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Chess for Hawks
New in Chess

Joshua M. Anderson

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Contents

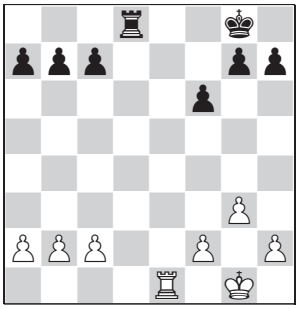
Introduction

The root presupposes everything else – Henri Matisse

The starting position of a chess game is the same for all of us. Upon this blank canvass we all project our stylistic world view – either peaceful and cautious, or adventurous and quick to initiate conflict. Our styles reflect exactly that which we love and that which we fear. When a naturally aggressive player sees complications arising, he or she thinks: 'Hooray, an adventure!' To a player like me, the concept of complication means looking into the face of a sinister stranger I don't trust and don't like on first sight.

The parable of e2 versus e7

There is one type of person whose natural instinct is to push to the front line of an emergency situation. I am not one of those people.



At age 8, if memory serves, I reached the following position as White in my third grade lunch room chess club, against a 10-year-old rival. I played the most natural move on the board, which was ♖e2, covering my second rank against his …♖d2 'threat'. At this point, the teacher 'tisk tisked' my move, when he revealed: 'Why not play your rook to the seventh rank instead? You would be a much stronger player if you would stop playing like such a sissy.' For me this was an epiphany on par with that time Sir Isaac Newton got bonked on the head with an apple (I learned this in second grade science class). The teacher's humiliating 'sissy' pronouncement induced the following physical effects on me:

1. I froze like a startled deer, followed by a gasping intake of breath and a pounding roar in my ears.
2. I experienced the odd feeling that the room receded before my eyes, and thought the power and lights went out, when in reality it was just the blood draining from my head.
3. My half-eaten chutney and cheese sandwich plunged to the floor from my now nerveless fingers, making an unpleasant 'Splat!' sound, which further offended my already offended ears.

It had never even occurred to me to take an aggressive stance by placing my rook on e7. I realized to my horror that I was a dove (which is this book's euphemistic replacement for the teacher's far ruder word 'sissy'). But I could cure myself, right? I would go over Morphy's and Tal's games, and solve millions of tactical puzzles which would release my inner hawk, and everything would be fixed, right?

Well, not quite. Today, almost a half century later, I can't truthfully call myself anything but a dove, since my brain is designed for the abstract of logic and planning, rather than specificity of calculation. When it comes to our negative stylistic tendencies it's a matter of unlearning, rather than learning to live with our limitations. I still struggle with issues of aggression – or the lack of it – over the board and a transformation to a pure hawk would be as unlikely as a left-handed person who suddenly decides to switch to the majority right hand. The difference is today I'm aware of my weaknesses, and adjust accordingly.

This book is mainly for the doves out there, who seek to reduce their natural tendencies and want to move closer to hawk status. Essentially, the purpose of this book is for you to reflect deeply at your own style, and correctly gauge where you stand. Are you lopsided (which is by far the most likely statistic)? Or are you a balanced player?

Now it may strike you that a player with my style advising you on how to play more aggressively is much the same as the chicken-hawk politician who dodged military service in his youth, and now, in old age, is pro war in every possible situation. I'm not promulgating an instant-aggression cure to the doves who read this book. Instead, my point is that exact knowledge of where you stand stylistically can be weaponized. For instance, if my opponent is a tactical-leaning IM, then I know not to enter an open position with crowded pieces on the board, since he (or she) will out-hawk me virtually every time. But if I can lure him or her into an ending, or a simplified, logic based position with little scope for tactics, I increase my chances to win exponentially. When I read a chess book and follow the writer's advice, which may be inappropriate to my style, if

I follow it blindly and lose, am I not evoking the Nuremberg Defense?: 'I was just following orders.'

This book isn't about my offering you advice. Instead, it is comprised of a series of questions about your style which you should ask yourself if you feel that your style is too heavily weighted toward static factors, like material considerations and structure, over dynamic factors like piece play, initiative and attacking chances. I'm not asking you to play chess with divided loyalties. Our goal is to interpret the chess board's reality with clear, unbiased eyes, since sometimes we must play in the position's attributes, despite our stylistic inclination to do exactly the opposite. We are forced to obey the position's commands and continue to play in a coldly factual way.

