Selected Double Piece Sacrifices

Rhys Goldstein, November 2013

I was recently inspired by a game of Fischer's in which he sacrificed two pieces of the same type to checkmate a castled king. Seeing that game, I decided that for every type of piece, I would try to find the most compelling example of a double piece sacrifice. Here are my picks.

Double Knight Sacrifice

Knight sacrifices occur all the time in attacking positions, but rarely does one give up both knights in quick succession. This example is mind-blowing.

Stanishevsky vs Nikonov
Moscow 1981
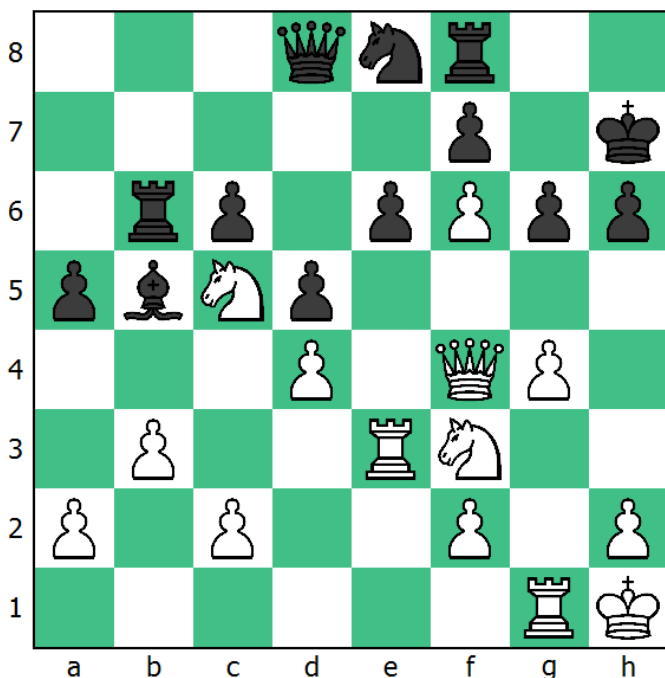
Position after 22…N(d6)e8. White to move.

In a perfect world, White would be able to do two things here:
1. Slide the rook on e3 to h3 to attack h6.
2. Delay Black's capture of the f6 pawn, attacked twice and defended only once.

White judged it worthwhile to achieve both of these objectives…at any cost.

23.Nd7!?

A decoy! White gives up one knight to allow the other to vacate the third rank with tempo.

23…Qxd7 24.Ne5 Qd8

Now the rook can get to h3, but f6 is still hit twice.

25.Nd7?!

A deflection on the same square! White gambles that if only f6 can survive a few more moves, the Black king will eventually get mated.

25…Qxd7 26.Rh3 h5 27.gxh5 g5 28.Qxg5 Qd8? 29.h6 Qxf6? 30.Qg7+! Nxg7 31.hxg7+ Qh6

After throwing away both knights for nothing, guess how White promotes the pawn…

32.gxf8=N+! Kh8 33.Rxh6# 1-0

Though amazing, the combination was not entirely sound. Black could have achieved at least a draw with the deeply hidden Bf1! on either move 28 or 29. If White captures on f1, Black has Rg8; if White declines the bishop, the rook on h3 runs out of squares. For example, 29…Bf1! 30.Rh5 Be2 31.Rh3 Bf1 32.Rh4? Qxf6 33.Qg7+ Nxg7 34.hxg7+ Qxh4 35.gxf8=Q Qe4+ and White gets mated.

Technically, White was mistaken to sacrifice the second knight. From the diagram, a more sound line was 23.Nd7!? Qxd7 24.Ne5 Qd8 25.Rh3 h5 26.gxh5 g5 27.Qxg5 Qxf6 28.Qg3 Rb7 (to prevent 29.Nd7) 29.h6. The position is similar to the game, but here White still has a knight on e5. 29…Bf1 30.Rh4 Be2 (best) 31.Qg7+ Nxg7 32.hxg7+ Qxh4 33.gxf8=Q and this time White's king is safe. Play could continue 33…Qe4+ 34.Rg2 Bg4 35.h3 Qe1+ 36.Kh2 and White wins the bishop and the game.

