

Sofia Polgar

AMAZING ARTIST ♣ DANGEROUS TACTICIAN

by Sofia Polgar

Forewords by Susan Polgar and Judit Polgar

Sofia Polgar
Amazing Artist – Dangerous Tactician

© Copyright 2023
Sofia Polgar

All Rights Reserved. No part of this book may be used, reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any manner or form whatsoever or by any means, electronic, electrostatic, magnetic tape, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the express written permission from the publisher except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles or reviews.

ISBN: 978-1-949859-59-1 (print)
ISBN: 978-1-949859-60-7 (epub)

Published by: Russell Enterprises, LLC
PO Box 332
Portsmouth, NH 03802

Cover design: Molly Scanlon

All artwork and illustrations by Sofia Polgar
Photos: Special thanks to the Judit Polgar Chess Foundation,
Timea Jaksa, Alina I'Ami, Paul Truong, and Stev Bonhage

You are invited to visit Sofia Polgar's website www.SofiaPolgar.com

Printed in the United States of America



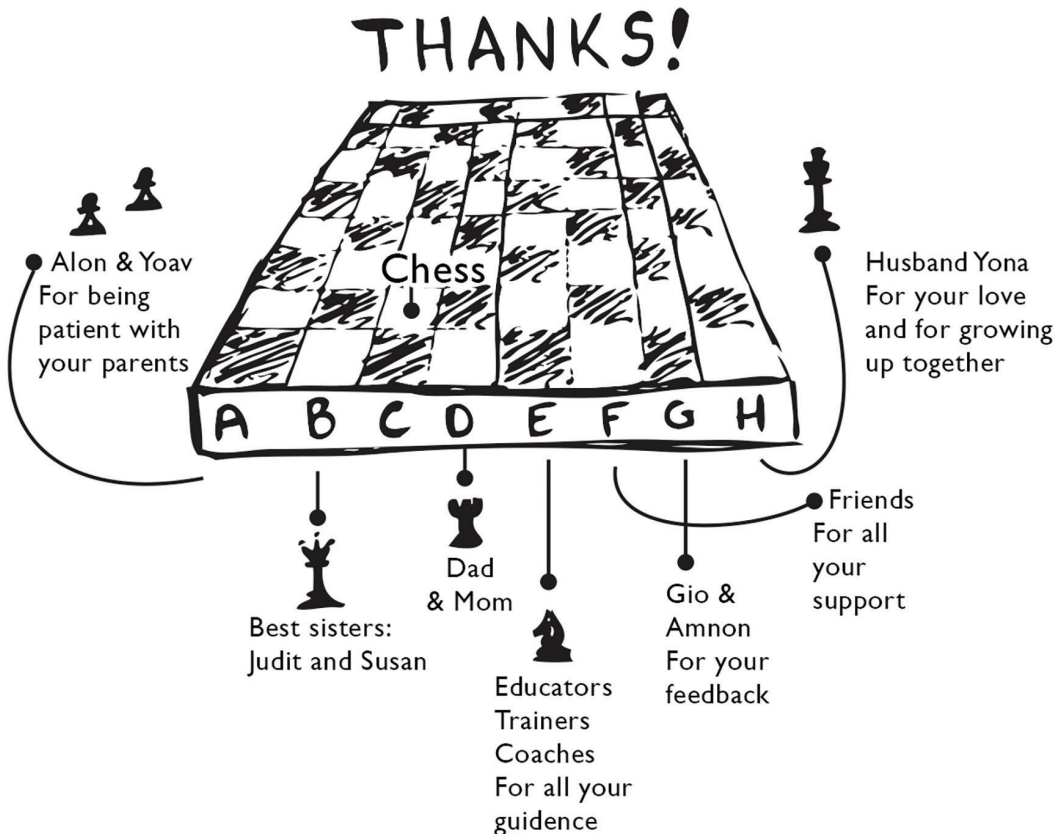
Dedication & Acknowledgements

This book is dedicated to my parents, Klara and Laszlo.

