

PANDEMIC SHARK

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PANDEMIC SHARK

A JOURNEY THROUGH THE WORLD OF CHESS IMPROVEMENT

DANIEL GORMALLY

Thinkers Publishing 2022



Key to symbols

!	a good move	±	White has a serious advantage
?	a weak move	+	Black has a serious advantage
!!	an excellent move	+-	White has a decisive advantage
??	a blunder	-+	Black has a decisive advantage
!?	an interesting move	→	with an attack
?!	a dubious move	↑	with initiative
□	only move	⇄	with counterplay
=	equality	Δ	with the idea of
∞	unclear position	▷	better is
≈	with compensation for the sacrificed material	N	novelty
±	White stands slightly better	+	check
≠	Black stands slightly better	#	mate

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Introduction

I was once dismissive of the attempts by amateur players to improve. To me it seemed too obvious - you either had it or you didn't. Talent was ultimately all that mattered. All my writing on chess was really for myself. If amateur players couldn't follow, tough.

I don't think that this dismissive attitude towards amateurs by professional chess players is particularly unusual. There is plenty of talk about 'fish', and in professional circles a general level of contempt is always on display. Perhaps we too easily forget that we were once 'fish' and 'patzers' ourselves, and are probably still viewed as such by even higher-rated players. It is only recently that I have started to think more along the lines of how amateur players approach chess, and the typical mistakes they make.

Classic mistakes by amateur players include:

1. Moving a piece too often in the opening. This is one of the mainstays which I think relates at least partly to the desire to create something in the opening, when we would be better advised to focus on simple development.
2. Impatience. Sometimes amateur players are too eager to change something when there really is no need.
3. Overgeneralising. One of the biggest differences I've noticed when comparing professional play to amateur play is that the former is much more about concrete calculation - you go there, I go here and so on - whereas an amateur player will have a tendency to overgeneralise when thinking about a position, perhaps because they are not used to the basic art of calculation.
4. Cutting variations off too quickly. Amateur players do not extend their calculation far enough, and thus superficiality tends to kick in.

These and other mistakes I will try to explain in the book. Of course it should be noted that professional players also make these kinds of mistakes. I certainly do, all the time, so there is plenty of overlap and understanding of where these mistakes come from.

Chapter One

Lessons on Skype

I don't really do much chess coaching these days but recently I was contacted out of the blue by a friend of mine, Terry Cordwell. I've known Terry since the days we both went to John Roan School in Greenwich. Back then I knew his brother Alex a bit better through a classmate of mine, Marc Sands, who sadly is no longer with us. After school our lives went in different directions, and Alex and Terry got into the world of gambling. Terry now works for a professional gambler who takes seven hours to make his selections, which just about beats my own record of seven seconds to plump for Arctic Owl at Warwick because I like the name.

Terry rang me on Skype to tell me that he was after a quick lesson. The life of a professional player has changed over the years. It used to be about lumping *Informators* around from tournament to tournament; now it is much more digitally based, revolving around working with ChessBase and producing video courses for a seemingly insatiable chess public.

There is an awful lot of online coaching as well on software like Skype and Zoom. Because it is possible to make regular money from these sources, a lot of professional players just don't play tournaments anymore. Either they don't have the time, or they lack the inclination. They judge they can make more at home than they can by trudging two hundred miles to a tournament that is often held in less than desirable conditions, fighting over a prize fund that may have seemed terribly enticing to their younger selves, but which they now view as derisory.

I think that giving up entirely on the playing side is something of a mistake and loses sight of what got you into chess in the first place. Terry has no such complexes and got into chess from a different angle, so most of his playing has been online. He plays remarkably well for someone who has never played an over-the-board tournament. Normally I turn down requests for online coaching because I find it awkward to chat to people I barely know, but Terry is easy to talk to. During our training games we were often interrupted by his greyhound walking around in the background.

Terry Cordwell – Daniel Gormally (2479)

The Colle System transposing into a Grünfeld setup

Casual rapid game, lichess.org, 16.08.2021

[Notes by Daniel Gormally]

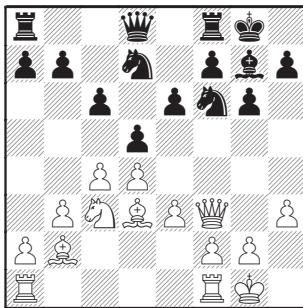
1.d4 d5

“Play ...d5 mate”, Terry told me. He wanted to test out the kind of openings that he got against the sort of players he would face at his level.

