



The Queen Exchange, Part One

I haven't done a statistical analysis, but I think I'm right in saying that the queens are exchanged in at least half the games of any player. Sometimes the exchange is natural and doesn't provoke any questions, but in a large number of cases the player has to solve a complex problem: who benefits from the exchange of queens, and if the exchange is favorable, how can it be achieved and what version of it should be implemented?

Clearly a transformation of the position as fundamental as exchanging the strongest piece has a significant influence on the character of the battle and its result. It's useful to improve your mastery of this important method, and the wide selection of examples that I offer here will help you do that.

There are no absolute laws in chess, no rules exist that are without exceptions. One and the same problem can be treated in a diametrically opposite way – compare, for example, the two well-known pieces of advice: "Do not exchange from a position of weakness!" and "Go youthfully to the endgame!" And yet there are frequent cases when a player who has taken or that template into his armory, sometimes even a clearly unsuccessful one, then follows it strictly without paying any attention to the specific circumstances.

For example, some people naively believe that against higher-rated opponents you should play more simply, exchange pieces – thereby increasing the chances of achieving the desired draw.

I'll give an episode that was described in the book *Secrets of Chess Training* by Dvoretsky and Yusupov.

In the summer of 1991 I gave lessons to some young American players. To my surprise I found that many of them, when they were playing important games or facing a more distinguished opponent, didn't want to play actively, but only thought about drawing. Clearly the result turned out to be the exact opposite – their ultra-cautious, passive play most often led to a worsening of their position.

Michael Granne – Dvoretsky
Blitz game, 1991

1.e4 g6 2.d4 Bg7 3.Nc3 c6 4.f4 d6 5.Nf3 Bg4 6.Be3 Qb6 7.Qd2 Nd7?

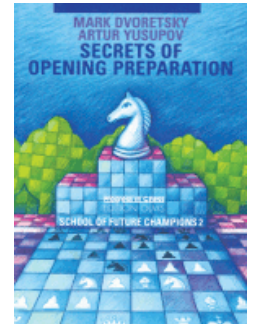
I forgot to exchange on f3 first and Black's entire setup immediately looked ridiculous.

8.Be2 Qa5 9.0-0 b5



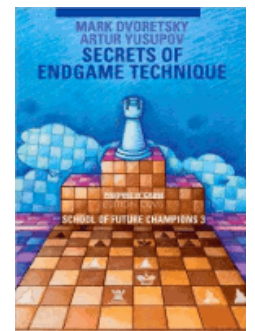
[FEN "r3k1nr/p2nppbp/2pp2p1/qp6/3PPPb1/2N1BN2/PPPB1PP/R4RK1 w kq - 0 10"]

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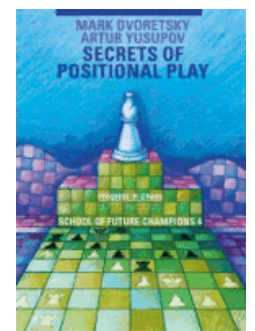
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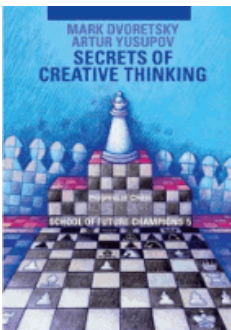
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Black doesn't develop his knight to f6, fearing e4-e5. But the pawn attack on the queenside with the white king castled kingside is also unpromising. My opponent could most easily underscore his huge lead in development by playing 10.h3. Instead of that Michael undertook a completely absurd exchange operation.

10.Ng5?! Bxe2 11.Nxe2? Qxd2 (thank you!) **12.Bxd2 h6 13.Nf3 Ng6** (now it's also possible to develop the knight) **14.e5 Nd5**. Black has a playable position; later he won the ending.

"Why on earth did you exchange queens?" I asked my opponent.

"I didn't know how I should play."

