

Powerhouse Pawn Sacrifices

By

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Preface

In chess, few tactics carry the weight and subtlety of a well-timed pawn sacrifice. A nuanced sacrifice can open doors to dynamic play, create enduring positional advantages, unleash devastating attacks on the opposing king, and so much more. This book explores the rich art of pawn sacrifices in a way that tries to be both instructional and inspiring.

The origins of this book are as intriguing as its contents. It began as a series of online lectures I gave for the Killer Chess Training Academy in 2023-2024, where I was trying to share my insights into the mysteries of pawn sacrifices. I was mostly using examples from my own play, since there were many and I was most familiar with them, but also a few examples by other grandmasters that had caught my attention through the years. I guess these lectures were well-received, since it was not long afterwards that Jacob Aagaard suggested they could be turned into a book. I promptly accepted.

The project then took on a life of its own. The first person I have to thank would be Jeremy Hart, the Quality Chess editor who went through the painstaking process of transcribing these lectures – it cannot have been an easy job! Soon after we had ChessBase files to work with, a new process began: turning the relatively raw lecture material into a book. Through this process the games were reorganized into appropriate chapters, the analysis was all rechecked, expanded and refined, and some structure was given to each chapter, so that the reader can better grasp the themes presented within each instructive example and chapter.

Moreover, the exercises were reselected. During a lecture, one can suggest a position for solving that has multiple solutions, or even no solution at all, and after briefly allowing the students to think and decide on a move, try to explain what's happening. The thought given to the problem in question is beneficial, since the student becomes better equipped to understand the essence of the position after thinking about it for some time. Sadly, when writing a book such exercises don't work as well, and each exercise needs to have a relatively clear solution. That is the case with most exercises in this book. In the few examples where a clear-cut solution does not exist, the reason why we still kept it as an exercise is laid out.

There was another problem with the selection of exercises: during a lecture, one can stop at various moments and ask a question, setting a new exercise. We have allowed for just a few such questions in this book, only in instances where we thought that no better solution existed, and we did not want to lose the question. That's because books written in this lecture-style fashion have a significant downside: how is one to avoid looking at the solution, when it is there, directly below the diagram asking the question? To avoid that problem, we opted for a layout with the exercises at the start of each chapter.

The reader is invited to tackle these exercises first, and then discover the solutions while playing through the illustrative games in the chapter. The only problem with this approach is that the reader might try to guess the solution by reconstructing how the position evolved from one diagram to another, since multiple exercises are taken from the same game. Please, don't try to do that! For one thing, it's a form of cheating. Secondly, doing that won't bear much fruit, since you have no idea whether or not the continuation that led to the next diagram was the correct one.

All these changes that turned the lectures into a book were decided and executed by collaboration between myself and my editor, IM Kostis Megalios, who I would like to thank for his efforts in shaping this book.

Inside this book you will find a structured approach that insists on, but also goes beyond, theoretical explanations. With a total of one hundred carefully chosen exercises of varying difficulty, this book invites you to engage with the material, test your understanding and hone your decision-making skills in different scenarios.

I hope this book will both inspire and challenge you, while enhancing your ability to recognize and execute the types of pawn sacrifices that characterize masterful play. May it deepen your understanding and encourage you to take bold but thoughtful risks on the chessboard.

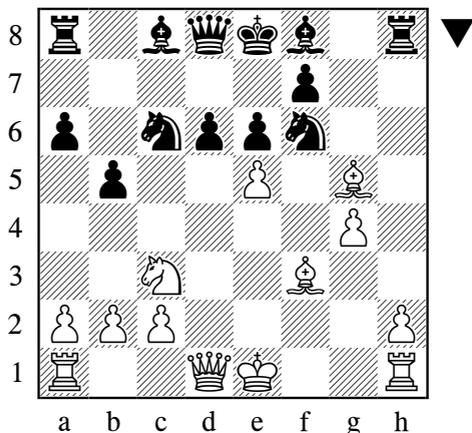
Ivan Cheparinov,
Valencia, March 2025

Chapter 1

Dynamics

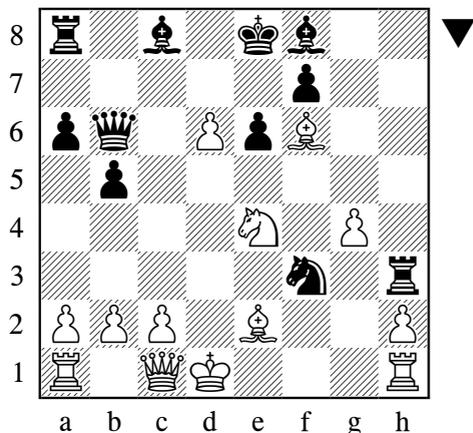


Exercise 21
Bologan – Cheparinov
Kemer 2007



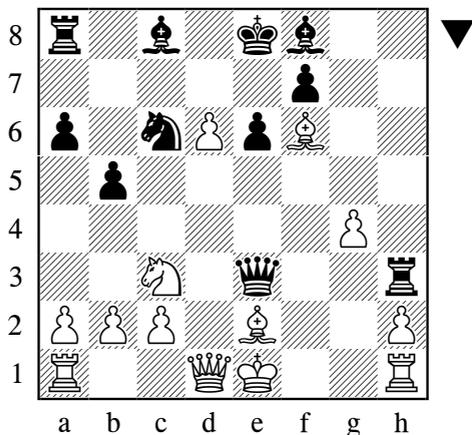
*It looks like Black is in a bit of a pickle.
Is there a way out?*

Exercise 23
Bologan – Cheparinov
Kemer 2007



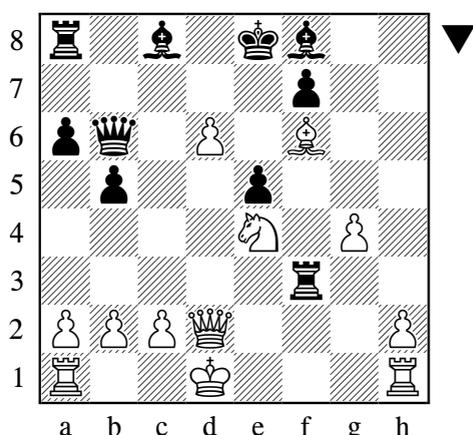
What should Black play?