Another motivation for writing this book is for the natural strategist to understand the inclinations and mental processes of aggressive tacticians to survive their assaults and dirty attempts to confuse the innocent – us. In most positions the club player will only look for the 'how' of the position. It's every bit as important to ascertain the 'why?' of our opponent's motivation.

Is there such a thing as a perfectly balanced player?

The answer is yes, but such players are exceedingly rare. Having taught for nearly four decades now, I can testify that the vast majority of my students are either hawk or dove, with most of them at least 60% - 40%, veering one way or another. Bobby Fischer, to my mind, was a perfectly balanced player, stylistically. He was Capablanca and Alekhine merged into a single mind. I on the other hand am an extreme example of an approximate 80% dove, which doesn't leave much hawk in me!

The stigma of our styles

The positional player suffers from an image problem, since the dove's play is virtually a negation of everything society considers noble and honorable in a soldier. We tend to be viewed as the teeth-chattering, knee-knocking type, reminding people of Lou Costello when he accidentally bumps into the Mummy or Frankenstein. At the 2016 Rio Olympics, U.S. Soccer team captain goalkeeper Hope Solo allowed Sweden's ball to get past her during the sudden death shootout. The U.S. lost the game 4-3. Solo, in a fit of hawkish sour grapes, contemptuously said of her defensive-minded Swedish rivals, who had held the higher ranked American team at bay in the game, and basically beat them in the sudden death shootout – the soccer equivalent of a technical ending: 'We played a bunch of cowards. The best team did not win today.' We doves must face the reality that

defensive play is looked down upon, while attacking, aggressive play is viewed as virtuous. Mikhail Tal gathered far more chess fans than Tigran Petrosian, and it will always be that way.

What is the difference between a hawk and a dove?

It's annoying that there is one set of rules for hawks, who act like people who watched too many Quentin Tarantino movies – namely, no rules – and another set for us law abiding doves. First, we must ask ourselves: just what constitutes bravery? And is bravery a vice or a virtue in chess?

In most chess games, there comes a point where we must decide if we should hold back, or go for it. It's human nature to withdraw into the comfort of our narrow world views. The facts may be plainly laid out, but with opposing dedications of optimism and pessimism. We become our own enabler when we reinforce our own incorrect assumptions. When we land in positions alien to our skills, it is almost as if we are robbed of a dimension of ourselves, playing with two dimensional skills in a 3D position. Hawk and dove are raised in divergent chess environments by the books we read and the heroes we worship. Hawks tend to love the Great Romantics, and players like Alekhine, Tal and Kasparov, while players like me studied and were influenced by Nimzowitsch, Capablanca, Petrosian, and Karpov. This divergence leads to the two camps' unique perspectives, which can also distort a position's reality. For example, in an identical position an attacker may think: 'Oh boy! My sacrifice will lead to mate!' while a positional player, his opponent, thinks: 'My opponent's sacrifice is ridiculously unsound. Bring it on!' Both can't be simultaneously correct.

The following is a list of some of the strengths, fears and weaknesses of both camps. Of course these are just tendencies, not absolutes, since on occasion, we have all seen doves attack brilliantly, and hawks produce subtle positional games:

1. Hawks interpret simplification as a concession, while doves view it with relief.

2. It saddens my heart to see hawks pick a fight with us kindly doves, on the flimsiest of pretexts. Hawks are willing to pay for initiative/attack with either material or strategic concessions. Doves tend to be far less concerned about their king safety, and often willingly allow the opponent an initiative, which we consider a fickle entity, susceptible to sudden alteration, if in return we receive material compensation (even though an avaricious nature is frowned upon in society) or strategic concessions, which we guard with reverent care. We tend to be weak attackers (attacks should be the closest thing to religious exultation, yet in us they produce

fear), who get tempted into backpedaling. Honestly, when I'm forced to hand over material to attack, the biblical Job's quote 'That which I feared most has come upon me' is the truth.

3. A hawk's instinct is to fight, while a dove's is to evade.

4. The hawk tends to crave winning a brilliant game, while the dove's philosophy is: the inartful is just fine, if in the end it produces a win. We refuse to embroider when the simple path is available. One side stresses a commitment to perfection, while the other goes with the practical.