"Any way you like, but with the queens on the board! White has excellent chances of an attack."

In general Michael is a fighting player with an active style, but here a common reflex probably went into action (one that's mistaken at its root) – the desire to play more quietly, "more solidly" against a stronger partner. In actual fact this approach only helps your opponent and usually makes his task easier.

Stories like this occur everywhere, and not only with American school kids. In the fall of 2004 my then student Ernesto Inarkiev played successfully for the Tomsk team at the European Champions' Cup in Turkey, scoring six out of seven. Examining the games he played I was amused to see that in the first three rounds his opponents made exactly the same mistake – they themselves offered to go into an endgame that would be unfavorable for them.

Ristoja – Inarkiev
Izmir, 2004



[FEN "r1bq1rk1/pp4b1/2n3pp/2p1p3/3pP3/1P1P1N2/1PPBN1PP/R3QRK1 w - - 0 16"]

1.?

Black controls more space in the center and on the queenside. A certain pressure that White can create on the enemy king's position may serve as compensation. 16.Qg3 Kh7 suggested itself, and now either 17.h3 with a subsequent Nh2-g4, or 17.h4, planning not only to carry out the same knight transfer to g4, but also to play h4-h5 when the opportunity arises. I think that the players' chances are roughly equal.

In the game White offered an exchange of queens without any justification for doing so, thereby eliminating his opponent's worries about the kingside and untying his hands on the other flank.

16.Qh4? Qxh4 17.Nxh4 Bg4! 18.Ng3 Kh7 19.h3 Be6 20.Nf3 Kg8!

A good prophylactic move. By playing h3-h4-h5 White planned to win squares for his king, which was standing idle on g3. Now on 21.h4 there's 21...h5 22.Ng5 Bg4.

But still White should have played like this (the g5-square could be useful in future), or, acting on the "principle of the worst piece" (see Alexei Kosikov's lecture from the book Positional Play by Dvoretsky and Yusupov), send the poorly-positioned g3 knight off on the route h1-f2-g4. For some reason White brought his other knight there, which wasn't badly positioned on f3.

21.Nh2 a5 22.Ng4 Kh7 23.Rxf8 Rxf8 24.Rf1 Rxf1+ 25.Kxf1 Nb4 26.Bxb4 cb

A pawn attack on the queenside, supported by the two powerful bishops, quickly leads to the goal.

27.Ke1 b5 28.Ne2 Kg8 29.Nh2 h5 30.Kd1 (30.Nf3 is a little more stubborn) **30...Kf7 31.Nf3 Kf6 0-1**

Inarkiev – Schebler

Izmir, 2004



[FEN "r1q2rk1/p4ppp/1p6/2nQ4/3R4/P1N2P2/1P4PP/2KR4 b - - 0 19"]

1...?

Black preserved a playable position in the middlegame after 19...Ne6 20.Rc4 Qe8. Most likely 19...b5! 20.Kb1 is even more accurate, and only now 20...Ne6 or 20...Rb8!?

19...Qe6? 20.Qxe6 Nxe6 21.Rd7

In the ending White is better – his pieces are more active, and in the event of subsequent exchanges the white king comes into play more quickly.

21...Rfc8 (21...Rfd8!?) **22.Kb1 Nc5 23.R7d5 Kf8 24.Nb5 g6?!**

He should have gone for 24...a6, as 25.Nd6 Rc6 26.Nc4 Rac8 isn't dangerous. On 25.Nc3 there also follows 25...Rc6+/-.

25.h4 (a provocative move) **25...h5?**

The provocation worked! It's usually favorable to use this method to prevent a pawn attack by your opponent, but in this case the move g2-g4 hasn't been prevented, but on the contrary gains strength, as it leads to the creation of a passed pawn on the h-file.

