

Craig Pritchett

Steinitz

move by move

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About the Author

Craig Pritchett is an International Master. Twice Scottish Champion, he has represented his country, four times on top board, in nine Chess Olympiads. He was a longstanding chess correspondent for the Scottish newspaper, *The Herald* (1972-2006), and completed a five year term as Schools Chess Development Director for Chess Scotland (2003-2008). 2015 Scottish Seniors (50+) Champion, he won the gold medal for the best board one performance at the European Seniors (60+) Team Championships in 2011.

Also by the author:

Starting Out: Sicilian Scheveningen

Play the English

Chess for Rookies

Chess Secrets: Heroes of Classical Chess

Chess Secrets: Giants of Innovation

Chess Secrets: Great Chess Romantics

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Introduction

The first world champion, Wilhelm Steinitz (1836-1900), is famously associated with the view that chess is an inherently 'balanced' game, in which opponents must jockey for 'small advantages' before launching all-out winning attempts. Steinitz considered that any attack needs to be rooted in objective, soundly-based positional factors to be truly effective. Revolutionary thought in his day, we all now understand that effective attacks, indeed all good plans in chess, require robust positional justification.

Steinitz made a huge contribution to the development of what we now consider to be the main guiding principles of modern positional chess and especially good planning. Because we can't calculate 'everything' at a chessboard, we need good 'plans' to help inform most of our move-by-move decision-making. Success in chess requires not just raw calculating power, but also good judgement, evaluation, planning and manoeuvring skills, to help us reach those truly decisive moments in games when a player's tactical skills actually tend to be at their highest premium.

None of the above causes the 21st century player to bat an eyelid. Indeed it was only revolutionary thinking in Steinitz's day because the all-out, open kingside, gambit-attacking style that prevailed in the early- to mid-19th century began to lose its attraction as Steinitz and others significantly stiffened 'defences'. In this new world, Steinitz began to investigate the closed as well as the old open games and to conceive unusually subtle and invariably flexible plans drawn from a pragmatic mix of dynamic and static positional factors that he, more than anyone, understood were often in a constant state of flux and might rapidly vary.

If Steinitz's greatest achievement was to address this new complexity and show us how to fuse the best of an essentially open, combinational and direct attacking past with a new and profound understanding of the widest array of material, time, structural and spatial positional factors, we mustn't, however, forget other aspects of his considerable playing strength. In addition to his obvious mastery of positional play and tactics, Steinitz also possessed a genius for the development of new ideas in the opening, an uncommon ability to size up his opponents' psychological state and a near-nerveless fighting spirit.

In elaborating his principles of positional play, planning and manoeuvre, Steinitz not unjustifiably considered himself to be in the vanguard of the development of a new 'modern school'. As he was the world's best player for the better part of at least two decades, he had an outstandingly successful strike rate. One of the most original and successful players that the game has ever seen, Steinitz produced many ideas and games of long-lasting and insightful brilliance that still bear comparison with those of any subsequent, modern great and remain just as instructive.

How to enjoy this book – and learn from it!

This book has a chronological structure that enables the reader to follow developments in Steinitz's life and games as they actually unfolded. As such, the book can be enjoyed as a traditional games collection and biography. Using the *Move by Move* series' question and answer technique in the game annotations, I also challenge readers to reflect on and seek to improve their own understanding and skills-set. To readers who take up that challenge, do try to approach it enjoyably!

Above all, allow yourself to be inspired by Steinitz. Embrace his innovative spirit and occasionally expect to get things wrong, not always right, just as he did. Like any 21st century modern, Steinitz saw near-endless scope to devise and test new ideas in chess and he always fought like a tiger, once he had made his choices. Prepared to take calculated, but not knowingly unsound risks, Steinitz also had the strength of mind to drop any idea, if he sensed it had been 'refuted' in the court of exhaustive analytical test.

I rest my case. Good luck in your own personal quest to release your own inner Steinitz – and win more points!

Craig Pritchett
Dunbar,
September 2015

Chapter One

Early Years (1857-1866)

Steinitz's biographer, Kurt Landsberger, could establish only relatively sketchy information about Steinitz's earliest years. Born into a poor Jewish family, in the "overcrowded, unsanitary [Prague] ghetto", Wilhelm, originally 'Wolf', was the seventh of thirteen siblings, six of whom died at a very early age. His mother died when he was 9. He may have learned to play chess at about 12 and possibly moved out of his father's home by 15, one year after his father remarried. He seems to have had a difficult relationship with his father, who apparently frowned on his early chess activities, which may have included playing chess for small sums in chess-playing Prague coffee houses in his later teens, but probably didn't completely abandon his early schooling.

