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How to Become a Candidate Master

A Practical Guide to Take Your Chess to the Next Level

New In Chess 2020

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Preface

In the summer of 1978 I began teaching at the Bradford Chess Camp organized by Robert Ferguson. The camp offered lessons to players from beginner to 1900+ and it was very successful. I continued teaching at Bradford for many years until the camp split and became the Castle Chess Camp held at Atlanta, Georgia. Here, too, the classes were offered for a wide range of rated students. One of the first things I noticed from Bradford to Atlanta was that you could not offer the same lesson to the aspiring young master as to the enthusiastic beginner.

When I first thought of writing a book to help young players, I realized that most, if not all, of the existent books were either written by masters to show off their skills, and annotated at a master level, or were written to aid the beginner to gain a glimmer of insight into the game. There just didn't seem to be a middle ground.

And I thought back to the game of Go. There was a series of books designed to raise a Go player's strength through different kyu levels. (A one kyu level player was roughly the equivalent of a 2000 rated player. The level just below, the two kyu, was about 1900.) I remembered seeing one book designed to raise a player from 5 kyu to 3 kyu. And I thought, why not a chess book to do the same thing? And so the idea of *How to Become a Candidate Master* was born.

I elected to write a book dedicated to 1800 rated players who desire to improve their chess to become experts (2000+ USCF; please note that FIDE ratings are 50-100 points lower).

I would like to thank my lovely wife Colleen, who makes the best gravy in the world, my daughter Samantha, who has produced some amazing grandchildren, my son Quentin, whose late night telephone calls made the distance to California minute, and my boy (now a 21-year-old man) Nicholas who has discovered some of the great books of the world, though not of chess.

Alex Dunne,
Sayre (PA) USA, April 2020

Introduction

For ambitious club players

It is a common dream of chess players to visualize themselves as master players, defeating their opponents and winning tournaments. Such is the stuff of dreams, but before we can run, we must first learn how to walk. As an 1800+ player you have already lifted yourself above the majority of tournament players. As a matter of statistics, with a rating of 1800+, 83% of all tournament players are ranked below you.

Above you, however, are some pretty strong players – the World Champion, the grandmasters, the masters, and our target, the Candidate Masters (experts, as they are called in the USA). Roughly speaking, the World Champion is defined as the player who consistently (3 out of 5 or better) defeats all the grandmasters he faces. A grandmaster, roughly defined again, defeats masters in 3 out of 5 games or better. The master will consistently defeat the Candidate Master by the same ratio or better and the Candidate Master has been defeating you by that same edge. Why?

The simplistic answer is that the Candidate Master (2000-2200 USCF) plays better chess than the 1800 player. It is the design of this book to reveal the difference in play to the 1800 player to enable him to become a Candidate Master.

The typical chess book uses a different approach. Most books select master games analyzed by masters in an attempt to raise a player immediately to the master level. Though these books are extremely valuable and sometimes very well written, the fact is that there is simply no easy road to masterhood.

As an 1800+ player, you are quite aware of the struggle, work, study, and pain it took to get you this far. Of course, there are rewards and joys in playing as well as you do, too. It is not easy to become a Candidate Master, but with the aid of this book, some perseverance, work and study, some joy in your chess, that goal can be obtained.

The first edition of this book, published in 1985, was quite popular, going through three printings plus an annex in a short time. The annex was the idea of the publisher. Originally I asked a number of questions to the reader, but I withheld the answers. I believe the addition of the answers helped make the book more successful, and therefore the answers have all been incorporated into the present edition. The questions are indicated with the term 'Analyze' in bold inside the games, and the answers are given at the end of each game with the term 'Analysis' in bold.

Some other changes have been made for the present edition. The addition of two games where the reader is matched against a strong Candidate Master make the book a better guide for the reader who wants to become stronger and wants to improve his rating. The analysis has been checked with modern computer engines for accuracy. Also, a more modern view of some of the openings has been used. The book has been made more accessible by adding a great many diagrams. I'd like to thank Frank Erwich from New In Chess for doing a wonderful job here.

