

Zenón Franco

Planning

move by move

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About the Author

Zenón Franco is a grandmaster from Paraguay, now living in Spain. He represented Paraguay, on top board, in seven Chess Olympiads, and won individual gold medals at Lucerne 1982 and Novi Sad 1990. He's an experienced trainer and has written numerous books on chess.

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Introduction

“First the idea and then the move!” Miguel Najdorf used to say in his habitually enthusiastic fashion. That statement is the perfect summary of planning in chess.

The topic of planning in chess is very broad. It can consist of improving the position of a piece, neutralising an opponent’s piece, beginning an attack on the king, trying to weaken your opponent’s structure, improving your own structure, deciding which piece to exchange etc. In this book we’ll look at many different scenarios.

Emanuel Lasker wrote: “An intelligent plan makes heroes of us, and absence of plan cowards and dullards”. Another well known saying is “Better a bad plan than no plan at all”, along with a number of others which agree on the importance of playing with a definite plan in mind.

I was surprised to discover that there are very few books on this topic. There are certainly sections on planning in classics such as *Play Like a Grandmaster* by Alexander Kotov, *School of Chess Excellence* by Mark Dvoretsky, *Understanding Chess Middle Games* by John Nunn, etc., and grandmasters refer to the topic when they comment on their games.

I believe that the reason why there are so few books about planning is because fortunately chess is so broad and complex that the plans are many and varied. It’s impossible to deal with all the plans in one book, because they are practically infinite; fortunately almost every position is different and requires a “new” plan.

That doesn’t mean that we are powerless. Initially we can certainly learn from certain typical positions and structures, where there are general plans which serve as a guide. For the remaining positions we can improve by training in planning through the analysis of different kinds of positions and so the improvement of such an important aspect of the chess struggle will come about.

It’s a continual learning process; finding the correct plan is not something that often leaps out at us immediately. It’s necessary to evaluate fully the requirements of the position and then work out a plan of action, without neglecting the tactics needed to implement it.

Something we must remember is that just as important as making progress with the plan itself is putting difficulties in the way of our opponent’s plans. Of course, the optimum outcome is to combine both of these in one single move because “It’s better to be rich and healthy than poor and ill”, as the Russian saying goes.

When I learnt to play chess in my childhood, most of the books and magazines with

annotated games contained a lot of prose and few variations. There were exceptions, of course, but most of them, even the ones which were considered good, had annotations containing few lines of analysis; they were useful, but incomplete. The reader could be left without an answer to his questions, especially as regards tactics.

At present the opposite seems to be more often the case; thanks to the progress made with analysis engines, there is more and better analysis, but fewer verbal annotations.

Of course there are positions where the tactical element predominates almost exclusively, but this is not so in the majority of cases.

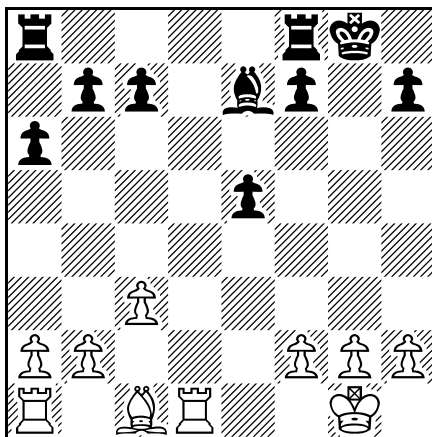
Objectively, modern day annotations can be more accurate but for someone who wants to learn, looking at variations with very little explanation is also inadequate.

When writing this book, I include, as I always do, comments by the players themselves, as they are an important source of information.

As ever, all phases of producing this book were pleasurable, from the initial stage of thinking about how to structure and organise it, searching my memory for useful examples, looking in books and magazines, and finally writing and revising it.

To finish off this introduction I want to comment on a position which made an impact on me when I was a youngster.

E.Znosko-Borovsky-A.Alekhine
Paris 1933



White to Play

Alekhine's impressive account of the current position and the plans he conceived is as follows:

“The endgame position thus reached is by no means as easy to conduct – especially for

the first player. Black's plan of campaign, which will prove a complete success, is divided into the following parts:

- 1) Exchange of one pair of rooks.
- 2) Bringing the king to e6, where he will be protected from a frontal attack by the king's pawn and be used to prevent the entrance of the remaining white rook at d7.
- 3) By operating with the rook on the open g-file and advancing the h-pawn, force the opening of the h-file.
- 4) After this the white king, and eventually the also the bishop, will be kept busy in order to prevent the intrusion of the black rook at h1 or h2.
- 5) In the meantime Black, by advancing his a- and b-pawns, will sooner or later succeed in opening a file on the queenside.
- 6) As, at that moment, the white king will still be on the other wing, the first player will not dispose of sufficient forces to prevent the final intrusion of the enemy's rook on his first or second rank.

Granted that if White had, from the beginning, realised that there actually existed a danger of losing this endgame, he probably would by extremely careful defence have saved it. But as it happened, Black played with a definite plan and White only with the conviction that the game must be a draw. And the result was a very instructive series of typical stratagems much more useful for inexperienced players than the so-called brilliancies."