Faced with a long string of such 'maybe's', and no apparent record of any actual chess games, Ludwig Bachmann simply begins his four volume (mainly chess) biography, in 1857, at the point when Steinitz resolved to move from Prague to Vienna, the capital of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. There, in 1858, Steinitz enrolled as a university student, but despite clear evidence of academic merit, especially in maths, he failed to take all of his first year exams and had to abandon his studies. By that time, however, it seems that Steinitz was beginning to take chess very seriously, possibly already with a view to devoting his life to the game.

Chess was no easy calling, however, for someone of scant private means and Steinitz appears to have enjoyed no more than a precarious living during these early Vienna years. He joined the Vienna Chess Club, one of the strongest in Europe, which gave him access to wealthier 'clients' willing to pay him modest sums for 'lessons' and stakes games (on which there might be frequent bets). Steinitz also played in the annual Vienna Club tournaments, Austria's strongest national events, eventually establishing clear Austrian supremacy: he placed third in 1859, second in 1860 and then clear first in 1861, scoring +30 -1 (Bachmann) over 34 games (Landsberger).

As a result of his Vienna 1861 victory, Steinitz was asked to represent Austria, at London

1862, which provided him with an opportunity to compete with some of the world's best players, in the strongest international tournament to be staged since the great match-tournament, won by Adolf Anderssen, at London 1851. Following a creditable sixth place at London 1862, Steinitz remained in the British capital, where he lived until his emigration to the USA, in the early 1880s. London's many chess clubs, divans and coffee houses offered richer pickings to the budding 'professional' chess player than elsewhere, and at least as stiff, top-class opposition. Steinitz rapidly gained a deserved reputation as London's best player in the next few years.

Steinitz took his first professional steps in Viennese chess just as his almost exact contemporary, Paul Morphy (1837-1884), was completing his dramatic, and quite separate rise to the chess world's pinnacle. At New York 1857, the prodigiously talented and socially charming young American had almost effortlessly won the first U.S. Championship Congress. Throughout most of 1858 and into early 1859, Morphy then trounced all-comers, in Paris and London. This brilliant series ended with a resounding, 8-3 match win against Anderssen, still then widely regarded as Europe's strongest player, shortly after which Morphy abruptly announced his chess 'retirement'.

The youthful Morphy's virtuosic technique, splendid combinations and powerful attacks, especially in open games, dazzled the chess world. Born into a wealthy New Orleans family, Morphy could not, however, bear the thought of playing chess 'professionally', as it did not square with his upper-class sense of a Louisianan gentleman's duty or station in life. Before his European trip, Morphy had obtained a degree in law and announced his intention to practise at law on his return. Sadly he failed as a lawyer and continued to cut himself off from competitive chess. An intensely private man, he became increasingly reclusive and eventually developed a socially debilitating form of actual mental illness.

The impecunious Steinitz came from a vastly different world from that of Morphy. Without private means, Steinitz could only hope to succeed in chess by embracing a fully professional approach and making his chess activities work economically. He modelled his playing style on Morphy, whose accent on rapid piece development, exploitation of open attacking lines, crisp combinations and prodigiously quick and accurate, strategic and tactical sight of the board, he rapidly absorbed, so much so that his prowess in handling open king's pawn games and gambits soon earned him the nickname, 'the Austrian Morphy'.

Steinitz took this playing style into London 1862, where he first met and played against Anderssen and Louis Paulsen, two of the world's greatest players, who finished respectively in first and second places. There he found that he could relate to Anderssen's broadly similar playing style, but found Paulsen's closed games of manoeuvre much harder to fathom. Paulsen liked to slow down play and invite attacks against defensively resilient pawn structures. He had a predilection for the acceptance of most conventional gambits, defending resourcefully and eventually confounding attackers with powerful counterattacks.

Steinitz later acknowledged that it took a great deal of persuasion by the two leading players of the then predominant open attacking (or 'romantic') style, Anderssen and the Hungarian player, Ignatz Kolisch, to convince him that Paulsen's closed style of play

shouldn't be underestimated. Looking back, in his *International Chess Magazine* (July 1891), Steinitz reflected that these wholly fruitful debates taught him for the first time "to recognize that chess genius is not confined to [...] more or less deep and brilliant finishing strokes after the original balance of power and position has been overthrown, but that it also requires the exercise of still more extraordinary powers [...] to maintain that balance or [...] disturb it at the [appropriate moment]".

