



C O L U M N I S T S

The Kibitzer

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The Not-so-fine Art of Game Annotation

In my main work as a chess editor and writer, I am frequently required to write or edit notes to chess games played by other people. This column is about my approach to game annotations, and I hope it will be of interest to other people who have to write annotations, as well as, of course, to ordinary readers.

My current main project is an anthology of correspondence games, entitled *64 Great Chess Games* and to be published by *Chess Mail* in (I hope) August. Working on this book, on and off, for nearly two years — and intensively in the past few months — has forced me to reflect on what an annotator's objectives and methods should be. There is clearly no simple answer to this question.

What is the target market: home, English-speaking world or international? An international market — aimed in part at readers for whom English may be their third language — requires shorter and clearer sentences, a more limited vocabulary and usually symbolic assessments (standard Informator symbols).

What is the playing strength or level of chess knowledge of the readership: beginner, average club player, master or advanced tournament or correspondence player? It is hard to aim for all these targets in one set of notes, because statements and some variations which a master will see as obvious or trivial may be required explanations for the novice.

Another factor — which especially determines how much space is available and hence the detail of the notes — is what publication will carry the notes: newspaper column, chess magazine article, Internet site or printed book? Or are the notes just going into a database where they will ultimately be played through on a computer, using ChessBase or a similar program?

The answers to all these questions do not merely have an impact of the type of notes to be written, in terms of the length, amount of detail and the level at which comments are pitched. They often actually determine what type of game is chosen in the first place. For example, newspaper columnists like miniatures because of their limited word count. Annotations for 'Informator'-style languageless publications favour games with lots of meaty calculated

variations rather than strategically-dominated games which are harder to explain in symbolic form.

In the case of books intended for ordinary club players, casual players, children and novices, a game with a clear strategic line and a few straightforward short tactical points is preferred; awkward defensive complication options usually must be glossed over so that the message can be delivered without confusing the reader.

Generally speaking, books for very young players and adult beginners are a different species, and writing good ones requires experience of coaching such players so that the writer can select material accordingly and gauge the level at which to pitch his explanation. When browsing in a bookshop, a player can usually decide for himself whether a book is too advanced or too elementary before deciding whether to purchase.

The quantity of books aimed solely at really advanced players is not that great; the Chess Informator series is perhaps the most obvious exception since it can count on a high percentage of strong players buying it, although players below 1800 strength (my estimate) can probably derive little benefit from these often very detailed languageless annotations.

The market determines the level at which the majority of books are pitched. There are just far more active players, interested in buying books, between (about) 1500-2300 than there are beginners (who may not buy books at all) or masters (for whom the majority of books published have at best a value as reference works for a short period). Also, openings monographs are the most popular class of book but they have a short shelf-life, at least for masters and advanced correspondence players who need to keep up with the cutting edge of theory.

Annotations intended for Internet sites raise other issues. Will the reader be able to play through the game on-screen or not, with a board that changes depending where you click — normally using a javascript dynamic HTML page or java applet? If so, are variations supported or is it only the actual game line that can be viewed onscreen? Writing annotations for websites which just present the game with plain text and a few diagrams generally means avoiding too many complicated variations, whereas a master annotating for the CD-ROM based ChessBase Magazine (for example) can make his notes as complicated as he wishes because all the variations can be followed on-screen.

Another issue affecting notes for books, magazines and websites is how much detail to give on the opening phase of the game? When a game has been decided by an opening novelty, it seems to me important to show what the main alternatives were at the players' disposal, at least to illustrate what line of play used to be thought best before the novelty. Sometimes, however, I see

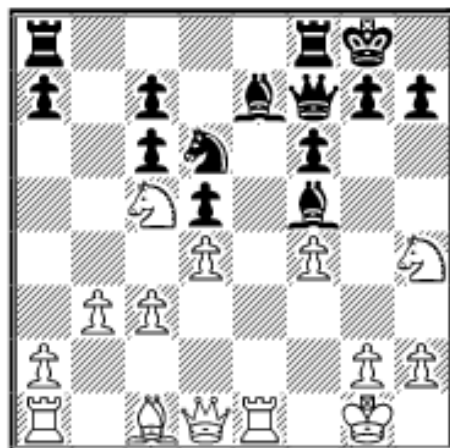
annotations that basically consist of chunks of other games and saying little or nothing about the actual game in question at all. It was one of the faults of the old *Correspondence Chess Yearbook* series that many of the annotations were of this type, although some did analyse games properly.

The style of annotations preferred by writers (and presumably by readers) has apparently changed over time. In the more leisurely era before the 1914-18 war, it seems that the gentlemanly classes who then constituted the majority of chess players liked a verbose style of writing notes. Lengthy prose explanations of what was going on in a game would be expounded but with relatively few concrete variations to justify those opinions. Maybe the annotators thought their readers would not be able to carry long variations in their heads and would not want to be moving the pieces around and then having to re-set the board.