This description left me in a daze; my level of play didn't allow me even to begin to understand the number of plans referred to. Let's look at the rest of the game, with some of Alekhine's annotations, which are in inverted commas.

16 ♖h6

"Certainly not an error but a proof that White has not grasped as yet the spirit of the position. Otherwise he would not have been anxious to 'force' the exchange of one pair of rooks which, as mentioned, is quite welcome to the opponent."

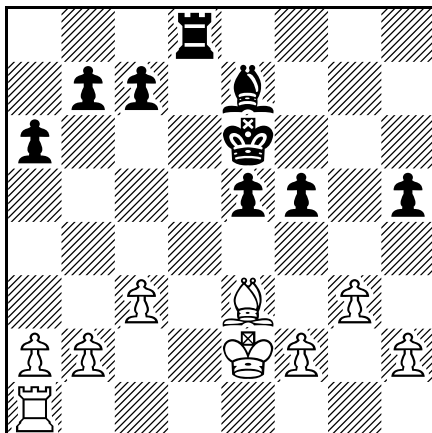
16...♖fd8 17 ♖f1

"A more aggressive line starting by 17 g4 would perhaps be advisable. But Black would also in this case maintain opportunities for complicating matters after 17...f6, followed by ...♖f7-e6, etc."

17...f5 18 ♖xd8+ ♖xd8 19 g3

"19...f4 was a serious threat."

19...♖f7 20 ♖e3 h5 21 ♖e2 ♖e6

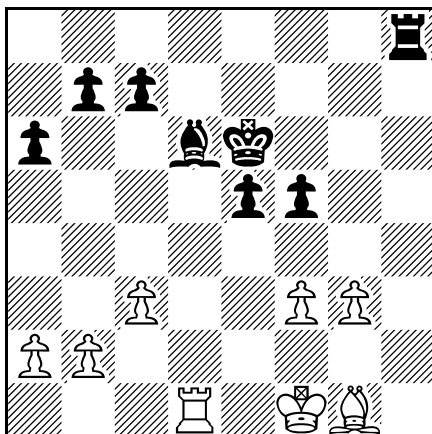


And Alekhine has completed the second part of his plan.

22 ♖d1 ♜g8!

“If now 23 h4 then 23...♜g4, with the strong threat 24...f4. White is therefore practically forced to allow the opening of the h-file.”

23 f3 h4 24 ♗f2 hxg3 25 hxg3 ♜h8 26 ♗g1 ♗d6 27 ♚f1



And stages three and four are now also completed.

27...♜g8 28 ♗f2 b5!

“Now Black shows his cards. In the event of White leaving his pawn position on the queenside intact, the attacking plan would be ...c5-c4 followed by ...a5 and ...b4; his next pawn move shortens the procedure.”

29 b3? a5 30 ♚g2 a4 31 ♜d2

“In the case of 31 b4, the intention was 31...♜c8 32 ♗c5 ♜a8!, followed by ...♜a6-c6, etc.”

31...axb3 32 axb3 ♜a8

On reaching the fifth and sixth part of his plans, Alekhine commented, “Thus Black has reached the position he aimed at when starting this endgame. His positional advantage from now on will prove sufficient for the victory, especially as he always can succeed in forcing the advance of his king by pinning (sic) the white rook through (sic) the defence of one of the weak pawns.” The rest of the game was as follows.

33 c4 ♖a3! 34 c5 ♙e7 35 ♖b2 b4 36 g4 f4 37 ♕f1 ♖a1+ 38 ♙e2 ♖c1 39 ♖a2 ♖c3 40 ♖a7 ♕d7 41 ♖b7 ♖xb3 42 ♖b8 ♖b2+ 43 ♕f1 b3 44 ♕g1 ♕c6 45 ♕f1 ♕d5 46 ♖b7 e4! 47 fxe4+ ♕xe4 48 ♖xc7 ♕f3 49 ♖xe7 ♖xf2+ 50 ♕e1 b2 51 ♖b7 ♖c2 52 c6! ♕g3! 53 c7 f3 54 ♕d1 ♖xc7 55 ♖xb2 f2 0-1

Impressive! I felt as if I were at an art exhibition, looking at a picture that the connoisseurs were praising but whose beauty was beyond my grasp. And although I had some doubts about it, who was I to object to it?

Many years later, Dvoretsky in his book *School of Chess Excellence 3*, after praising Alekhine’s play, questioned part of Alekhine’s account and instead of 17 ♕f1 suggested 17 f4!, when 17...e4? is bad because of 18 f5!, isolating the e-pawn.

In that way White could have blocked the first stage and thus incidentally all of the subsequent stages of Alekhine’s plan. Dvoretsky’s evaluation was that the initial position was completely equal, and it’s possible to add that after 17 f4 White’s position is easy to hold, contrary to what Alekhine expressed.

The conclusion we can draw is that, even though it’s bad to play without a plan, in general it’s neither necessary, nor possible, to make long-term plans.

