No Man's Land
Chapter 1
“3D Chess”

Written by Whanks/RCN

Two years ago, a rumor surfaced that there was a man capable of manipulating chance in his favor. Poker, blackjack, roulette… games that are difficult to win, where casino owners have the odds at their fingertips, often with results dictated by luck or rules that benefit the dealer. Casinos are structured in a way that triggers a dopamine release in the human mind, as well as a feeling of confusion in individuals perception. Floors with black and white squares, lack of clocks and windows in the buildings, the constant gambling side-by-side in a specific wing. It's a psychological effect, motivating inattention and relaxation of the brain while stimulating the most brutal emotions of human beings. But however strong a human heart may be, probabilities govern reality completely.

Unless… a man manages to create his own destiny. Dictate his own game. And thus, defeat the creators of the games with their own rules. This man… how much knowledge must he have to observe the flaws present in the bets, using them to cheat?

“So? Do you believe me? Maybe you can repay your debt if you find him in that place.”

“Are you sure he accomplished those feats?”

“Yes. Without a doubt, I saw it with my own eyes! He's a master of manipulation and deception!”

“But winning at roulette is basically winning the lottery, isn't it? I know it was 7 times in a row, but…”

“Many people theorize about this. Want to hear my opinion?”

“Go ahead…”

“He used mathematics. There were two men before the year 2000 who bought a roulette wheel and tested how it behaved under the force of the spins, as well as how the weight of the wheel and friction helped in the final result of the experiment. They managed to predict an area covering a few numbers where the ball was almost 100% certain to land and that's how they got rich. Roulette wheels today have a mechanism that prevents them from being moved in the same way, but I don't think it's impossible that he circumvented this problem. In any case, he's a very brilliant man, you have to trust him!”

"Okay… 181st Street, next to Redger's parking lot… let's see what happens…"

That's how Officer Silva's afternoon shift ended, receiving advice from a higher-ranking officer who told the young man fantastical stories. As a Brazilian police officer, Silva lived a life that alternated between extreme danger and the triviality of daily life. Neither was

particularly comforting. The shootings brought no satisfaction; he wasn't the type to be an action hero, and certainly not the type to be an ordinary man. So, he decided to enter the world of gambling, believing he could enjoy the adrenaline rush while earning a reasonable amount of profit. The first few days were good, but soon his lack of knowledge became apparent, and his debt rose to 4,000 reais (US$800). Then, seeking help, he found himself going to a strange location with gray streets and buildings, sand from unfinished constructions, and ravines with several trees in the distance.

“This is a very peculiar building. Is Paulo even here?”

It was indeed a unique building, cubic in shape, with some bushes outside and a small parking area. An antenna was visible on top and external stairs on one side of the building, but the most impressive thing was that there was no one outside. Perhaps it was because he had arrived so late, after all, the moon was already shining in the sky.

“Hey, are you lost? Or are you going where I think you are?”

“Another player, I suppose?”

“Yes. You guessed right. I've been observing the building and its surroundings for some time. Noticing the small details is important.”

“And how long have you been here? Also…”

“Oh! About 45 minutes ago. And if you want to know how you didn't see me before. Well… I like to hide to observe others, to discover what they bring to the game at hand. And I can see that you have a lot to add to this situation. I think you'll adapt to the rules perfectly, which is expected of a police officer.”

“How did you… how did you know I was a police officer?”

“Maybe I'll tell you… but first we have to win this game! Want to team up with me?”

“Are you Paulo?”

“I don't know that name. My name is Marcelo. I don't think there's a Paulo in this game. So… why the question?”

“Damn… I could have sworn he'd be here.”

What a shame. It would be great to see him playing in this match. I heard this game is going to be quite complex, so what do you think about us being a du—” Silva had already gone straight to the entrance before he could even finish his sentence “Ah… I see. So he didn't notice…”

Entering the building, he found all the other players, followed by Marcelo's sudden arrival. It was a large room, with several employees and a presenter on a stage with a microphone in his hand. The organization seemed to engage in radical gambling, with profound ideas,

exorbitant debts and profits, and a gigantic influence across several states in the country. This group emerged in the late 1990s, after the decline of the major influence of gambling in the country. Unlike common casinos, this organization is based on a highly guaranteed profit method, often without the possibility of debts being collected from players. Furthermore, costs are reduced by labor coming from other South American countries.

"Hello everyone! Thank you for noting the terms of participation in this game. Today I confirm the start of the most anticipated game you've all been waiting for," exclaimed the presenter, in a charismatic tone "The 16 players present here will participate in a challenge like no other! With each person putting 8,000 reais into this bet, it will be a zero-sum game where the only outcome is win or lose! Ladies and gentlemen, I present to you…
Three-Dimensional Chess!"

Everyone in the room was surprised, speechless. What on earth was this game?

“Don't think you need to be chess masters to win this game. There are more important skills to consider! After all, attention and observation are crucial in this challenge. Some of you may have already noticed this…”

"Three-Dimensional Chess is a game that divides 16 people into teams of eight. Each person represents a character from traditional chess. Each team has a king, a queen, a bishop, a rook, a knight, and three pawns. Each team waits for its turn, one after the other, with each team member making their decision on the same turn. Above us are 5 more floors in this building. Let's exclude the floor we're on and only consider these 5 floors. Each floor has a total of 25 rooms, all cube-shaped with 4 meters in width, height, and length. Think of an image with 25 squares, 5x5 squares; now, imagine that at the top left it says room 1, and that this line goes from room 1 to room 5. Below room 1 we have the same logic, going from room 6 to room 10, and so on until room 25. But that's not all. We also have to take into account the..." Floors. Therefore, we can write them down as follows: the floors go from A to E. The first is A, the second is B, and so on until floor E. Thus, we can write the same room on different floors. 1st A, 1st B, 1st C…”

“And what about the movement of the pieces themselves?”

“That's a great question! Let's see…”

“Pawns move one square each round. They can move sideways or up and down, but they cannot eliminate a piece diagonally like in normal chess. The rook can move an entire row sideways or up and down. The knight has the same movement as always, but now it can be done vertically instead of a flat movement, and this vertical movement is only to the right and to the left. The bishop moves only in diagonal rows, but in one move it covers both vertical and horizontal space. So if it starts in square 1A and wants to go to the end of its row, it will reach square 25E. The queen can move in all the directions mentioned, being the only one besides the bishop that moves diagonally. The king is simple. It has the same movement as the pawns, with one exception. The king, unlike the others, can hide in the game.”

“What do you mean by hiding? Like tag?” Not exactly. The player with that piece can separate the piece itself from its physical position in the game. Any other player moves in

sync with their piece. However, the king ignores this, making the game more interesting. When separated, if a player from the opposing team tries to eliminate the king by entering the room where the physical player is located, they will not succeed. They will only be able to eliminate the king if they manage to enter the room that the physical player chooses for the king's piece to enter."

"And how will we discover that room?"

"Using logic and abductive reasoning, of course."

"But in this game there are 125 rooms across 5 floors, that's a 1 in 125 chance…"

"That's why the player can only be separated from the king piece for 5 rounds. If they are not on the same square as the piece within 5 rounds, then they will be eliminated and their team will lose the game!"

"The options become drastically reduced and the player's behavior becomes predictable…"

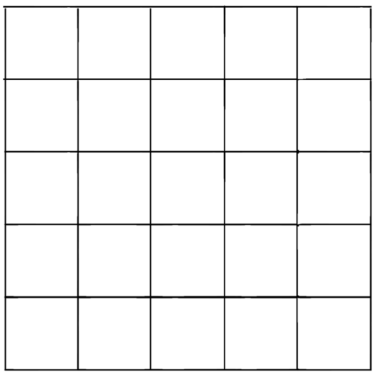
"That's right! Remember that you have an area of 400 square meters per floor to move around in. Keep that in mind."

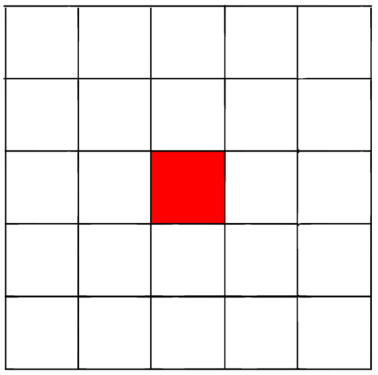
"This idea of separating the piece from the player makes sense; the king is a very weak piece in this situation. Is there anything else we should know about this piece?"

"Well, instead of regular chess, where the king is always cornered, in this version the king has to be eliminated by a piece when that piece enters the same room as the king. Only then can you defeat the rival team!"

(Images showing how each piece moves. The black square represents the piece's position in the center room of floor 3 (floor C). The colored squares represent the movements the piece can make according to its position in that round.)

