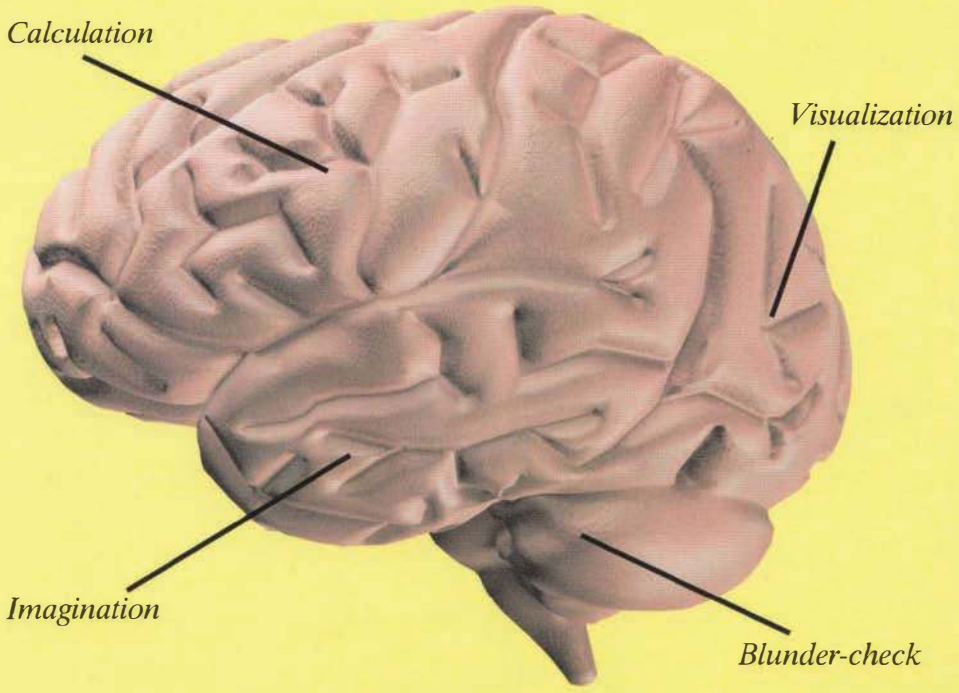
GAMBIT

The Grandmaster's Mind

Amatzia Avni

A look inside the chess thinking-process



GAMBIT

The Grandmaster's Mind investigates how chess-players find good ideas. Amatzia Avni, a psychologist by profession, pursues this goal by interviewing top players and analysts. The discussion focuses on their most interesting and instructive games and compositions.

Avni has been careful to allow his interviewees to convey their own thoughts, rather than direct their answers to comply with any pre-existing theories. We experience the events on the board through the vivid recollections of the player. This gives us a realistic view of each struggle and how the critical decisions were really made.

Avni also presents the players with some unfamiliar positions, and records their reactions upon encountering these new situations. Once we have heard from the grandmasters, Avni discusses the essence of what was said, and provides some insights and recommendations.

The interviewees include famous grandmasters such as Boris Gelfand, Ilia Smirin and Lev Psakhis.

Amatzia Avni is an Israeli psychologist. He is a FIDE Master in both game and composition, an international judge of studies, a former editor of the Israeli magazine *Schahmat*, and a regular contributor to *Chess Monthly* and *Kingpin*.

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Symbols

+	check
++	double check
#	checkmate
!!	brilliant move
!	good move
!?	interesting move
?!	dubious move
?	bad move
??	blunder
Ch	championship
corr.	correspondence game
1-0	the game ends in a win for White
½-½	the game ends in a draw
0-1	the game ends in a win for Black
(*n*)	*n*th match game
(D)	see next diagram

Superscript numbers (e.g. [33]) indicate the references listed on pages 167-9.
In the interviews, questions by the author are shown in *italic*. The interviewees' responses are given in quotation marks.

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Expressing one's thoughts in a foreign language is no easy task. I am deeply indebted to my friend **Raaphy Persitz** for his devoted assistance in polishing and clarifying my text.

I am grateful to my twelve interviewees, for their cooperation and insights; especially to **Alon Greenfeld**, who read the complete manuscript and contributed valuable comments.

The book is dedicated, like all my previous books, to my loving family: **Naama**, **Yuval**, **Ohad** and **Yael**.

Amatzia Avni
March, 2004
Ramat-Ilan, Israel

Introduction

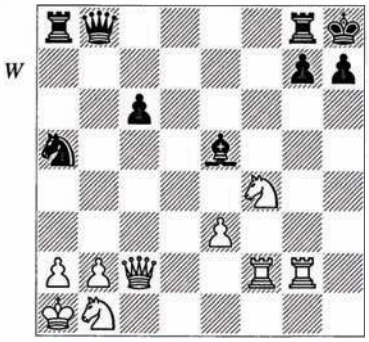
The gap between experts and novices is an intriguing topic for investigation in various fields. Finding an answer as to what differentiates one group from the other is not only of great interest, but contains clear practical implications.

Two fundamental questions arise: *why* are some people more skilled than others; and *how* does this difference express itself.

As for the first issue, research has indicated that experts are able to recognize meaningful patterns of information unnoticed by novices; they organize their knowledge around core concepts and major principles that guide their thinking. Experts are also capable of flexibly retrieving important aspects of their knowledge with little attentive effort [1]. They excel in their field because they possess more knowledge, understanding, specific talent and experience than most of us. How much of their expertise is inherited and how much is gained through devotion and hard work, remains an on-going dispute.

How does an expert's superiority over his peers reveal itself? Experts are supposed to reach better and faster decisions and to achieve an overall higher performance.

In the field of chess, many assume that stronger players will simply spot stronger moves. This assumption is amusingly illustrated by the following tale.



White to play

According to an old book by Birbrager [2], this (composed?) position was presented to four classes of players. The weakest player chose **1 ♖h2**, threatening mate in one and preparing to meet 1...♘b3+ with 2 ♕xb3 ♕xb3 3 ♘g6# (well, he was not that weak if he'd noticed this!). However, he ignored his opponent's threats, and thus succumbed to 1...♕xb2+! 2 ♕xb2 ♘b3#.

A somewhat stronger player – but not strong enough – identified Black's plot to exploit the pinned a- and b-pawns and proposed to parry his threats by, say, **1 ♘c3** or 1 ♘a3.

The third player hit upon a winning continuation: **1 ♘g6+** hxg6 2 ♖h2+ ♗xh2 3 ♖xh2+ ♕xh2 4 ♕xh2#. This is certainly good enough, but the best player found a shorter and more elegant solution: **1 ♕xh7+** ♔xh7 2 ♖h2#.

This description (the stronger the player, the more he sees) may well reflect reality at the lower levels of chess skill. However, things are different with mature and experienced players: many of them reach a reasonable standard of play, where they are well acquainted with the principles and basic stratagems of the game. At an average club-player level (1800 – 2000 Elo) one recognizes the importance of a passed pawn, the role of a rook on the seventh rank, the strength of a bishop-pair, and the importance of centralizing a king in the endgame. One is more meticulous about move-order in the opening, values the need to improve the scope of one's piece(s), and strives to create structural weaknesses in the opponent's camp. The average club-player would certainly be capable of solving the problem presented above at our best tale-solver level. Hence, the difference between him and a grandmaster is not so easy to depict.

It seems that both grandmasters and club-players approach many positions that evolve during a chess game in the same way. When walking through a well-trodden opening path, following a familiar middlegame plan, or applying proven principles in the endgame, most players are likely to reach similar decisions. It is only at a few junctures that the men are separated from the boys.

When we reflect on ideas in chess, it is these special occurrences that catch our attention. How does a strong player conceive unusual, non-ordinary concepts that escape his lesser brethren? What exactly goes on in his mind during such moments?

It appears that the simplest method of finding out the answer to this perplexing question is to listen to what top players have to say. Alas, results in this direction are not always helpful.



Liu Wenzhe – Donner
Buenos Aires (Olympiad) 1978
White to play

In his notes, the Chinese player recounts that he intended the sequence 14 ♕h4 (threatening mate) 14...f5 15

♗c4, "when all of a sudden the idea of a queen sacrifice dawned on me". [3]

14 ♕h4 f5 15 ♕h7+ ♔f7 16 ♕xg6+! ♔xg6 17 ♗h5+ ♔h7 18 ♗f7+ ♗h6 19 g6+ ♔g7 20 ♗xh6+ 1-0

The winner was a relatively inexperienced player at the time; variations on this tactical motif had been seen before. Maybe if we turn our attention to a more heavyweight player, it will contribute to our understanding of how great ideas emerge.



Karpov – Gulko
Oropesa del Mar 1996
White to play

In this position, barely out of the opening phase, ex-world champion Anatoly Karpov considered continuing quietly with 15 ♗c3, but then "a combinative idea suddenly occurred to me".

15 ♖xd7+! ♔xd7 16 ♘xb6+! ♗xb6 17 ♗a4

Following two successive sacrifices White regains one piece and holds some advantage:

17...♔c8 18 ♘e5 ♔b8 19 ♘xc6+ ♔b7 20 ♘e5 ♖ac8 21 ♗c6+ ♔a7 22 ♘xf7

White went on to win in 42 moves. Karpov marvels how this combination became possible: "What preconditions for tactics are present? Practically none. The knight alone has advanced to a more or less active position at a4 ... the two rooks are on open files, but ... everything is defended. And yet there is a combination! And you will be even more surprised when you see that two out of the three actively placed white pieces are sacrificed in turn." [4]

In plain words, an ex-world champion says: I had a brilliant idea; I don't know how it dawned on me; it doesn't flow naturally from the position; I'm baffled.

An honest account, but one that, like the previous one, does not have much practical value for the reader who tries to benefit from the champion's wisdom. If a great idea just lands from a clear sky, there is not much we can do to emulate it.

Researchers are long aware that a great deal of an expert's knowledge is tacit; that is, he can't always articulate what it is, precisely, that he is doing [5]. Sometimes, a third party is needed to elicit knowledge that is hidden in an expert's mind.

This state of affairs motivated the present work. "How do chess ideas enter our minds?" is a question that has engrossed me for some time. In recent years I wrote two short articles on the subject, in the German magazine *Rochade* [6] and the American *Squares* [7]. It was clear that to make progress, I had to seek assistance from the main source of good chess ideas – the strongest players – attempting to express mental processes in a clear and lucid way.

With the help of short, focused interviews, I endeavoured to penetrate the minds of chess figures who have succeeded in creating something new and valuable.

In these sessions I took the back seat and let experts reveal their thought-process. Sure enough, what people say they are thinking about and what actually runs through their minds do not fit precisely; but it is as close as you can get.

* * *

Before we proceed, some introductory words regarding the author and the task he took upon himself seem to be in order.

In the field of practical chess, I had neither a burning desire, nor sufficient skill and talent, ever to step close to becoming a grandmaster. My peak rating was 2400 Elo; respectable, but not outstanding.

However, I did spend many hours talking to GMs and analysing with them. I battled (generally with dismal results) against several dozen GMs. During my five-year editorship of the Israeli magazine *Schahmat* I examined hundreds of annotated games submitted by top players, discussing vague points with them on more than a few occasions. All in all, I acquired a decent understanding of my subject-matter.

The work undertaken does not pretend to be scientific research. There was no control group (consisting of club-players, for instance, or novices). Different interviewees were posed different questions. Each GM encountered varied positions to solve. You see, I was merely seeking to acquire an insight, not a proof.

Part 1: Interviews

In the following section, the reader will find a summary of 12 interviews, which were conducted between July 2003 and January 2004. The interviewees were chosen on the grounds that 1) they were chess personalities with rich, diverse ideas; and 2) they could eloquently convey their thought-process to an observer.

Nine out of my twelve interviewees are strong over-the-board grandmasters. A prominent study-composer, a world champion problem-solver and a successful coach were selected to complete the gallery.

Usually the interviews comprised three parts. In the first, the interviewee was asked to respond to some abstract questions, regarding his way of thinking in chess. How does he approach complex problems? What does he do when he runs out of promising ideas? Why does he occasionally decide to direct his efforts towards investigating a certain ambiguous variation, while ignoring another?

The second part consisted of going through a selection of games or composed works of the interviewee, attempting to elicit what actually happened, how some ideas were found. What led the interviewee to a specific solution? Did he implement systematic thinking methods? Where did concepts like 'feeling' and 'familiarity with position/opponent' fit in?

Finally, the interviewee was asked to tackle some unfamiliar positions, sharing his thought-process while he was trying to contemplate the best course of action. In this part my companions were not restricted by time-limits but were not allowed (unless specifically mentioned otherwise) to move the pieces on the board.

This last phase needs some clarification. Asking a person to speak his thoughts ('thinking aloud') is a well-known method of inquiry (e.g., De Groot) [8]. In the following interviews I tried to gain further insights by deliberately interfering with their thinking-process, posing specific questions.

Such questions were not only of a static character, like "give me your assessment of the position" or "what are your candidate moves here". Rather, I tried to engage my companions in a dialogue. If they overlooked a relevant move, I wished to find out why; if they concentrated on one wing, or on the movement of a certain piece, I wanted to understand their reasons.

As my work over this book evolved, I posed fresh questions to the interviewees. The output of one session, with Grandmaster X, became the input for the next session, with Grandmaster Y.

Each chapter is based on a face-to-face meeting, which lasted an average of two-and-a-half hours. Subsequent e-mails or phone calls, as well as computer-checks, were generally required to clarify obscure points. All interviewees received a copy of their chapter, and some took advantage of the opportunity to comment or to amend matters.

I very much enjoyed conducting these interviews and felt that generally my interviewees shared my delight. They were happy to relive some of their bright moments, were challenged to rack their brains in uncharted positions, and found interest in reflecting on their thinking-process.

These interviews stand on their own, as captivating evidence of many creative chess ideas. They also form the raw material for the next section, which attempts to put some order and reach conclusions regarding the working of a grandmaster's mind.

1 GM Lev Psakhis

Born 1958. Following impressive victories in USSR championships in 1980/1 (with Beliavsky) and 1981 (with Kasparov), Psakhis entered the top ten on the Elo list in 1982. Later he slowed down, but remained a formidable player. After his emigration to Israel, he won the country's championship in 1996, and shared laurels (with Gelfand and Smirin) in 1999. Lev represented Israel in six Olympiads. A world expert on openings, he is a long-standing coach of Judit Polgar.

What do you think of the role of knowledge in chess? Twenty years ago you had less knowledge than now...

... "But I had a much better memory! This is an intriguing question: are vast knowledge and a weak memory preferable to moderate knowledge and a strong memory?"

I wouldn't know; anyway, what are the pros and cons of a great amount of knowledge?

"Frankly, I fail to see a single disadvantage; knowledge is always positive."

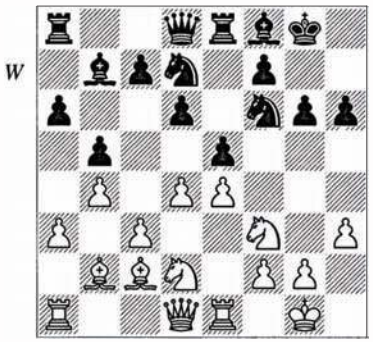
But some people say that if you know too much, it might block your creativity...

"We should differentiate between knowledge and experience. To possess knowledge is, as I said, laudable. Experience, on the other hand, may have negative aspects."

Like what?

"Experience may be connected to unfavourable memories, to unpleasant opponents, to bad losses; you may reject certain positions or ideas because of that."

Let us investigate some interesting positions from your career.



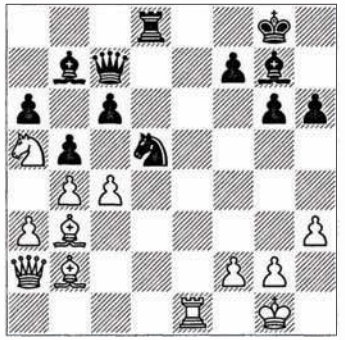
Psakhis – Razuvaev
Moscow 1986
White to play

16 ♕b1 ♗g7 17 ♘b3 c6 18 ♘a5 ♕c7 19 ♗b3 ♖ad8 20 ♕a2 d5

20...♖e7 is a serious alternative to the text-move.

21 exd5 ♘xd5 22 dxe5 ♘xe5 23 ♘xe5 ♖xe5 24 c4 ♖xe1+ 25 ♖xe1 *(D)*

The white pieces display great harmony.



How should we evaluate the move 16 ♕b1: as a simple, healthy move, or as a first step in a comprehensive plan culminating in the above diagram?

"At the time I was well acquainted with the Ruy Lopez and its various game-plans, although I did not have this exact position before. I played 16 ♕b1 with two aims in mind: to protect e4, thus making the knight manoeuvre ♘b3-a5 possible; and to keep an eye on the b7-bishop. In certain lines, an eventual ...c5 would be answered by bxc5, exploiting the vulnerability of Black's light-squared bishop."

I posed this question because we frequently read annotations by famous players, which state something like 'here I devised a complex six-stage plan...' etc.

(Waves his hands in scorn) "I don't believe in this; it is nonsense – especially in this sort of position."

25...bxc4

25...♘f4 26 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 27 ♕a1+ ♔h7? 28 ♘xb7 ♕xb7 29 ♕f6 with a winning position.

26 ♗xc4 ♗c8 27 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 28 ♕b2+ ♔h7 29 ♕e5 ♖d6 30 ♖c1 ♕d8

Did both sides miss 30...♘xb4, with the idea 31 axb4? ♖d1+? It transpires that by 31 ♔h2! White wins material.

31 ♖d1 ♖e6 32 ♘xc6 ♖xc6 33 ♖xd5 ♕h4 34 ♖c5 ♖xc5 35 ♕xc5 ♕f4 36 ♗xf7 1-0

Do grandmasters differ from ordinary players in their way of thinking, or do they utilize the same methods (only more strongly by far)?

"A grandmaster thinks in a more economical manner. He scans only major elements of the position, examines just critical lines. In comparison, an amateur considers all sorts of moves, doesn't direct his mind to spotting the best squares for his pieces. A grandmaster also works harder on chess; he may have more talent and chess-related intelligence; he understands very well the significance of pawn-structures...

"But basically, grandmasters do the same things as amateurs."

Aren't there grandmasters who think differently? Take for example Jonathan Speelman, who played some peculiar moves against you... [9]

"Ah, but Speelman has genius; he is a special kind of grandmaster. In 80% of cases he will think in an ordinary way, searching for the best squares for his pieces, etc., but at some points he will do other things. He has a different brain, and not just in chess."

What about guys like Shirov and Morozevich?

"Shirov is close to what I call 'normal': every grandmaster uses an algorithm for decision-making. Now, Shirov gives priority to generous doses of risk, activity and daring in his algorithm. Morozevich, I admit, is a distinct type; he thinks in a completely different manner. He belongs to the same category as Speelman.

"There are only a few extraordinary grandmasters. The vast majority are 'normal'. For instance, players like Nigel Short and Michael Adams – they are excellent grandmasters, but play a 'normal' kind of chess."

> If one may become a great player by excelling in 'normal' stuff, could a great idea be, in essence, just an enlargement of 'normal' ideas?

Psakhis – Svidler
Haifa (rapid) 2000

1 ♘f3 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 g3 c6 4 b3 ♗g7 5 ♗b2 0-0 6 ♗g2 d5 7 0-0 a5 8 d3 a4 9 ♘bd2 axb3 10 axb3 ♖xa1 11 ♕xa1 ♘a6 12 ♕a3 *(D)*

Until now, it has been fairly standard. But your 12th and 13th moves are not routine ones.

"My last move aims at supporting the advance b4. It also prevents his awkwardly placed knight from entering the battle via c5."

12...♗e6 13 ♗e5

What is this move about?

"(It is) just a modest move to improve my position..."



How does this move improve your position? It doesn't attack or defend anything...

"Well, maybe it makes it easier for a rook on b1 to support the advance of my b-pawn ... Anyway, it was clear to me that 13 ♗e5 improved my position (although it was not necessarily the best move here)."

I'm afraid, Lev, that what is clear to you is not so obvious to many others. Could you be more specific?

(After some attempts to convey his meaning, Psakhis gives up on me and says:) "There are some moves which you can't explain. Either you feel them, or you don't. Many of Karpov's moves are impossible to explain, yet they are the correct moves."

13...h6 14 ♘d4 ♗d7 15 c5 ♘g4 16 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 17 b4 e5 18 ♘4f3 ♖e8 19 e4 ♗e6 20 d4

White seems to be in control. "Svidler thought he stood much worse here" – Psakhis.

20...dxe4?

Black chooses an unsuccessful continuation. Fritz suggests 20...exd4 with the possible sequel 21 ♘xd4 ♕f6 22 ♕c3 ♖d8! 23 h3 ♔h7!! (on 24 hxg4, 24...dxe4 regains the piece).

21 ♘xe4 ♗d5 22 ♘d6 e4? 23 ♘xe8+ ♕xe8 24 ♖e1 ♕e6 25 ♕b2 ♘xb4 26 ♕xb4 ♕f6 27 h3 exf3 28 ♗f1 1-0

Yudasin – Psakhis
Beer-Sheba 1993

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘d2 c5 4 ♘gf3 ♘f6 5 exd5 exd5 6 ♗b5+ ♗d7 7 ♕e2+ ♗e7 8 dxc5 0-0 9 ♘b3 ♖e8 10 ♗e3 a6 11 ♗d3 ♗a4 12 ♘fd4 ♘bd7 13 0-0-0 ♗xb3 14 ♘xb3 ♘xc5 15 ♘d4 ♘a4 16 c3 ♖c8 17 ♗c2 ♘b6 18 ♕d3 g6 19 ♘b3?! ♘c4 20 ♗d4? ♗a3!

"When I played 15...♘a4, I thought about all sorts of sacrifices on the queenside. After 20 ♗d4? I saw 20...♗a3 in a second; it was clear to me that White had blundered."

Did you think you were going to win shortly?

"I do not bother myself with such questions. I knew that 20...♗a3 was the best move, and that by playing it, I stood better."

This is a very practical attitude.

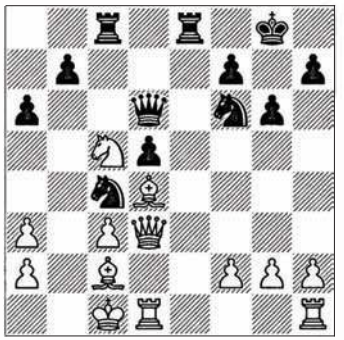
"(But) why is this question important? Does it matter if victory is fast or slow?"

Well, some people would like to know whether they are delivering mate in five, or playing a protracted 80-move endgame.

"I strive for victory, no matter how many moves it takes."

21 bxa3 ♕d6 22 ♘c5 *(D)*

This is an interesting juncture. You have three sensible options: 22...♖xc5, 22...♘d7, and 22...♘e4. In all of them you regain material, and keep some advantage. How do you take decisions when confronted with approximately equal options?



"I calculate variations and choose the one which appears the most promising."

Pure calculation? You do not base your choice on 'feeling'?

"If it were 'feeling' I would choose here 22...♖xc5 – that's the first move that came to my mind. But I analysed all variations until I saw a clear win in one of them."

22...♘e4

22...♖xc5 23 ♕g3 (or 23 ♗b3 ♖c6) 23...♕e7 and 22...♘d7 23 ♕g3 ♘xc5 (but not 23...♕xg3? 24 hxg3 ♘xc5 25 ♖xh7!) 24 ♕xd6 ♘xd6 are viable alternatives.

23 ♕xc4 dxc4 24 ♘xe4 ♖xe4 25 ♗xe4 ♕f4+ 26 ♖d2 ♕xe4

"I was convinced that this was a win for Black. When I entered this line I didn't know precisely how I was going to win, but I was sure that White would not be able to hold" (0-1, 64).

Malaniuk – Psakhis
USSR Ch, Moscow 1983

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 exd5 exd5 4 ♗d3 ♗d6 5 c3 ♘c6 6 ♕f3 ♘f6 7 h3 0-0 8 ♘e2 ♖e8 9 ♗g5 ♗e7 10 ♗e3 *(D)*



10...♘e4

Here you decided to sacrifice a pawn: an unforced and inconclusive choice, which I'm asking you to reconstruct.

"This was one of the first occasions where I played the French Defence. 6 ♕f3 was new to me; I didn't know what to do with my f6-knight. I looked at the sequence 10...♘e4 11 ♗xe4 dxe4 12 ♕xe4 ♘b4! and saw that White would have to give up his right to castle. I reckoned that with my bishop-pair, I had ample compensation and went for it.

"To this day I don't know if Black has enough compensation for the pawn, but I don't care. Sometimes you have to use poetry, not mathematics."

11 ♗xe4!? dxe4 12 ♕xe4 ♘b4! 13 ♔d1

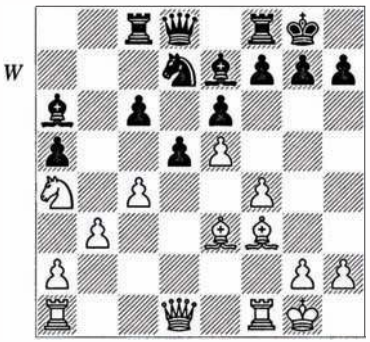
13 cxb4? drops White's queen to 13...♗xb4+; 13 ♘d2? ♗h4! 14 ♕f3 ♖xe3.

13...♘d5 14 ♘f4 ♘xe3+ 15 fxe3 ♗d6 16 ♕f3 c5 17 ♘d2 cxd4 18 exd4 ♗d7 19 ♖f1 ♗c6 20 ♕d3 ♖c8! 21 g3 ♕d7 22 b3 ♖e7! 23 ♖e1 ♖xe1+ 24 ♔xe1 ♗xf4 25 gxf4 ♖e8+ 26 ♔d1 ♗g2 27 f5 ♕d6!

(0-1, 56)

In the previous position you made a choice by means of concrete calculation, while in this one you acted by a general 'feeling'.

"These are different types of positions. Against Yudasin the situation necessitated accurate analysis. But here, apart from the first two moves, there is nothing to calculate. The guiding principle is to be active, not to enter a passive, defensive set-up where you have to suffer endlessly."



Psakhis – Ftačnik
Sochi 1982
White to play

16 ♖f2!

Strong players emphasize the value of flexibility – leaving your options open. Did you play 16 ♖f2 with this kind of consideration in mind?

"I don't know. I asked myself: what black moves should I worry about? There are two: ...f6 and ...dxc4. Against the first move I always have the strong riposte ♗g4!. 16 ♖f2! is directed against 16...dxc4 (17 ♖d2)."

16...♗a3 17 ♕d2 ♗b4 18 ♕c1 ♗e7

18...♗b5?! is met by 19 c5! ♗xa4 20 bxa4 ♕e7 21 ♖c2 and a3, winning.

19 ♖c2 f6

What would you play after, say, 19...dxc4 20 bxc4 ♕c7?

"I have several options: 21 c5 or plans such as ♕d2-f2, ♘c3-e4... In the game I didn't waste a second on 19...dxc4."

Why not?

"Because I don't invest my time planning what to do if my opponent plays bad moves. It is obvious that 19...dxc4 is bad; White would torture Black as he wishes."

20 ♗g4! ♔f7?

20...f5 21 ♗e2 is bad for Black, but the text-move is even worse.

21 ♕f1!

"Let me assure you, when I played 16 ♖f2!, this was not with a view to vacating f1 for my queen (although the idea was familiar; e.g., Karpov-Spassky, Candidates (9), Leningrad 1974). But in this position, a tactical possibility makes it viable."

21...g6? 22 ♗xe6+ ♔g7

Or 22...♔xe6 23 cxd5+ followed by 24 ♕xa6.

23 ♗xd7 ♕xd7 24 ♘b6 ♕f5 25 ♘xc8 ♖xc8 26 ♕f2 1-0

Psakhis – Cicak
Lugano 1988

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 e6 3 d3 ♘c6 4 g3 d5 5 ♘bd2 dxe4 6 dxe4 b6 7 c3 ♘f6 8 ♕a4 ♗d7 9 ♕c2

The queen manoeuvre was designed to prevent the placing of an annoying bishop on a6.

9...♕c8 10 e5 ♘d5 11 ♗g2 ♕a6 12 c4 ♘cb4?!

The less ambitious 12...♘de7 is more solid.

13 ♕e4!

From here on, White is required to find 'only' moves: 13 ♕b3? ♗a4, 13 ♕d1? ♗a4! 14 b3 ♘c3 and 13 ♕b1? ♗a4! 14 b3 ♘c3 15 ♕b2 ♘d3+ are all losing continuations.

13...♗c6 *(D)*



This seems to be a position that requires sheer calculation – general considerations are of no use.

"Correct. Pure calculation."

Did you think you stood better?

"I did. Black had to resort to tactical devices to make it a fight: positionally, his pieces are not stable. Of course, if it turned out that Black had a hidden resource in store, I wouldn't be surprised; he has active pieces."

14 a3!

14 cxd5? ♗xd5 (not the immediate 14...♘d3+? due to 15 ♕xd3 ♕xd3 16 dxc6) 15 ♕b1 ♘d3+.

14...♖d8 *(D)*

Various knight leaps (14...♘c3, 14...♘e3, 14...♘f4) are all refuted by 15 axb4!, attacking the black queen on a6.



15 ♕b1!

The only good move, but a winning one. Less convincing is 15 cxd5 ♗xd5 16 ♗f1 ♗xe4 17 ♗xa6 ♘c2+.

15...♘f4 16 axb4

16 gxf4 ♘d3+ 17 ♔f1 ♘xf4 would complicate his task.

16...♘xg2+ 17 ♔e2 ♕b7 18 b5! ♖xd2+!? 19 ♘xd2 ♘f4+ 20 gxf4 ♗xh1 21 f3 g5 22 ♕e4 ♕b8 23 ♕c6+ ♔d8

After 23...♔e7 24 ♘e4 g4, White wins by 25 ♖xa7+ ♕xa7 26 ♕d6+ ♔e8 27 ♘f6#.

24 ♖a3 1-0

I notice that in describing a battle, you use words like 'suffer' and 'torture'.

"When I train young players, I tell them to avoid, at all costs, entering a passive position, where they have to keep defending with no counterplay. 'Always aim for activity,' I advise them. 'Avoid positions in which you will just suffer.'

"Mature and experienced players can withstand the pain in such situations. Admittedly there are cases where you have no choice. If you have to (suffer), then this is what you should do."



G. Kuzmin – Psakhis
USSR Ch, Frunze 1981
Black to play

"Black is in dire straits. All his pieces except the b7-bishop stand badly. White threatens ♘bc5, when

the knight is taboo because of mate on e8. Here I made a move which buried my only good piece:"

24...c6

Some players never contemplate such a move; it hurts their pride.

"I don't select my moves according to pride. I have no problem with advancing a piece to a certain square and retreating it on the very next move, if this is required.

"By closing the a4-e8 diagonal, I prevent ♘bc5, and prepare ...h5 and ...♔g8."

25 ♔f2 h5 26 f4 ♖f5 27 ♘e5 ♘xe5 28 ♖xe5 ♖d5! 29 ♖xf5 ♖xf5 30 h4 ♖d5 31 c3 bxc3 32 bxc3 g6 33 ♖e5 ♖xe5 34 fxe5 ♔e7 35 ♔e3 c5 36 ♘c1 c4! 37 ♗c2 ♘d8 38 ♔d4 ♘c6+ 39 ♔xc4 ♘xa5+ 40 ♔c5 ♗f3 ½-½

"Kuzmin was quite embarrassed by not being able to convert his advantage."

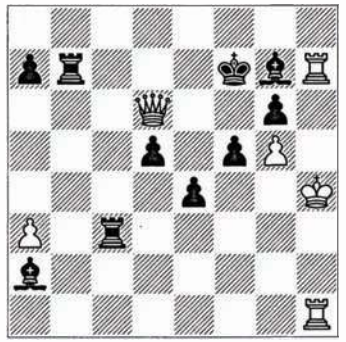
[Fritz points out that White could have gained an edge by 25 ♘xb4!; e.g., 25...c5 26 ♘d3 c4 27 ♘dc5 ♗c8 (27...cxb3 28 ♖xe6!) 28 ♘e4! ♖gd5 29 ♘bc5!.]

> Decisions, plans and ideas are frequently affected by emotions. Here we briefly discussed the 'pride factor' (would you look at your face in the mirror after playing a humiliating retreat) and the 'pain criterion' (if I'm going to perish, in the chess sense, at least I'll die painlessly).

In a recent interview, Vladimir Kramnik opined that the emergence of chess software improved chess-players' overall defensive skills. What is your view?

"The computer changed our way of thinking, there is no doubt about that. In the opening, players find new ideas, both in attack and in defence. Also your attitude changes: you play against a weak opponent yet you must be careful because his opening line may have been prepared assiduously with the aid of a computer."

Can you present me a piquant example of 'a computer move'?



Psakhis – Bönsch (variation)
Lvov 1984
White to play

"This is a hypothetical variation that could – and should – have occurred in the game, if I hadn't made a time-trouble error. In my original analysis, back in 1984 [10], I gave 39 ♖xg7+ ♔xg7 40 ♕f6+ ♔g8 41 ♕xc3 ♖h7+ 42 ♔g3 ♖xh1 43 ♕c8+ ♔f7 44 ♕d7+ ♔f8 45 ♕d8+ ♔f7 46 ♕f6+ ♔e8 47 ♕xg6+ ♔d8 48 ♕xf5, with a significant advantage for White.

"Now, look [switches on Fritz8]: within two seconds the monster points out a clear win, starting with an amazing move:"

39 ♖b1(!!) ♖cc7

Or: 39...♗xb1 40 ♕xd5+; 39...♖xb1 40 ♕d7+; 39...♔g8 40 ♖xb7.

40 ♖xb7 ♖xb7 41 ♕d8!

Yet another computer move. A human would choose 41 ♕f6+.

41...♗c4 42 ♕h8

and White wins.

I'd like you to speak your thoughts on the next pair of positions.



Eingorn – J. Howell
Liechtenstein 1995
Black to play

"If the white knight reaches c4, White will be better. So, Black should move his attacked queen, and if 19 ♘d2, then 19...c4. Let's say 18...♕a5 19 ♘d2 c4 20 ♘xc4 ♕b4 21 ♖ac1 ♗h6 – Black has the upper hand.

"The key (to the position) is the square c4. If White plants his knight there while the black pawn is on c5, he will stand better; if not, the advantage will switch sides."

[Psakhis examines briefly moves like 21 ♖fc1 instead of 21 ♖ac1 (21 ♖fc1 ♗h6 22 ♖ab1 ♕c5) and 19 ♕c4 (blockade) 19...a6; he concludes that they do not change his basic assessment.] "My queen must go to a dark square: maybe 18...♕b6 (instead of 18...♕a5). But Black has a good position in any case."

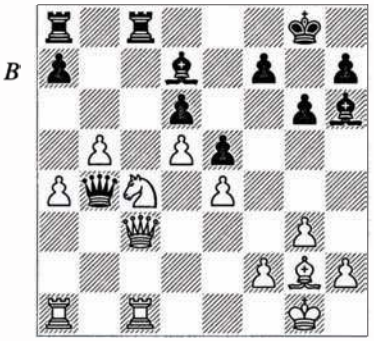
It's not so simple.

"Isn't it? I find it hard to believe." (He is reluctant to conduct a serious calculation and insists that 18...♕a5 is the right move).

18...♕a5?

18...♕b6! 19 ♘d2 c4 20 ♘xc4 ♕d4 21 ♖fc1 ♗h6 is good for Black.

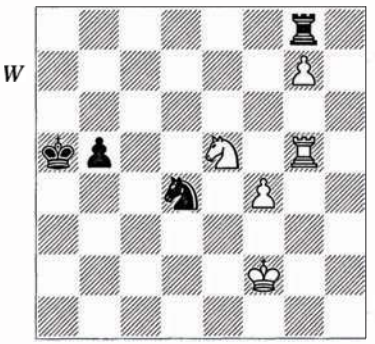
19 ♘d2 c4 20 ♘xc4 ♕b4 21 ♖fc1 ♗h6 22 ♕c3! *(D)*



The black-player, James Howell, comments: "I'd been labouring under the oldest delusion in the book: I attack a piece – he has to move it ... After 22 ♕c3!, not only was I lost, but, even worse, I also felt very, very stupid." [11]

22...♕c5 23 ♖c2 ♖c7 24 ♖d1 ♗g4 25 ♖b1 ♖ac8 26 ♗f1 ♗d7 27 ♕b2 f5 28 a5 fxe4 29 b6 axb6 30 axb6 ♖b7 31 ♘e3 ♕a5 32 ♖xc8+ ♗xc8 33 ♕c1 ♗d7 34 ♘c4 ♕a2 35 ♖a1! ♗xc1 36 ♖xa2 ♖b8 37 ♖a7 ♗b5 38 b7 1-0

Psakhis remains unconvinced. He points out that Black should have opted for 22...♕xc3 23 ♖xc3 ♖c5, with fair chances of holding the endgame (24 b6 ♗d2!, or 24 ♖a2 ♖ac8 25 ♖ac2 ♔f8, when White will find it hard to make headway). This being a mental exercise, he seems to be content with the validity of his general assessment and does not attach particular importance to details.



Smyslov – Spangenberg
Buenos Aires 1993
White to play

"Black wants to play ...♘e6 and take on g7. What can I do to stop him? (Maybe) move my knight somewhere ... perhaps I should make use of the check on c4 ... 63 ♔e3 ♘e6 64 ♘c4+ ... I don't trust it.

"63 ♔e3 ♘e6 64 ♖g6 ♘xg7 and we have a pleasant pin. Of course, Black threatens to check on f5. I'll have to move my king somewhere. 63 ♔g3 (as a first move) is not good: 63...♘e6 64 ♖g6 ♖xg7.

It's not easy. I'd like to play ♘e5-c6-e7 ... but his b-pawn may prove to be strong.

"63 ♔e3 ♘e6 64 ♖g6 ♘xg7 65 ♔f3 – I have to evaluate it. I think that White has fair winning chances – here I'd have to conduct a serious calculation."

The game went:

63 ♔e3

63 f5 ♘xf5 and 63 ♖g6 ♘f5 are equal.

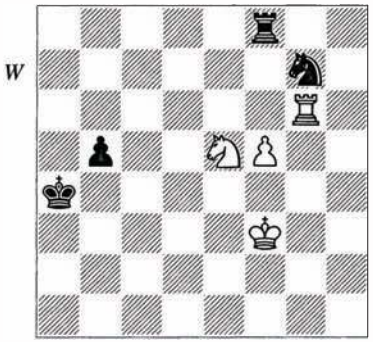
63...♘e6 64 ♖g6 ♘xg7 65 ♔f3!

65 ♔e4 fails to 65...♘h5! 66 ♖xg8 ♘f6+.

65...♔a4

Unfortunately 65...b4? loses to 66 ♘c6+ followed by 67 ♘e7.

66 f5 ♖f8 *(D)*



After 66...♖e8 67 f6! ♘f5 68 f7 White wins.

67 ♖a6+ ♔b3 68 f6 ♘f5 69 f7 b4 70 ♖f6 ♘g7

70...♘d4+ 71 ♔e4 ♔c3 72 ♘d7 ♖xf7 73 ♖xf7 b3 74 ♘c5; and 74...b2 is insufficient due to the reply 75 ♘a4+. [12]

71 ♘d7 ♘h5 72 ♖f5 ♘g7 73 ♘xf8 ♘xf5 74 ♘e6 ♘h4+ 75 ♔g4 ♘g6 76 ♔h5 1-0

"One more thing, about your quest for good ideas," says Psakhis. "Good ideas do not emerge when you play chess in a basketball hall, or in noisy surroundings, or in the midst of a crowd. It is difficult to produce art in uncongenial circumstances."

> Ideas are the product of our minds, but they hinge upon a long list of external factors: motivation, time, familiarity with the subject-matter, concentration skills ... and yes, a relaxed and pleasant atmosphere is instrumental to the creative process.

2 GM Alon Greenfeld

Born 1964. Runner-up in the Under-17 World Champion in 1981; Israeli Champion 1984. Peak rating 2610 Elo. Greenfeld represented Israel in five Olympiads and won major European annual festivals at Biel, Groningen, Pardubice and Montecatini Terme. A chess professional, he is a frequent contributor to various magazines. In recent years he has coached GM Emil Sutovsky.

What are your sources for getting fresh ideas? Are you interested, for example, in 19th century chess?

"I take a close look at almost every new serious game (above a certain level) that is played in my pet variations. I hardly screen old books: I don't believe I'll find something of value there."

Could computer chess become a source of inspiration?

"Whenever a computer makes what seems to us a silly move, people tend to react: 'ah well, the machine is stupid'. I believe we should try to understand the logic of chess computers. It might be that their way of 'thinking' leads them to some humanly logical conclusions."

When you think over your move in a certain position, what gives you a direction as to where to concentrate your efforts?

"Nowadays, with the benefit of my experience, I am familiar with the vast majority of chess positions. Wherever you put me, I know what I should aim for. Suppose I encounter a position which demands an advance d4-d5, I will search for proof that this is indeed the right plan."

Show me some interesting positions you've played, reconstructing your thinking-process.

Balashov – Greenfeld
Hastings 1985/6

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♗b5 a6 4 ♗a4 ♘f6 5 0-0 ♗e7 6 ♖e1 b5 7 ♗b3 d6 8 c3 0-0 9 h3 ♖e8 10 d4 ♗b7 11 ♘bd2 ♗f8 12 ♗c2 ♖c8 13 a3 ♘b8 14 a4 ♘bd7 15 ♗d3 c6 16 b3 ♕b6 17 ♗b2 g6 18 axb5 axb5 19 c4 ♘h5 20 cxb5 cxb5 21 b4 ♘f4 22 ♗b1 d5

"I don't recall how much I had seen when I played this move; I felt that this was a correct move (a thematic breakthrough in the centre) which gave me the initiative."

23 ♕b3 ♗g7 24 dxe5 ♘xe5 25 ♘xe5 ♗xe5 26 ♗xe5 ♖xe5 27 ♕e3 ♕f6

Was this a winning attempt? You could have exchanged queens.

"I believe that 27...♕xe3 28 fxe3 ♘h5 29 ♘f3 followed by 30 e5 is a bit

better for White. Anyway, I thought I was choosing the most active and attractive continuation."

28 ♘f3 d4! *(D)*



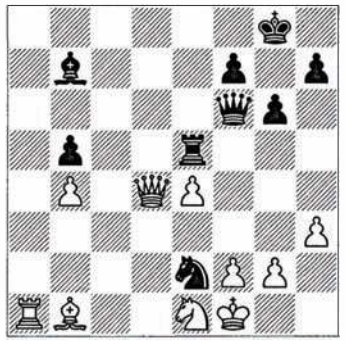
29 ♕xd4

29 ♘xd4 ♖g5. Now White is ready to meet 29...♘xh3+? with 30 ♔f1! (but not 30 gxh3? ♖g5+).

29...♖c1!? 30 ♔f1

30 ♖xc1? ♘e2+.

30...♖xe1+ 31 ♘xe1 ♘e2! *(D)*



One tactical shot follows another. If now 32 ♕e3 (32 ♔xe2? ♖xe4+) then 32...♗xe4! 33 ♗xe4 ♖xe4 with another fork in the offing.

32 ♕b2 ♘g3+ 33 ♔g1 ♖xe4! 33 ♕xf6 ½-½

33...♖xe1+ 34 ♔h2 ♘f1+ with perpetual check. Oddly, the combinative storm petered out to a peaceful conclusion.

Were you attracted by this line because it was the most effective, or because it was charming?

"I think that both factors – a will to find the best moves and an attraction to 'brilliance' – were having an effect. I recall vividly that I got excited and derived great satisfaction from the beautiful and aesthetic variations. I felt that I was dictating the course of events while my adversary was forced to follow; so I thought I had an edge and felt disappointed with gaining just half a point. Objectively, though, the game was always equal and hence the result was just."

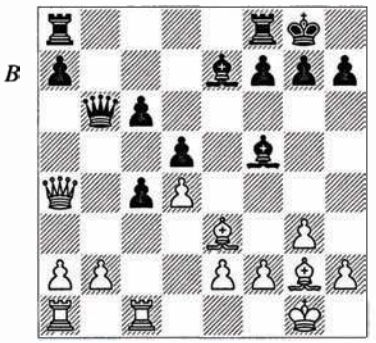
Soffer – Greenfeld

Israeli League, Tel-Aviv 1999

1 c4 ♘f6 2 ♘c3 c5 3 g3 e6 4 ♘f3 ♘c6 5 ♗g2 d5 6 cxd5 ♘xd5 7 0-0 ♗e7 8 d4 0-0 9 ♘xd5 exd5 10 ♗e3 c4 11 ♘e5 ♗f5 12 ♘xc6 bxc6 13 ♕a4 ♕b6 14 ♖fc1 *(D)*

How did you come to realize that this was a critical position?

"I felt that I stood better; 11 ♘e5 is not considered good. However, after White's last move I understood that he intended to continue 15 b3, after which he may even be better, and I sank into thought."



"The advance b3 is White's only plan. I can't prevent it, so I need to find something against it that will leave my strong c4-pawn secure in its place.

"14...♕xb2 is met with 15 ♕xc6. 14...♕b5 is faulty, because White exchanges queens and the d5-pawn falls. This led to 14...♖fd8, protecting d5, but after 15 b3 ♕b5 16 ♕xb5 cxb5 17 bxc4 bxc4 Black has a weakness on d5. Then, I saw what I should do."

14...a6!!

"I suppose you would be surprised if I told you that this was the winning move, but that's what it is. White has no sensible continuation other than the one he chose."

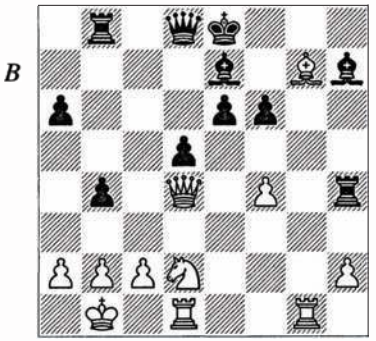
15 b3 ♕b5 16 ♕xb5 axb5 17 bxc4 bxc4

"We see the difference between this position and the one in the line 14...♖fd8: the d5-pawn is not weak, and the a-file is semi-open for the use of the black rooks. It is doubtful that White can save himself."

The game proceeded:

18 a4 ♗f6 19 ♖a2 ♖a6 20 ♔f1 ♖fa8 21 ♖ca1 c3 22 ♗f3 c2 23 g4 ♗g6 24 ♔g2 h6 25 h4 ♗xh4 26 ♗d2 ♗d8 27 e4 dxe4 28 ♗e2 ♖b6 29 ♖c1 e3 30 ♗xe3 ♖b4 31 ♖axc2 ♗xc2 32 ♖xc2 ♗f6 33 ♖xc6 ♗xd4 34 ♗d1 ♗xe3 35 fxe3 ♖d8 36 ♖c1 ♖xd1 37 ♖xd1 ♖xg4+ 38 ♔f3 ♖xa4 39 ♖d7 g5 40 e4 ♖a5 41 ♔g4 ♔g7 42 ♔h5 ♖a4 43 ♖e7 ♖b4 44 ♖e8 f5 45 ♖e6 ♖xe4 46 ♖g6+ ♔f7 47 ♖g7+ ♔f6 48 ♖xg5 hxg5 0-1

This is an example of an idea that developed gradually. An aim is set, and then various forms of achieving it are examined, with many kinds of possible refinements, until a satisfying result is achieved.



Wang Zili – Greenfeld

Beijing 1996

Black to play

24...♕c7!!

"This move took me at least 20 minutes," says Greenfeld. "It involves a forced sequence. In such cases, it is worthwhile to check everything to the end; maybe a good idea will emerge.

When there are several pieces *en prise* it enhances the probability that a decisive tactic lurks somewhere."

25 ♗xf6

Black threatened both f4 and c2. White chooses the critical continuation.

25...♖xf4 26 ♕e5

This rejoinder would make most players abandon the variation for Black. When calculating 24...♕c7, you didn't stop here, though, did you?

"Being very stubborn, I invest a lot of time, both on the board and in analytical work at home. I must feel that I exhaust every resource at my disposal."

26...♕xc2+ 27 ♔a1 ♕xb2+!! *(D)*

And not 27...♗xf6 28 ♕xb8+.

W



28 ♔xb2

28 ♕xb2 ♗xf6 comes to the same thing.

28...♗xf6 29 ♕xf6 ♖xf6

and Black won.

Can you pinpoint the underlying reasons for the queen bombshell discovery?