Finally we have some thoughts of world champion Magnus Carlsen, who has a similar opinion. In an interview in Denmark, last May, talking about long and short plans he said, “There are often short term plans, but sometimes (quoted by Bent Larsen) ‘to have no plan is better than having a bad plan’... it basically means that often in chess you have to take it a bit move by move... Often there are just so many possibilities that you cannot think more than a couple of moves... Most of the time you have some ideal situation, some sort of dream that you want to obtain from that particular situation but I very, very rarely have any long-term plans, it’s all short term.”

“You have constantly reevaluate the situation; that’s one of the things that sets apart the best players from the second best, the ability to adjust to new situations all the time.”

And about finding the best plans and moves he noted, “The good players find the right plans most of the time because they have studied these patterns over hundreds and thousands of hours”, and he emphasized the importance of tactical element of the game to implement those plans.

In this book we will frequently discuss planning in the context of these patterns.

Book Structure

The book is constructed in the 'move by move' format, which allows greater reader interaction. It contains 74 games, or parts of games, and is divided into five chapters:

1) Typical Structures

This consists of 14 examples, in which we'll examine some typical structures, two in greater depth, where the plans are more well known.

2) Advantage in Space

This made up of 10 examples, in which we'll analyse different situations where one side has a space advantage.

3) Manoeuvring Play

The 16 examples here deal with various kinds of manoeuvres and regroupings.

4) Simplification

This section features 14 examples where we'll look at situations in which it's necessary to decide which piece to exchange and which to keep.

5) Attack and Defence

This is the longest chapter, with 20 examples in which we'll analyse a range of situations which concern the placement of the kings.

Naturally almost all the chapters are interconnected, as it's unusual in chess for one single theme to be predominant.

Chapter Five

Attack and Defence

In this final chapter we'll see examples in which attack, defence and counterattack all play leading roles at particular moments. Naturally this is not decided in advance, but arises from the logic of the position. An attack is launched when it's judged that there are sufficient preconditions to justify it.

As Lasker's games have demonstrated, unless the defender's position is very compromised, an effective counterattack, the fruit of a good defence, can have as much success as a direct attack.

As well as having the right idea it's important to choose the right moment for carrying it out. In Game 55 Black mistimed his counterplay and White gained a small advantage, which increased when Black conceived a faulty plan of counterattack on move 12 and then increased the tension to White's benefit.

White's play also serves to provide examples of favourable or unfavourable exchanges on moves 24 and 25 as well as of manoeuvring play, for instance on moves 18, 29, 34 and 36. The game culminated in a devastating demolition of the Black monarch's defences.

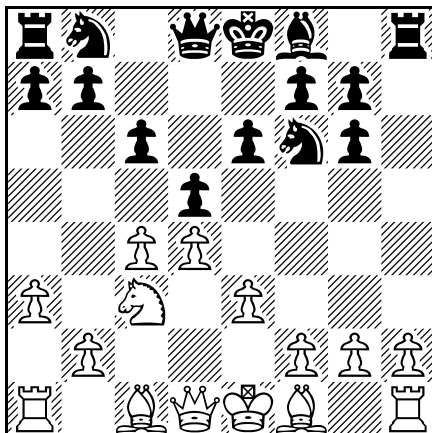
Game 55

V.Topalov-V.Kramnik

World Championship, Elista (Game 9) 2006

Slav Defence [D12]

1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 f3 f6 4 e3 f5 5 c3 e6 6 h4 g6 7 xg6 hxg6 8 a3



Question: What a passive move! Don't you agree?

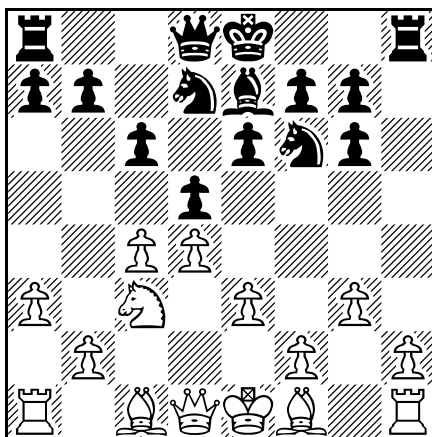
Answer: It's a surprising move. It seems passive, but isn't really. It's not just to prevent ...♙b4. As we'll see, in the event that White plays c5 at some point, it's also useful to be able to support this advance with b4. With a similar idea, later White played 8 ♖b1.

8...♞bd7 9 g3

To some extent this is consistent with 8 a3. Other 'normal' moves are 9 ♙e2 and 9 h3. With 9 g3 allows a future ♙g2.

9...♙e7

The position is very flexible and there are many possibilities of equal value. 9...♙d6 was the main alternative.



10 f4

This was the ambitious idea behind the two previous moves. White prevents the counter-blow ...e5 and plans 11 c5, since he has a free hand to operate anywhere on the board.

Once White has played 11 c5 the response 11...b6 is not to be feared, since White would support his pawn with 12 b4, which would be very solid thanks to 8 a3.

