Mastering Positional Chess

Daniel Naroditsky

Practical Lessons of a Junior World Champion

NEW IN CHESS
Mastering Positional Chess
Daniel A. Naroditsky

Mastering Positional Chess
Practical Lessons from a Junior World Champion

New In Chess 2010
Contents

Symbols .................................................. 6
Acknowledgments ........................................ 7
Bibliography ............................................. 8
Preface .................................................... 9
Foreword .................................................. 11
Introduction .............................................. 13
Chapter 1: Prophylaxis ................................. 15
Chapter 2: Defense in Worse Positions .............. 45
Chapter 3: Building and Breaking Fortresses ....... 95
Chapter 4: Positional Sacrifice ....................... 121
Chapter 5: Paralysis in the Middlegame .......... 187
Chapter 6: Maneuvering ............................... 205
Solutions to Exercises ................................. 233
Epilogue ................................................... 237
Index ...................................................... 238
Symbols

+- The position is clearly winning for White
± The position is clearly better for White
±± White has an edge
= The position is approximately equal
→+ The position is clearly winning for Black
↔ The position is clearly better for Black
↔↔ Black has an edge

![ Strong move
!_. Brilliant move
? Weak move; mistake
?? Blunder
!? Interesting move; deserving attention
?! Dubious move

1-0 Black resigns
0-1 White resigns
½-½ Draw
Acknowledgments

There are many people without whom this book would not have been possible. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to:

IM Armen Amhartsouman for not only being my chess mentor, but also for providing emotional support during many grueling chess tournaments.

My former chess teacher, sparring partner, and long-term friend NM Michael Aigner for contributing to my chess education in more than one way.

IM John Donaldson (Director of the Mechanics Institute Chess Club) for guiding my chess career for years and giving me many opportunities to study with numerous grandmasters who visited the Club.

My current chess teachers GM Gregory Kaidanov and GM Lev Psakhis for providing countless invaluable advice both on and off the board.

IM Sam Shankland and FM Steven Zierk for being true friends and cheering me up in times of stress.

My deepest appreciations to NM Dana Mackenzie for reading the entire manuscript and providing extremely valuable critique and making many improvements to it.

My parents for their never-ending support and constant encouragement.

My brother Alan for his love, devotion, and true friendship.
Mastering Positional Chess

Bibliography

Books
Isputaniye Vremenem (The Test of Time), Garry Kasparov (Azerbaijani Governmental Press 1985)
Khod za Khodom, God za Godom (Move by Move, Year by Year), Alexander Nikitin & Garry Kasparov (64 Press 1998)
Secrets of Chess Defense, Mihail Marin (Gambit Publications 2005)
The Road to Chess Improvement, Alex Yermolinsky (Gambit Publications 1999)
Opening Revolution in the 1970’s, Garry Kasparov (Ripol Classic Publications 2007)
Learn from the Legends: Chess Champions at their Best, Mihail Marin (Quality Chess 2006)
Poezia Shakmat (The Poetry of Chess), Boris Grigoriev (Boisen Publications 2008)
Modern Defense, Jon Speelman & Neil McDonald (Everyman Chess 2000)
Inside the Chess Mind, Jacob Aagaard (Everyman Chess 2004)
Understanding Pawn Play in Chess, Drazen Marovic (Gambit 2000)

Periodicals
New In Chess
New In Chess Yearbook
Chess Life

Websites
www.uschess.org
www.chessgames.com
www.theweekinchess.com
www.chessbase.com
www.chess-results.com
www.chessclub.com/fm
www.monroi.com
www.uschessleague.com

Miscellaneous
MegaBase 2009
Correspondence Base 2009
ICC (Internet Chess Club)
Preface

Daniel (born on 9 November 1995) started playing chess when he was six and a half years old (Summer 2002). His dad taught him how to play chess, so he would have something to do in his free time. Daniel played with his four-and-a-half year older brother Alan all summer, and after a few months Daniel had a natural ability to place pieces on the board – something which usually comes with many years of experience. Indeed, love for the great game runs in the family – Daniel’s grandfather played chess quite well, and collected chess books; Daniel’s Dad, Vladimir, played chess competitively in his youth, and Daniel’s brother Alan has been a Top 100 player in the United States in his age category for many years. Alan and Daniel have traveled together to numerous chess competitions and discussed their games with each other for endless hours. There is also a large library of chess books at home – collected over three generations now – both in English and in Russian.

A few months after he learned the rules of the game, Daniel played in his first tournament (2003 Scholastic Championship of California), and won all five games easily. This tournament served as the trigger, and after it Daniel became very serious about chess. His love for the game became more apparent every day, and he would spend many hours at the board just moving the pieces (we purchased several chess sets, and for Daniel, they replaced model train sets or Lego blocks). We hired a professional chess coach, and Daniel started to take weekly lessons. We did not have to wait long to fill up our bookcases with his trophies. Very soon, it became clear to us that we needed a more seasoned coach to accommodate Daniel’s rapid rate of improvement. Armenian-born IM Armen Ambartsoumian became that coach.

A few years later, when he was about 10 years old, Daniel was playing first board in an adult tournament. At that time, he was still relatively unknown on the United States chess scene. We walked him to the playing hall and directed him to his board. A few minutes later, he came back crying, telling us that the Tournament Director would not allow him to sit down – Daniel was told that he was in the wrong section, and kids were playing elsewhere. He looked very young even for his years, but his inner maturity exhibited itself during one of the master classes conducted by Garry Kasparov in New York (bi-annual sessions to which the best young players are invited). Kasparov could not help laughing when he asked Daniel about his opening repertoire, and Daniel began with “When I was young, I played…” Everybody who knows Daniel agrees that his intellectual development is far beyond his years.

After numerous successes and failures, Daniel’s then coach GM Gregory Kaidanov told him that if he wanted to become serious about his chess (his rating at that time was about 2000), he needed to study positional play. As is the case with most young chess players, Daniel was much more attracted to combinations and sacrifices rather than careful maneuvering. Nevertheless, he started to read books
Mastering Positional Chess

on positional play in English and in Russian, but was not easily satisfied, and his
couch suggested that Daniel should analyze his own games, and make annotations.
Daniel would spend hours filling notebooks with small, calligraphic characters and
diagrams he printed from ChessBase.

Since he was about four
years old, Daniel enjoyed
writing and kept count-
less notebooks of his
thoughts and short sto-
ries. Daniel loved writ-
ing in his notebooks
much more than just
typing on the computer.
Writing is inevitably
slower, and allows you to
comprehend the mate-
rial much better. It has
always been aesthetically
pleasing for Daniel.

In the summer of
2008, Daniel started to
ask us strange questions about the book publishing business, and one of the last
pages of his notebook contained an autobiographical section. Daniel always had curi-
osity for many unusual subjects: capitals of small countries, birth and death dates of
famous composers, and numbers of hospital beds per capita in third world countries,
just to name a few. We treated his questions about book printing as one of these curi-
osities (we knew he was writing a book, but never thought that a 12-year-old could
create publishable material). However, a year and several notebooks later, he showed
us the finished product, and we decided to ask for the opinions of his coaches. After
receiving positive reactions from GM Gregory Kaidanov and GM Lev Psakhis, chess
historian and popular author IM John Donaldson recommended that we send one
chapter to a few publishers. After choosing, editing, and sending the largest chapter,
we received an email from the publisher of New In Chess, Mr. Allard Hoogland. He
loved the excerpt, and expressed his surprise that a high quality work was written by
such a young author. After we sent the entire manuscript, the book was accepted for
publishing. That is how this book came into being.

The process of writing this book definitely helped Daniel to achieve three Cali-
ifornia scholastic championship titles, two national championship titles, and finally,
in November of 2007, the title of World Youth Chess Champion. Most importantly,
we hope that becoming an author and completing this book will inspire Daniel to
achieve any goals he sets for himself.

Vladimir Naroditsky and Lena Schuman
Daniel’s Parents
Foreword

The Mechanics' Institute Chess Club of San Francisco, founded in 1854, has produced many fine junior talents over the years. One need only mention future International Master Jay Whitehead who finished second, ahead of Garry Kasparov (''), in the 1977 World Cadet Championship, and future Grandmaster Vinay Bhat, who won a pair of bronze medals competing in World Youth Championships in the 1990s. When Daniel Naroditsky first joined the Mechanics' six years ago at the age of seven it didn’t take long to realize he was going to keep the tradition of excellence alive.

Even early on it was clear that unlike most kids his age Daniel loved to study chess just as much as to play it. Coming up in an age in which his peers were using ChessBase, Fritz and Rybka to acquire chess knowledge he was decidedly "old school", learning as much from books as from computers. Most notably Danya, as his friends affectionately call him, had an outstanding memory that allowed him to instantly recall the birth dates of famous chess players and musical composers (music is another of Daniel's passions and his brother Alan is a top level pianist as well as an Expert strength player). Besides possessing a near perfect recall of material he had read, Daniel also stood apart from his peers in his love for the history of the game, something most young chess players only develop an interest in much later in life.

Daniel quickly moved through the ranks at the Mechanics’, earning his Experts title at 10 and his Master ranking the following year. He came to international attention when he won the World Youth under 12 Boys Championship in Antalya, Turkey, in the fall of 2007. Daniel is now a FIDE Master closing in on the International Master title. This is quite impressive but there are plenty of junior players who have progressed more quickly. What makes Daniel unique is what you are holding in your hands. While the age at which players become Grandmasters has been steadily dropping the past twenty-five years, the age at which chess authors have their first book published has not.

Mastering Positional Chess: Practical Lessons of a Junior World Champion is unique. No book on chess has had a younger author than the present one. Arturo Pomar’s Mis Cincuenta Partidas con Maestros (1945) and Bobby Fischer’s Games of Chess (1959) were published when their nominal authors were 14 and 15 respectively, but the extent of their involvement in preparing the books is in doubt, so the previous record holder is Murray Chandler. The future Grandmaster, at age 15, wrote a privately-printed book A White Pawn in Europe, giving his games from the World Junior Championship and English tournaments from the second half of 1975. Another name that should be mentioned is Grandmaster Larry Evans, who wrote two well received books on Vienna 1922, and David Bronstein, at ages 16
Mastering Positional Chess

and 18 respectively. The record for youngest female author appears to be held by Alexandra Kosteniuk, whose How I became a grandmaster at age 14 (2001), was published when she was 17.

Started in 2006, when the author was only ten (!) years old, Mastering Positional Chess: Practical Lessons of a Junior World Champion, was written for a very specific reason. Young Daniel realized his lack of positional understanding was causing him to lose many games. He set out to correct this deficiency in a most ambitious way by collecting classic examples on a variety of positional themes and subjecting them to extensive analysis. Having done this Daniel then clarified things in his own mind by putting into words what he had learned not only from the classics but his own games.

Mastering Positional Chess: Practical Lessons of a Junior World Champion is, in some ways, a book from earlier times in that it offers the reader a significant amount of explanatory prose. Yes, analysis is given, but only what is needed, not more. The author repeatedly reinforces the points he wishes to make not only through the illustrative games he offers, but also in the summaries and exercises.

Youth may be lacking in experience but compensates with bravery! Throughout his first book you will find young Daniel challenging many assessments made by famous players. Older authors are prone to hedge their bets and tone down their criticisms but Daniel calls it like he sees it. He may not always be right – though he has tried hard to find the truth – but Daniel’s candor is refreshing. Readers will not find Mastering Positional Chess: Practical Lessons of a Junior World Champion boring. What they will find is a lot of information about positional chess and how to apply it to their own games.

Well done Daniel!

John Donaldson

October 1st, 2009
Introduction

Nowadays, many players hugely underestimate the importance of positional play. Certain writers promise the reader gigantic rating gains if the reader solves tens (or even hundreds) of tactical problems a day. Many players follow this advice for a while, and it certainly is a good idea to solve tactical problems. I have done the same thing for most of my chess career. Nevertheless, when I started getting constantly outplayed, I realized that tactical practice was not the only way to improve one’s playing strength. The more I studied positional chess, the more I understood the importance of positional play.

I realized that in order to create positions where tactical motifs could be utilized, it is vital to understand positional ideas at least on the basic level. Yes, reading a book on tactics is often a more entertaining task than reading a book on positional chess, but if you want to excel at chess, you have to delve deeper into the chess realm, and appreciate not only visually pleasing combinations, but much more subtle positional ideas. As I soon learned, winning with an extremely subtle maneuver is often a lot more aesthetically pleasing than executing a smothered mate.

If I could pinpoint the most important time when my studies came into use, it would certainly be the World Youth Chess Championship in 2007. Being a “veteran” of this prestigious annual event, I understood that most opponents did not pay attention to positional chess. Therefore, when I was playing my games, I steered the game into positional tracks and every time my opponent would make a mistake that handed the advantage or the initiative over to me. I won game after game in the same fashion – systematically improving my position until my opponent would make a mistake. No matter how strong he was, he made a mistake every time. In the last round, my studies helped especially. I needed a win for first place, but was playing a very strong player from Russia. In a quiet Najdorf, my opponent made one tiny-looking inaccuracy. Immediately, my pieces poured into the weaknesses he had created, and he could not defend against the vicious onslaught.

However, it’s impossible to learn positional chess only by reading. In order to improve, I started to write notes on my own games with the goal being to raise the level of my positional play. In a short while, the messy notes started to take shape. As my chess level progressed, I found a lot of mistakes to correct and a lot of analyses to redo, but after two years of work I finally finished the typed manuscript. Suddenly, my private notes turned into a more formal manuscript, which I showed to my chess friends and teachers. They liked it, and encouraged me to continue my work. After two years, I was ready to share it with other chess players!

This book is geared towards players aiming to improve their positional understanding, and towards advanced players who want to add to their arsenal of ideas. In other words, my goal is to equip you with enough positional motifs to help you
Mastering Positional Chess

to move on to more complicated material. I'm sure that no matter how strong you are, you will find some helpful material in this book.

I feel that now is a great moment to talk about why I chose the chapters that I did in this book. First of all, why did I allocate so much space to paralysis? I think that paralysis in the middlegame is a concept that is of paramount importance. Knowing techniques to impede the development of your opponent's pieces is crucial. As we shall see in the chapter, there are many games where grandmasters masterfully neutralized the activity of the opponent's pieces, and thus quickly won the game. The reason I chose the subjects in the other chapters is because I felt that they simply were the most important when studying positional chess. For example, prophylaxis is another concept that tactical players tend to underestimate. As we shall see, the most innocuous-looking moves are often the precursor to a decisive combination.

Although there are many great books on positional chess, I think that this book is a bit different. First of all, I tried to pick games in which the players were approximately equal in strength. Secondly, besides showing classic games I picked games in which the players made mistakes, since in almost all of today's games up to grandmaster level, errors are unavoidable. When I was only beginning to play serious chess, I thought that books written by strong grandmasters were flawless. To me, grandmasters were like gods — everything they wrote was law, and nothing could be debated. To my utter surprise, I discovered that the appealing outer layer of text hid many mistakes, which sometimes changed the evaluations of every single line given.

Also, another illusion of flawlessness has come along in recent years — the illusion that the computer will solve all problems. Very often, even grandmasters will categorically accept computer analysis. It is this addiction that usually leads to something I call "Silicon Syndrome." A prime example is the following: a computer-addictive master is playing a very important game. On every move, he asks himself, "And what would Fritz do here?" This constant questioning leads to big time trouble and, often, to big blunders. Therefore, in chess, the more verbosity there is in the annotations, the better! Summing up, in practical play, there will be no computer to assist you, so it is verbal annotations, phrased in human language, that you will be able to retain and apply in your own games.

IM Fred Reinfeld once said: "It seems to me that little effort is exerted as a rule (by most writers) to make the study of a book an interesting and pleasant occupation." Apart from packing this book with a multitude of great positional ideas, I have tried to make it as enjoyable and readable as possible. After all, the purpose of reading a chess book is not only to learn from it, but to enjoy it as well!

Daniel Naroditsky,
December 2009
Chapter 1: Prophylaxis

This book starts with prophylaxis because I’m convinced that in order to master positional thinking, one needs to first master prophylactic thinking. Let me define what exactly I mean by prophylaxis.

Prophylaxis can mean stopping a possible plan or a future threat by the opponent. For instance, evacuating the king from a danger zone is an example of prophylaxis – the king might be subject to an attack, and removing the king completely nullifies the effectiveness of the attack.

Another example of prophylaxis is when you take away an important square from your opponent, thus rendering a certain plan or idea useless. The first person that touched upon the concept of prophylaxis was the Latvian-born Danish Maestro Aron Nimzowitsch. He formulated the idea itself and emphasized the importance of prophylactic thinking. Although today’s definition of prophylactic thinking might differ from Nimzowitsch’s, he certainly deserves full credit for “inventing” prophylactic thinking.

Another important point: prophylaxis is completely different than defense. In defense, you’re almost always trying to parry threats that are already present, while prophylaxis is all about rooting out the source of problems. For example, if one side has a bishop that can potentially cause problems, trading the bishop for another piece or even giving up an exchange to eliminate it is an example of prophylaxis.

Often, when you’re attacking, it’s tempting to just throw all of your pieces at your opponent’s king, instead of stopping any counterplay first.

Let’s take a look at a position from one of the best attackers ever, to see how even the greatest can fall into this temptation.

By sacrificing a piece, Fischer had obtained a very strong attack. However, it’s not easy to find the best way to continue. Fischer, a brilliant attacker, here forgot to ask himself a question that you should ask yourself on every move:

“If it were Donner’s move, what would he do?”

In this position, besides ...\texttt{Wxe3}, Donner also wants to play ...\texttt{f5}, when he will be simply a piece up since the queen on a7 not only defends the
whole diagonal, but also guards the second rank and threatens to go to f7. Fischer didn’t ask himself this question, and played the obvious-looking:

1. $\text{d1-d4}$

If one didn’t know Black’s threat, this move would seem winning – White’s rook will be dead if it goes to g4. However, after Black’s next move, the tables will be turned.

Instead, White could have played the instructive 1. $\text{Wg3+ Kh7 2.h5!}$. Now, 2...f5 is impossible because of 3. $\text{Wg6}$ mate. Only after 2.h5 will White play $\text{d4-g4}$, and his attack will probably be unstoppable. For instance, 2...$\text{We7}$ 3. $\text{d4 Wg5 4.Wg4 Whxh5 5.g7+}$, and White mates.

Things, however, aren’t so simple. After a second look at the position, I discovered that Black has the strong 3...$\text{c5!}$, and it isn’t entirely clear how White should proceed. In truth, White has very big practical chances after 4.$\text{g4! f6 5.f4}$, but with 5...$\text{Wg7}$ Black at least fights on.

This example teaches us the importance of asking, ”What would my opponent do if it were his move?” Although this question should be asked in all critical positions, it doesn’t provide insurance against the opponent’s ideas.

In the next example, Botvinnik, a great master of prophylaxis, shows how to successfully parry an unpleasant idea.

☐ Botvinnik

Keres

Moscow 1952

Queen’s Gambit Declined (QGD),
Carlsbad Variation (D35)

1. $\text{d2-d4} \quad \text{g8-f6}$
2. $\text{c2-c4} \quad \text{e7-e6}$

1. ... $f7-f5!$

Oops! Now Black is up a piece for limited compensation. Obviously, Donner still needs to make a few accurate moves, but the result of the game is determined.

2. $\text{f1-d1} \quad \text{a4-c5}$
3. $\text{d4-d8} \quad \text{a7-f7}$
4. $\text{d8xe8} \quad \text{f7xe8}$
5. $\text{e5-d4} \quad \text{c5-e4}$
6. $\text{f2-f3} \quad \text{e6-e5!}$

And Black is winning, although he still has to be careful. Fischer threw in the towel after 15 more moves.
Chapter 1: Prophylaxis

9. \( \texttt{g1-e2} \) \( \texttt{d7-f8} \)
10. \( \texttt{0-0} \) \( \texttt{c7-c6} \)
11. \( \texttt{a1-b1} \) \( \texttt{e7-d6?!} \)

An unnecessary waste of a tempo. The bishop was sitting perfectly on e7. Moreover, the plan f3-e4 is even stronger now, since White will be threatening e4-e5.

However, a closer look reveals that Black wants to play \( \texttt{...g6} \) followed by \( \texttt{...h6} \), and this threat is not easy to parry. Furthermore, \( \texttt{12...xh2+} \) is threatened, so White has to stop this plan in one move.

12. \( \texttt{g1-h1} \) \( \texttt{f8-g6} \)
13. \( \texttt{f2-f3!} \)

Botvinnik displays brilliant positional understanding – this move is a mix of deep prophylaxis and a tactical idea, which will soon be revealed. Now, \( \texttt{13...h6} \) is met by \( \texttt{14.xf6} \) \( \texttt{xf6} \) \( \texttt{15.e4} \), and Black’s position deteriorates quickly.

For example, \( \texttt{15...h4} \) \( \texttt{16.g3} \) \( \texttt{h3} \)
\( \texttt{17.e5} \) \( \texttt{b8} \) \( \texttt{18.f4} \), and now White’s deadly pawn armada should decide the game.

It’s interesting how one pawn move can destroy a whole plan. Keres finds nothing else but to move the bishop back to its original square.

13. \( \texttt{...} \) \( \texttt{d6-e7} \)
14. \( \texttt{b1-e1} \) \( \texttt{f6-d7} \)
15. \( \texttt{g5xe7} \) \( \texttt{e8xe7} \)
16. \( \texttt{e2-g3} \)

Black has a horrid position. His pieces are totally uncoordinated and White will soon play \( \texttt{e3-e4} \), simply crushing Black.

16. \( \texttt{...} \) \( \texttt{d7-f6} \)
17. \( \texttt{wc2-f2} \) \( \texttt{c8-e6} \)
18. \( \texttt{g3-f5} \) \( \texttt{e6xf5} \)
19. \( \texttt{d3xf5} \) \( \texttt{wd8-b6} \)
20. \( \texttt{e3-e4} \)

and after 17 moves of agony, Keres finally resigned.

The next game we will look at is similar to the previous one in many ways – Karpov, another legendary master of positional play, demolishes Timman’s plans. It’s interesting to note how Timman makes no big mistakes, and nevertheless gets outplayed.
Mastering Positional Chess

Karpov
Timman
Montreal 1979
Pirc Defense (B07)

1. e2-e4 d7-d6
2. d2-d4 g8-f6
3. Qb1-c3 g7-g6
4. g2-g3

Although this move was never very popular, it still is completely viable and gives White an easy game. White’s idea is to set up a Closed Sicilian type formation, and slowly start to push Black off the board. The objective evaluation of this variation is a slight edge for White.

4. ... f8-g7
5. f1-g2 0-0
6. g1-e2 e7-e5
7. 0-0

7. ... b8-a6

This move is a bit awkward. The evaluation doesn’t really change, but the alternatives, 7...Qc6 and 7...c6, are better. The problem with 7...a6 is that the knight doesn’t really do anything – Black will play with a piece less until the position opens up. Interestingly, the knight will be one of the causes of Black’s trouble later on.

8. f1-e1 c7-c6
9. h2-h3 f8-e8
10. c1-g5

10. ... h7-h6?!

It’s hard to believe that this completely natural move is a mistake. The problem is that after Qe3, it will be very difficult for Black to achieve any kind of counterplay. White will simply play g3-g4 and Qg3, and Black will find himself totally cramped.

In order to get somewhere, Black needed to act quickly. This could only be accomplished by the active 10...exd4!. Instead, the move mentioned by ChessBase (I’m not sure who the commentators are, but my guess is that the annotations given in ChessBase are the ones that were made in the tournament bulletin) is 10...wb6?!, which is inferior. The variation given is full of mistakes:

11. b1? Much better is 11.d4-d5!, when 11...wb6xb2 is very dangerous on account of 12.d5xc6 b7xc6 13.Wd1xd6 and White is clearly better.
11...exd4 12.Qxd4 Qc5 13.b4!? Qxc4 14.Qxe4 Qxe4? This loses quickly; much better was 14...Qxh3!, and the position after 15.Qxf6 Qxf6 16.Qe2 d5 is completely unclear. 15.Qxe4
\[ \text{xd4? } \text{Black was already in dire straits, but he could have at least fought on with 15...\text{hx3}. 16.\text{\text{f6+}} and White wins.} \]

After 10...\text{exd4}, White is forced to play 11.\text{\text{xd4}}, and only now does Black play 11...\text{h6}. Although the position after 12.\text{\text{f4}} g5 13.\text{\text{e3}} is slightly better for White, Black has good dynamic counterchances after 13...\text{g4}!?

11. \text{\text{g5-e3}} \text{ Bd8-c7}

Now the a6 knight is locked out of play. Karpov slowly starts consolidating his pieces and preparing for the decisive invasion. Black’s problem is that he cannot achieve any counterplay!

12. \text{\text{d1-d2}} \text{ Bd8-h7}
13. \text{\text{a1-d1}} \text{ Bc8-d7}
14. \text{\text{g3-g4}}

Karpov plays this part of the game with immense precision. Timman, understanding that he will lose if he doesn’t do anything, attempts to find counterchances in dynamic play.

14. \ldots \text{Bd8-d8}
15. \text{\text{e2-g3}} \text{ Bd7-c8}
16. \text{\text{f2-f4}} \text{ Bb7-b5}

If White allows Black to play \ldots b4, his position will suddenly become a bit shaky. Therefore:

17. \text{a2-a3} \text{ Bb5-b4}
18. \text{a3xb4} \text{ Bxa6xb4}
19. \text{Qc3-e2} \text{ e5xd4}
20. \text{\text{e2xd4}} a7-a5
21. \text{c2-c3} \text{ Bb4-a6}

An important position has arisen on the board. White’s pieces are located ideally, or so it seems. He is centralized, and Black’s pieces are somewhat uncoordinated. However, things are not as one-sided as they appear. Black wants to play \ldots \text{\text{c5}}, and possibly \ldots d5, when White’s e4-f4-g4 armada will be subject to pressure.

Karpov, after determining the threat, looked for ways to defend against it. The next step was to decide which pieces could be improved. He quickly saw that the d8 rook x-rays White’s queen. He then asked himself where the queen would be better placed. Obviously, the answer is c2, from where it will x-ray the king and, mainly, defend the e4 pawn.

22. \text{\text{d2-c2!}}

Once you see this move, it may seem pretty obvious. Understanding that the queen isn’t placed well on d2 is not easy, however. Despite the pin, the queen was facing no danger, and it is very difficult to make a move such as
22. ḡc2. Now, Black’s counterplay is parried (22... ḡc5 is met by 23.b4, when the e4 pawn is defended), and he has to wait passively until White will crush him.

22. ... ḡc8-d7
23. ḡd4-f3!

White plans ḡf2, when he will be ready for the decisive assault. Black is completely helpless.

23. ... ḡe8-e7
24. ḡe3-f2 ḡd7-e8
25. ḡc2-d3

White is threatening 26.e5.

25. ...
26. ḡd1-a1!

And Timman resigned after 12 more moves.

A brilliant display of prophylaxis by Karpov – by means of one awkward-looking move, he totally demolished Black’s plan.

Being able to stop your opponent’s ideas is very important and very hard to master. The next game is interesting in the sense that it shows how prophylaxis can be used even in the most extreme positions.

□ Naroditsky
■ Taylor
Houston 2005

White has just sacrificed a piece for an attack. Of course, White has compensation, but the question is how to continue the attack. The first thing I did was ask myself the question “What would he do if it was his move?” The answer isn’t that complicated: ... ḡd7-e8. Therefore, 1 ḡxd4 was quickly eliminated, although I probably should have looked at some variations (White retains attacking chances after 1 ḡxd4). For a long time, I thought 1 ḡa8+ was the only move, and started calculating variations. After determining that I would have insufficient compensation for the piece, I started looking for other options. In a few minutes, I came across the incredible

1. ḡa6-a7!!

An aesthetically very pleasing move, but I didn’t just play it because it looks nice;
first of all, 2. \( \text{a6}^+ \) is threatened. Secondly, and most importantly, White stops 1...\( \text{d7} \) – Black’s king will now be subject to a huge attack. However, as I later discovered, the simple 1.\( \text{xd4} \) would also have won the game. After 1...\( \text{d7} \), White has the powerful 2.\( \text{c4} \), and after 2...\( \text{f5} \) 3.\( \text{a7}^+ \) \( \text{e8} \) 4.\( \text{a8} \) \( \text{f4} \) 5.\( g3 \) \( \text{c7} \) 6.\( \text{xd8}^+ \) \( \text{xd8} \) 7.\( \text{xe4} \) Black can resign.

1. ... \( \text{d5-c6} \)
1...\( \text{xe3} \) fails to 2.\( \text{a6}^+ \) \( \text{b8} \) 3.\( \text{b6}^+ \), mating.

2. \( \text{e3xd4} \) \( \text{e4-f6?!} \)
   As we will see, this move practically loses by force, but it’s hard to recommend anything else. Maybe 2...\( \text{d6} \) was a better try for Black, but after 3.\( \text{a6}! \) \( \text{e8} \) (unfortunately for Black, this is the only move, as 3...\( \text{d7} \) loses after 4.\( \text{a8}^+ \) \( \text{c7} \) 5.\( \text{a7}^+ \) \( \text{b7} \) 6.\( \text{e5}^+ \)) 4.\( \text{a8}^+ \) \( \text{c7} \) 5.\( \text{a7}^+ \), White wins.

3. \( \text{e1-e5?} \)
Careless play. White could have won on the spot here with 3.\( \text{a6}! \), and only after 3...\( \text{d5} \) does White play 4.\( \text{e5} \).

3. ... \( \text{f6-d5} \)

Forced, since 3...\( \text{d5} \) fails to 4.\( \text{ee7} \), when Black is helpless against the array of threats.

4. \( \text{a7-a6}! \)
A nice motif that I had to see when calculating 1.\( \text{a7} \). If not for this, Black’s position would have been viable. The problem is that Black has nowhere to go! 4...\( \text{e8} \) allows a mating attack after 5.\( \text{a8}^+ \) and 6.\( \text{a7}^+ \), while putting the queen on the 7th rank means losing it.

4. ... \( \text{c6-b7} \)
5. \( \text{a6-a8}^+ \) \( \text{c8-d7} \)
6. \( \text{a8-a7} \)
and Black soon resigned.

The moral of this game is that you should never forget about positional principles, even in the craziest positions. 1.\( \text{a7} \) is hard to find if you’re only calculating variations. As soon as I switched to prophylactic thinking, I immediately found the move.

Two players who are often considered to be the best prophylactic players of all time are Tigran Petrosian and Anatoly Karpov. Petrosian is especially known for his prophylactic exchange sacrifices, which are very instructive.

In the following game, Reshevsky seems to have a clear advantage, but Petrosian finds a startling exchange sacrifice that stops White’s advancing pawn armada, establishing a wonderful blockading square on d5 for Black’s knight.
At first glance, it seems that White's c3-d4-e5 pawn formation is too strong for Black to defend against. One of Petrosian's strengths was that he never panicked. Even here, in a seemingly dire situation he asks himself, "If it were my opponent's move, what would he do?". The answer is: 2...f3 followed by d4-d5. Petrosian immediately started looking for ways to stop this. He soon found out that the only way to stop it would be to place a knight on e7 on the next move. This, unfortunately, is not easy to achieve. The moves 1...c7, 1...b7, or 1...a7 are all met by 2.e6!, winning. There is one more square, however, and that is e6 itself!

1. ...  

A wonderful idea! If White takes the rook, his position after 2...fxe6 followed by ...e7-d5 will be miserable – his bishop on b2 will be a big pawn, and Black's pieces will be perfectly coordinated. Therefore, Reshevsky had to find a way to try to stop ...e7-d5. He, like Petrosian, never panicked. Instead, he searched for ways to activate the b2 bishop. A bishop on a3 would not only stop ...e7, but also control the f8-square. Therefore:

2. a3-a4!

Let's take a look at 2...xe6 wxe6 3.a4. After all, White is an exchange up and now he wants to activate his bishop with a3. Black replies 3...b4! Now, the tempting 4.cxb4 axb4 5.d5?! wxd5 6.e6 leads nowhere after 6...fxe6 7.xxe6 e3 8.exf1 wxf4+ 9.xxf4 exf4, winning for Black.

Instead, in his wonderful book about the tournament, David Bronstein recommends 2.h4. This is a very sensible move – White threatens the unpleasant 3.h5, and only after 2...h5 does he take on e6. Now, it will be White who is better: 3.xxe6 fxe6 4.g3 e7 5.g5 followed by c1, when White should have an edge. Black, however, has a better move than 2...h5: 2...h6! After 3.h5 d4 4.xe6 fxe6 the position is very complicated and unclear.

2. ...  

Bronstein correctly states that 2...b4 fails to 3.d5! xdx5 4.xe6 fxe6 5.xc4 with a clearly better position for White.

3. g4xe6 f7xe6  
4. wff1-f1
Chapter 1: Prophylaxis

Objectively, the position is approximately equal. Reshevsky decides to bail out by sacrificing back the exchange and transposing into a drawish position.

4. ... \( \text{d7-d5} \)
5. \( \text{e3-f3} \) \( g6-d3 \)
6. \( \text{f3xd3!? c4xd3} \)
7. \( \text{f1xd3 b5-b4} \)
8. \( \text{c3xb4} \)

The tempting 8.c4 fails to impress after 8...\( \text{b6} \) 9.d5 exd5 10.e6 dxc4 11.\( \text{gxc4} \) c3.

8. ... \( a5xb4 \)
9. \( a4-a5 \) \( d8-a8 \)
10. \( \text{e1-a1} \) \( \text{e8-c6} \)
11. \( \text{b2-c1} \)

After a number of exchanges, it's time to take stock.

Maybe Black is slightly better, but it is not enough to win. Reshevsky defends accurately and the game is soon drawn.

11. ... \( \text{c6-c7} \)
12. \( a5-a6 \) \( c6-b6 \)
13. \( \text{c1-d2} \) \( b4-b3 \)
14. \( \text{d3-c4} \) \( h7-h6 \)
15. \( h2-h3 \) \( b3-b2 \)
16. \( \text{a1-b1} \) \( g8-h8 \)
17. \( \text{d2-e1} \) \( \frac{1}{2}-\frac{1}{2} \)

The next game will illustrate an idea that I call semi-prophylaxis. If prophylaxis is the anticipation of your opponent’s threats, plans, or counterplay, semi-prophylaxis is the elimination in advance of an opponent’s piece that might potentially cause trouble. The great master of prophylaxis isn’t afraid to sacrifice even against the world’s best players.

\[ \begin{array}{c}
\text{Polugaevsky} \\
\text{Petrosian}
\end{array} \]

\[ \text{Moscow 1983} \]

At first sight, it may seem that the position is approximately equal. White has the bishop pair, but Black has the c5-square for his knight.

Petrovsk asked himself the question, “If I could take any white piece off the board, what would it be?” The answer is: the e3 bishop. This bishop holds White’s position together – it defends c5, and controls many important squares. Petrosian’s next move shows immense positional understanding – he correctly asserts that the bishop is in this case more important than the e8 rook. Thus:
Mastering Positional Chess

1. ... \textit{\texttt{\textfrak{e}e8xe3!!}}

The elimination of the bishop is not the only reason Petrosian made this move. After 2.fxe3, this pawn will be extremely weak and subject to attack. Also, White’s pieces will become completely uncoordinated. The b4 rook will be awkwardly placed. Of course Black isn’t winning, but from a practical point of view it’s very hard to play with White in this situation.

2. \texttt{f2xe3} \texttt{\textfrak{d}7-c5}
3. \texttt{\textfrak{w}d1-c2} \texttt{a8-e8}

Everything with tempo. Black’s pieces are coordinated perfectly: every single piece has a job. White, on the other hand, has a horrid position that is full of weaknesses – his pawn structure is in shambles and the dark squares are a catastrophe.

4. \texttt{\textfrak{f}1-f3} \texttt{\textit{g}7-h6}
5. \texttt{\textfrak{w}c2-c3} \texttt{\textfrak{w}c7-e7}
6. \texttt{\textfrak{b}4-b6??}

A horrible blunder, but White’s position was critical anyway.

6. ... \texttt{\textfrak{c}5-a4}

White resigned.

Exchange sacrifices weren’t Petrosian’s only method of prophylaxis. He never hesitated to retreat if needed. The following game is one of my favorites:

\begin{center}
\textit{\texttt{\textfrak{d} Terpugov}}
\textit{\texttt{\textbf{\textfrak{p} Petrosian}}}

Moscow 1951
\end{center}

At first sight it seems as though Black has been outplayed: White plans an attack on Black’s king and owns the c4-square. Black’s position is extremely cramped, and it’s unclear how to repel White’s pieces from their posts. Petrosian, instead of panicking, finds a very nice idea – if he can play ...g6, White’s pieces will not be so well-placed. The problem is, it’s not easy to execute ...g6. Petrosian notes that if his queen will be on e8, and the rook on g8, ...g6 could be perfectly playable, especially if immediately followed by ...\texttt{\textfrak{f}8}. The queen on e8 will exert pressure on e4, and the position will indeed be viable. This is exactly what Petrosian does.
1. ... \( \text{wc}7-d8! \)
2. \( \text{wd}1-g4?! \)

This only helps Black execute his plan. A better try is \( \text{wh}h5 \). Play could then continue: 2...\( \text{ag}8 \) 3.\( f4 \) 4.\( \text{xc}8 \) \( \text{xc}8 \) 5.\( \text{we}2 \), with a slight edge for White. Of course Black’s position is completely playable, but it’s a bit easier to play with White here.

It’s interesting to note the differences between the opponents’ playing strengths: Terpugov fails to utilize prophylactic thinking and does nothing to impede Petrosian’s plan of playing ...\( g6 \).

2. ... \( \text{ff}8-g8 \)
3. \( \text{gg}4-h5 \)

Terpugov’s idea was probably to “lure” the queen to \( e8 \), where he thought it would stand badly. However, he completely missed that after 3...\( \text{we}8 \), Black has 4...\( \text{f}8 \), and the queen will be placed very well. Already, Black has equalized.

3. ... \( \text{dd}8-e8 \)
4. \( \text{bb}2-b3 \) \( \text{ae}7-f8 \)
5. \( \text{wh}5-e2? \)

Terpugov overlooks Black’s idea. Instead, after 5.\( \text{wd}1 \), the position would be approximately equal. Of course, 5.\( \text{we}2 \) seems like a natural move, but unfortunately for White it fails to a small tactic.

Of course, one could write a whole book on Petrosian’s exchange sacrifices and his prophylaxis, but I want to show a few games by other players. Another player whose games show immense positional strength is Anatoly Karpov. Like Petrosian, he had the ability to thwart his opponent’s threats even before they had arisen. In the great book Secrets of Chess Training by Mark Dvoretsky and Artur Yusupov, grandmaster Yusupov analyzes one of his games against Karpov. I find the game very instructive from a prophylactic point of view. Analyzing this game alone can greatly improve a player’s positional sense.
An important position has arisen. White has the bishop pair, but it’s hard to keep it. His main pluses are Black’s weak dark squares and the c-file. He also has a space advantage, which gives him a slight edge.

Black’s position is tough to crack, though. He will try to put pressure on the a2 pawn by doubling rooks on the a-file.

White has a few candidate moves in this position. First of all, 20.AXB obviously fails to 20...AXB2 and 21...AXB4. 20.AXB3 may seem tempting at first, but after 20...AXB5 followed by 21...AXB4, it’s White who has to equalize.

20. Bb1, forcing an exchange of bishops, seems plausible, but after 20...AXB2 21.BxB2 (or 21...AXB2) 21...AXB5! White cannot stop the highly unpleasant 22...AXB4. Karpov found the only move that stops ...AXB5...C4.

20. Axb3-d2!

Now, after Black takes the bishop, he will have to defend the b5 pawn, and 21...AXB5 will be impossible.

20. ... Ac4xd3
21. Ad1xd3 A8xb8

21...AXB5 leads Black nowhere: 22.Bxb5 Bxb5 23AXB5 c6 24.AC5 Afc8 25.Afc1 Axc4 26.Axc2 and White is a pawn up for no compensation.

22. A1-b1 b5-b4
23. h2-h3!

It’s always useful to eliminate back-rank problems. Since the position is very quiet, White has time for such luxuries.

23. ... h7-h6
Another critical position has arisen. Black's plan is pretty simple: he will double on the a-file and pressurize the a2 pawn. If necessary, he will triple. 

On the other hand, it's not clear how to proceed with white. The problem is that if Black places a rook on b6, then tripling on the c-file wouldn't really do much good (if needed, Black could put the a8 rook on a6).

Therefore, White's "only chance" is to attack the b4 pawn. White has to think of the optimal way to do this. It's not easy, especially with the threat of ...Qa5-c4 looming. Karpov understands that placing the queen on b1 would be ideal, but how to achieve that? One way is to play 24. Rc1, but what if he plays 24...Qa5 then? This is where Karpov shows his immense positional strength. After 24...Qa5 25. Rxd2 Qc4, White replies with 26. Bxc4! and he will have two pawns and a strong position for the sacrificed exchange! Thus, after 24. Rc1, Black will not be able to play 24...Qa5, and White can safely proceed with 25. Rb1.

24. Bb1-c1!

Now it's Black's turn to think of a way to get to the a2 pawn or achieve ...Qa5-c4. Yusupov thinks of a seemingly strong plan — he will double rooks on the b-file, and then achieve ...Qa5-c4. Karpov, however, has everything under control.

24. ... Qb8-b6
25. Bd3-b1 Qa8-b8
26. Rc1-c5!

The point. Now, 26...Qa5 is impossible and Black can barely move his pieces! Yusupov doesn't find anything better than moving his c6 knight back and forth.

26. ... Qc6-d8
27. Mc5-c2 Qd8-c6
28. Wb1-c1 Qb8-b7
29. Mc2-c5 Qc6-e7
30. Qg1-h2!

Note Karpov's patience — he always improves his position to its maximum and only then starts concrete action. There is no need to hurry — Yusupov doesn't have any counterplay, and Karpov has all the time in the world.

30. ... e7-f5?!

Yusupov looks for counterplay, but unfortunately there is none! White has no weaknesses, and Black's knight can't access any good squares. The problem with this move is that Black simply loses a pawn. It was probably better to sit and wait, although obviously Karpov
Mastering Positional Chess

would have won such a position in his sleep.

31. h2-b2 c2 h6-g6

This was Yusupov’s idea. By sacrificing a pawn, he achieves some counterplay, although it is not enough.

32. c5xc7 b7xc7
33. c2xc7 d7-b5

The queen aims for e2 and possibly h5. Karpov doesn’t give Black even the slightest counterplay.

34. g2-g4! h5-f5 h4
35. c7-c8+

Karpov avoids 35. g3 h5 f5+ 36. f4 h4, which would be a bit risky for White. For example, 37. c8+ h7 38. d8? wxe2! 39. c8 wxf3 mate.

35. ... g8-h7
36. c1-d1!

Another very strong prophylactic move. Karpov restricts the possibilities of the black queen, which no longer has prospects on b5.

36. ... b5-a6
37. c8-c2

Neutralizing Black’s counterplay. Now his knight is stranded on h4 and his pieces are totally uncoordinated. Yusupov, attempting to make use of Karpov’s time trouble, tries his last chance.

37. ... f7-f5?

This move loses, but it’s not easy to refute it, especially in time trouble. Karpov’s cold-blooded approach shows here; he doesn’t panic and finds the best move.

38. h2-g3!

Now the black knight doesn’t have the f5 square anymore! Yusupov tries using the king’s precarious position, but to no avail.

38. ... f5xg4
39. g3xh4 g4xh3
40. f2-f4!

The last finesse. Black is completely lost – the king is perfectly safe on h4.

40. ... a6-e6
41. d1-h5 e6-e7+
42. h4xh3 e7-f7
43. c2-h2 f7-d7+
44. f4-f5

Black resigned.

There is also a type of prophylaxis called “extreme prophylaxis”. Extreme prophylaxis is used when there is a piece that needs to be eliminated at all costs. The following game shows an example of extreme prophylaxis – Black’s position seems lost, but he finds a way of rooting out the cause of his troubles – the h6 knight.
At first sight, it seems that Black’s position is almost lost. His king is in a horrible situation, his e6 bishop is under attack, and the queen and rook are stranded on the other side of the board. The problem is, 1...d7 (or 1...f7/g8) is met by the astounding move 2.xxe6!, and Black will be lost. Therefore, Black needs to defend against 2.xxe6, but how? Dlugy finds an extreme prophylactic idea – using the king as a defender.

1. ... h8-g7!!
A brilliant move that saves the day. The king is transferred to g6, where it will be perfectly safe, and the h6 knight will be cornered.

2. We3-f4?

The only way to keep the position under control was to take on e6. After 2.Wxe6 Wxe6 3.xxe6 xh6 4.g3=, the game would probably have ended in a draw.

2. ... g7-g6
This is the move Gajic probably missed. White already cannot defend the knight.

3. Wf4-g3+ g6xh6
4. Wg3-e3+

4. ... h6-h5!
An important move. White has no way to take advantage of the exposed king – he is a piece down for no compensation.

5. h4-g3 e6-d7
6. g3-c7 h5-g6
7. c7-d8 e7-e6
8. We3-g3+ g6-f7

White resigned.

The moral is that even in positions that may seem very bad, you should never give up and always look for unusual defenses. An attentive reader may ask, however, “How is Gajic-Dlugy an example of prophylaxis?”.

Despite the fact that White already had threats in the starting position, Dlugy rooted out the cause – the h6 knight.

The next game illustrates how White used prophylaxis to eliminate counterplay, achieved a positional advantage, and then transformed it into a tactical one.
Naroditsky

Bryant

Reno 2008

King's Indian Attack (A05)

1. \( \text{g}1-f3 \)
2. \( \text{g}2-g3 \)
3. \( \text{f}1-g2 \)
4. \( 0-0 \)
5. \( d2-d3 \)
6. \( e2-e4 \)
7. \( b1-d2 \)

... will be weakened and the king on h2 will not be in any danger (the d6-e5 pawns clog up the b8-h2 diagonal).

12. ... \( \text{e}7-e5 \)

Now, 12...0-0 fails to 13.e5! \( \text{e}8 \) (13...\( \text{d}xe5 \) 14.\( \text{f}xe5 \) \( \text{xe}5 \) 15.\( \text{xe}5 \) and the queen is trapped!) 14.\( \text{d}xe6 \) \( \text{d}x\text{e}6 \) 15.\( \text{g}5! \) \( \text{f}8 \) 16.\( \text{e}4 \), and Black’s position is a jumble of weaknesses.

13. \( \text{h}4-e3 \)

I can’t say this is a mistake, but 13.\( \text{g}5 \) was probably better. After 13...\( \text{h7} \) (13...0-0-0? fails after 14.\( \text{a}5! \) (14.\( \text{d}e3?! \) looks tempting, but allows Black to obtain a plausible position after 14...\( \text{d}e8 \) 15.\( \text{d}xe6 \) \( \text{d}xe6 \) 16.\( \text{d}d5 \) \( \text{d}d8 \) 17.\( \text{d}xe6 \) \( \text{d}xe6 \)) 14...\( \text{d}e8 \) 15.\( \text{c}3 \) followed by \( \text{b}2-b4 \) with a big advantage) 14.\( \text{e}3 \) 0-0 15.\( \text{c}3 \) \( \text{f}6 \) 16.\( \text{h}4! \) \( \text{e}8 \) 17.\( \text{b}4! \) White has a very strong attack, which will most likely prove decisive. I simply don’t see how Black defends.

13. ... \( \text{c}6-d4 \)
14. \( \text{f}3-g5 \)

Another vital move. Now, the d4 knight has no prospects and has to move again.

14. ... \( \text{d}4-e6 \)
15. \( \text{g}5xe6 \) \( \text{d}7xe6 \)
16. \( \text{f}2-f4 \)

An important move. White invites Black to play ...\( \text{e}5 \), after which the d5-square

30
It’s clear that Black has badly misplayed the opening and stands worse. However, Black is by no means lost and the fight is only starting.

16. ... 0-0-0

It was crucial to calculate two other variations, 16...\textit{xc}4 and 16...\textit{xf}4:

A) 16...\textit{xc}4 17.\textit{dx}c4 \textit{ex}f4 18.\textit{xf}4 0-0-0 (18...\textit{g}4+ looks tempting, but actually loses after 19.\textit{hx}g4 \textit{hx}g4+ 20.\textit{g}1 \textit{xb}2 21.\textit{xd}6! \textit{c}8 22.\textit{wd}5 \textit{d}4+ 23.\textit{f}2) 19.\textit{g}5! \textit{g}4+ (19...\textit{we}7 loses after 20.\textit{wf}3 \textit{g}4+ 21.\textit{wx}g4+) 20.\textit{hx}g4 \textit{hx}g4+ 21.\textit{h}4 (a very important resource which wins the game) 21...\textit{d}5 22.\textit{wx}g4+ etc.

B) 16...\textit{ex}f4 17.\textit{xf}4 0-0-0 18.\textit{g}5 \textit{we}7 19.\textit{wf}3 \textit{g}4+ 20.\textit{wx}g4 \textit{f}6. At first, I thought this was alright for Black, but then I discovered 21.\textit{xf}6! \textit{xf}6 22.\textit{wx}g6 with a completely winning position for White.

17. \textit{f}4\textit{xe}5 \textit{d}6\textit{xe}5
18. \textit{c}4-a3!

An unusual and strong move. The knight is transferred to b5, where it will exert huge pressure on Black’s position and may then be transferred to c3. Black defends with practically only moves.

18. ... \textit{f}6-d7
19. \textit{a}3-b5 \textit{c}7-b8
20. \textit{wd}1-e1

The tempting piece sacrifice 20.\textit{b}4? \textit{a}6 21.\textit{bxc}5 \textit{axb}5 22.\textit{axb}5 looks very strong, but after 22...\textit{xf}8! 23.\textit{c}6 \textit{e}c5 24.\textit{wf}3 \textit{e}c7 25.\textit{wf}2 \textit{b}6 White doesn’t have enough compensation for the piece, although obviously the position is not that clear.

20. ... \textit{a}7-a6
21. \textit{b}5-c3

The position looks like a Closed Sicilian where everything went wrong for Black. Black has many weaknesses, and White’s pieces are coordinated perfectly. This doesn’t mean, however, that Black is lost; White still has to somehow transform his advantage. Black played the following part of the game very well and made it extremely hard for White to win.

21. ... \textit{wb}8-d6
22. \textit{a}4-a5

Preparing a possible \textit{xa}4.

22. ... \textit{c}8-b8
23. \textit{we}1-f2 \textit{h}8-f8

Here, it was necessary to ask the golden question: “What would my opponent do if
it were his move?" The answer is clear: he would play ...f7-f5. Therefore:

24. \[f2-f3! \quad d8-c8\]

This move has a dual idea – Black wants to achieve ...c4 and place the rook on c7 in order to renew the threat of ...f5.

25. \[a1-a4 \quad c8-c7\]
26. \[h2-g1!\]

Another important prophylactic move. White defends against ...h4, while ...f5 right away doesn’t work because after exf5 the h5 pawn will be hanging.

26. ... \[f8-c8\]
27. \[b2-b3 \quad b8-a8!\]

Black prepares ...\[b8-c6-d4\]. This time, it’s not that easy to stop the maneuver. It was important to understand that a knight on d4 isn’t the end of the world for White – since I have some time before he can finally play \[cxd4\], I can make preparations to play c3.

28. \[c3-d1 \quad d7-b8\]
29. \[f3-f2!\]

Prophylaxis again! In order to play ...c6, Black has to play 29...\[f8\], and the f6-square will be weakened.

29. ... \[g1-h2! \quad d7-b5?!\]

I don’t understand the point of this move. 30...c6 right away was better, although it doesn’t really change anything.

31. \[b2-c4 \quad e6xc4\]
32. \[a4xc4 \quad b8-c6\]
33. \[f2-d2 \quad c6-d4\]

This is one of the most essential positions in the whole game. Black is obviously worse, but it’s not evident how to crack his position.

The first thing that came to mind was my original intention, achieving c2-c3. Unfortunately, this is not easy. If White plays c3, and Black plays ...c6, his d3 pawn will become weak.

I decided to look for other ideas first. I understood that my bishop on g2 was not really doing anything, and that it would be located optimally on h3. The only way to achieve this is to go back to h2 and play h3-h4. Things are not so simple, though. After \[h2\], Black can play ...h4, and take advantage of the position of White’s king.

I was very aesthetically proud when I found the idea of playing g4-g5 followed by \[f3-g4\]. Therefore:

34. \[g1-h2! \quad d7-b5?!\]

Black finally cracks, but it’s hard to recommend anything against h4-\[h3\]. Ac-
tually, Black didn’t miss my 36th move—he missed my 38th move!

35. $e3xd4$ $c5xd4$
36. $\mathcal{f1xf7!}$ $\mathcal{w}b5xc4$
37. $b3xc4$ $\mathcal{c}7xf7$
38. $\mathcal{w}d2-g5!$

This is the move my opponent had missed. His pawns are too weak, and his rooks have no prospects. It was best to play 38... $\mathcal{g7}$ here, but after 39 $\mathcal{w}xg6$ he should be lost.

38. ... $\mathcal{f7-f2}$
39. $\mathcal{w}g5xe5$ $\mathcal{f2xc2}$
40. $\mathcal{w}e5xd4$

Black has no way to stop e4-e5, after which the g2 bishop will prove deadly.

40. ... $\mathcal{f8-b4}$
41. e4-e5 $\mathcal{b}4-c5$
42. $\mathcal{w}d4-d7$ $\mathcal{c}8-b8$
43. e5-e6 $\mathcal{c}2-e2$
44. d3-d4 $\mathcal{c}5-a7$
45. c4-c5 $\mathcal{e}2-b2$
46. c5-c6 $\mathcal{b}8-f8$
47. c6xb7+ $\mathcal{a}8-b8$
48. $\mathcal{w}d7-d6$

Mate.

Despite the seeming simplicity of this game, it contained many subtle points. Note that in spite of the g2 bishop’s passivity, it played a crucial role in stopping Black’s counterplay, since it could come back to life with deadly effect at any moment. Also, note how White didn’t execute his plan before making sure that all of Black’s counterplay was eliminated.

This leads us to the next point: most tactical players have one main weakness: they aren’t patient. In many cases, your position is better, but you can still improve it. The temptation to try to win the game immediately is very big, but learning to parry all of your opponent’s threats before cashing in is a skill that a strong player has to have. José Raul Capablanca once said, “If you have a choice between winning a queen in one move and mating in 10, take the queen.” It’s very painful when you have a totally winning position and you conduct a faulty combination. Time and again, a player achieves a winning position, and the excitement of executing a nice combination takes over. Take a look at the following game:
White misplayed the opening badly, and Black achieved an overwhelming advantage by move 20. However, Williams thought he spotted a nice combination, and immediately played:

1. ...  

Simply 1...\(\text{c}3\)xb4 wins.

2. \(\text{d}1\text{xd5}\)

2...\(\text{c}2\text{c}2\) is horrible for White.

2. ...  

3. \(\text{b}4\text{-b}5!\)

Williams had expected to win beautifully after 3...\(\text{f}5\)xf5 \(\text{f}5\)xf5 4...\(\text{f}2\)xf2 \(\text{f}2\)xb1+.

Now, we’ll take a look at the complete opposite: what happens if one side totally stops all counterplay, and only then starts the decisive invasion.

4. \(\text{g}1\text{-f}3\)  

5. \(\text{f}1\text{-e}2\)  

6. 0-0  

7. \(\text{c}2\text{-c}4\)  

8. e5xd6  

9. \(\text{b}1\text{-c}3\)  

10. \(\text{c}1\text{-e}3\)  

The position seems totally hopeless for White, who is two pawns down for no compensation, but Solomon has a surprise in store:

4. \(\text{b}1\text{xe}4!\)

It’s understandable that Williams missed this move, after which the position becomes roughly equal. With just one different move, 1...\(\text{c}3\)xb4, the result would have probably been 0-1 and not 1-0. After a few moves, the game transposed into a drawish endgame, which the demoralized Williams managed to lose.

This game teaches us an important lesson – it’s better to win by simple means rather than conduct a precarious combination that may contain a flaw.
The first inaccuracy. Usually when Black advances ...d5, he follows it up with a quick ...e6-e5 breakthrough. In this case, Karpov manages to stop ...e5, and thus achieve a strong pawn formation. He will also have a big space advantage, which is extremely unpleasant in such positions.

11. c4-c5 d8-g8xf3

After 11...c4?, White has 12.bxc4 dxc4 13.h3 h5 14.g4 g6 15.e5 followed by f3, and Black's position will be practically hopeless.

12. e2xf3 b6-c6
13. e3-c1

White has achieved a dream Alekhine position: he has a space advantage, the two bishops, and Black's knight is perilously placed on c4. Of course Black's position is still hard to crack, but he has clearly lost the opening battle.

13. ... b8-c6
14. b2-b3 c4-a5
15. c1-e3 b7-b6

This is practically the only move, because White would have played a3-b4.

16. c3-a5!

A strong move which supports the c5 pawn.

16. ... a8-b8

Likewise, 16...bxc5? leads to a very bad position after 17.dxc5 (17.bxc5 also deserves attention) 17...d8 18.a3 d8 19.e2 e5 20.b4 a4 (or 20...b7 21.b5) 21.a4xc4 dxc4 22.e2.

17. a1-c1 b6xc5
18. a4xc5 e7-f6

The a5 knight is simply horribly placed—it cannot move anywhere, and it only disturbs the coordination between Black's other pieces. If White somehow achieves a3-b4, Black will be in huge trouble.

19. a2-a3 c6-e7

Black finds the only escape. The a5 knight now has the c6 square.

20. f3-e2

The bishop is transferred to a better diagonal, where it will control the c4-square and may be transferred to a6 or b5.

20. ... e7-f5
21. b3-b4 a5-b7

The alternative 21...c6 loses to 22.xe6! fxe6 23.xc6.

22. e3-f4 b7-d6

35
A critical position has arisen on the board. White is clearly better, but how to proceed? The bishop on f6 is more or less holding Black’s position together. Eliminating it won’t mean a loss for Black, but it will make Black’s defensive task much harder. Therefore, 23.\textit{e}5 is clearly the correct move: it defends d4 and practically forces a trade of the dark-squared bishops. If Black trades right away, White will also have the strong blockading d4-square for his knight.

23. \textit{f}4-e5! \textit{f}6xe5
23...\textit{e}7 is strongly met by 24.\textit{a}4!, when 24...f6 fails to 25.\textit{c}xe6+, winning.

24. d4xe5 \textit{d}6-b7
25. \textit{c}5-b3
As often happens in Alekhine’s Defense, the g8 knight struggles to find a good square. On b7 it has absolutely no prospects – it’s hard to find a worse square.

25. ... \textit{d}8-b6
26. \textit{e}2-d3!
Very strong play by Karpov. The knight on f5 was the only decent piece Black had, and now it is forced to retreat.

26. ... \textit{f}5-e7

27. \textit{d}1-g4!
Another very strong move. The queen paralyzes Black’s kingside and controls the d4-square. Black’s problem is already familiar to us: he has no counterplay, and his position is in complete ruins.

27. ... f7-f5
28. \textit{g}4-d4 \textit{b}7-d8
The first thing Karpov does here is ask himself, “What would Black do if it were his move?” Obviously, ...\textit{c}6. Therefore:

29. b4-b5!
Black is in total zugzwang – he cannot move a single piece!

29. ... g7-g5
Karpov is faced with a similar problem – how to crack Black’s position? The first thing that comes to mind is a4-a5 followed by \textit{c}c5. Karpov executes this plan, but he first improves his position to its maximum. The first golden rule of this chapter was to ask yourself what your opponent would do if it were his move. The second golden rule is to take your time. If possible, improve your position to its full extent before executing the decisive combination or starting the final
invasion. It is much easier to win a game if you place your pieces on optimal positions before the combination starts.

30. a3-a4  e7-g6

A very important move. Obviously 31.a5 right away didn’t work because of 31...exd4 and 32...e5c5. The queen on a1 can be transferred to d4, c3, or a3. In the long term, Black cannot defend all of his weaknesses.

31. d4-a1!

Before playing a4-a5, Karpov improves his position. He will place his bishop on f1; where it will defend the king. Only then will he play a4-a5.

32. ...  b6-b7
33. f1-e1!

It was very tempting to play something like b5-b6, but why hurry if Black can’t do anything anyway?

36. ...  d8-f7?! This accelerates the loss, but it’s hard to recommend anything better.

37. a6-c7  a8-d8
38. c1-c6  g6-f8
39. b5-b6  a7xb6
40. a5-a6!

The final touch. Black is completely lost, since there is no way to stop the a-pawn from promoting.

40. ...  f7-h6
41. e1-c1  h6-g4
42. a6-a7  g4xe5
43. c6-c2  e5-c4
44. a7-a8  d8xa8
45. c7xa8  b6xb5
46. c2-a2  e7-b7  1-0

Evacuating the king from a “danger zone” is another type of prophylaxis. In the following game Black will be under a big attack. Surprisingly, White couldn’t stop the risky-looking king transfer from the kingside to the center, where it was much safer.
Mastering Positional Chess

Such transfers must be calculated very precisely, though. If the opponent can intercept the transfer with a tactic or a sacrifice, the king can find himself in dire straits.

In the following position, Black didn't really have a choice, but nevertheless it was very hard for me to move my king right into the center, where all of White's pieces were concentrated. I understood, however, that if I managed to transfer the king, my extra pawn would make its presence felt, and White's position would become very shaky.

**Srbis**

**Naroditsky**

Antalya 2007

Earlier in the game, White sacrificed a pawn for an attack. It seems as though he has succeeded and Black has no defense. The problem is, 2.\textit{f6+} is threatened and it seems impossible to prevent this. The only way is by using the king as a defender:

1. ...  \textit{g8-g7!}

My opponent, who was clearly anticipating this, quickly and confidently replied

2. \textit{d5-f4}

This is obviously the only way to continue the attack. It may seem at first glance that 3.\textit{xh5+} will be deadly, but things aren't so simple.

2. ...  \textit{e6-e5}

Another important position has arisen. I thought that my position was at least okay, but then I discovered the unpleasant threat of 6.\textit{g7}. There was only one way to defend:

5. ...  \textit{e7-d8!}

Completing the evacuation. It's hardly believable that Black is okay here, but in reality it's very hard for White to make use of the unstable position of Black's pieces. The problem is, White has to play with gain of tempo, or else Black will consolidate with ...\texttt{b7}. Therefore:

6. \textit{a1-d1}  \textit{b7-b6}

In retrospect, this is probably the most critical position of the whole game. How could a position where White has only two obvious moves be so signifi-
cant? My opponent did not realize that there is a major difference between 7.\(\mathcal{N}h1\) and 7.\(\mathcal{N}h2\). Not only that, White also has a third option: the showy 7.\(\mathcal{Q}d5\), after which Black cannot exploit the discovered checks! White played:

7. \(\mathcal{N}g1-h1?\)

Which turned out to be the decisive mistake. Let’s take a look at the alternatives. Firstly, 7.\(\mathcal{N}h2\) was much stronger because Black wouldn’t have a check on g3 later. Play could continue 7...\(\mathcal{A}b7\) 8.\(\mathcal{Q}d4\) \(\mathcal{A}xe4\) 9.\(\mathcal{A}xe4\) \(\mathcal{A}xe4\) (this happened in the game, but now White had to waste a whole tempo on \(\mathcal{h}h2\) 10.\(\mathcal{W}g7\)! and now Black has the interesting idea 10...\(\mathcal{W}c7\)? trying to lure the knight to d5. After 11.\(\mathcal{Q}d5\), Black plays 11...\(\mathcal{W}b7\). The game should end in a draw after 12.\(\mathcal{B}e6\) \(\mathcal{Q}xf6\) 13.\(\mathcal{A}xe5\) \(\mathcal{A}xe5\) 14.\(\mathcal{W}xf6+\) \(\mathcal{W}e7\) 15.\(\mathcal{A}xd6+\) \(\mathcal{W}c8\).

