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10 Queen Sacrifices

From the wide range of possible sacrifices, the tactical operations where the strongest piece is offered on Caissa's altar are the most appreciated by both the public and experts. By 'queen sacrifice' we usually understand that the queen is exchanged for an amount of material worth slightly less than nine pawns, even though, objectively speaking, this shouldn't deserve a better evaluation on an aesthetic scale than a mere exchange sacrifice.

However, there is a certain magic about sacrificing the queen. We have all developed a deep respect for this powerful lady; her disappearance can create the same psychological effect as that of a general's sudden death caused by an enemy arrow fired over his army engaged in a fierce battle. Moreover, for the attacking side such sacrifices are the most unexpected and, logically, have the deepest psychological impact.

Another feature, of a more objective nature, is that in order to get an acceptable amount of material for a queen, a more complicated tactical operation is needed than, for instance, getting a knight and a pawn for a rook.

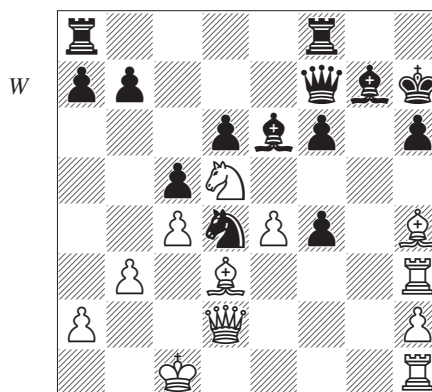
One of the common purposes of a queen sacrifice is to achieve a fortress, but these situations are covered Chapter 5 (Fortresses). Here we shall consider game fragments where the aim was to reduce the opponent's attacking potential or to launch a counterattack. We shall start with an example where a relatively simple operation came as a total surprise for the attacker.

In the following diagram, White has invested two pawns in his kingside attack; he also handed the control of several important dark squares to Black. There was no time for second thoughts.

26 e5+ ♔h8 27 exf6 ♕xh3 28 ♖g1!

White would get nothing after 28 fxg7+ ♗xg7 when, among others, the threat of ...♘f3 followed by ...♗a1+ is rather unpleasant.

After the text-move, things look pretty bad for Black.

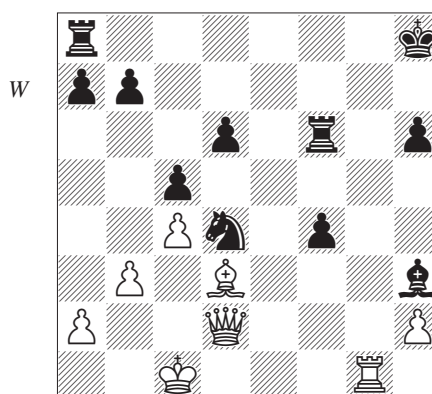


Marin – Uhlmann
Dresden 1988

28...♕xf6!

I remember how surprised I was when I saw this move; I had just managed to calculate that the apparently forced 28...♗g8 29 fxg7+ ♗xg7 30 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 31 ♕f6+ followed by ♗xf4 leads to a decisive attack. By sacrificing the queen, Uhlmann managed to eliminate two of my most dangerous attacking pieces.

29 ♕xf6+ ♗xf6 30 ♘xf6 ♗xf6 (D)



As a result of the operation initiated with 26 e5+, Black has managed to retain a small material advantage, preserve his strong central

knight and transform the weak f4-pawn into a strong one. Demoralized by such a sudden transformation I failed to find the correct way of maintaining the initiative.

31 ♖f2?!

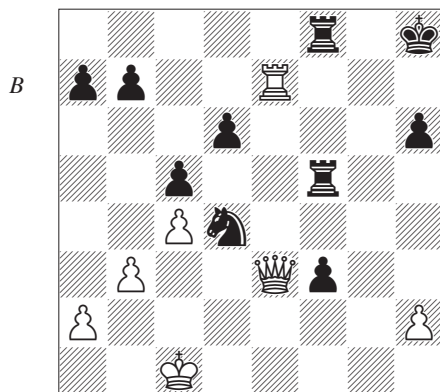
After this stereotyped move, Black manages to consolidate and only with great effort (and some luck) does White obtain a draw.

Much stronger is 31 ♖e1! threatening ♖h4, ♖e7 and ♖e4 at the same time. Because of his temporary lack of coordination, Black is forced to part with his f-pawn: 31...♗af8 (or 31...♙e6?! 32 ♖e4 ♗f7? 33 ♖g6 winning) 32 ♖e7 ♗f7 (32...♗f7? loses to 33 ♖h4) 33 ♖e8+ ♗f8 34 ♖h5 ♙f5 (again forced; if 34...♙e6 then 35 ♗g6!) 35 ♙xf5 ♘xf5 36 ♖g4 followed by ♖xf4. With his king exposed, Black has problems getting a fortress; White retains some winning chances.

31...♗af8 32 ♖e1 f3

White has serious problems now. His only hope is the open position of the black king.

33 ♗e7 ♙f5 34 ♙xf5 ♗xf5 35 ♖e3 (D)



This risky move ends up bringing White a rather undeserved draw, but unblocking the pawn is hardly a wise decision. It is better to capture on b7 when, if he wishes to make any progress, Black might have to offer the exchange of one pair of rooks, thus reaching a position similar to the final one of the game.

35...♗f6 36 ♖e4 ♘f5 37 ♗e8 ♗xe8 38 ♖xe8+ ♙g7 39 ♖e4 ♘d4?

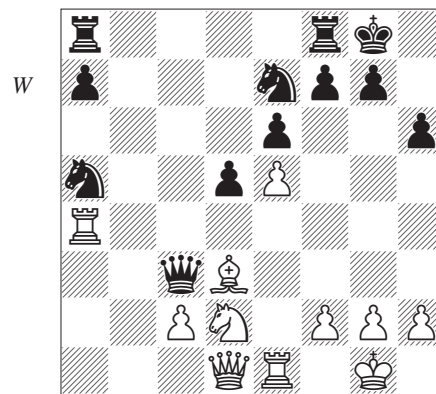
A typical phenomenon: the queen sacrifice has radically changed the course of the game and unexpectedly offered Black good winning chances. Not being entirely prepared to play for

victory with all his strength, Uhlmann missed a neat win by 39...f2!!. The idea is to meet 40 ♖g2+ with 40...♘g3! 41 ♖xg3+ ♙f7.

40 ♖g4+

It took Uhlmann 10 more moves to convince himself that the king cannot escape the perpetual, and agree to a draw.

The queen sacrifice in the following game came as a result of an equally simple operation. However, the example is one of the most impressive I've ever seen on this theme, because of Black's iron logic in the preliminary phase leading to the sacrifice.



Nunn – Yusupov
Linares 1988

For the sacrificed pawn, White has an active position, better development and chances for a kingside attack. The weak squares on the c-file are not too relevant while there is a bishop on d3.

18 ♗e3 ♙h8!

The queen is Black's most active piece, and prevents White from including all his pieces in the attack. After the more passive 18...♖c7 White would get strong pressure with 19 ♖h5 followed by ♗g3, ♗h4, etc.

19 g4?!

This aggressive move is in fact the main cause of White's further difficulties. The weakness of the f4-square seems not to be too relevant with the board full of pieces; both the f4- and g6-squares are under control for the moment. However, as a consequence of Yusupov's precise play, the white bishop will soon have to be