

Irrational Chess

Cyrus Lakdawala



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About the Author

Cyrus Lakdawala is an International Master, a former National Open and American Open Champion, and a six-time State Champion. He has been teaching chess for over 40 years, and coaches some of the top junior players in the U.S.

Also by the Author:

1...b6: Move by Move

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The Scandinavian: Move by Move

The Slav: Move by Move

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Introduction

Disorder: an Examination of Irrational Positions

You, what do you own the world? How do you own disorder? Disorder, now somewhere between the sacred silence, sacred silence and sleep; somewhere, between the sacred silence and sleep. Disorder, disorder, disorder! – System of a Down, “Toxicity”.

Have you ever taken a random word-association test? If they say “dog”, you respond with “bone”, “leash”, “bark”, or even “cat”. You aren’t likely to associate “dog” with “origami”, the Japanese art of paper-folding. In this book, we look at the “origami” games, which tend to be devoid of strategic – or even tactical – markers for us to orient ourselves. In this book we explore the idea: is darkness merely the absence of light, or is it a separate entity by itself? Tal taught us that our idea doesn’t need to be grounded in truth to actually work. The attempt to confuse is not obligated to be steeped in meritocracy, if the goal is simply to confuse the opponent and win. You cannot execute a plan or combination unless it contains truth, but don’t believe for a second that lies are of no use, since lies have a way of deceiving/confusing opponents.

The child is the extension of the parent. The childhood heroes who moulded my style – Nimzowitsch, Capablanca, Botvinnik, Petrosian, and Fischer – were all great strategists who excelled in positions of clarity. None of them felt comfortable in super-complex, irrational positions, where disorder reigns, and neither do I. This book is an attempt to tackle a natural strategist’s demons, by plunging into exactly the kind of positions where we are at our weakest. We examine games of the great chaoticists – like Tal, Kasparov, Carlsen, and others – in the hope that they will help us orient ourselves in positions which defy logic.

An athlete doesn’t normally choose their event. The body chooses it for them. If you are five feet tall and weigh 95 pounds, you aren’t going to fare well if you dream about entering the NBA, or aspire to become an Olympic weightlifter. On the other hand, you may turn out to be a brilliant jockey, or marathon runner. The patterns of our move choices are completely unique. There is nobody else on Earth who plays exactly like you. In the same way, we don’t choose our chess style; it chooses us. And if we are natural strategists, then positions filled with disorder will be our Kryptonite. This book is mainly written for such players, to face their fears and study the part of chess which they dread most.

My old student professor, Joel Sneed, once asked GM Boris Gulko: which element attracted him to chess the most? Boris replied, “The adventure!” In other words, the thrill of not knowing. This is the mind-state all great chaoticists have embedded within their DNA. In this book we look at games where the most common thought internally uttered is: “Huh? What?” We play so many forgettable games and so few which remain within our minds as long as we live. The ones we remember often come with a fearful level of confusion and irrationality. In such positions there is no clarity and no disclosure of its inner truth. We must keep in mind: how many of our games go exactly as scheduled? The answer is: not many.

In one respect we chess players are devolving since, during study, we hate using our own brains, preferring instead to suckle on the comforting teat of chess engines. Why use the flawed human brain when the instant-answer genie is available? If you are going through these games, I encourage you to disconnect the engine and only use it later for verification. Computers are designed to do all the brain-work for us, so we don't have to. And therein lies the problem. This book can be used as a manual to work on tactics and calculation, just as long as the engine is turned off.

How to Identify Positions of Disorder/Irrationality

1. A lack of continuity, in that one thing doesn't necessarily logically lead to what we expected. In this book we try to decode the “without words” positions, which cannot be accessed logically/verbally broken down and explained easily. In such positions the logical mind tends to transform atavistically into a kind of animal consciousness, where nothing is fixed and we are engulfed in a deep realization of terrifying impermanence, where all which matters is our survival.

2. You are lost in the woods and hungry. Then you come upon a patch of unfamiliar berries and mushrooms, which could be edible or could be poisonous. The question is: are you going to risk eating them? This book examines the mechanics of risk. Go too far and you overextend; play too safely with too strong a self-preservatory instinct and you may suppress opportunity.

3. Just because something is impossible to prove doesn't mean it is impossible to believe. We also examine the element of intuition, the mechanism which finds the solution despite a desert – or a complete overload – of data.

4. There exists one great disruptor of a position's logic: our opponent's (or ours, for that matter) capricious free will and its capacity to generate chaos from order. The deferential following of orthodoxy tends to keep us safe, at the high cost of stifling imagination. In this book we look at games which essentially give the finger to orthodoxy! The fact that no previous person ever thought of a certain idea, means one of two things:

- a) Nobody ever thought of it before.
- b) It's not played because it's a bad idea.

In this book we try to understand the nature of imagination.

5. There are two types of blindness:

- a) Those who are unable to see.
- b) Those who deliberately refuse to see.

We examine the nature of what it means to make mistakes – and in this book, they are myriad since the complexity level of the games is so high. We must deconstruct chaos and rebuild it back to reality. The way we do this is first to gather as much data as possible and then – even if the position is insanely complicated – make an educated guess, better known by its other name: intuition.

6. “I must not fear. Fear is the mind killer.” Crazy positions are stress-inducers in our games. If we acclimatize ourselves in such positions, we will (hopefully) be less stressed at the board when they arise in our own games.

7. When all our physical resources are depleted, we still have access to a final weapon: treachery! There are three steps in evading an opponent’s ambushes and traps:

- a) Suspecting that one exists.
- b) Correctly guessing its vicinity.
- c) Pinpointing its exact location.

In this book we see some of the most devious tactical minds in chess history at work. We observe how they ensnared opponents. The hope is that we will then appreciate the signs of danger in our own games, before it’s too late to do anything about them.

8. Any attempt at computation made within an irrational position is certain to be embedded with multiple disturbing unknowns, which we won’t be able to foresee in advance. Yet we must understand that, in chess, the words “disorder” and “irrational” actually mean irrational only to us flawed humans and not to engines which, if left on to analyse, accurately break down even the most nightmarish position and make perfect sense of it.

9. The fact that our crazy idea shouldn’t work doesn’t make it any less dangerous, since we are playing a flawed and often easy to confuse human, rather than an engine.