Dad, you've asked me for years to write a book of my selected chess games and finally here it is. Hope you like it!

Mom, your support is endless and so is my admiration for you.

For everyone who ever made a blunder.



Thanks also to publication designer Molly Scanlon and publisher Hanon Russell for bringing this project to fruition.

Contents

1	Introduction	10
2	Family Background	13
3	Basic Chess Lessons	18
4	Watch Your Back!	63
5	Sicilian Madness and Youth Championships	81
6	King's Gambit	116
7	Attack on the Seventh Rank	150
8	Olympic Experience	164
9	Open Files and Diagonals	186
10	Going After the King	205
11	Miracle in Rome	246
12	Chess and Friends	255

FOREWORD BY SUSAN POLGAR

This book is a very unique mix of autobiography, chess instruction, art, and more. Knowing my sister Sofia since her birth, I can confirm that it perfectly reflects her personality, what she is like and what she stands for.

Sofia has been – somewhat unfairly – in the shadow of her sisters, but she has accomplished a great deal in chess in her own right. Had she been born into any other family, she would have received a lot more recognition.

In addition to being a multiple-time Olympic champion, Sofia is most famous for winning a major international tournament in Rome with an amazing score of 8½ points out of 9, ahead of a number of Soviet grandmasters. That unbelievable score meant a performance rating of 2930 (a world record at any open tournament in those days), which gave her front-page coverage in many chess magazines. Read more about it the chapter “Miracle in Rome.”

Throughout the book, Sofia introduces the reader to the basics of chess in a fun and entertaining way. She gives you an insight into the world of chess from her childhood memories through the years of being a professional chessplayer. She shares her perspective of her early years in chess with many funny stories, as well as the golden years of “Polgaria,” when we – the three Polgar sisters – “conquered the chess world” together as a family (see the chapter “Olympic Experience”).

She has divided this book into twelve chapters, mostly based on tactical elements such as “Watch your Back” (referring to the weakness of the back rank) or “Attack on the Seventh Rank,” etc., using almost exclusively her own games as examples. Sofia has always been known for her fearless attacking style of play and countless combinations, dangerous even for grandmasters. The various, most important (and beautiful) chess tactical motifs, are illustrated also by her own artwork along with fun quotes taken from the greats of chess to mainstream celebrities.

I remember that Sofia, even as a young girl (7-8 years old), used to love arts and would draw beautiful colorful drawings effortlessly, sometimes even during chess training. After her retirement from competitive chess, she prioritized taking care of her family, while at the same time arts (and specifically painting and drawing) became her passion. In this work, she explains the parallels between art in general and art in chess.

Even though she is now inactive as player, Sofia has found various ways to remain connected to chess. For example, through her chess-themed artworks as well as co-authoring with our sister Judit, a series of educational chess-books.

This work on one hand is a fun instructional chess book, and on the other hand, a journey for the reader, learning about Sofia and her family. You are invited to enjoy the experience of the wonderful legacy of Sofia's amazing chess career and art.

Susan Polgar



FOREWORD BY JUDIT POLGAR

My sister Sofia is a wonderful person. A treasure. She has been an honest and true friend from the day I was born to this day. I like to think that will always be the case.

The three Polgar sisters have been known to the world since 1988, when we won the Olympic gold medal for Hungary in Thessaloniki. Our chess careers are different; Our sister Susan's and mine are better known to the public. That is why I am so happy that Sofia has written her own story, in her own words. I am delighted that she made the decision to share her incredible journey.

From her personal perspective, she reveals how she grew up, how she felt and discovered the world through chess, and how she became an artist on the chessboard and beyond. She loves to reflect her feelings and thoughts on canvas.