It was not only that, however. The annotator would state opinions as fact without feeling the need to provide variations in support of those opinion, the way that a 21st century chess writer would do. While trying to select a few games for my book from before the 1930s, I came across several examples of contemporary notes that were just plain wrong.

Here is an example. Emil Kemeny was a Hungarian who came to the USA around the end of the 19th century and he published annotations to many American games of the period. One was the game J.L.McCutcheon-H.Helms from the Continental correspondence tourney that began in 1894. The opening moves, with Kemeny's comments, were as follows.

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Nf6 4 0-0 Nxe4 5 d4 Nd6 ("Now generally approved. Formerly 5....Be7 was preferred.") 6.Bxc6 bxc6 ("Dr. Tarrasch has played here 6....dxc6 but the text move leads to a more interesting game.") 7 Nxe5 Be7 8 f4 0-0 9 Nd2 Nf5 10 Ndf3 f6 11 Nd3 d5 12 Re1 Qe8 13 Nc5 Qf7 14 b3 Nd6 15 c3 Bf5 16 Nh4



16...Rae8

Here Kemeny's comment was "Initiating a remarkably fine combination." I think what he meant was that this was a (poor) move giving White the opportunity for a combination, but actually the move is just a blunder in my view and anyway there is no 'combination' as that term would nowadays be understood.

Kemeny fails to mention any alternative; 16...Nxb5 17 Nxf5 Bxc5 leads to a complicated position where Black

probably stands better after either 18 Qd3 or 18 dxc5.

The game continued 17 Nxf5 Nxf5.

Again Kemeny fails to comment. Black already stands worse anyway but 17...Nxb5 might have been a better chance, White possibly continuing 18 Ne6.

Now McCutcheon played 18 Nd7!? and eventually won. However, 18 Nxb7 simply wins a pawn. It is questionable whether White's line is really sound. So in the space of two moves each by Black and White, the game has gone from somewhat favourable to Black to totally won for White and back to only slightly favourable to White, and the original annotator has completely missed the point! If I had been Kemeny, I would have chosen some other game to write about as this one is just too full of mistakes.

In the last 20-30 years annotations, at least in books and magazines intended for strong players, have tended to become more and more concrete in terms of variations. If you look at the Informator volumes for the first 10-15 years of the series (which began in the late 1960s) the annotations are generally far less detailed than what you now get in recent volumes. On the other hand, you can certainly have too much detail; most people, consider the depth of notes written by grandmaster Robert Hübner makes for indigestion.

The majority of readers in my opinion will prefer some sentences of explanation — so long as they really do explain and are just not the repetition of clichés such as “White stands better because he has the two bishops” — to yards and yards of variations leavened by a few symbolic assessments.

Once the game is chosen, or a candidate game is under consideration, what is the best approach? Generally I will play through the game fairly quickly to see what may make it publishable: opening novelty, interesting combination or complications, instructive endgame or some other feature such as unusual material balance or surprise finish.

An early step is usually to check the opening phase against my database to see where the first new move was played and what the most significant previous games were in the line. This will often send me scurrying off to the bookshelf too, first to compare encyclopaedic works like ‘ECO’ and ‘NCO’; if necessary, a search in more detailed monographs may follow.

Sometimes games come to me with annotations already written, or at least a few comments or variations. These may be recently-played games where one of those involved has commented the game (or got his computer to do it), or they may be older games which are being republished in connection with an article or book.

As Erik Larsson remarked to me many years ago, “the players’ comments to a game are always interesting – even when they are wrong!”. Increasingly often, however, editors are being sent games “annotated” not by the player himself but by a computer program such as Fritz, Junior or Shredder. Personally, I find such notes of little interest and I would hardly ever publish them. Certain phrases in the notes are a dead give-away that Fritz was at work, e.g., “threatening mate – how?”.

If you use a computer to analyse a game, you will get a fairly superficial view based on short-range calculation. Running a computer “blundercheck” can be useful sometimes, on the basis that if a serious mistake is spotted then the game is probably not worth considering for publication. If you run a blundercheck on a well-played game, the computer will generally not spot the decisive moments, because the turning points will not depend on a short-range tactical blunder but on one player outplaying the other.

Nevertheless, almost all annotators these days will use a computer as a tool in his work, usually by leaving the computer running in the background when scanning through games and possible variations, but also leaving it to analyse certain critical positions in depth. However, the computer’s output must be very critically checked. Sometimes, it will reveal hidden secrets in a game; in other cases, its recommendations may be quite wrong.

