



neil mcdonald

concise chess middlegames

EVERYMAN CHESS

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(tel: 020 7253 7887 fax: 020 7490 3708)

email: info@everymanchess.com; website: www.everymanchess.com

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Introduction

It is by no means easy to define the boundaries of the middlegame. You could say it begins at the moment you run out of theory – though this might mean you are still in the opening whilst your opponent is already 12 moves into the middlegame! Another possible definition is that the middlegame begins when the pawn structure has become fixed to such a degree that general development gives way to thoughts of a concrete plan. However, this is imprecise to say the least. Nor is it always easy to mark the transition from the middlegame to the final stage of the game. Just how many pieces must disappear before it is an endgame?

During the middlegame of a competitive encounter a host of strategic and tactical possibilities present themselves in our minds as we examine the ever changing position in front of us. These initial suggestions are mostly rejected but some are accepted, usually after being tested by our powers of tactical calculation and logical scrutiny. The aim of this book is to give you a lot more of these ideas – first rate ideas from the games of top Grandmasters such as Anand, Adams and Morozevich. Hopefully your ability to sift through them and find the one essential idea you really need will also be strengthened.

I wish you the best of luck in trying to master this most elusive phase of the game.

Neil McDonald
Gravesend, June 2004

Chapter One

Tactics and Calculation

The ability to foresee short tactical operations that last between one and three moves is essential if you are going to master strategical chess. This is for two reasons. Firstly, you will need to anticipate and so ward off any tactical blows by your opponent that might ruin your plan, and secondly you have to be able to utilise tactical ideas of your own to remove obstacles along each step of the way. If you miss an important tactic your plan might come to a dead end or be defeated without your ever realising why – a great pity!

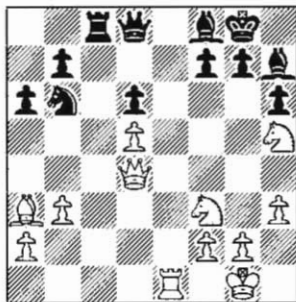
Fortunately this is one area of chess in which practice really does make perfect. No player can fail to become stronger if they work through a challenging puzzle book and find the solutions without moving the pieces on the board (or cheating!)

This is because when it comes to spotting such tactical finesses it helps enormously if you have already encountered the idea previously in one of your own games or seen it in a book. *The main difficulty is in noticing the idea, rather than in calculating it.*

Here we'll have a brief look at all the important tactical ideas so that they will become imprinted on your mind.

Deflection

Example One



Shirov-Short

Dos Hermanas 1997

Here Short decided to bring his knight back into the centre with **25...♞d7?** but this just lost a pawn to **26 ♕xd6!** as if **26...♕xd6** **27 ♜xg7** mate. Why did the very strong Grandmaster fall for such a simple-looking trick? I can sug-

gest two reasons: firstly, before he played his knight to d7 the d6 pawn didn't even begin to register in his mind as a target as it was defended twice; and secondly Black was worried about threats against g7 – so he thought all the danger from the bishop on a3 would come after ♕b2, not from its present diagonal.

The concept of deflection is closely associated with the idea of 'overloading' a piece – here for example the bishop on f8 was given one job too many in having to defend both d6 and g7.

You win some and lose some... and here Shirov is on the receiving end of a tactic involving deflection.

Example Two

Anand-Shirov

Frankfurt 2000

29... ♖xg2 30 ♜xf8+ forces mate.



Black appears to have all the squares around his king adequately defended, but after 28 ♙f8! he resigned. Either the black rook or knight has to give up a vital defensive function to prevent 29 ♙g7+ ♖h7 30 ♙f6+ ♗h6 31 ♙g5+ ♖xg5 32 fxg5 mate. If 28... ♖xf8 29 ♜g7 mate, or 28... ♗xf8 29 ♗f6! – a reminder that a piece doesn't control the square it stands on, as mate is threatened on g8 and if

Knight Fork

Example One



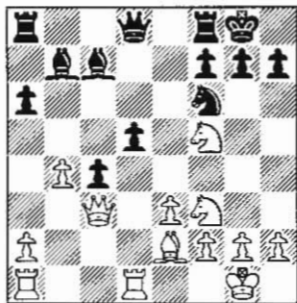
Zeliakov-Morozevich

FIDE World Championship KO,
Moscow 2001

White played 17 ♗f1?? and was hit by the thunderbolt 17... ♙xf2+!. He had no choice but to resign as he loses a lot of

material: 18 ♔xf2 ♚xc3 – removing the defender of the bishop on d3 with gain of time – 19 bxc3 ♘xd3+ 20 ♖e2 ♘xe1 21 ♔xc1 ♘xe4.

Example Two



Huzman-Kasparov

European Club Cup 2003

I chose this example to show that absolutely no one, however great, is immune from tactical blunders.

White threatens 21 ♔xc4, winning a pawn by exploiting the pin on the d-file. Something entirely unexpected happened in the game, as Kasparov played 20...♔c8?? attacking the knight but missing the tactical bolt 21 ♔xd5!

Now 21...♘xd5 allows 22 ♖xg7 mate while 21...♚xd5 loses the queen to the fork 22 ♘c7+. After 21...♚e8 22 ♔xc4 (there is still no need to move the rook) Kasparov looked at his position two pawns down, gave one of his trademark grimaces and then resigned.

Instead of the fiasco in the game Black might have played 20...♔e8, applying the time honoured principle that the best way to deal with a threat is to ignore it! Then if 21 ♔xc4? ♚c8! breaks the pin on the d5 pawn and leaves

two white pieces hanging (here we see the value of the move 20...♖e8, as it prevents a knight fork on e7).

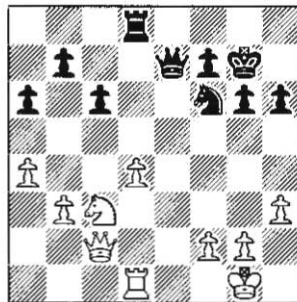


The white bishop can't save itself from capture as after 22 ♔d3 White loses his queen to a discovered attack with check: 22...♘h2+!

Nor does 22 ♘h6+ ♔f8! do anything but delay the loss of a piece.

Double Attack

Example One

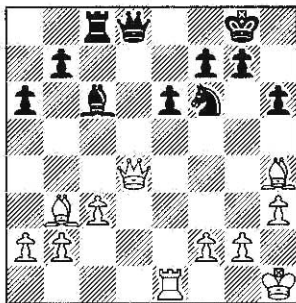


Balashov-Morozevich

Russian Cup final, Samara 1998

It looks like Black has only a slight positional advantage, but he won a pawn and soon the game with 36...♖xd4! as if 37 ♖xd4 ♕e1+ 38 ♔h2 ♕e5+ wins back the rook with a double attack.

Example Two



Adams-Bareev

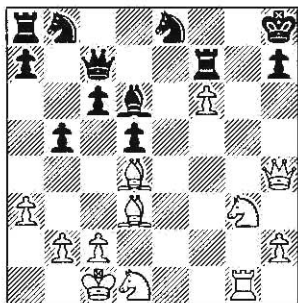
Wijk aan Zee 2004

White played 23 ♔xf6 when 23..gxf6 would leave Black with a weakened kingside but a playable game. Instead Bareev exchanged queens with 23...♚xf6? but after 24 ♚xf6 gxf6 he was struck down by 25 ♖xe6!. Black resigned as both 25...fxe6 26 ♔xe6+ ♔g7 27 ♔xc8 (two pawns

down) and 25...♔g7 26 ♖e7 (only one pawn down but with a rook on the seventh) are intolerable.

Discovered Check

Example One



Anand-Izeta Txbarri

Madrid 1993

White broke through with 24 ♔xh7! ♖xh7 25 f7+.

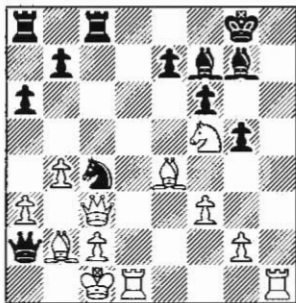
A fearsome discovered check

as if 25...♔e5 26 f8♚ is mate.

25...♘g7 26 ♔xg7+ 1-0

A second discovered check clinches matters after 26...♔xg7: 27 ♘f5+ ♔f8 28 ♚xh7 (even simpler than 28 ♚g8+ ♔xf7 29 ♚xh7+) 28...♚xf7 – how else to stop immediate mate on g8? – 29 ♚h8+ ♚g8 30 ♚xg8 mate.

Example Two



Akopian-Kramnik
Wijk aan Zee 2004

Seeing combinations for the opponent is one of the hardest things in chess – even the top players aren't immune. It is all too easy to become engrossed in your own ideas and forget that you might not be the only one with a trick up your sleeve.

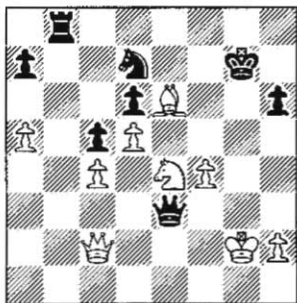
Here Black could simplify with 28...♚xb2+ 29 ♚xb2 ♘xb2, but instead he played 28...♚c7? guarding the e7 pawn and planning 29...♚ac8. But he was rocked back by 29 ♚h7!! The rook offers itself to draw the black king onto a square where it can be subjected to a decisive discovered attack. White gets in first after 29...♔xh7 30 ♘xe7+ ♔h6 (or 30...♔h8 31 ♚h1+ ♔h6 32 ♚xf6 mate) 31 ♚h1+ ♔h5 32 g4! ♔h8 33 ♚xh5+ ♔g7 34 ♚xf6 mate. Kramnik tried to escape by simplifying, but it was one move too late: 29...♚xb2+ 30 ♚xb2 ♘xb2

31 ♖xg7+ ♔f8 32 ♖h1 1-0 Black is mated if he tries to save his knight – 32...♘c4 33 ♖h8+.

The Pin

Example One

Fred Reinfeld came up with the brilliant saying that ‘the pin is mightier than the sword’.



Kraai-McDonald
Budapest 2003

Here White can win easily enough with 35 ♕xd7 ♖xf4 36 ♘g3 when the two pieces overpower the rook whether White chooses to play for attack on the black king or force an endgame. But White didn't want to give up the f4 pawn and so played the apparently crushing 35 ♘g3, with the threat of 36 ♘f5+ and if 35...♖xf4 36 ♘h5+. However, after 35...♖a3! my opponent started shaking his head and muttering to himself. White has no time to capture the knight as 36...♖b2 wins his queen. White resigned after 36 ♔h3 ♘f6 37 ♖f2 ♖b2 38 ♖e1 ♖f3 39 ♖g1 ♔f8 40 ♕f5 h5 0-1

The moral is that in a winning position you should always go for the straightforward, 100% cast iron win – trying to be too smart can rebound.

Example Two

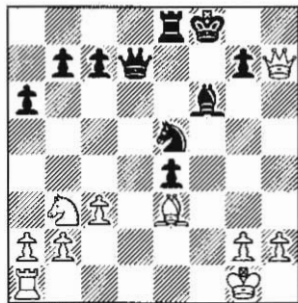


Anand-Dreev
Linares 1997

It is White's move and just as well, as otherwise 1...a3 would be checkmate! Rather than suffer this indignity Anand played 23 ♞dxb5! ♙xb5 24 ♞xb5 when if 24... ♙xb5 25 ♜xd6 exploits the pin on f8 to force mate after Black runs out of checks: 25...a3+ 26 ♚b1 ♜f1+ 27 ♙c1 etc. Dreev

tried 24...axb3 but had to resign after 25 ♞xd6+ ♚d7 26 ♞f5+ 1-0. His king is hopelessly exposed, e.g. 26... ♚c7 27 ♜c3+ ♚d7 28 ♜d4+ ♚c7 29 ♜b6+ ♚d7 30 ♜b7+ ♚e8 and again White can exploit the pin on the bishop to give mate with 31 ♜c7 .

Combining tactical ideas



Anand-Yusupov
Candidates, Wijk aan Zee 1994

Common mating tactics

Here Anand used a variety of tactical ideas, including pins and double attacks, to carry out his attack:

23 ♖f1

First of all he pins the bishop and threatens the attractive 24 ♖xf6+! gxf6 25 ♔h6+ ♚g7 26 ♚xg7 mate. If 23...♗e7 to avert this then 24 ♔c5 pins the rook and wins the exchange. Or 23...♚c6 24 ♘d4 ♚d6 25 ♘f5 ♚c6 26 ♘xg7! and again the pin on the f-file destroys Black's defences.

23...♘g4 24 ♔d4

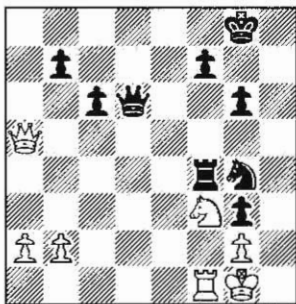
Again the pin on the g7 pawn is utilised with the threat 25 ♔xf6 ♘xf6 26 ♖xf6+! gxf6 27 ♚xd7 winning the black queen.

24...♚c6 25 ♔c5+ 1-0

And here the double attack wins a piece after 25...♔f7 26 ♚h5+ so Black decided he had seen enough.

Example One

An advanced pawn in the heart of a king's position sets up all sorts of mating threats.



P.Chandler-Morozevich

Mainz (rapidplay) 2001

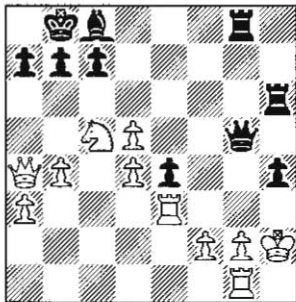
Black used the g3 pawn to set up a mating pattern: 27...♖xf3! 28 ♖xf3 ♚d1+ 29 ♖f1 ♚d4+ and

Concise Chess Middlegames

White resigned as 30 ♔h1 ♚h8+ 31 ♖g1 ♚h2 is mate.

Alternatively 28 gxf3 ♚d4+ 29 ♔g2 (29 ♔h1 ♚h8+ 30 ♖g2 ♚h2 mate) 29...♘e3+ 30 ♔g1 ♘xf1+ 31 ♖xf1 ♚f2 mate.

Example Two



Leko-Morozevich

Frankfurt 2000

It looks as if lines on the king-side are going to remain closed, as

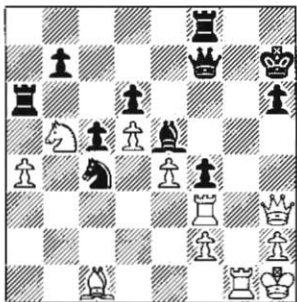
if 30...h3 then 31 g3 keeps things blocked up. But 30...♚g3+! did the trick, as 31 fxxg3 hxxg3 is double, discovered checkmate! Of course, Black would still only score one point.

Leko didn't take the queen, but battled on with 31 ♔h1 ♚xf2 32 ♖c3 h3 Every last strand of pawn cover is removed from the white king. 33 g3 h2 34 ♖gc1 ♖xg3 35 ♖xg3 ♚xg3 36 ♖f1 ♖g6 Now Leko tried one last fling with 37 ♘d7+ and resigned after 37...♔a8 0-1. It wasn't too late for Black to lose after 37...♔xd7?? 38 ♖f8+ ♔c8 39 ♖xc8+ ♔xc8 40 ♚e8 and it is the black king who is mated! Remember to stay alert!

Example Three

The arrival of the last piece into the attack can often be the

proverbial straw that breaks the camel's back.



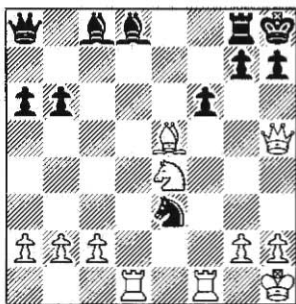
Kramnik-Kasparov
Novgorod 1997

Every White piece is putting pressure on the kingside apart from the knight on b5, which appears to be out on a limb. Kramnik rectified this with **31 ♖c7!!** as he had seen a familiar mating pattern with the two rooks: **31... ♜xc7 32 ♜xh6+**

♜xh6 33 ♜h3 mate. Naturally Kasparov had no wish to allow his arch rival to win so gloriously, and tried **31... ♜xa4** but after **32 ♙xf4!** he resigned. The threat is mate on h6 and after **32... ♙xf4 33 ♘c6** there is no answer to all the threats, the main one being **34 ♜xf4**. For example **33... ♜g8 34 ♜xg8 ♜xg8** (a quick massacre ensues after the alternative **34... ♜xg8 35 ♜xf4 ♜e7 36 ♜xh6**) **35 ♜f5+ ♜h8** – or **35... ♜g6 36 ♘f8+** winning the queen – **36 ♜f6+ ♜h7 37 ♘f8+** and Black loses his queen.

Note that Kramnik employed tactics to get the knight from its isolated position on b5 onto the wonderful e6 square. That is how it should be in a well-played middlegame: tactics should support strategy and not just be indulged in for the sake of complicating play or setting traps.

Example Four



Shirov-Topalov

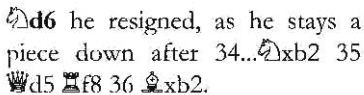
Linares 1998

It is White to play. He is the exchange up, but has every piece apart from the queen hanging – Black’s threats include 1...fxc5, 1...Wxe4, 1...Qxd1 and 1...Qxf1, and he might add the white queen to his list of targets with 1...Qg4. Nevertheless, White has a weapon in his hands more powerful than

the win or loss of pieces: check-mate. He would like to play 31 Qd6 aiming for 32 Qf7 with a smothered mate, but Black gets in first with 31...Wxg2 mate. No matter: Shirov played 31 Wf3!!.

Black loses because his queen is unprotected and there is the threat of 32 Qd6, when he must give up his queen or be mated on f7. Thus if 31...Qb7 or 31...Qg4, then 32 Qd6 is a killer. Or if 31...fxe5 then 31 Qd6? fails to 31...Wxf3, when 32 Qf7 mate is prevented, but White has another mating method: 31 Qxd8! when if 31...Qxd8 32 Wf8+ forces a back rank mate, while 31...Qxf1 32 Qxg8+ Qxg8 33 Qf6+ wins the black queen with a discovered attack.

So Topalov tried 31...Qxd1 but after 32 Qd6! W a7 – how else to save the queen and stop mate on f7? – 33 Qxc8 Wd7 34

 $\text{N}d6$ he resigned, as he stays a piece down after $34... \text{N}xb2$ $35 \text{W}d5 \text{R}f8$ $36 \text{Q}xb2$.

Don't worry if you don't know everything and can't play every position perfectly – neither can your opponents! Chess is a game of mistakes, and that is what keeps it lively and interesting.

What you should be trying to do is to prevent the **avoidable** errors that you make and at the same time try to make things as hard as possible for your opponent. The more tactical and strategical models you have in your head the more likely it is that you will be able to seize the chances that come up during the game.

Calculation

So far we have looked at tac-

tical ideas in which the main problem was in spotting the first move. In other cases, however, the difficulty centres not on finding a clever and surprising starting move, but on being able to calculate to the end of a long sequence of natural moves and make a correct assessment of the position reached. It is all too easy to fail to look far enough into the future or miss a nasty tactic at the end of a series of moves.

Continuous Practice Is Essential

A famous pianist once said that if he didn't practice his technique for one day, then during a concert only he could tell; if he didn't practice for two days, then his fellow orchestra members could tell; and if he didn't practice for three days, the audience could tell.

Concise Chess Middlegames

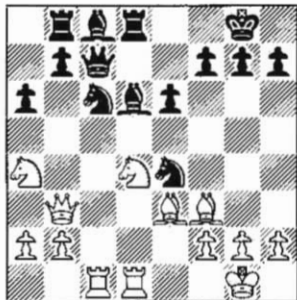
The ability to calculate is like a muscle. It can be made stronger with practice, or is eroded by lack of exercise. If you are deadly serious about improving your chess, try to practice calculation every day. Give yourself at least half an hour to work through a set number of chess puzzles.

I recall coaching a young boy at the European Junior Championships. We did a lot of work on his favourite opening line, an immensely complicated variation of the Najdorf Sicilian. He never got to play it in the tournament – but we had a great deal of fun looking at the sharp variations and tactics. He went into the games pumped full of sacrifices and tactical ideas, fully alert to tactical chances, and exceeded all expectations in his games.

Another good way to improve your chess is to become obsessed

with a position and try to take it apart – learn literally everything there is to know about it.

Example One



Shirov-Leko

Frankfurt 1996

Here is an example of a combination that is difficult to calculate rather than to see. Black has an extra pawn but he is under pressure on the queenside and he

has a knight hanging. He could retreat or defend it, but Leko thought he saw a way to escape by forcing a mass simplification:

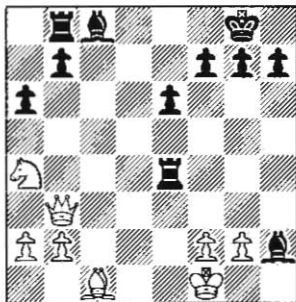
16... ♖xd4

After this there can be no turning back, as otherwise Black will lose at least a piece.

17 ♖xd4 ♙xh2+ 18 ♚f1 ♜xc1+

The idea: Black expects to gain more than enough for the queen.

19 ♙xc1 ♖xd4 20 ♙xe4 ♜xe4



Black's combination comes to

an end with a favourable material balance for him: two rooks and two pawns for the queen. However, White had waiting the nasty surprise 21 ♜d3! with the double threat of capturing the rook or mating on d8. Now 21...f5 allows 22 ♜d8+ ♚f7 23 ♖b6, slaying the bishop on c8 with a continuing attack.

Leko tried 21... ♙d7 but he soon resigned after 22 ♜xe4 ♙b5+ 23 ♚e1.

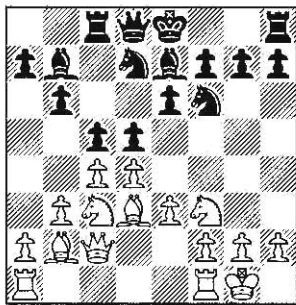
Having reached the position after 20... ♙xe4 there is no doubt that Leko would have seen the strength of 21 ♜d3 – in fact he most probably saw it a few moves before. But back on move 16, when he decided to risk the move 16... ♖xd4, it unfortunately escaped his notice.

The further we look into the future, the more uncertain our grasp of the position is going to

be. It is important to ask yourself 'if I commit myself to a long tactical variation, am I liable to mess things up? How far can I look into the future without making moves that I would instantly see are blunders if I had the position in my mind actually in front of me?'

A great World Champion, the Russian Mikhail Botvinnik, freely admitted that he was somewhat deficient in seeing tactical possibilities. This didn't stop him playing with success against tactical geniuses such as Alekhine and Tal, because he had a style of play that exploited his wonderful feel for chess strategy. If you tend to mess up in sharp tactical variations, then you can reduce their impact by playing quiet openings and being satisfied instead with achieving small positional advantages.

Example Two



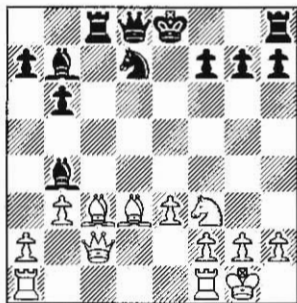
Kramnik-Ivanchuk Dortmund 1997

The opening moves were 1 $\text{d}4$ $\text{f}3$ $\text{d}6$ 2 $\text{c}4$ $\text{c}6$ 3 $\text{d}3$ $\text{c}3$ 4 $\text{d}4$ $\text{e}6$ 5 $\text{e}3$ $\text{b}7$ 6 $\text{c}2$ $\text{b}6$ 7 $\text{d}3$ $\text{b}7$ 8 0-0 $\text{e}7$ 9 $\text{b}3$ $\text{c}8$ 10 $\text{b}2$ $\text{c}5$.

Now after 11 $\text{c}5$ Black could simply recapture with 11... $\text{e}5$, but Ivanchuk was lured by the chance to set up a pin

Tactics and Calculation

along the c-file: **11...cxd4?** **12 dxe6!** Black would already stand well after **12 ...xd4 xd5**. **12...dxc3** There is no way for Black to escape as **12...fxe6 13 xd4** leaves him a pawn down with a wrecked position. **13 exd7+ xd7** If **13...xd7 14 f5!** exploits a pin to win material next move with **15 xc8**. **14 xc3 b4** This is Black's idea: he forces White into what seems at first to be a fatal c-file pin.



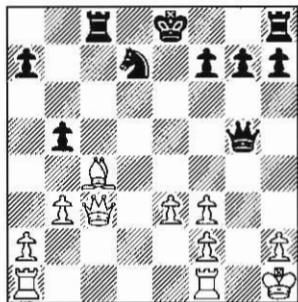
15 c4 xf3

Not **15...xc3 16 xc3 b5** because of **17 xc7**.

16 gxf3 xc3 17 xc3 g5+

Black gains time to defend **g7** to rule out the **xc7** escape from the pin.

18 h1 b5



The end of Ivanchuk's combination. It appears that he is winning a piece, but he has missed a sting in the tail: **19 xa5!** with a counter pin along the fifth

rank, as 19...bxc4? drops the queen. Black therefore has nothing better than 19...♖f5, attacking f3, but after 20 ♔e2 White is a pawn up and the pawns on a7 and b5 are also loose. Against Kramnik there would be no hope, so Ivanchuk resigned straightaway after 19 ♖a5.

Black was doomed, at least in elite chess, as soon as he played 11...cxd4. You might be wondering how on earth you could possibly see the killer 19 ♖a5 in eight moves' time? The a5 square doesn't appear to be of any significance whatsoever in the earlier position. Of course, Kramnik is a World Champion and any nuance good enough to fool Ivanchuk is bound to be hard to see.

On the other hand the fact that the variation is full of captures is a tremendous aid to calculation. Every single move after 12

dxe6 is forced for both White and Black – a single divergence will spell defeat. So when working out the variation in your head you don't have to keep choosing between two or more fairly good moves for yourself or the opponent – there is only one move. Ivanchuk didn't see the 'only' move 19 ♖a5 and so lost.

It is far easier to say 'he goes there, I go there' rather than 'I go there – or do I go there? Or what about this move?'

Here we'll end our discussion of tactics and calculation. Remember that it is a continuous process to keep up your strength in this department of the game – it is the easiest way to make yourself into a stronger player if you regularly practice, but also the easiest way to become weaker if you neglect it!

Chapter Two

First Thoughts on Strategy

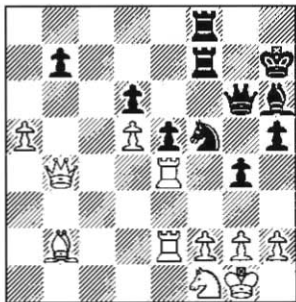
What is the difference between strategy and tactics?

This is best illustrated by two examples from a match between Kasparov and the computer program X3D Fritz.

They demonstrate that if a position contains tricky tactical ideas, a powerful computer can beat the world's greatest player; whereas if the position is strategic, it can lose like a novice.

(see following diagram)

Black has an excellent position: all his pieces are in a compact formation and he is planning to start a kingside attack. In contrast, the white rooks and bishop are staring at a brick wall on e5.



X3DFritz-Kasparov
Computer Match 2003

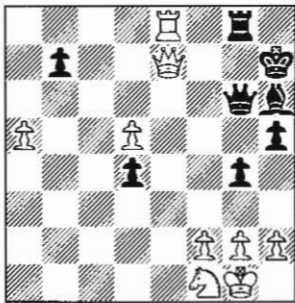
So Kasparov was convinced there was nothing to fear because of the immovable barrier on e5. Therefore he decided to put a rook on the g-file in order to support a pawn storm against the

Concise Chess Middlegames

white king with h5-h4 as if immediately 32...h4? then 33 ♖xg4.

But after 32...♖g7? the impossible happened: 33 ♖xe5!

It turns out that Kasparov has made a terrible tactical error as he has left the rook on f8 undefended. There followed 33...dxe5 34 ♖xf8 when not only has he lost a pawn but the black centre is collapsing. The computer quickly wrapped things up: 34...♘d4 35 ♙xd4 exd4 36 ♖e8 ♖g8 Necessary to stop mate. 37 ♖e7+!



Beginning a step by step sequence of moves with the queen to win the b7 pawn. Yes, computers can play aesthetically pleasing chess. 37...♖g7 38 ♖d8 ♖g8 39 ♖d7+ 1-0

Kasparov resigned as 39...♖g7 40 ♖c8 ♖g8 41 ♖xb7+ wins the b-pawn with check, when pawn on a5 runs through to queen.

A strong computer would *never* make an error like 32...♖g7. A human, on the other hand, can easily lose his sense of danger, as both e5 and the rook on f8 appear solidly defended: it never occurs to him that the 'passive' white queen is going to intersect with the f8 square.

A pocket calculator, with no knowledge of the world, no emotions, no character and powered only by solar rays, can outdo the greatest mathematician or scien-

rist who has ever lived when it comes to mental arithmetic or so called 'number crunching'.

In the same way, Kasparov is more than matched by the strongest computers in the 'if I go there, and he goes there' type of thinking.

On the other hand, computers don't understand chess, in the same way that a calculator doesn't understand maths. They cannot see patterns of ideas or learn from experience.



Kasparov-X3D Fritz

Computer Match 2003

A position from the same match, which was reached after the moves 1 ♞f3 ♝f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♞c3 d5 4 d4 c6 5 e3 a6 6 c5 ♞bd7 7 b4 a5 8 b5 e5 9 ♞a4 ♞c7 10 ♞a3 e4 11 ♞d2 ♞e7 12 b6 ♞d8 13 h3 0-0 14 ♞b3 .

Kasparov has very astutely blocked the position, in order to reduce the amount of tactical pitfalls for the human player and at the same time put the emphasis on positional manoeuvring.

A human player handling the black pieces might reason as follows: 'My opponent has a big space advantage on the queenside and sooner or later my a5 pawn is likely to drop – but White has to be careful, as I might have tactical tricks based on ♞xb6 if he plays ♞xa5 at an inappropriate mo-

ment. Still, I must try to gain some counterplay, as otherwise he will develop all his pieces and be ready to play ♖xa5.

Most of White's pieces are bunched together on the queenside, so the obvious place to seek counterplay is on the kingside. I should arrange the pawn advance f7-f5, followed by f5-f4 if possible, to break open the f-file for my rook and weaken the e3 pawn. If White plays g2-g3 to stop f5-f4, then g7-g5 looks the best response: I might be weakening my king's pawn cover, but I need to force through the advance f5-f4. Besides, I will also be weakening the white king's cover; and anyway the white pieces are too far away to cause any problems for my king.

So I should prepare f7-f5, what is the best way? I could play 14...♖h5, but then 15 ♗e2 is

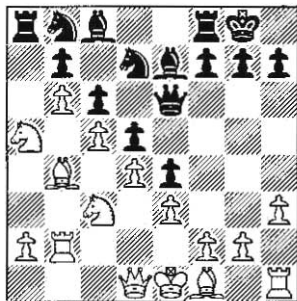
awkward, as I don't want my pawns to be ripped up after 15...g6 16 ♗xh5 gxh5, whilst returning the knight to f6 would defeat my plan. So what about 14...♗e8: the knight is safe here and the way is cleared for 15...f5. Yes, that's what I should do.'

The computer on the other hand, can't reason with itself in this manner. It doesn't have any model of how the position should be handled, based on experience, because it doesn't have any experience! In such instances it has to be guided by a series of vague rules introduced by its programmer. These rules make a pitiful contrast to the invincible precision of its tactical thinking. One rule was: *do not move pawns in front of your own king.*

Therefore the computer was unable to carry out the necessary plan of preparing f7-f5. Instead it

played **14...♔d6??** when if **15 cxd6?** then **15...♘xb6** traps the white queen. But the move is useless: after **15 ♖b1** Fritz could find nothing better than **15...♔e7**, with the loss of two moves. The computer continued to flounder around whilst Kasparov lunched on the a5 pawn and gradually prepared a queenside breakthrough:

16 ♖xa5 ♘b8 17 ♙b4 ♚d7 18 ♖b2 ♚e6 19 ♚d1 ♘fd7



Has the machine finally realised that it must play **f7-f5?** Alas, no. We humans can learn from our mistakes and find that a good idea slowly dawns on us; we can suddenly be inspired. But a computer can never feel inspiration. With the knight retreat it is clearing the way for its queen to get to h6, not for the positionally strong pawn move.

20 a3 ♚h6 21 ♘b3 ♔h4

The computer is reduced to tactical threats, but then there is always the chance that a human will fall for them – watch out for **22...♚xe3+!**
22 ♚d2!

Now we see that Black has gained nothing by attacking e3 as White intended to move his queen to d2 anyway to clear the way for his next move.

22...♘f6 23 ♚d1!

The king will be much safer

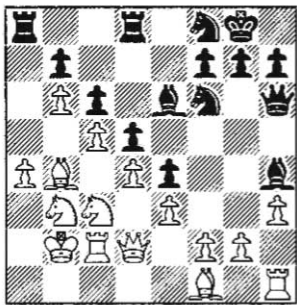
Concise Chess Middlegames

on the queenside than on the kingside, as it will be surrounded by the mass of its own pieces and be distant from the opponent's.

23...♙e6 24 ♔c1 ♖d8

The right move was still 24...f5!

25 ♖c2 ♗bd7 26 ♔b2 ♗f8 27 a4!



Having secured his king, Kasparov now embarks on the winning plan. The first stage is to use the a pawn as a battering ram to

disrupt Black's queenside pawn structure and create a protected passed pawn on b6.

27...♗g6 28 a5 ♗e7 29 a6! bxa6 30 ♗a5

The knight is the first white piece to aim at the c6 pawn which can no longer be defended by a pawn.

30...♖db8 31 g3 ♙g5 32 ♙g2 ♗g6 33 ♔a1!

The safest place for the king, and also the square where it least interferes with strategical operations on the a- and b-files.

33...♔h8 34 ♗a2

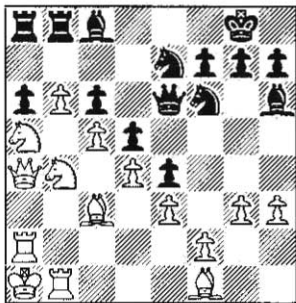
The knight heads for b4 where it will attack both a6 and c6.

34...♙d7 35 ♙c3 ♗e8 36 ♗b4 ♔g8 37 ♖b1 ♙c8 38 ♖a2

Now a white rook, queen and bishop are all deployed to the a-file to put further pressure on a6.

38...♙h6 39 ♙f1 ♗e6 40 ♗d1!

♞f6 41 ♖a4



Here the queen joins with the knights in besieging c6, and its defence will cost the a6 pawn. It is all too much for the cramped black pieces to bear, even if their commander is capable of seeing every possible variation 10 moves ahead.

41...♙b7 42 ♞xb7 ♞xb7 43 ♞xa6 ♜d7 44 ♜c2 ♙h8 45 ♞b3 1-0

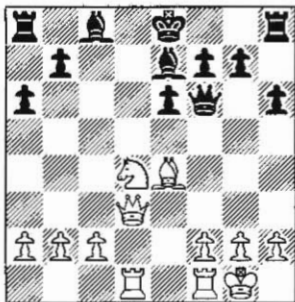
Here the programmers de-

ecided to pull the plug on the hapless machine. White doubles rooks on the a-file, when ♞b4 and if necessary ♙a6 will lead to a speedy collapse.

Tactics in support of strategy

Tactics should as far as possible support strategy. You should only set a trap purely for the sake of it in special circumstances. For example, if there is no adequate positional continuation available and you are trying to save yourself by tricking the opponent; or if you have the luxury of not needing to rush to carry out a plan, and so can proceed with the plan unharmed if the opponent doesn't fall for the trap. Setting traps with no positional merit in other circumstances – for example trying to trick your opponent

in time pressure or being convinced that he is a weak tactical player and so you should 'sharpen things up' – is very double edged, to say the least.



Svidler-Bareev

Wijk aan Zee 2004

Black is only one move away from castling kingside, when he has at least an equal position in view of his two bishops. Therefore Svidler has to act fast or the

game could easily turn against him. He did so with the spectacular 14 ♖c6! If now 14...bxc6 15 ♙xc6+ exploits the power of a double attack to win the rook in the corner. Nevertheless, it would be stupid to put the knight on c6 if there was no reason beyond the hope that Black would fall for 14...bxc6?? Here White's move is positionally well motivated, as after 14...0-0, the move Svidler no doubt expected, he can play 15 ♘xe7+ ♙xe7 16 ♚d6! ♙xd6 17 ♜xd6 when Black has problems developing his queen's bishop, especially as White intends 18 ♜b6 next move.

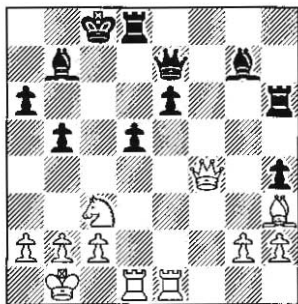
As things turned out Bareev reacted poorly, but this should be regarded as a bonus and not the logical consequence of 14 ♖c6!: 14...e5?! 15 ♘xe7 ♙xe7 16 f4! Now White will have a strong bind after 16...0-0 17 f5! as Black

is unable to develop his bishop, but this was far to be preferred to what happened in the game: 16...exf4?? 17 ♙xb7! and Black had to resign as 17...♙xb7 18 ♖d8 is mate or 17...♙xb7 18 ♗fe1 costs him his queen.

Watch out for the opponent's tactical ideas!

Almost all puzzle books ask you to find the mate or the combination: they never ask you anything like 'what is the move that White must play to prevent his opponent from making a combination?' Players tend to have an aversion to looking for resources for the opponent, whereas they are enthusiastic about their own plans and combinations. A truly great tactician, however, will be alert to all tactical finesses in the

position, whether for the opponent or for himself.



Kasparov-Ivanchuk

Frankfurt 1998

If it were Black to move he would play 1...♙xc3, when White has to submit to broken pawns with 2 bxc3 or be attacked after 2 ♙xh6 ♙b4, with dual threats 3...♙xb2 mate and 3...♙xe1. In fact it was White's move and when Kasparov played 23 a3 it

seemed that he was acting on the defensive by guarding b4, so that if 23...♙xc3 he can play 24 ♖xh6 without allowing 24...♗b4.