We should note, in passing, that White's more advanced-pawns would be situated on black squares, restricting the enemy bishop.

The text move didn't become very popular and later White started employing other moves, such as 10 b3, followed by ♗g2 or 10 ♗d3.

From the competitive point of view White's idea, starting with 8 a3, was a success in this game. Although he initially reacted well, the exceptionally strong player with the black pieces is soon practically shut out of the game and his play is notably weak in the next phase.

10...dxc4!

Although for now this gives up the centre, Black plans to attack the white centre later.

Another idea would be to create more central tension with 10...c5, attempting to show that 10 f4 has weakened White's position.

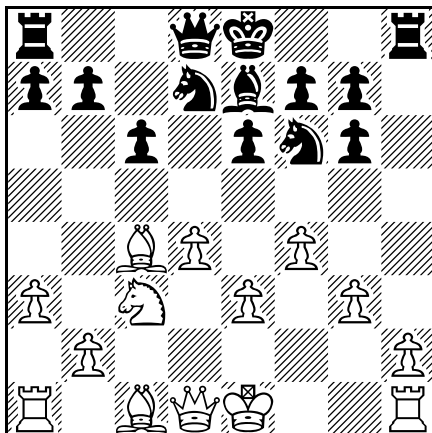
Exercise: How would you play in that case?

Answer: It would be ineffective and inconsistent with the ambitious 10 f4 to initiate mass exchanges with 11 dxc5. After 11...♗xc5 12 cxd5 ♗xd5 13 ♗xd5 ♖xd5 14 ♗xd5 exd5, the weaknesses in White's position compensate for the isolated pawn on d5.

Instead, 11 cxd5! is better and, after 11...exd5 12 dxc5 ♗xc5 13 ♗g2 ♗ce4 14 ♗xd5, there is no adequate compensation. Meanwhile after 11...♗xd5 12. ♗g2! (better than embarking on hectic complications with 12 e4 cxd4), the opening of lines means that the g2-bishop becomes important.

Instead 10...0-0 allows White implement his idea and eliminate the central tension with 11 c5. Cheparinov mentioned another possible possibility in *New in Chess*: 11 cxd5 cxd5, and, after stabilising the centre and secure in his bishop pair and his space advantage, White can play 12 g4, when Black has problems organising his pieces. Then if Black responds to g5 with ...♗h5, White would play ♗e2.

11 ♗xc4



11...0-0?!

This move is too passive. After conceding the centre to the opponent, it's important to quickly counterattack, before White can fortify and consolidate his central pawn majority.

Despite its bad appearance, 11...c5! is interesting, to answer 12 d5 with 12...♘b6! 13. ♙b5+ ♚f8. This is with the idea of sacrificing a pawn after 14 dxe6 ♜xd1+ 15 ♙xd1 c4!, etc, but not 12...exd5?! due to 13 ♘xd5, and once again the opening of the centre favours White.

Black could also prepare his counterblow with 11...♘b6! and after 12 ♙e2 c5 13 dxc5 ♜xd1+ 14 ♘xd1 ♙xc5 15 b4 ♙d6 16 ♘f2, White has a slightly more pleasant position, as Cheparinov notes, but no more than that.

Exercise (simple): How to continue now?

12 e4

Answer: Of course. If it's possible, the centre should be occupied in good circumstances like this.

12...b5?!

It will soon be apparent that this counterattack isn't best. Once again it was essential the attack the centre with 12...♘b6 13 ♙e2 c5!.

Exercise: Where should White retreat the bishop?

13 ♙e2

Answer: Here we see an unexpected benefit of 8 a3. As ...b4 isn't to be feared, the bishop doesn't need to go to d3 to protect the e4-pawn and can go to a more promising diagonal, h1-a8, weakened by 12...b5.

13...b4 14 axb4 ♙xb4 15 ♙f3 ♜b6?!

The cause of Black's defeat is clearly that he failed to find the appropriate moment to apply the correct plan, which was to attack the white centre. Also ineffective is 15...♖b6?! 16 0-0 c5, since after 17 ♖a2! the white centre remains stable.

It was best to play 15...c5!, when 16 e5 ♗d5 isn't to be feared. More logical seems 16 ♙e3, but with 16...♖b6 (Bareev recommended 16...♙e7) 17 dxc5 ♗c4 Black would still gain good counterplay.

16 0-0 e5?

This increase in the tension is now counterproductive, because White has no problems supporting his centre, and the inevitable opening of lines will favour White.

16...c5 is not satisfactory either, because 17 e5 is strong. For example 17...♗d5 18 ♗xd5 exd5 19 ♙e3 cxd4 20 ♙xd4 ♙c5 21 ♙f2 and Black has difficulties protecting all his weaknesses.

The exchange sacrifice 17... ♙xc3 18 bxc3 ♗d5 19 c4 ♗c3 20 ♙d3 cxd4 21 ♙xa8 ♖xa8 doesn't provide enough compensation. A good response is 22 ♖f2, defending e2 and intending 23 ♙a3, or immediately 22 ♙a3.

