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PREFACE

Improve Your Chess Now – the 2023 edition

Before sitting down to write this I was curious to see how I introduced the original edition of *Improve Your Chess Now*, both to see how it had aged and to avoid repeating myself, which seems easy to do, even at an interval of about 25 years.

It is heartening to look back on that volume and feel that it has indeed become a bit of a classic. The first few chapters were almost revolutionary for their time, daring to question the gospel of Alexander Kotov and his ‘tree of variations’, and introducing a neat concept, ‘stepping stones’, that has since entered the chess vocabulary, at least for those who focus on teaching and training.

The book was very well received, and gained flattering praise from esteemed chess educators, all the way up to the fabled Mark Dvoretsky. Even more gratifying is that it has provided me with long and regular positive feedback from readers.

I was bemused to see that I referred to the enormous rise of skill and literacy in the information age in the original introduction. Today’s levels were literally beyond imagination then. This book was written in the spirit of Mikhail Botvinnik, who intoned that all grandmasters should produce one upon achieving their title. The same Botvinnik famously sneered that he had played a blitz game – once (on a train). Now we can see just how much speed chess helps people gain strength and experience.

So, has this vintage volume aged well?

The book focuses on examining and honing your thought processes, and distilling various forms of wisdom touching on the psychological aspects of playing the game. It wasn’t written with engines, it was written to arm players for human combat. Since we are never going to be beating the machines, the study of how best to battle flesh-and-blood opponents should still be highly relevant.

You will find occasional dated references to the state of chess theory in those old days, and even a few antiquated engine opinions that should be viewed with historic interest. They give some context, but don’t change the relevant focus of the book.

One thing not emphasized enough is that I also intended the book to be a manual for self-training. Much of it is laid out in a format useful for creating material for working with a training partner (or students – we

also learn from teaching). There was also a hope that readers would find the proposed advice provides tools that allow them to inspect the way they think, learn, and improve.

Finally, I would like to confess my one lasting regret—the book’s title. It was the catchy suggestion of an editor, and coveted by another writer at the publisher’s, but even though I am sure it was better than my ideas, it never really sat well with me. The book may be relatively slim, but it isn’t easy, and there is very little ‘Now’ about it, except perhaps as a call to begin some hard work ASAP. ‘Now’ you have been properly warned.

I hope you will still find it full of useful advice.

Jonathan Tisdall

Asker, Norway, July 2023

Introduction

Seeing much, suffering much, and studying much, are the three pillars of learning – Benjamin Disraeli

Who am I, and what is this book about?

I can clearly remember the first time I read the fairly clichéd description of someone as a player ‘with a promising future behind him’. I appreciated the witticism so much that it may have subconsciously influenced what looked like a bright chess career. In any event, the shoe soon fit.

Moving on to (part of) another well-worn expression – ‘Those who cannot do, teach’ – we can find part of the justification behind this book. When a player insists on trying to make his way in the chess world despite obstacles and handicaps, teaching is often the haven he seeks.

Studying the games and careers of great players offers obvious advantages, but in many ways their trials are far removed from the sufferings of other mortals. A diary of upwardly spiralling success punctuated by declarations that ‘Grandmaster X¹ is now out to get me’ can make fascinating reading. On the other hand, the more mundane scenario of erratic results, blown wins and painful setbacks contains, I think, more fertile ground for cultivating material suited for improving one’s game.

This book is a manual for players facing problems in the development of their skills, i.e., most people. I will try to explain what goes on when experienced players are thinking, or what should go on. There is a lot of psychology and philosophy here. Although such serious words are not considered ideal when finding a title for a book, I hope that they will in fact make this book instructive in a less conventional way.

In the course of a long and sporadically encouraging career, I have given a lot of thought to various methods of improvement. This book is a selection of various ideas, both my own and those of others.

Some classic advice must be repeated, but I have tried to expand on this when possible. I have tried to list all conscious influences. During the closing stages of writing I have begun to understand how many subconscious influences there are. To deal with this, you will find an appendix that combines the tasks of a bibliography and a review list.

This book breaks some with recent tradition, and tries to supply references and documentation when possible. Some of the quotations

1 Or ‘Champion K’?

have proved elusive. This is partly due to the growing trend of incomplete information in all aspects of study. Rather than be overly scholarly, I have retained some quotes that are not fully referenced, simply because I couldn't resist them.

Is this book what you need?

I doubt that most readers will find every part of this book useful. On the other hand, I consider it likely that there will be material here that suits the reader perfectly, or fires the imagination. The practical sections of the book have worked successfully in training programs with players of various levels. The more abstract sections will, I hope, stimulate the kind of thinking that may spark improvement, or point to an area of study that will be of benefit.

Whenever I write or annotate, I do try to accommodate as wide an audience as possible. One's embrace can never be as wide as desired and I know that I tend to aim a little 'high'. This leads me to believe that I should suggest that the prospective reader of this book have a reasonable amount of playing experience.

Having said that, much of the material in this book has already been presented in some form to a wide range of players, from 'ordinary' club standard to promising youngsters, with encouraging results.

At the lower levels, a lot of the material may seem to go to waste, but many of the techniques are designed as self-training programs that one can implement at any pace. My experience is that the ideas here can help you help yourself. What may not be useful at once may come in handy later. And if just one of the training ideas proves helpful, I think you will reap clear benefits from this volume.

In the course of writing this book, I had hoped that working through my own barriers would provide material here. In retrospect, having finally achieved the grandmaster title during this time, I can only say that I am now even more convinced that each player must find his own unique solution to the problem of improving – there are so many things that can be done! If at times this book seems to wander, it is due to precisely this. Hopefully this will also ensure a sufficiency of ideas to explore. If nothing else, this book should be a great time-saver for those wondering about how to improve – a kind of training travelogue.

Starting fresh

One experiment I undertook in the course of this book was trying to recapture the awe and befuddlement that grips a newcomer to the game. I did this by renewing my acquaintance with shogi, the Japanese form of

chess. This certainly served its purpose. That game continues to baffle me completely, and helped give me back a sense of the beginner's mind. Some aspects of how shogi is taught and a few tactical patterns have made their way here. It was a thought-provoking jaunt, and some useful observations resulted.

How to read this book

Every detail of a major project tends to torment me. While I was writing this book, the problem of ordering the chapters was a recurring headache. This is how I see the material:

The critical chapters are those based on the 'Fabled Tree of Analysis' (Chapter 1), and the technique of 'stepping-stone diagrams' (Chapter 2). These ideas recur so often in other chapters that they had to come first.

Apart from this, I think the book can be read in any order, and is designed to be browsable, despite the occasional gravity attached to a teaching curriculum. I like the free-form chapter called Wisdom and Advice, which is a kind of micro-book. Basically, I wanted to present material in the form I find most appealing when studying. Using quotations to focus and separate material and being able to dip in and out as desired lighten the task of learning, at least for me.

How did this book come about?²

To be honest, this book as it exists now probably resulted from one of the offhand conversations I had with Anatoly Lein years ago. Occasionally these simple chats would take an unexpectedly serious turn. Suddenly Grandmaster Lein would erupt with a heartfelt question aimed in my direction. I don't know if he meant these questions to be largely rhetorical. Many of them have lingered with me over the years.

This book begins with one. A veritable koan that I have never been able to forget. I have another one (question and perhaps, book) nagging away at me, planted in the same way. Maybe someday I will have to try to answer that one too. In the meantime, I have to thank Anatoly Lein for giving me so much food for thought in such compressed form. A tip of the hat also to my various students, who have endured a great deal of the material in this book, and helped me to hone my conclusions.

I would like to thank the members of the shogi list, an email group on the Internet, particularly Jeff Mallett, who took the time to contribute thoughts and comparisons about the games and their respective teaching traditions.

2 The short answer: it took a long time to write, and a lot of people helped.

I would also like to thank Jeff LaHue for some enlightening source material on Alfred Binet and other research into blindfold chess. I am grateful to Andrew Kinsman for commissioning this book, and for encouraging it, despite the fact that writing it outlasted his stint as editor. Finally, Murray Chandler's threats were necessary (and appreciated) to get me to stop writing and fussing.

I am a little apologetic that some of my Norwegian friends and colleagues have quite a few losses included here. The material is influenced by my surroundings, and these games just happen to lie closer to my consciousness.

In its first incarnation, this book was to be an updating of Renaud and Kahn's *The Art of Checkmate*, a relatively forgotten work which does a marvellous job of teaching mating attacks through pattern training. Now, this topic lies in an appendix.

While basic attacking and pattern training are valuable subjects, they have been well covered in other works. This topic remains a part of this book, but has been merged with more ambitious training ideas. Much of what was a sterling textbook in my youth is common knowledge now. And that is not just because my youth was frighteningly long ago. The general level of skill and literacy in chess has risen enormously in this age of information.

So, I began to feel a more ambitious work beckoning, one with a more philosophical and psychological angle. This is it, and I hope it helps.

Jonathan Tisdall
Oslo 1994

Game 6 Slav Defence

Predrag Nikolic 2645

Jonathan Tisdall 2510

Reykjavik 1996

This game was played in the penultimate round, and I was leading a very strong field by half a point. I give the prelude to the instructive moment with light notes, concentrating instead on the subjective factors, nerves and psychology, that affected the game.