This is particularly true when the game under consideration is a modern master correspondence game that has been played by two strong players without the pressure of a clock, able to analyse in great detail and make notes. The type of time pressure blunders that so often decide professional master games rarely occur in grandmaster correspondence games. Many of today’s top players use computers as an aid but they don’t rely on them. The computer is more likely to find tactical errors in postal games played 20 or more years ago than in recent games.

In the case of my own book, while the majority of the 64 games selected have been played in the past 20 years, there is also a sprinkling of older games representing earlier periods and leading correspondence players going back to the middle of the 19th century. When a game has already been partly or wholly annotated, this can be very helpful — but it can also be enormously misleading! (As we saw above with the bad notes to the McCutcheon game.)

One issue I had to face when selecting games for my book was, what constitutes an “interesting” mistake that does not disqualify a game from inclusion, and what constitutes a serious flaw? I think most chess players will accept that no game can be won without the loser making at least one, probably two mistakes — of which one may be the selection of a doubtful opening variation. A perfect game (if there is such a thing) must be a draw (which is not the same as saying all draws are perfect!), but for most players

and readers, a well-played draw is intrinsically less interesting than a won game. Therefore, one accepts that a game containing an error or two is usually more publishable than a flawless game.

Of course, some drawn games are nevertheless very exciting and instructive. Nevertheless, out of the 64 games in my book, only three or four will be draws.

The late Wolfgang Heidenfeld wrote a book called *Draw!* (an expansion of an earlier German edition, *Grosse Remispartien*) into which he put a lot of work and love, but of course this was before the era of the computer. Heidenfeld's book included three postal games and I gave them all serious consideration for inclusion in my own book, one condition of course being that I must be able to find something new to say about them. In the end, only one of those three games will make it into my book.

Here is one that will not. I will give it first without any notes. Play it through and see if you can find out what is wrong with it; the answer is at the end of the article.

White: Engel Black: Klaus Junge Deutsche Schachzeitung-16 postal, 1942-44 Two Knights Defence (C59)

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Nf6 4 Ng5 d5 5 exd5 Na5 6 Bb5+ c6 7 dxc6 bxc6 8 Be2 h6 9 Nf3 e4 10 Ne5 Bd6 11 d4 exd3 12 Nxd3 Qc7 13 Nd2 0-0 14 b3 Re8 15 Bb2 Bg4 16 f3 Nd5 17 Ne4 Ne3 18 Qd2 Nxc2+ 19 Kd1 Bf4 20 Qc3 f6 21 Nxf6+ gxf6 22 Qxf6 Kh7 23 fxg4 Ne3+ 24 Ke1 Bg5 25 Qf3 Nac4! 26 h4 Ng2+ 27 Kd1 Nce3+ 28 Kc1 Nxe4 29 Rxh4 Ng2+ 30 Kb1 Nxe4 31 Qf2 Rf8 32 Qc5 Rae8 33 Nc1! Ng6 34 Bd3 Qf7 35 a4 Bf6 36 Ne2 Bxb2 37 Kxb2 Kh8 38 Rh1 Qg7+ 39 Ka2 Ne5 40 Bf5 Nxc4 41 Bxc4 Qxc4 42 Qxc6 Re6 43 Rxh6+ Rxh6 44 Qxh6+ Kg8 45 Qh2 ½-½

The question you have to answer is, why is this game really not a “great draw”?

Some chess annotators too like to tell a story when they annotate a game in some depth. The problem is, to decide whether the story is true! An all-too-familiar trap into which chess writers can fall is to assume that because White (say) won a nice-looking game, then White must have been winning all along, and notes are written which support this view of the game. But what if both players missed something big along the way?

For example, I was considering for my book the following game won by Dr Fritz Baumbach about ten years ago. I wanted to include games by the Correspondence World Champions and in his case I wanted a game which was too recent to be published in his book '52-54 Stop!' and also which had not appeared in my magazine *Chess Mail*. For several days, I thought the

following game was suitable and I spent quite a lot of time on it. I had some notes to the game which Baumbach had written but they made no reference to what I now see as the critical moment. The following notes are an abbreviated version of the draft I was writing.

White: Dr Fritz Baumbach (Germany) Black: Henk Sarink (Netherlands)
Armando Silli Memorial corr, 1990 King's Indian Defence (E96)

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 Bg7 4 e4 d6 5 Nf3 0-0 6 Be2 e5 7 0-0 Nbd7 8 Re1 c6 9 Bf1 a5 10 Rb1 Re8 11 d5 Nc5



Possibly Sarink was unaware of some earlier games by his opponent in this variation as Baumbach's book only came out in 1991. Against F.Smrcka, Lenin Memorial 1970-72, Baumbach now played 12 Nd2 Bh6 13 b3 and went on to win, but this time Baumbach refines his idea by playing b3 at once. In his book, he explains that this avoids Black's idea of exchanging his bad B with ...Bh6.