2.e3

The Colle System is one of Terry’s favourites because it tends to lead to straightforward attacking positions, promising the sort of brutal hacking games that he tends to revel in.

2... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 3.c4 c6 4. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ g6 5. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 6.b3
 0-0 7. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 8.h3 $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ e6
 10. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}bd7$ 11.0-0

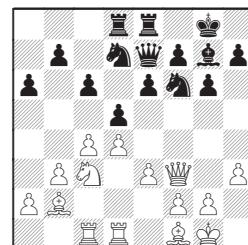


So far, so normal.

11... $\mathbb{Q}e8??$

Extremely careless. Terry said at the time that this wasn’t what he normally had to face in similar positions... clearly there is a good reason for this.

11... $\mathbb{Q}e8$ is a much more normal move. Black cannot play ...e5 yet as the d5-pawn will drop off, but he at least helps to prepare the idea. The problem for White is that it is not so easy to find an effective plan to improve his position. It is not clear whether or not e4 is a useful break, as it also has some downsides (for example the d4-pawn becomes a target for Black). This is exactly the sort of position that I personally find difficult because it is not clear what you have to do, and I guess Terry felt the same. He operates well when there is a clear target in sight. 12. $\mathbb{Q}fd1$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ Now ...e5 becomes an idea, threatening ...e4 with a fork. 13. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}ad8$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}ac1$ a6



All that can be said is that there are chances for both sides, but Black is well set up to defend here. 15.e4?! dxе4 16. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ e5! 17.d5? $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ cxд5 20.cxd5 $\mathbb{Q}h6\#$.

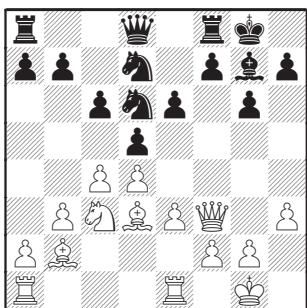
12. $\mathbb{Q}fe1?$

Terry misses his opportunity. I told him afterwards that when faced with a surprise, we should consider our next move carefully. Why is it a surprise? Is there a particular reason why our opponent played that move, and what is the possible flaw with it? If faced with something unusual and bizarre, then there could be a good reason why that move is not normally played. That's exactly when we should pause and consider our next move carefully.

12.cxd5 exd5 13.♕a3+– is the simple win of the exchange.

After **12.♕a3 c5** could be considered, but this is also inadequate. **13.cxd5 cxd4 14.dxe6 ♜e5 15.♗xb7+–** and White's threats are decisive, for example the idea of playing e7.

12...♝d6



13.c5?

I didn't like this move at all, because I felt it took away one of the useful assets that White enjoys in this position, namely the pressure on d5. It would have been better to have not made a move at all. This is one of the 'kinks' that I started to notice in Terry's play,

a desire to escape the tension in the position by closing the pawn structure too early. I feel this relates to patience: the more patient you are, the less you have this urge to escape the tension. But I also feel in this case it relates to experience. Those of us who have been around the block a bit would probably understand the downside of closing the position like this. As I explained, Terry has never played an over-the-board tournament, so has done astoundingly well to achieve the kind of online ratings that he has. There is no telling what level he could get to with the right amount of experience and training.

13.♕a3! would again have been awkward. I didn't want to put the queen on c7, as that seemed to run into ideas of sacrificing on d5. **13...♝f6! (13...♛c7 14.cxd5 cxd5 15.♝xd5 exd5 16.♕ac1 ♛b6 17.♗xd5 and White is stomping all over the position) 14.♕g3±** with some useful pressure.

13...♝c8 14.♕ad1 ♜e7

Black is doing well now as the ...e5 break is clearly on the cards (I could have even played it last move).

14...e5 15.♝xd5! I don't think Terry considered this idea, but again this is more about experience. I've seen examples where similar sacrifices have worked, he hasn't. It's very difficult to navigate your way around a chess game without any prior knowledge. **15...cxd5 16.♗xd5≈** White obviously has fantastic compensation for a relatively small material investment.

15.♘e2?

An unfortunate blunder.

15...♞xc5

Now Black is winning.

16.♗c3 ♘d7

16...♝xd3 17.♝xd3 ♘f5–+ was simpler.

17.♗g3 e5 18.e4 exd4 19.♔a1 ♘e5

20.♕e2 ♘xd3 21.♝xd3 c5–+

Now the bishop on a1 is effectively dead.