Ivanchuk replied 23...♖g6 in order to get the rook out of the range of the white queen and so renew the threat of 24...♙xc3 shattering the white queenside.

But now it became clear that 23 a3 wasn't a defensive move: it was the foundation stone of a decisive combination, that would only work if the white king had a bolt hole on a2:

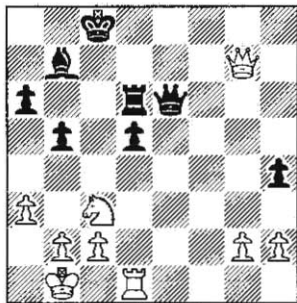
24 ♙xe6+!! ♖xe6 25 ♖g4

The white queen on g4 embodies the motifs of pin and double attack – the black queen cannot adequately defend both the rook on e6 and the bishop on g7.

25...♖dd6 26 ♖xe6 ♖xe6

Only delaying the inevitable is 26...♖xe6 because of 27 ♖e1 ♙d7 28 ♖xe6 ♖xe6 29 ♖xg7+.

27 ♖xg7



27...♖f6

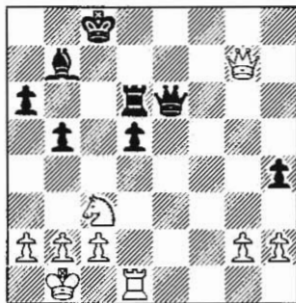
Black is a pawn down with a rotten pawn structure and a bad bishop. The game concluded:

28 ♖g4+ ♙b8 29 ♖d4 ♖e6 30 ♖xh4 ♖f1+ 31 ♙a2 ♖xg2 32 ♖g4 ♖f1 33 ♖g8+ ♙a7 34 ♖d4+ ♖b6 35 ♙xd5 1-0

Now let's see what would have happened if Kasparov had played the combination without playing the preparatory 23 a3:



23 ♖xc6+? ♜xe6 24 ♚g4
 ♜d6 25 ♜xe6 ♚xc6 26 ♚xg7



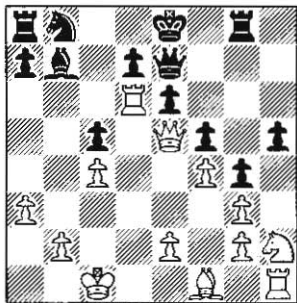
and now the move 26...d4!! is suddenly a killer as the white knight has no moves and White is mated after 27 ♜xd4 ♚e1+ 28 ♘d1 (this time there is no escape hatch with ♚a2) 28... ♚xd1+ 29 ♜xd1 ♜xd1 mate.

Note that Kasparov was alive not only to his own tactical ideas but *was also fully aware of the tactical resources of his opponent*. It cannot be stressed enough that you have to watch out for the opponent's ideas as well as your own.

Coordination of the pieces

This is the most important principle in chess, whether you are making a combination, defending, attacking or manoeuvring: you *must* get your pieces acting in unison. So what exactly does it mean to say that the pieces are 'well

coordinated”? It might be easiest to explain with an example of the opposite.



Van Wely-Bologan

Wijk aan Zee 2004

Take a look at White's kingside pieces, which are a model of disharmony and immobility.

The bishop has no moves; the rook has only one move, the less than awe-inspiring Rg1 ; while the knight has two moves, but cannot

rejoice as they both lead to immediate death.

In contrast, the white queen and the rook are on imposing centre squares – but rather than being well placed, they are in fact targets for the enemy pieces, for the simple reason that they are being given no support from the three pieces locked in on the kingside. In other words, White has failed to coordinate the action of his pieces: he is attacking with two pieces which have no connection or support from the rest of his pieces.

Such chaos is bound to lead to disaster. One thing that Black mustn't do however is disturb the sleeping kingside pieces by launching an attack on that wing: he should start active play as far away from them as possible. So Bologan went for a direct attack on White's king:

20...♖c6!

You can afford to be generous with your pawns when your opponent has half his army shut out of the game.

21 ♖xc5 ♘a5!

White is given no time to even think about freeing his king-side pieces with e2-e3 and ♙c2.

Now the threats include a mighty fork on b3 and 21...♖c8, driving the white queen away from the defence of her rook.

22 ♖b4 ♘xc4!



It is also easy to be brilliant when you are playing with twice as many pieces. In what follows every black piece will have an important task: even the bishop on b7 has a role as sacrificial fodder to deflect the white queen from the defence of the rook on d6. Therefore, Black's pieces are perfectly coordinated for the purpose of attacking the white king.

23 ♖xb7 ♖xd6 24 ♖xa8+ ♔e7
25 ♖b7

If 25 ♖xg8 ♖d2+ 26 ♔b1 ♖xb2 mate.

25...♖b8 0-1

Materially speaking, Black is a piece down, but for all practical purposes he has an extra rook and knight. He has achieved total coordination of his pieces.

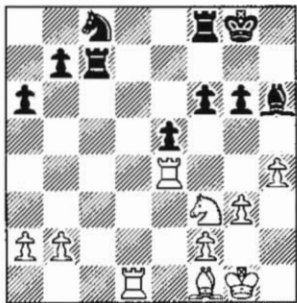
If White moves his queen, then 26...♖d2+ mates next move, while 26 ♖xb8 ♖xb8 is hopeless for him as 27 b4 ♖d6 leads to a

quick mate.

The white kingside pieces have been mere spectators as the white queen battled with impossible odds on the queenside.

The secret of chess strategy

The basic requirement in any position is to find a plan to improve piece coordination: to put them on strong, active squares where they work together.



Adams-Tiviakov

FIIDE World Championship KO,
Groningen 1997

There doesn't seem to be much to choose between the two sides; material is equal and there are no obvious weaknesses on either side. So it might appear that a draw is inevitable. But just watch as move by move Adams increases the power of his pieces:

28 ♖c4! ♜e7

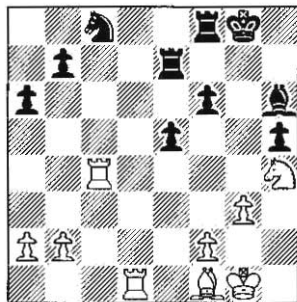
The white rook seizes control of the c-file thanks to the cooperation of his bishop and the other rook on d1, for if 28...♜xc4 29 ♙xc4+ ♔h8 30 ♜d7 is horrible for Black – the white rook is dominant on the seventh rank.

There has been a role reversal; the white rook, previously blocked in by the e5-pawn, now controls an open line, whereas the black rook has been forced onto a

First Thoughts on Strategy

closed line. Therefore it could be said that the energy in Black's position has reduced whilst White's has increased.

Having put his rooks on ideal squares, where they possess the only two open files on the board, Adams now turns his attention to increasing the power of his minor pieces. He sees a chance to break up Black's pawn formation on the kingside and create a beautiful square for his knight with **29 h5!! gxh5 30 ♖h4**



White has sacrificed a pawn, and there is no mate or win of material to follow, at least not immediately, though the threat of **31 ♘g6** forking the two rooks certainly causes the black pieces more discomfort and loss of time. As well as the g6 square, White's positional pawn sacrifice has opened up the f5 square for the knight. With regard to pawn structure, this is an ideal station for a knight as being a short range piece it wants to be able to sit in the centre and survey everything without the risk of being chased away by an enemy pawn. The f5 square is defined as an 'outpost' square for the knight since there is no black pawn that could evict it.

30...♗h7

Nevertheless, although the white knight can sit at f5 unmolested by pawns, it can be chal-

lenged after 31 ♖f5 ♗e7! So Adams went onto his next task, which is to get his bishop involved with his rooks and knights:

31 ♗h3!

The black and white bishops are symmetrically placed on h3 and h6, but only one of them is working with its comrades to introduce threats and harass the enemy pieces. The strength of a piece isn't just based on the number of squares it can control: it rises or falls according to the contribution it makes to the overall health of all the pieces. As we can see here this can mean reducing the efficiency of the enemy pieces as well as adding to the power of its own army.

31...♗e7

The knight must save itself from capture, and it chooses e7 in order to keep the white knight

out of f5. But here it obstructs the rook on h7 and so allows an invasion by the white rooks of his second rank. Clearly the black pieces aren't working together efficiently.

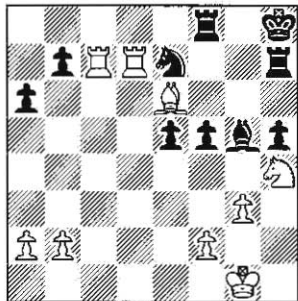
32 ♗e6+!

If 32 ♖c7 immediately then Black has the chance to shut out the white bishop with 32...f5! So White ensures that his bishop remains active and does so in the most economical way by giving a check.

32...♗h8 33 ♖c7

Now the white rooks invade the seventh rank. It has been known for more than 100 years that in most cases a rook is excellently placed on his seventh rank, either to lay waste to the opponent's pawn structure, restrict the movement of his pieces or contribute to a mating attack.

33...f5 34 ♖dd7 ♗g5



35 ♖g6+! 1-0

Black loses a piece as 35...♗xg6 36 ♖xh7 is mate. The knight has the privilege of ending the game, but the credit goes to all the pieces – the rooks and bishop as well as the knight – for working together so well to put Black under intolerable pressure. And we also mustn't forget the foot soldiers – the winning strategy was only made possible because of the sacrifice 29 h5!. You

will find a running theme throughout this book is that virtually any attack needs the use of pawns at some point to be successful.

The power of centralisation

It has been well known since the dawn of chess history that pieces that control or contest the centre squares – that is to say d4, d5, e4 and e5 – have more mobility, and therefore more flexibility and power, than pieces that have no influence upon them.

If coordination expresses the need to get the pieces working together harmoniously, then centralisation describes the terrain on which they will achieve their maximum effectiveness. In fact in most cases it is impossible to distinguish between a good centrali-

sation and a good coordination of the pieces. If the pieces are controlling centre squares, whether through occupying them directly or from a distance, they are most likely to be well placed to coordinate their action in carrying out a suitable strategic plan. The only exception would be if the centre pawn structure was entirely blocked, with no chance of a breakthrough for either player; in that case the pieces might be best coordinated for an attack on one of the wings. Such instances however are rare.

Example One

Strategically speaking this is a highly double-edged position. White has the two bishops and heavy pressure along the diagonal towards g7; Black has pressure against e2.



Van Wely-Morozevich

Amsterdam 1996

Now 15 ♖e4! would force the black knight to retreat from the centre on pain of 15...♗xe4?? 16 ♕xg7 mate. After 15...♗e8 White could either play the enterprising gambit 16 0-0 when 16...♗xe2 17 ♗xe2 ♖xe4 18 ♗d3 gives him a useful initiative with the two bishops, or 16 ♕d2 followed by castling with a good game.

First Thoughts on Strategy

Instead White played **15 a4?** – evidently he didn't want his queen pushed back by b5-b4, but there was no time for this slow move. It is a flagrant disregard for the centre which sets in motion of series of moves which end with the black knight being entrenched on e4 rather than driven back to e8.

15... ♖f8!

Now the black knight cannot be driven from the centre as g7 is defended and so if **16 ♘e4** Black can simply take the knight.

Note that the queen is the strongest piece on the board, but sometimes she should be used for menial – but vital – work.

16 ♘c4

If White had wanted to put his knight on this square – which has the merit of blocking out the bishop on a6 and so facilitates castling – he might have done it

on the previous move.

16... ♘e4!

The knight rejoices in its new freedom. It cannot be removed as White's position falls apart after **17 ♙xe4? ♜xe4 18 ♘xd6** (hoping for **18... ♜xd6? 19 ♜xg7** mate) **18... ♜xe2+ 19 ♔d1 ♜xb2 20 ♜xb2 ♜xd6** etc. and Black wins.

17 ♜c2 ♜ae8

Black now has a straightforward plan to improve his position: centralise all his pieces in support of the knight on e4, his spearhead.

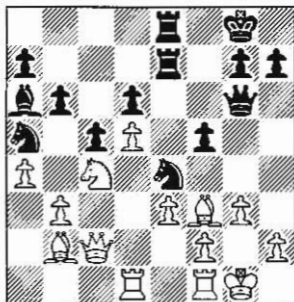
18 e3 f5!

Now the black queen heads for g6 where she also bolsters e4.

19 0-0 ♜f7 20 ♜ad1 ♜g6

The great chess thinker Aaron Nimzowitsch extolled the principle of over-protection. You should protect a key (centre) point as much as possible, even if it is far more times than neces-

sary, as using your pieces in this role will mean that they will find themselves well placed as if 'by accident' when it came to carrying out a strategic plan. The concept of over-protection has never really caught on, but as will be seen in this case the black pieces – including the pawn on f5 – all prove well placed for the coming attack on White's king. Of course, rather than over-protection this could be described as the power of centralisation.



21 ♖fe1

White has been reduced to paralysis. He cannot ever get rid of the pesky knight as even if he managed to arrange f2-f3 to chase it away he would be left with a weak pawn on e3. If he played ♙xe4 the exchange of his light-squared bishop would leave his kingside full of holes. Therefore he can only wait and react – a sure sign of impending defeat.

21... ♗xc4 22 bxc4 f4!

Finally all preparations are complete and Black decides it is time to stage a breakthrough. Now it is necessary to switch from thinking about strategy to tactical themes and calculation.

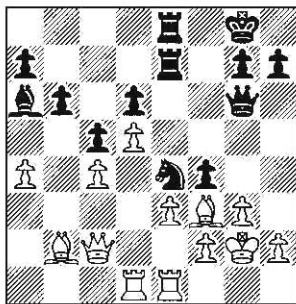
If 23 ♙xe4 then 23... ♖xe4 wins the c4 pawn. The main themes in what follows are *discovered attack* and *zwischenzug*.

23 ♙g2

If 23 exf4 ♗g5! with three

First Thoughts on Strategy

threats: 24...♖xc2, 24...♜xe1+ and 24...♘xf3+. White cannot deal with them all simultaneously, for example 24 ♖xg6 ♘xf3+ (zwischenzug: take something with check rather than take back the white queen immediately) 25 ♔g2 ♘xe1+ 26 ♜xe1 hxg6 with an extra rook or 24 ♖c3 ♜xe1+ 25 ♜xe1 ♜xe1+ 26 ♖xe1 ♘xf3+ winning the queen.



23...♔c8!

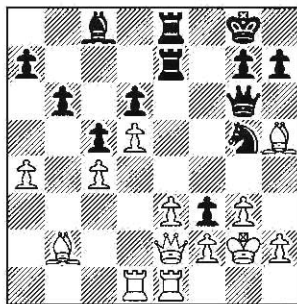
The entrance of the black

bishop adds the final touch to overturn White's defences.

24 ♖e2

If 24 exf4 ♔h3+! 25 ♔g1 (or 25 ♔xh3 ♘g5+ 26 fxg5 ♖xc2) 25...♘g5 26 ♖xg6 ♘xf3+ wins.

24...♘g5 25 ♔h5 f3+!



26 ♔xf3

Or 26 ♖xf3 ♘xf3 27 ♔xg6 ♘xe1+ 28 ♜xe1 hxg6 wins.

26...♘xf3 27 ♖xf3 ♔g4 28 ♖f4 ♜e4 0-1

The white queen is trapped.

Example Two

♖xe2 ♘d7 13 ♜h3 ♘f6 14 ♔d2



Timman-Topalov

Wijk aan Zee 2004

Here White could continue with the logical developing move 10 ♔f4, which prevents Black from developing his knight to d7 as that would leave d6 hanging. Instead Timman embarked on an attacking plan that neglected the centre squares:

10 ♜b3?! b6 11 ♘g5?! ♖xe2 12

White's attack isn't without venom as if Black responds passively he intends 15 ♔c3 with the threat of 16 ♔xf6 and then 17 ♜xh7 mate. Here is what might have happened if Black had responded with the natural 17...♗e8: 15 ♔c3 h5 – to meet the threat to h7 – 16 ♘xf7! ♔xf7 17 ♜e6+ ♔f8 18 ♔xf6 and White has won a pawn with a winning position.

First Thoughts on Strategy

Instead Topalov played actively with **14...h6!** **15** ♖f3 g5! driving back the white pieces. The weakness created by advancing the kingside pawns is of far less consequence than the benefit of seizing control of the centre. Now a sacrifice on g5 is doomed to failure after say **16** ♖xg5 hxg5 **17** ♙xg5 ♚c8! when the black queen comes to the defence of the king. And as **16** g4 just drops a pawn to **16...♚d7**, the threat of **16...g4** can only be met by retreating the knight to the back rank.

16 ♖e1 ♖e4

We are familiar with the strength of the knight on this square from the previous example. Now the best chance for White was to stand his ground in the centre with **17** ♚d1, not fearing the exchange of bishop for the knight with **17...♖xd2?**. Then he could challenge the knight

with ♖c3 next move. Note that if **17...♙xb2** **18** ♚xh6 allows White to muddy the waters.

17 ♙c1



White keeps the bishop but now the coordination of his pieces has been broken – it's not good news when the bishop has to retreat to c1 and the knight to e1!

Now Black builds up behind the knight on e4 in similar style to the Morozevich game:

Concise Chess Middlegames

17...f5 18 ♖d3 ♗d7 19 ♜b1 ♞ae8
20 b3

The knight is intolerable on e4. Hereabouts White should fight for the centre with f2-f3! forcing the knight back from e4. Black would retain pressure along the e-file after 20 f3 ♘f6 21 b3 ♘g6 – heading for e5 – or 21...f4 planning ♘f5 to land on the e3 square.

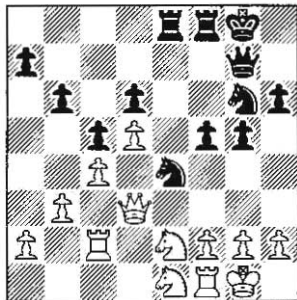
20...♘g6

Black has achieved a superb centralisation of his pieces. White now exchanges off bishops, but the black queen proves just even more potent than the bishop on g7.

21 ♙b2 ♙xb2 22 ♞xb2 ♗g7 23
♞c2

Having achieved an optimum placement of the pieces, Black now has to devise a plan to exploit his advantage. It has to be direct and dynamic, as if he just

waits then White will be able to slowly improve his position and the advantage will quickly evaporate.



Therefore Black played the move 23...f4! planning to wipe out White with a pawn storm by 24...g4 and 25...f3 smashing open the king's defences.

Black's threatened attack, as it has the weight of advancing pawns and well-centralised pieces behind it, has far more bite than

White's crude attempt to mate Black on h7 with his pieces in the opening.

This threat obliged White to force exchanges, but it was a case of out of the frying pan and into the fire, as the endgame proves horrible for him:

24 ♖c3 ♘xc3 25 ♚xc3 ♚xc3 26 ♙xc3 ♜e2

Black's initiative has been transferred into something more concrete: a rook on the seventh rank. 27 ♜c2 ♜fc8 affords no relief for White.

27 a3 ♜fe8 28 ♘d3 ♜d2 29 ♜e1 ♜xe1+ 30 ♘xe1 ♘e5 31 h3 ♚g7 32 ♚f1 ♚f6

Black's rook, king and knight are all more actively placed than White's. It takes quite some time as Timman defends heroically, but White is eventually ground down in the endgame.



For the record, the moves were: 33 g4 fxg3 34 ♜xg3 ♚f5 35 ♜e3 h5 36 a4 ♜b2 37 ♘g2 h4 38 ♜c3 ♚e4 39 ♜e3+ ♚f5 40 ♜c3 ♜b1+ 41 ♚c2 ♜h1 42 ♜c3 a5 43 ♜c3 ♘g6 44 ♜f3+ ♘f4+ 45 ♘xf4 gxf4 46 ♜c3 ♚e4 47 ♚d2 ♜b1 48 f3+ ♚f5 49 ♜c1 ♜xb3 50 ♜e1 ♜xf3 51 ♜e6 ♜xh3 52 ♜xd6 ♜e3 53 ♜xb6 ♜e4 54 ♚c3 f3 55 ♜b8 h3 56 ♜f8+ ♚g4 57 ♚d3 ♜e1 0-1.

Chapter Three

Attacking the King

How valuable is the king?

We have a rough guide to the other pieces that works surprisingly well, namely:

queen = nine points or pawns

rook = five points

bishop = three points

knight = three points

pawn = one point

In the middlegame, the knight is usually well worth three pawns; but in the endgame its value can easily drop to less than three pawns, as the pawns are able to take up a more aggressive role and can easily become potential queens.

In the endgame, when the threat of mate has receded, the king can easily become as powerful as a knight in the role of shepherding pawns to the queening square or attacking enemy pawns. But how much is king worth in the middlegame?

As the loss of the king means the loss of the game, the value of the king is in one sense infinite. But remember the point of the game is not only to defend your own king, but to hunt down the opponent's king. If the opponent's king is going to be pursued, then resources have to be applied to this task as well, and not just used for the defence.

Furthermore, the future of the king can best be safeguarded by

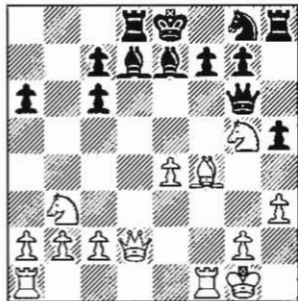
using pieces to defend the centre and by building up a strong pawn chain – if all the pieces are clustered around the king and the centre is neglected, then disaster will inevitably follow. Therefore coordinating the pieces is far more important than taking overt measures to fortify the squares around the king, as the king can only be truly safe if the layout of the pieces is healthy.

As a rule, it is best to defend the king with as few pieces as is necessary to ensure his safety – the more pieces that can be spared for pursuing a strategical plan or guarding the centre the better.

You will see in the examples of attacks on the king that follow it wasn't the lack of defenders that led to defeat – it was the disorganised state of the player's army.

Attacking the king in the centre

Example One



Shirov-I.Sokolov

Wijk aan Zee 2004

Black has the two bishops and a threat: 16...♗xh3 winning a pawn. If White plays passively, say with 16 ♖e3, then after 16...♘h6! Black will be on his way to full development. So if

White wants to exploit the fact that Black is playing without the services of his king's rook and knight he needs to act fast. With **16 ♖xf7!** he ensures that the black king will be obliged to stay in the centre.

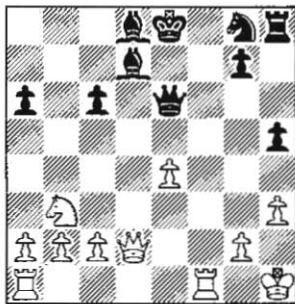
16... ♜xf7 17 ♙xc7 ♜e6 18 ♙xd8 ♙xd8

White's knight offer is excellent in that he has emerged with a rook and two pawns for two minor pieces, so materially speaking it isn't really a sacrifice; nevertheless, if Black managed to organise his game by castling then the two bishops might become a potent force.

19 ♙h1!!

I think this is the hardest move in the attack. Most players would be looking for a dramatic way to conclude matters, but Shirov simply improves the position of his king. Now the knight can

go to c5 without being pinned by ♙b6.



19... ♖f6

Better late than never: Black hasn't yet given up thoughts of castling kingside.

20 ♖c5 ♜e7 21 ♜ad1!

Now both white rooks control open files – the perfect state of affairs. Now **21...0-0 22 ♖xd7** or **21... ♜xc5 22 ♜xf6 ♙xf6 23 ♜xd7+ ♙f8 24 ♜c8+** winning the rook on h8 both give White a

Attacking the King

crushing material advantage.

21...♔c8

At last the black king is all set to castle

22 e5!

...but is confounded by a humble pawn. It cannot be stressed enough that in almost every attack you will need the help of your pawns. Here the pawn not only drives the black knight from the f-file, so preventing castling, but also creates an outpost on d6 for the white knight.

22...♞d5 23 ♞e4!

If you find a good post for your knight, always look for a better one! Now Black becomes desperate in view of the threat of 24 ♞d6+ ♔d7 25 ♜f7, winning the queen.

23...♞xe5

The white knight is denied its outpost, but there is suddenly an

open file for a white rook to attack the black king.

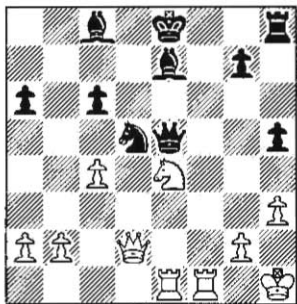
24 ♜de1

The right rook. If instead 24 ♜fe1 then 24...0-0! follows with a cry of relief.

24...♞e7

If 24...♞c7, aiming at mate on h2, then 25 ♞g3 pins and wins the queen.

25 c4!



This is every knight's nightmare: being ousted from a centre

post by an enemy pawn with no retreat available, for if 25...♖c7 then 26 ♖d6+ wins the queen – 26...♙xd6 27 ♗xd6!

25...♙b4

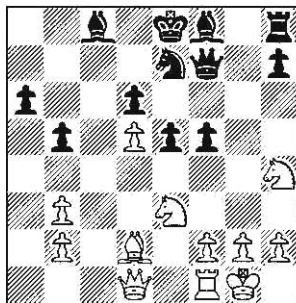
The last chance to upset White's plans, but the tactics can't possibly favour Black's outnumbered army.

26 ♖c3! 1-0

In the battle of the pins White is triumphant. Black resigned as his queen is lost. Note that if 26...♙xc3, White has no need to hurry to take the queen – the calm 27 bxc3 is the most lethal.

If you want a simple reason why Black lost, you need look no further than the rook sitting idly on h8. White won because he got his rooks into the attack, so despite having a smaller army 'on paper' he had a decisive advantage in force where it mattered.

Example Two



Anand-Timman

Linares 1993

Black has some excellent assets: the two bishops and a broad pawn centre that makes a sharp contrast to White's weakening on d5. In fact there is already a threat to win the d5 pawn with 1...f4 2 ♖c2 ♖xd5.

If Black is allowed to play 1...♙g7 and 2...0-0 then position-

Attacking the King

ally speaking he will have all the aces. But at the moment the time factor is greatly in White's favour. *Under no circumstances must Black be given the breathing space of two moves to safeguard his king.*

Anand therefore played
20 ♖b4! f4

Unfortunately for Black he can't save himself with 20...♗g6 as 21 ♜c2! attacks both c8 and f5, with disaster following on 21...♙d7 22 ♘hxf5 or 21...♘xh4 22 ♜xc8+ ♚e7 23 ♜c1.

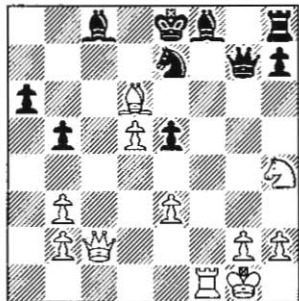
21 ♙xd6! fxe3 22 fxe3

White has destroyed the proud black pawn centre, activated his bishop and opened the f-file for his rook which ensures that the enemy king will remain stranded in the centre.

22...♜g7

If 22...♜xd5 then 23 ♜h5+ ♙d7 24 ♙xe7 when 24...♙xc7 loses the queen to 25 ♜d1, so

Black loses more material after 24...♙xe7 25 ♘g6+ hxg6 26 ♜xh8.
23 ♜c2!



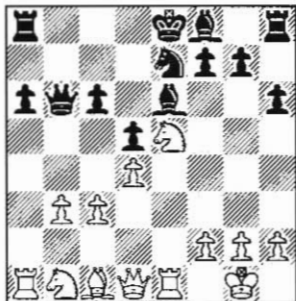
The white queen and rook act in a pincer movement along the two open files around the black king's residence.

23...♙d7 24 ♜c7

Threatening 25 ♙xe5.
 24...♜g5 25 ♘f3 ♜xc3+ 26 ♙h1 ♙g7 27 ♜c1 ♜f4 28 ♙xe7 ♙xe7 29 ♘xe5 1-0

The black king's cover is stripped bare. Timman resigned here as one possible finish is now 29...♙xe5 30 ♖xe5+ ♚f6 31 ♜d6+ ♚f7 32 ♜c7+ winning the black queen.

Example Three



Adams-Hennigan

British League,
Birmingham 2001

White could play 14 ♙a3, a

direct attacking move which virtually forces Black to give up castling with 14...♘f5 15 ♙xf8 ♚xf8 ♜xf8. White would undoubtedly have the advantage, though the black kingside would be a tough nut to crack. Instead Adams preferred the quiet move 14 ♘d2! just developing a piece. This puts Black in a quandary, as the move he wishes to play to free his kingside is 14...♘f5 but then 15 ♜h5! is very strong, for example 15...g6 16 ♘xg6! fxc6 17 ♜xc6+ when e6 drops with a massacre or 15...♙d6 16 ♜xf5! ♙xf5 17 ♘ec4+ uses a discovered check to win back the queen and emerge a piece up, or finally if 15...♙e7 then 16 ♘xf7! is crushing after 16...♙xf7 17 ♜xf5 or the heroic 16...0-0! 17 ♘xh6+! ♘xh6 18 ♜xe6.

Black actually chose 14...g6 but soon had to resign:

Attacking the King

15 ♔a3

All the stronger for being delayed a move, as with the pawn on g6 Black can no longer reply 15...♘f5 because of 16 ♘xg6!

16 ♖e2 ♖b7 17 ♘xf7 1-0



After 17...♘xf7 18 ♖xe7+ ♖xe7 19 ♖xe7+ Black must either give up a piece with 19...♔d8 20 ♖xf7 or walk into a deadly discovered check: 19...♗f8 20 ♖a7+.

Going back to the diagram

position, we see that rather than causing Black discomfort with 14 ♔a3?! ♘f5 15 ♔xf8 ♗xf8, White would actually have been doing him a favour by allowing him to get his king off the dangerous e-file. So remember: if your opponent can't improve his position, whereas you can do useful things to strengthen your game, don't force the issue: delay the moment of truth for as long as possible.

Example Four



Anand-Bologan

Dortmund 2003

Sometimes it is possible to drive a king that has already moved back into the centre. Thus in the diagram above, White played **22 ♖xe6!** beginning an impressive king hunt. The most interesting question here is: how much did Anand need to calculate before making the sacrifice?

He must have spent a little while considering what happens if Black refuses the offer. If Black declines the rook in a quiet way, then he will have lost an important centre pawn for nothing and be facing a decisive attack after **23 ♖e7** etc. So Anand only needed to calculate as far as **22...♙xf3 23 ♖xf3 ♖h2+ 24 ♔f1**, when the black rook on a8 is hanging and **24...♖h1+ 25 ♔e2** is useless for Black, to conclude that he is win-

ning if the offer is declined.

Therefore all his attention could be focused on the acceptance of the offer.

The game went **22...fxe6 23 ♙e7+! ♔e7**.

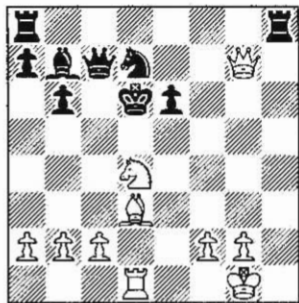
Here Anand had to see that **23...♙g8** fails to **24 ♖xe6** mate, while after **23...♔f7** (or likewise **23...♔e8**) it was quite sufficient to have foreseen that **24 ♖g6+** forces a transposition to the game after **24...♔xe7 25 ♖xg7+**. If Anand was sure that the critical continuation won, he had no reason to look for other moves if he could transpose to it – it would be a waste of time and energy to do so.

24 ♖xg7+ ♔d6

Here Anand had to see that if the black king goes to the back rank he can at least regain his rook with **25 ♖xh8+** whilst keeping a crushing attack.

Attacking the King

25 ♖xd4



This is the difficult or the easy part of the calculation, depending on how much you trust your intuition! I don't know how much Anand analysed here before deciding on the sacrifice 22 ♖xe6! but it is quite possible that he thought along the general lines 'with the black king stuck on the third rank in front of all his pieces, and all my pieces on strong attacking squares there

must be a win here for me somewhere'. He would have noticed the tactical threat of 26 ♖b5+ winning the black queen, and also that the knight check is useful in itself in stopping the black king slipping out via c7 if the queen vacates the c7 square; he would also have been aware of a looming discovered check on the black king by the rook on d1, and the fact that d7 is a square where the powers of the white queen and rook could potentially meet.

You might think that no great trust is being put on the intuition here, as White is so obviously winning. But looking at the position more closely, you will see that Black can play 25...♗ag8 when if the white queen moves to f7 then 26...♗xg2+ gives Black a murderous-looking counter-attack. But never mind, as rather than move the queen White has a

forced mate in *seven* moves, all with check:

26 ♖b5+ ♔c6 27 ♜c3+ ♘c5
 28 ♙e4+ ♚xb5 29 a4+ ♚xa4 (if
 29...♘xa4 30 ♙d3+ or 29...♚a6
 30 ♜c4+ both mate faster) 30
 ♜c4+ ♚a5 31 ♖a1+ ♘a4 32
 ♖xa4 mate.

I doubt very much if Anand saw all the way to the end of the combination when he played 22 ♖xe6. I imagine that he just assumed that the logic of chess would ensure that there was a win somewhere once he reached the position after 25 ♘xd4. The game continuation vindicates this judgment, as Anand doesn't find the best continuation.

25...♜c5 26 ♙f5?

This is sufficient to keep up the initiative and win in the end, whereas 26 ♖b5+ ♔c6 27 ♙e2! would have decided things in a matter of moves.



The threat is mate on d7 and if 27...♘c5 it is mate on c7, so the game could well have ended 27...♖ad8 28 ♘d4+ ♔d6 29 ♘xe6+! ♜d5 (gruesome is 29...♜f5 – I'll let you choose the win you want!) 30 ♖xd5+ ♙xd5 31 ♘xd8 ♖xd8 and Black can resign as a rook and knight for a queen and three pawns are entirely hopeless odds.

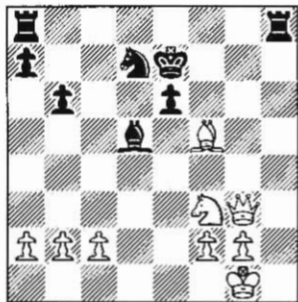
Anand's intuition told him he was winning, and so it proved:

Attacking the King

despite not finding the strongest tactical line he managed to wrap the game up after:

26... ♖e5 27 ♘f3+ ♗d5 28 ♗g3+ ♔e7 29 ♖xd5 ♙xd5

as he can fight on with 36... ♙c6, though with a strong attack as well as a material advantage White should win in the end.



Black has two rooks for the queen and two pawns – not an impossible material deficit, but his king is still under fatal pressure.

30 ♗g5+ ♔d6 31 ♗f4+ ♔e7 32 ♙e4 ♖h5 33 ♘h4 ♖g8 34 ♘g6+ ♔d8 35 ♗f7 ♖e8 36 ♙d3 1-0

Perhaps Black lost on time here

Attacking the fianchetto formation

Example One



Anand-Topalov

Wijk aan Zee 1999

The fianchetto of the bishop

on g7 is a key feature of many opening set-ups for Black, for example the King's Indian, Grünfeld, Benoni and Benko versus 1 d4 and most famously the Dragon Variation of the Sicilian Defence versus 1 e4 (for this reason, any bishop on g7 that has a diagonal unobstructed by a pawn on e5 is sometimes referred to as a 'Dragon bishop')

The bishop is not only well placed on g7 to attack White's centre, but is also a strong defender of the dark squares around the black king – assuming he has castled kingside as is most likely. For this reason White often goes to great trouble to get rid of the strong piece.

In the diagram above we can see the results of Anand exchanging bishops in a way very favourable for him. Black's has active pieces and a superior pawn struc-

ture, but he desperately misses a dark square bishop to staunch up his kingside. Thus if you move the bishop from a6 to g7 Black would have an excellent position, but as it is there are serious holes around his king which every white piece – queen, rook and knight is able to exploit.

Anand took advantage of this with 34 ♖h2!

If now 34...♗xe3 35 ♖h4! gains control of the dark squares with the threat of 36 ♖d8 mate. Black would be defenceless, for example 35...♖c8 36 ♖f6 with the double threat of mate on f7 and h8, or 35...g5 36 ♖h6+ ♕e8 (if 36...♕e8 37 ♖e6+! ♕f8 38 ♖h8+ and mate next move) 37 ♖xd6 when losing the rook is the least of Black's worries in view of 38 ♖h8 mate.

34...♗d3

Now White has to tread care-

fully as Black threatens 35...♖c1 followed by ♔b1+, when he will have at least a draw.

35 ♖h8+ ♕c7 36 ♖a8! ♜f6

White gets in first after 36...♖c1 37 ♖a7+ when whether Black plays 37...♕f8 or 37...♕f8 there follows 38 ♜h8 mate 37 g5!

Don't forget about the pawns! If 37...♜xg5 38 ♜h8 invades and wins at once, so Anand not only forces the black queen to a passive square but, as will be seen, also creates a deadly outpost for the white knight on f6.

37...♜g7 38 ♜d2!

The queen has served her purpose on the h-file. Now she seeks a way to invade via the queenside – this makes sense as the black queen is buried on the kingside and so is unable to aid the resistance on the other wing. At the same time 38...♖c1 is pre-

vented.



38...e4

Black cannot play 38...♕f5 to prevent the knight getting to f6 as then 39 ♜e2 ♖c1 40 ♘xf5+ gxf5 41 ♜b5! gives White a winning attack, for example 41...♜xg5 (to stop mate on e8) 42 ♜b8 ♕f6 43 ♜xd6+ ♕g7 44 ♜xe5+ f6 45 ♜e7+ ♕g6 46 ♖g8+ winning the queen.

39 ♘g4

Now the white knight reaches

f6 and the game is decided.

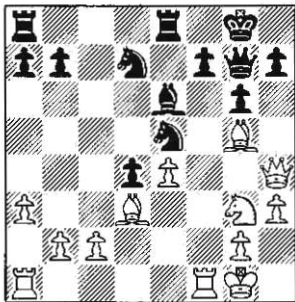
39...♖d7 40 ♘f6 ♗d8

The only way to stop mate on e8.

41 ♖c1 1-0

A nice finishing touch: if 41...♖xa8 then 42 ♖c7+ ♔f8 43 ♖xd6 mate.