Exercise 22
Bologan – Cheparinov
Kemer 2007



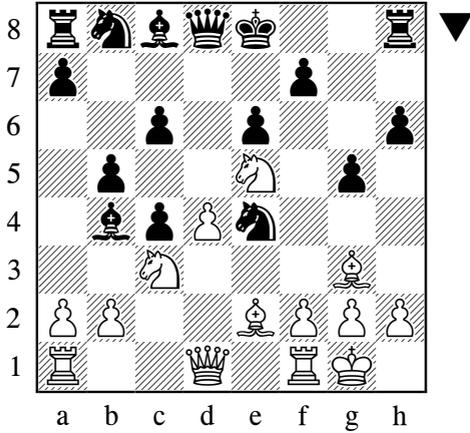
*What is the best way for Black
to pursue his initiative?*

Exercise 24
Bologan – Cheparinov
Kemer 2007



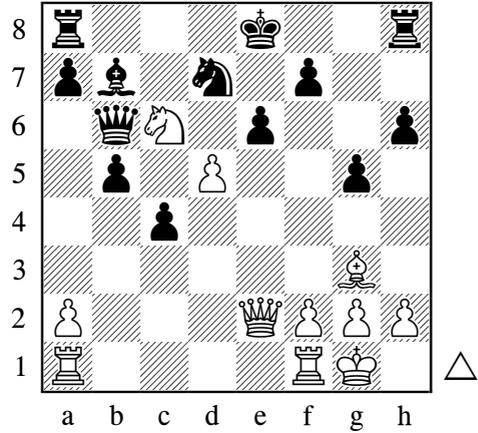
Should Black capture the hanging g-pawn?

Exercise 25
Cheparinov – Nepomniachtchi
 Wijk aan Zee 2008



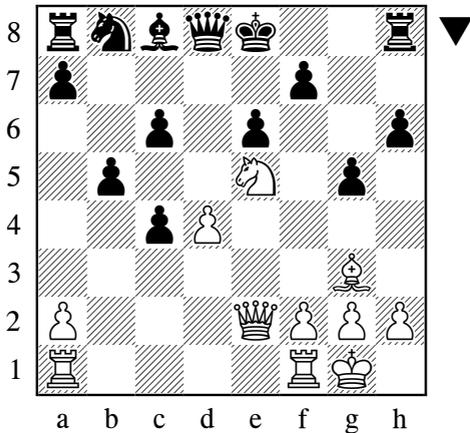
What should Black do about the knight on e4?

Exercise 27
Cheparinov – Nepomniachtchi
 Wijk aan Zee (var) 2008



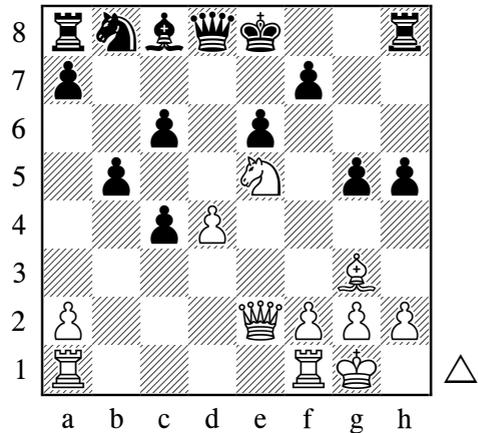
What is the best way for White to keep his initiative going?

Exercise 26
Cheparinov – Nepomniachtchi
 Wijk aan Zee 2008



What is the best way for Black to defend?

Exercise 28
Cheparinov – Nepomniachtchi
 Wijk aan Zee 2008



What should White do regarding the threat of ...b5-b4?

41.♔c2 ♖e3† 42.♔d3 ♗f5

The perpetual is prevented, and the conversion isn't that hard from now onwards.

43.fxe5 ♖f3† 44.♔d2 ♖f2† 45.♔d3 ♖d4†
 46.♔c2 dxe5 47.♗c3 ♖f2† 48.♔b1 ♖g1†
 49.♔b2 ♖xh2† 50.♔a3 ♖g3 51.♔b4 ♖f4†
 52.♔a5 ♖d4 53.♗d5 ♖c5† 54.♔a4 ♖d6
 0-1

Learning Points

- Black sacrificed a pawn to open the a- and b-files for an attack on the opposing king. This enabled him to bring all his pieces into play on that side of the board, exploiting the pawn weaknesses that White created there. This is a good illustration of the fact that it is easier to attack than to defend.
- Another interesting point came on move 20. White, as most humans would do, clung on to the pawn with 20.♙b3?!. However, the best strategy for the side that has accepted a pawn sacrifice is to find opportune moments to return that pawn and attain important positional goals. In that regard, 20.♙d3! was quite tough to find but also highly instructive.

