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Sacrifice and Initiative in Chess

Seize the Moment to Get the Advantage

New In Chess 2013

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Preface

'Sacrifice and Initiative' is a book I have wanted to write for a long time.

Though these are the two most important aspects of dynamic play, they have been largely ignored by chess authors and publishing houses and we still have very little work published on the subject.

Yes, we do have plenty of books dealing with tactical training, tactical motifs, combinations... but those are actually 'shame sacrifices', meaning that after a forced sequence of moves, the sacrificing side gets his material investment back with interest.

On the subject of the 'true sacrifice', where the sacrificing side takes off on a journey, on a slippery road with no guarantees, still very little work has been published, and we often have to go as far back as Rudolf Spielmann or Vladimir Vukovic to find a good, structured work.

My work has taken me a long time.

To reach a final decision on the selection of the games, I played through almost 1,000 games, from the old masters to the modern gladiators, in order to select 200 games for a 'work database'. And out of this work database eventually came my final selection.

The reader will quickly notice that the great majority of games are from the Tal period onwards – the 'old masters' are barely present. There is a reason for this. When I played through and analysed the old masters' games, it quickly became obvious that in the old days, the defenders simply did not defend well, so the attacker was usually not put to the ultimate test to justify his material investments.

After selecting the games, I had to classify them in a structure of attacking themes.

First I made a separation between an 'Initiative' and a 'Sacrifice' part, and then a further division into separate attacking themes. But the reader has to understand that all those themes – well, 90% of them anyhow – are interwoven! It is very rare that a 'true sacrifice' game is won by using only one single motif. Usually a combination of at least two different attacking themes is needed in order to win in an attack introduced by a 'true sacrifice'.

For the theme selection and the book structure I have tried to combine common knowledge (since the days of Spielmann's book 'The Art of Sacrifice in Chess', in German *Richtig opfern!*) with modern practice and find a balance between the two.



Before every chapter, the reader can find explanations of the theme at hand. Here, however, I will give a general set of ‘rules’ which can be universally applied to the theme of ‘sacrifice & initiative’:

- taking over the initiative often means you have to ignore your opponent’s threat
- when your opponent poses a threat, try to find a way to ignore it
- an opponent’s threat can be ignored by posing a higher-degree threat of your own
- to get to your opponent’s king in the centre or a castled king, you need open files and diagonals, and you should often be ready to sacrifice to achieve this
- removing the pawn defences in front of the enemy king is often essential, and frequently the only way to achieve this is with a piece sacrifice
- in many cases an essential piece in the attack (in order to weave a mating net) is the knight!
- a king chase is often difficult to calculate accurately until the end, but it mostly works for the attacking side
- assessing the ratio of ‘attackers vs defenders’ (i.e., the forces in the attack as opposed to the forces in the defence) is always a good way to get an idea if ‘something can work’
- never recapture a piece immediately without thinking, unless it is absolutely forced, as alternatives may offer surprising tactics
- once you are on the attack, never look back!
- once you are on the attack, do not think about the desired result – look for moves instead! Thinking about the result during the game puts a ‘mental brake’ on the attacker
- once you are swimming in the stream of the ‘sacrificing river’ – swim! Do not look for a lifeboat. The best attacking ideas take an effort and they take courage!

Writing this book has also helped me understand some of the great players better.

Mikhail Tal’s sacrifices have a reputation that there was a significant amount of bluff involved, and before I started working on this book and had a serious look at his sacrifices, I was inclined to concur to this general opinion.

But nothing could be further from the truth! Even if you give them enough time to run, computer engines are not able to refute 90% of Tal’s sacrifices. There is always compensation even against the very best defence, and most of the time it is enough for at least a draw.

Of course, I do not know, and I will never find out, how much of those possibilities Tal actually saw and how much of it was his ‘intuition’ (please see in the chapter on ‘Intuitive Sacrifices’ my opinion on this subject). But I’m sure he saw a lot! Tal was an attacking devil, a nine-headed monster, a true Houdini. Not that crap we buy for 80 euros and install on our computers – Tal was the real deal. He could hide an elephant!

David Bronstein had many original ideas, but in genuine attacking play, attacking geniuses like Tal and Spassky were head and probably also shoulders above him.

There are also things I already knew that were confirmed by my work on this book:

- the involvement of computer engines has killed part of Kasparov’s attacking genius
- Spassky was a brilliant attacker, and every chess player is well advised to study his games
- from the modern elite, the player who is the most inclined to take off on the slippery road of an intuitive sacrifice is probably Aronian.

Throughout the book I have highlighted important tips with italics. These tips are repeated at the end of each chapter, so they will be easier to memorize.

I hope that after reading this book, the reader will improve his attacking skills and recognize attacking patterns more easily.

I also hope that the reader will enjoy playing through the selected games, as much as I have enjoyed analysing them!

