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JACOB AAGAARD

EVERYMAN CHESS

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CHAPTER ONE

The Endgame

There are two kinds of endgame books. Firstly, those dedicated to the theory of the endgame, often with a very limited number of pieces. The most famous of these is probably Averbakh's five-volume *Endgame Manual*, about 25 years old but recently reissued in corrected and computer-checked form on DVD from *Chess Assistant*. Also important are *Informator's* big encyclopaedias of chess endings; the analysis in these books is of variable quality, but they are still an excellent source of material. Of the single volume books most notable is *Dvoretsky's Endgame Manual* (Russell Publications 2003), written by the world's best chess trainer, Mark Dvoretsky. Also excellent is Müller & Lamprecht's *Fundamental Chess Endings* (Gambit 2002). There are many other good books too, but these are the ones I recommend to anyone interested in theoretical endgame positions.

The second type of books are dedicated to more complex endings. Here the most famous are *Endgame Strategy* by Mikhail Shereshevsky, *Technique for the Tournament Player* by Mark Dvoretsky and

Artur Yusupov, and *Rate Your Endgame* by Mednis (edited by Crouch). These books are concerned with the art of endgame thinking, and the current book is considered as an extension of these earlier works.

In a kind of limbo, there are also untheoretical works such as *Endgame Virtuoso* (Smyslov), *Endgame Secrets* (Lautz), *School of Chess Excellence 1 – The Endgame* (Dvoretsky), *Practical Rook Endings* (Korchnoi), and many more. I mention these four because I can warmly recommend them, along with all those listed above. They are excellent books every one of them.

What I have tried to do in this book is present seven basic modes of thinking and endgame technique, which are helpful for understanding and playing the endgame well. I have explained them to the best of my ability and tried to give some examples. It is my belief that abstract rules alone have no value to anyone. They need both to be explained and seen to work in practice. The main point here is that *a rule is only valuable if you understand why it is a rule*. It is hard to grasp

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the practical application of a rule (such as 'a knight on the rim is dim') unless you comprehend the background to the soundbite. No one in their right mind would approach a position with a bag full of rules and then switch off their common sense. Rather, rules are just useful tools, in the same way as concentration, theoretical knowledge and the ability to calculate variations accurately.

One of the biggest misconceptions among chess players is the axiom: *the exception that proves the rule*. What rubbish! There are no exceptions to rules, or they would not be rules. 'All swans in the world are white' is a rule, but once we discover a green swan, the rule is no longer valid. In chess, the main point is that a rule has a limited reach. Often they are called principles or guidelines, which is in some ways more meaningful. 'A knight on the rim is dim' simply means that the knight has a limited power on the edge of the board. Just look at it! On the edge it can only control four squares, fewer still nearer the corner, whereas in the centre it can control eight. Furthermore, the central squares are usually more important than those on the edge of the board. This is all it means. So how can such a principle be useful to the improving player? Well, it is not so difficult. In order to place your knight on the rim you need it to have a specific function. Otherwise you may soon find that instead of a knight you have a limp goat. The same goes for the principles and techniques explained in this book.

The idea behind this book is not to introduce a lot of new ideas and knowledge, though something might slip by, but to help the improving player under-

stand the principles already presented by others – such as Shereshevsky, Dvoretsky, et al. – through deeply annotated and analysed examples. Therefore you will find one chapter outlining seven technical tools for use in the endgame (and elsewhere), followed by a chapter with more advanced examples, primarily involving the minor pieces. The techniques in Chapter 2 are of universal importance and will always be present in the mind of a strong endgame player. The themes in Chapter 3 are of a more specific nature. The strength of the bishop pair, for example, obviously has little relevance in the knight endgame.

My agenda in this book is to show how endgame technique is used in practice by strong players, and in doing so, I will try to explain, at length, how the different moves are found. With words when the moves should be understood abstractly, and with variations when these are appropriate. Often these two aspects will arise in the games in that order. First a general plan is drawn out, the pieces are manoeuvred and the position is improved to the maximum; then comes a moment when confrontation should no longer be postponed, and concrete action is taken. This often requires exact calculation, and the answer to why one move is better than another can be explained in no better way than through analysis and variations. This is because the positions become more tactical in nature once direct attacks on the opponent's pieces are executed, or once a passed pawn is pushed forward in an attempt to promote it. If the passed pawn is promoted the game will probably be won. If a knight is captured for

free, the game is probably won as well. Assumptions have little use in determining if this is really the case, or if the pawn can be promoted at all. Concrete calculation will have to do the job.

What is the endgame?

Before launching into these seven crucial techniques it is appropriate to discuss what the endgame really is. And in that respect, what the middlegame is, and also the opening. There is not really any easy answer. Let me try to explain the complexity with the following position:

Spassky-Fischer

Sveti Stefan (4th match game) 1992



It would be easy to argue that this is a position from the opening, and in some respects it is. Black still needs to find a good square for the king and to get his rooks into play. The easiest way to define the opening phase is to say that it is where the players develop their pieces. On the other hand, the position could also be called a middlegame position. White has fully developed his forces and is ready to improve his position with the pawn moves f2-f3 and e3-e4 (as he played in the game). So, maybe this is a

middlegame without queens?

The third option is that this is an endgame. For what is most characteristic about the endgame? That there is no attack against the king. In the endgame the king can play actively as a piece and only seldom will it be threatened with mate. Another common feature of the endgame is the promotion of passed pawns. This is not coming up right now, but on the other hand there are pawnless endings as well. What makes this an ending in some respects is that pawn weaknesses play a major part in evaluating the position and creating a plan. But then, dynamics play a lead role as well.

Normally this would be called a queenless middlegame, but it is a definition without much meaning. What is important is the position itself and how it is going to be played. The king's safety is enhanced by the absence of queens, but with all the other pieces on the board there are still tactical ideas like 13...0-0? 14 ♖xe6! and White wins a pawn.

So there is really no satisfactory definition of the position. And this will be the case with many positions, which are in no man's land between the opening and middlegame, or middlegame and endgame. In his *Endgame Manual* Mark Dvoretsky considers an endgame to be a position where neither of the players has more than one piece left. Although he includes rook and bishop vs. rook, it is not a bad definition from a practical point of view. Positions where neither player has more than one piece can hardly be anything else than an endgame. But what about positions with two pieces each? Again it seems to me hard to imagine a situation where this

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would not be an endgame. But once both players have three pieces, it becomes a grey zone. Sometimes this, sometimes that.

This book is dedicated to practical endgame technique. This means that it does not include endgame theory (see above) nor tactical endgames (for which John Nunn's *Tactical Chess Endings* is hereby recommended, as is Müller & Meyer's *The Magic of Chess Tactics*, both are excellent books on the subject, though the latter also has a lot of middlegame positions). The idea of the book is to illustrate the technical aspects of complex endings (most often starting with more than one piece each) in as clear a fashion as possible.

Theoretical and tactical endgames – the majority of which are known as studies – are fascinating and every player should devote all of his life to them, or at least as much of it as he can spare, but they will not be found here for simple reasons. I believe that my style of writing is well suited for writing exactly this kind of book, and that the books by Shereshevsky, Dvoretzky, Mednis, etc. cannot fully teach the principles of endgame technique to a young and aspiring player. If for no other reason, than because the instructive material is limited.

While trying to do so I will only rarely go into positions where there is a doubt whether it is really an endgame or not. But as such I do not want to discuss where the endgame begins and the middlegame ends. For the practical player it has little importance. He knows when the king is safe or not, and he will not march his king to the centre after move 40, irrespective of what the position

looks like, and get instantly mated (as a 1970's chess computer did, according to legend).

The main difference between the middlegame and the endgame is not just the absence of queens (therefore queenless middlegames), but the absence of consistent mating threats. This makes the king a valuable piece in the endgame. Julian Hodgson has said that the king is worth four pawns in the endgame.

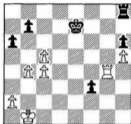
Keep your strongest piece active!

This could easily have been one of the seven techniques, in which case it would have been the first. It is the governing principle behind endgame play: *If possible, then activate your strongest piece.*

When we need to work with this in practice Hodgson's definition comes in handy. The order of command in the endgame is: Queen over rook, rook over the king, and the king over minor pieces. I have tried to explain this to some students in terms of domination. A queen can easily dominate a rook, a rook can dominate the king, and the king can dominate the minor pieces. But somehow not everyone feels that this is a satisfactory definition. Nonetheless, it is the reason for the ranking order between the pieces in the endgame. As we shall see, it is more important to play with the king than with the minor pieces in a minor piece endgame. Similarly, while this book will not cover rook endgames, it should be noted that the two best endgame writers, Dvoretzky and Mednis, both have *The rook should always be active* as the governing principle of the rook endgame. An example is the following:

Timman-Karpov

Belfort 1988

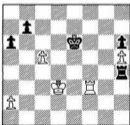


White is a pawn up but his rook will soon be forced into a passive position and Black will have the opportunity to gain an advantage.

