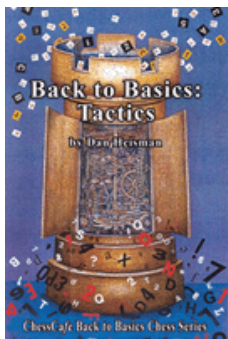




COLUMNISTS

Novice Nook

Dan Heisman



CHESSTHEATRE

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Anders' Game

Quote of the Month: *Ten years from now when you are a much better player, you will look back and think, "I learned a lot from this game!"*

The classic science fiction novel *Ender's Game* by Orson Scott Card was required reading at Lower Merion High School (whose graduates include my son and some guy named Kobe Bryant). I had already been an admirer of the book, so when a student named Anders played a highly instructional tournament game, I could not resist presenting "Anders' Game."

One of the best sources of chess knowledge is annotated master games (see [The Four Homeworks](#)). These games provide insight and instruction on the proper way to play common chess positions (planning, strategy, tactics ... everything). However, it is sometimes just as instructive – or more – to play over annotated *amateur* games to see what the players did incorrectly, why those moves were incorrect, what were better moves, and what the opposition should have done to punish the mistakes.

While there are many interesting and informative aspects to this game, I would like to emphasize the analysis and evaluation of the very instructive position preceding White's twenty-fifth move.

Anders (1250) – Opponent (1850)
 Sicilian Grand Prix Attack

1.e4 c5 2.Nc3 d6 3.f4

This is the characteristic move of the Grand Prix, a line that can generate a nasty kingside attack if Black is not careful.

3...Nc6 4.Nf3 g6

The fianchetto of the king's bishop is Black's main line.

5.Bc4

White usually plays Bb5 in this variation. However, Bc4 becomes attractive after Black commits to an early ...d6, as he did here. With the pawn still on d7, the possibility of Black playing d7-d5 in one move and attacking the bishop minimizes the strength of the c4-square.

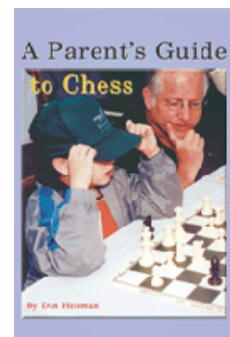
5...e6 6.0-0 a6 7.a4(!)

White should consider this move in reaction to an early ...a6 or ...c6, especially when there is a bishop on c4. By preventing ...b5, White fights for space on the queenside and prevents harassment of the bishop, at the slight cost of weakening the square b4.

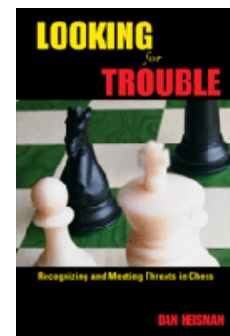
7...Bg7 8.Qe1

The standard attack against Black's fianchetto in similar positions (such as the f4-variation of the Najdorf Sicilian) is to play Qd1-e1-h4 and then f5, Bh6, and Ng5, followed by opening the f-file and a possible sacrifice on f6. If Black allows this attack unfettered, it often leads to checkmate!

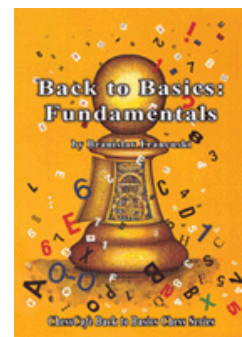
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8...Qb6

A little unusual. Black's queen is aggressively placed, but not necessarily well posted.

9.Kh1

Cautious and prudent. *It's normally a good idea to not allow future tactics* (see [The Seeds of Tactical Destruction](#)). Moving the king is prudent to prevent future discoveries, so Kh1 at some point sooner rather than later is wise. Of course, this principle is only meant to aid humans; a computer can calculate perfectly when such a possibility is dangerous! The program [Rybka](#), which never loses material to simple tactics, prefers the thematic 9.f5 or 9.d3 with a small advantage for White. For the next few moves both players play very reasonably, quickly developing their forces.

