Foundations of Chess Strategy

Lars Bo Hansen

Applying Business Methods to Chess Preparation and Training
Foundations of Chess Strategy

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Symbols

+  check
++ double check
# checkmate
!! brilliant move
!  good move
!? interesting move
?! dubious move
?  bad move
?? blunder
Ch championship
Cht team championship
Wch world championship
Wcht world team championship
Ech European championship
Echt European team championship
ECC European Clubs Cup
Ct candidates event
IZ interzonal event
Z  zonal event
OL olympiad
jr junior event
wom women's event
mem memorial event
rpd rapidplay game
tt team tournament
sim game from simultaneous display
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) nth match game
(D) see next diagram

Dedication and Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the Gambit Directors – John Nunn, Graham Burgess and Murray Chandler – for believing in this project and making the book possible; my good friend and Danish GM colleague Sune Berg Hansen for valuable input; and my son Martin and my wife Evgenia for love, support and patience during the long writing process.
Introduction

This is not a standard textbook on chess strategy. While it is a chess book, I have tried to approach the subject of chess strategy in a way which I believe is not typical for most books on the subject. I have attempted to build a bridge between two very different yet still related fields: business strategy and chess strategy.

Chess strategy outdates business strategy by some 100 years. Usually, the first world champion in chess history, Wilhelm Steinitz, is credited for introducing systematic strategic thinking into chess in the last part of the 19th century. Business strategy, on the other hand, didn’t receive much attention — either in academia or in business practice — until the 1960s.

Still, I believe chess-players can learn a lot from studying the rapid progress in strategic thinking in the business area. For the past 40 years, business researchers have attempted to penetrate into questions which are also familiar from chess strategy: What constitutes a competitive advantage? What are the driving forces in this particular industry or position? How do I achieve optimal coordination and synergy between my pieces? What is the relationship between strategy and tactics? How do I assess and exploit my core competences? Etc.

Sure, chess has also progressed since the days of Steinitz, Lasker and Nimzowitsch, as has for instance been documented in John Watson’s excellent books *Secrets of Modern Chess Strategy* and *Chess Strategy in Action*, but I do not think that the progress in strategic chess thinking has been nearly as fast as in business strategy. Rather than becoming increasingly profound in a strategic sense, chess has become more and more concrete. Again and again computer analyses overrule ‘standard strategic evaluations’ of positions by pointing out concrete variations that totally alter the evaluation.

This means that it is becoming increasingly difficult to play chess according to ‘standard principles’. It is no longer sufficient to know how to play according to basic principles in typical situations such as ‘isolated d-pawn’, ‘minority attack’ or ‘space advantage’. While there are still important principles that underlie the evaluation of many positions, they have now become commodities — knowledge and understanding of how to handle such positions is no longer reserved for the masters; this has become public knowledge and as such cannot any longer be used to build a competitive advantage against a knowledgeable opponent. More concrete and deep analyses of the position and of the two players are required if you want to outsmart your opponent and become successful in chess. After all, the purpose of chess is to beat the opponent and get a point on the score board!

Therefore it becomes increasingly important to understand your own strengths and weaknesses as a chess-player, as well as those of the opponent. Not all players handle all positions equally well, when they can no longer resort to their basic knowledge of how to handle ‘this type of position’. Some players are very good at concrete calculations, while others thrive in simple positions. To become successful, you must understand these differences. Put simply, you need to shift focus from how to *win the position* to how to *defeat your opponent*.

This line of thinking brings us back to business strategy. These are the same considerations that business researchers and practitioners have gone through during the past decades. If every strategist approaches the same position in the same way having the same basic knowledge, how then can anyone hope for a competitive advantage? In chess we have witnessed a soaring percentage of draws among top players, and the same tendency can be seen among competing companies in the business world. To avoid this potential deadlock, contemporary business strategy experts and researchers increasingly emphasize the role of *internal resources* rather than the *external position* as
the starting point for building a competitive advantage. Understand what you are good at and start from there – not the other way around! Think inside-out rather than outside-in! Do not choose the Sveshnikov Sicilian just because it is considered sound (outside-in thinking). Choose it if it fits your style or otherwise leave it alone and look for some opening that matches your style and talent better (inside-out thinking)! This kind of approach to strategy is known as the resource-based view on strategy and has been the dominant strategic paradigm throughout the 1990s. The paradigm builds upon the assumptions of resource heterogeneity and resource immobility. Put in another way: if you do not have the combinative talent of Kasparov from nature’s hand, it is pretty difficult to imitate his play! That resource is not easily imitated, and it is highly heterogeneous! It will not help you that you have a decent position after copying a Kasparov opening, if you have no understanding of how to play that kind of position. It is better to understand thoroughly the basics of your own style and talent, and choose openings and strategies from there. In this book I shall show you how this can be done.

I shall present a number of models that can help you assess chess positions and chess strategy not only from an ‘objective’ outside-in point of view, but also from your personal inside-out point of view. Hopefully you will be able to find your own style (and your opponent’s, when preparing for a game) in one of the types of players that I shall discuss in the book. The models have been adapted from business strategy and are built on sound empirical and theoretical foundations from the business field. After reading this book I trust you will have a better understanding of yourself as a chess-player and that you will be able to put this knowledge to use in practical situations. In any case, that is my hope and my ambition in writing this book.

Enough of the talking, let’s get down to business – and from there back to chess!

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Nykøbing F., Denmark
December 2004
1 What is Chess Strategy?

Tactics teaches the use of armed forces in the engagement; strategy the use of engagement for the object of war.
Carl von Clausewitz, Prussian commander and military strategist (1832)

In the business world, the following story is circulating about chess:

Many years ago, a famous European chess grandmaster played an exhibition match against a New York amateur – and lost. The champion was renowned for his chessboard strategy – his ability to plan a dozen or more moves ahead as a game developed. At the post-match press conference the amateur was asked how many moves ahead he had planned in defeating the master. “Only one,” he replied. “The right one.”

A nice little story, although I do not believe it is true – at least I have never heard about it in chess circles! But it does raise an interesting question: is chess strategy really a matter of finding ‘the right move’ at each individual turn? Can chess simply be boiled down to the operational task of finding the right move sequentially – detached from any long-term considerations?

Yes and no. Certainly, an extremely important aspect of chess is finding the right move in the given position on the board. However, to do so it is necessary to put on the strategic glasses and determine where you want to go in the longer term – otherwise the task of determining what the right move is will be impossible. It has been known since Steinitz – the first world champion and also the ‘father’ of modern positional play – that good (or right) moves do not come out of nowhere. In chess there is an inherent logic that prescribes the connection between strategy and tactics. Chess is a game where short-term tactics need to go hand-in-hand with long-term strategy. Profound strategic thinking must be aligned with clever short-term tactics.

However, defining chess strategy is far from easy. In fact, only a few attempts to define a coherent model of chess strategy exist. Most writings focus on various specific parts of chess strategy, such as the impact of a space advantage, how to play with or against an isolated d-pawn, the pawn-structure, good knight versus bad bishop, etc. Many excellent books exist on these and related topics and they are well worth studying for the ambitious chess-player. However, my purpose here is different. Rather than focus on specific elements within chess strategy, I shall attempt to create a framework in which the various specific elements can be systematically included and organized – in other words, a framework that helps chess-players decide how to think about chess strategy during practical play.

The field of strategy is not related only to chess; strategy is a vital part of, e.g., business and warfare as well. In these fields, strategy is much better developed and conceptualized, and much more research and writing has been done on business or military strategy. It is therefore logical to discuss whether any of the vast amounts of research and modelling done for business and military purposes can be applied in chess as well.

Since my professional background is in business economics, I shall attempt in this chapter to draw connections between business strategy and chess strategy. This discussion will then be used in Chapter 2 to develop a framework for thinking systematically about chess strategy. The remainder of the book will then explore and exemplify the practical use of this framework in greater depth.

Strategy as Plan

If you ask a hundred chess-players to explain the term ‘chess strategy’, I believe that the word ‘plan’ will be included in most explanations. This is consistent with strategic thinking in the business
field. For example, Bruce D. Henderson – founder of the world-renowned management consultancy Boston Consulting Group – has described strategy like this: “Strategy is a deliberate search for a plan of action that will develop a business-competitive advantage and compound it.” However, for the practical chess-player, this in itself is not very helpful. In order to make the concept of ‘strategy as plan’ more operational, it is necessary to answer questions like: “What should be the content of the plan?” “When should it be conceived and how long into the future should it cover?” “How to choose between two alternative plans – what criteria should be put to use?”

To illustrate these questions, let us examine one of the finest strategic games in chess history.

**Karpov – Unzicker**  
*Nice OL 1974*

1 e4 e5 2 ²f3 ²c6 3 ²b5 a6 4 ²a4 ²f6 5 0-0 ²e7 6 ²b3 d6 7 c3 0-0 8 ²c2 c5 9 d4 ²a5 10 ²c2 ²e7 12 ²bd2 ²c6 (D)

A year later, Unzicker tried 12...²d7 against Karpov in Milan 1975, but with the same dismal result: 13 ²f1 ²fe8 14 d5 ²db7 15 ²d3h2 g6 16 ²g3 c4 17 f4! exf4 18 ²xf4 ²f8 19 ²g5 ²e7 20 ²d2 ²c8 21 ²f1 ²d7 22 ²g4 1-0. The chosen line is solid but leaves Black with a passive knight on d8.

13 d5

The first critical point in the game, where White has to decide on a plan. He basically has two options: either to play with a semi-open centre with 13 dxc5 dxc5 14 ²f1, where his plan is to direct a knight to d5, or to close the centre with 13 d5 and slowly initiate play on either wing. With his more space it will be easier for White to shift his pieces from one wing to the other. Karpov chooses the second option, as it suits his style better. Your own style is in my opinion a key criterion in strategic decision-making in chess, and one which is often relatively neglected, as the position on the board is given the main attention. “This is better for me, isn’t it?” But often it is not enough to have a decent position, if it does not suit your style or you do not know how to proceed! It is noteworthy that this position has occurred in the white games of five world champions of that period (late 1950s to 1970s): Smyslov, Tal, Fischer, Spassky and Karpov. It is surely no coincidence that the active players Tal and Fischer preferred 13 dxc5; they are typical ‘open-position players’. Spassky, with his all-round style, and Karpov, with his magnificent feeling for space, preferred 13 d5. Smyslov varied between the two moves, yet in the majority of games as White from this position chose 13 dxc5. I emphasize the distinct characteristics in style of these players in connection with the plan they chose to pursue, as this will be a recurrent theme of this book: chess is not just about what is taking place on the board, but also in the heads and personalities of the two players.

13...²d8 14 a4 ²b8 15 axb5 axb5 16 b4 ²b7
An important moment. Black chooses for the moment to maintain the tension on the queenside and employs the passive knight for this purpose. The alternative is to close the queenside with 16...c4 and redeploy the knight to the kingside. This was tried in the game Karpov-Spassky, USSR Ch (Moscow) 1973, where the coming world champion (Karpov) maintained a small advantage after 17 £e1 £e8 18 £h2 f6! 19 f4 £f7 20 £f3 g6 21 f5 £g7 22 g4 £d7 23 £e3 £a8 24 £d2, although the former world champion (Spassky) managed to hold the draw by inventive defence in a difficult position. I shall give the rest of the game, as it is interesting for our coming discussion: 24...£b7 25 £ac1?! (preserving the rook for the attack on the kingside) 25...£a2 26 £g3 £fa8 27 h4! £d8 28 £h1 £b6 29 £g1 £xe3 30 £xe3 £a7 31 £d2 £e8 32 g5 £e7 33 £c1 fxg5 34 hxg5 £d7 35 £h2 £d8 36 f6 £d7 37 fxg7 £xg5 38 £g2 (optimally White should be winning, but the weak kingside and the strong black rook on its seventh rank give Black a surprising amount of counterplay) 38...£b2 39 £b1?! (here 39 £f2 seems better) 39...£ba2 40 £e2 £h4! 41 £bfl £h3 42 £f2 £g5! 43 £e3 £g4 44 £gf1 £xg7 45 £d1 £xd1 46 £xd1 £a1 47 £df1 £xf1+ 48 £xf1 £a2 49 £f2 £a1+ 50 £f1 £a2 51 £f2 £a1+ 52 £f1 £xf1+ (now Black is playing for a win – at least for a few moves) 53 £gxfl £xe4+ 54 £g1 £xe3+ 55 £xe3 £e4 56 £d1 £f6 57 £e3 h5 58 £f3 £e4 59 £d1 ½-½.

17 £e1 £d7 18 £e3 £a8 19 £d2 £fe8?!
Here Unzicker plays in too stereotyped a fashion and misses the deep point of Karpov’s plan – the 24th move, which was a novel idea at the time that now has become a standard theme in such Ruy Lopez positions. As Karpov pointed out, 19...£fb8 20 £d3 £c8 is better, fighting for the a-file.

20 £d3 g6 21 £g3 £f8 22 £a2! c4 23 £b1!
Although the bishop is slightly awkwardly placed here, it is important to deter Black from any counterplay based on ...f5. Thus, 23 £f1 would be inaccurate.

23...£d8 (D)

24 £a7!!
Plan number two is initiated: the fight for the only open file on the board, which White decides to his advantage with this move. Now Karpov can mobilize his rooks unhindered behind the bishop.

24...£e8 25 £c2 £c7 26 £e1 £e7 27 £b1 £e8 28 £e2 £d8 29 £h2 £g7 30 f4!
The third plan. White utilizes his extra space and mobility to open a second front of attack.

30...£f6
Unzicker accepts passive defence. But now he is restricted even further. For better or worse, I believe Black should have tried 30...exf4. However, it is a major problem for him that neither of his knights is in contact with the key square e5.

31 f5! g5 (D)
32 \textit{\&c2}!

Plan number four: White initiates the transfer – and subsequent exchange – of the light-squared bishop to h5. Given the central pawn-structure, this is a favourable exchange which Black cannot circumvent. However, you should notice that this plan is only possible because of Black’s choice to defend passively on move 30. If Unzicker had instead chosen to take on f4, Karpov would have had to think of another plan. This is why I label each plan as a new one, not consecutive elements of one single plan. The proceedings are dependent on the opponent’s choices.

32...\textit{\&f7} 33 \textit{\&g3} \textit{\&h7} 34 \textit{\&d1} h6?!

This seems overly helpful. There was no apparent need for Black to weaken the g6-square. However, it doesn’t really change the final result.

35 \textit{\&h5} \textit{\&e8} 36 \textit{\&d1} \textit{\&d8} 37 \textit{\&a3}!

There is no reason to hurry, as Black cannot improve his position. Karpov builds up for ‘Alekhine’s Cannon’ (rook, rook and queen, as in the famous game Alekhine-Nimzowitsch, San Remo 1930) – just in case.

37...\textit{\&f8} 38 \textit{\&a2}! \textit{\&g8} 39 \textit{\&g4}!

The position of the knight is also optimized. Black cannot take on h5 twice: 39...\textit{\&xh5} 40 \textit{\&xh5} \textit{\&xh5} 41 \textit{\&xf6}+.

39...\textit{\&f8} 40 \textit{\&e3} \textit{\&g8} 41 \textit{\&xf7}+ \textit{\&xf7} 42 \textit{\&h5} \textit{\&d8} 43 \textit{\&g6}! \textit{\&f8} 44 \textit{\&h5} 1-0

Black resigned in this hopeless position. White invades on the light squares and/or down the a-file.

A flawless positional performance by Karpov! What can we learn from this game with regards to chess strategy – apart from the specific lesson on how to build up and convert a spatial advantage? I believe a number of important lessons can be drawn from this game.

First, notice that Karpov worked with a number of strategic plans. Plan one was to close the centre and redirect the main battle to the flanks. Plan two was the fight for the a-file, which was won by the brilliant move 24 \textit{\&a7}. Plan three was to open a second flank by 30 f4, and plan four was the transfer of the light-squared bishop to h5, which paved the way for the decisive penetration on the light squares.

Secondly, it is important to notice that chess is not about \textit{one plan}, but a string of \textit{consecutive plans}. I am often asked what the main difference between a chess grandmaster and chess amateur is, and I believe it is this: the amateur knows that he has to follow a plan – grandmasters, on the other hand, are always ready to change their plan according to the circumstances.

Thirdly, the opponent plays a crucial role here – the opponent has the power to change the course of the game, and you must continuously be aware of this and ready to change your plans. That brings us to a key point in strategy: the \textit{interdependence of decisions taken by you and your opponent}. In business life these opponents are usually called ‘competitors’, but the basic feature is the
same: to obtain success you have to take your opponent into account, and outmanoeuvring the opponent is necessary to win. You have to build up a competitive advantage, which is subsequently transformed into a full point on the scorecard. In other words, strategy is about dealing with competition. Kenichi Ohmae, a famous management writer and director of the consultancy McKinsey in Japan, defines strategy like this: “What business strategy [and chess strategy] is all about is, in a word, competitive advantage. Without competitors there would be no need for strategy.” This is also what distinguishes ‘strategic’ positions from ‘technical’ positions: in strategic positions the result and course of the game is still unknown and is influenced by the opponent’s choices. In technical positions, on the other hand, the result following correct play is already known; the opponent can try to confuse matters, but cannot really do anything to influence the final outcome – he can only hope for mistakes.

In business strategy, there are numerous debates going on between various management scholars. One of the debates concerns the matter of ‘intended’ versus ‘emergent’ strategy. The notion ‘strategy as plan’ implicitly assumes that strategy is something the player can control. However, no one can control and overview everything in chess – it is impossible to anticipate all responses from the opponent.

Therefore a large part of the planned (or intended) strategies that a chess-player conceives during a game will not actually be realized. At the same time new strategic possibilities emerge continuously during the cause of the game, when the intended strategies of the two players collide. This is also so in the business world, where strategic intentions and actual behaviour are often two very different things. The renowned strategy scholar Henry Mintzberg has depicted this graphically like this:

![Diagram](image)

*Figure 1*

The lessons derived from the Karpov-Unzicker game can be found in this figure as well. Strategy is not about one plan, but a string of consecutive plans which are repeatedly influenced by the opponent’s choices due to the interdependence of the decisions taken by both players.

For example, had Unzicker chosen 30...exf4 rather than the passive 30...f6, Karpov would have had to continue very differently from what came in the game – the f4-f5 march would have been an
unrealized strategy confined to the notes. The move 34...h6?! on the hand, illustrates an emergent opportunity; Black voluntarily weakens his light squares even further, which Karpov could not have taken for granted in advance.

Grandmasters are very good at noticing these emergent opportunities and are consequently always ready to change their plans. However, the big question is when you should spend time and energy conceiving long-term strategic plans, and when you should prioritize concrete calculations - the tactical and operational aspects of the game. The easy answer is that you should always be on the lookout for strategic shifts, but in practice this is often not very practical, although obviously experience plays a big part here. A good practical rule-of-thumb can be deducted from the following figure:

![Usefulness of strategic planning](image)

**Figure 2**

If the position is very simple, technical accuracy is the most important point on the agenda. As outlined before, such positions are not really strategic in nature. If, on the other hand, the position is very complex and tactical, concrete calculations take precedence over strategic considerations, as the number of (emergent) options is so large, that it is impossible to control them all and to boil them down to an intended strategic plan.

Sudden shifts in the nature of the position are difficult even for strong players. Think of the game Karpov-Spassky in the notes to Karpov-Unzicker above. After winning a piece with a well-conducted strategic advance on the kingside, White was suddenly in a new kind of position where concrete calculation and technical accuracy were necessary to secure the point. Karpov is usually very good in such positions, but here Spassky managed to turn the tables and could even briefly pursue the win. Spassky is renowned for his fantastic feeling for the psychological changes in a game, and this is a case in point.

### Outside-in or Inside-out

Another contemporary debate in strategic management is between exponents of the ‘outside-in’ approach to strategy versus the ‘inside-out’ approach. This discussion is very beneficial to consider also in relation to chess.

The central question under debate is “what is the basis of a good strategy?” The strategy professor Richard Rumelt points out that in order to be successful, a strategy must meet four criteria:
What is Chess Strategy?

1) Feasibility (possible to implement);
2) Consistency (no mutually exclusive goals);
3) Competitive advantage must result from the strategy; and
4) Consonance (fit between the external opportunities and the internal resources; that is, does the organization have the abilities to exploit the identified opportunities?).

It is the last two criteria that separate the inside-out from the outside-in approach.

The outside-in perspective takes its starting point in the external environment. In chess this equals the position on the board. The environment/position is analysed carefully to decide what is the optimal position in the market or strategy in the chess game. The internal resource base is only a secondary consideration and must be adapted to fit the external opportunities. Translated into chess, this means that if a position is favourable for White, then everybody should be able to play it. It is not taken into account whether the player actually has the competence to play the position. It is assumed that everybody can learn to play any position, as long as it is the ‘right’ position to strive for from a purely objective analytical perspective.

The outside-in perspective is dominant in chess. It is how we are taught to think and work with chess from an early age – objective assessment of the position. It is this perspective that leads players to go for opening variations “because in ECO, Informator or a New in Chess Yearbook it is assessed as leading to a slight advantage for White”. But what if you are a positional player and the position demands a radical tactical approach? Or conversely, what if the position is evaluated as slightly better for White because Black has an isolated pawn, but actually you prefer active piece-play over pawn-structure?

The objective basis of the outside-in perspective is surely very important in chess, but there are a number of risks connected to an overly deterministic use of this approach to chess strategy.

First, as outlined above, the internal competences – the abilities of the chess-player – may not fit the external opportunities. The player may simply not be capable of playing the position. He may feel uncomfortable with having weak pawns in return for active play and may not have a clue as to how to continue. Then having a slight nominal advantage rarely helps.

Second, this approach leads to strategy convergence – we all start playing the same openings and positions in the same way. If we all read the same books, use the same analytical computer programs and judge all positions in the same way, then chess may indeed approach a situation of deadlock where not much new is brought forward and the rate of draws increases.

The problem is that this approach makes it very easy to imitate and copy each other. In a recent interview on ChessBase.com, Anand touched upon this problem in contemporary top-class events. He stated that “...short draws become a big problem, especially nowadays when everyone sits down with Fritz and gets these long, forced lines. I mean in previous times at least you went to the board and were not completely sure, but now you can mathematically work some lines out and force a draw... You’ve seen the effect in Linares. People are simply well prepared, they play topical lines, and in fact they even copy each other’s openings. Somebody who has never played the Sveshnikov will add it to his repertoire, someone who never plays the Marshall will have it in his repertoire, and they all play the same lines against each other, often with reversed colours as well. It is very difficult in those circumstances to get anything going.”

In fact, here Anand highlights a problem that is topical in the business world as well. If all companies analyse the environment in the same way, make decisions based on the same criteria and copy each other, then it is difficult for anybody to achieve a competitive advantage – in chess and in business. This is one of the main critique points against the outside-in perspective on strategy.

The inside-out perspective takes a different viewpoint. Here the starting point is the internal resources – the things that a company (or chess-player) does exceptionally well. According to the exponents of this perspective, strategies should be built around a company’s (or chess-player’s) strengths. The thinking is ‘market (or board) position follows the resource base’ – the position and the strategies should be adapted to fit the strengths of this particular player, not the other way
around. That means that a key criterion in choosing an opening or a strategy is whether it fits the style of the player.

The inside-out perspective focuses on resources and competences, and therefore it is often called the resource-based view of strategy. This perspective has been developed in detail throughout the 1990s (whereas the outside-in approach goes further back; to the first writings on business strategy by professors at Harvard Business School in the 1960s, and especially Michael Porter’s writings in the 1980s) and is currently considered the dominant perspective in strategic management.

The resource-based view is built on two basic assumptions: resource heterogeneity and resource immobility. Let me illustrate these with a simple example. Undoubtedly, Kasparov is a better chess-player than me—he is consistently rated some 250 Elo points above me. There are simply some things in chess that Kasparov does better than me. That is the resource heterogeneity part. Although Kasparov and I start from the same platform—the starting position of the game—Kasparov still achieves better results than me. However, since chess is a transparent game, where all moves are written down, top players annotate games, etc., I could try to study Kasparov’s games to figure out what he does better, and then imitate him. However, although I have spent hundreds of hours throughout my career studying the games of Kasparov and other world champions, there are still things in Kasparov’s play that I cannot copy. There are simply some resources that are impossible to imitate from Kasparov. These may, e.g., be chess talent, the training system in the old Eastern Block countries, motivation, working habits or personality, etc. Whatever they are, they demonstrate the resource immobility part. Even if you are aware of some of the advantages of the competitors, you still cannot imitate them, for a number of reasons. They remain a source of competitive advantage for this competitor, and there is—contrary to the outside-in perspective—no risk of strategy convergence. Everybody will have to identify their core competences and build from there, rather than adapt to the environment.

For chess that is highly interesting, because that will bring chess away from the path of eternal convergence of top players copying one another and short computer-checked draws being the order of the day. It does, however, require two things of chess-players:

1) A model for evaluating what their core competences are, so that you can start basing your choices of openings and strategies upon this knowledge rather than on how a specific opening variation is currently evaluated in Informator; and

2) A willingness to go your own ways rather than following in the footsteps of everybody else—not at random but based on a profound knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of yourself and your opponent in that particular game.

In later chapters of this book, I shall present a framework for how to evaluate yourself; the second part is up to you!

**Sustainability of Advantages**

Business strategy is about pursuing competitive advantages, and so is chess. However, an advantage is not just an advantage. What is equally important is the durability of the advantage—is it sustainable?

Steinitz was the first to point to two basic types of advantages in chess: temporary and lasting advantages. Temporary advantages only exist for a very short while—perhaps just one move—and must be exploited immediately. Otherwise, the opponent can repair his position and nullify the advantage. This is what Steinitz meant when he said that “if you have the advantage, you must attack, otherwise the advantage disappears”. Obviously temporary advantages are important in chess. They may for example arise due to an oversight, which can then be exploited by the opponent, if he notices it. They may also be forced; one player has exerted so much pressure that the opponent does not have anything better than to accept a temporary disadvantage in the hope that it can be nullified if it is not exploited optimally; e.g., if the player waits too long before initiating his attack.
However, from a competitive point of view, sustainable – or lasting – advantages are best. These are the type of advantages that the opponent cannot repair (without your ‘help’, i.e. mistakes), even if he is given a few moves. An example is a damaged pawn-structure. That is a sustainable advantage which is typically difficult to nullify. You may get something in return, such as active play, but you should be careful in the evaluation of the trade-off between a long-term sustainable advantage versus a short-term initiative. A temporary initiative is often a less resilient advantage than a lasting flaw in the pawn-structure.

As we shall see in the following chapters, sustainable advantages are typically positional in nature, and often have to do with the pawn-structure, whereas temporary advantages often have to do with the pieces and their coordination and placing throughout the board. During a game, there is a continuous trade-off between these various factors and advantages. At one point in time one of the players ‘does a bad deal’ and gives up too much on one factor without getting the same value in return on another factor. This is what leads to advantage for one of the players and subsequently decides chess games. Sometimes one advantage is traded for another. Imagine, for example, one player having the advantage of the two bishops, which he then abandons to damage the opponent’s pawn-structure instead. Such an exchange of one advantage for another is what Capablanca called the transformation of advantages.

However, as we shall see, the trade-offs are not only taking place on the board, but also in the minds of the players. Different players value, e.g., the trade-off between initiative and pawn-structure differently, and this psychological battle with relative values in the minds of the players may be just as – or even more – important as objective absolute values. After all, it is the result that matters. Chess is a zero-sum game where the winner takes all. As the saying goes: “Winners count their number of points – losers count their number of favourable positions”.

**Game Theory and Chess**

As I just mentioned, chess is a zero-sum game. The term ‘zero-sum’ stems from game theory – the branch of mathematics that deals with strategic decision-making. Chess is a sequential game – the players make moves (decisions) in turn.

Sequential games can be analysed and studied by using game trees. A game tree shows the sequential decisions that the players can take. A very simple game tree might look like this:

![Game Tree](image)

Figure 3

This is a simplistic game tree of the opening position, assuming that White only has two options on his first move – 1 e4 and 1 d4 – while Black in turn only has two replies to each of these opening moves.
Obviously the ‘real’ game tree in chess is much bigger and quickly becomes impossible to draw and control for the human mind – you simply have to consider that at his first move White has 20 different options at his disposal; in response to each of these moves Black also has 20 possible replies, after which White has an even greater number of options, depending on White’s and Black’s first moves. In theory, chess is a game which can eventually be studied to the end using this method, and some time into the (hopefully distant) future this may indeed be possible by using computers. Fortunately this will not matter much for practical chess-players, as we as humans cannot fathom just a marginal proportion of the game tree.

However, thinking in game trees is still very useful, and it is a very common training method used in the systematization and development of calculation skills. By building a qualitative game tree – based on the concept of candidate moves – you can optimize your ability to calculate concrete variations.

In sequential games, the key rule is to look ahead and reason back. You should use the game tree to look ahead and to evaluate the consequences of decisions taken (moves played in chess) by you and your opponent, and from there reason back to find the best move in the given position. Ideally, you should be able to calculate the game tree to the very end of the game, but this is rarely possible, since as I stated above, the game tree quickly becomes impossible to grasp for the human mind.

What to do then? The key is to combine the rule of looking ahead and reasoning back with value judgement. Since you cannot calculate everything to the end, you must stop at one point and decide which road to take. To do that you need to evaluate which future position is the most attractive one.

For chess-players this means that position evaluation is a key ingredient in strategic decision-making in chess. In the next chapter our focus will therefore be to build a model that practical chess-players can use in evaluating positions and choosing strategies. The specific value judgements of each position may vary, but the model can help you structure the trade-offs you need to consider to make the right strategic decisions. In building the model, we shall also incorporate some of the other components of strategy that we have discussed in this chapter, such as the resource-based view on strategy.
One of the great things about chess is that it is both very complex and at the same time very simple. Small children can learn the rules of the game, while even world champions cannot penetrate all the way through the intricacies of the game.

The purpose of this chapter is to structure the factors or elements that shape strategy in chess. A number of players and authors have developed theories and models concerning these elements, and we shall take these previous suggestions as our starting point in the discussion.

One of the most famous writers and players in chess history is Aron Nimzowitsch. Few figures in history have had more influence on how chess is played than Nimzowitsch. His legendary book *My System* remains one of the (perhaps the) most influential chess books ever written. In *My System* Nimzowitsch discusses eight elements of chess strategy:

1) The centre
2) Open files for rooks
3) Play on the 7th and 8th ranks
4) The passed pawn
5) The pin
6) Discovered check
7) Exchange
8) The pawn-structure

I believe that some of these are not really independent elements seen from a strategic perspective. Discovered check is clearly a tactical device, while the pin is crucial in material (or 'force') discussions, but perhaps not a strategic element in itself. The same can be said about play on the 7th and 8th ranks, which is mainly of importance in the endgame. The importance of the passed pawn can be categorized under the discussion about the pawn-structure.

The remaining elements – the centre, open files for rooks, exchange and the pawn-structure – are all crucial in the evaluation of a position or intended strategy, although they obviously need to be developed in more detail to understand the trade-offs and interdependencies between the specific elements. For example, an open file has less strategic value if there are no entry-squares in the enemy position. Or take the discussions of the strategic importance of the centre between classical players like Steinitz and Tarrasch on the one side, and hypermodern players like Nimzowitsch, Réti and Grünfeld on the other. This debate (taking place both in writings and in practical games) focused on the question of whether you really have to *occupy* the centre with pawns to control it (the classical view), or if you can also dominate the centre by controlling it with long-distance pieces (the hypermodern view).

*Eugene Znosko-Borovsky* (born 1884) is an old master from the times of Capablanca and Alekhine. Znosko-Borovsky was a strong player in his time, and although he never quite reached the same heights as the aforementioned legends, he did beat Capablanca in an exhibition game in St Petersburg 1913. I include him here, because he was also a writer on chess strategy, writing chess books in a different manner from most other authors. Rather than simply exemplifying chess strategy with a vast number of examples, Znosko-Borovsky instead tried to describe it verbally, to provide a real understanding of the basic elements of the game. This corresponds with my purpose here. In his interesting old book, *The Middle Game in Chess*, Znosko-Borovsky discusses three main elements of chess:

1) Force
2) Space
3) Time

I am not a chess historian, so I am not sure if Znosko-Borovsky was the first to formulate these three elements, but his discussion is interesting and original. I believe that it can be seen as the foundation of later and broader definitions of the elements of chess strategy. At any rate, his three elements correspond well with the definitions that the strongest player in the past decades, Garry Kasparov, has pointed out in a number of places, including his books My Great Predecessors.

1) Material
2) Time
3) Quality of the position

Let us discuss these in slightly more detail. Material is rather obvious: many chess games are decided because of a decisive material superiority of one of the players — “I lost a piece so I resigned”. In many games, the emergence of a material advantage is often the final proof that the strategy of one of the players was superior to that of the opponent. Can you recognize the following proceedings of a game: White (or Black) emerges from the opening with a small positional advantage — the opponent may, e.g., have a weak pawn. This weakness is gradually and systematically nudged until at some point the pawn is lost and the positional advantage is turned into a material advantage that is eventually converted in the endgame.

I prefer the term ‘positional factors’ rather than ‘quality of the position’ since this clearly separates sustainable advantages from temporary ones, following our discussion in Chapter 1. Although not all positional factors are completely sustainable in the long run — e.g., a weak pawn may under certain circumstances be advanced and exchanged, or even turn into a dangerous passed pawn — I feel this separation is useful for understanding the continuous trade-offs that take place during a game between different kinds of advantages and between the short and the long term.

As discussed in Chapter 1, temporary advantages are often connected with time — that is inherent in the term — and with the position of the pieces, whereas sustainable advantages are often tied to characteristics of the pawn-structure. However, as Hübner and Timman have pointed out, ‘time’ is a double-edged notion, since in a number of situations time is actually a negative factor rather than a positive one. For example, that is the case in positions where zugzwang is a main theme, while repetition of moves also works against using time as a positive indicator of advantage. On the other hand, in many situations time is highly important, such as positions where one player has a lead in development or where the two sides are pursuing attacks on opposite wings. As Timman points out, in such situations, a more precise term is ‘deployment speed’ rather than time.

However, in my opinion a broader term is needed to cover a number of sub-elements related to temporary advantages. I prefer the term ‘initiative’. Most positions where having the initiative is a strong strategic asset are characterized by the importance of deployment speed, but it is not the only crucial factor in such positions. Here force is also important, but not absolute force — the number of pieces on the board — but rather relative force, which is the number of pieces close to the centre of attention — typically attacking and defending the king. A related concept, which we shall later discuss, is Tal’s ‘Assault Ratio’. Furthermore, the coordination of the pieces is important, and in turn determines how quickly the pieces can be deployed in the initiative.

One last player should be mentioned here — Josif Dorfman. Like Znosko-Borovsky many years earlier, Dorfman is a Russian who has relocated to France, and he has also written interesting books on chess strategy. Dorfman works with four elements of strategy:

1) The king’s position
2) Material
3) Better position after exchange of queens
4) The pawn-structure

As you can see, there are two new elements presented here — the king’s position and the question of who has the better position after the exchange of queens. The position of the king is very important in many attacking positions, and it can also help explain a number of ‘mysterious’ king moves that, e.g., Kasparov is fond of. In apparently sharp positions he spends a tempo securing his king.
Making sure the king is safe frees the attacker of defensive worries. Still, the king’s position is hardly a strategic element of its own, as it is highly dependent on the position in general. In my opinion it is a sub-element of the initiative discussion. Similarly, I do not consider ‘better position after exchange of queens’ an independent strategic element. However, it is certainly an important tool, as the values of a number of factors change when the queens come off. For instance, the king is suddenly ‘a strong piece’, whereas it should mainly be tucked away in the middlegame, and the initiative may lose dramatically in strength without queens. Since the decision to exchange queens affects the material situation, I would place ‘better position after queen exchange’ as a sub-element under material.

We have now identified three important strategic factors in chess – material, initiative and positional factors – each with a number of sub-elements that should be considered when assessing a position or a strategy. However, these are all ‘outside-in factors’; they do not take into account who is actually playing the game – the specific characteristics of the two players. It is necessary to extend the model with a factor dealing with these issues – in short we have to apply a resource-based view on strategy, where the thinking is inside-out rather than outside-in.

Neither do the pure chess factors consider the circumstances surrounding the game. Chess is not played in a vacuum but is a part of an open system. Is the game played at a classical time rate (whatever that is these days) or is it a rapid game? Is it a team event or an individual competition? How are the standings in the tournament? These are all crucial questions which we all know impact our decision-making when we sit at the board, and they should accordingly be built into a model of chess strategy, if the model is to be useful for practical players.

Thus, the model is extended with two vital factors: the human factor and environmental factors. Graphically the model can be depicted as this:

### The five forces shaping chess strategy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Environmental factors</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time-rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team or individual competition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standings in tournament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opponent’s background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time-pressure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Material</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Absolute force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exchanges</td>
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<tr>
<td>Position after a queen exchange</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The human factor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Your own style and characteristics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Style and characteristics of the opponent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positional factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pawn-structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control of key squares and files</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control of the centre</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiative</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relative force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deployment speed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordination of pieces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King position</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The human factor must be considered in decision-making in order to accommodate the influence of the players who are actually going to implement the strategy in the practical game. It is crucial that there is a match between the demands of the position and the capabilities of the player. Conversely, it can also be a good strategy to enter positions that the opponent doesn’t like. If you know your opponent from preparation or previous games, this knowledge is an important ingredient in the strategic decision-making. The consequence of this approach is that two different players assessing the same position may come to very different conclusions as to whether this is a good position for them to enter. No more of the ‘objective’ evaluation that ‘White is slightly better’ – this is only the evaluation of the three chess factors material, initiative and positional factors – but it should not be the final verdict as to whether this is actually the best way to proceed for White given the characteristics of the two players at the board. In Chapter 3 we shall discuss this thinking in greater detail, and in Chapters 4-7 the characteristics of four distinct types of chess-players will be discussed. Hopefully you can find your own type, and the classification is also highly useful when preparing for a specific opponent.

Environmental factors are the consequence of chess being played as part of an open system. Although the game itself can be considered a closed system – everything is decided on the board – the players’ decisions are affected by a variety of considerations. Some of these are mentioned in the model, but this list is not meant to be exhaustive, just as other sub-elements may also be added to other factors. However, these are in my opinion some of the most important external factors influencing the decisions of players in a practical game. Who has not been in the situation where the team’s interest in a team event influenced your play? Or that the standings in the tournament made you play differently from how you would otherwise have done? I think we can all agree that such factors do occasionally influence our decisions and play at the board. My intention is to help you make the right decisions in such situations, and this is the focus of Chapter 8 of this book.

A few words should be said about how to use the model. The five factors should be seen as a coherent value system. The aim is to find the combination that gives the best total ‘score’. When you find the highest total score, you have found your optimal strategy. This may sound slightly abstract, since I suppose few players actually attach values to the various elements during a practical game. But that is what actually happens during a game. When you accept an isolated pawn in return for active piece-play, you give up something on the positional factor rating, while you gain something on the initiative parameter. Obviously the ultimate goal is to gain something on one of the parameters without giving up anything on any of the others; e.g., winning a pawn for no compensation. Strong players are highly experienced in understanding these continuous trade-offs and use this for outplaying less strong players. A number of small concessions – in many cases on the positional factor rating, since this is often too subtle to grasp for inexperienced players – eventually turn into a significant advantage and in the end a full point. My purpose here is to present a model that can help you understand and keep track of what is happening throughout the game. Awareness about the shifts in the five factors in the model can hopefully help you avoid giving up advantages for nothing. When you give up something – let’s say the two bishops – you should ask yourself: “What do I get in return – in the short term and in the long term?”

Much has been written about the three chess factors (material, initiative and positional factors), and consequently I shall not discuss these factors explicitly in this book. However, they are implicitly present in the numerous examples that you will find in the coming chapters. I have concentrated on discussing in detail the two factors that I feel have received inadequate attention in the literature on chess strategy: the human factor and the environmental factors. The human factor is clearly the largest, and that is the one we shall focus on in the coming chapters.
3 The Opponents: The Role of the Human Factor in Chess

The most fundamental element common to all strategy is the clash of antagonistic, purposeful and intelligent wills between opponents, be they enemies at war or businesses in competition [or players in a chess game].

From Clausewitz on Strategy

Despite the inherent differences of business, war and chess, these disciplines have one thing in common: strategy. Therefore it is interesting and useful to relate thinking from business and military strategy to chess.

As I have discussed in the earlier chapters, strategy is fundamentally about dealing with competition. Without competition there would be no need for strategy. In this case planning would merely be a technical optimization exercise. The point is that the competition affects planning due to the uncertainty about which choices and actions the competition will take. This uncertainty is seen by many as an annoying aspect of strategic planning, but in reality the uncertainty gives the real strategist his big chance for a place in the sun: such situations are the ones where deep understanding, intuition and the ability for creative thinking can outmatch concrete calculation and data crunching.

‘Competition’ is the term used in strategy discussions in business. In military strategy this equals the enemy and in chess the opponent. I believe the opponent plays a crucial role in strategy-making in chess. The players in a chess game are humans (forget about computers for a second), and the choices they make are influenced by their background, experience, self-confidence, personality, etc. This means that what is the right choice in a given position for one player is not the right choice for another player with a completely different personality and chess style. Therefore there is no ‘best’ choice in a (strategic) position – no ‘one size fits all’ approach! The right choice of plan in a given strategic position should not only be determined by purely chess reasons. It is not enough to evaluate material, initiative, pawn-structure and other structural considerations generically – these considerations should be held up against the characteristics of the two players. The style and personality of the combatants should be included in the decision process as well. This means that we should give up the assumption that in a given strategic position there is one best way to play which should be chosen by any player in the given position against any opponent sitting on the other side of the board. The assumption that chess is played on a board and against pieces should be abandoned and replaced by an approach which acknowledges that chess is played between opponents and that the aim is to win the game against this particular opponent. The consequence of this is that in a given position the right strategy can be different against two different opponents with different styles.

Take the example of two equally strong players but with different styles – one is solid and positional, the other a sharp attacking player. The positional player should weigh defects in the pawn-structure in return for initiative differently from the aggressive player with strengths in attacking play. These two should recognize their differences and evaluate the same position in different ways – without paying too much attention to the ‘right’ evaluation that chess experts would put on the position. This is most likely to lead to the best practical results. Who has not been in the situation of having a position on the board which you knew was objectively OK, but still you felt uncomfortable, because the position did not really fit your style? Honestly – did you do well in such games?
Obviously there are many positions where there is just one right way to play. But such positions are not really 'strategic' in the real sense of the term. In strategic positions there are a variety of choices which are affected by the influence of the opponent's choices. If (or when) at some point computers are able - in any position - to determine exactly the right move to play ('leading to mate in max. 47 moves') chess will cease to exist as a strategic game. Fortunately, this is still far from happening.

I remember an old comment by Tal in which he referred to a difficult choice he had to make in a complicated position where he was under pressure and in time-pressure to boot. At one point Tal had the option to exchange pieces off and enter a (theoretically drawn) rook ending with 3 against 4 on the same side of the board. Many players would probably have chosen this option, but Tal preferred to keep the pieces on the board because "the rook ending would require a technical accuracy which I was not certain to master under time-pressure". This shows a player who knows his own strengths and weaknesses! Tal knew that technical positions were not his strongest point (although of course he played those well too - otherwise you don't become world champion) whereas in complicated positions he did not need to fear any opponent (even in time-pressure). In such complications he could utilize his tremendous feeling for the initiative - his real core competence.

This chapter will explore ways to include these 'human considerations' into strategic decision-making in chess. We will consider a number of tools you can use to decide on the 'chess style' and 'approach to the game' of yourself and your future opponents. This knowledge can then be put to use when evaluating positions and deciding on strategic action.

Let us start by looking at a simple example of this thinking. Take a look at the following well-known position (see following diagram):

[Diagram of a chess position]

This common position from the Queen's Gambit Exchange Variation has been seen in thousands of games even at the highest level, but still no consensus seems to have been reached as to which is White's strongest plan. Some prefer 9 \(?f3 followed by 10 0-0 and a classic queenside minority attack with b4-b5; others play 9 \(?ge2 later followed by expansion in the centre with f3 and e4; and still others choose to castle queenside and initiate a kingside attack.

What should normal mortals like us do when even world champions like Karpov and Kasparov cannot agree on 'one right plan'? What we should not do is choose one over the other simply because, e.g., "Kasparov is my favourite so I will play like he does". Instead it is better to look deeply inside yourself and determine which style fits you best - the positional minority attack, active play in the centre or a reckless attempt to build up an attack. How you can determine your chess style is the topic of this chapter.

Karpov and Kasparov are well aware of their strengths and weaknesses, of course. It is surely no coincidence that Karpov normally chooses 9 \(?f3 and positional play here, while Kasparov prefers 9 \(?ge2 and active central play. These diverging approaches have yielded them many victories; according to the statistics in my database Karpov has an almost 80% score against top-level opposition in 'his' line, while Kasparov even displays 90% in 'his'! Despite their magnificent talents I doubt they would achieve the same scores if we switched the variations. Obviously they would still score well, but I don't believe it would be this high.

The personal chess style of a player has great impact on his play. It affects the choice of opening, the evaluation of positions and the choice of strategic action, particularly in the middlegame. Through profound understanding of your own style and that of the opponent in that particular game, the likeliness of making the right choices can be improved.
Remember here that the objective is the result – winning the game. No points are given for ‘fun’ or ‘interesting’ games. It is the score board that counts! This implies that if a player by nature is best in solid – some would say boring – positions, then solid positions are what he should play. He should choose solid openings and consciously adopt this knowledge when evaluating positions and choosing a plan. Conversely, of course, for players with natural skills in sharp complicated positions. Such players should adopt sharp openings, strive for complicated middlegame positions and take these characteristics of style – also seen relative to the opponent – into account when deciding on action.

This approach resembles the inside-out approach to strategy which is known as the ‘resource-based view’ and which we discussed in Chapter 1. Instead of looking only at the position and choosing ‘objectively’ what the right strategy is (an outside-in approach which assumes that the organization/player actually has the competences to implement the plan), the resource-based approach instead takes the competences of the organization (here the player) as its starting point and from there looks for markets/positions where these competences can be put to optimal use. I once heard a business strategy professor bluntly commenting that “it is better to be good in a shitty industry than to be mediocre in an attractive industry”! The same thinking can be applied to chess: it is better to have an equal (or maybe even slightly worse) position that you like than a slightly better position in which you don’t know how to proceed.

Let me illustrate this point by briefly showing two of my own games. In the first game, from my playoff for the 1994 Danish Championship against Curt Hansen, I tried to surprise Curt by playing the Open Sicilian, which I had never played prior to the match. Despite obtaining a better (or maybe even winning) position, I lacked familiarity with this type of position and had a general uncomfortable feeling in playing such complicated positions, and messed up things and lost the game. In the second game I stuck to my core competences and aimed for a solid and quiet position – even if this meant giving up any chance of a serious opening advantage as White – and eventually managed to win against the strong GM Sergei Movsesian, who for his part is at his best in complicated positions. The point is that it was not the position on the board in the strategic middlegame that eventually decided these two games. Judge for yourself:

**L.B. Hansen – Cu. Hansen**

*Danish Ch playoff (1) (Gladsaxe) 1994*

1 e4 c5 2 d3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 xxd4 e6 5 b5 a6 6 c2 e6 7 f4 b5 9 a3 d7 10 f3 c8 11 f1 e5 12 f5 g6 13 e3 exf4?

A mistake which allows White to launch a dangerous attack. Correct is 13...g7 with complicated play.

14 e5! xf3
14...dxe5 15 xb7 x6 16 a6 fxe3 17 xb5 is clearly better for White.
15 xf6 e5 16 xg3 fxe3 17 f4 g4 18 xe3 d7 (D)

The only move, because 18...xf6 fails to 19 b6+ e7 20 wh4 with the deadly threat xe1.

With the black king stuck in the centre, it would presumably only take a naturally gifted attacking player like John Nunn, Alexei Shirov or Jonny Hector (all former team-mates of mine from the German Bundesliga, where I have seen them time and again crushing opponents in vicious attacks) a few moves to deal the lethal blow, but I fail to do so. The clearest way was probably 19 d5!; for example, 19...xc2 20 xc1 xc1 21 xc1 and White penetrates via the c-file, or 19...c6 20 a4! opening the
a-file instead. Also 19...$xf6? 20 $b6 does not work. Instead I started manoeuvring aimlessly and even managed to lose the game rapidly.

19 $d4? $xf6 20 $h4 $g7 21 $h3+ $c7
22 $ad1?!

Taking the rook off the a-file is illogical. After 22 $xf6 $xf6 23 $d5+ $b8 24 c3 followed by a4 White would still have ample play for the pawn. Instead I keep drifting.

22...$b8 23 $b1 $c8 24 $d7 25 $e5
$e6 26 $a2 $e8 27 $xg7 $xg7 28 $b4 $w7
29 $d5 $f5 30 $w3 $e1+ 31 $f1 $w6+ 32
$g1 $c8 33 $xa6+! $a7! 34 $b4 $f2+ 35
$d6+ $a8 0-1

L.B. Hansen – Movsesian
Bundesliga 1996/7

1 $f3 $f6 2 g3 c6 3 $g2 $g6 4 b3 $g7 5 $b2
0-0 6 0-0 $d6 7 $d4 $g4 8 $bd2 $bd7 9 $e1
$e8 10 a4 $c7 11 h3 $xf3 12 $xf3 $e5 13 dxe5
dxe5 14 $c4 $d5 15 $w2 $b6 16 $xb6
axb6 17 $ad1 $ad8 18 $w1

White only has a very tiny edge after the opening, if any. Nothing much is going on. But I like such positions with the two bishops, while Movsesian prefers more complicated positions. Furthermore he – as the higher rated (2630 vs 2545) – probably also wanted to play for a win, which is not easy in such positions. It is not for objective chess reasons that the Slovak GM loses this game. It is due to the human ‘off-the-board’ side of the game.

18...$f6 19 $h4 $f8 20 $f1 $b4 21 c3 $f8
22 $c4 $g7 23 $g2 $w8c 24 $we2 $e7 25 $c1
$xd1 26 $xd1 $d8 27 $xd8 $xd8 (D)

28 $f4!
Opening the position for the two bishops. But Black still does not have any serious problems.

28...$xf4 29 $xf4 $d5 30 $d2 $w6 31
$w4 $e7 32 $h5! $f5?

Giving the bishops more space and weakening the king.

33 $w2 $f6?! 34 $w8! (D)

28...$xf4 29 $xf4 $d5 30 $d2 $w6 31
$w4 $e7 32 $h5! $f5?

Giving the bishops more space and weakening the king.

33 $w2 $f6?! 34 $w8! (D)

38...gxh5 39 $xh5

In very few moves the black position has gone from slightly worse to highly critical – if not lost. The next time-pressure move drops a piece and hastens the end.

35...$xc3? 36 $g5+ $h8

Other moves do not help: 36...$f8 37 $xc3
$xc3 38 $g8+ $e7 39 $g7+ or 36...$g6 37
$xc3+ $xc3 38 $e7+$h6 39 $e3+

37 $xc3+ 1-0

Two very different games, where the main battle was not decided on, but rather off the
board – in the various styles and personalities of the two players. This is not only seen in games of ‘normal’ grandmasters, but even at world championship level. Let us consider two well-known events, where I believe the human factor had a serious impact on the final results.

**The Human Factor and the World Championship**

The human side of the game is important even at the highest level. Let us consider the impact of the human factor on two of the historical events in chess of the past 20 years: when Kasparov won the world championship from Karpov in 1985 and when Kramnik in turn took the crown from Kasparov in 2000. Obviously there are a number of pure chess reasons for these results, but here I want to focus on the human side of these encounters. I should note that this is my interpretation of the events as an outside observer.

The first Karpov-Kasparov match in 1984/5 was played to six wins with draws not counting. As is well known, the match was cancelled by FIDE President Campomanes after 48 games with the score 5-3 for Karpov.

Going into the match, Kasparov was the aggressive young challenger who had swept away the old guard (beating Beliavsky 6-3, Korchnoi 7-4 and Smyslov 8½-4½) in the candidates matches. But in the first match against Karpov he had problems. By winning the 3rd, 6th, 7th and 9th games, Karpov grabbed a crushing 4-0 lead. Then followed 17(!) draws before Karpov extended the lead to 5-0 with the 27th game. Most games in the early stages of the match were played on ‘Karpov territory’ – technical positions where small nuances decided the games. Many of Kasparov’s white games were drawn relatively quickly. Typical of the first part of the match was the way Karpov won the 9th and the 27th games (see following diagram):

White has a slight edge since he has the better bishop (all black pawns being placed on light squares obstructing his own bishop) and a sounder pawn-structure (...b5 has created holes on the dark squares on the queenside). Still, Kasparov probably expected to draw this ending. But such positions are Karpov’s domain! He is extremely strong in sensing and exploiting tiny positional nuances, whereas Kasparov’s main strengths (especially at this point in his career) are in dynamic play and concrete calculation. Thus, Kasparov should try to refrain (as much as possible) from such positions and strive for ‘his’ kind of position. In fact, that is what he did in later matches and games against Karpov. Instead of choosing the Tarrasch Defence (as in this game) or the Orthodox Queen’s Gambit Declined (as in most other black games of the first match where Karpov opened with 1 d4) Kasparov turned to the dynamic Grünfeld and the King’s Indian Defences which in my opinion much more fit the relative strengths of Karpov and Kasparov.

36...£e7 37 £a2 £c8 38 £d4 £d6 39 f3 £g8 40 h4 £h6 41 £f2 £f5 42 £c2 £f6 43 £d3 g5!?

Allowing the following exchange is by principle dangerous, leaving White with a good knight against a bad bishop.

44 £xf5 £xf5 45 £e3 £b1 46 b4 gxh4?! Karpov and his team must have missed the following move in their analysis of the adjourned position.

47 £g2!!

Much stronger than 47 gxh4. The white king needs the h4-square and this is much more important than the temporary loss of a pawn.

47...hxg3+ 48 £xg3 £e6 49 £f4+ £f5 50 £xh5 £e6 51 £f4+ £d6 52 £g4 £c2 53 £h5 £d1 54 £g6 £e7 55 £xd5+?!

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**Karpov – Kasparov**

Moscow Wch (9) 1984/5
Logical, but later analysis (e.g. by Bent Larsen in the Danish magazine Skakbladet) indicates that it was more accurate to leave this pawn for later and play 55 £h5! instead. The point is the same as with 47 £g2: the black king gets a square and a potential counterplay route via d5 and c4.

55...&e6 56 £c7+ &d7 57 £xa6 £xf3 58 £xf6 £d6 59 £f5 £d5 60 £f4 £h1 61 £e6 £c4 62 £c5 £c6 63 £d3 £g2 64 £e5+ £e3 65 £g6 £c4 66 £e7 £b7 67 £f5 £g2 68 £d6+ £b3 69 £xb5 £a4 70 £d6 1-0

**Karpov – Kasparov**

_Moscow Wch (27) 1984/5_

1 £f3 d5 2 d4 £f6 3 c4 e6 4 £c3 £e7 5 £g5 h6 6 £xf6 £xf6 7 £c3 0-0 8 £c2 c5 9 £xc5 £xc5 10 £xc4 £a5 11 0-0 £xc3 12 £xc3 £xc3 13 bxc3 £d7 14 c6 £xc6 15 £ab1 £b6 16 £e2 £c5 17 £fc1 £b7? 18 £f1 (D)

This game followed a series of 17 draws. In his notes to the game Bent Larsen commented: “At this point Karpov is fully concentrated while Kasparov believes this is draw number 18.” This excellently describes the styles of Karpov and Kasparov in 1984. Indeed Black has to be slightly careful here as White is better developed and it is easier for him to attack Black’s queenside pawns than it is for Black to do likewise. At the same time this is the kind of position that Karpov plays best, whereas Kasparov – aged 21 – was perhaps already thinking of his next white game. It is amazing how quickly this seemingly innocuous situation turns into a winning position for White.

18...£d5?! 19 £b5! £d7

After 19...£xa2?? 20 c4 Black’s bishop is trapped.

20 £a5 £fb8 21 c4 £c6 22 £e1 £b4 23 £d1 £b7 24 £f3 £d8 25 £d3 g5 26 £h3 £f8 27 £xc5 £xc5 28 £xc5 £d6 29 £e2 £e7 30 £d1 £xd1 31 £xd1 £d6 32 £a5

and Karpov converted his material advantage in 59 moves.

I believe Kasparov learned a lot from this first match against Karpov. In my opinion the experience made Kasparov an even stronger player in a chess sense, since the lessons from the match made him a more universal player. He refined his positional understanding by ‘studying’ Karpov in practical games. In interviews Kasparov has stated that he is a fast learner, and the events after the first K-K match confirm this. But what he learned was not only purely chess related – my interpretation is that Kasparov also learned to appreciate the human side of chess when analysing the games of this match. Going into the match Kasparov presumably believed that he could win on chess strength alone, but that was not the case. Beating a giant like Karpov takes more (even if you are a giant yourself). Here it is necessary to look deeply into yourself and the opponent and strive for openings and positions that reflect the relative strengths of the players. This is what Kasparov did in later matches, and I believe that it is one of the reasons why he eventually came out victorious in these epic encounters. The trend is especially visible in his later games as Black against Karpov. Here Kasparov went for dynamic positions and active play even as Black. Gone are the days of playing for a draw with the Queen’s Gambit Declined. That is too dangerous against a technician like Karpov. Let us take a short but exciting example from the fifth K-K match in 1990:

**Karpov – Kasparov**

_Lyons/New York Wch (11) 1990_

1 d4 £f6 2 c4 g6 3 £c3 £g7

The other dynamic defence which Kasparov often deployed in these years was the Grünfeld (3...d5). This opening led to numerous exciting games between the two big K’s.
4 e4 d6 5 d3 f3 0-0 6 c2 e5 7 e3 exd4 8 exd4 e8 9 f3 c6 10 d2

Kasparov apparently considers the coming exchange sacrifice theoretically sound, since as White he prefers to avoid it. In his rapid game against the Norwegian wunderkind Magnus Carlsen in Reykjavik 2004 he preferred the calmer 10 f2, obtaining a promising position after 10...d5 11 exd5 cxd5 12 c5 d6 13 0-0 d5 14 d2 e5 15 g3 h3 (presumably the more common 15...g7 is better here in order to challenge White's blockade on d4) 16 e1 d7 17 a1 c8 18 db5! a6 19 d6 xd6 20 cxd6.

10...d5 11 exd5 cxd5 12 0-0 c6 13 c5 (D)

Before this game this line was thought to yield White a small but lasting plus due to his better pawn-structure and control of d4. Kasparov's next move created a whole new body of theory regarding this type of position. Material is considered less important than dark-squared control.

13...ex3!? 14 xe3 f8! 15 xc6

The most natural move, as White maintains his c5-pawn, but at the same time he reinforces Black's centre and opens the b-file. Later attempts at refuting Kasparov's bold exchange sacrifice have mainly focused on giving up the c5-pawn in return for time for consolidation. After 15 db5 xc5, Gelfand-Kasparov, Linares 1992 went 16 ac1 wb6 17 f2 d7 18 df1 e8 19 f1 d6 20 dc3 db4 and Black had more than sufficient compensation, winning in 60 moves. Shortly after this game I was more successful in my game from the 1992 Danish Championship against Peter Heine Nielsen, where I followed Seirawan's recommendation 16 f2!, and after 16...d6 17 ad1 d7 18 d3 xf2+ 19 f2 a6?! 20 c7 c8 21 xdx5 dx5 22 xdx5 c6 23 d2 db4 24 c1! I eventually managed to neutralize Black's initiative and convert the material advantage. I still believe this set-up is one of White's best options against the 13...ex3 line.

15...xc6 16 h1 b8 17 a4 b4! (D)

Making good use of the dark squares.

18 b3 e6 19 b2 h5 20 d3 h4! 21 f2 e7 22 g4

This move leads to a draw by force, but White didn't really have anything better at this point.

22...d4! 23 xdx4 xhx2+ 24 xhx2 h4+ 1/2-1/2

Drawn by perpetual check.

Kasparov won the world title in 1985 and held it for 15 years before losing it to Kramnik in London 2000. Kramnik won 8 1/2-6 1/2 without losing any games, while winning the 2nd and 10th games. The result was a surprise to most observers. Kasparov was (and is) consistently 30-50 Elo points higher rated than Kramnik, had huge matchplay experience and an almost flawless matchplay record (forgetting for a moment the electronic beasts...). Kramnik, on the other hand, had previously been somewhat vulnerable in matchplay, losing in 1994 to both Kamsky in the PCA qualifying matches and to Gelfand in the FIDE candidates matches and worse, to Shirov in 1998 in the match that was originally meant to provide Kasparov's challenger. But the match Kasparov-Shirov never materialized and Kramnik was given the chance
instead, understandably leaving Shirov very annoyed and frustrated.

How did Kramnik manage to beat Kasparov in the match for the world title? Given the above factors this was a formidable task. I believe there are two major reasons for Kramnik’s match win:

• Kramnik’s deep understanding of the concept of sustainability of advantages. As discussed in Chapter 1, it is not always enough to have a competitive advantage — either in business or in chess. The advantage should also be sustainable in the sense that it should be possible either to maintain it over time even when competitors (opponents) try to neutralize it, or to transform it into other advantages — what Capablanca called the transformation of advantages.

• Kramnik’s exploitation of the topic of this chapter: the human side of chess. Kramnik exploited his understanding of the relative strengths and weaknesses of himself and Kasparov. Here it came in handy that Kramnik had been Kasparov’s second during Kasparov’s world-title match against Anand in 1995. One striking feature of the match is the fact that in 8 of the 15 games the queens were exchanged before move 20. I believe this was not a coincidence but a part of Kramnik’s match strategy. In positions without queens, Kramnik is not inferior to Kasparov. For Kasparov’s dynamic play to excel, queens are a vital part of the equation.

These factors were underlying Kramnik’s choice of defence against 1 e4. His choice of the Berlin Defence was brilliant, and fitted the two factors mentioned above perfectly. While White theoretically may enjoy some advantage after the opening, this advantage is not very sustainable against careful play by Black, and with the queens off early, Kramnik could slowly work on neutralizing White’s advantage.

As early as the first game, the basic idea of this approach was shown:

Kasparov – Kramnik
London BGN Wch (1) 2000

1 e4 e5 2 d4 f4 f6 3 dxe5 fxe5 4 0-0 d5 5 d4 c3 (D)

There it is: the dreaded ‘Berlin Wall’. Seen from a classical and purely chess point of view, White has the advantage. He has a healthy pawn-majority on the kingside and the black king is feeling some pressure in the centre. But these advantages are not necessarily sustainable. The black king can hide on b7 and the pawn-majority might be blocked and lose its dynamism. The present game is an example of this. Furthermore Black has the two bishops which also represent a potential long-term advantage in the hands of Kramnik, who has often excelled with the two bishops.

9...d7

This move was Kramnik’s choice in games 1 and 3. It is logical to make room for the king on c8. However, in games 9 and 13 he chose 9...h6 instead, going with the king to e8 instead. This shows the versatility of the ‘Berlin Wall’ and highlights the profound reasoning underlying Kramnik’s choice of the Berlin as his main weapon against 1 e4 in this match. Even if Kasparov and his team could come up with something concrete against 9...d7, the opening could still be played and the fundamental match strategy of searching for queenless middlegames could still be followed.

10 b3 h6 11 b2 c8 12 h3

In game 3 Kasparov dispensed with this move and played the more direct 12 h1 instead. But after 12...b6 13 e2 e5 14 c4 c6 15 b4 b7 16 c5 d5 17 f1 b8 18 f4 g5 19 h5 g6 20 f6 g7 21 e3 bxf3 22 xf3 xf6 23 exf6 c6 Black still had sufficient counterplay to draw the game.

12...b6 13 e1 d7 14 e2 g6 15 e1! h5!
White plans to expand on the kingside with f4-f5, possibly supported by a timely g4. All Black’s attention is devoted to neutralizing this plan. If he succeeds, White’s initial advantage has vanished. The advantage was not sustainable. Alternatively, White could attempt to transfer his advantage of better pawn-structure into some other advantage. But what should that be? Black has the two bishops and a compact queenside, so it is not easy for White to find other weaknesses to probe in Black’s camp.

16...\(\text{d}3\)

The immediate 16 f4 is well met by 16...\(\text{h}4\). 16...\(\text{c}5\) 17 \(\text{c}4\) a5 18 a4 h4! 19 \(\text{c}3\) \(\text{e}6\) 20 \(\text{d}5\) \(\text{h}7\) 21 \(\text{e}3\) \(\text{h}5!\) (D)

Black has achieved his aim. The f4 advance is now always answered with ...\(\text{c}e7\), after which White cannot achieve the desired f5 advance. The position is now level and quickly peter’s out into a draw.

22 \(\text{c}3\) \(\text{e}8\) 23 \(\text{d}2\) \(\text{c}8\) 24 f4 \(\text{e}7\) 25 \(\text{f}2\) \(\text{f}5\) \(\frac{1}{2}-\frac{1}{2}\)

The Berlin Defence secured Kramnik four important draws as Black and was a key factor in his successful match strategy. When has it last happened that Kasparov failed to win one single game out of 15 and with 8 Whites?

In a long world championship match it is not enough to have only one defence against 1 \(\text{e}4\). You need to have a back-up. In Kramnik’s case this back-up was the Neo-Arkhangelsk Variation of the Ruy Lopez, which to my knowledge Kramnik had never used before. He had ventured the Berlin Defence once before, in a draw against Topalov in Wijk aan Zee 1999.

**Kasparov – Kramnik**

*London BGN Wch (11) 2000*

1 \(\text{e}4\) \(\text{e}5\) 2 \(\text{f}3\) \(\text{c}6\) 3 \(\text{b}5\) a6 4 \(\text{a}4\) \(\text{f}6\) 5 0-0 \(\text{b}5\) 6 \(\text{b}3\) \(\text{c}5\)

This active move was played by Morphy as long back as 1859 in a game against Løwenthal, a game which the great American incidentally lost. Löwenthal continued 7 \(c3\), which together with 7 a4 and 7 \(\text{d}xe5\) is still one of the main lines. Nowadays the Neo-Arkhangelsk is an accepted system, although it is still a sideline in the Ruy Lopez complex.

7 a4 \(\text{b}7\) 8 \(d3\) 0-0 9 \(\text{c}3\) \(\text{a}5!\)?

An interesting pawn sacrifice by which Black wishes to activate his light-squared bishop by playing ...d5. For this he is ready to sacrifice a pawn. However, as we shall see in the game, the main line of this variation leads to a complex endgame with some winning chances for White. Another opening choice in line with Kramnik’s overall match strategy!

10 axb5 \(\text{x}b3\) 11 \(\text{x}b3\) axb5 12 \(\text{x}a8\) \(\text{x}a8\) 13 \(\text{d}xe5\) \(\text{d}5\) (D)

The point. The light-squared bishop returns to duty.

14 \(\text{g}5\)

This is the most frequently played move and had also been employed by Kasparov once before, against Shirov in Linares 1998. Other moves do not bring White much: 14 \(\text{g}4\) dxe4 15 \(\text{xf}6+\) \(\text{xf}6\) 16 dxe4 \(\text{d}8\) 17 \(\text{c}2\) \(\text{g}6\) 18 \(\text{c}3\) \(\text{xe}3\) 19 fxe3 (Ivanchuk-Anand, Monaco rpd 1995), and now 19...\(\text{e}8\) gives Black ample compensation for the pawn (instead of Anand’s 19...b4?!), which allowed 20 \(\text{d}5!\) with the
point 20...\text{\textit{a}}xd5 21 \textit{\textit{w}}xc7), or 14\textit{d}4 \textit{\textit{c}}7 15 exd5\textbf{b}4\textbf{c} 16 \text{\textit{d}}a4 \textit{\textit{w}}xd5 17\textbf{f}3 \textit{\textit{d}}8 18 \textit{\textit{e}}3 \textit{\textit{f}}6 (de Firmian-Hector, Copenhagen 2004) and Black has sufficient counterplay as 19\textit{\textit{c}}d4?! fails to 19...\textit{\textit{e}}g4!.

14...dxe4 15 dxe4 \textit{\textit{w}}xd1 16 \textit{\textit{x}}xd1\textbf{b} 4 17 \textit{\textit{f}}xf6\textbf{c} 3 18 bxc3! gx\textit{f}6 19\textbf{d}7 \textit{\textit{d}}6 20 \textit{\textit{f}}xf8 \textit{\textit{f}}xf8 21 f3\textbf{h}5 (D)

Formally this is Kramnik’s novelty, 21...\textit{\textit{c}}6 having been played in an earlier game Kupreichik-Malaniuk, Münster 1995. But the really interesting issue here is what considerations the two players must have had in their preparation when considering this variation. Kasparov obviously believes in White’s objective advantage — and I am inclined to agree with him on that — since he repeats his play from the earlier game with Shirov, but Kramnik is happy to have forced Kramnik into a position in which technical skills are more important than creative, dynamic thinking and concrete calculation. Therefore this line was suitable for his chosen match strategy but apparently not for repetition, since (contrary to the Berlin Defence) Kramnik has not used it since.

22 h4 \textit{\textit{f}}7 23 \textit{\textit{f}}2 \textit{\textit{b}}7 24 c4

According to Shipov, White could have obtained reasonable winning chances with 24 \textit{\textit{h}}a1! \textit{\textit{e}}5 25 \textit{\textit{h}}a5!, aiming at the h-pawn and the prospect of creating an outside passed pawn.

24...\textit{\textit{e}}5 25 \textit{\textit{d}}d2 \textit{\textit{c}}8 26 \textit{\textit{d}}5 \textit{\textit{e}}6 27 \textit{\textit{a}}5 c5!

Closing the fifth rank and safeguarding the h-pawn.