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♘f3 e6 5.e3 ♗bd7 6.♙e2

A rather uncommon move and not Nikolic's usual choice.

6...♙d6 7.0-0 0-0 8.b3

By leaving out ♖c2 White puts less pressure on Black, who does not have to watch out for e4 yet.

8...♖e7

8...b6 was maybe the most flexible.

9.♙b2 b6 10.♖c2 ♙b7 11.e4 ♘xe4

12.♘xe4 dxe4 13.♖xe4 f5!

This seems to be very strong here – the e4-square gives Black active play and White has surprising difficulty in keeping e5 profitably under control.

14.♖e3

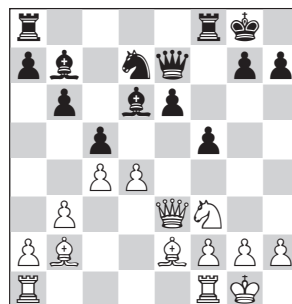
14.♖h4 is more prudent. I intended 14...c5! (14...♖xh4 15.♘xh4 c5 is less accurate since it allows White the favourable exchange 16.♙f3)

15.♖xe7 ♙xe7 16.dxc5 ♘xc5 17.♞fd1 ♞ad8 with comfortable play for Black.

14...c5

This position seems better for Black – his pieces are more actively placed

and there are many ways to liberate the centre.



15.♞ad1

Not 15.♘e5?? cxd4 16.♙xd4 f4 17.♖c3 ♙xe5 18.♙xe5 ♖g5 and Black wins.

15...♞ad8 16.dxc5

16.♘g5 ♞de8 (16...♞fe8!? – Nikolic) and White will waste more time with the knight than Black with his rook.

16...♙xc5 17.♖g5

Now White is eager to trade to relieve the pressure, but Black does not cooperate (yet).

17...♘f6 18.♞xd8 ♞xd8 19.♘e5

Nikolic later admitted that he disliked his position so much here that he considered a full grovel with 19.♙xf6 ♖xf6 20.♖xf6 gxf6 21.♞d1 but not only is this distinctly unpalatable, it would also remove any hope of Black developing a disorder of the nerves. This line would give Black a comfortable and utterly safe advantage.

At this stage there were two sets of dominant psychological factors. First, I was growing intoxicated with what was clearly a charmed event for me. Riding a wave of

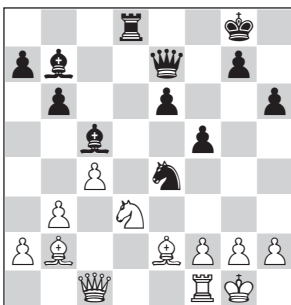
success, I found myself playing quickly and easily and at this stage my opponent had just over half an hour for the rest of the game, while I had about an hour and a quarter. Not only could I feel the accumulated confidence of the earlier rounds, but I could also see that I stood better here in every possible way.

Added to this was the sight of my esteemed opponent, who was using vast amounts of time and was visibly depressed as his chance to move into first place had transformed into prospects of disaster. These elements now combine to create a kind of imbalance which Kotov aptly called ‘dizziness due to success’.

19...h6 20. ♖c1 ♜e4

Everything goes forward smoothly. Black eyes the squares d2 and f2, and e5 is soon to come under control as well.

21. ♜d3



21... ♜xd3??

I subsequently nominated this move for an ‘Elmer Fudd award’, in honour of the huntsman eternally outwitted by Bugs Bunny.

The explanation for this is that the whole process behind this move reminds me of the classic cartoon routine; I am seized by an irresistible desire to blow my opponent’s head off. I then proceed to use most of my time calculating and recalculating the variations associated with the sacrifice. I cannot make it work, but keep trying... Finally, after listening to the frustrating clicks of the weapon refusing to fire, I perform the chess equivalent of pointing it at my face, looking down the barrel, and pulling the trigger one more time – with the usual result.

The reflex reaction here was to set the centre in motion by 21... ♜d6, and this captured my attention for a brief span. While this is tempting, it has the disadvantage of making Black’s dark-squared bishop inferior to White’s. (That is, when the black pawn advances to e5 pressure will be mounted with the aid of the b2-bishop, while the d6-bishop will, at least temporarily, be assigned a defensive role.) This is in fact the key strategic theme here, and if I had had the composure to think as rationally as in previous rounds it would almost certainly have struck me. Instead, I was playing my strategic moves solely on the basis of what I felt was my inspired feel for the game, and spicing this up with the occasional tactical calculation. There was absolutely no sense of detachment or calm reflection.

While I was sitting around wasting my time, Nikolic noticed that 21...♙d4! simply gives Black a gigantic edge. Black removes White's best piece, and takes even firmer control of the d-file and centre. I don't know exactly how to weigh Black's advantage here, but I would wager that Nikolic would beat himself with Black here fairly regularly. One sample variation we looked at is 22.♙xd4 ♖xd4 23.f3 ♖xd3 24.♙xd3 ♜c5+ 25.♙h1 ♗f2+ 26.♖xf2 ♜xf2 27.♙b1 ♙f7 and White's position is excruciatingly passive.

Meanwhile, I had noticed how dangerous the text-move was, and now my 'intuition' convinced me that the sacrifice had to be justified. My opponent is in full retreat, obviously dispirited, and everything is going my way. The fact that I could not successfully extract a single convincing variation during this internal struggle between desire and reason was insufficient to curb my obsession with not only winning, but winning in style.

22. ♙xd3 ♜h4 23. ♜e1! ♜g5?

And this is also feeble, but now reality had set in, with profoundly depressing effect. A better attempt was 23...♙d6!? though White wins with accurate play: 24.g3 (24.h3? ♜f4 25.g3 ♜f3 26.♙e2 ♗g5) 24...♗g5 (24...♜h3 25.♙xe4 (25.f3 ♙c5+ 26.♙h1 ♗g5 27.♙e2) 25...♙xe4 26.f3) 25.♜xe6+! ♗xe6 26.gxh4 ♗f4 27.♖d1 ♙f3 28.c5! (even stronger

than 28.♙c2) and White wins the ending easily. If 23...♗g5, then 24.♜e5 and the white queen hits g7 and prepares to drop back to g3 if needed.

24. ♙h1!

Most efficient.

24...♗d2 25. ♜xe6+ ♙f8 26. ♖g1 ♗e4 27. ♙xe4 ♙xe4 28. ♙d4!

As Porkey Pig says, 'Th-that's all folks.'

1-0

The moral of this sad tale could hardly be clearer.

Talking to yourself

Here is another example of a conversational, 'anti-Kotovian' episode, which I ran across while finishing this book. GM Gregory Kaidanov writes in *Inside Chess*, 9 December 1996, about his thought-process as Black to move in this position:

Game 7

Igor Foigel	2544
Gregory Kaidanov	2600

Boston 1995



Kaidanov's first comments when discussing this position are to refer to Kotov's theory of candidate moves. Like so many players raised in the shadow of Kotov's teaching, he outlines the theory, gives it credit, and then says that it does not always work. I always get the impression that there is a fear of being branded a heretic if and when someone ventures to criticize the gospel according to Kotov. You almost expect the Spanish Inquisition. Even players of Kaidanov's stature get apologetic for thinking like people instead of shrubbery. Anyway, Kaidanov gives us a glimpse into how he really thinks, or at least how he thought here:

'First I looked at 16...♙e4 but didn't like it in view of 17.♗xe4 dxe4 18.♖xd8 ♙axd8 19.♗g5. Then I considered 16...♗d7 but rejected it because of 17.♗d4. Next I asked myself, "OK what is White's next move?" The answer was 17.c4; this is why he played ♙c1. It was only after that I came up with a move, which originally was not among my candidates.'

Although Kaidanov has not gone into detail about how his ruminations resulted in his actual choice of move, there are a number of details here worth stressing. First, this is a very clear case of an impasse being cleared by an internal chat. Also, it seems to me from the way Kaidanov relates this tale, that he gets his candidates

from a quick, concrete examination of the moves that appeal to him. This is not explicit – perhaps he just drew up a short list and didn't like what he saw. But since he gives this process as an exception to Kotov's procedure, I infer that his little internal dialogue took place before what would normally be a conscious 'shopping list' of potential candidates. The result of his conversation was:

16...♖c8!!

'This move does everything:

- 1) It protects the pawn on e6 and so prepares both 17...♗d7 and ...♙e4.
- 2) Now 17.c4 is inadvisable in view of 17...♙d8!.' – Kaidanov.

There is only one other thing I would add here. This example is in fact a classic example of prophylactic thinking. Kaidanov's thought-process did not (at least as presented) deal so much with the elements of the position revealed by the concrete variations he first examined. It was instead addressed to the opponent's possibilities, and reacting to or restricting them. This is also an extremely important way of approaching a position, and will be discussed again elsewhere in the book.

Would Kotov agree?