Example Two



Shirov-Grischuk

Linares 2001

At the start of a game, the square most vulnerable to attack in Black's position is f7. This is because it is only defended by the black king, which means White has only to give a check there with a defended piece for the game to come to an abrupt end... Whilst most of us soon grow out of trying for the spectacular coup 1 e4 e5 2 ♘c4 ♘c6 3 ♖h5 ♘f6 4 ♖xf7 mate in favour of more elaborate schemes, the weakness of f7 never quite disappears, even if Black castles kingside.

Here Shirov systematically plays to weaken the f7 square, despite the fact that it is defended no less than four times.

20 ♘h6

The first step is crude, but nonetheless effective. Not only is the black queen cast into the darkness on h8 but also a black rook is prevented from coming to

Attacking the King

the aid of the pawn on f7 with **21...♙xf5**

♙f8.

20...♖h8 21 ♘f5!



The second stage is far more spectacular. Now the threat is **22 ♖e7** winning the exchange, and if **21...gxh5** then **22 exf5** opens the way for a queen check on g5 which will regain the piece whilst keeping the attack. One finish is **22...♙g6 23 fxe6! ♘xh4 24 cxf7** when not only has the f7 square dropped but it is checkmate!

21...♙xf5

Black keeps the g-file closed, but another defender of f7 vanishes.

22 exf5

Now there is the horrible threat of **23 f6** and **24 ♙g7**, when the black queen is suffocated. So an escape route has to be arranged, but this means that yet another defender of f7 disappears:

22...♘xd3 23 cxd3 ♖e5

Now only the black king is left to guard the weakest square in his camp. The white rooks can be doubled and are then ready for the breakthrough:

24 ♖f4 ♘c5 25 ♖af1!

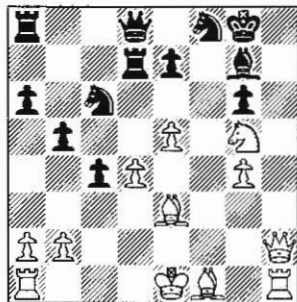
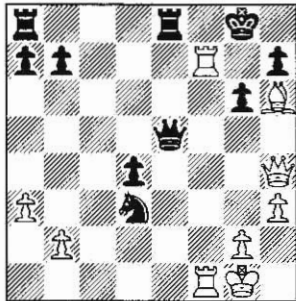
White isn't deflected from his plan by the attack on d3.

25...♘xd3 26 fxg6 fxg6

It's over quickly after **26...♘xf4 27 gxh7+ ♙xf7 28 ♙xf4.**

27 ♖f7

Example Three



The triumph of White's single-minded strategy. It took a series of spectacular and ordinary moves, but now White is ready to exploit the f7 square by doubling rooks on the seventh rank.

27...♖c5 28 ♜g7+ ♔h8 29 ♜ff7
♜e6 30 ♜xg6 d3

If 30...hxg6 then 31 ♜g5+ and mate next move.

31 ♜g4 ♜g8 32 ♜xh7+! 1-0

It will be mate after 32...♔xh7
33 ♜f8+.

Anand-Svidler

Linares 1999

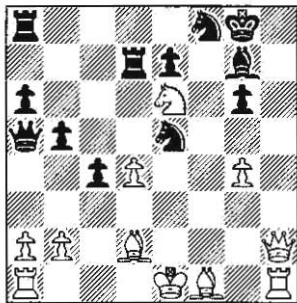
Here Black still has a bishop on g7, but this wasn't enough to save the game after White cleared the way for his queen and rooks to attack down the open f- and h-files:

25 ♜e6!

If now 25...♜xe6 then 26 ♜xc4! bxc4 27 ♜h7+ ♔f7 28

Attacking the King

Rf1+ leads to a massacre after 28... Nf4 (if 28... Qe8 then 29 Wxg5 mate) 29 Rxf4+ Qe6 30 Wxg6+ etc.
25... Wa5+ 26 Qd2 $\text{Nxe5!?$



Svidler makes a valiant knight offer of his own that applies the principle: if you are attacked on the wing, try to counter-attack in the centre.

On 27 Qxa5 , 27... Nf3+ regains the queen with a knight fork, while 27 dxe5 Rxd2! 28

Wxd2 Wxd2+ 29 Qxd2 Nxe6 gives Black good survival chances in the endgame. But the simple 27 Qe2!! was lethal. The knight fork on f3 is blocked, so the black queen is really hanging, and meanwhile on the other wing White's attack is breaking through.

27... c3 28 Qxc3 b4 29 Nxc3 bxc3

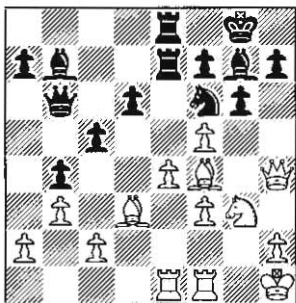
Here 29... Qxc3 is answered in the same way.

30 Wh8+ Qf7 31 0-0+ 1-0

Black can only avert imminent mate at the cost of fearful material losses.

It's not often that castling is so late and so decisive! Incidentally, as 31 Rf1+ does the trick just as well, I wonder if Grandmaster Anand checked his score-sheet before playing the final move just to make sure castling was still legal?

Example Four



Anand-J.Polgar

Monte Carlo (rapidplay) 1996

A spirited battle began as Black attempted to smash open the centre while White tried to land a tactical blow on the kingside.

22...d5 23 e5 c4 24 fxg6!

White must keep the centre closed rather than open a line for Black's rooks with 24 exf6? ♖xe1

or for the bishop with 24 bxc4 dxc4.

24...hxg6

If 24...cxd3, White's attack gets in first with 25 exf6! ♜xe1 26 ♖xh7+ ♔f8 27 ♖xg7 mate.

25 ♘f5!

Rather than retreat his bishop White puts the knight en prise. The game-deciding question is: can White carry off the kingside attack before the black pieces overrun the centre?

25...gxf5

One finish after 25...cxd3 is 26 ♘xg7 ♔xg7 27 exf6+ ♖xf6 28 ♙h6+ winning the black queen.

26 ♙xf5 d4

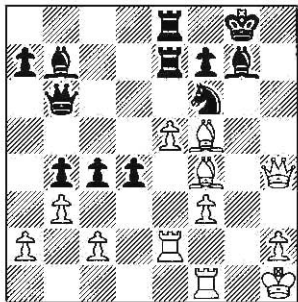
Stopping for a moment White's plan of putting a rook on the g-file due to 27 ♜g1? ♙xf3+.

27 ♜e2!!

White finds another way to get a rook to the g-file. It may seem a somewhat slow move, but

Attacking the King

the white pieces and pawn centre have just enough energy to keep the black pieces penned in while the rook carries out its mission.



27...d3 28 ♖g2 ♗xe5

White's centre collapses, but it is too late to save the black king.

29 ♗xg7+ ♔f8

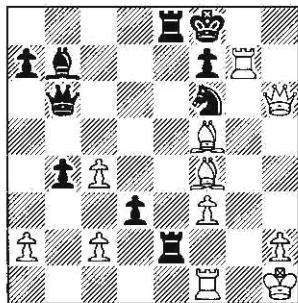
If 29...♔g7 White has to avoid 30 ♗h6+ ♔g8 31 ♗g1+? as Black has 31...♗xg1+! turning the tables, but 30 ♗h6+ ♔h8 (or 30...♔g8 31 ♗g5+ ♔h8 32 ♗g7

mate) 31 ♗e3+ is simple enough, winning the black queen.

30 ♗h6 ♗e2

Or 30...♗xf5 31 ♗g5+ ♔e7 32 ♗xf5 and White is the exchange up with an overwhelming attack.

31 bxc4!



A shrewd move in a rapid play game. Rather than play a discovered check with the rook Anand simply captures one of the dangerous advanced pawns and gives Black a 'free' move – which

she uses to beat herself!

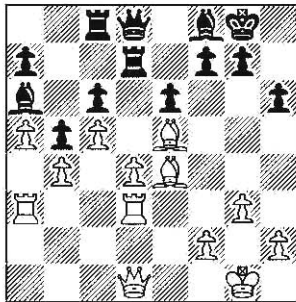
31...d2?

The attempt to counter-attack with 31...♙xf3+ 32 ♖xf3 ♗e1+ fails to the discovered check 33 ♜g1+, so the only way to play on was 31...♙d7.

Tempting, but after...

32 ♜g2+

...Black had to resign. The rook on e2 is no longer defended by the pawn on d3 and so it drops off: 32...♙e7 33 ♜xe2+.



Anand-Granda Zuniga

Madrid 1998

Players who like to fianchetto their bishop on g7 and are feeling a little depressed should play through Topalov's excellent win versus Timman given earlier to restore their confidence!

The power of pawns in an attack on the king

Example One

Superficially the pawn structure favours Black as there is a backward pawn sitting on an open file. But this weakness is an irrelevance in view of White's far superior mobility. After all, Black has a bishop shut out of the game on a6 and a rook tied down to the defence of the c6 pawn. In contrast, both of White's bishop are

Attacking the King

excellently centralised and well coordinated. The white rooks are also active and ready for action, so Anand gave the signal to attack with 26 g4!

26...♖d5!?

Now 27 ♗xd5 ♜xd5 would bring the black queen to an active square, so Anand preferred to continue his pawn storm with

27 h4! ♜xh4

If Black waits then 28 g5! bludgeons through his defences.

28 ♗xd5 cxd5

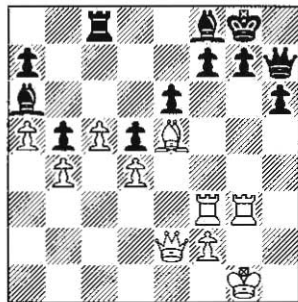
Now we see that by delaying taking the exchange Anand has forced Black to recapture in an inferior way: White now has a passed pawn on c5 and the black queen is a fugitive rather than controlling the centre on d5.

29 g5!

More open lines for the rooks and bishop please!

29...♜xg5+ 30 ♖g3 ♜f5 31 ♖af3

♜h7 32 ♜e2!



A simple move that underlines the hopelessness of Black's situation. He cannot manoeuvre his passive bishop back to the defence of the kingside with ♗b7, ♗c6 and ♗e8 as 32...♗b7 33 ♜xb5 will soon leave him facing connected passed pawns on the queenside. If on the other hand he just waits then White can build up pressure against g7 by doubling his rooks on the g-file. So

Concise Chess Middlegames

Granda decides to lash out, but it just leads to rapid destruction:

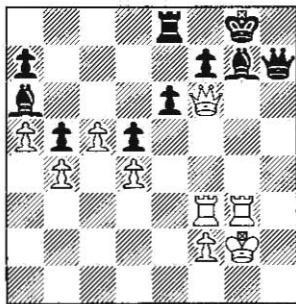
32...g5 33 ♖f6 ♜b1+ 34 ♔h2 ♜e4 35 ♜d2!

Naturally exchanging queens is no part of White's plan here.

35...♗g7 36 ♗xg5! hxg5 37 ♜xg5 ♜h7+

If 37...♜xd4 38 ♖f6! blocks off the queen's defence of g7.

38 ♔g2 ♖e8 39 ♜f6! 1-0



He must defend f7, but 39...♖f8 40 ♖xg7+ ♜xg7+ 41

♜g3 wins the queen for rook and bishop with all the dark squares thrown in as a bonus!

Example Two



Timman-Zhang Zhong

Wijk aan Zee 2004

White is a pawn up and even has connected passed pawns on the queenside, but as yet they are doing nothing. In contrast Black has a pawn majority in the centre

Attacking the King

which he makes work for him in splendid style:

22...g5! 23 ♖g2 ♚g7 24 ♘e1 g4

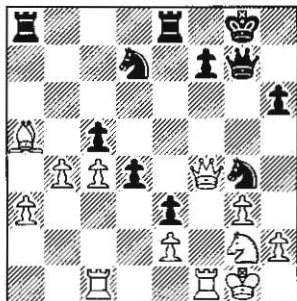
The advance of the g-pawn has not only driven back the white knight but also cleared the way for the black queen and other pieces to attack along the g-file.

25 ♙g2 e5!

Now it is the turn of the e-pawn to rush forwards and assail the white defences.

26 fxg4 ♙xg2 27 ♘xg2 ♘xg4

28 ♖f1 e4 29 ♚f4 e3!



Here the pawn forms a strong square for a knight right in the heart of White's kingside on f2.

30 ♚f5 ♘df6 31 ♘f4 ♖c5 32 ♚c2 ♘e4

The perfect post for a black knight: right in the centre of the board and free from pawn attack. Already ideas of ♘f2 and then ♘xg3 are looming.

33 ♙c7 ♖ee8 34 ♘d5 ♘gf2 35 b5

At last the queenside pawns make a move, but it is way too late to change anything: they have been spectators rather than active participants in the struggle for far too long.

35...h5!

The next wave of the attack threatens to blast through the g3 square.

36 a4 h4 37 ♙g2 ♖e6 38 ♖g1 d3!

Now all the light square defences around the white king

crumble away.



39 exd3 h3+ 40 ♔f1 ♘d2+ 0-1

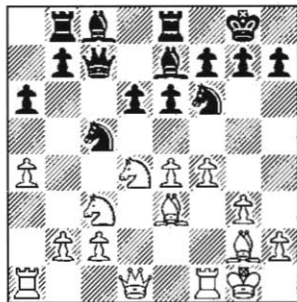
Everything caves in after 41 ♔e1 ♘f3+ or 41 ♔e2 ♗g4+.

Action in the centre to facilitate an attack on the king

Example One

Pin, skewer, overloading, discovered check, discovered attack,

fork, trapping... all these tactical themes are needed by Anand in the attack he launches from the diagram above. As Reti stated, a knowledge of tactics is the basis of positional play. And the best way to learn tactics is by attacking the opponent's king.



Anand-Sokolov

Brussels (rapidplay) 1992

Sokolov has just played the careless move 13...♗e8, weaken-

Attacking the King

ing his hold on the f7 square. He is punished in extraordinarily severe fashion for what seems a minor error.

14 e5! dxe5

Black would like to keep the f-file closed with 14...♘fd7 but then 15 exd6 is highly awkward, for 15...♙xd6 16 b4 leaves the knight on c5 trapped, whilst 15...♙xd6 – so that he can respond to 16 b4 with 16...♘b3! when the white knight on c3 also hangs – allows 16 ♘db5! axb5 17 ♘xb5. Then the fork on the queen and bishop regains the piece leaving White a sound pawn up.

15 fxe5 ♘fd7

If 15...♙xe5 then 16 ♙f4, when the black queen and rook on b8 are said to be skewered – the queen must move away to safety and give up the rook.

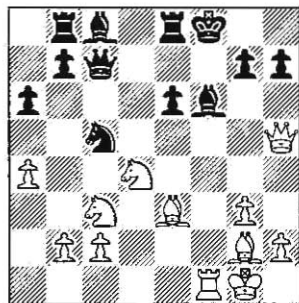
16 ♖xf7!

Once again the f7 square proves to be the weakest in Black's camp.

16...♙xf7 17 ♙h5+ ♔f8

An unfortunate state of affairs for Black – his king has to remain guarding the rook, when it should be the rook guarding the king! If instead 17...g6 then 18 ♙xh7+ followed by mate.

18 ♖f1+ ♘f6 19 exf6 ♙xf6



20 ♘db5!

Discovering a second attack

Concise Chess Middlegames

on the knight on c5 with gain of time by attacking the black queen. 20...axb5 21 ♖xb5 ♔d7 22 ♜xh7!

Excellent! Rather than snatch the knight with 22 ♙xc5+, which allows 22...♖g8 holding the king-side, Anand stages a breakthrough on h7. Black has no good way to save his knight in view of the threat of 23 ♜xf6+ gxf6 24 ♙h6+ with mate next move. 22...♜e7

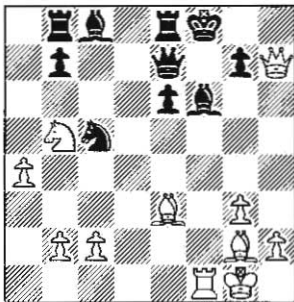
The black queen is now overloaded as she can't defend c5 and f6 at the same time.

23 ♜xf6+! ♜xf6

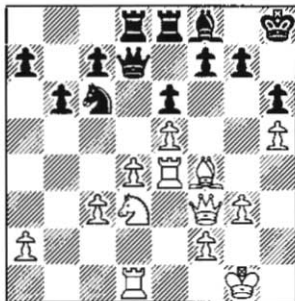
If 23...gxf6 then 24 ♙h6+. 24 ♙xc5+ ♜e7

Black must walk into a deadly discovered check after 24...♖f7 25 ♘d6+ ♖e7 26 ♘e4+ winning. 25 ♜h8+ ♖f7 26 ♘d6+ 1-0

26...♖g6 27 ♙e4+ ♖g5 28 ♜h4 is mate.



Example Two



Attacking the King

Kramnik-Karpov

Dortmund 1997

White has a substantial and unchallenged space advantage in the centre, which confers a lot of extra mobility on his pieces: for example the rook on e4 can easily swing to f4 or g4 to support a direct attack against the black king. As things are quiet in the centre, the natural plan is to advance g3-g4 and then g4-g5, to break open lines. But if at once 23 g4 then 23...♘e7 24 g5 ♘f5 allows the black knight to frustrate White's attack. So first of all Kramnik played the preventive move 23 ♖e3! so that if 23...♘e7 he can win a pawn with 24 ♗xf7. Therefore Black was deprived of an important defensive resource as his knight cannot cross over to the kingside. Karpov tried to counter-attack by clearing the way

for c7-c5 to strike at d4:

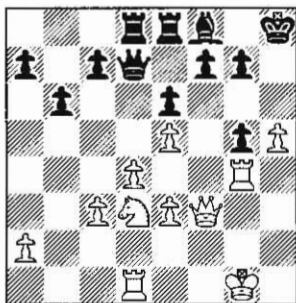
23...♘a5 24 g4!

Only now, when the black knight is offside on a5.

24...♘c4 25 g5! ♘xe3 26 fxe3

Black's knight had to eliminate the bishop before it could exploit the opening of the dark squares on the kingside, but the exchange has strengthened the white centre and made it impervious to attack by c7-c5. Also the f-file is opened for a white rook.

26...hxg5 27 ♖g4



White has temporarily sacrificed a pawn but his pressure on the kingside is sure to regain it sooner or later.

27... ♖e7 28 ♖f1

Now both white rooks are well placed on semi-open files and attacking pawns. In contrast the black rooks have hardly any scope.

28... ♖d7 29 ♖g3 f6 30 e4!

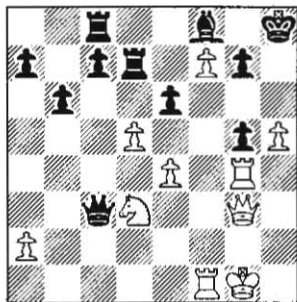
Having provoked 29...f6, White prepares to ram the pawn with 31 exf6 gxf6 32 e5! when the defences against the white rooks split open. Therefore Karpov makes a bid to destroy the white centre and activate his own rooks, even though this means giving White a passed pawn.

30... ♖a3!? 31 exf6 ♖xc3 32 f7 ♖c8

Black's only consolation is that the pawn on f7 is blocking the f-file and so keeping the white

rook on f1 at bay.

33 d5!



This pawn sacrifice however destroys Black's chances. It is strong not so much because it creates a second passed pawn – after all, Black also acquires passed pawns in what follows – but because it ensures that the d-file remains closed. This rules out any black counter-attack with his rooks against the white king via the centre. Therefore the kingside

Attacking the King

remains exclusively White's theatre of operations. As will be seen, Kramnik has enough time to complete his assault on the black king before Karpov can cause enough turmoil in the centre to distract him.

33...exd5 34 e5 c5 35 ♖f3 c4

The black passed pawns look impressive and his queen is very active – *but he is playing without his rooks.*

36 ♘f2 ♕e1+ 37 ♔g2 ♙e7

White intended to break through with 38 ♖xg5 and 39 h6 with a quick mate.

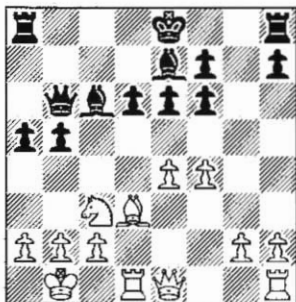
38 ♖xg5! ♙e7 39 f8 ♕+ 1-0

39...♖xf8 40 ♖xf8+ ♔h7 41 ♕xg5 is too awful to consider.

Example Three

Adams-Kozul

European Cup Final,
Belgrade 1999



Here we have a pawn structure often reached in the Sicilian Defence. Black has the two bishops and a compact centre; furthermore his queenside pawns are mobile and can be used to push back the white knight with b5-b4 when they are ready to make things uncomfortable for the white king with a5-a4 and b4-b3, etc.

So this isn't a position for White to sit back and make a se-

ries of quiet moves: if his moves have no bite then things will quickly become unpleasant for him. Incidentally, it is for this reason that the Sicilian Defence is so popular for Black: it requires White to make decisions that are both accurate and energetic at the same time – a hard task for a player who likes to manoeuvre his pieces and wait quietly for a blunder from his opponent.

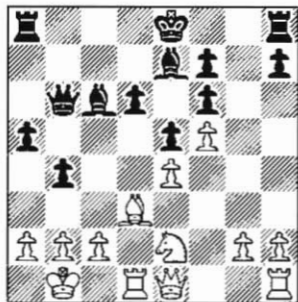
As Black is planning a general advance on the queenside, his own king mustn't be allowed to shelter undisturbed behind his pawn structure. So Adams played **15 f5!**

Straight away undermining Black's centre edifice.

15...b4

A wise insertion, as after 15...e5 16 ♖e2! White is already able to exploit the hole on d5 with ♘d5.

16 ♖e2 e5



If Black were still in possession of a knight he might have avoided this move in order to keep e5 as a centre outpost, but since this isn't the case he blocks the centre to prevent both f5xe6 and also the attacking move ♘f4. Nevertheless, the defect in his structure along the light-squared diagonal a2-g8 is hardly going to escape the notice of a world-class strategist.

Attacking the King

Now Adams devises the following plan

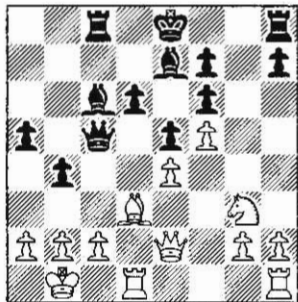
(1) play ♞g3 to defend the e4 pawn again and also threaten ♞h5 – a strong attacking move if Black castles kingside.

(2) with e4 defended, play ♙c4 to get a grip on the d5 light square and put pressure on f7.

17 ♞g3 ♚c5 18 ♚e2 !

White is not to be so easily deterred from playing ♙c4 .

18... ♜c8



19 b3!

And here White refuses to allow Black to confuse matters after 19 ♙c4 ♙xc4 with a double attack on c4. Nevertheless, you might be wondering if White is overreaching himself in his persistence with the idea of ♙c4 – after all, isn't he leaving a big gash in his king's defences on c3? Certainly weakening the dark squares around the king is a serious matter. If Black's dark-squared bishop suddenly jumped to d4 it would be curtains for White in view of ♚c3 . But the black bishop isn't on d4 – and it is precisely the strength of the light square bind inaugurated with 19 b3 and 20 ♙c4 that ensures it will never get there. Nonetheless, White must play precisely and keep control, or else he will live to regret 19 b3.

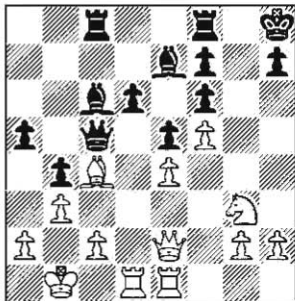
19...0-0

Black decides his king won't be safe forever in the centre. Besides, he cannot spend the whole game playing without the help of his rook on h8.

20 ♖c4

At last White gets his bishop to the best diagonal available to it.

20...♔h8 21 ♖he1!



You might well ask: 'Why does White develop his rook to a blocked file – it does nothing here as there was no need to defend e4

yet again.'

Indeed, at first glance this looks like the type of sloppy, 'natural', centralising move that deserves the highest censure.

However, chess strategy is not only about improving the mobility of your own pieces – it also involves taking away the mobility of the opponent's pieces. Here Adams wants to attack directly with ♖h5 – why this is so is discussed in the next note. But the immediate 21 ♖h5 permits 21...♔e3! when the black queen gets involved in the action on the kingside and in the centre. So first of all White guards the e3 square again to cut out this possibility.

21...♔g8 22 ♖h5!

After his precautionary rook move to frustrate the black queen, the next stage in White's plan is to use his own queen to exploit the holes and crevices in the black

Attacking the King

king's defences.

The golden rule of positional play is: *don't let your opponent have any counterplay.*

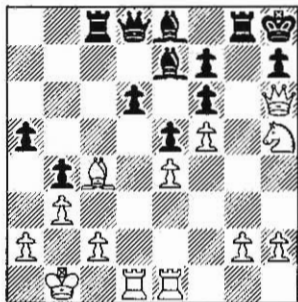
After 22 ♖xf7 ♔b5 Black would have activated his bishop, whereas now 22...♔b5? 23 ♖d5 wins the piece. This is a simple but important tactic as otherwise Black would gain counterplay along the c-file.

22...♔e8 23 ♜h6!

Now the threat of 24 ♘h5 winning the f6 pawn compels Black's queen to retreat all the way back to d8.

23...♜b6 24 ♘h5 ♜d8

All Black's dreams of an attack on the queenside spear-headed by his queen have vanished. The next step for White is to increase the pressure along the d-file after which the defence of either d6 or f6 will quickly buckle under.



25 ♖d2 ♜g5 26 ♖ed1 ♔c6

There was nothing to be done as f6 drops all the same after 26...♖c6 27 ♔b5 ♜b6 28 ♔xc8 ♜xe8 29 ♘xf6

27 ♘xf6!

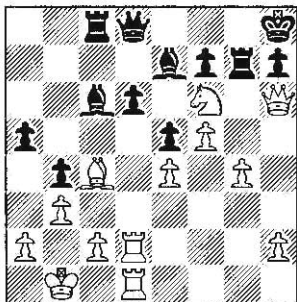
The decisive blow as if 27...♔xf6 then 28 ♖xd6 wins back the bishop two pawns up.

27...♜g7 28 ♘h5 ♜g4 29 ♘f6 ♜g7 30 g4!

After a little repetition White finds the winning idea: he will

Concise Chess Middlegames

weave a pawn chain that guards g4 so that he can play ♖h5 and then ♙xf7 without allowing the black rook to counter-attack against e4 with ♖g4.



30...♙b6 31 h3! ♖d8 32 ♖h5
♖gg8 33 ♙xf7

The completion of his plan. Now the whole of the black pawn edifice in the centre and on the kingside comes crashing down.

33...♙g5

We haven't seen much of the 36 ♙xe5+!

famous bishop pair in this game. They have only been allowed to gain freedom now that everything else is ruined in Black's position.

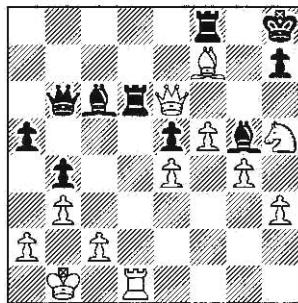
34 ♙e6 ♖gf8

If 34...♙xd2 then 35 ♙f6+ forces mate.

35 ♖xd6!

Before snatching the third pawn White had to do a little tactical calculation.

35...♖xd6



Attacking the King

You can never afford to relax your guard, no matter how overwhelming your position may appear. Here for example the obvious move was 36 ♖xd6, but then White will suddenly be mated on c1 after 36...♔g1+!

36...♖f6

Equally useless is 36...♙f6 37 ♗xd6 ♖xf7 38 ♘xf6.

37 ♘xf6 1-0

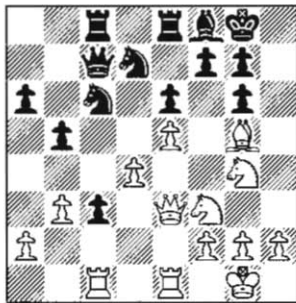
If 37...♖xf7 White can win the queen with a discovered check by the knight on d5 or d7.

Chapter Four

All About Defence

Defending the king against direct attack

Example One



Bareev-Morozevich

Cannes 2002

Although White is unsuccessful in the attack that follows, the

game reminds us that attacking is the way to develop your tactical sense. Playing over the next game you will be introduced to various mating patterns which can only help develop your imagination and flair.

Black has just played 21...♖ac8, assuming that the pawn on c3 was indirectly protected from capture because of a potential pin with ♗b4. But Bareev nevertheless replied

22 ♜xc3

This may well have been a surprise for Black. Should he carry out the pin, or assume that White has a devilish motive in deflecting the black bishop from the defence of his kingside?

22...♗b4

All About Defence

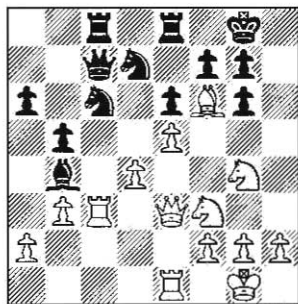
Unless you see a clearly good continuation for the opponent, you must *always* accept such offers. You should never avoid a move that your judgment and calculation tell you is the best move out of fear. If the opponent has prepared a wonderful attacking line that you have missed, that is tough. But overall it is better for your results to lose the game than to be afraid of playing moves that look good for you!

In this example, Black might as well risk facing the attack, as any refusal just leaves him a pawn down for nothing: against an awesome strategist like Bareev this would be hopeless.

23 ♖f6

This is Bareev's idea. Now Black would be mated in the variation 23...♗xc3 24 ♖xg7! – making the h6 square available for the white queen – 24...♔xg7 25

♕h6+ ♖g8 26 ♗f6+ ♗xf6 27 exf6 and there is no good way to stop 28 ♕g7 mate.



23...gx f6!

Just so: the rook on c3 isn't attacking Black, so it is the bishop he needs to eliminate.

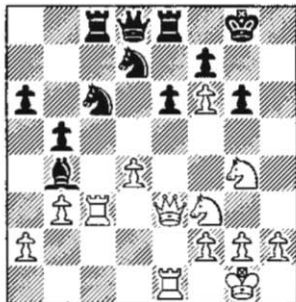
24 exf6

The pawn on f6 is now tremendously strong. If Black retreats his bishop back to the defence then after 24...♗f8 25 ♗g5 he faces the terrible threat of 26

Concise Chess Middlegames

♔h7 mate. The enemy is the pawn on f6, and it needs to be attacked immediately.

24...♔d8!



The queen is the strongest piece on the board and her help to the defence is vital. If now 25 ♖g5 Black would be mated prettily after 25...♗xc3?? 26 ♘h6+ ♕f8 27 ♘h7 mate, but 25...♘xf6! kills the attack – if 26 ♔h3 then not 26...♗xg4?? 27 ♔h7+ and mate on f7, but either 26...♘h5

blocking the h-file or 26...♗xc3! 27 ♘xf6+ ♔xf6 would make everything safe enough for Black.

25 ♔g5

White is forced to slow down by the need to defend f6.

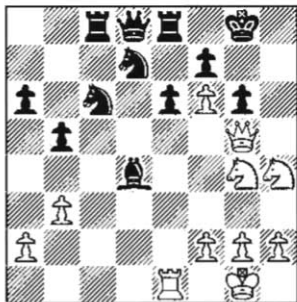
25...♗xc3!

Not only grabbing a rook but also preparing to return the bishop to the defence via d4.

26 ♘h4

The next wave of the white attack begins.

26...♗xd4!



A cool response. The bishop is now in touch with the f6 pawn and can eliminate it in an emergency.

27 ♖h6+

If 27 ♖xg6 Black would be mated after 27...fxg6 28 ♖xg6+ ♔f8 29 ♖g7 mate, but 27...♗xf6 kills off the attack – 28 ♖h5 fxg6 29 ♖xg6+. Now 29...♗g7? allows White to escape with a draw by perpetual check with 30 ♖h6+ ♔h8 31 ♖f7+ ♔g8, but 29...♔f8! wins after 30 ♖h6 ♖ce5 31 ♖g8+ ♔e7 32 ♖h7+ ♔d6 etc. It looks risky for Black's king to be in the centre, but you can afford to be brave when you have an extra rook and two pieces on decent squares.

27...♔f8 28 ♖xg6

A pretty move as 28...fxg6 29 ♖xg6 is mate. Also useless was 28 ♖xg6+ fxg6 29 ♖xg6 ♖xf6.

28...♗xf2+!

The clearest, though Black would also win after 28...♖xf6 29 ♖g8+ ♔e7 30 ♖4f5+ ♔d8.

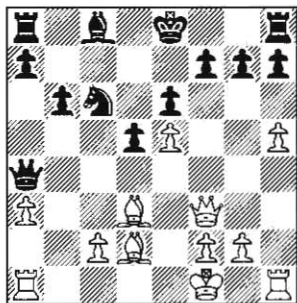
29 ♔h1

The exchange of queens after 29 ♔xf2 ♖xf6+ is unacceptable.

29...♖xf6 30 ♖g8+ ♔e7 0-1

Great defence from Morozvich!

Example Two



Kasparov-Anand

Linares 1992

Gary Kasparov is the greatest attacking player of all time. This is partly due to his wonderful knowledge of sharp attacking variations. Here he has caught Anand in a prepared variation in the opening which involved a pawn sacrifice. Black is a pawn up, but White has a significant lead in development – the rook on h1, although on its starting square, is playing an active role in the game, whilst the bishop pair are putting tremendous pressure on the black kingside. After 15 h6! the black position on the kingside looks close to collapse.

In all probability with best play the diagram position is winning for White but that doesn't mean that Black should give up without a fight and play the first moves that come into his head. If you must lose, then make the opponent work for it – don't give

him any easy winners. If possible, keep lines closed but don't be bullied into a lost endgame or into handing over material.

You wouldn't think much of Black's survival chances, but Anand defended brilliantly.

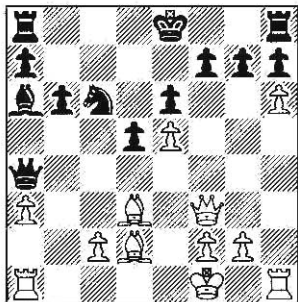
15 h6!

How is Black to deal with the threat of 16 hxg7, smashing up his kingside?

15...gxf6 16 ♖f6 ♜f8 17 ♙xh6 followed if necessary by 18 ♙xh7 will cost Black the exchange without even stopping the attack. Most players would instinctively try to keep lines closed with 15...g6 but then 16 ♖f6 – the perfect attacking square for the queen – 16...♜g8 17 ♜h4! d4 – the only way to save the queen – 18 ♙g1! ♙a6 19 ♙e4 and White has managed to keep the light-squared bishop and has an active rook that can swing to f4 to

join in the attack, whilst the black rook remains entombed on g8.

15...♙a6!



The first rule of defence is to get your pieces into action and if possible exchange off the attacking pieces.

Anand not only prepares to exchange off light-squared bishops, but refuses to hand over the f6 square *except at the price of activating his rook on h8*. Black may still lose, but at least his pieces will die

with their boots on rather than be slain helplessly in their sleep!

16 hxg7 ♖g8 17 ♙xa6

After 17 ♖xh7 Black gets strong counterplay based on centralisation after 17...♘xe5 18 ♚f6 ♙xd3+ 19 cxd3 ♚d4! with the double threat of 20...♚xa1+ and 20...♚xd3+ followed by grabbing the rook on h7. What saves Black in the battle that follows is that White hasn't managed to bring his last reinforcement – the rook on a1 into the attack.

17...♚xa6+ 18 ♙g1 ♖xg7

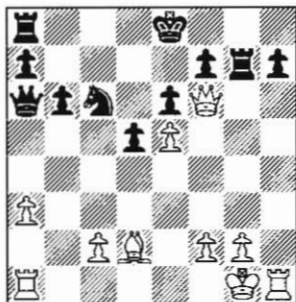
So Black eliminates the passed pawn and has his queen, knight and the rook on g7 all fighting hard for the defence. If White wants to win, he'll have to find some good moves.

19 ♚f6!

...such as this one! The queen prevents Black from castling queenside, drives the black rook

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from the defence of the second rank and besides attacking f7 is ready to spearhead an attack on the dark squares with ♕g5



19...♖g8 20 ♜xh7

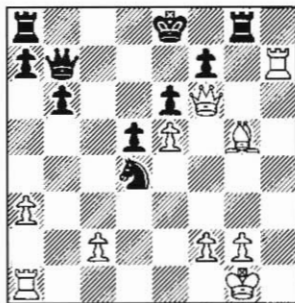
The white attack increases in momentum. Now the black queen is forced into a passive role.

20...♚b7 21 ♕g5

White's stranglehold increases. Now 21...♞c8 22 ♜h8 ♜xh8 23 ♚xh8+ ♔d7 24 ♚g7 leaves Black unable to defend the

f7 pawn, for example 24...♘d8 25 ♕xd8 ♚xd8 26 ♚f8+ ♔d7 27 ♚xf7+ and Black's whole centre pawn structure collapses.

21...♘d4!



A great move! Black:

- defends the e6 pawn
- clears the c6 square for the black king
- prepares the manoeuvre ♘e2+ and ♘c3, when ♘e4 would fork the white queen and bishop

If now White goes after the f7 pawn as in the variation above it is crucial that the black king has an escape hatch on c6: 22 ♖h8 ♙xh8 23 ♚xh8+ ♔d7 24 ♚f6 ♕c6! and the pawn is defended, whilst the black king is safer on c6 than on e8.

22 c4!

White strives to break open the centre so that his currently passive rook on a1 can join in the attack.

22...♗e2+!

Black must keep lines closed. 22...dxc4 23 ♖d1 leads to a quick massacre: 23...♗c6 24 ♖d6 ♖c8 25 ♖xe6+ or 23...♗c2+ 24 ♔h2 ♚c7 25 ♖xf7! ♚xf7 26 ♖d8+ ♖xd8 27 ♚xd8 mate.

