



#36 – August 20, 2003

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Lots of fun this week and we're sure you'll learn quite a few new things as well. Does *hypermodernism* mean Picasso with attention deficit disorder? Are you ready to give up the center after spending so much time trying to capture it?

More visualization work that now has a section of its own. It's still tactics, to a point. Can you solve them all without looking at the diagram? Your chance to find the blunder instead of the best move!

This week's annotated reader game shows how a simple pawn recapture can ruin your entire game, even if it doesn't hang your queen. Believe it or not.

Q&A: We need your chess questions and games in PGN for our Ask the Masters section. Send them to whitebelt@chessninja.com.

Download all the chess material and annotations in this issue in PGN format (text or reader software) [here](#). In ChessBase (Fritz, etc. format (CBV) [here](#). Online replay page [here](#).

FEEDBACK: Post your comments in the ChessNinja [message boards](#) or e-mail us at whitebelt@chessninja.com.



The Center Cannot Hold!

Q: *What are the strategic and tactical ideas behind white's hypermodern openings such as the English, the Catalan, or the Reti? I've been trying to familiarize myself with these openings, but once I leave the book I realize that I don't understand what's going on. How do I use my fianchettoed bishops? Where are whites pawn breaks? How do I undermine black's center?* – **carbogens**, [in this message board thread](#)

A: **First things first. Throw the "book" out!** Well, at least put it back on the shelf for a while. Your negative experience is a great illustration of the problem with playing book lines instead of moves you understand. If you don't know why you are making EVERY move something is terribly wrong.

The main reason we always recommend White Belts play classically (1.e4 or 1.d4 with pawn play in the center) is because classical play is easier to understand and by no means weaker. Open lines for your pieces and unblocked pawn centers are the best way to learn **tactics and piece play**, the absolutely essential things to learn first.



Closed openings and hypermodern positions can require a lot of knowledge and experience.

Starting with them before your tactics and other basics are competent is just asking for buckets of pain and suffering. This is usually because the disadvantages of those positions are a lot easier for your opponent to understand than the advantages are for you to understand! (E.g. it's a lot easier to play with space than without it.)

Hypermodern openings are what we call just about anything that does not try to occupy the center with pawns (which is what we usually call classical play). They even encourage the other side to take over the center with a big pawn mass that can then be attacked from the sides by pieces and wing pawns.

When players like Reti, Nimzowitsch, and Alekhine started playing these provocative openings in the early 1900's their moves were called bizarre and ugly by most of the leading voices of the day. This is similar to how many of the gambiteers of the mid-19th century criticized the closed openings like the French and Caro-Kann as cowardly.

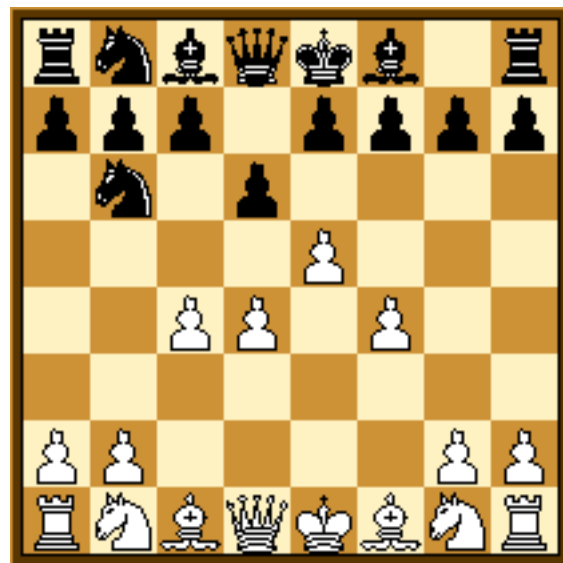


It didn't take long for everyone to realize that these new systems were not just a passing fad. Richard Reti's defeat of the "invincible" world champion Capablanca at New York, 1924 was the final confirmation, and not just because Reti won.

Reti used his system in that game, which started **1.Nf3 Nf6 2.c4 g6 3.b4 Bg7 4.Bb2 0-0 5.g3 b6 6.Bg2 Bb7 (Diagram)**. By 1924 the great classical master Capa had long recognized the power of these systems and he also fianchettoed both of his bishops! (A fianchetto is playing g3 and Bg2, for example.)