13 June 2013

Ivan Sokolov

Chapter 6

Developing the Attack

A necessary requirement for an attack on a certain part of the board is to have more pieces working on that part of the board (the attackers vs defenders ratio). So try to direct your pieces to the side on which you want to attack. Just one piece working on its own cannot achieve much, neither in the attack nor in the defence.

In the following, quite recent game we find a beautiful example of a seamless development of an attack on the kingside, eventually resulting in a mating net around the king in the centre. Carlsen advances his kingside pawns and grabs space. White's seemingly open king is very safe since Carlsen has more space, his pieces are better coordinated and throughout the game he keeps a highly favourable attackers vs defenders ratio on the kingside. The game is concluded with a nice mating net. The ease of Carlsen's play is impressive!

SI 32.8 (B32) **Game 30**

Carlsen, Magnus
Nakamura, Hikaru

Wijk aan Zee 2013 (12)

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4
4.♗xd4 e5 5.♗b5 d6 6.g3 h5
7.♗1c3 a6 8.♗a3 b5 9.♗d5
♗ge7 10.♙g2 ♙g4 11.f3 ♙e6
12.c3 h4

I have included this game because of the ease with which Carlsen develops his attack and concludes the game. At least I was very impressed watching it live, passing by their table and feeling Carlsen's ease playing a seemingly very complicated position.



With his h-pawn push Nakamura is trying to create counterplay on the kingside, and also to provoke a reaction by White. Carlsen continues his development undisturbed.

13.♗c2! ♙xd5

It transpires that the push to h3 is not going to bring Black any of the desired counterplay: after 13...h3 14.♙f1 White's bishop is actually good on the f1-a6 diagonal, especially in connection with a later pawn push a2-a4: 14...♙xd5 15.exd5 ♗a5 16.♗e3 g6 17.a4 and White is better.

14.exd5 ♗a5

This knight will prove misplaced on a5 and will stay on the edge of the board for a long time. Carlsen, being virtually a piece up on the kingside, senses the moment to start action there!

15.f4! ♗f5



With virtually an extra piece on the kingside, Carlsen feels comfortable to continue his action there. I will repeat once more the necessity to assess the ratio of potential attackers vs defenders on the part of the board you are planning to start your action! *If you start your action on a side of the board where you are virtually a piece up, feel comfortable about it, because as a rule of thumb it mostly works – in 90% of the cases!*

16.g4! h3 17.♙e4 ♘h4

17...♙h4+ is just one empty check, since Black has no pieces on the kingside to help his queen: 18.♚f1 ♘h6 19.♖g1. White is better and Black already has to start worrying about his queen getting trapped.



18.0-0!

Again good judgement by Carlsen! I remember that when I was passing by and looking at this particular position, I wondered whether White's seemingly

open king's position might offer Black attacking chances. Actually, due to the absence of Black's light-squared bishop and because he does not have enough pieces on the kingside, White's king will be perfectly safe on h1.

18...g6 19.♚h1 ♙g7 20.f5! gxf5 21.gxf5

21.♙xf5, playing for light-square control, was also possible.

21...♞g2?!

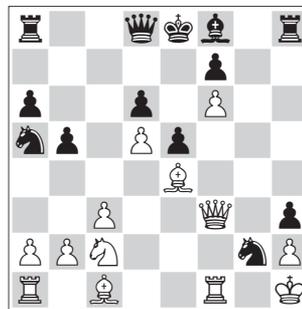
This knight will be a lone soldier stranded in the enemy camp – but more of a prisoner than an attacker.

For better or worse, 21...♙f6, stopping the advance of White's f-pawn, was the only move.

22.f6! ♙f8

22...♙xf6? was not possible due to 23.♙f3 ♘f4 (23...♖h4 loses material due to 24.♙g5) 24.♙xf4 exf4 25.♙xf4 ♖h4 (or 25...♙e7 26.♙xf6! ♙xe4+ 27.♖f3) 26.♙f5 ♙e7 27.♖ae1 ♙e5 28.♘d4 and with his king stuck in the centre and his pieces uncoordinated, Black's position would quickly collapse.

23.♙f3



It is interesting to take stock now. Black has his two knights (on a5 and g2) disconnected from the rest of his forces and out of play, while the rest of his forces (♙d8, ♙f8, ♖a8, ♖h8) are all still at their starting squares! This posi-

tion more resembles a game from a simultaneous display than a top game in the A-group of the Tata Steel chess tournament! And the ease with which Carlsen got to this position is remarkable. Magnus now executes directly, precisely and brutally.

23...♖c7 24.♘b4!

Black's knight will eventually move from a5 – which means the white knight will jump to c6!

24...♘b7 25.♘c6 ♘c5 26.♙f5! ♘d7

Black's knight continues on a senseless journey, however he has no moves here, and the only other option was to resign.

