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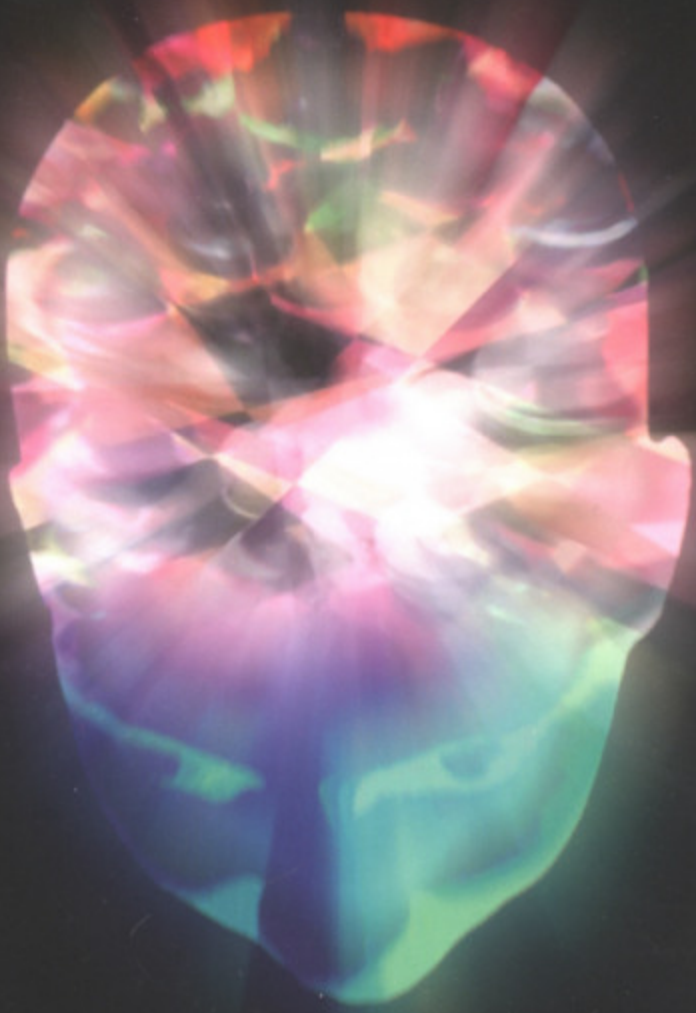
inside the chess mind



how players
of all levels
think about the game

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EVERYMAN CHESS

JACOB AAGAARD

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has ever been done before. It has. The Dutch psychologist and chess fan Adriaan de Groot tested a lot of top chess players in the late 30's and early 40's (the decades, not the age groups). This led to different conclusions, which it is logical to relate to.

But then we are already at the second consideration. What kind of book would I like to write, and with that comes: what kind of book would I personally have liked to read, had I not disposed of my last name in favour of my middle name at the age of 12 (which would have meant that someone else would have been asked to write the book). I quickly came to the conclusion that a scientifically-oriented book was not really something that interested me. What fascinated me about this project was the diversity I expected in the tests, originating from the test subjects' different personalities, age, idiosyncrasies and backgrounds. This is what I have tried to bring into the book by quoting the players as precisely as possible while still making sense; i.e. avoiding redundancy and less coherent talking or, in other words, changing spoken language into written language.

Still, though this book should be seen mostly as an empirical study – where the author has allowed the material to take its own form, and found himself messed up and confused as a twelve-year-old boy in a nudist colony – there has been some room for basic questions and conclusions along the way. The main conclusion is the limitation of the experiment as such. It almost instantly became obvious to me that the selection of exercises could have been cleverer and more rounded. Also, that in order to make any conclusions of scientific value, more tests would have been needed. Probably the best way would have been to do the tests at least three times (though maybe with different exercises from time to time), allowing the possibility of reshaping the tests based on the conclusions of the first set of results. For practical reasons this was not possible, mainly because it was hard to summon the guts to ask people like Peter Heine Nielsen and Artur Yusupov to participate even once in the testing. Asking them to participate almost regularly would simply have been impossible – and indecent.

Another important conclusion was that performance in the tests would never fully correspond with the actual playing strength of the different participants. (This goes beyond the obvious diversity of form on the day.) Practical use of and knowledge about opening theory does not play a great part in the testing (mainly because, as an author of many opening books, the subject has a tendency to be represented enough in my writing already); neither does the ability to see simple tactics, nor the psychological aspect of the game; minor piece endings and pawn endings are not represented; chaotic positions are simply absent; closed positions also did not get a fair representation here (mainly because I had decided to give a solution to all exercises and would not have been able to write anything decent about a closed position). That every position has a final solution is both a strength and a weakness. It is certainly a strength for the book as a reading experience, but it does influence the comparative value of the exercises, as this greatly favours the logical player over the intuitive player (Peter Heine Nielsen vs. Artur Yusupov could be mentioned).

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What is very important for me to stress – Silence now. Shut that book and listen. Hey! Open it again, I was just kidding – is that the exercises are not meant to be competitive in any way. To judge the performance of Peter Heine Nielsen against Yusupov, or Skovgaard against Skovgaard is not really interesting, as it would in no way reflect how these people would do in a real over-the-board game. The strength of a player in a fluent situation is not the same as that of the test room. The positions will naturally appeal more to some than others, and concentration level will not be that of the tournament hall for everyone. Talking into a microphone might decrease the abilities of one and increase the ability of another.

What *is* interesting is to examine the thought process itself, and try to judge when it is successful and when it is unsuccessful, and why. Not that there will be an answer on how best to think, or a certain algorithm to follow. There simply cannot be, as there is no single answer. But with all its imperfections and reservations, this is a book about chess as the sport of the mind. It is a deep study of ten positions of different origin and character, and an insight into what different chess players of different strength have thought about them. This can be used as infotainment or even as a mirror to the reader, who is of course invited to do the exercises himself.

Rather than giving answers, this book sets out to pose questions. Rather than to teach and preach a truth, this book is intelligent. Rather than being scientific or instructional, this book wants to inspire and communicate. Chess is a game of beautiful complexity, evolved to give the most possible meaning to our many-sided imagination, as well as the greatest possible challenge to our minds. Chess thinking is the essence of chess as an art and as a competitive sport. It is where we can be rewarded for our attempts to grasp the depth of this artistic combinatorial mathematics with moments of clarity and revelation.

This book is dedicated in great gratitude to its heroes: the people who were brave enough to open up their minds for the rest of us to gain some insight into the diversity of chess thinking.

Jacob Aagaard,
Copenhagen,
May 2004.