Hypermodernism is a strategic concept, not a tactical one, and you cannot talk of tactical themes that span the category. Positional themes abound, however, and here are some of the critical ones to keep in mind. Note that these are general guidelines, not commandments never to be violated. Remember also that the true concept of hypermodernism, according to one of its inventors, Reti, is the avoidance of routine play. **Think about each move and each move of your opponent.**

Right: *The Four Pawns Attack against Alekhine's Defense after 1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.c4 Nb6 4.d4 d6 5.f4. Which side would you prefer to play? Few Grandmasters play the Alekhine's these days with black, but even fewer answer it with this giant center. Most play relatively conservatively with 3.d4, proving that Black's provocative first move has no direct refutation.*



1) Not occupying the center does not mean ignoring the center. Just because you leave your d and e-pawns at home, or just move them one square, does not mean you play only on the flanks. You must still attack the center and attempt to control it from a distance. The c-pawn, and sometimes the f-pawn, can attack the enemy center pawns. Fianchettoed bishops cross the center squares. The center is still the critical field of battle.

You can't let your opponent keep his big pawn center, especially if it's mobile. It's imperative to attack it and/or stop it before it crushes you. Hitting it with flank pawns isn't very effective if the center pawns can pass by and just become even more dangerous.

2) You can't win a game from a distance and hypermodern play is not passive or defensive play. It's one thing to allow your opponent a big pawn center, it's another thing to let it roll over your position like a wave. You have to fight back aggressively, hitting the center and grabbing space on the flanks. This can mean a strike with a center pawn when the moment is right. Not moving them on move one doesn't mean they are glued to the board.



Left: *The Exchange Variation of the Grunfeld Defense. Black counterattacks the massive white center with ...c5. The a2 pawn is weak but the white center pawns can roll down the board. One of the sharpest openings in modern play.*

3) Use your pawns to help your pieces and give them life. This is always necessary but in hypermodern openings it is more subtle and more important. A bishop on g2 doesn't look very good if Black has pawns on c6 and d5, right? But if White can hammer at d5 with c4 and open the c-file to hit the c6 pawn, the bishop on g2 can be opened up.

The symbiotic relationship between the c4 pawn and a bishop on g2 (or the c5 pawn and a g7 bishop for Black) is the clearest example. You have to keep that long diagonal under pressure.

This goes double for your own pawns. You don't put a bishop on g2 and then plunk a pawn

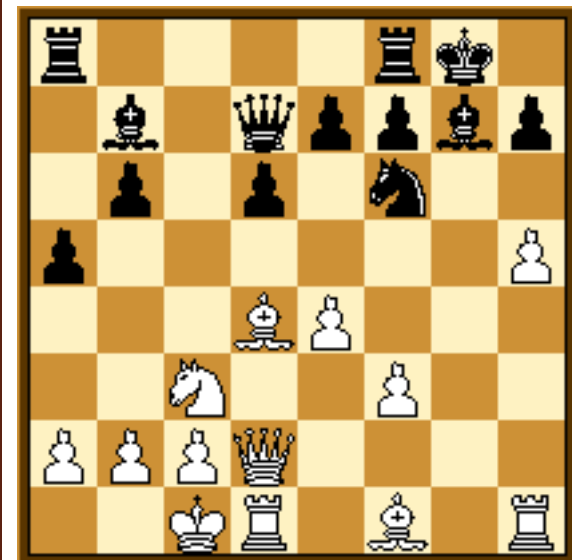
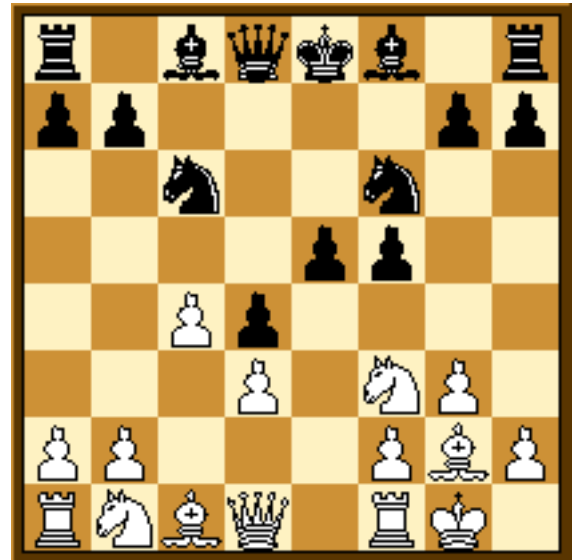
on e4 to block its diagonal unless you are sure you can open it back up. The tricky relationship between pieces and pawns in hypermodern openings is the main reason they aren't right for White Belts. You need to learn how to play **with** your pieces before learning how to play without them in closed positions!

