

Chess Active Learning – The Principles

PAVEL VERESOV



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Introduction

To whom is this book directed?

This book is an introduction to our new chess learning method. We believe that to improve your chess skills you need to be the one working and solving the problems that naturally arise while playing a game.

That is why we encourage any chess player who is eager to seriously improve his/her chess skills to read this book. Our goal is to make the reader think for himself and try to become more independent as a chess player.

What about the difficulty of this book?

The difficulty of each question will increase after you solve each exercise, and some of them might be related to the previous ones with an additional difficulty.

It is important to remark that the point is not to perfectly solve every problem or question you are asked, but to develop the good habit of having your own vision before listening to others. Afterwards, you will be shown the answers and you will be able to spot your mistakes, weak points and how to correct them.

1. Our vision – Understanding and Goal Setting

"I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand." - Confucius

Have you ever read a chess book believing that you understood it perfectly, but realizing a few months later that you forgot almost everything about it?

In the end, if you have read 1 or 100 books, what will mainly remain is what you considered or analysed yourself from every idea you were shown. If you were not pushed to do it, you will probably forget the book and its content quickly.

Therefore, you will develop your own understanding after every chapter while being explained what you need to know. You might forget some of the ideas in the book, but you will definitely improve your analytical skills.

Another very important thing we believe in is that you must set concrete goals in order to improve your chess skills.

What goals should you set?

Fortunately, in chess your progress can be measured quite objectively. For that every chess player has an ELO rating. The ELO rating system is nowadays used by almost every organization, including the FIDE (international chess federation) or any other online chess community.

We believe that an achievable and realistic goal is to increase your ELO at least 50 points per year once you feel you have reached a stable point (a point where you feel progression is particularly harder than before).

This may sound as a moderate goal, but even strong professional players are more than happy when they gain “only” 50 points per year. And the point is to keep this progress steadily year after year. Remember that first of all goals must be realistic!

In case you don't have any ELO your progress will be harder to evaluate. If your play is just limited to friendly matches with few people, you will naturally see an improvement if you start beating an opponent you did not before.

In any case, with small chess communities sometimes it can just be a matter of knowing the weaknesses of your opponent rather than improving your own skills. If this is your case, we encourage you to get into a bigger chess community and start testing your strength.

2. Improving your tactical skills

Many chess players say chess is 99% tactics. Whether that is true or not, is not the subject of this book. But the truth is games are normally decided by tactical mistakes, at amateur or master level.

What amount of your training time should be devoted to tactics?

This question is far from being simple and of course there is not just one answer to it.

But we suggest devoting as much as 50 % of your time to tactics until a clear

progress is made and you gain confidence when playing sharp positions.

How many times did you get a winning advantage against a higher rated opponent to just lose the game in one or very few moves?

What happened is that your opponent tried to create complications at any cost and tricked you. In this case something is clear: your chess tactic needs to be improved.

The first thing to work on are basic combinations that will allow you to see patterns.

We will divide them into mating patterns and combinations that give material advantage

Mating patterns

The most important thing here is to develop your vision to spot mating patterns as this is in fact the goal of the game of chess!

We will start with an old one, the Philidor's mate:



Diagram 1: White to play

2.1) How many mating positions do you visualize, for white and black?

2.2) How should white proceed? Is there only one winning move?

If we add some pieces to the board:



Diagram 2: White to play

2.3) Black's material advantage has increased. Is it possible to reach the same mating pattern?

Let us analyse a defensive resource for black in a similar position:



Diagram 3: White to play

2.4) Black has just tried 1...Re6. Can we still reach the Philidor's mate?

Is there a new possible mate if black's king goes to h8 after 2. Qxe6+?



Diagram 4: black to play

2.5) In diagram 4, black is a pawn down and white's bishops look quite menacing.

Therefore, an attack against the king seems to be black's only chance. How can he achieve that?



Diagram 5: White to play

2.6) In this wild position, both kings seem to be under fire but white is a whole rook down, so he must act quickly. Can white force mate?

2.7) If white decides to try the obvious mate with a pawn on f6 supporting the queen on g7 after 1. f6 reaching the below position:



Diagram 6: Black to play

Is mate or a clear win unstoppable?



Diagram 7: white to play

In the above position white is an exchange down (in this case a rook for a strong bishop) and black threatens mate on h1 or to consolidate with moves like Rc7 and Nc5.

2.8) What shall white do? (hint: you need to visualize 2 key positions)

Let us have a look at the below position with opposite coloured bishops:



Diagram 8: white to play

Endgames with just pawns and opposite coloured bishops tend to be drawish, as the bishop can normally neutralize the advance of the opponent's pawns.

However, with heavy pieces (queens and/or rooks) the attack is normally more important than the material advantage.

2.9) In diagram 8, Black is a pawn up and about to take another one on a2. On the other hand, white's bishop is taking control of the dark squares around the opponent's king (g7 and f8)

The mating patterns for white are rather obvious. But how can white achieve

his goal?

In the below position black is 3 pawns down with his pieces a bit uncoordinated:



Diagram 9: black to play

Black's rooks aren't connected but his minor pieces are extremely active.

2.10) What are the 2 main alternatives for black and are they winning (hint: remember f2 is pinned)?

Material advantage

Even though the goal of chess is to checkmate, this doesn't occur very often at standard level.

A big material advantage is usually enough to persuade your opponent that his king will be mated.

As a rule of thumb, a material advantage of a pawn (without any change in a previously balanced position) should give the stronger side clear winning chances. So, if mate isn't possible winning material is the second option.

We will start by winning a pawn with a classic example, combining mating ideas with material gain:



Diagram 10: White to move

2.11) How can white win at least a pawn?

We saw the below position where black could force mate due to white's weak back rank



Diagram 11: White to play

2.12) Black's king looks safe but how white can force things to win material?



Diagram 12: Black to play

In the above position white has only a slight space disadvantage, and he might play d4 soon.

2.13) What is the main tactical resource black has and how can he force material advantage?



Diagram 13: Black to play

2.14) In diagram 13 After 1...Bxc3 2. bxc3 we reach a symmetrical pawn structure and a fairly balanced position. Can black do better? (Hint: White's king would be better on b1)?

In the below position we will see how important it is to hit first when both kings are exposed



Diagram 14: White to play

Black is a piece up and threatening white's king with moves like Rh1+, Nxf3+ or Qxg3+.

2.15) How can white counterattack and what is the main tactical point?

Let us have a look at a position involving a pawn promotion:



Diagram 15: White to play

Material is somewhat balanced but the d7 pawn is about to bring a new queen to the board.

2.16) Is the natural looking 1. d8(Q) a good continuation for white?

2.17) Does white have anything better? (Hint: try looking for forcing moves)

In chess, a double attack is by far the strongest tactical resource. By attacking two pieces at the same time the opponent is sometimes left with no choice but to give one of them. Like the following position:



Diagram 16: White to play

Black is threatening 1...Qf3! winning on the spot as the back rank is weak. For example: 2. Qxf3 Ra1+ with mate or 2. Qf1 Ra1! 3. Qxa1 (Ne1 Rxe1!) Qg2#

2.18) How can white save the day?

In the diagram below white is a pawn up, but black's bishops are very active:



Diagram 17: White to play

2.19) On the other hand black's kingside is undefended. What should white continue (hint: just one strong move is required)?