This notion of the existence of a natural 'balance' in chess proved to be especially fruitful for the young Steinitz. While his style didn't change overnight, Bachmann contends that while Steinitz remained largely attached to open attacking methods, his game also began from that point to develop signs of the more nuanced positional strengths that were to become marked in his later years. Bachmann points in those earlier years to Steinitz's "remarkable defensive staying power in difficult positions and tenacity both in holding fast to and in the systematic development of small advantages to the point where they offer the prospect of potentially won games".

Steinitz's playing strength certainly developed apace in his early London years, bringing him not only considerable success, but also a growing reputation as one of the world's top four or five players, and as a possible threat to the ageing Anderssen's reassertion of his reputational primacy in a world that could no longer count upon a return by Morphy. By 1866, Steinitz's standing was such that he gained sufficient London backing to challenge Anderssen in a formal stakes match. Although Anderssen was favourite to win, Steinitz won convincingly, if relatively narrowly, by the remarkably belligerent score of +8 -6, with no drawn games.

Game 1
C.Hamppe-W.Steinitz
Vienna 1859
Vienna Gambit

Carl Hamppe (1815-76), a senior Austrian government official, was one of Steinitz's most competitive Viennese opponents. He was not just a strong but also a creatively reflective player. In his *International Chess Magazine* (January 1890), Steinitz tantalisingly hinted, but failed to develop the point, that Hamppe was "an even more important forerunner of modern play" than Paulsen. While Steinitz taught his opponent a lesson in the art of open attacking play in this game, Hamppe's core idea, that it might sometimes be worth enduring a degree of early king discomfort in exchange for a good extra centre pawn and prospects of reaching an early endgame, inspired Steinitz's later invention of his double-edged 'Steinitz Gambit' (see Game 8).

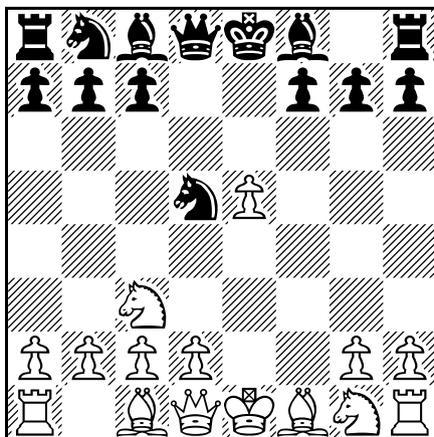
1 e4 e5 2 c3 f6 3 f4 d5 4 exd5!?

The main point of this move is revealed on White's next move. Against Black's tempting

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reply (other moves, including 4...exf4, are also possible), White aims to win Black's e-pawn at the expense of some insecurity in his king position. The main line begins 4 fxe5 ♘xe4. Steinitz tended to prefer 4 d3 (See Game 13).

4...♗xd5 5 fxe5



Steinitz deliberately played for this position, but he now declines to play 5...♖h4+!?

Question: Why?

Answer: While tempting, 5...♖h4+!? allows White to reach an endgame, in which Black must still work to regain his gambit pawn and struggle to equalize, after 6 g3 ♗xc3 7 gxh4 ♗xd1 8 ♖xd1, and if 8...♗c6 (or if 8...♗g4+ 9 ♗e2 ♗xe2+ 10 ♖xe2 ♗c6 11 ♗f3, or 8...♗e7 9 ♗f3 ♗g4 10 ♗e2 ♗c6 11 ♗g1) 9 ♗f3 ♗g4 10 ♗e2 0-0-0 11 ♗e1, all of which has occurred in 21st century games.

Black's actual choice keeps queens on the board and is best.

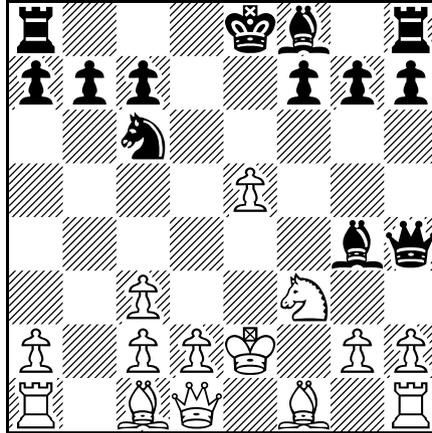
5...♗xc3 6 bxc3 ♖h4+ 7 ♗e2 ♗g4+

Steinitz might also have considered 7...♗e4+ 8 ♖f2 ♗xe5, regaining his pawn.