9...Nd4 10.Nxd4

The powerful knight is traded off, but Black obtains the semi-open c-file and a pawn on d4 that can become annoying, and White can no longer pull off the attacks that require Nf3-g5.

10...cxd4 11.Ne2 Ne7 12.d3 0-0 13.Ng3 Bd7 14.a5 Qc7 15.Bd2 Bc6

Here Rybka suggests Black should have played the break 15...d5 (see [Break Moves: Opening Lines to Create Mobility](#)).

16.Bb3

The thematic 16.f5 is probably better and certainly more aggressive. For the next few moves both sides continue the slow jockeying for position.

16...Rae8 17.Qf2 Bd7 18.Rfe1 Nc6 19.f5

Finally.

19...Qd8 20.Rf1 Be5?

This is the first major slip for either player. Better was 20...Qf6 or 20...Bf6. This mistake is yet another example that shows *if you just hang in, playing safely and following basic principles, you can often get winning games*, even against players 600 points higher!

21.Bh6 Bg7

It may look like this move is forced, but weaker players overrate the need to save the exchange in such positions. Rybka rates 21...Bg7 as best, but only by less than 0.1 pawns!

22.Qd2

Rybka strongly prefers 22.Bxg7 Kxg7 23.f6+ Kh8 24.Qh6 Rg8 (a forced, or "only move") 25.Qg5! with a big kingside attack. Now Black should repair some of his dark-square damage with 22...f6, leaving White with a pleasant position. Instead, Black makes a big – and very instructive – mistake.

22...Qh4?

The queen is "off-sides." In my teachings I have found that weaker players are very inconsistent in their tactical vision: they spot certain types of basic pins and double attacks easiest, while often failing to see that pinned pieces are not really guarding squares, trapped piece patterns, and removal of the guard (see [The Underrated Removal of the Guard](#)).

23.Bg5!

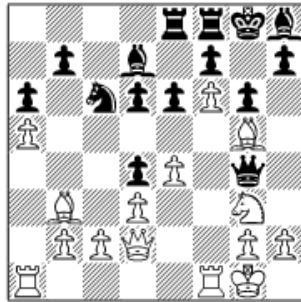
This move is not difficult, but it is nevertheless extremely strong. Not only is the queen in trouble, but so are the black dark-squared bishop and, consequently, his king! With best play, White should be winning.

23...Qg4 24.f6

Correctly entombing the bishop.

24...Bh8

This is a very instructive position. It is hard to believe that White is the player 600 points lower! Before proceeding, examine the diagram and answer the following questions:



A) What are *all* the things White is trying to do?

B) What move would you make as white?

This position presents an interesting test of many key analysis and evaluation issues, including the comparison of instantaneous versus average piece value. I presented those two questions to

over a dozen intermediate students and the overwhelming majority picked the move played in the game, the “obvious” 25.Bh6.

Yet Rybka rates 25.Bh6 as only the twelfth best move! Why?

The key is trapped pieces. Black has two pieces, the rook on f8 and the king, with no legal moves, and two other pieces, the bishop on h8 and the queen, which have no *safe* moves. That means that any move that safely attacks one of those four pieces can win it!

Let’s first consider the bishop on h8. The insightful question to ask is “How can Black *ever* get that piece into the game?” The answer is that if White can just guard the pawn on f6, the bishop is shut out, and White is effectively up a piece and should win the game easily. For example, if queens come off the board, then White should try to prevent ...h6 and ...g5 (effectively preventing ...Kh7 and ...Kg6 to attack the f-pawn) and, if necessary, guard the pawn with rooks along the f-file. After that, it should be relatively easy for White to guard the f6-pawn at least as many times as it can be attacked. That means that even a “simple” move like 25.Qf4, forcing a queen trade, should result in a winning endgame.

