

# REACHING

*the*

# TOP?!



**PETER KURZDORFER**

FOREWORD BY CYRUS LAKDAWALA

*A Practical Guide to Playing Master-Level Chess*

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## **A Practical Guide to Playing Master-Level Chess**

by

**Peter Kurzdorfer**

Foreword by Cyrus Lakdawala



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A Practical Guide to Playing Master-Level Chess  
by Peter Kurzdorfer

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# Reaching the Top?!

## Foreword

I don't actually remember meeting my old friend Peter Kurzdorfer for the first time. I just remember that he was always there as a sparring partner and Denny's grand slam breakfast go-guy, when we got tired of our blitz sessions. We were both young, thin and handsome back then in 1981, and we were both chess bums (well, okay, Peter had a real job and I was the chess bum) who hung around the Balboa Chess Club, which is the site today of the San Diego Chess Club. Peter, now an experienced editor and author, asked me to write the foreword to his new book, which is about how to become a chess master. Now you may ask: why would one want to buy a book written by a National Master, when we can buy books written by titled players. The reason is simple: A master understands the great trials one must endure to reach the goal much better than an international master or a grandmaster, whose unnaturally high innate ability tends to allow them to zoom past, attaining the master class and beyond with ease. For the rest of us, we need this book.

Night and day are interconnected, yet perpetually elude one another. We all understand there is a great chasm between what one needs to know and what one needs to *do* to attain that knowledge. In this book, Peter systematically links together the required steps necessary to reach your goal, including key components like:

(1) *The strategies required in playing the same opponent many times.* If our enemy knows we love something or someone, then by harming the object of our love, he has power over us. We must understand just what kind of positions our opponents love – and then promptly deny them their wishes.

(2) *Understanding classic positions.* Most players below the master level play with the following philosophy: “If I don't understand the exact sequence of my plan, then the next best thing is to travel in the direction of probability.” Unfortunately, this wing-it attitude is not going to be enough. We must deeply understand our positions from a structural level.

(3) *Learning from past mistakes.* When we lose the same way, over and over again, we all resemble Pharaoh, immediately after God visited plague after plague upon his head, after the unfortunate misunderstanding about the status of Moses and the children of Israel. Most of us are guided by our introspection, in that we tend to do the exact opposite of what we need! In this book, Peter shows us how to lay our weaknesses bare before our eyes, which is the first step in healing them.

(4) *Choosing openings which suit your style.* I'm currently working on a complete White/Black repertoire book with Professor Joel Sneed of Columbia University. In it we advocate London System as White, against everything, and Caro-Kann and Slav as Black. In this way we *always* reach the same structure, with black or white pieces. As our experience grows, so does our understanding – and our rating. The key is familiarity, mixed with an opening system in harmony with our inner nature.

The key to masterhood is repetitive hard work, mingled with self-knowledge. In this book Peter teaches us how to get from here to there. Good luck in your quest.

Cyrus Lakdawala  
San Diego  
July 2015

## Chapter 2

### Choose Openings to Suit Your Style

Whatever your style, there are appropriate openings. As I became more and more at home with those positions that offered lively pieces for a compromised pawn structure, I looked for ways to get them. Certain opening variations caught my eye, variations that would give me these types of positions, and I began playing them. A few of these are presented here, along with the stories of how they got my attention and how I fared with them.

At first I decided that the classical openings, the Ruy Lopez and the Queen's Gambit Declined, would be my main weapons with the Black pieces. This had less to do with style than with understanding. After reading books like *The Ideas behind the Chess Openings* by Rubin Fine, some of Edward Lasker's works, and *Chess from Morphy to Botvinnik* by Imre König, I felt that I understood the ideas behind the classical openings.

I had a little more trouble choosing openings for the White pieces, because I wanted to steer away from the newer, more complex ideas that drive the Sicilian Defense and the King's Indian Defense, to name only two of the many hypermodern openings that were popular in my day. Thus I was still using some form of King's Indian Attack with White whenever I could not get an open game even as I gained the master rating.