22.exd5 ♘xd5 23.♗f3 ♗d7 24.♗e4 f5

25.♗e1 ♕ae8 26.♗xe8 ♕xe8 27.♗e2 ♕e6

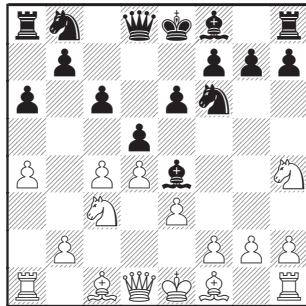
28.♗d2 ♔h6 29.♗c2 ♘b4 30.♗b2 d3

31.♕xb7 dxe2 0-1

Terry Cordwell – Daniel Gormally (2479)

Casual rapid game, lichess.org, 16.08.2021

[Notes by Daniel Gormally]



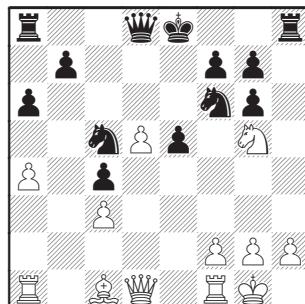
8.♘f3?

Quite clearly the move of an inexperienced player. Terry was concerned about the knight becoming marooned on h4, but a player with more knowledge of this opening would be aware that this is a perfectly normal square for it in this variation. It also displays a tendency to overgeneralise, a typical weakness of amateur players. In what sense is the knight vulnerable? Black would have to play a move first before the knight is threatened, and if ...g5, it can just go back to f3.

8...♗b4 9.♘g5?

This isn't great either, as another mistake typical of inexperienced and amateur players shows itself - the desire to move the same piece over and over in the opening.

**9...♗g6 10.♗d3 ♘bd7 11.♗xg6 hxg6
12.0-0 dxc4 13.e4 e5 14.d5 ♕xc3 15.bxc3
cxsd5 16.exd5 ♘c5–+**

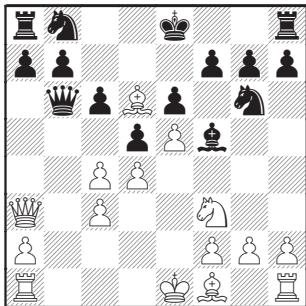


Black already has a decisive advantage with an extra pawn and the white pawn on d5 very weak. I went on to win some moves later.

Daniel Gormally (2479) – Terry Cordwell

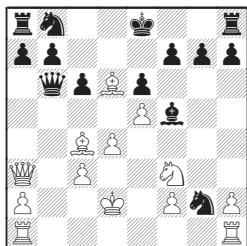
Casual rapid game, lichess.org, 16.08.2021

[Notes by Daniel Gormally]



11...♝d7

Black had the opportunity to play 11...♝f4 and the question is: how does White refute this move? 12.♛c1! is a nice use of geometry. Neither of us spotted this idea in the game. (I had intended to play 12.♔d2?! , but this is poor calculation on my part. Not because ♔d2 leads to a bad position for White, but because it misses something even stronger. 12...dxc4 13.♕xc4 ♝xg2



I thought this wasn't so clear, but now White manages to get a rook to g7. 14.♖hg1 ♘f4 15.♖xg7+.) 12...♝d3+ (12...♝g6 It is clear that White has

many ways of achieving a decisive advantage after this, as the bishop on d6 paralyses Black. 13.h4 ♜e7 14.♕g5 and Black crumbles.) 13.♗xd3 ♗xd3 14.♕g5+–.

12.♕g3+–

Publishing these games looks like I'm showing off: grandmaster posts his wins against much lower-rated player. But the reality is that I simply have vastly more experience than Terry when it comes to playing chess and therefore a lot more knowledge of the game. I do think Terry is a very gifted player and if he had devoted his life to the game, who knows what he could have achieved. He could still attain greatness, as he seems to excel in everything he devotes his time to, for example football, snooker and now chess.

To be able to 'understand' positions it is vital you become familiar with the process of assessing them. Doing this regularly will improve your understanding of positions and the ability to evaluate will become second nature.

I analysed the following game with Yaoyao Zhu-Ashton, otherwise known as Crystal (the English name that she uses) on Zoom while using ChessBase.

