

The Tactician's Handbook

by Victor Charushin



Revised & Expanded by Karsten Müller

Foreword by Judit Polgar

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Preface

After I had finished work on the new edition of Rudolf Spielmann's classic *The Art of Sacrifice*, publisher Russell Enterprises approached me with the idea of publishing a new edition of Charushin's seven books on tactics. At first I was a bit skeptical, as I was not familiar with Victor Charushin, but after briefly reviewing his seven-volume series released under the general heading of *The Tactician's Handbook*, it became clear to me that these were interesting and worthwhile books on tactics.

With the Spielmann book, while converting the English descriptive notation to algebraic, we also preserved the original content. My additions and comments to that content were presented in blue and appeared in the text. New material, guided by Spielmann's Epilogue, nearly doubled the size of the book and was presented in its own separate section. However, with *The Tactician's Handbook*, a somewhat different approach was used.

The seven original books averaged about 100 pages per book. Games and game fragments were presented by Charushin, often with little or no notes. With *The Tactician's Handbook*, I carefully reviewed and then selected the material I thought most instructive. Then I added instructive exercises. I also tried not to use too many examples from one single source, e.g., Kasparian's selection of endgame studies on domination, from which Charushin had chosen a lot of examples.

Regarding Charushin's seven themes, I was especially fascinated by Alekhine's Block and have added several new examples there. But of course Domination, Combination Cross and Lasker's combination are also quite common and worth knowing, while Mitrofanov's Deflection is very beautiful, but also quite rare.

All the analysis has been checked with the computer and Charushin's notes and comments were revised directly, where necessary, without indication. I nevertheless hope that I have preserved Charushin's spirit in the work. For this reason, I have tried to preserve Charushin's terminology, whenever possible.

I find it really amazing that Charushin managed to produce work of this quality considering the circumstances under which he worked. Apparently the manuscript of this book was presented to the original publisher in handwritten form. Charushin wrote the entire book longhand on lined legal-sized sheets, with diagrams created using an ink stamp for the boards and with the piece figurines hand-drawn on the proper squares. These aged and brown papers combined tape, glue and inserted newspaper columns – then were tied together with old string for shipment to America. Yet the result was a powerful sense of order and system, of method and, perhaps, of magic.

I hope that you will enjoy Charushin's magic as much as I did!

Karsten Müller
Hamburg 2016

Signs & Symbols

!	strong move
!?	interesting, good move
?!	dubious, weak move
?	mistake
!??	interesting but not good
!!!?	strong and interesting
↑	with the initiative
→	with an attack
□	the only move, all other moves are dramatically worse
△	made with the intention of the following move
±	White is slightly better
∓	Black is slightly better
±	White is substantially better
∓	Black is substantially better
+−	White has a winning advantage
−+	Black has a winning advantage
∞	The position is unclear

Foreword

It was not without certain nostalgia that I went through the pages of this book's manuscript. I have always considered myself a tactical player and as a child I have spent many thousands of hours solving tactical exercises. It is not an exaggeration to say that combinative play is like my second mother tongue.

Discussions between great players, specialists and theorists, aiming at giving an accurate definition of the chess combination started roughly a century ago, but I am not sure if they ever reached a final and indisputable conclusion. Therefore, I will give some of my personal and inevitably subjective thoughts on this matter.

From a practical point of view, tactics are something that yielded me some of my most memorable victories, and if we extend this correlation to my entire career, they have been the main "provider" of whole points. If we approach it from an abstract perspective, tactics are a combination of seeing ahead and precise calculating, but not without a dose of psychology. Tactical operations usually take place on a specific part of the board, and if they are destined to be decisive, the situation on remote areas loses significance. This explains why in my games I frequently sacrificed material or made strategic concessions. Combinations are closely related with time and accelerating the rhythm of the attack.

But even in such an imaginative and practically unlimited chapter of chess theory, thematic classifying according to certain patterns is possible. There are some special openings which are very tactical by their nature, featuring typical sacrifices on squares such as e5, e6, f5, d5, f6, g6, h6, g7, or h7 (and of course, if the attacker plays Black, this list also includes the corresponding squares); several Sicilian systems are among the best examples.

Some other patterns do not have a direct connection with the opening, belonging strictly to the middlegame theory. Ignoring the rich inheritance from our predecessors can have serious consequences. In our game from Hoogeveen in 2003, Karpov carelessly allowed the double bishop sacrifice on h7 and g7 – known ever since the famous game Lasker-Bauer – and had to resign just a few moves later.