It was only later on, after studying the games of Bobby Fischer, Mikhail

Tal, and Anatoly Karpov, along with perusing other explanatory books such as *New Ideas in Chess* by Larry Evans and such excellent works as *Logical Chess, Move by Move* by Irving Chernev and Larry Evans' *Chess World Championship: Fischer vs. Spassky 1972*, where each move of every game is examined, that I began branching out to include some of the hypermodern ideas in my play.

#### ***Queen's Gambit Declined, Exchange Variation***

I picked this one out of that little gem *Chess from Morphy to Botvinnik*. This is a great historical piece about the development of different ideas through several opening systems, focusing on the play of the world champions and their top competitors of the time.

One of the openings subjected to this analysis was the Exchange Variation of the Queen's Gambit Declined, and it included a strange line where Black's knight takes the route b8-d7-f8-e6 before the black king castles. This looked so outrageous I simply had to try it. Another selling point for me was that the minority attack that White pursues in this line is meant to saddle Black with weakened queenside pawns, which I was willing to take on anyway!

For some reason, this line did not come up very often in my games. In the following encounters my opponents

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were experts, and I won each one. As usual, though, I did not “outplay” any of them from start to finish.

### (25) Lavigne – Kurzdorfer Queen’s Gambit Declined [D36]

Boston 1979

**1.d4 ♟f6 2.c4 e6 3.♞c3 d5  
4.c×d5 e×d5 5.♙g5 ♙e7 6.♞c2 c6  
7.e3 ♞bd7 8.♙d3 ♞f8 9.♞f3 ♞e6  
10.♙h4**

This retreat, so similar to the Ruy Lopez retreat on the other side of the board, has the slight drawback that White is going to have to move the piece again later; However, though capturing on f6 saves time, it hands Black the bishop pair without gaining any visible compensating advantage.

**10...g6 11.0-0 ♞g7**

The knight is only temporarily in the fianchetto position; it is headed for f5 or maybe e6 after my light-square bishop, the problem child of the Queen’s Gambit Declined, gets exchanged.

**12.♞e5 ♙f5 13.♙×f6**

See the note to White 10th move. It is possible to get the minority attack started right away, but it seems to hold no terrors for Black after 13.b4 0-0 14.b5 ♙×d3 15.♞×d3 ♞d7 16.♙×e7 ♞×e7 17.f4 ♞×e5 18.f×e5 ♙ad8 19.♙ae1 c5 and White’s pawns are no healthier than Black’s.

**13...♙×f6 14.e4!?**

This attack in the center is one of White’s options in this variation, but in this particular position it appears to be a bit premature, despite the fact that Black is not yet castled.

**14...d×e4 15.♞×e4 0-0**

This may seem a no-brainer with the e-file open and Black still uncastled, but possibly stronger is 15...♙×e4! 16.♙×e4 0-0 17.♙ad1 ♞e6 18.d5! ♙×e5 19.d×e6 ♞f6 20.♙d7 ♙ab8 and White can play either 21.e×f7+ or even

21.e7, but Black has strong, well-coordinated pieces and can look forward to the future with confidence.

**16.♞×f6+ ♞×f6 17.♙×f5**

17.♙ad1 ♙ad8 18.♞a4 ♞e6 19.♙×f5 ♞×f5 leaves the players in a completely equal position.

**17...♞×f5 18.♞b3 c5!**

I did not like the passive 18...♙ab8, so my choice was between 18...♞e6 and the text; both hit White’s key pawn, which defends his outpost knight. On 18...♞e6 19.♞×b7 ♞×d4 20.♞×c6 ♞×c6 21.♞×c6 ♙fc8 22.♞a6 ♙c2 White can play either 23.b4 or 23.b3 and Black is searching for enough play for the pawn. Although my pieces are very involved, this seems to put an unnecessary burden on Black.

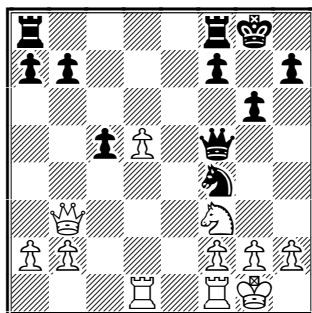
**19.♞f3**

So what happens if White goes pawn hunting now? Something like this: 19.♞×b7 c×d4 20.♞c6 ♞f6 21.♞d7 ♙ae8! and he begins to experience difficulties after 22.♞×a7 ♙d8 23.♞c6 ♞e6 24.b4 d3! or 22.♙ad1 ♞f5 23.♙fe1 ♙×e1+ 24.♙×e1 d3!. In either case Black has a strong initiative; his pieces are particularly assertive.