"I can't say that I unearthed the stroke on the 27th move because I was systematic – it could easily have been missed – but I can say that I realized that in this position, deep investigation was called for."

The star move is really Black's 24th; he had to foresee the combination in advance, otherwise the whole sequence would not be profitable.

> Great ideas may come after long deliberation has led to an impasse. If you have a sort of position in which you believe that 'something will be found', then a methodical calculation of every move – even an improbable one – may well pay rich dividends.

Hasidovsky – Greenfeld
Israeli League 2000

1 d4 ♘f6 2 ♘f3 c5 3 d5 b5 4 ♗g5 ♘e4 5 ♗h4 ♗b7 6 ♕d3 f5 7 ♘bd2 c4 8 ♕d4 ♘a6 9 0-0-0

9 c3 ♘xd2 10 ♕xd2 ♕b6 11 0-0-0 g6 12 ♕d4 ♖g8 13 e4 ♗g7 14 ♕xb6 axb6 (0-1, 33) was played in Kramnik-Topalov, Monaco (rapid) 2000, one month before this game.

9...♘b4 10 ♘xe4 fxe4 11 ♘g5 ♕b6 12 ♕xe4 *(D)*

"When I entered this position I had several ideas. Maybe 12...♕g6 – but I didn't like 13 ♕xg6+ hxg6 14 ♗g3 ♘xd5 15 e4 ♘f6 16 f3 which, I thought, was a bit better for White. I looked at 12...♘xd5 13 ♖xd5 and then searched for a way to attack the pinned

B



B



rook. But in vain: 13...♕c6? 14 ♖e5; or 13...e6 14 ♘xh7 with the threat of 15 ♕g6#.

"In an attempt to make the idea work I focused my thoughts on finding a way to deflect the g5-knight from its post. I calculated 12...h6 13 ♘f3 ♘xd5 14 ♖xd5 ♕c6. Unfortunately, this solution also falls short: 15 ♘e5! and White wins.

"Considering that ...e6 and ...♕c6 won't do, I started to look for other squares from which the d5-rook can be attacked. I realized that if I play the natural 12...♘xa2+ 13 ♔b1 ♘b4 (threat: 14...♕a6!) then after 14 c3 the white king and queen occupy the same diagonal..."

12...♘xa2+ 13 ♔b1 ♘b4 14 c3 *(D)*

"Now, if the g5-knight is deflected (say, after 14...h6 15 ♘f3), a fresh possibility arises: 15...♘xd5 16 ♖xd5 ♕d6!! since 17 ♖xd6 is countered by 17...♗xe4+ (check!)."

You describe a completely logical process.

"It was. I'm showing it because this is one of the few instances where I vividly recall my thoughts during the game.

"Considering the correct move-order was the next task. 14...♘xd5 15 ♖xd5 h6? loses to 16 ♕f5!; I don't recall if I had seen this in advance, but I knew that at worst, I could reverse the move-order."

14...h6 15 cxb4

All along, the move 15 ♘e6 is met by 15...♕xe6!. As we have seen, 15 ♘f3 is refuted by 15...♘xd5 16 ♖xd5 ♕d6!!, after which Black wins material.

15...hxg5 16 ♗xg5 a5 17 ♗e3?

17 bxa5?! ♕xa5 18 ♕g6+ ♔d8 19 d6 ♕a2+ 20 ♔c1 ♕a1+ 21 ♔c2 ♕a4+ 22 ♔c1 ♕b4 is in Black's favour. After the game it was established that 17 ♕f5! was the strongest move (idea – 17...axb4 18 d6!) with unclear complications.

17...♕e6!

After this Black gains the upper hand. His last move was in the offing throughout.

18 ♕xe6 dxe6 19 bxa5 exd5 20 ♗b6 e5 21 e3 ♖h6 22 ♗e2 d4!

With his strong bishop-pair, Black initiates a mating attack.

23 exd4 ♗e4+ 24 ♔c1 ♖xb6! 25 axb6 ♗b4 26 b3 ♗c3 0-1

Look at the moves ...♘xd5 and ...♕e6: they could not be implemented at the first opportunity, but proved to be valid at a later stage.

> When an idea doesn't work, we frequently throw it in the waste basket. Alternatively, we can store it temporarily at the back of our mind – it may be useful in the future, when circumstances have changed.

Now let us look at some instances where sharp play ensued from the very first moves.

Greenfeld – Yudasin
Jerusalem 1997

1 ♘f3 c5 2 c4 ♘c6 3 ♘c3 ♘d4 4 ♘e5!? ♕c7 5 f4 f6 6 ♘g4 *(D)*



A bit bizarre, 4 ♘e5 and 6 ♘g4 – are they not?

"Well, with my bad form and against this particular opponent, I didn't want to enter positional channels, so I infused life into the game."

6...♕xf4 7 e3 ♘c2+ 8 ♕xc2 ♕xg4 9 d4

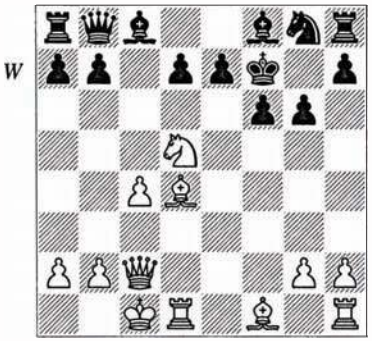
Is it essential to sacrifice a second pawn?

"I could have prepared it, but my intuition told me that my initiative was worth it."

9...cxd4

Accepting the challenge. 9...e6 is more prudent.

10 exd4 ♕xd4 11 ♘d5 ♔f7 12 ♗e3 ♕e5 13 0-0-0 g6 14 ♗d4 ♕b8 *(D)*



15 ♗d3 d6 16 h4 e5 17 h5! ♗h6+ 18 ♗e3 ♗g4 19 ♗xg6+! ♔g7 20 ♖df1

With a winning attack (1-0, 38).

Rotshtein – Greenfeld
Montecatini Terme 1997

1 ♘f3 c5 2 g3 b6 3 e4 ♗b7 4 ♘c3 ♘f6 5 e5 ♘g4 6 ♗h3 ♘xe5 7 ♘xe5 ♗xh1 8 f3 e6 9 ♔f2 ♕f6 10 ♘g4?! ♕f5 11 ♕xh1 h5 12 ♔g1 ♘c6!

12...hxg4 13 fxg4 ♕h7 (or 13...♕e5 14 ♕xa8 ♖xh3 15 d4! ♕xd4+ 16 ♔g2) 14 ♕xa8 ♗d6 15 ♗g2 ♕xh2+ 16 ♔f1.

13 ♘f2 ♕xc2 *(D)*



14 f4 ♖c8 15 f5 c4! 16 fxe6 fxe6 17 ♕e4 ♕xe4 18 ♘fxe4 ♘d4!

Black enjoys a significant edge. The game concluded:

19 b3 cxb3 20 ♗b2 bxa2 21 ♖xa2 a5 22 ♘a4 ♘f3+ 23 ♔g2 ♘xd2! 24 ♗xg7 ♘xe4! 25 ♗xh8 b5 26 ♘b6 ♖c6 27 ♘a8 ♗d6 28 ♖xa5 ♖c2+ 29 ♔f3 ♘g5+ 30 ♔e3 ♘xh3 31 ♖xb5 ♖c5 32 ♖b7 ♘g5 33 ♘b6 ♖b5 34 ♘c4 ♗c5+ 0-1

It appears that you search for new ideas right from the start.

"I often look for exciting and engaging play right from the very first moves. I force myself to decide **why** I'm playing this and that move(s)."

Smyslov – Greenfeld
Beer-Sheba 1990

1 e4 e5 2 ♗c4 ♘f6 3 d3 ♗c5 4 ♘c3 c6 5 ♗b3 d6 6 ♘f3 ♘bd7 7 0-0 ♗b6 8 d4 h6 9 dxe5 dxe5 10 ♕e2 ♕e7 11 ♘a4 ♘c5 12 ♘xc5 ♗xc5 13 ♘h4 ♗g4 *(D)*



The game has developed along positional lines, and one would not suspect that sharp tactics await in the background.

"While my opponent was pondering his next move, I considered the sequence 14 ♕d3 (to prevent ...0-0-0) 14...♖d8 15 ♕g3. Suddenly my heart skipped a beat: I noticed the combination 15...♘xe4?! 16 ♕xg4 ♘xf2 17 ♖xf2 ♕xh4! *(D)*."



"Brilliant; but as I went on analysing, I saw the refutation: 18 ♗xf7+ ♔f8 (18...♔e7 allows 19 ♕xh4+) 19 ♗e3!! when it is White who wins. A fantastic sideline.

"So, I decided that in case of 14 ♕d3 ♖d8 15 ♕g3, I'd play 15...g5 16 ♘f5 ♗xf5 17 exf5 ♔f8 with dynamic equality. All this remained behind the scenes."

14 ♕e1 0-0-0 ½-½

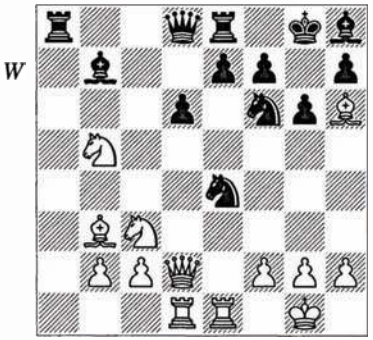
This short and apparently uneventful draw consumed 1½ hours of thinking-time from each contestant.

I wonder why you devoted so much time and consideration to such a fanciful variation. The chance that it will materialize – and against the solid Smyslov of all people – is negligible.

"The probability of an analytical variation not materializing in a game does not bother me unduly. In my career I've played against some weak opposition and learned that they often miss, or are unwilling to enter, complicated lines. I also acknowledge that sometimes I calculate a lot and my adversary responds immediately without checking anything at all. Apparently, it makes my effort redundant, but above all I want to be satisfied and feel loyal to myself, by exhausting all the relevant possibilities in a given position."

> A valuable discovery will seldom be made if it is not searched for. The willingness to remain open to extraordinary ideas, even in supposedly barren positions, is a precondition for finding them.

I'd like you to try your hand at tackling a position that is new to you.



Emms – Hodgson
British Ch, Dundee 1993
White to play

Looking at this position, please tell me what crosses your mind, as quickly as possible, without screening.

"I gaze at f7 ... Later I look at what happens in the centre. 17 ♘xe4 ♘xe4 18 ♖xe4 ♗xe4 19 ♕f4 ... Then I stop and take it more slowly. I want to exchange the black knight because what happens here revolves around the centre, and because I want to eliminate the f6-knight. 17 ♘xe4 ♘xe4 18 ♕f4. He must return to f6 (18...♘f6). I begin to think about a sacrifice on d6: 19 ♖xd6 exd6 and something with f7 ... It doesn't work."

You don't mention the possibility of 17...♗xe4. Why?

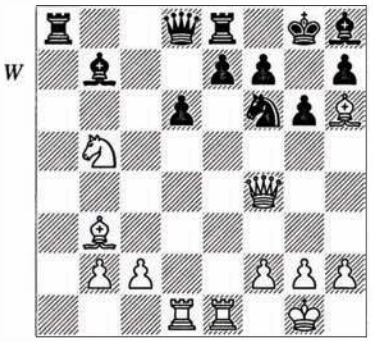
"I don't know ..." (looks at the board and immediately points out the refutation: 18 ♖xe4 ♘xe4 19 ♕d5 wins material).

Give me your preliminary assessment so far.

"At first I thought that Black was OK, that his pieces were secure and safe. When I began to check, I realized that White had tactical motifs which, at least, merited a try. If I had to decide whether to enter this position in the first place, I'd say that it would depend on whether White has some workable tactics. If he doesn't, Black will have a good position...

"I have an idea – 17 ♘xe4 ♘xe4 18 ♖xe4 ♗xe4 19 ♗xf7+ ♔xf7 20 ♕f4+. This might work ... But he plays 20...♗f5 ..."

*In the game, play went **17 ♘xe4 ♘xe4 18 ♕f4 ♘f6** (D). Please look at this position and tell me your thoughts.*



White to play

"Now I have another idea, a slower one, maybe 19 ♖e6 ... I need to put something on e6, but if I play 19 ♘d4 he'll have 19...e5.

"On the other hand, I had concluded that a move like 19 ♕c4 won't do ... I look again at 19 ♖xd6 exd6 20 ♗xf7+ ♔xf7 with some fork on d6..."

Why are you concentrating on tactics?

"Because if Black has the right to move, it could change the whole picture. It may be that there is something here that I shouldn't miss ... But I don't really believe in this tactic.

"Maybe a subtler, less direct idea can work: perhaps 19 ♕e3..."

What for?

"20 ♕e6, of course ... (but mainly 20 ♗xf7+) ..." *[abandons this idea; 19...♕d7 seems to be an adequate response].*

"... I have a fresh idea – maybe to make room for the king with 19 h3 ... and only then to attack ... But this is a concession on my part. I'll search for more concrete things...

"I very much want to play ♘c7 (at some point). I feel that I have to reach this square ... should ideas of sacrificing on f7 prove unsuccessful."

Were it a real game, would you also jump from one move to another?

"Yes. And I would definitely invest a lot of time on this position...

(After some time) "I tend to look now on 19 ♖e6."

Take your time. Just let me know when you reach a decision.

(After some time) "I'll play 19 ♖e6."

OK, I'm asking you now to direct your attention to 19 ♕c4. Tell me what you think about it.

"... Black plays 19...d5. I think about 20 ♕c7 or returning with the queen to f4 ... If I play 20 ♕c7, there is a double

threat (on b7 and to swap queens, which gains a pawn or an exchange). Seems not bad, but I feel uneasy about it. I fear that even if I win a pawn, the black pawns are strong...

"... Had I seen (in advance) that 20 ♕c7 involved a double threat, I would have invested more time on it..."

(Reluctantly and somewhat embarrassed): "What can I say, 20 ♕c7 looks not bad at all. It is obvious that I win material."

[The original game went **17 ♘xe4 ♘xe4 18 ♕f4 ♘f6 19 ♕c4 d5 20 ♕c7 ♖b8 21 ♕xd8 ♖bxd8 22 ♘c7 e6 23 ♘xe8 ♘xe8 24 c3** and White eventually converted his material advantage into victory (1-0, 45).]

* * *

To be fair, I have to say that I presented GM Greenfeld with some other positions, which he solved easily. Had he confronted the Emms-Hodgson position in a practical game, I believe that he might well have solved it satisfactorily. But in this particular mental exercise he was not successful, despite considering many candidate moves and thinking seriously for about a quarter of an hour. Why?

I suggested to Alon that he had 'fallen in love' with the idea of deciding the game through direct attack. He reverted, time and again, to analysing sacrifices directed against the black king. Greenfeld identified, in the process of this, all the ingredients of the solution: he saw 19 ♕c4 and realized the importance of controlling c7. But he dismissed 19 ♕c4 because he was a captive of the 'mate him' conception.

Even when, given leads, Greenfeld had spotted the correct move, 20 ♕c7, he was loath to admit that the odd manoeuvre ♕d2-f4-c4-c7 worked, against his better judgement and positional understanding. Interestingly, he was unhappy to admit the solution: it was not the one he desired!

> Sometimes, in order to reach a correct idea, you have to kill a wrong one. As long as a faulty path exists in your mind, it stands in the way of getting on the right track.

3 Gady Costeff

Born 1961. After a brief period of playing in chess tournaments, he switched his attention to studies. In recent years Costeff developed into one of the best study composers in the world, capturing top prizes in major tourneys. He resides in the USA, and has worked for some years as an e-commerce consultant.

When you look out for fresh ideas, what are your sources of inspiration?

"I get ideas from looking at various chess stimulants. When I see remarkable things in a chess problem, I ask myself if they can be done in the form of a study. Sometimes I see an idea in a study, which, in my opinion, is not exploited to the full; I wonder whether there is scope to pursue the idea further.

"Although I developed originally as a player, nowadays I seldom draw on ideas from practical games."

Describe your approach toward composing. How do you work on a study?

"In my younger days I composed only for the sake of enlightenment, the **'wow'**. Now the act of composing is, for me, more of a controlled process.

"Composing studies has two facets. Conceiving an idea is the easy part. Making it work, the technical part, is frequently very hard.

"When I think of an abstract idea, I manage with no board and pieces. But after that, I use the board, and every once in a while I check things with the computer. ... This tool helps me to save earlier versions, so you can see how the idea has evolved. For some of my studies I have in my files 100 different versions, and there is at least an equal number of versions that I do not bother to save."

Is the development from one version to the next, a linear one?

"Yes, it usually is, and then it develops sideways. Sometimes, an idea that pops up in one study deserves a completely different treatment to express it fully, so I create a new study."

Well, let's see an example.

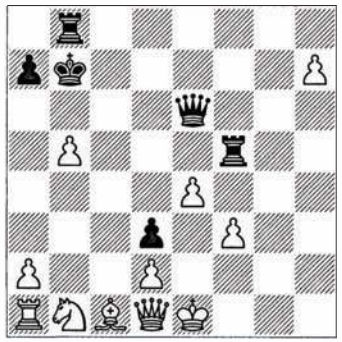
In the game-like position on the following page, White holds a big material advantage, but his barren kingside and his lag in development on the queenside create serious problems for him. For instance, the natural 1 ♘c3 or 1 ♗b2 is met with 1...♕b6!.

1 ♕a4 ♖xf3

The exchange of queens cannot be avoided: 1...♔a8 2 ♕a6. The text-move creates the deadly threat of 2...♖bf8.

2 ♕a6+ ♕xa6 3 bxa6+ ♔a8!

After 3...♔xa6 4 ♗a3 ♖h8 5 ♘c3 ♖xh7 6 0-0-0 White will prevail. With



Gady Costeff
WCCT, 2001-3
White to play and win

his last move, Black prepares a stalemate defence.

4 ♗a3

Forced, to prevent 4...♖bf8.

4...♖xb1+!

Now 5 ♖xb1 is met by 5...♖f1+!. A draw, then?

5 ♗c1!

Amazing. Apparently White has jettisoned a piece for nothing...

5...♖b8

Placing his king on the eighth rank (3...♔a8!) enabled Black to create stalemate possibilities. But 3...♔a8 has its drawbacks: 5...♖xa1 is refuted because 6 h8♕+ is check (and mates).

6 ♗b2 ♖bf8

After 6...♖h3 7 h8♕ ♖(either)xh8 8 ♗xh8 Black loses technically.

7 0-0-0!

The knight sacrifice vacated the first rank, so that now castling is possible. After 7...♖c8+ 8 ♔b1 ♖h3 9 h8♕ White will win on material.

A classic study. Please try to reconstruct the process of building it.

"The tournament's theme required White to pursue a plan which, in its raw form, did not quite work. In order to make it work, (1) White should get rid of one of his own pawns or pieces but (2) the position must remain the same, in every other respect.

"I was entrusted with the task of assembling and publicizing all known examples of this theme. There were about 1,100 studies that met the requirements. I saw that many examples involved a journey of a white king through successive check-threats, until he loses material, and only then can he reverse and win. Manoeuvres like this may impart a sense of depth, mathematical precision and systematic action, but in my opinion, they lack a sparkle of ingenuity."

> While searching for an innovative idea, drawing boundaries over what already exists gives us a sense of direction. Knowing where **not** to search is a vital element in the creation process and saves a lot of barren effort.

"About the same time, I read an article by John Rice in *The Problemist* about castling in problems. This stuck in my mind.

"I was thinking to myself, maybe I could get rid of a piece, so that I could castle."

So, you combined the castling idea with the tourney theme.

"Yes. Remarkably, once the concept entered my head, it took me only about an hour to devise a scheme that almost worked.

"You can see that the elements of the diagram flow naturally and logically in backward planning: I felt that it was the knight that should be got rid of. So, I needed to find a motive for Black to play ...♖xb1. This suggested the possibility of stalemate. Next, a reason for White to play ♗a3 (why not ♗b2?) was required. It was then that the element of doubling rooks on the f-file was found. White must prevent it, so ♗a3 is forced. The next step was to ask myself why the black rook, after capturing on b1, should return to b8. A white pawn on the seventh rank is needed. And so forth."

It's easy to find this logic in retrospect, but did it really occur like this?

"In reality, it was not exactly A-B-C-D; nevertheless, it was indeed a logical process that evolved very quickly. The study couldn't have been composed so fast if it had been conceived illogically. In other studies of mine, things sometimes evolve in a different way."

Is it your principled attitude towards problem solving – asking yourself what you should do in order to achieve so and so?

"Basically, it is. Admittedly, this study is an extreme example."

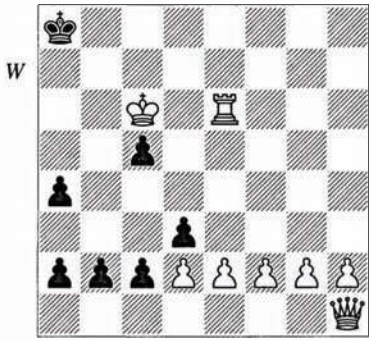
This is a tale with a happy ending. But sometimes an idea cannot be applied; it is simply not feasible.

"Correct. Unfortunately, many schemes do not work. I'm afraid I find it difficult to explain why certain things do not work; I don't have the mathematical strength of, say, Ofer Comay or Noam Elkies. These guys can look at a position and say: 'this can't work; can't you see – there is a basic reason why it can't be achieved, because of this and that'.

"Recently, while working on a study, I realized after a lot of time and effort that I really didn't understand the position. I made a certain retraction, and only then did I understand why the things I had wanted to achieve could not have possibly worked."

> We usually torture ourselves with the question 'how to arrive at a promising idea' but reflect less on its complementary aspects: how can you know in advance if an idea is attainable? Where is the point when you say to yourself 'it's time to give up'?

"In the following study I began with a modest idea and gradually discovered various new elements."



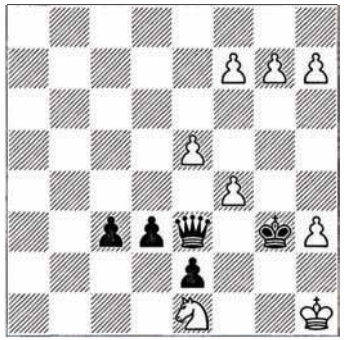
Reconstructed position
Mate in three

"In 1997 I visited the Manhattan Chess Club in New York and was shown a position which contained a startling move." (*See previous diagram*).

1 ♕b1!!

The motivation is White's need to prevent the promotion of a black pawn on b1 with check. 1 ♔b6? b1♕+. After the key, 1...axb1♕ (1...♔a7 2 ♕xb2) is met by 2 ♔b6, followed by 3 ♖e8#.

"I was fascinated by this idea, and tried to see what I could achieve in the form of a study."



Gady Costeff
Basic scheme (A)
Black to play and win

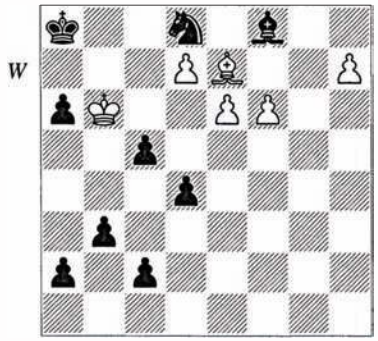
1...♕e4+

1...d2 2 g8♕+; or 1...♕f3+ 2 ♘xf3 ♔xf3 3 g8♕ e1♕+ 4 ♔h2 with a draw.

2 ♔g1 ♕d4+ 3 ♔h1 ♕d5+ 4 ♔g1 ♕c5+ 5 ♔h1 ♕c6+ 6 ♔g1 ♕b6+ 7 ♔h1 ♕b7+ 8 ♔g1 ♕a7+ 9 ♔h1 ♕a8+ 10 ♔g1 ♕g8

Black wins. For example, 11 hxg8♕ d2.

This presentation culminated in a spectacular queen move at the end of a staircase manoeuvre. In the next scheme, the operation was enlarged; in fact, doubled.



Scheme B
White to play and win

1 h8♕ b2 2 ♕h1+ ♔b8 3 ♕h2+

3 ♕b1? is useless: Black just captures the queen.

3...♔a8 4 ♕g2+ ♔b8 5 ♕g3+ ♔a8 6 ♕f3+ ♔b8 7 ♕f4+ ♔a8 8 ♕e4+ ♔b8 9 ♕e5+ ♔a8 10 ♕d5+ ♔b8 11 ♗d6+ ♗xd6 12 ♕xd6+ ♔a8

Now that the e7-bishop is gone and the path for White's e-pawn is free, the idea of ♕b1 will decide. A reverse staircase manoeuvres the queen to the correct position and carries the day.

13 ♕d5+

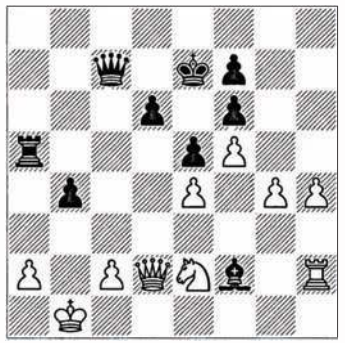
13 ♔c7? a1♕ 14 ♕d5+ ♔a7 15 ♕xc5+ ♔a8 16 ♕d5+ ♔a7 17 ♕xd4+ ♔a8 is only a draw.

13...♔b8 14 ♕e5+ ♔a8 15 ♕e4+ ♔b8 16 ♕f4+ ♔a8 17 ♕f3+ ♔b8 18 ♕g3+ ♔a8 19 ♕g2+ ♔b8 20 ♕h2+ ♔a8 21 ♕h1+ ♔b8 22 ♕b1

White wins.

A considerable development of the former scheme; yet the author belittles his accomplishment because of its forced nature: "this is really just a mate in 24 moves."

Before we immerse ourselves in further developments of this fancy idea, let us divert our attention to the following game:



Deep Junior – Deep Fritz
Match (game 3), Cadaques 2001
Black to play

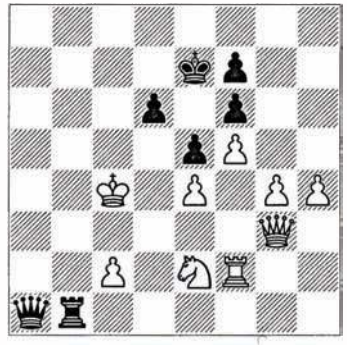
45...♕a7 46 ♕xb4

Accepting the challenge, for after 46 ♘c1 ♗e3 Black acquires a very strong initiative. Black now sacrifices a piece, adding fuel to his onslaught.

46...♖xa2 47 ♖xf2 ♖a4 48 ♕b3 ♖a1+ 49 ♔b2 ♖h1

With a double threat against king and rook.

50 ♕g3 ♕a1+ 51 ♔b3 ♖b1+ 52 ♔c4 *(D)*



52...d5+! 53 exd5

After 53 ♔xd5, 53...♕a6 mates.

53...♕a6+ 54 ♔c3 ♕a5+ 55 ♔d3 ♖d1+ 56 ♔e4 ♕xd5+ 57 ♔e3 ♕c5+ 58 ♔f3 ♕c6+

Does this ring a bell?

59 ♔e3 ♕b6+ 60 ♔e4 ♕b7+ 61 ♔e3 ♕a7+ 62 ♔f3 ♕a8+ 63 ♔e3 ♕a3+

Enabling this horizontal check is the crux of the solution.

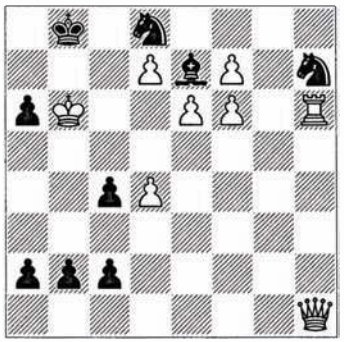
64 ♔e4 ♖d4+! 65 ♘xd4 ♕xg3 66 ♘c6+ ♔d6 67 ♘xe5 fxe5 68 ♖d2+ ♔c6 69 ♖d8 ♕f4+ 0-1

A prosaic finish. Had White played 64 c3 the d3-square would have been decisively weakened and Black would have won by 64...♕c5+ 65 ♔e4 ♕d5+ 66 ♔e3 ♕d3# – resembling, in a way, a reversed staircase.

So, here we have a similar mechanism, but of course the path to its conception, demonstrated by two machines, is completely different from the human method of discovering ideas. A

computer does not see anything special or 'unnatural' in staircase manoeuvres, nor does it derive aesthetic pleasure from devising it.

Back to Costeff's process of creation. Some time afterwards, the composer searched for interesting ideas following the double staircase. In the next scheme, a third staircase and a knight promotion were embodied in the solution.



Scheme C
(position after the double staircase)
White to play and win

1 ♕b1 c1♕ 2 fxe7 ♕g5 3 ♕xb2 a1♕ 4 ♕h2+ ♔a8 5 ♕g2+! ♔b8 6 ♕g3+

Yet another staircase! Both queens are taboo: White's can't be touched on account of exd8♕#; and 6 ♕xg5? fails to a mating attack: 6...♕b2+ and now 7 ♔xa6 ♕b7+ or 7 ♔c5 ♕b5+.

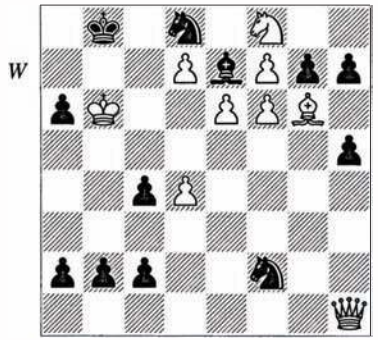
6...♔a8 7 ♕f3+

7 ♕xg5? allows perpetual check after 7...♕b1+.

7...♔b8 8 ♕f4+ ♔a8 9 ♕e4+ ♔b8 10 ♕e5+ ♔a8 11 ♕d5+ ♔b8 12 ♕d6+ ♔a8 13 ♔c7 ♕aa5+ 14 ♔c8 ♕gb5 15 exd8♘

White wins; e.g., 15...♕ab6 16 ♕xb6 ♕xb6 17 ♘c6 ♕xc6+ 18 ♔d8 ♕d6 19 ♖xh7.

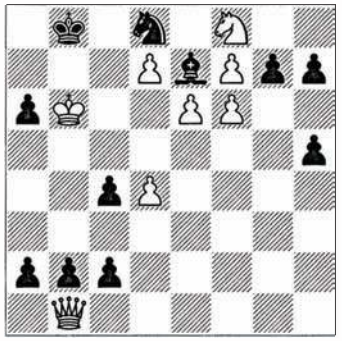
Some technical composing work was needed to achieve a more refined scheme, in which all the pieces are working to the full. The end-product was the following:



Gady Costeff
1st Prize, Afek-50 tourney, 2002
White to play and win

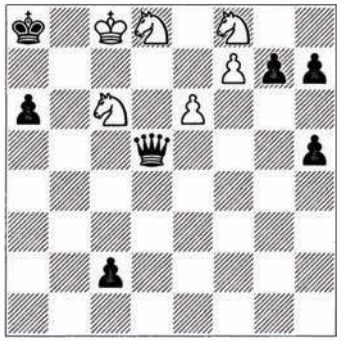
The full solution is backed up by some complicated analysis. Since our focus is on the idea, we'll settle for the main line only.

1 ♕h2+ ♔a8 2 ♕g2+ ♔b8 3 ♕g3+ ♔a8 4 ♕f3+ ♔b8 5 ♕f4+ ♔a8 6 ♗e4+ ♘xe4 7 ♕xe4+ ♔b8 8 ♕f4+ ♔a8 9 ♕f3+ ♔b8 10 ♕g3+ ♔a8 11 ♕g2+ ♔b8 12 ♕h2+ ♔a8 13 ♕h1+ ♔b8 14 ♕b1!! *(D)*

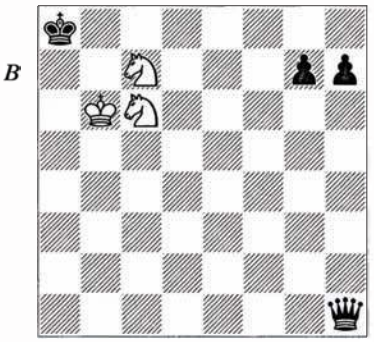


The initial stimulant that started the process has now become just a fraction in a chain of components that constitute the whole study.

14...c1♕! 15 fxe7 ♕g5 16 ♕xb2 a1♕ 17 ♕h2+ ♔a8 18 ♕g2+ ♔b8 19 ♕g3+ ♔a8 20 ♕f3+ ♔b8 21 ♕f4+ ♔a8 22 ♕e4+ ♔b8 23 ♕e5+ ♔a8 24 ♕d5+ ♔b8 25 ♕d6+ ♔a8 26 ♔c7! ♕aa5+ 27 ♔c8 ♕gb5 28 exd8♘ c3 29 d5 c2 30 ♕c6+ ♕xc6+ 31 ♘xc6 ♕xd5 32 d8♘ *(D)*



32...c1♕ 33 ♘d7 ♕cxc6+ 34 ♘xc6 ♕xe6! 35 ♘ce5!! ♕d6 36 f8♕ ♕xf8+ 37 ♘xf8 ♔a7 38 ♔c7 a5 39 ♘fd7 ♔a6 40 ♔c6 a4 41 ♘c4 a3 42 ♘c5+ ♔a7 43 ♘xa3 ♔b8 44 ♘b5 ♔c8 45 ♘b7 ♔b8 46 ♘7d6 h4 47 ♔b6 h3 48 ♘d4 h2 49 ♘c6+ ♔a8 50 ♘b5 h1♕ 51 ♘c7# *(D)*



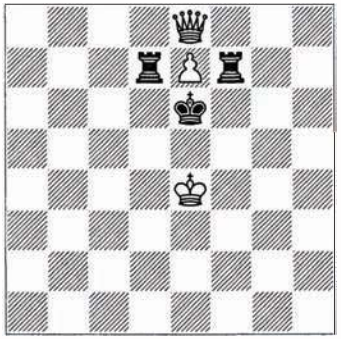
Just in time.

An extraordinary symphony performed on a grand scale. "A colourful blend of themes ... extravaganza at its very best" [13], wrote the judge, Yochanan Afek. Solvers in an internet forum were duly impressed by the richness of content and the protracted combat that took place.

> When an idea proves attainable, one tends to rejoice at the solution and stop exploring further.
>
> Dissatisfaction with the initial product often leads to additional, more useful and appropriate, discoveries.

Please tell me that there is some room in study composing for chance, fate or luck...

"Of course there is. Sometimes composers shove pieces without any clear intention, when a golden idea presents itself. Such was the case when, in the early 1980s, I stumbled into the following position:"



With Black to play, he faces some difficulties: he can't capture (either way) on e7 because of mate in one; in addition, can't play 1...♖f6 or 1...♖d6 because of 2 ♕d8! or 2 ♕f8! respectively.

Some adjustments had to be made, in order to stop the defences 1...♖a7!, 1...♔d6!, 1...♔f6!, 1...♖f1 and 1...♖d1.

(*See following diagram*).

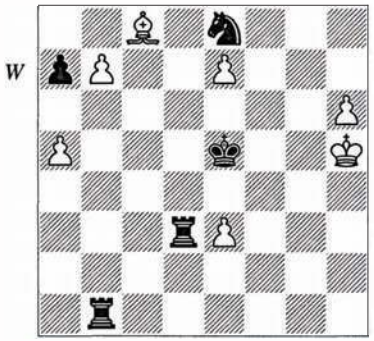
1 h7 ♖h1+ 2 ♗h3!

2 ♔g6 ♖b3 and all White's passed pawns are taken care of.

2...♖xh3+ 3 ♔g4 ♖xh7 4 b8♕+ ♔e6 5 ♕xe8 ♖g7+ 6 ♔f4 ♖f7+ 7 ♔e4 ♖d7 8 a6!!

A reciprocal zugzwang which splits into six symmetrical, harmonious variations:

8...♖dxe7 9 ♕c6#
8...♖fxe7 9 ♕g6#



Gady Costeff
2nd Prize, Guanabara Jubilee tourney, Brazil 1985
White to play and win

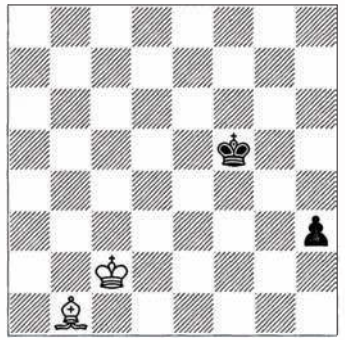
8...♖d6 9 ♕f8 ♖xe7 10 ♕f5#
8...♖f6 9 ♕d8 ♖xe7 10 ♕d5#
8...♖c7 9 ♕c6+ ♖xc6 10 e8♕+
8...♖g7 9 ♕g6+ ♖xg6 10 e8♕+

You once wrote: "Sometimes I have no idea how I compose ... My only recollection (of composing a certain study) is that I move some pieces here, some pieces there, et voilà ... *Surely it is frustrating to reach your destination without knowing how you got there..."* [14]

"Right. I am a logical guy – I like to be in control, to know what is happening and where I am going."

> In the arduous task of generating good ideas, there is, undeniably, an element of luck. It does appear, however, to go along with those who take an active role and make an effort.

Finally, I'd like you to show me a recent study of your choice that you find attractive.



A. Selivanov
Special Commendation, *Shakhmatnaya Kompozitsia*, 1993
White to play and draw

White's goal is obvious: to stop the h-pawn from promoting. The path to this goal, though, is filled with mines: 1 ♔d2+? ♔f4! (but not 1...♔e5? 2 ♔e3) 2 ♗a2 ♔e5!; or 1 ♔c3+? ♔e5! (but not 1...♔f4? 2 ♔d4).

1 ♔d3!!

Surprisingly, the white battery is not operated immediately. By keeping his options open, White manages to achieve his aim: 1...♔e5 (1...h2 2 ♔e3+) 2 ♔e3 h2 3 ♗e4; or 1...♔f4 2 ♔d4.

"In the space of three moves and with only four pieces," says Costeff appreciatively, "we have surprise (1 ♔d3!!), geometrical pattern and depth."

This choice came as a surprise to me: I thought you would pick a heavyweight piece.

"Let us compare this ultra-light miniature with my ♔b6/♔b8 study from the Afek tourney. The form of these studies is radically different. Yet, artistically, they have a great deal in common. Both studies, relative to their means, contain surprise, pattern, tension, depth, and ultimately, pleasure. I find it uplifting that such diverse studies can be so similarly beautiful."

4 GM Yona Kosashvili

Born 1970. Winner of the Israeli open championships of 1991 and 1993. Represented Israel in Olympiads in 1990 and 1998. In the mid-1990s he won a series of strong international tournaments, reaching a peak rating of 2580 Elo. Married to Sofi Polgar, he works as a physician and is regarded as one of the best chess amateurs in the world.

Some players are aided, during their thinking-process, by mental questions, like 'what are my rival's weakest squares', 'which piece can I sacrifice', 'where should my knight be heading' and so on. Do you use such methods?

(Reflecting) "I don't ask myself methodical questions during the game. However, I frequently examine if the previous play has been 'correct'. If I make sensible moves, it can't be that my position will be worse. If my opponent places his pieces in an artificial manner, I look for a refutation. I believe that there is justice in chess.

"Another criterion I use in selecting my candidate-moves is the degree that they correspond to my taste. It is very important for me to play positions that I like. If a line is 'objectively' good but does not accord with my style, I'll avoid it. Being better 'on paper' yields nothing.

"I have the same conviction regarding medicine: there are no absolute truths; everything is relative. You have to choose those techniques and methods of treatment in which you believe."

I am intrigued by your decision in the following game.

Kosashvili – Psakhis
Haifa 1995

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 exd5 exd5 4 ♘f3 ♘c6 5 ♗b5 ♗d6 6 0-0 ♘e7 7 c4 dxc4 8 ♗xc4 0-0 9 h3 *(D)*

B



The Exchange Variation of the French Defence has a drawish reputation. Lev Psakhis is a world-leading expert on the French; yet you chose this opening system striving for victory.

"At the time, I taught chess to advanced students and had to be ready for class, so I did some homework and had a pretty good knowledge and understanding of this variation, including some impressive ideas by Kasparov. The position we reached is clear and defined; you can't rely on the database, but have to keep finding good moves.

"I've found parallels to positions with an isolated d-pawn that I'm familiar with, stemming from other opening-systems; e.g., Kasparov-Karpov, World Ch match (22), Leningrad 1986: 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘f3 d5 4 ♘c3 ♗e7 5 ♗g5 h6 6 ♗xf6 ♗xf6 7 e3 0-0 8 ♖c1 c6 9 ♗d3 ♘d7 10 0-0 dxc4 11 ♗xc4 e5 12 h3 exd4 13 exd4.

"I just wanted to get a position in which I felt comfortable.

"Another consideration was a game I had played against Dolmatov in a previous round of the same tournament. I chose the variation 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 exd5 exd5 4 ♘f3 ♘c6 5 ♗b5 ♗d6 6 c4 dxc4 7 d5 a6 8 ♗a4 b5 9 dxc6 bxa4 10 ♕xa4 ♘e7 11 0-0 0-0 12 ♘bd2 but after 12...c3! 13 bxc3 ♕e8 the game petered out into a draw: 14 ♘e4 ♕xc6 15 ♕xc6 ♘xc6 16 ♘xd6 cxd6 ½-½. So I had to deviate."

> Some ideas are born through elimination. The first choice doesn't bring the desired dividends, so we look aside, endeavouring to investigate other options.

Back to the game...

9...♗f5 10 ♘c3 ♕d7 11 a3 ♘g6 12 ♖e1 ♖ae8 13 ♗e3 a6 14 ♗f1! ♕d8 15 ♘a4 ♘h4 16 ♘c5 ♗xc5 17 ♘xh4 ♕xh4 18 dxc5

Without making any perceptible errors, Black has drifted into an inferior position.

18...♖e6 19 ♕f3 ♗e4 20 ♕g4 ♕xg4 21 hxg4 ♘e7 22 ♗g5 ♖e8 23 ♖ad1 ♗c6 24 ♖xe6 fxe6 25 ♗c4 ♘d5

25...♗d5 is met with 26 ♗xe7! ♗xc4 27 ♖d7 ♖c8 28 c6! bxc6 29 ♗b4 followed by ♗c3, and White is winning.

26 ♗h4 ♘f6 27 f3 ♔f7 28 ♗g3 ♗d5 29 ♗d3 ♖e7 30 g5 ♘h5 31 ♗e5

With his pair of bishops and superior pawn-structure, White increased the pressure and went on to win on the 56th move.

Kosashvili – Gelpke
Hilversum 1996

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘d2 dxe4 4 ♘xe4 ♘d7 5 ♘f3 ♘gf6 6 ♘g3 e6 7 ♗d3 ♗d6 8 0-0 0-0 9 ♕e2 ♕c7 10 ♗g5 b6 11 ♘e4 ♘xe4 12 ♕xe4 g6 13 ♗h6 ♖e8 14 ♕h4 ♗b7 15 ♘g5 ♗e7 16 ♖ad1 a6 17 ♖fe1 ♖ad8 *(D)*

W



18 ♖xe6!!

How did this idea occur to you?

"Black has manoeuvred slowly on the queenside and the centre, without paying attention to my aggressive actions against his king; well, how can one play like this? My intuition told me that there must be a direct refutation."

18...fxe6 19 ♗xg6! hxg6

19...♘f6 20 ♗f7+ ♔h8 21 ♘xe6 and White wins.

20 ♗g7! ♗xg5

20...♔xg7 21 ♕h7+ ♔f6 22 ♘e4+ ♔f5 23 ♕h3+ ♔xe4 24 ♕f3#.

21 ♕h8+ ♔f7 22 ♕h7!

The star move. Despite being rook, bishop and knight ahead, Black is powerless.

Intuition aside, you were also calculating, of course?

"Naturally. The basic idea, which guides you where to search, is based on what we call 'feeling', a hunch. But after that, you must be sure that things are analytically correct."

22...♘f8

Alternatives are 22...♗f6 23 ♗h6+; 22...♖h8 23 ♗xh8+ ♔f8 24 ♗e5 ♕c8 25 ♗d6+; 22...♖e7 23 ♗e5+ ♔f8 24 ♕h8+ ♔f7 25 ♕g7+ ♔e8 26 ♕xg6+.

23 ♗xf8+ ♔xf8 24 ♕xc7 ♖b8 25 ♖d3

From a material point of view, Black is still in the game. His king's shattered defences, though, do not leave him a fighting chance.

25...♗e7 26 ♖f3+ ♔g8 27 ♕d7 ♔g7 28 ♕xe6 ♗h4 29 ♕f7+ ♔h6 30 g3 ♗g5 31 h4 ♗c1 32 ♖f6 ♖g8 33 h5 ♔xh5 34 ♕h7+ ♗h6 35 ♖f4 1-0

Sometimes a stratagem reappears time and again in a player's games. Do you have such a favourite device?

"At a certain period I was attracted by the idea of advancing my outside pawns. Implementing such methods, I was victorious on several occasions."

Kosashvili – V. Alterman

Israel 1990

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 c3 ♘f6 4 ♗e2 ♘c6 5 ♕c2 ♗g4 6 d3 e6 7 ♘bd2 d5 8 h3 ♗h5 9 0-0 ♗e7 10 ♖e1 0-0 11 ♘f1 ♗xf3?! 12 ♗xf3 ♘e5 13 ♗e2 c4?! 14 dxc4

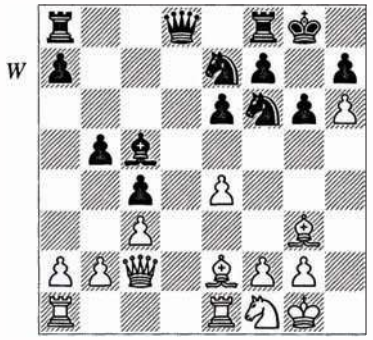
Not 14 d4 ♘d3 15 ♗xd3 cxd3 16 ♕xd3 ♘xe4 with a slight advantage to Black.

14...dxc4 15 ♗f4 ♘g6?! 16 ♗g3 b5 17 h4! ♗c5

17...h5 loses a pawn to 18 ♖ed1 ♕b6 19 e5 ♘g4 (or 19...♘d5 20 ♕e4) 20 ♗xg4 hxg4 21 h5 ♘h4 22 ♕e4.

18 h5 ♘e7 19 h6 g6 *(D)*

The lesser evil was the ugly move 19...gxh6. Now the weakness of the dark squares proves fatal.



20 b4!

A decisive stroke on the opposite flank. It transpires that after 20...♗b6 21 a4! (an echo of 17 h4!) 21...a6 22 ♗h4! Black loses material, since any move with a black knight fails to 23 axb5 when Black cannot recapture on b5.

20...cxb3

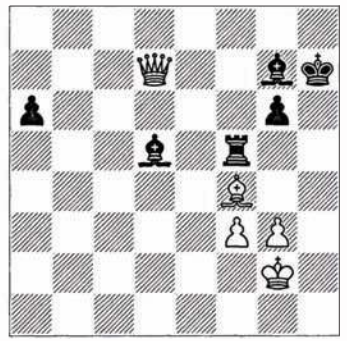
A forced concession.

21 axb3 b4 22 cxb4 ♗xb4 23 ♕b2! ♘c6?

Losing on the spot. He was lost anyway: 23...♘e8 24 ♖ed1 ♕b6 (24...♕c8 25 ♖ac1 ♕b7 26 ♖c7!) 25 ♖a6 ♕b7 26 ♘e3 followed by ♘g4-f6.

24 ♖ed1 ♕e7 25 ♖d7! 1-0

25...♕xd7 26 ♕xf6 ♕d4 27 e5 is curtains.



Kosashvili – V. Mikhalevsky

Israeli open Ch 1993

White to play

This game was played in the last round. The outcome of the other games made it apparent that victory would clinch an undivided first place for Yona.

"Everybody was convinced that it was going to end in a draw," he recalls.

In your original commentary to the game, published in the Israeli magazine Schahmat, *you wrote: "White's plan is to free himself from the pin on the f-file, to exchange the dark-squared bishops, to transfer his king to g5 with his pawns on f4 and g4."* [15]

I often wonder if this kind of commentary reflects a genuine thinking-process, or retrospective wisdom.

"I can only attest that in this particular case, I did make a comprehensive plan. Let me reconstruct my thoughts: I asked myself how could I undermine Black's solid structure. His king is exposed, and without his g7-bishop, this factor would become significant.

"This reasoning led me to realize that Black's dark-squared bishop was the key to his harmonious set-up. Therefore I should aim to exchange bishops and then initiate a direct attack against the king."