5. For their opening choices, hawks tend to prefer complex hair-trigger openings, like King's Gambit and Dragon or Najdorf Sicilians, which natural strategists may view as unnatural as a sociopath's smile. Strategists operate better in closed or simplifying openings like London System, Flank Openings, Slav, Caro-Kann or French, since tactically we are small forest animals, wary of predators, and who fear standing out in the open. We view any opening which produces great complications with instinctive suspicion and our goal in the opening tends to be to reduce our opponent's entertainment options as much as possible.

6. When risk/opportunity arises, the hawk, a champion of gallant causes, is quick to invest in decisive action, although they are completely unaware of the saying *Patience is a virtue*. My own tendency in such situations is to slip into a kind of Hamletesque dithering, and a tortoise on valium would be regarded as more energetic than one of my attacks, or attempts at seizing the initiative. Our silence represents a subconscious evasion, and we are masters of broken promises since we often start risky projects and then back down. We are full of contradictory forces, where we are willing to gamble, but secretly hope to accomplish it without any risk! Now you may cite a dozen logical objections to passive play, none of which I can logically contradict. But why do we do it? All I can answer is the heart wants what the heart wants. The naturally aggressive player can be accused of too much haste, while we strategists can be cited for too little.

7. Hawks tend to lose via overextension, while doves lose by drifting aimlessly, where we die a kind of slow, genteel death via inaction.

8. Strategists like me tend to think in abstractions, which is also why I tend to stink in detailed phases (like winning a won game) where absolute precision is required.

9. Tacticians feel constrained in closed games, while we strategists lose our bearings in open games, since we lack the familiar pawn-to-piece landmarks which strategically orient us.

10. When it comes to sacrificing – materially or strategically – doves refuse to play it on a hunch. Unless we see a clear outcome, we refuse to speculate.

11. The meek dove is willing to suffer the indignity of a setback in the present, if in turn it benefits in the long run. The dove is willing to take humbling – even degrading – action, if it means a greater likelihood of survival, while the gallantly imperious hawk is more prone to favor a last-stand approach, since pride tends to veer to violence when it is mocked.

12. I hate it when I come down with that incoherent flu-like haze, also known as the unclear position, which often is unclear only to me, but not my hawk opponent, who tends to comprehend the essence of the chaos. In clear positions, I proceed with a wisdom rivaling that of King Solomon.

13. Natural tacticians drive with their gas tanks perilously close to empty, while positional players never allow the tank to go below the halfway mark.

14. To sum it up: when hawks lose, they regret their risky actions; when doves lose, we regret avoiding risky actions, since in doing so, we simultaneously squandered opportunity.

The games selection for the book

The games I chose for the book were mostly ones I played over and was deeply influenced by in my youth. These masterpieces are awkwardly juxtaposed with some of my own non-masterpiece efforts which I added to try and show the reader just what a dove thinks about during a chess game.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Allard for conjuring up the idea for this book. Thanks to Peter for his edit, and thanks to the Czarina Nancy, proofreading Empress of punctuation.

May the hawks who read this book drink more chamomile tea and learn to calm down on the chess board, and may we doves stand our ground against them, without trepidation.

CHAPTER 4

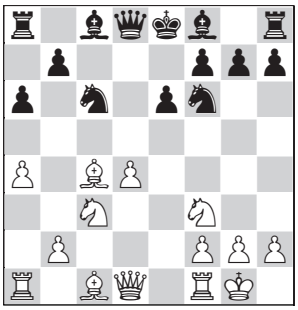
When should we weaken our structure in exchange for attack or initiative?

When I weaken my structure for an initiative or attack, I'm often uncertain if I'm going overboard, or if it's a sensible risk. Am I squandering that which matters most, for something enduring, or am I agreeing to weaken for just the transient fling of a temporary initiative?

In this game Lasker takes on a pawn structure which would make most of us doves exceedingly nervous, and yet he succeeds confidently. Then, in the following game against Altounian, I refuse to weaken my position in any way, and quickly land into difficulties, due to my unwillingness to take risk.