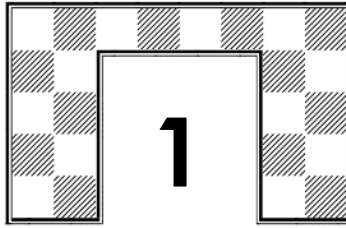
Some of my favorite patterns are Rf6!! in the Fischer-Benko game and White's queen sacrifice from Lilienthal-Capablanca. I would also add Levitsky-Marshall to my greatest memories from the early childhood.

I have always been impressed by the attacking power of two well-coordinated knights and in the beginning of my career I mainly associated tactics with the presence of queens on board. With the years, I have learned that tactics can be

beautiful and effective in endings too! From the gallery of great tactical players, whose games are worth examining for improving tactical skills, I would mention Morphy, Steinitz in the first part of his career, Alekhine, Tal and Kasparov.

Solving studies is another important method of tactical training, as we can find here beautiful patterns and special effects, such as *zugzwang*, in their pure form. My favorite composers are Rinck, Chéron and above all others, Kubbel. From the modern composers I appreciate Afek's ability of creating positions which could well occur in practical games. I hope you enjoy this book and benefit significantly from solving the featured exercises.

Judit Polgar
Budapest 2016



Alekhine's Block

The sixth rank is intimidating. A piece placed on it brings fear and panic to the enemy's army. – Savielly Tartakower

The object of a chess game is to checkmate the opponent's king. There are two means to this goal, either directly through attack or indirectly by acquisition of material superiority. Of course, the first way is more natural and more beautiful, but our opponent will try to place insurmountable obstacles in our path.

Overcoming such careful defense is an extremely complicated task, and toward this end various tactical measures are employed. Here we shall analyze one of them, the blockade on the f6-square.

Consider Black's castled position. The row of pawns in front aspire to build an impregnable bastion defending the king. The first duty of the attacker is to rupture that pawn barrier. The simplest way to do so is by a pawn storm, but advancing the white pawns will cost much time and is fraught with the danger of weakening his own king's position, when failure leads to an immediate counterattack and inevitable defeat.

A more reliable method of softening the enemy pawn barrier is by piece pressure. For example, place the white queen on h4 and a bishop on d3.

The threat of mate on h7 forces Black to move one of his pawns. The move...h7-h6 is the least successful, leading only to further weakening of Black's position. White's queen goes to e4 and Black must also play...g7-g6 or...f7-f5, after which his pawn fortress loses strength. Instead, the move ...g7-g6 weakens the dark squares, and makes sense only with a subsequent transfer of Black's bishop to g7 – time consuming or often simply impossible.

The most active defense against the h7-mate involves...f7-f5. This move begins to illustrate the role of Black's rook on f8. Before the pawn move, this rook is passive and only cramps the king. After...f7-f5, however, the rook gains in strength and supports the f-pawn, nurturing hope of a counterattack.

Therefore, it is a perfectly natural idea for White to blockade the f7-pawn by placing a rook, for example, in front of it on the f6-square. Thus the black defensive order is permanently frozen, while White's rook penetrates into the enemy camp. True, the situation is complicated by the defender's ability to capture the blockading piece, and the correctness of the sacrifice must be calculated accurately. But placing the white rook on f6 sets in motion this blockading operation, which we will refer to as Alekhine's Block or simply the Block.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the attractive ideas underlying

Alekhine's Block



Alexander Alekhine

the Block were brilliantly realized by Alexander Alekhine. A profound understanding of the game led him to conclude that the Block can be executed not only by a rook on the f6-square, but on any square of the sixth (or third) rank by any piece. None of the grandmasters reveal in their games such variety in implementing this complex tactical maneuver as does the fourth world champion. Although early examples of the Block may be seen here, Alekhine was the first to systematically employ this device in his kingside attacks. There can be no doubt that a blockading piece sacrifice on the sixth (or third) rank should be called "Alekhine's Block."

As a passive sacrifice, the Block should ideally be a "quiet" move, without a check or capture. Exceptions are possible, for example, in that a knight on f6 often gives automatic check, and the queen's Block – that of the queen on g6 (or g3) – was first demonstrated by Frank Marshall in game 1-74. Alekhine's similar effort in game 1-75, though earlier, was played in a simultaneous exhibition, and so this "subset" of the Block should rightfully bear Marshall's name.