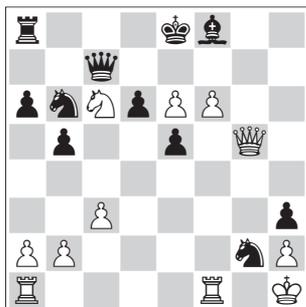
27.♙g5 ♖g8 28.♚h5 ♘b6 29.♙e6!

Black cannot move a single piece, while 30.♘e7 followed by 31.♚xf7 is a deadly threat.

29...♗xg5

Or 29...♘f4 30.♗xf4 exf4 31.♗e1.

30.♚xg5 fxe6 31.dxe6! 1-0



A nice final picture.

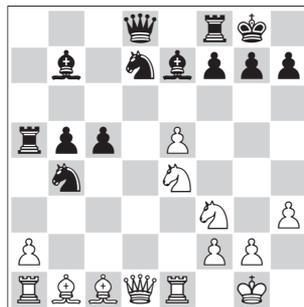
RL 26.3 (C92) Game 31

**Fischer, Robert
Stein, Leonid**

Sousse Interzonal 1967 (7)

**1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 a6
4.♙a4 ♘f6 5.0-0 ♙e7 6.♗e1 b5
7.♙b3 d6 8.c3 0-0 9.h3 ♙b7**

**10.d4 ♘a5 11.♙c2 ♘c4 12.b3
♘b6 13.♘bd2 ♘bd7 14.b4 exd4
15.cxd4 a5 16.bxa5 c5 17.e5!
dxe5 18.dxe5 ♘d5 19.♘e4 ♘b4
20.♙b1 ♗xa5**



This is a famous game of the 11th World Champion from the interzonal tournament, where he started so convincingly but would never finish, leaving the event when he had a huge lead. We will look at the way Fischer develops his kingside attack here. It is instructive because it is a standard type attack which may arise in the middle-game from different opening lines.

21.♚e2

It is clear that White's chances lie on the kingside. He is going to attack there with all of his well-coordinated pieces, apart from his ♗a1. Black's defenders on the kingside are likely to be outnumbered, which is a good sign for the attacking side. Fischer was not interested in a small advantage of the type White gets after 21.♘fg5 ♙xe4 22.♙xe4 ♙xg5 23.♙xg5 ♚xg5 24.♚xd7.

21...♘b6 22.♘fg5

This forces Black to part with his light-squared bishop.

22...♙xe4 23.♚xe4 g6 24.♚h4!

Forcing Black to further weaken his kingside, thus creating sacrificial motifs.

24...h5 25.♚g3

Chapter 12

The Sacrifice for Development

A ‘sacrifice for development’ occurs per definition in the opening and is often seen in practice. This type of sacrifice is designed to gain time, in order to get ahead in development, resulting in an initiative and/or an attack.

A sub-theme mostly connected to the sacrifice for development is an attack on a king in the centre.

The material that is sacrificed for development is mostly one or more pawns. Sometimes, more serious material investments, e.g. of a piece, are considered, like in the games Spassky-Mikenas and Fedorov-Adams examined in this chapter.

Given the fact that the sacrificed material is mostly one or more pawns, the sacrifice for development has for many years been an intuitive type of sacrifice, where the attacker reasons: I have development, I have initiative and I am not sacrificing that much material. However, the rapid development of chess theory and the increased depth of opening preparation is having influence on this type of sacrifice. In recent years, sacrifices for development are considerably more often the result of thorough, computer-checked opening preparation rather than a spontaneous over-the-board decision to shed material for the sake of quick development.

In this game Tal uses a sacrifice for development that has become standard in the Sicilian – bear in mind, however, that this game was played in 1966 and much less theory and opening ideas were known at the time. For the sacrificed pawn, White keeps Black’s king in the centre and combined with White’s pressure along the d-file, this decides.

With his last move, Black wants to collect a pawn, either on c3 or on e4. Tal opts for a standard Sicilian idea, sacrificing a pawn and aiming for quick development.

**8. ♖g5! ♜xc3 9. ♖xf6 gxf6
10. bxc3 ♜xc3**



SI 41.12 (B43) Game 69

Tal, Mikhail

Hamann, Svend

Kislovodsk 1966 (10)

1.e4 c5 2. ♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4

4. ♘xd4 a6 5. ♘c3 ♜c7 6. ♖e2

♘f6 7.0-0 ♖b4

Let's take stock. Black has won a pawn, but apart from his queen, all his pieces are on their initial squares, his kingside pawn structure is already damaged and his king is in the centre. White has completed his development, his pieces are ready for action. Common knowledge and logic tells us that White should have good compensation for the pawn.

11.♖b1!

White develops his rook to the b-file and also prepares the standard rook lift to b3.

11...♗c6 12.♗xc6

Black now faces a difficult choice – how to recapture?