But why just play 25.Bh6 and win the exchange (a rook for a bishop or knight)? Using “Reinfeld” values, a rook is worth two pawns more than a bishop and, even using the more accurate “Kaufman” values (see [A Counting Primer](#)), the exchange is still worth almost two pawns, say 1¾. However, using these average values, White would also have to part with the bishop-pair, worth about ½ pawn, so his net gain is only 1¼ pawns, which should still be enough to win the game, especially since the bishop on h8 is still trapped (see [The Margin for Error](#)).

However, average values don’t tell the true story in many positions and in this one especially. Note that one of the key jailers of the h8-bishop is its counterpart on g5, so giving up the exchange makes it much easier for Black to free that trapped piece. More importantly, Black is very weak on the dark squares around his king, and for White to trade his dark-squared bishop without at least getting Black’s dark-squared bishop would negate much of that weakness. Moreover, the rook on f8 is currently without a move, so trading the active bishop for the stagnant rook just looks wrong

to experienced eyes. Finally, let's return to the endangered black queen: one of the primary pieces trapping her majesty is also the g5-bishop, so the win of the exchange will also make the queen much safer. That's quite a bit of evidence in favor of not trading the g5-bishop for the f8-rook – and keep in mind that Rybka does not fully understand the trapped bishop on h8 and will undervalue moves that keep it trapped. All this instructively argues against the “natural” Bh6.

This is one of those positions where the famous and fundamental Lasker Principle, *when you see a good move, look for a better one*, strongly applies. For White to settle for 25.Qf4 to trade queens and win the endgame would not be criminal, but it would be vastly underselling the position. For White to just quickly play 25.Bh6 would be almost as bad. Having played “trapped bishop” positions before, I actually rejected 25.Bh6 faster than I rejected 25.Qf4. While it would be nice to play to checkmate the black king, my experience told me this, too, would be an unlikely plan.

So the main target becomes the queen and the secondary one keeping the bishop trapped on h8.

The black queen has no moves, so any move that attacks it is potentially winning. Candidates such as 25.Rf4 and 25.h3 immediately spring to mind, but both create avenues for escape: 25.Rf4?? Qxg5, and 25.h3?? Qxg3 26.Rf3 Qe5 both lose for White. But the idea is still good! Assuming you have time on your clock, then, if you wish to become a good analyst, you can't give up. Ask yourself a couple of questions:

- Can I change/reverse the move order?
- What other pieces can attack the queen on g4?

Both of these have intriguing answers.

Instead of 25.Rf4, perhaps 25.Bh6 works after all(!), but not to win the exchange – to threaten 26.Rh4. Or, instead of 25.h3? Qxg3 26.Rf3 Qe5, then 25.Rf3, threatening 26.h3, looks promising!

What other piece can attack g4? Why, the bishop on b3 – it travels on the white squares. Deductive logic leads us to understand that 25.c3 or 25.c4, threatening 26.Bd1, must therefore be investigated (see [Bootstrapping Analysis Skills](#)).

Any of these ideas might win the queen. How do you choose? *After listing all the options, start with your opinion of the most promising.* Let's assume that is 25.Rf3, threatening 26.h3. Don't stop now: ask yourself “What can Black do now?”

After 25.Rf3, clearly 25...e5 does nothing about 26.h3, so that leaves 25...Ne5, hitting the rook. Is that enough to give up? No – because the risk is still greater than the reward (you can give up the exchange and still trap a queen for a rook – that would win a queen and a knight for two rooks). If you do give up, that would be a quiescence error (see [Quiescence Errors](#)). After 25.Rf3 Ne5 26.Raf1, to replace rooks guarding g3, 26...Nxf3 27.Rxf3, Black, now ahead the exchange, has a new resource: 27...h6, so that if 28.h3?? Qxg5 wins. At this point you can start looking at other moves, or kudos to you if you have the time and analytical capability to find 27...h6 28.Bxh6 Qh4 29.Bg5 Qh7 30.Rf4, when the unstoppable threat of 31.Rh4 wins!

