Back to Basics: Strategy
by Valeri Beim

Back to Basics Chess Series
Back to Basics:
Strategy
by
Valeri Beim

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Russell Enterprises, Inc.
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Preface

Playing chess is interesting – but playing and winning is even more interesting!

Which paths lead to victory in a game of chess?

Three such paths are known. The first is a direct attack on the king, with the aim either to mate, or to force the opponent, in defending that attack, to suffer serious material losses. The second is also to obtain enough of a material advantage for an easy win; but this time it is achieved by means of a tactical blow (we will not be examining the case of a horrible blunder by our opponent, since the more playing experience one has, the less often this happens. Besides, training oneself to await stupid mistakes from one’s opponent is wrong on principle, and very harmful to one striving for self-realization!).

And the third and final way is the technical, and consists of slowly nursing relatively small and varied material or positional advantages to victory. This path may be the very hardest, and learning to master technique will cost the studious player more time than learning the other playing habits.

And although all the fundamental methods of play I just listed usually require that a player have different levels of knowledge and different levels of preparation, each of them shares one important general characteristic. And that is: in order to win by objectively proper means – that is, not as a consequence of your opponent’s terrible blunder – it is necessary that objective reasons for this exist in the position.

Such reasons, always contained in the position, are a superiority for one side in some of the components which make up a chess position. Such superiorities are usually called advantages. There are various kinds of advantages, sometimes in material, other times in the most diverse elements of the position. Advantages of the latter type are commonly referred to as positional advantages.

In the main, this book will be devoted to questions of classifying positional advantages and the various operations that can be performed with them.

For now, let’s look at a couple of examples, and at how the presence – or absence – of the necessary advantages influenced the outcome of the game.

Pillsbury-Burn
Hastings 1895
Here we have a classic (and very typical) example of the successful execution of one of the best-known methods of combinative attack against the king.

Harry Nelson Pillsbury, a legendary American player of the latter half of the 19th century, made excellent use of the tactical peculiarities of this position.

The opening moves of his attack are well-known to any player who has had sufficient experience solving the examples given in any manual on chess tactics: 20.Bxh7+! Kxh7 21.Ng5+ Kg8. On 21...Kg6, White wins at once by 22.Rg3, when Black has no defense against the fatal jump of the white knight, for example, to the e6-square. However, it should be noted that there are also cases in which such a king maneuver may be what saves Black from this attack!

The resulting situation is standard for combinations of this sort: White needs to bring his heavy pieces to the h-file as quickly as possible, where they and the knight will combine to checkmate his opponent. The continuation was: 22.Rh3!Qe8. Other replies lose as well: 22...f6 23.Rh8+ Kxh8 24.Qh4+ Kg8 25.Qh7+ Kf8 26.Qh8#; 22...cxd4 23.Rh8+, etc.; 22...Nf8 23.Qh4 Ng6 24.Qh7+ Kf8 25.Qh8+ Nhx8 26.Rxh8#.


Yusupov-Illescas Cordoba
Ubeda 1997

Looking closely at this position from a game between two well-known players, we can see its similarity to the tactical motif just examined. The Spanish grandmaster succumbed to the tempting opportunity to execute this old (probably several hundred years old!) and well-regarded trick, and look what happened:

11...e4 12.Nd2 Bxh2+ 13.Kxh2 Ng4+
But after the forced reply 14.Kg3! (but not 14.Kg1?? Qh4, when White cannot escape mate; matters would also have ended badly for him after 14.Kh3? Qd6 15.g3 [15.Kxg4 Nf6+ 16.Kg5 h6+ 17.Kh4 Qh2#; 15.Rh1 Nxf2+ 16.Kh4 g5+! 17.Kxg5 Qg6+ 18.Kf4 Qg4#] 15...Qh6+ 16.Kxg4 Ne4#), when it turned out that Black had been too optimistic in his evaluation of the likely outcome of his operation. As detailed analysis of the possibilities in this complicated multi-piece situation shows, in every possible variation that follows (I shall not overburden my readers’ attention with these analyses – just take my word for it!), White keeps enough of an advantage to win.

14...Qd6+

After 14...Qg5 15.Ndxe4 Qg6 16.Kf3, the king also runs to a safe haven, with White keeping his material advantage. And there are other possible variations which could also have developed similarly.


And now it would appear that Artur has not only a material, but also a significant advantage in the strength of his position, which in chess is usually referred to as a positional advantage. This advantage is what allows White to finish the game with a kingside attack of his own.


Kg6 36.Rh2 Re4 37.Rhxg2 fxg2 38.Rxg2 Bf3 39.Rf2 g4 40.e6 Ra4 41.Nc7 Rxa2 42.Kc1 1-0

Before drawing conclusions from what we have observed, I should like to share a few important thoughts. It is quite likely that these examples will seem overly complex to many readers: too many pieces, too many possibilities, with consequences that are difficult, sometimes impossible, to understand.

You shouldn’t be afraid of this. From my many years of training experience, I know very well that one and the same chess material can provide useful information to the novice and to the strong professional alike, provided it is packed with enough information. Of course, each of these two will see and take away, that which corresponds to his own level of preparation.

Here it is most useful to study material that has been taken from the games of strong players, since the actions these players take are conceived based upon their deep knowledge of the truths of chess play, and filled with interesting ideas.

I have always followed this principle when presenting material in my books and in my training sessions. Now, about the examples we examined, what have we seen?

First of all, we saw one and the same well-known tactical technique – leading to completely opposite results! If we bear in mind that in the second case, Black, after making the sacrifice, committed no further errors – well, he might have committed a few minor inaccuracies in an already difficult position – lost, then his defeat must be
considered the objectively correct outcome of the game. This gives rise to the question: why was the attack so powerful in the first case, and why did it fall so far short in the second? It was for the purpose of giving a complete answer to this question that I engaged in the entire previous lengthy – but, I am sure, necessary – discussion.

Here it is: the reason that Pillsbury’s combination succeeded was that his position before he started the combination was strong enough to render his sacrificial attack successful. In other words, the strength of his position lay in the ability of his pieces to work together in the necessary direction, and also in the enemy king’s lack of a sufficient defense. Together, these form White’s accumulated positional advantages.

In the second example, Black’s forces had not yet achieved that stage of cooperation necessary to overcome his opponent’s defensive barriers.

Another way of putting this would be: The sole presence of a combinative motif on the board, even if it is supported by a player of top-class tactical mastery, is insufficient basis for the success of a tactical operation! What else is needed? You need to have sufficient potential in the position! In our second case, this potential had not yet been accumulated by Black, and an incorrect impression of the possibilities of his position – overestimating its strength – led Illescas to the mistaken decision, which led in turn to the loss.

Instead of immediately sacrificing, he should have gradually improved the position of his army, seeking to complete its development and set out his forces harmoniously, refraining for the moment from any sharp action.

Thus we arrive, at last, at the most important point.

If, as we have already explained in the preceding examples, one cannot live successfully in chess on tactics alone, what else do we need? We need one more vital element of play. This element is called strategy.

The book which you hold in your hands is dedicated to a discourse on the essence of strategy, how it usually appears on the chessboard, and what it consists of.

I have written previously about chess strategy in my book Lessons In Chess Strategy (Gambit Publications Ltd., 2003). In working on this new book, I tried to avoid dealing with any theme that was previously covered in the other book. In this, I have more or less succeeded, and thus I hope that each will complement the other.

This book was initially intended for those who are taking their first steps studying the truths underlying the battles on the chessboard. But it seems to me that more experienced and better-prepared fighters can also extract something useful from this book.

I hope that such an expansion of its sphere of usefulness will not harm this book, but may instead attract additional interest. As in my previous writings, at this time again I advise my readers that any response from them, whatever it might be, will be accepted by me with gratitude.

Valeri Beim
Vienna 2010
Chapter 1: Introduction to Our Theme

We begin as we should, by explaining what we intend to study.

First we should make clear how the author himself defines all the most important terms associated with the theme under discussion.

This must be done, because it often happens that those reading, but more especially those discussing, have different (sometimes considerably different!) understandings of the same subjects and occurrences. This leads to confusion, which turns into misunderstandings and even to trading insults. And that is something we do not need.

First of all, let’s deal with the term strategy.

Strategy usually means the most general plan of action, leaving the working out of the details to the tactical element (by the way, I have also had occasion to give a definition of the concept of tactics as well, and it came out like this: Tactics involves the tasks of the moment, meaning those problems which require a solution here and now.)

But this formula is of little help to us in the beginning stages of our research, so for now we shall use it only for reductive purposes. Instead, we shall use as our main guide the following simple definition, wholly useful for practical purposes: strategy in chess (and not only in chess!) concerns itself with preparing favorable circumstances for decisive tactical or technical operations. (Remember that we generally use the term “technique” in chess to refer to that vital component of the game concerned with the effective exploitation of small material or positional advantages, or with holding a position in somewhat inferior situations, all of this occurring, as a rule, in the endgame.)

Nevertheless, I consider it useful to give a clearer explanation of the basis and connections between the two fundamental components of the game of chess that interest us: strategy and tactics. For this purpose, let’s take an example out of daily life.

How about something that is perhaps the most frequent and familiar of life’s situations: a person leaving home in the morning, off to do his or her daily business? Let’s assume this person intends to buy a few things; let’s also suppose she has decided to use mass transportation.

It is quite likely that, before she even leaves home, she will have decided which store she will visit in search of what she wants to buy.

It would also be a good idea for her to figure out beforehand how she is going to get there, in other words, which transit system, and which transfers may be needed (and at which stops), to arrive at her destination? Also, where should she go afterwards, if she cannot find what she is looking for in the first store (as sometimes happens), or if she does not like the price, or anything else about it (which sometimes happens too!).

And now, let us break down this singular situation into its elements,
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trying to figure out which of those components might be called strategic, and which tactical.

Therefore the intent to buy something, even to buy it in a definite place, as well as the consideration given to what might be the best time to get there, certainly must go into the strategic component, since we have set up a rather general goal we intend to reach at the end of this operation.

But the actions taken to complete the journey itself, such as the choice of when to leave home to get to the intended place at the intended time, the choice of route for the journey, and if necessary, the decision of where and at what approximate time to transfer to another kind of transport (and to what kind precisely) – all of these actions, requiring constant attention to every detail, for practically every step, and also calculation of the time – all of these come under the heading of tactics.

Let me repeat: all of these tactical operations are inextricably linked with calculation, even though in the present case, they might be the most simple and obvious kind, requiring nothing more than elementary attentiveness and accuracy.

Strategy, however, can never, under any circumstances, be ranked second to tactics! As we have already shown in the preface, the ability to calculate variations well and a talent for combinations might be of no use in a bad position.

In chess, strategy is concerned precisely with questions about the quality of the position – that is, it is concerned with what would lead to good positions. In addition, strategy sets goals. Without a goal, nothing useful, in life as in chess, can happen.

For if the person in our example had no goal whatsoever, then either the collection of variations of her actions would be limitless: (“I go where I please, since I have no concrete goal to aim for!”), or else the variations would never happen at all (“Since I do not need anything, why bother going anywhere?”).

We are always, to a greater or lesser degree, planning the actions of our daily lives. To this end, each one of us has a unique store of knowledge and habits, which in turn help us draw conclusions in the face of various life situations. All this knowledge is collected by each person from earliest youth, from the first steps in life.

A beginning player, needing to orient herself in this rather complicated world of chess, also finds it extremely important to create such a store for herself. This is the basic store of the most important chess concepts and habits you will be offered in this book.

I also intend to teach you to look at any situation that may arise on the chessboard from a strategic viewpoint – in other words, to take a strategic view of things.

The concept of the well-known and commonly-used term, “positional play” is also important. It appears to be diametrically opposed to the term, “combinative play.” Without getting too far afield, what is important to our theme is that the term positional play is taken to mean a method of play in which the struggle to improve one’s own
situation (or, correspondingly, to make the opponent's situation worse) is carried on by positional means, referring to means of gradually improving one's own position, step by step, rather than explosively.

But such play, in order to succeed, can only be planned, and must be based upon definite principles. In such cases, it is not hard to see that positional play in chess depends entirely upon what strategy we have selected. And this forms the chief objective of the study of chess strategy: without it, it is completely impossible to play positionally with any degree of success whatsoever.

Our accumulated knowledge about strategy in chess is rather large, and of course one should not attempt to swallow it whole – it is much better to divide it into themes.

Here is the first of the themes we shall present in our material. It is called...

Goals In Chess

Anyone who has grown out of the toddler stage and is reasonably capable of independent action can set a goal. Of course, these goals will be endlessly varied, depending on the circumstances which arise and upon the personality of the one setting them.

But they all have something in common: in all possible cases, goals are set, and the paths to achieving them are planned (even if these plans are quite simple – how about: Quick, before Mama shows up, paint our lips with her lipstick!) roughly this way: taking stock of the situation (and it is not important here whether it coincides with reality or not), a person sets himself some goal. In doing so, he makes use of his life experience and knowledge, and makes a decision, either on the conscious level or on the level of habit and reflex. Similar processes occur in chess too; but here, of course, we have a whole list of specific elements to consider.

But the main element remains the same: the same patterns of thinking and the same logic of taking action we examined previously are used as in normal life.

And now, finally, I shall interrupt this extended flow of words, and switch over to chess.

We begin with a position which should be familiar to the overwhelming majority of readers. But even for those who know everything in it by heart, I would advise you not to skip this example. It is possible that the conclusions that flow from it will even prove useful to those readers. And for those to whom this situation is unfamiliar, I advise that you do a good job memorizing the following variations. They may be quite simple, but they are among the variations on which stands the entire theory of pawn endings!

![Chessboard Diagram](image)
White to move has just one way to save himself: 1.Ke1!. The point is that this is the only way for him to escape the fatal necessity of making a move in the position that occurs after 1.Kd1 (going to f1 on the first move leads to the same thing). Then after 1...Kd3 2.Ke1 e2...

...we have a situation that is called zugzwang. This German word means that making a move is extremely disadvantageous, even though you must move according to the rules of chess! This means the white king must leave its good position, and Black wins after 3.Kf2 Kd2. But after the correct retreat of the White king, the game proceeds as follows: 1...Kd3 2.Kd1! e2+ 3.Ke1.

Again we reach the position from the variation we examined earlier, after Black’s second move – but now with a significant difference: now, it is Black to move. Looking more closely, we discover that it is now Black who is in zugzwang! Now the only move that does not lose the pawn is 3...Ke3, and that leads to stalemate.

Thus, the critical position for this ending (after White’s third move) is a position of mutual zugzwang. This means that whoever is on the move in such situations must lose something: the weaker side loses, the stronger side lets slip the win.

This all looks simple and understandable, with nothing in particular to think about – you just have to memorize. But let’s ask ourselves this question: What processes must take place inside the head of the one playing White so that the proper plan in the starting position is chosen consciously, rather than by guesswork? Obviously, for this the critical position of mutual zugzwang would have to be foreseen with the understanding the decisive importance of whose turn it is to move there. And this means that reaching the end position of this variation with Black to move was White’s goal.

And thus we have arrived, finally, at the main theme of this chapter – and with it, of the entire book. We have established that, before making the right choice, White had to picture clearly where he wanted to be at the end of the trip.

But how is a player to select his goal? For this, there exist two main approaches: either knowledge, which one may get from the computer, from books, from a trainer, or from just one’s own playing experience. But this last course – the path of trial and error – is the most time-consuming, and the least secure; and the first course is not always safe – not infrequently, it leads down the wrong path.

The second means of selecting a goal is based on the idea that a player who is unable to rely on accurate knowledge will choose the goal for himself. But if
he cannot rely on such knowledge, then what is there of substance for him to rely on? Are there base materials in chess? Yes, there are, and they are called strategic principles. These principles are a description of truisms that work over the chessboard for any combination of different factors, such as (a) the various combinations of pieces remaining on the board; (b) the particular peculiarities of pawn structure; (c) the different material balances between the two sides; and finally, (d) the various interconnections of the placement of pieces and pawns. Just listing these factors clearly shows how many chess principles there might be.

In fact, if we examine the sum total of knowledge accumulated in the chess world, the number of revealed truths of the most widely varied sort will prove enormous. The greatest part of these have a fairly limited sphere of influence. We’re talking about some frequently occurring results when two sides meet, which are observed only in a specific, limited number of situations, generally arising out of just one type of opening, where such truisms would not work with other kinds of positions.

To make my last assertion easier to understand, let’s look at a situation which is quite typical for the kind of opening we may define as being in the “King’s Indian Group.” Foremost among such openings are the King’s Indian Defense itself, and the Pirc Defense. The pawn structure arising from these openings bears characteristic and long-lasting features:

This time, I have chosen a fragment from one of my own games to serve as the illustration.

What do we see in the diagram? Material is even, and both kings are safe. Two things first attract our attention: (1) all of White’s pieces, without exception, are in play, while Black’s bishop and rook are still in their original positions at c8 and a8; and (2) the concentration of both white rooks on the only open file, which is an even more important detail.

Many readers are undoubtedly familiar with the special importance of the fundamental principles, development and taking open lines, that stand behind these two factors. Later on, we will be giving both of these principles some serious attention. But for now, what interests us is this: whether among the enormous collection of situations of the most varied kind, the possession of these two advantages by one side, with a safe king and material equality, would be quite enough to rate the position as clearly better for him.
Here, such an assessment would be improper, because Black possesses some other advantages, perhaps not quite so obvious, the proper combining of which completely neutralizes his opponent’s well-known advantages. Moreover, as we shall soon see in this game, White was unable to create any real play, and his passive position eventually brought about his downfall. At this time, I will present few variations, as they are not really necessary here. It will be enough to watch the events unfold:

21...Be6 22.g3 Rab8! 23.Ne2 Kg7 24.Nc1 c5 25.Nb3 Rec8 26.Nc1 c4 27.c3 Be7 28.a3 Rb7 29.Kf2 Nd7

30.f4?

This impatient move proves to be a serious inaccuracy; psychologically, however, it is easy to understand, when this diagram is compared with the previous one. While Black has successfully developed all his forces, White’s position has not improved at all, nor has he succeeded in extracting anything from the previously noted advantages of his position; in this specific instance, they have not accomplished a thing. I’m not going to explain here what White’s problem was, so as not to distract your attention from the main line of our explanation.

The reason for White’s error is a common one: it is hard to sit for any length of time under an opponent’s increasing pressure; you want to activate your forces – thus, the impatient, if attractive, pawn move. It should have been prepared, however, with 30.Bg2, giving additional protection to the e4-pawn, when White would keep realistic chances of a successful defense. Now, he is in trouble:

30...Nf6! 31.Kg1

On 31.fxe5 Ng4+ 32.Kf3 Nxe3 33.Kxe3 Bg5+, White loses material.

31...Ng4!? 32.Bf2 Nxf2 33.Kxf2 f6!? 34.Bg2 Bc5+ 35.Ke2 Re7 36.fxe5 fxe5 37.Bf3 Rf8 38.Rd8 Rf6! 39.Rf1 Bh3, and since, after 40.Rfd1 Re7, White has no hope left, he resigned. 0-1

Of course, we will not be discussing every truism in the known world in this book, since we have different goals in mind. We shall discuss only those which work for a considerable percentage of the most varied positions (since chess is, after all, not mathematics, and is not 100 per cent logical and strictly demonstrable; there are certain infrequent cases which deviate from “common sense”). Such truisms – the most important, most fundamental ones of all those many chess truisms in existence – are usually called general strategic principles.

And so, having come to the end of this extended discourse, I have finally
managed to sketch out the contours of this book; now we may begin to get to work. As you will have realized from everything I have said before, this work will consist of acquainting readers with the most important principles of chess.

Strictly speaking, talking about chess strategy means talking about the various strategic principles that have been defined during the process of the historical development of our game. I have dedicated separate chapters of this book to the most fundamental of these. But I have also tried not to forget others as well, discussing them within the major chapters. Opportunities for such digressions come up constantly, since in chess; neither strategic nor tactical themes are likely to occur by themselves. Everything here is closely connected—one depends on, and flows from, the other.
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Chapter 2: Strategic Principles

As we have just explained, the proper path of study for chess strategy is to systematically learn the general principles upon which the game is based. The first one we shall study is the principle we call...

**Piece Development**

This principle is simply formulated, thus: *From the very beginning of a chess game, strive to bring your pieces into play as quickly as possible.*

The logical basis for this principle is quite obvious: *other things being equal,* the side with an advantage in forces in the battle will have the better chances.

This principle is one of the most fundamental, and is quite obvious. In the history of chess, it was one of the first to be generally recognized because of its clarity and simplicity. However, even today, there are even some very strong players who sometimes go ahead and break it, following various inspirations, and who are demonstratively punished for it. And yet, over 150 years ago, the noted German player, Adolf Anderssen, gave repeated and most convincing demonstrations of this very principle. Among the many sharp games he played on this theme, there was one especially well-known example, and it was dubbed the “Immortal Game” by his inspired contemporaries. The clearest and most spectacular part was its conclusion:

As a result of the preceding frequently confusing actions by both sides, in which, however, it was Anderssen who firmly kept to the line of developing his pieces, this wholly unusual situation arose. Let’s take a closer look.

By the way, this is just the time to point out that what would appear to be the simplest action: *examining a position, and drawing the required conclusions as a result of that examination, one of the most important elements of playing chess.*

In order to increase the effectiveness of this work of examining a position, I would recommend following this order: (1) compare the material balance of the position; (2) compare the relative safety of the two kings; (3) compare the pieces for both sides (that is, which side has what); (4) compare the space available to each side; (5) evaluate the situation in the center of the board; (6) compare the mobility of the pieces; (7) compare the possibilities for the pieces to work together; (8) compare the respective pawn structures; and (9) the strong and weak points of each side.
Do not be alarmed at the number and complexity of these points. Gradually, step by step, I shall be acquainting you with all the parameters involved in them. Talking about some of them will involve lengthy explanations, while others will be easily understood at once.

Following the order given above, we begin our consideration of this position.

(1) **Material:** White is already down a considerable amount – rook and bishop; for the moment; the pawns are equal.

(2) **King positions:** The idea behind this term would seem to be simple and understandable, but is it always a simple matter to deal with this question? Here, for example, at first glance, it would seem that both kings stand insufficiently protected from hostile attack – neither is castled, and both have their pawn cover significantly weakened. But let’s ask ourselves: is either side capable of exploiting these shortcomings (note that, with this question, we enter into the territory of paragraphs 6 and 7!)?

Thinking over our response, we discover that all the white pieces, with the exception of the rook, are ready for a combined attack on the enemy king position, while the maximum activity of Black’s forces consists of one relatively harmless gesture by the queen, with no visible means of support. (There is more to be said about this, but we will leave it for later.) Meanwhile, Anderssen, discovering that a knight check from g7 (which turns out to be Black’s most important weak spot – see paragraph 9!) would be fatal for his opponent, played the most spectacular, and at the same time most important move of this game, **19.e5!!**, cutting off the enemy queen once and for all from that part of the board where the decisive events would occur. And although now Black will capture White’s sole remaining rook – and with check – he can no longer save himself.

**19...Qxa1+ 20.Ke2 Na6?**

Kieseritzky loses the thread completely, and loses at once, although it is true that in selecting this continuation, he allowed all future generations of chessplayers to enjoy the most beautiful and instructive of all possible conclusions to the game!

This game, worthy of its impressive title, has been commented on many times, of course, during the past 157 years. Among the commentators have been some of the very highest of the chess elite. The first world champion, Wilhelm Steinitz, provided analysis to show that, had Black continued 20...Ba6, he could have saved himself (in general, he was fond of refuting old attacking gems). Then, Steinitz’s opponent of many years in the battle for the world crown, Mikhail Chigorin, entered the fray, demonstrating convincingly that even in the event of this far more difficult defensive try, the continuation 21.Nc7+ Kd8 22.Nxa6 Qc3 23.Bc7+Qxc7 24.Nxc7 would eventually lead to a win for White. Here, I could certainly lull you to sleep with assorted variations supporting what was just stated. However, this would add nothing to your understanding of what actually
happened in this game, but would only serve to obscure the picture. Here and later, I shall avoid collecting too many variations, showing my readers only the ones most necessary for understanding the proceedings.

And now, for the promised pretty and convincing moment of truth:

21.Nxg7+Kd8 22.Qf6+! (White could also have won by taking the f7-pawn, but this is prettier, and in an esthetic sense is a useful thing for a chessplayer to have!) 22...Nx f6 23.Be7# 1-0

An entrancing final position – and with it, the best moment for thinking about what we have just witnessed. So, in the first diagram, the two most important factors were clearly evident – the excellent cooperation among the majority of White’s (remaining!) pieces, and the nearly complete absence of such cooperation among Black’s. And immediately, this last “nearly” was decisively eliminated by Anderssen’s brilliant 19th move. The outcome was demonstrably correct, as we could see in the final diagram in its most spectacular and convincing form (fortunately for everyone who loves chess – as also occurred in the Morphy and Botvinnik games presented later.

But I often wonder: is such “fortune” really an accident, or is there perhaps some higher intelligence here!?)

So, what happened in this game? Here’s what happened: although tremendously outnumbered, one side’s ideally organized forces defeated the enormous, but completely inactive forces of his opponent. And the disorganization of the latter occurred, above all, because of their complete lack of development. Here, it is important to underscore that this lack of development was, in fact, total. Now, the question will be asked, How could that be? How could it have been total, with Black’s queen and bishop, not just moved from their starting positions, but even having deeply penetrated into the enemy camp, and picking up a rook apiece?

The answer is given in the game score: both bishop and queen were operating on their own, with no connection either between themselves, or with the remaining forces of their army, in order to resolve the important tasks set before them in a coordinated fashion. In other words, just bringing a piece formally out of its starting position can sometimes prove insufficient. What else did Black’s enormous army lack, and what did White’s smaller army possess, which allowed the latter to win? The answer will be well known to many who are still novices at chess, but who are familiar with other team sports: control of the center. White’s pieces were wonderfully centralized, while Black’s “developed” pieces were flung to the far corners of the board, isolated from their own base and from one another.
Thus, as soon as we began talking about development, then two other factors made their presence loudly known: the special status of the center of the board, and the piece-coordination factor.

Now, let’s observe all the vital factors of chess strategy we just mentioned at work in some classic examples.

**Morphy – N.N.**
Two Knights Defense [C56]
New Orleans Blindfold Simultaneous Exhibition, 1858


This move is a serious error on Black’s part, as has been known for a long time. Correct here would be either 6...Na5 or 6...Ne5. True, this position first appeared in this particular game. Before this, the same error appeared repeatedly in a position differing somewhat, but not significantly, from the one that now appears on the board.

7.0-0 Be7

Black’s position was already very difficult in all lines. The natural move he played leads to a quick and smashing defeat. But, surprisingly enough, his game was already bad, no matter what alternative he chose. The toughest resistance could only be offered by 7...Be6.

But now, Morphy executes a standard combination for such positions, which proves to be the refutation of Black’s 6th move.

8.Nxf7! Kxf7 9.Qf3+ Ke6

Under attack, Black tries at least to hold on to his material advantage. For example, if 9...Bf6 10.Bxd5+ Kf8 11.Re1 Bg4 12.Qb3, White would have a powerful attacking position, without paying even a pawn for the privilege. Nevertheless, this was the only way to have any hope of extending his resistance – although with the castling privilege gone, and facing Paul Morphy, his chances of a draw would still have been tiny.

To continue – Only nine moves have been played, and we already have much to discuss. Even though Black has developed three of his minor pieces, as well as controlling a number of the central squares, all of this munificence gets spoiled by one little detail: his king is stuck in the middle of the board with a full set of pieces remaining, and with most of his army still sleeping in camp.

As a result, Morphy obtained the possibility of a direct attack on the enemy king, and created one of his unforgottably instructive examples.
Back to Basics: Strategy

Now, before presenting the rest of the game score, let’s look a little more closely at this situation. We have already spoken of Black’s troubles; the general contours of White’s task are also clear to us: to attack the king without loss of time, so that his opponent will not have time to bring out his reserves. But an immediate assault, although possible by several different means such as checks by the queen or the rooks, will not immediately achieve the goal, as may easily be seen, e.g., the knight can interpose on e5, and it can be supported by the bishop, going to f6.

Why does White have difficulties here? It is because he has not yet brought the development of his forces to the point he needs for the attack to succeed, which is not surprising, if we recall the odyssey his knight took on the kingside: first it went to f3, then it jumped to g5, and finally sacrificed itself on f7. And although all of these manipulations were aimed at a positive goal, in the meantime there were other pieces sitting in their starting positions, watching their comrade-in-arms go through the motions.

Now White must consider the notable results he has already achieved, since he will have to pay a good price for them. In other words, in such a situation, the right approach is to forget about material, and orient yourself to getting your forces out as quickly as possible. And since the opposing king is stuck in the center, and almost completely denuded of pawn cover, one should start thinking about hitting it with both rooks. It is probably this kind of thinking that led to White’s next move. But although it required lengthy description, I do not doubt that the decision took more than a few seconds for Morphy to make. Here, it is all about knowing how to look at the position, experience, knowledge, and one’s native gifts. So – what we need here, is to get both rooks into the game, remove the pawn from the d-file, and do all this as quickly as we can. Put it all together, and what do we get?

10.Nc3!!

We would come to the same position if we started with the obvious 10.Re1+ Ne5, and then continued 11.Nc3.

This exchange sacrifice is not only undoubtedly the strongest move, it is also, generally speaking, the only correct way to a successful completion of White’s attack. The variations – which I am not going to present here; I ask that you take my word for it – demonstrate this with mathematical precision. What interests us here, instead, is the mechanism which goes into making this sacrifice work. Let’s see, in the diagrammed position, Black already has an enormous advantage in material. So adding another bit to the mountain changes nothing for White, in that sense. What is most important for him at this point is time. In all the variations I mentioned earlier, in which White selects a different path, Black is just in time to put together a defense, using the single tempo he has been given. And here is what is especially interesting and important: the exchange sacrifice, which formally appears as a sacrifice of material, turns out, in this situation, to be a gain of material for a short period of this game!

Such a paradox is no accident – it absolutely fits into the theme we are currently discussing. Moreover, it is one of the fundamental elements of the vital factor in chess known as the struggle for the initiative. But how does the sacrifice of material turn out to be a win of material for me? It is all in those words: for a short period. It means only for this moment, and not one moment later, so as not to give our opponent any respite! Look at the last diagram again. White has every piece in play except the queen’s rook. There is no time to bring it into the game by “conventional” means.

From the other side of the board – Black’s bishop at e5 is the king’s best defender. Thus, taking it with the rook, followed by a check at e1 turns out to be an exchange of the most important enemy piece at this moment for the rook at a1 (sic!), which is non-participating – again, at this moment! From this, it obviously follows that for the nearest possible future, White gains an advantage in material in that part of the board where the decisive events are about to take place. These will develop completely by force; and in not one of the possible variations can Black find salvation. I consider these variations useful to show for instructive purposes.

14...Kxe5 15.Re1+ Kd4 16.Bxd5! Rf8

Matters develop similarly after 16...Re8 17.Qd3+ Kc5 18.b4+, etc. The variations after 16...cxb2...

...are also instructive. Here, White wins as follows: 17.Re4+ Kc5 (17...Kxd5 18.Qd3+ would lead to the same result, only a move quicker) 18.Qa3+ Kxd5 19.Qd3+ Kc6 20.Rc4+ Kb6 21.Qb3+ Ka6 22. Ra4#) 17.Qd3+ Kc5 18.b4+! Kxb4 19.Qd4+ and, seeing the forced mate coming after 19...Ka5 20.Qxc3+
Ka6 21.Qa3+ Kb5 22.Rb1, Black resigned. 1-0

The following game is also widely known; one must consider this to be the most famous and most frequently published of all the games of the first world champion, although it is not one of the most typical examples of Steinitz’s “mature period.”

Steinitz – Von Bardeleben
Giulio Pino [C53]
Hastings 1895

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4 Bc5 4.c3 Nf6
5.d4 exd4 6.exd4 Bb4+ 7.Nc3 d5?!

After this game, it became clear that although this move seems logical, it is weaker than the standard continuation 7...Nxe4 8.0-0 Bxc3.

8.exd5 Nxd5 9.0–0 Be6

The main events in this notable game begin at this point. Black has almost everything in order. He has brought out all of his minor pieces and set them up well in the center. In addition, White has an isolated center pawn, which could eventually become a nice target for the enemy rooks. Everything’s fine – except for that little almost! And that almost turns out to be his uncastled king. “Hmm, there is a problem,” von Bardeleben must have thought, “but I shall castle next move.” Understandably, then, White’s task is to prevent Black’s castling, or else make it as difficult as possible, since otherwise, Black’s affairs would indeed be most excellent. But how to do this? Steinitz found a simple and strong approach:

10.Bg5! Be7 11.Bxd5! Bxd5

The series of exchanges undertaken by White cannot fail to surprise us, at first, since a large number of exchanges must usually favor the defending side. But in this case, White’s decision is based on a concrete variation.

12.Nxd5!

This was the position Steinitz aimed for when he began his operation. Black’s king is stuck in the center; castling is not possible at the moment; and next move, Black first guards the e5-square against a possible incursion by White’s knight, while also preparing a so-called artificial castling: the king goes to f7,
the rook comes to e8, and finally the king hides on g8.

14...f6!

15.Qe2

Now, what could be more obvious than this move? However, Igor Zaitsev, a well-known analyst who worked on Anatoly Karpov’s team for many years, has suggested that White’s strongest continuation here was 15.Qa4+. But he could not reach total clarity after Black replied 15...Kf7 (on 15...Qd7, 16.Qb4 would be very strong). When he asked Efim Geller for his opinion, that gifted master and great analyst showed this smashing solution to the problem:


15...Qd7 16.Rac1?!

This move, which also appears completely obvious and inevitable, turns out to be a fresh inaccuracy, which could have made his opponent’s task much easier. Instead, Zaitsev suggested 16.Rad1, the idea being: 16...Kf7 17.Qc4+ Nd5 18.Ne5+! fx e5 19.dxe5. His analysis shows that Black’s defense would have been very difficult here, with very good winning chances for White. On the other hand, every cloud has a silver lining, as the saying goes. Black responded to White’s inaccuracy with a clear error:

16...c6?

The correct continuation would have been 16...Kf7. There was no need to worry about the c7-pawn, since 17.Qxe7+? Qxe7 18.Rxe7+ Kxe7 19.Rxc7+ would lead to a better endgame for Black after 19...Kd6 20.Rxg7 Rac8. I have only two suggestions for White to try to keep at least some advantage: either 17.Nd2!?, with the idea of setting the knight up on b3, or the Zaitsev-like 17.Ne5+! fxe5 18.dxe5, with good compensation for his material.

All this may be so – but what is wrong with Black’s last move?
This: 17.d5!!

From a strategic standpoint, this blow – which has the appearance of a typical *breakthrough* – actually wins the game! What is its strength? First of all, it forces open a new line, the c-file, and in a number of variations it offers the chance to exploit the d-file as well. This assures the quick and effective entry into the game of the a1-rook, which thus far is not participating.

In addition, the white knight, which as we have seen in previous variations was only capable of heroically sacrificing itself on e5, or else maneuvering via the second rank (which contributes little, when one needs to come up with energetic attacking ideas), now has the d4-square at its disposal, through which it may go to the e6-square, and from there, as the saying goes, it has the black king by the throat! In other words, in the shortest possible time, all of White’s pieces come into play, which leads to a major sharpening of his attack. Understandably, for all these benefits, the price of one little pawn is astonishingly small. Also understandably, all of these rich possibilities only opened up for White as a result of his opponent’s loss of time on the previous move.

17...cxd5

After 17...Kf7 18.dxc6 Nxc6 19.Rcd1, White’s entire army marches forward against the exposed enemy king.

18.Nd4 Kf7 19.Ne6 Rhc8

After 19...Nc6, White wins by 20.Nc5 Qc8 21.Qh5+ g6 22.Qxd5+;

What follows is forced:

20.Qg4! g6 21.Ng5+ Ke8 22.Rxe7+

This must be it; Black is finished now – 22...Qxe7 23.Rxc8+ Rxc8 24.Qxc8+; and it is just as simple after 22...Kxe7 23.Re1+ Kd6 24.Qb4+ Rc5 (24...Kc6 25.Rc1#; 24...Kc7 25.Ne6+ Kb8 26.Qf4+) 25.Re6+, and wins. Of course, if it were that simple, this would never have become such a famous game. Black had one reply, based on the theme of his opponent’s weak back rank:

22...Kf8!

Now, of course, White cannot take with the queen: 23.Qxd7?? Rxc1+. But he can continue the checks:
Chapter 2: Strategic Principles

23.Rf7+!

Under no circumstances may White trade a pair of rooks; the reason why will become clear at the very end.

23...Kg8!

An amusing theme of mutually untouchable pieces. Neither side can capture, so the play proceeds, by force, to the end.

```
   a b c d e f g h
8      8
7      7
6      6
5      5
4      4
3      3
2      2
1      1
```

24.Rg7+! Kh8!

Now there is a new motif: 24...Kf8 loses to 25.Nxh7+ Kxg7 26.Qxd7+.

```
   a b c d e f g h
8      8
7      7
6      6
5      5
4      4
3      3
2      2
1      1
```

25.Rxh7+!

And here, a most unexpected thing happened. Von Bardeleben did something quite beyond the pale: he simply walked out of the tournament hall, and never returned that day! In the ChessBase program, the note reads: “Black disappeared from the tournament hall without resigning.” 1-0.

Steinitz kept his composure. When it became clear that there would be no further play, he demonstrated to the spectators why this had happened. It turned out that, after 25.Rxh7+! Kg8 26.Rg7+! Kh8, Black is mated by force: 27.Qh4+! Kxg7 28.Qh7+ Kf8 29.Qh8+ Ke7 30.Qg7+ Ke8 31.Qg8+ Ke7 32.Qf7+ Kd8 33.Qf8+ Qe8 34.Nf7+ Kd7 35.Qd6#.

Next up: the most spectacular (and again, far from typical!) game of the sixth world champion, Mikhail Botvinnik. I have already commented upon it in my book, How to Play Dynamic Chess, but here, I want to alter my demonstration a little bit, tossing aside the bulk of my variations and adding instead some thoughts on the strategic, and some other (oh yes, they do exist!) principles of play.

**Botvinnik – Portisch**

English Opening [A22]

**Monte Carlo 1968**

1.c4 e5 2.Nc3 Nf6 3.g3 d5 4.cxd5 Nxd5 5.Bg2 Be6 6.Nf3 Nc6 7.0-0 Nb6 8.d3 Be7 9.a3 a5 10.Be3 0-0 11.Na4

In his annotations, Botvinnik took a skeptical attitude toward this move, considering it to be inaccurate. Today we know that 9...0-0 10.b4 Nd4 is good here.
11...Nxa4?!

This point in the game is most interesting and instructive. You see, a super high-class chessplayer, such as Portisch, will never just decide to trade pieces, “just like that,” as if to say, “I’ll just trade first, and then think what to do next.” I’m convinced that, already at this moment, he had made his plan for the next five or six moves; and it is quite likely that Black had already seen his 15th move, the key to this entire game, when he traded on a4.

Instead, Botvinnik recommended 11...Nd5 12.Bc5 b6 13.Bxe7 Ndxex7, when White has only a very small advantage. It should be noted that Lajos Portisch had very few such strange letdowns in the course of his brilliant career, by which I mean, losing in such crushing style, totally at odds with the elite class of this gifted master.


White’s play is simple and understandable. He has doubled his rooks on the half-open file, and plans to increase his pressure.

15...Nb8?

Here it is, the key moment of the game, when the outcome is decided, and the reason why we are examining it in such detail. Black is already in difficulties. It seems that he had nothing better than 15...Bd6. But now other questions arise: (a) What was the point of his last move? (b) What made it inferior? and (c) if it was inferior, then how should it be exploited?

For the answers to the first two questions, we look at the diagram and then we see that Black’s main problem is the pressure exerted by the battery of white rooks. Consequently, the point of the strange-looking knight retreat is to continue with c7-c6, and resolve this problem once and for all. Its shortcomings are obvious, as well. First, the c7-pawn remains en prise. Second, just look at the position: Black finally has all his pieces developed, and then – all of his pieces except one are now standing on the back rank! Black would seem to be following logical considerations, while violating just one principle of chess, but that is a fundamental one: the principle of piece development. And finally, can he be punished for this violation, and if so, then how?
Chapter 2: Strategic Principles

The answer may be arrived at in stages. First, considering what has transpired before the move, we see that White has acted consequently and logically – as Petrosian used to like to say about such situations, “He has done nothing so bad that he can be dealt with in this way.” And if that is true, and also since, once we allow Black to advance the pawn to c6, then both White rooks, and with them the whole point of White’s previous activity, will be “dead.”

That’s why (a) White is *forced* to take the c7-pawn! Even though this statement may sound a bit too categorical, it contains the fundamental logic of chess, that same high logic whose presence forms one of the most important reasons for the long existence of our beloved game!

There is more. We may conclude from what has already been said above that (b): the variations which arise as a consequence of the capture of this pawn must inevitably “converge” in White’s favor; and even if it seems not to be so at first sight, one must look a little deeper, because it *must* work out!

Now we understand how White’s next move came about, and why everything flowed from it so exactly and convincingly.

16.Rxc7! Bc6 17.R1xc6!

This capture also is completely based upon the preceding considerations, and is also virtually forced, since it would be most undesirable for White to slow the tempo of his assault, allowing his opponent to put together a defense, which is what would have happened in the event of the alternative capture 17.R7xc6? Nxc6 19.Ng5 Be7.

17...bxc6

But nonetheless, it is interesting to think about how a player as great as Lajos Portisch could have gotten himself into this position. All of Black’s pieces, without exception, stand on the last rank, while all of White’s pieces, also without exception, are in play, and also not particularly limited, either in their possible movements, or in their ability to coordinate with one another. And for all these pleasures, White paid a price equal only to the difference between the value of a rook and the value of a bishop and pawn – roughly half a pawn!

It is enough merely to glance at all of these factors to understand that such a
state of affairs could not possibly be acceptable for Black. It is quite possible that there may have been some psychological factors behind Portisch’s error.

And now there came yet another blow:

18.Rxf7!

…the logical consequence and also the strongest continuation of the operation begun by White’s 16th move.

18...h6

Taking the rook would lose quickly and by force. Here are the variations: 18...Kxf7 19.Qc4+ Kg6 20.Qg4+! Kf7 21.Ng5+ Kf6 (21...Kg8 22.Qc4+ Kh8 23.Nf7+ Kg8 24.Nh6+ Kh8 25.Qg8#) 22.Qf3+ Ke7 (after 22...Kg6 23.Qf7+ Kh6 24.Ne6+ g5 25.Nxd8, there is no use in continuing) 23.Qf7+ Kd6 24.Ne4#.