Unfortunately for Black, White has the even stronger move 7.\(\mathcal{Q}d5\)!, taking advantage of the fact that Black has no strong discovered check (after 7...\(\mathcal{A}xd5\)). Therefore, he has to play 7...\(\mathcal{W}a7\) and after 8.\(\mathcal{h}h2\) an interesting position arises. White is better after something like 8...\(\mathcal{O}c8\) 9.\(\mathcal{G}g7\), but I don’t see how White improves his position after 9...\(\mathcal{D}e6\) 10.\(\mathcal{W}f6\) \(\mathcal{Q}c5\)!

I encourage you to analyze the position and try to find resources for both sides.

7. ... \(\mathcal{A}a6-b7\)
8. \(\mathcal{Q}d1-d4\) \(\mathcal{A}b7xe4\)
9. \(\mathcal{A}c2xe4\) \(\mathcal{O}c5xe4\)

Now White is forced to waste a whole tempo on 10.\(\mathcal{h}h2\). Fortunately, I had a nice tactic that practically wins the game.

10. \(\mathcal{W}h1-h2\) \(\mathcal{D}e4xc3\)
11. \(\mathcal{A}c1xe5\)

11...\(\mathcal{W}b6xd4!\)

The point. All of White’s pieces are hanging, and he cannot coordinate them in time to defend.

Note that the inferior 11...\(\mathcal{A}xe5\) led to an unclear position after 12.\(\mathcal{W}f8+\) \(\mathcal{A}e8\) 13.\(\mathcal{A}xd6+\) \(\mathcal{W}c7\) 14.\(\mathcal{W}xf7+\) \(\mathcal{O}xd6\) 15.\(\mathcal{W}xg6+\) \(\mathcal{W}c7\) 16.\(\mathcal{W}xe8\) b4 17.\(h4\) when it’s not apparent who will win the pawn race.

12. \(\mathcal{W}h6-h4+\) \(\mathcal{D}d8-d7\)
13. \(\mathcal{A}e5-g5\)

White is desperate, but he has no chance.

13. ... \(\mathcal{E}e8-e4\)
14. \(\mathcal{W}h4-g4+\) \(\mathcal{D}d7-c7\)
Mastering Positional Chess

15. \( \text{g4-f3} \) \( \text{e4xf4} \)
16. \( \text{f3-a8} \) \( \text{f4-f5} \)
17. \( \text{g5-g3} \) \( \text{c3-e2} \)
18. \( \text{a8-a5+} \) \( \text{c7-b7} \)
19. \( \text{a5-e1} \) \( \text{e2xg3} \)
20. \( \text{e1-e7+} \) \( \text{b7-a6} \)

White resigned.

One might ask: “Since White already had many threats in the starting position, how is the king transfer an example of prophylaxis?"

In spite of the fact that White did have threats in the starting position, the king transfer rooted out the cause of Black’s troubles, which was the weakness of his king.

My inspiration for conducting such a risky king sortie was the following, even more spectacular game, where Andersson sends his king on a leisurely walk right into the center where it can be attacked in about 20 different ways.

\[ \square \text{Illescas Cordoba} \]
\[ \square \text{Andersson} \]

\text{Ubeda 1997}

The position looks completely lost at first sight – 1...h6 fails to 2.\( \text{xh6} \), mating. Ulf Andersson has the talent of finding defenses in completely hopeless positions, and this time his talent did not fail him:

1. \( \text{...} \) \( \text{h8-g8!!} \)

It’s incredible, but this move practically kills White’s attack. Illescas probably refused to accept the fact that this move defends, and played:

2. \( \text{g5xf6?} \)

which turns out to be a big mistake. The only way for White to keep the position under control was to repeat moves with 2.\( \text{g3} \) \( \text{h8} \) 3.\( \text{h3} \), with a draw.

2. \( \text{...} \) \( \text{e7xf6} \)
3. \( \text{h4xh7+} \) \( \text{g8-f8} \)

Andersson has in mind the maneuver ...\( \text{e7-d7-d8} \), after which White’s position will be in ruins. Illescas understood this perfectly well, but unfortunately could not do anything about it!

4. \( \text{h7-h8+} \) \( \text{f8-e7} \)
5. \( \text{h8-h5} \) \( \text{d8-d7!} \)

If not for this move, the whole idea would fail. Now, White cannot do anything to prevent ...\( \text{d8} \).
Chapter 1: Prophylaxis

6. \( \text{Nf1-e1+?} \)

Now White's position becomes hopeless. In his Chessbase commentary, Igor Stohl gives the variation 6.\( \text{Nxd3} \)  d4 7.\( \text{Nxe1+} \)  \( \text{Nxd8} \)  8.\( \text{Nxe8+} \)  \( \text{Nxe8} \)  9.\( \text{Nxe6} \)  \( \text{Nc7} \) as unclear, but I do not see how White defends against all the threats - Black's c6 bishop is monstrous, and White's pieces are in total disharmony.

6. ...  \( \text{Nc7} \)
7. \( \text{Nxe1xe8} \)  \( \text{Nxe8xe8} \)
8. \( \text{Nd5-h5} \)  \( \text{Nxe8-e7} \)

White's position is in ruins. His pieces are scattered all over the board and his back rank is alarmingly weak.

9. \( \text{Nc3-d1} \)  \( \text{d5-d4} \)

Now the bishop opens up, and White can safely resign.

10. \( \text{Nh6-g8} \)  \( \text{Nh5-c5} \)

Not paying attention to the hanging f7 pawn.

11. \( \text{Nh5-g7} \)  \( \text{Nf7-d8} \)
12. \( \text{Nh3-h8} \)  \( \text{Nd8-c7} \)
13. \( \text{Nh6-e8} \)  \( \text{Nh8xe8} \)
14. \( \text{Nh8-e8} \)  \( \text{Nh7-e7} \)
15. \( \text{Nh7-e8} \)  \( \text{Nh8-e8} \)
16. \( \text{Nh3-c4} \)  \( \text{Nh5xc5} \)
17. \( \text{Nh4-b3} \)

White resigned.

Let's summarize what we have learned in this chapter:

A. Always ask yourself what the opponent would do if it were his move (first golden rule).
B. Take your time! Improve your position to the maximum extent before invading (second golden rule).
C. If you have a choice between a simple win and a long combination, choose the simple win as it is much safer (see Solomon-Williams).
D. In worse positions, look for unusual solutions - possibly using your king (see Gajic-Dlugy).
E. King evacuation is an important method of defense - even in hopeless-looking positions, king evacuation may save the day (see Srbis-Naroditsky and Illescas Cordoba-Andersson).
F. When your opponent has a very unpleasant threat, sacrificing an exchange in order to prevent it is often a solution; an exchange is not that much material (see Reshevsky-Petrosian).
Prophylactic thinking is very hard to master—it requires studying a lot of chess material and a lot of practice. The key to mastery is studying the games of Karpov and Petrosian. I can prove this using my own experience: about two years ago I had very bad positional understanding and no patience at all. I ruined many winning positions by trying to cash in immediately and failing. As soon as I started studying the games of Petrosian and Karpov, my positional play started improving immensely. My patience grew, and my technique in winning positions also improved (see Naroditsky-Bryant).

This doesn’t mean that you will become Karpov in one year, but I can guarantee that this is the recipe for improving your positional and prophylactic understanding. Take a look at one of my games immediately after I finished studying the games of the two great players.

1. \( \text{...} \) \( \text{\#d8-d7} \)
2. \( \text{\&c1-e3!} \)

An extremely unpleasant shot, forcing Black to give up a pawn.

2. \( \text{...} \) \( \text{\&c6-d4} \)
3. \( \text{\&c2-c3} \) \( \text{\&d4-f5} \)
4. \( \text{\&e4xc5} \) \( \text{\&f8xc5} \)
5. \( \text{\&e3xc5} \)

White is a pawn up for nothing, but he still has to demonstrate some good technique.

5. \( \text{...} \) \( \text{\&b7-b6} \)
6. \( \text{\&c5-a3} \) \( \text{\&a8-d8} \)
7. \( \text{\#d1-c2} \) \( \text{\#d7-c7} \)
8. \( \text{\&a1-d1} \) \( \text{\&a7-a6} \)
9. \( \text{\&c4-d2} \) \( \text{\&g8-f7} \)
10. \( \text{\&d2-e4} \) \( \text{\&d6-d7} \)
11. \( \text{\&a4-a5!} \)

Bam! Black’s position falls apart, as he has to give up control of the square c5, where White’s knight will wreak havoc. Black duly resigned after a few more moves.
Exercises

In order to test yourself, I recommend that you try to solve the two exercises below. If you get them wrong, I would suggest going over the chapter again and analyzing the games more closely. Remember – always ask yourself the question, "What would my opponent do if it were his move?" and if you think you see a way to win immediately, check your calculations carefully.

Black is obviously worse, but is there a way to achieve a playable position? Try to find the best move and support it with a few concrete variations.

Should White take the rook? Try to find the answer – if he shouldn’t, provide a concrete variation.
Chapter 2: Defense in Worse Positions

Defending is always hard, no matter what kind of attack you are trying to ward off. Before we talk about concrete defensive tools, I’d like to talk about what exactly defense is. First of all, it’s important to understand that you can defend not only against desperate attacks, but also against sound attacks. Of course, the harder you concentrate and calculate, the bigger the chances are that you conduct a successful defense.

Unfortunately, that is easy to say and hard to do! The main message is that often, the fact that an attack is winning is only an illusion. If the defending player keeps calm and doesn’t panic, he will almost always find ways to counter the attack. For example, if your opponent delivers an unpleasant blow that you have missed, it’s easy to panic and start thinking irrationally. Yes, sometimes such a blow can be deadly, but as we shall see from the subsequent examples, one can often find a defense even against the most unpleasant shots.

Defending against unjustified attacks can be as difficult as defending against justified ones! During the game, it’s hard to convince yourself that an attack is unjustified. Further on in this chapter, we will be discussing this problem in detail.

Our first example will address the question of how to defend against sacrificial attacks. Although these are very risky for the attacker, they can also be extremely dangerous for the defender, as the following example demonstrates.

\[\text{\textit{Perez Marco}}\]
\[\text{\textit{Naroditsky}}\]
Los Angeles 2006

1. \textit{d3xb5?!}

When your opponent sacrifices something, it is vital to start calculating concrete variations. In particular, you should watch out for the trap of “trusting” your opponent, especially when facing strong players. Your opponent might not have calculated the sacrifice correctly. However, this doesn’t mean that every sacrifice should be accepted – players often forget that a sacrifice can be declined, sometimes with decisive effect. In any case, it is essential to calculate as much as possible – do not let the strength of your opponent or your emotional reaction to a move dictate your decision.

In this position, I understood that I had to take the piece, but in positions where it’s not obvious whether or not to accept the sacrifice, it’s crucial to weigh
the options very carefully. Every minute is golden, and you cannot afford to waste time.

1. ... a6xb5
2. c3xb5?

Interestingly, this move is a major error! After the intermezzo 2...xd6!, Black would have faced serious problems. I think it would suffice to say that the position after 2...xd6 3.cxb5 xc2 4.cxd6 a6 is very unclear.

Returning to the text, I first had to make a list of candidate moves:

2...wce5, 2...wb6, and 2...xc2. Only then did I start calculating:

A) 2...wce5 3.cbd6 xxd6 4.cxd6 bxa6 looks okay at first, but White gets a winning position after 5.xf7+! xf7 (5...g8 is better, but after 6.h4! Black's position is very dangerous) 6.xf7 cxe5 (or 6...xc2 7.hxh7 7.xf1! and there is no defense: 7...g6 8.xg7 f8 9.xg7+! xg7 10.h4+.)

B) 2...wb6 is better, but White still has a great game: 3.cbd6 g6! (3...xd6 4.xf6! and White wins) 4.e5 with a strong initiative.

C) This left the most obvious move, 2...xc2. Of course the move is risky, but it's the only way to put White's sacrifice to the test.

2. ... wc7xc2!
3. b5xd6

The best method of continuing the attack.

3. ... f8xd6?

I was debating for a long time whether or not to make this move. I came to the conclusion that after the alternative 3...a6 4.xd2 xa4 5.xd1, the position was unclear. I think that with correct play, Black should still be able to obtain an advantage: 5...f6 6.xf4 xxc2!. This move was discovered during analysis. The idea is to transfer the bishop to g6! 7.e1 h5 8.xa8 xe8 and Black is slightly better.

Unfortunately, I had overlooked White's next move!

4. g5-f6!

The problem is that three pieces are attacking g7, and Black's pieces are scattered all over the board. Fortunately, I am still not lost!

4. ... e5-g6

The only way to defend against mate.

5. f6xg7+ h8-g8

An important position has arisen. White has many moves, and all of them
 seem tempting. My opponent thought for about an hour, and played:

   6. \( \mathcal{B}g7-d4?? \)

A beautiful idea, but this was the decisive mistake! Obviously, Black cannot take the queen because of mate in two, but my opponent forgot that I could defend the h6 square.

Let’s take a look at the alternatives:

A) \( \mathcal{B}h6++ \) loses to \( 6...\mathcal{B}xg7 \) \( 7.\mathcal{B}xh7+ \mathcal{B}h8 \) \( 8.\mathcal{B}xd6 \mathcal{B}xe4; \)

B) The position after \( 6.\mathcal{B}xd6 \mathcal{B}xe4 \) \( 7.\mathcal{B}e3 \mathcal{W}c7 \) is clearly in Black’s favor;

C) The only good move is \( 6.\mathcal{B}xd6! \), when Black has five different replies.

Let’s take a look at the best option: \( 6...a6! \) \( 7.\mathcal{W}f3 \mathcal{B}ge5 \) (I had relied on this during the game, but underestimated the strength of White’s following attack) \( 8.\mathcal{B}xe5 \mathcal{B}xe5 \) \( 9.\mathcal{W}g3+ \mathcal{B}g6 \) \( 10.\mathcal{B}xe1 \) and the onus is on Black to find a viable defense.

Overall, White would have been clearly better had he played \( 6.\mathcal{B}xd6 \), but as often happens, imagination defeats rational thinking.

6. ... \( \mathcal{B}d6-f8! \)

Simple, but nevertheless nice. With the key h6 square defended, White is two pieces down for no compensation at all.

I later discovered that Black had another refutation of White’s move: \( 6...\mathcal{B}f4! \) and \( 7.\mathcal{W}xf4 \) is ineffective as White has no mate following \( 7...\mathcal{B}xf4 \) \( 8.\mathcal{B}h6+ \mathcal{B}f8 \).

The game continued:

   7. \( h2-h4 \) \( \mathcal{B}b7xe4 \)
   8. \( \mathcal{B}f5-e3 \) \( \mathcal{W}c2-c7 \)
   9. \( \mathcal{W}g3-g4 \) \( \mathcal{B}e4-c6 \)
   10. \( h4-h5 \) \( \mathcal{B}e8-e4 \)
   11. \( h5xg6 \) \( f7xg6 \)
   12. \( \mathcal{W}g4-g5 \) \( \mathcal{F}f8-e7 \)
   13. \( \mathcal{Z}f1-f6 \) \( \mathcal{B}e7xf6 \)
   14. \( \mathcal{B}d4xf6 \) \( \mathcal{D}7xf6 \)
   15. \( \mathcal{B}e3-f5 \) \( \mathcal{W}c7-e5 \)
   16. \( \mathcal{B}f5-h6+ \mathcal{B}g8-g7 \)

And here White finally threw in the towel.

This game shows that when you are subject to a sacrificial attack, you have to sit down and calculate. If you defend, your opponent will be down material for little or no compensation. However, a question arises: “What exactly do you calculate?”

In other words, in a very complex position, how do you choose when to stop your calculations? The answer is simple: calculate as much as you can without getting into bad time trouble. The more you calculate, the higher the chances of playing the correct move will be.

In the next game we will see what it is like to defend against a justified sacrificial attack in a much worse position.
Real de Azua

Bhat

Oropesa del Mar 2000
French Defense (C00)

1. e2-e4 e7-e6
2. d2-d3 d7-d5
3. Qb1-d2 Qg8-f6
4. Qg1-f3 b7-b6

An interesting variation which usually leads to sharp play. The main alternative is 4...c5 followed by ...Qc6 and ...Qe7.

5. g2-g3

The main alternative 5.e5 Qfd7 6.d4 leads to much quieter positions. Anand-Dreev, PCA Intel Rapid 1995, continued 6...c5 7.c3 Qe7 8.Qb5 Qa6 9.a4 Qb7 10.0-0 Qc6 11.Qe1 cxd4 12.Qxd4 Wc7, with an approximately equal position.

5. ... d5xe4
6. d3xe4 Qc8-b7
7. Wd1-e2


7. ... Qb7-a6?! The first inaccuracy. After a few moves, White will have a big development adv-

antage. The correct move and main line is 7...Qc6. If White wants to play for a win, he should have played 8.c3, as recommended by grandmaster Lev Psakhis. The alternative 8.Qg2 allows Black to force a draw by 8...Qb4 9.Wc4 Qa6 10.Wb3 Qd7 11.a3 Qc5 12.Wc3 (12.Wxb4 Qd3+ 13.cxd3 Qxb4 14.axb4 Qxd3) 12...Qxc2+ 13.Wxc2 Qd3+ 14.Qd1 Qxf2+ 15.Qe1 Qd3+ 1/2-1/2 Vujosevic-Bukal, Paks 1998.

8. c2-c4

The bishop is located awkwardly on a6, and the h1-a8 diagonal will be very weak. If Black wants to defend it, he will have to waste another tempo on ...Qb7.

8. ... Qb8-c6
9. e4-e5!

White has to play energetically in order to prove his advantage.

9. ... Qf6-d7
10. f1-g2 Wd7-c5

Black tries to consolidate, but to no avail – White’s development advantage is simply huge.

11. 0-0 Wd8-d7
12. a2-a3
Chapter 2: Defense in Worse Positions

Real de Azua is preparing b2-b4, driving away Black's knight and simultaneously forcing his next move. However, White had the even better 12...d3!, when Black is in a very unpleasant situation. After 12...b8 13...g5! xb3 14.axb3 I cannot see how Black can hold his position together for much longer.

12. ... a6-b7
13. b2-b4 d7-d3!

The only move which keeps Black in the game. Instead, 13...d3 was losing after 14.d1 c1c1 15.axc1, with a huge attack which Black cannot parry:

14. e2-d1 c5-d7
15. c1-b2

![Chessboard diagram]

Black's position is miserable—he is completely underdeveloped, and his queen on d3 is very precariously placed, not to mention the weakness of the h1-a8 diagonal.

15. ... 0-0-0
16. f1-e1

Threatening to drive Black's queen to g6 and follow it up with h4, winning the game.

16. ... h7-h6!

Again, Bhat finds the only practical defense. The queen will go to h7, where it won't be subject to attack. The obvious drawback is that the queen will be locked into a self-made prison after a future e4, but at least Black does not lose immediately.

17. e1-e3 d3-h7
18. d1-a4 f8-e7

This is a critical position. White seems to be totally winning, but a closer look reveals that things are not so simple. First of all, it is not easy to make use of the h1-a8 diagonal. Secondly, Black "threatens" to consolidate after ...b8 and a possible ...g5-g4. Therefore, White has to act quickly. Real de Azua had a similar train of thought and played the following good-looking move:

19. d2-b3!!??

![Chessboard diagram]

The two exclamation marks are for bravery and quality, and the two question marks are for the fact that White failed to anticipate Black's reply. The best move in the position was the simple but strong 19.e1, and the weaknesses of Black's position are highlighted. Black's queen being on h7 makes it very hard to defend; for example: 19...xe5 20.d1! A devastating
move after which Black’s position seems to collapse. The only move is 20...\(\text{g}4\), but after 21.\(\text{e}2\) \(\text{b}8\) 22.\(\text{x}a7\) \(\text{x}g2\) 23.\(\text{x}g2\) Black can only hope for miracles.

The move in the game seems completely logical and practically decisive. Bhat, however, kept cool and found a concrete idea that White had missed. This highlights an important point that I made at the outset: no matter how impressive and nice your opponent’s position may look, keep in mind the possibility that he might have overlooked something.

19. \(\text{b}6\)-\(\text{b}5!!\)

The concept is truly wonderful: by moving his knight to \(b3\), White has blocked the only means of escape for his queen on \(a4\)! Still, there is much analysis to be done. The problem is that White can sacrifice his queen and obtain a huge attack in return. Therefore, a question arises: why not 19...\(\text{c}2\) instead?

20. \(\text{c}4\text{xb}5!\)

Making the correct decision. I attended a training session led by grandmaster Vinay Bhat, along with some other young Californian players. We analyzed 20.\(\text{xb}5\) for a long time and came to the conclusion that the position was very messy: 20...\(\text{a}6\) 21.\(\text{xb}7\) 21.\(\text{a}4\) \(\text{b}6\) wins for Black. 21...\(\text{x}b7\)

22.\(\text{f}d4\) \(\text{b}8\)

And now White has three moves: 23.\(\text{a}5\)+, 23.\(\text{xc}6\), and 23.\(\text{b}5\).

A) 23.\(\text{xc}6\) is very interesting and leads to an unclear position after 23...\(\text{xc}6\) 24.\(\text{e}4!\) Locking in Black’s queen. 24...\(\text{g}6\) 25.\(\text{a}5+\) 25.\(\text{b}5\) is tempting, but after 25...\(\text{b}8\) 26.\(\text{xc}6\) \(h5\)! 27.bxa6 \(\text{a}7\) I would prefer Black. 25...\(\text{c}8\) 26.\(\text{xc}6\) \(\text{d}7\) 27.\(\text{b}3!\) Honestly, I think that it’s very hard to defend such a position with black, but if he defends against White’s powerful attack and consolidates, the queen will even-
tually decide the game. For example: 27...\texttt{hd8} (27...\texttt{h5} 28.b5 \texttt{a5} 29.b6! wins for White) 28.\texttt{xd8} \texttt{xd8} 29.\texttt{c6} \texttt{d2}, and Black doesn’t have too many problems defending this position.

B) 23.b5?! gives Black a chance to take control of the c5-square with the slightly paradoxical move 23...\texttt{b6}!.

After 24.\texttt{xc6} \texttt{xc6} 25.\texttt{xc6} \texttt{c2}! it’s White who has to fight for equality.

C) 23.\texttt{a5+} Bhat and the participants of the session came to the conclusion that this was the best move, although I’m not sure this is true after looking at \texttt{xc6} followed by \texttt{b5}. At any rate, the position after 23...\texttt{c8} 24.\texttt{xc6} \texttt{xc6} 25.\texttt{xc6} \texttt{d7} is similar to the one arising from variation A.

![analysis diagram](image)

White should be slightly better after 26.\texttt{e4} g6 27.b5, with a strong initiative for the slight material disadvantage. However, I don’t see a clear way for White to consolidate his advantage after 27...\texttt{a5}. In conclusion, we could say that 20.\texttt{xb5} was by no means a bad move, but Real de Azua’s move is objectively stronger.

20. ... \texttt{d7-b6}
21. \texttt{b5xc6} \texttt{b6xa4}
22. \texttt{c6xb7+} \texttt{c8-b8}

Again, White is faced with a dilemma: 23.\texttt{d4} or 23.\texttt{d4}? Calculating concrete variations is the recipe for making the correct choice in such cases, but the attacker always has a burden that the defender does not have. Often, it’s tempting to try to win by taking minimal risks – the attacker always strives to do that. The defender, on the other hand, does not need to make such decisions. It’s understandable that Real de Azua chose the safest option, but sometimes you cannot win by choosing only safe options.

23. \texttt{b2-d4}?

This turns out to be a mistake. After 23.\texttt{d4}! Black has two moves:

A) 23...\texttt{xb2} loses after 24.\texttt{c6+} \texttt{xb7} 25.\texttt{xd8+} \texttt{b6} 26.\texttt{xh7};

B) 23...\texttt{c5} is the only move that does not lose immediately. However, after 24.\texttt{bxc5}, 24...\texttt{d7} is forced, since 24...\texttt{xb2} loses to 25.\texttt{e4}! g6 26.\texttt{c6+}. Now, White plays 25.\texttt{c6} \texttt{c7} 26.\texttt{c1}, and he is nearly winning.

Does this mean that 19...\texttt{b5} was bad? Obviously not! The move was very hard to find and was Black’s only chance to put up a fight. Also, when you constantly force your opponent to make hard decisions, he is much more likely to make a mistake. This error came in the form of 23.\texttt{d4}.
Both Bhat and Real de Azua play this part of the game very strongly. The tempting 28...\texttt{xc1} fails to 28...\texttt{x}d4 29.\texttt{c}6+ \texttt{xc6} 30.\texttt{xc6} \texttt{x}d2.

23. ... \texttt{d}8-d5!

This is a very strong defensive move which cuts off the g2 bishop’s line of fire.

24. \texttt{f}3-d2

Real de Azua doesn’t succumb to Black’s strong defense. Making a switch from an almost winning advantage to a minimal one is always very hard, but Real de Azua seems to have overcome this problem during the game.

24. ... \texttt{h}8-d8

Sacrificing an exchange for the monstrous g2 bishop, which is essentially the root of Black’s problems.

25. \texttt{g}2-e4 \texttt{h}7-g8
26. \texttt{e}4\texttt{x}d5 \texttt{d}8\texttt{x}d5
27. \texttt{b}3-a5

White keeps finding ways to pour more oil into the fire and keep the attack going: 27...\texttt{xd4} fails to 28.\texttt{c}6+. Bhat is not thrown off and finds a very strong move.

27. ... \texttt{g}8-e8!

Keeping everything under control and defending the c6-square.

28. \texttt{d}2-b3

An amazing resource, which, at the cost of a pawn, blocks the c-file and thus stops any possible \texttt{c}6+ threats.

29. \texttt{b}4\texttt{xc5} \texttt{e}7-d8
30. \texttt{a}5-c4 \texttt{c}d8-c7
31. \texttt{c}4-d6

White can’t afford to allow Black’s consolidation – he has to keep making threats.

31. ... \texttt{c}7\texttt{xd6}
32. \texttt{e}5\texttt{xd6} \texttt{e}8-b5

Finally, the smoke has cleared and the position is approximately equal. After the moves:

33. \texttt{d}4\texttt{xc7} \texttt{a}4\texttt{xc5}
34. \texttt{b}3\texttt{xc5} \texttt{b}5\texttt{xc5}
35. \texttt{g}7-f8 \texttt{c}5-c2
36. \texttt{f}0\texttt{xh6} \texttt{d}5-d1+
37. \texttt{a}1\texttt{xd1} \texttt{c}2\texttt{xd1+}
38. \texttt{g}1-g2 \texttt{d}1-d5+
39. \texttt{g}2-g1 \texttt{b}8\texttt{xb7}
40. \texttt{h}6-f8 \texttt{d}5-d1+

the players finally called it a day. Draw.
Chapter 2: Defense in Worse Positions

In this game, we saw that even the most hopeless-looking positions can be saved with good calculation and inventive defense.

In the next game, Black is forced to defend against a strong attack in time trouble. Moreover, I had prepared the first 20 moves, so Black had no chance of getting a better position; she had to make crucial moves that were extremely hard to find. Then, when she finally defended and was on the verge of gaining an advantage, she blundered a knight!

Naroditsky
Tuvshintugs
San Francisco 2007
Sicilian Defense,
Sveshnikov Variation (B33)
This game was very important for me because a win would earn me second place in the tournament with 6.5 out of 8 points. Therefore, I spent a lot of time preparing against the Sveshnikov. Of course, there was some degree of luck involved since I couldn’t be sure that my opponent would go for this variation, but it nevertheless shows the importance of opening preparation.

1. e2-e4 c7-c5
2. Qg1-f3 Qb8-c6
3. d2-d4 c5xd4
4. Qf3xd4 Qg8-f6
5. Qb1-c3 e7-e5
6. Qd4-b5 d7-d6
7. Qc1-g5 a7-a6
8. Qb5-a3 b7-b5
9. Qc3-d5 Qf8-e7
10. Qg5xf6 Qe7xf6
11. c2-c3 0-0
12. Qa3-c2 Qf6-g5
13. a2-a4 b5xa4
14. Qa1xa4 a6-a5
15. Qf1-c4 Qa8-b8
16. Qa4-a2 Qg8-h8
17. Qc2-e3 g7-g6

Although not a mistake, this move is extremely risky – Black has to know a lot of lines here.

18. h2-h4!

This is the reason many players choose 17...Qxe3 instead. The position arising after 18...Qxh4 is easier to play with White, since he is attacking and Black has to make forced moves.

18. ... g5xh4
19. g2-g3

Although according to MegaBase 2008 this is one of the most popular moves, it’s already a serious inaccuracy. Instead, the correct move is 19...Qf6! Now, White has two moves: 20.f4 and 20.b3. However, interestingly, they transpose!

A) 20.f4 was played by Herman against my opponent in Foxwoods in 2007. The game continued: 20...Qxf4
21. gxf4  
21...hx4+ is inferior:
22.  
23. b3  
This is a big mistake after which White’s attack grows almost unbearable. Instead, the right way to continue is 22...e8! as played by Kramnik against Ponomariov in Wijk aan Zee 2005. That game continued: 23.  
24. ah2 h5 25. bxh5 (according to Ponomariov, this is inaccurate. The correct move was 25. g2, when White has a strong attack after 25...e7 26. xe7+ xe7 27. xg6 g4 28.e5!) 25...gxh5 26. xh5 e6! 27. h7+ f8 28. g1 g6 with a total mess – the game was drawn after some time.

23. ah2 h6

24. f5!! A brilliant tactical resource! 24...xd5 24...gxf5 loses to 25. xh6+ xh6 26. wh5 with a quick mate.
25. xd5 gxf5 26. xh6+ xh6
27. xh6+ g7 28. wh5 h8 29. xh8 xh8 30. xf7+ with a gigantic attack. It’s a shame that White couldn’t convert his attack and even lost the game after a heroic battle.

B) 20. b3 transposes into the f4 line after 20...g7 21. f4.

In conclusion, I’ll say that defending the position after 20.f4 or 20.b3 is very tricky – even the strongest players make mistakes in these kinds of positions; one tiny error can lead to a calamity.

20. f2-f4      e5xf4
21. g3xf4      g5-h4+?

This is a severe oversight which should have led to a critical position for Black. Instead, 21...f6 was much better. While analyzing, I came up with the following variation: 22. b3  
23. xf6 (23. f5?  xh5 24. xd5  e5 25. h3 h5 26. b3 xe4 27. bxc4 28. bxc4 29. b1+ 23...xf6 24. b1+ xd5 25. bxh5 xe7 26. h4 f8 27. h4 e8 28. bxc4 with a slight edge. However, it is probably not enough to win.

22. e1-d2!

Although there were only two games with this move in MegaBase 2008, I believe that it’s much stronger than 22. f1. The idea is simple: White will transfer his king to c1 where it will be safe, and only then will continue the attack. This idea might seem a little slow, but it’s not really clear how Black can take advantage of this.

22. ...          f7-f5?
Chapter 2: Defense in Worse Positions

The decisive mistake, which should have lost in a few moves. Correct was 22...\(\text{\#h}\)6!, and it’s not easy for White to continue his attack. In the game Zaslavsky-Bakos, World Youth Championship Antalya 2007, White played 23.\(\text{\#c}\)1, but after 23...\(\text{\#g}\)7 erred with 24.\(\text{\#a}\)4. Instead, Black’s position is highly problematic after 24.\(\text{\#b}\)3!, threatening 25.\(\text{\#h}\)2. For example, 24...\(\text{\#f}\)6 25.\(\text{\#h}\)2 \(\text{\#b}\)8 26.\(\text{\#d}\)3, with a clear advantage.

23. \(\text{\#d}\)2-\(\text{\#c}\)1!

Another important move — the tempting 23.\(\text{\#g}\)1 is strongly met by 23...\(\text{\#g}\)! when the position after 24.\(\text{\#g}\)2 \(\text{\#g}\)3 25.\(\text{\#e}\)3 \(\text{\#xf}\)4 26.\(\text{\#xf}\)4 \(\text{\#xf}\)4 27..\(\text{\#xf}\)4 \(\text{\#e}\)5 is far from clear.

23. ... \(\text{\#f}\)5-\(\text{\#e}\)4

In this position, I sank into a long think (my clock showed about an hour and 20 minutes for the remaining 7 moves, while my opponent had only 10 minutes). The first thing I noticed was that a rook on \(\text{\#h}\)2 would spell trouble for Black if activated. Therefore, I quickly played the natural move:

24. \(\text{\#b}\)2-\(\text{\#b}\)3?

I was very upset at myself after the game for missing the simple but nevertheless nice move 24.\(\text{\#b}\)!.

24. ... \(\text{\#g}\)6-\(\text{\#f}\)5!

A very nice resource which defends against 25.\(\text{\#h}\)2.

25. \(\text{\#a}\)2-\(\text{\#h}\)2 \(\text{\#c}\)8-\(\text{\#f}\)5??

A major blunder that should have lost by force. The correct move was 25...\(\text{\#b}\)! after which the position would have been approximately equal.

26. \(\text{\#e}\)3-\(\text{\#f}\)5 \(\text{\#f}\)8-\(\text{\#f}\)5
27. \(\text{\#d}\)1-\(\text{\#h}\)! \(\text{\#d}\)8-\(\text{\#d}\)7
28. \(\text{\#h}\)2-\(\text{\#g}\)2?
Blundering away the win for the second time. The simple 28.fxg5 \(\text{hxg5}+\)
29.\(\text{d1}\) \(\text{b7}\) 30.\(\text{g6}\) \(\text{f8}\) 31.\(\text{xe5}\) won on the spot.

\[\text{Diagram of the position after 28.\(\text{d1}\)}\]

28. ... \(\text{d7-g7}\!\)!

Despite having mere seconds on the clock, Tuvshintugs finds very strong moves. The queen moves into a pin, but unfortunately, White cannot exploit it. Black’s point is that 29.\(\text{xe5}\) loses to \(\text{gxf4}\), when White cannot take advantage of Black’s hanging pieces.

29. \(\text{c1-c2}\) \(\text{b8-f8}\)

Objectively speaking, this move might be worse than 29...\(\text{gxf4}\), which leads to a drawish position. However, since I was very upset at myself for missing 28.fxg5, it was harder to concentrate on the game.

30. \(\text{h5-e2}\)

My only hope here was that my opponent would finally collapse with 5 seconds on the clock for the last move. It’s a miracle that she played:

30. ... \(\text{a5-a4??}\)

Incredibly, Tuvshintugs blunders a piece in one move! However, it’s not easy to play when you are under constant pressure and in huge time trouble. After the correct 30...\(\text{b7}\) 31.\(\text{xe5}\) \(\text{f7}\)
32.\(\text{xe5}\) \(\text{xe5}\) 33.\(\text{xe5}\) \(\text{xe5}\) 34.\(\text{f6}\) \(\text{c4}\) 35.\(\text{bxc4}\) \(\text{a4}\) the position is roughly equal.

31. \(\text{h1xh4}\)

My opponent literally jumped out of her chair when I played this move. There is still some technique required, but the game is essentially over.

31. ... \(\text{a4xb3}\)
32. \(\text{c2-b1}\)

This doesn’t ruin anything, but why not 32.\(\text{xb3}\)?

32. ... \(\text{g7-a7}\)

\[\text{Diagram of the position after 32.\(\text{a7}\)}\]

33. \(\text{h4xh7+}\!\)

It’s always aesthetically pleasing to make such a move on the board. Both captures lose the queen.

33. ... \(\text{h8xh7}\)
34. \(\text{e2-h5}\) \(\text{h7-g7}\)
35. \(\text{g2-h2}\) \(\text{a7-g1}\)
36. \(\text{b1-b2}\)

Black has no checks, and has to give up her queen for White’s rook.

36. ... \(\text{g1xh2}\+)
37. \(\text{h5xh2}\) \(\text{c6-a5}\)
Chapter 2: Defense in Worse Positions

38. \( \text{h2-e2} \) g5xf4
39. \( \text{e2xe4} \) a5xc4+
40. \( \text{e4xc4} \) f4-f3
41. \( \text{c4-g4+} \) g7-h7
42. \( \text{g4-h4+} \) h7-g7
43. \( \text{d5-e3} \) f3-f2
44. \( \text{h4-g4+} \)

Black resigned.

This example teaches us that even in time trouble, you can defend a position. However, it also serves as a warning not to place yourself in a situation where you have absolutely no time left and do not have time to make important decisions. Sometimes time trouble is unavoidable, but you simply cannot allow situations where you have 5 seconds on the clock. Another point that this game illustrates is the fact that the analysis of your games is very important. Not only does analysis highlight the mistakes you made, it also might win you other games in the future!

About a year later, I found myself in a similar situation, but this time I was the victim!

[Diagram of chessboard]

\( \text{Langer} \)
\( \text{Naroditsky} \)
Reno 2008
Sicilian Defense,
Najdorf Variation (B99)

Hitherto, I was having the tournament of my life: I beat a 2000 in round 1, drew grandmaster Sergey Kudrin in round 2, and then beat IM Vladimir Mezentsev with black in round 3. Therefore, I really didn’t want to lose this game.

1. e2-e4  c7-c5
2. \( \text{g1-f3} \) d7-d6
3. d2-d4  c5xd4
4. \( \text{f3xd4} \) g8-f6
5. \( \text{b1-c3} \) a7-a6
6. \( \text{c1-g5} \) e7-e6
7. f2-f4  f8-e7
8. \( \text{d1-f3} \) d8-c7
9. 0-0-0  \( \text{b8-d7} \)
10. \( \text{g2-g4} \) h7-h6?

In my opinion, a very interesting sideline. First of all, it avoids the huge mass of variations arising from the main move 10...b5; and secondly, it practically forces White to trade on f6, since 11...h4 g5 is in Black’s favor. The drawback is that the h6 pawn may be a hook when White later plays g5. Overall, I think that this line is by no means worse than the main line 10...b5, where one mistake can lead to catastrophe.

11. \( \text{g5xf6} \)

Our previous game continued: 11.h4?! g5! 12.fxg5 \( \text{e5} \) 13.\( \text{g3} \) \( \text{fxg4} \) 14.g6?! (White tries to generate counterplay, but equalizing with 14.gxh6 would have been the best choice: 14.gxh6 \( \text{exh6} \) 15.\( \text{wxh6} \) \( \text{wxd6} \))
16. \( \text{Wg3} \)  \( \text{g6} \)  17. \( \text{Wh4} \)  with a possible repetition of moves) 14...fxg6 15. \( \text{xe2} \)  \( \text{xe2} \)  16. \( \text{Wh4} \)  \( \text{e7}! \)  17. \( \text{Wg3} \)  0-0! (evidently, White had missed these two 

moves: 18. \( \text{xe4} \) is met by 18...\( \text{g5} \), winning back the piece) 18. \( \text{h4} \)  \( \text{f6} \)  19. \( \text{df1} \)  \( \text{d7} \) (it may seem that White 

has counterplay, but the e5 knight keeps 

everything together) 20. \( \text{f3} \)  \( \text{g4}! \) (an 

important move — otherwise Black 

would have to give up material and the 

e5 knight) 21. \( \text{h3} \)  \( \text{xf3} \)  22. \( \text{xf3} \)  \( \text{e5} \)  23. \( \text{Wh6} \)  \( \text{h7} \). Black is better, but a 

draw would have been the probable 

result after 24. \( \text{Wh7} \). Instead, White 

made a major error with 24. \( \text{e3} \) and 

lost in a few moves after 24...\( \text{h3} \), 


11. ...  \( \text{xe7xf6} \)

12. \( \text{h2-h4} \)

White has to play energetically in order 

to fight for the initiative. He cannot let 

Black play ...b5, ...\( \text{b7} \), and ...0-0-0 for 

free because the two bishops would 

guarantee Black an excellent game.

12. ...  \( \text{g7-g5} \)

Playing this crazy move was a bad 

decision on my part. I did not want to fight 

for equality after the main moves 

12...\( \text{wb6} \) or 12...\( \text{b6} \), although equal-

izing shouldn’t be a problem. However, 

about a year earlier, I had analyzed 

12...g5, which is actually quite a popular 

move (Black fights for control over e5). 

After a lot of work, I found an improve-

ment in the completely crazy game 

Scherbakov-Andreikin, which led to a 

forced win for White. I remembered an-

alyzing this position, but I forgot that I 
had found a forced win for White! After 
the game, my opponent told me that he 
too had analyzed this position. It’s simply 
a miracle that I saved this game.

13. \( \text{h4xg5} \)  \( \text{h6xg5} \)

An important move that is the prelude 
to White’s brilliant combination. In my 

old analysis, I had found another inter-

esting idea that I thought was winning: 

14. \( \text{xdh8} \)  and \( \text{e7} \)  15. \( \text{Wh1} \). The 

problem is that Black’s pieces are very badly 
placed and the h-file is undefended. I 
thought that 15...\( \text{f6} \) was the only 

move, but it loses after 16.f5! \( \text{xdh4} \) 

17. \( \text{xdh4} \)  \( \text{e5} \)  18. \( \text{Whh8} \)  \( \text{e7} \)  19. \( \text{f6} \). 

However, Black has a major improve-

ment: 15...\( \text{xdh4} \)  16. \( \text{xdh4} \) and now 

not 16...\( \text{fxh4} \)  17. \( \text{Whh8} \)  \( \text{f8} \)  18. \( \text{b5} \) ! 

\( \text{d7} \)  19. \( \text{xdh7} \)  20. \( \text{e5} \)  21. \( \text{e4} \) winning, but 16...\( \text{c5} \) !, and 

after 17. \( \text{Whh8} \)  \( \text{f8} \) White has an edge, 

but the fight is still ahead. It’s clear that 

Langer had worked hard on finding an 

improvement here; discovering the fol-

lowing combination is not easy.

14. ...  \( \text{d6xe5} \)

15. \( \text{d4xe6} \)

Blasting open Black’s king, and the en-

suing attack is deadly. Besides, he had 
almost all of his time left for the next 25 

moves, while I only had 30 minutes.
Chapter 2: Defense in Worse Positions

15. ... f7xe6
16. Zh1xh8+!

This is the improvement I mentioned above. Scherbakov-Andreikin had continued 16.Oe4?! Zxh1 17.fxg5?! Zh2 18.d3 &g7 19.g6 Zb6 with a winning position for Black, although he later managed to mess everything up. I think that it would suffice to say that from now on, almost every single move was a huge blunder!

16. ... &f6xh8
17. &f3-h1 &h8-g7
17...&f6 loses immediately to 18.Oe4.

18. &h1-h5+

[Diagram: Chessboard with moves 16...&f6xh8, 17. &f3-h1 &h8-g7, 18. &h1-h5+]

Here, I finally came to terms with what had just happened. First of all, I had 20 minutes for the remaining 23 moves, and I didn’t see any defense from the gigantic mating attack that was about to take place. I had no time to calculate variations, so I had to play intuitively.

18. ... &e8-f8
18...&e7 loses to 19.Wg6 &f8 20.Oe4.

19. f4xg5

My opponent half-smiled, and prepared for my resignation. I, on the other hand, was debating how to resign — to put my
ing down in grace or to storm out of the playing hall and punch the wall. Part of my brain, however, sub-consciously looked for ways to defend against the massacre along the f-file.

When you are subject to what seems like a mating attack, never panic and always try to look for unusual defensive resources. Suddenly, out of the blue, I found a defense:

19. ... e5-e4!

My idea is that after ...We5, the e7-d6-c7 path for the king will be vacated, and White will simply be a piece down. Now, it was my opponent’s turn to panic — he thought for maybe 30 minutes before finally playing:

20. &f1-g2!

Incredibly, there was one previous game here, which had continued: 20.Oxe4?! Wf4+ 21.Zd2?! Wh7? 22.Oc4! Whxh5 23.gxh5 b5 24.Zg2 Zb8 25.Oa5 b4 26.h6 with a quick win, Sowray-Grooten, London 1996. However, after the simple 21.Oe5 I don’t see how White can continue his offensive.

20. ... Wc7-e5

[Diagram: Chessboard with moves 20. ... Wc7-e5]

21. g2xe4!!
Mastering Positional Chess

It’s remarkable that White found this over-the-board. White sacrifices a second piece, but in return fuels his attack.

21. ... 
22. c1-b1 
23. Wh5-h1?!

This natural-looking move gives Black a chance to consolidate his pieces and achieve a viable position. Instead, White had the extremely computeresque move 23.bxc3!!

I want to highlight the fact that even in objectively lost positions there are almost always chances to defend. Here, as in the last game, White had a win, but Black’s previous defense made a huge psychological impact on him; he thought he was totally winning and relaxed. Suddenly he had to find a way to win again!

23. ... 
24. b2xc3 

Black has finally consolidated, but since it’s hard to get his rook and bishop into the game, the position remains unclear.

25. Wh1-h2! 
26. b1-a1 
27. Wh2-h8 
28. Wh8-h2 
29. Wh2-h8 

Draw. A fitting end to a game played well by both players.

As this example shows, when you are defending against a justified and powerful attack, you cannot hope to find a saving grace in every game. However, there have not been many attacks where players didn’t make mistakes and didn’t give their opponent any chances. It is your job to make life as hard as possible for your opponent, and immediately pounce on any error he might make. In the game above, White did not find 23.bxc3, and gave his opponent very good chances to defend. If he does everything with mathematical precision, then hats off to him. However, when your opponent is under pressure, the likelihood of him making a mistake is very large.
In the next game, we will examine how the not-so-known black player masterfully defends against a vicious onslaught by his main rival.

- **Karpov**
- **Kasparov**

World Championship Match, Moscow 1985
Sicilian Defense,
Schveningen Variation (B85)

This was the final game of the second World Championship match between Karpov and Kasparov. Kasparov was leading by one point, and Karpov needed a win in order to retain his title. He decided that playing 1.d4 would be too drawish, and played:

1. e2-e4

Kasparov saw no reason not to play his favorite opening, the Sicilian Najdorf:

1. ... c7-c5
2. g2-g3 d7-d6
3. d2-d4 c5xd4
4. c3xd4 g8-f6
5. e2-b1 c3 a7-a6
6. f1-e2

Karpov decides to play his specialty; although 6.e2 is known to be a quiet line, one has to know a sizable amount of theory in order to fully equalize.

6. ... e7-e6

The other main move, 6...e5, also equalizes, but Kasparov was known to like Schveningen structures more.

7. 0-0 f8-e7
8. f2-f4 0-0
9. g1-h1 d8-c7
10. a2-a4 b8-c6
11. c1-e3 f8-e8
12. e2-f3 a8-b8

13. d1-d2

Karpov decides to play the quiet line; instead, the aggressive 13.g4!? is also a good variation. The positions arising from it are usually very sharp and double-edged.

13. ... c8-d7
14. d4-b3 b7-b6
15. g2-g4

The time has come for White to start his usual kingside attack. The main drawback of this plan is that if White’s attack fails, his king will become very weak and subject to attack along the a8-h1 diagonal.

15. ... d7-c8

A typical maneuver in this line. The bishop is transferred to the long diagonal, while the f6 knight will have a comfortable square on d7.

16. g4-g5 f6-d7
17. d2-f2

Objectively speaking, White may be slightly better in this variation, but
Black has a lot of possibilities and cracking his position is extremely hard.

17. ...  \( \texttt{e7-f8} \)
18. \( \texttt{f3-g2} \)  \( \texttt{c8-b7} \)
19. \( \texttt{a1-d1} \)

Of course, this doesn’t mean that Black has sidestepped everything, but at least it’s a good temporary defense since White will have to spend a lot of time preparing \( f4-f5 \). Besides, the bishop is located optimally on \( g7 \), and the knight is also well placed on \( f8 \).

19. ...  \( \texttt{g7-g6!} \)
20. \( \texttt{e3-c1!} \)

Karpov finds the best way to transfer his rook to \( h3 \). The rook will also defend the \( c3 \) knight, and may move to \( f3 \) in case Black leaves \( f7 \) completely undefended. Such play is typical of Karpov: when he sees a tempting possibility (i.e. \( \texttt{Wh4} \) followed by \( \texttt{f3-h3} \) he always looks for better options. In this case, \( \texttt{c1} \) followed by \( \texttt{d3} \) is much better than \( \texttt{Wh4} \) and \( \texttt{f3-h3} \). Again, Kasparov has to find a way to generate counterplay on the queenside.

20. ...  \( \texttt{b8-c8} \)

Against the immediate 20...\( \texttt{b4} \) Karpov was planning to play 21.\( f5! \) after which the \( f7 \) pawn is in serious trouble: 21...\( \texttt{exf5} \) 22.\( \texttt{exf5} \) \( \texttt{xe2+} \) and now not 23.\( \texttt{xg2} \) \( \texttt{b7} \), giving Black good play, but 23...\( \texttt{xe2+} \) \( \texttt{b7} \) 24...\( \texttt{xe2+} \) when White’s position is clearly better. Kasparov’s coach at the time, Alexander Nikitin, tells this move inaccurate, recommending 20...\( \texttt{c5} \) instead, but both moves obviously deserve attention.

21. \( \texttt{d1-d3} \)  \( \texttt{c6-b4}! \)

Kasparov finds the only way to obtain counterplay; the knight will be very annoying and will always attack \( c2 \).

22. \( \texttt{d3-h3} \)
Just in time – $\text{g}8$ is met by $\text{g}8$.

The move $\text{g}2\text{--g}7$ looks completely natural, but a close look at the position would reveal that it doesn’t defend against $\text{f}5$ in the book $\text{d}e2\text{--d}5$.

1st move: $\text{g}2\text{--g}7$.

To make only moves in order to survive.

Obviously, the line was not clear when he correctly

But after $\text{g}2\text{--g}7$, the position is not at all clear. Obviously, the line mentioned above, the game isn’t over, but the history of chess might have been completely different had Karpov pressed the attack with $\text{f}2\text{--f}5$.

Chapter 2: Defeat in Worse Positions
Now, let’s return to the move Karpov made. It may be a mistake, but it’s still not clear how Black can generate counterplay. Kasparov affirmed that the only way to open up the position would be to achieve f5, but he has to prepare this break first. Therefore, he first makes the completely paradoxical move:

23. ... He8-e7!!

In my opinion, this is one of the best moves ever played in chess. The move 23...He7 seems completely useless; the rook seems much better placed on e8 rather than on e7. Kasparov, however, planned a very deep and beautiful idea: before playing ...f5, he will double rooks on the e-file, in order to prepare himself for the imminent opening of the position.

Nikitin writes: “Garry is proud of this regrouping, which none of the numerous commentators Grandmasters saw. The rook defends f7, and stops 24.f5 because of 24..exf5 25.exf5 Hxg2+ 26.Hxg2 gxf5 or 24...d4 e5! 25.fxe5 dxe5. It’s surprising that one move can stop a whole array of threats. After a long 30 minute think, a rattled Karpov played:”

24. Hh1-g1

This move doesn’t really do anything, but I can’t really recommend a better alternative. Now, it’s White’s turn to sit and wait for Black to execute his plan.

24. ... He8-e8!

Continuing his amazing idea – White has no defense against 25...f5.

25. Hf1-d1

It’s interesting how two seemingly quiet and innocuous moves totally turn the tables. Before we move on, let’s see how Kasparov defended and how he transformed the position so quickly. First of all, and probably most importantly, he didn’t panic when he saw the imminent attack. Instead, he calmly searched for defenses and found ...g6 followed by ...Hg7 and possibly ...He8. Then, he carefully parried all of Karpov’s ideas, but at one point failed to identify the critical point of the game and made a mistake (22...Hg7).

When one makes a mistake, sometimes it’s so hard to find the refutation that the mistake becomes justified. In this case, the refutation consisted of a beautiful piece sacrifice that Nikitin and Kasparov didn’t even find in their analysis! After Karpov failed to refute it, Kasparov immediately took control and stopped White’s counterplay with 23...He7!!.

A golden rule of defense is that when you think that your opponent is losing control over the game, stop and look for ways to completely eliminate your opponent’s counterplay.

Kasparov thought for 40 minutes before playing ...He7, and when he finally played it, Karpov, instead of getting confused, understood the idea and found the objectively best line.
25. ... f7-f5
26. g5xf6  d7xf6

27. h3-g3
Karpov correctly decides that accepting the pawn sacrifice would have been way too dangerous; 27.xb6 cxb4! 28.xc7 xc7 29.xd6 xd1 30.xe7 xe7 31.xd1 xc2 with good compensation for the pawn, and the game would have probably ended in a draw, although I would prefer Black here.

27. ... Ee7-f7!
Still leaving the b6 pawn undefended, but in turn consolidating his pieces and seizing control over the f-file.

28. e3xb6
Finally taking the pawn. This time, if he didn’t take it, he would simply have a bad position for nothing.

28. ... Ec7-b8
29. b6-e3  f6-h5
Every move is made with tempo – Karpov knows that his initiative may fizzle out at any moment if he doesn’t play actively.

30. g3-g4  h5-f6
31. g4-h4

Karpov obviously doesn’t go for the three-time repetition, while 31.xg5 is bad because of 31...h6 32.g3 h5 33.cf3 Ee8! 34.h3 Ac8! as pointed out by Kasparov in his book Great Rivalries.

31. ... g6-g5!
One of Kasparov’s strengths was that his decisions were never dictated by the situation in the tournament or match; all he did was simply make the best moves (for example, he once played in a tournament against Alexander Areschenko, who was rated 200 points below him. He had a choice whether to go for a perpetual, or to make a risky but interesting move. After he chose the perpetual, he was asked why. “I played it because it was the best move,” replied Kasparov). Here, even though he only needs a draw to win the match, he plays as if he needs to win. Black’s initiative grows more menacing with every single move.

32. f4xg5  f6-g4!
Kasparov said he didn’t like 33.wxg7+ on 32...exf4, but in fact after 33...xf7 34.xe4 xc2 35.xd6+ Ac6 Black is winning. Instead, White should play 33.wc2, after which the position is completely unclear.
33. \( f2-d2 \)  
34. \( d2xe3 \)  
35. \( e3-b6 \)

So far, Karpov has played very precisely in time trouble. 35.\( \text{h3} \) would allow 35...\( w7+ \) followed by 36...\( e3 \).

35. ...  
\( b7-a8 \)

Kasparov said that this move is dubious, and gives the line 35...\( e5! \) as better. Maybe this is true, but White's position is already very unsteady.

36. \( d1xd6? \)

Karpov's position wasn't great, but this is the decisive mistake. Kasparov gives a gigantic analysis showing that 36.\( \text{xb8} \) leads to an unclear position, but I think that it suffices to say that Karpov probably wouldn't have managed to save the position in huge time trouble even if he had played 36.\( \text{xb8} \).

36. ...  
\( f7-b7 \)  
37. \( b6xa6 \)  
\( b7xb3 \)

37...\( b4 \) won faster, but this doesn't spoil anything.

38. \( d6xe6 \)  
\( b3xb2? \)

A bad mistake that should have lead to a draw; Kasparov prematurely thought he was winning. However, Karpov, already convinced that he was totally lost, played in desperation:

39. \( a6-c4 \)  
\( g8-h8 \)

40. \( e4-e5? \)

This loses the game immediately. Instead, the correct move was 40.\( \text{xe8+} \)  
\( \text{xe8} \)  
41.\( \text{d1} \)  
\( \text{a3} \)  
42.\( \text{d3} \), and Black cannot avoid the perpetual: 42...\( \text{a2} \)  
43.\( g6! \) \( \text{h6} \)  
44.\( \text{xe6+!} \) \( \text{xe6} \)  
45.\( \text{c3+} \)  
\( \text{g7} \)  
46.\( \text{h3+} \)  
\( \text{g8} \)  
47.\( \text{b3+} \) (Kasparov).

40. ...  
\( b8-a7+ \)  
41. \( g1-h1 \)  
\( a8xg2+ \)  
42. \( h1xg2 \)  
\( c2-d4+ \)

Finally, Karpov resigned, and Kasparov won this historic match.

So far, we have seen players defend against justified attacks, but sometimes it's even harder to defend against unjustified attacks, although this may sound illogical at first. Even if you know that your opponent's attack is unjustified, the refutations can be very difficult to find – and if you don’t find it, the attack may become justified and even winning. The recipe to defending is to keep calm and try to apply positional rules. Before looking at concrete examples, I’d like to answer a question that
Chapter 2: Defense in Worse Positions

I’ve heard asked by many players: “How do I know if my opponent’s attack is justified or not?”

Of course, the following approach won’t give you the right answer every time, but it will really help to determine whether or not an attack is justified.

First, ask yourself the following questions:

A. Did my opponent’s move, which signaled the start of his attack, come in the form of a deviation from theory?

B. Does my opponent have any pieces concentrated on the flank he is beginning an assault on?

C. Are my pieces placed well to face the sudden turn of events?

If the answer to question A is yes, then there are very big chances that the attack is unjustified. Question B is usually very easy to answer, and it can help a lot. If your opponent has well-placed pieces that are concentrated on the flank he is trying to attack, you have to take the attack very seriously — even though it might not be perfectly sound, it will not be reckless. Question C is designed to help you decide how to go about defending against the attack. If the answer is yes, concentrate your pieces on either the counterattack or the defense of the flank or piece in question. On the other hand, if the answer is no, it’s important not to panic.

As we’ve seen in Langer-Naroditsky, even the most dangerous attacks can be defended against.

In the following game, we will see how White tried to take over the initiative by means of an unsound attack.

Shulman
Naroditsky
San Francisco Clock Simul 2008
King’s Indian Defense (E91)

In the winter of 2008, GM Yury Shulman held a master class at the Mechanics Institute Chess Club in San Francisco. During the session, he played a clock simul. I thought the following game was interesting:

1. d2-d4  g8-f6
2. c2-c4  g7-g6
3. b1-c3  f8-g7
4. e2-e4  d7-d6
5. g1-f3  0-0
6. f1-e2  b8-c6?

This move was first introduced and analyzed by grandmaster Igor Zaitsev. After 7.

with 7...e5, so Shulman decides to go for d4-d5:

1. d4-d5  c6-b4

67
Though this was Zaitsev’s original recommendation, it is no longer considered to be the best move. However, the most popular move, 7...b5, leads to very similar positions. White should reply 8.0-0. White has a slight edge, but the position is completely fine for Black. Bhat-Nakamura, USCL 2008, continued 8...g4 9.cxd4  xe2 10.Wxe2 c8 11.f4 c6, with equality.

8. a2-a3?

This only pours oil onto the fire. Black would like to play ...a6 anyway, and White cannot follow up with b2-b4 because of ...b5xe4. The correct move is 8.e3, after which Black needs to play carefully in order to equalize. Grisak-Kuzmin, Swidnica 1999 continued 8...a6!? 9.0-0 ec5 10.Wc2 a5 11.Ed1 eg4 with a good position.

8. ... c4-a6
9. f3-d2 a6-c5

White still cannot play b2-b4 because of ...b5xe4. At this point, it’s White who has to equalize.

10. a1-b1

White insists on playing b2-b4, and Black has to find a good way to continue. Here I remembered an old game played in one of the Candidates’ Tour-
naments (I don’t remember which one, but I believe grandmaster Reuben Fine was playing Black). The position was similar, and Black had to find a way to meet or prevent b4. I remember that he sacrificed a pawn by means of ...h5. In that game, White took the pawn and the position became double-edged, but here things are totally different: White is underdeveloped, and Black will have an unpleasant intermediate check if White takes. Therefore:

10. ... f6-h5!

This is the only way to develop the initiative. White was visibly surprised by this move, and quickly played:

11. e2xh5?

Missing the fact that Black can open up the position with a timely ...f7-f5. The position would have been about equal after 11.f1! e5 and only now 12.e5xh5 gxh5 13.c3. I was planning ...f5, with a double-edged position.

11. ... c5-d3+

A very important interpolation – White is rid of his right to castle, and the knight on d3 is like a bone in the throat.

12. e1-f1

Obviously, 12.e2? is met by 12...f4+.

12. ... g6xh5
13. d1xh5

Suddenly, I realized that things weren’t as one-sided as I thought. I had forgotten that White needs just one more move, e3, in order to start an unpleasant attack with h6 and g5. The next thing that I had to do was to
convince myself that I had not made a mistake – there had to be a defense. That defense, I reasoned, required me to open up the position before White consolidated. Before I committed, I thought about Question B. The answer is clearly no, so I could safely open the position up. There was only one way to do that:

```
[Diagram of chessboard]
```

13. ...  f7-f5!

And White realized that he was already almost lost. His problem is that he can’t consolidate in time; everything is getting blasted open, and his “attack” turns out to be a fake scare. There was nothing for it but to go all in. Of course, this couldn’t work.

14. Qd2-f3  f5xe4
15. Qc3xe4  Qc8-f5

The bishop is defending h7, Black’s only weakness. White is already lost, but Black still needs to be very careful.

16. Qe4-g5  Qd3-c5

The rook on b1 is dead, so White prefers to lure Black into giving away his bishop for it.

17. Qf3-d2  h7-h6
18. Qg5-f3  Qd8-e8!

It’s interesting that the attack grows even stronger in the endgame. White’s queen was his only strong piece, and now he must give it up. Also, the rook on e8 comes into play while White’s position is a mess of weaknesses and dead pieces.

19. Wh5xe8  Qa8xe8
20. Qb1-a1  e7-e6

Continuing to open up the position. White’s only piece that is in play at the current moment (and for the rest of the game) is the f3 knight, which technically means that Black is up two pieces and two rooks. I thought that ought to be enough to win this game.

21. d5xe6  Qe8xe6
22. h2-h3

As grandmaster Yuri Shulman said after the game, he was “still optimistic.” If Black doesn’t do anything, he will play Qg1-h2 and a4-a3, after which Black would still have to win. However, as it often happens, tactics come to strategy’s aid.

22. ...  Qf5-d3+
23. Qf1-g1

```
[Diagram of chessboard]
```

23. ...  Qf8xf3!

It’s aesthetically pleasing to play such a move; 24.gxf3 fails to 24...Qg6+ and
Mastering Positional Chess

25...ay5+, mating, while after
24. axf3 e5 White can resign. The
game continued:

24. d2xf3  c5xb3
25. c1xh6  b3xa1
26. h6xg7  g8xg7  0-1

Obviously, White’s attack was not very hard to refute. Often, a player’s decisions are
influenced by how strong he thinks the attack is (i.e. if a player has a lot of extra
material and he is under an attack which he thinks is strong, he may go for perpet-
ual check even though objectively he may be completely winning). It’s very im-
portant to think about the position from an objective point of view:

Do not let emotions get in the way of your train of thought.