28 \textit{\textit{e}}e3 \textit{\textit{d}}d4+ 29 \textit{\textit{d}}d3\textbf{f} 5! 30 b4 fxe4+ 31 \textit{\textit{e}}xe4 \textit{\textit{f}}f2 32 bxc5 \textit{\textit{x}}h4 33 c6 \textit{\textit{d}}d6 34 \textit{\textit{a}}xh5

16...\textit{\textit{x}}f2 35 g4 \textit{\textit{x}}xc6 36 \textit{\textit{h}}h2 \textit{\textit{c}}5 37 \textit{\textit{c}}2\textbf{f} 6 38 \textit{\textit{h}}h2 \textit{\textit{a}}xe4 39 \textit{\textit{h}}h6 \textit{\textit{d}}5+ 40 \textit{\textit{f}}f5 \textit{\textit{f}}xf3 41 g5 \textit{\textit{d}}d5 \textbf{\textit{g}}5/2

The best White can hope for is a drawn rook versus bishop ending.

In the match Kasparov did not manage to break down Kramnik’s strategy. It is perhaps not surprising that when the year after, Kasparov finally succeeded in beating Kramnik in the Berlin Defence, the weapons he used were dynamic play and concrete calculation rather than technical exploitation of the ‘classical’ advantage of the better pawn-structure. Let us conclude this section with this fine game.

\textit{\textit{K}}asparov — Kramnik
Astana 2001

1 e4 e5 2 \textit{\textit{f}}f3 \textit{\textit{c}}6 3 \textit{\textit{b}}b5 \textit{\textit{f}}6 4 0-0 \textit{\textit{f}}xe4 5 d4 \textit{\textit{d}}d6 6 \textit{\textit{g}}g5 dxc6 7 dxe5 \textit{\textit{f}}5 8 \textit{\textit{w}}xd8+ \textit{\textit{x}}xd8 9 \textit{\textit{c}}c3 h6 10 h3 \textit{\textit{d}}d7 11 b3\textbf{e} 8 12\textbf{b} 2\textbf{b} 8 13\textbf{d} 1\textbf{d} 7 14\textbf{\textit{f}}e1\textbf{g} 6 15\textbf{e} 4 (D)

Notice that Kasparov has prioritized rapid development and active piece-play and is excellently centralized. Kramnik’s next move is inaccurate (better is 15...\textit{\textit{e}}6 or 15...c5 although White certainly has the more pleasant position) and allows Kasparov to launch a strong offensive.

15...\textit{\textit{\textit{f}}f}4? 16 e6! \textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{f}}f}}6

Forced, since 16...\textit{\textit{\textit{x}}xe6? fails to 17\textit{\textit{f}}6+!\textbf{gx}f6 (17...\textbf{f}7 18 \textbf{a}3+) 18\textbf{\textit{x}}d8+ \textit{\textit{\textit{x}}x}d8 19 \textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{x}}}f}6+, and 16...\textit{\textit{f}}xe6 17\textbf{\textit{e}}5 is also very unpleasant for Black.

17\textbf{\textit{d}}4\textbf{c} 5 18\textbf{\textit{f}}5
A dream square for the knight. All White’s pieces are now involved in the onslaught. Kasparov has repeatedly stated that f5 (f4 for Black or c5/c4 if the players have castled queenside) is the ideal attacking square for a knight.

18...h7 19...e6! e8 20...xg7?!

Very tempting, and it does lead to an advantage for White. Crucial is White’s 26th move, which Kasparov must already have seen at this point (notice his exploitation of his core competences: dynamic play and concrete calculation!). But as Kasparov’s long-standing second Dokhoian – himself a 2600+ player – points out in Informator, 20 f4! (pawns are also strong attackers and should be included in the offensive!) is even stronger; e.g., 20...e6 21...f3! (a momentary retreat to pave the way for the f-pawn) 21.g6 22.c4 b6 23.f5 gxf5 24...xf5 with a clear advantage for White.

20...xg7 21...xg7+...g7 22...f6+...e7 23...xd7...d8 24...e5...xd1 25...xd1...f4 (D)

Since this does not work, 25...d4 is probably stronger. Dokhoian gives 26...h2 f6 27...d3 b6 with some advantage for White.

26...h1!

The point of White’s previous play. The g-pawn is invulnerable since neither 26...xg2? 27...g1...g5 28...f3 nor 26...xg2? 27...d3 works for Black. This means that White emerges with a structural advantage after all, with a healthy pawn-majority on the kingside versus a crippled black majority on the queenside. But here this advantage is much more important than in normal Berlin Defence positions, since the exchanges have helped White, and the black pawns are scattered and weak.

30...xg2?

In time-pressure Kramnik falters. Although his position is difficult, he could still put up stiff resistance by Dokhoian’s suggestion 30...g7 31...f5...xg2 32...xg2...xh6 33...c5 c6 or by giving up in the knight in better circumstances than in the game by 30...c2!? 31...f5...f2 32...g4...xg2 33...f4...a2. 31...f5!

The point of the previous move. Now Black is lost.

31...g7 32...g4...xg2 33...f4...c2 34...f2...c3 35...g2 b5 36 h4 c4 37 h5!

Kasparov concludes the game in the same style he has played it throughout: by concrete calculation. He has seen that he can abandon the queenside; the advance of the h-pawn decides.

37...xb3 38...xb3...c5

Or 38...xb3 39 h6+...g8 (39...f8 40...g7 41...xf7+) 40...f6+...h8 41...e2. 39 h6+...f8 40...f6...g5+ 41...h1!

Vacating h2 for the rook, so that the h-pawn decides after 41...g6 42...h2.

1-0
To my mind, the Karpov-Kasparov and Kasparov-Kramnik encounters are excellent examples of the important role that the human factor plays in chess. As already formulated by Clausewitz – the Prussian military strategist – 175 years ago, the core element of all strategy (in battle, business and chess) is the clash between two (or more, as is seen in business) opponents with opposing objectives: both sides want to win, and if you can outsmart your opponent on the human (psychological) battlefield, this is just as beneficial as having an ‘objective’ chess-related advantage. If you genuinely manage to assess your own strengths and weaknesses, and those of the opponent, your chances of success on the board will rise tremendously.

The question is then: how does one systematically assess the strengths and weaknesses of a chess-player? It is necessary to develop a model for chess players to determine their personal chess style, since the personal style of a player influences his evaluations of positions and thus the decisions taken during play. Such a model is presented in the next section.

Defining Your Personal Chess Style

Defining the style of a chess-player is no easy matter. From early on we are taught to be able to adapt to the type of position on the board and that a player needs universal skills to succeed. In other words, to become a really strong player you need to be able to play all kinds of positions. It is not enough to be strong in attack, you should also be flexible in defence, know all the theoretical endgames, be on top of contemporary opening theory, etc. That is all entirely correct! But at the same time it is impossible – even for full-time professionals – to know it all and to be equally good at all aspects of the game. Chess is far too complex for one player to be the best in all areas of the game. Even among current top players and the giants of the past, aspects of the game can be identified in which they are more or less strong vis-à-vis other top players. The key is to understand these differences in yourself and in the opponent, and to apply this understanding consciously during preparation, training and in practical play.

For categorizing chess-players into broad categories, it is again useful to turn to models that are used in business life for various personality-assessment and human-resource purposes. One such model is the following, which I have adapted from the human resources professor Jean-Marie Hiltrop:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intuition</th>
<th>Activists</th>
<th>Reflectors</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Trial and error&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Alternatives&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logic</td>
<td>Pragmatics</td>
<td>Theorists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;What must be done must be done...&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;A model for everything&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Business managers can be divided into broad categories, and so can chess-players. The division can be made along two dimensions:
Do you reach your decisions at the board through logic or through your experience and intuition?
Do you think and play on the basis of facts (e.g. concrete calculation of variations) or do you focus on general concepts?

Considering these two simple and basic questions can already lead us far in the understanding of a chess-player’s style.

Logical players make decisions by systematic and interrelated lines of reasoning. They develop connected chains of thought and arguments, which then at the end lead to the final decision. A very simple example of a logical player’s line of reasoning could be like this, where a player makes use of the general concepts of space, mobility and the rule of two weaknesses (strategy as simple rules!): “I have some pressure against his weak pawn on the queenside, but he is well defended. But if I can create another weakness on the kingside I can divert his forces. Having more space and better mobility I can more easily shift from one side to the other. So how do I do it? Aha, preparing g4 will isolate his h-pawn and create a second target to attack. This means that I should prepare g4 by playing h3 now.”

The games of logical players are often very instructive and easier to understand and learn from than games of intuitive players. I believe that one of the reasons that collections of games of, e.g., Alekhine, Botvinnik, Fischer and Kasparov have been so popular is because of the ‘educational nature’ of the play and annotations of these players, whom I consider logical players. The trick to learn from games of such players is to follow and understand the line of reasoning behind their moves. This reasoning obviously becomes more and more sophisticated, the stronger the player gets, but the fundamental way of thinking about positions and making decisions does not change.

Intuitive players, on the other hand, are players who simply feel what the right move is and how they must place their pieces to obtain maximum coordination. They are often very strong in determining the value of positional or long-term sacrifices, which cannot be assessed through concrete calculation or logical deduction. Often such players have difficulty explaining verbally how they reached the decision to play a given move or to choose that particular plan. It is very much tacit knowledge. For the chess-playing public, it is difficult to follow games of such players live, since their play is often subtle and much is going on ‘behind the scenes’. At the end of the game, however, everything often becomes clear – now it is clear that this was the right way to play or to coordinate the pieces, and that the opponent was outplayed. It is sometimes not easy to determine where the opponent made his mistake – the advantage was built up in a subtle and incremental way until it had decisive proportions. Examples of intuitive players where these characteristics can be found are Capablanca, Petrosian and Karpov.

On the other dimension we have the continuum from facts to general concepts. Notice that – as with the dimension logic-intuition – it is a continuum with two opposites, but also much ‘middle ground’. That is, some players are more towards one of the poles than others, and still others are close to the middle and appear universal. Two such players are Lasker and Spassky. Both were perhaps slightly more logic-and-fact-based (pragmatic), but generally very universal in their play. Spassky is also one of the few top players in history who has really managed to change his style from being an aggressive attacker in his youth – basing his play on fact-based calculations – to the universal style that made him world champion. Most other historical giants have mainly excelled by developing and utilizing their initial core competences (exceptional talents for one specific aspect of the game) while improving to ‘competent’ (but not to ‘core’ competent) in other aspects of the game. This is in line with the thinking behind the resource-based view to strategy.

Fact-based players are players who are very concrete in their decision-making. Concrete facts in the form of calculation of variations play a crucial role in their play. Such players calculate, calculate and calculate, and they base their decisions on these concrete calculations. If, e.g., a fact-based player does not see any concrete reason not to take an offered pawn, he will take it. Examples of players in this category are Korchnoi, Tal, Shirov and to a lesser extent Anand.
On the other hand, players who base their decisions on general concepts might decline an offered pawn on more general grounds, for instance because they feel the long-term risk to be too big or unnecessary, even if they do not see an immediate refutation. Such players tend to calculate relatively few variations compared to the fact-based players and instead base their decisions on a wide range of general considerations, ranging from simple strategic rules to very subtle understanding of tiny positional nuances only visible to the very trained and talented eye. Examples of players in this category are Steinitz, Nimzowitsch, Smyslov and to a lesser degree Kramnik.

It is interesting to compare not only the play of various world champions, but also their approach to annotating games. Fact-based players will often tend to explain the game through numerous concrete variations, whereas general-concept players will often prefer to explain the proceedings verbally and with relatively few variations to support the text notes. Pick up the game collections of some of the mentioned world champions and see what I mean!

The two dimensions leave us with a standard two-by-two matrix with four distinct quadrants. Players falling in the logic-facts quadrant are called pragmatics; the intuition-facts ones are called activists; intuition-general concept players are reflectors; while logic-general concepts players can be termed theorists. For each type I have in the figure above indicated a small statement to illustrate the characteristic of this type. Theorists are keen on developing theories and models which they can logically apply in any given situation. Reflectors are mainly interested in considering and evaluating a number of broad alternatives in the given situation rather than building universal models. Activists exhibit 'trial and error' behaviour; by combining observed facts with their intuition they are, e.g., ready to try out unclear, long-term sacrifices. Pragmatics, on the other hand, rely on their calculations. If the calculations show that a sacrifice is strong, then fine, let’s go for it, but it needs to be backed by concrete evidence.

In the business world, the fact-based types (pragmatics and activists) clearly outnumber the general-concept types (theorists and reflectors) in managerial positions. The ratio is something like 3 to 1. This is because of the emphasis placed on concrete numbers in modern business. The fact-based managers are labelled ‘doers’, whereas the general-concept ones are referred to as ‘thinkers’. I am not so sure that the ratio is the same in chess; here I would assume the number of general-concept players to be at least equal to the number of fact-based players. One way to substantiate this is by looking at the first 13 world champions (not going into the discussion as to who actually came after Kasparov – Kramnik or the FIDE world champions). In my view seven of these champions fall into the category ‘doers’ (Lasker, Alekhine, Euwe, Tal, Spassky, Fischer and Kasparov), while six are ‘thinkers’ (Steinitz, Capablanca, Botvinnik, Smyslov, Petrosian and Karpov). This indicates that in chess the types are more evenly represented than in business.

I have tried to place the world champions and a number of former and contemporary top players in the matrix:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intuition</th>
<th>Logic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activists</td>
<td>Pragmatics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tal, Anand, Shirow, Morozevich</td>
<td>Lasker, Alekhine, Euwe, Spassky, Fischer, Kasparov, Korchnoi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflectors</td>
<td>Theorists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capablanca, Smyslov, Petrosian, Karpov, Adams</td>
<td>Steinitz, Tarrasch, Nimzowitsch, Botvinnik, Kramnik</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facts</td>
<td>General Concepts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
You may or may not agree with me on the placing of all players. That is fine. That simply goes to show that working with human personality (in business, chess or real life) is not an exact science. It also indicates the important point that all strong players can adapt and play in different styles. But even if being able to adapt according to the position is essential for all chess-players, we still have certain areas of the game that deep inside we prefer and play better than other areas. To identify your type, you need to dig really deep into yourself and evaluate where you belong (and not where you want to belong).

In the next four chapters the characteristics and typical game patterns of each of the four types will be discussed in greater detail.
4 Characteristics of Reflectors

Reflectors have a number of distinct characteristics, some of which are strengths, while others constitute potential weaknesses which an alert and well-prepared opponent can hope to exploit.

Typical characteristics of reflectors are:
- A strong feel for where the pieces belong and very good understanding of the coordination of the pieces
- Very good at sensing and collecting small subtle advantages, which they then convert into something more tangible
- Often very strong in endgames, where this feel for small advantages is a major strength
- Good at assessing the value of long-term positional sacrifices, e.g. the positional sacrifice of the exchange
- Calculate relatively few variations and make decisions mainly on general grounds, trying to utilize their deep understanding and feeling for the game

Let us see how these characteristics show themselves in the games of some well-known reflectors.

Perhaps the most 'natural' player in the history of chess is Capablanca. The Cuban world champion had a tremendous feel for chess, which for him was almost 'too easy'. However, this attitude also occasionally cost him games, when he was not paying enough attention to detail, a typical characteristic of the reflector type. A typical game of the Cuban's early career:

Capablanca – Marshall
New York (6) 1909

1 e4 e5 2 £f3 £c6 3 Ab5 d6 4 c3 Ag4
A rare move which is not very good, as Black does not really want to part with his lightsquared bishop.

5 d3 £e7 6 £bd2 £f6 7 0-0 0-0 8 £e1 h6 9 £f1 £h7 10 £e3 £h5 11 g4!
White grabs space on the kingside.

11...£g6 12 £f5 h5?
A serious mistake. Black is in no position to exploit the open h-file, for this White is much better positioned. A move like 12...£g5 is more consistent with Black's previous play.

13 h3 hxg4 14 hxg4 £g5?!
In closed positions knights are often stronger than bishops, and the dark-squared bishop can be said to be Black's 'bad' bishop. But here the pawn-structure in the centre is still dynamic, so it seems more natural to preserve the two bishops and play 14...£g5.

15 £xg5 £xg5 16 £g2 d5 17 £c2 £e8 18 £h1
Taking advantage of the open h-file, which Black graciously opened for White.

18...£e6 19 £c3! f6 (D)

20 £a4!
It is because of this and the manoeuvres in the coming moves that I have included this game. Capablanca seemingly effortlessly builds up the pressure by coordinating his pieces around the weak points in the black camp. Here he targets the a2-g8 diagonal, which Black was forced to open on the previous move.

20...£e7 21 £b3 c6 22 £g3 a5 23 a4 £f7 24 £e3 b6
Preventing £c5, but now this pawn is a further target which the queen must defend.
25 \( \text{Nh4! } \text{Qf8} \text{ 26 } \text{Nah1 } \text{Qg8} \text{ 27 } \text{Wf3!} \)

Now all White's pieces are optimally coordinated: the rooks control the only open file, the bishops exert pressure on key diagonals, the knight is placed on what Kasparov calls the optimal attacking square, and now the queen joins the light-squared bishop in breaking down the stronghold on d5. Compare the activity and coordination of each white piece to its black counterpart! No wonder that the black position collapses in few moves.

27...\text{xf5}  
A sad necessity as d5 could otherwise not be defended.

28 \text{gxf5} \text{Nd6} 29 \text{Wh5} \text{Ha7} 30 \text{Wb6} \text{f5h6}  
(D)

On 30...\text{We7} Capablanca gives 31 \text{Nh8+} \text{Qxh8} 32 \text{Whh8+} \text{Qg8} 33 \text{Wh7} \text{f7} 34 \text{Qxb6!} and White wins. Notice that all White's pieces are contributing.

31 \text{Exh6! gxh6} 32 \text{Qxh6+ We7}  
After 32...\text{Qxh6} 33 \text{Exh6} Black will soon be mated.

33 \text{Wh7+ We8} 34 \text{Wxg8+ Wh7} 35 \text{Wh7+ We7} 36 \text{Qf8! Wh7} 37 \text{Exh7+ We8} 38 \text{Exa7} 1-0

Apparently an easy win by Capablanca. Such games were typical for his play. Often his opponents seemed helpless while Capablanca managed to coordinate all his pieces. Coordination is a key theme in attack; it is not enough to count the number of pieces in attack and defense – the relative levels of activity should also be assessed. Sometimes even small forces (in number) can constitute a devastating force. See the following game, where Capablanca shows that he was not just a dry positional player but a talented attacker as well. Again coordination is the key word.

\textbf{Capablanca – O. Bernstein}  
\textit{St Petersburg 1914}

1 \text{d4 d5} 2 \text{Qf3 Qf6} 3 \text{e4 e6} 4 \text{Cc3 Qbd7} 5 \text{Qg5}  
\text{Le7} 6 \text{e3 c6}  
It is more common to castle here to keep the option of going directly ...\text{c5}.

7 \text{Qd3 dxc4} 8 \text{Wxc4 b5} 9 \text{Qd3 a6} 10 \text{e4 e5?!}  
11 \text{dxe5 Qg4} 12 \text{Qf4 Qc5} 13 0-0 \text{We7}  
Perhaps 13...\text{We7} is better, although White has a promising position after 14 e6! fxe6 (not 14...\text{We7} 15 \text{Qg5) 15 e5.}  

14 \text{Qc1 f6}  
This weakens the kingside, but 14...\text{Qgxe5} 15 \text{Qxe5} \text{Qxe5} 16 \text{Qxb5! cxb5} 17 \text{Wh5} is disastrous for Black.

15 \text{Qg3 fxe5} 16 \text{b4! Qa7}  
16...\text{Qxb4} is strongly met by 17 \text{Qd5 We6}  
18 \text{Qxb4 We4} 19 \text{Qxc6.}  

17 \text{Qxb5! axb5} 18 \text{Qxb5 We8} 19 \text{Qd6+ Qf8} 20 \text{Qxc6 Qb6} 21 \text{Qh4!}  
Other moves like 21 \text{Qxc8, 21 Qxe5 or 21 Qh5} are also strong, but this move is the neatest. The point is seen in move 30, when the white army – small in number but strong in activity – is decisively coordinated in the attack on the black king.

21...\text{We7} 22 \text{Qxc8! Wxc6} 23 \text{Wd8+ We8} 24 \text{Qe7+ Qf8} 25 \text{Qd6+ Qg6} 26 \text{Qh4+ Qh5} 27 \text{Qxe8! Qxd8} 28 \text{Qxg7+ Wh6} 29 \text{Qgf5+ Qh5}  
(D)

30 \text{h3!}
The point of the forced sequence initiated on move 21. Almost all the white pieces – except the pawns on the queenside – participate in the attack against the black king. Black is formally a rook up for some pawns, but he has to give up loads of material to avoid getting mated. The threat is 31 hxg4+ hxg4 32 f3+ f5 33 g#.  

30...£ic8

There is nothing better; e.g., 30...£h6 31 £g7#, or 30...<X>g8 31 hxg4+ £g4 32 £h2, and Black is helpless against f3 and g4+.  

31 hxg4+ £xg4 32 £xd8 £xd8 33 g3 £d2  
34 £g2 £e2  
34...£xa2 fails to 35 £f3 £b8 36 £h1.  
35 a4  
and White won easily.  

Janowski – Capablanca  
New York 1916

This is one of Capablanca’s most famous games, rightly quoted as a fine positional effort. But it also shows some potential weaknesses of reflectors: a tendency for sloppy opening play and occasional tactical oversights due to the lack of emphasis on concrete detail and calculations. Reflector should be very aware of these tendencies, and opponents can adopt knowledge of these characteristics in their game preparation and during the game by deliberately choosing openings or entering positions where concrete calculation and attention to detail are crucial.  

1 d4 d5 2 £f3 £f6 3 c4 £c6 4 £c3 £f5?!  
Calling this a mistake is probably too harsh considering the fact that it has also been played by Euwe and Keres. But it is certainly dubious and risky, which is not usually Capablanca’s style. Interestingly, Capablanca, in his notes to this game in My Chess Career, does not even discuss or mention that 4...£f5 may involve some risks. In general, in his notes he rarely shows long and forced variations, but prefers verbal explanations instead. This approach is typical of the way many reflectors annotate games, and reflects their way of thinking during the game.  

5 £b3

Not bad, but 5 cxd5 is more forcing. Then 5...cxd5? 6 £b3 is very bad for Black, since 6...£b6 drops a pawn with insufficient compensation after 7 £xd5 (7 £xb6 axb6 is also better for White; compared to the game continuation without knights on c3 and f6 White has the extra option of £b5, which is quite disturbing for Black), and 6...£b6 is a terrible weakening of the light squares. This means that Black has to take back with the knight on d5 (5...£xd5) after which 6 £d2! leads to a pleasant advantage for White; e.g., 6...£g6 7 e4 £f6 (7...£xc3 8 £xc3 £e6 is slightly better for White according to the late Tony Miles) 8 e5 £d5 (Kostić–Euwe, Budapest 1921), and now 9 £b3 is very strong.  

5...£b6 (D)
It is vital to exchange a set of knights to prevent $\text{Qd}_b5$ options.

8 $\text{Qxd}_5 \text{cxd}_5$ 9 $e_3 \text{Qc}_6$ 10 $\text{Qd}_2$ ($D$)

10...$\text{Qd}_7$!

This bishop is needed to support the plan ...$\text{Qa}_5$, ...$b_5$ and ...$\text{Qd}_4$. Hence, the natural 10...$e_6$ would be inaccurate. From this point on White is slowly outplayed.

11 $\text{Qe}_2$ $e_6$ 12 0-0 $\text{Qd}_6$ 13 $\text{Kc}_1$ $\text{Qe}_7$!

In the endgame the king is often used actively and therefore it is stronger to centralize the king instead of castling.

14 $\text{Qc}_3$ $\text{Qhc}_8$ 15 a3 $\text{Qa}_5$ 16 $\text{Qd}_2$ $f_5$ 17 $g_3$ $b_5$ 18 $f_3$ $\text{Qc}_4$

Black has fulfilled the first part of his plan and has the better chances. In order to create some counterplay with $e_4$, Janowski gives up the two bishops, but the counterplay is illusory while the concession is long-term. "He who owns the two bishops, owns the future", is an often quoted saying.

19 $\text{Qxc}_4$ $\text{bxc}_4$ 20 $e_4$ $\text{Qf}_7$!

Coolly parrying the threat of $e_5$.

21 $e_5$?

White attempts to keep the position closed, as two bishops are mainly powerful in open positions. However, this move takes a key square from White’s knight. It is better to direct the knight to $e_5$ with 21 exf5 exf5 22 $f_4$ followed by $\text{Qf}_3$-$e_5$, after which Black is only slightly better.

21...$\text{Qc}_7$ 22 $f_4$ $b_5$

Now Black can play on two fronts: White has to look out for the breaks ...$b_4$ and ...$g_5$. Capablanca combines these plans in admirable fashion.

23 $\text{Qf}_2$ $\text{Qa}_4$ 24 $\text{Qe}_3$ $\text{Qca}_8$ 25 $\text{Qab}_1$ $h_6$! 26 $\text{Qf}_3$ $g_5$! 27 $\text{Qe}_1$ $\text{Qg}_8$ 28 $\text{Qf}_3$ $\text{xf}_4$ 29 $\text{xf}_4$ $\text{aa}_8$

Play on two wings. Black is much better coordinated to shift swiftly from one wing to the other.

30 $\text{Qg}_2$ $\text{Qg}_4$ 31 $\text{Qg}_1$

This walks into an annoying pin, but 31 $\text{Qe}_3$ is strongly met by 31...$\text{Qh}_4$.

31...$\text{Qag}_8$ 32 $\text{Qe}_1$ ($D$)

White hopes to push Black back by $\text{Qg}_3$ and $\text{Qe}_3$, but...

32...$b_4$! 33 $\text{axb}_4$

After 33 $\text{axb}_4$ Capablanca gives 33...$\text{xb}_4$ 34 $axb_4$ $h_5$!, leaving White hard-pressed to find an adequate defence to the advance of the h-pawn.

33...$\text{Qa}_4$! 34 $\text{Qa}_1$

A curious tale is associated with this move. In his notes to the game Capablanca remarks: "This eases Black’s task. It would have been better to play 34 $\text{Qc}_1$." But it is quite likely that Janowski — who was by nature a strong tactician — had seen the refutation of 34 $\text{Qc}_1$: 34...$\text{Qxf}_4$! wins. Capablanca was apparently focused on his long-term positional winning plan and even after the game did not look for tactics. Again a typical trait of reflectors’ approach to chess.

34...$\text{Qc}_2$

Now the hitherto passive bishop joins the attack with devastating consequences as White cannot untangle from the pin down the g-file. Notice how all Black’s pieces are perfectly coordinated: the trademark of the gifted reflector.

35 $\text{Qg}_3$ $\text{Qe}_4$+ 36 $\text{Qf}_2$ $h_5$! 37 $\text{Qa}_7$ ($D$)
This loses material, but 37 \texttt{Qe3 h4} was also hopeless.

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
\draw (0,0) rectangle (2,2);
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

37...\texttt{xg2} 38 \texttt{Exg2} h4 39 \texttt{Exh4 Exg2+} 40 \texttt{\texttt{Bf3 Exh2} 41 \texttt{Qxe7}}

After 41 \texttt{Exe7+ Qf8} 42 \texttt{Qf6} Capablanca gives 42...\texttt{eh8}! with an easy win.

41...\texttt{h3+} 42 \texttt{Qf2} \texttt{Bb3} 43 \texttt{Qg5+ Qg6} 44 \texttt{Exe7} \texttt{Exb2+} 45 \texttt{Qf3 Qa8!} 46 \texttt{Exe6+ Qh7} 0-1

A brilliant positional game by Capablanca, but also one which behind the scenes highlights typical traits of reflectors – traits which it is beneficial for both reflectors themselves and also their opponents to be aware of and to integrate into their preparation and strategic thinking during the game.

In 1921 it was Capablanca who eventually took the title from Lasker, who had held it since he defeated Steinitz in 1894. Some people speculate – supported by subsequent historical Elo calculations – that Capablanca was probably already stronger than Lasker a few years earlier, from about 1916. But others were also in contention for the world championship. One of these was Akiba Rubinstein. Rubinstein was close to getting a match against Lasker for the world championship just before World War I, but the outbreak of the war in 1914 prevented him from getting a title shot. It is likely that Rubinstein was stronger than Lasker at the time, having won five tournaments in 1912 (San Sebastian, Pistyan, Breslau, Warsaw and Vilna), an extraordinary effort at a time when the number of tournaments for top players was far less than in the present time. Still, it would have been a great match. Lasker was a formidable opponent who knew how to rise to the occasion, and it is unfortunate that non-chess-related events prevented the chess world from seeing the clash between Lasker and Rubinstein. Rubinstein is one of my personal favourites in chess history. One of the chess biographies I studied as a teenager was Kmoch’s \textit{Rubinstein’s Chess Masterpieces}, from which I learned a lot. Rubinstein has been said to be the best practitioner of Steinitz’s theories (see more about Steinitz in Chapter 5, about theorists), better than Steinitz himself at putting the profound theories developed by the First World Champion to practical use. When studying Rubinstein’s games I was especially impressed by his feeling for the pawn-structure. Rubinstein was exceptionally good at noticing and exploiting small nuances in the pawn-structure to the fullest extent. The following manoeuvre has since Rubinstein been adopted by grandmasters in a number of games.

\begin{center}
\textbf{Rubinstein – Schlechter}
\end{center}

\begin{center}
\textit{San Sebastian 1912}
\end{center}

1 \texttt{d4 d5} 2 \texttt{Qf3 Qf6} 3 \texttt{c4 e6} 4 \texttt{\texttt{Qc3 c5} cxd5 \texttt{Qxd5} 6 e4}

The alternative is 6 \texttt{e3}, which leads to a totally different type of position.

6...\texttt{Qxc3} 7 \texttt{bxc3 cxd4} 8 \texttt{cxd4 \texttt{Qb4+} 9 \texttt{Qd2 \texttt{Wd5?!}}}

The main line goes 9...\texttt{Qxd2+} 10 \texttt{Wxd2 0-0} 11 \texttt{\texttt{Wc4}}.

10 \texttt{\texttt{Qb1 Qxd2+} 11 \texttt{Wxd2 Wxd2+} 12 \texttt{Wxd2 0-0} (D)}

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

13 \texttt{Qb5}!!
Whether this is very much stronger than, e.g., 13...d5 (which has also given White good results) is not so important here. The main point is the attention paid to small differences in the pawn-structure. Forcing the little move ...a6 makes a huge difference in the course of the game. It is not easy for Black to avoid ...a6, as it is then difficult for him to develop his queenside.

13...a6 14 d3 d8 15 h4 b5

With the pawn still on a7, 15...c6 would be the normal move. But now it allows White to build a bind with 16 e3 f8 17 b6! as in Makharov-Henriksson, Helsinki 1992. Black’s dream in this opening line is to be able to mobilize his queenside majority at some point, but it is never to happen in this game, as he is starved by the white central and kingside dominance.

16 e7 d7 17 e3 f6 18 e5 d7 19 g4!

Rubinstein consistently increases the pressure.

19...h6 20 f4 f8 21 g5! hxg5 22 fxg5 h7 23 h4 dce8 24 bc1 xc7 25 xc7 (D)

25...d8

This weakens the a-pawn, but it is not easy to suggest an improvement, as 25...f6 26 gxf6 gxf6 (or 26...xf6 27 e7) 27 g4 is no better.

26 e7 f6 27 gxf6 gxf6 28 g4 h5 29 h6+ h8 30 e2!

Working with small tactics in combination with the positional squeeze. The black bishop is pushed back, as 30...xe2? loses to 31 f7+.

30...e8 31 xa6 g7 32 g4 f5 33 e7+ h8

After 33...g6? Knoch gives the beautiful line 34 h5+ g5 35 xf6+, winning) 35 g7+ h6 36 e5 e5 37 h6! f8 38 xf5+ h3 39 f1+ h2 40 g2+ h1 (40...h3 41 g3+ h2 42 f2! followed by mate) 41 g3#. Even in the endgame it is possible to weave a mating-net! The text-move avoids mate but is equally hopeless.

34 e5 fxe4 35 xb5!

Once more, small tactics come into play. The bishop still can’t be taken because of 36 f7+.

35...f6 36 xe8 xe8 (D)

37 f4!

Initiating a mating attack!

37...g8 38 g5! f8 39 g6! 1-0

White threatens 40 g7+ h8 41 f7+ and after 39...e8, 40 f7! followed by 41 h6+ and 42 h7# decides.

This game was played in 1912 during the string of tournaments that Rubinstein won that year, which made him the most realistic challenger for Lasker before World War I.

Here is another example of Rubinstein’s focus on the pawn-structure from the same year:

Rubinstein – Marshall

Breslau 1912

1 d4 d5 2 f3 c5 3 c4 e6 4 cxd5 exd5 5 c3 dxc6 6 g3

This was the system that Schlechter and Rubinstein developed — and which is still regarded as the main line — to combat the Tarrasch Defence, which was very popular in those years. Tarrasch was so convinced of the strength of his
system that in his book *Die Moderne Schachpartie* he gives the classical 3...\( \text{d}f6 \) (after 1 d4 \( \text{d}5 \) 2 c4 e6 3 \( \text{c}c3 \)) a question mark, while his own 3...c5 is awarded an exclamation mark. Although both lines are still frequently seen in grandmaster practice, this is one of Tarrasch’s claims that history has not confirmed. Other of his opening ideas have been more influential, such as 3 \( \text{d}d2 \) against the French Defence.

6...\( \text{d}f6 \)

The so-called Swedish Variation is interesting here: 6...c4 followed by ...\( \text{b}4 \) and ...\( \text{g}e7 \). 7 \( \text{g}g2 \) \text{cxd4}?! 7...\( \text{e}7 \) is the modern move.

8 \( \text{d}xd4 \) \( \text{c}e5 \) 9 \( \text{h}b3 \) \( \text{b}4 \) 10 0-0 \( \text{xc}3 \)

Giving up the two bishops is always risky, especially if the position cannot be kept closed. 11 bxc3 0-0 12 \( \text{g}5 \) \( \text{e}6 \) 13 \( \text{c}5 \)! \( \text{w}e7 \) 14 \( \text{d}xe6! \) \text{fxe6} (D)

Apparently White has allowed Black to strengthen his centre, but Rubinstein has a specific plan in mind. Another excellent example of the same idea can be found in other of Rubinstein’s games, such as Rubinstein-Spielmann, Karlsbad 1929.

15 c4! \text{dxc4} 16 \text{xc6}!

Giving up the advantage of the two bishops to achieve another one: the better pawn-structure. Rubinstein was very fond of the two bishops and played many fine games where the main theme was the exploitation of this advantage. But he was not dogmatic; if another, even larger, advantage could be achieved by giving up the two bishops, then he was ready to do so. Another example of this can be found in the next game.

16...\text{xc6} 17 \text{wd}4 \text{wd}8 18 \text{xf6}!

Also the other bishop is exchanged, as 18 \( \text{w}x\text{c}4 \text{wd}5 \) would give Black some counterplay. Rubinstein wants to be able to play against the scattered black pawns without interference.

18...\text{xf6} 19 \text{w}x\text{c}4 \text{wd}5 20 \text{aac}1

This would not be possible in the previous line, as the bishop would be hanging on g5.

20...\text{af}8 21 e4 \text{wh}5 22 \text{f}4!

Rubinstein consistently works on minimizing Black’s potential counterplay. Here he resembles Karpov (or vice versa). Taking the pawn would allow Black some chances on the kingside after 22 \text{w}x\text{c}6 \text{lh}6 23 h4 \text{wg}4.

22...\text{wa}5 23 e5 \text{hh}6 24 \text{e}c2! \text{wh}6+ 25 \text{g}2 \text{dh}8 26 \text{ff}2! (D)

Now everything is defended and White is ready to start collecting the weak black pawns.

26...\text{ac}8 27 \text{fd}2 \text{wh}8 28 \text{ad}6 \text{wb}1 29 \text{xc}6 \text{gg}8 30 \text{ac}8 \text{wb}7+ 31 \text{g}1 \text{wb}6+ 32 \text{wc}5 \text{wxc}5+ 33 \text{h}x\text{c}5

The rook ending is easily winning for White. But Marshall was an optimist and keeps fighting until the end.

33...gg5 34 \text{xg}8+ \text{xg}8 35 \text{fxg}5 \text{hh}5 36 \text{h}4 \text{h}6 37 \text{gxh}6 \text{axh}6 38 \text{ac}8+ \text{gg}7 39 \text{xc}7+ \text{gg}6 40 \text{xa}7 \text{ff}5 41 \text{ha}5 \text{hh}8 42 \text{g}2 \text{hb}8 43 \text{hh}3 \text{bb}1 44 \text{xa}3 \text{hh}1+ 45 \text{gg}2 \text{aa}1 46 \text{ff}3+

Cutting the black king off.

46...\text{xe}5 47 \text{ff}2 \text{dd}4 48 \text{h}5 \text{ac}1 49 \text{hb}6 50 \text{g}4 \text{e}4 51 \text{h}7 \text{ac}8 52 \text{g}5 \text{e}3 53 \text{g}6! \text{exf}2 54 \text{g}7 \text{ee}3 55 \text{g}8\text{w} \text{ee}2 56 \text{we}6+ 1-0

After World War I Rubinstein never managed to return to the same heights as before the war. He was still a formidable opponent who...
made several good results, but he lacked the same stability that he had before. He ended his career at the age of 50 in 1932, and in the last 30 years of his life (he died in 1961) he only played a few casual games, including a number against the Belgian grandmaster O’Kelly.

Rubinstein – Nimzowitsch
Berlin 1928

1 d4  $f6 2 c4 e6 3 $c3 $b4

The Nimzo-Indian, named after the player with the black pieces. The fight is concentrated around the e4-square, but rather than possessing the centre with pawns, Nimzowitsch and other of the so-called hypermodern players (e.g. Réti and Grünfeld) preferred to attack the centre directly or indirectly with pieces.

4 $c2

Rubinstein is known as the inventor of the system with 4 e3, which to my knowledge he first employed without success against Alekhine in St Petersburg 1914: 4 e3 b6 5 $d3 $b7 6 f3 c5 7 a3 $xc3+ 8 bxc3 d5 9 $e2 0-0 10 0-0 $bd7 11 $g3 $c7 12 exd5 exd5 13 e4? (the rolling pawn-centre is mainly associated with Botvinnik, but here we see an earlier example; however, at the present moment this advance is flawed) 13...cxd4 14 exd4 $c3! 15 $e3 dxe4 16 fxe4 $a6 (not bad, but 16...$xe4! is better – Donaldson and Minev) 17 $xa6 $xe3+ 18 $h1 $xe4 19 $f5 $xf2 19...$xf2 21 $g4 $b6 22 $f1?! (22 $e7+) 22...$b2 23 $h6+? $g7 24 $xf7?! $b3! 25 d5 $f6! 26 $d4 $xf7 27 $c4 $a4 28 $g4 $e8 0-1. In other games he was more successful with 4 e3, but here he chooses what was then (and now again – history repeats itself) the main line.

4...d6

In line with Nimzowitsch’s approach to the fight for the centre, but at the time 4...d5 was considered best. Nowadays 4...0-0 is the main line.

5 e3 c5 6 $d3 $c6 7 $e2 e5 (D)

As Knoch notes, the pawn-structure e5-d6-c5 is generally not optimal for Black, who would prefer to have either e5 or c5 for one of his minor pieces. But chess is also about trade-offs, and to induce White to close the centre, it is often necessary for Black to accept this pawn-structure in the Nimzo-Indian.

8 d5 $xc3+

With the centre closed and the black pawns placed on the dark squares, it is logical to exchange the dark-squared bishop. Still, it is also possible to postpone this swap and play 8...$e7 directly.

9 $xc3 $e7 10 $c2 0-0 11 0-0 $g6 12 $g3 $e8 13 f3 $d7 14 $d2

White has more space and the two bishops, but Black is solid and flexible, and he has potential counterplay on the queenside. Notice that White should not play e4, for some time at least, as this would make his pawn-structure rigid and inflexible.

14...a6 15 b3 b5 16 b3 $b6 17 $h2 a5 18 $ab1 (D)

18...b4?

Closing the queenside plays into White’s plans, as he is given a free hand on the kingside.

19 $f4!

Rubinstein immediately adjusts to the new situation and turns his attention to the kingside.
This is in line with Steinitz’s theories; the closed centre with extra space points to a kingside attack.

19...exf4 20 exf4 $if8 21 $c1!
The bishop is redirected to b2, where it serves multiple purposes: it puts pressure on the long diagonal and prevents Black from utilizing the soon-to-be-opened a-file, as Black will have no entry-points for his rooks.

21...$d8 22 $b2!!
Accuracy is needed: 22 $b2?! $g4+! 23 hxg4 $h4+.

22...a4 23 $b2 $g6 24 $bd1 axb3 25 axb3

Presumably Nimzowitsch overestimated the value of the open a-file. Since ...$a2 is always answered by $b1, the a-file does not bring Black much, while White can continue with his plans on the kingside. However, the text-move is untypical of Nimzowitsch for another reason. His sense of prophylaxis and overprotection should have led him to play 25...$a6 instead. The base of the black pawn-chain on d6 deserves to be overprotected. This would have prevented the game continuation, although White would still be better.

26 $de1 $xe1 27 $xe1 $f8 (D)

28 $xf6!!
Do you remember the Rubinstein-Marshall theme above? Rubinstein was very strong in understanding the concept of transformation of advantages – as was Capablanca and other strong reflectors. Here White exchanges his powerful bishop for the possibility of ‘stalemating’ the black queen.

28...$xf6 29 $e4 $h6

Forced since otherwise Black loses a pawn (29...$e7 30 $xc5! or 29...$d8 30 $xd6). This is why 25...$a6 would have been safer.

30 f5! $a3 31 $b1 $a6 32 $g4 $f6 33 $g3!
This takes the squares f4 and h4 from the black queen and frees the white queen for active duty. At the same time, the moves h4 and g5 are in the air.

33...$c8
If only Black could bring his knight to e5...
But Rubinstein does not allow that to happen. Notice how strategy and tactics interconnect – this is a typical feature in Rubinstein’s games.

34 $e1! $b7
Black would very much like to play 34...$xd7, but this is met by 35 $xd6! $xd6 (35...$e5 36 $xc5) 36 $e8+ $f7 37 $xc8. However, perhaps this was still Black’s best chance, as he can hope for some counterplay by 37...$c1. But with only the queen active this should not be enough. With the text-move Black takes the bishop off the back rank and renews the threat of ...$d7-e5 – but again Rubinstein prevents it.

35 $e2! $d7 (D)

This time Nimzowitsch wants to see – no more bluffing!

36 $xd6!
It was not a bluff! White crashes through.

36...$xd6 37 $e8+ $f8 38 $e7!
The point. Notice how useful the prophylactic move 33 $g3 was. Black has no disturbing queen checks.

38...g6 39 $f7+ $h8 40 $e8 $d8!!?
Not a bad try – the idea is 41 $xd8? $e3+. But of course Rubinstein does not fall for such a trap.
41 \textit{Wxf6+ \textit{£}g8 42 \textit{W}e6+! \textit{£}g7 43 \textit{f6+} 1-0}

Now the queen covers e3, so White wins after 43...\textit{Wh}8 44 \textit{Wxd}8.

Rubinstein had a very good score against Tarrasch – 8 wins and 12 draws in their 20 games. However, it should be said that Tarrasch was past his best time, being 20 years older than Rubinstein. The following game made a big impression on me when I studied it for the first time. Rubinstein demonstrated that even seemingly very drawish positions may contain much venom. Many years later, Bent Larsen – who is very knowledgeable about chess history – used what he had learnt from this game in his own game against Panno (see the notes to the game).

**Rubinstein – Tarrasch**

*Karlsbad 1923*

1 \textit{d4 d5} 2 \textit{c4 e6} 3 \textit{\textit{d}c3 c5} 4 \textit{cxd}5 \textit{exd}5 5 \textit{\textit{f}3} 6 \textit{g}3 \textit{g}6 7 \textit{\textit{f}4} \textit{e7} 8 0-0 0-0 0-9 \textit{\textit{g}5}

This is still the main line against the Tarrasch Variation.

9...\textit{\textit{e}6}

Most modern Tarrasch players prefer to play 9...\textit{cxd}4, but Tarrasch’s 9...\textit{\textit{e}6} is also occasionally seen.

9...\textit{c4} is also playable, even if it looks slightly suspect. Black is ready to accept a horrible pawn-structure in return for active play. That is what John Watson calls modern chess! I cannot resist the temptation to include the beautiful game Polugaevsky-Pfleger, Buenos Aires OL 1978 from the match where West Germany sensationally beat the Soviet Union by 2½-1½: 9...\textit{c4} 10 \textit{\textit{d}e}5 \textit{\textit{e}6} 11 \textit{\textit{d}xd}6 \textit{\textit{c}xd}6 12 \textit{b}3 \textit{\textit{a}5} 13 \textit{\textit{d}a}4 \textit{\textit{e}fd}8 14 \textit{e}3 \textit{c}5 15 \textit{\textit{g}xf}6 \textit{g}x\textit{f}6 (D).

I wonder what Rubinstein would say about the black pawn-structure! But Black’s initiative should not be underestimated. 16 \textit{\textit{d}xc}5 \textit{\textit{a}xc}5 17 \textit{\textit{w}h}5 \textit{\textit{m}ac}8 (in another game at the Buenos Aires Olympiad, Day played 17...\textit{\textit{f}8} against Polugaevsky; after 18 \textit{e}4 \textit{\textit{a}bb}8 19 \textit{\textit{e}xd}5 \textit{\textit{d}d}7 20 \textit{\textit{f}2} \textit{\textit{c}xb}3 21 \textit{a}xb3 \textit{\textit{w}b}6 22 \textit{\textit{c}c}4 \textit{\textit{w}xb}3 23 \textit{\textit{e}e}4 \textit{\textit{b}6} 24 \textit{\textit{e}e}3 \textit{\textit{w}b}4 25 \textit{\textit{f}5} \textit{\textit{xf}5} 26 \textit{\textit{d}xf}5 \textit{\textit{h}b}7 27 \textit{\textit{d}ad}1 \textit{\textit{h}h}7 28 \textit{\textit{d}d}4 \textit{\textit{w}c}5 29 \textit{\textit{f}fd}1 a position arose that is much more in Rubinstein’s spirit: White is positionally winning!!) 18 \textit{\textit{f}fd}1 \textit{\textit{f}8} 19 \textit{\textit{m}ac}1 \textit{\textit{w}b}4 20 \textit{\textit{a}xd}5? (falling for a trap) 20...\textit{\textit{a}xd}5! 21 \textit{\textit{a}xd}5 \textit{\textit{c}xb}3! 22 \textit{\textit{h}xc}8 \textit{\textit{a}xc}8 23

Now let’s return to Rubinstein-Tarrasch.

10 \textit{\textit{d}xc}5 \textit{\textit{a}xc}5 11 \textit{\textit{f}e}1

Most modern games continue 11 \textit{\textit{a}xf}6 \textit{\textit{w}xf}6 12 \textit{\textit{d}xd}5 \textit{\textit{w}xb}2 13 \textit{\textit{d}c}7 \textit{\textit{m}ad}8 14 \textit{\textit{d}c}1 \textit{\textit{w}xc}1 15 \textit{\textit{a}xc}1 \textit{\textit{b}6} (or 15...\textit{b}6) 16 \textit{\textit{a}xe}6 \textit{\textit{f}xe}6 with a small but lasting endgame advantage for White.

11...\textit{\textit{d}d}4 12 \textit{\textit{a}xf}6 \textit{\textit{w}xf}6 13 \textit{\textit{d}e}4 \textit{\textit{w}e}7 14 \textit{\textit{d}xc}5 \textit{\textit{w}xc}5 15 \textit{\textit{d}d}3 \textit{\textit{w}b}6 16 \textit{\textit{f}d}4! (D)

Gelfand writes that he believes it was studying this game that led Bent Larsen to formulate his rule for playing against an isolated pawn: “One should not blockade such a pawn; the
pawn should be encircled.” This is what Rubinstein does with this move.

16...#xb2?!

Apparently Tarrasch underestimates the simple position that arises in the game. A solid continuation is 16...£fe8, which led to a drawn position in Flohr-Euwe, Amsterdam 1932 after 17 £d2 £ad8 18 b3 £b4 19 £ac1 £d5 20 £xd5 £xd5 21 £xd5 £xd5 22 £c4 h5 23 h4 £de5 24 £xd4 £xd4 25 £xd4 £xe2.

17 £xe6 fxe6 18 £b1 £xa2 19 £xb7 £a6

Black has temporarily won a pawn, but he has weak pawns on a7, d4 and e6, and his knight does not have a safe foothold. Still, Tarrasch probably thought that White could at best regain the pawn by swapping the bishop for the knight at some point, leading to a draw.

17...£b8 18 £b3 £d8 19 £d7

Better than 19 £xg7+?!

20 £b3 £d8 21 £d7

White has temporarily won a pawn, but he has weak pawns on a7, d4 and e6, and his knight does not have a safe foothold. Still, Tarrasch probably thought that White could at best regain the pawn by swapping the bishop for the knight at some point, leading to a draw.

20...£c8 (D)

White cannot maintain his pawn-centre, but in the process of liquidating it White reaches a position very similar to the one in the Rubinstein-Tarrasch game. This was no coincidence. Larsen undoubtedly knew the older game and went for this position deliberately. In his notes
Larsen assesses the position after the liquidation as difficult for Black, referring to Rubinstein-Tarrasch. Larsen-Panno continued 27 d5! exd5 28 exd5 Wxd5 29 Bxb5 Wd6 30 We4 Qe5?? (the decisive mistake; Larsen recommends 30...Wf8! as Black's best chance, although his defence is not easy) 31 Wh7+ Wf7 32 Qc2 Qc7 33 Qe3+ Qc4 34 Bb8 We5 35 Qd3 Qe1+ 36 Qb2 Qe5+ 37 g3 Qc5 38 Qg1 Qe7 39 Qg8 Wf7 40 Qa8 Qe7 41 Wd8+ 1-0.

29...Qd7 30 Qa8 Qdd8 31 Qf1 Wd6 32 Qxf8+ Qxf8 33 Qg2 Wb4 34 Wd3 Qh8 35 Qa7 Wb2+ 36 Qh3 Wb6 37 Qa8 Qd8 38 Qc4 Qd7 39 Wc6 Qxa8 40 Wxa8+ Qb8 41 Wd5 We7 42 Qf5 Qx6 43 Qc4 Wd6 44 Qf7 Wd8 45 Qg6 1-0

Looking through the notes to the previous two games you will notice that at some point in each game Rubinstein's opponent ' underestimated' something. That is quite typical for opponents of reflectors. Often the nuances in the game are so tiny or hidden that they disappear from vision or are underestimated by the opponent. Another example is the 27th game of the first Karpov-Kasparov match, which we studied in Chapter 3. This is a real danger which you should be very aware of when you sit across the board from a reflector!

Reflectors are very strong in collecting and exploiting small advantages, which they sense earlier than their opponents. This trait is also very useful in endgames, where tiny advantages can prove the difference, such as the aforementioned Karpov-Kasparov game. Perhaps the best proponent of this characteristic is the former world champion Smyslov. Smyslov has written excellent books on, e.g., rook endings, and often won endgames where the opponent sensed the danger too late. Furthermore, he did not mind going into simplified positions, relying on his ability to outplay his opponent in the endgame. He even adopted this approach against world-class opposition.

Smyslov – Tal
USSR Ch (Moscow) 1969

1 c4 Qf6 2 g3 c5 3 Qg2 Qc6 4 Qc3 g6 5 Qf3 Qg7 6 0-0 0-0 7 b3
With this move Smyslov acknowledges that he is not really aiming for a theoretical opening advantage, but is trying to reach a quiet position that suits his style better than Tal’s. 7 d4 is a more active move.

7...d5 8 exd5 Qxd5 9 Qb2 Qxc3 10 Qxc3 Qxc3
Here 10...e5 would lead to more complicated play, and it would definitely suit Tal’s style better. What happens in the next few moves is typical for many games by reflectors: the opponent believes that the seemingly innocuous opening play is a sign of peacefulness and that a quick draw is in the cards. Therefore they steer for simplification (“so that the draw can be settled”), but this is playing into the hands of the reflector, who thrives on such simple positions.

11 dxc3 Wxd1
And here 11...Qc7 is safer.

12 Qfxd1 a5
Black offers a draw! But Smyslov is happy with the result of the opening, and it is extraordinary how quickly this deceptively simple position turns critical for Black.

13 Qb4! Qc6 (D)
After 13...Qf8 Smyslov gives 14 Qxf5 gxf5 15 f4 with a slight plus for White. Now comes another transformation of advantages in resemblance of Rubinstein-Marshall above.

14 Qxc6! bxc6 15 Qf3 f6
The doubled pawns on the c-file are a long-term structural disadvantage for Black. White intends to reposition his knight to e5 or e4 to attack the weak pawns. Black cannot prevent the knight transfer by 15...Qg4, as 16 Qe5! Qxe2 17 Be1! Qa6 18 Qfd7! followed by Qxc5 is very pleasant for White. Smyslov notes that “endings have frequently occurred where the
The presence of doubled pawns gives superiority to a knight over a bishop. This is also often the case in positions with isolated pawns, and it is an example of strategy by simple rules.

16 \( \text{xd2! } \text{xd8} \) 17 \( \text{ce4 } \text{c4} \) 18 \( \text{xe5} \)

A strong outpost for the knight, but as yet it does not threaten anything.

18...\( \text{xf5} \) 19 \( \text{f3 } \text{c2} \) 20 \( \text{xd8+ } \text{xd8} \)

Black has succeeded in gaining control of the open d-file, but this is not very significant as there are no entry-squares for the rook. The white king rushes to prevent the short-term threat of ...\( \text{d2} \), while the long-term structural defects in the black camp remain.

21 \( \text{f2 } \text{f7} \) 22 \( \text{h4 } \text{f5} \) 23 \( \text{e1 } \text{e5?!} \)

Impatient. Smyslov gives the prophylactic 23...\( \text{c8} \) as stronger, putting a lock on the white knight. After 24 \( \text{a4} \) White enjoys the better long-term prospects, but Black is still in the game. The text-move drops a pawn.

24 \( \text{h7! } \text{d7} \) 25 \( \text{a5 } \text{c5} \) 26 \( \text{bxc5 } \text{d5} \) (D)

27 \( \text{h7}?! \)

Rather than entering a rook ending a pawn up by 27 \( \text{xc4 } \text{xc5} \) 28 \( \text{d6+ } \text{e6} \) 29 \( \text{xf5} \) \( \text{xf5} \) (29...\( \text{gxf5} \)?) 30 \( \text{e4+} \) (30 \( \text{d2 } \text{e4} \) 30...\( \text{e6} \)
31 \( \text{d2} \) or 27 \( \text{e4 } \text{xc5} \) 28 \( \text{b7 } \text{c7} \) 29 \( \text{d6+} \) \( \text{e7} \) 30 \( \text{xf5+} \) \( \text{gxf5} \) 31 \( \text{exf5} \), Smyslov prefers to keep the knight/bishop on. This is probably best from a purely chess point of view, as Black's rook is active in the rook ending, but it is also sensible from a psychological point of view not to allow Tal any activity.

27...\( \text{d7} \) 28 \( \text{d6+ } \text{e7} \) 29 \( \text{g4!} \)

Again Smyslov prefers restriction over material gain. He could simply play 29 \( \text{xc4 } \text{c7} \), remaining a healthy pawn up, but allowing the black pieces increased activity. Instead he drives the bishop to a passive square and vacates b1 for activating his own rook.

29...\( \text{e6} \) 30 \( \text{b1 } \text{c7} \) 31 \( \text{h7} \)

White keeps his extra pawn, as 31...\( \text{d7} \) fails to 32 \( \text{xc7+ } \text{c7} \) 33 \( \text{e8+} \).

31...\( \text{xb7} \) 32 \( \text{xb7 } \text{d7} \) 33 \( \text{d6 } \text{h6} \) 34 \( \text{f2 } \text{c6} \) 35 \( \text{e3 } \text{a5} \)

35...\( \text{xc5} \)? 36 \( \text{e4+} \) obviously does not work, and after 35...\( \text{f5} \) Smyslov gives 36 \( \text{xf5} \) \( \text{gxf5} \) 37 \( \text{f4 } \text{d5} \) 38 \( \text{e8+} ) \text{xf4+} \) 39 \( \text{xf4 } \text{xc5} \) 40 \( \text{g7} \), and White wins.

36 \( \text{e8}+! ) \text{f5} \) 37 \( \text{g7 } \text{d7} \) 38 \( \text{gxf5 } \text{gxf5} \) 39 \( \text{f4 } \text{d5} \)

40 \( \text{c6}! \)

Now this pawn decides the game by restricting the black pieces even further.

40...\( \text{e8} \) 41 \( \text{c7 } \text{d6} \) 42 \( \text{h4 } \text{1-0} \)

Smyslov sealed this move – these were the good old days with adjournments – and Tal resigned without resuming play. After 42...\( \text{d7} \) 43 \( \text{h5 } \text{c8} \) 44 \( \text{fxe5+ } \text{xe5} \) 45 \( \text{f4} \) followed by \( \text{g6+} \), \( \text{h5} \) and \( \text{f4} \), the white king penetrates decisively.

Smyslov – Benko

Monte Carlo 1969

1 \( \text{c4 } \text{c5} \) 2 \( \text{f3 } \text{f6} \) 3 \( \text{g3 } \text{g6} \) 4 \( \text{b3 } \text{g7} \) 5 \( \text{b2 } \text{b6} \)
6 \( \text{g2 } \text{b7} \) 7 0-0 0-0 8 \( \text{c3 } \text{d5} \)

Like in the previous game, Black voluntarily enters an endgame where he can only hope for a draw. This is a dangerous strategy against a reflector, even for an endgame specialist like Benko. 8...\( \text{a6} \) and 8...\( \text{e6} \) are solid alternatives.

9 \( \text{xd5 } \text{xd5} \) 10 \( \text{c7 } \text{g7} \) 11 \( \text{cxd5 } \text{xd5} \) 12 \( \text{d4 } \text{cx} \) 13 \( \text{g4+ } \text{xd4} \) 14 \( \text{d4 } \text{xc2} \) 15 \( \text{g2} \) (D)
This position has occurred in many games, even at grandmaster level. A number of these games were agreed drawn at this point or soon thereafter. But Smyslov is playing this variation for a win, and he believes that White is better, stating that “White has gained an advantage. His knight occupies a strong post at d4, and Black’s queenside pawns can be attacked”. Whether White is really better from an ‘objective chess point of view’ is impossible to establish, but the comment reveals Smyslov’s way of thinking. He is convinced that even such apparently simple positions offer excellent winning chances in his hands. And he is right! From this deceptively dull position he quickly beats a well-known endgame specialist, and the game Smyslov-Castro, Biel IZ 1976, also ended in a white win from the same position after only 31 moves. Could Smyslov have won these games more easily by applying a more complicated opening set-up? I doubt it! This is what the human factor in chess is all about – knowing yourself and intentionally applying this knowledge at the board.

15...c8
Castro played 15...a6, but was worse after 16 fd1 c8 17 ac1 f6 18 b5.
16 ac1 d7 17 fd1 c5 18 b4 a4
This knight is sidelined for the rest of the game. Perhaps 17...d6 would have been better.
19 b5 xcl 20 xcl a5 21 a3 d8 22 c7 (D)

22...d5 23 a7! xab4 24 xab4 e6 25 c6 d2
Without really committing an obvious error, Black has drifted into an unpleasant position. White was threatening e4, giving his knight access to e5 or d8, and 25...c3? loses material to 26 e7.

26 e5 xex2 27 xf7 h5 28 g5+ f6
This loses, but 28...h6? 29 h4 leads to instant mate, and going to the back rank drops the e-pawn after 29 f1.

29 f1! xf2+
Hopeless, but after 29...b2 30 f4 f5 31 h3! Black is mated!
30 xf2 xg5 31 e3 g4 32 b5! h3 33 c4 b2 34 c2 1-0

To conclude the section of Smyslov endgame mastery, let us see a game from Smyslov’s second run at the world championship: his spectacular results in the early 1980s, where Smyslov, aged 63, reached the candidates final. Only the young Kasparov, 42 years his junior, stood between Smyslov and a world-title match against Karpov.

Browne – Smyslov
Las Palmas IZ 1982

1 d4 f6 2 c4 e6 3 f3 b4+ 4 M2 a5 5 g3 d5 6 g2 xxc4 7 wc2 d6 8 xxc4 d5 9 xxd5
The alternative is 9 d3, which was played in another game Browne-Smyslov (Tilburg 1982), which ended in a draw.

9...edx5 10 c3 a6 11 xcl a4 12 b5 xxd2+ 13 xxd2 d8 14 c5 xxa5! 15 xxc6+ bxc6 16 xce3 xxe7 (D)

22...d5 23 a7! xab4 24 xab4 e6 25 c6 d2
Around here Browne loses orientation and starts playing too passively, allowing Black to
build up an instructive advantage based on the notion of king activity in the endgame.

17 ḥd1 ḥd6 18 f3 c5! 19 dxc5+ ewidth=5 20 ewidth=5 21 ḥc3 ewidth=5

An active king is a strong asset in the endgame.

22 ewidth=5 23 e3 d4 24 exd4 cxd4 25 a3+?! This invites the black king even further into the white camp. A better chance was 25 ḥc2 ewidth=5 26 ḥd3 ewidth=5 xa2 27 ḥxd4, where White can still hope for a draw. Presumably Browne was already in severe time-pressure.

25... ewidth=5 26 ḥd4 27 ḥd5 28 ḥe4 ewidth=5 29 ḥe5+ ewidth=5a2! (D)

I included this game mainly because of this position. Despite there being relatively many pieces left on the board, the black king has decisively penetrated the white position, which is now completely lost. 30 ewidth=5xa4 drops a piece to 30... ewidth=5b3, and White has no way of protecting his queenside pawns.

30 ewidth=5h3 ewidth=5b3 31 ewidth=5d7 ewidth=5c4+ 32 ewidth=5d3 0-1

White lost on time. After 32... ewidth=5e5+ his position is hopeless anyway, as 33 ewidth=5xd4 fails to 33... ewidth=5xd7 34 ewidth=5xd7 ewidth=5d8 35 ewidth=5c7 ewidth=5e6.

Reflectors have a very good feeling for positional sacrifices – for instance the sacrifice of the exchange in return for positional compensation. Perhaps the most renowned reflector when it comes to these kinds of sacrifices is the former world champion Petrosian. In his autobiography with 131 of his best games, positional exchange sacrifices can be found in both games and notes, a clear indication that Petrosian himself was very aware of his strength in assessing the virtues of an exchange sacrifice. A typical and well-known example is this:

Reshevsky – Petrosian
Zurich Ct 1953

With the two bishops and central pawns, White holds the initiative. The e6 advance is in the air. But Petrosian keeps a cool head. Being a disciple of Nimzowitsch, Petrosian understood the concepts of prophylaxis and blockade perhaps better than anyone. To achieve a blockade Black needs to bring his knight to d5 via e7, while at the same time preventing e6. So Black’s next move is logical:

25... ewidth=5e6! 26 a4!?

With the ideas 26...b4 27 d5! ewidth=5xd5 28 ewidth=5xe6 fxe6 29 ewidth=5xc4 or 26... ewidth=5xa4 27 ewidth=5a3, after which Black does not reach his blockading set-up. But according to Bronstein, play on the kingside with 26 h4!? was probably better.

26... ewidth=5e7! 27 ewidth=5xe6 fxe6 28 ewidth=5f1 ewidth=5d5 29 ewidth=5f3 ewidth=5d3 (D)
30 \textit{\textbf{Nxd3}}

Sensible. White returns the exchange to reach a slightly better position with an extra pawn. But with the strong knight on d5 versus the passive white bishop on b2, the chances of exploiting the material advantage are slim.

30...\textit{\textbf{cxd3}} 31 \textit{\textbf{Bxd3}} \textit{\textbf{b4}} 32 \textit{\textbf{cxb4}}

After 32 \textit{\textbf{c4}} \textit{\textbf{Nc5}} 44 \textit{\textbf{hxg5}} \textit{\textbf{Bf4+}} 45 \textit{\textbf{Nxe1}} \textit{\textbf{Ng3+}} 46 \textit{\textbf{d1}} \textit{\textbf{Nf1+}} 47 \textit{\textbf{Ne1+}} 48 \textit{\textbf{Nxe1}} \textit{\textbf{hxg5}} 49 \textit{\textbf{Ng2}} \textit{\textbf{f4+}}

Here the game was adjourned. With three pawns for the exchange, Black is obviously winning, although some precision is still required.

31...\textit{\textbf{f5}} 32 \textit{\textbf{gxf5}} 33 \textit{\textbf{gxh5}} 34 \textit{\textbf{hxg5}} 35 \textit{\textbf{hxg5}} 36 \textit{\textbf{Nxe5}} 37 \textit{\textbf{f4}} 38 \textit{\textbf{f3}} 39 \textit{\textbf{fxe4}} 40 \textit{\textbf{Nf3}}

Not 39...\textit{\textbf{f4}} as this would allow White to blockade the pawns on the light squares.

39...\textit{\textbf{Ne7}} 40 \textit{\textbf{Nxe6}} 41 \textit{\textbf{Nf4}}

White resigned, as after 58 \textit{\textbf{Nf5}} \textit{\textbf{Nf5}} 59 \textit{\textbf{Nxe4}} 60 \textit{\textbf{Nc5}} the c-pawn decides.

Three games against Spassky from the world championship matches in 1966 (which Petrosian won) and 1969 (which Spassky won) are probably the most famous among Petrosian’s many games involving exchange sacrifices.

25...\textit{\textbf{Nxe4}}!

Nowadays such positional exchange sacrifices are standard. Black gets a central pawn and a strong bishop-pair in return for the minimal material investment.

26 \textit{\textbf{Nxe4}} \textit{\textbf{Nxe4}} 27 \textit{\textbf{Qc2}} \textit{\textbf{d5}} 28 \textit{\textbf{Qd4?!}} b4! 29 \textit{\textbf{cxb4}} \textit{\textbf{axb4}} 30 \textit{\textbf{a4?!}}

30 \textit{\textbf{Nxe5}} is probably better, liquidating as much as possible.

29...\textit{\textbf{Na7}} 30 \textit{\textbf{Nf2}} \textit{\textbf{Nc6}}!

Despite his reputation as a cautious positional player, Petrosian was strong tactically as well. Here he does not fall for the trap 31...\textit{\textbf{Nxa4?!}} 32 \textit{\textbf{Qxe4!}} fxe6 33 \textit{\textbf{Nxe4}}!

32...\textit{\textbf{b3}} 33 \textit{\textbf{Qf3}} \textit{\textbf{Qb5}} 34 \textit{\textbf{Na6}} 35 \textit{\textbf{Nc6}}

Petrosian’s second positional exchange sacrifice in this game! White has to accept the gift, as 36 \textit{\textbf{Qd4}} loses to 36...\textit{\textbf{c5}} 37 \textit{\textbf{Ned1}} \textit{\textbf{Nxd4}} 38 \textit{\textbf{Nxe4}}

36 \textit{\textbf{Qc3}} \textit{\textbf{Nc6}} 37 \textit{\textbf{Nc2}} \textit{\textbf{Nxb3}} 38 \textit{\textbf{Nec1}} \textit{\textbf{Nd4}}!

39 \textit{\textbf{Nxc2}} 40 \textit{\textbf{Nxe2}} \textit{\textbf{Nxa4}}

Eventually Spassky grabs the exchange. Due to the threat of invasion via the c-file and the h3-c8 diagonal he didn’t really have anything better.

40...\textit{\textbf{dxh4}} 41 \textit{\textbf{Nf5?!}}

Sacrificing a pawn in order to open files for the rooks.
41...\(\text{d}xd5\) 42 \(\text{e}d1\) c3 43 \(\text{c}c2\) \(\text{W}h3\) 44 \(\text{g}g1\) \(\text{W}g4\) 45 \(\text{g}g2\) \(\text{W}f3\)+ 46 \(\text{h}h2\) \(\text{W}xe3\) 47 f5 \(\text{f}e5\) 48 \(\text{f}f1\) b4 49 f6 b3 50 \(\text{c}c2\) c2 51 \(\text{W}c1\) e3 52 f7+ \(\text{g}g8\) 53 \(\text{h}h5\) b2 54 \(\text{W}xb2\) c1\(\text{W}\) 55 \(\text{W}xg7+\)!
\(\text{g}xg7\) 56 \(\text{e}g5+\) 0-1

The ultimate triumph of the pawns! Philidor would be happy!

43 \(\text{g}g2\) \(\text{fxg}2+\) 0-1

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24...\(\text{d}xe5\)! 25 \(\text{d}xg4\) hxg4

The two pawns more than compensate for the loss of the exchange.

26 e4 \(\text{d}d6\) 27 \(\text{W}e3\) \(\text{d}d7\) 28 \(\text{c}x\text{d}6\) \(\text{W}xd6\) 29 \(\text{d}d4\)!

29 f4 was a better chance. The text-move invites the black pawns to start rolling.

29...e5 30 \(\text{d}d2\) f5! 31 exd5 f4! 32 \(\text{W}e4\) \(\text{xf}6\)
33 \(\text{W}f5+\) \(\text{h}8\) 34 f3 \(\text{e}8\) 35 \(\text{W}b1\) g3 36 \(\text{e}1\) h3
37 \(\text{f}f1\) \(\text{h}8\) 38 gxh3 \(\text{x}h3\) 39 \(\text{g}g1\) \(\text{x}f1\) 40 \(\text{x}f1\) e4! 41 \(\text{d}d1\) (D)

---

41...\(\text{d}g4\)!! 42 fxg4 f3

---

21 \(\text{e}e3\) \(\text{xf}1\)

Black has to accept the offer, as 21...\(\text{xf}4\)?
22 \(\text{xf}4\) \(\text{W}g5+\) 23 \(\text{g}g4!\) \(\text{xf}4\) 24 \(\text{xf}4\) \(\text{xf}4\)
25 \(\text{xf}4\) \(\text{xf}4+\) 26 \(\text{h}h1\) \(\text{W}d4\) (forced) 27 \(\text{g}g1+\) \(\text{h}8\) 28 \(\text{W}xd4+\) \(\text{cxd}4\) 29 \(\text{g}g4\) leads to a better endgame for White.