19.Rb7 Qc8 20.Qc4+!

White needs to check from precisely this square, since only in this way does he have an answer for 20...Qe6. He then continues 21.Nxe5, and after 21...Qxc4, 22.Nxc4 gives him enough of an advantage to win. But as we shall soon see, this turn of events would have been the best way out for Black, allowing him to extend the game considerably, and forcing his opponent to display accuracy in his technical realization. This episode supports my opinion that, on this day, Portisch was unprepared for a serious struggle.

20...Kh8?


Botvinnik conducts the whole game in the brilliant “style of the old masters,” playing most exactly and energetically. This would be a good time to point out that the punishment for ignoring piece development is almost always like that: energetic and effective – which is understandable. The better-developed side simply must play energetically, as otherwise there might be no punishment, but we shall say more about this much later on. Whereas the effective side of the matter appears because in most cases, the punishment is carried out by means of a direct attack, most often directed at the monarch, for whose life any life might be given up! So major pieces are not spared; we sacrifice whatever is necessary, and in the end, there is enough to bring down the enemy king. This is how many of chess’s attacking treasures came about.

On the other hand, much like the preceding sacrifice, this sacrifice of the rook on f7 was not at all hard to find, since from the strategic standpoint, the situation on the board is quite clear: the
greater portion of Black’s pieces are stranded on the queenside, while on the kingside, we have terrible gaping holes – and all on light squares. And for this reason, even the dark-square bishop, which appears to stand close to its king on f8, is in fact capable only of watching White’s attack on the light squares, unable to come to its monarch’s assistance. But all these considerations can only be of use if you act decisively; you cannot put off the assault until later, because, as we already well know, this allows your opponent to bring up the reserves.

After all these ruminations, it becomes clear that (a) the attack must be carried out immediately; (b) it must come on the light squares; (c) the lone white queen is not enough for this – it must be supported; (d) who can offer support? The answer is clear: the white knight, and after that, the bishop; and (e) what move answers all of these requirements, and must for this reason be regarded by us as candidate-move No. 1? Again, the answer is clear: 21.Nh4. All that is left is to check out the resulting variations. And soon we see that they were simple enough – for a super-grandmaster, elementary.

21...Qxb7 22.Ng6+ Kh7 23.Be4 Bd6

This move was necessary. It is not even to save the bishop so much as the need to defend the g8-square against the threat of 24.Ne7+ g6 25.Qg8#.

24.Nxe5+ g6 25.Bxg6+ Kg7

Black has sheltered his king, with difficulty, against the assault through the center. But now comes the shot on the kingside...

26.Bxh6+! 1-0

The reason for Black’s capitulation is demonstrated in the variation 26.Bxh6+! Kxh6 27.Qh4+ Kg7 28.Qh7+ Kf6 29.Ng4+, etc. A tremendous game. Ignoring development was punished according to the best traditions.

We shall add the following game to the collection of opening crushes by world champions. This time, the example proves to be quite typical of the resourceful, energetic – but also exceptionally elegant – playing style of the tenth world champion, Boris Spassky.

Mikenas – Spassky
Nimzo-Indian Defense [E43]
Ch-USSR(t), Leningrad, 1962

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 Bb4 4.e3 b6

This move is no longer popular. 4...d5 and 4...0-0 are more frequently seen. However, it is certainly not a mistake,
and so White’s reply, apparently expecting to hinder his opponent’s development, is positionally unfounded.

5.Qf3?! 

We know that bringing the queen into battle early is rarely justified. Here it looks very dubious, since it does not pose any real problems for Black, while taking away a good square from his own knight.

5...d5 6.Bd3 Ba6

Already, White is experiencing difficulties with the c4-pawn.

7.Bd2?! 

And here is another dubious decision, putting him behind in developing his kingside. 7.Nge2 was better.

We should look at this position more closely. If we do “à la Tarrasch,” counting “pieces developed” on our fingers (and you know what I’m talking about, don’t you?), then by this measure, White is doing fine. Each side has made an equal number of pawn moves, but White has moved one more piece out of its starting position.

But as far as the quality of his development, matters stand much differently. Our attention is drawn to the pin along the f1-a6 diagonal, and the resultant weakness of the c4-pawn. If we look closer still, we may discover that both the bishop at d3 and the queen at f3 may at some point find themselves attacked by a knight sitting on e5. This clumsiness in the white pieces’ development allows his opponent to strike a blow in the center.

7...c5! 8.dxc5?

And this is just a mistake, after which White’s game is lost. His previous transgressions had made his position vulnerable; after 8.Nge2 Nbd7! 9.b3 0–0 10.0–0 Rc8, he would have had an unpleasant task defending the weaknesses which would unavoidably have arisen in the center.
But now, even more difficult times await him.

8...Nbd7!

In contrast to his opponent, Spassky plays with exceptional accuracy, each move coming at just the right moment to create immediate threats which keep White from completing his development. Now he threatens Nd7-e5.

9.Be2 Bxc4!

And this capture is also strongest. It is useful for Black to trade off the white bishop defending the d3-square from checks, as, for instance, in the variation 10.Bxc4 dxc4 11.c6 Ne5.

10.cxb6 0–0 11.Bxc4 Ne5 12.Qe2

Quite obviously, the game has been strategically decided. White’s king position is very sad, his king’s rook is offside, and Black dominates in the center. Now he needs to be accurate and energetic to bring the point home. Spassky confidently winds the game up.

15...Bxc3!

This secures the e4-square for his second knight, as well as d5 for the queen, if need be.

16.bxc3

White does not have it any easier after 16.Bxc3 Ne4 17.Be1 Qd5, when Black controls the entire board.

16...Ne4 17.Nd4 e5 18.Nc2 Qf6 19.f3 Rfd8 20.Kg1

13...Nd3+ 14.Kf1 axb6 15.Be1

This is even stronger than the knight recapture. The attack is now more important than capturing a commanding height with the knight.

13.Nf3

Also after 13.0-0-0 Nd3+ 14.Kb1 Qxb6, White’s king would quickly come under powerful attack along the b-file.
20...Nxe1!

Yet another example of how general considerations give way to concrete circumstances: the proud, beautiful knight, on its powerful forward outpost, is traded for a wimpy, half-dead bishop, in order to weaken the d2- and c3-squares.

21.Nxe1

21.Qxe1 Rd2! 22.Qc1 (or 22.Rc1 Rxa2; or 22Nb4 Qg6 23.g3 Ng5 24.Qf1 Qf5) 22...Rad8 is also hopeless.

21...Nxc3 22.Qxc4 e4

Now material losses are inevitable: 22...e4 23.Rc1 Rac8 24.Qa6 Nc2+; or 23.Kf1 Nd5 24.Qd4 Nxe3+. 0-1

This game might seem relatively simple at first glance, but it is in fact instructive, clear and strongly played to the highest degree. It always reminds me of my own favorite game, Savielly Tartakower – José Raúl Capablanca, New York 1924.

But now, let’s look at an example from our own time, when it might seem that no one could have any doubts that one ought to conduct oneself properly in a game of chess, remembering all of Mama’s about the dangers of neglecting development.

And it was not amateurs who played this game, but two grandmasters; and the loser was not just strong, but very experienced as well – and just look at what happened!

Chuchelov – Jobava
Queen’s Gambit Declined [D38]
8th ch-EU, Dresden 2007

1.Nf3 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 d5 4.d4 Bb4
5.exd5 exd5 6.Bg5 c5 7.dxc5 0–0
8.Rc1 Be6 9.a3

This is a contemporary line of one of the sub-variations of the Queen’s Gambit, which puts it in the category of closed openings.

Instead of White’s last move, I prefer the continuation 9.e3, as Chuchelov himself played in an earlier game. The point of this move order is to make Black’s knight develop at d7 (...Nbd7), rather than c6 (after 9...Nc6 10.a3 Bxc5 11.Nxd5, Black loses a pawn). But of course, there is nothing bad about the move 9.a3 either, if you look at it by itself, rather than in connection with what comes after. The problem lies in the fact that it is the prelude to an operation which ends up costing White the game. Such a case, where a move is quite acceptable by itself, but is directed towards an unfortunate end, and becomes the initial step toward disaster, happens most infrequently. How should one act, so as to stop oneself only halfway to oblivion?

One answer: Do not fire off your pre-planned series of moves without stopping. Teach yourself to stop and think about each move, if only for a little bit (Fischer advised 30 seconds), even when it seems to you that everything is totally clear.

9...Bxc5
10.Bxf6?

As a result of White’s short, forcing operation (that is, the one where White chose the scenario by which events would proceed, and his opponent had to follow the line of a few forced moves), a new situation has arisen, one which we should talk about in greater detail.

So, White has won a pawn, and established control over a number of central squares. If we count the number of pieces that have moved from their starting positions, it comes to 3 for each side – of course, with Black now on the move. Perhaps this is not so bad after all – give up a tempo to grab a pawn? But is it only one lost tempo for White we are talking about? We have only to ask this question, for it to become obvious that matters stand worse than that; for White has several more moves to make, in order to prepare the development of his bishop, then to develop it, and only after all of this, to castle. And it is his opponent’s move, too! Thus it becomes clear that White’s assessment of the results of the operation of which he was the instigator was, at the very least, unfortunate.

10...Qxf6 11.Nxd5?

And this capture turns out to be the decisive error. By taking our advice to “stop – hey, what is that sound?” (as in the old song), White might still have escaped with only a worse position after 11.e3.

11...Bxd5 12.Qxd5

As a result of White’s short, forcing operation (that is, the one where White chose the scenario by which events would proceed, and his opponent had to follow the line of a few forced moves), a new situation has arisen, one which we should talk about in greater detail.

So, White has won a pawn, and established control over a number of central squares. If we count the number of pieces that have moved from their starting positions, it comes to 3 for each side – of course, with Black now on the move. Perhaps this is not so bad after all – give up a tempo to grab a pawn? But is it only one lost tempo for White we are talking about? We have only to ask this question, for it to become obvious that matters stand worse than that; for White has several more moves to make, in order to prepare the development of his bishop, then to develop it, and only after all of this, to castle. And it is his opponent’s move, too! Thus it becomes clear that White’s assessment of the results of the operation of which he was the instigator was, at the very least, unfortunate.

And now, look at one more vital factor of this position. Reading the game score, at the very beginning, I deliberately italicized the fact that the Queen’s Gambit belongs to the group of closed openings. It is called that because, as a rule, it leads to positions with various pawn configurations in the center, which cause both sides’ pieces to be somewhat restricted in their movements. But in our case, the only thing that remains of the center is the pawn at e2. As a result, the positions we now get into are going to be much
closer in character to those that flow from open games. And this means that we should use that point of view to examine this position. We made the acquaintance of a number of vital particulars of such situations when we examined the Anderssen and Morphy games. We know those lessons: in such positions, time is more important than material. It is also obvious that in this situation, a decisive role will be played by the open c- and d-files.

Taking all of this together, we end up with a result that completely coincides with our conclusions.

12...Na6!

This move does not lose time retreating; it brings pieces which are so far not in play into the game, clears the way for the rooks, and does not ignore the bishop, which will come in handy for us, on those dark squares! In this case, this continuation works excellently – one hundred per cent! Of course, that is not always true.

However logical and tempting a move may appear, it needs to be tested to “make sure the variations work.” As we shall soon see, Black’s calculations were accurate.

13.Qb3

A sad necessity! Winning material by 13.Rxc5 Nxc5 Qxc5 would lead, after 14...Rac8, to a quick win for Black in all lines: 15.Qe5 (this is still the best, since after 15.Qg5 Qxb2, or the spectacular 15.Qd4 Rfd8! 16.Qxf6 Rc1#, everything ends at once. Also after 15.Qb4 Rfd8 16.e4 Rc1+ 17.Ke2 Rc2+ [17...Qf4 is also very strong, keeping White’s king trapped] 18.Ke3 Rxb2) 15...Rfd8! 16.e4 Rc1+ 17.Ke2 Qb6 18.Ne1 (the c2-square must be protected) 18...Qb3 19.f4 Qd1+, White can resign.

At first glance, it would seem that the Black would have had to make his 12th move only after a complex and not easily digestible calculating effort, but this is not entirely true. For an experienced player, the first glance at the position arising after 14.Qxc5 will make it clear that since both of Black’s rooks will arrive at their destined files without difficulty or prevention, and the opponent’s entire kingside will be excluded from further developments, then the White king cannot be saved.

I have presented these extended variations only with the goal of fully illustrating the possibilities of the stronger side, and the problems awaiting the weaker. The usefulness to be gained from learning such variations consists primarily in their typicality. A player who is up on such things, seeing that at the end of a certain variation he will come into a situation with which he is familiar, can fairly clearly imagine the way things are likely to go, and decide whether it will be good for him to venture in this direction, or whether he should seek out other possibilities.

But what I cannot understand at all is White’s willingness to put himself into such an unpleasant situation!

13...Rac8 14.e3
If an advantage of this magnitude is attained in so-called simple positions (that is, positions with few pieces left on the board) – and it often even happens that these kinds of positions are known from the theory of endgames – then we speak of technically won positions.

In this game, the blows began raining down on White’s king, which should come as no surprise.

14...Bb4+! 15.Kd1 Rfd8+ 16.Nd4 Bc5
17.Bxa6 bxa6

Understandably, the poor White monarch’s shelter is now too fragile to withstand the combined direct assault of all the opponent’s heavy pieces. This is confirmed by the following variation: 18.Rc2 (clearing a path to shelter for the king, but after...) 18...Bxd4 19.exd4 Qxd4+! 20.Kc1 Qxf2 21.Kb1 Qf5! 22.Rhc1 Rd2, White can only save his king from the attack by suffering losses too great to live through. This variation is only the tip part of a small iceberg of calculations, which Black would have had to make, had White chosen the indicated rook move. Here we have a small illustration to explain the term, “strategically won position!” For the reason given, Chuchelov decided to give up his rook for the evil bishop.
18.Rxc5 Rxc5 19.Ke2 Qg6! 20.Qb7

But it did not make things any easier, once Jobava found the following excellent finish to his attack, and accurately calculated all the possibilities:

20...Rc2+! 21.Nxc2 Qg4+!

An outstanding finishing shot – not at all easy to find, in the course of one’s preliminary calculations – after which White resigned. For after 21...Qg4+ 22.Qf3 (22.Kf1 Rd1+ 23.Ne1 Qc4+ 24.Kg1 Rxe1#) 22...Qc4+ 23.Ke1 Qxc2, there is nothing more he can do.

0-1

Now it is time to talk about an important technique that can be used to impede an opponent’s development.

Petrosian – Grigoriev
Sicilian Defense [B29]
Tbilisi 1945

(Note: the young Petrosian’s opponent was the second cousin of the great chess composer, who had unfortunately already long since passed away.)

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nf6 3.e5 Nd5 4.Nc3 Nxc5 5.dxc5 b6?

Amazingly, this move is already the decisive mistake – now, that is rare! The correct method of developing was 5...Nc6 6.Bf4 b6, and so forth.

6.e6!!

Here it is – the moment of truth! The pawn sacrifices itself in order to prevent Black from having the chance to develop normally for a long time by e7-e6. But more than that is involved, of course. Any capture of this pawn will be unfavorable – but it has to be taken!

6...dxe6

Taking with the other pawn leads to these variations: 6...fxe6 7.Ne5 g6 8.Qf3 Qc7 9.Qf7+! Kd8 10.Bf4 d6 (10...Bh6 11.Nxg6) 11.0-0-0. Understandably, such a position could not be held, and White would soon finish the game by direct attack.

7.Qxd8+!

Just so! Winning the exchange by 7.Bb5+?! Bd7 8.Ne5 Bxb5 9.Qxd8+ Kxd8 10.Nxf7+ Ke8 11.Nxh8 was possible, but in this position Black would certainly obtain counterchances. However, after the game continuation, the play is all one-way.
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7...Kxd8 8.Ne5 Ke8 9.Bb5+

9...Bd7


10.Nxd7 Nxd7

11.Bf4!

From here, the bishop may appear at any moment on c7, attacking the rook if it goes to d8.

11...e5 12.0-0-0 f6

12...exf4 would lose the rook: 13.Bxd7+ Kd8 14.Bc6+, while on 12...Rd8, White continues 13.Bxe5, followed by Bc7.

13.Bxd7+ 1-0

To continue our theme, a game from that gifted master of the attack, and an enormously talented player: Leonid Stein.

Stein – Birbrager
Caro-Kann Defense [B10]
Moscow, 1966

1.e4 c6 2.d3 d5 3.Nd2 dxe4 4.dxe4 Nf6 5.Ngf3 Bg4

This move already looks a little dubious. Black intends to resolve the problem of development in a simple way, but in doing so, he forgets to be careful.

6.h3

6...Bh5?

And this proves to be a flat-out error. He should have traded, which would leave White with the bishop pair, but in return, Black would have a fully acceptable position. Now the whirlwind begins.

7.e5 Nd5
Back to Basics: Strategy

And now, of course...

8.e6!

It is amazing that anyone would present Stein with such an opportunity!

8...f6

This is forced. Now White has a choice.

9.g4!?

Stein plays it high and wide. He had a good alternative in 9.Bc4!? Qd6 10.0-0, and if 10...Qxe6 (on 10...Na6 11.Bxa6 bxa6 12.Qe2, White has a true and lasting advantage), then 11.Ng5 is very strong.

9.Bg6 10.Nd4 Ne7

After 11...Nb4 11.c3, in all variations – which I am not about to present here – White keeps a significant advantage.

11.c3! Qd5?!

And once more, I ask you to take me at my word. This obvious move is considerably weaker than the more modest 11...Qd6!?, after which White would have had to work far harder in order to demonstrate his advantage. On the whole, Black’s play in this game looks excessively naïve at times. All the better for us, then – the game turns out clear and memorable.

12.Qb3!!

Starting here, events move much faster. Now we will have more than enough variations, and I will show all the main ones – I am not hiding anything; this is just the place for them! The joy and power of White’s decision consists not only in his sacrificing a rook, but more so, that this sacrifice is, to a great extent, forced! This latter circumstance requires an explanation.

Black’s queen has attacked the rook and the e6-pawn. Simply retreating the rook is not good: 12.Rg1 Nxe6 13.Bc4 Qe5+, and Black has picked off the most important pawn for nothing. So we react to this with 12.Qf3, and after 12...Qxf3 13.N2xf3 Be4, Black has no problems that I can see. Without queens, White cannot succeed in exploiting his opponent’s cramped position. So he still has to concern himself with his “nail!” And how about Black’s opening errors? Can he violate the canons of play, and walk away scot-
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free? That is illogical – somewhere, there must be a solution! And that is how the move 12.Qb3!! was born – the only way to fight for the triumph of “common sense in chess” (Lasker-style)!

12...Qxh1

An attempt to put out the fire by exchanging falls short. After 12...Qxb3 13.axb3 c5 14.Nb5 Nba6 15.f4! f5 (Black cannot allow f4-f5) 16.Bg2, Black suffers material losses, without the slightest compensation.

13.Qxb7 Kd8

Interesting variations occur after 13...Nba6. White would reply 14.f3, cutting the queen off from the theater of action. Black must respond 14...Kd8, and then White’s strongest move would be 15.N2b3. This is a tough one – all other moves would be much worse. I am not going to give a lot of variations here – we already have enough without them. What is important, is to know that this might have made White’s task more difficult.

![Chess Diagram]

Here we might see such variations as (a) 15...Qh2 16.Be3! Qg3+ 17.Bf2 Qe5+ 18.Be2 – here, it is not hard to see that Black has no defense against his opponent’s assault. We get much more lively play after (b) 15...Bd3 16.Bf4. Note this – it is an important attacking resource for White. 16...Qxf1+ 17.Kd2, and after 17...Qxa1 (take my word for it – other defensive tries also lose), Black gets mated after the following amusing long run: 18.Bxc7+ Nxc7 19.Nxc6+ Ke8 20.Qxc7 Qxb2+ 21.Kxd3 Qb1+ 22.Ke2 Qxa2+ 23.Ke3 – and it is not hard to see that Black’s checks soon run out, and he has no defense against the mate!

The game continued in much the same fashion.


![Chess Diagram]

Once again, we see the very same picture: White’s king easily escapes the attack of Black’s only working piece, while his Black colleague is helpless against the assault of his opponent’s coordinated pieces.

17...Nxe6

In today’s chess, you will find many convincing examples of the use of this kind of cramping sacrifice. In the following game, the sacrifice took a more complex form, with less clear prospects.

**Wang, Hao – Timofeev**  
Sicilian Defense [B51]  
Nizhny Novgorod 2007

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 d6 4.0-0 Bd7 5.Re1 Nf6 6.c3 a6 7.Bf1 Bg4

Another way this is sometimes played is to insert 7...e5 8.d4 cxd4 9.cxd4 first, and now 9...Bg4.

**8.d4 cxd4 9.cxd4**

9...d5

This move appears quite logical from a positional standpoint: Black intends to continue by constructing a pawn wall from f7 to d5 – very apropos, once his light-square bishop has left its starting position and gone into play. It is all good – except for his underestimating the dangers of the cramping sacrifice we are now familiar with. The present game was one of those which led nearly everyone to now play 9...e5.

I advise you to compare this game with Anderssen’s “Immortal” – you will find many similarities!
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10.e5! Ng8

White’s game, leaving few players willing to test the strength of this positional sacrifice themselves.

13...Na5 14.Qe3

This transfer is the point of the novelty. As much as I tried to find a principal improvement in Black’s defense from this point, I was unable. To judge from everything, it appears that many other players have not succeeded at this as well.

13...Rc8 15.Nc3 Qd6 16.g3 g6 17.Bh3 Bh6 18.Qe2 Rc6

By now, it is even clearer that the sacrifice of a considerable amount of material – and by this time, White is down about 2½ pawns – was probably justified. Here are the justifications: first of all, it is quite clear that the e6-pawn will not last long. Moreover, when that falls, one of White’s minor pieces is going to show up at e6. This piece, whether knight or bishop, will cause further disruption in the already poorly-coordinated black army. Conclusion: White already has full compensation for the material he has given up, and as the game continues, this compensation will increase.

Here it is clear to see that there is an important difference from the previous example: the brave little pawn can also be captured by the bishop. Nevertheless...

11.e6! Bxe6

And now:

12.Rxe6! fxe6

Strictly speaking, only this move is the novelty. The idea of sacrificing the pawn, and the exchange after it, appeared a year earlier, and looked interesting, but not very dangerous to Black. This new move strengthens
Especially after Wang Hao found the following excellent move...


Also after 23...Nf5 24.Nf4! Nxd4 25.Nxd4 Qxd4 26.Rd1 Qc5 27.Rd5 Qc1+ 28.Kg2, Black’s position is very difficult.

24.Qd2

24...Nf6?!

Black’s position has gone bad unexpectedly fast. This is confirmed by the fact that, if he plays the natural 24...Nc4 25.Qg5 Nf6, White can, with 26.Nh4, force his opponent to give up his queen by 26...Qxe6; then, after 27.Rxe6 Rxe6 28.Nf4 Re1+ 29.Kg2 Nd6 30.Nf3 Re4 31.h4, he develops powerful pressure on the king’s wing.

Timofeev decided to seek salvation in tactics, but the variations did not run in his favor.

25.Qxa5


25...b6 26.Nxf6! exf6

White has forced his opponent to make the unnecessary move 25...b7-b6, which gives him an extra tempo. And this tempo now proves decisive:

27.Qd2! Re7

After 27...Rxe6 28.Rxe6 Qxe6 29.d5, the c1-square is protected by the queen, while the queen is protected by the knight.

28.Kg2 b5 29.h4 h5 30.Bb3 Rcc7 31.d5 1-0

Well, it would certainly be a shame not to take the opportunity to show an example from my own archives.

Beim – Schlosser
Pirc Defense [B08]
Austria 2006

1.Nf3 g6 2.e4 Bg7 3.d4 d6 4.Nc3 Nf6 5.Be2 0–0 6.0–0 a6 7.Re1

Where the last two examples presented us with the typical Caro-Kann pawn structure (and this is a very useful habit in general: to look at very different situations from a pawn-structure standpoint. Such viewing often evokes
useful associations with previously viewed games and their typical ideas), now we will look at what can happen in positions arising from the King’s Indian and Pirc-Ufimtsev Defenses. As we know, these openings lead to pawn structures with many similarities. Here, for example, Black commits an error which is extremely typical of such pawn structures, and is most often seen precisely in the Pirc Defense.

7...b5?

The principle discovered, as far as I can remember, by Steinitz, says that if you’re going to start a flank operation, do not forget about the safety of your center! The safe continuation here was 7...Nc6. The b7-b5 advance, which is extremely popular in this opening, ought to be played only when the following central blow is either impossible, or can be successfully warded off.

8.e5! Nfd7?

And right away, Black commits still another typical oversight, allowing the pawn sacrifice which is so strong in this position. The exchange 8...dxe5 9.dxe5 also turns out very favorably for White.

The right choice was to retreat the knight to e8. After 8...Ne8 9.Bf4 Nc6, there is a lot of play ahead, even though White would have an undoubted advantage.

9.e6! fxe6 10.Ng5

As we can see, in this case the pawn sacrifice is only cramping in part – mostly, it is destructive. But in all cases, it hampers the development of White’s opponent, since Black now has to switch over to the defense of his new weaknesses.

10...Nf6

The g4-square has to be covered. After 10...Nb6 11.Bg4 e5 12.Be6+Kh8 13.dxe5, Black is in serious trouble.

The problems besetting Black are obvious. But his next decision finishes matters.

13...d5?

13...Ra7 was much better, maintaining a flexible pawn structure, and with it some hopes for a draw. Understandably, my opponent wanted to close off the diagonal of the bishop on f3, but the cure turned out worse than the disease. The weakness of the pawn at c6 is just as acute, but now the chance of making a break with c6-c5 has disappeared (however small that chance was in the first place). Additionally, Black has weakened the e5-square.

14.Qe2 Rf7 15.Bg5 Ra7 16.Re1 Bf8 17.Bf4

Attacking the c6-pawn, and forcing the Black pieces into a hedgehog-like huddle.

17...Nfd7 18.Bg3 Qa5?

And here is a tactical error. On the other hand, after the relatively better 18...Kh8, White could play Nd1-e3-g4-e5, with a decisive strengthening of his position.

The finish may not be very complex, but it is cute enough.

19.Nxd5! cxd5 20.Bxd5 Qd8

I was hoping for 20...b4, as that would have led to the most spectacular finish:

![Chess Diagram]

21.Bxb8 Nxb8, and now 22.Qf3!! leaves Black no defense: 22...Rxf3 (or 22...Kg7 23.Rxg6+, with mate soon to follow) 23.Rxg6+ Kh8 24.Rg8#. But here too, White can strike a tactical blow:

21.Rxe7! Ne5

After 21...Bxe7 22.Qxe7 Qf8, 23.Bxb8 decides.

22.Bxf7+ 1-0

The time has come to take the next step, with the aim of giving you a preliminary (the detailed version will be left for another chapter!) acquaintance with an extremely important principle of the game. For this, we shall examine a highly instructive example from the work of the second world champion.

Lasker, Em. – Mieses
Dutch Defense [A84]
Leipzig 1889
Chapter 2: Strategic Principles

1.d4 f5 2.c4 e5 3.dxe5 Qa5+ 4.Nc3
Qxc5 5.e4 fxe4 6.Nxe4 Qc7

Clearly, Mieses has mishandled the opening: the f7-pawn has stupidly disappeared, endangering the position of his king; the queen has moved, but not one of his minor pieces has yet been developed, even though in principle, it should have been the reverse. Thus, after the first six moves, Black’s position already appears quite dubious. But White also needs to bring his own pieces into play, which means that he needs to think up a plan of action for this situation. On the other hand, for an experienced player, it would seem that such questions should not be complex. The general principles of opening play are well known – development plus centralization.

In the present case, this should be pretty typical: bring the knights out to the center (one is already there, at e4; so the other one comes out to f3, as it should!); then, the light-square bishop, as quickly as possible – probably, all things considered, to d3; then castling short, and then out comes the dark-square bishop, then the queen, and finally, the rooks to the d- and e-files. Then, once all that is completed, we proceed to attack our opponent’s weaknesses – and he has plenty: there is the king’s wing, both the central files, plus the central squares – d5, for example, there is a clear weakness, all by itself.

This would be the typical course of action; it is highly appropriate, and would undoubtedly guarantee White an extended, secure advantage, with no big risk. There might be only two things one could say against it.

(1) This position itself is non-standard enough, and so perhaps some non-standard method of action might be still more effective for it. (2) In fact, if White plays this way, he would give his opponent enough time to complete his development, after which Black might be able to put up a lengthy, stubborn defense. One may suppose that Emanuel Lasker followed a similar line of thought, to come up with the following outstanding plan of action, both original and exceptionally effective:

7.Nh3!

Why here, since knights are supposed to aim for the center?

7...g6 8.Nf4!?

Now it becomes more understandable. The knight actually does go toward the center, but to a much more “centralized” square, d5. This, however, does break another rule, not to move the same piece more than once in the opening, in order to give the other pieces their chance to develop. Here is the conflict of principles we promised you earlier!
And this effect – the clash of well-known principles – is a completely normal event in the game of chess. Another question, and really a very complex one, is: “How do we determine, in such cases, which principles we should follow?” This is a question we shall consider later on. For now, I give the short version: it all depends on the concrete particulars of the position. And here is where the knight maneuver to d5 becomes understandable: Black will find it very hard to live with the knight once it gets there – but he will also find it difficult to keep it from getting there, since e7-e6 seriously weakens the d6-square, which is also very dangerous.

8...Bg7 9.Nd5 Qd8

White easily wards off the counterattack 9...Qe5 by playing 10.Bd3, when the queen will find it rough going, all alone in the center.

10.Bg5 Bxb2

Mieses decides, if he must suffer, then let it be for a pawn, at least! – a typical attitude for many players.

11.Nd6+ Kf8 12.Qf3+Bf6

13.Bxf6?!?

The continuation 13.Nxf6 Nxf6 14.0-0-0 represented a good alternative to the text, with a great advantage for White. However, in this case Lasker rejected the routine course of action, in favor of an outstanding original solution, which also appeals to me, subjectively speaking, far more – and objectively, turns out to be far stronger!


This position deserves special consideration. Although White’s king has lost the castling privilege, and has not one pawn for shelter, it feels just fine, since none of the opponent’s pieces can reach it, while its colleague cannot say the same! But the most interesting fact is not even this; it is much more important that the white pieces not only come into play with great speed, but also that, as they do come into play, they all together, as one, throw themselves onto the enemy king’s position! In other words, Lasker, by his decision on the 13th move, took the shortest path to obtain the coordinated interaction of all his forces.
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Not surprisingly, after this, the real struggle in this game turned out to be a short one.

16...Kg7 17.Re1 Qf8

18.h4!

One more significant detail of White’s plan: the pawn advances to batter down the king’s position, and his second rook comes into play by the quickest possible method.

18...h5

Black must prevent the highly unpleasant threat of 19.h5.

19.Rh3! Nc6 20.Rhe3 Qd8

21.Re8

This move is very good, and the simplest way, as far as calculation of variations is concerned (an important note) to bring the game by force into an endgame that is an elementary win for White. It would be hard to do more. Therefore, Lasker probably, having seen the obvious and most easily found solution, decided not to “dig deeper,” and thus did not see the immediate win he could have had by 21.Qf7+! Kh6 22.Qxg6+! Kxg6 23.Rg3+ Kh7 24.Bd3+ f5 25.Bxf5+ Kh6 26.Nf7#. For a top-level chessplayer, the complexity of finding and calculating such a variation would be comparable to the complexity of multiplying by twos! And nevertheless, Emanuel Lasker, whose enormous tactical strength is well-known, let this chance pass. It would have been interesting to know why.

The rest was simple enough, although Black took long enough to decide to resign – something he could certainly have done ten moves sooner.

Chapter 3: The Center

In the preceding chapter, we touched briefly on the special role of the center of the board. But this is a wide-ranging theme, and a very important one. Therefore, we shall name this chapter “The Center.”

First of all, what do we call the center of the chessboard?

Answer: we distinguish the large center – the square bounded by c3, c6, f3 and f6 – from the small center, bounded by d4, d5, e5 and e4. This is simple enough, requiring no further explanation.

The second question is much more complicated: what makes the center of the board so valuable, that its problems require special attention and a lengthy discussion?

To answer this, we turn to the following, somewhat strange-looking diagram:

Let’s try comparing the possibilities of differently-placed, identical pieces. Thus, what is the effectiveness of the knight standing at a1 – how many squares can it influence (by which I mean how many can it attack or defend against enemy attack or invasion)? That is easy, just two. Now, how many squares does the knight control after you move it a bit closer to the center – to b7? Now it controls four squares. But a totally centralized knight, such as the one at d4, has eight squares under its control! Similarly, the bishop at h2 controls just one diagonal, while the one placed in the center at e4 can work in four different directions.

Still, there is a definite difference. Bishops are long-range pieces, and can work effectively even on just one diagonal. Therefore, it is less important that they occupy some center square, than that they keep under fire – that is, control – important squares.

But knights love, like no other pieces, to occupy positions in the center – although in the same way, they often carry out a very important function just by controlling squares, rather than occupying them.

The conclusions are simple and obvious. The first is that we may compare pieces to each other, call them by the same name – but at a given moment, their real potential depends upon where they stand on the board. And the second is that all other things being equal, any piece placed in the central part of the board will be able to do more work than the same piece placed on the periphery.

And from this automatically flows the following principle of play: Strive to centralize your pieces, especially your knights! And consequently, it is a good
idea to prevent your opponent from centralizing his pieces.

The principle is simple, but exceptionally important. This theme is multi- branched, with a large number of different aspects to it. I shall acquaint you with the most significant of them.

First, let’s look at some examples confirming the power of well-centralized knights.

![Chess Diagram]

Smyslov-Rudakovksy
Moscow 1945

Here we have a situation in which it is easy to define the desired goal. Clearly, the d5-square lies open, and draws the white pieces to it. Out of this obvious fact flows the equally obvious decision by White to trade off Black’s knight for the bishop, which is currently bringing him no particular benefit, and cannot exert influence on the strategically important d5-square in any other way. The game continued:

15.Bg5! Rfe8 16.Bxf6 Bxf6 17.Nd5 Bd8

If Black were to yield to the temptation to pick up the pawn by 17...Qxc2, he would pay for it by losing the exchange after 18.Rf2 Qc5 19.Rc1 Qd4 20.Nc7 (20.Rd1!? Qc4 21.b3 Qc5 22.Rc1 Qb5 23.Nc7 appears to be an even stronger method of executing this operation)

The strategic composition of this position is now quite clear: the knight is incomparably stronger than the bishop. By occupying a dominating (and, most importantly, invulnerable!) position in the very center of the board, it can control the situation, no matter what course the game may take, simultaneously supporting the attack by his own pieces on the kingside and quashing any hopes his opponent may have had of generating counterplay on the opposite side of the board. Such are the benefits of centralization.

18.c3 b5 19.b3 Qc5+ 20.Kh1 Rc8

![Chess Diagram]

21.Rf3!
Back to Basics: Strategy

This rook transfer turns out to be a necessary preface to White’s short and at first sight hastily considered (ah, but this simplicity is just an illusion!), yet powerful final attack.

21...Kh8

Black had to decide whether to halt the advance of White’s f-pawn or to allow it. The attempt to prevent it by 21...f6 would result in White exploiting, once again, the all-powerful placement of his knight to proceed unhindered with a “rollup” of the kingside by g4, followed by h4 and g5; then the queen’s rook would go to g1, followed by the decisive breakthrough and inevitable destruction of the black king. In such situations, this kind of plan is as routine as it is enormously strong.

22.f6! gxf6 23.Qh4 Rg8

On 23...f5, the simplest way to win would be 24.Nf6 Bxf6 25.Qxf6+ Kg8 26.Rxf5, with an irresistible attack.

24.Nxf6 Rg7

But now, doubts steal into our hearts: did Smyslov do everything right in the last few moves? Did he not decide to exchange his luxuriant knight for that puny bishop too soon? The answer comes in White’s following brilliant reply, which he undoubtedly had to foresee no later than his 22nd move (and I suspect he saw it a move sooner!)

25.Rg3! Bxf6

The capture is forced, as the following variations show:

25...Qf2 26.Qxh7+! Rxh7 27.Rg8#; 25...Be7 26.Rxg7 Kxg7 27.Qxh7+ Kxf6 28.Qh6#. So we can assure ourselves that Smyslov’s 22nd move was the start of the decisive combination. Thus it often is in chess: the most beautiful sacrificial variations remain beneath the surface – invisible unless you plunge into the depths of the iceberg. Still, this does not make a pretty combination any less of a combination!

26.Qxf6 Rcg8 27.Rd1! d5

There is no salvation in any line. For example, aiming for perpetual check by 27...Qa3 loses after 28.h4 Qb2 29.Rxd6 Qc1+ 30.Kh2 Qf4 31.Qxg7+! Rxg7 32.Rd8+.

28.Rxg7

After 28.Rxg7 Rxg7 29.Rxd5 Qf8 30.Rd8, Black loses his queen. 1-0

That was a convincing, and informative, example. After going over it, anyone familiar with the chess classics could not help but be reminded of a game which followed very much the same course, and even partly resembled it in stages, but has become far better known in chess literature –
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the game Robert Fischer-Julio Bolbochan, Stockholm Interzonal 1962. Of course, one's hand moves on its own to add this effective example to our book. But I have resisted the temptation, and I am proud! The reason I did not is precisely because that example is so well-known. If you include such a game, you only give your critics a chance to upbraid you for not wanting to do the spadework necessary to find something less overused. On the other hand, that game received outstanding commentary from Fischer himself, in his now legendary book, My 60 Memorable Games (Simon and Schuster 1969). Read it, enjoy it, learn from it!

For now, we should turn our attention to the vital fact that in both the game we have just examined and in the Fischer gem we mentioned, the knight was not only maximally centralized, but also located on a square from which, first of all, it could not be driven by any of the opposing pawns; and second, on which it was supported by a pawn of its own.

A square that meets the above enumerated criteria is generally referred to as a forward outpost, or support-point. Those factors render the position of the knight that lands on such a square practically invulnerable, allowing it, like a proud mountain eagle, to survey its domain completely—all 360 degrees of it!

Such a picture is, of course, both romantic and pretty—but if our opponent is also familiar with the forward-outpost concept, he will hardly let us get what we want, just like that.

But the ideal is so attractive, it makes sense to aim for it—it is worth fighting for.

But how do we do this? The following example will help us understand the process.

![Chess Diagram](image)

Terpugov-Bronstein
Moscow 1951

This position does not look quite as one-sidedly understandable as the one from the previous example. Indeed, each side has its trumps. Foremost for White would be the “nail” at f6, driven into his opponent’s kingside, followed by the passed pawn at a5 and the threat against the e5-pawn, which will be far from simple to ward off. Black can rejoice in his own passed pawn at b4, which, once protected by its neighbor at c5, would acquire the proud title of protected passed pawn. Such a pawn often becomes a very serious factor, which—other things being equal, of course—can bring victory all by itself.

On Black’s side, we have another couple of vital elements of the position, which we are already familiar with, but which at this point are not so obvious. The first of these is a chronic weakness on the dark squares, both on the
opposing queenside, and especially in the central area of his position. The second element flows directly from the first, and that is the gaping hole at d4, which is simply born to become a forward outpost. Now Black has only to imagine his knight on that wonderful square, and he will fall into a fever to start putting together a plan. Let’s try doing it ourselves. The first point is the simplest – the knight can only reach d4 by way of e6 – and it only gets there via c5 or c7. Now for the second point – any plan involving getting the knight to d4 must undoubtedly also manage to hold onto the e5-pawn. But at the moment, it is not easy to see how that can be done without losing it. The queen does not do it very well: 35...Qd6 36.Rd2 Qc5 37.Qh6 Qf8 38.Qg5. We could try bringing the rook to e8, but then it will be harder to maneuver the knight – the enemy a5-pawn picks up speed we do not need. What to do?

This is the right moment to bring up a subject of particular importance: tactics and strategy are tightly intertwined. In reality, they are rarely seen in pure form. It is impossible to resolve strategic problems without considering the tactical elements and calculating variations, since however well-laid our final goal may be, it must be one we can realistically attain. But the realistic attainability of the task we have set for ourselves can only be proven by calculating variations, into which tactical blows are continuously woven. And on the other hand, tactics sometimes allows us attain goals which at first sight might appear difficult, or even impossible to reach.

This is just what happened in this game. David Bronstein found a quick and elegant means of overcoming all obstacles on the path to his goal. Here’s how he did it...

35...Ne5! 36.Ra1

The first thing that appears is that the b4-pawn is indirectly, but securely, defended. On 36.Raxb4 Rxb4 37.Rxb4 Nxe4!, White loses the exchange for insufficient compensation. This latter thesis is demonstrated by the forcing variation 38.Qxe5 Qxb4 39.Qxe4 Rxa5 40.Qe8+ Qf8 41.Qxc6 Qb8!, when Black’s advantage is enough to win.

And so our first step is complete: the knight has reached c5. Now it is time to worry about the e5-pawn. But wait – could not White take it now, when the Black knight is on the c5-square? No, because then there is a fork on d3. That means we can exploit this to drive the White queen away:

36...h6! 37.Qe3 (37.Qxe5 Nd3)

And now – it is time!

37...Ne6 38.a6 Rba7 39.Rba2 c5 40.h4

40...Kh7!

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Thus, Bronstein frees his queen from its defensive function, and prepares the decisive strengthening of his position. Black’s king will be completely safe, as we shall soon see.

41.h5 g5 42.Qf2 Nd4 43.Bh3 Qd6 0-1

The position speaks for itself. If you compare it to our starting diagram, you can appreciate the maximum possible progress that Black has achieved, while White has in the same time frame achieved nothing.

“Thus, a sensible plan makes heroes of us all.” – Emanuel Lasker.

The following game will be one much closer to our own time.

Here there are more pieces on the board than in the previous examples, meaning that there are more factors that need to be taken into account; but our eyes are already fairly well trained to seek out support points in the center of the board, so the d4-square stands out for us in particularly bright colors. Of course, it is only available to the black knights; there is no way for the bishop to get there.

Yet, such a multi-piece position cannot be evaluated based on just one element. What else should we be looking at? Of course, we should note first of all that the sole open file is being occupied only by Black’s rooks, and it would be a good thing if we could find them a way to invade the enemy camp. (There is another couple of important details in this position – but we will talk about them a bit later.) The conclusion Anand came to, based upon the first two points of evaluation for this position, led him to the following maneuver:

28...Bb3! 29.Re3

Exchanges would lead to the following consequences: 29.Bxb3 Nxb3 30.Nxb3 Rxb3, and then the only open file (a theme we shall also be examining in detail) would remain in possession of Black’s pieces for a long time to come.

