All,

Here is an enlightening game, where the question of an "outpost" is discussed. When is an "outpost" useful, and when not? When is a game strategy based on obtaining an outpost clearly flawed and how can outposts be truly utilised?  
All very intriguing questions, which are explored in this illustrative example of how outposts are to be exploited.  
Enjoy.  
[Event "Minor County Championships 2012-2013"]

[Site "Milton Keynes, ENG"]

[Date "2013.05.18"]

[Round "1.2"]

[White "Mansson, James"]

[Black "Ross, Chris"]

[Result "0-1"]

[ECO "E05"]

[WhiteElo "2215"]

[BlackElo "2247"]

[Annotator "Chris Ross"]

[PlyCount "82"]

[EventDate "2013.05.18"]

[WhiteTeam "Sussex"]

[BlackTeam "Bedfordshire"]

{E05: Catalan}

1. d4 Nf6

2. c4 e6

3. g3 d5

4. Nf3 Be7

5. Bg2 O-O

6. O-O dxc4

7. Qc2 a6

8. Qxc4 b5

9. Qc2 Bb7

10. Bd2

{So far, all according to theory. This 10th move by white is the older variation of the Catalan and not often seen nowadays. White's plan is obvious, to challenge black's backward C-pawn. If black can achieve c7-c5, he would have equalised more than likely.

In compensation for white's slightly awkward piece development, black has much freedom and lucid manoeuvrability for his pieces. The struggle for the C-file is an interesting one and one deeply wrestled with for the entirety of this opening.

Although white's focus point is the backward C-pawn, to control this pawn, he is seeking to occupy the square in front of it, c6, as decreed by Nimzovich, blockade the square in front of the backward or isolated pawn.

Black's answer to this strategy is quick piece play. First though, the forcing of more awkward placement of the white pieces.}

10... Be4

11. Qc1

{Once again, all seen many hundreds of times in theory. Here, new theory has developed new concepts. The thoughts behind the placement of the black pieces is an intriguing one, but subtle in its complexity.  
Since the light-squares are very important, and the long h1-a8 diagonal, the issue of the black light-squared bishop has to be considered. White will soon hit this bishop with the white queen's knight. Control of the centre (e4) is important for black and moves like Nd5 take that piece away from the central protection.  
Here, I adopt an idea tried out now in the latest ideas of the Catalan. This move can even be played on move 10 and is an imitation from an idea tried in the Slav defence. It looks odd, but makes a lot of positional sense.}

11... Ra7

{Which came as a bit of a surprise to my opponent. The ideas behind the move are not that complex. Critically, the rook is lifted off the long diagonal, making tactics with the fianchettoed bishop on g2 unlikely. Also, the a8 square is vacated for the light-squared bishop, or better still, the black queen. The c-pawn is no longer a target and black aims to push this pawn, hopefully to c5, thereby opening up the 2nd rank for the rook, which can switch rapidly to c7 or d7 when necessary. An unorthodox development strategy for the rook, but one deeply planned out.}

12. Rd1

{It is curious how many games I have won with black in the Catalan where the white rook is simply misplaced on d1. Threats down the D-file are rarely achieved, and the f2 pawn often becomes weak. The only advantage of the move is that the c7-c5 thrust is yet again held up for some time to come.}

12... Nbd7

13. Ba5

{White is intent on his game strategy now. The pinning of the C-pawn is crucial to his plan. The bishop holds up all counter play on the queen-side for black and he must find a way to untangle his pieces and obtain that desirable c7-c5 thrust.}

13... Qb8

{Not an easy decision to make, but I envisaged the sort of tactics that appear within another 6 moves. A8 was the tempting square for the lady, raking along the long diagonal. I had ideas though of b5-b4 and Qb5 ensnaring the loose bishop on a5. This does not quite work, but the idea was there. I also wanted to leave the a8 square for the a7 rook or the light-squared bishop. I had ideas too of leaving the light-squared bishop on e4 if attacked by the white queen's knight and achieving c7-c5 in one move. I hadn't decided on that though.  
White now has a very critical decision to make.}  
14. b4

{A highly instructive position has now arisen.  
White has committed himself and entombed his bishop on a5, with the concrete conviction that his play down the C-file is too strong. C7-c5 is pretty much blocked off for a long time to come and his objective, the c6 square, is going to be incredibly difficult to support for black.  
Let us look deeper though, and consider the true nature of the outpost on c6. Although a nice hole for a white knight, it is not supported by a white pawn, and apart from the e5 square, where, in fact, can a white knight go from c6? Occupying an outpost is one thing, being effective from that outpost, is another.  
That security of a pawn protection is important.  
Switch your attention now further down the C-file and to the c5 square. A white knight can land in there, but could be duly taken by the black dark-squared bishop. In effect, not that useful.  
However, the light squares, which were described earlier as important are now noticeably weaker for white. The c4 square, for instance, has now become an outpost. From there, a black night would in fact be very useful, not only attacking the strangely-placed bishop on a5, but dominating the centre. Of absolute importance though is that, when a black night lands on c4, it will screen the c6 square, and hence, weakening that square for white.