This book, then, differs from others in that the games contained within are mostly games between 1800+ players and Candidate Masters. These games were mainly selected from 1982 US tournaments with some more modern games included. In these games we will see the typical strengths and weaknesses of the 1800+ player and we will discuss how the Candidate Master, usually, takes advantage of them.

When you play over these games, you will take the side of the Candidate Master. If you are going to learn to play like a Candidate Master you may as well sit in his chair. A word of warning – you will not win every game from the Candidate Master's seat. No Candidate Master can so dominate 1800+ players, just as no 1800+ player can expect 100% results from 1600 players; there are lessons to be learned from losses and draws as well as wins.

I have one final word about studying these games. There are fifty-two chapters in this book, fifty-two tournament games.

These games were played with a clock running, ticking away. It is one thing to study games in the quiet of your den. It is another thing, again, to play a tournament game. Since your intention, presumably, is to become a Candidate Master in the tournament area, not an armchair 2000+ player, the best way to study this book is one (or possibly two) games a day, with a chess clock running by your side. Take a 3x5 index card to cover up the moves. A small rectangle can be cut out of the left hand side to reveal White's move and still cover up Black's response when you are 'playing' the black pieces. If you want to record your choices, you may. This would give you a guide to compare your choice of moves against the Candidate Master's choice. If you have the book as an ebook, try reading it one move at a time, planning your next move before reading on, possibly on a small portable chess set.

It was both a pleasure and a daunting task to update *How To Become a Candidate Master*. I can only hope the reader finds it the same.

Alex Dunne,
Sayre (PA) USA, April 2020

CHAPTER 41

1816 – You

Ruy Lopez C68

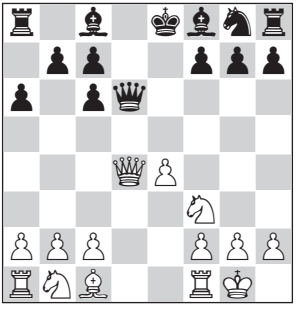
1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗xc6

Because of a famous game Lasker-Capablanca, St Petersburg 1914, and the view of the annotators, for a long time this was known as a 'drawing line'. Such is the power of the pen. This, the Exchange Ruy Lopez, as Fischer has shown, is not a drawing line but an invitation to an unbalanced endgame. As such it is an ideal practice for the aspiring Candidate Master. He should familiarize himself with the strategic play for both sides.

4...dxc6 5.0-0 ♕d6

This is a playable line, but most modern players essay 5...f6 or 5...♗g4 to hold on to the e-pawn.

6.d4 exd4 7.♕xd4



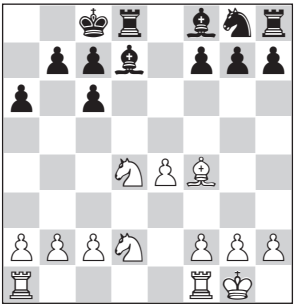
The 1800 player rushes into the endgame, probably still under the spell of 'the drawing line'. What we have seen is that this position, with the two bishops, can be a powerful point-scorer in the hands of a Candidate Master. For this reason, 7.♘xd4 would have been a better idea, when Black helps White to develop if he wants to force further exchanges. We have already seen the Candidate Master using the two bishops to win an endgame. Let us critique Black's abilities in this game.

7...♕xd4 8.♘xd4 ♗d7

By castling queenside Black will occupy the open file and place his king on the side of the board where he has a pawn more. The king can protect the c7-pawn here, too.

9.♗f4 0-0-0 10.♘d2

The first sign that the player of the white pieces is not a master. In the stem game Barendregt-Bronstein, Hamburg Ech-tt 1965, White played 10.♘c3, a move that integrates his pieces better. White's problem in this opening is to find squares for his knights. The ideal square is e4, after a properly timed e4-e5.



10...♘e7

If Black can paralyze the white kingside pawns, and prevent them from advancing, White will soon find he has no counter-chances against Black's two bishops. For this purpose Black plans to post his knight on g6 where it eyes f4 and e5. Notice that if the knight is driven from g6 by f4-f5, the e5-square will be available to it. Notice that 'mindless' development by 10...♗e7 – development without a plan – will soon lead to a position where Black has few chances as a strong white center will keep Black's pieces out.