The following game illustrates the use of a pawn sacrifice to open lines for an attack on the enemy king, but this time with the kings in the centre instead of castled on opposite sides. Simultaneously, it serves as a good opportunity to train your calculation skills by pretending to play against the strong grandmaster from Moldova. In that regard, and due to the mind-bending complications that follow, I would suggest that you treat this whole game as an exercise, stopping to consider what *you* would play before looking at the moves that occurred in the game.

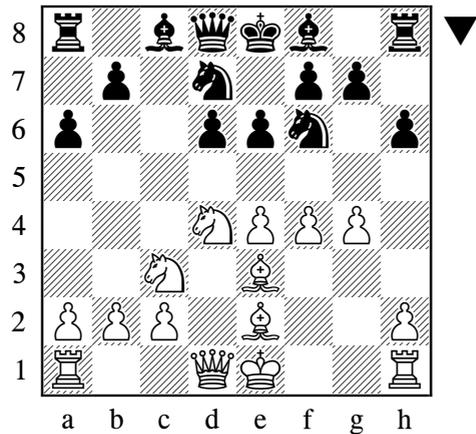
Viktor Bologan – Ivan Cheparinov

Kemer 2007

1.e4 c5 2.♗f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♗f6
 5.♗c3 a6 6.♙e3 e6

6...e5 is nowadays a much more popular approach.

7.♙e2 ♗bd7 8.g4 h6 9.f4



This was a popular line at the time, played a few times with Black by Veselin Topalov.

9...g5!?

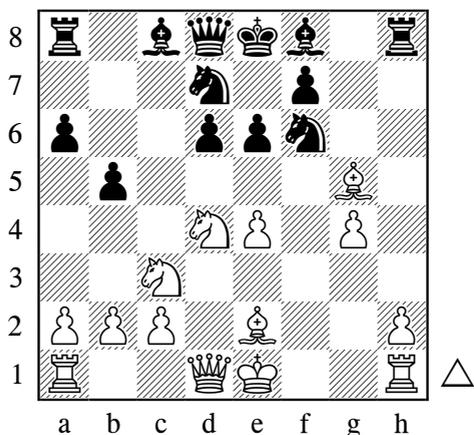
It is typical to sacrifice a pawn like this in this kind of Sicilian position. The idea is to open the h-file, and to carve out the e5-square for the knight. In some ways, the pawn sacrifice is for the moment more positional than it is tactical, as Black wants the e5-square for the knight. But it also opens the h8-rook and some lines against the opponent's king, and the situation quickly gets tactical:

10.fxg5

The pawn grab was a welcome sight.

The most critical line is: 10.f5 ♗e5 There is a ton of theory here which is outside the scope of this book. Suffice to say that, in my opinion, the chances are balanced.

10...hxg5 11.♔xg5 b5



Black wants to play ...♕b7 and ...♖e5.

12.♕f3

12.a3 was the main move we had analysed. A complex and interesting game would arise, with Black having sufficient compensation for the pawn after 12...♕b7 followed by ...♖c8 and ...♖e5.

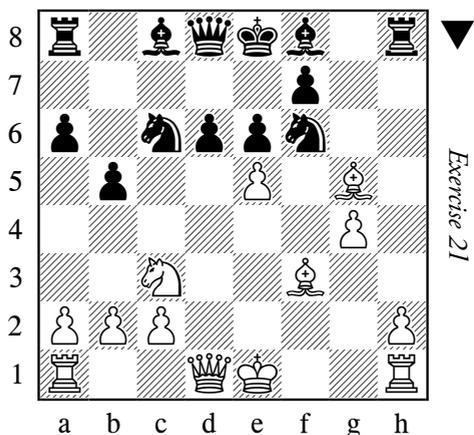
12...♖e5

Black counters White's threat of e4-e5. What was the idea behind White's 12th move?

13.♖c6! ♖xc6

Black is forced to recapture to avoid losing material.

14.e5



Exercise 21

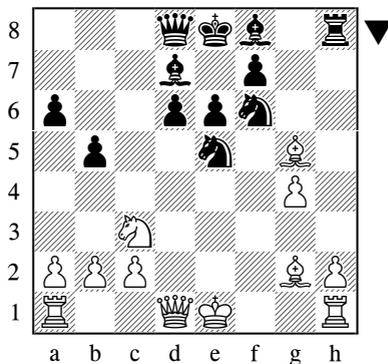
Black's position is under severe tactical pressure. Both knights are hanging, and both of them would fall with a fork.

14...♗b6!

This has the dual purpose of protecting the c6-knight and eyeing a check on e3 if the g5-bishop captures the other knight. It is the only move that protects against both of White's threats.

14...♕b7? 15.♕xf6 loses the h8-rook.

But sacrificing the exchange with 14...♖e5!? is quite possible: 15.♕xa8 ♕d7 16.♕g2



White plans to quickly complete development with ♖d2 and 0–0–0. However, Black has an excellent antidote: 16...♖g8! 17.h4 ♖xg5! 18.hxg5 ♖fxg4 With total mayhem as Black's knights are highly active, and White has some trouble completing development.

If you spotted the second exchange sacrifice starting with 16...♖g8!, that counts as a solution. But without it, the first exchange sacrifice with 14...♖e5!? isn't fully viable.

15.♕xf6

Black is better after 15.exf6? ♕b7. He has strong central pawns, a safe home for his king on the queenside and a strong outpost for his knight on e5.

15...♖h3!

