



COLUMNISTS

Dutch Treat

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Market Forces

Chessplayers tend to laugh about medieval church fathers who used to condemn chess, but they don't take into account that chess at that time was not our virtuous game. As it was played in the fairs and markets by professional tricksters, it often resembled the games that are nowadays played on the streets, where innocent bystanders are lured into the illusion that they can guess under which cup the quickly moved ball is hidden.

Murray, in *A History of Chess*, quotes a Latin manuscript from the second half of the fifteenth century (one of the manuscripts from the *Civis Bononiae* group) that may well be called a manual for cheaters. These cheaters often did not start the game from the initial position, but from constructed positions that we would call studies or problems. The guileless opponent was allowed to choose what we would call "white" or "black".

Murray's translation from the Latin goes: "My master used to say that in the first *partitum* we ought to play indifferently and to lose, and that similarly we ought to lose sometimes in the course of play, because in this way men are induced to play.

But in order that you may play cautiously and avoid losing, you should take care that you know the secrets of the gamester, about which many tricks are given.



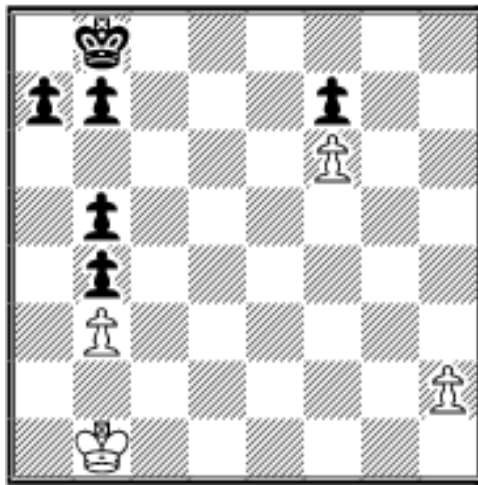
The first is: it is certain that a good problem ought not to be what it appears, but the opposite. Therefore you should place that side of the chessmen which has the worse, but looks to have the advantage, at your side of the board. For then, if your opponent does not know the problem, he will take the board round and take the side that looks so much better. However, many players do not do so, so it is not to be reckoned as a certainty.

Other tricks are mentioned, such as pretending at the start that you do not know the problem well and then later, if the opponent has taken the strong side and threatens to win, "correcting" it. The final piece of advice is:

There is also another trick which is called the *golden* one which is worked in such a way that it compels the gamester to take the worse side. It is done thus. You know that a good problem ought not to be what it appears, but its opposite. You say that the side that appears to have the better is to lay a double stake. For unless he plays carefully, in this way alone he is compelled, before you lay your wager, to say which side he wishes. For you will ask him whether he wishes you to stake double or single, and in this way you will learn which side he is choosing. Thus do some use this trick.

And thus well prepared the professionals of the late Middle Ages found their victims at the European fairs and markets and apparently until very recently the same thing happened in China.

This old tradition was revived last year during a tournament in Wales by the Englishman Simon Buckley, as reported in the September issue of *Chess Monthly* by his victim Chris Duncan.



Buckley said that he would win this position as White and draw as Black. Duncan was allowed to choose his color, on the condition that a draw would be equivalent to a win by Black.

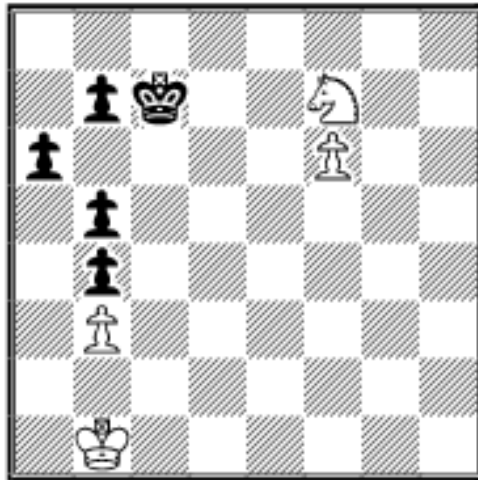
Duncan chose White, for as he confessed in *Chess Monthly* he was still under the impression that White would make a Queen and win, thereby proving a naïvity unspoiled by a hundred years of endgame studies.

So their first game went **1. h2-h4 Kb8-c7 2. h4-h5 Kc7-b6 3. h5-h6 Kb6-a5** At this moment Duncan realized that promoting to a Queen would fail, because Black would construct a stalemate. **4. h6-h7 a7-a6 5. h7-h8N** Not 5. h8Q because of 5...b6 and White cannot prevent stalemate. Now however 5...b6 would be refuted by 6. Ng6 fxg6 7. f7 g5 8. f8N (here 8. f8Q would be good enough also) 8...g4 9. Ne6 g3 10. Nc5 g2 11. Nb7 mate. **5...Ka5-b6** But this was

another disappointment for Duncan. Now what?

In the first game he played, apparently still entranced by the variation he had just calculated, 6. Ng6, but this was no good, for of course Black didn't play 6...fxg6? but 6...Kc7 and after 7. Ne5 Kd6 8. Nxf7+ Ke6 9. Nd8+ Kxf6 10. Nxb7 Ke5 a draw was agreed soon, so that Buckley had "won" his first game as Black.

Duncan did slightly better the second time with **6. Nh8xf7 Kb6-c7**



Now Duncan proceeded with 7. Ne5 Kd6 8. f7 Ke7 9. Kc2 a5 10. Kd2 Kf8 1. Kd3 a4 12. Ke4 a3 13. Kf5 Ke7 14. Kg6 a2 15. Kg7 a1Q 16. f8Q+ Ke6 17. Qe8+ Kf5 18. Qh5+ Ke6.