23 ♔h2 ♗c3

This forces White's hand in view of the threat of 24...♗f5 winning the bishop.

24 ♖h8 ♙xh8+ 25 ♚xh8+ ♔d7



26 ♚h7?

Black's tough resistance finally provokes a blunder. Instead 26 ♚f6 ♔c6 (if 26...♖f8 27 ♚e7 wins the rook) 27 cxd5+ ♗xd5 28 ♖c1+ ♔b5 29 ♚f3 would have left the black king at the mercy of all the white pieces. Curiously enough Kasparov missed this winning variation even in his analysis to the game in *Informator* 54.

26...♖f8

Now every Black piece is involved in the struggle.

27 ♔h6 ♖e8 28 ♜xf7+ ♗e7 29 ♜g6 ♜b8!

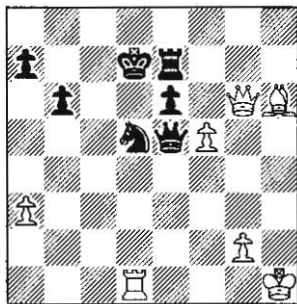
The black queen makes herself available to counter-attack against the white king, either by capturing on e5 or going to the h-file – or, as in the game, both!

30 cxd5 ♘xd5 31 ♖d1

According to Kasparov there was still a win to be had with 31 f4 ♜h8 32 ♔g3, but it is not surprising that he avoided exposing his own king like this in time pressure.

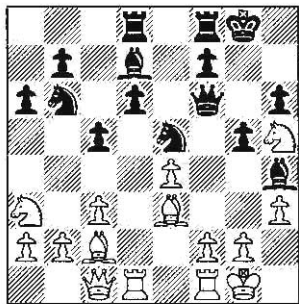
31... ♜xe5+ 32 f4 ♜h8 33 f5 ♜e5+ 34 ♔h1 ½-½

The position has burnt out to a draw after 34...exf5 35 ♜g8 ♜e6 – a temporary piece offer after which all White's pieces are left hanging – 36 ♖xd5+ ♔c6 37 ♜xe6+ ♗xe6 38 ♗xf5 ♗xh6+ 39 ♔g1 etc.



Defence against a potential attack

The former World Champion Tigran Petrosian was reputed to have such a strong sense of danger that he could anticipate and prevent an attack long before his opponent had even begun to plan it. Judging from the next extract it seems that some of this magic has been passed down to Alexander Morozevich.



Nunn-Morozevich
Amsterdam 1995

White has just played 22 ♖h5 attacking the black queen. Things look grim for Black as after the obvious reply 22... ♚g6 White can break open lines of attack with 23 f4!, for example

(a) 23... ♜xh5 24 fxe5 dxe5 25 ♙xc5 attacking both the knight on b6 and the rook on f8

(b) 23... ♜ec4 24 ♜xc4 ♜xc4

25 g4! with a menacing attack – 25... ♜xe3 26 f5! traps the black queen as if 26... ♜h7 then 27 ♜f6+ is a killing fork.

Black would have little chance of surviving against a maestro of attack such as John Nunn. But Morozevich found a brilliant way to establish a blockade with 22... ♜f3+!! . Now 23 gxf3 ♜xf3 24 ♜g3 ♙xh3 is followed by mate on g2. So White moved his king.

23 ♚h1 ♜g6

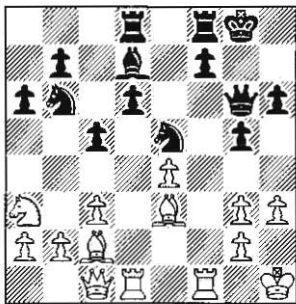
Now we see the value of the zwischenzug 22... ♜f3+. The white knight is hanging, and White has no wish to defend it with 24 g4, which leaves the black knight sitting pretty on f3. So he has to retreat his knight but after...

24 ♜g3 ♙xg3! 25 fxg3 ♜e5

...the white f-pawn had vanished. There was no longer any

Concise Chess Middlegames

way for White to undermine the black knight on e5. This means in turn that the white bishop remains passive on c2. And to add to all his troubles, the pawn on e4 is very weak.



The white pawn structure was gradually whittled down:

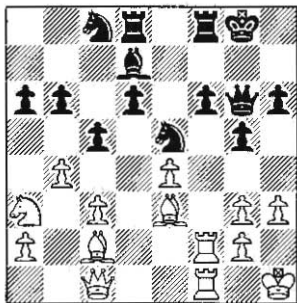
26 ♖f2 ♘c8!

Black's first priority is to solidify his pawns on dark squares. He therefore clears the way for b7-b6.

27 ♜df1 f6

And this pawn move stops 28 ♜f6.

28 b4 b6



The black pawns on c5 and g5 form an impenetrable barrier to White's dark-squared bishop. Meanwhile Black's light-squared bishop fits in perfectly with his pawn structure. He has a choice of open diagonals. Not surprisingly he goes after the e4 pawn.

29 ♜d2 ♙c6 30 ♙b3+ ♚g7 31

All About Defence

♙d5 ♘e7 32 ♙xc6 ♘7xc6 33 b5

White has to do something active or else e4 drops for nothing, but every active move leads to further dislocation of his pawn structure.

33...axb5 34 ♘xb5 ♘c4 35 ♚c1 ♚xe4

Now Black has total control of the light squares.

36 ♚e1 ♘6e5



Black can let White carry out his threat as his grip on the light

squares is lethal.

37 ♙xg5 ♚g6 38 ♙f4 ♘d3

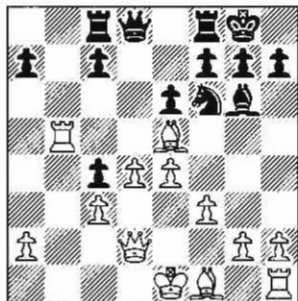
A mighty fork indeed!

39 ♚c7+ ♚f7 40 ♙xh6+ ♚g8 41 ♚xf7 ♚xf7 0-1

White has run out of attacking ideas and he has too many pieces hanging.

Understanding dynamism

Example One



Aseev-Morozevich
Russian Championship,
Elista 1995

In some cases energetic, bold play or *dynamism* is essential at all costs. You can't afford the luxury of quiet development or consolidating moves.

Although his king is under no threat, there is grave danger for Black in the diagram position. Thus if White is allowed to play ♖e2 and 0-0 undisturbed he will have a winning position: the bishop on g6 is shut out of the game, the pawn on c4 is terribly weak and White has a strong dark square bishop and control of the b-file. It could be said that Black is positionally busted and so needs to find tactical resources – though this is rather imprecise as positional factors include development and the coordination of

the pieces, which in this case White is conspicuously lacking for at least a couple of moves.

Black must stop at nothing to generate play – including heavy sacrifices – he has to find a way to create a crisis that will exploit his opponent's temporary lack of development, or else he will lose.

14...c6!

Black has two obvious ways to generate counterplay: contest the b-file and attack the white centre with c7-c5. The white rook was well placed on the fifth rank to obstruct both plans – for if 14...♖b8 15 ♖xc4 defends the rook without breaking White's stride towards development.

15 ♖xf6

White decides that simplification will clarify his positional advantage, but now the b8 square becomes accessible to the black rooks. If instead 15 ♖b7 c5! gives

Black lots of play after either 16 dxc5 ♖a5 17 ♙d6 ♜fd8 or 16 ♙c2, when Black can and must speculate with the piece sacrifice 16...♘xe4!? 17 fxe4 ♙xe4 hitting both b7 and g2 with complications, for example 18 ♜b2 f6 19 ♙g3 cxd4, etc.

15...♙xf6 16 ♜c5

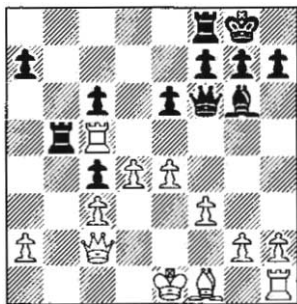
Now the situation on the c-file is gruesome for Black. White only needs one free move to play ♙xc4 and he would be completely winning. Therefore Black needs to strike along the b-file at once.

16...♜b8! 17 ♙c2

White must spend time defending the b-file as otherwise 17...♜b1+ would compel his king to move and leave him in a pin on the first rank – an intolerable situation. And of course if 17 ♙xc4? then 17...♜b1+ wins a rook. This is a vital tactic in

Black's counterplay.

17...♜b5!



Black prepares to double his rooks along the b-file with gain of time as White is again prevented from finishing his development in peace: 18 ♙xc4 ♜xc5 19 dxc5 leaves his pawns broken up and after 19...♙e5! he can't even castle as 20 0-0 ♙xc5+ costs him a piece. Nor does he wish to straighten out his opponent's pawns with 18 ♜xb5 cxb5, as this

means giving up his winning attempt.

18 ♖xc6

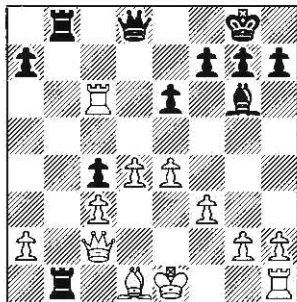
Therefore, White takes the pawn, but it will soon become clear that this is too ambitious. It is very hard psychologically speaking to accept equality when you have been striving to win, but the 'cowardly' 18 ♖xb5 was necessary.

18...♗fb8 19 ♕e2 ♖b1+ 20 ♕d1

Threatening 21 ♖xb1 ♖xb1 22 ♖c8 and mates on the back rank. Likewise 20...♖1b2 ♖xb2!

20...♗d8!!

Black preserves essential dynamism in his position. The obvious way to prevent White's threat was 20...h5, clearing h7 for the king and attacking; but this allows White to exchange off a pair of rooks with 21 ♖c8+ ♖xc8 22 ♖xb1, when the black attack has faded away.



21 0-0

White completes his development, but the black rooks now cause mayhem.

21...♖8b2 22 ♖a4 h5!

The black rooks are excellently placed. The weakest square in White's camp is g2. Therefore Black prepares 23...♗g5, bringing the queen into the assault without being mated by ♖c8.

23 ♖c5

White prevents 23...♗g5. A

All About Defence

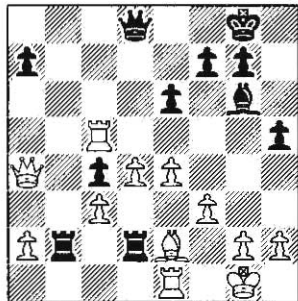
brutal finish would be 23 ♖xc4? ♗g5 24 g3 ♗e3+ 25 ♔h1 ♜xd1! 26 ♜xd1 ♗xf3+ and mate next.
23...♜d2

Black is already one pawn down and the pawn on c4 is doomed, so he has to strive to keep his initiative going.

24 ♙e2

White hopes to escape from his troubles with a rather clever tactical idea.

24...♜bb2 25 ♜e1



He can't let the rooks rampage along the seventh rank, but now it appears that White has got everything in order as if 25...♜xe2 then 26 ♜xe2 ♜xe2 27 ♖xc4 with the double threat of 28 ♜c8 and 28 ♗xe2. The black pieces can't help each other, e.g. 27...♜e1+ 28 ♔f2 ♗h4+ 29 g3 ♗xh2+ 30 ♔xe1 and White wins. Nor can Black continue attacking with 25...♗h4 as White gets in first after 26 g3 ♗h3 27 ♜c8+ ♔h7 28 ♗e8 with 27 ♗h8 mate planned.

If now 25...♜xa2 then 26 ♖xc4 will follow, guarding the bishop again and threatening 31 ♜c8. Is Black busted?

25...♜xd4!

Tactical awareness is the basis of all strategic play! If Black hadn't been aware of this tactical possibility his initiative would have been thwarted. Morozevich detonates the white centre as 26

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cx d4 ♖xd4+ 27 ♔h1 ♖xc5 leaves him a passed pawn up. But this is far from being the only facet of his combination.

26 ♖a6

The threat is now 27 ♜c8.

26... ♖f6! 27 ♜c8+

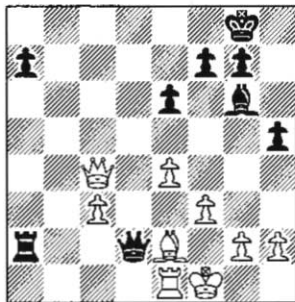
Aseev may have believed that he could refute Black's combination with 27 e5, cutting off the black queen's contact with the rook. But then Black's initiative breaks through after 27... ♖g5! 28 cxd4 ♖e3+, when White is mated on the back rank after 29 ♔h1 ♜xe2 30 ♜g1 ♜c1 or on the second rank after 29 ♔f1 ♙d3! 30 ♙xd3 ♖f2. In the absence of the white queen on a6 the attack is irresistible.

Even though he is a fantastic combinative player, Morozevich couldn't possibly have seen all these variations when he decided to accept a wrecked pawn struc-

ture on the queenside in return for a lead in development 15 or more moves ago. He must have felt intuitively that he was getting enough initiative for the material. In effect, he had to trust that the variations would turn up to support his opinion of the position.

Perhaps a computer would have found a way to quell Black's counterplay....

27... ♜d8 28 ♜xd8+ ♖xd8 29 ♖xc4 ♖d2 30 ♔f1 ♜xa2



Black has regained his material and has a large positional advantage – a rook on the seventh rank, a far safer king and a passed pawn that is easier to advance than White's.

31 ♖d4 ♜g5!

Naturally he keeps the queens on in order to put pressure on the flimsy defences of the white king.

32 ♜d1 ♔h7

Again he prevents a queen exchange with 33 ♜d8+.

33 g3 e5 34 ♜d3 a5 35 ♜b1 ♜d2
36 ♜c1 ♜xd1+ 37 ♜xd1 ♜e3 38
c4 f5 39 exf5 ♙xf5 40 g4 0-1

Evidently White lost on time as he can battle on after 40...hxg4 41 fxg4 ♙e4 etc.

The biggest improvements in my chess occurred when I started using puzzles to sharpen my tactical ability. As long as it isn't trivial, any puzzle must exercise the calculation muscle.

Example Two

Chess is ultimately based on logic, but a real game is usually a messy, chaotic affair. In particular, if we want to create winning chances we have to take risks. This might mean giving the opponent the chance to attack in the hope that he will lose his nerve and falter before a determined defence.



Vaganian-Kasparov

USSR Championship, Minsk 1979

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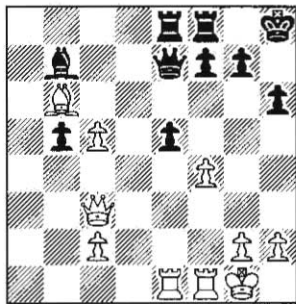
This position was reached in a very early Kasparov game. At the time the 17-year-old genius was slightly out of his depth in positional struggles against the strongest players in the world. Therefore he had to rely on his tactical ability and fighting spirit to see him through. This makes some of his early games highly eventful as he often had to resort to extreme measures to survive.

Here is a case in point. It looks horrendous for Black as his bishop is buried, his dark squares seem on the point of collapse and he loses the exchange after 27...dxe5 28 ♔c5. But the future World Champion played the explosive move **27...c5!!** bringing his bishop to life and adding vital dynamism to his position.

28 bxc5 dxe5

By sacrificing the pawn on c5, Black has prevented 29 ♔c5.

Now after 29 ♖xe5 ♕d7 it is White's bishop that is shut out of the game, and once Black plays ♖c6 hitting g2 it is White who must defend against threats.



29 c6 ♕e6!

Black meets the double threat to the bishop and 30 ♔c5 by pinning the c6-pawn. Now 30 cxb7 ♖xb6+ followed by 31...♖xb7 is equal, while if 30 ♔c5? then 30...♖xc6 attacks g2 and prevents White winning the exchange.

30 f5 ♖f6

Black keeps the tension – it is fair to assume that Vaganian must have been in time pressure hereabouts. Objectively speaking he should simplify with 30...♖xc6, though after 31 ♖xc6 ♗xc6 32 f6 he would be unlikely to win due to the opposite-coloured bishops.

31 ♗c7 ♗a8?

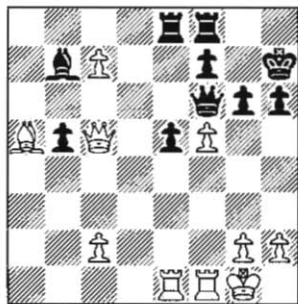
I don't think the mature Kasparov would have played like this as it involves a very big risk. Instead 31...♖xc6 32 ♖xc6 ♗xc6 33 ♗xe5 is equal.

32 ♗a5?

After 32 ♗xe5! b6! White has a crucial choice. 33 ♖d4? allows Black a strong counter-attack after 33...♖xc6 34 ♗xg7+ ♔h7 35 ♖g4 ♖xe1 36 ♖xe1 ♖d8!, threatening 37...♖d2 and ready to play ♖g8 if the white bishop leaves g7. Instead 33 ♖g3! forces Black into a queen exchange due

to the threat of mate on g7. Then 33...♖g5 34 ♖xg5 hxg5 35 f6 g6 36 ♗d6 ♖xe1 37 ♖xe1 ♖c8 38 c7 and the passed pawn will win the game.

32...♔h7 33 c7 ♗b7 34 ♖c5 g6!



At last counterplay begins to loom along the g-file.

35 ♖b6 ♖xb6+ 36 ♗xb6 gxf5 37 ♖d1?

He had to play 37 ♖xf5 f6 with balanced play – not 37...♖e6? 38 ♗c5 when f7 will drop.

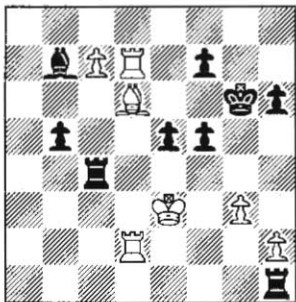
37...♖g8 38 g3 ♜e6!

Now White's bishop is forced backwards and the black rooks take control of the position.

39 ♔a5 ♜a8 40 ♔b4 ♜c6 41 ♜d7 ♜xc2 42 ♜fd1

If 42 ♜xf7+ ♔g6, and White has no good way to defend the rook and prevent 43...♜g2+ followed by mate. Now Black is two pawns up and efficiently wears down White's defences.

42...♔g6 43 ♜1d2 ♜c4 44 ♔d6 ♜a1+ 45 ♔f2 ♜h1 46 ♔e3

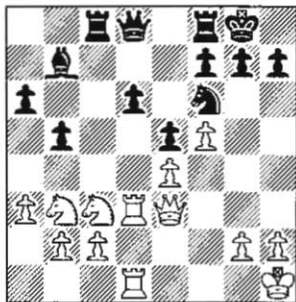


46...f4+!

A little combination to finish things off.

47 gxf4 exf4+ 48 ♔xf4 ♜c4+ 49 ♔d3 ♜xf4 50 ♜g2+ ♔h7 0-1

Example Three



Adams-Salov

Wijk aan Zee 1998

Here Black played

18...♜c6

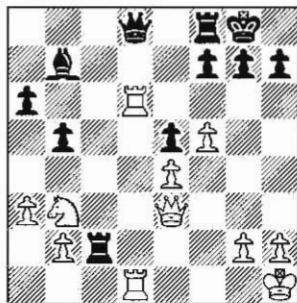
Instead he could make an in-

teresting exchange sacrifice with 18...♖xc3 19 ♖xc3 ♗xe4, when he has a strong bishop and a centre pawn in return for the rook. But Salov presumably didn't want it to become 'interesting' as that suggests 'unclear' or 'double edged' whereas if nothing much happens Black's position could quickly become clearly better: after all, he has a bishop that looks like the best minor piece on the board, and he has potential pressure on both c2 and e4. He only needs to play ♕c7 and ♖d8 to be ready to seize the initiative with ♖c4, when e4 is likely to drop – and this time without the fuss of an exchange sacrifice.

Therefore, as regards piece coordination it can be said that White's position has reached its optimum strength and can only decline, whereas the black position can only get stronger. Adams

was aware of the danger and so decided that he had to provoke a crisis and plunge into sharp tactical play, before Black could complete his build up. He did so with 19 ♗d5!? ♖c4?

Another good feature of introducing tactics is that the opponent can be startled by the sudden change from positional manoeuvring to tactical jousting and react poorly. Crucial was 19...♗xd5 20 ♖xd5 ♖xc2 21 ♖xd6



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and here 21...♖a8 22 ♘c5! ♜xb2? 23 f6! gives White a decisive attack on the black king, but 21...♜c8!? preventing ♘c5 looks awkward for White as 22 f6 ♜g4! threatens mate on g2 while the attempt to mate Black on the back rank appears to fail in spectacular style due to the weakness of White's own back rank and the g2 square: 22 ♜d3? ♜xb2 23 ♜d8 ♙xe4! 24 ♜d6 ♜xd8! 25 ♜xd8 ♜xg2 when Black threatens a discovered checkmate with his rook which can only be averted by allowing Black to win back the queen with 26...♜d2+ when he has a huge material advantage.

One thing is clear from all these murky tactics: Black's pleasant and safe little advantage due to having the better minor piece and more secure pawn structure has vanished. He can only prove he is better by entering some

mind-bending variations. The game move looks logical as Black wants to exchange the d6 pawn for the e4 pawn – a good swap as it frees his bishop – but it fails to a tactic.

20 ♘xf6+ ♜xf6 21 ♜xd6 ♜xe4
22 ♜g1!

Now Black loses the exchange to a knight fork,

22...♜xf5 23 ♘c5 ♜c8 24 ♘xe4
♙xe4 25 c3

...and White eventually managed to exploit his material advantage and win after 39 moves.

Why did things turn out so well for White when Black appeared to have the better position? One reason is that all his pieces were engaged in the struggle, whereas Black had a rook on f8 doing nothing. Things might well have been very different if White had delayed introducing complications for even one move.

Chapter Five

General Ideas on Planning

Tactics are like adding together 2+2 and hopefully making 4; strategy is deciding whether it is a good idea to add them together.

Opening theory

If you sit down with a thick book and try to learn opening theory it is easy to despair. It is a thankless and boring task to plough through every possible line of every variation of every system. It feels like you are fighting a many-headed monster – if you cut off one head then straightaway you are attacked by another. And then another and another and another.

So instead of trying to cut off one head after another, use the sword of strategy to slay the beast

straight through the heart. Try to understand the underlying themes behind the opening system.

You should also try to maximise the chance of getting the sort of middlegame position you enjoy. For example, if you like the emphasis to be on strategy rather than tactics, then ways to get quiet middlegame positions versus 1 d4 include the Queen's Gambit and Nimzo-Indian. In contrast the King's Indian, Grünfeld or Dutch tend to lead to far more complex middlegame pawn structures and therefore more tactics. Against 1 e4 a player with a sharp style should make the Sicilian his choice.

Everything can be understood if you are persistent

Concise Chess Middlegames

In a murder mystery the author may be withholding a vital piece of information from you. I remember feeling slightly cheated by Agatha Christie when at the end of *A Pocket Full of Rye* it emerged that two of the suspects had gone off on holiday together before the murder. The Detective knew this, so why hadn't the reader been let in? It would have made things too easy of course.

In chess all the information is in front of you – there are no hidden pieces; the black knight and white bishop haven't been on holiday together. Therefore the greatest mysteries on the chess board can be solved by logical reasoning and deduction.

If it is your move and you know what you should be doing...

Stop! Have a look around be-

fore you make the move your hand is itching to play. Is there a subtle little pawn move to gain space or free a square for a piece? Can a bishop be redirected to a more powerful diagonal? (or can this be made possible with a sideways move of the king?) Can a knight be retreated in order to begin a journey to an advantageous square? Can we offer a positional sacrifice? Challenge your assumptions about the position.

If it is your move and you have no idea what to do....

1 Run through a mental check list of possible plans:

- checkmating after an all out attack on the opposing king
- attempting to win control of the centre or a key square

General Ideas on Planning

- threatening an attack to force a structural weakness or gain space
- snatching material, defending grimly then winning the endgame
- improving the harmony of your pieces or breaking that of the opponent's pieces
- putting up barriers against the opponent's plan or direct threats.

2 State the facts!

Sherlock Holmes would often get Dr. Watson to state the facts of the case. Just making obvious statements can help the mind connect with your 'intuition' – and there is a vast reservoir of chess ideas and schemes stored somewhere in your head.

Have an internal dialogue to yourself about the safety of the

kings, the strengths and weaknesses of the pawn structure, and the activity or otherwise of your pieces. You may be verbalising stuff of which you think you are already fully aware, but a sudden moment of illumination can occur.

After all, how do you remember a name that is on the tip of your tongue? You might run through all your memories of the person, their appearance, behaviour, hobbies, temperament, their circle of friends and partner, where they live; then you might start going through the alphabet from a-z. Then when you get to a certain letter it might click. Was it a long name or short name, foreign sounding? Often, after all that effort, the name just pops up later on. The statement of all this 'obvious' information was the catalyst to recovering the memory of the name.

Concise Chess Middlegames

So run through all the ideas and suddenly the winning idea might pop up!

3 Recall the advice of Lasker and Capablanca:

Lasker stated you should aim to do one of three with a move:

- develop – that is, bring new forces into play
- increase the work of your own pieces
- undo the work of the opponent's pieces

Capablanca listed four key factors governing any position:

- force or material
- space
- time
- position, or the specific features of the position

Of these he regarded position as the most important – after all you can have extra material, space and time – the last of which basically means more pieces in play – but still be mated!

So can you see a way to increase your share of space, force, time or position, or increase the work of your pieces, or decrease the work of your opponent's?

4 If you still have no idea what to do...

- try to improve your worst placed piece
- try to centralise a piece
- wait for the opponent to get a plan – it is sure to be wrong! (Tarrasch).
- read the next section of this book

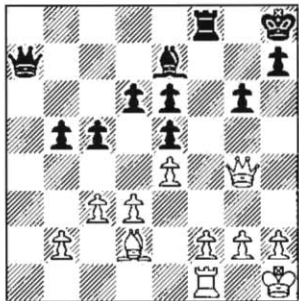
Chapter Six

Winning Piece Strategy

In this section we consider plans which focus on destroying the coordination of the enemy pieces. If successful the result can be just as deadly as winning material or ruining the opponent's pawn structure: after all, just one piece rendered ineffective could leave the remaining pieces unable to hold their ground in the centre or adequately defend their king against a direct attack.

Making the opponent use his pieces to defend pawns

Adams-Paramos Dominguez
Spanish Team Championship,
Cala Galdana 2001



The e6-pawn is attacked, but if 25 ♖xc6? ♜xf2! would be bad as 26 ♜xf2 ♔a1+ mates. So White played 25 h4!

This not only clears an escape hatch on h2 for the king but also prepares to use the h-pawn to ram the fragile black kingside.

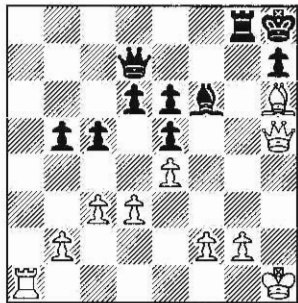
25...♔d7

Now there is no choice but to defend e6. Nevertheless, it is a bad sign for Black that his proud queen is reduced to the role of sick maid for a weak pawn.

26 ♖h6 ♜g8

The black rook is also needed to shore up weak squares in view of the looming h4-h5 advance, which means it cannot seize control of the only open file on the board with 26...♖a8.

27 h5 gxh5 28 ♔xh5 ♕f6 29 ♖a1



Whereas the black queen and rook are encumbered by the need to defend pawns and weak squares, the white heavy pieces have complete freedom of action. How is this advantage to be exploited? More black pawns must be fixed as targets so that the black queen finds herself overworked and unable to defend everything against the fleet-footed white pieces. This can be done by using the white pawns to undermine the black pawn mass in the centre and on the queenside. With his next move Black rather helps White in his task by loosening his pawn front, but this is what normally happens in such situations: a player becomes desperate for counterplay and makes rash pawn advances.

It should also be observed that the black queen is tied down to the defence of not only pawns

Winning Piece Strategy

but also the second rank, as if she lifts her guard then an invasion with ♖a7 will follow. If that happens the black king will face a mating attack. This factor will prove crucial in deciding the game in White's favour, as he can't win just by attacking the black pawns.

29...d5?! 30 ♖f3 ♘d8 31 b3 ♖e7 32 g3!

White mustn't lose his sense of danger as Black threatened 32...♗h4+.

32...♗d7 33 ♙g2 ♗b7 34 c4!

Now the black pawn structure is split open.

34...bxc4

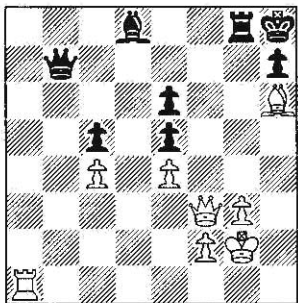
Also unpleasant is 34...dxc4 35 dxc4 b4 36 ♙d1 with the threat 37 ♙xd8! ♙xd8 38 ♖f6+.

35 bxc4 dxc4

Black would also be worn down after 35...d4, for example 36 ♙a2 ♗d7 37 ♙a6 ♖c7 38 ♗h5 ♗f6 (or 38...♗c7 39 ♙xc6) 39

♙a7 when the white rook reaches the seventh rank.

36 dxc4



Adams has manoeuvred so as to leave his opponent's pawns fixed on the dark squares, where they not only impede Black's own bishop but are also targets for White's bishop.

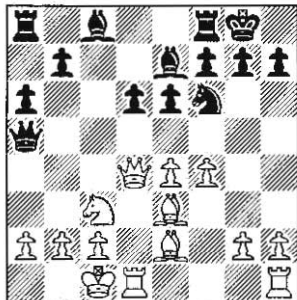
36...♗e7 37 ♙a6 ♗d7 38 ♘c3! 1-0

After sitting quietly on h6 for a long time the bishop finally

enters the fray with decisive effect. Black gave up in exasperation, as something has to give: for example if he tries to defend c5 with 38...♖c8 then 39 ♖a7 intending 40 ♖f7 is a mating attack on h7, while 38...♙c7 39 ♖h5 ♙d6 40 ♙xc5! ♙xc5 41 ♖xe5+ ♖g7 42 ♖xc5 is hopeless.

Shutting in an enemy piece

Example One



Anand-Kamsky

PCA World Championship
Candidates final, Las Palmas 1995

Black has three ways to free his bishop on c8 and so complete his development. The first is with 1...b5 followed by 2...♙b7; the second is 1...♙d7; and the third is 1...e5, gaining time to eliminate the white pawn on f4 with 2...xf4 by attacking the white queen, followed by 3...♙e6.

But it is White's move and Anand took measures against all three methods of development with

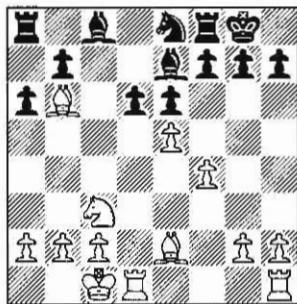
12 ♖b6! ♖xb6 13 ♙xb6

Now the pawn on b7 is blocked, and if 13...♙d7 to chase away the bishop then 14 ♙c7 wins the d6 pawn. Nor can Black play 13...♙d7 as he runs into trouble after 14 e5: if 14...dxe5 15 fxe5 he has to give up a pawn

Winning Piece Strategy

with 15...♖d5 16 ♖xd5 etc. as otherwise the bishop on d7 drops. The third attempt at break out with 13...e5 is no longer effective as no white queen is attacked: White can reply 14 f5! stopping ♗e6 and with a bind on the centre. Nevertheless, this was perhaps Black's best chance as at least he can develop with 14...♗d7.

13...♖e8 14 e5!



14...d5

Thinking it terms of pawn structure, you might be wondering why Black doesn't give White an isolated pawn with 14...dxe5 15 fxe5. Indeed, in the endgame such a pawn will often be a liability: it could be construed as a sign of a premature attack in the opening.

But as always we have to look beyond the pawn structure per se and see how it blends with the activity of the pieces. Here we see that White has some tremendous plusses after 14...dxe5 15 fxe5.

He has absolute control of the d-file, the only open line on the board, as his bishop controls the d8 square. Furthermore every black piece apart from the bishop on e7 is impeded in one way or other which would make it easy for White to build up a winning attack. Therefore the white pawn on e5 would be a great strength,

despite the fact that it is isolated. If Black tried to attack it with 15...♙g5+ 16 ♖b1 ♙f4 Black is punished by 17 ♙c5 winning the exchange – a graphic reminder of the paralysis of his pieces.

You may object to 14 e5 for a different reason: after the game move 14...d5 White has let his opponent advance his backward pawn to d5 which undoubtedly improves his pawn structure. But once again we should think about piece activity. Black's knight has no safe move, and being stuck on the back rank it interferes with the mobility of the rook on f8: if the knights on c3 and e8 vanished Black could immediately challenge the blockade on b6 with ♙d8.

So Black is very constricted, but Anand had better do something active or he may gradually unwind his position and emerge

with a good position as his pawn structure is no worse than White's.

15 f5! ♙d7

Of course Black's centre crumbles after 15...exd5 16 ♘xd5 **16 ♙g4 ♙c8?**

An admission of defeat. He had to at least try 16...exf5 though 17 ♙f3 intending 18 ♘xd5 is very strong for White.

17 ♞hf1 a5

A desperate attempt to break the bind with 18...♞a6, but White clamps down even on this hope.

18 ♘a4! f6

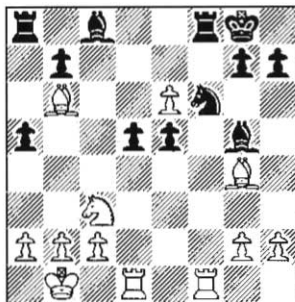
Black's can't stand the slow torture any longer and open lines, but it is no surprise that White's vastly superior piece coordination wins the day.

19 fxe6 fxe5 20 ♘c3!

The knight returns to attack d5. 20...d4 21 ♘d5 wins quickly – just look at the paralysed bishop

on c8 and you will see why.

20...♙g5+ 21 ♖b1 ♘f6



Now a little combination wins material:

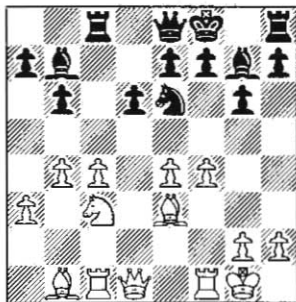
22 ♘xd5! ♘xg4 23 ♖xf8+ ♙xf8
24 ♘c7 ♖a6

If 24...♖b8 simply 25 ♙a7
wins the rook.

25 ♙c5+ ♙g8 26 ♘xa6 ♙xe6
27 ♘c7

and White, the whole exchange up, easily won the end-game.

Example Two



McDonald-Twyble

Charlton v. Ilford 1995

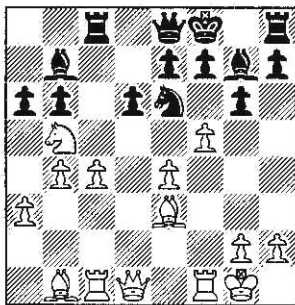
Here I was sorely tempted to try to bludgeon my way through with moves like 19 ♘d5 and 20 f5, as the black king is an attractive target. Nevertheless, Black is solid and a direct attack might rebound. Why should White take any risk when there is a safe way to exploit his advantage?

It is important to realise that White's main advantage here isn't the position of the black king per se, but the fact that the rook on h8 is shut out of the game. Therefore, should lines become open on the queenside White will be effectively a rook up. So...

19 ♖b5!

attacking the a7 pawn and forcing Black to weaken himself there, as 19...♖a8 20 f5 ♖d8 21 ♖c7 wins the exchange.

19...a6 20 f5!



White makes the aggressive pawn advance, but remember it is part of a positional plan to open lines on the queenside, not an attempt to rip aside the black king's defences.

20...axb5

White has a risk-free extra pawn after 20...♖c7 21 ♖xc7 ♖xc7 22 ♗xb6, while 20...♖d8 allows the mini-combination 21 ♖xd6! exd6 22 f6 when Black loses his dark square bishop after which he will perish on the dark squares.

21 fxe6 f6 22 ♖d4

Now the black queenside crumbles, and all the time the black rook is sitting helplessly on h8.

22...bxc4 23 ♖xc4 b5 24 ♖xc8 ♖xc8 25 ♗a2

More incisive was probably 25 ♖b6 and 26 ♖c1, but here White can afford to take his time. He is

Winning Piece Strategy

under much less pressure to find the best moves than if he had launched an attack on the black king, in which case one slip up could have fatal consequences. Here Black cannot ever get his rook into the game, so there is no need for White to hurry.

25...f5

The only freeing chance. After 25...♔g8 White could even consider 26 ♖xd6!? when 26...exd6 27 e7+ mates.

26 ♕h6!



Every exchange of piece is to White's advantage, as long as he ensures that the black rook remains buried.

26...♔g8 27 ♕xg7+ ♖xg7 28 ♕d5!

White continues his policy of exchanging pieces to increase his advantage of firepower where it matters – on the queenside.

A terrible positional blunder would be 28 exf5?? gxf5 29 ♖xf5+ ♔g8 when the black rook has come to life and is attacking g2. It isn't worth white allowing this for a mere pawn.

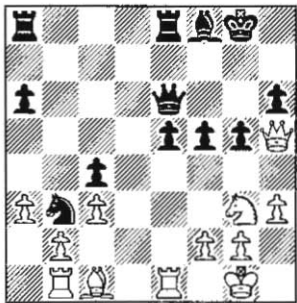
28...♔g8 29 ♖b6 ♕a8

If 29...♕a6 then 30 a4 looks decisive, while 29...♕xd5 30 exd5 gives up all hope of freeing the rook.

30 ♖xb5 fxe4 31 ♖d7! 1-0

Black resigned as if 31...♖b8 32 ♕xa8 ♖xa8 33 ♖c1 then 34 ♖c8+ wins the queen.

Example Three



Kindermann-Adams

Novi Sad Olympiad 1990

An examination of the pawn structure suggests that Black should either keep the two pawns abreast on e5 and f5, where they form a solid wall controlling the fourth rank, or if he wants to advance one it should be e5-e4, when the centre pawn is supported by its comrade on f5. The

move f5-f4 on the other hand would be structurally speaking a mistake: it creates a hole on e4 and leaves the pawn on e5 with no other pawn to defend it, unless it could somehow be advanced to e3. In other words f5-f4 is contrary to the demands of the pawn structure.