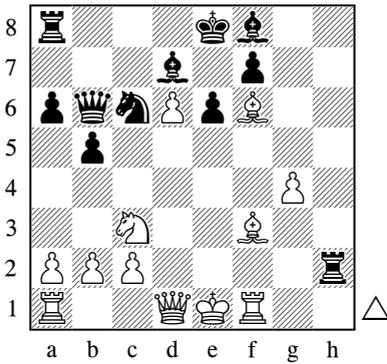
It is important that Black maintains momentum by threatening ...♗e3†. Moreover, this blocks the pawn on h2, making it harder to notice that White is up a pawn by stopping h2-h4 and embarrassing the rook on h1 in the process.

15...♖xh2? fails to the intermediate move 16.♕xc6† after 16...♗xc6 17.♖xh2.

15...♗e3† gets nowhere after 16.♗e2.

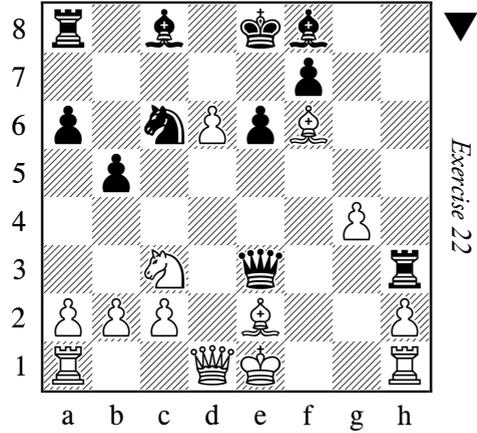
16.exd6?

White needed to find the difficult 16.♖f1! to protect the bishop: 16...♖xh2 (16...♗e3† is nicely answered by 17.♗e2.) 17.exd6 ♕d7



An unusual position has been reached – neither side can castle! Nevertheless, it is Black who has the more active pieces with ideas of ...♕h6, ...♗e3† and ...♖c8. The black king is currently quite safe on e8.

16...♗e3† 17.♕e2



17...♗e5!?

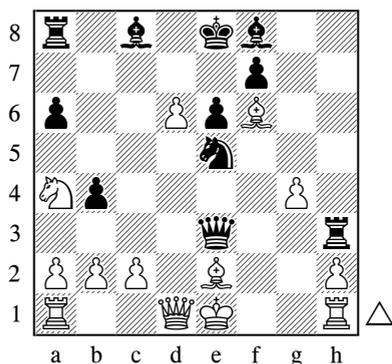
This is the easiest way to continue. Black threatens ...♗f3† and the c8-bishop will rake down the long a8-h1 diagonal.

The trick involving 17...♖xh2? does not work: 18.♖xh2 ♗g1† 19.♕f1 ♖xh2 20.♗f3 White is winning. His king will be safe on the queenside, and the d6-pawn is strong.

17...♕h6? is too slow as it does not threaten anything. After 18.♗d3! White trades off the queens and wins.

17...♖f3?! threatens both the f6-bishop and a check on f2. But White has a nice reply: 18.♕g5! (After 18.♕h4 ♗d4 Black seizes the initiative.) 18...♗f2† 19.♗d2 ♕xd6 20.♗c1 White would be winning if it weren't for 20...♖xc3!, when the position remains chaotic but balanced.

The strongest option is quite logical. Black goes for the same plan that I chose in the game but first includes a discombobulating thrust: 17...b4! The knight is ousted from its natural square and pushed towards the rim. 18.♗a4 ♗e5

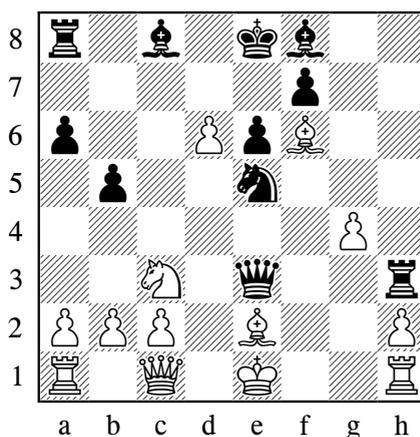


19.♙xe5 In this case, this is forced. (Without the inclusion of ...b5-b4 and ♖c3-a4, White can go for 19.♞f1 ♞xh2 20.♙xe5 ♜xe5 21.♞d3, but this time it loses to 21...♙d7!, which threatens both the knight on a4 and ...♙b5.) 19...♞xe5 But pushing the pawn to b4 also comes at a cost. In this position Black would be winning if he got to keep the two bishops, but White has 20.♙b6. Anyway, after 20...♙b7 Black is still better, but it is a difficult position for both sides to navigate through the complications.

18.♞c1?

Black is also clearly winning after 18.♙xe5? ♞xe5. The active rook on h3, centralized queen and two bishops are too much for White to handle.

18.♞f1! was the only move that doesn't lose, but I would still prefer Black after: 18...♙b7 (18...♞xh2 19.♙xe5 ♞xe5 20.♞d3 is also OK for White who is ready to castle.) 19.♞c1 ♞xc1† 20.♞xc1 ♙xd6 White's kingside pawns are chronically weak, and his king poorly placed on e1. In a practical game, this is seriously unpleasant to play from the white side.



Black had more than one tempting option. Did he choose the right one?

18...♙b7

18...♙xg4! would make it much harder for Black to make a mistake in converting his advantage. After 19.♞xe3 ♙xe3 Black threatens to take the pawns on c2 and d6. In hindsight, apart from being approved by the engine, this also looks much simpler. During the game, I thought that White may have some chances in the endgame, which is why I chose the text move.

