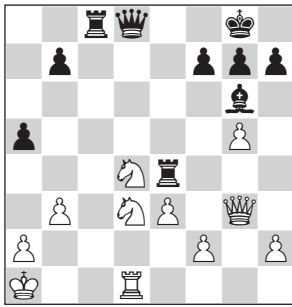
23... ♜c8 24. b3

He gives his king some luft, at the
cost of weakening a tad.

24... ♜e4

I contemplated returning the
exchange on d4.

25. ♗g3



Exercise: Your combination-
challenged writer misses a
knockout punch here. What would
you play for Black?

25... ♜c3?

Is this a case of a good man,
accused falsely? No, not really. It
is the worst kept secret in chess
that your writer stinks in open
positions. My move is still winning
but much stronger was:

Answer: 25... ♙h5! (removal of the
guard) 26. ♜b1 ♜c3! 27. ♗b2 ♜xd4!
28. ♗e5 ♜dd3 29. ♗xd3 ♜xd3, leaving
White down a full piece.

26. ♗g1?

26. ♗b2 was necessary.

Imagined threats looming over
the defender's head can be more

oppressive psychologically than the
implementation of an actual threat.



Exercise: White just blundered on
his last move, in an already lost
position. How do we exploit it?

Answer: 26... ♜xd4! 0-1

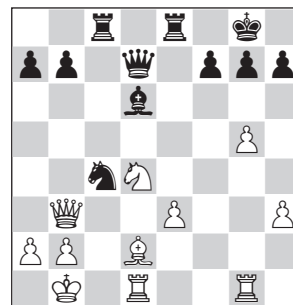
Discovered attack. The d3-knight
falls as well and White is just down
a piece for nothing.

Game 46

Braulio Cuarta 2280

Cyrus Lakdawala 2524

San Diego rapid 2017



position after 23... ♗c4

I cannot truthfully say that White
has treated his structure in a
caring, ethical way. He is saddled
with pawn targets on e3 and the

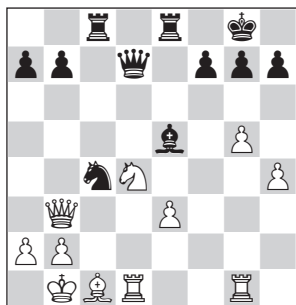
Clinch it!

kingside, and his attack is slower than Black's. We were both low on time so the remainder of the game turns into a painful blunderfest.

24.h4 ♖e5

Principle: Centralize your pieces in open positions. In this case the bishop takes latent aim at b2.

25.♙c1



Reinforcing b2, while worrying Black's queen about potential discovered attacks by the d4-knight.

25...g6

A triple purpose move which:

1. gives luft to Black's king;
2. allows the e5-bishop a potential retreat to g7;
3. keeps White's knight perpetually out of f5.

26.♖a1 ♙g7

Adding heat to e3, since I just uncovered my rook on the square.

27.h5

I wasn't worried about his attack and was happy to see this move, since now his g5-pawn must be protected by a piece.

27...a6 28.hxg6 hxg6 29.♖h1

I couldn't see any scenario where White has time to triple his major

pieces on the h-file, without getting mated first himself.

29...b5

Anchoring my knight, which frees my c8-rook.

30.♖b4

30.♖d3! was correct.

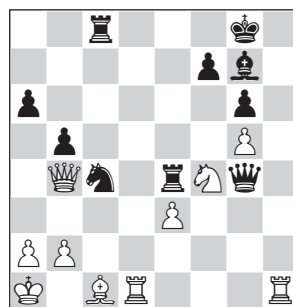
30...♗e4

Why threaten, when you can simply take? I underestimated the strength of 30...♘xe3! 31.♙xe3 ♗xe3 32.♘b3 ♖f5.

31.♘e2 ♖g4?!

Still winning, but I missed an immediate knockout with 31...♘xb2! 32.♗xd7 ♗xb4.

32.♘f4?



Exercise: This allows Black a crushing combination. How should Black proceed?

32...♖xg5?

My mind is stuck in perpetual defense mode. I wanted to prevent ♘d5 and ♘f6+ ideas.

Answer: Black has the crushing 32...♘xb2! 33.♖xe4 ♘xd1+ 34.♖b1 ♘c3+, picking up White's queen.

33.♘d5? ♖e5?