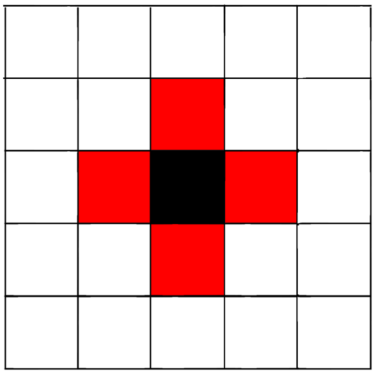
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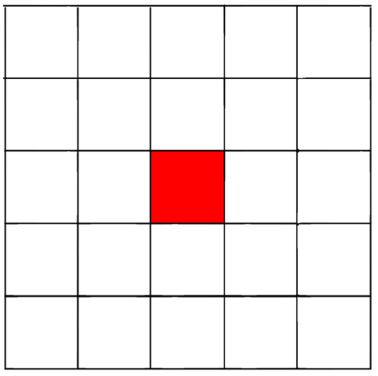




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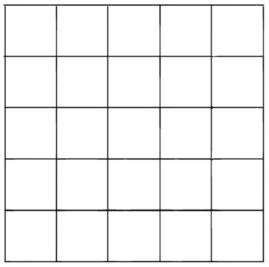
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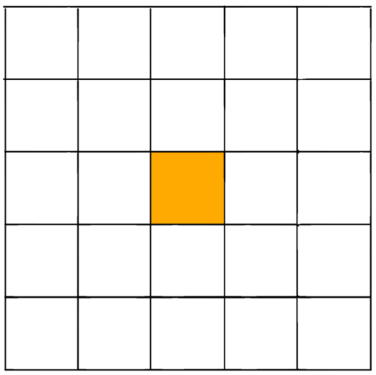
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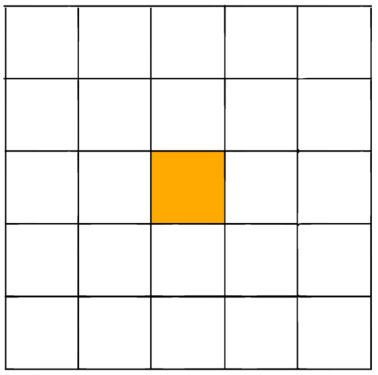
PAWNS AND KINGS



E

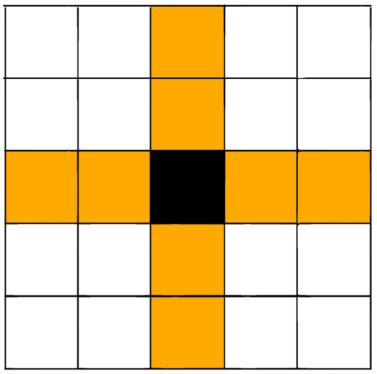
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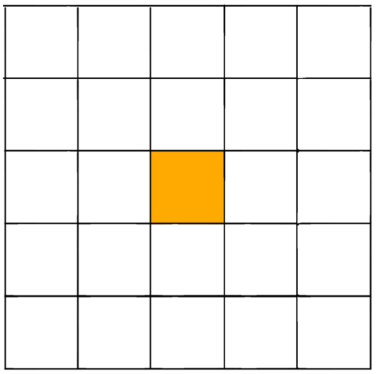




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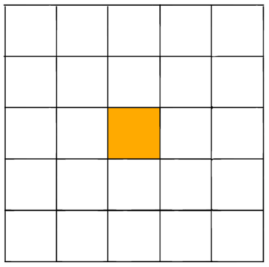
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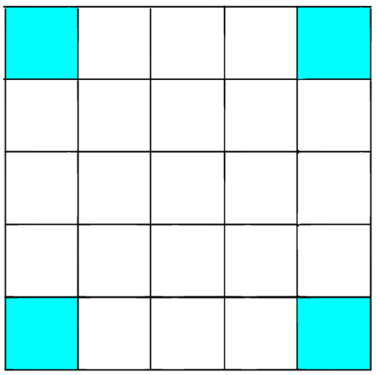
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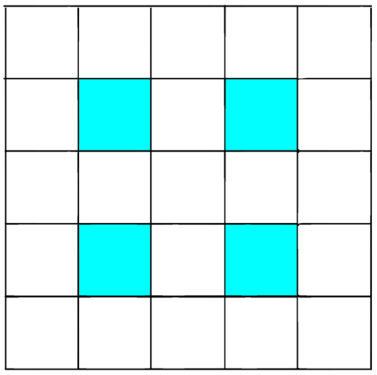
TOWER



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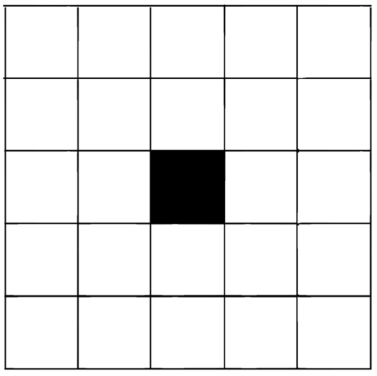
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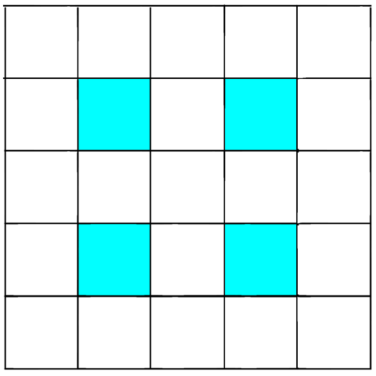




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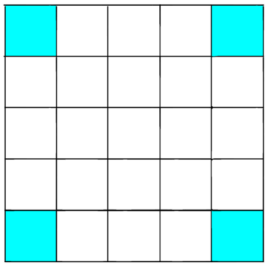
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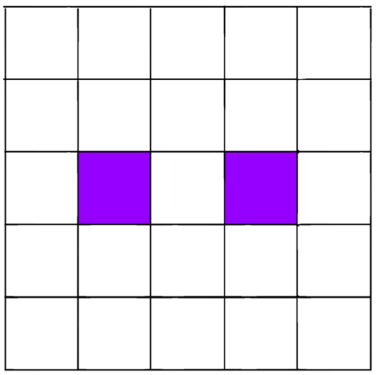
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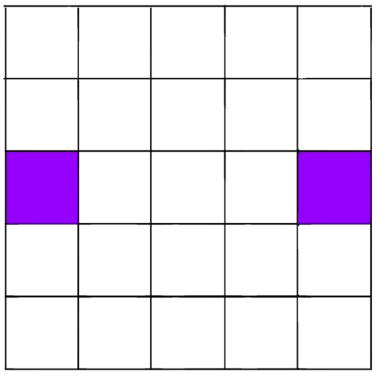
BISHOP



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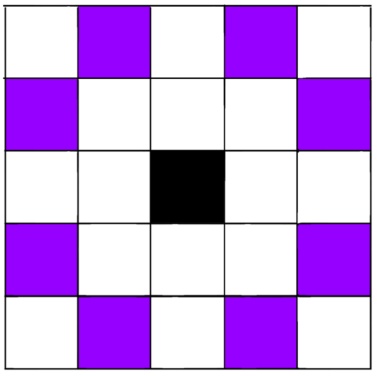
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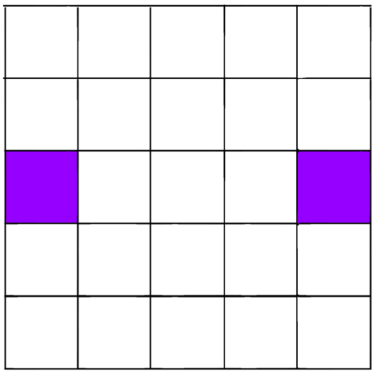




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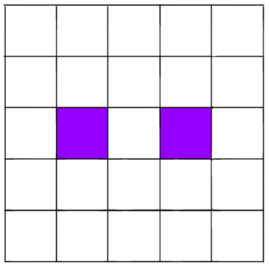
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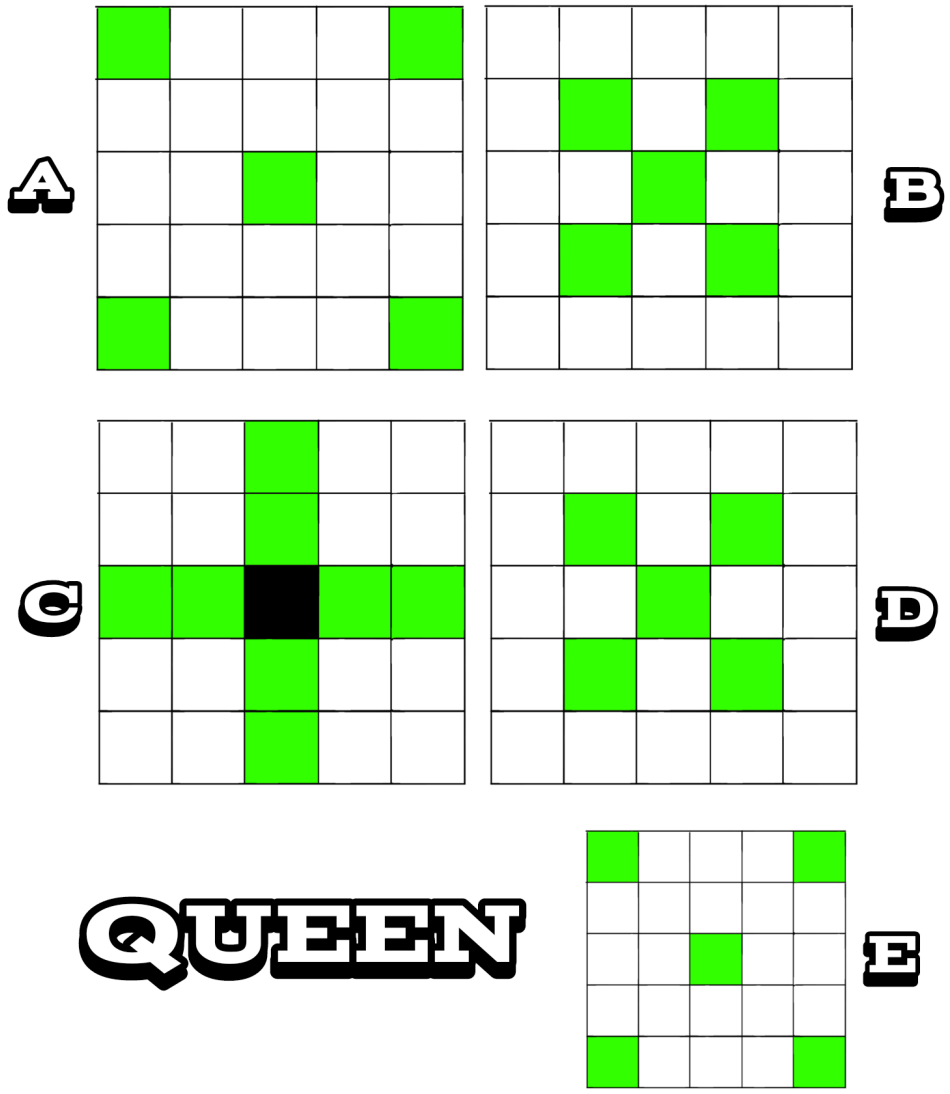