QG 13.4 – D37
Queen's Gambit Accepted
Emanuel Lasker
Geza Maroczy
Paris 1900

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6
2...dxc4 is the normal route into the Queen's Gambit Accepted.
3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♘f3 dxc4!? 5.e3
5.e4 can be met with 5...♗b4.
5...c5 6.♗xc4 a6 7.a4
This weakening/aggressive move suppresses ...b7-b5 at the cost of offering Black a hole on b4. Such moves make doves cringe, since we hate to create concrete pawn weaknesses for abstract/noble ideals, like initiative and attack.
7...♘c6 8.0-0 cxd4 9.exd4
Lasker, a notable hawk, is completely at ease in taking on an isolani, coupled with a hole on b4. The dove's argument against it is that if we had White's position, we would bungle our initiative/attack, and then suffer a miserable ending or late middlegame, where we are left defending our multiple weaknesses.



9...♗e7 10.♗e3
I know this is going to sound ridiculous, but when I showed dove students this game, the majority wanted to immediately eliminate their isolani with the painfully unambitious move 10.d5, which, although not intrinsically incorrect,

openly admits to the opponent: 'I am a hopeless attacker, so why even try?'

10...0-0 11.♕e2 ♕a5

I would be more inclined to keep the queen where she sits and develop with something like 11...♘b4 12.♘e5 ♗d7.

12.♖fd1 ♖d8

This move adds pressure to d4, at the cost of slightly weakening f7. Why does f7 matter? It is one of White's thematic sacrificial squares in QGA isolani positions.

13.♖ac1 ♘b4!?

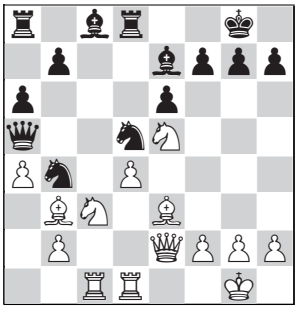
Maroczy is intent on domination of d5 and b4, at the same time allowing Lasker ♘e5.

13...♘d5 is a safer and probably wiser alternative.

14.♘e5 ♘fd5?!

The wrong knight. Maroczy, in typical dove fashion, underestimates White's coming kingside attack by voluntarily moving defenders away from his own king. Black should play 14...♗d7, intending to reinforce f7 with a future ...♗e8.

15.♗b3



15...♖f8?!

When we are confused, we only make matters worse when we attempt to hide our confusion. Tempi matter, and we can only manipulate the variables so much. Worried about f7, Black negates his previous 14...♖d8 with a time-wasting reversal, retreating the rook to its originally castled state at f8. If such a move is necessary, then it suggests deep problems with Black's position already. Alternatives:

A) 15...♘xe3 16.♕xe3! (16.fxe3 ♘c6 looks okay for Black) 16...h6 17.♕f3 ♖f8 Now White applies the principle *Create confrontation when leading in development*: 18.d5! is in White's favor;

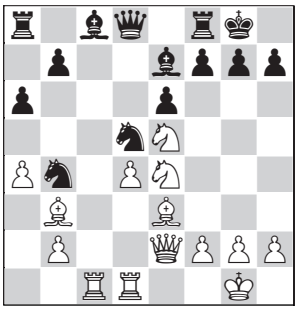
B) 15...♗d7 16.♗d2! ♕b6 17.a5! and now:

B1) 17...♕a7?? loses a piece to 18.♘xd5 ♘xd5 19.♗xd5 exd5 20.♖c7;

B2) 17...♕xa5?? 18.♘xd5 exd5 19.♗c2! ♗e6 20.♕h5 with a winning attack. If 20...g6 21.♘xg6! hxg6 22.♗xg6;

B3) 17...♕xd4 18.♘xd5 ♘xd5 19.♘f3 ♕xb2 20.♗xd5 ♗a4 21.♖b1 ♕a3 22.♗xb7 ♗xd1 23.♕xd1 ♖ab8 24.♕e1 and White's two minor pieces will beat Black's rook and pawn.

16.♘e4 ♕d8



Another two tempi lost. In this game Maroczy spots Lasker four free moves to launch his attack.

17.f4!?

Soltis gives this move an exclam, while I am convinced of its dubious nature. So then why do I give the move an interesting rather than a dubious assessment?

The reason is the move also increases the position's complexity level and comes with a clear practical benefit, where it reaches a type of position Lasker excelled in, and Maroczy did not. But practical chances aside, always keep in mind that most attacks are strategic leeches that tend to consume rather than provide.