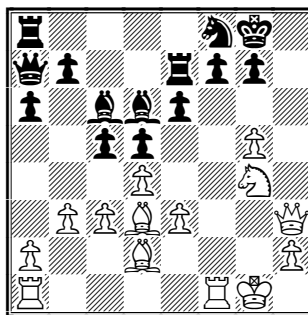
It is noteworthy that the theoretical and widely known exchange sacrifice on c3 in the Sicilian Defense represents a modern development of Alekhine's Block. By means of this sacrifice, Black obtains sufficient counterplay with minimal material loss.

Alekhine's Block has been firmly established in practice. It is employed at all levels, from blitz games to matches for the world championship. In order to study this tactical maneuver we propose that the reader analyze the games given below, which are classified according to the piece being sacrificed and the square being blockaded. I am convinced that both beginning chessplayers and experienced masters will derive true enjoyment from these examples of chess art.

Alekhine uses his own block

The rook blocks at f6/f3

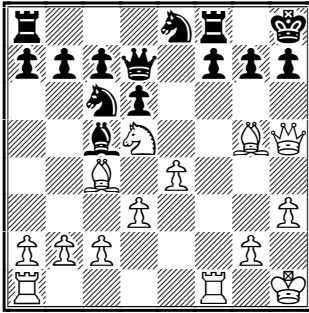
(1-1) Alekhine – Ostrogsky
Moscow (sim) 1910 (D)



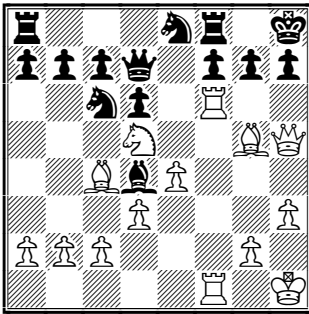
22. ♖f6!! With the idea 23. ♖h6 g×h6 24. ♗f6+. 22. ♗f6+! g×f6 23. g×f6+- – Lein. **22... ♗g6** 22... g×f6 23. ♗×f6+ ♖g7 24. ♗h6#; 22... g6 23. ♖af1 ♕e8 24. ♖×g6+ This is even better than Charushin's 24. ♖6f3+-.

24...fxg6 24...dxcg6 25.dxf6+ ♖f8
 26.♖h6#) 25.♖xf8+ ♖xf8 26.♖h8+
 ♖f7 27.dh6# 23.♖xg6 fxg6
24.♗xg6 1-0

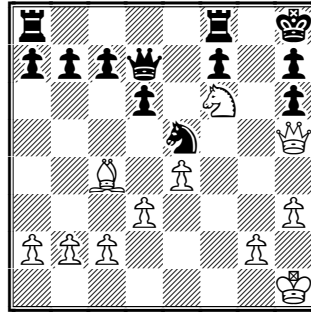
(1-2) Alekhine – Dawnman
 San Luis (bf sim) 1924 (D)



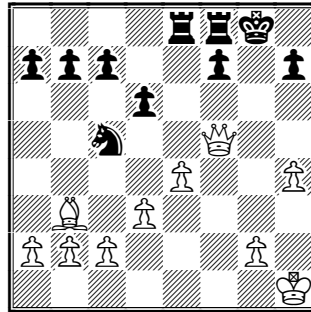
16.♖f6!! 16.♗e7! g6 (16...dxe7
 17.♖xf7+-) 17.♖h6+- Lein.
16...♗d4 16...gxg6? 17.dxf6 dxf6
 18.♗xf6+ ♖g8 19.♖g5# **17.♖af1?** (D)



Alekhine brings his last piece into the attack, but this over-presses. 17.♖f4 is called for: 17...f6 (17...g6 18.♖h4 ♗g7 19.♖af1+-) 18.♖af1 ♗e5 19.♖h4 g6 20.♖xg6 ♗a5 21.♖xf6+- **17...♗xg6?** After the cold-blooded 17...gxg6! 18.♖xf6 dxc7, White has some compensation, but not enough, e.g., 19.♖h4 dxe6 20.c3 ♗e5 21.♗e3 ♖d8 22.d4 ♖g8 23.dxe5 dxe5 and Black is for choice. **18.♖xf6 dxe5** **19.♖h6 gxh6** **20.♗f6+ dxf6** **21.dxf6** (D)