D

KNIGHT



E



"I have a question!" exclaimed Silva

"Yes, sir." replied the presenter

"Why are there so many cameras on this floor? I know there must be cameras in the rooms above, but… I didn't know you needed so many down here."

"Ah. It's one of the ways we make a profit. In this game, since you're competing for each other's money, we have to receive money from an external source. Our viewers! On average, for these games, we have between 200,000 and 500,000 viewers, many from other countries! So, by partnering with famous brands and establishments, we raise large sums per game."

"Hm… and how are we going to move vertically through the rooms?"

"There's a hatch next to a small retractable ladder inside it in each room, above and below them, that allows for such movement. Well, there are photos of the floors you'll be on over there. Take a good look before the game starts."

“The first floor was filled with furniture and household items, the second had a hospital aesthetic and objects, the third was modeled after different train carriages, the fourth had construction materials and a rough appearance, and the fifth was completely white, with nothing to use or notice, empty in every detail. There were also rooms with windows to the outside world, which was to be expected.”

“Well, it's time to form the teams! Each team will talk to its members to devise a strategy for this challenge. The king is the main leader, but that doesn't mean they can't make individual decisions. Understood? Let the team formation begin!”

Initially, the creation of the two groups was confusing, but both groups showed similarities as each ally revealed more of their history and motivations. A bald man, an old bearded man, a very strong forty-year-old man, a woman adorned with jewels, and another dressed in a punk style. A large collection of eccentric and remarkable figures. And as expected, Marcelo decided to invite Silva to his group.

“I swear, we're going to win. I've already noticed a few things about this game, and one unexplained detail that I might be able to solve with my reasoning.”

“Okay… I don't think it makes much difference…”

“ I think you couldn't be more wrong…” Marcelo stated, with an enigmatic smile

Teams created

Team 1: Silva, Marcelo, Diana, Roberto, Milton, Wagner, Sandra, Gabriel

Team 2: Matheus, Villa, Marcos, Tiana, Menzer, Francisco, João, Rico

Everyone was then led to the next stage of group formation: choosing each member's role. The most important position, that of the king, would be decided by a roll of dice. Team 1 was located on the first floor, and Team 2 on the floor above. In the end, these were the roles assigned to each member:

Teams created

Team 1: Silva (pawn), Marcelo (king), Diana (pawn), Roberto (rook), Milton (knight), Wagner (pawn), Sandra (queen), Gabriel (bishop)

Team 2: Matheus (bishop), Villa (queen), Marcos (pawn), Tiana (pawn), Menzer (king), Francisco (knight), João (pawn), Rico (rook)

“I felt something strange.”

“What is it, Silva?” Marcelo asked

“It was quite convenient that you took the king, wasn't it?”

“Maybe I did something to favor myself in that regard.”

“Some special tactic!?”

“I was lucky, I can't deny that. 20% chance of that dice game happening on any of the floors. But precisely on the first floor… the employee showed that he had spare dice and put them in his pocket, right?”

“Yes, I saw that happen. So?”

“I bumped into him and pretended it was an accident, but in reality I took one of the dice from his pocket without him noticing. Then I went to check the other rooms. Since it was based on a house, I thought there might be a microwave inside one of the rooms. And I was right. I let the die heat up. When it heats up, one of its ends increases its area, leading to the opposite end having a greater chance of being chosen. I decided to be the last one, so that the same number wouldn't come up multiple times, thus making it noticeable to the employee. When he gave me the regular die, I swapped it for the heated die, and then swapped it back for the regular die. Before handing him the regular die, I pretended to trip and put my hands near his pockets for support, without him realizing I had put the heated die back in its place.”

“So it was half luck and half genius?”

“I took the opportunity that was presented to me. And in a bet, there's always a luck factor, no matter the situation.”

“Wow, that was quite impressive. Perhaps it's not a bad idea to follow your orders.”

“Well… it's as they say… I'm a man with a plan.”

After choosing their roles, both groups were called to choose the floor and room where they would start the game. If the same room on the same floor is occupied by two players from opposing teams, the two players must choose the room they wish to be in again. Everyone on the team talks amongst themselves before choosing a room and floor so they can coordinate their strategies. Marcelo, confident in his words, told Silva about his plans and the detail omitted by the presenter.

“Each team will know the position of their teammates and pieces. But no one will know the position of the opposing team's members. So, for example: if a rook is on a floor, able to move along a column of 5 rooms, and an enemy is somewhere in that column… let's say the rook is in room 23 and the enemy is in room 13 on the same floor… what do you think would happen, Silva?”

“With the little I know about chess, it should eliminate the piece by moving to room 13, not being able to go to room 8 or 3.”

“That's right. But the aim of the game is to discover and predict the other team's position using logic. Don't you think that if the rook wanted to move to room 8 or 3 it should be warned of the enemy blocking its path? Then it would be warned by circumstance, not by reasoning. And a circumstance that can occasionally repeat itself. In other words, this game would become one where luck is highly necessary, and where randomness dominates brilliant decisions. So… why would they undermine the purpose of this game?”

“That's true… I mean, unless you choose the right room, the player in the tower can pass by the other without even noticing.”

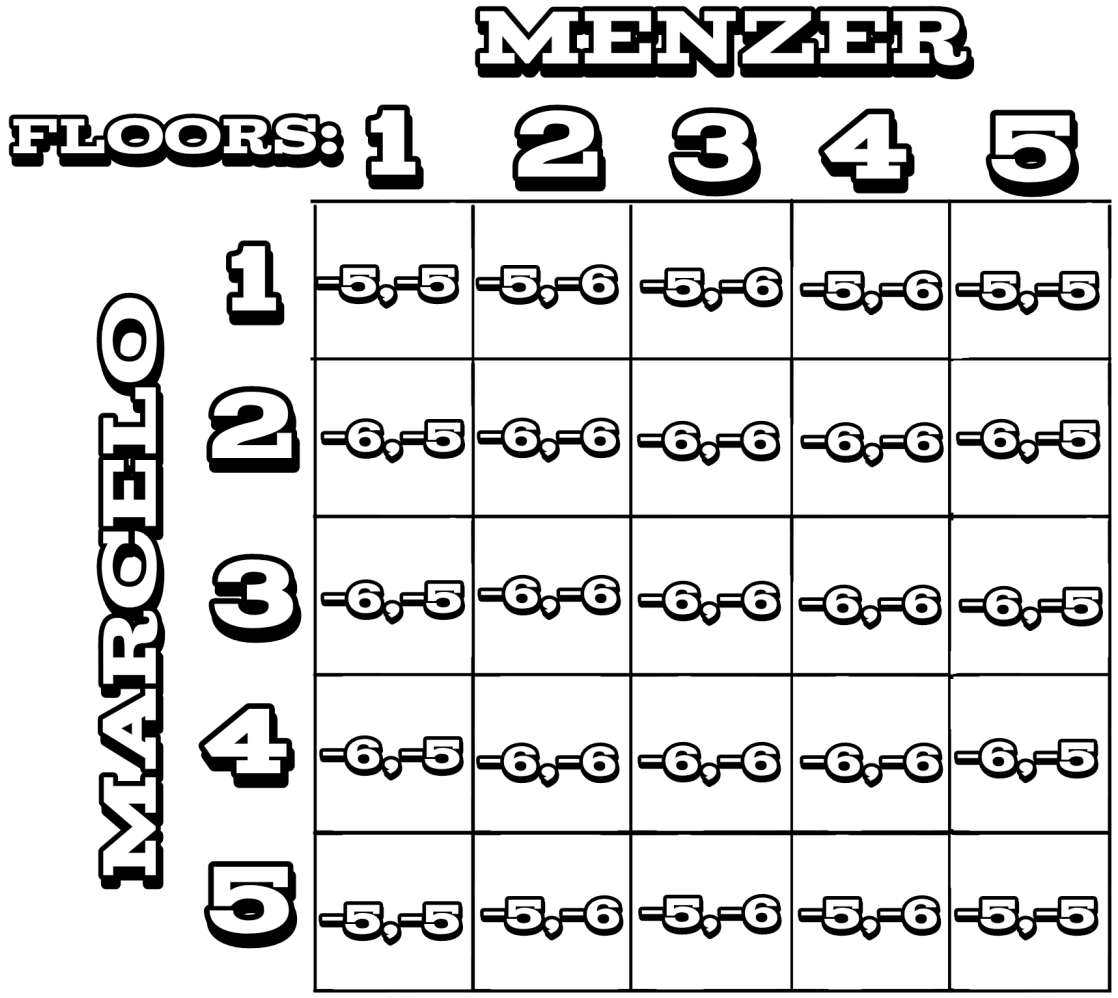
“Well, they would still have to physically pass through the rooms. I asked one of the employees about this, and he said they will blindfold the player, making him pass through other rooms to reach the position without encountering an enemy player.”