Although the second sacrifice was unsound, White deserves admiration for having the creativity to consider giving up both knights on an empty square, and the boldness to go through with it.

Double Bishop Sacrifice

Many chess players are aware of the "classic double bishop sacrifice". The basic idea is to expose a castled king by giving up both bishops for the g and h pawns. It has been done countless times since Lasker discovered the idea in 1889. Here are a few noteworthy examples:

- Lasker vs Bauer, Amsterdam 1889
- Koenig vs Cornforth, London 1952
- Brown vs Kneebone, Exeter 1985

My goal was to find a more original example of a double bishop sacrifice. It took considerable searching to discover this game, and I was pleased that it was won by a top Canadian player.

**Kevin Spraggett vs Giovanni Vescovi
Moscow 2004**
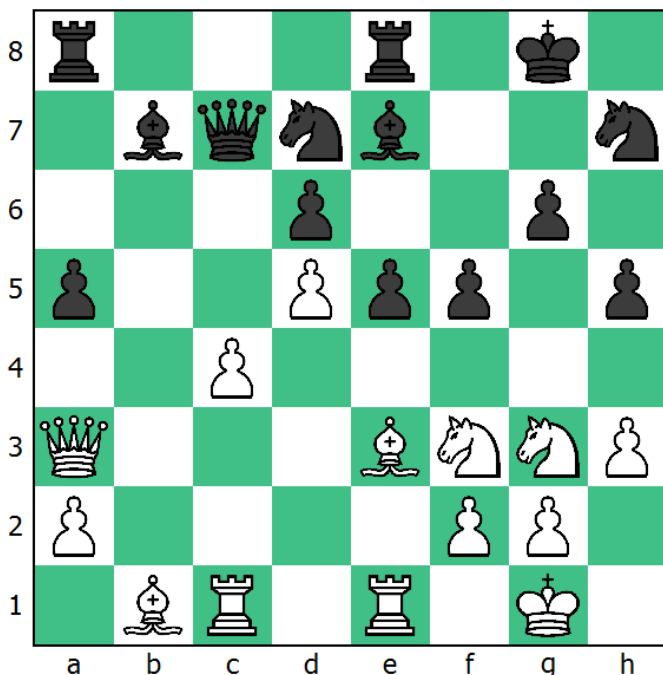
Position after 27…(f7)f5. White to move.

Black has a threatening wall of pawns on the kingside, so White takes immediate action with a sacrifice that has both tactical and positional justification.

28.Bxf5! gxf5 29.Nxf5 Bf8

The position is comical in that, although White's pieces require a considerable amount of time to advance on the Black king, Black's pieces require even more time to come to its defense.

30.N3h4 Bc8 31.Bb6!

The bishop must move so that White's queen can give check on g3. White realizes that this check will be so devastating that it hardly matters whether the bishop survives. Essentially, White gives up the second bishop to vacate the third rank with a forcing move, the easiest type of move to calculate.

31…Nxb6 32.Qg3+ Qg7

Black gets mated after 32…Kh8 33.Ng6+ Kg8 34.Nge7+.

33.Nh6+

Also winning is 33.Nxg7, but the text move is more accurate.

33…Kh8 34.Ng6+ Qxg6 35.Qxg6 Bxh6 36.Qxe8+ Bf8 37.Qc6 1-0

The knight and rook are forked. If 37…Rb8, White wins a piece after 38.Rb1 Bd7 39.Qc7.

Double Rook Sacrifice

The most celebrated double rook sacrifices usually occur with both rooks being captured on the first rank. While one player is preoccupied with this material gain, the other goes on to win with a mating attack. Without a doubt the most famous instance of this theme is the so-called "Immortal

Game" won by Anderssen in 1851. It is listed below along with a couple other worthwhile examples.

- Anderssen vs Kieseritsky, London 1851
- Alekhine vs Levenfish, St. Petersburg 1912
- Maczynski vs Pratten, Portsmouth 1948

But again, our interest is in highly original double piece sacrifices. For that reason, I selected this game in which White's selfless rooks share neither rank nor file.