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CHAPTER ONE

The Test Positions

The following ten positions will be discussed for the next 150 pages of this book by chess players at all levels. But first you have the chance to compare your own findings with those of GMs Peter Heine Nielsen and Artur Yusupov, as well as those of IM Jesper Hall, Dr. Ivo Timmermans, *Fritz 8* t15, and several other really nice and smart people who play chess at different levels and who were kind enough to help me with this little project.

The best method would probably be to try to solve the exercises in exactly the same fashion as they did. In order to do this you need to have a tape recorder or recordable minidisk, or just a microphone inserted into a computer. In case the reality check is of less importance to you, you can of course jot down candidate moves and the most important main lines on a piece of paper. Only for Test Position 2 you need to have opposition of some kind: either a friend who can use the comments in this book to play the strongest reply to almost any move you can come up with, or maybe more realistically, by playing the position against a strong chess-playing program such as *Fritz 8*. Here the computer should be given at least 10 seconds to come up with an answer, but not much more than that. That is if your computer has 256 Mb RAM and a processor of at least 1000 MHz. If your computer is slower, then give it more time. If you do not own a computer you can try the old trick with a piece of paper and the solutions.

I would recommend that you do all the tests before proceeding with the book, as did the subjects, though the order in which you do them is completely irrelevant. This will give a more continuous thought process: you will be concentrated and not starting from scratch each time. To complete the test will take somewhere around three hours all in all. The main reasons for doing these exercises as a reader is that, if you have not faced these positions with uncertainty yourself, it will be very difficult to associate with the challenges and difficulties of the participants in this experiment. The danger is that you will then find it less valuable to go through their

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differently structured thought processes. The second best option is that you look at the positions and then follow the thought processes of the participants in order to learn more about the position as you go along. In both cases it is *highly important that you refrain from looking at the solutions to the different exercises* before you actually get to that part of the book. The eyes that see do structure the world, just as far as the world exists and is thereby within the structures we see.

Imagine that you do not know the rules of chess and then try to look at the board without seeing possible moves, but only chunks of wood. It should not be possible. Or that you do not see possible captures. You cannot unlearn the rules of chess or forget how to take a piece. Equally, only with the assistance of time would you be able to forget the solutions, and be able to meet the positions anew. But it would be strange to go through the solutions to the 10 exercises and then put the book away in a drawer for three years before you continue reading it.

So why not forget about looking at the solutions for now, and take a trip into the unknown together with these wonderful and intelligent and highly different people, who have been so kind as to look at these exercises and share their thought processes, well aware of the mistakes they were bound to commit.

Without further ado, let us turn to the different positions.

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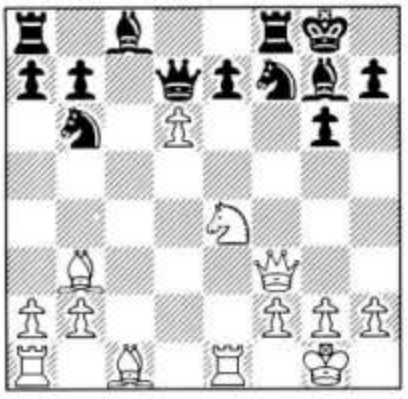
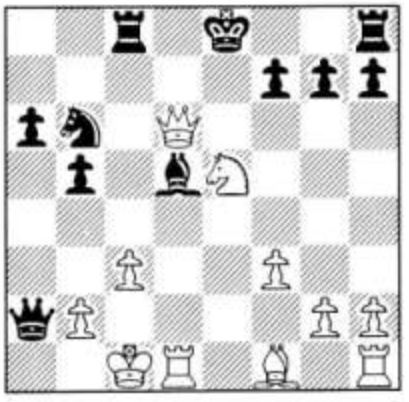
Test Position 1



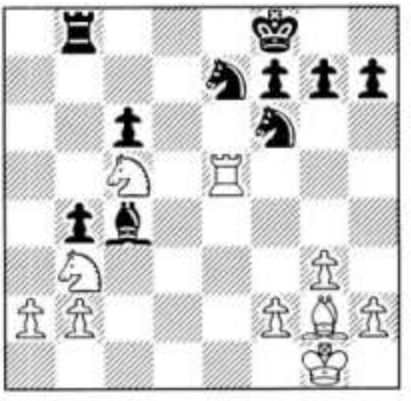
White to move. Take 5 minutes to find the strongest continuation, talking into a microphone or writing down your thoughts afterwards.

Test Position 2



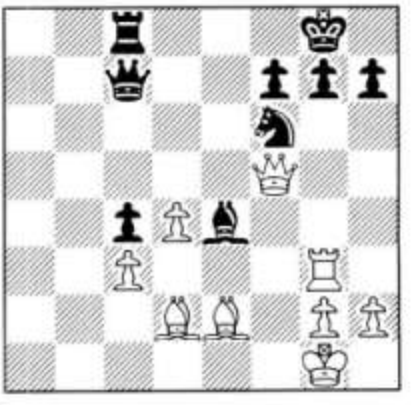
White to move. Take 30 minutes and play the white position as if it was a game and you had 30 minutes to the end of the game. This can be done against a friend who is finding the relevant replies in this book, or against a computer chess-playing program like *Fritz*.

Test Position 3



White to play. Take 7 minutes to find the strongest continuation, talking into a microphone or writing down your thoughts afterwards.

Test Position 4



White to move. Take 10 minutes to find the strongest continuation, talking into a microphone or writing down your thoughts afterwards.

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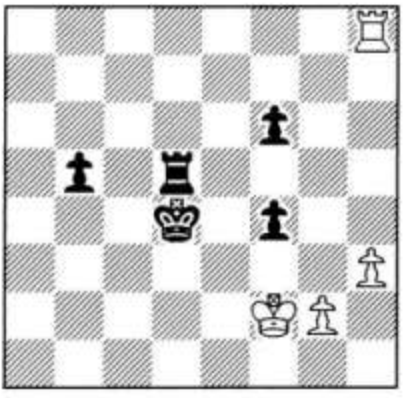
Test Position 5

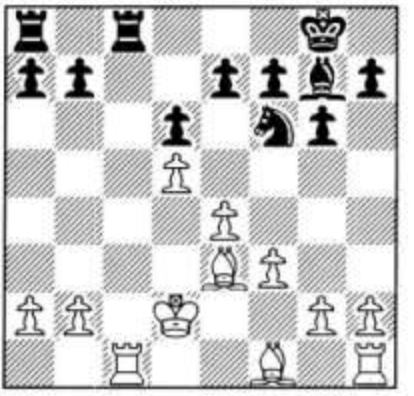
Black to move. Take 6 minutes to find the strongest continuation, talking into a microphone or writing down your thoughts afterwards.