As heretical as some of this chapter may seem, I think that even Kotov would admit that there is good reason to consider the method of thinking outlined here. Although the tree of analysis is

probably Kotov's most enduring contribution to chess teaching, he too advocated the knitting together of the two approaches, abstract and concrete. This is very easy to overlook. A careful reading of *Think Like a Grandmaster*, some hundred pages after the discussion of arboreal husbandry (page 134 of the algebraic edition), reveals the following statement, in a section on positional judgement:

'I hope these examples of how to combine general formulae with concrete variations will help the reader to understand this important topic. I recommend him to use general formulae, to define in words what the immediate plans of each side are, both in his own games and in analysing grandmaster games.' While this is not at all the same as the process outlined in this chapter, it indicates again the wisdom of trying to combine the different approaches to examining a position. In fact, the positional judgement section of Kotov's book purports to show how positional assessments should be combined with concrete analysis, but the examples almost exclusively employ abstract assessments, just as his analytical chapter was almost exclusively based on variations.

Kotov implies that this is a useful way to begin understanding the

strategic currents in a game. I think that it is of even greater use when calculating, and as a practical tool. To repeat, instead of just using general positional guidelines, one should also try to translate the findings of concrete variations into a general, verbal form. The extremely scientific approach outlined in Kotov's *Tree of Analysis* is better suited for study.

The last word

Old people have fewer diseases than the young, but their diseases never leave them. – Hippocrates (460-370 BC)

If there is any one factor that may have influenced my recent modest increase in success⁴, I think it is this conscious knitting of abstract thought and concrete calculation. The added emphasis on the intuitive side of the game, and using it to harness the scientific side of the brain, gives one's play a type of harmony that I find both satisfying and rewarding. For others the emphasis may well need to be the other way round, finding a way to enhance a general approach with concrete calculating skills.

Unfortunately, for those of us with a lifetime of bad habits, there will always be problems, recurring and new, to overcome. Still, every little step forward helps.

⁴ Since writing this I seem to have slipped back to my more familiar bumbling ways, but that only reinforces the point of the next paragraph.

Chapter Summary

Talk to yourself – not out loud of course – that’s against the rules, and chess players have a shaky enough reputation already.

Try to determine your next move by examining one principal variation. This variation may either be the one which first or most strongly appeals, or which you feel seems to fit the strategic demands of the position.

Process the concrete variations calculated, into themes and positional factors and use them to determine what moves are likely to be relevant. Use the information gathered on your calculations, and try to render it in verbal form that makes it useful for further searches. Describe your findings.

Do not be afraid to use intuition, or abstract factors when seeking lines to calculate.

If your primary variation is unsatisfactory, calm down, lean back, and make a thorough list of possible candidates with fresh eyes. While using intuition to begin work on a position has merits, some order has to be brought in quickly. Otherwise there is no balance in one’s approach, and the grave danger of simply firing off random lines exists. If your first shot is off target, you need a wider view.

The times for a conscious listing of candidate moves are quite logical: when one pauses naturally due to an obvious wealth of alternatives, or when one’s preliminary calculations have not achieved the desired result. In sharp, tactical positions it is extremely important to make a *comprehensive* list at these times.

There is one other time when it can be rewarding to have a careful scan of possible moves. Having decided on a course of action, it can often be worthwhile to have one last, attentive inventory of the board. This can be impractical if one plunges into thought anew, but it often turns up something important. This can be a potential blunder that went overlooked while you were immersed in other details. Most often, this last check is useful in very good positions, to seek out an absolutely crushing move instead of a reasonably strong one.

Have faith in your calculations. You may be wrong, but you have only yourself to trust. If you are often wrong, it just means that you need to improve this ability, but when you use it, you must trust it.

In predominantly strategic games, the search process is similar, but the calculation of concrete variations will be less important than the internal discussion of positional elements.

The Art of Playing Bad Positions

Nothing succeeds like success. ('Rien ne réussit comme le succès.') – Alexandre Dumas

Here I would like to take a look at a relatively unexplored topic, the art of playing (and succeeding in) bad, perhaps terrible, positions. I can think of several reasons why this topic has evaded popular scrutiny. For one thing, it is hard enough to organize constructive ways to study 'proper' chess. Studying positions where one side may be objectively lost is even more vexing. How to formulate guidelines, how to assimilate this information without simply concluding that with a little extra brain power from the swindled party such examples would have been consigned to some scrap heap?

Another problem is that what worked in one specific example might have failed miserably against another opponent – or even against the same opponent on a different day. Nevertheless, we can try to find some common themes in these 'lucky' escapes. When one stops to think about it, the phenomenon of the 'unjust' result is one of the commonest occurrences. The heartfelt wail of 'I was winning' is universally known. The proverbial nugget that nothing is harder to win than a won position strikes a sympathetic chord, even though

nothing could be farther from the truth.

In fact, an examination of the handling of bad positions should be one of the cornerstones of effective technique. We will, sadly, need to know how to do it often enough. Above all, we need to learn how to stop others from doing it successfully. The lucid realization of advantages so beautifully demonstrated by the Karpovs and Capablanecas of the chess pantheon teach us a great deal, but in our own struggles, the messier task of dispatching a wounded adversary is often more useful.

To begin, I will propose a few guidelines for the treatment of 'diseased' positions. You may be able to add to the list. We should take these, like all rules, with a grain of salt. Advanced cases of positional decay may require a more drastic prescription.

1. Keep fighting. Chess is not an easy game, as Miguel Najdorf claimed his grandmother always told him. The longer and more often your opponent has to find strong moves, the greater the chances that his or her human frailty will come to your aid. There

is almost always an opportunity to claw your way back into a game.

2. Create problems for your opponent. Identify the strong points of your position, and try to find a way to use them. Aim above all to gain activity, and to centralize your forces. It is absolutely amazing how much resistance can be mustered just based on these two simple strategic elements.

3. Seek the initiative, even at the cost of material. The turning point in a game often comes when the player with an advantage must pull back and defend. When you are in difficulties, the spectre of defeat should also provide some psychological liberation. The pressure on you lessens while your opponent has more and more to lose. Whatever problems you can pose can only unsettle the enemy.

4. Prolong resistance. Do-or-die gambles and cheap tricks are only advisable when one's position is more or less resignable. In most cases such violent thrashings will only make things worse and hasten defeat. Especially in calmer games there is more to be gained by patient and gradual improvement of the position. Complications do tend to improve the chances of the inferior side, but only if they are based on the positive aspects of one's position (assuming there are some!), and not some prayer-winged shot in the dark. In a nutshell: don't make your position worse. I well remember the first times I began to regularly

encounter players of a certain class. If you hit them, you could hurt them, but they didn't just fold up and fall down. You had to keep at them. Players below this level would get rattled, make additional errors, panic. The ability to limit damage and cold-bloodedly make the most of what one has left can be extremely discouraging for the opponent.

5. Use your imagination. As a game heads towards its apparently inevitable conclusion, even the most seasoned competitor has a hard time maintaining concentration. A watchful and inventive eye for a last tactical finesse can give surprising benefits.

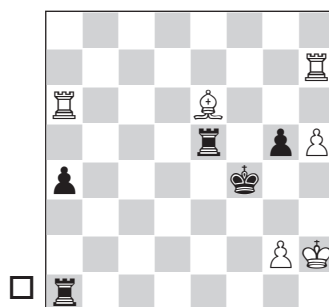
Here is a gruesome example:

Game 13

Hein Donner

Eduard Spanjaard

Leeuwarden 1961



1. ♖ha7?? ♜h1+ 2. ♚xh1 ♔g3 0-1

Sends shivers down the spine, doesn't it? This illustrates the real golden rule of technique far better

than some delicate example of endgame wizardry: *Never* relax.

Now on to a more practical example, the gradual fight-back from the edge of darkness. I will try to keep our guidelines in mind, and see how useful they are. As always, try to puzzle out what lies ahead as you read, cover up the page beneath if that helps. Trying to anticipate a game under analysis is one of the best ways to improve. It also guarantees a more active role from the reader, and a more inquisitive mind (why on Earth didn't he play...?).

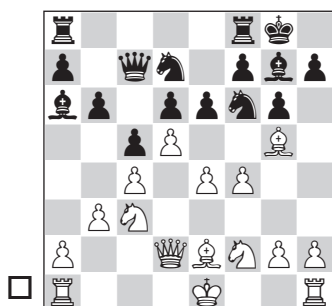
Now feast your eyes on this:

Game 14

Uwe Kunstowicz

Raymond Keene

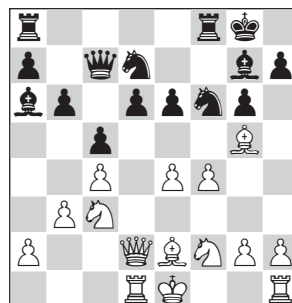
Dortmund 1973



Black's provocative strategy in a hypermodern opening has resulted in problems. Even though the bishop on a6 has provoked a softening of the long dark-squared diagonal, it now sits out of play. White decides to exploit his space

advantage and more harmonious development by posing a thorny question – how can Black defend his weak d-pawn?

14.dxe6! fxe6 15.♞d1



Simple and direct play by White – he removes the a1-rook from a potential accident on the long diagonal and mounts nasty pressure on d6.

