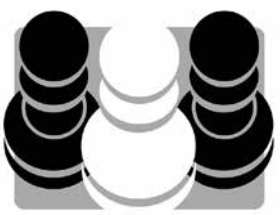
# Black & White Magic

By

**Axel Smith**



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# Preface

Don't ask me what colours the wallpapers in my previous apartments were. In that sense, I am colour blind. Colour complexes in chess are more important – to see if you or your opponent control the black or the white squares. However, I have noticed a knowledge gap among many players. When analysing games with students, they sometimes misevaluate these kinds of positions in a way that stronger players would never do.

Ideally, you should not need to look for a blockade or a dominance of a colour complex. You should see them more or less automatically. Doing so gives a lot of advantages: you know what positions to strive for, which pieces to exchange or not exchange, and it saves a lot of time.

I hope reading this book is a good way to achieve that skill.

Colour-complex strategy is a theme that I have appreciated for a long time. I used it in a lecture for a group of young players back in 2014. I knew that it was a difficult subject, but my intention was that they would go home with a feeling that they had started to understand something that none of their opponents did.

Based on their final questions, I failed miserably as a coach.

It took five years until I tried again, this time with Sweden's elite women players. Over the next years, the material evolved to finally become a course on Chessable. At the last moment the title changed from *Colour Complex Strategy* to *Dominate the Squares* to *Light and Dark Magic.* I cycled 200km to rerecord ten seconds of pronouncing the title, but the theme remained the same: playing on the light or the dark squares. At Quality Chess, the title has changed once more, to *Black and White Magic*.

Chessable is a good platform for exercises, with spaced repetition and automatic corrections. In this book I also want to highlight the beauty of colour-complex strategies, while keeping the instructive exercises which readers are encouraged to solve. As always, after publication I will realize what I should have done differently.

I have used a lot of my own games, simply because I know them well. In my first book, *Pump Up Your Rating*, I started with a game where I lost in 10 moves, just to make sure the readers didn't think that I aimed to show only my victories. I am now too old to worry about such things. You will have to trust that I picked these games because I found them appropriate for the theme. And when I couldn't find a good example, I invented one.

My thanks to Alina L'Ami on Chessable for thoroughly checking all the material and to the rest of their team for splendid support. Viewers also gave valuable comments before Quality Chess used their expertise to create this book.

But most of all, thanks to my wife, for having been so bad at evaluating colour complexes and thus giving a purpose to the subject. She later improved more than I could have imagined. And then she became, as with everything I have written, my harshest critic.

Axel Smith
Lund, December 2022

# Chapter 5

# Exchange Sacrifices

We have arrived at a theme that's a favourite for many: the positional exchange sacrifice.

**Definition**

*An exchange sacrifice means giving up a rook in return for a bishop or knight.*

Giving up a rook for a minor piece can sometimes be a way to get a crushing attack or dangerous passed pawns. But in this chapter, the return is always control over a colour complex.

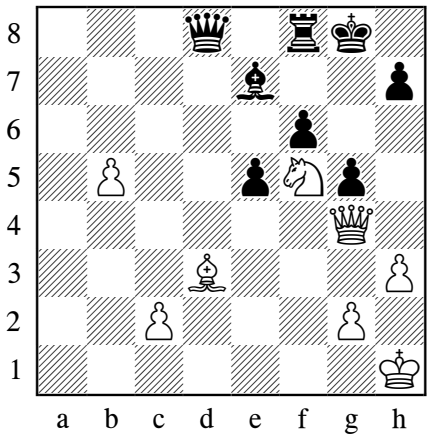
So why do exchange sacrifices often create a colour domination?

a) Bishops and knights are good pieces to use weak squares, but rooks can be clumsy in the middlegame.
b) The player who sacrifices usually get some activity, which makes it easier to use weak squares.

Opposite-coloured bishops are often connected with exchange sacrifices. There are two reasons:

1) Capturing the opponent's bishop (with a rook) can significantly weaken the squares of that colour.
2) The opponent's remaining bishop, moving on the other colour, can't defend the weak colour complex.

**Exchange sacrifice #1**




We can say that it is White to play, but we are *not* looking for any specific move, just an understanding of the position. White has sacrificed an exchange to play on the light squares.