Alexander Khalifman vs Grigory Serper
St. Petersburg 1994
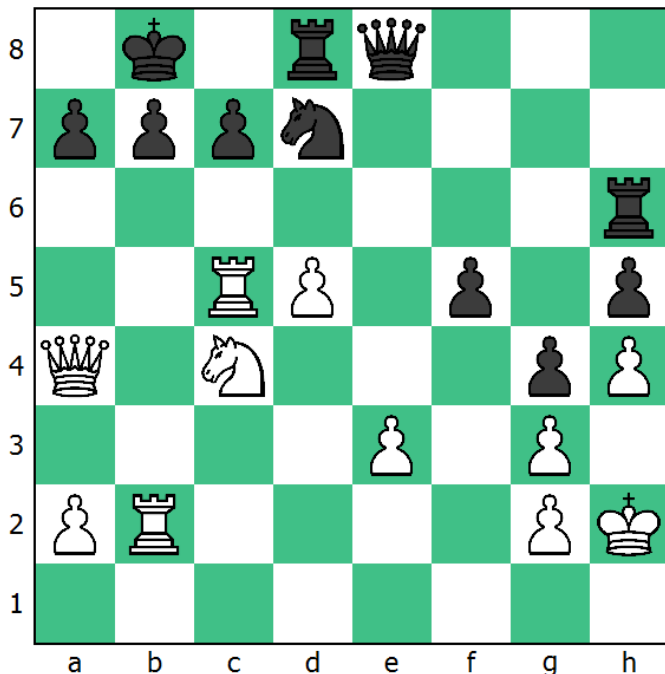
Position after 27…N(e5)xd7. White to move.

The attack which follows reminds me of a classic double bishop sacrifice. The idea is simply to trade one's pieces for pawns then checkmate the exposed king. Try to solve this one on your own. You get full credit if you predict White's final move.

28.Rxb7+! Kxb7 29.Rxc7+! Kxc7 30.Qxa7+ Kc8 31.d6! 1-0

White threatens 32.Qc7#. If 31…Rxd6, then 32.Nxd6#.

Double Queen Sacrifice

A double queen sacrifice is something you don't see every day. In fact, I was unable to find a single historical game that met all of my criteria.

There are a number of games described as featuring a double queen sacrifice. Here are two examples. Balashov's finish is particularly nice.

- La Bourdonnais vs McDonnell, London 1834 Match, Game 37
  (Google: chessgames.com "London Broil")
- Sznapik vs Balashov, Warsaw 1990

Unfortunately, in both of these games as well as several others, at least one of the sacrifices occurs immediately after a pawn reaches the last rank and promotes. To me, that's more of a pawn sacrifice than a queen sacrifice. I wanted to find a position in which one side has two perfectly safe queens on the board, but can only win by giving them both up in an original way. In the end, I decided to invent such as position as a puzzle.

Composition by Rhys Goldstein, 2013
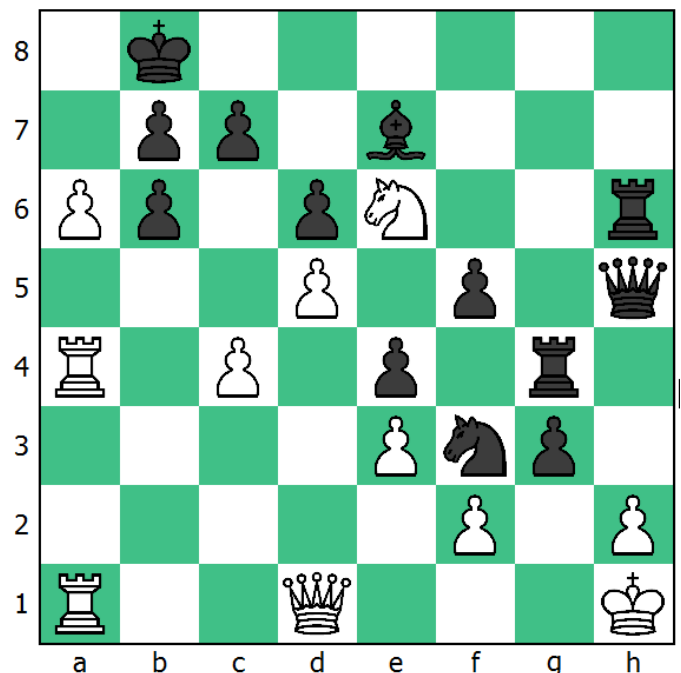
White to move.