Only a hawk of the highest order would dare to bang out such a move, which crosses the point of strategic no-return. No dove, on the other hand, would ever play such an odiously weakening move in a million years, since we fear the white attack's initial euphoria may soon pass, and then comes the time to tally the strategic bills:

1. Lasker's move instantly consigns White's dark-squared bishop to bad bishop status.
2. The move weakens White's central light squares, e4 and f5.
3. If White intends an undermining of f5, then his rook is misplaced on the d-file; it should rather be on the f-file.
4. If White intends f4-f5, this can be either discouraged or prevented with a coming ...g7-g6 from Black.

Four points against the move, and yet it is fully playable from an over the board perspective. Such is the awesome confusion power of a hawk's complications, mixed with initiative/attack. We strategists loathe ostentation of any kind, and would be more inclined to go with the tame (but possibly superior!) 17.♗d2.

17...b6!

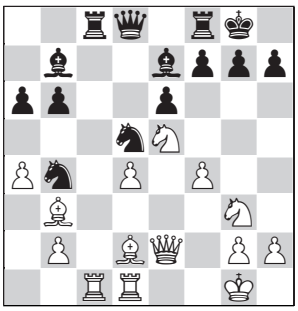
Maroczy senses weakness on White's side on the central light squares and prepares a fianchetto, aiming at e4, while further supporting d5. After 17...♘xe3?! 18.♕xe3 ♘d5 19.♕f3 White looks better since Black experiences trouble developing his queenside pieces, and the undermining f4-f5 idea is in the air.

18.♗d2 ♗b7 19.♘g3

Preparing f4-f5.

19...♖c8!?

To my mind, unwise. I would toss in 19...g6!, not fearing the slight weakening of the dark squares around my king.



20.f5!

This is White's only viable way to proceed with his kingside plans.

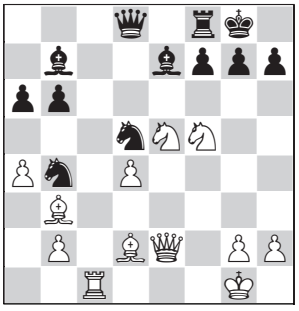
20...♖xc1

A move made with the principle *Swap down if your opponent prepares a kingside assault to reduce attacking potential.*

21.♖xc1 exf5??

This move is like the person who fervently prays for a miracle to save him, while simultaneously laboring to obstruct its occurrence. Yes. We conciliatory doves occasionally make such boneheaded moves, which allow our opponent's pieces free jumps into the attack. Black may yet survive with the cold-blooded 21...♗c8!.

22.♘xf5



Suddenly White, with a million kingside threats, has a winning attack. If you prove a point's underlying validity, then you also prove its ultimate truth. The Wright brothers proved humans can fly, and just over six decades later, humans flew to the moon. Some annotators in the pre-comp days tried to prove that Black could still survive the assault, but the truth was laid bare by the comps: Black is busted, no matter how he continues.

22...♗f6

This move allows White a combination, as do other tries:

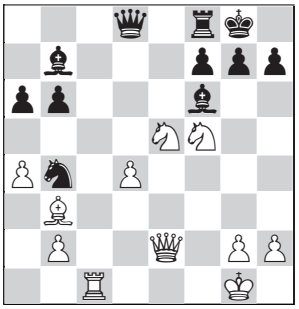
A) 22...g6 23.♕g4! ♗c8 24.♘xe7+ ♘xe7 25.♖xc8! ♕xc8 26.♕xc8 ♖xc8 27.♗xb4 Not only is White up material, but e7 and f7 hang simultaneously;

B) The idea of 22...a5 is that if White chops on b4, Black need not release his d5-blockade. 23.♕g4 g6 24.♘h6+ ♔g7 25.♘hxf7! ♖xf7 (a dying person may blurt out a dangerous secret, which ordinarily would never be revealed if he or she were going to face the consequences in life) 26.♗h6+! (attraction/knight fork) 26...♔g8 (Black's king looks like he just walked off the set of a bloody season-ender of Game of Thrones) 27.♕e6 ♕e8 28.♖f1 wins.

23.♗xb4!

Shatters the d5-blockade, allowing White a combination on f7.