16...♖fd8 17 ♙e3 c5 is no better, in view of 18 e5 (18 d5 is also attractive, when 18...♙xc3?! 19 bxc3 exd5 is weak due to 20 e5!) 18...cxd4 and now both 19 ♙f2 and 19 ♗a4 ♙b5 20 ♙xd4 are promising for White.

Given how delicate the position is, and taking into account the last line above, it was preferable to play 16...♖ad8, with the same idea of 17...c5 but without sacrificing the exchange.

Exercise: How did White reply?

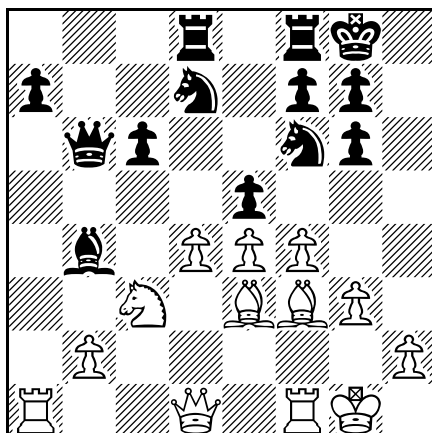
17 ♙e3

Answer: Of course, the most natural move is often the best. There is no need to activate Black's position with 17 fxe5 ♗xe5.

17...♖ad8

Exercise: Isn't it better to exchange in the centre with 17...exd4?

Answer: It isn't clear that this is better, White would reply, not with the immediate 18 ♙xd4, due to 18...♙c5, and White's pressure is reduced, but with the intermediate move 18 ♗a4!. After 18...♙b5 19 ♙xd4 Black has problems protecting his weaknesses and neutralising White's strong bishop pair.



Exercise: How should White continue now to support his centre?

18 ♖a4

Answer: This eliminates the problems caused by the pin along the g1-a7 diagonal and gives greater freedom to the white pieces.

Question: But doesn't it leave the knight badly placed?

Answer: It's true that for the time being the knight is left on the edge of the board, but it's more important to gain mobility for the other pieces. The knight can always return to the centre later, without any great problems, given that Black can't exploit its absence from the centre.

18... ♜b8

Exercise: What now?

19 ♜c2

Answer: This was the idea of the previous move. White's plan is to regroup, enabling the rooks to occupy the appropriate central files.

19... ♟xf4

Instead, 19... ♟xd4 20 ♟xd4 ♞b6 is no better, in view of the simple retreat 21 ♟e3, after which Black must protect his weak points, while White organises the advance of his kingside pawn majority.

Exercise: How to recapture?

20 ♖xf4

Answer: Of course, opening the f-file with a gain of time. This is better than 20 gxf4, which would allow Black more play with 20...♙fe8, threatening 21...♗xe4 22 ♖xe4 ♗f6.

20...♙b7 21 ♖ad1

There are several promising move here. White opts to bring his inactive rook to the centre, before taking any active measures.

21...♙fe8

Exercise: How can White make progress now?

22 ♖g5

Answer: White improves the position of his bishop, and creates the threat of 23 e5.

22...♖e7 23 ♖h1

It was already possible to recentralise the knight with 23 ♗c3, but there's no hurry. White first makes a prophylactic move, leaving the knight the option of going to c5 in some lines.

23...♗h7 24 ♖e3

White follows the well-known rule that side with a space advantage and greater mobility should not exchange pieces.

Nevertheless, the concrete line 24 ♖xe7 ♙xe7 25 e5 ♙c8 (better than 25...♗b8 26 ♗c5) 26 ♗c3, with the idea of ♗e4, was also favourable.

24...♖g5

Exercise: Once again the same dilemma - to exchange, or not?

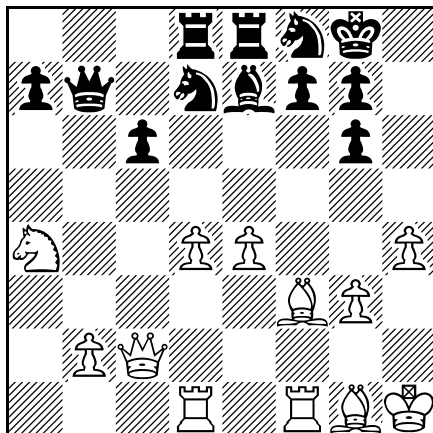
25 ♖g1!

Answer: Here it's definitely best to follow the above-mentioned rule. Instead, 25 ♖xg5 ♗xg5 26 ♖g2 ♗e6 would unnecessarily improve the black position.

25...♗hf8 26 h4

This and the next move are interchangeable. White forces start to advance.

26...♖e7



Exercise (simple): What's the best continuation now?

27 e5

Answer: The complement of the plan initiated with 26 h4, forcing an unpleasant retreat and allowing the light-squared bishop to come powerfully into play.

27...♘b8 28 ♘c3

Just as on move 21, before entering any complications White decides to recentralise his inactive piece. Now Black must take into account the advance d5, which would follow 28...♘e6 for example.