The sequel was not perfect, and sometimes mysterious. But according to Kosashvili it was always conducted, for his part, with the guiding goal of exchanging the dark-squared bishops in favourable circumstances.

45 ♔f2 a5 46 ♔e3 ♗b3 47 ♗d6 a4 48 f4

e5 is a potential square to initiate the exchange of bishops.

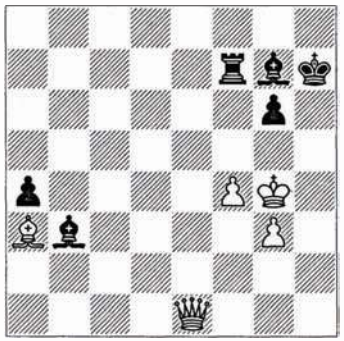
48...♖f7 49 ♕h3+ ♔g8 50 ♕c8+ ♔h7 51 ♗a3?!

51 ♕b8 was better, and if 51...♗b2 then 52 ♗e5.

51...♖f5 52 ♕d7 ♖f7 53 ♕h3+ ♔g8 54 ♕c8+ ♔h7 55 ♔f3 ♗d5+ 56 ♔g4 ♖f6 57 ♕d8 ♗e6+ 58 ♔f3

Not 58 ♔h4?? ♖f5.

58...♖f7 59 ♕e8 ♗d5+ 60 ♔g4 ♗b3 61 ♕e1! *(D)*



B

"This strange-looking move limits the scope of Black's light-squared bishop, sustains the threats against the black king (checks on h1 and a8) and prepares an eventual exchange of the dark-squared bishops following an incursion of the white king to g5."

61...♖f5? 62 ♗d6 ♖h5 63 ♗e7 ♖d5 64 ♕h1+ ♖h5 65 ♕e1 ♖d5 66 ♗b4 ♖h5 67 ♔f3 ♗d5+ 68 ♔e3

It appears that not much progress had been made in the last 20 moves.

"I was confident that White's sustained pressure would bear fruit.

"Part of my advantage was a psychological one. Black has no counterplay. It is extremely hard to maintain a passive defence for a long period. There are not many players around like Kramnik, who are willing to play (and endure) a Berlin Defence (vs Kasparov, 2000) and hold on stubbornly."

68...♖h2 69 ♕d1 ♗e6?

69...♗b3 70 ♕d7 is also insufficient for Black, but dropping the a-pawn is hopeless.

70 ♕xa4 ♖g2 71 ♗e1 ♖a2 72 ♕e4 ♗g4? 73 ♕h1+! ♗h6 74 ♕b7+ ♗g7

Or 74...♔g8 75 ♕d5+ and wins.

75 ♗c3 ♖e2+ 76 ♔d3 1-0



B

Baciu – Kosashvili
Rishon-Letzion 1985
Black to play

31...c3!

This move takes advantage of the miserable position of the white pieces. By dint of a forced sequence of moves, Black wins the exchange for a pawn or two. It is not easy to evaluate the consequences of the resulting position.

32 ♗xc3

32 bxc3 will be met by the same rejoinder. 32 ♘xc3 ♘g3 33 ♘d5 appears attractive but is refuted by 33...♘xh1+ 34 ♖xh1 ♖c2!! 35 ♘f6+ ♔h8 (36 ♘xe8? ♖xd2+ 37 ♔e1 ♖xb2).

32...♗b5 33 ♖fg1 ♗xe2 34 ♔xe2 ♘g3+ 35 ♖xg3 hxg3 36 ♖g1

I still find it hard to believe that Black will prevail. What were your thoughts when you embarked upon 31...c3?

"First of all, I thought that I would have good chances to decide the resulting endgame in my favour. But a major component of my decision was timing. Look at the diagram position: had I not acted promptly, White would have played 32 ♖c1 and prevented the breakthrough for good."

36...b5 37 ♔d2

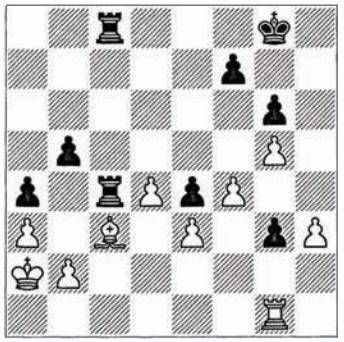
37 a3 is better.

37...♖c4 38 a3 ♖ec8 39 ♔c2

If 39 ♖xg3 then 39...a5 followed by 40...b4 and the black rooks infiltrate.

39...a5 40 ♔b3 a4+ 41 ♔a2 *(D)*

Forced; 41 ♔c2 loses to 41...b4! 42 axb4 ♖xb4 43 ♖xg3 a3! 44 b3 ♖b7.



B

41...♖xc3!

Entering a rook ending in which the activity of his remaining rook and his superior pawn-structure, together with the unfortunate placement of the white king, more than compensate Black for his pawn deficit.

"This is the only viable winning plan. Once again, the element of timing is crucial. If White had already captured on g3, he would be safe. So, it's now or never."

> In the process of devising and implementing an idea, the element of timing is an integral part. A sense of urgency, a recognition that something has to be performed here and now – these are attributes that guide our thoughts towards certain moves and game-plans.

42 bxc3 ♖xc3 43 ♖xg3 ♖c2+ 44 ♔b1 ♖f2!

The threat of 45...♖f3 gains an important tempo.

45 ♖g1 ♖e2 46 ♖g3 ♔f8 47 h4 ♔e7 48 h5

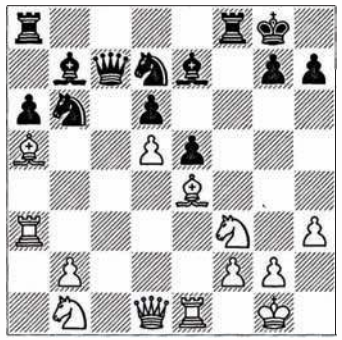
White's only chance is to create a passed pawn. Against waiting tactics, Black's king goes to f5 and White will soon find himself in zugzwang; for example, 48 ♔a1 ♔e6 49 ♔b1 ♔f5 50 ♔a1 ♖d2 51 ♔b1 ♖d3 52 ♔b2 ♖b3+ 53 ♔a2 ♖c3 54 ♔b2 ♖d3 55 ♔a2 ♖b3.

Instead of the text-move, White can try 48 f5 gxf5 49 h5, but it is doubtful whether it will save him after 49...♔f8! 50 h6 ♔g8.

48...gxh5 49 f5 ♖f2 50 g6 ♔f8! 51 g7+ ♔g8 52 ♖g5 ♖f3 53 d5 f6 54 d6 ♖xe3

Not 54...fxg5?? 55 d7, when the tables are turned.

55 ♖g6 ♖xa3 56 ♖xf6 ♔xg7 57 d7 ♖d3 58 ♖g6+ ♔f7 59 ♖h6 ♖xd7 60 ♖h7+ ♔e8 61 ♖xh5 ♖d5 0-1



Y. Grünfeld – Kosashvili
Rishon-Letzion 1993
Black to play

20...♖ab8! 21 ♖c3 ♕d8 22 ♘a3 ♕e8 23 ♖c6 ♘c8

Accepting the offer is not advisable: 23...♗xc6? 24 dxc6 ♘c5 25 c7 ♘xe4 26 cxb8♕ ♕xb8 27 ♗xb6.

24 ♗c7 ♖a8 25 ♖c3 ♖a7! 26 ♘c4 ♗a8 27 ♘a5 *(D)*

27...♔h8!

I'm baffled. White seems to have made some progress while your forces are in retreat or, at best, marking time. Yet you consider your last move a very strong one and evaluate the situation in your favour.

"Note that Black has no evident weaknesses, and he has a clear plan, directed against d5."



"In spite of appearances, White's forces are in fact acting without co-operation and harmony. My last move is a prophylactic measure. The king moves away from potential checks and lets the other pieces do their jobs. The immediate 27...♘f6 28 ♗f5 ♗xd5 29 ♗xc8 ♕xc8 30 ♗b6 was less convincing."

28 b4 ♘f6 29 ♗b8 ♘xe4 30 ♖xe4 ♖d7 31 ♖c6 ♘a7 32 ♗xa7 ♖xa7 33 ♖c1 ♕f7 34 ♘c6 ♖b7

The rook aspires to settle on b5, where it will exert additional pressure on d5.

35 ♖ec4 ♗f6 36 ♕a4 ♕xd5 37 ♕xa6

With his two bishops and pair of connected central pawns, Black has a decisive advantage. Now he should have played 37...e4!: 38 ♘fd4 ♗h4! 39 ♖1c2 (39 g3 e3! 40 gxh4 exf2+ 41 ♔h2 ♖bf7 42 ♖f1 ♖f4! and Black wins) 39...♖bf7 and White collapses.

37...♕b5? 38 ♕xb5 ♖xb5 39 ♘a7 ♖bb8 40 ♖c8 ♔g8 41 ♖xb8 ♖xb8 42 ♖c8+ ♖xc8 43 ♘xc8 d5 44 ♘b6 ♗c6 ½-½

This prophylactic approach, thinking from the opponent's angle, is it a prominent feature in your games?

"Yes. I succeed in finding ideas for my opponent on the same level that I find ideas for my own side. I apply prophylactic thinking all the time."

* * *

Let's go over some positions, to see how you tackle them.

I present you a game and ask you to take the white side. At several junctures I'll ask you to give me your thoughts.

Kluger – Portisch
Hungary 1958

1 d4 e6 2 c4 ♘f6 3 ♘f3 b6 4 g3 ♗a6 5 ♕a4 c6 6 ♘c3 b5 7 cxb5 cxb5 8 ♘xb5 ♕b6

"I can defend with 9 e3 or else withdraw the knight. 9 e3 seems to me unnatural, paying a high price for the pawn. I'll play 9 ♘c3."

9 e3 ♗b7 10 ♗e2 ♗c6

"I think of 11 ♕b3 ... I'd like to play actively, 11 ♘e5, but I lose a rook with no significant compensation. 11 d5 ♗xd5 12 e4 ♗xe4 13 ♗e3, probably with initiative ... doesn't seem too promising. (returns to) 11 ♕b3, but I feel that this is passive. After 11 ♕b3 ♕b7 12 ♘e5 ♗xh1, I don't see a good follow-up ... Also there is 11 ♕c4 and 11 d5. But after 11 d5 I don't have any advantage. So I opt for 11 ♕c4."

11 ♕c4 ♕b7 *(D)*



"Black's threat is not alarming. If he captures the f3-knight he will be checked on c8. Let's see what happens after 12 0-0 ♗xf3 13 ♗xf3 ♕xf3 14 ♕c8+ ♔e7 ... I believe there is a strong initiative here ... Maybe 12 b3 or 12 ♗d2, intending to meet the double capture on f3 with ♕c8+ and ♗a3(b4)+. But Black can interpolate 12...a6. This leaves 12 d5 ♘xd5 13 ♘e5 ... This looks very dangerous for White. 13...♘b6 14 ♕f4 ♗xh1 15 ♕xf7+ ♔d8.

"I come to the conclusion that my position is shaky. 9 e3 was probably a mistake. I will go for 12 0-0; e.g., 12...♗xf3 13 ♗xf3 ♕xf3 14 ♘c7+; or 14 ♕c8+ followed by 15 b3."

12 0-0 a6 13 ♘c3 ♗xf3 14 ♗xf3 ♕xf3 15 ♕c8+ ♔e7

"I now realize that 16 b3 is bad because of 16...♕c6 17 ♗a3+ d6. So, I have to play 16 d5. I feel that this is where the money is: 16...♘xd5 17 ♕b7. I don't see anything else and 17 ♕b7 is good enough for me."

If you were Black, what would you do?

"White is engaged in capturing the rook; Black should create strong counterplay. ...♘c6 is insufficient, I guess.

"(How about) advancing ...h5-h4 ... White is still in trouble. After 16 d5 ♘xd5 17 ♕b7 h5 Black should be alert to tactics on the a8-h1 diagonal ... 18 ♘xd5+ exd5 19 e4 is interesting. Then if 19...h4 20 exd5 h3? 21 d6+ ... Oh, but he has 18...♕xd5, winning.

"Perhaps after 17...h5 I'll play the immediate 18 e4 and if 18...♘xc3 19 bxc3 h4, then 20 ♗a3+ ♔f6? 21 e5+."

16 d5 ♘xd5 17 ♕b7 h5 *(D)*



"I can play 18 e4 or 18 b3 ... 18 e4 ♘xc3 19 bxc3 ♕xc3 20 ♕xa8 ♕xa1 21 ♗a3+ wins."

Who is better here?

"I prefer White. But every move is critical to the overall outcome."

Why don't you consider 18 ♕xa8?

"It's too simple; I pay a price. I should look for something more correct ... 18 e4 appears to be more natural."

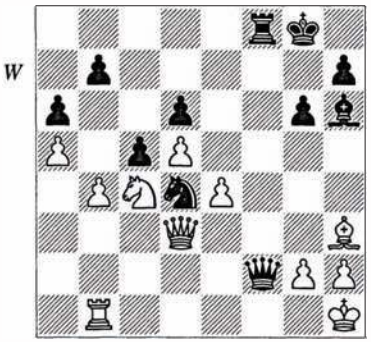
In the actual game White bailed out with a draw.

18 ♕xa8 h4 19 ♘xd5+ exd5 20 ♕xb8 ½-½

20...h3 21 ♕e5+ ♔d8 22 ♕b8+ with perpetual check.

Yona's suggestion, 18 e4, seems to lead to the same result after 18...♘xc3 19 bxc3 f6! 20 ♕xa8 h4 21 ♖e1 h3 22 ♔f1 ♕d3+ 23 ♔g1 ♕f3.

In the following position, take the black side.



Ehlvest – Minasian
New York Open 1993
White to play

36 bxc5

"White's first rank is vulnerable ... his pawn-structure is superior ... bishops of opposite colour are good for the attacking side. I must be active, energetic, because White possesses a static advantage. Recapturing by 36...dxc5 suggests itself but it leaves White with a dangerous pair of passed pawns. I search for a tactical stroke, taking advantage of the first rank's weakness. I'd contemplate crazy moves like 36...♗c1

and 36...♖f3, which are probably rubbish. 36...♘f3 37 gxf3 seems too slow ... 36...♘e2 is energetic and beautiful. I notice that in an emergency, White may play ♗f5.

"36...♘e2 (threatening 37...♕f1+) 37 ♕d1 maybe 37...♗c1 38 ♖xc1 ♘xc1 39 ♗e6+ ♔g7, does not look bad for Black. (He proceeds to examine 37 ♗e6+ and 37 g3). On 36...♘e2 37 g3 ♖f3 38 ♗e6+ ♔h8 White has a problem. 36...♘e2 is my move."

36...♘e2 37 g3 *(D)*



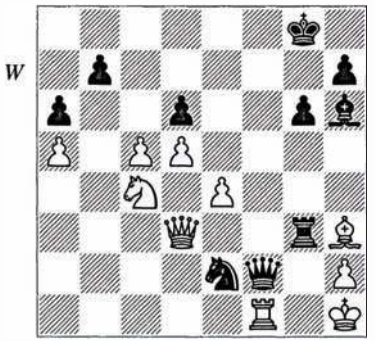
"Wait a minute. 37...♖f3 can be met by 38 ♖f1. 38...♖xd3 39 ♖xf2, when Black is doomed. 38...♕xf1+ 39 ♗xf1 ♖xd3 40 ♗xe2 ♖c3 41 cxd6 is also not too brilliant. 38...♘xg3+ is no good.

"I think I have exhausted the possibilities after 37...♖f3 – I may return to it later but will try to check something else. 37...♗c1 38 ♗e6+ ♔g7 39 ♖xc1 ♘xc1 40 ♕c3+ ♖f6 (or 40...♕f6) 41 ♕xc1 ♕f3+ 42 ♔g1 ♕f2+ draw." (goes on to examine 38 ♖xc1 ♘xc1 39 ♕c3 ♘e2 40 ♗e6+ ♖f7).

Look again at 37...♖f3.

"37...♖f3 38 ♖f1 ... I don't see anything for Black."

37...♖f3 38 ♖f1 ♖xg3 *(D)*



(Astonished) "Wow!"

Why do you think you overlooked that? You were aware of the first rank's vulnerability.

"The mate after 39 ♖xf2 ♖g1# does not fall into familiar patterns. Had the black knight stood on f3 instead of e2, I would have easily spotted it.

"But I don't think 38...♖xg3 is all that strong. As White, I'd love to punish Black. You have made me angry now; this is a rude move ... I can play 39 ♕b1 or 39 ♕d1. The latter seems to me natural, and it also threatens the knight. 39 ♕d1 ♖g1+ 40 ♖xg1 ♕f3+ 41 ♗g2 ♘g3+ 42 hxg3 and there is no mate on h5.

"I choose 39 ♕d1. It seems that Black is lost after that."

39 ♕d1 ♕xc5 40 ♗e6+ ♔h8 41 ♕xe2 ♖c3 42 ♘b6 ♕d4 43 ♖d1 ♖c1 44 ♖xc1

(1-0, 52)

Our interviewee did have some lapses of calculation, but overall, he made the correct choices. In the Ehlvest game, Black should have chosen 37...♗c1 instead of 37...♖f3.

I notice that you frequently describe the moves you examine in judgemental terms: correct, natural, harmonious, just, ugly, artificial...

(Smiles) "When I was young I read in the books that this or that move was 'natural' and I couldn't understand it – what is a 'natural' move? Now I know what is 'natural' for me and my thoughts during a game are directed at finding those moves which appear to me natural, correct, appropriate *(yet another mysterious term!)*. Only if I don't find a satisfying 'natural' solution, do I reach out for the 'unnatural' ones."

Here we have a recipe that some will find useful while others may regard as irritating:

> A good idea is usually what you think, believe or value to be a good idea. If a move you feel comfortable with enters your mind, play it. The idea is probably 'right' for you.

5 GM Alik Gershon

Born 1980. Singled out in his youth as an outstanding talent, Alik fulfilled these hopes by becoming World Under-14 Champion in 1994 and World Under-16 Champion in 1996. In 2000 he won the Israeli Championship (together with GM Boris Avrukh). With a peak Elo rating of 2571, Gershon's best results, one feels, still lie ahead.

Top players are known for their predilection for preparing opening systems at home. Tell me your approach towards opening novelties.

"Suppose I look at an unfamiliar variation. I collect data and ideas, mainly from recent games. Not too much – just to get a feeling, to see which way things are going. Eventually I reach a position where I feel that 'something' is there; I analyse; at a certain point I switch on my Fritz and direct it which moves to examine.

"If I encounter an opponent who always plays the same stuff, I try to see how to change course and surprise him. My game versus Lesiège is a successful demonstration of such work."

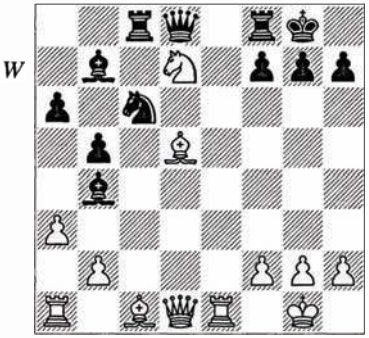
Gershon – Lesiège
Bermuda 2001

1 d4 d5 2 c4 dxc4 3 e3 ♘f6 4 ♗xc4 e6 5 ♘f3 c5 6 0-0 a6 7 ♗b3 cxd4 8 exd4 ♘c6 9 ♘c3 ♗e7 10 ♖e1 0-0 11 a3 b5 12 d5 exd5 13 ♘xd5 ♘xd5 14 ♗xd5 ♗b7 15 ♘e5 ♖c8

"15...♘xe5 16 ♗xb7 ♖a7 17 ♗e4 ♗f6 is almost equal (Avrukh – Har-Zvi, Tel-Aviv 1999). The text-move was new to theory, but GM Alex Khuzman had detected this possibility and advised me to check it out, which I did, quite thoroughly."

16 ♘d7! ♗b4! *(D)*

It is easy for Black to go wrong; e.g., 16...♕xd7? 17 ♗xf7+; or 16...♖e8? 17 ♗xf7+ ♔xf7 18 ♕d5+ ♔g6 19 ♕e4+ ♔h5 (19...♔f7 20 ♕e6#) 20 ♕xh7+ ♔g4 21 f3#.



17 ♕g4!

17 axb4 ♕xd7 and 17 ♘xf8 ♗xe1 18 ♘e6 ♗xf2+ are fine for Black. "Black was having a big think here".

17...♗xe1? 18 ♗h6 g6 19 ♖xe1 is winning for White.

17...h5 18 ♕xh5 ♗xe1 19 ♗h6!!

The point, threatening 20 ♕g6. For example, 19...♘e7 20 ♘f6+! gxf6 21 ♕g4+ ♘g6 22 ♕xg6+ mates.

19...♗xf2+ 20 ♔xf2

Not 20 ♔h1? ♕h4 and Black wins.

20...♘e5!! *(D)*



21 ♗xg7!

21 ♕xe5? ♕h4+ 22 ♔g1 ♕xh6 23 ♗xb7 ♖c1+ 24 ♖xc1 ♕xc1+ 25 ♔f2 ♕d2+ is bad for White.

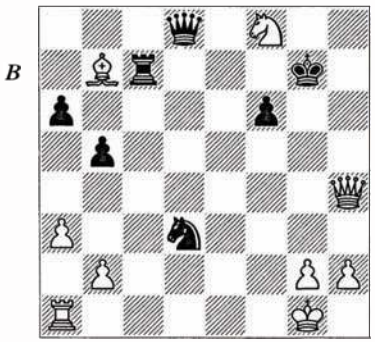
21...♘d3+ 22 ♔g1 ♔xg7 23 ♕g4+ ♔h6 24 ♕h3+ ♔g7 25 ♕g3+ ♔h8 26 ♕h3+

"I knew from my prepared analysis that even if Black found the best defence (which, so far, he did), I could always force a draw, and try for more without risk."

26...♔g7 27 ♗xb7 ♖c7 28 ♕g4+ ♔h8?

Having impressively conducted an arduous defensive task, Black deviates from the right path. 28...♔h6! is correct. In this case, 29 ♘xf8? fails to 29...♖c1+! 30 ♖xc1 ♕b6+, while 29 ♖f1? ♖xd7 30 ♖f3 allows 30...♘f2! (Fritz) 31 ♔xf2 ♖d2+ 32 ♔f1 ♖d1+ and it is only Black who can win. So, in this case White would have to resort to perpetual check: 29 ♕h3+ ♔g7 30 ♕g4+ with a draw.

29 ♕d4+! f6 30 ♕h4+ ♔g7 31 ♘xf8 *(D)*



The weakening ...f6 gives White a significant edge.

31...♕d6 32 ♗e4 ♖c1+ 33 ♖xc1 ♘xc1 34 ♗f3! ♕xf8 35 ♕g3+ ♔h8 36 ♕h3+ ♔g7 37 ♕g4+ ♔h8 38 ♕h5+ ♔g7 39 ♕g4+ ♔h8 40 ♕h3+ ♔g7 41 ♕d7+

"By now time-trouble was over, and I was able to find a forced win."

41...♔h8 42 ♗e4 ♕h6 43 ♕e8+ ♔g7 44 ♕e7+! ♔h8 45 ♗d5 ♕f4 46 ♕f8+ ♔h7 47 ♗g8+ ♔g6 48 ♗f7+ ♔f5 49 ♕c5+ ♔e4 50 ♗d5+ ♔f5 51 ♗f7+ ♔e4 52 ♗g6+ f5 53 ♗xf5+ ♕xf5 54 ♕xc1 1-0

This cooperation between man and machine in concocting opening innovations is intriguing.

"Mind you, it's not always successful. First of all, Fritz does not 'see' moves like 17 ♕g4! in conjunction with 19 ♗h6!; it can be of assistance only if directed to examine these moves. Secondly, the computer's assessments are frequently inaccurate, as I learned to my expense in the following game:"

Gershon – Dzhumaev
Athens (Acropolis) 2003

1 d4 f5 2 ♘f3 ♘f6 3 g3 g6 4 ♗g2 ♗g7 5 c4 0-0 6 0-0 d6 7 ♘c3 ♕e8 8 d5 ♘a6 9 ♖b1 ♗d7 10 b4 c6 11 dxc6 bxc6 12 a3 ♘g4

"Dzhumaev always plays this move. Before our game, his opponents played 13 ♗b2, letting him proceed with 13...f4. I thought about 13 ♕d3 – a logical move, which protects the knight, assigns the c1-bishop to watch f4, and threatens 14 c5. I focused my attention mainly on the responses 13...♘c7 and 13...e5."

13 ♕d3 ♘e5

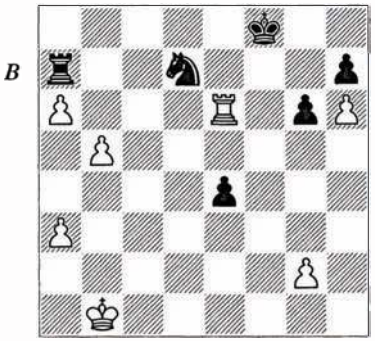
"Before the game I consulted Fritz and it was quite optimistic from the white point of view, giving the variation 14 ♘xe5 ♗xe5 15 ♗h6 ♖f7 16 c5 ♘c7 17 ♗f4."

14 ♘xe5 dxe5

"This recapture looks positionally bad for Black, and Fritz endorses this estimation. However, concrete variations show that Black is perfectly OK here; e.g., 15 e4 f4 and the black kingside pawns start rolling. Later, I drifted into a bad position, but won in the end."

Apart from openings, are there other situations where one consciously goads oneself towards finding a special idea?

"In inferior positions you must unearth a **big idea**; otherwise you lose. Take for example the following episode:"



Sutovsky – Gershon
Amsterdam (Lost Boys) 2001
Black to play

"White's last move was 45 ♖d6-e6. He intends simply to capture on e4, after which his queenside pawns will decide, in the absence of any counterplay on my part.

"As I looked at my position I became gloomy. 45...♘b8 46 ♖xe4 ♘xa6 47 bxa6 ♖xa6 48 a4 is not encouraging, while 45...♘c5 (protecting e4) is met by 46 b6 ♖a8 47 a7 ♘xe6 48 b7 ♘c7 49 b8♕+.

"I tried to find saving chances in the continuation 45...♘c5 46 b6 ♖xa6 47 b7 ♖xe6 48 b8♕+ ♔e7, but it was not satisfactory. In the end, I found salvation:"

45...♘c5!!

"Only after this move was played, did my opponent, along with some other strong players who were watching the game, observe that on 46 b6 ♖a8 47 a7 Black has 47...♘d7!!. Such a switchback is difficult to detect, yet I discovered it because I simply had to."

46 ♖c6 ♘d7 47 ♔c2 ♔e7 48 a4 ♘e5 49 ♖b6 ♔d7 50 a5 e3

The game keeps a dynamic equilibrium, and after some adventures it ended peacefully on the 66th move.

Some of my interviewees described to me a systematic and logical thinking-process. Do you also manage your thoughts in the same manner?

(In an apologetic tone): "Not at all. I know that Alon Greenfeld, for example, my erstwhile coach, can always explain how he reaches a specific decision. I'm afraid my own mind is a complete mess.

"In the majority of cases I can't articulate how I reach a certain decision. I rely on intuition; I feel that in this position, this is the move, and in that position, a winning manoeuvre should exist.

"I try to systemize my thinking – I even read Kotov's model of how players should think – but I don't know ... It may help, but sometimes it brings me counterproductive results."

If I understand you correctly, you're implying that if we cultivate a savage, he may lose his savage skills...

"Something like that. One of the reasons I do not give chess lectures nowadays, is that whenever I try to understand, analyse, or explain why I play the moves I play, what is 'correct' play, where the pieces should be placed – it interferes with my game, and my results suffer."

> Terms like system, order and organization have a positive flavour; but they are not always necessary. Imposing such aiding tools upon creative players may prove to have a restraining effect.

"Still on the same issue, I have great respect towards chess computers. They have a system, a well-founded algorithm. In a way, they complement me.

"Currently I'm trying to ascertain what kind of positions lend themselves to systematic thinking. I believe that in closed positions, which bear strategic characteristics, it may benefit me to order my thinking."

Being a player of an imaginative and aesthetically pleasing style, I wonder how you succeed in weighing your options objectively. Aren't you biased by flashy, brilliant moves?

"Yes, I am; I frequently fight against an urge to make moves I **want** to play, at the expense of moves I **ought** to play."

So, it is difficult for you to abstain from attractive ideas.

"I recently had a most annoying game against GM Av. Bykhovsky. I was completely winning, and then made an insane knight sacrifice. I clearly understood that simple continuations were decisive. On top of that, he was left with only two minutes. Somehow I 'forced' myself to find ridiculous justifications to sacrifice, and duly lost."

Of course, on many occasions, a startling idea may also be the most effective.

Gershon – Zilberman
Israel 2000

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e5 4 ♘c3 d6 5 e4 ♘bd7 6 g3 a6 7 a4 g6 8 ♗g2 ♗g7 9 ♘ge2 0-0 10 0-0 b6? 11 ♗g5! h6 12 ♗d2 ♖b8 13 ♕c1 ♔h7 14 ♕c2 ♘h5? 15 ♔h1! ♖b7 16 f4 exf4 17 gxf4 f5 18 ♗f3 ♘b8 19 ♖g1 ♖bf7 *(D)*



20 ♖xg6!

"I enjoyed a clear superiority, and the positional continuations 20 ♗xh5 or 20 ♖g2 followed by 21 ♖ag1 would have been simple and strong. The text-move, however, is much more convincing."

20...♔xg6 21 ♗xh5+!

This is better than 21 ♖g1+ ♔h7 22 ♗xh5.

21...♔xh5

21...♔h7 22 ♗xf7 ♖xf7 23 ♘g3 is hopeless for Black.

22 ♖g1 ♗xc3

With a wandering king, there is no chance for salvation. The most stubborn was 22...♗f6 23 exf5! ♖g8 24 ♘g3+ ♔h4 (24...♖xg3 25 ♕d1+ ♔h4 26 hxg3+ ♔h3 27 ♕h5+ is amusing) 25 ♗e1 and no further evidence is needed.

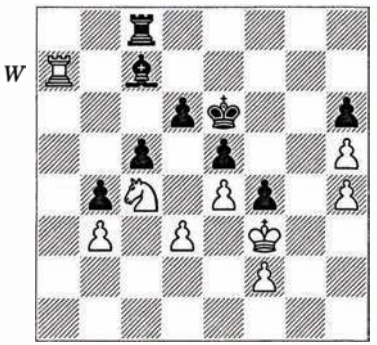
23 ♕xc3 fxe4 24 f5!

A focal move, or 'Novotny', in problemist terminology. Black can't handle the double threat of 25 ♘f4+ and 25 ♕h3+. 24...♖xf5 25 ♕h3+ or 24...♗xf5 25 ♘f4+.

24...♕h4

"Here is another juncture where several roads lead to Rome: 25 ♘g3+, 25 ♘f4+ or 25 ♕e3. I couldn't resist the temptation to sacrifice my queen."

25 ♕h3! ♕xh3 26 ♘f4+ ♔h4 27 ♗e1+ ♕g3 28 ♖xg3 1-0



Jobava – Gershon
Under-20 World Ch, Erevan 2000
White to play

"White is better, as he was during most of the game. I was able to prevent his rook from penetrating along the seventh rank or the g-file (46 ♖a1 ♖g8). Still, White retains winning chances."

46 ♘d2 ♔d7 47 ♘f1 ♖g8 48 ♘h2 ♖g1 49 ♘g4 ♖b1 50 ♘xh6 ♖xb3 51 ♘g8 ♖a3?

"Later analysis proved that the introductory 51...♖xd3+ was the right move."

52 h6 ♖xa7 53 h7 b3 54 h8♕ b2 55 ♘f6+?

"Missing 55 ♕g7+! ♔c6 56 ♘e7+ and now 56...♔b7 loses to 57 ♘d5 b1♕ 58 ♕xc7+ ♔a6 59 ♕xd6+ ♔a5 60 ♕xc5+, while 56...♔b5 is defeated by 57 ♘d5 ♔c6 58 ♘c3 ♖a3 59 ♕xc7+!! (we both missed that) 59...♔xc7 60 ♘b5+ ♔b6 61 ♘xa3."

55...♔c6 56 ♕e8+ ♔b6 57 ♘d5+ ♔a5 58 ♘c3 ♔b4

"At this point I felt rather good: at last, I have some threats and active play."

Just to make sure – you say that you felt good here, with a rook for a queen?

"Yes, I did. Objectively, I was overestimating my chances. I thought I was playing for a win here. I felt that my opponent was not sure of himself; that he was not enjoying the proceedings as he had earlier in the game."

59 ♘b1 ♔b3!

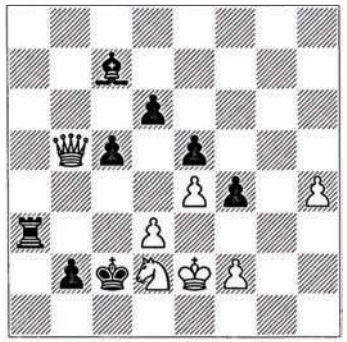
Not 59...♖a1? 60 ♕f7! ♖xb1 61 ♕a2.

60 ♘d2+ ♔c2 61 ♕b5

"I had missed this move. But then I discovered a magnificent idea."

61...♖a3 62 ♔e2 *(D)*

62 ♔g4! is more taxing for Black. He would have to find 62...♖c3! (not 62...♖xd3? 63 ♘b1!) 63 h5 ♗a5!! (intending 64...♗b4) 64 ♕xa5 ♔xd2 65 ♕a2 ♔c1 66 h6 b1♕ 67 ♕xb1+ ♔xb1 68 h7 ♖xd3 69 h8♕ ♖d4, when Black is not worse!



62...f3+! 63 ♔e3 ♗b6!!

With the idea 64...c4+ 65 ♕xb6 ♖xd3#.

64 ♕c4+ ♖c3 65 ♕a4+ ♔c1 66 ♘b3+ ♖xb3 67 ♕xb3

67 ♕c4+?? ♔b1 68 ♕xb3 c4+ 69 ♕xb6 c3 leads to an incredible position, which Black wins!

67...b1♕ ½-½

Now 67...c4+? 68 ♕xb6 c3 fails to 69 ♕b4!. After the text-move, a draw was agreed on account of 68 ♕c3+ ♕c2 69 ♕a1+ ♕b1 70 ♕c3+ and so on.

Do you talk to yourself during a game, conducting a sort of mental dialogue?

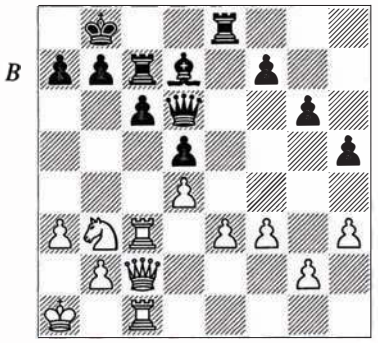
"I frequently give myself internal orders to relax, to play slowly, to restrain myself. In times of crisis, I ask myself: 'What does he want? That's all? Calm down, you'll find something'."

What can you tell me about the following game, which you played in uncharacteristic style?

"This is one of my best games. I had a lot of respect for my esteemed opponent. I was afraid of employing my usual reckless style, and repeatedly instructed my brain to act patiently."

Gershon – Timman
Amsterdam (Lost Boys) 2001

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘f3 d5 4 ♘c3 ♘bd7 5 cxd5 exd5 6 ♗g5 ♗e7 7 e3 c6 8 ♕c2 ♘h5 9 ♗xe7 ♕xe7 10 0-0-0 ♘b6 11 h3 g6 12 ♗d3 ♗e6 13 ♔b1 0-0-0 14 ♘a4 ♘xa4 15 ♕xa4 ♔b8 16 ♔a1 ♘f6 17 ♘d2 ♖he8 18 ♕c2 ♗c8 19 ♘b3 ♘e4 20 ♖he1 ♕h4 21 f3 ♘f2 22 ♖c1 ♘xd3 23 ♕xd3 ♕g3 24 ♕d2 ♖e7 25 ♖c3 h5 26 ♘a5 ♕d6 27 ♖ec1 ♖c7 28 ♕c2 ♗d7 29 a3 ♖e8 30 ♘b3 *(D)*



No clash has developed as yet between the two opposing armies. White's potential prospects, though, are preferable.

30...♗c8

He is better off with 30...♗f5, preventing White's next move.

31 e4 dxe4 32 fxe4 ♖ee7 33 ♕d3 b6 34 ♘d2 ♖ed7 35 ♘f3 ♗b7 36 ♕c2 ♕f4 37 ♖c4 ♕g3 38 ♘e5 ♖d6 39 ♖c3 ♕g5 40 ♘f3 ♕d8 41 d5 ♕e8 42 ♘d4 c5 43 b4!

Decisive.

43...♕e5 44 bxc5 ♖xc5 45 ♖xc5 bxc5 46 ♕xc5 f5 47 ♖c3 a6 48 ♕b4 ♔a7 49 ♖b3 ♖d7 50 ♔a2 ♕c7 51 ♘c6+ ♗xc6 52 dxc6 1-0

There is one more game I'd like you to comment on.

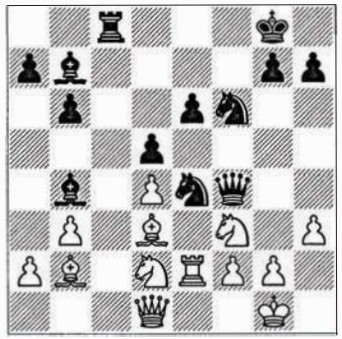
Golod – Gershon
Israeli Ch 2000

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 c3 ♘f6 4 h3 ♘bd7 5 ♗d3 b6 6 0-0 ♗b7 7 ♖e1 ♕c7 8 ♗c2 ♖c8 9 ♘a3 e6 10 b3 ♗e7 11 ♗b2 0-0 12 ♖c1 ♕b8 13 d4 cxd4 14 cxd4 d5 15 e5 ♘e4 16 ♘b1 f5 17 exf6 ♘dxf6 18 ♘bd2? ♕f4! 19 ♗d3 ♗b4 20 ♖xc8 ♖xc8 21 ♖e2 *(D)*

21...♘c3!

In your original notes to the game, you wrote: "Strangely, the b2-bishop is a key factor in White's army. Once it is exchanged, White's defences begin to crumble". [16] *Such healthy, reasonable considerations do not fit in with the image you're selling me...*

"Rest assured, I knew that this was the move – the justifications were found in retrospect. My first inclination was to play 21...♗c3, but the odd



variation 22 ♗c1 ♗a1 23 ♖e1 ♘c3 24 ♘b1 did not seem convincing. Hence I switched to the text-move."

22 ♗xc3 ♖xc3 23 ♖e3 ♘e4 24 ♘f1 ♖c7

Vacating c3 for other pieces was correct, but 24...♖c8 was more accurate, as then the rook is protected.

25 g3 ♕f6 26 ♔g2 ♗c3

In view of the game's progress, it is interesting to know what future you were planning for your bishop.

"At first I just aimed at increasing the pressure on d4."

27 ♘1h2 h5!

"Restricting the knight's mobility. At this point I realized that my bishop could be used to obtain other goals: 28...♗d2! is threatened."

28 ♗b1?!

28 ♕c2!, pinning the bishop, is better, although 28...♖c8 leaves White with many problems.

28...♗d2!

"White's last move made a minor difference, enabling the defence 29 ♖xe4, but my move is still decisive."

29 ♖xe4?

"29 ♖e2 ♖c1 30 ♖xd2 ♖xd1 31 ♖xd1 would pose Black considerable technical difficulties in converting his material advantage."

29...dxe4 30 ♘xd2 ♕xd4

The whole concept of 28...♗d2, and the fact that White is now utterly lost, are rather surprising.

"For me it was natural. Clearly White couldn't hold on against such formidable threats."

31 ♕e2

Or: 31 ♕xh5 ♖f7; 31 ♔g1 e3 32 ♗h7+ ♔h8!. The text-move intends to meet 31...e3+ with 32 ♘df3, but...

31...♕xd2 0-1

Before we part, I'll ask you to step into Black's shoes in the following position.



Black to play

[This position is based on the game R.Rozanky-S.Kagan, Tel-Aviv 1973. We have shifted the rook from c1 (as in the game) to b1, to prevent an alternative winning method later on.]

Tell me what runs through your head: assessment, plans, variations, in no particular order.

"Black is better. His pieces are more active, the h-file is open, the white bishop is out of play. My first thought is to double rooks on the h-file. I try to see what White's plans are, I do not see any dangers that he can pose; maybe g5+, but this is nothing because my bishop controls g1 (in case of 32 g5+ ♔xg5 33 ♖g1+).

"31...♔g5 is the first move that comes to my mind. If 32 ♖h3, then 32...♖ff7 and 33...♖h7; or 32...♕f6 and 33...f3. ... (The breakthrough) 31...c4 does not work here."

31...♔g5

Suppose White builds a set-up of h3 and ♔g2; how are you going to proceed?

"I shall double rooks on the h-file with ideas like ...♕c8xg4+, or sacrifice a rook on h3 coupled with ...♕xg4+, although this (latter idea) is probably less dangerous for White ... Maybe first ...♖h4 and then sacrifice the rook on g4. Anyway, there is nothing for me to worry about on the queenside, I am virtually a piece up (since the c6-bishop is irrelevant)."

Let me show you the game's continuation:

32 h3 ♖h8 33 ♔g2 ♖h4 34 ♖ff1

Now what?

"I think of ...♗e3, followed by ...♕b6 with an eventual ...c4; ... but he'll play ♗b5. ... Now I look at trebling the major pieces on the h-file, sacrificing on h3 and ...f3+. It doesn't work; Black's pieces are not in their right places ... (Maybe) 34...♗e3, to avert 35 ♕f3 ... but he plays 35 ♕e2.

"I have another idea – ...♗e3, ...f3+ with ...♗f4 – it would suit Black to open the f-file. I am in favour of 34...♗e3, though I can't envisage a clear-cut follow-up. I examine 34...♗e3 35 ♕e2 ♖xh3 36 ♔xh3 ♖h7+ 37 ♔g2 ♖h4 ... it looks promising (worth checking)."

Play went:

34...♖ah7 35 ♖h1 ♕h8

Intending 36...♗e3.

36 ♕f3 *(D)*

What do you think?

"I looked at similar formations before ... everything is defended now ... this is a dead-end; I don't see (how to break his position)."



Think again.

(Stays silent for a minute) "How can I force him to weaken (his defences) ... I'll check crazy moves like 36...♗f2 ... (smiles) Hey, this is not so crazy, it is very strong! ... this move turns me on ... I'm going to play it!"

36...♗f2!! 37 ♕xf2

Black intended 37...♗g3. 37 ♔xf2 is met by the same rejoinder.

37...♖xh3 0-1

White will suffer heavy material losses.

It was engaging to watch you tackle this position. You formed an accurate assessment and landed on the right track very quickly, but somehow the crucial tactical device 36...♗f2 eluded you. You said 'it is a dead-end' and it was only when I urged you to take another look – thus hinting that there ***was*** *something there – that you hit upon the bishop's infiltration.*

"Logically, the idea of driving a wedge between the white pieces should emerge. But it didn't. I was beginning to think that a direct, brutal onslaught on the kingside held no promise, and diverted my attention to positional means."

> There is a strong connection between what you believe in and what you find. If you don't believe a solution exists, it is unlikely that you'll uncover one.

"One disadvantage of being an intuitive player is that sometimes your intuition fails you, especially when you're out of form. Had I been a logical type of player, and asked myself 'what is the most promising square for my bishop', I might have discovered this idea sooner."

But as you indicated, such an approach could just as well throw you off balance.

"That's right. I think I'd better stick to my own methods."

6 IM Alexander Mikhalevsky

Born 1958. A former USSR Army Champion (1977). An IM with two GM norms (peak Elo rating: 2495). Alexander works as a professional chess coach. Amongst his students: his brother, GM Victor Mikhalevsky; former European Under-20 Champion, GM Dmitri Tyomkin; and the remarkable Porat family – six young brothers and sisters who play high-level chess.

You devote your career to teaching people how to think properly about all sorts of chess positions. Tell me what constitutes, in essence, a system of chess thinking.

"Basically a player should comprehend what a position consists of. He should be able to identify every positional element, like an open file, a passed pawn, weak squares, etc., and evaluate it."

This is not a system of thinking yet – just a list directing a player to what he should look for.

"Understanding a position is the first step; you can't proceed anywhere without it. Thereafter thinking revolves around three key issues:

1) What does my opponent want?
2) Where should I place my pieces?
3) Which pieces should be exchanged?"

Beginners ask themselves more fundamental queries, like "have I put my queen en prise*?"*

"I regard this to be part of the broader question 'what does my opponent want'.

"Based on the answers to these questions, one forms a game-plan. When I teach small children, I recommend to them to concentrate on developing their pieces and taking control of the centre. When I work with advanced students, the emphasis shifts to choosing a plan tailored to the pawn-structure."

What about tactical calculation?

"Tactics do not stand on their own; they are implemented to assist, or solve, strategic needs."

Is there a useful system for managing our calculations during a game?

"Let's take Kotov's basic model as a starting point [17]: selecting candidate moves, checking each variation until we reach a definite conclusion, comparing the merits of several branches. The value of this model is limited: it might be useful in calculating forced variations. Even then, one shouldn't shut the door to alternative candidate-moves, which emerge in the course of the searching process.

"Unlike Kotov, I advise my students to calculate each plausible variation

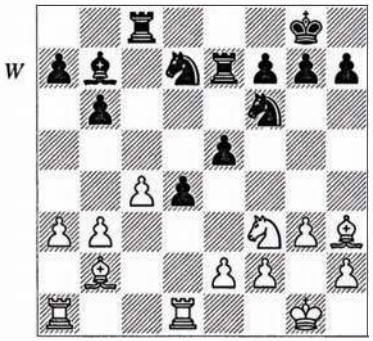
just a little bit, to see if it is viable; to push the calculation only up to a point where one can sense the likely outcome; and then compare the various options. "

A lot of players report that during this mental analysis, they lose track and the position gradually fades from their mind.

"Whenever you feel that you don't see the position clearly, it will be wise to halt the analytical search. Instead of climbing an analytical tree replete with holes and blurred variations, concentrate until the future envisaged position crystallizes and stabilizes in your mind."

In your lectures, which you sporadically put into writing, you express a distinct preference for verbal evaluation over concrete variations.

"In the end, both kinds of reasoning, abstract and concrete, are required. But certainly, verbal evaluation precedes analysis: sometimes you can solve all problems without concrete calculation."



A. Mikhalevsky – Mittelman
Israeli Open Ch 1999
White to play

"I was tempted to hold on to a second pawn, which complicated my task after 23...♘e4 (although I won in the end). 23 f3!, intending 24 e4, would force Black to enter the previous line (23...♖xe2 24 ♖d8+ ♖e8 25 ♖xe8+).

"Anyway, the point is that I made an important decision (19 ♘xe5!), based on general grounds; calculating variations was not crucial."

You claim that this is the way to play 'this sort of position'. What characterizes such a position?

"First of all, following many forced exchanges, we reach an ending. Were it a middlegame, with queens or even a pair of rooks still on the board, the assessment would change sharply. In addition, White possesses a distant passed pawn, while Black has no parallel trump."

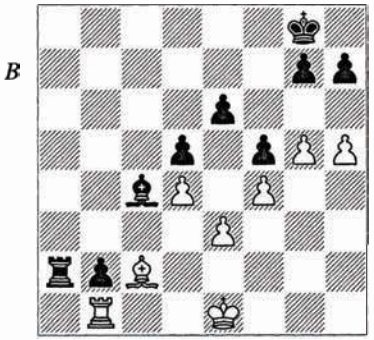
Here is another instance where play is dictated by general principles:

(*See following diagram*)

19 ♘xe5! ♖xe5 20 ♗xd4 ♖ee8

The main line runs 20...♖xe2 21 ♗xf6 ♘xf6 22 ♗xc8 ♗xc8 23 ♖d8+ ♖e8 24 ♖xe8+ ♘xe8. "In this sort of position, a rook plus one pawn is frequently stronger than two minor pieces." For example: 25 ♖d1 ♔f8 26 ♖d8 ♗f5 27 ♖a8 ♗c2 28 b4 ♗d3 29 ♖xa7 ♗xc4 30 a4 with a decisive advantage.

21 ♗xf6 ♘xf6 22 ♗xc8 ♗xc8 23 ♖a2



Neimer – Bluvshtein
Israeli U-12 Ch 1999
Black to play

"Black enjoys a temporary advantage of a pawn, but due to the plan ♔d2-c3, this advantage, in itself, is insufficient.