4) The idea is to build pressure. Keep aiming your pieces at the center, looking for weak spots and trying to force their creation. Don't release the tension with early exchanges or it will decrease the number of potential weaknesses and make it easier for your opponent to defend.

Right: Black grabbed space but fell way behind in development in the process. White was winning after 1.Nxe5! Nxe5 2.Re1, soon regaining the pieces with an attack. (Lazic-Di Lazzaro in the file.)

5) Damaging your opponent's pawns is as important as forcing them forward or winning them. Doubled pawns and isolated pawns are vulnerable to attack and create more holes in a position that pieces can take advantage of. Look for opportunities to force your opponent to ruin his structure, creating weaknesses you can then attack.

6) Hypermodern development, particularly the bishop fianchetto, is slower than classical development. This can lead to major disasters and very short games against an aggressive opponent aiming at your king. The idea is to build pressure and plan breaks like a diamond cutter. You can't continue such slow play against a direct attack.



Left: Instead of attacking the white king, Black played ..b6 and ..Bb7, a very slow plan in a very sharp position. White used that extra time to quickly break through on the kingside. Black resigned after 1.h6 Bg7 2.Qg5+ with mate on the next move.

That's exactly what we recommend when someone plays this way against you. The margin for error is much smaller for the hypermodern player so throw those pawns out there, open files, and blow them off the board. As you and your opponents improve you'll learn to be more cautious, but White Belts should be attacking directly until they drop!

Right: This oddly symmetrical position might look like a little joke by White, but Black, a 2400-rated player, was completely lost by move 25 without making a serious blunder. (Blatny-Heberla in the file.) White began to break down the center with the typical c4 and b4 plan to empower the g2 bishop.

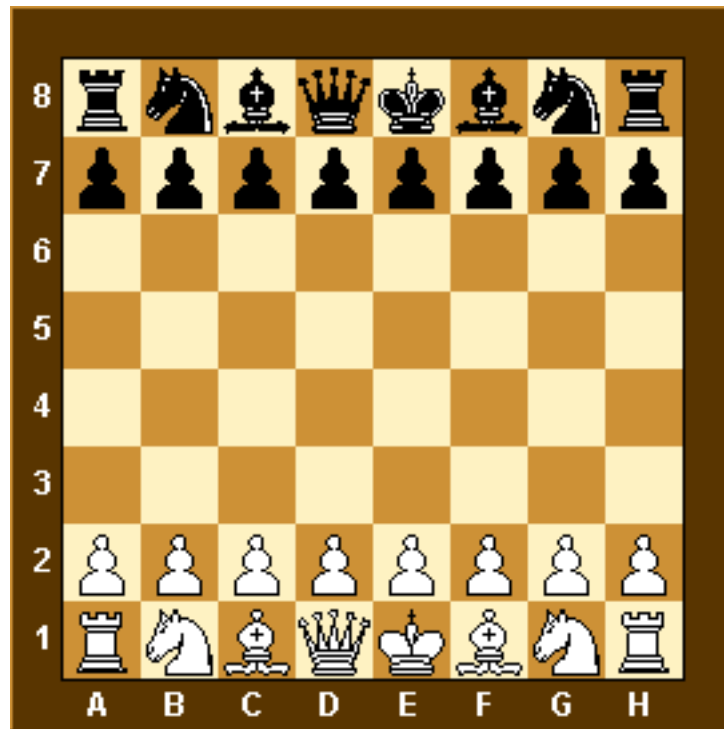
7) A precautionary note to #6. White is still White! Just because these moves aren't as overtly aggressive and leave the pieces far away doesn't mean White has relinquished the advantage of the first move by playing in hypermodern style. If Black ignores his own development he can get killed almost as quickly as in an open game.