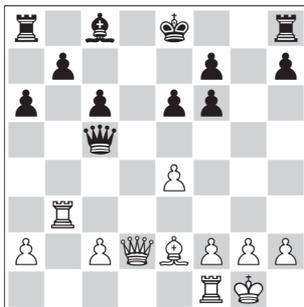
12...dxc6?!

After this recapture, White will quickly build up pressure on the d-file and gets a devastating attack on Black's king in the centre. After the other captures, White certainly has compensation, but matters look less dramatic for Black:

A) 12...♙xc6 13.♙d4 intending 14.♖b6;

B) Or 12...bxc6 13.♖b3 ♗c5 14.♙d2, when Black's main problem is that it is difficult to develop and solve the problem of his king in the centre.

13.♖b3 ♗c5 14.♙d2



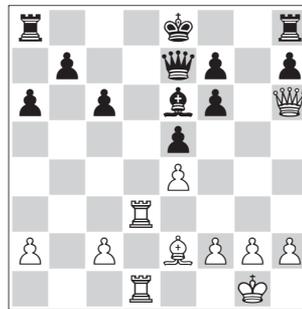
White now executes a classic type of attack, combining his d-file pressure

with motifs along the h5-e8 and h4-d8 diagonals. Black is not able to connect his rooks and solve the problem of his king.

14...h5

Black indeed wants to eliminate the motifs along the h5-e8 diagonal by preventing the white bishop from coming to h5, and also wants to prevent the white queen from coming to h6. However, he falls far behind in development and the pressure on the d-file, combined with motifs on the h4-d8 diagonal, now decides.

However, Black did not really have any good moves here. I will give some lines to show White's attacking motifs: 14...e5 15.♖d1 ♗e7 16.♙h6! ♗e6 17.♖bd3.



analysis diagram

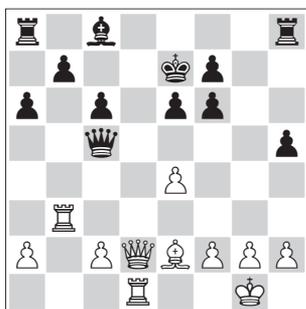
White will now collect the h7-pawn and also exchange the strong defender on e6. Black cannot connect his rooks and is unable to defend or create counterplay here.

A) 17...♖g8 (otherwise White plays 18.♙g7 and follows up with ♗g4, trading off the defender on e6) 18.♗h5 ♗xa2 19.♙xh7 ♖f8 20.♗g4 ♗e6 21.♗xe6 ♗xe6 (21...fxe6 falls under a deadly pin after 22.♙h6 ♖f7 23.♙h5) 22.♖d6 ♗e7 and now the d-file decides: 23.♙h3 with 24.♙d3, 25.♖d7,

and 26.♖d8 to follow – in general, Black is not able to defend here against White’s prosaic and simple build-up of threats on the d-file;

B) 17...♙xa2 loses to 18.♙g4 ♙e6 19.♙xe6 ♖xe6 20.♗d2! (the mating threats on the d-file force Black’s centered king to flee to the kingside, but it will get mated there) 20...♔f8 21.♗b4+ ♔g7 (or 21...♔e8 22.♗xb7) 22.♗g3+ ♔h6 23.♗d2+.

15.♖d1 ♔e7



16.♖d3?

A rare instance of Tal missing an accurate execution. 16.♖c3!, forcing the black queen to the e5-square and preventing the developing move ...e6-e5, was winning instantly: 16...♗e5 and now the d-file decides: 17.♖d3, and 18.♖d8 cannot be stopped.

16...♗b6?

Black could have stayed in the game with 16...e5! followed by 17...♙e6, since in the event of 17.♖c3 he has 17...♗d4. Now the combination of d-file pressure and the h4-d8 diagonal is decisive:

17.e5! 1-0

In this game, similar to the previous one, Tal sacrifices a pawn in order to get a development advantage. Van der Wiel accepts Tal’s pawn sacrifice, but lags in

development and has his king stuck in the middle of the board. As a result, as often happens after sacrifices for development, Tal gets an attack on the king in the centre, which he executes excellently.

EO 60.7 (A17) Game 70

Tal, Mikhail

Van der Wiel, John

Moscow Interzonal 1982 (4)

**1.c4 ♘f6 2.♗c3 e6 3.♗f3 b6
4.e4 ♙b7 5.♙d3 c5 6.0-0 ♘c6
7.e5 ♗g4 8.♙e4 ♗c8**



9.d3!?

White sacrifices a pawn in order to speed up his development. A non-sacrificial developing move was 9.♖e1.

9...♗gxe5

Black was not obliged to accept the sacrifice and could have opted for 9...d6 or 9...f5.

10.♗xe5 ♗xe5 11.f4 ♘c6