I remember the atmosphere of our training sessions, and how much we giggled, smiled, and laughed. We were together in good times and hard times. When we played together in the same tournament, it was important that we could share and discuss everything. She was and still is a huge support for me. Her smile gives a positive vibration to everyone around her. It is always a pleasure and fun to talk and work with her, as we did at the first educational chess book, followed by more later. Her passion as a teacher-educator, her positivity, and her open, creative attitude and vision are contagious, all of which come through while reading this book, thanks to her unique writing style.

I wish the readers a pleasant journey on this artistic excursion that provides great chess lessons while also offering nourishment for the soul. Enjoy!

Judit Polgar, Budapest

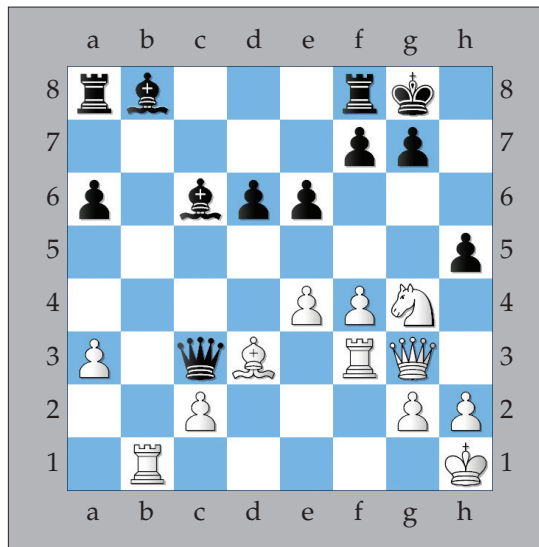


Let us see a few more games in the Sicilian against my Icelandic opponents.

Sofia Polgar – Ralf Akesson

Reykjavik 1988

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 a6 5.Bd3 Bc5 6.Nb3 Ba7 7.0-0 Nc6 8.Qg4 Nf6 9.Qg3 d6 10.Nc3 b5 11.a3 0-0 12.Bg5 Ne5 13.Rad1 Qe7 14.Kh1 Ng6 15.Be2 h6 16.Bxf6 Qxf6 17.f4 Bb8 18.Nd4 Ne7 19.Nf3 Nc6 20.Bd3 Bb7 21.Rde1 b4 22.Nd1 bxa3 23.bxa3 Nd4 24.Ne3 Nxf3 25.Rxf3 Qc3? 26.Rb1 Bc6 27.Ng4 h5



Black's last move attacks the knight, so the question is where to go with it, right? It is tempting to give a check with 28.Nh6+ because of the pinned pawn on the g-file, but after 28...Kh8, the knight seems to be trapped. If White then tries to continue to attack with 29.Qg5, 29...Qf6! forces the exchange of queens. After the exchange, White is in real trouble without an escape route for the knight.

So rather than going anywhere with the knight, I chose another way. **28.e5!** Rather than retreating the knight, I put also my rook en prise, but at the same time the pawn move opens the diagonal for the white bishop and prepares for tricks on the third rank. If Black takes the knight, 28...hxg4?, then 29.Bh7+! with a discovered attack – 29...Kxh7 30.Rxc3 and the queen is lost.

28...Bxf3 29.Nf6+ The knight cannot be taken due to the pin. **29...Kh8 30.Qxf3** Forking the rook and the h5-pawn; the pawn has to be protected otherwise it is mate. Capturing the knight leads to mate in two moves: 30...gxf6 31.Qxh5+ Kg7 32.Qh7# mate. **30...g6 31.Qxa8 dxe5** White is a

knight up. Black tries some back rank tricks offering me the bishop, but that naturally does not work. 32.Rxb8?? taking the bishop would be huge blunder: 32...Qe1+ with mate on the first rank. 32.Nd7 Rc8 33.Nxb8 1-0 Capturing the bishop with the knight is safe now and White is two pieces up, so Black resigned.