38...♖f8 39 ♖g1 ♖f4 40 ♖f1 ♔e6 41 ♔c2!

Timman realises that if he clings on to the queenside pawns then Black will advance his king to assist the passed f-pawn. Then the black rook will be freed to roam the board unequaled.

41...♗xc4+ 42 ♔d3 ♗xb4 43 ♖xf3 ♗h4



44 ♖f1!

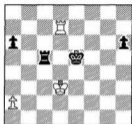
Again Timman shows his quality. The rook needs to be activated and this can

only be achieved on the b-file.

44...♗xh5 45 ♖b1 ♗xc5 46 ♖xb7 ♔d5 47 ♖d7+

Stronger was 47 ♖h7!

47...♔e5



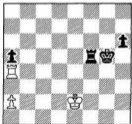
48 ♖e7+?

White plays without a plan. The correct move was 48 ♖h7 when he would still have reasonable drawing chances. After the text move the white rook lacks a clear function, while Black is relieved from using his rook passively.

48...♔f5 49 ♖f7+ ♔g6 50 ♖f4

The white rook is less active here, and the black rook is still not tied down to passive defence of the pawns.

50...♔g5 51 ♖a4 a5 52 ♔e2 ♖f5



Everything has gone wrong for White.

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The black pawns have advanced one rank before being blocked, while the white rook on a4 is now hardly active at all. Black managed to take advantage of this change of events and bag the point.

53 ♖a3 ♗g4 54 ♜c3 h5 55 ♜c8 h4
 56 ♜g8+ ♜g5 57 ♖a8 ♗g3 58 ♗f1
 ♗f3 59 ♜c8 ♗e3 60 a4 ♜g4 61 ♜c5
 h3! 62 ♜e5+ ♗f3 63 ♜h5 ♗g3 64
 ♗g1 ♜xa4 65 ♜g5+ ♗h4 66 ♜c5
 ♜g4+ 67 ♗h2 a4 68 ♜c3 ♜g2+ 69
 ♗h1 ♜g4 70 ♗h2 ♜g2+ 71 ♗h1 ♜g3
 72 ♜c4+ ♜g4 73 ♜c3 ♜b4 74 ♖a3
 ♜g4 75 ♜c3 ♗g5 76 ♗h2 ♜h4 0-1

This is not a book on rook endings, but the principle from this game that the rook should be activated first, and only then the king, is universal. Pieces should be activated in descending order. This means queen before rook, rook before king, and king before minor pieces. And hence, of course, queen or rook before minor pieces.

But now, after having failed to answer the question of what an endgame really is, though at least given one good piece of advice, I will turn to the seven techniques which have an universal character.

CHAPTER TWO

Seven Technical Tools

In this chapter we shall scrutinize seven important techniques in the endgame. They are not related to any specific material constellation. They are attitudes and understandings which relate to most endgames. They are more mindsets than rules, and their aim is only to assist players in making correct decisions in tournament play, not to save him from having to think at all.

1) Schematic thinking

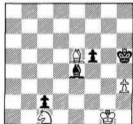
Good endgame technique requires the ability to think schematically. This means *being able to search for specific positions or placements of the pieces in a given position, and then try to reach them by means of calculation.* Great endgame specialists such as Ulf Andersson have a tendency to think this way. When they see an endgame position they do not think in terms of my move, his move, my move, etc., but look for the perfect placement of their pieces. This might sound like a plan, but there is a difference, however slight. A plan is a progression in a position: I will do this and then I will do that. Schematic thinking is when you see, for example, that

when my knight is there and his bishop is there, then I will win like this, or I will achieve that. Then you would work on a plan of how to carry it out. Schematic thinking comes before planning. A fortress is a perfect sign of schematic thinking: if the pieces are placed like this, then I cannot lose.

The following excellent endgame illustrates how White, in a few positions, thought schematically and then used a simple plan to push his agenda forward.

Danielsen-A.Petrosian

Schwerin 1999



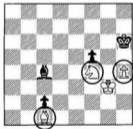
The situation in this endgame is at

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once clear. White has the advantage of a knight against a pawn, as well as a passed pawn of his own. Nevertheless, winning the endgame will not be easy and, as we shall see, it requires what some would call 'fantasy positions' and others simply *schematic thinking*. In his attempt to win the position White will manoeuvre his pieces to specific squares, while Black will try to build a fortress. It turns so out that White has one way to storm this fortress and a very attractive one indeed.

57 ♖f4

White needs to formulate a plan in order not to lose whatever winning chances he retains here. The correct plan runs as follows: get the pawn to h4 and the knight to f4; together these form a barrier against the black king. Then the white king will be free. Meanwhile the white bishop will eye the c-pawn, and Black will not be able to do anything constructive on the light squares.



This is the target position. White now starts his manoeuvring.

57...♗h4 58 ♗h2 ♖d5 59 ♖d3

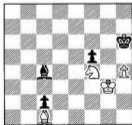
Phase one is in action. White is on his way to promoting his pawn.

59...♗c4

Black has no illusions about blockad-

ing the h-pawn. After 59...♗c6 60 ♖e5 ♗c4 61 ♗c1 ♗b7 62 ♖g6+ ♗h5 63 ♖f4+ ♗h4 64 ♗b2, the threat of 65 ♗f6 mate forces Black to retreat with 64...♗g5 when White achieves the first part of his plan with 65 ♗g3 and 64 h4+. Since White's plan can only be postponed not prevented, Black is not interested in making his grandmaster colleague perform mini-operations in order to achieve his initial objectives. This is a matter of taste. Some strong players would argue that you should make your opponent fight for every inch to put him under as much stress as possible, while others would argue that you should not waste your own energy on delaying the critical position which will arise all the same. Time remaining on the clock – and what time control the game is played under – obviously also play a part here. But as soon as there is the slightest possibility of resistance, where the opponent will have to work to find a plan or a certain move, he should always be given the chance to mess up.

60 ♖e1 ♗b3 61 ♖f3+ ♗h5 62 ♗g3 ♗d5 63 ♖d4 ♗e4 64 ♗c1 ♗d3 65 ♖e6 ♗c4 66 ♖f4+ ♗g5 67 h4+ ♗h6



The first part of the plan has been

achieved. White has prevented all kinds of counterplay against the h-pawn and can now use his king actively rather than defensively. So what is White's winning plan? Let us have a fresh look at the position. The knight is excellently placed on f4, the bishop hangs back keeping an eye on the c-pawn, while the h-pawn is ready to march on, once the signal is given (this could be the black king trying to get into the game again somehow). The black bishop cannot counter White's ambitions, as these can be pursued on the dark squares.

However, Black does not necessarily need active counterplay. If White advances the h-pawn it will be difficult to defend. For instance, if 68 h5? Black will instantly play 68...g5! when there is no adequate defence against ...f7-xh5 with an immediate draw. White could just sit tight and move his king around hoping something turns up before the game is drawn under the 50-move rule. But what would this be? The concept of *Do not hurry* (see page 64) cannot really be attributed to this position. Black will not feel any extra pressure if White does nothing or takes things slowly; all he can do is move the bishop aimlessly around anyway.

So what does White want to achieve? Basically he wants to break the blockade of the h-pawn, but how? If the knight moves away then the black king comes to h5. If the bishop gets as far as f8, then the white king would have to stay behind with the c-pawn, and it will be difficult to get the h-pawn through to the eighth rank. Still, this plan should not be abandoned immediately, since it is currently the best one we have found.

It is here that schematic thinking once again comes in handy: if the white king was on h8 then ♔g7 would be mate. As Black can do nothing White wins by simply moving the king to h8.

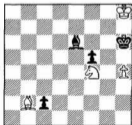
68 ♖b2 ♖a6 69 ♖f2 ♖b7 70 ♖e3 ♖c6 71 ♖d4 ♖b7 72 ♖e5 ♖c8

If Black does not protect his f-pawn (electing to keep the white king out of g8 by placing the bishop on the a2-g8 diagonal) White wins simply by taking the f-pawn, returning for the c-pawn and then promoting his h-pawn (having the right coloured bishop for the corner).

73 ♖f6 ♖d7 74 ♖f7 ♖c8

74...♖h7 was a try, again with the intention of preventing the king from going to h8, but after 75 ♖h5 ♖h6 76 ♖f6 f4 77 ♖c1 Black cannot save the game anyway. Black might still his opponent cause some practical difficulties with 77...♖e8+? 78 ♖xe8 ♖h5 79 ♖xf4 ♖xh4 80 ♖f6, when White has to prove that he can mate with knight and bishop against king. Of course there would be no insecurity from Danielsen – his hand would move the pieces without thinking – but against a club player this would be a worthwhile try.

75 ♖g8 ♖e6+ 76 ♖h8 1-0



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The final position deserves a diagram. Black has no defence against ♔g7 mate next move.