I suppressed a surge of hate for the ancient relative who handed me such crappy chess skills down

the gene pool. Sigh. Do you think maybe the goddess Caissa will take note of my suffering and make a place for me in the afterlife?

33...♟xb2! still worked: if 34.♞xe4 ♟xd1+ 35.♝b1 ♞xd5! (attraction/knight fork) 36.♞xd5 ♟c3+ wins.

34.♞d4

A good cheapo attempt.

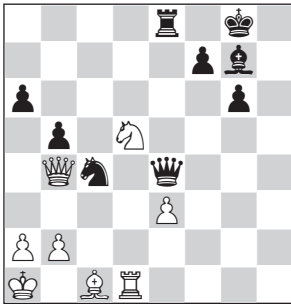
34...♞e8

In time pressure I almost played the idiotic 34...♞xd4?? 35.♟e7+! (this zwischenzug may save White) 35...♞xe7 36.♞xe7 ♞d6 37.♞f1 ♞f8 – White can probably save the game.

35.♞xe4?

Correct was 35.♞c5.

35...♞xe4 36.♞d1



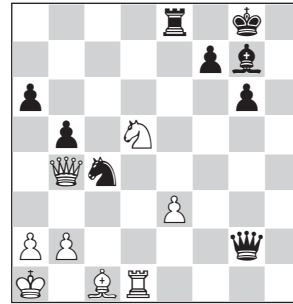
Exercise: Black to play and win.

36...♞c2?

‘Failure’ is simply not a word in my lexicon. ‘Inept’, yes, ‘Failure’, no. Now that you have discovered just how pathetic your writer is in time pressure, I just wanted to let you know that there is a strict no refund policy on this book. All sales are final!

Answer: I missed 36...♞d8! 37.♟c3 ♞xd1 38.♟xd1 ♞c2!, winning on the spot.

37.♞h1 ♞g2 38.♞d1



Exercise: I’m getting writer’s cramp from typing this phrase so often: Black to play and force the win.

38...♟e5?

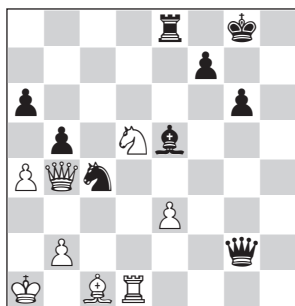
While some players jump into action when confronted by destiny, I just tend to congeal in hesitation. Oh, lord. I am the NN of the modern era. For me, finding a combination in an open position while low on time is more difficult than catching an eel in a muddy pond. I don’t have time for this sightseeing detour, and it’s downright dumb to consider a defensive move when I had a killing shot.

Answer: The comp found the amazing idea 38...♞d8!!, which looks like a terrible blunder. But as we all know, the greedy computer never gives something for nothing: 39.♟e7+ ♟h7! 40.♞xd8 ♞c2! 41.a4 a5!! 42.♞xb5 ♟a3! (I would never have found these comp-generated moves if the time control were 40 moves in one million years) 43.♟a2 ♟xb5, winning.

39.a4

Okay, here we go again. This time I really, really mean it:

Clinch it!



Exercise: Black to play and win.

Answer: 39... ♖c2! 0-1

Step 1: Chase White's rook away from d1, while sliding our queen closer to White's king. 40. ♕f1 a5!.

Step 2: Force the white queen to take on b5, opening the b-file. 41. ♕xb5 ♖b8!.

White's queen feels the bitter pangs of the criminal who, having been caught, realizes that she missed a key element in her plan. Step 3: Occupy the b-file with your rook and White's position crumbles.

Game 47

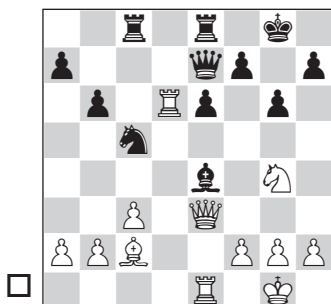
Cyrus Lakdawala

2438

Varuzhan Akobian

2442

Los Angeles 2001 (7)



position after 24... ♕e7

Under normal circumstances, your writer, a man of simple ambitions, makes it his goal to not bang out some catastrophic blunder, rather than actually find a deep move. On rare occasions I rise above my natural station and actually unearth a deep idea. So please prepare yourself and sit down. The brilliance of my next move may startle you.