And yet in the game Adams played 26...f4!! and indeed after 27 ♖e4 the black pawns had lost their flexibility and the white knight was sitting on a beautiful blockade square in the centre. Had Adams made a terrible mistake?

In fact he had looked beyond general principles and seen that advancing the pawn to f4 severely impedes the mobility of the bishop on c1. Even that might not have been enough to sway the argument in favour of 26...f4: after all, the white bishop might

Winning Piece Strategy

be shut in, but isn't this balanced by the fact that the knight gets to its dream square on e4?

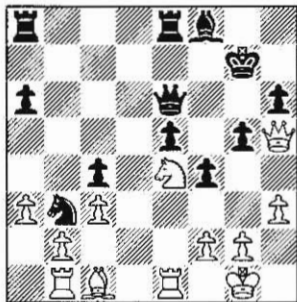
If it was just a case of 'good for the knight, bad for the bishop' this may be true: but *the problem for the bishop is also a problem for the rook on b1*: whereas the knight's lack of a centre square was only a problem for the knight itself. Therefore with 26...f4 Adams is obstructing the quick development of both a bishop *and a rook*. As will be seen this prevents White from challenging for control of the d-file before Black has gained a firm grip on it.

It may look ugly, but 26...f4 has a beautiful idea behind it!

Let's see what happened in the game after 26...f4 27 ♖e4: 27...♔g7!

Anticipating White's next move: the black king proves he has an important strategic role

even in the middlegame. Black's first priority is to prevent White from breaking up his kingside pawns



28 h4 ♔g6!

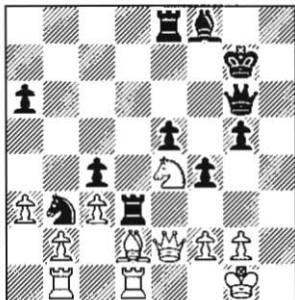
Defeating White's plan as the chains around the bishop on c1 are unbreakable after 29 ♔xg6+ ♕xg6.

29 ♕e2 ♖ac8 30 hxg5 hxg5 31 ♖d1 ♖cd8 32 ♕d2 ♖d3

The pawn on c4 is a wonderful asset for Black: it not only

Concise Chess Middlegames

supports the blockading knight on b3 but also the rook on an outpost square.



33 ♖e1

The bishop is as useless on e1 as on c1, but at least it is out of the way of its own rooks here.

33...♞ed8

White can't challenge Black's grip on the d-file as after 34 ♞xd3 cxd3 35 ♔f3 the move 35...g4 wins the knight.

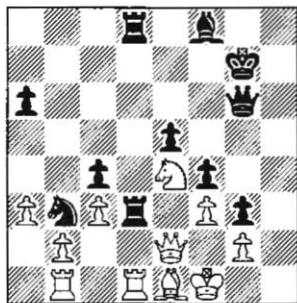
34 f3 g4!

A familiar scenario: after the pieces are on optimum squares, the pawns advance to finish the job.

35 ♔f1

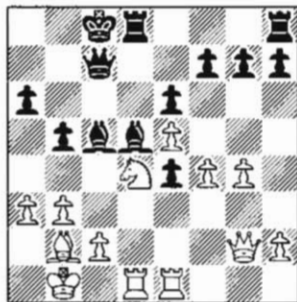
35 fxg4 ♞xd1 will cost a piece, while 35 ♞xd3 ♞xd3 is also resignable

35...g3 0-1



The white bishop is now completely smothered and the move 36...♞h5 threatening mate on h1 is irresistible.

Example Four



Adams-Svidler

FIDE World Championship KO,
New Delhi/Theran 2000

Black is well centralised and has the bishop pair; his king is somewhat open but the white pieces are in no shape to launch a mating attack. Nor can the bishop be dislodged from its strong post on d5, where it soundly defends the pawn on e4. It is quite aston-

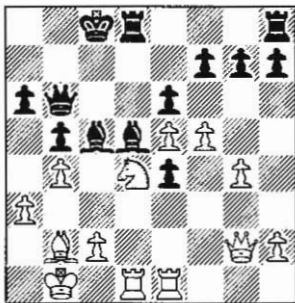
ishing that in only a couple of moves Svidler, a top class Grandmaster, will be in serious trouble. Such is the power of a well-formulated strategical plan.

The pawn structure suggests that White should prepare the advance f4-f5, putting a pawn adjacent to his furthest advanced pawn. In fact, Adams was able to play **23 f5!** straightaway, as if 23...♖xe5?, 24 ♘xc6 wins the exchange: a simple instance of tactics supporting strategy. Instead Black has various ways to strengthen his game, for example he could double rooks on the d-file, or play 23...♖b8 to make his king a bit safer or try 23...b4!? when 24 axb4 ♙xb4 has made his bishop more active, while 24 a4 leaves it securely posted on c5.

Instead Svidler played **23...♖b6?**, which at first glance looks like a good move as it adds

to the attack on d4, but it cut off the retreat of his bishop.

24 b4!



It is not only combinations and tactical ideas that need to be snatched at once. Strategic opportunities are just as fleeting and need an instant response.

This move is only strong because the black queen is on b6: if it were on b7 Black could reply $\text{Q}b6$, keeping the bishop on an active diagonal. But in the actual

position the bishop must retreat to an inferior square or else capture on d4: in both cases Black becomes seriously weak on the dark squares.

24... $\text{Q}e7$

After $24... \text{Q}xd4$ $25 \text{ Q}xd4$ $\text{W}b7$ $26 \text{ R}e3$ White has a clear advantage: he has more space on the kingside and can attack on the queenside.

25 g5!

Now the bishop on e7 is a target for White's kingside pawn advance.

25... $\text{R}d7$

Black has no wish to undermine the defence of his other bishop after $25...exf5$ $26 \text{ Q}xf5$.

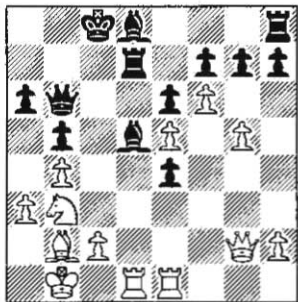
26 f6 $\text{Q}d8$

After $26... \text{Q}f8$ the bishop would be buried: the white pawns on b4, e5 and f6 shut it in. This would be a problem not only for the bishop but also for the rook

on h8, which is in turn shut in by the bishop.

With his deft pawn advances White has driven the bishop from the good square on c5 to d8, where it gets tangled up with the other black pieces.

27 ♖b3!



The next stage in White's plan is to utilise the dark squares that the bishop on d8 no longer controls. Now 27...♙xd5 28 cxb3 leaves the black king wide open

and the e4 pawn about to drop, so the knight gets to the c5 outpost square.

Completely anti-positional would be 27 fxg6?? ♜g8, when Black regains his pawn and there is no longer a bind on the queen-side.

27...gxf6 28 gxf6 ♜c6 29 ♘c5 ♜a7 30 ♘xe4

The outcome of his strategic play is that White wins a pawn. Black sought counterplay but this just led to more loss of material.

30...♙c7 31 ♜g7 ♜d8 32 ♘c3 ♙f3 33 ♜xd8+ ♙xd8 34 ♜xh7

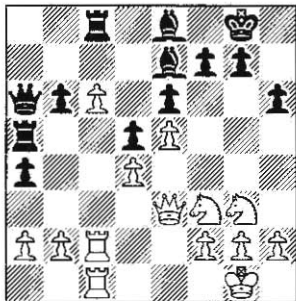
Now White is two pawns up and won easily.

Attacking an opponent where he is weakest

Example One

If you succeed in pinning down a

large number of enemy pieces on one side of the board, it makes sense to attack him on the other wing if it is at all feasible. In that way you will be keeping as far away as possible from the main body of his army and so will meet with less resistance.



Adams-Morozevich

Sarajevo 2000

The first thing we notice is that White is a pawn up: an im-

pressive-looking passed pawn on c6. The first plan that springs to mind is to force through the pawn to the queening square, by bringing over the knights to the queenside. But how can this be done? The knights have no way of coming to the aid of the pawn via the centre as the squares e5 and d4 are blocked by his own pawns. Meanwhile 23 ♖c1, preparing the laborious manoeuvre ♖d3, a2-a3 and then ♖b4 can be met in a variety of ways – the simplest reply is ♜b5 as in the game, preparing ♘xb4 if the knight reaches b4.

Meanwhile Black has a straightforward plan to capture the passed pawn: ♜b5, followed by playing the rook from a6 to c7, when the pawn is doomed. So it appears that White has to give up trying to win the game and think about how he controls Black's

initiative on the queenside once the c6 pawn is lost.

I'm sure that Morozevich would have won this position against most players, but Adams is aware of a fundamental fact: all Black's pieces are far away from the kingside, so why not start an immediate attack there? It is an obvious, simple fact, but difficult to remember when all the play so far has focused on the queenside.

Adams played

23 ♖h5!!

Clearing the way for g2-g4.

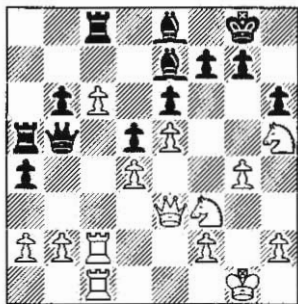
23... ♜b5

All Black can do is carry on with his plan of capturing the c-pawn and hope his kingside defences hold out.

24 g4!

Here once again we should emphasise that the apparent damage to White's king's defences is irrelevant – he is the player with

the initiative and there are no black pieces anywhere close to the white king.



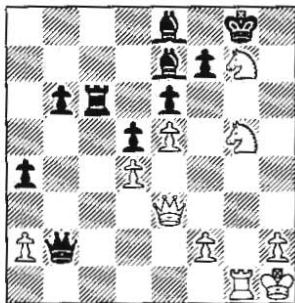
24... ♜a7 25 g5 hxg5 26 ♖xg5 ♜ac7 27 ♚h1 ♜xc6 28 ♜xc6 ♜xc6 29 ♜g1!

White needs this rook to finish off the attack and so is quite happy to hand the c-file to Black.

29... ♜xb2 30 ♖xg7!

Just in time before Black offers the exchange of rooks with **30... ♜c1.**

Concise Chess Middlegames



30... ♖c3

Black is mated after 30... ♔xg7

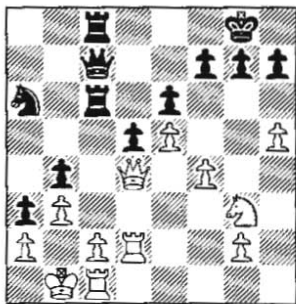
31 ♘xe6+ ♔h7 32 ♗h3+.

31 ♘xe8 1-0

Example Two

In our next example, Black has pressure along the c-file, but White's defences are holding firm against direct attack. Furthermore, White hasn't given up his own aggressive aspirations with

f4-f5 or h5-h6. Therefore Morozevich decided to manoeuvre his queen to the kingside:



Topalov-Morozevich

Sarajevo 1999

24... ♗e7! 25 ♗d3 ♗h4

Here the queen not only obstructs any initiative Topalov might have planned but also creates a nuisance for his defence by attacking both the knight and f4 pawn. I don't know if White

could have held things together, but it is no surprise that in a practical game he quickly crumbled.

26 ♖f3 ♜c3 27 ♜d3 h6!

A calm move that avoids back rank tricks. It also puts the onus on White to find a decent move.

28 f5

Topalov can't stand the passive defence, but now the e5-pawn becomes weak.

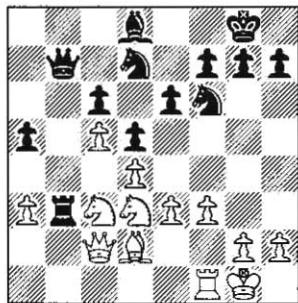
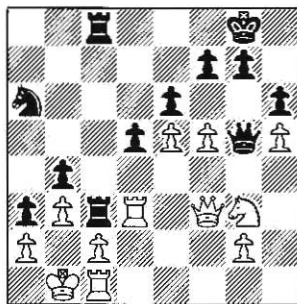
28... ♗g5!

square where she attacks the rook on c1 which introduces more tactical ideas. If 29 ♘e2 ♜xd3 30 ♗xd3 ♘c5 31 ♗h3 ♘e4 and Black will win a pawn besides keeping a crushing attack.

29 ♗f1 ♜xd3 30 ♗xd3 ♘c5 31 ♗f3 ♘d7 0-1

32 ♜c1 ♜c3 wins the knight, otherwise the e5-pawn is lost.

Exploiting the loose position of an enemy piece



The black queen acquires a

Nakamura-Lobron

Wijk aan Zee 2004

At first glance you might think that Black has an excellent position in view of the aggressive posture of his queen and rook along the b-file. But after **23 a4!** the black rook is a target rather than an attacking piece: it can neither retreat nor advance, and there is the terrible idea of **b5!** looming, cutting off the protection from the queen. The rook has penetrated deep into enemy territory, but it is inadequately supported by the other pieces – in fact the minor pieces are giving it no help at all.

Therefore we can say that Black has overextended himself in moving his rook to b3: it is an expedition too far with insufficient back up.

The game continued

23...b8 24 e4!

White is in no hurry as the black pieces can only flay around looking for a non-existent breakthrough on the queenside. Therefore first of all he gains more space in the centre and on the kingside, in order to set up attacking chances there.

24...c7 25 e5 d7 26 f4 g6 27 c1!



Now Black has to contend with **28 b5!**? **xd3** (or else he

loses the exchange after 28...cxb5 29 ♖xb3) 29 ♖xd3 cxb5 30 cxb5 when the connected passed pawns look very strong. Of course, White has no need to 'cash in' his advantage like this, and could try probing on the kingside, say by preparing g2-g4, as Black can do nothing active. For example if 27...♘a6 then 28 ♘b5! is now decisive for if 28...♙xd3 then 29 ♖xd3 cxb5 30 c6 wins a piece.

In any case, Lobron tried to counter-attack:

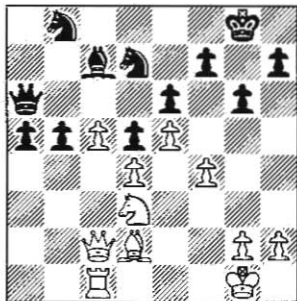
27...♖a6 28 ♘b5!

It can't be stressed too much that if you have a winning position your first thought should be about stopping your opponent getting any counterplay. White would lose control after 28 ♖xb3 ♖xd3 as both the bishop on d2 and 29...♖xd4+ are threatened.

28...♙xb5

If 28...♙xd3 then 29 ♖xd3 cxb5 30 axb5 ♖a8 31 ♙a1! followed by ♖a3 and ♘xa5 would be decisive. The rook and two passed pawns would overwhelm the two knights after the queen and bishop are exchanged off.

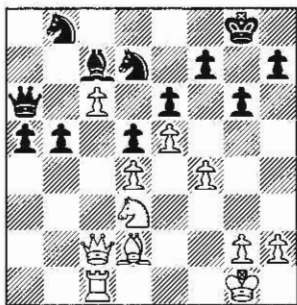
29 axb5 cxb5



Now it is extremely important for White that he doesn't relax and trust in his material advantage to win the game by itself – incidentally this is a fault with many

players. If Black is allowed to blockade the c6 square with 30...♖c6 then his own passed pawns give him huge counterplay. **30 c6!!**

This move prevents ♖c6 and clears the c5 square for either the white knight or queen. It also disturbs the black knight on d7 which as will soon become clear was performing an important role in defending the f8 square.



30...♖b6 31 f5!

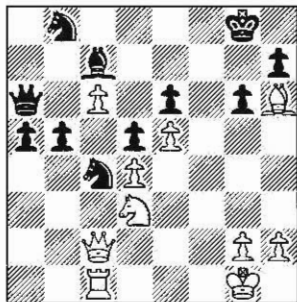
Every single black piece is tied down on the queenside: so White opens lines and attacks on the kingside.

31...♖c4

If 31...exf5 or 31...gxf5 White could play 32 ♖c5 with the big threat of 33 ♕h6 then 34 ♖f8 mate, as well as 33 ♖c7 infiltrating into the black camp.

32 fxe6 fxe6 33 ♕h6 1-0

Disaster follows down the f-file after 34 ♖f2 or 34 ♖f1 with mate on f8 in the offing.



Chapter Seven

Pawn Structure and Model Thinking

Doubled, isolated and backward pawns

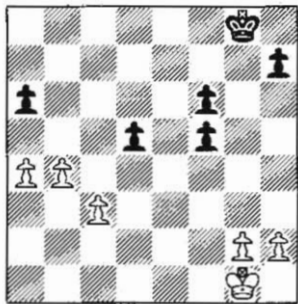
In practical terms, there is no such thing as a good or bad pawn structure – either the pawn structure suits the pieces or it doesn't.

Nevertheless, there are features of a pawn structure which, in general terms, can be regarded as somewhere in a range between a slight blemish or a serious defect.

Let's start by looking at the black pawns in the following diagram.

Black has doubled and isolated pawns on the f-file – these pawns represent a dreadful static weakness, as they cannot be de-

fended by other pawns and, in the case of the pawn in front on f5, cannot even be defended from behind by a rook.



Besides the f-pawns, Black has isolated pawns on a6, d5 and h7. These are also a weakness as

Concise Chess Middlegames

they require defence by the pieces if attacked, if indeed they can be defended at all.

Whereas the black pawns are split into four groups or pawn islands, the white pawns are in only two groups. The general rule is: the fewer pawn islands the better, as it means your pawns are more compact, more mobile and more able to defend each other. Here White can already create a passed pawn with b4-b5, though this would mean that after a6xb5 and the reply a4xb5 the pawn on b5 would be far less safe than on b4, as it is no longer defended by the c3 pawn. With just kings on the board as in the diagram 1 b5 would of course win at once by queening the pawn, but in a typical middlegame position there are a lot more variables.

The white pawn structure isn't without faults, as the pawn on c3

is a backward pawn. It isn't isolated and one day could become a protected passed pawn if it managed to advance to c5; but this is very unlikely as it must get past the pawn on d5. In fact the backward pawn is a serious weakness as it stands on an open file and can be besieged by an enemy queen and rook. In fact because it is on an open file the backward pawn is weaker than the isolated black pawns on a6 and h7, which stand on blocked files and so are more difficult to attack.

It is worth reminding ourselves again that in a 'real' game the abstract, general assessment of the pawn structure may not be relevant or need a lot of adjusting. It is possible to imagine an attacking scenario in which Black uses the semi-open g-file to launch a strong attack with his queen and rooks, and the supposedly weak,

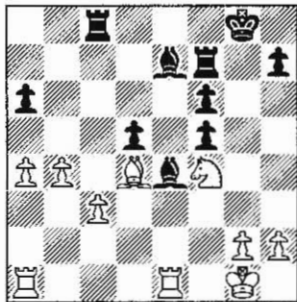
miserable pawn on f5 proves to be the perfect tool to smash through White's defences with f4-f3!

Or consider the pawn on d5. In chess terminology this is called an Isolated Queen's Pawn or 'IQP'. It may be statically weak, but every chess player has a lot of respect for a centre pawn and is often willing to 'forgive' it for needing to be defended. Indeed, in various opening set ups Black is willing to accept an IQP because of the control of the centre it confers. It guards the c4 and e4 squares and creates outposts there for the black pieces.

Here is the actual game position from which I took the pawn structure above:

Adams-Zvjaginsev

FIDE World Championship KO,
Moscow 2001



Black's light-squared bishop is entrenched on e4, where it has a mutually supporting relationship with the pawns on d5 and f5. In fact it is hard to imagine how the bishop can ever be dislodged from its dominating centre post. If it were Black's move he could play 1...♗d6 attacking the white knight, when after 2 ♖h5 ♗e5! the bishop not only shields the f6 pawn from attack but also undermines White's bishop that

defends the backward c pawn. The black rooks would be able to infiltrate down the c-file after ♖fc7 intending ♕xd4+, or Black could even contemplate a sacrifice involving ♖xc3!?

In this scenario after 1...♕d6 and 2...♕c5 it would hardly be relevant to describe the doubled f-pawns as liabilities in view of the excellent centre posts that they are granting the black bishops.

Nevertheless, it was White who had what David Bronstein has described as the most powerful weapon in chess: the next move. He used it to play

28 ♖h5!!

If now 28...♕d6? then 29 ♖xf6+ wins, which means that the black bishop can never get to e5. Rather than be supported by the pawn on f6, the bishop is therefore tied down to its defence

– an absolutely crucial difference. Furthermore, the black rook on f7 is also pinned down to a defensive role and there is no active play available against the c3 pawn. As a consequence the vitality drains out of the black position which means that White is able to exploit the static weaknesses in his pawn structure. And all this is entirely due to White having the move and using it to play 28 ♖h5!!.

28...♕d8 29 ♖a2!

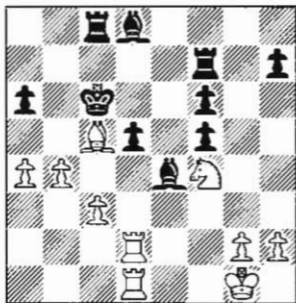
The first step in the build up against d5. White targets this pawn rather than f5 as the knight will be able to return to f4 to join in the attack against it at the right moment.

29...♖f8 30 ♖d1 ♖e7

Finally Black is ready for 31...♕c7 and 32...♕e5 as the king defends f6, but White is just in time to win the d5-pawn before

he can carry out the manoeuvre:

31 ♔c5+! ♚d7 32 ♖f4 ♚c6 33
♜ad2



A harmonious deployment of all the pieces by Adams – yet again!

33...♜d7

Now Black is all set to play 34...♔c7 with a fighting chance, but instead he resigned immediately after 34 c4 as the d5 pawn is lost leaving him with a wrecked position.

If you play through this game fast it looks like a smooth, effortless win by White. In reality Adams had to play very precisely to restrain the dynamism of the black pieces – you don't beat top grandmasters merely by giving them a weak pawn and then piling up all the pieces against it.

Thinking in terms of models – an essential skill

The same rule applies to strategy as to pawn structure: there are no moves or plans that are always good or always bad – they will be weak or strong according to the needs of the specific position in front of you. If this wasn't the case then I could show you all the bad moves and ideas and tell you to avoid them – you would never lose a game again and chess

Concise Chess Middlegames

would be dead.

Luckily for those of us who love the game, the complexity of chess is beyond the powers of human calculation; therefore we are forced to rely on so called 'models' in our heads of the general schemes that are likely to fit the requirements of any given position. These models are based on our study, knowledge and practical experiences of similar positions.

In *My 60 Memorable Games*, Bobby Fischer gives a simple model of how White should attack the black king in the Sicilian Dragon:

'I'd won dozens of skittles games in analogous positions and had it down to a science: pry open the h-file, sac, sac...mate!'

Of course Fischer backed up this general idea with a vast knowledge of Sicilian Dragon

theory – which in essence meant he had in his grasp all the ideas and techniques discovered by other top players in this variation.

Incidentally, this explains why chess players often react badly to a surprise in the opening: a good opening novelty changes the position in such a way that the previous model of how you are meant to play no longer works. That is why even the greatest players can blunder horribly when facing a new move, even if it is objectively no stronger than the well-established move.

If your knowledge and experience – which may be manifested as an instinctive 'hunch' – suggests a certain plan should be good, you have to analyse it closely, paying attention to all the tactical and strategical subtleties of the position. After a while, you might shake your head and think 'No,

the plan of advancing pawns on the queenside is tempting, but it doesn't work here.' It may for example be inappropriate for a deeply concealed tactical reason.

As stated above, chess is far too complicated for humans to play without models, but, to adapt a comment that Capablanca once made about chess books, a model should be used to aid sight, like a pair of spectacles, it shouldn't be treated as if it provided sight. True understanding only comes when we use the power of our mind – the ability to assess and calculate – to adapt the model so that it fits the position.

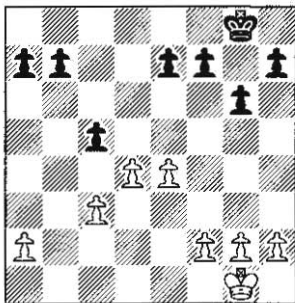
How do we build up this store of models or patterns of play? An obvious way is to play a lot of games. You will gradually learn what works and what doesn't in given situations by trial and error – things will start to click.

Another way is to see how great chess players handle archetypal positions. If you played through a hundred games by Kasparov something should rub off, even if you don't study them in detail – just being exposed to the chess of a genius will help you to perceive what a good plan 'looks like'.

It is almost always the pawn structure that suggests the model. For example, consider the following pawn chain that arises in the Grünfeld main line (see following diagram).

White has an extra pawn in the centre. Therefore the plan of creating a passed pawn with d5, e5, d6 suggests itself. World Champion Kramnik has won many games against the Grünfeld with this plan, and a study of his games would therefore be of the greatest benefit in building up a

model of the correct way to implement it.



A second plan suggests itself: the g6 pawn would be a useful hook for a kingside attack, so White could prepare h2-h4-h5, followed by breaking open the h-file in the Dragon style that Fischer described above. In carrying out a plan a player will borrow ideas from various different openings. Regarding this plan, we might recommend Kamsky's

games as being a good source of 'model' material.

A third plan: White plays f2-f4 angling for f4-f5 to use the g6 pawn to aid an attack along the f-file. This was used by Geller back in the 1960s but is out of fashion at the moment.

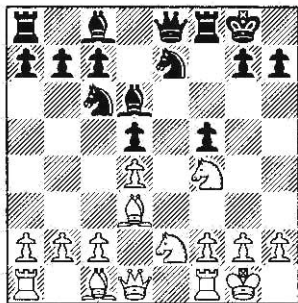
What will make White prefer one plan over another? His style of play is important – if he wants solid dominance of the centre he should choose the plan of creating a passed pawn; if he likes to attack but without any great risk he could castle kingside and then attack with f4 and f5; or if he likes to speculate then h4-h5 is the most promising plan.

The danger of over-reliance

Here is an illustration of the danger inherent in basing your strat-

Pawn Structure and Model Thinking

ogy exclusively on the pawn structure without paying sufficient regard to the specific features of the position. I was impressed by the brilliant play of German GM Uhlmann when I saw the following game in the book *Chess for Tigers*:



Eley-Uhlmann
Hastings 1972/73

First of all the black pawns are used to drive back the white

knight and clear the way to seize control of the open e-file:

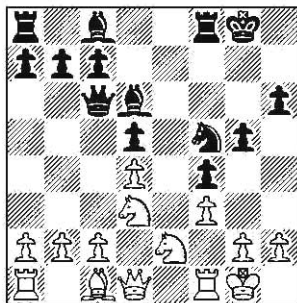
11...h6! 12 ♖b5 g5 13 ♗xc6?

Giving up the two bishops in this fashion hardly helps the defence.

13...♔xc6 14 ♘d3 f4!

A familiar advance from the games above: White is obliged to weaken the e3 square by the threat of 15...f3.

15 f3 ♘f5



16 ♘e5?

White begins a senseless manoeuvre that transfers the knight from a safe centre post to g4 where it is decentralised and a target. He should at least develop with ♔d2 and ♖c1 and hope for the best.

16... ♖b6 17 ♘g4 ♔d7 18 a4
♞ae8

Now Black has absolute control of the only open file on the board.

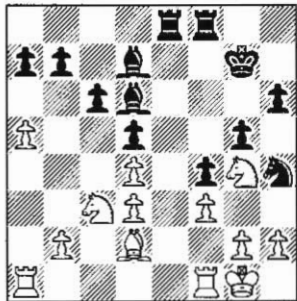
19 ♚d3 ♗g7 20 ♔d2 ♘h4!

This is no flagrant decentralisation as the knight is clearing the way for 21... ♔f5 which would win a piece. White therefore feels obliged to enter a horrible endgame.

21 a5 ♚b5 22 ♘c3 ♚xd3 23
cxd3 c6

Black has the two bishops, a space advantage on the kingside, doubled pawns to attack and more active pieces – it is no won-

der that he is able to wrap things up quickly in convincing positional style.



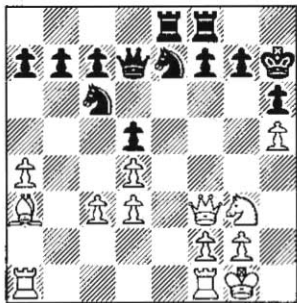
24 ♔a4 ♔f5 25 ♘c5 ♞f7 26
♞ae1 ♞xe1 27 ♔xe1 ♘g6 28
♔c3 h5 29 ♘f2 g4 30 fxg4 hxg4
31 ♞e1 g3 32 hxg3 fxg3 33
♘h1??

White is probably losing, but as Simon Webb remarks in *Chess For Tigers*, he might as well have tried 33 ♘d1 rather than burying his knight on h1. The remaining

moves were:

33...b6 34 ♖e6+ ♔f6 35 ♘d8
 ♜c7 36 a6 ♙f4 37 ♞d1 ♙g4 38
 ♞e1 ♞c8 39 ♘b7 ♞h8 40 ♙b4
 ♞h2 41 ♘d8 c5 42 dxc5 ♘h4 43
 cxb6 ♞xg2+ 44 ♔f1 ♞h2 0-1

A very smooth demonstration of technique from Uhlmann. Having played through this game, the reader has no doubt built up in his or her head an internal 'model' of how to handle this type of pawn structure characterised by only one open file: you bunch your pieces in the centre and then start advancing pawns against your opponent's kings: f5-f4 'exclamation mark'! But don't start thinking that the 'solution' to such positions is *always* to advance the kingside pawns. To see why, let's fast forward to an encounter played 19 years after the Eley game:



Hickl-Uhlmann

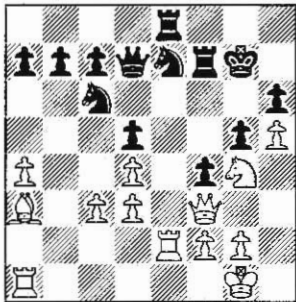
German Championship,
 Bad Neuenahr 1991

Uhlmann employed the plan of advancing the kingside pawns that proved so effective in his game above but after

16...g5? 17 ♞fe1 f5 18 ♘f1! f4 19
 ♘h2 ♞f7 20 ♘g4 ♔g7 21 ♞e2

Black's plan had suffered a fiasco as he was threatened with 22 ♞ac1 with a paralysing pin on the

e-file. He therefore tried sacrificing a pawn but this proved ineffective and he lost after



21...♖f5 22 ♜xe8 ♜xe8 23 ♜xd5
 ♜e2 24 ♖xh6!

A little combination to wreck the black kingside as if 24...♙xh6 then 25 ♜xf7.

24...♙xh6 25 ♜xg5+ ♙h8

Here 25...♙h7 26 ♜g6+ doesn't help.

26 ♜xh6+ ♙g8 27 ♜g5+ ♙h8
 28 ♜g6 1-0

Why did the kingside pawn advance fail here? I can give three reasons – which are in fact so interconnected as almost to be one big reason:

(1) Most importantly the e-file wasn't in Black's hands – it was being actively contested by White. In other words, things weren't 'quiet' enough in the centre to justify action on the wing.

(2) In the starting position of the Hickl extract, there are only two minor pieces each, a bishop and a knight. In the Hley game there were four minor pieces each. Therefore there were more bodies for the black pawns to push back and make to trip over each other. In contrast, the white knight in the Hickl game found the perfect spot on g4 – the eye of the hurricane, as it were – where it couldn't be harassed by the black pawns. And the bishop

on a3, though exerting pressure on the centre, was too far away to be disturbed by the pawn onrush.

(3) The white queen and rooks were active or easily activated in the Hickl game – again, it comes back to the open e-file.

The conclusion from all this is that every position should be judged on its own merits. The point of this book is to suggest models which you then have to decide if you can apply in your future games. You might be able to find a use for a kingside pawn advance, but don't assume it is the right or best way to handle the position. The same plan can lead to a beautiful victory or a shattering defeat – just ask Uhlmann!

The irresistible lure of an 'obvious' plan

Further to the previous section,

the pawn structure may be crying out for a certain treatment, but the piece disposition just doesn't suit this course of action. Even a top class Grandmaster can get it wrong.



Zhang Zhong-Anand
Wijk aan Zee 2004

In the diagram position the pawn structure suggests that White should try to force through the advance f4-f5, with g3-g4 as a

preparatory move. This is all the more tempting as the black king is sitting on f8...

In anticipation of this plan Anand played 23...♖e8!

He plans to evacuate his king to the queenside where it will be protected by the main body of his army, and furthermore the king won't get in the way of the coordination of his rooks.

White now has a choice of plans

(1) Do nothing

In that case a draw is inevitable, as Black has no effective breaks with his pawns: on the kingside, if h5-h4 then g3-g4, or if g6-g5 then f4-f5 (or f4xg5) while if f7-f6 then exf6 all result in a strengthening of White's game. Nor would the advance a5-a4 on the queenside be effective, as b3 can be easily defended and in any case opening

lines would be double edged if Black intends to put his king on the queenside.

A draw with Anand is by no means a bad result, but chess players find it psychologically difficult to renounce activity and just wait. We are all brought up to believe that a plan is central to playing good chess, so doing nothing doesn't come easy!

(2) Play actively on the queenside.

If the black king is heading for the queenside, then breaking open lines with b3-b4 makes sense. Play could go 24 ♖fb1 ♜c6 25 a3 ♜a6 (obstructing b3-b4 by attacking c4) 26 ♘ge1 ♙c6 27 ♙c2 ♙d8 28 ♙f2 ♙b6! (28...♙c7 29 b4! is just what White wants) 29 ♜e4 ♙c7 30 ♙d3 with unclear play. The trouble with the b3-b4 plan is that there is a whole mass of black pieces on the queenside

to cut through before you can get at the black king.

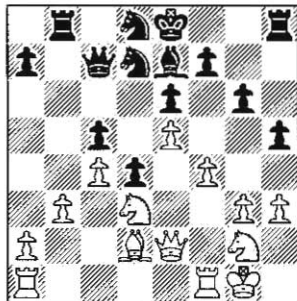
(3) Move the king over to the queenside and then play f4-f5.

If the white king was beamed over to c2 it would be far more secure than on the kingside once the plan of f4-f5 is implemented. Play could go 24 ♔f2 ♚c6 25 ♔c1 ♚a6 26 ♘c1 (not 26 ♔d1 ♚xb3! exploiting the pin on the a-file) 26...♘c6 27 ♔d1 ♔d8 28 ♘e1 (after 28 ♔c2 ♔c7 29 ♘d3 ♘b6 White always has to reckon with a ♘xc4 sacrifice to open lines) 28...♔c7 29 ♘ed3 ♘b6 30 ♚e4 with unclear play. If White plays g3-g4 then h5xg4 leads to the opening of the h-file, which could be awkward for the white king.

So what can we conclude from these sample variations? Black seems to have sufficient

counter-chances: any attempt by White to break through and win entails some risk. And no wonder: White doesn't have any great advantage in the diagram position, so there is no good reason why Black should lose.

Now let's look at what happened in the game.



Evidently here White overestimated his position as he immediately opened lines with 24 g4? hxg4 25 hxg4 and Black had

been presented with the open h-file.

25... ♖c6!

Black methodically clears the way for his king to get to c7.

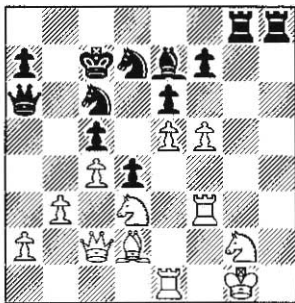
26 ♜f3 ♖a6

Threatening 27... ♜xb3.

27 ♖d1 ♘c6 28 ♖c2 ♔d8 29 ♜e1 ♔c7

The black king reaches relative safety on c7 and at last the two rooks are connected on the first rank.

30 f5? gxf5 31 gxf5 ♜bg8



With his kingside pawn advances White has stripped bare the pawn cover in front of his own king and presented his opponent with two open files for his rooks. How can we explain such suicidal play from a top class Grandmaster? It can only be that he was so convinced that f4-f5 was the correct strategy in the position that he ignored all the danger signs and kept pressing ahead to his destruction.

32 fxe6 fxe6 33 ♜f7 ♔c8!

Anand's calm play contrasts with the reckless manoeuvres of his opponent. This simple retreat frees his pieces from the potential pin on the second rank. Instead 33... ♔h4? would be a horrible blunder after 34 ♘xc5 or 34 ♜xd7+.

34 ♔f4 ♔f8!

Another quiet move that is difficult to meet. For example if

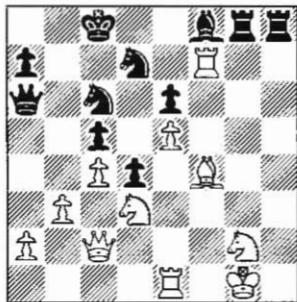
35 ♔d2 – making an escape route for the rook on f7 – then 35...♖h5 attacks and intends to build up along the h-file with ♖gh8.

38 bxc5 ♖h3 39 ♕c2 ♕c6 40 ♖e2 ♔xc5 0-1

'Ugly' moves

Example One

Any change to the pawn structure must take regard to the arrangement of the pieces, both your own and the opponent's.



35 ♕f2 ♖d8!

Now Black wins the exchange whilst keeping up his initiative.

36 ♖xd7 ♕xd7 37 b4 ♕e8!

After a life time of wandering, the black king finally discovers the perfect resting place on his starting square.

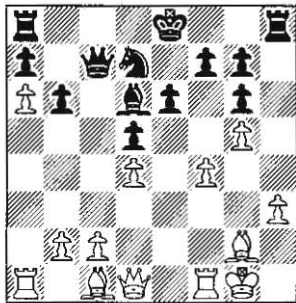


An example from one of my own games. It was a rapid play

game, so without too much thought I played **17 f5** – a natural move to break open lines in the centre for the rook. I had seen hundreds of games with this type of pawn structure in which it was the thematic move. But after **17...gxf5 18 gxf5 ♖f6! 19 ♔d3 0-0-0** Black's king was safe whereas the white kingside was full of holes. Already White has to reckon with **20...♗h2+** and after **♙h1** then **♘h5** and **♘g3+**. It turns out that the 'natural' **17 f5** has opened up all the dark squares along the b8-h2 diagonal to the black knight and bishop.