Test Position 6



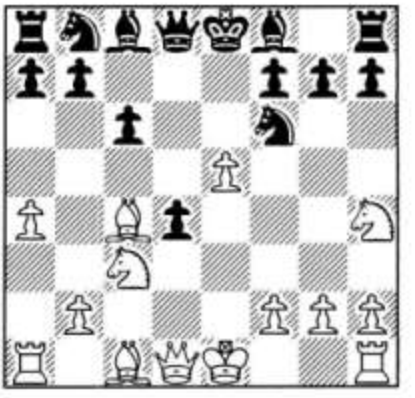
White to move. Take 8 minutes to find the strongest continuation, talking into a microphone or writing down your thoughts afterwards.

Test Position 7



White to move. Take 5 minutes to find the strongest continuation, talking into a microphone or writing down your thoughts afterwards.

Test Position 8



Black to move. Take 12 minutes to find the strongest continuation, talking into a microphone or writing down your thoughts afterwards.

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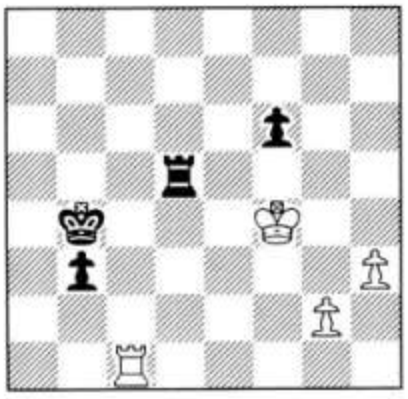
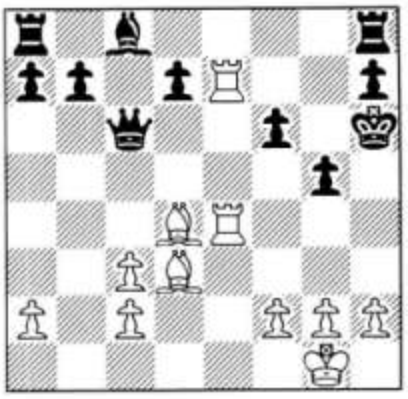
Test Position 9



Black to move. Take 10 minutes to find the strongest continuation, talking into a microphone or writing down your thoughts afterwards.

Test Position 10



White to move. Find the strongest continuation. Do this talking to a microphone or taking notes on a piece of paper at timely intervals. Take the time you find necessary and write it down too.

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CHAPTER TWO

The Participants

Grandmaster Artur Yusupov

Artur is originally from Moscow, but now lives with his wife and his two children, a 12-year-old girl and a 10-year-old boy, in Weissenhorn in southern Germany. He considers his greatest achievement in life to be becoming a father to his children, but in chess reaching the semi-final of the candidates tournament on three separate occasions. His best world ranking was 3rd, in 1986, after Kasparov and Karpov.

He used to be a professional chess player, but these days he calls himself a professional trainer – probably!

At the age of 43 he has an Elo rating of 2589 and is ranked 7th in Germany and 142 in the world (as of January 1st 2004). According to this author, this is mainly due to his peaceful nature and lowered ambitions; Yusupov is still a very strong player.

During the testing Yusupov was calm and focused, scratching his legendary big red beard, mumbling out phrases in English, often with Russian syntax. His attitude towards the test was generally very relaxed and full of adventure. 'I no longer consider myself a professional player,' he would say. 'I no longer do any training and I am no longer in top shape.' To the fact that he had recently departed from FIDE's top 100 list, he exclaimed: 'What a relief! Now I no longer have to worry about such silly things as rating.'

Testing Yusupov was a very pleasant experience, except for a most unfortunate feature: during the fourth test position the microphone broke. The failure to the microphone was minor, but sufficient to ruin the taping. This was only discovered some days after the test had finished and the poor writer had few choices at his disposal:

One was to completely disregard the participation of this, the most famous of participants. Definitely not fair to the readers, though it would save the author's face.

Another was to rearrange the test, hypnotise the German grandmaster and make him lose all recollection of the positions and do the test all over. Unfortunately the writer did not possess the abilities required for this Harry Potter

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solution, nor the owl-number of Harry Potter himself. So he was left with:

The third and only option. When the mistake was discovered the writer had a complete fit and threw his laptop out the window. A few minutes down the line, when no improvement to the situation had been detected, the writer did the only possible thing. He sat down and reconstructed Yusupov's answers and thoughts to the best of his ability. The writer of this book would like to express his deepest regrets to the readers for the absence of a complete account of the testing of Grandmaster Yusupov. I hope that the book will not lose greatly in overall value from this obvious flaw.

On the way I would like to thank God for yet another sublime lesson in humility. If you continue this way I am sure very small things are in store for me indeed.

The game I have chosen to present Yusupov is one he himself considered to be his best ever.

Yusupov-Sokolov

Moscow Championships 1988

Catalan Opening

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 g3 d5 4 ♗g2 dxc4 5 ♘f3 c5 6 0-0 ♘c6 7 ♘e5 ♗d7

Sokolov played this line all the time against the Catalan in the 80's.

8 ♘xc4!?

Not the main choice at the time; 8 ♘a3 was more mainstream.

8...cxd4 9 ♗f4 ♘d5 10 ♘d6+ ♗xd6 11 ♗xd6 ♘de7 12 ♘d2 0-0 13 ♕b3 ♗c8

A new move at the time.

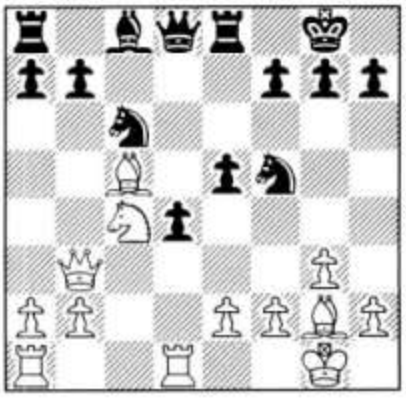
14 ♘c4 ♖e8

In *Informant 46* Yusupov gives 14...♘a5 15 ♗xe7 ♘xb3 16 ♗xd8 ♘xa1 17 ♗e7 as clearly better for White, but after 17...♘c2 this is not so clear, as White cannot play 18 ♖c1?? because of 18...d3! and Black is much better. After 18 ♘d6 White would still keep the advantage though.

15 ♖fd1 ♘f5 16 ♗c5 e5

Black is trying to cling on to the extra pawn – his excuse for giving away the two bishops.

16...♕f6 is brutally met by 17 g4! ♘h4 18 ♗xc6! and Black is very weak on the dark squares and might be about to lose material.



17 e4!

A wonderful positional decision. Black is allowed to have a passed pawn, but White has the initiative and the two bishops, and therefore also the advantage.