12 b3

The idea is play a3 and b4, without allowing ...a4, which is the usual answer to the immediate 12 a3.

12...Bd7?!

Other moves include:

a) 12...Bg4?! 13 h3 Bxf3 14 Qxf3 Rf8 15 Bg5! h6 16 Be3 Nfd7 (better 16...cxd5 17 cxd5 Nfd7 when Baumbach intended either 18 a3, preparing b4, or 18 Bb5, with an eventual Bxd7.) 17 dxc6 bxc6 18 Qd1 Qe7 19 Qd2 with advantage to White (Baumbach-O.Sande, 11th CC World Ch Final 1983-88).

b) 12...b5!? came unstuck in another Baumbach game: 13 dxc6 b4 14 Nb5 Nfxe4 15 Be3 Bf8 16 g3 Ba6 17 Bxc5 Nxc5 18 Qd5 Ne6 19 Rbd1 Bxb5 20 cxb5 Qb6 21 Bc4 Be7 22 h4 Rad8 23 h5 and White won in F.Baumbach-U.Svenson, 13th CC World Ch Final. This event began in 1989, shortly before the Silli Memorial.

13 dxc6! Bxc6

If 13...bxc6 Baumbach intended 14 h3!? (following Popov-Knaak, Polanica Zdroj 1976) but according to Graham Burgess, in his book on the King's Indian, 14 Qxd6 is good, e.g. 14...Nfxe4 (14...Bf8!?) 15 Rxe4 Nxe4 16 Nxe4

Bf5 17 Nfd2 (Farago-Vogt, Kecskemet 1977). However Burgess's notes don't go deep enough and players have evidently been put off by the fact that Vogt won the game which continued 17...Qxd6 18 Nxd6 Bxb1 19 Nxe8 Bxa2 20 Nxc7 Kxc7. Here I think that White should have played 21 Bd3 or 21 g4 instead of 21 Bb2 f6 22 g4 Bxb3 23 Nxb3 Rb8 and White had got himself into a mess.

14 Qc2

Here Burgess recommends 14 Bd3 "as Black must either allow Bc2, a3, b4 or exchange off White's B and be left without compensation for the weakness of d5 and d6". I don't find this argument especially convincing, particularly as Burgess seems unaware of the precedent for 14 Bd3 namely 14...Bd7 15 h3 (15 Bc2 Qb6) 15...Qb8 16 Be3 Bc6 17 Bc1 b6 18 Bc2 Qb7 19 Qe2 Nh5 20 Nd5 Nf4 21 Qd1 Nxd5 22 cxd5 Bd7 23 Nd2 b5 and Black had plenty of play. Y.Averbakh-T.Petrosian, Moscow tt 1978, ended in a draw after 100 moves (!) but it was Black who was pushing.

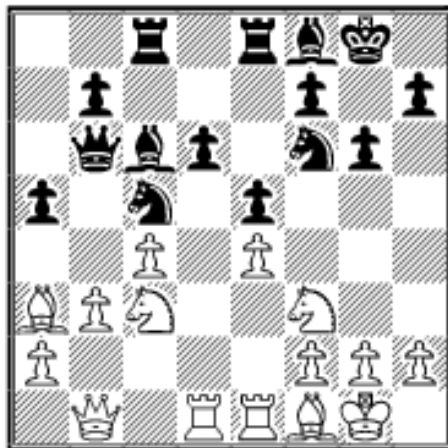
14...Rc8 15 Ba3

Not 15 Nd2 b5! 16 cxb5?! Bxe4!.

15...Qb6 16 Rbd1 Bf8

Baumbach was following Knaak-Möhring, Leipzig 1975, which went 16...Rcd8 17 Qb1 Bh6 18 h3 Rf8 19 Nd2 with some space advantage for White, e.g. 19...Rc8 20 Bc1 Kg7 21 Nd5 Nxd5 22 cxd5 Bxd2 23 Bxd2 Bd7 24 Be3! (not 24 Qb2 f5!) 24...f5 25 exf5 Bxf5 26 Qb2 and White had the better chances.

17 Qb1



This had only been played previously in a few minor games. 17 g3 Bd7 is the main line in theory. I think the safest move for White is 17 Bc1, but this has been seen only in some women's games e.g. N.Titorenko-E.Kovalevskaya, Elista 1994.

17...Bd7

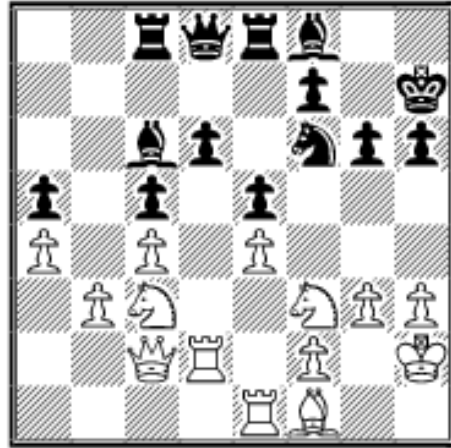
Instead of this, 17...a4 had been seen in a 1985 Italian postal game while 17...h6 was played in W.Schmidt-Maciejewski, Polish

ch, Lodz 1980.