When defending such a position the first step in the climb uphill is diagnosing the extent of the 'illness'. Here we can observe weaknesses on d6 and e6, a misplaced bishop on a6 and a lack of space. Objectively, there are many worrying symptoms. Now we need to determine a proper course of treatment. Of course, some concrete calculations will be necessary, but in order to develop a potential cure we should first try to determine the healthy characteristics of Black's condition. These are: a strong bishop on g7; control over the central dark squares; and most of all a fine outpost on d4. White's f-pawn is potentially weak, and his king is still in the centre. The presence

of an extra centre pawn could in the long run be an advantage for Black, but for the moment his centre is weak. With these factors in mind, Keene begins a remarkable come-back, using many of our preliminary guidelines. What do you think he should do?

A man surprised is half beaten. –
Gnomologia

15...♗b8!!

In my opinion, a brilliant move, based on concrete calculation, assessment of the position's merits, and, perhaps most importantly, psychological grounds. The move looks ridiculous at first sight – in fact Keene relates that Kunsztowicz could not suppress his laughter when he saw it.

But the move is far from silly, and its appearance only makes it more effective. The move does not change the assessment of the position, but it does begin to transform the nature of Black's disadvantage, something I will discuss later. Now, let's examine some more conventional alternatives.

15...♗e8? is the most obvious move, but a detached examination reveals that it will not help us: 16.♙g4! and the weakness at e6 is fatal: 16...e5 17.♖d5+ ♘h8 18.♖xa8 ♗ef6 19.♗d5!. A further search could lead us to 15...♞f7!?, which falls under the heading of protracted, passive defence. Its main merit is that it indirectly defends the d6-pawn:

A) 16.♖xd6 ♖xd6! (but not the clever 16...♗d5?17.♗xd5! ♖xd6

18.♗f6+) 17.♞xd6 ♗e8 18.♞d3 h6 19.♙h4 ♞xf4 and Black is doing fine. Variations like this should reinforce the observation that f4 is a potential target, and allow us a little flexibility in our search. We now see that we have a little time before the weakness of d6 is fatal;

B) 16.0-0! is a sensible reaction. Black can continue 16...♗f8 17.♗g4 (or 17.f5!?) and while immediate catastrophe has been averted, we have not done much to create counterchances. This is a tough call – we would like to find something more testing, but there are arguments for trying to sit tight.

If we do not succeed, then we run the risk of failure. – Former US Vice-president Danforth Quayle

As mentioned before, it is impossible to be sure, since in bad positions a defence needs to succeed before we can assess it. Keene's continuation has the merit of actively creating problems to solve, but if his opponent had refuted it, armchair annotators would sagely recommend 15...♞f7. If he had played that and been squashed like a bug... you get the idea.

After 15...h6 16.♙h4, 16...g5! is a spirited reaction that usually finds a few takers, but I think this should fall under the heading of premature panic. It does have the merits of trying to change the course of the game and introducing an element of chaos, but it is not easy

to see any concrete compensation for the pawn. Instead, 16...♘e8 (other knight moves allow ♘e7) 17.0-0 (17.♙g4!) 17...♙xc3 18.♚xc3 d5 (18...♗xf4 19.♚g3!) is an instructively reckless continuation. Black's search for activity is evident here – the a6-bishop, f8-rook and queen on c7 have expanded their horizons – but as the position opens up (and this is clearly a factor in the way Black has sought counterplay), White's pieces, particularly the powerful bishop pair, will become ever stronger. Here Black has weakened himself because the apparent activity has dissolved the strong points of his position (the g7-bishop and the central dark squares) and after a brief period of aggression he should be lost.

16. ♘b5!

A strong move and a logical reaction. White allows Black to rid himself of the poorly placed a6-bishop, but gets new assets in return. These are an outpost on c4, and the stifling of the knight on b8, which has used a great deal of time attempting to gain access to d4. On the other hand, the potential strength of Black's pawn centre has increased. It is important to list these factors, not just because it is an instructive way of thinking. The contours of the position are changing, and so may demand a new method of handling the position. Again, 16.♚xd6? is premature: 16...♚xd6 17.♗xd6 ♘e8 18.♗d3 h6 (or even 18...♘c6!?).

16... ♙xb5 17.cxb5 ♘e8

17...d5 was a logical consideration, trying to exploit Black's improved central presence. However, if White refrains from closing the position, the clash of pawns increases the likelihood of White's bishop pair becoming even stronger. My guess is that Keene mistrusted 18.♙f3! for Black. Instead of allowing White the opportunity to make simple and strong moves, Black consistently seeks ways of posing less conventional problems.

18. ♙c4

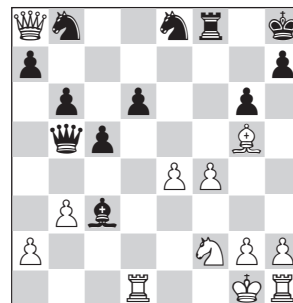
The obvious follow-up to his last move. Black's position now appears to be on the critical list.

18... ♚d7!

18...♚f7 19.♘g4! paralyzes Black. His choice in the game also paves the way for ...♙d4 and ...d5, but with the queen on a far better square.

19. ♘g4

White seeks an active form of punishment. He foregoes the greedy 19.♙d5?! exd5 20.♚xd5+ ♖h8 21.♚xa8 ♙c3+ 22.♖f1 ♚xb5+ 23.♖g1,



analysis diagram

when Keene gives the following attractive sample variation: 23...♘c6

(23...♘c7!?) 24.♙h6? (24.a4 ♖e2 25.♗xc6 ♙d4 26.♚f1 ♙xf2+ 27.♚xf2 ♖e1+ 28.♚f1 ♖e3+ with perpetual check) 24...♘d4 25.♙xf8 (25.♚xd4 ♙xd4 26.♙xf8 ♖e2 wins for Black) 25...♘e2+ 26.♙f1 ♘g3+ 27.♙g1 ♖f1+ 28.♚xf1 ♘e2#.

These variations are not exhaustive but illustrate Black's compensation very well. The whole game stresses the priority given to initiative over material by both players. This is obviously a suspect line for White – both members of his royal family are terribly misplaced and Black develops a dangerous attack. By definition this implies a mishandling of the advantage.

19...♙d4!

Black centralizes his best piece and emphasizes his domination of the central dark squares. The bishop also screens the weak d-pawn, which allows his centre to grow in strength. The advance ...d6-d5 now hangs in the air.

20.h4 ♘g7

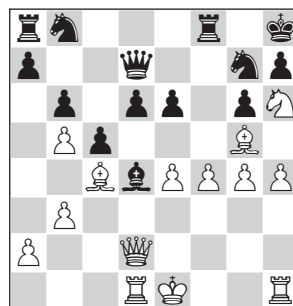
A smooth regrouping which guards his other soft central pawn and hinders the attacking advance h4-h5.

21.♘h6+?

White gets carried away by the aggressive appearance of his position and banks on a mating attack. In fact, this divides and decentralizes his forces. Better was 21.e5! d5! 22.♘f6+ ♚xf6 23.exf6 ♘h5 24.♙e2 ♘xf6! (Keene feared the consequences of the cruder 24...♘g3 25.♚h3 ♙f2+ 26.♙xf2

♘e4+ 27.♙g1 ♘xd2 28.♚xd2 with a powerful attack for White; he is ready to crack open the kingside – another good example of initiative outweighing material considerations) 25.♙xf6 ♙xf6 26.h5 ♖g7 27.♚h3 ♘d7 and Black has completed his development and has a pawn and secure central control for the sacrificed exchange. Keene considered this fully satisfactory for him, but White should have settled for this since he no longer has a secure grip on the position.

21...♙h8 22.g4



22...a6!

This aggressively liberates Black's queenside and he now takes charge of the game. Note that by delaying the advance ...d6-d5 Black has kept his position stable and increased his options. Now both potential breaks (...b6-b5 and ...d6-d5) may come with gain of tempo.

23.♖e2?!

23.a4 was probably slightly more accurate.

23...axb5 24.♙xb5 ♖a7 25.a4 ♘a6 26.♙f1 ♖b7!

Another precise move – from here the queen monitors b5 and d5 as

well as hindering White's king from scurrying to relative safety on g2.

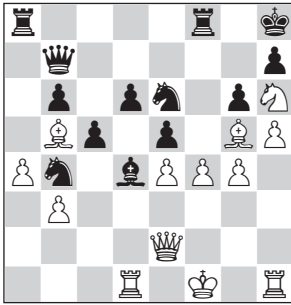
27. ♖d3? ♜b4 28. ♖b5

White now notices that ...♜xd3 followed by ...b5 was a threat. This staggering back and forth clearly indicates punch-drunkenness.

28...e5!

An unexpected break, but White cannot reply 29.f5 because his e-pawn is pinned, another benefit of Black's 13th move.

29.h5 ♜e6!



A graphic illustration of the transformation wrought by Black's dynamic and cunning play. White has only succeeded in scattering his troops and exposing his own king with his over-optimistic play. Nevertheless, Black's move had to be very precisely calculated.

30. ♔g2?!