Find the Blunder!

I believe it was Reti quoting Breyer when he called the below diagram a complex position, and who could argue? This week it also serves as a cheat-sheet for your visualization exercises. If you're tired of finding the best move all the time now you get the chance to find the worst move in a few of these.

You should be able to solve some of these in your mind since you are so familiar with the initial array (the starting position). If necessary, look at the diagram or a regular board and see each move to answer the questions. As always, [let us know](#) if these are too hard or too easy for you.



- 1) **1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 exd4 4.Nxd4 Bc5**. Black has a threat, which move by White would be a blunder? **5.Nc3, 5.Nb3, 5.Nxc6**
- 2) **1.e4 d5 2.exd5 Qxd5 3.Nc3** What is the worst possible move by Black here? **3...Qa5, 3...Qd6, 3...Qc4**
- 3) **1.e4 c5 2.d4 cxd4 3.Nf3 e5 4.Nxe5??** That was the blunder, what is the punishment?
- 4) **1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4 Nf6 4.Ng5 d5 5.exd5 Na5** How can White lose immediately here? **6.d3 6.Bb5+ 6.Nc3**
- 5) **1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 c5 4.Nf3 cxd4 5.Nxd4 Nc6** Which move is the blunder here? **6.Bd3, 6.Bb5, 6.Bf4**
- 6) **1.d4 c5 2.d5 d6 3.c4 b5 4.cxb5 a6 5.Qa4 axb5??** Why was Black's last move a loser?



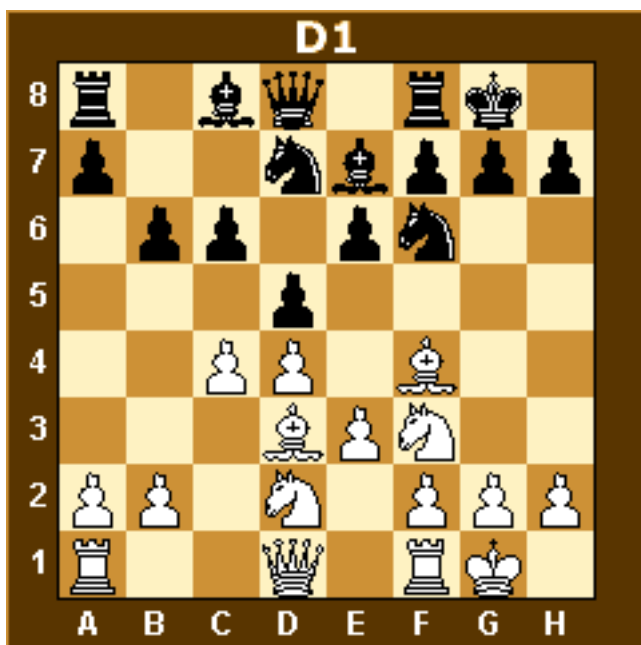
Wrong Pawn Ruins Game

For White Belts we usually reserve the word "blunder" for moves that make you scream aloud in horror and shock. Hanging the queen, falling for a mate in one, that sort of thing. As the quality of your chess improves, so does the quality of your blunders! In this reader's game we have a good example of a horrible blunder that doesn't even lose a pawn.

Rumata (1619) - Struggler (1751) ICS freechess.org, 31.07.2003

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.Nf3 c6 4.Bf4 Nf6 5.e3 Nbd7 6.Bd3 Be7 7.O-O O-O 8.Nbd2 b6 (D1)

Rumata: "Black is trying to find a place for QB, but this weakens c6."



Well, let's not go too far. As the old saying goes, a weakness is only a weakness if it can be attacked. With a bishop on b7 protecting the c6 pawn, how can White bring any force against it? More importantly, this pawn dreams of c5 after Black finishes developing and he has to get the bishop out of the way to play a rook to c8.

