

New Englander

Chess Club Update – Christmas 2021

Chairman's Chatter

It is hardly credible that we have reached another festive season so quickly! The past chess year has been so quiet in some ways and yet busy in others. With the pandemic dominating, we can look back on many online matches, a new venue and the resumption of play over the board. I consider the season a modest success and thank all those whose efforts contributed. Let us hope the news on the medical front in the coming months is not as worrying as we might fear and eventually, the situation improves to permit a more care-free future.

Before that, however, we have Christmastide to enjoy. We probably all have different ways in which to celebrate from either traditional family gatherings and jovial company to over-indulgence in good food and maybe, a little warming beverage. Mmmm..!

One heartening feature of 2021 was the chance to welcome new faces. I trust that in these restricted times, they can still glimpse what our normal schedule would look like and are enjoying our club events.

Some weeks ago, when introducing Piers to the game, I highlighted the fact that all battlefield tactics have a parallel on the chessboard. Some examples are setting an ambush (opening traps), breaching the walls of the enemy fortress (pawn storm), overwhelming the opponent by weight of numbers (material advantage), a war of attrition and endurance (the Petroff Defence) and starving your opponent into submission (zugzwang). Very, very rarely is there a so-called "lone wolf" attack in which one unit is able to take on a whole army. Think of it like the Christmas film being *The Day of the Jackal*...

E Knox v P Hanks

New England Club Championship Rd 4; 08.12.2021

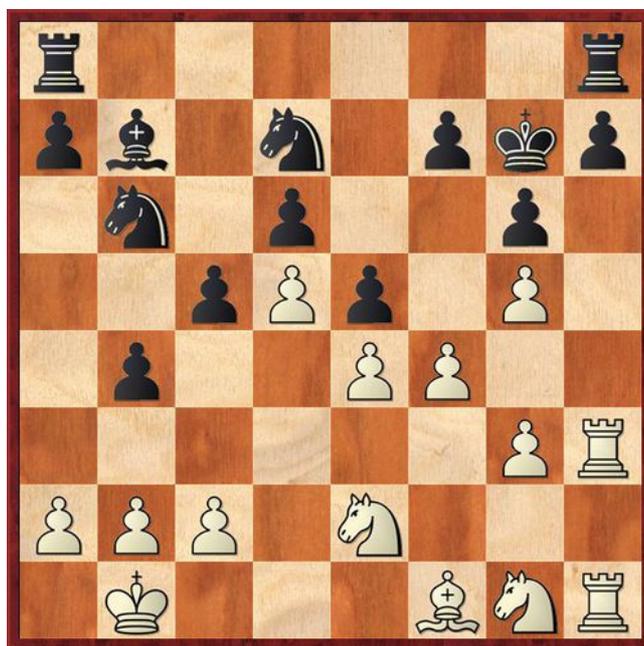
Starting from the diagram with Black to move, White enjoys a space advantage but having invested several tempi in doubling the rooks, he has fallen behind in development. If Black does not react immediately, White can simply activate his pieces and choose how best to push forward the mobile centre pawns.

The best option is to confront White with 19 ... f5 when the protection of e4 is thrown into question after 20 gxf6+ Nxf6 21 Bg2 exf4 22 gxf4 Rae8. I underestimated the danger for my opponent here and believed that this would merely rid White of his doubled pawns. Instead, I hatched a plan involving a daring mission by a solitary hitman.

19 ... Nc4

Crossing the border alerts the authorities to the threat of 20 ... Nd2+ winning the bishop on f1 but this is just a fake passport. What is the real target?

20 Nf3



There is no need to panic yet. White meets the threat and continues development effectively unhindered.

20 ... Ne3

The secret service ponder a little strategy. Black can trade knight for bishop but in this case, the blocked pawns minimise any advantage. No real problem ... but wait a minute! The veteran is using a cunning disguise! Black plans 21 ... Ba6 with the booby trap 22 ... Nxf1 followed by 23 ... Bxe2 and if the knight on e2 moves, the bishop on f1 is doubly attacked. White can defend with 22 R3h2 but just look how paralysed the president's entourage has become.

21 Nc1

The bodyguard's defensive instincts kick in.

21 ... Ng4

Our hero could call for back-up with 21 ... f5 but with total single-mindedness, he trains his sights on f2, taking down one of the enemy's strong men.

22 Rh4

Had the branches of law enforcement communicated, counter-terrorism would have recommended 22 Bb5. Fixated by the sniper, however, White avoids the fork.

22 ... Nf2

The assassin takes his shot, hits a rook but the target was e4. Which is worse – material deficit or crumbling pawn structure? White leaves you the choice.

23 Nd3

After all, *The Day of the Jackal* famously ends on a cliff-hanger.

Merry Chessmas!

Paul Hanks