23...♘xb4



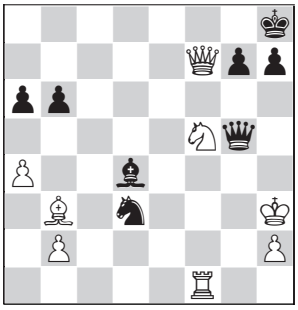
24.♘xf7! ♖xf7

24...♗xd4+ 25.♔h1 ♖xf7 26.♗xf7+ ♔xf7 27.♘xd4 ♕xd4 28.♖f1+! either mates or wins Black's queen.

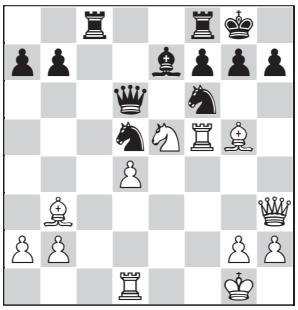
25.♕e6 ♔h8

25...♕f8 allows 26.♖c7 ♗d5 27.♗xd5 ♘xd5 28.♖c8 and Black can resign.

26.♕xf7 ♗xd4+ 27.♔h1 ♘d3 28.♖f1
Threatening 29.♘xd4 and 29.♕xb7.
28...♗xg2+
28...♕a8 29.♘h4!, threatening a back rank mate on f8, while covering g2: 29...♘f2+ (29...h6 30.♕f8+ ♕xf8 31.♖xf8+ ♔h7 32.♗g8+ ♔h8 33.♘g6# – a good time was had by all except Black's king) 30.♖xf2 ♗xf2 31.♕xf2 with an extra piece for White.
29.♔xg2 ♕g5+ 30.♔h3 1-0



Black is out of checks, since he must cover his back rank. 30...♕d8 31.♘xd4 is hopeless since capturing with 31...♕xd4 allows White three separate mates in one. Although it was only one night of passion with the queen, Black's king will spend the remainder of his life attempting to expunge the memory of it.
Three and a half decades after Lasker's game, Botvinnik absorbed his predecessor's lessons to crush Vidmar with this game, which is annotated in my book on Botvinnik: 1.c4 e6 2.♘f3 d5 3.d4 ♘f6 4.♗g5 ♗e7 5.♘c3 0-0 6.e3 ♘bd7 7.♗d3 c5 8.0-0 cxd4 9.exd4 dxc4 10.♗xc4 ♘b6 11.♗b3 ♗d7 12.♕d3 ♘bd5 13.♘e5 ♗c6 14.♖ad1 ♘b4 15.♕h3 ♗d5?! 16.♘xd5 ♘bxd5 17.f4! ♖c8 18.f5 exf5?! (Maroczy made the same mistake against Lasker. 18...♕d6 should be played) 19.♖xf5 ♕d6?? (19...♖c7 was necessary)



20.♘xf7! (I thought this was all trail blazing stuff by Botvinnik, but GM Andy Soltis, in his book *Why Lasker Matters*, points out this same shot, and also the earlier f2-f4 thrust was first used by Lasker, against Maroczy) 20...♖xf7 21.♗xf6! ♗xf6 (21...♘xf6 is crushed by 22.♖xf6! – clearance: 22...gxf6 23.♕xc8+) 22.♖xd5 ♕c6 23.♖d6! ♕e8 24.♖d7 1-0, Botvinnik-Vidmar, Nottingham 1936.

QG 8.2 – D25
Queen's Gambit Accepted
Cyrus Lakdawala
Levon Altounian
Irvine 1998 (7)

This game was played in the final round of the 1998 Southern California State Championship. My friend IM Levon Altounian led by a full point, so I had to play for a win in order to tie for first place.

My solution was to allow a sharp isolani position – except without the isolani!

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 d5 3.c4 dxc4

Now I felt a pang of nerves coming on, thinking: 'Oh, no! Must I take on an isolani?'

4.e3 a6 5.♗xc4 e6 6.♕e2 b5 7.♗d3 c5 8.dxc5?!

This obnoxiously passive choice is not an objectively bad move, yet I deem it dubious, since it is guilty in thought, if not in deed. I decide to hop on the bandwagon with a blatantly stupid choice when needing to win. Such evasions offer our opponent a glimpse into our own fear of confrontation. In this case I refuse to compromise my safety-first ideals, since then it feels like paying a greedy merchant a too high price, for an object we desperately desire – in this case safety, while desperate for a win, which I freely admit makes absolutely no sense!