"The boy who handled the black pieces (nowadays a top Canadian player) devises a winning plan, based on endgame principles like 'schematic thinking', 'do not hurry' and the 'rule of two weaknesses'. Firstly, he forces an exchange of rooks, which establishes the superiority of his position."

1...♖a1! 2 ♔d2 ♖xb1 3 ♗xb1 h6 4 gxh6 gxh6 5 ♔c3 ♗e2 6 ♔xb2 ♗xh5

"Black intends to promote his h-pawn, and/or to infiltrate with his king. He exploits the fact that White cannot defend against both threats."

7 ♔c1 ♔f7 8 ♔d2 ♔f6 9 ♔e1 ♔e7 10 ♗d3 ♔d6 11 ♔d2 ♔c6 12 ♔c3 ♗f3 13 ♗f1 h5 14 ♔b4 ♔b6 15 ♗h3 h4 16 ♗f1 ♗g4 17 ♗g2 h3 18 ♗f1 h2 19 ♗g2 ♗e2 20 ♔c3

Forced; but in the long run White will be unable to prevent the manoeuvre ...♗d3-e4.

20...♔b5 21 ♗h1 ♔a4 22 ♗g2 ♔a3 23 ♗h1 ♗c4 24 ♗f3 ♗a2 25 ♔c2 ♔b4 26 ♗g2 ♗c4 27 ♗h1 ♗f1 28 ♔d2 ♔c4 0-1

"The correct solution," says coach Mikhalevsky, "was found by an eleven-year-old boy by means of general assessment and setting a goal. Indeed, everything is clear and there is no need for supporting variations."

The following game is of a different type.

V. Milov – A. Mikhalevsky
Israeli Ch 1994

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♗e7 4 cxd5 exd5 5 ♗f4 ♘f6 6 e3 0-0 7 ♗d3 b6 8 ♘f3 ♗b7 9 ♘e5 ♘bd7 10 0-0 ♘xe5 11 ♗xe5 ♗d6 12 ♕f3 ♗xe5 13 dxe5 ♘d7 14 ♖ad1 c6

14...♘xe5 is met by 15 ♗xh7+ ♔xh7 16 ♕h5+ ♔g8 17 ♕xe5.

15 ♕h3 g6 16 f4 ♕e7 *(D)*



"I felt confident in this position. Black's pawn-structure is better, and he intends to proceed with ...f6. White's chances lie in tactical play, advancing f5, which involves sacrificial lines.

"I was familiar with these kinds of positions, and felt that I had nothing to fear. Curiously, one of my positive experiences stemmed from an earlier game against the same opponent." [V.Milov-A.Mikhalevsky, Israeli Ch 1992: 1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♗e7 4 cxd5 exd5 5 ♗f4 ♘f6 6 e3 0-0 7 ♗d3 b6 8 ♘ge2 c5 9 0-0 ♗b7 10 ♘g3 g6 11 ♗e5 ♘bd7 12 f4 ♘e8 13 ♕g4 ♘xe5 14 dxe5 c4 15 ♗c2 ♗c5 16 ♖ae1 ♘g7 17 f5 ♕c7! 18 f6 (better is 18 e6 fxe6 19 fxg6 {19 f6 ♘f5 20 ♘xf5 exf5 21 ♗xf5 ♔h8 22 ♗e6 ♕e5 23 f7 ♖ad8 is plainly in Black's favour} 19...♖xf1+ 20 ♘xf1 {20 ♖xf1!?} 20...hxg6 21 ♕xg6 ♕e5 with a slight edge for Black) 18...♘e6 19 ♖f5 d4 20 ♘ce4 d3 21 ♗a4 ♖fd8 22 ♖h5 d2 23 ♖f1 ♗xe3+ 24 ♔h1 ♖d5 25 ♘d6 ♘f4 26 ♖xf4 ♗xf4 27 ♘gf5 ♖xe5 28 ♘e7+ ♕xe7 0-1.]

"White's central pawns are not as strong as they appear, and even if the f-pawn reaches f6, Black's defensive measures are adequate."

Back to the game:

17 f5

In comparison with previous examples, here it is inconceivable to work one's way through just on general considerations.

"Of course. I realized that this was a critical position. White threatens to win with 18 f6, as Black cannot meet this advance with 18...♕xe5 – his d7-knight is hanging. I saw that I could play calmly 17...♖ad8, but what about an immediate 17...♕xe5? (17...♘xe5?? loses outright to 18 f6).

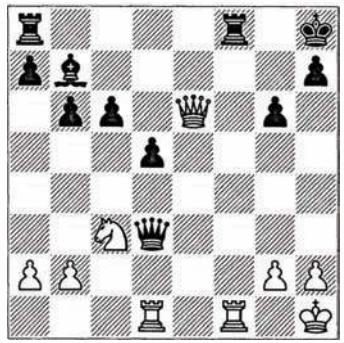
"After some deliberation I opted for what seemed to be a well-calculated risk."

17...♕xe5? 18 fxg6 fxg6 19 ♕xd7 ♕xe3+ 20 ♔h1 ♕xd3!

"Black regains his piece and keeps a two-pawn advantage. I thought that White ought to bail out with perpetual check..."

21 ♕e6+ ♔h8 *(D)*

21...♔g7?? would be a grave error on account of 22 ♕e7+ ♔g8 23 ♖xf8+ ♖xf8 24 ♕xf8+ ♔xf8 25 ♖xd3.



22 ♖f7!!

White threatens mate (23 ♕f6+) and Black is helpless against the various threats.

22...♖xf7 23 ♕xf7 ♕e3

Heavy material losses are unavoidable. 23...♕c4 is met by 24 ♕xb7 ♖f8 25 ♖g1, while 23...♕a6? 24 ♖e1 is suicidal.

24 ♕xb7 ♖e8 25 ♖g1 d4 26 ♘d1 ♕e6 27 ♕xa7 c5 28 ♖f1 d3 29 ♕a3 *(D)*



29...c4 30 ♖f8+ ♔g7 31 ♖xe8 ♕xe8 32 ♕c3+

(1-0, 43)

I wonder what the lesson is. What would prevent you or me, in future, from capturing, as Black, such pawns? Frankly, the fact that 22 ♖f7!! wins appears to be accidental.

"On a superficial level, one must admit that there is a certain element of luck or chance in White's victory. The strength of 22 ♖f7!! is very difficult to appreciate in advance. It might have equally failed.

"On a closer look, Black made an instructive mistake. I was familiar with White's ideas, 18 f6, or 18 e6 fxe6 19 fxg6, and knew that 17...♖ad8 was solid and safe. I fell into 17...♕xe5 believing my opponent had missed 20...♕xd3. Instead, I should have asked myself why he was heading towards this variation, and checked the resulting position carefully."

Sometimes a good idea does not involve inventing something new, but rather deciding if and when to implement well-known devices.

"This is true. In the following game, played by one of my girl-students, all the ingredients of the position are 'on the table', having been demonstrated many times in the past. Still, it was no easy matter to decide what to play, and when to play it, in the particular position that arose."

V. Zaks – R. Eynullaeva

European girls' U-12 Ch, Litohoto 1999

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘c3 ♘f6 4 ♗g5 ♗e7 5 e5 ♘fd7 6 ♗xe7 ♕xe7 7 f4 0-0 8 ♘f3 c5 9 dxc5 ♘c6 10 ♗d3 ♘xc5

The theoretical move is 10...f6.

Now 11 ♗xh7+?! is tempting, but unclear: 11...♔xh7 12 ♘g5+ ♔g6 13 ♕g4 f6!? (13...♘xe5!?) 14 exf6 gxf6 15 ♘xe6+ (or 15 ♘ge4+ ♔f7 16 ♕h5+ with a draw) 15...♔h7! 16 ♕h5+ ♔g8 17 ♕g6+ ♔h8 18 ♕h6+ ♔g8 19 ♕xf8+ ♕xf8 20 ♘xf8 d4.

"Eleven-year-old Victoria Zaks decided, on general grounds, that at this stage, the bishop sacrifice was premature."

11 0-0 a6? *(D)*

11...♘xd3, or 11...f6, is correct.

12 ♗xh7+!

"Intuition and general understanding convinced White that with 11 0-0 a6 inserted, the time was now ripe for this sacrificial blow."

12...♔xh7 13 ♘g5+ ♔g6 14 ♕g4! ♘xe5



14...f6 fails to 15 ♘xd5!! exd5 16 f5+ ♗xf5 17 ♕xf5+ ♔h6 18 ♕h7+ ♔xg5 19 ♖f5+ ♔g4 20 ♕h5#.

15 ♕h4! f5 16 ♕h7+ ♔f6 17 ♖ae1!

"Every single element had been known and practised beforehand. The bishop sacrifice, the king's chase, placing a rook on an open file ... But it takes a proficient practitioner to know how to bake the cake."

17...♘e4 18 ♘cxe4+ dxe4 19 ♘xe4+! fxe4 20 fxe5++ ♔xe5 21 ♕xe4+ ♔d6 22 ♖xf8 1-0

In view of 22...♕xf8 23 ♕b4+.

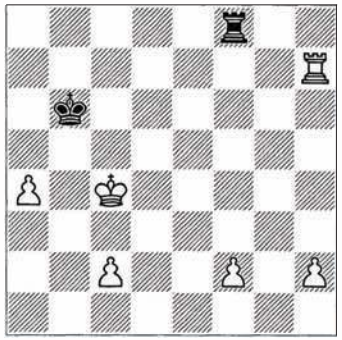
(*See following diagram*)

"Four pawns down, Black is totally lost, of course. But it is still possible to lay traps and make life difficult for White."

How?

"Well, an idea which rests on purely chess foundations would be insufficient. My thoughts here were based, in part, on psychological considerations.

"White must take a little care: if he loses his f- and h-pawns, this would



D. Pedersen – A. Mikhalevsky
Andorra 2001
Black to play

leave a rook ending with a- and c-pawns, which is usually drawn."

45...♔a5

"Now 46 h4 ♖xf2 47 c3 is one simple way of winning. White will advance his h-pawn to the seventh rank, and then push his c-pawn all the way (suppose the black king stands on b7: White plays c6+ and if ...♔c7 then the well-known ♖a8! wins).

"Mentally, White has already chalked up the point. In such a state, one is reluctant to give away even a fraction of one's material advantage. Instead, White should set his sights on the kind of position he is trying to obtain."

46 ♔b3 ♖xf2 47 ♖h5+ ♔a6 48 ♖h8 ♔a5 49 h4 ♖h2 50 h5

"When deciding to postpone resignation and play 45...♔a5, I hoped for a stalemate trap: if White obliged with 51 h6, I could reply 51...♖xh6!.

"What should I do? Maybe 50...♖h1, hoping for a miracle? No, it's too obvious; the rook has nothing to do there. So, I made a move containing (ostensibly) some threat:"

50...♖h4!

"Do I intend 51...♖b4+ 52 ♔a3 ♖xa4+? No; White can easily give away the a-pawn and meet 51...♖b4+ with 52 ♔c3!. By camouflaging my trap, I gave White a reason to continue advancing the h-pawn."

51 h6?? ♖xh6! 52 ♖b8 ♖h5

The game was eventually drawn on move 72.

> We tend to believe that in order to gain tournament success, we need to discover some new chess ideas. As the last two examples demonstrate, ideas need not always be **new**, nor do they have to rest solely on pure **chess** factors!

You have worked with players of various levels. After one gains a decent mastery of the basic elements, what differentiates, say, a 2200 Elo player from a 2500 one?

"A 2200 player frequently assesses positions in an approximate manner; he acts upon a hunch. Sometimes he proves to be right; it happens that in critical positions he hits upon the correct choices, and beats much stronger adversaries. 2500 players, as a rule, are familiar with more types of positions, and their assessments are far more accurate."

Let's take it further: what do you think differentiates a 2500 player from a 2700 elite star?

"Well, the 2700 player's mind is more ordered..."

When I look at Morozevich's games, for example, order is not the word I'd choose.

"By 'order' I mean that his thoughts are more controlled. Top players are far more focused and concentrated; they don't forget to check all the relevant aspects of a position; they seldom lose the thread of the battle.

"In addition, they know their business extremely well. I know certain types of positions very well, but am not so sure about other types. The 2700 players are well versed with almost every position."

Isn't there anything special about these players, regarding their thinking system, the way they tackle problems?

"I don't think that there are fundamental differences. The thing is that while average players are able to produce, on occasion, magnificent ideas or even perfect games, top players do it all the time.

"Ordinary players usually know what they wish to achieve in a certain position. But this is not enough; you have to find strong moves, to assess them correctly ... Players who succeed in accomplishing this task quickly and accurately climb to the top.

"Here is another difference: strong players are very disciplined. Their attitude is akin to that of a sportsman; they play within reasonable boundaries: pursuing analytical research, when required, while satisfying themselves with 'good enough' moves when pressed for time."

When I look at some games by Shirov, I get the feeling that an ordinary player would not be able to conceive them. It is 'something completely different'.

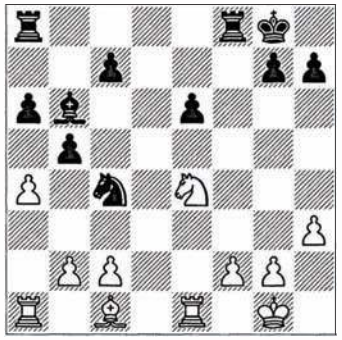
"A player like Alexei Shirov is ready to sacrifice a substantial amount of material to obtain a position to his taste. Ordinary players may feel that there is 'something' in the position but wouldn't dream of sacrificing, say, a whole rook for this nebulous 'something'. They wouldn't believe the compensation was worthwhile.

"I think that deep assessment of a position (as Shirov is conducting) is not only about the pure theoretical view of 'who is better', but also embodies an estimation of the obstacles you create for your opponent. Once in a while an accurate positional assessment is less important than an evaluation of what kind of problems you pose your opponent, and how difficult it will be for him to solve them."

The next game, by your GM brother, is very impressive.

Grünfeld – V. Mikhalevsky
Tel-Aviv Open Ch 1994

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♗b5 a6 4 ♗a4 ♘f6 5 0-0 ♘xe4 6 d4 b5 7 ♗b3 d5 8 dxe5 ♗e6 9 ♘bd2 ♗c5 10 ♘xe4 dxe4 11 ♗xe6 ♕xd1 12 ♖xd1 fxe6 13 ♘g5 0-0 14 ♘xe4 ♗b6 15 a4 ♘xe5 16 h3 ♘c4 17 ♖e1 *(D)*



17...♖ac8!!

"17...♘d6 is tempting, unleashing a threat against the vulnerable f2-pawn. But White has at his disposal the riposte 18 ♗e3!; e.g., 18...♘xe4 19 ♗xb6 or 18...♗xe3 19 ♖xe3. Notice that White, having the better pawn-structure, would gain from these exchanges."

18 ♔f1

"18 b3 ♘d6 19 ♗e3 ♘xe4 20 ♗xb6 cxb6 21 ♖xe4 allows 21...♖xc2 – the point of Black's mysterious 17th move."

Could you define the goal of Black's 17th move?

"Sometimes, a plan does not have an independent right to exist. It is formed against, or devised in relation to, the opponent's plan. Black's 17th move implements the famous 'prophylactic thinking'. Its purpose is to foil White's intentions; only then can Black proceed with his own ideas, like pressure on f2."

> When somebody says 'I have a great idea!', we tend to interpret this as some active thought or action. In a chess duel, often the essence of an idea is just to thwart the opponent's plans.

> The notion that no idea, move, or plan stands on its own, regardless of one's opponent's intentions, is worth remembering.

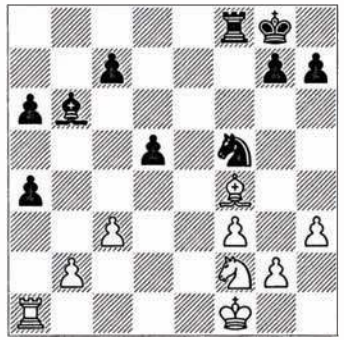
18...♘d6! 19 f3 ♘f5! 20 c3 ♖cd8

Having completed its duty on c8, the rook assumes a more active role.

21 ♗f4 ♖d5! 22 ♖ed1 bxa4! 23 ♖xd5

23 ♖e1! is stronger.

23...exd5 24 ♘f2 *(D)*



24...g5!

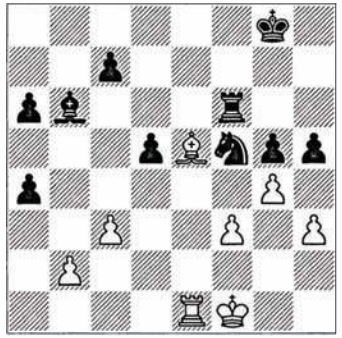
"The general idea is to deflect the f4-bishop from a post where it covers both e3 and g3. This thought is backed up by concrete calculations: 25 ♗xg5? ♘g3+ 26 ♔g1 ♗xf2+ 27 ♔xf2 ♘e4+; or 25 ♗d2 ♘g3+ 26 ♔g1 ♖e8 27 ♖e1 ♖xe1+ 28 ♗xe1 ♘e2+! 29 ♔f1 ♘f4 30 ♗d2 (or 30 ♘d1 ♘d3 threatening 31...♘xb2! followed by ...a3) 30...♗xf2 31 ♗xf4 gxf4 and Black wins."

25 ♗e5 ♖e8! 26 ♘g4 ♖e6 27 ♖e1 h5!

Simplifying into a won ending.

28 ♘f6+ ♖xf6 29 g4 *(D)*

29 ♗xf6?? ♘g3#.



29...♘e3+! 30 ♖xe3 ♗xe3 31 ♗xf6 hxg4 32 hxg4 ♔f7 33 ♗h8 c5 34 ♔e2 ♗c1 35 ♔d3 ♗xb2 36 ♔c2 ♗a1! 37 ♗e5 0-1

37 ♔b1 would lose to 37...d4! 38 ♔xa1 d3 39 ♔b1 c4! 40 ♗d4 d2 41 ♔c2 a3.

Near the end of our meeting, tell me your view regarding the effect of chess computers on over-the-board players.

"Its positive sides are well-known, so I'd say something about its negative influences. Young players analyse with tools like Fritz, and they take its word (or rather, its numerical evaluation) for granted. The snag is that on many occasions the machine is dead wrong.

"I am prone to this error of judgement, too. Recently I began playing correspondence chess, and in one game chose a move I didn't believe in, only because Fritz insisted that it was the best option. I'm still suffering from its consequences."

Any tips on preferred training methods?

"I recommend to young students of the royal game to trust their own feeling and understanding. If an analytical position seems to be foggy and they are at a loss as to what is going on, players should focus on positional factors, try to answer the three aforementioned basic questions, and not rush into switching Fritz on.

"One final piece of advice: I benefit greatly from solving studies and recommend it to all improving players. These composed works have a unique correct solution: there is always one good move, and only one. Thus we are constantly compelled to find **the** move, which is both challenging and rewarding."

7 GM Gadi Rechlis

Born 1967. Israeli Champion 1988. Represented Israel in Olympiads in 1988 and 1990. Rechlis qualified for the Manila Interzonal (1990) and achieved a respectable 7/13 score, winning against Portisch and Miles. Regarded by many as a great natural talent, with a peak Elo rating of 2535, it seems that he has not fully realized his potential. Rechlis works as a computer programmer.

What do you think differentiates grandmasters from average chess players?

"Knowledge, experience, and a feeling where things are heading.

"This difference reveals itself in a narrow range of positions. An acquaintance of mine is a decent player, but not more than that. His skill in solving endgame studies, however, by far exceeds that of a GM. He delves straight into the composer's intended points. Grandmasters excel in practical chess; this constitutes their expertise."

And what differentiates super-grandmasters from run-of-the-mill ones?

"The strongest players employ a practical thinking method. They are not diverted by fancy lines. When I notice an interesting possibility, a captivating sacrifice, for instance, I invest time in examining it, notwithstanding its practical value. But top stars spend their time concentrating solely on relevant variations."

Are there typical situations where it might be easier for a player to find good ideas?

"We tend to discover good ideas when we tread on familiar terrain, playing our pet opening systems and stratagems. I believe that in order to find new ideas, you have to be acquainted with the old ones.

"Another instance occurs in difficult positions. With their back to the wall, players will frequently hit on the correct path. This is why the books advise you to give your opponent some room for choice. When people have alternatives, they may err; but when there is only one reasonable move, chances are that they will arrive at the right decision."

Does the task of spotting an idea in attack and in defence, for yourself and for your opponent, occupy the same difficulty level?

"I find it easier to discover plans and moves while being on the offensive. I also succeed in finding ideas for myself more often than in unravelling my opponent's schemes. This is natural – in the latter case, you are in the dark as to what goes on in his head."



Ehlvest – Rechlis
Manila (Interzonal) 1990
White to play

21 ♖ad1(!)

It turned out that the purpose of this move was to evacuate a1 for the white knight(!). Now, how can one fathom such an idea from Black's point of view?

"Admittedly this is not an easy task but I think that nowadays I would have spotted the point. You see, White doesn't have many options. The advance f4 is impossible, as it leaves e4 undefended. Meanwhile Black is preparing ...♘g7 followed by ...f5. I always ask myself: 'how can my opponent improve his position?' In the present position, the answer is: 'by transferring his knight to d5' (via a1-c2-e3).

"In the game, I failed to get to the bottom of White's last move. I should have reminded myself that being no sucker, Ehlvest does not make pointless moves."

21...♘a6?

Intending to regroup with ...♘b8-c6-e5. Instead, 21...♘g7! 22 ♘a1 f5 is correct.

22 ♘a1! ♘g7 23 ♘c2 f5 24 ♘e3! f4

24...fxe4 25 fxe4 ♗xe4? is refuted by 26 ♘g4 ♘f5 27 ♖xe4!. Black's careless 21st move allowed White to execute his plan undisturbed.

25 ♘d5 ♘h5 26 a4 ♘b8 27 a5 bxa5 28 ♗c2 h6 29 ♖a1 g5 30 ♗f2 ♘f6 31 ♖xa5 ♘c6 32 ♖a2 ♖a8 33 ♖ea1 a6 34 ♗d3 ♘e5 35 ♗e2 ♖ee8 36 ♖b2 ♖a7 37 ♘xf6+?! ♕xf6 38 ♖b6 ♘f7? 39 ♗xc5 ♕e7 40 ♗xd6 ♕d8 41 c5 1-0

R. Lev – Rechlis
Bern (zonal) 1990

1 ♘f3 ♘f6 2 c4 b6 3 ♘c3 ♗b7 4 d4 e6 5 a3 d5 6 cxd5 ♘xd5 7 ♕a4+ ♘d7 8 ♘xd5 ♗xd5 9 ♗g5 f6!? 10 ♗h4?! *(D)*



Describe your thoughts in this position.

"I realized that if left uninterrupted, White will proceed with 11 ♕c2 followed by 12 e4. If he does, he will gain a significant edge. So, I asked myself how I could thwart his plan. I began by contemplating 10...c5. But what am I to do if he just captures? The continuation 11 dxc5 ♗xc5 12 e4 ♗b7 13 ♖d1 is unappealing.

"Then the idea 10...c5 11 dxc5 b5 crossed my mind. The thinking-process was gradual, step by step.

"Then I thought about the bishop sacrifice on the 14th move. I asked myself if this was the kind of position in which one should check sacrificial options."

Did you really pose yourself this mental question during play?

"I did. You see, there are many positions which do not lend themselves to sacrificial themes. But in this particular position, with White undeveloped, and with his king still in the centre, sacrificing is a viable option."

10...c5! 11 dxc5 b5! 12 ♕xb5

After 12 ♕c2 ♘xc5 Black is fine.

12...♖b8 13 ♕a4 ♖xb2 14 e4 *(D)*



14...♗xe4!

"By choosing 10...c5 I had committed myself to a whole package: I had to foresee the subsequent moves and decide upon the bishop sacrifice; otherwise I'm busted. I thought about 10...c5 for a long time, perhaps 40 minutes. I was reluctant to sacrifice, but could not think of reasonable alternatives. I checked the variations, saw that there was no clear refutation. I loved the idea, knew that Ronen Lev wouldn't feel happy in this sort of position, and decided to go for it."

15 ♗c4

15 ♕xe4 ♕a5+ 16 ♔d1 ♘xc5 is the main line. Then 17 ♕c6+ ♔f7 followed by ...♗e7 and ...♖d8 enables Black to develop a most dangerous initiative. 17 ♕c4 is stronger, with a possible continuation 17...g5 18 ♗g3 g4 19 ♕xg4 ♗h6 20 ♕d4 0-0!! 21 ♕xb2 (21 ♗c7 *ed.*) 21...♕a4+ 22 ♔e1 (22 ♕c2 ♖d8+) 22...♕e4+ 23 ♕e2 ♘d3+ 24 ♔d1 ♕a4+ 25 ♕c2 ♘b2+ winning.

15...♗c2 16 ♕c6 ♕a5+ 17 ♔f1 ♕xc5 18 ♕xe6+ ♔d8 19 ♗g3 ♘b6 20 ♗e2 ♗b3 21 ♕e4 ♕d5 22 ♕xd5+? ♗xd5 23 ♘d4 ♗xa3

Black has emerged from the complications with a material and positional superiority, and after some further vicissitudes, went on to win on the 51st move.

Tal and Geller once opined that in conducting an intuitive attack, there is a limit to the amount of material that can be sacrificed. [18] *What do you think?*

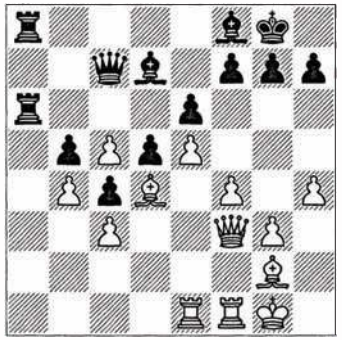
"In the game vs Lev, I thought my initiative was worth a piece, and that I would enter gladly into this kind of

position even at the cost of a rook. Of course, to give up a queen just for an initiative would be too much..."

During the late 1980s you won two games against very strong opponents. These games shared certain features.

Rechlis – Korchnoi
Beer-Sheba 1988

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘c3 ♘f6 4 e5 ♘fd7 5 f4 c5 6 ♘f3 ♘c6 7 ♗e3 ♕b6 8 ♘a4 ♕a5+ 9 c3 c4 10 b4 ♕c7 11 g3 b5 12 ♘c5 a5 13 a3 ♗e7 14 ♗g2 0-0 15 0-0 ♘xc5 16 dxc5 ♗d7 17 ♘d4 ♘xd4 18 ♗xd4 ♖a6 19 ♕f3 axb4 20 axb4 ♖fa8 21 ♖ae1 ♗f8 22 h4! *(D)*



"This is my kind of position. My opponent just awaits developments, and this is fine by me; I am in no hurry. I have a definite advantage, there is no risk whatsoever ... Human nature tends to reveal itself sooner or later – people collapse in difficult situations ... how long can one suffer and find 'only' moves?"

22...♖a2 23 ♖e2 ♕b7 24 h5 ♖xe2 25 ♕xe2 ♖a3 26 f5 exf5 27 h6 ♗e6

27...g6 is met by 28 e6! and 29 ♕e5.

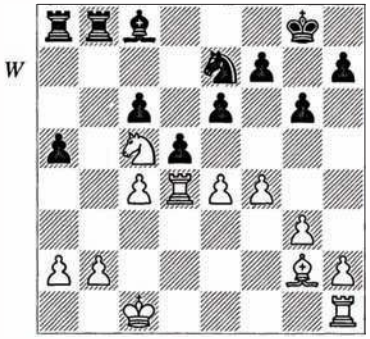
28 hxg7 ♗xg7 29 ♗h3 ♕a6 30 ♕h5 ♖a1 31 ♗xf5 ♖xf1+ 32 ♔xf1 h6 33 ♔g2 ♔f8 34 ♗xe6 ♕xe6 35 g4 ♔e7 36 ♕f5 ♔d7 37 ♔h3 ♗f8 38 ♗e3 ♗g7 39 ♗d4 ♗f8 40 ♔g3 ♔e7?

40...♗g7 is better. Now White's king penetrates.

41 ♔h4 ♕c6 42 ♕f6+ ♕xf6+ 43 exf6+ ♔e6 44 ♔g3 ♔d7 45 ♔f3 ♔e6 46 ♔f4 h5 47 g5 1-0

Rechlis – Gelfand
European Team Ch, Haifa 1989

1 e4 c5 2 ♘c3 d6 3 f4 ♘c6 4 ♘f3 e6 5 g3 ♘ge7 6 ♗g2 g6 7 d4 cxd4 8 ♘xd4 ♗g7 9 ♗e3 0-0 10 ♕d2 d5 11 ♘xc6 bxc6 12 0-0-0 ♗a6 13 ♗d4 ♗xd4 14 ♕xd4 ♕b6 15 ♘a4 ♕xd4 16 ♖xd4 ♖fb8 17 ♘c5 ♗c8 18 c4 a5 *(D)*



"As in the Korchnoi game, White dictates the course of battle. Here he controls the dark squares and his pieces are more active.

"Although I hadn't seen a concrete winning plan, I thought in general terms and arrived at the conclusion that I should exchange a pair of rooks and advance my king to the centre.

"In this kind of positional struggle, my thinking is focused on ensuring that my opponent does not free himself. That even if I do not succeed in improving my position, you, buddy, are not going to move at all!

"It seems a bit sadistic, I suppose, but such an approach is very effective."

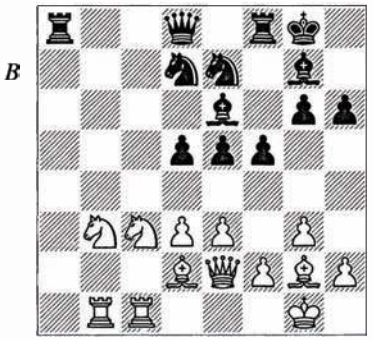
19 ♖hd1 ♖a7 20 ♖1d3 ♔g7 21 ♖b3 ♖xb3 22 axb3 h6 23 ♔d2 g5 24 ♔c3 gxf4 25 gxf4 ♖c7 26 ♖d1 ♘g6 27 ♖f1 dxe4 28 ♗xe4 f5 29 ♗h1 ♔f6 30 ♔d4 ♘xf4 31 ♘e4+! fxe4 32 ♖xf4+ ♔e7 33 ♗xe4 ♖d7+ 34 ♔e5 ♖d2 35 ♖h4 ♖xb2 36 ♖xh6 ♗d7 37 h4 ♔d8 38 h5 ♔c7 39 ♖h8 ♖xb3 40 h6 ♖h3 41 h7 1-0

Let's look at the following game, which illustrates an amazing transformation in the span of a few moves.

Rechlis – Chernin
Vienna 1996

1 c4 e5 2 ♘c3 ♘f6 3 ♘f3 ♘c6 4 a3 g6 5 g3 ♗g7 6 ♗g2 0-0 7 0-0 d6 8 d3 h6 9 ♖b1 ♘d4 10 ♘d2 c6 11 b4 a6 12 a4 ♗e6 13 e3 ♘f5 14 ♘b3 ♘d7 15 b5 axb5 16 axb5 ♘e7 17 ♗d2 f5 18 ♕e2 d5 19 bxc6 bxc6 20 cxd5 cxd5 21 ♖fc1 *(D)*

After 21 moves, not a single soldier within your army has crossed the third rank. Yet eleven moves from now you're all over him.



"Chernin is a specialist in the Grünfeld Defence; so I opted for an obscure position, in which he didn't have a clear-cut plan. In the diagram position I wondered whether to offer a draw or to press for a win. The longer I looked at my position, the more I liked it. I was not familiar with pawnless queenside set-ups beforehand, and it transpired that my position contained great potential."

21...e4?! 22 ♘b5 ♗f7 23 d4 ♖a2 24 ♕e1 ♕b6 25 ♗f1

"My last two moves are retreats, but make no mistake – White is ready for the kill. I was very pleased here, realizing that Black was helpless."

> An essential ingredient in forming an opinion on the merits of a given position consists of assessing its future potential. A grandmaster does not halt at evaluating the current state of affairs; rather, he forecasts how good his position might become.

25...♕f6 26 ♖c7 ♘b8 27 ♘a5 ♘a6 28 ♖d7 ♖a8 29 ♘a7

Fritz points out an alternative win: 29 ♖d6 ♕g5 30 ♘c3! ♖xa5 31 ♘xe4 dxe4 32 ♗xa5 and the a6-knight is lost. The text-move is more aesthetic and systematic.

29...♘b8 30 ♖c7 ♗e8 31 ♖bb7 ♗f8 32 ♗b4

Quite an invasion by White's pieces!

32...♖xa5 33 ♗xe7 1-0

Rechlis – V. Milov
French League 2000

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 a6 5 ♘c3 b5 6 ♗d3 ♗b7 7 0-0 ♘c6 8 ♘xc6 ♗xc6 9 ♖e1 ♘f6 10 e5 b4 11 ♘e4 ♘xe4 12 ♗xe4 ♕c7 *(D)*



13 ♗d2!

"This is an apt demonstration of my way of thinking, on the same lines as the previous examples. I ask myself: what does he want? Answer: to complete his development with ...♗e7, ...0-0, and to create pressure on the c-file, with ...♖c8. Now, what do I want? Answer: to develop my pieces, to create threats, to foil his plans.

"I also gear myself towards identifying critical positions, where decisions have extra significance. I find the position after Black's 12th move to be a critical one.

"I thought: the dark-squared bishop has to move somewhere. 13 ♗f4, to prevent ...d6 (or ...d5) looks plausible; but 13 ♗d2 is even better. One basic idea is to play c3, opening the c-file for a white rook on c1. Note that 13...♗e7 is met by the unpleasant 14 ♕g4. In a way, the whole struggle now revolves around White's attempts to hinder Black from completing his development."

13...♖d8 14 ♕g4 ♗xe4 15 ♕xe4 d5 16 ♕d3 ♕b6?

"One commentator asserted that after the superior 16...♕c4 Black would attain equality, but I prefer White's chances even in this case: 17 b3 ♕xd3 18 cxd3 ♗e7 19 ♖ec1."

17 a3! bxa3 18 b4! a5

Not 18...♗xb4? 19 ♖eb1 a5 20 c3.

19 bxa5 ♕c6 20 ♖eb1 ♖a8 21 ♖b6 ♕d7 22 ♖ab1 ♖c8 23 ♖b8 ♗e7 24 ♖xc8+ ♕xc8 25 ♕b5+ ♕d7 26 ♕b8+ ♗d8 27 a6 1-0

Sutovsky – Rechlis
Israeli League 2003

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♗b5 d6 4 0-0 ♗d7 5 ♖e1 ♘f6 6 c3 a6 7 ♗f1 ♗g4 8 d3 e6 9 h3 ♗h5 10 g4 ♗g6 11 ♘h4 d5 12 g5 *(D)*

"I was surprised by White's last move, but concrete calculation revealed its merits: if 12...♘g8 (12...♘d7? 13 exd5 and 12...♘h5 13 ♗e2 are bad for



Black), 13 ♕e2 intending to storm with f4-f5. In this event, the position of the g6-bishop is precarious: if Black ever plays ...h6, it will be strongly countered by ♘xg6.

"As a rule, if I can see where my opponent is heading, I look for ways to foil his plans. In this position, I gathered that if my g6-bishop left its post, the white h4-knight might look silly. Now, how could I exploit these factors? Then I conceived the move 12...♗h5. The reply 13 ♕b3, on first impressions, seems to refute my design. Then the idea of 13...c4 cropped up..."

You describe a wholly systematic approach.

"Well, I wish I was as systematic in life as I am in my chess thinking."

> Here we witness notions of 'restriction' and 'prophylactic thinking' embedded into the routine screening methods. On each turn, diagnosis of our opponent's goals, and search for means of parrying them, precede the process of choosing candidate moves.

12...♗h5! 13 ♕b3 c4! 14 dxc4 dxc4

"I had originally planned 14...♘xe4 15 cxd5 ♘c5, but here I forced myself to take another glance at the position and found a better continuation."

15 ♕xc4

15 ♕xb7? and 15 ♗xc4? lose outright to 15...♘a5.

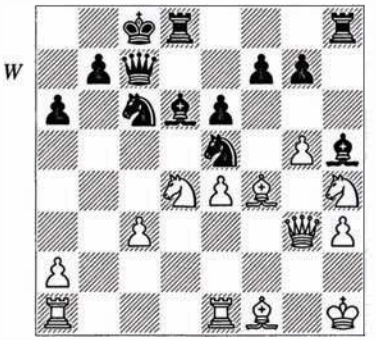
15...♘d7

"This was it. Faced with 16...h6, White has drifted into an inferior position (16 ♘g2? ♘de5)."

16 ♕d3 h6 17 ♕g3 ♘de5

Simpler and stronger is 17...hxg5 18 ♗xg5 f6 19 ♗e3 g5 20 ♘f3 ♘de5 21 ♘bd2 ♗d6 with a clear advantage for Black.

18 f4 hxg5 19 fxg5 ♗d6 20 ♗f4 ♕b6+ 21 ♔h1 ♕xb2 22 ♘d2 ♕b6 23 ♘b3 ♕c7 24 ♘d4 0-0-0 *(D)*



"Black has regained his pawn, and his game is easy to handle. No weaknesses, solid position."

25 ♘xc6 ♘xc6 26 e5 ♗c5 27 ♗g2 ♖d7 28 ♖ab1 ♖hd8 29 ♗e4 g6 30 ♘g2 ♕a5 31 ♘e3 ♕a4 32 ♗c2 ♕xa2 33 ♗b3 ♕d2 34 ♘c4 ♗f2 35 ♗xd2

♗xg3 36 ♖f1 ♖xd2 37 ♖xf7 ♖f2 38 ♘d6+ ♖xd6 39 ♖xf2 ♗xe5 40 ♖e1 ♔b8 41 ♖e3 ♔a7 42 ♗c2 ♖d5 43 ♖f8 ♖c5 44 h4 ♗xc3 45 ♖xe6 ♘d4 46 ♖xg6 ♘xc2 47 ♖gg8 ♖c4 48 ♖c8 ♖xh4+ 49 ♔g2 ♘e3+ 0-1

Look at the following two positions and tell me what you think about them.



Manuelyan – Negolescu
European corr. Ch 1986
White to play

"White is better; I like his position. My first thought is 15 ♕g4, but after 15...♕g6 there is no fork on e7. The c5-bishop also prevents me from playing 15 ♕xd5. I'd search for ways to get rid of the c5-bishop, before he plays ...♘c6, overprotecting e7 ... If I can't kick the bishop away, I'll think about 15 ♘xg7 ♔xg7 16 ♖f6 ... (This) doesn't look too promising, though it's interesting: If 16...♕xe5 then maybe 17 ♕g4+ ♔xf6 18 ♗f4 ... there is also 17 ♗h6+ ♔xf6 18 ♕g4..."

Would you play it?

"I would check these continuations. Should they fail to yield the desired results, I'd go for 15 ♕h5 and if 15...♘c6, then 16 ♗f4 followed by 17 ♖ae1, keeping a healthy position."

Try to think without talking, until you reach a decision.

(After 5 seconds) "15 b4 wins on the spot (laughs). If 15...♗xb4, 16 ♕g4 captures the bishop."

Suppose he answers 15 b4 with 15...♗b6. Now what?

"16 ♕g4 ... or 16 ♗h6 ... Yes, 16 ♗h6 is good enough – I'll play it."

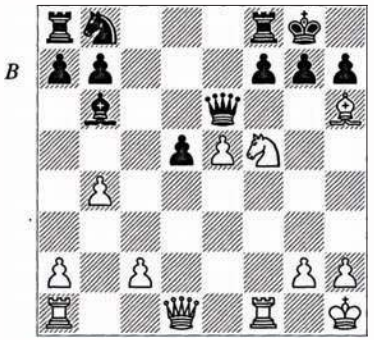
[Notice that Rechlis doesn't mention 16 ♕xd5 – a natural choice – because he knows that one shouldn't 'sell' a position like this for a mere pawn. Indeed, after 16...♘c6, the position is not so clear].

The game went:

15 b4! ♗b6

15...♕xe5 16 ♗h6 gxh6 17 bxc5; 15...♗e7 is met by 16 ♕xd5 or 16 ♕g4.

16 ♗h6! *(D)*

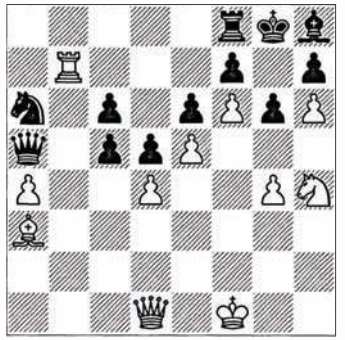


16...♘c6

16...gxh6 17 ♕g4+ ♕g6 18 ♘e7+.

17 ♗xg7 ♖fe8 18 ♗f6 ♘xe5 19 ♕h5! 1-0

19...♕xf6 20 ♘h6+; after other moves White plays 20 ♕h6.



S. Bernstein – Heal
New York 1940
White to play

"White appears to be a lot better: his rook is active; Black's bishop is buried..."

Do not explain things for me – just verbalize your thoughts.

"This is precisely what I'm doing."

Let me make sure that I understand what you're saying. You feel, intuitively, that White is a lot better; yet you take time and effort to understand why you feel that way?

"Exactly. If I feel positively about the position, I'll try to clarify to myself what makes me happy. I try not to leave things on the purely intuitive level."

> Mental questions are multi-purpose. On the one hand, they direct us towards correct solutions; on the other hand, they may prove beneficial in supporting and verifying our intuitive feelings.

"Well, 29 ♘f3 is good; in addition, I'd check ideas connected with 29 ♘f5..."

In the game White played 29 ♕c2. Now, take the black side.

"Well, we all see that White wants to capture on g6."

(Do we "all" see, within two seconds, that White threatens 30 ♘xg6!! hxg6 31 ♕xg6+! fxg6 32 h7#? I wonder.)

"White's last move also prevents Black from continuing 29...♕c3. Of course, I (can) move my rook ... and there is also 29...♘b4 intending 30...♕a6+ ...

"I would go for 29...♘b4. If I move the f8-rook, my position stinks. At least, with 29...♘b4 I get some play. (He goes on to examine the moves 30 ♕xc5, 30 ♗xb4 and 30 ♕e2.)

"I'm out of my mind! On 29...♘b4 White has 30 ♘xg6 up his sleeve ... Wait: 30...♕a6+ 31 ♕e2 hxg6 or 31 ♔g1 ♕xb7 32 ♘e7+ ♕xe7 ... I have a problem...

"... Got it! 33 ♕d2, threatens both mate and the queen. Damn, he replies 33...♗xf6. (frustrated): What, (is there) no follow-up?"

Let's stop here. What is your current assessment?

"I still like White. Even if play proceeds 29...♘b4 30 ♗xb4 ♕a6+ 31

♔g2 ♕xb7 32 ♗xc5 I'm playing with two pieces vs a rook, since the h8-bishop is dead."

The game went **29...♘b4 30 ♘xg6 hxg6?? 31 ♕xg6+ 1-0**

By the way, after 29 ♕c2 ♘b4 30 ♘xg6, apart from 30...♕a6+, another defensive device is 30...♗xf6.

I assume that the dead h8-bishop and the white rook on the seventh rank suggested to you that it was a one-sided struggle, but play proved to be more intricate than you imagined.

"I guess you are right."

From Rechlis's suggested line, 29...♘b4 30 ♗xb4 (30 ♘xg6 ♕a6+ 31 ♕e2 hxg6 32 ♕xa6 ♘xa6 33 g5! is an interesting idea of GM Greenfeld) 30...♕a6+ 31 ♔g2 ♕xb7 32 ♗xc5, play may proceed 32...♖a8 33 ♘f3 ♖a6 followed by 34...♕a8.

8 GM Boris Gelfand

Born 1968. Gelfand won the European Junior Championship in 1987/8, and in 1990 he climbed to the 3rd place on the world Elo list. He has remained a top player ever since, belonging to the 2700-club. Boris participated in five Olympiads, representing the USSR, Belarus and Israel. He played in several candidates matches, reaching as far as the semi-final stages, knocking out stars like Kramnik and Adams on the way.

Once, in the course of a discussion, GM Pfleger said that in the last resort, nobody fully knows the reasoning by which he arrives at a certain move. GM Schmid strongly disagreed, stating that he knew very well why he played his moves. [19] *What do you think?*

"I can't always reconstruct how I hit upon a certain idea. Usually you get a general strategic or tactical direction, and then you seek how to implement it.

"On some occasions you feel that an idea ought to be right for you, but you can't prove it; so you act on intuition. At other times, you blunder, miss some lines or a counter-idea by your opponent, only to find out that your error turned out to be a good move after all."

What do you do when you fail to detect good ideas?

"When this happens, I analyse each reasonable variation in a methodical way, checking what is hiding there. I give it some time, and if I don't find gold, I move on."

So, your method of arriving at a decision is closely connected with your clock position.

"Right. You can't allow your opponent a big lead in time. Of course, if I'm lost, time is not a constraint; but if the position is tenable, I allot myself a specified amount of time to reach a decision.

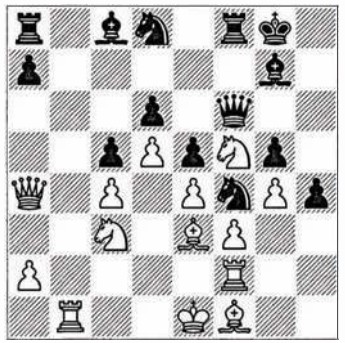
"In a game from Budapest, 2003, my opponent, Peter Acs, reflected on a certain position for one hour. I found it strange, because it was not the sort of position in which you must find 'only' moves. Later in the game he was short of the time he had spent on that position."

> The amount of thinking time consumed by both players may be viewed as an integral part of the overall assessment.

"Usually, if you don't see a move in the first few minutes, you are unlikely to see it at all."

But sometimes you arrive at an idea only after long deliberation.

"Yes, it does happen. I recall a funny episode from my own experience."



Gelfand – Dominguez
Moscow 2001
Black to play

27...♘f7?

"A grave error; however, it took me 10 or 15 minutes (!) to see the elementary refutation."

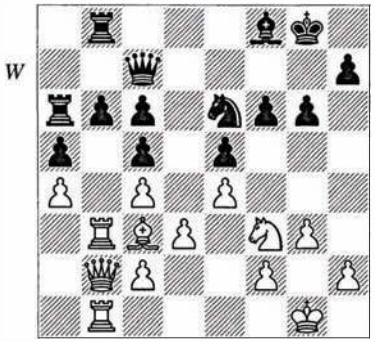
28 ♘xg7! ♔xg7 29 ♕c6
(1-0, 39)

"Black loses a piece. I suppose that 28 ♘xg7 didn't come easily because stereotyped thinking warns us against exchanging the powerful f5-knight for the miserable g7-bishop."

Let us go over some other games of yours.

Gelfand – Van Wely
Plovdiv 2003

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♗b5 g6 4 0-0 ♗g7 5 ♖e1 e5 6 ♗xc6 dxc6 7 d3 ♕e7 8 ♘bd2 ♘f6 9 ♘c4 ♘d7 10 ♗d2 0-0 11 a3 b6 12 ♗c3 a5 13 a4 ♗a6 14 b3 ♖fb8 15 g3 ♗xc4 16 bxc4 ♘f8 17 ♕c1 ♕c7 18 ♕b2 f6 19 ♖a3 ♘e6 20 ♖b3 ♗f8 21 ♖b1 ♖a6 *(D)*



What is White's idea? You have created strong pressure against b6, but Black's defences appear sturdy; so, what's the point?

"First of all, I had played this opening before, against Radjabov, so I was familiar with some game-plans. My pressure along the b-file forced Black to post his rook awkwardly on a6, since doubling rooks on the b-file would fail to ♗xa5. Now I was going to transfer my major pieces to the kingside, in an attempt to open a second front."

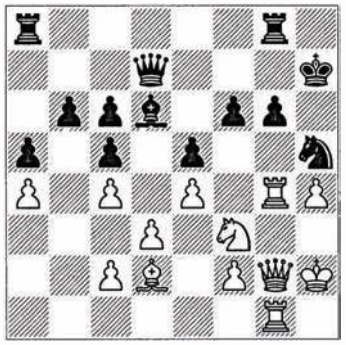
22 ♕c1 ♗d6 23 ♕f1 ♕d7 24 h4 h5

"24...♘d4 prevents White's next move. In this case I intended 25 ♘xd4 cxd4 26 ♗d2 with an eventual f2-f4."