Schematic thinking is very often the difference between a good player, who feels lost in the endgame, and a great endgame player, who is exercising his superiority. The Swedish grandmaster Ulf Andersson is a great endgame player, famous all over the world for being one of the most cautious of all professional chess players in the history of the game, but also for his exceptional endgame technique. It cannot be said with any certainty which player had the best endgame technique in history. Some would say Capablanca, others Botvinnik, Rubinstein, Korchnoi or Karpov. But nobody would be insulted if you claimed it was Ulf Andersson. He is greatly respected even among the Russians for his fine understanding of the endgame.

In the following game Andersson imposes his technique on a strong grandmaster colleague in a position that at first looks quite even. But then his opponent makes an inaccuracy and White suddenly has a reason to believe there is something worth fighting for. Black displays good defence in phases, but when he gets short on time the pressure becomes too much, and he ends up in a very difficult endgame, which turns out to be too difficult for him to defend in practice.

U. Andersson-Se. Ivanov

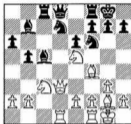
Swedish Team Championship 2000

1 ♖f3 d5 2 d4 ♖f6 3 c4 e6 4 g3 dxc4 5 ♗a4+

A favourite of Andersson. Not very dangerous for Black, but equally not at

all risky for White.

5...♗bd7 6 ♗g2 a6 7 ♖c3 ♞b8 8 ♗xc4 b5 9 ♗d3 ♗b7 10 0-0 c5 11 dxc5 ♗xc5 12 ♗f4 ♞c8 13 ♗ad1 0-0 14 ♖e5



The natural progression in the position is towards simplification. White has no more promising plan here since he has no way to attack the black pawn structure on the queenside, and there are no other weaknesses in Black's position, apart from the potential holes on the sixth rank.

14...♗xg2 15 ♗xg2 ♖xe5 16 ♗xe5 ♗xd3 17 ♞xd3 ♞fd8?!

After this move all possible dynamics leave Black's position and the endgame will be a long and hard journey in the desert of defence. Stronger was 17...♗c7! avoiding the forthcoming exchange on f6 which will Black give problems with his pawn structure. Then Black can come with his counterplay on the c-file with ...b5-b4, and think about trading the rooks with ...♞fd8 if he wants (not that any clear benefit seems to be achieved by this).

18 ♞xd8+ ♞xd8 19 ♗xf6!

This is the sort of winning attempt you see from Andersson when he is in

an aggressive mood.



By giving up bishop for knight White inflicts a minor weakness in Black's kingside pawn structure and creates a very tiny imbalance in the position which makes it more difficult to play, especially for Black. And as we shall see, Andersson is able to exploit his opponent's inaccuracies fully. The dynamic aspects of the position which characterise the open positions in the middlegame are no longer present, and only the minor weaknesses of the ruined pawn structure on the kingside and the weakness of the c6-square count. If you really want to look for aspects in the position beyond pawn structure, then it should be mentioned that the c-file is more important than the d-file. These kinds of small advantages have a tendency to increase in the hands of the great masters like Andersson and Karpov.

19...gxf6 20 ♖c1 ♗e7

Again this is hardly a big mistake, but it is the beginning of a bad plan. With this move we can already see the next move coming up which will cause serious long-term damage to the black position. It was better to negate the importance of the c-file with 20...♗d4?. Then

after 21 ♗d1 ♖f8 22 e3 ♗b6 23 ♗xd8+ ♗xd8 White will not have sufficient advantage to win the game. The weaknesses of the c6-square and the a6-pawn on a6 are not so relevant, as White has no way to apply any real pressure. The same goes for the h7-pawn, which cannot be attacked by the knight, while a king attack there will be easy enough to parry. White would undoubtedly continue to probe, but it will hardly be enough to cause Black serious distress. 21 ♗d1? would not achieve the desired goals for White either. Black can simply play 21...♗e5! and the direct threat of ...♗d8-d2 will give him enough counterplay. White is probably forced to weaken his position with 22 f4, after which Black should not be worse, though White might try ♗f2-d3 and a king march to the centre.

21 ♗b1!

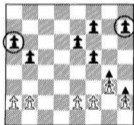
This move is truly an example of Andersson's strength in schematic thinking. His idea is to get the king to e2 in order to cover the possible penetration squares on the d-file. The white knight belongs on d3 from where it is threatening both to jump to the kingside with ♗f4-h5 (threatening f6) and to the queenside with ♗c5 or ♗b4, attacking Black's weakest points on that side of the board. Now the advantage of the c-file will become important. Black should therefore think about this and take steps to eliminate this advantage.

21...f5

This is far from being a decisive mistake, but it is the source of a lot of headaches to come. Black is playing a move that seems logical in many ways, but fails on deeper investigation of the position.

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It seems right to put the pawn on the opposite colour to the bishop and it seems right to activate the bishop. Except that this is not really what happens. After b2-b3 the bishop is shooting into thin air from f6 and the rook has no way of coming to its assistance. Black is treating the position as if it were the middle-game where activity was still important. But though time always matters in chess, this position is not a matter of dynamics. What is worst about ...f5 is that it radically weakens Black's kingside defensive formation. White now has a way to open the h-file or, by threatening to do so, provoke Black to create a further weakness. The following diagram illustrates this clearly:



We are coming close to a situation in which Black has two weaknesses (for the principle of two weaknesses see section 2 below), one on the kingside and one on the queenside. As White has no weaknesses of his own this spells trouble for Black. The right defence would have been to understand that White is planning to use his king to rule out any penetration on the d-file, in order then to get his rook to c6 and put pressure on the black position. Therefore Black should

not play for activity, but calmly retaliate by protecting the c-file with his own king.

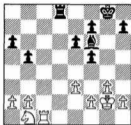
The best defence seems to be 21...♔f8 22 e3 ♕e8 23 ♔f3 ♕d7 and Black is only very slightly worse. He should not fear an endgame like 24 ♖d1+ ♕c6 25 ♖xd8 ♕xd8. Even though h7 is still somewhat fragile, this is only one weakness and can easily be defended. The a-pawn is hardly a weakness anymore: Black will play ...a5 and, with the king in the neighbourhood, has control over the streets there. For example, 26 ♕g4 is weak because Black can penetrate with his own king with far more destructive effect, but even if this were not the case, Black could always play the passive 26...♕e7 27 ♕h5 ♕f8 and White has no easy way to make progress on the kingside. The game would have been an uneventful; draw. Instead White now has a real advantage.

22 e3

White starts implementing his plan, which is to create the set-up with the king and knight (as described in the note to White's previous move), and then play h3 and g4 in order to give Black problems on the kingside. Again Black does not really seem to understand the danger this plan poses to him and so does nothing to meet it.

22...♕f6?!

In principle this is not a good square for the bishop. Black does not realise how White will place his pieces and therefore has no idea about how best to place his own accordingly. The great difficulty in defending such positions is that it is hard to guess what you need to defend against.



The player with the advantage can to some extent form his plan as he goes along, but the defender may need to anticipate the opponent's plan far in advance, often before the opponent has even conceived it himself. Here it is not easy to see where the bishop belongs, so 22...♖f8 was a more logical move.

Nevertheless, Black will have to find a set-up soon, and with very few hints given by his opponent. If Black had realised that White will play h3 and g4, as well as put the king on e2 and the knight on d3 (the last was probably the hardest to foresee), he would have understood that he needed to play ...h5 himself at some point (in order to avoid the h-pawn being targeted on an half-open h-file) and put the bishop on d6 to cover all the squares (f4, c5, b4) from which the knight might cause problems. White might choose another plan of action than in the game (though which is not easy to see) and Black would then have to react accordingly. But first of all he should defend against White's most dangerous set-up, and do so by improving the piece that needs most to be improved anyway, which is the king. Should White change his plan of action it

would still be necessary for Black to centralise the king in order to be able to meet it as adequately as possible.

In the game Ivanov decides to exchange the rooks into an unpleasant bishop vs. knight ending. This might be drawn by passive defence, but was not. So it is reasonable to say that the end-game was difficult for Black to play, and he should therefore have chosen a different set-up, as suggested above, in which White cannot make any easy progress.

23 b3

White continues with his plan.

23...♖f8 24 ♖f3 ♖e7 25 h3 ♜d5 26 ♖e2

26 g4?! would be too soon. Black is ready to play 26...fxg4+ 27 hxg4 h5 after which a draw is the most likely result. Note that lines like 28 gxh5 ♜xh5 29 ♜c6 ♜h2 30 ♜xa6 ♜h4 do not favour White at all. But most important here is the question: would White try to change the nature of the position from one of quiet manoeuvring to a race while his knight is stuck on b1? No. The knight belongs to d3.

26...♖d7 27 ♞d2 ♜e7 28 ♞f3 ♜f6

It was still possible to consider a set-up with 28...h5? 29 ♞e1 ♜d6 30 ♞d3 when White has no easy way to make progress. Black probably felt uncomfortable about the position of the rook on d5. And with good reason: this rook would be much better placed on d8. Therefore Black chose a plan in the game that involved trading the rooks.