Finally, we'll see the importance of having all pieces taking action in the game:



Diagram 18: white to play

2.20) White's main advantage are his centralized rooks and a better kingside (the h6-square is weak). Black is ready to consolidate with moves like Rac8, Rfd8, Bf8 so white must take advantage of his situation as soon as possible. What shall he do?

Answers

2.1) Black's threat is Re1#, so if white doesn't have anything in return his material disadvantage will be decisive.

The key mating positions for white are the below 3:



Diagram 19: first mating position



Diagram 20: second mating position



Diagram 21: third and key mating position

The first 2 are almost identical and fairly easy but the third one is by far less obvious. Not knowing it doesn't mean you won't find it over the board, but if you only have seconds on your clock, this might not be easy at all.

2.2) Therefore, 1.Qd5+ Kh8 (1...Kf8 2.Qf7#) 2.Nf7+ Kg8 3.Nh6+ Kh8 (3...Kf8 4.Qf7#) 4.Qg8+ Rxd8 5.Nf7#

The last question was a bit tricky. In fact, once you see the winning manoeuvre you will realize that the queen needs to be placed on the a2 g8 diagonal, so 1. Qc4+ is equally possible.

Important

Try to find the pattern first, and then look for the move.

2.3) Yes, it is! You just need to imagine the original position by removing a pair of rooks after 1.Rxe8+!Rxe8 2.Qc4+ Kh8 3.Nf7+ Kg8 4.Nh6+ Kh8

5.Qg8+ Rxd8 6.Nf7#

If white played 1. Qc4+ assuming that after 1...Kh8 it could transpose into the line mentioned before after 2. Rxe8+ (or even mate after 2. Nf7+) black would win after 1...Rd5!

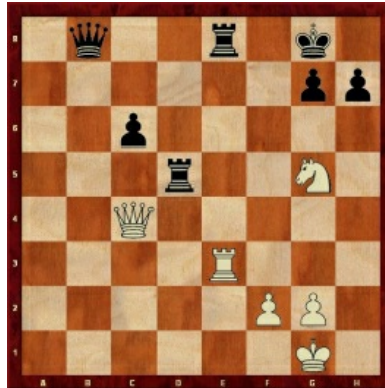


Diagram 22: Black parries the mating attack and keeps material advantage

Important

In chess move order does matter

2.4) No, it isn't possible since after 1.Qc4+ Re6 2.Qxe6+ Kh8 3.Nf7+ Kg8 4.Nh6+ Kh8 (4...Kf8 5.Qf7#) 5.Qg8+ Qxg8, black's queen is controlling f7!

Instead a new pattern appears! The knight curtains black's queen making the back rank weak. 1.Qc4+ Re6 2.Qxe6+ Kh8 3.Nf7+ Kg8 4.Nd8+! (other moves might lead to advantage but this is definitely the shortest win) Kh8 5.Qe8#



Diagram 23: Queen and knight combine very well to attack

2.5) The back rank is weak due to the knight on e1, so Black can checkmate after

1...Qg1+ 2.Kxg1 Bd4+ (double check!) 3.Kh1 (3.Kf1 Rg1#) 3...Rg1#

2.6) Yes After 1.Rh6+!! mate is unavoidable as 1...gxh6 2.Bf6! the threat of mate on both g7 and h8 is too much to deal with for black. For example: 2...Rh1+ 3.Kxh1 Qb1+ 4.Kh2 Qxf5 5. Qg7 mate

If black tries 1...Kxh6 white mates with 2.Qh8#

Note the importance of the double threat on g7 and h8 after 2. Bf6!

2.7) No. Indeed, black has a pretty defensive resource after 1.f6 gxf6! 2. exf6 (2.Bxf6 Rh1+!! 3.Kxh1 Qc1+ 4.Kh2 Qh6+ 5.Qxh6+ Kxh6 and white is just a pawn up) 2...Kg6 3.g4 Rh1+ 4.Kxh1 Qc1+ 5.Kh2 Qf4+ 6.Bg3 Qh6+ 7.Qxh6+ Kxh6 black manages to exchange queens and hope to survive the endgame being a pawn down.

Important

After spotting a mating position, always recheck whether your opponent has a defence or not

2.8) White mates after the pretty 1.Qb7+! Kxb7 2.Nc5+ Kb8 (2...Kc7 3.Na6#) 3.Na6#

Remember this pattern as it can appear in your games!

2.9) After 1. Re4!! White hits the queen on f6 and the rook on e8 and black is defenceless. For example: 1.Re4 Qxc3 2.Rxe8# or 1.Re4 Rxe4 2.Qxf6 with mate to follow on g7

Important

Always keep an eye on double attacks as they force things and give your opponent less options

2.10) The first main move is 1...Nxb3 but white can try the 2. h3!? (if 2.Nxd4 Ne2+! 3.Nxe2 (3.Kf1 Nxc1 and black is better) 3...Qxh2+ 4.Kf1 Qxg2+ 5.Ke1 Rh1+ 6.Ng1 Rxb1+ 7.Ke2 Qf3#) and the position is better for black but still not winning after 2... Ne2+! 3.Qxe2 Qg3! 4.Kf1 Bxg2+ 5.Ke1 Bc3+ 6.Rxc3 Qxc3+ 7.Qd2 Rxb3.

Still, this long line is far from being obvious and not easy to find over the board

Instead, Black can force mate with the spectacular 1...Qxg3!! 2. hxg3 Nxb3:



Diagram 24

Mate on h1 is unstoppable!

2.11) After 1. Nxe5! the best black can do is to lose a pawn without any compensation after

1...Nxe5 2.Qxh5 Nxc4 3.Qb5+ c6 4.Qxc4

Since after the suicidal 1...Bxd1 White mates with 1.Nxe5 Bxd1 2.Bxf7+ Ke7 3.Nd5#



Diagram 25: position after 3.Nd5#

2.12) After 1.Rxh6+! Bxh6 2.Be5+ wins the queen and white has a decisive material advantage

2.13) A fork on d4 (white hasn't played d4 yet!) makes 1...Rxe3! possible. After 2. Rxe3 d4! 3. Re2 (or other rook move) white captures the knight with 3...dxc3 or after 3...Bb4 forcing a favourable exchange (2 pieces vs. rook and pawn)

If white tries 2. Qxe3 black can still play 2...d4! as 3. Qxd4 loses the queen to the pin 3...Bc5!

2.14) After 1...Be7!! White is simply lost. The rook on h4 is attacked and tied defending the queen while 2. Qxg5 loses the rook to the double attack 2...Bxg5+ and 2. Rdh1 loses an exchange after 2...Qxf4+ 3. Rxf4 Bg5 or even a whole rook after 2...Rh8!! 3.Qxg5 (3. Rxh8 Qxf4+) Bxg5+

Important

When a piece is under attack, captures shouldn't be automatic. Retreating moves (even though they might look passive) can sometimes be stronger

2.15) Black's king is skewered by the white queen after 1. Rxg5+! Kxg5 (1... fxc5 2. Qd7 and 3. Qxh3) 2. Qg7+ white wins the queen after 2...Kf5 3. Qd7+ or 2...Kh5 3.Qh7+

2.16) Amazingly, it is not only a bad but a losing move.