22 \(\text{xf}1\) \(\text{g}6\) 23 \(\text{g}4\) \(\text{xf}4\)?

The only chance was 23...\(\text{d}d6!\), although White is better after 24 \(\text{e}6+\) \(\text{h}8\) 25 \(\text{W}xf6+\) \(\text{xf}6\) 26 f5 \(\text{e}5\) 27 \(\text{d}e4\).

24 \(\text{xf}4!\)

The second exchange sacrifice!

24...\(\text{xf}4\) 25 \(\text{e}6+\) \(\text{f}7\) 26 \(\text{d}e4\) \(\text{W}h4\) (D)

After 26...\(\text{d}f8\) 27 \(\text{f}5\) \(\text{f}8\) 28 \(\text{W}f6\) the threat of \(\text{h}6+\) is lethal.
27 dxe6 wxe6
This allows a beautiful finish, but 27...we1+ 28 w2 wxe3 29 wxf7+ wxf8 30 w8+ or 27...aa7 28 axf7 axf7 29 af5 wxf4+ (or 29...we1+ 30 w2 w4+ 31 w3 we1+ 32 w3 w1f1+ 33 w2) 30 w2 w2g2+ 31 wfxg2 leads to an easily winning endgame for White.
28 w1 w7 29 wxf7+ wxf7 30 w8+!! 1-0

Besides his legendary feeling for the positional exchange sacrifice, Petrosian is renowned for what his critics called his ‘cautious’, or sometimes even ‘boring’ play. In my opinion, however, Petrosian was not by nature a cautious player. Rather, I think that Petrosian had a fantastic feeling for danger — perhaps the best in chess history — and this helped him see potential dangers and avoid them, long before they became really dangerous or perhaps were even noticed by his opponent (and the spectators). And if you see a potential threat by your opponent, it would be crazy not to counter it — you cannot count on your opponent not to see it! We all try to counter our opponent’s threats — the question is only when we notice them! So when Petrosian is accused of playing cautiously, I think it is really closer to the actual truth to say that he saw or sensed some actual danger before his opponent. Feeling for danger is a skill often mastered by reflectors. It can be seen in games of, e.g., Seirawan, who in my opinion is very strong in this aspect of the game.

In chess circles, we often refer to preventive moves (such as those favoured by Petrosian) as prophylactic. The term prophylaxis in chess stems from Nimzowitsch’s *My System* and Petrosian adopted this notion and applied it to practical chess strategy better than anybody. It should be noted that the term prophylaxis is used more broadly in our times (and by Petrosian) than originally stated by Nimzowitsch. Today, the term covers attempts to prevent the opponent’s plans, whereas Nimzowitsch used it to describe either a) the prevention of the opponent’s freeing (pawn) moves, or b) overprotection of one’s own points. John Watson has a more in-depth discussion of these definitions in *Secrets of Modern Chess Strategy*.

A typical example of Petrosian’s prophylactic approach to a position is this one, which impressed me with its simple yet profound conversion of the positional advantage of having the better pawn-structure.

**Petrosian – Yudovich**

**USSR Cht (Moscow) 1966**

1 d4 d6 2 c4 e6 3 c3 d5 4 c3 c5 5 e4 0-0 6 e3 c5 7 dxc5 wxc6 8 c3 wg5 9 a3 w7

Nominally, this was a novelty at the time. In previous games, 12 wxc8+ wxc8 13 xc4 was played. One of these games was the entertaining encounter Euwe-Taimanov, Zurich Ct 1953: 13...w7 14 0-0 w7 15 d1 d8 16 w8 w8 17 d7 18 d5 h6!? 19 d6 w6 20 wh7+ w8 21 w6 h5 22 w67! wxd7 23 w8+ w7 24 w8 w8 25 w8 w8! (Black has emerged from the complications with the better position; however, White manages to create counterplay) 26 h3 wxb7 27 a4 w6 28 wh8! w6! 29 h4! w5 30 h5! g4 31 h6 w6 32 h7! (suddenly it is Black who is fighting to stay afloat) 32...g3! 33 w8 gxf2+ 34 wxf2 w7! 35 h8 w8 36 w8 w4+ ½-½. Petrosian’s simple development move seems stronger. The black queen is actually worse placed on e7 than on d8, as his main problem is the pin on the f6-knight, which he cannot now disentangle by...w7.

12...xd1+ 13 wxd1 h6 14 wh4 a6 (D)

15 de3!

Prophylaxis. Black intended 15...b5, but now this is strongly met by 16 we4.
15...\textit{\textbf{W}}d8 16 0-0 \textit{\textbf{A}}e7 17 \textit{\textbf{W}}e2 \textit{\textbf{Q}}d5 18 \textit{\textbf{A}}xe7 \textit{\textbf{W}}xe7!?

A difficult choice. Black accepts a weak isolated d-pawn in order to develop his c8-bishop. The alternative was taking back with one of the knights, maintaining a healthy pawn-structure but still struggling with the c8-bishop.

19 \textit{\textbf{Q}}xd5 \textit{\textbf{Q}}xd5 20 \textit{\textbf{B}}b1!

The bishop is transferred to a2, attacking the d5-pawn. At the same time, Petrosian toys with ideas like \textit{\textbf{W}}d3, initiating threats on the diagonal.

20...\textit{\textbf{A}}e6 21 \textit{\textbf{E}}d1 \textit{\textbf{W}}f6 22 h3 \textit{\textbf{Q}}d8 23 \textit{\textbf{Q}}d4 \textit{\textbf{Q}}xd4 24 \textit{\textbf{Q}}xd4 \textit{\textbf{A}}e8 25 \textit{\textbf{W}}d2 g6 26 \textit{\textbf{Q}}a2 \textit{\textbf{W}}f5 27 \textit{\textbf{Q}}b3!

Notice Petrosian’s patient play. Now ...\textit{\textbf{Q}}c2 is prevented.

27...\textit{\textbf{H}}h5 (D)

Take a good look at this position. It contains a problem typical for play against isolated pawns: even when one has managed to blockade the pawn, exchange some pieces and prevent counterplay, it is not easy to make progress, as after an eventual capture of the pawn on d5 and the subsequent mass exchanges, Black usually obtains counterplay with ...\textit{\textbf{A}}c2 (or ...\textit{\textbf{A}}c1+ first and then ...\textit{\textbf{A}}c2). In this particular position, 28 \textit{\textbf{Q}}xd5 is premature due to 28...\textit{\textbf{W}}b1+ 29 \textit{\textbf{Q}}h2 \textit{\textbf{A}}c2 with strong counterplay. Petrosian’s solution to this problem is surprising but straightforward, if you have a prophylactic approach.

28 \textit{\textbf{A}}h2!

Now White threatens to capture the d5-pawn, as Black lacks a check on b1, and, for example, 28...\textit{\textbf{A}}h7 29 \textit{\textbf{Q}}xd5 \textit{\textbf{A}}c2 30 \textit{\textbf{A}}xe6! with the idea 30...\textit{\textbf{W}}e5+ 31 f4 is good for White. So Black has no choice.

28...\textit{\textbf{W}}b1

Preparing again to counter 29 \textit{\textbf{Q}}xd5 with 29...\textit{\textbf{A}}c2. But Petrosian once more thwarts Black’s plan with a surprising preventive move.

29 \textit{\textbf{A}}g3!

The king feels completely safe in front of the pawns, and at the same time f2 is covered. This is important, since in many such positions Black’s counterplay is based on the intrusion of Black’s rook on the 7th rank (White’s 2nd rank), attacking typically b2 and f2.

29...\textit{\textbf{A}}e5 30 a4!

Again Petrosian blocks any black counterplay. Black intended 30...\textit{\textbf{H}}b5.

30...a5 31 e4! (D)

Black has run out of counter-threats and Petrosian shows his hand. Black seems completely helpless, which is a typical theme in the best games from Petrosian’s hand: all the opponent’s counterplay is prevented, after which Petrosian’s eventual offensive cuts through the opponent’s position like a hot knife through butter.

31...\textit{\textbf{W}}g1

31...\textit{\textbf{A}}xe4 32 \textit{\textbf{E}}d8+ \textit{\textbf{A}}h7 33 \textit{\textbf{W}}xe6 fxe6 34 \textit{\textbf{W}}d7+ wins for White.

32 h4!

Again Petrosian is alert to the opponent’s threats. He prohibits 32...h4+.

32...\textit{\textbf{A}}h7 33 \textit{\textbf{Q}}xd5 \textit{\textbf{Q}}xd5 34 \textit{\textbf{Q}}xd5 \textit{\textbf{A}}e6 35 \textit{\textbf{E}}d7 \textit{\textbf{H}}f6 36 \textit{\textbf{W}}d4 1-0

Such games were typical for Petrosian. Often his opponents seemed utterly helpless. The following game would have pleased Nimzowitsch. It is fitting that it was played in a tournament.
1 d4

Barendregt had to suffer two Petrosian strang¬
elies within a few months. Shortly before this
game, he was Black against Petrosian at the
tournament in Beverwijk, and here Petrosian
gave another positional lesson: 1 c4 g6 2 d4
£a7 3 £c3 d6 4 e4 c5 5 d5 e5 6 £e2 £h6 7 h4!
f5 8 £g5 £b6 9 £b1 £f7 10 £d2 a5 11 £f3
h6 12 g3 £a6 13 a3 £d8 14 £c2 h5 15 exf5
gxf5 16 £g5 £f6 17 £a4! f4 18 £b6 £f5 19
£d3 £xd3 20 £xd3 £b8 21 £e4 £d8 22
£xa5 0-0 23 £d1 f3 24 b4 £h6 25 £b3 £g4
26 0-0 £f6 27 £fx3 £e7 28 £f5 £f7 29 £xh5
£g7 30 f3! £xh4 31 fxg4 £h7 32 £f5 1-0. In-
structive chess!

B

9...b6

Black faced a choice here. He could ‘copy’
White and play 9...c6 followed by 10...£c7, af-
fter which White only has a small edge due to
the fact that his light-squared bishop can turn
out to be more active on c4 than its dark-squared
counterpart on g7. Instead Barendregt de-
velops his bishop to b7 and aims for typical King’s
Indian counterplay based on ...£f5. But White is
too solidly placed for this, and it is instructive
to follow how Petrosian nips any black coun-
terplay in the bud.

6 £e6!

The refutation, planned some moves in ad-
vance. As White threatens 17 exf5 or 17 £c4,
Black must take.

16...£xe4 17 £xe4! £xe4 18 £xe4 £c5

White is winning after 18...£xe4 19 £xd7
(better than 19 £xf8 £xf8 20 £xd7, although
White should also be better here) 19...£f6 20
£d5! £g5 21 £xa8 £xa8 22 £xg5 £xg5 23
£xc7 (or 23 £e4 with the idea 23...£d8? 24 £4!
£f6 25 £c7).

19 £xc5 bxc5 20 £d5! £b8

20...£xe4 21 £xe4 followed by 22 £xa8 is
a positional ruin for Black — look at his pawn-
structure!

21 £e3! £f5 22 £e1 £d4

Black could defend passively with 22...£e7,
hoping for the tactic 23 £xe5? £xe5 24 £4
£e3! 25 £xe3 £d4, but after the calm 23 £d2,
intending 24 £c4, his position is not envious.

23 £xex5!

Petrosian is not afraid of ghosts.
23...\( \text{g5} \) 24 \( \text{d6} \) \( \text{f3!} \) (D)

A good idea which unfortunately meets a cool reply. Following the theories of Steinitz, it is not surprising that it does not work. Steinitz taught the chess world that tactics and combinations only occur when the opponent has a weakness, either permanent or temporary. This is not really the case here. White is well coordinated, centralized and with solid kingside pawn-cover. Still, one has to see the following move in advance.

25 \text{g3!}

Suddenly a number of black pieces are hanging. It is because of this move that I have included this game. Notice how all White’s pieces are working together as one coherent unit, contributing both defensively and offensively. Black has no weak points to attack.

25...\( \text{e8} \) 26 \( \text{e4!} \)

Centralization!

26...\( \text{f4} \) 27 \( \text{e3} \) \( \text{g4} \) 28 \( \text{e5} \) \( \text{xe5} \)

After 28...\( \text{g5} \) White can simply reply 29 \( \text{h1} \), forcing Black into a lost ending with 29...\( \text{xe5} \) 30 \( \text{xe5} \) \( \text{xe5} \) 31 \( \text{xe5} \) \( \text{f5} \) 32 \( \text{e3!} \) \( \text{f3} \) 33 \( \text{e4} \) \( \text{f6} \) 34 \( \text{d5} \).

29 \( \text{xe5+} \) \( \text{f6} \) 30 \( \text{d3} \) \( \text{f5} \) 31 \( \text{xc7} \) \( \text{d6} \)
32 \( \text{f3} \) \( \text{f5} \) 33 \( \text{dd1} \) h5 34 \( \text{xc5} \) h4 35 \( \text{d4} \) \( \text{hxg3} \) 36 \( \text{hxg3} \) g5 37 \( \text{g2} \) g4 38 f4 \( \text{g7} \) 39 \( \text{e7+} \) \( \text{g6} \) 40 \( \text{e5} \) \( \text{c2+} \) 1-0

The next great reflector giant in chess history is Karpov, whose style is reminiscent of Capablanca, with some features from Petrosian as well. In many of Karpov’s games the same theme can be found: all pieces are optimally coordinated, prophylactic measures are taken to prevent the opponent’s plans, and when the final break occurs, the opponent’s position crumbles. It is unfortunate that the chess world was never to see a match between Fischer and the young Karpov in 1975. Most observers at the time predicted that Fischer would have won, but that is certainly not clear. It would have been a great fight between two players with different styles and distinct competences in different aspects of the game. But it was not to happen.

Look at the following game. Don’t Karpov’s patient manoeuvres remind you of the prophylactic style of Petrosian discussed above?

Karpov – Kharitonov
USSR Ch (Moscow) 1988

This was the last really strong Soviet Championship. Both Kasparov and Karpov took part, ultimately sharing first place with 11\( \frac{1}{2} \) out of 17, 1\( \frac{1}{2} \) points ahead of a world-class field consisting of players such as Yusupov, Salov, Ivanchuk, Beliaevsky, Smyslov, Khalifman, Vaganian, Efhlvest, M. Gurevich, etc.

1 \text{c4} \text{e6} 2 \text{c3} \text{d5} 3 \text{d4} \text{f6} 4 \text{exd5} \text{exd5} 5 \text{c5} \text{e7} 6 \text{e3} \text{d7} 7 \text{f3} \text{c6} 8 \text{d3} 0-0 9 \text{c2} \text{e8} 10 0-0 \text{f8} 11 \text{h3} (D)

This is Karpov’s favourite line against the Queen’s Gambit, one which he has employed in a number of games, with fantastic results. The middlegame positions suit his style, as he can calmly build up a minority attack on the kingside, while applying his sense of prophylaxis to prevent Black from becoming really dangerous on the kingside. These features are also seen in the present game.
11...\textit{\textbf{\textbf{f6}}} 12 \textit{\textbf{bxc1}}

This was a new move at the time. Two years earlier, at Tilburg 1986, Karpov had played 12 \textit{\textbf{f4}} against Beliavsky, losing a rare game with White in this variation: 12...\textit{\textbf{d6}} 13 \textit{\textbf{fxe6}} \textit{\textbf{fxe6}} 14 \textit{\textbf{a3}} \textit{\textbf{e7}} 15 \textit{\textbf{b4}} \textit{\textbf{eac8}} 16 \textit{\textbf{fc1}} \textit{\textbf{d6}} 17 \textit{\textbf{d2}} \textit{\textbf{g6}} 18 \textit{\textbf{g3}} \textit{\textbf{d8}} 19 \textit{\textbf{d2}} \textit{\textbf{h4}} 20 \textit{\textbf{f3}} \textit{\textbf{g5}} 21 \textit{\textbf{h2}} \textit{\textbf{e7}} 22 \textit{\textbf{e5}} \textit{\textbf{c8}} 23 \textit{\textbf{e6}} 24 \textit{\textbf{bxc1}} \textit{\textbf{h5}} 25 \textit{\textbf{b5}}? (a rare miss by Karpov; White should continue his prophylactic play on the kingside with 25 \textit{\textbf{gl}}) 25...\textit{\textbf{fxg2}}! 26 \textit{\textbf{xg2}} \textit{\textbf{h4}} 27 \textit{\textbf{bxc6}} \textit{\textbf{hxg3}} 28 \textit{\textbf{fxg3}} \textit{\textbf{exf3}} 29 \textit{\textbf{hxe3}} \textit{\textbf{wxe3}} 30 \textit{\textbf{cxb7}} \textit{\textbf{xxb7}} 31 \textit{\textbf{wxe3}} (D).

White seems to have consolidated, but...

31...\textit{\textbf{xc5}}! 32 \textit{\textbf{wxc5}} \textit{\textbf{wd3}} 33 \textit{\textbf{wc3}} \textit{\textbf{wxc2}} + 34 \textit{\textbf{gl}} \textit{\textbf{e6}} 35 \textit{\textbf{d1}} \textit{\textbf{xd4}} 36 \textit{\textbf{h1}} \textit{\textbf{db5}} 0-1.

12...\textit{\textbf{d6}} 13 \textit{\textbf{f4}} \textit{\textbf{d6}} 14 \textit{\textbf{a4}} \textit{\textbf{b6}} 15 \textit{\textbf{a5}} \textit{\textbf{e2}} \textit{\textbf{g6}} 16 \textit{\textbf{fxe6}} \textit{\textbf{fxe6}} 17 \textit{\textbf{a4}}!

Not the automatic 17 \textit{\textbf{b4}}, as this weakens the c4-square, giving Black the opportunity to create counterplay with 17...\textit{\textbf{e4}}! 18 \textit{\textbf{xe4}} \textit{\textbf{dxe4}} 19 \textit{\textbf{c3}} \textit{\textbf{b5}}.

17...\textit{\textbf{eac8}} 18 \textit{\textbf{wc5}}! \textit{\textbf{wb8}}

Not 18...\textit{\textbf{xc5}}? 19 \textit{\textbf{dxc5}} \textit{\textbf{dxa4}}? (19...\textit{\textbf{d7}} 20 \textit{\textbf{b4}} with advantage for White) 20 \textit{\textbf{b3}}.

19 \textit{\textbf{wa3}} \textit{\textbf{a6}} 20 \textit{\textbf{e3}} \textit{\textbf{wc7}} 21 \textit{\textbf{e1c1}} \textit{\textbf{e8}} 22 \textit{\textbf{d2}}!

Notice Karpov’s patient preparations for the minority attack \textit{\textbf{b4}}-\textit{\textbf{b5}}. Only now, with c4 solidly covered, is he ready to play 23 \textit{\textbf{b4}}.

22...\textit{\textbf{a5}}

Black prevents a ‘normal’ minority attack, but after the eventual \textit{\textbf{b4}} advance White will still reach his ultimate goal of isolating the c6-pawn by pushing forward with the a-pawn to \textit{\textbf{a6}}, exchanging it for the black \textit{\textbf{b7}}-pawn.

23 \textit{\textbf{b1}} \textit{\textbf{c8}} 24 \textit{\textbf{b4}} \textit{\textbf{axb4}} 25 \textit{\textbf{wb4}} \textit{\textbf{wd6}} 26 \textit{\textbf{d3}} \textit{\textbf{e8}} 27 \textit{\textbf{a5}} \textit{\textbf{e7}} (D)

What are the plans of the two sides in this position? Clearly White wants to play \textit{\textbf{a6}} to achieve the aforementioned isolation (and eventual annihilation) of the c6-pawn – the end goal of a minority attack. For this, the light-squared bishop is vital. Black’s plan is therefore to exchange this bishop by 28...\textit{\textbf{f5}}. The first priority for White is to prevent this – the idea of an \textit{\textbf{a6}} advance will not go away. Study the next moves closely to see how Karpov carefully prevents Black’s plan before eventually implementing his own. That is prophylactic play at its best!

28 \textit{\textbf{g3}}! \textit{\textbf{g6}} 29 \textit{\textbf{e5}} \textit{\textbf{h5}}?!

Black will not give up on his plan. He intends to push the white knight away from \textit{\textbf{g3}} and then play ...\textit{\textbf{f5}}.

30 \textit{\textbf{a1}}! \textit{\textbf{h4}} 31 \textit{\textbf{f1}} \textit{\textbf{f5}} 32 \textit{\textbf{e2}}!

Black reached his goal – ...\textit{\textbf{f5}}. But White was in time to make sure that it was not really dangerous – 30 \textit{\textbf{a1}} and 32 \textit{\textbf{e2}} secured the light-squared bishop’s presence on the board.

32...\textit{\textbf{e4}} 33 \textit{\textbf{c5}} \textit{\textbf{e5}} 34 \textit{\textbf{xe5}} \textit{\textbf{e6}} 35 \textit{\textbf{d2}}!

Typical of Karpov. The positions of all pieces are optimized before dealing the decisive blow (\textit{\textbf{a6}}). The knight is transferred to \textit{\textbf{f3}}, where it attacks the black \textit{\textbf{h4}}-pawn, which has become a liability. Notice that Black pushed the \textit{\textbf{h}}-pawn to \textit{\textbf{h4}} voluntarily to look for counterplay. But the counterplay based on ...\textit{\textbf{f5}} never materialized, and now the pawn is simply weak. This pattern is seen a lot in games of reflectors!

35...\textit{\textbf{f5}} 36 \textit{\textbf{f3}} \textit{\textbf{wd8}} 37 \textit{\textbf{a6}}! (D)

The break at last!
37...bxa6 38 Axa6 Sxa6 39 Axa6 W'a8?
A mistake, presumably in time-trouble. But it is unlikely that passive defence by 39...d7 40 c5 Ee6 would save the game in the long run.

40 Wfxc6 ®xc6 41 2xc6 Sa8 42 d3 1-0
The h4-pawn also drops after 42...2al+ 43 4?h2 2a2 44 2c2.

Often games and wins by players like Capablanca and Karpov seem deceptively easy. The ability to coordinate pieces also comes in handy when such players are confronted with new and rather unusual positions. A famous example is Capablanca-Marshall, New York 1918, where Marshall introduced his gambit in the Ruy Lopez into tournament practice. Despite being caught off-guard, the great Cuban managed to manoeuvre through the minefield prepared by Marshall, and eventually won. Sometimes it is an advantage for such players to enter positions where the best way to play has not yet been established. With their intuition and feel for the pieces they will often find the correct way to play. These characteristics can be seen in the following game from the same tournament as the game above.

Karpov – Malaniuk
USSR Ch (Moscow) 1988

1 d4 f5 2 g3 £if6 3 Ag2 g6 4 c4 £g7 5 f3 d6 6 0-0 0-0 7 £e3 £e8

The Leningrad Variation of the Dutch Defence is a competitive opening, which leads to interesting and rare types of position. At the time of this game, Malaniuk was probably the expert on the Leningrad Dutch, and he had scored many convincing wins with it. But Karpov disentangles the black set-up with deceptively simple tools.

8 b3 Qa6 9 Qa3! c6 10 Wd3 £d7
In later games, Malaniuk reverted to 10...Ab8 with the idea of creating counterplay with ...b5. This was also played in a few games by Kramnik in his teenage years. It is definitely better than the rather passive set-up in the game, which allows Karpov to highlight the drawbacks of the Leningrad Dutch.

11 £fe1 £d8?! 12 ad1 Wh8 13 e4 (D)

Classical chess: White plays in the centre and saddles Black with a weak pawn on e7.

13...fxe4 14 £xe4 £f5 15 £xf6 £xf6 16 Wc3 £f7 17 h3! £c7 18 £e2!
A small move with large benefits. White prepares doubling on the e-file while at the same time covering f2 and toying with options like £g5 or £b2 and d5. Such simple, yet multitask moves are often seen in games of reflectors. Notice the connection between this and the previous and following moves. Each move facilitates the next and builds a logical thread in White’s play.

18...£c8 19 £g5! Wg8 20 Wd2 £e6 21 £xe6 £xe6 22 £de1 £d7 (D)
23 £xe7! £xe7 24 £xe7
Suddenly Black is lost. The dark-squared bishop enters the game with devastating effect after d5 is played. Apparently Black has not made any clear mistakes, but he is still helpless. The point here is not so much the exchange sacrifice, which is neat but pretty obvious – the difficult part is the preceding play, where every
small move eventually turns out to fit into the overall strategy. Individually, each move looks simple, but now it turns out that they all contribute to White’s overall play. This is a trademark of the master reflector.

24...\textit{f6} 25 \textit{d5} \textit{\textit{w}}f8 26 \textit{\textit{g}}e3 \textit{\textit{d}}g8 27 \textit{\textit{b}}b2 \textit{\textit{f}}5 28 \textit{\textit{w}}d4 \textit{\textit{e}}e5 29 \textit{\textit{e}}xe5 \textit{\textit{d}}xe5 30 \textit{\textit{w}}xe5 \textit{\textit{f}}7 31 \textit{\textit{d}}6 \textit{\textit{f}}5 32 \textit{\textit{c}}5 \textit{\textit{h}}5 33 \textit{\textit{g}}4! \textit{\textit{h}}xg4 34 \textit{\textit{h}}xg4 \textit{\textit{d}}3

Now Black is mated, but 34...\textit{c}x\textit{g}4 35 \textit{\textit{w}}f6+ \textit{\textit{e}}8 36 \textit{\textit{w}}x\textit{g}6+ or 34...\textit{c}8 35 \textit{\textit{e}}4 was equally hopeless.

35 \textit{\textit{d}}5+! 1-0

Of contemporary top players, Michael Adams is probably the most typical representative of the reflector type. I have played together with Adams for Lübecker SV in the German Bundesliga, and time and time again during analysis I was impressed by his exceptional understanding of the coordination of pieces. A recent example is this:

\begin{center}
\textbf{Adams – Zhang Zhong}
\textit{Wijk aan Zee 2004}
\end{center}

1 \textit{e}4 \textit{c}5 2 \textit{\textit{g}}f3 \textit{d}6 3 \textit{\textit{d}}4 \textit{cxd}4 4 \textit{\textit{\textit{d}}x\textit{d}4 \textit{\textit{f}}6 5 \textit{\textit{c}}3 \textit{a}6 6 \textit{\textit{c}}e3 \textit{e}5 7 \textit{\textit{b}}b3 \textit{\textit{e}}e6 8 \textit{\textit{f}}3 \textit{\textit{c}}c7 9 \textit{\textit{w}}d2 0-0 10 \textit{\textit{f}}f2 \textit{\textit{w}}d7 11 \textit{\textit{g}}4 \textit{\textit{\textit{g}}8 12 \textit{\textit{g}}5 \textit{\textit{\textit{h}}h}5 13 \textit{\textit{\textit{d}}xd}5 \textit{\textit{g}}d5 14 \textit{\textit{e}}xd5 \textit{\textit{d}}d7 15 \textit{\textit{h}}3 \textit{g}6

Here or on the next move Black should probably push 15...a5 in order to obtain counterplay on the queenside. This had already been played in the game Adams-Vallejo Pons, Bled OL 2002, which continued 16 \textit{\textit{b}}b1 \textit{\textit{a}}4 17 \textit{\textit{\textit{c}}c}1 \textit{\textit{a}}3 18 \textit{\textit{b}}3 \textit{\textit{\textit{d}}f}4 19 \textit{\textit{\textit{f}}xf}4 \textit{\textit{\textit{e}}xf}4 20 \textit{\textit{\textit{d}}xd}7 \textit{\textit{w}}d7 21 \textit{\textit{h}}4 \textit{\textit{f}}8 22 \textit{\textit{e}}e2 \textit{\textit{f}}5 23 \textit{\textit{\textit{h}}he}1 \textit{\textit{\textit{c}}c}7 24 \textit{\textit{\textit{w}}c}1 \textit{\textit{\textit{e}}e}8 25 \textit{\textit{\textit{d}}d}2 \textit{\textit{e}}c7 26 \textit{\textit{w}}c1 \textit{\textit{\textit{e}}e}8 27 \textit{\textit{\textit{d}}d}2 \textit{\textit{g}g}2-\textit{\textit{f}}2.

Presumably Adams had an improvement on this game, but Zhang Zhong deviates first – to no avail.

16 \textit{\textit{b}}b1 \textit{\textit{\textit{d}}f}8 (D)

17 \textit{\textit{w}}c1!

A key question in this type of position is how to coordinate the pieces. The pawn advances are clear: White intends to advance his h-pawn (once the black knight has been pushed from h5 by \textit{\textit{g}}4), whereas Black intends ...a5-a4-a3 to weaken White’s dark squares. Notice how Adams coordinates his pieces over the next few moves, before moving to the pawn attack. First, the knight – which will soon be pushed away from b3 anyway – is given access via d2 to its dream square, e4.

17...\textit{\textit{f}}4?!

Perhaps Black should have postponed this move until White actually threatened the knight by \textit{\textit{g}}4. 17...a5 and 17...\textit{g}7 are feasible alternatives.

18 \textit{\textit{\textit{w}}xf}4 \textit{\textit{\textit{e}}xf}4 19 \textit{\textit{\textit{d}}d}2! \textit{\textit{g}7 20 \textit{\textit{e}}e4 \textit{\textit{e}}5

The first step has been reached, but what now? The game was displayed live on ICC, and several moves were suggested for White here: 21 \textit{\textit{\textit{d}}xd}7 \textit{\textit{w}}xd7 22 \textit{\textit{h}}4 or winning the exchange with 21 \textit{\textit{f}}f6+ \textit{\textit{g}}7 22 \textit{\textit{\textit{e}}e}x\textit{8} \textit{\textit{e}}x\textit{8} 23 \textit{\textit{gx}}f6 \textit{\textit{e}}xf6, which however gives Black excellent compensation on the dark squares. But I believe nobody found White’s plan:

21 \textit{\textit{\textit{d}}d}2!

In itself a useful move, as it covers c2, prepares for doubling on the h-file and waits for Black to untangle on the h3-c8 diagonal before taking on d7. But the real point behind Adams’ idea is only revealed on moves 25 and 26.
21...\textit{Wd}8 22 \textit{Qxd}7 \textit{Wxd}7 23 h4 \textit{Cc}7 24 h5 \textit{Ac}8 25 \textit{Hh}4!

The third key point of White's play. Again the move is multitask: first, the rook threatens the weak f4-pawn, which is likely to fall after the eventual \textit{Qf}6+ \textit{Qxf}6 gxf6, and second, 'Alekhine's cannon' – queen, rook and rook – known from the famous game Alekhine-Nimzowitsch, San Remo 1930, is prepared on the h-file. To counter the threat of \textit{d}h2, \textit{Wh}1 and hxg6, Black must indirectly defend h7 in order to take back with the f-pawn on g6.

25...\textit{Vf}5 26 \textit{Vdh}2 \textit{Vf}7!

Preparing to meet 27 \textit{Wh}1 by 27...\textit{Cc}7, supporting the second rank.

27 a3 (D)

A quiet and useful move, asking Black how he intends to continue. However, Adams indicated 27 \textit{Wh}1! \textit{Cc}7 28 a3 as more precise.

27...b5?

And Black loses his patience! Up until this point, Black has defended well, but now he voluntarily weakens his own position. The thrust ...b5 leaves the a6-pawn isolated, and Adams immediately shifts his attention to this new weakness. This is a typical positional phenomenon: the player with pressure and more space can more easily change between different plans and different sides of the board.

28 \textit{Wd}2! \textit{Cc}4 29 \textit{Wa}5 \textit{We}8 30 \textit{Qf}6+!

The time for action has come.

30...\textit{Qxf}6 31 \textit{Gxf}6 \textit{Cc}7 32 h\textit{gx}g6 \textit{fxg}6 33 \textit{We}1!

White threatens to invade down the newly opened e-file by \textit{Cc}2 and \textit{Cc}8+.

33...\textit{Wf}8 34 \textit{We}6+ \textit{Vh}8 35 \textit{Qh}6!

At last White’s subtle manoeuvres pay off on the material account. Black is unable to protect all his weak pawns.

35...b4 36 a\textit{xb}4 \textit{Qxb}4 37 \textit{Kg}6 \textit{Kh}8 38 f7! \textit{Wxf}7 39 \textit{Wxd}6 \textit{Cc}7 40 \textit{Cc}6 \textit{Cc}1+ 41 \textit{Vxa}2 \textit{We}8 42 \textit{Vxf}4 1-0

\textbf{Adams – Hamdouchi}

\textit{Tripoli FIDE KO 2004}

1 e4 c5 2 \textit{Qf}3 \textit{Cc}6 3 \textit{b}b5

This solid way to avoid the Sveshnikov Variation (3 d4 cxd4 4 \textit{Qxd}4 \textit{Cc}6 5 \textit{Cc}3 e5, etc.) has been all the rage in the new millennium. This enterprising line is quite typical of modern chess: dynamic features and free piece-play are often seen as more important than the potential damage to the black pawn-structure.

3...d6 4 0-0 \textit{Cd}7 5 \textit{Cc}1 \textit{Qf}6 6 h3 a6 7 \textit{Qf}1 (D)

7...g5!!

An enterprising attempt to stir up counterplay, and to my knowledge a novelty. Usually 7...e6 or 7...e5 is played.

8 d4!

Classical chess: an attack on the flank is met with a thrust in the centre. All according to Steinitz!

8...g4 9 d5 gxf3 10 dxc6 \textit{Qxc}6 11 \textit{Wxf}3 e6 12 \textit{Cc}3 \textit{Cc}7 13 \textit{Qf}4

Let’s take stock: Black did not manage to get a really dangerous initiative on the kingside, but he did manage to swap his g-pawn for a white central pawn – nominally a good deal. But it also means that Black has problems deciding where to put his king, and his d6-pawn is
somewhat backward and potentially weak. And worst of all: what is Black's long-term plan? It is not easy for him to initiate a pawn advance, as touching any of the central pawns is risky given the weak king's position. Conclusion: White is better.

13...\(\text{g}8\) 14 \(\text{h}d1\) \(\text{g}6\) (D)

27 \(\text{w}xh7\) f5 28 \(\text{w}h8\) fxe4 29 h4!

Crushing any black hopes for counterplay. Notice how White's pieces coordinate much better than Black's.

29...\(\text{E}f5\) 30 \(\text{h}h3\) \(\text{E}f7\) 31 \(\text{d}e2\)!

Here it is, the knight manoeuvre! Besides \(\text{e}3 + \text{d}4\), the direct threat is 32 \(\text{f}f4\). Black is defenceless.

31...e3?! 32 \(\text{xe}3\) e5 33 \(\text{g}5\) 1-0

The main weakness of reflectors lies in the circumstance that they tend to calculate relatively few concrete variations. The preoccupation with the 'big picture' occasionally leads to short-term oversights and blunders. Even world-class reflectors have been seen to blunder badly, even early in the game. Examples of such high-class 'reflector blunders' are games like Sämisc-Capablanca, Karlsbad 1929, Petrosian-Spassky, Moscow Wch (8) 1969 or Christiansen-Karpov, Wijk aan Zee 1993. Obviously everybody blunders from time to time, but the risk of blundering is bigger if you are the type of player who prefers long-term general considerations to short-term concrete calculations ("they are just details in the big picture").

If you are a reflector you should be aware of this potential weakness, and if you are playing against a reflector, you should strive for positions where the price on each move in the short-term is high. This means going for highly complicated and tactical positions, where precise calculation and combinative vision is the name of the game. Conversely, against reflectors, try to avoid positions that are strategically (but not tactically) complex and where achieving piece coordination is crucial, and situations that are positional, or simple with small nuances making the difference.
Great theorists are among the best-known masters of the past among the general chess public. Names like Tarrasch, Nimzowitsch and Réti are well known, even if none of these past giants ever became world champion. Their fame is no coincidence. Together with other past theorists who did win the world championship – Steinitz and Botvinnik – they are known for their contribution to the development of chess thinking. A large part of the foundations of contemporary chess strategy can be traced back to the writings of some of these players, with Steinitz being the first to develop chess strategy into a coherent framework. While not all of Steinitz’s claims and theories have turned out to be correct, they still formed a platform from which other theorists and thinkers could develop chess strategy further and build more accurate theories and ideas – some of which are still valid to this day. This is the same way that theory and knowledge develop in most other fields. It is therefore fully justified that Steinitz is by many awarded the unofficial title of ‘the father of chess strategy’.

However, here my purpose is not to explore the writings of these and other theorists in depth – this has been done splendidly in a number of other sources – but rather to identify the characteristics of theorists in practical games, so that their strengths and weaknesses can be included in decision-making during practical games.

Typical characteristics of theorists are:

- Very well acquainted with chess history and often base decisions on this knowledge
- A good understanding of the pawn-structure in the centre and how the characteristics of the central pawn-structure influence strategy
- Especially strong at understanding and manoeuvring in closed and semi-closed positions
- Often very strong in utilizing the advantage of two bishops
- A logical thread can be seen throughout the game; proceedings are often very logical and systematic
- Good and thorough opening preparation with emphasis on building solid and resilient systems that can be used for a long time
- A certain stubbornness in their belief in their own concepts and systems

These characteristics spring out of the circumstance that theorists base their decisions on logical thinking and focus on building and understanding general concepts.

As Steinitz is acknowledged as the first real theorist (although other thinkers like Philidor could be included as well), we shall start by looking at examples from Steinitz’s play, where his thinking is presented in practice. Contrary to, e.g., Morphy, Steinitz was not interested in seeking quick victories by vicious early attacks that were sometimes, and sometimes not, correct. Steinitz was interested in lasting positional values, and he formulated the principle that attacks should be well-founded and built on sound positional principles in order to succeed.

One of these lasting values is the bishop-pair. Steinitz was the first player who really appreciated this advantage and demonstrated it in a number of games. Based on, amongst others, Steinitz’s games and writings, this has now become ‘common knowledge’, but the profound understanding of and ability to handle the battle between bishops and knights is an area where true theorists continue to excel and distinguish themselves.

Rosenthal - Steinitz
Vienna 1873

1 e4 e5 2 d4 c3 d6 3 d3 g6

Steinitz was very fond of the fianchetto of his bishops. This was probably because it often leads to closed positions – an area where Steinitz was unrivalled at his time.

4 d4 exd4 5 cxd4

A dangerous alternative is 5 d5!?, which is best met by 5...g7 6 g5 c5?! with the idea...
of \ldots c6. This was first played in a later game Rosenthal-Steinitz, London 1883, which ended in a draw after an interesting struggle.

5...\textit{g}7 6 \textit{e}3 \textit{ge}7 7 \textit{c}4 d6 8 0-0 0-0 9 \textit{f}4?! \\

This is premature as Black is now able to strike back in the centre. That a flank attack should be met by a counter in the centre has been known since Steinitz!

9...\textit{a}5! 10 \textit{d}3 \textit{d}5! 11 exd5 \\
Forced, as 11 e5? drops a piece to 11...c5 and 12...d4. But now White would prefer to have his f-pawn on f2. As it is, White has lasting weaknesses on the e-file, and Steinitz made a living out of exploiting such long-term weaknesses. This game is an instructive example of how Steinitz was years ahead of his contemporaries in chess thinking.

11...\textit{x}d5 12 \textit{x}d5 \textit{w}xd5 13 c3 \textit{d}8 14 \textit{w}c2 \textit{c}4 15 \textit{xc}4 \textit{w}xc4 16 \textit{w}f2 (D)

Now Black has another lasting advantage: the two bishops vs bishop and knight. How Steinitz builds and exploits such lasting advantages is very instructive. Réti – another great chess thinker and theorist, who tragically died from scarlet fever at the early age of 40 – makes this comment in his excellent book \textit{Masters of the Chessboard}: “This is perhaps the oldest game in which we find the practical application of the method created by Steinitz to demonstrate the advantage of the combined bishops. Most chess-players know, thanks to the study of master games, that two bishops are stronger than two knights or than bishop and knight, though very few really know the reason for this advantage and how to turn it to account. In order to obtain a better understanding, we have to consider, first of all, the differences in the use of bishop and knight. In contrast to the far-reaching bishop, which can become effective from a distance, the knight, in order to become effective, has to operate in close proximity to the opposing forces. In order to become lastingly effective, it must find protected squares near the enemy’s camp, mostly squares protected by pawns, inasmuch as other pieces are, in the long run, not suitable for the protection of the knight. It follows, therefore, that in completely open positions without pawns, the bishop is superior to the knight, a fact which is confirmed by endgame theory. Conversely, the knight is superior to the bishop in closed positions, on the one hand because the pawns are in the bishop’s way, and on the other hand because the pawns form points of support for the knight, as outlined above. The method created by Steinitz to turn the advantage of two bishops to the fullest possible account is applicable only to positions like the above which are neither closed, nor completely open, but in which there are still to be found some points of support for the knight, protected by pawns, as here, for example, on the squares d4 and e5. The method then consists in advancing the black pawns in such a way that these points of support become unsafe for the knight, which thereby is condemned to a passive role and becomes quite ineffectual. It will be seen that the same pawn moves can be used with telling effect also against the bishop. It is of course possible to use the same method occasionally also in the fight of a bishop against a knight. This is rare, however, because the advance of the pawns often weakens the position and offers the enemy a chance of breaking through. With a pair of bishops covering squares of either colour, such a procedure is, as a rule, quite sound.” I cannot state it better, so we shall leave Réti’s words as they are and follow how Steinitz turns his theory into practice!

16...\textit{c}5 \\
First step: the d4-square is taken from the knight.

17 \textit{f}3 b6 18 \textit{e}5 \textit{w}e6 19 \textit{w}f3 \textit{a}6 20 \textit{e}f1 \textit{f}6 \\
Step two: the e5-square is taken from the knight, which is systematically pushed back.
Foundations of Chess Strategy

21 \( \text{g}4 \text{ h}5 \) 22 \( \text{f}2 \) \( \text{f}7 \) (D)

23 \( \text{f}5 \)?
This simply weakens the f-pawn, and it takes Steinitz only a few moves to exploit this additional weakness with pointed play. However, the white position was already highly unpleasant.

23...\( \text{g}5 \) 24 \( \text{d}1 \) \( \text{b}7 \) 25 \( \text{g}3 \) \( \text{d}5 ! \) 26 \( \text{xd}5 \) \( \text{xd}5 \) 27 \( \text{xd}1 \) \( \text{xf}5 \) 28 \( \text{c}7 \) \( \text{d}5 \) 29 \( \text{b}3 \) \( \text{e}8 \) 30 \( \text{f}7 \) 31 \( \text{c}1 \) \( \text{e}2 ! \)

Although the importance of occupying the 7th rank with the rook is usually ascribed to Nimzowitsch, Steinitz was already aware of this.

32 \( \text{f}1 \) \( \text{f}2 \) \( \text{s}3 \) \( \text{g}3 \) \( \text{g}6 \) 36 \( \text{h}4 \) \( \text{g}4 \) 37 \( \text{d}3 \) \( \text{xb}3 \) 38 \( \text{c}7 \) \( \text{xd}3 \) 0-1

The same approach to exploiting the two bishops can be seen in a number of Steinitz’s games. He also used the method described by Réti above in the endgame. Here is an example:

\[ \text{Englisch – Steinitz} \]
\[ \text{London 1883} \]

1 \( \text{e}4 \) \( \text{e}5 \) 2 \( \text{f}3 \) \( \text{c}6 \) 3 \( \text{b}5 \) \( \text{g}6 \)
As mentioned above, Steinitz was very fond of the fianchetto of his king’s bishop, as it often leads to the closed positions that he liked. This particular line, which was also employed regularly by Smyslov, is still seen occasionally nowadays, although White is supposed to get a slight opening advantage with correct play.

4 \( \text{d}4 \) \( \text{exd}4 \) 5 \( \text{xd}4 ? ! \)
According to contemporary opening theory, 5 \( \text{g}5 ! \) is best here; e.g., 5...\( \text{e}7 \) 6 \( \text{xe}7 \) \( \text{xe}7 \)

7 \( \text{xc}6 \) \( \text{xc}6 \) 8 \( \text{xd}4 \) \( \text{f}6 \) 9 \( \text{c}3 \) with a small plus for White, although Black’s position is solid, as seen in a number of Smyslov’s games.

5...\( \text{g}7 \) 6 \( \text{e}3 \) \( \text{f}6 \) 7 \( \text{c}3 \) 0-0 8 0-0 \( \text{e}7 ! \)

8...\( \text{xd}4 \) 9 \( \text{xd}4 \) \( \text{d}6 \) gives White a pleasant space advantage with the e4-pawn vs the d6-pawn, a small but lasting advantage, which Tarrasch was a great champion in utilizing. Instead, Steinitz aims at liberating his position by ...\( \text{d}5 \). At the same time White is provoked to play 9 \( \text{e}5 \), which, however, only weakens his position after 9...\( \text{e}8 \) 10 \( \text{f}4 \) \( \text{d}6 \). This resembles the idea behind Alekhine’s Defence (1 \( \text{e}4 \) \( \text{f}6 \)):

10 \( \text{w}2 \) \( \text{d}5 \) 10 \( \text{exd}5 \) \( \text{xd}5 \) 11 \( \text{xd}5 \)

12 \( \text{e}2 \) \( \text{g}4 ! \)
As always Steinitz goes after the two bishops.

13 \( \text{h}4 \) \( \text{h}4 \) 14 \( \text{d}3 \) \( \text{xd}2 \) 15 \( \text{xd}2 \) \( \text{d}8 \) 16 \( \text{c}3 \)
White didn’t really have any choice, but as Réti points out, this weakens the white position even further (notably the d3-square) and places the pawn on the same colour as his own bishop.

16...\( \text{e}8 \) 17 \( \text{b}3 \) (D)

17...\( \text{b}6 ! \)
Steinitz initiates the plan that we already know from his game against Rosenthal above. He wants to build the pawn-chain c5/b6/a7 in order to restrict White’s minor pieces.

18 \( \text{h}3 \) \( \text{e}6 \) 19 \( \text{f}1 \) \( \text{c}5 \) 20 \( \text{g}5 \) \( \text{f}6 \) 21 \( \text{f}4 \) \( \text{g}7 \) 22 \( \text{f}3 \) \( \text{g}5 \) 23 \( \text{xd}8 \) \( \text{xd}8 \) 24 \( \text{c}3 \) \( \text{h}6 \) 25 \( \text{e}1 \) \( \text{f}5 \) 26 \( \text{f}4 \) \( \text{f}6 \) 27 \( \text{g}3 \) \( \text{a}5 ! \)
The knight is restricted even further.

28 \( \text{c}1 \) \( \text{a}4 \) 29 \( \text{a}3 \)
A further weakness of the light squares, but 29...a3 had to be prevented.

29...c4 30 f2 (D)

![Chessboard Diagram]

30...gxf4! 31 xf4 g5!

One of the strong points of the pair of bishops is that you can decide for yourself when it is beneficial to exchange one of them. Here Steinitz shows an example of Tarrasch’s famous words: the important thing is not what is exchanged, but what remains on the board! Compare the remaining pieces: the c4-bishop is much better than the knight imprisoned on c1, and the black rook threatens to penetrate on d2.

32 xg5 hxg5 33 e3 f6 34 h4?!

This loses, but it was not easy for White to find a decent move. He is almost in zugzwang. The knight has no moves, and a rook move is answered by ...e5 followed by ...f4+, when Black penetrates with his rook.

34...gxf4 35 gxf4 e8+ 36 f2 xel 37 xel e5

White is lost: he has no defence against the penetration by the black king.

38 d2 xex2 39 xe2 f4 40 c4 g4 41 e3 f4+ 42 e4 f3 43 e3 g3 0-1

Steinitz was not just a master in handling the two bishops. He developed coherent theories concerning positional play. Steinitz believed that the beautiful combinations that stunned the public did not occur at random or simply due to a master’s genius. Rather, combinations occur in positions where there is a positional foundation for them. This foundation can be a temporary weakness, which is then exploited, or can be a lasting advantage, which is systematically developed into something tangible, where combinations can be a natural element due to the weakness in the enemy camp. In neither case do combinations occur ‘out of nowhere’, but as a natural consequence of some positional (lasting or temporary) superiority. Let us see an example of this in one of Steinitz’s most famous games.

Steinitz – Chigorin
Havana Wch (4) 1892

Steinitz and Chigorin were archrivals, whose rivalry resembles that of Karpov vs Kasparov in the 1980s. Like in the K-K struggle, the two players had very different styles and perceptions of chess, and one (Steinitz and Karpov) was significantly older than the other (Chigorin and Kasparov). Steinitz and Karpov were champions of pawn play, whereas Chigorin and Kasparov’s trademark lay in active piece-play. But here the similarities end. While Karpov eventually had to give way to Kasparov, Steinitz managed to prevail in two matches against Chigorin, before eventually losing the world championship title to Lasker in 1894. Both Steinitz-Chigorin matches were played in Havana, in 1889 and 1892, and especially the second was a gigantic struggle. In the first match Steinitz won comfortably +10, −6, =1, while the second ended +10, −8, =5 for Steinitz. In the last game of that match, Chigorin was close to equalizing to 9-9, but instead he blundered and missed mate in two moves, losing the game and the match on the spot. The present game is perhaps Steinitz’s best game of the match.

1 e4 e5 2 d4 c6 3 b5 d6 4 d3

This move was Steinitz’s favourite, as it leads to closed positions and long-term manoeuvring. In a world championship match played 108 years later, between Kasparov and Kramnik in London 2000, Kasparov refrained from this quiet move, but as shown above, he was not able to make an impact on Kramnik’s position after 4 0-0 xe4. After the match Kasparov was asked why he didn’t try 4 d3, but he dismissed this idea with the comment that “it does not lead to an opening advantage for White”. This shows how chess has developed over the past 100 years: it has become a much more concrete game, where precise calculations and
evaluations are emphasized much more than in Steinitz's times.

4...d6 5 c3 g6 6 ∆bd2 ∆g7 7 ∆f1

Notice that Steinitz postpones castling. This was often seen in his games and later led Réti to formulate the principle: "Castling should be postponed until there is nothing better to do." This does not mean that castling is unimportant, but on the other hand there is often no reason to rush to castle, as committing the king to one side of the board already puts constraints on possible future plans. This game is a case in point: by postponing castling, Steinitz retains the option of castling queenside and initiating a kingside attack.

7...0-0 8 ∆a4

Preserving White's light-squared 'Spanish' bishop, which is often key to White's play in the Ruy Lopez. Steinitz gives the line 8 ∆e2?! ∆d7 9 ∆a4 ∆d4! 10 cxd4 ∆xa4 11 dxe5 ∆xe5 12 ∆xe5 ∆b5 as clearly better for Black.

8...∆d7 9 ∆e3 ∆c5 10 ∆c2 ∆e6 (D)

11 h4!?

On this bold move, Steinitz commented: "Normally I am not a dangerous attacker early in the game, but I saw a weakness in the enemy's kingside, and if you put a finger in my mouth, I will bite, even at my age!" This comment reveals Steinitz's way of thinking: when there is a weakness - especially if the weakness is temporary - in the enemy's camp, one must attack; otherwise the advantage disappears. The question is then: where is the weakness that Steinitz refers to? It is the pawn on g6, which White attempts to challenge by h4-h5 (reinforced by the fact that the black knight has left f6). After hxg6 Black will face a dilemma: either to take back with the h-pawn, leaving the open h-file to White (now it becomes clear why White delayed castling!) or to take back with the f-pawn (as in the game), leaving the a2-g8 diagonal open for White's powerful bishop. Another important point is that the centre is stable. Steinitz was one of the first to emphasize the principle "a flank attack should be countered by action in the centre". That is not really possible for Black here.

11...∆e7

Black faces a difficult choice. He had two major alternatives:

a) 11...h6 is probably safest but leads to a pleasant advantage for White after 12 h5 g5 13 ∆f5 due to the permanent weakness of the light squares in Black's camp.

b) 11...f5!? is more active, but also more dangerous for Black. White can choose 12 exf5 gxf5 13 d4!, which is in accordance with the principle of countering flank play with action in the centre, and which according to Neishtadt's analysis in his book on Steinitz leads to an advantage for White. Another option - which I believe Steinitz would have chosen - is 12 h5 f4 13 ∆d5 g5 14 h6 ∆f6 15 ∆h2 with some advantage for White, who again benefits from delaying castling.

12 h5 d5 13 hxg6 (D)

13...fxg6?!

A key moment in the game, and a very instructive one. Several authors criticize this move and recommend 13...hxg6, pointing to a line apparently originating from Chigorin: 14 exd5 ∆xd5 15 ∆xd5 ∆xd5 16 ∆h6 ∆xh6 17 ∆xh6
with good play for Black. That is undoubtedly true, but the instructive point is that Steinitz would not have opened the centre with 14 exd5. I agree with Réti and Neishtadt who claim that Steinitz would presumably have played 14 We2 (14...Df4 15 Wf1) followed by Dd2 and castling queenside, trying to initiate an attack down the h-file, which has been opened to White’s advantage. In Steinitz’s terminology, the h-file would constitute a weakness that White should attempt to utilize. To do this he needs to reinforce the centre, not open it. After 13...fxg6 the weakness is to be found elsewhere: in the a2-g8 diagonal. Accordingly, Steinitz changes his plan and immediately initiates action to clear this diagonal and utilize this weakness. The course of the game shows this in impressive fashion, as Chigorin fails to recognize the danger and allows Steinitz to finish the game with a beautiful combination. However, in my opinion the real value of this game is not in the combination on move 24, but in the way Steinitz builds up his play and is ready to change plans whenever he sees a new weakness in the enemy camp. It is with this kind of profound thinking that Steinitz outmatched his peers and justifiably rose to fame in the history of chess.

14 exd5! Dxd5 15 Dxd5 Wxd5 16 h3 Wc6 17 We2 Dd7 18 e3 Dh8 19 0-0-0 Zae8 20 Wf1! (D)

A brilliant attacking move! White has already taken possession of the a2-g8 diagonal, and the next step is to open the centre by playing d4, so that the adjacent a1-h8 diagonal can be attacked. At the same time the innocent-looking queen move sets up a beautiful combination that concludes this fine game.

20...a5 21 d4! exd4 22 Zxd4 Zxd4

An awful concession, but other moves were no better. 22...Dxd4? loses immediately to 23 Zxh7+! Dh7 24 Wh1+, and neither 22...Wf4 23 c2 Dg4 24 f3 Wg3 25 Df5! gxf5 26 Dxd7 nor 22...Wf6 23 Dc4 Wa8 24 Df3 (Euwe) leaves Black with much hope.

23 Zxd4!

White threatens 24 Ddh4, after which both weaknesses are probed – the diagonals as well as the h-file!

23...Dxd4 (D)

Allowing the brilliant finish that has made this game famous.

24 Zxh7+! Dh7 25 Wh1+ Dg7 26 Dh6+ Dh6 27 Wh4+ De5 28 Zxd4+ 1-0

After 28...Df5 both 29 g4# and 29 Df4# are mate.

The next great theorist in chess history is the German, Siegbert Tarrasch. Although Tarrasch never managed to win the world championship, he was most likely the strongest player in the world in the beginning of the 1890s, when he won four international tournaments in a row (Breslau 1889, Manchester 1890, Dresden 1892 and Leipzig 1894), unprecedented at the time. He actually did get the offer to challenge Steinitz in 1890, but due to his family and professional obligations (he was a doctor in Nuremberg and later Munich) declined the offer to go all the way to Havana to fight for the world title. I believe he would have had good chances in a match in 1890 against an ageing Steinitz. Presumably
Tarrasch later regretted his decision, as another German instead took the world championship title from Steinitz in 1894 – Emanuel Lasker. Tarrasch and Lasker were not the best of friends, and their view on chess, as we shall see, was very different. There is a curious tale about Tarrasch and Lasker. After the tournament in Dresden 1892, which Tarrasch won convincingly, Tarrasch was challenged to a match by his young countryman Lasker. Tarrasch declined the challenge with the remark that when Lasker had proven his worth by winning a big international tournament, Tarrasch would be ready to play him in a match, but not before. Perhaps chess history would have been different if this match had materialized in 1892. In 1908 he got his chance in a world championship match against Lasker, but at that time Tarrasch was over his peak, whereas Lasker was still in his prime. Lasker won the match convincingly.

In a way Tarrasch built on Steinitz’s ideas, although he did not agree with all of them. Especially the closed positions were far from Tarrasch’s view on chess. He was a proponent of free and active piece-play, pawn dominance in the centre and space. Some of his best games are model examples of these features of chess strategy. Let us see the following exhibition on how to convert a spatial advantage. Tarrasch’s opponent is another of the great past masters, who in 1910 drew a match with Lasker for the world championship only after losing the last game.

Tarrasch – Schlechter
Leipzig 1874

1 e4 e5 2 d3 d6 3 Bb5 d6

This leads to the closed positions that Steinitz liked, but which Tarrasch felt had the “seeds of disaster in them”. Black gets a solid but restrained position. One of the discoveries of the hypermodern thinkers (especially Nimzowitsch) was that the key to understanding such positions is not necessarily the actual space, but the chances for initiating active play – a more dynamic approach to the classical principle of space advantages. In this game Tarrasch shows the merits of this advantage.

4 d4 c3 5 dxe6 6-0-0 f7 7 e1 dxe4

This is forced, as the attempt to maintain the centre with 7...0-0? loses: 8 x7 e6 x7 e6 9 dxe5 w3 10 x7 e8 11 x7 e7 12 x7 d3 13 f3 c5 14 x7 c5 dxe5 15 x7 g5! x7 d5 17 c7 x7 e8 18 c4 1-0 Tarrasch-Marcio, Dresden 1892. But in Tarrasch’s view it also symbolizes the failure of Black’s opening set-up that he has to abandon the stronghold in the centre, thereby handing White a space advantage.

8 d7 x7 d7 9 dxe7+ x7 d7 10 x7 d4 0-0 (D)

On this position, Tarrasch notes: “White’s advantage is apparently not that important: he has the freer game. White controls four rows, whereas Black has to make do with three. The fifth row is free. This is all that White could get out of the opening. But this game is a very instructive example of how such an insignificant advantage can be converted consistently into a win. During the entire game White keeps more space for manoeuvres and Black never succeeds in stepping past the third row.” Black’s problem – as the hypermodern school would later show – is not only his lack of space, but the fact that he cannot initiate any of the counter-strikes ...d5, ...f5 or even ...b5 (after White plays c4).

11 b3 f8 12 b2 f8 13 x7 d1 c6 14 x7 d3 c6 15 x7 e1 x7 e6 18 b3 x7 b6 17 x7 d3

Strategy as simple rules: with more space one should prevent freeing exchanges.

17...c6 18 x7 a4 x7 c7 19 c4

White consistently builds up his space advantage. His play is centred around preventing liberating thrusts like ...d5, ...f5 and ...b5.
19...\(\text{\textit{d7}}\) 20 \(\text{\textit{h1}}\) (D)

20...\(\text{\textit{f6}}\)?

A very instructive mistake. White had a pleasant spatial advantage, but no real attacking points. The potentially weak pawn on \(d6\) is safely protected. The move ...\(\text{\textit{f6}}\) opens a clear target for White, which allows him to exploit his extra freedom of action. In the chapter on Tarrasch in Masters of the Chessboard, Réti explains Tarrasch's teachings on how to exploit such advantages: "The second stratagem [the first being on 'the bad bishop' - LBH] concerns the typical method of treating an opponent's restricted position. It is, generally speaking, not possible in a closed position to bring about a decision by direct action and it becomes necessary to begin by opening up the position. A favourable decision can only be reached by the leading side attacking with his pawns on one of the flanks, so as to force the opening of the game. It is very essential in this manoeuvre that, before breaking through and opening the game, the greater freedom of action be used in such a way that the pieces are posted as favourably as possible for the ensuing open game." The problem with ...\(\text{\textit{f6}}\) is that it actually helps White in his quest for opening the game, as \(g4-g5\) can now be played with much greater impact. The way Tarrasch converts his advantage is very much in line with the description given by Réti.

\begin{center}
\textbf{Tarrasch - Berger}
\end{center}

Breslau 1889

\begin{center}
\textbf{Tarrasch has just played 13 c3 and plans to open the centre by \(d4\). In Steinitz's view this was not the correct plan. Tarrasch comments:}
\end{center}

The decisive break. Notice how carefully Tarrasch has optimized the mobility of all his pieces before initiating action.

31...\(\text{\textit{fxg5}}\) 32 \(\text{\textit{Exg5}}\) \(g6\) 33 \(\text{\textit{f5}}\) \(\text{\textit{e5}}\)
Hopeless, but \(\text{\textit{c3}}\) was a major threat.
34 \(\text{\textit{f4}}\) \(\text{\textit{xf5}}\)
34...\(\text{\textit{exf4}}\) is answered by 35 \(\text{\textit{wc3}}\).
35 \(\text{\textit{exf5}}\) \(\text{\textit{g7}}\) 36 \(\text{\textit{fxg6}}\) 1-0

Notice the logical build-up of a small advantage (more space) to a decisive assault. Such logical game-flows are typical of the pure theorist.

Theorists like building models and concepts - like Tarrasch's concept for how to exploit a space advantage, as explained in the notes to the above game. However, the risk of such models and concepts is that they become too rigid. Dogmatic thinking is a potential risk of theorists, and Steinitz and Tarrasch are both cases in point. They did not want to back down from any of their views, and they did not easily accept opposing views or findings. In his excellent book Verdens bedste skak ("The World's Best Chess" - unfortunately only published in Danish), the Danish IM Jens Enevoldsen has an amusing discussion on the differences in opinion between Steinitz and Tarrasch, when it comes to closed positions. The position in question is the following:

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“On this move, Steinitz notes in International Chess Magazine: ‘We do not consider this breakthrough in the centre as good as letting Black suffer as long as possible from the defects of the doubled pawns. At the very least we would have preferred to postpone this manoeuvre, until the knight had been brought to e3 via d2 and c4.’ This remark is very interesting and characteristic for Steinitz’s slow, cautious and not very active style of playing. To me the way of playing suggested by Steinitz is outright disgusting, and the one chosen by me is the quickest way to show the weaknesses in the enemy’s camp, as the course of the game shows.”

Two very stout theorists with differences in opinion! Notice the very rigid views – no acceptance of the opposing view. They agree that the doubled pawns constitute a weakness in the black position, but they thoroughly disagree as to how this defect is best exploited. Who is right? Enevoldsen concludes that Tarrasch is right. The weaknesses must be attacked. He notes humorously that it does not hurt to be put on the bench of torture in itself – it is only when they actually start torturing you that the discomfort sets in! In other words, Black only feels the defects in his position when they are attacked. In line with the thinking introduced in Chapter 3, my standpoint is somewhat different. I believe that there is some truth in both claims. Arguments can be found for both continuations. Which continuation is best not only depends on the position on the board, but also of the players involved. For Tarrasch, who valued free piece-play, c3 and d4 is clearly the way to play, but for a ‘slow’ player like Steinitz, the subtle reshuffling of the minor pieces first will probably lead to the best result. I am convinced that both Steinitz and Tarrasch would have won this position, but the way they would do it would differ. But that doesn’t really matter. Chess is about getting results. This pragmatic approach is seen much more in the games of Steinitz and Tarrasch’s rival, Lasker. Lasker was a pragmatic player who didn’t care much for theories, models and dogma, but who simply wanted to win. Theoretical discussions didn’t interest him much in chess, but much more so in mathematics and philosophy, with which he also worked. Steinitz, Tarrasch and other theorists, on the other hand, believed in a more scientific approach, where there is one and only one correct solution to the problem, which should be only looked upon as a chess problem. I believe that this is an unnecessary constraint, and that problems and decisions in chess should be approached as competitive problems – how to achieve the desired result. Here I am in line with Lasker. Let us briefly return to the game to follow Tarrasch’s plan.

13...£d7 14 d4 exd4 15 cxd4 £f6 16 £e3 cxd4 17 £xd4 £e8 18 £c2 £xd4 19 £xd4 £c5 20 f3 £f6 21 £fd1 (D)

White maintains some advantage, as he has the better pawn-structure (two islands versus three). But Black is still very much in the game, and it took a mistake by Black to turn White’s advantage into something really tangible and eventually into a win on move 73. In itself the game does not settle the dispute between the two great theorists.

Tarrasch had a great impact on the development of chess, as his writings were more easily accessible than Steinitz’s. At the same time his active and logical style of play was also more appreciated by the general public. His strong beliefs in the necessity to dominate the centre with pawns were later modified by the hypermoderns, but in this modified form still remain valid. Witness a game like the following:

Tarrasch – Spielmann
Nuremberg 1910

1 d4 d5 2 £f3 c5 3 c4 £e6 4 £c3 £f6 5 £c3 £c6 6 £d3
Nowadays 6 a3 and 6 cxd5 are more common.

6...dxc4

In modern thinking this wins a tempo, but to Tarrasch this is a concession (especially in connection with Black’s 10th move), as Black forfeits the centre.

7 ¤xc4 a6 8 0-0 b5 9 ¤d3 ¤b7

Compared to a normal Queen’s Gambit Accepted, Black has won a tempo (…¢b8-c6). But Tarrasch is more focused on White’s potential pawn-majority in the centre.

10 a4 c4?

On this move, Tarrasch notes: “Black has given up the centre with his 6th move, and consequently he now places the emphasis of his play on the queenside – a weighty strategic mistake. In the opening or at least in the early middlegame the main battle takes place in the centre, and who is stronger here will emerge with a positional advantage and attack.” Such comments have led generations of players to think twice before committing to ...c4 in such positions. After all, who wants to commit well-known ‘weighty strategic mistakes’ early on in the game? But perhaps things are not so clear-cut after all. In his review of Kasparov’s My Great Predecessors Volume II in New in Chess 1/2004, Sadler writes of his surprise about the fact that Kasparov did not put a question mark on Maroczy’s 14...c4 in the following position against the world champion Euwe in Zandvoort 1936:

14...c4

Had such a move not been known to be bad for decades? Apparently not, since according to Kasparov Black’s mistake only came later! This shows how chess has evolved. In order to obtain success in modern chess it is necessary to abandon dogmatic thinking and to think creatively and concretely in every position. However, the fundamental strategic rules formulated by classical thinkers like Steinitz and Tarrasch, as well as hypermodern thinkers like Nimzowitsch and Réti still form a good starting-point for strategy-making in chess. But they should not be seen as overly rigid and prescriptive. In the present position Black is excellently developed and is ready to initiate piece exchanges (…¢xe5). White’s pawn-majority in the centre should form the basis for a kingside attack, whereas in the endgame the outside pawn-majority can be a strong asset. For the sake of history, let us relive this famous and fine game:

15 ¤bl c8?

This is much too slow – Kasparov recommends 15...¢xe5, after which White has to content himself with a complicated position after 16 ¤xe5 c7 17 ¤c2 f5! 18 ¥f4 ¥f6 with chances for both sides, since 16 dxe5?! ¥xd1 17 ¥xd1 ¥d5 is fine for Black.

16 ¥e2 ¤xe5

Now this is too late, as White has avoided the queen exchange, although according to Kasparov’s analysis, Black is still not without chances. 17 dxe5! ¥xh7 18 ¥h5 ¥f8 19 ¥c1 ¥c7 20 ¥xh6!? gxh6 21 ¥d4 f5 22 ¥xf6 ¥xf6 23 ®g4+ ¥g7 24 ¥xh6 ¥ad8 25 ¥e2 e5 26 ¥g3 ¥e6 27 ¥h4 ¥d3 28 ¥f5 ¥g6 29 ¥h5 ¥f7 30 h4 ¥f8 31 ¥h6+ ¥xh6 32 ¥xh6 ¥h7 33 ¥g5 ¥f7 34 ¥xd3 cxd3 35 ¥f5+ 1-0

Let us return to the Tarrasch-Spielmann game, where things go a bit easier for White:

11 ¥c2 b4 12 ¥e4 ¥a5 13 ¥xf6+ ¥xf6 14 e4

Let us quote Tarrasch again: “This is the move which exploits the mistake ...dxc4. Black has abandoned the centre and White now completely controls it. In return Black has the upper hand on the queenside, but this – even if this is not unimportant – has never – ceteris paribus – been as important as the control of the centre.”

14...b3?! 15 ¥b1 ¥b4 16 ¥g5! ¥g6 17 ¥d2!

Now Black is lost. His queenside collapses.

17...¥xd2 18 ¥xd2 ¥c6 19 d5 (D)

The decisive break in the centre.
Steinitz and Tarrasch are the most famous proponents of the classical school of chess, and their place in the hierarchy of chess thinkers is unchallenged, even if some of their theories were too rigid and have proven insufficiently flexible to survive unharmed. Many of Steinitz and Tarrasch’s concepts are still valid, but they cannot stand alone, as the example of ‘...c4 in Queen Gambit positions’ shows. That is the typical pattern of theory: someone has to build the foundation, from which the thinking can develop further. Eventually, the classical style was overtaken by the ‘hypermodern’ generation with Nimzowitsch and Réti as the best-known figures.

Judged on impact on chess, Aron Nimzowitsch is by far the most important figure in chess history. Steinitz can be called the father of chess strategy and Tarrasch the teacher that brought Steinitz’s theories to the broader chess public in an accessible way. But Nimzowitsch is the one most contemporary chess-players think of and refer to when the topic is chess strategy. His famous book My System remains—in my opinion—the most important and influential chess book ever written—a must for all aspiring chess-players.

Nimzowitsch introduced concepts to chess—such as prophylaxis, overprotection and blockade—which remain valid to this day. However, as in so many cases, the best thinker is not necessarily the best practical player. Nimzowitsch never became World Champion (on his business cards, he titled himself “Candidate for the World Championship in Chess”), and in his games he did not always manage to get his profound ideas translated into powerful moves at the board. In the early days of his career, this gave him a reputation as a ‘strange’ player, as the general public (and even the masters) at first did not understand his play and his ideas.