Let's look at 25.c3. If Black does nothing, then 26.Bd1 traps the queen, and inserting 25...dxc3 26.bxc3 doesn't change anything (26.Qxc3?? Qxg5). So Black would have to play 25...e5, to answer 26.Bd1 with Qe6. However, this now triggers two ideas:

First, since ...e5 was the escape square in the 25.h3-line, maybe 26.h3 works now: 25.c3 e5 26.h3 Qxg3 27.Rf3 traps the queen, since e5 is no

longer available. It is true that Black gets a rook, knight and pawn for the queen after 27...Qxf3 28.gxf3 Bxh3, yet not only is White a little ahead in material, but the bishop is still trapped on h8.

The other idea is even stronger. As Chuck Grau pointed out (and was confirmed by Rybka), why not just sacrifice a knight to prevent the queen from escaping to e6? So 25.c3 e5 26.Nf5! gxf5 (or 26...Bxf5) 27.Bd1 and the queen is trapped! As it turns out, this is just as good as or better than 25.Rf3, because both eventually trap the queen.

As stated in many previous *Novice Nooks*, unless you are discussing very highly rated players, *the better the analyst you are, the better player you are* (see [Improving Analysis Skills](#)). Chess knowledge has less to do with your chess strength, although obviously there is a positive correlation. If you can analyze a position like the one after 24...Bh8 and find one of the eleven moves better than 25.Bh6 – especially one that correctly traps the black queen – then you are doing a good job of analysis, and you are probably either a pretty good player or on your way to becoming one. Of course, if you play fast and miss all this analysis, then no matter what your capable of, you are not playing up to it.

In the game, White, like many of my students who were shown this position as a puzzle, decided to win the exchange:

25.Bh6 g5?

In desperation, Black pitches another pawn. If you followed the above analysis, then you can deduce that White should now play 26.Bxg5. Also, since 26.Bxf8 on the average “only” wins about 1¼ pawn, then it makes sense that 26.Bxg5 would win comparatively more, given the instantaneous, and not average value of the pieces, as discussed above.

26.Bxf8? Kxf8



White to play

We have reached another critical phase of the game. White thinks he is winning easily and therefore just needs to trade off pieces (but not necessarily pawns; see [Trading Pawns When Ahead](#)). But if you are only ahead 1¼ pawn and it takes 1 pawn on the average to win, then [The Margin for Error](#) is only a quarter of a pawn, so “bad” trades of otherwise

equally valued pieces can easily throw away the win. The key is whether White can continue to trap the bishop on h8. If he can, the win will be easy. If not, hold onto your hats!

27.Qe2 Ne5 28.Qxg4

Trading queens is helpful, but here it brings another attacker onto the key f6-square. Rybka suggests 28.Qf2!, with the possible continuation 28...Nc6 29.Ba4 e5 30.Nf5 and a big advantage.

28...Nxc4 29.Nh5 Ne3 30.Rf2

White’s lead is evaporating and the thin margin for error makes the win problematic. Rybka rates the difficult-to-find 30.Rfc1 as most accurate.

30...Rc8 31.Re2 Ng4 32.Ba4

32.Rf1 to hold onto the f6-pawn loses the a5-pawn to 32...Rc5, but still may be worth considering. But now the dark-squared bishop is let loose and, amazingly, it turns from a goat into a star!

32...Bxa4 33.Rxa4 Nxf6 34.Nxf6 Bxf6 35.Rc4 Rc5 36.Rxc5 dxc5

White continues to trade, undoubling Black's pawn. The good news is that White is still much better, on the verge of winning. The bad news is that he now has to find the right plan with time trouble approaching.

37.Re1!

White correctly looks ahead and sees that the rook will be needed to guard the pawn on a5. If you don't do this and wait until Black attacks your pawn and you can't guard it – that is “Hope Chess.”

37...Bd8 38.Ra1 Ke7 39.Ra4

A key moment. Here 39.c3 or 39.g4 are also good. White has to be careful not to waffle plans between activating the king and using his pawns to open lines for his rook.

39...Kd6 40.Kg1 Kc6 41.Kf2?