29...Bxa2 30.Rxa2 Nf6 31.Ra1

Lutz-Anand
Germany 2004
The position has been simplified somewhat, but it hasn’t gotten any easier for White. Although it was quite passive, his bishop – now exchanged off – was quite valuable for defensive purposes. It was useful for “hobbling” the black rooks, and also the knight – the b3-square! But even now, being in too much of a hurry to play an immediate 31...Na5-b3 would have been a terrible blunder. In that case, after 32.Nxb3 Rxb3 33.Qxb3 Rxb3 34.Rxb3, Black would lose everything that made up his advantage – and the resulting position would clearly be good for his opponent. This means that Black must find an idea that would help him to prepare the conditions for a successful incursion. How do we approach a solution to this problem? Yet another fundamental strategic principle comes to our aid, which will later become the subject of our study. It is called the two weaknesses principle, and is formulated approximately as follows: if your opponent’s position contains some significant weakness, against which your forces can exert pressure, but so far cannot achieve anything decisive, then you must look for an opportunity to create a second weakness for your opponent, preferably located as far as possible from the first one. On the other hand, the creation of a weakness, per se, may not always be possible. In such cases, you should at least create some play on another part of the board, which should also, of course, be far enough removed from the location of the weakness he already has.

What is the point of this recommendation, so difficult to understand, and still more difficult to execute? It is that a weakness, however it may appear, is first of all an element of the position that requires defending (now, or in the very near future). And this leads to the circumstance that it will favor us to give the defending side additional problems to deal with, and pieces which will be required in that case to hurry over a considerably larger portion of the board. This is the source of this very valuable advice about making the new front a long way from the old one. And that is how we get such a longwinded, but still very valuable principle!

There may be times when I misuse common phrases and descriptions; but I do it exclusively with the goal of making my explanations maximally clear. But how did Anand turn all of this into reality? For him, it worked out very well – strong and clear!

31...h5!

Now we have no difficulty understanding what Black is after. Here, first of all, he is generating play on the opposite side of the board. And in the second place, Anand spotted a possibility of attacking the e4-pawn
(another possible weakness! This is well illustrated by the variation which Anand himself gave. If White were to play 32.Ne2 here, he would lose the pawn after 32...Nb3! 33.Nxb3 Rxb3 34.Qxb3 Rxb3 35.Rxb3 Nxe4. Therefore, Lutz took defensive measures:

32.f3

But now, he has something new to worry about: the dark squares have become a weakness, which his opponent immediately fixes. In general, this is a very useful and also extremely important strategic and technical tool, that of fixing an opponent’s weakness. A weak pawn, on the square where it is the weakest; a weak square, so that it can be more easily attacked or occupied. This is the reason Black continued...

32...h4!

White is already in difficulties, having to defend himself constantly. This is also psychologically difficult. In such circumstances, the likelihood of further inaccuracies grows. So it was on this occasion.

33.Ngf1?!

33.Ne2 was more stubborn, although then too, 33...Nh5 would have left Black with a considerable advantage. But now things get very bad.

33...Nh5 34.Ree1 Nf4 35.Ne3 Nb3!

And this is the final blow.

36.Ra2

Anand rated the position after 36.Nxb3 Rxb3 37.Qd2 Qg5 as winning for White. For clarity’s sake, I will add a few more moves: 38.Kh1 Rb2 39.Nc2 Qxg2+, and there is really nothing more to be said. After...

36...Nd4

Lutz decided that there was no point in continuing the game against Anand in such a position. And really – White is completely helpless. Enough is enough. 0-1

And once again we note that, just as in the preceding example, a comparison of the starting and ending diagrams shows that White has made no progress, while Black’s achievements have been enormous. The reason is the same: total domination of the center.

It is not just knights that find employment in the center, although it suits them most of all. Other pieces too may exploit this particular section of the board to great advantage.
The strategic focus of this position is unmistakable: at this moment, it is all happening in the center, and White needs to come to an immediate decision about how to define the position there, without hesitation. The continuation was…

16.dxc5!

In this situation, a very powerful solution. With 16.d4-d5, White would seize space and maintain his central pawn massif in more compact form; but the position in that case would have become blockaded, which is more attractive to a knight, as a rule, than to a bishop.

16...dxc5

But now, despite the fact that all White’s queenside pawns have now become isolated, and this should be considered a drawback of the exchange, White will reap great profit from it, based upon the following factors: the bishop is now very well placed, controlling all of the free central squares and the most important (because of its influence on the center) long diagonal. In addition, the central support point d5 ends up completely under the control of White’s pieces.

17.Rad1 Rad8 18.Rd5 b6

Exchanging on d5 would not be good for Black. After 18...Rxd5 19.cxd5 Ne7 20.Qa4 Rd8 21.Qxa7 Nxd5 22.Qxc5, he would lose a pawn without compensation. This means that Black will be unable to neutralize his opponent’s two previously mentioned vital trumps.


23.Bf5!

A most important square for the bishop: from here, it defends the queen and prepares the rook’s invasion of the seventh rank.

23...Qb8

It is important that Black cannot play 23...g6?, because of the variation 24.Bxg6! fxg6 25.Qxg6+ Kf8 26.Rd6, and wins.

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White’s excellent activity has led to this position, the evaluation of which is unmistakable. White has a great advantage — indeed, from a strategic standpoint, it is already decisive. Its components are as follows: first of all, a powerful rook on the seventh rank — a place where you can always find a few enemy pawns. (In Russian professional chess slang, such a rank is called “glutton’s row,” which perfectly captures the attraction of such a rank for rooks.) Meanwhile, the black rook is passive. Also, White’s bishop is far stronger now than the opposing knight, since the latter cannot even dream of having any support points in the center, while the bishop has everything it could want, namely: nothing obstructs it, it stands ready to coordinate with its rook, which cooperation will prove very effective, since bishop and rook complement each other well in a natural way (just as does the similar pairing of queen plus knight!)

27.Be4!

Centralization of the bishop, leading to the previously mentioned cooperation, is more important here than the win of a pawn, which, after 27.Rxa7?! Nd6 28.Bd7 Ne4 29.c4 Rd8, would let Black have counterchances. Here we have another extremely typical case: having achieved a considerable advantage, it is most important not to sell out too cheap, allowing yourself to be tempted by small material acquisitions. Taking the bishop to the key d5-point will bring White far more.

27...Na3 28.Bd5 Rf8 29.e4 a5 30.c4 b5 31.exb5 Nxb5

32.e5

Now the pawns join in to help the pieces, and soon the king comes on board as well.

32...a4 33.f4 Nd4 34.Kf2 g5 35.g3! gxf4 36.gxf4 Ne6 37.Ke3 c4
A very instructive situation: with few forces left for either side, all of White’s are active and cooperate fully, as if they were formed into a single fist; meanwhile, Black’s are passive and scattered. So it is no surprise that the game ends very quickly.

38.f5 Nc5 39.Rc7 Nd3 40.e6 fx e6 41.fx e6 1-0

Even the powerful queen is subject to the same rules of centralization!

At first glance, it is hard to give either side the preference: material is even, each side securely controls its own open file. On the other hand, there are two “asymmetrical” factors: the black king is better protected than White’s, but White has an extra – and passed – pawn on the queenside. From this, it follows that Black should keep as many pieces on the board as he can, and use them to attack the opposing king; while White, conversely, should trade off as many pieces as he can, so that his passed pawn can shine forth in full glory. It was White to move here, and Capablanca forced exchanges:

35.Rd7 Re1+ 36.Rxe1 Rxe1+ 37.Qxe1 Qxd7

The first centralized piece in this ending. From here, it can control a great number of squares. And although Black’s position is still defensible, it will require accurate play.

38.Qe5!

Alas, this maneuver is already unfortunate, leading to great difficulties. He should have played 38...a4.

39.Kh2 Qb3 40.Qxa5 Qxb2
The situation has now stabilized, and clearly to White’s benefit. His passed c-pawn is very dangerous, with queens on.

41.Qc7!

The queen takes control of its passed pawn’s advance, as well as the h2-b8 diagonal, which is vital in this position, as the black queen could use it to generate threats against White’s king.

41...h5 42.c4 Kg7 43.c5 Kf6 44.Qd6+ Kg7 45.c6 Qc3

The only chance at counterplay for Black is to check – and for this, it would be very useful for him to get a pawn to h4. But here, after 45...h4, White would have the powerful reply 46.Qc5!. This is why Black covers the c5-square.

Now a new phase begins in this most interesting and exceptionally instructive ending. White’s task is to aid his own passed pawn, while not allowing perpetual check. The first part of the task is not difficult, but what about the second? To answer this question, White employs yet another important method which is typical of queen endgames.

48.Kg1!

The first step in a long journey by White’s king across the entire board! Inexperienced players might not believe their eyes here: the king voluntarily exposes itself to checks, and what if the checks prove to be perpetual? But in this case, that does not happen – and why not? Because the White queen is centralized, which prevents the majority of those unpleasant checks! Eventually, the king arrives at the place where it will be best protected. Let’s watch:

48...Qc1+

Capablanca calculated everything accurately: 48...Qxh4 does not work, because of 49.c8Q Qe1+ 50.Kh2 Qh4+, and now White has 51.Qh3.
49.Kf2 Qc2+ 50.Ke3 Qc3+ 51.Ke4
Qc4+ 52.Ke5 Qc3+ 53.Kd5 Qb3+
54.Kc6 Qc4+ 55.Kb7 Qb3+ 56.Kc8

This was the final destination of the White king’s travels, beginning eight moves ago. Now the king is safe and secure against checks behind its pawn, its queen – and its opponent’s pawns, which interfere with the movements of their own queen! The rest is elementary...

56...Qb5 57.Kd8 Qa5 58.Ke8 Qa8+
59.Qd8 Qe4+ 60.Qe7 Qa8+ 61.Kxf7
Qg8+ 62.Kf6+ Kh6 63.c8Q! And seeing the mate coming after 63.c8Q Qxc8 64.Qg7, Black resigned. 1-0

A beautifully played endgame, which lasted all of 26 moves – there are some entire games which do not last as long!

We conclude this discussion of the question of piece centralization with a completely amazing – I venture to say, in some sense, even a unique – example, in which the winner succeeded in placing every kind of piece you can name in the center, except the king, of course.

Right away, I would like to prepare the reader for the serious work which will be needed to understand this game. Much of what happens in it remains unseen, and hard to understand even with commentaries. Because it is so complex, this example contains more than the usual number of diagrams.

What can we say about this position? This is a multi-piece situation. Material is even; all of the pieces are still on the board; the pawns aren’t in contact anywhere. Both kings are fairly well sheltered. We must note White’s spatial acquisitions, consisting of the advanced pawns at b4 and f4, while Black’s pawns have not made any similar advances. This would appear to be to White’s benefit, since the space advantage can in some cases be enough to win, even without further advantages. In other words, this is one of the important elements of strategy which should always be attended to.

But how do things stand in our case? At the moment, one cannot see any realistic means for White to make use of the further-advanced state of his
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pawns; and meanwhile, we can already see some drawbacks of this pawn activity, first and foremost being that most simple, most trivial truth: that pawns cannot move backwards! “Well, everybody knows this; it is one of the rules of the game; so what are you driving at?” you will say. And I will reply that, having moved forward, the pawn leaves behind itself squares which it no longer defends, and which are therefore weakened – and weakened forever (“they do not move backwards,” that is why)! And from this flows my advice: if an active-looking pawn thrust is easily neutralized, and brings you no realistic advantage, better not to let it tempt you. The game we will examine now gives a clearer demonstration of this than any other game I know.

And so White wants to win a piece by f4-f5. The move which parried that threat...

15...Bf5!

...is the first one that comes to mind. So why do we award it an exclamation point? There is a deep strategic basis to it. We are already familiar with the concept of weak pawns of a certain color, and here it stands before us. White’s light squares are obviously weak, chief among them the e4-square. This weakness is especially significant, since it is targeted by a number of black pieces, while only White’s bishop and knight are holding it. In such cases, it is useful to trade off the defenders of the long term weaknesses.

And this is not all we can say in favor of this move. Let’s look at White’s other bishop. We discover that those same pawns whose dashing advances left their own light-square rear areas weakened, now form a barrier of sorts in the way of their own dark-square bishop! Chessplayers generally refer to such a bishop, subject to serious and long term blockage by its own pawns in its own camp, as bad. And now, it is time for yet another important piece of advice: if your opponent has a piece which is going to stand badly for some time to come, it is a good strategic idea to trade off the other piece(s) of the same category. The point of such an operation would be to reduce the possibility of your opponent finding compensation for the invalid state of his bad piece in the activity of his good one. Now it is clear why Black’s 15th move is completely deserving of its exclamation mark.

16.Qc2

A small but important tactical detail: White cannot play 16.Nxd5??, because after 16...Nxd5 17.Bxf5 Qxf5, he ends up losing a piece.

16...Be4!?

An interesting choice.

17.b5

After 17.Nxe4 dxe4 18.Bc4 Bc7! 19.Be3 Ne7! , in exchange for a weak square, Black gains a powerful passed pawn and direct pressure on the isolated d4-pawn, and occupies the d5-square instead. But now a new detail has appeared, and the Black knight alters course!

17...Bxd3 18.Qxd3
Back to Basics: Strategy

18...Na5!

Here's the point! The knight's path to a5 has now been opened. From there, it is ready to leap forward to still another support point, c4. Such a possibility simply must be spotted and calculated, which Botvinnik did.

19.Ng3

There is no doubt that White had thought Black's last move would turn out better for him after 19.Nxd5 Nxd5 20.Bxa5, but discovered that then after 20...Re3 21.Qc4 Qf5 22.Rac1 Rae8, the resulting position would be very unpleasant for him. I present the diagram of the concluding position of this variation, so that the reader may consider it in depth:

At a quick glance, it is not easy to see what is so terrible about it. But in fact, this position is very difficult, in a larger sense even lost for White, since his numerous weaknesses will soon begin to drop, one after another. I will not give the variations themselves; even without them, the annotations to this game are getting rather long. A better idea would be for you to just play out this position, for both sides, with your chess friends. I would advise you just to pay particular attention to the ideal cooperation of all the black pieces, and the uncoordinated white forces.

In addition, for the first, but far from the last time in this example, we see variations that are not difficult to calculate, and positions that are very hard to evaluate, arising at the end of these variations. Note this as well! The game continued...

19...Ne4!

Here's another uncomplicated variation for us. Once again, Black allows his opponent to snap off the pawn on d5, with the following continuation in mind: 20.Nxd5 Nxd5 21.Qxc4 Ne3 22.Bxe3 Rxe3 23.Kh2 Rc8 24.Qa2. There was no need to calculate any further during play, since Black only needed to take the pawns at b5 or a3 to retain a sizable advantage. But analysis shows that he has a forced win here too by 24...Rcc3 25.Ne2 Rxh3+! 26.gxh3 Rhx3+! 27.Kg2 Qg4+ 28.Kf2 Bxf4, when despite his rook minus, Black's full-bore attack on the white king will bring him victory.

20.Bc1 Rac8 21.Ra2 Bf8
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The bishop is pulled back, so that it will not interfere with the rest of his pieces.

22.a4

22...Bb4!

And now it is put to better use. The knight at c3 defends the key e4-square, which means it would be useful to trade it for the bishop that can never reach that square.

23.Nd1

For the same reason, White strives to keep the knight.

23...Ne4 24.f5

This advance is necessary, since Black was himself planning to continue f7-f5, when White would be suffocating. But now we get some complications, in which Botvinnik had to find an accurate means of neutralizing his opponent’s counterplay, beginning with f5-f6. (D)

24...Nxg3! 25.Qxg3 Bd6 26.Qf3

In selecting his 24th move, Botvinnik had to evaluate the consequences of

26.Bf4 in reply. Then the game might have continued: 26...Re4! 27.f6 g5!. 28.Bxd6 Qxd6. Once again, I’m posting a diagram; this position also deserves some fundamental thinking, in order to gain a proper understanding of its possibilities.

26...Be7!

Botvinnik begins the transfer of the bishop, which will completely eliminate White’s hopes of counterplay.

27.Qg3 Bf6! 28.Bxh6 Bxd4+ 29.Kh1
29...f6!

.  
This move finally puts everything in place. White will get neither an attack on g7, nor even the advance to f6, while his center falls hopelessly to pieces.

30.Bc1 Re4 31.Qd3 Ne5 32.Qb1 Rc4!

A fantastic picture! Never before and nowhere else have I seen a more convincing illustration of the theme “seizing the center with pieces.”

33.a5 Bc5 34.b6 a6 35.Nb2 Rc3 36.Bd2 Rb3 37.Qe2 Qb5 38.Rc1 Bf8! 39.Rd1 Re2 40.Qc1

I advise you to note the kind of helpless pile into which White’s pieces have devolved, trying with all their might to avoid the blows of the centralized enemy forces.

And still – the final blow comes from the center!

40...Rxh3+! 41.gxh3 d4

The white king cannot be saved: 42.Kg1 Qd5 0-1

A fiery and uniquely constructed game to some extent, although at first (and perhaps even at second!) sight, the development of events might seem anything but rapid! The winner performed strategic work of the very highest class here.

A good slogan to apply to our next example might come from a contemporary Russian TV ad: “Not all yogurts are equally good for you!”
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Lilienthal-Botvinnik
Moscow 1945

White centralized his knight in typical fashion, making use of support:

14.Ne5

Could there be anything more obvious? But in fact, Botvinnik gave this move the thumbs-down, saying that it was not in keeping with the character of the position! Instead, he advised playing 14.Bf5, to maintain equal chances. Here, I am not going to analyze the position down "to nubs," as I did in the previous example. This time, let's just watch how the game went, and see, move by move, why in this particular case the most typical knight centralization, on a supported central square, led to problems.

14...Kb8 15.f4?!

Continuing the same well-known plan of action. This is the way the knight is usually supported in the center; in cases where the details of the position were different, such a plan has brought success countless times. How is it bad here?

The first clue: recall the previous example, and its long-suffering e4-square. Here, that square also begins to "glow" after White's move. After thinking about it, we can better imagine Black's main goal. It is obvious enough: drive the knight away from its support point. Then the e-file weakness will become vulnerable. This plan was convincingly brought to life. In retrospect, knowing the outcome, it is easier for us to agree with the paradoxical conclusion: instead of this last pawn "shot," the objectively correct course would have been to admit the inaccuracy of his ambitious plan, and beat a humble retreat by 15.Nf3!? , with a somewhat inferior, but quite playable position.

15...c5 16.Kb1 c4

17.Bf5?

It happens – and rather frequently, too – that what was okay on the 14th move, barely three moves later turns into a real positional (and that equals strategic) error. I emphasize the key words here: positional = strategic. That means that White has not committed any oversights in the variations, but that the consequences of the decisions he has made will still be hard on him, even
though it will not come as quickly as it does for tactical errors, whose punishment often comes with lightning speed. But it would be useful to understand what the reason was for such a sharp change in assessment. It stems from the fact that, of the three moves indicated, only one full move (two half-moves: Black’s 14th plus White’s 16th) was spent moving pieces, and those having nothing to do with events in the center of the board; the rest all concerned pawn moves, which resulted in a principal alteration in the pawn structure. First and foremost came the weakening of the e4-square that we have already noted, plus a sharp activation of Black’s whole queenside position. That is why the exchange of light-square bishops now has become bad in principle for White. After this, there can be no cure for the weakness of the white squares. The bishop had to be retained as a last hope, even though then, as Botvinnik showed, after 17.Be2 g6!? 18.g4 h5 19.h3 hxg4 20.hxg4 Rh2, Black would retain a long-lasting initiative.

17...Bxf5 18.Qxf5 Bb4!

The same maneuver, for precisely the same strategic reason that we saw in the previous example.

19.Qc2

Now we are looking at a position that has acquired long-lasting characteristics. What this means is that its major characteristics, consisting of the assortment (or collection) of the remaining pieces, and to an even greater extent the outlines of the pawn structure, are not likely to change very much in the foreseeable future. Such

19...Rd6!

It is quite obvious that Black’s chances are on the queenside, where the position of the white king looks to become very shaky. One rook is now headed there, soon to be joined by the second.

20.Re2 Bxc3

The rook moved, rendering the knight mobile – now is the time to snap it off!

21.bxc3

Taking with the queen had its own serious drawbacks. Here’s how the game would likely have gone: 21.Qxc3 Ra6 22.Rc1 Ne4 23.Qc2 Rc8, and Black cannot be prevented from breaking in with c4-c3. So Lilienthal puts up a pawn as a barricade, but it too must soon perish.

21...Ne4
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positions, which retain their basic parameters over an extended period, are usually referred to as “defined.”

Let’s see what defines our position here. The first thing we notice, according to the scheme we set up earlier, is that material is equal; after that, we see that the two kings are unequally defended. Here White obviously has indisputable problems. Along with Black’s equally indisputable queenside space acquisitions, this factor tells us that we can expect to see the main evens taking place on this part of the board. But there is also another most interesting element of the position: both sides possess centralized knights, but it is easy to see that very different futures await them. After the proper preparations, White’s knight will be driven away, and begin to dream of possibly being able to exchange itself for the enduring enemy knight. Consequently, Black’s secondary task will be to prevent this from happening. The game developed under the banner of these particulars of the position we have cited.

22.Ka1 Ra6 23.Qc1 Rd8! 24.Rc2 Rdd6! 25.Ng4

As we predicted, the white knight is only too glad to be going, in hopes of ending up on f2.

But Black prevents it:

25...Rg6! 26.h3 h5! 27.Ne5


27...Rg6 28.Nf3

8
7
6
5
4
3
2
1

a b c d e f g h

8
7
6
5
4
3
2
1

a b c d e f g h

28...Qa3! 29.Ng5

29.Nd2 would also be met by the same blow: 29...Nxc3!

29...Nxc3 30.Qxa3 Rxa3 31.Rdc1 Nb5 32.Nxf7 Rxe3 33.Ne5 Kc7 34.g4

8
7
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4
3
2
1

a b c d e f g h

8
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6
5
4
3
2
1

a b c d e f g h

Despite time-pressure, Botvinnik finds an exact, forcing route to victory. Generally speaking, he had an astoundingly good technique for realizing his advantages.
34...Nxd4! 35.Rd2 Ne2 36.Re1 Nc3 37.Rc1

The knight cannot be taken: 37.Rxe3 Rb1#; while 37.Rc1 would be met by 37...Re2! 38.Rxe2 Nxe2. So there was no point in further resistance. 0-1

The following section of our great and multi-faceted theme of the center in chess will be devoted to the examination of various aspects of a theme we cannot pass by without examining:

The Center and the Wings

We have examined many sharp examples illustrating the exceptional importance of the center. But there are the two wings as well, whose total area amounts to the same measure of the chessboard as does the center, even if the center is considered in its maximal extent, including all the squares on the c-, d-, e- and f-files. Now is the time for us to examine the relationships among these components of the playing field.

The first world champion, Wilhelm (or William, as he used to call himself in English) Steinitz was the first to begin systematically researching the strategic rules of play. Among these, he noted the fact that successful active operations on the flanks require the attacker to have a solid position in the center. Like any rule, this one also has its exceptions; but many years’ experience undoubtedly shows that in the overwhelming majority of cases, this principle is operative. Let’s see exactly how it works.

So – material is even, and we have bishops of opposite colors – but the main thing that catches our eye is the positions of the two kings. White’s has lost the castling privilege, while Black’s h-file cover has disappeared. From this it follows that the king-safety factor will play an important role in this situation. But will that be the only factor? Both sides still have to resolve the problem of development. In addition, Black’s pieces suffer from a lack of space, while White’s camp contains more pawn weaknesses. That is a lot of different and differently-characterized factors, so giving this position an accurate evaluation will not be easy. Smyslov played

16...f6!

This move is very strong here, since it frees up some previously imprisoned black pieces. Now Szabo had to make a decision, determining which way the game would develop for quite some time to come.

17.Qh4+?!
And his choice proved exceptionally optimistic. Still, White’s choice can be understood, after we look at both the alternatives: 17.exf6 Nxf6 18.Nf3 e5, with a dangerous initiative for Black; and on 17.exd6 Qxd6 18.Qxd6 Nxd6, White would have to work long and patiently to defend his weaknesses, with no counterplay, against perhaps the greatest master of the endgame in the history of chess. Such prospects looked most unappetizing, and could not have made White happy. Apparently this was why Szabo decided to play va banque, betting everything on the attack. And if we approach the question purely objectively, the second variation would have been better. Had White possessed a taste for stubborn defense, he could certainly have hoped to save the draw. But chess is a very complex game, and for this reason it has a place for those who are objective, as well as the subjective – provided, of course, it is played by people, and not by computers.

17...Kg8 18.Rd1

Both here and on the following move, he could still have simplified matters somewhat by trading either on d6 or on f6. In both cases, Black would keep an indisputable advantage, but White would have some hope. However, Szabo follows the plan he chose on move 17.

18...Qc7 19.Rd3 dxe5 20.Rh3 b6!

And now we have arrived at a position which shows everything in sharp relief.

White, of course, is attacking with insufficient forces; meanwhile, Black’s king has enough room to run away. But the main question is: how did matters reach such a state? Because White cannot bring up enough support for his queen and rook – the other pieces have no chance at breaking through Black’s monolithic center. Attacking with the forces at hand is harmless: 21.Qh7+ Kf7 22.Qh5+ g6 23.Qh7+ Ng7, and that is all.

21.Nf3 Ba6 22.Nd2 Rc8

And now it is Black’s turn to start active operations. His prospects are quite realistic here, since he can drive right through the flimsy shards of White’s center, just like a knife through butter. So the situation in the center determines, to a great extent, one’s chances at attack!

23.Qh7+ Kf7 24.g4 Bxc4+ 25.Ke1 Qd6 26.g5 Qxa3
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The diagram shows it all quite clearly. White’s chances of a successful attack are about equal to the chances of a successful assault on a tank with a pistol.

27.Qc2

And this queen retreat confirms this. An attempt to continue the banquet might look something like this, 27.Qh5+ Ke7 28.gxf6+ gxf6 29.Qh7+ Rf7.

27...Bd5 28.Rg1 Qa1+! 29.Nb1 Qa2! 30.g6+ Ke7 31.Qc1 Nd6 32.Rh7 Nf5 33.Rg3 b5

Events have played out logically and typically for those cases where one side’s attack has fallen through. As a result, he not only suffers material losses, but also ends up with a shattered periphery, which it is no longer possible to defend. Not surprisingly, this kind of game most often finishes with a quick, victorious counterattack – which is what we are about to witness here.

34.Rd3 b4 35.Rd2 Qc4 36.Rc2 Qe4+

A total crush. 0-1

The conclusion is as obvious as it is fundamentally important: an attack must be positionally justified. We shall examine this in much greater detail in a separate chapter, dedicated to attacking strategy. But for now, we simply note that you should always keep in mind Steinitz’s thesis about the connection between the center and a successful attack.

In order to acquaint yourself better with the various aspects of the problems we are studying, it is recommended that you examine them from different points of view, so as to see the object of your study from all sides. So let’s press on.

An experienced eye can tell that this was a Sicilian Defense, and that White’s achievements out of the opening were very modest. His opponent is already better developed, and therefore ready for active operations, while White still has his own development to complete. It is logical to suppose that the one who is behind in development should be trying to play with maximum accuracy, coordinating his own actions in light of his opponent’s potential threats. But Tseshkovsky decided to generate some activity of his own, by playing...

13.g4?!

In general, White’s piece configuration is familiar, as is his last move, intending to reposition the knight from e2 to g3. However, there is one small, but significant, difference: usually, it is the knight on d4 that retreats to e2, while the knight on c3 stays in place. And consequently, White usually does without the c-pawn advance, which gives him an extra tempo, compared
Chapter 3: The Center

with what we see here. But in this position, White would have been better off playing either 13.Re1!? or 13.b3!?

But what would appear to be the significant difference between moving the g-pawn or the b-pawn one square forward, or which knight goes to e2? The game will provide the answers to both our questions.

13...d5!

Of course! A poorly-based action on the wing is met by a counterblow in the center. I'm sure many of my readers were expecting this reply. Now we see that the knight on c3 would have made this shot considerably harder to enforce, thanks to its control of d5! And soon the weakened protection of White's king will make itself felt; that is why 13.b3 would have been better than 13.g4.

14.exd5 Nxd5 15.Bxd5?!

As nearly as I can remember, Emanuel Lasker formulated the principle of the economical defense, whose main idea goes something like this: "If you must defend, try to make only those concessions which are absolutely necessary." So here, it is already obvious that White has landed in an unpleasant position, which he will have to hold against his opponent's superior forces. And in such circumstances, to give up, first of all, a piece that covers your weakened king position, and second, to give your opponent the advantage of the two bishops - aren't those both clear concessions? White could and should certainly have done without them. The most suitable maneuver I could find would be the following: 15.Nc2!? Rcd8 16.Ne3, aiming to trade off the strong enemy knight.

15...exd5 16.Nf4

As we have seen, White has committed a number of transgressions against strategic principles. It should not be surprising that his opponent now gains some good chances of developing a dangerous initiative. And this is precisely the area of the game in which Kasparov has always been phenomenally strong. The combination of these two factors renders the remainder of the game a demonstration of the power of Black's position and an excellent case of instruction on how to turn an initiative into victory.

16...Bc5! 17.Nb3

Black gladly gives up the pawn, since to exploit his advantage in development, it would be good for him to open up as many different lines as possible - both vertically and diagonally. Thus, after 17.Nxd5 Qe5 18.Ne2 Be6 19.Nef4 Rfd8, Black's activity would become very dangerous. On the other hand, matters are no better now.
17...Ba7 18.Qxd5

18...Be6!

Yet another powerful blow in the same direction, opening new lines, as Black’s advantage in development keeps on growing.

19.Nxe6 fxe6 20.Qe4

Taking one more pawn would mean opening one more line for the Black rooks. This is how that would turn out: 20.Qxe6+ Kh8 21.Kg2 (Forestalling the awful check 21...Qg3+) 21...Rce8 22.Qc4 Bxf2! 23.Rxf2 Rxf2+ 24.Kxf2 Qh2+ 25.Kf1 Qxh3+ 26.Kf2 Ne5, destroying White.

Note that in this case, except for the queen, White has only pieces which are out of play. This leads us to one more useful conclusion: with an advantage in development, it is useful to trade off the opponent’s pieces which are already in play, in order to increase one’s development advantage. However, it is also a good idea here not to go overboard with this, and oversimplify the game. But Kasparov finds a beautiful chance to create a direct attack against the king (the beauty is not in his next move, but in Black’s 23rd move – in both variations!).

20...Rxf2 21.Rxf2 Qg3+ 22.Qg2 Bxf2+ 23.Kf1

In reply to 23.Kh1, Black had planned 23...Qd3! 24.Qxf2 Rf8, with a decisive attack.

23...Qe5!


In the following game, a strategic assault through the center also turned into a highly effective means of punishing the opponent for a weakening of the flank.

Smyslov-Kuzminykh
Leningrad 1951
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The situation is of interest from a strategic standpoint. Each side has its trumps: White’s are his lead in development and the strong pawn grouping in the center; Black’s, the pair of bishops. Which is worth more in this position, and why? The game’s further course will demonstrate that it is White’s advantages that are worth more. However, if Black’s pawn were on g6 instead of g5, and the h-pawn were still on its original square, matters would be much more complicated. Let’s follow the game, to see the importance of these details.

For us, it is already completely obvious that White must attack decisively in the center, and that he should start it off with.

14.d5! Bd7

Of course exchanging would be bad.

15.dxe6 fxe6

16...dxe5?

He should have left the situation closed as much as possible, despite the well-known principle that it is useful to open up the position, in order to exploit the bishop pair successfully. In the present case, however, he should have evaluated the situation properly, paying attention to the fact that there is another factor that stands out in bold relief: White’s indisputable lead in development, which also requires the opening of lines, in order to generate benefit. It could not have been difficult to determine – a glance would do – that in this position, with White’s forces clearly better centralized, and the weaknesses in Black’s kingside (that very advanced state of Black’s g- and h-pawns we spoke of earlier!), that this lead might carry the greater weight (we will speak in greater detail about such collisions when we look at the next example).

Consequently, the correct reply was 16...Qe7. Then, if White wanted to maintain his initiative, he would have had to find a string of complex solutions. The main line might go like this: 17.Ne4! dxe5 18.fxg5 hxg5 19.Rxh8+ Bxh8 20.Qe3! b6 21.Qf3! 0–0 22.Nc5! A•6 23.Nxd7 Kc7 24.Nxb6 Rxd1+ 25.Kxd1 Kxb6 26.Qe3+ Kb7 27.Nc3.

In this position, White’s chances are better, but Black could put up stubborn resistance – although against one of the greatest – if not the greatest – technicians in chess history, his task would have been very unpleasant and difficult. But now, he falls under a
direct attack, which Smyslov executes impeccably.

17.Qd3 Qe7 18.Qg6+ Kd8 19.f5!

A very important, but at the same time, very predictable shot. White needs open lines for his rooks, and an invasion square for his knights. Black has to take the pawn, as otherwise the pawn itself will become a powerful battering ram; but then White acquires the vital center square for his knight, and the game proceeds inexorably to the finish.

19...exf5 20.Nd5 Qf8

21. g4!

This move serves the same purpose: to clear lines and squares.

21...a5

It still would have been better to reply 21...f4. Then another aspect of White’s last move would be revealed: 22.Rh3, and the rook comes out to the third rank, with a significant strengthening of the attack.

22.gxf5

Obviously the pawn cannot be recaptured: 22...Bxf5 23.Ne3+ Bd7 24.Rhf1. Black, however, was counting on

22...Ra6

Let’s look at this position. It is not hard to see that Black is holding on to his poorly organized position by a thread, and that one more push would bring the whole structure down. And most often, in such cases, such a push is indeed to be found. There is one here, too:

23.f6! Rxf6

After 23...Bxf6 24.Rhf1 Qg7 25.Qd3! Rf8 (25...Rd6 26.Rxf6!) 26.Qc3! c6 (Black’s situation is also hopeless after 26...Rc6 27.Qxa5) 27.Nxf6 Rxf6 28.Qxe5 c5 29.Qb8+, the game is over.

24.Nxf6 Qxf6
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25.Qe4!

Of course! In situations like this, the only time a queen exchange is good is when it leads to a forced win! The main thing here is the black king, and the fact that almost every black piece is cut off from its defense. It is also very important that White’s rooks now have open files. All these factors are quite sufficient for victory.

25...Kc8 26.Qd5 Bc6 27.Qxa5 b6 28.Qa6+ Bb7 29.Qc4 Qc6

White now has both a material advantage and the attack. The rest of the game is a mere formality: Black did not want to resign before the time-control.

30.Qf7 Bf8 31.Qf5+ Kb8 32.Rd8+ Ka7 33.Rxf8 Qxg2 34.Re1 Be4 35.Qc8 Rh7 36.Qb8+ Ka6 37.Qe8 Bc6 38.Qxe5 Rd7 39.Qc3 Kb7 40.Qa3 b5 41.Ra8

And now the time-control has been made, and there is nothing more to hope for. 1-0

Where the strategic content of all the preceding examples was completely clear, and the main thrust of the battle was mostly transferred to its calculated tactical component, the next example was more strategically complex.

Matamoros – Thorfinnson
English Opening [A29]
Reykjavik 2006

1.c4 Nf6 2.g3 e5 3.Bg2 d5 4.cxd5 Nxd5 5.Nc3 Nb6 6.Nf3 Nc6 7.0-0 Be7 8.a3

8...g5

For a while, this unexpectedly early advance of a wing pawn – especially leading away from a possible short-castling position – looked interesting. Indeed, the game Cvetkovic-Gurevich, Korinthos 1998, made it look positively brilliant. At first glance, its point was hard to see, but the further course of events in that game explained a lot: 9.d3 g4 10.Nd2 h5 11.Nc4 h4. It turned out that Black’s pawn onslaught had the goal of driving White’s knight from f3, thereby strengthening Black’s presence in the center at the d4-square. As the game continued, Mikhail Gurevich succeeded in demonstrating that his activity here really was dangerous. After 12.Nxb6 axb6 13.Nd5 Bc5 14.Be3 Be6 15.Bxc5 bxc5 16.Nc3 Nd4 17.e3 Nb3 18.Bxb7 Nxa1 19.Qxa1 Rb8 20.Bc6+ Kb8, he managed to win the game in 27 moves.
And so, Black’s wing operation turns out not to have been an impulsive “shot in the dark,” but an action thought up beforehand, having a strategic basis in the struggle for control of an important central square. But nevertheless, such a decision also contains a contradiction to the Steinitz principle we have examined that must be considered. I have already indirectly mentioned that in chess, it very rarely happens that one strategic principle “runs into” a different principle or playing technique, and that then the two of them must “work out their differences.”

Now we shall speak of this theme in greater detail. In such collisions, playing principles and methods sort out which of them can realistically work in the given situation, and which must give way, since at the given moment in the position the proper conditions do not exist for its successful operation.

I can put this a different way: suppose we have two juxtaposed principles. The “loser” in this conflict of principles has existed, and will certainly exist in future, and will be successfully employed in other positions many times; but in the hypothetical situation under consideration, the possibility of its usefulness breaks down upon the details of the position.

This is precisely what happened in the game under discussion here. The technique of a flank attack, aimed at the battle for the center squares, employed by Black here, ran into the very same Steinitz principle. And Cvetkovic, who had to have analyzed this opening variation at home, showed convincingly which was stronger in the given concrete position. He continued...

9.d4!

...which accorded completely with Steinitz’s conclusions: “Answer a flank attack with a counterstroke in the center.” And after...

9...exd4 10.Nb5 Bf6

...came the clarifying

11.Bxg5!

Here it is, the moment of truth. It turns out that all variations are now good for White. And this means the complete collapse of the strategy on which Black’s last move was based.

11...Bxg5 12.Nxg5Bg4

Attempting to win material either by 12...a6 13.Bxc6+ bxc6 14.Qxd4, or 12...Qxg5 13.Nxc7+ Kf8 14.Nxa8 Nxa8 15.Bxc6 bxc6 16.Qxd4 Rg8 17.Qxa7, would lead to hopeless positions. And that means that this opening variation has been decisively refuted.

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21...Bxf7 22.Qxh7+ Kf6 23.Qh6+ Kf5 24.Nxf7 Rx7 25.Qe6+, it is all over. But here too, although it is not at all immediate, yet White still manages to bring the game to a conclusion.

22.Re6 Qf5 23.Re5 Qd3

24.Nh6


And so we have encountered still another interesting and important aspect of our theme. It turns out that it is not only the breakthrough in the center to the wings that can be effective, but sometimes the completely opposite action as well: from the wings, to the center!

Even the in the preceding example, this kind of attempt suffered a complete
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fiasco, it certainly does not mean that such a strategy is doomed.

The following game is one of my favorites. Although it is short, it is most interesting; and the part in which the direct collision of forces takes place is filled with sharp and terrible struggles.

Byrne, R. – Fischer
Sicilian Defense [B87]
Sousse Interzonal 1967


This move begins the so-called Sozin Attack – a weapon used against several different variations of the Sicilian Defense by those who love to get into a sharp fight from the very first moves. Fischer was thoroughly familiar with the fine points of this system, not only because he played the black side of it more than once, but also because he particularly liked playing it with White.

6...e6 7.Bb3 b5 8.f4 Bb7 9.f5 e5 10.Nde2 Nbd7 11.Bg5 Be7

A few years before, Fischer, playing White, had selected 12.Bxf6 Nxf6 13.Qd3 here, which on the basis of the game we are now analyzing, was acknowledged to be White’s best continuation. Robert Byrne, however, preferred the more ambitious...

12.Ng3

After...

12...Rc8 13.0-0,

...the game reached a critical position for the whole opening variation.

13...h5!!

Generally speaking, this pawn push, which appears strange at first sight, had been seen long before this game – and more than once – in situations with a similar pawn configuration. This is the proper time to explain that the pawn structure is always the most important strategic element, as it defines for a long time the way events will develop in the game. The length of its influence flows from the fact that the pawn is far less mobile than the other actors on a chessboard. For this reason, pawn configurations are the slowest-changing factors of the position. For this same reason, they define, for long periods of time, the possible maneuverings of the pieces, giving rise to one more important strategic rule: in similar pawn setups, similar playing rules often apply!

Chessplayers have long known of the existence of such rules, and have long since begun to pay serious attention to typical pawn configurations. Strictly speaking, the famous Steinitz theory is based, to a considerable extent, precisely on studying the influence of pawn structures on the future development of events on the chessboard.
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However, let’s return to our own battles! In the position we are examining now, it is not hard to grasp the special importance of the central squares e4 and d5. These squares play a large role in most of the constructions arising out of the Sicilian Defense; but here their role is especially important, for the following reasons: (a) in Black’s camp, the important d5-square is weakened; (b) White’s pawn is frozen at f5, which renders the e4-pawn permanently immobilized, and thus even more vulnerable. Under these circumstances, the knights come to have an important role, including the one now standing on g3. First of all, it protects this important pawn; and secondly, it intends a further leap to h5, in order to exchange off the second knight to reach f6 (the first one would have been exchanged for the white bishop!); and (c) from the preceding considerations obviously comes the particular importance of this black knight. Indeed, it attacks the pawn at e4 (and the square, that is no less important, even if there is no longer a pawn on it!). In addition, it guards the key d5-square against an incursion by White’s pieces (recall the games at the beginning of this section!). Now it is easy to understand the point behind Black’s early flank aggression, begun by 13...h5!! It is (1) to prevent White’s knight from leaping onto that square; and (2) to create a threat of 13...h5-h4, driving away the white knight from g3.

And all this (pay attention now, because here’s where the dog is hidden!) is done in the interest of fighting for the most central squares on the board, and it is accomplished by an advance of the most distant flank pawn there is! Now there is only one question left to be answered: if it is all so clear strategically, and it was known before, then why is this move given (by me!) the highest chess decoration, two exclamation marks? The first is understandable: the move completely answers the needs of the position. And the second, because in just this concrete position, it possesses genuinely crushing force. After this game, there were very few players willing to put themselves in the way of this shot; and of those who did, the overall result, as nearly as I can tell from my database, was 6-2 in Black’s favor!

14.h4

Byrne decided to prevent the threatened pawn advance. The following variation, quite likely, if White decided to try to maintain a piece on d5, shows the very real danger to White: 14.Bxf6 Nxf6 15.Nd5 Bxd5. In Sicilian positions with this pawn configuration (that is, e4 + f5 vs. d6 + e5), it is the bishop capture that occurs most frequently, since Black usually has greater need of the knight on f6. And so it is here. After 16.Bxd5 h4 17.Ne2 Qb6+ 18.Kh1 h3 19.g3, the knight goes on the attack, 19...Ng4, and White cannot avoid heavy material losses.
But now, Fischer reveals yet another important aspect of his last move:

14...b4!