Nimzowitsch lived his last 12 years (up to his death in 1935) in Denmark, and here we call him ‘Denmark’s chess teacher’. But really he is the chess teacher of the world. To illustrate some of Nimzowitsch’s ideas in practice, I have chosen two games that are not among his most famous (although I strongly recommend that the reader thoroughly analyses Nimzowitsch’s games against Sämisch, Copenhagen 1923 and P. Johner, Dresden 1926; the latter is among my personal favourites and would feature high on my top ten of all-time best games! However, these games are rightly famous and can be found in a variety of other sources). Notice the evolution from the ideas of Steinitz and Tarrasch to Nimzowitsch. In the following game the concepts of ‘space’, ‘7th rank’ and ‘passed pawn’ are shown and refined.

Brinckmann – Nimzowitsch
Bad Niendorf 1927

1 e4 Qc6?!

This move was Nimzowitsch’s own invention and pet. The idea is to counterattack in the centre after 2 d4 d5. However, compared to his defence against 1 d4—the Nimzo-Indian, 1...Qf6 2 c4 e6 3 Qc3 Qb4—this variation has not really caught on. One problem is that White can easily transpose into other openings. After 2 Qf3 Black doesn’t really have anything better than 2...e5 (although 2...d6 is played by hardcore Nimzowitsch fans), and in the game we see a transposition to a rare line of the French Defence.

2 Qc3 e6 3 d4 d5 4 e5 Qge7 5 Qf3 b6 6 Qe2??!

This plays into Black’s hands, as it allows the exchange of the light-squared bishops.

6...Qa6! 7 Qg3 Qxf1 8 Qxf1 h5!

A deep move, typical of Nimzowitsch. After the exchange of the light-squared bishops, Black wants to seize the light squares on the kingside.
As Réti notes, 10 h4 was better to prevent Black from seizing more space on the kingside.

10...Bg6 11 c3 h4 12 Qe2 Qe7 13 h3 Qxg5 14 Qxg5 Qce7 (D)

It is mainly because of this position that I have included this game. It illustrates the advances in the understanding of cramped positions from Tarrasch to Nimzowitsch. Let me once again quote Réti, who explained this as follows: "Much profit can be derived from a study of this position. White is in control of more territory, and so one might think he has the advantage. But that is not the case. The real criterion by which to appraise closed positions is the possibility of breaking through. In general, the player who can move freely over a greater area can probably place his pieces to break through later more advantageously than his opponent, who is restricted in his movements. As we know, this is the idea underlying the method of playing in restricted positions, an idea to which Tarrasch has contributed much. Tarrasch's opposite, Nimzowitsch, now shows that one may be in a restricted position and yet have every possibility of breaking through. Thus, in the present situation, the possibilities of White's breaking through obviously lie in c4 and f4-f5. The first is scarcely a strong move, for White dominates more territory in the middle and on the kingside, but not on the queenside. In the present case it is a particularly doubtful move, as White's d4-pawn would become backward. The liberating move dictated by the position would therefore be f4-f5. But there can be no question of making those moves, as White will obviously never be able to dominate the point f5. Furthermore, Black has made very good provision for the future in his seemingly artificial but really very profound manoeuvres (...Qg6, h5-h4, ...Qce7, but above all in the exchange of White's light-squared bishop). Thus, while White has no possibilities of breaking through and is, therefore, limited to making waiting moves behind the wall of his pawns, Black has at his disposal the possibilities of breaking through afforded him by ...f6 and ...c5. Black alone, therefore, is able to take the initiative, and consequently he is in a superior position, in spite of his limited control of territory."

15 Qg1 f6! 16 c3 Qd7 17 Qh2 c5 18 c4!

Brinckmann himself calls this an "act of violence", as otherwise he would be gradually crushed through lack of counterplay. I believe 18 c4 is White's best chance to complicate matters. It also gives Nimzowitsch the chance to show other elements of his system, such as the importance of the 7th rank and the power of the passed pawn.

18...Qc7 19 exd5 c4! 20 Wc2 exd5 21 Qhe1 0-0 (D)

Notice that Nimzowitsch does follow some of the rules formulated by Steinitz. Here he has postponed castling, as other strategic considerations had higher priority.

22 Qc3 fxe5 23 Qxe5 Qxe5 24 dxe5 d4!

The passed pawn has an inherent lust to expand!

25 Qb5 Wc5 26 Qd6 d3?!

Nimzowitsch sacrifices his pawn-chain in return for an endgame where his rook reaches
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the 7th rank and the strong d-pawn ties White up. The alternative was 26...b5, but as Réti points out, White would have certain counter-chances on the kingside after 27 \( \text{xd}2 \) followed by \( \text{g}5 \) or \( \text{f}4 \).

27 \( \text{xc}4+ \) \( \text{xc}4 \) 28 \( \text{xe}4 \) \( \text{xf}2 \) 29 \( \text{d}1 \) \( \text{e}8 \) 30 \( \text{e}3 \) \( \text{d}8 \) 31 \( \text{f}4 \) \( \text{f}5 \) (D)

W

32 a4

After 32 e6 Nimzowitsch had prepared the beautiful reply 32...\( \text{e}2 \)! Now 33 \( \text{xe}2 \) fails to 33...\( \text{dxe}2 \) 34 \( \text{xd}8+ \) (34 \( \text{e}1 \) \( \text{d}4 \) followed by \( \text{xe}8 \text{xe}6 \) 34...\( \text{h}7 \) and the pawn queens, and after 33 \( \text{xd}3 \) \( \text{xe}1 \) 34 \( \text{xd}8+ \) \( \text{h}7 \) White is defenceless against the threat of \( \text{g}3 \) and \( \text{h}1 \#.

32...\( \text{f}7 \) 33 \( \text{e}4 \) \( \text{e}2 \)! 34 \( \text{f}4 \)
34 \( \text{xe}2 \) \( \text{dxe}2 \) 35 \( \text{e}1 \) loses to 35...\( \text{d}1 \! \! \! 36 \) \( \text{xe}2 \) \( \text{g}3 \) and White is mated.

34...\( \text{e}6 \) 35 \( \text{g}4 \) \( \text{d}2 \) 36 \( \text{g}6+ \) \( \text{f}7 \) 37 \( \text{g}4 \) \( \text{a}6 \! \! \! \text{!}

The white knight is dislodged from c4 by ...b5, after which \( \text{d}3 \) decides.

38 \( \text{f}4 \) \( \text{e}6 \) 39 \( \text{d}6 \) \( \text{e}3 \) 0-1

One of Nimzowitsch’s key themes is the concept of overprotection. This is a very profound and important concept for chess strategy, but it can also appear to be quite abstract. Why should I use my pieces to cover points in my own camp rather than actively attacking the opponent’s camp? Here I shall offer my explanation of the concept by comparing it to a concept from organization theory known as resource dependence theory. Organizations rely on a variety of resources, many of which are provided by suppliers or other alliance partners.

The organization is dependent on these resources, and especially if the specific resources are scarce and critical for the organization, the suppliers will have a strong power in the relationship. The organization will lack flexibility and its fate and strategic options will be in the hands of the suppliers. The intelligent manager of such an organization will devise strategies that will decrease the power of the suppliers and increase the flexibility and possible options of the organization. One way (of many) to do this is to have more suppliers, thereby decreasing the dependence on any one of them. The same thinking can be used in chess to understand the content and value of Nimzowitsch’s overprotection concept. The key first step is to identify the strategically critical points in the position – as the business manager assesses which resources are critical and scarce for the organization. In chess, these are often central squares or pawns. These are the points that should be overprotected. Overprotection actually increases flexibility and decreases the power of the opponent, just as business strategies can increase flexibility and reduce the power of suppliers. If a critical point (e.g. a central pawn) is attacked three times by the opponent, and it is only covered three times, then the flexibility and the power is with the opponent, as he can at any time choose to deploy his attacking force elsewhere. The defending pieces, on the other hand, are inflexible and dependent on the opponent’s moves. They cannot choose to move, as this would cost the essential central pawn. If, on the other hand, the central pawn is covered four times (or more), the defending pieces still have their freedom. Any one of them can at a given point in time leave the protection role and be actively deployed elsewhere, as the pawn will still be sufficiently covered. By overprotecting the pawn, flexibility is increased, and the power to choose is no longer in the hands of the opponent. The key, of course – in business as well as in chess – is to identify the strategically important and critical points that merit overprotection. A good rule of thumb is to look closely towards the centre. The classical thinkers were right in their emphasis of the importance of the centre. However, as Nimzowitsch and other hypermoderns taught us, you do not necessarily have to occupy the centre.
with pawns to dominate it; overprotecting it with pieces can be just as powerful.

One of Nimzowitsch’s own favourite games with overprotection was the following consultation game. His line of thought at move 14 is very instructive and shows the true theorist at work: always logical reasoning as the basis for decision-making.

Brodd, Paulsson & Mandel – Nimzowitsch
Uppsala 1921

1 e4 0-0 2 d4 d5 3 c4 f6!? 3...e5 is perhaps safer, but Nimzowitsch had great faith in his opening – perhaps too great. This is a common trait in theorists: sticking too much to their own theories!

4 b5

Nimzowitsch himself believed 4 f4 to be a better move, as te Kolste played against him in Baden-Baden 1925. This exciting game went: 4...exf4 5 dxc6 e6 6 Qg3 fxe5 7 fxe5 Wd7 8 Qxf5 exf5 9 b5 a6 10 Qe2 g6 11 0-0 h6 12 bxc6 bxc6 13 Wd2 Qg7 14 Qc3 Qe7 15 Qe3 Qd8 16 Qe2 g5 17 c4 0-0 18 Qb4 c6 19 g3 f4 20 gxf4 g4?! 21 Qg2 Qh5 (blockade!) 22 Qb3 dxc4 23 Wxc4+ Qh8 24 Wc3 h5 25 Qd1 h4 26 Qd3 Qd5 27 Qd2 Qg8 28 Qxd5 cxd5 29 Qh1 g3 30 hxg3 hxg3 31 Qg2 Qh4+ 32 Qg1 Qf8 33 Qxf3 Qxg3+! 34 Qxg3 Qf3+ 35 Qh2 Qg7 36 Qd3 (Nimzowitsch gave 36 f5 as equal) 36...Qf8 37 Qxf3? (after 37 e6! White is not worse) 37...Qxf3+ 0-1. 4 Qd3 also comes into consideration. Black often has to walk a tightrope to get his pieces out in this line.

4...Qf5 5 Qf3 Wd7 6 e4 Qxb1!

This surprising exchange is part of Black’s plan: to seize the key central square d5. The bl-knight could be a key piece for White in the fight for this square.

7 Qxb1 0-0-0 8 cxd5

On 8 c5 Nimzowitsch intended 8...g5!?. This is consistent with Steinitz’s teachings: when the centre is stable, a flank attack can be initiated, but not before.

8...Wxd5 9 Qxc6 Wxc6 10 0-0 e6 11 Qe3 Qc7 12 Wc2 Qd5

Black has reached his first goal. The knight has taken up a dominant position in the centre. Furthermore, the d4-pawn is backward and a potential weakness. But White also has certain trumps: more space, attacking chances on the queenside and the possibility of opening the e-file with exf6 in order to apply pressure on e6. Nimzowitsch assesses the position as approximately equal.

13 Qe1

Going for the attack. 13 exf6 gxf6 14 Qe1 was another option.

13...Wd7 14 Qc4 (D)

An interesting position. How should Black proceed? In My System, Nimzowitsch uses this position to explain his concept of overprotection. He explains his reasoning behind the following manoeuvre: “There is no doubt that the d5-knight is the pride of the black position. But it does not seem easy to find a plan. White is preparing an onslaught with Wd2 and Qe1-d3-c5, although this does not seem too threatening. The thinking which I followed in the game led me to find a hidden manoeuvre, which I also today regard as very good. Here are the individual steps of this line of thinking: I. The d5-knight is strong. II. This means that the overprotectors, the black queen on d7 and the d8-rook, are also strong. III. But the d8-rook is also engaged towards the kingside. Therefore: IV. The h-rook belongs on c8! Such logical deduction – albeit somewhat abstract and profound in this case – is typical of theorists. It is interesting to see how consistently Nimzowitsch carries out his plan, once it has been conceived.

14...Qh8! 15 Wd2 Qc8! 16 Qe1 Qe7 17 Qd3 Qd8

Nimzowitsch: “It is done! The d-rook can now fully regard itself as a central officer, since now the king protects its colleague on c8.”
Having consolidated, Black proceeds to active play, hoping to build up an attack on the kingside.

19 \texttt{c1}?

White loses the thread, and from this point on he is gradually outplayed. As Nimzowitsch points out, White should play 19 \texttt{b4} followed by \texttt{c5}. He gives two lines:

a) 19...\texttt{b5} 20 \texttt{c6} \texttt{b7} 21 \texttt{c5}+ \texttt{xc5} 22 \texttt{xc5} \texttt{b6} with decent play for Black on the light squares.

b) 19...\texttt{b6} 20 \texttt{c5} and now:

b1) Not 20...\texttt{xc5}? 21 \texttt{bxc5}+ \texttt{b7} (the only chance is 21...\texttt{b6}) 22 \texttt{c6} \texttt{e8} 23 \texttt{e4} \texttt{b6} 24 \texttt{d5}! \texttt{xc5} 25 \texttt{xa7}+ \texttt{b6} 26 \texttt{e8}+ \texttt{b8} 27 \texttt{xb6} \texttt{xc6} 28 \texttt{xe6}+ \texttt{f6} 29 \texttt{c5}+ \texttt{d7} 30 \texttt{g5} \texttt{d8} 31 \texttt{d5}+ \texttt{xc5} 32 \texttt{f2} \texttt{b8} 33 \texttt{xg3} \texttt{f6} 34 \texttt{h4}+ \texttt{g7} 35 \texttt{h2} \texttt{h7} and White wins, a beautiful line that Nimzowitsch calls a “true Morphy combination”!

b2) 20...\texttt{xc5}! 21 \texttt{bxc5} \texttt{c6} with chances for both sides.

19...\texttt{g5} 20 \texttt{c5} \texttt{xc5} 21 \texttt{xc5} \texttt{g8} 22 \texttt{we2} \texttt{h5}! 23 \texttt{d2}

Not 23 \texttt{wxh5}? \texttt{g4}, and the queen is in trouble.

23...\texttt{h4} 24 \texttt{a4} \texttt{g4} 25 \texttt{a5} \texttt{a6}! 26 \texttt{b4} \texttt{c6} (D)

White's attack has reached a dead end.

27 \texttt{h1} \texttt{f7} 28 \texttt{h3} \texttt{f4} 29 \texttt{we4} \texttt{f3} 30 \texttt{c1} \texttt{fxg2} 31 \texttt{exg2} \texttt{ef8} 32 \texttt{fe1} \texttt{g3!} 33 \texttt{hxg3} \texttt{hxg3} 34 \texttt{f4}

34...\texttt{exg3} 35 \texttt{fxg3}+ 36 \texttt{hxg3} \texttt{g8}+ is hopeless for White.

34...\texttt{de7} 35 \texttt{xe1}

And so is 35 \texttt{exg3} \texttt{fxg5}! with the idea 36 \texttt{g5} \texttt{xg5} 37 \texttt{fxg5} \texttt{d4} 38 \texttt{we1} \texttt{exg3}

Simplest. Black remains with a few extra pawns.

39 \texttt{g8} 40 \texttt{fxf4} 40 \texttt{g8} 41 \texttt{w2} \texttt{exg3}+ 42 \texttt{hxg3} \texttt{we4} 43 \texttt{h2} \texttt{we5} 44 \texttt{g2} \texttt{wd5}+ 0-1

It is no coincidence that so many openings are named after theorists (Nimzowitsch Defence, the Nimzo-Indian, the Steinitz variation in the Ruy Lopez, the Tarrasch variations in the Queen's Gambit and the Open Ruy Lopez, the Réti Opening, the Botvinnik System in the Semi-Slav, etc.). It is typical for the way theorists approach chess. Theorists attempt to build long-lasting theories, be it in the opening, in the middlegame or in the endgame. Theorists pursue concepts and openings that can be used again and again, and which do not depend on one decisive novelty, but on a sound overall concept. Obviously, not all opening concepts developed by theorists are equally sound and lasting, but in many cases they stubbornly stick to the opening anyway, as it is also a matter of pride. This stubbornness is a potential weakness, which an alert opponent may utilize in a practical game.

In chess circles, one often hears references to chess schools like the 'Russian School' or the 'Soviet School'. The first one is mainly associated with Chigorin, the second one with Botvinnik. However, I must say that I agree with Bent Larsen when he claims (in an article in the Danish magazine Skakbladet) that such schools don't really exist, at least if you look at the actual games of the masters and pupils associated with such schools. Studying the games of Chigorin, it is hard to see in what way he was the founder of a specific school in chess. This is also Réti's argument for not including Chigorin in his book Masters of the Chess Board. Chigorin was a world-class player, but his emphasis was on practical play rather than theorizing. It is hard to find a contemporary chess-player that can be said to play in the style of Chigorin. The same can be said about the 'Soviet School'. Like Larsen, I cannot really see the similarities
in the games of players such as Tal, Petrosian, Korchnoi, Spassky, Karpov and Kasparov.

Still, Mikhail Botvinnik is surely the most influential chess figure after World War II. Not because many contemporary players play like Botvinnik, but for the methods of working that Botvinnik introduced to chess. Botvinnik approached chess in a highly scientific and systematic way. His legacy goes far beyond the play at the board; Botvinnik showed aspiring chess-players how they must work on chess in order to obtain success at the board. His trademarks were thorough analysis of openings, middlegame structures and specific endgames as well as deep knowledge of the origins of chess strategy. Bronstein—who was very close to taking the world championship from Botvinnik in 1951 but had to settle for 12-12—once made the following remark about Botvinnik’s dreaded opening preparation: “What we know today, Botvinnik already knew yesterday. What we find out tomorrow, Botvinnik already knows today...” Once Botvinnik was asked in an interview if he did not find it sad that preparation had become such a large part of chess. “No”, Botvinnik replied, “if two players are equally talented, it is both natural and correct that the one who works the most will be the most successful.” Botvinnik showed that systematic work on chess can take you a long way, as there are a number of concepts and theories that have lasting value. This is in my opinion the key of the ‘Soviet School’. Players who have gone through the Botvinnik-inspired training methods rarely commit ‘known positional mistakes’. They have studied the teachings of Steinitz, Tarrasch, Nimzowitsch and other past giants. Different players play differently and have different styles and preferences, but they have one thing in common: you can be sure that they have thoroughly analysed the positions and structures that they play.

Botvinnik also emphasized the importance of physical training as part of chess preparation. Throughout his life he stayed in good physical shape through morning exercises. There is an interesting anecdote regarding this. In chess, the book title My System is connected with Nimzowitsch’s book from 1925, but in fact this title is borrowed from a book from 1904 by Jens Peter Müller, who had developed a system for exercises. According to the anecdote Botvinnik swore to both systems in his chess preparations, Nimzowitsch’s for chess and Müller’s for exercises!

One of the first chess books I read as a teenager was the Swedish edition of Kotov’s excellent Think Like a Grandmaster. Botvinnik is a prominent figure in many examples of Kotov’s books, and I was impressed by the following game and especially the simple and logical explanation Botvinnik gives in the notes about his plan in the middlegame:

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**Botvinnik – Ståhlberg**

*Moscow 1935*

1 c4 e6 2 ∆c3 d5 3 d4 c5 4 cxd5 exd5 5 ∆f3 ∆c6 6 e3

More common is Schlechter’s 6 g3.

6...c4 7 ∆e2 ∆b4 8 0-0 ∆ge7

This particular set-up (...c4, ...∆b4 and ...∆ge7) is known as the Swedish Variation of the Tarrasch Defence. It was analysed intensively in Sweden and often employed by the ‘Three Swedish Musketeers’, Ståhlberg, Stoltz and Lundin. However, perhaps it is better after 6 g3, as White can now open the centre advantageously, leaving the c4-pawn vulnerable.

9 e4! dxe4 10 ∆xe4 0-0 11 ∆xc4 ∆g4 (D)

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Black wins back his pawn, but at the expense of the two bishops.

12 a3 ∆a5 13 ∆a2 ∆b6 14 h3 ∆xf3 15 ∆xf3 ∆xd4 16 Wh5 ∆ef5 17 ∆g5!?

Not bad, but Kotov gives 17 ∆g5! ∆h6 18 ∆b1 as even stronger; e.g., 18...∆b3 19 ∆xh7+ ∆h8 20 ∆b1 ∆xc1 21 ∆xc1 f6 22 ∆b1! fxg5
23 \texttt{Wg6}, “with a winning attack”. This seems correct. Taking the line a bit further, White seems to break through after 23...\texttt{g8} 24 \texttt{Wh7+ f7} 25 \texttt{g6+ f6} 26 \texttt{h5!}. However, 18...\texttt{f5} is a better defence. White is surely clearly better after 19 \texttt{a2+ h8} 20 \texttt{f4}, but I do not see anything decisive after, e.g., 20...\texttt{e8}. Botvinnik’s choice is safer. The knights may be centrally placed, but as we learned from Steinitz, knights need protected points on which to settle. As the game shows, the black knights are just ‘hanging in the air’ without pawn protection.

17...\texttt{d7} 18 \texttt{g4} \texttt{h8} 19 \texttt{a1} \texttt{d6} (D)

Botvinnik’s comments on the strategic features of this position are highly instructive: “All the strength of Black’s position lies with the bishop on b6. If White can manage to eliminate this bishop, Black will quickly lose due to the unstable position of his knights.” Following this logical thinking, White’s plan is clear: the bishop on b6 must be eliminated, and to do that a knight transfer is needed.

20 \texttt{c3!}

White threatens \texttt{d5}.

20...\texttt{a8!} 21 \texttt{b1}

The logical follow-up of White’s play was 21 \texttt{d5}, but Black has the tactical ploy 21...\texttt{g6}! 22 \texttt{x} \texttt{b6?! h5!}, and the white queen is trapped! This goes to show the interconnectedness between strategy and tactics. Strategic plans must always stand up to the specific requirements of the position. With 20...\texttt{a8} Black emphasized a weak spot in the white position: e2. White must be alert to implement his strategic plan while at the same time guarding against Black’s counterplay.

21...\texttt{e6} 22 \texttt{xe1!? e8?}

Now Botvinnik is able to carry out his basic strategic plan, after which Black quickly loses. The critical line is of course 22...\texttt{xe1+} 23 \texttt{dxe1} \texttt{xe1}+ 24 \texttt{h2}. Notice that the basic strategic problem for Black remains: the insecure placing of his knights. Kotov gives the line 24...\texttt{d6} 25 \texttt{d2 f5} 26 \texttt{h4 e6}, noting that this is “Black’s only chance for resisting”. Kotov believes – as apparently Botvinnik and \texttt{Stahlberg} do too – that the strategic features of the position are more important than the material situation of two black rooks against the white queen, and that it is still Black who is fighting for survival. It is interesting that my computer evaluates the position after 26...\texttt{e6} as better for Black! This is apparently an area where there are still discrepancies in the criteria used by men vs machine. I go for the human race here and prefer White. But still \texttt{Stahlberg} should have gone for this line, as he is now on the receiving end of an instructive two bishops vs two knights position.

23 \texttt{d5}! \texttt{h6} 24 \texttt{x} \texttt{xb6 axb6} 25 \texttt{d2} \texttt{e6} 26 \texttt{e1} \texttt{d8} 27 \texttt{e3} \texttt{e5} 28 \texttt{e4} \texttt{c6} 29 \texttt{f4} \texttt{b5} (D)

Again Black built his counterplay on the e2-square. But White is in no rush and can calmly optimize his position. Notice the helpfulness of the two knights. Compare this to the discussion of resource dependence and overprotection above.

30 \texttt{d5}! 31 \texttt{e5}

Decisive. 31...\texttt{d5} loses to 32 \texttt{xd5} \texttt{xd5} 33 \texttt{d4} \texttt{d4} 34 \texttt{h8+}. 
Botvinnik was a big fan of the two bishops, and in many games he showed the virtues of this strategic aspect of the game. Most famous is his crucial win in a two bishops vs two knights endgame against Bronstein in the 23rd game of their match in 1951, the aforementioned match which ended 12-12 after a tense struggle. But Botvinnik wins based on a ‘two bishops’ strategy can be found in hundreds of his games, and it is very worthwhile to study these games.

Another strategic area of chess to which Botvinnik contributed greatly is the mobile pawn-centre. In several of his books on the middlegame, Kotov discusses the pawn-centre, and he divides the theme into five distinct types of pawn-centres – the closed centre, the open centre, the mobile centre, the rigid centre and the dynamic centre – which he then discusses at length and in instructive fashion. In the mobile pawn-centre section, Botvinnik is the prominent figure. As with the two bishops, he won a multitude of games with this strategic theme. Most famous is his win against Capablanca from the AVRO tournament 1938, but since this game can be found in a variety of other sources, I have chosen a few other – less famous but still highly instructive – examples of Botvinnik’s handling of this theme.

Botvinnik – Keres
USSR Ch (Moscow) 1952

This particular game between the two long-standing rivals Botvinnik and Keres has an interesting story. For the Olympiad in Helsinki 1952 Botvinnik was not selected for the Soviet team, despite being world champion. The story goes that the other members of the team did not want him, as he had not played much in the previous years and several of his tournament results had been unconvincing. Instead Keres was given board 1. Now the World Champion had a score to settle!

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♗c3 d5 4 cxd5 exd5 5 ♘g5 ♗e7 6 e3 0-0 7 ♘d3 ♗bd7 8 ♘c2 ♗e8 9 ♗ge2

Do you remember the discussion on this position in Chapter 3? Karpov usually puts his knight on f3, while Kasparov prefers ♗ge2. Both are prominent ‘graduates’ of Botvinnik’s school. However, although Kasparov prefers Botvinnik’s line, it is hard to see many similarities in style between these two great champions. It is simply that the dynamic approach to this type of position, developed by Botvinnik, suits Kasparov well, whereas the more rigid pawn-structure after 9 ♘f3 is more to Karpov’s taste. This underlines my claim that there is not really a Soviet School of play, but a Soviet School of preparation. By the way, Botvinnik did occasionally play 9 ♘f3, for example against Robatsch in Amsterdam 1966.

9...♘f8 10 0-0 c6 11 ♕b1 ♗d6?! This plays into White’s hands, as later the bishop has to return to e7. Black has a number of better moves at his disposal, including 11...♗g6, 11...♗e6, 11...a5 and 11...♗g4.

12 ♗h1 Black’s threat was 12...♗xh2+ 13 ♗xh2 ♗g4+. Now White can answer 12...♗xh2 with 13 ♘xf6 before taking on h2.

12...♗g6 13 f3! (D)

The Botvinnik pawn-roller! Here it is even stronger than in other positions, since the bishop has gone to d6, setting up a fork after e4-e5. This induces Botvinnik to change his plan from a traditional minority attack with b4-b5 (prepared by 11 ♕b1) to activity in the centre. Notice the spirit of Steinitz here: once a new weakness is discovered (here the unfortunate position of the d6-bishop), the master is ready to change his plan.
13...e7
A necessary concession.
14 Be1 d7 15 Bxe7 Bxe7 16 Bg3 Bf6
17 Wf2 e6 18 Bxf5 Bxf5 19 Bxf5 Sb6 20 e4
(D)

Here it comes! The threat is e5 and f4-f5-f6,
so Black must surrender the centre.
20...dxe4 21 fxe4 Sd8 22 e5 Bd5 23 Be4
23...Bf8 24 Bd6 Se7 25 Be4 Se6
Botvinnik mentions 25...Bxd6 26 exd6 Wxd6
as perhaps the toughest defence, but still inadequate.
26 Wh4 g6 27 Bxd5 exd5 28 Ac1 Wd7 29
Ac3!
Botvinnik consistently improves his position. The logical build-up of a decisive advantage around a general strategic concept is a typical feature of the master theorist. White batters f7 and h7, and eventually the passive black position is bound to crack.
29...Bf8 (D)

30 Bf5! Sf8
30...gxf5? allows mate by 31 Bh3+ Bh7 32
Wf6, and 30...Bh8 fails to 31 Ah6+ Sh7 32
Wh6+ Bh7 33 Bh7+, when the black position collapses.
31 Bh6+!
Even stronger than taking the exchange. White consistently goes after the f7-pawn.
31...Bf8 32 Wf6 Bh7 33 Bhf3
The climax of White's central strategy initiated with 13 f3! Now f7 cannot be defended.
33...Bc8 34 Bxf7 Be6 35 Wg6 Bf5 36 Bh6
Wg7 37 g4 1-0

Botvinnik – Larsen
Noordwijk 1965

1 c4 e6 2 Ac3 d5 3 d4 Ac6 4 exd5 exd5 5 Bg5
c6 6 e3 Ac7 7 Bc2 0-0 8 Ac3 Bd7 9 Bge2
h6?!
A rare move, but not without its merits. The direct 9...Bh8 is the usual move.
10 Bh4 Bh8 11 f3 c5!
A common way to counter White's intentions in the centre. As White has weakened his e3-pawn, Black is ready to accept an isolated d-pawn.
12 0-0 a6 13 Ab1 b5 14 Af2 (D)

14...c4!?
An uncompromising advance. Compare this game to the Tarrasch-Spielmann game above. The alternative was to shift the central formation into a rigid one with ...cxd4 at an appropriate moment, when White has to take back with the e-pawn. This pawn-structure is also well-known from Botvinnik's practice. See the game...
Botvinnik-Pilnik, Budapest 1952: 1 d4 ♞f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♞c3 d5 4 ♞g5 ♞e7 5 e3 0-0 6 ♞c1 h6 7 ♞h4 b6 8 exd5 exd5 9 ♞d3 ♞b7 10 f3 c5 11 ♞ge2 ♞bd7 12 0-0 ♞e8 13 ♞f2 ♞d6 14 ♞e1 a6 15 ♞g3 ♞wb8 16 ♞h1 exd4 17 exd4 ♞xel + 18 ♞xe1 ♞f8 19 ♞c2 ♞e6 20 ♞xf5 ♞f8 21 ♞e3 ♞e8 22 ♞wh4 ♞d8 23 ♞g4 ♞h8 24 ♞f4 ♞g5 25 ♞xe6 ♞xg4 26 fxg4 ♞xe6 27 ♞h4 ♞g8 28 ♞g6 ♞d6 29 ♞g5 hxg5 30 ♞xg5 ♞f6 31 ♞xg1 ♞e8 32 ♞f1 ♞c7 (32... ♞f7 33 ♞e5+ ♞e7 34 h4!, with the idea h5-h6, and 32... ♞e4 33 ♞c1! are both very unpleasant for Black) 33 ♞xf6 gx f6 34 ♞xf6 ♞c1+ 35 ♞f1 ♞c7 36 g3 b5 37 ♞e1 ♞c8 38 ♞e5 ♞g7 39 ♞g2 b4 40 h4 a5 41 g4 1-0. 15 ♞h1 c6 16 ♞wb3 ♞h8 17 f4 e4 18 ♞d4 c5 19 ♞c2 ♞xd7 20 ♞e3 ♞xf6 21 ♞xf5!! ♞xc3 22 ♞xd6 ♞wb8 23 ♞xe4 ♞xf6 24 ♞d2 g5 25 e4 (the pawn-roller!) 25.gxf4 26 gx f4 ♞d4 27 e5 ♞e8 28 e6 ♞g8 29 ♞xf3!? (stronger is 29 ♞h3!) 29... ♞g6 30 ♞g1! ♞xg1 31 ♞xg1 ♞f6? (the decisive error — after 31... ♞xf5 a draw is still the most likely outcome) 32 ♞g5! ♞g7 33 exd7! (and here 33... ♞xf4 is better) 34 ♞we3 ♞e7 35 ♞e6 ♞f8 36 ♞e5! ♞xe5 37 fxe5 (the pawns are back!) 37... ♞f5 38 ♞e1 h6 39 ♞d8 ♞f2 40 e6 ♞d2 41 ♞c6 ♞e8 42 e7 b5 43 ♞d8 ♞g7 44 ♞h7 ♞f6 45 ♞e6+ ♞g5 46 ♞d6 ♞xe7 47 ♞e4+ 1-0.

18...g6 19 ♞h3 a5 20 e5 b4 21 ♞ce2 ♞h7 22 f4 ♞c6 23 ♞a1 ♞ad4 24 ♞h1 f5! Larsen does his utmost to restrict the advance of White’s central pawns.

25 axb4 axb4 (D)

26 ♞xf5!

The pawn-storm has come to a halt, but this sacrifice reopens this strategic battle. Such piece sacrifices in return for pawn-rollers have frequently occurred through chess history. The most famous game of all with this theme is probably the 26th game of the world championship match Euwe-Alekhine 1935 (the one Euwe won — two years later Alekhine took the world title back) — also known as the ‘Pearl of Zandvoort’ (Euwe is White): 1 d4 e6 2 c4 f5 3 g3 ♞b4+ 4 ♞d2 ♞e7 5 ♞g2 ♞d6 6 ♞c3 0-0 7 ♞f3 ♞e4 8 0-0 b6 9 ♞wc2 ♞b7 10 ♞e5 ♞xc3 11 ♞xc3 ♞xg2 12 ♞xg2 ♞wc8 13 d5 d6 14 ♞d3 e5

15 ♞h1 c6 16 ♞wb3 ♞h8 17 f4 e4 18 ♞d4 c5 19 ♞c2 ♞xd7 20 ♞e3 ♞xf6 21 ♞xf5!! ♞xc3 22 ♞xd6 ♞wb8 23 ♞xe4 ♞xf6 24 ♞d2 g5 25 e4 (the pawn-roller!) 25.gxf4 26 gx f4 ♞d4 27 e5 ♞e8 28 e6 ♞g8 29 ♞xf3!? (stronger is 29 ♞h3!) 29... ♞g6 30 ♞g1! ♞xg1 31 ♞xg1 ♞f6? (the decisive error — after 31... ♞xf5 a draw is still the most likely outcome) 32 ♞g5! ♞g7 33 exd7! (and here 33... ♞xf4 is better) 34 ♞we3 ♞e7 35 ♞e6 ♞f8 36 ♞e5! ♞xe5 37 fxe5 (the pawns are back!) 37... ♞f5 38 ♞e1 h6 39 ♞d8 ♞f2 40 e6 ♞d2 41 ♞c6 ♞e8 42 e7 b5 43 ♞d8 ♞g7 44 ♞h7 ♞f6 45 ♞e6+ ♞g5 46 ♞d6 ♞xe7 47 ♞e4+ 1-0.

26...gxf5 27 ♞xf5 ♞we7 28 ♞g3 ♞d7 29 ♞xd7 ♞xd7 30 ♞g6+ ♞g7 31 ♞we6! ♞xa1 32 ♞xa1

Greed does not pay off: after 32 ♞xd5+?! ♞f7 33 ♞xf7+ ♞xf7 34 ♞xa1 ♞b6 the queenside pawns give Black counterplay. It is stronger to maintain the pressure.

32... ♞xf7 33 ♞xa7 (D)

33... ♞xe5!?

Giving the piece back while hoping for counterplay with the queenside pawns. 33... ♞e7? does not work due to 34 ♞xd7! ♞xd7 35 e6, but 33... ♞b8 is possible. Botvinnik gave 34 ♞wb6 ♞xd7 (not 34... ♞xf4? 35 ♞g6+) 35 ♞wa5! (35 ♞wc6 is a draw by repetition) 35... ♞e7 36 f5, when Black is in trouble due to the strong central pawns.

34 dxe5 ♞we6 35 ♞xe6+ ♞xe6 36 ♞f5 ♞xc6 37 ♞f1 c3

This is what Larsen was hoping for, but Botvinnik manages to keep the pawns under control.
Foundations of Chess Strategy

38 bxc3 bxc3 39 e5 40 xc5 xc5 41 a1 f4 42 e2 e6 43 g3 h5 44 d3 d4 45 d6
Not 45 xd4? xd5.
45...c7 46 e4 h7 47 f5 d8 48 f6+ h6 49 d5 b7 50 e6 xc6 51 a6! e5+ 52 xd4 1-0

Botvinnik was not only good at advancing mobile central pawns. He also showed how to combat such pawn-rollers. Let us conclude this presentation of Botvinnik with a game where he is on the other side of the strategic theme 'mobile central pawns'.

Reshevsky – Botvinnik
Breda AVRO 1938

1 d4 f6 2 c4 e6 3 c3 b4 4 e3 0-0 5 c2 d5 6 a3 e7 7 cxd5 xd5 8 xd5
This line is still played in contemporary grandmaster games, but nowadays 8 c2, 8 e2 and 8 g3 are more common.
8...xd5 9 g3 d7 10 g2 f6 11 0-0 e6 12 c3 c6 13 b4 a6 14 e1 e8 15 b2 f8 16 d3 e6 17 f3 (D)

Now Botvinnik must taste some of his own medicine! The upcoming battle is very instructive: with pointed manoeuvres Botvinnik manages to take the sting out of White's offensive, only to miss the win when it is within his grasp.

17...d7!
This prevents 18 e4, as 18...dxe4 19 fxe4 e5! is not good for White, who lacks a good square for his queen.
18 a4 b6! 19 a1 b5

It may seem odd to play ...b6 and on the next move ...b5, but actually the 'free move a1' is to Black's advantage, as the white rook is actually worse placed on c1 than on a1. This is because the a3-pawn becomes weak.
20 c5 b6 21 c3 a7!
Another fine defensive move in the spirit of Nimzowitsch! The rook is on its way to the centre to help counter the advance of the white pawns.
22 e4 c4 23 a1
There is the point of 18...b6 – White would have preferred to have the rook still on a1.
23...xc5 24 dxc5 d7! 25 d4 f6
Despite having had the two bishops and the centre, White is in some trouble. He cannot maintain control of the centre.
26 f4 dxe4 27 xxe4 d3! 28 a1 Back again!
29...xc3! 29 xc3 f7 30 d3 (D)
Not 30 b1+ d4+

30...b8??
After his fine play, Botvinnik falters badly. 30...c8! is a better square for the queen, when Nunn indicates 31 xe6! xe1+ 32 f2 c8 33 xe8+ xe8 34 c6! as White's best – surprisingly, it is not obvious how Black can win, despite his material advantage, as the c-pawn is strong. One sample line is 34...b8 35 d7 a8 (with the point 36 c6 a7) 36 c6!, and Black has made no progress.
31 ad1 xe4 32 xe4 b8
Black is losing, as 32...d5? does not work now, since the queen cannot escape after 33 xd5+ xd5 34 xd5. It shows a strong character that Botvinnik is able to pull himself together
Despite this sudden change of events. However, it was presumably only due to Reshevsky’s time-trouble that he was able to save this game.

33 \text{d}d8 \text{\textit{\textbf{d}}}e8 34 \text{\textit{\textbf{c}}}e1 \text{\textit{\textbf{f}}}7 35 \text{\textit{\textbf{x}}}xh7 \text{\textit{\textbf{d}}}e5!? 36 fxe5 \text{\textit{\textbf{w}}}h8 37 \text{\textit{\textbf{c}}}c2?

White could win immediately by 37 \text{\textit{\textbf{e}}}e4, as we shall see.

37...\text{\textit{\textbf{\textit{\textbf{e}}}}}7 38 \text{\textit{\textbf{e}}}e8?
38 \text{\textit{\textbf{e}}}e8 is much better.
39...f5! 39 \text{\textit{\textbf{\textit{\textbf{x}}}f}5

Had the bishop been on e4, 39 \text{\textit{\textbf{\textit{\textbf{x}}}c}6 would now have won.

39...\text{\textit{\textbf{w}}}h5 40 g4 \text{\textit{\textbf{w}}}g5 41 \text{\textit{\textbf{c}}}c7+ \text{\textit{\textbf{d}}}d8 42 \text{\textit{\textbf{e}}}e8+ \text{\textit{\textbf{e}}}e7 43 e6

Black is past the worst. Had the rook been on the a-file rather than the c-file, this would still be an easy win for White.

43...\text{\textit{\textbf{g}}}g6 44 \text{\textit{\textbf{c}}}c7+ \text{\textit{\textbf{d}}}d8 45 \text{\textit{\textbf{e}}}e7+! \text{\textit{\textbf{c}}}c8! 46 e7 \text{\textit{\textbf{g}}}xg5 47 \text{\textit{\textbf{c}}}c8+ \text{\textit{\textbf{e}}}e7 48 \text{\textit{\textbf{e}}}e8 \text{\textit{\textbf{w}}}xg4+ 49 \text{\textit{\textbf{h}}}h1 \text{\textit{\textbf{w}}}f3+ 50 \text{\textit{\textbf{g}}}g1 \text{\textit{\textbf{w}}}g4+ \frac{1}{2}-\frac{1}{2}

Of contemporary top players, I believe Vladimir Kramnik and Peter Leko most resemble the characteristics of theorists, although it should be said that top players today are much more universal than in the past. This is because of the trend in chess towards faster time-limits and the more and more concrete nature of top chess, where the stakes in the form of top-notch opening preparation and concrete calculations are rising rapidly with the introduction of computer aids in analysis and preparation. Today, you cannot become a real top player ‘just’ by being a strong theorist (or any of the other types) – you still need to work on the areas that characterize the other types. Kramnik and Leko obviously do that, but many of their games still resemble the old theorists.

Like Botvinnik, Kramnik is very fond of – and very strong with – the two bishops. In the following game he demonstrates the combined strengths of the two bishops and the central passed pawn.

\textbf{Kramnik – Anand}
\textit{Las Palmas 1996}

1 \text{\textit{\textbf{f}}}f3 \text{\textit{\textbf{f}}}f6 2 c4 b6 3 g3 \text{\textit{\textbf{b}}}b7 4 \text{\textit{\textbf{g}}}g2 e6 5 0-0 \text{\textit{\textbf{e}}}e7 6 \text{\textit{\textbf{c}}}c3 0-0 7 \text{\textit{\textbf{e}}}e1

This is Kramnik’s old pet move, which he has played in a number of games. It is more flexible than 7 d4 \text{\textit{\textbf{e}}}e4, which leads to a normal Queen’s Indian.

7...d5

Black faces a choice, as he has a variety of options here. He could still play 7...\text{\textit{\textbf{d}}}d4 as in the game Kramnik-Yudasin, Erevan OL 1996 (with ...c5 played instead of ...0-0), where Black had a decent position after 8 d4!? (8 \text{\textit{\textbf{x}}}xe4 and 8 \text{\textit{\textbf{w}}}c2 are more common) 8...\text{\textit{\textbf{\textit{\textbf{x}}}c}3 9 \text{\textit{\textbf{b}}}xc3 \text{\textit{\textbf{d}}}e4! 10 \text{\textit{\textbf{h}}}h3 \text{\textit{\textbf{\textit{\textbf{x}}}f}3 11 \text{\textit{\textbf{e}}}xf3 cxd4!? (compare this to the game Yusupov-Karpov, Linares 1993, which John Watson mentions in Secrets of Modern Chess Strategy; rather than obstructing the doubled pawns, Black allows White to untangle them in order to be able to attack them; that is one example of what Watson calls modern chess) 12 cxd4 \text{\textit{\textbf{d}}}d4 13 \text{\textit{\textbf{d}}}d3 0-0 14 \text{\textit{\textbf{e}}}e1 \text{\textit{\textbf{c}}}c8 15 f4 \text{\textit{\textbf{a}}}a5 16 \text{\textit{\textbf{w}}}d3 g6 (drawn in 26 moves). Another option is 7...c5, going for a kind of Hedgehog set-up.

8 cxd5 \text{\textit{\textbf{\textit{\textbf{x}}}d}5 (D)

A key moment in the strategic course of the game. By recapturing with the knight, Black makes the key strategic theme of the game the ‘mobile pawn-centre’. By taking with the pawn the strategic main theme would indeed be the ‘hanging pawns’ (after ...c5). An instructive example of White’s play in that type of position is Kramnik-Ribli, Groningen PCA 1993: 1 c4 \text{\textit{\textbf{d}}}f6 2 \text{\textit{\textbf{c}}}c3 e6 3 \text{\textit{\textbf{f}}}f3 c5 4 g3 b6 5 \text{\textit{\textbf{g}}}g2 \text{\textit{\textbf{b}}}b7 6 0-0 \text{\textit{\textbf{e}}}e7 7 \text{\textit{\textbf{e}}}e1 d5 8 cxd5 exd5 9 d4 0-0 10 \text{\textit{\textbf{f}}}f4 \text{\textit{\textbf{b}}}bd7 11 dxc5 bxc5?! (11...\text{\textit{\textbf{\textit{\textbf{x}}}c}5 is safer, going for an ‘isolated pawn’ position with a small edge for White, but not more than that) 12 \text{\textit{\textbf{d}}}h4! \text{\textit{\textbf{d}}}d6 13 \text{\textit{\textbf{f}}}f5 \text{\textit{\textbf{e}}}e8 14 \text{\textit{\textbf{d}}}d5 \text{\textit{\textbf{w}}}d7 15 \text{\textit{\textbf{b}}}bd6 \text{\textit{\textbf{\textit{\textbf{x}}}d}6 16 \text{\textit{\textbf{\textit{\textbf{x}}}d}6 \text{\textit{\textbf{e}}}e6?! 17 \text{\textit{\textbf{h}}}h3 \text{\textit{\textbf{c}}}c6 18 \text{\textit{\textbf{w}}}c1 c4
19 ℄e5! ℄f8 20 ℄f4 ℄h5 21 ℄x6 ℄xe6 22 ℄d4 ℄f6 23 b3 ℄a8 24 ℄f3 ℄c6 25 ℄ac1 ℄fd7 26 bx6 dxc6 27 ℄xg7 ℄xf3!! 28 ℄xf3 ℄xf3 29 ℄e4 ℄d5 1-0.

9 e4 ℄xc3 10 bx6c6 11 d4 ℄d7 12 ℄f4 cxd4 13 cxd4 ℄f6 14 ℄e5

The cards are on the table: is the mobile centre strong or will Black manage to restrain and attack it?

14... ℄b4

Most likely 14... ℄c8 is better. Anand goes in for a forced line, where White cannot just nurse his centre, but has to show his hand.

15 ℄e3! ℄c8 (D)

16 d5!

This is more or less forced, because Black was threatening 16... ℄c3 – the idea behind 14... ℄b4. But it is also a classic thrust, although it – as is common in contemporary chess – hinges on concrete calculations.

16... exd5 17 exd5 ℄d6

With this concession, Black indicates that White has won the strategic battle and that the plan initiated with 14... ℄b4 was inadequate to solve the strategic situation. The d-pawn is allowed to live. But it was not possible to grab the d5-pawn, as both ways of capturing lose:

a) 17... ℄xd5? 18 ℄d3 ℄xg2 (18... ℄c5 19 ℄e3 ℄b5 20 a4 ℄a5 21 ℄c6) 19 ℄xd8 ℄fxd8 20 ℄xb3! ℄c3 21 ℄xf7+ ℄h8 22 ℄h6! ℄g8 (22... ℄xh6 23 ℄xf6+ ℄g8 24 ℄xe6+ ℄f8 25 ℄f1) 23 ℄xf6!! ℄d5 (23... ℄gf6 24 ℄f7#) 24 ℄xg7+ ℄xg7 25 ℄d1 and White wins.

b) 17... ℄xd5 18 ℄d3 and then:

b1) 18... ℄e5 and now 19 ℄e3 ℄xe3! 20 ℄xd8 ℄xd1 21 ℄xf8+ ℄xf8 22 ℄d7+ ℄e7 23 ℄xc5 ℄xg2 24 ℄xd1 (24 ℄xg2 ℄xf2! 25 ℄a6 ℄c3 26 ℄c1 ℄e4) 24... ℄c6 leads to a position where the two strong bishops give Black certain drawing chances, but after 19 ℄wb3! I do not see a defence for Black.

b2) 18... ℄xf4 19 ℄xf4! (stronger than 19 ℄xd8 ℄cxd8! [keeping f7 covered] 20 ℄wb3 ℄xg2 21 ℄xb4 ℄f8 with good chances for Black) 19... ℄c2 20 ℄d7 ℄f6 21 ℄xc7 ℄xd1+ 22 ℄xd1 ℄xc7 23 ℄d8+ ℄f8 24 ℄xb7 ℄xb7 25 ℄d7 ℄xd7 26 ℄xd7 leads by force to a winning endgame for White) 20 ℄xd8 ℄f8 (unfortunately forced, as 20... ℄xd8 21 ℄wb3 costs Black another piece) 21 ℄xb3 ℄c3 22 ℄xg2 ℄xal 23 ℄xf7+ ℄f8 (23... ℄c3 allows the well-known yet always beautiful smothered mate by 24 ℄h6++ ℄h8 25 ℄g8+ ℄xg8 26 ℄f7#) 24 ℄g5! ℄d7 25 ℄e6! and Black is defenceless. This multitude of variations is the backbone of the claim that White’s strategy has prevailed, and it again shows that in strategy, rigorous analysis and creative thinking go hand in hand.

18 ℄c6 ℄xc6 19 ℄xd6 ℄a4!? (D)

19... ℄xd6 20 dxc6 is highly unpleasant for Black, as the advanced pawn on c6 severely limits Black’s range of movement. The pawn in itself may be possible to blockade, but at the expense of any hope for activity.

20 ℄xf8!

Kramnik called this an ‘intuitive sacrifice’, but in fact it is very logical. The passed d-pawn and the two bishops will seriously restrict Black. The solid alternative was 20 ℄xa4 ℄xd6 21 ℄xa7 ℄xd5 22 ℄xd5 (not 22 ℄d1?? ℄xe3!, or 22 ℄d3 ℄e5) 22... ℄xd5 23 ℄xb6 with a healthy
Characteristics of Theorists

extra pawn for White, but reasonable drawing chances for Black. I managed to hold a draw from an almost identical position against Delchev at the 2000 Istanbul Olympiad. The text-move is more forcing.

20...\( \text{\textit{xd1}} \) 21 \( \text{\textit{e7!}} \) \( \text{\textit{we7}} \) 22 \( \text{\textit{xd7}} \) 23
\( \text{\textit{h3 h6 24 \textit{f5}}} \)

This strong move takes h7 from the black king and sets up back-rank mates. Hitting the bishop with ...\( g6 \) leaves the dark squares around the king seriously weakened.

24...\( \text{\textit{b5}} \) 25 \( \text{\textit{b4}} \) \( \text{\textit{ed8}} \) (D)

26 \( \text{\textit{e7}} \)

Nimzowitsch would be pleased: the rook on the 7th rank in combination with the passed pawn decides the game. Kramnik has repeatedly emphasized his affection for Nimzowitsch's writings and My System in particular.

26...\( \text{\textit{we4}} \) 27 \( \text{\textit{xd7}} \) \( \text{\textit{xd7}} \) 28 \( \text{\textit{xd7}} \) \( \text{\textit{xb4}} \) 29
\( \text{\textit{d6}} \) \( \text{\textit{wa4}} \) 30 \( \text{\textit{ed3}} \) \( \text{\textit{we4}} \) 31 \( \text{\textit{xb5}} \) \( \text{\textit{we1+}} \) 32 \( \text{\textit{g2}} \)
\( \text{\textit{we4+}} \) 33 \( \text{\textit{gl}} \)

A well-known trick favoured by Petrosian: in favourable positions there is no need to rush; the position can be repeated to show the opponent his helplessness. In this case, though, avoiding time-pressure was probably the reason for the repetition.

33...\( \text{\textit{we1+}} \) 34 \( \text{\textit{g2}} \) \( \text{\textit{we4+}} \) 35 \( \text{\textit{fl}} \) \( \text{\textit{wh1+}} \) 36
\( \text{\textit{e2}} \) \( \text{\textit{we4+}} \) 37 \( \text{\textit{f1}} \) \( \text{\textit{wh1+}} \) 38 \( \text{\textit{e2}} \) \( \text{\textit{we4+}} \) 39
\( \text{\textit{d1}} \) \( \text{\textit{g4+}} \) 40 \( \text{\textit{f3}} \) \( \text{\textit{wh3}} \) 41 \( \text{\textit{d7}} \) 1-0

Leko has a very good sense of the central pawn-structure and the weakness of pawns and squares. He resembles the old theorists in his very systematic and methodical exploitation of such weaknesses. His talent showed from an early age – I witnessed this myself in a game against him when he was 15 years old.

Leko – L.B. Hansen
Bronshøj 1995

1 \( \text{e4 e5} \) 2 \( \text{\textit{f3}} \) \( \text{\textit{c6}} \) 3 \( \text{\textit{b5}} \) \( \text{\textit{a6}} \) 4 \( \text{\textit{a4}} \) \( \text{\textit{xf6}} \) 5 \( \text{\textit{0-0}} \)
\( \text{\textit{e7}} \) 6 \( \text{\textit{e1}} \) \( \text{\textit{b5}} \) 7 \( \text{\textit{b3}} \) \( \text{\textit{d6}} \) 8 \( \text{\textit{c3}} \) 0-0 9 \( \text{\textit{h3}} \) \( \text{\textit{a5}} \)

The old classical Chigorin Variation of the Ruy Lopez. This line is perhaps the longest-lasting feature that Chigorin brought to chess. It has stood the test of time for over 100 years. I have also often employed 9...\( a5?! \), an interesting line championed by Paul Keres.

10 \( \text{\textit{c2}} \) 11 \( \text{\textit{d4}} \)

I usually prefer the Romanishin Variation 11...\( \text{\textit{b7}} \), but I wanted to surprise my young opponent. Not a wise idea, as it turned out! The game reveals the dangers of employing openings that you do not know in depth.

12 \( \text{\textit{exd4}} \) \( \text{\textit{b7}} \) 13 \( \text{\textit{d5}} \) \( \text{\textit{e8}} \) (D)

14 \( \text{\textit{d3}} \!\!\!\!

At the time I thought this was a strong novelty, which is only half of the truth. In fact, it had already been played in an old game Robatsch-Hennings, Helsinki Z 1972 (so it is not a novelty), but it is strong and shows that Leko immediately grasped the nuances of the position. Black’s weak points are the b5-pawn and the sidelined knight on a5. The text-move hits both these flaws on the nail: an attack on the b5-pawn is prepared, and the a5-knight is kept from c4.

14...\( \text{\textit{d7}} \)

Had I known the game Robatsch-Hennings, I would probably have followed in Hennings’s
footsteps with 14...\textit{Wc7}!. The point of this move-order is to secure the a5-knight a foothold on c4; for example, 15 b4 \textit{Cc4} or 15 \textit{Ac3} \textit{Cc4}. The game continued 15 \textit{Ec2} \textit{Dd7} 16 \textit{Cc2} \textit{Wb8} 17 b4 \textit{Cc4!} 18 \textit{Cbd2} (after 18 \textit{Ax}c4\textit{Bxc}4 19 \textit{Bxc}4? \textit{Bb}5 the important c4-pawn falls) 18...\textit{Cc}8! 19 \textit{Bb}1 \textit{Bb}6 20 \textit{Bb}2 \textit{Aa}7 21 \textit{Bxc}8+ \textit{Wxc}8 22 \textit{Ea}2 \textit{Cc}7 23 \textit{Hxc}7 \textit{Wxc}7 with an equal game and a draw in 49 moves.

15 \textit{Ae}3 g6

I continue to play like in the Romanishin Variation. With pawns on c3 and c5, the pressure is often taken off the b5-pawn with ...c4. As this is not possible here, the b5-pawn is weaker than in those lines, and therefore Black should probably pay more attention to the queenside by, for example, 15...\textit{Cc}8, forcing the white queen's knight to d2, as 16 b4 \textit{Cc}4 is fine for Black.

16 b4 \textit{Cc}7

Now 16...\textit{Cc}4 just leads to a weak pawn and a white advantage after 17 \textit{Hxc}4\textit{Bxc}4 18 \textit{Cc}3. 17 \textit{Cc}3! \textit{Cc}8 18 \textit{Wd}2 \textit{Dh}5 19 a4! (D)

19...\textit{We}8

Black accepts passive defence, which indicates that White has won the opening battle. However, the active thrust 19...f5 simply does not work after 20 axb5 axb5 (after 20...f4 21 bxa6! fxe3 22 \textit{Exe}3 the knight is trapped on b7, and 20...fxe4 is not answered with 21 bxa6, when Black gets some kingside counterplay after 21...exf3 22 axb7 \textit{Bb}8, but simply 21 \textit{Exe}4 with a clear positional advantage) 21 \textit{Bh}6, and Black loses either the exchange or the b5-pawn.

20 axb5 axb5 21 \textit{Ha}7 \textit{Bb}8 22 \textit{Bh}6 \textit{Gg}7 23 \textit{W}e2 \textit{Cd}8 24 \textit{Cc}1 f6 (D)

24...f5? fails tactically to 25 exf5 gxf5 26 \textit{Hxe}5! dxe5 27 \textit{Wxe}5 \textit{Df}6 28 \textit{Wxb}8 \textit{Ax}c3 29 \textit{Wc}7. Again the relationship between tactics and strategy is emphasized.

25 \textit{Dxb}5!

This wins a pawn and eventually the game. But as Leko points out, even stronger was to play in the spirit of Nimzowitsch and double on the 7th rank by 25 \textit{Bb}1!; e.g., 25...\textit{Eg}7 26 \textit{Aa}7 \textit{Ah}8 27 \textit{Aa}5 \textit{Aa}7 \textit{Ab}5 28 \textit{Ea}7! \textit{Ah}7 29 \textit{Ax}b5 and White wins.

25...\textit{Axb}5

25...\textit{Axb}5 fails to 26 \textit{Ah}7 \textit{Ah}7 27 \textit{Ah}5 \textit{Ah}b5 28 \textit{Hxe}7+ \textit{Wxe}7 29 \textit{Wxb}5.

26 \textit{Axb}5 \textit{Wxb}5 27 \textit{Wxb}5 \textit{Axb}5 28 \textit{Ea}7 29 \textit{Aa}2 \textit{Ah}5 30 g4 \textit{Af}4 31 \textit{Ah}4 ef4 32 \textit{Cc}4 \textit{Hbb}8 33 \textit{Dd}4 \textit{Ee}8 34 \textit{Hxe}8+ \textit{Ee}8 35 \textit{D}e6 \textit{Ee}5 (D)

36 \textit{Cc}3 \textit{Dd}7 37 f3 \textit{Ha}8 38 \textit{D}e7+ \textit{Gg}7 39 \textit{D}e8 \textit{Wh}6 40 h4 \textit{Ha}1+ 41 \textit{Gg}2 \textit{Df}2+ 42 \textit{Ef}1 f5 43 gxf5 gxf5 44 \textit{Dx}d6 \textit{Fx}e4 45 \textit{Axe}4 \textit{Dh}2 46
Characteristics of Theorists

4)c5 £>f6 47 d6 £xb4 48 £d3 £h5 49 d7 £xd7 50 £xd7 £xh4 51 £e4 £h5 52 £d5 £b1+ 53 £e2 £h2+ 54 £d2 £a2 55 £d3 £a4 56 £c5 £a3+ 57 £e4 £a4+ 58 £e4 £a2 59 £xf4! £h3 60 £e4 £g2 61 £g5 £f2 62 £f5 £f1 63 £h4 1-0

The weak b5-pawn can also be found in later Leko games. One such game is from the match Leko won 4½-1½ (by winning all his white games and drawing as Black) against the newly crowned FIDE World Champion Alexander Khalifman.

Leko – Khalifman
Budapest (2) 2000

1 e4 c5 2 £f3 e6 3 d4 £xd4 4 £xd4 a6

The old Paulsen Variation, named after Louis Paulsen, Morphy and Anderssen’s old counterpart from the 19th century. In many ways Paulsen was a very modern player, but unfortunately he did not always manage to turn his good ideas and play into points. Consider for instance his game against Morphy from the US Congress 1857: 1 e4 c5 2 £f3 e6 3 d4 £xd4 4 £xd4 £c5 5 £e3 £b6 6 £b5 £f6 7 £xc5 £xc5 8 £d6+ £e7 9 £xe8+ £xc8 10 £d3 £c6 11 0-0 £h5! 12 £d2 h4 13 £h3 £g5 14 a3 £g8 15 £b4 £w6 16 £c4 £w7 17 f3 £e5 18 £xe5 £xe5 19 £d2, and now I think most contemporary grandmasters would be happy to play Black after 19...£h5 (or perhaps even 19...£d5). But Paulsen began to drift, allowed Morphy to play £f4, and eventually lost.

5 £d3 £c6 6 £xc6 dxc6

This solid line is championed by the Latvian grandmaster Miezis. White gets a slight pull, but the black position is solid.

7 £d2 £e5 8 £c4 £f6 9 0-0

Obviously not 9 £xe5?? £w5+.

9...£w7 10 £d2 £g4 11 £w1 £b5 12 £e3 £c5?! 13 £xg4 £xg4 14 £w2 £f6 15 £b4 £b6 (D)

Let’s take stock: White has the two bishops, but that is not really a significant factor right now, as the pawn-structure in the centre is rigid. The real potential weakness in the black camp is the queenside pawns, which Leko systematically sets out to probe.

16 £c4 £d4 17 £ac1 £w6 18 £c2!

The bishop is transferred to a more active diagonal, at the same time taking it off the potentially vulnerable open d-file.

18...0-0 19 £b3 £zd8 20 £c2 £d7 21 £fc1 £a7 22 g3 £h6 23 £g2 £ac8 24 a4! £w6 25 axb5 axb5 26 £w3 £xc4

A concession, as the c6-pawn is more vulnerable and easier to attack than the b4-pawn. But b5 could not be maintained in a satisfactory way.

27 £xc4 £w7 28 £e3! (D)

Following in the footsteps of Tarrasch: “What is important is not what is exchanged, but what remains on the board.” White does not mind giving up the advantage of the two bishops, as in this concrete position the d2-bishop was not doing much else than defending the b4-pawn, whereas the black bishop was actively placed in the centre, keeping the black position together.

28...£xe3 29 £xe3 £w7 30 £a4 £b8

Khalifman defends resourcefully. The c6-pawn cannot be defended in the long run, so
instead he counterattacks against White’s b-pawn, relying on tactics. But there is a catch.
31 \textit{\textcolor{red}{\text{Wc3 \text{Ec}b7 32 \text{Hb1 c5!? 33 \text{Xxe4 \text{Exe4}}\text{-This was Khalifman’s idea.}}}}}
34 \textit{\textcolor{red}{\text{Ec8+ \text{Dh7}}}}
Not 34...\textit{\textcolor{red}{\text{Xxc8? 35 \text{Wx}c8+ \text{Dh7 36 \text{xf5+}.}}}}
35 \textit{\textcolor{red}{\text{Dc2! f5}} \text{(D)}}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{chess_diagram.png}
\caption{Diagram (D)}
\end{figure}

\textbf{36 \textit{\textcolor{red}{\text{Df3!}}}}
The refutation! After 36 \textit{\textcolor{red}{\text{Dxe4 fxe4 37 \text{Cc4}}}}
White also wins a pawn, but in this ending with major pieces Black retains good drawing prospects after, e.g., 37...\textit{\textcolor{red}{\text{Dg5, as it is not easy for White to break the black blockade. Now, however, White wins the pawn in much better circumstances.}}} Following the theories of Steinitz it is perhaps not surprising that the tactics work in White’s favour. As he obviously had the advantage, it is quite logical that the tactics should also be in his favour. As Steinitz taught the chess world, tactics rarely come out of nowhere; they must be built on some kind of advantage or weakness in the enemy camp (lasting or temporary). Such weaknesses do not exist in the white position, whereas the black position hangs on a thread – making the ‘sudden’ appearance of tactics much more likely.
36...\textit{\textcolor{red}{\text{Dxe8 37 \text{Wxf5+ g6 38 \text{Wxe8 \text{Df6 39 \text{Wc3 \text{Db6 40 \text{We5 \text{Wxe5 41 \text{De5 \text{Db1 42 \text{Dxb1 \text{Dg7 43 \text{Df3 \text{Df7 44 c6 \text{Dd8 45 \text{We3 \text{Df6 46 \text{Dc4 \text{De8 47 \text{Dc3 \text{Dc7 48 \text{Ec4 g5 49 \text{Lh5 f5 50 \text{Cc5 \text{Dh7 51 f3 h4 52 \text{Dd7 1-0}}}}}}}}}}}}}}}}}}}}}}}}}}}}}

Let us sum up: theorists are very strong in positions where the emphasis is on the systematic exploitation of some positional feature, such as the two bishops, the central pawn-structure and pawn weaknesses in general. Here they can employ their talent for systematic and logic thinking and combine this with an often profound knowledge of chess history and the developments of chess strategy. They are often well-prepared in the opening, but the basis of the opening preparation is to get sound positions, from which systematic play is required, and where a logical thread can be identified throughout the game.

As an opponent of theorists, you have to break this logical thread. You should aim for positions where there is ‘no logic’, and where concrete evaluation of the position and the potential strategies rely more on concrete factors than on profound knowledge about ‘what is the right concept in this type of position’. Often this means going for sharp opening variations where the stakes on every move are high. However, this should not be confused with unsound opening variations. As for instance the games Steinitz-Chigorin and Leko-Khalifman showed, unfounded tactics rarely work, and theorists have a very good feeling for when to look for tactics. This is due to their deep understanding of the concepts of lasting and temporary weaknesses.
6 Characteristics of Pragmatics

Pragmatics are the most common type of world champions, if you are to believe my typology. That is no coincidence, in my opinion. Often it is not the best theoretical thinker, but the one who best puts knowledge to use, who comes out on top in competition. This is true for chess as well as for business. However, there is no doubt that the various ‘doers’ (pragmatics and activists) and ‘thinkers’ (reflectors and theorists) need to learn from each other to succeed, and the main pragmatics in chess history have shown a remarkable ability to learn from thinkers. I have already shown, in Chapter 3, how Kasparov learned from Karpov and eventually came out victorious in their epic battles, and the same argument can be made for the relationship between Alekhine and Capablanca. Before their world championship match in 1927 in Buenos Aires, Alekhine spent months analysing Capablanca’s games with the stated goal of learning to play on ‘Capablanca territory’ while maintaining his own strengths. As history shows, Alekhine was very successful in this respect; I believe it is fair to say that at the height of his powers (in the early 1930s) Alekhine was a universal player who could play any type of position. This shift from ‘clear pragmatic’ in the beginning of their careers towards ‘more universal’ can be noticed in a number of historic giants; besides Alekhine and Kasparov, Spassky also comes to mind. Pragmatics seem to be open-minded learners, who can identify and absorb new concepts rapidly. This is probably a consequence of their concrete and very fact-based approach to decision-making.

A number of typical traits in pragmatics can be identified:

- Depend on concrete calculation and facts for evaluation and decision-making
- Very strong and accurate in the calculation of variations
- Characterized by very strong and precise opening preparation, often in sharp variations, where the value of each move is important
- Often drive opening theory forward by detailed work with their variations; they are often ‘trend-setters’ within opening play
- Strong attackers with a gift for direct attacks on the king
- Sometimes materialistic and prepared to accept material when the opponent’s compensation is not immediate
- May sometimes start to drift in ‘dull’ or simple positions, where their calculating powers are not valuable

Although I have also placed Lasker in the pragmatics box, Alekhine is probably the first ‘real’ pragmatic among the world champions, as Lasker was essentially a universal player. Throughout his career, Alekhine’s precise calculations earned him many beautiful wins in swift attacking style. This talent is already apparent in games from his early career.

**Alekhine – Levenfish**

*St Petersburg 1912*

1 d4 c5 2 d5 d6 3 e3

This is nowadays called the Schmid Benoni, named after the German grandmaster Lothar Schmid, who employed it regularly in the 1950s and 1960s, even against world-class opposition. His preferred move-order, however, was 1 d4 c5 2 d5 d6 and only later ...e6. This is more precise than Levenfish’s version. Nowadays, the most common move-order is probably 1 d4 e6 2 f3 c5 3 d5. Schmid was not unsuccessful with the opening, but in three Olympiads (1952, 1960 and 1962) he was unfortunate to have to defend the black pieces in West Germany’s matches against the Soviet Union. Each time he employed his ‘own’ variation, and took a beating. As these are all fine and famous games, I shall not keep them from the readers:

Smyslov-Schmid, Helsinki OL 1952: 1 d4 c5 2 d5 d6 3 e3 g6 4 c4 g7 5 f3 f6 6 e2 0-0 7 0-0 a6 8 d2 c7 9 a4 b6 10 c4
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Botvinnik-Schmid, Leipzig OL 1960: 1 d4 c5 2 d5 d6 3 e4 g6 4 7f3 9g7 5 Ae2 9f6 6 £)c3 4la6 7 0-0 4ic7 8 a4 a6 9 £)d2 £7 10 £)c4 b5 (D).

11 e5! dxe5 12 axb5 axb5 13 ba8 9xa8 14 dxe5 b4 15 d6! bxc3 16 dxc7 9c8 17 £)f4! cxb2 18 9xd7 9xd7 19 9b5 9d4 20 c3 9e5 21 exd4 exf4 22 9xd7+ 9xd7 23 9e2+ 9d8 24 9e5 9g8 25 9b1 f6 26 9xc5 9g7 27 9xb2 9e8 28 9b1 f3 29 9xf3 9h3 30 9c6 1-0.

Spassky-Schmid, Varna OL 1962: 1 d4 c5 2 d5 d6 3 e4 g6 4 7f3 9g7 5 Ae2 9f6 6 £)c3 9a6 7-0 9c7 9e1 0-0 9a4 9a6 10 9g5 h6 11 £)f4 9d7 12 9d2 b5!? 13 e5 dxe5 14 dxe5 b4 15 9xf6 9xf6 16 9e4 9g7 17 9xc5 9xb2 18 9ad1 9f5 19 9xh6 9g7 20 9h4 9d6 21 9g5 9h8 (D).

10...9xf3+ 11 gxf3!