Now imagine if instead of thinking about his own plans White had asked himself 'how can I stop my opponent from getting his pieces to good squares?' Then the ugly-looking move **17 g5!!** suggests itself. White removes most of the flexibility from his

kingside pawn structure, and if the black knight were able to get to the f5 square then it would be a horrible positional mistake. But what is Black to do with his knight now that it is denied the f6 square? Let's think about possible developments after **17 g5**:



Black castles kingside

17...0-0 18 h4! and White can build up an attack on the black king with **h4-h5**. The white kingside pawns are flexible after all!

Black castles queenside

17...0-0-0 18 ♖e3. White intends a rapid c2-c4 to blast open the c-file and also the h1-a8 diagonal for his bishop (and queen after ♖f3). If Black responds d5xc4 then ♖c1 followed by b2-b3 will soon dissolve the barrier on the c-file. Meanwhile it would be hard for Black to generate counterplay on the kingside.

Black tries to attack the f4-pawn

17...♖h4. This can be answered tactically by 18 ♖xd5! when if 18...exd5 then 19 ♖e1+ wins the rook – our good friend the double attack.

Black regroup his knight to f5

For example, 17...♗b8 18 ♖e3 ♗c6. The knight intends to go via e7 to f5. White can try to exploit this slow manoeuvre with 19 c4!? when if 18...dxc4 then 19 ♖c1 b5

20 d5! exd5 21 ♖xd5, attacking both b5 and c6, gives White a strong initiative. So Black should answer 18 c4 with 18...♗d7! with unclear play.

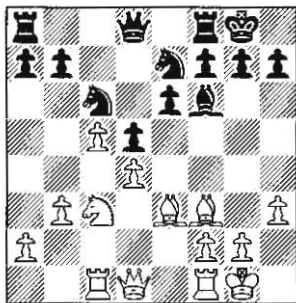
The move 17 g5 is aesthetically unpleasant as it erodes the dynamism in White's kingside pawn structure; but it causes a lot more damage to the dynamism of the black pieces.

Example Two

The following position can be reached in the Alekhine Defence after 1 e4 ♗f6 2 e5 ♗d5 3 d4 d6 4 ♗f3 ♖g4 5 ♖e2 e6 6 c4 ♗b6 7 0-0 ♖e7 8 ♗c3 0-0 9 ♖e3 ♗c6 10 exd6 cxd6 11 b3 d5 12 c5 ♗c8 13 ♖c1 ♖f6 14 h3 ♖xf3 15 ♖xf3 ♗8e7 (see following diagram)

White has a space advantage on the queenside and can try to increase it by preparing b3-b4.

But Black has ready the strong move 16...♘f5, when the black knight attacks d4 a third time and is ready to exchange itself off if necessary with ♖xe3: the disappearance of a pair of minor pieces suits Black, who has much less space.



If I had to give a move a rating out of 10, I would describe 16...♘f5 as a 10/10 move for Black. Any other move, for example 16...♖c8 or 16...♖e8 is de-

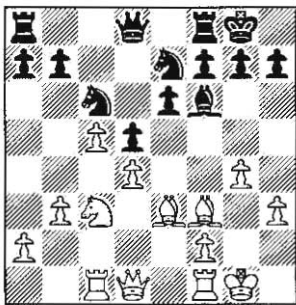
cidely inferior – let's say it deserves no more than 5/10. Therefore there is no doubt that 16...♘f5 is the strongest move, and given the chance any Grandmaster would play it.

So White should be prepared to take strong measures against it – even if it means playing a move that is a bit weakening. Too slow is 16 ♖e2, to bolster d4, as there could follow 16...♘f5 17 ♖d2 a5! (to prevent b3-b4) 18 ♗g4 ♘xe3 19 fxe3 ♗g5 20 ♘f4 ♖c7 21 ♖ce1 ♗ad8 and Black is ready to break up the white centre with 22...e5.

There is a way to prevent 16...♘f5 and that is with **16 g4!**

You might feel nervous about weakening your kingside like this, but perhaps it helps to reason as follows: 'I would award the move 16 g4 only 2/10 on a points scale

as I don't like to loosen my king-side like this – but I am preventing my opponent playing 16...♘f5, which is a 10/10 move for his strategy – so my move is worth a good look!



Having overcome your initial reluctance to even consider the move you might well soon warm to it as after for example 16...♘g6 17 ♙h1 White is ready to get a grip with f2-f4 and ♖d2, etc.

It isn't always the correct pol-

icy to play something loosening in order to prevent your opponent from playing a good move. But it is certainly worth sparing a thought for an 'ugly' move that disrupts the opponent's plans.

The role of pawns

A pawn is needed:

- to become a passed pawn, and queen
- to take away a square from an opponent's piece
- to force open lines, like a battering ram
- to control key central squares
- to gain space
- to form a solid barrier

In fact pawns are needed to do all the things revealed in the next section of the book!

Chapter Eight

Winning Pawn Strategy

In this section pawns are both heroes and villains, aggressors and victims, priceless assets and cannon fodder. Nevertheless, whatever value you put on pawns, it is clear that hardly any plan can succeed without their help.

the fact that the bishop on d4, although well centralised, has no retreat square.

Destroying the opponent's centre

Example One

In this first example, White has a protected passed pawn on e5. This would be a tremendous asset in the endgame, but with lots of other pieces still on the board it is as yet of no great significance. Much more important is the fragility of the d5 pawn, and



Hübner-Nunn
Brussels 1986

If it were Black's move he could play 1...c4, which will not only blocks out the attack on d5

Winning Pawn Strategy

by the white bishop but also opens up a diagonal along which his bishop can retire from d4.

But it is White's move, and Hübner seized his chance with...

15 ♖f3!

Now Black has no time for 15...c4 and must prevent his centre pawns being smashed up by 16 ♗xd4 cxd4.

15... ♗c6

For the moment Black appears to hold his own, as if 16 ♗xd4 ♗xd4 he can eliminate the white bishop on b3 with 17... ♗xb3 and so remove the danger to d5. But Hübner undermined the black queenside with...

16 a4!

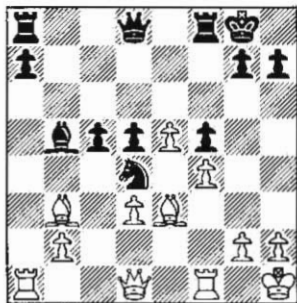
It's not too difficult to see that 16...a6? 17 axb5 or 16...c4? 17 axb5 cxb3 18 bxc6 are both ruinous for Black; a deeper point is that 16...b4? 17 ♕e3! ♗xb3 18

♗xb3 leaves the c5 pawn hanging to ♕xc5 when further pressure with ♖ac1 can be applied to win it if necessary. Here we see that once the pawn moves a4-a4 and b5-b4 are inserted Black's pawn structure can no longer support the advance c5-c4.

16... ♕a6

Trying to bolster b5, but this also led to problems.

17 ♗xd4 ♗xd4 18 axb5 ♕xb5 19 ♕e3!



Concise Chess Middlegames

If now 19...♘b3 20 ♖xb3 leaves both b5 and c5 hanging, so White gets to keeps the two bishops – a powerful asset in a position with enemy pawns that are vulnerable to attack.

19...♘e6

Nevertheless the knight is on an ideal blockade square in the centre: paradoxically the white pawn on e5 is the perfect shield from frontal attack by the white rooks or queen, as a player isn't allowed to capture his own pieces or pawns!

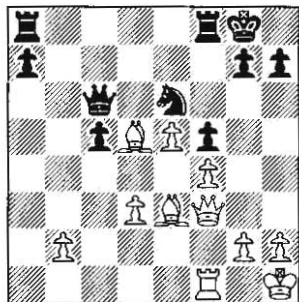
If he is given a breathing space Black will get his king's rook involved in the defence of his centre after 20...♖d7 and 21...♗fd8, so White is again required to act fast.

20 ♖f3 ♙c6 21 ♖a6!

Here we see another good feature of the move 16 a4: Hübner is able to exploit the open file

to eliminate a vital defender of d5.

21...♖d7 22 ♖xc6! ♖xc6 23 ♙xd5



The collapse of Black's centre allows White to demonstrate the enormous power of the bishop pair on an open board.

23...♖c8 24 ♖c1!

Much stronger than 24 ♙xa8? ♖xa8, though that would also win in the long term. White's bishop on d5 is his star piece and he is

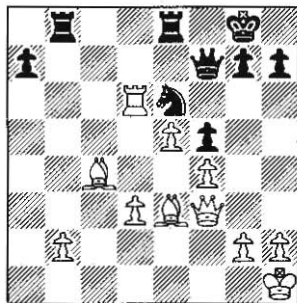
Winning Pawn Strategy

loath to hand it over for a rook sitting passively in the corner of the board.

24...♖b8 25 ♖xc5

Now all White's pieces are beautifully coordinated for the task of overrunning the centre.

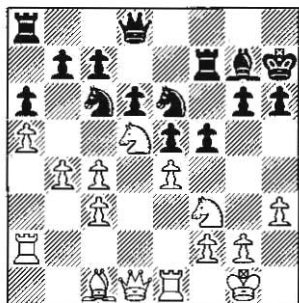
25...♔d7 26 ♖c6 ♖fe8 27 ♖d6 ♔f7 28 ♙c4 1-0



There is no answer to the pin on e6 – even after 28...♔h8 29 ♖c6 wins a piece. Or if 28...♖xb2 29 ♖xe6! ♖b1+ 30 ♙g1 ♖xe6 31

♔a8+ when Black will be mated, the quickest being 31...♖e8 (or 31...♔e8) 32 ♖xe8 mate.

Example Two



Adams-Dautov

European Cup, London 1996

White wants to play 19 exf5 gxf5 20 ♘h4 to put pressure on the f5 square and perhaps follow up with ♖h5 to attack the rook on f7, the pawn on f5 and the

hole on g6. But you might have spotted the tactical drawback: if 23 ♖h4 ♜xh4!. So White has to be more crafty. He played 19 ♔d2! with the threat of 20 c5 when 20...dxc5? 21 ♖b6 would cost Black the exchange, so he wouldn't really be able to avoid being encumbered with a backward pawn on d6 after 21 cxd6 cxd6. Not much liking the idea of this Dautov played 19...♜e8 moving his queen of the d-file, but this meant that White can now play ♖h4 without dropping the knight.

20 exf5 gxf5 21 ♖h4! e4

Black meets White's idea of 22 ♜h5 with counteraction in the centre, but Adams once again adapts his plan to the needs of the position.

22 f4!

A highly important move. White must deny the black knight

on c6 the e5 square or else 22...♞e5 would threaten both 23...♞xc4 and 23...♞d3.



If we judged the position purely on pawn structure, with no regard to the piece layout, we might think that Black is doing rather well as he has an impressive protected passed pawn in the centre, whilst White has doubled pawns on the c-file. However, Adams is able to prove that the pawns on e4 and f5 are in fact a

Winning Pawn Strategy

liability, as White can prepare and execute the thrust g2-g4! after which the proud black pawn centre collapses. This is only possible because White succeeds in placing all his pieces on excellent squares where they put intense pressure on the pawns; in contrast the black pieces prove unable to offer adequate support to their pawns or deter g2-g4 by making a feint to attack on the kingside. As usual, the player with the superior piece coordination is able to make the pawn structure work better for him than it does for the opponent – in this case regardless of whether he has doubled pawns and his opponent has a protected passed pawn.

22... ♖e7

Here we see that rather than being a weakness the doubled white pawn on c3 is in fact performing a crucial role in the cen-

tre by keeping the black knights out of d4.

23 ♖de2 ♘xd5 24 cxd5 ♘f8 25 ♖c2 ♗d7



All the white pieces apart from the bishop – queen, rooks and knight – are aiming at the black centre pawns. It is time for the long awaited pawn advance:

26 g4! fxg4 27 ♖xe4 ♗h8 28 f5!

As so often, the conquest of the centre leads automatically to a strong attack on the king.

Concise Chess Middlegames

28...gxh3 29 ♖e6!

As regards pawn cover, the white king is as exposed as the black king, but it is the white pieces that are in a position to exploit the open lines.

29...♙f6

If 29...♜xe6, then the reply 30 fxe6 ♖d8 31 ♜g6+ ♙g8 32 exf7+ wins.

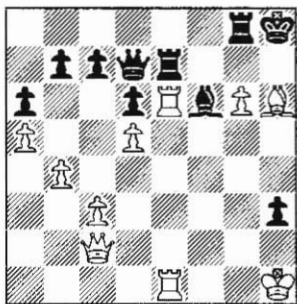
30 ♜g6+ ♜xg6 31 fxg6 ♖g8 32 ♙h1 ♖e7 33 ♙xh6!

in the whole game and a decisive one! It introduces the idea of a pawn check on g7 which will inevitably cost Black material.

33...♙e5 34 ♖xe7 ♖xe7 35 ♖f5 ♖f6

There was no good way to stop 36 ♖h5 or 36 g7+ for if 35...♖h4 36 ♖xe5! dxe5 37 ♖xe5+ and mate next move.

36 g7+ ♖xg7 37 ♙xg7+ ♙xg7 38 ♖g1+ ♙f8 39 ♖c8+ 1-0



The first move by the bishop

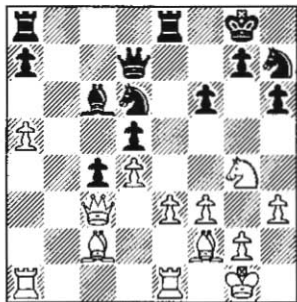
Advancing a pawn to overrun a key square

Example One

White has a 'restrained' or 'restricted' centre of a type which typically arises from the Nimzo-Indian. He would love to be able to advance e3-e4 to conquer space in the centre and open lines for his bishop pair. Unfortunately

Winning Pawn Strategy

for him Black has the e4 square protected no less than four times – Tiviakov is no slouch and he knows that his safety depends on preventing White playing e3-e4.

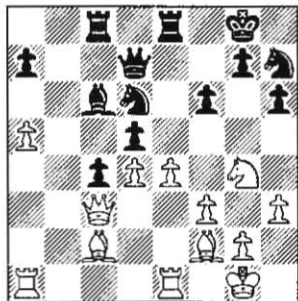


Kramnik-Tiviakov

FIDE World Championship KO,
Las Vegas 1999

Unfortunately for him he let his vigilance slip for just one move and rather than drive the white knight back from g4 with

27...h5 he played the careless centralising move 27...♖ac8? after which Kramnik immediately pounced with 28 e4!.



The e4 square may be covered four times, but if 28...dxe4, 29 d5! ♙xd5 – better to positional torment after 29...♙b7 30 fxe4 – 30 ♖ad1 would leave Black in a highly unpleasant pin along the d-file which can be strengthened by ♜d4 or ♙g3 as necessary.

This illustrates once again

how tactical variations are the basis of positional chess – often they remain ‘hidden’, but they exert a crucial influence on the strategical flow of the game.

It may appear that Kramnik out-manoeuvred his opponent, whereas in reality he won because at a critical moment he spotted a tactical nuance that was missed by his opponent.

28...♖b5

Tiviakov strives to complicate matters, but in such positions it is a sure sign that things have gone wrong for Black if his opponent can overrun the e4 square with impunity.

29 ♖d2 h5

Too late!

30 ♗e3 dxe4 31 d5 f5

Black has no time for 31...exf3 because of 32 ♗xh7+ ♕xh7 33 ♖c2+, breaking the pin, then 34 dxc6.

32 ♗xf5!



Not of course 32 dxc6?? dropping the queen, but now if 32...♖xf5 33 dxc6 gives White a strong passed pawn as 33...♗xc6 34 ♗xe4 wins the exchange. 32...♖xd5 33 ♖xd5+ ♗xd5 34 ♗a4

The opening of lines in the centre is of enormous benefit to the white bishops as now he wins the exchange by force.

34...a6 35 ♗xb5 axb5 36 fxe4!

Winning Pawn Strategy

If you see a good move, don't be in a hurry to play it – look around to see if you can find anything better. White has no need to cash in at once with 36 Qd6 as the game move eliminates one of Black's dangerous pawns without allowing him to evade the fork on d6 – 36... Axex4 37 Kxxe4 Qxxe4 38 Qd6 costs Black a piece. 36... Qxc6 37 Qd6 Qf6 38 a6!

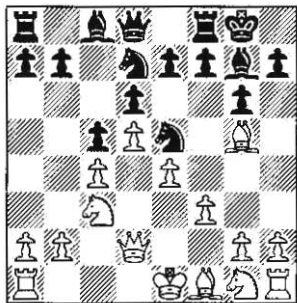
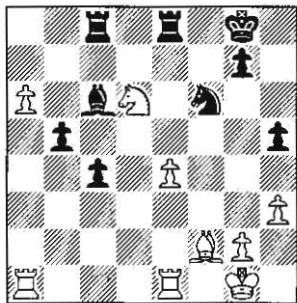
action by snatching the exchange immediately.

38... c3 39 a7 c2

Black's passed pawns will be no compensation for the exchange as White has a monster of his own on a7.

40 e5 Qe4 41 Qxe8 Kxe8 42 Kec1 1-0

Example Two



Again White refuses to give Black's pieces any freedom of

Kramnik-Lanka
Manila Olympiad 1992

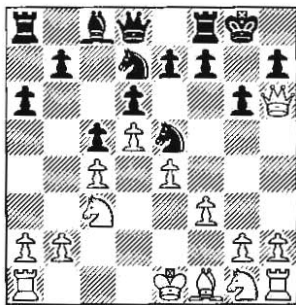
Concise Chess Middlegames

White's long-term plan is to roll forwards in the centre with f3-f4 and then e4-e5. But he must ensure this advance has the support of all his pieces as there is a lot of pent up dynamism in the black pieces. Furthermore, pushing a lot of pawns to gain space isn't automatically a good idea, as they form the skeleton of the position and if overstretched they can lose their flexibility and vitality.

You will notice that the bishop on g7 is Black's only minor piece that isn't in some way obstructed by his lack of space in the centre – his two knights are bunched awkwardly together, while the bishop on c8, which is temporarily shut in, will find in the future that it is deprived of promising posts by the white pawn structure, which guards such squares as c6, b5, e6, f5 and g4.

With these considerations in mind, Kramnik began with the circumspect **10 ♖h6!** in order to exchange off Black's best minor piece. This will reduce the dynamism in the position, which means that White's space advantage rises in significance.

10...♗xh6 11 ♚xh6 a6



Black envisages counterplay based on a standard plan in this type of pawn chain: the preparation of b7-b5. Here it involves a7-

Winning Pawn Strategy

a6, ♖b8 and ♔a5, as well as ♙d7 12...f6

if could be arranged; all these moves fight for control of b5, as a prelude to b5-b5 and then b5xc4, breaking open the b-file for the rook and undermining the white centre, of which e4 is a vital pillar. Or the pawn may advance from b5 to b4 to drive the white knight from its good centre post.

Although this plan never comes to fruition here, in many similar situations it proves to be highly annoying for White who often struggles to keep his centre intact.

12 h4!

Kramnik uses a direct threat to further his scheme of overrunning the centre. Now 13 h5 looms, when the h-file will be broken open and the black king will face summary execution. Therefore Lanka is compelled to weaken his pawn structure.

Now Black can no longer play e7-e6 to challenge the white centre and answer d5xe6 by recapturing f7xe6, keeping a solid centre. Also his knights are deprived of the f6 square: a serious matter as Black is fast running out of squares beyond his second rank that are suitable for a horse.

13 ♖d2

Kramnik is satisfied at having provoked a weakening of the black centre and so retreats his queen. A wise decision, as after 13 h5?? g5 she will be trapped by 14...♙f7.

13...♔a5 14 f4

At last Kramnik decides it is the right time to push the black knight from its post and in doing so he provides his own knight with a strong centre square on f3.

14...♙f7 15 ♙f3 ♖b8 16 a4!

Black's plan of 16...b5 is con-

Concise Chess Middlegames

founded, as the b5 square is now covered by four white units. If the black bishop on c8 and the white bishop on f1 vanished into thin air, then Black could already break out with 1...b5! due to the pin on the a-file. Here we see that the poor position of just one piece – the black bishop on c8 – can have a knock on affect that decides the outcome of the game. For this reason you should never consider a space advantage as a good or bad thing without analysing the affect it has on all the pieces – friend or foe.

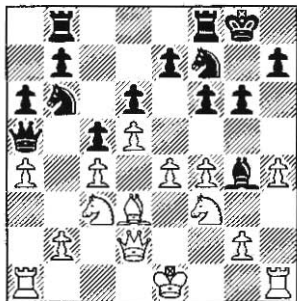
16...♘b6

From now until the end of the game Black plays almost exclusively with his pieces and hardly makes any pawn moves. This is a sure sign that something has gone awry with his strategy.

17 ♔d3 ♕g4

Now Black would love to play

18...♕xf3 19 gxf3 for three reasons:



Firstly, generally speaking every exchange helps the side with the less space. Secondly, the key square on the board is e5: it is this centre point which White must conquer if he is to stage a winning breakthrough with e4-e5. So in exchanging on f3 Black would be eliminating an enemy piece that can directly control e5 in return for a light-squared

Winning Pawn Strategy

bishop which doesn't even know that e5 exists. And thirdly, White's king needs a safe residence, which can only mean kingside castling. Whilst it is true that his kingside pawn structure has been slightly compromised by playing 12 h4, this is nothing compared to having it blasted open after 18...♙xf3 19 gxf3.

18 ♖h2!

A great player like Kramnik knows which pieces to keep as well as which pieces to exchange.

18...♙d7 19 b3!

Not only defending the a4 pawn but also clearing the b2 square for the queen so that she can support the e4-e5 advance from the wing.

19...♚h8 20 0-0 ♖a8

Black contemplates counterplay with ♘c7, ♙b4 and then b7-b5, but it is all too late to distract White from his central advance.

21 ♙b2 ♖g8 22 ♘f3 ♙g4 23 e5!!

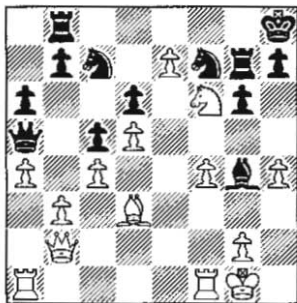


Kramnik now agrees to an exchange, but not as we might have imagined it: instead of a bishop, he wants a fearsome passed pawn and a strong attack on the dark squares in return for his knight.
23...♙xf3 24 exf6! ♙g4 25 fxe7 ♖g7

The rook blocks a discovered attack on the king, but the scattered black pieces cannot resist the strength of White's build up.

Concise Chess Middlegames

26 ♖e4 ♜c7 27 ♜f6



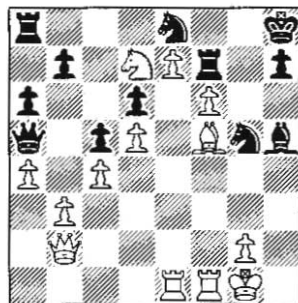
Step by step the white pieces take advantage of the holes in the black kingside. If you want to know why White has such an easy game to play when he is a piece down, you need only compare the white queen, who dictates the struggle from b2, with her opposite number on a5, who has spent the whole middlegame staring at the a4 pawn.

27... ♙h5 28 ♜ae1 ♜e8 29 ♜d7

♙a8 30 ♙f5!

Now Black has the unwelcome choice between allowing his opponent more avenues of attack with 30...gxf5 31 ♜xf5 or conceding a second passed pawn.

30...g5 31 hxg5 ♜xg5 32 f6 ♜f7
33 ♙f5!



White's minor pieces prepare to enmesh not only the black rook, but, as will be seen, the bishop on h5 as well.

33... ♜c7 34 ♜f8 h6 35 ♜e3 b5

36 g4

The bishop is cornered, after which Black might have done best to resign.

36...bxc4 37 gxh5 c3 38 ♖xc3
 ♜xd5 39 ♜d3 c4 40 bxc4 ♜c5+
 41 ♜d4!

Exchanging queens is often the best way to clarify a material advantage.

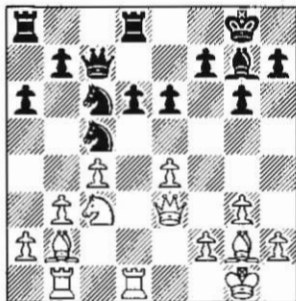
41...♜xd4+ 42 ♜xd4 ♞e3 43
 ♙g6 ♚g8 44 ♜xd6 1-0

After 44...♞xf1 one way to win is 45 ♜d8! ♜xd8 46 exd8♜ ♜xf8 47 ♜e7 ♞f7 48 ♙xf7+ ♜xf7 49 ♜e8+ ♜f8 50 ♜g6+ and mate follows.

Targeting pawns with the pieces

Example One

Adams-Topalov
 Wijk aan Zee 1998



Black's set up with the mini pawn centre d6/e6 opposed by pawns on c4 and e4 is referred to as a 'hedgehog': this is known to be a tough set up for an attacker to break down, as the black pawns are compact and durable. However, in this specific position there is a key factor in White's favour : the black king's bishop is normally placed on e7 in the hedgehog proper, where it bolsters the d6 pawn, whereas here

Concise Chess Middlegames

Topalov has chosen to fianchetto it on g7.

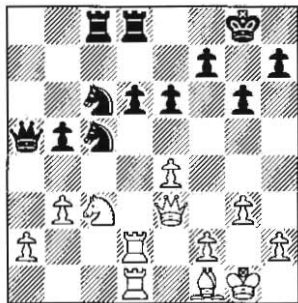
Therefore the backward pawn on d6 is not as well protected as usual. It makes a tempting target as it sits on an open file where it can be attacked from the front by the white rooks and queen. Furthermore, Black is hardly likely to be able to advance d6-d5 unless White completely loses control, as at the moment he is guarding the d5 square no less than five times. Hence the pawn can be said to be permanently fixed on d6, which helps White: it is always easier to attack a non-moving target.

Although the black bishop has gone AWOL from defensive duty on e7, it is nevertheless a valuable piece as it guards all the dark squares around his king and exerts pressure on the centre. Therefore White forced its exchange with

18 ♖e2! ♙xb2 19 ♖xb2

...which has also facilitated the attack on d6 by bringing the rook in contact with the d2 square. It duly arrived there after the moves 19...♖ac8 20 ♖c3 ♕a5 21 ♖bd2. Now rather than defend passively Black decided to counter-attack on the queenside with 21...b5!? – a stock idea in this type of pawn structure as it undermines the white centre and the knight on c3, which could suddenly find itself exposed to attack from the rook on c8 or driven from its centre post by b5-b4. White has no wish to be left with a weak pawn on c4 and so there followed 22 cxb5 axb5. Now 23 ♖xd6 ♖xd6 24 ♖xd6 b4 drives the white knight backwards and leaves the a2 pawn hanging. In that case Black's counter-attack would have achieved its aim. Instead Adams played 23 ♙f1!!.

Winning Pawn Strategy



This is a quiet and unobtrusive move yet absolutely vital if White is to keep control of the position. The bishop, which looked out of things on g2, becomes a star performer in restraining Black's counterplay.

23...♖a7

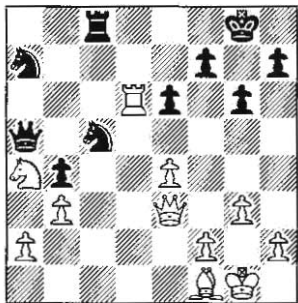
If 23...b4 we already see the influence of the bishop: the knight no longer has to retreat as 24 ♖b5! is made possible when 25 ♖xd6 follows with a crushing

advantage.

24 ♖xd6

This capture is all the stronger for having been delayed a move.

24...♖xd6 25 ♖xd6 b4 26 ♖a4!



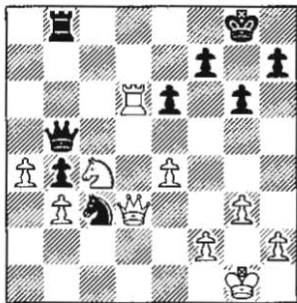
Again it is all thanks to the bishop that the knight doesn't have to retreat and give the a2 pawn. If now 26...♖xa4 27 bxa4 keeps the extra pawn as 27...♖xa4? 28 ♖a6 drops the knight – as the rook on a6 is defended by the bishop.

26...♖b5 27 ♗xb5 ♜xb5 28 ♘b6 ♜b8 29 ♘c4

Now White has a sound extra pawn and the superior piece coordination.

29...♘a4 30 ♜d3 ♘c3

Topalov strives to activate his game, but this allows 31 a4!



A remarkable transformation – the backward pawn on a2 becomes a strong outside passed pawn! Black has nothing to

counter it and resigned after 31...♜g5 32 ♔g2 ♜c1 33 a5 ♜a1 34 a6 ♜f8 35 ♘e5 ♘e2 36 ♜xe2 ♜xe5 37 ♜d3 ♜a5 38 ♜c4 h5 39 h4 1-0

Example Two



Adams-Topalov

FIDE World Championship KO, New Delhi/Theran 2000

Black played 15...♗c4 clearing the d5 square for his knight. If

left undisturbed he will continue ♞d5 and b5-b4 , with a strong attack against the white king. So White needs an active plan, but what should it be? As the black knight is heading for d5, Adams reasons that g7 will become a target, and so he puts his bishop forthwith on e5:

16 ♔f4! ♚b6

With the black king still in the centre moves like $16...e5$ should only be made if they win a piece, and even then they need to be checked carefully! Here the move would fall flat after the simple reply $17 ♚e3$.

17 ♔e5 ♞d5

After $17...♞d7$ $18 ♔g3$ the black knight has been diverted from its task on d5 whereas White's bishop is not all displeased to be on g3 where it is actively placed.

18 ♚he1!



Having gone to all the trouble of getting the bishop to e5 White isn't going to let it be pushed back with $18...f6$, which can now be answered by $19 ♞xe6!$, when White wins in all lines for example $19...fxe5$ $20 ♔xc4$ bxc4 $21 ♚xd5$ or $19...♚xe6$ $20 ♔xc4$ bxc4 $21 ♔g3$ winning Black's queen – this variation shows the value of $18 ♚he1$.

If you are playing White in such a situation, you could either

analyse all the variations after 18...f6 19 ♖xe6 to great depth or you could trust your intuition completely and say 'with all my pieces centralised and the black king wide open on e8, and Black's rooks and bishop on f8 still undeveloped, I *must* be winning after 18...f6 19 ♖xe6!'

In a practical game, most players adopt a compromise – they look at the variations fairly deeply and allow their intuition to play an important, but not dominant role.

18...0-0-0

As he cannot castle kingside due to the pressure on g7 Black evacuates his king to the queenside.

19 ♖d3!

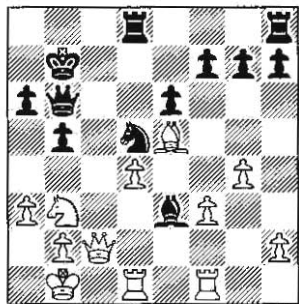
A simple-looking move, but how difficult to find! White puts further pressure on Black's kingside pawns – h7 is now attacked

which means developing the rook on h8 will cost Black a pawn, while if 19...f6 then 20 ♖xe6! works for a different reason – 20 ♖xe6 ♜xc6 21 ♖f5 wins the black queen. Finally if 19...♙xd3 then 20 cxd3! allows White to use the open c-file.

19...♙c5

Black tries to break free from the bind on his kingside in tactical style but it turns out badly.

20 ♖b3 ♙f2 21 ♜f1 ♙xd3 22 cxd3! ♙e3 23 ♜c2+ ♚b7 24 d4



Winning Pawn Strategy

White's positional advantage has increased as his knight now has the c5 square and his queen has taken over from his exchanged light square bishop in attacking h7. Meanwhile Black's g7 pawn is still hanging and to add to his woes the bishop is badly placed on e3.

24...f6

Black feels obliged to meet the threat to g7 and at the same time prepare a way for his stranded bishop on e3 to get back to its own camp via f8. On the other hand, a serious weakness now appears in Black's pawn structure on e6. This pawn is in the range of not only the white rooks along the e-file but also the white knight once it is ensconced on c5.

25 ♖g3 ♔a7 26 ♜fe1

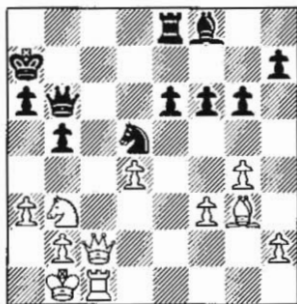
White is alert and immediately focuses his attention on the weak

pawn.

26...g6 27 ♜d3 ♕h6 28 ♜e2
♜he8 29 ♜c2

White's major pieces are co-operating nicely: one rook attacks the e6 pawn, the other rook contests the c-file and can be readily replaced by the queen after an exchange.

29...♜c8 30 ♜e1 ♜xc2 31 ♜xc2
♕f8 32 ♜c1!



Adams realises that he can combine an attack on the e6

pawn with a threat to invade on the seventh rank if he gets his rook to c6. This seems a tall order but he manages it in only four moves.

32...♔d6

Black cannot contest the c-file as after the continuation 32...♗h6 33 ♔c7! – a difficult move to see – Black is overwhelmed, for example 33...♘xc7 34 ♖xc7+ ♗b7 35 ♜c6! when Black has to concede the second rank to the white rook in view of the threat of 36 ♜xa6+! ♔xa6 37 ♖a5 mate, or 33...♗b7 34 ♖c5+ ♔a8 35 ♘a5 ♖xc7 36 ♖xc7 ♘xc7 37 ♜xc7 when the main threat is 38 ♘c6 followed by mate on a7.

33 ♖c6! ♜d8

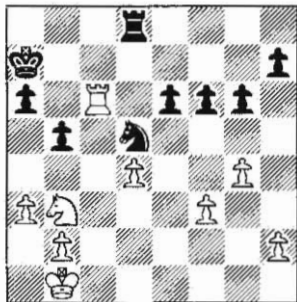
If 33...♖xc6 then 34 ♜xc6 ♔xg3 35 hxg3, when 36 ♘c5 will win a pawn on a6 or e6.

34 ♔xd6 ♜xd6 35 ♖e8

Now Black is compelled to

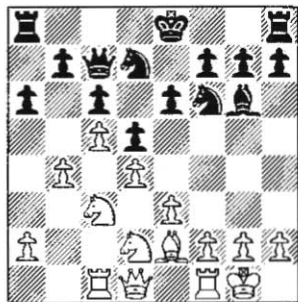
exchange queens or else White will build up a mating attack with 36 ♜c8.

35...♗d8 36 ♖xd8 ♜xd8 37 ♜c6



At last White has achieved his aim of getting his rook to c6. Black has no good answer to the threat of ♘c5. Topalov tried 37...♘f4 but he eventually lost the rook and pawn endgame that resulted after 38 ♘c5 ♜xd4 39 ♜xa6+ ♔b8 40 ♘xe6 ♘xc6 41 ♜xe6.

Creating passed pawns



Kramnik-Topalov

Dortmund 1999

The natural plan for White would be to advance on the queenside with a2-a4 and b4-b5 in order to increase his space advantage there. This would be in keeping with the rule of thumb that says you should try to put another pawn next to your furthest advanced pawn – here the

pawn on c5.

However, Black can respond to 14 a4 with 14...e5! when his counteraction in the centre will be at least a distraction for White, and possibly even a problem: after an exchange on d4 it will be easier for the black rooks to utilise the open e-file than for the white rooks.

So Kramnik found a better plan, that took advantage of the peculiarities of the position: he began with

14 f4!

to gain control of the c5 square and so prevent 14...e5. If now 14...0-0 White can exploit the bishop on g6 with 15 g4!, for example 15...h6 16 f5 exf5 17 gxf5 ♗h7. The bishop has been entombed on h7 and after 18 ♗d3 followed by 19 ♖f3 White is all set to begin an attack along the open g-file. Note that this plan is

only effective because the black bishop is a target on g6 in the initial position: it isn't automatically suggested by the pawn structure. In the game Topalov tried
14...♖g8

The aim is to manoeuvre the knight to e7 where it holds up the f4-f5 advance. It also clears the way for f7-f6 if necessary to provide an escape route for the bishop on g6. Unfortunately White can exploit Black's temporary lack of manpower in the centre to stage an advance there and smash up the black pawns:

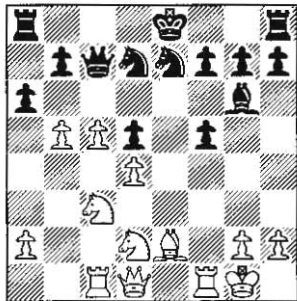
15 e4! ♘e7

If 15...dxe4 16 ♘dxc4 and a white knight can't be prevented from causing havoc on the d6 square.

16 f5! exf5 17 exd5 cxd5 18 b5

White has after all reverted to the plan of a queenside offensive with b4-b5 which was described

above. So why did he go to all the trouble of advancing his centre pawns? The reason is that he hopes by dislocating Black's centre pawns he has prevented, or at least enfeebled, any counter-attack either in the centre or on the kingside. This means he can act on the queenside without any distractions.



Note that in this instance the preparatory 18 a4 was unnecessary as 18...axb5? 19 ♘xb5 just

shows that there is more than one way for a white knight to get to d6.

18...0-0 19 b6 ♖d8 20 ♘b3!

White's plan is to turn his formidable queenside pawns into connected passed pawns by making a piece sacrifice either on a6 or b7. It would be foolish to rush the advance a4-a5 as it would take away the a5 square from the white knight, where it puts b7 under the microscope.

20... ♘f6 21 ♘a5 ♜b8 22 a4!

Not just a useful pawn advance, but also a clearance move that frees a2 so that the other white knight can head towards b4 and increase the pressure on Black's queenside pawns.

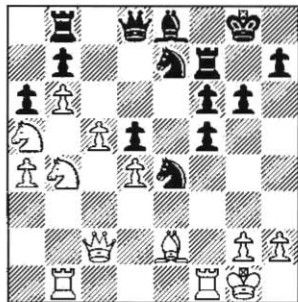
22... ♞e4 23 ♘a2 f6?