18 h3! Ne6 19 Bc1 h6 20 Be3 Qd8 21 g3

This keeps a black Knight out of f4 and prepares a new home for the light-squared Bishop. The move also serves as a fulcrum for later kingside expansion.

21...Nc5 22 Kh2 Kh7 23 Qc2 b6 24 Rd2± Bc6 25 Bxc5 bxc5 26 a4!



At first sight, this move may seem strange as it leaves White with a backward pawn on the half-open b-file but the positive points outweigh this. White is preparing a strong post for his N on b5 and he rules out ...a4 ideas by which Black could liquidate his isolated a-pawn and obtain counterplay on the a-file. Now the black a-pawn is a long-term weakness. Black also has a backward pawn, on d6, and this is far more serious. To shield it, he would like to get his N to d4 but that involves a long-winded manoeuvre for which, it turns out, there is insufficient time.

26...Nh5 27 Bg2 Ng7

Half-way there but now the pressure builds up on Black's centre.

28 Nb5 f6

The e-pawn needs reinforcement as you can see from the variation given by Baumbach: 28...Ne6? 29 Na7 Rc7 30 Nxc6 Rxc6 31 Nxe5±.

29 Red1 Re6

Black has to block the square that he wanted to reserve for his N because 29...Ne6 loses the d-pawn to 30 Nxd6. Also 29...Bxb5 surrenders Black's main asset, his B pair, and after 30 axb5 Ne6 and now the a-pawn comes under fire by 31 Qc3 Ra8 32 Ra2.

30 Nh4

White opens a new front on the kingside.

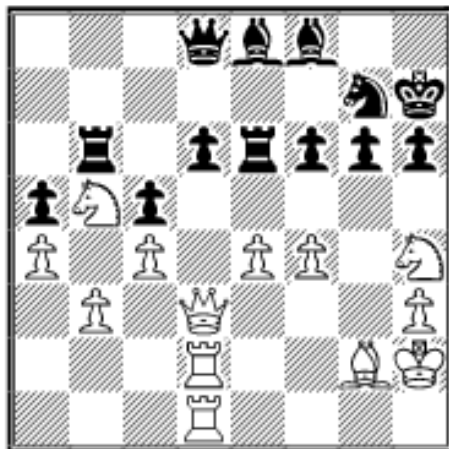
30...Rb8 31 f4

With an awkward threat of f4-f5 which would win the d-pawn.

31...exf4 32 gxf4

White has gained a lot of space and freedom for his pieces. Although his kingside looks temporarily loose, Black cannot exploit it. There is now a threat of 33 e5, attacking both g6 and d6; hence Black's reply.

32...Be8 33 Qd3 Rb6



34 Nxg6!

34 f5 was the more obvious way of proceeding but the temporary N sacrifice has greater psychological impact and Baumbach had calculated it was tactically correct. The way Black plays, the two moves are equivalent: 34...Re5 35 Nxg6 Bxg6 would transpose to the game.

34...Bxg6 35 f5 Re5 36 fxg6+ Kxg6

White stands better but there is still work to do. There are various possible ways of continuing, e.g. 37 Rg1 or 37 Qc3, but Baumbach makes a flexible move first and awaits his opponent's reply.

37 Bf3

This clears the g-file and starts the process of increasing the influence of White's only poorly-placed piece.

37...Kh7 38 Rg1 Kh8 39 Bg4 h5

Because of the serious light-square weaknesses around his K, Black wants to exchange White's B.

40 Bf5

The last chance was a desperate drive for counterplay on the b8-h2 diagonal with 40...d5 (a move not mentioned in Baumbach's own notes) 41 Qf3 Qb8 although after 42 Kh1 dxe4 43 Bxe4 Qe8 (or 43...f5) 44 Re2 f5 45 Bc6 Qe7 White should be able to play for a win, e.g. 46 Rxe5 (46 Rxc7!? Kxc7 47 Qc3 Kf6 48 Bd5 is interesting but may not lead anywhere) 46...Qxe5 47 Bd5.

42...Qh7 43 Rg6 h4 44 Qf3 Rb8 45 Qg4 threatening Rg8+ 45...Bh6 46 Nxd6 is also hopeless for Black in the long run.

White avoids the trap 44 Qg3? Re2+ 45 Kh1 Qc6+ when the exchange of a pair of Rooks reduces his pressure.