29 ♞e1 ♜d6!

Ivanov correctly evaluates that only White benefits from having the rooks on the board.

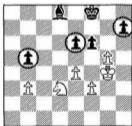
*Excelling at Technical Chess***30 g4!**

If White has a way to force a real advantage it will have to be this way, entering the knight vs. bishop ending, where Black will have to play accurately in order to survive. After 30 Qd3 Nc6 31 Nd1 Black keeps the position level with 31... Nc2+! (31... Qe7 32 Qb4 Nxb6 33 Nc1 Qd7 34 g4 would give White a real advantage) 32 Qf3 Qe7 33 Qb4 Nxb2 and Black is by no means worse. In fact White should probably think about making a draw himself.

30...fxg4!

Black correctly gets rid of his doubled pawn and now has only to live with the h-pawn as a weakness. This is acceptable only because of the exchange of rooks to come. Instead 30... Nd5 31 Qd3 Qe7 32 Ng1 gives White the prospect of penetrating on the g-file, and Black would have to play many accurate moves in order to equalise the game.

31 hxg4 Nc6! 32 Nxc6 Qxc6 33 Qd3 a5 34 e4 a4 35 Qe3 axb3 36 axb3 Qd6 37 Qf4 Qd8 38 g5 Qe7 39 Qg4 Qf8 40 f3 f6!?



After this Black is left with a lot of isolated pawns, all of them difficult to defend. White takes advantage by pene-

trating with his king, something that can no longer be stopped. However, the alternative 40... Qg7 was no walk in the park either. White would continue 41 Qh5 (otherwise Black plays 41... h6 liquidating his last major weakness) and then the passive defence with 41... Qe7 is probably not good enough for Black to be able to hold the position. After something like 42 f4 Qd6 43 f5 exf5 44 exf5 f6 45 g6 White has a clear advantage. If he gets the knight to e6 he will win; he can also provoke Black into playing ... b5-b4 , when the white king will have an easier job penetrating on the queenside later.

In the game Ivanov tries to avoid this passive, but structurally fine position, by activating his pieces at the cost of the structure. As this was move 40 it is also very possible that he overlooked White's next move, but whether his decision is objectively faulty is hard to say, since both endgames are very difficult to get to the bottom of. My conclusion is that Black can still make a draw after 40... f6!? , while there is no guarantee after 40... Qg7 , but that deep analysis would probably reveal the same conclusion.

41 Qh5!

With exceptional clarity Andersson shows what is important here and what is not. He was able to see that after 41 gxf6 Qxf6 White has no way to penetrate the black camp:

a) 42 Qc5 Qe7 43 Qh5 Qg7 and White has no obvious way to make progress.

b) 42 Qh5 Qd4! (preventing Qc5 ; the bishop is able to dominate the knight perfectly) 43 Qh6 Qg8 and again White cannot make progress.

For this reason Andersson sends his king down to take the h-pawn instead, in order afterwards to manoeuvre around the black defences. In this way tactics reappear in the endgame when an advantage is converted or when a slip is being punished.

41...fxg5

41...♗g7 42 ♔c5 ♖f7 43 ♖h6 would be the same as the game. Note that 43...♙e7 is met strongly by 44 ♖xh7! forcing Black to take on g5.

42 ♖h6 ♗g8

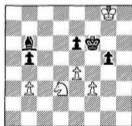
Black does not have time to counter-attack. After 42...♖f7 43 ♖xh7 ♖f6 44 ♗g8 g4 45 fxg4 ♗g5 46 ♖f7 ♖xg4 47 ♖xc6 ♖f3 48 ♖d5 ♖e3 49 ♔c5 ♙e7 50 b4 ♖d2 51 ♖c6 White will win a second pawn. The main point here is that Black cannot create counterplay against the e-pawn, as the conversion into a pawn endgame with ...♙xc5 is hopeless.

43 ♔c5 ♖f7 44 ♖xh7 ♙b6

Black is bound to lose after 44...♖f6 45 ♔d7+! ♖e7 46 ♔e5 ♖f6 47 ♔g4+ ♖e7 48 ♗g6 and White will win.

45 ♔d3 ♖f6 46 ♗g8!

The white king has discovered a new weakness in the black camp: the pawn on b5.



46...♙g1?

This move seems a little useless. What is Black trying to achieve? Again schematic thinking would have assisted Black. It is not hard to see that White will try to go to the queenside, and that Black therefore will have to play ...e5. This knowledge alone should be enough for Black to find the right move. The pawn will need to be defended, so 46...♙d4! is more accurate. After 47 ♖f8 e5 48 ♖e8 ♖e6 49 ♔b4! (White has to find this in order to pose Black any problems; if 49 ♖d8 ♖d6 50 ♖c8 ♖c6 and Black keeps his position together) 49...♙c3 50 ♔d5 ♙b2! 51 ♖f8 (White has used the attack on b5 to expose Black's second weakness, the pawn on g5) 51...♖d6 52 ♖f7 ♖c5 53 ♖f6 ♖d4 54 ♖xg5 ♖d3 and then:

a) 55 ♔c7 b4! (if 55...♖c2 56 ♔xb5 ♖xb3 57 ♖f5 ♖c4 58 ♔d6+ ♖d3 59 ♔f7 wins) 56 ♔d5 ♙c3 57 ♖f5 ♖c2 (if 57...♖e2 58 ♔e7 ♖xf3 59 ♔c6 ♖e3 60 ♔xe5 ♖d2 61 ♔c4+ ♖c2 62 ♔a5 wins) 58 ♔xb4+ ♙xb4 59 ♖xe5 ♖xb3 and White cannot win, e.g. 60 ♖d4 ♙c3+ 61 ♖d5 ♖c2 62 f4 ♖d3 63 e5 ♖e3 64 f5 ♖f4 and Black makes the draw.

b) 55 ♖f5 ♖c2 56 b4 looks simple, but Black can still create difficulties with 56...♖b3 57 ♖e6 (if 57 f4 exf4 58 ♖xf4 ♖c4 59 ♖f5 ♙g7 and White cannot win) 57...♙d4 (57...♙a3? loses by force to 58 ♖xe5 ♙xb4 59 ♔xb4 ♖xb4 60 ♖d4 ♖a3 61 f4 b4 62 f5 b3 63 f6 b2 64 f7 b1♖ 65 f8♖+ ♖a2 66 ♖a8+ ♖b2 67 ♖b8+ ♖c2 68 ♖xb1+ ♖xb1 69 e5 and so on) 58 ♖d6 ♖c4 and a win does not seem to be present. If 59 ♖c6 ♙b2 60 ♔c7 ♖xb4 61 ♔xb5 ♖c4 62 ♔d6+ ♖d3 63 ♖d5 ♖e2 64 ♔c4 ♙c3 65 ♔xe5 ♖e3

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66 ♖c6 ♜f4 and Black escapes with a draw.

So the conclusion is that Black could make a draw even here. Of course this can be contested, but my simple abilities were not able to support this, for me, counter-intuitive conclusion.

47 ♜f8 e5

A sad necessity, but this can only postpone the inevitable.

48 ♜e8 ♜e6 49 ♜d8 ♜d6 50 ♜c8

The weakness of the e-pawn is now a very decisive factor. Black should probably try to give it up in order to defend, but it would not succeed.

50...♙e3

If 50...♜c6 51 ♜xc5+ ♜c5 52 ♜f7! ♜b4 53 e5 ♜xb3 54 e6 ♙c5 55 ♜d7 ♙f8 56 ♜xg5 ♜c4 57 ♜h7 ♙c5 58 ♜f6 b4 59 ♜e4 and White wins all the same because of 59...b3 60 ♜d2+!

51 ♜b7 ♙d4



52 b4

Black has no defence now. His king is passive and the b-pawn is lost.

52...♜d7 53 ♜c5+ ♜d6 54 ♜b6 ♙c3 55 ♜xb5 ♙d2 56 ♜b7+ ♜c7 57 ♜a5

Planning 58 ♜c4 ♙c3 59 ♜d5 followed by ♜xc5.

57...♙e3 58 ♜a6! 1-0

Black cannot prevent the white g-pawn from running all the way to the eighth rank.

An important lesson from this game is that *it is not essential to have a winning position, it is sufficient to have winning chances!* At least this was what our great Danish hero Bent Larsen once wrote. And of course he was right. What happens is that once a player is under pressure he will be obliged to play accurately on every move in order not to hasten towards defeat, while the opponent has the opportunity of stalling, of trying one thing, and then return to another plan. The life of a passive defence is a tough one indeed.

It is one of the most important points in technical chess that *an advantage does not have to be decisive in order to win.* Obviously it is better to have a winning advantage than a clear advantage, but as it is harder to defend in the endgame than to play for a win, a clear or even a tiny advantage often has a tendency to increase over time and prove sufficient to win the game.