10. While the Sesame Street Muppets taught us that learning can be fun, in this book we look at games so irrationally complex that it is actually difficult to learn from many of them. Nonetheless, in a position’s confusion, just because we lose our faculty of sight, doesn’t mean we also lose our power of reason. The idea behind this book is: any position, no matter how complex, can still be broken down (at least to some degree!) into points of data, from which we hope to come up with the correct idea. So before most of the examples, I try my best to “explain” that which is often unexplainable. In such positions when we think: “I have a strong intuition on the matter”, it won’t be code for “I’m taking a wild guess!”

11. There seems to be an unspoken “rule” where every chess book written *must* educate and teach us something. We sometimes forget that chess is also our form of entertainment, so some of the games are placed in the book solely for their enjoyment value. A blunder doesn’t mean that we are weak; it means that we are human. Games with numerous double question mark moves (in this book there are many double exclamation moves as well) can be a joy to play over, since they demonstrate to us that in insane complications even the greatest players in chess history are human and make a load of errors, just like we do.

12. After more than a half century in chess, I finally learned the secret to navigating irrational positions: let go of our obsession with knowing the position's future and even let go of the game's outcome. Just let the law of karma decide whether you win, lose or draw.

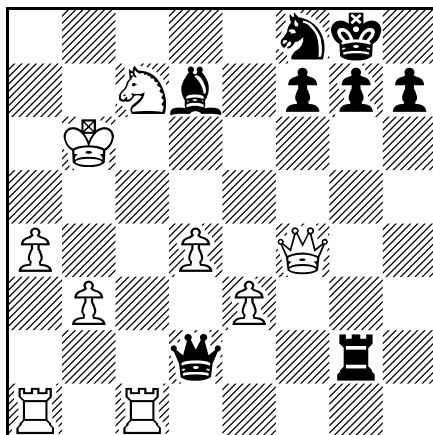
It's not so easy to place disorder into orderly categories, yet we must do so, otherwise this will be a single-chapter book.

The chapters:

1. Irrational Attack: This is the crowd-pleaser chapter, with some of the most complex attacking games in chess history.
2. Irrational Defence: "He who attacks must vanquish; he who defends must merely survive," said Master Po, from the 1970's show *Kung Fu*. The will to survive is our most elemental drive. In this chapter we examine Houdini-like escapes, where creative defensive ideas triumph.
3. The Dynamic Element: We examine the nature of what it takes to seize and, more importantly, keep hold of the initiative.
4. Exploiting Imbalances: In this book we look at some of the most zany imbalances we have ever seen.
5. Irrational Endings: When working on the games selection, I attempted to find some of the most tangled endings ever played.
6. Opening Shockers: The first twelve or so moves of the opening in our games tend to be a solemn ritual, requiring little or no thought, since we previously reached the same position dozens or even hundreds of times. So how refreshing when something anomalous occurs in the opening phase. Opening theory is not a fixed entity but one subject to constant amendment. Yet there are limits to what can be changed. I very much doubt that a GM game will open with 1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♖c6 3 ♙a6??, then to be called the Accelerated Ruy Lopez. In this book we look at some of the craziest theoretical novelties ever concocted by the human mind.
7. Irrational Draws: We normally equate draws as incomplete events and disappointment. Not in this chapter though, where every draw is the result of bedlam.
8. Irrational Promotion Races: So scary are some pawn promotion races that they may be the leading cause of heart attacks and strokes among chess players. In this chapter we look at a few of these nail-biters, where second place in the race is not an option.

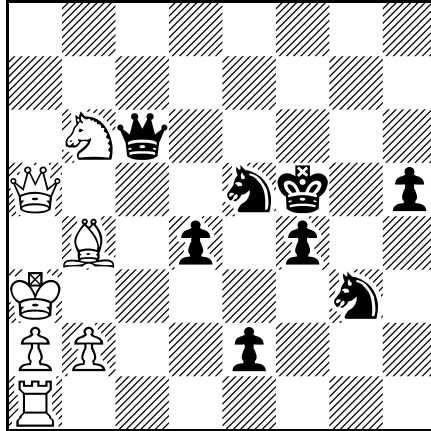
I give you a written promise that there are zero boring games to make your eyes glaze over in this book. Here are a couple of examples:

Game 35
S.Matveeva-A.Skripchenko
Krasnoturinsk 2003



Welcome to the swamp. Black's candidate moves are 44...♔b4+ or 44...♚g6+. One line leads to a clear win, while in the other the assessment drops to almost even. Imagine playing Black in this position in one of your tournament games. Would you find the right line? Normally when most of us enter such positions, we become the high school student who is happy with a C grade and delighted with a B minus, meaning we take a wild guess. The problem is that intuition doesn't work in such positions, unless your name is Mikhail or Magnus. The object of this book is to help us find a path of hidden logic, when it doesn't appear to exist.

Game 66
I.Graudins-L.Sandström
 Correspondence 2012



We have clearly reached the Lord of the Flies point in the game. Can you tell me what is going on here? I don't have a clue either. It's White, who is a rook up, to play. Yet Black has this armada of pawns all sailing for their respective promotion squares. How would you assess this position without an engine? Is it even, is White winning, or is Black winning?

The written word is merely a diluted substitute for actual experience. Still, my hope is that analysing the games in this book will help us all maintain our bearings when we arrive in irrational positions. Good luck. May you survive the storm!

Cyrus Lakdawala,
 San Diego, February 2023

Game 11
M.Stean-W.Browne
 Nice Olympiad 1974

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 a6

I no longer play the Najdorf, since I suck at it. While it served Bobby Fischer and Walter Browne faithfully, I always regarded my brief, sorrowful infatuation with the Najdorf as one with a malicious and untrustworthy girlfriend, since she hurt me every chance she got. I routinely got mated before move 30 and then she would taunt me by laughing in my tearful face. The other problem is the obligatory memorization of long lines, which is so daunting that after a week of playing it I was shopping around for a nursing home with a good memory-care unit, and I was only 12 years old.