This is especially important when you’re defending against an unjustified attack – if
you’re playing a strong opponent, you might think that there is no way his attack
can be unsound. As you saw in the previous game, even very strong players often
fall for the temptation of trying to deliver a quick mate.

In the following game, Black starts what seems like a strong attack, but White
finds a series of very nice blows and refutes it.

[Diagram]

□ Kislik
■ Naroditsky
San Francisco 2007

White did not play the opening well
and Black is a pawn up for no compen-
sation whatsoever. After the simple
1...d8, I could have slowly prepared
...d5. Instead, I thought that I could fin-
ish the game immediately and played:

1. ...  g4-g3?!

This isn’t a huge mistake, but why make
things complicated? I saw 1...d8, but I
declared that this was faster.

2. h2xg3  f4xg3
3. f2xg3

This was Black’s last chance to play
3...d8. He wouldn’t have been a pawn
up, but he would have the g-file as
compensation.

Instead, I thought that I could easily
break through and played:

3. ...  g7-h6?

This move seems totally natural; Black
brings his bishop into the game with
gain of tempo and prepares ...g8.
However, such reasoning is very naïve.
Instead of succumbing to Black’s pres-
sure with 4.b1, White finds the very
nice move:
Chapter 2: Defense in Worse Positions

4. \( \texttt{d1xd6!} \)

Very instructive. White sacrifices the exchange, but totally disrupts the coordination of Black's pieces. Besides, he will have a pawn for the exchange and a great position. I was rattled by this move, but still thought that my attack was strong.

4. \( \texttt{...} \) \( \texttt{we8-g6} \)
5. \( \texttt{g3-f2} \) \( \texttt{e6-h3} \)
6. \( \texttt{e2-f1} \) \( \texttt{h6xc1} \)
7. \( \texttt{wxc2xc1} \) \( \texttt{g8-h8?} \)

The decisive mistake, although Black was in big trouble anyway. Now, White gets a chance to deliver a devastating blow, after which Black loses everything.

8. \( \texttt{b4-d3!} \)

Only now did I realize the trouble I was in, but a little too late! Black is already almost lost. White's previous moves were very well thought out; he understood that Black's attack couldn't be justified (the pieces weren't ready yet), and instead of panicking found a very strong sacrifice which refuted the premature attack almost immediately.

8. \( \texttt{...} \) \( \texttt{a8-d8} \)
9. \( \texttt{d3xe5} \) \( \texttt{g6-g7} \)
10. \( \texttt{c1-d2} \) \( \texttt{d8xd6} \)
11. \( \texttt{d2xd6} \) \( \texttt{f6-e8} \)

Black is desperate to find counterplay, but unfortunately his position is already beyond repair.

12. \( \texttt{d6-c5} \) \( \texttt{e8-f6} \)
13. \( \texttt{f2-d4} \)

The rest is just a matter of time.

13. \( \texttt{...} \) \( \texttt{f8-d8} \)
14. \( \texttt{c3-e2} \) \( \texttt{d8xd4?} \)
15. \( \texttt{e2xd4} \) \( \texttt{f6-h5} \)
16. \( \texttt{e5xc6} \) \( \texttt{g7-h6} \)
17. \( \texttt{c5-e5+} \)

Black resigned.

Obviously, this attack was much harder to refute than the previous one, but there are cases where the attack seems to flow naturally; it's much harder to determine whether the attack is justified or not in those cases. Take a look at the following game:

71
Mastering Positional Chess

☐ Naroditsky
■ Martinez

Cuenca 2007

I misplayed the opening badly, but Black made a few mistakes and the advantage was passed back to me. However, I was under the mistaken impression that the “strong” position of Black’s queen and knight gave him a powerful attack.

1. ...  Qa4-c3+??

I started looking for a way to save myself. However, the queen on a5 and knight on a4 merely look nice; without other pieces they are nothing. If I had realized that, I would have found the simple defense on the 4th move.

2. b2xc3  b4xc3
3.  Qb1-a1  Qc8-c4

4. Qd1-b1??

As soon as I found a way to draw, I immediately played it, happy that there was a miraculous defense. Had I looked for refutations, however, I would have found 4. Qd5, winning on the spot (4... Wa3 is met by 5. Qc1, winning). The game continuation should have lost anyway. The game ended:

4. ...  Qc4-a4
5. Qb1-b8+  Qe8-d7
6. Qa1-b1  Qa4xa2
7. Qb8-d8+

The simple 7... Wxd8 8. Qxa2  Wx5+ followed by 9... Qe7 and 10... Qb8+, mating, would have won immediately, but Black missed that and agreed to a draw. Of course, 4. Qd5 was very simple and I didn’t find it only because I thought my sacrifice was justified.

This leads us to another important point. Sometimes, it’s not clear whether an attack is justified. For example, your opponent’s pieces might be well coordinated and prepared to support the attack, but he might not have many pieces on the flank he wants to attack. In such cases, look for refutations on every single move — if the attack is justified, then you will probably realize that after a few moves. If it is not justified, you will almost certainly find some kind of refutation if you keep looking for one.

Take a look at the following game:

72
Chapter 2: Defense in Worse Positions

Larsen

Portisch

Amsterdam Interzonal 1964

French Defense,

Exchange Variation (C01)

1. e2-e4 e7-e6
2. d2-d4 d7-d5
3. ćb1-c3 ćf8-b4
4. e4xd5 će6xd5
5. ćd1-f3?!

A very interesting move invented by Larsen. The idea is that the queen will be very well placed on f3 and may go to g3. Later, a refutation was found, though. In the main line, White doesn’t get anything more than equality after 5. ćd3 ćc6! Fressinet-Ponomariov, Pamplona 2005, continued: 6.a3 ća5 7.će3 ćf6 8.h3 0-0 9.će2 će7! 10.0-0 c6 11.ćg3 ćg6 with complete equality.

5. ... ćb8-c6

This isn’t a huge mistake, but after the correct 5...će7+ (this is the refutation – White’s pieces are not ready to meet this unpleasant check) 6.će3 (after 6.će2 ćc6 7.će3 ćf6 Black has an edge, Shihan-Kaidanov, Tan Chin Nam Cup 2002) 6...ćf6 7.a3 ćg4 8.ćg3 ćd6 9.ćh4 ćf4 10.ćxd5! ćxd5 11.ćxg4 0-0 12.0-0-0 was equal in Bates-McDonald, British Team Championship (4NCL) 1999. Overall, after 5...će7+ White has to play carefully to equalize. However, 5...će7+ isn’t easy to find if you don’t know this move.

6. ćf1-b5

Larsen finds the best move; White has to develop actively in order to fight for the advantage.

6. ... ćg8-e7

7. ćc1-f4 0-0

The time has come for White to decide which way he will castle. Obviously, castling kingside is the safer option; the game will probably end in a quick, boring draw. However, Larsen isn’t this type of player – he is always ready to take even the biggest risks. Here, he correctly reasoned that Black’s “attack” against his queenside by means of maneuvers such as ...ćc6-a5-c4, and moves like ...c6 and ća5, cannot be justified (although it might seem dangerous) because White has simply developed his pieces and not committed any mistakes! Like Wilhelm Steinitz said, “An attack has to come out of the previous play,” and it definitely doesn’t here! Therefore:

8. 0-0-0!

When you look at this move for the first time, it seems strange. White doesn’t seem to have any attacking chances on the kingside, and the aforementioned plan appears logical. Portisch, without a lot of thought, played:

8. ... ćc6-a5?

Black hasn’t finished his development yet and has begun attacking. No matter
Mastering Positional Chess

how logical this attack may seem, it simply can't be correct; this rule is nearly set in stone and exceptions are extremely rare.

Therefore, White can safely begin counterattacking without having to worry about concentrating all of his pieces on the defense. As I mentioned in the introduction to this game, not all cases can be decided this easily. Usually, if you have a choice between concentrating all of your pieces on the defense or on a counterattack, choose the latter. If you passively defend your king, your opponent's confidence will grow and he will not have to worry about his own monarch. Even if your counterattack is unsound, it will make your opponent worry and, in nine out of ten cases, he will make a mistake that will make your counterattack sound.

9. \( \square b1-e2 \) \( c7-c6 \)

This seems completely natural. Not only does Black begin his attack, he does so with gain of tempo!

10. \( \square b5-d3 \) \( b7-b5 \)

Preparing \( \ldots \square c4 \) and \( \ldots \square a5 \).

11. \( h2-h4 \)

Suddenly, Portisch realized how strong White's attack was. First of all, it came out of the previous play – Black's pieces are scattered while White's pieces are all in action, and the best way to defend against a premature attack is to start an immediate counterattack.

11. \( \ldots \) \( \square a5-c4 \)

12. \( h4-h5 \) \( f7-f6 \)

The first concession; the \( f \) pawn will be a hook. However, I don't think that getting mated after 12...

14. \( \square c7? \) \( \square x7 \) 15. \( \square f5 \) \( \square f5 \) 16. \( \square x5 \) was part of Portisch's plans.

13. \( g2-g4 \)

White has only made three pawn moves, and already his attack seems much stronger than Black's. Portisch has a knight on \( c4 \) and a bishop on \( b4 \), but what do these pieces accomplish apart from looking nice? The answer is: nothing. The problem is that in order to actually make the attack strong, Black needs to bring his queen and \( a8 \) rook into action, but this will take a huge amount of time; by then Black's monarch will be dead.

13. \( \ldots \) \( \square d8-a5 \)

Turning back was hardly an option; 13...

14. \( \square d3xc4! \)

The time has come for concrete action – Larsen eliminates the annoying knight, which was threatening to take on \( b2 \) in some cases.

14. \( \ldots \) \( d5xc4 \)

No better was 14...\( bxc4 \) 15.\( a3 \) \( \square c3 \) 16.\( \square c3 \) followed by \( \square d6 \).
Chapter 2: Defense in Worse Positions

15. a2-a3  \( \text{\#b4xc3} \)
16. \( \text{\#e2xc3} \)

This is what happens when one refutes a premature attack. Already, Black’s position is a complete jumble of weak squares and a horrible pawn structure. Portisch tries to keep things under control, but fails since the position is already beyond repair.

16. ...  \( \text{\#a5-d8} \)

Black is still trying to keep the fire going by preparing ...a5, but White’s water supply is nearly infinite!

17. \( \text{\#h1-e1} \)

Larsen avoids the trap. 17 \( \text{\#xb5?} \) would have been met by 17 ... \( \text{\#d5!} \) and the tables are turned.

17. ...  \( \text{\#a7-a5} \)

Portisch is already desperate; it’s clear that he has no way of stopping the numerous breakthroughs (d5, h6, g5, etc.)

18. \( \text{\#f3-g3} \)  \( \text{\#a8-a7} \)

Portisch defends against one threat, but cannot defend against the other!

19. h5-h6

White’s advantage is decisive; resigning was already a possibility here, but Portisch lets Larsen demonstrate his wonderful, albeit strange, technique.

19. ...  \( \text{\#g7-g6} \)
20. \( \text{\#f4-d6} \)  \( \text{\#f8-e8} \)
21. \( \text{\#g3-f4} \)  \( \text{\#g8-f7} \)
22. \( \text{\#d6-e5} \)  \( \text{\#f6-f5} \)
23. \( \text{\#e5-b8} \)  \( \text{\#a7-b7} \)
24. \( \text{\#f4-e5} \)  \( \text{\#e8-g8} \)
25. \( \text{\#g4-g5} \)  \( \text{\#b5-b4} \)
26. \( \text{\#e5-f6+} \)  \( \text{\#f7-e8} \)
27. \( \text{\#f6xc6+} \)  \( \text{\#e8-f7} \)
28. \( \text{\#c6-f6+} \)  \( \text{\#f7-e8} \)
29. \( \text{\#d4-d5} \)  \( \text{\#g8-f8} \)
30. \( \text{\#f6-c6+} \)  \( \text{\#d8-d7} \)
31. \( \text{\#b8-d6} \)  \( \text{\#f8-f7} \)
32. \( \text{\#d6xe7} \)  \( \text{\#b4xc3} \)
33. \( \text{\#e7-b4+} \)  \( \text{1-0} \)

In this game, the black attack seemed completely natural (unlike in the previous game). However, this didn’t stop Larsen from correctly asserting that since he hadn’t made any mistakes, the attack could not be justified. He quickly refuted it by means of a few very accurate moves. Remember, if you make natural developing moves, a sudden attack on your king is generally unsound.

75
□ Sawyer
■ Naroditsky
Tulsa 2008
Sicilian Defense,
Grand Prix Attack (B23)

1. e2-e4 c7-c5
2. d2-b1-c3 d7-d6
3. f2-f4 g7-g6
4. e2-g1-f3 h8-g7
5. f1-b5+!

The only way to put Black’s system to the test. The immediate 5.c4 c6 6.0-0 e6 7.d3 c7 is met by the simple 9...gx5! when I don’t see how White gets enough compensation for the pawn. Khachiyan- Naroditsky, Western Class Championship 2008, continued: 10.h3!? g6 11.h5 fx4 12.dxe4 c5 and Black was a pawn up for nothing.

5. ... c8-d7
6. b5-c4

This is White’s idea — the bishop is awkward on d7, and after ...e6 the d6 pawn will be a temporary weakness.

6. ... b8-c6
7. d2-d3 e7-e6

Although 7...a5 seems to be an easier way to equalize, there is nothing wrong with ...e6 either.

8. f4-f5?!
This is not a huge mistake, but already an introduction to White’s premature attack; after 8.0-0 the position is double-edged.

8. ... gxf5

Although this may seem very weakening, White has no way to exploit Black’s weak squares. However, he thought that he could make use of the fact that I wasn’t fully developed yet.

9. 0-0?
After this, Black will be a pawn up, but my opponent thought that he would get a strong attack in return.

Here, I had to stop and convince myself that Black hadn’t made any mistakes, and White’s attack could not be correct. Then, I started looking for concrete ways to defend. The first thing I had to do was to finish my development.

9. ... g8-e7
10. c3-b5?!

My opponent played this quickly — he later told me that this was his idea. However, he didn’t understand the fact that a knight on d6 will only look nice, but in truth can easily be trapped after ...a6. Moreover, Black’s king stands no
worse on f8 than on e8! It was still not too late to transpose into a slightly worse endgame after 10.\( \text{We}1 \) 0-0
11.\( \text{We}3 \) fxe4 12.dxe4 \( \text{C}d4? \) 13.\( \text{X}d6 \) \( \text{C}c6 \) 14.\( \text{X}d8 \) \( \text{X}d8 \) 15.\( \text{G}g5 \) \( \text{d}d7 \).

10. \( \ldots \) \( d6-d5! \)
In order to refute White’s attack, it’s vital to take immediate action. The slow 10...\( \text{C}c8 \) was much worse after 11.\( \text{G}f4 \).

11. \( \text{\&}b5-d6+ \)

My opponent later told me that he thought White’s position was much better. However, in truth, he is already close to losing; he can’t take advantage of the king’s position on f8.

11. \( \ldots \) \( \text{e}e8-f8 \)
12. \( \text{Cc}4-b3 \) \( c5-c4! \)

Again, tactics come to strategy’s aid. The time has come to start calculating concrete variations. The text move locks White’s bishop in its own camp, and achieves a strong pawn mass (\( l7-e6-f5-e4 \)), which completely covers up any other weaknesses Black has. However, the game is still not quite over.

13. \( \text{d}3x\)c4 \( \text{d}5xe4 \)
14. \( \text{G}f3-g5 \) \( \text{c}6-e5 \)

A nice defense, after which White realized that his pieces were in complete disharmony. Black is nearly winning, but he still has to be very careful, especially in a position like this.

15. \( \text{c}4-c5 \)

Opening up the bishop – White’s last chance.

15. \( \ldots \) \( \text{h}7-h6 \)

Clearly, it’s time for Black to start realizing his large advantage. He has defended against White’s attack and is a pawn up with a much better position.
The first thing that came to mind was playing ...\( \text{G}g4 \) followed by ...\( e5 \). I thought this won outright; it seemed that White had no defense since he was losing the c5 pawn, and with it, the game. Therefore, I played:

17. \( \ldots \) \( \text{e}e5-g4?! \)

Before we go on, I’d like to tell the reader that at the start of the round, Jerry Hanken, a writer for Chess Life – recently deceased – who was well known for his love of queen sacrifices, offered a $100 prize to anyone who sacrificed their queen and won the game. No wonder my opponent played:

18. \( \text{e}3-d4 \) \( \text{e}6-e5? \)

I was so rattled by this move that I had to sit there for 5 minutes before I actually started thinking. At first, as I learned later, everybody (a lot of people started watching at this point) thought that 18...\( e5 \) was a huge blunder and White was winning. However, I noticed an in-
interesting thing: if I accept the Trojan Horse gift, after 20.\texttt{gxg7\#} I didn’t see what exactly White would do! I did miss a computer draw, which was almost impossible to find. Therefore, instead of 17...\texttt{g4}, Black should have played something like 17...\texttt{g7}.

22. \texttt{b3-e6?}

This natural move loses the game. Instead, my opponent could have achieved the draw by means of 22.\texttt{f4!!}, putting another piece under attack, but creating the deadly threat of 23.\texttt{h5}. 22...\texttt{g8} now looks winning, but White has the brilliant move 23.\texttt{d5!}, and after 23...\texttt{e7} 24.\texttt{xe4}+ \texttt{g8} 25.\texttt{d5+} the game is drawn!

22. ... \texttt{h8-f8!}
23. \texttt{e6xd7} \texttt{h7-h8}
24. \texttt{d6-b5} \texttt{c7-d8}
25. \texttt{e7xg7} \texttt{e5xd4}

White currently has three pieces for the queen, but he cannot save them, so he resigned.

So far in this chapter we have only seen games where one side attacks the king. Sometimes, getting pressured along the central files and on the queenside may be just as difficult to defend against. The problem is that the player who is exerting the pressure is playing without any risk; therefore, psychologically, it’s hard to defend when “there is no end”. Take a look at the following game:

\textbf{Gulko}  
\textbf{Azmaiparashvili}  
Pamplona 1996

Black’s position is obviously worse – White has a space advantage and better placed pieces. Also, it’s not clear where Black should put his queen: d8, f7, or f5?

1. ... \texttt{f6-f5!}

Azmaiparashvili chooses the right square. Although this move may seem weird (the queen will be subject to attack after \texttt{d3}), Azmaiparashvili provokes \texttt{d3}, after which his queen will have a good square on h5. Let’s take a look at the other options:
A) 1...\(\mathcal{W}f7\) is a possibility, but White retains an edge after 2.\(\mathcal{A}f3\); 
B) 1...\(\mathcal{W}d8\) is also met by 2.\(\mathcal{A}f3\), when White has a clear edge. For example, 2...\(\mathcal{A}f7\) 3.\(g3!\) (preparing 4.\(\mathcal{W}g2\)) 
3...\(\mathcal{A}e7\) 4.\(\mathcal{A}f2\) with a long-lasting advantage.

2. \(\mathcal{A}e2-d3\)

White makes the correct decision; the black queen will be slightly awkward on h5.

2. ... \(\mathcal{W}f5-h5\) 
3. \(\mathcal{A}e3-f2\) 
Gulko wants to exchange both rooks, so that he can penetrate with his queen while the h5 queen untangles herself.

3. ... \(\mathcal{A}e8xe1!\) 
A very deep move. It’s not easy to just give away an important file, letting the opponent infiltrate with his rook. However, Azmaiparashvili understood that if he let Gulko trade the rooks, the endgame would be critical because of the queen’s position on h5.

Let’s take a look at what would have happened if Azmaiparashvili let Gulko trade the rooks: 3...\(\mathcal{O}c6!\) 4.\(\mathcal{X}xe8\) \(\mathcal{X}xe8\) 5.\(\mathcal{A}e1\) \(\mathcal{X}xe1+?\) (5...\(\mathcal{O}f8\) transposes to the game) 6.\(\mathcal{W}xe1\) g5 (forced, as \(\mathcal{W}e8+\) was a deadly threat) 7.fgx5 \(\mathcal{W}xg5\) 8.\(\mathcal{W}e8+\), winning. The rooks allow Black to keep the position under control.

4. \(\mathcal{A}f1xe1\) \(\mathcal{O}a5-c6!\) 
Another strong move – Black brings his knight back into the game and defends against 5.\(\mathcal{A}e7\). However, the position is still not quite even – White has a small but annoying initiative.

5. \(\mathcal{A}e1-e6\) 
At first glance, it may seem that Black’s position is critical and it’s unclear how he can keep his position together. Again, strategy comes to help to save the day.

5. ... \(c5xd4\) 
6. \(c3xd4\) \(\mathcal{O}c6-d8!\) 
A very nice tactic that drives away the annoying rook. Black allows 7.\(\mathcal{A}e7\), but now it doesn’t achieve the desired effect.

7. \(\mathcal{A}e6-e7\) 
Black’s idea was that 7.\(\mathcal{X}xd6\) is met by 7...\(\mathcal{O}f7\), when after 8.\(\mathcal{A}d7\) (8.\(\mathcal{O}f6\) \(\mathcal{W}h6\)) 8...\(c8\) 9.\(\mathcal{X}xa7\) \(\mathcal{X}g4\) 10.\(hxg4\) \(\mathcal{W}xg4\) White is a pawn up, but due to his fragile d4 and f4 pawns and the weak light squares, Black has full compensation.
Mastering Positional Chess

7. ... b7-c8
8. ¤d2-e2 c8-f5

Clearly, Black is doing great: 9...c6 is a menacing threat, his pieces are finally completely coordinated, and White has no way to attack his weaknesses. Gulko finally achieves his goal of trading rooks, but Black’s pieces are already much better placed, so this doesn’t achieve anything.

9. ±e7-e8 f5xd3
10. ±e8xf8+ g7xf8

After this inaccuracy, the position will transpose into an endgame where White’s advantage will be merely symbolic.

White’s last chance to retain some initiative was to play the strong 11.±e8!, after which Black needs to be very careful in order to preserve the balance. The best move is 11...±f5 12.±xd8 ±xf4, when White has an initiative, but I don’t see how exactly he can make use of it.

11. ... d8-e6
12. ±f2-e3 h5-f5
13. ±d3xf5 g6xf5
14. ±g4-f6 e6-c7

White’s advantage is no more, and the position is rapidly steering towards a draw. This result was agreed upon on move 32.

No matter how unpleasant it is to defend against positional pressure, it’s important to never give up. If you succeed, your opponent will be psychologically affected and may make a big mistake – even strong grandmasters do this.

□ Nijboer
■ Kortchnoi
Arnhem 1999

French Defense (C11)

1. e2-e4 e7-e6
2. d2-d4 d7-d5
3. ±b1-c3 ±g8-f6
4. e4-e5 ±f6-d7
5. f2-f4 c7-c5
6. ±g1-f3 ±b8-c6
7. ±c1-e3 a7-a6?
In my opinion, this is the best move in this position. Black’s other two main alternatives are 7...cxd4 and 7...wb6.
The idea of the move 7...a6 is to prepare ...b5. However, it does have one drawback: Black falls a bit behind in development and he has to be very careful. For those who are considering this variation with black, take a detailed look at the famous game Kasparov-Radjabov, Linares 2003, where Kasparov lost in a beautiful battle.

8. wd1-d2 c5xd4?!

Although some very strong players have played this move, it isn’t really in the spirit of the position. After the main move 8...b5 White’s best reply is 9.a3, stopping a further advance, although 9.dxc5 also gives White a very small advantage. The position after 9.a3 is very entertaining and double-edged. The Kasparov-Radjabov game continued 9...wb6 10.e2! The knight helps overprotect the important d4 stronghold and is ready to maneuver to g3 in order to prepare f4-f5. Radjabov decided to close the center with 10...c4!? 11.g4 h5 12.gxh5 zhxh5 13.g3 zb8 14.f5 Perhaps 14.g5 was better.

White’s position looked almost crushing, but Radjabov found the very nice 14...exf5 15.cf5 cf6!, and after 16.g3 cg4 the position was about equal. Kasparov went on to play very nicely, but at the culminating moment he made a bad mistake, allowing Radjabov to overtake the initiative and win with a dazzling final combination.

9. f3xd4 f8-c5
10. 0-0-0 0-0
11. h2-h4

The idea of this move is twofold: firstly, the pawn may act as a battering ram against Black’s kingside pawns. Secondly, White’s rook can easily come into play by means of h3. However, the less popular move 11.wf2? also gives White a slight advantage, as in Kramnik-Shirov, Monaco (blind) 2003.

11. ... c6xd4
12. e3xd4 b7-b5
13. zb1-h3!

This is the only move that gives White an advantage. Black’s main problem is the chronic weakness of the c8 bishop and the d4-square. His only chance is to attack White’s king, but this is not easy because White also has good attacking chances on the kingside.

13. ... b5-b4
14. c3-a4!

Another very accurate move. After 14.e2?! a5 15.wc3 wc7 16.xc5 xc5 17.d4 a4 Black obtained a good position in Polgar-Shirov, Eurotel Trophy 1999.

14. ... c5xd4
15. wd2xd4 a6-a5
The players have reached a theoretically important position. At first glance it may seem that White has a dream French position, but in truth things aren’t completely black-and-white (excuse the pun). Yes, White is better, but Black has his counterchances (i.e. ...b7-c6). Nijboer, a fearless attacking player, finds a very interesting resource:

16. c2-c4!?

First of all, we have to understand what White does if Black just takes 16...dxc4. The answer is simple: 17.âxc5 âa7 18.âxe6, winning. Therefore, Black is left with only one option:

16. ... b4xc3

Around here, Nijboer, with more time on his clock and a great position, decided that a pawn sacrifice would only add to the quality of the game. However, he probably forgot a saying by Australian IM C.J.S. Purdy: “You play in tournaments to win games, not to paint pictures.”

17. âh3xc3?

Objectively this move is probably okay, but why not simply 17.âxc3? Without any sacrifices, White establishes a blockade and a steady advantage. Let’s take a look at Black’s defensive resources: 17...âa6 Black has to trade his bad bishop. 18.âxa6 âxa6 19.h5 âc6 Black must immediately start using the c-file and the c4-square for his knight. Otherwise he will get swept away by the armada of white pawns on the kingside, hungry for royal blood. Notice that Black’s main point is that f4-f5 is met by ...âg5+, winning the pawn. In order to make the attack effective, White has to combine the assault with prophylaxis. 20.âb1! âb6! Since White’s attack is faster, Black’s only chance is to defend in the endgame. After 21.âxb6 âxb6 22.âe2! a critical position arises.

Before we take a look at this endgame, it’s important to remember:

When you have a choice whether to continue defending against an attack or transposing into a slightly worse endgame, almost always choose the latter.

Why? There are two main reasons: first of all, you have very little chance of playing perfectly when defending, while it’s much easier to play for the attacking side. Secondly, you have huge drawing chances in a slightly worse endgame, and your opponent might be
psychologically unprepared to switch from tactics to positional play.
In the game we are looking at, Black has
great drawing chances due to the b-file
and the c4-square for his knight. How-
ever, things are by no means easy. Black
has to activate his pieces right away:
22...\textcolor{red}{\textbf{b8}}! 23.\textcolor{red}{\textbf{d4}} \textcolor{red}{\textbf{c8}} White must
now control the b-file without delay to
avoid mate: 24.\textcolor{red}{\textbf{b3}}! After 24...\textcolor{red}{\textbf{c4}}
25.\textcolor{red}{\textbf{xb8}} \textcolor{red}{\textbf{xb8}} 26.b3 a4 27.\textcolor{red}{\textbf{d3}} \textcolor{red}{\textbf{f8}}
28.\textcolor{red}{\textbf{c2}} White’s passed pawn should
decide the game in his favor.
Does this mean that Nijboer was win-
ing after 17...\textcolor{red}{\textbf{xc3}}? Of course not.
This line isn’t forced — it just shows that
White’s advantage would have been ser-
ious in that case. Kortchnoi, one of the
best defenders of all time, remembered
another golden rule in defense he him-
selves had stated:

"When under attack, I take all sacrif-
ced material and tell my opponent,
go ahead, mate me!"

![Diagram](image)

17. ... \textcolor{red}{\textbf{d8}}xh4!

For some reason, one has the temptation
to say "typical Kortchnoi", but of course
making such a move isn’t easy at all. The
main reason is that the h-file is opened.
This seems deadly for Black, but making
use of it is not easy. Nijboer, taken aback,
commits another inaccuracy:

18. \textcolor{red}{\textbf{g2}}-\textcolor{red}{\textbf{g3}}?!

This isn’t a huge mistake, but already
Black will not be worse after his next
move. Instead, Nijboer had to play
18.\textcolor{red}{\textbf{d3}}, not wasting any time. Essen-
tially, Black had three moves: 18...\textcolor{red}{\textbf{g6}},
18...\textcolor{red}{\textbf{h6}}, and 18...\textcolor{red}{\textbf{f5}}. Let’s take a look:
A) 18...\textcolor{red}{\textbf{g6}}? is too weakening. After
the simple 19.\textcolor{red}{\textbf{c2}} with the idea of
\textcolor{red}{\textbf{h3}} Black is in huge trouble;
B) 18...\textcolor{red}{\textbf{h6}} is a better try. However,
White still replies 19.\textcolor{red}{\textbf{c2}}. Now, Black
has to watch out for sacrifices on \textcolor{red}{\textbf{h6}}.
The correct way to defend is 19...\textcolor{red}{\textbf{e7}}
20.\textcolor{red}{\textbf{h3}} and now 20...\textcolor{red}{\textbf{d8}}! 21.\textcolor{red}{\textbf{dh1}}
\textcolor{red}{\textbf{f8}}, defending \textcolor{red}{\textbf{h7}}. Honestly, I see
nothing wrong with Black’s position;
C) 18...\textcolor{red}{\textbf{f5}}? is very interesting. How-
ever, after 19.\textcolor{red}{\textbf{c2}} \textcolor{red}{\textbf{e7}} 20.\textcolor{red}{\textbf{h3}} \textcolor{red}{\textbf{g6}}
21.\textcolor{red}{\textbf{dh1}} \textcolor{red}{\textbf{f7}} 22.\textcolor{red}{\textbf{b6}}! White has a
strong initiative.
All in all, Black was fine after 18.\textcolor{red}{\textbf{d3}},
but after 18.\textcolor{red}{\textbf{g3}} it’s White who has to
search for a way to equalize. Neverthe-
less, after 18.\textcolor{red}{\textbf{g3}} Black is faced with a
dilemma: where to move his queen?
Kortchnoi finds the best move:

18. ... \textcolor{red}{\textbf{h4}}-\textcolor{red}{\textbf{d8}}!

Yes, Kortchnoi found the best move, but
why this retreat as opposed to others?
Let’s take a look at the alternatives:
A) 18...\textcolor{red}{\textbf{e7}} seems like the best and
most tempting move. However, White
has the very unpleasant 19.\textcolor{red}{\textbf{c7}}, forcing
19...\textcolor{red}{\textbf{b4}}. Unfortunately, the endgame
after 20.\textcolor{red}{\textbf{xb4}} axb4 21.b3 f6 22.\textcolor{red}{\textbf{d8}} f5
23.\textcolor{red}{\textbf{d4}}! is winning for White;
B) 18...\textcolor{red}{\textbf{h2}}?! is interesting but too
risky. After 19.\textcolor{red}{\textbf{b5}} f6 20.\textcolor{red}{\textbf{xd7}} \textcolor{red}{\textbf{xd7}}
21. Qc5 d7 22. exf6 gxf6 23. Qxd7
\( \text{xd7} \) 24. \( \text{xf6} \) White is nearly winning;
C) 18... \( \text{Wh6} \) loses to 19. \( \text{c7} \) g5
20. \( \text{b5} \) gxf4 21. \( \text{xf4} \) b8 22. \( \text{xd7} \)
\( \text{xd7} \) 23. \( \text{xd7} \) \( \text{b4} \) 24. \( \text{g1} \) +;
D) 18... \( \text{g4?!} \) is the best alternative,
but after 19. \( \text{b5} \) b8 20. \( \text{b3} \) f6
21. exf6 gxf6 (21... \( \text{c7} \) 22. \( \text{e2} \) \( \text{xb3} \)
23. \( \text{xg4} \) is clearly better for White)
22. f5!? \( \text{xf5} \) 23. \( \text{ff1} \) \( \text{g5} \) + 24. \( \text{f4} \)
White has overwhelming compensation
for the pawn.
This was not easy to foresee, but
Kortchnoi demonstrated his wonderful
abilities and calculated all of this. Now,
Nijboer loses the thread entirely.

19. \( \text{c1-b1} \) \( \text{c8-a6!} \)
Trading off the bad bishop.

20. \( \text{f1xa6} \) \( \text{a8xa6} \)

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

21. \( \text{d1-h1?} \)
A mistake after which Black’s slight
advantage grows bigger. Instead, 21. \( \text{dc1} \)
was much stronger, when White should
have equalized with correct play.

21. \( \ldots \) \( \text{a6-a8} \)
22. \( \text{g3-g4?!} \)
Another bad mistake after which Black’s
advantage grows decisive. However, I
can’t really recommend anything better
at this point!

22. \( \ldots \) \( \text{a8-b8!} \)
23. \( \text{a2-a3} \)
Alternatively, 23. \( \text{ch3} \) loses to 23...h6
24. g5 \( \text{b4} \) 25. \( \text{g1} \) \( \text{xf4} \) 26. \( \text{hxh6} \)
\( \text{ff1} \) + 27. \( \text{xf1} \) \( \text{g6} \) 28. \( \text{hxh6} \) \( \text{xf5} \).

23. \( \ldots \) \( \text{d7-b6} \)
24. \( \text{g4-g5} \) \( \text{b6xa4} \)
25. \( \text{d4xa4} \) \( \text{d8-b6} \)
26. \( \text{a4-c2} \) \( \text{g7-g6} \)
27. \( \text{h1-h6} \) \( \text{b8-b7} \)
28. \( \text{c2-h2} \) \( \text{f8-b8} \)
29. \( \text{c3-c2} \) \( \text{b6-d4} \)
30. \( \text{b1-a1} \) \( \text{b7-b3} \)
31. \( \text{a1-a2} \) \( \text{d4-a4} \)

There is no defense against 32... \( \text{xa3+} \),
mating, so White resigned.

Before we move on to our culminating game, let’s summarize the golden rules
we have stated so far:
A. Never ever give up; even in completely losing positions, look for
moves that create the biggest practical difficulties for your opponent
(cf. Naroditsky-Tuvshintugs).
B. When you see that your opponent is lost, stop and try to find ways to
completely eliminate his counterplay (cf. Karpov-Kasparov).
C. If your opponent makes a move that you completely missed, immidiately
start calculating – don’t get too upset and make a mistake out of
distress (cf. Sawyer-Naroditsky).
Chapter 2: Defense in Worse Positions

D. When you have a choice between continuing to defend against a huge attack or to transpose into a worse ending, almost always choose the latter (cf. Nijboer-Kortchnoi).

E. Never be afraid to accept sacrifices, no matter how strong your opponent may be (cf. Perez Marco-Naroditsky and Nijboer-Kortchnoi).

These five rules alone will make you much better at defending, but it’s also important to try not to blunder if you get into time trouble. Yes, we know that, but easier said than done, right? The usual ”I blundered in time trouble” story is as follows: from the opening, a player is under attack and spends a lot of time finding defenses. As the culminating/critical point nears, he has almost no time and obviously blunders. Avoiding this is no easy task, but there are several methods of time management. First of all, if you find yourself under attack early in the game, try to plan out your time. For example, if it’s move 15 and you have 30 minutes to reach move 40, you have to force yourself to move quickly, even if you are under a strong attack. This seems to be daunting, and it is. But it is possible.

Our next game will combine everything: Black walked straight into a draconian attack from the start and spent almost all of his time on finding a way not to lose in the opening. Black had to find 20 consecutive forced moves, only to find himself clearly worse. When White finally made a mistake, he took advantage of it, finding extremely hard moves. This grueling, beautiful marathon of a game is an underestimated gem.

square Ashley
■ Bezold
Bermuda 1997
Sicilian Defense,
Paulsen Variation (B48)

1. e2-e4 c7-c5
2. d2-d4 d7-e6
3. e1-g3 f8-d6
4. d1-c3 a1-b5
5. a1-b3 b8-c7
6. c1-f3 c6-b6
7. b1-c1-e3

The players have gone into an ultra-sharp variation of the Paulsen Sicilian. Black has a multitude of options at his disposal. Bezold, a sharp attacking player, chooses one of the riskiest and most interesting variations.

The undisputed main line in this position is 7...f6. The game Kasparov-Lautier, Amsterdam (Euwe Memorial) 1995 continued 8.d5 exd5 9.h3 xC5 10.xh1 d6 11.f4 ed6e7!! 12.a3 b5 13.xxb5. This is a very interesting sacrifice that gives White good practical
chances. However, Kasparov misplayed it and went down to one of his more spectacular defeats in the era when he usually dominated super-tournaments.

8. 0-0 \(\text{\textit{d}c8-b7}\)
9. \(\text{\textit{w}d1-e2}\)?

This move is much sharper than the alternatives: 9.\(\text{\textit{d}h1}\), 9.\(\text{\textit{g}b3}\), and 9.\(\text{\textit{e}xc6}\). It has a multitude of ideas: firstly, White x-rays Black’s king (already 10.\(\text{\textit{e}xc6}\) followed by 11.\(\text{\textit{d}xd5}\) is threatened). Secondly, White makes space for the a1 rook to go to d1. In response, Bezdolf simply develops his pieces.

9. ... \(\text{\textit{g}g8-f6}\)

Defending against 10.\(\text{\textit{e}xc6}\) and 11.\(\text{\textit{d}d5}\), and developing the knight. In this position, White is at a major crossroads: he has many options to choose from and all of them seem pretty tempting. In my opinion, the best line here is 10.\(\text{\textit{e}xc6}\), when analysis and practical play confirm that White has a small advantage.

10. \(\text{\textit{a}a1-d1}\)

After 10.\(\text{\textit{e}xc6}\) Black obviously has three options:

A) 10...\(\text{\textit{w}xc6}\)? is interesting but nevertheless a bit risky. Zarnicki-Milov, Buenos Aires (Najdorf Memorial) 1996 continued 11.a3! \(\text{\textit{e}c8}\)?! Surprisingly, this obvious move is an inaccuracy. According to Ribli, the line 11...\(\text{\textit{e}e7}\) 12.f4 0-0 13.\(\text{\textit{w}f3}\) \(\text{\textit{e}c5}\)(!) 14.\(\text{\textit{d}d1}\) \(\text{\textit{d}d8}\) leads to an unclear position. The stem game Khalifman-Salov, FIDE Candidates’ Match 1994, confirms this assessment, but there the position was reached via move transposition, so White couldn’t avoid it! However, instead of 13.\(\text{\textit{w}f3}\), 13.e5! \(\text{\textit{e}xe5}\) 14.\(\text{\textit{e}exe5}\) \(\text{\textit{w}xe5}\) 15.e4 gives White a slight but steady edge. 12.f4 \(\text{\textit{d}d6}\)? A blunder, but already Black’s position was very dangerous. 13.\(\text{\textit{e}xc5}\) with a nearly winning position.

B) 10...\(\text{\textit{d}xc6}\) is a better try, but Black still doesn’t get full equality. 11.\(\text{\textit{d}d4}\), and if 11...\(b4\) then 12.\(\text{\textit{e}xf6}\) \(\text{\textit{g}x6}\) 13.\(\text{\textit{e}d5}\) \(\text{\textit{w}e5}\) 14.\(\text{\textit{b}b6}\) followed by ...\(\text{\textit{e}e4}\) with an edge, while if Black tries 11...\(\text{e}5\) White gets an advantage after 12.\(\text{\textit{c}c4}\) \(\text{\textit{d}d5}\) 13.\(\text{\textit{e}xd5}\) \(\text{\textit{e}xd5}\) 14.\(\text{\textit{w}xe5}\) 15.\(\text{\textit{e}xe5}\), Macieja-Milov, FIDE World Cup (1.1) 1999. White went on to win a very nice endgame.

C) 10...\(\text{\textit{d}xc6}\) is the best way to fight for equality. However, after 11.a4 the onus is certainly on Black. Ribli gives the variation 11...\(\text{b}4\) 12.\(\text{\textit{b}b1}\) \(\text{c}5\) 13.\(\text{\textit{d}d2}\) followed by \(\text{\textit{c}c4}\) with an edge, but in my opinion Black should follow the games Sanguinetti-Letelier, Lima 1959, and Pilnik-Bazan, Buenos Aires 1970, and play 11...\(\text{\textit{d}d7}\), when after 12.f4 0-0 13.e5 \(\text{\textit{d}d7}\) 14.\(\text{\textit{w}f2}\) \(g6\) White’s advantage is very small.

10. ... \(\text{\textit{c}c6-e5}\)

This move is very important. The other move in this position, 10...\(\text{\textit{d}d7}\)!, is much worse. Geller-Gipslis, USSR
Chapter 2: Defense in Worse Positions

Championship 1969, continued 11.f4! 0-0 12.e5 ∆e8 13.∆h5! and already, Black’s position is critical. 13...f5 and now Geller played the brilliant move 14.∆xf5!!, albeit with the wrong idea.

![Analysis Diagram](image)

This looks like a dream Sicilian position, but things are not as simple as they seem. First of all, Black’s pieces are a bit precariously placed, and his king is not yet castled. Secondly, White has many attacking chances connected with the sacrifice on e6. Therefore, this advance by no means gives Black an advantage. Ashley obviously played:

13. e4xd5

In this position Black is at a fork in the road: he can either take the d3 bishop first or take on d5.

GM Zoltan Ribli pays no attention to this moment in his Chessbase commentaries, even though this may be one of the most important moments of the whole game. Obviously the bishop is very important here, but 13...cxd3 has its drawbacks: first of all, Black has to calculate moves like 14.dxe6 and 15.∆g5. Secondly, after 13...cxd5 Black’s knights will work harmoniously together: one stopping e4 and the other c4! However, Bezold missed that after 13...cxd5 he would simply not have enough time to finish development, and his king would get stranded in the center! If not for Ashley’s brilliant refutation, 13...cxd5 would be perfectly fine!

13. ... f6xd5?
On the correct move, 13...odiacd3, Bezold probably feared 14.dxe6!?.
What everyone (Bezold, Ribli, and Ashley) missed was that after 14...odiac5!
it’s not clear how White continues his attack. Let’s take a look at White’s options here:

A) 15.adg5 looks tempting but fails to 15...odiac4! (15...odiacf4? 16.dxf7+ adxf7
17.adc4+ adg6! 18.dxc5 with a huge attack) 16.adxf6 dxf6, and after 17.f3
adg5 18.adf1 adg8 White cannot make use of Black’s king position, since if
19.dxf7+ then simply 19...adxf7, while if he moves his queen, Black will immedi-
ately take on e6.

B) 15.dxc5 is the only way to put Black’s move to the test. Here, Black re-
plies not 15...dxc5, which fails to 16.dxf7+ adxf7 17.adf6!!, but 15...adxc5! (found by Fritz 10, I admit),
when after 16.adf1 add6 White has no way to continue his attack. Winning
such a game would have been very beautiful, but unfortunately the machine keeps finding defenses in even
apparently completely lost positions. This is a good lesson for us humans, and it leads us to another golden rule:

**When your opponent has sacrificed material in order to conduct an at-
tack, always look for strange, maybe even ridiculous-looking defenses.**

In this position after 15...adxc5, which looked completely suicidal, it turned out that White had absolutely nothing!
Before we move on with 13...odiacd3, I’d like to show you a game of Petrosian’s that illustrates this theme, long before silicon monsters turned “computer moves” into an everyday occurrence:

---

**Kasparov - Petrosian**

Tilburg 1981

In his book *The Test of Time*, Kasparov said that he had thought this position to be absolutely hopeless for Black. One
could fill up a book by listing White’s threats here. However, Petrosian took his monarch and simply moved it one
square diagonally:

1. ... adb7-c6!!!

Two exclamation marks are for the quality, and one is for the bravery. The
move seems completely crazy, but interestingly, it has a completely sound idea.
All of White’s pieces are suddenly in the wrong place at the wrong time. The
same is the case after ...adxc5 – at first glance it seems that White is com-
pletely winning, but a closer look reveals the extremely deep idea behind this move. Kasparov, demoralized, im-
mediately blundered with:

2. adb3-a3?

If Kasparov had not been so shocked, he would certainly have found the draw af-
ter 2.adxc7! bxc4 3.adb7 adxc7 4.adxa6+ adxa6 5.adwb5+ addb6 6.adwa6+ adc7
(6...adc6? 7.adwa3+ wins for White) 7.adxd5 adxb7 8.adxb7 adb8 9.adf2.

---

88
Chapter 2: Defense in Worse Positions

2. ... b5xc4  
3. bxa6+ bxa6  
4. c7-b6  
5. d6-c5 e6-d8

Kasparov found himself a piece down for absolutely no compensation, and resigned after

6. wb1-a1 d7xc5  
7. d4xc5 w6xc5

Back to Ashley-Bezold. After 13...dxc3 White has two other options:

A) 14.g5 loses to the extremely cold-blooded 14...h6, when the desperate attack with 15.xe6?! is thwarted by 15...fxe6 16.wxe6+ w7 17.wxe7+ xe7 18.xf6 xf6;

B) 14.cxd3, opening the c-file for the rook, is White’s best bet. After 14...dxc5 15.c1 w5 16.wc1 d6 17.f3 w7 Black has a purely symbolic advantage (Cc5 will eliminate the bishop pair).

All in all, we can conclude that after 13...dxc3 Bezold would probably have had a comfortable game. After 13...dxc5?, Ashley pounced on the opportunity.

14. d3-e4!

Bezold immediately realized his mistake, but it was already too late – the damage was done. In addition, Bezold got into time trouble here.

Imagine being Black. It is extremely hard and unpleasant to play such a position, when you have to defend against threats at every single move. Moreover, when you realize that you have made a mistake, it becomes increasingly difficult to concentrate. In such a situation, it’s crucial to start with a clean slate and forget about everything that happened before – just erase the previous moves from your memory. Of course this is easier said than done, but it is possible. Bezold immediately brought all of his reinforcements together:

14. ... a8-d8!

On 14...e7?! there follows 15.f5! exf5 16.xd5 xd5 17.xd5 with an advantage (Ribli). Ashley, a very talented attacking player, finds another great move:

15. d4-b3!

Now Black gets into serious trouble. First of all, threats such as c5, xd5, and b6 (or f4) are constantly hanging in the air. Secondly, Black is already in time trouble, while White has all the time in the world. Despite the circumstances, Bezold finds extremely difficult forced moves.

15. ... b7-c6!

The only move which keeps the position together. Other moves lead to an almost dire situation. If, for example, 15...xe3, White replies 16.xd8+ xd8 17.xb7! xf1 18.xe5 with a nearly won position.

89
Ashley finds another nice resource: if 16...\textit{dx}5 White has 17...\textit{b}6, winning an exchange. I’m sure that in this position many players would desperately play 16...\textit{dx}5, but the indefatigable Bezold finds another great defensive idea.

\textbf{16. ... \textit{c}6-b5!}
\textbf{17. \textit{d}e2-h5?!}

The problem with this move is that it gives Black practical defensive chances. More precise was 17...\textit{b}6! \textit{xb}6 18...\textit{xe}5 \textit{xa}4. Although Ribli assesses this position as unclear, I believe White can convert his strong initiative into a full point. For example, after 19...\textit{c}4! \textit{xc}8 20...\textit{e}2! \textit{c}6 21...\textit{e}1 it’s not clear how to defend against White’s attack.

Obviously the position was very difficult to assess correctly. Ashley decided that he should first provoke 17...g6, and only then play 18...\textit{b}6.

\textbf{17. ... g7-g6?}

Unfortunately, this completely obvious move should have been the decisive mistake. In order to hold, Black needed to play 17...\textit{dx}5! immediately, and after 18...\textit{dx}5 \textit{ex}d5 19...\textit{e}1 \textit{xa}4 20...\textit{f}4 Black simply replies 20...\textit{d}6!. What both players missed was that on 21...\textit{xe}5 Black has the paradoxical move 21...0-0! (instead of 21...\textit{xe}5), when the battle still lies ahead. Of course, White does have an edge after 22...\textit{dx}d6 \textit{xd}6 23...\textit{d}4, but this is better than what happened in the game!

\textbf{18. \textit{e}3-b6! \textit{c}7-b8}

The only move which doesn’t lose immediately. The position after 18...gxh5 19...\textit{xc}7 is completely hopeless for Black.

\textbf{19. \textit{h}5-g5 \textit{f}8-e7}
\textbf{20. \textit{g}5-h6}

Here, Black needs to calculate some variations and decide on a course of action, with very little time on his clock. Bezold played:

\textbf{20. ... \textit{d}8xd5!}

Let’s take a look at his other two options:

A) 20...\textit{f}8 looks tempting, but a closer look reveals that Black’s position is completely lost in this case: 21...\textit{f}4! \textit{xd}5 22...\textit{xd}5 \textit{ex}d5 23...\textit{f}6! \textit{xf}1 24...\textit{xh}8;

B) 20...\textit{ex}d5 seems to hold, but in fact the position after 21...\textit{xd}8 \textit{xd}8 22...\textit{e}1 \textit{d}6 23...\textit{b}6! is totally hopeless. Thus, Bezold made the correct choice to take on d5 with the rook.

\textbf{21. \textit{d}1xd5 \textit{e}6xd5}
\textbf{22. \textit{h}6-g7}

Another strong shot, forcing Black’s king to leave his home.

\textbf{22. ... \textit{e}8-d7}

In retrospect, I would say that this is the most important position in the whole game.
At first sight, it may seem that there is absolutely nothing wrong with Black’s position, as his king looks relatively safe, but a detailed look and analysis confirm that with correct play White could have achieved a win. Ashley made one of the most common mistakes when playing against someone in severe time trouble: he tried to fail Bezold by creating complications instead of playing simply. He played:

23. \( \text{\textit{\textbf{b6-a7}}} \)

This beautiful and apparently strong move throws away the whole advantage. Moreover, it will be White who has to initiate the draw. Actually, the correct move wasn’t very hard to find, but White had to calculate some variations. After the devastating 23.\( \text{\textit{\textbf{d4}}} \) Black’s position suddenly falls apart. He is forced to play 23...\( \text{\textit{\textbf{x}}f1} \) (if 23...\( \text{\textit{\textbf{g8}}} \) White wins with 24.\( \text{\textit{\textbf{c5+}}} \)), but after 24.\( \text{\textit{\textbf{x}}e5} \) \( \text{\textit{\textbf{g8}}} \) 25.\( \text{\textit{\textbf{x}}b8} \) \( \text{\textit{\textbf{x}}g7} \) 26.\( \text{\textit{\textbf{x}}f1} \) the endgame is completely hopeless for Black (Ribli). It’s surprising that Ashley, one of the strongest American tacticians of all time, didn’t find this. However, when one side is in time trouble, the temptation to embark upon wild tactics instead of simply winning without any finesse is huge, and here it overcame Ashley. Had he played 23.\( \text{\textit{\textbf{d4}}} \), perhaps the strong Mermaid Beach Club Cup would have seen a different winner. Nevertheless, Ashley’s mistake wasn’t coincidental. Bezold, by defending impeccably, agitated Ashley to the point where he started playing impatiently, and thus started to commit mistake after mistake. We should always try to make the job more complicated for the opponent, no matter how hopeless the position might seem.

23. \( \text{\textit{\textbf{... b8xa7}}} \)
24. \( \text{\textit{\textbf{g7xh8}} \textit{\textbf{f7-f6}}} \)

And only here did Ashley realize what he had done, but unfortunately it was too late. White cannot save the a4 knight, after which Black will have two pieces for a rook. Obviously, White has compensation, but Ashley, who was still in “attacking mode,” didn’t realize that he had to acquiesce to a draw.

25. \( \text{\textit{\textbf{xf1-d1?!}}} \)

As correctly mentioned by Ribli, this natural move is inaccurate. Instead, White could have achieved (at least) a draw by means of 25.\( \text{\textit{\textbf{g8}}} \) \( \text{\textit{\textbf{xa4}}} \) 26.\( \text{\textit{\textbf{x}}d5+} \) \( \text{\textit{\textbf{e8}}} \) 27.\( \text{\textit{\textbf{g8+}}} \) \( \text{\textit{\textbf{f8}}} \) 28.\( \text{\textit{\textbf{e6+}}} \) \( \text{\textit{\textbf{e7}}} \) with perpetual check.

25. \( \text{\textit{\textbf{... b5xa4}}} \)
26. \( \text{\textit{\textbf{d1xd5+}}} \) \( \text{\textit{\textbf{d7-c6!}}} \)

After this move, Ashley essentially starts to lose control of the game. If Black had instead played 26...\( \text{\textit{\textbf{e6}}} \) White would have gotten a strong initiative by means of 27.\( \text{\textit{\textbf{g8+}}} \) \( \text{\textit{\textbf{f7}}} \) and 28.\( \text{\textit{\textbf{d2}}} \), threatening 29.\( \text{\textit{\textbf{e2+}}} \).

27. \( \text{\textit{\textbf{Wh8-g8}} \textit{\textbf{a7-c7}}} \)

Nullifying the effect of 28.\( \text{\textit{\textbf{e6+}}} \), after which simply 28...\( \text{\textit{\textbf{b7}}} \) would follow.
28. f2-f4?! 

This is, ideologically speaking, an inaccuracy after which White has to find a few very strong moves in order to draw. Again, one might think that Ashley simply had a bad day, but this is completely untrue. By making very strong moves, Bezold made the job as hard as possible for his opponent, and Ashley couldn’t keep making the correct choice.

In order to find the true evaluation of the position, we have to study the correct sequence 28.\( \text{Qd4+} \text{b5} 29.\text{Whxh7} \). 

The position is obviously very double-edged. Technically White has a material advantage, but his pieces are very precariously placed. When looking at this position for the first time, I immediately noticed the extremely vulnerable placement of the rook on d5. However, can Black exploit this? 29...\( \text{Qc6} \) was one of the first things that came to my mind, but unfortunately I had missed the simple 30.\( \text{Qe6} \), winning 29...\( \text{Qd6} \) is a great move, which locks in the rook and forces White either to transpose into a worse endgame, or to continue hanging on the precipice. The computer chooses the second option 30.\( \text{Wh6} \), but remember one of the golden rules (for human play):

Usually, it is better to transpose into a slightly worse endgame than to continue playing a technically difficult position.

Thus, 30.\( \text{Wxc7+} \text{xc7} 31.\text{Qe6} \) is the recommended option for most human players. After 31...\( \text{b6} \) 32.\( \text{Qc5+} \text{xc5} 33.\text{Qxc5 Qc6} \) White is forced to play 34.c3! (if 34.a3? bxa3 35.bxa3 \( \text{Qb5} \) White cannot save the a3 pawn), and the position after 34...\( \text{Qd3} \) 35.\( \text{Qc4} \) a5 36.\( \text{cx}b4 \) looks drawn.

So, with a few accurate moves, Ashley should have been able to draw. However, he was too upset and could not calculate very far. This is what I’ve been advising the reader to avoid all along. I will reiterate the golden rule because it is of paramount importance:

There is no point in being upset after a mistake, because you cannot change anything. You have to accept the fact that you made a mistake and continue playing as if nothing happened. As hard as this may seem, it is possible, and when you have mastered this skill, you will find yourself getting many more points out of worse positions.

Returning to our game, Bezold, who was also a bit shaken by the turn of events, returned the favor:

28...\( \text{a4xb3?!} \)

After this, White should have gotten an easy draw, if not a small edge. Instead, the correct move was 28...\( \text{Qc4} \), after which White’s only way to achieve a draw is 29.\( \text{Qxd4+} \text{b7} 30.\text{b3! Wxf4} 31.\text{bxa4 Wc1+} \) with a perpetual. Now, White gets an initiative:
29. a2xb3  Če5-d7
30. Ģg8-e6+ Ėe7-d6

31. ... Ĥc7-b6+
32. ľg1-h1 ĉb6-c5

Finally the smoke has cleared, and Black is obviously better. From here until the end of the game, Bezold demonstrates unbelievable technique, reminiscent of Petrosian’s. Since the rest of the game doesn’t apply to our theme, I will give only occasional, light comments:

33. ĥe6-e4+ Ĺc6-c7
34. ĥe4-e2 ďa6-a5
35. ĥe2-a6?!

This only throws more oil into the raging fire, but White’s position would have slowly deteriorated anyway.

35. ... Ĝd6xf4!

Not fearing ghosts after Ashley’s next move.

36. ĥa6-e6 Ķf4-d6
37. Ĺd1-d5 ĕc5-b6

White’s so-called “initiative” is over, and his position is nearly hopeless now, since he has lost an important pawn on f4 for absolutely no compensation. Bezold won the game with impeccable technique.

Let’s reiterate some of the crucial things that we have learned in this game:

A. When you must make a complicated decision in time trouble, don’t start debating with yourself. This will inevitably lead to you hesitating and wasting all of your remaining time. Instead, use your intuition: ask yourself, “Which move just looks correct?”

Of course this is a risky method, but it’s better than sitting there until your time runs out! It certainly worked in this game.

B. In a critical position, don’t surrender. Instead, stir up as much dust as you can and try to make complicating moves, forcing your opponent to make decisions. This will hugely increase the risk of him making a mistake.

C. When your opponent has sacrificed to attack, look for ridiculous-looking but effective moves. Such moves are often the recipe for success.
Exercises

The following exercises are designed to help you comprehend the material that we have learned. Use as much time as you need, and try to be detailed. If you make a mistake, try to find where your error was and analyze why you made it.

Solving studies is a great way of exercising your creativity. However, the following study looks like it came from a real game.

In this position, Torre resigned (according to most sources). However, is there a way to possibly save this seemingly hopeless position?

Can you find the only way to draw this outwardly lost position?

Black's position is obviously much worse, but is there a way to get chances for a draw? If yes, include a concrete variation.
Chapter 3: Building and Breaking Fortresses

Building Fortresses
Fortresses are built and broken very often – constructing them can save a player many games. Before we start the analysis of concrete examples, a few words about what fortresses are and when you will usually see them.

When you build a fortress, it usually means that you have built a position that is very hard to breach or weaken. Usually, fortresses can only be constructed in the endgame and when the pawns are on one flank, as it is hard to control both flanks simultaneously. I should also mention that in order to construct a fortress, one often has to sacrifice a substantial amount of material.

The following endgame study shows that fortresses can be constructed even in the most extreme situations.

V. Chekhovev, 1947
White to move and draw

At first sight, White seems completely lost. He has three pawns for the exchange, but 1...h2, winning all of them back, seems imminent. What can White do? The answer lies in building a fortress, even at the cost of a bishop!

1. \( d1-d1 \) h8-h2
And now, instead of the obvious 2.f3 or 2.f1, White plays the astounding:

2. \( d1-e1!! \) h2xg2

Black has no way of breaking through. However, looking at this position I discovered an amusing idea connected with a sacrifice of the rook on e4.

3. \( e1-f1 \) g2-h2
4. \( f1-g1 \) h2-h6
5. \( f2-f3! \)

Not 7.g2 because of 7...e2+.

5. ...
6. \( g1-f2 \) e7-f6
7. \( f2-f1 \)

7. ...
8. \( f6-f5 \)
Mastering Positional Chess

8. d1-f1  b5-b4
9. a3-a4  d6-e4?

This was my idea, but White still draws.

10. f3xe4+  f5xe4
11. f2-g2  e4-d3
12. g3-g4  d3-c2
13. g4-g5  c2xb3
14. g5-g6  b3-a2
15. g6-g7  b4-b3
16. g7-g8W  b3-b2
17. g8-a8  \(1/2-1/2\)

A not very complicated but nevertheless great study.

In the next, more complicated example, Black finds a brilliant queen sacrifice in a seemingly critical position.

\[\text{Kraai} \]
\[\text{Akobian} \]
US Championship, Tulsa 2008
Catalan Opening (A13)

1. \(\text{d}g1-f3\)  \(\text{g}8-f6\)
2. c2-c4  e7-e6
3. g2-g3  d7-d5
4. d2-d4  c7-c5?

Black obviously didn’t want to follow the main lines with 4...dxc4 or 4...c6, choosing this move instead. In almost all variations, play transposes into the Tarrasch Variation of the Queen’s Gambit Declined (QGD). Instead of transposing with 5.cxd5 followed by \(\text{c}3\) and \(\text{g}2\), White decides to take the game out of mainstream theory and plays:

5. \(\text{f}1-g2\)  \(\text{b}8-c6\)
6. 0-0  \(\text{f}8-e7\)

Although this move is as popular as 6...dxc4, I think it is inferior. The main problem with 6...\(\text{e}7\) is that it keeps the tension, leaving White both the option of 7.cxd5 and the additional option of 7.dxc5, which White played in the game. Better is 6...dxc4 7.e5 \(\text{d}7\) 8.a3, transposing into the main lines of the Catalan Opening.

\[\text{d}4xc5!?\]

An interesting try to fight for the advantage. Instead, 7.cxd5 exd5 8.c3 transposes into the main lines of the Tarrasch Variation of the QGD. According to MegaBase 2009, White achieves an astounding 68% success
rate with the move played by Kraai. The main idea is to force Black to make two bishop moves in a row. On the other hand it isn’t clear if it’s good for White to remove the tension (7...c3 is also possible).

7. ... e7xc5
8. a2-a3!

This is the only way White can fight for an advantage. The idea of this move is to prepare b2-b4 followed by b2, achieving a very comfortable position. Black, on the other hand, has a multitude of options. Akopian chooses the simplest one:

8. ... O-O

However, I’m not sure that this is the correct move. Let’s take a look at the main alternative: 8...dxc4?! seems to be one of Black’s best options. Now, White’s best try is 9...xd8+ (9...a4 0-0 10...xc4 d5 ½-½, Miroshnichenko-Mamedyarov, Antalya Ech 2004) 9...xd8 (9...xd8 10...bd2 c3 11.bxc3= Zontakh-Kupreichik, Lipetsk Open 2006) 10...e5! with a slight edge, although Black should equalize with accurate play, Gulko-Bezgodov, FIDE KO World Championship 2000.

9. b2-b4 c5-e7
10. c1-b2 d5xc4?!

Although this is the most popular move in this already relatively unpopular position (37 games in Megabase 2009), it is a serious inaccuracy. The main problem is that White’s best reply makes it very hard for Black to develop his pieces without making serious concessions. Instead, Black should have started to think about finishing his development with 10...d7. In the game Kengis-Ginsburg, Zurich Open 2003, Black neutralized White’s advantage by means of 11...bd2 c8 12...c1 a6! 13...b3 dxc4 14...xc4 b8! After the text, White’s initiative becomes menacing.

11. b1-d2?!

A bad error, which should have given away the lion’s share of White’s advantage. It is surprising that Kraai didn’t play 11...c2, after which he would have had a comfortable edge.

11. ... d8-c7

The other game in this variation (besides the one we are analyzing now), Kengis-Schlamp, Bad Zwesten Open 1997, continued 11...c3 12...xc3 d5 13...b2 d6 14...c2...xb2 15...xb2 and Black is left with a horrible position and very bad piece coordination. White won in another 20 moves.

12. a1-c1

This is an inaccuracy. The correct move is 12...xc4, and after 12...xb4 13...ac1, White’s compensation is enough for equality, but certainly not for an advantage.