“That's an interesting loophole… this game goes deeper than I thought. By the way, what's your strategy for winning this game?”

“I know the king of the other team… Maurício Menzer… he's a great psychologist, you know? Maybe one of the greatest in Brazil, without a doubt. He must already be predicting our moves using game theory. And with that, he'll figure out which floor I'll choose, and with that clue he might even figure out which pieces will be on which floor… so I have to outsmart his model and act at a disadvantage.”

“How did you arrive at that conclusion? Could you explain it in more detail?”

“Think about it… assuming that Menzer and I are perfect players, that we don't make any mistakes, which is likely in this case. What is the best floor to choose? From floors 2 to 4 you can be attacked from the left, right, front, back, top, and bottom. That's 6 directions from which an attack can come. Let's write that down as -6. But on floors 1 and 5 there are only 5 positions from which we can be attacked. This reduces the directions by -5. So, if we both take a floor from 2 to 4 we end up with -6, -6, meaning this is a strictly dominated strategy. All other strategies where one of us receives -5 while the other receives -6 are also strictly dominated. So this leads us to the best options, as predicted by Nash Equilibrium. Either we choose the 1st floor, we choose the 5th, or each of us chooses a different one from the other.”



“So how are we going to structure our team strategy from there?”

“Menzer will choose the first or fifth floor, so I'll choose the third to throw him off. He'll take a while looking for me before realizing I'm not there. He'll need protection, so the best options to cover his floor and the rooms below are the rook or the queen. The bishop, even on higher floors, can only protect him in four rooms on the 1st floor, and if its movement is diagonal to the king's, then when the bishop is eliminated, the king won't be able to eliminate the enemy piece. If you put the knight on the 1st floor, its long movements will separate it from the king, and placed on floors 2 and 3, it will only be able to move to two rooms on the first floor. Even if the queen and the rook are taken, the loss of one of their members will alert Menzer to the enemy's location on the floor, something that would be quite unlikely with the bishop and the knight.”

“So, most of the pawns should be on floors 2 through 4. And if Menzer knows you're going to floor 5 or 1, he'll send the rook or queen to attack you, while one of them protects him. Am I understanding this correctly?”

“Exactly. I think it's likely he'll send the rook against me. The queen is too valuable a piece to risk losing. And it's possible that between the first and fifth floors he opted more for the first. There are objects to be used there, while the fifth floor is a white, empty room. That said, the bishop's position is unknown to me. But I think the knight could be incredible for him in the center of the third floor. The knight can move 8 rooms in the center, and vertically it can move 2 rooms on the other floors. It's the most beneficial position.”

“Our defense should be based on circumventing that. Perhaps two pawns should be on the 5th floor, close to each other. That way, when the rook goes to take one of the pieces, the other can come and take the rook.”

“That would be a great sacrifice. I was thinking of something similar. Well, let's do the following…”

“Our strategy will give us a huge advantage in this game. First, the two pawns on floor 5 side by side. That's a good trap. Second, a pawn on floor 3. The possible rooms for this pawn will be rooms 8 or 18. If the knight is in the center and we are the first to move, we will gain a great advantage. Now, imagine that the knight jumps to floor 1 or 5 if he thinks his position in the center is being threatened. Normally, he will only be able to attack the two rooms next to 8 or 18. He would need a few more vertical moves to attack those rooms. And if he returned to the center on either of those floors, you would be safe in both rooms.”

“Perfect. That seems like a great strategy!”

“I will stay on the third floor assisting the pawn. I think I now have an idea of the bishop's position. If he sends the rook behind me, he will want it to stay as far away as possible, that is, away from the central rooms. The rook can eliminate me from afar; if I separate from my piece, it will have a greater chance of being eliminated if it goes far away, limiting its movement to the central rooms, and he can keep the rook in the game longer without risking the early elimination of such a powerful piece. This could also mean that the bishop will be used to reduce my movements. Even if the bishop were in the center of the 3rd floor instead of the knight, the rooms covered by it on the 5th floor would be those far from the center, the rooms already covered by the rook! That is, the bishop would be on the 4th floor and could move to 4 central rooms. If I eliminated it, I would alert the rook, and even if I didn't eliminate it, my movements would be more predictable for the rook, leading to my defeat.”

"So the pawn and your king will go against the knight and the bishop. The vertical movement will help in this regard."

"Certainly. On the 3rd floor I would also place my bishop. But it wouldn't actively try to capture the opponent's knight or bishop. I would place it in rooms 3, 11, 15, or 23. These are rooms in the middle of all the columns and rows. This means that in any of these positions the diagonal movement extends to 2 rooms on the fifth floor. 2 rooms where the rook will certainly move, being the corners of the floor. If the rook senses that the king is getting close

to it without being able to attack, then it will move to the corners. We could make a trap with that!"

"Brilliant! That's incredible…”

“The queen will be somewhere on the second floor. If the bishop is in the center of the 4th floor, then we can discard the corners of the 2nd floor and the few places where the knight could eliminate her. She will attack the king and the queen who will protect him. If she is eliminated, we will have the knight on the fourth floor. If the knight is on that floor, choosing the central rooms and excluding only room 13, he will cover 1 room in the central rooms of the 5th floor to serve as bait for the rook, and there will be 2 rooms on the 2nd floor where the queen can enter if she thinks she will be eliminated by the opponent. And finally, our rook. It can stay on the first floor to assist the queen. The two can move so that at any moment at least one is in the other's sights, in case they are eliminated. Well, that's my plan. What do you think?”

“I thought I wasn't going anywhere with you, but maybe it's better than this Paulo guy I heard about.”

“I'm sure I've faced more dangerous men than this john doe, and Menzer is one of them. This isn't the first time I've faced him…”

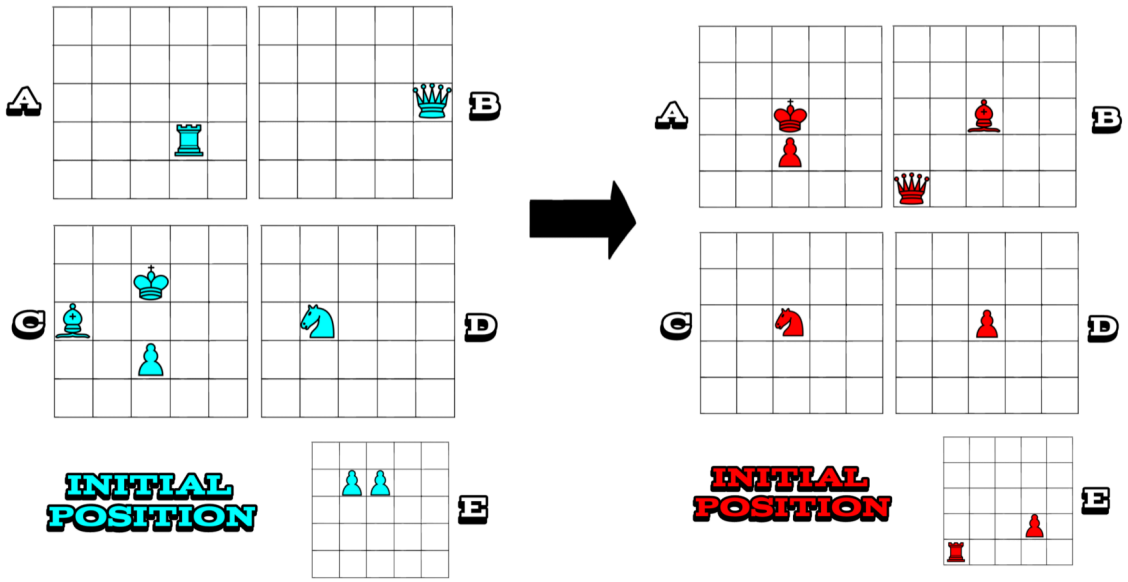
“You lost to him last time?”

“Why did you assume that?”

“The way you talk… it sounds like you're rivals. So?”

“Maybe… maybe not… perhaps he's the closest thing to a rival for me. But know that…”

I have no equal!



(Symbols will appear later. Full blue squares means sand, blue circle means coin, blue square between rooms means carpet, "X" squares have to do with a room having its access blocked by a serum strategy. Red squares are carpet traps set by team 2. This will be explained soon. When the red king separates itself from it's piece the king icon symbolizes the physical person, meanwhile the red circle is the actual king. The blue king's circle doesn't appear in any of these graphs, it's placement will be explained later.)