Please note the following points:

1) White's knight and bishop make good use of the weak square on f5
2) White has some activity (an attack against h7)
3) Black's rook can't challenge many of the light squares (notably e4 and f5)
4) Black's bishop can't challenge the light squares

Understanding why exchange sacrifices and opposite-coloured bishops are good when playing for a colour complex is so important that I will repeat myself, only changing to roman numerals:

i) The player who sacrifices an exchange gets something in return: a pawn, better pawn structure, safer king, active pieces, a strong bishop, or a combination of those things.
ii) Right after the sacrifice, he usually has some initiative – which makes it possible to put pressure on the opponent.
iii) Opposite-coloured bishops increase the importance of activity (in the middlegame), because you have an extra piece moving on the weak squares.
iv) If you manage to hold on to the initiative, the opponent will not get time to use their bishop (and your weaknesses).

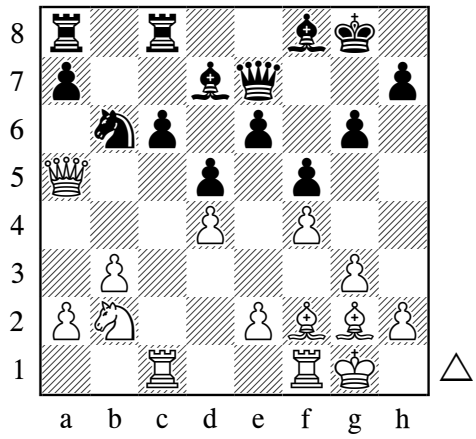
In the position above, White has weakened the dark squares around his king, but to attack them, Black would need four tempos (...♗d6-b8, ...♕c7 and ...e5-e4).

Let's start the party, with lots more exchange sacrifices to come.

## Dominating colour complexes

### Viktorija Cmilyte – Axel Smith

Copenhagen 2008




*Should White allow ...♕a3 or play ♖c5 with the idea of sacrificing an exchange?*

Reading my old annotations to this game was depressing. I wrote that I couldn't calculate variations – my brain was not working. I tried chocolate, water, walking around, getting fresh

air, but nothing helped. My explanation was that a friend had played pinball the night before, depriving me of sleep.

That sounds like a really bad excuse, but what's even worse was blaming my calculation skills for the bad positional decisions I had taken. There were no variations to calculate up to this point!

Looking at the position, everything is already in White's favour:

1) The pawn on c6 is backward on an open file.
2) White's knight is on its way to c5 or e5, while the black knight is restricted.
3) The bishop on d7 is blocked by the pawn on c6.

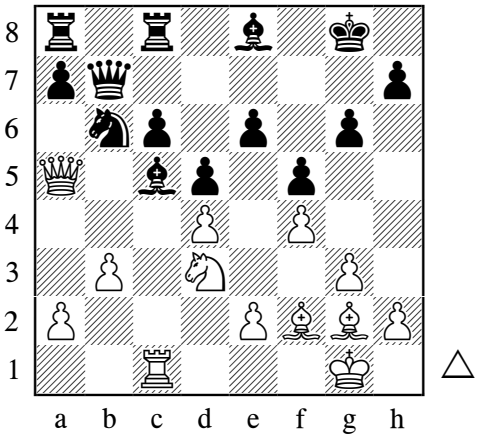
White can also improve her position in many ways: ♘d3, e2-e3, doubling on the c-file, ♗f1, ♗e1-b4. I don't think the move order is important. White's queen will probably be more useful than Black's – a better position makes it easier to manoeuvre. But the queen isn't what builds up the advantage, so keeping them on isn't vital. Given how good White's position is, I consider it unnecessary to sacrifice the exchange. Cmilyte did not.

**20.♖c5**

Instead 20.♘d3 ♕a3 was what she wanted to avoid, even though the exchange of queens doesn't bother White after 21.♗e1!.

**20...♗e8 21.♖fc1 ♕b7 22.♘d3 ♗xc5!**

I still have a bad position, but now at least with an extra exchange.



*How should White recapture?*

**23.dxc5!**

Opening the long diagonal makes the dark-squared bishop much more valuable. And note that while this is not an opposite-coloured bishops position, Black is dearly missing the dark-squared bishop.

**23...♘d7**

White's compensation is based on the dominance on the dark squares and the lack of open files for the rooks. But it's not easy to find a winning plan. Putting the queen on d4 and the bishop on c3 takes time. One defence is ...h7-h6 and ...♔h7 with the rook defending h8 and the queen defending g7. (It's not that easy though, as Black has some minor pieces to move, without having any good squares.)