Again White’s decision is based on concrete considerations. After 11 9xf3 Black’s idea was 11...fxe6! 12 9xg4 (12 0-0-0!?!) 12...e5!, and the two bishops (especially the dark-squared one) give Black real hope of counterplay.

11...9f6?!

Kotov, who wrote extensively on Alekhine, gave 11...9h6 as better, but after 12 9d2 9f5 13 9b5! 9d6 14 9c3! f6 (or 14...9g8) 15 9xc5! axb5 16 9xb5+ 9xb5 17 9xb5+ 9d7 18 exd7+ 9xd7 19 9xd7+ 9xd7 White has a winning endgame. Perhaps 11...9h6?! was the best chance, although after, for example, 12
\( \text{#h6} \text{#xh6} 13 \text{#d2} \text{#f5} 14 \text{#xf7+} \text{#xf7} 15 \text{0-0-0} \) Black's position is unenviable.

12 \text{#c4} \text{#xe6}

12...\text{#g7} is not pleasant, but striving for development was Black's last chance. Now he will never be able to castle.

13 \text{#xe6} (D)

13...\text{#wb6}

Exchanging queens does not ease the pressure; e.g., 13...\text{#xd1+} 14 \text{#xd1} \text{#g7}, and now either 15 \text{#c7} 0-0 16 \text{#b6}, 15 \#a4 or 15 a4 leads to a winning position for White. The text-move, though, is not without its merits, attacking both h2 and e6.

14 \text{#e2}!

The e6-pawn is the most important one!

14...\text{#xb2} (D)

15 \text{#b5}!!

A famous double-rook sacrifice! Fortunately, Levenfish accepts the gift, allowing Alekhine to take his masterpiece through to the end. That was not the case in an earlier game in Alekhine's career, against Rosanoff in Moscow 1908, played when Alekhine was 16: 1 \text{e4} \text{b6} 2 \text{d4} \text{#b7} 3 \text{#c3} \text{e6} 4 \text{#f3} \text{d5} 5 \text{#b5+!} \text{c6} 6 \text{#d3} \text{#f6} 7 \text{e5} \text{#d7} 8 \text{#g5!} \text{#e7} 9 \text{#g4} \#f8 10 \text{#xh7! \#xh7} (10...\text{#xh7} 11 \text{#xg7}) 11 \text{#xh7} \text{#xh7} 12 \text{#xg7} \#f8 (D).

13 \text{h4}! \text{#xh4} 14 \text{#xh4} \text{#xh4} 15 \text{#g5}! \text{#h1+} 16 \text{#d2} \text{#xg2} (Black does not take the second rook, as he is mated after 16...\text{#xal} 17 \text{#f6}, but this is equally hopeless) 17 \text{#f6} \text{#xg5+} 18 \text{#xg5} \#g6 19 \text{f4}, and Alekhine won shortly.

15...\text{#xa1+} 15...\text{#xb5} 16 \text{#xb5+} \#d8 17 \#d1+ \#d7 18 \#e5! \#b4+ 19 c3 does not help Black.

16 \#f2 \text{#xh1} 17 \#c7+ \#d8 18 \#d2+ \#d7 19 \text{exd7} 1-0

Black is mated after either 19...\#xd7 20 \#e6 or 19...\#e5 20 \#e6+ \#e7 21 \#d8+ \#xd8 22 \#xd8+ \#f7 23 \#xf8+ \#g7 24 \#e7#.

From his early games, Alekhine's talent for combinations and precise calculation was visible. Later he developed a more universal style, but he never lost his touch for beautiful combinations - based on rigorous calculations - that have rightly made him acknowledged as one of the greatest champions in chess history. The following game is probably already known to many readers, as it is one of Alekhine's most famous efforts. However, I have chosen it anyway, as it is an excellent illustration of a gigantic battle between a top-class pragmatic and a top-class theorist. Réti later wrote very positively of Alekhine; in Masters of the Chessboard he stated: "In his thinking and in his
writing on the subject of chess, he is always so logical and easy to understand, so far removed from any mystical tendency, that he may best be described by the epithet that has been grossly misused in recent years – he is 'objective'. Alekhine and Réti played several interesting games against each other – the interested reader can look for their games in Vienna 1922, both games of the great tournament in New York 1924 and Semmering 1926 – all instructive and enjoyable. Alekhine was generally more successful in their encounters, winning three and losing just one (with some draws). On the following game, Kasparov noted that “there is reason to nominate this game the most beautiful ever played in the history of chess”.

Réti – Alekhine
Baden-Baden 1925

1 g3 e5 2 Qf3 c4 3 Qd4

An interesting paradox: Alekhine has to fight against the opening that carries his name (1 e4 Qf6, which to my knowledge he first employed against Sämisch in Budapest 1921) with reversed colours and a tempo down! Although Alekhine would probably have objected to being associated with the ‘hypermoderns’, his opening does resemble the thinking championed by the hypermodern players: that the centre does not need to be controlled by pawns; it might just as well be attacked by the pieces. Réti was a protagonist for this point of view and used to attack the opponent’s centre by developing his bishops on the long diagonals. Here, however, he follows in Alekhine’s own footsteps!

3...d5 4 d3 exd3 5 Wxd3

In the normal Alekhine’s Defence, Black usually takes back with one of the pawns, but this is fine too. In fact, Réti also employed Alekhine’s Defence as Black, and here he also used to recapture with the queen on d6, for instance after 1 e4 Qf6 2 e5 Qd5 3 d4 d6 4 exd6, as in his games with Yates (Budapest 1926) and von Holzhausen (Giessen 1928).

5...Qf6 6 Qg2 Qb4+!? 

Do you remember this check from the game Alekhine-Rosanoff, given in the notes to the Levenfish game above? Alekhine was fond of this intermediate check, which has now become common in many lines – remember for instance the line 1 d4 Qf6 2 c4 e6 3 Qf3 b6 4 a3 Qb7 5 Qc3 d5 6 cxd5 Qxd5 7 e3 Qe7 8 Qb5+ c6 9 Qd3, which the young Kasparov used to good effect in the early 1980s. The point is that after c2-c3 (or ...c7-c6) the d3(d6)-square is weak and White has been forced to commit to a move that might not otherwise fit in with his plans.

7 Qd2 Qxd2+ 8 Qxd2 0-0 9 c4 Qa6 10 cxd5 Qb4 11 Wc4 Qbxd5 12 Qb3 c6 13 0-0 Ze8 14 Qfd1 Qg4 15 Qd2 We8 16 Qc5 Wh3! (D)

17 Qf3

Réti does not fall for Alekhine’s poisonous trap. Grabbing a pawn by 17 Qxh3? Whxh3 18 Qxb7? loses to 18...Qg4 19 Qf3 Qg3! 20 fxe3 Qxe3 21 Wxf7+! Wh8! 22 Qh4 Qh8, and Black wins the queen, as f1 must be kept defended.

17...Qg4 18 Qg2 Qh3 19 Qf3 Qg4 20 Qh1!!

Réti plays for the win. With 20 Qg2 he could force a draw through repetition of moves. Réti’s decision to continue the game is understandable. He has the potential of either a minority attack (b4-b5) on the queenside or the preparation of an expansion in the centre (by c4). Objectively White is probably slightly better. But Alekhine is Alekhine! He notices the weak spot in White’s position: the g3-pawn, which he sets out to soften.

20...h5! 21 b4! a6 22 Qe1 h4 23 a4 hgx3 24 hxg3 Qc7 25 b5

The natural follow-up to White’s preceding moves. White consistently carries out his minority attack to saddle Black with a weak isolated
pawn on the queenside. But this advance also allows Black to initiate an imaginative counter-attack, which may be possible to rebut but only with very precise play. In any case, the resulting positions are very complex and require precise calculation, and this is more in line with the pragmatic Alekhine than the theorist Réti. Therefore it would have been a better strategy for Réti to play 25 e4 ëe7 (or 25...ëb6 26 ëc2) 26 a5 with some advantage for White, as pointed out by Kasparov.

25...axb5 26 axb5 (D)

26...ëe3!
Targeting g3. The rook obviously cannot be taken, as 27 fxe3? ëxg3+ 28 ëg2 ëxe3 leads to mate.

27 ëf3?
But this is not the correct response. Now Alekhine is allowed to carry out the beautiful sequence that has made this game rightly famous. However, at this point Réti had a number of possibilities of escaping this fate.

a) White could block access to g3 by 27 ëf3!?; after 27...ëxf3 28 exf3! his king is safe and he can continue probing the black queenside pawns, although the doubled pawns would give Black reasonable drawing chances even if he drops a pawn on the queenside. One sample line given by Nunn is 28...ëxb5 29 ëxb5 ëa5 30 ëxd5 ëe1+ 31 ëxe1 ëxe1+ 32 ëg2 ëxd5 33 ëxd5 ëa1 34 ëd8+ ëh7 35 ëh4+ ëg8 with a draw by perpetual check.

b) Another attempt to rebut the attack is the prophylactic 27 ëg2!??, so that the capture on g3 is no longer with check. However, 27...ëxg3! is still dangerous, as 28 fxg3? ëe3 followed by ...ëxg3 still wins for Black. But again White does not have to take the rook, but can instead play 28 e3!, opening the way for a defensive retreat by the queen on the a6-f1 diagonal while trapping the black rook. Black then has the choice of sacrificing the exchange on g2 or a piece by 28...ëxe3 29 fxe3 ëe5 (Nunn), in both cases with reasonable compensation for the sacrificed material.

c) Most natural is the attempt to overprotect g3 by 27 ëh2!. This is what Alekhine himself quoted as best right after the game. Subsequent analysis has indicated that Black may still leave the rook en prise and step up the pressure with 27...ëa3! (D). Then:

c1) The rook still cannot be taken, as 28 fxe3? now loses to 28...ëxe3 29 ëb4 ëf1+! 30 ëg1 ëxg3+ 31 ëg2 ëe3, and again White is mated.

c2) However, as pointed out by Alekhine himself, White does not have to take the rook, but can simply block the 3rd rank by 28 ëcb3!!, after which it is not so easy for Black to keep his offensive going. According to Nunn’s extensive analysis of this game in The Mammoth Book of the World’s Greatest Chess Games, the critical line is 28...ëe5 29 bxc6 bxc6 30 fxe3 ëh5+ 31 ëg1 ëh3 32 ëxd5 ëxd5 33 ëf3, when 33...ëxg3+ 34 ëh1 ëxf3+ 35 exf3 ëxf3+ 36 ëh2 ëxe3 37 ëxc6 ëxb3 38 ëc8+ ëh7 39 ëf5+ ëh6 40 ëc6+ g6 41 ëxg6+ fxg6 42 ëf8+ is a draw by perpetual check.

c3) Nunn also points out a move which to my knowledge has not been analysed anywhere else: 28 ëd3!. According to Nunn’s analysis, the best line then goes 28...ëh5 29 ëxd5!
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\[ \text{\$g3 30 \text{\$e1} \text{\$e2} 31 \text{\$e2} \text{\$e2} 32 \text{\$c5} \text{\$xh2} 33 \text{\$x3} \text{\$d8} 34 \text{\$e1} \text{\$xh5} 35 \text{\$xb7,} \]

and although White is slightly better, Black should hold the draw.

As we can see, Réti had a number of ways to defend against the onslaught. This is perhaps not surprising considering again the teachings of Steinitz. If White was slightly better before, it is natural that he should be able to rebut an attack. Black's chances rest only on the temporary weakness on g3, which he hopes to exploit with tactical means and even at the cost of material. It is therefore not surprising that the correct way to defend involves either overprotecting g3 (27 \$h2), prophylaxis against the sacrifice on g3 (27 \$g2) or denying Black access to g3 (27 \$f3 and 27 \$h2 \text{\$xa3} 28 \text{\$d3}).

Presumably Réti thought along the same lines, but his calculations were not totally accurate (as calculations were not his core competence), and his choice consequently inferior. This is why it would have been better for a theorist like Réti to avoid this complicated position altogether by settling for the positional 25 e4 instead of 25 b5.

27...cxb5! 28 \text{\$xh2} \text{\$e2}+ 29 \text{\$xh2} (D)

31 \text{\$f1} leads to a lost endgame for White after 31...\text{\$e1} 32 \text{\$xe1} \text{\$xe1} 33 \text{\$xe1} \text{\$xa3}! 34 \text{\$xe1} \text{\$xa3}! 35 \text{\$d6}. But the attack is not yet over:

31...\text{\$e1} 32 \text{\$e1} \text{\$xh2} (D)

32 \text{\$xh2} drops material after 32...\text{\$d8} (double threat on c1 and f3), but this is a good try which falls just short. The alternative was 32 \text{\$d8+} \text{\$d8} 33 \text{\$e3}, hoping to exchange off as much as possible. However, Black wins by the following beautiful continuation given by Nunn:

33...\text{\$d5}! 34 \text{\$c4} \text{\$xg3} 35 \text{\$g2} \text{\$f1}+!! 36 \text{\$g1} (36 \text{\$xf1} \text{\$xf3} and 37...\text{\$h5+} decides) 36...\text{\$d1} 37 \text{\$xf1} \text{\$xf3} with the deadly threat of 38...\text{\$d2}.

32...\text{\$xf1}!

Réti's idea was 32...\text{\$d2} 33 \text{\$d2} \text{\$d3} 34 \text{\$d5}! \text{\$d2} 35 \text{\$d2} with a draw, or 32...\text{\$xf3} 33 \text{\$e4} \text{\$e4} 34 \text{\$e3} \text{\$xh1} 35 \text{\$xh1} \text{\$g3}+ 36 \text{\$g2}, when the limited material gives White good drawing chances.

33 \text{\$g2} \text{\$e1}!

At this point Alekhine must have seen the final position. A fitting end to a creative attack built on the trademark of the pragmatic: the devastating accuracy of his calculations.

34 \text{\$e2} \text{\$g4}+ 35 \text{\$h3}

The king cannot retreat to the first rank because of 35...\text{\$a1}+.

35...\text{\$e5}+ 36 \text{\$h2} (D)
36...\textit{xf3}!
White could still slip off the hook: 36...\textit{xf3}+ 37 \textit{xf3} \textit{xf3} 38 \textit{xe2} is probably drawn.
37 \textit{xe2} \textit{g4}+ 38 \textit{h3} \textit{e3}+ 39 \textit{h2} \textit{xc2} 40 \textit{xf3} \textit{d4}! 0-1

Sources differ on exactly where this game finished, with some claiming that the remaining moves in Alekhine's combination were actually played. These moves are 41 \textit{f2} \textit{xf3}+ 42 \textit{xf3} \textit{d4}!, when the b7-knight is lost.

Pragmatics are very strong in the direct attack on the king. Here their talent for precise calculation can be put to optimal use. However, often it is not the attack itself that constitutes the most difficult part – it is the preparation and build-up to the attack. I think it was Tartakower who once commented on Alekhine's attacking and combinative skills: “I can also make the same combinations and swift attacks as Alekhine – if I had his positions. The problem is to get the positions!” This is a profound observation. Alekhine was not only lethal when he had the attack – the way he prepared the attacks is no less impressive and very instructive to follow. The final attack in the following game may not be too difficult, but the clear and straightforward way that Alekhine explains the prelude to the attack is worth noting. Understanding how to build up an attack – and not only how to conduct it – is a key learning point that can be derived from the thorough study of Alekhine's games. The same feature can also be seen in the games of later pragmatics, most notably Kasparov.

\textbf{Alekhine – Bogoljubow}
\textit{Triberg 1921}

Alekhine and Bogoljubow were long-time rivals. Twice – in 1929 and 1934 – Bogoljubow challenged Alekhine to world championship matches. Many games of these matches were interesting and are worth studying, but the results were never in doubt: Alekhine won convincingly both times. The present game is from the early years of their rivalry.

1 d4 \textit{f6} 2 \textit{xf3} e6 3 c4 b6 4 g3 \textit{b7} 5 \textit{g2} e5?!  
Contemporary theory regards this as inadequate. However, to prove this White must be prepared to make a temporary sacrifice of one or sometimes even two pawns. 5...\textit{e7} and 5...\textit{b4}! are the solid main lines.

6 \textit{xc5}!
This should not unduly worry Black. The refutation attempt starts with 6 \textit{d5}! \textit{exd5} 7 \textit{h4}!. A fine example of White's chances after this is Karpov-Gavrikov, USSR Ch (Moscow) 1988, which continued 7...b5?! 8 0-0! \textit{c4} 9 \textit{c3} \textit{e7} 10 \textit{xf5} 0-0 11 \textit{xe7}+ \textit{xe7} 12 \textit{g5}! h6 13 \textit{xf6} \textit{xf6} 14 \textit{xd5} \textit{xd5} 15 \textit{xd5} \textit{c6} 16 \textit{xc4} \textit{xb2} 17 e3 \textit{ab8} 18 \textit{xc5} \textit{b6} 19 \textit{ad1} \textit{b8} 20 \textit{d5} with a clear advantage for White and a typical positional Karpovian squeeze, resulting in a white win in 40 moves.

6...\textit{xc5}
6...\textit{bxc5} is safer.

7 0-0 0-0 8 \textit{c3} d5?!  
This is a well-known position with the white queen on a4 (arising from 1 d4 \textit{f6} 2 c4 e6 3 \textit{xf3} b6 4 g3 \textit{a6} 5 \textit{wa4} \textit{b7} 6 \textit{g2} c5 7 dxc5 \textit{xc5} 8 0-0 0-0 9 \textit{c3}). The normal move is 8...\textit{e7} going for either a hedgehog set-up with ...\textit{a6} or a simplifying plan with ...\textit{a6-c5-e4}. Bogoljubow's choice is risky because he is lagging behind in development.

9 \textit{d4}! (D)

\textbf{B}

9...\textit{xd4}?!  
But only this is really playing with fire! Giving up the two bishops so light-heartedly is asking for trouble. The problem for Black is the pressure on the h1-a8 diagonal and the potential risk of an isolated pawn on d5. A possibility is 9...\textit{d7}, covering the bishop while preparing to overprotect d5 by ...\textit{d8}, if needed.

10 \textit{xd4} \textit{c6} 11 \textit{wh4} \textit{dxc4}?
Black should try to keep the centre closed by
11...d4.

12 d4! Wc8

Bringing the queen further away from the kingside. However, 12...We7 is not good because of 13 d5 with the point 13...h6 14 xf6 Wxf6 15 Wxf6 gxf6 16 d7 (16 Qe4 Qa5)! 16...ab8 17 xe7! xb7 18 xc6 with advantage for White.

13 Ag5 Qd5

Keeping the queenside majority but moving
one more piece away from the king's defence.

14 Qxd5 exd5 15 Qxd5 Qb4 (D)

16 e4!

Alekhine begins the direct onslaught on the
king, which has been left to its own devices.

Alekhine's comments on this attack are inter¬
esting and instructive: "This is decisive, as is
shown by the variations given below. I should
like to draw the reader's attention to the simila¬
rity of this game to others I have played. The
main peculiarity of these games lies in the
unexpectedness of their rapidly successful at¬
tacks, which are always prepared far away from
the point at which they are really aimed. In
each case they are preceded by manoeuvring,
of varying degrees of complexity, in the centre
or on the queenside, the aim of which is to lure
the opponent's pieces away from the main
scene of the battle. And only then a lightning
blow is struck, followed usually by sacrifices,
leaving the opponent with no chance of saving
the game. The attacks based on the same plan,
in games of completely different character, are,
in my opinion, very significant, and could serve
as material from which to form an opinion on a
player's style, or at least, on the evolution of his
style." The games to which Alekhine refers in
the text are his wins against Sterk (Budapest
1921) and Rubinstein (Semmering 1926). These
splendid games should not be kept behind the
scenes. Keep Alekhine's explanation of the
background of the attacks in mind while play¬
ing over the games.

Alekhine-Sterk, Budapest 1921: 1 d4 d5 2 Qf3 c5 3 c4 Qf6 4 Qc3 Qbd7 5 e3 Qd6 6 Qb5
Qe7 7 Qc2 c6 8 Qc3 0-0 9 Qd3 dxc4 10 Qxc4
e5 11 dxec5 Qxc5 12 0-0 b6 13 e4 Qb7 14 Qg5
Qc8 15 Qe2 Qb4! 16 Qd3 Qxc3 17 Qxc3 Qxc3 18 Qd7
Qe4? (this loses; Kotov recommended instead
17...Qxc5, giving 18 Qc3 Qxe4 19 Qxf6 Qxd3
20 Qe2! Qxf6 21 Qc4 22 bxc5 bxc5 23 Qxc5
"followed by h4-h5 with compensation for the
pawn", but as pointed out by Beim, Black can
repel White's attack by 23...Qa6 24 h4 Qc8
with the point 25 h5 Qxc5 26 Qxc5 Qc8; White
can instead mix things up by 25 dxc6 Qxc5 26
Qxc5 Qxa2 27 h5 Qxf5 28 Qd4, but even then it
seems likely that Black can repel the attack, and
at the very least he should not be worse; this is
an excellent example of the concrete nature of
chess in the 21st century - rather than accept¬
ing a verbal verdict like "compensation for the
pawn", contemporary grandmasters want con¬
crete variation-based evidence of its soundness)
18 Qxe4 Qxe4 19 Qxe4 Qd5 20 Qe2? (Ale¬
khine falters! 20 Qb1 Qb4 21 a3 Qb7 22 b3!
(better than 22 axb4 Qb3) leads to a forced
win, as Nunn pointed out) 20...Qa5 21 Qb1
Qb6 22 d4! Qe4? (D) (Black returns the
favour and allows Alekhine the beautiful com¬
bination that has made this game famous; as
pointed out by Beim, the calm 22...h6! is better,
after which Black is still very much in the
game).

23 Qf6! Qc8 (other moves do not help:
23...gx6? 24 Qg4+ or 23...h5 24 Qg4!! Qxe2
25 Qxg7+ Qh8 26 Qg5!! and Black is mated;
Kotov gives 23...h6 as Black's best chance, but
after 24 Qe5 he has little hope of survival; no¬
tice how far all his pieces are from the real bat¬
tlefield - the kingside!) 24 Qe5!! Qc5 (this
loses a piece, but other moves lose the queen or
the king; e.g., 24...gx6 25 Qc4+ Qh8 26 Qd6+,
24...Qxc4 25 Qg5 Qh8 (or 25...Qf1 26 Qb5
Qc1+ 27 Qxe1 Qxb8 28 Qe6 Qb8 29 Qa4)
26 Qd7+ Qe8 27 Qg8+ Qd7 28 Qe5+ Qc7
CHARACTERISTICS OF PRAGMATICS

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a) 16...g6 17 h6! gxh6 18 hxg6 hxg6 19 h5 (or 18...Wf5 19 hxe7) 19...c3! Wd8 20 Wd4, and mate is inevitable.
b) 16...h6 17 Wxd8+ f5 (17...Wxd8 18 Wg5
+19 Wxh6 18 Wg5+! do not help) 18 Wg5 Wf7
(not 18...Wf7 19 Wxh6 Wxg5 20 Wxh6+ Wxg5
21 Wb7+) 19 Wxf6! Wxe4 20 Wxf6 Wxf6 21
Wg6+ Wxe5 22 Wd1 "with a winning attack".

These variations seem convincing. However, Black has a third possibility, which is not
mentioned by Alekhine:
c) 16...h5! Surprisingly, I (and more accu-
rately my computer) cannot see a direct win af-
after this. The point compared to 16...h6 is that
the black queen now has the g4-square, which
in many lines is a saving measure. Surely,
White is clearly better after 17 Wd4 (as he wins
a pawn), but Black may still fight on. This is a
good example of the impact of computers on
contemporary chess: the accuracy of calcula-
tions, sacrifices and evaluations are often ques-
tioned, as the silicon monsters do not have any
‘disturbing’ human feeling of danger whatsoever. Computers ‘want’ concrete proof and it is
my experience that they often value material
higher than humans do. I agree with Peter Heine
Nielsen, who believes that material is becom-
ing increasingly important in chess following
the rise of computers as an aid in preparation
and analysis.

17 Wxf6! Wxf6 18 Wd8+ Wxd8 19 Wxd8
Wc8 20 Wd1 Wf7 21 Wg4 Wd3 22 Wd3 Wxd8
23 Wd4 Wxf8 24 Wf4 Wc7 25 Wf2 b6 26 Wb1
Wc8 27 Wf3 Wf7 28 Wd5 g5 29 Wxe7 gxf4 30
gxf4 1-0
Foundations of Chess Strategy

Opening theory often advances with the help of pragmatics. Throughout chess history, a number of pragmatics have put their stamp on opening theory. Examples are Alekhine, Euwe, Keres and most recently Kasparov, who has taken opening preparation to an entirely new level. Contrary to theorists, who focus on developing opening repertoires that simply lead to sound positions, pragmatics often play opening variations where one single move radically changes or determines the fate of the game. Take a look at the following game:

Alekhine – Euwe
Haarlem Wch (6) 1937

1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 Qc3 dxc4 4 e4
The main alternatives are 4 e3 and 4 a4.
4...e5
Here 4...b5 is more common nowadays, leading to complicated play.
5 Qf3 exd4 6 Qxd4 is thought to give White a small endgame advantage. But Alekhine doesn’t have an endgame in mind!
5...exd4 (D)
5...Qxd4 6 Wb1 #d7 7 $g5 gives White a strong initiative according to Alekhine.

6 Qf3!!??
Remember that this is a world championship match! Euwe had taken the title from Alekhine two years earlier, and Alekhine had prepared thoroughly for the return match. The idea of 5 Qxc4 and 6 Qf3 is one of his inventions. Later analysis indicates that it is flawed, but over the board this is almost impossible to calculate.

6...b5?
Euwe immediately stumbles. 6...dxc3 is of course critical. At the time of the game Alekhine himself apparently believed his spectacular sacrifice to be correct. However, a year after the game, the chess amateur Goncharov published analysis that seems to indicate that Black may indeed repel the attack through accurate defence. The main line of his analysis goes 7 $xf7+! $e7 8 $b3 cxb2! 9 $xb2 $b6 10 $a3+ (or 10 $xg8 $xg8 11 $xg8 $b4+! 12 $d2 $xb2 13 $b1 $c2 and White’s attack peter out) 10...c5 11 $xg8 $xg8 12 $xc5+ (12 $xg8 $a5+) 12...$xc5 13 0-0 (threatening $ac1) 13...$h5! (the point of Goncharov’s analysis) 14 $xg8 $e6 15 $h8 $c6, and with the queen trapped, White is in trouble. To my knowledge the acceptance of the sacrifice has not been tested in master practice.

As a solid alternative, 6...Qc5 has been suggested, which according to published analysis should lead to a small advantage for White after 7 0-0! $f6 8 $a4 $e7 9 e5 $xd4 10 $xd4 0-0 11 Qc3. 6...Qc5 was played in a game Khashdan-Polland, New York 1938, which ended in a pretty miniature: 7 $e5?! $f6 8 $xf7 $xc3 9 0-0! $e6?! 10 $g5! $xg5 11 $xg5 $xc4 12 $h5+ $g6 13 $h3 cxb2 14 $d1 $a6 15 $c3 $xf1 16 $xf1 $b1 17 $xb1 1-0.

It seems that Alekhine’s invention was incorrect after all. This opens up an interesting question: would Alekhine have gone for this line if he had known the sacrifice to be incorrect, relying on the surprise effect? I doubt it. As Réti stated above, Alekhine was an objective player. Usually this is an advantage, but not always. As I repeatedly emphasize, chess is first and foremost a game between two players, and it is the result that matters. Sometimes results are best achieved by a bit of bluff!

7 $xb5!
The simple refutation which Euwe must have missed. 7...cxb5 is answered by 8 $d5, winning the rook.

7...$a6 8 $b3! $e7
8...$xb5 9 $xf7+ $d7 and now 10 $xd4! gives White a winning attack (but certainly not 10 $xg8? $xg8! 11 $xg8?? $d4+).

9 0-0 $xb5 10 $xb5 $f6
10...cxb5 11 $d5 still doesn’t work for Black.
11 $c4 $bd7 12 $xd4 $b8 13 $c2 (D)
The smoke has cleared and it is obvious that White is winning: extra pawn, better development, two bishops, and a psychological advantage having sprung an effective surprise.

13... f6 14 £f5 £e5 15 £f4! £h5 16 £xf7+! £xf7 17 £xc5 £xc5 18 £xe5 £b5 19 £d6 £b6 20 b4 £d8 21 £ad1 c5 22 bxc5 £xc5 23 £d5! 1-0

Despite only holding the world championship for two years, Euwe has meant a lot to chess as world champion, author and president of FIDE. In my opinion, he is an underestimated champion, who deserves a prominent place in chess history. Euwe wrote extensively on both openings and middlegames, and through his writings I believe he has been the chess teacher of the western world after World War II. I know many grandmasters who grew up studying Euwe’s writings. As a mathematician Euwe was an objective character, and this is also visible in his play and writings. Again, there are advantages and disadvantages to this. In his interesting book Psychology in Chess Krogius (a Russian grandmaster and psychologist) made a study of Euwe’s choice of openings in the period 1920 to 1927. Krogius concludes that Euwe had a very broad and systematically developed opening repertoire, but that he did not gain optimal benefit out of this profound knowledge. According to Krogius, this was because he chose openings in individual games according to how good he considered the opening and how deeply he had analysed it (objective criteria) rather than through an appraisal of which opening would likely be best and most unpleasant against this particular opponent (more subjective criteria). This is very much in line with the approach that I advocate to chess strategy and chess in general. Nevertheless, Euwe was an immensely strong player even in the period examined by Krogius. Witness for example the following game from the 20-year-old Euwe’s match against one of the most solid players from the preceding period, Geza Maroczy (born 1870). The match ended in a 6-6 draw with two wins for each side.

**Euwe – Maroczy**

*Bad Aussee (6) 1921*

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 £c3 £f6 4 £g5 £b4!? The old MacCutcheon, which is still popular today.

5 e5 h6 6 £d2 £xc3 7 bxc3

7 £xc3 was (unsuccessfully) tried by Fischer (against Petrosian, Curacao Ct 1962), but this was and is the main line.

7...£e4 8 £wg4 (D)

8...£g6

Today 8...£f8 is just as common and is, e.g., favoured by Korchnoi. Both moves are playable, but Black has to know what he is doing as his king may quickly come under fire, as in the present game.

9 h4

In contemporary games White usually prefers 9 £d3, keeping all options open. However, here it just transposes.

9...£c5 10 £d3 £xd2 11 £xd2 £wa5

11...£c6 is more flexible, although following 12 £h3 (12 £f3) 12...£wa5 13 £xg6! Euwe won a fine game as White against Bogoljubow.
in the same year (Budapest 1921): 13...\textit{f}8?! 14 \textit{f}3 cxd4 15 \textit{x}f7+! \textit{d}8 16 \textit{g}7 \textit{d}xc3+ 17 \textit{e}1 \textit{b}4 18 \textit{g}6 \textit{xf}3 19 \textit{xf}3 \textit{f}4 20 \textit{d}1 \textit{b}8 (D).

However, time (and analysis) has shown that this can be improved for Black. 13...\textit{xd}4! (instead of Bogoljubow's 13...\textit{f}8) has given Black good results; e.g., 14 \textit{d}1 \textit{g}8 15 \textit{xf}7+ \textit{xf}7 16 \textit{h}5+ \textit{e}7 17 cxd4 \textit{xg}2 18 \textit{d}2 \textit{d}7 19 \textit{xh}6 \textit{f}8 with initiative for Black, Spoelman-Glek, Hoogeveen 2003. Furthermore, Black can simply play 12...\textit{c}xd4 13 cxd4 \textit{b}6 with good counterplay. Euwe himself ended up on the receiving end of a fine game by an 'underdog' as White against Castaldi, Venice 1948: 14 \textit{f}3 \textit{d}7 15 \textit{hh}1 0-0-0 16 \textit{h}b1 \textit{a}5+ 17 \textit{e}2 (D).

17...f5! 18 \textit{f}4 (18 \textit{xf}6 e5!) 18...\textit{c}3 19 \textit{h}1 g5! 20 hxg5 hxg5 21 \textit{xg}5 \textit{h}g8 22 \textit{e}3 \textit{f}4! 23 \textit{d}2 (23 \textit{xf}4? loses beautifully after 23...\textit{x}f8 24 \textit{f}3 \textit{xf}3!! 25 \textit{xf}3 (forced) 25...\textit{xd}4+ 26 \textit{f}4 \textit{xc}2! 27 \textit{xc}2 \textit{b}4+ 28 \textit{e}4 \textit{f}8+! 29 \textit{f}5 \textit{xf}5#) 23...\textit{xd}4+ 24 \textit{xc}4 \textit{xd}4 25 \textit{ab}1 \textit{xg}2 26 \textit{f}3 \textit{dg}8, and Black was winning, although Euwe fought on until move 48.

12 \textit{h}3 cxd4 (D)
Black could still transpose by 12...\textit{c}6.

13 \textit{xg}6! \textit{wc}7 14 \textit{f}3 \textit{g}8 15 \textit{xf}7 \textit{wc}3+ 16 \textit{e}2 d3+?!
Natural and perhaps not bad, although Black is walking a tightrope after this. Black had two safer alternatives:

a) 16...\textit{d}8, after which White maintains the initiative with 17 \textit{d}1 as the black king is more vulnerable than White's.

b) 16...\textit{xc}2+ goes for an endgame and is probably safest, but not necessarily best. After 17 \textit{xc}2 \textit{xc}4 18 \textit{h}7 White is still better due to his superior coordination and development, but Black is still in the game.

17 cxd3 \textit{wc}5+ 18 \textit{f}3 (D)
18...\textit{f}8?!
In some older sources this move is considered forced, because 18...\textit{xa}1?? loses beautifully to 19 \textit{g}7+ \textit{f}8? (19...\textit{d}8 20 \textit{xc}7 is obviously superior, although White is clearly better after, e.g., 21 \textit{g}3? \textit{e}5+ [21...\textit{xg}1? 22 \textit{f}4+!] 22 \textit{f}4 \textit{xf}4+ 23 \textit{xf}4 \textit{xc}6 24 \textit{f}3 with a solid endgame advantage for White) 20 \textit{f}4+! \textit{xc}7 21 \textit{f}7+ followed by mate. However, it only takes the computer a few seconds to suggest the cool 18...\textit{c}6! as an interesting
alternative that might keep Black afloat. The idea behind the move is 19 \( \texttt{f5}+ \) \( \texttt{d8} \) \( \texttt{xe5? xe5}+ \) (check!) and Black wins. White obviously has a draw after 19 \( \texttt{g7+ f8} \) \( \texttt{f7+ e8} \), but can he aim for more? My computer claims that White is slightly better in the endgame after 19 \( \texttt{c1!} \) (threatening 20 \( \texttt{xc6!} \)).

25...\( \texttt{exf4} \) 26 \( \texttt{f5} \) \( \texttt{e8} \) 27 \( \texttt{xd7! xd7} \)

Now we see the point behind White’s 25 \( \texttt{f4} \): 27...\( \texttt{xf7} \) is not check but instead drops the queen to 28 \( \texttt{e6+} \).

28 \( \texttt{f8} \) 1-0

Pragmatics fall into two broad categories. One group – probably the larger – utilize their talent for concrete calculation for attacking purposes (e.g., Alekhine, Keres, Fischer and Kasparov), whereas the other group often use them for defensive purposes; e.g., by being willing to accept ‘dangerous’ material (here Korchnoi is the most prominent representative). Of course some can be found in both categories, depending on the situation. Euwe is one such player.

We have already seen his attacking abilities, but he was also very strong in defence and more than willing to accept offered material if he did not see an immediate refutation. In fact, this helped him take the world title from Alekhine. Their 1935 match was played over 30 games, and after 24 games the match was tied 12-12. Then Euwe won the 25th and the 26th games to take the lead for the first time in the match, and although Alekhine responded by winning the 27th game, he could not save the match, as the remaining games were drawn. The 26th game is the one known as the ‘Pearl of Zandvoort’, and we have already seen that game in the notes to Botvinnik-Larsen in the previous chapter.

That was a brilliant attacking effort by Euwe. In the 25th game, however, it was his defensive abilities that carried the day.

**Alekhine – Euwe**

*Amsterdam Wch (25) 1935*

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 \( \texttt{f3} \) \( \texttt{f6} \) 4 \( \texttt{c3} \) e6 5 \( \texttt{g5} \) \( \texttt{bd7} \)

Euwe does not go for the dreaded Botvinnik system with 5...\( \texttt{dxc4} \) 6 e4 b5 7 e5 h6 8 \( \texttt{h4} \) g5. True, this line did not become really well-known until after World War II, not least following Botvinnik’s quick win as Black against Denker in the radio match USA-USSR 1945. That match ended with a crushing 15\( \frac{1}{2} \)-4\( \frac{1}{2} \) win for the Soviets, for the first time indicating the hegemony of Soviet chess-players which was to dominate the chess scene for the rest of the 20th century. The Denker-Botvinnik game went
9 ♕xg5 hxg5 10 ♕xg5 ♕bd7 11 exf6 ♕b7 12 ♕e2 ♖b6 13 0-0 0-0 14 a4 b4 15 d4 c5 16 ♖b1 ♕c7 17 ♕g3 ♕xd4 18 ♕xe4 ♕c6 19 f3 d3! 20 ♗xe1 ♕c5+ 21 ♗h1 ♖d6 22 ♕f4 ♖hx2+! 23 ♖hx2 ♖h8+ 24 ♗f4 ♖h4+ 25 ♖e4 ♕xe4! 0-1.

6 e3 ♕a5

The Cambridge Springs variation, named after the tournament in the town of that name in 1904, where it was played in three games (Marshall-Teichmann, Hodges-Barry and Schlechter-Teichmann). Sometimes it is slightly arbitrary how an opening or variation receives its name. These were not the first games to see the move 6...♕a5 (it was, for example, played in the games Burn-Schiffers, Berlin 1897 and Walbrodt-Tarrasch, Vienna 1898), nor did Black do very well (Teichmann got a draw against Schlechter, while the other two games were won by White). Later this variation became highly popular and it is still occasionally seen in modern grandmaster games.

7 cxd5

The sharp reply. 7 ♕d2 is more restrained.

7...♕xd5 8 ♕d2 (D)

8...♕7b6

Today 8...♕b4 is more common. After 9 ♕c1 h6 10 ♗h4, two recent games with former FIDE World Champion Khalifman as White show the durability of the Cambridge Springs.

a) 10...0-0 11 a3 ♕xc3 12 bxc3 ♕xa3 13 e4 ♕e7 14 ♕d3 ♕g6 15 ♕g3 e5 16 h4 exd4 17 cxd4 ♕e8 18 h5 ♕gf8 19 0-0 ♕f6 20 ♕a1 ♕e7 21 ♕h4 ♕e6 22 ♕a5 b5 23 d5 cxd5 24 exd5 ♕d6 25 ♕xb5 ♕xe5 5/2-5/2 Khalifman-M.Gurevich, Lanzarote 2003.

b) 10...c5 11 a3 ♕xc3 12 bxc3 b6 13 ♕d3 ♕a6 14 0-0 ♕xd4 15 ♕xa6 ♕xa6 16 ♕xd4! 0-0! 17 e4 ♕f4 18 ♗xe7 ♕xe7 19 ♗h1 ♕xe1 20 ♕xe1 ♕xa3 21 ♕d2 ♕a8 22 ♕d4 ♕e6 23 ♕xe5! Khalifman-Dreev, St Petersburg 2004.

9 ♕d3 ♕xc3 10 ♕xc3 ♕d5

Eco (Encyclopedia of Chess Openings — together with Informator the bible for serious chess-players in pre-computer times!) recommends 10...♕a4! here, leading to equal chances after 11 0-0 ♕xc3 12 ♕e2 ♕b2 13 ♕d1 ♕xc3 14 ♕e1 ♕f6?! Vladimirov-Nogueiras, Havana 1986. But the text-move is also not bad. Black is ready to postpone development in order to win the c3-pawn.

11 ♕c1 ♕xc3! 12 0-0

Of course, White cannot capture the knight due to 12...♕b4.

12...♕b4 13 a3!? (D)

Sacrificing another pawn to destroy the coordination among the black pieces and dragging the queen into a dangerous position deep inside the enemy camp.

13 ♕xa4 ♕xc3 14 ♕a1 ♕b3 15 ♕c2?!

After this White does not have enough compensation for the sacrificed pawns. He had two better options.

a) Eco gives 15 ♕fc1 ♕a2? (15...a5 seems like a natural alternative) 16 ♕xa2 ♕xd3 17 ♕f5! ♕xd5? 18 ♕d1! ♕xa2 19 ♕d8# and 17...exd5 18 ♕b2, with the threats ♕xb4, ♕xg7 or ♕e5+, are not good alternatives for Black) 18 ♕d1 followed by d6 with good compensation for the pawns.

b) Euwe gives 15 ♕e5?! 0-0 (15...♕e4 16 ♕e2 ♕xg5 17 ♕h5 with a strong attack for the
sacrificed material, according to Euwe's analysis) 16 \( \text{c}4 \) \( \text{d}4 \) 17 \( \text{e}e2 \) \( \text{w}c3 \) 18 \( \text{e}c1 \) \( \text{w}d2 \) 19 \( \text{g}g4 \) \( \text{e}xg5 \) 20 \( \text{c}c1 \) \( \text{w}c3 \) (20...\( \text{w}e2 \) 21 \( \text{d}d3 \)) 21 \( \text{e}e1 \) \( \text{w}d2 \) as leading to a possible draw by repetition.

15...\( \text{w}d5 \) 16 \( \text{e}4 \)

More wood is thrown into the fire!

16...\( \text{e}x e4 \) 17 \( \text{w}x b4 \) \( \text{e}x g5 \) 18 \( \text{d}e5 \)

This is the position that Alekhine was aiming for. Black cannot castle and the knight on \( g5 \) is hanging in the air. But Euwe is not impressed and defends coolly.

18...\( a5 \) 19 \( \text{d}a3 \) \( f6 ! \) (D)

20 \( \text{g}g6 + ? \)

An attractive combination, but it has a flaw. White's best was undoubtedly 20 \( \text{b}3 \) \( \text{w}d8 \) (safest) 21 \( \text{c}4 \) \( \text{d}7 \)! (that's why 19...\( f6 \) was strong) 22 \( \text{e}e1 \). Now 22...\( \text{w}e7 \) 23 \( \text{g}b6 \) \( \text{w}a3 \) 24 \( \text{d}a3 \) \( \text{w}b8 \) 25 \( \text{d}a5 \) and 22...\( b6 \) 23 \( \text{d}x b6 ! \) \( \text{w}x b6 \) 24 \( \text{d}xe6 \) both give White good counter-chances. However, with the cool prophylactic move 22...\( a6 ! \) (planning 23...\( \text{w}e7 \)) Black can consolidate and retain his material advantage.

20...\( \text{h}x g6 \) 21 \( \text{d}x g6 \) \( \text{f}3 + ! \)

The refutation! White must take with the queen as 22 \( \text{d}h1 \) \( \text{h}x h2 \# \) is mate, and 22 \( gxf3 \) \( \text{w}g5 + \) just drops the knight.

22 \( \text{w}x f3 \) \( \text{w}f3 \) 23 \( \text{g}xf3 \) \( \text{d}h5 ! \) 24 \( \text{d}f4 \)

24 \( f4 ? \) \( \text{d}f7 \) costs White his knight, while Black threatens 24...\( \text{g}5 \), and 24 \( \text{d}h1 \) \( \text{d}f5 \) is equally hopeless.

24...\( \text{e}f5 \) 25 \( \text{d}d3 \) \( \text{w}xf3 \) 26 \( \text{d}c5 \) \( b6 \) 27 \( \text{g}2 \)

\( \text{e}f4 \) 28 \( \text{d}b3 \) e5 29 dx e5 \( \text{d}e6 \) 30 \( \text{d}c1 \) 0-0-0 31 \( \text{e}x f6 \) \( \text{g}4 + \) 32 \( \text{d}f3 \) \( \text{f}8 \) 33 \( \text{d}e3 \) \( \text{w}x f6 \) 34 \( f4 \) g5 35 \( \text{d}d3 \) \( \text{d}c4 \) 36 f5 \( \text{h}4 \) 37 \( \text{a}d1 \) \( \text{h}x h2 \) 38 \( \text{d}e4 \)

\( \text{e}e2 + \) 39 \( \text{d}f3 \) \( \text{e}e8 \) 40 \( \text{g}4 \) \( \text{d}d8 \) 41 \( \text{d}e5 \) \( \text{e}x d1 \)

42 \( \text{e}x d1 \) \( \text{d}e2 + \) 43 \( \text{d}x g5 \) \( \text{e}x f5 + \) 44 \( \text{d}x f5 \) \( \text{e}x d1 \)

45 \( \text{d}c6 \) a4 0-1

A famous pragmatic who just failed to take the last step to the world championship is Paul Keres. Keres is probably the player in chess history who was a contender for the world crown over the longest period of time. For 30 years – from the 1930s to the 1960s – Keres was in the top five or ten in the world, and he finished second in four candidates tournaments. He won games against all the world champions from Capablanca to Fischer (Capablanca, Alekhine, Euwe, Botvinnik, Smyslov, Tal, Petrosian, Spassky and Fischer). Like many other pragmatics, Keres started his career as a fierce attacker (who doesn’t remember his famous win against Winter at the 1935 Olympiad in Warsaw?) and gradually became more all-round. He was objective, systematic and hard working – in his book The Art of the Middlegame, which he wrote together with Alexander Kotov, he describes his approach to the analysis of adjourned games. Serious stuff! Nothing was left to chance – all possibilities had to be appraised. In one of his other books (Think Like a Grandmaster) Kotov uses Keres as an example in his explanations of how players should work systematically with 'decision trees' in calculation. One of the positions he examines is from the following game.

Tal – Keres
Curacao Ct 1962

1 e4 e5 2 \( \text{d}f3 \) \( \text{d}c6 \) 3 \( \text{b}b5 \) a6 4 \( \text{a}4 \) \( \text{f}6 \) 5 0-0 \( \text{d}e7 \) 6 \( \text{e}e1 \) b5 7 \( \text{b}b3 \) d6 8 c3 0-0 9 h3 \( \text{d}a5 \) 10 \( \text{c}c2 \) c5 11 d4 \( \text{d}7 ? ! \)

This move (instead of Chigorin's old main line 11...\( \text{w}c7 \) or Romanishin's 11...\( \text{b}7 \)) was Keres's own invention, and he had introduced it into tournament practice a few rounds earlier in a game against Fischer. The American did not believe in this move. In My 60 Memorable Games he notes: "Keres's novelty, introduced on this occasion, has since become quite fashionable. I was – and still am – unimpressed. Black loses time redeveloping his knight to b6, but the kingside is weakened by its absence and it's questionable whether the knight is not better where it stands originally."
12 \( \text{Q} \)bd2

Fischer played 12 dxc5, and after 12...dxc5 13 \( \text{Q} \)bd2 \( \text{W} \)c7?! (better is 13...\( \text{b} \)7 14 \( \text{W} \)e2 \( \text{E} \)e8 15 \( \text{E} \)d1 \( \text{W} \)c7 16 b3 \( \text{Q} \)xc6 17 \( \text{Q} \)f1 b4! with equal chances, Svidler-Adams, Wijk aan Zee 2004) 14 \( \text{Q} \)f1 \( \text{Q} \)b6 15 \( \text{Q} \)e3 \( \text{E} \)d8 16 \( \text{W} \)e2 \( \text{E} \)e6 17 \( \text{Q} \)d5! \( \text{Q} \)xd5 18 exd5 \( \text{Q} \)xd5 19 \( \text{Q} \)xe5 \( \text{A} \)7 20 \( \text{A} \)f4 \( \text{W} \)b6 21 \( \text{Q} \)d1 he had a dangerous initiative and won a fine game.

12...cxd4 13 cxd4 \( \text{Q} \)c6 14 a3 exd4 15 \( \text{Q} \)b3 \( \text{Q} \)de5 16 \( \text{Q} \)fxd4 \( \text{Q} \)f6 17 \( \text{Q} \)d2 \( \text{Q} \)xd4 18 \( \text{Q} \)xd4 \( \text{Q} \)d3?!

Now 19 \( \text{A} \)xd3 \( \text{A} \)xd4 or 19 \( \text{A} \)a5 \( \text{W} \)xa5 20 \( \text{W} \)xd3 \( \text{A} \)6 is fine for Black. But what about...

19 \( \text{Q} \)c61 (D)

\begin{center}
\text{B}
\end{center}

19...\( \text{Q} \)xf2!

19...\( \text{W} \)b6 20 \( \text{A} \)xd3 \( \text{W} \)xc6 21 \( \text{A} \)c1 followed by \( \text{Q} \)c3 gives White a serious positional grip, as Black is left with the backward d6-pawn.

But now the board is in flames. This is the position that Kotov examines extensively in the aforementioned book. Obviously 20 \( \text{Q} \)xf2? \( \text{W} \)b6+ or 20 \( \text{Q} \)xd8? \( \text{Q} \)xd1 is not the right way to go for White. So White must move his queen. 20 \( \text{W} \)h5 is one option, threatening 21 e5. The position is very complicated and a good choice for a training session in calculation. Black has two options (20...\( \text{W} \)b6 and 20...\( \text{Q} \)xh3+), both of which must be examined – as the saying goes “if you have found a good move, then try to find a better one!” In other words, even if the first option is good, you should look at the other one as well before deciding.

a) After 20...\( \text{W} \)b6 Tal had planned 21 e5! \( \text{Q} \)e4+ (not 21...\( \text{Q} \)d3+? 22 \( \text{Q} \)e3 \( \text{W} \)xc6 23 exf6 \( \text{W} \)xc2 24 \( \text{W} \)g5 and Black is mated, as the knight blocks the saving 24...\( \text{W} \)g6) 22 \( \text{Q} \)h2 (22 \( \text{Q} \)e3 \( \text{W} \)xc6), when 22...g6 23 exf6!! \( \text{W} \)xh5 24 \( \text{Q} \)xe4 gives White a dangerous attack despite the material deficiency. But better is 22...\( \text{Q} \)xh5+! 23 \( \text{Q} \)xe5 \( \text{Q} \)d6!, when Black has nothing to fear after 24 \( \text{W} \)h4 dxe5 or 24 \( \text{W} \)f3 \( \text{Q} \)b7 followed by 25...dxe5 (Keres). So 20 \( \text{W} \)h5 \( \text{W} \)b6 seems to be OK for Black.

b) But still 20...\( \text{Q} \)xh3+ should be examined. This turns out to be even better! 21 g3xh3 and 21 \( \text{A} \)xh3 are both answered by 21...\( \text{W} \)b6+, so White must try 21 \( \text{Q} \)h2. Now 21...\( \text{Q} \)e5+? 22 \( \text{W} \)xe5! dxe5 23 \( \text{Q} \)xd8 \( \text{A} \)xd8 24 \( \text{Q} \)a5 is good for White, but Black plays 21...g6!. White has a variety of options, but none seem to work: 22 \( \text{Q} \)xd8 gxh5 and Black is fine; 22 \( \text{W} \)xh3 \( \text{Q} \)e5+! followed by ...\( \text{W} \)c7 and too many of White’s pieces are hanging; 22 \( \text{W} \)d5 \( \text{W} \)d7! followed by ...\( \text{Q} \)b7 and the c6-knight is in trouble; 22 \( \text{W} \)f3 \( \text{Q} \)e5+! 23 \( \text{Q} \)xe5 dxe5 24 \( \text{A} \)h6 \( \text{W} \)h4! and Black is better.

Conclusion: 20 \( \text{W} \)h5 is not dangerous for Black. But White has another interesting option, which Tal chose:

20 \( \text{W} \)f3 \( \text{Q} \)xh3+! (D)

Also here this turns out to be strongest. After 20...\( \text{W} \)b6 21 e5! \( \text{Q} \)g4+ 22 \( \text{Q} \)e3 \( \text{Q} \)xe3 23 exf6!! \( \text{Q} \)xc2+ 24 \( \text{Q} \)h2 \( \text{Q} \)xe1 25 \( \text{Q} \)xe1 it is not easy for Black to parry the white attack despite his extra material.

\begin{center}
\text{W}
\end{center}

21 \( \text{Q} \)h2

Again White had several other options, but most can be disregarded quickly: neither 21 gxh3 \( \text{W} \)b6+, 21 \( \text{W} \)xh3 \( \text{W} \)b6+ nor 21 \( \text{Q} \)h1 \( \text{W} \)b6 22 e5 \( \text{Q} \)g4! is any good. The choice is between the text-move and 21 \( \text{Q} \)f1. However, after more
careful consideration it turns out that 21 \( \text{f1} \) \( \text{b6} \) 22 e5 \( \text{g4}! \) is again advantageous for
Black; for example, 23 \( \text{e3} \) \( \text{xf3} \) 24 \( \text{xb6} \) \( \text{xc6} \) or 23 \( \text{w3} \) \( \text{xc6} \) 24 \( \text{ac1} \) \( \text{w4+} \) 25 \( \text{d3} \) \( \text{xf4+!} \) 26 \( \text{xf4} \) \( \text{xf4} \), and Black comes out on
top. This means that 21 \( \text{h2} \) is essentially
forced.

21... \( \text{e5+!} \) 22 \( \text{ixe5} \)
22 \( \text{h1} \) \( \text{c7} \) is good for Black; for exam¬
ple, 23 \( \text{b3} \) \( \text{xc6} \) 24 \( \text{d5} \) \( \text{w} \) 24!! 25 \( \text{xe8} \)
\( \text{d2} \) and 26 \( \text{g3} \).

22... \( \text{dxe5} \) 23 \( \text{ed1} \)

The smoke has cleared: Black is better. The
question is then: how much of this had Keres
seen when he played 19... \( \text{xf2} \)? Probably most
of it, since as Kotov points out, most of the vari¬
atons are relatively short. The big issue is to
structure the calculations, and this is exactly
what pragmatics like Keres are phenomenal at
doing! Kotov suggests that the reader make a
‘tree’ of the calculations, and I can recommend
that. It is a very good and instructive exercise
in how to structure calculations and concrete
thinking in chess – entering the domain of the
pragmatics!

26 \( \text{d6}?! \)
but only after learning a great deal in the process. Knowing Fischer’s willingness to learn, the old legend surely has a point. As I have already pointed out repeatedly, willingness to learn is a key attribute of many successful pragmatics.

**Fischer – Unzicker**

*Zurich 1959*

1 e4

“Best by test” (Fischer).

1...e5 2 d3 d5 3 h5 a6 4 a4 d6 5 dxe5 dxe5 6 c3 e6 7 Be2 Be7 8 c4 0-0 9 h3 c5 10 fxe5 cxd4 11 wxd4 dxc4 12 cxd4 Bb6 13 Be3 c5 14 c5 Bb7 15 a4 Bc4 16 Bc2 Bb8 17 f4 Bf8 18 d3 c5 19 d4 Bc6 20 g5!? Fischer’s novelty, which he introduced in a game against Shocron, Mar del Plata 1959. The point is to give the white knight access to g4, so that it can ‘escape’ exchange by the black knight after ...dxc4. The question is of course whether Black can capture the pawn with 20...xg5. To my knowledge this has never been tested in practice. Like Shocron, Unzicker declined the gift, even after home analysis as preparation for the game. Remember that in those days you had to analyse such things for yourself – no computers to the rescue! Let us briefly examine the lines after the acceptance of the sacrifice. In My 60 Memorable Games Fischer gives 20...xg5 21 d5 exd5 22 c3 dxc3 23 dxc3 (not 21...dxe5? 22 dxe5, winning the exchange) 22 d6+ Bg8 23 Bxc6 (after 23 dxe8 Bg5 24 d6 c4 Black’s bishop-pair and activity compensate for the slight material deficiency) 23...Bf8 24 Bg3 Bc7 25 Bg5 Bg7, “and now White can force a draw with 26 Bb5+ Bg8 27 Bf6+, etc., or try for more with either 26 f4 or 26 Bc3.” This comment shows a key difference in the development of grandmaster chess from those days until now. Top grandmasters of today cannot rely on a ‘maybe White can try for... possibility of ...d3 gives Black sufficient counterplay (draw in 36 moves).
more feeling, as a well-prepared, computer-aided opponent may have refuted everything at home. In fact, my computer does not see anything for White after either 26 f4 exf4 or 26 \( \text{Bxe3} \) h6. This means that Fischer's inventive pawn sacrifice should only lead to a draw, and it is quite unlikely that a contemporary top grandmaster would go for such a pawn sacrifice without having double-checked it with his computer — then disregarding it, if it only leads to a draw as White. Again we see how chess has become increasingly concrete in modern times. Perhaps we shall see a return to quieter and less forcing opening lines in the future (e.g. the Réti or Larsen's 1 b3, moving the main battle from the opening to later stages in the game) as more and more forcing opening lines become fully explored with silicon help, thus making them inadequate for striving for an advantage early in the game. Or maybe Fischer will get the last word after all: Fischerrandom (or chess960, as it is sometimes called) to the rescue!?

20...\( \text{Qxc4} \) 21 \( \text{Qg4} \) \( \text{Qxg4} \) 22 \( \text{Wxg4} \) f6?!

Unzicker tries to improve on the Fischer-Shocron game mentioned above, but in fact this is probably worse than Shocron's 22...\( \text{Qb6} \). Black releases any potential pressure on h7, but isolates his e5-pawn in the process. Fischer's systematic probing of Black's weak pawns (b5, c5 and e5) eventually carries the day and is highly instructive. Let us briefly examine the proceedings of the game Fischer-Shocron as well: 22...\( \text{Qb6} \) 23 g3 c4 (the plans of both players are clear: White wants to attack h7, whereas Black hopes to achieve a stronghold for his knight on d3) 24 \( \text{Qg2} \) \( \text{Qd7} \) 25 \( \text{Kh1} \) \( \text{Qf8} \) 26 b4?! \( \text{Qc6} \) (Black cannot afford the 'Spanish' bishop into play by 26...\( \text{cxb3} \) 27 \( \text{xxb3} \) 27 \( \text{Qe2} \) a5! 28 bxa5 \( \text{Qa6} \) 29 \( \text{Qe3} \) \( \text{Qxa5} \) 30 a4 \( \text{Qa8} \) (safer is 30...\( \text{Qxc3} \) 31 axb5 with equal play according to Fischer) 31 axb5 \( \text{Wxb5} \) 32 \( \text{Qhb1} \) \( \text{Qc6} \) 33 \( \text{Qb6} \) \( \text{Qc6} \) 34 \( \text{Qb4} \) \( \text{Qc6} \) 35 \( \text{Qxe6} \) \( \text{Qxe6} \) 36 \( \text{Qf6} \) \( \text{Qc6} \) 37 \( \text{Qxe6} \) \( \text{Qd6} \) with the decisive blunder; Black believes he has set a trap, but White wins by 'falling into it': Instead, 38...\( \text{Qd7} \) still gives Black good defensive prospects; e.g., 39 \( \text{Qh2} \) [not 39 \( \text{Qxc4?} \) \( \text{Qd3} \) 40 \( \text{Qd6} \) \( \text{Qb1} \) with a strong counterattack] 39...\( \text{Qb1} \) 40 \( \text{Qxb6} \) \( \text{Qd3} \) 41 \( \text{Qxb1} \) \( \text{Qxb1} \) 42 \( \text{Qd7} \) \( \text{Qc7} \) 43 \( \text{Qc6} \) \( \text{Qd3} \) “with drawing chances” — Fischer) 39...\( \text{Qxe6} \) ! \( \text{Qc8} \) (the point, but...) 40 \( \text{Qd7?!} \), and Black resigned because 40...\( \text{Qxd7} \) 41 \( \text{Qxg6+} \) wins the black queen.

23 \( \text{gxf6} \) \( \text{Qxf6} \) 24 \( \text{a4!} \) \( \text{Qb6} \) 25 axb5 axb5 26 \( \text{Qe3} \) (D)

White has a small but lasting advantage.

26...\( \text{Qa8} \) 27 \( \text{Qed1} \) \( \text{Qh8} \) 28 \( \text{b3} \) \( \text{Qg7} \) 29 \( \text{Wh4} \) \( \text{Qf6} \) 30 \( \text{Qg5}! \)

Concrete thinking! Many players would presumably have tried to hold on to the two bishops, but Fischer realizes that this is dogmatic thinking. It is more important to get rid of Black's dark-squared bishop, which defends the e5-pawn and the king.

30...\( \text{Qxg5} \) 31 \( \text{Wxg5} \) \( \text{Qxa1} \) 32 \( \text{Qxa1} \) \( \text{Qd7} \) 33 \( \text{Qd1}! \)

Again using concrete calculation to bring the bishop into play. Black cannot grab the pawn due to the forced line 33...\( \text{Wxe4?} \) 34 \( \text{Qf3} \) \( \text{Wf4} \) (34...\( \text{Qc2} \) 35 \( \text{Qa7} \) with a decisive initiative) 35 \( \text{Wxf4} \) \( \text{exf4} \) 36 \( \text{Qc6}! \) \( \text{Qe7} \) 37 \( \text{Qa8+!} \) \( \text{Qg7} \) 38 \( \text{Qa7} \), and White wins a piece.

33...\( \text{Qf6} \) 34 \( \text{Qa7}! \) \( \text{Wd6} \)

Now 34...\( \text{Qxe4?} \) simply loses to 35 \( \text{Wb6} \).

35 \( \text{Qe2!} \) (D)

Surprisingly, Black now cannot avoid losing a pawn! He has a number of possibilities, but none work:

a) 35...\( \text{Qxe4?} \) 36 \( \text{Wc6} \) \( \text{Qe7} \) 37 \( \text{Qf8#} \).

b) 35...\( \text{Qb4} \) 36 \( \text{Qa6} \) \( \text{Qxe4} \) 37 \( \text{Wb4} \) \( \text{Qd5} \) 38 \( \text{Qf3} \) \( \text{Wd3} \) 39 \( \text{Qa7} \) and wins.

c) 35...\( \text{Qc6} \) loses to the immediate capture 36 \( \text{Qxb5}! \).

d) 35...\( \text{Qb8} \) 36 \( \text{Qf7} \) \( \text{Qg8} \) 37 \( \text{Qd7} \) \( \text{Wf6} \) (or 37...\( \text{Wxd7} \) 38 \( \text{Wxe5+} \) \( \text{Qg7} \) 39 \( \text{Qxb8} \) \( \text{Qxc3} \) 40 \( \text{Wxb5}, \) winning) 38 \( \text{Qe3} \) \( \text{Qc6} \) 39 \( \text{Qd5} \), and loss of material is unavoidable (Fischer).
Foundations of Chess Strategy

These variations show the connection between strategy (the sustained advantages of better pawn-structure and more active pieces) and operational implementation (using concrete calculation to achieve strategic goals). Fischer was exceptional in connecting these notions.

35...Se7

Unzicker accepts the loss of the b-pawn and hopes to be able to put up a dark-squared fortress that the light-squared bishop cannot penetrate.

36 Sxe7 #xe7 37 ilxb5 &g7 38 Ae2 Wc7

Passive defence with 40...®c7 is more stubborn.

41 &g2 Wa5

Returning home, as 41...Wxb3 42 Wxc5 helps White.

42 Wd3 Wb6 43 Wc4 Wc6 44 £d3 Wb6 (D)

Fischer conducts the endgame accurately. The bishop must dominate the knight to prevent a blockade on the dark squares. Here ...£d7 is prevented.

51...£e6 52 £c4+ £e7 53 c6! £e8

53...exf4 is more stubborn but still inadequate: 54 gxh4 £e8 55 e5, and White slowly penetrates with £e4 and £g8.

54 fxe5 h6 55 £e3 £c7 56 £d4 h5 57 £e3!

Black’s last move opened the gate for the white king via f4-g5. To prevent the white king from advancing, Black must weaken his position further.

57...g5 58 £e2! h4 59 gxh4 gxh4 60 c4 £e8 61 £f4 £d8 62 £g4 £c7 63 £f7! £g7 64 £xh4 £xc6 65 £g5 1-0

Now the king and pawn ending after 65...£d7 66 £f6 £e8+ 67 £xe8+ £xe8 68 e6 is lost for Black, so Unzicker resigned.

Pragmatics are characterized by decision-making based on a concrete appraisal of the facts in the given position. This means that they are not afraid to make a ‘strange-looking’ move, if the facts and their calculations indicate that it is the right move. Korchnoi is a player where this characteristic is clearly visible. Korchnoi never makes dogmatic moves but instead relies on the vast number of variations that he calculates during a game.

Korchnoi – Polugaevsky

USSR Ch (Leningrad) 1963

1 c4 e5 2 £c3 £c6 3 g3 £g7 4 e4 h5!? 10...

A typical Korchnoi move! He doesn’t mind ‘redeveloping’ his knight, as he simply believes this is the best move in the given position. That the knight had already been developed does not matter. And the move does make sense: after ...h5 Black has weakened g5, so f3 is clearly the best square for the knight.

10...£h6 11 £e2 f5 12 f4! £f7 13 £f3

There it is!

13...0-0 14 0-0 fxe4 15 £xe4 £f5 16 £d2 £d8 17 £a1 c6

It is slightly dangerous to open the centre further, as White is better centralized. But because of his more space it is easier for White to
improve his position (e.g. by $\text{c3}$), so Black could hardly just wait.

18 fxe5 $\text{xe5}$ 19 $\text{xe5}$ $\text{xe5}$ 20 dxc6 $\text{bxc6}$
21 $\text{c3}$ $\text{c3}$ (D)

22 bxc3!

Another unconventional move! The concrete motivations for this seemingly awkward move are many: the black knight is kept from d4, the b-file is opened for a possible $\text{b1-b7}$ and no time is wasted by removing the knight from the centre. Yet not everybody would accept the long-term damage to the pawn-structure!

22...$\text{e7}$ 23 $\text{d2}$ $\text{ae8}$ 24 $\text{h3}$! (D)

It is astonishing how quickly the white initiative has developed into a winning position.

27...$\text{xf1}$+ 28 $\text{xf1}$ $\text{xe4}$?

Hoping for some positional compensation (due to the damaged pawn-structure) and some counterplay against the white king (which was weakened by g3-g4-g5), but it never materializes against Korchnoi's accurate play.

29 $\text{xe4}$ $\text{f5}$ 30 $\text{xf5}$ $\text{xf5}$ 31 $\text{e1}$ $\text{d7}$ 32 $\text{d4}$ $\text{c2}$ 33 $\text{e2}$ $\text{f5}$ 34 $\text{d2}$ $\text{e4}$ 35 $\text{e3}$
36 $\text{g4+}$ 37 $\text{e1}$ d5 38 $\text{f2}$ $\text{g4}$ 39 $\text{f4}$ $\text{g1+}$ 40 $\text{e1}$ $\text{e5}$ 41 $\text{f7+}$ $\text{h8}$ 42 $\text{e8+}$ 1-0

Korchnoi has won many games through such concrete appraisals of a position. There is another important point to make here: the psychological effect. Such non-typical moves can come as unpleasant surprises for the opponent, who may not be ready for these often drastic changes in events. Another example from Korchnoi's practice is this:

20 e4! dxe4

Korchnoi – Suetin

Nothing much seems to be going on. Black has an isolated d-pawn, but his knight covers it safely while at the same time hitting White's a4-pawn. Suetin probably expected a quiet game. However, with his next move Korchnoi redirects his focus to another point in Black's camp: the kingside. The doubled pawn in front of the king is a weakness, as it 'suffocates' the king. This is a very profound detail which is very clearly visible in the game.

20 e4! dxe4
Forced, as White was threatening e5-e6 with an attack.

21 £xe4 £fd8 22 We1! £d5 23 Ac1 Wa3 24 £d1

Let’s take stock. Within a few moves, the position has changed significantly. White’s major pieces are beautifully centralized and Black has to be very careful not to lose control over the back rank, as his king cannot escape. Still, with precise play Black should not lose. But it is not easy to adjust to the changed circumstances.

24...£c3?!

Perhaps not bad, but rather risky. 24...£if6 seems more natural.

25 £xd8+ £xd8 26 £e3

An unpleasant pin.

26...£c8 27 h4 £b4 28 b6! (D)

Again concrete calculation! The text-move indirectly covers the a4-pawn, as 28...£xa4? now loses a piece after 29 £e8+ £e8 30 £xe8+ £f8 (30...£h7? 31 £g5+ mates – here we see the weakness of the kingside imposed by the rigid doubled pawn) 31 £xa4.

28...£d5 29 £e8+ £e8 30 £xe8+ £f8 31 £b5 £d6 32 £xa5 £xb6 33 £b5!

Suetin has defended well, but Korchnoi keeps a tiny nagging pressure despite the limited material. Notice the importance of the rigid kingside structure. This was the tiny detail that led Korchnoi to change the course of the game by 20 e4.

33...£d1+ 34 £h2 £d6+ 35 g3 f6 36 £g2 £c7

Passive, but the threat was 37 a5.

37 £d4! £c4 38 £e8+ £h7 39 £e6! £c6+ 40 £xc6 bxc6 41 £f3

Contrary to the black king, the white monarch can enter the game undisturbed.

41...£g8 42 £e4 £a5

A very passive square for the knight, but 42...£f7 is impossible due to 43 £d8+.

43 £e5! £f7 44 £d4

The black knight is trapped! But the game is not yet over.

44...£e7 45 g4 £d6 46 f4 f5

White was threatening 47 f5 followed by £e6. Again the weakened pawn-structure hurts Black.

47 gxf5 gxf5 48 h5!

Isolating the g7-pawn. White is winning.

48...£c7 49 £c3 £d6 50 £b4 £d5 (D)

51 £e6!

Accuracy to the end! Now the pawn ending after 51...£xe6 52 £xa5 c5 53 £b5 £d5 54 a5 wins for White, as he queens with check.

51...£b7 52 £xg7 £c5+ 53 £c3 £d6 54 h6 £e4+ 55 £c2 £f6 56 £xf5 £c4 57 £c3+ £d4

57...£b4 58 £d5+!.