25 ♕h3 ♗c7 26 ♗d2 ♖d8 27 ♔h1

"White controls more space. He can manoeuvre and rearrange his pieces faster than Black."

27...♔h7 28 ♖g1 ♖aa8 29 g4 ♘g7 30 ♔h2 hxg4 31 ♖xg4 ♘h5 32 ♖b1 ♖g8 33 ♖bg1 ♗d6 34 ♕g2 *(D)*



A remarkable shift of effort – you now operate on the kingside.

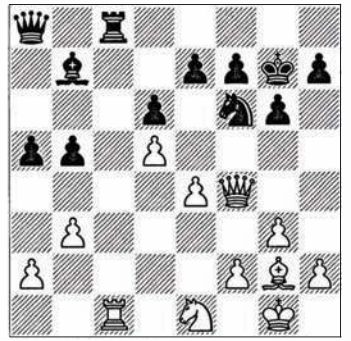
"After the game, a friend brought to my attention that I had trebled my major pieces on two different knight's files!

"Objectively Black ought to hold this position, but in a practical game, with limited counter-chances, it is not easy."

34...♕f7 35 ♖g5 ♗e7 36 ♖g4 ♗f8? 37 ♖b1 ♖a6?! 38 ♘g1! ♗h6 39 ♗xh6 ♔xh6 40 ♘h3 ♔h7 41 ♔h1 ♖g7 42 f4 exf4 43 ♘xf4 ♘xf4 44 ♖xf4 ♖a8 45 ♕f2 ♖f8 46 ♖xb6 ♕c7 47 ♖b1 ♕e5 48 h5 gxh5 49 ♖f5 ♕e8 50 ♕xc5 ♔h6 51 ♖bf1 ♕g6 52 ♕e3+ ♔h7 53 ♕h3 ♔h6 54 e5 ♖gf7 55 ♕e3+ ♔h7 56 ♕f3 1-0

Karpov – Gelfand
Cap d'Agde (rapid) 2002

1 c4 ♘f6 2 ♘f3 b6 3 g3 c5 4 ♗g2 ♗b7 5 0-0 g6 6 d4 cxd4 7 ♕xd4 ♗g7 8 ♘c3 d6 9 ♖d1 ♘bd7 10 ♗e3 a6 11 ♖ac1 ♖c8 12 b3 0-0 13 ♕h4 ♖c7 14 ♗h6 ♕a8 15 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 16 ♘e1 b5 17 ♘d5 ♘xd5 18 cxd5 ♖xc1 19 ♖xc1 ♘f6 20 e4 ♖c8 21 ♕f4 a5 *(D)*



Let's take this as a starting point. What was your aim here?

"All my pieces are placed on good squares, except the b7-bishop. So I played my last move with the intention of proceeding with ...b4 and ...♗a6."

22 ♕d2 b4 23 a3!? ♖xc1 24 ♕xc1 a4!

Was this move played on its objective merits, or because you wished to confuse him in time-trouble?

"I thought that this was the best move. I didn't want to be left with a weak pawn on b4."

25 ♘c2?!

"On 25 bxa4 I intended 25...b3 26 ♕c4 ♕a5 27 ♘d3 ♗a6 28 ♕xb3 ♕d2. It is possible that after 29 ♗f1 ♘xe4 I would not gain an advantage, but I have active pieces and in the circumstances (rapid game), it seemed adequate."

25...♕c8! 26 ♕b2 bxa3 27 ♘xa3 axb3 28 h3

Did you think you were winning at this point?

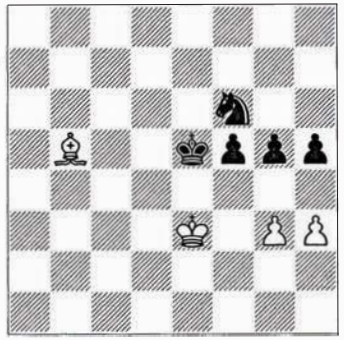
"I thought I had an advantage; I wasn't sure how big it was."

28...♗a6 29 ♕xb3 ♕c1+ 30 ♔h2 ♕d2 31 f3 ♘h5 32 f4?

Better was 32 ♘b1! ♕f2 (avoiding the exchange of queens by 33 ♕c3+) 33 f4 with drawing chances.

32...♗d3 33 ♘c4 ♗xc4 34 ♕xc4 ♕e3 35 f5 ♕xg3+ 36 ♔h1 ♘f4 37 ♕d4+ ♔g8 38 ♗f1 ♘xh3 39 ♗xh3 ♕xh3+ 40 ♔g1 ♕g4+ 0-1

More material is lost after 41 ♔h2 gxf5.



Gelfand – Movsesian

European Team Ch, Batumi 1999

White to play

What was your evaluation, once you had reached this position?

"I knew that with correct play, it should be drawn: Fischer, Rubinstein and others had similar positions."

> As a player accumulates a large reservoir of existing knowledge, he becomes able to commence a search for good ideas from a higher pedestal.

78 h4

"It was simpler to leave the pawn on h3, but I was afraid of getting into a mutual zugzwang. Therefore I aimed to fix Black's pawns on light squares."

78...g4 79 ♔f2 ♘e4+ 80 ♔g2 ♘d6 81 ♗d3 ♔d4 82 ♗b1 ♔e3 83 ♗c2 ♘e4 84 ♗b3 f4 85 gxf4 ♔xf4 86 ♗c2 ♘f6 87 ♗d3

"I had calculated in advance that after 87...g3 I had 88 ♗e2 ♘g4 89 ♔h3 ♔e3 90 ♗xg4 ♔f2 91 ♗f3!, drawing by stalemate. Unfortunately, the computer later demonstrated that this is not a unique drawing method: 90 ♔xg3 ♔xe2 91 ♔f4 draws as well."

87...♘e8

"An unpleasant surprise: Black's knight is heading to g7. For a moment I thought that I was about to lose, and then, suddenly, I found salvation."

How?

"I don't know. In an apparently desperate position, with only a few minutes to reach the time-control ... there appeared **the idea**, and a beautiful one."

88 ♗g6 ♘g7 89 ♗f7 g3 90 ♗d5 ♔g4

90...♘f5 91 ♔h3 is a draw.

91 ♗c6 ♔xh4

91...♘f5 92 ♗d7 draws.

92 ♗d7

Amazingly, Black is unable to exploit his two extra pawns. A study-like finale.

92...♔g5 ½-½

Do you sometimes hit upon splendid ideas, at a place and time not dedicated to chess?

"Yes. Many bright ideas descend upon a player when his mind is floating. I recall that two years ago I worked with my trainer, Alex Khuzman, on a certain opening line. I went to rest for a while, and then hit upon an idea that refuted the whole variation.

"On another occasion, I found a solution in my sleep. It was in an adjourned game vs Kiril Georgiev in the 1990 Olympiad. I woke up at 4 a.m. with a mathematical win. All that remained was to verify my nocturnal discovery over the board. Indeed, it was correct."

This is intriguing. The mind goes on working.

"Well, it happens quite often. GM Razuvaev advises his trainees that when they're stuck, they should change something: go for a walk, get involved in another activity ... Then, sometimes a solution suggests itself."

Nikolić – Gelfand

Candidates match (6), Sarajevo 1991

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♗b4 4 ♕c2 c5 5 dxc5 ♘a6 6 e3 ♘xc5 7 ♗d2 0-0 8 ♘f3 b6 9 ♗e2 ♗a6 10 0-0 d5 11 cxd5 ♗xc3 12 ♗xc3 ♘xd5 13 ♗xa6 ♘xa6 14 ♗d4 ♕d7 15 ♘g5 f5 16 ♘f3 ♘ab4 17 ♕e2 ♘c6 18 ♖ad1 ♖ac8 19 ♖fe1 ♘xd4 20 ♖xd4 ♕c6 21 h3 ♘f6 22 ♖ed1 ♕c2 23 ♖4d2 ♕c4 24 ♕xc4 ♖xc4 25 ♘e5 ♖c7 26 ♖d6 *(D)*



Here you had an inferior position, in a crucial moment of the match. What were you thinking?

"In this match, Nikolić always opted for quiet positions, while I sought to complicate matters, even if they were unfavourable to me. Here he definitely attained 'his' kind of position. Right now, I just have to wait."

26...♖e8 27 ♖c6 ♖xc6 28 ♘xc6 ♔f7 29 ♖d6 ♖c8

"Sacrificing a pawn, but it was an easy decision to make. 29...♖a8 30 b4 held no prospects."

30 ♘xa7 ♖c1+

Not 30...♖a8 31 ♘b5 ♖xa2 32 ♖xb6, when b2 is taboo.

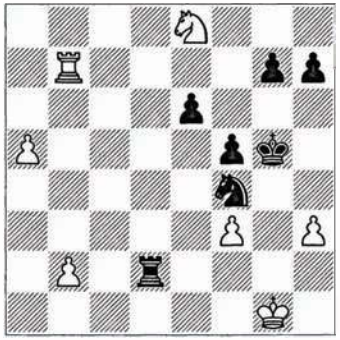
31 ♔h2 ♘e4 32 ♖d7+ ♔f6 33 f3 ♘c5 34 ♖d2 ♖e1 35 ♘c8 b5 36 ♘d6 b4 37 ♖d4 ♖xe3 38 ♖xb4 ♖e2 39 a4 ♘d3 40 ♖b7 ♘f4

"Here 41 ♘e8+ ♔e5 42 ♖xg7 ♖xb2 leads to a draw. Nikolić tries for more."

41 a5 ♖xg2+ 42 ♔h1 ♖d2 43 ♘e8+ ♔g5 44 ♔g1 *(D)*

The position has become double-edged.

B



"I felt that in a practical game, it was easier to handle the black side. My plan is clear."

44...♔h4 45 ♔f1?

45 ♖xg7! ♖xb2 46 a6 is correct, with chances for both sides.

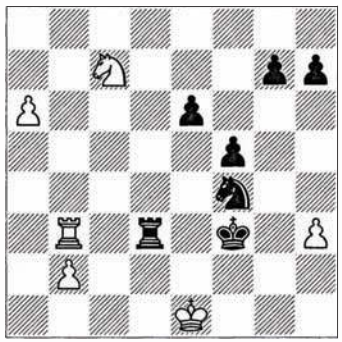
45...♔g3 46 ♔e1 ♖d8?! 47 ♘c7 ♘g2+ 48 ♔e2 ♘f4+ 49 ♔e1 ♖d3!

This is confusing. Who is trying to win and who is striving to draw?

"Here I turned down a repetition. I believed that by now I was dictating the course of the battle."

50 a6 ♘g2+ 51 ♔e2 ♘f4+ 52 ♔e1 ♔xf3 53 ♖b3! *(D)*

B



53...♘g2+ 54 ♔f1 ♘e3+ 55 ♔g1 ♖xb3!! 56 a7 ♔g3 57 a8♕ ♖d3 58 ♕a1 ♖d1+ 59 ♕xd1 ♘xd1 60 ♘xe6 g6 61 b4 f4 62 ♘c5 ♘c3 63 ♘d3 g5 64 ♘f2 h5 65 ♔f1 ♔h2 0-1

How does one know when to push for the full point and when to be satisfied with a draw?

"As a rule, I don't ask myself which result I'm aiming to achieve. This might harm my game. I just look for the best moves."

But surely evaluation and calculation are interconnected: the outcome you are seeking influences the moves you examine. For example, if you play for a win, you might reject a drawing line.

"I do assess during the game whether a position is advantageous for me or not; one has to do that, of course. I just refrain from asking myself what result I'm after."

The concept of 'critical positions' is often debated. How do you identify a critical position?

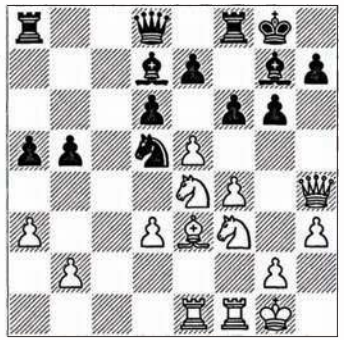
"This is indeed one of the most important skills which determines a player's strength. GM Dorfman wrote a book on this subject. [20]

"Based on his writings, a position might become critical if the turn of events is about to be changed. For instance, when one intends to take irreversible decisions regarding an exchange of pieces, a transformation of the pawn-structure, closing or opening the centre, or entering a forced tactical line."

How many critical positions arise in a game?

"An average game may contain three to four critical positions; but in a complex tactical struggle, every move could be critical."

W



J. Polgar – Gelfand
Dos Hermanas 1997
White to play

19 e6

"This is definitely a critical position. In such positions I try to calculate as far as I can: the game's result is at stake."

19...♘xe3

"It is possible to capture on e6 at once. At the time I believed that 19...♗xe6 20 ♘eg5 fxg5 21 ♘xg5 ♖f6 22 ♗d4 would be too dangerous."

20 ♖xe3 ♕b6 21 ♖fe1 ♗xe6 22 ♘eg5 fxg5 23 ♘xg5 ♖f6 24 ♔h1 ♗f7 25 ♖xe7 h6 26 ♘xf7 ♖xf7 27 ♖xf7 ♔xf7 28 ♖e7+ ♔g8 29 ♖xg7+ ½-½

One strong grandmaster declined my request for an interview, on the grounds that disclosing his thought-process in public might harm him in future contests. Do you think that different GMs think differently?

"Yes, people think in diverse ways. Some undertake far-reaching, meticulous calculations, until they reach a clear-cut conclusion. Others check certain positions, make an assessment that this is good for them, and play the move with no additional analysis. They assume that they should be able to cope with future problems when they arise.

"Another difference: there are some people who think only for their own side, and pay little attention to their opponents' moves."

I find it hard to believe that top players behave like that.

"I'm also amazed as to how people are able to get away with this, without trying to predict their opponent's moves. GM Yudasin, for example, and GM Khenkin. The latter actually expressed his opinion in writing..."

How is it possible to become a 2600 player with such 'methods'?

"I suppose it has a lot to do with one's sense of danger. A strong player can feel that he should evade certain positions, even if it is not backed by concrete variations."

Do you have a particular thinking system?

"I don't have one. People like Botvinnik had a system. On the other hand, Smyslov played by intuition."

What type of dilemmas do you encounter during play?

"I ask myself what would be the positional assessment, if I exchange queens, or other pieces. This is a natural thing to do in case of a concrete

possibility, but sometimes I delve into such matters even if they are not topical. It helps you to order your thoughts, to decide where you want to head."

> The average player thinks about the current position and its future ramifications. A grandmaster often probes eventual, hypothetical scenarios as well.

The following game was tense and captivating from beginning to end.

Har-Zvi – Gelfand
Israel 1999

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 ♗b5+ ♘c6 4 0-0 ♗d7 5 ♖e1 a6 6 ♗xc6 ♗xc6 7 d4 cxd4 8 ♘xd4 g6 9 c4 ♗g7 10 ♘c3 ♘f6 11 ♗g5 h6 12 ♗h4 0-0 13 ♕d2 ♕b6 14 ♖ad1 ♖fe8 15 ♔h1 ♕c5 16 b3 ♗d7 17 f4 b5 18 e5 dxe5 19 fxe5 ♘g4 20 ♘d5 ♘xe5 21 b4 ♕d6?!

Correct was 21...♕xc4 22 ♘b6 ♕c7 23 ♘xa8 ♖xa8 24 ♗g3 ♗g4! 25 ♖c1 ♘c4 26 ♗xc7 ♘xd2. "I had missed White's idea."

22 ♘xe7+! ♖xe7 23 ♘f5

23 c5 allows a miraculous save: 23...♘f3!!.

23...♕xd2 24 ♘xe7+ ♔f8 25 ♖xd2 bxc4 26 ♖xe5 ♗xe5 27 ♖xd7 c3 28 ♖d5 *(D)*

What did you think here?

"I saw that I was not worse, despite his piece advantage. I played for a win."

Do your thoughts wander backwards, in the style of 'why didn't I play this' or 'how could I have missed that'?



"You can't let this happen; it interferes with your game. During a game, I focus only forward."

Do you give yourself mentally encouraging orders, like 'come on', 'hold it', or 'you'll be fine'?

"I used to, when I was a young player, but nowadays I don't need to any more."

28...g5? 29 ♘c6?

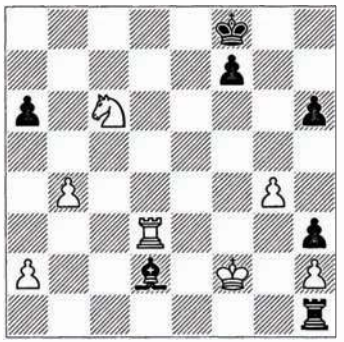
Black should have opted for 28...c2 29 ♖c5 ♗d6 with equality. Both players, in time-trouble, were under the impression that after 28...g5 29 ♖xe5 c2 30 ♖c5 (30 ♖e1? ♖d8!) 30...♖d8 White had to play 31 h3 ♖d1+ 32 ♔h2 c1♕ 33 ♖xc1 ♖xc1, when he is losing a piece and the game. It was only during the *post mortem* that they found 31 ♗f2! ♖d1+ 32 ♗g1 c1♕ 33 ♖xc1 ♖xc1 34 ♘d5, when White has the upper hand.

29...♗f4 30 ♖c5 gxh4 31 ♖xc3 ♖e8 32 g3 h3! 33 ♔g1 ♗d2 34 ♖d3?

34 ♖c2 keeps the balance.

34...♖e1+! 35 ♔f2 ♖h1 36 g4? *(D)*

36 ♖xd2? loses to 36...♖xh2+ 37 ♔e1 ♖xd2, but playing 36 ♔f3 ♖xh2 37 ♔g4 would still have given fair chances for a draw.



36...♖xh2+ 37 ♔g3 ♖e2! 38 ♘d4

Or 38 ♔xh3 ♗f4 39 g5 h5.

It is remarkable to find mating themes in such a simplified position. How did you conceive them?

"We were in severe time-trouble ... I just played what occurred to me ... I don't know."

38...h2 39 ♘xe2 h1♕ 0-1

Let's talk about the process of decision-making.

"Years ago I read Kotov's model of choosing candidate moves and screening each one thoroughly. It doesn't really work, because during the searching process you find new ideas that had escaped your first glance – and have to go back and search for new lines.

"In certain positions, it is easy to find moves, because one's choice is limited. In these types of positions, a club-player and a grandmaster will pick the same moves. In other positions you have to choose between two or three approximately equal moves, and you have to reach a decision based on your style, your feeling, your opponent. This is one of the hardest things in chess."



Gelfand – Shirov
Istanbul (Olympiad) 2000
White to play

21 ♘bxd6! ♘xd6 22 ♘b6!

"Here it was possible to continue 22 ♗xc5 ♘xc4 23 ♗xc4, when 23...b6? fails to 24 ♗d6, and 23...♗xa4 24 d6+ ♔h8 25 ♗e6 ♖c6 26 ♗d5 is advantageous for White.

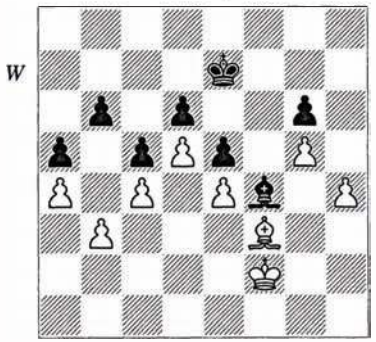
"I chose the text-move because I thought it was even better, and besides, it was simpler: Shirov is a master of escape, and the position emanating from this continuation limits his chances."

22...♗f8 23 b4! ♘cxe4 24 fxe4 ♗e8 25 ♕f3 ♗e7 26 ♘xa8 ♕xa8 27 ♗c5 ♕b8 28 a5 ♕c7 29 ♖ac1

(1-0, 41)

I ask you now to treat the following two positions seriously, as if they had

occurred in your game. Tell me your thoughts.



Nagar – Cahane
Israeli League 1968
White to play

"I see that White's winning chances lie in a breakthrough on the kingside. I'll post the bishop on e6, the king on g4. Then – maybe h4-h5, or I'll sacrifice the bishop ... The most important thing is to win the d6-pawn ... I believe that White should win."

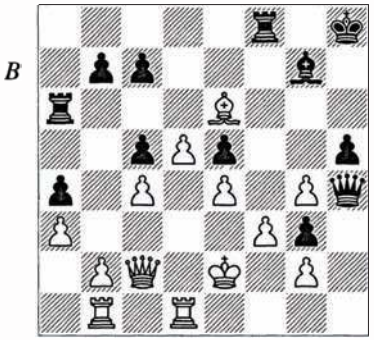
(After bringing his king to g4 and his bishop to e6) "For instance, ♗f5. If Black captures, I'll recapture with my king. If not, say, ...♔f7, I'll play ♗xg6+ (...♔xg6) and h5+ and my king will invade (through f5) ... I don't think Black can hold it...

"(Let's look at) h5 (instead of ♗f5) ... it's not enough ... (after ...gxh5+) he will plant his king later on e7."

This position was adjudicated. We need a clear verdict – is it a win?

"... I see that Black places his bishop on e1 ... Both White and Black have waiting moves ... Let's say that Black posts his king on g7 ... **1 ♗g4 ♔f7 2 ♗e6+ ♔g7 3 ♔f3 ♗d2 4 ♔g4 ♗e1 5 ♗f5 gxf5+ 6 ♔xf5 ♗xh4 7 ♔e6 ♗xg5 8 ♔xd6 ♔f7 9 ♔c7 ♔e8 10 ♔xb6** ... Black can't survive this. White wins."

[The adjudicator, IM J.Porath, gave victory to White, based on the considerations elaborated here by Gelfand.]



Kalir – Kagan
Israel 1970
Black to play

"The white king is exposed, but he threatens 32 ♖h1. Black should examine an attacking move – 31...♖xf3 – but this is no good – or 31...♕h2. Playing on the dark squares with moves like 31...♕g5 and 32...♗h6 seems to me rather slow.

"31...♕h2 32 ♔d3 ♖b6 33 ♖h1 ♖b3+ 34 ♕xb3 ♕xg2 35 ♖xh5+ ♗h6. [concludes that this is good for Black].

"31...♕h2 32 ♔d3 ♖b6 33 b4 axb3 34 ♕e2, or 34 ♕d2 intending 35 ♖h1. Maybe 34...b2 but then 35 ♔c2.

"31...♕h2 32 ♔d3 ♖xe6, but White can either capture the rook or play 33 ♖h1.

"(31...♕h2 32 ♔d3 ♖b6) 33 b4 – that's the move I should check ... 33...axb3 34 ♕e2. (By 31...♕h2) Black burns all his bridges ... [dissatisfied, he returns to check other options than 31...♕h2] but (the alternative) 31...♕g5 loses."

Who is better, in your opinion?

"It's hard to tell. If Black has a successful tactic, he is doing fine; otherwise, he is lost."

After 31...♕h2, why don't you look at 32 ♖g1?

"Because then Black gains some moves, in comparison with 32 ♔d3 ... Black replies 32...♖b6 (33 ♕xa4? ♖xb2+)."

Please pursue your thinking, until you reach a decision.

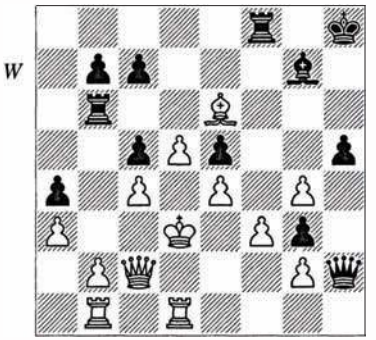
"31...♕h2 burns all bridges ... I don't like to limit my choice. It is either good or it loses – no way back ... I don't see how I can make it work. 31...♕h2 32 ♔d3 b5 is no good ... 32...♖b6 is natural. I have to find something else (to add another ingredient) to make it work."

[He reverts to 31...♕h2 32 ♔d3 ♖b6 and now examines 33 ♕d2 ♖b3+ (33...♖xe6 34 ♖h1) 34 ♔c2]. "Maybe 34...hxg4 35 ♖h1 gxf3 – (but) it doesn't seem sufficient.

"(Conclusion): I prefer White."

The game continued:

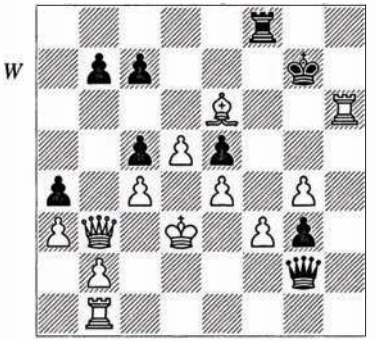
31...♕h2?! 32 ♔d3 ♖b6 *(D)*



33 ♖h1?

Both 33 b4 and 33 ♕d2 appear to win.

33...♖b3+ 34 ♕xb3 ♕xg2! 35 ♖xh5+ ♗h6 36 ♖xh6+ ♔g7 *(D)*



Gelfand abandoned this variation here but in fact White has one more shot:

37 ♖g6+! ♔h7!

... which, however, proves insufficient against this accurate response. Not 37...♔xg6? 38 ♗f5+, or 37...♔h8? 38 ♖g8+!.

38 ♗f5 ♖xf5 39 gxf5 axb3 40 ♖c1

Loss of heavy material is unavoidable: 40 ♔e3 ♕f2+ 41 ♔d3 ♕c2+; or 40 ♖e1 ♕c2+ 41 ♔e3 ♕f2+.

40...♕xf3+ 41 ♔d2 ♕f4+ 42 ♔d1 g2 0-1

GMs' commentary frequently treats 'a committal move' with disdain. I notice that you too are reluctant to burn your bridges. Is it always a bad thing, to make a full commitment?

"Hmm ... An interesting question. Usually we do want to keep our options open. If I can choose my move-order, I'll choose one that preserves maximum flexibility for myself and leaves my opponent guessing at my intentions. But you have a point: sometimes it may be good to burn your bridges, in chess as in life. (In this case) you know what you're doing, you play fast, you don't hover between alternatives."

9 Ofer Comay

Born 1957. An inactive national chess master (peak rating: 2340 Elo) and a distinguished composer of studies and problems, Comay's major field of excellence is problem-solving. He won the annual individual world chess solving championship in 1980 (informal), 1985 and 1999. Comay works as a manager of his own software company.

What are the qualifications of a good problem-solver?

"First of all, he should absorb the essence of chess problems. These works of art have paradoxical aspects. They present the opposite of what is expected, and the search for the composer's ideas is directed towards the uncommon, the strange, the bizarre.

"He has to be a fast calculator, because solving tourneys have a limited time-frame. The most important quality, perhaps, is flexibility. Frequently a position entices you to make a certain move, or suggests a mating pattern, when in fact it is a false lead. You should be able to discard a wrong path, tempting as it might be."

Can you describe the mental process during problem-solving? Do you go through systematic phases?

"I pose myself certain questions. For instance, in helpmate problems (where Black cooperates with White, in the task of delivering mate to Black in a fixed number of moves), I wonder on which square the black king could be mated. Then I pick a certain square and examine all sorts of mates. If I fail in these efforts, I look for a proof that my idea is unworkable. It is vital to prove what cannot be done, in order to avoid loss of valuable time."

In practical chess there are certain 'bricks' that form the vocabulary of a player: fork, pin, double attack, piece development ... Are there equivalents in chess composition?

"In composition there are far more 'bricks' than in a game. There are hundreds of different themes. The material hints towards the possible direction; if you have a rook and bishop you start to think of themes like 'Grimshaw' or 'Novotny'."

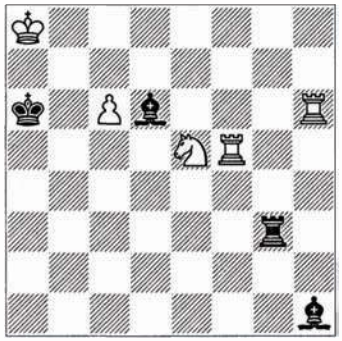
Try to be more specific. You glance at a position; there are 20 pieces and many reasonable options. What (and where) do you look at?

"In good problems, every piece has some function – it is not placed on the board just to be there. I ask myself: what is this pawn doing, or how can the knight participate in the execution of the idea.

"In mate problems I naturally focus on the zone around the black king. I watch for pieces that may join the

attack by blocking a square, interfering with a counter-check by Black and so on."

Let me watch you solve some chess riddles I brought with me, and we'll discuss them.



S. Osintsev
3rd Commendation,
Cheliabinsk 1990
White to play and draw

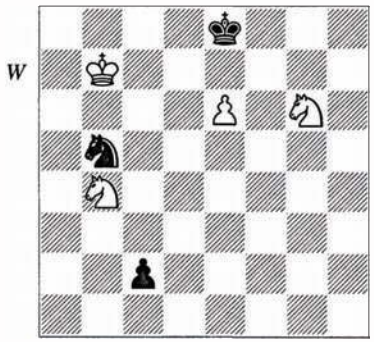
(He immediately moves the pieces, as he talks and checks various options).

"(Black) threatens mate; 1 ♖h8 looks boring ... too many options; let's drop it for the time being...

"There aren't many possibilities ... Perhaps 1 ♖f8. I don't notice any difference between the two possible rook moves.

"Suppose 1 ♖h8 ♖g7, but Black wins on the spot – nothing here, right? I can't capture on d6 ... how can I prevent the mate? – Aha, 1 ♖f8 and if 1...♖g7, 2 ♖xd6. If 1...♗xf8, then 2 ♖xh1. OK."

1 ♖f8 ♗xf8 2 ♖xh1 ♖g8. Maybe there is something here ... Oh, **3 ♖h8 ♖xh8 4 ♘f7 ♖g8 5 c7** is an option; there is a kind of stalemate here. So, **5...♗d6+** (5...♗e7+ 6 ♘d8 ♗xd8? 7 c8♕+) **6 ♘d8 ♗xc7 draw**. That's it."



A. Kazantsev
Shakhmatnaya Kompozitsia, 1992
White to play and win

"Well, I'm sure 1 ♘xc2 doesn't work, probably because of 1...♘c7 (2 ♔xc7 stalemate). Of course, what is left (for White to do) is to mate Black. **1 ♘d5**. What can he do? **1...♘d6+ 2 ♔b8**. Now 2...♘e4 doesn't help, since there is 3 ♘c7+. Maybe 2...♘f5 or 2...♘c8 ... say **2...♘f5**. This is a well-known position, mating with a pair of knights: **3 ♘f6+ ♔d8 4 e7+ ♘xe7 5 ♘e5!** wins (5...c1♕ 6 ♘f7#, or if the e7-knight moves, then 6 ♘c6# instead)."

You solved these studies very easily; the second piece took you literally seconds to crack.

"Both works had characteristics that facilitated the solving process. The first had a forced nature – very limited possibilities. The second led quickly to a famous mating picture."

I believe that the next problem will prove to be a tougher nut.



A. Feoktistov
1st Prize, *Bulletin CKA SSSR*, 1972
Mate in four

"I look for flight-squares for the black king ... if 1...♔xg8 then 2 ♕a8+ mates; if 1...♖xg8, 2 ♕f6#. If 1...♖xd6 I don't see a mate; perhaps after 2 ♗xd6 there will be one. Black would like to play ...♘g2 with ...♖h3+; so maybe I should create checking options. Let's say 1 ♕h8, with the threat – it's not clear what the threat is ... maybe 2 ♘xh6+ intending ♕e8+ and ♕f8+.

"What happens after 1 ♕h8 ♖g7? How about 2 ♘xh6+ ♔g6 ... not enough to mate (in time). Is this a refutation? Strange.

"Maybe I have to make a quiet move on the second turn: 1 ♕h8 ♖g7 2 ♘f6, or 2 ♗f6 ... No, I don't think it works.

"1 ♕f1+ ♔g7; if the queen cedes him a flight-square on g7 it will be difficult to complete the mission ... No, this is out. 1 ♕a8, but what will I do against 1...♖xg8? What's going on here?

"Once again, if the queen deserts the (a1-h8) diagonal, there is 1...♖xg8 and no mate on f6. Ah, maybe it can abandon the diagonal...

"1 ♕e1 ... a move of over-the-board players, with no point. Did I overlook something after 1 ♕h8? You have to start with the queen; other pieces are not participating here ... how about 1 ♕e5? Looks silly again.

"Let's see if there can be a zugzwang ... Perhaps a game of corners ... 1 ♕h1 – no, it's not to the point. Maybe 1 ♕a8, threatening mate in one ... Ah! (enlightenment on his face) OK, it is a game of corners after all.

"**1 ♕a8 ♖xg8 2 ♕a1 ♖g6 3 ♕h8**. Nice (**3...♖xd6 4 ♕xh7#**)."

I have a few questions here. Your first step was to look for Black's moves, as if it were his turn.

"I always need to ascertain the degrees of freedom at my disposal: do I have to act fast, to create immediate checking threats, or can I take my time leisurely?"

Interesting: in practical chess terms you employed prophylactic thinking. Next, you spent quite some time on 1 ♕h8, which proved to be mistaken.

"This was careless of me – I failed to notice that this move robbed the black king of a flight-square (g8); a

decent composer would never do things like that."

And then you commented on one of your own suggestions "a chess-player's move" – with some disrespect, I might add.

(Apologetic) "You see, moves like 1 ♕e1 and 1 ♕e5 are typical players' moves. They bring the queen closer to the black king, they look fine ... Were this position a practical game, I'd probably play such moves myself ... but they are not oriented towards a specific goal."

The turning point seemed to come when the concept 'corners' entered your mind.

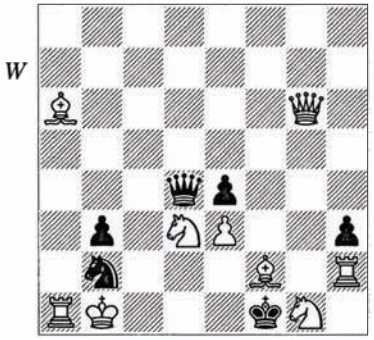
"Right. 'Corners' is an illustrious brick in the house of composition. The symmetrical character of the chessboard makes it possible for a queen to leap from one corner to another. Numerous problems on this theme have been composed."

> Rich knowledge and considerable experience increase the probability that the right idea will emerge at the right time.

(*See following diagram*)

"I check what happens if Black plays 1...♕xd3+; White has an answer – 2 ♔xb2# (the queen is pinned). Can the g1-knight move? No, the black king will run away.

"Let's see how we deal with black queen moves ... If 1...♕h8 there is a mate (2 ♘xb2#). If the queen abandons the long diagonal, 2 ♔xb2# is the answer. *[This is incorrect: 1...♕a4! (also 1...♕c5 or 1...♕c4)]*. The key move could be 1 ♕g7 – but it looks rather stupid: why should Black accept the offer?



M. Barulin
Tijdschrift v.d. KNSB, 1927
Mate in two

"If I try to mate Black on e2, he has 1...exd3 ... Maybe the mate should be on h3 ... I don't examine knight moves for White; I'll leave them to a time of crisis.

"If 1 ♕h7 (threatening 2 ♕xh3#), he plays 1...♕d7. No, he can't do that (2 ♔xb2#); what are his defences? What is it? (It seems that) the white queen can go anywhere whence it threatens h3 ... it can't be ... I don't see it, there is a mistake somewhere..." (correct chess problems have a unique solution).

"Ah! I've got it, Black defends with 1...♕xe3. Lucky!

"Suppose I play 1 ♕f5 ... this is surely the solution ... Yes."

1 ♕f5 (with the threat of 2 ♕xh3#) 1...♕g7 2 ♘xb2#; 1...♕d7 2 ♔xb2#; 1...♕xe3 2 ♗xe3#.

What made it absolutely clear to you that the key move should involve the white queen?

"Once again, I try to penetrate the composer's mind; he wants to achieve his goal, implementing the most economic set-up: this is a significant criterion for evaluating problems. Now, if you place a tremendously strong piece like a queen on the board, and fail to use it, this constitutes a major flaw, which detracts from the problem's value."

In a way, you excel only in solving good problems. If I show you a poor problem, you will lose your cornerstones.

(Amused) "You have a point. I recall that once, in a world championship solving contest, one problem had an atrocious key (first move): rook captures queen! In addition to this dreadful capture, the move contained a million threats. Out of 60 solvers, only 5 got it right!"

Yet such a move would be a practical player's first choice.

"When you think about it, over-the-board players are trained to search for the most natural, the simplest, the clearest kind of moves. Problem solvers, on the other hand, seek as their first choices, paradoxical moves and unexpected twists."

I've read somewhere that world champions Steinitz and Capablanca failed in solving some mate problems in two, three or four moves – which seems incredible. [21]

"Practical chess and composition – they use a different 'language'."

> A surprising idea is one that runs contrary to expectations. When two people maintain conflicting expectations, what causes surprise to one may be self-evident to the other.

How do you define – or recognize – a difficult, hard-to-solve problem?

"In the majority of problems, the surprising element is concealed in the first move. Everybody knows that the key will be unexpected, but once you find it, the rest will follow smoothly. Now, difficult problems are those in which the surprise does not lie in the first move, but in the follow-up. They are hard to solve, because if I fail to see a proper continuation on the second move, I tend to believe that I'm on the wrong track, and I might even drop the correct line altogether.

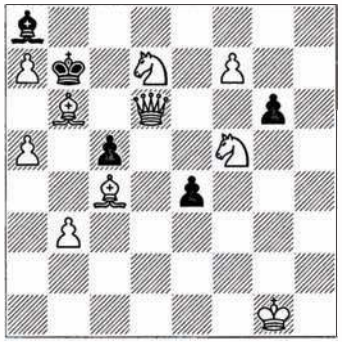
"The most difficult problems differ from the conventional ones to such an extent that you simply don't have a clue."

Show me such a difficult, unconventional problem.

(*See diagram overleaf*).

"In a selfmate problem, White forces Black to mate him (White) in a fixed number of moves. Pay attention: Black does not want to mate White; he is forced to do so.

"Now, the conventional solution to such problems is as follows: as Black is averse to mating White and will do his best to avoid it, the first thing to do is to limit Black's options. After that, he will be left with one, maximum two, paths that lead to mate.



B. Lindgren
Open chess solving championship, 2003
Selfmate in 12

"The problem I presented to you is nothing of the sort. The minute I saw it, I said to myself 'nobody will succeed in solving it' (we had 180 minutes for 12 problems, an average of 15 minutes to handle each problem)."

1 ♕d5+ ♔c8 2 ♘d6+ ♔xd7 3 ♕e6+ ♔c6 4 ♘xe4+ ♔b7

"Four moves have elapsed. True, the a8-h1 diagonal is opened, and the possibility ...gxf5 is excluded; but basically, White just gave a series of checks and rearranged his pieces; Black has not improved his position."

5 f8♘

"This mysterious move is designed to prevent the black king from reaching d7 in the forthcoming play."

5...g5 6 ♗a6+ ♔xa6 7 ♘xc5+ ♔b5 8 ♕c4+ ♔c6 9 ♘b7+ ♔xb7

"White has forced the black king to make two full circles, ending on its initial square b7. In doing so he has jettisoned two knights and a bishop. He has just three more moves to accomplish his mission..."

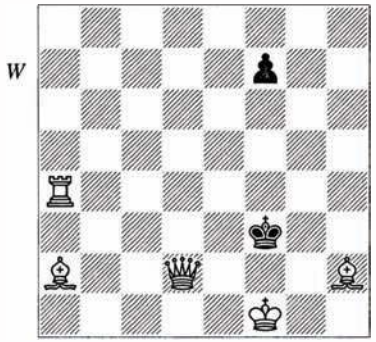
10 ♔h1 g4 11 ♗g1 g3 12 ♕c8+ ♔xc8#

"You asked for a difficult problem. Well, 93 solvers took part in the Moscow competition; the number of correct answers to this problem was ... zero."

I tend to believe that such a disastrous result would not occur amongst players. A Kasparov will find a 12-move combination in a game-like position.

"Within 15 minutes? In unfamiliar territory, with no clues or anchors, achieving such a goal in a specific number of moves...? Maybe he would, using his sheer powers of calculation.

"But let me tell you an interesting anecdote. In 2002 Andrei Selivanov showed me one of his problems:"



A. Selivanov, 2000
Selfmate in 5

"According to Selivanov, he had shown the problem to Kasparov, who

took several hours (!) to solve it. Now, I found the solution in two or three minutes, without putting the position on the board – and I'm not the only solver to have done so rather quickly."

1 ♗e6!! with three variations.

1...f5 2 ♕d1+ ♔e3 3 ♔e1 f4 4 ♗h3 f3 5 ♗f1 f2#

1...f6 2 ♗h3 f5 3 ♗g4+ fxg4 4 ♕e1 g3 5 ♗g1 g2#

1...fxe6 2 ♕g5 e5 3 ♗g3 e4 4 ♗e1 e3 5 ♕g1 e2#

"It simply requires a different mode of thinking from practical chess. Here is my way of solving it: if Black plays 1...f6, the mate should obviously be executed with the pawn on the seventh rank. This means that White should sacrifice a piece, so that Black will have to capture it and inflict mate on g2 or e2.

"The square g2 is the more natural square, because the white queen and h2-bishop are ready to move to the blocking squares (e1, g1). How can White sacrifice a piece on the g-file in the line 1...f6? Only by 1 ♗e6, 2 ♗h3, 3 ♗g4+. The rest is simple.

"By the way, the world's best solvers are quite competent players (the names of British GMs Jonathan Mestel and John Nunn spring to mind).

"Many problems demand changes of rules. Pieces may move differently (as is the case of fairy pieces); basic laws may be broken (e.g., in 'circe' problems, where a captured piece is reborn on its initial square). Sometimes a calculation is performed backwards (retrograde analysis); the board may be enlarged ... Solvers are quick to adapt to changes. I doubt if this can be said of most players."

I admit that reactions to Fischer's Random chess are not over-enthusiastic and if someone were to suggest adding a different type of piece (an elephant?) he would be risking his life.

Returning to problem-solving – what do you do when your line of thinking fails?

"First I look for a simple, forced solution. If I don't find one, I search for a slightly more complex solution. If this doesn't bring the desired results, I increase the complexity level. You see that I indulge in complex solutions only if I have to.

"I work in circles: I leap from one set of solutions to another, making sure that no resource eludes me."

Indeed, from what I've seen, your model is not as systematic as the Kotov model advocates.

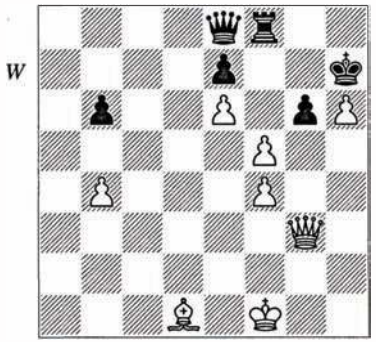
Our last mental exercise is quite difficult, I warn you. This is a sophisticated study by a great composer.

(*See diagram overleaf*)

"1 fxg6+ suggests itself. I want to act fast. 1 ♗c2 is complicated: maybe 1...♔xh6. So, 1 fxg6+. What can Black do? 1...♕xg6 2 ♗c2, it's over ... no, wait, there is 2...♖xf4+ 3 ♔g1 ♖e4 4 ♗xe4, that's it. I'm not sure, though, we'll see.

"1...♔xh6 2 g7 ♕b5+ 3 ♗e2, this wins simply – I'll return to 1...♕xg6 although I don't see anything there ... 2 ♗c2 ♖xf4+ 3 ♔g1 ♖g4 4 ♕xg4...

"Aha, 3...♖f6. OK, this is a defence ... (after 4 ♗xg6+ ♖xg6 Black regains

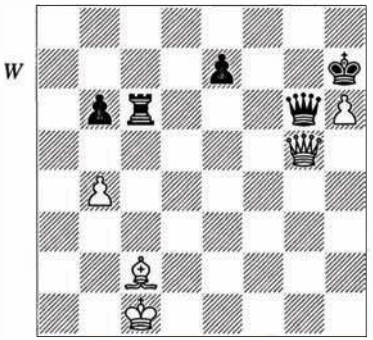


O. Pervakov
5th Prize, Moscow 850, 1997
White to play and win

material). Maybe 3 ♔g2 – no, he captures c2 with check; how about 3 ♔e1? No, he replies 3...♖e4+. Let's see 3 ♔g1 ♖f6 4 ♔h1 ... (this fails to) 4...♖f1+."

(Comay now proceeds to examine the pawn ending which arises after the total liquidation following 4 ♗xg6+ ♖xg6 5 ♔f2 ♖xg3 6 ♔xg3 ♔xh6). ... "It's a draw ... still, it was important to check: maybe I can reach such an ending later with a slight (but significant) difference ... (Next he looks for stalemate possibilities after an eventual ...♔h8 with a white queen on g6) ... rubbish, there is a pawn on b6 which is free to move."

"After **1 fxg6+ ♕xg6 2 ♗c2 ♖xf4+ 3 ♔g1 ♖f6** – suppose it is Black's move, what does he want (to do)? 4...♖xe6 and 4...♔xh6. I'll try **4 ♕g5** (to prevent 4...♔xh6) **4...♖xe6**, I'll move the king. **5 ♔f1** this is interesting: **5...♖f6+ 6 ♔e1 ♖e6+ 7 ♔d1 ♖d6+** and I can't hide ... **8 ♔c1** ♕xg5+ – no, this is illegal – but **8...♖c6** *(D)* (re-immerses himself in the position after 4 ♕g5 ♖xe6).



I'd like to save some time and make a technical intervention. Your last variation is a critical one: Black indeed saves himself in that way. Now go back to the starting position.

"I look again; what other moves are there? Oh, I can play 1 ♗a4. He is forced to answer 1...b5, right? (He has) no other move. I can play now 2 fxg6+; is there a difference? ... I don't think so ... if there is a difference it might be for the worse...

"Let's analyse – **1 ♗a4 b5 2 fxg6+ ♕xg6 3 ♗c2 ♖xf4+ 4 ♔g1 ♖f6 5 ♕g5 ♖xe6 6 ♔f1 ♖f6+ 7 ♔e1 ♖e6+ 8 ♔d1 ♖d6+ 9 ♔c1 ♖c6** (reflects for several seconds) **10 ♕c5!**.

"Beautiful. That's the solution."

(10...♖xc5 11 bxc5. White's tenth move would not work had he not inveigled the black b-pawn one square forward on the first move).

Suppose I had not given you that clue in the midst of your analysis. Would you have pursued the variation 1 fxg6+ on and on? When would you have given it up?

"You have touched upon one of the most important issues in problem-solving. You have a time constraint and you have to decide when to abandon a tempting course since it just won't work.

"As I told you before, my preferred technique is to look for proof: there are certain positions in which you can find analytical evidence that ensures that it is not possible to lose a tempo; or that mate is possible only with a knight on a certain square.

"Alas, you then discover that no matter what the knight's chosen route to this square, it cannot be accomplished in an odd, or even, number of moves, as stipulated by the composer. So you conclude that this is just a try: maybe the composer wanted to confuse you, and you turn your attention to another direction."

I notice that as soon as I present you with a problem to solve, you set about moving the pieces right away. Now, not only is this illegal in a chess game, but many experts preach that players must get the whole picture before they rush to delve into analytical details.

"Years ago I used to calculate in my head, but with the passage of time, I've learned that it works better for me to move the pieces, checking concrete variations. In this way I get a better feeling for the position, gain a deeper understanding of what is going on and what it is all about.

"It's difficult to project from my experience to other solvers or players. Everyone must find out what works best for him."

Some people look for **'the method'** for doing things. Regarding problem-solving, there are various approaches, and one should select what is appropriate – and feels right – for oneself.

10 GM Zvulon Gofshtein

Born 1953. In 1969 he captured 2nd place (behind Beliavsky) in the USSR youth championship. After emigrating to Israel, the results of Zvulon (formerly Leonid) improved drastically. He rocketed to 2580 Elo, representing his adopted country in an Olympiad. In 2002 Gofshtein shared first place (with Smirin and Avrukh) in the Israeli Championship. A year later, he won the national title in rapidplay chess.

I notice a lot of tactics in your games. Are you, basically, a calculator?

"Not at all; I am not the calculating type. My analysis is frequently flawed. My tactical ideas rest upon my strong intuition."

Has anything changed in your manner of thinking, since the time you were a young player?

"In my younger days I used to search for the 'best move'. As I grew up, the more experience I gained, the better I understood that my aim should be 'to reach a good position'. I used to play with my head; now I play more with my hand. I no longer seek the 'best move' any more."

Is it a good thing, to play by intuition?

"Not always. In critical positions, playing by 'feeling' is not enough; you must calculate. But on average, playing by intuition is good – for me, at least."

Do you find that grandmasters are all alike in their chess thinking?