This standard Sicilian advance against the knight on c3 acquires much greater force than usual, after the exchange of h-pawn moves (h7-h5 and h2-h4).

15.Bxf6

White tries to keep the material balance at any cost, and finds it quite difficult.

15...Bxf6 16.Nd5 Bxh4 17.Nxh5

This is how Byrne intended to keep the material even; he counted on replying to the obvious...

17...Qg5

...with...

18.f6

One needs only a cursory glance at this position to see how bad it is for White: his pieces are scattered, his king’s position is shaky – in other words, the position is strategically hopeless. In such cases, it is important for the stronger side to limit the opponent’s counterplay. And it was just to avoid unnecessary complications in a winning position that Black refused the sacrifice:

18...g6! 19.Ng7+

But of course, one cannot make such decisions “just like that,” only on general considerations. Fischer had calculated all this beforehand, and now made the only correct decision. This moment is very interesting, and principally important as a good illustration of what we said before about limiting the opponent’s counterplay. So, if Black had chosen the other king retreat, 19...Kf8?, then after 20.Nf4 we get complications in which Black would have to find a number of “only” moves in a sharp position, and so forth and so on. In other words, Black would have to start the winning process all over again, and what use is that to somebody who has already achieved so much?


Byrne makes one more attempt to muddy the waters, since “normal”

23...Rh4!!

Once again, Fischer shows his cool and stifles his greed. Taking the bribe would have been weaker from a practical standpoint. In that case, he would have had to deal with the complications following 23...Nxd3 24.Rxh8+ Kd7 25.Ba4+ Be6 (here, for example, he could have erred seriously: on 25...Rc6? 26.exd3, it would be White who had the significant advantage) 26.Nb6+ Kc7 27.Rxc8+ Kxb6 28.Rxc6+.

But now, everything works out in Black’s favor – quickly and mainly one-sidedly.


28...Qf4!

Black’s position is completely winning. But in studying the games of the greats, it is useful to pay attention to every detail. So it is here. For Black, it would in principle be unsound to exchange the stranded, helpless white knight for his fighting bishop. His last move is undoubtedly the strongest, not only for this reason, but also because (a) it does not allow his opponent to castle long; and (b) it is the fastest way to bring about the appearance of that battling pair of queen + bishop against the exposed white king.

Possible variations demonstrating their cooperation are 28...Qf4! 29.Qh8+ Kc7 30.Ne8+ Rxe8 (generally speaking, from a practical – that is, a subjective – point of view, it would be much more reasonable to retreat the king to b6 or b8. In that case, Black wins with much less expenditure of energy and likelihood of making mistakes in calculation.) The variation I present still makes sense to study, for two reasons. First, because it leads to mate absolutely by force; and that means that objectively (that is, from the computer’s point of view!) it is simpler. And second (and this is much more important), it serves as an excellent illustration of a theme of particular importance: the cooperation of the pieces. We have already touched on this theme when we studied development. Later on, we
dedicate a chapter to it, whose introduction might very well be the following forced mating finale: 31.Qxe8 Bg3+ 32.Ke2 Qe4+ 33.Kf1 Qf5+ 34.Ke2 Qxc2+ 35.Ke3 Bf4+ 36.Kf3 Qd3+ 37.Kf2 Be3+! 38.Kg3 Bg1+! 39.Kh4 Qe4+ 40.Kh3 (40.Kg5 Qf4#; 40.g4 Bf2+ 41.Kh3 Qf3+) 40...Qf5+ 41.Kg3 Bf2+ 42.Kh2 Qh5#.

However, Byrne did not choose to test his genial opponent’s finishing skills, being already well acquainted with them, and resigned at once. 0-1

But of course, the center is not always dominant, in a battle with the flanks. Sometimes it is the reverse!

To start with, let’s look at the ending of a famous, classic game.

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1. a b c d e f g h
2. a b c d e f g h
3. a b c d e f g h
4. a b c d e f g h
5. a b c d e f g h
6. a b c d e f g h
7. a b c d e f g h
8. a b c d e f g h
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**Anderssen-Zukertort**  
Barmen 1869

24...Qxd5?

I choose not to comment at this point, limiting myself just to one question mark and a note, that with this move, Zukertort committed the decisive error. The problem is that, having decided to use a game I have long been familiar with as an effective illustration for this segment, I sat down to do some independent verification of the conclusions made by those who had annotated this game before me and discovered that everything was much more complex, and incomparably more interesting, than we had been accustomed to believe earlier. But then I saw that working through all the problems in this game in detail would be much better done in the book I planned to write next!

For now, let’s just look at the move, with which Black accomplished so many useful tasks. He picks up a pawn, pins the opposing knight, and centralizes his queen, while at the same time leaving nothing en prise – and it turns out to be a loser! Sometimes that happens in chess. I say further: if our game did not have these paradoxical-appearing qualities, it would already have joined the ranks of the many half-forgotten historical curiosities.

The punishment for Black’s mistake came as follows:

25.gxf6! Rd8 26.Rcg1

White carries his kingside concentration to its highest level.
26...Kh8

And it turns out that Black stands badly in all lines. The most important fact is that taking the bishop loses: 26...Qxd3 27.Qh6 Qxf5 (the main line of the attack is revealed in the variation 27...Kf8 28.fxg7+ Kg8 [28...Ke8 29.Qe6+] 29.Qxh7+ Kxh7 30.Rh3+ [or, if you prefer, 30.g8Q+ Rxg8 31.Rh3#] 30...Kg8 31.Rh8#) 28.Rxg7+ Kh8 29.Ng5, with mate in a few moves, for instance after 29...Rb7 30.f7.

Distressed by this discovery, no doubt, Zukertort overlooked a simple tactical solution for White (at least, for a player of his or Anderssen’s caliber), and thus missed his chance to offer the most serious resistance by 26...Rxg6! – although even then, by continuing 27.Rxg7+ Kh8 28.Qe3! c4 29.Bh4! Bxe3 (if 29...Qd6, then 30.Qg5) 30.Bxd5, White would obtain a winning position.

27.fxg7+ Kg8 28.Qh6 Qd6

Taking the bishop leads to a thematic mate: 28...Qxd3 29.Qxh7+ Kxh7 30.Rh3+ Kg8 31.Rh8#. Therefore, Black’s last move was to cover the h6-square.

29.Qxh7+!

Anyway! It turns out that White intends to answer the Black queen’s interference on the h-file with an interference of his own. After 29.Qxh7+ Kxh7 he continues 30.f6+! Kg8 31.Bh7+! Kxh7 32.Rh3+ Kg8 33.Rh8#. 1-0

A spectacular finish, and yet another indisputable proof that in chess, there are almost no absolute truths.

The following fragment is, thematically, amazingly similar to the one we just examined, and demonstrates that fact convincingly.

What strikes you first? That both the center squares which are unoccupied by pawns are securely controlled by black pieces, and that White’s heavy pieces are concentrated on the kingside, where the open g-file is so attractive – but here his minor pieces stand, temporarily far removed from that side of the board. And of course, the weaknesses: White’s pawn at a4 is doomed; its demise will open a path for Black’s rook into the
enemy camp. White, for his part, intends to remove the f4-pawn, although this will not be so easy.

But all this becomes clear after our first glance at the position. Looking more closely, we discover a most attractive tactical possibility. First, there is a shot on h6, and then we discover, alas, 31.Qxh6+?? Kxh6 32.Rh3+ Qh5. But the idea is so tempting, that to reject it immediately would be beyond human strength! Thinking further, we understand that it is only the queen that stands in our way; consequently, we have to deflect it. And thus, the decisive blow appears:

31.Nc7!! Rxa4

Of course, giving up the exchange would not have saved Black either. But now how does White break through?

The variations are indeed quite convincing: after 32.Bxf4!! Bxf4 33.Ne6 Rg8 (the rook needs to move, as shown in the variation 33...Ra3 34.Nxf8+ Qxf8 35.Qd7+ Kh8 36.Rxf4 Qxf4 37.Qg7#) 34.Rxg8 Qxg8 (34...Kxg8 35.Rxf4 Ra1+ 36.Kg2 Qg6+ 37.Rg4) 35.Qf5+ Kh8 36.Qf6+ Kh7 37.Nf8+, it is all over.

Up to this point, we have dealt with the problems of pieces fighting for and against the center of the board; but while doing so, we have naturally encountered, on more than one occasion, the factor of having pawns also participate in the fight. Let's examine their role in greater detail, in their various aspects.

The following advice is obvious, and easily understood: as a rule (of course, in this case exceptions are also quite possible) it is better to capture pawns toward the center!

By way of illustration, I shall offer just one example – but it is a convincing and attractive one.

Petrosian – Kupreichik
Slav Defense [D13]
Moscow 1976


10...Bxg3?!

So far, a very peaceful exchange variation of the Slav Defense.
Chapter 3: The Center

Petrosian, the tenth world champion, rightly calculated that a quiet order of events would be psychologically uncomfortable for his opponent, famous for his fighting spirit and very sharp style of play. And indeed, as early as his 8th move Black began to upset the symmetry, intending the following freeing maneuver. But still, good intentions alone are sometimes not enough: it is very important that they are based on the realistic possibilities of the position. Here, it was not too late to stop halfway and continue 10...f5. But Kupreichik, aiming for quick activation of his forces, traded off the bishops, paying no attention to the fact that for this exchange, there would be a positional price to pay. And it would be this: after the obvious pawn recapture “towards the center,”

11.hxg3!

White’s position now contains a file which is half-open, and aimed precisely at the location where Black will probably be castling. And although for now, there appears to be no particular danger, still it should not be underestimated. The second circumstance, which accompanies such a doubling of pawns far more frequently, is that the wing pawn, coming from the h-file, in this case, becomes a little more “centralized,” which makes White’s entire pawn mass, from e3 to g3, able to exercise a bit more influence on the center. And one more thing: such a capture maintains the unity of White’s pawn mass, which is quite significant from a strategic point of view. Here it is entirely apropos to mention that chessplayers generally refer to a unified pawn mass of any size as an island, and that the totting up of the number of such “islands” is one of the elements in assessing a position.

11...e5 12.dxe5 Qa5 13.Qb3 Qxe5

The operation Black undertook on his 8th move has led to this position. At first sight, the reasons for my disapproval might not seem very understandable. Everything seems to be in order: Black has developed normally, there are no weak squares visible in his camp, and he has even secured a slight space advantage. But if we spend a bit more time taking a careful look at the position, we can uncover a hitherto invisible weakness in his healthy-looking pawn structure, consisting of the “underweight” state of the pawn at e4. With an immediate attack on it by 14.Rh4, White could achieve a very
promising position after 14...f5 15.0-0-0!? (or even 15.g4!?). Petrosian delayed a little, playing...

14.Be2?!

And now, if he had castled immediately, Black could have equalized. But he paid no attention to move order, playing..

14...Qe7?! first; and after 15.Rc1,

...he committed one more inaccuracy, this one a tactical oversight:

15...0-0-0?!

Such oversights are not, as a rule, the result of good play. Indeed, the indicated continuation, 15...Be6 16.Qa4 f5 runs into a very unpleasant check, 17.Bh5+, when the reply 17...Bf7? (17...Kf8 would be better, but it is not a happy alternative) loses to 18.Rxc6. And on the preventive 15...h6, a new attack on the e4-pawn by 16.Qa4 sets Black unpleasant problems.

Obviously when considering castling, Kupreichik, a brilliant tactician himself, could not have failed to notice the shot 16.Nxe4!.

However, he did not consider it dangerous; he must have miscalculated a variation. In turn, Petrosian, a legendary master of positional play, was also a high-class tactician and "calculator" himself – something chess books pay much less attention to. And he did not let his chance go by!

16...Qxe4?

Objectively speaking, Black should not have taken the knight, and played 16...Be6 instead. Then, after 17.Qa4, White would retain a healthy extra pawn. However, Kupreichik trusted his calculations, and they turned out to be wrong!

17.Bd3

Analysis shows that Black is in trouble here in all lines. I will not present the many branches, but only the main variation, should Black choose what is, in my mind, the most stubborn continuation: 17...Qe7! 18.Bxh7+ Kh8 19.Rc4! g5 20.Qc3+ f6 21.Qc2, and White, with only (or is it "already"?) two pawns for the piece, has very strong threats, which his opponent will have to return material to parry, and then
Chapter 3: The Center

strong reply 20...g6, when everything is in order after either 21.Bxg6+ Kg7 22.Bb1 Nc6, or after 21.Rxb4 Kg7, since how can White get his bishop out then?

20...Kg8 21.Rc4 a5

If the knight retreats, White plays the same thing.

22.Bh7+ Kh8

The key point, and at the same time the most spectacular part of White’s combinative attack. One can only understand the idea after examining the other possibilities: on 23.Rch4?, Black plays 23...g5, and White is in trouble; while after 23.Bb1+? Kg8 24.Rch4, Black is doing just fine after 24...f5 – this is the line that White’s last bishop move was designed to parry. But now it is Black whose position is hopeless, as you can see from the following variation: 23.Bf5+! Kg8 24.Rch4 g5 (understandably, 25...f6 would be met by 26.Bg6) 25.Rh8+ Kg7 26.R1h7+ Kf6 27.Rxf8. So Black had to resign. 1-0

The previous example touched on a technique of play that might be very
useful, but is not of the greatest strategic importance. But now we shall take up a problem of far greater importance – what exactly is a pawn center and its virtues and its shortcomings.

Busnardo – Saduleto
Italian Game [C54]
Rome 1927

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4 Bc5

These moves are the introduction to one of the oldest openings, the Italian Game, also known as the Giuoco Piano. And the historically most popular development of play in it is the attempt by White to seize the center with pawns by...

4.c3 Nf6 5.d4 exd4 6.cxd4

And so, White has constructed his desired center out of his d- and e-
pawns. Since times long forgotten, it has been known that Black should give check here, 6...Bb4+, and then get right to work, dealing with his opponent’s center pawns. The reason why it is not a good idea to delay this is clearly illustrated by the course of this game, where Black retreated

6...Bb6?

White’s center was immediately set into motion:

7.d5 Ne7 8.e5, and after 8...Ne4 9.0–0 0–0 10.Qe2 Nc5 11.b4 Na6

…the pawns continue their assault, driving the opponents’ pieces out of the center:

12.d6 cxd6 13.exd6 Ng6 14Bg5 Qe8 15.Be7 (15.Qd2 Ne5; 15.Qb2!) 15...Kh8 16.Nc3 Nxb4 17.Rae1

And here is the sad outcome for Black: Black must lose, without even having made it out of the opening. And it all started with a grievous blunder, back on move 6!
Chapter 3: The Center

17...Ne6 18.Bxf8 Qxe2 19.Rxe2 Nxf8
20.Re8 Kg8 21.Nd5

And now the apotheosis: complete paralysis, with the battering-ram center pawn at d6 playing the first-violin.

21...g6 22.Ne7+ 1-0

This was a demonstrative and indisputable crush; but the inferior level of Black’s play was equally indisputable, as well as his unsure play in this game. Could it be that the fault lay more with this than in the crushing power of the pawn center; might a stronger player, in Black’s place...?

Let’s see – in the next game, a great master fought against the pawn center.

Korchnoi – Tal
Yerevan 1962

Each side is playing his own game: Tal develops queenside activity, while Korchnoi prepares his own play, relying on his pawn and piece preponderance in the center. He now has at his disposal a most typical breakthrough for this kingside situation (which most often occurs in the openings we call Benoni), and he in fact played...


Just as in the previous example, the pawns attack in the center, driving the opposing pieces out of it.

23...b4!
This counterblow is forced: Black could not allow White’s knight to establish itself at d5.


The position appears to be unclear and double-edged, and White's center pawns rendered harmless. Korchnoi, however, shows that he has one more serious trump.

31.Bxe6! Bxe6 32.Bh6 Re8 33.Qg5

This is it: the weakened dark squares around the black king. Now it looks as though Black will not survive for long; but Tal was capable of squeezing chances literally from nothing!

33...Re4 34.Rf2!

And now it becomes clear that on 34.Qf6? Re2+ 35.Rf2 Rxh2+ 36.Qxf2 Qd4! 37.Qf6 Qxb2+ 38.Kg1 Qd4+ 39.Kh2 Qb2+, the game ends in a perpetual check!

34...f5

Korchnoi explains that this move was forced, and gives the variation 34...Qd4 35.Qf6 Qxe5 36.d7, and wins. But this results in White's second passed pawn also becoming passed, giving him a pair of connected passed pawns, even though, for now, they are blockaded. Such a pair is a serious matter, if it falls into good hands. And we need have no doubts about Korchnoi's hands!

35.Qf6 Qd7 36.Rxc5 Rc4 37.Rxc4 Bxc4 38.Rd2! Be6 39.Rd1 Qa7 40.Rd2 Qd7 41.Rd1 Qa7 42.Rd4! Qd7 43.g4! a5

Up to this point, White has played faultlessly, and has achieved a decisive advantage – which, as Korchnoi showed, ought to have been prosecuted to victory by 44.gxf5! Bxf5 45.Rc4 Qa7 46.Rc5! a4 47.e6! Bxe6 48.Rc7. Instead, he committed an inaccuracy:

44.Kg3?!

Even though the idea of bringing up the king looks excellent, it gives Black some counterchances, which Tal of course does not miss.

44...Rb8 45.Kh4 Qf7 46.Kg5 fxg4 47.hxg4 Bd7 48.Rc4!
The rook goes to c7, which should mean the end of the game – but even here, Tal finds his chance!

48...a4! 49.Rc7 a3

It turns out – as it has so many times before! – that things are not simple at all, and direct action does not reach the goal: 50.Qxf7+? Kxf7 51.Rxd7+ Ke6 52.Re7+ Kd5 53.d7 axb2 54.Re8 b1Q. But here too, Viktor Korchnoi is on top of things.

50.Rxd7!

White still gets there first, and decides the game with his central pawns – which is both logical and symbolic.

50...Qxd7

Making a new queen would not save Black in the variation 50...Qxf6+ 51.exf6 axb2 52.f7+ Kh8 53.Re7.

51.e6 Qa7

The storied pair of central passed pawns shows its strength in the variation given by Korchnoi: 51...Qb5+ 52.Kh4 g5+ 53.Kh5 Qe8+ 54.Kxg5 Qg6+ 55.Qxg6+ hxg6 56.d7 axb2 57.e7.

52.Qe5! axb2 53.e7 Kf7 54.d7!

And here is the apotheosis. The pawns have broken through, and cannot be destroyed fast enough: 54...Qxd7 55.Qf6+ Ke8 56.Qf8# 1-0

So, what does this mean? Is it enough for one side to occupy the center with pawns, for the other to find himself inevitably in a difficult position?

No, certainly not always, as we shall soon see. There is a number of quite usable and even popular opening schemes, designed around the idea that one side – usually Black – allows the opponent to create an imposing pawn center, in order to follow up by undermining it with pawns and then attacking it with pieces. The most popular of these are the Grünfeld and King’s Indian Defenses.

The ideas contained in the latter opening, and what can happen if White
acts too straightforwardly, is demonstrated in the following example.

**Shirfin – Paschall**  
King’s Indian Defense [E70]  
USA 2003

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 g6 3.Nc3 Bg7 4.e4 0–0

With his 4th move, Black put off the usual pawn advance to d6 in the King’s Indian (it is precisely the position of pawns at d6 and g6 that defines the King’s Indian setup), as if to invite his opponent to shove his center pawn forward.

5.e5?!

And his opponent cannot resist the temptation – even though it is wrong, and has been demonstrated to be wrong many times before! Now White’s central pawn trio becomes a nice target for Black’s pawns; and after them will come his pieces. He should have carried on with the usual development of his pieces, and paid no attention to this insignificant transposition.

5...Ne8 6.f4 d6 7.Nf3 c5 8.d5

Perhaps it was here that the first player finally recalled the famous game Letelier-Fischer (Leipzig 1960), and varied from it. In that game, White played 8.dxc5 Nc6 9.cxd6 exd6, and Fischer eventually scored a spectacular victory – for which I again refer you to the previously mentioned *My 60 Memorable Games*.

8...Bg4 9.exd6 Nxd6

In this situation, recapturing with the knight is even better than the standard pawn recapture. Here, the knight occupies a very comfortable, invulnerable position, similar to the forward post we are already familiar with. And the e-pawn will soon join in the attack on White’s center.


Recapturing with the knight might have been the lesser evil, although after 13.Nxd5 Bxb2 14.Rb1 Bg7, White does not have enough for the pawn.

13...Re8

Now the results of White’s ill-considered strategy are perfectly clear, as well as the ideal (alas, almost never
realized!) pursued by Black in the King’s Indian Defense: White’s once proud pawn center has been reduced to mere shards, one being the d5-pawn, blockaded in very comfortable, practically ideal fashion, and the other being a pawn most unfortunately placed at f4, where it locks in its own bishop; in addition, its advance has seriously weakened the e-file.

The following phase of the game presents itself, to a great extent, as a rather complex technical job of realizing Black’s considerable positional advantage. Black managed the task rather well, although his opponent several moves could have made things more difficult for him. Our interests would not be served by a detailed analysis of what follows, so I shall limit myself only to a few comments.


Here is the result of the dark-square strategy: all Black’s pieces are most comfortably ensconced on dark squares, securely controlling the center.

31.Rf1

Black’s last move was based upon yet another principally important variation: if 31.Qxe5 Rxe5 32.Rxe5 Qf2, White’s last hope dies with the fall of the f6-pawn.
31...Qc8 32.Rb1 b5 33.Rxb4 g5 34.Qf2 Qc5 35.Rbb1 Rxd5 36.Rbe1 Rde5 37.Rxe3 Qxe3 38.Qxe3 Rxe3 39.Rd1 Re6 40.Rd5 h6 0-1

A confident victory, and a convincing reply to the question: How does one punish over-active pawns?

But still, we cannot help but have questions, the first of which would be: why was the pawn center the deciding factor of the entire struggle in our first two examples, while everything came out the opposite in the last one? What are the rules underlying so great a difference? Here what is more significant is that in the first two cases, the pawn center White created was a mobile one, and for an extended period, nearly invulnerable, while in the third case, the pawn-built center was immediately immobilized, and attacked straightaway. Thus, there was a principal difference between the cases.

Understandably, the second question must be this: how should we regard the pawn center – as a strength, or as a weakness? The answer to the first question helps us answer the second one too: it all depends on the circumstances. Well defended and – supported by pieces, the pawn center is undoubtedly an asset to the position, since even without being mobile, it allows you to obtain and maintain an advantage in space, thereby restricting the possibilities of your opponent’s pieces. An insufficiently defended and poorly piece-supported pawn center will become a target of successful attacks – and nobody wants that!

As we have already learned, the center and flanks of the board stand in various and complex relationships. I should like to call my readers’ attention to a few more examples.

[Diagram of chess board]

Smyslov – Geller
Moscow 1973

Here we have one of a great number of games played between these two great masters. Let’s try to analyze what is before us. The first thing we notice is the powerful position of the black bishop at d5, supported by the well-placed rooks on central files and the possibility of a joint attack with the queen at g6 on the g2-square. And what does White have to brag about? Only his two extra pawns in the area of the kingside and the center, one of which is passed. But can this provide a sufficient counter-argument? A better pawn structure could have something to say in an endgame; but what is on the board now is a multi-piece middlegame. Thus, we conclude that Black has a considerable advantage. Not surprisingly, he is quickly able to demonstrate that his trumps carry considerably greater weight.

24...Bxc5!
Chapter 3: The Center

As we shall soon see, opening the b-file does not play a significant role in this position, despite the fact that only White can make use of it. What is far more important is that this exchange helps Black to strike the first blow in the center.

25.bxc5 Nd4!! 26.Qxd4 Rxf3 27.Ne4

Taking the rook would be bad, of course. The most stubborn defense was probably to enter the endgame, either by 27.Qg4+ Qxg4 28.hxg4 Rc3, or by 27.g3 Rd3 28.Qg4+ Qxg4 29.hxg4 Rc3. But in both cases, Black wins the c5-pawn, and the resulting endgame gives him great winning chances. Smyslov bet on his b-file counterattack, and here's how that went:

27...Rxh3 28.Ng3 Rh5 29.Rae1 Rg5 30.Rb2 Rg4 31.Qc3 h5 32.Reb1 h4 33.Rxb7

So, White has broken through on the b-file, but he cannot extract any benefit from it. One reason for that is, appropriately enough, that same notable bishop on d5. The game continued, I am sure, only because of Black’s time-pressure – a normal occurrence for Geller.

33...hxg3 34.f3 Qh6 35.Rxc7+ Kxc7 36.Qa5+ Kd7 37.e6+ Kxe6 38.Qe1+ Kf6 and finally 0–1.

We conclude this chapter with an examination of a game dealing with the theme of mutual relationships between pawn attacks on the wings and the battle for the center squares in the Sicilian Defense. I remember that we already dealt with this theme in our analysis of the game Byrne,R.-Fischer (1967).

This is a position from the Najdorf Variation of the Sicilian Defense. The most popular continuation here is 11.Bd3; White, however, played a very typical pawn thrust in such situations:

11.g4

The point of this is well-known: to advance this pawn further, and either drive the knight away from f6, where it was doing useful work controlling the e4- and d5-squares (for a more detailed examination of the importance of these
squares and other details of the position connected with them, I would refer the reader to the previously mentioned Byrne-Fischer game), or else to open the g-file for his rook. In our next example, we will see how this motif works. But in the present concrete case, White has underestimated one unimportant-looking detail, which is that in this opening variation, the black pawn usually remains on h7. Then the advance of the white pawn is quite useful. What changes, as a result of its insignificant relocation, was demonstrated in this game. Black continued...

11...g5!

And this unexpected pawn shot, for those unacquainted with the ideas of this opening, is well-known from similar positions. In this situation, it is especially good, since White’s usual response is to meet it by Bh4-g3, which is tactically unsound here. But after...

12.fxg5 Ne5 13.Qg3 Nfxg4 14.gxh6 Bxh4 15.Qxh4

...here is what we find: As a result of the exchange of pawn shots on the flank (which, however, are meant to fight for the center), it is not White, but Black, who has improved his affairs in the center, by securing for himself the e5-square. One can see that he will have some difficulties with his king’s position. To take care of these problems, he offers a trade of queens:

15...Qe7!? 16.Qg3 Qg5+ 17.Kb1 Qe3 18.Qxe3?

And here, White commits a new inaccuracy, which I believe we can actually label a flat-out error, since after the following exchanges, which favor Black, White’s affairs slide irresistibly under the wheels. It is hardly possible to avoid the trade of queens, but White should have continued 18.Rg1 Qxg3 19.Rxg3 Rxh6 20.h3 Nf6, when Black only has a small advantage. But now, after...


...a most unpleasant situation for White appears. His pawn structure is much worse; from an endgame standpoint, Black’s king is much better placed, and in that endgame, the bishop will be better than the knight. If the game develops quietly, say by 24.h3 Ke7 25.Kc1 Rah8, Black will have a great
advantage. But perhaps White was counting on the following shot, 24.e5, expecting the continuation 24...dxe5? 25.Ne4. But after 24...Bc6! 25.Rg3 0–0 26.exd6 Rx d6, everything was back in place — with a pair of connected passed pawns added to Black’s previous advantages. Soon, these would decide the game.

27.Rd3 Kd7 28.Rf2 Ke7 29.Kc1

Black’s advantage is now decisive.

35.b3 Kg5 36.Nf1 e5 37.c4 Rh3+ 38.Kd2

38...f4!

Just so! This kind of position, which may serve as an ideal — and very hard to achieve, by the way — for all who play the Sicilian Defense with Black, should be given an unmistakable evaluation as winning for Black. White has absolutely nothing he can put up against his opponent’s pair of pawns.

This is just the right time to offer — as one of the heroes of my favorite writer, Isaak Babel, would have put it — “a note from life.” Pawns and pieces belong together; as far as bishops go, it works best when the pawns are on squares not
of the same color of their own bishop.
Then there is complete harmony and agreement among them – which is what we observe in this instance.

39.Re2 Kf5 40.Kc1 e4 41.Rd2 Rc3 42.Rd8 e3 43.h4 Bf3 44.Rf8+ Ke4 45.Rc8 Kd4 0-1

And now, as promised, let’s see what goals are aimed at, and what a successful advance of the white wing pawns can lead to in the Sicilian Defense.

![Chess Diagram]

Polgar, J. – Ree
OHRA-B, Amsterdam 1989

We have a position that is well-known to theory. White’s next move is really only an introduction to the real theoretical discussions. Besides the complete and rapid success by White in this game, it is an interesting fact that at this moment, the superstar of world chess, and strongest woman chess player of all time, Judit Polgar, was only 13-years old!

10.g4 Re8 11.g5 Nfd7 12.Bh5

This move was a popular one at the time, with the idea of inducing g7-g6, in order to weaken the Black king’s position. Today, theory prefers the continuation 12.Bd3.

12...g6 13.Bg4 Nc6?

This absolutely normal-looking developing move is Black’s first, and actually the decisive error! His position would have been very uncomfortable after 13...Nb6?! 14.f5!, since now 14...Nc4? would be quite bad: 15.fxe6 fxe6 16.Nxe6, and White wins. But after the correct 13...Bf8, it is a complicated position, with double-edged play. And anyway, why should a completely natural-looking move turn out to be such a terrible move that loses immediately? That is what sometimes happens in sharp positions, where the price of each move becomes very high. And the sharpness was introduced by White’s 10th move, and now drives everything that follows. But again, why is 13...Nc6 a mistake?

![Chess Diagram]

Here’s why: after...


...White has partly torn open the position of the enemy king, while her knight invades the center, with decisive effect. Note – on the very same square that the knight on f6 was supposed to
be controlling – which, in turn, was driven away by the pawn that started from g2, and rushed to g5 (“...that lay in the house that Jack built.”)!


And this is how White exploits the previously-made weakening – cf. 12. Bh5:

18...Nde5

Black is doomed, no matter what he does. After 18...Nxd4 19.Qxd4+ Bf6 20.Nxf6 Qa7 21.Qxa7 Rxa7 22.Nxd7, the ending is an elementary win for White.


Black does not have it any easier after 23...Rxf7 24.Qd8! Bh3 25.Bf6+.

24.Qf3 1-0
In this chapter, we shall be talking mainly about rooks. The reason for this is that, of all the inhabitants of the chessboard, they are the ones who most love open lines, which is how we refer to files and ranks which are free of pawns. If open lines are not present on the board, a rook has great difficulty displaying its power. And just that difference in strength, between a rook that occupies an open line, and a rook that is closed in behind its own pawns, can be enough to win a game.

The following example is quite simple, easily understood, and yet completely convincing. It is taken from a book (Capablanca’s *A Primer of Chess*), which I am quite fond of and rate very highly, considering it to be one of the best books in chess history. Here is what he writes concerning the following position:

```
  a b c d e f g h
8 ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕
7 ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕
6 ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕
5 ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕
4 ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕
3 ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕
2 ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕
1 ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕
```

“In the above diagram, having the move decides the issue. Whoever moves first plays Re1(e8) and obtains a winning game. Thus: 1.Re1 Kg6 2.Re7 c5 3.dxc5 bxc5 4.Rd7, and White wins a pawn, usually sufficient to win the game among players of the same strength, provided they have learned how to handle their king.”

By the way, note how the power of the rook, obtained by occupation of the open line, is realized here by invading the next-to-last, the seventh rank (if we were speaking of the black rook, then it would be the second). We shall have more to say about this a little later.

But an invasion by the heavy pieces to the very last (first or eighth) rank can also be highly effective. A gigantic collection of combinations exists on this very theme. But this book is dedicated not to tactics, but to strategy. So I shall present just two of my very favorite examples on this theme of back-rank mates.

```
  a b c d e f g h
8 ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕
7 ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕
6 ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕
5 ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕
4 ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕
3 ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕
2 ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕
1 ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕ ♕
```

**Mikenas – Bronstein**

Tallinn, 1965

White’s position is indisputably attractive. He already has a securely protected passed pawn, while Black’s b-pawn may eventually prove a good target. Perhaps the only thing that could trouble him might be his opponent’s active stance on the e-file, but this is not worrisome yet. Lost, one must imagine, in such pleasant ruminations, White played the most obvious move:

**24.Rb4?**
Chapter 4: Open Lines

Correct was either 24.Rd4!? or 24.Qd4!, in either case with a small advantage to White. I remember very clearly, that in the newspaper report of this round, it was said that after making this move, Vladas Mikenas stood up from his chair, to find Korchnoi gazing thoughtfully at this position. The latter could not resist asking, “And what if he takes on a3?” Ah! With such questions, brutally thrusting one from the gates of Heaven to the depths of Hell, one could cause a heart attack! Understandably, a great tactician like Bronstein was not going to miss his chance:

24...Rxa3!!

I’m certain that he had prepared this shot beforehand. Seeing that there was no defense, even in the variation 25.bxa3 Qxa1+ 26.Rb1 Re1+, White resigned. 0-1

Note the “strategic” underpinnings of this combinative shot: it transformed the half-open a-file into one completely open.

The following example, which I learned in the earliest stage of my chess education, to this day leaves me with a strong impression.

17.Bxf6! Bxf6

The hand refuses to give this move a question mark, since the other recapture, 17...gxf6, would have led to a situation in which Black’s kingside pawn structure would lie in ruins. Nevertheless, now White wins by force, and between four and six of his remaining moves fully deserve a mark of the highest acclaim.

18.Qg4! Qb5

Obviously, the goal of White’s assault is the e8-square. It is also obvious that for this to succeed, he must divert either Black’s queen, or the rook on c8 from its defensive function. This is the goal pursued by White’s next two moves. They are easy to understand, but very effective in execution.

19.Qc4!! Qd7 20.Qc7!! Qb5

In the variation 20...Qa4 21.b3 Rf8, an important element of White’s attack is revealed: 22.Qxc8 wins a rook.

Adams – Torre
New Orleans 1920
But now what? The answer would appear to be obvious: 21.Qxb7. But then, after 21...Qxe2, it is Black who wins! Or White could bring the queen back to c4 – but then his opponent also returns his queen to d7. Is there a solution?

21.a4!!

White finds the necessary move, difficult though it was. The entire difficulty lay in finding his next super-move!

21...Qxa4

Two important variations were: 21...Qxe2 22.Rxe2 Rf8 23.Qxa5 Rc1+ 24.Re1, and 21...Rf8 22.Qxe8! Qxe2 23.Qxe8+.

22.Re4!!

If the rules of chess allowed it, I would have added still another – a third! – exclamation mark, so much does this move me, even now!

The reason why I get so excited over this fragment becomes clear if you look carefully at the diagrammed position. All the heavy pieces for both sides are, at this moment, under attack. Obviously, in such cases, the turn to move plays an enormous, and generally decisive, role. But it is at once the pleasure and the difficulty of this situation that it is Black to move, he has a number of different continuations – but each one leads to a loss!

Here are those variations: 22...Rf8 23.Qxc8 Qxe4 24.Qxf8+; 22...g6 23.Qxc8 Qxe4 24.Qxe8+; 22...Qxe4 23.Rxe4 Rxc7 24.Rxe8#; 22...Kf8 23.Qxd6+ Be7 24.Rxe7.

And thus, the hardest thing for the White player to do was not to cut short his calculations after seeing the reply 21...Qxa4, but to continue after that to find the move 22.Re4!!, and to work out all its consequences. For White to do this required faith in his actions, and even – dare I say it – manhood!

The actual finish was quick:

22...Qb5 23.Qxb7,
Chapter 4: Open Lines

And now, neither the counterblow at e2, nor any other Black resource works here (the result of the “combination within a combination” on White’s 21st and 22nd moves), so Black had to resign. 1-0

I consider it significant, and not even accidental, that this entire inspiring game – in which, I repeat, White’s 21st and 22nd moves were especially astounding – was played in the city of Paul Morphy!

Earlier, we learned of the high effectiveness of an invasion by the heavy pieces onto the next to last rank (from our own perspective, that is!). In Russian chess slang, such ranks are not without reason labeled “glutton’s row”. There, a pair of heavy pieces – most often a rook – or even a single rook, can always find something to eat!

I beg your pardon for presenting this well-known example – which I have already used once myself – but it is so clear, and so convincing, that I cannot resist the temptation!

One Black rook has already broken in to the enemy’s position. Is the other prevented by the bishop? Then drive it away!

26...e5! 27.Bxe5 Rdd2

Well, now it has happened: both black rooks have broken in to the desired second rank. Now everything becomes quite clear. It is enough to compare the options of White’s rooks, sealed behind their own pawns with no hope of release, and Black’s battery of rooks, additionally supported by the queen. For such a beautiful sight, a single pawn is not much to pay, especially when his opponent appears to have no good continuation.

28.Qb7

Now it turns out that defending the pawn by 28.Rf1 leads to 28...Qxe3! 29.Bf4 (a thematic and exceptionally important [because of its typical nature] mate follows the capture: 29.fxe3 Rg2+ 30.Kh1 Rhx2+ 31.Kg1 Rcg2#), and now we continue the same theme: 29...Rx f2, and wins.

28...Rx f2 29.g4 Qe6 30.Bg3

Nimzovich – Capablanca
New York 1927

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36...a5!

With this stroke, Capablanca adds a new problem to his opponent’s list: the need to monitor yet another weakness, on the other side. White cannot cover everything at once – a method we shall have occasion to deal with in greater detail.

37.Re2 axb4 38.axb4 Be7 39.Re4 Bf6 40.Rf2 Qd5 41.Re8+ Kh7 0-1

Now, I believe, the term “glutton’s row” should require no further explanations!

And here’s one more example on the same theme – this one not so well known.

Rudakovsky – Botvinnik
Moscow 1945

White’s position is joyless, but this certainly does not mean that Black can “win as he pleases.” Botvinnik chooses the most convincing path to victory.

30...Nd2!

As a calculation of the variations shows (which I shall omit here – for us, there is no need), he could also have won by continuing 30...Rd3 31.Qxh3 Re8, but
here, Black would have had to be careful with his calculations; whereas now, everything is crystal clear.

31. Bxd2 Rxd2 32. Qxh3 Qxf4

A pair of rooks invading on glutton’s row can be like a tornado, as we have seen. But it often happens that a lone rook can do pretty well by itself. To begin with, an example from the classic tradition:

33. Qxh4

White cannot prevent the second rook’s invasion: 33. Rbc1 Rcc2! 34. Re8+ Kg7 35. Rxc2 Qf2+ 36. Kh1 Rd1+, and mates.

33... Rcc2 34. Qg3 Qd4+

In the preceding play, White was able to accumulate a number of weighty positional advantages, primarily a considerable advantage in the quality of his pawn structure, which consisted of all White’s pawns forming a single unbreakable line, while Black’s were broken up into two separate groups. In such cases, chessplayers say that White has one pawn island, while Black has two. As a result, Black has two bases – that is what the pawns which anchor the entire pawn chain on their shoulders are called – which here would be the pawns on g6 and b7. The latter is not so easy to deal with: if pawns are exchanged on the b-file, then the c6-pawn becomes the base. Nimzovich used to call such an occurrence a transfer of the base. White has just one base, which is of course the pawn at e3. So this qualitative difference between White and Black’s structures consists mainly in the number of islands

White’s completely helpless, as may be seen from the following variations, 34... Qd4+ 35. Kf1 (35. Kh1 Qd5+ 36. Kg1 Rg2+; 35. Re3 Rg2+ 36. Qxg2 Qxe3+) 35... Rf2+ 36. Kg1 Rg2+, and therefore resigned. 0-1
(obviously, the fewer of these there are, the better). In addition, White’s pawns have secured considerably more space for their pieces than their black counterparts have for theirs. It becomes clear that the greatest benefits from the difference in pawn structure we are examining will accrue to White’s rook. After the unavoidable forthcoming exchange of pawns on the b-file, it will become much more active than the enemy rook. And how are things with the queens? Here, matters stand somewhat differently: White’s is not very active at the moment, although it might eventually leap to a6, after the exchange of pawns. But in this case, Black’s queen will immediately come to grips with the insufficiently protected white king, which White certainly will not like.

Summing up, we conclude as Capablanca did, that White should exchange queens, in order to be able to realize all the advantages of his position. Therefore...

49.Qh3! Qxh3+ 50.Kxh3 Kg7

Now, after the exchange of queens, White’s king can also take an active part in the game, which its black counterpart will find very hard to emulate.

51.Kh4 Kf7 52.bxc6 bxc6 53.Rb8 Re7

Now White’s accomplishments have become obvious. Black’s pieces are so hemmed in by White’s pawns, and tied down by the need to defend their weaknesses, that their movements are restricted even in their own camp, as you can easily tell by the variation 53...Ke7 54.Rh8 Rd7 55.Rc8, picking up the important c6-pawn.

54.Rc8 Re6 55.Rc7+ Kg8

Here you see the results of White’s strategy: his rook is dominant, and also pins the enemy king onto the last rank. But for now, Black is defending his weaknesses. The king must therefore come to the aid of the rook. This is achieved by means of a breakthrough.

56.Kg3!

Just so; it would have been a mistake to play 56.f5? gxf5 57.Kxh5 instead, when Black would be the one breaking through with 57...f4, creating a powerful passed pawn.

56...Kf8 57.f5! gxf5 58.Kf4
Chapter 4: Open Lines

We can see that White has already achieved a great deal: he has a powerful bishop, and his rooks occupy the central files. But what should he do next, to keep his advantage from disappearing, to make it grow? To this vital question of the moment, Botvinnik has a convincing reply.

25.Nd5! Ne6?!

Black had a tough decision to make here. The variation 25...Nfxd5 26.Bxd5! Nxd5 27.exd5! Rfc8 28.Rdc2 would have landed him in an unpleasant ending. But it was undoubtedly preferable to the game continuation, when Black’s affairs go rapidly downhill. And here I cannot let pass a chance to pronounce my favorite opinion: that what turned out badly for the person playing this game, turned out great for many chess fans, giving us both pleasure and great benefit from observing the actions of the winner. And thus it was in this case, as well.

26.Nxf6+ gxf6 27.Rd7 Rab8

Now White threatens to check and win the f7-pawn.

Whereas now, all Black has is the weak and harmless little passed h-pawn.

58...Re7

His counterplay comes to nothing: 58...h4 59.Kxf5 Re7 60.Rxe7 Kxe7 61.Kg4. Black might already have resigned here.

59.Rxc6 h4 60.Rh6 Rg7 61.Rxh4 1-0

Out next example will be a much more complex game by the young Mikhail Botvinnik (he was 20 years old, which in those days was considered the age of an inexperienced player). He was in fact still short of experience; but in this game, he demonstrated outstanding strategic and technical mastery.

