

Fallibly fascinating

PERUSING my latest copy of *New Zealand Chess* I could not help smiling on reading that a player had won a recent local tournament in "error-free" style. Ah, how many of us dream of such games! Small advantages unerringly convert themselves into decisive attacks. Extra pawns always win. The initiative, once seized, is flawlessly pounded home.

Alas, it is so often only in dreams that such ethereal delights come true. In practice the average game has more ups and downs than a fire-walking kangaroo. Smith lays a new move on Jones in the opening and sits back looking smug. Jones, psychologically battered, nevertheless finds a strong reply. It's Smith's turn to worry and he offers a draw. Edging in for the kill Jones sacrifices a pawn and whips up the mating attack. Queens, knights, bishops and rooks go flying in the skirmish, Jones forgets to checkmate and Smith wins the end-game. Or would have if he hadn't lost on time through misreading his score-sheet.

Yes, that is competitive chess — even at top level. Masters certainly do play games where almost no perceptible mistakes are made (look at Karpov's exemplary handling of the last world championship match) but it is the exception, not the rule. It is the sporting aspect of chess that draws in most of its devotees — and decides the result of most games between equals.

And it is this personal struggle that makes games so hugely entertaining to play through. One can feel with the players the heights of elation or depths of despair, as fortunes undulate with the tide. Witness for example the following melodramatic encounter from this year's Otago Easter tournament.

PIRC DEFENCE

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| 1. e4 | d6 |
| 2. d4 | Nf6 |
| 3. Nc3 | g6 |
| 4. f3 | c6 |
| 5. Be3 | Nbd7 |
| 6. Nge2 | Bg7 |
| 7. Qd2 | h6 |
| 8. g4 | b5 |
| 9. Bg2 | Nb6 |

The right strategy here is 9... a6 playing for either... c5 or... e5.

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| 10. b3 | Qc7 |
| 11. h3 | Bb7 |
| 12. a4 | b4 |
| 13. Nd1 | a5 |
| 14. c3 | c5? |
| 15. cxb4 | axb4? |
| 16. dxc5 | dx5 |
| 17. Rac1 | |

Black's play so far has been as inspired as these notes. Now he loses a pawn for no compensation.

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| 17. ... | Nfd7 |
| 18. Qxb4 | Rc8 |
| 19. Qd2 | Ba6 |
| 20. 0-0 | Bxe2 |
| 21. Qxe2 | 0-0 |
| 22. Nc3 | f5 |

Trying to stir up complications — the right approach but it is hard to believe it should seriously trouble White here.

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| 23. a5 | Na8 |
| 24. Nd5 | Qd6 |
| 25. Qc4 | Kh8 |
| 26. exf5 | gxf5 |
| 27. Rcd1 | Qe6 |
| 28. Qc1? | Bd4! |



Oops. Suddenly White is forced into contortions to save his knight.

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| 29. Bxd4 ch | cxd4 |
| 30. Rde1 | Qd6 |

Or 30... Qxd5 31. Qxh6 ch.

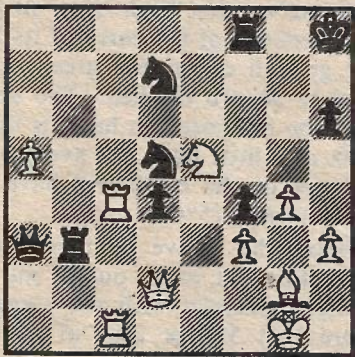
31. Qf4?

Correct is 31. Qd2 when Black has to accept the draw by perpetual check after 31... Qxd5 32. Qxh6 ch Kg8 33. Qg6 ch.

31. ... e5!

A new era begins, with Black the aggressor driving his opponent back.

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| 32. Qd2 | f4 |
| 33. Nb4 | Rc3 |
| 34. Nd3 | Rxb3 |
| 35. Rc1 | Nc7 |
| 36. Rc4 | Nd5 |
| 37. Rfc1 | Qa3 |
| 38. Nxe5! | |



And just when Black was putting his advantage on auto-pilot to cruise to victory comes this tactical shot.

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| 38. ... | Nxe5 |
| 39. Qxd4 | Re3 |

Things are clearly not so clear any more: 39... Qe7 40. Qxd5 Nxc4 41. Qxc4 Qe3 ch 42. Kh2 leads to a similar position to the game continuation, and 39... Qd6 40. Rc6! Rd3! 41. Qa1! Qb8 42. Rxb6 ch Kg7 tempts both fate and mate after 43. Rh5.

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| 40. Qxd5 | Nxc4 |
| 41. Rxc4! | Qa1 ch |
| 42. Kh2 | Re2 |
| 43. Rc6 | Qg7 |
| 44. Qc5 | Rf7? |

The losing move, 44... Rfe8 45. Qb6 Kh7 46. Qb1 ch Kh8 47. Qb6 is a draw.

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| 45. Rc8 ch | Kh7 |
| 46. Qc4! | Re5 |
| 47. Qd3 ch | Qg6 |
| 48. Rh8 ch | Resigns |

Black loses his queen after 48... Kg7 49. Rg8 ch.

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