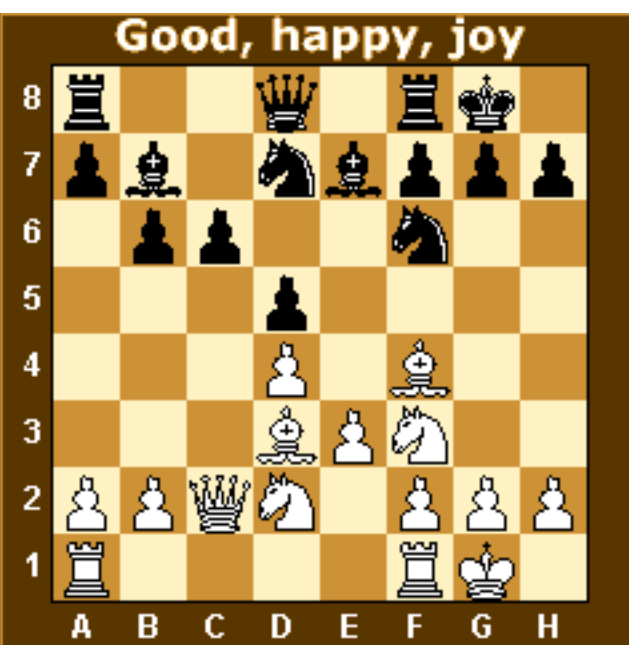
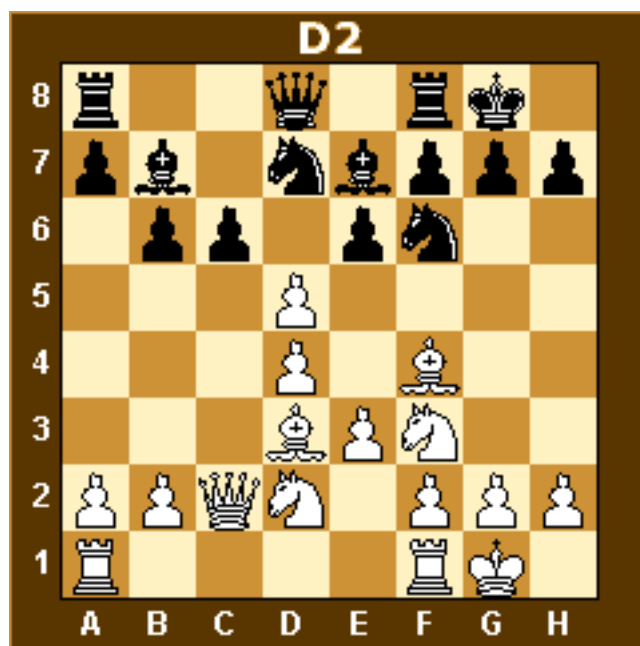
Except for the white bishop on f4 instead of g5, this position after ..b6 is very similar to one of the most popular lines of the Queen's Gambit Declined, the Tartakower variation. The bishop on b7 can be a powerful piece if the center opens. Black's problem comes on move 10, not here.

9.Qc2 Bb7 *"Rumata: This locks QB Bishop in."*

True, but the bishop wasn't better on c8 and it has a future now! And that square is for a rook. Black's set-up is fine. [9...c5?! 10.cxd5 exd5] **10.cxd5**

(D2) 10...cxd5?? This move is the reason we selected this game for analysis. It's a little harsh to give two question marks to a move that doesn't blunder a piece, but this is a monumental positional mistake that ruins Black's position completely.

Look at Black's position now (below diagram) and ask yourself how he can make progress. He has no control over the center and the move ..e5 is totally out of the question. The only open file is the c-file and White has the lead there. The b7 bishop has no hope of entering the game because the d5 pawn is frozen solid. The same is true of the d7 knight. The only hope for Black to get any freedom is with ..Ne4 at some point.



Compare and contrast. Left: after 10...cxd5?? Right: after 10...exd5

All of this doom and gloom is in stark contrast to the position after the correct 10...exd5. There Black's position is full of dynamic potential based on the move ..c5 and other action on the queenside. Unlike ..e5, the ..c5 break is clearly possible thanks to the support of the b6 pawn, the e7 bishop, the d7 knight, and a rook that will play to c8. Just about every black piece is prepared for ..c5!