Botvinnik – Sorokin
Moscow 1931
Another decision that was not best. 28...Rbd8 would have held out longer.

29.Rce7 Rbc8 30.Rxf7 Rxc7
31.Rxc7+ Kh8

White has achieved a decisive advantage; but it still needs to be nursed to the point where his opponent admits defeat. And since his opponent intends to do everything he can either to put off that moment of truth for as long as possible, or eliminate it, White cannot afford to relax, to console himself with thoughts of how strong a position he has. Accurate moves are required, to the very end.

Why am I saying all this? Because here, Botvinnik might have gone down the following obvious path: 32.b4 Nc6 33.Rxb7. In that event, White’s victory would have been only a matter of time and accuracy. But he chose a different path, no less secure, but far more instructive, which means more useful to us.

32.Bd5!? b5 33.b3!

Here is the position for which White rejected the immediate win of a pawn. Let’s look at it more closely. First, we see something we are already familiar with: the gigantic difference in the positions of the rooks. This difference also determines – along with many other things – the difference in the kings’ prospects. The black king is going to be forever cut off from any active play, while the white monarch knows no restrictions, and will soon be coming to the aid of its other pieces. But we already saw all this in the previous example. Here we should turn special attention to the cooperation between the minor pieces. As we can see, White’s bishop controls every movement of the enemy knight, pinned to the edge of the board. With his last move, White deprived the knight of any movement, forever. There is another Russian colloquial expression for such cases: we say the bishop cuts out the knight, as in: cuts off all his access to the game.

To sum up, all of White’s pieces have significantly greater prospects than the opponent’s pieces, now and for the foreseeable future.

Such an all-encompassing differential is commonly called domination. This
is what attracted Botvinnik about this position; this is why he disdained the forced win of a pawn. What is decisive here is not material, but the total helplessness of Black’s position. The rest of the game turns into nothing more than the finishing touches applied to a defeated opponent, although some accuracy is required.

33...Rd8 34.Kg3 f5 35.Kh4 fxe4 36.fxe4 Rd6 37.Kh5 Rf6 38.h3 Rd6 39.h4 Rb6 40.Kg4 Rf6 41.Ra7 Rb6 42.Re7 Rd6

Black’s knight cannot escape: 42...Nc6? 43.Re6.

Finally, White starts the decisive operation.

47.Bf7! Rf6

A small but important finesse: the king cannot leave the corner, since on 47...Kg7, White wins by 48.b4! Nc6 49.Bd5+.

48.Bg6 Nxb3 49.Kxh6 Rf8

Another line that loses by force is 49...Kg8 50.Kg5 Rf8 51.Bh7+ Kh8 52.Bf5 Nd2 53.Kg6! Rg8+ 54.Kh6 Re8 55.Rg7 b4 56.Bd7 Rd8 (or 56...Rf8 57.Rh7+ Kg8 58.Be6+) 57.Be6.

Note that White is in no hurry to start decisive action, preferring to prepare and prepare, until the last “t” is crossed. But one can only allow oneself such a sybaritic approach in the chess environment when the opponent is completely helpless and doomed to passivity. It is far more common in chess to have to move very quickly; but you always have to pay attention!
And now, an uncomplicated, but instructive final attack:

50.Rh7+! Kg8 51.Rg7+! Kh8 52.Bf7! Rxf7 53.Rxf7 Kg8 54.Kg6 Nd2 55.Rd7 1–0

Next, a contemporary example:

Aronian – Jakovenko
Batumi 2002

White has a chance to invade the sacred seventh rank with his rook, and does not miss it.

48.Rd7! e5

At once, it becomes obvious that Black is in trouble. He can no longer save the pawn. If 48...a5, it is lost anyway after 49.Ra7; and on 48...Re7 49.Qd6 Qa8+ 50.f3 Rxd7 51.Qxd7, he must still lose one of his pawns, since after 51...Qd5 52.Qxd5 exd5 53.Kf2, he would lose the resulting endgame.

49.Rxa7 e4 50.Qg6

50...f4

Black strives to develop some kind of activity, as otherwise he loses the f5-pawn as well (50...Re5 51.Rf7); but here too, the White rook finishes matters.

51.Rxg7 f3+ 52.Kh3 1-0

In the next example, the winner of the previous game was the one to suffer from an invading rook.

Carlson – Aronian
Elista, 2007

The pawn White previously won will now be recovered, but he has other trumps besides that. There is a rook on the eighth, a strong knight in the center, and also the pawn at f6, which could
cause his opponent a lot of trouble, were it to become passed. The pawn is hindered by its counterpart on f7 that also prevents the white rook from showing its wild side. And the black bishop prevents White from removing this obstacle. But Carlsen had already prepared for everything, and now proceeds with his operation to remove it.

36.f4! Rxc3 37.h5! gxh5

Black must take. After 37...Rb3 38.hxg6+ fxg6, for example, 39.Re8 wins at once.

38.Rf8 Ra3

Now the bishop is driven off its important square.

39.f5! Bxf5

And now the rook invades.

40.Rxf7+ Kg8

Now the white rook has made its way to glutton's row, nailing the opposing king to the back rank. It is now time for the white king to advance, with the aim of increasing the size of the fist. As a result, the game will be decided by the cooperative efforts of all the white pieces against the black monarch.

43.Kg3!

It is more or less easy to describe the actions of others, but much harder to
perform them yourself. Before undertaking this strategically obvious king migration, Carlsen had to have done some significant calculating work (well, he does calculate excellently). First of all, he had to consider the advance of Black’s passed pawn. Here are the variations that would then occur: 43...c3 44.Kf4 Be4 (44...c2 leads to a most typical development, in which the fist demonstrates its abilities: 45.Kxf5 c1Q 46.Ng6+ Ke8 (or 46...Kg8 47.Rg7#) 47.f7+ Kd8 48.f8Q#. But here too, the same mechanism applies: 45.Rf7+ Ke8 46.Re7+ Kd8 47.Nc6+ Kc8 48.f7.

44.Kf4 Be4 45.g3 c3

The finish utilizes the mechanisms we are already familiar with.

46.Rf7+ Kg8 47.Rg7+ Kf8 48.Nd7+ Rxd7 49.Rxd7

After 49...c2, the rook stops the pawn “Tarrasch-style”: 50.Rc7 1-0

Now let’s look at a pair of full-length games.

Rubinstein – Bogoljubow
Slav Defense [D94]
Vienna 1922

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.e3 Nf6 4.Nc3 g6 5.Nf3 Bg7

This is Schlechter’s Defense – a hybrid mix of the Grünfeld and the Slav.

6.Be2 0–0 7.0–0 Nbd7?!

An important moment. Why does a natural developing move suddenly deserve a question mark? Because now, White can open the c-file favorably, since the Black knight will no longer be able to go to c6. Therefore, Black would have done better to take on c4.


Rubinstein makes no attempt to preserve the bishop from exchange, and willingly offers his opponent the chance to obtain the bishop pair. In those days, it was an article of faith to many that two bishops were always a good thing.
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12...Nxd2?

Bogoljubow thought so too. He also probably did not like the idea that otherwise, White’s bishop would retreat to e1. Nevertheless, this exchange was a serious positional error, and here’s why: first, because the advantage of the bishop pair does not mean much at this stage. And second: because White wins a tempo, by immediately getting one of the rooks to the second rank, which helps him quickly double rooks on the only open file. In any battle for open lines, the speed with which the rooks can get there may play a decisive role. And, as we shall soon see, White now succeeds in taking complete control of the c-file.


This reply, simple, but very strong, alters the situation radically. With this move, White seizes control of two very vital squares in this position, a6 and e8. After this, it becomes clear that Black’s assessment was too superficial and overoptimistic.

16...a6

Black absolutely cannot afford to allow 17.Ba6, when White gains control of the c6- and c8-squares too. But now, the rook can invade the seventh rank...

17.Rc7 ...because trading both rooks on c8 would lose to a queen check at e8. At last, we see the full power of White’s 16th move!

17...b5 18.Qa5 Rab8 19.R1c5!

Yet another small, but very significant nuance: now the white rook is defended by a pawn, which means that anytime Black plays ...Rc8, White can respond by Rxb7.

19...Rfd8

Now we can clearly see what Black’s mistaken decision to trade on move 12 has led to. White has complete control of the only open file, and has already
moved in on the cherished next-to-last rank. Nevertheless, it is still a long way to go until the game is over. Right now, it is hard to see how White can expand his territorial acquisitions. He cannot go right or left along the seventh rank, nor can his heavy pieces invade any further down the c-file. In other words, White cannot make any further progress with the pieces he now wields in the fight, even though he has grounds for it. In such cases, one needs to bring up the reserves. Here, that would be his knight and his bishop. And if, while doing so, he sees that Black’s last move prepared the exchange Rd8-d7, easing his position, then it becomes clear that the first move White should consider is the one he actually played:

20.Ne5!

We have just made clear the strategic basis of this move; the tactical basis is the variation 20...Bxe5? 21.dxe5 Qxe5 22.Rxb7. Now White threatens a deadly incursion by the knight onto the c6 square. It looks like Black is helpless, but Bogoljubow finds an excellent defensive resource:

20...Bf6! 21.Nc6 e6!

Now even if White takes the rook at b8, Black still recovers the exchange by ...Bf6-d8. (D)

22.g3!

A most instructive moment. This “modest” pawn move shows the hand of a great master! The combinative blow which follows soon after could also have been delivered now; but Rubinstein understood that, as a consequence of his dominance over the open line, the Black pieces have minimal mobility, and are unable to alter anything. Therefore, he made a move which will be useful in future. As a result, his combination would be executed in the most favorable conditions possible.

22...Rdc8

It is important that trading would be unfavorable for Black here as well. After 22...Bxc6 23.R5xc6 Qf8 24.Rxa6 b4 25.Ra7 Ra8 26.Rxf7 Qxf7 27.Rxa8 Rxa8 28.Qxa8+ Kg7 29.a4, even bishops of opposite colors would not be enough to save Black. He cannot resolve both his problems – dealing with the enemy passed pawn, and defending his kingside weaknesses – at the same time.


Here is the problem: Black cannot take the bishop, since 24...axb5 25.Qa7 would lose right away.

24...Bd8
25. Be8?!

This is the only place where Rubinstein slips a little. 25.Bd3 was undoubtedly stronger.

25...Qf8?

Black returns the favor at once! After the correct 25...Bxc7 26.Qxc7! Qxc7 27.Rxc7 Rx e8 28.Rxb7 Rc8 29.g4!, White would still have had to bring the endgame home to victory. It is not the simplest ending, but it would offer White good winning chances. Perhaps, having seen this prospect, Bogoljubow decided that any road was better than a rook ending, considering Rubinstein was an unexcelled master of rook endgames, who created many brilliant examples of how they should be played. Now, however, things are much simpler.


The following example bears a considerable strategic resemblance to the one we just looked at, but in a more complex form.

Petrosian – Unzicker
Torre Attack [D61]
Hamburg 1960


9...cxd5?

This game was played 38 years after the previous game, and after the Rubinstein game had become firmly enshrined in the canon of the chess classics. And here, if you please, such a terrible strategic error! Both 9...Nxd5 and 9...exd5 were both good here.

10.Bd3 a6 11.0-0 b5

Black’s last two moves, although they may seem indisputably logical and obvious, still have one shortcoming. Petrosian reveals it at once, using a typical method for such pawn configurations.
12.a4! b4

White responds with the second part of the maneuver begun with his 12th move. For this reason, it sometimes makes more sense to exchange this pawn, rather than to advance it. I think that here too, Black should have gone in for 12...bxa4 13.Nxa4 Bb4.

13.Na2 Ne8

The point: the knight is heading for an ideal post, the b3-square, where it will be sheltered from attacks by the opposing pawn, while it keeps control of the a5- and c5-squares, which will be of importance in this situation. I repeat: this kind of knight maneuver is most typical in this sort of pawn structure, and would be useful to commit to memory.

14.Nc1!


Why – and to what end? Looking more closely at the position, we easily discover that there is a whole complex of light squares on Black’s queenside that has been fundamentally weakened. From f4, White’s dark-square bishop cannot offer any significant assistance in attacking them, while the black knight, once it reaches c4, would block the white pieces’ access to both the aforementioned light squares, and to the c-file.

19...Bxd6 20.Rc6 Nb8 21.Rc2 Nd7

22.Rac1 Nb6 23.Qb5 Nc4

The second knight has succeeded in reaching c4, but White can deal with him.

24.Nfd2! Nxd2 25.Rxd2 Qa8 26.Rdc2 Rd8 27.Rc6 g6 28.g3 Kg7
Chapter 4: Open Lines

The results of two interconnected processes – Black’s mistake on the 9th move, and his inaccuracy on the 12th, on the one hand, and White’s logical and consequent strategy, on the other – are plain to see. White has seized the only open file, and established himself on his opponent’s weakened light squares. But all of this has occurred in just one part of the board – the three queenside files. To secure victory by exploiting just these accomplishments does not seem possible. The battle zone needs to be expanded – opening a second front. Do you understand what that means? Where shall it be? For now, the center is impossible. It would be more realistic to advance the pawns on the kingside, where the opposing pawn structure is already weakened. On the other hand, it is not so simple to decide to push pawns away from one’s own king. So White engages in a lengthy pilgrimage, bringing his monarch to the queenside, where even though he does have weaknesses, he has everything under control.

29.Kf1! Kg8 30.h4 h5 31.R1c2 Kh7 32.Ke1 Kg8 33.Kd1 Kh7 34.Kc1 Kg8 35.Kb1 Kh7 36.Qe2 Qb7 37.Rc1 Kg7 38.Qb5! Qa8

Black would not enjoy the trade. After 38...Qxb5 39.axb5 a4 40.b6 Re7 41.Nc5 Bxc5 42.dxc5, White’s pair of passed pawns would decide the game.

But now, White begins operations on the kingside.

39.f4 Kh7 40.Qe2 Qb7 41.g4 hxg4 42.Qxg4 Qe7 43.h5 Qf6 44.Ka2 Kg7 45.hxg6 Qxg6

Now it is evident that White’s strategy has triumphed completely: his opponent is lost on both flanks. Note the most useful role played by the unmoving knight at b3.

46.Qh4!

With the enemy king so weak, trading queens would be illogical.
46...Be7 47.Qf2 Kf8 48.Nd2 Rb7 49.Nb3! Ra7

White finally begins the concluding attack.

50.Qh2! Bf6 51.Rc8! Rad7

Trading off the rooks wouldn’t save him, either. After 51..Rx8 52.Rxc8+ Ke7 53.f5! Qxf5, White wins by 54.Qb8.


If 55... Qxf5, then 56.Nd7+. 1-0

An outstanding, strategically unified game, consistently played by Petrosian. Now let’s see what benefit open files confer in the endgame.

Earlier in the game, Black succeeded in accumulating several advantages. The first of these is easily recognizable: while Black’s knight roams freely, White’s bishop is solidly locked in behind its own pawns. And the second flows from the first: since the pawns and bishop only reinforce each other in occupying the dark squares, which piece in the white camp is looking after the light squares? Thus, White’s light

squares are seriously weakened, and over the long term.

26...f5!

This is exactly the right moment to formulate yet another most useful positional principle: at the first reasonable opportunity, you should fix (that is, nail down) weak squares and pawns. This is just what Black did with his last move.

27.Kf3 Kf7 28.a4

And here another serious shortcoming of White’s position manifests itself: he has lost the battle for the only open file.
Chapter 4: Open Lines

29.Ba3 Ke6 30.Rb1 b6 31.Bb4

31...Rab8!

This “insignificant” rook maneuver is the start of a deep and very strong plan of action.

32.Rcb2

First of all, we see that 32.a5?? is impossible, because of 32...bxa5. Meanwhile, White still needs to whip up counterplay, before he suffocates under the wall of his own pawns. And this counterplay is only possible on the queenside.

32...Rb7! 33.Rg2

And now Kramnik’s idea becomes clear. Black is ready for his opponent’s break – after 33.a5 bxa5 34.Bc5 Rx b2 35.Rxb2 Rb8! 36.Rxb8 Nxb8 37.Bxa7 Nd7, he would have a winning endgame.

33...R x g2 34.Kx g2 Rg7+ 35.Kf3 Rg8!

The rook returns, in order to maintain control over the important b8-square.

36.Ra1

We have already seen the variation 36.a5 bxa5 37.Bc5 Rb8

And so the rook has occupied the open file – but what can it do there? We know about the advantages of invading along the open file into the enemy camp, but how is this to be accomplished here? These were the questions facing Kramnik, and here is how he answered them:

36...h5!

Black plans to push this pawn to the third rank, giving Black’s rook a support point for invasion. Such a course of action is well known, and constitutes one of the essential elements of endgame technique.

37.Rb1 h4! 38.a5!

White must open lines for his own pieces. Waiting passively would be hopeless, as may be seen from the following variation: 38.Ra1 h3! 39.a5 b5 40.Bc5 (the rook endgame after 40.a6 Nxb4 41.cx b4 Rg2 is won for Black) 40...a6 41.Ra2 Rg1, and Black wins.

38...bxa5 39.Bc5
39...Rg7!

In chess, one must stay alert! Why, one might think, cannot Black play 39...Rb8? here? What is the difference? As it happens, after 40.Rg1 White gains serious counterplay – via the weakened g6-square!

40.Ba3 h3 41.Rb5 a4 42.Rc5

42...Nb8!

One more very strong choice. Knight and king together work to neutralize the White rook, which allows its Black opponent to remain active. But making such a decision required very accurate calculation on Black’s part.

43.Ra5

43.Rc8!? would result in more complex variations; but there too, after 43...Nd7! 44.Rc6+ Kf7 45.Ra6 Nf6 46.Rxa7+ Kg8, Black has a great advantage. For example: 47.Ra8+ (the minor-piece endgame after 47.Rxg7+ Kxg7 48.Bb4 Ne4 is just hopeless for White) 47...Kh7 48.Rf8 Ne4 49.Rxf5 Rg2 50Rh5+ Kg7 51.Rxh3 Rf2! 52.Kg4 Ra2 53.Bb4 Nf2+.

43...a6 44.Rxa4 Rg2 45.Bb4 Rxh2 46.Kg3 Re2 47.Kxh3 Rxe3+ 48.Kg2

48...Nc6!

Once again, very simply played, and yet very strong. This endgame, even though the pawns are even, will be won for Black, because of the difference in activity of the rooks.

49.Rxa6 Kd7 50.Kf2 Rd3 51.Bc5

The rook endgame after 51.Rb6 Nxb4 52.Rxb4 Rxh3 is won for Black without much difficulty.

51...Rxc3 52.Rb6 Rb3 53.Ra6 Rd3 Another pawn must fall. 0-1

I wrote the commentary to this game on October 24, 2008, on the day after the last game of the Anand-Kramnik
world championship match that Kramnik lost. The choice of this game for the book was made, besides its obvious accomplishments, with a view of demonstrating my enormous respect for this notable master, together with my belief that he will find within himself the strength to return to his full former playing ability.

The following example does not quite match up with the theme we have been examining in this chapter; but it is a very good choice for illustrating one important technique with which we became familiar in the ending we just examined, and which Kramnik may have followed.

53...c5! 54.Rf6+ Ka5 55.Rf2 c4! 56.Rg2

56...c3! 57.b4+

If 57.bxc3 Rxc3 58.Kb2, Black wins as follows: 58...Rb3+ 59.Ka2 h4! (to set up a supporting square for the rook to invade, just as in the previous example) 60.Re2 Rf3 61.Rb2 h3! 62.Rd2 Rf4 63.Kb2 Rg4 64.Rc2 Rg2, and wins.

57...axb3+ 58.Kxb3 c2+ 59.Kxc2 Rxa3 60.Kb2 Rf3 61.Re2

How does Black realize his great advantage? White will sit and wait, so Black must try to find a means of breaking through his defenses. Here we also have a case where the winning method must include play on both wings. Keres demonstrates an accurate and extraordinarily instructive plan. First, he advances the c-pawn, with the aim of opening the third rank and thus weakening the a3-pawn and obtaining, thanks to the possibility of a rook check along the second rank winning the h2-pawn, the freedom to reposition his rook.
And now it is time for the same plan of action – important, first of all, because it is so typical:

61...h4! 62.Rd2 h3! 63.Re2 Ka4 64.Kb1 Rf1+ 65.Kc2 b4 66.Kd3 Rd1+! 67.Kc2 Rg1

And there is no defense to the decisive entry of Black’s rook onto the support square g2. 0-1

Mating attacks along files – whether open or semi-open – have also been carried out numberless times. Here’s one example.

**Spassky – Evans**

King’s Indian Defense [80]

Varna 1962

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 g6 3.Nc3 Bg7 4.e4 d6 5.f3 c6 6.Be3 a6 7.Qd2 b5 8.0-0-0 bxc4?!

Black has played the opening poorly, and quickly falls into difficulties. Thus, here he would have done much better to have continued his development by 8...Nbd7

9.Bxc4 0-0 10.h4 d5?!

Yet another unfortunate choice. There is nothing better to advise here other than 10...h5!?.

11.Bb3! dxe4

Black is already facing serious problems, as may be seen from the variation 11...Nbd7 12.e5! Ne8 13.h5, when White has a very strong, probably decisive attack. Black’s best chance was to switch over to a counterattack by 11...a5!? 12.h5 a4. Now White will be able to attack without worrying about his own ranks.

12.h5!

Starting with this moment, White pays no attention to the material balance, his chief goal being to gain time to open kingside lines as fast as he can.

12...exf3 13.hxg6 hxg6 14.Bh6! fxg2

15.Rh4!

Spassky refrains from recapturing the pawn right away, so as not to disrupt a well-known and highly effective mechanism for attacking a fianchettoed bishop. Black’s reply is forced, since he is unable to cover the h6-square.

15...Ng4 16.Bxg7 Kxg7 17.Qxg2
Chapter 4: Open Lines

Here's an instructive picture. At the cost of two pawns, White has opened all three lines against the enemy king position. In addition, he has a considerable lead in development. Black's task is not easy; thus, it is no surprise to see him commit a fresh error.

17...Nh6?!

Other knight retreats were just as bad. After 17...Nf6 18.Nf3 Rh8, the pretty 19.Bxf7! wins in all lines. So the only defensive try was 17...Rg8. But then too, after 18.Rxg4 Bxg4 19.Qxg4, White has a great advantage. Now he rapidly brings up all his pieces.


Commentaries are not needed at this point – it is all perfectly clear.

22...Rg8 23.Rh7+ Kf8 24.Rxf7+ Ke8

The final blow is also delivered, quite logically, by the heavy pieces:


That last was an outstanding example; in it, however, all obstacles were removed by force. Of course, problems involving opening lines favorably for the rooks may also be resolved by positional means. The next game is an excellent demonstration of this.

Karpov – Gligoric
San Antonio 1972

This position has a lot of pieces; it is complicated, but its strategic basis is
clear. The powerful protected passed d-pawn strongly cramps the mobility of Black's pieces, giving White a great positional advantage. And to this, we ought also to add the passive position of the bishop at d6, thanks to its own central pawns. At the same time, Black's extra pawn on the queenside so far has not brought him any dividends, since it is difficult to support a pawn advance there with pieces. Meanwhile, White is all set to advance his own pawns on the kingside, and gets to it immediately.

35.h4! Ke7 36.g5 hxg5 37.hxg5 Nd7
38.Bg4 Rg8

White's pawn assault has brought home its first advantages: an increased amount of space under control, and the open h-file. Only White's pieces can benefit from this, being much more active than their opposition.

39.Kf2 Rh8 40.Rh1 Rcg8 41.Qd1

This move is a good one anyway, and made with an outstanding purpose in mind; but Karpov says that the immediate 41.a3! would have been still stronger.

41...Kd8

This brilliant decision by Karpov, though it may at first sight seem hard to understand, has the point that, from g1, the queen takes control of the two most important points in this position: the weak pawn at c5, which will also be attacked by the knight at b3, and the h2-square. (Why this square is important will be seen shortly)

42.Qg1!!

Making this vital maneuver possible was the second point of White's previous move.

43...Qe7?!

Gligoric loses his chance to offer much more stubborn resistance by playing 43...a5!? True, even then, after 44.Qh1! Rxh2+ 45.Qxh2 Qe7 46.a3, White would still have had a considerable advantage.

44.Nb3 Kc7
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45.Kf3!

This would be a good place to quote Karpov himself: “The best place for the king is f3, where it avoids checks, gives extra protection to the bishop on g4, and clears the g1-a7 diagonal for the bishop+queen battery and the second rank for rook maneuvers” (A. Karpov, Sto Pobyednikh Partii, Moscow “FiS” 1984). What you have here is an outstanding example of the logical analysis of a position, resulting in the choice of the strongest move in this situation.

45...Nd7

White has done all he can on the kingside; there is no more to be extracted there, now that his opponent has dug himself in. But – while White can move his pieces easily and quickly over the greater part of the board that he has acquired for himself, every maneuver of Black’s army – squeezed onto the back three ranks, and also not counting the squares controlled by White’s pawns – is achieved with great difficulty. It is no surprise, then, that as soon as White carries the play to a different part of the board, Black simple cannot get there in time to stop him.

46.a3! bxa3 47.Ra2! Rh4 48.Rxa3 Rgh8 49.Rb1! Rb8

On 49...Rh1 50.Qxh1 Rxh1 51.Rxh1, White has an easy win. And on 49...Qe8, there follows 50.Na5.

50.Qe1!

The white queen transfers to the queenside, and the game ends. Now it is abundantly clear what role is played by an advantage in space.

50...Rxg4 51.Kxg4 Bc8 52.Qa5+

Back to Basics: Strategy

An outstanding positional achievement, on a grand scale.

Mikhail Tal was a great master of the art of “clearing” files for his rooks.

I have prepared here a small selection of examples of his creativity (now there is someone to whose work the word “creativity” applies in full measure!) Those wishing to study this theme at greater depth should study the games of one of the greatest geniuses in chess history.

White has achieved a great deal. He has two extra pawns, and the pair of bishops. But he has his problems, too – chief among them being his delayed development, giving Black hopes of continuing the battle. Or perhaps I should say, “gave” – until White made his next move:

30.Be3!

And now it turns out that taking the bishop would lose by force, since after 30...Bxe3 31.fxe3 Qxe3+ 32.Kh1, the white rook comes into the game with decisive effect, thanks to the files that have been opened for it. Thus, if 32...Qe5 33.Rd1 decides; and on 32...Qxc3 33.Rf1+. So Black had to resign. 1-0

The most typical means of opening files is the breakthrough – such as in this game:

![Chess Diagram](image)

Tal – Podgaets
Sochi 1970

At first glance, this position looks quite murky. Both sides have something to brag about. White has the advantage in development and space, and his opponent’s king has not yet been sheltered. What does Black have? Two things – first: the opposing center pawns are so placed on the same color squares as the opponent’s bishop. In other words: they all stand on dark squares, which means White has poor control of the light ones. And this reason gives rise to the second factor: the excellent black knight in its invulnerable centralized position. These plus-factors could outweigh the accomplishments of the enemy’s position, if... if only it were Black to move here! He could castle, thereby taking the greater part of White’s trumps from his hands.

All of these words of mine have a single aim: to explain why White’s next move
is not just very strong, but in a larger sense, even necessary, from a positional point of view. White must act decisively!

21.c6! bxc6 22.Ba3 f5 23.exf6 gxf6

Now it is clear how much that breakthrough has accomplished for White. By sacrificing one little pawn, he has obtained decisive advantages: the opposing king now cannot now either side; he has changed a half-open file into an open one, and now he will assemble an invading army on that file.

24.Rb3! Kd8 25.Rfb1 Rh7 26.Qg3 Nb6

27.Rxb6! axb6 28.Qg8+ Qe8 (28...Kc7 29.Qxa8) 29.Qxh7

The conclusion is obvious: 29.Qxh7 Rxa3 30.Rxb6 Ra8 31.Rb7 Rc8 32.Rg7. 1–0

When treating the theme of opening files with a breakthrough, it is a good idea to include this non-Tal game.

White’s advantages are indisputable. He has a protected passed d-pawn, and pressure on the half-open b-file, with prospects of doubling rooks there. He could have exerted direct pressure along the file by 49.Reb2, but one imagines that Gligoric did not want to give his opponent the opportunity to create his own battery of rooks by 49...Rbe7 50.Rxb6 Rxe4+. Therefore, after some thought, he followed the breakthrough line:

49.d6! Kd7 50.Reb2 Kc6

White’s idea was based on the winning endgame he would get after 50...Kxd6 51.Rxb6+ Rxb6 52.Rxb6+ Kc7 53.Ra6. Black’s chief problem in this case is that he does not have any real counterplay. Thus, he declined the pawn.
Here it is all different; this is a more typical Tal “party” position. He has already sacrificed material, and his opponent’s king is wandering under the predatory eyes of the white pieces. But White’s rooks are still inactive; and there does not seem to be a way to achieve success with only the white forces currently active. The general recipe for such cases is well-known, and we have discovered it ourselves: bring up the reserves, as fast as possible. Which lines should we use? There is the open d-file, but that one is well protected against invasion. How did Tal do it? In typical Tal-style: he gave up his last minor piece, in order to open files for his rooks and clear the key g6-square:

21.Nxe5! Qe8

Unpleasant necessity. White would win easily after 21...Kxe5 (21...Bxe5 22.Qg6+) 22.f6+ Ke6 23.Qf5+ Kf7 24.Qxh7+.

22.Nxd7+ Rxd7

It does not seem that one should have to think here – why not take the pawn, especially with check? But after 23.Qxh6+ Kf7 24.Rae1 Be5, Black would be doing fine. And this is not surprising, since the White rooks would
still be out of play. Of course, when he started this whole operation, Tal had something quite different in mind. Rather than take an enemy pawn, he gave up one of his own, in order to open up a path for his rook.

23.e5!! Bxe5 24.Qxh6+

Now here, the check works, since the queen is no longer acting alone.

24...Kf7 25.Rae1 Rd5

Here, Black could have made his opponent’s life more difficult by selecting the most dangerous continuation: 25...Rad8.

In that case, White would have had to find the only correct continuation, 26.Kh1. White needs to get out of the way of the check, as the variation 26.f6? Qh8! 27.Qxh8 Bd4+ shows here, it is Black who wins! But after this move, things are in order for White once again, and after 26...Rd2 27.Qg6+! Kf8 28.Qg5! R8d7 29.f6, his attack is decisive.

26.Qh7+ Kf6

27.Re4! Bd4+

Here too, Black could have set his opponent a more difficult task by playing 27...Bxh2+. Then White would have had to figure out that his only appropriate response would be 28.Kh1. (The “obvious” 28.Kxh2 would not win: 28...Qxe4 29.Qg6+ Ke5 30.Qe6+ Kd4 31.Rd1+ Ke3 32.Re1+ Kf2!) 28...Qxe4 29.Qg6+ Ke5 30.Qe6+ Kd4 31.Rd1+ Ke3 32.Re1+ Kf2 33.Qxe4.

28.Kh1!

After 28...Qxe4 29.Qg6+ Ke7 (29...Ke5 30.Qe6#) 30.f6+, the queen is lost. 1-0

And now, we come to the most amazing example of our Tal collection.
However long you may look into this position, you cannot imagine either side being able to occupy an open line. The only one that might eventually come open would be the e-file; but in that case, there would be rook exchanges there, nothing more.

First, Tal brings his other rook to that file.

20.Rd1

Now, after a quiet continuation, such as 20...Bd7, White would retain compensation for his sacrificed pawn, but no more than that. Benko, however, played...

20...f6?

Apparently, he had concluded that he had the right to try for more than complex equality; but he had underestimated one possibility, which is quite frankly hard to believe:

21.e6 f5

The rook acts as though it had been developed to a half-open file! Perhaps it is true, to a certain extent; but the file is certainly a short one: just one square left for the rook. Understandably, one should expect that Tal would make a jump toward the kingside; but as I said before, it is hard to believe it has any force.

22...Bxb2?

And Benko did not believe it, calmly grabbing a second pawn. In fact, this is just what he had in mind, when he made his 20th move. Black faced considerable problems even after the best continuation, 22...Bf6 23.Ng5. Note how White’s pieces hang over the black king’s position. But how effective is this collection? After the necessary preparations, 23...Rb6 24.c4! bxc3 25.bxc3 Bb3 26.c4 (White has strengthened his center, and cleared the long black diagonal; now he can proceed with his attack) 26...Rb4, it turns out that the loaded gun can, after all, shoot: 27.Nxh7! Bxh4 28.Qc3 Bf6 29.Nxf6+ exf6 30.e7 Rxe7 31.Qxf6 Rd7 32.Qxg6+ Kh8 33.Bg5, and the attack crashes through after 33...Qf8 34.Bf6+ Rg7 35.Qh6+! Kg8 36.Bxg7 Qxg7 37.Qxd6.

All this is very difficult, of course, especially when you’re in full battle fury, and have to find these preparatory position-improving maneuvers. But Tal could have done it!

23.Bf8!!

Now, however, things are much simpler.
Chapter 4: Open Lines

It is amazing, of course, to see how effectively the white rook performs on the h-file in all lines. And to believe in it from many moves back was really very difficult!

23...Rxf8

Black has nothing else, since all other reactions lead to mate: 23...h5 24.Qh6 Rxf8 (24...Bf6 25.Qxg6+ Kxf8 26.Qf7#) 25.Ng5; 23...Kxf8 24.Rxh7 Bg7 25.Qg5.

24.Qh6 Rf7 25.exf7+ Kxf7 26.Qxh7+

Here, Black ought to have resigned; but you can see how powerful the shock of White’s 23rd move must have been.

26.Bg7 27.Rh6 Qg8 28.Qxg6+ Kf8 29.Ng5 Qxd5

30.Rh8+! 1-0

The next example offers an unexpected, but typically Tal solution to the problem. And although it is somewhat simpler than the previous one, its proper place is here, at the end of the series, serving as the bridge transporting us into the next subsection.

13.e6! fxe6 14.Qg3 Nf8

But now comes a completely atypical – more than that – amazing in its unexpectedness – solution:

15.Bh5!! cxd4

It turns out that taking the bishop loses: 15...gxh5 16.Rxh5 Kf7 (if 16...e5, then 17.f5 Kf7 18.Bh6 Bxh6 19.Rxh6 Bxf5 20.Ng5+ winning) 17.Rg5! Bh6 18.Nf3! Nxc4 (18...Bxg5 19.Nfxg5+ Kg8 20.Nxe6+) 19.Qg4 Ng6 20.Qh5!, with a winning attack. From these
variations, it is already clear that the bishop sacrifice was intended to clear a path for the rook to get at the opposing king. But now, too, its invasion is unavoidable; and with it, the breakthrough of the rest of White’s pieces into the kingside.

16.Bxg6 Bd7

17.Rh5!

Now comes the moment I had in mind when I spoke of a bridge to transport us into our concluding subtheme. The rook arrives, in order to set up a battery with the queen, as follows: rook in front, queen behind it.

17...Bc6 18.Rg5 Nxg6 19.Rxg6 Bxe4 20.Rxg7+ Kh8 21.Qg5 1-0

In conclusion, let us look more closely at the question we just brought up.

We’re talking about the most appropriate arrangement of the heavy pieces on open lines – which most often means files.

The following classic game quite clearly dots all the “i”s.

Alekhine – Nimzovich
French Defense [C17]
San Remo 1930

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nc3 Bb4 4.e5 c5
5.Bd2 Ne7 6.Nb5 Bxd2+ 7.Qxd2 0–0
8.c3 b6?!

This move introduces a dubious plan of action. Today, we know that it is much better to orient Black’s play around getting in the freeing push f7-f6, either immediately or after the preparatory 8...Nbc6.

9.f4 Ba6 10.Nf3 Qd7 11.a4 Nbc6?

And this positional oversight puts Black in serious trouble. The following white pawn thrust had to be prevented by 11...c4.

12.b4! cxb4

After 12...c4 13.Nd6, White would still have a significant advantage.

13.cxb4 Bb7 14.Nd6
Chapter 4: Open Lines

14...f5?

Amazing! Black voluntarily immobilizes his own forces, apparently hoping to wait it out behind his pawn barricades. 14...Nf5!? would have been much better, although even then, White’s advantage would still have been considerable. But now, White’s position is just strategically winning. Aron Nimzovich, that great teacher of positional wisdom, had a number of such terrible, unexplainable positional lapses – such as 16.g4?, for example, in the famous game Nimzovich-Capablanca, New York 1927.

15.a5! Nc8

16.Nxb7!

Of course! The right piece to exchange is precisely that bishop that will open the gates for White’s pieces to invade the light squares on the queenside. In view of Black’s terribly constricted position, the knight on c8 will be left to do nothing but duplicate the function of the other black knight.

16...Qxb7 17.a6! Qf7

Alekhine gives a funny variation here: 17...Qe7 18.Bb5 Nxb4 19.Rb1, and the knight is lost. It illustrates the terrible state of Black’s position, the consequence of his positional lapses.


Here, White could already have played 21.Ra3, etc., but there is no need to hurry.

21...Qe8 22.Rac1

Here again, he could have played 22.Ra3! Rc7 23.Rac3 Rac8 24.Qc1.

22...Rab8 23.Qe3 Rc7

By this time, Alekhine had found the most effective deployment of his forces, and set about executing it.
Back to Basics: Strategy


Here’s what we are talking about! White’s heavy pieces are lined up on the open file in the most effective order: rooks in front, queen bringing up the column rear. Not infrequently, this order of invasion is proper, even with only one rook.

26...Rbc8 27.Ba4 b5 28.Bxb5 Ke8 29.Ba4 Kd8

Such complete paralysis of all the pieces is not something you often see. Black’s best course here was to resign; but once he decided to continue playing, White took the simplest possible course, making neutral moves, until his opponent ran out of pawn moves, and had to start moving pieces.

30.h4! h5 31.Kh2 g6 32.g3, and Black has to lose a piece. 1-0

A similar motif dominates the next ending as well, but in a more complex form.

Karpov – Spassky
Montreal 1979

Although the only fully open line here is the c-file, it is not difficult to see that the main point of interest, for both sides, is the d-file, and on it – the isolated pawn on d5.

The problem of the isolated pawn is one of those strategic problems we have known for a long time. An especially significant aspect, and one which has been more closely studied than the rest, is the question of the isolated center pawn.

I shall lay down here, in the shortest possible format, the conclusions drawn from over one hundred twenty years of observing this phenomenon, beginning with Zukertort and Steinitz’s disputes in the first world championship match in history. Here are the most important general points:

(1) An isolated pawn is always a weakness.
Chapter 4: Open Lines

(2) But there is an another side to the coin: not infrequently, the pawn can also become an asset to the position, when it assists in gaining space – just look at the diagrammed position above. And the second point leads us to the third:

(3) Making effective use of this advantage in space is best done with a lot of pieces – preferably minor pieces – on the board. These pieces are also very good defenders of the isolated pawn from direct attacks by the rooks, which should be obvious enough.

(4) And it follows, from point #3, that the one who has the isolated center pawn should keep as many minor pieces on the board as possible, and, as a rule, trade off the rooks.

(5) Meanwhile, the side which is playing against the isolated center pawn should trade off the minor pieces, and retain his heavy pieces, especially the rooks, for direct attacks on the “isolani.”

(6) And, last but not least: the side playing against the “isolani” should take care that the isolated pawn will find it difficult to take any forward steps.

And now, armed with new knowledge, let us return to our diagram.

It is not hard to see that White has carried out a considerable portion of the program which is mandatory for one playing against the isolani. The d5-pawn is securely blockaded, all the knights have been traded off, and Black’s bishops are passive. In consequence, Black is deprived of any real active possibilities, and White can develop pressure against the isolated center pawn unhindered. Clearly, in order to do this, he needs to send his heavy pieces against it. We already know how this should be done: rooks in front, queen bringing up the column rear. And this is what Karpov did.


Up to this point, events have developed according to the principles we have learned. What do we have here? White has achieved everything he wished for; but he cannot deliver the decisive blow yet, since his opponent has brought up all his reserves. Such a state of affairs is also quite typical, and we should examine it as well.

Clearly, White has achieved a great deal, and a long-lasting advantage, working in the main direction. But he cannot expect to score a victory on that path alone. We have already run into similar situations, and the moral is a familiar one: we need to open a second front.

The first question is: Where? Understandably, not on the queenside, where White has no resources available; but the kingside, let’s say, the g7-square, with the entire a1-h8 diagonal behind it – now that could very easily present us with the desired

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new goals. The bishop on c3 cannot do it alone, so we need to look for ways to support it. Let’s see how Karpov accomplished this.

28.Qh5!

Now it is clear that the d1-square also provided a nice trampoline for the transfer of the white queen. The threat is e3-e4.

28...a6 29.h3!

Karpov begins preparations for a wing assault with his pawns.

29...Qc6 30.Kh2 Qb5

31.f4! f6 32.Qd1!

The queen needs to retreat, and the d1-square is still its best post.

32...Qc6 33.g4! g5

Spassky has accepted the fact that he needs to give up a pawn, and strives to make the resulting position a blockaded one.

34.Kh1!

Played in the most typical Karpov style possible. Before beginning aggressive maneuvers, he constructs his own position so as to minimize his opponent’s counterplay. This applies absolutely to White’s 30th move, as well! What gives this way of playing a special savor is the fact that the side which completely deprives the opposition of any active counterplay will find it significantly easier to find various maneuvers within his own camp than the side which risks tripping over a mine at any moment. In this aspect, as well as many others, Karpov is the heir to two giants, Capablanca and Petrosian.

34...a5 35.f5 Bf7

White’s kingside operations have led finally to the black bishop being driven away from e6, which at last makes the central breakthrough possible.

36.e4 Kg7 37.exd5 Qc7 38.Re2!

Now White needs to find a way to break down the blockade. In such a position, it has to be there – White’s advantage is too great, and the playing field too wide. The move made by Karpov begins the rearrangement of his pieces.
Chapter 4: Open Lines

![Chessboard Diagram]

38...b5?

A serious tactical error, possibly brought on by time-pressure. Black’s position, however, was very unpleasant in any variation. With his last move, among other things, White prepared a very typical exchange sacrifice. Thus, on 38...Bd6 he would have continued 39.Re6?!, with the following likely continuation: 39...Bxe6 40.fxe6 Re7 41.Qf3 Be5 42.Qf5 Bxc3 43.Be4! Kf8 44.Rxc3 Qe5 45.Qxe5 fxe5 46.Rf3+ Kg7 47.Rf5. This endgame would have to be considered a win for White. But of course, the game would have lasted more than just one move. Now, it ends at once:

39.Rxe7! Rxe7 40.d6 Qc4

This is what Spassky was counting on, but the following simple counterblow ends it all.