30.hxg6 was the last chance to test his adversary:

A) 30...♜xf4? 31.♜f7+! ♜xf7 32.gxf7 ♜xf7 (32...♜xe2?? 33.♖f6#) 33.♞f3 allows White to fight on;

B) Keene planned 30...♜xg5! 31.♜f5 ♜xf5! (not 31...♜xe4? 32.♞xe4! (32.♜xh7+ ♞xh7 33.gxh7 ♜xf5--+) 32...♞xe4 33.♜xh7+ ♔g8 34.♜e7#)

32.gxf5 ♜xe4 33.♜xh7+ (33.♞g2 ♜g3+!; 33.♜h3 ♜g3+!) 33...♞xh7 34.gxh7 ♜g3+ and Black wins.

Note how White sinks like a stone in this game, absolutely unable to notice the turning point. This is a useful psychological observation and a common occurrence when encountering surprisingly stiff resistance.

30...♜xg5 31.♜xd4 exf4!

Black finishes with merciless efficiency once he takes control. Now White must part with a whole rook, and resigned, doubtless in shock and disbelief.

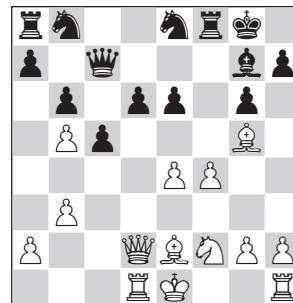
0-1

Perhaps you are thinking what many of my students do when presented with this game – maybe the white position wasn't so good after all? Let's return to the position after Black's fourth move (see next diagram).

Game 15

**Uwe Kunstowicz
Raymond Keene**

Dortmund 1973 (position after 17...♜e8)



Positional sacrifices and ‘combinations’

In Appendix 2, ‘Common Tactical Themes’, I mention that there are quieter, strategic versions of those themes more commonly associated with decisive attacks or combinations. The most common of these are pawn sacrifices to rupture the enemy structure, and clearance sacrifices to increase the range of one’s pieces.

Although pawn sacrifices that expose the opponent’s king are well known and dramatic, the subtler version designed to inflict lasting strategic problems can be just as deadly.

Have a look at an extremely sophisticated version:

Destruction of pawn structure

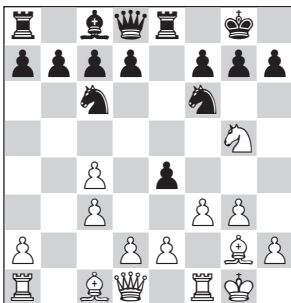
Game 45 English Opening

Garry Kasparov 2740

Anatoly Karpov 2710

Seville Wch m 1987

1.c4 e5 2.♘c3 ♘f6 3.♘f3 ♘c6 4.g3
♙b4 5.♙g2 0-0 6.0-0 e4 7.♘g5 ♙xc3
8.bxc3 ♖e8 9.f3



9...e3!?

A bold innovation that set the fourth title match between these players off to a dramatic start.

10.d3(!)

Declining the sacrifice has received the universal stamp of approval. This is perhaps a bit surprising, as accepting it also leads to very obscure play.

The greatest drawback to accepting the sacrifice is that White’s c-pawns, and so his entire queenside, become incurably weak. As long as Black takes care not to let White use his kingside pawn mass aggressively, he has a very solid position and can look forward to counterplay on the other flank. Some of the analysis circulating at the time of the match gives a rough idea of how these positional considerations translate into variations after 10.dxe3:

A) The simple and solid 10...d6!? should give Black good play. As long as Black keeps the white c4-pawn fixed as a long-range target he will have plenty to do, and nearly all of his pieces are potential attackers on the queenside. White may try to jettison this pawn with c5!? at some point, to create a completely unbalanced pawn structure, though even this will not cure the problem of weakened squares on the queenside. By playing ...b6, Black avoids even this possibility...;

B) 10...b6!? 11.e4 and then:

B1) 11...♙a6?! 12.f4 h6 13.♘xf7 ♙xf7 14.e5 ♙xc4 (14...♘g8? 15.♙d5+

♔f8 16. ♖a3+ ♘ge7 17. ♖d3 d6
18. ♖h7 and the advance of the
f-pawn will blow Black's king sky
high) 15.exf6 and White's attacking
chances should be the most
pertinent factor in the position;

B2) After the insertion of 11...
h6 12. ♘h3 ♖a6 Black can pursue
his hobby of harassing the white
weaknesses in relative peace, and
has ample compensation for the
pawn.

10...d5

Black wishes to open the position.
To some, this might seem strange,
since White has the proverbially
fearsome bishop pair, and doubled
c-pawns.

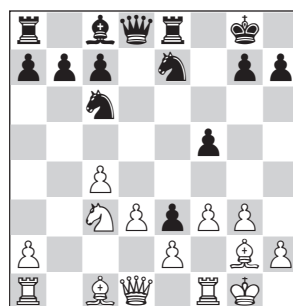
Several factors change the
assessment of the position. The
advanced e-pawn cramps White in
many ways. Although White can
get his bishops working on the long
diagonals, the centre itself falls
under black piece control later,
especially the d4-square. This can
be deduced from the necessary
white freeing moves c4 and f4,
which will weaken d4 and g4,
both potentially useful attacking
squares for Black. The e3-pawn is
an attacking asset (a pawn near the
king – see Chapter 6, 'Wisdom and
Advice'), and prevents the free flow
of pieces to the white kingside.

11. ♖b3

11.cxd5 ♘xd5 and now:

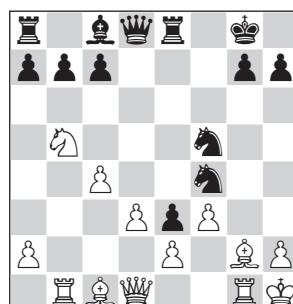
A) 12. ♘e4?! is a related game that
fits in very well with the topic
of discussion (pawn sacrifices to

disrupt the enemy structure). It
seems this theme thrives in this
variation: 12...f5 13.c4 ♘de7 14. ♘c3



analysis diagram

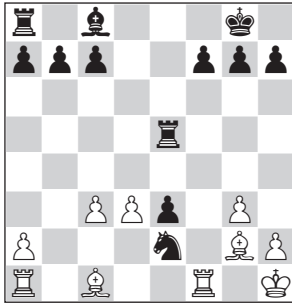
14...f4! (preserving the gem on e3
and freeing Black's minor pieces)
15.gxf4? ♘f5 16. ♖b1 ♘cd4 17. ♘b5
♘e6 18. ♖h1 ♘xf4 19. ♖g1



analysis diagram

19...♘g3+! 20.hxg3 ♖g5 0-1 (White
is faced with inevitable execution
on the h-file) C. Holland-Plaskett,
Hastings Open 1994/95;

B) 12. ♖b3!? ♘a5 (12...♖xg5 13.f4
♘xf4 14. ♖xf4 gives White a strong
initiative for the pawn) 13. ♖a3
♖xg5 14. ♖xa5 ♖e5 (14...b6 15.f4 is
again to be avoided for Black) 15.d4
(not 15.f4? ♘xf4! 16. ♖xe5 ♘xe2+
17. ♖h1 ♖xe5



analysis diagram

18. ♖b2 ♜b5 and Black is clearly better) 15... ♗d6 with a complex game, and planning to answer 16. ♙a3 by 16... ♗c6 17.f4 ♗xc3 18. ♗a4 ♙e6! 19.f5? ♘b6.

11... ♘a5 12. ♗a3 c6 13.cxd5 cxd5 14.f4 ♘c6

This complicated variation is [in 2023] still occasionally seen at the top level, which implies that the engines haven't killed it off. In the inaugural game, Black eventually won after a tremendous and confusing struggle.

The positional clearance sacrifice

Now we have seen that a sacrifice to disrupt pawn structure can have nearly as profound an influence on the course of a game as the more brutal tactical version used to damage a king shelter.

The tactical theme of clearance can take place at any stage of the game, and can be just as useful in an ending as when launching an attack. Here are some sedate, strategic examples of the clearance sacrifice. You will encounter these themes in practice as often as their

flashier attacking counterparts. The examples given here are part of a basic repertoire of pawn combat.

Shaving on Kotov's face

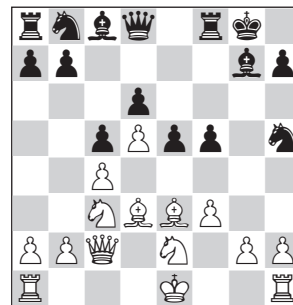
Kotov gives a fragment of this game in his book *Think Like a Grandmaster*. It is about as clear an example as one could wish, and has now entered the chess armoury as a completely normal method of handling such positions for Black.

Game 46 King's Indian Defence

Alexander Kotov
Svetozar Gligoric

Zurich ct 1953

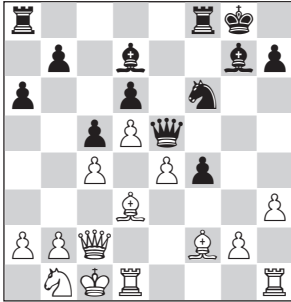
1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3. ♘c3 ♙g7 4.e4 d6 5.f3 0-0 6. ♙e3 e5 7.d5 c5 8. ♙d3 ♘h5 9. ♘ge2 f5 10.exf5 gxf5 11. ♗c2



11...e4! 12.fxe4 f4!

