

# THE CHESS DETECTIVE:

## HUNTING THE KING WITH THE EXCHANGE SACRIFICE

By NM Todd Bardwick

Even when it means opening up the position in front of the enemy king, most novice chess players have difficulty sacrificing pieces because they place too much emphasis on material advantages.

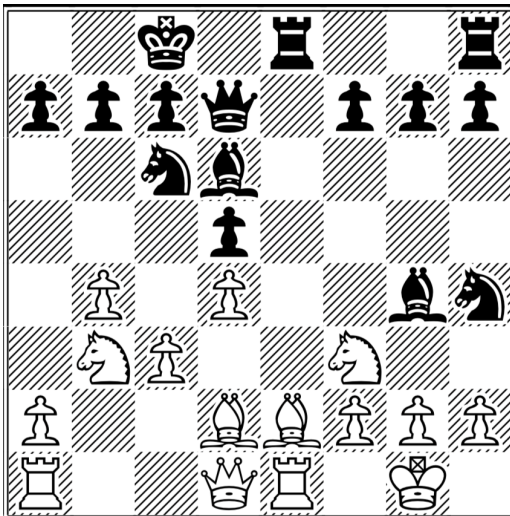
This doesn't mean that material isn't important. Just remember that material imbalances must be carefully weighed against the other types of chess imbalances: king safety, piece activity, pawn structure, and space.

During the course of the game, these imbalances are constantly fluctuating and the master must carefully weigh each one against the other in order to determine the most favorable outcome.

Since the object of the game is checkmate, the highest importance must be placed on king safety.

The exchange sacrifice, giving up a rook for a bishop or a knight, is one of the most common types of sacrifices in chess.

Here is an example from the Exchange Variation of the French Defense.



Position after 13.Be2 (from d3)  
Black to move

First, let's pick up the clues in the position and get a general overview of what is happening.

Notice the pawn structure is symmetrical and the players are castled on opposite sides. When opposite side castling occurs, the general strategy for each player is to launch an attack in front of the opposing king in an attempt to hunt him down and checkmate him.

Time is of the essence; usually the player to break through first wins the game.

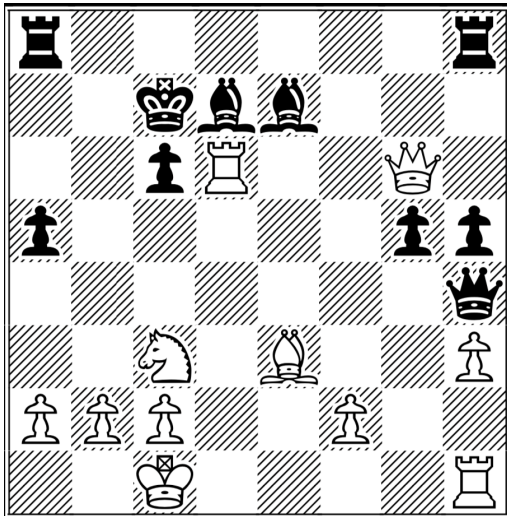
White's last move 13.Be2 protects the knight and breaks the pin on the queen.

The most important square in front of the White's king is f3. White's knight is attacked twice and defended three times. The exchange idea of 13...Bxf3 14.Bxf3 Rxe1+ 15.Bxe1 Nxf3+ 16.Qxf3 leaves White's pawn structure intact and his king out of harms way.

Black can sacrifice the exchange in order to pry open White's king with **13...Rxe2!** eliminating the bishop, a key defender of f3. **14.Qxe2 Bxf3 15.gxf3 Qh3 16.Qf1** stopping 16...Qg2 mate. **16...Qxh2 mate**

In this position from the 1995 Denver Open, Senior Master David Lucky demonstrates the beauty of the exchange sacrifice as he successfully hunts Black's king.

Sharnopolsky (2100)



Lucky (2407)  
Position after 22...Kc7

Black's king is partially exposed and is hoping to find a safe haven on the queenside.

White played **23.Rxd7+!** A pretty exchange sacrifice that tears open Black's defenses. **23...Kxd7 24.Rd1+** Bringing the other rook into the attack without the loss of tempo. **24...Kc7 25.Nb5+! cxb5** If 25...Kb8 or 25...Kc8, then 26.Qxc6 is mating. 25...Kb7 is met by 26.Rd7+ with mate soon. **26.Qb6+ Kc8 27.Qc6+ Kb8 28.Rd7 Resigns**

It is important to keep in mind that when you sacrifice material to make sure that you get some other type of advantage to offset your material loss, or your "sacrifice" is unsound and would be more accurately described as a blunder!

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