28...♙b4 29 ♖g2

Once more White is fighting for control of the d5-square.

29...♖c8

If 29...♘fd7, preventing 30 d5 due to 30...♘xe5 then, as well as the promising moves 30 h5 and 30 ♘e4, White has the elegant regrouping manoeuvre 30 ♘d5! a5 31 ♘f4, etc, and in a few moves the knight has moved from the distant point a4 to the heart of the struggle.

30 ♜c1

The x-ray on the black queen creates an unpleasant situation for Black. 'Normal' moves such as 30 ♘e4 or 30 ♙e3 were also appropriate.

30...♙xc3?!

A weak move. This exchange can only favour White, but Black's position was already very difficult. 30...♘e6 allows 31 d5!, winning material, but even the most tenacious move, 30...♖b7, didn't hold out much hope.

31 bxc3

The logical recapture, strengthening the centre White and thus freeing White's hands. At the elite level of these two players, the white position is winning.

31...♘e6 32 ♙g4

Over the following moves White is able manoeuvre at will until he has attained the maximum productivity of all his forces. All Black can do is wait.

32...♖c7 33 ♜cd1 ♞d7 34 ♚a2

Further x-ray pressure, this time on the weak point at f7. This phase of the game reminds me of the situation in a game of tennis where one player has the initiative and is able to force the player on the defensive to run from one side of the court to the other to chase down shots.

34...♞b6

Exercise: What's the best plan now?

35 ♜f3!

Answer: White needs to double rooks on the f-file. 35 ♜d3 with the same idea is also effective.

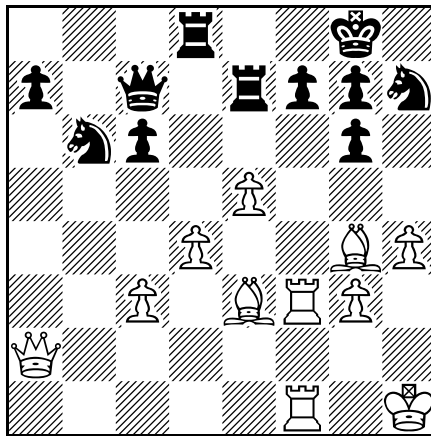
35...♞f8

If 35...♞d5 then 36 ♜df1 ♜d7, and now the central pawn majority can start to advance with decisive effect after 37 c4 ♞b6 38 d5! cxd5 39 ♙xb6 and 40 cxd5.

36 ♜df1 ♜e7 37 ♙e3

White wastes no opportunity to improve a piece. Now the threat is 38 ♙g5. There are other strong moves, but this is the best.

37...♞h7



Exercise (simple): How can White bring the game to a conclusion?

38 ♜xf7!

Answer: And the game is effectively over. If 38...♜xf7 then 39 ♜xf7 ♚xf7 40 ♙e6.

38...♞d5 39 ♜7f3 1-0

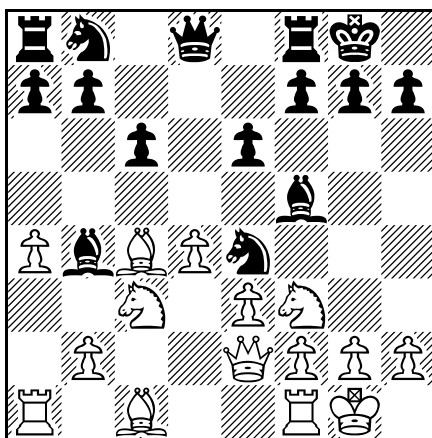
“Distrust natural moves” was a saying of Richard Réti’s. On move 13 of Game 56 Black made a natural retreat, when the most accurate move was an untypical one which would have prevented White from improving his position in the centre. Black was left slightly worse and his inferiority became more serious when shortly after, on move 16, he failed to counter appropriately and White was able to consolidate his central control and then manoeuvre more easily.

Once Black took the risk of opening the position, White’s bishop pair helped him gain a decisive attack.

Game 56
V.Topalov-B.Xiangzhi
Sofia MTel Masters 2008
Slav Defence [D19]

1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 ♘f3 ♘f6 4 ♘c3 dxc4 5 a4 ♙f5 6 e3 e6 7 ♙xc4 ♙b4 8 0-0 0-0 9 ♚e2 ♘e4

An old move, played in the first half of the twentieth century. Black holds up White’s e4-advance. The main line is 9...♘bd7 10 e4 ♙g6 11 ♙d3, which has been played many times, including games in important events such as the Topalov-Kramnik match for the world title in 2006.



10 ♘e5

“The most ambitious move,” commented Topalov.

Question: Is this better than 10 ♙d3? That’s the most usual move, isn’t it?

Answer: Yes, but opening theory is very dynamic. Other common moves are 10 ♘a2 and

10 ♖xe4.