12. ... b7-b5!
Akobian decides to take up the challenge and test Kraai’s calculation. However, since Akobian’s position would have been clearly worse if he let White take on c4, he didn’t really need to calculate too many variations; his intuition told him that there would be something after White’s next move.

13. \( \text{Qf3-e5} \) \( \text{Qf6-d5?} \)

Akobian misses Kraai’s very pretty tactic. Instead, the exchange sacrifice 13...\( \text{Qxe5!} \) 14.\( \text{Qxa8} \) \( \text{Qd5} \) leads to a position that is very easy to play for Black, and difficult for White. However, Black should avoid 14...\( \text{Qc6?!} \), allowing the flashy 15.\( \text{Qxc4!} \) \( \text{bxc4} \) 16.\( \text{Mxc4} \) \( \text{Qb7} \) 17.\( \text{Qxb7} \) \( \text{Wxb7} \) 18.\( \text{Wc1!} \) with \( \text{Mc7} \) to come.

14. \( \text{Qd2xc4!!} \)

Simple, but very nice. Suddenly, all of White’s pieces come alive, while the clumsiness of Black’s pieces is clearly demonstrated. Black’s queen is located on the worst square imaginable, while White’s g2 beast makes matters even worse for Black. Before we see what Akobian played, let me draw your attention to an important rule:

When your opponent plays a move that you missed, forget about your previous move and imagine that you started the game in the position after your opponent’s move.

Akobian knew that his previous moves had not been perfect. However, he cleared his mind and acted like the position was given to him as a problem with the caption: “find the best defense”. Naturally, Akobian played:

14. ... \( \text{b5xc4} \)

but after

15. \( \text{Mxc1xc4} \)

he settled into another think. The first thing he realized was that 15...\( \text{Qb7} \) obviously failed to 16.\( \text{b5!} \) (16.\( \text{Qxc6?} \) \( \text{Qxc6} \) 17.\( \text{b5} \) looks tempting, but Black has 17...\( \text{Wb7!} \) 18.\( \text{Mxc6} \) \( \text{Wxb5} \) 19.\( \text{Mc2} \) \( \text{Mxd8} \), equalizing).

At this point, Akobian calmly picked up his queen and played:

15. ... \( \text{Wc7xe5!!} \)

At first glance, this crazy-looking move seems to be a joke, but a closer look reveals that Black gets three pieces for the queen and pawn, and has good chances of holding the position. However, this sacrifice is entirely based on the building of a fortress. As the next few moves show,
White develops a strong initiative, which is surprisingly hard to extinguish. Black balances on the edge of the precipice, almost losing a piece, until it seems like White has finally won. Akobian’s way of thinking leads to an important rule about how to reason in seemingly lost positions:

When your position seems to be totally lost, don’t hurry with resigning. Try to find ideas, which, despite giving away material, lead to positions where your pieces are all defended and your opponent’s material advantage is hard to realize.

Following this rule can allow you to save a completely hopeless-looking position, as we saw in the Chekhov study.

16. b2xe5 c6xe5  
17. g2xd5 e6xd5  
18. d1xd5 e5xc4  
19. d5xa8 c4xa3  
20. a8xa7 e7xb4

Finally, after another series of forced moves, a crucially important position has arisen. In order to try to win, White has to construct a plan. Kraai played:

21. a7-a4! b4-e7  
22. f1-a1

And the poor knight on a is trapped! One would want to resign here, but Akobian doesn’t give up hope. Since all of the pawns are on one flank, it proves extremely difficult for Kraai to realize his huge material advantage.

22. ... h7-h6  
23. a1xa3 e7xa3  
24. a4xa3 f8-e8  
25. a3-d3 c8-e6  
26. f2-f3 f7-f6  
27. g1-f2 h6-h5

After a series of forced captures, a critical position arises on the board. It seems that if Black manages to consolidate his pieces, which are currently all over the board, he will be doing okay and will have good drawing chances. Unfortunately for Black, Kraai plays:

28. h2-h3??

White has to keep in mind that trading pawns gives Black more drawing chances, since White’s pawns are his only chance to break Black’s position. Black’s chances lie in the fact that all the pawns are located on one flank. Put additional pawns on b4 and b5, and Black is dead. The first thing that comes to mind when looking at this position is to play h3-g4, and then go from there. Let’s take a look:
Plan A: \( \mathcal{g}2, h3-g4 \) (maybe \( e4 \))

28.\( \mathcal{g}2, \mathcal{f}7 \) Pushing pawns will only favor White. 29.h3 \( \mathcal{E}6 \) 30.g4 hxg4 31.hxg4 \( \mathcal{f}7 \) Black needs to keep all his pieces in one place.

Now, if White doesn’t play \( e2-e4 \), I don’t see any way for him to break through. Therefore, 32.e4 \( \mathcal{g}7 \) 33.\( \mathcal{g}3 \) Preparing \( f2-f4 \). 33...\( \mathcal{f}7 \) 34.f4. White’s plan has been executed, and now it’s Black’s turn to find a defense.

First, we have to look at the radical 34...g5, but this loses quickly after 35.f5 \( \mathcal{c}8 \) 36.\( \mathcal{e}4+ \).

Therefore, Black has to sit and wait. This is done, for instance, by 34...\( \mathcal{f}8 \). However, after a while, we realize that White has the absolutely deadly 35.g5 \( fxg5 \) and now 36.f5, when the two passed pawns decide the game. Therefore, Black has to prevent \( f4 \) by means of 33...g5, temporarily fixing the pawn structure. The downside: \( f6 \) is severely weakened. This leads to the idea of playing \( e5 \) at the right moment. For example, 34.\( \mathcal{e}3 \) \( g8 \) 35.e5. Unfortunately for White, after 35...\( \mathcal{e}5 \) 36.\( \mathcal{e}5 \) \( \mathcal{f}7 \) White has no way to break through.

Therefore, playing \( e4 \) is obviously a mistake. This leads us to a very interesting idea: what if White simply plays 32.e3 instead of 32.e4 and then \( g4-g5 \)? It’s hard to come up with this move if you haven’t analyzed the position. Now, Black has to solve very serious problems. His most viable option is to play 32...\( g6 \) and hope for the best. However, White plays 33.\( \mathcal{g}3 \) \( \mathcal{g}7 \) 34.f4. Black needs to play 34...\( \mathcal{f}7 \) with the idea of meeting 35.e4 with 35...g5, but nobody is forcing White to play \( e3-e4 \).

Instead, a short look at the position leads to the conclusion that White has the killer move 35.\( \mathcal{d}4 \), with the unstoppable threat of \( g4-g5 \).

Thus, Black can’t play 33...\( \mathcal{g}7 \). Probably, his best move is something like 33...\( \mathcal{e}7 \), but after 34.f4, I don’t see any satisfactory defense for him. Still, the fact that White had a win does not mean that Akopian’s defense wasn’t strong. Finding all these subtleties with limited time is an almost impossible task. White made a big mistake, allowing Black to achieve a drawing position almost instantly. The problem with 28.h3?? is that it allows Black to trade pawns. Despite the fact that the trade doesn’t seem to favor Black, it brings him closer to building an unbreakable fortress.

Before we see Akopian’s masterful defensive technique, let’s take a look at an alternate winning plan that I discovered while analyzing this game a second time. White can play \( e4 \) without trading a pair of pawns with \( h3-g4 \). It doesn’t take long to discover that White wins without too much difficulty.

Plan B: \( e4-\mathcal{g}3-\mathcal{f}4 \), followed by a possible \( h4 \) and \( g4 \)

After 28.\( \mathcal{w}b5! \) \( \mathcal{f}7 \) 29.e4 \( \mathcal{e}6 \) Black has to wait, since moving any of his pawns only harms his position even more. After 30.\( \mathcal{e}3! \) \( g6 \) 31.h4 \( \mathcal{e}7 \) 32.\( \mathcal{w}c5 \) \( \mathcal{e}8 \) 33.\( \mathcal{f}4 \) \( \mathcal{e}6 \) 34.\( \mathcal{w}c7 \) \( \mathcal{f}8 \) 35.g4 Black’s position falls apart.

Again, the fact that White could have won in two different ways doesn’t diminish Akopian’s strong play in any way. In chess, mistakes are made, no matter how strong the players are.

28. ... \( \mathcal{e}6xh3 \)
29. \( \mathcal{d}3-d5+ \) \( \mathcal{h}3-e6 \)
30. \( \mathcal{d}5xh5 \) \( \mathcal{e}6-f7 \)
Kraai suddenly realized that he had absolutely no way of breaking through without the precious h-pawn. He tried hard, but Akobian showed some impeccable defensive skills.

31. \( \text{W}h5-f5 \) \( \text{Ke}8-e5 \)
32. \( \text{W}f5-c8+ \) \( \text{g}8-h7 \)
33. \( \text{f}3-f4?! \)

This gives Black an easy draw, but even White’s best try lead nowhere: 33.e4? \( \text{Ke}8 \) 34.\( \text{W}d7 \) \( \text{g}8 \) 35.\( \text{We}3 \) \( \text{f}8 \)
36.\( \text{W}d6+ \) \( \text{g}8 \) and although my silicon friend is still rather optimistic about White’s chances, I’m pretty sure that White has no way to win this position.

33. \( ... \) \( \text{Ke}5-e8 \)
34. \( \text{W}c8-d7 \) \( \text{h}7-g8 \)
35. \( \text{W}f2-f3 \) \( \text{f}7-g6 \)
36. \( \text{g}3-g4 \) \( \text{g}6-e4+ \)
37. \( \text{W}f3-g3 \) \( \text{e}4-g6 \)
38. \( \text{W}d7-b5 \) \( \text{e}8-e3+ \)
39. \( \text{W}g3-f2 \) \( \text{e}3-e7 \)
40. \( \text{W}b5-c6 \) \( \text{g}8-h7 \)
41. \( \text{W}f2-f3 \) \( \text{f}6-f5! \)
42. \( \text{g}4xf5 \) \( \text{g}6xf5 \)

And after 58(!) more moves, the players finally agreed to a draw.

In the following example, White will have to take even more extreme measures in order to build a fortress. For those of you who have the problem of resigning early, you might change your mind after taking a look at this game, which I first saw in Mihail Marin’s great book Secrets of Chess Defense:

\[ \text{□ Adianto} \]
\[ \text{■ A. Mikhalevski} \]

\[ \text{Biel 1998} \]

Adianto, who was rated 150 points higher than his opponent, misplayed the opening (QGD), and got a very suspect position by move 10. A further blunder cost him an exchange, and all seemed to be decided. However, with some very tenacious defense, Adianto managed to make things hard for Mikhalevski, and after many adventures the position on the board was reached. Black seems to be completely winning; the a-pawn is unstoppable. However, as it turns out, things are not clear. First, Adianto finds the nice move:

1. \( \text{Qd}4-c6! \)

White has to play very actively, or else Black will simply promote without any difficulty. Unfortunately for White, Mikhalevski finds a great tactical resource, which seems to refute White’s move.

1. \( ... \) \( \text{a}5-a4! \)

One has to give credit to Mikhalevski for calculating precisely that the pawn
promotes. Adianto takes up the challenge and plays:

2. \( \text{Qc}6-a5+! \)

A hard move to play; Adianto calculated accurately to the end. However, I found another draw in this position, which is extremely surprising: 2.\( \text{Qe}5+ \) \( \text{Kh}4 \) 3.\( \text{Qc}6 \) \( \text{Bd}7 \) 4.\( \text{Qd}3+ \) \( \text{Qc}3 \) 5.\( \text{Qe}1 \), and it turns out that White has nothing to fear; Black’s best try is 5...d4, but after 6.\( \text{Qe}2+ \) \( \text{Qc}4 \) 7.\( \text{Qa}4 \) \( \text{Qa}7 \) 8.\( \text{Qxd}4! \) \( \text{Qxa}4 \) 9.f4 the position is totally drawn.

2. \( \text{b}5-b4 \) 3. \( \text{Qa}5xb7 \) a4-a3

Black’s pawn is unstoppable. One’s first instinct would be to resign, but Adianto finds an extraordinary defense. The idea involves letting Black promote, but in return, winning a pawn and setting up a fortress. Black’s king and queen would not be a strong enough force to overcome White’s optimally positioned pieces.

4. \( \text{Qb}7-d8 \) f7-f6
5. \( \text{Qd}8-c6+ \) \( \text{b}4-c3 \)
6. \( \text{Qc}6-d4 \) a3-a2
7. \( \text{Qe}8-f7 \) a2-a1=\( \text{Q} \)
8. \( \text{Qf}7xd5 \)

Obviously, this is the critical position.

Black has a material advantage, but his main problem is that all of White’s pieces are positioned very well to fight the queen. Mikhailovski realized that he had no win, but still tried to make a few moves just to check if White wouldn’t blunder anything:

8. ... \( \text{Qa}1-g1+ \)
9. \( \text{Qd}5-g2 \) \( \text{Qc}3-d3 \)
10. \( \text{Qd}4-f5 \) \( \text{Qd}3-e2 \)
11. \( \text{Qf}5-d4+ \) e2-d3
12. \( \text{Qd}4-f5 \) \( \text{Wg}1-c1 \)
13. \( \text{Qg}2-f3 \) \( \text{Qd}3-d2 \)
14. \( \text{Qg}3-g2 \) \( \text{Qd}2-e1 \)
15. \( \text{Qf}5-d4 \) \( \text{Qc}1-b2 \)
16. \( \text{Qe}3-e2 \) \( \text{Wb}2-b1 \)
17. \( \text{Qe}2-f3 \) \( \frac{1}{2}-\frac{1}{2} \)

A simple example, but it clearly shows that a side with minor pieces against a queen is not always lost, and can often build a fortress.

In the following position, taken from one of my games long ago, White builds a very interesting fortress, which I naturally thought was unbreakable. However, analysis proved otherwise.

This example could have been used for the ‘breaking fortresses’ section, but I decided to put it here since Black’s plan connected with breaking the fortress is very complicated, and one could safely have counted on drawing the position with white.

After an exhausting battle, the position in the diagram was reached.
At first, I was waiting for my opponent to resign, but then I realized that my advantage wasn’t easy to convert. As in the previous example, Black’s main problem is that all the pawns are on one side. I also realized that in order to win, I needed to create at least one weakness in White’s camp. Unlike in the Kraai-Akobian game above, trading a pair of pawns brings no relief to White, as the trade actually creates weaknesses in White’s position. Since the only thing White can do is wait, there is no point for Black to force matters before his position is improved to the maximum. The move I played was irresistible, but it turned out to be a major error:

1. ... h7-h5?

It’s hard to believe that this tempting move is a big mistake. The idea behind it is that after the inevitable trade (or else Black plays 2...h4), the f2 and h3 pawns will be very hard to defend, and Black will constantly have the threat of playing ...f5. However, White will have the strong g4-square for his bishop, and White’s position will be almost impossible to crack.

The win could have been achieved by 1...f8, when Black’s king will travel to d2 or e1, cramping White’s position. Only then will Black concentrate on creating additional weaknesses in White’s camp. White has nothing better than to wait with 2. g2 (2.f3 allows 2...f5, which White should only permit if he has nothing better), and after 2...e7 3.g1 d6 4.g2 c5 5.g1 d4 6.f1 c3, the first step of Black’s plan has been achieved. Now, his idea is to transfer the king to e1 and attack the f4 pawn. For example, 7.g2 d2 8.f1+ e1 9.g3 f4 10.f3 (10.f3 d2+ 10...d2 11.e2 f5! and Black wins because White has no defense against ...f4. Thus, the fortress could have been demolished, but in major time trouble, it was hard to refrain from playing the natural 1...h5.

2. g4xh5 g6xh5

White, though also exhausted and in time trouble, managed to come up with:

3. e4-f3!

And I suddenly realized that White’s weaknesses aren’t so easy to attack. In truth, I forgot that I had to push the h-pawn, making the important g4-square accessible for White’s bishop.

3. ... h5-h4
4. g3-f1 e5-f4

Unfortunately, I did not see Black’s main idea, which was to play ...f5 as soon as possible. The text move is still okay, but it’s wrong in the sense that I did not see the winning plan.

5. g1-g2 g8-f8
6. f1-e3
Mastering Positional Chess

Now, Black could have won by advancing his pawn to f5 (this takes away the g4 square), and slowly advancing his king to e1. Let’s see how this could have taken place: 6...f5! 7...d4!! White wants to play c2, forcing the pawn to f4. It’s paradoxical that this isn’t at all bad for Black! After 7...g5+ 8.f1 e7 9.c2 f4 10...f5+ (10.g4? loses more quickly to 10...f3) 10...d7 11.f3 e6 12.e4+ d5 13.f2 c4 14.f1 c3 15.f2 d2 16.f1 a critical position arises.

Black has achieved his plan of bringing his king to d2, but what now? The key to winning the game is the transfer of the queen to a1 (or b6) by means of 16...f6! 17.f2 and now 17...b6+, mating (17...a1 also seems to win).

Thus, even after 1...f5 Black could have won. However, exhausted after 5 hours of play, I completely overlooked this idea, and played the lemon

6. ... f14-g5+??

One question mark is for the quality of the move, and the other is because the advantage can no longer be realized. After:

7. f3-g4!

Black cannot play ...f5 anymore. The fortress White has set up is very interesting; despite the fact that Black can transfer his king to d2 without problems, Black still cannot win. However, the great thing about playing against a fortress is that there is practically no limit to the number of moves you can make (if you have a pawn move which doesn’t harm your position), and after a while, your opponent will be so exhausted and irritated that the chances of him committing a mistake becomes very big. If you are the defending side, it’s important not to be annoyed that your opponent keeps playing on. You might be exhausted, but try to use your remaining energy; you don’t have to search for resources; you simply have to watch out for tricks and traps.

White played impeccably for about 20 moves, but finally, after:

7. ... f18-e7
8. g2-h2 e7-d8
9. h2-g2 d8-c7
10. g2-f1 c7-b6
11. f1-g1 b6-b5
12. g1-f1 b5-c5
13. g4-c8 c5-d4
14. c8-f5 d4-c3
15. f1-e2 c3-b2
16. e3-c4+ b2-c1
Chapter 3: Building and Breaking Fortresses

17.  øc4-e3  øg5-f4
18.  øf5-g4  øf4-a4
19.  øg4-f5  øa4-b4
20.  øf5-g4  øb4-b5+
21.  øe2-e1  øb5-b4+
22.  øe1-e2  øb4-d2+
23.  øe2-f3  ød2-e1
24.  øf3-g2  øc1-d2

White played the tempting

25.  øg4-d1??

and offered a draw, which I accepted.

Ironically, White missed that after 25...f5, Black wins on the spot, transposing into the winning variation. And I had convinced myself that White was playing extremely well and wasn’t giving me any chances. Therefore, after 25...d1, I was confident that White’s move was correct, and didn’t even search for any refutation.

Your opponent is human, and no matter how strong he is, he might make a mistake if you keep setting traps. More about that at the end of this chapter. As we have seen, the queen isn’t always that powerful. Yes, it’s the strongest piece, but two pieces are often more than enough to restrain a queen, especially when all pawns are on the same flank. Also, as both Kraai-Akopian and Schemm-Naroditsky showed us, pawn trades often work in the defender’s favor, even when it seems as if they shouldn’t. If you are trying to breach a fortress, be very careful before you trade any pawns – ask yourself if there is any other way to improve your position first.

Fortresses, however, aren’t only about restraining a queen. Sometimes an endgame with even material arises, but one side’s pieces are so active that the position seems totally lost for the defending side.

When I first saw this position, I didn’t have the slightest idea how White could have drawn it. First of all, it seems as though White can’t defend against 1...xf4, not even mentioning the deadly threat 1...g4. The key to holding a draw is to liquidate into a rook ending, where, despite being two pawns up, Black will be unable to win. This leads us to a very important rule: When you think you are losing in an endgame, try to transform the position into a different one, even at the cost of material.
Mastering Positional Chess

For example, imagine you are under a strong attack in a \( W + K \) vs. \( W + K \) endgame. It’s better to transform into a queen ending a pawn down than to get mated. In the above position, Socko transposes into another type of ending:

1. \( d6-d7! \)

Such a move is very hard to make. White gives up the only pride of his position, or so it seems. However, in truth, the \( d6 \) pawn is the cause of White’s troubles since it blocks all of his other pieces. Sacrificing it will mean freedom for his pieces. Needless to say, counterplay such as 1.\(a8f4 2.h8+ g6 3.g8+ f7 \) leads nowhere.

1. \( ... \) \( d3xd7 \)
2. \( c7-e5! \)

Another very strong move by Socko. White’s pieces have to be as active as possible in order to hold the draw. Interestingly, Black is in a kind of zugzwang, as almost every move harms his position.

2. \( ... \) \( h6-g7 \)

The tempting \( 2...g7 \) fails to \( 3.f6 \), drawing immediately.

Socko defends with great accuracy. White has to keep the bishop on \( e5 \), so that after the trade Black has to spend time on halting the progress of the pawn.

3. \( ... \) \( g7xe5 \)

Murdzia sees nothing better than to trade the bishops.

4. \( f4xe5 \) \( d7-e7 \)
5. \( e2-e3 \)

5. \( ... \) \( e7xe5?! \)

Essentially a draw offer. Black's only winning chance was \( 5...g5! \). Fritz 10 gives the evaluation “−2.20” in favor of Black, but after the accurate \( 6.a8! e5 7.g8+ f6 8.g3 \) White builds a fortress like the one in the game (the fortress is one of the most difficult concepts for a computer to “understand”, and thus you should be very wary of trusting computer evaluations in endgames where fortresses may arise).

6. \( e3-f4 \) \( e5-b5 \)
7. \( a3xh3+ \)

As grandmaster Karsten Müller writes, this fortress would hold even without the \( h2 \) pawn!

7. \( ... \) \( h5-g6 \)
8. \( h3-a3 \) \( b5-b6 \) ½-½
Chapter 3: Building and Breaking Fortresses

Building a fortress like Socko did is something you don’t get to do every day. The main point that the reader should take away is that when your position seems lost because of your pawns, don’t be afraid to sacrifice them.

The following example is further proof that study-like fortresses can be constructed even in apparently hopeless positions.

Marin

Florean

Herculane 1996

1. ...  
2. f2-f4  
3. g1-f2  
4. f2-e3  
5. d3-d4!

Marin tries his best to find winning chances, but unfortunately there are none.

5...c4?? loses to 6.bxc4 b3 7.cxd3 b2 8.c2.

To the untrained eye, the position may seem pretty drawish. However, a closer look reveals that Black is actually in a critical position. First of all, the tempting 1...e6 is parried by the strong 2.f4!, rendering the move useless. White, on the other hand, wants to slowly but surely advance his king to the center and attack the c5 pawn. Therefore, Black has to come up with something, but what?

Let’s try to reconstruct Florean’s train of thought: “Since White wants to advance his king, I have to use my knight in the defense. What are the possibilities? Obviously, I can place it on d4, but that doesn’t help. I can also take the a2 pawn, but then he just plays ...e4-b1. But then, I simply go back to c3, and White cannot win my b4 pawn!”

As you can see, coming up with the fortress isn’t as complicated as it seems. You just need to keep calculating until the end; chess is full of paradoxes.

White cannot reach the a2 knight!

6. e3xd4  f7-f6
7. d4-c5  h7-h6
8. g2-f3  g6-g5
9. c5-c4  g7-f8
10. f3-e4  f8-g7
11. e4-b1  a2-c3
12. b1-d3  c3-a2
13. h3-h4  a7-g7
14. c4-d5  f8-g7

Draw.
Mastering Positional Chess

So far, the fortresses that we have seen were sort of one-sided. In other words, it was obvious that the fortress was unbreakable. In our final example, White clearly has chances to break the fortress, but with great defense Black manages to hold a draw.

[Diagram of a chess game]

10. \( \text{c1-d2} \) \( \text{d8xd4} \)

In the comical game Sharavdorj-Fernandes, World University Championship, Ulaan Bator 2002, White won after 10...\( \text{wb4}+7 \) 11.g3 \( \text{cxd3} \) 12.hxg3 \( \text{whxh1} \) 13.\( \text{gxd4} \) 0-0 14.0-0-0 (White is already nearly winning, but Black makes it much easier for him) 14...\( \text{f5} \)

15.\( \text{xc4} \) ! \( \text{f} \)
16.\( \text{xe6+} \) \( \text{wh8} \)
17.\( \text{g6+} \) ! 1-0. Very well played by White, I have to admit, but Black made things simpler for him with his 14th move.

11. \( \text{c3xe4} \) \( \text{d4xe4}+ \)
12. \( \text{d1-e2} \) \( \text{b4xd2}+ \)
13. \( \text{e1xd2} \) \( \text{e4-d5}+ \)
14. \( \text{d2-c2} \)

The risky 14.\( \text{c3} \)?? allowed Black to equalize quickly in Geldānd-Hübner, Munich 1992, after 14...0-0 (14...\( \text{e6} \)?

15.\( \text{xc4} \) 0-0 16.\( \text{we5} \) \( \text{c5} \) 17.\( \text{e2} \) \( \text{f6} \)
18.\( \text{we3} \) ! \( \text{b5} \) 19.\( \text{hd1} \) \( \text{b4}+ \)
20.\( \text{xb4} \) \( \text{hab8}+ \)
21.\( \text{a3} \) is nearly lost for White according to grandmaster Hertneck)

15. \( \text{e3} \) \( \text{b5} \) 16.axb5 \( \text{exe5} \) 17.\( \text{e2} \) \( \text{d7} \).

14. \( \text{...} \)

\( \text{b8-a6} \)

The rash 14...\( \text{b5} \)?? loses quickly to 15.axb5 \( \text{cxb5} \) 16.\( \text{d1} \) \( \text{c5} \) 17.\( \text{e4} \), Blackburn-Turner, Swansea 2001.

15. \( \text{e5xc4} \)

This is probably the most important position of the whole variation. Black is at a major crossroads. First of all, let’s see what Anand played:
15. ... b7-b5?!

Although this move may be okay for Black, it seems a bit too risky. Black has many options in this position, but let’s take a look at the most popular one. 15...0-0-0 The idea of this move is to take advantage of White’s precariously placed pieces. However, Kramnik discovered the idea 16...We3! This move had been played before, but Kramnik showed that White obtains an advantage. The well-known game Kramnik-Shirov, Dortmund 1996, went 16...c5 17...e2! Wxg2 18...hgl Wxh2. Before Kramnik’s famous novelty, theory considered this position to be good for Black. However, Kramnik now played the simple 19...xg7! Suddenly, everyone realized that Black’s position was critical! Let’s take a quick look at what happened next: 19...d4? This is probably already decisive (the alternative was 19...d3 20...h1! Wxh1 21...xd3 with a clearly better position for White). Kramnik’s famous line runs 20...xd4 Wxe2+ 21...d2. Simple and strong, Black doesn’t have nearly enough compensation for the huge material investment. 21...d8 I think that Shirov probably considered his position very good here. If you look at this position for a short time, Black’s attack seems strong. In truth, however, White’s monarch escapes the checks after only a few moves. 22...xc5 xd2+ 22...d3+ 23...c1 Wxd2+ 24.b1 d1+ 25.c1+- 23...b3 xb2+ 24.a2 xb2! Shirov defends with tenacity, making the win as hard as possible for Kramnik. 25.g3! One can only marvel at Kramnik’s technique. Every move is played with the accuracy of a machine. 25...e4 26.b3 b6 27.f8+ b7 28.fx7+ a6 29.f3! xf3 30.xf3 and Shirov soon resigned. For those who want more in-depth annotations, take a look in Kramnik and Damsky’s book Kramnik: My Life and Games. In any case, the main conclusion is that Black has to search for other ways to equalize.

16. a4xb5 @a6-b4+
17. c2-c3

It seems to me that Black cannot possibly achieve more than a draw here; and even that is under question. However, after:

17... c6xb5
18. a1-d1

it looks like Black has gone terribly astray. First of all, if he plays 18...c5, White gets an advantage after 19...e5! @d5+ 20.xd5 b4+ 21.b3 Wxd5.
22...e2 0-0 23.Wxd5 exd5 24.Отa5, Kramnik-Shirov, Linares 2000.

So what does Black do? The truth lies in thinking outside the box. The point is that his position is very solid, so if he manages to complete his development (even at the cost of material), his position will be okay. Therefore, Black has to eliminate the c4 knight at all costs.

Anand uncorks:

18. ... b5xc4!!

The subtlety of this move is that despite White’s extra queen, Black’s fortress will be unbreakable. However, unlike the previous positions, this one will require mastery and accuracy in order to hold. Notice that the b2 and a7 pawns will play an important role in the battle to follow – had these pawns been traded, Black’s life would have been much easier.

19. Zd1xd5 £b4xd5+

Again, White is at a major crossroads. He has to decide between three moves: 20.£xc4, 20.£c2, and 20.£d2. Topalov played:

20. £c3-c2?!

It is paradoxical that this move can be inaccurate, since it looks totally natural.

A) 20.£xc4?! is way too risky. After 20...0-0 White has to choose:

A1) 21.£e5?! looks tempting, but after 21...£ab8! 22.£d3 (22.£d3?? £fc8+ 23.£d4 £b4+) 22...£fc8 and White’s king is under fire. For example, 23.£e2 £b5! 24.£d4 £b4 and Black has at least equality;

A2) 21.£d4! is the best option, but still, after 21...£ab8! 22.£c2 £fc8 23.£c4 £5 Black has easy equality. However, a week after this game, Salov reached exactly this position against Illescas Cordoba. Salov, a master of opening preparation, found an excellent improvement:

B) 20.£d2!! The main idea here is that the king can later be transferred to e1, where it will be safe. The game continued: 20...0-0 21.£e5 £c8 22.£e2 £fd8 23.£c1 £b6+ 24.£e1 £d5 25.£e4, and Salov obtained a clear edge, which he converted into victory. Does this mean that Anand’s move 18...bxc4 doesn’t deserve the exclamation marks? The answer is no. Why? As was mentioned before, even someone like Topalov could not find 20.£d2, since the move seems totally absurd! Moreover, White still is by no means winning, and Black can search for improvements.

The problem with 20.£c2 is that the king won’t be safe there, and will be subject to constant checks and attacks. Anand quickly utilizes this by great, active play:

20. ... 0-0
21. £e2-e4 £f8-c8

Threatening a future ...c3, although at this moment White can easily sidestep this with b3 followed by £c4.
Chapter 3: Building and Breaking Fortresses

22. h2-h4 Ec8-c5

With every move, Black’s fortress grows stronger. Already, I would be surprised if White had any chance to break through.

23. h1-h3  a8-c8
24. h3-c3  a7-a5
25. c2-c1  h7-h5
26. e4-d4  h5-h4 ½-½

White doesn’t have a chance to win.

In this game, we saw how White’s huge material advantage was insufficient to break through Black’s powerful fortress. White’s only attempt would have been 20. d2, but even then the game would by no means have been winning for him.

In conclusion, we could formulate a few basic rules for constructing fortresses. First of all, you should know that even in completely hopeless positions, you should always keep in mind the possibility of constructing a fortress. For example, take a look at the Chekhov study. White’s position seemed lost, but by constructing a fortress he held a draw. Thus:


- Never be afraid to sacrifice material in order to build a fortress.
- Sacrificing the queen for a few minor pieces is a great technique when trying to save a game. If the pawn formation is solid enough, two minor pieces or a rook are often enough to hold the position against a queen. Even in objectively lost positions, the person with the extra material might quickly go astray (i.e. Schemm-Naroditsky).
- If all the pawns are on one side of the board, this often makes constructing a fortress easier. However, fortresses can be constructed even with pawns on both sides (see Topalov-Anand).
- In seemingly lost endgames, look for ways to utilize motifs from studies in order to find a drawing plan.
- In the games Marin-Florea and Socko-Murdzisz, one of the sides seemed hopelessly lost, but utilizing study-like motifs they were able to hold the draw. Finally, it’s important to understand that some fortresses can be breached (that will be our subject in the next part of this chapter).
- If you have a choice whether to go for a lost ending or to construct a fortress that can possibly be breached, almost always choose the latter. You simply won’t believe how many fortresses that could have been broken have been held.

Having said all this, let’s look at the other side of the story: how do you try to breach fortresses?
Breaking Fortresses

Knowing how to break a fortress will bring you a huge amount of extra points (you'd be surprised how many strong players lack this important skill). In order to illustrate this, we will start out with an unusual example. Unfortunately, it was ruined by Black, who lost on time and did not let White demonstrate the win.

Naroditsky
Rowley
Tulsa 2008

When we reached this position after an up-and-down struggle, my opponent offered me a draw, thinking that I would automatically accept. However, after 1.\textit{xc}2, Black realized that things weren't as simple as he had thought. In fact, he completely forgot about his clock and lost on time.

How would White have breached this rock-solid fortress if Black had not had this brain freeze? As we all know, in order to win, you need to construct a plan. First of all, aimlessly wandering around with the rook is useless. White has to provoke ...c6, in order to play \textit{h}2-h8-a8-a7, but how to do that?

As often happens, there is only one way: zugzwang. First of all, let's try to imagine which position would be optimal for White. If his rook is placed on \textit{f}2 and his king on d5, Black will be forced to play either \textit{e}7 or \textit{d}8, both of which give White a chance to make progress (\textit{c}6 in case of ...\textit{e}7 and \textit{h}2-h7 in case of ...\textit{d}8; White first provokes \textit{d}7 by means of \textit{g}3 and only then plays \textit{c}3, forcing a fatal weakening of the queenside by means of ...c6). If Black plays ...g5, the weakness of the f5-square will spell trouble for him. However, before finding a way to set up the optimal position, White has to decide whether including a3-b4 helps. The first thing that sticks out is that on b4 the pawn will take away the potentially important c5-square. It may also advance to b5 in order to put a clamp on the c7-b6 chain.

Thus, White's first move is:

1. \textit{b}2-c2

Strengthening the position of the rook. Before we move on, a bit of chess psychology. When you're trying to break a fortress, it might be a good idea to pretend (for a couple of moves) that you can't see a win, although you actually see the winning plan. When your opponent's hopes are raised, you suddenly embark on the right plan, and your psychologically demoralized opponent will have a higher chance of blundering. In this position, after 1.\textit{xc}2, I was about to do just that, but instead my opponent lost on time. Black's best bet would have been to simply wait with:

1. ... \textit{e}7-d7
In order to execute White’s plan, he first has to play a3-b4:

2. \(\text{c2-c3}\)

After the absent-minded 2.a3?? Black would have won a pawn after 2...\(\text{c5+}\).

2. ... \(\text{d7-e7}\)

Black has nothing better to do than sit and wait.

3. a2-a3 \(\text{e7-d7}\)
4. b3-b4 a5xb4
5. a3xb4 \(\text{d7-e7}\)

The first step has been achieved. First of all, the tempting 6.\(\text{a3}\) \(\text{d7}\) 7.\(\text{a8}\) \(\text{e7}\) 8.\(\text{d5}\) \(\text{d7}\) 9.b5 doesn’t achieve anything because of the very precise 9...\(\text{d8!}\), and unfortunately, after 10.\(\text{b8}\), Black has 10...\(\text{e7}\), when there is no way to break the fortress.

6. \(\text{e4-d5}\)

As you have seen from this example, White could have breached Black’s seemingly unbreakable fortress by simple means!

In the following position, I was practically ready to offer a draw, but then saw an amazing idea that induces Black to weaken his position.

At first sight, Black seems to be holding fairly easily; as soon as White’s king goes to d3, Black will counter with ...\(\text{d6}\). Here, Nimzowitsch’s famous quote comes to mind: “One weakness is not enough to win an endgame. One needs two weaknesses.” The first weakness is obviously the d3-c4-b5 complex, but Black doesn’t have a second weakness, so he can concentrate solely on the protection of the first one. After a long think, I came up with the following idea: if I could somehow
Mastering Positional Chess

I cannot emphasize enough the importance of constructing a plan in such positions. Without a plan, finding 1...h5 would not have been easy. In other words, you have to think of ideas - they aren't just hanging in the air. Black at 1...h5 also loses:

1. g6-g5!

Although Black's position was critical, the move makes the win easier (despite the fact that some accurate play is still required). Instead, Black has three alternatives: to play 1...h5 or play 1...d5. 1...d5? 2. c2-c4! with a win.

2. b3-h3

White may have more than one way to win, but 1...h5 or play 1...d5. 1...d5? 2. c2-c4! with a win. The moves 1...d5? 2. c2-c4! with a win. 1...d5? 2. c2-c4! with a win. 1...d5? 2. c2-c4! with a win. 1...d5? 2. c2-c4! with a win. 1...d5? 2. c2-c4! with a win. 1...d5? 2. c2-c4! with a win. 1...d5? 2. c2-c4! with a win. 1...d5? 2. c2-c4! with a win. 1...d5? 2. c2-c4! with a win. 1...d5? 2. c2-c4! with a win. 1...d5? 2. c2-c4! with a win. 1...d5? 2. c2-c4! with a win. 1...d5? 2. c2-c4! with a win. 1...d5? 2. c2-c4! with a win. 1...d5? 2. c2-c4! with a win. 1...d5? 2. c2-c4! with a win. 1...d5? 2. c2-c4! with a win. 1...d5? 2. c2-c4! with a win. 1...d5? 2. c2-c4! with a win. 1...d5? 2. c2-c4! with a win. 1...d5? 2. c2-c4! with a win. 1...d5? 2. c2-c4! with a win. 1...d5? 2. c2-c4! with a win. 1...d5? 2. c2-c4! with a win. 1...d5? 2. c2-c4! with a win. 1...d5? 2. c2-c4! with a win. 1...d5? 2. c2-c4! with a win. 1...d5? 2. c2-c4! with a win. 1...d5? 2. c2-c4! with a win. 1...d5? 2. c2-c4! with a win. 1...d5? 2. c2-c4! with a win. 1...d5? 2. c2-c4! with a win. 1...d5? 2. c2-c4! with a win. 1...d5? 2. c2-c4! with a win.
Suddenly, Black’s position has gone from seemingly drawn to completely lost.

6. ... c5-b6
7. b3-d1 b6-c5
8. d1-g4 d6-e7
9. g4-f5

One of the plans, which I started to execute, is to simply transfer the bishop to g6 and then move the king to f5. However, I then decided to keep my bishop along the a2-g8 diagonal, in case Black tries to play ...d6-c5-c4.

9. ... e7-d6
10. f5-g4 c5-b6
11. g4-d1 b6-c5
12. f2-f3

Black is simply defenseless against the deadly h3-g4-f5-g6.

12. ... c5-e3
13. g2-h3 e3-f2

14. b2-b4?

White could have won without this, but why not create a passed pawn?

14. ... a5xb4
15. c3xb4 f2-e1
16. b4-b5 e1-f2
17. h3-g4 d6-c5
18. d1-e2 c5-d6
19. e2-f1 d6-e6
20. f1-e2 e6-d6
21. g4-f5 f2xg3
22. f5-g6 g3-f4
23. g6xh6 g5-g4+
24. h6-g6

Black resigned.

Before we move on to our next example, I would like to make a few points about opposite-colored bishop endings.

First of all, if you’re on the defending side, beware of traps; it’s very easy to lose in a completely drawn opposite-colored bishop endgame (e.g. by blundering a pawn).

However, what if you are on the attacking side? It’s completely clear that without a plan, trying to win is completely useless. You simply can’t find the winning ideas without looking for them! For example, if you have a king that has a lot of potential, find the ideal square for it and think of ways to transfer it there. Also, remember Nimzowitsch’s famous quote mentioned above. Even if you think there is no way to break your opponent’s position, always try.

The next example is pure chess paradox. Let’s take a look:
Mastering Positional Chess

Vidmar
■ Spielmann
St Petersburg 1909

If you haven’t seen this position before, you will probably evaluate it as a dead draw. Not only does White lack weaknesses, both his king and his bishop are located optimally. Nevertheless, White’s position is critical. The main reasons are the following:

A. Black’s passed pawn ties down White’s bishop, thus restricting its movement;

B. The weakness of White’s light squares are of a chronic character; he has a hard time stopping ...g6-h5-g4, and if g3 then ...h3 will be decisive (or if h3 then ...g3);

C. White’s seemingly active king is no more than an optical illusion; he cannot even move it because of ...e6.

Having said all this, Black now has to construct a plan. His problem is that it’s very hard to actually make use of all these factors. The only plan that comes to mind is the plan outlined above with ...g5-g6-h5-g4.

1. ... c4-f1!

The idea of this move is to further weaken White’s light squares, so the king can have easy access to h3.

2. g2-g3 f1-h3!

It’s important for Black to stop the drawing move h2-h4.

3. c5-a3

Vidmar doesn’t sense the danger and simply waits. Although this move in itself is correct, Vidmar doesn’t understand that White’s situation is dire.

3. ... g6-g5!

Only here did Vidmar finally realize how dangerous the threat of ...g6-h5-g4-f3 was. He immediately tries to find counterplay, but unfortunately he has no such luck.

4. a3-b4 f7-g6

5. c3-c4!

This is the best idea (although he didn’t follow it up with the correct move). The main point is that the movement of the b7 pawn is restricted. However, Spielmann continues with his plan.

5. ... g6-h5

6. e5-f6?

Too aggressive, and the decisive mistake. White’s only chance to hold the position was by passive defense. This is achieved by 6.e4. The idea is to force
Chapter 3: Building and Breaking Fortresses

Black to find a way to break through. For example, 6...e6, and now he has to sacrifice a second pawn with 7.\textit{f}3\textit{!}, trying to build a fortress. After:
7...\textit{xc}4 8.h3 \textit{d}5+ 9.e3 \textit{g}6 10.d4 \textit{g}2 11.h4 gxh4 12.gxh4
Black still has to find a way to win. This is achieved by 12...\textit{h}5 13.e7 a3\textit{!}. Thus, White's position is lost anyway, but now the win is just a matter of time.

6. ... \textit{h}5-g4

This is a very good example of breaking a typical fortress. Still, opposite-colored bishop fortresses are obviously not the only fortresses which one can often break. Take a look at the following example:

\textbf{Topalov}

\textbf{Kasparov}

\textit{Linares 1999}

Kasparov played the opening brilliantly. He won an exchange and came very close to victory. However, he made a crucial mistake, and in this position Topalov's fortress after \textit{e}3-c5-d6 seems unbreakable. Nevertheless...

1. ... \textit{c}8-b7

When reaching an endgame like this one, it's important to make the obligatory moves first, and only then construct a plan. Max Euwe once said, "First make all the only moves, and then start thinking." Kasparov follows Euwe's advice by bringing all of his pieces into play first.

2. \textit{d}2-e3 \textit{e}7-d7

Black has to stop the completion of the fortress with 3.\textit{d}4 followed by 4.c3.

3. \textit{e}3-c5! \textit{b}7-c6
4. \textit{c}5-d6

It's pretty obvious that this position is critical. At first sight, it seems that White's fortress is impenetrable, but a closer look
reveals that White’s light squares are very weak and can be exploited. Nevertheless, if Black doesn’t open up the position, one weakness will not be enough to win. Therefore, Kasparov finds the best move:

4. ... f7-f6!

If the position had remained closed, Black’s rooks wouldn’t have been of any use. Let’s take a look at the alternatives:

A) 4...exd6 is a quick draw after 5.exd6 h5x6 6.c3 and 7.e4 or e5;

B) 4...b65 seems like a decent try. However, after 5.c3 exd6 6.d4 7.a4 Black can’t break White’s fortress. Thus, we can conclude that Kasparov’s move is Black’s only chance.

5. g5xf6?

Although this is probably still not losing, it is a serious mistake after which White has to play very accurately in order to hold the draw. Instead, a draw could have been achieved by 5.g6!, closing the position at all costs. The position after 5...fxe5 (5...f5 6.Ag1 Ag6 7.e4) 6.Axe5! Bh8 7.e4 is drawn.

5. ... g7xf6
6. Ae1-g1 f6-f5!

Now, Black can utilize the weakness of the light squares and the g-file. It’s clear that White already has serious problems.

7. Ac1-d2 Ac6-d5
8. Ad2-e3?

After this mistake, the draw becomes problematic. White still could have held relatively easily after 8.Ac3!. Now, the main problem is that at any moment Black will be able to switch plans and play ...Ac6-b5-a4. Kasparov masterfully realizes his advantage.

8. ... Ah8-h7

The first step in Black’s plan is to place a rook on the g-file so that White can’t create any counterplay. Topalov, still a great defender, tries his best to prevent this.

9. Ad6-f8! Ah7-f7
10. Ah8-f6 Bh7-f7
11. Ag1-g6?!

Another inaccuracy. He should have gone for 11.Af8, although after 11...Ad7! 12.Ac5 Ag7 White’s position is critical.

11. ... Ag7-b7!
12. Ah6-f8 Bh7-f7
13. Af8-d6 Kg7-g7

The first part of Black’s plan has been achieved. All he has to do now to win is maneuver his king to b3. Then, White’s king will be tied up, and his position will slowly fall apart. However, Topalov finds a great idea.

14. Ag6-g5! Ag7-f7
15. c2-c3 Ad5-c6
16. Ae3-f3 Ac6-b5
17. Ad6-c5 Ab5-a4
18. Ac5-d4

Topalov has built another fortress — his idea is that the d4 bishop will hold everything together. In such cases, the attacker needs to find a tactical shot. Here,
the exchange sacrifice on d4 followed by ...c3-c2-c1 hangs in the air. Unfortunately for Black, White's king can just stay on e3, right? Wrong! After \( \text{\#e3} \), Black will make a random move, and White will be in zugzwang! This leads us to one of the most important rules to follow when trying to break fortresses:

When fighting a seemingly impenetrable fortress, try to use zugzwang to your favor. In other words, find positions where the defending side has to make a move that forces serious concessions, allowing you to make progress by either positional or tactical means. The latter is the case in this game. After:

18. ... \( \text{\#f7-d7} \)
19. \( \text{\#f3-e3} \) \( \text{\#a4-b3} \)

White is in fatal zugzwang! Topalov was forced to play

20. \( \text{\#e3-e2} \)

And Kasparov played:

20. ... \( \text{\#g7xg5!} \)
21. \( \text{\#f4xg5} \) \( \text{\#d7xd4!!} \)

The pawns queen simultaneously, but White will have to sacrifice all of his remaining pawns in order to evade mate.

22. \( \text{c3xd4} \) \( \text{c4-c3} \)
23. \( \text{g5-g6} \) \( \text{c3-c2} \)
24. \( \text{g6-g7} \) \( \text{c2-c1} \)
25. \( \text{g7-g8} \) \( \text{Wc1-c4} + \)
26. \( \text{e2-e3} \) \( \text{b3-c3} \)
27. \( \text{g8-d8} \) \( \text{Wc4-d3} + \)
28. \( \text{e3-f4} \) \( \text{Wd3-d2} + \)
29. \( \text{f4-f3} \) \( \text{Wd2-d1} + \)
30. \( \text{f3-e3} \) \( \text{Wd1-g1} + \)
31. \( \text{e3-e2} \) \( \text{Wg1-g2} + \)
32. \( \text{e2-e3} \) \( \text{f5-f4} + \)

White resigned, as on 33. \( \text{\#xf4} \) \( \text{\#d3} \! \) mates. A masterful display by Kasparov.

As we reach the end of this chapter, I would like to sum up what we have learned so far. First of all, never ever give up hope of breaking a fortress, and on the other hand, never agree to a draw just because you think the fortress is indestructible:

A. Think outside the box – when trying to break a fortress, look for tactical and possibly unorthodox ways to achieve this (i.e. Topalov-Kasparov).

B. Always construct a logical plan. Without a plan consisting of clear steps, you will never be able to crack a fortress. Also, if your plan does not succeed, immediately look for another one.

C. One weakness is almost never enough to win. If, for example, your opponent has weak light squares, this usually won't be sufficient. You need to create another weakness, or, for example, create a passed pawn, which you will use as a decoy in order to distract your opponent's pieces (i.e. Naroditsky-Malinarski).
Exercises

And now, a few exercises relating to both building and breaking fortresses. Don’t get upset if you can’t solve some of the exercises – they aren’t easy at all, and there is no shame in getting them wrong. If you’re looking for some entertainment, try Exercise 2: it’s one of my favorite studies and one of the most beautiful ones ever constructed.

### Exercise 3:1

In this crucial tournament game, after blitzing out 17 moves of theory, Topalov found a very strong novelty: \( \&g5 \). Suddenly it became clear to Anand that his position was in danger. Is there any way to neutralize this unpleasant novelty? (Hint: think outside the box: sometimes a fortress can be very strange, but nevertheless unbreakable.)

### Exercise 3:2

At first glance, it might seem that resigning is a good option, but is there a way to draw this seemingly hopeless position?

### Exercise 3:3

The position seems completely drawn, but is there a way to break White’s fortress?
Chapter 4: Positional Sacrifice

The positional sacrifice is one of the most important topics in the realm of positional chess. Time and again, you will encounter situations in which a positional sacrifice occurs. In this chapter, my goal is to discuss the meaning and correct timing of positional sacrifices. In order to make this topic easier to comprehend, the chapter is divided into three sections: 'Positional sacrifice in the opening', 'Positional sacrifice in the middlegame', and 'Positional sacrifice in the endgame'.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The usual goal of the positional sacrifice is to either:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Acquire a significant space advantage and simultaneously cramp your opponent's pieces;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Create a position in which the opponent's pieces and pawns will be inefficiently placed; or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Achieve dynamic compensation in various forms.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although there are sometimes other purposes for positional sacrifices, these are the three major ones. The main point here is that one shouldn’t be afraid of sacrificing a pawn or even a piece in order to achieve one or more of the three forms of compensation. A pawn is not always a huge amount of material, so often the investment is completely justified.

Moreover, utilizing the positional sacrifice is the ONLY way to maintain the initiative in most cases. One quickly realizes that in order to maintain the initiative, it’s vital to utilize some kind of unusual resource. A chess classic once said, “You don’t win by good positions, but by good moves.” In many of our examples here, the positional sacrifice will simply transform a static advantage into a dynamic one (or the other way around).

Positional Sacrifices in the Opening

Positional sacrifices in the opening occur not as often as in the middlegame. Frequently, one has to sacrifice a pawn in order to keep the initiative going. While looking at the following games, please note that many tactical sacrifices have a clear positional basis.

Our first example is one of the most instructive games ever played: Black incorporated a multitude of ideas – positional sacrifice, energetic play, and a formidable amount of over-the-board calculation.
Now White is at an important crossroads. He has to choose between the aggressive move 8.f4 and the more restrained move 8.f3. Kortchnoi played:

8. f2-f4!? 

After 8.f3 Qc6 White has many options, but the best one seems to be: 9.d5 Qe5 10.dxe6 c6 11.f4 Qg4 12.Qe3 (12.Qf3 Qxf3 13.gxf3 Qxf3+! with a voracious initiative) 12...Qxe4! 13.Qxe4 Qxe4 14.Qxg2 Qxg2 with equality.

8. ... Qb8-c6!

The only way to neutralize White’s opening aggression. 8...f5 looks interesting, but after 9.Qb3+ Qh8 10.e5 c6 11.Qf3 e6 12.Qe2 Qd5 13.Qxd5 cxd5 14.0-0 White has a huge positional advantage because of the chronic weakness of Black’s light-squared bishop and his huge lack of space.

9. d4-d5 Qc6-b5?!

I’m reluctant to call this a mistake, but it’s certainly very risky. The main move is 9...Qa5. Now, if White doesn’t take immediate action, Black will play ...c6 and White’s position will be at risk of completely collapsing. Therefore, White’s only move is 10.Qa4. Now the correct move is 10...e5! (on 10...c6,
11. \( \mathcal{N}xg7 \mathcal{N}xg7 12. b4! \mathcal{N}ac4 13. \mathcal{N}xc4 \mathcal{N}xc4 14. \mathcal{W}d4+ \text{ wins a piece} \) 11. \( \mathcal{N}xe5 \mathcal{N}xe5 12. fxe5 \mathcal{W}h4+ 13. g3 \mathcal{W}e7 \).

The main problem with the text move is that Black delays his development, while White has already placed most of his pieces on aggressive positions. Obviously, White does have to be careful not to miss ...\( c7-c6 \).

10. \( \mathcal{N}e3-d4?! \)

Returning the favor. The only way for White to exploit his advantage was by fighting for the initiative. In his \textit{ChessBase} annotations, grandmaster Michal Krasenkov gives a thorough analysis after the correct move 10.\( a4! \).

In a previous analysis of the game, I gave the variation 10.\( \mathcal{N}e3-f5?! \mathcal{N}g4? \)

11. \( \mathcal{N}d3 \mathcal{N}xf3 12. \mathcal{W}xf3 c6 13.0-0 \mathcal{N}xc3 14. bxc3 cxd5 15. \mathcal{N}ab1 \) with a very dangerous initiative. However, Black isn’t forced to give up his light-squared bishop. The significantly stronger 10...\( c6 \) leads to approximate equality after 11.\( dxc6 \mathcal{N}xc6 12. \mathcal{N}b5 \mathcal{N}g4 13.0-0 \mathcal{O}d4! \)

14. \( \mathcal{N}xd4 \mathcal{N}xf3 15. \mathcal{W}xf3 \mathcal{W}xd4++. \)

Thus, Krasenkov was absolutely correct.

The main idea of 10.\( a4 \) is to threaten the unpleasant \( a4-a5 \), horribly misplacing Black’s pieces. Therefore, Black has a dilemma: he can allow \( a4-a5 \), or try to make use of White’s risky pawn play. Again, he has many options, but we’ll examine his best option.

10...\( e5! \) It is absolutely crucial for Black to fight for the initiative. In the stem game of this variation, Gheorghiu-Ftcnik, Black achieved easy equality after 11.\( fxe5 \mathcal{N}xe5 12. \mathcal{N}if3 \mathcal{N}g4! \)

(Ftcnik even gives 12...\( \mathcal{N}xc3+ \)

13. \( hxc3 \mathcal{W}e8 14. \mathcal{W}d4 \mathcal{W}f5 \) as better for Black) 13. \( \mathcal{W}d2 \mathcal{N}xf3 14. gxf3 c6! 15. a5 \mathcal{O}c8 16. \mathcal{N}f4?! \) (this move appears to waste a tempo. After Black’s next move, White will find himself in a dangerous position. Better and safer is 16.\( \mathcal{N}d4 \), with approximate equality) 16...\( \mathcal{N}d6! \)

17. \( \mathcal{N}b3 \mathcal{O}d7++. \) and Gheorghiu realized that he was in trouble. Ftcnik masterfully converted his advantage into a brilliant win.

White’s best reply, however, is 11.\( a5! \), when his development advantage gives him a nagging initiative.

Therefore, the active 10.\( a4 \) would have lead to a position which was certainly better for White. I’m not sure what McShane intended to play in response to 10.\( a4 \).

10. ... \( \mathcal{N}g7-h6! \)

The most ambitious and best option, although the line 10...\( \mathcal{W}xd4 \) 11.\( \mathcal{W}xd4 c6 \) should also give Black equality.

11. \( \mathcal{W}d1-f3 \) \( c7-c6 \)

12. \( h2-h4?! \)

Kortchnoi decides to take drastic measures in order to refute McShane’s play, but this is met by a stunning reply. Instead, it was still not too late to consolidate his pieces by means of the simple
12. \( \text{d}1 \), after which the position would be about equal.

12. ... \( c6x\text{d}5 \)
13. \( e4x\text{d}5 \)

Now it's not clear how Black can stop the extremely unpleasant \( h4-h5 \). Let's try to reconstruct McShane's train of thought here:

"What a disaster! My opponent is threatening \( 14.h5 \), when I undoubtedly have no defense to the impending voracious attack. Of course, moves like 13...\( \text{h}8 \) do nothing. What about 13...\( \text{c}6 \)? Oh, it also seems to fail after the intermediate 14.\( \text{xe}6 \). What else can I do? Since my opponent is moving his pawns and not developing many pieces, maybe there is some strike in the center. I only have my \( e \)-pawn, so the only moves seem to be 13...\( c6 \) and 13...\( e5 \). 13...\( e6 \) seems to be slow, so why not 13...\( e5 \), forcing White to make another move with his bishop and opening up the e-file and \( h4-h3 \) diagonal for my bishop?"

Once you understand the essence of the position, the following move comes as no big surprise:

13. ... \( e7-e5!! \)

This is simply one of the best moves I have ever seen played in the opening. Suddenly, White's weaknesses become exposed! Notice that this sacrifice is by all means positional: Black sacrifices a pawn in order to finish his development with tempo and to expose White's hidden weaknesses. Kortchnoi, however, is not thrown off:

14. \( d4xe5! \)

Instead, 14.\( \text{xe}5? \) lost to 14...\( c6! \)
15.\( \text{xb}6 \) \( \text{xb}6 \) 16.\( dx\text{c}6 \) \( \text{xb}2 \), and after 17.\( \text{d}1 \) \( g4! \) White is mated (Krasenkow).

14. ... \( \text{b}8-d7 \)

Developing the knight and stopping 15.0-0-0, since after 15...\( \text{xe}5 \) the \( f \)-pawn will be pinned.

15. \( e5-d4 \) \( d7-f6 \)

As a result of the sacrifice, all of Black's pieces work together harmoniously. Also, it becomes clear that the \( g4 \)-square is irrevocably weakened (pawns don't move backwards!).

16. 0-0-0

Exploiting a nice tactical motif; 16...\( g4 \) fails to 17.\( \text{xf}6 \). Still, White's position is at risk of complete collapse. There are three main reasons for this:

A. The position of White's king is very precarious. After a future ...\( \text{f}5 \), it may be in dire straits;

B. The hole on \( g4 \) is a crucial factor in the assessment of the position. White
will constantly have to be on the lookout for ... privileges:

C. White’s pieces are still not fully developed. By the time he mobilizes them, Black will already be prepared to start a direct assault on the king. Kortchnoi perfectly understands this, and immediately starts taking emergency precautions.

16. ... \(\text{d}8-\text{d}6\)

Blockading the d5 pawn and simultaneously coordinating his rooks. It’s interesting to note that in good positions, it’s very easy to make a move that achieves many aims at once. Kortchnoi, though probably shocked by the sudden course of events, still doesn’t give in.

17. \(\text{d}4x\text{f}6\) \(\text{d}6x\text{f}6\)

Every move is played with great accuracy. Instead, the attractive 17...\(\text{xf}4+\)

18.\(\text{b}1 \text{xf}6\) would have lead only to approximate equality after 19.\(\text{d}3\)

\(\text{e}5\) (19...\(\text{f}5\) 20.\(\text{g}1\text{ge}2\) \(\text{xd}3+\)

21.\(\text{xd}3\) \(\text{e}5\) 22.\(\text{xf}6\) \(\text{xf}6\) 23.\(\text{c}e4\))

20.\(\text{xf}6\) \(\text{xf}6\) and now:

A) 21.\(\text{g}1\text{ge}2?!\) \(\text{g}7\) 22.\(\text{d}6\) \(\text{e}5\) gives Black an edge;

B) 21.\(\text{g}1\text{ge}2!\) \(\text{g}4\) 22.\(\text{e}4\) \(\text{e}5\) 23.\(\text{f}2\) leads to approximate equality.

18. \(g2-g3\) \(h6-g7\)

As if building a killer battery (g7+f6) was not enough, Black also threatens the dangerous 19...h5 followed by 20...\(\text{g}4\). Although White’s position isn’t critical yet, he has to play very carefully in order to survive.

Now, White has a very important dilemma. He can either stop 19...h5 by playing 19.h5 himself, or ignore the threat and play \(\text{h}3\) after Black plays ...h5. Kortchnoi plays:

19. \(\text{h}1-h2?\)

A very strange move. I’m very surprised that Kortchnoi didn’t choose the natural and correct 19.h5! Taking the variation a bit further, Black’s best bet is to obtain a quick counterattack after 19...\(\text{d}7\)

20.\(\text{h}x\text{g}6\) \(\text{h}x\text{g}6\) 21.\(\text{h}3\) \(\text{h}xh3\) 22.\(\text{g}3\) \(\text{h}3\) \(\text{c}4!\); when, despite Deep Fritz 10’s evaluation of “clearly better for White,” I’m pretty sure that most players would prefer to be Black here. Also good is 19...\(\text{d}6!?)\) 20.\(\text{g}1\text{ge}2\) \(\text{c}5\) 21.\(\text{b}1\)

\(\text{c}4\) with a strong counterattack. Overall, White certainly wasn’t better after 19.h5, but at least the position would have been double-edged and not clearly in Black’s favor.

19. ... \(h7-h5\)

20. \(\text{f}1-h3\)

This is the only move, as 20.\(\text{e}2\) \(\text{g}4!\)

(20...\(\text{f}5?)\) 21.\(\text{d}3\) \(\text{f}5\) 22.\(\text{d}2\)

\(\text{ac}8\) 23.\(\text{f}3\) \(\text{xd}5!\) 24.\(\text{xd}5\) \(\text{xc}3+\)

loses quickly.

20. ... \(\text{b}6-c4\)

This was McShane’s intention when playing 19...h5. Now, the pressure on b2 is very strong, and Black needs only a few moves in order to build up a decisive attack. However, White, in the little
time he has, builds a very strong defensive cocoon around his king, which proves to be surprisingly tough to crack.

21. ... $c1-b1

When I came across this game, the first thing that came to my mind was the move 21...$xb2??, which, surprisingly, all of the commentators (McShane, Rowson, Krasenkow) fail to mention. Obviously, McShane's move was no worse, but 21...$xb2 certainly deserves attention. It doesn't take long to see that both of White's options lead to a bad position:

A) 22.$xb2?? $b6+ 23.$c1 $xc3! 24.$xc3 $xh3 is horrible for White, as 25.$xh3 or 25.$xc3 both fail to 25...$ac8, winning the queen;

B) 22.$xb2! is much better, although the position after 22...$xh3 (not 22...$g4??, which was recommended in my previous analysis of the game, since the position after 23.$xg4 $xg4 24.$d3 $xc3 25.$xc3 $xc3 26.$xb7 is completely unclear) 23.$xh3 $f5+ 24.$c2 $ac8! 25.$d3 $xh3 is without doubt excellent for Black. White's king is very weak, while his pawn structure is in ruins.

22. $f3-d3 $f6-a6

The ambitious 22...b5?! looks interesting, but gives White a chance to bail out with 23.d6 $xh3 24.$xh3 $ad8 25.d7 $e3 26.$d5! $xb2+ 27.$xb2 $xd3 28.$xd3 $xb2 29.$d2 $c4 with a repetition of moves. McShane obviously wanted more than a draw.

23. $h3xc8

This is the only move, as playing 23.$f1 fails to 23...$f5, winning the queen.

23. ... $a8xc8

The intermezzo move 23...$e3? failed to 24.$xb7! $xb7 25.$xc4 $xc3 26.$e4 $xg3 27.$f3, and it is White who has an edge.

24. $h2-e2

This should have lost quickly, but one can't recommend anything better. The only other viable move is 24.$ge2, but Black wins quickly with 24...$b6 and following 25...$b4 White's position collapses like a house of cards.

24. ... $e8xe2

Now, b2 is weakened and the g7 bishop starts sinking its teeth into the c3 knight. White doesn't have time to consolidate because Black makes threats on every move!