8...♗xc5 9.0-0 ♘c6 10.♘c3 0-0 11.b3 ♗b7 12.♗b2

White's bishops ally themselves in a common cause, taking aim at Black's king, which for now is certainly well guarded.

12...♕e7 13.a4

The idea is to force his b-pawn to b4, and then take advantage of the newly created hole on c4. What I failed to appreciate was that Black's grip on c3, and also my b3-pawn becoming weak, fully compensated.

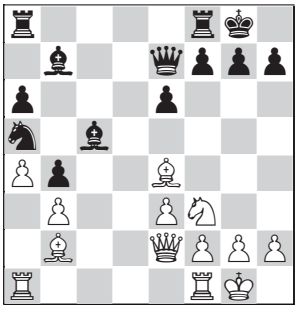
13...b4!

13...bxa4?! leaves his a6-pawn a target after 14.♘xa4.

14.♘e4 ♘xe4 15.♗xe4

I strategically misjudged this position, thinking I had an edge since I can later post a piece on the c4-hole. As I mentioned above, the factor I underestimated was the weakness of my b3-pawn. In reality the game is even.

15...♘a5!



Targeting b3. I hate getting outdoved, which is an intolerable state for a player like me, accustomed to outplaying opponents strategically (and then botching it later in the complications!).

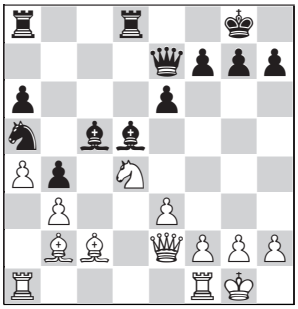
With his last move the tiny pilot light of my would-be kingside attack just got extinguished, since

my pieces are forced into defensive postures.

16.♗c2 ♖fd8 17.♘d4?!

The knight on d4 is an unstable defender of b3. I should have played 17.♖ac1 ♗d5 18.♘d2.

17...♗d5



Advantage Black, who pounds and tenderizes away at b3, as if the pawn were a cheap cut of meat. At this point the Lakdawala molars were grinding away in frustration, since my world at this stage is devoid of joy or hope of winning. It may have been a hallucination, but I swear that my sickly b3-pawn looked back at me with a sad emoticon face.

18.♖ab1 ♕b7

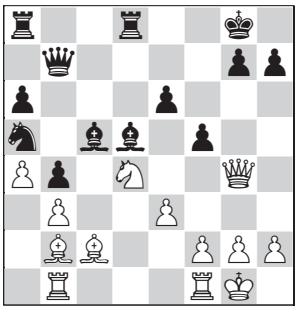
I thought he might try 18...e5!? 19.♘f5 (19.♘f3?! f6 20.♘d2 ♕f7 when White is tied down to the defense of b3) 19...♕e6 20.f4 ♗xb3 21.♗e4 ♗c4 22.♕g4 ♗f8 23.♖f3 g6 24.♕g5. The computer likes Black, but we humans get nervous with so many attackers hovering in close proximity of our king.

19.♕g4

Threat: 20.♘c6! with a double attack on the mating square g7 and his d8-rook.

19...f5?

An overreaction. Black stands better after the calm 19...g6.



20.♘xf5!

Ambition rarely lies dormant, eternally. For the piece White gets two pawns and a strong attack with the queen/bishops lineup against Black's king.

20...exf5 21.♕xf5 h6?

He had to try 21...g6 22.♕e5 ♕e7 23.♕h8+ ♔f7 24.♕xh7+ ♔e8 25.♕xg6+ ♕f7 with advantage to White, who picked up four pawns for the piece.

22.e4?

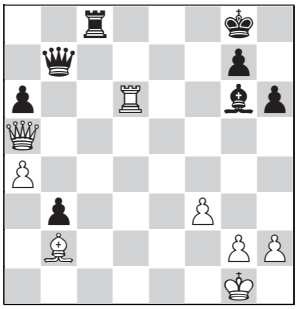
I begin to confuse and merge actual variations with fantasies. This move, which defends against Black's non-existent threat on g2, regains the sacrificed piece, but only leads to an equal position.