26.g4! hg 27.fg a6 (or 27...Kg7!? 28.Nd6 Rc7 29.h5+/-) **28.Nd6 Rc6 29.h5 Rd8?** (29...Kg8 is more stubborn) **30.h6 f6 31.h7 1-0**

Rotstein – Inarkiev

Izmir, 2004



[FEN "4r1k1/1q2r1b1/1p1p1n1n/1Pp1ppp1/2P5/2NPP1P1/1B1Q3P/4RRNK w - - 0 33"]

1.?

For a long time the players skillfully maintained the tension in a difficult-to-evaluate situation, and finally White lost his cool.

33.Qg2?

33.e4 unclear was necessary.

33...Qxg2+ 34.Kxg2 e4!

Now White's position falls apart instantly. On 35.d4, there follows 35...cd 36.ed Rc7.

35.Na4 Ra7! 36.Bxf6 (36.Nxb6 Ra2) **36...Rxa4 37.Bxg5 ed 38.Bxh6 Bxh6 39.Rxf5 Rxe3 40.Ref1 d2 41.Rd5 Re1** (41...Ra2! 42.Rf2 Re1) **42.Nf3 Ra2**, and Black won easily.

And in the following game, which was played a few years later, Inarkiev himself made a serious mistake on the same theme.

Inarkiev – Wang Yue
Baku, 2008



[FEN "r4rk1/1q3ppp/p3p3/5b2/QPR2B2/P3P3/5PPP/2R3K1 w - - 0 28"]

1.?

White is not only a pawn up, but also has significantly more actively-positioned pieces. His opponent can only place his hopes on the opposite-colored bishops, but that factor will only make itself felt in the endgame, which would seem to be a long way off.

28.Bc7! suggested itself. With that move White kept both enemy rooks on the back rank. Then he could have continued f2-f3, e3-e4, Rc5, h2-h4-h5, retaining all the winning chances.

Instead of that Ernesto decided to play "more accurately": **28.Qc6??** Exchanging queens brings the affair closer to the endgame, and, what's more, Black now manages to activate one of his rooks.

28...Qxc6 29.Rxc6 f6 30.Bd6

On 30.Bc7!? his opponent would have replied 30...e5 31.f3 Rf7 32.e4 Bd7.

30...Rfd8 31.Bc7 Rd3 32.a4 e5 33.R6c5

33.b5 ab 34.ab Ra2 35.b6 Rb3 isn't dangerous.

33...Bd7

33...Rb3 34.b5 ab 35.Rxb5 Ra3 36.a5 Rc8 is also possible, with a subsequent 37...Bd3.

34.Ra5

The battle ends in a draw in the variation 34.b5 ab 35.ab Ra2 36.b6 Rb2 37.Ra5 Rdd2 38.Ra8+ Kf7 39.Rd8 Ke7 40.Rf1 Rdc2 and 41...Bb5.

34...Rc8 (threatening 35...Rxc7) **35.h3 Rb3 36.Rc4** (36.Rxa6? Rxb4, with the threat of 37...Rb7) **36...Ra3 37.Rxa6 Rxa4 38.Ra5 Kf7**

The position has almost equalized, and a peace treaty was signed twenty moves later.

Finding the strongest move 28.Bc7! that I suggested is much easier if you're familiar with the classic example on this theme.

Karpov – Unzicker

Olympiad, Nice, 1974



[FEN "r1rq1bk1/1n1b1p1p/3p1np1/1p1Pp3/1Pp1P3/2P1BNNP/R2Q1PP1/1B2R1K1 w - - 0 24"]

1.?

24.Ba7!

Under cover from the bishop White concentrates an attacking group on the queenside. All his pieces get an opportunity to occupy natural and strong positions. Meanwhile "normal circulation" in Black's camp has been destroyed, and the blame for this lies above all with the blocked-in knight on b7 (A. Karpov).