The game order begins with Team 1's turn, followed by Team 2's. Marcelo tells his team members to carefully observe every corner of their rooms to discover objects that would be useful throughout the game. Upon receiving the details, he highlights the most advantageous items: posters from the train car floor along with coins from the other floors; sand from the construction floor; bags full of serum from the second floor; and finally, he notes the importance of the carpets from the first floor. Therefore, each player takes something important that he emphasizes, carrying these objects wherever they go. The first round begins with Team 1's turn. Diana, seeing an opportunity to eliminate the knight, goes to her room and finds him there. Marcelo moves to 8B, knowing that with Diana under the enemy bishop, the bishop would move on its turn, probably to the second floor.

"Listen carefully… these materials have a very specific purpose. The sand and mats will be used to discover the location of our enemy. If you are in a room, you can throw the sand on the floor so that the opponent's tracks become visible as they pass through it. The mat is a little different. You will pass the mats under the opening in the door, leaving them between your room and the other room you chose. When you pass through either of these rooms again, you can pull the mat and see the footprints left on it on both sides."

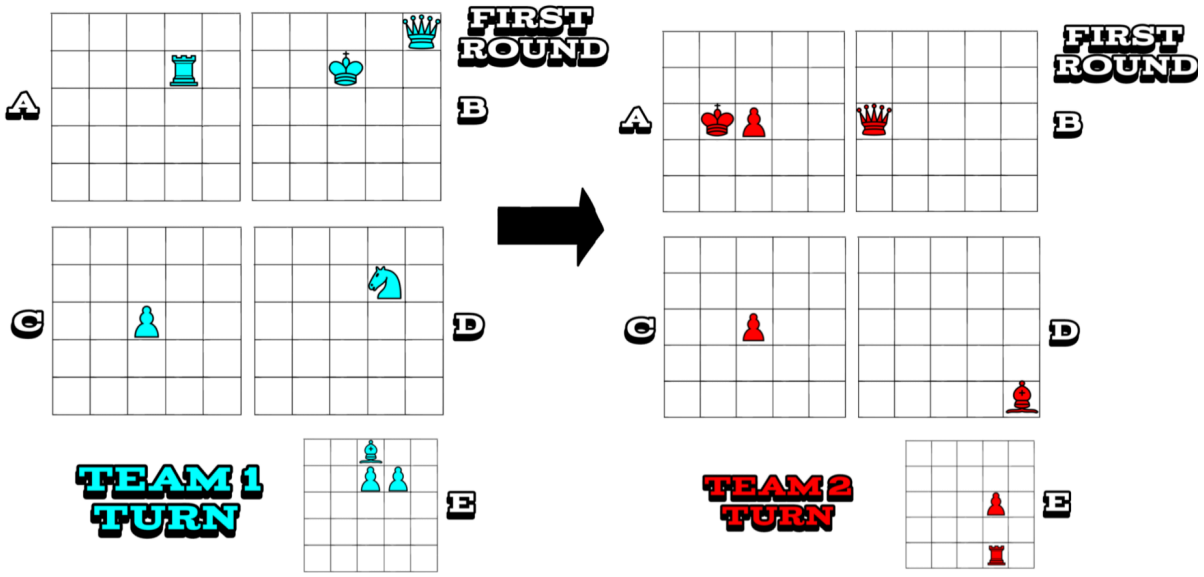
"That seems like a good tactic."

"We will follow your advice, boss!"

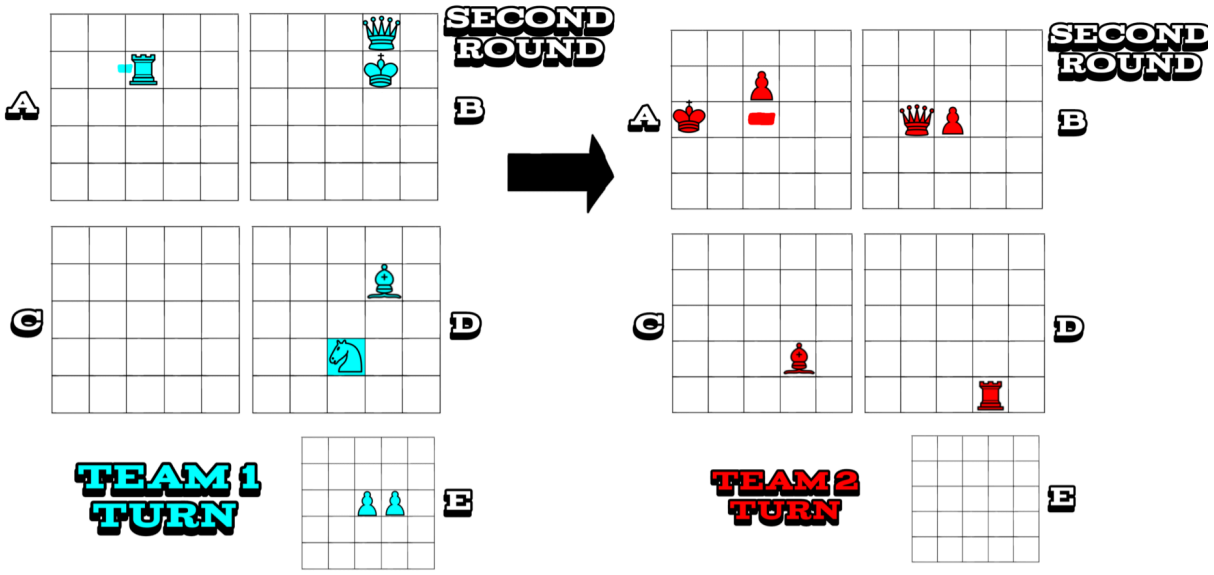
"Let 's go!"

“There are still 3 more elements to mention. The posters and the coins will be used together. Both pass through the opening in the door, and you must move the poster quickly so that it passes through the room ahead and enters another room next to it. If you are in room 13A and are passing this coin through room 12A, the intention is to throw it to room 11A under the door that leads to 12A, for example. If any of us go there and the coin has disappeared, it means that an opponent passed through there. Some of the rooms have electrical outlets; break them when you can and use the serum strategically. Because it is composed of water, it will cause a shock when mixed with the wires. This tactic is used to block certain rooms, preventing the movement of enemies!”

Team 2's turn had barely begun when suddenly a hatch opened above Diana. It was a pawn that had been strategically placed by Menzer to eliminate anyone who wanted to take the knight. It was at that moment that Marcelo realized something. In his observation, the bishop was in room 13D, but that couldn't be the case since the pawn was in its place, so where was the bishop?



Second round, Team 1's turn. The knight places sand in their room, while the rook places a carpet between the door to their left. In the midst of all this, one of the pawns on floor E captures an enemy pawn. On Team 2's turn, something unexpected happens. Team 1's rook is eliminated by a pawn! With so many moves and so many pieces in play, sudden eliminations like these were to be expected.



“Ah… I understand. The knight and the bishop, both in the center of floors 3 and 4, reach 6 central rooms on the fifth floor. They are great for slowing down the king's movements, but they also serve another purpose. Taking up space not only for attack… but also for defense. The bishop could be in room 13B instead of 13D. Then the enemy king would be protected in 6 central rooms. The remaining central rooms to place the king would be rooms 8A, 13A, or 18A. We can eliminate two of these rooms with the revelation of the pawn that eliminated our tower.”

"The pawn couldn't have come from above because it would need two moves to reach the rook room, and I was in room 8C at the beginning. The pawn couldn't be in room 8B because the bishop would already be there. Now, we only have 5 possibilities left. The pawn could have come from room 6A, 10A, 6B, 10B, or 18A. These are the only routes it can take to reach room 8A. Menzer knew the knight could be eliminated, meaning he also expected that the bishop's defense alongside the knight wouldn't be enough to defend the king. So, a pawn could support the king, staying close to him. All other possibilities would be far from the king's room; only 18A is in one of the central rooms. And if the pawn were in that room, then the king should be next to it, as he would want to be as close as possible to that piece. The most plausible room for the king is... room 13A.”

“Marcelo, do you have any idea what we could do next?” Silva asked, growing increasingly tense

“We already have the initial positions of 5 of the pieces… the most important thing now is to know the initial positions of the rook and the queen. We are at a disadvantage, we have to move cautiously…”

“I noticed something about this game… it's a game that consists of maximum support between each piece. That is, the king has to determine the movements of the pieces in synchrony to create an efficient strategy. It's like a gear. If you figure out how one part moves, you can figure out the others by inference.” Silva observed

“Silva… you just gave me an idea of how to capture the enemy bishop. It's like I can see the future…”