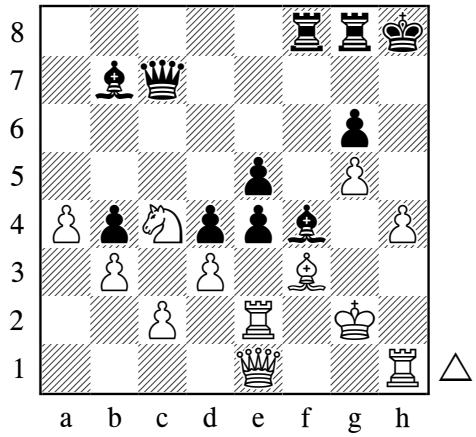
Mainly Black wants to create counterplay by opening lines with ...a5-a4, and defend the diagonal by sacrificing a pawn with ...e6-e5. White should take measures against the latter.

**24.♗d4!**

To be able to capture with a minor piece on e5. White is slightly better, but not as much as before the sacrifice. I will spare you the rest of the game – remember the pinball...

**Christian Baude – Axel Smith**

Lille 2014 (analysis)



*How should White capture on e4?*

**29.♖xe4!**

The light squares are more important than an exchange. Now h4-h5 is a threat, but Black can defend against it with 29...♖g7 or other moves. White has two or three pawns for the exchange, depending on whether he takes on b4, but more important is that Black can't put up any fight on the light squares, while his dark-squared bishop is useless. White is much better.

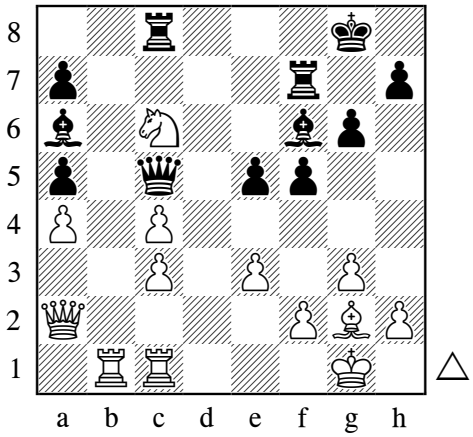
29.♗xe4? loses control over the light squares on the kingside. After 29...♕d7!, Black has a strong attack.

29.dxe4? is anti-positional. The bishop on f3 and the heavy pieces on the e-file all become passive.

Disclaimer: This was not the real position in the game – to make the example clearer, I have given White an extra pawn.

**Sven Rosell – Axel Smith**

Lund 2007



*White to move. Execute the move that's in line with this book.*

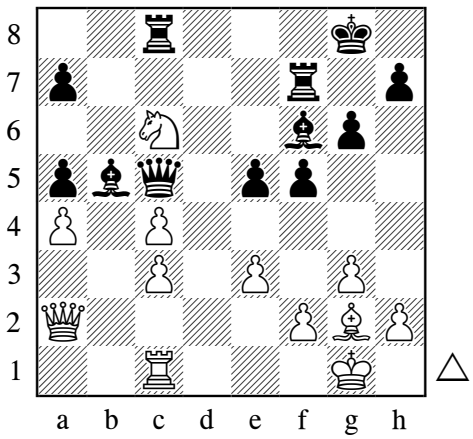
**23.♖b5!**

As the pawn on a5 is threatened, Black has to take.

23.♖b8 is the only other move that saves the knight. 23...♖xb8 24.♘xb8 ♗xc4 The bishop pair starts to enjoy the position, and Black is better.

**23...♗xb5**

Or if 23...♕d6 then 24.c5 wins with ♗d5 or ♖xa5 next.



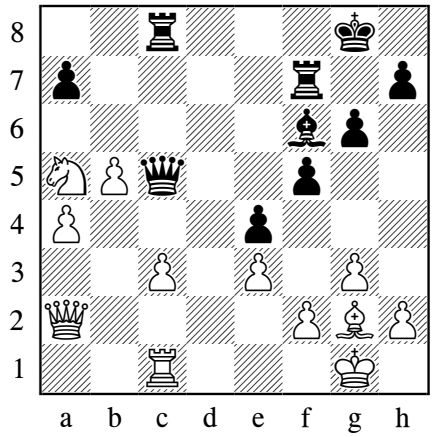
**24.cxb5!**

Instead 24.axb5? would be an ugly mistake, since White's pawns would be much worse than in the game, and Black can restrict White's bishop with: 24...e4! White would still be better, though.