Black clears the way for his bishop to join in the defence of the queenside via e8, but this passive move is hardly in keeping

with the needs of the position – or indeed with Topalov's aggressive style of play. We might have expected 23...f4!, returning the extra pawn, when he would be able to generate counterplay in the centre after, for example, 34 ♜xf4 ♘f5 clearing the way for ♖g5.

Instead White has it all his own way and can build up undisturbed on the queenside.

24 ♘b4 ♙e8 25 ♖c2 g6 26 ♜b1 ♜f7



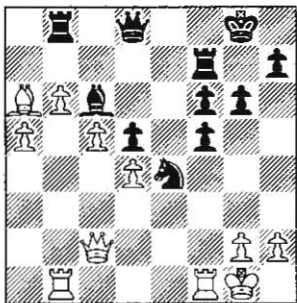
27 ♖xb7!

At last Kramnik decides all his preparations are complete and he detonates the black queenside with a long-expected sacrifice.

27... ♜xb7 28 a5!

The a6 pawn can wait as by protecting b6 again White threatens 29 c6.

28... ♖c6 29 ♖xc6 ♜xc6 30 ♜xa6 ♜b8



If you count the material you will see that White is a piece

down for a pawn – a huge material deficit, which in most cases would persuade him to resign at once. But there are more cheerful statistics for White – notably on the queenside he has a 3-0 advantage in pawns. These pawns are all far advanced, supporting each other and mobile. Furthermore Black doesn't have the slightest counterplay: the knight looks pretty on e4 but what exactly does it contribute to the black position? The black rooks have no open files available to them, apart from the e-file which is blocked by their own knight, and the queen has no inroads along either file or diagonal to counter-attack. Therefore it is easy to conclude that Black has no means, either direct or indirect, of stopping the white juggernaut on the queenside.

31 ♜b5!

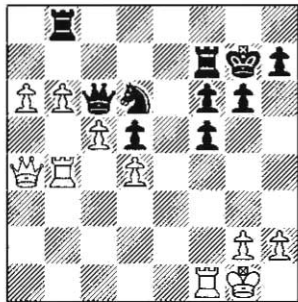
Winning Pawn Strategy

White removes another barrier to the passed pawns by exchanging off Black's bishop.

31... ♖c8 32 ♙xc6 ♗xc6 33 a6

The passed pawns are unstoppable. In order to win White only needs to make sure that a counter-sacrifice by Black's knight fails.

33... ♔g7 34 ♖b4 ♘d6 35 ♗a4!



Every exchange benefits White as it reduces both the chance of a swindle or a blockade of the passed pawns.

35... ♗xa4 36 ♖xa4 ♘c8 37 ♖b4 ♘a7

The knight sacrifices itself to split up the passed pawns; normally a good idea as isolated passed pawns are vastly inferior to connected ones, but all hope has already gone here.

38 bxa7 ♖a8 39 c6 ♖axa7 40 ♖c1 1-0

One of various winning methods for White would be 41 c7 ♖fxc7 42 ♖xc7+ ♖xc7 43 ♖b7 when the remaining passed pawn will shortly queen.

Chapter Nine

Exchanging Pieces and Simplification

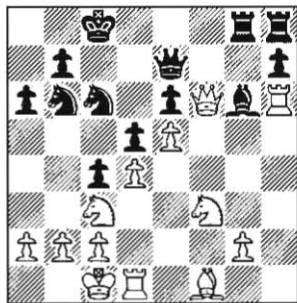
The nature of a position can change totally when queens are exchanged. A king who was cowering with fear in the corner might be emboldened to advance towards the centre; or a player who had a strong initiative in return for an inferior pawn structure suddenly has to worry about how he can save the endgame.

For this reason knowing when to avoid an exchange of queens, when to accept it and when to seek it is a key decision in a game.

Exchange of queens incorrectly avoided

Here White would have some

pressure on the kingside after 19 ♔xe7 ♚xc7 20 g4, when the black pieces are denied the f5 square. Instead Shirov played the immediate



Shirov-Morozevich
Frankfurt 2000

Exchanging Pieces and Simplification

19 g4

No doubt he considered there was no need to rush to exchange queens, as if 19... ♖xf6 20 exf6 he has a passed pawn which can be strengthened by 21 g5. But Morozevich played the simple

19... ♕e8!!

with the threat of 20... ♖f8, winning the knight on f3 with a skewer. (A skewer is similar to a pin, but with the stronger piece in front – it has to move out of the way and let the less valuable piece behind it be captured.)

After 20 ♖g5 White must reckon with another skewer: 20... ♖xd4! 21 ♖xd4 ♖f8, this time the piece on the line behind the queen is the bishop. After 22 ♕xe6+ ♕xe6 23 ♖xe6 ♖xf1+ 24 ♖d1 ♖xd1+ 25 ♔xd1 ♖e8 White is fighting for a draw as his pawns are more scattered than Black's. Instead White played the passive

20 ♖g2 and came under a sudden and brutal attack:

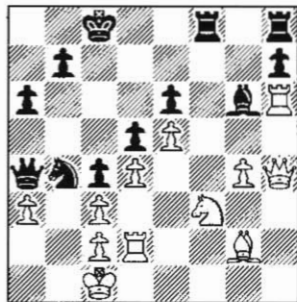
20... ♖f8 21 ♕h4 ♖b4!

The c2 pawn is now attacked twice.

22 ♖d2 ♖a4!

The white queen and a rook are sidelined on the h-file. Therefore it is no wonder that there are insufficient pieces to defend the king. Now 23 ♖xa4 ♕xa4 leaves both a2 and c2 hanging.

23 a3 ♖xc3 24 bxc3 ♕a4!



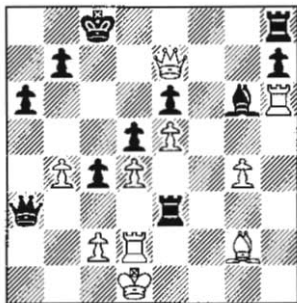
A deadly blow. Remember 27...♖e3!
 this queen would have been sitting with the other captured pieces if Shirov had exchanged it!
25 cxb4

25 axb4 ♖a1 mate is an easy variation, while both a3 and c2 were attacked, so this move was forced. After this capture it isn't hard to see that Black will recoup material with ♜xf3, so he is exchanging a rook for a bishop and a pawn with a huge attack on the white king thrown in as a bonus. It isn't necessary to calculate long variations to see that this is an absolute bargain for Black.

25...♖xa3+ 26 ♔d1 ♜xf3 27 ♖e7

A despairing attempt to use his own queen. Hopeless is 27 ♙xf3 ♖xf3+ 28 ♔c1 (or 28 ♜c2 ♙xc2+ 29 ♔xc2 ♖xc2+) 28...♖c3 – threatening mate on a1 – 29 ♔d1 ♜f8 with a decisive attack.

27...♖e3!



Cutting off the white king's escape with the threat of mate on a1.

28 ♖xe6+ ♔b8 29 ♖d6+ ♔a8 30 ♜e2 ♖a1+ 31 ♔d2 ♖c3+ 0-1

If 32 ♔d1 then 32...♙xc2+ 33 ♜xc2 ♜e1 mate.

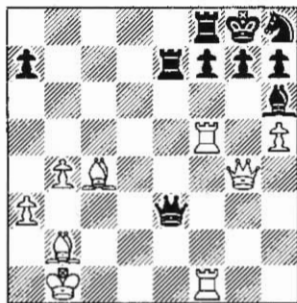
Shirov got so engrossed in his own attacking plans on the king-side that he completely underestimated the danger to his king. The golden rule is: if you want to

Exchanging Pieces and Simplification

defeat an attack on your king, exchange off queens.

Manoeuvring to exchange queens

Example One



Bareev-Akopian

Wijk aan Zee 2004

White has two bishops aiming at Black's kingside, the rooks doubled against f7 and the queen

on an open file attacking g7. Therefore you might be expecting the game to end in fireworks, with a sacrifice or two. Indeed, many players would become excited as White here and be looking for the killer tactical blow.

But remember that all Black's pieces – even the buried knight on h8 which defends f7 – are performing a defensive role on the kingside. So if White lunges against the black king he will be attacking his opponent where he can expect maximum resistance.

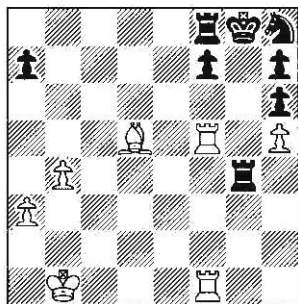
Instead Bareev found a far superior solution to the position with a simplifying sequence:

32 ♖c1! ♜e4+ 33 ♜xe4 ♜xe4 34 ♙d5 ♜g4 35 ♙xh6 gxh6

The disappearance of the queen means that Black is unlikely to be mated. But in the endgame he is left with the tortoise-like knight on h8, whilst the white

Concise Chess Middlegames

bishop can rove hare-like all over the board. White has a majority of pawns on the queenside which can be turned into a passed pawn with the help of the bishop and king.



It takes a long time for Bareev to exploit his advantage, especially as Akopian defends heroically; but there is an air of inevitability about the outcome, whereas if White had gone for a headlong attack on the black king there is

always a chance that things could go wrong.

36 ♖b2 ♕g7 37 ♖b3 ♜g5 38 ♕a4

The white king advances step by step to help his pawns advance. He has been far more empowered by the exchange of queens than the black king, who never manages to get beyond g7. So it could be said that White has gained a king by exchanging queens!

38...♞d8 39 ♔c4 ♜d4 40 ♔b3 ♞h4 41 ♞a5!

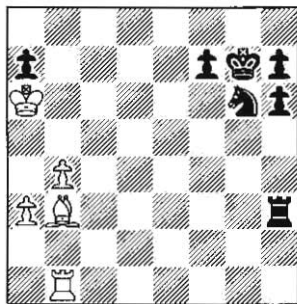
Forcing another favourable exchange. There was no reason whatsoever to rid Black of his bad knight with 41 ♞xf7+? ♘xf7 42 ♞xf7+ ♕h8.

41...♞xa5+ 42 ♕xa5 ♞xh5+ 43 ♕a6 ♞h3 44 ♞b1 ♘g6

Only now does the knight awake. Black also has passed pawns, but they are split and

Exchanging Pieces and Simplification

more difficult to advance than White's well-supported connected passed pawns.



45 ♔xa7 ♖e5 46 b5 ♜d3 47 b6
♘c6+ 48 ♔a6 h5 49 b7 h4 50
♚b6 ♘b8

It is quite remarkable that Black has managed to get his knight from h8 into a blocking role on the queenside, but it isn't enough to save the game.

51 a4 ♜d4 52 ♔c5 ♜g4 53 ♙c4
♘d7+ 54 ♔d6 ♘b8 55 ♙b5 1-0

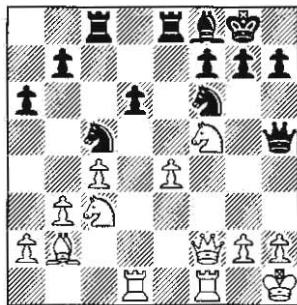
The knight is stalemated and will be lost after 56 ♔c7.

Many players, when they are engaged in a direct attack on the opponent's king, dislike the idea of exchanging off into an endgame, no matter how promising – they want to save time and effort and have the pleasure of a quick win, rather than have to grind things out in the endgame. For this reason, Romanian GM Suba points out that if you are facing a big attack on your king a good defensive technique is to 'bully' your opponent by offering him the chance to swap to a winning endgame – the chances are he won't take it. Of course, this idea wouldn't work against Bareev!

Example Two

In the following example, there

appears to be no great advantage in pawn structure for either side, as both the d6 and e4 pawns are isolated and threatened with capture. But Adams found a clever way to rid himself of White's weak pawn whilst condemning his opponent to the passive defence of the weakling on d6:



Adams-Kengis

Aarhus 1997

21 ♔xf3!

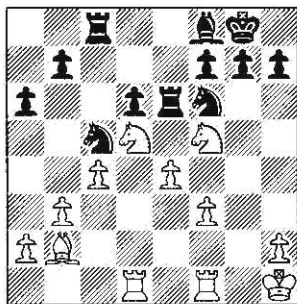
This can be said to remove the dynamism from the black position. Here once again it must be asserted that a positionally strong decision is almost always based on a tactical variation, namely Black loses a piece if he tries to grab the e4-pawn: 21...♘xc4? 22 ♘xc4 ♙xe4 23 ♖xf6 ♗xf3 24 gxf3 and Black's rook is hanging so he can't recapture on f6.

Now besides 22 ♘xd6 Black has to reckon with 22 ♘d5! undermining the defender of his queen, when 22...♗xf3 23 ♘xf6+ gxf6 24 gxf3 leaves his pawns wrecked, so with a heavy heart Kengis played 21...♗xf3 but after 22 gxf3! the e4 pawn was suddenly well protected and White had the open g-file along which to put pressure on g7. In addition, Black has to deal with the threat to his d6 pawn. Looking at the game continuation, you will see

Exchanging Pieces and Simplification

how the simple 21 ♔f3! has completely ruined Black's chances:

22...♖e6 23 ♘d5!



As so often the square in front of a centre isolated pawn provides a perfect knight outpost as it cannot be evicted by a pawn.

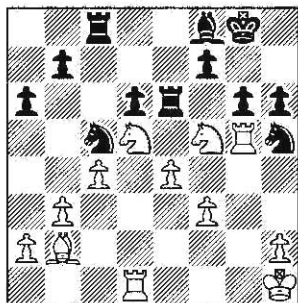
23...♘h5

After 23...♘d5 White has the extremely pleasant choice between 24 ♖xd5, intending to increase the pressure on the backward pawn with 25 ♖fd1, or 24

24 ♖g1, which forces Black to put his rook on g6 where it is shut out of the game, as 24...♖e8 25 ♘xg7! ♘xg7 26 ♖g1 followed by 27 ♖xg7+ leaves White a pawn up with a crushing position.

24 ♖g1 g6 25 ♖g5! h6

Black has to make a hole for his king as White threatened 26 ♖xh5! gxh5 27 ♖g1+ ♖g6 28 ♘fe7+ and he will be a piece up.



26 ♖xh5!

This no longer wins a piece

Concise Chess Middlegames

but it completes the destruction of Black's pawn structure.

26...gxh5 27 ♖f6+ ♜xf6

Even worse is 27...♙h8 28 ♜g1, threatening mate on g8.

28 ♙xf6 b5

The pawn on d6 drops as after 28...♜c6 29 ♙c7! (stronger than 29 ♖e7+ ♙xe7 30 ♙xe7, which wins the d6-pawn) Black has no good answer to the threat of 30 ♜g1+ winning the bishop as 29...♙xe7 30 ♖xe7+ is fatal.

29 cxb5 axb5 30 ♖xd6



Now White has won his pawn and wrapped things up as follows:

30...♜a8 31 b4 ♖e6 32 ♖xb5

♜xa2 33 ♖c3 ♜f2 34 b5 ♙c5 35

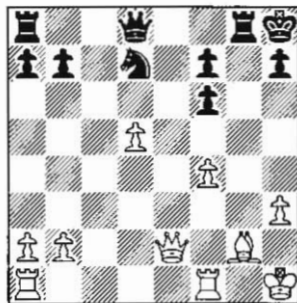
♖d5 ♜xf3 36 ♜b1 ♖f4 37 ♖xf4

♜xf4 38 ♙d8 ♜xe4 39 b6 ♜b4

40 ♜xb4 ♙xb4 41 ♙h4! 1-0

If 41...♙d6 then 42 ♙g3 and the pawn goes through.

Example Three



McDonald-Gait

London League 2004

Exchanging Pieces and Simplification

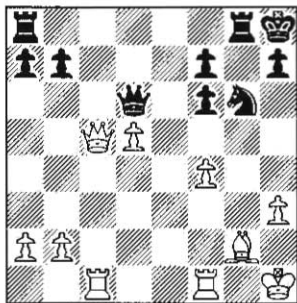
In the endgame White's endgame. passed pawn should be more valuable than Black's doubled pawns on the f-file, while his long-range bishop should outwit the knight. But as Tartakower remarked 'before the endgame the gods have placed the middle-game'. Black played 19...♖f8 with the following attacking plan in mind: manoeuvre the knight to h4, put the queen on d6 and double the rooks on the open g-file. If White took no measures against this he would soon end up in big trouble. So he prepared to confound this plan by setting up the exchange of queens:

20 ♖ac1 ♗g6 21 ♚f2!

Not only deterring 21...♗h4 but preparing his next move.

21...♚d6 22 ♚c5!

An unwelcome offer which ruins Black's attacking plan and forces him into an unpleasant



22...♚xc5 23 ♖xc5 ♗h4

Black persists in trying to land a strong blow along the g-file, but in the absence of queens it has far less effect.

24 ♖f2 ♖g3 25 d6 ♖d3 26 ♖d5!

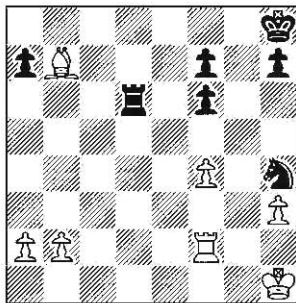
Now Black is forced into another exchanging sequence that favours White.

26...♖xd5 27 ♗xd5 ♖d8 28 ♗xb7 ♖xd6

It might appear that White

Concise Chess Middlegames

has only a positional advantage because of his superior minor piece and pawn majority on the queenside.



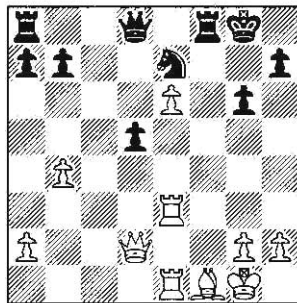
But as always, it is necessary to look at the tactical 'landscape' of the position as well as general ideas of pawn majorities and better pieces. This reveals that White has a decisive advantage for a rather unexpected reason: after **29 f5!** the black knight is trapped on h4 and cannot be saved from

capture despite the best efforts of the black rook and king. There followed:

29...♖d4 30 ♔h2 ♕g7 31 ♔g3
♜b4 32 ♙h1 a5 33 a3 ♖d4 34
♜f4 ♜d1 35 ♙e4 1-0

Black resigned as all his delaying tactics are at an end and the knight finally perishes.

Example Four



Kramnik-Shirov
Tilburg 1997

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Here Black has a clear plan to improve his position: ♖b6 (with the incidental threat of ♘f5 winning the exchange) then ♜f6 and ♜af8, when his rooks command the open file and his queen and knight guard all the important dark squares.

Kramnik found a clever way of opposing this plan: 22 ♖d4!. White walks straight into a knight fork as he has foreseen that after 22...♘f5 23 ♖e5 the threat of his own fork on e7 is deadly, for example 23...♖b6 24 e7 ♜fe8 25 ♖xd5+ with a decisive attack. So Shirov tried

22...♖d6 23 ♖c5!

Now Black should agree to the exchange of queens with 23...♖xc5 24 bxc5 when White can try to put pressure on b7 with ♜b1 etc. but Black should defend adequately. Instead Shirov per-

sisted in playing for the attack and was severely punished:

23...♖f4? 24 ♜f3

Not of course 24 ♖xe7? ♖f2+ 25 ♖h1 ♖xf1+ 26 ♜xf1 ♜xf1 mate.

24...♖g5 25 ♜f7!



A good example of a conversion of one advantage into another. White gives up his passed pawn but in return opens lines for all his pieces and puts the black king in jeopardy.

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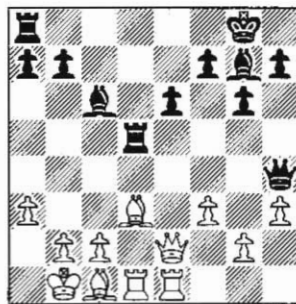
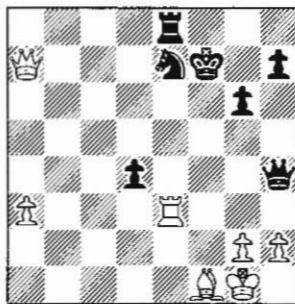
25... ♖xf7 26 exf7+ ♔xf7 27 ♔e2 ♖c8 35 ♖xd4 ♖c1+ 36 ♖c7!

The pin on the knight is highly unpleasant. You can bet that Shirov was kicking himself for not exchanging queens!

27... ♖h4 28 ♖e3 ♖xb4 29 a3 ♖h4 30 ♖xb7 ♖e8 31 ♖xa7 d4

Not only has Black lost his passed pawn but he is also facing a mating attack.

Exchanging pieces to increase advantage



Now Black collapses, but if he sits tight then Kramnik can simply advance his own passed pawn all the way up the board.

32 ♔c4+ ♔f8 33 g3 ♖g4 34

Nothing much seems to be going on here, but White gained

Adams-Prusikhin

German Bundesliga 2002

Exchanging Pieces and Simplification

the advantage by offering a series of judicious exchanges:

27 ♖e4! ♜xd1?

Black would have done better to enter complications with 27...♞e5!? 28 ♛d2 ♙xe4 29 fxe4.

28 ♜xd1 ♙xe4

Black doesn't want to be left with split pawns on the queenside after 28...♛e7 29 ♙xc6 bxc6.

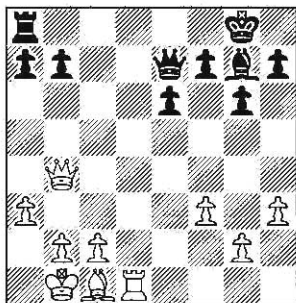
29 ♛xe4 ♛e7

Black could give White an isolated pawn with 29...♛xe4 30 fxe4, but he would then be powerless to prevent the invasion of his second rank with 31 ♜d7. In this scenario the e4 pawn would hardly be a target as Black would be too preoccupied with his own weaknesses to ever attack it.

30 ♛b4!

White would love to exchange off queens and bishops and leave himself with a good rook on d1 against a passive rook on a8. In

order to avoid this the black queen has to keep running from her opposite number, which allows White to improve the coordination of his pieces with gain of time.

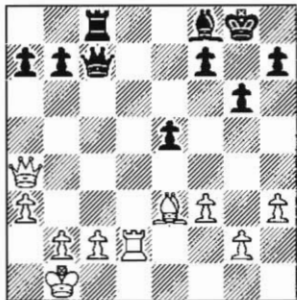


30...♛c7 31 ♙f4! e5

Now Black has to shut in his bishop as if 31...♙e5 then 32 ♙xe5 ♛xe5 33 ♜d7 b6 34 ♛e4! ♛xe4 35 fxe4 gives White the endgame he has been hoping for.

32 ♙e3 ♞c8 33 ♜d2

Patience: White defends c2 and so threatens 34 ♙xa7. Adams has gained some small advantages which on their own might not seem very important, but collectively they add up to a clear plus. His queen, rook and bishop are all slightly better placed than Black's pieces and can work together to put pressure both on Black's queenside pawns and the d7 square: the key invasion point for his rook into the black camp.



33...♙f8

33...b6 34 ♖a4 (intending to win a pawn with 35 ♖d7) 34...♗b8 35 ♖d7 ♖c7 36 ♖xc7 ♗xc7 37 ♗c8+ ♙f8 38 ♙h6 ♗e7 39 ♗a8 leaves Black completely paralysed.

34 ♗a4!

The ideal square for the white queen, where she attacks a7, guards c2 and supports a rook invasion on d7.

34...b5

Black gambles everything on a counter-attack as the alternative 34...a6 is too passive and after 35 ♖d7 ♗b8 36 ♗b3 leaves f7 indefensible.

35 ♗xa7 ♗c4 36 ♗d7

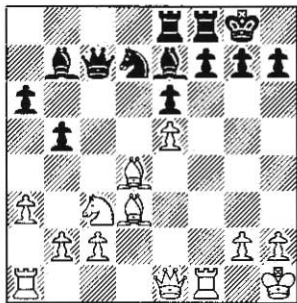
The well-centralised white pieces easily beat off Black's offensive, when the extra pawn on the queenside proves decisive. The game ended 36...♗f1+ 37 ♖d1 ♗e2 38 ♗xc8 ♗xd1+ 39

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♔a2 ♕g7 40 ♖c3 ♗d5+ 41 b3
♙d6 42 ♗d3 ♖c6 43 c4 1-0

A real tour de force of positional chess – White built up a win out of nothing.

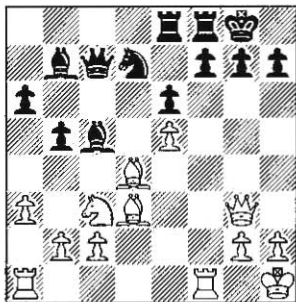
Avoiding exchanges to keep sufficient pieces for a direct attack



A typical Sicilian position: White is looking to attack on the kingside, whilst Black seeks coun-

terplay with his minor pieces in the centre or on the queenside.

The natural way for White to continue his attack is with 17 ♗g3, perhaps followed by 18 ♗h3 to force Black to weaken the pawn structure in front of his king. But this can be answered by 17...♙c5!



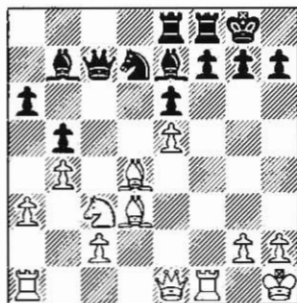
The forced exchange of bishops is most unwelcome to White, as he wants things to stay quiet in the centre whilst he pursues his

kingside attack. Furthermore, every exchange of piece lessens the chance of his attack being successful. After **18 ♖xc5** – what else? – **18...♗xc5** he can't even play **19 ♗h3** as **19...♗xd3** kills the threat to h7 – and wins a pawn after **20 ♗xd3 ♗xc5**. If White continues trying to play aggressively he is soon in big trouble, e.g. **19 ♖ae1 ♗d8 20 ♖e2 ♗e4!** – another annoying exchange – **21 ♗xe4 ♖xe4 22 c3 ♗d5** when besides losing control of the d-file White has to reckon with the loss of the e5 pawn.

All White's travails can be avoided if in the diagram position he plays **17 b4!** (see following diagram) to prevent **17...♖c5**.

It looks incredibly ugly to weaken the queenside pawns in this fashion and leave a hole on

c4, but White is maintaining vital dynamism in his position by preventing simplification. Play could go **17...♗b6 18 ♗e4 ♖xe4** – this exchange suits White as he gets rid of Black's active bishop and gets his queen to a strong attacking square – **19 ♗xc4 g6 20 h4!** and White is ready to wear down the black pawn structure with **h4-h5**.



Chapter Ten

Knights and Bishops

It is terribly hard to devise a strategy that suits both knights and bishops: you could say that 'Bishops are from Mars' and 'Knights from Venus'. A knight likes a closed, fixed pawn structure, whereas a bishop likes fluidity and open lines. No wonder it isn't easy to make everyone happy in your camp when there are such disparate individuals! And furthermore, if you do open lines to appease your bishop, then the opponent's bishop is going to be a beneficiary as well.

First of all we'll look at the knight, beginning with a fantastic manoeuvre by Michael Adams.

Knight manoeuvre to exploit weak square



Adams-S.Haslinger

Four Nations Chess League,
Telford 2003

A white knight would be brilliantly placed on b4, where it not only attacks the bishop on a6 that is tied to the defence of the b5 pawn, but also blocks the advance

b5-b4 which would get rid of the weak pawn and eyes the hole in Black's pawn structure on c6. Here 19 ♖c2 and 19 ♗b4 is possible, but this would relinquish the attack on b5 and allow the black bishop to retreat to b7, perhaps followed by a break out with c7-c6.

Instead Adams decided to put the other knight on b4:

16 ♖h2! ♕g6?

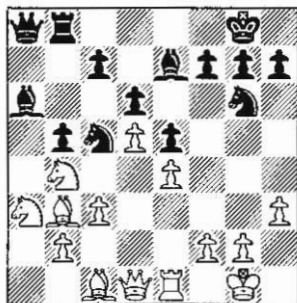
Understandably Black doesn't want to allow White to acquire the bishop pair after 17 ♖g4 and 18 ♗xf6+ but the time spent preserving the bishop from exchange allows the white knight to reach c2 before Black has time to get rid of his weak pawn with ♗b8 and b5-b4. Furthermore, the black knight leaves e7 and so gives up its important role in guarding the c6 square. A better method was 16...g6 17 ♖g4 ♕g7

when Black is poised to generate counterplay with f7-f5.

17 ♖g4 ♕e7 18 ♗e3 ♗b8 19 ♖ec2

Just in time to prevent 19...b5-b4.

19...♗c5 20 ♗b4



Mission accomplished! The black queenside is now under severe restraint and because the black bishop is on c7 there is no way to prevent the white knight getting one step further to c6:

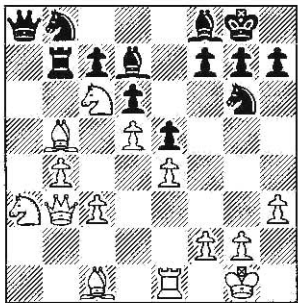
20...♔c8 21 ♘c6

A quite phenomenal manoeuvre – from f3 over to c6 in six moves.

21...♞b7 22 ♔c2!

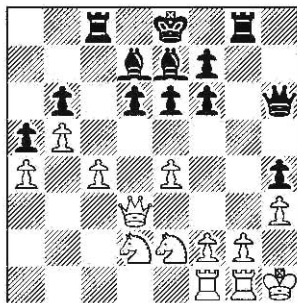
White plans b2-b4, ♔d3 and if necessary ♚e2 to win the b5 pawn.

22...♔d7 23 b4 ♘a6 24 ♔d3 ♔f8 25 ♔xb5 ♘b8 26 ♚b3



and White, with a sound extra pawn, has a decisive advantage and won in 62 moves.

A pair of knights defeat the bishop pair



Ivanchuk-Kasparov

Linares 1991

In blocked positions it can be an advantage to have knights rather than bishops. As a very general rule, the more pawns that have been exchanged the more valuable a bishop is likely to become: it thrives on open lines and likes to have undefended enemy

pawns to attack, so the more the pawn structure breaks up the better as far as it is concerned. The knight on the other hand is content in a blocked position as long as it has a safe and useful square. One of the dilemmas for a player with knights facing an opponent with bishops is that even if he establishes a clear positional advantage in a blocked position, it is almost inevitable that he will have to open the position at some point to try to clinch the win, and then the bishops may have the last laugh.

Here Ivanchuk has achieved an impressive bind that has neutralised the famous bishop pair. If you try placing the black bishops on c5 and b7, you will see that Black suddenly has an excellent game. This little experiment shows that it is not only White's pawns that are stopping the bish-

ops functioning properly – for example, the b5 pawn stops ♖c6 and ♗b7 – but also Black's own pawns – the d6 pawn gets in the way of ♗c5.

Sometimes the expression 'good' or 'bad' bishop is used to describe a bishop that is either on the opposite colour to most of its own pawns ('good') or on the same colour squares to most of its own pawns ('bad'). This definition has value in the endgame, but in the middlegame it isn't always helpful. A so-called 'bad' bishop is indeed obstructed if it is shut inside its pawn chain; but it can be valuable if it is outside the pawn chain. For example in the diagram above the 'bad' bishop on e7 would hardly be a bad piece if it were sitting outside its pawn chain on c5.

Ivanchuk found a way to stage a breakthrough on the

queenside and create a passed pawn without allowing the black bishops any scope:

23 c5!! ♖xc5

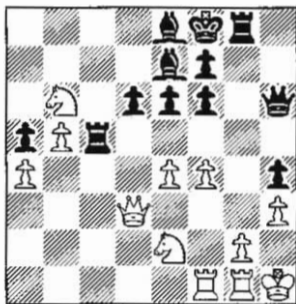
If 23...bxc5 then 24 ♘c4, when White can either capture on d6 or create connected passed pawns with 25 ♘xa5. Alternatively 23...dxc5 24 ♘c4 ♖b8 25 ♗d1 gives White a lethal attack down the d-file for if 25...♖b7, 26 ♘xb6!.

24 ♘c4 ♗f8 25 ♘xb6!

Ivanchuk avoids 25 ♘xd6 as this might help Black to activate his bishop on c5 or d6 at some point in the future.

25...♗e8 26 f4!

Now the threat is 27 f5 when the black bishops will be totally boxed in, and White will be able to queen the passed pawn at his leisure. Therefore Kasparov took the only chance to create some air for his pieces with



26...f5 27 exf5 ♖xf5

Nevertheless, the position has opened too early for Black as his bishops are still on passive squares and he will be defeated before he can activate them:

28 ♖c1! ♔g7

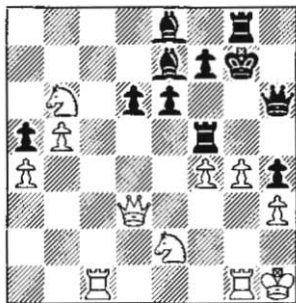
He has to avoid a killer pin with 29 ♖c8.

29 g4!

Now the black pieces become entangled in the tentacles of the white pawn structure on the king-

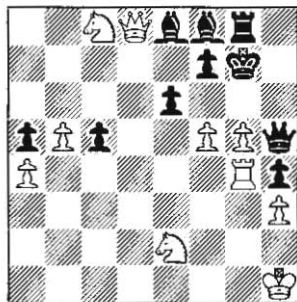
Concise Chess Middlegames

side, as if 29...hxg3 then 30 ♖xg3+ wins at once.



same fate as her bishops at the hands of the white pawns.

34... ♖h5 35 ♖g4



29... ♖c5 30 ♖xc5 dxc5 31 ♘c8 ♙f8

Seldom have a bishop pair been so powerless in the hands of a great World Champion.

32 ♖d8 ♖g6 33 f5!

Black isn't to be allowed even the ghost of counterplay with 33 ♖xc8 ♖d3.

33... ♖h6 34 g5

The black queen suffers the

The last path to activity for the black queen is blocked.

35... exf5 36 ♘f4 ♖h8

A wretched square for a self-respecting queen but if 36... ♖h7 37 ♖f6 mate.

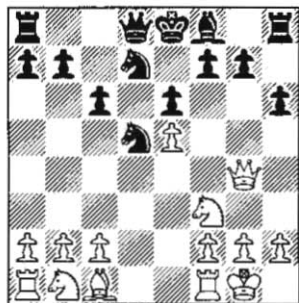
37 ♖f6+ ♖h7 38 ♖xh4+ 1-0

Black has been pole-axed. It was all thanks to the white pawns, who exerted a pincer-like grip

across the whole board: queen-side, centre and kingside.

The drawbacks of the knight exposed

Knights are short range pieces that need a secure post in or near the centre to function well. When this is denied they can be reduced to a pitiful state of decrepitude.



Adams-Burgess

Prestwich 1990

First of all White restricted and then evicted the black knight from its active centre square.

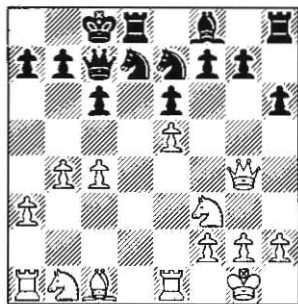
12 a3!

Stopping ♖b4.

12...♙c7 13 ♜c1 0-0-0 14 c4 ♘e7

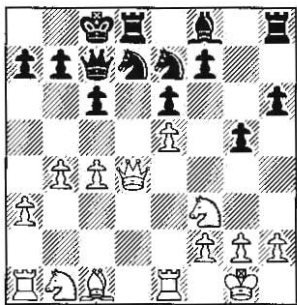
Mission accomplished, but now Black threatens to activate his other knight with 15...♘c5, with ideas of ♖b3 or ♘d3, so no time is to be lost in controlling the c5 square.

15 b4!



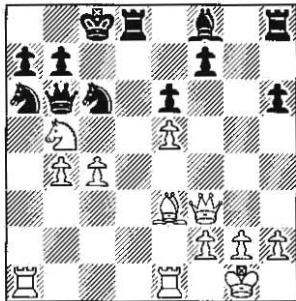
Concise Chess Middlegames

Now the black knights have been denied any good posts in the centre. After 15...g5, White decided it was time to take positive action to win a post for his knight on b1: 16 ♖d4!



attacking a7 and provoking 16...c5, so that after 17 ♖e4 ♘c6 18 ♘c3 cxb4 19 ♘b5 the white knight has been provided with a fine attacking square. 19...♘c5 20 ♖e3 ♖b6 21 axb4 ♘a6 and again the black knight is com-

pelled to retreat, as 21...♘xb4 22 ♖xa7 is too strong. 22 ♖e2 g4 23 ♘e3! gx f3 24 ♖xf3



The black queen is boxed in by her knights and can only be saved by allowing all the lines of attack against her king to be opened.

24...♘d4 25 ♘xd4 ♖xd4 26 ♘xd4 ♖xd4 27 ♖ed1 1-0

Black resigned as if 27...♖xe5 (or 27...♖b6 28 c5 ♖b5 29 ♖f6) 28 ♖xa6! bxa6 29 ♖a8+ ♖b8 -

29...♔c7 30 ♖xa7+ – 30 ♜d8+ wins his queen.

The knights seize a key centre square



Ovsejevitch-Morozevich
USSR Junior Championships,
Jurmala 1992

White has the bishop pair, full development and a solid-looking position, but there is a hole in his pawn structure: the d4-square.

This would make a perfect outpost for a black knight – it would be right in the thick of the action and could never be driven away by a white pawn.

Morozevich began a long manoeuvre to get the knight from f6 into contact with the d4 square:

13...♞d7! 14 ♖e2

A passive response. If the position remains closed the black knights are going to dominate the bishop pair. Therefore White should be trying to create tension on the kingside, for example 14 g3 ♞dc5 15 h4 h5 16 ♔g5 f6 17 ♙e3 ♞e6 18 ♙h3 with active play.

14...♞dc5 15 f3 ♞e6 16 ♖f2 b6!

Black is in no hurry to put the knight on d4 as after 16...♞d4 17 ♞d2 ♞fd8 18 ♞ed1 ♞d7 19 ♞e2 c5 20 ♞c3! the d5 square falls into White's hands. So Morozevich intends to manoeuvre his

other knight from its offside position on a6 to d4.