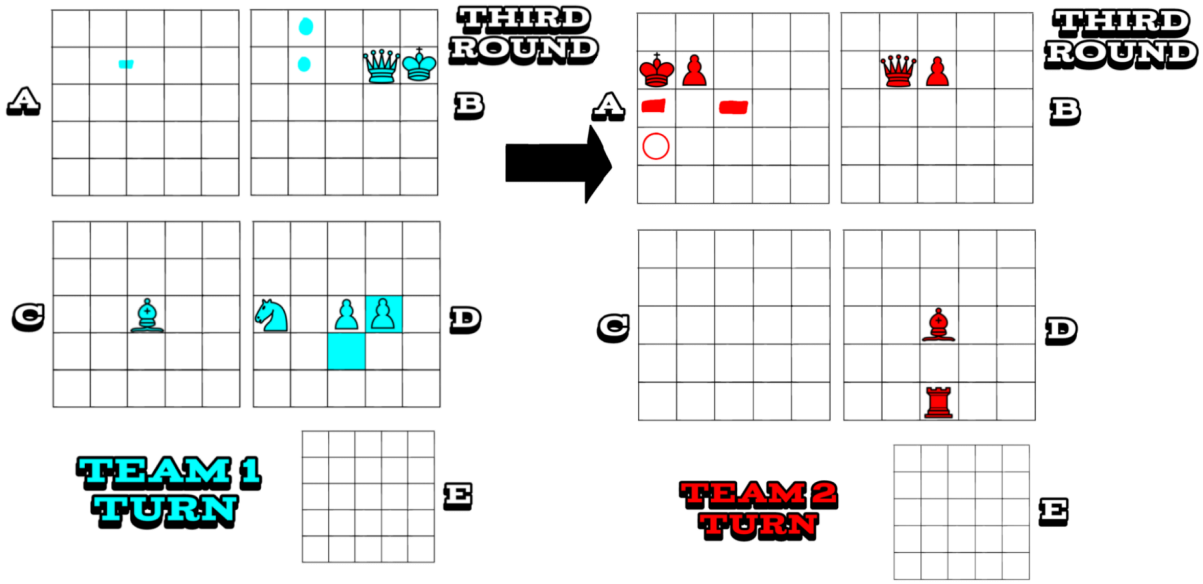
“I know the rook is on the fifth floor. The enemy pawn was eliminated there; it should have been supported by the rook, like a bait. The rook should have been in a position where it could eliminate my pawn, but Menzer must have anticipated supporting the pawn, probably assuming it was a king. The bishop, being in the center of the second floor, must have moved to the fourth floor to avoid elimination, while also helping the rook on the fifth floor. What would be the bishop's second move? It couldn't stay on the 4th floor, and the 5th and 1st floors wouldn't offer the opportunity to secure important spaces. So it would go to the 2nd or 3rd floor.”

“The rook should have been behind the pawn when it was eliminated. That makes sense. Menzer used game theory, and that's why he realized I would know about the rook on the fifth floor, probably expecting me to stay in the nine central rooms. If that's the case, eliminating the initial rooms of my two pieces on the 5th floor… there was a 2/7 chance of Menzer's pawn being eliminated on my first turn. There was a chance of his pawn being eliminated, but it wasn't as high as the chance of my pieces being eliminated on a possible second turn. So he moved the rook behind his pawn, knowing that on my next turn it would be more likely to be eliminated. If my two pieces didn't enter previous rooms on the second turn… the chance of the pawn being eliminated would be 2/5, a 40% chance of elimination.”

“The corners are dangerous; the rook shouldn’t be in one initially. He wants distance from the enemy pieces… it doesn’t make sense for him to move to room 15E, it would be too close to my pieces. He could only have moved to rooms 11E or 24E before my second turn. The bishop wouldn’t be of any importance to the 5th floor; Menzer must have found a way to support the rook with the bishop, evidenced by the rook’s lack of attack. If the rook went to the room below, it could form a trap with the bishop. No matter the position of the two, the same thing would happen. The bishop on the 3rd floor would attack room 13D to see if the king had moved down a floor, and if that wasn’t proven, the rook could act underneath the two pieces to capture the king.”

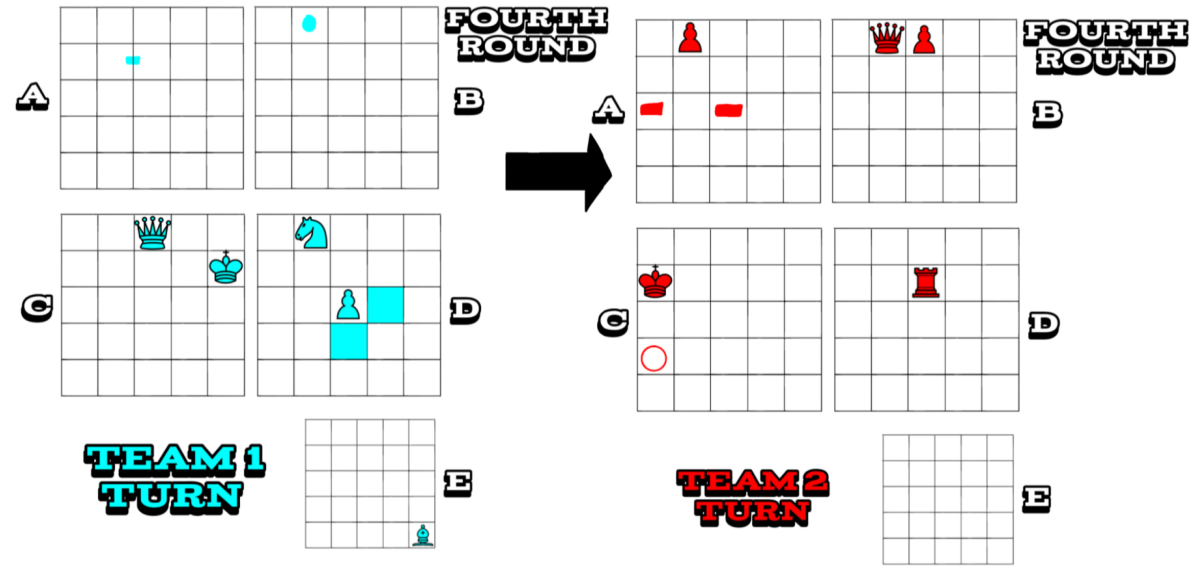
“However, I will prepare for this. The two pawns will be placed in the room below. Menzer will lose the bishop, but he will be certain that there was no king on the fifth floor.”

Before the third round began, Marcelo flipped a coin to room 7B and gave a poster to the queen to flip her coin to room 2B. He had deduced that, due to the formation of the knight, bishop, and pawn protecting Menzer's king on the first floor, the queen should be on the second floor, thus protecting the king in a more offensive position. The third round began, and these were the actions taken:



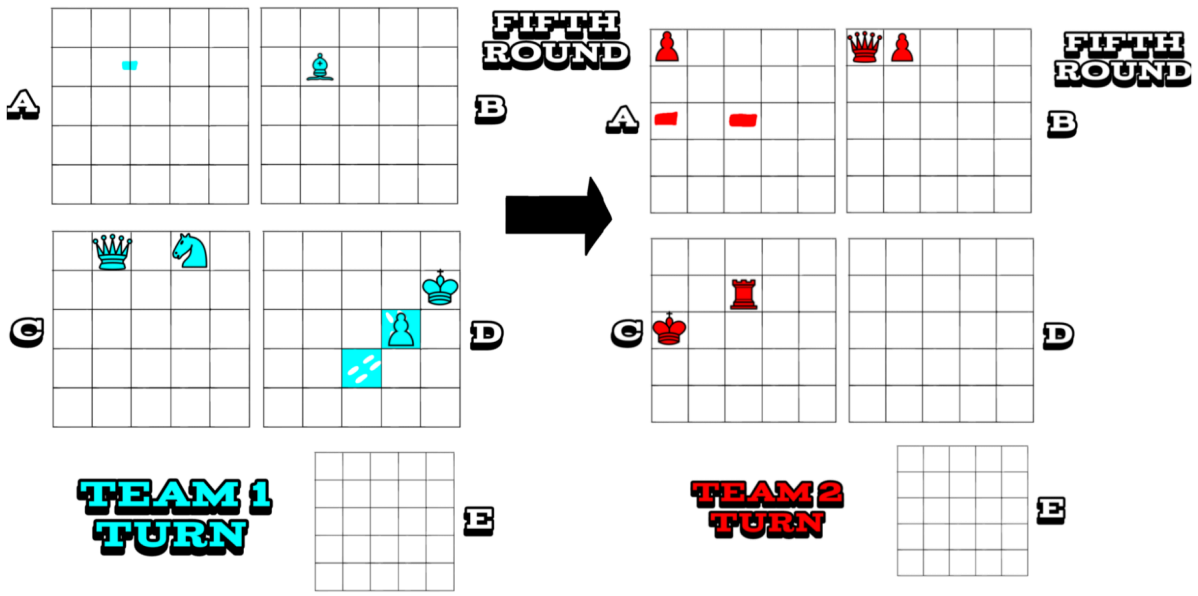
"There's something strange about room 10B… I can feel it. Is it my imagination, or is this room smaller than the others?" He tried measuring the room with his feet and discovered that there really was a lack of space "It seems that this room measures 3 meters in diameter, that is, an area of 9 square meters. But if that's the case… could it be…"

Marcelo looked through the room's only window and saw something surprising. Something he had seen when analyzing the building before the game began. And then he started laughing, looking out the window. He looked at room 5B, concluding that it also had an area of 9m². Now, to test his theory, he will separate his piece from himself in the fourth round, going up to the upper floors to develop a trap.