25. $g1xe2 $a6-b6

26. b2-b3 $c4-a3+

27. $b1-b2 $a3-b5

28. $d1-c1 $b6-c5

29. d5-d6?!

This is White's only chance, although he is already lost. Other moves lost to
simpler refutations, although I found the variation 29...\(\text{g}6b1\) @a3+ (29...\(\text{c}xc3+!!) 30.\(\text{w}e8\) 31.d6 \(\text{g}b5\) rather amusing.

McShane, who so far has played the game brilliantly, now misses an extremely simple winning tactic and plays:

\[ 29. \ldots \text{\(g\)b5xc3} \]

It's amazing that McShane missed not one but two forced wins, which were not at all hard to calculate:

A) 29...\(\text{w}a3+\) 30.\(\text{w}b1\) \(\text{g}xc3+\) 31.\(\text{w}xc3\) \(\text{g}xc3\) 32.\(\text{g}xc3 \text{w}c5\):

B) 29...\(\text{e}e8\) 30.d7 \(\text{xe}2+\) 31.\(\text{w}xe2\) \(\text{g}xc3+\) 32.\(\text{f}c2\) \(\text{g}a3+\), mating in two moves. After McShane's lapse, Kortchnoi gets a chance to consolidate, and unfortunately, McShane will have to convert his advantage all over again.

\[ 30. \text{\(g\)e2xc3} \quad \text{\(f\)c8-d8} \]

\[ 31. \text{d6-d7} \quad \text{\(w\)c5-c6} \]

Black still has a big advantage, but the game is prolonged for another 25 moves. This game was, in grandmaster Andy Soltis's words, "A Botched Brilliance."

\[ 32. \text{\(f\)b2-b1} \quad \text{\(w\)d3-e4} \]

\[ 33. \text{\(w\)d3-e4} \]

\[ 33. \ldots \text{\(w\)d7-c7!} \]

McShane isn't demoralized by his slip and again makes an exceptionally strong move. Krasenkov correctly mentions that instead, the tempting 33...\(\text{w}d6\) would have lead to a perpetual after 34.\(\text{e}d1\) \(\text{w}f6\) 35.\(\text{e}e8+\) \(\text{g}h7\) 36.\(\text{w}xd7\) \(\text{w}xc3\) 37.\(\text{e}d2\) \(\text{w}a1+\) 38.\(\text{w}c2\) \(\text{w}xa2+\) 39.\(\text{e}d1\) \(\text{w}xb3+\) 40.\(\text{g}e2\) \(\text{w}xg3\) 41.\(\text{w}xf7\). The endgame will be lost for White due to the chronic weakness of the f4-g3-h4 pawn structure.

\[ 34. \text{\(w\)e4xc6} \quad \text{\(w\)c7xc6} \]

\[ 35. \text{\(e\)c3-d5} \quad \text{\(c\)c6xc1+} \]

\[ 36. \text{\(w\)b1xc1} \quad \text{\(g\)g7-d4!} \]

Although Kortchnoi has defended against the attack, the ending is completely hopeless. Black will centralize his king, and the attack on both flanks will prove deadly for White. Kortchnoi tries hard to find counterchances, but in such positions, the tandem of King with long-range Bishop is practically always superior to the King + Knight tandem.

\[ 37. \text{\(c\)c1-d2} \quad \text{\(g\)g9-f8} \]

\[ 38. \text{\(d\)d5-e3} \quad \text{\(f\)f8-e7} \]

\[ 39. \text{\(d\)d2-d3} \quad \text{\(d\)d4-c5} \]

\[ 40. \text{\(d\)d3-e4} \quad \text{\(e\)e7-f6} \]

\[ 41. \text{\(e\)e3-c4} \quad \text{\(f\)f6-e6} \]
Black has centralized his king, and it becomes clear that White cannot defend both flanks at once.

42. \( \text{c4-a5} \) f7-f5+
43. \( \text{e4-f3} \) b7-b5
44. \( \text{a5-c6} \)

44. \( \ldots \) \( \text{e6-d5!} \)
45. \( \text{c6-e5} \) \( \text{d5-d4} \)
46. \( \text{e5xg6} \) \( \text{d4-c3} \)
47. \( \text{g6-e5} \) a7-a5
48. \( \text{f3-e2} \) c5-b6
49. \( \text{e5-c6} \) c3-b2
50. \( \text{b3-b4} \) a5-a4
51. \( \text{e2-d3} \) b2xa2
52. \( \text{d3-c2} \) a2-a3
53. \( \text{c6-e7} \) a3xb4
54. \( \text{e7xf5} \) a4-a3
55. \( \text{g3-g4} \) h5xg4
56. \( \text{h4-h5} \) g4-g3

White resigned.

Let's quickly summarize the most important points we have learned from this game:

A. Usually, in dynamic openings such as the Grünfeld, making a lot of moves with one piece is not a good idea (McShane's \( \ldots \text{c6} \) \( \ldots \text{b8} \) gave Kortchnoi a rather unpleasant initiative).

B. When you are under an opening attack but your opponent has not yet developed most of his pieces, look for blows in the center that will open up files and diagonals for your pieces and disrupt the coordination of your opponent's.

C. Whenever your opponent is hanging on the precipice, look for finishing blows. If you procrastinate with the decisive invasion, your opponent may often have time to consolidate his position (in this particular endgame, Black was still winning, but in other cases the defending side might manage to escape into a drawn or even better endgame).

D. Usually, in knight vs. bishop endgames with pawns on both flanks, the knight has a very hard time since it cannot defend both flanks at the same time, while the bishop can attack them simultaneously.

In the next game, White produces an incredible piece sacrifice out of the blue, and the only thing he will seem to get is a space advantage!
Chapter 4: Positional Sacrifice

Romanishin
Petrovian
Yerevan 1975
English,
Hedgehog Structure (A17)

1. c2-c4  \( \text{d8-f6} \)
2. b2-b3  e7-e6
3. \( \text{g1-f3} \)  b7-b6
4. e2-e4  c8-b7

5. \( \text{f1-d3?!} \)

This is probably the only move in the position that makes Black work hard to equalize. Instead, the tempting move 5...e5?! is met by 5...\( \text{dxe4} \!), when White’s “initiative” is a mere illusion.

Barsauskas-Boleslavsky, Minsk 1957, was drawn quickly after 6.d3?!  g5 7.e2  xf3+ 8.xf3  xf3 9.xf3  c6 10.xe4  c5 11.d3?! (11.\( \text{c2} \)  b4 12.c3 with equality) 11...f5! 12.exf6  xf6 13.0-0 0-0 14.e3  d4 15.xd4  xd4 16.xd4  0-0 17.ac1 and a draw was agreed.

5. ...  d7-d6

Petrovian decides to stick with the Hedgehog, although the move 5...d5, completely changing the pawn structure, deserved serious attention. After 6.cxd5 exd5 7.e5  c4 17...xf7?! 8.0-0, and now if 8.e7 9.e6! xe6 10.xd4  c5 11.wh5+ with a very strong attack. White is now at a major crossroads, but let’s take a look at his best line: 8.b5! With this annoying check, White completely disrupts the harmony between Black’s pieces. After 8...c6 9.\( \text{c2} \)  e7 10.d4 0-0 11.\( \text{d3} \) c5 12.0-0 White retains an edge. Obviously, this doesn’t mean that 5...d5 is a bad option – it just seems that the whole line with 5.d3 gives White a slight edge, no matter what line Black chooses.

6. \( \text{d3-c2} \)

Clearing the road for the d4 pawn. After both sides develop, the bishop on c2 will be located very well, since in case of a sacrifice on d5 its strength will increase exponentially (especially in conjunction with the dark-squared bishop).

6. ...  c7-c5
7. d2-d4  c5xd4
8. c3xd4  f8-e7
9. 0-0  0-0
10. b2-b3

The position looks like a typical Hedgehog, but it nevertheless contains some subtleties. The main thing that comes to mind is the placement of the c2 bishop: it defends e4 and can help launch an offensive along the b1-h7 diagonal.
10. ... \( \text{b8-c6} \)

It seems more natural to place the knight on d7, but after 10...\( \text{bd7} \) 11.\( \text{b2} \) a6 12.\( \text{h1} \), White still retains some advantage. Simic-Adamski, Vrnjaka Banja 1984, continued 12...\( \text{ae8} \) 13.\( \text{f4} \) \( \text{f8} \) 14.\( \text{f3} \) g6 15.\( \text{h3} \) (in such cases it's very important to immediately start the attack on Black's king, when Black is still unprepared) 15...e5?! 16.\( \text{fxe5} \) \( \text{exe5} \) 17.\( \text{f3} \) with a pleasant edge.

11. \( \text{c1-b2} \) a7-a6
12. \( \text{g1-h1?} \)

Romanishin is preparing \( f2-f4 \). Another option was 12.\( \text{xc6} \) \( \text{xc6} \) 13.\( \text{d3} \), which is a great alternative to the text. Spraggett-Ivanov, Montreal 1983, continued 13...b5?! 14.\( \text{d5!} \) bxc4 15.bxc4 e5 16.\( \text{a3} \) with a clear advantage. Thus, Romanishin's idea was not the only one that gives White a preferable position.

13. \( \text{f2-f4} \)
14. \( \text{a1-c1} \)

It is time to draw some conclusions about the opening. Black has built a typical Hedgehog structure, while White has placed his pieces ambitiously and is ready to start attacking.

However, the main idea of the Hedgehog is to lure White into attacking prematurely, which will be met by a timely ...b5 or ...d5 break, and his position will collapse. Understanding this, Romanishin figured out that instead of 14.\( \text{c1} \) the move 14.\( \text{f3} \) was risky in view of 14...\( \text{xd4} \) 15.\( \text{xd4} \) \( d5 \), when White has many options, all of which lead to dangerous positions.

However, what is White's idea after 14...\( \text{c1} \)? One possibility is to prepare \( \text{f3-h3} \), but the problem with this plan is that the move \( \text{f3} \) will place the rook under the x-ray of the bishop and make many tactical shots possible. Thus, a more economical plan has to be found.

At this point, Romanishin realized that the position of Black's knight (on c6) allowed a very nice positional sacrifice: \( \text{d5} \). However, for now this doesn't achieve anything concrete. White would have to wait until Black played something along the lines of ...g6, weakening the long diagonal. Petrovian played the stereotypical Hedgehog move:

14. ... \( \text{c7-b8} \)

Only to be quickly met by:

15. \( \text{f1-f3} \)

Romanishin doesn't necessarily want to play \( \text{h3} \) — his idea is to provoke a weakening move. Petrovian, unaware of Romanishin's hidden idea, decides to play:

15. ... \( g7-g6?! \)
Chapter 4: Positional Sacrifice

Missing his chance to equalize. The typical move 15...d5! would have equalized on the spot after 16.cxd5 Өxd4 17.QWidget=2d5 Qxd5 18.WidgetItem=3d5 Qxd5 19.exd5 Qxd5 20.Wxc3 Wc8.

Lo and behold, Romanishin played:

16. 辘c3-d5!!

![Diagram](image)

Although in itself this sacrifice is rather typical for these lines, in this position it seems completely absurd. White sacrifices a knight for only a pawn and a space advantage.

In truth, Romanishin’s idea is much subtler than one would think. The main point is to exploit the weakness of the a1-h8 diagonal. Although White will not have anything concrete, Black will be very cramped and has a hard time neutralizing White’s huge pressure.

Notice that even though Romanishin doesn’t have a clear-cut plan, he knows that the sacrifice is completely sound. The paradox is that the extra piece won’t really make a tangible difference in Black’s position! Petrov obviously accepted the sacrifice:

16. ... 辘e6xd5
17. e4xd5

Interestingly, ChessBase gives the move 17...f5? as winning. However, after Kasparov’s 17...dxe4! (17...gf5 18.g3+ 辘g4 19.Wxg4+) 18.WidgetItem=7xe7+ (18.WidgetItem=7xe4 d5! 19.cxd5 Qxf5 20.Wg3+ WidgetItem=9xh8 21.Qxe6 WidgetItem=7xe6 22.Wd4 Qd6! (22...fxe4 23.Wxf6+) 23.qxe6 Qxd4) 18...WidgetItem=7xe7 19.Wd4 d5! 20.Wxf6 d4 Black has a clear advantage. Thus, Romanishin made the only correct move, avoiding a very tempting trap which none of the commentators saw.

17. ...
18. Wd1xd4 Qd8-e8!

Petrov is demonstrating his usual wonderful defensive tenacity. Other moves were clearly worse:

A) 18...b5 19.g4 Qa8 20.WidgetItem=7e4! (much weaker is 20.g5?, which only leads to a draw after 20...WidgetItem=9xd5 21.cxd5QWidget=2xd5 22.qxf6 QWidget=9xf3+ 23.Wg1 Qg4+) 20...WidgetItem=7fe8 21.g5 WidgetItem=7e8 22.qxf6 QWidget=7f8 23.f5 WidgetItem=7xe4 24WidgetItem=7xe4 WidgetItem=7xf5 25WidgetItem=7xf5 gxf5 26WidgetItem=7g1+ WidgetItem=9h8 27WidgetItem=7e1, winning;

B) 18...h6 is strongly met by 19.g4! Qc8 20.g5 hxg5 21WidgetItem=7e3! (not 21.fxg5?, which only leads to a draw after 21...QWidget=2g4 22WidgetItem=7xd6 QWidget=2xd4) with a won position. Petrov clearly had to calculate all of this in time pressure, which was not an easy task.

19. f4-f5!?

This is a bit premature and overambitious. According to Romanishin and Mikhailchishin, the correct move was the dangerous 19.g4!, setting the board on fire and forcing Black to find a viable defense. The correct reply is 19...QWidget=2a8, but after 20WidgetItem=7d3 WidgetItem=7d8 21WidgetItem=7d2 QWidget=2c8 22.g5 QWidget=2h3 23WidgetItem=7g1WidgetItem=7e3 24.qxf6, due to his gigantic initiative, White is clearly better.

19. ...
20. Wd4-h4 Qe7-d8
20. QWidget=2d4-h4 Qe8-e5!
Petrosian immediately pounces on the opportunity created by 19.f5. Both 20...Rx d5 21.Wxc7+ Wx c7 22.Wh3+ and 20...Rx g7 21.Wxf1 We2 22.fx g6 Rx c2 23.Wx h7# weren’t variations Petrosian wanted to go for.

21. Wh4-h6

When you have no clear-cut way to continue, it’s very important to stop and think for a while. In this case, Petrosian has many moves, all of which need to be carefully scrutinized and calculated. As we have learned in chapter one, we should first ask ourselves: “What would my opponent do if it were his move?” Clearly, the answer is Wh3. Therefore, a defense has to be found. Let’s try to imagine how an experienced defender might think in such positions:

“I am up material, but my opponent is threatening Kg3 or Wh3. Therefore, action has to be taken. Clearly, passive moves such as 21...Rx c8 or 21...Wh7 can be ruled out immediately. I do have 21...Wh e8, but that fails to 22.fx g6 hxg6 23.fx g6 with a decisive attack. What else can I do? Of course, I can somehow repel the queen from h6, but how? 21...Qg4 seems to be an option. Then, on 22.Wh3 I’ll simply go back, and the h3-square will be blocked, while the move Kg3 will lose all effectiveness. On something like 22.Wf4, the purpose of the whole queen sortie is lost!”

Petrosian, probably caught unawares by Romanishin’s aggressive queen move, panicked and played the illogical:

21. ... Wh b8-c7?

which should have led to a quick loss. A quick draw could have and should have been forced by means of 21...Qg4! 22.Wh3 Qf6, when White has nothing better than to repeat the moves by means of 23.Wh6. Certainly, a draw would have been a fitting ending to this heroic battle, but apparently Caissa decided otherwise.

22. f3-g3 b7-c8

Even in a lost position Petrosian continues to show defensive prowess. Both 22...Qe4 23.fx e5 Qxg3+ 24.Qx g3 and 22...Qe8 23.Qf1 Qf6 24.Wh3 lose without a battle.

23. b2xe5 d6xe5

At first glance, it seems that Black has defended and stands perfectly well. However, Romanishin demonstrates another brilliant tactical resource.

24. f5xg6 f7xg6

25. c2xg6!

Blasting open Black’s king and unleashing an unbearable attack. Nevertheless, Petrosian fights until the very end.
Chapter 4: Positional Sacrifice

25. ... Qf6-g4!
The tempting 25...hxg6 lost quickly to 26. hxg6+ fxg6 27. Kg2+ Kg8 28. Bxc7 Kxc7 29. f1 + Ke7 30. h3.

26. Kg5-h5 Qf8-f6
27. Wh6-d2

White's attack is simply huge. Even someone who has recently learned the moves of the game would realize this; Black's king is completely naked, and the weakness of the g-file is killing him. The game is objectively over.

27. ... Qf6-f4
28. d5-d6 Qc7-g7
29. d6-d7?

This gives Black unnecessary defensive chances. The straightforward 29. hxg4 Qxg4 30. h3 Qd4 31. Wxd4 exd4 32. hxg4 Qg5 33. d7 won on the spot.

A great end to a phenomenal game. Crushing Petrosian in 30 moves is a task not every player can achieve!

This game shows how intuitive sacrifices of a substantial amount of material do not have to be completely calculated; as long as you have some kind of idea how to continue, you can go for the sacrifice. However, if you have sacrificed a piece you have to be very careful and look out for counterchances for your opponent, sometimes by returning the material.

In the following game, Black uncorked a brilliant sacrifice, following it up with a few fantastic moves. Unfortunately, when he reached the culminating point, ego and celebration took over rational thinking.

☐ Shabalov
☐ D. Gurevich

New York 1998
English Defense,
Benoni Declined (A31)

1. d2-d4 Qg8-f6
2. c2-c4 c7-c5
3. Qg1-f3

... c5xd4
4. Qf3xd4 e7-e5

This attempt to avoid the Benko Gambit and the Benoni Defense usually leads to Hedgehog types of positions. In this game, Gurevich opted for a sharp gambit that has been subject to theoretical debate for many years.
The idea of this gambit is to obtain fast piece coordination and to make use of White’s lag in development. The main drawback is that if Black doesn’t manage to get tangible compensation, the passed (and possibly protected after a later e4) pawn on d5 will say its word. Therefore, this gambit is certainly not for the cowardly.

7. \textit{\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{c6-b5}}}} \textit{\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{d7-d5}}}}
8. \textit{\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{e2-e3}}}} \textit{\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{e5-e4}}}}
9. \textit{\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{f1-e2}}}}

Already, Black is at an important crossroads. The two main moves in the position are \texttt{9...\textcolor{red}{\texttt{\textbf{Wf8-e7}}}} and \texttt{9...\textcolor{red}{\texttt{\textbf{Wc8-e8}}}}. Gurevich played:

9. ... \textit{\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{Wd8-e7}}}}

The positions after \texttt{9...\textcolor{red}{\texttt{\textbf{Wc8-e8}}}} are double-edged, but the general consensus seems to be that White has an edge after either 10.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\texttt{\textbf{Wd2}}}} or 10.a3.

10. \textit{\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{a2-a3}}}} \textit{\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{Wf8-d8}}}}

On 10...a5 White has 11.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\texttt{\textbf{Wd2}}}}, when the light squares are very weak. Sokolovs-Andrienko, Jurmala 1991, continued 11...\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\texttt{\textbf{Wd8}}}} 12.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\texttt{\textbf{Wc2}}}} \textit{\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{Wf5}}}} 13.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\texttt{\textbf{Whb3}}}} \texttt{\textcolor{red}{\texttt{\textbf{Wxd5}}}} 14.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\texttt{\textbf{Wxd5}}}} \textit{\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{Wxd5}}}} 15.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\texttt{\textbf{c4}}}} with an edge. Thus, Black cannot waste time. This variation isn’t played too much nowadays because a pawn is too much of a material investment for the dynamic initiative, which usually fizzles out quickly.

11. \textit{\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{0-0}}}}

Interestingly, at the time Shabalov played this move, it was a novelty. Instead, Lautier-Illescas Cordoba, Linares 1995, saw 11.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\texttt{\textbf{b4!}}}} 11...\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\texttt{\textbf{d6}}}} 12.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\texttt{\textbf{Wb2}}}} 13.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\texttt{\textbf{Wf5}}}} 14.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\texttt{\textbf{Wxe6}}}} 15.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\texttt{\textbf{Wxf4}}}} 16.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\texttt{\textbf{Wxe4}}}} is a bit better for White, Rotstein-Stranjakovitch, Paris 1992. 12.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\texttt{\textbf{Wb2}}}} 13.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\texttt{\textbf{Wc8}}}}! This novelty essentially refuted the whole line with 11.b4. The game continued 13.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\texttt{\textbf{Wb3}}}} \texttt{\textcolor{red}{\texttt{\textbf{Wbd7}}}} 14.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\texttt{\textbf{Wd2}}}} 15.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\texttt{\textbf{Wf1}}}} 16.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\texttt{\textbf{Wc4}}}} (Lautier fights for the initiative, but Black’s pieces are optimally mobilized in order to neutralize White’s temporary activity) 16.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\texttt{\textbf{Wxc4}}}} 17.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\texttt{\textbf{Wxc4}}}} 18.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\texttt{\textbf{Wb3}}}} a6 and the position is roughly equal, although following a few blunders Illescas managed to steamroll Lautier.

The idea of the text move is very simple: White develops his pieces and wants to neutralize Black’s initiative. Gurevich, after some thought, decided to permanently stop the nagging threat of b2-b4.
11. ... a7-a5?!  
As I already mentioned, in this variation ...a5 is usually too slow and results in White emerging with an extra pawn for no compensation. Instead, Black had to immediately finish his development with 11...a5, after which the position would be extremely complicated. Let’s take a look at White’s best option:  
12.b4! In order to retain the extra pawn, White has to play very energetically. Nevertheless, after 12...d6 13.b2 We5! 14.g3 h3 15.e1 Wf5, White’s position seems to be pretty dangerous because of the weakness of f3. Black’s plan is quite simple: ...Qb7-a5, when he will be dominating. However, after the accurate 16.Qd2, 16...Qbd7 is met by 17.Wc2, when the position after 17...Qe5 is double-edged and unclear. Overall, the move 11...a5 retains good, solid compensation for the pawn, and in order not to come under a powerful attack, White needs to play very carefully and accurately:

12. Qb1-d2!  
Immediately pouncing on Black’s mistake. The main idea of this move is that 12...Qxg5 is no good after the simple 13.Qxe4, when the crazy 13...Qxe3?? loses after 14.fxe3 Qxe3+ 15.Qh1 Qxd2 16.Qxd2. Gurevich, realizing his mistake, plays:

12. ... Qc8-f5  
But unfortunately the damage is already done. Shabalov has an extra tempo compared with 12...Qxd5 – which is a lot, considering that one move in this variation can change the whole evaluation of the position.  

13. Wd1-b3!  
Shabalov plays very accurately and energetically. Note that the tempting 13.Qc4? only leads to equality after 13...Qe5!.

13. ... h7-h5  
14. Qd2-c4 a8-a6!  
One has to give credit to Gurevich for his defense. It’s not easy to switch from confident to “uh-oh, I’m about to lose” in one move and keep defending. At this point, Shabalov, thinking that he had nothing to fear on the kingside, played the absolutely natural:

15. h1-d1?  
The problem with this move is that suddenly, White doesn’t have ANY pieces defending the kingside. The root of the mistake was purely psychological. Realizing that he had an advantage, Shabalov completely forgot that the fight is still ahead and that Black has very real counterchances. He also probably underestimated the hidden idea of 14...a6 – the rook may become useful in a future attack, as it could easily transfer to g6. After Gurevich played

15. ... Qf6-g4!  
Shabalov sank into thought. Before we go any further, the best 15th move, as grand-
master Igor Stohl correctly points out in his ChessBase analysis, was 15...ga4. From now until the end of the variation is Stohl’s analysis: 15...g4 (15...x5d5 16.6c6; 15...x5d5 16.6xc5 6xc5 17.6xb7 with a slight edge for White; 15...a7? 16.d6 with a clear advantage) 16.6xg4 hxg4 17.6d2 with a slight edge for White. Shabalov, still unsure what exactly Gurevich had in mind, played the natural-looking:

16. h2-h3

However, it’s hard to recommend anything better, as after the alternative 16.6xg4, Black has 16...x5g4 17.6d2 6g6, and if 18.6h1, 18...6f3! 19.gxf3 6g5 wins immediately.

Now, turning back with 16...6f6 makes no sense, but what else to do?

Let’s try to understand how Gurevich thought here:

“What a mess! I’m down a pawn, my pieces are hanging, and d5-d6 threats are hanging in the air. Of course, I can’t play 16...6f6, what else? What if I turn into Tal for a second and play 16...6xf2? Well, White takes. Then what? Wait, since my rook is on a6 waiting to go to g6, I can expose the king’s position even further with 17...6h3. Then, my pieces will come into action with great effect!”

No wonder he played:

16. ... 6g4xf2!!

What could be the idea of this move? First of all, I will spare the reader hours of analysis by saying that there is no mate after this move. The idea of the sacrifice is to simply spike up the position and achieve counterplay. Black gets an attack, but that’s kind of the by-product of the sacrifice. The main point is that the extra piece doesn’t make a difference — all of Black’s pieces are activated, while half of White’s army is sleeping. After the obvious:

17. 6g1xf2

Black has to find a way to stop White’s consolidation. White wants to play 6e1, and if 17...6h4, he simply plays 18.g3 6xh3 19.6xb7 followed by 6e1 with a won position. Gurevich, understanding this, unleashes another brilliant sacrifice:

17. ... 6f5×h3!!

Words simply cannot describe the depth and strength of this whole combination. 18.gxh3 loses to 18...6h4+ 19.6g2 6g6+, and it suddenly becomes unclear what to do.

I feel that now is a good time to discuss the difference between speculative sacrifices and concrete sacrifices. Usually,
inexperienced players have the tendency of fearing to sacrifice when they cannot calculate until the very end. However, often the only way strong players can be beaten is by sacrificing for long-term, static compensation. For instance, in the previous example, Black sacrificed a pawn in order to statically weaken White’s piece coordination. In the game we are presently examining, Black sacrificed two (!) pieces for static compensation! Of course, that is very hard to do, but if you don’t convince yourself that the sacrifice is sound, you will never be able to go for the risk!

Thus, speculative sacrifices are sacrifices where you do not give material for dynamic compensation, but for a long-term plus. We will be examining mostly these sacrifices, as they are the ones that are the hardest to master. Concrete sacrifices, on the other hand, involve giving up a piece for some form of quick, short attack, which leads to some kind of transformation of the position. Therefore, amateur players feel more comfortable sacrificing for dynamic compensation. As you will see in the following games, speculative sacrifices are often very effective and unpleasant to face.

18. \( \text{B} \text{e}2\text{-f1}\)!

White had numerous alternatives. Let’s take a look:

A) 18.\( \text{Be}1 \text{Bxg2} 19.\text{Bxd2} \) is certainly an interesting option. White evacuates his king, but after 19...h4! it’s not exactly clear how to stop the h-pawn. White is best advised to play 20.\text{Bxc2 h3 21.\text{Be1}}, but after 21...\text{g6} 22.\text{Bd2 h2} Black is clearly better;

B) 18.\( \text{Ba4} \) is what Fritz 10 likes at first, but a quick analysis reveals that after 18...\text{Wh4+ 19.g3 Wh6+ 20.Be1 Whxg3+ 21.Bd2 Whf2} Black is close to winning;

C) 18.d6! is the strongest alternative. The idea is to temporarily intercept Black’s pieces from the kingside. Black’s best idea is to play 18...\text{Bxd6}, when his raging attack continues. After 19.\text{Bxd6 Bxh3 20.Bxh6 Bxh6 21.Wc4 Wh4+} Black is slightly better. Still, this was White’s most promising alternative. The main problem with the move in the game is that White cannot move his king to e1 anymore.

18. ... \text{We7-h4+}
19. \text{Bf2-g1 Aa6-f6}
20. \text{Wb3-c2}

The only move, as 20.gxh3 fails to 20...\text{Wg3+ 21.Bh1 Wh2}.

20. ... \text{Bh3-g4}
21. \text{Bc3xe4}

At first sight, it seems that Black can resign. Everything is hanging, and he is a piece down. First of all, 21...\text{Bxd1} loses immediately to 22.\text{Bxd1+ Whxh6 23.Wxd1}. However, what else can Black do? Gurevich finds an interesting idea: if he can move the rook to a good square, after 22.\text{Bxc5 Bxd1 23.Wd2 (23.Wxd1 Wh2+ 24.Bh2 Wh4 mate) 23...Bxf1+ 24.Bxf1 Wxc4+} Black will
have a strong attack. Unfortunately, it seems like all of Black's rook moves fail to something else. All of them, that is, except for:

**21. ...**  
\$f6-f4!!

An astounding resource, after which it turns out that Black's attack becomes even more ferocious. The main idea of this move, besides the fact that other moves simply lose, is to exert pressure on the e4 knight, pushing White to find a defense. Let's take a look at Black's other options:

A) **21...\$g6?** loses to **22.\$xc5 \$xd1 23.\$xd1 \$h3 24.e4** when the three pieces should be enough to overpower the rook;

B) **21...\$f5** also loses, this time to the more simple **22.\$xc5 \$xd1 23.\$xf5!**. Shabalov, disappointed by the sudden turn of events, played:

**22. \$c4xa5?**

which should have been the decisive mistake. Instead, White had many different moves, all of which presented Black with some challenge. Let's take a look:

A) **22.g3 \$xd1 23.gxh4 (23.\$xd1 \$xf1+! 24.\$xf1 \$xe4) 23...\$g4+ 24.\$xf2 \$xd5 with an edge and an attack;**

B) **22.\$e2 \$xe2 23.\$xe2 \$xe4 24.b3 \$c6! nearly winning for Black;**

C) **22.\$d4!** seems to be the best move, when after **22...\$xd4 23.exd4 \$xf1+ 24.\$xf1 \$f5 25.\$g5! \$xg5 26.\$xg5 \$xe2 27.\$e3 \$g6 28.\$c1 \$a6! Black is slightly better;**

D) **22.\$cd6?!** is interesting, but after **22...\$xd1 23.\$xc5 \$xe4! 24.\$d2! \$a4 25.\$xa5 \$xd6 26.\$xd6 \$c7 followed by ...\$f6-g4 or ...\$g5 if \$h2, I simply cannot see a way how White can consolidate in time.

**22. ...**  
\$g4xd1

**23. \$c2xd1**

A horrible tactical oversight after which the tables turn in White's favor. All Black needed in order to win was to find a few strong resources. The correct sequence was **23.\$xe4 24.\$xb7 \$a7**, after which White has the following options:

A) **25.\$d3 \$de8 26.\$d6 \$xe3 27.\$xe3 \$xe3+ (Stohl);**

B) **25.\$f3 \$c8! 26.\$d6 \$xc1 27.\$xc1 \$xe3+;**

C) **25.\$xd8 \$xe3 26.\$a4, and now Black has the extremely picturesque finish 26...\$h3+ 27.\$xa7 \$h1 mate.**

This would certainly have been a fitting end to this brilliant game, but unfortunately, as often happens, one mistake completely botches all other brilliant moves. Shabalov immediately pounced on Black's blunder:

**24. \$d1xf1 \$h4xe4**

**25. \$a5xb7 \$d8xd5**

**26. \$b7xc5 \$e4-c2?!**

After this mistake, White's advantage grows decisive. However, since this was
probably Gurevich’s intention when he played 23...hx f1+, it’s hard to criticize him. Instead, after 26...hx f3 27.hx f3
Wh4 28.d2 White has a large advantage, but Black can at least fight.

27. Wh f1-f4!

This is the move Gurevich had missed. He is simply a piece down now, and there’s no attack in sight. The rest is relatively simple, although Gurevich does generate some counterplay.

27. ... b8-c6
28. c5-e4 c2-d1+
29. g1-h2 c6-e5
30. e4-f2 d1-f1
31. e3-e4 d5-d3
32. f2xd3 e5-g4+
33. h2-g3 f1xd3+
34. f4-f3 d3-d8
35. c1-f4 g7-g5
36. a1-f1 f7-f6
37. g3-h3 d8-d7
38. f4xg5 g4-e3+
39. h3-h2 e3xf1+
40. f3xf1 f6xg5
41. f1-f5 d7-d6+
42. e4-e5 d6-d2
43. f5-c8+ 1-0

It’s clear that Black deserved to win this game, but on the other hand, one has to give credit to Shabalov for being very resilient and facing Gurevich with many problems, which he wasn’t able to solve in time trouble. When you’re down material, you cannot make a single mistake, since your opponent can simply defend and end up with extra material.

The following positional sacrifice took place when it seemed like the position was completely equal and harmless for Black. Unlike the previous game, White played impeccably and didn’t allow his opponent even a semblance of counterplay.

[Nikolic Van Wely]
Rotterdam 1998

English,
Hedgehog Structure (A30)

1. g1-f3 g8-f6
2. c2-c4 c7-c5
3. g2-g3 b7-b6
4. f1-g2 c8-b7
5. 0-0 e7-e6

6. b1-c3 f8-e7
7. d2-d4

In Romanishin-Petrosian, Romanishin played the more ambitious 7.e1 here. Obviously, there is nothing wrong with the text move, but it gives Black a pretty comfortable Hedgehog position.

7. ... c5xd4
8. d1xd4

139
Instead, the innocuous 8...\( \text{Qxd4} \) leads to complete equality after the well-known 8...\( \text{Qxg2} \) 9.\( \text{hxg2} \) \( \text{Qc8} \) 10.\( \text{Qd3} \) \( \text{Qc6} \) 11.\( \text{b3} \) 0-0 12.\( \text{Qb2} \) \( \text{Qd8} \) 13.\( \text{Qac1} \) \( \text{Qxd4} \) 14.\( \text{Qxd4} \) \( \text{Qc5} \) 15.\( \text{Qf4} \) \( \text{Qb7}+ \) 16.\( \text{Qg1} \) \( \text{d5} \) 17.\( \text{cx} \text{d5} \) \( \frac{1}{2} - \frac{1}{2} \), Bronstein-Kotov, Candidates’ Tournament, Zurich 1953.

8. ... 0-0

This is the classical move, and possibly the best. However, Black has two major alternatives: 8...\( \text{d6} \) and the more original 8...\( \text{Qc6} ??? \). After both, the game retains a Hedgehog flavor.

9. \( \text{Qc1-f4?!} \)

This is a pretty rare move, which nevertheless contains more than a drop of poison. Instead, White has many alternatives, all of which should give him a tiny edge; however, in the Hedgehog, White always has an objectively better position, but one mistake can completely turn the tables.

9. ... \( \text{d7-d6?!} \)

Grandmaster Igor Stohl correctly points out that this completely obvious-looking move is in fact an inaccuracy. The main problem is that Black will have a hard time putting his knight on d7, since the d6 pawn will always be hanging.

Instead, it was time to start thinking outside the box, and to come up with the move 9...\( \text{Qc6} \). Although I mentioned that this move is almost always bad, in this case it’s Black’s only choice. Also, White doesn’t get a chance to place his queen on f4, which makes life significantly easier for Black in this variation. Still, after 10.\( \text{Qd2} \) \( \text{Qa5} \) 11.\( \text{b3} \) \( \text{d5} \) 12.\( \text{cx} \text{d5} \) \( \text{Qxd5} \) 13.\( \text{Qxd5} \) \( \text{Qxd5} \) 14.\( \text{Qac1} \) White has a small, but long-lasting edge.

10. \( \text{Qd4-d2} \)

Now, 10...\( \text{Qc6} \) doesn’t achieve the desired effect, as the pawn is already on d6; the idea of ...\( \text{Qc6} \) is to execute the liberating ...\( \text{d6-d5} \) by means of the tempo gain via ...\( \text{Qa5} \). In this case, ...\( \text{d5} \) is permanently stopped, and Black will have a hard time untangling his pieces. However, Van Wely finds a very creative solution to his problems.

10. ... \( \text{Qd8-c8} \)

This is a nice defensive resource. Otherwise, Black had no way of gaining any counterplay. Also interesting was 10.\( \text{Qc7} \), trying to defend d6 at the same time. However, after something along the lines of 11.\( \text{Qac1} \) a6 12.\( \text{Qfd1} \) White retains an edge.

11. \( \text{Qa1-c1} \) \( \text{Qf8-d8} \)
12. \( \text{Qf1-d1} \) \( \text{a7-a6} \)
13. \( \text{Qd2-e3} \) \( \text{Qc8-c7} \)

The position on the board is extremely important. At first sight it seems that Black has completely equalized, but a more detailed analysis shows the hidden dangers for Black.
First of all, the threat of Ïd5 is constantly looming in the air. Secondly, Black’s d6 pawn is pretty weak, and pinned on account of the queen on c7. However, it’s not exactly clear how to exploit any of these factors. Nikolic realized that after Ïd5 and cxd5, Black’s queen will only have one square: d7. Therefore, he comes up with:

14. ëe2-h3!

And now, 15.Ïd5 is actually a threat. Van Wely, not sensing the impending danger, plays the active move:

14. ... Íc7-c5?

As it turns out, this move is a big mistake. The only way for Black to achieve a playable position was to play 14...ëf8!, after which White still has a lot of work to do in order to breach Black’s solid barriers. After the more or less obvious 15.Ïa4 Ïbd7 16.b4 ëe6, White probably plays 17.Ïc3, when Black has an important choice to make:

A) 17...ëe5?! is too impatient. After 18.Ïg5 ëb7 19.b5 (19.Ïd2?! ëh6! 20.Ïxf6 ëxf6) 19...axb5 20.cxb5 White has a practically decisive advantage;
B) 17...ëh6?! looks tempting, but after the accurate 18.Ïd5! ëb7 (18...exd5 19.Ïxd5 ëxd5 20.Ïxd5) 19.Ïxf6+ ëxf6 20.Ïd4! ëe5 21.Ïxc6 exf4

22.Ïxd8 White has a decisive material advantage;
C) 17...ëac8 seems best, but still, after the strong 18.Ïb5! axb5 19.cxb5 Ïd5 and now 20.Ïxd5!, White has a clear advantage.

Thus, Black’s position was already critical. What can White do after Black’s seemingly active and strong move? Of course, since grandmaster Predrag Nikolic is a hugely experienced and very strong player, he probably had no problem coming up with the next move. However, for the majority of players, it’s not so easy! Let’s try to put ourselves in his place:

“Clearly, my opponent wants to trade queens and bail out into an equal endgame. However, the e6-square is very tender, and the e6 pawn is pinned. Black’s position seems to be very shaky. Is there a way I can take advantage of that? Well, I can retreat with my queen, but what would that do? Black is underdeveloped, but the only way to make use of this is by playing actively. Unfortunately, there is no way to do that without sacrificing. What if I sacrifice on d5? Then Black’s pieces will be locked in and my material losses will not be so substantial (after a future sacrifice with the rook on d5).”

Thus:

15. Ïc3-d5!!
A brilliant positional sacrifice out of the blue. I have to admit, when I first saw it I had no idea what White could do on the 18th move!
Let's take a look at Black's options. He can't take on e3 because of 16.\(\text{Qxe}7+\), 17.\(\text{Qxe}3\), and 18.\(\text{Qxb}6\), winning a pawn with a decisive advantage. Taking on d5 with the knight transposes into the game, while the tempting 15...exd5 16.\(\text{Wxe}7\) \(\text{Qc}6\) fails to 17.\(\text{Wxb}7\) \(\text{Ma}7\) 18.\(\text{b}4!\), retaining the extra piece.

15. ... \(\text{b}7\text{xd}5\)
16. \(\text{c}4\text{xd}5\) \(\text{Wc}5\text{xe}3\)
17. \(\text{f}4\text{xe}3\) \(\text{f}6\text{xd}5\)

And again, it's completely unclear what White can do in this position. Nikolic continues his brilliant play with another sacrifice, this time of more substantial material:

18. \(\text{d}1\text{xd}5!\)

Once you see this move, it seems very simple, but playing it in a real tournament game is not easy. The main idea is that Black's whole army will be completely paralyzed, and his extra exchange will not make the slightest difference.

18. ... \(\text{e}6\text{xd}5\)
19. \(\text{e}3\text{xb}6\) \(\text{d}8\text{-f}8\)
20. \(\text{b}2\text{-b}4!\)

Extremely subtle play by Nikolic. Before moving on to concrete actions, he completely deprives Black of any counterplay. Notice that a careless move such as 20.\(\text{Qc}8??\) can lead to disaster after 20...\(\text{Qc}6\) 21.\(\text{Qb}7\) \(\text{Ma}b8\), when it is Black who is close to winning.

20. ... \(\text{f}7\text{-f}5!\)

One has to give Van Wely credit for persevering in this position – he makes Nikolic’s job as hard as possible. Van Wely prepares 21., \(\text{Qd}7\), when already the evaluation of the position will not be so simple. Nikolic, on the other hand, finds another sobering blow:

21. \(\text{b}6\text{-e}3!\)

This great move "prevents" 21...\(\text{Qd}7\) (although Van Wely played it anyway), and prepares a future \(\text{Qf}4\) followed by \(\text{Qd}4\). Already, Black is very close to losing.

21. ... \(\text{b}8\text{-d}7\)
22. \(\text{c}1\text{-c}7\) \(\text{a}8\text{-d}8\)
23. \(\text{f}3\text{-d}4\)

Another blow, after which White wins back by force the exchange with a completely won position. The rest is clear without comments.

23. ... \(\text{e}7\text{-f}6\)
Chapter 4: Positional Sacrifice

24. \( \text{d4-e6} \) \( g7-g6 \)
25. \( \text{h3-g2} \) \( d5-d4 \)
26. \( \text{e3-h6} \) \( \text{f8-e8} \)
27. \( \text{e6xd8} \) \( \text{e8xd8} \)
28. \( \text{g2-d5+} \) \( \text{g8-h8} \)
29. \( \text{h2-h4} \) \( \text{d7-e5} \)
30. \( \text{h6-g5} \) \( \text{f6xg5} \)
31. \( \text{h4xg5} \) \( d4-d3 \)
32. \( \text{e2xd3} \) \( \text{e5xd3} \)
33. \( \text{a2-a3} \) \( \text{d8-e8} \)

Black resigned.

Certainly, from this game and the similar Romanishin-Petrosian (both examples featuring \( \text{d5} \) sacrifices in the Hedgehog) we can glean many important things. First of all, the \( \text{d5} \) sacrifice is often very strong in the Hedgehog, especially when the opponent’s pieces are underdeveloped. Not only does it severely restrict the movement of the opponent’s pieces, but after the recapture on \( d5 \) White can also establish a powerful stronghold on \( c6 \) and use the c-file. Therefore, you should consider these sacrifices on every move in the Hedgehog.

In the next game, Black delivers a lightning bolt when everything seems quiet.

\[ \text{Bacrot} \]
\[ \text{Nisipeanu} \]
Balatonbereny 1996
Benko Gambit (A57)

1. \( \text{d2-d4} \) \( \text{g8-f6} \)
2. \( \text{c2-c4} \) \( \text{c7-c5} \)
3. \( \text{d4-d5} \) \( \text{b7-b5} \)
4. \( \text{c4xb5} \) \( \text{a7-a6} \)
5. \( \text{b1-c3?!} \)

A relatively rare yet interesting idea which leads to a quick tactical fight (and usually ends in a very unclear position).

This move doesn’t give White any advantage – he should search for it in the topical lines with \( 5. \text{b6} \).

1. \( \text{...} \) \( \text{a6xb5} \)
2. \( \text{e2-e4} \) \( \text{b5-b4} \)
3. \( \text{c3-b5} \) \( \text{d7-d6} \)

\[ \text{8. g1-f3} \] \( \text{g7-g6} \)

\[ \text{7...e4??} \text{ leads to a quick mate after} \]
\[ \text{8.} \text{e2 f6 9. d6#}. \]

\[ \text{9. f1-c4?!} \]

This is a slight inaccuracy. White is best advised to play \( 9. \text{d3} \), although after \( 9. \text{g7} \) \( 10. \text{h3} \) \( 0-0 \) \( 11.0-0 \) \( \text{d7} \)
\[ \text{12. e1 b6} \text{ Black achieves easy equality, Kuzmin-Sharapov, Alushta 2000.} \]

143
9. ...  
10. 0-0

The main problem for White is that Black gets a desirable Benko position without the pawn sacrifice. White’s knight is stuck on b5, and Black has counterplay along the open a-file.

10. ... 0-0?! 

There is absolutely nothing wrong with this move, but nevertheless, 10...\(\text{exf}4\)! would have won a pawn for virtually no compensation. If White wants to achieve any counterplay, he must play actively, but even so, in Yezersky-Kalegin, St Petersburg 1996, Black was almost winning after 11.ae1 \(\text{f6}\) 12.\(\text{we}2\) (Nisipeanu was probably afraid of this position, but most likely missed that Black’s 13th move was legal) 12...\(\text{b7}\) 13.\(\text{f4}\) 0-0?! A very strong move, based on a very precise calculation of the following tactical mêlée: 14.\(\text{exe}7\) \(\text{exe}7\) 15.\(\text{exe}7\) \(\text{xd}5\) 16.\(\text{c7}\)! \(\text{xc}4\)! 17.\(\text{xa}8\) \(\text{d}5\) and although White continued to fight for 50 more moves, he was lost all the way.

11. \(\text{f1-e1}\) \(\text{b8-d7}\)

This move seems like the only way to defend, but grandmaster Lev Psakhis in his commentaries draws our attention to a subtler move, namely 12.a3\!\!. Here, Black’s only good choice is to transpose into the game with 12...\(\text{bxa}3\) (in the game Black had other promising choices), as 12...\(\text{b6}\) 13.\(\text{f1}\) \(\text{bxa}3\) 14.\(\text{xa}3\) is equal.

12. ... \(\text{b4xa3}\)\!?! 

After this slight inaccuracy, White gets a chance to equalize. Better was 12...\(\text{b6}\)! 13.\(\text{f1}\) \(\text{d7}\), after which Black has an advantage.

13. \(\text{a1xa3}\) \(\text{a8xa3}\) 
14. \(\text{b5xa7}\)?

After this mistake, Black seizes the initiative and doesn’t give it back. Instead, correct was 14.\(\text{bx}a3\) \(\text{b}6\) 15.\(\text{f1}\) \(\text{a6}\) 16.\(\text{a}4\) with equality (Psakhis).

14. ... \(\text{f6-g4}\)!
15. \(\text{c}4-f1\) \(\text{d}7-e5\) 
16. \(\text{f}3-d2\)?

This move seems completely natural and strong. White takes advantage of the fact that Black’s two knights are placed precariously and will be expelled after h2-h3 and a possible f2-f4 followed by \(\text{a}c4\), when White will stand very well. However, for the moment, White’s
Chapter 4: Positional Sacrifice

pieces are uncoordinated, and Black takes advantage of this with a brilliant sacrifice. Better would have been a move like 16...c2, after which the fight is still ahead.

16. ... g4xf2!!

An absolutely incredible positional sacrifice. Although Black sacrifices the knight for a mere pawn, White’s king gets stranded in the center, and his pieces become awkward long enough for Black to destroy the slim barricades around White’s king.

17. g1xf2 e5-g4+
18. f2-e2 e7-e6!

Black conducts the final part of the game brilliantly. He cannot dilly-dally as White will have a chance to consolidate, when the extra piece would say its word.

19. d1-b3 e6xd5
20. h2-h3?

The final mistake. 20...xd5 was called for, but after 20...e6 21...d3 d5 Black’s attack should decide soon enough.

20. ... d5xe4!

The last finesse. Now, White’s next move is forced, since 21.hxg4 fails to 21...xg4+ 22...f2 h4+, winning.

21. d2xe4 f8-e8
22. e2-d2 d8-a5+
23. d2-c2 a5xe1

White resigned. An astonishing display by Nisipeanu.

Finally, we can draw some conclusions from the games that we have seen in this chapter. First of all, many tactical sacrifices have a purely positional foundation. It is hard to sacrifice substantial material for long-lasting positional compensation, but sometimes it is the only way to transform an advantage. To play such bold moves, one needs to be self-confident, and not be afraid of the opposition. Although positional sacrifices fail occasionally (like in the Shabalov-D.Gurevich game), it is often because of a miscalculation and not because of the unsoundness of the sacrifice itself. Overall, it’s very important to have faith in oneself and not abstain from sacrificing because of the strength of the opponent.

Positional Sacrifices in the Middlegame

Positional sacrifices in the middlegame occur much more frequently than in the opening or endgame, and obviously need to be studied in detail. In the opening, most sacrifices are made to create a development advantage. In the middlegame, most sacrifices are made in order to build up a space advantage, make use of the disharmony between the opponent’s pieces, or take the initiative.
In our first game, Black's position seems completely fine, but suddenly White makes use of a seemingly unusable pin to unleash a very strong positional sacrifice. Although White wasn’t successful and the game ended in a draw, the idea of the sacrifice was very strong.

\[ \square \text{ Grover} \]
\[ \text{ } \square \text{ Naroditsky} \]

Belfort 2005
Sicilian Defense, Najdorf Variation, Fischer-Sozin Attack (B86)

1. e2-e4     c7-c5
2. \textit{\&}g1-f3  d7-d6
3. d2-d4     c5xd4
4. \textit{\&}f3xd4 \textit{\&}g8-f6
5. \textit{\&}b1-c3  a7-a6
6. \textit{\&}f1-c4  e7-e6

\[ \square \text{ Grover} \]
\[ \text{ } \square \text{ Naroditsky} \]

Another inaccuracy, after which Black should have achieved at least equality. Instead, the correct move is the prophylactic 9.\textit{\&}a2, although after 9...b5 10.\textit{\&}e2 \textit{\&}b7 11.f4 \textit{\&}c6 12.\textit{\&}f3 b4! Black had an excellent game in Seeman-Morovic, Keres Memorial, Tallinn 1998.

9. ... \textit{\&}b8-c6?!

This isn’t a mistake, but Black had an easier route to equality. He could have made use of the position of White’s light-squared bishop with the more energetic 9...d5!. Müller-Hracek, Lippstadt 2000, now continued 10.exd5 exd5 11.\textit{\&}e2 \textit{\&}c6 (the pawn at f4 makes White’s position precarious) 12.\textit{\&}e3 \textit{\&}e8 13.\textit{\&}h1?! (13.\textit{\&}f2! \textit{\&}c5 14.\textit{\&}f3 with equality was better) 13...\textit{\&}xa3! 14.\textit{\&}xa3 \textit{\&}xe3 15.\textit{\&}xc6 bxc6 16.\textit{\&}xd5 \textit{\&}xa3 17.\textit{\&}xf6+ \textit{\&}xf6 18.bxa3 \textit{\&}f5 with a slight edge, which Black failed to convert after a 64-move struggle. Obviously, this was by far Black’s best option.
10. $\text{c1-e3} \quad \text{c8-d7?!}$

It’s clear that both players didn’t play the opening stage of the game well. Again, 10...d5 would have given Black equality, although this time he would have no chances for better play.

11. $\text{d4-f3?!}$

Another inaccuracy, after which Black finally equalizes. Instead, White could have achieved a slight edge by the prophylactic move 11.$\text{a2}$, when Black would have had a hard time liberating his position.

11. ... $\text{f6-g4!}$

Black finally takes advantage of White’s mistake, winning the bishop pair. It’s already White who has to be careful.

12. $\text{d1-e2} \quad \text{g4xe3}$
13. $\text{e2xe3} \quad \text{a8-c8}$
14. $\text{g1-h1} \quad \text{d8-c7?!}$

A completely pointless move. Instead, the energetic and active 14...b5 gave Black a slight edge, i.e. 15.$\text{a2} \quad \text{b4!}$ 16.axb4 $\text{xb4} \quad 17.\text{b3 a5}$.

15. $\text{c4-a2} \quad \text{e7-f6}$
16. $\text{a1-d1} \quad \text{f8-d8?!}$

Missing White’s elegant idea. Instead, the recipe for equality is 16...$\text{a5}$, after which White is practically forced to play 17.e5 – 17...dxe5 18.fxe5 $\text{e7}$.

17. $\text{e4-e5!}$

A graceful introduction to the following sacrifice.

17. ... $\text{d6xe5}$
18. $\text{f4-f5!}$

When you look at it at first, White’s whole idea seems faulty, but soon the depth of this positional sacrifice will become apparent. White’s main idea is to utilize the seemingly dormant bishop on a2. The move also creates a hole on d5, which White later exploited with great effect. Clearly, the pin along the a2-g8 diagonal is now very unpleasant for Black. Also, 18...exf5 fails to the simple 19.$\text{c5}$, making it hard for Black to find a move. However, after a long thought I came up with:

18. ... $\text{c6-d4}$

which is the best and only defense. Instead, the idea 18...$\text{e7}$, shown to me after the game, is easily refuted by 19.$\text{fxe6} \quad \text{xe6} \quad (19...\text{fxe6} \quad 20.\text{e4})$
20.$\text{xex6 fxe6} \quad 21.\text{e4}, when the bold 21..$\text{xc2}$ is met by 22.$\text{xd8+} \quad \text{xd8}$
23.$\text{e1!!}$ with a virtually won position.

19. $\text{f5xe6} \quad \text{d7xe6}$
20. $\text{a2xe6} \quad \text{d4xe6?!}$

After this move, White’s pressure grows stronger. Better was 20...$\text{fxe6}$, when I’m not convinced that White has a big advantage, although he certainly has one after either 21.$\text{xe4}$ or the bold 21.$\text{e4}$, which should be investigated further.

21. $\text{c3-d5!}$
Immediately pouncing on Black’s mistake. Inexplicably, I had missed this move. However, I still felt that Black was doing well after his next counter-sacrifice.

21. ... \( \text{Nxd5} \)
22. \( \text{Nxd5} \) \( \text{c7-c6!} \)

The only move that holds the position together. I was optimistic at this point, thinking I was at least equal, since 23.\( \text{Nxd5} \) fails to 23...\( \text{c4} \) followed by 24...\( \text{g5} \). But, lo and behold:

23. \( \text{Nxd5xe5!} \)

A critical position, where White has to do some calculation in order to choose the right move. My opponent quickly played the most obvious move:

25. \( \text{Re4xe6?} \)

Throwing away the whole advantage; moreover, if Black hadn’t agreed to a draw, he would have had a better position. Let’s take a look at White’s moves:

A) 25.\( \text{Re4xe5} \) fails to the elegant 25...\( \text{c1} \) 26.\( \text{Rexh1} \) \( \text{c6} \), winning;

B) 25.\( \text{a4} \) \( \text{h5} \) 26.\( \text{Re6} \) \( \text{c6} \) gives Black easy equality;

C) 25.\( \text{Re5} \) is the correct move; White has a small advantage after 25...\( \text{c5} \) 26.\( \text{Re5} \) \( \text{c3} \) 27.\( \text{Re4} \).

25. ... \( \text{f7xe6} \)
26. \( \text{Re3xe6+} \) \( \text{g8-h8} \)
27. \( \text{Re3-f3-g5} \)

White had aimed for this position, thinking that Black had no defense against the smothered mate. However, as soon as he noticed 27...\( \text{h6} \), parrying the attack, White offered a draw, which I accepted. I thought that after 27...\( \text{h6} \)
28.\( \text{g7} \) \( \text{h7} \) White had a perpetual with 29.\( \text{g5}+ \) \( \text{hxg5} \) 30.\( \text{Re3+h3}+ \), completely missing that after 30...\( \text{h6} \)
31.\( \text{Re2+} \) Black has 31...\( \text{f6} \), winning.

Although the game itself was full of mistakes, White’s positional sacrifice was nevertheless deep and very strong. Also, the psychological pressure is very high when you’re playing under pressure. On the one hand, you really want to defend against the pressure and wind up with extra material. On the other hand, you want to do anything just to free your position up. This leads us to an important rule:

Whenever you are up material and under intense positional pressure, don’t think about the position from a materialistic point of view. If you keep trying to find ways to keep your material, the pressure will just grow stronger. If defending against the onslaught involves sacrificing some, if not all, of your extra material, don’t hesitate!
Chapter 4: Positional Sacrifice

In the following game, it seems as though Black neutralizes all of White’s threats, and obtains at least equality. However, the not-unknown white player finds a brilliant sacrifice to reinforce his initiative and open up a key square and file.

\[ \text{Kasparov} \quad \text{Kramnik} \]
\[ \text{Astana 2001} \]

Obviously, this position arose after an intense opening struggle in the Berlin Wall Variation of the Ruy Lopez. When I first looked at the position (without knowing White’s next move), I thought that Black had won the opening struggle. His next move will be 1...\(\text{e}6\), and if he is not satisfied with a draw, he might even consider playing ...c5 followed by ...\(\text{e}6\). Understanding that, Kasparov settled into a think. He knew that he couldn’t play slowly, and that if he allowed 1...\(\text{e}6\), all of White’s pieces would stand uselessly; even the e4 knight wouldn’t be doing much.

The first move that comes to mind is 1...\(\text{d}4\), with the idea of meeting 1...\(\text{e}6\) with 2...\(\text{f}5\). However, Black plays 2...c5, and now the thematic sacrifice 3...\(\text{f}6\) achieves nothing after 3...\(\text{e}6\) 4...\(\text{f}6\) \(\text{g}8\). Therefore, White has to find something else.

So Kasparov thought outside the box and found a move which opened diagonals, files, and squares for all of his pieces, and put Black’s king in grave danger:

1. e5-e6!!

When you see this move played, it looks totally obvious, but in truth it’s very hard to find, much less to play. Suddenly, everything comes alive: White’s b2 bishop terrorizes Black along the long diagonal, while White’s rooks work together to form a unique prison for the black king, who cannot move (this is the main disadvantage of the Berlin Wall Variation!). White’s two centralized knights control all of the important squares, rendering Black’s bishop pair useless. However, after:

1. ... \(\text{f}4\times\text{e}6\)

White still has to crack open Black’s position. In positions like this, it’s very important to know a golden rule:

**Never be satisfied with the placement of your pieces. If you see a better square for one or more of them, look for ways to get the piece there; and mainly, use your imagination.**

In this position, all of White’s pieces seem to be placed perfectly, but White can still improve the f3 knight. Obviously, it would be better on f5. Therefore:

2. \(\text{f}3\times\text{d}4!\)
Mastering Positional Chess

In his annotations, Kasparov mentioned that 2.\( \text{c}5 \) followed by 3.\( \text{f}4 \) and 4.\( \text{f}4 \) was also winning; notice that 2.\( \text{c}5 \) is another improvement of the placement of a piece.

2. \( \text{...} \) \( \text{c}6\text{-c}5?! \)

Kasparov and grandmaster Tom Wedberg both state that this move is inaccurate, citing 2...\( \text{h}7 \) as a major improvement. Wedberg’s main variation runs: 3.\( \text{f}4 \) \( \text{c}5 \) 4.\( \text{c}3 \) \( \text{f}3 \) \( \text{c}6 \) 5.\( \text{b}1 \)?! \( \text{xe}4 \) 6.\( \text{xe}4 \) \( \text{g}6 \) 7.\( \text{g}4 \) \( \text{d}5 \)! 8.\( \text{c}4 \) \( \text{d}3 \) 9.\( \text{c}e1 \) \( \text{d}2 \) 10.\( \text{f}5 \) \( \text{gxf5} \) 11.\( \text{gxf5} \) \( \text{g}7 \) 12.\( \text{c}1 \) \( \text{d}4 \)! 13.\( \text{h}1 \) \( \text{d}1 \) 14.\( \text{f}6 \) \( \text{f}5 \) 15.\( \text{e}2 \) \( \text{g}7 \) 15.\( \text{h}2 \) \( \text{g}1 \) + 16.\( \text{h}1 \) \( \text{d}4 \), and if anyone is better, it’s Black, as he has the additional try of going for the win with \( ...\text{f}5\text{-f}4 \).

However, why play \( \text{f}2\text{-f}4 \)? The simple move 3.\( \text{c}4 \), with the variation 3...\( \text{c}8 \) 4.\( \text{d}3 \) (interestingly, the computer doesn’t like this at first, but Black is just totally paralyzed!) 4...\( \text{x}d1 \) 5.\( \text{x}d1 \) \( \text{h}8 \) 6.\( \text{b}1 \) (a sobering blow, totally freezing all of Black’s pieces) 6...\( \text{a}6 \) 7.\( \text{c}4 \) \( \text{b}6 \) 8.\( \text{b}4 \) \( \text{a}5 \)!! 9.\( \text{c}5 \) \( \text{bxc}5 \) 10.\( \text{bxa5} \) and White penetrates along the \( \text{b} \)-file (I’m sure that readers will find other ways as well).

3. \( \text{d}4\text{-f}5 \) \( \text{h}8\text{-h}7 \)
4. \( \text{b}2\text{-f}6! \)

The great champion finds yet another simple and great move, expelling the rook from the \( \text{d} \)-file. Notice how he uses every one of Black’s disadvantages (like the position of the rook on \( \text{h}7 \)).

4. \( \text{...} \) \( \text{d}8\text{-c}8 \)
5. \( \text{f}6\text{xd}7 \)

Instead of this showy move, 5.\( \text{f}4 \) (Kasparov), keeping the tension, won faster.

5. \( \text{...} \) \( \text{f}8\text{xd}7 \)
6. \( \text{f}5\text{xd}7+ \) \( \text{h}7\text{xd}7 \)
7. \( \text{e}4\text{-f}6+ \) \( \text{e}8\text{xe}7 \)
8. \( \text{f}6\text{xd}7 \)

The smoke has cleared, and it’s time to draw some conclusions. The material is equal, but Black’s pawn structure is completely ruined. Also, his pieces are totally uncoordinated, while White’s pieces are working together brilliantly. Kramnik tries his best to de-
fend, but Kasparov shows impeccable technique.

8. ...  
9. c8-d8
10. d7-e5  
11. e1xd1  

This knight sortie only throws more wood into the fire — it was better to play 10...c4, but after the strong reply 11...hx! (not Wedberg's 11...c4, which is inferior), White has a clear edge, as 11...cxc2 is met by 12.d7+ e6 13.f4!.

11. g1-h1!

Another great move – now 11...cxc2 is met by 12.d3, and 11...cxc2 is met by 12.g1, when White will be winning a piece or an exchange in both cases.

11. ...  
12. e5-g4  
13. d1-e1+  
14. g4xh6  

Kramnik had probably overlooked this move, after which White is winning. The rest is a matter of time and technique.

15. e1-e5!

Blundering a piece. Better was Wedberg's 15...xc2 16.f5 cxf2 17.gxg2 xg2 18.xf4 exa2, although after something like 19.e5 White is totally winning.

16. e5-f5!  
17. h6-g4  
18. f5xf4  
19. f4-f2  
20. h1-g2  
21. h3-h4  
22. h4-h5  
23. a2xb3  
24. h5-h6+  
25. g4-f6  
26. g2-h1  

1-0

A fantastic display by Kasparov.

So far, we've seen players sacrifice minor material in order to gain the initiative. However, sacrificing for a space advantage or to take control over a complex of squares is much harder to force yourself to do. Take a look at the following position:
Mastering Positional Chess

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lautier</th>
<th>Topalov</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elida Olympiad 1998</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The position seems to be about equal. However, Black has a space disadvantage. Obviously, this is compensated for by the weakness of White’s light squares at e4 and c4. However, a famous aphorism states that one weakness isn’t enough. If Black wants to make use of White’s disadvantage, he has to create another weakness — in this case, it’s obvious that the e3 bishop is more or less holding White’s position together. If it was somehow eliminated, Black would have dominance over the dark squares as well (e5, g5, h4, etc.). In order to find the next move, you must have a good imagination. Without much hesitation, Topalov played:

1. ...  