17 a3 ♖ac5 18 b4 ♖b3 19 ♚b2
♜bd4



Black has achieved his aim and the d4 square is under his control. The next step is to build up an initiative on the kingside.

20 ♜e2 h5!

A standard idea in such positions. Advancing the pawn to h4 will increase Black's ascendancy on the dark squares.

21 ♙f2 h4 22 ♜xd4

White can't bear to wait passively any longer, but the opening of lines leads him to destruction.

22... ♜xd4 23 ♙xd4 exd4

The black knights have done their duty as the double exchange on d4 has altered the pawn structure decisively in Black's favour – and by no means just because he has a passed pawn. Now it is the turn of the black bishop to show its worth.

Opposite coloured bishops

Example One

You may be wondering if the opposite-coloured bishop means that it will be a draw? Not at all! In the middlegame they often increase the dynamism of a position.



Ovsejevitch-Morozevich

USSR Junior Championships,
Jurmala 1992 (continued)

There is an aphorism that says when there are opposite-coloured bishops the player with the attack is a piece up. Whilst this is of course an exaggeration it points to the fact that the defender will always be lacking a man if pressure is applied to a key point on an opposite colour square to his

bishop. Here for example if it was Black's move he could get a grip on the kingside dark squares with ♙e5, ♜g5 and ♜f4, hitting h2; none of these squares can be contested by White's bishop.

Meanwhile the white bishop is obstructed by its own pawns, and even if it did escape it isn't clear if it could attack anything. We can therefore conclude that Black has a clear positional advantage as his bishop has the potential to utilise the dark square diagonals a1-h8 and b8-h2, whereas White's bishop has no diagonals of such worth.

We can also see that e5 is the pivotal point between the black bishop's two diagonals of influence. It would therefore be a superb post for the black bishop in the centre.

24 e5!

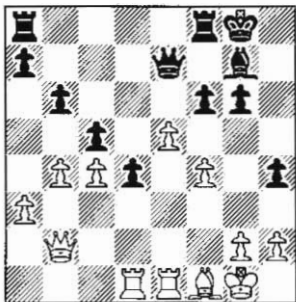
White denies the black bishop

the e5 square. If given time he will activate his own bishop with f3-f4, ♖e2 and ♖f3, when he will be the player who benefits from the opposite bishops.

24...c5

Not 24...♖xe5? 25 f4.

25 f4 f6!



Breaking up the barrier to his bishop.

26 e6

The f4-pawn is left fatally weak after 26 exf6 ♖xf6.

26...f5!

It is essential to reactivate the bishop immediately before White can play 27 f5!

27 g3

White has to clear the way for ♖g2 and ♖d5 or else Black can just round up the e6 pawn with ♖f6 and ♖xe6.

27...d3!



Here also Black must act fast to break open the kingside before White can consolidate. Totally

wrong would be 27...♖f6 28 ♔g2 ♜e8 29 ♔d5 and the white bishop has found an active role.

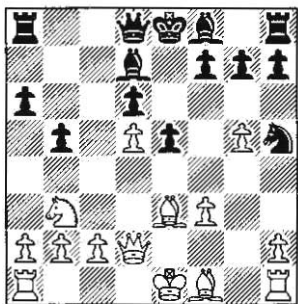
28 ♖d2 ♔d4+ 29 ♚h1 hxg3 30 ♖xd3

An admission of defeat – White has no time to get his bishop to d5 as 30 hxg3 ♚g7 31 ♔g2? ♜h8+ wins. Therefore his kingside pawn structure is whittled away and he lost after 30...gxf2 31 ♔g2 ♜ab8 32 ♔d5 ♚g7 33 ♖g3 ♜h8 34 ♖d2 ♜h4 35 ♖g2 ♜g4 36 ♖f3 ♜xg2 37 ♖xg2 cxb4 38 axb4 ♖xb4 39 ♖e2 ♖e7 40 ♖d1 ♔f6 41 ♔c6 ♖d8 42 ♖xd8 ♖xd8 43 ♔d7 ♖e7 44 ♖xh2 ♖d6 45 ♖f2 ♖d3 0-1

Example Two

Where are the opposite-coloured bishops you may be wondering? Well, we have joined the play early so we can see how Adams

manufactures the favourable scenario.



Adams-Svidler

Tilburg 1998

Black intends to answer 14 0-0-0 with 14...a5! when the mobile black queenside pawns will spearhead an attack against the king. So White physically blocked the a6 pawn with 14 ♔a5!

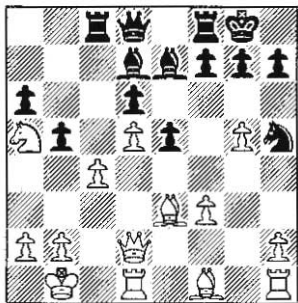
At the same time the knight eyes the c6 square: an outpost

deep in enemy territory provided by the pawn on d5.

14...♖c8

Black takes immediate measures to defend the weak square, after which both sides safeguard their kings.

15 0-0-0 ♗e7 16 ♔b1 0-0 17 c4!



The black queenside pawns, rather than blunt instruments with which to bash the white king, prove to be targets now that they are restrained.

17...♞f4

The knight was doing a similar job on h5 to the white knight on a5 in blocking a pawn advance against his king, but Black feels obliged to re-centralise it as otherwise White might stage an effective break through in the centre. For example, in the variation 17...g6 18 c5!? dxc5 19 d6 it's clear that the bishop on e7 has no safe move.

18 h4!

Black could only dream of being allowed to free his game after 18 ♗xf4 exf4 19 ♔xf4 ♗xg5, when 20 ♞xd6?? ♗f5+ would cost White his queen. The pawn on g5 is not only a potential attacking weapon: it takes away the f6 square from the black bishop and so leaves it boxed in. This will become an important factor when the opposite-coloured bishops appear.

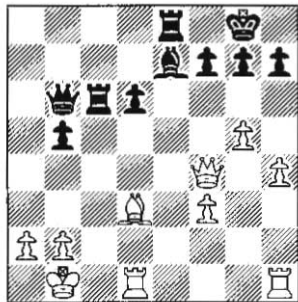
18...♖e8 19 ♔xf4!

With a couple of deft exchanges Adams clarifies the situation in order to emerge with the superior minor piece.

19...exf4 20 ♘c6! ♚b6

Or 20...♙xc6 21 dxc6 ♜xc6 22 cxb5 when either White gets a strong passed pawn with 23 bxa6 or else 22...axb5 23 ♙xb5 skewers his rooks.

21 cxb5 axb5 22 ♚xf4 ♙xc6 23 dxc6 ♜xc6 24 ♙d3



A new phase begins with opposite-coloured bishops. White has the far more active bishop which gives him an enormous advantage; in fact this game strongly supports the adage that says ‘when there are opposite-coloured bishops the player with the attack is a piece up!’

24...♜c5

If 24...♙f8 then 25 ♙xh7+! ♙xh7 26 ♚xf7 ♚e3 27 ♚h5+ ♙g8 28 g6 sets up a common mating pattern with queen and pawn against the enemy king: 28...♙e7 29 ♚h7+ ♙f8 30 ♚h8 is mate, while 28...♚h6 allows 29 ♚d5+ picking up the rook on d5.

It is worth remembering that you can’t play good positional chess until you are acquainted with all the important tactical themes. The strength of the pawn on g6 in this scenario was discussed earlier in the book – see

Concise Chess Middlegames

the game Chandler-Morozevich, where Black got his pawn to g3; in the same chapter you will find examples of a double attack by the queen.

25 ♖he1

Black has defended against the tactic described above but in doing so he falls into an awkward pin along the e-file.

26... ♖c7 26 ♖e4

Chess strategy depends on crude threats as well as elaborate manoeuvres! Black has to weaken his pawn front to defend against mate in two, which creates a target for White's advancing pawns.

26...g6 27 f4!

Not only defending g5 as a prelude to his next move but also preventing Black from breaking the pin on his bishop with 27... ♖e5.

27... ♖d7 28 h5 ♖cc8

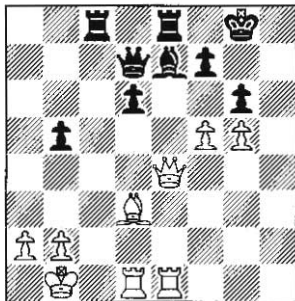
Black is forced to break the

pin on his bishop in an inferior way by retreating the rook from its active post.

29 ♖d5 ♖c5 30 ♖e4 ♖cc8 31 hxg6

After a little repetition it's back to business again.

31...hxg6 32 f5!



A beautiful example of tactics supporting strategy. Generally speaking Black would like nothing better than to exchange queens, but 32... ♖xf5 33 ♖xf5 gxh5 34

Knights and Bishops

♙xb5 would cost him the exchange. Here we see the difference in power between the bishops: White's is the aggressor, it *works*, whereas Black's is just an object that needs to be defended, it *doesn't work*.

32...♙xg5

Black couldn't let White play 33 fxg6 or 33 ♖h4 and 34 ♖h1 unchallenged. The bishop is now free from the cords that bound it, but at a terrible cost as the pawn defences around the black king eventually crumble away.

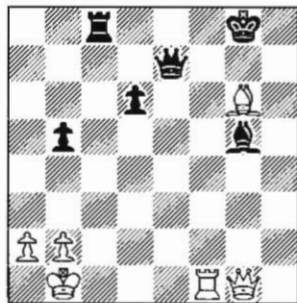
33 ♖g2 ♖xe1 34 ♖xe1 ♖e7

Black saves his bishop with a little trick, as 35 ♖xe7?? allows mate in one.

35 ♖g1 ♖f6 36 ♖f1 ♖e7 37 ♖e1 ♖f6 38 ♖f1 ♖e7 39 fxg6

After another repetition to gain time on clock White presses for the win.

39...fxg6 40 ♙xg6



With his king wide open Black has a horrendous defensive task. It is highly unlikely that a computer would have found a series of 'only' moves to keep all the holes plugged by the pieces, but it is definitely way too much for any human player.

40...♙g7 41 ♙f5!

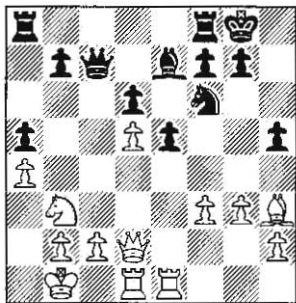
Black escapes after 41 ♖f7+ ♖xf7! 42 ♙xf7 ♖c1+ 43 ♖xc1 ♙xc1.

41...♖f8 42 ♖g4 ♖e3 43 a3 ♖h8

44 ♖c2 1-0

There are multiple threats such as 44 ♖g1, 44 ♖f5 and 44 ♗f5. Right until the end the bishops favour White, as his pawns on b2 and a3 are providing a safe shelter against the enemy bishop, while his own bishop has free range against the black king.

Example Three



Shirov-Svidler
Linares 1998

If it were Black's move he could begin an energetic counter-attack with 1...b5! 2 axb5 a4 opening lines against the white king. But it is White's move and Shirov played

19 ♖f1!

Restraining Black's queenside pawns. After
19...♖fc8 20 ♖b5

Black had run out of constructive counter-attacking moves and settled for
20...♖f8

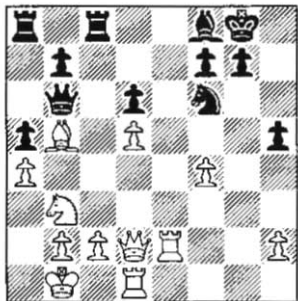
In contrast, there is no restraint on White's kingside pawns and he broke lines open straight-away with

21 f4 exf4 22 gxf4 ♗b6 23 ♖e2

Another excellent feature of White's bishop is that it guards the e8 square, which means that the white rooks have uncontested control of the only open file on the board. In other words the

Knights and Bishops

energy of the bishop has added extra power to the rooks: this is what good coordination is all about.



23...Nc7

Black hurries his knight over to c7 to challenge the bishop, but it soon becomes clear that he was performing a vital role in defending his king.

24 f5 Nc7 25 f6! g6

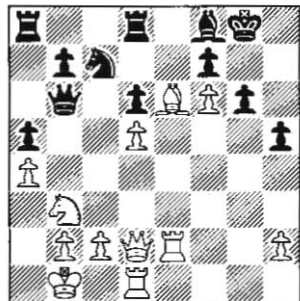
The black knight arrives too late, for 25...Nxb5 26 fxg7 Bxg7

27 Bg2! gives White a winning attack – he can afford to ignore the black knight as 28 Wh6 with mate on g7 is looming, to say nothing of 28 Bdg1.

26 Bd7!

The white bishop has a marvellous career both as a defender and an attacker.

26...Rd8 27 Be6!!



The bishop attacks the pawn that defends g6, the only barrier to the white pieces on the g-file.

You can see that Black has all his pieces apart from the bishop bunched together on the queen-side, where they can hardly help defend the king. Therefore White can afford to make a sacrifice to open lines and still have surplus pieces where the real battle is taking place.

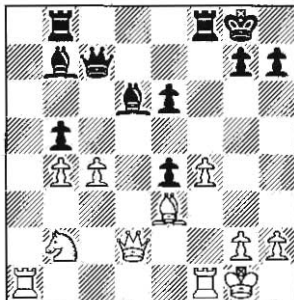
27...♖e8

Or 27...fxe6 28 ♖g5 ♔f7 29 ♗g2 and the threat of 30 ♖xg6 mate is decisive.

28 ♖g5 1-0

Black resigned as there is no good response to the threat of 29 ♖xg6+ – if 28...♘xe6 then 29 dxe6. Then besides 30 exf7+ White threatens 30 e7, when the black bishop is trapped – a wretched end to the bishop's inglorious career.

Two bishops on an open board



Lutz-Morozevich

Elista Olympiad 1998

A pair of bishops often prove a greater asset when it comes to an attack than a bishop and knight. They are at their best when they are aligned on neighbouring open diagonals. Here Morozevich tried to bludgeon his way through the white defences with 23...g5!

White should keep lines

Knights and Bishops

closed with 24 g3, but instead he played for a counter-attack on the queenside which allowed the bishops to demonstrate their awesome power:

24 cxb5? gxf4 25 b6 fxe3!

but he can't hold back the passed pawns which are abetted by the two bishops.

29 ♖d1 ♙a7+ 30 ♜f2 ♙a6! 0-1

The pawns sail through after 31...e3.



A decisive exchange sacrifice: the bishops and passed pawns will be worth far more than a rook and knight.

26 bxc7 ♜xf1+ 27 ♜xf1 exd2 28 cxb8♙+ ♙xb8

White is now the exchange up

Using the bishop pair to control key squares



Adams-Dreev

PCA/Intel Grand Prix,
London 1995

First of all White forces a slight weakness in the Black queenside pawn structure.

17 a4

Now 17...bxa4 18 ♖xa4 leaves Black with a weak pawn on a6, so Dreev preferred to keep the queenside closed with

17...b4

When he is ready to play 18...a5 followed by 19...♙a6. This would allow him to exchange off the strong white bishop and target the c2 pawn.



Black is prevented from playing 18...a5 and White begins to assume control of the d-file, the only open file on the board, as if 18...♖fd8? 19 ♙b6 wins the exchange.

18...♙b7 19 ♘g5

The attack on h7 compels Black to take the knight, after which the open nature of the position favours the bishop pair over the knight and bishop.

19...♙xg5 20 ♖xg5 ♖c6

Now White takes direct control of the d8 square as a prelude to seizing the open file with the rooks.

21 ♙b6! f5

Black must generate counterplay by action on the kingside or else White can quietly double rooks on the d-file and infiltrate.

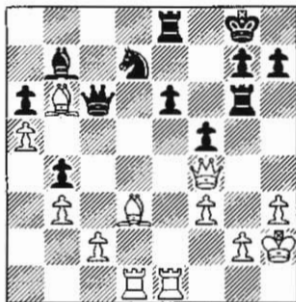
22 f3 ♖ae8 23 ♖ad1 ♖f6 24 b3!

The next step in White's plan

Knights and Bishops

is the creation of a strong post for the king's bishop on c4.

24...♖f8 25 ♔f4 ♙g6 26 ♚h2
♘d7



With his last couple of moves White has safeguarded his king-side, which means that the black rook on g6 has no longer an attacking role and finds itself cut off from the other black pieces; therefore White will have a decisive advantage in firepower if he stages a breakthrough along the

d-file. The e6 pawn is also a terrible weakness which needs constant defending and prevents the black pieces operating freely. In order to speed up his assault Adams is willing to allow the exchange of his dark-squared bishop and even temporarily sacrifices a pawn.

27 ♙c4! ♘xb6 28 axb6 ♗xb6 29
♙e2

Not 29 ♗xf5? ♗f2, but now 30 ♗xf5 is a threat.

29...♗c5 30 ♗d6! ♗c8

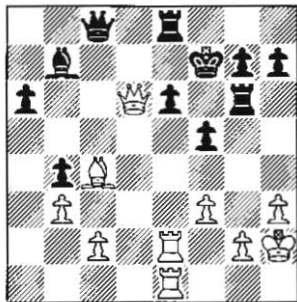
Too horrible to contemplate is 30...♗xd6+ 31 ♗xd6, when the black pieces are tied down to e6 and White can target the queen-side pawns with 32 ♗b6 and 33 ♗e5 if necessary.

31 ♗de1 ♚f7

Now every white piece is aimed at the wretched pawn on e6 whilst the black queen, rooks and king are all hopelessly tied

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down to its defence. It is no wonder that Adams is able to quickly execute an attack on the black king.



32 ♖e5

With the threat of 33 ♖xf5+ as well as 33 ♖c5 driving the black queen away from the defence of e6.

32...♗f6 33 ♖c5 ♖b8

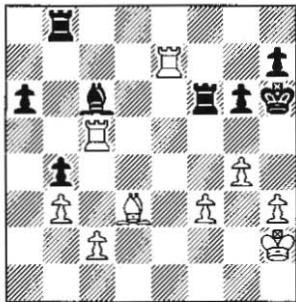
Black has to pin the white queen to prevent an invasion of his seventh rank after 33...♖a8 34

♖c7+ ♔g6 35 ♕d7 with a double attack on b7 and g7.

34 ♕xc6+! ♔g6

If 34...♗fxe6 35 ♖xe6 when Black can't recapture on e6 without dropping his queen.

35 ♕xf5+! ♔h6 36 ♖xb8 ♗xb8
37 ♕d3 g6 38 ♖e7 ♕c6 39 g4
1-0



There is no good way to prevent 40 g5+ as 39...g5 allows mate in one, and 40...♗xf3 41 g5+ also mates next move.

Chapter Eleven

The Blockade

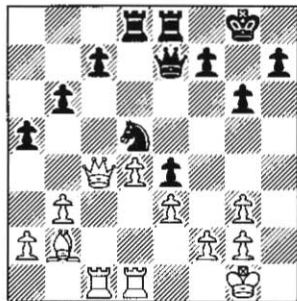
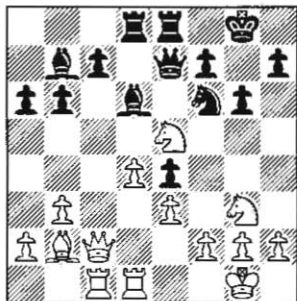
If there is a fixed pawn structure it can be possible to gain supremacy over a complex of squares in the centre of the same colour. If the opponent cannot mount a challenge in any meaningful way then he is 'blocked in' and can only wait for the attack.

Onischuk-Morozevich

Yalta (rapidplay) 1995

Here White initiated an exchanging sequence with 18 ♖c6, but it turned out to be an appalling positional mistake: 18... ♙xc6 19 ♗xc6 ♜xg3! 20 hxg3 ♘d5 21 ♗c4 a5

Knight Blockades



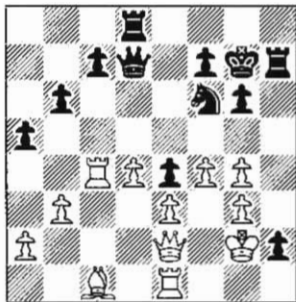
Now White is losing! He isn't just slightly worse, or even clearly worse: his position would be lost almost every time in a game between good players of even strength. This may seem an incredible statement: all his pieces are developed, his pawn structure is solid and there are no enemy pieces near his king. Fair enough, but what can White DO? There is no way to increase the pressure on the c-file – even if somehow he managed to advance his b pawn to b5 it would be meaningless. Nor can he try the pawn advance in the centre f2-f3, as the e3 pawn would drop. He is losing because of the difference in value between the minor pieces. The black knight can never be dislodged from d5 where it dominates the board. In contrast White's bishop is a feeble piece – it cannot attack anything.

If the bishop and knight vanished from the board White would have a good position, because of his pressure on c7; if the d4 pawn vanished White would have excellent compensation for the pawn in the shape of an active bishop that cuts into the black kingside. But as things stand he is lost. Such is the difference that having the better minor piece can make.

White can do nothing and in the game he played **22 ♖e2**. Black is playing without an opponent and only needs to find a plan to break through without disturbing the status quo on the queenside or in the centre. The obvious place to attack is on the kingside. Therefore Morozevich played **22...h5!** Now for all that White can do, Black can close his eyes, play **♗g7**, **♞h8** and h5-h4, when he will have a decisive attack

The Blockade

along the h-file. Sure enough, there followed 23 ♖c4 ♔g7 24 ♜dc1 ♜h8 25 f4 h4 26 g4 h3 27 g3 h2+ 28 ♔g2 ♚d7 29 ♜e1 ♜h7 30 ♙c1 ♖f6



least activate the bishop, but it is far too late. Instead 31 g5 ♚h3+ 32 ♔h1 ♜h5 wins at once because of 33...♜xg3+.

31...♜xg4 32 ♙b2+ ♔g8 33 ♙d4 ♜h5

Black prepares the manoeuvre ♜h6, ♚h3+ and ♜f5 when his pieces close in for the kill on the white king.

34 ♜ec1 ♜h6 35 ♔h1 ♚h3 36 ♚g2 ♚g4 37 ♜xc7 ♜f5 38 ♜c8



The knight only leaves d5 under the most favourable conditions. Here the g4 pawn is sure to drop, after which the knight can join in the final attack on the white king.

31 d5!

A desperate measure to at

White has put up the toughest

possible resistance and has activated all his pieces.

38... ♖xg3+ 39 ♖xg3!

Hoping for 39... ♖xg3?? 40 ♖xd8+ ♔h7 41 ♖h8 mate.

39... ♖xc8!

Now 40 ♖xg4 ♖xc1+ and the pawn queens on h1 with a quick mate.

40 ♖xc8+ ♖xc8 41 ♖e1 ♖g4 42 ♖f1 ♖h3 0-1

After 42 d6 ♖g3 threatens 43... ♖g1+ and if 43 ♔xh2 ♖h4 mates.

White defended resourcefully but it wasn't enough to save him.

Blockade with the queen

Here chances look fairly equal, as the knight on d5 is more or less balanced by the white knight on e4. We could also point to the weakness of the pawn on

b3. The black queen is more aggressively placed than the white queen.



Kosten-Morozevich
Hyeres 1992

The real advantage is the difference in power of the bishops. The black bishop is doing everything required of it: it is guarding the dark squares around its king that have been compromised by the loosening of his pawn struc-

The Blockade

ture with g7-g6. In contrast, White's bishop cannot defend the light square holes around his king on f3, h3 and g2.

The bishop on b2 is blocked in by the pawn on d4. The black bishop is also obstructed by the pawn, but it has an extra bit of mobility that Black can exploit to seize control of a light square complex in the centre:

20...♙h6! 21 ♖c2

After 21 ♖c1 Black can gain control of the c-file with 21...♗c8, but that was the lesser evil.

21...♘e3!

The point. Now both the white knight and rook are hanging, which means he has to agree to the exchange of knights.

The main reason you need to have an eye for tactics is to spot possibilities such as this – in order to be able to carry out strategic operations.

22 fxe3 ♚xe4

The pawn structure is now virtually symmetrical, but Black has the initiative: his queen dominates the light squares in the centre and together with the bishop and rook can target the pawn on e3.

23 ♙c1 ♗f3 24 ♖c3



Now all the white pieces – queen, rook and bishop have been forced into the role of defenders. Strategically speaking this

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is a disaster for White, as pieces can't function properly either defensively or aggressively if they are tied down to defending pawns.

Black now has two tasks

Plan A – prevent White from freeing his pieces from their defensive role

Plan B – find a good way to exploit the greater firepower of his pieces

The obvious target for Plan B is the white king, as the light square around him are very weak.

24...d5!

Plan A in action.

Black fixes the pawn on e3 by preventing any future e3-e4 break out, and also rules out 25 ♖c4+. Neither idea is necessarily playable for White, but why give him any chance?

25 ♖d3 ♕g4!

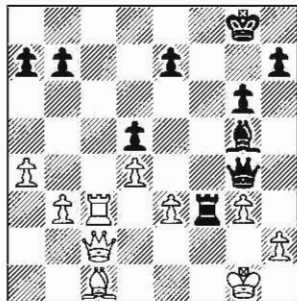
The exchange of queens with

25...♕xd3? 26 ♖xd3 would be a strategic blunder, as not only would the white king cease to be a target, but he would also be able to drive away the black rook with 27 ♖g2, freeing his pieces from the defence of e3.

26 ♖c2

White's queen can't wander too far as after, for example, 26 ♖b5 ♖f5 27 ♖e8+ ♔f8 Black is threatening mate in two beginning with 28...♕d1+.

26...♔g5!



Plan B: Black clears the way for the advance of his h pawn, which he will use as a battering ram against g3.

27 ♖g2 a5

There is no need to hurry. Therefore Black takes the chance to fix the pawn structure on the queenside. It also gives White the chance to lose tactically if he tries a counter-attack with 28 ♖c7? when 28...♖xe3! 29 ♙xe3 ♙xe3+ 30 ♚f1 (30 ♚h1 ♜d1 also mates) 30...♜d1 is mate.

If your opponent can't do anything constructive it is worth waiting a while to see if he self-destructs before forcing the issue. Many players collapse under pressure.

28 ♙d2 ♚g7

Another preparatory move. It is better to have the king on g7 than g8 to rule out any tricks on the back rank based on ♖c8+.

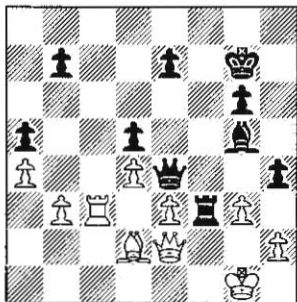
29 ♙c1 h5!

At last the moment is right to begin the assault on g3.

30 ♙d2 ♜e4!

It was still possible to throw the game away with 30...h4?? 31 gxh4, and Black loses a piece however he plays!

31 ♜e2 h4



Now White's resistance disintegrates on the dark squares as well as the light.

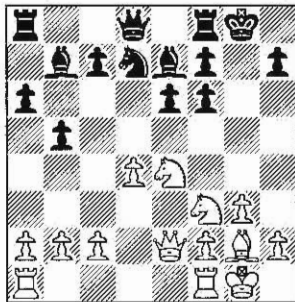
32 gxh4 ♙xh4 33 ♙e1 ♙xe1

Black is willing to exchange bishops now that he has a forced win.

34 ♖xe1 ♜f5 35 ♜d2 ♜g5+ 0-1

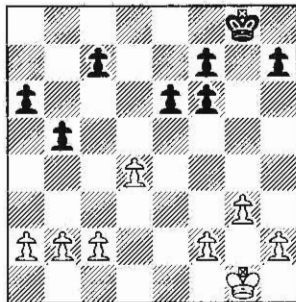
White loses his queen after 36 ♔f1 ♜f3+ 37 ♜f2 ♜d1+ 38 ♜e1 ♜f5+.

Blockade with the bishop



J. Polgar-Morozevich
Wijk aan Zee 2000

Here we should look closely at the pawn structure as it will reveal to us the correct plans for both white and black.



Black has doubled pawns on the kingside, but they form a compact centre. The natural plan for White is to prepare the pawn advance d4-d5 in order to break up the kingside pawns with d5xe6 when after f7xe6 there is a weak pawn on e6. If Black responded to d4-d5 with e6xd5 then the

doubled pawns on the f-file become a liability: White could manoeuvre a knight to the hole on f5. Alternatively, White could advance d4-d5 and just leave the pawn there, when the bishop on b7 is shut out of the game.

Of course if 12 d5? immediately Black can just take it. So White must prepare the advance carefully. The obvious method is to put a rook on d1 and then playing c2-c4. But remember that after the reply b5xc4 White wants to be able to recapture on c4 with a pawn, so the advance c2-c4 itself requires the preparatory b2-b3. Nor must White hurry b2-b3, as Black can reply b5-b4! crippling the c pawn – it can never advance to c4 without allowing b4xc3 en passant. So White should edge forwards with c2-c3, b2-b3, c3-c4 and only then d4-d5!. A rook should be placed on

d1 to support the pawn advance.

This is the right plan, but unfortunately for Polgar she implemented it in the wrong way:

12 ♖ad1?

It might seem astonishing to describe this natural centralising move as the losing blunder, but it allows Black to obstruct White's plan after which she gradually runs out of ideas and goes downhill.

When you have two rooks on the wings on the first rank, it is notoriously difficult to decide which one to move to a centre square. It looks natural to play the rook from a1, as the rook on f1 is already near the centre and might prove to have a role in a future attack down the f-file. But after Black's reply it proves a classic case of the 'wrong rook'.

12...♙d5!

The bishop takes up the

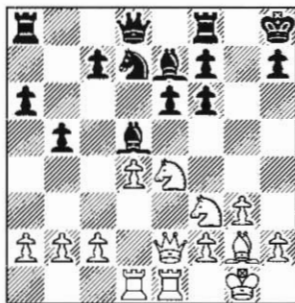
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blockading square with the threat of 13...♙c4, winning the exchange.

13 ♖fe1

Not 13 b3 b4! crippling White's queenside pawns.

13...♙h8



Not just a defensive move – as will be seen Morozevich plans a counter-attack along the g-file.

14 ♖fd2

Not only has White been forced to delay preparations for

the c4 pawn advance by the threat of 13...♙c4, but she can't even play 14 c3 here as 14...♙xa2 picks up a pawn. Here we see the terrible effect of the natural move 12 ♖ad1 on White's position: it has lost time and left the a2 pawn hanging.

Polgar gives up on the plan of getting a pawn controlling d5, but the outcome is that the black bishop can never be dislodged from d5.

14...c6 15 c4 bxc4 16 ♖xc4 a5

A useful move that gains space and rules out ♖a5 in the future if the black queen leaves d8.

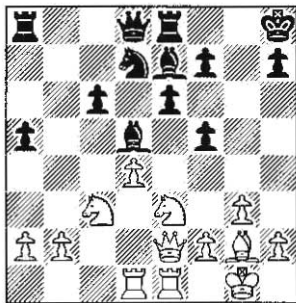
17 ♖c3 ♖e8!

Black has no need to hurry. As long as he doesn't fall for any tactical tricks he will have a good game, as White can only eliminate his dominant bishop with 18 ♖xd5 when 18...cxd5 leaves him

The Blockade

with by far the superior pawn structure in view of his rock solid centre, whilst the white bishop on g2 would remain passive.

18 ♖e3 f5



Black gradually improves his position – and meanwhile White is floundering around without a plan.

19 ♖c4 ♜b8 20 ♖a4

The knight remains passively on this square right until the end of the game. White should have

sought salvation in exchanges with 20 ♙xd5 cxd5 21 ♘e5 ♘xe5 22 dxe5, when Black has the better pawn structure but she has got rid of her passive bishop

20... ♜b4 21 b3 ♙f6 22 ♜c2 ♞g8 23 ♜c1

White becomes more and more helpless whilst the black pieces find excellent squares.

23... ♞g4

Black plans to double rooks along the g-file and then ram the g3 defensive shell with both f5-f4 and h5-h4.

24 ♘e5 ♘xe5 25 dxe5 ♙e7 26 ♞d3 ♞ag8 27 ♞ed1

White's rooks are doubled on the d-file, but there is no way for them to get passed the barrier on d5.

27...f4

In contrast, Black has pawns to help him open the file for his doubled rooks.



28 ♖c3 fxg3 29 hxg3 h5 30
 ♙xd5 cxd5 31 ♜f3 ♚g7 32 ♜c7

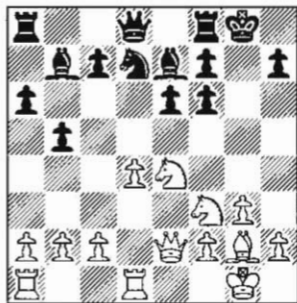
The endgame is rotten for White after 32 ♜xb4 axb4 – Black has the superior minor piece and better pawns – a protected passed pawn in the centre compared to a feeble pawn on a2. 32...h4 33 ♚g2 hxg3 34 fxg3 ♜e4 35 ♜c3 ♜e2+ 36 ♚h3 ♜g5 0-1

White will soon be mated.
 As soon as Black got an im-

movable bishop on d5 all the energy began to drain from White's position as there was no plan available.

The attempt to blockade with the bishop thwarted

Now let's see how Kasparov handled the same situation in a later game. Returning to the position at move 12, rather than 12 ♜ad1 he played 12 ♜fd1!



Kasparov-M.Gurevich

Sarajevo 2000

A slight difference to 12 ♖ad1 , but what a difference in the outcome to the game! Gurevich replied 12... ♙d5 , but in contrast to the game above, there was no threat to win the exchange with ♙c4 , nor was the a2 pawn hanging; so Kasparov was able to play 13 c3! getting on with the plan of undermining the bishop. There followed 13... f5 14 ♞ed2 c5

Black has no way to prevent the gradual advance b2-b3 and c3-c4, driving away his bishop, so Gurevich takes the bull by the horns and opens the centre himself.

15 dxc5 ♞xc5 16 ♞f1!

Preparing a powerful exchange sacrifice.

16... ♞c7 17 ♞xd5! exd5 18 ♞e3 ♙f6



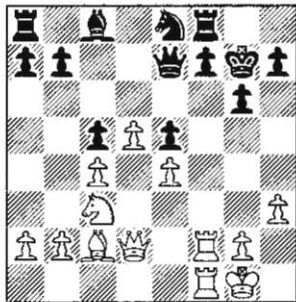
White has wrecked the pawn cover in front of the black king, and is sure to gain at least one pawn for the exchange. Now after 19 ♞d1 ♞ad8 20 ♞d4 ♙xd4 21 ♞xd4 ♞e5 22 ♞h5 , with the threat of 23 ♞h4 ♞g7 24 ♞xf5 , White would have a highly dangerous attack. Instead Kasparov played the inferior 19 ♞d4?! but still won in the end.

Judith Polgar is a great attacking player, but she was never able

to show it because all the dynamism in her position died after 12 ♖ad1.

I am reminded of a comment by Rudolf Spielmann, one of the great attacking players of the 1920s and 1930s, who remarked 'I could play any of Alekhine's combinations, but I can't get the positions from which they come'. Any player who aspires to win in tactical style against good opponents needs to be very proficient in strategy, just as a positional player needs to have a tactical eye. Here opening preparation should also be mentioned: Polgar is by no means a weak positional player, but she was surprised by the opening set-up that Morozovich adopted and reacted badly. In contrast, Kasparov had the advantage of hindsight and might well have prepared the exchange sacrifice before the game.

The blockade with the knight defeated



Shirov-Kovacevic
Belgrade 1997

White played 19 ♖a4 with the aim of 20 ♖xe8! eliminating the knight. Then his passed pawn would be ready to advance to d6 with ideas of ♗d5 etc. when his control of the dark squares in conjunction with his pressure on the f-file would give him every

chance to win. But Black replied 19...♘d6 when the knight was an ideal blockader of the passed pawn. Now White needs to take forceful measures as c4 is hanging and after the lame 20 ♖e2 Black can improve his position with moves such as 20...a6 (to avoid an unwelcome exchange of knights with 21 ♘b5) 21...f6 and 22...♞b8, when he is ready to launch counterplay with b7-b5.

20 ♞f6!

White stops the consolidating f7-f6 and puts immediate pressure on the black knight. Now 20...♞xf6 21 ♞xf6 ♙xf6 22 ♖f2+ ♙g7 23 ♖xc5 breaks the blockade in the centre with a winning position, as 23...♞d8 24 ♖c7 wins material, whilst otherwise the passed pawn rolls forward.

20...h6

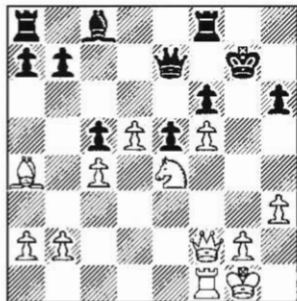
If 20...♘xc4 then 21 ♖g5 with the threat of 22 ♞xg6+!

winning the queen by discovered attack is very strong.

21 ♖f2 ♘f5

Black decides to win the exchange, but the disappearance of his excellent knight allows White enormous freedom of action. In any case he was under severe pressure, for example the blockade crumbles after 21...♘xc4 22 ♙b5!?, e.g. 22...♘d6 23 ♖xc5 or 22...♘b6 23 d6.

22 ♞xf5! gx f5 23 ex f5 f6 24 ♘e4



In return for the rook White has a brilliant blockading knight and a strong passed pawn.

24...b6 25 ♖h4 ♔h7 26 ♜f3 ♜f7
27 d6!

This pawn isn't going to queen in a hurry but it vacates the d5 square so that White's bishop, who has long been his least impressive piece, can be brought to nirvana on d5.

27...♖f8 28 ♙c6 ♜b8 29 ♙d5



Now White has that great rarity a chess – a centre pawn structure that is of full benefit to both a knight and a bishop. The bishop surveys the whole board, whilst the knight is totally secure and is both defending the passed pawn and attacking f6.

29...♞bb7

Black can only break up the harmony of the white minor pieces by giving up the exchange but meanwhile White has time to fatally undermine the f6 pawn.

30 ♙e6!

White has no need to hurry to take the exchange.

30...♞bd7 31 ♜g3

Heading for g6.

31...♙b7 32 ♙xd7 1-0

Black surrendered as in 32...♞xd7 33 ♘xf6+ or 32...♙xe6 33 ♙e6 both lead to a fatal loss of material.

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