After 1. d8(Q) Ra6+! 2. Qa5 (forced) Rxd8! (of course not 2...Rxa5 3. Qxa5 with material advantage for white) White will lose both queens!

2.17) White forces a win with 1. Qg3+! Kf1 (1...Kh1 2. Qh4+ and Qxf6 with decisive advantage) 2. Qg1+! Kxe2 3. Qxd1+ Kxd1 4. d8 (Q)+ and Qxf6 with a winning advantage

2.18) After the simple 1.Rxb8+ Kxb8 2.Qb3+ Kc8 3.Qxa2 white is a piece up and 3...Qf3 (threatening mate on g2) fails to 4. Qa8+! Kb7 Nxe5+ winning black's queen

2.19) White can throw the pretty 1. Bc7! and win an exchange as after 1...Rc7 2. Qe5! both c7 and g7 (with a mate threat) are under attack so the c7 rook is lost.

2.20) After 1.Rxd7! black doesn't have any good way to recapture the bishop 1...Bxd7 (1...Qxd7 2. Ne5 Q moves 3. Nxc6 / 1...Nxd7 2. Qxe7) 2.Ng5!! Qb8 (if 2...Qc8 3.Nce4 Q moves 4. Nxf6+ and 5. Qxh7 mate) 3.Bxa8 Qxa8 and now white has reestablished material balance and win a pawn with 4. Nxh7! Nxh7 5.Qxe7 with clear advantage

But even better is 4.Qh6!! Rd8 (with the idea of 5...Bf8) 5.Nce4! Qxe4 (otherwise Nxf6+ and Qxh7) 6.Nxe4 Nxe4 winning the queen for 2 pieces

Important

Whenever you spot a good move quickly, keep on looking for a better one

3. Improving your strategy

How can we define strategy?

The following quote is from Savielly Tartakower, a leading Polish/French grandmaster in the 1920s and 30s:

"Tactics is knowing what to do when there is something to do. Strategy is knowing what to do when there is nothing to do."

This means that whenever the position is not fresh enough for a tactical combination (i.e. we cannot spot any forced line which gives a material

advantage or forces mate) the position needs to be improved in a more abstract way.

What are the things we need to evaluate to have a good position, strategically speaking?

The first and main thing is the pawn structure. Whenever the material is balanced, a better pawn structure will definitely provide a long term advantage.

The following position will help us visualize this idea:



Diagram 1: white to play

First of all, if we only analyse the pawn structure from a purely static point of view

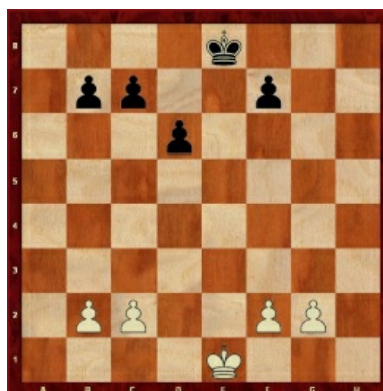


Diagram 2: pawn structure

3.1) What can be said about each pawn structure? Who has the better one?

3.2) In diagram 1, how can white react dynamically and destroy black's pawn structure?

Let us see another position that can arise from openings such as the french or Tarrasch defence:



Diagram 3: white to play

3.3) Material is equal, so is the position?

3.4) White's bishop is under attack, so there are not many choices. Shall white exchange pieces or not?

A good pawn structure is the basis to have a solid position.

However, the pawn structure is not the only way to measure whether our position is strategically good or not. Another very important factor is the piece activity and how many squares they can control.



Diagram 4: White to play

3.5) How would you evaluate the position considering the pawn structure and piece activity?

3.6) Black is threatening to win a piece with 1...Nxd5 2 Bxe7 Nxe7. If white plays, shall he take on e7 or f6 (with knight or bishop)?

Exchanging pieces is another key to acquire a positional advantage. A very typical case is the fight between knight and bishop after a favourable piece exchange. Materially speaking, both pieces are worth approximately the same in the beginning of the game. But when the game develops their value can change drastically until the endgame, where the advantage can sometimes be decisive.



Diagram 5: Black to play

3.7) In diagram 5, the pawn structure is a bit better for black, as h2 might be weaker than f5. To neutralize this, white has 2 bishops that might get active if black allows moves like Bd4, c5 and Bc4. How can black force some exchanges to reach a better endgame? (Hint: never forget about tactics!)

3.8) In a position with king and bishop vs. king and knight with the same number of pawns. Does it make a difference if there are pawns on one flank or both flanks of the board (Hint: think about the piece activity)?

Another positional idea that appears frequently in games is the exchange sacrifice. Normally a rook is worth a minor piece (bishop or knight) plus 2 pawns but other factors (such as king safety, pawn structure, piece activity or strong passed pawns) can break this rule.



Diagram 6: white to play

White has a clear positional advantage in diagram 6, with black having an isolated and weak pawn on d6 and each of white's pieces being very active.

3.9) The natural 1. Nf5 (improving white's position and threatening 2. Nxh6+ gxh6 3 Rxf6 winning a pawn) is good and easy to spot but there is still a better and more elegant move. Which one is it?

Let us see another classical but instructive example:



Diagram 7: white to play

3.10) White's c5 pawn is under attack and black plans to continue with 1... Rc8. How can white save the pawn?

Answers

3.1) White's structure consists of 2 pawn islands, as well as black's. As a general rule, it is better to have as few pawn islands as possible so pawns can defend each other.

Another detail here is that white has two islands of 2 pawns each whereas black has an island of 3 pawns and another of 1 pawn (f7 pawn). This means that the f7 pawn might be a target as no pawn can defend it whenever it advances.

So white has a slightly better pawn structure

3.2) After the forcing line 1.Nxc6! bxc6 2.Bxc5 dxc5 3.Qxd8+ Kxd8 we can see how black's structure is destroyed!

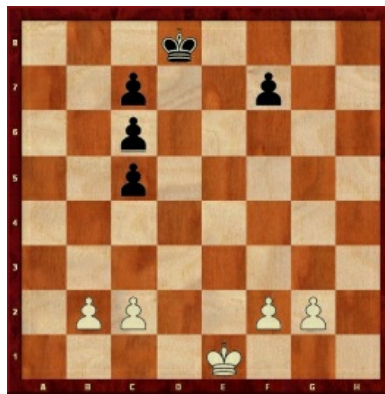


Diagram 8: black's pawn structure is ruined

Black's tripled pawn on the queenside might be helpful to control squares in the middle game with more pieces on the board, but definitely not here! White can create a free pawn on the kingside and black can't, so this endgame is winning for white.

3.3) No, white's position is better as the isolated d5 pawn will be a target. Isolated central pawns are normally useful in the opening or middlegame as they can support pieces in the centre, but they tend to be weak in endings.

3.4) Yes since after 1.Bg3 black can get rid of the weakness on d5 with 1... d4! And if 2.Rd1 (2. cxd4 Rxd4 is perfectly fine for black) Bf6 3.f3 Rd8! White will have to exchange pawns as the d4 can become dangerous with bishops over the board.

Important

A strategic evaluation shouldn't be done alone. Always keep an eye on tactics

and the dynamic factors. Strategy and tactics are not completely independent from each other.

3.5) The pawn structure is fairly equal (in fact if white played d3 and black h6 it would be symmetrical).

However, white pieces are more active with a strong knight on d5 and a bishop on g5.