17...♘fe7

The alternative was 17...♘h6 18 ♘d6 ♖e6 19 ♘xc8 ♖xc8 20 ♗h3 ♘a5 21 ♕d5 and White wins the exchange. The endgame is only slightly better for him, but in practice this might prove to be

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torture for Black.

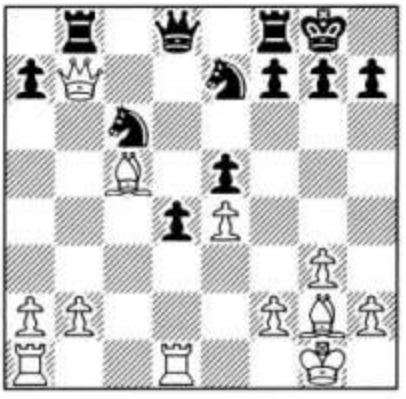
18 ♘d6 ♖f8 19 ♘xb7

This is not about winning a pawn, as it does not do so, but about eliminating the black bishop.

19...♗xb7

19...♕c7!? was probably better here.

20 ♕xb7 ♖b8



21 ♕a6!

After 21 ♗xe7 ♘xe7 22 ♕xa7 Yusupov gives 22...♕d6! and Black has good counterplay along the open files and against the ill-placed white queen. In our time and age *Fritz 8* thinks the position is simply equal.

21...♖xb2 22 ♕a4!? ♕b8?!

Yusupov thinks that 22...♕c8 is better, but after 23 ♗a3 he likes the compensation given to him by his two bishops and the better coordination.

23 ♗f1!

The second bishop is brought into play.

23...f5!? 24 ♗a3 ♖b6

24...fxe4? 25 ♗xb2 ♕xb2 26 ♕b3+ and Black will have a difficult endgame.

25 exf5 ♘b4

25...♖xf5 26 ♖ac1 was the alternative (preferable according to Yusupov), but White is much better here as well.

26 ♖ab1! ♘ec6?

After this White is able to organise a strong attack. Necessary was 26...♘ed5 when Yusupov was intending 27 ♗c4 ♔h8 28 ♗xb4 ♖xb4 29 ♖xb4 ♕xb4 30 ♕xb4 with excellent winning chances in the endgame. White has a superior bishop against knight and the black king has difficulties getting into the game.

27 ♗g2 ♖d8

27...♖c8 28 ♗xb4 ♘xb4 29 a3 ♘c6 30 ♖xb6 ♕xb6 31 ♖c1 and White wins material.

28 ♗xc6! ♘xc6 29 ♖xb6 ♕xb6 30 ♕c4+ ♔h8

31 ♕f7!

With the threats 32 ♗f8 and 32 f6.

31...♖g8

Forced. If 31...♘b4 32 f6! ♖g8 33 fxg7+ ♖xg7 34 ♕f8+ and White wins a piece.

32 f6 ♕d8 33 ♗e7!

With the idea 34 fxg7+ and 35 ♗f6.

33...♘xe7 34 fxe7 ♕d7 35 ♖d3!

With the idea 36 ♖f3 and 37 ♕xg8+ winning.

35...h6

35...e4 36 ♖xd4! ♕xd4 37 ♕xg8+ ♔xg8 38 e8♕ mate.

36 ♖f3 ♖c8

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This attempt at counterplay is futile, probably the product of time trouble.

37 ♕f8+ ♔h7 38 ♖f7 ♖c1+ 39 ♔g2 ♕c6+ 40 ♔h3 ♕e6+ 41 ♔h4 1-0

Grandmaster Peter Heine Nielsen

Peter is a 30-year-old grandmaster, born May 1973, living in Aarhus, Denmark. He is currently Scandinavia's number one by a narrow margin, but will soon lose this position due to a few bad results. But that he belongs to the absolute top here is beyond question. He is well known for his preparation and for his great physical size: 1 metre and 98 cm in height he is a true tower, terribly intimidating when he leans over the board.

His best result so far was to win the North Sea Cup in Esbjerg 2001 together with Peter Svidler, but I am sure that even greater things will happen to him over the years. His Elo at the time of writing is 2638, but as said he will lose a few points on the next list.

Outside of tournament life he is single, at times a history student, and also the joint author of *The Accelerated Dragon* with Carsten Hansen (Batsford 1998).

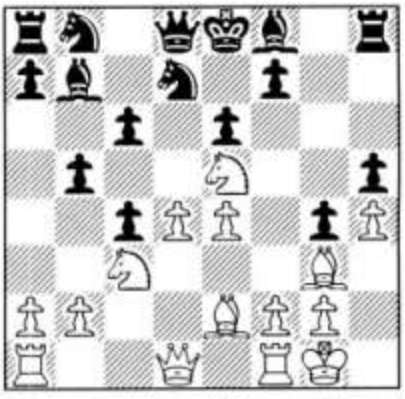
During the test Peter had a few problems concentrating but, as he said, these kind of exercises are not the natural playing field for him, which also explains some of his mistakes. He sees himself more as a intuitive player.

Here is a very attractive game from him, in which he beat the Bulgarian no.2.

Nielsen-Kir.Georgiev
Istanbul Olympiad 2000
Semi-Slav Defence

1 d4 ♘f6 2 ♘f3 d5 3 c4 c6 4 ♘c3 e6 5 ♗g5 h6 6 ♗h4 dxc4 7 e4 g5 8 ♗g3 b5 9 ♗e2 ♗b7 10 h4 g4 11 ♘e5 h5 12 0-0 ♘fd7?!

Certainly an invitation. Peter's first thought was: is this really possible? His answer to this question was: probably not.



13 ♘xf7!!

With this sacrifice White opens the black king's position for a perpetually ongoing attack.

13...♔xf7 14 f3 ♔g8

14...gxf3 was played in another game, but did not help Black much.

15 fxg4 e5 16 g5!

Peter Heine explains: 'The idea is to take on h5 with bishop, as well as controlling f6, making sure Black's knights will have their problems protecting their king.'

16 gxh5 was also dangerous for Black.

16...exd4

16...♕e8!? was maybe better, but after 17 d5 Peter thinks that the white attack is very dangerous. An important point here is that it is hard for Black to develop the queenside, as the pieces seem to be in each other's way.

17 ♗xh5 ♖h7

White's attack is very strong. The following line given by Peter shows how

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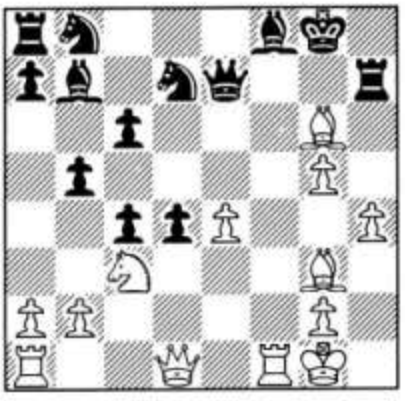
lowing line given by Peter shows how dangerous the attack is. 17...dxc3 18 ♗f7+ ♔g7 19 ♕d4+ ♘f6 20 ♕xc3 ♔xf7 21 ♖xf6+ ♔g8 22 ♖g6+ ♔h7 23 ♕f3 and White wins.