This dual-action mechanism has been dubbed the 'sealer-sweeper'. The first move sacrifices a pawn to jam the action of several enemy pieces, the second pawn forges past into aggressive position. The offer also extends the range of the g7-bishop and creates a strong point on e5.

13. ♖f2 ♘d7 **14.** ♘g1 ♔g5 **15.** ♖f1
 ♘e5 **16.** ♘f3 ♔e7 **17.** ♘xe5 ♔xe5
 Gligoric makes good use of the
 e5-square, and envisages opening
 the b-file to mount pressure against
 the b2-pawn.
18. 0-0-0 ♘f6 **19.** h3 ♖d7 **20.** ♖d3 a6
21. ♘b1



The knight is eyeing the f3-square.
 If the steed reaches that post, White
 will regain influence of the key d4-
 and e5-squares...

21...f3!

The enemy's vital point is your
 own.

22.gxf3 ♘h5

Opens the long diagonal and the
 f-file, and prepares to occupy the
 f4-square. White's extra material
 only hinders the action of his
 own forces, which are helpless to
 do anything but watch as Black
 occupies the key points cleared by
 the sacrifices. Now White faces a
 grim defensive task. A combination
 of careful defence and material
 superiority just allows him to hold
 the balance.

23. ♘d2 ♘f4 **24.** ♖f1 b5 **25.** h4 ♔h8
26. ♔g1 ♖f6 **27.** ♘b3 ♔ab8 **28.** ♖e1
b4 **29.** ♔b1 ♔a8 **30.** ♖g3 ♔g8 **31.** ♔h2

♔xg3 **32.** ♔xg3 ♘e2 **33.** ♔xe2 ♔xg3
34. ♘c1 a5 **35.** ♘d3 ♖d4 **36.** h5 ♔h4
37. ♖g2 ♔g8 **38.** ♔h1 ♔g3 **39.** ♖f1 a4
40. ♔c2 a3 **41.** b3 ½-½

One explanation for the peaceful
 result is the variation 41...♔f8
 42. ♖g2 (42.f4 ♔xf4 43. ♘xf4 ♔c3+
 44. ♘d1 ♔a1+ 45. ♘d2 ♔xa2+ and
 Black's queenside pawn(s) will
 decide the game) 42...♔g8 43. ♖f1
 and Black still has to prove he has
 more than his money's worth for
 the sacrifice.

White certainly had no joy from his
 extra material in this game.

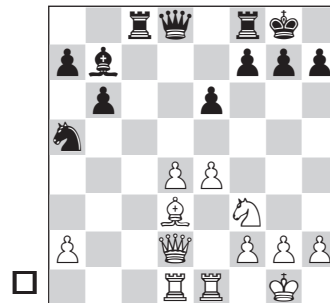
More pawn-related violence

Game 47

Lev Polugaevsky

Mikhail Tal

Moscow ch-URS 1969



16.d5!

Another typical pawn sacrifice with
 the motif of sealing and sweeping.
 Accepting the offer on d5 leads
 to temporary blockage of Black's
 queen and bishop, and White uses
 the time gained to launch an attack.

16...exd5

16...♖d6!? was better.

17.e5!

The e-pawn moves into attacking position and unveils the gaze of the white bishop.

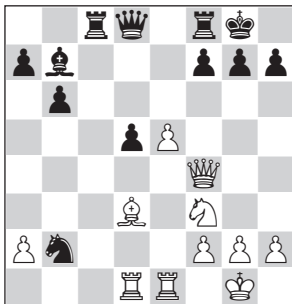
17...♗c4

If 17...♖e7, then 18.♗d4 gives

White attacking chances and fine positional compensation. 17...h6 18.♖f4 ♗c6 19.♖f5 g6 20.♖g4 gave White a punishing attack in N. Popov-Rumiantsev, USSR 1978.

18.♖f4 ♗b2

If 18...h6, then 19.♖f5 g6 20.♖h3 ♔g7 21.e6 shatters the black kingside.



Now the stage is set for the best-known of chess sacrifices. Of course Tal of all people must have taken it into serious consideration, but presumably he missed White's 21st move.

19.♗xh7+! ♔xh7 20.♗g5+ ♔g6

21.h4!!

This elegant move is the point behind the sophisticated version of this old classic. The threat is 22.h5+ ♔xh5 23.g4+ ♔g6 24.♖f5+ ♔h6 25.♖h7+ ♔g5 26.♖h5+ ♔f4 27.♖f5#. Tal finds nothing better

than to prolong resistance in a lost ending.

21...♗c4

21...f5 is met by 22.♗d4!, planning h5, while if 21...♖d7, 22.e6 fxe6 23.♖g4 ♗f6 24.♗xe6+ ♔h6 25.♗e5 g6 26.♖g5+ wins.

22.h5+ ♔h6 23.♗xf7+ ♔h7 24.♖f5+ ♔g8 25.e6! ♖f6

If 25...♖e7, White strips open the kingside with 26.h6!. White realized his advantage like this:

26.♖xf6 gxf6 27.♗d2

27.♗d6!.

27...♗c6! 28.♗xb2 ♗e8

28...♗c8, although still bad for Black, was better.

29.♗h6+ ♔h7 30.♗f5 ♗exe6

31.♗xe6 ♗xe6 32.♗c2 ♗c6 33.♗e2

♗c8 34.♗e7+ ♔h8 35.♗h4 f5

36.♗g6+ ♔g8 37.♗xa7 1-0

Sealing, Sweeping, Breaking, Passing; Pawn Dynamics

The following game made a big impression on me. I was attending the tournament as a commentator and annotator, and rarely have I seen a game packed with so much educational value.

Game 48 King's Indian Defence

Alexander Khalifman 2640

Bent Larsen 2560

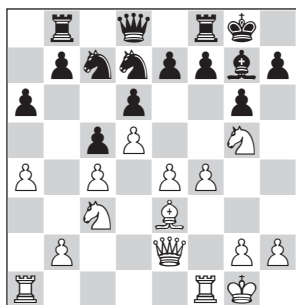
London 1991

1.d4 ♗f6 2.♗f3 d6 3.c4 ♗g4 4.♗c3

g6 5.e4 ♗g7 6.♗e2 ♗fd7 7.♗e3 c5

8.d5 ♗a6 9.0-0 0-0 10.♗g5 ♗xe2

11.♖xe2 ♗c7 12.a4 a6 13.f4 ♗b8



Play has reached a Benoni type of pawn formation. White has several thematic plans in such structures. The Modern Benoni formation (with the black pawn on e7 exchanged for the white one on c4, by the sequence ...e7-e6xd5 and c4xd5) is a more common setting for these plans, but they apply to the structure as a whole.

The most popular plan is the development of an attack by the sealing/sweeping sequence e5, answering ...dxe5 with f5. Another option is to use the b-file and create pressure on the queenside pawns by arranging the advance b2-b4. Finally, the creation of a passed d6-pawn to create disarray in the black camp often occurs, particularly in the Modern Benoni, where White has a central pawn preponderance.

The remarkable thing about this game is that Khalifman employs all of these devices!

14.e5! dxe5 15.f5

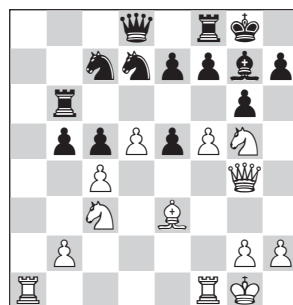
The kingside assault is in motion. The pawn sacrifice clears the e4-square for cavalry manoeuvres, activates the f1-rook and stifles

both the g7-bishop and d7-knight – good value for a pawn.

15...b5

Larsen strikes back with one of Black's thematic breaks, and creates the chance to use the b8-rook to defend the kingside.

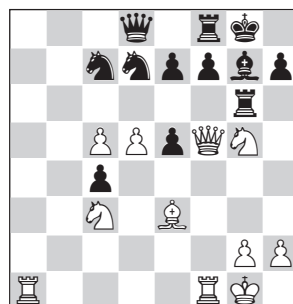
16.axb5 axb5 17. ♖g4 ♜b6



18.b4!

The unfortunate situation of the b6-rook allows Khalifman to strike out on the opposite flank as well. The b-pawn manages to join the attack...

18...gxf5 19. ♜xf5 ♜g6 20.bxc5 bxc4



21.d6!

... and manages to play a key role! Khalifman achieves breakthrough number three, an unusual hat-trick.

21...exd6 22.cxd6 ♘e6

The d-pawn is immune from capture as the rook must block ♖xh7#. 22...♗e8 23.♗xf7 ♗xd6 24.♖xg6 hxg6 25.♗xd8 ♖xd8 26.♖ad1 should win for White. For completeness I give the rest of my notes to the game, though we have now covered the relevant material.

23.♗xf7

23.♗d5!? may be the most accurate, according to Khalifman. [Editor's note: Then Fritz indicates 23...♖xg5, when 24.♗e7+ ♗h8 25.♗xg5 ♖b6+ 26.♗h1 ♖xd6 looks quite OK for Black.

23... ♖f6!