This move seems to follow logically after 40.Kg1. But the imminent attack upon the rook leads one to look for new targets, and so much better is 41.g4! making the f-pawn backward, so that 41...Kb5 can be met by 42.Ra1! and 43.Rf1. This rook reactivation maneuver, especially after having carefully placed the rook to the a-file, is easy for even strong players to miss.

41...Kb5 42.Ra2

42.Ra1 is better as the rook has more mobility and flexibility on the first rank.

42...Bxa5

Black wins back his pawn with approximately equal chances. At this point some additional instructive play occurs, but it would be unfair to criticize the players who, understandably, were both in time trouble. Black misses some wins and White misses some chances for counterplay before White exceeds the time control.

43.Kf3 h5 44.Ra1 Bc7 45.h3 Be5 46.Rf1 a5 47.Ke2 f6 48.Ra1 Kb4 49.Rf1 b5 50.Ra1 c4 51.Ra2 a4 52.Kd1 cxd3 53.Kd2 Kc4 54.Ra3 Bf4+ 55.Kd1 d2 56.b3+ Kb4 57.Ra2 axb3 58.Rb2 Ka5 59.cxb3 d3 60.Ra2+ Kb4 0-1

White overstepped the time limit. 61.Ra6 would give White some practical chances and would have required accurate play from Black to win.

Ironically, Black's dark-squared bishop, trapped and miserable in the first diagram, unnecessarily freed becomes the dashing hero of the endgame! After I reviewed this game with Anders, I said, “Ten years from now you will be a much better player and you will look back on this game and think ‘This is one of those games where I learned a lot!’” Hopefully the reader will, too.

Fun Puzzle (Dan original)



White to play

Which side would you rather have and why?

The obvious try 1.Qh6, loses the queen to 1...Ng4+ (either) 2.hxg4 Nxg4+ 3.K-



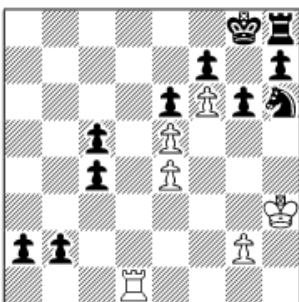
moves Nxh6.

The tricky try 1.Rd1!? draws, but Black (and White) need to find the fantastic line: 1.Rd1!? Ng4+ (either) 2.hxg4 Nxg4+ 3.Qxg4 (3.Kg3 h5!) h5! 4.Rd8 + Kh7 5.Rxh8+ Kxh8 6.Qd1 b1Q! (6...a1Q? won't work, as will be seen) 7.Qd8+ Kh7 8.Qf8 Qh1+! 9.Kg3! (If 9.Kxh1? a1Q+ 10.Kh2 Qxe5+ and 11...Qxf6 wins, which is why 6...a1Q does not work!) 9...Qe1+ draw!

Other first White moves lose, e.g. 1.Qxe3 b1Q 2.Rxb1 axb1Q 3.Qh6 Qh1 + 4.Kg3 Nxe4+ and Black wins.

So it seems that Black is better if White does not find the draw, but suppose we combine the first two ideas.

The answer is **1.Qh6! Ng4+ (either) 2.hxg4 Nxg4+ 3.Kh3! Nxh6** 3...Nf2 + 4.Kh4 g5+ 5.Kh5 and mate next move. **4.Rd1** with unstoppable back-rank mate!



Black to play

If White had played 3.Kg3?, then after 3...Nxh6, 4.Rd1 Nf5+ would win for Black. If there was not a rook on h8, Black would win with 4...Kh8! 5.Rd8+ Ng8. Finding the solution this way is a good example of switching or combining the move-order: since 1.Rd1 did not work, it makes sense to try 1. Qh6 first and then Rd1 later (and vice versa, had that been the case).

This puzzle has received very high marks for both fun and instructive play from the players who have seen it.

Dan welcomes readers' questions; he is a full-time instructor on the ICC as tutor.

[Yes, I have a question for Dan!](#)