11.♘2f3 ♘g6 12.♗g3 c5

Black begins the by now familiar process of driving the white pieces from the center. This also opens up avenues for the light-squared bishop. As White's pieces are driven back, Black's bishops will grow stronger.

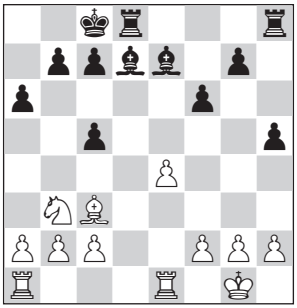
13.♘b3 ♗e7 14.♖fe1 h5!?

One goal of the holder of the two bishops is to swap off his knight for one of the white pieces. This brings the two-bishops

ending closer. Black neatly accomplishes this by the threat of ...h5-h4. For White to play h2-h4 would reduce his bishop's scope and weaken his own kingside pawn majority.

Therefore:

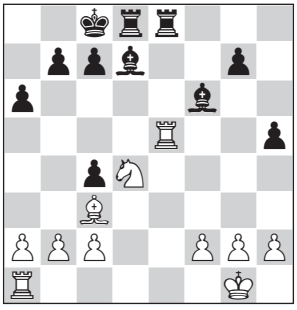
15.♘e5 ♘xe5 16.♗xe5 f6 17.♗c3



Black has achieved his simplification. Now, as a Candidate Master, what can you do to further increase Black's advantage?

17...c4!?

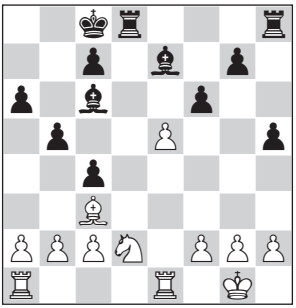
Black had two lines of play. The attacking line based on 17...h4 may well succeed over-the-board, but Black does not have too many pieces to attack with. Instead, he continues planning to drive the white knight out of the center. After 18.♘d4, White's e4-e5 push is temporarily unappetizing due to 18...♖he8! (notice the centralization on both sides) 19.e5?! fxe5 20.♖xe5 ♗f6!



analysis diagram

21.♖xe8 (**Analyze 1:** Why not 21.♖xh5 ?) 21...♖xe8 with a slight edge.

18.♘d2 b5 19.e5 ♗c6!



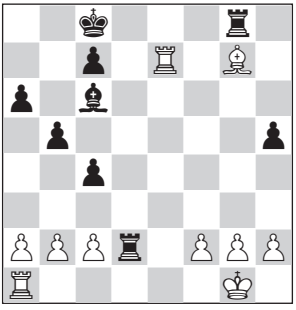
Black plays with finesse – the two bishops offer such opportunities. The Candidate Master needs only to be alert to such chances. He makes these chances happen by knowing the technique to 'soften up' the opponent's position. The 1800 player has been acquitting himself well, but many a GM has fallen to the power of the bishop duo.

Analyze 2: What is Black's plan?

20.exf6 ♗xf6 21.♗xf6 ♖xd2 22.♗xg7

White is not likely to survive the ending after 22.♗c3 ♖xc2.

22...♖g8 23.♖e7



23...♖d7!

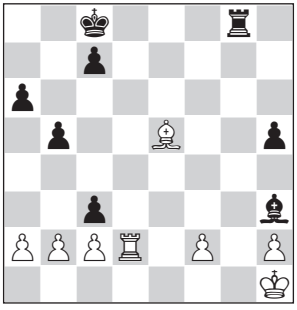
This insures the invasion of g2 – White cannot defend by 24.♖1e1 because of 24...♖xg7, winning.

24.♖xd7 ♔xd7 25.♖d1+ ♔c8 26.♗e5 ♗xg2 27.♖d2 ♗h3+ 28.♔h1

Black has broken through, but what now? Would even the gain of a pawn be enough to win? Analyze.

28...c3!? 29.♗xc3 ♗g2+ 30.♔g1 ♗d5+ 31.♔f1 ♗c4+ 32.♖d3
Based on the following continuation, do you see why White could have had slight drawing chances without his 25th move? Omit 25.♖d1+ ♔c8 and try 25.♗e5 ♗xg2 26.f3 ♗xf3+ 27.♔f2 ♗e4 28.♖d1+ ♔c6 29.♖d2. Black will still have a chance to win, but he may be disappointed in the end.