58 a5! 1-0

That brings us to the present time (although Korchnoi is still going strong even in his seventies!) and the strongest pragmatic (and perhaps of all players) of all time – Garry Kasparov. Kasparov has taken the strengths of pragmatics to a new level. His abilities to calculate concrete forcing variations, his unmatched opening preparation that drives the state of opening theory in many lines, his talent for the direct attack on the king and not least his ability for continuous learning throughout his career – all this has
contributed to Kasparov’s dominance of the chess world for almost 20 years. His game from the Olympiad 1982 against Korchnoi signalled these changing times in the chess world – in the preceding years the main battle had been between Karpov and Korchnoi, playing two matches for the world championship (1978 and 1981) and the Candidates Final in 1974 for the right to challenge Fischer in the match that never took place, leaving Karpov as World Champion without play. In 1983 in London, Kasparov beat Korchnoi in a Candidates match on the way to taking the title from Karpov in 1985. But first there was the game from Lucerne that gave rise to hundreds of hours of analysis by chess fans all over the world.

Korchnoi – Kasparov
Lucerne OL 1982

1 d4 £f6 2 c4 g6 3 g3 £g7 4 £g2 c5
Taking the game from a King’s Indian to a Modern Benoni – an old favourite also of Mikhail Tal.
5 d5 d6 6 £c3 0-0 7 £f3 e6 8 0-0 exd5 9 cxd5 a6 10 a4 £e8 11 £d2 £bd7 12 h3 £b8 13 £c4

The first critical position of the game. Black has to choose between the sharp 13...£e5 and the quieter 13...£b6. Of course, the 19-year-old Kasparov goes for the sharp one!

13...£e5 14 £a3 £h5 (D)

15 c4!
Of course Korchnoi also goes for the sharpest option! At the same time he sidesteps some dangerous minefields:

a) 15 f4?! £xg3! 16 fxe5 £xe5 17 £c4 £xc3 18 bxc3 b5 19 axb5 axb5 20 £e3 £xf1 21 £xf1 £h4 led to a black initiative and later win in Donner-Ree, Amsterdam 1979.

b) Similarly, 15 g4?! allows Black a dangerous attack. In Kagageldiev-Tseshkovsky, Ashkhabad 1978, White escaped with a draw after a hair-raising king-march: 15...£h4! 16 £e4 (16 gxh5 £xh3 gives Black a strong attack according to Kasparov) 16...h6 17 gxh5 £xh3 18 £g3 £g4 19 £f4 £f4 20 e3 £xe3! 21 fxe3 £xg2 22 £xg2 £h2+ 23 £f3 £xe3+! 24 £xe3 £e5+ 25 £xe5 £f5+ 26 £xf5 £xf5+ 27 £xf5 (D).

After 27...£h3+ 28 £e4, Black settled for a draw by repetition with 28...£g2+ 29 £f5 £h3+ 30 £d4, but 28...£e8! seems to leave White in a hopeless situation. A more forcing win is also available: 27...£f8+ 28 £e6 £h4! (28...£h3+ is far less clear), when White cannot avoid mate: 29 £xd6 £d8+ 30 £xe5 (or 30 £xc5 £c8+ 31 £b6 £d8+) 30...£e8+ 31 £e5 £f8+ 32 £e6 £f6+ 33 £d7 £d8+ 34 £e6 £f6+ 35 £e5 £e7#.

Should White wish to play it safe, 15 £h2 is a better choice.

15...£f8?

Copyright Timman, 1980! Previously, the direct 15...£f5 was tested in a number of games, usually proceeding with 16 exf5 £xf5 17 g4 £xg4 18 hxg4 £h4! (if you want to play this line you must not be afraid to sacrifice a piece or two!) 19 gxh5 £f8 20 h6! £h8 21 £e4 £g4 22 £xg4 (forced) 22...£xg4 23 £c4 with a highly complicated position and mixed results. But then the Yugoslav grandmaster Kovacević came up with the improvement 21 £c4!! (instead of
21 \( \text{Qe}4 \), which improves the coordination of
the white pieces and supposedly leads to an
advantage for White after 21...\text{Qg4} 22 \text{wxg4}
\text{wxg4} 23 \text{Qxd6} \text{Qe}5 24 \text{Qde4}. This led people
to abandon 15...f5 years ago. But perhaps things
are not so clear-cut. In Saint Vincent 1999, the
young grandmaster Sadvakasov – surely fol¬
lowing previous preparation – went in for this
position in his game against Lacrosse and won
quickly with 24...\text{Qf3}? 25 \text{Qe}3 b5 26 axb5 axb5
27 \text{Qxc5}? \text{Qh3}! 28 \text{Qe}1 \text{Qh2} 0-1. Surely
White’s play can be improved, but still we might
see a resurgence of 15...f5. If you do not trust
15...f5 or 15...\text{Qf8}, there is also the option of
going in the footsteps of John Nunn. I refrain
from trying to attach any signs or evaluations to
this hyper-complicated outing – judge for your¬
self: 15...\text{Qd7} 16 a5 \text{Qxa5} 17 g4 \text{Qf6} 18 g5
\text{Qh5} 19 f4 \text{Qxc4} 20 \text{Qxc4} \text{Qxa1} 21 \text{Qxd6} \text{Qd4}+
22 \text{Qg2} \text{Qe7} 23 b5 c4 24 e5 b5 25 \text{Qe}4 \text{Qb5}
26 \text{Qxb5} axb5 27 \text{Qxf6}+ \text{Qxf6} 28 \text{gxf6} \text{Qg7} 29
\text{Qg3} \text{Qxb2} 30 \text{Qxa3} 31 \text{Qg5} \text{Qh8} 32 \text{Qxc5}
\text{Qaa8} 33 \text{Qe7} \text{Qwd3} 34 e6 \text{fxe6} 35 \text{Qwh6} \text{Qg8} 36
\text{f7} b3 37 \text{Qxg8}+ \text{Qxg8} 38 \text{Qh4} \text{Qe3} 39 \text{Qf3}
\text{Qc2} 40 \text{Qxc3} \text{Qxe5} 41 \text{Qf6} \text{Qb4} 42 \text{Qg5} \text{Qa2}
43 \text{Qd8}+ \text{Qf8} 44 \text{Qg7} \text{Qxe2} 45 \text{Qg3} b2 46
\text{Qxe6}+ \frac{1}{2}-\frac{1}{2} Hulak-Nunn, Toluca IZ 1982.

16 \text{Qh2}

In the stem game with 15...\text{Qf8}, Scheeren-
Timman, Leeuwarden 1980, Black was win¬
ning after 16 g4 \text{Qh4}! 17 \text{Qxh5} \text{Qxh3} 18 \text{h6}
\text{Qh8} 19 \text{Qe}2 f5 20 \text{exf5} \text{Qxf5} 21 \text{Qg3} \text{Qf8} 22
\text{Qxf5} \text{Qxf5} 23 \text{Qh3} \text{Qxg2} 24 \text{Qxg2} \text{Qe4}+ 25
\text{Qf3} \text{Qxf3}! 26 \text{Qxf3} \text{Qxf3} 27 \text{Qxf3} \text{Qe}2+ 28 \text{Qf2}
\text{Qg4}+ 29 \text{g1} \text{Qd1}+ 30 \text{g2} \text{Qd4}!. White is
fine on material but is unable to coordinate his
queenside pieces.

16...f5 17 f4 h5! (D)

Blow for blow! The e5-knight is left en prise
for a number of moves. Taking the knight is
possible, but after 18 \text{fxe5} \text{Qxe5}! 19 \text{Qxg3}
\text{Qxe5}+ 20 \text{Qf2} Black has at least a forced draw:

a) 20...\text{Qd4}+ 21 \text{g3} \text{Qe5}+ 22 \text{Qf2} \text{Qd4}+
23 \text{Qg3} \text{Qe5}+ 24 \text{Qf2} \frac{1}{2}-\frac{1}{2} Jirka-Ziegler, Sweden
2003.

b) In Birnboim-Arnason, Randers Z 1982,
Black avoided the repetition and was rewarded
after 20...\text{Qh4}+? 21 \text{Qg1} \text{Qg3} 22 \text{Qf3} \text{Wh2}+
23 \text{Qf1}?! (according to Arnason, 23 \text{Qe2}
is better) 23...\text{Qxf1} 24 \text{Qc4}? (White panics; after
24 \text{Qh6}! \text{fxe4} 25 \text{Qxf8}+ \text{Qxf8}+ 26 \text{Qxf8} \text{Qd4}!

27 \text{Qxe4} \text{Qg1}+ 28 \text{Qe2} \text{Qe3}+ 28...\text{Qxg2}+?
lets White escape after 29 \text{Qd3} \text{Qf5} 30 \text{Qe2}
29 \text{Qf1} \text{Qg1}+ (a draw is still on the cards)
24...\text{Qxc4} 25 \text{Qxe4} \text{Qxf4} 26 \text{Qxe4} \text{Qh3} 27 \text{Qh3}
\text{Qwh3}+ 28 \text{Qe2} \text{Qg2}+ 29 \text{Qf2} \text{Qc}3! 30 \text{Qxf8}+\text{Qxf8}
31 \text{Qe3} \text{Qf3}+ 32 \text{Qd3} c4+! 33 \text{Qxc4}
\text{Qxe3} 34 \text{Qg4} \text{Qf4}+ 35 \text{Qh3} \text{Qxb6}+ 36 \text{Qc}2-0.1.

18 \text{axb5} \text{Qxb5} 19 \text{Qaxb5}!

Taking the knight is still dangerous, as a
recent top-level encounter showed: 19 \text{fxe5}
\text{Qxe5}! 20 \text{Qf3} (20 \text{Qg3} must still be critical,
but only Black can play to win) 20...\text{Qxe5} 21
\text{Qaxb5} \text{Qh4}! 22 \text{exf5} \text{Qxf5} (according to
Timman, 22...\text{Qxf5}+ 23 \text{Qg1} \text{Qd7}! is even
stronger) 23 \text{Qa4} \text{Qe4}+! (and here 23...c4 is
simpler) 24 \text{Qxf8}+? (White stumbles, as so of¬
ten seen in such circumstances where the value
of each move is high; instead, Timman gives 24
\text{Qxe4} \text{Qxe4}+ 25 \text{Qg1} \text{Qxf3} 26 \text{Qxf3} \text{Qe}1+ 27
\text{Qf1} \text{Qg3} 28 \text{Qxe4} \text{Qh2}+ 29 \text{Qf2} \text{Qf8}+ 30 \text{Qe2}
\text{Qxf1} 31 \text{Qxf1} \text{Qg3} with just some advantage
for Black) 24...\text{Qxf8} 25 \text{Qg1} \text{Qe2}+! 26 \text{Qxe2}
\text{Qg3} 27 \text{Qf4} \text{Qxf4} 28 \text{Qxe4} \text{Qg3}+ 29 \text{Qh1}
\text{Qf1}+ 0-1 Van Wely-Timman, Wijk aan Zee
2002.

19...\text{Qxe4} 20 \text{Qxe4}!!

Again White is at a crossroads. The alterna¬
tive here is 20 \text{Qd7}!!, which was played in
Alburt-Olafsson, Reykjavik 1982 (shortly before
the Olympiad, but according to Kasparov in his
book The Test of Time neither player
knew that game; how times change – this would
be unthinkable in modern Internet days!). White
won after the typical hair-raising complications:
20...e3?! 21 \text{Qe2} (21 \text{Qe6}! is stronger accord¬
ing to Kasparov) 21...\text{Qxg3}?! 22 \text{Qxg3} \text{Qg5}!! 23
f5? \text{Qxf4} 24 \text{Qxe3} \text{Qd7} 25 \text{Qxg5} \text{h6} 26 \text{Qh5}
We2 2xf8+ £xf8 28 We2 &d3 29 We3 £c6?? (29..£a8! keeps Black in the game) 30 dxc6 £f5 31 £h2 &d4 32 £d5+! 1-0. However, according to Kasparov Black can improve by 20...£xf3+ 21 £xf3 exf3 22 £c6 £d7 23 f5!? (not 23 £xb8?? £xh3+) 23...£b7 24 g4 £f6 25 £xf3 £xf5 26 £xf5 (but not 26 £xf5? £xf4+! 27 hxg4 £xf5 28 £xf5 £xf5 with an irresistible attack) 26...£e8 with complications. Kasparov also mentions the line 20 £sxd6!? £xd6 21 £xe4 £b6 22 fxe5 £xf1 23 £xe5; Black maintains compensation due to the insecure position of the white king.

20...£d7! 21 We2! £b6 22 £a3 £be8 (D)

This is the critical turning point of the game, where Korchnoi miscalculates and falters. 23 fxe5 £xe5 is still too dangerous, so White should look for ways to consolidate his loose position. The position was analysed all over the world, and eventually it was concluded that White’s best is to secure the king with 23 £g2!. This was tested in a radio game (one move per day) in 1983 between the two high-class correspondence players Sloth (former correspondence world champion) and Sterud. After a fascinating struggle this game ended in a draw, although it was Black who was fighting throughout. I shall give the rest of the game, as it is interesting and well played, but not so well known (at least I could not find it in my database; only in the Danish chess magazine Skakbladet): 23...£b3! 24 £c2 £b4 25 £d2 £c4 26 £xc4 £xc4 27 £e1 £d4 28 £b3 £b4 29 £e4 £b6 30 £a5 £b8 31 £b1 £f5 32 £a4! £a8! 33 £xd6 £xe6 34 £xe6 £xc2 35 £xc2 cxb4 36 £xb4 £b8 37 £b1 £xd5 38 £a3 £a8 39 £b5 £e6 40 £b3 £xb3 41 £xb3 £g7 42 £g2 £f8 43 £c4 £xa3 44 £xa3 £c8 45 £f3 £f6 46 £d3 £c5 47 £b1 £f7 48 £c3 £h5 49 £g2 £a5 50 £g4 £h5 51 £g5 £e8 52 £e4 £g7 53 £d7+ £f8 54 £d6 £a2+ 55 £f3 £a3+ 56 £e4 £xh3 57 £f5 £xf5+ 58 £xf5 £xf5 59 £xf5 £h4 60 £g6 £g3! 61 £f7+ £g8 62 £b7 £f8 63 £b8+ £e7 64 £h8 £h3 65 £h4 £f8 66 £h6 £g8 67 g6 £a3 1/2-1/2.

23 £d2? £xb2!

Korchnoi apparently missed that 24 £f1? is impossible due to 24...£f3+!. Having missed such a simple tactic he loses control over the position and blunders again. After, e.g., 24 £c2 White could still fight.

24 fxe5?

This is still bad – maybe even worse than at any of the previous moves! However, psychologically it is annoying to have such a knight standing in the centre en prise for so long.

24...£xe5 25 £c4 £xg3! 26 £xf8+ £xf8 27 £e1! (D)

Korchnoi fights back – this is the only chance, and he is almost successful, as Kasparov also slips.

27...£xe4+ 28 £g2 £c2 29 £xe5 £f2+?

The slip! According to Kasparov, Black could have won immediately with the beautiful line 29...£xd2! 30 £xd2 £f3+ 31 £e2 £h4+! 32 £g1 £xc3 33 £e6+ £h8 34 £f8 £g3+! 35 £f1 £g2+ 36 £e1 £f3+ 37 £d1 £d2. #

30 £xf2! £xf2 31 £e2! £f5 32 £xd7 £d3 33 £h6?

The last mistake in this fantastic game. The knight on d7 cannot be saved by 33 £b6, as 33...£f1+ 34 £h1 £f3+ 35 £h2 £f4! 36 £xf4
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...xf4+ 37 g2 g5+! wins the other knight. But Korchnoi could have salvaged the draw by 33 a8+ h6 34 a7! fxf2+ 35 h1 axd2 36 e5+! f8 (36...h6?? even loses: 37 g4+ g5 38 e4+) 37 a8+ h7 38 a7+ h8 39 a8+, and the black king cannot escape the checks as 39...c7? loses to 40 b5+! b7 (40...b6 41 c4+) 41 a7+, and the combined knights and rook mate the black king!

33...a8?! f7 34 h8?!

35 e4 is more stubborn, but as Kasparov points out, 35 a7 36 f5+! xf5 37 g5+ (37...xf8 xf8 38 xd6 f4+ is equally hopeless for White) 37...e8 38 xf8 xf8 39 h7+ g7 40 g5 f6 leads to an easily winning knight endgame for Black. Presumably Korchnoi was in extreme time-pressure, as the next move also indicates.

35...f6! 36 f3? xhx3+ 0-1

Kasparov’s deep opening preparation has made him very difficult to beat, even when he is Black. In the period 1984-2004 I count just above 50 Kasparov losses in classical games in my database – or fewer than 3 per year. Considering the competition and Kasparov’s aggressive style, this is a very good average. The problem for his opponents can be induced from games like the following two – even as White it is difficult to get a clear shot at Kasparov, as he frequently has the whole game ready from home analysis!

Yusupov – Kasparov

USSR Ch (Moscow) 1988

1 d4 a6 2 c4 g6 3 e4 g7 4 cxd5 5 c3 6 d4 c6 7 c3 d5 8 cxd5 cxd5 9 e5 0-0 10-0-0 g4 11 f3 a5 12 d3

12 xf7+?! was Karpov’s choice in the world championship match against Kasparov in Seville 1987. See the next game for this!

12...cxd4 13 cxd4 e6 14 a1

To my knowledge no one has ventured Bronstein’s famous exchange sacrifice 14 d5 against Kasparov. It would be interesting to see what he has in store for that! Although strictly speaking Bronstein was not the first to play this sacrifice, he was the one to introduce it into top-level chess when he played it in a game against his good friend Isaak Boleslavsky in the Candidates tournament in Budapest in 1950 and later repeated it to win the first game of the playoff between the two to decide who would challenge Botvinnik in 1951. As we all know, Bronstein won this right (and drew 12-12 with Botvinnik after leading with two games to play), but the playoff between Bronstein and Boleslavsky was close. Bronstein led this 12-game match by two, but Boleslavsky managed to draw level, and a sudden-death playoff was needed. Boleslavsky was winning in the first overtime game but missed the win, and then Bronstein won the second game and the match. Curiously, many years later Bronstein married Boleslavsky’s daughter Tatiana. Enough of history for now; let’s return to the game!

14...e5 15 a4 e6 16 d5 d7 17 b4 e6 (D)

18 xd1?!?

To my knowledge, this was a novelty at the time – 18 dx6, 18 d6 or 18 c3 usually being played. 18 a3 exd5 19 exd5 f8 20 f2 f8 21 b2 g7 22 b4 f8 23 b2 f7 ½-½ was Beliavsky-Kasparov from the same tournament. But Kasparov was not surprised! The rumour has it that he had analysed the entire line beforehand, up to the final position of the game!

18...exd5 19 exd5 e8 20 f2 b5! 21 d4 d4 22 c6

22...xg4! 23 e5 bxc4 24 xc4 a4 25 d6 f6 with sufficient counterplay is given by Kasparov.

22...xg4 23 dxc6 b2! 24 xb5 xd1 25 c7 (D)

25...xd5! 26 xex8 xf2! 27 c8xc8 28 xc8 h3+! 29 gxh3
Not $29 \text{e}1??$, when $29...\text{d}3+$ forces mate:

$30 \text{d}1 \text{d}3+ 31 \text{f}2+ 32 \text{f}2 \text{d}3+ 33 \text{c}1 \text{d}1$.

$29...\text{d}1+$

White cannot escape the checks.

$30 \text{g}2 \text{e}2+ 31 \text{g}1 \frac{1}{2}-\frac{1}{2}$

Kramnik - Kasparov

Linares 1999

1 d4 $\text{f}6$ 2 c4 g6 3 $\text{c}3$ d5 4 cxd5 $\text{d}5$ 5 e4

$\text{xe}3$ 6 bxc3 $\text{g}7$ 7 $\text{c}4$ e5 8 $\text{xe}2$ $\text{c}6$ 9 $\text{e}3$ 0-0 10 0-0 $\text{g}4$ 11 f3 $\text{a}5$ (D)

12 $\text{xf}7+$!

This old and rare line was brought back to the fore when Karpov employed it in several games of the world championship match in Seville against Kasparov in 1987. Here is an old game with this line between two young players who were later to play a crucial role in chess history: Spassky-Korchnoi, USSR Ch (Moscow) 1955: 10...cxd4 11 cxd4 $\text{g}4$ 12 f3 $\text{a}5$

13 $\text{xf}7+$ $\text{xf}7$ 14 fxg4 $\text{xf}1+$ 15 $\text{xf}1$ $\text{d}7$

16 h3 $\text{e}6$ 17 $\text{d}3$ $\text{c}4$ 18 $\text{w}2$ $\text{a}6$ 19 $\text{c}2$

$\text{c}4$ 20 $\text{b}3$ $\text{h}8$ 21 $\text{g}1$ $\text{e}2$ 22 $\text{d}2$ $\text{xe}2$

23 $\text{e}3$ $\text{b}4$ 24 e5 $\text{b}5$ 25 $\text{c}1$ a5 26 $\text{g}5$ h6 27

$\text{xe}7$ a4 28 $\text{d}1$ $\text{e}3+$ 29 $\text{h}1$ $\text{f}2$ 30 $\text{g}1$

$\text{f}4$ 31 $\text{a}3$ $\text{h}7$ 32 $\text{c}5$ h5 33 gxh5 $\text{h}6$ 34

hxg6+ $\text{g}7$ 35 $\text{e}1$ $\text{g}3$ 36 $\text{b}4$ $\text{e}3$ 37 $\text{wh}2$

$\text{g}5$ 38 e6 $\text{f}4$ 39 $\text{g}1$ $\text{h}4$ 40 e7 $\text{f}3+$! (D). Black threatens $41...\text{axh}3+$ with mate.

13 $\text{xf}7+$ $\text{xf}7$ 14 fxg4 $\text{xf}1+$ 15 $\text{xf}1$ $\text{d}7$

16 h3 $\text{e}6$ 17 $\text{d}3$ $\text{c}4$ 18 $\text{w}2$ $\text{a}6$ 19 $\text{c}2$

$\text{c}4$ 20 $\text{b}3$ $\text{h}8$ 21 $\text{g}1$ $\text{e}2$ 22 $\text{d}2$ $\text{xe}2$

23 $\text{e}3$ $\text{b}4$ 24 e5 $\text{b}5$ 25 $\text{c}1$ a5 26 $\text{g}5$ h6 27

$\text{xe}7$ a4 28 $\text{d}1$ $\text{e}3+$ 29 $\text{h}1$ $\text{f}2$ 30 $\text{g}1$

$\text{f}4$ 31 $\text{a}3$ $\text{h}7$ 32 $\text{c}5$ h5 33 gxh5 $\text{h}6$ 34

hxg6+ $\text{g}7$ 35 $\text{e}1$ $\text{g}3$ 36 $\text{b}4$ $\text{e}3$ 37 $\text{wh}2$

$\text{g}5$ 38 e6 $\text{f}4$ 39 $\text{g}1$ $\text{h}4$ 40 e7 $\text{f}3+$! (D). Black threatens $41...\text{axh}3+$ with mate.

41 $\text{wh}2!!$ 1-0. After 41...$\text{axh}2$ 42 $\text{e}8\text{w}$ the black bishop is in the way and White mates first.

12...$\text{xf}7$ 13 $\text{fxg}4$ $\text{xf}1+$ 14 $\text{xf}1$ cxd4

The other option, which Kasparov has also tried, is 14...$\text{wd}6$.

15 cxd4 $\text{e}5$!?

Karpov-Kasparov, Seville Wch (9) 1987 featured 15...$\text{wb}6$, but after 16 $\text{gl}$ $\text{w}6$ 17 $\text{wd}3$

$\text{wxg}4$ 18 $\text{f}1$ White was slightly better, although Kasparov saved the draw.

16 d5 $\text{dc}4$ 17 $\text{wd}3$ $\text{x}e3+$ 18 $\text{wx}e3$ $\text{wh}4$ 19

$h3$ $\text{h}6$ 20 $\text{wd}3$ $\text{f}8+$ 21 $\text{gl}$ $\text{f}2+$ 22 $\text{hl}$

$\text{xe}3$!

With the white king cut off in the corner, Black does not mind going for the endgame, despite being a pawn down. This assessment was verified by the earlier game Kramnik-Shirov, Cazorla (3) 1998, which was drawn after 23 $\text{wx}e3$ $\text{xa}3$ 24 $\text{xd}1$ $\text{f}2$ 25 $\text{gl}$ $\text{f}7$ 26 $\text{ed}3$

$\text{b}6$ 27 $\text{f}3+$ $\text{e}7$ 28 $\text{xf}2$ $\text{xf}2$ 29 $\text{f}3$ $\text{d}6$

30 $\text{g}3+$ $\text{hx}g3$ 31 $\text{g}2$ $\text{f}4$ 32 $\text{f}2$ $\text{c}5$ 33 $\text{e}2$

b5 34 $\text{d}3$.

23 $\text{wc}4$

This is more ambitious, and in Van Wely-Shirov, Belgrade 1999 Black did experience some problems after this. But Kasparov was well-prepared...
23...b5!
Sidetracking the queen.
24 \textit{W}xb5 $\textit{A}f2$ 25 \textit{W}e8+ $\textit{A}f8$!
The novelty! Shirov played 25...$\textit{A}f8$ and was slightly worse after 26 \textit{W}e6+ $\textit{A}h8$ 27 g5! $\textit{A}xg5$ 28 \textit{W}xe5+ $\textit{A}f6$ 29 \textit{W}d6 $\textit{A}g7$ 30 $\textit{A}g1$ \textit{W}xe4 31 $\textit{A}c1$, although the eventual draw was never in real danger.
26 \textit{W}e6+ $\textit{A}h8$ 27 d6! \textit{W}xe2 28 \textit{W}xe5+ $\textit{A}g7$ 29 \textit{W}e8+ $\textit{A}f8$ 30 d7 \textit{W}d3 31 e5! (D)

White’s plan is clear: push the passed pawns!
What to do about that?
31...h6!!
The point of this calm move will be clear in a few moves.
32 e6 $\textit{A}h7$! 33 $\textit{A}g1$ (D)
Forced, as Black was threatening 33...$\textit{A}f1$+. Here we see the point behind the moves 31...h6 and 32...$\textit{A}h7$: the rook was freed from the pin on the back rank! But Black is still not off the hook. 34 e7 is a winning threat. But do you remember the game Spassky-Korchnoi above?

33...$\textit{A}f3$!!
Like Korchnoi! But here Kramnik cannot prevent the draw, as Spassky could with his brilliant 41 $\textit{W}h2$.
34 \textit{W}b8!
Not 34 e7?? $\textit{A}xh3+$ 35 gxh3 \textit{W}xh3#.
34...$\textit{A}xh3+$! 35 gxh3 \textit{W}e4+! $\frac{1}{2}$-$\frac{1}{2}$
As in the previous game White cannot escape the checks. Again it is quite likely that Kasparov had analysed the final position at home.

There are a number of pragmatics among the world’s contemporary top players (besides Kasparov and Korchnoi, who is still going strong!), including Peter Svidler and Veselin Topalov. Let us conclude this chapter with a snapshot from a recent game where Svidler shows the strengths of concrete calculation to build up a winning position against Vishy Anand.

\begin{center}
\textbf{Svidler – Anand}
\textit{Wijk aan Zee 2004}
\end{center}

Black has just played 18...c5 and seems to be doing fine. But with an accurately calculated sequence, which at first sight might appear suicidal, Svidler shows that this is not the case. He simply takes the pawn!
19 dxc5 d4 20 $\textit{A}xd4$!!
Going directly into the pin! Anand probably assumed that this was much too dangerous – as would most players. But Svidler has calculated that Black cannot utilize the seemingly dangerous pin for anything concrete. It may appear dangerous, but if there is nothing \textit{con}crete White may simply end up with an extra
pawn. That is the reasoning of a true pragmatic!

20...0-0

20...AXBc5? 21 AXc5 AXxd1 22 AXxd1 is disastrous for Black, who will never be able to castle. And the queen cannot attack the bishop: 20...Axf4 21 Axc3! and White unpins, keeping extra material.

21 c6! ADd5

Again the lines 21...AXc5 22 AXc5 AXxd1 23 AXxd1 AXc8 24 c7! and 21...Axf4 22 Axc3 do not work.

22 AXc1 AXc8

22...AXfd8 23 c7.

23 g3! (D)

This move takes f4 from the black queen and prepares to untangle gradually by Axec2-d2. Black cannot exploit the pin and Anand contents himself with regaining one of his pawns.

23...Axe6 24 Ad3 Axiec6 25 Axiec6 Xxc6 26 Axe4

At last! White is out of the pin and maintains an extra pawn.

26...g6

The materialistic 26...AXc4!? could be considered but Anand understandably did not like sidelining his queen after 27 Axec3 Axe2 28 e6!

Instead he plays it safe, going for a blockade on the light squares. Against a pragmatic like Svidler this is a smart choice, even if a materialistic computer might recommend going after the a-pawn!

27 Axec3 Aexe6 28 Axd2 h5 29 h3 Ad8 30 a3

The game has entered a technical phase — not a core competence of most pragmatics. Perhaps that is why Anand managed to escape after all — the game was drawn after 80 moves.

This game fragment highlights what this chapter has been about: the characteristics, strengths and weaknesses of pragmatics. Let us sum up: pragmatics are extremely concrete and make decisions based on facts and precise calculations. They often drive opening theory forward and excel especially in sharp variations. They are very dangerous in the direct attack on the king. If you are a pragmatic, you should obviously try to exploit these talents, but on the other hand be open for input and learning within other areas as well. The best pragmatics in chess history have this feature in common: early in their careers they climb the ladder by utilizing their talents for sharp play, calculations and combinations; later they learn 'new tricks' and become even more powerful by becoming universally strong — while still maintaining and perfecting their core competences.

If you are playing against a pragmatic, you should try to avoid sharp variations — both in the opening and during the game — where the punishment for making mistakes in calculations is large (unless of course you are an even better pragmatic!). Instead you should strive for quiet positions where it is feeling for small positional nuances rather than concrete calculation that is needed. Go for technical and 'boring' positions; in such positions pragmatics may start to drift or spend a lot of time calculating irrelevant variations.
7 Characteristics of Activists

Activists are often held in high regard by chess fans. This is due to their entertaining and inventive chess style, which produces exciting and often brilliant games with surprising twists and turns. The style of activists is courageous but also risky, as the inventive ideas may occasionally backfire. This is perhaps why we have only seen rather few activists reach the very top — the world championship. Only Tal and later Anand as FIDE champion have managed to go all the way to the top. However, it is my prediction that we may see more activists as champions in the future, if the current trend toward faster time-limits continues. The activist style is well suited for faster time-limits, and it is no coincidence that Anand is recognized as perhaps the strongest rapid player in the world and that Tal was World Blitz Champion as late as 1988, 27 years after he had to give the classical world championship title back to Botvinnik.

Typical characteristics of activists are:

• A very good feeling for the initiative, for which they are often willing to sacrifice material
• A sharp combinative vision that immediately notices tactical possibilities and combinations
• Strong sense of the trade-off between material and initiative; an intuitive talent that activists use for evaluating and deciding on long-term sacrifices
• Calculate variations well, but also combine this with their intuitive feeling for the evaluation of especially sharp positions
• Often very strong at blitz, rapid and other shorter time-limits, where they can utilize their talent for handling and understanding the initiative
• Enterprising playing style, where they are not afraid to make non-conventional moves
• Not afraid to take risks; however, sometimes the risk-taking is too great and leads to unnecessary losses
• Prefer to be on the attack; they play less confidently in positions where their own king is insecure

One of the earliest players who fitted these characteristics was the American Harry Nelson Pillsbury. Pillsbury was a revelation in the chess world after winning the legendary tournament in Hastings 1895 ahead of Chigorin, the World Champion Lasker, Tarrasch and Steinitz. Tragically, Pillsbury died in 1906 at the age of only 33. At an early time of his life he was hit by an incurable illness which eventually cost him his life. For the chess world, this was a tragic loss, as Pillsbury was seen as one of Lasker’s hardest competitors. These two giants played a number of beautiful games against each other. Lasker came out victorious in their lifetime encounters, but only marginally: 5 wins, 4 losses and 4 draws. No other players in that period could match Lasker so closely. Most famous of the Pillsbury-Lasker games are those from St Petersburg 1895/6 (which Lasker won in great style) and Cambridge Springs 1904 (Pillsbury’s last top tournament, where he got his revenge against Lasker in the same line as in the St Petersburg game). Since these games have been presented in countless other books, I shall instead exemplify Pillsbury’s encounters with Lasker with two other beautiful and exciting games.

Pillsbury - Lasker
Nuremberg 1896

1 e4
Pillsbury had a universal opening repertoire and played both 1 e4 and 1 d4.

1...e6 2 d4 d5 3 c3 f6 4 e5 f6 7 e3 5 f4 c5
This position is still a common guest in contemporary grandmaster games. Now White usually continues 6 c3 c6 7 e3. However, although Pillsbury’s continuation is slightly different, his basic idea is still the same as is seen
in modern grandmaster play: to fight for control of the dark squares, most notably d4.
6 dxc5 Qc6 7 a3! Qxc5
Given that White is going to play b4 at some point, it seems more natural to take back with the bishop (7...Qxc5). After an eventual b4 (not immediately 8 b4? Qxg1 9 Qxg1 Wh4+; White should play 8 Qf3 first) the bishop can then retreat to e7, saving Black a tempo.
8 b4 Qd7 9 Qd3 a5
This secures the c5-square but loses precious time - time which an activist like Pillsbury quickly turns into a dangerous lead in development.
10 b5 Qcb8 11 Qf3 Qc5 12 Qe3 Qbd7 13 0-0 Qg6!?
Obviously White's plan is to play f5, so this is quite logical. However, there are also drawbacks: the dark squares on the kingside are weakened, and if White succeeds in pushing f5 - either prepared by g4 or as a pawn sacrifice, as in the game - the damage may consequently be worse than if Black's pawn defences on the kingside were still intact.
14 Qe2! Qe7 15 Qe1 Qb6 16 Qfd4 Qd7 17 Wf2 Qxa4 18 Aab1 h5 19 b6!
The threat of 20 Qb5 now forces Black's hand.
19...Qxd3 20 cxd3 Qxa3 (D)
Let us look a bit closer at this position, as the continuation is typical for activists. Black has an initiative on the queenside and has just grabbed a pawn, but he has also had to pay a price for this: his pieces are far from the kingside, which is in turn weak on the dark squares. However, to break through White has to invest even more material, and this is where activists show particular strengths - in swift attacks where initiative and continuing threats matter more than material.
21 f5! gx f5
After 21...exf5 22 Qf4 White threatens 23 Qxd5 as well as 23 e6.
22 Qf4 Qh4?!
This prevents ideas like Wg3-g7 but allows another brilliant combination.
One alternative is 22...Qe7?!, but by investing even more material in his attack by 23 Qxd5! exd5 24 Qxf5 White can keep the pressure on. A sample line is 24...Qe6 25 Qg7+ Qd7 26 Qxe6 Qxe6 27 Qc2!, and White wins back his invested capital with interest.
As pointed out by my editor Graham Burgess in The Mammoth Book of the World's Greatest Chess Games, Black's best defence is 22...Qb4!, after which he may still be OK; e.g., 23 Qg3 Qf8 24 Qxd5! h4! 25 Qf4, when 25...exd5 (25...Qc3??) 26 Qxb4! axb4 27 Qxf5 Qh7 leads to a forced draw.
23 Qa1 Qe7 (D)

24 Qxa4! Qxa4 25 Qdx e6!!Qxe6 26 Qxe6 Qd7!
Typically for Lasker, he finds the most stubborn defence. Although it eventually does not help him here, his inventiveness and coolness in defence helped him save many dubious positions. Here the key concern is to avoid immediate mate, and 26...Qd7 27 Wxf5 is not suited to this purpose. Here Black will not survive for long. By giving up the queen, Lasker manages to avoid immediate defeat and to survive into a (lost) endgame, forcing his opponent not only
Foundations of Chess Strategy

to display his skills in attack, but also to show that he masters the technical side of the game. It is a good practical chance in many cases, as often strong attackers are not automatically equally strong in converting technical or material advantages; they prefer to finish the game with mate! However, Pillsbury does not falter. Contrary to his image, he was not only a fierce attacker, but played several instructive positional games as well.

27  
Good technique – now Black will have permanent problems with the dark squares.

28...bxc6 29  
Or 29...h8 30  

7  

46  

50  

Pillsbury – Lasker
London 1899

Although this variation has also been played in more modern times by greats like Smyslov, Spassky, Korchnoi, Timman and even once by the young Anand, I must say that I have always found this line a bit odd. However, I would not put it quite in the way Tarrasch did: “When after eight moves a knight has made no fewer than four moves in order to find itself on the amazing square b7, it seems so ridiculous to me that I cannot understand how this way of developing has for decades been regarded as normal.”

9  

12 exd6 cxd6 13  

16  

17  

21  

24  

25  

Later Lasker recommended 27...b8 as safer, so that the rook can always cover g7 from d7. But the text-move also looks fine. Isn’t White being pushed back? Pillsbury finds an inventive solution to keep the initiative.
28 \( \text{Wh}6!! \) \( \text{Wxf}5 \)  

The queen cannot be taken: 28...\( \text{gxh}6? \) 29 \( \text{Ag}8# \) or 28...\( \text{Wh}xh6 \) 29 \( \text{Qxh}6 \) with the threat 30 \( \text{Qxf}6 \).  

29 \( \text{Qxf}6! \) \( \text{Ke}7! \)  

As usual Lasker keeps cool and finds the only defence, after which this exciting game peters out in a draw. Who said that draws are boring?  

30 \( \text{Qxe}7 \) \( \text{Qxe}7 \) 31 \( \text{Qxg}7 \) \( \text{Qxf}3+ \)  
Due to the threat of 32 \( \text{Qg}6! \), Black must take the perpetual.  

32 \( \text{Qg}2 \) \( \text{Qd}1+ \) \( \text{Qd}2-\text{d}1 \)  

Pillsbury had an amazing memory, and he excelled in blindfold chess, where he gave simul against strong competition. His most famous achievement in this discipline was the one at the tournament in Hanover in 1902, where he played blindfold against the 18 players of the main tournament plus the three best from the group below – 21 strong players in total. This was a world record at the time. The simul lasted from 2 p.m. until 2 a.m., with only half an hour break for dinner. In the end Pillsbury won three games, lost seven and drew eleven, an amazing result considering the competition. Nominally, he later exceeded his own record, playing against 22 players in Moscow later that year, winning 17, drawing four and losing just one. However, these opponents were markedly weaker than the ones from Hanover.  

Pillsbury's mental talents were not confined to chess. At one exhibition he was presented with the following list of words, which he was asked to memorize and recite: antiphlogistine, periosteum, takadiastase, plasmon, ambrosia, Threlkeld, streptococcus, staphylococcus, micrococcus, plasmodium, Mississippi, Freiheit, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, Athletics, no war, Etchenberg, American, Russian, philosophy, Piet Potgelter's Rost, Salamagundi, Oomisilcootsi, Bangmamvate, Schlechter’s Nek, Manzinyama, theosophy, catechism, Madjesoomalops. Try that! Pillsbury recited the list, and afterwards he did it once more – only this time backwards...  

But here our focus is chess and activists, and their characteristics. One such characteristic is the swift attack on the king, where they can utilize their talent for combinative vision.  

Pillsbury invented the attacking scheme in the Queen’s Gambit that is now known as the ‘Pillsbury Attack’. White plays \( \text{cxd}5, \text{Qe}5 \) and \( \text{f}4 \), followed by an attack on the kingside. The first and most famous Pillsbury game with this attacking approach is Pillsbury-Tarrasch, Hastings 1895. But Pillsbury also employed it in other fine games, such as the following.  

Pillsbury – Marco  
Paris 1900  

1 \( d4 \) \( d5 \) 2 \( c4 \) \( e6 \) 3 \( \text{Qc}3 \) \( \text{Qf}6 \) 4 \( \text{Qg}5 \) \( \text{Ke}7 \) 5 \( \text{e}3 \) 0-0 6 \( \text{Qf}3 \) \( b6 \)  

With ...\( h6 \) and \( \text{h}4 \) interpolated this is the Tartakower Variation – or the Bondarevsky-Makogonov Variation in the Russian-speaking part of the world. This line is still very popular in grandmaster games, as practice has shown it to be solid and resilient, yet still with chances to play for a win as Black. The Pillsbury Attack, which the American adopts in this game, is no longer believed to pose a real threat to the black set-up.  

7 \( \text{d}3 \) \( \text{b}7 \) 8 \( \text{cxd}5 \) \( \text{exd}5 \) 9 \( \text{Qe}5! \) ? \( \text{Qbd}7 \) 10 \( \text{f}4 \) (D)  

\[ B \]

There it is, the Pillsbury Attack! White reveals his intentions: an attack on the kingside.  

10...\( \text{e}5 \)  

A natural counter based on the old saying “an offensive on the flank should be countered by a thrust in the centre”. However, one of the features of the Pillsbury Attack is that White’s centre is well positioned to absorb this counter.  

Teichmann – another of the great old masters – instead recommends 10...\( \text{Qe}8! \) ? 11 \( \text{Qxe}7 \) \( \text{Wxe}7 \)
followed by $...\text{c}x\text{e}5$ and $...f6$ or the direct $...f6$. The idea of this line of defence is to gain access to the e3-pawn, which has been left backward and weak by the move f4.

11 0-0 c4

Realizing that White’s centre is secure, Black transfers his counterplay to the queenside. An interesting struggle now begins: who is faster?

12 $\text{c}e2$ a6 13 $\text{w}f3$ b5 14 $\text{h}h3$ g6 15 f5! b4 16 fxg6 hxg6 (D)

The struggle has reached its climax. If White retreats with 17 $\text{d}e2$, Black is still in the game after 17...$\text{d}xe5$ 18 dxe5 $\text{e}4$, although he must be careful about his weakened king’s position. However, White does not have to retreat! The action is taking place on the kingside, and in such positions speed of deployment is often more important than material. Activists are very strong at judging when this is the case. Here is a simple example, which probably did not take Pillsbury much time to notice.

17 $\text{w}h4$! bxc3 18 $\text{d}xd7$ $\text{w}xd7$ 19 $\text{xf}6!$ (D)

The point. With all his pieces directed towards the black king, it is not surprising that White quickly crashes through.

19...a5

Or 19...cxb2 20 $\text{a}f1$.

20 $\text{a}f1$ $\text{a}6$ 21 $\text{x}g6$! fxg6 22 $\text{x}f8+$ $\text{x}f8$ 23 $\text{x}f8+$!

Here Pillsbury announced unavoidable mate in six moves – a common practice at the time. The variation goes: 23...$\text{d}x\text{f}8$ 24 $\text{w}h8+$ $\text{f}7$ 25 $\text{w}h7+$ $\text{f}8$ (25...$\text{e}8$ 26 $\text{g}8#$ or 25...$\text{e}6$ 26 $\text{x}g6#$) 26 $\text{x}d7$ followed by 27 $\text{h}6+$ and 28 $\text{g}7#$.

Activists are inventive players, who are often willing to take risks and deploy non-conventional opening variations. One such opening is the King’s Gambit – a favourite of the young David Bronstein. As is well known, Bronstein was close to taking the world championship from Botvinnik in 1951 in the match that ended in a 12-12 tie. The ‘Patriarch’, as Botvinnik is often called, had known for some years about the creative nature of Bronstein. In one of his writings Bronstein recalls an incident in 1946 in Moscow. The Soviet national team was having a preparatory meeting before their match against the United States, an encounter that was regarded as highly important following the crushing and surprising win of the Soviets in the radio match against the Americans the year before. At the meeting Botvinnik stood up and while looking directly at the youngest member of the team, David Bronstein, the patriarch noted: “I hope everybody understands the importance of this match and that no one plays the King’s Gambit.” Being a loyal team member, Bronstein chose the Ruy Lopez and was outplayed by the relatively unknown Ulvestad. Perhaps Botvinnik should have let Bronstein play the King’s Gambit. Being a creative player with an excellent feeling for the initiative, this presumably suited him better than the Ruy Lopez. Furthermore, Bronstein had spent quite some time during World War II analysing the King’s Gambit. During the war he applied to be sent to the front, but he had problems with his vision, and instead he was sent to Stalingrad and assigned the task of cleaning up the mess in the ruined city. In the nights he analysed the King’s Gambit and made notes by hand on small pieces of paper that he could find lying around.
The notes came in handy when he got the chance to return to the chessboard after the war. According to my database, Bronstein played the King’s Gambit 30 times against top-class opposition throughout his career, scoring +20, –3 and 7 draws. Not a bad score! Let us see two of the wins from his early career.

**Bronstein – Panov**
**Moscow Ch 1947**

1 e4 e5 2 f4 \( \text{\textit{c5}} \)

Nowadays this line is not played very often. One of the reasons is the following manoeuvre invented by Réti in 1912.

3 \( \text{d}3 \) d6 4 c3 \text{Ag4} 5 fxe5 dxe5 6 \text{Ba4+!}\n\( \text{d}7 \) 7 \text{Cc2} \text{Cc6} 8 b4 \text{Cc4} 9 \text{f6} 10 d3 \text{We7} 11 0-0 0-0-0 (D)

Notice that Bronstein – like Pillsbury – is not a reckless attacker. Rather, he is a typical dynamic activist with an exceptional talent for understanding the dynamic elements of the position and the battle for the initiative. Here he plays the King’s Gambit in a conservative manner. With Black having declined the pure gambit – some other Bronstein games featured more inventive versions of the King’s Gambit; for example, 1 e4 e5 2 f4 d5 3 \( \text{Cc3!?} \) exf4 4 \text{b3} \text{Ag4} 4 \text{xd5} \text{Wh4+} 5 \text{Cc2}! from Bronstein-Alatortsev, Moscow 1945 – Bronstein reconciles himself with a pleasant advantage with an extra central control following the exchange of the f-pawn for the black d-pawn.

12 a4 a5 13 b5 \text{b8} 14 \text{bd2} \text{g4} 15 \text{b3} b6 16 \text{e3} \text{bd7} 17 \text{ae1}\n
(Toying with the idea of playing d4.

17...\text{e6} 18 \text{xe6} \text{xe6} 19 \text{Wh1} \text{e7} 20 \text{bd2}!\n
The knight has done its duty on b3, provoking the weakening ...b6.

20...\text{g4} 21 \text{g1} b5 22 \text{c4} g5?\n
With White’s strong central control, the black flank attack is not too frightening. But at the same time, this advance is tactically flawed. 22...f6 is better, although White’s advantage is not in doubt.

23 \text{dx6}+! \text{xd6}

There we have it. On principle the black bishop is a ‘bad bishop’ given the central formation, but there is a simple point behind giving up the strong c4-knight for the black bishop: Black has to take back with the c-pawn – thus leaving b6 weak – as 23...\text{wx}d6? is impossible because of 24 \text{dx}g5. This is why 22...f6 would have been better.

24 \text{d2}!\n
Heading for c4 where it attacks b6.

24...f6 25 \text{c4} \text{b7} (D)

26 \text{xb6}! \text{xb6} 27 \text{xa5+} \text{c7} 28 \text{c6} \text{we8} 29 \text{a5}!\n
Much better than taking the exchange. The knight is a key actor in the white onslaught, whereas the rook is not participating actively. This is a simple example of the talent of activists in assessing the relative value of material in connection with initiative.

29...d7 30 b6+! \text{b7}

30...\text{xc}6 loses to 31 \text{wa4+} \text{b7} 32 a6+. White simply wants to clear the road towards the black king.

31 a6+! \text{xb6} 32 \text{b1+} \text{c7} 33 \text{b7}+! \text{c8} 34 \text{a7#} (1-0)
Bronstein – Dubinin  
USSR Ch (Leningrad) 1947

1 e4 e5 2 f4 exf4 3 ♜f3 g5 4 h4 g4 5 ♜xe5 h5!?  
This line is rarely seen these days, but in the 1850s and 1860s it was a big hit in the games of Morphy, Anderssen and Von Kolisch! Nowadays 5...♗f6 is considered the main line, with 5...d6 as an alternative.  
6 ♝c4 ♗h7  
This is the point; Black defends the weak point f7 from the side.  
7 d4 ♝h6  
The old main line ran 7...d6 8 ♝d3 ♗f3!?. One example is Morphy-Mac Connell, New Orleans 1849: 9 g3 (9 gxf3 ♗xe7 10 ♝e3 ♘xe4+ 11 ♗d2 is another possibility, which was tested in several games by Anderssen) 9...♗c6 10 ♜xf4 ♘d7 11 ♝c3 ♖f6 12 ♖e3 ♖e7 13 ♖f2 c6 14 ♖e1 ♖g7 15 e5! dxe5 16 dxe5 ♖fd5 17 ♖xd5 ♖xd5 18 ♖c5 ♕c6 19 ♕b4! ♕b6 20 ♕xe7 ♕xe7 21 ♖xf5 ♖b7 22 ♖f6+ ♕xf6 23 ♖xh7 ♕d8.  
8 ♝c3 ♘c6 9 ♖xf7! ♖xf7 10 ♖xf7+ ♕xf7 11 ♕xf4! ♖xf4 12 0-0 ♖xh4 13 ♖xf4+ ♕g7 14 ♕d2 ♕d6 15 ♖af1  
On material Black is doing OK, but his pieces do not coordinate and the initiative is in the hands of the activist – always a dangerous cocktail.  
15...♕d8 16 ♕d5 ♖d7 (D)

All the white pieces are involved in the assault – now it is time to break open the position.

17 e5! dxe5 18 dxe5 ♕c6 19 e6! ♖xd5 20 ♖xf7+ ♕xf7 21 ♕xf7+ ♕h8 22 ♕c3+ ♖f6 23 ♕xf6 ♕xf6  
There was no other defence against White’s threats of 24 ♕h6++ or 24 ♕f7+.  
24 ♕xf6+ ♕h7 25 ♕f5+ ♕h6 26 ♕xd5 ♕g6 27 ♕xd7 1-0

Bronstein is one of the founding fathers of the dynamic King’s Indian, as we know it today. Together with other dynamic players like Boleslavsky and Geller, he showed that the typical King’s Indian structures with e4 + c4 vs c6 + d6 are not so bad for Black as the backward nature of the d6-pawn indicates. Black has dynamic possibilities which prevent White from focusing all his attention on the weak pawn. The following game is an example from the first years of the development of the dynamic King’s Indian.

Pachman – Bronstein  
Moscow – Prague 1946

1 d4 ♖f6 2 c4 d6 3 ♖c3 e5 4 ♖f3 ♕bd7 5 g3 g6 6 ♖g2 ♘g7 7 0-0 0-0 8 b3 ♕e8 9 e4 ♕xd4 10 ♕xd4 ♕c5 11 ♕e1 a5 12 ♖b2?!  
This allows Black a tactical possibility. The normal continuation is 12 h3 c6 with a standard King’s Indian position.  
12...a4! (D)
A typical alert activist move. The white kingside is continuously probed, leading the path for an eventual kingside attack.

19 e2 h4 20 ed2 (D)

20...edx1!

The beginning of a beautiful combination.

21 exd1 ed4 22 edx4 edxb3 23 edx6!

A good counter. Now 23...edx1? is answered by 24 edx5! followed by 25 ef6+. But Bronstein has everything under control...

23...exf2!! (D)

Even smarter! Now White is mated after 24 exb3 hxg3+ 25 h1 exh3! 26 eg1 egx2+ 27 eg2 ef1+ 28 eg1 eg3#. In this line we see the importance of bringing the h-pawn into play.

24 eax2 exg3+ 25 h1 exc3 26 eax3 exh3 27 exb3 eg2+ 28 eg2 ecx4

We can take stock: with four pawns for the exchange Black is easily winning.

29 ed4 we6 30 exb7 ea8! 31 we2 h3+ 0-1

Activists are extremely dangerous in time-scrambles. Do not get into time-trouble against these guys! Bronstein was no exception. Look at the following example, also taken from one of his earliest King’s Indian games.

White is under pressure. Again Bronstein has rushed forward with his h-pawn. But right now White has everything defended. The knight on d2 is vital in covering f3, and the knight on a6 prevents the bishop from attacking the d2-knight from b4. 36...edx3? leads nowhere after 37 edxf3 edxf3 38 ecx8+ and 39 edxh3. Bronstein’s next move is a typical tricky time-pressure move.

36...eg7!

A quiet but poisonous move which White presumably in heavy time-pressure – does not see through.

37 eb7?

The only chance was covering f3 by 37 edx1. 37...ef6

Suddenly White is defenceless against the threat of 38...edx3 39 edxf3 edxf3 followed by 40...eh1+ and 41...hxh2.

38 db4 edx3 39 edxf3 edxf3 40 ee1 eh1+ 0-1

The game was presumably adjourned here, but White resigned. After 41 ee2 hxh2 42 edx5 eg2 the h-pawn decides.

Activists are creative players with a mind of their own. They are not afraid of going against conventional wisdom and trying things out. I
remember being very impressed by Bronstein’s inventive play in this position, which arose from a 4...\texttt{f5} Caro-Kann.

Black has not played the opening completely accurately, and now he faces a tough choice as to how to develop. Playing 11...e6 looks dangerous because of various sacrifices on e6. But what was it Nimzowitsch taught us about prophylaxis and over-protection? Bronstein played...

11...\texttt{g8}!

This looks crazy, but in fact it allows Black to develop, as e6 is covered. The confinement of the bishop is only temporary. White did not find any way to storm Black’s solid position, and gradually Bronstein took over the initiative.

12 \texttt{d3} e6 13 \texttt{f4} \texttt{d6} 14 \texttt{xd6} \texttt{wx6} 15 \texttt{f5} \texttt{w8}

One more to the back rank! But once again White cannot utilize the temporary retreat.

16 \texttt{f3} 0-0-0 17 \texttt{g3}

Now it is White who is on the retreat...

17...\texttt{h7} 18 a4 \texttt{xd3} 19 \texttt{xd3} \texttt{w6}

...while it is now Black who is on the offensive. The position is probably relatively even, but from this point on White is consistently outplayed, showing that Bronstein was not only a strong creative player, but also mastered more technical positions. Of course, this is a common feature of top players. While most top players have some areas where they perform exceptionally well, they are generally able to play all kinds of positions. Let us see the rest of the game; although the theme is not directly related to our topic, it shows good craftsmanship and is typical for the Caro-Kann.

20 a5 a6 21 \texttt{a3} g5! 22 h5 \texttt{w4} 23 \texttt{w2} \texttt{c7} 24 c3 \texttt{h8} 25 \texttt{d4}?! (D)

It was better to keep the knight on the board. Both of Black’s knights wanted to occupy f6, and now this problem is solved voluntarily by White. The two knights struggling for the same square is what Dvoretsky calls ‘the superfluous piece’, and in such cases one is happy to exchange one of them.

25...\texttt{xe4} 26 \texttt{wxe4} \texttt{wxe4} 27 \texttt{xe4} \texttt{f6} 28 \texttt{f3} g4 29 \texttt{d1} \texttt{g8} 30 \texttt{e5} \texttt{e5}! 31 \texttt{a4} \texttt{g5}! 32 \texttt{b3} \texttt{dxe5} 33 dxe5 \texttt{d7}

Now the loss of material is unavoidable.

34 \texttt{d1} \texttt{xe5} 35 \texttt{e4} \texttt{xh5} 36 \texttt{xg4} \texttt{xg4} 37 \texttt{xg4} \texttt{xa5} 38 \texttt{e7} \texttt{f5} 39 g4 \texttt{f6} 40 \texttt{g2} \texttt{d6} 41 \texttt{g3} e5 42 \texttt{g8} \texttt{d5} 0-1

The perhaps most famous activist in chess history is the legendary Mikhail Tal – ‘The Magician from Riga’. Tal was only World Champion for one year – winning the world title from Botvinnik in 1960 by defeating the reigning champion 12½-8½, only to lose the return match a year later 8-13 – but his legacy goes far beyond that one year, and his games are still analysed throughout the world in our time, more than a decade after his premature death at the age of 55 in 1992.

Tal’s games are well-known, but his style gives rise to discussions. Was Tal a ‘calculation machine’ or was he an intuitive master? I believe he was mainly the latter. Of course Tal was very good at calculating variations – as is
every grandmaster – but in my opinion his special gift was his intuitive feel for the initiative and a perhaps unprecedented understanding of the trade-off between material and initiative in attack. Kasparov once said about Tal: “In my memory, Tal was the only player who did not calculate long variations – instead he simply saw the resulting positions.”

In his instructive and entertaining book Attack with Mikhail Tal, which he wrote together with Damsky, Tal himself explains his thoughts during the game on a number of attacking positions he had throughout his career. True, we cannot know if some of it is hindsight, but it is interesting just the same. One of the games Tal refers to is this one.

**Tal – Vasiukov**

*USSR Ch (Kiev) 1964/5*

1 e4 c6 2 ∆c3 d5 3 d4 dxe4 4 ∆xe4 ∆d7

The solid Smyslov Variation, which is still regarded as a sensible choice for Black.

5 ∆f3

Today 5 ∆c4 and 5 ∆g5!? are most commonly seen.

5...∆gf6 6 ∆g3!?

With this move Tal signals that he does not wish to go in for a discussion about opening theory, but simply wants to keep the pieces on the board. For some time 6 ∆xf6+ ∆xf6 7 ∆e5 was considered somewhat dangerous until it was established that 7...∆e6! is fine for Black.

6...e6 7 ∆d3 c5 8 0-0 cxd4 9 ∆xd4 ∆c5 10 ∆f3 0-0 11 ∆e2

In a later game against Minev (Nice OL 1974) Spassky tried 11 b3, but Black was OK after 11...b6 12 a5 b5 13 We2 Wc7. Tal prefers the bishop on another diagonal.

11...b6 12 ∆f4 b5 13 a4 d5!?

Although this may be objectively playable, it is a dangerous course against an activist! Against these players you should not move pieces away from the king, as many of their attacks are based on what Tal calls the ‘Assault Ratio’ – the relative number of pieces in the vicinity of the king. 13...Wc8 has been suggested as a solid alternative.

14 ∆g5 Wc7 (D)

15 h5!

This is the kind of move that Tal refers to as ‘launching’. The piece is launched to a position in the vicinity of the opponent’s king. The term is taken from ice hockey, where it is a well-known strategy to play the puck into the open space close to the opposing goal, hoping that a friendly player will reach it first. In chess, this strategy is consistent with the previous discussion about the assault ratio – by bringing more pieces to the vital part of the board, this ratio is improved.

15...Wh8!

A good defensive move. Now a bishop sacrifice on h7 will no longer be with check, and in the variation 16 c4 ∆f6 17 ∆xf6 ∆xf6 18 ∆xf6 (best is possibly 18 ∆e5 with an edge for White) 18...gx6 Black is ready to initiate counterplay with 19...∆g8.

16 ∆e4 f6! 17 ∆h4 ∆d6 18 c4 ∆a6 (D)
altogether obvious sacrifice, leading to a mass of variations. I began trying to calculate them, and realized to my horror that nothing was coming of this. My thoughts piled up one on top of another. A subtle reply by the opponent, suitable in one case, was suddenly transferred by me to another situation, and there, of course, it proved quite unsuitable. In general, in my mind there arose a completely chaotic accumulation of all kinds of moves, sometimes not even linked to one another, and the notorious ‘tree of variations’, from which trainers recommend cutting off one branch at a time, grew with incredible speed... Somehow I immediately realized that it was impossible to calculate all the variations, and that the knight sacrifice was purely intuitive. And since it promised an interesting game, of course, I did not restrain myself. And the following day I read with great pleasure in a paper that Mikhail Tal, after careful thought, made an accurately calculated piece sacrifice...”

19 £xg7! £xg7
19...£xc4? does not work on account of 20 £xe6 £xe2 21 £xc7, and too many black pieces are hanging down the d-file.
20 £d4! £c5 21 £g4+ £h8 22 £xe6 £xe6
23 £wxex6 £ae8!
23...£xh2+ 24 £h1 £b4? 25 £xf6+ does not work for Black.
24 £xd5 £xh2+ 25 £h1 £f4 (D)
Tal recommends 25...£xc4 26 £xc4 £xc4 with a better ending for White, but Black is still in the game.

26 £h5!
With the point 26...£xe4? 27 £d7, winning. Black’s reply is forced.
Tal’s creativity and inventiveness when on the attack are highly instructive, albeit difficult to learn. It is a talent with which such players are born. Still, by studying the games of great activists like Tal, it is possible to deduce valuable learning points. One of these points is the relative value of material, an area of chess where Tal excelled and scored numerous memorable victories. See the following game when Tal was still a teenager and participated in his first Soviet Championship—a tournament he was later to win five times.

**Tal – Tolush**

*USSR Ch (Leningrad) 1956*

1 e4 c5 2 Qf3 d6 3 d4 exd4 4 Qxd4 Qf6 5 Qc3 a6 6 Qg5 e6 7 f4 Wb6 8 Wd2 Wxb2

The Poisoned Pawn Variation, Fischer’s old favourite!

9 Kb1 Wa3 10 e5

Nowadays this is rarely seen, 10 f5 being the main line. This was also Tal’s choice in a later nice game, against Bogdanović in Budva 1967: 10 f5 Qc6 11 fxe6 fxe6 12 Qxe6 bx6 13 e5 Qd5 14 Qxd5 cxd5 15 Re2 dxe5 16 0-0 Re5+ 17 Re1 Qf8 18 c4 Qxf1+ 19 Qxf1 Qb7 20 Qc2 e4 21 Qe4! Qc7 22 Wf2! 0-0 23 Qf4! Qd6 24 Qxe5+ Qb8 25 Qb6! Qxf4 26 Qxd8+ Qa7 27 Qb1 Qd6 28 Qxd5! Qxd5 (28...Qxd8 29 Qxb7+ Qa8 30 Qd7+) 29 Qxd6 Qxd6 30 Qxd5 1-0.

10...dxe5 11 fxe5 Qd7 12 Qe4 Wa2

Two years later, against the young Korchnoi (*USSR Ch (Riga) 1958*), Tolush improved on his own play: 12...h6! 13 Qh4 Qxa2 14 Qb3 Qa1+ 15 Qf2 Wa4 16 Qb5!? axb5 17 Qxb5 Qc5+! 18 Qxc5 Qxh4+ 19 g3 Qd8 20 Qd6 Qxc7+ 21 Qxc7+ Qxc7 22 Qxc7 Qba6! 23 Qb6 Qxb3 24 Qxb3 Qxb3 0-0 25 Qa1 26 Qxa8 Qxa8 27 Qd6 b6 28 Qc6 Qa6 29 Qd7 Qe8 30 Qa7 Qb5 31 Qb7 Qc2+ 32 Qe1 Qc7 33 Qxb6 Qe2+ 34 Qd1 Qd5! 35 Qd4 Qxb2 36 Qc1 Qg2 37 Qg4 Qg5 38 Qb1 Qg7 39 Qb4 Qc2 0-1.

13 Qb3 Qa1+ 14 Qf2 Wa4 (D)

15 Qb5!

Material doesn’t matter; initiative does! The aim is to break through the wall to the uncastled black king.

15...axb5 16 Qxb5 f6

Forced, as 16...Wxe4? 17 Qc7# is mate!

17 exf6 gxf6 18 Qe1!

More forces to the front! After 18...fxg5 White has the pleasant choice between several strong continuations; e.g., 19 Qxg5, 19 Qc3 or 19 Qc7+

18...Qe6 19 Qxf6 Qxf6 20 Qxf6+ Qf7 21 Qf3 Qd4+ 22 Qf1 e5 23 Qd5+ Qe6 24 Qd7+! Qg6 25 Qxe5+ Qg7 26 Qg3+ Qxg3

Sadly forced, since 26...Qf6 27 Qd8+ and 26...Qh6 27 Qf7+! Qxf7 28 Qwd2+ Qh5 29 Qe5+ both lose immediately.

27 Qxb7+ Qd7 28 Qxg3 Qb6 29 Qc7 Qc5

30 Qxd7 Qc4+ 31 Qe2 1-0

I am no great expert on the Poisoned Pawn, which I have never dared to play with either colour, but such games are a delight to all chess fans, regardless of whether you play the line or not! For Tolush, this was just the first of a series of losses against Tal in this period. He was unfortunate enough to be paired with Black against Tal in the Soviet Championships of 1956, 1957 and 1958, each game ending in a crushing defeat. Let us see one more of these games. It was the game that secured Tal his first Soviet Championship and at the same time qualified him for the Interzonal tournament, the first step on a series of victories that culminated with the win of the world championship against Botvinnik.

**Tal – Tolush**

*USSR Ch (Moscow) 1957*

1 c4 Qf6 2 Qc3 g6 3 e4 d6 4 d4 Qg7 5 f3

The Sämisch Variation, a good choice for an activist, as it gives Black relatively few attacking chances, while White can build up an attack
on the kingside, as is seen in this game. As mentioned, activists prefer to be on the attack rather than on the defence.

5...e5 6 dge2 dbd7 7 d5 c6 8 wbd2 0-0 9
d5 c5 10 g4 a6 11 d3

Tal begins the launch of pieces to the king-side.

5.. .e5 6 £sge2 £ibd7 7 Ag5 c6 8 ®d2 0-0 9
d5 c5 10 g4! a6 11 £)g3

Tal begins the launch of pieces to the king-side.

11.. .2e8 12 h4 Wa5 13 ±h6 £sf8 14 h5

It is clear that the result of the opening favours White. His initiative is already on its way, whereas Black has not yet achieved anything on the queenside.

14~Wc7 15 Ad3 b5!? (D)

16 0-0-0!

Of course Tal does not take such a pawn. That would pass some of his initiative over to Black, and for an activist initiative is more valuable than material.

16...bxc4 17 Jsi.bl!

Same argument as in the previous note. 17 £xc4 would allow Black some counterplay on the queenside by attacking the bishop (e.g. ...£b8-b4 or ...£d7-b6), whereas now the c4-pawn is simply in the way for Black. Furthermore, the bishop is needed on the b1-h7 diagonal, as will become apparent later.

17...£h8 18 £dg1 £b8 19 Of5!

The pieces are launched closer and closer to the black king! Of course 19...gxf5 20 gxf5+ is suicidal.

19...£d7 20 £5 £g7

Perhaps 20...£b6 was a better chance, although after, e.g., 21 £h6+ £g7 22 £h4!? intending 22...£f6 23 g5, the black position is not enviable. Since Black is left without any counterplay on the queenside, White can afford to build his attack up slowly, while being on the lookout for tactical breaks.

21 £xg7 £xg7 22 £h6+ £g8 23 f4! exf4 24
£xf4 £d8 25 hxg6 £xg6

White is consistently working to create holes and weaknesses on the kingside.

26 Wh2 £de5 27 £f4 £f8 28 Wh6 £eg6
29 £g5 b6 (D)

30 e5!!

The decisive breakthrough. Note how Tal consistently focuses on deploying all his pieces in the kingside attack. This is a typical trait for activists. They don’t count the absolute number of pieces on the board, but are far more interested in the relative number of attacking and defending pieces around the king – the assault ratio. Here the concrete variations supporting the break are quite simple: 30..fxg5 31 £xg6 hxg6 32 £h8+ £f7 33 £h7+! with mate to come.

30...£xe5 31 £xg6 £b7

31...hxg6 32 Wh8+ £f7 33 £h7+ is still hopeless for Black, and so is 31...£xg5 32 £xh7+ £f7 33 £e4.

32 £e4!

Again the focus is on optimizing the assault ratio. All reserves are brought in to deliver the final blow.

32...£xg5 33 £f1! £xe4

The only defence against 34 £f6+.

34 £x4 £g7 35 £f6 £xg4 36 £h1
36 £xh7+! £xh7 37 £g6, forcing mate, is a little neater.

36...£d7 37 £xd6 £e7 38 £xa6! £h8
38...£xc4 39 £a8+.

39 £h7! £b8
Like Bronstein, Tal was never afraid to play sharp and unconventional opening lines. Not even in world championship matches! Botvinnik was shown this as early as the first game of their first match.

Tal - Botvinnik

*Moscow Wch (1) 1960*

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 c3 Bb4 4 e5 c5 5 a3 Bxc3+ 6 bxc3 Be7

6...Be7 is more commonly played nowadays.

7 Wg4 f5 8 Bg3 Be7!?

Botvinnik goes for the sharpest sub-variation, perhaps not the best choice against Tal. At the world championship match tournament in 1948 – the one to establish the world champion after Alekhine’s death in 1946 – Botvinnik chose the more restrained 8...cxd4 9 cxd4 Be7 against Reshevsky, eventually winning both the game and the world title.

9 Wxg7 Bg8 10 Bxh7 cxd4 11 Bb1!? (D)

Look at this position: White has 'developed' only his king and queen! To my knowledge, this move had only been played once before (the usual move being 11 Ba2), in a game Gligoric-Petrosian, Belgrade 1959, where Petrosian was lucky to draw after 11...Bc6 12 Bf3 Bxe5 13 Bg5! Bg6 14 Bxe7 Bxe7 15 cxd4. Obviously both players had studied the position in their pre-match preparation, and now Botvinnik shows his intended improvement.

11...Bd7!? 12 Bh5+ Bd6

In the return match between the two players, Botvinnik wisely preferred quieter openings than this one, utilizing the fact that as a theorist character, simple and sound positions are the right kind of positions to strive for against an activist like Tal. But as I mentioned in Chapter 5 (on theorists), they are occasionally rather stubborn, and in the 12th game of the return match – when he held a comfortable four-point lead – Botvinnik couldn’t resist the temptation of employing this sharp variation again, trying to prove that it was OK for Black. But in vain – Tal won again. He simply played this kind of position better than Botvinnik. For the interested reader, here is this exciting game: 12...Bd8!? 13 Bf3 Bxc3 (later, Keres pointed to 13...Ba4! as the right move here, with complicated play) 14 Bd2 Bc6 15 Bb2 Bc7 16 Bb5! Bh8 (after 16...a6 17 Bb2 axb5 18 Bxh8 Bxc3 19 Bxb5 Bxa3 20 Bxe2 Bxg2 21 Bb1 Ba2 22 Bf1 Bg4 23 Bd3 Black did not get quite enough compensation for the queen in the recent game Nakamura-E.Berg, Bermuda 2003) 17 Bxh8 Bxh8 18 Bb2 Wxf3+! 19 Bxf3 Bd6 (D).
had gone wrong with his home analysis. A rare occurrence in Botvinnik’s practice!