23...♖e8 looks more critical but meets with an elegant refutation. 24.♗d5! ♖xf7 (24...♖xf7 25.♗e7+) 25.♖xf7+! ♖xf7 26.♗e7+ ♖xe7 (alternatively 26...♗h8 27.♖xf7 or 26...♗f8 27.♖a8+) 27.dxe7 ♗c7 28.♖a8+ and the pawn (which began life on b2!) promotes.

24.♖xf6 ♖xf6 25.♖xf6 ♗xf6?

After 25...♗xf6! it is not clear how large White's advantage is – Khalifman. [Editor's note: for example 26.♗h6+ ♗xh6 27.♗xh6 ♖d8.]

26.♗h6+ ♗g7 27.♖a7

White's attack, aided by the powerful passed d-pawn, continues into the ending.

27...♖d8 28.♗f5+! ♗g6 29.♗e7+ ♗f7 30.♗c6 ♖c8 31.♖xd7+ ♗e8 32.♗xe5 ♗xe5 33.♖e7+ ♗d8

33...♗f8 34.♗h6+ ♗g8 35.♖xe6 ♗xc3 36.d7.

34.♗b6+ 1-0

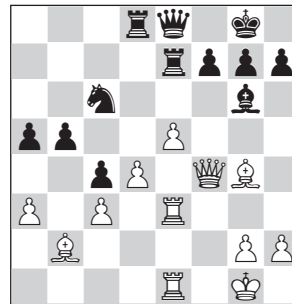
The positional exchange sacrifice

Game 49

Samuel Reshevsky

Tigran Petrosian

Zurich ct 1953



Black's position is rather grim. White has mobilized an impressive centre, and can cause further discomfort by setting the d-pawn in motion, or putting a rook on the g-file and shoving his h-pawn. Black must also beware of the e-pawn crashing through to e6 at an inopportune moment.

Petrosian solves these problems in patented style.

25... ♖e6! 26.a4

26.h4!? was an alternative, planning to press on with h4-h5 and ♖g3, but Black's last move has greatly increased the co-ordination of his pieces.

26... ♗e7!

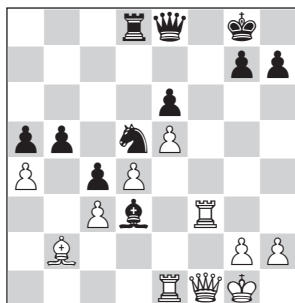
Petrosian does not allow himself to be distracted from shoring up the protection of the relevant squares. 26...b4? 27.d5! ♖xd5 28.♗xe6 fxe6 29.♖xc4 would allow White to take the material in a much improved

version, with the position much more open and conducive to rooks.

27. ♖xe6 fxe6 28. ♖f1

28. ♖f2 ♘d5 29. ♖f3 b4 sets the queenside pawns in motion.

28... ♘d5 29. ♖f3 ♙d3



30. ♖xd3!

White sensibly returns most of his material advantage. Or else Black's magnificent minor pieces, domination of the light squares, and queenside pawn majority would quickly become too dangerous. This move is also consistent with White's 26th move, which aimed to disrupt Black's blockade on the light squares.

30... cxd3 31. ♖xd3

Now it seems that White will be able to regain the initiative and liberate his bishop and central pawns...

31... b4! 32. cxb4

Unfortunately, the thematic move 32.c4 does not clearly improve the white position: 32... ♘b6 33. ♖c1 ♘xa4 34. ♙a1 ♖c6 with complicated play. However, after capturing on b4, the beautiful, unassailable knight on d5 frees Black from worries.

32... axb4

32... ♘xb4!? was also possible.

Bronstein gave the variations 33. ♖b3 ♘d5 and 33. ♖b5 ♖xb5 34. axb5 ♘d3 35. ♖e2 ♖b8 36. ♖d2 ♖xb5 37. ♖xd3 ♖xb2 38. d5 as leading to equality. The game concluded:

33. a5 ♖a8 34. ♖a1 ♖c6 35. ♙c1 ♖c7

36. a6 ♖b6 37. ♙d2 b3 38. ♖c4 h6

39. h3 b2 40. ♖b1 ♘h8 41. ♙e1 ½-½

White has no hope of an advantage, and so the game was agreed drawn here. The superior minor piece is worth at least a pawn. This is one of the best known positional exchange sacrifices.

Game 50

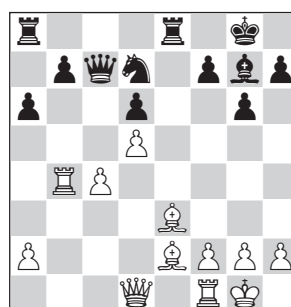
Lev Polugaevsky

2625

Tigran Petrosian

2605

Moscow ch-URS 1983



19... ♖xe3! 20. fxe3 ♘c5

What has Black gained for his offer? The knight at c5 is inviolate, which means that his queenside is secure. It also means that White's bishop is unlikely to become active since the pawns from the a- to the d-files are now rigid. He has a weakness on e3 to hit, and another eternal outpost

on e5, thanks to the transformation of White's f-pawn to an e-pawn. He dominates the dark squares, and has a position that is virtually free of targets. All of this gives him an objectively good position, and robs White's position of almost all of its potential. Subjectively, White's position is very difficult to play, since he is 'ahead' in a strictly material sense but 'behind' in terms of being able to undertake anything. These factors lead to, and explain, White's remarkable collapse.

21. ♖c2 ♜e8 22. ♜f3 ♙h6 23. ♚c3 ♚e7



None of these moves are very difficult. White will not even have the comfort of being able to exploit the more open position type if his e-pawn falls since Black so strongly dominates this most useful file.

24. ♜b6??

White hopes to return the exchange on e3, when the black d-pawn falls. How depressing White's position was, can be gauged by the magnitude of his blunder.

24... ♘a4 0-1

White loses everything.

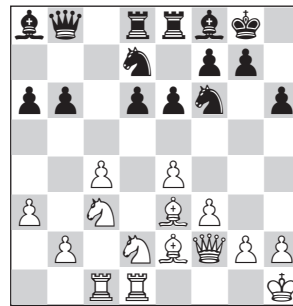
Spiritual successor

Swedish super-GM Ulf Andersson carried the development of the positional sacrifice forward. Here are two famous examples against noteworthy opposition. Neither of the offers achieves clear results, and one could argue that neither of them was necessary. They did create a fascinating dynamic (im-)balance, and succeeded at the very highest level.

Game 51

Anatoly Karpov
Ulf Andersson

Milan 1975



24...d5!?

A thematic pawn sacrifice, and a very common weapon in this particular, 'hedgehog'¹⁶ type of position.

25.cxd5 exd5 26.exd5 ♙d6

So far, a documented type of pawn sacrifice. Black has a nice blockade, an active bishop on d6, and chances to round up the pawn with ...b5 and ...♘b6. Andersson is planning an

¹⁶ So called because Black is rolled up in a bristly, and surprisingly sharp, ball.

ambitious twist on this positional idea.

27. ♖f1

27. ♖de4?! ♗xe4 28. ♖xe4 ♕xh2
29. g3? ♜xe4! 30. fxe4 ♕xg3 is clearly not advisable for White.



27... ♜xe3!?

The pedestrian 27...b5 28. ♕a7! ♜b7 29. ♕d4 is better for White, since Black's pieces have lost their co-ordination.

28. ♗xe3!

28. ♜xe3 ♕f4 29. ♜d4 ♕xc1 30. ♜xc1 b5! 31. ♞d1 ♗b6 and Andersson rounds up the pawn: 32. ♗e3 (32. d6 ♗e8) 32... ♗bxd5 33. ♗cxd5 ♕xd5 34. ♗f5 ♜e8 and the little combination 35. ♗xh6+? gxh6 36. ♜xf6 fails to 36... ♜xe2 37. ♜xd5?? ♜e1#.

28... ♕xh2 29. ♗f1

29. ♗f5!? ♕f4 30. ♗e7+ (30. ♜c2 ♜e5! is frightening for White, who lacks kingside defenders) 30... ♜f8 31. ♗c6 ♕xc6 32. dxc6 ♜e5!?, planning ...♕g3 with a winning attack (the immediate 32... ♕xc1 33. ♜xc1 ♗c5 34. b4 ♗e6 35. ♕xe6 favours White), leads to a messy position with mutual chances.

29... ♕f4 30. ♜c2 b5! 31. ♕d3 ♗b6

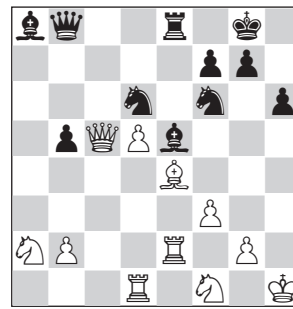
32. ♕e4?! ♗c4 33. a4?! ♜e8 34. axb5 axb5 35. ♜e2 ♕e5

Creating the annoying threat of ...♗xb2.

36. ♜c5 ♗d6

Here a short checklist can reassure us that Black has all the ingredients necessary for full compensation: dark-square domination, a strong blockading knight, and a much safer king.

37. ♗a2?!



The knight is not completely secure on c3, with ideas like ...♜c8 and the return of ...♗c4, but heading for b4 and c6 is not the solution. The knight never gets to complete the circuit.

37... ♗dxe4!