White's knight controls important squares and keeps black's queen tied to the defence of the b6 pawn.

White's bishop is not hindered by his own pawns (as black's bishop on e7 by the d6, e5, c5 and b6 pawns) so black would like to exchange bishops.

3.6) After 1. Bxf6! Bxf6 (gxf6 ruins black pawn structure) white keeps a long term advantage as the knight is more active than the bishop.

1.Nxe7 Qxe7 is not so clear as the knight keeps the pressure on the centre and if white tries 2. Qf3 (with the idea of 3. Bf6 doubling black's pawn) black activates the rook with 2...Ra8!

If 1. Nxf6 Bxf6 2. Be3 Bg5! Black exchanges pieces with an equal position

3.7) After 1...Qxe2+! 2.Kxe2 Nc3+ 3.Kd3 Nxb5 4.cxb5 Kd5:



Diagram 9: white to play

White has serious problems in this position. The b5 pawn is a target, so that means the bishop will have to stay on the g1-a7 diagonal (5. Kc3 with the idea of Kb4 is bad as after 5...Ke4 the king goes after the h2 pawn).

Furthermore, Black's king is centralized (king's activity is a key factor in endgames!) and the knight is better than the bishop as it can attack white's

pawns. The endgame should be winning for black

3.8) Yes, it does make a difference.

As a general rule, a bishop can normally outplay the knight whenever there are pawns on both sides of the board as it can attack on both flanks at the same time whereas the knight can normally cover squares on a more restricted area.

Another general rule is that pawns should be placed on squares of colour opposite to that of the bishop to complement its activity. In the below example, white's kingside pawns are better placed on g3 and h2 than g4 and h3.



Diagram 10: the bishop is slightly better than the knight

With pawns on one side of the board normally the knight has an advantage as it can attack any of the pawns, whereas the bishop can only threaten the pawns of its colour.



Diagram 11: the knight is slightly better than the bishop

In this position, though drawish, white should avoid getting his pawns blocked on the light squares as they could become a target for the knight.

Important

General rules in chess must only be used as a guideline. Each position has its own “rules”, so always recheck the moves over the board!

3.9) After 1. Rxf6!! gxf6 2. Nf5!



Diagram 12: black to play

Black is an exchange up but much worse. His pawn structure is destroyed and his king is under attack (white threatens 3. Qg4+ and 4 Qg7 mate).

The best defence is 2...h5! (2...Kh7 3. Qh4 with the idea of Qxh6+) 3. Qh4 Qe5 4. Qxh5

Rb8 5.Qg4+ Kf8 6.Qg7+ Ke8 7.Qg8+ Kd7 8.Qxb8 Qxf5 and white gets the exchange back being a pawn up.

3.10) After 1. Rxa6 bxa6 2. c6! White's pawns on the sixth rank cannot be stopped, for example 2... Ke6 3.c7 Rg8+ 4.Kh2! and 5. b7!

4. Endgames: What to know and what to figure out

Third world champion José Raúl Capablanca:

“In order to improve your game, you must study the endgame before everything else, for whereas the endings can be studied and mastered by themselves, the middle game and the opening must be studied in relation to the endgame”

Given the high amount of theory that exists about endgames and the fact that this is just a chapter of our book we will focus on the main aspects of this stage of the game and the positions that arise more often: pawn endgames and pawn and rook endgames. We have already seen the general ideas regarding minor pieces (knights and bishops) endgames in chapter 3.

Pawn endings arise after a general simplification and rook and pawn endgames occur often since rooks are pieces that normally take action lately in the game.

What shall be studied about endgames?

Nowadays, endgame table bases can provide us with definite answers where a position is a draw, a win or a loss. However, learning by heart hundreds of positions is not at all our method of learning as we believe this isn't the best practical way. Furthermore, in chess one model position can easily change from winning to losing by simply changing any piece from its square. That might be quite misleading, considering the fact that one could not recognize that difference over the board and play blindly.

Therefore, we must only memorize the essential points and always try to keep ideas rather than moves.

Pawn endgames

Is a pawn enough for a win with only kings on the board?

Well, the answer is yes if the pawn is promoted to a rook or a queen (bishop and king vs. king or knight and king vs. king is a draw).

How can the weaker side try to avoid this?

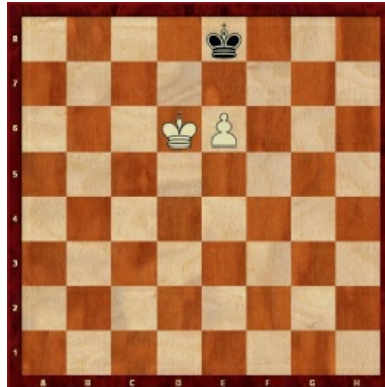


Diagram 1: king and pawn vs. king endgame

4.1) The above position is well known and easy to remember. It arises very often after white pushes his free pawn and black's king tries to stop it.

Does white win in any case (even if it's black to play)?

4.2) Does it make any difference to move all the pieces 1, 2 or 3 files to the left or right while keeping the pieces on the same ranks?

4.3) After 1...Kd8, white tried 2.Ke5 Ke7 3.Kd5 reaching the below position:

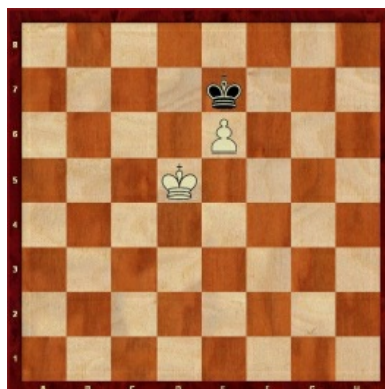


Diagram 2: Black to play

Which is black's only move?

So we can see that having to move can sometimes be a problem (this is called zugzwang in chess jargon). This can be solved if we can make a move that doesn't change the position so we can "pass the ball" to our opponent.



Diagram 3: white to play

This is a key position in king versus pawns endgames. If you understand it you will avoid spoiling a winning position and get a better sleep at night!

4.4) In diagram 3, Black has managed to oppose white's king, avoiding further progress. For example, 1. Kf4 Kf6. What shall white do?

Let us use this principle with more pawns on the board:



Diagram 4: black to play

4.5) Material is equal, but who is better and why?

4.6) Black plays 1...g5. Which is the easiest and clearest reply?

Rook endgames

In chess, it is quite normal that after the middle game and exchanging some

pieces one or two pairs of rooks remain on the board together with some pawns. As rooks normally don't take action in the opening, minor pieces are exchanged first.

Rooks normally make the position more drawish than pure pawn endgames. The reason is that the weaker side has an additional resource here: perpetual checks.

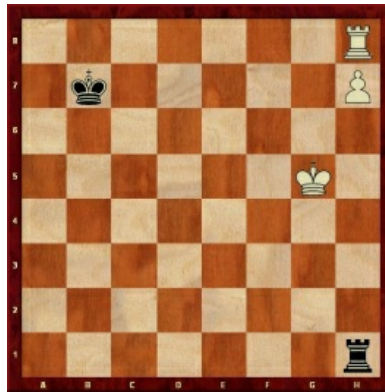


Diagram 5: Black to play

4.7) How do you assess the position?

4.8) Black played 1...Kc7. Does it change anything?