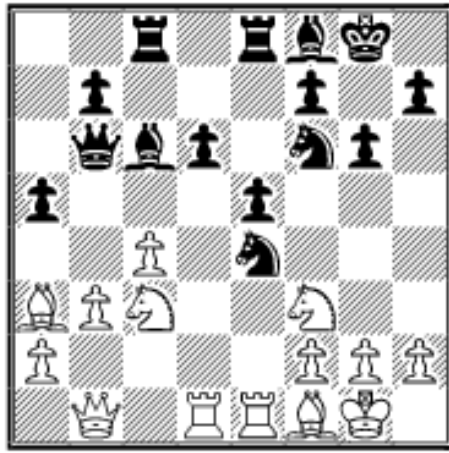
Threatening 46 Rh8+ Kxh8 47 Qg8#.

Or if 47...Kh8 48 Nf7#.

48 Qxf4 1-0.

I thought this was quite a good game by Baumbach, and I was quite pleased with my notes as I felt I had managed to understand a lot of points which were not really explained in the few variations given in the original notes. Something bothered me, however, and this time I won't keep you in suspense too long before I reveal what is wrong with this game.

It was White's 17 Qb1 that bothered me; I could not really explain why Baumbach had selected this move and the more I looked at it, the less I liked it. Why had Black not replied **17...Ncxe4!** attacking f2 which has been undefended by the Queen retreat (also 17...Nfxe4!? seems strong.).



in a previous game is no guarantee that the move is not actually bad.)

Now White either loses a pawn or must give up the exchange, e.g., 18 Nxe4 (18 Qc2 Nxc3 19 Qxc3 d5) 18...Nxe4 19 Rxe4 Bxe4 20 Qxe4 d5 21 Rxd5 Bxa3 22 Rxe5 Rxe5 23 Nxe5 Re8 and probably Black should win. It seems that the move 20...d5, attacking the undefended Bishop as well as the Queen, must have been overlooked by both Baumbach and Sarink, and also by the players in the two previous games. (A subsidiary lesson here is that just because a move has gone unpunished

Some mistakes are interesting mistakes but this failure by both CC-grandmasters to see ...Nxe4 is inexplicable and to my mind spoils what would otherwise be a good game. Once I had faced up to the fact that 17 Qb1 is actually a blunder, I realised that some of the comments I wrote earlier were wrong.

My original comment to Black's 12th move read "This has been played several times but seems insufficient." Now, however, I could see that actually, it may well be a good move!

This is a very typical case where an annotator's incorrect view of a later stage of a game causes him to make an incorrect value judgment on an earlier move.

One of the things a conscientious annotator has to be wary of is how the consequences of an unexpected tactical discovery later in a game may require him to rewrite things said earlier, because of the altered view of the course of the game.

When I was at university, a friend was writing a doctoral thesis in the Philosophy of Science on the topic of "Every observation presupposes a point of view". As his supervisor discussed with him, this proposition has at least two meanings. On one level, it refers to a scientist making measurements in a physical experiment, but the sentence also has a layman's meaning which is perhaps more than metaphorical.

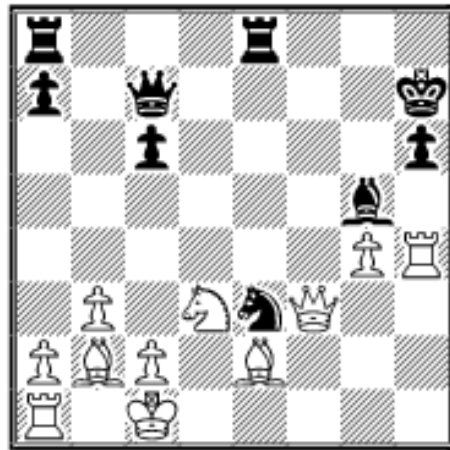
A chess annotator will usually have a point of view about a game which colours the prose he writes about it and influences the selection of variations, from the many more that he analyses, which he will actually publish with the game. In a game won by White, for example, he will tend to praise White's moves and give variations to show why alternative moves that Black played would not have saved him. However, if he suddenly finds there was a saving

line after all, this changes what was said before, if it does not even make the game unpublishable.

For this reason, a chess annotator is normally advised to analyse deeply first and only write notes after he is really satisfied he understands the game. Of course, it is somewhat different with a game one has played oneself. We tend to think we understand our own games “warts and all”, but here too it is sometimes possible for an outsider to spot something that both we and our opponent have missed (as in that Baumbach game!).

Now for the solution to my puzzle. What is wrong with the Engel-Junge game? I think you will agree with me that a “great draw” loses a lot of its charm if one of the players actually missed a clear win. I am sure that if Heidenfeld had spotted a win here, he would have excluded the game from his book, but he did not have computers to help him. I think he was over-impressed by notes in a German book, *Das war Klaus Junge*, from which he quotes, that he failed to look as critically as usual at this particular game. It is indeed one of the hazards of the game anthologist that he will be lead astray by the enthusiasm of predecessors.