It is important to understand this as a defender as well. I know many people would have thought that there was nothing much wrong with 17...♜fd8, 21...f5 and 40...f6 in this game, and that 46...♙g1? was entirely to blame for Black's defeat. But this would be missing one of the simplest truths about chess – that *chess is a game.* The defender has to find the best defence all the time, and if you go through the annotations, you will see that his problems are multiplying as the game proceeds. At move 17 the improvement is one half move long, while

at move 46 the proof that Black was still not lost has increased to half a page, and most of the lines are drawn by the smallest possible margin of a single tempo. Furthermore, there is no guarantee that I have not missed something in my analysis, and that White actually has a winning plan against 46...♙d4. But this would not change the evaluation of 46...♙g1?, since after this move White wins barely without comment, at least compared to what a possible refutation of 46...♙d4 might contain. So again *the important thing is to see chess as a game, which has to be played!* We are humans and we make mistakes. In simple positions we are less likely to make them than we are when every move bar one is a mistake. This is what we call being under pressure or being clearly worse.

What Andersson achieved with his play in this game was to bring the knight to d3 after he had created weaknesses in the black camp. From d3, well assisted by the pawns, the knight limited the black king wonderfully and allowed for the white king to run around and cause mayhem.

2) Weaknesses

It is my experience that the nature and definition of weaknesses are among the most difficult for the chess student to learn. I remember an occasion when I was attending a training session with Mark Dvoretsky, years after becoming an IM, where I clearly was the only one in the room who did not understand why White was winning in a certain position. Everybody else saw White's structural advantage as similar to a material advantage. It is my hope that I will be able to

explain here exactly what constitutes a weakness, the principle of two weaknesses (or the principle of two advantages, which is easier to understand) and a hook. These will be recurrent themes throughout the book, as endgames are all about weaknesses. So please fasten your seatbelt, buy a big bucket of popcorn and prepare for the long explanation.

The basic definition of a weakness

I have already written about weaknesses in this series, in the middlegame book *Excelling at Positional Chess*. Though I am perfectly happy with what is written there, I also know that it is far from the whole story. The whole story would probably account for a million pages and a similar amount of practical examples. Here we shall try to get under the skin of some basic aspects of weaknesses, what they are and what forms they can take. We shall look at pawn islands, doubled pawns, weak squares, backward pawns, hooks, potential weaknesses and the principle of two advantages, also known as the principle of two weaknesses. We shall also discuss the creation of weaknesses and the elimination of weaknesses, as two important parts of endgame play.

But first, an attempt at an abstract definition: A weakness is a defect in one's position. It can take the form of a pawn, a square, a file or a diagonal. A weakness is of a permanent nature. A pawn hanging for a brief moment is not a weakness, but a hanging pawn. In order for the weakness to be of lasting importance it has to stay where it is for some time.

Also, for something to be a weakness

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the opponent needs to be able to exploit it. A weak pawn on a dark square is not so important when the opponent has just a light-squared bishop, and the king has no chance of getting access to the pawn. Marovic deals with these basic questions in his book *Secrets of Positional Chess*, which I can recommend, though authors who repeat the same old examples known from the books of Euwe, Kotov, Dvoretsky, etc., do irritate me a bit. But, that criticism aside, I think the average club player will find the Croatian trainer and grandmaster easy to understand and the examples instructive. I appreciate that many readers today are not familiar with the old books, and therefore do not have a problem with repetition of famous examples.

Anyway, in his book Marovic writes the following about weak squares: 'Every weak square is a static feature. Its weakness is not functional in itself, but it depends on both sides' actions on the board. As long as an active plan is being carried out, all the static weaknesses – weak squares included – are irrelevant, unless they themselves are targets. In our time the chess master has acquired a new awareness of the complex, dialectic relationship between dynamic forces and static elements. Today we should say pragmatically that only those squares which can be exploited are weak.'

I quite like this explanation of the importance of weaknesses. They are of lasting importance, and the weaknesses we might have in our position in the endgame, are often ones we have taken upon ourselves in the middlegame, usually in order to be active. But the main point is that a weakness is only a weak-

ness if it can be exploited.

Basic pawn weaknesses

When a chess writer talks about a weakness he is most often referring to a pawn weakness. A weak pawn is often one that is under direct or indirect attack, and cannot advance. Either because it is physically blocked, or because advancing would mean certain capture, or because it is weak on a file and therefore cannot run away from the problem. Endgames are often decided by the exploitation of pawn weaknesses. The following endgame is a basic example of how great a liability a pawn weakness can be.

Motylev-Willemze
Hoogeveen 2003



In this endgame White is already winning because of his two advantages. The first one is difficult to hide from anyway: after a2-a4 on one of the next few moves White will have a distant passed pawn to occupy one of the black pieces. Meanwhile White will be able to attack the d7-pawn. Black is not able to put up a credible defence of this obvious pawn weakness. For this is indeed a pawn weakness in its purest form. Black can-

not remove the weakness without capturing the g6-pawn, and this is not going to happen easily. (Actually, it is not going to happen at all unless Black allows the white a-pawn to queen, and that is a high price to pay to rid oneself of a weakness!)

An important reason why the g7-pawn is very (fatally) weak is that it is on the same colour as the bishops. This means that White can attack the pawn with his bishop, whereas Black cannot do the same to the white g-pawn. It is also important for the evaluation of the position that the white g-pawn is close to the back rank. This means that once the black g-pawn falls the white pawn will quickly rush to promote; and for the same reason Black cannot allow the exchange bishops on f6 (with ♖xf6 gxf6) as the g6-pawn would sail over the finish line.

It should be mentioned that the black e-pawn does not have the same qualities. Usually when we talk about two advantages, it is two against zero. Here Black does have a passed pawn, but if it is doing anything it is just sitting in the path of the white king on its way to the kingside. So it is not a strong trump at all.

33 b3!

White has no reason to hesitate with the creation of a passed pawn on the queenside. This at once must attract Black's attention.

33...♙f6

Black can consider defending passively by 33...♙g5+ 34 ♖c2 ♖e7 35 ♙d4 ♙h6 but will not really make a draw after 36 ♙e5! (domination – an important endgame theme) 36...♙d7 37 a4 ♖c8 38 ♙d3 ♖b7 39 ♖e4. Here we see the ad-

vantage of two advantages in its purest form. Black is occupied with his king on the queenside and awkwardly tied down to the defence of the g-pawn on the kingside. At the same time White is right on track, advancing his king with the possibility of eliminating the black pawns, but in reality probably just with the idea of entering a won pawn ending after 39...bxa4 40 bxa4 ♖a6 41 ♙f4! ♙xf4 42 ♖xf4 ♖a5 43 ♖e5 ♖xa4 44 ♖xc6 ♖b3 45 ♙d6 (simplest, preventing counterplay, although 45 ♙f7 also wins) 45...♖xc3 46 ♖xc6 and the white g-pawn still queens. Again we have two advantages: the pawn formation and the active king. One advantage (the distant passed pawn on the queenside) was transformed into a better placed king. In this way we often have trade advantages in order to make progress.

34 ♖c2

White's plan is simple: the a-pawn is advanced only to the point that it is passed and threatening to advance (why run into the arms of the black king?); then the king is brought into the centre and the bishop is activated. Black has no chance against this basic strategy.

34...♖e7 35 a4 bxa4 36 bxa4 ♙d6 37 ♙d3 ♖c7 38 ♙d4!

Almost any move wins here, but the best thing White can do is to make it as simple for himself to collect the full point. After calculating a few moves ahead, White confidently provokes a series of exchanges, after which Black retain his two weaknesses and has no defence.

38...e5

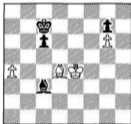
This is of course forced. Now White continues with accurate moves.

*Excelling at Technical Chess***39 ♖c5!**

Again domination. White plans ♖d3-e4 followed by ♖c5-d6. This will be possible because the black king cannot defend against the a-pawn and keep control over d6 at the same time.

39...e4+

A decent try. The main line goes 39...♗g5 40 ♖e4 ♖f6 (if 40...♖d2 41 ♖xe5 ♖xc3+ 42 ♖d4 ♖d2 43 ♖e6 ♖h6 44 ♖f7 and White is obviously first) 41 a5 ♖b7 42 ♖d6 ♖a6 (or 42...♗g5 43 ♖xe5 ♖h6 44 ♖f4! and the pawn ending wins easily again) 43 ♖xc5 ♖xe5 44 ♖xc5 ♖xa5 45 ♖e6 ♖a4 46 ♖f7 and White wins.

40 ♖xe4 ♖xc3 41 ♖d4

Once again, Black cannot go into the pawn ending because White has the distant passed pawn and because the g7-pawn is weak. Had the g-pawns been at g2 and g3, White would require a lot of pawn moves in order to promote the pawn, and maybe, just maybe, Black would be able to create some counterplay with his c-pawn. Now he is not even close.

41...♖d2

Black chooses to keep the game alive, when resignation was a perfectly viable

option. Now White takes the g-pawn for free.