"No, different players treat positions differently. Emil Sutovsky, for example, focuses on his opponent's king, always looking for tactics, ready to sacrifice. Mark Tseitlin's thinking revolves around initiative, adventures, a kind of coffee-house play (albeit on a high level). As for myself, if I spot a dubious position or encounter strange moves, I feel pain; so I stay away from them.

"Some time ago, I partnered Tseitlin, as a pair, against some people on the internet. We had to stop cooperating because we looked at totally different things."

Let's have a close look at some positions you've played.

Gofshtein – Kagansky
Israel 2002

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 f3 e6 4 ♘c3 ♗b4 5 ♗f4 ♘e7 6 ♕d3 ♘d7 7 0-0-0 0-0 8 ♘ge2 b5 9 h4 a6 10 h5 ♗b7 11 h6 g6 12 ♕e3 c5 13 a3 ♗xc3 14 ♘xc3 cxd4

14...b4 is better. The text-move is based on a miscalculation.

15 ♕xd4 f6

"My opponent's original intention was 15...e5 16 ♗xe5 ♘c6, but now he realized that 17 ♗c7! was advantageous for White."

16 ♗d6 e5 17 ♕b4 ♘c6 18 ♕b3 ♘d4 *(D)*



19 ♖xd4

Is not 19 ♕a2 simpler, just winning a pawn?

(Surprised): "Retreating my queen to a2 didn't even cross my mind. I saw that 19 ♖xd4 was good, and played it quickly."

I find it intriguing that your first choice was giving material away, instead of gaining it.

"When I find a forced path which secures a clear edge, I look no farther. ... (examines 19 ♕a2) ... After 19 ♕a2 ♖c8 20 ♗xf8 ♕xf8 Black may have some chances ... 19 ♖xd4 is clearer."

[It turns out that Gofshtein's gut feeling was correct, although he wasn't able to back it up with concrete reasons: 19 ♕a2 ♖f7! 20 ♘xd5 (20 exd5 ♖c8 and 21...♘b6) 20...♗xd5 21 exd5 (21 ♕xd5? ♘b6) 21...♖c8! and Black regains his pawn with a good position.]

19...exd4 20 ♘xd5 ♗xd5 21 ♕xd5+ ♖f7 22 ♕xd4 ♘b6 23 ♗e2 ♖c8 24 ♖d1 ♘c4 25 ♗xc4 ♖xc4 26 ♕d5 ♕c8 27 ♗e7! ♖xc2+ 28 ♔b1 ♖xg2 29 ♗c5 ♖h2 30 ♕e6!

Observing your choices on the 27th and 30th moves, I deduce that you have a penchant for attractive moves. Here, for instance, 30 ♕d8+ ♖f8 31 ♕e7 would be the normal continuation.

"I probably chose the first winning move that came to me."

30...♕xc5 31 ♖d8+ 1-0

Gofshtein – V. Mikhalevsky
Israeli Ch 2002

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♗b5 a6 4 ♗a4 ♘f6 5 0-0 ♘xe4 6 d4 b5 7 ♗b3 d5 8 dxe5 ♗e6 9 ♘bd2 ♘c5 10 c3 ♗e7 11 ♗c2 ♗g4 12 ♖e1 0-0 13 ♘b3 ♘e6 14 a4 ♖b8 15 axb5 axb5 16 ♕d3 g6 17 ♗h6 ♖e8 18 ♖ad1 ♗f5 19 ♕e2 ♗xc2 20 ♕xc2 ♕d7

Tell me your train of thoughts from this position on.

"I had examined similar schemes at home. I wonder why Black enters such positions voluntarily; to me it seems evident that White is much better.

"I analysed certain white plans that had been played before: 21 ♘bd4, or 21 h4 followed by h5. Then I thought about transferring my knight to g4."

21 h3! ♘cd8 22 ♕d2 c6 23 ♘h2 f5 24 exf6 ♗xf6 25 ♘g4 ♗h8 26 ♖e2

What is the purpose of the subsequent doubling of rooks?

"This seemed to be the natural follow-up, amassing pressure along the open file. I saw that the black pawn-chain b5-c6-d5 was rather weak, and concluded that an exchange of a pair of rooks would suit me."

Suppose he did not allow a swap along the e-file?

"Then I have a good position, controlling key squares, and await events."

26...♘f7 27 ♖de1 ♘d6? *(D)*



28 ♗f4!

Not an obvious move, yet an extremely powerful one. How did you conceive it?

"The idea of 28 ♗f4, vacating h6 for a knight check, came to me easily. Some time was needed, though, to make the necessary calculations."

28...♘xf4

28...♘c4 29 ♘c5!!; for example, 29...♕a7 30 ♘xe6! ♘xd2? 31 ♘h6#. Or 29...♘xc5 30 ♘h6+ ♔f8 31 ♗xb8! ♘xd2 32 ♖xe8+ ♕xe8 33 ♗d6+. "I was looking at such variations while Black was contemplating his 28th move."

29 ♕xf4 ♖xe2?! 30 ♖xe2 ♖f8

30...♖e8 31 ♘c5 ♕c8 32 ♖xe8+ ♘xe8 33 ♘h6+ ♔g7 34 g4! with a winning position.

31 ♘h6+!

Winning by force.

31...♔g7 32 ♕d4+ ♔xh6 33 ♕h4+ ♔g7 34 ♖e7+ ♖f7 35 ♖xd7 ♖xd7 36 ♕d4+ ♔g8 37 ♕b6 ♘c4 38 ♕xc6

(1-0, 49)

V. Agzamov – Gofshtein
Erevan 1981

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 ♘f3 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 b6 5 f3 ♗b7 6 e4 d6 7 ♘c3 e6 8 ♗e2 ♗e7 9 ♗e3 a6 10 0-0 0-0 11 ♕d2 ♘bd7 12 ♖fd1 ♖c8 13 ♖ac1 ♖e8 14 ♗f1 ♕c7 15 ♕f2 ♕b8 16 a3 ♗d8 17 ♔h1 ♘e5 18 b3 ♗c7 19 h3 ♘g6 20 ♘de2 ♗a8 21 ♘f4?

A tactical oversight.

21...d5! 22 ♘xg6 dxe4! *(D)*



It transpires that the g6-knight is not going anywhere (23 ♘h4 ♗g3).

23 f4? fxg6!

This decision is the reason why I've chosen this game. You're a pawn to the good, but instead of proceeding quietly, you ruin your pawn formation to go for the kill.

"This is something that I have in my character: to press on even when I have the upper hand, not allowing my opponent a moment of rest. This trait was even more conspicuous in my younger days.

"I guess I was loath to trust my technique. 23...hxg6 24 ♘a4 gives White some chances."

24 ♘a4 g5! 25 fxg5 ♘h5 26 ♘c3

26 ♗xb6 ♗h2! is murderous.

26...♖f8 27 ♕d2 ♖cd8 28 ♕c2 ♖xd1 29 ♖xd1 ♘g3+ 30 ♔g1 ♘xf1 0-1

31 ♖xf1 ♗h2+.

> Ideas rest on the shoulders of our basic assumptions. Grandmasters are well aware of the fragility of 'the rest is just a matter of technique' message. Most of them are seldom satisfied with an acquired advantage and constantly strive to enhance their superiority.

The next two examples feature a positional pawn sacrifice in the opening.

Greenfeld – Gofshtein
Israeli Open Ch 1995

1 ♘f3 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 g3 d5 4 ♗g2 dxc4 5 ♕a4+ ♘bd7 6 ♕xc4 c5 7 ♕b3 ♖b8 8 d3 ♗d6 9 ♘c3 a6 10 ♗g5 b5 11 a4 *(D)*



11...c4!

"This is (based on) pure intuition. I was not forced into it – 11...♕b6 was a viable alternative – but I thought it was right."

Were you reminded of similar occurrences in other games?

"No, my memory is weak and besides, the position is not the type that I'm familiar with."

12 dxc4 ♘c5 13 ♕c2 b4 14 ♘b1 h6 15 ♗f4

15 ♗xf6 ♕xf6 is possible; in this case too, Black has ample compensation for his pawn.

15...♗xf4

In many instances, this type of exchange only strengthens White's hold on e5.

"But here it is connected with the idea ...g5, breaking White's defensive set-up. I was quite proud of this idea."

[Gofshtein tends to adopt certain mystical views concerning the world.] "Some things (moves, plans, ideas) come from above. They are subjective; you just know that this is how it should be."

16 gxf4 ♗b7 17 ♘bd2 ♕d6 18 e3 g5! 19 fxg5 hxg5 20 h3 ♘fe4 21 ♘xe4 ♗xe4 22 ♖d1 *(D)*



"I had totally missed this move. But when one's position is good, things turn out well (even if you overlook some details)."

22...♕c7 23 ♕e2 ♔e7

"Capturing on a4 would give White a tempo to reorganize. It was obvious that I should keep up the pressure. The text-move united my rooks."

24 ♖d4 ♖bd8 25 ♖g1 ♗d3 26 ♕d2 e5 27 ♖xd8 ♖xd8 28 ♕xb4 ♗xc4! 29 ♘d2 ♕d6 30 ♗f1 ♘d3+ 0-1

Psakhis – Gofshtein
Israeli League 1996

1 c4 d6 2 d4 e5 3 ♘c3 exd4 4 ♕xd4 ♘c6 5 ♕d2 ♘f6 6 g3 ♗e6 7 e4 ♗e7

Psakhis won a crushing victory in this line as Black against Benko (Aruba 1992): 8 b3 ♘xe4! 9 ♘xe4 d5 10 cxd5?! (10 ♗g2!) 10...♗b4 11 ♘c3 ♗xd5 12 f3 ♕f6 13 ♗b2 0-0-0 14 ♗e2 ♗xf3 15 ♘xf3 ♖xd2 16 ♔xd2 ♖d8+ 17 ♔c2 ♕g6+ 18 ♔c1 ♗c5! 19 ♘d1 ♕e4 20 ♖e1 0-1. It seems that he now tries to improve White's play in this line.

8 f3 ♘d7!

"A robust strategic response, intending to undermine the white pawn-centre with ...f5."

9 ♘d5 0-0 10 ♗g2 f5 11 exf5 ♗xf5 12 ♘e3

12 ♘e2 is met by 12...♘de5, targeting c4 and d3.

12...♗e6 13 f4? *(D)*



13...d5!

"I saw the move quickly, but took some time to check its consequences."

How far do you calculate, in general? When would you recommend halting the analysis process?

"When you feel that your position is good, that's where calculation should end. You shouldn't exert yourself unduly when effort is not required. This might cause harm."

This is odd. I can understand that an extra effort might be superfluous, but what harm can it cause?

"If you continue to analyse beyond a certain point, you can miss something simple, and doubts begin to creep in. When you see too many things (some real, others imaginary) you might lose your confidence.

"Moreover, by investing extra effort, you lose strength that may be needed later on in the game."

> Remarkably, 'practical play' may turn out to be not only the more efficient way of decision-making, but actually superior in quality to the 'truth-seeking' method.

14 ♘xd5 ♖e8 15 ♘f3?! ♗c5 16 ♔f1 ♘b6 17 ♘g5 ♗f5 18 b3 ♘b4!

Black's initiative is so strong that a queen exchange does not alter the picture.

19 ♗f3

19 ♘xb4 ♗xb4 20 ♕xb4? ♕d1+.

19...♘6xd5 20 ♗xd5+ ♘xd5 21 ♕xd5+ ♕xd5 22 cxd5 ♗d4 0-1

Gofshtein – Bacrot
France 1996

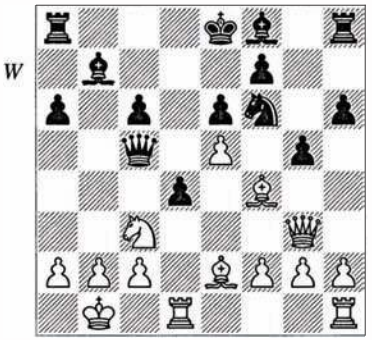
1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 ♘c6 6 ♗g5 e6 7 ♕d2 a6 8 0-0-0 h6 9 ♘xc6 bxc6 10 ♗f4 d5 11 ♕e3 ♕a5 12 ♗e2 ♗b7 13 ♔b1 ♕c5

In his original analysis of the game [22], Gofshtein points out the fascinating possibility 13...0-0-0 14 exd5 cxd5 15 ♕a7 ♘d7?! (15...♗d6) 16 ♘xd5!!. Play may proceed 16...♗c5 (16...exd5 17 ♗g4) 17 ♗xa6! ♕xa6 18 ♕xc5+! ♗c6 19 ♕d6 ♔b7 20 ♕c7+ ♔a8 21 ♘b4 and wins (Fritz).

14 ♕g3 d4 15 e5

Ready to counter 15...dxc3 with 16 exf6 ♕b4?! 17 b3, when Black's king is insecure and his pawn-structure is problematic.

15...g5 *(D)*



16 ♗e3!!

Stronger than both 16 exf6 gxf4 17 ♕xf4 e5 (but not 17...dxc3? 18 ♕c7) and 16 ♗xg5 hxg5 17 exf6 ♖d8.

This brilliant move actually decides the game. How did it occur to you?

"It could be that I recalled a similar move I had played against a German player, some years before."

[Gofshtein-Baldauf, Berlin 1991: 1 e4 ♘f6 2 e5 ♘d5 3 d4 d6 4 ♘f3 ♗g4 5 ♗e2 c6 6 ♘g5 ♗f5 7 g4 ♗g6 8 f4 e6 9 f5 exf5 10 gxf5 ♗xf5 11 0-0 ♕d7 12 ♖xf5 ♕xf5 13 ♗g4 ♕g6 14 ♕f3 dxe5 15 ♗h5 ♕f6 16 ♗xf7+ ♔d7 17 ♕h3+ ♔c7 18 ♗xd5 cxd5 19 ♘c3 ♕c6 20 ♘e6+ ♔b6 21 ♕f3 a6 22 ♘xf8 exd4 **23 ♗e3** dxe3 24 ♕xe3+ ♔c7 25 ♖d1 ♘d7 26 ♘xd5+ ♔b8 27 ♘c7 1 0.]

How would you explain this move in the present context?

(After some thought) "White should aim at opening the d-file ... also at preserving his knight..."

Is this how you were thinking, telling yourself 'I need to achieve this, therefore I have to play that'?

"Frankly, no. I think (not logically but) intuitively. As I said, sometimes I think with my hand. Maybe I should think more with my head, but there is not much order there."

Back to the game vs Bacrot. Play proceeded:

16...dxe3 17 exf6 ♕b6 18 ♘e4 c5 19 ♘d6+ ♗xd6 20 ♖xd6 ♕a5 21 ♖xe6+! fxe6 22 ♕d6 1-0

Black threw in the towel in face of 22...♔f7 23 ♕e7+ ♔g6 24 g4.

So, you are 'a hand man'.

"I do rely on my intuition without making deep calculations. The following game, one of my very best, was a great sacrificial orgy. I played it literally with no thinking whatsoever, at a very fast pace. I just believed that my attack should succeed."

> Sometimes, emptying our head and trusting our hand is a habit we should promote during play.

Gofshtein – Ma. Tseitlin
Israel 1991

1 d4 ♘f6 2 ♘f3 g6 3 ♗g5 ♗g7 4 ♘bd2 0-0 5 c3 b6 6 e4 d5 7 e5 ♘e4 8 ♗d3 ♗b7 9 ♕e2 f5 10 h4 h6 11 ♗f4 e6 12 ♕e3 ♔h7 13 0-0-0 c5 14 g4! fxg4 15 h5 g5 16 ♘xg5+ *(D)*



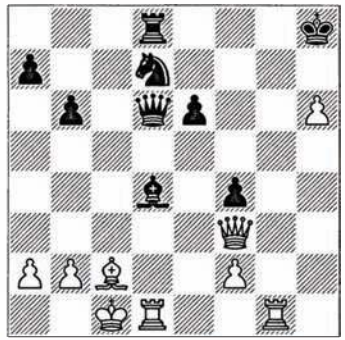
16...hxg5 17 ♘xe4 gxf4 18 h6!! dxe4

18...fxe3 19 ♘f6++ ♔h8 20 hxg7++ ♔xg7 21 ♖h7#.

19 ♗xe4+ ♔g8 20 ♕d3 ♗xe5

20...♗xe4 21 ♕xe4 ♕d5 22 ♕g6 ♖f7 23 hxg7 and White wins.

21 ♗xb7 cxd4 22 ♗xa8 ♘d7 23 cxd4 ♗f6 24 ♕g6+ ♔h8 25 ♗e4 ♕e7 26 ♕xg4 ♖g8 27 ♕f3 ♕d6 28 ♗c2 ♖d8 29 ♖hg1 ♗xd4 *(D)*



30 ♖xd4! ♕xd4 31 ♖d1 ♕f6

31...♕e5 32 ♖xd7! ♖xd7 33 ♕a8+ leads to mate.

32 ♕e4 ♔g8 33 ♕h7+ ♔f8 34 ♖g1 1-0

Let me observe your thoughts in an unfamiliar position.



Romanishin – Ribli
Polanica Zdroj 1993
White to play

"My first thought is 13 ♗c7. For instance (moving the pieces quickly), 13...♕xc7 14 ♘xd5 ♕d8 15 ♘xe7+ ♕xe7 16 ♖c7 ♗d5 17 ♕b5 ♘hf6 18 ♘e5. Yes, 13 ♗c7 should be checked thoroughly.

"Then I think about 13 ♗e3. Anyway, I don't want to let him play 13...♘xf4. 13 ♗e3 seems to me preferable to 13 ♗d2, but I don't even know why...

"Maybe I would consider 13 ♘e5; e.g., 13...♘xf4 14 gxf4 ♘xe5 15 fxe5 ... Now I think of 13 ♗d2, with (the plan) 14 ♘b5 and 15 ♗b4 to follow."

What does your intuition tell you?

"I don't know. Intuition is insufficient (in this sort of position). Here one should calculate. I am attracted to 13 ♗c7 but its calculation will cost a lot of time. There are doubts."

Can you think of a possible version of the 13 ♗c7 idea?

"(Immediately) Yes, perhaps 13 ♗e5 ... For if 13...f6, the h5-knight remains offside (and I get an improved 13 ♗c7 variation). If 13...♘hf6 then 14 ♘b5. If 13...♘xe5 then 14 ♘xe5 ♘f6 15 ♘b5 a6 16 ♖c7 (notices 16...♖b8) no, it's bad. Maybe 14 dxe5. The h5-knight is stuck (in its place) while my f3-knight has a strong outpost at d4."

So, what do you say?

"Right now, I don't feel (I have a decisive continuation). White is (just) a little better ... These are difficult positions for me. I feel something, but I have doubts."

Were it a real game, what would you do?

"I'd think for a long time. Maybe for half an hour, for this is a critical position ... The idea (connected with) 13 ♗c7 may prove worthwhile ... Or else I would decide straight away, depending on my mood ... I am ambivalent whether to enter a long and deep calculation of this type..."

The game went:

13 ♗e5 f6 14 ♗c7

!! – Dautov; !? – Romanishin.

14...♕xc7 15 ♘xd5 ♕d6

15...♗xd5 16 ♖xc7 ♗xb3 17 ♖xd7 favours White.

16 ♘xe7+ ♕xe7 17 ♖c7 ♗d5 18 ♕b5 ♖fd8

18...♖ad8 19 ♖xa7 ♕d6 is another option.

19 e4 ♗xe4

19...a6 20 ♕e2 ♕d6 is critical for the whole line: 21 ♖fc1 (21 exd5 ♕xc7 22 dxe6 ♘f8 23 ♖e1 is hardly worth a whole rook) 21...♗xa2 (21...♘c5 22 exd5 ♕xc7 23 dxc5 exd5 24 ♘d4 is advantageous for White) 22 e5.

20 ♕xh5 ♕d6

20...♖dc8!?.

21 ♖fc1 a6?

21...♗g6!.

22 ♘h4 ♗xg2 23 ♘xg2 e5 24 ♘h4 g6? 25 ♘xg6 hxg6 26 ♕xg6+ ♔h8 27 dxe5 1-0

When you face problems on the chessboard, do you treat them as a challenge or as a burden?

"Frequently I bypass a difficult decision, or leave it, accepting that I am only human and that there is a limit to what I can see. But at times I am able to penetrate deeply into the secrets of the position. It all depends on how I feel at a particular moment, what are my mood, my energy, my feelings towards my opponent ... In short, on my inner harmony.

"The majority of my moves flow easily. It happens, though, that I have to liberate myself from earlier (faulty) assumptions. In such cases I have to relax, to let go my will."

What do you mean?

"Well, sometimes, if you desire something badly, you don't see things. It's a thought rooted in the Jewish *Kabbala*: over-motivation, or ambition, if you like, might block us from reaching our destination."

11 GM Dov Zifroni

Born 1976. As a boy prodigy, Zifroni took third place in an under-12 world championship. Later he became Israeli champion for ages 14 and 16. Although never a professional, he made consistent progress and won several strong international tournaments, to attain the GM title with apparent ease. His best Elo rating is 2552.

In an interview held some years ago, you defined yourself as a logical player.[23] *What does it mean?*

"When I study an opening system, I try to understand what's going on, why a certain move is played. During the game, I try to identify my opponent's weaknesses and exploit them, tending to keep away from far-fetched intuitive decisions."

What happens when you confront players who play illogically?

"If they're weak players who make inferior moves, I face no problems. But against a strong illogical player, I experience hard times, being frequently incapable of predicting my opponent's very next move. GM Arthur Kogan belongs to this category. He thinks in an original and creative manner; I have a dreadful score against him."

Surely you catch on to the point of his play afterwards.

"In retrospect, when we analyse the game, I do; mind you, it doesn't prove helpful in our next encounter. With him, I feel utterly in the fog, never knowing what to expect."

> When rivals in a certain game possess not only opposing styles but also colliding thinking systems, it might be difficult for them to predict the course of the game. It is as if each antagonist is managing his own game.

Are you systematic in your chess thinking? Are there fixed procedures that you go through, or constant questions, which you ask yourself during play?

"I look for a game-plan. In some positions it might take quite some time to conceive a worthwhile plan. Then some candidate moves emerge.

"I ask myself which pieces I should exchange with an eye to the ensuing endgame. I devote particular attention to the pawn-structure: I will always have a good think before I push a pawn.

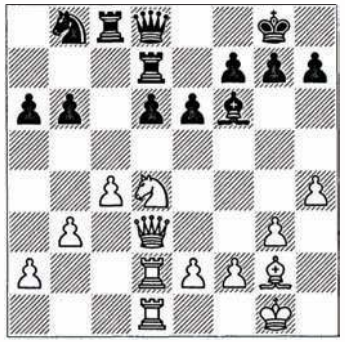
"However, these considerations are relevant in a positional type of game, rather than in a tactical skirmish."

Let's see some of your games and follow your train of thought.

Zifroni – Postny
Israel open 2001

1 c4 e6 2 ♘c3 c5 3 ♘f3 ♘f6 4 g3 b6 5 ♗g2 ♗b7 6 0-0 ♗e7 7 d4 cxd4 8 ♕xd4 d6 9 ♗g5 a6 10 ♗xf6 ♗xf6 11 ♕f4 ♖a7 12 ♖fd1 ♗e7 13 ♘e4 ♗xe4 14 ♕xe4 0-0 15 ♘d4 ♖d7 16 ♕d3 ♗f6 17 ♖d2 ♕c7 18 ♖ad1 ♖c8 19 b3 ♕d8 20 h4 *(D)*

B



So far, play has been simple and natural. But from now on, you make several moves which demand explanation.

"My pieces are positioned on good squares; there isn't much room for improvement. My last move is multi-purpose. I thought that Black would play at some time ...g6 with ...♗g7. In this case, I would soften his king by playing h5.

"Next, in some lines he might have ...d5 or ...b5, and if I capture he checks on c1. So, my last move provides some air for my king.

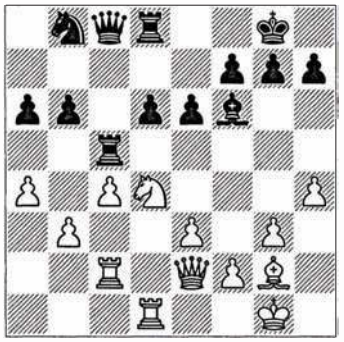
"Lastly, I'd like to restrict his bishop. This is achieved by placing my pawns on h4 and e3."

20...♖c5 21 e3 ♕c8 22 ♕e2 ♖d8 23 ♘f3 ♕c7 24 ♘d4

"This to and fro manoeuvring is meant to show my opponent that I am in control, that I can take a draw if I just desire. It puts some psychological pressure on him, encouraging him to avoid repetition, to his detriment. Besides, I didn't have a clear plan at this stage, and repeating moves is a well-known time-saving device."

24...♕c8 25 a4 ♗e7 26 ♖c2 ♗f6 *(D)*

W



27 ♗e4

What is this move about?

"Well, Black was aiming to play 27...d5 and if 28 cxd5? then 28...♗xd4. So, I had to take measures against this plan."

27...♘d7 28 ♖cd2 ♗e7 29 ♕f3

The purpose of this battery along the h1-a8 diagonal is unclear; the threat of 30 ♗xh7+ ♔xh7 31 ♕xf7 can be easily parried...

"I saw that he had some problems on the c6-square and strove to plant a knight there."

29...♘e5 30 ♕g2 ♗f8? 31 ♗b7

Now White wins a pawn. What would you have done had he played 30...♖c7?

"I intended 31 f4 ♘g4 32 ♕f3 ♘f6 (32...f5? 33 ♘xe6!) 33 ♘c6, securing a minute advantage after 33...♘xe4 34 ♘xe7+ ♖xe7 35 ♕xe4 ♖ed7 (35...♕c5? 36 ♖xd6!) 36 f5."

31...♕b8 32 ♗xa6 d5 33 ♘f3 ♘xf3+ 34 ♕xf3 ♕a8 35 ♗b5 dxc4 36 ♕xa8 ♖xa8 37 ♗xc4 ♖cc8 38 ♖d7 ♗c5 39 ♔f1 ♔f8 40 ♔e2 ♖ab8 41 ♗a6 ♖e8 42 ♔d3 ♖a8 43 ♗b7 ♖ad8 44 ♔c4 ♖xd7 45 ♖xd7 ♖e7 46 ♖d8+ ♖e8 47 ♖xe8+ ♔xe8 48 a5 ♔d7 49 a6 ♔d6 50 ♔b5 ♔c7 51 ♗e4 ♔b8 52 ♗xh7 e5 53 b4 ♗e7 54 ♔xb6 ♗d8+ 55 ♔c6 ♔a7 56 ♗d3 ♗e7 57 b5 ♗d8 58 ♔d7 ♗a5 59 h5 1-0

Zifroni – Skripchenko
Tel-Aviv 1998

1 c4 c6 2 e4 e5 3 ♘c3 ♗b4 4 ♘f3 d6 5 d4?! ♕e7 6 ♗d3 ♗g4 7 a3 ♗xc3+?!

"Inaccurate play on both sides. 7...♗a5! would be unpleasant for White, for if 8 b4 then 8...exd4!."

8 bxc3 c5 9 h3 ♗d7 10 ♖b1 b6 11 0-0 ♘c6 12 d5 ♘a5

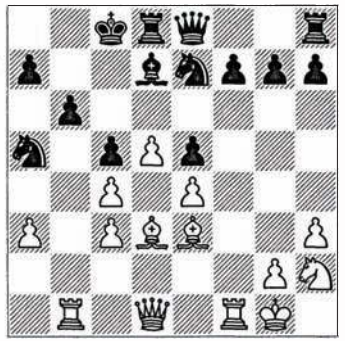
"I felt I was playing against a wall, Black's formation being so solid. I thought that if she stabilizes her king's defences, I would at best be equal."

13 ♘h2 0-0-0 14 f4 ♕e8 15 ♗e3 ♘e7?

"15...f6 is correct. Now I had a very long think. I wanted to break Black's defences somehow, and knew that drastic action was called for."

16 fxe5 dxe5 *(D)*

W

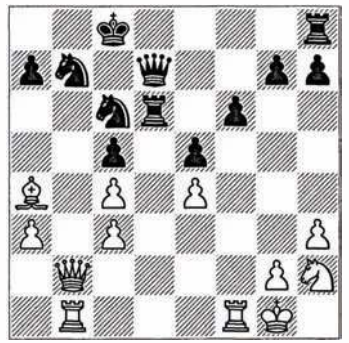


17 ♕f3! f6 18 ♗xc5! bxc5 19 ♕f2 ♘b7 20 ♕b2 ♗c6 21 ♗c2!

"I had seen in advance that 21 dxc6 ♕xc6 was insufficient for White. By transferring my bishop to a4, my attack gains venom."

21...♖d6 22 ♗a4 ♕d7 23 dxc6 ♘xc6 *(D)*

W



24 ♘g4!

"The final touch – the knight is brought to the key square d5" (if now 24...♖d2?, then 25 ♗xc6).

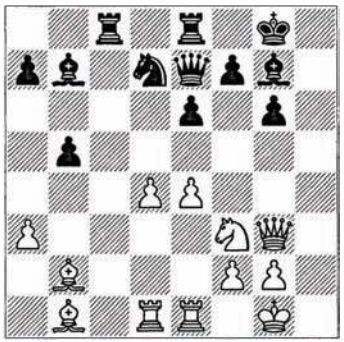
24...♕c7 25 ♘e3 ♘e7 26 ♘d5 ♘xd5 27 cxd5

When I first saw this game I was thoroughly impressed. This is one hell of an operation! How did you conceive such a grandiose plan – ♕d1-f3-f2-b2, ♗d3-c2-a4, ♘h2-g4-e3-d5?

"As I told you, I thought for a very long time. Frankly I didn't see every detail of each variation, but I had a general conception, which indeed mobilizes my entire army."

27...♖hd8 28 ♕e2 ♘a5? 29 ♕g4+ ♖6d7 30 ♖f2 ♘c4 31 ♗xd7+ ♖xd7 32 ♕e6 ♕d6 33 ♕g8+ ♖d8 34 ♕xg7 1-0

Another long-term plan, albeit on a smaller scale, occurred in the following game.



Zifroni – Krayz
Tel-Aviv 1997
White to play

25 ♘g5

"By creating an attack (♘g5 + ♕h4) I wanted to reduce his knight to passivity on f8, thus discouraging ...♘b6-c4. Besides, I felt that I should concentrate on the kingside."

25...a5 26 e5 b4 27 axb4 axb4 28 ♕h4 ♘f8 29 ♖d3

Heading to f4 – some journey.

"I liked the idea of ♖d3: it is flexible. I can employ the rook on the h-file, g-file, f-file ... It also guards the third rank."

I notice that keeping options open plays an important role in your thinking.

"Yes, it does. I prefer moves that are applicable to all sorts of plans. It improves my position while putting extra pressure on my opponent, who is left in the dark as to what I'm really after."

29...♗d5 30 ♖g3 ♖a8 31 ♖g4 ♖ec8 32 ♖f4

Weren't you bothered by the long time that this plan took to materialize?

"As long as there is no danger to my own position, especially to my king, I don't mind. The vulnerability of f7 forces Black to weaken his king's pawn-defences."

32...f6 33 exf6 ♗xf6 34 ♖g4

White keeps the initiative (1-0, 52).

In the next two examples, your opponents concocted surprising dishes for you.

Kožul – Zifroni
European Clubs Cup, Eupen 1997

1 d4 d5 2 c4 dxc4 3 ♘f3 ♘f6 4 e3 e6 5 ♗xc4 c5 6 0-0 a6 7 a3 b5 8 ♗a2 ♗b7 9 ♘c3 ♘bd7 10 ♕e2 ♕b6 11 ♖d1

♖d8 12 h3 ♗e7 13 e4 cxd4 14 ♘xd4 ♘e5 15 ♗e3 ♗c5 *(D)*



16 ♘d5?!

Did you see it coming?

"No; it came as a complete shock."

Tell me what goes on in your mind when such a blow lands on your board.

"As long as I have enough time, I am able to withstand such blows. I begin calculating variations; if I find even one variation in which I'm saved from a forced mate, my confidence rises back to normal."

16...exd5 17 b4 ♗xb4

A courageous decision.

"I saw that I could obtain an equal game by returning the piece with 17...♗xd4 18 ♗xd4 ♕e6 19 exd5 ♗xd5 20 ♗xe5 0-0. However, the team situation required that I try for more."

18 axb4 0-0

Once again, a very calm response.

"19 ♘f5 ♕c7 20 ♖ac1 looks scary, but I can defend with 20...♘c4."

19 ♘b3 ♕c7 20 ♗f4 dxe4 21 ♘c5 ♖xd1+ 22 ♖xd1 ♖e8 23 ♗g3 h6 24 ♖d4 ♕b6 25 ♗h4 ♗a8 26 ♕d2 ♘d3 27 ♕e3 ♖d8 28 ♖xd8+ ♕xd8 29 ♘xa6 ♘e5 30 ♗g3?

A serious error. 30 ♗b3 ♘c4 would have kept his inferiority to a minimum.

30...♕d1+ 0-1

31 ♔h2 ♘eg4+.

Zifroni – V. Milov
Israeli Team Ch 1999

1 ♘f3 c5 2 c4 b6 3 g3 ♗b7 4 ♗g2 g6 5 0-0 ♗g7 6 ♘c3 ♘f6 7 d4 cxd4 8 ♕xd4 d6 9 ♖d1 ♘bd7 10 ♗e3 a6 11 ♖ac1 0-0 12 ♕h4 ♖b8 13 ♘d5 ♘xd5 14 cxd5 ♘f6 15 ♘e1 ♖c8 16 ♘c2 *(D)*



16...♗xd5

"I was concentrating on my planned knight tour to c6, when Milov played this move. After some reflection, I came to the conclusion that this was, in fact, a welcome surprise. I realized that Black's chances lay in the ending, but that in the middlegame my chances were good."

17 ♗xd5 ♘xd5 18 ♖xd5 ♗xb2 19 ♖dd1 ♗xc1 20 ♖xc1 b5 21 ♘b4 f6?! 22 ♕e4 ♖xc1+ 23 ♗xc1

"I thought that he would find it difficult to prevent an invasion by my pieces."

23...♕d7 24 ♗b2 ♖c8 25 ♘d5 ♖c4 26 ♕e3 ♖c5 27 ♘b6 ♕d8 28 ♕e6+ ♔g7 29 ♘d5 ♖c2 30 ♗d4 ♔f8 31 h4 ♕e8? 32 ♗xf6!

"Winning by force, although by now I was pretty sure of victory even if he had not faltered."

32...exf6 33 ♕xd6+ ♔g7 34 ♕xf6+ ♔h6 35 ♕f4+ ♔g7 36 ♕d4+ ♔h6 37 ♘e3 ♖c1+ 38 ♔h2 ♕e6 39 ♘g4+

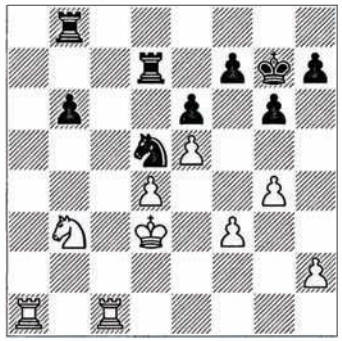
White chooses one of many roads. 39 g4 are 39 ♕d2 are deadly as well.

39...♔h5 40 ♘f6+ ♔h6 41 ♘g4+ ♔h5 42 ♕f4 ♕xg4 43 ♕xc1

(1-0, 50)

Let's observe your thinking in a simplified position.

B



Zilberman – Zifroni
Israeli League 2003
Black to play

How did you rate your chances at this point?

"I thought that I had a substantial advantage."

Really? Material is limited and White is not saddled with too many weaknesses.

"I disagree. In addition to d4, h2 is also weak, to say nothing of the square f4. Moreover, I have a passed pawn on b6 ... I was confident that I was better."

31...h5

"A direct approach. 31...♖h8 is a viable alternative."

32 gxh5 g5 33 ♖g1?

33 h4 gxh4 34 ♖h1 ♖c8 35 ♖ac1 is better.

33...♔h6 34 ♘d2 ♘b4+! 35 ♔c3

35 ♔e4 fails to 35...♘c2 (36 ♖a4 b5).

35...♖c8+! *(D)*

W



To me it looks like some kind of tactical opportunism. Were it not for this trick, White would proceed with ♘e4, with fair counter-chances.

"I don't see it in this way. During the game I felt that White did not have time to regroup. The tactical refutation flows from positional foundations."

36 ♔xb4 ♖xd4+ 37 ♔b5 ♖xd2 38 h4 gxh4 39 ♔xb6 ♖b2+ 40 ♔a7 ♖c4 41 ♖g8 h3 42 ♖g4 ♖c3 43 ♖f4 h2 44 ♖h4 ♖xf3 0-1

The following episode provides an even clearer demonstration of the interplay between positional considerations and tactics.

Zifroni – Gershon
Rishon-Letzion 1995

1 e4 c5 2 c3 ♘f6 3 e5 ♘d5 4 ♘f3 ♘c6 5 ♗c4 ♘b6 6 ♗e2 d6 7 exd6 ♕xd6 8 d4 cxd4 9 cxd4 ♗g4 10 ♘c3 e6 11 0-0 ♗e7 12 h3 ♗h5 13 ♘b5 ♕d7 14 ♘e5 ♘xe5 15 dxe5 ♗xe2 16 ♕xe2 ♘d5 17 ♖d1 a6 18 ♘d4 0-0 19 ♕g4

"Trying to develop some initiative (threat: 20 ♗h6). More importantly, it is a preparatory measure to a trade of bishops."

19...♔h8 *(D)*

W



20 ♗g5

Was it necessary to initiate this exchange? An average player would argue that if you want to attack, you should preserve your pieces.

(Shrugs his shoulders) "♗g5 is a natural move. The bishop has no other (reasonable) square. Its black counterpart is superior to White's, with plans like ...♗c5."

20...♗c5?

"20...♗xg5 21 ♕xg5 ♕e7 is equal. I secretly hoped that Black would refrain from exchanging. As he was contemplating his 20th move, I started to think on the following sequel. I wished to avoid positions where he would trade his bishop for my knight. My next move turned out to be extremely powerful."

21 ♘f5!! f6

White was threatening 22 ♘xg7. If 21...exf5, 22 ♕f3! regains material with the better game, since 22...♖ad8 fails to 23 ♗xd8 ♖xd8 24 ♖d3 and 25 ♖ad1. 21...♖g8 is met by 22 ♘h6!; e.g., 22...♖gf8 23 ♖xd5! ♕xd5 24 ♗f6! gxf6 25 exf6.

22 ♖xd5!

A minute ago play was purely positional: leading criteria were good and bad squares, strong and weak pieces. All of a sudden, hell breaks loose.

22...exd5

After 22...♕xd5, 23 ♗xf6 wins on the spot. 22...exf5 leaves White with a pleasant choice between 23 ♖xd7 and 23 ♕c4.

23 e6 ♕xe6

23...♕c7 24 ♗f4.

24 ♗h6 g6 25 ♗g7+ ♔g8 26 ♘h6+

♔xg7 27 ♕xe6 ♔xh6 28 ♕xd5 b6 29 ♖d1 a5 30 a3 a4 31 ♕c6 ♖ad8 32 ♖xd8 ♖xd8 33 ♕xf6

(1-0, 49)

Finally I'd like you to share your thoughts with me, taking command of the black side in the following game.

Yudovich – Alatortsev

USSR Ch (½ final), Moscow 1944

1 c4 e5 2 ♘c3 ♘c6 3 ♘f3 ♘f6 4 e3 d6 5 d4 ♗e7 6 ♗e2 0-0 7 0-0

"I look at 7...♗f5, to control e4. Maybe 7...♖e8 ... (Another option is) 7...exd4 with a subsequent ...d5. I am not too comfortable with my c6-knight, nor with my d6-e5 formation.

"...exd4 is my main idea. The question is the timing: right now or later. 7...♖e8 is a flexible move, preparing for future developments. 7...exd4 8 ♘xd4 (8 exd4 d5) 8...♘xd4 9 ♕xd4. Now I have a problem: if I play 9...c6, d6 is weakened; if I don't, he'll play 10 ♗f3 (with annoying pressure).

"I dislike 7...e4: the pawn will be weak. On 7...♖e8 White has 8 d5 with 9 e4 ... My preference now leans towards either 7...♗f5 or 7...exd4."

7...♖e8 8 b3 ♗g4 9 ♗b2

"d4 could turn out to be a weakness; how do I target it? I'd rather have my bishop on f6 (after swapping pawns on d4), but it's difficult to accomplish.

"9...e4 seems bad. 9...♗f8 is a (reasonable) candidate move, transferring the bishop to g7 and also facilitating (the plan) ...e4 with ...d5.

"On 9...exd4 he'll play 10 ♘xd4. If then 10...♘xd4, 11 ♗xg4 is better for White. 9...♗xf3 10 ♗xf3 exd4 11 exd4 ♘d7 12 ♘d5 does not look good. 9...♗f8 appears logical. (If then) 10 d5, Black replies 10...♘e7 and 11...g6. 9...a6 is also possible.

"I should check if he threatens 10 ♘xe5 (10...♗xe2 11 ♘xc6) ... that's OK for me (10...♘xe5) ... With the dark-squared bishop on f8 I'll be calmer. So my choice is 9...♗f8."

We're hardly out of the opening, yet you take a considerable time over your moves.

"This is a critical position: what I do here will have a significant bearing on future developments."

9...♗f8 *(D)*



10 h3

"10...exd4 11 ♘xd4 (11 hxg4 dxc3) 11...♗xe2 12 ♘dxe2 seems a bit better for White. This leaves 10...♗h5 or 10...♗f5, as 10...♗d7 appears passive. 10...♗h5 11 d5 (11 ♘xe5 dxe5 is fine with me) 11...♘e7 12 e4: I don't like it (as Black).

"(Let's examine) 10...♗xf3 11 ♗xf3 exd4 12 exd4 g6. Against a tactical player, I may choose this continuation. Against a positional player, or if I were playing for a win, I'd pick 10...♗f5."

10...♗h5 11 ♖e1

"Once again, what happens after 11...♗xf3 12 ♗xf3 exd4? ... it looks as if I win a pawn, unless there a trick somewhere ... 11...♗xf3 12 ♗xf3 exd4 13 exd4 (13 ♗xc6? dxc3) 13...♖xe1+ 14 ♕xe1 ♘xd4 15 ♗xb7 ♘c2 16 ♕e2 ♘xa1 17 ♗xa8 ♘xb3 ... Yes, I win a pawn.

"11...♗xf3 is my move."

(After 11...♗xf3 12 ♗xf3 exd4 White should play 13 ♘d5 dxe3 14 ♘xf6+, with some compensation for the pawn.)

11...e4 12 ♘h2 *(D)*



"12...♗xe2 or 12...♗g6? In the latter case, how am I going to activate my f8-bishop? ... after 12...♗xe2 13 ♕xe2 I have interesting ideas like 13...♘b4 or 13...d5.

"When my knight lands on d3 (via b4) I should check ideas like ♘xe4, when d3 hangs. But White should evacuate his e1-rook so it does not come under attack.

"12...♗xe2 13 ♕xe2 ♘b4 14 ♗a3 (14 ♘g4 ♘xg4 with 15...c6 to follow) 14...♘d3 15 ♖f1 ... Is my d3-knight strong or weak? White intends 16 ♘xe4 so 15...d5 is compulsory ... Instead of occupying d3 (after 14 ♗a3), I should consider 14...a5 ...

"I don't like 12...♗g6. I would play 12...♗xe2, with the follow-up ...♘b4, to establish a pawn-chain c6-d5-e4 plus an outpost on d3 for the knight."

12...♗xe2 13 ♕xe2

"13...♘b4 or 13...d5 (contemplates more or less the same variations as in the previous note). However, 13...d5 is met by 14 ♘g4. I'll play 13...♘b4."

13...d5 14 ♖ad1

"14 ♖ad1 is not to the point. 14...♘b4 is now obvious."

14...♘b4 15 ♖f1

"The first thing (to do) is to fortify the pawn-chain. So, 15...c6 or 15...♘d3. In both cases I think Black stands better.

"White wants to play 16 f3 ... Maybe I'll play 15...♗d6 ... I choose 15...♘d3."

Why do you favour this move over 15...c6?

"All things being equal, I go for the more active move."

15...c6 16 ♘g4 ♘xg4 17 ♕xg4 ♘d3 18 ♗a1

"I feel that Black has the upper hand. I'd like to exchange my bishop for his knight, or to trade queens. Another option is 18...g6 followed by ...f5. It looks strong, and White's f3 advance is no longer worrisome. Yes, 18...g6."

18...g6 19 f4 f5 20 ♕e2 *(D)*

B



"Black holds a large advantage now. He can trade his bishop for a knight (20...♗b4) or consider 20...♗h6 with the idea ...g5, shifting rooks to the g-file.

"It is tempting to play on the queenside ... (His mind wanders between 20...♗b4 and 20...♗h6). Maybe White will try ♘a4-b2 to get rid of my knight, so how about 20...b5 ...

"I'll play 20...♖c8."

Odd; you were spending almost all your thinking time on other moves.

"Yes, but 20...♖c8 is flexible, as it retains the option to proceed according to White's plan. It is a less committal move."

> Though A, B and C may all be appealing candidate moves, sometimes a grandmaster may opt for alternative D, as it leaves the door open to a later utilization of A, B and C.

20...♗b4 21 ♕c2 ♗xc3 22 ♗xc3

"I ponder 22...b5 or 22...g5. Anyway, Black has a marked edge."

22...b5 23 c5 b4 24 ♗e1 a5

Black is definitely better (0-1, 41).

[Zifroni's choices were frequently better than Black's moves in the game.]

You were making a lot of calculations in this exercise. Some of my other interviewees were mostly engaged in a strategic kind of thinking.

"This is what I do in a game. I look for promising lines and reach out for the one continuation that will yield the highest dividends."

12 GM Ilia Smirin

Born 1968. Smirin was already a recognized talent in his former land, Belarus. After his emigration to Israel in 1991, he became Israeli champion twice (1992 and 2002) and represented his newly adopted country in six successive Olympiads.

Ilia won numerous tournaments in Europe and the USA. In mid-2001 he climbed to his best ever rating (2702), which placed him 13th on the world's Elo list.

Some of my interviewees handle their thinking-process in a logical manner, while others rely on intuition. To which group do you belong?

"I believe that everyone leans on both logic and intuition. The latter forms a significant part in my decision-making. However, the more time I have and the stronger my opponent, the more I'll tend towards concrete, rational calculation."

Do you use the same type of chess thinking on your turn as on your opponent's turn?

"When the clock is ticking for my adversary I frequently take a stroll. So about 50% of the time allotted is used for relaxation, rather than for active thinking."

Do you need to survey the board while thinking?

"I don't need a board, but it's easier for me to look at it, especially when the situation is complex. But other players are known to gaze aside or above. Different people have different habits."

Have you developed your own system of dealing with problems on the board?

"I have never reflected on questions like 'what kind of thinking system do I have'. I suppose I do have some system, but it comes to me automatically, in a natural way."

What type of positions do you find most difficult to handle?

"At my level and experience, it doesn't take long to understand what's going on, from the strategic point of view. I find calculating tactics more taxing.

"Equal positions are toughest. If you are intent on winning them, you have to make concessions, to give something to your opponent. Emanuel Lasker was well aware of this. You have to weigh various factors and to decide their worth: which is more valuable – the pawn I surrender or the initiative I obtain in return; the strong outpost for my knight or the passed pawn I let him create; and so on."

Watching grandmasters play 'mysterious moves' is a constant source of

frustration for ordinary players. I'd like to go over some 'strange' moves of yours, pleading for an explanation.

Smirin – Vallejo Pons
Leon 2001

1 c4 ♘c6 2 d4 d5 3 cxd5 ♕xd5 4 e3 e5 5 ♘c3 ♗b4 6 ♗d2 ♗xc3 7 bxc3 ♘f6 8 f3 e4 9 ♕b3 ♕d6 10 ♕b1 ♗f5 11 ♘e2 ♗g6 *(D)*



12 ♕b3

Please, enlighten the readers and me: what is the purpose of all these queen moves?

"10 ♕b1 is geared towards attacking e4, and could be regarded as a measure of fighting for the centre. I preferred 10 ♕b1 to 10 ♕c2, because I wished to keep an eye on the b7-pawn, and also to maintain an option of a later ♕b5. I didn't mind blocking my a1-rook for the moment, because I didn't need it (in the short term).