So as we could see, in rook endgames the activity of the rook is essential. It is better to support a pawn behind it as the rook can keep its activity and doesn't block the pawn.

What happens if we place the king in front of the pawn?

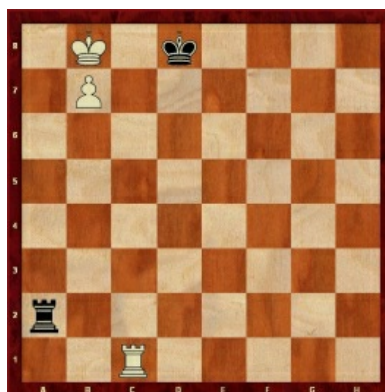


Diagram 6: White to play

4.9) We can easily see that it is better to place the king in front of the pawn as white's rook is now "alive". How should white win (hint: black's checks must be stopped)?

Another position which often arises is the "Philidor position", named after François André Danican Philidor (born 1726-died 1795), a leading chess player from France:



Diagram 7: black to play

4.10) The best move for black here is 1...Ra6! Why and what is your evaluation of the position?

An advantage of 2 pawns is normally enough to ensure the stronger side a victory. The exceptions to this rule are some positions with the f and h pawns (or a and c) and h and b (or a and g). We will not study them in this book as our goal is not to provide dozens of positions to memorize but rather stimulate our reader to think on his own.

With more pawns over the board, it is advantageous to have a free pawn to diverge the weaker side pieces (king or rook) from the defence of its pawns.

If all the pawns are on the same side like below:



Diagram 8: rook and pawn endgame

This position is theoretically drawn. Of course, that means with perfect play from both sides, which is usually not the case! In practice, white has winning chances, so this position must be played if you have white.

Black will try to achieve theoretically drawn positions like the “Philidor position” after exchanging pawns and leaving white with one pawn.

Final ideas about endgames

Is a pawn advantage enough to win a game?

As we could see sometimes it is not enough.

How is this balance affected by adding pieces over the board?

We could say that queens and rooks always give the weaker side more chances to draw as they have the additional resource of perpetual check. As we saw in rooks endgames, a pawn advantage doesn’t necessarily mean a win.

Knights and bishops don’t tend to change the balance that much whenever there are many pawns over the board.

Of course, if there is only one pawn and a knight (or bishop) on each side, the weaker side has the additional resource to sacrifice the knight (or bishop) for the pawn and get a draw as knight (or bishop) and king vs. king do not check mate.

Furthermore, if the bishops are of opposite colour, the drawing chances are very high for the weak side even with a material deficit of 2 pawns.

As we said in the beginning of the chapter, we encourage you to only

memorize the positions we saw in this chapter and to fight as much as you can whenever you have an advantage in an endgame. And always recheck what you know over the board!

Answers

4.1) No. If white plays, he wins with 1.e7 Kf7 2.Kd7 Kf6 3.e8(Q).

After black's 1...Kd8! 2.e7+ Ke8 3.Ke6 it is a stalemate

Black's manoeuvre is called "opposition", as he opposes his enemy and doesn't allow him to penetrate into the seventh and eight ranks.

4.2) Yes, it does only if pieces are moved 3 files to the right:



Diagram 9: drawn pawn endgame

This is a draw, no matter who plays first. After 1. h7 the position is a stalemate

The same applies if white's pawn is on a6, with the white king on b6 and the black king on a8.

4.3) After 3...Ke8! 4. Kd6 Kd8! We reached the same position and black holds. 3...Kd8?? would lose after 4. Kd6 (white has the opposition here!) and 5. e7

Important

As a rule of the thumb, the pawn should advance to the seventh rank **WITHOUT** checking the opponent's king, as this allows stalemate (see 4.1)

4.4) After 1. f3!! White loses a tempo and gains the opposition. For example 1.f3 Kf6 2.Kf4 (opposition!) Kg6 3.Ke5 (penetration) Kf7 4.Kf5 (opposition!) Ke7 5.Kg6 (penetration) Kf8 6.f4 Ke8 (6...Kg8 7.f5 Kf8 8.Kf6 Kg8 9.Ke7) 7.Kg7 and the f pawn advances.

1. f4 is a very bad move as after 1...Kf6! White doesn't have the f4 square for the king and black will use the defensive manoeuvre seen on the example 4.3

4.5) White is better (winning in fact). His king is centralized and the threat of Kc5 and Kb6 is a constant headache for black. Furthermore, he has the opposition if black runs out of pawn's moves.

4.6) 1...g5 2. g4! white just imitates black and after 2...h6 3.h3! black will have to move his king and the game will be over soon. For instance 3...Kf6 4. Kd5 or 3...Kd6 4. Kf5 and white will start picking up pawns.

4.7) Black draws. His plan is fairly simple: Keep the king on a7 or b7 (you will see later why) and the rook on the first or second rank to start checking white after the king tries to support the pawn. After 1...Rh2 2.Kg6 (threatening to free the rook) Rg2+! 3.Kf5 (3 Kh6 Rh2+!) Rh2 4.Kg4 Rh1 5.Kg3 Rh6! White hasn't made any progress.

4.8) Black loses after 1...Kc7?? 2. Ra8!



Diagram 10: black to play

Keep this position in mind as your opponent can go for it. After 1...Rxb7 (what else?) 2.Ra7+ and 3. Rxb7 the game is over.

4.9) This position is called the "Lucena position" and it doesn't work with the a and h pawns (you will know why after checking the answer)

After 1.Rd1+! Ke7 2.Rd4!! (if 2.Rd5 Ke6 and 2.Kc7 Rc2+ 3.Kb6 Rb2+ 4.Ka7 Ra2+ goes nowhere) 2...Ra1 3.Kc7! Rc1+ 4.Kb6 Rb1+ 5.Kc6 Rc1+ (5...Ke6 6.Rd6+ Ke7 7.Rd5 and Rb5) 6.Kb5 Rb1+ 7.Rb4 black runs out of checks.

Important

This is a position to keep in mind: **the rook must be placed on the 4th rank!**

4.10) The idea of 1...Ra6! is to stop the king's penetration into the 6th rank.

The position is a draw as after 1...Ra6!! (1...Ra5? 2.Ke6 Ra1 3.Rh8+ Kc7 4.d6+ Kc6 5.Rc8+ Kb6 6.d7 winning) 2.Rb7 Rh6 3.d6 Rh1! (once the pawn advances black is ready to start with the checks) 4.Ke6 Re1+ 5.Kd5 Rd1+ and white can't make any progress

Important

After the pawn advances to the 6th rank, the weaker side starts checking.

5. Model world champions: learn from the best players

In this chapter we will analyse positions from the best chess players of all time: the world champions.

Why study world champion's games?

If you wanted to improve, let's say at soccer, what kind of games would inspire you to watch and learn from?

The same applies to chess. Furthermore, world champions have changed the game by introducing new ideas and defining trends in the opening.

You might think that games from world champions are too hard to understand as they require a lot of opening, middlegame and endgame knowledge.

True, that's why we will focus on their main ideas or critical positions. And you will realize that quite often simple moves and basic ideas are played by

world champions as long as they are strong moves!

The goal of this chapter is to provide you with an overview of some of the players that changed the game of chess. We will only focus on some of the world champions given the extent of the book. Needless to say, a whole book could be written about each one.