21...♖e7? The queen sacrifice 21...♖g8! 22.dxc7 dxc7 23.♗xf7 ♖g7 was the last chance to defend, but White is of course much better. **22.♖xh6 ♖xf6** **23.♖xf6+ ♖g8** **24.♗b3 ♖ae8** **25.h4 dxc7** **26.♖f5 dxc5** (D)



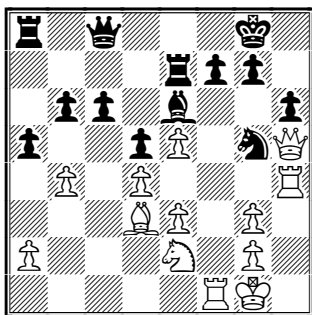
27.h5? Alekhine should block f6 first with 27.♖g5+! ♖h8 28.♖f6+ ♖g8 29.h5+- . **27...dxb3?** **1-0** 27...♖e5! stops the direct attack, but White's long term pressure prevails after 28.♖g4+ ♖h8 29.h6 dxe6 30.♖h4 f6 31.♖h3+- . **28.♖g5+ ♖h8** **29.♖f6+ ♖g8** **30.h6** With the idea 31.♖g7# . **1-0**

*♖f6 introduces the option ♖xh6
 The defense ♖f8*

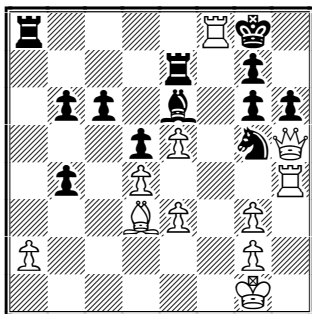
(1-3) Marshall – Spielmann
 Moscow 1925 (D)

27.♖f6!! ♖f8! 27...gxg6? 28.♖xh6+-; 27...axb4? 28.♖xh6 gxh6 29.♖xh6+- **28.dxf4** Marshall feeds his knight into the attack. 28.b5!?, to close

Alekhine's Block



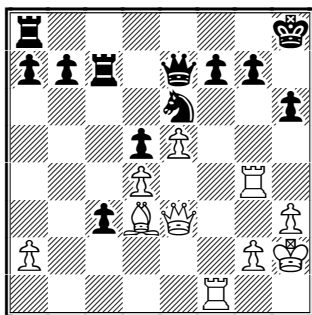
roads on the queenside first, was the alternative. **28...a×b4** Even 28...g×f6! 29.exf6 ♖ea7 is not completely clear, e.g., 30.♗xe6 f×e6 31.♖g6+ ♖g7 32.♖×h6 ♗f3+ 33.g×f3 ♖×g3+ 34.♕f2 ♖×h6 35.♖×h6 ♖g5 36.f4 ♖f5 37.♗×f5 exf5, and Black still has drawing chances. **29.♗g6 f×g6 30.♖×f8+ (D)**



30...♖×f8? Until now Spielmann has defended well, but this natural recapture is wrong. After 30...♖×f8! 31.♖d1 (31.♖×g6 is met by 31...♖×a2 32.♖f4+ ♖g8) 31...♖ea7, White is only slightly better. **31.♖×g6 ♗e4 32.♗×e4 d×e4 33.♖×h6 ♗f5 34.♖g5 ♖e6 35.♖×e6 ♗×e6 36.♖g6 ♗d5 37.e6 ♖c8 38.♖f7+ ♖h7 39.♖d7 ♖a8 40.e7 ♗f7 41.♖×c6 1-0**

(1-4) Charushin (D)

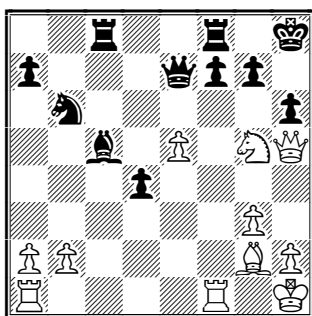
1.♖f6! With the idea ♖×h6+. **1...♗g5?** 1...♖f8! 2.♖f3 g5 3.♖×d5 ♖g7 4.♖e4 ♖d8 with counterplay is



called for. **2.♖×g5 h×g5 3.♖×g5 ♗g8** 3...g×f6? 4.♖h6+-- **4.♖h5!** This is better than Charushin's 4.♖h4?, which can be met by 4...♖e8!! (4...g6? 5.♖g5 c2 5...♖f8 6.h4+- 6.♗×c2 ♖d8 7.♗f5+-) and Black defends, e.g., 5.♖h7+ ♖f8 6.♖d6 ♖c6 7.♗b5 c2 8.♖h8+ ♖e7 9.♖h4+ f6=. **4...g6 5.♖g5 ♖f8 6.h4** with a very dangerous attack.