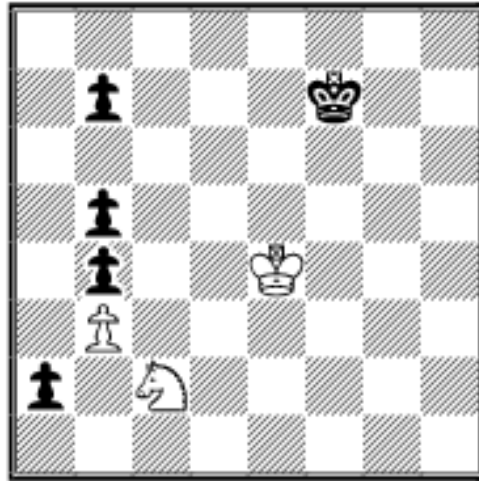
The extra Knight is not enough to win. Another draw, the score 2-0 for Buckley.

After these lessons Duncan thought he had learned how to draw as Black, but he was disappointed again. The position in the second diagram was reached again, but now Buckley was White and he showed the right way:

7. Nf7-g5 Kc7-d7 8. f6-f7 Kd7-e7 9. Kb1-c2 a6-a5 10. Kc2-d3 a5-a4 11. Kd3-e4 This position lead to a loss for Duncan three times:

A 11...axb3 12. Kd3 Kf8 13. Kd2 Ke7 14. Kc1 Kf8 15. Kb2 and White wins. Score 3-0 for Buckley.

B 11...a3 12. Ne6 Kxf7 13. Nd4 a2 14. Nc2 (but here we need a diagram for later use)



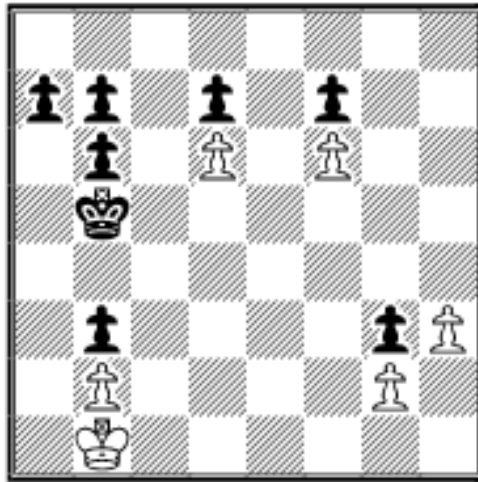
14...Ke6 15. Kd3 Kd5 16. Na1 Kc5 17. Kc2 Kd4 18. Kb2 Kd3 19. Kxa2 Kc3 20. Kb1 Kd2 21. Kb2 Kd3 22. Nc2 and White wins. Score 4-0

C 11...Kf8 12. Kf5 a3 13. Kf6 a2 14. Ne6 mate. Score 5-0.

After this Duncan had had enough, otherwise he could have tried 11...b6 and force White to triangulate with 12. Ke3 Kf8 13. Kd3 Ke7 14. Ke4, when Black can again choose from the three alternatives that hadn't saved him earlier.

So, is White winning from the first diagram? Duncan seemed to think so, though he wrote also that his torturer had told him that there were still some nuances left undiscovered. I too thought it was a win, after reading his article, but see later.

Was it an endgame study known in literature? Harold van der Heyden's *Endgame Study Database 2000* did not give it, but there were some studies that were quite similar. For instance this one:



H. Geiger 1920. White wins with 1. h4 a5 2. h5 Ka4 3. h6 b5 4. h7 b4 5. h8N b5 6. Ng6 fxg6 7. f7 g5 8. f8N g4 9. Ne6 dxe6 10. d7 e5 11. d8N e4 12. Nb7 e3 13. Nc5 mate.

But then, after I had written a newspaper column about this intriguing endgame, Tim Krabbé, who had read it, told me sternly: “Apparently you don't subscribe to EBUR. You really should.”

EBUR, anagrammatically named after the many-sided Alexander Rueb, expert on endgame studies, founder of FIDE and collector of chess books, is an excellent Dutch magazine devoted to endgame studies and indeed I should have been a subscriber.

It turned out that an article had appeared in EBUR by Bert van der Marel, *Das Schwarze Kabinet* (the black cabinet), which had treated the study or pseudo-study of the first diagram in great detail. The position had been shown to Van der Marel by the Latvian player Janes Daudvarsis.

According to Van der Marel the position in the first diagram is a draw after all and I think his analysis is right.

From the third diagram, Van der Marel does not play 14...Ke6 (which he gives a question mark) but 14...Kf6, and then his analysis goes 15. Na1 Kg5 16. Kf3 (or 16. Kd5 Kf4 17. Kc5 Ke3 18. Kxb5 Kd2 19.

Kxb4 b5 20. Ka3 draw) Kh4 17. Kg2 Kg4 18. Kf2 Kh3 19. Ke2 Kg2 20. Pc2 Kg3 21. Kd2 Kf2 22. Na1 Kf3 23. Kc1 Ke2 24. Nc2 Kd3 25. Kb2 Kd2 (if in this position it would be Black's move he would draw with b6) 26. Na1 Kd1 27. Nc2 Kd2 28. Nxb4 a1Q+ 29. Kxa1 Kc3 draw.

So it seems that the position in the first diagram is a draw after all. As a modern study, "White to play and win," it would therefore be incorrect, but for the medieval trickery of professional gamesters it would surely be a perfect gem.

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