We hope that what you have learnt so far will help you to better understand some of the masterpieces of all time.

We will start with from Robert James Fischer.

Robert James Fischer was born in Chicago, United States, in 1943 and became the eleventh world chess champion. His victory over the tenth world champion Boris Spassky in Reykjavík, Iceland (played between July-August 1972) was a worldwide event as it was seen as a fight between the American and Soviet system (Boris Spassky was representing the Soviet Union).

His style was normally quiet with the white pieces, trying to exploit small advantages in endings.

However, when he was given the chance to attack he would not hesitate. Like in the following game against the strong American GM Reuben Fine:

Fischer, Robert James - Fine, Reuben

New York New York, 1963



Diagram 1: white to play

5.1) There is no need to point out that white's position is absolutely

dominating despite being 2 pawns down. Still, chess requires precision till the end. How can white force a quick win (hint: you just need to find 2 strong moves)?

Let us see a few ideas played in the 05th game from his match against Boris Spassky:

Spassky, Boris V (2660) - Fischer, Robert James (2785)

World Championship 28th Reykjavik (5th game), 20.07.1972



Diagram 2: White to play

The position is somewhat balanced. Both sides have some weaknesses in their pawn structures and white cannot make very good use of his bishops as the centre is closed.

5.2) Spassky played the interesting move 1. a4!? and Fischer replied 1...a5!?. Can you explain what the positional idea of 1. a4 is and the pros and cons of 1...a5?

After 10 moves the following position appeared:



Diagram 3: White to play

5.3) After 1. Qf3 Kg8 black's position is more active but not yet winning.

Spassky erred with 1. Qc2. Why is this bad (hint: overprotection can sometimes be bad)?

The final game we will see from Fischer is probably his most famous one, a masterpiece he played against Donald Byrne when he was only 13 years old!

On move 17 Fischer moved his bishop from g4 to e6, leaving his queen en prise:

Byrne, Donald - Fischer, Robert James

New York, 1956



Diagram 4: white to play after 17...Be6!!

5.4) As we can see, combinations played by world champions are not always easy or obvious to see. The best way to understand this position is to visualize the reasonable moves white has (also called candidate moves).

a) Does white win a piece after the safe looking 18. Qxc3?

b) After 18. Bxe6 black can force mate. How?

c) After the safe looking 18. Bd3 both pieces on b6 and c3 are under attack. How can black solve this problem?

d) Byrne took the queen with 18. Bxb6. How did Fischer continue after 18... Bxc4+ 19. Kg1?

Fischer said that his play was inspired by Capablanca, a Cuban player born in 1888 who was the third world champion between 1921 and 1927. His style

was solid, straightforward and he had an excellent endgame technique. He was possibly the toughest player to beat in chess (he only lost 34 games in his adult career!)

He won comfortably against his predecessor Emanuel Lasker by winning 4 games and remaining undefeated.

Capablanca, José Raúl - Lasker, Emanuel

World Championship 12th Havana (5th game), 29.03.1921



Diagram 5: Black to play

In the above position Emanuel Lasker (second world champion) should have played 1...Kf6 and although he is an exchange down for a pawn, he could hope to get some drawing chances as the white king is exposed.

5.5) Instead he played the safe looking 1...Kf8?? Why is this bad?

Lasker, Emanuel - Capablanca, Jose Raul

World Championship 12th Havana (10th game), 08.04.1921



Diagram 6: Black to play

In this balanced position, white has more active pieces but an isolated pawn on d4 that might become weak in the long term. Black's bishop is under attack and b7 might fall after it moves, so the reasonable moves here are 1...Ba6 or 1...Bc6. Capablanca did not like 1...Ba6, possibly because the bishop does not seem to do much on the a6-f1 diagonal.

5.6) Instead he played the move 1...Bc6!?. How do you evaluate the position after it?

Later on Capablanca made use of his technique, exchanging some pieces and reaching the following position:



Diagram 7: Black to play

5.7) Why is black winning and how should he play Lasker's move, 1. Ke2?

Capablanca lost his second world championship match against the Russian player Alexander Alekhine (1892-1946), a fearsome attacking player, in Buenos Aires 1927. It is said that the "invincible" Capablanca underestimated his opponent and did not prepare seriously for the match. Learn from the world champions, even from their mistakes!

He still managed to win some pretty games in the match, amongst them this very instructive knight vs. bishop endgame:

Capablanca, José Raúl - Alekhine, Alexander

World Championship 13th Buenos Aires (29th game), 14.11.1927

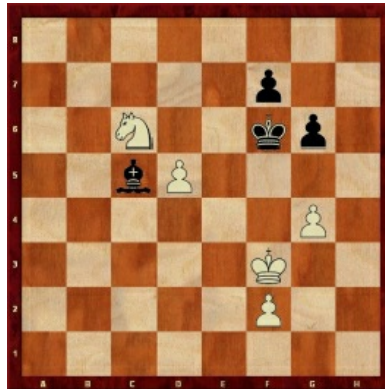


Diagram 8: black to play

5.8) As we have studied in chapter 4, white is a pawn up but far away from a victory. Had Alekhine played waiting moves like 1...Bd6 the result would have been unclear. Instead why does 1...Kg5 lose (hint: knight forks can be deadly in this kind of positions)?

Apart from Robert Fischer's success, chess was dominated by the Soviet chess school in the second half of the 20th century. Amongst them, there was a young champion called Anatoly Karpov (born in Zlatoust, Russia 1951) who became the twelfth world champion in 1975 (at the age of 24 years old) until 1985.

His solid, positional style reminds us of José Raúl Capablanca.

However, when given the chance to attack, he would not hesitate. Like every strong player, he strived to play what the position required!

Let us take a look at his pretty win against world championship contender Viktor Lvovich Korchnoi:

Karpov, Anatoly (2700) - Kortschnoj, Viktor (2670)

Candidates final Moscow (2nd game), 1974



Diagram 9: white to play

In this position black is 2 pawns up but white has a strong attack. Black has just played Bc6. White has many tempting moves.

5.9) Why is 1. Nxf6+ exf6 2. Qxh7+ not so strong?

Karpov played the fantastic 1. e5!!



Diagram 10: position after 1. e5!!

The game continued 1...Bxd5 2. exf6 (threatening mate on g7) exf6 3. Qxh7+ Kf8 4. Qh8+



Diagram 11: position after 4. Qh8+

And now we can see one the points of 1. e5. The e-file is open and after 4... Ke7 5. Nxd5+ Qxd5 6. Re1+ white will win a rook, so Korchnoi resigned.

5.10) What is the problem with the natural looking 1... dxe5 (hint: remember that taking on h7 leads nowhere as the king goes to e7)?

Karpov played a series of world championship matches against his successor, Garry Kimovich Kasparov (born in Baku, Azerbaijan in 1963). Their first match in 1984 was cancelled due to its length (it lasted 5 months, and 48 games were played). The final result was 5 wins to 3 in favour of Karpov (40 games were drawn)

Karpov started dominating until Kasparov stroke back. The 9th game was quite instructive.

Karpov, Anatoly (2705) - Kasparov, Garry (2715)

World Championship 31st - Moscow (9th game), 05.10.1984



Diagram 12: black to play

5.11) This endgame (bishop vs. knight) was reached after 46 moves. Who is better and why?

After 46...gxf4 Karpov played the unexpected 47. Ng2!?