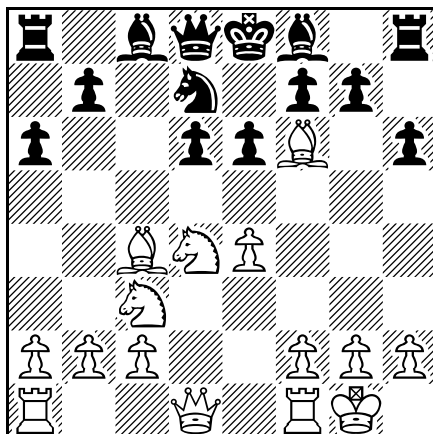
6 ♙g5 ♗bd7!?

6...e6 is the more common entry way into Najdorf main lines.

7 ♙c4

7 f4 is White's main move.

7...e6 8 0-0 h6 9 ♙xf6!?



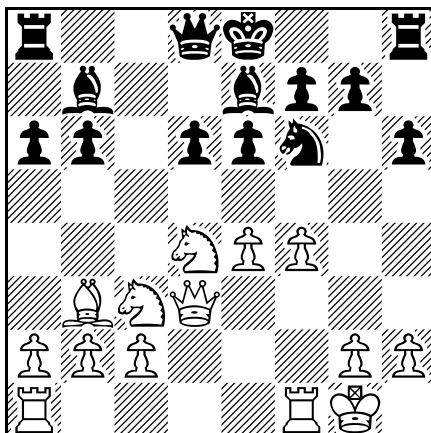
Big Brother Theory is always watching us. With this interesting decision Stean informs us that he values time and the initiative more than his bishop pair and potential for future lack on the dark squares. After 9 ♙e3 ♗e5 10 ♙b3 g5!? 11 ♚e2 ♗fg4 12 ♙d2 ♙d7 13 ♜ad1, T.Radjabov-E.Sutovsky, Baku (rapid) 2010, call me old fashioned but I still prefer the better developed side, which in this case is White.

9...♗xf6 10 ♙b3 b6?!

What the hell are you doing, Walter? Black is really asking for it in this game. There is no justification for a non-developing move. 10...♙e7, as in C.Hevia Alejandro-A.Shabalov, Greensboro 2016, is both more natural and superior.

11 f4 ♘b7 12 ♖d3 ♙e7

If 12...♗c7 13 ♜ae1, then now what for Black? Maybe he should castle long, since 13...♙e7? is devastated by 14 ♙xe6! fxe6 15 ♘xe6 ♗c6 16 ♘d5! (tactically covered via a future knight fork on c7) 16...♙c8 17 ♘xg7+ ♙f7 18 ♘f5 with a winning attack for White.



Exercise (critical decision): A sacrifice on e6 beckons. But with which piece?

Answer: White should go for a positional piece sacrifice to seize control over Black's central light squares.

13 ♘xe6!

Stein comes armed and dangerous. This is a promising sacrifice, made that much more so by the fact that Black's coming moves are not going to be easy to find.

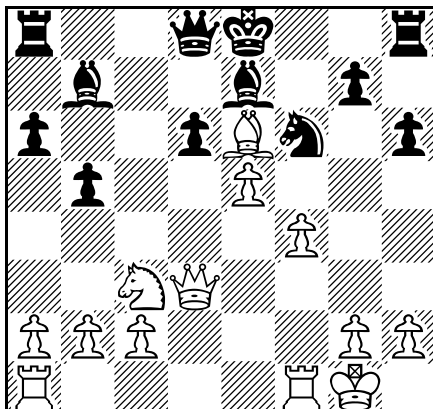
Giving up the bishop is worse since White doesn't, as it first appears, get three pawns for the piece: 13 ♙xe6?! fxe6 14 ♘xe6 ♗c8 15 ♘xg7+? (correct is 15 f5 ♙f7, though White doesn't quite get enough for the piece) 15...♙f8 16 ♘f5 ♙xe4! (undermining) 17 ♘xe4 ♗xf5 18 ♜ae1 d5 and queens come off the board, after which White is busted.

13...fxe6 14 ♙xe6 b5?

He had to try 14...♙f8! 15 ♜ae1 g6! 16 e5 dxe5! 17 fxe5 ♗xd3 18 cxd3 ♙g7 19 exf6+ ♙xf6 20 ♙d5 ♙xd5 21 ♘xd5 ♙d4+ 22 ♙h1 ♜ae8, when Black should save the game.

15 e5!

Opening the queen's access to g6. Now White's pieces have the feel of hungry sharks, on the prowl for dinner.



15... ♖b6!

Browne clears d8 for his king. Strong GMs don't fall for idiotic cheapos like 15...dxe5?? 16 ♖g6+ ♔f8 17 ♖f7 mate.

16 ♔h1 dxe5 17 ♖g6+ ♔d8 18 ♖f7!

Threat: ♖ad1+ and ♖xe7+. Not 18 fxe5?? ♖xe6 and Black is winning.

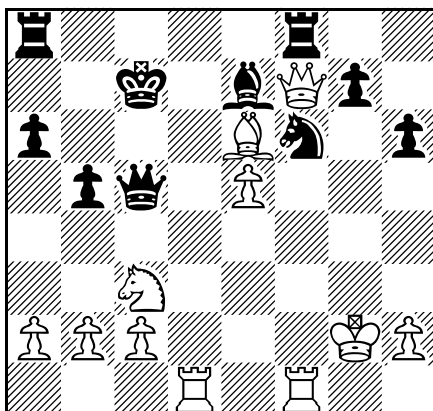
18... ♖c5

18... ♔c7 19 ♖xe7+ ♔b8 20 fxe5 ♖e8 21 exf6! is lost for Black.

19 fxe5 ♔xg2+!?

Desperado, why don't you come to your senses? 19... ♖f8 20 ♖xg7 ♔h5 21 ♖xf8+ wins since Black can't recapture due to the mate on d7.

20 ♔xg2 ♖f8 21 ♖ad1+ ♔c7



Exercise (critical decision): Should White's queen move to g6 or chop the g7-pawn? One line is much considerably stronger than the other:

Answer: The queen should chop the g7-pawn, allowing ...♙g8.

22 ♙xg7!

At first this looks like a terrible blunder since White loses his queen. When we do the accounting, we see that White gets way too much for it. 22 ♙g6? ♙xe5 is not nearly as clear.

22...♙g8 23 exf6! ♙xg7+ 24 fxg7 ♙d6 25 ♙f7+!