42 ♖xg7 ♖d7 43 ♖d3 ♖g5 44 ♖d4

White has won a pawn and is in no hurry. As Piket once said when he was asked if he was not irritated that his opponent played on for a long time in a lost position. 'No, why? I was enjoying myself!' It is important to trust our own ability. Those waiting for the opponent to resign are either nervous in case they make some blunder (perhaps because of previous experiences), or simply fail to realise that miracles only occur when you are down on your knees begging for them!

44...♖h6 45 a5 ♖c7 46 a6 ♖f8 47 ♖c4 ♖b8 48 ♖c5 ♖g7 49 ♖d3

White has now strengthened his position on the queenside to the maximum (something a less patient player would most likely have failed to do) and now marches the king to f7 and plays ♖f8. After this Black's hopes of sacrificing the bishop for the g-pawn and thereby reaching a theoretical drawn endgame, where White's extra piece would be superfluous, are devastated.

49...♖a8 50 ♖e4 1-0

This game is a clear example of what a fixed pawn weakness can look like. It also clearly illustrates the strength of a distant passed pawn in a minor piece ending. But of course things are seldom that clear and games between strong players are often a complicated and dynamic fight for such advantages. A strong grandmaster knows that a position like this is won for White, and would not go as peacefully into the endgame as Black did here (before we came

in). Still, endgame technique is not something that can be acquired over a weekend, but needs to be perfected over years of study. One player who has done so is the Russian grandmaster Alexei Dreev.

Potential weaknesses and the creation of weaknesses

With the definition of a weakness it is the same as with all academic expressions. Each theoretician has his own usage of the word, and it would be wrong to think that Marovic and I mean exactly the same thing when we indicate a weakness. It will probably be very close, but when we go deeper there will most likely turn out to be microscopic discrepancies. Personally I like to make a distinction between an actual weakness and a potential weakness. An actual weakness has a permanent character to it, while the potential weakness is a weakness in structure, which is not yet a real weakness as there is no way for the opponent to exploit it immediately, but later, in the far future, there might be.

In the following example Dreev exploits a small mistake by his strong opponent to create an uncomfortable environment for him. This eventually leads a situation where weaknesses almost spring out of the ground.

P.H.Nielsen-Dreev
North Sea Cup 2003

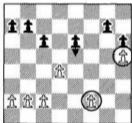
We are just out of the opening. White has tried to create open files down to the black king with the less than subtle ambition of mating him. But this is failing. Black transfers the queen to the kingside to assist the defence, and White's attack

is stopped more or less before it has been begun.



18...Wf5 19 We2?

This looks like a positional mistake to me. The problem comes when we consider the possible pawn structure arising after Black's next move.



The pawn on h5 could be said to be fixing the g7-pawn as a weakness, but actually this is far from the case. Black can easily protect the g7-pawn with the bishop and king without in any way having to place his pieces awkwardly. The same cannot be said for White, whose h5-pawn will eventually have to be passively defended by a rook, if Black persists in putting pressure on it along the fifth rank. The f2-pawn is also a potential

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weakness. It is not easy for Black to attack it, and in the game he never did, but still it is not impossible to imagine a situation where Black plays ...♗g5 or something, with the idea of exchanging bishops and thereby eliminating the defence of the f-pawn. Eventually b2 will become a little vulnerable too. This comes from the power of the black bishop on f6 — an *apparatus* in the terminology of our national hero Bent Larsen — unchallenged on the long diagonal, because the white bishop will be tied to the defence of the f-pawn.

So White cannot allow the position to simplify into an endgame. Instead 19 ♖xf5 was necessary, and after 19...♞xf5 (19...exf5 blocks the rook's view down the f-file and weakens Black's control over the centre; after 20 ♖e3 ♞ae8 21 d5 White has a good game, as suddenly f5 is weak) White has 20 ♗xh6! gxf6 21 ♖xh6+ ♖h7 22 ♖xf5 exf5 23 d5 and, though it is not clear if he has better chances, it is hard to imagine that White will ever lose this endgame with reasonable play. He has two pawns and a rook for the minor pieces, as well as a passed pawn (since 23...cxd5 24 ♞xd5 would cost Black the f5-pawn).

19...♖f6!

Black has no problems with exchanges, as soon all White's threats are gone. After 19...♖xf4 20 ♖xe6+ ♞f7 21 ♖xd7 White would be better (Nielsen).

20 ♖xf6+

Forced. If 20 ♖xh6+? gxf6 21 ♗xh6 ♞f7 22 ♞dg1+ ♖h7 23 ♗e3 ♞g8 and the attack is but a dream and White will have to fight for a draw.

20...♗xf6

This is the so-called *apparatus* — a

bishop which protects a weakness and yet is extremely active at the same time.

21 ♗e3

Here the bishop is rather passive, but White was running out of sensible options. After 21 ♗d6 ♞fd8 (21...♞f7? is also possible, questioning what the bishop is really doing on d6) 22 ♗e5 ♗xe5 23 dxe5 ♞xd1+ (23...♞d5 24 ♞xd5 cxd5 also gives Black a superior structure) 24 ♞xd1 ♞f8 and White has problems with all his weak pawns. This is probably even worse than the game.



Black has achieved the first part of his plan, the neutralisation of White's counterplay on the kingside. Now he starts the real technical work: the slow improvement of his position. The initial idea is to eliminate his only potential weakness, the pawn on e6, by exchanging it for the white d-pawn. To achieve this, he first takes control of the d5-square, so that ...e6-e5 cannot be met with d4-d5.

21...♞ad8 22 ♞dg1

22 ♖a1 ♖h7 (22...e5 23 ♖c4+ ♖h7 24 d5 is not completely clear) 23 c4 was an attempt to prevent the advance of the black c-pawn, but Black would then react to the altered pawn structure with a new

plan. The white d-pawn is no longer solidly defended by the c-pawn (it was enough that c2-c3 was always possible), and the c-pawn has become what we shall later learn to know as a *hook*. Black would have the strong 23...b5!, after which the white d-pawn will be isolated and weak, while Black gains the wonderful d5-square for a rook, from where it can put pressure on both d4 and h5.

22...♖h7



23 ♖g4

Peter Heine Nielsen writes about this position: 'Somewhere around here I believed White was fine and I offered a draw. But this is a misunderstanding, Black is clearly better. The white activity on the g-file is purely optical. More important is the black bishop on f6. It protects g7 solidly and will soon become active in a very aggressive manner.'

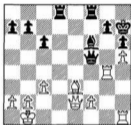
It is interesting that so strong a player as the Danish no.1 and occasional training partner with Anand can misevaluate the position so badly. Nielsen is a very strong middlegame player and, in my opinion, is no worse than average in the endgame, but here he overrated the activity of his pieces and underestimated the weaknesses of his fragmented pawns.

This is a common mistake. He assessed the position according to middlegame criteria, but it is already so close to the endgame, that endgame criteria have become much more important.

23...e5

Now there are no problems associated with it, Black carries out his prepared advance.

24 dxe5 ♖xe5 25 c3 ♖f5+



26 ♖c2?!

It is not really clear that this move is dubious from an objective point of view, but it does strike me as a questionable decision from a practical point of view. Without the queens the relevance of an open king position is reduced, while the importance of weaknesses increases. With the queens on the board White could at least have kept his options open, if nothing else. Now he is in for a cruel endgame.

26...♖xc2+

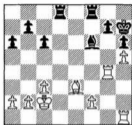
Naturally Black does not hesitate.

27 ♖xc2 a6

Black puts his pawns on the squares advocated by Philidor: those of opposite colour to his bishop. That this advice should not be taken as dogma can be seen on the kingside, where White has a

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weak pawn on a light square, and Black has wonderful pawns on the dark squares.



The reason for this is the black bishop: on f8 it would have a terrible relationship with the pawns, but on f6 it is in synergy and grows off the pawn chain like a big fruit from a tree.

28 ♖b4 ♜f7

Black refrains from pushing the b-pawn forward just yet. As it can go to b5 at any time, but never go back, the pawn is better left on b7, simply to give Black more options. This is an important point about technical endgames. The dynamic part of chess is virtually non-existent here, and so a tempo does not matter in the preparation phase, where the player with the advantage tries to improve his position to the maximum and find the best possible moment to exploit his collected advantages.

29 ♜h3

White is without counterplay as Black has no weaknesses and White has no way to provoke any.

29...♞e7 30 ♜f4 ♞d5 31 c4

Nielsen writes that this is a slight mistake, accelerating what might already be inevitable. But I am not sure that this is

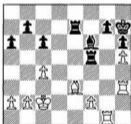
really the case. True, the advance of the pawn weakens the queenside, especially on the dark squares (b2), but White would soon be provoked to play this advance anyway. Black's threat was 31...♞e5 when the weakness of the white h-pawn immediately forces 32 c4, and then Black would calmly reply 32...♞d7!. Again a tempo means nothing here. There is no reason for Black to go into a variation like 32...♞xh5 33 cxd5 ♞xh3 34 d6 ♞h5 35 ♙d4 ♞d5 36 ♙xf6 gxf6 37 ♞xf6 h5 38 ♞e6 where White has drawing chances, even though it might still be uncomfortable with Black's distant passed pawn.