41.b3! 1-0

The pawn could not be taken: 42...Qxb3 42.Bxf6+

In this example also, the heavy pieces were drawn up on the open file in the most effective order: rooks in front, queen bringing up the column rear.

Not infrequently, this kind of action is correct even with just one rook. We have already seen one such example of this theme in the game Tal-Kampenuss.

Now let’s look at a contemporary example.

We have a game by one of the brightest (if not the brightest, but let’s wait and see – time will tell) representatives of the new generation.

![Chessboard Diagram]

Carlsen – Granda Zuniga
37th Olympiad, Turin 2006

Here we have a position with a pawn structure that is very typical of a number of systems of the Sicilian Defense. In this game, the young and thoroughly modern Magnus Carlsen skillfully brings to life the classic plan of Efim Geller. What is interesting is that positions with this structure were especially popular years before our young hero was even born. And his virtuoso play in this position shows that Magnus’ play contains a healthy dose of the chess classics.

11.f3! Bb7 12.Rf2!

Everything according to the best of Geller’s examples. The rook goes to d2, in order to get in front of the queen and
create the classic battery! But in contrast to all our previous examples, the most important task of this battery will be not so much to exert pressure on the black pawn at d6, but to provide maximum strengthening of his control over the strategically vital d5-square.

12...Qc7 13.Bf1 Rfb8

Relying upon the experience of Geller’s games, the position that occurs after 13...Rfd8 14.Rd2 Nc5 15.Nxc5 dxc5 16.Bc4 should be evaluated as being significantly better for White.

This is the right time to say that his strategy is primarily aimed at exploiting the light-square weaknesses in the opponent’s camp, and especially along the a2-g8 diagonal, whose most vulnerable square is d5. And in fact, the entire d-file requires Black’s constant care.

14.Nc1!

This move, which looks strange at first sight, initiates yet another important element of this brilliant and impressively deep plan, worked out by Geller in the 1960s: the knight travels via c1, a2 and b4 to d5!

14...Nc5 15.Rd2 Ne6 16.Na2 Nd4

The attempt to get out of the bind by 16...d5 17.Nxd5 Nxd5 18.exd5 would be refuted by 19.c3 Nf5 20.Bf2Bg5 21.Re2, when White retains his extra center pawn.

17Nb4 Rd8 18.Kh1!

The king escapes a possible pin on the a7-g1 diagonal.

18...a5

White’s plans include establishing a piece on the d5-square. With his last move, Black forestalls this; but it comes at a stiff price, since the important b5-square is permanently weakened. On the other hand, it is already hard to give good advice here.

19.Nd3

Just so. The double exchange on d5, resulting in a white pawn ending up there, instead of a piece, would be a dream outcome for Black.

19...Ne6 20.Nf2
Chapter 4: Open Lines

Black's position is very sad. He has nothing to compensate for his numerous weaknesses. But that still does not mean he had to commit the following oversight:

20...Nd7?

20...Ne8 would have been better, of course.

21.Nb5 Qb8 22.Nxd6

Tired of suffering, Black resigned, although that might seem at first sight to be a hasty decision. Still, after 22.Nxd6 Bxd6 23.Rxd6, his position is both strategically and technically lost. 1-0

It is interesting that the “proper” queen + rook battery ended up playing the decisive role!
Chapter 5: Weaknesses

What we call a “weakness” defines one of the most fundamental elements of chess strategy. Thanks to our life experiences, we can all sense, more or less, what is meant by this terminology, but sensing by itself is insufficient. A clear definition of what we are learning or examining is necessary, to avoid confusion. Let’s use the following, somewhat simplified definition: A weakness, in chess, should be considered anything that requires defending, over a sufficiently long period of time. The reference to time is necessary, so as not to create confusion with that situation in which the threatened object may be freed from threats in a very short period of time (one, two, three moves, at most), after which it ceases to require our attention. This definition will make it easier to understand why the weakness factor is afforded such a prominent place in chess strategy. First of all, a weakness might just be lost; and secondly, in order to avoid the first, it must be defended, placing those forces which are detailed to the defense in a passive position. And this brings it various kinds of unpleasantness.

Now let’s look at some examples of what we have been describing works out in practice, and what benefit we can derive from the fact that our opponent possesses various weaknesses. (D)

White’s great advantage is clear. Not only does he have an extra pawn, but his queen is beautifully centralized, too. His position must be assessed as technically won; but turning it into an actual victory requires technique. And Vassily Smyslov never had any problems with that phase of the game!

Here too, he finds an accurate, unstoppable path to victory.

45.e6! fx6

The endgame after 45...Qe7 46.Qd7 Qxe6+ 47.Qxe6 fx6 48.Kd3 is an elementary win for White, as would also be the case after 45...Qa6+ 46.Kd2 fx6 47.Qd3.

And now, the solution to the problem is:

46.Qe4!!

Beautifully played, unexpected, and quite strong. One can better understand the strength and the point of this move
by comparing it to the obvious continuation 46.Qxe6+ Kh7 47.Qd6. Then, after 47...b3, Black still has hopes of a draw; whereas now, he must lose either the pawn at g4 or at b4. Either of those pawns is worth far more than the pawn at e6. To understand how this became possible, look at the diagram: there it is clear to see that Black has three weak pawns. It is no surprise, then, that the powerfully placed White queen would have such a pleasant choice.

46...Qa6+

If White takes the b-pawn, he will have a passed pawn, which would shortly bring him victory.

47.Qd3!

The key move of this variation. If the queens are exchanged, the result is the same endgame we saw in the note to move 45.

47...Qb6 48.Qxg6+ Kf8 49.Qxh5 Qd4

This attempt at counterattack meets an elementary refutation:

50.Qf3+ Kg7 51.b3 Qb2+ 52.Kf1

Now it is over, and Black should resign. The rest of the game requires no comment.

52...Qc1+ 53.Kg2 Qc3 54.Qe3 e5 55.h5 Qc6+ 56.Kg1 Qc3 57.Qg5+ Kf7 58.Qg6+ Ke7 59.h6 Qxb3 60.h7 Qd1+ 61.Kg2 Qd5+ 62.f3 Qd2+ 63.Kh3 Qd7+ 64.Qg4 Qd1 65.Qg7+ 1-0

The same theme is featured in a well-known game of Fischer’s, with an excellent short formulation at the end.

Szabo – Fischer
King’s Indian Defense [E70]
Leipzig 1960


Fischer picked the right moment for a useful exchange. Its only shortcoming is that Black offers his opponent the advantage of the bishop pair; but in this position, it plays almost no role. Moreover, it is possible that, eventually, the black bishop on the long diagonal may become the strongest bishop on the board!

11.exd5
Black chose this moment to exchange because recapturing with the other pawn, 11.cxd5, which is the more normal choice in such positions, runs into a counterblow which, although typical, does not always work, just in certain circumstances: 11...c4. If now 12.Bxc4, then 12...Nxe4! 13.Bxd8 Nxd2 14.Kxd8 Rxd8, with advantage to Black. And on 12.Bc2, Fischer gives this variation: 12...Nbd7 13.0–0 Nc5 14.Nc3 b5!, with an active game.

11...Nbd7 12.0–0 Ne5

The best comment to this move was made by Fischer himself in his famous book My 60 Memorable Games – “...weakening White’s e3 and e4... Szabo misjudges White’s attacking prospects.” He should have played 13.Nc3, with equal chances.

13.f4?

One more overly optimistic decision from White. He gives up, not just a pawn, but the base of his entire pawn chain – that is, the unbroken, unified line of pawns from a2 to d5. It is not hard to see that the base of a pawn chain is the pawn on which, like a foundation, the entire pawn-chain construction rests. He should have gritted his teeth and switched into passive defense by 20.Qb1.

19...Qa5! 20.Rc1?

Already, White is experiencing difficulties. Thus, after 17.b3 Ne4, Black’s advantage would be undeniable.

17...Bxf6 18.f5 g5 19.b3
Chapter 5: Weaknesses

24...a4!

A blow against the new base. This is how swiftly and accurately Fischer assesses its consequences, still from the same book: “White’s pawns fall like ripe apples.” White resigned. 0-1

It all started with a positionally unjustified weakening of the center squares, and ended in the destruction of White’s pawn chain.

Here’s another classic example of the successful “working-over” of weak pawns, this time from a specialist in this department: the legendary Akiva Rubinstein.

We can see that all four white pawns are isolated – that is, they require piece protection, which makes them weaknesses. First, Black pins down his opponent to defense, which allows him to activate his king.

41...Ra4! 42.Rd3 Ke7 43.Kg3 Ke6
44.Kf3 Kd5 45.Ke2

45...g5!

There are a number of factors underlying this excellent move. First: after the careless pawn capture 45... Rx d4?, White would achieve a draw, thanks to his outside passed a-pawn, as follows: 46.h4! Kc4 47.Rxd4+ Kxd4 48.a4 Kc4 49.Ke3! d5 50.Kd2! Kb4 51.Kd3 Kxa4 52.Kd4 Kb4 53.Kxd5 Kc3 54.Kd6 Kd3 55.Ke7 f5 56.Kf7 f4 57.Kxg7 f3 58.Kxg6 Ke2 59.h5. The second factor is called fixing the weaknesses; and the third reason is, the second front. We will be dealing with both of these a little later on in this chapter.

46.Rb3 f6! 47.Ke3 Kc4 48.Rd3 d5
49.Kd2 Ra8 50.Kc2 Ra7 51.Kd2

Spielmann – Rubinstein
St. Petersburg 1909
51...Re7 52.Rc3+

Spielmann strives for active counterplay, knowing that he will have to give up one of his pawns. He could have offered stiffer resistance with 52.a4! Ra7 53.Ra3 Kb4 54.Rc3.

52...Kxd4 53.a4 Ra7 54.Ra3

54...Ra5!

As a rule, the earlier an opposing passed pawn can be stopped, the better.

55.Ra1 Kc4 56.Ke3 d4+ 57.Kd2 Rf5!

This important tempo gain became possible, thanks to the fact that White’s passed pawn had not yet advanced too far.

58.Ke1 Kb4 59.Ke2

Almost always, the king is a better blockader than a rook, with very rare exceptions. After 59...Ra5? 60.Kd3, the game would have swiftly headed towards the draw.

60.Ra3 Rf4 61.Ra2 Rh4 62.Kd3

62.Ra3 would also allow Black to win two pawns: 62...Kb4 63.Ra1 Rxh3 64.a5 d3+ 65.Kd2 Kb5 66.a6 Rh8 67.Kxd3 Ra8 68.a7 Kb6 69.Rb1+ Kxa7 70.Ke4 g6 71.Kd5 Re8. As you can see, I have departed somewhat from my principles in annotating this game, and presented some fairly lengthy variations. There are two reasons for this: first, these variations are practically non-branching; and second, in this way, if only on the level of variations, I should like to acquaint you briefly with some of the basic principles of endgame play.

62...Rgxh3+ 63.Kxd4 Rh4+ 64.Kd3

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64...Rxh4

They really are “like ripe apples!”


72...g6+! 73.Kxg6 Rxh7 74.Kxh7 Ke5 75.Kg6 g4!

On 76.Kh5 f5 77.Kg5, Black wins by 77...Ke4 0-1

A sparkling masterpiece of endgame play!

And here’s a contemporary example of excellent technique in exploiting weaknesses.

We can see that, although all four of Black’s pawns are isolated, White also has two isolated, and one backward pawn on a half-open file; so White has no great advantage, along these lines at least. But he does have something. First, his bishop is considerably more active than that of his opponent, which is restricted by its own pawns, especially the pawn on g6. And a comparison of the strength of the knights must give the preference to White’s, which holds an invulnerable position, while Black’s can be driven away at any convenient time by the e-pawn. Additionally, the pair of white rooks is more active than Black’s. At the moment, the game is in a maneuvering stage, as both sides attempt to improve their positions. For the reasons given above, White is able to achieve more here than his opponent.

44.Rch1 Rxh7

This exchange further strengthens White’s position, by getting his rook into the enemy camp.

45.Rxh7 Nb4 46.Be4
46.Bc4+? Kf5 would be considerably weaker, as Black would gain some counterchances.

46...Rd8 47.Nc4 Bc6

As in the previous game, the defending side grows weary under the increasing pressure, and tries to gain at least some freedom by sacrificing material. Black’s chances were not good with passive defense, either: after 47...Bf7 48.Rg7, he could have held out longer, but with hardly any chances to alter the final result.


Aronian has played the difficult technical stage of the game excellently, and now had only to calculate accurately some relatively uncomplicated variations, which he also did well.

56.Bh7! Nb4 57.Rxc5! Nd5+

After 57...Na2+ 58.Kb2 Nb4, White wins quickly by 59.Re5+.

58.Rxd5!

After 58... Kxd5 59.g6, the pawn will cost a rook. 1-0

It is great if our opponent creates weaknesses in his camp by himself; unfortunately, it does not always happen that way! So then, we have to help him with this task, when we get the opportunity, of course. In our next example, Black does find such an opportunity.

White’s pawn chain looks completely healthy and secure. But thanks to the tactical particulars of the position, in the blink of an eye it falls to bits.

1...e4+! 2.fxe4

White’s position is also hopeless after the try 2.Kd2. Then 2...Rxc2+ 3.Kxc2 exf3 4.Kd2 Nc5, with ...Ne4 to follow, will win for Black.

2...Ne5+ 3.Kd2 Nf3+ 4.Kd1 Rxc2 5.Kxc2 Nxe2

The outcome is clear. White’s pawns have been converted into shipwrecked splinters; one of them, the g-pawn, is irretrievably lost. Black has a technically won position.

We find a similar motif in the following classic endgame by the great master of rook endings, Akiva Rubinstein.
Chapter 5: Weaknesses

"Rubinstein is the rook ending of a chess game begun by the gods a thousand years ago." – Savielly Tartakower.

Black now has a nice opportunity to strike a blow at the opposing pawn structure. Rubinstein, of course, does not let this chance pass by.

31...h4! 32.Qxf5+

White cannot keep his chain together. On 32.g4 Rg3+ 33.Kh2 Qxd5 34.cxd5 Ree3, the pawn at h3 falls, and then the king comes under fire from both Black rooks.

32...gxg5 33.gxh4 Rg8+ 34.Kf1 (if 34.Kh2, then 34...Rgg3) 34...Rhx3 35.Ke2 Re8+ 36.Kd2 Rhx4 37.Rg2

Rubinstein has carefully calculated the variations, and now confidently goes after another pawn.

37...Reh8!

A most instructive moment. Black has a decisive technical advantage – that is, one that still needs to be worked out. Rubinstein saw that the endgame with one rook on each side would be won for him; so he traded the other pair, which greatly reduced his opponent’s chances for counterplay. Here we need to recall that two rooks working together are a powerful force, and can sometimes cancel out, or even overcome, any other factors. For this reason, the exchange of one pair of rooks, with the goal of reducing the opponent’s counterchances, is one of the standard techniques for realizing a material or positional advantage in the endgame phase.

38.Kc3 Rh3+ 39.Rd3

If 39.Kc2, then 39...Rh2 is strong.

39...Rxd3+ 40.Kxd3 Rh3+ 41.Kd4

If 41.Kc2, then 41...Rg2+ wins.

41...Re3

Rubinstein has carefully calculated the variations, and now confidently goes after another pawn.
42. Kd5 Rxf4 43. Kc6

The key move of the operation begun on move 41.

44. Rf2 Rg7 45. Kd5 Re7 46. Rf1 Kg5

Here, White should have resigned; but Duras decided to extend the game, continuing his hopeless resistance for another 19 moves.

47. Rg1+ Kf4 48. a3 Kf3! 49. Rf1+ Kg4 50. Rg1+ (D)

50... Kh3! 51. Rf1 Re5+ 52. Kc6 Kg2 53. Rf4 Kg3 54. Rf1 Re5+ 55. Kb7 f4 56. Rc1 d5

and White resigned on the 65th move. 0-1

Now here’s an instructive example from the theory of pawn endgames.

Running about in various patterns with the king does nothing for White, since the black king has enough room to maneuver with the squares e5, e6 and d6. Therefore, White’s only chance is to alter the pawn formation, like this:

1. e5+! fx e5+

And here is the important part:

2. Kc4!


2... Kc6

White also wins after 2...e4 3. Kd4.
Chapter 5: Weaknesses

Now, with 3.e4, White puts his opponent in zugzwang. This is a very simple-looking, but extremely instructive situation. Material is even, the pawn position is symmetrical, and – the most important thing for us right now – there is an equal number of weaknesses on both sides. Yet Black is going to lose all his pawns, while White will not lose a single one! Here’s how it happens:

3...Kd6 4.Kb5 Ke6 5.Kc6 Ke7 6.Kd5 Kf6 7.Kd6, and so forth. And this inevitably leads to the question: apparently, it is not just the number of weaknesses that matters, but also some other factor – which factor is it?

It is a simple one: With an equal number of weaknesses, the more active side will be better able to exploit them.

Let’s look at another example, again from Smyslov, that supports this rule. This is a good time to explain that for this chapter, I planned to use a sizable number of examples from the work of the seventh world champion. When we start talking about solving problems by combinative, attacking means, that will be a very good time (and later on, as well) to use examples from the greatest master in this field, Tal.

But questions of exploiting weaknesses in the opponent’s camp come under the sphere of the technique of realizing positional and material advantages. And in that sphere, one of the most important figures in the history of chess – if not the most important figure – is Smyslov.

At a glance, it is obvious that White has the advantage in this position. It can be measured four ways: (a) his control of the only open file; (b) his more active king; (c) his more active knight; and (d) his more active pawn configuration on the kingside. The number of isolated pawns even favors Black: he has one, White has two. As Smyslov convincingly demonstrates, only White can reap any benefit from the opponent’s isolated pawns. The reason is simple: he has something he can do with it, while his opponent has nothing! The difference in activity of all the elements of the position, without exception, between the two sides explains why this should be so. The game continued...

37.Ke4 h6 38.Rd6! hxg5 39.fxg5
Back to Basics: Strategy

Now all four of White’s pawns are isolated, but Black gains very little from it, for the reason already cited. Meanwhile, White’s pieces forge irresistibly ahead, invading the enemy’s position.

39...Kf8 40.Rc6 Ke8

41.Ke5!

A very useful moment for anyone who wishes to learn the technique of realizing an advantage. White could have won a pawn; but after 41.Nxe6 Re7 42.Rxc7 (how terrible it would have been to lose this game, which is what would happen after 42.Ke5?? a4 43.Kf6 Rxe6+ 44.Rxe6+ Nxe6 45.Kxe6 b3) 42...Rxe6+, Black would gain definite counterplay – better than he had up till now. And an important element in a good technique of realizing an advantage is just this: knowing how to keep one’s opponent from gaining more counterplay than he deserves from his previous play! So Smyslov refuses to take the pawn, choosing instead to strengthen the position of his pieces still further.

41...Kd8 42.Rb6!

Here too, it would not have made sense to let the black rook out with 42.Kd6 Ne8+ 43.Kxe6 Re7+ 44.Kd5 Rxe3.

42...Kc8 43.Kd6 Rf2

On 43...Ne8+ 44.Kc6 Rc7+ 45.Kb5, White collects a lot of Black’s pawns!

But here too, White invades decisively.

44.Kc6! Rc2

On 44...Rxa2, White continues 45.Rb7 Ne8 46.Re7 Kd8 47.Rd7+ Kc8 48.Nxe6, and mates soon.

45.Rb7 Ne8 46.Ra7! Kb8 47.Re7

And now, Black suffers real material losses! 1-0

Now it is time to discuss another important method of exploiting
weaknesses, which flows from the simple observation that the most effective way of exploiting a weakness in the enemy position can be when it can really be attacked – not just theoretically. The method which helps us to hold the weakness on that square where it will be easiest for us to attack, is called...

**Fixing The Weakness**

Let’s see what this is, and how we do it.

![Diagram](image)

Smyslov – Keres
Moscow 1951

Here it would be very useful to demonstrate another principle, which we have not so far mentioned, but which is very important and widely known: the comparative powers of bishops of the same color (and only of the same color!) of that side’s pawn structures. Thus, here we see that all the pawns on White’s queenside are on light squares, and that his bishop moves on the light squares too. If these pawns are also immobilized for the long term – and in this case, this is true – then they will restrict the mobility of their bishop to a serious extent, and for a long time. Such a bishop is usually labeled bad. And in the case where the pawns harmoniously complement the bishop, as here with the black bishop, which moves on light squares, while its queenside pawns stand on squares of the opposite color, that bishop is of course called good. But this is only the first part of our saga of good and bad bishops. The second half of this truth is easily understood: that a good bishop moves on the same color squares as the opponent’s pawns, which means it is capable of attacking them. Meanwhile, a bad bishop will be unable to attack enemy pawns. Here is the direct connection between the abilities of a bishop and weaknesses. In this position, Black undoubtedly has a considerable advantage. In order to increase it, Keres attacks his opponent on the other wing.

42...Bf5! 43.g4

After 43.h4 Bg4+, White loses.

43...Bb1 44.Kf3

![Diagram](image)

44...f5! 45.gxf5 Kxf5 46.Kf2

The Black king must be restrained. After 46.Kg3 Ke4 47.Kf2 Kd3, it breaks in and all is lost.

46...Be4 47.Kg3 Kg6! 48.Kf2
Weaknesses only on the queenside are not enough to win; therefore, Black starts an operation to nail the h3-pawn in place, where it will be a new and excellent target for Black’s bishop. The nail’s role will be played by Black’s h-pawn. This operation to nail down a weak pawn (and, as we shall soon see, the weak square, as well) to its most vulnerable spot is called fixing the weakness.

48...h5! 49.Kg3 h4+! 50.Kf2

Now the pawn at h3 becomes a real weakness, and White must tie down his king to its defense. Then Black need only await the precise moment to put his own monarch into action.

50...Bf5 51.Kg2 Kf6 52.Kh2 Ke6!

After this accurate move, Smyslov resigned. The reason for this, as well as the reason why Black’s king went to e6, instead of to e5 at once, is shown by the variation 53.Kg2 Ke5 54.Kh2 (here’s the secret: by thus losing a tempo, Black forces the white king to go back to h2, so that it can no longer arrive in time to block the path of its black colleague) 54...Bb1! 55.Kg2 Ke4 56.Kf2 Kd3 0-1

It is interesting that, four years earlier, Smyslov, the loser in this game, won an ending very similar to the one we just looked at.

Black’s choice will not surprise us now:
Chapter 5: Weaknesses

42...g5!

This fixes, not one pawn, but an entire chain – even if it is a short one. Interestingly, this time it nails just one pawn, on g4, in place; the other is merely limited in its movements. Theoretically, it might be advanced to h4, with the king’s support; but then, first of all, the king would be far away from the center, where his rival could then break in, as we saw in the previous example; and secondly, Black need only respond with h7-h6 for White’s whole operation to come to nothing. Thus, we may confidently assert that with his last move, Smyslov fixed the whole chain in place.

46.Kf2 Bxh3? 47.Kg3, the black bishop is trapped, while a break-in by the king brings no more than equal chances – you’ll have to trust me on this! But it is all good for us: this turn of events allows us to observe a real gem of technique and calculation!

46.Kd2 Bb1 47.Ke3 h6 48.Bf3

The bishop’s preceding “dances” were aimed at reaching precisely this position.

48...Bc2!

And now, Smyslov begins the concluding operation with a jeweler’s calculating accuracy. It is quite likely that, in making this move, he already foreseen the final position!

Back to Basics: Strategy

51...b5!

Here’s the breakthrough that was prepared by Black’s previous moves. But what is its point, its strategic importance? The answer to the latter question has been known since the days of Nimzovich, who called such actions “attacking the base”. Not too long ago (the game Szabo-Fischer), we touched briefly on this theme. As applied to this position, it signifies the following: it is not easy for Black to reach his opponent’s fixed weaknesses with his pieces, in the form they are currently in. Therefore, he cuts away the d5-pawn’s support. That pawn will then be easy for him to deal with.

52.cxb5 axb5! 53.Bf3

After 53.c4 bxc4 54.Bxc4 Bc2 55.Kd2 Be4 56.a4 Bxd5, all possible pawn endgames are won for Black – as is the bishop endgame. This is all part of the calculation Smyslov had to make when choosing his plan of action on move 48.

53...Bb3 54.Be2

The forcing play continues, following the main line!

55.Bxc4 bxc4 56.a4 Kxd5 57.a5 Kc6

58.Ke4

58...d5+!

58...Kb5? 59.Kd5 is only a draw.

59.Ke5 d4 60.cxd4 c3 61.d5+

61...Kd7!

Here – it must be here!

62.a6 c2 63.a7 c1Q 64.a8Q Qf4#

And may I remind you that all of this was calculated back on move 48! 0-1

You will agree that this endgame deserves to be labeled a gem.

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Chapter 5: Weaknesses

The same method of fixing pawns by "nailing them to the wall" is used in more than just bishop endgames. Here's how it is done in rook endings.

I chose this example because it not only illustrates the problem we are now dealing with, but also because it is interesting from the standpoint of the theory of rook endings. Usually in such four-pawns-to-three positions, with all the pawns on one side and no passed pawns, the likelihood of a draw result is very high, if the defending side has no additional weaknesses. The presence of a weakness or weaknesses will give the attacker additional chances. Here we have a typical, and at the same time classic, example from rook-endgame theory, showing us how such an extra chance might work.

40.h5!

Here is White's chance. The idea is to nail down the pawn at g7. If it were Black's move, he would play ...h6-h5! himself, with a well-known theoretically drawn position.

40...Ra5 41.g4 Ra7 42.Rc6 Ra3 43.f3 Ra5 44.Rc8+ Kh7

Following a more-or-less forcing path, the endgame has reached its culminating point. First, we must evaluate the results of nailing down the g7-pawn. It boils down to the fact that Black's king is shut in at the board's edge, and the attempt to break loose by g7-g6 would lead to a significant weakening of Black's pawns. That would bring about a new situation, which in turn is also of interest to theory — but we are not going to deal with that right now. In the game, Black missed his only, unrepeatable opportunity, and played...

49...Rg3?

He had to continue 49...Rf3; then, after 50.Ke5 f6+ 51.Kf5 Rf1, Black's position is quite defensible, thanks to the pin on the f-pawn. But now White has a forced win. As it plays out, I ask you to note that what dooms Black is precisely the king's distance from the place where the main events are taking place. And the reason for that, we
already know: the nailed-down g-pawn!

50.Rf8! f6

After 50...Rxf4 55.Rxf7, the passed pawn decides. But it decides now, as well!

51.e5

The preliminary exchange by 51...fxe5+ 52.fxe5 would change nothing important. In all lines, the e-pawn is going to cost Black his rook.

52.e6 Rxf4+ 53.Kd5 Rf5+ 54.Kd6 Rxh5 55.e7 Re5 56.e8Q Rxe8 57.Rxe8

This ending is won for White, although not without some effort. Korchnoi copes quite well with the task.

57...Kg6 58.Kd5 Kf5 59.Re1 h5 60.Rf1+ Kg4 61.Ke4 g5 62.Rxf6 h4 63.Ke3 Kg3 64.Ke2 g4 (or 64...Kg2 65.Rg6) 65.Kf1 Kh2 66.Rf4 h3

67.Rxg4 Kh1

In conclusion – the icing on the cake – a pleasing and most useful technique for winning such positions, which you should memorize!

68.Kf2! h2 69.Kg3! Kg1 70.Kh3+

The conclusion would be: 70...Kh1 71.Ra4 Kg1 72.Ra1+ 1-0

An analogous strategy was successfully employed in the following example, taken from Mikhail Shereshevsky’s excellent book, *Endgame Strategy*, (Moscow, FiS, 1988).

Pavlenko – Bagirov
Azerbaijan 1969
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Black undoubtedly has the initiative, chiefly because of his excellently placed rook, whose active placement renders the White a-pawn very vulnerable. In addition, this rook may, if it wishes, move to the second rank (or ‘glutton’s row’, for those of you who may have forgotten), where the f2-pawn, and perhaps the h2-pawn after it, might become the objects of its attention. After these explanations, the point of...

24...g5!

...becomes understandable: those pawns are now pinned down to the vulnerable second rank. Now, if Black had hesitated with his fixing, playing something like 24...Rc2, then (remember the previous example!) White would have a typical, but no less powerful reply, 25.h4. Remember both of these techniques – the fixing and the countermeasure to it, as they will be very useful.


Now Black cuts down the mobility of the pawn at a3.

29...a5! 30.Bc2 Rb2 31.Kd1

Now comes the trade of bishops, which favors Black.

31...Bb3!

This trades off the enemy piece that is the most useful defender, while making the black rook more active, since it now also has the light squares at its disposal. Meanwhile, its white opposite number will be tied to the defense of his a-pawn, which makes him very weak, in comparison to the black one. Eventually, this difference is what decides the game.

32.Bxb3 Rxb3 33.a4 Rb2 34.Ke1 Rb4 35.Ra2 Kg7 36.Kd2
One weakness on the opponent’s queenside is not enough to win the game. Making use of his long-term initiative, Black first seizes more space on the other side of the board, which will eventually make it much easier for him to force the win.

36...h5 37.Kc2 e6 38.Kf3 f5 39.Kg2 Kf6 40.h3 Re4 41.Ra3 Rc4 42.Ra2 Ke7 43.Ra1 Kd6

44.h4

A familiar situation: tortured by his longstanding passivity and the growing pressure of his opponent, White offers a pawn sacrifice in search of any hope at all.

44...g4h4 45.gxh4 Kc5

Black could also have taken the pawn; but Bagirov has a clear plan of action, and does not wish to depart from it. This represents a healthy approach to the technique of realizing a considerable positional advantage. If you have a secure, sometimes even a lengthy path to victory, there is no sense complicating your life. The game only needs to be won once!

46.f3

46...e5!

Covering the f4-square, just in case, so that if a pawn endgame should arise, the White king will not be able to pass through it. Black has no reason to hurry, since his opponent has no counterplay whatever.

47.Kg3 Kb4 48.Rd1 Rc3 49.Kf2 Rc5 50.f4 exf4 51.exf4

If 51.Rd4+, then 51...Rc4.

51...Kxa4 52.Ke3 Kb5 53.Rd8 a4

Black finishes up with a simple shot, but one that is useful to remember.

54.Kd4

54...Kb4! 55.Rb8+ Rb5
Chapter 5: Weaknesses

This was the point of Black's last move. 56.Rc8 a3 57.Rc4+ Kb3 0-1

Up to this point, our conversation has been mainly about weak pawns – weaknesses you can, as the saying goes, touch with your hands, being concrete and visible.

But there is another form of weakness, which is no less important. I'm talking about weak squares, often without pawns on them. Nevertheless, their influence on the outcome of a game can be just as important as that of pawn weaknesses.

The following game will help you to better visualize and understand this.

Alekhine – Yates,
Queen's Gambit Declined [D64]
London 1922


Alekhine's favorite maneuver in such positions. The usual reply was 11.Bxe7.

11...f5?!

With this move, Black takes his first step toward the precipice, even though it only creates a small weakness in his position. By playing 11...Qa5+ instead, he could have set definite problems for his opponent. The best reply then would apparently have been 12.Kf1!!


This knight retreat is strongest in this position – pay attention here.

13...b5?

Now this is the serious positional error. Quiet development of his queenside by 13...b6 14.0-0 Bb7 would have been much better here. But what is the difference? Only this: on b6, the pawn keeps control of the c5-square, while the pawn on b5 does not. Is it possible that this difference could be that crushing? Apparently, in this concrete situation – yes it can! And why? Several reasons.

The first reason is to recall Black’s dubious 11th move, and note that it weakened the e5-square – an important square in the center. Now, the c5-square is right next door – and the same color. Further: the c-file is now opened, giving a clear view to the weakness of
yet another square of the same color, namely c7. And now, let us note that Black’s dark-square bishop has disappeared, while his light-square bishop remains. All this means that: (a) Black’s remaining bishop is bad; and (b) he now has a complex of *long-lasting* weaknesses on dark squares. The rest of the game very clearly shows what dangers accrue to the presence of this kind of weakness.

14.Bxd5!

Of course! This exchange is necessary, for several reasons: (a) it forces open the c-file, and with it, Black now has two weaknesses, while White correspondingly obtains two excellent invasion squares at c5 and c7; and (b) in the absence of a dark-square bishop, those weak dark squares, good or bad, can only be defended by the knight, while his light-square bishop cannot touch them! So from this standpoint, this exchange is good for White.

14...cxd5 15.0-0 a5

16.Nb3?

This the only part of White’s play that deserves criticism. Alekhine is playing too straightforwardly. Strategically, the move is faultless. White intends to trade off his opponent’s last knight, strictly according to the ideas presented above – but the tactical execution is lacking. He should have played 16.Qc7! b4 17.Ne5, with the same purpose in mind, with a great advantage.

16...a4?

One cannot help be amazed at Black’s conduct of this game. Yates was an experienced player, who had by this time played many games against the leading masters of the day – which makes his terrible positional blunders difficult to explain. He is voluntarily inviting his opponent to make the exchange most favorable to himself, while walling his own bishop in once and for all! Instead, he should have tried for the reverse – improving the position of his own bishop, while trying to compensate in some way for his weaknesses with active play. Here was just such an opportunity: he should have played 16...Ba6, and after 17.Nxa5 b4! 18.Rfe1 Bb5 19.Qc7 Nf6, Black would have recovered the a-pawn, and obtained good chances to equalize. But now, he is in bad shape.

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Now everything that I described in the notes to Black’s 13th move and White’s reply has come to pass. White is dominant; and although material is even, Black’s position is absolutely hopeless. I draw particular attention to the fact that all of White’s pieces are now established on dark squares, from which they cannot be driven. Thus, White’s colossal advantage is a consequence of the weakness on the dark squares in Black’s camp. And now, Alekhine executes a typical plan of action in such situations. First, the king gets into the action. As we shall soon see, its prospects are excellent.

22.f3! b3 23.a3! h6

A significant element of the position is the fact that trading rooks, with the goal of easing the pressure, costs Black a pawn: 23...Rc8 24.Rxc8+ Rxc8 25.Rxc8+ Bxc8 26.Nd3 Bd7 27.Nc5. White would win this endgame without much trouble: the knight takes the pawn, followed by a king march to the queenside.

24.Kf2 Kh7 25.h4! Rf8

With Black completely helpless, White brings his king back to the center, where it can help his pieces in the deciding operations. The rest of the game is so obvious, and at the same time so inevitable, that Black could have resigned at this point with a clear conscience. If we could imagine such a position arising, in some strange way, out of a game between two strong contemporary players, many of them, if they had the black pieces, would not have continued from this point.

26.Kg3! Rfb8 27.Rc7 Bb5 28.Rc5 Ba6 29.R5c6 Re8 30.Kf4 Kg8 31.h5 Bf1 32.g3 Ba6 33.Rf7 Kh7 34.Rcc7 Rg8

Now comes the decisive invasion – and all on dark squares!

35.Nd7 Kh8 36.Nf6 Rgf8

And for dessert – a nice, but appealing little combination:

37.Rxg7! Rxf6 38.Ke5! (D)

And the rook is indefensible: 38...Rff8 39.Rh7+ Kg8 40.Rcg7# 1-0

The strategic motifs of this game resonate with the motifs of another, even better known classic game. I was
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either strive to fianchetto his queen’s bishop, or try to get in c6-c5, even a tempo down. For example: 7...0-0 8.0-0 c5!? (or 8...b6?)

8.Nxc4 0–0 9.0–0 c5 10.Rc1 b6 11.Qe2 Bb7 12.Rfd1 Nd5?!

Black was already experiencing some pressure; this move was expressly intended to relieve that. Knowing how the game developed, we should recommend instead 12...cxd4!? 13.Nxd4 a6.

Here is the game’s first critical moment. With our first glance at this position, we can see that White does have a serious lead in development (considerably aided, by the way, by Black’s inaccuracy on move 7). At the same time, it is not quite clear how this advantage can be used, since White must first of all decide what is to be done with the bishop on g5. If he trades on e7, there goes a significant part of his development advantage. So what else is there? Capablanca provided an outstanding answer.

13.Nd6!! Bc6

After 13...Bxg5 14.Nxb7 Qe7 15.dxc5, White ends up with an extra pawn and the better position.

Capablanca – Janowski
Queen’s Gambit Declined [D30]
New York 1918

1.d4 d5 2.Nf3 Nf6 3.c4 e6 4.Bg5 Nbd7

7...dxc4?!

This trade certainly cannot be called a mistake; but it plays into White’s hands, since now the knight on d2 becomes active. In such situations, Black should
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14.Ne4!

After this move, we can see quite clearly how this game resembles our previous example. Both there and here, this move turns out to be a significant positional blunder, leading only to a weakening of Black’s position. He should either have played 14...h6, or gone in for the line 14...Bxg5 15.Nexg5 h6 16.Ne4 Nb4. In either case, White retains an advantage; but it would have been smaller than what he obtains now.

15.Bxe7 Qxe7

Here, as in the analogous situation from the previous game, White has to choose to which square to retreat the knight. In this case, Capablanca’s task was noticeably more complex than Alekhine’s – first, because both g3 and c3 had their selling points; and second, because in this position, he had to do some calculating. Capablanca acquitted himself flawlessly.

16.Ned2!

If we recall our preceding game, guessing this solution would not be difficult! Here it should be said that the opponents of our two great masters in these selected games were different. In his best years, Dawid Janowski was a really strong player, and even played a match with Lasker for the world championship! He did not push that pawn to f5 because he had a poor understanding of the positional basics of chess, but because he intended to continue...

16...e5

...and hoped that this would free his game. But Capablanca, in making his 16th move, had foreseen all of this, and calculated further and more accurately!

17.dxe5 Nxe5 18.Nxe5 Qxe5 19.Nf3 Qe7?

This move was the decisive error. On the other hand, even after the strongest move, 19...Qf6, White could play 20.Bc4 Rad8 21.e4, maintaining a serious advantage, with great winning chances.(D)

20.Nd4!

This is what Capablanca had foreseen, and what Janowski had either underestimated or overlooked. Black is lost in all lines.
20...cxd4 21.Rxc6 Nb4

The knight is lost after 21...Qd7 22.Rc4 dxe3 23.Rd4.


Here Black could have resigned; indeed, playing against Capablanca, he should have. But Janowski continued to push his pieces – which ended up being good for many chess fans, who thus had the opportunity to fall in love with the elegant finale.

25...b5 26.Bxb5 Nxa2 27.Bc4 Nb4 28.Qh5 g6

On 28...Rad8 29.Rh4 finishes matters.

29.Rxg6 Rad8

And here’s that finale I promised you:

30.Rg7!

Now there is really nothing to be done: 30...Kxg7 31.Qg5+ Kh8 32.Rxd8 Rxd8 allows mate by 33.Qf6# 1-0

And now, I should like to offer you two more already classic examples on the same theme of weak squares, from the legacy of one of the deepest masters of chess: the eighth world champion, Tigran Petrosian.

Petrosian – Hernandez
Modern Benoni Defense [A79]
Banja Luka 1979


This is a variation of the Benoni Defense, a complex opening leading to sharp play. Here, Petrosian’s opponent showed a poor understanding of the strategic basis of this opening, by making a move which may indeed fit in with Black’s “compulsory program” – but not here; and besides, it aims to fulfill other tasks.
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13...Ba6?

Here, either 13...Nd7, or 13...Nh5 are usual; sometimes, even 13...Rb8 is played. And only after 14.Nc4 (in all of these variations) does Black answer 14...Ba6. The serious drawback of the move Black played in this game is the very long-term weakening of the light squares in his camp. The remaining White knight will be far more effective than the bishop that is now gone from the board.


Black's position after his error is already significantly worse, and Petrosonian convincingly demonstrates this.

16.Bf4! Bf8 17.Bg5!

With this simple, yet effective maneuver, White has won a tempo, which helps him secure the initiative.

17...h6 18.Bh4 g5?!

This move obviously leads to further weakening of the light squares, while the bishop which could have protected them is now gone. But Black rightly feared f3-f4, with Qd1-f3 to follow. Although this makes a fresh weakness,

he was hoping to drum up at least some counterplay.


En route to punish Black for his positional sins, the knight sets a course for the commanding f5-square.

20...a6 21.Ne2 b5

Black's only hope of counterplay lies on the queen's wing. White should keep the lines there closed.

22.a5!

22...Rec8 23.Ng3 Nce8 24.Be1 Ng7 25.Bc3 Ngh5 26.Ngf5 Re8

27.b3!
A most characteristic manner of play for Petrosian: he undertakes hard-to-understand maneuvers of his pieces and pawns on his own side of the board; only later does it become clear that his entire army is ready for a decisive leap!

27...Qd8 28.Ra2 Kh7

By a short series of threats, White has driven the enemy knights off some important squares; now he can push forward.

31.Ng4 Ng6

This incursion is decisive. Black no longer has any defense.
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12.Ra3

This somewhat unusual method of bringing the queen's rook into the game was Petrosian's favorite continuation in this position.

12...b6 13.Qe2

And here's another unusual-looking decision. Black voluntarily agrees to the destruction of his pawn structure, and the weakening of the f5-square. This idea was pretty popular in those days, in imitation of Fischer's play in the famous third game of his 1972 match with Spassky.

14.Bxh5 gxh5 15.Nd1 Ba6

For a better understanding of this complex position, let's compare it with what we saw in the previous game. In this case, White has already given up the two-bishop advantage he was given in the hope of exploiting, sooner or later, the weaknesses in his opponent's position. In addition, now his light squares are weakened. We can see that Black's ideas had some positional basis. In order to wrest away the initiative and demonstrate the superiority of his position, White sacrificed the exchange.

16.Rh3! Bxf1 17.Nxf1

What was the point of this decision? Chiefly, to deprive Black of his light-square bishop (recall Hernandez's error, on the 13th move of the previous game!). Without it, Black will have a most difficult time defending the weaknesses of his kingside. Is such a positional achievement worth an exchange? Tigran Petrosian demonstrates brilliantly that it is worth even more than that.

17...b5 18.Nde3

Still another difference between this game and the previous one is that here,
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White has no chance to deprive his opponent of his queenside play, which means that soon, both sides will have to compete over whose attack is quicker and more effective on “their” respective flanks.

18...bxa4 19.Nf5 Ng6 20.Rxh5 Be5
21.g3 Rb8 22.N1e3

With this “ill-favored” and hard-to-understand relocation of his queen, Black begins a series of piece maneuvers which are awesome in their depth of positional understanding and accuracy of calculation, leading eventually to a white victory.