It is for these reasons that I do not fight white for the occupation of the c6 outpost, for as it is, it is of no importance at all. White can, and does, obtain the outpost, but at a cost. The major cost being his entombed bishop on a5.  
If white had not done this, black could have achieved c7-c5 easily, even if it meant giving up the light-squared bishop, which was not forced in any case.}

14... Nb6

{Calmly allowing Ne5 and Nc6, for as perceived, the outpost is not effective in the slightest.}  
15. Nbd2 Bd5

16. Ne5 Bxg2

17. Kxg2 Bd6

{Now white has a major problem to solve. Black is threatening to exchange on e5 and give white not only a bad pawn on e5, but severe problems in completing his development. The occupation of the c6 square is now necessary.}

18. Nc6 Qb7

{Luring white into the following tactics. The other point of 17... Bd6 is that the bishop is no longer loose on e7. With the light-squared bishops being off the board, the black queen stands on an ideal diagonal.}

19. e4

{All of this must have seemed very attractive for white, but the reality is that the long diagonal prevents him ever from playing e4-e5, winning a piece. The threat then, is actually, ineffectual.  
19. Kg1 was to be preferred, when black would do best to simply retreat the rook to a8 and wait for white to show his hand, as the same tactic that now comes, is very much looming.}

19... Nc4!  
{The first of many moves that shows the comparison of the outposts. The knight on c4 is protected, whereas the knight on c6 is not. White is now in a very sticky situation and the exchange sacrifice seems to be forced.}

20. Nxa7

{20. Nxc4 Qxc6 is no joy for white. 21. Nxd6 Qxc1 27. Raxc1 cxd6 and white has a horrible ending, where the bishop on a5 has nowhere to go. It can come to b6 and c5, but nowhere from there. IN the mean time, the e4 pawn is attacked and black will play d6-d5 and obtain that good knight vs. bad bishop ending which will give him a massive advantage.}

20... Nxd2

{With this exchange sacrifice, not only does black obtain the c4 outpost, but also the d5 one, since the e4 pawn can not be saved.}

21. Qc6

{Curiously, white is still intent on utilising the c6 outpost, oblivious that it is an erroneous outpost, with no value at all. IN fact, black is more than happy to exchange queens, as white's attacking potential is practically wiped out with one exchange.}

21... Qxc6

22. Nxc6 Ndxe4

{At which point, we can sit and assess the position for it's true worth. White is an exchange up, but black has snaffled a central pawn but got magnificent outposts on c4 and d5. Once the black night settle on these outposts, they will work in tandem to cause white all kinds of tactical difficulties. Whereas the knight on c6 is doing very little and the bishop on a5, is as good as a pawn. Black already has a sizable advantage, it is the conversion of that advantage, which is the tricky part.}

23. Rac1 Nd5

24. a3

{White is struggling for moves. He realises the b4 pawn is also loose. If black could steal this and run back to protect his C-pawn, he will secure a passed pawn on the queen-side, something white does not want to contend with.}

24... f6

{Completely and utterly restricting the white knight on c6 at the cost of a pawn. White is now, effectively, two pieces down, the bishop on a5 entombed and the knight on c6, on its beautiful outpost out of the game, in comparison to the black nights, which are dancing around the board.}

25. Re1   
{White believes that black has blundered a pawn, but in fact, it is a lure to ask the white rook to step off the D-file, allowing the black night to reach its ideal square. The E6-pawn is not important to black, it is the outposts that will determine the result of this game.}  
25... Nd2

26. Rxe6 Nc4

{And black has now achieved his ultimate objectives. Both his knights stand on the true "outposts". The tactics that can now be so fluid for black with the combinations that the knights can flourish caused white some considerable time. Even a3 is a tactical weakness now, and once this falls, b4 will shortly tumble.}

27. Rce1

{Humbling as it was, 27. Ra1 was the only move for white. Black would have work to be done to force a weakness in the centre or on the king-side.}

27... Kf7

{Preventing Re8 and the exchange of rooks. The black rook is needed to guard the back-rank, hindering a Nb8/Nxa6 idea freeing up the piece.}

28. R6e4 Nxa3

{And thus, the A-pawn is snatched. The b4 pawn will have to follow soon after and the collapse of the white position is now commencing. The technique is relatively easy from now on.}

29. Ra1 Nc4

{Returning to the outpost. Excursions to c2 are not advantageous. The occupation of the outposts is the most important here.}

30. Rh4

{Amazingly, white contrives to uncoordinate his pieces even more. His intensions are genuine though, sadly enough. White wishes to dislodge the knight on d5 and maybe allow d4-d5 for white, freeing up the d4 square for the stranded c6 knight. Unfortunately for white, black has yet another neat refutation to this plan.}

30... h6

{Black could conceivably run for the stranded night on c6 with 30... Ke6 but 31. Rh5 instead of stealing on h7 is compensation enough for white.}

31. Rh5

{Not seeing black's idea. 31. Re4 forced black to work that bit harder to make progress.}

 31... g5!