31...♞de5 32 ♞g4 ♞f5

Threatening to attack h5 with ...♞e5.

33 ♞g1

Preparing to defend with the ugly ♞g1-h1.



33...b5!

This is a typical feature of the rule of two advantages. White is forced into defending the h-pawn, and in that way loses a lot of the flexibility in his position. Meanwhile Black plays on the other side of the board as well, where he tries to create a second weakness (a *third* if we include the f2-pawn, though it is not

clear if we should do so or not). Once White has two clear weaknesses he will be unable to defend them both. (See below for a clearer explanation of the rule of two advantages.) 33...♖cc5 was also possible, forcing White to play 34 ♜gh1, but it is not really obvious that Black makes any progress thereby. The white rooks are passive, but the black rook was better on e7. Therefore Black decides to attack immediately, keeping the option of ...♖cc5 later, which White will always have to be ready to meet.

34 cxb5 cxb5 35 ♞d1 a5 36 b3?!

This move was really not necessary. It was much better to wait and see what Black would come with. Black wanted to advance on the queenside so he could create a weakness, and White weakened himself without much provocation. Now the path to victory is easy for Black to follow.

36...♞c7+ 37 ♔b1 a4

The b-pawn becomes weak, and the scope of the black bishop is increased.

38 ♞hh1?!

The last fighting chance was 38 ♞d3 in order to recapture on b3 with the rook. As White cannot take on a4, Black would manoeuvre some more and eventually win. But a passive defence is better than a quick defeat. Resistance will always allow the opponent to falter, but a breakdown will decide the game in his favour without even giving him the chance to mess things up.

38...axb3 39 axb3 ♞c3 40 ♔a2 b4 0-1

White resigned in view of ...♞a5+. White had now made the time control, and with good time on his clock could convince himself that the battle was

over. With weaker players there might still be reason to play on, but between these 2600+ players it is as if Black was a rook up.

So this is what pawn weaknesses (h5 and to some extent f2) and weaknesses of squares (b2 and later all round the king) look like in a complex competitive setting. Aspiring players are often advised to go through the games of the great masters of around 100 years ago – Rubinstein, Alekhine, Capablanca, Réti, Nimzowitsch and so on – and I would like to pass on this recommendation. These players seldom came up against equal opposition, and therefore had the chance to prove their skills without their opponents preventing the most obvious plans in the positions. This way the most natural plans can be seen without the complications of a strong defence.

Hooks

One of the most complicated things to understand about weaknesses has, for my part, been the function of hooks. The classic example, mentioned in all the Russian books, can be repeated here due to its clarity.

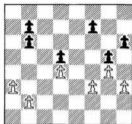


In this position, which might be from a game or might not, taken from the classical book by Lipnitsky that in English would be called *Problems of Modern Chess Theory*, White would have a lot of positional problems, were it not for the black pawn on f5. The bishop on b2 is stupid and the c4-pawn so weak that it will soon vanish from the face of the board after ...♙a6, ...♖a4 and, if necessary, ...♘c6-a5 and ...♗c8 followed by ...cxd4 as well, just to make sure, Schwarzenegger style, that the pawn is really dead. So White would be in trouble if it was not for the move 11 g4!, exploiting that the black f-pawn has made it all the way to f5 so soon. White will have strong counterplay after either 11...fxg4 12. 2 ♖g1 h5 13 h3 or 11...♙a6 12 ♙g2 ♘c6 13 gx f5.

The f-pawn in this position is what we call a *hook*. Though not in itself weak, the pawn provokes a counter-thrust, after which the position behind the pawn can fall like a house of cards when it has to make its sad choice.

In the following game one of the truly strong players of our time, English grandmaster Michael Adams, creates a hook for his opponent, Hungarian challenger for the world championship, Peter Leko, to play against. Due to passive play from the Englishman, he is not able to justify this weakening of his position, and after the hook is used, following excellent preparation, to open the Black's position, the game ends rather poetically with a total meltdown of the black king-side.

It all comes down to this pawn structure, which eventually becomes a winning tool for White.



The pawn on g5 is the hook on which the high rated fish is caught. All Leko has to do in the game is reel it in. Once he has played h3-h4, the black pawn structure collapses. But this is simply because he failed to dynamically justify this weakness. Here this simplicity is presented in its complex reality.

Leko-Adams

Dortmund 2002

Petroff Defence

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘f6 3 ♙xe5 d6 4 ♘f3 ♙xe4 5 d4 d5 6 ♙d3 ♘c6 7 0-0 ♙e7 8 c4 ♘f6

The line with 8...♙b4 is usually considered a better attempt at equalising. In the game Black gets a slightly passive position, which is defensible but requires that he does not make the first mistake (as he does in the game), when White will be able to give Black some serious problems to solve.

9 h3 0-0 10 ♘c3 ♙b4 11 ♙e2 dxc4 12 ♙xc4 c6 13 ♙g5 ♘bd5

This set-up with the knights is rather defensive in nature. Black is hoping to make it to the endgame where the d-pawn is likely to become a liability for

White. In the middlegame it is an asset, as it gives White the advanced outpost on e5 to the knight. Not that any of the players were struggling with such basic considerations, which are second nature for any titled player. Rather the players were scheming in order to twist the situation in their favour. Besides, this is still all opening theory and White seems to get a slightly better position without too much effort.

14 ♖e1 ♗e6 15 ♜b3 ♜b6 16 ♜xd5
cxd5 17 ♜xb6 axb6



We have now reached the late middle-game/early endgame straight from the opening, and Leko is still playing book moves.

18 ♗b3!

White is slightly better. Black has a potentially weak pawn structure on the queenside and his set-up in the centre is a bit passive in comparison to White's. The pressure down the a-file is not really annoying at the moment, as the bishop guards a2 excellently. Notice that, although White can always play a2-a3, he would prefer to avoid it. There is no guarantee that this pawn set-up will be the best in all lines and, for that reason, he would rather avoid advancing the a-

pawn for now. The bishop is also well placed on b3 because it attacks the d5-pawn. White would like manoeuvre the knight to d3, from where it can go to both b4 and f4 in order to put more pressure on the d-pawn. At the same time he is seeking the right exchanges. While the g5-bishop looks active, in reality it cannot do much more than exchange itself against the one on e7, but this would be highly satisfactory. Despite the fairly open position, Black's other bishop on e6 is restricted in its movement by the d5-pawn, which it might actually be doomed to defend passively.

18...h6

This was a new move. Previously 18...♗b4 was played, which is probably better. White did not manage to cause Black much trouble in the two games preceding this one. But then again, White probably did not exploit his chances to the maximum.

a) 19 ♖cc1 ♗e4 20 ♗f4 ♖fc8 21 a3 ♗d6 22 ♗e3 ♖c6 ½-½ Motylev-Fridman, Mainz 2002. The improvement in Black's position is so great that he should probably consider playing on. Maybe White was having a bad day.

b) 19 ♖e5 ♗d7 20 ♖c2 ♖fc8 21 ♗e1 ♗b8! (the knight needs a function so it focuses on the white weakness at d4) 22 ♗d3 (the knight is heading for f4 so Black must not play slowly) 22...♗c6 23 ♗xb4 ♗xb4 24 g4 (trying to restrict the e6 bishop) 24...h6 25 ♗f4 g5 26 ♗e3 ♗d7 27 a3 ½-½ Kasimdzhanov-Fridman, Essen 2002.

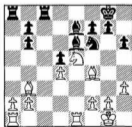
Is ...h7-h6 really an improvement to the black position? I do not see it. Black does get out of the pin, but he also changes his pawn formation perma-

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nently: not much and not clearly to the worse, but he loses some flexibility and weakens the (seemingly irrelevant) g6-square (see the annotations to Black's 20th move). The evaluation of the position, and the whole opening as such, is that White is slightly more active, but that with accurate play Black can slowly neutralise the pressure. But this is not what he is doing in this game. I think he would have been better off following Fridman's examples from above, although Leko was likely to have had an improvement ready somewhere, possibly on the 19th move.

19 ♖f4

The bishop might look more natural here than on g5, but it is not clear what function the bishop really has. Besides the potential for attacking the b6-pawn the bishop is doing very little. But it would also be doing very little on h4, and should Black play ...g7-g5, then ♖g3 could be met by ...♗e4 with further gain of tempi, whereas now White is ready to play ♖h2 in one go, should it ever be relevant. The flip side to this is that the bishop is occupying the favourite square of the white knight.

19...♞fc8 20 ♖e5

The knight is headed for d3, while also considering ♖g6 in some strange situations.

20...g5!