**19...♞e6 20.d5!?**

My opponent gets a bit rambunctious with this thrust. Safer and maybe sounder is 20.♙ad1 ♙ad8 21.d×c5 ♞×c5 22.♞e3 b6 with an equal game.

**20...♞f4! 21.♙ad1 (D)**



## Choose Openings to Suit Your Style

### 21...♖fd8

Bringing pieces into play is all right, but White has more problems after the alert 21...c4! and now:

(a) 22.♗xb7 ♘xg2! 23.♙xg2 ♖g4+ 24.♕h1 ♗xf3+ 25.♙g1 ♖g4+ 26.♕h1 ♙ab8 27.♗xa7 ♙xb2 28.♗d4 ♗f3+ 29.♙g1 ♙e2! (threatening 30...♙e4) 30.♙fe1 ♙fe8 and it is pretty obvious that the white king is under a lot of pressure;

(b) 22.♗xc4?? ♖g4 and White has no defense against both 23...♗xg2# and 23...♗h3+;

(c) 22.♗a3 ♘d3 23.♘e1 ♗xd5 24.♘xd3 ♙ad8 25.♙d2 cxd3 26.♙fd1 ♙fe8 27.h3 (27.♗xa7 ♙e2 28.h3 ♗e5! with a terrific attack) 27...♗f5 28.♙xd3 ♙xd3 29.♙xd3 ♙e1+ 30.♕h2 ♗f4+ 31.♙g3 ♗xf2 and Black's penetration wins.

I have always struggled with missing these kinds of sharp lines; here is an area that you can concentrate on if you want to get better at chess than I ever was.

### 22.d6! ♖g4??

As a follow-up to missing a win last move, I lose my advantage entirely and fall into a worse position by making the same threat at the wrong time. A better try is 22...b5 23.♗xb5 ♙ab8 24.♗c6 ♙xb2, when my pieces are all well placed and still exerting pressure on White's position. But even worse than the text move is 22...c4??, which was so recently winning, because of 23.♗xc4 ♖g4 24.♗xf7+! (this possibility was opened up with White's 22nd move) 24...♗xf7 25.♘e5+ ♗e6 26.♘xg4 ♘e2+! (we revisit the concept of allowing the absolute pin on the e-file because White has no time to take advantage of it that we first saw in game 7 of the introduction) 27.♕h1 ♙xd6 and White winds up with a healthy extra pawn.

### 23.♗xf7+??

And now it is the other guy's chance to make a move that was so good in a variation last move at the wrong time. The trouble with this combination now is that it helps Black bring the king into the center as the endgame approaches without first winning a pawn. Instead, White takes over the initiative with 23.g3 c4 24.♗e3 (it is just a draw after 24.♗xb7 ♘e2+ 25.♙g2 ♙ab8 26.♗e7 ♘f4+ 27.♙g1 ♗xf3 28.gxf4 ♖g4+) 24...♘d3 25.♘e5 ♘xe5 26.♗xe5 ♙d7 27.♙d4 ♗e6 28.♗xe6 fxe6 29.♙e1 ♙e8 30.♙xc4 ♙xd6 31.♙c7 ♙b6 32.♙d1 ♙xb2 33.♙dd7 h5 and it is pretty obvious that White is the one putting the pressure on with the wild pigs on the seventh rank.

**23...♗xf7 24.♘e5+ ♗e6 25.♘xg4 ♘e2+!**

Once again this check gains the time necessary to extract the knight from the coming pin on the e-file.

### 26.♕h1 ♙xd6 27.♙xd6+

There is no way to make Black pay for setting up that e-file pin: 27.♙fe1 ♙xd1 28.♙xd1 ♙e8 29.♙e1 ♗f7 30.♘e3 ♘d4; even the subtler 27.♙de1 ♙d2 28.f4 ♗f5 29.♘e3+ ♗e4 30.♘c4 ♙c2 31.b3 ♙xa2 32.♙f2 b5 33.♘e5 ♗e3 34.♘g4+ ♗d3 35.♘e5+ yields nothing but a draw.