18 ♗g6 ♕e7

Against 18...♖g7 the German grandmaster Christopher Lutz gives the following winning line 19 ♕h5 ♕e7 20 ♖f3! dxc3 21 ♖af1 when Black has no defence. He might in principle be two pieces up, but he has 3 or 4 pieces out of play, so White has more pieces where it counts; e.g. 21...♕e6 22 ♗f7+ ♖xf7 23 ♖xf7 ♗g7 24 g6 and White wins.



19 ♗d6!

A wonderful shot that increases the pressure with gain of tempo.

19...♕g7

19...♕xd6 loses to 20 ♗xh7+ ♔xh7 21 ♕h5+ ♔g8 22 g6 ♕e7 23 ♖f7 and it seems like it is all over. A computer might come up with 23...♘f6 24 ♖xf6 ♘d7 25 ♖f7 ♘f6 26 ♖xf6 dxc3 27 e5 cxb2 28 ♖af1 and White wins with 29 ♖f7.

20 ♗xh7+ ♕xh7 21 ♕g4!

After destroying the black pawn structure on the light squares, White can enter as he pleases.

21...♕g6

21...♗xd6 22 ♕e6+ ♔h8 23 ♖f7 and White wins.

22 ♗xf8 ♘e5

Black cannot save the position. After 22...♘xf8 White wins in the following way: 23 ♖xf8+ ♔xf8 24 ♖f1+ ♔e7 25 ♖f6 ♕g8 26 ♕f4 ♘d7 27 ♕d6+ ♔d8 28 e5 ♔c8 29 ♖f2 dxc3 30 e6 cxb2 31 ♕xd7+ ♔b8 32 ♕d6+ ♔c8 33 e7 b1♕+ 34 ♔h2 and wins (Nielsen).

23 ♕h3 ♘bd7 24 ♗e7 ♖e8

Black accepts simply being material down as well as under attack. But then 24...dxc3 25 h5 ♕e8 26 ♕e6+ ♔h7 27 ♕h6+ ♔g8 28 ♗f6 and Black is toast.

25 h5 ♕g7 26 ♗f6 ♘xf6 27 gxf6 ♕f7 28 ♖f5 ♔h7 29 ♕g3 dxc3 30 ♖xe5 cxb2 31 ♖f1 ♖xe5 32 ♕xe5 ♗c8 33 ♕xb2 ♗e6 34 ♕e5 b4 35 ♖f3 c3 36 ♖g3 c2 37 ♕f4 c1♕+ 38 ♕xc1 ♕xh5 39 ♖g5 ♕h4 40 g3 ♕h3 41 ♖g7+ ♔h8 42 ♕g5 1-0

International Master Jesper Hall

Chess writer, teacher and player. 32 years old. Elo 2487. Currently working on both chess books and a children's book. From Lund in Sweden, but has recently purchased a house in the countryside with his wife, with whom he has a baby daughter.

Hall-Sadler

German Bundesliga 2002

Caro-Kann Defence

1 e4 c6 2 ♘c3 d5 3 ♘f3

This is a less standard variation, which suits the non-theoretical and non-standard Hall well.

3...♗g4 4 h3 ♗xf3 5 ♕xf3 ♘f6 6 d3

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e6 7 ♗d2 ♘bd7 8 g4 b5!?

Many moves have been played here.

9 g5 b4 10 ♘d1 ♘g8 11 ♘e3

11 d4 with a slight edge was also possible.

11...♗d6 12 h4 ♘e7 13 h5 ♖b8 14 ♕g2 ♗e5 15 ♖b1

15 0-0-0?? would bring the white king into a true thunderstorm, as the majority of the white pieces are aimed at the kingside. Black would have a winning attack after 15...♕a5!.

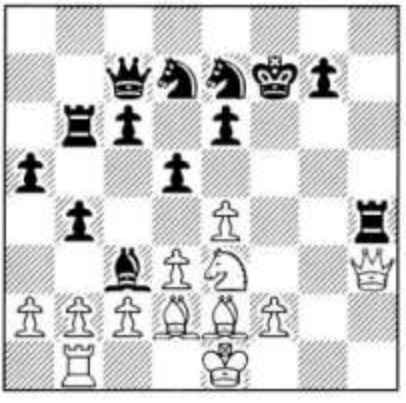
15...♕c7

15...♗c3! (Lukacs) was stronger, in order to rid White of the two bishops.

16 ♗e2 a5 17 ♖h4 ♖b6?!

This looks very artificial. Better 17...a4!? with unclear play (Lukacs).

18 ♕h3 ♗c3! 19 g6 hxg6 20 hxg6 ♖xh4 21 gxf7+ ♔xf7

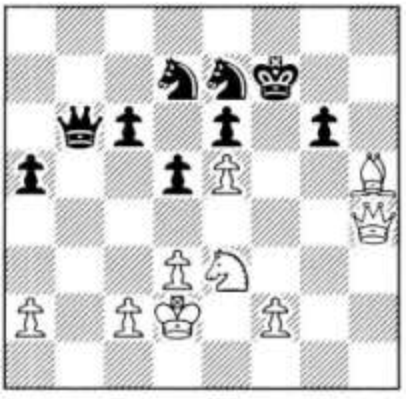


White is always better now. He has fewer pawns islands, and Black will suffer from the weakness of the g-pawn for a very long time. Theoretically that is. In the game he just loses that pawn without much resistance.

22 ♕xh4 ♘f6 23 bxc3 bxc3 24 ♖xb6 cxd2+ 25 ♔xd2 ♕xb6 26 e5!

White starts his attack on the black king.

26...♘d7 27 ♗h5+ g6



28 ♗xg6+!

This tactic decides the game.