Like in the previous example, once this move is played, it looks totally simple and natural. Playing it on the board during such an important game is much harder — after all, this isn’t a pawn, it’s an exchange.

2. f2xe3  

Topalov continues his assault on Lautier’s weaknesses very energetically. Instead, Wells, in his annotations, gives the amusing line 2...We8!? 3.Wf2 Wxc3!? 4.Wxc3 Wxa4 5.Wc8! Wxc8 6.Wxa4 Wxd5 7.Wg4 Wd8 and Black is clearly better. He’s absolutely right — I will only mention that 3...Wh4 is also possible.

3.  

Lautier defends with tenacity. 3.Wf2 loses to 3...We8 4.Wa2 Wxa4! 5.Wxa4 Wxe3+, mating.

4.  

When you’ve sacrificed a substantial amount of material for clear compensation, it’s very important to continue playing energetically; you have to come to the win, it won’t come to you! For instance, if Black played something stereotypical, like 4...We4, White would be able to consolidate after 5.a5 Wa7 6.Wf3. Therefore, never relax, and keep searching for good moves, even when you know you’re better.

5. Wb3xa4 We7xe3+

6. Wg1-h1

And here, the simple move 6...Wxd4 would have attained an almost winning position. However, Topalov makes a
very typical mistake in such positions – he thought that he could finish White off with a direct, beautiful attack. In truth, he had missed a great chance for White to obtain serious counterplay. The conclusion is:

Whenever you see a simple way to obtain a clear advantage, whether it is elegant or crude, go for it. Even though another combination might work, the chances of missing it are huge.

Topalov played:

6. ...  e5-f6

And Lautier quickly replied with the most obvious move:

7.  d4-f5?

However, Fritz 10 points out that White had a wonderful chance for counterplay, namely: 7. fxe8+ fxe8 8. gxe6! (a brilliant move, which, I admit, is almost impossible for a human to find) 8... fxe6 9. dxe6 fxe6 10. h2 xxe6 11. xxe6+ fxe6 12. e1 and Wells writes: "And the position is far from clear." Indeed, if anyone is better in this line, it’s White!

7. ...  e7-f6+  
8.  h1-h2  e8-f6+  
9.  f5-g3  f2-f4

Topalov is back on track – this time, he doesn’t leave Lautier a single chance.

10.  a4-b3  b6-f2  
11.  d1-d3  h7-h5!

The killer move, after which White has to give up tons of material in order to defend:

12.  e2xh5  e4xg3  
13.  d3xg3  e5xh5!

The final blow. Worse was 13... xg3+ 14. xg3 xh5 15. xd6 with counterplay:

14.  g3xg6  h5xg6

The rest is a matter of time.

15.  b3-f3  f2-d4  
16.  c1-d3  g6-g5  
17.  f3-e4  g5-e3  
18.  e4xe3  d4xe3  
19.  h2-g3  g7-g6  
20.  g3-f3  e3-d4  
21.  f3-e2  g8-g7  
22.  d3-e1  g7-f6  
23.  e2-d3  d4-f2  
24.  e1-f3  f6-f5  
25.  d3-e2  f2-a7

White resigned.

Sometimes, a pawn is sacrificed to open up an important square for a piece. This is a vital method that I have not seen covered in a lot of books. Sometimes, for one reason or another, you just wish your pawn wasn’t there. The solution is often very simple – if you don’t want it, give it up!
Jansa

Mäki

Pula 1997

Sicilian Defense,
Classical/Dragon Variation (B70)

1. e2-e4  c7-c5
2. d4-g1-f3  d8-b8-c6
3. d2-d4  c5xd4
4. e4fxd4  g8-g6
5. b1-c3  d7-d6
6. g2-g3  g7-g6
7. d4-e2

Although this variation with g3/\(\text{g2}\) and \(\text{cde2}\) has no official name, IM Vasily Panov had great success with it in the early 20th century. The idea of the variation is to switch to positional play, which is usually the opposite of a classical or Dragon player’s wish. Strong grandmasters can sometimes get a hopeless position in this line with black in a matter of moves.

7. ...  \(\text{f8-g7}\)
8. f1-g2  \(\text{0-0}\)
9. h2-h3  \(\text{a8-b8}\)
10. a2-a4  \(\text{a7-a6}\)
11. c2-d5?!

This was the second time Jansa played this weird move – in the first game (against Nevednichy), he got crushed. This move is a bit premature and not really in the spirit of the variation. The correct way to play is 11.0-0 followed by the usual pressure with 1.e3/\(\text{b}3\), and only after due preparation should White play \(\text{cxd5}\). Baklan-Corrales Jimenez, Balaguer Open 2008, continued 11...b5 12.axb5 axb5 and only now did White play 13.cd5 (it’s important that he has already castled) 13...b4 14.a2! \(\text{cxd5}\) 15.exd5 b3! 16.cxb3 \(\text{b4}\) 17.a4 \(\text{d7}\) 18.a7 with a slight edge, which Baklan converted into the full point.

11. ...  b7-b5?!

Both Nevednichy and Mäki went for this, allowing White to transpose to the main line. However, what if simply 11...\(e6\)? A sample line is 12.\(\text{xf6+}\) \(\text{xf6}\) 13.0-0 \(\text{g7}\) 14.d1 \(\text{c7}\) with equal prospects. Of course, the text isn’t a mistake, but I simply don’t understand why neither the annotators nor the players pay any attention to 11...\(e6\).

12. a4xb5  a6xb5
13. c1-e3  b5-b4
14. 0-0

This transposes to the main line, which is a bit better for White. In the other game, Jansa-Nevednichy, Krynica Zonal 1998 White quickly got into trouble af-
ter 14.\( \text{fxd4?} \). Jansa had probably analyzed this “improvement” over the Mäki game at home in a hurry, as he misses an elementary refutation.

14...\( \text{exd4} \) 15.\( \text{exd4} \) \( \text{exd5} \) 16.\( \text{exd5} \) \( \text{exd5} \) 17.\( \text{Wxd4} \) My guess is that Jansa had stopped his analysis here – indeed, if Black doesn’t play energetically, the position is obviously better for White, who will have chronic pressure along the e-file. However: 17...\( \text{fxf5!} \) 18.\( \text{dxd2} \) In Matulovic-Zontakh, Sabac 1998, Black also got a clear advantage quickly after 18.\( \text{e4} \) \( \text{Wc8} \) 19.\( \text{dxd2} \) \( \text{b5} \).

18...\( \text{e5!} \) Very energetically played – Nevednychy is not giving White any chances to consolidate. 19.\( \text{dxex6} \) \( \text{exex6} \) 20.\( \text{mhd1} \) \( \text{mce8} \) 21.\( \text{mxe1?} \) The decisive mistake, according to IM Valery Atlas; indeed, White is lost after this. However, his position was already critical.

21...\( \text{mxc2} \) 22.\( \text{mxa8} \) \( \text{mce7} \) 23.\( \text{mxf8} + \) \( \text{mxf8} \) 24.\( \text{ma1} \) \( \text{mg7} \) 25.\( \text{mb8} + \) \( \text{mc8!} \) 0-1

A very good game by Nevednychy!

14. ... \( \text{gf6-d7} \)

An important position for this variation has arisen. White has numerous ways to defend the pawn. Jansa played the only move that gives White an edge:

15. \( \text{ma1-a2!} \)

Let’s take a look at White’s other options (be prepared to witness one of the most amusing paradoxes in chess):

A) 15.\( \text{dxd4??} \) is White’s most popular move and was played by players such as Kamsky, Georgiev, Sofronie, and Slobodjan. However, after the famous refutation 15...\( \text{mxg4!!} \) 16.\( \text{xd4} \) \( \text{e6} \) 17.\( \text{mf3} \) \( \text{e5} \) 18.\( \text{mb7} \) \( \text{mb7} \) White resigned in V. Georgiev-Janek, Elgohar 2001 (in Kamsky-Tiviakov, Daugavpils 1987, Kamsky played on but obviously lost). An incredible trap!

B) 15.\( \text{mb1} \) is a good alternative. In Malakhov-Svidler, Russian Championship, Elista 1997, White won quickly after 15...\( \text{mb6} \) 16.\( \text{mf4} \) \( \text{mc7} \) 17.\( \text{ma2} \) \( \text{gf6!} \) 18.\( \text{md3} \) \( \text{md8} \) 19.\( \text{mc4} \) \( \text{mb7} \) 20.\( \text{mb3} \) \( \text{md7} \) 21.\( \text{md1} \) \( \text{mb5?} \) 22.\( \text{mb4} \) \( \text{mc5} \) 23.\( \text{mb5!} \) \( \text{mb6} \) 24.\( \text{mb6} \) \( \text{mb6} \) 25.\( \text{mb5} \) \( \text{mb6} \) 26.\( \text{ma3} \) \( \text{xc4} \) 27.\( \text{mb4} \) \( \text{mc4} \) 28.\( \text{mb3} \) 1-0.

15. ... \( \text{e7-e6} \)

Black expels White’s knight from its strong post at the cost of weakening \( \text{d6}. \)

16. \( \text{mb5-f4} \) \( \text{md8-c7} \)

17. \( \text{mb2-b3} \)

The opening has ended and it’s time to draw some conclusions. White has more space, and the \( \text{d6} \) pawn is weak, but Black’s position is a bit more flexible.
Also, he controls the long diagonal — therefore, for now, White cannot double on the a-file. Overall, White has a slight edge, but certainly not a big advantage.

17. ...  
18. \( \text{Wd1-d2} \)  
\( \text{Mb8-a8} \)

At first glance this move seems a bit strange, as after White’s 20th move it isn’t clear how he should defend d6. But Black had calculated a bit further.

19. \( \text{Ka2xa8} \)  
20. \( \text{Mf1-d1} \)  
\( \text{Ma8-a1!} \)

This was Black’s strong idea. He pins the d1 rook, so that White cannot take on d6. However, Jansa answers with a strong move:

21. \( \text{Ce2-c1!} \)

Renewing the threat of taking on d6. However, Mäk finds another clear-headed defense:

21. ...  
22. \( \text{Cf4-e2!} \)

This part of the game is played with strong moves from both sides. It’s interesting to observe how Black keeps trying to defend the d6 pawn, while White keeps attacking it.

22. ...  
\( \text{Mb7-a6!} \)

I can’t help but put exclamation marks on all of the moves here — they’re simply great! Obviously, if White wins Black’s d6 pawn, his whole position will fall apart. However, if Black somehow manages to defend his pawn, chances are that White’s position will not hold against Black’s strong pressure.

23. \( \text{Wg1-h2} \)

Not 23.\( \text{Wxd6??} \) because of 23...\( \text{Wxd6} \)  
24.\( \text{Mxc6 \& xe2} \)  
25.\( \text{Mxc6 \& xc1} \).

23. ...  
\( \text{Ma6xe2} \)

At first sight, it may seem that Black has "resigned" the fight for d6. In truth, the two-bishops advantage that White will receive doesn’t make a huge difference. He will obviously still retain a slight edge, but not more than that.

24. \( \text{Cc1xe2} \)

24.\( \text{Wxe2??} \) deserved serious attention and was probably better. On Atlas’s recommendation 24...\( \text{Mxc1?!} \)  
25.\( \text{Mxc1} \)  
\( \text{Mxd4} \), White simply replies 26.\( \text{Mxd4} \)  
\( \text{Mxc1} \)  
27.\( \text{Mc4} \), winning the b4 pawn by playing \( \text{Mxd2} \) on the next move. Therefore, Black has to look for something else. Let’s take a look at his alternatives:

A) 24...\( \text{Mf6} \) looks a bit dubious to me. After 25.\( \text{Mwd2} \)  
\( \text{Mxe8} \)  
26.\( \text{Me2} \), White has a steady advantage;

B) 24...\( \text{Me7} \), with the idea of preparing ...d6-d5, is also dubious. After 25.\( \text{Mwd2} \)  
\( \text{Mxc8} \)  
26.\( \text{Me2} \)  
\( \text{Mxd1} \)  
27.\( \text{Mxd1} \)  
White again has an edge;

C) 24...\( \text{Me5!} \) is the correct way to play. After 25.\( \text{Md3!} \)  
\( \text{Mxd1} \)  
26.\( \text{Mxd1} \)  
\( \text{Mxd3} \)  
27.\( \text{Mxd3} \)  
\( \text{Mxc3!} \) the position is drawish.

24. ...  
\( \text{Ma1xd1} \)
Chapter 4: Positional Sacrifice

25. \( \text{d2xd1} \) \( \text{d7-c5} \)
26. \( f2-f4 \) \( e6-e5! \)

A very strong positional decision. Already, Måki must have seen his 28th move — otherwise, White would have been better.

27. \( f4-f5 \) \( \text{c5-d7} \)
28. \( \text{d1-d2} \)

The second critical position of the game has arisen. The smoke has cleared, and it seems as though White has won the battle. He has the two-bishops advantage and the d5 square seems weak. However, the g2 bishop is White’s major weakness. If there was a way to sink a knight into e5, Black would stand very well. If this could be accomplished in conjunction with trading the e2 knight and even the e3 bishop, Black might even be better.

Once you start reasoning like this, the move comes to you immediately:

28. ... \( \text{c6-d4!!} \)

The reason I’m putting two exclamation marks to this move is to highlight its importance.

Often, your brain forms a wall that doesn’t let you consider certain moves which give up material — especially in the late middlegame, when you are about to transpose into the endgame. In order to tear down this wall, it’s important to understand the concept of sacrificing to open up a square. When your opponent has a bad piece, try to think of ways (regardless of what you’re sacrificing; you’ll consider that later) where you can trade off the rest of the pieces. If this is at the cost of a pawn — that’s fine. Sometimes, even the sacrifice of two pawns may be totally viable. Pawns alone cannot form anything — they need the support of pieces.

This idea of sacrificing to open up a square is not only a defensive method; if it can be achieved without any sacrifices, chances are that the position of your opponent will be close to lost. As Tarrasch said, “If one piece stands badly, the whole position stands badly.”

29. \( \text{e2xd4} \) \( \text{e5xd4} \)
30. \( \text{e3xd4} \) \( \text{b2xd4} \)
31. \( \text{d2xd4} \) \( \text{c7-c5} \)

Another accurate move! If White does not trade, the queen will occupy a dominant post on c5, and, in conjunction with a knight on e5, will give Black a better position!

32. \( \text{d4xc5} \) \( \text{d6xc5} \)

As Atlas mentions, 32...\( \text{xc5} \) followed by ...\( \text{g7-f6} \) was also possible.
Mastering Positional Chess

33. \( \text{\texttt{h2-g1}} \)

Atlas provides a funny variation: 33.g4 g5! and if Black gets a chance to put his knight on e5 he will be winning! Unfortunately, Atlas misses the 34.e5 \( \text{\texttt{dxe5}} \) 35.e4 draw, but the idea of Black winning this endgame is certainly very comical.

33. ... \( \text{\texttt{g8-g7}} \)
34. \( \text{\texttt{g1-f2}} \) \( \text{\texttt{g7-f6}} \)
35. \( \text{\texttt{f5xg6}} \) \( \text{\texttt{f7xg6}} \)

36. \( \text{\texttt{f2-e3}} \) \( \text{\texttt{f6-e5}} \)
37. \( \text{\texttt{h3-h4}} \) \( \text{\texttt{h7-h6}} \)
38. \( \text{\texttt{e3-f3}} \) \( \text{\texttt{e5-f6}} \)
39. \( \text{\texttt{f3-f2}} \) \( \text{\texttt{g6-g5}} \)
40. \( \text{\texttt{h4xg5+}} \) \( \text{\texttt{h6xg5}} \)
41. \( \text{\texttt{g2-f1}} \) \( \text{\texttt{d7-e5}} \)
42. \( \text{\texttt{f1-f5}} \) \( \text{\texttt{f6-e7}} \)
43. \( \text{\texttt{b5-e2}} \) \( \text{\texttt{e7-d6}} \)

Draw.
A wonderful game and a great illustration of the positional sacrifice to open up a square.

The next game features the same motif. This time, White’s move following the positional sacrifice was so devastating that Black soon found himself paralysed.

\[ \text{\texttt{Karjakin}} \]
\[ \text{\texttt{Kotsur}} \]

Chalkidiki 2002
Modern Defense,
Gurgenidze Variation (B06)

1. \( \text{\texttt{e2-e4}} \) \( \text{\texttt{d7-d6}} \)
2. \( \text{\texttt{d2-d4}} \) \( \text{\texttt{g7-g6}} \)
3. \( \text{\texttt{b1-c3}} \) \( \text{\texttt{c7-c6}} \)

The Gurgenidze set-up of the Modern Defense is a bit dubious, but nevertheless can be an enemy to an attacking player - this probably explains Kotsur’s choice. Karjakin plays the sharpest move:

4. \( \text{\texttt{f2-f4}} \)

However, in this position, there is another way to gain an advantage. In the 2008 Summer Tuesday Night Marathon, my friend IM Sam Shankland played (after 1.e4 g6 2.d4 \( \text{\texttt{g7}} \) 3.\( \text{\texttt{\texttt{c3}}} \) c6) 4.\( \text{\texttt{\texttt{d3}}}; \) and after 4...d5?! 5.\( \text{\texttt{\texttt{e3}}} \) \( \text{\texttt{\texttt{h6}}}; \) 6.\( \text{\texttt{\texttt{d2}}} \) \( \text{\texttt{\texttt{g4}}} \) 7.\( \text{\texttt{\texttt{f4}}} \) \( \text{\texttt{\texttt{wA5}}} \) 8.\( \text{\texttt{\texttt{exd5}}} \) cxd5 9.\( \text{\texttt{\texttt{b5}}} + \) \( \text{\texttt{\texttt{wF8}}} \) 10.0-0 I found myself in a close to lost position.
After the game, I looked this variation up, and found out that White had tremendous success with it. In The Modern Defense by Jon Speelman and Neil McDonald, the authors analyze Gallagher-Izhanov, Lucerne 1997, and write after 4.\( \text{\texttt{\texttt{e3}}} \) d6: "In view of the difficulties Black encounters in this game, the reader is urged to investigate 4...d5(!!?) here. Then after 5.\( \text{\texttt{\texttt{d2}}} \) \( \text{\texttt{dxe4}} \) 6.\( \text{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{xe4}}} \) \( \text{\texttt{d7}} \) 7.0-0-0 \( \text{\texttt{g6}} \) 8.\( \text{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{c3}}} \) ?! 0-0 9.\( \text{\texttt{\texttt{f3}}} \) b5 10.\( \text{\texttt{\texttt{b1}}} \) \( \text{\texttt{b6}} \) 11.h4 \( \text{\texttt{h5}} \) 12.\( \text{\texttt{\texttt{h6}}} \) \( \text{\texttt{\texttt{e6}}} \) 13.\( \text{\texttt{xg7}} \) \( \text{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{g7}}} \) 14.\( \text{\texttt{\texttt{h3}}} \) b4 15.\( \text{\texttt{\texttt{e4}}} \) \( \text{\texttt{\texttt{a4}}} \) Black had excellent attacking
chances based on ...\(\text{b}5\) in Socko-Krasenkow, Poland 1996. Of course, White can also play less aggressively (perhaps recklessly is a better word) than this, but Black should hardly experience serious problems.”

After reading this, two things came to my mind:

A) After Krasenkow’s recommendation \(8.\text{c}x\text{f}6+\) instead of \(8.\text{c}3\), White is better and has great attacking chances;

B) Although \(5.\text{d}2\) isn’t a mistake, my opponent’s move \(5.\text{f}3\) is a serious improvement. I analyzed the line, and didn’t find a single satisfactory response for Black. Inspired by the line, I had a game against FM Alexander Kretchetov (Los Angeles 2009) which went: 1.e4 c6 2.d4 g6 3.\text{c}3 d5 4.\text{e}3 dxe4 5.\text{d}xe4 \text{h}6 6.\text{f}3 \text{g}7 7.\text{c}4 \text{c}0-0 8.0-0 \text{g}4 9.h3 \text{xf}3 10.\text{xf}3, with a great position for White.

\[\text{4. } \ldots \text{d}6-\text{d}5\]
\[\text{5. } \text{e}4-\text{e}5 \text{h}7-\text{h}5\]
\[\text{6. } \text{g}1-\text{f}3 \text{g}8-\text{h}6\]
\[\text{7. } \text{c}1-\text{e}3 \text{d}8-\text{b}6\]

The two authors and grandmaster Boris Avrukh (in his ChessBase commentaries) completely disagree on the correctness of this move. In The Modern Defense, Speelman and McDonald say that the move is a good one, attacking \text{b}2 and placing the queen on an active square. Avrukh, on the other hand, says that the idea is dubious as it doesn’t really achieve anything.

In this case, I tend to agree with Avrukh. Although \(7.\text{b}6\) does have a point, White’s next move is very strong and gives him an edge. Instead, Black should play the usual move \(7.\text{b}4\), although after \(8.\text{h}3 \text{xf}5 9.\text{f}2 \text{xf}3 10.\text{xf}3 \text{b}4 11.\text{d}3\) White has a small edge.

\[\text{8. } \text{c}3-\text{a}4!\]

This is the only move that gains an advantage for White. Instead, \(8.\text{b}1\) takes away the opportunity for White to castle queenside. The idea of the text move is that the knight always has the c5-square if Black plays ...\text{b}5. Even though the knight seems to be awkwardly placed, it is extremely annoying for Black.

\[\text{8. } \ldots \text{b}6-\text{a}5+\]
\[\text{9. } \text{c}2-\text{c}3 \text{c}8-\text{g}4\]

Obviously, Black’s position is rock-solid, but he has very little winning chances. This is the main problem with the Gurgenidze System – it is good enough for a draw, but almost never for more.

\[\text{10. } \text{a}4-\text{c}5!\]
Mastering Positional Chess

Very well played by Karjakin; Black is forced to lose a tempo to defend the b7 pawn.

10. ... \textit{\(\text{W}a5-c7\)}

Avrukh notes the game Luther-Gurevich, Cappelle la Grande 1998, which continued 10...\textit{\(\text{e}5\)} 11.\textit{\(\text{e}2\)} e6 12.\textit{\(\text{b}3\)} \textit{\(\text{b}6\)} 13.\textit{\(\text{h}3\)} \textit{\(\text{xf}3\)} 14.\textit{\(\text{xf}3\)} h4 (such positions occur very commonly in the Gurgenidze; Black has stopped g2-g4, but after White's reply it becomes clear that Black's position is pretty dangerous) 15.\textit{\(\text{d}3\)}! \textit{\(\text{d}7\)} 16.0-0 \textit{\(\text{e}7\)} 17.\textit{\(\text{ab}1\)}! with a clear edge.

11. \textit{\(\text{h}2-h3\)} \textit{\(\text{h}6-f5\)}
12. \textit{\(\text{e}3-f2\)} \textit{\(\text{g}4xf3\)}
13. \textit{\(\text{d}1xf3\)} b7-b6
14. \textit{\(\text{c}5-d3\)}

A novelty, preparing the next brilliant move; practice shows that 14.\textit{\(\text{b}3\)} also gives White an edge. However, the text move is certainly better.

14. ... \textit{\(\text{h}5-h4\)}

The opening stage is completed, and it's time for both sides to construct plans. Obviously, Black has no way to break through, so his plan is to set up a practically unbreakable defensive barricade by means of: ...\textit{\(\text{e}6\)}, ...\textit{\(\text{h}5\)}, ..., \textit{\(\text{e}7\)}, and ...\textit{\(\text{d}7-f8\)} (to meet a possible \textit{\(\text{xf}5\)} by ...\textit{\(\text{exf}5\)} and \textit{\(\text{e}6\)}, blocking the pawn) In White's case, on the other hand, it is not totally clear what exactly he should do. When in such a situation:

\textbf{Stop, think, and decide where you would like your pieces to be placed.}

If White just aimlessly moved pieces, he wouldn't get anywhere. Therefore, White has to methodically go through every piece and see where it would be best located. Obviously, White should castle kingside, and place the rooks on d1 and e1. However, when it comes to the knight, things become clouded. In this closed position, the knight is very important, but all of White's pawns block important squares! Now, White has to think outside the box. Can he open any of the squares? When you ask yourself this question, you give yourself a chance to come up with:

15. \textit{\(\text{e}5-e6!!\)}

As in the previous game, when we see this move played, it seems very easy to find it. However, it's important to understand the process of finding such moves. Not only will White occupy the dominant \textit{\(\text{e}5\)} post, Black's whole pawn structure will also be ruined. Black, who had probably overlooked the sacrifice, played:

15. ... \textit{\(\text{f}7\text{xe}6?\)}

Showing a clear underestimation of Black's weaknesses. Or, the strong Kazakh grandmaster couldn't believe that the diminutive 12-year-old sitting opposite him could find such a brilliant, Karpovesque positional sacrifice. Black's
best bet was to decline the Trojan Horse with 15...f6!. Here I quote Avrukh’s analysis: 16.0-0-0 \(\text{Wd6} 17.\text{B}e1 \text{C}a6 18.\text{Wg4} \text{h}h6 19.\text{C}e5! \text{fxe5} 20.\text{dxe5} \text{Wxe6} 21.\text{B}xa6\) with a clear advantage. However, Black still has chances to hold the position. In hindsight, it should be said that if Black had parried this sacrifice with 14...e6, White would have had the killer move 15.g4! and Black is blown off the board after 15...hxg4 16.hxg4 \text{B}h1 17.\text{W}xh1 \text{C}e7 18.\text{W}h7!.

16. \text{Wf3-g4}

As I already mentioned before, it’s extremely important to follow up a positional sacrifice with strong play. If Karjakin had played a lethargic move such as 16.0-0-0, Black would have been back on track after 16...h6 followed by 17...\text{Cd7}, when he would castle queenside, ignoring the hanging pawn on e6.

16. ... \text{Bh8-h6}

The only way to hold Black’s position together.

17. \text{Cd3-e5!}

The knight sinks its teeth into the dominant post, already, Black’s position is strategically lost, and tactics will soon come to help.

17. ... \text{Bb8-d7}

18. \text{f1-d3}

Defending against the unpleasant threat of ...\text{Cf6-e4}. Black is totally paralyzed, and tries to untie the devil’s knot at all costs.

18. ... \text{f8-g7}

19. 0-0 \text{g7xe5!}

Kotsur finds the best defense in a position where most people would resign and forget about the game. Alternatives were:

A) 19...\text{Cf6} 20.\text{We2} \text{Ch5} 21.\text{C}xg6! \text{Wd6} 22.\text{C}xf5 \text{exf5} 23.\text{C}xh4! and due to the fact that White’s knight is taboo, Black is nearly lost;
B) 19...\text{Cxe5} 20.\text{fxe5} 0-0-0 21.\text{Ce1}! \text{C}e3 22.\text{W}xe6+ \text{Cd7} 23.\text{W}xd7+ \text{B}xd7 24.\text{Bf7} and White is completely winning.

20. \text{f4xe5}

The smoke has cleared, and it’s apparent that Black’s position is in pieces. As Avrukh notes, White only needs to open up the position, so that the bishops could become powerful.

20. ... \text{Cd7-f8}

Black has shown some great defensive prowess and managed to hold his posi-
tion together for now. Therefore, White needs to find a way to crack the position open. In such situations, it’s vital not to hurry, since Black doesn’t have any counterplay. Before breaking through, improve your position to the maximum. It may be tempting to cash in immediately, but it may cost you dearly. Before we move on, take a look at this position:

Borovikov
■ Areschenko
Rivne 2005

Obviously, Black is totally winning with something like ...\texttt{\textuc{e}7} followed by ...\texttt{\textuc{a}d}d6. However, excited that he was winning, he played the tempting:

1. ... \texttt{\textuc{h}4-\textuc{f}5+!!}

What can possibly be wrong with this move? Black pins White’s queen, and it seems like the queen has nowhere to go. However, Areschenko missed the simple but elegant:

2. \texttt{\textuc{h}4-\textuc{f}5+!!}

It soon becomes clear that Black is getting mated. The game continued:

2. ... \texttt{\textuc{h}6-\textuc{g}5}
3. \texttt{\textuc{f}5xd6} \texttt{\textuc{c}8xe6+}

Black resigned.

This game should serve as a warning sign – even in totally won positions, consider your moves carefully, and don’t react too quickly without looking for hidden tactical resources your opponent may have.

Now back to our game. Karjakin made a brilliant move:

21. \texttt{a2-a4!}

Instead of making a committing move such as 21.b4, Karjakin doesn’t put his cards on the table yet and improves his position.

21. ... \texttt{c6-c5?}

Kotsur, annoyed that Karjakin won’t show his plans, cracks. The text move only helps White open the position, and Black soon finds himself in a totally lost position. It was necessary to play 21...a5, although even then White would prepare c3-c4 and eventually win the game rather easily.
22. b2-b3

Karjakin continues in the same quiet, non-committal, and incredibly strong manner. Avrukh notes that 22...b5+ also did the job: 22...cxd7 22...d8 23...xh4! c4 24...a6!! xh4 25...xh4 xh4 26...xf8+ xh7 27...b5+) 23...e1! 0-0-0 24...d2 xh8 25.a5 with a decisive assault along the a-file.

In New In Chess 7, 2002, Karjakin himself indicated that the pretty 22...xh4!! also wins in all lines: 22...xh4 23...f4 xh4 24...f7! 22...xh4 23...b5+ xh7 24...xg6+ xh8 25...xe6, or 22...c4 23...g5 cxd3 24...xh6 xh6 25...xf8+!

22. ... c5xd4
23. c3xd4 xh7-c3
24. xg4-d1

The queen returns home with decisive effect. The threat of 25...c1 is deadly, so Kotsur tries his last chance.

24. ... xf5xd4
25. a1-c1 xh3-b2
26. f2-e3

Winning a piece due to the double threats of 27...f2 and 27...xh6. The rest is agony.

26. ... xh6-h8
27. f1-f2 xh2xb3
28. e3xd4 xh2xb3+1
29. c1xd1 h8-c8
30. d1-f1 xh8-g8
31. f2xf8+!

A nice shot to round off this brilliant game. 31...xf8 loses a second piece to 32...b5+, so Black resigned.

The next type of positional sacrifice that is important to remember is the sacrifice that serves to wrest the initiative. Note the difference between tactical and positional sacrifices here: the person who made a positional sacrifice doesn’t get immediate dividends – rather a long-term initiative. Take a look at the following position:

□ Wells
■ Roundson
Edmonton 2000

This looks like a mundane Isolated Queen’s Pawn position where White has outplayed Black and will proceed to slowly win the game. However, in truth, the story is different. Black’s pieces are very well-coordinated, and the only thing he needs to do is to stop the regrouping xh3 followed by xh4 at all costs.

Black needs to get rid of the extremely annoying pin along the h4-d8 diagonal. 1...xh4 gets the job done, but does nothing against the regrouping. Thus:

1. ... g7-g5!
2. h4-g3

However, what now? Black has simply weakened himself, and done absolutely
nothing to prevent White's regrouping. When in such a situation, ask yourself, "If I forgot about material, is there any way to prevent the regrouping?" In this case, the answer comes easily: the only way to prevent the regrouping is by taking the initiative away from White:

2. ... $f6-e4!!

It doesn't take long to see the great compensation Black gets for the pawn: not only does he have a strong initiative, but he also has an active bishop pair. It may seem paradoxical, but White is in trouble!

3. $f5xe4  d5xe4
4. $e1xe4  f7-f5!

Much stronger than 4... $xd1+? 5.$xd1 $xf3 6.$xf3 $f5 7.$e6! $f4 8.$h2, and after 8... $g7 9.$d6! (not 9.$d7+? $f7 10.$xf7+ $xf7 11.$xh6 when Black has the great 11... $e7! 12.$d4 $xd4 13.$xd4 $f5 and the h2 bishop will never get into play) 9... $ad8 10.$xh6 $e7 11.$d4, and the position is about equal.

5. $e4-e6  $d8xd1+
6. $a1xd1  $f5-f4
7. $g3-h2  $a8-d8

Another important point of the sacrifice is that the h2 bishop is buried alive and Black is effectively a piece up. Most likely, he will eventually activate it with a pawn break such as $h4 or $g3, but for now he is playing with a piece less. Moreover, the bishop is blocking the h2-square for the king, making the first rank weak.

8. $d1xd8  $f8xd8
9. $f3-d2

Another very important position has arisen. Note that White couldn't play 9.$bd2 because of 9... $f7 10.$e1 $xa2 11.$b3 $a5 with a won position. Black has the initiative and has overwhelming compensation for the pawn, but he still needs to find a way to breach White's defenses. Again, it's important to realize which pieces do not stand ideally. In this position, the answer is clear: the h5 bishop. Since the h6 pawn will be untouchable, Black came up with the very accurate:

9. ... $h5-f7

Black had another very interesting alternative, namely 9... $a5. After 10.$e1! (the only move that doesn't lose) 10... $xb3 11.$xb3 $f7 Black is better, but in the game Black had a bigger advantage.

10. $e6-e2
The only move – 10...e1 would have been met by the overwhelming 10...a5!.

10. ...  \text{\textit{\texttt{f7-c4!}}}

Another blow to White’s position; note the bishop on h2, which doesn’t let White take on c4! However, after:

11. \text{\textit{\texttt{e2-e1}}}

it isn’t totally clear what exactly Black had in mind. Rowson, always a very creative and imaginative player, uncorks the brilliant follow-up:

11. ...  \text{\textit{\texttt{c6-e5!}}}

Black’s position may seem precarious, but in truth White cannot do a single thing to improve his position. It’s pretty hard to imagine that 11 moves ago White’s position was very active and it was Black who seemed to be in trouble. Wells tries his best to defend, but his position is already beyond repair.

12. \text{\textit{\texttt{d2xc4}}}

White’s best chance was to rid Black of his powerful bishop, but now the knight takes its place, becoming no less powerful.

12. ...  \text{\texttt{e5xc4}}

13. \text{\textit{\texttt{g1-f1}}}

Wells probably still thought he had some slim chances, but after he saw the blow:

13. ...  \text{\textit{\texttt{b6xf2!}}}

played on the board, his mind must have changed. Resigning was already an option, but White decided to play on for a little while. Interestingly, White gets two pieces for the rook, but by the time he wakes them up, the black rook will already have captured all of White’s pawns and promoted his own.

14. g2-g3!  f4-f3

15. g3-g4

16. \text{\textit{\texttt{f1xf2}}}

17. \text{\textit{\texttt{f2-f1}}}

18. \text{\textit{\texttt{f1xe1}}}

19. \text{\textit{\texttt{e1-f1}}}

20. \text{\textit{\texttt{h2-g3}}}

21. \text{\textit{\texttt{b3-d4}}}

22. \text{\textit{\texttt{d4xf3}}}

White resigned. A brilliant display by Rowson – not only did he come up with a great sacrifice, he followed it up with impeccable technique, destroying Wells’s defensive bastions faster than they could be repaired.

As if his position wasn’t totally lost anyway, White now loses his whole queenside. Wells finally activates his sleeping bishop, but unfortunately it’s way too late.

In the following game, White sacrifices for the same idea, but with a bit more at stake.
Mastering Positional Chess

□ Volkov
■ Balogh

Moscow 2007
Nimzo-Indian Defense,
Rubinstein Variation (E46)

1. d2-d4  e7-e6
2. c2-c4  e7-e6
3. b1-c3  f8-b4
4. e2-e3  0-0
5. g1-e2

The Rubinstein Variation is one of the most popular variations against the Nimzo-Indian Defense. The main idea is to push back the b4 bishop without having to worry about doubled pawns after ...\(\text{\#}x\text{c3}\)+. However, the main drawback is that in order to free the f1 bishop, the knight will have to move again, probably to g3. In my opinion, White has a very small edge here — he simply has easier play.

5. ... d7-d5

By far the most popular move. Black immediately strikes in the center, practically forcing White’s next move.

6. a2-a3  b4-d6

Although there is certainly nothing wrong with this move, much more popular is 6... e7. Ponomariov-Kramnik, Wijk aan Zee 2003, continued 7.cxd5 \(\text{\#}x\text{d5}\) 8.d2  d7 9.g3 b6?! (better is 9...\(\text{\#}7\text{f6}\) with an approximately equal position) 10.\(\text{\#}x\text{d5}\) exd5 11.\(\text{\#}x\text{g2}\) \(\text{\#}b7\) 12.0-0 with an edge.

7. e2-g3  c7-c5

It seems that 7...c6 also equilizes. In Harikrishna-Sargissian, Reyjavik Open 2006, the players agreed to a draw after 8.e2 e5! 9.cxd5 exd4 10.exd4 cxd5

11.0-0 \(\text{\#}c6\) 12.\(\text{\#}f3\) h6 13.\(\text{\#}x\text{ge2}\) \(\text{\#}g4\) 

8. d4xc5  \(\text{\#}d6\)xc5
9. b2-b4  \(\text{\#c5}\)-b6?!

An inaccuracy, which becomes clear after White’s next move. The tempting 9...d4 loses a pawn to 10.\(\text{\#}a4\), but 9...\(\text{\#}e7\) is much better. The position seems totally equal to me — in Aronian-Pelletier, Calvia Olympiad 2004, Black equalized quickly after 10.\(\text{\#}b2\) a5 11.b5 dxc4 12.\(\text{\#}xc4\) \(\text{\#}bd7\) 13.\(\text{\#}e2\) \(\text{\#}b6\) 14.\(\text{\#}b3\) e5! 15.0-0 \(\text{\#}e6\) and the players soon agreed to a draw.

10. \(\text{\#}c3\)-a4!  \(\text{\#}b6\)-c7
11. \(\text{\#}c1\)-b2

Now, 11...a5 makes little sense after 12.b5, so Black has to resort to other means. Balogh decides to develop with:

11. ...  \(\text{\#}b8\)-c6

In retrospect, it might have been better to play 11...dxc4. After 12.\(\text{\#}xc4\) \(\text{\#}e7\) 13.0-0 White is better, but after 13...\(\text{\#}c6\) Black has chances to equalize.

12. c4xd5

A novelty probably found over the board; however, both 12.\(\text{\#}e2\) and 12.\(\text{\#}c1\) are also good enough for an
advantage. Interestingly, the latter was played by grandmaster Alexander Graf, an expert for White in this line. He got a small advantage which he slowly converted in Graf-Ionov, Russian Championship, Moscow 1991. In another game, Graf chose 12.\textls{-6}b3, but shouldn’t have achieved much after 12...\textls{-6}g4 if his opponent Tischbierek had played accurately.

12. ... e6xd5

Balogh, an attacking player, didn’t want to suffer after 12...\textls{-6}xd5 13.\textls{-6}b3. Objectively speaking, the latter variation might have been better, but practically, Balogh’s choice was better.

13. \textls{-6}f1-e2 \textls{-6}d8-e7

After 13...\textls{-6}e5 White obtains an edge after 14.0-0 \textls{-6}xb2 15.\textls{-6}xb2 d4 (15...\textls{-6}b6 16.\textls{-6}d3 with the idea of 17.\textls{-6}f4 is good for White) 16.e4!, followed by 17.\textls{-6}d3 with an edge.

14. 0-0 \textls{-6}f8-d8

A typical isolated queen’s pawn position has arisen. White is better, since his pieces are placed very well to prevent ...d5-d4 and to exploit Black’s weaknesses. However, in order to actually exploit them, White needs to construct a plan:

A) White should bring the a4 knight to d4 by means of \textls{-6}c5-b3-d4;
B) The rook should control the c-file by means of \textls{-6}c1;
C) White should further strengthen control of d4 by means of \textls{-6}d2 and \textls{-6}d1;
D) The e2 bishop will be optimally placed on f3.

If White achieves this plan, he will have total domination of the position, so Balogh invented his own, dynamic plan.

15. \textls{-6}a1-c1 d5-d4!

This is Balogh’s idea – he cracks the position open at a time when White’s pieces aren’t ideally placed to meet it.

16. e3xd4 \textls{-6}c7-e5?

Balogh had been counting on this move. Before we discuss what White should do, let’s analyze the key concepts in this position. Black’s best idea lies in the active 16...\textls{-6}f4!, and although Black’s compensation will certainly not be enough, the fight will still be ahead. For example, after 17.\textls{-6}c5! (17.\textls{-6}c2?! \textls{-6}e5!) 17...\textls{-6}d6 18.\textls{-6}f3 h6 19.\textls{-6}c2 \textls{-6}g4 20.\textls{-6}xc6 bxc6 23.\textls{-6}xc6 \textls{-6}d5 the position is not completely clear. Balogh, however, simply overlooked White’s next move. Let’s try to model Volkov’s train of thought:

“My opponent is threatening to take my central pawn with an excellent game. So, I have to think of something. Of course, 17.h5 does nothing after 17...\textls{-6}xd4, because I cannot play 18.f4. Since I cannot defend the pawn without sacrificing something, why can’t I sacrifice the queen? My material disadvantage will be minimal, while I will have a huge initiative. My two rooks will control the crucial open files, my
opponent’s back rank will be extremely weak, and the e5 pawn will be untouchable, forcing my opponent to further worsen his position with a knight retreat. In addition, I will also have the nice b4-b5 idea, when Black will either have to burn all his bridges with ...Qxe5 or play the awkward ...Qd8."

Therefore:

19. b4-b5  Qc6-d8
20. a4-c5!

It was very easy to lose control of the game. Instead, something along the lines of 20.b6? would release Black from the cage after 20...Re6! 21.f4 (21.bxa7 Rxa7 22.Qb6 Qc6) 21...Qc6! 22.f5 Qb3! 23.f6 gxf6 24.Qf5 Wf8 and it’s Black who is winning.

20. ... Qd8-e6
21. Qc5-e4!

This knight will dominate the whole position. Instead, the tempting 21.Qf5? hands over the initiative after 21...Wg5 22.Qd6 Qf4! 23.Qf3 Qg4!.

21. ... Qe6-f4
22. a2-f3 Qc8-e6

Black only needs one more move, ...Qd8, in order to consolidate his position. Therefore, White has to act fast. Volkov transfers his e4 knight to d6, where it exerts even bigger pressure on the black position than it did on e4.

23. Qe4-d6

On move 16, the position seemed very unclear – it’s pretty hard to imagine that this position has arisen in only seven moves! However, Black is still not lost, as the game shows. In order to maintain
his huge pressure, White has to play very carefully. In positions like this, one move could ruin the whole brilliant game.

23. ... H_a8-b8

The only move which doesn't lose.

24. Qg3-f5?!

A slight blot. 24.Qge4 would have kept the huge pressure.

24. ... He7-g5?!

Returning the favor. Much better was 24...hxg5! 25.Qxf5 He6, when Black would have had a bit of an easier life. After something like 26.Qe3 followed by Qd5 White is clearly better, but at least Black could fight on.

25. h2-h4!

As it often happens, tactics come to the aid of strategy. The only drawback of this move is that Black finally gets a chance to create some complications, which could have caused the position to become very unclear.

25. ... Qf4-h3+
26. Qg1-f1 Wh5-f4
27. Qg5-f7+?

A major error that could have changed the result of the game. Interestingly, when I looked at this game first, I gave this move an exclamation mark (!), giving the variation 27.Qd4? Wh2! 28.Qxf5 Qxf5 29.Qxf5 Whxh3+ 30.Qg2 Whxf5 with equality. However, Reeh found the correct move: 27.Qxe8! Qxf5 28.Qd6 and White is practically winning.

27. ... Wh8-g8
28. Qe7-d5 Wh4-h2

Reeh mentions that with 28...Whxh4 29.Qxh4 Qxh3+ 30.Qe1 Qxd6 31.exd6 Qe8+ Black gets counterplay, but this is untrue, as after 32.Qe7 Black's counterplay comes to an end.

29. g2xh3

This is the decisive mistake – Black had probably missed White's 31st move. Instead, after 29...Qxd6 30.exd6 Qxh3+ 31.Qe2 Whxh3 White has a material advantage, but his king is placed very shakily and Black has good chances of counterplay. However, after the exact 32.Qd4! White nevertheless retains a clear advantage; for example: 32...b6 33.Qc3 Qe8+ 34.Qe3 Whxh3 35.Qc6! with a clear edge. Still, Black should have gone for this – the smoke has not yet cleared.

30. Wh1-e2 Wh3-g2

Black had probably relied on this, but overlooked the simple but elegant:

31. Qd1-h1!

when Black's queen is trapped! After

31. ... Qg2xh1
32. Qc1xh1

Black threw in the towel.
Often, one side has a chronic weakness that cannot be exploited because the position is closed. In such cases, it’s very important to immediately open up the position, even at the cost of material. Perhaps you don’t think that opening up the position is worth material. Maybe the following game will change your mind:

\[ \square \text{Nijboer} \]
\[ \text{■ Braun} \]
Wijk aan Zee III 2008
French Defense,
Winawer Variation (C18)
1. e2-e4 e7-e6
2. d2-d4 d7-d5
3. \( \text{\&b1-c3} \) \( \text{\&f8-b4} \)
4. e4-e5 c7-c5
5. a2-a3 \( \text{\&b4xc3+} \)
6. b2xc3 \( \text{\&d8-c7} \)
7. \( \text{\&d1-g4} \) f7-f5
8. \( \text{\&g4-h5+} \) g7-g6
9. \( \text{\&h5-d1} \) \( \text{\&c8-d7} \)

The most popular and probably best move.

10. \( \text{\&f1-d3} \)

Paradoxically, this is a novelty. However, in a few moves, it transposes into one of the main lines starting with 10.\( \text{\&f3} \).

10. ... \( \text{\&d7-a4} \)
A typical idea for the French. Black’s main idea is to stop the annoying plan a4/\( \text{\&a3} \). Also, on a4 the bishop is just extremely annoying.

11. \( \text{\&c1-d2} \) \( \text{\&b8-d7} \)
12. \( \text{\&g1-f3} \) h7-h6!
This is better than the alternative 12...c4, since Black shouldn’t commit so quickly.
In Kamsky-Cu.Hansen, Groningen 1995, White quickly obtained an advantage after 13.\( \text{\&e2} \) h6 14.\( \text{\&h4} \) 0-0-0 15.\( \text{\&c1} \) \( \text{\&b6} \) 16.\( \text{\&h3} \) \( \text{\&e8} \) 17.\( \text{\&b1} \).

13. h2-h4 0-0-0
After 13...a6, with the typical French idea ...\( \text{\&b5} \), White replies with the strong 14.\( \text{\&h5!} \) g5 15.g4! fxg4 16.\( \text{\&g6+} \) \( \text{\&d8} \) 17.\( \text{\&h2} \), with a clear advantage.

14. \( \text{\&h1-h3?!} \)
A rather empty move. First of all, White loses the right to castle (he probably wouldn’t have in the near future anyway, but later it might have been possible). Also, White doesn’t really threaten anything, since \( \text{\&g3} \) is easily neutralized by ...\( \text{\&e7} \). More prudent and simply better is 14.\( \text{\&c1} \).

14. ...
11. \( \text{\&d7-b6} \)
15. d4xc5?
This is way too risky – White opens up all of his weaknesses. My guess is that Nijboer simply overlooked Black’s next move.
It was much better to play 15...e3, but Black has a strong reply in 15...e7!
(15...c4 also promises equality after 16...xc4 dxc4 17...d2 w6 18.f3 cxd4), when he seems to have an edge in every line:
A) 16...d2 c4 17...xc4 dxc4 18...xb6 cxd4 19...xd4 (19...xe5+ 19...c3!);
B) 16...xc5 c4 17...d4 (17...xc4 dxc4 18...e2 c5 17...c6 18...e2
g5! with a slight advantage.
15. ... c6-d7!
A very strong retreat, which Nijboer had probably missed. The Dutchman may have counted on the inferior 15...wxc5?!, when White achieves an equal position after 16...d4 e8 17...e2 c4 18...xc4 dxc4 19.f4.
15...d7 is another type of move that we usually do not consider – we do not tend to look at retreats!
16. c5-c6!
Nijboer finds the best defense in an already difficult situation. The alternative to the text, 16...d4, gives Black a huge initiative after 16...xc5! (not 16...xe5?!, when after 17...xe6 w7 18...xd8 c3+ 19...f1 xc5 20...e3 the position is unclear), for example: 17...f4 e7 18...e3 g5!
with an initiative and a clear advantage.
16. ... a4xc6

Chapter 4: Positional Sacrifice

17. ... e1-f1!
Nijboer continues to play well in a difficult position. The text move kills two birds with one stone. First of all, White brings his king to a safer place. Second, e5 is defended, since 17...xe5 is now met by 18...f4, winning a piece.
17. ... d7-c5
18. a3-a4 c5-e4!
Ignoring the a4 pawn, which is totally unneeded as capturing would give White counterplay along the open a-file.
19. d2-e3 g8-e7
20. w1-c1
The critical position has arisen, and it certainly seems like White has built up a strong defensive bastion.

White has kept the position closed, and his weaknesses covered. At the mo-
ment, it isn’t too clear how to defend the h6 pawn. In such a position, it’s very important to start thinking of ways to open up the position – White’s pieces aren’t prepared for this. Forgetting about material, Braun found the only way to crack open the position:

20. ... g6-g5!!

A truly beautiful positional sacrifice; opening up the h-file, through which all of Black’s pieces will penetrate into the white camp. However, a question arises: what exactly made this sacrifice possible? A few factors:

A. White had a lot of weaknesses and spent most of his attention on defending them, not improving the position of his pieces;
B. After depriving himself of castling, White’s king was stuck in the center, making the sacrifice and the opening of the position much more effective;
C. As a result of both factors above, White’s pieces were chronically uncoordinated, making the sacrifice even more unpleasant.

When considering a sacrifice such as the one above, try to ask yourself the question, “Did my opponent make mistakes to justify this sacrifice?” If the answer is yes, go for the sacrifice. If you didn’t see any blatant mistakes, think twice about the opening of the position. The following questions will be useful to ask yourself in that case:

A. "Are my opponent’s pieces ready to meet the sacrifice?"
B. "Are my pieces well placed to support the sacrifice?"
C. "Is my king safe enough, and if yes, is my opponent’s king located unsafely?"

If you don’t ask yourself these questions, it’s very risky to sacrifice, since you don’t know if it is sound! In this case, White is obviously unprepared for the opening of the position, and a pawn is absolutely worth sacrificing! In addition, White cannot decline the sacrifice, as the move 21...g4 would be deadly.

21. h4xg5 h6xg5
22. e3xg5

The move 22.e3xg5 is met by 22...d7g8 23.xe4 fxe4 24.xe4 25.gxh3 26.e5 with a totally crushing attack.

22. ... h8xh3
23. g2xh3 d8-h8

With every move, Black’s pressure grows stronger. Nijboer could have tried 24.xe4 xe7 25.xe4 fxe4 26.d6, but after the simple 26...e5 Black wins on the spot.

24. h3-h4 e7-g6
25. d1-e3 c8-b8
26. a4-a5 h8-h5!

Forcing White’s next move, after which his whole position collapses immediately.

27. d3xe4 d5xe4
28. f3-d4 c6-d5
Chapter 4: Positional Sacrifice

29. $e3-g3  e4-e3!

A great combination to top off a wonderful positional game. The e3 pawn is poisoned, but White cannot decline it.

30. $g5xe3  $c7-c4+
31. $d4-e2  $h5xh4
32. f2-f3  $h4-h1+
33. $e3-g1  $g6-e7
34. $g3-f4  $h1xg1+

Black is winning material.

35. $f1xg1  $c4xe2
36. $a1-f1  $d5-c4
37. $f1-f2  $e2-e1+
38. $g1-g2  $e7-d5
39. $f4-h4  a7-a6  0-1

So far, we have looked at sacrifices that achieve an advantage, but sometimes things don’t go so smoothly. The positional sacrifice is also a great defensive technique – eliminating an important attacking piece is an extremely important skill. Usually, it’s hard to convince yourself to sacrifice for a defensive cause because in a worse position, it’s not easy to just sacrifice material! Nevertheless, it might save you many points.

In the following game, Black, by sacrificing an exchange, achieves very strong counterplay and White soon makes a big error.

\[ \text{Magem Badals} \quad \text{Nijboer} \]
\[ \text{Mondariz Zonal 2000} \]

It’s clear that Black has been outplayed – his weaknesses are scattered all over the board, his attack has been stopped, and White threatens to crash through Black’s defenses with $h5. Therefore, Black has to invent something urgently. In such cases, it’s very important not to panic. Panicking will only make you play much worse; stay calm, and try to find the best defense. It’s clear that White’s knight on f3 holds his position together – it defends both the $g5 bishop and supports his attack in gen-
eral. When in such a situation, know that you have nothing to lose; it’s better to risk than to get mated. Nijboer, without hesitation, immediately eliminated the f3 knight with the great positional sacrifice:

16. ... $f8xf3!!

As soon as the move is made, it becomes clear that White’s attack is seriously hindered. Analysis does show that White could have kept a clear advantage, but practically speaking, White’s position will not be easy to play at all. White obviously accepted the sacrifice:

17. g2xf3

Black made necessary prophylaxis with:

17. ... $e6xf7!

“Stopping” h5 (18 h5 was still a move here, but then Black would get great counterchances) and removing the bishop from the vulnerable square on e6. Magem Badals also found a great prophylactic move, defending his only vulnerable square:

18. $e2-c1! $a5-b6
19. $d3-e4 $d7-f6
20. h4-h5!

Magem Badals continues along the correct but very narrow path. Instead, almost any other slow move would have been met by 20...a5, with great counterchances. However, after:

20. ... $f6xf5

A position arises where White has a lot of options, and in order to choose the correct one White has to do some heavy calculation. White played the most obvious and natural move, namely:

21. $h1xh5?

And this sacrifice turns out to be a major mistake, after which Black immediately takes over the initiative. Let’s take a look at White’s alternatives:

A) 21...$c3 is met by 21...a5 22.$c5 $xd4! 23.$d7 $a7 24.$xd5 cxd5 25.$e5 $c5 26.$xf7 $xf7 and now White has the computeresque 27.$xh5! gxh5 28.$h4 with a strong attack. However, with 28...e5 Black can still defend;

B) 21.f4 is not very good on account of 21...$xd4 22.$f5 $e8 23.$h4 c5 24.$b3 e5! with a rather messy position;

C) 21.$h4! is the brute-force computer move which is the best. After, for instance, 21...a5 22.$xe7 $xe7 23.$xe7 $xd4 24.$xh5! gxh5 25.$b3, Black is in major trouble.
21. ... g6xh5
22. Še1-g1

This was White’s idea. He defends the d4 pawn and threatens 23.Šh6. However, after Nijboer’s next move White realizes that his attack is no longer effective; Black’s king will be in total safety, and his material advantage will already be gone.

22. ... Šg8-h8
23. Še4xd5

White admits that he has made a big mistake and immediately resorts to defensive measures. The knight on d5 was extremely dangerous and threatened to make a deadly leap to c3.

23. ... c6xd5
24. Šg5xe7 a7-a5
25. Še7-c5 Šb6-f6

Black has a definite advantage because of his voracious bishops, White’s weak pawn on f3, and Black’s passed pawns on the h-file, which will play a major role in the endgame.

26. Šc1-d3 Ša8-c8l
27. f3-f4 Šf7-g6
28. Šd3-e5

At first glance it seems like White has built a strong defensive wall, but he has merely placed a cover on his weaknesses. Black accurately occupies the extremely weak light squares.

28. ... Šg6-e4
29. Šg1-e3 Šf6-f5
30. Še3-f2??

Blundering away two pieces for a rook, but the position was already extremely bad. Kaspi gives 30.Šxd3 Šc6 31.Šf1 h4 with a clear advantage for Black.

30. ... Šc8xc5
31. d4xc5 Šg7xe5

Black is totally winning.

32. c5-c6 Šf5xf4
33. Šf2xf4 Še5xf4
34. Šd1-f1 Šf4-e5 0-1

Of course, White was still much better after the sacrifice, but finding the narrow path was very difficult.

Sometimes, you aren’t lost, but you are under very unpleasant pressure. A great technique is to sacrifice a pawn, but trade a few minor pieces in order to free the position. Take a look at the following game:

Chapter 4: Positional Sacrifice
Stefansson
Fernandes

Istanbul Olympiad 2000
Dutch Defense,
Leningrad Variation (A87)

1. d2–d4 f7–f5

The Dutch Defense is an opening which
has had a very shaky reputation. Al-
though some strong grandmasters play
it, theory and practice have shown that
it isn’t a great opening. The first move
doesn’t do much for development, and
only weakens the king.
White decides to go for the main line
with g3 followed by g2 and g3.

2. g2–g3 g8–f6
3. h1–g2 g7–g6
4. g1–f3 f8–g7
5. 0–0 c7–c6!

A rather rare variation of the Dutch—
most players start with ...d6, and only
later decide whether to play ...c6 or not.
However, the text move avoids the ma-
Jor variation with an immediate d4–d5
followed by c3d4.

6. c2–c4 0–0
7. b2–b3 d7–d6
8. c1–b2

8. ... f6–e4

To be honest, I don’t really like this
move, since the knight on e4 doesn’t re-
ally do anything; besides, why commit
so quickly? With his next move, White
practically forces Black to take with his
e4-knight.

A question arises: why did he move to
e4 in the first place? A brief overview of
Black’s main moves:

A) 8...w7c7 is met not by the most
popular move, 9.cbd2, but by the
much stronger 9.d5! For example,
Vladimirov-Tisdall, Gausdal 1990, con-
tinued 9...e5 10.dxc6 6xc6 (10...bxc6
11.c5!) 11.6xc3 6e7 12.6c1 6h6
13.6a3! 6d8 14.e3 with an edge for
White;

B) 8...e8e is, alongside 8...6a6, the
most popular move. Black’s idea is to
prepare ...e7–e5. However, White al-
ways has d4–d5, stopping it. A great
model game for White here is
Sasikiran-Dzhumaaev, Commonwealth
Championship 2003, which continued
9.6bd2 h6 10.wc2 g5 11.e3 6a6
12.a3 6c7 13.b4 with a good
advantage;

C) 8...6a6 is, as I mentioned above,
one of the most popular moves. White
obtains an advantage by playing, among
the many possibilities, 9.cbd2 6d7
10.6e1 d5 11.a3. Mikhalevishin-
Overall, the position after White’s 8th
move already promises him at least a
slight edge – this is the main reason
why none of the super-grandmasters
play this opening; White simply gets an
advantage without a fight!

9. c1–d2
Black is practically forced to take this
knight.
Chapter 4: Positional Sacrifice

9. ... \( \mathbb{e}4xd2 \)
10. \( \mathbb{d}1xd2 \) \( \mathbb{b}8-d7 \)

11. \( \mathbb{f}3-g5! \)

Strong play by Stefansson. White immediately goes for the weak e6-square (which was weakened on the very first move!) and after Black defends, fixes it with the usual move d4-d5. White already has an edge.

11. ... \( \mathbb{d}7-f6 \)
12. \( d4-d5 \) \( c8-d7 \)
13. \( h2-h4 \)

I am not convinced that this is a strong move. White’s idea is clear — after ...h6 he wants to be able to control g5, but I’m not completely sure that White needed to spend time on this.

Instead, after 13.\( \mathbb{a}d1 \) White seems to be increasing his pressure. For example, if Black plays 13...h6, White will reply with 14.\( \mathbb{g}h3 \), and now if 14...g5, White obtains an advantage with 15.\( f4 \) g4 16.\( f2 \) followed by an eventual e2-e4. Now, Black gets time to play a very important move.

13. ... \( \mathbb{w}d8-e8! \)

Black plans to play ...h7-h6 and follow it up with ...\( \mathbb{w}f7 \) — the queen will cover up e6 and stand well in general, also putting pressure on d5.

14. \( a1-e1 \) \( h7-h6 \)
15. \( g5-h3 \) \( e8-f7 \)
16. \( b2-d4 \) \( a7-a5 \)
17. \( h3-f4 \)

Stefansson has placed all his pieces on optimal central positions and White’s pressure has reached a peak. Therefore, Black has to find some way to relieve the pressure, but how? In such cases, it’s very important to determine what exactly your opponent is attacking, and what your weaknesses are. In this position Black has a few:

A. The hole on e6 is certainly gaping, and White is permanently controlling it with his knight and his pawn on d5;
B. White’s pieces are located optimally, while Black’s are located very clumsily. Also, the b6-square has just been weakened;
C. White is also putting pressure on the c6 pawn, and it’s extremely hard to permanently defend it.

These three factors make Black’s position very shaky. The only way to solve these problems would be to close the position by means of ...c6-c5. An inexperienced player would exclude this move because White wins a pawn after 18.\( \mathbb{xf}6 \) and 19.\( \mathbb{e}6 \). However, how
bad is the arising opposite-colored bishop position, where Black has compensation along the a- and b-files? As soon as you ask yourself this question, the move Black played next seems completely natural.

17. ... c6-c5!
Not too hard to find, but still a very nice defensive positional sacrifice. Black not only gets rid of the weakness on c5, he also blocks the g2 bishop, which is now obstructed by his own pawn on d5. While the weakness on e6 persists, in order to win a pawn, White has to place his knight there, which Black will take. Then, the pawn on e6 will cover up the weakness. True, White gets the diagonal for his bishop, but in this case controlling the diagonal is not very important.

18. d4xf6 g7xf6
19. f4-e6 d7xe6
20. d5xe6 f7-g7
21. g2xb7 a8-a7
22. d2-d5
The only move to defend against both 22...AXB7 and 22...c3.

22. ... a5-a4

A good idea – White lures Black into taking the b3 pawn after axb3 ...xb3 b8, but then he will have activity along the b-file, promising him an initiative. However, Black doesn’t fall for the “trap”.

23. ... f6-c3
24. e1-c1 g7-e5
25. bxaxA c3-b2
Not necessarily bad, but unnecessary. Black could have achieved equality more easily by means of Tyomkin’s recommendation 25...AXA4 26.c2 b8 27.c6 c3, with full equality.

26. c1-c2 a7xa4
27. f1-b1 a4-b4
28. d5xe5 b2xe5
29. b1xb4 c5xb4
Despite White’s extra pawn, the position is completely drawn. White has no way to break through due to the opposite-colored bishops. The rest is easy technique.

30. f2-f4 e5-c3
31. b7-d5 f8-b8
32. g1-f2 g8-g7
33. f2-f3 h6-h5
34. f3-e2 b8-b6
35. e2-f2 g7-f6
36. f2-e2 1/2-1/2
Chapter 4: Positional Sacrifice

Lastly, the positional sacrifice may be used to defend against a very unpleasant threat. In other words: if your opponent wants to carry out a dangerous plan, stopping it in its tracks with a positional sacrifice is very often the way to go. Undoubtedly, the master of such sacrifices was former World Champion Tigran L. Petrosian. In conclusion of this section, let’s take a look at one of his greatest performances:

**Portisch**

**Petrosian**

San Antonio 1972

It’s clear that White has outplayed Black in the opening, and will proceed to systematically pressure the e7 pawn until Black finally has to play ...exd6 (which is essentially resignation). Therefore, a radical plan to stop the impending pressure is necessary.