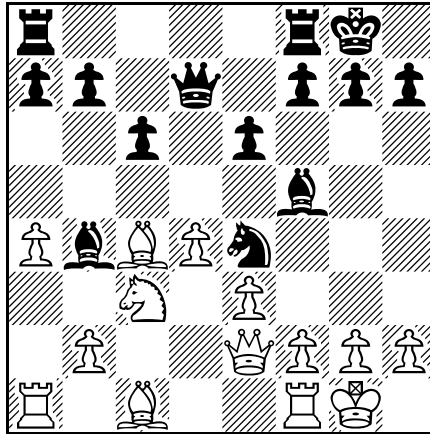
Topalov commented after this game that “in that case White can only aspire to a minimal advantage” Nevertheless Topalov’s move has never become very popular.

10...♗d7

Accepting the pawn with 10...♗xc3?! 11 bxc3 ♕xc3 12 ♖a3 ♕b4 as played in the game B.Sahl-E.Parr, Gausdal 2001, is risky due to 13 ♖b3 a5 14 e4, according to Topalov. After 14...♕g6 there are several attractive continuations, such as 15 ♖h3 ♗xd4 16 ♖xg6 hxg6 17 ♖d1 ♗e5 18 f4 ♗c5+ 19 ♕e3 ♗e7 20 f5, with an unstoppable attack.

Accepting the pawn with 10...♕xc3?! 11 bxc3 ♗xc3? is also bad due to 12 ♗b2.

11 ♖xd7 ♗xd7



Exercise: How to proceed now?

12 ♖a2

Answer: This was the idea behind 10 ♖e5. White avoids further exchanges and prepares the creation of a strong pawn centre with f3 and e4. The knight on a2 will have no difficulty in coming back into play later.

12...♕e7

The bishop retreats to its most natural square.

An important game (albeit a blindfold one) continued 12...♕a5 13 b4 ♕c7 14 f3 ♖d6 15 ♕b3 ♕g6 16 e4 and White has implemented his plans, gaining a “pleasant space advantage,” to quote Topalov. In L.Van Wely-B.Gelfand, Monte Carlo 2006, Black played 16...♖ae8, seeking to strike back with ...f5, but this didn’t work out well. Instead 16...a5 is interesting.

13 f3 ♖f6?!

The most natural retreat, but it allows White’s plans to proceed unhindered.

It seems more precise to play 13...♖d6 and after 14 ♕b3 challenge the white centre with

Planning: Move by Move

14...♙g6 (14...♙f6 15 ♖d1 e5 was suggested by Topalov) 15 e4 ♔h8, preparing ...f5 or ...f6. This was played soon after in a game E.L'Ami-E.Bareev, Amsterdam 2008.

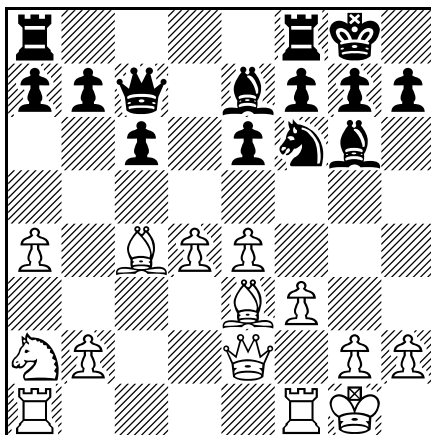
14 e4 ♙g6

Of course 14...♚xd4+?? loses to 15 ♙e3.

15 ♙e3

The strong white centre leaves Black's minor pieces short of squares. Topalov is making it difficult to advance with either ...e5 or ...c5.

15...♚c7



16 ♞c1

Question: Isn't it better to activate the rooks with 16 ♖fd1 or 16 ♖fc1?

Answer: Possibly. White opts to recycle his worst-placed piece. The knight is headed for d3, from where it controls the key squares c5 and e5. Now Black has to come up with a plan, and this is your next exercise.

Exercise: What would you play as Black?

16...a5?

Answer: This is a common move in the Slav and in this instance it serves to hinder one of White's ideas, which was to gain space with a timely b4. However, this is a position where concrete measures are required, rather than moves of a general nature.

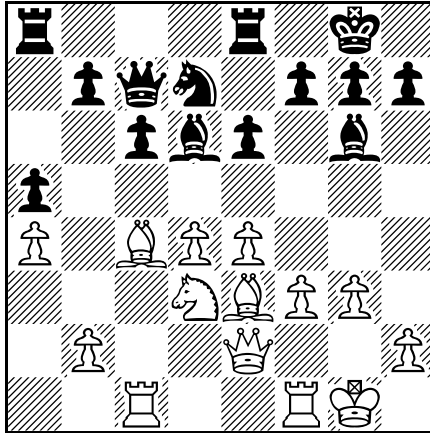
The counterblow 16...c5! was an acceptable way to relieve some of the pressure. After 17 ♞b3 cxd4 18 ♞xd4, with the idea of ♖ac1, Black can play 18...♙d6 19 g3 ♚e7, with a reasonable position.

17 ♞d3 ♞d7 18 ♖ac1

The x-ray on the queen hinders the counter-blows ...e5 and ...c5.