The only way to understand this very difficult-to-find move is first to examine the other possibilities very carefully. The first one that springs to mind would be to move the knight from e3. Here’s how that turns out: after 24.Ng4 Qb1! 25.Qd2 Bb2 26.Qh6 Qxc1+ 27.Qxc1 Bxc1 28.Nf6+ Kf8 29.Nxh7+ Kg8 30.Nf6+, White has nothing better than perpetual check. And after 24.Nc4 Qb3 25.Qxb3 Rxb3 26.Bd2, he has only a slight advantage. The move order employed by Petrosian allows him to choose which way the knight will go, depending upon what his opponent does.

24...Qb3

After 24...Qb1, the knight would have gone to c4: 25.Nc4! Qxe4 26.Ncxd6! Bxd6 27.Qh6! Qe1+ 28.Kg2 Qe4+ 29.Kh3 Be5 30.Qxh7+ Kf8 31.Bh6+. After the move Black actually made, White continued...

25.Ng4! Rb7

If Black chooses to pursue the White queen, there is an outstanding combination: 25...Qc3 26.Nf6+! Kg7 27.Rxe5! Qxd2 28.Nf5+ Kf8 29.Rxe8+, with an easy win for White.

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Look at this: on the king’s wing, all the White pieces are set up on weakened light squares in the enemy camp!

26.Kg2!!

The king avoids any possible first-rank checks, killing off any possible counterplay. What that might have been is shown in the next note.

26...Qc4

On 26...Qb1, White wins as follows: 27.f3! Bb2 28.Qh6 Qxc1(without check!) 29.Qxh7+ Kf8 30.Ngh6, and Black cannot escape mate.

27.Nxe5! Qxe4+

Black’s game is still hopeless after 27...Rx e 28.Nxd6.

28.f3 Qxe5 29.Nh6+ Kf8 30.Rxe5 Rxe5 31.Ng4 Ree7 1-0

And now let’s see how weak squares can be exploited by bishops, not just by knights.

For his sacrificed pawn, White has more than enough compensation. His only task now is to expand his initiative. In such Sicilian Defense positions, the standard method is the pawn advance 18.g5; but as Karpov himself explains, that would be met by 18...hxg5 19.hxg5 g6, leaving him hard pressed to figure out whether including the moves g4-g5 and g7-g6 favored White, or not. What he thought up instead might at first give many players a sizable shock:

18.Rd5!!

It makes one want to shout: “There you go! I’m not just giving up the rook for a bishop – I’m giving up the rook that stopped you from castling! And what do I get in return for this valuable prize?” To a great extent, we get our answer – from the previous game! There, Petrosian, also completely unforced, gave his rook for the opponent’s bishop, which was controlling important light squares in his position. In spite of the fact that the two positions are not at all similar, the idea behind this sacrifice is the same: the bishop on c6 is the most valuable
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(not the strongest, but just that, the most valuable!) black piece, defending not only the key pawn at b7, but also the two diagonals a4-e8 and h1-a8. We shall soon see how important a role it played in this opposition.

18...Bxd5

He must take as on 18...Qc7 19.Rgd1 Bxh4 20.Bb5, he is still going to have to trade.


Already it is clear that the exchange sacrifice brought White domination over the light squares, in the most important part of the board. Also very important is the fact that the lines for the dominating light-square bishop are open.

21...Bb4 21.c3 b5

Sax finds a chance for counterplay. The position after 21...Bd6 22.Qxb7 Qc7 23.Qxe4 would have been very unpleasant for Black.

22.Be2 Bd6

An excellent solution, and one that required White to delve deeply into the secrets of the position. First of all, one must agree with Karpov that after 23.Bxb5+ Ke7, the black king would be securely placed. Then it is time to do something much more difficult: find the blow 23...Qxc3+, and correctly calculate the consequences of the variation 24.Kb1 Qxb2+ 25.Kxb2 Ba3+ 26.Kxa3 Rxd5. It is complex; but Karpov assures us that this is a winning endgame for White, despite his opponent’s small advantage in material. I spent some time analyzing the possible developments here, and I think his assessment is correct. The game continuation,

23...Ke7?

...put Black in a hopeless situation. It appears that his best chance was 23...Qc7!? 24.Bxb5+ Ke7.

24.Bc5!

Sax underestimated the power of this move. Now his position collapses.

24...Bxc5 25.Qxe5+ Kd7 26.Qxc5 Qc7 27.Qf5+ Ke7 28.Qxe4+ Kd7 29.Qf5+ Ke7 30.Re1 Rd6
Chapter 5: Weaknesses

31.Bc4+

31.Bxb5+? Re6 would have been much weaker.

31...Kd8 32.Bxb5 a6 33.Ba4 g6
34.Qf3 Kc8

White’s deep play concludes with a brilliant shot:

35.Re7!! Rd1+

Capturing is impossible: 35...Qxe7 36.Qa8+ Kc7 37.Qa7+ Kd8 38.Qb8#.

36.Kxd1 Qxe7

36...Rd8+ would have held out longer, but after 37.Rd7! Rxd7+ 38.Bxd7+, White has an elementary win.

37.Qa8+ Kc7 38.Qa7+ Kd6 39.Qb6+

A mating finish follows: 39...Ke5 40.Qd4+ Ke6 41.Bb3# 1-0

We’ve now seen many examples of the effective exploitation of various weaknesses. But it happens – quite often, in fact – that our opponent may have an obvious weakness, yet one that cannot be exploited, either by direct assault, or by slow siege. In such cases, we have a very important principle to help us out, which is usually labeled...

The Two-Weaknesses Principle

Although I myself prefer to call it the second front, since that label better explains how this particular mechanism works. Now let’s see what kind of mechanism this is, and exactly how it works.

![Chessboard](image)

Vajda – Asrian
Minorca 1996

This is an opposite-colored bishops endgame, in which, as is well known, even the two extra pawns that Black has might not be enough to win, since the blockading motifs can be so effective here. Indeed, Black cannot give up the b-pawn; and advancing it would give White’s king the c2-square – how would Black win then?

However, there is a solution! It consists of enlarging the battlefield, by opening up a second front, which should be as far as possible from the first front! Then, the defending side is very likely to be unable to go everywhere at once. I repeat: this method is usually termed the principle of the second weakness, but soon we shall see that calling it the second front is more accurate.
In the game, this was accomplished as follows:

85...g5!!

Other move orders, such as 85...b2 86.Kc2, and then the thematic 86...g5, would work as well. But at any rate, it is still completely unclear where all this is going.

86.hxg6

If 86.Be6 f5 87.gxf5 (Black also wins after 87.Bxf5 b2 88.Kc4 Ka2 89.Kd5 Bf4 90.Ke6 b1Q 91.Bxb1+ Kxb1), Black continues with 87...Bf6 and White is helpless (but not 87...g4? 88.Bxb3! Kxb3 89.Ke4 Bd6 90.f6 Kc2 91.f7 Kd2 92.f8Q Bxf8 93.Kf4, with a draw).

86...b2! 87.Kc2 f5 88.gxf5 h5

With his two-pawn sacrifice, Black has created a passed pawn on the other side – that is, opened a second front. Here we could say that he gave his opponent a second weakness, if we take into consideration that a passed pawn for one side is always a weakness for the other side, because dealing with it entails sending off some forces – in other words, he must go on the defensive. And we define a weakness as precisely whatever requires defending.

In this game, it is all over. After 89.Kb1 h4 90.Bd5 h3 91.Kc2 h2 92.Kb1 Bf6! (Black is in zugzwang!) 93.Bf3 (After 93.Kc2 h1Q! 94.Bxh1 Ka2, the pawn will queen) 93...Kb3 94.Bh1 Kc3, the black king travels to the other wing to help its pawn. Notice how both white pawns have been rendered harmless by the enemy bishop, which also carries out another mission of exceptional importance: defending its own passed pawn. This technique, which we call the one diagonal principle, is most typical of endings with opposite-colored bishops.

Seeing that his position was hopeless, White resigned. 0-1

One more modern example of the “second weakness” theme.

Aronian – Huzman
Warsaw 2005

This unusual-looking position resulted from the very interesting play that preceded it. How should we evaluate this? Materially, it is about even; but positionally speaking, White’s advantage is great, based first and foremost on the
poor coordination among the black pieces, the open position of his king, and the power of White’s pawn triangle at e3, e5 and f4. All these factors clearly indicate the direction White’s play will take – toward the king’s wing. But suddenly, he played...

38.Bc8!

...which turned out to be a strong continuation. Why? What led to this decision?

The problem is that achieving success on the kingside alone is very difficult here, if at all possible – the previously mentioned pawn triangle may look threatening, but for now, it is not very mobile. A piece attack against the black king is not a realistic option here: White has too few pieces. But Aronian’s sharp eye has spotted one more weak spot in his opponent’s position: the pawn at c6. It is defended only by a nearly immobile, almost “bad,” bishop. But once that piece is traded off, the pawn becomes vulnerable – one more black weakness.

38...Bxc8 39.Qxc8 Bc5 40.Qxc6 Bxe3
41.Qd6 Bc5 42.Qxd5 Nf8 43.f5 Nd7

An elegant decision, and a most effective one. After 44.f6+ Nxf6 45.exf6+ Kxf6, White still would have won, but only after immense technical difficulties. Now his task becomes much simpler. Huzman is a most proper mensch and chessplayer. The only reason he did not resign here, was because this was a team event, and he needed to “withhold” the result, so as not to disturb his teammates who were still playing. The rest is of little interest.

44...Nxe5

Taking on b4 would be worse still. After 44...Bxb4 45.f6+ Nxf6 46.exf6+ Kxf6 47.Qd4+, he would lose the bishop.

45.bxc5 bxc5 46.Qxc5 Kf6 47.Qd6+ Kf7 48.h4 Nd7 49.Qg6+ Kf8 50.Qh6+ Kf7 51.Qg6+ Kf8 52.h5 Rh7 53.Qd6+ Kg8 54.Qg6+ Rg7 55.Qe6+ Rf7 56.h6 Kf8 57.Qd6+ Ke8 58.Kg2 Nf8 59.f6 Rd7 60.Qc6 Kf7

61.Qxd7+! (61...Kxd7 62.h7) 1-0

The following wonderful Smyslov game is a sharp classical example of how to use the method of creating a second front.
This was one of those games that make chess history. In the very first round of a Candidates’ Tournament that was loaded with talent, behind the white pieces sat a mature ex-world champion, but also the one most likely to win this tournament, as well as his fourth (!) match for the world championship with Mikhail Botvinnik. His opponent was a young (23) and very talented player, Mikhail Tal, who along with Boris Spassky, was a generally acknowledged leader of the new wave. Adding a great additional dollop of interest was the principal difference in playing styles between the two. Smyslov was the clearest possible representative of the classical, “Capablanca-style” manner of play: powerful, crystal-clear strategy, supported by phenomenal technique. Tal played a completely opposite style of chess: chaos on the board, in which many objective factors took a back seat, and what became most important was the ability – above all, intuitive – to make one’s way through the chaos he had created. Here, no one could ever be compared with Tal. But in their first encounter, Tal could not succeed in playing “his game” in the opening; whereas Smyslov got everything he needed.

This is a complex endgame, where White has the bishop pair. Even though they are not exerting too much influence at the moment, they only await the opening of the game. The pawn on a5 plays a very important role, blocking two black pawns. With his next move, Smyslov practically forces his opponent to make the trade, as otherwise, he threatens to take control of the c-file.

18.Rc3! Rxh3 19.bxc3 Rc8 20.c4

20...e4!

Of course, Tal has no intention of sinking into passive defense, and seizes the chance to activate his pieces.


After Black’s 20th move, play has been virtually forced. Smyslov has had to find the only moves to avoid giving up his advantage.
Chapter 5: Weaknesses


After 26...Rxd2 27.Be3 Rb2 28.Rc1, White has a considerable advantage, while his opponent has no counterplay. He cannot play 28...Nxe4? 29.Rc8+ Kg7 30.Bd4+.

27.Ke2

The exchange sacrifice gave the game a new direction: Black set course to create an impregnable position, the kind we usually label a “fortress,” and it appears he largely succeeded. Indeed, how is White to play for the win here? Yes, he does have targets on the queenside, the b6-square and the b7-pawn, but he cannot reach them. Does White have anything else? Yes, it turns out – greater space. Here, White’s space advantage allows him to stir up play on the other wing immediately – to create a second front, with the goal of creating some weaknesses there.

27...Rxd2+!?

And here we are! After 27...Rd4 28.f3, Black would be left without counterplay, and with the same serious problems on the queenside. But now, thanks to a relatively cheap material investment, he breaks up his opponent’s powerful pawn chain, gives the game a blockaded character, defends the b7-pawn securely (the base of his queenside pawn chain), and, finally, takes away the white king’s chance to go to c4, which could have proved useful later on. It would not surprise me in the least if we were to discover that Tal had foreseen all this back on move 20!


34.f4! Bd4 35.Rf1 Be3

If Black forestalls the breakthrough by playing 35...f5, then after 36.Re1, sooner or later White will go after the newly created weakness of the e6-square.
36.f5 Bd2 37.fxg6 hxg6

Here too, after the capture 37...fxg6
38.Ra1 Ke7 39.Ra2 Bb4 40.Re2+ Kd7
41.Ka4, White’s rook would invade at e6 with powerful effect.

38.Ra1 Ke7 39.Ra2 Bb4

The f-pawn’s assault has brought results: the kingside pawn structure is so altered that White can now create a passed pawn there. Smyslov takes immediate advantage of this.

40.h4! Kf6 41.g4 Be1 42.h5 Kg5
43.Ra1 Bd2

44.Rh1!

All according to the vital principle which reads as follows: “In the endgame, the rook should stand behind the passed pawn – whether its own, or the enemy’s.”

44...gxh5 45.gxh5 c4+!?

Tal finds an opportunity to reduce the number of pawns remaining. 45...Kh6 46.Ka4 would keep more pawns on board, which is better for the stronger side.

46.Bxc4 Kh6

Let’s look more closely at this position, comparing it to the position after Black’s 33rd move. We see that, despite the considerably reduced amount of material, White has achieved his chief aim – as we like to put it: he has extended Black’s defense. And Black can no longer react successfully to all the shots.

47.Rf1! Kxh5 48.Rf6 Ne4 49.Be2+ Kg5 50.Rxf7
50...Be3

It is done. Tal tries his last chance, gathering his remaining forces together, but this cannot save him. Had he taken the pawn here, 50...Bxa5, then after 51.Bd3 Nd6 (51...Nc5+ 52.Kc4) 52.Rd7 Nc8 53.Rxh7, his situation would not have improved. The rest only requires that White plays accurately.


Following the method brought quick results in the following example.

25.g4! Ke8 26.g5 Ng8

White win here, since attacking the pawn at c6 can only be done by the rook? The answer, as might be expected, lies in opening a second front. And that is what Alekseev did:

27.Be5!

This move stretches Black’s defense, since any way he defends the attacked pawn will cost him something. Thus, on 27...Kf8, the rook invades glutton’s row (remember that?), or the seventh rank, 28.Rd7. The attempt to defend it tactically by 27...Ne7 28.Rh4 Ng6 is refuted by 29.Rxh7 Nxe5 30.Rh8+. The actual continuation...

27...f6,

...leads to kingside weaknesses, which would be the goal of the second weakness strategy: to open a second front.

28.gxf6 gxf6 29.Bc7 Ne7 30.Rd6 Kf7

It is plain to see that White has fulfilled his plans first. Now he brings his bishop to c5, after which Black cannot avoid losing material.
31. Bb6! e5 32. Bc5 Ng6 (White threatened 33. Rd7) 33. Rxc6 Nfx4
34. Be3 Nd3 35. b3 f5

White has some indisputable achievements to his credit. He is a pawn up, Black’s bishop is noticeably restricted by the pawns at b4 and e5, which also gives White an indisputable advantage over the light squares. So overall – a bucket of joys! Nevertheless, as the game demonstrates, it is still a long, long way to go for the win! The reason for that is that White must break through, attack something, create a passed pawn somewhere; and Black is going to try to stop any attempt to do any of these. Thus, the white king would love to go to c4, but his opposite number will get to c5 first. White could play a4 (or a3 first); but after Black takes en passant, first of all, the black bishop would become much more active; and second, White would have to spend all his time worrying about his opponent’s counterplay on the queenside, since it would open up a path for him there. And “last, but not least,” Dmitri Jakovenko, Svidler’s opponent in this game, has a great reputation himself as a first-class endgame master and an exceptionally stubborn defender. Taking all these factors into account, Svidler decided to...
play this endgame in strictly classical fashion, not giving his opponent any additional counterchances, even if it meant making a couple of dozen extra moves himself. White’s plan can thus be guessed at, at least in its most general form: he will try to break up the compact pawn formation on the directly opposite side of the board from the queenside – that is, on the kingside.


So now, the kings stand opposite one another. Who can reap more benefit from this face-off? As we shall soon see, it is White. Generally speaking, the reason for this is that White’s entire position is more active than his opponent’s, and that soon another detail will appear, which has great importance.

41.Nf7!

The knight’s move to this square is the most accurate, as will soon become clear.

41...Bb6

Now a pawn enters the fray – a most typical plan of action when attacking this kind of pawn structure, either in the middlegame, or in the ending. The main goal of this assault is to force the g6-pawn to move.

42...Kb5 43.h5! Bc5

Capturing would not have improved Black’s position. After 43...gxh5 44.Nd6+ Kc5 45.Nf5 Kb5 46.Ng7 h4 47.Nf5, White recovers the pawn, having achieved all the goals he set for himself.

44.hxg6 hxg6

45.Nh8! g5 46.Nf7 Bb6 47.Nd6+ Kc5 48.Nf5 Kb5

Now we can see how much White has accomplished. Black’s pieces were
passive before, and they have remained so. Meanwhile, White’s knight has taken up an ideal – and invulnerable – position. The most important part of it is that it now closes off the Black king’s last pathway to the queenside, the d4-square. And this means that White’s king is no longer tied to defense, and can begin active operations. Where will he focus his activity? On the kingside, of course. There, Black has one hole after another – and all of them on light squares! The only way to reach them is via g2, h3, g4 and h5. With his next move, Svidler gets the green light.

49.g3! Bc5 50.Kd2 Bf8 51.Ke2 Bc5 52.Kf1 Kc6 53.Kg2 Kd7 54.Kh3 Ke6 55.Kg4 Kf7 56.Kh5 Bf8

Here is the first instance: after 57...Bg7, trading minor pieces does not win, but White does have 58.Nd6+ Ke6 59.Nb5 Kf7 (59...Bf8 60.Kg6) 60.a4!, when Black will have no counterplay at all, with his horribly passive king.

58.Kh6!

The trade still does not win: 58.Nxe7? Kxe7 59.Kh6 Kd6, when the distant opposition saves Black.

58...Bc5 59.Kh7 Bf8 60.Kh8 Bc5 61.Nh6+ Kg6 62.Nf5 Kf7 63.Kh7 Bf8

White repeated the position in order to gain time. Now, having calculated the variations (and we shall soon see just how far and accurately they were calculated), Svidler starts the decisive concrete actions.

64.Ne3!

This move starts the knight’s long journey to the b7-square!

64...Bc5 65.Nc4 Bf8 66.Na5! Bd6 67.Nc6 Bc5 68.Nd8+ Ke7 69Nb7 Bb6
Chapter 5: Weaknesses

70.Kg7

The whole point of the knight’s head-spinning tour was so that the king could take this small step. Now Black has no way of preventing his opponent’s forces from invading.

70...Ke6

If the king does not stir from its spot, then the bishop must move, and that would release the knight, which would then find its way, sooner or later, back to g3, and from there to f5, which would drive away the black king anyway. Now it looks like Black will win the voluntarily exiled knight, but this will not help. Svidler has calculated everything accurately!

75.Kf6

75.Kf5 Kd6 76.g5 Bd8 77.g6 Ke7 78.Kxe5 would also have won.

75...Kd6 76.g5 Bd8+ 77.Kf5 Bb6

It turns out that after 77...Be7 78.g6, Black is in zugzwang, and must lose. Zugzwang is a most useful and effective tool in the endgame.

78.Kg6 Bd8 79.Kh6 Ke7

80.Kg7!

The final brushstroke – any other move would have let slip the win, but now it is all over. 1-0
I believe that a book about strategy must conclude with this chapter, because the principle we call interaction of the forces (other definitions, such as coordinating the forces or harmony are also possible) occupies a special place among the many principles of the game of chess. What makes it so special?

We have already seen, many times, how strategic principles are always coming into conflict with one another. For example: I have in mind the sort of position in which the most important role is played by the advantage in development one side holds, while the fact that the other side has the pair of bishops versus the pair of knights has no particular influence on the course of events in this situation. While in a different case, it is precisely the fact that one side has the bishop pair, versus bishop and knight, that exercises a decisive influence on the further course of events, and on the outcome of the game itself, while the same advantage in development, or let’s say the better control of the open files plays no great role in the position.

Here’s an example that will make what I have just said clearer and more evident.

I should explain that this was an “rapid-chess” tournament, usually played with a time-control of 20 or 25 minutes for the entire game. This fact means we should rate the brilliant combination Ivanchuk starts off with a rook sacrifice even higher!

20.cxb5!! Rxc3 21.bxa6!

Here we have a position which beautifully illustrates our thesis of the relativity of principles, and their constant opposition. Indeed, Black has not just a material superiority, but also that well-known powerful factor, control of the only open file by his two rooks together. The usual dangerous counterweight – a mating attack – has no likelihood of success here at all. Plus, it is Black to move. But with all this, White still wins, in all lines! This must mean that the trumps he possesses defeat his opponent’s trumps in this particular situation. Here are the advantages working for White here: the bishop pair, crisscrossing pins on the e1-a5 diagonal and the c1-c8 file, plus the far-advanced passed pawn at a6. Undoubtedly, in a great number of other positions (even here, for example – if we mentally remove the white pawn at e4, along with one black pawn – let’s
say, at h7 – from the board, everything would be quite different!), then the extra rook and normal development would have outweighed all these achievements; but in this situation – this is what allows us to make that statement above: that the strategic principles are constantly at war with one another.

21...Nf6

Here’s the main line of the combination: 21...Qc7 22.Rxc3 Qxc3 23.Qxc3 Rxc3 24.a7 Rc8 25.Ba6 Re8 26.Bb7, and White easily wins the endgame.

22.f3! R3c5

The threat of 23.Bd4 makes this rook retreat absolutely forced. Here again, I ask you to take me at my word: in every possible variation, White obtains a winning position.

23.Rxc5! Rxc5 24.b4 Qa3 25.bxc5 dxc5 26.Bh6 Nd7 27.Bb5 1-0

We have examined a spectacular example, and can now continue our deliberations. What we said before may also be expressed somewhat differently. The principle that will be dominant in a concrete situation depends upon the peculiarities of the situation. To designate one particular principle, in abstract fashion, without relying on a real position, to be more important than others is impossible. There are almost no such principles. (You’ll notice: I said almost!)

In chess, there are, in fact, a small number of absolute truths. These are: check, mate, and stalemate. And there you have it: I dare say that, with the sole exception of these three truths, the principle of coordinating forces supersedes, through its universality, all other principles, and that all other principles are subordinate to it. And that following general chess principles always has the ultimate goal of achieving or improving the already achieved coordination of forces.

Such a strong assertion needs to be both shown and illustrated. To attain these ends, let’s examine the most varied set of examples we can. First, I offer you a somewhat altered small fragment, taken from my book, Paul Morphy: A Modern Perspective (Russell Enterprises, Inc., 2005).

Morphy – Löwenthal
New Orleans 1850
In this game, the 13-year-old boy from the provincial chess town of New Orleans faced off against a 40-year-old, highly experienced chess fighter from Europe, whose reputation was that of one of the strongest masters of his day.

23.Bxh7+?!  

Objectively speaking, this was inexact; but I am convinced that it was not without point, even though White thereby missed an excellent chance. Playing 23.Qf5 Nd7 24.Rf4 instead would have brought him a great advantage, perhaps even a decisive one.

23...Kf8 24.Be4 Rh6 25.Qf5 Qxg3  

This has led by force to a situation where material is even, and Black has even managed to create a mating threat. Does this mean that Morphy made a mistake in his calculations at move 23? I do not think so – I suggest that he foresaw the position after his next move.

26.Rb2  

And if I’m right, then it is quite possible to understand what it was about this position that attracted our young genius: now all of White’s pieces are in play, and they are all working together!

By the way, there is one more detail – but this is, of course, only a supposition. The last move by White might have attracted Morphy because of its beauty, which is far from obvious, even difficult to see at first glance. It consists of the fact that, although the move appears purely defensive, it turns out, in fact (that is, unless it involved an oversight – see later), to be the introductory move in an attack in which the rook, thus far relatively idle, has been allotted a significant role. Such hidden beauty can provide enormous enjoyment, but only to someone who is well acquainted with the essentials of the game.

26...Re8?  

Having received a chance to save himself, Black lets it slip. The only correct move was 26...Qh3, a move Morphy undoubtedly overlooked in his calculations. This would force the exchange of queens, depriving White of the leading piece in his attack. After 27.Rg2 Qxf5 28.Rxf5 Re6, the game would be practically equal.

27.Nf6 Re6 28.Rg2?!  

This move does not cost White the win, but it could have been much simpler after 28.Qxe6. Perhaps it was tiredness, or completely understandable excitement.

28...Qxg2+
29.Bxg2!?

At first sight, 29.Kxg2 looks more natural; but the move played turns out to be stronger, and based upon accurate calculation!

29...Rxf6 30.Qxf6 Rxf6 31.Rxf6 Ng4 32.Rf5!

White’s choice at move 29 was based upon the possibility of this move. Had he taken back with the king, the important rook maneuver would not have been possible, because of the knight check on e3!

32...b6 33.Bd5 Nh6 34.Rf6 Kg7 35.Rc6

Morphy plays the endgame beautifully, every move (over 20 of them!) the best. The rest requires no comment.

35...a5 36.Rc7 Kg6 37.Kg2 f6 38.Kf3 Nf5 39.Be4 Kg5 40.Bxf5 Kxf5 41.h4 Kg6 42.Rc6 Kh5 43.Kg3 f5 44.Rf6 f4+ 45.Kxf4 Bf2 46.Ke4 Be5 47.Rf5+ Kxh4 48.Rxc5 bxc5 49.Kd5 1-0

White’s confident technique of realizing his endgame advantage makes an impression. In those days, at such an age, this was unheard of. Let me repeat my favorite thought: Paul Morphy was, in addition to everything else, the first true *wunderkind* in chess history! There is a great deal of resemblance between the rapid mobilization of White’s forces in the example we just looked at, and the following game.

Lasker – Blackburne
London 1892

23.Rf2!

This is considerably stronger than the immediate 23.Bxh5. Lasker sees that this capture will not run away, and first makes sure his forces are maximally mobilized.
23...Qh4?!  
Black avoids the ruination of his pawn structure, but his queen does not now have, and cannot obtain in future, the support of other pieces, and will soon be forced to retreat. 23...Ne6 was better, although even then White retains a great advantage by 24.Bxh5 gxh5 25.Be3 Bh6!? 26.Qf5.

24.Rg2 Nd5 25.Rf1!  
![Chessboard diagram](image-url)

An instructive spectacle. White has effected the complete coordination of all his forces. Does not this remind you of the situation Morphy was striving for in the previous example? Please note especially the light-square bishop, which rules the light squares and denies the opponent any hope of counterplay. And the main reason this piece is strong is that Black has nothing with which to oppose it.

We come to another useful conclusion: the most valuable of a pair of bishops will most often be the one that has no opposition.

25...f5  
The advance 26.f5, opening lines for many White pieces, was the most dangerous threat. But things are no better now!

26.Be1 Qe7 27.Bxh5 gxh5 (27...Ne3? 28.Qb3+) 28.Ng3  
The game is over – Black could resign right here. The rest is nothing more than simple acquisition (at the grandmaster level, naturally).

28...Rf8 29.Nxf5 Rxf5 30.Qxf5 Ne3 31.Qg5 Qxg5 32.Rxg5 Nxf1 33.Kxf1 Rf8 34.Bd2 h6 35.Rxh5 Kh7 36.Ke2  
One more instructive moment. This way, Lasker sniffs out even the slightest hope of counterplay for his opponent, which could have appeared after 36.f5 c5.

36...Kg6 37.Rh3 Kf5 38.Kf3 Rd8 39.Be3 c5 40.dxc5 Rd3 41.Rg3 Bf8 42.b4 Rxa3 43.Rg8 Be7 44.Rg7 Bh4 45.Rf7+ Kg6 46.Rxb7 Be1 47.Ke4 Ra4 48.f5+ Kh5 49.f6 1-0  
The next game is also taken from the legacy of the great Emanuel Lasker.

Janowski – Lasker  
New York 1924
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Black has achieved a lot in this position; we would like to draw particular attention to his two-bishop advantage. It is also clear that White’s pawn configuration on the kingside and in the center is seriously weakened. These shortcomings in White’s position should also be looked at as a most important achievement for Black’s position!

It would be useful to remember one very simple rule: weaknesses in one side’s position always become a strength for the other side’s position. This uncomplicated thesis is in fact one of the cornerstones of all of chess strategy. And certainly not just in chess. We see the same thing in politics, business, war strategy, and so forth. But for now, we are dealing only with our beloved game.

Of course, in order to make effective use of precisely these numerous weaknesses, we should target them with the greatest possible assemblage of force. So let’s brainstorm together, before we follow along the text of the game. Thus, White’s e-, f- and g-files are obviously weak. The pieces best suited for attacking weakened files are the rooks (frequently supported by the queen, but the main actors in such cases would still be the rooks), which we also know well. Having established that fact, we discover that the bishop on e7 is in our way. The conclusions are obvious, and lead to Black’s next few moves:

36...Bf8! 37.Nd5 Rf7! 38.Nbc3 Re8!

Now it is quite clear how effective Black’s plan of development has been. It is interesting to note that even his passive bishop on f8 is not at all idle, since eventually, when all Black’s pieces have advanced, it will shelter the black king. I would advise you, by the way, to pay attention to this insignificant-looking point, and remember it.

So, we see that this time also, Lasker was able to achieve the total coordination of his forces, aimed at the opponent’s kingside weaknesses we noted. And although as a result, White obtained an overwhelming queenside advantage, he cannot derive any benefit from it. The game continued:

39.Qd4 fxe4 40.Qxc4 Bd7 41.Be3 Nh4 42.Rdf2 Bh3 43.Nxe4
But here, something amazing occurred. Lasker continued 43...Qg4+?, overlooking an elementary way – for a player of his class – to force a win by 43...Rxe4! 44.Qxe4 Bf5 45.Qh1 (the queen must protect g2, for example: 45.Qc4 Qg6+ 46.Kh1 Be4+) 45...Qg6+ 46.Rg2 Qxg2+ 47.Qxg2 Nxg2 48.Kxg2 Be4+ 49.Kg3 Bxd5, with an extra piece. And this from Lasker, who was always considered a tactician of colossal strength!

Nor is this all. The fourth world champion, Alexander Alekhine, commenting on this game in one of his best books (New York 1924, Russell Enterprises 2009), also skips over this possibility – and this from a man who quite deservedly received the title of combinative genius from his contemporaries!

Nor is this all I want to say on this topic. In short – we have already made a quick note of the similarity between the play of Morphy and Lasker, in regard to their efforts to maximize the coordination of their pieces. And we noted, just as quickly, Morphy’s inaccuracies when selecting concrete variations. And although we were speaking of a game by a 13-year-old boy, such events also occurred when he was at the height of his powers. For those interested in pursuing this theme further, I suggest looking into the previously mentioned Paul Morphy: A Modern Perspective. I ask the rest of you to take me at my word on this resemblance (and there are others, as well!). Surprising parallels, are they not?

But in the game, White, of course, shielded himself with the rescued knight by 44.Ng3, and Black had to win the game all over again, after many adventures, which we will not examine here, over the course of another 24 moves! 0-1 (68).

From the time of the deep classics we go now to a time closer to our own.

At first glance, it is difficult to give preference to either side. Indeed: (a) development is level; (b) occupying the half-open f-file with both rooks might strengthen White’s position considerably, but this is actively prevented by the Black bishop; and: (c) for his part, Black has already set up a threat against the pawn at c2, and intends, after trading off a pair of rooks, to occupy the d-file.

I have listed those elements of the position which are most clearly visible; but there are a few more substantive details which will show themselves during the course of play. Now we shall observe the brilliant maneuverings of the White pieces. As we shall soon see, they are based on the points of evaluation for this position that we have already noted.

24.Nb1!
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A brilliant solution to all the problems for White enumerated above. Thus, right now, it is clear that the c2-pawn is defended. Later on, after the rooks are traded, White’s knight will occupy a square from which it can go to one of the exceptionally important squares in this position: either to b3, as in the variation 24...Rx d2 25.Nxd2 Rd8 26.Nb3. In this case, the weakness of the a5-pawn, which we have not paid attention to until now, will make itself felt, and Black will find it very hard to maintain such a position. Or else the knight may go to f3, as happened later.

Karpov’s decision also takes another significant nuance into account: Black’s knight, which currently occupies a solid-looking and even threatening position, will be driven offside to a6. And then, finally, we will clearly see the main difference in the capabilities of the respective sides’ pieces, and in their coordination.

24...Qb7 25.Kh2!

This move starts yet another stage in driving off the black pieces. We have already spoken of the importance of the f2-square to White’s rooks, as well as of the black bishop that stands guard over it. So now, the white king has decided to deal with this problem in person – by supporting the advancing pawn! Here’s the kind of strong positional play Karpov is famous for: even his king works in the middlegame for the greater good!

25...Kg7 26.c3 Na6

27.Re2!

Another brilliant solution! What is its strength, its basis? Clearly, that White gains the use of the f2-square, and with it, the f-file. It is clear enough that in that case, White’s rooks will become more dangerous than their black counterparts, so it would make sense to avoid trading them. We will soon be convinced of this. At the same time, a square is cleared for the knight to come back into play.

27...Rf8 28.Nd2 Bd8

Greed is bad: after 28...Qxb2?? 29.Nf3, Black loses his bishop.

29.Nf3 f6

Clearly, this weakens the pawn structure on the kingside. But there really wasn’t much choice – he had to protect the e5-pawn and cover the f-file.
30.Rd2!

Note the short – one-square! – movements of this rook! Each, nevertheless, brings excellent dividends, making unswerving improvements to White’s position, while inducing weaknesses in the opponent’s position. This latter factor is quite easy to understand. Since the f-file is closed now, White switches to a different file.

30...Be7 31.Qe6 Rad8

Up to this point, Karpov has steadily outplayed his opponent positionally, and achieved a decisive strategic advantage, consisting first and foremost of the considerably better coordination of his pieces. White now demonstrates this difference strictly in Lasker style, refuting false values by tactical means. It is amazing how quickly a series of blows sets everything to rights.

32.Rxd8! Bxd8

After 32...Rxd8, White wins quickly by 33.Nxe5. The variations aren’t complicated – you can figure them out for yourselves.

33.Rd1 Nb8 34.Bc5! Rh8

35.Rxd8!

Black resigned. The basis for his decision comes from these variations: 35.Rxd8 Rxd8 36.Be7 Re8 37.Qxf6+ Kh6 (37...Kh7 38.Qf7+ Kh6 39.Bg5#) 38.Nh4 Rg8 39.Nf5+ Kh7 40.Qf7+ Kh8 41.Bf6+. 1-0

Similar motifs of complex piece reorganization are visible in the following game, played by a very young Vladimir Kramnik.

Kramnik – Nunn
Germany 1994

The diagrammed position had already occurred prior to this game, and at that time, it was considered good for Black. Obtaining an accurate evaluation just
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from *general considerations* (a form of evaluation of both sides' possibilities, in which *we consider factors existing on the board at the given moment*, while the possibilities that are hidden and thus far unseen – those for which we would have to add the calculation of variations – are not considered) is made much more difficult, since there are too many factors in the position. In such cases, trying out various approaches plays a large role. Here is roughly how it goes: when we are talking about a professional approach to the game, one side works out (at home, as a rule, with major assistance from analytical programs) a plan of action for what comes next. Then, he tries it out in practice. The opposing side begins to search for a counter-weapon, finds one, and puts it into practice – and so on. This is approximately the way opening theory is developed.

This time, it was White's turn to strengthen his play, and Kramnik arrived at this game prepared with a deep and far-seeing plan of action, prepared at home, that began as follows:

**17. Rae1**

This is certainly no sensational move – in fact, it is quite obvious. The point is not the move itself, but the regrouping of pieces that it sets off, whose final goal is to achieve the effective coordination of White's forces.

**17...Qa7 18.Nd1 Bc5 19.Qc1**

This move is part of White's idea. It protects the a3-pawn, while eyeing the f4-square. We shall see the reason for the latter somewhat later.

**19...Rae8**

![Chess Diagram](attachment:Chess_Diagram.png)

**20.Bd3!**

An important refinement, which also fits into White's plan. The immediate 20.Nb1 would be weaker, because of 20...Qb6.

**20...e6 21.Nb1!**

This move is also an important part of White's idea – a very deep idea, as we shall very soon see.

**21...Qb6?**

Kramnik considered this reply a mistake, getting Black into serious difficulties. In his opinion, Black should have clarified the situation immediately with the exchange 21...cxd5, keeping reasonable counterchances.

**22.Bc2 Kg7 23.Nbc3 Qa7 24.Bg3!?**

An immediate 24.f4 would have lost a pawn after 24...exf4 25.Qxf4 Bxa3.

**24...f6**
Another inaccuracy, in an already very difficult position. 28...Re5 would have held out longer, although then too, after 29.Na4, White would have a very strong initiative.

But now, White launches a decisive *breakthrough*. (Digressing for a moment, we note that this element of the game is something Kramnik is better at than anyone.)

29.e5! Rxe5

Nor do the other captures help. After 29...fxe5 30.Bxc5 Rxf1+ 31.Rxf1 Nxc5 32.Bxh7 Kxh7 33.Qxg5, the black king will soon get mated. 29...dxe5 would hold out a little longer, but White wins there too. Kramnik gives the variation 30.Bxh7 Kxh7 31.Ne4 Bxf2 32.Rxf2 Ref8 33.Ref1 Kg7 34.Rxf6! Rxf6 35.Qxg5+ Rg6 36.Qe7++; and if instead 32...Qd4, Black loses material, 33.Qxd4 exd4 34.Nxf6+ Rxf6 35.Rxe8 Rxf2 36.Re7+ Kg6 37.Nxf2).

30.Rxe5 fxe5

After 30...dxe5, White wins with the thematic 31.Bxh7 Kxh7 32.Ne4.

31.Bxh7 Kxh7 32.Qxg5 Bxf2 33.Nxf2

25.f4

The preparation for this advance involved all White’s maneuvers back to move 17. He now has a firm grasp of the initiative. Seeing that no particular weaknesses have appeared in the opponent’s position during that time, we may conclude that White has gained his advantage because he has deployed his forces better than his opponent.

25...h4?! 

Nunn overestimates the solidity of his position, and loses rather quickly. It appears that Black’s only means of extending his resistance appreciably was 25...g5!?, “when after 26.f5, the position takes on a closed character, which will cost White a lot of time to win.” (V. Kramnik, J. Damsky, *Breakthrough*, Moscow, Nauka i Interperiodika, 2000).

26.Bf2 exf4 27.Qxf4 g5

After 27...h3 28.gxh3 Bxh3, White has another file at his disposal: 29.Rg1.

28.Qd2 Rf7?!
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33...Ne5

33...Rxf2? does not work: 34.Qxh4+ and 35.Qxf2. A more elegant tactic is displayed after 33...Qd4 – here we have a combinative solution: 34.Nce4! Qxe4 35.Qh5+ Kg7 36.Qxf7+.

34.Qxh4+ Kg7 35.Re1!

A very strong move, if somewhat simple-looking. The rook steps out from the pin, aiming for the third rank. Once again, we see the pieces coordinating.

35.Bf5 36.Qg5+ Bg6

Black’s king cannot survive 36...Kf8 37.Re3, either. If it were not for time-pressure, Black could certainly have resigned already.

37.Ng4 Rf5 38.Qh6+ Kf7

39.Qh8!

After this invasion, everything’s simple. The hopelessly exposed black king falls to direct attacks.

39...Ke7 40.Qg7+ Bf7 41.Nh6 Rf2
42.Qg5+ Kd7

43.Qe3!

The last simple, yet elegant stroke. After 43.Qe3 Rf4 44.Nxf7 Rxf7 45.b4, Black’s knight is lost. 1-0

The preceding examples might have left the impression that cooperation (harmony) of the pieces in chess applies only to cases of active play, where all the pieces, sometimes assisted by pawns, move forward with linked arms, lending one another support. Well, such cases do occur, but not as often as we would like. More often, we see a situation where a piece (or pieces) needs to go on the defensive, so that the remaining pieces on its side will not be distracted from their active operations. We’ve already seen one example of this in the game Janowski-Lasker, New York 1924, at the start of the chapter. Now here is how it happened in our next example.
White has a number of ways to ward off this attack; he chooses the strongest.

37.Re3! d4


But now, the important diagonal g1-a7 is closed off, which interrupts the coordination of the black pieces. He must put them back together again.

38.Qe7! Nd6

39.Rd3

This move only appears to be an attack. In fact, it is the start of a maneuver to bring this rook back into a deep defensive position – yet at the same time, it is this rerouting that leads inexorably to White’s victory!

39...Qa6 40.Rd1 Qe2 41.Rf1 d3
Thus, White’s rook is now totally passive, yet it also “kills” the battery of both Black’s heavy pieces – which in turn frees White’s queen + bishop battery. Now a series of accurate maneuvers allows Kramnik to coordinate his pieces for the decisive assault.

42.Bd4! d2 43.Qe5 Kf8

If we examine this position by the counting-on-fingers method, in order to determine the number of pieces working together, White’s would come up to 50%. But such a calculation would be superficial. The point is that the concept of “coordinated pieces” should not be taken just literally – that is, making it a simple process of arithmetic. Here, in fact, all the White pieces, except the king, fulfill the general task, viz., the rook, and to some extent, the bishop cover all the most important weaknesses, the king’s position, and the e4-pawn. Thanks to them, the queen and dark-square bishop can occupy themselves attacking the opposing king via the weakened dark squares. In other words, some attack, some defend – or simply restrain – the opponent, but they all work together towards the main goal. It is important here to have each one performing its assigned task.

44.Be3! Kg8 45.Bh6

Desperado. This is mere decoration, born of desperation – the black pieces can no longer do anything else. Note the difference: he has a dangerous pawn and two other pieces on the attack, but nothing performing any realistic defense!

45...Qxf2+

Do not even think about 47.Bf1?? Qa1.

46.Rxf2 d1Q+ 47.Rf1

Now the checks are over, and so is the game. 1–0

And now, a more complex variation on the same theme.