19.♙d1

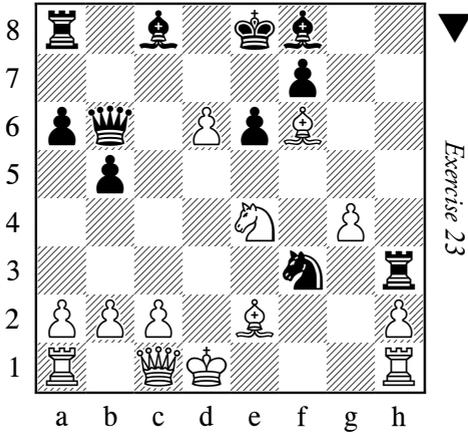
19.♙f1 loses quickly: 19...♙d2† 20.♙e1 ♞xh2 21.♞xh2 ♙f3† With checkmate to follow.

Where should Black retreat the queen: to c5, or to d6?

19...♞b6?!

19...♞c5! was stronger. Black should not be afraid of ghosts. It looks like White can benefit from gaining a tempo on the queen, but this does not work: 20.♙e4 (After 20.♙xf3 ♞xf3 the white king is toast. 20.♞f4 is even worse after 20...♙xd6 21.♞e4 ♞b8 followed by ...♙b7.) 20...♞d5† 21.♙d3 e5! Black opens the diagonal to bring in all his pieces to attack the king – the bishop is coming to g4.

20. ♖e4!



Exercise 23

Now Black does not have the strong move ... ♗d5†, but he does have another strong option.

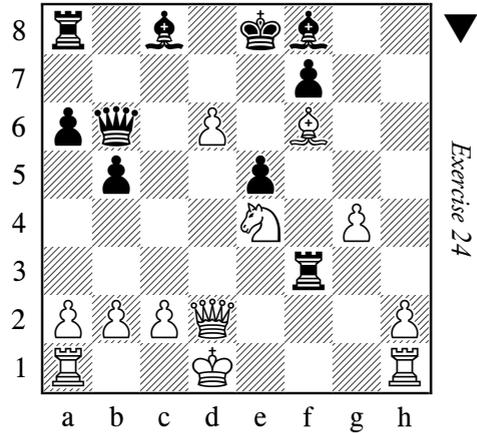
20...e5!

We have seen this idea already. The idea is to bring the bishop into play on g4. It also prevents the white queen coming to f4, while simultaneously giving the black queen access to the d4-square. We could be a bit blatant and call this another pawn sacrifice in return for dynamic potential, and we wouldn't be wrong. On the other hand, there's time for talk in chess and there's time for calculation. Concrete observations tend to overshadow abstract considerations, and this case is a good example. The text move was suggested by my intuition, but then it had to be supported by a fair deal of calculation; that's just the stage this game is at.

The natural 20... ♗b7? would allow: 21. ♗xf3 (21. ♗f4! also works.) 21... ♖xf3 22. ♗d2 White threatens d6-d7† and has turned the tables. It is instructive to note how quickly you can get egg on your face if you do not maintain the momentum of the attack. Black can hold by playing accurately, but not more.

Similarly, after 20... ♗xd6? 21. ♗xf3 ♖xf3 22. ♗d2 White has a lot of counterplay. For example: 22... ♗f4 23. ♗b4 The king on e8 is no longer comfortable on his home square!

21. ♗xf3 ♖xf3 22. ♗d2



Exercise 24

22... ♗xg4?

Objectively a mistake, but it went unnoticed during the game.

It was better to play 22... ♖f4! first: 23. ♖e1 ♗xg4† 24. ♖c1 ♗h6 Black has too many threats. 25. ♗g5 loses to 25... ♗xg5 26. ♖xg5 0–0–0!. It is instructive to note how the side that manages to castle safely is immediately winning as a result.

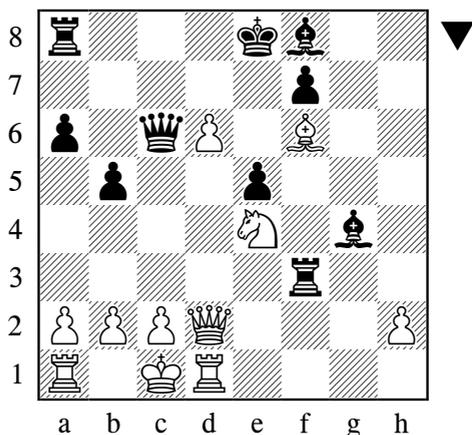
23. ♖c1 ♗c6

Now 23... ♖f4 runs into 24. ♗g5 ♖xe4 25. ♗d5, and the white king dodges all kinds of tricks (... ♗d4†, ... ♗xd6 and others) by being on c1 instead of d1.

24. ♗d1?

But White collapses anyway.

24. ♖e1 hangs on for White. It looks somewhat unpleasant to the human eye, but the engine claims the ever unhelpful 0.00.



24...Rf4

White is losing too much material. The knight on e4 is attacked twice and moving it would drop the bishop on f6, while the d1-rook is also attacked.

25. Nc5 Rxf6 26. d7+ Qd8 27. Wa5+ Kb6
28. Nb7+ Qc7

White resigned in view of 29. Wxb6+ Qxb6
30. d8=W+ Rxd8 31. Rxd8 Qh6+ and mate.

0-1

Learning Points

This game was instructive in highlighting several themes.

