



Book Review by Don Aldrich

Winning Chess Strategies, Yasser Seirawan & Jeremy Silman (2003 Everyman) 257 pp., \$19.95

This marks the third title in Everyman's reprint of the Seirawan *Winning Chess* series. Originally published by Microsoft Press, no changes have been made to the text – it's a straight reprint.

While a 'beginner's' book, *Strategies* assumes that one has already either read the first two volumes, *Play Winning Chess* and *Winning Chess Tactics*, or is at least familiar with the concepts covered therein. There are no explanations of how the pieces move or how algebraic notation works here.

There are twelve chapters, each dealing with a basic element of strategy, and each chapter concludes with several problems for the student to solve. The solutions are given in the back of the book, along with a quite extensive glossary.

The chapters introduce the basic elements any experienced player is familiar with – good vs. bad pieces, pawn structure, space, mobility, king safety. The final chapter, 'Great Masters of Strategy', contains short biographical descriptions and annotated games from a group of great players selected for their strategic acumen. Steinitz, Rubinstein, Capablanca, Nimzowitsch, Petrosian, and Karpov are covered; Botvinnik, Tal and Fischer are not.

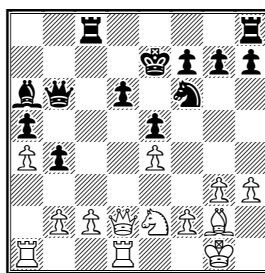
Pretty simple and straightforward, but what actually is in this book? Now, I am not exactly in the target audience, being one of those 'experienced tournament players' mentioned above. However, I certainly don't know everything, and sat down to run through it and see exactly how deep this thing went.

The first couple of chapters are pretty trivial – a short discussion of exactly what is strategy, and how to realize a material advantage. The 'problems' even struck me as kind of silly.

Chapter three is entitled, 'Stopping Enemy Counterplay'. It didn't take too long for me to realize Seirawan is addressing prophylaxis, a fairly advanced concept, and one where all too many class players have a pronounced weakness. After a fairly mundane start, he is suddenly showing examples from Fischer and Petrosian, and sophisticated ones at that.

Matulovic–Fischer

Vinkovci, 1968



Black to play

Take a second and look at this diagram. What would you play? Here is Seirawan's treatment of it:

"Diagram 16 is another example of the superior side treading carefully to avoid giving the opponent any counterplay. White suffers from a terrible bishop on g2, a knight that doesn't appear to be going anywhere, and pawns that are in need of constant defense on c2 and e4. Black's natural plan is to double rooks on the c-file and add to the pressure against c2. Unfortunately, 1...♖c4, which attacks e4 and prepares for this doubling would give White some counterplay chances with 2.g4, because 2...♗xe4 3.♗xe4 ♖xe4 4.♗g3 followed by ♗f5+ is not what Black wants. The advantages of the position are not going away, so Black decides to kill his enemy's counterplay chances first. Then he will be free to pursue his queenside dreams. Here's how Fischer neutralized Matulovic ..."

Now be honest, how many would have played 1...♖c4 here? I certainly would have. I never in a million years would have played Fischer's move, but after Seirawan's explanation, it is pretty evident isn't it?

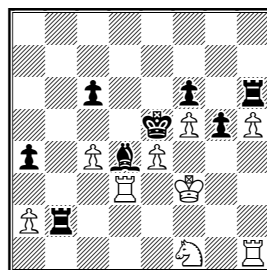
1...h5 Black stops g3-g4 in its tracks. **2.b3** This move keeps the rook out of c4, but weakens the c3-square. **2...♗xe2!** Why give up the nice bishop for the lame knight? Because only the knight was keeping Black out of c3. **3.♖xe2 ♖c3** With White's counterplay crippled, Black can proceed with the occupation of the c-file. **4.♗d3 ♖hc8 5.♖xc3 ♖xc3 6.♗h2 ♖c5** White, who is bound hand and foot to the weakling on c2, eventually lost the game. Black, on the other hand, triumphantly demonstrated the wisdom of this principle: *If you have a permanent advantage, take the time to stop any potential counterplay.*"

Chess is so easy when it's properly explained! This chapter has several examples on this same theme, all well explicated and demonstrated. Perhaps more important than the actual concept are the examples themselves. Chess is a game of pattern recognition. In this simple chapter, there are several very nice examples of pawn moves used to restrain and/or stop counterplay. I know the Fischer example is one I haven't seen before, and will stick with me.

The problem given at the end of the chapter is also quite interesting.

Gligoric-Fischer

Siegen, 1970



Black to play

"Problem 4: It's Black's move. He is a pawn down, but his bishop is superior to the white knight; the pawns on a2, c4, e4 and h5 are all weak; the black king is well placed; and the rook on b2 is also very strong. Is 1...♖xa2 a good move?"

This kind of problem strikes me as more instructive than the ubiquitous, 'Black to

Play and Win'. As we noted in the review of Dvoretsky's advanced treatise on Positional Play, there is no one in a game whispering, "You can win". As a practical player in this position, your first question would most likely be, 'Should I take the pawn? '. Now, given that this is the chapter on stopping counterplay, you know that you probably shouldn't! But why, and what should be played instead? Seirawan's answer is a bit surprising:

"No. Playing 1...♖xa2 allows White to play 2.♗h2 followed by 3.♗g4+, when the white knight suddenly enters the game with great effect. In the game, Fischer stops this possibility with a nice exchange sacrifice that led to a winning endgame: 1...♖xh5! 2.♖xh5 ♖f2+ 3.♜g3 ♖xf1 4.♖h8 ♜xe4 5.♖a3 ♖g1+ 6.♜h2 ♖c1 7.♖xa4 ♖c2+ 8.♜h1 c5 9.♖a3 ♜xf5 0-1"

Yasser assures us he didn't expect us to find this idea (Gee, thanks Yaz!) but hopes the student realized that 1...♖xa2 didn't cut the mustard. Quite a sophisticated example for a basic text, but it does make sense, and prepares the student for more advanced concepts.

The remaining chapters are at least as strong. The chapter on pawn play seems particularly well done. Amateurs are so prone to making damaging pawn moves that coaches often drill into them that pawns don't move backwards, every pawn move creates a weakness, and so on, to the extent that many coached amateurs open 1.♗f3 out of fear of spoiling their pawn structure. And after 2.♗c3, they are stuck for a move... Seirawan acknowledges this, but also introduces the concepts of using pawns as battering rams, restraining piece play, and even sacrifices for the initiative. He explains how the weakening part is true, but chess is a game of constant trade offs. As Fischer puts it, to get squares, ya gotta give squares. The trick is knowing which pawns to move, and when. Seirawan lays a solid foundation for the student to build upon.

This is a very well done introduction to the basic elements of strategy. It is suitable for a reader of any age as long as he or she is capable of understanding the vocabulary, and has the required basic knowledge of the game. **Highly recommended.**