White would be winning had I found 22.♖bc1! ♕f7 (if 22...♖ac8 23.♖fd1 ♕f7 24.♖xd5! wins) 23.♕h7+ ♔f8 24.♗g6 ♕g8 (24...♕e7 25.♕h8+ ♗g8 26.♖xc5 overloads Black's queen and wins for White) 25.♕xg8+ ♔xg8 26.♖xc5 ♘xb3 27.♖c7 with a winning attack, despite the absence of queens.

22...♗xb3 23.♕xc5 ♖ac8 24.♕xa5 ♗xc2 25.♖bc1 ♗xe4

I thought to myself: 'Well, there goes my chance to tie for first in the State Championship.' It's an almost certain draw, and the only reason I won was a combination of my own irrationality, mixed with blind luck.

26.♖xc8 ♖xc8 27.f3 ♗g6 28.♖d1 b3 29.♖d6??



Tip: *Follow the position's requirement, not the one in your mind, since it's a lot better to be a survivor than a martyr.*

This is the demarcation point of the move we *want* to play and the move we *ought* to play. If a move like this is a chess crime, then it is a crime of passion, rather than one of cold calculation. Here I irrationally discarded normal self-preservatory instincts, all in the name of attempting to win an unwinnable game. Correct was to bow to the position's reality and take an almost certain draw with 29.♖d8+ ♖xd8 30.♕xd8+. The only problem with this version was that I didn't get to be State Champion!

29...♕e7!

Threatening to mate on e1.

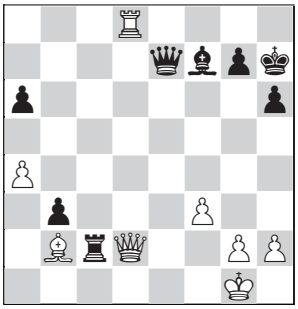
30.♕d5+ ♗f7 31.♕d2 ♖c2 32.♖d8+

The secret of luring our opponent into a trap is that our geometry must feign total innocence. This move – which on the surface looks like no more than a spite check and a display of injured dignity – indicates an intent more sinister than outward appearances would have us believe.

32...♔h7??

If we are winning and miss an opponent's cheapo/combination, we become a person who catches a glimpse of paradise, only to be barred entry at its gate.

The unnatural 32...♗e8! wins after 33.♕d5+ ♔h7 34.♕e5 ♕xe5 35.♗xe5 ♗xa4 and the b-pawn costs White a piece. If 36.♖b8 (36.♖d1?? b2! White must give up a piece, or face ...♖c1) 36...♗b5 (the bishop interferes with the white rook's coverage) 37.♖b7 h5! 38.♖xg7+ ♔h6 39.h4 b2 40.♗xb2 ♖xb2 Black will convert.



It appears as if White must resign, but the opposite is true. White to play and win:

33.♖h8+!

Attraction/pin. When we are saved by a miracle, we realize we owe the chess goddess a debt we will never

be able to repay. When we get hit with such unexpected shots, the feeling of disconnection is similar to when our dentist novocaines our mouth, and we no longer feel our tongue.

I confess, in the time scramble, this wasn't a pre-planned event. It was more of a crime of opportunity, which I saw in my desperation, only a few moves before it happened.

33...♔g6

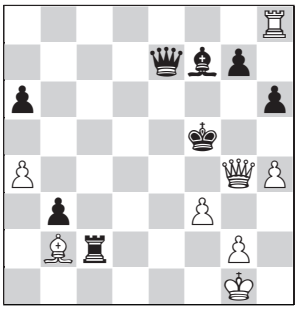
33...♔xh8 34.♕xh6+ – the point of the rook check on h8 is that Black's g-pawn is pinned in this line: 34...♔g8 35.♕xg7 mate.

34.♕d3+ ♔g5 35.h4+! ♔f4

A) 35...♔h5 36.♕f5+ g5 37.♕g4+ ♔g6 38.h5# To deliver checkmate with a pawn is the sweetest of all possible fairy tale endings;

B) 35...♔xh4 36.♕d4+ ♔g5 37.♕g4#

36.♕d4+ ♔f5 37.♕g4#



I will go down in history as the flukiest State Champion of all time!