{After which, there is no hope for white.  
The rook on the H-file has been proven to be as stranded as the other white pieces on the queen-side. Again, at the cost of a pawn, the white pieces are sent to the most unproductive squares on the board.}

32. Rxh6 Kg7

33. Rh3

{There was something comical about the white pieces here, the bishop on a5, the knight on c6 and now the rook on h3. None of the white pieces were working harmoniously to support each other in a clear and logical objective. Whereas, the black pieces surround and aid one another beautifully. Now for the rook to be activated.}

33... Re8

34. f4

{Sheer desperation. White had clearly given up here, understanding that his position was hopeless with this disjointed pieces. Once again, there was a certain aesthetical pleasure in the best response for black here.}

34... Bxf4!  
{34... gxf4 35. Rh4 gave white reasons to hope, slim as it was. The text-move just shattered all of white's illusions entirely. Stealing the F-pawn is one thing, but preventing the rook on h3 emerging was the psychological tipping point. If white does nothing, black will simply retreat the bishop and get on with penetrating with the rook and weaving a net around the white king with the two nights.}

35. Bxc7

{In desperate time-trouble, white goes for a last-gasp attempt. 35. gxf4 Nxf4+ 36. Kg3 Re3+ is curtains.

White gives up a second minor piece to delay the inevitable, picking up two pawns en route. Naturally, if black recaptures on c7 with the knight, then all is well for him, as he can capture on f4 without the tactics.}  
35... Bxc7

36. Rxa6

{Interestingly enough, the knight on c6 still becomes a focus point. The piece still doesn't really have a square to go to. The edge of the board is its only route to safety, but that is ponderous and time-consuming.  
36... Re6 was crying out, but there is no good response to 37. Nb8, which was rather frustrating. Then came the concept of attacking the knight from the rear, controlling the 7th rank in the process. After which, the resistance from white soon flooded away.}  
36... Re2+

37. Kf1

{37. Kg1 Bb6 38. g4 Re6 does pick up the knight on c6.}

37... Rc2

38. g4

{White attempts to free up his rook on h3, but this just gives up another pawn and allows the knights to dance around the white king that bit more. The position was hopeless in any case.}

38... Nce3+

39. Ke1

{39. Kg1 Nxg4 with Re1+ and Nf4+ to follow.}  
39... Nxg4

{Snaffling the G-pawn, without spending any time on tactics. There is little worth in consideration for tactics here, as slow methodical play will simply convert the victory. Perhaps better was 39... Nf4 40. Rxe3 Ng2+ 41. Kf1 Nxe3+ but I was determined not to give white the sniff of counter play, especially so with the b5 pawn being vulnerable.}

40. Rb3 Rxh2

{Curiously, having now reached the time-control on move 40, white played his 41st move relatively quickly, falling for an attractive mate!}

41. Na7

{And thus, the night that has caused white so many positional problems moves, to attack the pawn on b5, but it is all far too late. The knight, which was so carefully planned to place on c6, winning an exchange in the doing, sat on c6 and had no influence on the game at all. A superb illustration of the effectiveness of outposts.}  
  41... Nge3    
{And white cannot prevent Bg3 mate.  
A very instructive game.}

42. 0-1

Opening references

A.  
12. a4 b4 13. Bg5 c5 14. dxc5 Rc7 15. Bxf6 Bxf6 16. Nbd2 Bb7 17. Nb3 Nd7 18. Qc2 Qa8 19. Ne1 Bxg2 20. Nxg2 Nxc5 21. Nxc5 Be7 22. Qb3 Rxc5 23. Rac1 Rfc8 24. Rxc5 Bxc5 25. Nf4 Bd6 26. Qd3 Be5

Karpov,A (2668)-Zhao Xue (2467)/Cap d'Agde FRA 2006/0-1 (66)

B.  
12. a3 Nc6 13. e3 Qa8 14. Qd1 Nb8 15. Ba5 Nc6 16. Be1 Nb8 17. b4 Nbd7 18. Nbd2 Bd5 19. Nh4 Bxg2 20. Nxg2 a5 21. Nb3 axb4 22. Bxb4 Bxb4 23. axb4 Rxa1 24. Qxa1 Nd5 25. Qa5 Qxa5 26. bxa5 e5

Tonon,A (2235)-Hrenic,M (2077)/Nova Gorica SLO 2012/1-0 (55)

C.  
13... Qa8 14. Nc3 Bb7 15. a4 b4 16. Na2 c5 17. b3 Rc8 18. Qb2 cxd4 19. Qxd4 Rc2 20. Qd3 Be4 21. Nd4 Rxa2 22. Bxe4 Nxe4 23. Rxa2 Ne5 24. Qe3 Ng4 25. Qf3 Ngxf2 26. Rc1 g5 27. Nc6 g4 28. Qe3

Azmaiparashvili,Z (2465)-Zaitsev,I (2400)/Moscow 1986/EXT 2002/1-0 (43)