14 cxd3 \( \text{\textit{a}}4+ \)

Tal suggests 14...\( \text{c}6 \) as stronger, in order to be able to castle queenside as quickly as possible. In the game Botvinnik never gets his king into safety.

15 \( \text{\textit{c}}1 \text{w}xe5 \) 16 \( \text{g}5! \)

Tal’s comment on this position is interesting, as it again reveals his preference for initiative over material: “The basic problem which now confronts White is how to keep the black king in the centre. In this respect, the loss of White’s e-pawn played into White’s hands, since new threats can be created by opening the e-file.”

16...\( \text{c}6 \) 17 d4 \( \text{\textit{d}}7 \) 18 h4!

A key move in this kind of position. The h-pawn is pushed forward to distract Black, and the king’s rook can enter the game via h3.

18...e5 19 \( \text{h}3! \) \( \text{\textit{f}}7 \) 20 dxe5 \( \text{c}xe5 \) 21 \( \text{e}3 \text{e}7 \)

The insecure position of the king in the centre is a major problem for Black.

22 \( \text{b}1 \text{b}6 \) 23 \( \text{f}4 \text{a}e8 \) (D)

24 \( \text{b}4! \)

Tal shows his intuitive talent for coordinating the pieces for an assault.

24...\( \text{c}6 \) 25 \( \text{\textit{d}}1! \) \( \text{xf}4 \) 26 \( \text{xf}4 \) \( \text{g}6 \) 27 \( \text{d}4 \) \( \text{xe}3+ \) 28 \( \text{f}xe3 \)

Not 28 \( \text{xe}3 \) f4.

28...\( \text{c}7 \) 29 \( \text{c}4! \)

Black is not given any rest. Notice how White maintains the initiative throughout the game. Black is lost.

29...\( \text{xc}4 \) 30 \( \text{xc}4 \) \( \text{g}7 \) 31 \( \text{g}8 \) \( \text{xg}8 \) 32 \( \text{h}5 \) 1-0

Activists are characterized by having fantastic combinative vision. The marvellous combination made by Tal in the following game shows a theme which is more often seen in studies and constructed combination exercises – the cross-pin. The combination itself is rightly famous, but let us see the entire game, as the way an activist builds up to the combination is often the most difficult in practice.

Tal – Brinck-Claussen

Havana OL 1966

1 \( \text{f}3 \) \( \text{f}6 \) 2 c4 c5 3 \( \text{c}3 \) \( \text{c}6 \) 4 e3 e6 5 d4 d5 6 a3 \( \text{c}4 \)

This leads to a typical isolated d-pawn position, which can occur from a number of openings. A solid alternative is 6...a6, when it is not easy for White to exploit his extra tempo.

7 \( \text{xd}4 \) \( \text{e}7 \) 8 \( \text{d}3 \) 0-0-0 9-0-0 \( \text{d}4 \) 10 \( \text{xc}4 \) \( \text{b}6 \) 11 \( \text{d}3 \) \( \text{b}7 \) 12 \( \text{d}1 \) \( \text{c}8 \) 13 \( \text{a}2 \) (D)

An interesting and double-edged position has arisen.

13...\( \text{c}7?! \)

I am not sure that this move is right, although it was played by Tal himself against Polugaevsky in Tbilisi 1956. The problem is that Black loses control over d5, the key square in an isolated pawn position. This often allows White to play d5 under favourable circumstances. An example is Gausel-de Firmian, Copenhagen 2002, which continued 13...\( \text{c}8 \) 14 \( \text{f}4 \) \( \text{f}8 \) 15 d5! \( \text{exd}5 \) 16 \( \text{xd}5 \) \( \text{h}6 \) 17 \( \text{f}5 \) \( \text{xd}5 \) 18 \( \text{x}d5 \) \( \text{f}6 \) 19 \( \text{xf}6 \) \( \text{xf}6 \) 20 \( \text{d}7 \) \( \text{c}7 \) 21 \( \text{ad}1 \) with a difficult ending for Black. I prefer 13...\( \text{c}7?! \), which was good for Black in Voitsekhovsky-Kharlov,
Kuibyshev 1990 after 14 \( \text{Qe3} \text{Ed7} 15 \text{Ac1} \text{Ad6} \) 16 \( \text{b1} \text{e7} 17 \text{g5} \text{Dg6} \).

14 \( \text{g5} \text{Efd8} 15 \text{We2} \text{Dd5} \)

The tactical 15...\( \text{Dg4!} \) was Tal's choice, and Polugaevsky answered with 16 \( \text{Db5!} \) (D).

\[ \begin{array}{c}
\text{B} \\
\end{array} \]

After 16...\( \text{a6?!} \) (this is countered by a nice desperado-type idea; 16...\( \text{Dxd4!?} \) 17 \( \text{Wxe6!} \) \( \text{Dxb5} \) 18 \( \text{Wxg4} \text{Qe2} 19 \text{xe7} \text{Wxe7} 20 \text{He1} \) \( \text{Dxf3} \) 21 \( \text{Wxf3} \text{Dd7} 22 \text{d5 Dd4} 23 \text{Wd3 Dc2} 24 \text{Db1! Dxe1} 25 \text{Wxh7+ Dh8} 26 \text{Df5! Wxd5} 27 \text{Axel f6} 28 \text{Dxc8 Dxc8} 29 \text{h4} \) White should have won, but Tal was lucky to scrape a draw in the endgame.

16 \( \text{Dxd5} \text{exd5} 17 \text{Wd3 Dd6} 18 \text{xe7 Dxe7} 19 \text{He1} \)

White has a small but lasting advantage as his bishop is better than Black's, and d5 easier to attack than d4.

19...\( \text{g6} 20 \text{g3 He8} 21 \text{h4} \text{Wf6} 22 \text{h5 Df8} 23 \text{Dxe8 Dxe8} 24 \text{De5 Wg5} 25 \text{We3} \) (D)

\[ \begin{array}{c}
\text{B} \\
\end{array} \]

25...f6!

Good defensive play. Now White cannot take on d5, as he loses a piece after 26 \( \text{Dxd5+} \) \( \text{Dxd5} 27 \text{Wxd5+ He6} \) due to the pin on the fifth rank.

26 \( \text{Dc4!} \text{Ed8} 27 \text{He1 Dc8} 28 \text{De3 Dc6} 29 \text{Ec1 Df7} \)

Brinck-Claussen has defended well and has even obtained a certain degree of counterplay against the white h-pawn. But with his next moves Tal exchanges his small positional advantage for another asset, which in his hands is even more dangerous: the initiative.

30 \( \text{h6! Wxb6} 31 \text{Ec7 Wg5} \)

Black could not defend the a-pawn, since 31...\( \text{Dd7} 32 \text{Dxd7 Dxd7} 33 \text{Dxd5} \text{or} 31...\text{a5} 32 \text{Dxf7!} \) is even worse than the text. Notice how Black's queen is out of play. This is a key factor in White's initiative.

32 \( \text{Dxa7 Dg6} \) (D)

33 \( \text{Dxd5!! Dxd5} \)

Not 33...\( \text{Dxd5} 34 \text{Dxf7!!} \).

34 \( \text{Da8!!} \)

This is the cross-pin that has made Tal's combination famous! The German chess magazine \textit{Deutsche Schachzeitung} was so thrilled by Tal's combination that it claimed that anyone that could solve it should instantly be entitled to the title of IM...

34...\( \text{Dxa2} 35 \text{Dxd8+ Dh7} \)

Forced, since after 35...\( \text{Df8} 36 \text{Da8} \) the knight cannot be defended.

36 \( \text{Da6!} \)

In my opinion this quiet move together with the moves 38, 39 and 42 constitute the most difficult part of the combination. It is also quite typical of Tal's attacking play. He was very
strong at keeping up the pressure with such 'op¬

36...£e7 37 w£8+ £e6 38 £c8!

This move prevents 38...wc1+ and threatens 39 £c6+.

38...£d5 39 £e3! £d7 40 £e3+ £d6 41 £wb8+ £c6 42 a4!

The king should not be allowed to hide in front of the b-pawn.

42...£d5 43 £e1 £d6 44 £e1+ £d7 45 £wc8+ 1-0

It is interesting to compare the attacking styles of Alekhine and Tal - perhaps the two most famous attackers in chess history. In my opinion, the difference in their styles can best be discussed by looking more closely at the formula for the 'Assault Ratio', which was briefly mentioned above. The Assault Ratio calculates the number of pieces attacking compared to the number of pieces defending. Mathematically, it can be stated like this:

Assault Ratio = Number of attacking pieces
Number of defending pieces

The ratio can be improved either by adding to the number of pieces attacking (increasing the numerator) or by distracting the defence so that potential enemy defenders are lured away from the vicinity of the king - thus decreasing the number of defending pieces.

For Tal, the numerator was often the most important one. It was he who introduced the term 'launching' into chess, bringing pieces closer to the enemy king in order to prepare an eventual attack, even if the attack was not imminent. An example is his game against Vasiukov above. Tal improved the Assault Ratio by bringing his own pieces close to the king.

Alekhine's attacking approach was often different. As you may remember from the discussion under pragmatics, Alekhine described his preparations for an attack as consisting of central or even queenside actions, with the purpose of luring or forcing the enemy pieces away from their king - thereby decreasing the number of defending pieces and improving the Assault Ratio. At the preliminary stages of an attack, Alekhine's attention can therefore be said to be more on the denominator of the formula. See Alekhine's own explanation of his attacking scheme in the notes to his game against Bogoljubow in Triberg 1921 (given in Chapter 6, on pragmatics).

It is striking how two such powerful attackers can have such diverse approaches to attacking, and it goes to show the richness of the game. At the same time it shows the power of strategic and conceptual thinking in chess. Contrary to a number of other grandmasters, I still strongly believe in general concepts (as opposed to a concrete approach to any given position, disregarding general strategic concepts and focusing mainly on the specific details and calculations in that position) as powerful tools in chess, although obviously these must be aligned so that general concepts and concrete calculation support each other in decision-making. Chess is certainly becoming more concrete, but I still see the game as being essentially strategic in nature. However, our knowledge and understanding of chess strategy can still be improved - I do not believe that we have seen the last advances in the formulation of principles of chess strategy, although these advances are not likely to be as groundbreaking as the ones introduced into chess by, e.g., Steinitz and Nimzowitsch.

Activists may potentially play an important role in future progress, as their ability to combine intuition and facts into decision-making as well as their willingness to try out new things may lead them down new roads and bring new enterprising insights to the surface ('trial and error').

Looking down the list of the current top players in the world, a number of these can be characterized as activists. In my opinion, Anand, Shirov, Topalov and Morozevich are all in this category.

Anand's style is in my opinion reminiscent of that of Pillsbury. His style has the same sound positional understanding as its basis, but always with a keen feeling for the initiative. I met Vishy for the first time in the mid-1980s, when we both participated in various junior championships. At the time he swept his opponents away with his extremely fast play, and he capped his junior tournament appearances with winning the World Junior Championship in Baguio City in the Philippines in 1987 - at the same venue where the famous Karpov-Korchnoi match took place in 1978. Nowadays
Characteristics of Activists

he no longer plays quite as fast as in his junior years, but he is still recognized as perhaps the best rapid player in the world. Although Anand is a brilliant and very fast calculator of variations – and thus could be said to resemble pragmatists – I still believe that he belongs in the activist category, as he fits most of the characteristics of this type. He is fond of the initiative, has strong combinative vision, and is not afraid to go his own ways, although he seems to play slightly more solidly as Black than most other activists. Like other activists Anand emphasizes having a safe king and being the one on the attack. These characteristics can be seen in some of Anand’s recent games.

Anand – Markowski
Bundesliga 2003/4

1 e4 c5 2 Qf3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Qxd4 a6 5 Ad3 Ae5 6 Ob3 Ac7 7 Ac3

This particular line in the Kan Sicilian has been rather popular in recent years. Markowski has played it in a number of games, and it is also a favourite of, e.g., Epishin. Besides the text-move, White can also choose 7 0-0 or the aggressive 7 Wg4.

7...d6 8 Qd2 Qf6 9 f3 b6 10 We2 Qb7 11 0-0-0 We7 12 g4 Qfd7 13 Qb1 Qc6 14 c3 b5 15 Wf1 e5 16 f5 h6 17 Wf2 Qc8?!

According to Anand, the immediate advance 17...b4 was better. Firstly, counterplay should be Black’s top priority in such a sharp position, and secondly the rook may actually be more useful on the a-file, as the lines 18 c4 a5! and 18 Qc1 Wd8 with the idea ...a5-a4 indicate.

18 h4 b4 19 Qc1! bxc3 20 Qxc3 Wd8 (D)

21 f6! gxf6 22 a3!

Notice these two moves. With the first one White grabs the initiative – Black must take with the g-pawn, as 21...Qxf6 and 21...Qxf6 both lose to 22 g5. But then White switches to quieter play, neutralizing any black counterplay based on ...Qb4, thus securing his own king before proceeding with the attack. This approach is quite typical for many activists, but also for Kasparov, who has made it one of his many trademarks to play ‘mysterious’ king moves in the middle of an attack, thus spending a tempo securing the king. Strong attackers often value king safety highly, as they understand better than anyone what can happen if you have an insecure king position!

22...Qc5 23 Qxc5 dxex5 24 g5!

The onslaught begins. Black’s problem is a classical one: his king is stuck in the centre and is therefore under continuous fire.

24...hxg5 25 hxg5 Qd4 26 gxf6 Qf8 27 Qg3! Qh5 28 Qxd4! exd4

The best defence, albeit not sufficient. After 28...exd4 Anand gives 29 Qb3! Qc7 30 Qe2! Wf6 (here we see the importance of 22 a3 – 30...Qc2+ is now a fruitless blow in the wind since White can play 31 Qa2) 31 Qxb7! Wxb7 32 Qxe5+, and White crashes through. Notice that White has to be alert: 29 Qb3! is more precise than the seemingly decisive 29 Qxc8 Qxc8 30 Qe2 – in this case Black can seriously disturb the white initiative by 30...Wf8!.

29 Qb3 Qc7 30 e5 Qd5 31 Qc4! Qxe5 (D)

Inaccurate. Presumably Anand overlooked Black’s clever defence. Instead, he points out

32 Qc1?
that White could win simply by 32 \textit{a}xd5 \textit{b}xd5 33 \textit{e}e1+ \textit{g}d7 (33...\textit{g}d8 34 \textit{b}g8) 34 \textit{w}g4+ \textit{f}e6 35 \textit{a}c4 \textit{h}b8 36 \textit{x}xb8 \textit{x}xb8 37 \textit{f}f3!, and the pin is lethal.

32...\textit{e}e6!

A brilliant and surprising defence. The point is 33 \textit{a}xd5? \textit{w}xg3 34 \textit{b}xe6+ (34 \textit{b}xg3? \textit{a}e1+) 34...\textit{f}xe6 35 \textit{x}g3 exd5 and Black wins!

33 \textit{b}xe6+ \textit{g}xe6 34 \textit{d}d3!

We5

35 \textit{a}xe6 \textit{w}xe6 36 \textit{c}c4

Black survived the direct onslaught, but the long-term problem of the king in the centre still renders his position difficult to defend—especially in practice and shortly before the time-control. It is a safe bet that Markowski was short on time, while Anand presumably had plenty of time left on the clock.

36...\textit{w}xf6 37 \textit{b}b6! \textit{h}h4?

According to Anand this is the decisive mistake. The queen is sidelined and White invades. The variation Anand gives instead is interesting and typical for activists. He recommends 37...\textit{w}f4 38 \textit{a}xa6 \textit{c}e7 39 \textit{a}a2, when White has positional compensation due to his strong knight and his passed a-pawn. Notice especially the last move of this line. Again White spends a tempo safeguarding his king, keeping the pressure up. I believe the black position would be difficult to defend.

38 \textit{w}e2+ \textit{d}d8 39 \textit{w}e5!

The decisive invasion, which Black should have prevented by 37...\textit{w}f4.

39...\textit{h}h3 40 \textit{d}d6! \textit{w}e3 41 \textit{f}xf7+ \textit{d}d7 42 \textit{w}d5+ \textit{e}e7 43 \textit{b}b7+ 1-0

\textit{Anand} – \textit{Cu. Hansen}

\textit{Middelfart rpd 2003}

Here we see the strength of Anand at faster time-limits—in this case 25 minutes for the entire game. The game was played in a four-player double-round rapid tournament in Denmark with Anand, Curt Hansen, Peter Heine Nielsen and Jonny Hector competing. Seemingly strong opposition, but Anand did not leave any doubts as to the difference in strength between solid 2600 grandmasters and a 2750+ world championship contender: he won with 5½ out of 6, conceding only a single draw as Black against Peter Heine Nielsen. The following is one of his impressive wins from this event. Remember as you study the game that this is rapid chess!

1 \textit{e}4 \textit{e}5 2 \textit{d}4 \textit{d}5 3 \textit{c}c3 \textit{b}b4 4 \textit{e}5 \textit{e}5 5 \textit{a}3 \textit{xc}3+ 6 \textit{b}xc3 \textit{w}c7 7 \textit{w}g4 \textit{f}5 8 \textit{w}g3 \textit{a}e7?!

Do you remember this sharp line from the games Tal-Botvinnik above? In previous games Curt Hansen (by the way, although no fewer than three of Denmark’s eight grandmasters carry the surname ‘Hansen’—Curt, Sune Berg and myself—we are not related; Hansen is one of the most common names in Denmark) had preferred the quieter 8...\textit{c}xd4, achieving solid draws against Leko (Groningen 1995) and Svidler (Esbjerg 2000). With 8...\textit{a}e7 he presumably hoped to surprise Anand, but the Indian reacts impeccably and quickly reaches a promising position. It is interesting to speculate if he had actually prepared the strong new plan that he introduces in this game at home, or if he conceived over the board using the typical activist feeling for the initiative and king safety.

9 \textit{w}xg7 \textit{e}g8 10 \textit{w}xh7 \textit{c}xd4 11 \textit{d}d2

Tal played 11 \textit{d}d1 instead in the games against Botvinnik.

11...\textit{d}d6 12 \textit{w}b5+

A new move, but it is the following move that is the core part of Anand’s new plan. In the game Byrne-Botvinnik, Monte Carlo 1968, Black had sufficient counterplay after 12 \textit{f}4 \textit{a}d7 13 \textit{w}h3 \textit{d}xc3 14 \textit{w}xc3 0-0-0 15 \textit{g}3 \textit{a}e8! 16 \textit{a}g2 \textit{h}h5.

12...\textit{a}g6 (D)

\textit{W}

13 \textit{a}g5!

By bringing the bishop outside the pawn-chain before playing \textit{f}4, White significantly increases his active possibilities while keeping
the black king in the centre. This is more important than materialistic worries about the e5-pawn.

13...\textit{W}xe5 14 f4! \textit{W}g7
14...\textit{W}e4 15 \textit{W}h7! \textit{D}xe7 16 \textit{D}xe7 \textit{D}xe7 17 cxd4 is clearly better for White.

15 \textit{h}4!

Anand believed that White was already winning here. It is very hard for Black to complete his development and bring his king into safety. The text-move is multi-purpose: the h-pawn itself is a dangerous passed pawn, and the rook can now join the game via the third rank.

15...dxc3 16 \textit{D}d1!

Another strong move with a prophylactic purpose. Any black counterplay based on ...\textit{D}xd4 is prevented. With his two next moves Black only weakens his position, but it is not easy to suggest any improvements. How can Black otherwise create some space for his pieces?

16...d4 17 \textit{W}f3 e5?! 18 \textit{W}d5! \textit{D}ge7 19 \textit{W}d6 \textit{D}d7 (D)

20 \textit{D}xe3! \textit{D}c8 21 \textit{W}c7 dxc3 22 \textit{D}e2!!

This quiet move is the point behind White’s combination. Like in many of Tal’s games, the crucial factor is not the absolute number of pieces on the board, but the relative assault ratio – and here White outmatches Black, as the rook on a8 does not participate. Conversely, all White’s pieces are involved in the attack – even the seemingly passive rook on h1 will play a decisive role. Notice that pawns are also part of the attacking squad. The h-pawn may potentially distract Black, and on the next move a powerful e-pawn emerges.

22...\textit{D}h8

Forced to parry the threat of 23 \textit{D}h5+.

23 fxe5 \textit{D}f7

The e-pawn cannot be taken: 23...\textit{D}xe5? 24 \textit{W}d8+ \textit{D}f7 25 \textit{D}xd7+ \textit{D}xd7 26 \textit{W}xd7+ \textit{D}g8 27 \textit{D}c4+, and the white attack crashes through.

24 \textit{D}c4! \textit{D}xc4

Again Black has no choice as 24...\textit{W}h7 25 e6 or 24...\textit{D}e6? 25 \textit{D}d8+ loses at once.

25 \textit{W}xd7+ \textit{D}f8 26 \textit{W}xf5+

Now the h1-rook is ready to join the game down the open f-file.

26...\textit{D}e8 27 \textit{W}d7+ 1-0

28 \textit{D}f1+ decides.

As I have already emphasized, activists like having a safe king, so that they can pursue an attack against the enemy king unhindered. This feature was seen in the two previous Anand games, and it can also be noticed in a number of other games of his. Take a look at the following example.

\begin{center}
\textit{Anand – Tiviakov}
\textit{Wijk aan Zee 2001}
\end{center}

This position arose from a Sicilian Dragon, a variation where Tiviakov has long been one of the leading experts. In two earlier games between the two, Anand had quite a difficult time against Tiviakov’s Dragon, losing in Moscow 1989 and barely scraping a draw in Tilburg 1992. At first sight his position also does not look too promising here, as Black seemingly has the better pawn-structure with a passed d-pawn versus a rather useless white doubled b-pawn. But this evaluation is superficial. The key here is the relative safety of the two kings.
The white king will be totally safe on a2, hiding behind the doubled pawns, whereas the black king does not have a similar pawn shelter. Furthermore, the black queen, which looks well placed on c5, cannot easily join the defence of the king. White’s simple plan is h4-h5-h6, attacking on the dark squares.

24...h5?!

Tiviakov counters the aforementioned threat, but his king becomes even weaker. Perhaps he should have tried 24...d5!? instead; e.g., 25 h5 d4 26 h6+ √f8! 27 √f4 √e8!, and Black has counterplay.

25 √a2!

Tucking the king safely away!

25...hxg4 26 fxg4 √h8 27 √f4! √xh4 28 √f1!

Now f7 cannot be satisfactorily defended, as 28...√d5? 29 √f6+ drops the rook and 28...f5 29 √g5! √xg4 30 √e7+ √g8 31 √h1 gives White a winning attack.

28...√e5 29 √xf7+ √h6 30 √f6! √xg4 31 √e6 √g7 32 √f3 (D)

Notice how the safe white king allows White to keep the pressure on. Time is not a crucial factor here, as Black does not have any counterplay against the white king. Such positions are very hard to defend in practice.

32...√d4 33 √f8+ √h5 34 √xd6 √e5 35 √d8 √g5 36 √d7 √g4 37 √d1!!

White’s attacking scheme resembles the Tal – Brinck-Claussen game, given earlier. The attack is transferred from the rear to the front.

37...√e3 38 √d4+ √xd4

Regrettably Black does not have anything better: 38...√h5 39 √h8#, 38...√g3 39 √d3 or 38...√f5 39 √xa5+. With the text-move Black hopes to build a fortress, where the rook on g5 defends the pawns on a5 and g6, while White cannot create a passed pawn. But the fortress is insecure, and zugzwang decides.

39 √xd4+ √h5 40 √h8+ √g4 41 √g7! √h5 42 √h7+ √g4 43 √f1 √f5 44 √f7+ √e4 45 √f6 1-0

Alexei Shirov is often called ‘the new Tal’, and it is true that there are many similarities between the two. Both are Latvian (although Shirov now represents Spain) and famous for their bold sacrifices and brilliant attacks. In fact, Shirov worked together with the late Tal in the years before the old champion’s premature death. In Attack with Mikhail Tal, Tal writes enthusiastically about the 17-year-old Alexei Shirov, who understood and adopted Tal’s principle of ‘launching’. Like Tal, Shirov is not afraid to take risks, even as Black. Here he differs from, e.g., Anand, who mainly prefers to play aggressively as White. Obviously such an enterprising and uncompromising style also involves risks. I have played for some years together with Shirov in the German Bundesliga, and I was very impressed by a string of brilliant attacking wins from his hands – often in highly important matches. In the Bundesliga, match points count before board points. This means that often just a few matches involving the head-to-head meeting of the strongest teams decide the outcome of the entire season. In such matches Shirov was often at his best. But he also occasionally lost games against nominally weaker opponents, an inevitable consequence of his adventurous style. Let us see two of his Bundesliga games, both taken from these aforementioned decisive matches.

Shirov – Van Wely
Bundesliga 2002/3

1 e4 c5 2 √f3 √c6

These two players have a long history of exciting games. Some years ago Shirov and Van Wely had an ongoing rivalry with ‘discussions’ in a number of variations in the Najdorf (2...d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 √xd4 √f6 5 √c3 a6). The contest ended clearly in Shirov’s favour, who according to my database won seven games and lost
two in the period 1995-2000. Most famous are the games from the year 2000, where the topical line \(6 \text{\&e}3 \text{\&e}6 \text{\&g}4 \text{\&e}5 \text{\&g}6 \text{\&g}5 \text{\&e}xf5 \text{d}5\) was seen in three games between the two, all with Shirov as White. In the rapid game in Monaco, Shirov played \(\text{\&xf}6\) and won after 11...d4 12 \text{\&}c4 \text{\&}c7 13 \text{\&}d3 dxe3 14 0-0-0 \text{\&}xf2 15 \text{\&}xf2+ \text{\&}xf2 16 \text{\&}d5+ \text{\&}xf6 17 \text{\&}e4+ \text{\&}e7 18 \text{\&}d6 \text{\&}h6+ 19 \text{\&}b1 \text{\&}f6 20 \text{\&}h1 \text{\&}f8 21 \text{\&}xf2 \text{\&}c6 22 \text{\&}c4 \text{\&}f4? 23 \text{\&}xf4! \text{\&}xf4 24 \text{\&}c3+ \text{\&}g5 25 \text{\&}g1+ \text{\&}h4 26 \text{\&}f3! 1-0. However, a few months later Van Wely improved on his own play in a rapid game against Topalov (Frankfurt 2000) by 22...\text{\&}g7! (instead of 22...\text{\&}f4) and reached a winning position after 23 \text{\&}g1+ \text{\&}h8 24 \text{\&}f2 \text{\&}g7 25 \text{\&}xg7 \text{\&}xg7 26 \text{\&}xg7 \text{\&}xg7 27 \text{\&}g4+ \text{\&}h8 28 \text{\&}xg5 \text{\&}e6 29 \text{\&}d8! 30 \text{\&}h6 \text{\&}xf5 31 \text{\&}xb7 \text{\&}c8 32 \text{\&}d6 \text{\&}g6 33 \text{\&}xc8 \text{\&}xc8.

In the other two games Shirov therefore chose 11 \text{\&}f3, when a highly interesting position arose after 11...d4 12 0-0-0 \text{\&}bd7 13 \text{\&}d2 \text{\&}c7 14 \text{\&}xf6 dxc3 15 \text{\&}xc3 \text{\&}c6 16 \text{\&}g3 (D).

![Diagram](image)

Black is a piece up, and the rook on h1 is hanging. But the king on e8 is insecure, while the white king can be safely put away on b1. Furthermore, Black has difficulty developing his queenside pieces.

In Polanica Zdroj Van Wely refrained from taking the rook and played 16...\text{\&}h6+, the most common move. However, in the ensuing high-stake battle he faltered, and Shirov won a fine game: 17 \text{\&}b1 \text{\&}f4 18 \text{\&}d3 0-0 (at Wijk aan Zee in 2001, Topalov tried 18...\text{\&}g8 against Shirov, but that also did not end well: 19 \text{\&}h3 \text{\&}d8 20 \text{\&}b4 \text{\&}xf6 21 \text{\&}c4 \text{\&}g5 22 \text{\&}d6 \text{\&}g7 23 \text{\&}f6 \text{\&}g1+ 24 \text{\&}f1! 1-0, as 24...\text{\&}f8 25 \text{\&}xg1 \text{\&}xg1 26 \text{\&}a5+ \text{\&}e8 27 \text{\&}e6+! wins for White) 19 \text{\&}g1+ \text{\&}h8 20 \text{\&}b4 \text{\&}g8? (presumably the decisive mistake; later Van Wely tried 20...\text{\&}c5! here, and the latest word of theory seems to be that this holds; e.g., 21 \text{\&}c3 \text{\&}xf6 22 \text{\&}xc5 \text{\&}xf5! 23 \text{\&}a3 \text{\&}e8 24 \text{\&}d3 \text{\&}e6 25 \text{\&}xf5, and Black was fine in Kalka-Van Wely, Bundestiga 2000/1) 21 \text{\&}xg8+ \text{\&}xg8 22 \text{\&}e7 h6 23 \text{\&}e2 \text{\&}xf6 24 \text{\&}d8+ \text{\&}h7 25 \text{\&}f8! (stronger than 25 \text{\&}xf6 \text{\&}xf5! 26 \text{\&}xa8 \text{\&}xc2+ 27 \text{\&}a1 \text{\&}xh1, and there is no win in sight for White) 25...\text{\&}e6 26 \text{\&}xa8 \text{\&}xf5 27 \text{\&}a1 \text{\&}d5 28 \text{\&}f8 \text{\&}e6 29 \text{\&}c5 \text{\&}xc2 30 \text{\&}g1 \text{\&}g6 31 \text{\&}h4 \text{\&}h2 32 \text{\&}d1 \text{\&}f4 33 \text{\&}e8 1-0.

At the Olympiad in Istanbul a few months later, Van Wely was ready to take the rook, but that also did not turn out well: 16...\text{\&}xh1 17 \text{\&}g2 \text{\&}h6+ 18 \text{\&}d2 \text{\&}xd2+ 19 \text{\&}xd2 \text{\&}xg2 20 \text{\&}xg2 a5 21 f4! \text{\&}xf4 22 \text{\&}g7 \text{\&}f8 23 \text{\&}e1+ \text{\&}d8 24 \text{\&}e7 \text{\&}e8 25 \text{\&}f8 1-0.

However, in recent years Van Wely has switched to the Pelikan/Sveshnikov Variation, \(2...\text{\&}c6 3 d4 cxd4 4 \text{\&}xg6 c5 \text{\&}xe5, etc.

Since this variation is holding its own remarkably well at world-class level, Shirov prefers to avoid it.

3 \text{\&}e3

In the playoff match for the German Team Championship in 2004 between Baden-Oos (with Anand, Shirov, Svidler, Vallejo Pons, etc., in their line-up) and Porz (with Lutz, Van Wely, I. Sokolov, Andersson, etc.) Shirov preferred 3 \text{\&}b5 against Van Wely, but after 3...\text{\&}g6 4 \text{\&}xc6 dxc6 5 d3 \text{\&}g7 6 h3 b6 7 0-0 \text{\&}e6 8 \text{\&}d2 0-0 9 \text{\&}c3 \text{\&}e8 10 \text{\&}b2 \text{\&}c7 11 \text{\&}xg7 \text{\&}xg7 12 a3 f6 13 e5 a5 14 \text{\&}c6+ \text{\&}xf6 Black was fine and later even won when Shirov over-reached.

3...\text{\&}f6 4 \text{\&}b5 \text{\&}c7

A fashionable line at the highest level. It has also been played by Kramnik, Leko and Shirov himself.

5 0-0 \text{\&}e6

Here 5...\text{\&}d4 is a common alternative.

6 \text{\&}e1 \text{\&}g4!?

Very ambitious but also risky, as Black will be lagging in development. 6...\text{\&}e7 is quieter.

7 \text{\&}xe6

The threat was 7...\text{\&}d4, and 7 h3 \text{\&}xe5 is fine for Black.
Let's take a closer look at this dynamic position. Black has the two bishops and potentially a strong centre. But he is behind in development, which White hopes to utilize to build up an initiative. A sharp fight is on the cards. But with his next move Black crosses the line – he gets too far behind in development in his search for a material advantage. That is a very risky strategy against an activist like Shirov.

13...d6?

Shirov instead recommends 13...d6 14 xxe7 wxe7 15 xc3 with complicated play. Both sides have their assets.

14 xxe4! c5 15 wc3! a6

The threat was 16 cxb5, and 15...xe5 16 xe5 gives White too much initiative on the dark squares.

16 xd5! wc6 17 eg5!

Notice how Black is not given any rest. Every move presents a new threat which Black must counter.

17...h6 (D)

18 xxd6! hxg5
18...wxd6 19 xd1!

19 xd1!

The point of the previous move and the key behind the entire combination. The bishop on d6 acts like a pole in the flesh and must be preserved at all costs. The black king is forever stuck in the centre – a dream position for an activist. It does not take Shirov many moves to deal the decisive blow.

19...h6
19...wxd6? 20 xf6+.
his king is stuck in the centre, so White is certainly not without chances either.

12 \text{xf6} \text{gxf6} 13 a3 bxc3 \text{Wxa3}+ 15 \text{d2} b2 16 \text{fxe6} fxe6 17 \text{dxe6}?!  

An oversight. Presumably Kasimdzhanov missed Black’s 21st move. 17 \text{c4} is correct; e.g., 17...\text{h6}+ 18 \text{e1} \text{xc3}+ 19 \text{xc3} \text{bxc3} 20 \text{d3} \text{e4} 21 \text{xe6} with an approximately equal endgame.

17...\text{c7}! 18 \text{c4} \text{h6}+! 19 \text{e1}
Not 19 \text{xc6}? \text{xc3}+.

19...\text{xc3}+ 20 \text{xc3} \text{bxc3} 21 \text{d3} (D)

21...\text{ec}8!
This wins material due to the pin down the c-file.

22 \text{xc3} \text{xe6} 23 \text{xe6}  
There is nothing better. White hopes for drawing chances due to opposite-coloured bishops but the problem is that he loses another pawn.

23...\text{xc3} 24 \text{h3} \text{e3}+ 25 \text{f2} \text{xe4} 26 \text{d5} \text{f4}+ 27 \text{g3} \text{b4} 28 \text{g8} \text{f4}+ 29 \text{f3} \text{e5} 30 \text{axh7} a5 31 \text{g8} a4 32 \text{e1} b5 0-1

Activists often put a lot of energy into their games, as they are not satisfied playing sound and ‘ordinary’ moves. They want to invent something extraordinary! One player, who is probably the most concentrated player during play on the circuit, is the Bulgarian grandmaster Veselin Topalov. Watching Topalov in action is impressive. But it is also a style of playing that consumes a lot of energy. This is why physical training has become an important factor to meet the trend of more concrete play in chess, where many top players emphasize concrete evaluation of each position and strategy, rather than simply adhering to pre-established rules of chess strategy.

At the FIDE world championship in Tripoli in 2004, Topalov started with the incredible score of 9\(\frac{1}{2}\) out of 10, before losing in the rapid play-off of the semi-finals against Kasimdzhanov, following four draws in the ordinary games. The typical activist trait of combining attacks with focus on the safety of their own king is visible in some of Topalov’s games from this event.


toplasov – Movsesian
Tripoli FIDE KO 2004

1 e4 c5 2 \text{df3} \text{c6} 3 d4 cxd4 4 \text{xd4} \text{wc7} 5 \text{d3} e6 6 \text{e3} a6 7 \text{d2}  
This line is becoming increasingly popular. White wants to bolster his centre by f3 and to initiate an ‘English Attack’ with g4.

7...\text{f6} 8 0-0-0 \text{b4} 9 f3 \text{e5}?! (D)
9...\text{d5} has been Anand’s choice in a number of recent games. His results have been reasonable, but in Leko-Anand, Moscow tt 2004, something went wrong: 10 \text{bl} 11 \text{xc3} 11 bxc3 b5 12 \text{f4} \text{wb6} 13 \text{b3} \text{c4} 14 \text{wd4} d5 15 \text{xc4} \text{xd4} 16 \text{cxd4} \text{xc4} 17 \text{a5} \text{d7} 18 \text{c7} 0-0 19 d5 exd5 20 exd5 with a clear advantage for White, who went on to win.

10 \text{b3} b5 11 \text{b1}  
In another game in Tripoli, Almasi chose 11 \text{e1} against Ye Jiangchuan, also winning a fine game after 11...\text{b8} 12 \text{g3} \text{e7} 13 \text{f4} \text{c4} 14 \text{e5} \text{b5} 15 \text{f2} \text{xe3} 16 \text{xc3} g6 17 g4 \text{g7} 18 \text{d3} \text{b7} 19 \text{fh1} 0-0 20 f5 \text{exf5} 21 \text{gx5} \text{b4} 22 \text{f6} \text{xe6} 23 \text{f5}! \text{e8} 24 \text{h5}! \text{f8} 25 \text{g1} \text{g7} 26 \text{fxg7} \text{hxg7} 27 \text{wh2}.  

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11...e7 12 w2 d6 13 b6 b8 14 d4 c6 15 e3 d7 16 g4!

At last. After a period of ‘shadow boxing’, the players get down to business.

16...- 17 g5 b4 18 a4! c5 19 e1 b7 19...a5?!

20 a5! c8 21 b3!

Notice how Topalov secures his king before proceeding with his own attack. This strategy is often seen in games of activists. After their own king has been protected safely, the attack comes ‘for free’. It is no longer a question of ‘who arrives first’. In this respect the attacking scheme of activists often differentiates itself from that used by pragmatics, where the precise calculation of variations is often used to determine who has the stronger attack. Topalov seems very fond of securing his king with b3 in such positions in the Sicilian. He also did it in another game at Tripoli, against Kožul: 1 e4 c5 2 d3 d5 3 d4 cxd4 4 dxc4 b6 5 c3 c6 6 g5 e6 7 d2 a6 8 0-0-0 d7 9 f3 e7 10 b1 0-0 11 h4 b8 12 g4 c8 13 cxc6 14 d3 b5 15 e2 b4 16 d4 e8 17 h5 a5 18 e3 d7 19 b5! c5 20 a4 e8 21 b3 d7 22 g5 a4 23 w2 c8 24 b3 cxb3 25 gxf7+ xf7 26 cxb3 e3 27 hgl with advantage for White (1-0, 58). Notice how b3 and cxb3 made it difficult for Black to access the white king.

21...c6 22 x6 cxc6 23 f4 c5 24 x5 dxe5 25 f5 c6 26 d3 exf5 27 exf5 e8 28 f4 d6 (D)

29 g6!

Opening lines against the black king. Black does not have a similar option.

Another contemporary activist who delights the chess fans with his enterprising games is Alexander Morozevich. My good friend and Danish GM colleague Sune Berg Hansen recently described ‘Moro’, as he is often called in chess circles, in this way: “Morozevich plays a new kind of chess. It is a shame that he is not number one in the world; in that case he could change the way chess is played.” I tend to agree with this statement, at least partially. It is true that Morozevich has many fresh ideas and often goes his own ways, also in the openings. Morozevich is in my opinion the top player in the current world elite whose approach most resembles the resource-based view on strategy, as outlined in Chapter 1. On the other hand it is possible to influence chess even if you are not number one in the world, as, e.g., Tarrasch and Nimzowitsch did. They did it to a large extent through their extensive and profound writings. It would indeed be interesting to have Morozevich and other top players write books explaining – like Tarrasch and Nimzowitsch did – their personal perception of chess and chess strategy! In a world of Internet, databases and powerful analytical programs, where data crunching seems to be the order of the day, it would be highly interesting and no doubt instructive to have more top grandmasters explain how they see chess in holistic terms and not only in fragmented game notes.

Let us finish this chapter on activists by looking at two interesting games by Morozevich, where he shows his talent for the initiative and the direct attack on the king.

Inarkiev – Morozevich
Russian Ch (Krasnotarsk) 2003

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 c3 c6 4 g5 e7 5 e5 fd7 6 xe7

Morozevich himself chose the sharp Alekhine-Chatard variation 6 h4 against Korchnoi in Biel 2003, the tournament he won with 8/10 and a 2879 performance. That game turned out
to be a miniature, as the Grand Old Master uncharacteristically blundered: 6...c5 7 dxe7 dxe7 8 dxc5 c6 9 f4 dx5 10 d2 dxc6 11 f3 b6 a3 a5 13 h5 h6 14 0-0-0 d7 15 b1 a4 h3 xac8 17 b5!? xd8?? (Black should play 17...dxe5!, as 18 d7 xec4 19 xec8+ dxc8 provides reasonable compensation, whereas 18 dxe5 xex5 19 xc3 xac4 20 xec4 dxc4 21 xec4! xd8! is only slightly better for White according to Pelletier) 18 d6 b8 19 d3 f8 20 d3!, and Korchnoi resigned, as the penetration by the white queen at h7 can only be prevented by 20...g8, after which 21 dxf7! decides.

6...Mxe 7 f4 a6 8 d3 d7!? 9 0-0-0?!
(D)

10...d6!

A strong manoeuvre that reveals Morozevich’s creativity. Even in an apparently dull French position, he can whip up an attack ‘out of nowhere’. This is one of his special talents. Here, the bad light-squared bishop is exchanged, while at the same time files are opened on the queenside.

11 dxe5

Perhaps White should simply continue with his own plans by, for example, 11 g4, keeping the queenside files closed.

11...dx5 12 xex5+ c6! 13 d3 xa2 14 dh1 dh4 15 g4 xc4! 16 xex4 dxc4!

As Fischer said: “To get squares you have got to give squares!” Here Black abandons e4 (and thereby d6) to get d5 for his own knight and a potential pawn-roller on the queenside. As mentioned earlier, pawns are also attacking units.

17 xg5 h5 18 xce3 d6 19 xd7 xac7 20 xec4 d5 21 f3


21...0-0 22 f5 b4

Who has the stronger attack? Let us try to apply logical reasoning – always a good idea in chess, as concrete calculations often reflect the basic strategic features of the position. This is why we cannot do without strategic thinking in chess, even if the game has become considerably more concrete in the past decade! Black has already managed to break holes in the white king’s pawn protection, and his rook on a4 and the knight on d5 are already actively involved in the onslaught. The queen and the other rook can join in two moves. On the other hand White is still far from creating real threats against the black king. For example, 23 f6+ a7 24 fxg7 b8 is not really dangerous; Black simply moves his pieces where they want to go anyway. Conclusion: Black’s attack is bound to be the stronger, and it is not really surprising that the white defences break down in a few moves.

23 xh1 bxc3 24 xxc3 xxc+ 25 xxc3 b8 26 fb3 b3 27 xce2 xxe7 28 xf2 c3 0-1

Morozevich – Lutz
Biel 2003

1 c4 xf6 2 x3 c5 3 g3 e6 4 d3 b6 5 e4

An interesting alternative to the more common Hedgehog set-ups when White plays d4.

5...B7 6 d3 d6 7 g2 e7 8 0-0 0-0 (D)
9 \( \text{Qg5!} \)?

White clears the way for the f-pawn and is ready to accept the knight being pushed to the rim. This idea is sometimes called the ‘Morozevich Manoeuvre’, as Morozevich has used it before, for instance in a game against Khalifman in Samara 1998: 1 e4 c5 2 \( \text{Qf3} \) d6 3 \( \text{Ab5}+ \) \( \text{d7} \) 4 \( \text{Af4} \) d5 0-0 \( \text{Qg5} \) 6 d3 e6 7 \( \text{Qe7} \) h6 9 \( \text{Qh3} \) \( \text{wc7} \) 10 f4 0-0 11 c4 \( \text{Qb8} \) 12 \( \text{Ab3} \) 13 \( \text{Qd2} \) 14 a3 f5 15 \( \text{Ab1} \) 16 \( \text{Ah1} \) \( \text{Qg4} \) 17 \( \text{Ag1} \) \( \text{Qf6} \) 18 b4, and White went on to win an interesting game.

9...\( \text{Qfd7} \) 10 h4 h6 11 \( \text{Qh3} \) \( \text{Qc6} \) 12 f4 \( \text{Qd4} \) 13 \( \text{Ab3} \) 14 \( \text{Ah2} \) \( \text{Qc6}?! \) (D)

This gives White the opportunity to change the course of the game to his advantage. According to Morozevich Black should have played the natural 14...a6, as 15 g4?! (which Lutz probably feared) does not work on account of 15...\( \text{Axh4} \) 16 g5 \( \text{hxg5} \) 17 f5 \( \text{Qe5}?! \). Instead Morozevich intended to answer 14...a6 by the quiet 15 \( \text{Ad1} \) b5 16 b3 with equal chances.

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure1.png}
\caption{Position after move 15.}
\end{figure}

15 \( \text{Qxd4}! \)

A surprising but strong swap. White goes for a position with opposite-coloured bishops, where the player holding the initiative has the better chances as the opponent has a difficult time defending on the squares not covered by his own bishop.

15...\( \text{Qxd4} \) 16 \( \text{Qb5} \) \( \text{Qxb5} \) 17 \( \text{cxh5} \) \( \text{Qf6}?! \) (D)

This natural move is condemned by Morozevich. Instead he suggests a highly interesting plan for Black, to initiate a counter-strike on the dark squares with 17...\( \text{Qc8} \) 18 \( \text{Qg1} \) g5?!. I don’t know if Lutz considered this possibility at all (according to Morozevich’s notes in New In Chess, Lutz played 17...\( \text{Qf6} \) quickly) as it appears to violate the classical rule of not weakening the pawn-structure on the wing where you are weaker. But the idea certainly has a lot of merit, as Black obtains reasonable counterplay after, for example, 19 \( \text{Qf3} \) \( \text{Qf6} \) 20 \( \text{Ah3} \) \( \text{Qc5} \). The discussion can be brought one step further, beyond the evaluation of mere variations. It is interesting to speculate on the impact differences in style have on how to approach a position like this. Should Black continue naturally – believing in his position – or has the time already come for Black to take drastic measures such as ...g5? I believe that this is an excellent example of the deep understanding that activists have of the initiative, and the value they attach to it. Morozevich apparently considers White’s potential initiative on the kingside to be so strong that in his opinion Black should take rather drastic measures to counter it. Natural moves like 17...\( \text{Qf6} \) won’t cut it, as it does not counter White’s planned kingside advance. In an activist’s opinion, the quest for the initiative should have top priority, and therefore ideas like ...g5 come more easily to mind for activists than other types of players. A parallel can be drawn here towards the discussion of Petrosian’s prophylactic style in Chapter 4 (on reflectors). Petrosian had a strong feeling for danger at a very early stage, and then countered it even before anybody noticed the potential danger – it never became visible. Feeling for danger is a very useful weapon for a chess-player.

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure2.png}
\caption{Position after move 18.}
\end{figure}

18 \( \text{Qg1} \) \( \text{Wd7} \) 19 a4 a6 20 bxa6 \( \text{Wa7} \) 21 \( \text{Ah3} \) \( \text{Wxa6} \) 22 \( \text{Qf3} \) b5 23 a5 \( \text{Wa7} \) 24 g4!
Characteristics of Activists

The advance begins.

24...\(\text{c7}\) 25 \(\text{g5}\) \(\text{hxg5}\) 26 \(\text{hxg5}\) \(\text{g6}\) 27 \(\text{wd2}\) \(\text{b4}\)
28 \(\text{f5}\) \(\text{a6}\)! 

Diversion. The a-pawn is ready to give up its life to keep the black pieces away from the kingside. Do you recall the discussion on Alekhine and Tal’s attacking styles and the concept of the ‘Assault Ratio’? A common trait for activists becomes visible here and in the coming few moves: initiative supersedes material.

29...\(\text{b6}\) 30 \(\text{fxg6}\) \(\text{fxg6}\) 31 \(\text{xe6+}\) \(\text{g7}\) \(\text{(D)}\)

Again initiative over material. White plays to restrict the black pieces and does not allow Black to grab the initiative. More materialistic players would have considered holding on to the advanced a-pawn by 32 \(\text{c4}\), but this allows Black counterplay by 32...\(\text{a5}\)!

32...\(\text{xa6}\) 33 \(\text{ac1}\) \(\text{wd7}\) 34 \(\text{g2}\) \(\text{xf4}\)!

In time-trouble Black does not find a defence. White’s threat was 35 \(\text{g1}\). According to Morozevich the only chance for Black was 34...\(\text{wd8}\).

35 \(\text{g3}\)! \(\text{g4}\)!

This runs into a nice tactic that concludes the game.

36 \(\text{de5}\)! \(\text{dxe5}\)

6...\(\text{exg3}\) loses to 37 \(\text{f7}\).

37 \(\text{f7}\) + \(\text{h8}\) 38 \(\text{f7+}\) \(\text{f7}\) 39 \(\text{h3}\) +

Black resigned due to 39...\(\text{g7}\) 40 \(\text{g6}\#\).

Let us summarize the characteristics of the activist type and extract some rules of thumb for how to play against such players.

Activists have a fantastic feel for the initiative, a strong combinative vision and a good sense of the trade-off between material and initiative. They often value initiative more than material, especially if the extra material is not participating in the ‘vital’ parts of the game, around the king – the ‘Assault Ratio’.

Activists do not mind going their own way and they are not afraid to take risks – sometimes too many risks, a trait that the opponent can hope to utilize. Activists have a good intuitive sense for long-term sacrifices. Their sacrifices are not always based on concrete calculation (as is the case with pragmatics); often they employ their intuitive feeling for, e.g., long-term threats against the enemy king stuck in the centre. This means that if an activist sacrifices material against you, you should not immediately ‘trust’ him – calculate the variations for yourself, as there might be a concrete way out.

However, if you play against activists, it is a high priority to avoid time-pressure. Activists are very strong in time-pressure and at shorter time-limits, where their intuitive feel for the initiative can be put to optimal use.

Activists prefer to have the initiative themselves, and they place quite a lot of emphasis on having a safe king. That means that if you play an activist, you should not avoid complications per se, but make sure that you are the one having the initiative – not the other way around. Activists are deadly when they are allowed to grab the initiative, to which countless beautiful and famous wins by activists in chess history testify.
In this chapter we shall consider a number of factors that influence people’s decisions during a game. Obviously the list of such factors is virtually unlimited, but here we shall consider five factors that I believe are quite common: the time-rate, the standing in the tournament, the impact of the opponent’s background, whether it is an individual game or a team event, and time-pressure.

The point is that these factors impact how we think and react in certain situations. Often the impact is pushing us in the wrong direction! But I believe it is possible to define a number of rules of thumb for how to take these factors into account. For example, I believe that in rapid games (or games with even shorter time-limits) holding the initiative is a more valuable asset in practice than in games with a classical time-control, whereas in time-pressure the coordination of the pieces is crucial – the pieces should be kept tightly together and all pieces should be covered at least once to avoid falling into traps or double attacks.

But let us not get ahead of ourselves. The five external factors will be discussed in turn.

The Impact of the Time-Rate

In recent years rapid games and other forms of games with shorter time-limits have become an increasingly large part of ‘serious’ chess games. See for instance the proportion of games at the knockout world championships that are decided in a rapid or blitz shoot-out. Furthermore, the trend in classical games as well is for the time allotted to the players to be steadily declining. You may be critical towards this trend – as I am – but it is more practical simply to acknowledge that these are the circumstances under which chess is played these days. The question is then how to optimize your play to such time-limits.

As I mentioned above, I believe that the initiative is a relatively more important factor in games with shorter time-limits. Obviously that does not mean that you should play completely unsoundly to grab the initiative, but that the initiative should be awarded slightly higher values in the value system in the five forces that impact chess strategy – material, initiative, positional factors, the human factor and environmental factors. Often a slight material investment is acceptable to grab the initiative in rapid chess.

The reason for the importance of the initiative in such games is that in rapid games (or games with even shorter time-limits) it is more difficult for the opponent to neutralize the initiative. Finding the right path in such positions for the defender is often time-consuming and a single mistake may be fatal. On the other hand, the player with the initiative may commit inaccuracies and still maintain practical chances.

Another point is that the initiative is, as we know, a temporary advantage, whereas positional or material advantages are long-lasting or sustainable. Normally it is preferable to have a sustainable advantage, but consider here how this advantage is converted into what the game is all about: a full point on the scorecard. Converting a positional or minor material advantage often takes a long time and many moves, and often such games go into a time-pressure phase where everything is possible. Temporary advantages, on the other hand, have the potential to finish the game quickly – especially if the defence is not flawless, as is often the case when pressed for time.

Let us see some games with this thinking in action.

Morozevich – Topalov
Monaco Amber rpd 2004

1 e4 c5 2 ▪f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ▪xd4 ▪f6 5 ▪c3 a6 6 ▪c3 c5 7 ▪b3 ▪e6 8 ▪d2 b5 9 0-0-0 ▪bd7 10 f4 ▪e7 11 ▪b1 ▪c8 12 f5 ▪c4 (D)

13 g4!?
White grabs the initiative at the cost of a pawn. Is it correct? It is hard to say, but in a rapid game it is a very good choice. I could only find one other game with this position – Todorović-Marjanović, Subotica 2000, where White played the more cautious 13 h3, and after 13...d5! 14 exd5 (14 exd5 £b4!) 14...£e4 15 £a5 £xb3 16 £xd8+ £xd8 17 axb3 £g3 18 £g1 £xf5 Black was fine.

13...£ixg4 14 £a5 £ixe3 15 £xe3 g6 16 lxc4 bxc4 17 £d2 £46 18 Wh3?!
18 £h6! is stronger (Nunn).

18...£d7 19 £f1!
Heading for d5.
19...gxf5 20 £e3!
Again initiative is the top priority! 20 exf5 takes an attacking square from the knight but loses time, allowing Black to initiate counterplay by 20...£b7, controlling d5 and creating threats down the b-file.

20...£xe4?!
Nunn gives 20...fxe4 as the right defence.

21 £cd5! £f2 22 Wh5 £xd1 23 £xd1 (D)

Take a look at this position! White has sacrificed an exchange and three pawns. Does Black have a defence? 23...£g8 seems best. This prohibits 24 £xf5? due to 24...£g5, and there are some ideas on the back rank too. Some sample lines are: 24 £b6? £a7! 25 £xf5 (25 £xc8 £xe3 with the idea 26...£g1) 25...£c5 26 £xh7 £g6 27 £f1 £f8, and everything is defended; 24 £xf7? £g6 25 £h8+ £f8 26 £f6+ £xf6 27 £xf6 £e6; or 24 £xe7 £xe7! 25 £xf5+ £e6! (D).

The black king is on tour but apparently it shall not perish in the centre. Note that 26 £xd6+? £xd6! 27 £xd6 £g1+ and 26 £xd6? £xd6 27 £xd6+ (27 £h6+ £g6) 27...£xd6 are winning for Black. 26 £h3 is coolly answered with 26...£c8, when White’s various discovered checks do not bring much; his best is Nunn’s 27 b3! (reclaiming the back rank and in some cases simply threatening bxc4), leading to a likely draw. But who wants to have his king in the centre like that? Especially in a rapid game where you do not have time to calculate all variations, it seems like suicide.

23...£c5? 24 £xe7 £xe7
Now 24...£xe7 does not work: 25 £xf5+ £e6 26 £xd6 £xd6 27 £h6+ and wins. Black misses both...£g6 and mate motifs on the back rank.

25 £xf5 e4
Topalov’s idea with 23...£c5, but it does not work. In a game with a classical time-rate he would undoubtedly have seen this, but that is exactly the point: the rules of rapid games are significantly different from classical games.

26 £g7+! £f8
Forced as 26...\textit{\texttt{d}8} fails to 27 \textit{\texttt{w}x\texttt{c}5}.

27 \textit{\texttt{w}h\texttt{b}6}!

Decisive.

27...\textit{\texttt{e}5}

27...\textit{\texttt{w}g\texttt{5}} 28 \textit{\texttt{d}e\texttt{6}}+.

28 \textit{\texttt{f}5}+ \textit{\texttt{e}8} 29 \textit{\texttt{d}xd\texttt{6}}+ \textit{\texttt{e}7} (D)

More or less forced due to White’s pressure on \textit{\texttt{d}6}, but it is also a move you would like to make in a rapid game: now it will be a fight between Black’s kingside attack and White’s positional queenside offensive. And since Black attacks where the enemy king is, White often cannot afford the slightest mistake in such positions.

12 \textit{\texttt{g}5} e3 13 f4 \textit{\texttt{f}8} 14 b4 \textit{\texttt{f}5} 15 \textit{\texttt{w}b\texttt{3}} b6

16 \textit{\texttt{f}3} \textit{\texttt{g}4} (D)

17 \textit{\texttt{h}5}

This is the natural follow-up to White’s play, but perhaps 17 d5 is better. In Romanishin-Schekachev, Györ 1990, White came out on top after 17...\textit{\texttt{f}2} 18 \textit{\texttt{d}d}4! (typical of Romanishin: he often worries more about the initiative than material) 18...\textit{\texttt{d}3}?! (after 18...\textit{\texttt{d}x\texttt{d}1} White can choose between 19 \textit{\texttt{g}xf5} \textit{\texttt{g}x\texttt{f}5} 20 \textit{\texttt{d}xd1} and simply 19 \textit{\texttt{d}xd1}, in both cases with reasonable compensation for the exchange) 19 dxc6! \textit{\texttt{g}x\texttt{d}4} 20 \textit{\texttt{d}xd3} \textit{\texttt{d}xd3} 21 \textit{\texttt{d}xd5}! \textit{\texttt{w}d}8 22 cxb7 \textit{\texttt{h}8} 23 \textit{\texttt{d}1} \textit{\texttt{xf}4} 24 \textit{\texttt{d}xf4} \textit{\texttt{f}6} 25 \textit{\texttt{f}f1} \textit{\texttt{g}5} 26 c5!.

17...\textit{\texttt{g}5} 18 bxc6 bxc6 19 \textit{\texttt{e}5}?!?

Rather risky as it takes more pieces away from the kingside. Do you recall Tal’s concept of the ‘Assault Ratio’? But it is difficult to suggest something better; if White just waits, Black can slowly build up his attack.

19...\textit{\texttt{x}f4} 20 \textit{\texttt{x}c\texttt{c}6} \textit{\texttt{w}g\texttt{5}} 21 \textit{\texttt{x}d\texttt{6}} \textit{\texttt{g}6} 22

\textit{\texttt{d}5} \textit{\texttt{h}5} 23 b4 (D)

23...\textit{\texttt{x}h\texttt{4}}?!

Following his game-plan: the initiative is more important than material. Objectively, perhaps 23...\textit{\texttt{x}g}3 24 \textit{\texttt{x}g\texttt{3}} \textit{\texttt{h}x\texttt{4}} 25 \textit{\texttt{f}4} \textit{\texttt{w}g\texttt{5}} 26

\textit{\texttt{d}h\texttt{3}} \textit{\texttt{f}6} is better, as Black gets his attack for

Ivanchuk – Yusupov

Brussels Ct rpd (9) 1991

This was the first of two semi-rapid playoff games (60 moves in 45 minutes, then 20 moves in each subsequent 15 minutes). The original match ended 4-4 after Yusupov equalized in the final game. That game was also highly interesting in the way Yusupov approached the must-win situation, and the game can be found later in this chapter (p. 159). But here we are in the rapid games, and Yusupov uses the concept of ‘initiative as first priority’ to win the game and subsequently the match following a draw in the final rapid game.

1 \textit{\texttt{c}4} \textit{\texttt{e}5} 2 g3 d6 3 \textit{\texttt{g}2} g6 4 d4 \textit{\texttt{d}d7} 5 \textit{\texttt{c}3}

\textit{\texttt{g}7} 6 \textit{\texttt{f}3} \textit{\texttt{gf6}} 7 0-0 0-0 8 \textit{\texttt{w}c2}

8 c4 is the main line.

8...\textit{\texttt{e}8} 9 \textit{\texttt{d}1} c6 10 b3 \textit{\texttt{w}e7} 11 \textit{\texttt{a}3} e4
free. Yusupov missed the last move of this line, believing that he had no better than a draw with 26...Wh5 27 £)f4 Wg5. Still, I find it hard to criticize Yusupov's decision, because this is precisely the kind of approach to rapidplay that I am advocating. It also goes to show that it is often easier being the attacker in such situations in rapidplay. Later on, White has a chance to refute Black's attack, but misses it, after which the game is lost – albeit in beautiful and far from standard fashion. Black, on the other hand, can allow himself the inaccuracy of this move, as he still retains practical chances with the inherent threats against White's king.

24 gxh4 Wxh4 (D)

25 £ide7+?!
The wrong knight! The d5-knight is needed to annihilate the troublesome pawn on e3. Correct was 25 £)ce7+ £h8 26 £xf5 Wh2+ 27 4f1. Now it seems that Black has run out of ideas, but he can keep the kettle boiling with 27...£e5!! Now:

a) The idea is the beautiful mating motif arising after 28 £xe5+? £xe5 29 dxe5 £g8, when 30 £b7 is met by 30...Wh1+!! 31 £h2+ 32 £e1 £g1#. White can try 30 £dxe3 instead, but that also doesn't help after 30...fxe3 31 £xe3 £f7+ 32 £f3 £xe3+ 33 £e1 £g1+ 34 £f2 (34 £d2 £d4+ 35 £d3 £xe4+ 36 £c2 £b2#) 34...£g4+! 35 £xg1 £h2+ 36 £f1 £f2#.

b) However, it seems that Black's attack can be refuted by 28 dxe5!, as was later found out. The point is seen after 28...£g8 (28...f3 29 exf3 £e2+ 30 £xe2 £xg2+ 31 £d3 £xf3+ 32 £d3, and Black's attack peters out) 29 £dxe3! fxel (29...£xe3+ 30 £xe3 £xe3 31 £b7) 30 £e6!. Since the bishop now covers h2, the mating motif based on ...£h1+ no longer works, and after 30...£h5 31 £xe3 Black's attack is finally neutralized. But who can blame Ivanchuk for not seeing through these complicated variations in a rapid game?

25...£h8 26 £xf5 £wh2+ 27 £f1 £e6!
The black rook is transferred to g6, after which the by now well-known mating motif of ...£h1+ followed by ...£h2+ and ...£g1# is in the air.

28 £b7?! (D)
This loses to a brilliant combination, but it was probably already too late to save the game. Some commentators have pointed to 28 £dce7 as a way for White to stay in the game, but as the extensive analysis by Burgess in The Mammoth Book of the World's Greatest Chess Games shows, Black can then win by another fantastic line: 28...£g8!! 29 £b2 £e5!! 30 £xe5+ (30 £xg8 £g6) 30...£xe5 31 £xg8 £g6 32 £b7 f3, and White is mated.
28...g6!! 29 wxa8+ h7 30 wg8+!
The only try to prevent mate by 30...wh1+!.
30...wxg8 31 c7+ h7 32 exg6 fxg6 33 xg7
Is there now some hope for White?
33...f2!!
No! With another brilliant move Yusupov takes his fantastic performance through to its successful conclusion. The threat is 34...h3! with unstoppable mate.
34 xf4 wxf4 35 e6 wh2!
Back again!
36 db1 h3! 37 b7+ g8 38 xb8 wxb8 39 xh3 w3 0-1
A fantastic game, and in my opinion one of the best rapid games ever played. The consistent way in which Yusupov rated initiative over anything else is the lesson that you should bring with you from this game. But remember: it only goes for games with shorter time-limits! In a classical game, I believe the odds are quite good that Ivanchuk would have refuted the sacrifices.

Sacrificing material for initiative in rapid games often has a psychological effect. Since it is often not possible to see through all the variations when time is short, many players will intuitively decline the sacrifice. This happens even for the best. But sometimes sacrifices must be accepted! As Steinitz said, “Sacrifices are refuted by accepting them.”

J. Polgar – Anand
Mainz rpd (5) 2003

This was game five of the exciting rapid match between Polgar and Anand – a wild slugfest that ended 5-3 to Anand without a single draw!
1 e4 c5 2 d4 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 e4 d7 5 c3 a6 6 e3 e6 7 f3 b5 8 g4 h6?! (D)
17 d5?! wc5?!
Taking the piece obviously does not work, as 17...exd5? 18 exd5+ d7 19 f5# is mate, but taking the pawn was obligatory, either by 17...exd5 18 exd5 d5 19 h4 g5! 20 fxg5 e7 (Anand) or 17...exd5 18 exd5 d5, when White still has to show the objective correctness of the sacrifice. In a rapid game, however, White’s position would certainly be easier to play.
18 b3 w2?
Sidetracking the queen. 18...wc6 was necessary.
19 f1 w2 20 xb6 xb6 21 w3! (D)

Now the black queen is in trouble, while the white queen penetrates.
21 c4 22 a7 e4 23 xa6 b8 24 g1 hxg5
No better is 24...\texttt{f}f3 25 \texttt{d}d4!.
\textit{25 \texttt{x}xg2 \texttt{x}xg2 26 \texttt{x}xe4 bxc4 27 \texttt{w}a4+1-0}

Anand is an activist, and as we discussed in Chapter 7, activists prefer to hold the initiative and to have a safe king. This is even more so in rapid chess. Here is a brilliant Anand performance with this theme.

\textbf{Anand – P.H. Nielsen}

\textit{Middelfart rpd 2003}

\texttt{1 e}4 \texttt{c}6 \texttt{2 d}4 \texttt{d}5 \texttt{3 \texttt{c}c}3 \texttt{dxe}4 \texttt{4 \texttt{x}e}4 \texttt{d}7 \texttt{5 \texttt{g}g}5 \texttt{gf}6 \texttt{6 \texttt{c}c}4

Against Bologan in Dortmund 2003 (a tournament that Bologan sensationally won ahead of Kramnik, Anand, Radjabov and Leko) Anand won a beautiful game with another line: \texttt{6 \texttt{d}d}3 \texttt{e}6 \texttt{7 \texttt{f}f}1f3 \texttt{d}6 \texttt{8 \texttt{e}e}2 \texttt{h}6 \texttt{9 \texttt{e}e}4 \texttt{\texttt{x}xe}4 \texttt{10 \texttt{x}xe}4 \texttt{w}c7 \texttt{11 0-0 b}6 \texttt{12 \texttt{w}g}4 \texttt{g}5 \texttt{13 \texttt{w}h}3 \texttt{g}8 \texttt{14 \texttt{e}e}1!

(a strong novelty that Anand had prepared at home) \texttt{14...\texttt{f}f8 \texttt{15 \texttt{w}f}5 \texttt{g}7 \texttt{16 \texttt{h}h4! \texttt{f}f8 \texttt{17 \texttt{w}h}3 \texttt{h}8! \texttt{18 \texttt{h}xg}5 \texttt{h}xg5 \texttt{19 \texttt{w}g}4 \texttt{c}5 \texttt{20 \texttt{x}x}g5! \texttt{cxd}4 \texttt{21 \texttt{a}ad}1! \texttt{b}7 (D).}

\texttt{22 \texttt{x}xe}6! \texttt{fxe}6 \texttt{23 \texttt{c}c}7+!! \texttt{xc}7 \texttt{24 \texttt{w}x}g7+ \texttt{d}6 \texttt{25 \texttt{c}xd}4! \texttt{w}5 \texttt{26 \texttt{f}f}5 \texttt{w}e}5 \texttt{27 \texttt{f}f3+ \texttt{w}d}5 \texttt{28 \texttt{w}g}3+ \texttt{w}7 \texttt{29 \texttt{c}xd}5 \texttt{a}xd5 \texttt{30 \texttt{w}g}5+ \texttt{d}6 \texttt{31 \texttt{w}f}4+ \texttt{w}7 \texttt{32 \texttt{c}c}4 \texttt{h}5 \texttt{33 \texttt{c}h}4 \texttt{g}8 \texttt{34 \texttt{g}g}6+ \texttt{d}8 \texttt{35 \texttt{w}f}7 \texttt{e}8 \texttt{36 \texttt{c}d}3! \texttt{1-0}. World-class chess!

\texttt{6...\texttt{e}6 \texttt{7 \texttt{w}e}2 \texttt{\texttt{b}b}6 \texttt{8 \texttt{b}b}3 \texttt{h}6 \texttt{9 \texttt{c}f}3 \texttt{c}5 \texttt{10 \texttt{c}c} \texttt{d}7 \texttt{11 \texttt{c}d}2}

A rather rare line that has only been seen in a few games. I suppose Anand simply wanted to develop his pieces.

\texttt{11...a}6 \texttt{12 \texttt{c}c}5 \texttt{d}7 (D)

\texttt{12...\texttt{c}xd}4 \texttt{13 \texttt{c}xd}4 just opens the c-file for White.

\texttt{13 \texttt{c}c}4 \texttt{cxd}4 \texttt{14 \texttt{d}d}6 \texttt{15 \texttt{d}d}7 \texttt{d}xd7 \texttt{16 \texttt{f}f}5 \texttt{x}f4!

\texttt{16...\texttt{f}f8 is probably better, with just some advantage for White due to the two bishops. After the text-move, Black will have lasting troubles with his king – not a nice feature in a rapid game.}

\texttt{17 \texttt{x}f4 \texttt{w}f4 \texttt{18 \texttt{x}g}7+ \texttt{f}f8 \texttt{19 \texttt{h}h}5 \texttt{\texttt{c}c}5 \texttt{20 \texttt{x}h}5 \texttt{w}e}4+ \texttt{21 \texttt{w}e}2 \texttt{w}xg2 \texttt{22 0-0-0}

Black has regained his pawn, but his king is still a concern.

\texttt{22...\texttt{g}5+ \texttt{23 \texttt{b}b}1 \texttt{f}f6 \texttt{24 \texttt{f}f4! \texttt{c}c}5}

Sensibly trying to keep White from getting more free lines towards the black king.