24...Ne8 25.Bc2 Nc7 26.Rea1 Qe7 27.Bb1 Be8

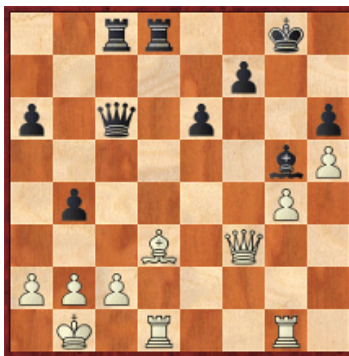
Black prepared for play on the queenside as well as he could by uniting his forces. But White also has a big choice – exploiting his space advantage and the great maneuverability of his pieces he begins action on the other flank.

28.Ne2 Nd8 29.Nh2 Bg7 30.f4! f6? (30...ef 31.Nxf4 f6 is better, with a subsequent Nf7-e5) **31.f5 g5?! 32.Bc2! Bf7 33.Ng3 Nb7 34.Bd1! h6?! 35.Bh5 Qe8 36.Qd1 Nd8 37.Ra3 Kf8 38.R1a2 Kg8 39.Ng4! Kf8 40.Ne3 Kg8 41.Bxf7+ Nxf7 42.Qh5 Nd8 43.Qg6! Kf8 44.Nh5 1-0**

Let's take a look at one more example, in which the futility of exchanging

queens was far less obvious.

Adams – Van Wely
Dortmund, 2005



[FEN "2r2k1/5p2/p1q1p2p/6bP/1p4P1/
3B1Q2/PPP5/1K1R2R1 w -- 0 27"]

1.?

27.Qxc6?!

Hydra Syndrome – grandmaster Sergei Shipov commented on this exchange. Shortly before the tournament in Dortmund Michael Adams had lost a match disastrously to the computer program Hydra – he only scored half a point in six games. Not wanting to compete with the computer at calculating complicated variations, the English grandmaster exchanged pieces at the first convenient moment.

This strategy is sensible in principle in a battle against a computer, especially bearing in mind the fact that Michael has a deserved reputation for his high level of technique when playing quiet, maneuvering positions. But still, simplifying the game isn't always objectively justified, and sometimes leads only to a worsening of the position.

That was the case here: Adams obviously wasn't satisfied with the results of the opening and hoped that by exchanging queens he could get closer to his desired drawing outcome. In actual fact Black's advantage increases in the endgame, as he can easily activate his king, while the white king's mobility is restricted by the enemy bishop and b4-pawn. With the queens on the board that circumstance wouldn't have any significance, which is why after 27.Qe2 or 27.Be4 Black is left with only a slight advantage.

27...Rxc6-/+ 28.Rge1 Rcd6 29.Re5 Rd4 30.Rg1 R8d6 31.b3 (*This isn't a little window, it's a trapdoor to hell* – Shipov) **31...Bf6 32.Ree1 Kg7!** (the king starts its journey to the opponent's camp) **33.a4 a5 34.Ref1 Bg5 35.Rg2 Bf4!** (securing a path to g5 for the king) **36.Rgf2 e5 37.Kb2 Kf6! 38.Bf5 Kg5 39.c4 Be3** (39...bc+ isn't bad either) **40.Rc2 Rd1 41.Rxd1 Rxd1 42.Re2 Kf4 43.Kc2**

If 43.c5, then 43...Rd5! 44.c6 Rc5 45.Rc2 Bd4+ 46.Kc1 Bc3 47.Bd7 e4.

43...Rd6 44.Re1 Rd2+ 45.Kb1 Bd4 46.Kc1 Rf2 47.c5 Rf3! (of course, not 47...Bxc5? 48.Re4+!) **48.c6 Rc3+ 49.Kd2 Rxc6 50.Rf1+ Kg3 51.Be4 Rc3 52.Bd5 Kxg4 53.Bxf7 e4 54.Bc4 Be3+** (54...Bf2!?) **0-1**

After this wide-ranging introduction we'll move on (in subsequent columns) to a systematic examination of episodes on the theme of "the queen exchange."

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