Witchcraft

Acrylic on canvas, 2005



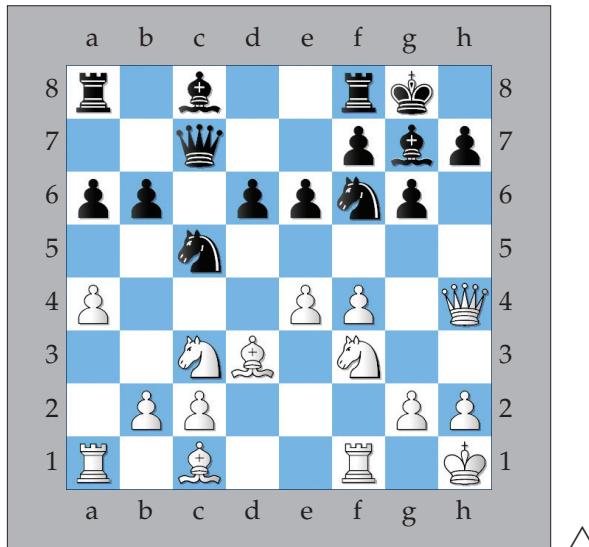
A few years later in another tournament in Reykjavik, I played the legendary Danish grandmaster Bent Larsen, who was the strongest Western player in the world until Fischer surpassed him (and everyone else, the Soviets included). Mr. Larsen was one of the most intellectual people I knew; he was great with languages and the author of many good books. I feel fortunate to have known him personally and also to have had some valuable training sessions with him. In the international tournament in Reykjavik in 1995, we played the following exciting game.



Playing for the first time against Bent Larsen in 1988, in Mexico at the Rapid World Chess Championship. Mom is watching behind me.

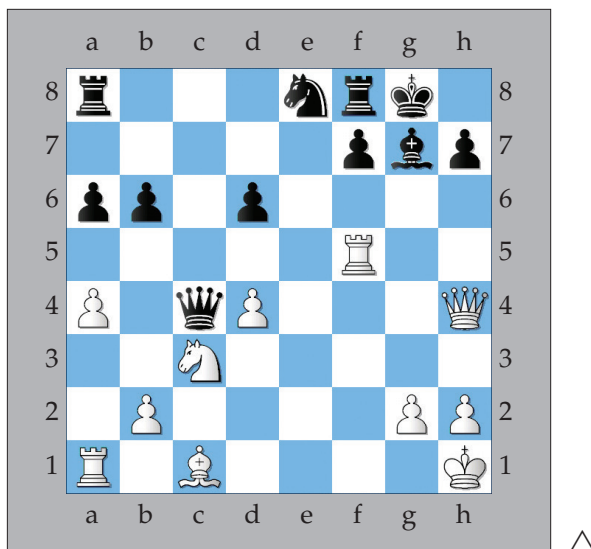
Sofia Polgar – Bent Larsen
Reykjavik 1995

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 Nf6 4.Nc3 cxd4 5.Nxd4 Nbd7!? 6.f4 a6 7.Nf3 Qc7 8.a4 g6 9.Bd3 Bg7 10.0-0 0-0 11.Qe1 There are two ideas behind the queen move, preparing a possible push with e4-e5 and transferring the queen to the kingside. 11...e6 Playing both ...g6 and ...e6 with Black in the Sicilian is rarely successful... 12.Kh1 As usual, I prefer to remove my king out of any possible checks from b6 by Black's queen. 12...Nc5 13.Qh4 b6



14.f5! A pawn sacrifice with the plan of opening the diagonal for the bishop and preparing play for the rook on the f-file. The aim, in general, is to weaken Black's pawn structure. 14...exf5 15.exf5 Nxd3 16.cxd3 Bxf5 17.Nd4 Offering another pawn, but taking it, 17...Bxd3 18. Rxf6, would lose material for Black. If Black defends the bishop with 17...Qd7, after 18.Nxf5 gxf5 19.Bh6, White gets great compensation for the sacrificed pawn.