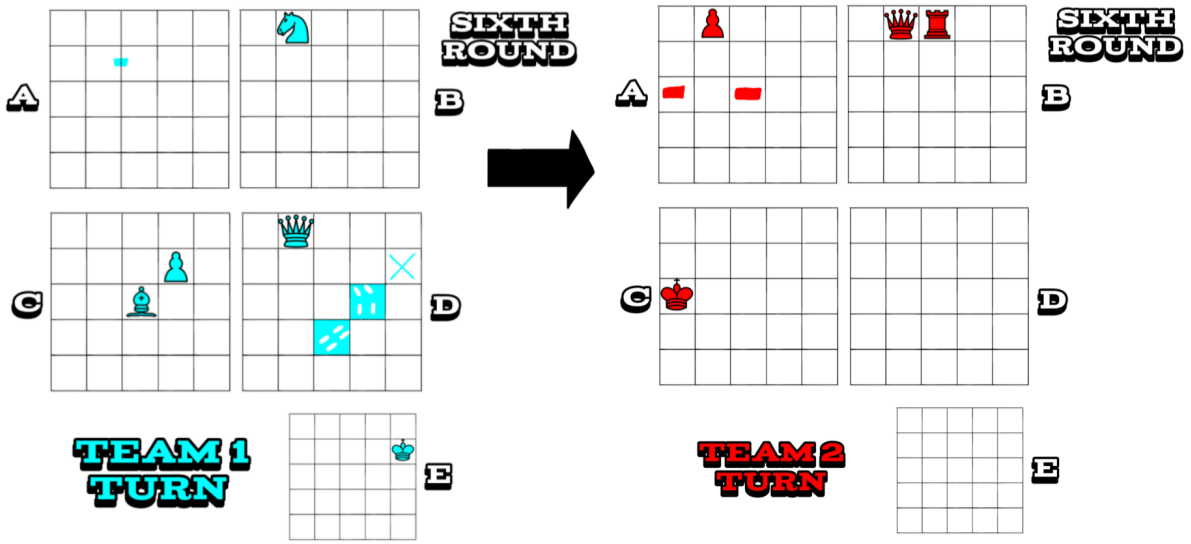


The fourth turn begins. Team 1's pawn captures the bishop. Team 1's bishop moves to room 25E to then move to room 7B in the fifth round to check if one of the coins has disappeared.

If this happens, it means the queen passed through that room during the third round, and her movements will be limited to rooms 1B through 5B.

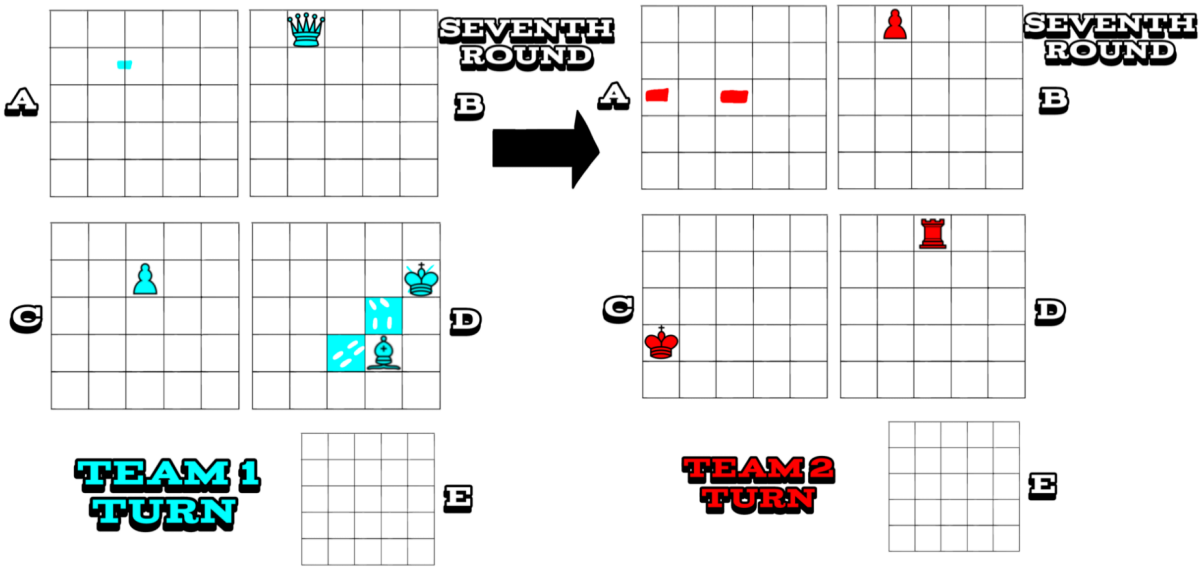


The bishop confirms the queen's location, finding her trapped on the first row of floor B. Marcelo moves the pieces according to the queen's possible position, hoping she will receive additional support to avoid losses. The pawn on floor D discovers through the sand trap that the rook had moved to room 3D or 8D, as it had bypassed the pawn's room. Marcelo observed that the rook could get too close to the first row of floor B if it were in one of those rooms. His final conclusion is that the enemy rook was moving down to support the queen.

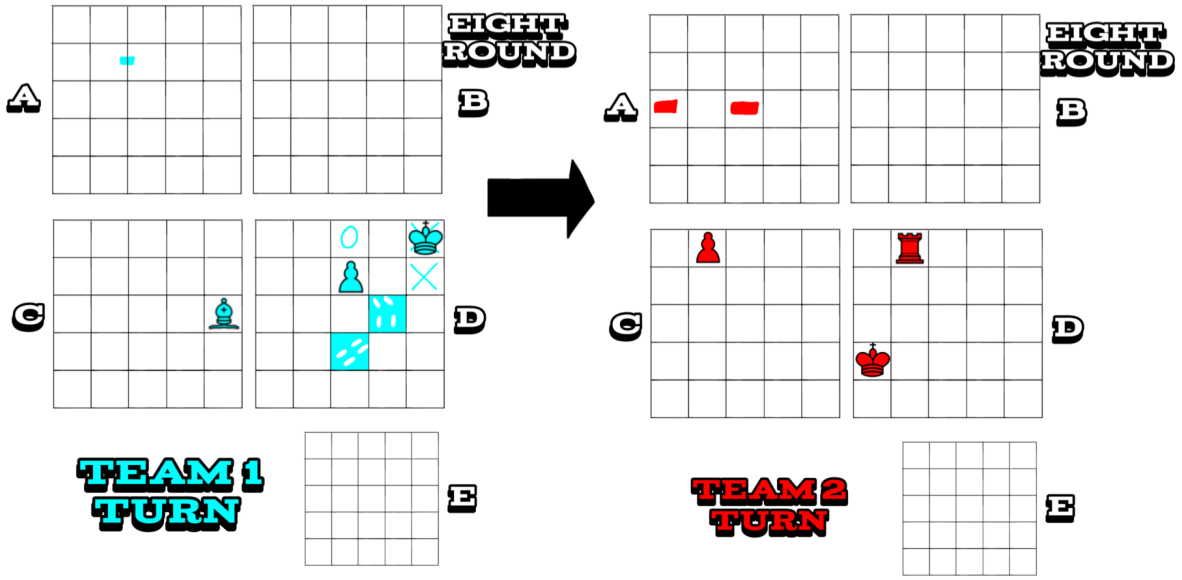


The knight from team 1 captures a pawn, only to be subsequently eliminated by the queen. With the enemy queen revealed, an equal exchange of pieces would be possible. Marcelo

would still be at a disadvantage, but he has a plan to eliminate the rook shortly after these events.

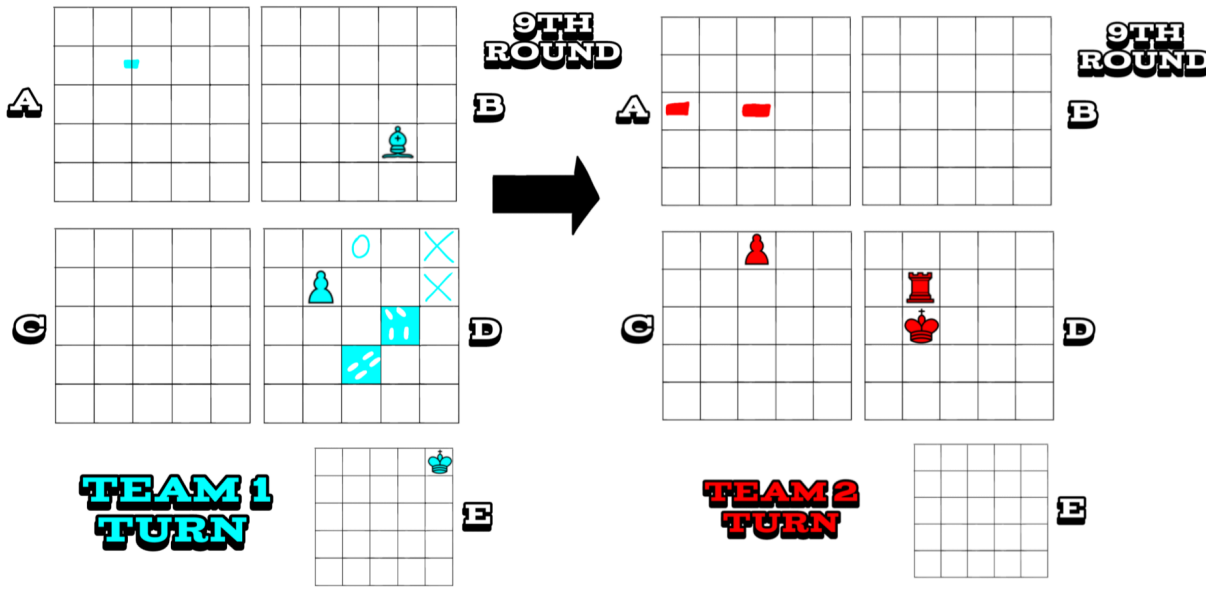


An equal exchange occurs, and now only 3 pieces remain for each player. Menzer believes that Marcelo doesn't know the position of his rook and wants to keep its location secret for as long as possible. This fact will be extremely important for Marcelo's endgame.