Exercise: White's game pulses with menace and we sense that Black's punctured dark squares may somehow be exploited. How do we accomplish this?

Answer: 25.b4!!

Overloaded defender/double attack. 'This is the move of the Century!' you were about to say? Yes, quite correct. Very perceptive of you. As a lifelong A-player, I somehow miraculously picked up a title and now get to ladle out advice to others without getting laughed at (at least too much). It's not all that difficult to become what is considered a strong player. In my teaching career of around four decades, I produced 15 or so masters. It comes down to hard work, not some innate, inborn talent, reserved for the privileged few.

It's an art form for players like Carlsen and his class. To become a 2200, it's the equivalent of learning a trade, which, although difficult, is accomplishable if you apply yourself, and have the time and resources.

25... ♕xd6

Only now comes the dawning of understanding. Everything loses:

A) 25...♙xc2 26.♚e5! (threatening mate in two moves) 26...h5 27.♘f6+ ♔f8 28.♘xe8 ♚xe8 29.bxc5 and White is up the exchange, with an enduring attack;

B) 25...h5 26.bxc5 ♙xc2 27.♖d7!. This move was difficult to foresee. White wins.

26.♘f6+ ♔f8 27.bxc5!

The point. Black will lose two pieces for a rook and allow White a blistering attack along the dark squares.

27...♚d8 28.♚h6+ ♔e7 29.♘xe4 ♙d5 30.♙b3 ♚e5 31.f4

Giving luft to my king, with tempo.

31...♚f5 32.♚h4+ ♔f8

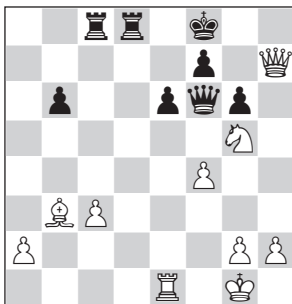
Black's king is like an Indian fakir, who tosses and turns in his sleep, on his bed of nails.

33.♚xh7 ♖ed8 34.cxb6 axb6 35.♘g5

Targeting e6 and f7.

35...♚f6

Akopian blunders in an already losing position. 35...♖c6 was better but wouldn't have held out in the long run.



Exercise: It's clear that White should sacrifice. But with which

piece? And should the sacrifice fall on e6, or on f7?

Answer: 36.♖xe6!

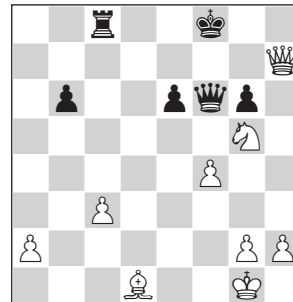
Sacrifice the rook on e6. Like the Dickens character Sydney Carton in *A Tale of Two Cities*, I feel 'It is a far, far, better thing I do, than I have ever done'. Okay, fine, this isn't much of a heroic sacrifice, since its acceptance loses immediately.

36...♖d1+

A) 36...fxe6 37.♘xe6+ ♔e8 38.♙a4+ and Black's only recourse is spite blocks on b5, c6 and finally on d7;

B) After 36...♚g7 37.♚h4 ♖xc3 38.♖f6! 38...♖c1+ 39.♔f2 Black runs out of checks, since the one on d2 just loses.

37.♙xd1 fxe6



I saw the win here, but for the benefit of the audience, I dramatically posed as Rodin's Thinker (except wearing clothes and glasses), straining to find the not-so-difficult-to-see solution.

Exercise: How does White immediately end the game?

Answer: 38.♚d7! 1-0

Double attack. Black's rook hangs and he must also deal with the

Clinch it!

knight fork on h7. If his queen slides to d8, he gets forked on e6.

Game 48

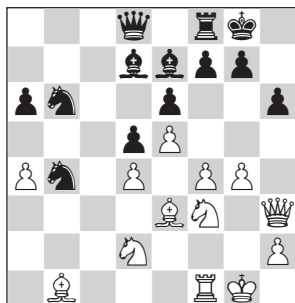
Keaton Kiewra

2392

Li Ruifeng

2284

Rockville 2014 (3)



position after 25.g4

White's attack, although promising, isn't yet decisive.

Exercise: Does Black have time to grab the a4-pawn?

Answer: 25...♙xa4?