If 25 g8♙?? ♙xg8+ 26 ♙xg8 ♙g5+ 27 ♙h1 ♙xg8, Black should hold the draw.

25...♙c6

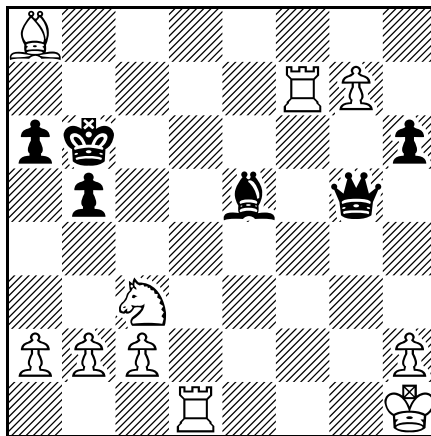
Any king move to the back rank allows White to promote with check on g8, and 25...♙b6 26 ♙d5+ ♙c6 27 ♙d7+ ♙b7 28 ♙c8+! ♙b8 (or 28...♙xc8 29 g8♙+) 29 ♙f5! prepares promotion on g8, while covering c2.

26 ♙d5+ ♙b6 27 ♙xa8 ♙g5+

There isn't even a prayer for perpetual check since White's light-squared bishop easily guards against it and h2 can also be covered with ease.

28 ♙h1 ♙e5

If 28...♙xh2 29 ♙b7+ ♙a5 30 g8♙! ♙xg8 31 a3!, Black must hand over his queen to prevent immediate mate on b4.



Exercise (combination alert): Stean found a forced mate. How would you proceed?

Answer: Push the b-pawn two squares, which follows the principle: *When attempting to deliver mate to the enemy king, don't chase him. Instead cut off escape squares.*

29 b4!

Threat: ♙d5 mate. The move cuts off the black king's escape routes to c5 and especially a5.

29...a5

The king is desperate for air. 29...♙xc3 30 ♙d6 and 29...♙h4 30 ♙d5 are instant mate.

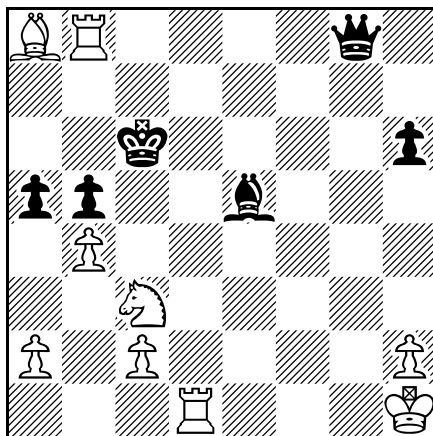
30 ♙b7+ ♙c6

The condemned convict is led to the scaffold, step by step. 30...♔a6 31 a4! (threat: a4xb5 mate) 31...axb4 32 axb5+ ♕a5 33 ♖a1 mate.

31 g8

A little quicker is 31 ♖xb5 axb4 (or 31...♕xg7 32 ♖d6 mate) 32 ♖b8+ ♕c5 33 ♖d5+ ♕c4 34 ♖c8+ ♕c7 35 ♖xc7 mate.

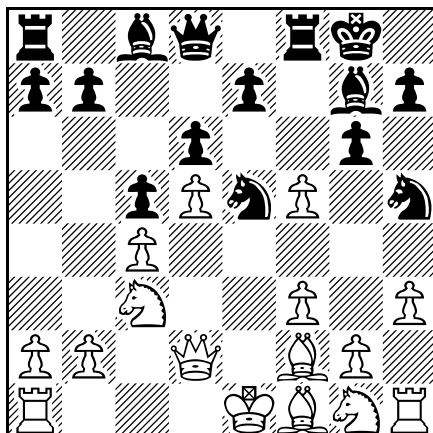
31...♖xg8 32 ♖b8+ 1-0



The simple discovered attack picks up Black's queen and forces mate in seven.

Game 12
A.Beliavsky-J.Nunn
Wijk aan Zee 1985

I wasn't sure if this game should be placed in the Attack chapter or the Dynamic Element chapter, since I couldn't decide whether Black's play equates to a mating attack or a wicked initiative.



Black is considerably ahead in development and has three separate ways to recapture on f5:

- 11...gxf5 is the safe route which maintains material equality.
- 11...♙xf5 is met by 12 g4.
- 11...♖xf5 is also met by 12 g4.

Exercise (critical decision): The question is: are lines b) and c) playable? If so, which one is best?

Answer: Only line c) 11...♖xf5! is sound and leads to a winning attack for Black.

11...♖xf5!

This is one of those infant-shaking-the-rattle, attention-seeking moves, where Black is just begging to provoke g2-g4. Instead:

- 11...gxf5 12 f4 ♘g6 13 g3 looks okay for White.
- 11...♙xf5? 12 g4 ♘f4 13 gxf5 ♖xf5 14 0-0-0 and Black doesn't have enough for the sacrificed piece.

12 g4

White pretty much has to take the plunge and accept the piece offer.

- 12 ♘ge2? is met by 12...♖xf3 with an extra pawn and a winning position.
- 12 ♙d3? ♘d3+ 13 ♗xd3 ♘f4 14 ♗f1 ♗a5 is horrible for White.
- 12 0-0-0 ♗f8! 13 ♙b1 ♙d7 sees Black's attack about to launch on the queenside and White has no play. 14 g4? is impossible due to 14...♘xf3 15 ♘xf3 ♖xf3 and White doesn't win a piece since his own bishop hangs on f2.

12...♖xf3 13 gxh5 ♗f8!

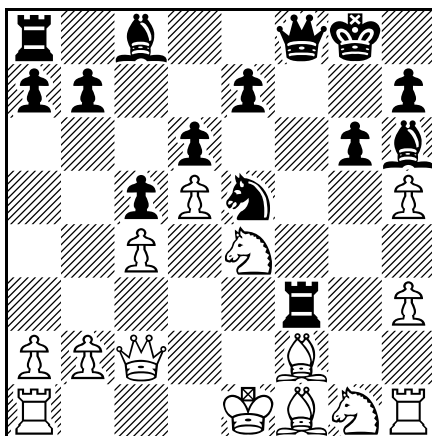
White experiences great difficulty in untangling.

14 ♘e4?