- Black sacrificed a pawn in the first phase of the game to gain potential for his pieces: the h-file for the rook and the e5-square for the knight. After White's reaction with 12. Qf3, 13. Nc6! and 14. e5, all hell broke loose.
- It was important to maintain momentum of the ensuing attack and to pay attention to the activity of all the attacking pieces. As before, Black needed to be careful of his opponent generating counterplay. An example was the threat to push the d6-pawn. I also liked how the rook on h3 blocked White's pawn that was supposed

to be extra and embarrassed the h1-rook, clearly highlighting the possible value of giving up a pawn just for the sake of activity.

After watching a game with kings castled on opposite sides, and then one where both kings remained in the centre, let's see one where only one side is castled; at least for the most part. As expected, the side that has already castled, is also the one holding the initiative. That's not the only theme of the game though.

We'll also see another way to sacrifice pawns in return for dynamics. White won't sacrifice the pawns to open lines per se, although that also happens as a byproduct. The main reason would be to not delay developing for a single move, trying to increase the disparity in activity between the two armies and simply abandoning any pawns the opponent threatens in the process.

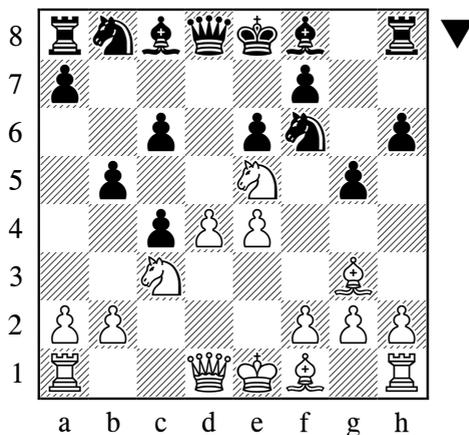
Ivan Cheparinov – Ian Nepomniachtchi

Wijk aan Zee 2008

1. d4 d5 2. c4 c6 3. Nf3 e6 4. Nc3 Nf6 5. Qg5

The critical Moscow Variation of the Slav Defence, which was very popular at the time.

5...h6 6. Qh4 dxc4 7. e4 g5 8. Qg3 b5 9. Nxe5



A sideline compared to the much more popular $9.\text{♕e2}$.

9...♕b4

A rare move.

The main move used to be $9.\text{♕b7}$, while $9.\text{h5}$ also enjoyed some popularity.

In recent years, obviously influenced by the all-knowing engines, attention has shifted towards $9.\text{♗bd7}$ $10.\text{♗xc6}$ ♖b6. It's the first time, but it won't nearly be the last in this game where we suggest that Black should return some material and try to catch up in development.

In dynamic positions where time is of the essence, returning the extra pawn is a common motif. Nevertheless, even experienced and strong grandmasters, people that have heard this advice a million times, often have a hard time letting go of the precious extra pawn.

10.♕e2!?

A provocative approach, acting as if Black's previous move did not threaten anything.

The most common reaction has been $10.\text{♗f3}$, supporting the e4-pawn and preparing ♕e2 on the next move. But I had been surprised in the opening and decided to sacrifice a pawn to muddy the waters.

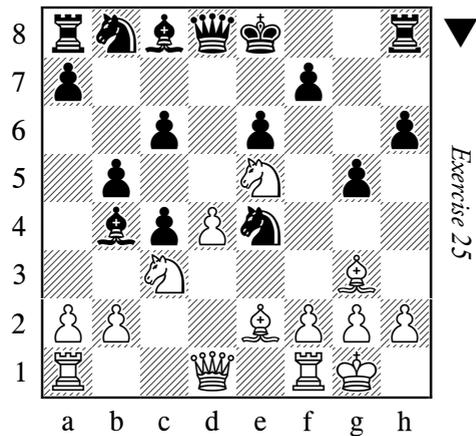
In general, contrary to most people's nature, when surprised by our opponent's opening play we shouldn't drift towards passive or materialistic approaches. Reacting in principled, attacking and dynamic fashion gives us vastly better chances to come out unscathed. Furthermore, I really like ignoring my opponent's threat in the opening and simply continuing development. Such sacrifices usually hold at least some merit, and they set a nice tone for what is about to follow, both on the chess board and psychologically.

10...♗xe4

If Black doesn't take, then what was the point of pinning the knight? Note how my previous uncompromising move narrowed down my opponent's path.

11.0-0!

The consistent follow-up to $10.\text{♕e2}$, continuing to ignore Black's threat of grabbing material.



11...♕xc3

This is not bad, but there was a much better practical option. To a human, having so many pawns on light squares and then parting with the dark-squared bishop looks weird.

$11.\text{♗xc3}?$ is the worst available option: $12.\text{bxc3}$ ♕xc3 ($12.\text{♕e7}$ $13.\text{♕h5}$ wins.) $13.\text{♕h5}$ White gets a winning attack. It's somewhat important that $13.\text{0-0}$ loses to $14.\text{♕xf7} \uparrow \text{♞xf7}$ $15.\text{♗xf7}$ ♞xf7 $16.\text{♗f3} \uparrow$, followed by ♗xc3 .

$11.\text{♗xg3}!$ was best, keeping the invaluable dark-squared bishop. After $12.\text{fxg3}$ $0-0$ the burden is on White to prove that the compensation is adequate. The best according to the engine is $13.\text{a4}$, but after $13.\text{a6}!?$ $14.\text{axb5}$ cxb5 $15.\text{♗xb5}$ Black can either go for $15.\text{♕b7}$ followed by ♗c6 , with a fine game, or even sacrifice an exchange with $15.\text{axb5}$.