28...♘xg6 29 ♕h7+ ♔f8 30 ♕xg6 ♕b4+ 31 ♔e2 ♔e7 32 ♕g7+ ♔d8 33 ♕g8+ ♔e7 34 ♕g5+ ♔e8 35 ♘g4 ♕c3 36 ♔d1 ♕d4 37 ♘f6+ ♘xf6 38 ♕xf6 ♕g4+ 39 ♔d2 c5 40 a3 a4 41 f3 ♕g8 42 ♔c3 ♔d7 43 ♕f4 d4+ 44 ♔d2 ♔c6 45 ♕e4+ ♔b6 46 ♕g4 ♕f7 47 f4 ♔b5 48 ♔e2 ♕b7 49 ♕f3 ♕h7 50 ♔d2 ♔b6 51 ♔c1 ♕h4 52 ♕e4 ♕f2 53 ♔b2 ♕d2 54 ♕g6 ♕c3+ 55 ♔b1 ♕xa3 56 ♕xe6+ ♔c7 57 ♕c4 ♕b4+ 58 ♔a2 ♔d7 59 f5 a3 60 ♕b3 1-0

Dr. Ivo Timmermans

Ivo Timmermans is a medical doctor from Maastricht, Holland. He was born famously on April 1st 1960. When his parents sent a telegram to his grandparents, they replied, 'Ha ha, very funny.' For the last 12 years Ivo has worked as drug researcher for different biotech companies. He is single and with no children is not responsible for overpopulating the planet.

His highest ever Elo was 2295. In the past few years he has circled around

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2200, but recently he has improved somewhat and now has 2237 Elo. His playing level varies much from day to day: one day he can beat two strong IMs, as indeed happened at Santa Domingo 2003, and the next he can lose like a child. His best result is probably Groningen Open 1997, a 2400 performance where he had a game for the IM norm. He was also ghost writer and assistant for Xie Jun's autobiography *Chess Champion from China* (Gambit 1998), which comes highly recommended.

Of his other achievements it could be mentioned that Ivo has twice completed an Ironman triathlon (swim 2.4 miles, bike 112 miles, then run a marathon), has run a marathon in just over 3 hours, has a helicopter licence and a brilliant sense of humour.

The following game justly makes him proud.

Timmermans-Hennigan
Boca Chica 2003
Sicilian Defence

This is the second game in a double round in Santa Domingo. In the morning Ivo had won against Rene Stern, a very strong German IM, with Black in only 25 moves. Here, in the afternoon, he proved to himself that it was no coincidence.

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 d6 6 ♗g5 e6 7 ♕d2 a6 8 0-0-0 ♗d7 9 f4 ♗e7 10 ♘f3 b5 11 ♗xf6 gxf6 12 ♔b1 b4?!

12...♕b6 is considered more solid.

13 ♘e2 ♕b6 14 f5 e5

This is considered forced. The threat of White's last move is to play as follows: 14...a5 15 ♘f4 ♕c5 16 fxe6 fxe6 17 g3 ♖a7 18 ♗h3 and the light squares in the black camp are under heavy fire (Radulov-Padevskij, Bulgaria 1975).

15 ♕h6 ♘a7

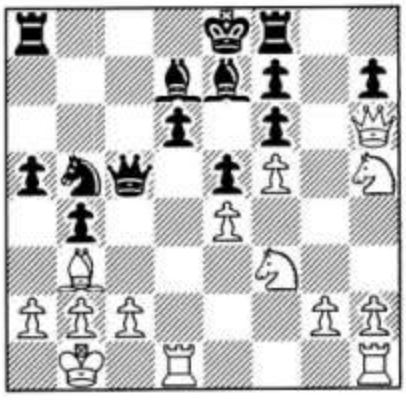
This is a new idea and though it looks dubious, it might be the entire line which is to blame. A previous game continued 15...0-0-0 16 ♘g3 ♘a5 17 ♘h5 ♗c6 (Yeo-Hennigan, Swansea 1995), and now White could have gained a clear advantage with 18 ♘xf6! because of 18...♗xf6 19 ♕xf6 ♗xe4 20 ♘xe5! and White is winning.

16 ♘g3

Ivo correctly targets the black camp where it is weakest. First he develops, then he strikes.

16...♘b5 17 ♗c4 ♕c5 18 ♗b3 a5 19 ♘h5 ♖f8

19...a4 20 ♗xf7+! ♔d8 21 ♘xf6 and White is winning.



20 ♘g5!!

The only inactive minor piece is brought into the game. If White had played with less imagination the game would probably have ended with a draw: 20 ♘xf6+ ♗xf6 21 ♕xf6 a4 22 ♗d5 ♖c8 23 ♘g5 (23 ♖c1? a3 24 ♘g5 axb2

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and Black even wins) 23...♘a3+ 24 bxa3 ♕xc2+ with perpetual check to come.

20...fxg5

Black is also worse after 20...a4 21 ♘g7+ ♔d8 22 ♘xf7+ ♔c7 23 ♘e6+ ♗xe6 24 ♗xe6 a3 25 ♖d5 ♕c6 26 ♖xb5! ♕xb5 27 ♕xh7 and White has managed to protect his king and win some pawns. Black's fragile king and his inability to activate his rooks gives him a bleak future.

21 f6 ♗c6

21...♗d8 22 ♘g7 mate.

22 fxe7 ♔xe7 23 ♕xg5+ ♔d7 24 ♘f6+ ♔c8?

Better was 24...♔c7 when White needs to find 25 ♕g7! (25 ♘xh7 ♖g8 26 ♕c7+ ♔b6 27 ♕xf7 ♖xg2 28 ♘f6 a4 29 ♗c4 ♘d4 is not clear) 25...♘d4 26 ♖d2 with a clear advantage.

25 ♕f5+ ♔c7 26 ♘xh7 a4 27 ♘xf8!

Everything has been calculated very accurately.

27...axb3

27...♖xf8 28 ♗d5 ♘d4 29 ♕f2 and White is technically winning.

28 ♕xf7+ ♔b6

29 axb3!

Again a matter of accuracy. After 29 cxb3? White loses to 29...♗xe4+ 30 ♔a1 ♖xa2+! 31 ♔xa2 ♘c3+ 32 bxc3 ♕a5+ 33 ♔b2 ♕a3 mate.

29...♘d4

29...♘c3+ looks tempting, but White wins with 30 bxc3 ♕xc3 (30...bxc3 31 ♕c7+ ♔xc7 32 ♘e6+ ♔b6 33 ♘xc5 and it is all over) 31 ♘d7+ ♗xd7 32 ♖xd6+ ♗c6 33 ♖xc6+ ♕xc6 34 ♖f1 and Black has no chance.

30 ♖xd4! exd4

30...♕xd4 31 ♘e6 ♕xe4 32 ♕c7+ ♔b5 33 ♕xd6 and White wins.

31 ♘e6

The start of a brilliant cooperation between the knight and the queen.

31...♕e5 32 ♕c7+ ♔b5 33 ♘d8 ♗xe4 34 ♘f7!

It is beautiful, don't you think?