If 14 ♖h2? then 14...♙h6 15 ♗c2 ♗f4 16 ♖g2 ♙f5 wins. 14 ♖d1 is relatively best, though

14...b5! 15 cxb5 a6 16 a4 is still rough for White, who hasn't managed to untangle.

14...♖h6 15 ♚c2



Two candidate moves pop up:

- a) 15...♚f4, entering White's camp with the queen.
- b) 15...♗e3, entering White's camp with the dark-squared bishop.

Exercise (critical decision): One line wins, while the other allows the evaluation to swing to White's favour. Analyse both and pick one.

Answer: The bishop entry of line b) is correct.

15...♚f4?

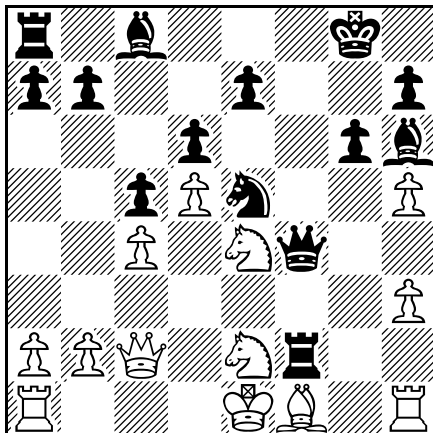
15...♗e3! wins after 16 hxg6 hxg6 17 ♚e2 ♜xf2! 18 ♞xf2 ♚f4, threatening ...♗xf2+, followed by ...♚e4+ and ...♚xh1. If 19 ♗g2 then 19...♗xf2+ still wins since the bishop can't be captured due to the knight fork on d3.

16 ♞e2?

Now White's position surpasses its pain threshold. 16 ♞xf3! ♞xf3+ 17 ♚d1 ♗f5 18 ♗g3! ♚e3 19 ♚d3! ♚xe4 20 ♚xe4 ♗xe4 21 ♗g2 leaves White the exchange up. Black has some pressure for it, but not enough.

16...♜xf2!!

This second sacrifice will leave Nunn a rook down for only a pawn. Yet so dis-coordinated are White's forces that he never can untangle, nor secure his king's safety. The engine prefers the eerily quiet move 16...♚f7! 17 ♞2g3 ♗f5 18 ♞xf5 ♚xf5, when ...♜f8 is coming and White is unable to survive.



17 ♖xf2 ♜f3+ 18 ♔d1 ♜h4! 19 ♜d3

Covering the mating threat on e1. Not 19 ♜g4?? ♜e1 mate.

19... ♙f5 20 ♜ec1

20 ♙g2 ♜e5 21 ♜ec1 ♙xc1 wins.

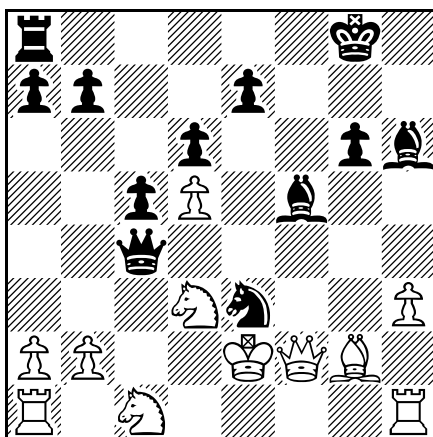
20... ♜d2!

Threat: ... ♜xc4, followed by ... ♜e3+. In this game the black knight's wingspan is that of a Stealth bomber.

21 hxg6

If 21 b3 ♜e4 22 ♜g1 (or 22 ♜h2 ♜xf1) 22... ♜e3!, White's rook has no safe square and Black wins.

21... ♜g6 22 ♙g2 ♜xc4 23 ♜f2 ♜e3+ 24 ♔e2 ♜c4!



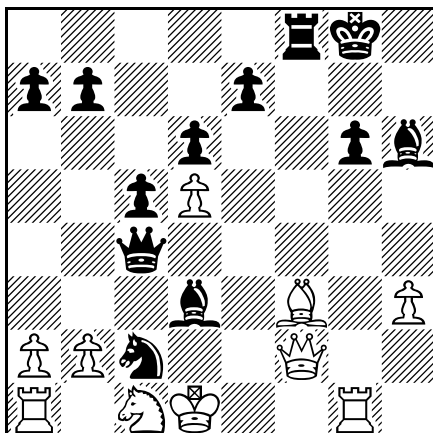
The disturbing image of swarming rats in a sewer just popped into my mind. Good God, what a kingdom of misery for Beliavsky. Nunn is relentless in his pursuit of White's king,

who must now watch out for ...♔c2+.

25 ♙f3 ♖f8 26 ♜g1 ♞c2

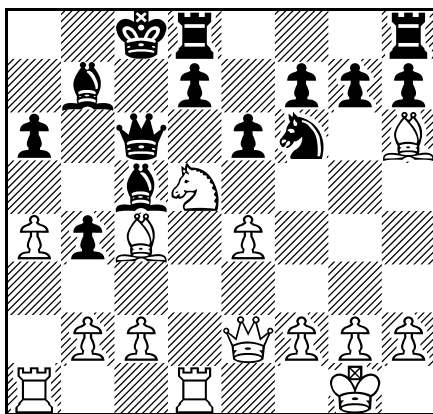
Intending ...♞d4+. 26...♙e4 is also deadly.

27 ♚d1 ♙xd3 0-1



White's position, by now way past saving, is a tsunami of bad karma, ripening all at once. If 28 ♞b3 ♞e3+ 29 ♚e1 ♜b4+ 30 ♞d2 (or 30 ♜d2 ♜h4+! 31 ♜f2 ♞c2+) 30...♞c2+ 31 ♚d1 ♜xf3! 32 ♞xf3 ♞e3+!, Black wins the queen and also forces mate.

Game 13
V.Kupreichik-J.Sunye Neto
 Palma de Mallorca 1989



We sense the gathering of the coming mayhem.

Exercise (combination alert): Simply 15 ♖xg7 is tempting. Do you see anything better for White?

Answer: Offer another piece in order to pry open the a-file and force Black's queen to the tactically disastrous d6-square.

15 ♖b5!!

Does Black's queen know any prayers? Or should the b5-bishop recite one for her? 15 ♖xg7 exd5 ♖b6 17 a5?? ♗d6 18 ♖f3 ♘g4! 19 ♖xg4 ♗hg8 is less clear.