In such cases, the positional sacrifice theme comes into mind. For Petrosian, finding the next move was not hard, but not everybody is Petrosian! First of all, if Black has any way to defend, even at the cost of some material, a sacrifice is already a serious option. In this case, the only way is obvious: Black can advance his e-pawn to e5. However, White then traps the f8 rook with ...e7. Most players would make the mistake of stopping their reasoning at that point. Petrosian, however, takes his reasoning one step further. Even if White does win the exchange, Black will have a huge knight on c5 and he can advance his e- and f-pawns at his convenience. Thus, Petrosian played the brilliant first move:

1. ... e7-e5!!
2. g5-e7

Portisch later wrote that he had thought that Petrosian simply blundered. Of course, the Hungarian grandmaster simply didn’t know that Petrosian had seen this long before Portisch even began to think about it.

2. ... f7-f5
3. e7xf8 d7xf8

It doesn’t take long to realize that Black has full compensation for the exchange – Portisch correctly decides that the time to bail out has come, and switches from trying to win to trying to hold the draw.

4. f3-e2 g7-h6
5. c1-c2 b7-c8
6. b1-c3 f6-d7
7. f1-e1 d7-f6
8. e2-f1 f5-f4
9. c2-e2 e8-f8
10. c3-a4 c5xa4
11. d1xa4 f6-d7
12. c6-e7+ g8-h8
13. e7xc8 c7xc8
14. a4-a3 d7-c5
15. a3-f3 c8-f5
16. h2-h3 ½-½
In conclusion, it should suffice to establish a few rules about when sacrifices can be considered:

| A. When on the defensive, positional sacrifices may be considered to lock the position up. |
| B. Positional sacrifices may be considered to weaken the opponent’s pawn structure. |
| C. When attacking, they may be considered to open up a file, diagonal or square. |
| D. When you are losing, they may be considered to take over the initiative. |

Overall, this is an extremely important chapter; I recommend reading it more than once, as positional sacrifices in the middlegame occur very often.

**Positional Sacrifice in the Endgame**

In the endgame, positional sacrifices occur rarely but nevertheless are very important to master. Many games have been won through positional sacrifices in the endgame. Usually, the player doesn’t sacrifice more than a pawn, since sacrificing more material is usually too high a cost. Take a look at the following:

**Example:**

\[\text{\textcopyright V. Mikhalevski}\
\text{\textcopyright Kaganskiy}\
\text{Ashdod 2004}\

At first glance, White seems to be much better, since Black’s pieces have no place to go. However, if Black gets a chance to play \(\ldots g6, \ldots \text{g}7\), and \(\ldots \text{e}6\), his pieces will be freed and he will simply realize his material advantage. Thus, White is even at risk of losing here! Therefore, White has to prevent the regrouping at all costs. First of all, the radical \(1.h4\) \(g6\) \(2.h5\) with the idea of meeting \(2...\text{g}7\) by \(3.h6+\) is simply met by \(2...\text{gxh}5\), when White has nothing for the pawn. If White somehow blocked the \(g6\)-square, Black would be in complete zugzwang, as he doesn’t have an alternative way to untangle his pieces. Once you find this idea, the solution should immediately come to you. Nevertheless, it’s extremely hard to find if you don’t think about what Black wants.

1. \text{g}5-g6!!

Obviously, White pays the price of a pawn, but in reality he “wins” two pieces since they simply can’t move!

1. \text{f}7xg6

\(1...\text{hxg}6\) leads to a similar position after either \(2.f4\) or \(2.h4\).

2. \text{f}2-f4
Also good is 2. h4.

2. ...    h7-h5!

The only chance for Black is to prepare the bishop sacrifice with ...h5-h4-h3. Then, after the sacrifice of the bishop, Black’s knight will have a chance to target h2.

3. ¤c1-d2  h5-h4
4. ¤d2-e3  h4-h3
5. b2-b3    b5-b4
6. ¤e3-f3

Forcing the sacrifice of the bishop for two reasons: first, Black has no waiting moves, and second, even if he did, White would simply win the h3 pawn with ¤g3/¤xh3.

6. ...    ¤f8-e6
7. ¤c7-c8+  ¤g8-f7
8. ¤c8xa8  ¤e6xd4+

Black may seem to have achieved counterplay, but he loses all his pawns.

9. ¤f3-g4  ¤d4-e2

Trying his last chance – the passed d-pawn. As we shall see, it is still possible for White to fall into a trap.

10. ¤a8xa5  ¤e2-c3
11. ¤a5-a7+  ¤f7-e6
12. ¤a7-a6+

Also winning is 12. ¤xg7 d4 13. ¤xg6+ ¤d5 14. ¤g8, and the f-pawn promotes.

12. ...    ¤e6-e7
13. ¤g4-f3  d5-d4
14. ¤a6xg6  ¤c3xa2
15. ¤f3-e4

Black could have resigned now, but he decides to play on until the very end.

15. ...    ¤e7-f7
16. ¤g6-b6  ¤a2-c1
17. ¤b6xb4  d4-d3
18. ¤e4-e3  ¤f7-g6
19. ¤e3-d2  ¤c1-e2
20. ¤d2xd3  ¤e2-g3??

A funny “trap,” which Mikhailovski “falls into.”

Obviously, a pawn is a lot in an endgame, but if one paralyzes the opponent’s pieces with its sacrifice, it’s obviously worth it. In the position we just looked at, White was already down material in the beginning (two pieces for a rook). Therefore, it was very hard to force himself to sacrifice another pawn. Instead, he could have tried something like ¤d2-e3 followed by ¤c5 with a perfectly acceptable position. Nevertheless, he did not fear to sacrifice the pawn.

In the next example, the position is already better for White. He has strong pressure, and Black has a lot of weaknesses. In such cases it’s very important to forget that your position is better; if you ask yourself, “Why do I need to risk sacrificing when I’m better anyway?” you will never force yourself to sacrifice. You need to concen-
trate not on why you are sacrificing, but rather on the objective and practical correctness of the sacrifice.

For example, if you are sacrificing to open up a square in the ending, ask yourself, “Is a pawn worth sacrificing for the square?”, and if you are reluctant, search for better possibilities. Remember, a pawn isn’t too much material; even in a heavy + minor piece endgame. Even though there might be a better opportunity, psychologically, a positional sacrifice may lead to your opponent being surprised and making mistakes.

In this case, it’s important to identify what is holding the weaknesses together. In this case, it’s the light-squared bishop (it is protecting the key squares). In order to exploit Black’s weaknesses, this bishop must be eliminated, even at the cost of a pawn. Immediately, White’s idea becomes very easy to find. The h3-c8 diagonal is where both Black’s king and bishop are located, so White must occupy it. Thus:

1. f5-f6!!

The main point of this sacrifice is that Black is forced to take it – if after 1...g6 White didn’t have 2.h5, the text move would have been completely useless.

1. ... g7xf6
2. e4-f5+ d7-c7
3. f5xc6 b8xc8
4. b4-c6 a7-b7

4...a8 5.b6 e8 6.hb1 and Black will soon get mated.

5. b1xb7+ c7xb7
6. h1-b1+ b7-c7
7. b1-b6

Grandmaster Peter Wells captures the essence of the position in a catchy phrase: “A tale of two outposts – one purposeful, the other lacking direction.” Both White’s rook on b6 and his knight on c6 totally dominate the posi-
tion, while Black’s f4 bishop is a sad remnant of Black’s position 20 moves ago. Still, White has to show some technique in order to win.

7. ... c8-a8
8. d6-b4 e5-e4

Black tries to somehow activate his bishop, but it’s obviously too late – he loses the a6 pawn and soon, the game.

9. b4xa6+ c7-c8
10. c4-c5 d6xc5
11. b6-c6+ c8-d8
12. a6xc5 d8-e7
13. a5-a6 a8-d8
14. a6-a7?!

This doesn’t give Black any chances, but immediately winning was 14.d6+ hxd6 15.b7 d7 16.xd6 b6x6 17.xd6 a7 and the pawn promotes.

14. ... d8-a8
15. c6-a6 f4-e5
16. e2-e3?!

Again, White doesn’t show full accuracy in the realization of his advantage. In order to stop Black’s next move, he had to play 15.h5, and due to the imminent e3xe4 Black could safely resign.

16. ... h6-h5!
17. c5-a4 e5-h2!

White had probably missed this – he now had to be very careful not to allow Black a lot of counterplay.

18. e3xe4 h2-g1

This loses quickly. The only chance was to play first 18...f5+, when White’s fastest win was 19.gxf5 g1 20.d6+ d8 21.d5 xxa7 22.xxa7 xxa7 23.c5, when victory will be gained by c6 and c7+, followed by d6-d7+.

19. g4xh5 f6-f5+
20. e4xf5 a8xa7
21. a6xa7+ g1xa7
22. a4-c3 e7-f8
23. d5-d6 a7-f2
24. f5-g5 f7-f5+
25. g4xf5 f2xh4
26. f5-g6 h4-g3
27. c3-e4 g3-e5
28. h5-h6 1-0

In this game, the sacrifice of the pawn caused White no problems materially; moreover, it ruined Black’s pawn structure. Therefore, you need not worry too much when making such sacrifices. Of course, offering more than a pawn is extremely rare, but such sacrifices nevertheless occur. Take a look at the following position:
Frankly, I was extremely surprised that Black took back with the a-pawn instead of the c-pawn on his previous move. I immediately penetrated the seventh rank, and had already recorded 1...♕d8 on the scoresheet. When my opponent started thinking, I became even more surprised. I completely forgot that my b2 pawn was hanging! When I realized what my opponent had in mind, I was horrified and impressed at the same time:

1. ... ♖c7-b6!!

How did Black come to this idea? If you reach a position where it seems like you have only one viable reply, regardless of whether it is in the opening, middlegame, or endgame, always stop to think before responding.

In this case, the only move seems to be 1...♕d8, but once you realize that the b2 pawn is hanging, it will be much easier to find 1...♖b6. White will have an extra knight, but the passed pawns are already far advanced, and White’s uncoordinated knights are the worst pieces to fight passed pawns.

Obviously, I had nothing better than to accept the sacrifice, since otherwise Black would just take on b5 or b2.

2. ♗a7xe7 ♗h8-d8!

Black plays with great accuracy. Instead, the careless 2...♕xb2? leads to an unclear position after 3.♗d2!, when White controls the important c4-square.

3. g2-g3 ♗g7xb2
4. ♗e7xf7

The position is incredible – White is completely cut off from the queenside; he simply cannot cross the d-file! Therefore, I desperately took any material that I could, hoping for the best. However, as we shall see, White did have an incredible way to draw:

4. ... b4-b3
5. ♗f7-e7 ♗d8-d1+
6. ♗g1-g2 ♗b2-d4
7. ♗e7xe6+ ♗b6-b7!

Another great move – instead, after 7...♗xb5 the tables would have been turned by 8.♗d6! b2 9.♗c3+ ♗a5 10.♗xd4 ♘xd4 11.♖xd1 ♗b1 12.♗xd4.

8. ♗e6-d6?

This is the decisive mistake! Fritz 10 shows an incredible draw: 8.♗e7+! ♗c8
Chapter 4: Positional Sacrifice

9. $\text{xe}8+$ and now if 9... $\text{xc}7$? White has $\text{xd}6$ 14. $\text{cxd}6+$ $\text{xc}7$ 15. $\text{e}5$ $\text{b}1$ $\text{w}$ would have won the game immediately!

10. $\text{b}6+$! $\text{b}7$ 11. $\text{xe}7+$ $\text{xb}6$ 12. $\text{e}5$ $\text{xe}5$ 13. $\text{xe}5$ $\text{c}6$ 14. $\text{c}3$ $\text{c}1$

15. $\text{a}4+$ with at least a draw.

8. ...

11. $\text{xe}2xc1$ $\text{w}1xc1$

12. $\text{f}3xd4$ $\text{c}5xd4$

13. $\text{d}6xd4$ $\text{w}7-c7$

14. $\text{b}5-b6+$ $\frac{1}{2}-\frac{1}{2}$

I was shocked when my opponent played this move, throwing away all of his previous work. The prosaic 10... $\text{c}2$

11. $\text{c}xd4$ $\text{cxd}4$ 12. $\text{c}xd4$ $\text{c}d2$ 13. $\text{c}f5$

I have no idea what Black missed, but it must have been something very simple. Despite the accidental result of the game, the knight sacrifice was brilliant.

Although this chapter is really short, it nevertheless contains some very important information. First of all, in endgames, a pawn is almost always worth the paralysis of a piece. Also, if your opponent has one piece that is holding the position together, do not be afraid to sacrifice! In the final example, Black sacrificed a whole piece in order to activate his passed pawns.

We shall review the main points of the positional sacrifice as a whole:

A. **When sacrificing in the opening, the sacrifice is usually to wrest the initiative away from your opponent.**

In Kirchhoefer-McShane, Black's 13... $\text{e}5$ was purely to wrest the initiative from White. Practically speaking, the position after such a sacrifice will usually be excellent for you, as your opponent constantly has to solve difficult problems.

B. **A special opening where positional sacrifices are often hanging in the air is the Hedgehog structure of the English or Sicilian Defense.**

This sacrifice can serve to establish a huge outpost on $\text{c}6$ and lock out the $\text{b}7$ bishop, even in the opening (Romanishin-Petrosian, Nikolic-Van Wely).

C. **In the middlegame, sacrifices can be used both to attack and to defend.**

Sometimes, a sacrifice may not be totally correct (passive defense might be objectively better), but it's very unpleasant for your opponent psychologically when he is attacking to suddenly lose the initiative (Magem Badals-Nijboer).

D. **It is extremely important that you carefully think through the sacrifice before committing - a pawn is a pawn, and sometimes the consequences need careful calculation.**

In the game Wells-Rowson, Black's initiative hung on a thread, and Rowson had to calculate the consequences of his sacrifice very carefully.

E. **In the ending, sacrifices occur much more rarely and you need to be especially careful. Always ask yourself if it's worth it.**

Finally, and most importantly, you need not convince yourself not to sacrifice; if you think the sacrifice is correct, it probably is!


**Exercises**

Now, I’d like to give the reader some exercises on all types of sacrifices – they will not be easy, so do not get upset if you get some of them wrong.

The players are coming out of the opening, and the position seems very double-edged and unclear, with White having the two bishops advantage, but also a weakened kingside. Is there a way for Black to make use of the weakness of the light squares in White’s camp?

The position looks very double-edged, and in order to find the correct idea you will have to do some calculation. Is there a way White can wrest the initiative away from Black?

In Fischer-like style, White has gained control of the vital d5 square, and is planning to plant a knight there, even at the cost of a pawn at c2. Can Black stop him?

White had just played an important novelty, and he obviously stands a bit better. Is there a way to neutralize that slight advantage?
Chapter 5: Paralysis in the Middlegame

Paralysis is a concept that is very important to understand. Inexperienced players often underestimate how unpleasant it is to play when all of your pieces cannot move. In the following games, we will examine techniques to restrain your opponent’s pieces.

In our first game (of course, I’m sure that most of the readers have seen it, but nevertheless it is a classic), Black will go so far as to sacrifice a piece (!) in order to paralyze White’s position.

\[ Sämisc/\]

\[ Nimzowitsch \]

Copenhagen 1923
Queen’s Indian Defense,
Old Main Line (E18)
1. \( d2-d4 \) \( g8-f6 \)
2. \( c2-c4 \) \( e7-e6 \)
3. \( g1-f3 \) \( b7-b6 \)

This was one of the first games where a real Queen’s Indian was played. However, since Nimzowitsch was way ahead of his time, he often played openings that were considered absurd then but are played on a regular basis nowadays.

4. \( g2-g3 \) \( c8-b7 \)

A few years later, Nimzowitsch would develop the ultra-modern 4...\( \text{a}6 \), which was unheard of at the time, but is the most popular move at grandmaster level today.

5. \( f1-g2 \) \( f8-e7 \)
6. \( b1-c3 \)

More popular in modern times is the pawn sacrifice with 6.0-0 0-0 7.d5?!

7. ... \( d7-d5?! \)

Obviously, Nimzowitsch probably made this natural move without thinking, but in fact it gives White a very pleasant position. The more provocative 7...\( \text{e}4! \) is the only road to near-equality: 8.\( \text{c}2 \) (White has other moves such as 8.\( \text{e}4 \) and 8.\( \text{d}2 \), but they all lead to similar positions) 8...\( \text{xc}3 \) 9.\( \text{xc}3 \) c5! (Black has to challenge

187
Mastering Positional Chess

White in the center, or else the latter will build up a menacing position with $\text{d}1 \text{ and } a \text{ possible d4-d5)} 10.\text{d}1 \text{d}6 11.\text{b}3 \text{b}6 12.\text{b}2 \text{d}7 13.\text{d}2 \text{e}7 14.\text{dxc5 bxc5 with total equality in Karpov-Ivanchuk, Linares 1992.}

8. $\text{e}3-e5!$

Sämisch finds the right path to an advantage. White has more space and it’s not clear how Black should develop his pieces. Nimzowitsch chooses a rather passive route, which causes further damage to his position.

8. ... $\text{c}7-c6?!$

Obviously, we are not talking about a huge advantage here, but this move allows White to gain a nagging initiative. The main line here runs: 8...$\text{a}6 9.\text{b}3!? \text{c}5 10.\text{b}b2 \text{b}8 11.\text{d}5 \text{e}5 12.\text{c}1 \text{c}7 13.\text{e}3 with a long-lasting edge in Smyslov-Hübner, Moscow 1981.

9. $\text{c}4\text{xd5}$

Even without any theoretical knowledge, Sämisch, a world-class player, should have found the rather simple and strong 9.e4!, when Black is in some trouble. The right way to play seems to be 9...$\text{a}6 10.\text{d}4 \text{exd}4 11.\text{d}xc4 \text{b}5 12.\text{d}e3 \text{d}7, but after 13...$\text{d}4! \text{b}4 14.\text{a}4 White had a clear edge in Kortchnoi-Yusupov, Rotterdam 1988.

9. ... $\text{c}6\text{xd5}$

I have no idea what Sämisch was thinking, but now, Black gets the c6-square for his knight and the e2-e4 break loses all effectiveness. Although White has a strong knight on e5, it can be traded immediately with ...$\text{c}6$.

10. $\text{c}1-f4$

Sämisch develops his bishop, exerting pressure on c7 and defending his e5 knight. Also, he might be threatening $\text{b}5$ at some point.

10. ... a7-a6

Typical Nimzowitsch; he stops a threat in its tracks even before it materializes. However, I don’t see any problems with 10...$\text{bd}7$ either.

11. $\text{a}1-c1 \text{ b}6-b5!?$

Nimzowitsch aims for more than a boring draw. Although the c5-square is weakened, White will have a hard time making use of that, and Black prepares a possible ...$\text{wb}6$ or ...$\text{bd}7$-$\text{b}6$-$\text{c}4$.

12. $\text{d}1-b3$

Threatening $\text{a}4$ followed by $\text{c}5$, but this is child’s play compared to Nimzowitsch’s ideas.

12. ... $\text{b}8-c6$

Now, 13.$\text{a}4$ is met by 13...$\text{xd}4$, while Black simply wants to take on e5 and then play 14...$\text{d}7$, with at least equality.

13. $\text{e}5\text{xc6 b7xc6}$

14. h2-h3

A total waste of tempo – why not $\text{b}8$ or $\text{c}7$?

14. ... $\text{d}8-d7$

15. $\text{g}1-h2?$

After this horrible move, Black gets a strong initiative. Already, White needed to be careful not to get a slightly worse position, but Fritz draws our attention
to the strong move 15.\(\text{b6}\)! with the dual idea of \(\text{d2-d4}\) and \(\text{d2-f3-e5}\).
A continuation might be 15...\(\text{h5}\)
16.\(\text{d2 a5}\) 17.\(\text{c2 e3}\) 18.\(\text{f3 f6}\)
19.\(\text{f1}\) with equality.

15. ... \(\text{f6-h5!}\)
16. \(\text{f4-d2}\) \(\text{f7-f5!}\)

With just two moves, White’s position has become miserable. First of all, his king position is very weak, and a possible ...\(\text{d6}\) followed by ...\(\text{f6-g6}\) would already spell trouble. Also, the e2-e4 break is no longer a possibility, and Black’s knight is eyeing the great outpost e4. It’s already quite hard to recommend something, but what Sämisc did certainly isn’t the right defense.

17. \(\text{b3-d1?!}\)

Worried about the possibility of getting mated, Sämisc immediately retreats his queen from the queenside, where it did nothing to defend. However, this completely ignores the existence of that same queenside! Nimzowitsch immediately makes use of the fact that White has retreated his queen from there.

17. ... \(\text{b5-b4!}\)
18. \(\text{c3-b1}\) \(\text{c6-b5}\)
A very picturesque position.

If this were a mural in the Louvre titled “The Triumph of the Black Forces”, I wouldn’t have been too surprised. Every single white piece is located in the worst possible place: his queen does absolutely nothing to defend either flank, his f1 rook is hemmed in by its own pieces, his c1 rook and both of his bishops are staring into empty space, and his knight doesn’t even have a square. The king can also become the subject of a huge attack.
Still, technique is needed to finish White off; after all, Sämisc could be a very slippery defender sometimes.

19. \(\text{f1-g1}\) \(\text{e7-d6}\)

Here, Sämisc probably got very excited, recorded his move quickly, and breathed a sigh of relief. He must have looked at Nimzowitsch quizzically, and immediately played

20. \(\text{e2-e4?!}\)

At first glance, it seems like Black has simply blundered something – it isn’t too easy to realize that White can create a threat with his pieces placed like this. However, Nimzowitsch had devised a plan even some of today’s grandmasters might not have seen.

20. ... \(\text{f5xe4!}\)
21. \(\text{d1xh5}\) \(\text{f8xf2}\)
Mastering Positional Chess

After a short glance at the board, we should realize that White’s extra piece makes no difference whatsoever — his whole position falls apart anyway! Still, Sämisch made Nimzowitsch actually win the game; after all, White can still consolidate if Black plays too slowly.

22. \( \text{Wh5-g5} \) \( \text{a8-f8} \)
23. \( \text{h2-h1} \) \( \text{f8-f5} \)
24. \( \text{g5-e3} \) \( \text{b5-d3} \)
25. \( \text{c1-e1} \) \( \text{h7-h6} \)

If the picture after Black’s 18th move didn’t impress you, this one will! White is forced to resign in this jaw-dropping, astounding position, where every move loses a huge amount of material.

However, sometimes a player is paralyzed, but has moves he could make which don’t harm the position. In such cases, a great resource, which is sometimes used by players, is the usage of the king. After all, he is in no danger when his opponent’s position is paralyzed! Take a look at the following game:

\[ \square \text{Short} \]
\[ \square \text{Timman} \]

Tilburg 1991

Alekhine Defense (B04)

1. \( \text{e2-e4} \) \( \text{g8-f6} \)
2. \( \text{e4-e5} \) \( \text{f6-d5} \)
3. \( \text{d2-d4} \) \( \text{d7-d6} \)
4. \( \text{g1-f3} \)

Along with the capture 4.exd6 followed by 5.c4, this line is the most popular. The objective evaluation of the text line is that White has a slight edge.

4. \( \ldots \) \( \text{g7-g6} \)
5. \( \text{f1-c4} \) \( \text{d5-b6} \)
6. \( \text{c4-b3} \) \( \text{f8-g7} \)

7. \( \text{d1-e2!} \)

Not the main move, but nevertheless an interesting one. White’s idea seems to be to prepare e5-e6 and vacate the d1-square for a rook. In my opinion, a
Chapter 5: Paralysis in the Middlegame

... bit better is the main move 7.  \( g5 \). Now, in Karapov-Torre, Leningrad Interzonal 1973, White won nicely after 7...d5 8. \( f4 \)  \( c6 \) 9. \( c3 \) f6 10. \( f3 \) \( f5 \) 11.0-0 \( w7 \) 12. \( b2 \) fxe5 13. fxe5 0-0 14. \( w2 \) \( a5 \) 15. \( c2 \) \( xc2 \) 16. \( wxc2 \) (White is already better because of Black’s blunt g7 bishop, but Torre only throws more wood into the fire with his next moves) 16... \( f5 \)?! 17. \( d4 \) e6?! 18. \( f1 \) c5 19. h3 (already threatening a possible g2-g4 and if ... \( w4 \), \( g3 \), winning the queen!) 19...cxd4 20.cx\( d4 \) \( c6 \) 21.b3 \( d7 \)? 22. \( a3 \)! \( f7 \)? 23. g4! \( w4 \) 24. \( g5 \) 1-0.

7. ... \( b8-c6 \)
8. 0-0 0-0
9. h2-h3

Prophylaxis against ... \( g4 \) – and keeping the g7 bishop blocked by the e5 pawn.

9. ... \( a7-a5 \)
10. a2-a4 \( d6xe5 \)
11. d4xe5 \( c6-d4 \)
12. \( f3xd4 \) \( w6xd4 \)
13. \( f1-e1 \) \( e7-e6?! \)

Although the text is the second-most played according to statistics, much better in my opinion is the simple developing move 13...d7, which Timman played against Leko in 1996.

The game continued 14. \( c3 \) \( c6 \) 15. \( h5 \) \( xh5 \) 16. \( wb5 \) c6 17. \( w2 \) \( d5 \) 18. \( c3 \) \( wb6 \) 19. \( c4 \) \( ad8 \). Now Leko played the mistaken 20. \( g5 ? \), allowing Timman to equalize after 20...h6!. Instead, 20.h4! would have given White a clear edge.

14. \( b1-d2! \)

A strong move with the obvious aim of placing the knight on f3, where it will reinforce the e5 pawn and can be transferred to f6 via g5 (or via d2) and e4.

14. ... \( b6-d5 \)
15. \( d2-f3 \) \( d4-c5 \)
16. \( e2-e4! \)

Already, Black is in some serious trouble. White threatens to transfer his queen to h4, and start a very dangerous attack against the black king. Timman is forced to try to prevent it, but already Black’s position is very precarious.

16. ... \( c5-b4 \)

If Black decided to ignore the threat and play 16... \( d7 \), a sample line is 17. \( w4 \) \( c6 \) 18. \( w6 \) \( b4 \) 19. \( c4 \) f6 20. \( xg7 \) \( xg7 \) 21. \( e6 \) \( x6 \) 22. \( d4 \) with a nearly winning position.

17. \( b3-c4! \)

Powerful play by Short – he is willing to give away his strong b3 bishop in order to cut off the queen, which is really important in the defense.

17. ... \( d5-b6 \)
18. b2-b3

Karpov probably would have preferred to transpose into a better endgame with 18. \( d3 \), but Short finds attacking more appealing than winning a slightly better endgame. White’s pawn structure will
be ruined, but this has no relevance — who will care about pawn structure if Black’s king gets mated?

18. ... $b6xc4
19. b3xc4 $f8-e8!

Timman is not ready to go down without a fight. Black vacates the f8-square for his queen, so that White cannot play $h6.

20. $e1-d1

Preventing ...$d7, and more or less cutting off the a8 rook as well.

20. ... $b4-c5?!

This gives White a chance to develop his attack even more quickly. Black had a good chance in 20...$e7, with the idea of meeting 21.$a3 with 21...$f5 followed by 22...$f7. White would still be clearly better, but at least Black would have good chances to defend.

![Chess Diagram]

21. $e4-h4?!

Interestingly, none of the annotators of this game pay attention to a hidden resource: 21.$a3! $c6 and only now 22.$h4, threatening the unstoppable $e7-f6, with mate. Short’s move does not ruin anything, but still, 21.$a3 would have been more accurate.

21. ... b7-b6

Desperately trying to coordinate his pieces, but White’s attack is too quick.

22. $c1-e3 $c5-c6?!

Grandmaster Ian Rogers correctly mentions that Black’s only chance was to play 22...$f8 — after all, what did he play 19...$e8 for?

23. $e3-h6!

Already, Black is in huge trouble. None of his pieces, with the exception of the bishop on g7, are doing anything to defend Black’s king; and White’s queen, bishop, and knight are organizing themselves for a final mating attack.

23. ... $g7-h8
24. $d1-d8!

White sets the board on fire! Now he penetrates to the 8th rank, causing even more discord in Black’s position. Not only does White have a huge attack, but Black’s position is paralyzed as well!

24. ... $c8-b7

It’s understandable that Timman played this move, but in my opinion, his only chance to achieve counterplay was 24...$d7!?, in order to sacrifice the queen after 25.$c4 $axd8 26.$xc6 $xc6, though after 27.$g5 and 28.$f6 White is still objectively winning.

25. $a1-d1 $h8-g7
26. $d8-d7

Short plays with incredible accuracy — now, Black is forced to go into total passivity. On 26...$e4, White has the amazing 27.$xf7!! (Rogers).
is totally paralyzed, Short realizes that he has a clear path with his king to h6!

31. \( \text{g}1\text{h}2! \text{E}8\text{c}8 \)

Rogers correctly mentions that the try for activity with 31...\( \text{c}8\) is met by the mating 32.\( g4\) \( h\times g4 \) 33.\( c5 \text{g}5 \text{xd}7 \) 34.\( h5 \).

32. \( \text{h}2\text{g}3 \text{c}8\text{e}8 \)

33. \( \text{g}3\text{f}4 \text{b}7\text{c}8 \)

34. \( \text{f}4\text{g}5! \) 1-0

Black is totally paralyzed and the only thing he can do is move his rook back and forth. However, it's not totally clear how White can realize his advantage.

Unfortunately, he cannot move his knight to g5 because Black is attacking g2, and moving the queen away is not what he wants. Therefore, White has only one piece left: the king. Since Black

An amazing position; Black is totally paralyzed, and White is about to play 35.\( \text{h}6\) and give mate with 36.\( \text{g}7 \).

Rarely can a king be used in such a way.

The next game is no less incredible – White uses his king in a completely different way, but as we shall see it was much harder to decide on such a daring walk.

\( \text{Psakhis} \)
\( \text{Hebden} \)

Chicago 1983

White is a pawn up and his position is completely dominating; Black cannot move! However, his bishop on b6 and pawn on d6 are stopping White from playing c4-c5, and there doesn't seem to be a winning reorganization in sight. Like in the previous game, since Black's pieces are totally paralyzed, Psakhis realized that using his king was a very effective method here; but where will the king go? It can go to g4, but what will it do there? It can go to d3, but then where will it go after that?
Although it wouldn’t come to everyone’s mind, Psakhis understood that if he somehow evicted Black’s bishop from b6, then the b5 pawn could go to b6 or b7 with support from another piece. After some thought, Psakhis realized: can’t my king help the b5 pawn advance?

43. \( \text{g}2\text{-f1!} \)

At this point Hebden still probably did not realize White’s plan, and was still counting on the game ending in a draw.

43. \( \ldots \) \( \text{b6-a7} \)
44. \( \text{f1-e2} \) \( \text{a7-b6} \)
45. \( \text{e2-d3} \) \( \text{b6-a7} \)
46. \( \text{d3-c4!} \)

Played without hesitation!

As a side note, I would like to say that when I was reading an article by grandmaster Gregory Kaidanov in one of Dvoretsky’s books, Kaidanov mentioned that grandmaster Psakhis had a great feel for using the king; he was unafraid, even when the opponent had many pieces, to use his king in many ways.

Here, a horrified Hebden must have realized the problem, and he tries to prevent the king from reaching his rendezvous point at a6. However, the king simply uses another path.

46. \( \ldots \) \( \text{e7-c7+} \)
47. \( \text{c4-b3} \) \( \text{c7-e7} \)
48. \( \text{g3-g4} \) \( \text{a7-b6} \)
49. \( \text{b3-c4} \) \( \text{b6-a7} \)
50. \( \text{c4-b5} \)

If you saw this position alone, you would think that the king must be misplaced.

It’s incredible how it stands here in the midst of Black’s camp, exerting more pressure than all his other pieces. The thought of the king helping to prepare a deadly pawn advance is amazing — and even more amazing is the fact that Black cannot stop him. Hebden finds his last chance, but Psakhis simply uses the positions of his pieces to construct an even deadlier idea.

50. \( \ldots \) \( \text{e7-e8+} \)
51. \( \text{d5-c6} \) \( \text{e8-d8} \)
52. \( \text{b5-c4} \) \( \text{d8-e7} \)
53. \( \text{f5-d7!} \)

Bam! Immediately Psakhis uses the ideal situation to trade queens — the king will now have a dominating post on d5 if Black trades immediately, and on Hebden’s next move, the king will go back to a6 to support the already familiar, decisive advance b4-b5-b6.

53. \( \ldots \) \( \text{e7-e6+} \)
54. \( \text{d7xe6} \) \( \text{f7xe6} \)
55. \( \text{xf3xf8} \) \( \text{g7xf8} \)
56. \( \text{c4-b5} \) \( \text{f8-e7} \)
57. \( \text{b5-a6} \) \( \text{a7xf2} \)
58. \( \text{c3-c4} \) \( \text{e7-d8} \)
59. \( \text{a6-b7} \)

The triumph of White’s plan — the king has traveled all the way from g1 to b7, and in that time, caused so much dis-
cord in Black’s position that he was forced to bail out into a lost endgame.

59. ...  d2-e1
60. b4-b5  e1-f2
61. b5-b6  f2-d4
62. c6-a4  d6-d5
63. cxd5  exd5
64. e4xd5  e5-e4
65. b7-c6  d8-c8
66. d5-d6  e4-e3
67. a4-b5  d4-f6
68. b5-a6+  c8-b8
69. c6-d7  1-0

Certainly, this king walk was much more complex and harder to find than the previous one, which paid immediate dividends, while in this case, White needed to be very careful and switch plans according to Black’s decisions.

When someone’s position is paralyzed, it usually means that all his pieces are defended, but they cannot move. Just like in a brick building, removing one brick can cause the whole building to collapse. Translating that to chess terminology: if you eliminate one piece, the whole position will topple. In the following game, things aren’t so simple, but nevertheless the connection will be clear.

\[ I. \text{Sokolov} \]
\[ \text{Emms} \]
\[ \text{Hastings 1998/99} \]
\[ \text{Nimzo-Indian (E21)} \]

1. d2-d4  g8-f6
2. c2-c4  e7-e6
3. g1-f3  b7-b6
4. b1-c3  f8-b4

This variation is more or less a hybrid between the Nimzo-Indian and the Queen’s Indian.

5. d1-b3?!

From what I have seen, this move seems to lead to the sharpest positions. White forces Black to make a decision: what to do with his bishop?

In the game, Emms chooses the most popular and sharpest option, leading to very interesting play. However, objectively speaking, White is better in this line.

5. ...  c7-c5
The alternatives are 5...a5, 5...\textit{e}7, and 5...\textit{x}c3+.

6. \textit{c}1-\textit{g}5

Again, the sharpest continuation. The alternative 6...d3 leads to quieter positions.

6. ... \textit{c}8-b7

On the main alternative 6...\textit{c}6, grandmaster Ptacnik gives the variation 7...d5 \textit{c}a5 8.\textit{w}c2 \textit{h}6 9.\textit{h}4 d6 10.\textit{e}e4 \textit{e}5 11.\textit{d}d2 \textit{d}d7 12.\textit{d}db1! with a slight edge in Van Wely-Tiviakov, Groningen 1994.

7. \textit{a}1-d1

Interesting, but probably not best. I honestly don’t understand why White didn’t play 7.0-0-0 with the same idea, but now with his king in safety. Black needs to be really careful in that variation. After 7...\textit{x}c3 White doesn’t play 8.\textit{w}xc3?! after which Black gets equality with the thematic 8...\textit{e}e4!, but rather 8.bxc3!. In Ivanisevic-Pikula, Bar Open 2003, White got an advantage after 8...d5 9.e4! dxe4 10.\textit{e}e5 \textit{b}d7 11.\textit{e}e2 \textit{w}c8 12.\textit{a}a3 with a very strong attack.

7. ... 0-0

8. \textit{e}2-\textit{e}3 \textit{c}5xd4?!

Black employs a more aggressive and concrete strategy, giving away the two bishops advantage but ruining White’s pawn structure and practically forcing his king to stay in the center. The other reasonable move in this position, 8...\textit{x}c3+, is again met by 9.bxc3 in order not to allow ...\textit{e}e4.

9. \textit{e}3xd4

Fortunately for Black, on 9.\textit{w}xb4, he has the already familiar equalizer 9...\textit{d}xc3 10.\textit{x}xc3 and now 10...\textit{e}e4! 11.\textit{x}xd8 \textit{c}xc3 12.bxc3 \textit{d}xd8.

I doubt the correctness of this move; after all, White will have the very strong g-file for his rook, and it isn’t clear how Black can use the “weakness” of the white king. Obviously the move has its pluses, but giving away such an important bishop is not worth the destruction of the pawn structure around White’s king, which can’t be attacked anyway.

In Alterman-Gelfand, Tel Aviv 1999, Gelfand improved on Emms’s play by taking the c3 knight: 9...\textit{x}c3+. After 10.bxc3 Gelfand played 10...\textit{w}c7!, and after the obvious 11.\textit{x}f6 Gelfand played 11...\textit{x}xf3!. After 12.gxf3 gxf6 13.\textit{w}c2 \textit{f}4 14.\textit{e}e4 \textit{w}xe4+, the players agreed to a draw. However, Alterman’s statement that the position is totally equal after 9...\textit{x}c3+ is not quite right — White seems to be getting an edge after the simple 11.\textit{d}d3.

9. ... \textit{b}7xf3?!

Sokolov understands that the only way to take advantage of his initiative is to play energetically. He doesn’t worry about the fact that he loses the right to
castle; Black simply cannot take advantage of that. However, this had all been played before and Sokolov’s novelty comes not until a few moves later.

11.  
12.  
13.  

This is the novelty: White stops ...e6–e5, and prepares f3 and f4-f5 all at the same time. Already, Black has a bit of trouble freeing his position.

In his preparation for the game, Emms must have looked at the earlier game in this variation, Jakobsen-Hansen, Torshavn 1997, in which White’s position went rapidly downhill after 13...f1 c5 d7 14.e3? (too passive; this allows Black to free himself and take advantage of White’s weakened position) 14...f8 15.f4 g6 16.d5 w8! with a better position for Black.

13.  
14.  

This is a thematic move in such positions – Black is trying to establish the squares d5 and e4 for his pieces, but underestimates the risk. If White didn’t play energetically, then Black would simply take on c4 and things would look much more rosy for him. However, Sokolov plays according to Nimzo-

witsch: attack the base of the pawn chain! In retrospect, I would say that the simple 14...f8, retaining a playable position, was the best choice.

15.  
16.  
17.  

Without hesitation, Sokolov starts the assault on Black’s position. The more you look at it, the more critical Black’s position seems. Understanding that, Emms seeks to open up the position in order to exploit the position of White’s king.

15.  
16.  
17.  

Many players would fear a discovered check, but Sokolov realized that there were simply no effective discovered checks! The position is really amazing – White’s king is in the center, his bishop is undefended, and his pawn structure is ruined, but Black’s pieces are located in the worst possible places to exploit all these factors. Although a mistake, Emms’s next move is understandable – he just wants to free himself from White’s grasp!

17.  

It seems that this was the decisive mistake. The g-pawn was vitally important because it defended the f6 knight, thus cementing Black’s position. It was not too late to play 17...c7 (Tisdall), when Black’s position still wouldn’t have been too bad. Sokolov simply retreated his queen:

18.  

And Emms decided to grab a pawn while he still could. Still, I am not cer-
tain that this was the right choice as it opens up the h-file for the white pieces!

18. ... \[\text{d8-c7}\]
19. \[c4-b3 \text{c7xh2}\]
20. \[g1-h1 \text{h2-c7}\]

A critical position has arisen, and it's time for White to decide on a course of action. First of all, because of Black's 17th move, he is totally paralyzed; he can only move his rook back and forth. Therefore, White has time. The question is: how does he take advantage of the precarious position of Black's pieces? In such a situation, it's very important to determine what exactly is holding your opponent's position together. In this position, it's obviously the e7 bishop – without it, Black's whole position would collapse. So White needs to find a way to eliminate it. Then why not place the rook on e1?

21. \[\text{e1-f1}!\]

With one little king move, White sets the whole position ablaze; it's incredible! Suddenly Black is in big trouble. On 21...\[\text{d6}\], White has the beautiful resource 22.a3 followed by 23.f4, trapping the queen! Emms finds the only defense: to place the queen on d8 – but he's in for another unpleasant surprise.

Again, Black seems to have defended against White's onslaught. However, by playing 22...\[\text{f8}\] Black has left the e7 bishop undefended. Therefore, by his next move, White highlights the total hopelessness of Black's position:

23. \[\text{b3-a4}!\]

It doesn't take long to see that Black can safely resign. Tisdall also draws our attention to another win in this position, namely 23.\[\text{xe7}\] 24.\[\text{d5} \cap xd5 25.\text{xe7} \cap xe7 26.\text{b7}\].

23. ... \[\text{b6-b5}!\]
24. \[\text{a4xb5} \text{a8-b8}\]
25. \[\text{b5x7} \text{d8x7}\]
26. \[\text{e1xe7}!\]

The last finesse. This mates much faster than 26.\[\text{xf6}\].

26. ... \[\text{d7xe7}\]
27. \[\text{g5xf6} \text{e7-e6}\]
28. \[\text{d4-d5} \text{e6-a6}\]
29. \[\text{f1-g2} \text{b8-b6}\]
30. \[\text{c3-e4} \text{1-0}\]

An amazing display by Ivan Sokolov; in textbook fashion, he showed how to exploit a paralyzed position.
Chapter 5: Paralysis in the Middlegame

Sometimes, when your opponent’s position is paralyzed, a tactical motif comes to help. In the previous case, it was constructing a plan. In the following game, Black uses tactics to finish White off.

Podgaets
Dvoretsky
Odessa 1974
Czech Benoni Defense (A44)

1. d2-d4  c7-c5
2. d4-d5  e7-e5

Nowadays, theory considers this variation to be better for White, but nevertheless, it’s extremely solid and if White doesn’t find a good set-up, Black can achieve easy equality in a few moves.

3. e2-e4  d7-d6
4. Qb1-c3  f8-e7
5. Qg1-f3  c8-g4
6. h2-h3  g4xf3
7. f1xf3  e7-g5

Already, the tabiya of the variation has been reached, and White is at a crossroads. There are two main moves in this position: 8.Qxg5 and 8.Qb5+. Both have their pros and cons, but in my opinion Podgaets chose the inferior move:

8. Qf1-b5+

Overall, it’s pretty clear that 8.Qxg5 promises White an advantage; he can either go into a better endgame with 9.Rb5 (Miles-Gheorghiu, Ostend 1986) or 9.Qg4, or keep the queens on the board with h4 followed by g3 and h3, as in the game Nikcevic-Drazic, Kladovo 1991, where White got a great position and won in excellent fashion.

Because of these variations, most Czech Benoni players have switched to another move order: 1.d4 c5 (or 1...Qf6 2.c4 c5 3.d5) 2.d5 Qf6 3.c4 and only now 3...e5. This line with the quick trade of two bishops is almost forgotten today.

8. ...  e8-f8
9. c1xg5  d8xg5

The position is very similar to that of the game Nikcevic-Drazic mentioned above, with the only difference being that Black’s king is now on f8, but in order to place his bishop on h3 White needs to spend a few more tempi. Podgaets decides on the same plan that Nikcevic employed later.

10. h3-h4  g5-e7
11. b5-e2?!

A totally useless move: if Podgaets wanted to re-route his bishop, he should have played 11.Qf1 followed by g3 and h3. In that case, the bishop would have been impeding the ...f7-f5 break and helping to prepare g2-g4 at the same time.

Podgaets also had a principally different plan, namely playing h4-h5 to definitely stop the ...f7-f5 breakthrough that was constantly nagging him. After
11...h5!? Black's best bet is to seek immediate counterplay on the other flank with 11...a6 12...f1?! b5. However, after 13.g3 cxd7 14.h3, White has a clear edge since Black's counterplay on the queenside is not sufficient to compensate for the chronic weaknesses of Black's position.

11. ... h7-h5!

Dvoretsky doesn’t miss his chance; he immediately stops White from playing h4-h5, and in the long term he will prepare ...g7-g6 followed by ...f7-f5 (after preparation). After looking closely at the game, I realized that White already is in some trouble. After all, he will really have a hard time stopping ...f7-f5, since he cannot prepare g2-g4 by means of h2-h3.

12. a2-a4 g7-g6
13. g2-g3

Finishing the architectural design. In retrospect, I should say that since castling queenside was better than castling kingside (see also the comment after move 14), g2-g3 is a useless move now. However, since Podgaets was preparing 0-0, it’s hard to criticize him.

13. ... ♕f8-g7

Understanding that Podgaets might castle the other way, Dvoretsky doesn’t make any commitments yet, preferring instead to improve his king.

14. 0-0?

Podgaets probably played this move automatically, hugely underestimating the big troubles that he would face later. He thought that by transferring his c3 knight to e3, he would hamper ...f7-f5. However, he failed to note an extremely important and strong tactical nuance that we will see later.

In retrospect, it seems to be better to castle queenside, despite the obvious dangers. After 14.0-0, Black probably should first play 14...h6 (as 14...a6?! is met by the dangerous 15.g4! hxg4 16.Wxg4 ♕f6 17.Wg5 with the deadly threat of h4-h5), and White can reply 15.Wg2, insisting on g3-g4. After 15...d7 16.g4 O×g4 17.O×g4 h×g4 18.Wxg4 ♕f6 19.Wg2, the position is about equal; White will try to attack on the kingside, and Black will try the same thing on the queenside.

14. ... ♕g8-h6

Continuing the preparation of ...f7-f5.

15. ♕c3-d1

If you didn’t see the nuance, then White’s position might seem totally fine, maybe slightly better. Dvoretsky, however, sees one step further.

15. ... ♕b8-d7
16. ♕d1-e3 ♕h8-f8
17. a4-a5

Already, Podgaets may have seen the idea, but it’s too late – 17...♕d3 is met by 17...♕ae8.
Chapter 5: Paralysis in the Middlegame

17. ... f7-f5
18. e4xf5 e5-e4!

This is what Podgaets had missed! Now, Black will attack the d5 pawn and control both e5 and f3. White’s queen is locked up on g2, and his whole army will not be ready to meet Black’s sudden attack.

19. w3-g2 h6xf5
20. e3xf5 e8xf5
21. a5-g6 b7-b6
22. g3-g4!

Podgaets is not ready to go down without a fight. He desperately tries to open up the g-file in order to achieve counterplay. However, Dvoretsky’s play is exact.

22. ... h5xg4
23. e2xe4 e7-e5
24. e1xe4 e4xe4
25. w2xe4 w7xh4
26. g4-f3 e8-f8!
27. f3-h1 e6-g4
28. w4-e2 g2

As strange as it sounds, White has built a defensive wall around his king and, although he is practically paralyzed, is challenging Black to find some way to win! After all, pieces don’t grow on trees, and Black only has a limited amount of material.

Dvoretsky realized that not a single White piece apart from the g2 queen can move. Thus, if he could take away the g3 square, White would simply be in zugzwang! Since only the queen is defending h2, Dvoretsky didn’t take long to play:

29. ... g8-f3!!

An incredible position; Black’s pieces are literally blocking White’s. White simply cannot move a single piece; a deadly stalemate. White played

30. c2-c4 g7-h6

But now he resigned. A great show by Dvoretsky, who methodically prepared ...f7-f5 and later found a great tactic to put White in a deadly zugzwang.

Finally, in order to help you find moves such as these, it’s important to solve zugzwang-themed studies. A good reader might ask, why is that? Aren’t studies crazy positions, which are solved just to develop the imagination? The answer is partially yes, but the main thing about a study that can improve one’s play is not the set-up, but the idea itself. For example, in a study White might be trapping Black’s rook in a certain way; in a real game, the position might be totally different, but the
idea might be the same! I encourage you to try solving these on your own first, and only then consulting the solution. The first is one of my favorite studies of all time:

**Gurvich, Bakinsky Rabochi 1927**  
**White to play and win**

Unlike many other studies, this position might well have arisen in a real game. For the moment, White is a queen up, but it seems like he cannot stop Black from promoting. The first move isn’t hard to find: it’s simply the only way to temporarily stop Black from queening:

1. \( \text{c5-e4!} \)

The idea is that 1...g1\# is met by 2.\( f2+ \) xf2+ 3.\( xfx2++ \), with mate in a few moves. However, Black finds a nice resource, renewing the threat.

1. ... \( \text{b4-d3!} \)

The idea of this move is obviously to stop 2.\( f2+ \) and prepare promotion. White seems to be totally helpless against this threat, but there is a hidden resource: since the h2 knight blocks the square for the king, if White manages to force Black’s other knight to f2, Black’s king will have no air. It doesn’t take long to find:

2. \( g3-f2!! \)

The dazzling idea of the study is that after the forced:

2. ... \( \text{d3xf2} \)  
3. \( \text{e4-g3+} \) \( \text{h1-g1} \)  
4. \( \text{h7-g5} \)

Black is in zugzwang, and White’s two knights mate the black king. Jonathan Rowson, in one of his New in Chess articles, captures the essence of the position: “And a jaw-dropping, beautiful zugzwang arises on the board. The position is like an M.C. Escher drawing in that no matter how much I stare at the position, my eyes cannot believe it.” Truly amazing; White has a mere two knights, and Black is still getting mated!

Placing your opponent in zugzwang with few pieces on the board is aesthetically quite pleasing. Although you might not have thought of paralysis as zugzwang, it means just that! To entice you to solve the following study, I will tell you that when I first solved it, I sat for about half an hour, staring at the board, convincing myself that this is not a dream. I couldn’t believe that every black move led to mate.
Chapter 5: Paralysis in the Middlegame

Loyd, Boston Gazette 1859
Mate in 2

When I saw "mate in 2," I was certain that it was a typo — how can White possibly mate here? I looked at obvious moves, and still saw nothing: Black was winning in most lines! Then, I realized something — the only way to mate is to place Black in zugzwang. After all, Black's king is in grave danger. By simply eliminating all the other moves, I came up with:

1. **Wh5-a5!!**

Simply amazing! I just couldn't believe at first that every single black move blocked a square, which is currently defended by a Black piece. Let's take a look:

1...**d7 2.**f5#
1...**d6 2.**xb4#
1...**d5 2.**xe5#
1...**e7 2.**xb4#
1...**e6 2.**f5#
1...**e5 2.**xe5#
1...**g7/h6 2.**xb4#
1...**e7 2.**e5#
1...**d6 2.**d5#
1...**c5 2.**a1# (!)
1...**d7 2.**d5#
1...**e6 2.**e5#
1...**b7 2.**f5#
1...**f5 2.**xf5#

As I already said, paralysis in the middlegame occurs rather rarely, but when it does occur, it's really important to understand the techniques to take advantage of the paralysis of your opponent's pieces.

Let's recap the most important principles:

---

**A. Never hesitate to sacrifice material in order to paralyze your opponent's pieces.**

As we saw in Sämisch-Nimzowitsch, White's extra knight didn't help at all, since all of White's pieces were completely paralyzed and couldn't make a single move.

**B. Very often, paralysis can be taken advantage of by means of exploiting a tactical factor.**

The game Pogats-Dvoretsky highlighted the fact that a paralyzed position can be cramped even further by means of a tactical shot (like 2...**f5**).

**C. Sometimes, a player's position is paralyzed, but it isn't clear how to take advantage of the paralysis. In such cases, unusual moves with unusual-looking ideas often do the job.**

The games Sokolov-Emma, Short-Timman, and Psakhis-Heiden clearly demonstrated that atypical methods can be used to exploit paralysis (one of them is the use of the king, which can be a lethal weapon as we saw from the two games).
Exercises

Is there a way for Black to make use of his pawn pressure on the queenside?

Black’s b5-c4 pawn chain sticks out like a sore thumb. However, can White make use of that?
Chapter 6: Maneuvering

GM Jesse Kraai once said: “Bad players like to play with their ‘pretty’ pieces. It is the mark of good players that they won’t go on an adventure before they solve the problem of their bad pieces.” Indeed, amateur players often underestimate the risk of playing without pieces. In this chapter, my goal will be to show the reader when, why, and how he should improve his pieces.

When one says, “This player is good at positional chess and always outplays me and I don’t know why”, it is usually a sign that the victim cannot effectively maneuver and improve his pieces.

The first example is simple, but illustrates the theme of improving one’s passive piece very well.

\[ \text{Psakhis} \]
\[ \text{Röder} \]
Vienna 1993

This position arose from a Rossolimo Sicilian, where White had outplayed Black in the early middlegame. However, Black is preparing \( \text{d}f4-e6-d4 \), after which he will stand well. Therefore, White has to find some way to improve his position.

In such cases, try to determine what is not ideal about your position. In this case, the solution is simple: the c3 knight is restricted by the black c6 pawn and is merely blocking White’s own c-pawn. Then, ask yourself where you would like to place the piece in question. Again, the answer for the knight is rather simple. From c4, the knight would harass e5 and be centralized to help any possible attacks. Finally, look how you can transfer the piece to the ideal square. Here, the fastest and best route is c3-b1-d2-c4. Therefore:

1. \( \text{c}3\text{b1}! \)

Starting the maneuver. Black can do absolutely nothing to stop it.

1. \( \ldots \) h7-h6

This is Black’s only move, since he has to prepare \( ...g5 \) followed by \( \text{g}6\text{g}6 \) in order to defend the e5 pawn.

2. \( \text{d}1\text{d2} \) g6-g5

3. \( \text{d}2\text{c4} \) f4-g6

Now, all of White’s pieces are ideally placed, and it’s time to find a breakthrough. I want to draw your attention to a key factor: many players lack the killer instinct or the ability to decide on
Mastering Positional Chess

an aggressive approach because they do not want to burn any bridges.

It’s crucially important to realize that in this position right now, Black’s pieces are immobilized, while not a single of White’s pieces can be improved. Since that is the case, you need to be on the lookout for a killer move. Here, it does not take long to realize that...

4. b2-b4!

... is extremely strong and wins the game almost immediately. Black’s pieces are all locked up on the kingside and cannot do a thing to help their monarch.

4. ... g5-g4
5. h3xg4 c5xb4
6. wxe3xa7 d7xg4

7. d1-f1!

When I was given this position as an exercise, I immediately picked 7. df2; but although it may win, why hurry? Why sacrifice something when you can win without any risk? I emphasize that patience is often the difference between a point and a half point:

When your opponent is tied up, always be patient and search for the simplest options.

It’s very tempting to try to finish your opponent off immediately, but when people see a zero or half point beside your name, they won’t care if you were winning at any particular moment. Time and again, players lose because they make rash decisions. Therefore, you always have to remind yourself: don’t hurry and be patient. This certainly doesn’t mean that you shouldn’t search for immediate wins. If you can win quickly and without risk, that is ideal. However, embarking on a risky combination that cannot be calculated to the end is certainly not the right thing to do if you have a safer, sound, choice.

7. ... d8-e8

7... xf3 8. xf3 h8f8 9. h3f5 and Black is too tied up to resist.

8. f3-d2

Now, White is transferring the knight without any risks, and Black doesn’t even have extra material!

8. ... h8-f8
9. d2-b3 g4-e6
10. b3-a5 e7-c7
11. c4-b6+ c8-d8
12. b6-a8 1-0
Chapter 6: Maneuvering

From this game we learn two crucial things:

A. When you have reached a critical moment, ask yourself, "Which piece(s) can be improved?”. When you have identified the piece(s), ask yourself where you would ideally place it. If the ideal square is unrealistic, choose another good, more realistic square for the piece. Of course, in a real game, you might forget to ask yourself this question, but it’s vital to try to improve your pieces to the maximum.

B. If you see a seemingly winning maneuver, the temptation to play it might be huge. However, before you play it, calculate very carefully. If you cannot calculate the maneuver to the end, look for a safer option that is guaranteed to give you a big advantage.

Sometimes, however, things aren’t as simple. Very often, a good square isn’t just there for a piece – it has to be created. In the following game, Black uses a typical resource in order to create a great square for his knight.

☐ Eliskases
☒ Flohr

Semmering 1937

This looks like an uneventful Grünfeld with White having a slight advantage, but the position contains many more subtleties than it seems.

First of all, Black is exerting a certain amount of pressure on the d4 pawn by attacking it directly with the d8 rook and indirectly with the g4 bishop. However, Black’s a5 knight is out of play, and the obvious Qc6 is met by the powerful d4-d5, gaining the initiative. Flohr realized that if he wanted to at least equalize, he would have to somehow bring the a5 knight into play.

Obviously, Black has no good squares at this point. Thus, it’s very important to create a square. So, Flohr asked himself: “What is prohibiting my knight from moving to c6?” In this case, it’s the mobility of the pawn on d4. By immobilizing it on d5, Black would create a great blockading square for the knight on d6. Now, it’s only a question of how to do it.

Since the f3 knight is defending e5, Flohr immediately played:

1. ... Qg4xf3!
2. Qe2xf3 Qa6-c8

The immediate 2...e5? would have allowed 3.dxe5 Qc4 4.Qe2! Qxe5 5.f4 with an edge. Therefore, Flohr lures White’s rook to d2.

3. Qd1-d2?!

This looks natural, but in truth, much better was 3.Qe1!, when 3...Qc2 isn’t all that effective after 4.d5!. The position after 4...exd5 5.Qxd5 Qxd5 6.exd5 Qc4

207
7...d1!! is about equal, so in order to fight for an advantage Black should prepare b5 with 3...a6!. Black has a slight pull after 4...d2 Cc4 5...d3 b5. Anyhow, it’s clear that White couldn’t have completely equalized even after the correct move.

3. ... e6-e5!
4. d4-d5 Cc5-c4
5. e2-e4 Cc4-d6

Black’s plan has been realized. His knight, which was placed very badly only five moves ago, now stands ideally, blocking White’s passed pawn and controlling key squares. In my earlier annotations, I wrote that Flohr’s technique was impeccable from this point, but in truth there are a few inaccuracies hidden in his play.

6. a1-b1 Cc8-c4
7. g2-g3 Cc8-c6
8. f3-g2

So far, Black has been making natural, good moves, improving his position. Now, however, he is at a crossroads: he can either continue improving all of his pieces and pawns with 8...b5, or trade one or two rooks with 8...Cc1+.

Both of these moves are excellent and lead to an obvious advantage for Black. However, since White doesn’t really have any counterchances, there isn’t any point for Black to force matters and play 8...Cc1+. Flohr, on the other hand, wanted to reach a position that he had miscalculated, and played:

8. ... Cc4-c1+?! 

As said, there is no need to force matters. Besides, there’s no reason for trading a pair of rooks, as Black’s rooks are much more active than White’s. After 8...b5, White would have been in serious trouble as it isn’t clear how he can stop the slow advance of Black’s pawn majority on the queenside. A sample line is: 9.h4 Cf6 10.g4 g5! 11.hxg5+ Cxg5 12.f3 Cc4 and White cannot stop the advance of the a- and b-pawns.

9. b1xc1 Cc8xc1+
10. e2-e1

Although this doesn’t throw everything away, it makes Flohr’s task considerably harder. Since Black’s rook was much more active than White’s, there was simply no reason to trade them off. After 10...Cc3, White’s position would have remained very unpleasant. For example, after 11.Ce3 Cxe3 (only now Black takes, as White’s pawn structure will be completely ruined) 12.fxe3 b5! Black is clearly better. Even though the game might go on for a long time, Black...
should eventually win because of the chronic weakness of White’s pawn structure and the passivity of his bishop.

11. \( fxe1 \) f7-f5
12. \( f2-f3 \) f5xe4
13. \( f3xe4 \) b7-b5
14. \( e1-d2 \) a7-a5
15. \( d2-d3 \) g7-f6
16. \( g2-f3 \)

16. \( \ldots \) \( f6-e7 \)

Also interesting was 16...\( \text{b}7? \) with the idea of transferring the king to d6. After 17.\( h3 \) \( e7 \) 18.\( g4 \) \( c5+ \) 19.\( c3 \) \( h6! \) (it’s important not to allow White to play \( g4-g5 \), fixing the \( h7 \) and \( g6 \) pawns) 20.\( g2 \) \( a4\ldots \) followed by \( \ldots d6-c5 \) Black should be able to penetrate into White’s camp. Overall, Black still seems to be winning, but there was no need to complicate matters.

17. \( h2-h4 \) h7-h6
18. \( f3-d1 \) \( e7-d8 \)
19. \( a2-a4 \) \( b5xa4! \)

After the rash 19...\( b4? \) 20.\( b3 \) Black cannot make any progress.

20. \( d1xa4 \) \( d8-c7 \)
21. \( a4-c2 \) \( c7-b6 \)
22. \( d3-c3 \) \( b6-b5 \)
23. \( c3-b3 \) \( b5-c5 \)
24. \( b3-a4 \) \( d6-c4 \)

White is too overextended: he cannot hold the \( a5 \) pawn, restrict Black’s knight, and defend his pawns all at once. Eliskases tries his best, but cannot hold the position together for much longer.

25. \( c2-b3 \) \( c4-d2 \)
26. \( b3-c2 \) \( d2-f1 \)
27. \( a4xa5 \) \( f1xg3 \)
28. \( a5-a4 \) \( g3-h5 \)
29. \( a4-b3 \) \( c5-d4 \)
30. \( b3-b4 \) \( h5-f6 \)
31. \( d5-d6 \) g6-g5
32. \( h4xg5 \) h6xg5
33. \( b4-b5 \) g5-g4
34. \( c2-d1 \) g4-g3
35. \( d1-f3 \) \( d4-e3 \)
36. \( f3-h1 \) \( e3-f2 \)
37. \( b5-c6 \) g3-g2
38. \( h1xg2 \) \( f2xg2 \)
39. \( d6-d7 \) \( f6xd7 \)
40. \( c6xd7 \) \( g2-f3 \) 0-1

A very instructive game, which, in spite of some inaccurate play, showed some great maneuvering and good technique. In Flohr’s case, the main maneuver (preparing the \( d6 \)-square for his knight) seemed more or less natural; there was nothing unusual about it. Sometimes, though, the first step of a redeployment maneuv-
ver may look artificial, strange, or even weak. It’s vital to look past that initial step and think about the final destination. In other words, you have to consider the placement of the piece on the intended square, not the way you transfer it there.

Although certainly not flawless, the following game was still an amazing example of positional mastery. As we analyze it, pay little attention to the many mistakes made by Black – instead, try to concentrate on the strong moves that Black made!

\[ \text{A. Sokolov} \]
\[ \text{Yusupov} \]
\[ \text{Riga 1986} \]

French Defense, Winawer Variation (C18)

1. e2-e4 \( e7-e6 \)
2. d2-d4 \( d7-d5 \)
3. \( \text{c2-c3} \) \( \text{f8-b4} \)

The Winawer variation of the French Defense is the most popular both at amateur and at grandmaster levels.