18...♖fe8

Bu plans the typical Slav manoeuvre to recycle the g6-bishop with ...f6 and ...♗f7, but first it's necessary to protect the pawn on e6.

19 g3 ♗d6**20 ♘f4!**

This prevents Black's idea, and threatens 21 e5, followed by 22 h4.

20...e5?!

"Opening the position when the opponent has the bishop pair never is never a good idea" commented Topalov in *New in Chess*. Topalov considered that the lesser evil was 20...♗xf4 21 ♗xf4 ♖b6, considering that White would still be better. 21...e5 22 dxe5 ♘xe5, followed by ...♗h8 and ...f6 was another possibility, although also with some advantage to White.

Question: Hmm, but in that case doesn't the position open up for White's bishop pair.

Answer: Certainly. But, as we'll see, the situation in the game is more than favourable for Black.

21 ♘g6 hxg6

Exercise: How to continue now?

22 f4!

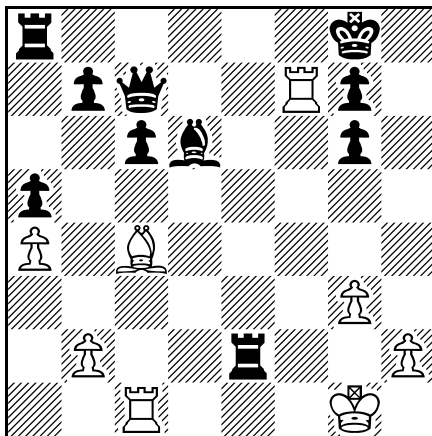
Answer: White's plan is to become active on the f-file and especially target the f7-square.

22...exd4

The complications following the sacrifice 22...exf4 23 e5 ♘xe5 favour White, who can

Planning: Move by Move

exploit the weakness of f7 after 24 dxe5 ♖xe5 25 ♙xf4 ♗xe3 26 ♙xf7! (even better than 26 ♙xe3 ♗xf4) 26...♗xe2



Exercise (simple): What's the strongest move here?

Answer: 27 ♙f4+! (not 27 ♙xc7+?? ♗h7 and the advantage evaporates) 27...♗f7 (27...♗h7 allows mate.) 28 ♙xf7, winning.

23 ♗xd4

White's advantage is considerable (perhaps winning, according to Topalov). Black has great difficulty defending against the pressure on f7.

23...b6?!

A miscalculation. Black wants to play 24...♗c5 (if 23...♗c5 immediately then 24 ♗xf7+), but can't afford to waste a single tempo. It's hard to see a much better continuation.

Exercise (simple): Which move is the most consistent with the plan indicated above?

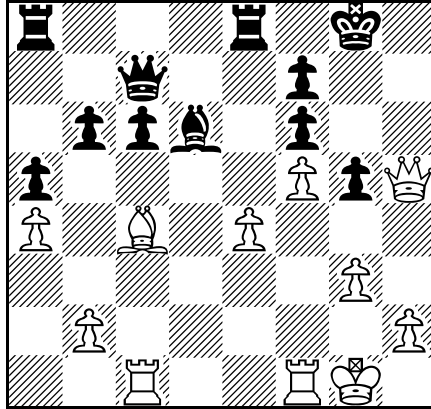
24 f5!

Answer: Of course. This strong move would also be the response 23...♗f8.

24...g5 25 ♗h5 ♗f6

Or 25...♗e5 26 f6 g6 (or 26...gxf6 27 ♙xf6) 27 ♗h6 ♗f8 28 ♗xe5, eliminating the defender of g6 and winning.

26 ♗xf6 gxf6



Exercise (simple): and now?

27 ♖g6+

Answer: This brutal move was overlooked by Bu. Now his position collapses.

27...♙f8 28 ♚xf6 ♜e5 29 ♚xg5 ♚e7 30 f6 ♜d4+ 31 ♜f2! 1-0

The quickest. If 31...♜xf2+, not 32 ♙xf2? ♚c5+, but 32 ♙f1!

Creating a central outpost that can serve as a base for the pieces and opening diagonals for the bishops are both logical plans often worth considering. However, as pawns can't move backwards, it's also necessary to evaluate the cost of losing control of a square.

In Game 57 Black rejected a particular pawn advance on move 13, delaying it to move 18. White was able to show this wasn't the ideal moment.

Of course the way forward for White wasn't obvious. It required a complex struggle in which White held a space advantage and had greater mobility. Then, thanks to a tactical error by Black, White's advantage became substantial, although it still required some time to convert.

Game 57
F.Caruana-M.Carlsen
Shamkir 2014
Berlin Defence [C67]

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♙b5 ♘f6 4 0-0 ♘xe4 5 d4 ♘d6 6 ♙xc6 dxc6 7 dxe5 ♘f5 8 ♚xd8+ ♙xd8

Vladimir Kramnik made probably the greatest contribution to opening theory of the last twenty years when he successfully defended this endgame several times against Garry Kasparov in their match in London 2000.