Look at the position after White's move **29 Rxb4**.



Junge, the young German star who was killed at the end of World War II, has established a winning position with Black. White earlier made a daring piece sacrificed but he defended well and has just returned the piece. However, his move 29...Nxb2+, which Heidenfeld graced with an exclamation mark, actually cost him the win. Not 29...Bxb4? 30 Nf4! Bg5 31 Nh3! with "an enormously effective pair of Bishops" (Heidenfeld) but Black should have played 29...Nc4+!, a move which Heidenfeld did not even mention.

Now 30 Kd1 is the only move as Kb1 loses the Queen to a Knight fork. But after 30 Kd1 comes 30...Nxb2+ 31 Nxb2 (If Ke1 the Rook goes with check) and now 31...Bxb4 (31...Qe5 is also strong) when Black has rook for knight and pawn and the white king is perilously placed. The black king is not really in danger because Black is very solid on the dark squares; his bishop will soon return to g5, protecting h6 and setting up threats against the white King.

So the game Engel-Junge has unfortunately failed the test of time.

In the course of finding 64 games for my book, I have considered hundreds of

games and narrowed them down to a short-list of just over a hundred, of which about 30 were certainties for inclusion. Deciding which of the others “made the cut” has been a much more laborious process than I expected, because in many cases (as I have shown above) it virtually involved annotating the game only to ultimately reject it.

For my book, I have not attempted to establish a list of the “best” 64 correspondence games ever played (an impossible task), but I wanted to offer a good variety of quality games. I wanted a range of periods, of players (no more than 3 games by any one player), of openings, of styles of game. I also wanted to include some little-known games and not just fill my book with games that have appeared already in my magazine. Some of the chosen games are tactically very complex, some involve delicate endgames and a few were essentially decided in the opening. I have varied the depth of annotation and approach somewhat too, to suit the mood and point of each particular game.

I will conclude this column with a game that narrowly failed to make it into my final selection of 64 games. Nevertheless It is a lively, entertaining struggle which few readers probably saw before, and quite instructive too.

White: Egon Ditt (Germany) Black: Aleksandr Volchok (Ukraine) Evrard-Delannoy Cup Final corr, 1973-74 English Opening (A39)

1 c4 Nf6 2 Nc3 c5 3 g3 Nc6 4 Bg2 g6 5 Nf3 Bg7 6 0-0 0-0 7 d4 cxd4 8 Nxd4 Nxd4 9 Qxd4 d6 10 Qh4

This line against the English has gone out of fashion, mainly because 10 Qd3 is now reckoned to be strong. On the other hand, 10 Qh4 is no longer considered dangerous because Black can answer 10...Qa5 or as in the game.

10...Be6 11 Bg5 Qa5 12 Rac1 Rab8 13 Rfd1 Rfc8 14 c5! h6

Black has to avoid such lines as 14...Rxc5 15 b4 and 14...Qxc5 15 Nd5 and 14...dxc5 15 Bf4 Ra8 16 Bxb7. White seems to have some initiative but careful play can neutralise it.

15 Bxh6 Bxh6 16 Qxh6 dxc5

This game appeared in the Latvian magazine *Shakhmaty* and later in a booklet on postal chess by M.Arkhangel'sky and Volchok gave the finish in his own book on attacking the king.

“16...Rxc5 leads to calm play” says the original notes. I would add to that: “...with some advantage to White”. Therefore Volchok seeks complications.

17 Ne4

This move passes without comment in the original sources but maybe White is in too much of a hurry. He could have played 17 a3 (to prevent Black's next) or maybe 17 h3.

17...Qb4!?

Black could exchange Knights and then capture on a2 but Volchok wants to hit the more important b-pawn. His chances lie with his queenside pawn majority but he also hopes to provoke White into an unsound kingside assault.

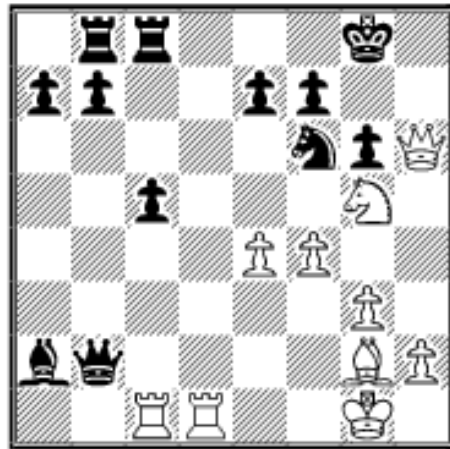
18 Ng5

White dreams of an attack; otherwise he might have played 18 Nxf6+ exf6 19 b3. However, he can be excused for not foreseeing the remarkable line of defence and counter-attack which Volchok conjures up.