**24...e4**

There is ♗f1-c4 if White wants, but he can also start by capturing on a5 and going back with the knight. Black is lost on the queenside, but can try to create counterplay by pushing the kingside pawns.

**25.♘xa5**

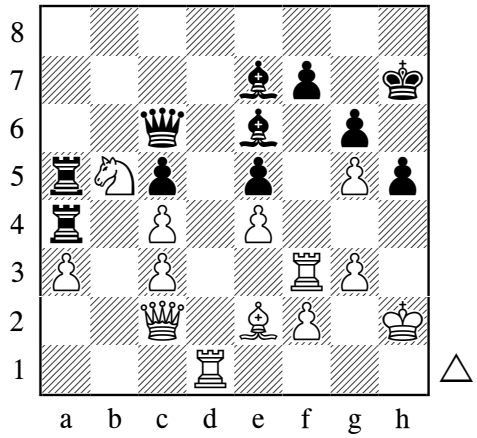


It's not over yet, but White has a clear advantage.

In the diagram below it is White to move. He is two pawns up, but the pawns on g5 and c4 are weak.

**Axel Smith – Peter Lauritzson**

Lund 2008



*What should White do? There are two solutions and you should start by finding the normal one.*

## Solution I

**46.♖d5!**

White tries to sacrifice an exchange to reach a position with opposite-coloured bishops and domination on the light squares. He threatens to capture on e5, and it's no big deal if the rook gets stuck there.

**46...♗xd5**

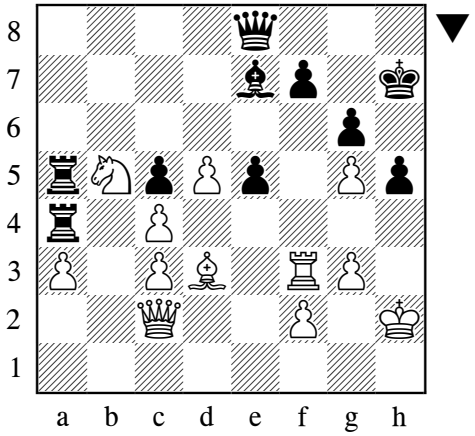
Black's best practical try might be 46...♗xg5, even though White should be on the way to victory after 47.♖xe5.

After the text move, both recaptures are good for White, but one is more logical.

**47.exd5**

This recapture opens a diagonal for the bishop against Black's king.

**47...♕e8 48.♗d3**



Black's rooks are stupid on the a-file, and White can add an extra piece to the attack with ♘b5-c7, followed by the simple threat of ♕e2 or some sacrifice. It should win. The following moves are just a few examples of how the game might finish.

**48...♔g7 49.♘c7 ♕d7 50.♗xg6**

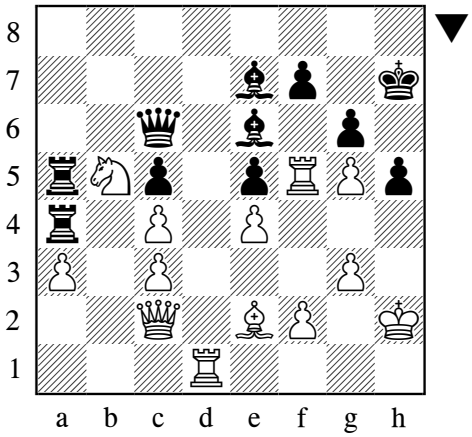
This is the type of fun position where every sacrificial idea works for White. For example, 50.♘e6† and 50.♖xf7† also win. The latter line might conclude: 50...♔xf7 51.♗xg6† ♔g8 52.♗f7†! ♔xf7 53.♕h7† ♔f8 54.g6 Black's two extra rooks are mere spectators.

**50...fxg6 51.♘e6†**

Mate is coming.

## Solution II

**46.♖f5!**



Also a move that fits our theme. Taking the rook would now be even worse for Black, as he loses the pawn on g6 – one that still fought for the light squares. And the reason why 46.♖f5 is even stronger than 46.♖d5 is that it defends the g5-pawn. As before, White doesn't worry about getting the rook caught on e5.

**46...♗f8**

It almost goes without saying that 46...gxf5 47.exf5 is overwhelming.

**47.♖xe5 ♗g7**

There is always a standard sacrifice:

**48.♖ed5**

And White is on top. Well done, rook!