See if you can solve it.

Clearly White must give check every move to avoid devastation on the kingside, so the first two moves are easy.

1.a7+ Kc8 2.a8=Q+ Kd7

Now White has two queens on the board, both of them are perfectly safe, and it is not immediately obvious that they must both be sacrificed. But there are two key observations. First, the queen on a8 might as well be replaced by a rook, since its only duty is to cover the Black king's escape squares on the back rank. Second, the queen on d1 can only join the attack by giving check on a4, a square currently occupied by a White rook. With these observations, the finish plays itself.

3.Qc8+!! Kxc8 4.Ra8+ Kd7 5.Qa4+ c6 6.Qxc6+! bxc6 7.R1a7#

Double Pawn Sacrifice

Finally, here is the game of Fischer's that inspired my search for double piece sacrifices.

Robert James Fischer vs Boris Spassky
Belgrade 1992 Match, Game 25
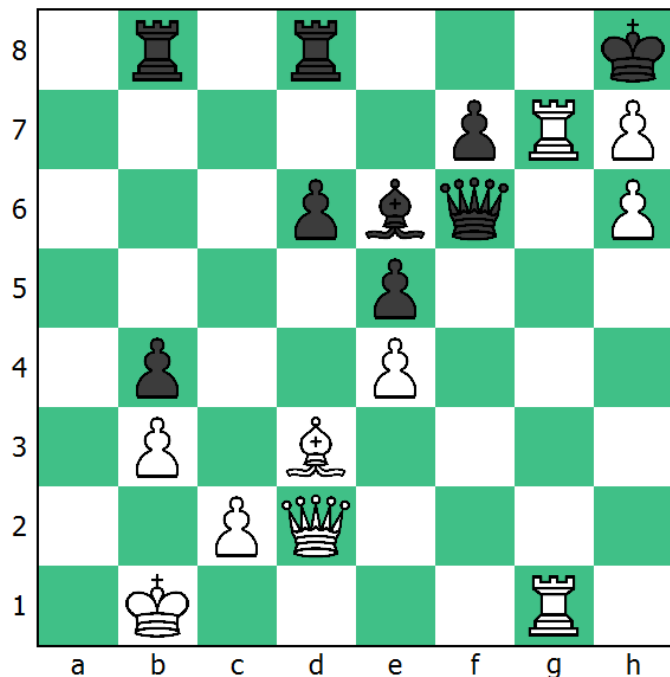
Position after 31…R(f8)d8. White to move.

This was the final game of the controversial 1992 match between Bobby Fischer and Boris Spassky. After taking the world championship from Spassky in 1972, I'm not sure whether Fischer played even one serious game over the next 20 years or so before preparing for this match. After the match, which violated US sanctions against Serbia, Fischer became a fugitive who gained more attention from his obscene rants than from chess. In any case, the following appears to be the final moves of the final serious game that Fischer ever played.

In the diagram, Black is of course completely lost. The king is trapped, the rooks are tied down to the defense of the back rank, the queen is tied down to the defense of g7, and the bishop can do nothing on its own. However, to me it wasn't immediately obvious how White should deliver checkmate.

The key observation is this: if the pawns on h6 and h7 did not exist, White could simply give check on the h-file and that would be that. So the objective is to sacrifice the two pawns. Needless to say, Black will only capture these pawns if forced.

32.Qg2! Rf8

Black can do nothing to do but wait.

33.Rg8+ Kxh7 34.Rg7+!

The point! Fischer essentially restores a previous setup with his rook on g7 and the Black king on h8. The key difference in the position after the last two moves is that one of White's pawns has disappeared. To win, White simply repeats the same procedure and sacrifices the second pawn.

35…Kh8 35.h7 1-0

After the unstoppable 36.Rg8+, the Black king must capture on h7 allowing a deadly check on the h-file.