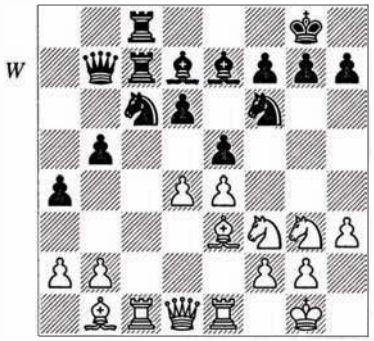
"When he played 11...♗g6 I had to react against his threat of 12...exf3. If 12 ♘f4, then after 12...exf3 13 ♘xg6 hxg6 my h-pawn becomes vulnerable; and 12 ♕xb7 0-0 was not to my taste – I feared it would grant him a strong initiative. So, I moved my queen once again. When I had played 10 ♕b1 it was not my intention to return to b3, but the game evolved in a way that dictated such a decision.

"In short, these 'strange' moves stem from concrete calculation."

12...0-0 13 ♘f4 ♘a5?!

13...b6 14 h4!?.

14 ♕b4 ♘c6 15 ♕xd6 cxd6 16 h4 exf3 17 gxf3 ♘h5 18 ♘xg6 hxg6 19 ♖g1 ♖ac8 20 c4 ♘e7 21 ♖b1 ♘f5? 22 ♖xb7 ♘xh4 23 ♔f2 ♖b8 24 ♖b3 ♖b6 25 ♗d3 ♖fb8 26 ♖gb1 ♔f8 27 ♗b4 ♔e7 28 ♗xd6+ 1-0



Smirin – I. Sokolov
Sarajevo 2002
White to play

21 ♔h1

What is this for?

"Black intends 21...♘xd4. I would like to respond to this move with 22 ♖xc7 but it fails because of the intermediate 22...♘xf3+, winning a pawn. I can play the simple 21 ♕d2 but after 21...♘xd4 22 ♘xd4 ♖xc1 23 ♖xc1 ♖xc1+ the position simplifies considerably.

"I was willing to exchange one rook, but not two. I also didn't like to close the centre with 21 d5. Hence, I side-stepped with my king, to prevent the intermediate check."

So, the sole purpose of 21 ♔h1 is prophylactic.

"Correct."

How far are you ready to go in order to foil your opponent's plans? Would you put your queen on h1? And is Black's plan so dangerous, anyway?

(Smiling) "Regarding moves like ♕h1, the late T. Petrosian would definitely take them into consideration! But here, moves like 21 ♔h1 do not make any concessions. It was natural to me; I took (only) a minute or two on this decision."

21...h6 22 ♕d2 ♗f8 23 a3 exd4 24 ♘xd4 ♘e5 25 ♖xc7 ♖xc7 26 ♘df5 ♘c4 27 ♕d4 ♘xe3 28 ♘xe3 *(D)*



28...♕a7 29 ♕d3 ♕c5? 30 ♘d5! ♘xd5 31 exd5 g6 32 ♘e4

with advantage to White (1-0, 69).



Kasimdzhanov – Smirin
Elista (Olympiad) 1998
Black to play

16...♘g4! 17 f3 ♘f6!

How did you conceive this idea?

"This apparent 'waste' of a move evolved like this: I had to find counter-chances against White's intention to gain space on the queenside (by playing c5). I didn't like the appearance of 16...c6 17 ♘e3. So I went for the standard King's Indian plan, moving the f6-knight to make ...f5 possible. 16...♘e8 disunites my rooks and he can play 17 ♖a1! f5 18 ♘b2. Therefore, 16...♘g4 was chosen.

"Had he responded with 17 h3 I would have answered 17...♘h6. 17 h3 is not a useful move against the intended advance ...f5. But on 17 f3 I decided (in advance) to retreat my knight back to f6. With the d1-h5 diagonal

blocked, the idea ...♘f6-h5-f4 gains in strength.

"There is a variation in the King's Indian where Black's bishop goes to g4, White responds with f3, and the bishop withdraws to d7. So my knight manoeuvre may have come, in part, through association."

18 ♘b3 ♘h5 19 ♘a5 ♘f4 20 ♘xb7??

A losing blunder.

20...♘xe2+ 21 ♕xe2 ♖fb8 22 c5

22 ♘a5? ♖xa5.

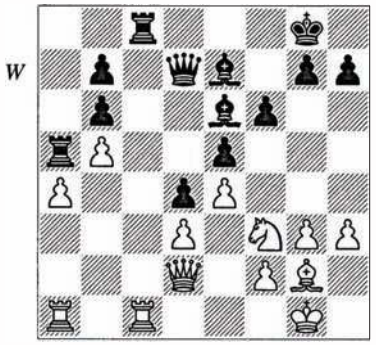
22...dxc5 23 bxc5 ♘xc5 24 ♘xc5 ♖xb1 25 ♘xd7 0-1

The following two games are chaotic. I wonder if you could put some order in the mess.

Smirin – *Gambit Tiger* (computer)

Internet 2002

1 ♘f3 d5 2 g3 ♘f6 3 ♗g2 c5 4 0-0 ♘c6 5 d3 e5 6 ♘bd2 ♗e7 7 e4 0-0 8 c3 ♗g4 9 h3 ♗c8 10 ♖e1 d4 11 ♘c4 ♕c7 12 a4 ♗e6 13 ♗d2 ♘d7 14 ♕c2 f6 15 ♖ec1 ♘b6 16 ♘xb6 axb6 17 cxd4 cxd4 18 b4 ♕d7 19 b5 ♘a5 20 ♗xa5 ♖fc8 21 ♕d2 ♖xa5 *(D)*



Until now the game appears quite normal. I'd like you to comment on the proceedings from now on.

22 h4

"I thought that I stood much worse. I wanted to confuse him (it) ... (My last move aims) at pushing my h-pawn forward and making ♗h3 possible. Psychologically, it turned out brilliantly." *[It may seem strange to talk about 'confusion' and 'psychology' in the present context, but in fact it is quite common for humans to personify computers].*

22...♔f8 23 h5 ♖ca8 24 h6 g6 25 ♕c2 ♗b4

"25...♗c5 is strategically decisive, but a computer always looks for maximum gains."

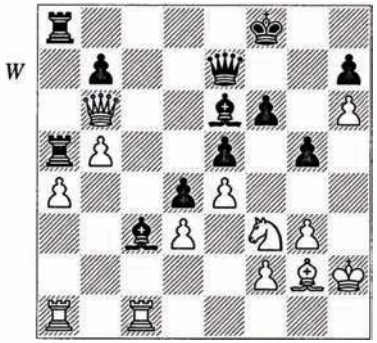
26 ♕c7

"In fact, my only chance."

An easy decision, then.

"Yes. When you have only one move, it's easy."

26...♗c3 27 ♕xb6 ♕e7 28 ♔h2 g5 *(D)*



29 ♘d2!!

"I was proud of this move, which gave the computer a chance to go wrong. The text-move presents Black with several tempting paths: Tiger can capture a rook, a knight ... Best was 29...♖xa4, keeping a solid edge."

Had you calculated the consequences of Tiger accepting the sacrifice through to the end?

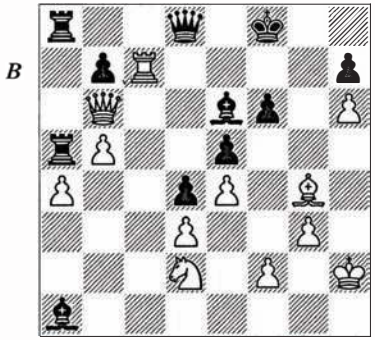
"No. At this point I just took it one move at a time."

> Exceptional ideas frequently rest upon simple justifications: concrete analysis, discarding alternatives, or the wish to create practical chances.

29...♗xa1? 30 ♖c7 ♕d8 31 ♗h3!

"Now I realized that I had a huge attack."

31...g4 32 ♗xg4 *(D)*



32...♗xg4 33 ♕c5+ ♔e8

33...♔g8 fails to 34 ♕c4+ ♔h8 35 ♕f7.

34 ♖xh7 ♖c8 35 ♖h8+ ♔f7 36 ♖xd8 ♖xc5 37 h7 ♖c8 38 ♖xc8 ♗xc8 39 h8♕ 1-0

"I was particularly pleased to score a victory against a computer in a tactical tussle, a rare feat for a human. It transpires that upon deciding on its 29th move, the tactics were beyond the computer's range."

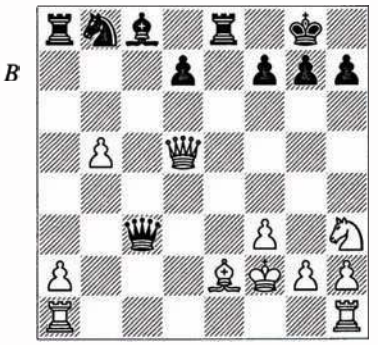
I. Sokolov – Smirin

Wijk aan Zee 1993

1 d4 ♘f6 2 ♗g5 ♘e4 3 ♗f4 c5 4 f3 ♕a5+ 5 c3 ♘f6 6 d5 ♕b6 7 b3 e6 8 e4 exd5 9 exd5 ♗d6 10 ♘h3 0-0 11 ♕d2 ♖e8+ 12 ♗e2 c4! 13 ♗xd6 ♕xd6 14 bxc4 b5 15 cxb5 a6

In his original notes in *New in Chess*, Smirin explained that Black's energetic play was mandatory, else White would have gained a positional plus. [24]

16 c4 axb5 17 cxb5?! ♕e5 18 ♘c3 ♘xd5 19 ♕xd5 ♕xc3+ 20 ♔f2 *(D)*



20...♗b7!!

You wrote that this move came to you only after 25 minutes of thinking.

"It is true. Sometimes you spot a move right away; but at times, as at this

juncture, you feel that there is something, but it takes a lot of energy and concentration to pinpoint it precisely."

Yet the tactical justification is only three moves deep; you are capable of coping with longer variations in seconds...

"... But here the trapping of the queen in broad daylight is quite original (21 ♕xb7? ♕c5+ 22 ♔g3 ♖a7) – there aren't many examples like this. Admittedly, a computer will take only a fraction of a second to find it."

In handling such an obscure position, what accounts for your superiority over a club-player? There is no strategy here, no use of opening principles or game-plans...

"In order to reach this position, strategic understanding was required: I operated to grasp the initiative and to weaken the white king's position. In the diagram position, however, strategy indeed doesn't play a role."

So, it's just sheer power of calculation?

"Not just calculation ... I'd rather say that the important factor here is imagination: the ability to picture such possibilities."

> The distinction between calculation and imagination is instructive. A GM knows not only how to calculate, quickly and accurately; he is also capable of imagining that certain ideas do exist.

21 ♕c4 ♕e3+ 22 ♔g3 h5?! 23 ♕f4! ♕xf4+

23...♕xe2? 24 ♖he1 ♕xe1+ 25 ♖xe1 ♖xe1 26 ♕c7 ♗d5 27 ♘f4.

24 ♘xf4 g5 25 ♘xh5 ♖xe2 26 ♖hc1 f5! 27 ♖c7 f4+ 28 ♔h3 g4+! 29 ♔h4 gxf3 30 ♖xb7 fxg2 31 ♘xf4 ♖f2 32 ♘xg2

32 ♔g3? ♖f1.

32...♖xg2 33 ♖c1 ♖xh2+ ½-½

A captivating game, from beginning to end.

Boris Gelfand told me that some top players do not pay attention to their opponents' moves.

"This is an exaggeration. All (good) players pay some attention to their opponent's moves. GMs differ one from the other in the amount of attention they pay to their own moves and to the opponent's moves. For former world champion Tigran Petrosian, for instance, it would probably be 60% attention to his opponent's moves and only 40% to his own moves. For me it may be approximately 50-50, or maybe 60-40 in favour of my own moves. There are some players for whom the ratio may be 70-30.

"Of course, sometimes one's position is so good that it doesn't matter what your adversary does."

How much weight do you assign, during a game, to psychological elements?

"Psychology is very significant. Queries like 'what moves would be unpleasant for him?', 'what is his mood?'; or 'should I complicate matters against him?', are important. Sometimes I place too much weight on psychological factors, when I should be concentrating on the board."

B



Beliavsky – Smirin
Belgrade 1998
Black to play

24...♖d8

"I played this to protect d6 against his intended ♖b6."

25 ♖b6 ♖d7!

"Playing this move, which threatens to capture White's queen with 26...♖e7, I had to see through Beliavsky's plan."

26 ♘xc5 ♖g7!

Black must avoid the continuations 26...dxc5? 27 ♕xg6+, 26...♖e7? 27 ♕xe7+ ♕xe7 28 ♖xb7 and 26...♕xc5? 27 ♕xd7+.

27 ♖xe5

"Beliavsky played this move instantly. He probably thought that he was winning, expecting only 27...♖xe5 (27...dxe5 28 ♘e4) 28 ♕xd6."

27...♕xc5!

"Only now did my opponent realize that 28 ♖xf5 is met by 28...gxf5+ (check!) – the point of my 26th move. Caught by surprise, he didn't put up the toughest resistance."

28 ♖e2 ♕xc4 29 ♕e4 ♕c1+ 30 ♖e1 ♕c5 31 ♕e3 ♖e5 32 ♕c1 ♖g5+ 0-1

Smirin – B. Alterman
Haifa (Zim) 1995

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘f6 3 d4 ♘xe4 4 dxe5 d5 5 ♘bd2 ♗e7 6 ♗b5+ c6 7 ♗d3 ♘c5 8 ♗e2 ♗g4 9 ♘d4 ♗xe2 10 ♕xe2 ♘bd7 11 0-0 ♘e6 12 ♘xe6 fxe6 13 ♕g4 ♘xe5 14 ♕xg7 ♘g6 15 ♘f3 ♔d7 16 c4 ♕g8 17 ♕d4 ♖f8 *(D)*

W



18 ♕xa7!

"If I let him proceed with ...♔c7-b8, I'll have nothing."

18...♖xf3 19 ♕xb7+ ♔d6

19...♔d8 20 ♕b8+ ♔d7 21 ♕xg8 ♖xg8 22 gxf3.

20 ♖e1

Is there a concrete threat here?

"I intend 21 c5+, with a deadly attack. The rook's move prevents him from escaping with ...♔e5-f6."

20...e5

20...♖d3 (20...♕c8 21 ♕xc8 ♖xc8 22 gxf3) 21 c5+ ♔xc5 22 ♗e3+ ♔d6

23 ♗c5+! (a beautiful clearance operation: the bishop is sacrificed to vacate the c1-square for the rook) 23...♔xc5 24 ♖ac1+ ♔d4 25 ♕a7+ c5 26 ♖c4+!! followed by mate.

21 b3! ♖d3 22 ♗a3+ c5?

22...♔e6 offers stiffer resistance, although after 23 cxd5+ ♖xd5 (not 23...cxd5? 24 ♕a6+) 24 ♕xc6+ ♗d6 25 ♖ad1 White keeps a strong initiative.

23 ♗xc5+! ♔xc5 24 ♖ac1!!

A quiet, deadly move. Black cannot shut the gates, since 24...d4 25 ♕c7+ ♔b4 26 ♕b6+ ♔a3 27 ♕a5+ leads to mate.

24...dxc4 25 ♖xc4+ 1-0

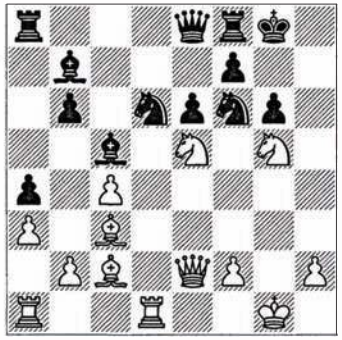
While the combination in the former game (...♖d8-d7-g7!) was backed up by concrete analysis, your 18th move in the Alterman game was intuitive. Am I right?

"I would say that it was (based on) intuition plus some variations. Well, it was difficult to see it through to the end. You know, most annotations that you read in print do not reflect what happens in the contestants' minds during a game: the analysis is often completed after the game is over, frequently with the aid of a computer."

GM Gofshtein told me that, when calculating, if a player gets in his mind a good position, he should stop calculating.

"If you have a type of position in which you seek a forced win, you should carry on the analysis until the very end. But otherwise, he is right: you should stop calculating when you reach a promising position."

In the following position, try to put yourself in White's shoes, and convey your thoughts to me.



Hecht – Keene
Brunnen 1966
White to play

"At first glance White seems to be better ... I see that Black has threats along the (a8-h1) diagonal. White needs something concrete; otherwise Black will take the initiative...

"(I look at) 23 ♘g4 ... (also) 23 ♕d3 with ♕h3 ... (or perhaps) sacrifices on g6 in mind."

(Starts to concentrate.) "It's not easy. It looks better for White, but concrete calculation is required. 23 ♘d7 ♘xd7 24 ♕h5 gxh5 25 ♗h7#.

"23 ♘d7 ♕xd7 is a problem: 24 ♗xf6 ♕c6 winning. (But) maybe a similar motif..."

(After some silence): What are you thinking about?

"23 ♖xd6 ♗xd6 and maybe 24 ♖d1 and if 24...♗c5 then 25 ♘d7. Hmm, looks good for White (25...♘xd7 26 ♕h5!). (But what) if 24...♕e7 ... Nevertheless, there should be something (for White) in this position. 23 ♖xd6 ♗xd6 24 ♖d1 ♕e7 25 ♖xd6 ♕xd6 maybe 26 ♘g4 ♘xg4 27 ♕xg4 ♖ad8 28 h3 (not 28 ♕h4 ♕d1+) [28 ♕h5! *ed.*]."

Do you believe in this continuation for White?

"**Yes** ... but it's not smooth ... (laughs). I'm not sure.

"23 ♖xd6 ♗xd6 and now maybe 24 ♘exf7 ♖xf7 25 ♗xg6 ♖g7. (No); Black is fine."

You have several continuations here; are you looking for the simplest one?

"This position is already complicated. You cannot make it simple."

(After a while): What are you doing now – looking for new directions or rechecking the same variations?

"I'm doing both things.

"... The b7-bishop is a very strong piece – it gives Black counter-chances ... I am in favour of 23 ♖xd6."

Were this a real game, what would you do?

"If I had an hour, I might use 40 minutes here. I feel that the result of the game depends on my next move.

"23 ♖xd6 ♗xd6 24 ♖d1 ♕e7 maybe 25 ♗xg6. It's difficult to calculate, he has 25...♗xe5 ... maybe 26 ♗h7+ – no, it doesn't work. I am also tempted by 23 ♖xd6 ♗xd6 24 ♘g4 ♘xg4 25 ♕xg4 – it may be the strongest.

"... Right now I think that I'd play 23 ♖xd6 ♗xd6 and then decide between 24 ♘g4 and 24 ♖d1."

Were it a real game, would you behave like this – first give away an exchange and then contemplate your follow-up?

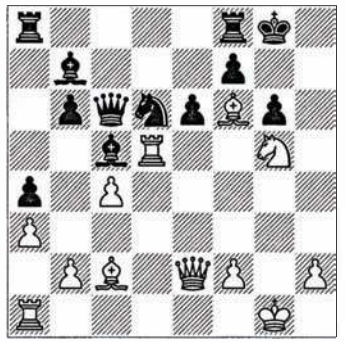
"It's possible (that I would). I'm sure that in this position (after 23 ♖xd6 ♗xd6) White is OK."

The game continued:

23 ♘d7?! ♕xd7

23...♘xd7? 24 ♕h5!.

24 ♗xf6 ♕c6 25 ♖d5 *(D)*



Smirin missed this shot which requires extensive analysis to reach a verdict.

25...exd5?

GM Gershon, to whom I had presented the same position, was attracted by the 23 ♘d7 line, and exerted some effort to make it work. He saw the reply 25...♘e8! and dismissed the line for White. It is far from simple even then, but Black is indeed on top: 26 ♗c3 exd5 27 ♕h5 ♘f6! 28 ♗xf6 ♗xf2+ and now 29 ♔xf2 ♕xf6+ or 29 ♔f1 ♕xc4+ 30 ♔g2 (30 ♔xf2 ♕xc2+) 30...d4+ 31 ♔h3 ♕c8+.

26 ♕h5! ♗xf2+ 27 ♔xf2 ♘e4+ 28 ♘xe4 gxh5 29 ♖g1+ ♔h7 30 ♘c5+ 1-0

Smirin is pleased that his intuitive rejection of 23 ♘d7 was correct. He claims that if he had seen 25 ♖d5, the subsequent 28...♗xf2+ would have been easy to find.

"It's interesting to check my proposal to play 23 ♖xd6. My approach was positional: to eliminate Black's active knight. It's more logical. "

Well, I'm more interested in your thought processes; the correct moves in this position do not matter much to me.

"But they do to me!"

So, we examine 23 ♖xd6 ♗xd6 24 ♘g4 ♘xg4 25 ♕xg4. This time Smirin moves the pieces on the board. At first he is inclined to endorse his recommended exchange sacrifice, on account of 25...f6 (25...♕e7 26 ♕h5!) 26 ♘xe6 ♗c8 27 ♖e1.

Then he notices 25...e5!, which is hard to crack. After 26 ♕h4 ♔g7 27 ♕h7+ ♔f6 28 ♕h4 the game may end in repetition (28...♔g7).

Do you think about your thinking?

"Not really. It's quite difficult to explain what crosses our mind, and not only in chess. Frequently it's even difficult to reach a conclusion as to what is the best move. In certain positions, a specific move may prove to be pleasant for me and repugnant for my opponent. Thus, it may turn out to be the 'best' move.

"I tend to think about such matters in philosophical terms, rather than in mathematical terms."

Part 2: Discussion

13 The Thinking of GMs

As a starting point to our discussion, it would be worthwhile to make a brief overview of current knowledge in the field of chess thinking.

The seminal research was made by De Groot (1946)[25] and Simon & Chase (1973) [26]. Modern studies followed, the most important being those by the Swiss Fernand Gobet [27], the Finn Pertti Saariluoma [28] and the American Neil Charness [29].

These studies were usually conducted in an 'expert vs novice' framework, trying to establish the difference between skilled and unskilled players, and to target its sources.

The main findings – some rather banal, others intriguing – can be summarized as follows: [27, 28, 29, 30, 31]

1) Skilled players possess a large amount of chess-related knowledge.

2) This knowledge is organized in chunks (clusters of related information), rather than as isolated pieces of data. The size of an expert's vocabulary of chess-related configurations is currently estimated at around 300,000 chunks.

3) The excellence of strong players stems more from their quick perception and powerful memory, than from their ability to think furthest ahead (calculation).

4) Strong, experienced players are conspicuous in selecting chess-specific perceptual cues from an over-the-board position. They are able to encode, at a glance, the essence of a position; to identify the most relevant areas on the board and to focus their attention on those pieces and squares that are most meaningful in a specific situation.

5) This capability is backed up by a huge storage of familiar patterns ('in such a position it is usual to do this and that') which they are able to retrieve and process in an efficient and selective manner.

6) Strong players' superiority over novices in tasks of recall and reconstruction is demonstrated mainly in game positions. It is markedly narrowed – but still exists – when random positions are presented to them.

7) In a given position, skilled players do not consider more candidate moves than their weaker counterparts. They do, however, consider pertinent, more effective moves. Hence, the difference lies in quality, not in quantity.

8) Top players are faster and more accurate than intermediate players, in choosing the best move. In fact, they may be so fast as to advance the notion that they encode chess-related information in parallel.

9) Calculation is performed in a cyclic method of 'progressive deepening': screening several candidate moves lightly, reverting to some of them time and again, while taking the range of calculation further and further, until a decision is reached.

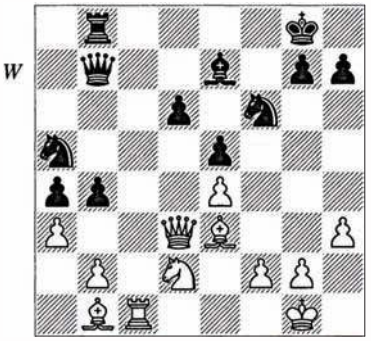
10) Preliminary neuroscientific investigations of chess-players point to experts' and amateurs' thinking involving a pronounced activation of different parts of the brain (the frontal lobe vs the medial temporal lobe and the hippocampus, respectively). This suggests that experts use higher-order reasoning and make better use of their memory chunks.

One methodology of inspecting chess-players' cognitive faculties is by recording their eye movement, when confronted with an uncharted position. Utilizing this technique, it was found that during the first seconds of screening a position, stronger players produce more fixations on empty squares and along the edges of squares than lesser players. This was interpreted as instrumental in order to maximize the extraction of information from surrounding piece-occupied squares.

With the following diagram, let us illustrate this last point.

The board is full of pieces; the number of reasonable moves and plans is large. Where should White focus his attention?

A novice would probably concentrate on those squares occupied by pieces. A more advanced player will turn his attention to the weakness of



Murey – Beliavsky
Moscow (Interzonal) 1982
White to play

d5 and contemplate a manoeuvre like ♗g5xf6, followed by ♘f1-e3-d5. He may also gaze at the open c-file and concentrate on c7.

A top player will spot more key squares:

28 axb4 ♕xb4 29 ♗a2+ ♔h8 30 ♕a6! h6 31 ♗e6!

White's last two moves are extremely powerful: by occupying the empty squares a6 and e6, ostensibly irrelevant to the untrained eye, White severely restricts his opponent's options, while preparing the ground for an assault against the black king.

31...♗d8 32 ♖c8 ♔h7

32...♕xb2 fails to 33 ♕xd6! ♖xc8 34 ♕f8+ ♔h7 35 ♗f5+ g6 36 ♕xh6+ ♔g8 37 ♗e6#.

33 ♘f3! ♘e8

Losing a piece, but Black's position was hopeless anyway. For instance: 33...♖xc8 34 ♕xc8 ♗b6 35 ♗f5+ g6 36 ♕e6.

34 ♗d2 ♕xb2 35 ♖xb8 ♕xb8 36 ♗xa5 ♕b1+ 37 ♔h2 ♗xa5 38 ♕xa5 ♕xe4 39 ♗d7 ♕f4+ 40 ♔g1 ♘f6 41 ♗xa4 d5 42 ♗b3 e4 43 ♕d2 1-0

Leafing through psychological chess research, one detects several problems that make it hard to draw specific conclusions regarding the elite players; namely, grandmasters.

One problem is methodological in nature. You can't really know for sure what goes on in somebody else's mind; hence you have to implement simulative methods. Sadly, the celebrated technique of 'thinking aloud' has serious deficiencies, some of which have already been acknowledged by the founding father of chess psychology, Adriaan de Groot.

Presenting positions to players, without introducing the development which had preceded them, is hardly a valid imitation of occurrences in an actual game.

Verbal expression of thoughts slows down the thinking-process, because talking consumes more time than thinking. Even worse, this method interferes with thinking: the reader has witnessed in the previous section several occasions where a grandmaster first went astray but when asked to think silently, hit on the right track at lightning speed.

The performance of a subject in 'thinking aloud' tasks strongly depends on his motivation to make an effort (after all, it is not a real game, just an exercise). The motivation, for its part, influences the concentration level.

An interviewee's willingness to expose his inner thoughts or to risk failure in the presence of an outside observer should not be taken for granted. Indeed, some interviewees decided on their moves more quickly than I had expected, while others were not too keen to engage in any serious calculation of concrete moves.

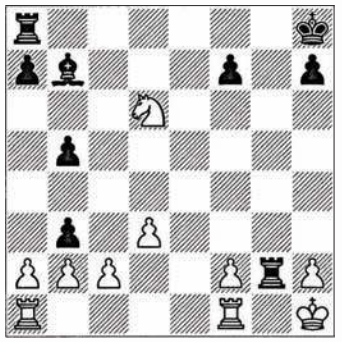
Based on my own experience in the present work, I regard the 'thinking aloud' technique to be a dubious simulation of the mental processes involved in an over-the-board game.

Another method of inquiry – investigations of eye-movements – tells us where a chess-player is looking, but leaves the reasons for this phenomenon open to interpretation.

Looking at certain directions on the board may shed light on the perceptual process, but doesn't necessarily indicate that active chess thinking is taking place around these areas. The issue is further confounded by the fact that more than a few grandmasters conduct their thinking without looking at the board.

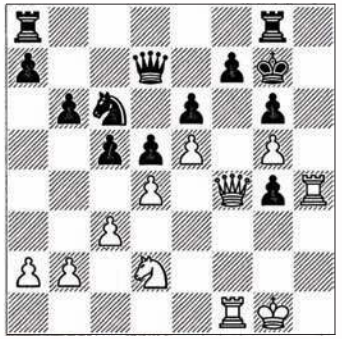
One more characteristic of existing chess research is the inclusion of well-defined, solvable problems. The diagrams below are taken from two recent studies [29, 28]. They may teach us something about the difference between a 1900 Elo player and a 1400 Elo player, but I do not find them helpful in distinguishing grandmasterly attributes: they are too elementary.

B



Black to play

W



White to play

Solutions: A) **1...♖g1++** with mate next move. B) **1 ♖h7+** ♔xh7 (1...♔f8 2 ♖xf7+) 2 ♕h2+ mates.

Other disturbing points in cognitive chess research: 'experts' are defined, in one sample study, as players who hold a 2100 to 2350 national rating. Considering the rating inflation, is it right to treat a 2100 player as an 'expert'?

Several studies act upon the old '10-year rule', asserting that even a talented individual must spend at least ten years to attain an international level of performance, or to achieve an elevated status. In modern chess, this assumption is way off the mark. Improved methods of gaining knowledge and training through smart software, and the wealth of international tournaments that give everyone a chance to accumulate experience – all these have considerably shortened the path from novice to grandmaster.

The confusion between 'grandmasters' and 'experts' (grandmasters are experts, but not vice versa!); the presentation of easy tactical positions along with complex and double-edged positions; the small number of subjects in many studies (sure, they sometimes obtain the magical 0.05 statistical significance – but does it *mean* anything?) and the problematic tools of investigation – all these lead the present writer to conclude that, while considerable progress has been made regarding the nature of chess thinking, the issue of *grandmaster's thinking* is, as yet, not fully understood.

I'd like to share some insights that I acquired from conducting the preceding interviews. Please keep in mind that they should be taken as impressions and thoughts, not as scientific conclusions.

Grandmasters, it would appear, are just like (reasonable) players in many respects. They check a limited number

of candidate-moves in each position. They skip, during calculation, from one possible option to another in an apparently unorganized, unsystematic manner. They conduct the search for the best moves in the method of progressive deepening. Much like lesser mortals, grandmasters look for the best squares for their pieces, for ways to open lines and for methods of advancing passed pawns. When the position becomes complicated and obscure, they lose their anchors: their store of recognized patterns ceases to be of help, and they are prone to analytical errors.

There are, however, certain aspects of thinking in which grandmasters are different from mid-strong players ('experts'). [The classification to grandmasters and experts somewhat overlaps the professionals vs amateurs categorizing.]

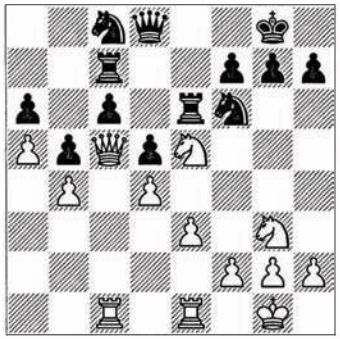
1) Grandmasters always put the question *What* before the question *How*.

Ordinary players quickly engage themselves in calculation mode: "I go here and he may go there and then...". Grandmasters, as a rule, in the vast majority of position-types, start with strategic considerations before they move on to concrete analysis.

Sure, strategy and tactics are interwoven and GMs may glance at certain moves in an early stage of their thinking; but basically, they crave to understand what is going on before they plan their actions. This may sound obvious, but is, in fact, quite rare: confronted with a problem, in chess as well as in real life, we tend to rush towards doing, hopping over the stage of understanding the real nature of the problem.

Coach Alexander Mikhalevsky says: "tactics are implemented to assist, or solve, strategic needs." As far as I am able to judge, grandmasters' thoughts are indeed conducted according to this rule.

Interestingly, grandmasters create an implicit hierarchy of thinking levels, in which 'tactics' are ranked lower than 'strategy'. Tactics are frequently treated by GMs as something cheap: a trick, a swindle, bluffs. The following diagram, with its accompanying commentary, attests to that.



Euwe – Alekhine
Zurich 1934
White to play

28 e4

"The text is severely criticized by Alekhine on the grounds that it is based wholly on tactical finesse" – Euwe. [28...♘xe4 29 ♘xe4 dxe4 30 ♖xe4 f6? 31 ♘f7! as happened in the game (1-0, 53).] "This latter consideration is, however, only incidental to the primary strategic significance of the text-move ... The basic point underlying the text is that the player with the greater freedom of action ought to strive to increase his mobility by opening up new lines wherever possible". [32]

Euwe goes on to explain that even after 28...dxe4 29 ♘xe4 ♘d5 30 g3 his position would still be preferable from the strategic point of view. His urge to defend himself against the 'accusation' that he preferred tactical considerations to strategic factors is illuminating.

2) Grandmasters implement *prophylactic thinking* in a profound and systematic way.

GM Jonathan Rowson writes: "(many) find the whole idea of prophylaxis a bit perplexing, occurring only in exceptional circumstances ... Most club-players consider it as an entirely foreign concept". [33] I share his view. Of course, from time to time one must reflect on one's opponent's plans, his likely defences and so on. But prophylaxis as an indispensable concept? Surely, just one of Nimzowitsch's (currently, Dvoretsky's) obsessions.

To my surprise, I found out that my interviewees had adopted this thinking method – looking at things from their opponent's angle, trying to see through his mind in order to thwart his schemes in advance – as a fundamental tool. Not only was prophylaxis embedded in their system – it was usually their starting point, the very cornerstone on which everything else rested.

Some grandmasters stated it explicitly. GM Rechlis went as far as saying that he was reconciled to being unable to make any progress in his own camp, on condition that his opponent would be even more restricted. For many others, by observing how they reacted to, or explained, certain positions [see 16 ♖f2! in Psakhis – Ftačnik; Greenfeld's 14...a6! against Soffer; Comay's all-embracing approach to problems and studies] you could realize the enormous importance they attached to prophylaxis.

3) Grandmasters manage their thinking in a *focused and economical* way.

Some players spend their thinking time in daydreams. 'Is my position any good? Was I right in choosing that opening line? Where did I make a mistake? What is the purpose of this game? Why am I here, in this galaxy?'

Unlike them, grandmasters (and certainly the super-GMs) are characterized by a down-to-earth approach. They get to the bottom of things right away. They perceive within seconds the type of problem(s) they are facing, and muster all resources to concentrate on means towards the optimal solution.

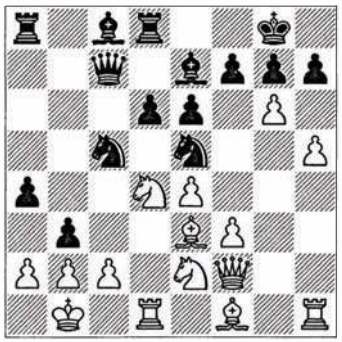
Anyone who has played a tournament game against a grandmaster

knows that in the *post-mortem* analysis, it transpires that the grandmaster had not seen a lot of stuff that he, a non-GM opponent, had calculated.

At first, one wonders how come a grandmaster didn't see what his lower-rated rival had seen. After a while, one realizes that the grandmaster didn't see because he didn't bother to search for it; the variation was probably irrelevant: "I don't invest my time planning what to do if the opponent plays bad moves," says Psakhis.

Top players manage their actions according to another important guideline: the need to be practical. A practical player does not spend oceans of time on complicated lines if he feels it will lead to time-shortage later on. 'Practical' also means to settle for 'good enough' moves; if you can win your opponent's queen, it might be superfluous to search for mate. Abandoning an unpromising line on the basis of 'feeling', rather than 'proof', reveals another aspect of the practical attitude of GMs (Comay's method is a notable exception).

Here are other, subtler examples of a practical approach.



Ganguly – Svidler
Bled (Olympiad) 2002
White to play

(*see top diagram*)
21 gxh7+ ♔h8

Why not 21...♔xh7? "I can't say I know why it is such a bad idea to actually go ahead and take the pawn," writes Svidler. [34] Yet he opted for the common set-up in which an enemy pawn shields one's king. If a safe and well-tested option is available, a practical player usually steers towards it.



Kramnik – Bareev
Wijk aan Zee 2003
Black to play

This, according to Kramnik, is an equal position, in theory. But in practice, he thought that "It is quite difficult to find a plan for Black, whereas it is very easy to find a plan for White". [35] Hence the evaluation of this position rests on the amount of effort which will be required from both antagonists: yet another practical consideration.

Grandmasters' ability to identify critical positions is remarkable. They seem to know when to play on automatic mode and when to switch on the 'thinking' button. "I would definitely invest a lot of time on this position" was a recurring expression of my interviewees when reflecting on a complex position.

4) Grandmasters employ *logical reasoning*.

Don't we all? We wish we did.

Chess manuals advocate utilization of logic – putting forward premises founded on facts; then extracting conclusions based on these premises. Frequently, though, chess-players play moves that spring out of nowhere: they embark on combinations which do not lean on positional grounds, or opt for strategic plans that do not correspond with pawn-structures.

Grandmasters look for logical connections. They deeply need to understand why they stand better or worse, and why the correct plan is this and not that. I reckon that, reconstructing their thoughts, they even tend to introduce system and order in chaotic situations.

Reshevsky – Dake
Lone Pine 1977

1 ♘f3 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 g3 ♗g7 4 ♗g2 0-0 5 0-0 d6 6 ♘c3 e5 7 d3 ♘c6 8 ♖b1 a5 9 a3 ♗d7 10 b4 axb4 11 axb4 ♕c8 12 ♗g5!

Black's set-up (...♗d7 and ...♕c8) invites this response. 12...♘e8 is bad now on account of 13 b5 and 14 ♗e7.

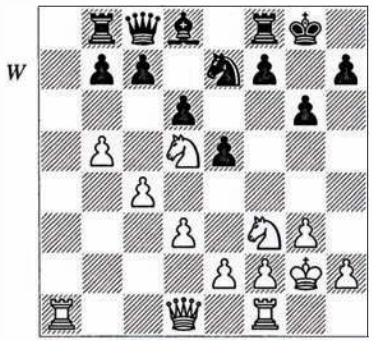
12...♗h3 13 ♗xf6! ♗xf6 14 ♘d5

"The point of White's strategy. My plan is to drive Black's king's bishop out of play long enough for me to get control of the a-file" – Reshevsky. [36]

14...♗d8

14...♗g7?? 15 b5.

15 ♖a1 ♗xg2 16 ♔xg2 ♖b8?! 17 b5 ♘e7 *(D)*



18 ♘c3

Having planted his knight on d5 four moves ago, he retreats. Why? "Trading knights would only relieve the pressure against Black," explains Reshevsky.

His play is directed towards achieving his goal. Does a certain move assist me, or does it help my opponent? Here I exchange (13 ♗xf6!), there I don't (18 ♘c3).

18...♘f5 19 ♖a4 ♘g7 20 ♕d2 ♘e6 21 ♕h6 ♗f6 22 ♘d5 ♕d8 23 ♘xf6+

♕xf6 24 ♖a7 ♕e7 25 ♕e3 ♖fe8 26 ♘d2 ♕g5 27 ♘e4!

The policy of trading pieces continues to be guided by the same criteria. White holds a definite edge (1-0, 71).

When GMs make an intuitive decision, they try to explain to themselves what exactly is going on (GM Rechlis). When they act solely on gut feeling, they might feel unease (Costeff).

In the previous section GM Smirin presented the logic behind some of his 'mysterious' moves. The following example provides another illustration.



Uhlmann – Hartston
Hastings 1975/6
White to play

24 ♗f1

Eyeing b5, and thus preventing ...♘b6-c4. Black now seeks counterplay against e4, weakened by White's last move.

24...♘f6 25 a3 ♕b7 26 ♗g2 ♘d7

As we were. So, White has to find another antidote to Black's plan.

27 ♕d3! ♘f6 28 ♖dc2 ♗e7 29 ♘e2!

"An apparent retreat," says Uhlmann. Intending to transfer the knight to d4, White exploits a neat little tactic: 29...♘xe4? 30 ♖xc6 and 29...♗xe4? 30 ♖xc8 both cost Black a piece.

29...e5?! 30 ♘c3

Waste of time? Not at all: Black's last move has weakened d5. Moreover, the freeing ...d5 is no longer possible.

30...exf4 31 gxf4 ♘h5 32 ♘e2

What may seem to an untrained eye as mere cat-and-mouse play, is, in fact, completely logical. d4 becomes available once again to the white knight, and the opening of the a1-h8 diagonal is of paramount importance. "(The) knight alternates between e2 and c3, making good use of each square" – Uhlmann. [37]

32...♗e8?

On 32...♘f6 (32...f5? 33 ♖xc6 ♖xc6 34 ♕d5+; 32...g6 33 ♗f3 is no improvement) comes 33 ♘d4! with an overwhelming advantage.

33 ♖xc8 ♖xc8 34 e5 ♕b8 35 ♖xc8 ♕xc8 36 ♗f3 f5 37 exd6 ♗f6 38 ♗xh5 ♗xh5 39 d7 1-0

Grandmasters use logical reasoning also in the process of making evaluations. Analysing their games, one can find comments like "I must be fine here as I have made no mistakes so far" or "I was confident that my opponent's play should be refuted: he has violated all principles of piece development".

More about the logical system of GMs' problem-solving, in the forthcoming pages.

5) Grandmasters validate their assessments against a host of *subjective criteria*.

The average, even the fairly strong player, tends to evaluate his position against solid, objective criteria. When contemplating his moves, he clings to familiar positional principles ("This move is appealing because I'll have the bishop-pair", or "because I'll create a passed pawn") and to some sort of decision-model ("This move should be played because all other options lead forcibly to defeat").

I have noticed that my grandmaster companions were inclined to test their ideas against more practical, subjective measures. They report that they frequently ask themselves questions like:

- Does the resulting position suit my liking?
- Am I in the mood to enter a defensive configuration, right now?
- Is this move likely to prove profitable against this particular opponent?
- What move is the least convenient for my opponent?
- Is this plan too committal, burning my bridges? (Put in another way, if I turn out to be wrong, would I be able to step out of the main road)?
- Will it be possible to enliven the play, reaching a double-edged position?

Other criteria that GMs might use are, for instance, "the pain criterion" – assessing the long-range moral damage of playing a passive, cramped position; or "the dignity factor" – the influence on their self-image, should they abstain from an obvious sacrifice. The latter does not go hand in hand with the quest for maximum effectiveness, so grandmasters are likely to deny its usage.

6) Grandmasters *adapt to changed circumstances* quicky and effectively.

Top players of every generation seem to hold flexible interpretations of core chess concepts, like material, time, pawn-structures and piece deployment. They may disregard accepted principles and common chess values without hesitation. "Would you bury a black bishop or knight on h8 for the rest of the game?" was a question I posed to several interviewees. They all responded confidently that if this was what the position demanded then, sure, they would.

We have witnessed many examples of GMs' flexibility in the previous section: shifting effort from one flank to another (Gelfand-Van Wely); changing course from positional to tactical channels (Zifroni-Gershon); executing 'ugly', unnatural moves when in need (Kuzmin-Psakhis); or challenging one's opponent's strong points (the combinative storm in Smirin-Gambit Tiger).

Skilled and knowledgeable as they are, grandmasters are willing to step 'out of the box', exploring new territories, creating fresh schemes and gameplans.

14 A System for Problem-Solving

In the interviews I conducted, I repeatedly posed my companions questions about the way they tackled problems on the chessboard. Did they have a systematic method of examining certain positions? Did they proceed through defined stages while engaging in calculation and assessment?

Some respondents gave explicit answers. From others I had to make my own deductions, on the evidence of the games we've discussed.

A universal 'grandmaster method' is, of course, non-existent; every top player shapes and crystallizes his own style. However, there are some noteworthy common characteristics.

Defining the Goal

First, we should ask what the goal of a grandmaster is in a game. Amateurs have all sorts of goals: to enjoy themselves, to practice their rusty minds, to hit on beautiful combinations, to attain glory ... Seasoned, tough grandmasters are very much result-oriented: they simply strive to win. This narrows their outlook in a given position, to one of two options: looking for 'the best move', or searching for 'the best practical continuation'.

I first became aware of this distinction when reading an essay by the famous Czech GM Vlastimil Hort. He defines a 'best move' as one "which promotes the most efficient coordination of the forces ... (thereby) develops the initiative to the greatest degree."[38]

Hort asserts that producing a series of best moves may be beyond the limits of human capabilities. He argues that even if we succeed in finding a chain of 'best moves', we may induce our opponent to find counter 'best moves', a process which, at the end of the day, would not lead to our advantage.

"Is finding the 'best' move worth the extraordinary effort?" asks Hort. Opposite the perfectionist type, who looks out for the absolute truth on every turn, he presents a grandmaster "(who) plays White without undue ambition and with Black he meets each problem as it arises". Hort makes it plain that he prefers the latter type's approach.

The majority of my over-the-board interviewees likewise adhere to the practical approach. When a position was presented to them to solve, they frequently called a halt to the searching process as soon as they spotted a decent move. On many occasions they were not keen on verifying all details through to the end and made a choice based on partial data. (Smirin's willingness to sacrifice an exchange without deciding on the next move comes to mind.)

In analysing these positions, almost all of them made mistakes in calculation. When we discussed the correct solutions afterwards, I was amazed that several grandmasters were indifferent to committing analytical errors; some were even elated when it turned out that their chosen path proved to be (by mere chance!) correct. It is as if they said, "Hey, I'm only human, don't expect me to see everything. My hunch was right, the position I got was OK – and that's fine with me."

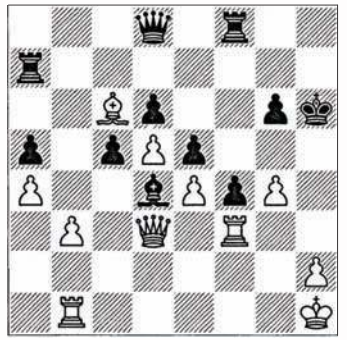
In a real-game situation my subjects would undoubtedly be more serious and responsible, but I tend to believe that basically the 'good enough position' rules over the 'best move' approach.

Defining the Problem

We have mentioned the grandmasters' quick perception of chess stimulants and their tendency towards examining, first and foremost, strategic factors. Top players can detect, in one cursory glance, the core characteristics of a position.

When analysing a specific position, a player must formulate a clear definition of the problem he is facing and identify the root cause of this problem. He has to ask himself questions like: 'What should be done or changed, for the problem to be solved?' and 'What would the consequences be if I remove, exchange or temporarily neutralize this enemy piece?'

Let us take a second look at one position that was presented for solving.



Black to play

To suggest **1...♔g5** as Black's first move, as GM Alik Gershon did, you have to realize that:

- The white king's defences are weak.
- Combined together, Black's rooks constitute a powerful force, which may create pressure along the h-file.
- Black's king is hindering Black's actions, so it should step out of the way.
- On g5 the king may seem vulnerable but...
- It is not, because White has no access to it (2 h4+ ♔xh4).

Now, if we go over GM Gershon's transcript, we see that while he did mention some points before embarking

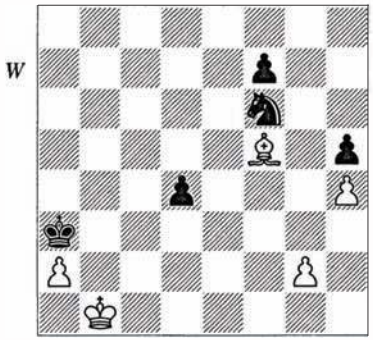
on 1...♔g5, he said nothing about the others. Did they cross his mind too swiftly to be articulated in words, or did he conceive 1...♔g5 as one holistic 'package' ("I rely on intuition; I know that in this position, this is the move" – Gershon)? It's hard to say.

When the problem is simple (in the eyes of the solver), thinking takes place so fast that it is difficult to follow and trace its roots. When I asked my interviewees, on several occasions, 'how did this idea come to you?', on more than one occasion their answer was a bewildering 'I don't know'.

When problems are more difficult, and the solutions less transparent, grandmasters slow down. They reassess the situation, and make a conscious effort to examine things in an ordered manner. They ask themselves mental questions ("I ask myself what would be the positional assessment, if I exchange queens, or other pieces" – Gelfand; "I frequently examine if the play so far has been 'correct'" – Kosashvili).