15...axb5

Acceptance is obligatory since 15...♗d6?? loses instantly to 16 ♘xf6.

16 axb5 ♗d6

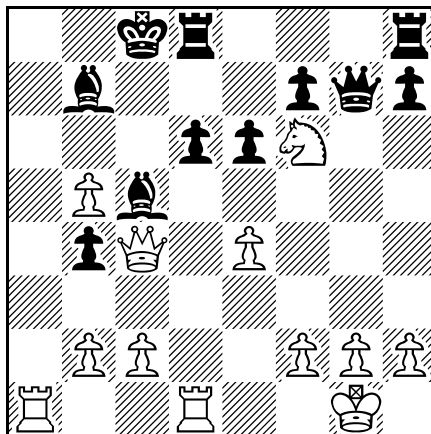
So Black's queen is forced to move to a square which allows White a discovered attack.

17 ♘xf6 ♖f8 18 ♖xg7!

Not 18 ♖g5? gxf6 19 ♖xf6 ♗g8 and White is busted. But 18 ♖c4! is also effective: 18...gxh6 (or 18...d6 19 ♖xg7! ♖xg7 20 ♗xd6! ♗g5 21 ♘d5! – interference) 19 e5 (Black is weirdly helpless; White threatens ♗d6!, to which there is no effective remedy) 19...♖b8 20 ♗xd7 and Black is unable to survive.

18...♖xg7 19 ♖c4! d6

- 19...♖xf6 20 ♖xc5+ forces mate, most simply by 20...♖b8 21 ♖d6+ ♖c8 22 b6.
- 19...♖f8 20 e5! is almost zugzwang; if 20...♖c7 then 21 ♗d6! wins.



Exercise (combination alert): Continue White's attack.

Answer: Annihilation of defensive barrier/undermining/pinned piece.

20 ♗xd6! ♗g5

20...♖xd6 21 ♜xc5+ ♘b8 22 ♜xd6+ ♘c8 23 b6 again forces mate.

21 ♘d5!

Interference.

21...exd5

If 21...♖xd6 22 ♜xc5+ ♘d7 23 ♜c7+ ♘e8 24 ♜xd6 (threat: ♘c7 mate) 24...exd5 25 ♜b8+ ♜d8 26 ♜xb7, there is no remedy to the coming ♜a8.

22 ♜xc5+ ♘b8 23 ♜c6! 1-0

This move cuts off the black king's escape squares on the c-file, enabling ♜a7 mate. After 23...♙xc6 24 ♜xc6 Black's king is painfully short on defenders and is soon mated. It's never a good sign when the engine's top choice is to give away a free queen with 24...♜c1+.

Game 14

V.Ivanchuk-A.Yusupov

Candidates match (Game 9), Brussels 1991

This is one of the wildest attacking/defensive games I have ever played over. Both sides displayed staggering ingenuity, in Yang as well as Yin.

1 c4 e5 2 g3 d6 3 ♙g2 g6 4 d4!? ♘d7

4...exd4 5 ♜xd4 ♘f6 6 ♘c3 ♙g7 7 ♜e3+ ♜e7 8 ♜xe7+ ♘xe7, as in G.Kasparov-N.Short, Barcelona 1989, offers White a tiny edge in the queenless middlegame.

5 ♘c3 ♙g7 6 ♘f3 ♘gf6 7 0-0 0-0

In youth, I played such King's Indian structures as Black, in pitiful imitation of Bobby Fischer. That was when I made an agonizingly painful discovery: I was no Bobby Fischer.

8 ♜c2

8 e4 is White's main move.

8...♜e8 9 ♜d1 c6 10 b3!?

10 e4 prevents Black from playing ...e5-e4.

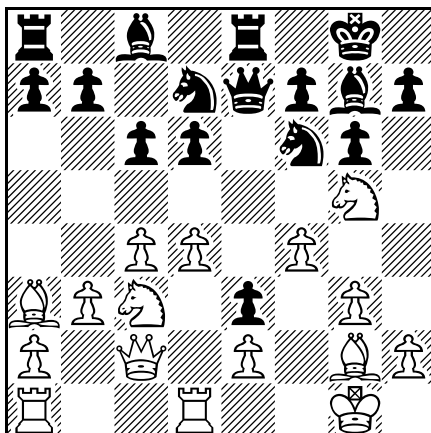
10...♜e7

10...e4!? 11 ♘g5 d5 12 cxd5 cxd5 13 ♘b5 ♜f8 14 ♙a3 ♘e8 was B.Socko-F.Vallejo Pons, Spanish League 2020, which the engine assesses at dead even, even though White can win the exchange.

11 ♙a3 e4!?

Black's most ambitious move. 11...exd4 12 ♘xd4 ♘c5 is slightly in White's favour.

12 ♘g5 e3 13 f4?!



Here are the problems with this decision:

1. By pushing to f4, White weakens both the e4- and g4-squares.

2. White's rook is no longer on f1, which is where it probably belongs with the f-pawn on the fourth rank.

Instead, White may have an edge after 13 f3!.

13... ♖f8!

Multi-purpose:

1. Black begins to mass pieces for a future kingside assault.

2. Black clears the path for the tempo-gaining ... ♕f5.

14 b4!

Black is going to attack on the kingside, so White needs either central or queenside counterplay. This move also anticipates Black's coming ... ♕f5 and opens a square for White's queen on b3.

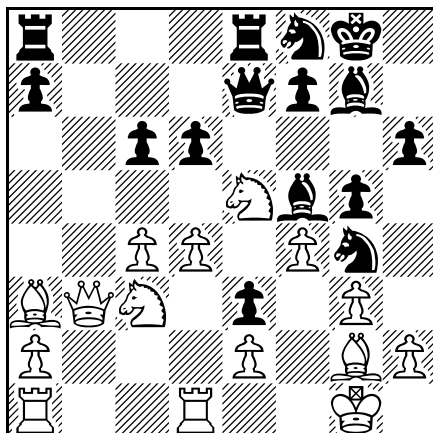
14... ♕f5 15 ♔b3 h6 16 ♖f3 ♖g4!? 17 b5

17 d5! looks more accurate. White looks okay after 17... ♖f2 18 ♖d4!, offering the exchange for central play and a reduction of Black's kingside attacking potential.