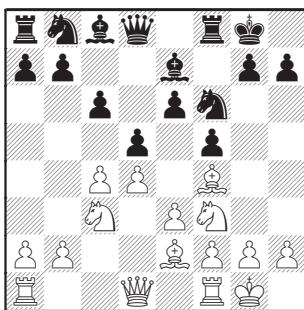
James Chilton (1728) - Yao Yao Zhu (1839)

Dutch Defence

4NCL Spring Bank, Basingstoke (5), 26.05.2019

[Notes by Daniel Gormally]

1.d4 f5 2.c4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 3. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ e6 4. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ d5 5. $\mathbb{Q}f4$
c6 6.e3 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 7. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ o-o 8.o-o±



This was the first occasion where I asked Crystal to tell me how she assessed the position. Is it better for White, equal or is Black better? Crystal said she thought it was unclear. I was a bit harsher on Black and said I thought the correct assessment was that White was clearly better. The computer agreed with this assessment, and to be fair I had a bit of a head start; I have probably analysed similar positions before and therefore I'm more aware of the state of play. I also learned when I was younger that when White gets the bishop to f4 in the Stonewall Dutch he can claim a clear advantage. So what was true more than twenty years ago is also true now!

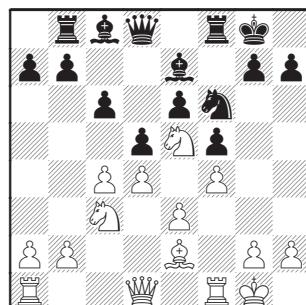
8... $\mathbb{Q}h5$!?

An interesting move and by no means

a bad one, although it did seem to fit in with the impression I got of Crystal's play in that she had a tendency to display a lack of patience at times. Rather than building up she goes for an immediate exchange. As we agreed that this move was interesting but seemed unclear if it was truly the best, we gave it a !?.

I feel that marking your moves every now and again is a vital component of analysing your own games. Crystal seemed impressed by my desire to do this and assess positions in general, because this was something that she had neglected to do before. In fact previous to our analysing this game, she had sent me all of her commentary without any evaluations or exclamation marks.

9. $\mathbb{Q}xb8$ $\mathbb{Q}xb8$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 11.f4



I asked her again what her assessment

of the position was. She thought that White was clearly better, based on the following factors: a powerful knight on e5 and the possibility of attacking on the kingside with g4 or making progress on the queenside with b4–b5. I disagreed and felt that Black was completely fine simply because he had the advantage of the two bishops. In my view that balanced out any advantages that White could claim.

In reality neither of us was completely right because the engine gives White a slight edge. Crystal was impressed by my ability to assess positions accurately and asked me if I was always correct. This is far from the truth and I get it wrong all the time. Even though I might be right more often than someone with a lower rating, this is down to my greater experience and knowledge. If the position is sharp enough, or if I don't allow myself enough time to evaluate, then I will get it wrong quite often.

11...♝e8 12.♞f3 dxc4!

This was certainly worthy of an exclamation mark: Black sharpens the play.

13.♝xc4 b5 14.♝b3 c5 15.♞c1?

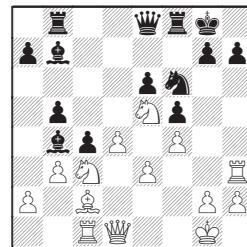
It was true that I was making judicious use of the computer to help make assessments in this game. A better way to operate would be to add your own assessments and exclamation marks before checking with the engine, or even better perhaps, not use the computer at all. This move is a mistake as

it fails to do anything about Black's threatened queenside assault.

15.dxc5 ♜xc5 16.♝h3= was one way to retain parity.

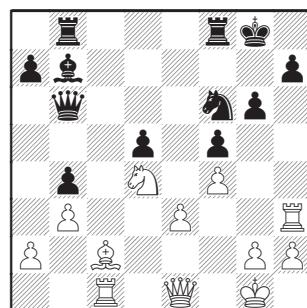
15...c4 16.♝c2 ♜b7 17.♝h3 ♜d6 18.b3 b4?

We soon established in analysis that 18...♝b4!



was a strong reply. 19.♞e2 cxb3 20.♝xb3 a5+ when Black is taking over.

19.♞xc4 ♛c6 20.d5 exd5 21.♞xd6 ♛xd6 22.♝b5 ♛b6 23.♝d4 g6 24.♛e1=



This was another interesting moment. Crystal felt this was clearly better for White due to the strong knight on d4 and the chances of attacking on the kingside. I agreed that White was better but the engine does not