Figuring this out doesn't require knowing a lot about the Queen's Gambit or openings at all. It's about "the breaks" we have discussed in White Belt before. (#32 "Analyze This" in particular.) That is, the pawn breaks in the position.

After 10...cxd5?? Black doesn't have any and to play without any pawn breaks means you had better have advantages with your pieces (and he doesn't have them here). Black probably agreed with Ramata's comments above and saw the capture as a way to remove

the c-pawn "weakness."

It's true that the pawn on c6 looks vulnerable with the c-file open for White. This confirms that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing. In the game, Black eliminated a weak pawn on principle but he also eliminated every shred of play in his position! [10...exd5]

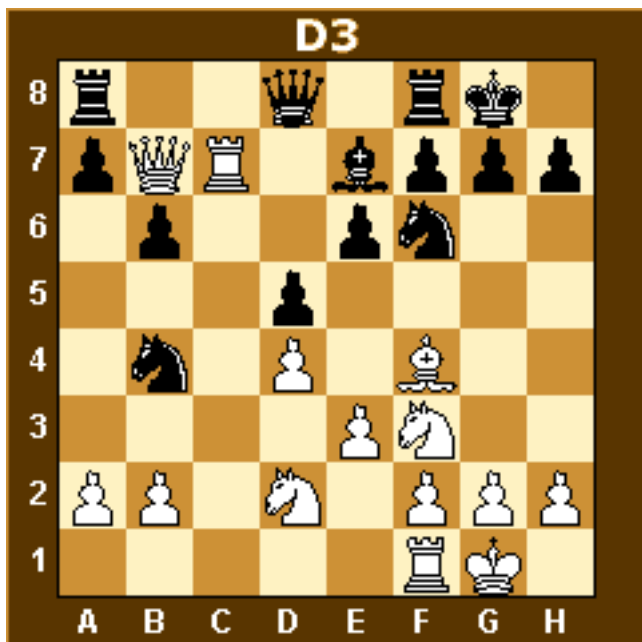
11.Rac1 The logical move. The c-file is the main strategic item on the board and White has control of it. In the face of this Black now proceeds to self-destruct completely. It was already a tough position, admittedly, but you can't ignore the problems in the position, you have to combat them.

11...Nb8? *Rumata: "Black undevelops his knight in order to defend his QB on a6."*

Terrible and bizarre, giving White the c-file without a fight and losing time to do it. There isn't much Black can do to save the game after this so we won't add many more notes. White finishes him off convincingly.

[11...Rc8 12.Qa4 a5 13.Rc2 *Rumata: "And Rfc1 next move taking over c file." ? This is a little too direct. Black captures the rook and gains some time to regroup. Better is to keep putting pressure on with moves like 13.Bb5 or Ne5.*]

12.Qc7 Ba6 [12...Qxc7? 13.Rxc7 *Rumata: And Black loses one of his bishops.*] **13.Bxa6 Nxa6 14.Qb7 Nb4** *Rumata: "Forced"* **15.Rc7** *Rumata: Threatening to win the bishop.*



(D3) 15...Bd6 *Rumata: "Forced."* Not at all! It was better to give up a pawn now with ..Rb8!

[15...Rb8! This pawn sacrifice was the best chance to confuse the issue. The rook will be protected by the queen on b8 so the Rxf7 trick won't be possible. 16.Qxa7 Bd6 17.Rfc1 Bxf4 18.exf4 Nd3]

16.Bxd6 Qxd6 17.Rxf7! A nice tactical shot. Domination of the seventh rank always pays dividends.

[17.Rfc1 Nxa2 (17...Rfb8 18.Rc8+ Rxc8 19.Rxc8+ Rxc8 20.Qxc8+ Qf8 21.Qc7 Nxa2 22.Qxa7 Nb4 23.Qxb6+-) 18.R1c6 Qb4 19.Rxf7