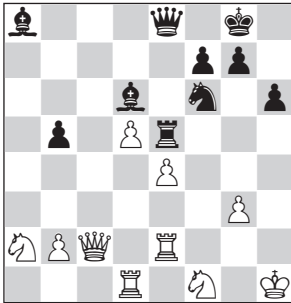
Not an obvious move if one is guided by superficial principles. The blockading knight looked stronger than White's bishop. More relevant is that Black's control of the dark squares allows him to monitor the white centre pawns, and the pawn on e4 now becomes a target. And if the e-pawn falters, the d-pawn becomes vulnerable again. The exchange also slightly increases the amount of exposure

around the white king. I am sure that Andersson's profound strategic feeling convinced him that such gains could be made when he made the original sacrifice. Karpov clearly understood the risks but trusted in the combination of the material and his technique.

38.fxe4 ♕d6 39.♖c2 ♜e5!

Watch now as Andersson methodically mounts magnificent pressure on e4.

40.g3 ♖e8!



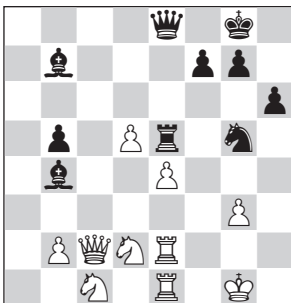
41.♜de1 ♕b7

Inching back into play.

42.♔g1 ♘h7!

Tremendous composure from the Swede, who calmly continues to improve his position by taking up an even better vantage point from which to assail e4.

43.♘c1 ♘g5 44.♘d2 ♕b4!



45.♔f2

White can no longer retain his booty: 45.♖d3 ♕xd2 46.♜xd2 ♕xd5 and White's kingside vaporizes.

After 45.♔g2 ♖d7! Black switches to direct attack: 46.♘d3 ♖h3+ 47.♔f2 ♕xd2 48.♖xd2 (48.♘xe5 ♖h2+ 49.♔f1 ♖h1+ 50.♔f2 ♘h3#) 48...♖h2+ 49.♔f1 ♖h1+ 50.♔f2 ♘h3+ 51.♔e3 ♜xe4#.

45...♕xd2

Better than 45...♖e7 46.♘cb3! and White maintains control over f3.

46.♜xd2 ♘xe4+

And Black's extra pawn and enduring attack gave him a winning advantage.

Give me your best shot

Game 52

Garry Kasparov

2625

Ulf Andersson

2610

Moscow 1981



13...♜xe3?!

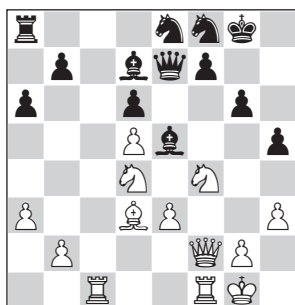
This is a much more extravagant sacrifice than the one seen in the game Polugaevsky-Petrosian. The position here is much less simplified. The presence of white

knights means that no squares are completely unassailable by White. Nevertheless, the domination of the dark squares and the loss of flexibility in the white pawn structure give White enormous technical difficulties, and even though Black was always struggling, Kasparov could not manage to break down the Swede's defences.

14.fxe3 g6 15.0-0 ♖e7 16.♗d4 ♕g7 17.♗f4 ♘e8!?

Black intends to put the bishop on e5.

18.♞ac1 ♕e5 19.♗f2 ♘df6 20.♕d3 h5 21.♘ge2! ♘h7 22.♘f4 ♘f8 23.♘b5 a6 24.♘d4 ♕d7



Black has a passive but solid position. After 83 moves, the game was drawn.

The mysterious exchange sacrifice

The next game is included for further study. It made a great impression on me at the time it was played, and to be honest, it still does, and it still baffles me. Ljubojevic seems to declare that the pieces simply are not worth what we are taught they are. I

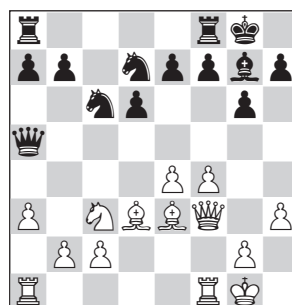
cannot explain this paradox, but examining it will at least give the reader an idea of what is possible, at least in practical play.

Game 53 Pirc Defence

Ljubomir Ljubojevic
Eugenio Torre

Manila 1975

1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 g6 4.f4 ♕g7 5.♘f3 c5 6.dxc5 ♗a5 7.♕d3 ♗xc5 8.♗e2 0-0 9.♕e3 ♗a5 10.0-0 ♕g4 11.h3 ♕xf3 12.♗xf3 ♘c6 13.a3 ♘d7



14.b4!? ♗d8 15.♘e2 ♕xa1 16.♞xa1 e6 17.♞d1 a6 18.c3 ♗e7 19.♕c2 ♞fe8 20.♕f2 d5 21.♘g3 ♞ad8 22.a4 d4 23.b5 axb5 24.axb5 ♘a7 25.cxd4 ♘xb5 26.♗d3 ♘c7 27.f5 b5 28.fxe6 ♗xe6 29.♗f3 ♗f6 30.♗g4 ♗c6 31.♕b3 ♗c3 32.♗f3 ♗xf3 33.gxf3 ♘e6 34.e5 ♘g5 35.♔g2 ♞c8 36.♕e1 ♞a8 37.♕b4 ♘b6 38.f4 ♘e6 39.♔f3 ♘c7 40.d5 ♘a6 41.♕d6 ♘c8 42.♘e4 ♘xd6 43.♘xd6 ♞eb8 44.♘e4 ♘b4 45.d6 ♞a3 46.♘c5 ♘a6 47.♘xa6 ♞xa6 48.f5 ♞a3 49.♞d3 gxf5 50.♔f4 ♔f8 51.♔xf5 ♞a1 52.♞f3 ♞e1 53.♔g4 ♞e4+ 54.♔g3 ♞xe5 55.♞xf7+ ♔e8 56.♔f4 ♞c5 57.♕e6 ♞d8 58.d7+ ♞xd7 59.♞xd7

h6 60. ♖h7 ♘f8 61. ♗f5 b4 62. ♖xh6 ♜b5 63. ♘g5 ♘g7 64. ♖h7+ ♘g8 65. ♜c7 ♜b6 66. ♗g6 b3 67. ♘h6 ♜b8 68. ♜g7+ ♘h8 69. ♖h7+ ♘g8 70. ♗f7+ 1-0

A virtuoso performance

Here is a very straightforward game that I find very pleasing. Maybe this is because it combines three types of positional combination? Balashov's bold attack employs the exchange sacrifice, the blocking/rupturing of the enemy pawn structure, and a quiet¹⁷ clearance sacrifice.

Game 54 Sicilian Defence

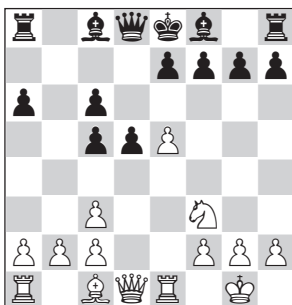
Yuri Balashov

2505

Rifat Sabianov

Kstovo 1994

1.e4 c5 2. ♘c3 ♘c6 3. ♘f3 ♘f6 4. ♗b5 a6 5. ♗xc6 bxc6 6. 0-0 d6 7.e5 ♘d5 8. ♜e1 ♘xc3 9. dxc3 d5



10.e6!!

Preparing a heavy material investment at a startlingly early

stage of the game. White gains the e5-square and inflicts chronic congestion on Black's kingside. **10... ♗xe6 11. ♖xe6 fxe6 12. ♘e5 ♜b6** Or **12... g6 13. ♜f3 ♜c8 14. ♜f7+ ♘d8 15. ♗g5**, planning ♗f6. Black's paralysis is so acute that White can strengthen his position first with moves like ♜e1, or perhaps h4!?. **12... ♜c7 13. ♜h5+ g6 14. ♘xg6 hxg6 15. ♜xh8** might have been the lesser evil for Black, but he has no real compensation for the destruction of his kingside.

13. ♜g4!?

13. ♜h5+ was also strong.

13... ♜d8 14. ♜xe6 ♜d6 15. ♜f7+

♘d8 16. ♜f5 ♘e8

16... ♘c7 17. ♘f7 ♜f6 18. ♜e5+; 16... e6

17. ♘f7+.

17. ♗g5

Preventing ... ♜f6 and so threatening ♘f7.

17... g6 18. ♜f7+ ♘d8 19. ♜f3

Now ♘f7 will definitely win back the investment.

19... ♜xb2 20. ♘f7+ ♘c7 21. ♜e1

♜e6?!

Hoping to escape his difficulties by exploiting White's slightly weak back rank. It was hard to find stubborn moves: **21... ♗g7 22. ♘xd6 ♗xc3** loses nicely after **23. ♜xe7+ ♘xd6 24. ♜g3+ ♗e5 25. ♜xe5!**

22. ♜f4+!

Prepares to interpose at c1, and leaves the rook on e6 stranded.

1-0

¹⁷ Perhaps 'long-term' is a more accurate term than 'quiet'. The point is that the knockout or payoff is considerably delayed, and perhaps less certain, than in the tactical version of the sacrificial theme.