Diagram 13: position after 47. Ng2!?

5.12) What is the positional idea of this move (hint: note that 47...h3 is bad as after 48. Nf4 white will end up winning both the h5 and h3 pawns)? Why is this better than the natural 47. gxf4?

We will finish this chapter with 2 of the greatest tactical and attacking players of all time: Garry Kimovich Kasparov and Mikhail Tal.

Garry Kimovich Kasparov (born in Baku, Azerbaijan in 1963) was the thirteenth world champion (1985-1993) and is considered by many to be the greatest player of all time, together with Robert James Fischer.

His rivalry with Anatoly Karpov (they played 5 matches for the world title) is considered to be the greatest ever.

Garry was a very dynamic player, always looking for active positions. His feeling for the initiative was second to none.

Before playing against Karpov in 1984 he had to beat the seventh world champion Vasily Smyslov in a match. Let us take a look at the critical point of their ninth game:

Kasparov, Garry (2710) - Smyslov, Vassily (2600)

Candidates final Vilnius (9th game), 1984



Diagram 14: White to play

Kasparov played the surprising 14. Qxc3!?

5.13) What were the 2 other alternatives and why is 14. Qxc3 the better move?

In the 1987 match Kasparov chose a more positional opening, the English. However, his tactical vision was as strong as usual:

Kasparov, Garry (2740) - Karpov, Anatoly (2700)

World Championship 34th-Seville (8th game), 02.11.1987



Diagram 15: white to play

5.14) In this position, black is materially better (2 pieces for a rook), but with uncoordinated pieces and a weak king. How did Kasparov finish the game in 1 move?

Kasparov continued to be a top player until his retirement in 2005.

Particularly impressive were his wins with black, counterattacking at any possible time:

Adams, Michael (2741) - Kasparov, Garry (2804)

Linares 22nd Linares 08.03.2005



Diagram 16: white to play

5.15) In diagram 16, we have a typical Sicilian defence with opposite side castling. How do you assess the position?

5.16) Adams tried the defensive 22. Nb3. Why is this losing?

Mikhail Tal (born 1936 Riga, Latvia – died 1992 Moscow, Russia) was the eight world champion for only 1 year (1960-1961).

However, he became one of the most popular world champions thanks to his extremely creative and tactical play.

In many of his games he would not mind having his king in the centre while trying to mate his opponent!

Tal, Mihail - Kolarov, Atanas S

WchT U26 Reykjavik, 1957



Diagram 17: white to play

White is a piece down and with a king in the centre. Nevertheless, his king is safer than it looks like (the d-file and the a5 square are covered by the queen) and his pieces are all active.

5.17) Tal played the fantastic 23. Ng6+! What is the main tactical point of it?

The below simultaneous game shows us his sharp style:

Tal, Mihail - NN

Stuttgart simul Stuttgart, 1958



Diagram 18: White to play

5.18) Black has just played 15...Rxf1 waiting for the natural 16. Rxf1, but Tal played something else. How did he quickly win?

Tal became world champion when he was only 23 by beating the sixth world champion Mikhail Moiseyevich Botvinnik (born 1911 in Kuokkala, Russian

Empire - died 1995 in Moscow, Russia). He managed to break Botvinnik's solid style by creating complications at all cost.

Tal, Mihail - Botvinnik, Mikhail

World Championship 23rd Moscow (17th game), 26.04.1960



Diagram 19: Black to play

Black is 2 pawns up and he should be able to consolidate and defend his position after 39...Ka8 (note 39...Qxe2 leads to mate after 40. Rxb7+ Ka8 41. Rb8+ Ka7 42. Qb6#).

5.19) But as we know, defending is always harder than attacking. How did Botvinnik lose after 39...Qd5?

Tal, Mihail - Botvinnik, Mikhail

World Championship 23rd Moscow (7th game), 29.03.1960



Diagram 20: White to play

5.20) In the above position, how did Tal simplify the position to reach a better endgame (hint: the h5 knight isn't so badly placed after all)?

Answers

5.1) Fischer played 1. Rfe1+! (1. Rae1 is also winning) Kd8 (1...Bxe1 2. Rxe1+) and then 2. Qg3!! (2. Qb2 was also possible but less straightforward). The point is that the queen is deviated from the e7-h4 diagonal and after 2... Qxg3 white checkmates with 3. Bf6. 2...Qe7 3. Rxe7 is hopeless for black.

5.2) After 1. a4 Spassky wanted to play 2. a5 and after 3. axb6 axb6 the b6 pawn becomes weak.

Fischer's 1...a5 stops 2. a5 but leaves black with a weak pawn on b6 (ironically: what he wanted to avoid). However, white's a4 pawn remains on the board and became under attack after 2. Rb1 Bd7! so it's an eye for an eye! The position remains dynamically balanced.

5.3) After 1. Qc2?? Bxa4!! 2. Qxa4 (2. Qc1 Qxe4 is also hopeless) Qxe4 black threatens mate on e1 and g2 (remember how strong double attacks are). Mate is unavoidable.

As you can see, even world champions like Spassky can blunder!

5.4) a) No, since after 18. Qxc3 Qxc5! 19 dxc5 Bxc3 20. Bxe6 Rxe6 black is a pawn up and his pieces are better developed.

b) 18...Qb5+ 19 Kg1 Ne2+! 20. Kf1 Ng3+ 21. Kg1 (otherwise mate on e2) Qf1+! 22. Rxf1 Ne2#



Diagram 21: position after 22... Ne2#

We can see a famous mating pattern we studied in chapter 1

c) 18...Nb5! attacks white's queen on a3 and after 19. Bxb6 Nxa3 white's position is hopeless

d) After 19...Ne2+! 20.Kf1 Nxd4+! 21.Kg1 Ne2+ 22.Kf1 Nc3+! 23.Kg1 axb6 24.Qb4 Ra4! 25.Qxb6 Nxd1 black has a rook and 2 bishops for the queen plus the initiative so Byrne could have resigned there.

Here is the whole game:

1.Nf3 Nf6 2.c4 g6 3.Nc3 Bg7 4.d4 0-0 5.Bf4 d5 6.Qb3 dxc4 7.Qxc4 c6 8.e4 Nbd7 9.Rd1 Nb6 10.Qc5 Bg4 11.Bg5 Na4!! 12.Qa3 Nxc3 13.bxc3 Nxe4 14.Bxe7 Qb6 15.Bc4 Nxc3! 16.Bc5 Rfe8+ 17.Kf1 Be6!! 18.Bxb6 Bxc4+ 19.Kg1 Ne2+ 20.Kf1 Nxd4+ 21.Kg1 Ne2+ 22.Kf1 Nc3+ 23.Kg1 axb6 24.Qb4 Ra4 25.Qxb6 Nxd1 26.h3 Rxa2 27.Kh2 Nxf2 28.Re1 Rxe1 29.Qd8+ Bf8 30.Nxe1 Bd5 31.Nf3 Ne4 32.Qb8 b5 33.h4 h5 34.Ne5 Kg7 35.Kg1 Bc5+ 36.Kf1 Ng3+ 37.Ke1 Bb4+ 38.Kd1 Bb3+ 39.Kc1 Ne2+ 40.Kb1 Nc3+ 41.Kc1 Rc2# mate 0-1

5.5) After 2. Qb8+! Ke7 (2...Kg7 3. Qh8+ Kg6 4. Qh6#) 3. Qe5+! Qxe5 4. Rxe5+ white wins the knight and the game.