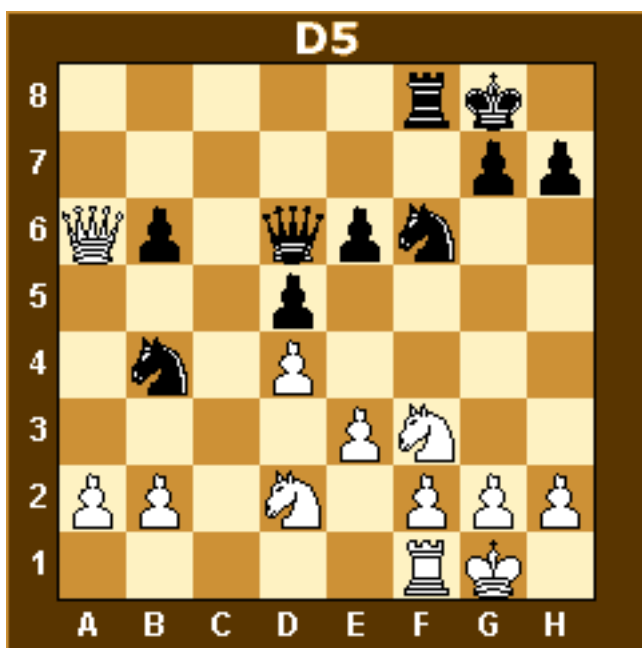
Qxb2 20.Rcc7+-]

17...Rab8? [17...Rxf7 18.Qxa8+ Qf8 19.Qxf8+ Rxf8 20.Rc1! Developing a piece and dominating the open file is more important than the a2 pawn. White has a pawn but the control of the c-file is critical. The black rook is relegated to defensive duty because of the Rc7 threat.]

(D4) 18.Rxf8+?! Rumata: "Didn't risk to take 2 pawns in fear of queen being trapped."

Excellent logic. A winning position you are sure of is better than complications that are probably stronger but that you aren't sure of. Spending a lot of time to work out details and risking a mistake can get you into trouble. You don't have to play perfectly or finish every game spectacularly.

[18.Rxg7+ Kh8 19.Qxa7 Ra8 20.Qe7 Qxe7 21.Rxe7 Rxa2 22.Rxe6] **18...Rxf8 19.Qxa7** [19.Ne5] **19...Nd3 20.Qa6 Nb4** [20...Nxb2?? 21.Qb5 Nc4 (21...Qa3 22.Qxb6 Qxa2 23.Rb1) 22.Nxc4 dxc4 23.Qxc4]



(D5) 21.Qa3! Rumata: "Pinning the knight."
21...Rc8 22.Ne5 Rumata: "Heading to d3 in order to win the knight on b4."

22...Rc2 23.Rd1 Qf8 24.Qb3 Ne4? 25.Nxe4 dxe4 26.Qxe6+ Kh8 27.Nf7+ Kg8 28.Ng5+ Kh8 29.Qxe4 Rumata: "Mate is inevitable."
 ..Qxf2+ 30. Kh1 g6 31. Qb7! and 32. Qxh7# **1-0**

[Online replay page](#)



VISUALEYES

- 1) **1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 exd4 4.Nxd4 Bc5 5.Nxc6** [5.Nc3?? Missing the double attack on the knight, which is only protected by the queen. 5...Bxd4; 5.Nb3 Bb6] **5...Qf6 6.Qd2 dxc6**
- 2) **1.e4 d5 2.exd5 Qxd5 3.Nc3 Qa5** [3...Qd6 4.Nf3; 3...Qc4?? Hanging the queen in one move. 4.Bxc4] **4.d4 c6**
- 3) **1.e4 c5 2.d4 cxd4 3.Nf3 e5 4.Nxe5?? Qa5+** Fork! **5.Bd2 Qxe5**
- 4) **1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4 Nf6 4.Ng5 d5 5.exd5 Na5 6.Bb5+** [6.d3 c6 7.Qe2; 6.Nc3?? Here's the blunder, leaving the Bc4 unprotected.] **6...c6 7.dxc6 bxc6**
- 5) **1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 c5 4.Nf3 cxd4 5.Nxd4 Nc6 6.Bb5** [6.Bf4 Qb6 7.Nb3; 6.Bd3?? There's your blunder, blocking the queen's protection of the knight. 6...Nxd4] **6...Bd7 7.Bxc6 bxc6**
- 6) **1.d4 c5 2.d5 d6 3.c4 b5 4.cxb5 a6 5.Qa4 axb5??** That pawn was pinned against the rook on a8. **6.Qxa8**

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