17... g5

17... ♖f2! is also a consideration.

18 bxc6 bxc6 19 ♖e5!?



This move leads to horrific complications, which I suspect are actually in Black's favour.

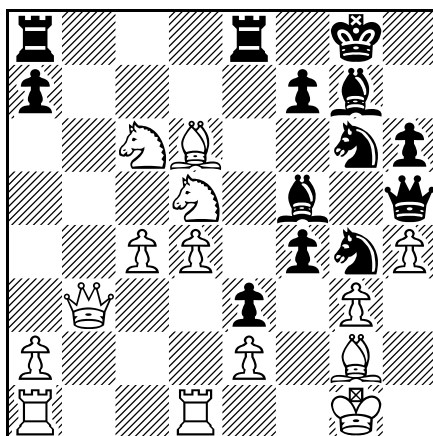
19...gxf4! 20 ♖xc6 ♔g5 21 ♙xd6 ♜g6

Scary stuff. White deals with five attackers and two attacking pawns around his king!

22 ♜d5 ♔h5!

22...♜xh2 can be met by 23 ♙xf4.

23 h4



Exercise (critical decision): Darkness is coming. Do you want to attack sensibly with 23...fxg3 - ? Or do you want to go bonkers with the piece sacrifice 23...♜xh4 - ?

Answer: In this case the safer route was also the sounder and stronger path.

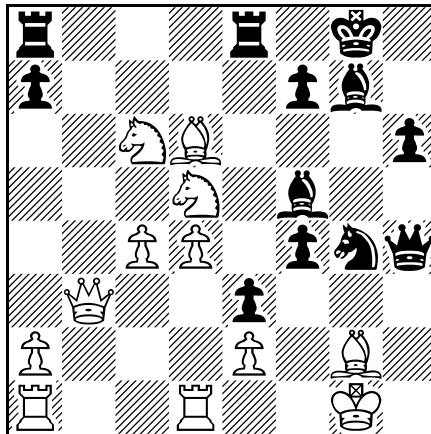
23...♜xh4?!

Lack of inhibition tends to be a natural gambler's trait. Okay then, bonkers it is. There are two opposing emotions which are difficult to conceal: love and hate. The funny thing is, when we go on a sacrificial binge, we experience both, in that we love the intoxicating effects of being on the attack, while simultaneously sinking into a rage to deliver mate to our opponent's king.

More simply, 23...fxg3! 24 ♔xg3 ♖ac8! 25 ♘a7 ♗cd8 is a strong attack for Black. If 26 ♗c6? ♗xd5! 27 cxd5 ♕f6! 28 ♖f1 ♕xh4, it's unlikely White can survive the coming storm.

24 gxh4 ♗xh4?

This move is a potentially losing blunder. 24...♕e4! was necessary.



Exercise (critical decision): White has a choice of knight checks on e7. Play the correct one and the engine has you up by more than +7.00; pick the wrong one and the evaluation flips to -3.03! That is a big swing, so be careful. Which knight should give the check?

Answer: The c6-knight is the winner.

25 ♗de7+?

This is a strange decision since it's more logical to move the c6-knight, which is less centralized than the d5-model.

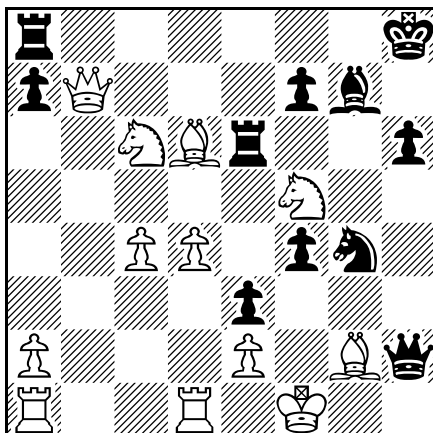
Instead, 25 ♗ce7+! ♗h8 26 ♗xf5 ♗h2+ 27 ♖f1 ♕e5 (or 27...♗e6 28 ♕xf4 ♗h5 29 ♗fxe3) 28 dxe5 ♗e6 29 ♗d3!! ♗g8 30 ♗xe3! fxe3 31 ♗fxe3 ♗eg6 32 ♖e1 wins for White, since Black's attack is at an end.

25...♖h8 26 ♗xf5 ♗h2+ 27 ♖f1 ♗e6?

Missing 27...♕f6!! 28 ♗d3 (28 ♗ce7 ♗g8! 29 ♗xg8 ♗xg8, when White must give up his queen by moving it to b8, since a natural defensive move like 30 ♗d3?? is mated after 30...♗h1+! (clearance) 31 ♕xh1 ♗h2+ 32 ♖e1 ♗g1.

28 ♗b7?

The position sashes with garbled, misinterpreted data, which continues to confuse the living daylight out of both players. 28 ♖ce7! saves White: 28...♗g8! 29 ♜b7 (29 ♖xg8? ♗g6!, threatening ...♜h1+!, is deadly) 29...♗xe7 30 ♖xe7 ♜g3 (threat: ...♜f2 mate) 31 ♖g1 ♜f2+ 32 ♖h1 ♜h4+ is perpetual check.



Exercise (planning): What is the best way to continue Black's attack?

Answer #1: Transfer the rook to the g-file.

28...♗g6!!

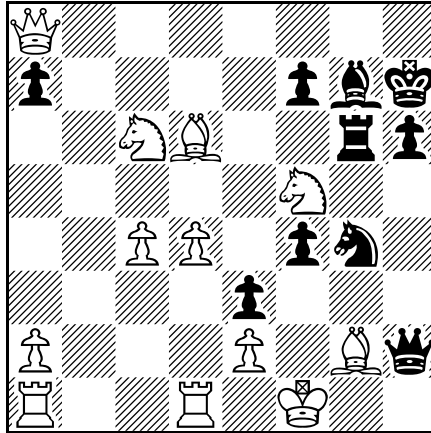
Yusupov goes with the Hollywood, dramatic version of moving the rook to g6, giving the a8-rook away with check!