He doesn't. The future GM playing Black logically grabs a pawn while threatening to eliminate a potent White attacker with ...♙c2 next. He underestimates the force of Keaton's attack. Correct was 25...♖c8! 26.f5 exf5 27.gxf5 ♘c2! 28.♙xh6 ♙xf5 29.♖g3 ♙g6 when Black survives.

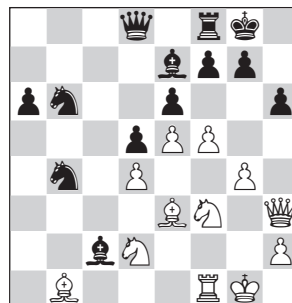
26.f5

White's attack is a carnival of tempting choices. This is the correct pawn push. 26.g5?! ♙b5 gives Black chances to survive.

26...♙c2

All according to plan. Black eliminates a white attacker. The trouble is it's too slow and Keaton's

next move rips a hole in Black's kingside.



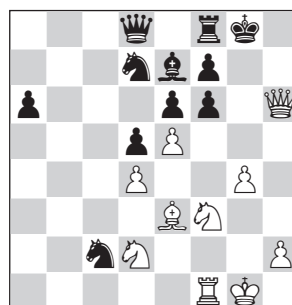
27.f6

Of course. You don't even need to analyze a move like this, since the eye just tells us its strength.

27...gxf6

The piece sacrifice 27...♙xf6 28.exf6 ♖xf6 fails to ward off the attack after 29.♘e5 ♖e7 30.g5! hxg5 31.♘df3.

28.♖xh6 ♘d7 29.♙xc2 ♘xc2



Exercise: White has two ways to win. Find one of them.

Answer: 30.♘g5!!

Clearance. In Rank and File magazine, Keaton wrote: 'I don't normally like to give my own moves double exclaims, but I was really excited to find this idea.' Don't worry about it Keaton,

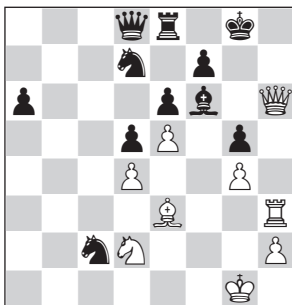
I already gave myself a double exclaim in the previous game against Akobian in this book, so a precedent has been set. The idea of Keaton's sacrifice is to clear the way for White's rook to lift to the third rank.

Answer #2: 30.exf6 also works. This line follows the boxer's creed: when you are ahead in points, go into safety mode with the goal of remaining vertical after round 12 to win on the scorecards, rather than with a knockout. After 30...♙xf6 31.♘g5 ♙xg5 32.♙xg5 ♖b6 33.♙f6 ♗xf6 34.♖g5+! ♕h8 35.♝xf6 ♖xd4+ 36.♕h1 Black must hand over his queen on f6 to ward off immediate mate.

30...fxg5 31.♝f3!

Black is curiously helpless against the threat of ♝h3 and then mate on h7 or h6. Black's problem is that ...f7-f6 always fails miserably to a queen check on g6, followed by ♝h3 mate.

31...♞e8 32.♝h3 ♙f6



Exercise: Simply taking the bishop with the e-pawn wins. Do you see something more crushing?

Answer: 33.♙xg5!

Deflection/removal of the guard. A barbarian hoard is ill suited to wait out a siege of a weakened enemy.

White looks upon Black's defensive barrier with undisguised contempt, unwilling to be bought off.

Keaton, unlike his teacher, isn't a materialist. With his move, he goes for mate, and it is stronger than pausing to grab material with 33.exf6 ♖xf6 34.♖h7+ ♕f8 35.♖xc2.

33...♖b6

This is a desperate attempt to deliver perpetual check against White's lightly guarded king.

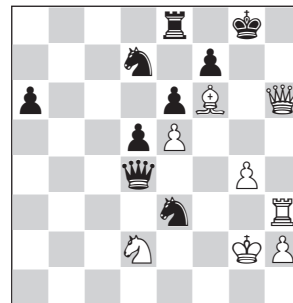
34.♙xf6 ♖xd4+ 35.♕g2!

Keaton accurately calculated that Black's checks will soon end.

35...♗e3+

A) If 35...♖xg4+ 36.♝g3 pins;

B) On 35...♗e1+ 36.♕f1 Black runs out of checks.



Exercise: What is White's strongest move?

Answer: 36.♖xe3! 1-0

Line clearance! Black cannot even take the queen, due to the rook mate on h8.