In both cases, the strong dark-squared bishop ensures Black's safety.

12.bxc3 ♖xc3?

Black continues down the path of eating pawns. However, this one might prove to be a bit tough to swallow.

It is often the case that the activity of the pieces is more important than the win of a pawn.

12...♖d7!

Black wants to remove the strong knight from e5.

13.♖c2 ♖xe2!?

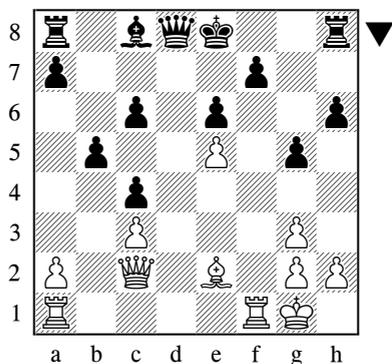
Asking some questions.

13.♖xc6? ♖b6 is not an issue for Black.

After 13.♖f3 ♖xg3 14.♖xc6 ♖b6 15.hxg3 ♖b7 16.d5 ♖xc6 17.dxc6 ♖e5 Black is completely fine.

A way to pose some problems for Black is 13.♖h5!? 0-0 14.f4, but after 14...f5! it is anyone's game.

13...♖xg3 14.fxg3! ♖xe5 15.dxe5



White has good compensation for the pawn and a kingside attack, but Black is not without chances. For example:

15...♖d7 16.♖e4 ♖b6† 17.♖h1 0-0-0 18.♖xf7 ♖e8

White has enough compensation, but Black is not worse and has an impressive queenside majority.

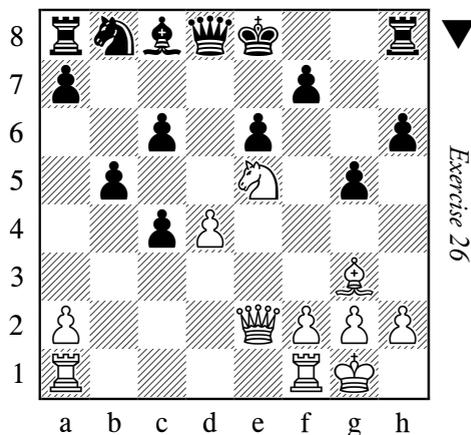
12...0-0!? is also better than the game continuation, aiming to return at least one pawn during the next few moves.

In any case, returning some material was advisable. In contrast, my young opponent decided to grab a second one; let's see how that turned out:

13.♖c2 ♖xe2†

Otherwise the bishop will land powerfully on h5.

14.♖xe2



White is now three pawns down, but his pieces are extremely active while Black's army remains undeveloped. The immediate threat is f2-f4.

14...h5?

Black prevents ♖h5 and wants to play ...h5-h4 in response to f2-f4.

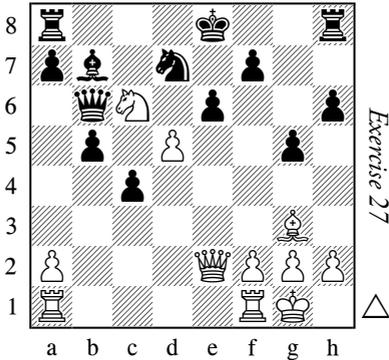
After 14...0-0? 15.f4 Black will not survive the opening of the f-file and the queen coming to h5.

The best move was again to develop with:

14...♖d7! 15.♗xc6 ♜b6 16.d5!

This is a move that the hand should immediately seek to play. White needs to open lines to exploit his lead in development.

16...♙b7



Exercise 27

But now comes a harder choice for White. This is a critical moment and precise calculation is needed.

a) The first line that needs to be examined is a capture:

17.dxe6!?

This opens the centre and carries a large threat. However, Black has a surprising retort:

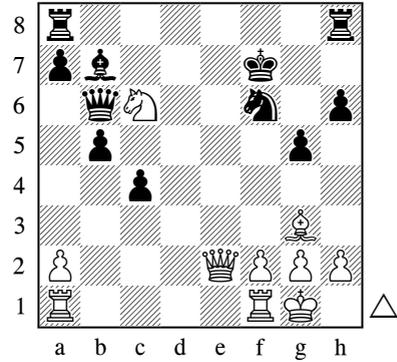
17...♗f6!

17...0-0 loses to 18.♗e7† and exd7.

17...♜xc6? is natural, but it is also losing: 18.exd7† ♔f8 (18...♗xd7 loses in many ways, the cleanest being: 19.♞ad1† ♔c8 20.♜g4† ♜e6 21.♞d4 Black is playing without the rook on a8 and without pieces that can defend the gaping holes on the dark squares. The king on c8 is not long for this world.) 19.f3 ♜xd7 20.♞ad1 This is again lost for Black. He is two pawns up, but White's bishop is much stronger than its counterpart, and the king is poorly placed on f8 or g8. White has excellent play on the

dark squares with his queen and bishop, and the rook can also enter via d6.

18.exf7† ♔xf7



19.♗e5†!

It is far from obvious that this is best, especially from afar.