Question: Why did he avoid this?

Answer: Black is playing for more than the very roughly equal chances that may result in that line after 9 ♗f3. This, too, has occurred in the 21st century, with some players still arguing that White might still have something to play for, if only the very tiniest pull.

8 ♗f3 ♗c6



At this point, Hikaru Nakamura has played 9 ♕e1, a move that has also been favoured by Kamran Shirazi.

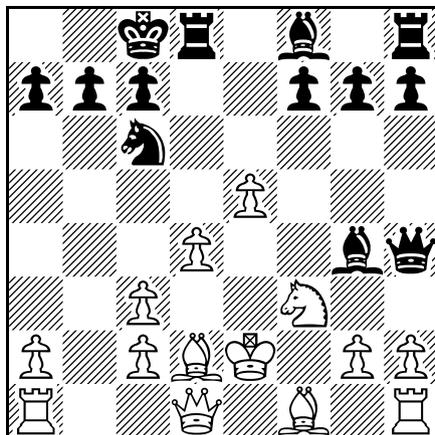
Question: Is this White's best try and why?

Answer: It probably is. By playing 9 ♕e1, White aims to exchange queens and obtain the bishop pair, with an active, if very slight endgame edge, such as after 9...♜xe1+ 10 ♔xe1 ♙xf3 11 gxf3 ♘xe5 12 ♚f2.

Black should perhaps avoid the endgame, by playing 9...♜h5. White can then, however, usefully play 10 ♘d1, slotting White's king into relative safety behind his d-pawn and allowing White to complete his further development, with chances for both sides.

H.Nakamura-S.Milliet, Cap d'Agde (rapid) 2010, then went 10...♙xf3+ 11 gxf3, gaining the bishop-pair in a double-edged middlegame (White won). H.Nakamura-A.Onischuk, Saint Louis 2010, instead continued 10...♘xe5 11 ♙e2 0-0-0 12 ♘xe5 ♙xe2+ 13 ♜xe2+ 14 ♚xe2 ♜e8 15 d4 f6 16 ♙e3 fxe5 17 d5, with an eventual draw.

9 d4 0-0-0 10 ♙d2?



This is a poor move, however, that might have lost quickly. While Steinitz's reply is hardly 'bad', he overlooks a powerful combination.

Question: How can Black actually crush White?

Answer: Steinitz should have played 10...♖xd4! 11 cxd4 ♘xd4+, and if 12 ♔d3 ♙f5+ 13 ♔c3 ♘xf3, threatening ...♗b4+, and with White's king now hopelessly adrift in the open, Black must win quickly. After 12 ♔e3 ♘xf3 13 gxf3 ♙c5+, Black mates in at most four moves: 14 ♔e2 ♗f2+ 15 ♔d3 ♗d4+ 16 ♔e2 ♗e4+ 17 ♙e3 ♗xe3 mate.

White should still have played 10 ♗e1, for the same reasons as explained in the previous note. Hamppe possibly feared 10...♙xf3+ 11 gxf3 ♘xd4+ 12 cxd4 ♗xd4 13 ♙e3 ♗xe5, which is playable, but no more than double-edged. Black should avoid 11...♖xd4? 12 cxd4 ♘xd4+ 13 ♔d1, and if 13...♗xe1+ 14 ♔xe1 ♘xc2+ 15 ♔d1 ♘xa1 16 ♙b2, which is much better for White.

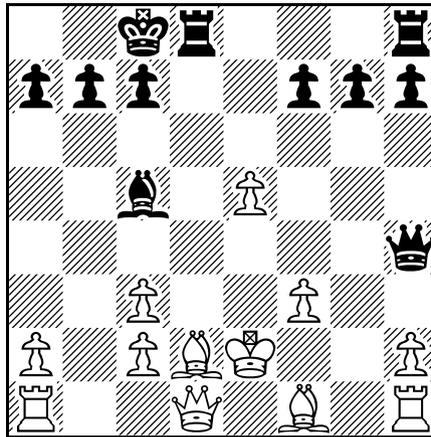
10...♙xf3+ 11 gxf3 ♘xe5

This really is a powerful sacrifice that shouldn't be accepted. I am not even going to ask the question now. White must now play 12 ♗e1! (as actually pointed out in Emanuel Lasker's *Manual of Chess*), after which Black may have nothing better than to exchange queens, with no more than a roughly equal endgame. The same motif is also known to occur in some lines of the Steinitz Gambit.