In certain cases, they must forsake earlier assumptions (*see following diagram*):

"Here I spent a lot of time trying all sorts of ideas without success," writes correspondence GM Simon Webb. [39] The natural plan of advancing White's king to the centre allows Black enough time to capture the a-pawn, sacrifice his knight for the g-pawn, and hurry with his king to the opposite flank, to enforce a drawn endgame of ♔+wrong ♗+h-pawn vs ♔.



Webb – Baumbach
corr. (Zagorovsky Memorial) 1999
White to play

"I was about to give up and agree to a draw, when it occurred to me that I might have a zugzwang."

45 ♗c8!! ♔b4

45...d3 loses as well: 46 ♗f5 d2 47 ♔c2 ♔xa2 48 ♔xd2.

46 ♔b2 ♘d5 47 g4 hxg4 48 ♗xg4 ♘e3 49 ♗f3 d3 50 h5 ♘c4+ 51 ♔a1 1-0

Black resigned in anticipation of 51...♘e5 52 ♗d1 ♔c3 53 h6 ♘g6 54 h7 f5 55 a4 ♔b4 56 ♔b2 ♘h8 57 ♔c1 ♔c5 58 ♔d2 ♔c4 59 ♗b3+.

Thinking along the lines of 'what should *I* do?' failed to supply a promising answer. But switching attention towards the query 'what can *he* do?' made all the difference.

The concept of the 'cornerstones' of a chess language emerged in my conversation with Ofer Comay. Problemists have a list of 'things to look for': battery, cross-check, self-block, flight-square, cyclic play, ideal mates ... Players have a parallel list: rook on the seventh rank, centralized knight, double attack, passed pawn, *zwischenzug*, strong bishop vs weak knight, and so on. I don't believe that grandmasters carry such lists with them. They usually don't need to, as they are firmly anchored in their minds.

From time to time, though, when grandmasters face intricate obstacles, they shift the list into an 'awareness' mode, to light their path in the darkness.

Methods of Solving

Scrutinizing the interviews in Part 1, the reader will observe that grandmasters apply one of two principal methods of thinking: *forward* and *backward*. The forward method is based on logic and uses concrete calculation as its major tool. A player gathers data, builds assessments, reaches conclusions and finally decides upon a line of action.

The backward method commences with the end point, the decision. A player 'knows' that he should choose a certain move or plan. The basis of this knowledge is intuition; the working tool: 'a gut feeling'.

Between these two schools of thought there is, naturally, a wide variety. One can implement one principal method and support it with the other; or one may combine the two methods into an integrated system of thought. One player may implement a very structured approach (e.g., Alex Mikhalevsky). Another player may be unaware that he is utilizing a system at all.

Whenever grandmasters were able to reconstruct a logical thought-process that had led them to a specific decision, it was apparently by going through some defined stages. I shall try to outline the process leading to some *special ideas* that differentiate the men from the boys.

Glancing at a position when it is his turn to move, a grandmaster asks himself whether anything special is going on. If the answer is negative, he keeps his former assessments and proceeds with his earlier plans.

A positive answer motivates the commencement of a searching process, designed to derive fresh information. A review of various ideas and game plans ensues.

If this process yields a satisfactory result, the GM picks a move from the arsenal of tested weapons. In all frankness, much of what a grandmaster does during a game can be described more as 'recognition' (of familiar piece-configurations and a set of associated patterns) than as 'thinking' (see, for instance, notes to Gofshtein-Bacrot and Gelfand-Movsesian).

If, on the other hand, a GM is unhappy with what he sees, or anyway feels that the position deserves better treatment, a search for some new ideas unfolds.

At this point, some grandmasters conduct a sort of feasibility test ("I asked myself: is this a kind of position

in which one should check sacrificial options" – Rechlis). They indulge in an *a priori* assessment of the idea's chances of success.

Suppose a GM is turned on by a peculiar, attractive possibility. Apart from analysing concrete variations, he may ask himself, at any time during his reflection, mental questions, like:

- How do I feel about this idea?
- Do I trust it? Do I believe that it stands a working chance?
- Is it worth the effort? Is it practical?

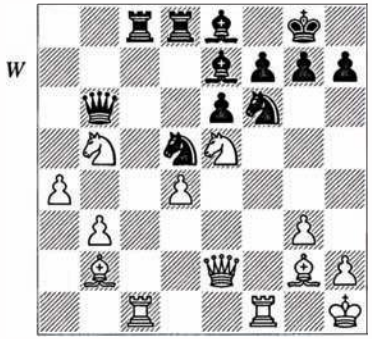
After screening the positional factors and doing additional analysis, the grandmaster is left with a list of candidate moves: some routine, perhaps well-tested in previous games; others which throw the game into uncharted waters. Examining the latter, typical dilemmas that appear at this juncture are:

- Can I use this idea differently (in an improved version, or a different timing)?
- What changes are required to make the idea work?

When the game is over, a self-reflecting GM also wonders why he was drawn to the idea in the first place, and whether such ideas are applicable in similar situations.

To demonstrate an internal conflict, so common in the grandmaster's mind when he examines a non-routine idea, let us look at the following diagram.

White is a pawn up, and his pair of passed pawns on the queenside is a promising factor in an ensuing endgame. However, right now Black retains good piece-play and the white pawns are blockaded.



Purdy – Fryda
Sydney 1946
White to play

22 ♖c2!?

White should consider the reply 22...♖xc2 23 ♕xc2 ♘e3, as occurred in the game, as well as 22...♘b4, when the rook must abandon its new post. It is not clear, then, if 22 ♖c2 is worth checking in the first place.

"Would you contemplate such a move?" I asked GM Greenfeld. He reflected for a while, and gave a positive answer, on the grounds that making a bid to control the c-file was logical. Other GMs, upon noticing the complications, might discard the line altogether.

22...♖xc2 23 ♕xc2 ♘e3 24 ♘c4 ♘xc2

24...♕xb5 25 ♕d3. After the text-move, White simplifies into a superior ending.

25 ♘xb6 ♗xb5 26 axb5 ♘xd4 27 ♗xd4 ♖xd4 28 ♘c4 ♘d5 29 b6 ♗d8 30 b7 ♗c7 31 ♖a1 g6 32 ♖a8+ ♔g7 33 ♗xd5 exd5 34 ♖c8 1-0

The idea connected with 22 ♖c2 probably evolved, from White's viewpoint, in the following manner:

1) I'd like to advance my passed pawns on the queenside, but it's impossible right now.

2) I should contest the c-file. How about 22 ♖c4, followed by 23 ♖fc1?

3) No, it fails to 22...♗xb5, when I lose my extra pawn. Is there another move, with the same motif?

4) Yes, 22 ♖c2; but 22...♖xc2 23 ♕xc2 ♘e3 refutes it – does it not?

5) (Some analysis of concrete variations).

6) What is the evaluation if we exchange rooks, and/or queens? What will be the consequences of a major-piece ending, with no minor pieces?

7) Is it worth entering these complications? Can't I find a simpler continuation?

8) Is it wise to play in such a manner against this particular opponent?

9) How do I feel about 22 ♖c2? Am I sure about the soundness of my calculations? Is this really the best I can achieve?

This ongoing deliberation is partly concrete, partly abstract; some of its ingredients appear also in lesser players' thoughts, but some are unique to top players.

15 The Grand-Plan Approach

How far does a strong chess-player plan ahead? This ancient question has elicited, over the years, diverse answers.

Where sharp and concrete analysis is called for, grandmasters have proved, time and again, that they are capable of calculating long variations accurately. Things are less clear when the position demands the formation of strategic plans, which, by nature, involve unforced lines and abstract thinking.

Leafing through the writings of leading players, one often wonders whether their retrospective commentary reflects the truth, or a wish to glorify themselves in the public eye.

Alekhine – Tartakower
San Remo 1930

1 d4 e6 2 c4 f5 3 g3 ♘f6 4 ♗g2 ♗b4+ 5 ♘d2 ♘e4 6 a3 ♘xd2 7 ♗xd2 ♗xd2+ 8 ♕xd2 0-0 9 ♘h3 d5 *(D)*



Here Alekhine comments that he decided to liquidate the central pawns as rapidly as possible, in order to exploit the weakness of Black's dark squares.

10 cxd5 exd5 11 ♘f4 c6 12 0-0 ♕e7 13 b4

This might be interpreted as a natural move, commencing a minority attack (a4, b5), but Alekhine states: "The real object of this move ... is to open the queen's way to a2." [40]

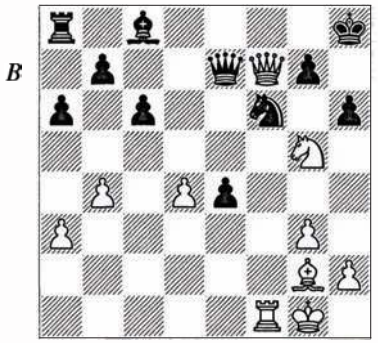
13...a6

13...♘d7 14 b5 ♘b6 15 bxc6 bxc6 16 ♖fc1 is advantageous for White (16...♘c4? 17 ♘xd5!).

14 f3

"All in accordance with the plan inaugurated by his 10th move" – Alekhine.

14...♘d7 15 e4 fxe4 16 fxe4 dxe4 17 ♕a2+ ♔h8 18 ♘e6 ♖xf1+ 19 ♖xf1 ♘f6 20 ♘g5 h6 21 ♕f7! *(D)*



"This ... had to be foreseen when the central action was started," claims Alekhine; and we are led to believe that when embarking upon 10 cxd5, the Great Man saw everything in advance.

21...♕xf7

21...♕d8? 22 ♖xf6.

22 ♘xf7+ ♔h7 23 ♘d6 ♗e6? 24 ♘xb7 ♗d5 25 ♖e1! ♖a7 26 ♘c5 a5 27 bxa5 ♖xa5 28 a4

(1-0, 50)

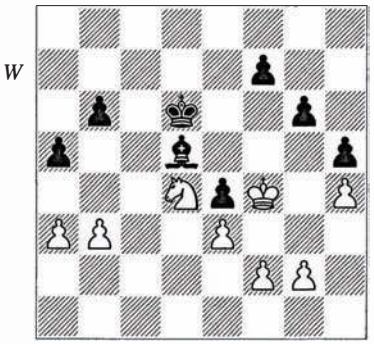
Are grandmasters really capable of such imposing mental feats? We have evidence to the contrary. Some members of the GM inner circle have expressed doubts about the existence of *grand plans*. Quoting a comment by Botvinnik, in which the ex-world champion described a complex five-stage middlegame plan (Benko-Botvinnik, Monte Carlo 1968) [41], chess journalist GM Hans Ree wondered: "Does it really happen this way...? Most of the time, in chess, it isn't the plan that rules, but chaos". [42] Ree concluded that in Botvinnik's case, the above commentary could well be authentic, but opined that such grandiose operations were extremely rare.

In another instance, French GM Joel Lautier is reported to have said that everyone plays move by move, but pretends after the game that he was carrying out plans. [43] See also Psakhis's comments to his game vs Razuvaev, and Smirin's annotations to some of his games, in Part 1.

In modern chess literature, one meets frequent admissions of changes of plan, due to errors in calculation or evaluation. GM comments like "here I intended to proceed with ... but at the last moment noticed (the refutation)" or "I had missed (the enemy's response) in my earlier calculation, and had to deviate..." are common.

It seems that GMs are often satisfied with mini-plans, consisting of a series of two to four moves. In a critical position in a recent famous game (Shirov-Topalov, Linares 1998), the winner reportedly said that he had not seen anything concrete in advance, but felt that "there should be something in the position". [44]

The next position may be tackled in an holistic manner, as well as with a 'one step at a time' approach.



Korchnoi – Bruzon
Hoogeveen 2001
White to play

Korchnoi makes this materially level position look like a forced win.

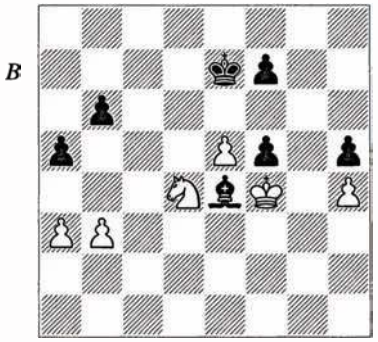
34 ♔g5 ♔e5 35 ♔h6 ♔f6 36 ♔h7 ♗b7 37 ♔g8

White threatens to infiltrate behind the enemy lines (♔f8-e8-d7), thus forcing Black's next move.

37...♔e7 38 ♔g7! ♗d5 39 f3 exf3 40 gxf3 ♗a8 41 e4 ♗b7 42 e5! ♗d5

Black must guard against 43 e6, amongst other things.

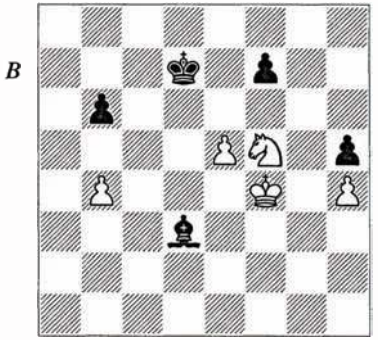
43 ♔h6! ♗b7 44 ♔g5 ♗d5 45 f4 ♗e4 46 f5 gxf5 47 ♔f4 *(D)*



If we compare the position with the previous diagram, we might conclude that we were witnessing a grand strategic plan. First, the white king marched to g7; then a white pawn was pushed to e5, controlling the f6-square. After that, the white king returned to g5, to add power to the breakthrough f4-f5. Black's pawn-structure was shattered and a loss of material became unavoidable.

But did it actually happen that way? Probably it did, since in this simplified position it is possible to envisage far ahead, and besides, Viktor Korchnoi is an eminent endgame player. On the other hand, one can decide upon the white's king tour to g7 on general grounds ('let's improve my king's position and then we'll see how to proceed').

47...♔d7 48 b4 axb4 49 axb4 ♗d3 50 ♘xf5 *(D)*



50...♔e6

50...♔c6 will not bring salvation: 51 ♘h6 ♗g6 52 ♔g5 ♔d5 53 ♔f6 threatening 54 e6.

51 ♘g7+ ♔d5 52 ♘xh5 ♔c4 53 ♔g5 ♔xb4

We enter the last stage, where a pawn-race is in the offing.

54 ♘f4 ♗e4 55 h5 b5 56 e6! fxe6 57 ♘g6 ♔a3 58 h6 b4 59 h7 b3 60 h8♕ b2 61 ♕c3+ ♔a2 62 ♕c4+ 1-0

To sum up: the concept of a grand plan does exist but is probably rarely exercised in GM chess and only in limited types of positions.

16 The Dilemma of an Impasse

One of the most difficult situations in chess arises when a player fails, even after prolonged thinking, to find a satisfactory solution to his over-the-board problems. This may occur either because there isn't one, or else because the correct solution eludes him.

As every tournament game is limited by a time-frame, a dilemma presents itself: ought a player to pursue his quest for something that may not exist? How long should he carry on with his efforts before quitting? What clues are there to signal to him whether he is on the right track?



Ehlvest – Mednis
Las Vegas 1998
Black to play

Following White's last move, 19 f4-f5, Black pondered for 31 minutes. After considering various options he concluded that: "White's attack was going to be very dangerous no matter what I did. Therefore, the only chance is to resolutely attack White and hope for the best." (Mednis). [45]

19...a5!

Calculation, supported by judgement, brought Mednis to realize that White's attack was strong, perhaps unstoppable. In his commentary Mednis doesn't bother to suggest concrete variations, which he surely examined. Facing insoluble obstacles, he chose to pursue his own plan: not so much because he liked it, but more because he believed it was his only shot.

20 c3 a4 21 ♗c2 b4 22 f6!? gxf6 23 ♗xh7+ ♔xh7 24 ♕h5+ ♔g7 25 ♕g4+ ½-½

As far as I am able to ascertain, grandmasters are divided in their approach to the impasse dilemma.

Some GMs force upon themselves a *time-constraint*: they will explore for ten minutes or so, and if a golden solution does not present itself, they will settle for what they have (e.g., GMs Gelfand and Gofshtein).

The amount of time and effort a player is ready to invest in a problematic position seems to be closely connected with how strongly he believes that a good solution will emerge. We've witnessed, in the previous section, several cases in which a conviction that 'something must be there', led grandmasters to launch a prolonged searching process.

Other GMs endorse the *perfectionist approach.* If they suspect a bright move or plan lurks in a certain position, they will go all-out for it, invest all their energies and will not rest until they hit gold. Study composer Costeff and GM Greenfeld are representatives of this approach.

Then, in some specific situations, closer to the domain of problems than to the practical game, an attempt to arrive at a mathematical proof (Comay) regarding the feasibility of a particular move may prove to be the most promising method.

Lastly, some GMs will act on partial data – variations with no clear-cut end – in addition to what their intuition tells them. This method of decision-making will now be elaborated.

Getting on the Right Track: How Do You Know?

A common problem for all chessplayers arises when they obtain a position that offers several reasonable options. While it's easy to choose 'an only move', or to prefer a good, promising plan to a dubious one, opting for one path amongst its equal-valued peers is an intricate task.

Average players tend to base their choices on analysis. They engage in calculation, striving to find 'the best move' (see earlier chapter). It is my impression that top players frequently look for leads that will signal to them what they ought to look for and when a certain idea is the correct one.

These leads may consist, for example, of the following:

- A general, unaccounted-for 'feeling' that 'this is it'.
- Accumulated experience, which suggests a certain conclusion (e.g., 'in such positions, it is customary to place rooks on e1 and d1').
- Convergence between analytical data and positional assessment. For instance: 'the position appears to be equal, and the line I'm considering leads to mass exchanges and a draw'.
- Agreement between a concrete variation and previous expectations. For instance: 'I knew my passed pawn was a serious trump, and here there is a line in which I can push it towards promotion'.
- Correspondence between extraneous information and the outcome of a certain variation. For example, one's opponent's style, form, recent results or facial expression suggest that he is not at ease with the situation: therefore I must be doing something right.
- Attainment of intermediate goals. If, in the midst of the path we choose, our opponent is forced to make some concessions (hand us the two bishops or control over a key file), we tend to view this as confirmation that things are progressing in the right direction.

The previous section is filled with such examples. GM Psakhis is certain that his 13 ♗e5 against Svidler improves his position, based on an obscure, inexplicable 'feeling'. GM Greenfeld carefully examines a critical position vs Wang Zili, because the shaky position of some pieces suggest to him "(an increased) probability that there will be a decisive tactic somewhere". GM Kosashvili sacrifices his entire army in a game against Gelpke, because his intuition and positional understanding guide him to seek "a direct refutation". GM Rechlis deduces that he is doing fine when his rivals are restricted and passive ... and so on.

Tal – Larsen
Candidates match (6), Bled 1965

1 e4 ♘f6 2 e5 ♘d5 3 d4 d6 4 ♘f3 dxe5 5 ♘xe5 e6 6 ♕f3 ♕f6 7 ♕g3 h6 8 ♘c3 ♘b4 9 ♗b5+ c6 10 ♗a4 ♘d7

Ex-world champion Tal assessed the position as advantageous for White. "If I could not win from such a position ... it would mean that I had altogether forgotten how to win." Tal recalled that he considered several continuations: 11 a3 ♘d5 12 ♘xc6, 11 ♗f4 or 11 ♘e4 ♕f5 12 f3. "Suddenly my attention was drawn to the possibility of the piece sacrifice..." [46]

11 0-0 ♘xe5 12 dxe5 ♕g6 13 ♕f3 ♕f5 14 ♕e2 ♗e7 *(D)*

W



15 a3 ♘d5 16 ♘b5! cxb5 17 ♕xb5+ Not 17 ♗xb5+ ♔f8 18 ♗d3 ♘f4!. **17...♔d8 18 c4** *(D)*

B



White has developed a strong initiative and after Black failed to put up the strongest resistance, White won in 34 moves.

What signs did White have to tempt him into this variation? We can name a few.

The variation is of a *forced nature* – there is not much room for a clever riposte evading our sight. Side-variations like 17...♔f8?? 18 ♕e8#, 16...0-0 17 ♘d4 ♕h7 18 c4 ♘b6 19 ♗c2 and 15...♘a6 16 ♘b5! cxb5 17 ♗xb5+ followed by 18 ♗d3, are easy.

The black king is misplaced, in the centre of the board. Taken together with the former factor, this gives White a distinct feeling that he is *conducting an offensive.*

There is a chance that 16 ♘b5! – not an obvious move – has evaded his opponent. Hence, the variation gains in *surprise value.*

A decision to initiate an attack should rest on positional foundations. Here it *corresponds with White's overall assessment* that he was better.

The sacrificial line also *accorded with the style of the white-player.* Daring, adventurous chess was Tal's hallmark in that period.

All these leads contain a message to the white-player: this is the way to play in this position, or: this is right for you.

Unfortunately, sometimes the leads do not produce a coherent picture; some leads point in a certain direction, while others indicate a different course. The following game demonstrates this phenomenon.

Zsu. Polgar – Xie Jun
Women's World Ch match (game 7), Jaen 1996

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 d4 exd4 4 ♘xd4 ♗c5 5 ♘xc6 ♕f6 6 ♕d2 dxc6 7 ♘c3 ♗e6 8 ♘a4 ♗d6 9 ♕e3 ♘h6 10 h3 0-0 11 ♗e2 ♖fe8 12 ♘c3 ♕e5 13 f4 ♕a5 14 ♗d2 ♗b4 15 a3 ♘f5 *(D)*

W



With her last few moves, Black has developed some initiative, culminating in a piece sacrifice.

16 exf5 ♗c4

A lot of players would be able to evaluate the soundness of Black's play at this point. But the Chinese grandmaster had to make a decision at an earlier stage, probably when embarking upon her 12th move.

Adopting the lead-collecting technique, there is much to be said for this sacrificial attack: the white king is stranded in the centre. A black rook on the open e-file targets the white royal family. White, having to parry concrete threats on every turn, has at her disposal a limited number of options. The black-player is an excellent tactician and feels at home in such positions.

Alas, concrete analysis undermines the validity of Black's conception.

17 ♕d4! *(D)*

B



17...♗xc3

17...♗xe2 18 ♕xb4.

18 ♗xc3 ♖xe2+ 19 ♔f1!!

The natural 19 ♔d1 allows the saving move 19...♕d5, while after the text-move, notwithstanding appearances (the availability of a discovered check), White wins material.

19...♕xc3

Or 19...♖e4+ 20 ♕xc4.

20 bxc3 ♖e4+ 21 ♔f2 ♖xd4 22 cxd4

(1-0, 44)

17 The Attraction of Beautiful Ideas

The primary attraction of the royal game to its adherents rests to a large extent on its tactical fantasy, which symbolizes the victory of spirit over matter.

Ordinary players are usually thrilled when they sense the possibility of a 'brilliancy'. The ultimate dream of a club-player is to produce an immortal combination, if not a complete 'evergreen' game.

Grandmasters view things differently. Being part of the chess-loving fraternity, they share the same desire to produce a brilliancy, for the pleasure of themselves and their audience. However, being imbued with a strict result-oriented approach, GMs tend to seek simple, concrete and practical solutions.

Attractive, fascinating ideas are not always the best objectively. In fact, 'attractive' and 'effective' frequently collide, as we can see in the following diagram.

Leading the match by one point in this prestigious man-machine contest, White could have played 17 ♖e1 or 17 dxe6 ♖xe6 18 ♘e4, holding a slight edge. Instead, after thinking for 43 minutes, he opted for a sacrificial line:



Kramnik – *Deep Fritz* (computer)
Match (game 6), Bahrain 2002
White to play

17 ♘e4 exd5 18 ♘d6 dxc4 19 ♘xf7 ♔xf7 20 ♗d5+ ♔g6 21 ♕g4+ ♗g5 22 ♗e4+ ♖xe4 23 ♕xe4+ ♔h6 24 h4 ♗f6 25 ♗d2+ g5 26 hxg5+ ♗xg5

Only now did White detect the flaw in his preliminary calculations: his intended 27 ♕e6+ ♘f6 28 f4 is refuted by 28...♗h4!!, when Black gains the upper hand after 29 gxh4 ♕g8+ 30 ♕xg8 ♖xg8+ 31 ♔h2 c3.

27 ♕h4+ ♔g6 28 ♕e4+ ♔g7 29 ♗xg5 ♕xg5 30 ♖fe1 cxb3 31 ♕xd4+ ♘f6

(0-1, 34)

"I was in a creative mood," said Kramnik afterwards. "I just wanted to enjoy the game ... At least I played like a man". [*The pride factor!*].

In a later press conference Kramnik said: "Of course, (the decision to sacrifice) was not very pragmatic; it was a mistake ... but I'm not sure that I would do something different if the situation arose again." [47]

In the next episode, there was nothing wrong with the attractive idea, yet the winner was not entirely happy with his choice.



Kasparov – Palatnik
Daugavpils 1978
White to play

The young Kasparov tore Black's defences apart by **23 ♗xg5! hxg5 24 ♕h5 f5 25 ♘xg5 ♖f7** (25...♖fd8 26 ♖xf5! exf5 27 ♗b3+; or 25...♖fc8 26 ♕h7+ ♔f8 27 ♘xe6+! ♕xe6 28 ♗xf5) **26 ♗xf5!! ♖xf5 27 ♖xf5 exf5 28 ♘d5 ♕e8 29 ♕h7+ ♔f8 30 ♕xf5+ ♔g8 31 ♕h7+ ♔f8 32 ♖a3!** and wins (1-0, 37).

In his book *The Test of Time*, Kasparov revealed that although his attack proved to be correct, he believed that he could have scored the point without fireworks. Indeed, he later found another winning method: 23 h4 gxh4 24 ♕g4! f5 (24...♘g6 25 ♕h5) 25 exf6 ♘xf6 26 ♘xf6+ ♖xf6 27 ♖xf6 ♕xf6 28 ♕e4! ♖d8 29 ♕h7+ ♔f8 30 ♘b5! and so on.

Further reading of Kasparov's commentary attests to his ambivalence towards the second solution: "This path is undoubtedly simpler," he writes, "but then there would not have been ... sacrifice of two bishops and an attack in which all the white pieces took part." [48]

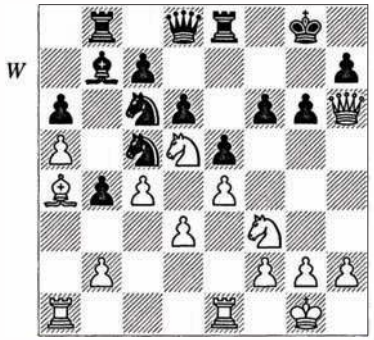
Somewhere along the line from a developing youngster to a mature grandmaster, efficiency takes precedence over aesthetics. GM Alik Gershon, our youngest interviewee, groans: "I frequently fight against an urge to make the moves I want to play, at the expense of the moves I should play."

When efficacy and elegance combine together, an air of disbelief accompanies the discovery (*see diagram overleaf*):

20 ♘h4!

A prelude to a sacrificial attack, which leaves a deep aesthetic impression.

GM King notes: "It's rare that (such things) actually work, and in one's thoughts you end up returning to something sensible and tedious." It is as if the fancy nature of the main line generated a suspicion regarding its



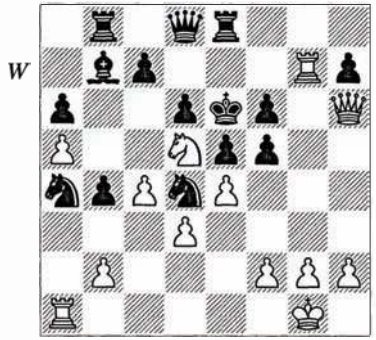
King – D. Howell
London (Simpsons) 2003
White to play

soundness. It was with some reluctance that King forced himself to check the variations, "until I convinced myself that I was just winning." [49]

20...♘xa4 21 ♘f5! gxf5 22 ♖e3 ♘d4

Other moves also lose: 22...f4 23 ♖h3 ♖e7 24 ♘xf6+ ♔f7 25 ♕xh7+; 22...♘e7 23 ♖h3 ♗xd5 24 ♕xh7+ ♔f8 25 cxd5; or 22...♔h8 23 ♖h3 ♖e7 24 ♘xf6 with the deadly threat 25 ♕xh7+.

23 ♖g3+ ♔f7 24 ♖g7+ ♔e6 *(D)*



Now comes the knockout.

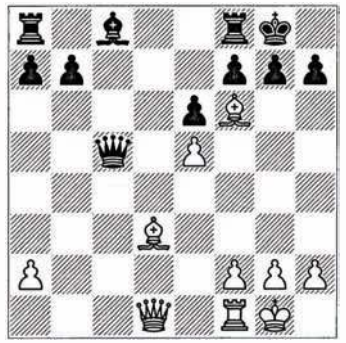
25 ♕xf6+! 1-0

18 Serendipity

Serendipity occurs when we search in one direction, only to strike gold by chance on another, uncharted road. The phenomenon first occurred when the biblical Saul, son of Kish, made a journey to search for some lost donkeys, but ended up, instead, King of Israel. Since that time, many significant discoveries have been arrived at in this manner, such as America's accidental discovery by Columbus in 1492.

Dolmatov – Speelman
Hastings 1989/90

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 exd5 cxd5 4 c4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 e6 6 ♘f3 ♗b4 7 ♗d3 dxc4 8 ♗xc4 0-0 9 0-0 ♘bd7 10 ♗g5 ♗xc3 11 bxc3 ♕c7 12 ♗d3 ♕xc3 13 ♖c1 ♕a5 14 ♘e5 ♘xe5 15 ♖c5 ♕a3 16 dxe5 ♕xc5 17 ♗xf6 *(D)*



White has sacrificed an exchange and a pawn to reach an aggressive, attacking position. True, after 17...gxf6 he has nothing better than perpetual check by 18 ♕g4+ (18 ♗xh7+ is similar) 18...♔h8 19 ♕h4 f5 20 ♕f6+ ♔g8 21 ♕g5+.

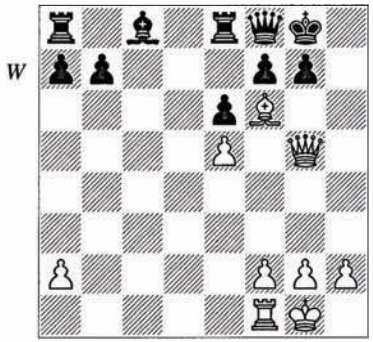
17...♖e8?!

"My thoughts were fixed on drawing, but now I looked and couldn't see a perpetual check ... for five minutes I couldn't see anything that would do ... and then it dawned on me that it was pointless looking for a draw at all – I should be playing for mate..." (Dolmatov). [50]

18 ♗xh7+!! ♔xh7

18...♔h8 19 ♕h5 or 18...♔f8 19 ♕g4 gxf6 20 exf6 leaves Black defenceless.

19 ♕h5+ ♔g8 20 ♕g5 ♕f8 *(D)*



21 ♖d1! b6 22 ♖d4 ♗a6 23 ♖g4 ♗e2 24 ♗xg7

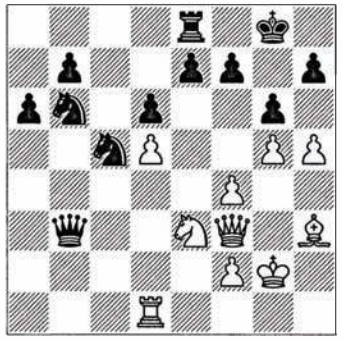
Not the tempting 24 ♕xg7+ ♕xg7 25 ♖xg7+, because of 25...♔h8! drawing (but not 25...♔f8?? 26 ♖h7).

24...♗xg4 25 ♗xf8+ ♔xf8 26 ♕xg4

Subsequently White converted his advantage into victory (1-0, 68).

So, White had apparently stumbled, by accident, upon victory. Lucky devil! One may wonder what this has to do with thinking. But as the next example demonstrates, serendipity has more to it than mere luck.

W



Eingorn – Zilberman
Oberwart 1994
White to play

30 ♖d4

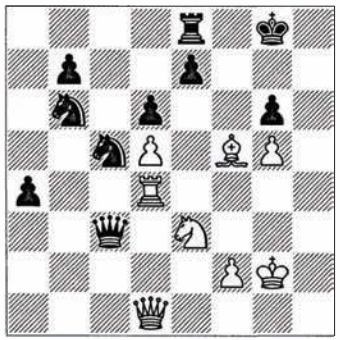
Two pawns down, and without much hope of salvation, Eingorn testifies that he played the text-move solely to prevent the simplifying 30...♘c4.

30...♕c3 31 ♕d1 a5? 32 f5 a4?

"At this point ... (I) discovered with no little astonishment that (I) could win almost by force." – Eingorn.[51]

33 hxg6 hxg6 34 fxg6 fxg6 35 ♗f5! *(D)*

B



35...♔g7

35...gxf5 36 ♕h5 leads to mate after 36...♕xd4 37 ♕xe8+ or 36...♖a8 37 g6.

36 ♗xg6 ♔xg6 37 ♕b1+ ♔g7 38 ♘f5+ ♔g8 39 ♘h6+ ♔g7 40 ♘f5+ ♔g8 41 ♘xe7+ ♔f8 42 ♕h7 ♖xe7 43 ♕h8+ 1-0

Was White's victory just a matter of luck? I doubt it. White posted his pieces in the most active positions. He preferred 30 ♖d4 to the meek 30 ♖c1 or 30 ♕e2 (which also prevents 30...♘c4). He threw an avalanche of pawns at Black's throat. He didn't wait passively for the smile of fate, but rather paved the way for opportunity. Once he got his chance, he grabbed it with both hands.

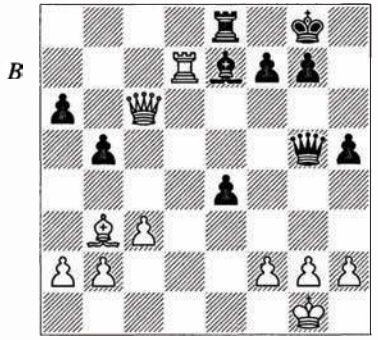
Serendipity – namely, "the gift of finding valuable or agreeable things not sought for" – implies contradiction. Yet a good chess-player must learn to live in ambivalence: to search for a clear direction, yet to leave room for indirection; to seek a particular goal or a certain result, but be ready to modify his aims due to changing circumstances.

To be able to reap dividends from serendipity, one has to live in a state of *floating thinking*. I think that grandmasters practice this a lot. You may recall GM Gelfand's recollection of discovering significant ideas while resting or even in his sleep. GM Kosashvili told me of a similar experience, when the refutation of a piece of analysis conducted in his presence occurred to him during a telephone conversation.

Grandmasters are preoccupied with chess matters even when they're not playing or analysing. In this respect, they are not unique: top experts in various fields act similarly. By keeping our minds open, we may receive and absorb useful data, even in a state of half-awareness.

19 Pros and Cons of Expertise

Being an expert certainly gives you an edge. When you know more, understand better, grasp faster – this is great. There are, however, some drawbacks to being a (chess) expert. You spot many great moves for your opponent; you fear more dangers. Hence you might skip some easy victories that ordinary players would score. A grandmaster's strengths are sometimes his burden.



Cherepkov – Bronstein
USSR Ch, Moscow 1961
Black to play

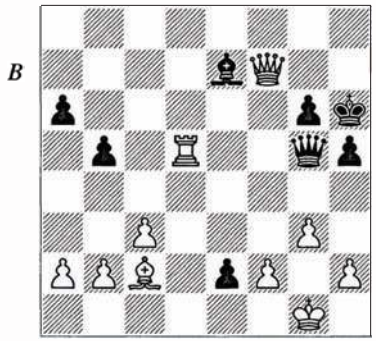
29...e3! 30 ♖d5?! e2 31 ♕xe8+ ♔h7 32 ♗c2+

32 ♖d1 fails to 32...exd1♕+ 33 ♗xd1 ♕d2.

32...g6

After 32...f5? 33 ♖d1! exd1♕+ 34 ♗xd1 ♕d2? 35 ♕xh5+ ♔g8? 36 ♗b3+ White mates.

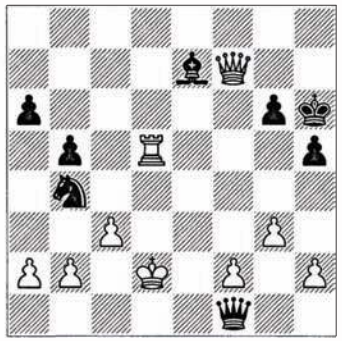
33 ♕xf7+ ♔h6 34 g3?! *(D)*



Now an ordinary mortal would play 34...e1♕+ without blinking. A strong and imaginative player that he is, Bronstein was looking at fantastic variations like 34...e1♕+ 35 ♔g2 ♕g4 (35...♕f6?? 36 ♖xh5+! mates after 36...♔xh5/gxh5 37 ♕h7+). Now 36 h3!? is countered by 36...♕xh3+!, while 36 ♖d8!? (intending 36...♗xd8 37 ♕f8+ ♔h7 38 ♕f7+ with a perpetual check) fails to 36...♕h3+! 37 ♔f3 (37 ♔xh3? ♕f1#) 37...♕h1+ 38 ♔e2 ♕3f1+ and Black's attack comes first.

In severe time-trouble, Bronstein failed to find a proper answer to 36 ♖d8, and in the end opted for a weaker continuation, promoting the e-pawn to a knight instead of a queen(!). This proved successful only due to his opponent's blunder.

34...♕c1+? 35 ♔g2 ♕f1+ 36 ♔f3 e1♘+ 37 ♔e3 ♘xc2+ 38 ♔d2 ♘b4 *(D)*



39 ♖xh5+??

39 ♕f4+! g5 40 ♖d6+ is correct. With the text-move, White was hoping for 39...gxh5? 40 ♕e6+!.

39...♔xh5 40 ♕h7+ ♔g4 41 cxb4 ♗xb4+ 0-1

So, even if you are not particularly gifted at chess, you might occasionally choose better moves than grandmasters. Thus, paradoxically, ignorance may turn out to be a blessing in disguise.

Suppose we wish to study a new opening, or acquaint ourselves with a certain type of endgame. Should we approach these issues with a fresh, naïve mind, or refer to accumulated knowledge as our starting point?

Mathematician Andrew Wiles, the celebrated solver of Fermat's last theorem, placed his hands on everything done by previous generations in his specific field, before trying his own methods. [52]

On the other hand, the great Latin American writer, Augusto Monterroso, said in one of his last interviews: "I never learned how to write a story or an article. Moreover, I'm afraid of such knowledge. I don't want to know. I have a sort of prejudice ... that if I know how to construct a story, I'll turn from an artist to a craftsman, and then I'll be able to complete a story every eight days." [53]

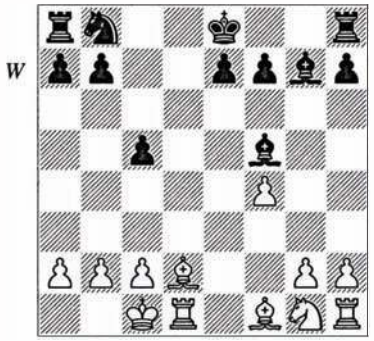
Being knowledgeable in your subject saves precious time and avoids the folly of reinventing the wheel. On the other hand, it may have some undesirable repercussions on the explorer's quest.

Miles – Plachetka
Dubna 1976

1 e4 c5 2 f4 ♘f6 3 ♘c3 d5 4 e5 d4 5 exf6 dxc3 6 fxg7 cxd2+ 7 ♕xd2 ♕xd2+ 8 ♗xd2 ♗xg7 9 0-0-0 ♗f5 *(D)*

10 ♘e2 ♘c6 11 ♗e3 ♖c8 12 ♘g3 ♗g4 13 ♖d5

When Michael Basman interviewed GM Tony Miles about this and other games, he argued that 10 ♘e2 and 13 ♖d5 were non-automatic, non-standard kind of moves. "That's because I'm not used to playing this opening. You



see, I don't know how to play it – I don't realize (what is) the automatic move," replied Miles, half in jest. [54]

13...♗d4 14 ♗xd4 cxd4 15 ♗b5 ♗d7 16 ♘e4 ♖d8 17 ♗xc6! bxc6

17...♗xc6 18 ♘f6+! exf6 19 ♖e1+ wins for White.

18 ♖xd4

(1-0, 26)

Assuming we do take advantage of existing knowledge, should we scan it causally or with a specific aim in mind?

Viswanathan Anand, one of the outstanding chess-players of modern times, describes his approach as a young player: "I read a lot, but always in a very disorganized way. I never thought 'what are my repertoire problems and how am I going to work them out?'. I just kept on reading and a lot of it came in handy." [55]

20 Yes, They are Different



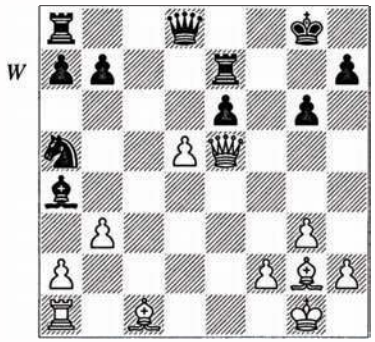
Ribli – Rogozenko

Hungary 1993

White to play

16 ♕e2 ♗a4 17 ♖d4! ♗xd4 18 ♘xd4 e5?! 19 ♕xe5! ♖e8 20 ♘e6! fxe6 21 b3 ♖e7 *(D)*

21...♕b8 22 d6.



22 ♗b2 ♕f8 23 d6 ♕g7 24 ♕e2 e5

24...♗b5 25 ♕d2.

25 dxe7 ♗c6 26 ♗h3 ♕xe7 27 b4! ♕xb4 28 ♕xe5 1-0

An impressive attack by GM Zoltan Ribli: the white pieces cooperated in perfect harmony. Could an ordinary club-player produce such brilliancy? On a bright day, he might. But we reckon that a grandmaster would look at the diagram position in a different manner from Joe Average. He would also see different things.

Here are some differences between the two:

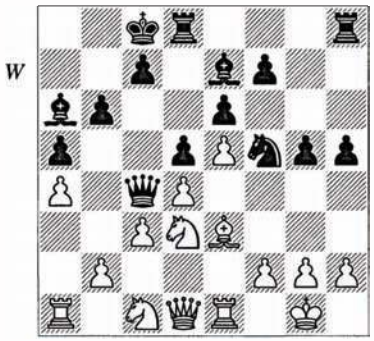
- An average player will begin by reviewing his possibilities; a grandmaster will first survey his opponent's plans and will quickly realize that 16...♖c8, followed by 17...♘c4 or 17...♗a4, would grant Black serious counterplay, if allowed.
- An average player will start by calculating variations; a grandmaster will direct his thoughts to the strategic situation, weigh the relative strengths and weaknesses of the pieces, and try to find their most influential outposts.
- An average player will focus on the short term; a grandmaster will be interested in future developments, in the potential of making progress.

- The idea of 17 ♖d4 will probably strike an ordinary player as a surprising revelation. For a grandmaster, giving up an exchange to gain control of the dark squares is a routine, familiar device. It is one of the numerous patterns embedded in his vast chess vocabulary.

The list is long: an intermediate player may skip the signs that attest to the critical nature of the position depicted in the diagram; a grandmaster will not overlook their significance. A club-player will try to stretch his calculation as far as possible; a grandmaster will be pleased enough with his position after 17...♗xd4 18 ♘xd4 and look no further. The need to commit oneself to additional sacrifices (19 ♕xe5! coupled with 20 ♘e6!) may deter a lesser player from entering the complications in the first place. A grandmaster will attribute less weight to considerations like 'material' and 'time', and comprehend the crushing power of the line-up along the a1-h8 diagonal.

It is said that every amateur can create, at times, a grandmasterly game. But when an ordinary player shines, as a rule, he does so on the tactical level. I truly believe that many profound ideas could not have been the product of plain players.

I submit the next episode as an example. If the average Joe were able to reproduce Gulko's play, then the idea of 'grandmaster thinking' would be futile. As it is, I think that it takes a grandmaster to conceive the upcoming plan.



Chesney – Gulko
US Open, Somerset 1986
White to play

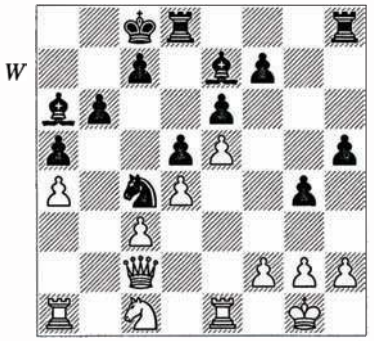
20 ♕d2 ♘xe3 21 ♘c5

Gulko's commentary does not reveal if he'd seen this thrust in advance. [56] Black is about to lose his queen (22 b3) and the game's result depends on the kind of material and positional compensation he's likely to obtain.

Black has at his disposal several options. 21...bxc5 22 b3 ♕f1+ 23 ♖xf1 ♘xf1 is the natural choice, maximizing his material gains to a rook and two minor pieces for the queen. However, the continuation 24 ♕c2 cxd4 25 cxd4 ♗b4 26 ♘a2 is not very promising for Black, as the white queen is quite powerful.

21...♘f1 22 ♕c2 ♗xc5 23 b3 ♕xc3 24 ♕xc3 ♗b4 and 21...♘g4 22 b3 ♕xc5 23 dxc5 ♗xc5, gaining f2 with an attacking initiative, are also interesting tries. Regardless of which is objectively best, Gulko's actual choice is astounding:

21...♗xc5!! 22 b3 ♗e7 23 bxc4 ♘xc4 24 ♕c2 g4 *(D)*



Black has only two bishops and a pawn in return for the queen and he has no concrete, immediate threats. However, his pieces control the whole board. White is at a loss for a positive plan, either now, or in the foreseeable future.

25 ♘d3 ♖dg8 26 ♘b2 ♘xb2 27 ♕xb2 h4 28 ♕c2 ♖h5 29 ♖ab1 ♗c4

Black's bishops far outweigh White's rooks. To White's chagrin, he is unable to ease the pressure by trading these beasts.

In this kind of position, White can only hope that Black is unable to break through. He is restricted to the role of a passive spectator.

30 ♖e3 ♗g5 31 ♖d3 ♗h6 32 ♖f1 ♖f5 33 g3?! ♖h8! 34 ♖fd1 ♖h5 35 ♕e2 hxg3 36 fxg3 ♗e3+! 37 ♕xe3

37 ♔h1 ♖xh2+ 38 ♕xh2 ♖xh2+ 39 ♔xh2 ♗g5 is winning for Black.

37...♖xh2 38 ♕g5?

38 ♕d2 still holds a fighting chance.

38...♗xd3 39 ♖xd3 ♖h1+ 40 ♔f2 ♖8h2+ 41 ♔e3 ♖e1+ 0-1

To play 21...♗xc5!! you have to:

Imagine that two minor pieces can outclass a queen.

Focus on abstract strategy, and minimize concrete analysis.

Understand that time is not of the essence here, and that Black can deploy his forces leisurely.

Identify that White will aim at opening the game or at exchanging rooks for bishops.

Realize that Black can foil White's plan.

Know that in a practical game, prolonged passive play, while holding on to a (useless) material advantage, is bound to frustrate one's opponent, lower his spirits, and consequently, affect the level of his play.

Put together, this may be the essence of the illusive concept 'grandmaster's thinking'.

21 Critical Success Factors

This book has focused on the thinking-process of chess grandmasters. As our discussion is coming to a close, it would be appropriate to remind ourselves that success in chess involves more than a strong brain and efficient problem-solving methods.

Some qualities that were considered essential in the not-so-distant past are deemed less crucial nowadays: faster time-limits mean a diminishing emphasis on *patience*; computerized databases decrease the value of *memory*.

But other elements remain paramount. *Concentration* is one: I often wonder if people realize how difficult it is to keep oneself immersed in a chessboard, totally ignoring extraneous events.

People around us make love, work hard to meet financial needs, perish in monstrous terror acts, starve, make significant discoveries, have fun. Families and friends require constant care. Nations disintegrate and disappear; new entities are formed. At times the whole world is in turmoil. Yet a grandmaster is expected to explore for hours breathtaking questions like 'is my bishop stronger than my opponent's knight'; or 'if I sacrifice a pawn, do I get enough compensation' – questions which have no relevance to anything (except the game in progress) or anyone (apart from himself).

It takes a certain type of character to perform such tasks with dedicated single-mindedness.

Another key factor is *toughness*: the ability to withstand shocks that accompany unforeseen moves by one's opponent; to rise from the ashes having spoilt one's chances with a careless mistake; to stay cool and handle a crisis with equanimity.

Additional factors which correlate to success in chess are one's level of *motivation*, willingness to invest *hard work*, austere *self-discipline*, *competitive drive* and more.

Thinking like a grandmaster may put one on the right track; but for actually becoming a formidable player, a host of other ingredients are required.

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