17...Qc5 18.Nxf5 gxf5 19.d4 Now the queen is chased away from the defense of the pawn and the material balance will be restored. 19...Qc4 20.Rxf5 If 20...Qe6, 21.Rg5 is quite strong. 20...Ne8 Not the best defense, but there is some logic to it: defending the bishop on g7.



21.Nd5! The superpower of a knight in the center is again revealed. If 21... Qxd4?, White follows with a beautiful queen sacrifice that would win the game after the knight check: 22.Ne7+ Kh8 23.Qxh7+!! Kxh7 24.Rh5+ Bh6 25.Rxh6+ Kg7 26.Nf5+ winning the queen back, with an extra bishop.

21...Ra7 Giving check with the knight would be a huge mistake now: 22.Ne7+? Rxe7 23.Qxe7 Qd3! and White gets in trouble with the rook hanging and the weak back rank. **22.Be3** Finally the bishop is out! No more worries on the back rank. **22...f6** **23.Qe4!** The queen will also be able to attack h7 from here; everything considered, this is a more active spot for it. **23...Raf7** **24.Ne7+ Kh8**

25.Rh5 1-0 Black resigned, since the h-pawn will be taken one way or another, after which the king is too exposed. For example, after 25...f5, a rook sacrifice leads to mate in only three moves: 26.Rxh7+! Kxh7 27.Qh4+ Bh6 28.Qxh6#.

*“Chess is a matter of delicate judgement,
knowing when to punch and how to duck.”*

– Bobby Fischer

Homage Szinyei Merse Pal
Acrylic on canvas, 2018



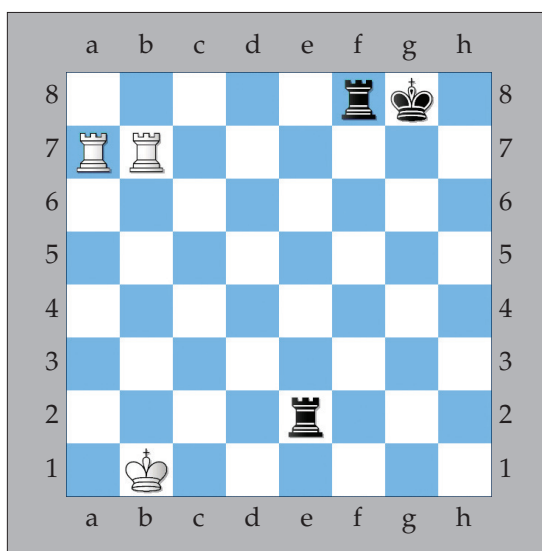
Homage to Szinyei Merse Pal's Balloon, one of my favorite artworks at the Hungarian National Gallery. This painting was born when I heard the Global Chess Festival will be held at this spectacular location.

Attack on the Seventh Rank

IN previous games when examining basic tactics, we saw how powerful rooks can be on the open files and when invading the enemy's position on the back ranks. In addition, rooks also seem to have super-powers on the seventh rank (for White) and the second rank (for Black). When one rook enters the seventh rank, it can attack sideways and if the rooks double on the seventh, it is double, if not triple the trouble for the opponent!

With such a teamwork between the rooks, a mating attack with checks is tailored for the seventh rank. Another typical pattern is that one rook takes the escape route away from the king, while the other rook gives mate on the back rank. Both methods can be seen in the following example.

Basic checkmate with doubled rooks



For example, in this position, if it is Black's turn, there is mate right away on the back rank with **1...Rf1#**. The white king cannot escape to the second rank because of the other black rook. However, if it is white to move, he can give mate in three moves with the doubled rooks on the seventh rank: **1.Rg7+!** Forcing the king into the corner. **1...Kh8** Now another check... **2.Rh7+ Kg8** and now that one rook controls the corner, the other rook shows up to mate: **3.Rag7#**.