Topalov – Kramnik
Linares 1998
A position with many pieces, and many plans. What we notice first are such elements as Black’s bishop pair and passed c-pawn. But of these, the light-square bishop looks fairly well “dead-ended,” and the weakness of the f5-square also draws our attention. In fact, just as in any complex situation, there are a lot more important details which also influence our assessment. Therefore, we shall examine this situation in more detail, as events develop. Topalov made a decision that looks typical for one of the elements of this position – he played...

25.g4

...intending first of all to create a forward post at f5 for his pieces, and secondly to clear the g3-square for his knight, which will then be ready to jump into that support point. It is very interesting to compare the assessment of this move given by Kramnik himself in his annotations, with that of the Fritz program. The former considered it a mistake, and gave it a question mark, while the latter gave it an exclamation point, and kept this move for a long time on the first line of its preferences! You will agree that such a sharp divergence of authoritative opinion does not happen very often. What is the problem here, and which one was right?

First of all, the course of the game convincingly demonstrated the correctness of the winner – Kramnik. In addition, while both Topalov and Fritz saw the obvious advantages of pushing the pawn, both underestimated a couple of important circumstances. The first is that Black could easily cover the vital f5-square against the White knight’s invasion, and maintain it for a long time – which alone would reduce the value of the pawn move, while the drawbacks, the perpetual weakening of the dark squares along the b8-h2 diagonal, would remain forever, since pawns never move backwards! Additionally, Black’s dark-square bishop, the one without an opponent, acquires extrapower. As a result, White actually has added nothing to his own position, while Black has acquired weighty advantages. Now he carries out a regrouping, and obtains excellent piece cooperation.

25...Qd7 26.Ng3 Ng7 27.a4

Black must keep a close eye on White’s only serious threat – breaking in the center by e3-e4. This is why he targets the knight on c3.

28.Bh3 Bb7 29.Qc2
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29...Bd6!

Now he can go here, since the threat of taking on g3 is unpleasant for White.

30.Nf5

Topalov acknowledges the failure of his plan, but perhaps too quickly. He might have insisted on it a while longer, by playing 30.Kg2!?  

30...Nxf5 31.gxf5 Bb4 32.Kg2 Qd6 33.f3

33...Re7

Finally, the opportunity appears for Black to double his rooks on the half-open file. His pressure increases...  

34.Re2 Rde8 35.Rce1 Qf6 36.Bg4 Bd6!? 37.Qd1

It is not hard to see that the difference in activity between the two sides’ forces has grown, and clearly in Black’s favor. Both White rooks are blocked by their own pawn, and his bishop has similar problems, while the only discomfort felt by a Black piece is the light-square bishop, and that piece intends to get into the game very soon via c8.

But in chess, one must always stay alert. Black’s tremendous position can collapse in a second, were he to allow his opponent to get in e3-e4. Then, all that coiled power in White’s position would explode into freedom, and the situation would change radically. Thus, Black’s next move is forced.

37...Bb4! 38.Qc2 Rd8!

The rook defends the d5-pawn, freeing the bishop from this task.

39.Rd1 (D)

39...Bc8!

One more move with well-studied consequences, bringing the last inactive
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piece into play. With this move, Black also intends an exchange sacrifice (see below), but as a result, he obtains a completely winning position.

40.e4 Bxc3 41.e5

I will not give the variations, just take my word for it: after 41.Qxc3 dxe4 42.dxe4 Bb7, White’s game would be pretty sad also.

41...Rxe5

This sacrifice was forced, but also very strong.

42.dxe5

Black’s position is also winning after 42.Rxe5 Bxd4.

42...Bxe5

This is a hopeless position for White, who hasn’t the slightest compensation for the many holes in his dark squares and his opponent’s pair of mighty bishops. Note also White’s “big pawn” on g4, and recall that this sad circumstance was a direct consequence of White’s mistaken decision on move 25.

43.Rde1 Bc7 44.Re8+ Kg7 45.Rxd8 Bxd8 46.Rd1 Bb7 47.f4

And now, a simple bit of tactics ends the game:

47...d4+! 48.Bf3 d3

Here, Topalov resigned – just in time, as we can see from these variations: 48...d3 49.Qxc4 (49.Qf2 does not save White either, because of 49...Qxf5! 50.Bxb7 Qg4+ 51.Kh2 Qxd1 52.Qd4+ Bf6) 49...Qb2+ 50.Kg3 Bxf3 51.Kxf3 Qe2+. 0-1

And now, here’s one I really like – an elegant example of lightning-quick setting-up of complete piece coordination, out of what would seem to be relatively disjointed locations.
White has outstanding compensation for the sacrificed exchange, both materially, two pawns, and positionally – the active, centralized, and coordinated positions of his pieces. But now he has to make a proper, and not at all simple choice – and it will require calculating a number of variations.

26.Bd5!

Svidler makes the best choice, although as we shall soon see, it was not a simple one. After 26.Bxg4 Bxg2 27.Nd4! Rxd6 28.exd6 Rd8 29.d7 Ke7 30.c4 Kd6, he would only have had a very small advantage. Now comes a short forcing episode.

26...Rxe5 27.Rd8+ Re8 28.Rd7 Re1+ 29.Kb2 Rd1

This position is simple only at first glance. In fact, White has just one way of successfully reordering his “hanging” pieces – and that way is very difficult to find. And in fact, Svidler had to have foreseen it when making his decision at move 26.

30.Rxf7+! Ke8 31.Re7+! Kf8 32.Re5!

32...Rd2

It turns out that White found a beautiful and strong solution, based on this short, but elegant variation: 32...Rxd5 33.Rxd5 Rxc6 34.Rf5+ Ke7 35.Rxf1, and wins. As a result, White once more has two extra pawns, and excellent, sound posts for his pieces. His winning chances are now very great. Peter Svidler possesses outstanding endgame
technique, which he demonstrates on this occasion as well.


This position is already unquestionably won for White.

38...Kc5 39.Bd3 h6

40.a5!

We already know this technique: the weak pawn is fixed on the square where it will be easiest to attack.

40...Rbf6 41.Kb2 R2f4 42.Rg7 Rf7

43.Rg3!

One more moment that will be useful to remember. What we see here in action is one of the principles rarely mentioned in the literature, which is: As a rule, *if one rook* – in almost any combination with other pieces and pawns – *is playing against two enemy rooks, then it is a good idea to avoid exchanging it off*. Of course, as with any rule, there are exceptions to this one as well. Even though the game continued for another 20 moves, during all that time the play was “at one end of the field,” so I shall give the remaining text without comment.

43... Kb4 44.Bxa6 Kxa5 45.Bd3 Rf2 46.Rh3 R7f6 47.Rh5+ Kb6 48.g4 Rd6 49.Ka3 Rg2 50.h3 Rg3 51.Kb4 Rd4+ 52.Kc3 Rd6 53.Kc4 Rf3 54.b4 Rf4+ 55.Kb3 Rf3 56.Ka4 Rg3 57.Be4 Rc3 58.Bd3 Kb7 59.h4 Rc8 60.g5 hxg5 61.hxg5 Rd4 62.g6 Rg4 63.Bf5

After 63.Bf5 Ra8+ 64.Kb5 Rf4 65.Rh7+ Kb8 66.Rf7 Ra7 67.g7, it is all over. 1-0

And now I would like to show you a pair of freshly-played games, both of them highly instructive. It makes me
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glad that both of them “ripened” just when I was writing this book!

Kinderman – Harikrishna
Dresden 2008


The opening has resulted in a position with a symmetrical pawn structure and an open center. In such situations, the pawns generally do not see much action, and the game’s center of gravity shifts to the players’ relative expertise in setting out their pieces. Here, White makes a decision...

14.N4f3?!

...which would appear automatic: the knight returns to its “native” square. Yet this move, although it is certainly not yet a mistake, I have still decided to give a question mark to, because it turns out to be, not just the first inaccuracy – 14.Nc2 was stronger, preventing the enemy light-square bishop from developing without problems – but also the first sign that White underestimates the possible dangers from optimizing his opponent’s piece placement.

14...Bf5

Now if White’s knight had gone to c2, it could have come out to e3 here, driving the bishop from its excellent diagonal.

15.Nc4

The natural 15.Ne4?? would be a horrific blunder, 15...Bxe4 16.Rxe4 Bxh2+, and the queen is lost. However, the problem is that such an exchange would be good for Black anyway, if only in a small way for now; it would trade off his least comfortably developed piece.

15...Nxc4 16.Bxc4 Qd7!

Another inaccuracy. 17.Be3!? at once was stronger, meeting 17...Rad8 with 18.Bg5. White is being careless.

17...h6? 18.Be3 Rad8 19.Bf1 Qc6

Already we can see that White is running into some problems; still, for now they were quite solvable. He should have met the threat of 20...Bh2+ by playing 20.Qb3, retaining good chances for gradual equalization. Instead, he played...

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20.Nd2?!

...allowing still another enemy piece to take up a strong central position.

20...Ne5 21.Qb3

Black is better in the center; there, however, he does not have enough targets for a successful assault. Therefore, he regroups his forces for an attack on the opposing kingside.

21.Bb8! 22.Qb5 Qc8! (D)

23.Qxc5?

It is not easy to say what impelled White to make this sacrifice. Most likely, this choice was driven by a mistaken assessment of the position that arises after the 27th move. But there can be no doubt that one of the components of this decision was dissatisfaction with his position. Nevertheless, in spite of the inaccuracies he has made so far, White could still have kept the situation under control by playing 23.b4. Then, after 23...Nd3 24.Bxd3 Rxd3 25.Qxc5!? Qxc5 26.bxc5 Be5, he would have had an inferior endgame to play; but I am certain that it would have been defensible, with some hard work.

23...Qxc5 24.Bxc5 Rxd2 25.Bxf8 Kxf8 26.Rad1

It appears that it was this possibility that attracted White. Black cannot avoid trading off his remaining rook (and you will recall that we discussed this matter quite recently). But there is another side to the coin as well: the pair of black bishops (once again, principles collide!) – and they are of greater value.

26...Rxd1 27.Rxd1 (D)

27.Bc7

From this point, the game is no longer of interest, as far as our theme is concerned, and therefore I will not give any notes. I can only say that the young
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Indian player dealt confidently with his technical task.


41...Bc6!

A simple conclusion: the wandering rook is finally trapped.

42.Bf5+

On 42.Bxc6+ Kxc6 43.Rc8+, Black has 43...Bc7.

42...Kd6 43.Rb8 Bb7 0-1

Bischoff – Fressinet


12...exd5?!

It would be more typical of this kind of pawn structure to recapture with the e-pawn, the point being (1) not to open up the c-file (recall the game from the “open lines” chapter); and (2) to open the e-file for himself.

Fressinet, however, was playing to strengthen his presence in the center. This decision has its positive and negative sides, but it does give the game a sharper character than 12...exd5.

13.Nb3 e5

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14.Na5

This is the first point in the game where one of White’s decisions gives me pause. He begins to maneuver too carelessly, without any counter to his opponent’s plans. I believe he would have been better off playing 14.d4!? e4 15.Nfd2 b6 (White already had the positional threat of Nc5), and now 16Nb1!? with 17.Nc3 to follow, leading to a very complex game, with chances for both sides.

14...Nb6 15.Rc1 Rfe8

16.Qb3?!

“Let’s waltz together a tempo – sweet and slow.” Meanwhile, the storm clouds are gathering in the center, and will soon move on to the kingside! So now, he should still have made an effort to clarify the situation quickly, by playing 16.d4!?, and after 16...e4, continue with 17.Ne5 Bf5 18Nb3. It will soon be clear that, with his last move, White not only lost a tempo he needed to maneuver his minor pieces, but also deprived his knight of the necessary b3-square. As a result, this one move has lost no fewer than two tempi, and this cannot fail to have an effect on coming events.

16...Bf5 17.d4?!

The saying, “Better late than never” is frequently refuted in chess. Thus it is here: this advance, which would still have been useful one move before, now looks unfortunate. It appears that White should have accepted that he now has the inferior position, as a result of the inaccuracies he committed earlier, and gone over to defending against his opponent’s threats, as follows: 17.Qa2!? Bg4 18.Ba1!?; and if Black plays for an immediate breakthrough with 18...e4?! (18...Rad8 19Nb3 would be better, with only a small advantage for Black), then 19Nd4 Bxe2 20.Qxe2, with an even game.

17...e4 18.Ne5 Rab8!

Here I would draw the reader’s attention to this incomprehensible move (I could use a number of labels here to describe its insignificance: humble, unpretentious, unassuming...); but it plays a useful role in Black’s plans, preparing an important activity to strengthen the position (see below).

19.b5

The best thing about White’s position right now is the knight at e5. There is an easily understood, even self-evident, principle here: it is always a good idea to trade off the enemy piece that is most
useful at the moment. This is what Fressinet does now.

19...Nbd7!

Here, the advantage is twofold: White’s most effective piece is exchanged for one of Black’s least effective knights (for which the b7-pawn was protected a move earlier!).


22...Bb8!

Of course! Avoiding the exchange in this position is forced for Black — that is, if we take the word “forced” in the greater sense, meaning that playing otherwise would spoil everything we have done up to this point. The reason is not hard to see: it is because all Black’s play has been aimed at the opposing kingside. Therefore, the difference in value between his dark-square bishop and its white opponent, that has no influence whatever on events in that direction, is simply beyond measure.

23.Rc3?

White’s position is already very difficult, and now he makes a decisive error (no matter how surprising and categorical that sounds). It appears to me that he had to prevent the trade of light-square bishops, for the very same reasons that he needed to aim for a trade of dark-square bishops! There was only one way to achieve this: to take the risk of playing 23.h3!, and to meet 23...Bxh3 with the counterblow 24.Nxb7!. This would lead to complications, out of which Black would emerge with the advantage; but there would have been a lot of complex play. Once again, I will omit the variations, and ask you to take my word for it!

23...Bg4! 24.Qa2

The following variations make it quite clear why Black needed to trade off these bishops. After 24.Bxg4 Nxg4, several black pieces would have gained immediate access to the white king: 25.h3 Nh2! 26.Rd1 Nf3+ 27.Kh1 Nh4 28.Rdc1 Re6! 29.Qd1 Rg6 30.g4 Rf6, and the attack decides.

I strongly advise you to consider carefully whether or not you should exchange bishops. These questions are not simple at all, and they are some of the most vital questions in all of chess strategy. And, much like the others, they work above all on the basis of creating one’s own, and disrupting the opponent’s, coordination of pieces.

24...Bf3!
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A brilliant stroke, although also exceptionally typical for such pawn structures. The bishop “impales itself,” clearing the way for other pieces, most importantly the queen.

25.h3


25...Nh7! 26.Rfc1 Ng5

And here, White resigned, with a full set of pieces on the board, a still unbroken pawn structure, and without a single check having yet been delivered! 0-1

A very pretty game, as though specially constructed to illustrate our theme of the decisive importance of coordination in chess. What is the foremost reason it is instructive? Compare the positions and possibilities of both sides’ forces. As we can see, all of White’s are assembled for queenside play. Both of his rooks occupy the only open file, while neither of his opponent’s rooks is even attempting to contest it. White’s pieces have plenty of room. And yet he resigned – and quite rightly so, as the variations demonstrate: 26...Ng5 27.Bf1 (27.Kf1 Bxg2+) 27...Nxe3+! 28.Kh1 (28.gxh3 Re6 29Bg2 Rg6) 28...Qg4. Strictly speaking, it is over now – but I’m going to show the conclusion: 29.Rc7! Qh5 30.a4 Nf4+ 31.Kg1 Nxe2 32.Bxg2 Qg4 33.Kf1 Qxg2+ 34.Ke1 Qg1+ 35.Kd2 Qxf2+ 36.Kc3 Qxa2.

So why is it, considering all the factors listed above, that White should find himself in a hopeless position? Because all of those achievements were completely ineffective! And the reason for that is that the entire white army is working for nothing: it has no point of attack for that huge, thundering mass of white pieces. Indeed, the c-file brings him nothing – there is not one invasion square. Similarly, neither the knight, nor the dark-square bishop, nor even the queen has anything to do here. Meanwhile, all of Black’s pieces, except for the rook at d8 (the rook at e8, as we have seen, is very much a part of the action), has something to do; all of them accomplish their tasks together, working cohesively. Which leads us to the conclusion: Some important strategic elements, taken together, do not always guarantee a good result, if they are not united by common goals, and cannot work together to attain those goals.

And here I had planned to end my discourse on how successful maneuvering can achieve a decisive advantage in piece coordination – but at the last possible moment, a game was played which I found impossible to overlook!
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Karjakin – Morozevich
Sicilian Defense [B48]
Wijk aan Zee 2009

8.0–0–0 Be7 9.f3 0–0 10.g4

10...b5

This variation has, in recent years, become Morozevich’s favorite weapon in the Sicilian Defense. At the time this game was played, he had used this variation in five games, and scored 4½ points!! And every one of his opponents was a strong player – one was Peter Leko! Obviously, Sergey Karjakin had taken all of this into account in his preparation, and arrived at the game with a plan of action ready.

11.g5 Ne8 12.h4 Ne5

13.Kb1

This move – which, first of all, does not seem very forceful, and second, is quite typical of most variations of the Sicilian Defense involving long castling by White – is the start of Karjakin’s plan of action for this game. On the other hand, this move had already been played before in this position, but with different ideas.

13...Bb7 14.h5

Formally speaking, it is this move that was the novelty; but the point is not in the move itself.

14...Rc8 15.Qg2!?

This repositioning of the queen serves several important purposes, among which are supporting the pawn assault and controlling the e4- and f3-squares.

15...b4 16.Na4 f5!?  

This center blow is an important link in Black’s plan for this opening system.

17.gxf6!

This is the right time to explain that the maneuvers on both sides, aimed at
accumulating the maximum amount of force before dealing a heavy blow to the opponent’s position, and White’s crushing success in that contest, were in very large measure built upon the calculation of complex – in some places, very complex – but at the same time apparently non-aggressive variations. I am omitting the great majority of these variations, so that they should not obscure the main theme of our study, which is the overall profile of play, and the decisive effect of coordinating forces. Here is a sample of the many calculations which the players had to perform in this game, this one demonstrating why it would be bad to take with the e-pawn: 17.exf5? Nxf3! 18.Nxf3 Rxf5 19.Rh3 Bxf3 20.Rxf3 Rxf3 21.Qxf3 Qxc2+ 22.Ka1 Qxa4 – and that was one of the simpler examples!

17...Nxf6

A small but important element of this position is the fact that the capture 18...Nxd3 is met by another typical move, the recapture 19.cxd3, which here is considerably stronger than taking back with the rook. In this case, White could make favorable use of the c-file.


21...Bf6?

It looks very much like this was the first real error committed by Morozevich in this game – but it is already the decisive one. And the point is not that he overlooked a tactical blow from his opponent, nor that he miscalculated a variation – that is, the sort of errors that almost always are the reason why a single oversight leads inevitably to a loss. The point is that this was a positional error, and such errors very rarely have an inescapably fatal outcome. More often they are followed by a long struggle, and the position often remains defensible, if inferior.

So why was this case different? The reason is that all the pieces, for both sides, are still on the board, with all of them developed, without exception, and mobilized for cooperative action. As a result, at this moment the position is filled with great internal tension. From this, it follows that if one side directs his entire force the wrong way, then the entire force his opponent has gathered will in turn break through the defensive line, like water bursting through a dam. That is just what happens in this game! Black should
have prevented the transfer of White’s rook to g3, by playing 21...Bd6! Then after 22.Qe2?! (of course not 22.Rg3? Nxd3) 22...Nxe3 23 exd3, White would only have had a small advantage, with the whole game yet to play.

22Nb2 Ne6 23Nxc6

23...Qxc6

This part of the game is especially rich in complex, sharp variations. I have already warned you that I do not see a need to present them all. I will show only one of these variations, that being one of the simplest to calculate, to give you some idea of what we’re talking about here. It would flow from the alternative capture, and go like this: 23...Bxc6 24.h6 Qe5 25.c3! Qxc3 26.e5! Bxe5 27.Bxh7+, and it is easy to see that it is all over for Black. In other, far more complicated branches, White’s chances would also be far better, although with best defense, Black would retain some saving chances.

24.Nc4 d5

This loses immediately. Black’s only chance to continue fighting looks to be the continuation 24...Bc3!? 25.Na5 Qc7 26.Nxb7 Qxb7 – but here too, after the thematic blow 27.e5!, I do not see anything better for Black than to neutralize the terrible bishop by means of the sacrifice 27...Rf5. Taking it would grant White a winning position, but the win itself would take a long time. But now, after...

25.exd5 exd5 26.h6! ...Black resigned!

It was mainly the need to think through the reasons why Black resigned in such a position that this game was included in the book. This position is notable primarily because almost all the pieces are still on the board. Also, Black’s forces number no fewer than his opponent’s, and are certainly not lacking in space. So what is killing them? This is what makes this position interesting: what kills Black is solely the difference in the degree of piece coordination!

I’m not going to add much to that – the following simple variations will demonstrate it: 26.h6! g6 (26...dxc4 27.Bxh7+! also loses at once) 27.Bxg6 hxg6 28.Qxg6+ Kh8 29.Qg7+! Rxg7 30.hxg7+ Kg8 31.Rh8+ Kf7 32.gxf8Q+. 1-0
Now, I will speak of an element of strategy that expresses the idea of coordinating forces in a particularly obvious fashion. This means is referred to as a fist and appears as a method of concentrating a great amount of force in a small area of the board. The most famous example in chess history is the following endgame:

![Chess Board Diagram]

Capablanca – Tartakower
New York 1924

At first glance, one cannot tell who has the better position: the White rook’s activity is unsupported by any other pieces, and the pawn at c3 is doomed. But, as Capablanca shows, White’s position is very strong, and can most probably be rated as winning! In any event, all the many attempts that I know of to show that Black can actually save himself here have always been refuted. But how did the game go?

34.Bxf5! gxf5 35.Kg3! Rxc3+ 36.Kh4

This was the idea of the Cuban genius. White’s king penetrates the enemy’s camp by force, to join forces with its rook.

36...Rf3

After 36...Rc1 37.Kh5!, the exchange of rooks is impossible, and the king comes in via g6. I have seen analyses which attempt to improve Black’s play. The most serious of these was 36...a6, with the idea of creating Black’s own passed pawn by continuing b6-b5. This attempt was refuted by that gifted analyst, grandmaster Igor Zaitsev. It is good to see such a notable and highly productive idea withstanding the test of time.

37.g6 Rxf4+ 38.Kg5 Re4

Otherwise, it is mate: 38...Rxd4 39.Kf6 Kg8 40.Rd7.

39.Kf6 Kg8
Chapter 6: Coordinating Forces

And here is the position in which White’s “fist,” consisting of king, rook and pawn, is clearly visible. This fist may occupy a small area, but it is very powerful. Its power comes from a particularly high concentration of force in the decisive area of conflict. Notice how, deep in the endgame, Black has to defend against mating threats!

40.Rg7+

Note this detail. Capablanca did not play this way out of a love for threatening gestures, but for greater comfort in the realization of his advantage. The advantage he gains from this check will make itself felt later on.

40...Kh8 41.Rxc7 Re8 42.Kxf5!

One more apparently simple, short-spanned episode – but very useful to remember. White has achieved a very great, and already decisive positional advantage, whose most important component is Black’s almost total helplessness. In such cases, it is very important not to allow the opponent any undeserved counterplay – such as Black might gain from the f-pawn, if White were to continue 42.Rxa7 f4 43.Kg5 f3 44.Rf7 Re4. So Capablanca simply takes it off; after that, the play is all at one end of the field. The technique of realizing an advantage comes down mostly to such “small things.”

42...Re4 43.Kf6 Re4+ 44.Ke5 Rg4

45.g7+!

And here’s the result of White’s farsightedness (recall his 40th move). This wins a useful tempo, and makes the victory easier to achieve.

45...Kg8

The pawn endgame would be hopeless after 45...Rg7 46.Rxg7 Kxg7 47.Kxd5 Kf7 48.Kc6 Ke7 49.Kb7.

46.Rxa7 Rg1 47.Kxd5 Rc1 48.Kd6 Rc2 49.d5 Rc1 50.Rc7 Ra1 51.Kc6 Rxa4 52.d6 1-0

This game made a strong impression upon the world of chess, and was much imitated. Among the imitators, I am particularly fond of the following.

Pelletier – Rozentalis
Yerevan 1996
Although this position differs markedly from the previous one, in character they are alike. Both situations may be described as follows: one side is more active – in this case, it is Black, with his rook standing on the next-to-last row inside the enemy camp, his active pawn configuration, and finally – his king, cut off from all this magnificence! But how can Black get it into the game? Grandmaster Eduard Rozentalis found a brilliant solution:

41...g4!!

Only this unexpected resource solves the problem. One might expect an attempt to penetrate with the king, 41...f4 42.gxf4 gxf4 43.Rxb4 f3 44.Ke1 Rb2 45.Rb8, but it does not deliver the desired result, since the black king will be unable to escape the relentless white rook. Black’s plan aims at creating a shelter for his king from checks. And this shelter will be located as close as possible to the white monarch!

42.Rxb4 f4! 43.Ra4 Rb2 44.gxf4

Black’s plan has become much clearer. We can already see that the king’s intended shelter is to be the f3-square. We can also see that the path thereto lies through the e4-square, which leads us to conclude that this path will require the sacrifice of yet another pawn! The only question is which one to give up, and which to retain, the e-pawn, or the g-pawn. Rozentalis has everything calculated precisely.

44...g3! 45.fxg3 e3 46.f5 Ke4 47.f6

And again, as I have done so many times before, I advise you that in this position, there are a lot of sharp lines possible, and once again I ask you to take my word for it that they all end well for Black. The path chosen by White here sets his opponent a most complex task, so it should be acknowledged as his best chance.

47...Kf3 48.Ra1

Now we have arrived at the third critical point of this endgame we are studying. Black must solve one last difficult problem.

48...Rg2!!

And he copes with it brilliantly! One more amazing move – and once again, it is the only solution for this problem. As the variations show, White’s king must be held to the f1-square. After
48...Rf2+? instead, 49.Kg1 Kxg3 50.Re1 e2 51.d5, and Black has nothing better than perpetual check, and a draw. But after the text move, it is all over. Pelletier acknowledged as much by resigning. 0-1

Here are the variations: 48...Rg2! 49.Re1 (49.f7 e2+ 50.Ke1 Ke3 leads to mate; and 49.b4 e2+ 50.Ke1 Rg1+ 51.Kd2 Rxa1 would be no better) 49...e2+ 50.Rxe2 Rxe2 51.g4 (51.f7 Rf2+ 52.Ke1 Kxg3) 51...Rf2+ 52.Ke1 Ke3 53.g5 Rg2 54.Kd1 Rxd5 55.f7 Rf5 – Black is just in time.

For all the genius of Capablanca’s conception, this endgame we just looked at was far harder to play perfectly. In this game, Rozentalis created a true gem of chess technique and accurate calculation!

Now let’s watch as the “fist” strategy shows itself in complicated middlegame situations.

Karpov was aiming for this layout of his pieces; once he had achieved it, the dangers facing Black became clear.

31...Bd4

White executes a beautiful attack after 31...Kh8, as follows: 32.Be5! Bxc5 33.Nxf7+! Rxf7 (33...Kg8 34.Nh6+ Kh8 35.Rxf8+ Rxf8 36.Rxf8#) 34.Rxf7 Bf6 35.R1xf6! Rd1+ 36.Rf1, and wins.

32.Bh6!?  

Another strong continuation would have been 32.Nf5 Qxe4 33.Bd6, with a winning position.

32...Nc6
33.Nf5!?  
White would have won more quickly by taking the pawn with 33.Nxf7. What follows is the main line, though it is not forced: 33...Rde8 34.Bxg7! Bxg7 35.Nh6+ Kh8 36.Rxf8+ Rxf8 37.Rxf8+ Bxf8 38.Qg8#. The most likely reason why Karpov passed up this possibility might have been a shortage of time. You cannot calculate everything in time-pressure, which is why players stick to one line and follow it, if they find it leads to a favorable result.

33...Qb2  
An important component of White’s choice was the following pretty variation: 33...Be5 34.Bxg7! Bxg3 35.Rxg3, leaving Black’s king defenseless. For example: 35...h5 36.Bf6+ Kh7 37.Rg7+ Kh8 38.Rxf7+ Kg8 39.Nh6#. In this line, the power of the "fist" – which, you will recall, consists of a high concentration of pieces (and pawns too, if required) in a small space – shows itself most convincingly.

34.Bc1! Qb5 35.Nh6+ Kh8 36.Nxf7+ Rxf7 37.Rxf7 Bf6  
But in this next game, everything worked out as it was supposed to for Topalov.

38.Qf2  
Please, not 38.R1xf6?? Rd1+.

38...Kg8 39.Rxf6 gxf6 40.Qxf6 1-0  
These days, the most successful exponent of the “fist” method is Veselin Topalov. The most convincing of the many examples ever seen of the power of a piece/pawn fist could have been the second game of his match with Kramnik in 2006. (I highly recommend reading Topalov – Kramnik 2006, Russell Enterprises Inc., Milford 2007). But that was clearly not his day!
Chapter 6: Coordinating Forces

Where does the rook go?

24.Rbd5!

We know about the power of high concentration already; but in life, as in chess, good intentions alone are not enough! Accurate consideration of the consequences would be a good thing, also. As we shall see, Topalov has calculated the variations flawlessly.

24...Be6 25.Be2! Qh6 26.Bf4! Nxf4 27.exf4 g6

On 27...Bxd5 28.Nf5, White wins the queen.

28.Qe4!

This continuation is considerably stronger than 28.fxe5 Bxd5 29.Rxd5 Qe3+ 30.Kh1 fxe5, when Black retains counterplay.

28...Bxd5 29.Qxd5+ Kh8

30.Re4!

Now the knight is untouchable. After 30.fxe5?? Qe3+, suddenly it is Black who is winning. But something else is interesting here. On move 28, White rejected a variation that would have brought him an advantage in material, choosing instead this line, where he is behind in material, but keeps the high degree of concentration of his forces—a powerful fist in the middle of the board, which decides the outcome of the game.

30...Nd7

The alternative defense, 30...Ng4 31.Bxg4 f5, leads to a spectacular finish: 32.Nf7+ Rxf7 33.Qxa8+ Kg7 34.Re8 fxg4 35.Rg8+ Kf6 36.Qc6+ Kf5 37.Qd5+ Kf6 38.Qe5#.

31.Nf7+ Rxf7 32.Qxf7
Here, Kasimdzhanov resigned, seeing that his position was indefensible. 1-0
For example, 32...Nf8 33.Re7; 32...Nc5 33.Re8+ Rxe8 34.Qxe8+ Kg7 35.Qe7+ Kh8 36.Bc4, and there is no hope; or 32...Rd8 33.Rd4 Qg7 34.Qxg7+ Kxg7 35.Bb5. Note that in all variations, the decisive factor is the difference in coordination of the forces.

To end this chapter, and this book, I considered it proper to present a selection of examples by Mikhail Tal. You will soon be convinced that there could be no better way to create the most inspiring aperitif ever!

However, the question might be asked: this book talks about chess strategy – wasn’t Tal renowned above all as a tactical genius and past master of calculation? Does it make sense to illustrate strategic themes with examples in which tactics predominate?

The point is that cooperation of forces is, as we now know, one of the few absolute principles of chess, and in that capacity it touches every aspect of the game, without exception – strategy and tactics, statics and dynamics. What is more, all of these elements are closely bound to one another, and will almost never be seen in their “pure” state. Thus, the examples I shall present here are quite to the point!

Since these examples are filled with tactics and calculation, the frequency of diagrams in the text will be correspondingly greater than usual. So do not be surprised if sometimes, you find a diagram after every move. In these examples, the active weight of each decision made by the players was very high.

First, three examples, relatively short ones, but very textually dense.

![Chess Diagram]

Tal – Miles
Porz 1982

Clearly, White has the initiative here. It is also clear that the sector of the board where he should seek to add forces is the kingside. But how should White’s main forces – the queen in particular – arrange to get there? After considering this task, Tal found an astounding solution.

17.b4!! Bc8

The following variation reveals the idea behind the sacrifice: 17...cxb4 18.Be3! Qa6 19.Qg4! Nf6 20.Qf4. The pawn was sacrificed, so that the bishop could free up a square for the queen, with tempo. Now White has collected enough forces for the decisive blow, and the game would end as follows: 20...Kg7 (20...Rad8 21.Rxe7 and 22.Qxf6) 21.Qh6+ Kg8 22.Nxg6 is crushing. The other capture also loses: 17...Qxb4 18.Nxg6! fxg6 19.Qxe6+, and so forth.
Chapter 6: Coordinating Forces

18.bxc5 Qxc5 19.Ne4

And so the first piece arrives with tempo.

19...Qb6

20.Qf3!

Now the queen reaches its jumping-off point.

20...Qb2


But here too, White unleashes a pile of blows.

21.Nxf7! Qg7

Once again, taking the rook loses: 21...Bxd7 22.Be5 Qxa2 23.Nh6#.

22.Nh6+ Kh8

23.Rc7!

23.Be5 would also have been an easy win; but Tal sees that it is not going to run away!

23...Rf8

If 23...g5, and equally after 23...Nf6 24.Nxf6 Qxf6, White wins by Bf4-e5. Whereas now...

24.Rxe7!


I would like to draw your attention to the amazing speed with which events developed here, as well as to the rapidity with which Tal was able to arrange the astonishingly effective cooperation of nearly every one of his pieces.

The events in our next example appear more astonishing still.
Back to Basics: Strategy

Tal – Rantanen
Tallinn 1979

The position appears difficult to evaluate. The centralized white knight is fabulous, and the rook that has invaded down the open file, and could be supported by the other rook, makes us happy. But the bishop at g4 is attacking one of them, and then plans to retreat to h5, interdicting an important square along that open file. Our preliminary conclusion: White certainly has the initiative, but Black’s defense is sufficiently sound. But then, Tal played…

24.Nf6!!

…and suddenly the position turned interesting…and confusing.

24...gxf6

The capture 24...Bxd1? would be clear enough: after 25.Qh4 h5(a thematic variant would be 26.Qxh6+ gxh6 27.Rh7#) 26.Qg5 Rb7 27.Qg6, and it is all over.

25.Qh4 Bg7 26.Bh6!

But now, Black has a wide choice of possibilities; and I, in contrast to the rules I laid down for this book, shall acquaint you with the main lines.

26...Rg8 27.Rxd6 Rb7 leads by force to a queen endgame, 28.Bxg7+ Rxg7 29.Rxb7! Qxb7 30.Rd8+ Rg8 31.Rxg8+ Kxg8 32.Qxg4+, that is technically won for White. The position after 26...Rb7 27.Bxg7+ Kg8 28.Rxb7 Bxd1 29.Ra7 Qb8 30.Rd7! Qc8 31.Qh3 is indisputably winning. The most interesting defense is 26...Qe6, but there too, after 2.Bxg7+ Kg8 28.Rxf6 Bxd1 29.Rxe6 Rxe6 30.Bf6, White would have a decisive advantage. The only question left unanswered is the most obvious one: what happens if Black takes the rook?

26...Bxd1 27.Bxg7+ Kg8
Chapter 6: Coordinating Forces

Here was Tal’s answer:

28.Bh8!!

Genius – both for spectacular effect, and for its effectiveness. Finding this move in the final position would be relatively simple; but it would have been very hard to do at the stage of choosing White’s 24th move. In fact, if White did not see this possibility, then he should not have played 24.Nf6!! at all! Most importantly, looking at the position in the last diagram, it is very hard to believe that White could achieve anything useful there. Yet, one amazing move later, and a miracle of total cooperation comes to pass!

28...Kxf7

Only shock might explain why Black continued to make moves here. The variations are elementary, and they all end in mate: 28...Bh5 29.Qxf6 Qg4 30.Rg7+; 28...h5 29.Qxf6.

29.Qxf6+ Kg8 30.Qg7# 1-0

It might seem hard to believe, but the next example made an even bigger impression on me!

Tal – Padevsky
Moscow 1963

White can take the pawn three different ways. Clearly, the worst of these would be 25.Bxe5?, since this only brings the bishop into play, while the other forces do not change their positions. It would be far more logical, natural and typical to take with the rook, 25.Rxe5!?. The point and power of this move is that it brings both pieces into play, the rook and the bishop. I do not doubt that most strong players would have chosen this line without much thought; and in the larger sense, they would have been right. But it was Tal who was sitting at the board! And he succeeded in finding the kernel of greater truth in the third possibility:

25.dxe5!!

Yes, this simple capture does deserve two exclamation marks, since it leads inevitably to a great sharpening of the game, with unpredictable consequences; and these consequences Tal evaluated quite correctly, and most likely intuitively.

25...d4

If Black does not want to get involved in the serious calculations necessary here, and plays 25...Bg7 instead, then 26.Nd4 demonstrates the enormous positional benefits of White’s 25th move. The knight is powerfully centralized, and the attacking ranks are swelled by the addition of a strong passed pawn.

26.e6! dxc3 27.exd7 Bg7 28.Nxc7...

and here, Black resigned! 1-0

What could have brought on such a surprising decision? The variations are
complex, and I will present only the
main line. It is the most indicative, and
is quite difficult to calculate. 28.Nxc7.

And in conclusion, a powerful game,
filled right from the opening with very
sharp play.

28...Qf3  (28...Qh4 leads to the same
thing. It is important that Black not take
the b2-pawn with check, in order to
retain the possibility of taking on f4
with check) 29.Ne6+Ka8.

And here, White deflects the queen
away from the f4-square: 30.Bg2! Qxf2
(after 30...Qxg2 31.Nc7+ Kb8
32.Ne8+, the pawn queens) 31.Nc7+
Kb8 32.Nd5+ Ka8 33.Rxe7 Rd8
34.Re8 Bf6 35.Nc7+ Kb8 36.Rxd8+
Bxd8 37.Ne6+ Ka8 38.Bxb7+ Kxb7

In the opening, Tal eagerly sacrificed
pawns, and Spassky just as eagerly
accepted. But unfortunately, he did not
pay the required attention to his
opponent’s plans when doing so, nor
maintain the necessary accuracy; and
now, Black’s activity has reached
serious proportions. Now he had an
opportunity to strike a blow in the
direction of White’s king, which Tal
took advantage of. Still, the entire
consequences of this action were very
hard to foresee, since the end stage of
this calculation gives rise to a very
sharp situation which is not at all simple
to evaluate correctly. But once again,
Tal’s genius intuition did not fail him!

14...d4!

The combination gets underway.

15.exd4 Rxf3! 16.Bxf3 cxd4
17.0-0

Black would answer 17.Rc1 Bxa6 18.Bxc6 with 18...Rd8! 19.Qc2 dxc3 20.bxc3 Qe5+, and it is all over.

17...dxc3 18.bxc3 Bxc3 19.Qd6 Rxa6 20.Bxc6

It is just that deciding who would be on top in this position would have been most difficult. Tal had to be sure that he could profitably withstand White's pressure along the c-file. Or, to put it another way: that the cooperation of the forces he controls would be more effective than the cooperation of the opposing forces. As we can see, all Black's pieces are unsupported - just hanging in the air. So they must need especially good coordination.

23.Rc2 Qa4 24.Qb3

On 24.Rfc1, we see the first appearance of Black's main resource: 24...Bxf2+!

24...Qf4

Up to here, everything has been forced; now comes a series of moves on which Black's entire operation depends.

20...Bb4!

20...Be5?? would have been an awful blunder: after 21.Qe7, White wins.

21.Qb8 Rxc6 22.Rac1 Bc5!

The concluding move of the combination.

25.Qf3
The whole rest of the game will consist entirely of battles between the two sides’ pieces, leading to the appearance of a vast number of variations, as a consequence of which the players’ job boils down almost exclusively to the calculation of these variations. I will be showing you only a relatively small portion of them – the most important lines.

At this point, Spassky could have forced the trade of queens by 25.Qf3!?., leading to 25...Qxf3 26.gxf3 e5. Now on 26.Rfc1?, Black wins by 27...Rg6+ 28.Kh1 Bb7. White could put up a far more stubborn resistance by continuing 27.Kh1! Bb7 28.Rb1!, although then too, Black keeps winning chances after 28...Bd4 29.Rxc6 Bxc6. But it appears that this is what he should have played.

25...Qf5 26.Rfc1

Spassky probably envisioned this position when he avoided the exchange of queens. Now the threat of 27.Qf3 is very strong. However...

26...Bb7! 27.Qf3

And it turns out that he cannot take the cheeky bishop: 27.Qb8+ Kh7 28.Qxb7 Bxf2+!, and again, Black wins!

27...Qg5!

Here, Black cannot trade: 27...Qxf3? 28.gxf3 e5 29.Rxc5 Rg6+ 30.Kf1 – and the king escapes!

28.Qb3

He cannot continue his pursuit of the black queen: on 28.Qg3, Black replies 28...Bxf2+! 29.Qxf2 (29.Kxf2 Rxc2+ 30.Rxc2 Qf5+ picks up the rook) 29...Qxc1+, and wins.

28...Rc7!

The thematic 28...Bxf2+ does not work here as 29.Kxf2 Rxc2+ 30.Rxc2 Qxg2+ 31.Ke3 Qf3+ 32.Kd2 accomplishes nothing for Black.

29.g3

Again, 29.Qg3 Bxf2+.
But the thunder still rolls here, although in a much more complex version than in the previous variations!

29...Bxf2+! 30.Kxf2

30...Qf6+

It would have been stronger to play a different check here, 30...Qf5+ 31.Kg1 Qe4, and White cannot stop the attack.

31.Ke1


31...Qe5+ 32.Kf1

32...Ba6+

Tal makes a mistake, which one may understand and forgive, considering the enormous amount of variations he had to work through for this game. We already know the proper course, 32...Qf5+ 33.Kg1 Qe4.

33.Kg1 Qd4+ 34.Kg2 Qe4+

35.Kg1?

But here, Spassky makes his opponent’s job easier! The reason is as given above, plus it is quite likely both sides were in time-pressure. 35.Kh3? would also have been a mistake, because of 35...Rxc2 36.Qxc2 Bf1+. But with 35.Kf2, White could have seriously complicated Black’s task. Here I shall finally call a temporary halt to the flood of variations. I shall say only that Black would have kept good winning chances, but it would have been a much harder task than in the game.

35...Bb7 36.h4 Qh1+ 37.Kf2 Rf7+ 38.Ke2 Qe4+
Back to Basics: Strategy

Now 39.Qe3 Ba6+ 40.Kd2 Rd7+ leads to the loss of White’s queen; nor is 39.Kd1 Rd7+ 40.Rd2 Qh1+ 41.Kc2 Rc7+ any better. So White resigned. 0-1
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