\texttt{25 \texttt{w}f3 \texttt{c}7 \texttt{26 \texttt{w}e}3 \texttt{g}8 \texttt{27 \texttt{f}5! \texttt{e}5 \texttt{28 \texttt{x}h}6+ \texttt{w}e}7 \texttt{29 \texttt{e}e}1 \texttt{d}4 \texttt{30 \texttt{c}c}2 \texttt{x}g4 (D)}

\texttt{31 \texttt{c}c2!!}

A nice way to finish the game.

\texttt{31...\texttt{x}e}4
Or 31...\(\text{ex}e4\) 32 \(\text{fxe}4+\) \(\text{fxe}4\) 33 \(\text{Wh}4+\) \(\text{ff}6\) 34 \(\text{Fe}1+\) and the knight drops.

32 \(\text{fxe}4+!\) \(\text{fxe}4\) 33 \(\text{Wh}5+\) \(\text{ff}8\) 34 \(\text{f}6!\) 1-0

The concluding silent move of the combination. Black cannot prevent 35 \(\text{Wh}8+\) and mate.

Obviously initiative does not always win in rapid chess. It is possible to find games where the defence prevails. However, it is my belief that from a strategic point of view, the factor ‘initiative’ should be weighted higher when evaluating positions in rapid chess than in classical games. It again goes to show that chess is not an ‘objective’ game. Like I advocated in the discussion of the impact of the human factor in chess, the same position can be evaluated differently when it arises in a rapid game instead of a classical game. That is one of the twists that make chess such a fascinating game.

The Impact of the Tournament Standings

The goal of chess is to win the game. But games are played in tournaments, and sometimes the standings in the tournament influence the decisions made during a game. A draw may be enough to clinch tournament victory, or a win might be the only useful result to reach some tournament objective. It is useful to discuss whether the right approach in these situations can be systemized, as the situations are often generic in nature.

Obviously the last round is where most tournaments are decided. It is rare that the final result of the tournament cannot be altered in the last round. However, it is my experience that in many open tournaments, the penultimate round is just as important. As in golf, where round three is sometimes called ‘moving day’, the penultimate round in an open tournament is where the favourites move into contention. Sure, the last round may still alter the result, but quite often safe draws are seen in the last round. Therefore, I have always tried to go all-out in the penultimate round. Even if you lose, there is still a chance to catch up in the last round and reach a decent final result by a last-round win. That is the nature of open tournaments.

However, in other types of tournaments the situation is different. Take qualification tournaments, for example. Here not only the individual game but also the final standings in the tournament can be considered zero-sum games. There are winners (qualifiers) and losers (who missed qualification) – nothing in between. The same argument can be made about matchplay. In these types of events the last round is crucial.

Here we shall consider two typical last-round situations: what to do when a draw is enough, and how to play for a win when only a win will do.

When a draw is enough, it is essential not to play directly for the draw. In that case you will often start playing too passively and cautiously, conceding the initiative and going too much for exchanges in the assumption that this will bring the desired draw closer. This is what happened to White in the following game.

M. Gurevich – Short
Manila IZ 1990

1 \(d4\) \(e6\) 2 \(e4\) \(d5\) 3 \(\text{exd}5?!\)

The situation before this game was that a draw was sufficient for Gurevich to qualify for the candidates matches, while Short had to win – not an easy task as Black against high-class opposition! But here Gurevich in my opinion commits a strategic mistake. By so openly going for a draw – Gurevich never plays the Exchange Variation in the French – he readily concedes the initiative to Short. Psychologically this is favourable for Black.

3...\(\text{exd}5\) 4 \(\text{f}3\) \(\text{g}4?!\)

Slightly risky from a pure chess point of view. Some annotators appraise the move with ‘?’ instead. But here I believe it is justified! Probably Short speculated that Gurevich would continue playing passively. For the text-move to be challenged, White has to proceed aggressively, and White had already indicated that he was not in a fighting mood. In such circumstances it is not easy to shift one’s attitude. The following year Short repeated 4...\(\text{g}4\) against Kasparov at Tilburg 1991, and in that case I really think that ‘?!’ is the right evaluation. Kasparov is always a fighting man! After 5 \(h3\) \(\text{h}5\) 6 \(\text{f}2+\) 7 \(\text{e}7\) \(\text{e}3\) 8 \(\text{c}6\) 0-0 9 \(g4\) \(g6\) 10 0-0-0 \(f6\) 11 a3 \(d7\) 12 \(d2\) f5 13 \(b3\)
Environmental Factors

White was slightly better, although Short managed to hold the draw. The moral is the same as in a number of other sections of this book: that the evaluation of a position is not an objective endeavour but is dependent on a number of factors not directly related to the pieces and the board.

5 h3 h5 6 e2?! d6 7 e5?! xe2 8 wxe2 e7 9 0-0 0-0 10 f4 e8 11 wg4 xe5! 12 xe5 g6 13 g3 d7 (D)

With his 6th and 7th moves White has continued to play with excessive restraint and Black has with no effort at all reached a pleasant position where White’s bishop risks becoming the ‘bad bishop’. If Gurevich had stuck to his normal play, it is quite unlikely that he would have risked being worse after 13 moves as White – that is the impact of the tournament standings!

14 d2 f6 15 f3 c6 16 wb3 wb6!

An exclamation mark for the fact that Black is not afraid to initiate exchanges even in the given tournament situation. Exchanges do not bring White relief from his lasting problem with the bad bishop.

17 wxb6 axb6 18 a3?!

On principle it is better to put the pawn on a light square with 18 a4.

18...e4 19 wxe4 xe4 20 b3 b5 21 f1 f6 22 f3 e6 23 e1 f7 24 xe6 xe6 25 e1+ d7 26 e2 h5! 27 w3 h4 28 h2 e7 29 f4 f5 30 d2 b6 31 e2 c5! 32 e3 (D)

32...b4! 33 axb4 c4+ 34 e3 d6 35 e1 a4

Black wins the pawn back with a clear advantage.

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32...b4! 33 axb4 c4+ 34 e3 d6 35 e1 a4

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32...b4! 33 axb4 c4+ 34 e3 d6 35 e1 a4

Black wins the pawn back with a clear advantage.

When ahead in such a situation, the key is to play naturally – to stay faithful to one’s own style. After all, that is what has given you the lead in the first place! One of the best examples of this approach is the 24th and final game of the second Karpov-Kasparov match – the game where Kasparov took the world championship title from Karpov.

Karpov – Kasparov
Moscow Wch (24) 1985

1 e4 c5 2 d3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 wxf6 g6 5 wxf6 a6

Sticking to his guns. The Najdorf has been Kasparov’s main weapon throughout his career.

6 ee2 e6 7 0-0 de7 8 w4 0-0 9 h1 wc7 10 a4 de6 11 e3 de8 12 f3 hb8 13 wd2 ad7 14 db3

Keeping pieces on seems right. In the second game of the match Karpov played 14 wxf2 here, but after 14...xd4 15 xd4 e5 16 e3 ec6 17 f5 ec4 18 bc6 wc8 19 fcl d5! 20 b3 db4 21 da2 a3 22 bc4 xc1 23 xc1 wxc4 Black was fine and the game ended in a draw.

14...b6 15 g4?!

This is the active thrust that Karpov trusted in to win the game and retain the world championship title. In the 18th game of the match, he
played 15 f2, but reached nothing and the game was quickly drawn: 15...c8 16 g3 d7 17 b1 b7 18 e5 d8 19 f2 f8 20 e4 dxe5 21 fxe5 c5 22 xex5 bxex5 23 f4 1/2-1/2.

15...c8
A standard manoeuvre in this line. The bishop is transferred to the long diagonal and room is made for the f6-knight on d7.

16 g5 d7 17 f2 f8 18 g2 (D)
Four years later, at the World Cup tournament in Barcelona 1989, Beliavsky tried another plan against Kasparov that might be more dangerous for Black: 18 h4 b7 19 h5 a5 20 ad1 c4 21 ac1 b8 22 g2 c5 23 d4 d5 (23...e5??) 24 e5 c4 25 dxe4 dxe4, and now 26 e2 ed8 27 xe4 xe4+ 28 xe4 d5 29 e2 would have given White some advantage. Karpov instead initiates a long plan to attack down the h-file.

18...b7 19 ad1 g6 20 c1 bc8 21 d3 b4 22 h3 g7
Perhaps Black should have played the direct 22...f5?! here.

23 e3?!
This seems rather indecisive. The logical follow-up to White’s preceding play is to plunge on with 23 f5!.

23...e7!
An original plan. Black discourages White from playing f5 and intends to play ...f5 himself.

24 g1 c8 25 d1 (D)
25...f5! 26 xf6 xf6!
Playing for maximum piece activity. The b6-pawn is happily sacrificed in the process.

Kasparov plays as he always does; no holds barred just because it is the final game of a world championship match!

27 g3 f7! 28 xb6 wb8 29 e3 h5 30 g4 f6 31 h4
Here we see the impact of the external factors. Due to the situation in the match Karpov cannot afford to go for the repetition of moves by 31 g3 h5.

31...g5! 32 fg5 g4
Going for the dark-squared bishop. The alternative was 32...xe4!?

33 wd2 xe3 34 xe3 xc2 35 wb6 a8 36 xd6? (D)
The final mistake. After 36 wb8 xb8 37 h3! xb3 38 xe6 xb2 39 f1 d4+ 40 h1 xc3 41 xf7 xd4 42 a7+ xe6 43 xa8+ g7 a draw was still within reach for White. But alas, this was of no use to Karpov.

36...b7
Wins a piece, the game – and the world championship.
Environmental Factors

In normal tournaments the situation is different from matches or qualification tournaments. This is because the game is no longer zero-sum. There might still be a substantial prize for 'the loser' – it is not a winner-takes-all game. This changes the rules of the game. Take the typical example of one player in a tournament leading by half a point but who still has to play the closest opponent. What to do?

To find the best strategy we can turn to game theory. The leader is obviously satisfied with a draw, as this clinches tournament victory, but the point is that a draw is also not useless for the player trailing by half a point, as that will still secure a decent prize. On the other hand a loss will put the player trailing far back in the standings, whereas the leader may still earn a reasonable prize even in the case of a loss. What needs to be done is to induce the opponent to accept a draw by playing on the second player’s risk of losing it all, while giving him the option of securing something through a draw. In game-theoretical terms we would say that the leader needs to establish a credible threat. Here the threat is to go all-out – going for a wild and complicated game with high stakes. Since the stakes are higher for the player trailing – he risks dropping far back, while the leader is more or less sure of at least some kind of prize – this is a credible threat, and therefore the second player is likely to be willing to accept a draw facing the threat. Let us see how this thinking can be put into practice. In Tilburg 1987 Jan Timman was leading Predrag Nikolić by half a point before the last round, but still had to play Nikolić in the last round. A draw would suffice for Timman for the prestigious tournament victory, since in this event he could not be caught by others. On the other hand, Nikolić could still lose second place by losing. Thus Timman chose to play a sharp opening line (a credible threat in game-theory terms) and on move ten offered a draw, giving Nikolić the choice to accept the draw and earn a good second place or to risk falling further back in the event of a loss. Game theory would urge Nikolić to take the draw, and in fact this is what he did. This is how the game went:

**Timman – Nikolić**

*Tilburg 1987*

1 ćf3 ćf6 2 d4 e6 3 c4 ćb4+ 4 ćd2 c5 5 ćxb4 cxb4 6 ćc2 d6 7 e4 e5 8 c5!? 0-0 9 cxd6 exd4 10 ćbd2 ½-½

What to do then when you need to win? Basically there are two options you can choose:

1) To keep up the pressure – not just on the board but also psychologically – for a long time by avoiding exchanges and keeping the game going. The hope is that when pressed over a long period of time the opponent will eventually crack.

2) To bring about maximum tension quickly, hoping that the tension is so high that the opponent cracks. The problem is that here the opponent only needs to absorb pressure – albeit high pressure – for a short period of time; the pressure fizzles out quickly.

Both these options have been used in chess history, also in high-level and very important games. Two games from world championship matches can exemplify the first approach.

**Kasparov – Karpov**

*Seville Wch (24) 1987*

1 c4 e6 2 ćf3 ćf6 3 g3 d5 4 b3 će7 5 ćg2 0-0 6 0-0 b6 7 ćb2 ćb7 8 e3 ćbd7 9 ćc3

In this, the last game of the match, Kasparov had to win to retain his world championship title, being 11-12 down after losing the penultimate game. For this decisive game Kasparov chose a solid Réti set-up. It is probably not suited to obtaining a significant opening advantage, but it is the kind of opening that makes sure the tension is maintained for a long time, as easy liquidation is not possible for Black.

9...će4 10 će2 a5 11 d3 ćf6 12 ćc2 ćxb2 13 ćxb2 ćd6 14 cxd5 ćxd5

14...exd5 has been suggested by some commentators, but after 15 d4 c5 16 dxc5 bxc5 it seems to me that White is slightly better, since the black pieces are not too well placed to
compensate for the potential weakness of the hanging pawns through active piece-play.

15 d4 c5 16 fd1 ec8?! 
Perhaps this is where the game starts to slide in White’s direction. Karpov prefers passive defence to the more active 16...c4!? 17 df4 b5 18 dx5 exd5 19 de5 df6. Here Black seems fine as he has active counterplay on the queen-side while still restraining White's potential e4 advance.

17 df4 dx5 18 dx5 ef7 19 ac1 fd8 20 dxc5 dx5 21 b4! axb4 22 xxb4 wa7 23 a3 (D)

The opening phase and the early middlegame are over. Let's look a bit closer at the position. White has a small but lasting advantage. Why? Because the bishop on f3, controlling the long diagonal, ensures that the b6-pawn is easier for White to attack than the a3-pawn for Black. Still, this is not the kind of position that you would count on Kasparov winning against Karpov. Fundamentally, it is more a technical ‘Karpovesque’ type of position than a dynamic ‘Kasparovesque’ type. But here the impact of the match standings is seen. There is no easy liquidation in sight, time-pressure is looming and the tension is rising as the minutes tick away.

23...df5?!
This knight is drifting around the board, never really finding out where to go. I believe f6 would be a good safe square for the knight, so here 23...de8 seems better.

24 b1 exd1+ 25 xd1 ef7 26 dd3! h6?! 
The weakness of the light squares around the king will cause Black considerable headaches. To avoid that, 26...g6 is a safer choice.

27 ac1 (D)

And here 27...dd6 is more precise, keeping the white queen from b5. It is rare to see Karpov committing so many small but still significant errors in a rather simple position. Usually he is close to being unrivalled in such positions. The only explanation I can come up with is the impact of the match standings – the pressure of being so close to reclaiming the world championship.

28 wb5! df5 
Now Black realizes the knight belongs on d6.

29 a4 dd6 30 wb1 wa7 31 de5! dxa4? 
The decisive mistake! As one would expect of the decisive game in a world championship match, this game was published in many magazines around the world, and subjected to extensive analysis by many commentators, seeking to establish the truth about the critical moments. One long line runs 31...wa4? 32 xb6 wa3 33 d1 df5 34 dd8+ dx8 35 dx8+ dh7 36 df7 db1+ 37 h2 w2b2 38 e4 de3+ 39 h3 xf2 40 w8+ dg6 41 de5+ df6 42 ff8+ de5, when White has a two-move mate that is surprisingly hard to see: 43 wg7+ dd6 44 e5#.

32 exa8+ dxa8 33 wb1? 
Kasparov misses the win! We should remember that the pressure in such situations is two-way. Correct is 33 wb5! wh7 34 xc6 wa8 35 wd3+ f5 36 wd8 dc5 37 g2! wa2 38 de5! wb2 39 df7 w6f6 40 wh8+ dg6 41 wg8!, and the threat 42 dh8+ decides, as 41...xf7 loses to 42 dh5+.

33...de7??
Black returns the favour! After 33...\(\text{c}5! 34 \text{w}d8+ \text{h}7 35 \text{g}2 (35 \text{d}1 \text{f}5! 36 \text{w}xc8 \text{w}a1; 35 \text{w}xc8 \text{w}a1+ 36 \text{g}2 \text{w}xe5) 35...\text{f}6! 36 \text{c}6 \text{w}d7 37 \text{xd}7 \text{xd}7 38 \text{d}8 \text{c}5 (38...\text{e}5?? 39 \text{g}4) 39 \text{xe}6! \text{xe}6 40 \text{g}4 \text{d}6 41 \text{xe}6 \text{g}5 the draw would be close and Karpov world champion!

\[\begin{array}{c}
34 \text{w}d8+ \text{h}7 35 \text{xf}7 \text{g}6 36 \text{w}e8 \text{w}e7 \\
37 \text{w}a4 \text{w}xf7 38 \text{e}4 \text{g}8 39 \text{w}b5 \text{f}8 40 \\
\text{w}xb6 \text{w}e7 (D)
\end{array}\]

The time-control has been reached (although initially there were reports that Karpov had exceeded the time-limit) and we have reached an endgame where White has an extra pawn but Black retains certain drawing chances since all the pawns are on one wing. The situation remains unchanged: the pressure is still on, and it is not really the crucial point whether the position is objectively won or not. In practice Black's task is very difficult.

\[\begin{array}{c}
41 \text{w}b5 \text{w}e7 42 \text{g}2 \text{g}6 43 \text{w}a5 \text{w}g7 44 \\
\text{w}c5 \text{w}f7 45 \text{h}4 \text{h}5?!
\end{array}\]

This seems wrong, as fixing the pawns on the light squares allows White to pursue a queen exchange, since the pawns are then latent targets. Before Black played ...\text{h}5, the bishop versus knight endgame was probably drawable for Black, although Kramnik won a similar endgame against Zhang Zhong in Wijk aan Zee 2004. In that game, however, Kramnik had e+f+g+h pawns against f+g+h pawns. That makes it easier for White to achieve a passed pawn than in the pawn constellation of the present game.

\[\begin{array}{c}
46 \text{w}c6 \text{w}e7 47 \text{d}3 \text{w}f7 48 \text{w}d6 \text{g}7 49 \\
e4 \text{g}8 50 \text{c}4 \text{g}7 51 \text{w}e5+ \text{g}8 52 \text{w}d6
\end{array}\]

\[\begin{array}{c}
\text{g}7 53 \text{h}5 \text{g}8 54 \text{c}6 \text{w}a7 55 \text{w}b4 \text{w}c7 \\
56 \text{w}b7! \text{w}d8 (D)
\end{array}\]

See the previous note. But now Black is decisively restrained.

\[\begin{array}{c}
57 \text{e}5! \text{w}a5 58 \text{c}8 \text{w}c5 59 \text{w}f7+ \text{h}8 60 \\
\text{a}4 \text{w}d5+ 61 \text{h}2 \text{w}c5 62 \text{b}3 \text{w}c8 63 \text{d}1 \\
\text{w}c5 64 \text{g}2 1-0
\end{array}\]

Here Karpov resigned, although he could still have played on for some moves. White still has to be careful, but the result is no longer in doubt; e.g., 64...\text{w}b4 65 \text{f}3 \text{w}c5 66 \text{e}4 \text{w}b4 67 \text{f}3! (not 67 \text{w}xg6? \text{w}xg6 68 \text{w}xg6 \text{w}b7+ 69 \\
\text{w}h2 \text{w}g2+!! with a draw through stalemate!) 67...\text{w}d2+ 68 \text{w}h3 \text{w}h6 (68...\text{w}b4 69 \text{w}xg6 \\
\text{w}xg6 70 \text{w}xg6 \text{w}xh4+! 71 \text{w}g2! and wins) 69 \\
f4 \text{w}g7 70 \text{w}xg7+ \text{w}xg7 71 \text{c}6, and the white king eventually penetrates via the queenside (you can try this yourself). Again the consequences of having the black pawns blocked on the light squares are felt.

\[\begin{array}{c}
\text{Botvinnik - Bronstein}
\end{array}\]

\[\begin{array}{c}
\text{Moscow Wch (23) 1951}
\end{array}\]

1 \text{d}4 \text{f}6 2 \text{e}4 \text{g}6 3 \text{g}3 \text{c}6 4 \text{g}2 \text{d}5?!

In my opinion this is psychologically flawed in the present situation. This was the penultimate game of the match, and Bronstein had a one-point lead, having won the previous two games. No doubt he had the upper hand psychologically at the beginning of this game. In that situation I don't think it is the best strategy to volunteer to fight on 'Botvinnik turf' – long-lasting positional battles. The rumour has it that Bronstein himself wanted to deploy his favourite dynamic King's Indian – where he was a
leading expert together with Boleslavsky and later Geller and which he had used to win the 21st game – but his advisors recommended this solid line instead. It is not the first time in history that advisors have come up with poor advice, but here it may have cost a world championship!

5 cxd5 cxd5 6 Oc3 Ag7 7 Okh3 Oxb3 8 Oxb3 Oe6 9 O2e6 10 e3 0-0 11 Oe2 Oe8 12 0-0 Od7 13 Oe2 Wb6

Nothing much is going on. But Botvinnik is an expert in putting the advantage of the two bishops to use, and even worse: there is no way that Black can force events – he has to wait, and the pressure is just kept on for a long time.

14 Oc3 Oe8 15 Od4 Oe6 16 Ob3 Oe4?! 17 Wxb6 axb6 18 Oa5 19 Oe8 20 f3 Od6 21 Oe2 Oh6 22 Oc4 Oc4 23 Oa5 Oe6 24 Od1 Ag7 25 g4 Od6 26 b3 Oe5 27 Oa4 Oc7 28 Od1 Oe6 29 Od1 Oc7 30 Od1 Od6 31 Od1 Od6 32 Od1 Od6 33 Od1 Od6 34 Od1 Od6 35 Oc1 36 Oc1 37 Oc1 38 Od1 39 Oc1 40 Oc1 41 Oc1 42 Oc1 43 Oc1 44 Oc1 45 Oc1 46 Oc1 47 Oc1 48 Oc1 49 Oc1 50 Oc1 51 Oc1 52 Oc1 53 Oc1 54 Oc1 55 Oc1 56 Oc1 57 Oc1 58 Oc1 59 Oc1 60 Oc1

Here the game was adjourned and Botvinnik sealed his move. This is one of the most famous adjourned positions in chess history. Botvinnik was legendary for always finding the best move to seal, but here he failed to find the correct and winning move, which is 42 Od1, immediately going after Black’s d5-pawn. A famous story is connected with this sealed move. In the match Botvinnik was seconded by Salo Flohr, himself a former world championship candidate, who in fact in May 1938 signed an official agreement for a world championship match with the then world champion Alekhine; a match which however never materialized because of World War II. Flohr was brilliant in technical positions such as this one, and he believed that Botvinnik had sealed 42 Od1. Botvinnik said nothing, and Flohr analysed the position after 42 Od1 extensively, eventually concluding that White is winning. It was only a few minutes before resumption that Botvinnik revealed to Flohr that he had sealed another move. Why did Botvinnik leave his second in the belief that the sealed move was 42 Od1, and let Flohr spend hours on analysing a false position? Several possible explanations have been given for this. However, they are all speculation, as Botvinnik to my knowledge never publicly addressed the matter. One explanation goes that Botvinnik was simply a distrustful person by nature, who did not trust his second and wanted to make sure that
no secrets were delivered to the enemy camp. Another explanation that has been given is that Botvinnik was simply ashamed that he had not found the right sealed move – a move so obvious that his second did not even consider it possible that another move was in the envelope. Whatever the reason, 42 d6 is an inaccurate move, which gave Bronstein an opportunity to save the game and bring himself in highly favourable position to win the world championship – a chance which, however, he does not grab.

42 d6?! c6 43 b1 f6?

Bronstein returns the favour. This move loses, whereas a draw was within reach after 43...a7! 44 exd5 exd5 45 a2 b5! 46 a5 b4+!. According to Bronstein, he had analysed this at home, but got confused when Botvinnik against his habit had not sealed the strongest move. No doubt the tension of the situation played a crucial role here. The confusion of variations cost Bronstein dearly, as after Botvinnik’s next accurate move – according to Botvinnik himself found at 8 a.m. in the morning before the resumption – the game is lost.

44 g3! fxe4 45 fx e4 h6 46 f4 h5 47 exd5 exd5 48 h4 d5 49 a7 f5 50 f5 d3 51 df3 f4 a6 52 d6 a5 53 a2 c6 54 d3+ f6 55 a1 c7 56 f3 f6 57 a5 (D)

The time-control has been reached – at the time the time-rate was 2½ hours for 40 moves and 1 hour for the next 16 moves. Black is in zugzwang and loses a pawn, while the white bishops continue to dominate the board. After thinking for 40 minutes, Bronstein resigned. Some spectators were initially confused and thought the game was drawn. But Bronstein trusted Botvinnik’s technique and wanted to get this game over with to concentrate on the last game. But it didn’t help him: the last game was drawn in 22 moves in a position where Botvinnik was a healthy pawn up. Botvinnik had a scare but was still champion.

1-0

In these two games Kasparov and Botvinnik were successful with a strategy of keeping tension on a high level for a long time. This increases the possibility of small mistakes on the opponent's side, as we saw in the two games. The alternative is to go for maximum tension over a shorter period. Here the stakes are high on a few moves, which decide everything – all or nothing! This is the strategy pursued by Yusupov in the following game, where he was trailing 3-4.

Yusupov – Ivanchuk
Brussels Ct (8) 1991

1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 d4 b6 4 d4 g6 5 e4 c5 6 Nc3 d6 7 c3 e5 8 d5 cxd5 9 exd5 cxd5 10 Nxd5 Nxd5 11 c4 c6 12 e4 e8 (D)

13 e4!?

Here we go! Yusupov goes all-out and sends every piece into the attack! But it is a risky strategy – if the attack fails, the pieces may just be misplaced.

13...Cc7 14 Dxd5 Dxd5 15 h4 g6 16 Dxc8 Wxc8 17 g5 Ce7!
For the moment Ivanchuk has the situation under control. Bringing back pieces to the kingside is the safest and best defence.

18 \( \text{g}4 \text{ a}6?! \)

This may not be a mistake, but here Black had two other good options:

a) 18...f5 19 \( \text{w}e2 \), with a complicated game, is suggested by Yusupov.

b) 18...\( \text{f}6! \) (probably best) 19 \( \text{h}3 \) h5 is suggested by Lautier and looks good for Black. The point is that the violent 20 g4 – continuing in the aggressive spirit – is refuted by 20...\( \text{w}c6 \)
21 f3 \( \text{w}a4! \), where the double threat on d4 and d1 decides the game in Black’s favour.

19 \( \text{h}3! \) h5 (D)

Forced, as 19...\( \text{xe}3? \) loses beautifully to 20 \( \text{xh}7 \) \( \text{w}c2 \) (20...\( \text{f}6 \) 21 \( \text{h}h8! \) and 20...\( \text{xe}5 \) 21 dxe5 both lead to mate) 21 \( \text{h}h8+ \) \( \text{g}7 \) 22 \( \text{xg}8+! \) \( \text{xe}8 \) 23 \( \text{w}h7+ \) \( \text{f}6 \) 24 \( \text{w}c7\#.

20 \( \text{xh}5! \) \( \text{gxh}5 \) 21 \( \text{h}7+ \) \( \text{g}7 \) 22 \( \text{w}h5 \) \( \text{f}6? \)

The decisive error. Black succumbs to the pressure. Two alternatives have been suggested for Black here, but only one of them seems to work. The most natural defence is 22...\( \text{xe}5? \), which leads to the desired draw after 23 \( \text{xe}5+? \) \( \text{xe}7 \) 24 \( \text{w}h6+. \) So White must play 23 \( \text{xe}5 \) instead, after which a forced line goes 23...\( \text{f}6 \)
24 \( \text{e}4! \) \( \text{h}8 \) 25 \( \text{g}6+ \) \( \text{f}8 \) 26 \( \text{xe}5 \) exd5 27 \( \text{xf}6+ \) \( \text{g}8 \) 28 \( \text{w}g6+ \) \( \text{f}8 \). At first sight White doesn’t seem to have more than a draw, but after the calm 29 \( \text{d}2! \) \( \text{w}c4 \) 30 h3! (Nunn) it is surprisingly difficult for Black to find a defence.

White simply threatens 31 a3 and 32 \( \text{b}4+ \), and there seems to be no adequate defence for

Black. This means that Black’s best defence seems to be 22...\( \text{b}4! \). Now a probably drawn ending arises in the main line: 23 \( \text{xe}7 \) \( \text{xf}7 \)
24 \( \text{w}h6+ \) \( \text{h}8 \) 25 \( \text{f}5+ \) \( \text{g}8 \) 26 \( \text{w}g6+ \) \( \text{h}8 \) (26...\( \text{f}8 \) 27 \( \text{xe}6 \) is dangerous) 27 \( \text{xe}6 \) \( \text{w}g8 \)
28 \( \text{xf}7 \) \( \text{xf}7 \) 29 \( \text{xf}7 \) \( \text{d}2 \) 30 \( \text{xe}5 \) \( \text{c}1 \)
31 b3 \( \text{b}2 \), and Black wins the d4-pawn. White has three passed pawns for the piece, but hardly any real winning chances.

We now return to 22...\( \text{f}6 \) (D).

Now White reaches a winning position with a beautiful combination.

23 \( \text{xe}6+! \) \( \text{xe}6 \) 24 \( \text{w}h6+ \) \( \text{h}8 \) 25 \( \text{f}5+ \) \( \text{g}8 \) 26 \( \text{w}g5+ \) \( \text{h}8 \) 27 \( \text{w}h4+ \) \( \text{g}8 \) 28 \( \text{w}g5+ \) \( \text{h}8 \) 29 \( \text{w}h4+! \) \( \text{g}8 \) 30 \( \text{w}g3+! \) \( \text{h}8 \) 31 \( \text{w}h3+! \)

This zigzag manoeuvre with the queen is the point behind White’s play.

31...\( \text{g}7 \) 32 \( \text{w}g3+ \) \( \text{h}8 \) 33 \( \text{w}h3+ \) \( \text{g}7 \) 34 \( \text{xe}6 \) \( \text{xe}6 \)

Black cannot save the queen, because White threatened mate on h6.

35 \( \text{xe}6 \) \( \text{d}8 \) 36 g4!
A forceful way to conclude this exciting game.

36...e8 37 wxf5 c4 38 g5 1-0
Black resigned since after 38...dxc4 39 xf4 the white bishop enters the attack with devastating effect.

Obviously there are plenty of possible tournament standings that can affect the play at the board. It is impossible to set up rules for how to approach them all, but the key is to take this factor into account before and during the game. The player who is better prepared psychologically for the situation is likely to come out on top.

The Impact of the Opponent’s Background

In some countries it is very common that players work together on opening preparation. The same goes for chess clubs all over the world, or even just friends working together. Often this is very useful. For the opponent, though, it is important to be aware of this factor. Occasionally it is possible to predict the choice of opening or style of the opponent by studying not only him but also his ‘co-workers’. The alert strategist may be able to find holes in the cooperation. Take two players working together but having different styles, such as an activist working with a theorist. If they are not aware of their differences, at least one of them runs the risk of adopting variations that don’t fit his style. Cooperation in analysis should take these things into account; do not only focus on the ‘objective’ analysis on the board.

The story of the birth of the ‘Gothenburg Variation’ is famous and can serve to illustrate this point. For the interzonal tournament in Gothenburg in 1955 the three Argentine grandmasters Najdorf, Panno and Pilnik had prepared a sharp line of the Sicilian. As a matter of fate they were to face three Soviet grandmasters as Black in the 14th round of the tournament – Keres, Spassky and Geller respectively. No better chance to test the variation and the joint analysis, right? Unfortunately the Soviet grandmasters excelled in such sharp Sicilians, so perhaps it would have been more prudent to avoid a theoretical discussion against them! At any event the games have gone into chess history as masterpieces of attack. Let us see what happened:

Keres – Najdorf
Gothenburg IZ 1955

1 e4 c5 2 d3 d6 3 d4 g5 4 c4 cxd4 5 d5 c3 a6 6 g5 e6 7 f3 c7 8 wxf3 h6 9 h4 g5?! 10 fxg5 xf4 (D)

This is it! Black wants to secure an excellent square on e5 for his knight, but he is seriously lagging in development. The first of the Soviet grandmasters to reply was Efim Geller against Panno, and soon after the two others followed suit:

11 dxe6! fxe6 12 w5+ w8 f8 (D)

13 w5!!
The point of the sacrifice on move 11. Development and initiative are more important than
material. White wants to castle and mate the black king; this move prevents Black from reinforcing a knight on e5 with his other knight. It is possible that this move was missed by the Argentineans in their preparation.

13...\texttt{\textbf{b}}7?! 

This was the choice by Najdorf and Pilnik. But it is not sufficient. However, Panno’s choice against Geller, 13...\texttt{\textbf{d}}5?! , is not better. In fact, this led to the fastest loss: 14 \texttt{\textbf{g}}3 \texttt{\textbf{d}}xe5 15 0-0+ \texttt{\textbf{e}}7 16 \texttt{\textbf{h}}6+ 17 \texttt{\textbf{h}}1 dxe5 18 \texttt{\textbf{f}}7+ \texttt{\textbf{h}}6 (here we see another point behind 13 \texttt{\textbf{d}}5: the bishop covers d7, so that 18...\texttt{\textbf{d}}8 fails to 19 \texttt{\textbf{d}}7 20 \texttt{\textbf{x}}d7+) 19 \texttt{\textbf{d}}xe7 \texttt{\textbf{e}}6 20 \texttt{\textbf{x}}d7+ \texttt{\textbf{h}}x7 21 \texttt{\textbf{f}}7+ \texttt{\textbf{f}}6 22 \texttt{\textbf{h}}5\texttt{\textbf{h}}. The best defence was introduced three years later by a young prodigy – 15-year-old Bobby Fischer. In the game Gligorić-Fischer, Portoroz IZ 1958, Bobby played 13...\texttt{\textbf{b}}7!, and the game was eventually drawn after 14 \texttt{\textbf{g}}6 \texttt{\textbf{f}}7 15 \texttt{\textbf{x}}h6+ \texttt{\textbf{g}}8 16 \texttt{\textbf{g}}6+ \texttt{\textbf{f}}7 17 \texttt{\textbf{x}}h6+ \texttt{\textbf{f}}8 18 \texttt{\textbf{d}}7+ \texttt{\textbf{d}}7 19 0-0 0-0 \texttt{\textbf{c}}5 20 \texttt{\textbf{d}}5 \texttt{\textbf{g}}4 21 \texttt{\textbf{d}}xf1 \texttt{\textbf{x}}g5+ 22 \texttt{\textbf{h}}3 and 1-0. According to the latest theory on this topical line, the key position for the variation arises after 14 0-0+ \texttt{\textbf{g}}8 15 \texttt{\textbf{g}}6 \texttt{\textbf{f}}7 16 \texttt{\textbf{f}}7! \texttt{\textbf{x}}h4 17 \texttt{\textbf{x}}h6 (D). 

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{image.png}
\caption{Position after 17 \texttt{\textbf{x}}h6, with White to play.}
\end{figure}

Another piece joins the attack. Black cannot play 22...\texttt{\textbf{e}}d5 due to 23 \texttt{\textbf{e}}d5 \texttt{\textbf{c}}5 24 \texttt{\textbf{x}}e5 \texttt{\textbf{d}}xe5 25 \texttt{\textbf{d}}xe5+ and the black position collapses. White has a material advantage and an attack.

22...\texttt{\textbf{a}}xa2 23 \texttt{\textbf{h}}4

Only here did the games Keres-Najdorf and Spassky-Pilnik diverge. Spassky chose 23 \texttt{\textbf{h}}3 and also won after 23...\texttt{\textbf{h}}8 24 \texttt{\textbf{c}}xe7 \texttt{\textbf{e}}xe7 25 \texttt{\textbf{g}}5 \texttt{\textbf{a}}1+ 26 \texttt{\textbf{h}}2 \texttt{\textbf{d}}8 27 \texttt{\textbf{x}}b5+ \texttt{\textbf{c}}7 28 \texttt{\textbf{e}}c5! \texttt{\textbf{b}}8 29 \texttt{\textbf{d}}b1+ \texttt{\textbf{a}}8 30 \texttt{\textbf{c}}7 \texttt{\textbf{a}}5 31 \texttt{\textbf{a}}b4 1-0.

23...\texttt{\textbf{h}}8 24 \texttt{\textbf{c}}xe7 \texttt{\textbf{e}}xe7 25 \texttt{\textbf{g}}5 1-0

The game could end as in Spassky-Pilnik above.

A heavy beating for the Argentineans. I believe the main problem was probably not the opening variation itself, but the fact that all three Soviet grandmasters were natural attackers, whereas the same cannot be said about the Argentineans, whose natural style was more positional.

Another Argentinean speciality in my opinion fits the style of some these players better. The following opening system has been played by a number of Argentinean grandmasters,
including Najdorf (although Najdorf originally was Polish, but he remained in Argentina after the Olympiad in Buenos Aires 1939, due to the beginning of World War II), Panno and Quinteros.

Poch – Najdorf
Mar del Plata 1971

1 \( \text{d}f3 \text{c}5 \text{2} \text{c}4 \text{d}f6 \text{3} \text{d}e3 \text{g}6 \text{4} \text{d}4 \text{g}7 \text{5} \text{d}5 \text{0-0} \text{6} \text{e}4 \text{d}6 \text{7} \text{c}e2 \text{e}5\)? (D)

This is the pawn-structure that characterizes the Argentinean speciality in the King’s Indian. According to theory, White has a small edge in such positions due to his extra space. But the Argentineans have played this set-up many times with good success. Essentially it is based on play on the dark squares, but sometimes it turns into a ‘normal’ King’s Indian with a direct kingside attack, as we shall see in the next game. In this game Najdorf plays it positionally.

8 \( \text{g}5 \text{h}6 \text{9} \text{d}2 \text{bd7} \text{10} \text{f}3 \text{h}7 \text{11} \text{h}4\)

11...\( \text{Sh8}\)?

Notice this move and the deep idea behind it. The long-term strategic idea is to exchange the dark-squared bishops.

12 \( \text{h}2 \text{b}5 \text{13} \text{f}3 \text{g}8 \text{14} \text{a}3 \text{f}8 \text{15} \text{b}4 \text{b}6 \)

16 \( \text{b}1 \text{g}4 \text{17} \text{b}3 \text{h}6\)!

Black has achieved his first strategic objective.

18 \( \text{bxc5} \text{bxc5} \text{19} \text{b}2 \text{xd2+} \text{20} \text{xd2} \text{d}7 \text{21} \text{a}4 \text{f}6 \text{22} \text{f}3 \text{g}7 \)

The king’s position is back to normal!

23 \( \text{g}3 \text{a}6 \text{24} \text{d}2 \text{e}8 \text{25} \text{f}1\)?

From here White starts to drift, and Black gradually takes over the initiative.

25...\( \text{a}5 \text{26} \text{d}3 \text{e}b8 \text{27} \text{0-0} \text{xb}3 \text{28} \text{xb}3 \text{b}4 \text{29} \text{b}5 \text{xb}5! \text{30} \text{xb}5 \text{a}5! \text{31} \text{a}2 \text{b}6 \text{32} \text{d}2 \text{a}4 \)

White is slowly being outplayed. The white bishop is useless, while the knight on b6 is a blockading knight reminding one of Nimzowitsch’s teachings.

33 \( \text{b}1 \text{a}5 \text{34} \text{f}3\) (D)

34...\( \text{g}8\)!

A classic strategic theme. Having tied up White on the queenside, Black initiates play on the kingside in order to create a second weakness.

35 \( \text{f}2 \text{e}7 \text{36} \text{e}2 \text{f}6 \text{37} \text{a}1 \text{c}3 \text{38} \text{b}1 \text{g}5! \text{39} \text{h}1 \text{h}8 \text{40} \text{b}1 \text{d}4 \text{41} \text{hxg}5 \text{f}xg5 \text{42} \text{a}3 \text{c}3 \text{43} \text{b}1 \text{b}4 \text{44} \text{a}3 \text{h}4! \)

Black intends to secure f4 for the knight. White is outplayed positionally and panics.

45 \( \text{f}4? \text{hxg}3 \text{46} \text{xh}8 \text{b}xh8 \text{47} \text{f}5 \text{c}3 \text{0-1} \)

Now 48...\( \text{c}1\) decides.
White is the Argentinean IM Luis Bronstein, not the Russian GM and world championship contender David.

1 d4 £if6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 d6 4 £c3 g6 5 e4 JLg7 6 ±e2 0-0 7 £f3 e5 8 £g5 h6 9 £h4 £c7 10 0-0 £lh7 11 £e1 h5 12 f3 Wh6! (D)

Again Black has managed to free his dark-squared bishop.

13 Wh2 £e7 14 £h1 h4 15 £c2 £g5 16 £e3 £f6 17 ¿e1 £h5 18 a3 £f4 19 £f1 £g7!

And like Najdorf, the h-file is used to optimal effect. Notice that Black does not spend time on developing the queenside until it is necessary.

20 b4 b6 21 bxc5 bxc5 22 ¿b1 £g5 23 d3 £h8 24 ¿b2 £d7 25 ¿b5 ¿b8 26 ¿b1 £df6 27 £xd6 £g3+! 28 £g1 (D)

The king joins the action – of course on the dark squares.

44 £g2 £e7 45 £f3 £d6 46 £g2 £c5 47 £f3 £b4 48 £e3 £xe3 49 £e3 £d2 50 £e2 £f4+ 51 £g2 g4 52 hgx4 h3+! 53 £g1 £f3 0-1

If in your club, region or country there are some openings or systems that 'everybody' plays, then remember to compare it to your style before you join the choir. Working together on things is beneficial, but also contains some risks.

If, on the other hand, you are playing against a player who comes with such a background, then compare the opening to his overall style, perhaps by using the framework presented in this book. Chances are that you will find some players where there is a mismatch between their style and the 'agreed opening' of the club to which he belongs. Group pressure – in the form that 'this is the opening that we analyse...
and play around here’ — occasionally has the ef-
fact of underestimating individual differences.

The Impact of the Nature
of the Event

Most chess tournaments are individual — just as
the game itself is essentially individual. How-
ever, most chess-players will at some time or
another participate in team events, and this may
affect the play.

The most common feature of team play is
that some players tend to play more solidly than
they would do in an individual competition, so
as ‘not to let down the team’. However, giving
up on your personal style is not always in the
interest of the team. Do you recall the anecdote
from earlier in the book about how Bronstein
refrained from playing the dynamic King’s
Gambit, and instead lost in a dull Ruy Lopez?

Fundamentally, I believe that a player should
stick to his guns, also in team chess. After all, it
is due to your strength and results in individual
tournaments that you are in the team in the first
place!

Still, team chess does have some specific
features. One of these is especially evident in
team tournaments where the event is played ac-
cording to match points rather than the sum of
the individual points. I find this is a good idea.
Making chess a team game is difficult, and to
do so I believe it should be the team’s result
that is the unit of measurement, not a more or less
random collection of individual player’s results.

In team events carried out in this format
(e.g., the German Bundesliga) you may occa-
sionally find yourself in situations where a cer-
tain result is necessary in your individual game
for the team to be successful. This impacts the
way the game should be played. Take for exam-
ple the situation where you are trailing and
you need to win, being the last to finish. What if
your position offers no real hopes of winning?
Some players in this situation take huge risks in
the short term in the hope of a mistake on the
opponent’s part, and if it fails they often lose
instead. This is reminiscent of the strategy cho-
osen by Yusupov against Ivanchuk in the above
section. Sometimes it works, but sometimes it
backfires. An alternative, which I prefer, is to
play like Kasparov and Botvinnik in must-win
situations: keeping on the pressure in the long
term, leaving the opponent no chance of forc-
ing events. A good example of how this can be
done is shown in the following game by my
team-mate in Lübecker SV in the German
Bundesliga, the Swedish grandmaster Jonny
Hector.

Wilhelmi - Hector
2nd Bundesliga 1995/6

At this point in time our team was trailing 2-
4, with Jonny and I still playing. While it was
more or less clear that I would win my game at
this point, the same cannot really be said about
Black in this position. There are no real pawn-
breaks, and no obvious way for Black to im-
prove his position. What to do, then? Rather
than panicking, Jonny simply kept playing, set-
ing up minor threats while hoping that White
might lose his patience and commit an error.

41...Wh5 42 Zf2 Zh6!

Not much of an improvement, but still some-
thing. The white kingside is weakened.

43 g3 Zf6 44 Wb4 Wf8 45 Zf2 Zf6 46
Wd2 Wf8 47 Zd3 Zf7 48 Zc5 Zg6 49 Wg2
Zg5 (D)

50 h4!?

Here it is! White gets tired of just waiting and
initiates an active plan to force events. While this
is probably not bad objectively speaking, it is ex-
actly what Hector was waiting for. If White had
just passed, it is difficult to see how Black could
have initiated any play. But just waiting patiently
is not to everybody’s taste.
50...\(\text{Qf}7\) 51 e4?!

It was still possible for White to change his mind and stay put, although the weakness of the g3-pawn gives Black more hope than before.

51...\(\text{dxe4}\) 52 fxe4 \(\text{Qb}8\) 53 e5 \(\text{Wd}8\) 54 h2 \(\text{Qd}5\) + 55 \(\text{Qh}3\) \(\text{Qh}6\) 56 \(\text{Qf}4\) \(\text{Qg}4\) 57 \(\text{Wf}2\) \(\text{g}6\) 58 \(\text{Kh}1\) \(\text{Qg}7\) 59 \(\text{Wf}3\) \(\text{Qg}8\) 60 \(\text{Qg}2\) \(\text{Qxf}4\) 61 \(\text{gxf}4\) \(\text{Qg}4\)

Bringing a knight near the opponent's king is always useful when time-pressure is looming. In the German Bundesliga, the time rate is 40 moves in 2 hours, 1 hour up until move 60, and then 30 minutes for the rest. The game had now reached the rapidplay phase.

62 \(\text{Qh}1\) h6! (D)

This move gives the king space and toys with the idea ...g5.

63 \(\text{Qg}3\) \(\text{Qe}7\) 64 \(\text{Qd}1\) \(\text{Wd}8\) 65 b4 \(\text{We}8\) 66 \(\text{Qd}3\)?

Probably White's only real mistake. Here he waits one move too long. After the direct 66 d5! White seems to be doing fine. The problem with the text-move is not just that it loses a tempo but that the rook cannot any longer be switched to the h-file. This allows Black the possibility of opening the position by ...g5, which would be dangerous with the rook in position to counterattack on the h-file.

66...\(\text{Qg}7!\) 67 d5?!

It was better to retract the previous move and play 67 \(\text{Qd}1\).

67...g5! 68 \(\text{Qe}6\) \(\text{gxf}4\) + 69 \(\text{Wxf}4\) (D)

69...\(\text{Qg}8\)!

A strong calm move. The white king is kept under fire.

70 \(\text{Qh}3\) \(\text{cxd}5\) 71 \(\text{Qc}7\) \(\text{Wc}6\) 72 \(\text{Qxd}5\) \(\text{Wc}2\)!

73 \(\text{Qd}2\) \(\text{Wc}1\)

Suddenly Black has an irresistible attack.

74 e6 \(\text{Qh}1\) + 75 \(\text{Qg}3\) \(\text{Qe}5\)! 76 \(\text{Qf}2\) \(\text{Qg}2\) + 77 \(\text{Qe}3\) \(\text{We}1\) + 78 \(\text{Qd}4\) \(\text{Qxd}2\) + 0-1

Another interesting factor of team play is that you may risk playing the same openings on several boards. That can lead to curious situations. Who should deviate first? Two games – also from the German Bundesliga – highlight this theme.

**Anand – McShane**

**Bundesliga 2003/4**

The club Baden-Oos has a strong squad, with Anand, Shirov and Svidler playing on the top three boards. In this particular match against Werder Bremen, the same position arose on both top boards after 14 moves.

1 \(e4\) c5 2 \(\text{Qf}3\) \(\text{Qc}6\) 3 d4 \(\text{cxd}4\) 4 \(\text{Qxd}4\) \(\text{Qf}6\) 5 \(\text{Qc}3\) e5 6 \(\text{Qdb}5\) d6 7 \(\text{Qg}5\) a6 8 \(\text{Qa}3\) b5 9 \(\text{Qxf}6\)
At this point there was some mumbling among the spectators. How was this going to continue? At the extreme the games could follow each other until the end, leaving the two top boards with a 1-1 score. Of course that was not very likely in practice, but it was interesting how far the games would get before one of the players deviated! This is where it happened. However, Anand’s choice is probably not very good. The normal move is 15 \textit{Sfd1}, as played in Hracek-Shirov, and that is probably also better. It was also Anand’s choice against Kramnik in the rapid game in Cap d’Agde 2003.

15 \textit{\textDelta c2}?! \textit{f5} 16 \textit{\textDelta c5} \textit{xb4} 17 \textit{\textDelta x b4} \textit{a5} 18 \textit{exf5} \textit{\textDelta f7} 19 \textit{Wh3} \textit{\textDelta f6}!

A strong novelty. Obviously the b4-knight cannot be taken because of 20 f6, but previously the less accurate move 19...\textit{\textDelta d7} had been played here.

20 \textit{\textDelta c2} (D)

20...\textit{\textDelta ab8}

Not bad, but according to subsequent analysis by Hraček and McShane, 20...\textit{\textDelta b4}! 21 \textit{cxb4} \textit{d5} is even better, with a good game for Black.

21 \textit{g3} \textit{\textDelta h6} 22 \textit{a4} \textit{b4} 23 \textit{cxb4} \textit{d5}!

Black plays consistently for initiative rather than material.

24 \textit{\textDelta b5} \textit{\textDelta f6} 25 \textit{\textDelta e1} \textit{e4}!

Again initiative over material. The white knight must be restricted.

26 \textit{bxa5} \textit{f3}

Black is three pawns down, but due to his active pieces versus White’s inactive ones on \textit{e1} and \textit{h3}, Black has sufficient compensation for the material.

27 \textit{a6} \textit{\textDelta g7} 28 \textit{\textDelta b1} \textit{h5} 29 \textit{b4} \textit{\textDelta c7} 30 \textit{\textDelta h1} \textit{\textDelta g5} (D)

31 \textit{\textDelta d3}!!

A brilliant idea. White too is ready to abandon material for activity. In his case it is to free the knight and to get the passed pawns moving.

31...\textit{exd3} 32 \textit{\textDelta b5} \textit{d2} 33 \textit{\textDelta xf3} \textit{\textDelta h6} 34 \textit{Wh4} \textit{\textDelta b6}?!?

This blockading move looks natural, but according to Anand it is better to activate the rook by 34...\textit{\textDelta c4}!.

35 \textit{\textDelta xd2} \textit{\textDelta c2} 36 \textit{\textDelta bd1} \textit{\textDelta e8} 37 \textit{f6}?!?

An interesting idea, but 37 \textit{\textDelta g5} is more prudent.

37...\textit{\textDelta xf6}?

Black falls into White’s clever trap. After 37...\textit{\textDelta h6}! Black is not worse.

38 \textit{a5}! \textit{\textDelta x b4}

After 38...\textit{\textDelta e6} 39 \textit{\textDelta a4} the white pawns are ready to march.

39 \textit{\textDelta b6} \textit{\textDelta d8} 40 \textit{b7} \textit{\textDelta b6} 41 \textit{\textDelta c1}!
Now the passed pawns decide the game. If
41...\texttt{exd2}, 42 \texttt{exc6} wins.
41...\texttt{g6} 42 \texttt{exc1}! 1-0
If the rook moves, 43 \texttt{e6} wins.

**Hraček – Shirov**

_Bundesliga 2003/4_

\begin{align*}
1 & e4 \texttt{c5} 2 \texttt{\textbf{d}f3} \texttt{d6} 3 d4 \texttt{cxd4} 4 \texttt{\textbf{d}xd4} \texttt{d5} 5 \\
& \texttt{\textbf{d}c3} \texttt{e5} 6 \texttt{\textbf{d}db5} \texttt{d6} 7 \texttt{\textbf{g}g5} a6 8 \texttt{\textbf{d}a3} b5 9 \texttt{xf6} \\
& \texttt{gxh6} 10 \texttt{\textbf{d}d5} f5 11 \texttt{c3} \texttt{\textbf{g}g7} 12 \texttt{\textbf{d}d3} \texttt{\textbf{e}e6} 13 \\
& \texttt{\textbf{h}h5} 0-0 14 0-0 \texttt{f4} 15 \texttt{\textbf{f}f1} \\
\end{align*}

The deviation from the previous game.

15...\texttt{h8} 16 \texttt{\textbf{c}c2} \texttt{\textbf{d}d7} 17 h3 \texttt{f5} 18 \texttt{\textbf{c}b4} \\
\texttt{\textbf{x}b4} 19 \texttt{\textbf{x}b4} a5 20 \texttt{\textbf{f}f5}??

A novelty. Previously this topical variation
had seen games with 20 \texttt{\textbf{c}c2}.

20...\texttt{xf5}

The alternative is 20...\texttt{f7} 21 \texttt{\textbf{h}h4} axb4 22 \\
\texttt{f6} \texttt{\textbf{g}g6} 23 \texttt{fxg7} \texttt{\textbf{x}g7} 24 \texttt{\textbf{x}g6} \texttt{\textbf{x}g6} 25 \texttt{\textbf{c}xb4}
with a slight advantage according to Anand.

21 \texttt{\textbf{c}c6}! \texttt{\textbf{d}e8} 22 \texttt{\textbf{x}b5} \texttt{\textbf{w}c7} (D)

As so often in this sharp variation, Black
must part with material. However, his strong
centre, two bishops and active play give him
adequate compensation.

23 \texttt{\textbf{x}a5}!!

23 \texttt{\textbf{w}f3} \texttt{\textbf{h}h8} 24 \texttt{\textbf{d}d5} led to unclear play in

23...\texttt{\textbf{h}h8}?!

According to Shirov, 23...\texttt{\textbf{g}g6} 24 \texttt{\textbf{g}g4} (24 \\
\texttt{\textbf{w}e2} \texttt{\textbf{a}xa5} 25 \texttt{\textbf{a}e8} \texttt{\textbf{a}e8} is unclear) 24...\texttt{\textbf{b}b8}
is more precise.

24 \texttt{\textbf{c}c4}+ \texttt{\textbf{h}h8} 25 \texttt{b4} \texttt{\textbf{g}g6} 26 \texttt{\textbf{w}g4}?

This leaves the queen exposed. Stronger is
26 \texttt{\textbf{e}e2}, after which it is doubtful if Black has

sufficient compensation for his invested material.

26...\texttt{\textbf{e}e4}! 27 \texttt{\textbf{a}a1} \texttt{f3}!

Cutting off the white queen and exposing the

king.

28 \texttt{\textbf{d}d5} \texttt{\textbf{h}h6}! 29 \texttt{\textbf{c}c4}

White must keep the c3-pawn covered.

29...\texttt{\textbf{f}xg2}?!

According to Shirov, it is stronger simply to
take the exchange by 29...\texttt{\textbf{x}c1}.

30 \texttt{\textbf{w}h4}?

White could have exploited the black inaccuracy
by 30 \texttt{\textbf{d}e3}!, intending to hide the king
behind the g2-pawn. This is a common theme
in many situations.

30...\texttt{\textbf{a}a7}! \texttt{(D)}

Presumably Hraček missed this. The bishop
on h6 is invulnerable, as the white queen must
keep f2 covered.

31 \texttt{\textbf{w}xg2}

Probably played with a heavy heart, as this
opens lines towards his own king, but 31 \texttt{\textbf{b}b1}
is strongly met by 31...\texttt{\textbf{g}g5}! 32 \texttt{\textbf{w}g3} \texttt{\textbf{f}f3} 33 \\
\texttt{\textbf{w}xg2} \texttt{\textbf{h}h4}.

31...\texttt{\textbf{x}c1} 32 \texttt{\textbf{x}c1} \texttt{\textbf{f}f3}! 33 \texttt{\textbf{c}c3} \texttt{\textbf{b}f8} 34 \\
\texttt{\textbf{a}a2} \texttt{\textbf{w}g7}

All pieces to the kingside! Now the black at-
tack crashes through.

35 \texttt{\textbf{g}g5} \texttt{h6} 36 \texttt{\textbf{w}g4} \texttt{\textbf{b}f4} 37 \texttt{\textbf{c}c8}+ \texttt{\textbf{h}h7} 38 \\
\texttt{\textbf{b}b7} \texttt{\textbf{f}f7}+ 39 \texttt{\textbf{g}g4} \texttt{\textbf{x}d5} 40 \texttt{\textbf{x}d5} \texttt{\textbf{a}xh3}! 0-1

Team chess can lead to many funny and in-
teresting situations, but my fundamental advice
is: play as you always do. Trying to adjust your
style to something that is not natural to you
rarely leads to better results. And fundamentally
you are in the team to deliver results based on your own strengths. Don’t let the nature of the event change that, unless there is a good reason for it.

The Impact of Time-Pressure

There is only one really good piece of advice to give concerning time-pressure: avoid it! In the vast majority of cases it is bad news to get into time-pressure. It is very easy to lose sight of the big picture while concentrating on not blundering.

There are a few exceptions, though. In the following game Keres deliberately gets into time-trouble, using it as a psychological trick to save a lost position.

Enevoldsen – Keres
Stockholm OL 1937

Chances are you have never heard of the Danish IM Jens Enevoldsen. That is a pity, so a short introduction is in order. Enevoldsen was the strongest Danish player from the 1930s until Bent Larsen’s rapid rise in the 1950s. But besides being a strong player he was also an entertaining and controversial figure. He wrote several interesting books, which as far as I know unfortunately have only been published in Danish. There are many anecdotes about him – whether they are all true I do not know, but they are entertaining and long-lived! One of these anecdotes is the following: during World War II Denmark was occupied by German forces, and Enevoldsen fought in the underground resistance. Shortly after the war Enevoldsen participated in a chess tournament and in one game offered a draw. When the opponent hesitated, Enevoldsen got annoyed. He reached to his inner pockets and extracted a huge gun of the kind used by the underground resistance. Without a word he placed the gun next to the board. The draw was instantly concluded...

1 d4 e6 2 e4 d5 3 exd5 exd5 4 d3 c6 5 1xe2 c4 6 c3 c3 c3 c3 f4 b4 d6 8 w2 g4 9 c2 f6 10 cxd6 11 cxd7 12 d3 0-0 13 0-0 0-0

So far nothing serious has happened. White, the underdog, has played a solid line against the famous young attacking wizard from Estonia. Keres obviously wants to win, but his next move is impatient and places him immediately in a bad position.

12 a5? 13 14 h5?! 14 w5!

Suddenly White is clearly better. His pieces are better coordinated and it is difficult for Black to parry the simple threat of 15 xg6 fxg6 16 f5.

14...Ed5 15 xg6 fxg6 16 f4 f5 17 Ae1 Ae8?! (D)

White has won a crucial pawn, as 19...xh5? fails to 20 c7 21 c8. Black is in deep trouble. But here Keres utilized a clever trick based on time-pressure. He thought for so long on his next move that when making it he only had 5 minutes for 21 moves to reach the time-control. That was completely deliberate. He wanted to induce White to play quickly to avoid time-pressure on his own part while exploiting Keres’s time-trouble. The trick worked – Enevoldsen played too quickly and missed the win. Instead of looking at the clock he should simply have concentrated on winning the position on the board.

19...b5?!

Black threatens 20...xh5 as the king now has an escape route via b7. At the same time Black seemingly threatens ...b4, although this is not really dangerous. But for a player who wants to move quickly it looks prudent to avoid any black counterplay by going for a queen exchange. But that is exactly what Keres hoped for!

20 c7 21 c5 (D)
There it is. Instead 21 h5 would have won easily, as 21...b4 22 cxb4 (or 22 Qc2) 22...Wxb4 23 Qc2 is nothing.

21...Qg8!
Oops! White had only counted on 21...Qxe5 22 Qxe5 Qg8 23 Qe6. But now White has to allow a draw by repetition in order to save the knight.

22 Wxd6 cxd6 23 Qe7 Qc6
The knight returns and saves the draw.

24 Qf7 Qd8 25 Qe7 Qc6 ½-½

It is a commonly quoted rule of thumb that when having an advantage but being in time-pressure, one should not hurry but try to bring the advantage past the time-control before making any serious decisions on how to convert the advantage. However, this is not always true, as it goes against Steinitz’s teachings that when you have the advantage you must act, as otherwise the advantage disappears. I believe the rule must be modified: it depends on the sustainability of the advantage. If the advantage is sustainable (e.g., a chronic pawn weakness) then it is indeed sound advice to try to maintain the status quo until after the time-control. Sustainable advantages by definition do not go away – time is not the crucial factor here. The situation is different when the advantage is temporary. Here a few ‘do nothing’ moves may jeopardize the advantage and let the opponent get off the hook. In this case it may be necessary to act, even in time-pressure. An example of an advantage that vanished due to indecisive play in time-pressure is the following.

Black is obviously under great pressure, and I could win immediately with the energetic 33 f4!; e.g., 33...Qh8 34 f5 Qg5 35 fxg5 fxg5 36 Qxh7+! and White wins. I vaguely saw 33 f4 but in time-pressure I didn’t want to take any risks as I thought I could win prosaically as well. This is a typical theme in time-pressure: the big picture is not appraised sufficiently accurately. In fact White’s advantage is temporary, based on the vulnerable a2-g8 diagonal and the open h-file. However, given a few free moves Black can repair the damage. By doing nothing in order to pass the time-control, I gave Black these necessary free moves. This was not without consequences for the final standings: in the end Gulko and I tied for first with Jonny Hector.

33 Qd1? Qh8 34 Qh4 h6 35 Qd5 Qg5! 36 Wc2 Qfb8 37 Qa1 Qb4 38 Qhh1 Wd8! 39 Qa2 Qe6 40 Wd2 Qf8! (D)
Now everything is covered.  
\[41 \text{Kh1} \text{Qd4} 42 \text{Qd3} \text{Kab8} 43 \text{Kb1} \text{Qxc6} \]
\[\frac{1}{2}-\frac{1}{2}\]

Four years later, in the same tournament, I had a similar situation. Learning from the experience of acting indecisively when having a temporary advantage, I convinced myself to strike despite being short of time in the following game:

\[\text{Jørgensen – L.B. Hansen} \]

\[\text{Copenhagen 2004}\]

Black has a strong attack on the kingside. Try to calculate the assault ratio! But given a few moves White might improve his position—e.g., by overprotecting f2 or by playing \text{Kdb2} and \text{Kdb7} or \text{Kd8} to seek relief in exchanges. I decided I had to strike, but first Black can repeat moves to get two moves closer to the time-control.

\[31...\text{Kc4} 32 \text{Kd1} \text{Kd5}! 33 \text{Kd2} \text{Kc4} 34 \text{Kd1} \text{Kxf2!} 35 \text{Kxf2} \text{Kxf2} 36 \text{Kxc4}\]

This is hopeless, but 36 \text{Ke1} \text{Kf7} also does not hold. Black threatens the prosaic 37...\text{Kxd4} followed by 38...\text{Kf3} or more forcefully 37 \text{Wxc6} \text{Kxe3!} 38 \text{Kxe3} \text{Kxg2+}! 39 \text{Kxg2} \text{Kf1+} 40 \text{Kd2} \text{Kf2+} 41 \text{Kh1} \text{Kxe3} and wins.

\[36...\text{Kxc4} 37 \text{Wxc6} \text{Wxc6} 38 \text{Kxc6} \text{Kf8!}\]

The safest under the circumstances. Any white hopes based on the c-pawn are eliminated.

\[39 \text{Kxa7} \text{Kxc5} 40 \text{Kb5} \text{Kxe3}\]

A nice way to reach the time-control!

\[41 \text{Kg1} \text{Kd2} 42 \text{Kg1} \text{e3} 43 \text{Kd4} \text{e2} 44 \text{Kxe2} \text{Kxe2} 45 \text{Kf1} \text{e3+} 46 \text{Kh1} \text{e4+} 0-1\]

As I said, one of the problems in time-pressure is that you lose sight of the big picture—the holistic view. Often this represents itself in an excessive desire to go for exchanges. But as we discussed in previous chapters, exchanges are a key strategic factor, and need careful appraisal. In time-pressure this appraisal is often not possible to conduct accurately—one’s judgement is clouded by the desire to simplify the position. Here is an example from my tournament practice on this theme.

\[\text{Miezis – L.B. Hansen} \]

\[\text{Copenhagen 2004}\]

White has an isolated d-pawn but in return he has active pieces. The position is about level, and the most practical would be for Black to bide his time for two moves, until the time-control has been reached. With less than a minute for two moves, I instead went...

\[39...\text{Kd5}?!\]

Objectively this is probably not really a mistake, as the position is still drawn after this, but the move is impractical in time-pressure. There was no need to take the crucial decision about exchanging knights at this point. In fact, the knight is well placed on c7, where it controls not only d5 but also stops a minority attack based on b4-b5 (b4 is answered by ...a6). At the same time the knight may want to jump elsewhere than d5 in the future.

\[40 \text{Kc1} \text{Kf7}\]

It was still not too late to take back the previous move and go 40...\text{Kc7}. This would have been the most prudent way to reach the time-control.
41 \( \text{Qxd5! Exd5} \) 42 b4! a6 43 f4!

Suddenly I realized that Black must be careful not to be worse. The premature exchange of knights has given White the opportunity to grab space and now he threatens f5 followed by c5 and either d5 or b5. However, the following accurate defensive manoeuvre just saves the draw.

43...g6! 44 f5 g7! 45 c5 xc5 46 bxc5 g5!

Now the closed nature of the position ensures the draw despite White's passed d-pawn.

47 d5 f7! 48 d6 \( \pm \) 

The features of a time-scramble resemble the ones we discussed above concerning games with shorter time-limits. In such games the initiative may often be more valuable than at other times, since defending accurately is often difficult in time-trouble and with short time-limits. Furthermore coordination is crucial in time-pressure. The pieces should be kept focused and close together – no pieces should be ‘standing alone’, as they are potential victims of double attacks and other similar disasters that may easily be missed in time-pressure. A good example of how to play according to these principles in time-pressure is the following.

A. Kuzmin – Dreev
St Petersburg 2004

A typical situation in the Meran Variation: the e5-pawn gives White attacking chances on the kingside due to his more space, but if the attack doesn’t materialize it may end up as a weakness. This is the case here. Black is slightly better, but the strong knight on c4 secures White from any serious difficulties.

23 c3 xe3 24 c5 25 d3 e7! 26 dxe3 27 c4! 28 g4 (D)
Black grabs the initiative. Going into the time-trouble phase this is important.

29 exf6!

Initially White defends well. Worse is 29 Wh5 sh7 followed by ...Wc7 and ...ac6 with strong pressure on e5.

29...Eg5!

The point behind the previous move.

30 Exd4!

White is still alert. The text-move is forced but also not bad.

30...Exd4

Much better than taking the queen, which would hand the initiative to White.

31 Wxe6+

Obviously not 31 Wxd4?? Exg2#.

31...h7 32 g3 Wf3! 33 fxg7 Ee4! (D)

Notice these two last moves. These are excellent time-pressure moves. Black coordinates his forces and brings them close together in the vicinity of the white king.

34 Wh6?

And finally it happens – White stumbles! 34 Ec5! is correct, after which Black must go for a draw by 34...Exg3+! 35 fxg3 Whg3+ 36 sh1 Eh1+ 37 Exh1 Whh1+ 38 Eh2 We2+ 39 Eh3 We3+ 40 g4 We4+ 41 Eh5 We5+

34...Ee2 35 Ef1 Exg7 36 Ea5?

This is not the way to play in time-pressure. The knight leaves its secure post on c4 and White loses coordination between his pieces. Better is 36 h4, after which White can still fight according to Dreev.

36...Exa2 37 Ec6 Ea6!

Now the poor knight is in deep trouble. This is a typical theme in time-scrambles: coordination is lost and suddenly material is shed.

38 Ec1 Ea2

Repetition of moves in order to reach the time-control.

39 Ef1 Ea6 40 Ec1 Ec7! 41 Ec5 Ec7! (D)

Notice the unfortunate placing of White's pieces. Coordination is totally absent. There is no defence – the unfortunate white knight is lost.

42 Ec2+ Eg7 43 Ee2+ Ef6 0-1

Let us conclude this chapter and the book with a practical hint on how to play in time-pressure. One of the key success factors of time-trouble play is to know exactly how many moves you have to play before the time-control is reached and you can start thinking again. The databases are filled with games with errors committed on move 41 or 42, because the players did not know that they had made the time-control. A small trick can help you here. If, for example, you have six moves to play before the time-control (this is where you stopped keeping score), then take into your left hand six pieces, matches or something else, and every time you make a move you remove a piece from your hand. This way you always know how many moves you have to play – it corresponds to the number of pieces you are holding in your hand. This small trick has helped me several times – I offer it to you for free as an operational conclusion to a book on strategy!
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Chess is a game where profound strategic thinking must be allied with clever short-term tactics. Most previous works on chess strategy focused on specific strategic elements, but Lars Bo Hansen’s aims here are different. He creates a framework in which these various elements can be systematically included and organized — a framework that will help chess-players know how to think about chess strategy during practical play.

The theory of business strategy is extensively developed, and Hansen adopts the novel approach of investigating whether any of the vast amounts of research and modelling done for business purposes can be applied to chess. He finds that there are indeed many useful parallels, and focuses on how these ideas can be used to good effect by chess-players, both in their preparation and when making over-the-board decisions.

This unique new approach to chess strategy, explained by a grandmaster who is also an expert in the theory of business strategy, covers topics including:

- What is chess strategy?
- The factors shaping chess strategy
- The opponents: The role of the human factor in chess
- Characteristics of reflectors
- Characteristics of theorists
- Characteristics of pragmatics
- Characteristics of activists
- Environmental factors

Lars Bo Hansen is a well-known grandmaster from Denmark. He has won the Danish Championship on two occasions, and represented his country in four olympiads, winning a bronze medal for his individual performance in 1990. His many tournament victories include first prize in the strong Copenhagen Open in both 1997 and 2000. Away from the board, he teaches and lectures on business studies, with a particular focus on marketing, organization and strategy.