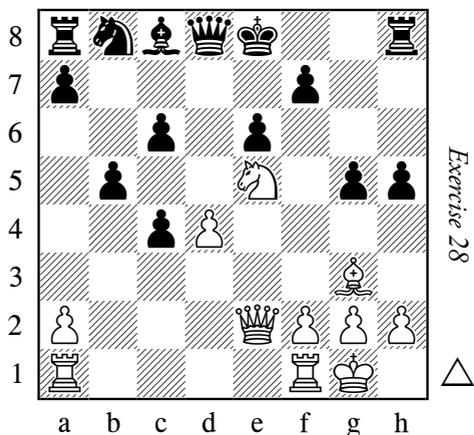
19.♜e7†?! is tempting, but it leads nowhere: 19...♔g8 20.♜e6† (After 20.♜xf6? ♜xc6 the queens come off. Even worse is 20.♗e5? ♖h7, and Black defends everything.) 20...♔g7 21.♙e5 ♜xc6 22.♙xf6† ♔g6 23.♜xc6 ♙xc6 24.♙xh8 ♖xh8 Black's chances are no worse in this endgame.

19...♔g8!

Another strong move, steering clear of the dark squares. The h8-rook can be activated next along the seventh rank, starting with ...♞h7. This still looks more pleasant to play with White, but Black's position isn't without merit. (After 19...♔g7? 20.a4 a6 21.♜b2 White combines threats on both sides of the board. Black has weaknesses on c4, and on the a1-h8 diagonal where his king is vulnerable. It would be difficult for Black to hold such a position in practice.)

b) In light of the above, White's best chance is to keep the tension with 17.♞ad1!, threatening a much-improved version of dxe6. The key line to calculate would be: 17...♙xc6 18.dxc6 ♜xc6 19.♞d6 ♜b7 20.f4! 0-0 21.fxg5 Black is in serious trouble.

Let's return to the game continuation of 14...h5?. Black has just played another pawn move when all his pieces have not moved. Can you find the way to punish him?



Exercise 28

15.f4!

This is clearly in the spirit of the position.

15...f5

Stopping f4-f5.

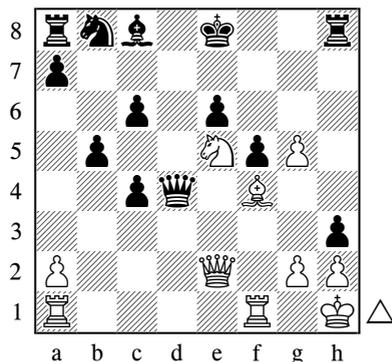
When playing his previous move, White needed to have calculated: 15...h4 16.gxf7! (After 16.fxg5?! hxg3 Black is threatening to take on d4 and then h2.) 16...xf7 17.fxg5† ♖g8 18.g5 White wins. If 18...xg5, then 19.f4 and g4.

Also hopeless for Black is 15...xd4† 16.gf2 ♖xf4 17.gc5.

And the same goes for 15...g4 16.f5.

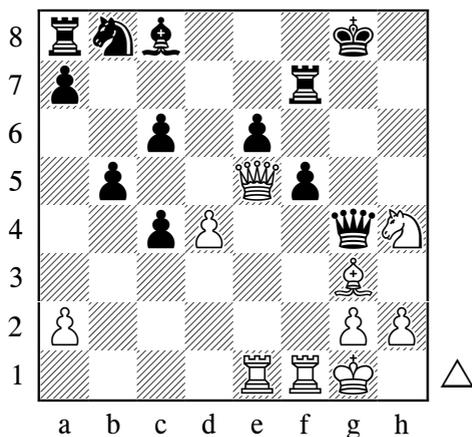
16.fxg5 ♖xg5

Another line I calculated was: 16...h4 17.gf4 ♖xd4† 18.gh1 h3



Black is hoping to open up my king to exchange queens. 19.g6! White frees the g5-square for his bishop. 19...e4 20.xe4 fxe4 21.g5 White is winning. A single check would be checkmate, and there are many ways to threaten that check.

17.ae1 h4 18.f3 ♖g4 19.e5 0-0 20.xh4 f7



White is winning. None of Black's queenside pieces are taking part.

21.d6 d7 22.xe6 d8 23.e8 c3 24.g6 e6 25.e7† xe7 26.xa8 ♖g5 27.d8 ♖g7 28.e5 ♖f7 29.d6 1-0

Learning Points

- The key moments in the game were Black's 11th and 12th moves. He continued to grab pawns rather than develop his pieces. This gave White a strong initiative, as all my pieces were active and able to enter the attack, whereas Black's pieces remained undeveloped.
- I believe it is also instructive that since White had already chosen a dynamic, sacrificial approach in the opening, he did not back down and start being materialistic halfway through the complications. Once the stage is set, rarely should we change tack. The sacrifice of the second and third pawns was the only principled way to continue.
- An important thing, which we mentioned repeatedly, was that Black needed not to grab additional pawns, or even to even hold on to the one extra pawn captured on c4; but rather to return the extra material and catch up in development as soon as possible. That is the most common defensive approach in such situations.
- More than anything else, I think this game was another good illustration of what I tried to briefly explain at the start of this chapter: often, open lines for our pieces are worth more than a pawn. Furthermore, it illustrated something else: time, as in tempos, is also often worth more than a pawn.

Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated that sacrificing a pawn to increase the dynamic potential of one's army is not only a possibility, but a common theme that can crop up in a multitude of ways. It should be considered an essential tool in the arsenal of all ambitious improving players.

If the question arises, "What is more important: material, or activity?" then our answer should be, "it depends." However, if we're to err on one side or the other, we should always choose to err on the side of activity, and not the other way round, as most humans are naturally inclined. Material is the only quantifiable aspect of our game, and many tend to gravitate towards it, unable to accurately measure anything else. However, the game itself is ruthless, and tends to reward those able to embrace uncertainty and prefer activity over everything else. The more active side usually gets the easier game, and that tends to work out well in a practical setting.