34...♕d5 35 ♘xd6+ ♔a6 36 ♘xe4 ♕xe4 37 ♕c4+ ♔a5 38 ♕c5+ ♔a6 39 ♖f1 1-0

Tom Skovgaard

Residence: Skovlunde, Denmark
Born month and year: February 1951
Profession: IT consultant
Height: 1.78m
Family status: Married, 4 children
Highest Elo rating ever: 2076 (current)
Best result: No. 1 with 4½/5 in 'Sydkysten', October 1998 (performance rating 2384; average of the opponents' rating 2020)

Skovgaard-Mortensen

Danish Primary League 1972

Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 a6 5 ♗d3 ♘c6 6 ♗e3 ♕c7 7 0-0 ♘f6 8 ♘b3 ♗e7 9 ♘c3 b5 10 a3 0-0 11 f4 d6 12 ♕f3 ♗b7 13 ♕h3 e5 14

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f5

14 ♘d5 is a more obvious choice, but as the text move turns out to work well, there are no reasons for complaints.

14...♘d8?!

This does not seem like the most natural move., but still it is not the reason for Black's downfall. Still it was more natural to play something like 14...♘a5!? with chances for both sides.

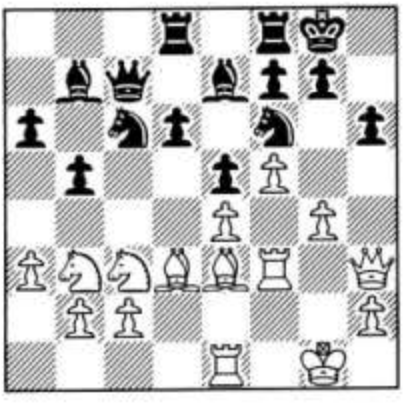
15 g4 h6 16 ♖ae1

16 g5!? is more thematic, opening lines on the kingside.

16...♘c6?

After this Black has simply wasted two tempi. Necessary was 16...d5! with the idea 17 exd5 ♗xa3!? and the position remains complicated, even though White is to be preferred.

17 ♖f3 ♖ad8



18 ♗xh6!

White is ready to begin his attack. No piece could be improved upon.

18...♘d4

The only move. If 18...gxh6 19 ♕xh6 ♘h7 20 ♖h3 ♗h4 21 f6! leads to mate.

19 ♖g3 d5

White has a winning attack after 19...♘xb3 20 g5 ♘e8 21 ♗xg7! ♘xg7 22 g6 fxg6 23 fxg6 ♗h4 24 ♕xh4 ♘e6 25 ♘d5 ♗xd5 26 exd5 and Black has all the problems one could possibly invent for him.

20 g5!

White does not hesitate.

20...♘h7

The win against 20...♘e8 is less obvious, but still to be found: 21 f6! ♘xb3 22 ♗xg7! ♘xg7 23 exd5 ♗c5+ 24 ♔h1 and Black is soon to be mated.

21 ♗xg7! ♕b6

21...♔xg7 22 f6+ and White wins.

22 ♔h1

22 ♘xd4 was perhaps slightly more accurate.

22...dxe4 23 ♘xe4 ♗c8

23...♔xg7 24 f6+ ♗xf6 25 gxf6+ ♔h8 26 ♖g7 still mates.

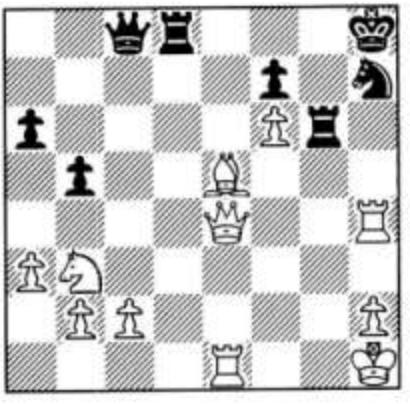
24 ♗xe5 ♘xf5

24...♘xb3 25 ♕xh7+! ♔xh7 26 ♖h3+ and Black is mated.

25 ♘f6+ ♗xf6 26 gxf6+ ♔h8 27 ♗xf5

White has won a piece and the attack continues.

27...♗xf5 28 ♕xf5 ♕c6+ 29 ♕e4 ♕c8 30 ♖g4 ♖g8 31 ♖h4 ♖g6



32 ♕xg6!

A nice way to end the show.

32...fxg6 33 f7 mate

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Peter Skovgaard

Peter lives with his family in Skovlunde, Denmark, which obviously includes his father Tom. He was born in April 1990 and still attends school. (In Denmark we have a system of 1st to 9th grade of compulsory schooling.) He is a slender boy of normal build (1 metre and 67 cm tall) with a pleasant mood. He is into computer games, sports and other usual teenage activities.

His Elo has been circling 2050 for some time. It is my impression that he is very talented, but raw talent is only an opportunity. He is a generally talented boy, likely to find happiness in whatever endeavour he pursuits.

During the test Peter was focused and relaxed, not at all intimidated. I attach this to his general easy-going character, and not to the fact that we know each other. Occasional lapses in concentration are bound to happen to 13-year-olds, and did to Peter. Still, his overall performance left a positive impression.

His best result by far is the 2003 Nordic championship in his age group. The Nordic countries include Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Iceland and the Danish self-ruling colony, the Faeroe Islands. He won this event with 4½/6 in a convincing fashion, even though he occasionally was in trouble. When I asked him to present a game for this book, he chose the following swift kill.

Skovgaard-Olsen

Lyngby 2003

Modern Defence

(Express notes by P. Skovgaard)

1 e4 c6 2 d4 g6 3 ♘c3 d5 4 ♘f3 ♗g4 5 ♗e3 ♗g7 6 h3 ♗xf3 7 ♕xf3 e6 8 ♗d3 ♘e7 9 ♖d1!? f5!? 10 e5 0-0 11 ♘e2!

The knight is going to f4. The e6-pawn is weak.

11...b5

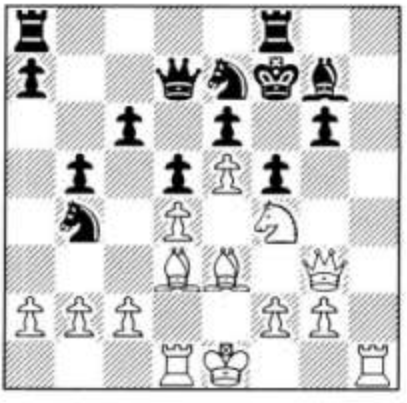
11...c5 12 c3.

12 ♘f4 ♕d7 13 ♕g3!

...g6-g5 is prevented and the attack on the king initiated.

13...♘a6 14 h4 ♘b4 15 h5 ♔f7 16 hxg6+ hxg6

Now comes the winning attacking move...



17 ♗xf5!!

The bishop can be captured by three pieces, but all these moves lose.

17...♘xf5

If 17...gxf5 18 ♖h7 ♖g8 19 ♘h5 ♘g6 20 ♗h6!.