18...Bxa2 19 e4!?

White plays in a risky style. Ditt was not content with the draw, else he would have played 19 Be4 when after 19...Rd8 (or several other moves) White can play 20 Bxg6 fxg6 21 Qxg6+ Kf8 22 Qh6+ Ke8 23 Qg6+ as given in contemporary notes.

19...Qxb2 20 f4



20...Rd8!

Black launches a counter-attack. White has to allow the total destruction of his queenside to justify his 19th move.

21 Rf1

If 21 e5 Rd2! 22 Bf3 Bd5! 23 Kh1 Bxf3+ 24 Nxf3 Rxd1+ 25 Rxd1 Qe2.

21...Rd2 22 Bf3

Not 22 e5 losing at once to 22...Rxd2+ 23 Kh1 Bd5.

22...Nd7!?

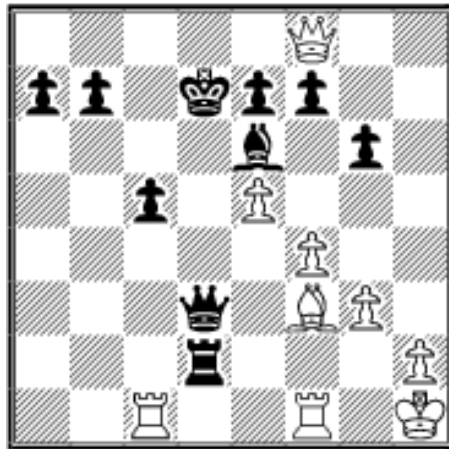
Computers usually claim White is winning at this point but Black has found an imaginative solution involving a Rook sacrifice but I am still not sure if it is correct or not. Black could play other moves here such as 22...Rd3 or

22...e5 but White definitely has chances in the ensuing complications.

23 Qh7+ Kf8 24 e5 Ke8 25 Qh8+ Nf8 26 Nh7 Kd7! 27 Nxf8+ Rxf8! 28 Qxf8 Bd5

Threatening 29...Qd4+ 30 Kh1 Qd3 and mates. For example 29 Bxd5 allows mate in 4.

29 Bg4+ Be6 30 Bf3 Qd4+ 31 Kh1 Qd3



The question of whether White's 19th move was correct or not depends on whether he can find a good continuation here. He has an extra Rook and certainly should not have lost the game although there are several traps to avoid, e.g. 32 Rcd1? Bd5!.

32 Qh8?

White makes a fatal oversight, overlooking Black's main resource: the

strength of the passed c-pawn.

As the contemporary notes say, the critical move was 32 Qh6! which threatens 33 f5 followed by 34 Qxd2 and 35 Rd1. Then if 32...c4 White wins by 33 f5 Bd5 34 Qf4 Qe2 35 e6+! Kc8 36 Rxc4+! Qxc4 37 Qxc4+ Bxc4 38 Rc1 b5 39 exf7 Rd8 40 fxg6. However, Volchok again intended to make use of his c-pawn, e.g. 32...Bd5 33 Qh3+ e6 34 g4 c4 35 Qg3 c3 36 Bxd5 Qxd5+ 37 Qf3 Qxf3+ 38 Rxf3 c2 39 Kg1 b5 40 Rf2 Rd1+ 41 Rf1 Rd2 42 Rf2 with a draw by repetition of moves. Instead of this, White can try 35 f5 but it is not clear that this makes any significant difference after 35...gxf5 36 gxf5 exf5 37 Qg3 c3 38 e6+ Kxe6.

32...c4 33 g4 Bd5 34 Qh3 c3 35 Qg3 c2 36 Bxd5 Qxd5+ 37 Kg1

37 Qf3 loses to 37...Qxf3+ 38 Rxf3 b5 39 Kg1 b4 40 Rf2 Rxf2 41 Kxf2 b3 42 Ke2 b2.

37...b5 38 Rf2

Or 38 f5 gxf5 39 gxf5 b4 40 e6+ fxe6 41 fxe6+ Kc6 42 Qg8 Kb7.

38...Rd1+ 0-1

White resigned because after 39 Rf1 Rxc1 40 Rxc1 Qd1+ 41 Qe1 Qxe1+ 42

Rxe1 b4 the Black pawns are too strong for the Rook.

I should be interested to hear if anybody can find a win missed by White in this game, but I would warn you that computers tend not to recognise the strength of Black's advancing pawns until it is too late.

64 Great Chess Games by Tim Harding (ISBN 0953853640) will be published by Chess Mail Ltd. later this year. An advance order form is posted on the Web at

http://www.chessmail.com/great64_order.html and after publication there will probably be a special offer for **ChessCafe.com** readers on this book.

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