**27...♗xd6 28.♙d1+ ♘d4 29.♙g1 ♙e8 30.♗f1 h5 31.♘e3 ♗c6 32.♘c4 b5 33.♘e3 ♙e4 34.g3 c4 35.h4 ♗c5 36.♙c1 ♘f3 37.♗e2 ♘e5 38.f3?**

The endgame has been advantageous for Black because of my space advantage, but that will not in itself win. I have been putting on the pressure in the hopes of weakening White's position somewhere, and this move is just what the doctor ordered, since it hands me a tactical opportunity. Stiffer resistance comes from 38.b3 ♘d3 39.♙b1 ♘b4 40.a3 ♘c6 41.bxc4 bxc4 42.f3 ♙d4 43.♙c1.

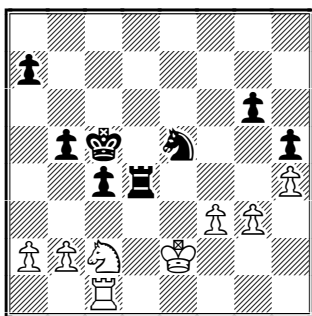


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### 38...♞d4

This is strong, but even stronger is the sharper 38...♗d3!, keeping the pin in place. After 39.♞b1 ♞e8 40.♜d2 ♖x2! 41.♞x2 c3+ 42.♜xc3 ♞xe3+ or 39.♞c2 ♞e6 40.♜d2 ♖x2! Black penetrates into the heart of White's position. Therefore, he has to find 39.b4+! ♜d4! 40.♞xc4+! bxc4 41.fxe4 c3! when Black maintains a large space advantage and White is barely holding on.

### 39.♖c2 (D)



### 39...♗d3!

This time I find the sharp move.

### 40.♖x4??

With only one more move before the time control, the expert finally succumbs to the pressure. 40.♞b1 ♞d8 41.b3 ♞e8+ 42.♜d2 ♖e5 43.bxc4 ♖xc4+ 44.♜c3 a5 45.a3 ♞e7 continues to stubbornly hold on.

**40...♖xc1+ 41.♜e3 ♖xa2 42.g4 ♖b4 43.♖e6+ ♜d6 44.♖f4**

This blunder does not really matter; it simply shortens the game a bit. After 44.♖f8 ♖d5+ 45.♜e4 a5 Black's pawns are much faster than White's pawns: 46.♖xg6 a4 47.gxh5 c3 48.bxc3 a3.

**44...♖d5+ 45.♜e4 ♖xf4 46.♜xf4 hxg4 47.fxg4 ♜e6 48.♜e4 a5 49.♜d4 a4 50.♜c3 ♜e5 0-1**

## Taking a Thought Break

The next example comes from another of the rated matches I played against an expert. It features the same kinds of horrors that have always been the normal procedures in so many of my encounters with such near-masters. In this case, however, the vacation we took from strong play included a double glitch in the middlegame, and came back strong over a five-move sequence late in the game where it looks as though somebody else took over for both of us.

In my case at least the awful play stemmed from frustration that my position was not yielding what I thought it should; therefore, I tried to force a win where none existed, and of course allowed my opponent to turn the tables several times. David Hart may have had other psychological reasons for his poor showing in this series, but it comes to the same thing; he also attempted to win without paying any attention to how his pieces wanted to go about the task, and failed to try to win when victory was within his grasp, looking for defenses instead.

Interestingly, the multiple blunders late in the game came both before and after the time control. This shows that time pressure, while it probably contributed to the first horrors, was not a factor in the following play.

### (26) Hart – Kurzdorfer

Queen's Gambit Declined [D36]

m(4), San Diego 1981

**1.d4 ♖f6 2.c4 e6 3.♗f3 d5 4.♖c3 ♗e7 5.cxd5 exd5 6.♗g5 c6 7.e3 ♖bd7 8.♗d3 ♖f8 9.♜c2 ♖e6 10.♗h4 g6 11.0-0 ♖g7 12.♞ab1 ♗f5 13.b4 ♗xd3 14.♜xd3 a6**

This time I prepare counterplay on the a-file.

**15.a4 0-0**