5.6) After 1...Bc6 2. Nxc6 bxc6 black is doing fine since white exchanged his most active piece. True, the c6 pawn becomes a bit weak but so is white's d4 pawn.

5.7) White's three pawn islands mean he has weak pawns, particularly b3 and d4. In fact, black will continue with Na5 attacking the b3 pawn. After 1. Ke2 black has 1...Rxb3! as 2. Rxb3 Nxd4+ and 3...Nxb3 wins 2 pawns for black

5.8) After 2. Ne5!! White wins more material.

White has the double threat of 3. Nxf7+ and 3. d6 Bxd6 4. Nxf7+ winning the bishop. 2...Kf6 fails to Nd7+ (another knight fork!). After 2...f5 3. d6! fxg4+ 4. Kg2 Bb6 (4...Bxd6 Nf7+) 5. d7 Kf5 6. Nc6 white will win the bishop for the pawn.

Alekhine played 1...Bd4 and after 2. Nxf7+ Kf6 3. Nd8! black cannot play 3...Ke5 as after 4. Nc6+ Kxd5 5. Nxd4 Kxd4 6. Kf4 white wins the pawn endgame.

Instructive technique from Capablanca!

5.9) The point is that after 1. Nxf6+ exf6 2. Qxh7+ Kf8 black's king will find

a shelter on e7 and the position will become unclear

5.10) After 2. Nxf6+ exf6 white can play 3. Nh5!!:



Diagram 22: black to play

Now we see the other idea of 1. e5 The fifth rank is closed to black queen. Had black's pawn been on d6, he could have played Qg5+ exchanging queens.

Black has no defence against 4. Qg7# (if 3...gxh5 4. Rg1+ Kh8 5. Qg7#). Inspired attack by Karpov.

5.11) White has a clear advantage and serious winning chances. In this structure the knight is better than the bishop because the centre is closed and the pawns on d5, a6 and b5 limit black's bishop activity.

5.12) The main point of this deep idea from Karpov is that he wants to have the h4 square for his pieces (knight or king). After 57. gxh4, white only has the f4 square.

The pawn sacrifice is temporary and white will get the h5 pawn soon. Finally, the king and knight will penetrate into black's camp.

The game continued 47... hxg3+ 48.Kxg3 Ke6 49.Nf4+ Kf5 50.Nxh5 Ke6 51.Nf4+ Kd6 52.Kg4 Bc2 53.Kh5 Bd1 54.Kg6 Ke7 55.Nxd5+ Ke6 56.Nc7+ Kd7 57.Nxa6 Bxf3 58.Kxf6 Kd6 59.Kf5 Kd5 60.Kf4 Bh1 61.Ke3 Kc4 62.Nc5 Bc6 63.Nd3 Bg2 64.Ne5+ Kc3 65.Ng6 Kc4 66.Ne7 Bb7 67.Nf5 Bg2 68.Nd6+ Kb3 69.Nxb5 Ka4 70.Nd6 and Kasparov resigned

5.13) After 14. Rxc3 Qb6 15. Rc1 the position is about equal. White has 2 bishops but his pieces are less coordinated.

14. bxa5 Bxd2 15. Kxd2 is similar to 14. Qxc3 but black gets more tempi here (see below)

After 14. Qxc3! Nxc3 (forced: if 14...Qb6 15. Qxg7) 15. bxa5 white gets a slightly better position. He has the bishop pair and the b7 pawn can become a target. Kasparov won the endgame.

5.14) After 1. Rd6! white threatens 2. Qf6+ with the idea of 3. Qxh6 and 3. Rd8. Karpov resigned as after 1...Qf7 2. Qxf7+ Kxf7 3. Rxh6 white is easily winning.

5.15) Surprisingly, the position can be evaluated as preferable for black. Even though white's rooks are well placed to attack, the h5-pawn is blocking their activity. For example, if 22. h6 g6! and now black is ready to start a counterattack on the b-file.

5.16) 22. Nb3? loses on the spot after 22...Nxc2 The point is that now white's queenside collapses. The game finished 23.Nxc5 (if 23.Qxc2 Rxb3) 23...Na3+ 24.Ka2 Qxc5! 25.Na4 (25. bxa3 Bxc3) Nc2!! 26.Kb1 (if 26.Nxc5 Rxb2#) 26...Qa3 and Adams resigned (if 27.Qxc2 Rfc8 28.Qd2 Qxa4 black gets a winning attack)

5.17) After 23. Ng6+ black cannot play 23...hxc6 as 24. Rh3+ Kg7 25. Qxa2 loses the queen.

After the game continuation 23.Ng6+ Kg7 24.Nxf8 Kxf8 25.e5! material is about equal (2 pawns and rook vs. knight and bishop) but white's position is totally dominant.

5.18) After Rxh1 16.gxf6! Rxd1+ 17.Nxd1!! (attacking both a5 and g7) Qxd2 18.fxg7! white will get his queen back

5.19) After Qd5?? Tal won with 40.Rxa6+!! Kb8 (40...bxa6 41.Qb6+ Ka8 42.Qxa6+ Ra7 43.Qxc8#; 40...Kxa6 41.Qb6#) 41.Qa4! with the threat of 42.Ra8+ Kc7 43.Qa5+ Kc6 44.Qb6#. Botvinnik resigned as he had no defence.

5.20) Tal played 26.Rxd7+! and after 26...Nxd7 27.Rxd7+ Kxd7 28.Nf6+

Kd6 29.Nxg8 white has 2 knights for a rook and won the game.

Conclusion

So as we reach the end of this book, we can make a summary of what we have learned:

- The importance of tactics
- How to improve your strategy
- What you should know and memorize about endgames
- Why you should have model players to improve

Tactics are the basics of chess, something you will need to master whenever you play or analyse a game. That is why we believe you should focus most of your time on it (around 50 % of your time).

To improve your strategy, we advise you to become familiar with few positions and play them often. If you do not have an opening repertoire, then try to slowly build one.

We have not spoken about openings in this book as we do not believe this is the critical point to start with to become a better player.

Try to play as few positions as possible (for example, only the Sicilian defence with 1...c5 against 1. e4) and you will realize how often you will get similar positions and how your experience and study will start telling you how to better place your pieces.

As for endgames, try to only memorize the positions you find hard to understand during a game. In any case, you must ALWAYS check that your knowledge is suitable for the particular position you have over the board.

We encourage our reader to solve endgames studies to keep on progressing on this stage of the game. Endgame studies are quite useful as they help you develop your endgame and tactical skills at the same time.

Regarding the world champions, try to get 1 or 2 “model players” to study his games deeply and use as a reference.

First of all, you need to find a playing style that suits you. Try to find whether

you like quiet and slow games or whether you are always looking for the sharp, aggressive or best move. It will be very helpful to know whether you have a preference for positional or tactical play. After that, you should pick up a model player between the world champions based on the similarity between your style and his.

As for the openings, we suggest to focus on few openings. So here it will be quite useful to get a second “model player” based on your opening preference. It could be the same one you chose for his playing style, but select the model players separately.

Finally, remember your goal is not to imitate anybody, just be inspired by them and work hard to be the best player you can!