But we observe in this position another peculiar happening when Candidate Master meets 1800 player. Were you, too, taken in? Does 28...c3 win?

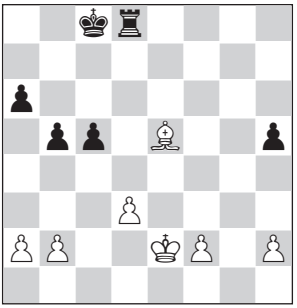


Well, maybe, but not as convincingly as in the game. Why does it happen that a player 'believes' another player, believes him so much that he continues on a losing course? Believes him so much he cannot find 29.bxc3 ♗g2+ 30.♔g1 ♗d5+ 31.♗g3! and White has better surviving chances compared to what happened in the game? A large part of this mental set comes from over-respecting one's opponent. The higher-rated player does not usually suffer from this ailment; it generally afflicts the lower-rated player. The Candidate Master must not worry too much about his opponent's rating. His job is to defeat his opponent. If he believes he can, he usually will. If he believes he is going to lose, he usually will. Rating points are a measure of an opponent's past performance, not how well he will do in the game under consideration. Confidence grows with success, and success, at chess, is often closely related to the will to win, the sheer will to succeed.

But what has this missed line to do with the technique of 2♗'s vs. ♗+♘? Only that the tactical chances favor the two bishops. They do not always provide a forced win; they only

give the holder the better chances when used correctly. The Candidate Master should learn to treat them with respect and assume he will find a win with them. In our game, the Candidate Master found the 'winning' line.

32...c5 33.♔e2 ♖d8 34.♗e5 ♗xd3+ 35.cxd3



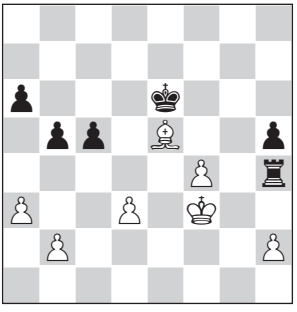
A new phase of the ending has developed. Black has a rook against a bishop and pawn. Can he win? What plan should he adopt?

35...♔d7

The king is to be brought to the center first. With its aggressive posture, the rook and king should find new inroads into White's position.

36.♔e3 ♔e6 37.♔e4 ♖g8 38.f4 ♖g4 39.a3 ♖h4 40.♔f3?!

White gives ground, but after 40.♗b8 ♔f7! Black wins the h-pawn with an easy win.

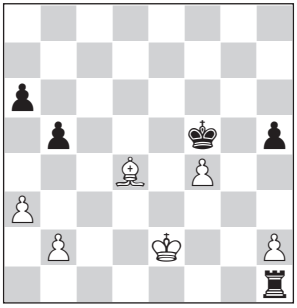


Analyze 3: What would one winning attempt be now?

40...♔f5 41.♔g3 ♖g4+ 42.♔f3 ♖g1 43.d4

White seeks to exchange pawns, but this allows Black to tie him up.

43...cxd4 44.♗xd4 ♖f1+ 45.♗f2 ♖d1 46.♔e2 ♖b1 47.♗d4 ♖h1



Notice that the CM does not hastily grab the f-pawn. He knows that the h-pawn (freeing his own h-pawn for queening) is more valuable.

48.♔f3 ♖xh2 49.♔g3 ♖d2 50.♗e5 ♖d3+ 51.♔h4 ♖f3 52.♗g7 ♖xf4+ 53.♔xh5 ♖f1 0-1

Comment on the Candidate Master's endgame play. Could you do better?

Analysis 1: After 21.♖xh5? then 21...♗g4! will win a piece.
Analysis 2: Black's plan is to open up kingside lines to attack White's king with rooks and bishops.
Analysis 3: Black has an easy win after 40.♔f3?!. He should simply have played 40...♖xh2. Black was concerned a move earlier that ...♖xh2 could be met by f4-f5+ but 40.♔f3 unguarded the bishop, so that 41.f5+ could be met by 41...♔xe5. 40...♔f5? was a knee-jerk reaction but tournament chess should not be played by the knee.