4. \( e4-e5 \) \( c7-c5 \)
5. \( a2-a3 \) \( b4xc3+ \)
6. \( b2xc3 \) \( g8-e7 \)

\[ \text{Diagram} \]

7. \( g1-f3 \)

A quiet move, which doesn’t really give White any advantage. Nowadays, most top players fight for an advantage with \( g4 \). Here is a small overview of the current theory of this line: 7...0-0 7...c7?! is also extremely popular and leads to very sharp positions. White is best advised to take the pawns with 8..\( \text{wxg7} \) \( \text{g8} \) 9..\( \text{hxh7} \), and after 9...\( \text{cx}d4 \) White should play 10..\( \text{e2} \). 8..\( \text{d3} \) \( b6 \) 8...f5?! is the main alternative. In Ponomariov-Ivanchuk, Linares 2002, White came up with a strong novelty after 9..\( \text{exf6} \) \( \text{xf6} \) 10..\( \text{g5} \) \( \text{f7} \) 11..\( \text{h5} \) \( \text{g6} \) 12..\( \text{d1} \) \( \text{b6} \) 13..\( \text{f3} \) \( \text{f8} \) 14..0-0 \( c4 \) 15..\( \text{e2} \) \( \text{h6} \) 16..\( \text{c1} \) \( \text{d7} \) and now, instead of the previously played 17..\( \text{a4} \), 17..\( \text{e1} \) with the idea of \( g2-g3 \) and \( \text{g2-e3} \). 9..\( \text{h5} \) \( \text{g6} \) 10..\( \text{f3} \) \( \text{c7} \) 11..\( \text{e3} \) \( \text{c4} \) 12..\( \text{xg6} \) \( \text{fxg6} \) 13..\( \text{g4} \) with a slight edge.

Overall, the verdict in this line seems to be that White has a solid edge in every variation. However, this might change any day, as players find novelties all the time that change the evaluation of lines.

7. ... \( \text{b7-b6} \)
8. \( \text{f1-b5+} \)

The idea of this move is to lure Black’s bishop to d7, where it cannot be traded for the white bishop. In this variation, Black’s \( \text{c8} \) bishop is his main problem, as the \( e6 \) pawn blockades it. The other move in this variation is 8..\( \text{a4} \), with the idea of attacking \( c5 \) with \( \text{a3} \) or pressuring \( b6 \) with \( \text{a4-a5} \). In both cases, Black should be able to obtain comfortable play.
8. ...  $$c8-d7$
9. $$b5-d3$$ d7-a4!

A thematic move in this line; Black stops the annoying move a3-a4 followed by $$a3$$, and exerts pressure on the c2 pawn, not allowing a move such as $$wxe1$$.

If Black eschews this move with 9...$$wc7$, 10.h4 $$bc6$, White obtains a great position after, for example, 11.0-0 h6 12.h5 $$a5$ 13.$$e3 cxd4 14.cxd4, with a big advantage in Vallejo Pons-Rojo Huerta, Madrid 1994.

10. h2-h4

This too is an important resource for White in this line. White has a dual idea: to open up the h3-g3 pathway for the rook, and to create a hook (after Black plays ...h6) for a possible attack on the king. The main problem with such an aggressive approach is that Black can always castle queenside or even play ...$$d7$ (as in this game), while if White weakens his kingside with g4, he still will eventually need to castle kingside, when it will be Black who will organize an attack.

10. ...  $$h7-h6$
11. h4-h5  $$b8-c6$
12. $$h1-h4$

A flashy move, which practically forces Black's response. The main thing that one has to know when playing this position is that it can turn into a tactical slugfest in a matter of moves. White needs to play aggressively, as his pawn structure is weak and he cannot afford to play slowly.

12. ...  c5-c4
13. $$d3-e2$$ e8-d7!

It's a good idea for Black to evacuate his king from the center. On d7, it cannot be attacked. The only drawback is that it blocks the diagonal for the bishop, but White has absolutely no way to attack it, and even if he does (by $$b4$), Black always has ...b6-b5.

14. $$c1-e3$

Both sides have made all of their obvious developing moves, and it's time to formulate a plan. The main problem with Black's position is that the g7 and f7 pawns are rather weak, and none of the black pieces are doing anything to defend them. The queen is another major problem for Black. It's doing absolutely nothing on d8, and needs to be placed on a better square immediately.

As in the last game, Yusupov asked himself: "Where can I ideally place my queen?"

The square a5 comes into mind, but

211
what does it do there besides block his own a-pawn? The square b6 is a possibility, with the idea of supporting an advance on the queenside, but a potential b1 will highlight the awkwardness of this post.

Yusupov then realized that he had another square that doesn’t come to mind quickly: h7! From there, the queen not only attacks c2, but defends g7 and, potentially, f7. It can jump to f5 or e4, and cannot be attacked. Then come the logistics: “Can I place my queen there?” In this case, the transfer is simple, yet aesthetically brilliant:

14. ... \( \texttt{d8-g8!!} \)

It’s incredible how one move from d8 to g8 causes huge disarray in the White forces. Immediately, a lot of questions arise for White: “How will I defend my constantly weak c2 pawn? How will I defend against a possible g- and f-pawn assault? What if the opponent suddenly switches to the other flank?”

In retrospect, White’s position isn’t much worse, if at all, after 14...\( \texttt{g8} \). He will have his own counterplay, but psychologically, it’s extremely unpleasant when one makes such a move. One has to give credit to Sokolov for playing extremely well in this situation.

15. \( \texttt{d1-d2!?} \)

Sokolov finds a good option: he places his queen on a better square and prepares \( \texttt{c1 on ...h7} \).

15. ... \( \texttt{g8-h7} \)

Because of the maneuver, Black’s position has literally come alive. His bishop and queen are working in perfect coordination to attack c2, and his a8 rook will soon come into action, helping to prepare ...f7-f5. The e7 knight can jump to f5, while the c6 knight can transfer to f7 after ...\( \texttt{d8} \). Finally, the king is located perfectly amidst the black pieces.

16. \( \texttt{a1-c1 d7-c7} \)

17. \( \texttt{h4-f4} \)

The aggressive 17...\( \texttt{g4!!} \) is no good after 17...\( \texttt{f6!} \) 18.\( \texttt{xf4 \texttt{b7}} \), and if White tries to attack e6 after 19.exf6 gxf6 20.\( \texttt{we3} \), Black simply replies 20...\( \texttt{ae8} \) with the idea of meeting 21.\( \texttt{xe6} \) with 21...\( \texttt{xc2} \), with an edge for Black.

17. ... \( \texttt{a8-f8} \)

18. \( \texttt{f3-h4!} \)

White does his best to prevent Black from achieving easy pressure with 18...\( \texttt{f6} \). His main idea is to exert counterpressure on the g6-square if Black plays 18...\( \texttt{f6} \), after 19.exf6 gxf6 20.\( \texttt{g4} \). Although after 20...\( \texttt{hg8} \) Black certainly is OK, the position is about equal after 21.\( \texttt{hxg8 \texttt{xg8}} \) 22.\( \texttt{xf1} \). In my opinion, though, White’s position is a bit easier to play because of the weak g6-square and the two bishops advantage.
18. ... c6-d8!

Patience is the key to success. Before executing any break, Black first places his knight on d8 in order to defend e6, then places the bishop on e8 in order to support the advances, and only then will he execute the break. If the position were open and dynamic, Black would have no chance to make such preparations, but if the position is closed, it's extremely important to make preparations first.

The golden rule is:

When your opponent has concrete counterplay and the game is a race for mate, you practically have no time for preparations. However, if the position is closed and time is a secondary factor, first prepare your breaks, no matter how tempting they may seem. You will never regret having prepared a break or sacrifice, but you will often regret a premature one.

19. e2-g4 c7-b7?!

So far, Black has been making logical moves, preparing the following break. However, I don't understand this move – the king was located perfectly well on c7. Also, it gives White an opportunity to further improve his pieces. If Black had played 19...e8 immediately, White would have had a much harder time defending against the ...g7-g5 or f7-f5 break. For example, after 19...e8, White's best bet seems to be 20.f1!? and if 20...f6 simply 21.g1. After 21...ec6 22.e2 fxe5 23.dxe5 g5! Black has a slight edge.

20. f4-f3 a4-e8
21. f3-h3!

Anticipating Black’s next move.

21. ... g7-g5

The other break, 21...f5, didn’t seem to achieve anything after 22.f3. If Black now sacrifices the h6 pawn by means of 22...g5, White simply replies 23.hxg6 hxg6 24.xg6 xg6 25.xh6! followed by f4 and e2 and Black has no compensation for the pawn.

22. h5xg6 f7xg6
23. h4-f3 g6-g5!

A great move based on precise tactics. On 24.xg5, Black wins a piece by means of 24...e4+ 25.e3 xg4, and on 24.xg5 Black wins either the knight or the bishop by means of 24...xg6. Therefore, White must retreat, as 24...h5 is threatened.

24. f3-h2 h7-g7
25. d2-e2

213
Over the past few moves, White defended with impeccable accuracy. The position is approximately equal; White is controlling the important squares h5 and g4, but Black has the strong f5-square. Still, Black's position is easier to play – his moves are more natural, while White has to constantly defend against Black's threats.

25. ...  \( \text{e}8\text{-}g6 \\
26.  \( \text{g}4\text{-}h5 \\

White prepares the transfer \( \text{h}2\text{-}g4\text{-}f6 \), when he will practically force Black to sacrifice the exchange in order to eliminate the annoying knight.

26. ...  \( \text{e}7\text{-}f5 \\
27.  \( \text{e}1\text{-}d2 \quad \text{g}6\text{-}h7! \\

Black correctly decides to keep his light-squared bishop, as White's bishop is merely occupying the h5-square, but not doing anything effective. Black will trade this bishop in a situation that is comfortable for him, not White.

28. \( \text{h}2\text{-g}4 \quad \text{d}8\text{-}c6 \\
29. \( \text{g}4\text{-f}6 \quad \text{xf}8\text{xf}6 \\

Practically forced, as the f6 knight was exerting huge pressure.

30. \( \text{e}5\text{xf}6 \quad \text{g}7\text{xf}6 \\
31.  \( \text{h}5\text{-}g4 \\

The position has totally transformed, and it's important to stop and assess the situation. White has a small material advantage, but his pieces are not coordinated and his king is located precariously. Black's pieces are coordinated perfectly and are ready to attack. White already wants to play \( \text{ch}1 \) and win the h6 pawn, so Black has to find a way to defend it. In this case, the correct move is rather simple: it opens up the h7 bishop and threatens a possible later ...\( \text{e}4\text{+}\).

31. ...  \( \text{f}5\text{-}d6! \\
32.  \( \text{f}2\text{-f}3 \\

White has to stop 32...\( \text{e}4\text{+} \), winning the c3 pawn.

32. ...  \( \text{h}7\text{-}f5! \\

Very strong play by Yusupov – the g4 bishop was exerting pressure on e6, and by forcing the trade Black opens the e-file and prepares a possible ...f5-f4. Black has excellent compensation for his slight material deficit.

33. \( \text{g}4\text{xf}5 \quad \text{e}6\text{xf}5 \\
34. \( \text{c}1\text{-h}1 \quad \text{f}5\text{-f}4 \\
35. \( \text{e}3\text{-f}2 \quad \text{h}8\text{-e}8 \\
36. \( \text{e}2\text{-d}1 \quad \text{d}6\text{-f}5 \\

Finally, after an amazing display, Black has obtained serious benefits. White's
material advantage is minimal, and his position is a total mess. Objectively speaking, White's position might still be defendable, but in practice, defending such a position is nearly impossible. However, as we shall see, due to numerous time-trouble inaccuracies committed by both sides, the game becomes more of a tactical slugfest than a slow, positional struggle.

37. \textit{h}1-e1 \textit{e}8-e7

I hesitate to criticize this move, but it gives White the additional option of playing \textit{c}1 followed by \textit{b}2. Black could have played the more accurate and forcing 37...\textit{x}e1! 38.\textit{xe1} \textit{d}6, when White is forced to make the awkward move 39.\textit{a}1.

38. \textit{h}3-h1

As I mentioned in the note to Black's previous move, White had the additional possibility of playing 38.\textit{c}1 followed by \textit{b}2.

38. ... \textit{b}7-c7?!

In time trouble, Yusupov starts playing inaccurately. If on the last move allowing \textit{c}1 followed by \textit{b}2 wasn't too bad, there was no reason to allow it this move. With 38...\textit{f}8! or 38...a6! (with the idea of \textit{a}7-b5) Black could have thwarted the annoying transfer.

39. a3-a4?!

Returning the favor. After 39.\textit{c}1! \textit{d}6 40.\textit{b}2 the position would have been roughly equal (notice how much better White's king is placed on b2 than on d2!). Black's best try seems to be 40...a6, but after 41.\textit{xe}7+ \textit{xe}7 42.\textit{e}1 \textit{d}6 43.\textit{e}8 White has nothing to fear.

39. ... \textit{f}6-f7
40. \textit{xe}1xe7+ \textit{f}7xe7
41. \textit{h}1-e1 \textit{e}7-f7

Honestly, I can't see the rationale behind this move. It's understandable that Black didn't want to play 41...\textit{a}3?!, but why not 41...\textit{d}6? After 42.\textit{e}2, which Yusupov probably feared, Black has the simple 42...\textit{g}7, and all of the squares along the e-file are defended. Black can slowly proceed to start playing for a win with ...a6-b5-b4.

42. \textit{d}1-e2 \textit{c}7-d7
43. \textit{d}2-c1 h6-h5
44. \textit{c}1-b2 \textit{f}7-g6
45. \textit{e}2-f1 g5-g4
46. \textit{e}1-e2

46. ... g4-g3!

A hard move to decide upon, as it chronically weakens the f4 pawn. However, had Black followed up actively and aggressively, White wouldn't have had a single chance to attack the pawn or activate his pieces.

47. \textit{f}2-e1 \textit{e}5-e7?

An inexplicable error. I simply cannot see why Black didn't play the completely natural and correct 47...\textit{e}3!, when White's position would have
been very hard to defend. For example, after 48.\texttt{Wh}1 (48.\texttt{Wg}1? \texttt{Qe}7! 49.\texttt{Qd}2?? \texttt{Wx}c2+) 48...\texttt{Qe}7, Black has a great position. Since the game was adjourned after the 41st move, I’m practically certain that Yusupov wasn’t in time trouble, which makes his decision even more strange.

It’s interesting that after Yusupov’s error the game turns from a quiet, mutually well-played positional struggle into an extremely sloppy tactical battle, where one mistake follows another.

\begin{center}
48. \texttt{Qe}1-d2 \texttt{Wg}6-f5  
49. \texttt{Wf}1-e1 \texttt{h}5-h4
\end{center}

\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{chess_board}
\end{center}

50. \texttt{a}4-a5!

Forcing Black to open up the b-file, which will obviously be in White’s favor, since White’s queen can control the file before Black’s queen can reach it.

\begin{center}
50. ... \texttt{b}6xa5  
51. \texttt{We}1-a1?!
\end{center}

This gives Black an extra tempo; the immediate 51.\texttt{Wh}1 would have been much more effective.

\begin{center}
51. ... \texttt{Qe}7-g6  
52. \texttt{Wa}1-a3?
\end{center}

I have no idea what was running through the players’ minds at this point, but whatever it was, it hampered their train of thought!

White completely forgets about ...\texttt{h}4-h3, thinking that the “threat” of \texttt{Wc}5 will scare Black and force him to try to think of a defense. Although admitting his mistake with 52.\texttt{Wh}1 wouldn’t have been easy, it was by far the best thing to do.

\begin{center}
52. ... \texttt{h}4-h3  
53. \texttt{g}2xh3 \texttt{Wf}5-h5!
\end{center}

A nice nuance: White cannot defend the f3 pawn.

\begin{center}
54. \texttt{Wa}3-c5 \texttt{Wh}5xf3  
55. \texttt{He}2-e1 \texttt{Qg}6-e7
\end{center}

Unfortunately for Black, the tempting 55...\texttt{g}2?? leads to a quick draw after 56.\texttt{Wh}5 \texttt{Qc}7 57.\texttt{He}6 \texttt{Qe}7 58.\texttt{Wc}5 \texttt{Qb}7 59.\texttt{Wb}5+.

\begin{center}
56. \texttt{Wc}5-b5 \texttt{g}3-g2  
57. \texttt{Wb}5-b7+ \texttt{Qd}7-d6  
58. \texttt{He}1-g1 \texttt{Wf}3-f2
\end{center}

\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{chess_board2}
\end{center}

59. \texttt{Qd}2xf4+ \texttt{Wf}2xf4  
60. \texttt{Hg}1\texttt{x}g2 \texttt{Wf}4-f3

Finally, after many inaccuracies and mistakes, Black has reached a position where his queen and two knights cooperate much better than White’s queen and rook. Black’s king on d6 seems to
be perilously placed, but in truth, it is defended very well by the two knights. White tries his best to hold on, but fails, as we shall soon see.

61. \( \text{g}^2-g^4 \) \( \text{w}^3xh^3?! \)

This gives White additional counterplay. More accurate would have been 61...a4! For example, after 62.\( w^a^6 \) (otherwise Black plays 62...a3+ followed by 63...\( w^x^c^3 \) 62...\( w^x^h^3 \) 63.\( g^7 \) \( w^c^7 \), Black is practically winning.

62. \( g^4-f^4 \) \( d^6-e^6 \)
63. \( f^4-f^8 \) \( h^3-h^6 \)
64. \( f^8-f^3 \) \( h^6-h^8 \)
65. \( f^3-e^3+ \) \( e^6-d^6 \)
66. \( e^3-f^3 \) \( h^8-h^6 \)
67. \( f^3-f^1 \) \( h^6-g^7 \)
68. \( b^2-a^3 \) \( e^7-f^5 \)
69. \( b^7-c^8 \) \( f^5-e^3 \)
70. \( f^1-f^8 \) \( e^3x^c^2+ \)
71. \( a^3-a^4 \) \( c^2x^d^4 \)
72. \( c^3x^d^4 \) \( g^7x^d^4 \)

White resigned.

Despite the fact that it contained many inaccuracies, this game was extremely illustrative and the maneuver \( w^d^8-g^8-h^7 \) was simply brilliant. Of course, it by no means won the game. One can’t even say that Black obtained an advantage after 15...\( w^h^7 \). Nonetheless, the pressure Black kept exerting forced White to keep finding defenses. Understandably, White, in spite of being a world-class player, eventually cracked.

In the next game, we see a similar maneuver, but with a completely different goal. Yusupov played 15...\( g^8-h^7 \) in order to fight for the advantage. Here, however, White is winning and needs to find a finishing blow. As often happens, the “finishing blow” is a quiet, harmless looking maneuver. Take a look at the following position:

□ Topalov
■ Yusupov
Dortmund 1997

It’s clear that White’s position is winning. He is an exchange up, and Black’s pieces are miserably placed. White’s pieces, on the other hand, are perfectly coordinated: his rook and queen are placed optimally, while White’s bishop restricts both of Black’s minor pieces. Nevertheless, Black’s position isn’t easy to crack. Black’s pieces are located terribly, but they still defend the weaknesses in his position, making it hard for White to break through. Topalov knew that Black’s position was sturdier than it seemed, and tried to find even better squares for his pieces. The king on g2 cannot be improved; it’s defending g3 and supporting White’s position. The bishop is also located ide-
Mastering Positional Chess

ally, restricting Black’s pieces and controlling the important b1-h7 diagonal. The rook cements White’s position, and at the same time threatens to leap to h4 with deadly effect.

The queen, on the other hand, is located far from ideally. Although it does support that rook and threatens to go to e5, a square such as f8 would have been much better. So, Topalov asked himself: “Can I transfer my queen to f8?” The answer, as he soon found out, is yes:

1. \( \text{We}3-\text{c}1!! \)

An incredibly deep, subtle, and positionally aesthetic move. Black cannot defend against the deadly maneuver \( \text{W}a3-\text{f}8 \) or e7. Note that the straightforward 1. \( \text{W}e5+?! \) gave Black unnecessary chances after 1...\( \text{W}xe5 \) 2.\( \text{dxe5} \) \( \text{C}f7 \) 3.\( \text{Wh4}+ \) \( \text{g}7 \) 4.\( \text{Wh}5 \) \( \text{C}d8 \)., when there is still a fight ahead.

1. ... \( \text{g}h8-\text{g}7 \)
2. \( \text{W}c1-\text{a}3 \) \( \text{g}8-\text{f}7 \)
3. \( \text{W}a3-\text{d}6 \) \( \text{h}6-\text{g}4 \)

The best chance, but Topalov soon eradicates all counterplay.

4. \( \text{g}2-\text{f}3! \)

From this game we learn an important rule:

When realizing a decisive advantage, never hurry to force the play. Never be satisfied with the placement of your pieces, and constantly look for ways to improve them.

However, so far, the maneuvers we have been examining have been done without any concessions; one side simply improved his pieces without making any concessions or sacrifices. It’s much harder when you need to sacrifice in order to improve your position. For example, if a piece is out of play, ask yourself, “Is it worth sacrificing material in order to activate that piece?” The following position is a great example:
Practically forced: other moves lead to a total collapse of the black position:

A) 2...f4 3.\(\text{c}xe6\) \(\text{fxe}3\) 4.\(\text{c}xg7\) exf2+ 5.\(\text{w}f1\) \(\text{w}xg7\) 6.\(\text{a}xd5\) winning the d7 knight;

B) 2...\(\text{a}xd4\) 3.\(\text{a}xd4\) \(\text{c}b6\) is an ill-fated attempt to keep the extra pawn. After 4.\(\text{w}f6\) \(\text{w}h7\) 5.\(\text{a}xb6\) axb6 6.\(\text{c}xd5\) Black’s position collapses like a house of cards.

3. \(\text{w}a4\)-b3 \(\text{w}d6\)-b4!

Eliminating the queen, which is exerting the most pressure on the d5 pawn. The position is obviously dangerous for Black, but in my analysis I couldn’t find any concrete way for White to obtain a lasting advantage.

4. 0\(\text{d}4\)-xe6

Changing the move order with 4.\(\text{w}xb4\) leads to the loss of a pawn after 4...\(\text{c}xb4\) 5.\(\text{c}xe6\) \(\text{a}xe6\) 6.\(\text{a}xb6\) \(\text{c}xb6\) 7.\(\text{a}xd5\) \(\text{c}xd5\) 8.\(\text{a}xd5\) \(\text{a}xb2\) 9.\(\text{c}xf5\) \(\text{a}xe2\).

4. ...
5. \(\text{a}2\)-xb3 \(\text{w}e8\)-xe6
6. \(\text{c}e3\)-xb6

Interestingly, this seemingly simple position is (for me) the most complicated one in the whole game. Black has three recaptures: 6...\(\text{a}xc3\), 6...\(\text{a}xb6\), and

...
6...axb6, none of which can be ruled out immediately. Making such a choice is very hard, especially with very limited time. Without calculating any variations, I decided that I should first eliminate the c3 knight, since in all lines it was placed very annoyingly on d5. Therefore, I played:

6. ... $g7xc3$

Unfortunately, I pick the wrong recapture. The problem with this move is that after White takes on d5 with the rook, he will constantly have the idea g3-g4, activating the g2 bishop, while Black’s knight is permanently passive. Also bad was 6...axb6, on account of 7.\textit{exd5}\textit{exe5} 8.\textit{exe5} \textit{exe5} 9.g4 with a clear advantage.

However, the only move that drew the game was 6...\textit{xb6}! After 7.\textit{exd5} Black plays another great move, namely 7...\textit{b5}! During the game I stopped calculating after 8.g4, but after the simple 8...\textit{fxg4} 9.\textit{xe4}\textit{xe8} (not 9...\textit{f8}? because of 10.\textit{c7!}\textit{xc7} 11.\textit{xc7}\textit{b8} 12.\textit{xdd7} with mate) 10.\textit{d3} \textit{c5} with a drawish position.

7. \textit{xc1xc3} \textit{a7xb6}
8. \textit{d1xd5} \textit{e6-f6}

Black is forced into passivity. Trying to activate his pieces by means of 8...\textit{c5} 9.\textit{xf5} \textit{a1+} 10.\textit{f1}\textit{d6} fails to the nice 11.\textit{f4!} (but not 11.\textit{f3?!}, as Black even wins after 11...\textit{e3!} 12.\textit{f4} \textit{g4} 13.\textit{xe3}\textit{dd1}).

9. g3-g4!

When I was calculating this line, I had somehow underestimated this simple move (my guess now is that I missed the idea of \textit{f3}, trapping the rook after \textit{fxf2}), after which White’s advantage becomes serious. If Black could at least activate his knight, his position would not have been so bad, but since he is unable to, things quickly go downhill.

9. ... f5xg4
10. \textit{g2xe4} \textit{a8-f8}
11. \textit{d5-d7!}

White shows refined technique in the ending. Instead of defending the pawn with 11.\textit{f3}, which allows 11...\textit{xc5}, White utilizes a nice tactical resource, which I completely overlooked.

11. ... \textit{a6-c5}
12. \textit{e4-d5+} \textit{g8-h8}
13. \textit{d7-e7}

13. ... \textit{f6xf2}

Missing White’s next move, but the position was critical anyway. There were two other tries, both losing as well:

A) 13...\textit{d6} 14.e4 \textit{de7} trades off the annoying rook on the 7th rank, but its colleague immediately takes its post: 15.\textit{xd7} \textit{xd7} 16.\textit{c7} \textit{c5} 17.b4;

B) 13...\textit{f5?!} 14.\textit{xb7} \textit{xb7} 15.\textit{xb7} \textit{xf2} looks interesting, but after 16.\textit{cc7} \textit{f1+} 17.\textit{g2} \textit{f2f2+} 18.\textit{g3} \textit{g8} 19.\textit{c8}+ \textit{f8} 20.\textit{xf8} \textit{xf8} 21.\textit{xb6} b5 22.\textit{h6}, Black cannot save his pawns.
14. d5-f3!

Curiously, I played a tournament right before this one in Philadelphia. In the penultimate round, I played grandmaster Alonso Zapata from Colombia. I got outplayed, and in a very similar situation, took the same poisonous pawn on f2, and missed exactly the same tactic! I really don’t know how such a thing can happen two times in 10 days.

14. ...  f8xf3
15. e2xf3  f2xb2
16. c3-c1  g4xf3
17. c1-d1  1-0

Very often, you play the opening well and have a good position in the middlegame. However, you have one piece that just isn’t playing. I’ve seen countless games where one side hesitates with the improvement of a piece, and by the time the finally realizes that it simply has to play, it’s too late! The following game is a great illustration of what happens when you procrastinate with the improvement of a piece:

\[ \text{\textcopyright Stein} \]
\[ \text{\textcopyright Ilivitsky} \]
Sverdlovsk 1963
Caro-Kann, KIA Variation (B10)

1. e2-e4  c7-c6
2. d2-d3!??

In the 1960s, King’s Indian (Attack) set-ups were still in their adolescent stages. Grandmaster Leonid Stein contributed a lot to the development of this line.

2. ...  d7-d5
3. b1-b2  g7-g6

To this day, the set-up with ...g6 remains one of the most popular. The other main set-up in this position is to play 3...e5 immediately, followed by ...d6 and ...f6/e7, with an approximately equal position.

4. g1-f3  f8-g7
5. g2-g3  e7-e5

Another solid plan is 5...g4 followed by ...xf3 and ...e6. In the game Eingorn-Lerner, Metz 1998, Lerner employed a slightly different set-up and after 6.g2 played 6...dxe4 7.dxe4 d7, equalizing quickly after 8.h3 xf3 9.xf3 g6 10.0-0 0-0 11.e2 e5.

6. f1-g2  g8-e7
7. 0-0  0-0

8. d1-e2

Obviously this is not a mistake, but more flexible is 8.e1, reserving the right to develop the queen along the d1-a4 diagonal. Also interesting is the radical move 8.b4!? with the idea of developing the bishop to b2 and at the same time grabbing space on the queenside. Stein played this move against Hort in Los An-
geles 1968, but got a bad position quickly after 8...a5 9. bxa5 \[\text{f}a5\] 10. b2 d4 11. a4 \[\text{c}d7\] 12. c3?! (the d3 pawn becomes very weak after this; after 12. \[\text{c}c4\] followed by 13. a5 the position is about equal) 12...dxc3 13. \[\text{x}c3\] \[\text{d}8\] 14. \[\text{c}4\] \[\text{e}6\] 15. \[\text{e}3\] h6 with an edge due to the weakness of the d3 pawn.

8. ... \[\text{b}8-d7\]

Instead, in Kochev-Smyslov, Leningrad 1977, Black got great play with 8... \[\text{c}7\] 9. b3 d4! 10. a4 \[\text{c}a6\] 11. \[\text{x}a3\] c5, with even a slightly better position. Obviously, 8... \[\text{d}7\] isn’t wrong, but delaying the move would have been slightly better, as it could have jumped to c6 or a6, as in the Smyslov game.

9. \[\text{c}2-c3\] \[\text{f}8-e8\]
10. \text{f}1-e1

In the only other game in the position after 9... \[\text{e}8\], Bunk-Dobosz, Germany 1994/95, White got steamrolled off the board after 10. \[\text{d}1?!\] f5! 11. \[\text{b}3\] h6 12. h3 g5 13. \[\text{h}2\] \[\text{f}6\] 14. \[\text{f}3\] b6 15. \[\text{e}3\] \[\text{c}7\] with a completely horrid position for White, who actually managed to hold on for 39 more moves.

10. ... \[\text{d}7-b6\]
11. a2-a4 \[\text{a}7-a5\]
12. \[\text{d}2-b3

So far, both players have been making completely logical developing moves. Now, however, it’s not entirely clear what Black should do. Should he trade off the light-squared bishop with 12... \[\text{g}4\]? Or maybe prepare ...f7-f5? Faced with a choice among many logical options, Ilivitsky had no idea which one to choose. He made a typical mistake in such situations – he decided to go for the simplest option, the option that “can’t be wrong,” and played:

12. ... \[\text{d}5xe4?!\]

The problem with this move is that now the weaknesses on c5 and a5 become much more pronounced, and Black’s position becomes very unpleasant. Instead, the simple 12... \[\text{c}7\] would have lead to an approximately equal position. Another very important factor that Ilivitsky completely forgets about is that in an open position, White will have an “extra piece”, because the \[\text{e}7\] knight does absolutely nothing but stand in the way of the black pieces. If Black had kept the position closed, he would have had time to improve the knight’s position gradually by transferring it either to d6 by means of ... \[\text{c}8\], or to f6 by means of ... \[\text{g}8\].

13. \[\text{d}3xe4\] \[\text{d}8-c7\]
14. \[\text{c}1-e3\]

Of course, Black’s position isn’t all that bad, and I’m sure that a computer would gradually equalize, but in a practical game playing this position with black is extremely hard – there is no clear-cut plan.

14. ... \[\text{e}8-d8\]
15. \[\text{b}3-c5\]
Chapter 6: Maneuvering

Slowly clamping down on Black’s position; Black must try to trade this knight or evict it from its annoying post.

15. ...  \( \mathcal{B}b6-d7 \)
16. \( \mathcal{W}e2-c4 \)

In a matter of four moves, the position has turned from a quiet, boring one to an open position full of tactical nuances. It’s interesting to see how Black’s position has become unpleasant in such a short time.

16. ...  \( \mathcal{D}d7-f6 \)

Trading on \( c5 \) doesn’t alleviate Black’s troubles: 16...\( \mathcal{O}xc5 \) 17.\( \mathcal{W}xc5 \) \( \mathcal{D}g4 \) 18.\( \mathcal{D}d2 \) \( \mathcal{D}e6 \) 19.\( \mathcal{D}c4 \).

17. \( \mathcal{A}a1-d1 \)  \( \mathcal{D}d8-f8 \)

After 17...\( \mathcal{A}xd1 \), grandmaster Psakhis gives the nice variation 18.\( \mathcal{A}xd1 \) \( b6 \) 19.\( \mathcal{A}g5! \) \( \mathcal{B}xc5 \) 20.\( \mathcal{W}xf7+ \) \( \mathcal{H}h8 \) 21.\( \mathcal{A}xc5 \) and Black’s position completely collapses.

18. \( \mathcal{W}c4-b3 \)

Simple and strong. Stein keeps an eye on the \( a2-g8 \) diagonal and on the \( b6 \)-square at the same time.

18. ...  \( \mathcal{D}f6-g4 \)

Trying to achieve counterplay by means of aggression. Other options were:

A) 18...\( \mathcal{A}b8 \) 19.\( \mathcal{D}d3 \) \( \mathcal{A}e6 \) 20.\( \mathcal{W}b6! \) \( \mathcal{W}xb6 \) 21.\( \mathcal{A}xb6 \) \( \mathcal{H}b3 \) 22.\( \mathcal{A}a1 \) \( \mathcal{D}d7 \) 23.\( \mathcal{A}c7 \) \( \mathcal{B}c8 \) 24.\( \mathcal{A}d6 \) \( \mathcal{H}e8 \) 25.\( \mathcal{D}fxe5 \) with an extra pawn for no compensation (Psakhis);

B) 18...\( \mathcal{B}b6 \) 19.\( \mathcal{D}d3 \) \( \mathcal{D}d7 \) 20.\( \mathcal{H}h3 \) \( \mathcal{H}b8 \) 21.\( \mathcal{W}a3 \) \( c5 \) 22.\( \mathcal{A}xd7 \) \( \mathcal{A}xd7 \) 23.\( \mathcal{D}dx\mathcal{E}5 \), again with an extra pawn for nothing;

C) 18...\( \mathcal{A}g4 \) 19.\( \mathcal{H}h3 \) \( \mathcal{A}xf3 \) 20.\( \mathcal{A}xf3 \) \( b6 \) 21.\( \mathcal{D}d3 \) and Black has a totally miserable position.

19. \( \mathcal{A}e3-g5 \)  \( \mathcal{A}f8-e8 \)

On 19...\( \mathcal{H}h6 \), Psakhis shows a nice line starting with 20.\( \mathcal{A}c1 \) 20...\( \mathcal{B}b6 \) 21.\( \mathcal{D}d3 \) \( \mathcal{A}e6 \) 22.\( \mathcal{C}c4! \) \( b5 \) 23.\( \mathcal{A}c2 \) (an unorthodox idea which is very rare, but very effective) 23...\( \mathcal{A}xc4 \) 24.\( \mathcal{H}h3 \) \( \mathcal{A}xd3 \) 25.\( \mathcal{A}xd3 \) \( \mathcal{D}f6 \) 26.\( \mathcal{A}xb5 \).

20. \( \mathcal{A}g5-c1?! \)

Grandmaster Leonid Stein, despite having conducted many brilliant combinations, often shirked from risk, preferring instead the slower but risk-free method to win. Here, he had the extremely effective move 20.\( \mathcal{A}f1! \), when Black has to resort to desperate measures in order to survive for another few moves — the threat of 21.\( \mathcal{A}c4 \) is simply deadly: 20...\( \mathcal{F}f8! \) (20...\( \mathcal{B}b6 \) 21.\( \mathcal{A}c4 \) \( \mathcal{B}xc5 \) 22.\( \mathcal{A}xf7+ \) \( \mathcal{H}f8 \)

223
23. \( \text{xe8} \) \( \text{xe8} \) 24. \( \text{wc4} \) h6 25. \( \text{c1} \)
21. \( \text{d3} \) h6 22. \( \text{c1} \) and Black’s position is paralyzed.

20. ... \( \text{g4-f6} \)
21. \( \text{c5-d3} \) \( \text{e8-c6} \)
22. \( \text{b3-c2}?! \)

This move seems completely natural. However, the same unorthodox and effective idea of 22.c4! is very strong here. After 22...\( \text{d7} \) 23.\( \text{g5} \) \( \text{f8} \) 24.\( \text{e3} \) h6 25.\( \text{b6} \) \( \text{c8} \) 26.\( \text{xe6} \) \( \text{xe6} \) 27.\( \text{h3} \) White’s position is winning. However, it’s understandable that Stein didn’t find this idea, as it almost never occurs in other positions. Anyhow, his position is still much better – Black simply has no way to improve his position and he has to passively sit and wait.

22. ... \( \text{f6-d7} \)
23. \( \text{f3-g5} \) \( \text{e6-c4} \)
24. \( \text{b2-b3} \) \( \text{c4-a6} \)

25. \( \text{g2-h3!} \)

With every move Black’s position becomes harder and harder to defend. However, with his next move, Black allows a forced winning combination. Instead, Black had a few other options, which held on for a little longer, although they shouldn’t have changed the overall evaluation of the position, namely:
A) 25...\( \text{ad8} \) 26.\( \text{xd7} \) \( \text{xd7} \) 27.\( \text{c5} \) \( \text{dd8} \) 28.\( \text{xa6} \) \( \text{xa6} \) 29.\( \text{xe3} \) with an overwhelming advantage for White (Psakhis);
B) 25...h6 26.\( \text{xf7} \)! \( \text{xf7} \) 27.\( \text{xd7} \) \( \text{xd7} \) 28.\( \text{xe5}+, \) winning the queen and the game;
C) 25...\( \text{ed8} \) 26.\( \text{xd7} \) \( \text{xd7} \) 27.\( \text{c5} \) \( \text{dd8} \) 28.\( \text{xa6} \) \( \text{xa6} \) 29.\( \text{xd8}+ \) \( \text{xd8} \) 30.\( \text{d1} \), again with an overwhelming advantage (Psakhis).

25. ... \( \text{d7-f8}?! \)
26. \( \text{d3-c5} \)

The triumph of White’s strategy; his position is completely dominating. However, when asked to pinpoint an exact moment where Black definitely went wrong, I can’t give a clear answer. What I can say is that the general reason why Black got outplayed is that the \( e7 \) knight was out of play for the whole game, and therefore White played the middlegame effectively with an extra piece. It might have seemed a minuscule problem to Black, but had he known that he would have lost the game because of that knight, he would have tried to improve it earlier.

The golden rule is:

You cannot ignore the placement of a piece. Despite the fact that the position might be closed, it’s important to understand that if the position suddenly opens, you will be playing the middlegame without this piece. You have to take the time to improve your pieces.

26. ... \( \text{b7-b6} \)
27. Cc5xa6  Ha8xa6
28. Wc2-e2

This is the prelude to the combination, but the simple 28.afx1 Haa8 29.Ac4 was also sufficient to win.

28. ... Haa6-a7

As Psakhis notes, the desperate 28...b5 loses on account of 29.Wf3 f6 30.Ce6 Wb8 31.Ce3.

29. Cg5xf7!

A great finishing combination. Black is helpless against the mating attack that will follow.

29. ... Hg8xf7
30. We2-c4+ Hf7-f6
31. Bd1-d3 Cc7-f5

The helpless knight sacrifices itself to prolong the game for a few moves, but obviously Black needs about 10 moves to defend, which he doesn’t have.

32. e4xf5 e5-e4
33. Cc1xe4

Black resigned.

A great game that illustrates what happens when you eschew the improvement of a piece and hesitate.

Sometimes, your opponent makes a risky move that can only be taken advantage of by means of very active play. Take a look at the following game:

□ Koutaly
■ Cerisier

French Championship, Ales 1984

Black has just played ...b6 and wants to equalize by means of ...Cf6 and ...b7. However, he has created a temporary weakness: the c6-square. In order to take advantage of it, White has to play extremely actively.

The only piece that can effectively take advantage of the weakness is the c3 knight. However, the knight has to somehow be transferred to c6 with tempo, so that Black won’t get a chance to complete his development.

Koutaly finds a nice idea:

1. Cc3-b5!

Because of the clumsy placement of his pieces, Black has nothing better than to play:

1. ... a7-a6
White, on the other hand, instead of being satisfied with an edge after 2.\(\text{c}6\), plays the much stronger:

2. \(\text{b}5\)-\text{a}7!

It doesn’t take long to see that Black is in big trouble. White threatens to win material after both 3.\(\text{c}xc8\) and 3.\(\text{c}c6\), while Black’s pieces are placed horribly. Black, probably demoralized by the sudden turn of events, played:

2. \(...\) \(d7-f6?!\)

Although the position was critical for Black, he could have put up a fight with 2..\(\text{e}5\). White should play 3.\(f4\), but after 3..\(g4\) (3..\(g4\) loses after 4.\(\text{c}c6\) \(b7\) 5.\(\text{c}e5\)!) Black’s knight defends the \(e7\)-square. White is still clearly better after 4.\(\text{d}6\) \(b7\) 5.\(\text{xb}7\) \(xb7\) 6.\(\text{c}c6\), but at least Black can still fight for a draw:

3. \(a7-c6\) \(b8-b7\)
4. \(c6-e5\) \(b7-b8\)
5. \(d1-d6!\)

Very often, you have a piece with a high potential to become strong later in the game, but your own pawn is blocking the piece (or a file). If you can sacrifice the pawn, you need to decide if the piece is strong enough to be worth that sacrifice.

In the following game, there were two critical moments where I needed to decide whether or not to sacrifice for an open file or diagonal.

\(\square\) Baboyan
\(\square\) Naroditsky
Vung Tau 2008
King’s Indian Defense,
Sämiscn Variation (E85)

1. \(d2-d4\) \(g8-f6\)
2. \(c2-c4\) \(g7-g6\)

The Classical Variation of the Sämisc used to be the main line, but nowadays, the ultra-sharp Panno Variation
(6...c6 and 7...a6) has become more popular, whereas at top level we often see the interesting pawn sacrifice 6...c5. However, there is certainly nothing wrong with this typical King’s Indian approach.

7. d4-d5

Another tricky move order here is to play 7...ge2?!, delaying d4-d5. Then, Black is best advised to start preparing ...b7-b5 by means of ...c7-c6 and ...a7-a6. Gurczak-Naroditsky, Reno 2009, continued 7...c6 8.wd2 a6 9.0-0-0 ḍbd7 10.dxe5?! (this gives Black great play; instead, correct is 10.סיםb1) 10...cxe5 11.اقتصf4 b5 12.b4 ḍa5 13.h5 b4 14.סיםb1 d5! with a huge initiative for Black.

7. ... c7-c6

Argentinean grandmaster Miguel Najdorf and Yugoslav grandmaster Svetozar Gligoric developed this line in the mid-20th century. The idea is to open up the c-file in case White castles queenside so Black will have more attacking chances. Also, after the trade, it will be easier for him to prepare ...a6-b5 as in this game. The drawback is that Black’s attack is sometimes too slow.

Anyhow, this line is great if one wants to avoid the theoretical ramifications arising after the highly controversial 6...c6 and 7...a6.

8. wd1-d2 c6xd5
9. c4xd5 a7-a6
10. 0-0-0?!

There’s no reason for White to commit so fast. It’s better to play 10.伊斯d3, reserving the right to castle kingside also.

10. ... b7-b5?!

This move order is not very common, but in my opinion it is not worse than the main 10..._makeConstraintsd7, which usually transposes anyway. The reason behind playing the text move first is that in almost all cases Black plays ...b5, while the knight still might be developed to a6 or not at all. In other words, I’m delaying the development of the knight, which is often annoying for the opponent.

11. ḍf1-d3?!

White makes the same inaccuracy as on the previous move; he commits too soon. The bishop could remain on f1 or even go to h3. A move such as 11.伊斯b1 or 11.g4 would have resulted in a usual Sämisch position. However, in this position I have to decide what to do.

I really didn’t want to play ...읻bd7, ...伊斯b7, ...伊斯c8, ...伊斯a5, and ...伊斯b5-b4, as that would have been a little too slow. Therefore, I needed to find a way to activate the g7 bishop; without it, the attack is blunt. The problem is that the e5 pawn is blocking it! There is only one way to activate it — to sacrifice something on f4, so the pawn on e5 takes the piece on f4. Immediately, I played:

11. ... ḍf6-h5
In K1 positions, sacrifices on f4 are very common; a pawn is not too high a price to pay for the activity of the g7 bishop.

12. g2-g4?! 

Very strange. If Black wants to play ...Qf4 anyway, why make him go there? 12...b1 or 12...ge2 would have been much more logical.

12. ... h5-f4 
13. g1-e2 b8-d7 
14. e2xf4 e5xf4 
15. e3xf4 

The first of a series of important positions for Black has arisen. There are three viable options: 15...e5, 15...c5, or 15...wb6, waiting for White to commit before placing the knight on a square. I didn’t like 15...wb6 because it’s a bit slow and after 16.h4 Black already needs to start defending. Besides, the queen doesn’t necessarily have to go to b6 – it can go to a5.

That left two options: ...e5 or ...c5. First, I considered the more natural option: 15...e5. I liked this move, but after 16.axe5 bxe5 17.b1, I couldn’t say that I really liked my position since White has ideas of h4-h5 and I didn’t see anything concrete. Therefore, that left 15...c5: it keeps more pieces on the board, and helps prepare ...b5-b4.

15. ... d7-c5 

In retrospect, I should say that of the four games in this position (not including mine), two games went 15...c5 and two 15...e5.

16. f4-e3 d8-f6 
17. e3xc5? 

A bold decision, and one that contains a lot of poison. If he hadn’t taken, Black would have threats of ...b4 and ...d7/a8, attacking along the c-file.

17. ... d6xc5 
18. d3-e2 

The fine point of White’s plan – he prepares f3-f4 and e4-e5, definitely stopping Black’s attack and starting his own. Therefore, I had to think of something to stop f3-f4. At first, I thought about 18...g5, but this only throws more oil into the fire after 19.h4, and if 19...h6 20.hxg5 hxg5 and 21.h5. My next thought was to use my strong b- and c-pawns and the h8-a1 diagonal. First, I played the natural move:

18. ... b5-b4 

and after

19. c3-b1 

I sank into a deep thought. The previous move did little to stop f3-f4, so I had to think about stopping the threat once again. I didn’t like 19...e8 because after 20.h4, Black still has to prove his compensation for the pawn. Then I had an idea: if I could somehow open up the c-file, my counterplay would obviously become much more powerful. As soon I started to think of ways to open the file, I came up with:
19. ... c5-c4!

Suddenly, Black’s position comes alive. White can take two pawns, b4 or c4, but then Black’s attack will grow much more powerful. The main tactical point of Black’s move is that 20.\(\text{\textit{wxb4}}\) is met by the powerful blow 20...\(\text{xg4!}\) and if 21.fxg4, then 21...\(\text{\textit{ab}}\)b8. Therefore, White has to take on c4, but first he has to kick the queen from f6, so that f3 will not be under attack.

20. g4\-g5 \(\text{\textit{w}}\)f6\-d6

21. \(\text{x}\text{\textit{e}}\text{\textit{xc4}}\) \(\text{x}\text{\textit{g}}\text{\textit{7=\textit{e}\text{\textit{5}}}}\)

Taking control of the dark squares and preventing f3-f4 once and for all. Despite being two pawns up, White is in great danger — Black will occupy the c-file, threatens 22...\(\text{x}\text{\textit{f4}}\), and might open up White’s king further with the extremely unpleasant 25...\(\text{\textit{a}}\)5-a4-a3. Obviously White is by no means lost or even much worse, but in a practical game this position is very hard to defend.

22. \(\text{\textit{w}}\text{\textit{d2-e2}}\) a6-a5

Making a useful move and not committing to anything. Such a strategy is worth remembering — instead of committing to a certain plan, first make the moves that you know you’ll have to make. If you don’t force your opponent into making any moves, it’s more likely that he will make a mistake.

23. \(\text{\textit{d}}\text{\textit{b1-d2}}\)

White tries to transfer his knight to c4. However, now the b2-square is temporarily undefended, and I try to make use of that with my next move:

23. ... a5-a4

White’s position grows more and more dangerous. Already, Black is threatening to play 24...a3 and mate along the long diagonal. Also, Black has the idea of playing ...b3 and then attacking b2, so it’s hard to tell what White should do. He finds the only defense:

24. \(\text{\textit{c}}\text{\textit{1-b1}}\) a4-a3

25. b2-b3 \(\text{\textit{e}}\text{\textit{5-g7}}\)

26. \(\text{\textit{b}}\text{\textit{1-c2}}\)

The only move — Black was threatening 26...\(\text{\textit{w}}\)e5 and mate on a1 or b2. However, if White has to resort to desperate measures to defend against such a simple threat, this is a sign that his position is not very good.

26. ... \(\text{\textit{d}}\text{\textit{6-e5}}\)

27. \(\text{\textit{d}}\text{\textit{1-b1}}\) \(\text{\textit{e}}\text{\textit{5xg5}}\)

White simply cannot do anything, so I have the time to take the pawn, elim-
nating any possible counterplay with h4-h5. White can only sit and wait for Black to win the h2 pawn.

28. \( \text{h1-f1} \) \( \text{w5-f4} \)
29. \( \text{w2-f2} \) \( \text{g7-h6} \)
30. \( \text{b1-d1} \) \( \text{f4-e5} \)
31. \( \text{d1-b1} \) \( \text{c8-h3}! \)
32. \( \text{f1-e1} \) \( \text{h6-f4} \)
33. \( \text{f2-e2} \) \( \text{a8-c8} \)
34. \( \text{e2-d3} \) \( \text{h3-d7} \)
35. \( \text{c2-d1} \) \( \text{f4xh2} \)

Now, White doesn’t even have an extra pawn. Black will slowly push the h-pawn until White’s position cracks, and there is no way to stop it. The rest is simply agony; obviously, White cannot resign here, but his position is doomed.

36. \( \text{d2-f1} \) \( \text{h2-f4} \)
37. \( \text{f1-e3} \) \( \text{h7-h5} \)
38. \( \text{e3-g2} \) \( \text{f4-h6} \)
39. \( \text{e1-h1} \) \( \text{w5-g3} \)
40. \( \text{g2-e1} \) \( \text{h5-h4} \)

The last finesse, winning the game immediately.

41. \( \text{d3-e2} \) \( \text{h4-h3} \)
42. \( \text{e1-d3} \)

42. ... \( \text{c8xc4}! \)

Sometimes, as a result of one player outplaying the other, a position arises in which the "victim" is completely paralyzed, but it’s not clear how to make use of the paralysis. In such cases, a maneuver might be the finishing blow.

Black's position is completely dominating. His pieces are located brilliantly, while White's position is a jumble of weaknesses, beginning with the extremely perilous position of the f1 king and ending with the isolated pawn on c6. Also, White is completely paralyzed: his pieces are tied together and cannot move. His only available moves are \( \text{g1-f1} \) and \( \text{c2-e2} \). However, it's not completely clear how Black can take advantage of this! I feel that now is a good time to address the
concept of ‘moving the opponent’s pieces’, invented by NM Dana Mackenzie. When you play forcing moves, you not only move your own pieces, but you move your opponent’s pieces as well! Therefore, if Black plays, for example, 1...\(\text{Wf4}\), he forces White to play 2.\(\text{We1}\), thus worsening his position. It is a very important concept to keep in mind when making forced moves.

Hickl, a strong and experienced player, finds a powerful maneuver that forces White to play \(\text{We1}\) and give away a huge amount of material.

1. ... \(\text{Wg3-d6!}\)
2. \(\text{We2-c2}\) \(\text{Wd6-f4!}\)

White is in zugzwang! His only two moves are \(\text{c7}\) and \(\text{We1}\), which both give away material. It’s funny how with two strange-looking moves Black has won the game immediately.

3. \(\text{Wf1-e1}\)

3.\(\text{c7}\) prolongs the game for a few moves, but after 3...\(\text{Wxc7}\) the result of the game is clear.

3. ... \(\text{Wf4-h2!}\)
4. \(\text{Qf2-d1}\) \(\text{Wh2-g1+}\)
5. \(\text{We1-d2}\) \(\text{Wg1xg2+}\)
6. \(\text{Qd2-c1}\) \(\text{Wg2-f1}\)
7. \(\text{Wc2-c3}\) \(\text{e4-e3}\)
8. \(\text{Wc3-b4}\) \(\text{Wh6-h5}\)
9. \(\text{Wb4-e7}\) \(\text{e3-e2}\)
10. \(\text{We7-h7+}\) \(\text{Wh5-g5}\)
11. \(\text{Wh7-e7+}\) \(\text{Wg5-f4}\)
12. \(\text{We7-d6+}\) \(\text{Wf4-f3}\)

In conclusion, let’s reiterate what we have learned in this chapter:

A. Always choose the simplest winning option, as it minimizes the chances of a mistake or blunder.
B. When you have reached a critical moment in the game, ask yourself: “Which pieces can be improved?”
C. Don’t force the play when you’re realizing a decisive advantage. Be patient and win slowly but surely.
D. Never hesitate with the improvement of a piece. If, in a closed position, you hesitate with the improvement of a piece and the position suddenly opens up, you will be playing a piece down!
E. Sometimes, the best square for a piece is an unusual one. Always look for unusual ways to transfer a piece to a square, as such an abnormal transfer may be the fastest and most effective.

Of course, the above rules aren’t engraved in stone. We shouldn’t follow these rules in every single position – all rules have exceptions. Instead, we should just keep them in mind when playing. For now, try your luck at the exercises below. They’re not easy, so take your time. Remember to keep in mind the rules mentioned above and always ask yourself what pieces you can improve.
Exercises

Can you find a way to improve the placement of White’s queen which is currently under the x-ray of the e8 rook?

Imagine that you are Botvinnik and playing Black. Can you find a way to improve the coordination of your pieces?
Solutions to Exercises

Chapter 1: Prophylaxis

Exercise 1:1

**Tal-Petrosian** Riga 1958

Black’s best try is 1...\(\mathbf{f}4\), and after 2.\(\mathbf{xf}4\) \(\mathbf{exf}4\), he will have the crucial e5-square for the knight. On 3.\(\mathbf{xf}4\), a good option is 3...\(\mathbf{ae}5\) with great dynamic compensation for the material loss.

Exercise 1:2

**Rodin-Nejrovsky** St Petersburg 1999

White should accept the sacrificed material, and after 1.\(\mathbf{xf}3\) \(\mathbf{xf}3\) should find the great prophylactic move 2.\(\mathbf{ad}1\), with the idea of meeting 2...\(\mathbf{hxh}4\) with 3.\(\mathbf{g}4\).

In the game, White went wrong with the rash 1...\(\mathbf{e}5?\), and had nothing after 1...\(\mathbf{gxf}5\) 2.\(\mathbf{xf}3\) \(\mathbf{d}6\).

Chapter 2: Defense

Exercise 2:1

**Torre Repetto-N.N** New York simul 1924

Kudos to any reader who found that White actually wins with 1.\(\mathbf{d}6\)!, when both captures lose. On 1...\(\mathbf{xd}6\) White queens with 2.\(\mathbf{g}8=\mathbf{w}+\), while on 2...\(\mathbf{cxd}6\), the pawns are unstoppable after 3.\(\mathbf{f}7\). An amazing defense!

Exercise 2:2

**A. Petrosian-Hazai** Schilde Open 1970

Black found the amazing 1...\(\mathbf{wb}6\)!. Now, White could have won slowly by attacking the a5 pawn. Instead, he thought he had found a brilliant win: 2.\(\mathbf{x}xb6\)? \(\mathbf{cxb}6\) 3.\(\mathbf{h}4\) \(\mathbf{ghh}4\) 4.\(\mathbf{wb}1\) (or c1), but missed that Black draws after 4...\(\mathbf{h}3\) 5.\(\mathbf{ghh}3\) \(\mathbf{h}4\) and White cannot break through.
Mastering Positional Chess

Exercise 2.3
Study R. Tavariani 1989
The only way to save the game is 1...\(\text{g}3\)+. Hats off to anyone who saw the amazing 1...\(\text{e}4\) 2.\(\text{g}4+\) \(\text{f}5\) 3.\(\text{c}4\) \(\text{d}1+\) 4.\(\text{d}2!\), and White draws by a hair’s breadth.

Chapter 3: Building and Breaking Fortresses

Exercise 3.1
Topalov-Anand Dos Hermanas 1996
After 1...\(\text{e}a1\) 2.\(\text{d}x\text{d}8\) \(\text{xf}1+\) 3.\(\text{xf}1\) \(\text{x}d8\), White found that he cannot break through Black’s rock-solid fortress!

Exercise 3.2
Study Hasek 1951
First, White should lock the position up with 1.\(\text{g}4+\) h\(\text{x}g4\) 2.d4+ \(\text{e}6\). Then, he has the amazing 3.\(\text{h}h1!\) \(\text{w}f8\) 4.\(\text{e}e1\) \(\text{w}a8\) 5.\(\text{xf}1\) \(\text{w}a6+\) 6.\(\text{g}1\) and Black cannot penetrate into White’s fortress without stalemat ing him.

Exercise 3.3
Keres-Alekhine Dresden 1936
Black’s winning plan is simple but effective: he will transfer his king to \(b7\), and play \(a7-a5\), forcing the en passant capture. He will then take back, return to \(c5\), and play \(b5\), decisively breaking up White’s pawns. If White moves his king to \(f2\), Black plays \(e4\) \(g3\) e\(3\), etc.

234
Chapter 4: Positional Sacrifice

Exercise 4:1

Acs-Zelčić Baden tt 1999
After the shocking 1...hxg4! 2.hxg4 hxg4, White’s extremely weak pawn structure and d5-square guarantee Black excellent compensation. He won the game pretty quickly.

Exercise 4:2

Gipslis-Simagin Sverdlovsk 1957
The typical exchange sacrifice 1...hxg4! saves the day. After 2.hxg4 hxg4 White is in big trouble, as the central pawns will start rolling very soon!

Exercise 4:3

Charbonneau-Lahno Montreal 2004
After the strong 1.h6! fxg6 2.hxg6 hxg6 3.hxg7, White’s attack will be completely overwhelming.

Exercise 4:4

Yakovenko-Ivanchuk Foros 2007
Yes! The strong 1...hxg5 2.hxg5 hxg5 3.hxg5 guarantees Black good compensation for the sacrificed pawn.
Chapter 5: Paralysis in the Middlegame

Exercise 5:1
Papa-Mamedyarov Lausanne 2004
After 1...c4! 2.b1 b3, White’s whole queenside is paralyzed and he cannot get out. Black won the game in style.

Exercise 5:2
Kamsky-Mamedyarov Sofia 2007
Black will be paralyzed after 1.a4! bxa4 2.xa4, when his pieces are stuck to their positions.

Chapter 6: Maneuvering

Exercise 6:1
Spassky-Portisch Geneva 1977
Kudos to any reader who finds 1.c1!, with the idea of transferring the queen to the optimal square g3 by means of e3-g3.

Exercise 6:2
Tolush-Botvinnik Moscow 1945
After the active maneuver 1...h4! followed by 1...e4, Black’s pieces will be coordinated optimally and the weakness of White’s pawns will be especially highlighted.
Epilogue

As we come to the end of this book, there are a few parting thoughts that I would like to express.

After reading a book on positional chess, I have always thought that I would not get outplayed in a single game. That, unfortunately, is quite untrue. From my own experience, I have found that the ideas which one has learned simply blend into the rest, and when you analyze a game, you might not see any visible signs that you have comprehended many more ideas. Therefore, you should certainly not be alarmed if you get badly outplayed. After all, positional mastery comes not only with immediate understanding, but also with experience.

Also, many readers think (and for a long time I thought so too) that mistakes hugely denigrate a book’s value. In my view, that is quite untrue as well. I am totally confident that this book will contain mistakes. This, however, certainly shouldn’t discourage the reader from believing the rules stated here. I have sincerely tried my best in providing objectively correct and useful analysis. Any mistakes are completely accidental. In other words, books often contain so many mistakes that you already start doubting the author’s main conclusions! In this book, no matter how many mistakes it might contain, I believe that by following all of the principles and rules stated, a player can still improve his positional understanding quickly.

Overall, I hope that the reader really enjoyed reading this book and took away a lot from it. As of now, I’d like to wish you the best of luck in your future chess careers! Armed with the knowledge of a great amount of positional ideas, you will be able to reach chess heights that are new to you and you will feel more comfortable facing strong, experienced players.

Daniel Nanditsky,
December 2009
## Index of Players

Numbers refer to pages.

<p>| | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acs</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>Fernandes</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>Kraai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adianto</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>Fischer</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Kramnik</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akobian</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>Flohr</td>
<td>207</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alekhine</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>Florean</td>
<td>107</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anand</td>
<td>108, 234</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andersson</td>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Areschenko</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>Gajic</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Lahno</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashley</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>Gipslis</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>Langer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azmaiparashvili</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>Grover</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>Larsen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Gulko</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>Lautier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Gurevich, D</td>
<td>133</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td></td>
<td>H</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baboyan</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>Hazai</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>Maged Badals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bacrot</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>Hebden</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>Mäki</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bagirov</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Hickl</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>Malinarski</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balogh</td>
<td>166</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mamedyarov</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berndt</td>
<td>230</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Marin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bezold</td>
<td>85</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Martinez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhat</td>
<td>48</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>McShane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borovikov</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>Illivitsky</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>Mikhailievski, A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Botvinnik</td>
<td>16, 236</td>
<td>Illescas Cordoba</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Mikhailievski, V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Braun</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>Ivanuch</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>Murdzia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bryant</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bykhovsky</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>Jansa</td>
<td>154</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td></td>
<td>J</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cerisier</td>
<td>225</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charbonneau</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>Kaganskiy</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>Neverovsky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Karjakin</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>Nijboer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Karpov</td>
<td>18, 34, 61</td>
<td>Nikolic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Kasparov</td>
<td>61, 88, 117, 149</td>
<td>Nimzowitsch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dlugy</td>
<td>29</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Nisipeanu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donner</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drake</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>Keres</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Perez Marco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dvoretsky</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>Khuzman</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>Petrosian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eliskases</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>Kotsur</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>Podgaets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emmes</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>Kouatly</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>Poehlmann</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

238
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Polugaevsky</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Shulman</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>Torre Repetto</td>
<td>233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portisch</td>
<td>73, 179, 236</td>
<td>Simagin</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>Tuvshintugs</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psakhis</td>
<td>193, 205</td>
<td>Socko</td>
<td>105</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sokolov,A</td>
<td>210</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sokolov,I</td>
<td>195</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>R</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real de Azua</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Solomon</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Vidmar</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reshevsky</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Spassky</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>Volkov</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Röder</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>Spielmann</td>
<td>116</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romanishin</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>Srbis</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>W</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rowley</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>Stefansson</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>Wells</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rowson</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>Stein</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>Williams</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>S</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sämisch</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>Taylor</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Yakovenko</td>
<td>186, 235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sawyer</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>Terpugov</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Yusupov</td>
<td>210, 217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schemm</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>Timman</td>
<td>18, 190</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shabalov</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>Topalov</td>
<td>108, 117, 120</td>
<td>Z</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short</td>
<td>190</td>
<td></td>
<td>152, 217</td>
<td>Zelcic</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Daniel Naroditsky
Mastering Positional Chess

“If you want to excel at chess, you have to delve deeper, and appreciate not only visually pleasing combinations, but much more subtle positional ideas as well”, writes Daniel Naroditsky (1995) in this book. Daniel is a unique talent. He became World Junior Chess Champion in 2007, and now, at the age of 14, he is also the youngest published chess author in history.

Mastering Positional Chess is a serious, but entertaining chess instruction book. Daniel started writing it when he realized that his lack of positional understanding was causing him to lose many games.

Despite his young age, Daniel’s mature style and systematic method of working stand out. He gives crystal-clear, verbal explanations on the essence of positional chess, thus showing himself to be a born writer and instructor.

This refreshingly original book contains six chapters on the important positional aspects of chess, with many attractive games and fragments from Daniel’s own games, but also from games by top players like Kasparov, Karpov, Topalov and Petrosian. The author repeatedly reinforces the points he wishes to make not only through the illustrative games, but also in the summaries and the exercises.

In a special preface Daniel’s parents tell the story behind this book, which teaches chess skills every club player needs in order to win more games.