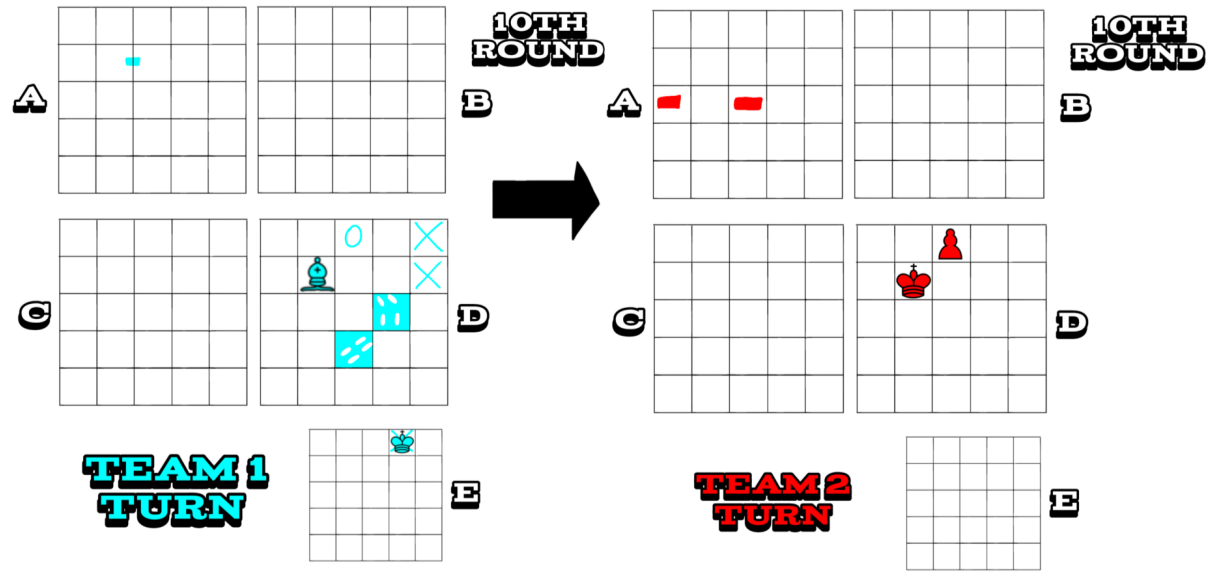


Room 10D is blocked by the serum trap, and everyone in that location is informed of this. Menzer had already deduced some of Marcelo's king's positions, and based on the fact that this serum tactic was used for defense, having been placed on a floor that hadn't had many enemy pieces in previous rounds, there was only one possibility in his mind… that Marcelo was retreating to floors 4 and 5 to protect himself from the enemy pieces below. So on his turn in the eighth round, he began moving all his pieces upwards to corner Marcelo, little knowing that this was what Marcelo had planned.

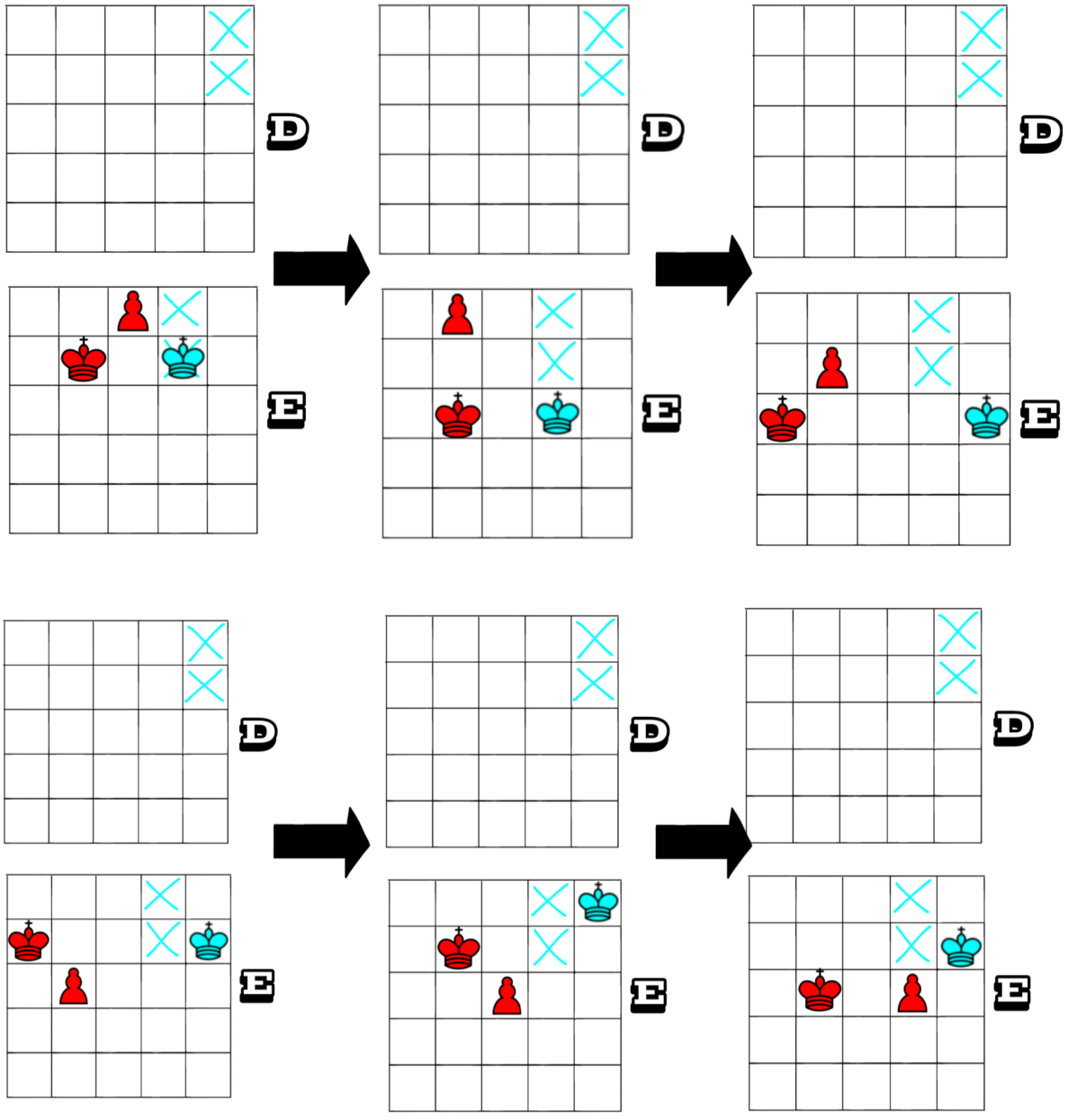
On Team 1's turn, the king tossed a coin to the tower. Menzer knew that piece was the king, but predicted it would be a trap consisting of separating Marcelo from his piece, like bait to eliminate Menzer's tower. So he moved the tower away, to room 2D. But this would be a move that would cost him dearly in the next round.



Room 5D was blocked. Anticipating that the rook would go to room 2D, Marcelo had already prepared one of his pawns next to the rook's room. He sent the pawn to pass the coin directly under the door of room 2D, revealing its position. Menzer was certain that that piece could only be a pawn or a bishop, and that Marcelo didn't expect the rook to see the coin tossed in that room. In other words, for him, sending the rook to room 7D was a sure-fire decision.



The enemy rook had just eliminated the pawn when suddenly the bishop of team 1 appeared and eliminated the rook. The bishop had made several previous moves just to reach that specific position, designated several rounds ago by Marcelo. But unfortunately, Menzer decided to get closer and closer to his pieces in those rounds, leading to a countermeasure against that bishop, something unexpected by Marcelo. But the leader of team 1 wasn't desperate. His plan could still work even with an enemy pawn still present in the game.



Menzer realized that Marcelo might have cornered himself, but it could also be a trap. In Menzer's view, Marcelo might have separated from his piece, and when Menzer entered the trap, the piece would eliminate him from behind. Therefore, knowing this possibility, he used his pawn as insurance against this tactic.

After many moves, he managed to corner Marcelo's king. He entered room 10E, hoping to eliminate the enemy king there. The king could only be in that room. Even so, he only encountered Marcelo physically, without having eliminated his king. But he had verified with his pawn that the king's piece should be in that room based on calculations. Then, Marcelo told Menzer to check room 5E. Menzer was confused, but he complied with the request anyway, not understanding the danger he would find there.

Upon entering, he discovered he had been eliminated by Marcelo's king. Right behind him came Marcelo, directly from room 10E. Menzer wondered how this was possible, so Marcelo explained:

"The presenter said there are 400m² of area per floor. But there are 10 rooms in this building that are 9m² each. That means there are 14m² missing per floor. Where are those 14m² on each floor? Then I noticed that the outside of rooms 5 and 10 on each floor had emergency stairs. Perhaps those stairs could be used as specific rooms. I tested this in the fourth round, separating myself from my piece, letting it move up those stairs, and rejoining it in the seventh round. Then I sent my piece to one of those rooms on the fifth floor, hoping you would go all the way to the end, so you would fall into my trap!”

Menzer was shocked. But after a moment of reflection, he calmed down. Everyone left the game, some happy, others disappointed. Silva thought he hadn't found Paulo, but the truth is he had met the king of gambling. A man who went by many names. Who was a different person, a different name, every day. It was an irregular life, but a life where he was destined to be the king of betting. In loss, or in victory.