Because of this resource, Black should perhaps prefer the alternative piece sacrifice, 11...♘xd4+ 12 cxd4 ♗xd4, and if 13 ♗c1 ♗xe5+ 14 ♙e3 ♙c5, although after 15 ♔f2, White still has defensive chances.

As played in the game, White gains material, but his king lacks a crucial tempo to escape to d1, while on e2, it fatally obstructs the further development of White's queen and king's bishop. White is also plagued by a nasty pin on the d-file, allowing Black time to get in ...♙c5, and creating immediate mating threats.

12 dxe5 ♖c5



Black threatens mate on f2, leading to forced lines that eventually recoup much more than Black's initial knight sacrifice. White is lost, though Steinitz could hardly have calculated 'everything' at this point and would have relied in large part on good judgement.

Exercise: Before ploughing on with the final moves of the game, try to calculate as far as you can from this point. Hint: Take your calculations in bite-size chunks, try to put into words your main judgements and compare your results, in what follows below, with Steinitz's moves and insights.

13 ♖e1 ♖c4+ 14 ♔d1 ♖xc3 15 ♜b1

You should have tried to calculate at least as far as this move. White's last three moves were forced and Steinitz would certainly have realized (good judgement) that with his next move, he not only wins a second pawn for his knight, but also sets up a devastating attack on the e- and d-files, which 'must' work due to White's parlous lack of development and Black's massed forces.

Black wins at once, after 15 ♔e2? ♖xe5+.

15...♖xf3+ 16 ♖e2

With this move, White effectively caves in. Hamppe and Steinitz would both have noticed that Black could now simply capture White's rook on h1, and win, but that Black's sacrificial reply must be even stronger.

At his 12th move, Steinitz would have spent most time on finding a good reply to 16 ♔e2. He may not have analysed this completely clearly, but his judgement would almost certainly have convinced him that he 'must' stand well, after 16...♜xd2+! 17 ♔xd2 ♖e3+, which blasts White's king into the open and 'must' win somehow.

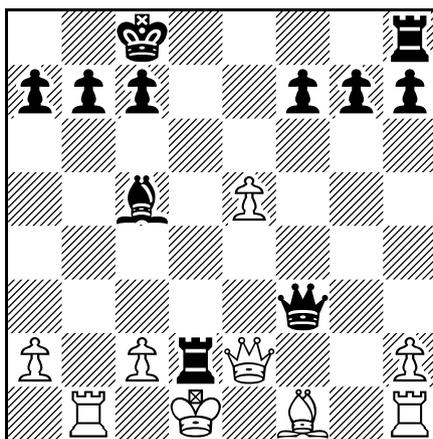
The computer confirms this judgement, after the further moves 18 ♔d1 ♜d8+ 19 ♔d3

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♞xd3+! 20 cxd3 ♞xd3+ 21 ♙c1 ♕a3+ 22 ♞b2 ♞b5! , when White must either give up his rook on b2, leaving Black with a winning queen, bishop and three pawns versus queen and rook endgame, or lose both rooks for Black's bishop, such as after 23 ♞f2 ♕xb2+ 24 ♞xb2 ♞c6+ .

If you managed to work all of that out at move 12 (especially noting the quality of Black's fine 22nd move), your calculating powers already match those of a powerful engine!

16...♞xd2+!



Black now wins by force.

Exercise: Try to work out Steinitz's concluding moves from this point.

17 ♙xd2 ♞d8+ 18 ♙c1

You probably noticed that after 18 ♞d3 (or if 18 ♙e1 ♞c3+) 18... ♞xd3+ 19 ♕xd3 , White's king is in terminal distress, such as after 19... ♕b4+ 20 ♞xb4 ♞xh1 , and wins.

18...♕a3+ 19 ♞b2 ♞c3

If you spotted this move, you will have realized that Black must again win material.

20 ♕h3+ ♙b8 21 ♞b5 ♞d2+!

Black needn't bother with the mundane, 21... ♕xb2+ 22 ♞xb2 ♞xh3 and wins, but ends with a pretty back-rank mate.

22 ♙b1 ♞d1+ 23 ♞xd1 ♞xd1 mate (0-1)