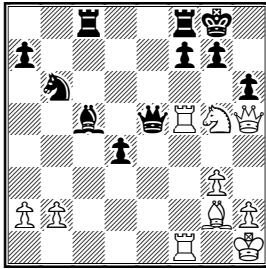
The defense ♖g8

(1-5) Schoneberg – Liebert
Germany 1972 (D)



25.♖f6!? This wins, but the direct 25.♗×f7+ is even stronger because of 25...♖g8 26.♗h3 ♖b7+ 27.♖f3 ♖×f7 28.♖×f7+ ♖×f7 29.♖×f7 ♖×f7 30.♗×c8 ♗×c8 31.♖c1+- **25...♖g8! 26.♖af1** Now 26.♖×h6? can be met by 26...g×h6 27.♖×h6 f6+- **26...♖×e5 27.♖6f5 (D)**

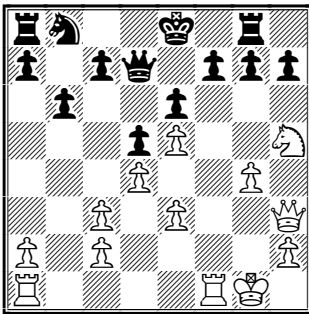
27...♖e3? With queens on the board White's attack crashes through.



27...g6! 28.♖xh6 ♖h8 29.♖xh8+ ♗xh8
30.♗xf7 d3 is forced and limits the
damage. 28.♗xf7 d3 29.♗e5 ♖d2
30.♗e4 ♗d7 31.♖g6 ♗f2
32.♖h7+ ♗xf7 33.♗d5+ 1-0

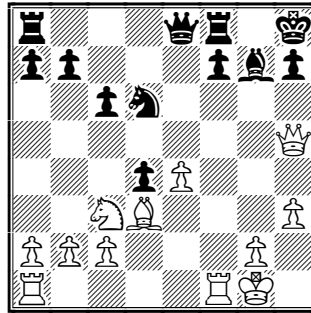
Doubling on the f-file

(1-6) Simagin – Lyskov
Moscow 1957 (D)



16.♖f6!! ♖e7? Black had to
defend his Achilles heel f7 with
16...♗c6 17.♗af1 ♗d8, when White is
better after, e.g., 18.♗h6, but matters
are not completely clear. 17.♗af1
♗d7 18.♗xf7 ♖xf7 19.♗xf7 ♗xf7
20.♗f4 ♗f8 21.c4 dxc4 22.♖f3
♗d8 23.d5?! 23.♗h3+!? ♗e8 24.♗g5
♗d7 25.d5+- was more precise.
23...exd5?! This opens roads for
White's attack. 23...♗e7 was called for,
but White will win after 24.e4 anyway.
24.♗h3+ ♗e8 25.♗g5 ♗d7 26.e6
♗xe6 26...♗e7 can even be met by
27.♖f7+ ♗xf7 28.exf7+ ♗e7
29.fxg8♖+- 27.♗xe6 ♗e7 28.♖f5
♗d6 29.♗f4 c6 30.♖e6+ 1-0 ♖f6
blocks the f-pawn.

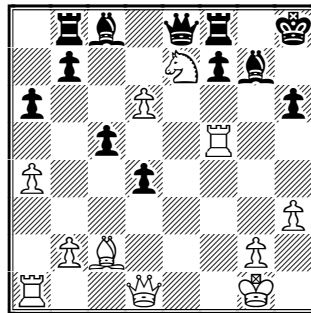
(1-7) Fischer – Benko
USA ch New York 1963 (D)



19.♗f6!! A really fantastic shot.
Benko had counted on 19.e5? f5!=
19...♗g8 20.e5 h6 21.♗e2 1-0

The following example is similar:

(1-8) Knaak – Anastasian
Yerevan 1988 (D)



23.♖f6!! 1-0



Rainier Knaak