18 ♕xg6+ ♔e7

18...♔g8 also does not last: 19 ♘xe6 ♘xc3 (19...♖f7 20 ♕h7 mate or 19...♘xc2+ 20 ♔d2) 20 ♕h7+ ♔f7 21 ♕xg7+ ♔xe6 22 ♖h6+ and so on...

19 g4

The exact continuation.

19...♘xc2+ 20 ♔d2 ♘fxd4 21 ♕xg7+ ♖f7

21...♔e8 22 ♕xd7+ ♔xd7 23 ♖h7+

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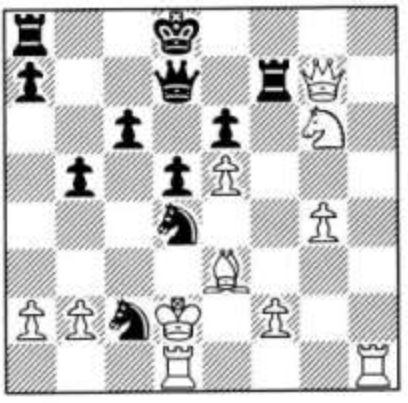
♔e8 24 ♖c1! and Black loses material.
22 ♘g6+ ♔d8



23 ♕g8+! 1-0

Black resigned as the rook on a8 is lost.

Sidsel Høeg

Sidsel is 23 years old, a student of political science, living in the heart of Copenhagen, with a penthouse view over the city from her student flat (allegedly). Her best results as a chess player have been winning her groups at the North Sea Cup in 2002 with 6/7 and in her club Brønshøj with 7½/9 in 2000. Her highest rating has been 1535, but recently she has dropped to the area around 1400. As national ratings are different from country to country, this probably does not say so much. It would be higher in the US, lower in Australia and probably about the same in the UK.

She has not yet settled down nor produced future world champions of her own.

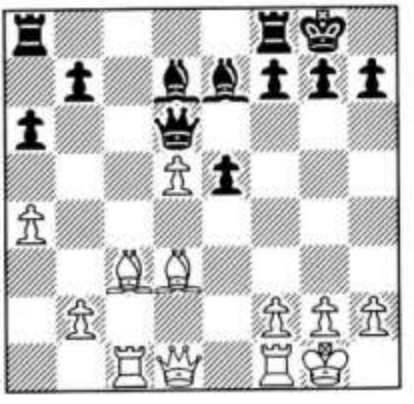
Sidsel deviates from the other participants first and foremost by being the only female player involved in the testing. Also, she is the most calm by far. This showed in her approach to talking into the microphone. Often she would say nothing for 45 seconds or so, keeping parts of her thought process to herself. As this was the natural way for her to do her part of the test, I did press her to talk more than she did. When she spoke, it was open and direct, and the final result gives a good image of her thought process excellently all the same.

The following game is a good representation for Sidsel as a chess player.

Bloom-Høeg
Hastings 2002/03
Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 c3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 cxd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 e6 6 ♘f3 a6 7 a4 ♗e7 8 ♗d3 0-0 9 0-0 ♕c7

White has emerged from the opening with a slight edge, but in the coming middlegame struggle he is not able to keep up the pressure.
10 ♗d2 ♘c6 11 d5 exd5 12 ♘xd5 ♘xd5 13 exd5 ♘e5 14 ♘xe5 dxe5 15 ♖c1 ♕d6 16 ♗c3 ♗d7!



Though the e-pawn is indirectly threatened, Sidsel concentrates on her development.
17 ♕h5?! h6?

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After this White has strong pressure. 17...f5 would give Black full equality.

18 b3?!

White misses 18 ♕xe5 ♕xe5 19 ♗xe5 ♗xd7 20 ♖c7 with a strong position.

18...♕xd5?!

This is probably too risky. 18...♗g5! would have solved all problems immediately.

19 ♗c4 ♕c6 20 ♗xe5 ♕b6 21 ♗c7

21 ♖fd1!? with the idea 21...♖ad8 22 ♗c7! and White wins.

21...♕f6 22 ♖fd1

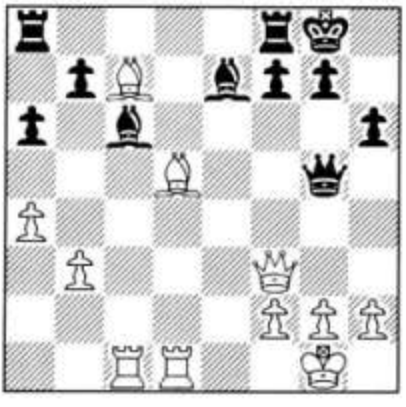
22 ♗d5 looks strong here.

22...♗c6!

Black is out of the worst problems with this move.

23 ♗d5 ♕g5!? 24 ♕f3

24 ♕xg5 ♗xg5 25 f4 ♗xd5 26 ♖xd5 ♗f6 27 ♖d7 would have kept up the pressure.



24...♖ac8!

Again Sidsel is highly aware of the importance of bringing her pieces into action.

25 ♗f4?

This is a miscalculation. Sidsel now wins the game with ice cool clarity.

25...♗xd5! 26 ♗xg5 ♗xf3 27 ♗xe7 ♗xd1

White probably overlooked that 28 ♗xf8 ♖xc1 loses the game.

28 ♖xd1 ♖fe8

Now we enter a purely technical phase.

29 ♗b4 ♖e2 30 ♔f1 ♖cc2 31 ♗e1 ♖e7 32 a5 ♖ec7 33 b4 ♖c1!

The exchange of a pair of rooks prevents all counterplay.

34 ♖xc1 ♖xc1 35 ♔e2 ♔f8 36 ♗d2 ♖c6 37 ♗e3 h5 38 ♔d3 g6 39 ♗c5+ ♔e8 40 ♔c4 ♔d7 41 ♔d5 ♖f6 42 g3 ♖f5+ 43 ♔c4 ♔c6 44 h4 f6 45 ♔d3 ♖xc5 0-1

Sten Vesterli

Sten Vesterli is a 37-year-old IT-consultant from Haraskovby in Denmark. He has been invited to participate in this experiment because he only recently started to play chess in a chess club. He did so at the same time as his 9-year-old son, who won the F-group in the Danish children championships shortly before the testing. Sten is married and has no results nor any recollection of any great games from his career.

I would like to thank him immensely for participating in this project. It was very important to me that an intelligent adult with little experience in chess should share his thoughts, so that we would have a sound basis to compare with the more accomplished players. One thing that I have changed in his answers is recurring problems with the terminology and problems with naming the right squares. Often the g5-square became f5, f3 became e6 and so on. All of this was obviously caused by a chess board without letters and numbers at the sides.

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