Answer #2: The less dramatic 28...♗g8! wins as well:

a) 29 ♜xf7 ♗f6! (threatening the now familiar mate with ...♜h1+, followed by ...♖h2+) 30 ♜xg8+ ♖xg8 31 ♖e5 ♗xe5 32 ♗xe5 ♖f2 33 ♖xe3 ♖h3! 34 ♖e1 ♜g3+ 35 ♖d2 fxe3+ 36 ♖c3 ♜xg2 and wins.

b) 29 ♖ce7 ♗f8!! 30 ♖xg8 ♗g6! (threat: ...♜h1+!) 31 ♖xe3 ♖xe3+ 32 ♖e1 ♗xg2 33 ♖d2 (forced) 33...♖xc4+ 34 ♖c3 ♖xd6 35 ♜f3 ♗xe2 and White is completely busted.

29 ♜xa8+ ♖h7



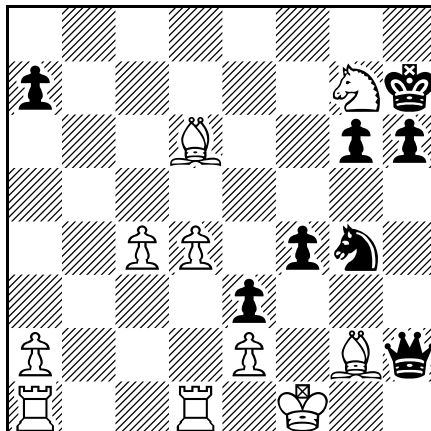
Exercise (combination alert): It seems there is no good defence to Black's threat of ...♔h1+, ...♘h2+ and ...♖g1 mate. If you don't find Ivanchuk's defensive combination, White is mated. What would you play?

Answer: Queen sacrifice/attraction/knight fork/removal of a key attacker.

30 ♕g8+!

What happens if you throw your enemy into the fire and he refuses to burn. This is an expensive way – but the only one! – to evade mate and keep playing.

30...♖xg8 31 ♘ce7+ ♕h7 32 ♘xg6 fxg6 33 ♘xg7



Exercise (planning): It appears as if Yusupov has given too many of his pieces away and his army exists on half-rations. Ivanchuk must have believed that his opponent would be forced to settle for perpetual check with ...♔g3, ...♕f2+ and ...♕h4+. This assessment is incorrect. Look closer and you may spot Black's winning plan.

Answer: Move the knight to f2 with deadly mating threats.

33...♞f2!!

The immediate threat is 34...♞h3! 35 ♟xh3 ♕h1 mate; or if 34 ♖db1 then 34...♞e4! 35 ♖b7 ♞d2+ 36 ♙e1 ♕g1+ and mates.

34 ♟xf4

The angry gnome fails to intimidate Black's queen.

34...♕xf4 35 ♞e6 ♕h2

Threat: ...♞h3! again.

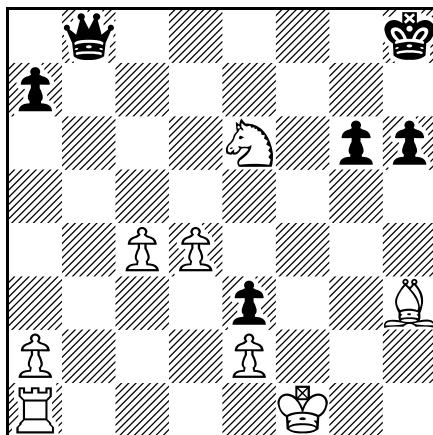
36 ♖db1 ♞h3! 37 ♖b7+

37 ♙e1 ♕xg2 38 ♙d1 ♕e4 39 ♞c5 ♕xd4+ wins, since 40 ♞d3 is met by 40...♕c3 41 ♖b7+ ♙g8 42 ♖b8+ ♙g7 43 ♖b7+ ♙f6 44 ♖b2 ♞f2+! (removal of the guard) 45 ♞xf2 exf2 and White is mated in two.

37...♙h8 38 ♖b8+

This is a move of supreme desperation.

38...♕xb8 39 ♟xh3



Exercise (calculation): The screams in the white king's head are getting louder. Here is an easy one for you. Black mates in two.

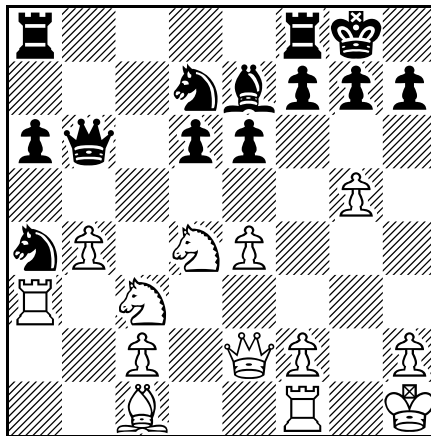
Answer: Simply move the queen to g3, after which there is no way to stop ...♕f2 mate.

39...♔g3 0-1

This queen's obnoxious presence has been a continuing assault on the white king's dignity for a long, long time.

Game 15
E.Tate-L.Yudasin
US Masters, Chicago 1997

I could fill a book with stories about the late IM Emory Tate, but only have room for one. We played in a tournament in Los Angeles in 2001. I was on the black side of a Modern Defence when Emory went on a sacrificial binge, throwing in the proverbial kitchen sink. I won the game, taking all his pieces, while he failed to deliver mate. After the game I attempted to console him by saying how inventive his attack was. He was a touch offended that I didn't praise it further and proclaimed: "It was extraordinary!"



Emory was kind of a mini-Tal, who could one round beat a strong GM and then in the same tournament, lose to a 1990 player. In this position against GM Leonid Yudasin, Emory found White's most promising attacking continuation.

19 ♖f5!

The engine approves and actually prefers White's chances after this piece sacrifice.

19...exf5

Forced, since 19...♙d8?? hangs a piece to 20 ♖xa4; while the zwischenzug 19...♗xc3?? loses to the counter zwischenzug 20 ♗xe7+ ♕h8 21 ♖xc3 and White's knight can't be trapped. If 21...♗b8 22 ♖h3 ♔d8 then 23 ♖xh7+! (Anastasia's Mate) 23...♕xh7 24 ♔h5 mate.

20 ♗d5 ♔d8 21 exf5 ♖e8?

Black needed to break up White's kingside pawn mass with 21...♙xg5! 22 ♙xg5 ♔xg5