It is easy to criticise this move, but very hard to come up with convincing alternatives. Notkin gives it “?” in his annotations in *Super Tournaments 2002* and Leko's *Hundred Wins*, both by Soloviov. Leko, on the other hand, gives the move !? in *Informator*, and thus do not have the same kind of criticism for his opponent. This is probably because he realises that Black does not have that easy a choice, and that Adams' move is not clearly worse than others.

Therefore we should go through the pluses and minuses of this move, and see how the alternatives compare. The plus is not that it wins a tempo or threatens to take the bishop, but that White cannot now use the f4-square for the knight, and is forced to decide on the placement of the bishop now, before Black starts his manoeuvres. The minus is that Black has a permanent weakness of his kingside and, as we shall see, this becomes a great liability in the game – but this is only in connection with further mistakes later, as Leko points out in his annotations. In fact Black's position already seems to be slightly awkward to defend and Notkin's improvements do not survive serious analysis.

So the conclusion is that 20...g5 leaves Black with some structural problems, but it is hard to work out whether this move is dubious or not. The differences between the various moves are slim and Adams was forced to make a practical decision at the board. I think that I would personally have tried to avoid a

structural disadvantage here, but this is probably as much a question of taste as anything else. But let us turn to the alternatives and see why Adams decided on 20...g5:

a) 20...e4 21 f3! is good for White. The knight must return to f6, as the planned 21...d6? fails utterly to 22 g6! and White wins a piece.

b) 20...b4 21 c2 e8 is an improvement suggested by Notkin. The idea is to avoid the g6 trick, but Black is not completely safe here either. If we take a further look Black does not equalise. Rather he now has problems with the bishop on b4. After 22 d3! (this is where the knight belongs, and then b4 or f4) Black can try:

b1) 22...d6?! (it is not in Black's interest to exchange this bishop) 23 xxd6 dxd6 24 f4 and White has achieved everything he could ever dream of. One possible continuation is 24...e8 25 ae1 b5 26 xxd5 dxd4 27 e4 d7 28 e7 xe7 29 xe7 ce6 30 xce6 fxe6 31 a3 and White will win this endgame one way or another.

b2) 22...f8 is the most logical – at least the bishop is not in the way here – but after 23 h2! it is hard to see how Black is going to defend himself. It is likely that he will have to bite the sour apple and either play 23...g5 after all (directed against 24 f4), or return the knight to f6 with 23...f6 24 f4 c6 when White is simply better.

c) 20...e8 also looks interesting and then:

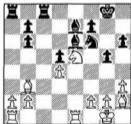
c1) 21 d7 d8 22 xxd5 xxd7 23 xb7 hf6 with even chances according to Notkin. I am not so sure that this is really the case. Maybe White is still

slightly, only slightly, better. Secondly, White has no reason to go for this kind of a computer line, as Black has no easy way to manoeuvre his pieces to the squares he desires.

c2) 21 h2! and if 21...f6 (not 21...d6? 22 g6!) 22 ad1 White maintains the pressure, based on 22...d6? 23 xf7! netting a pawn without counterplay. So how is Black going to free himself after this? There is no easy answer.

For these reasons it is hard to say that 20...g5 was a mistake. The downside to the move is obvious, but once you get deeper into the position, as one must imagine that Adams did, you see that there is no easy way to deal with White's strategy, and that his slight lead in development and slightly more active pieces really do pose Black a lot of problems. Once it has been made impossible for Black to carry out his main plan, White can slowly improve his position before he strikes. This is the principle of *Do not hurry* (see section 4 below).

21 h2!



Leko retains the bishop on this diagonal where it has the best chance of becoming active, or at least creates some

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tricks with ♖g6 because of the control over d6. Instead Leko evaluates 21 ♙e3 ♘e4 as equal since White has no easy way to prove that ...g5 is a weakness. Whereas now Black still has to prove that it is not that serious. The way to demonstrate that one's position can survive a structural disadvantage is to be active and in this way obtain compensation.

21...♙b4?!

Leko dislikes this move somewhat, though Notkin has nothing to say about it. As the game proceeds Black actually loses a tempo with this move. White has nothing against placing his rook on e2, which later turns out to be a clear improvement of his position, while he also is guaranteed to gain a tempo by hitting the bishop with the knight. Black does avoid some tactics, but this should not be a goal in itself. Rather the tactics here seem to work out OK for Black.

Leko suggests instead 21...♙g7 22 ♙e2 with a slight advantage, but also indicates the possibility of playing 21...♘e4! which is clearly the most logical move. In the long run White will try to establish pressure against d5, and to fight this Black should try to locate a his knight on c4, from where it attacks b2 and limits the scope of the white bishop. Leko then recommends 22 ♙e2 after which White is a little bit better. This seems prudent, as after 22 f3 ♘d2! Black avoids the ♖g6 tricks that follow ...♘d6. Perhaps Adams disliked the exchange sacrifice, but it is not really dangerous: 22 ♙xe4? dxe4 23 d5 ♙f5 24 g4 ♙h7 25 ♘d7 when Black he can choose between the seemingly fine 25...♙d8 and the dead drawn 25...♙c5 26 ♘f6+ ♙g7 27 ♙e5 e3

and White has nothing better than perpetual check, which was not really what he was looking for.

22 ♙e2 ♘e4

It seems Black still gets his knight to c4, but White will do what he can to prevent it.



Now there are two strategies: one is to try to squeeze something out of the positional advantage immediately; the other is to manoeuvre around and let Black suffer in the uncomfortable position of defender for as long as possible. The latter is the most practical decision (though objectively the two seem to be of the same value) and a superb technical player like Leko would not be in much doubt. The continuing pressure which arises after the text move is more uncomfortable, and probably more difficult, to play against. At least the game supports this observation. One of my favourite quotes is from Alekhine who claimed that a strong player would always prefer to have an advantage with material equality and the initiative, than to have a material advantage but have to defend it. Though White does not really have much initiative here the same practical logic applies. White would rather

have Black defend long and hard to prove equality, than win a pawn and have to defend long and hard to prove that Black's compensation is inadequate.

23 ♖d3!

White slowly improves his position and prevents the intended ...♗d2. It was possible to seek trouble with 23 ♖g4? with all kinds of tactical ideas, such as ♗xd5 and ♖f6+ winning a pawn or 23...♗g7 24 ♗e5+ f6? 25 ♗xf6+! winning at least a pawn. But Notkin correctly points out that Black should sacrifice a pawn with 23...h5! 24 ♖c3 ♗a5 25 ♗xd5 (White could reconsider his actions and play 25 ♗d1, but then why would he want to put his knight on e3? No, action has been planned and should be carried out) 25...♗xd5 26 ♗xd5 ♗xd5 27 ♗xe4 and now after 27...♗c2 Black has a lot of activity for the pawn, which it is by no means easy to dispel. White is better, but it is not clear that this advantage is greater than the one in the game, so Leko quite wisely choose to build up further advantages before capitalising on them.

23...♗f8

After 23...♗a5! White would prevent ...♗d2 once again by 24 ♗d1! preparing 25 f3 with a clear edge.

24 ♗ae1 ♗g7

24...♗d6? would lose to 25 ♗xd6 ♗xd6 26 ♗xe6! fxe6 27 ♗xe6 and White will get a great return on his material investment, once the black pawns start to drop one by one. Instead 24...♗a5! was suggested by Notkin, simply awaiting White's plan to reveal itself. This does make a lot of sense, as exchanging the dark-squared bishops is a principle goal for White with this structure, but

then again the h2-bishop does seem to work well. For the time being ...♗d6-c4 is not possible, so Black makes it happen.



25 ♗e5

After this Black is certainly under pressure. White had another option, but once again Leko chooses to delay his moment of action and improve his position gradually. As long as this is possible, and Black does not have similar opportunities, it is a very strong plan. The choice is by no means obvious. White could also go for direct material pay-off with 25 ♖b4! ♗a5 (25...♗xd4 26 ♖xd5 ♗xd5 27 ♗xd5 ♖c5 with a sad endgame was hardly what Adams wanted, though it would still be a hard fight before White had to draw the last straw) 26 ♗e5 ♗xe5 27 dxe5 ♗d8 when can only try to prove an advantage with 28 ♖xd5 ♗xd5 29 ♗d1 ♖f8 and then:

a) 30 ♗xd5 ♗axd5 31 ♗xd5 ♖xf2 32 ♗c4 ♗d4! (not 32...♗d1 33 ♗b3 and the knight is in real trouble) 33 ♗xf2 (otherwise ...♖e4) 33...♗xc4 34 e6 f5! 35 ♗xf5+ ♖e7 and Black will be able to make a draw in this rook endgame. His king is more active, and the white pawns are weak.

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b) 30 ♖xe4 ♗xe4! 31 ♖xd8+ ♔e7 32 ♗d6 ♖xe5 33 ♖xh6 ♗g6 and though White remains somewhat better, Black will probably be able to make a draw. Too many pawns have been exchanged.

25...♗xe5 26 ♖e5 ♗g7 27 ♖d3

White has achieved first part of his plan. After ♖b4, his pieces are all where they want to be, while Black has some serious weaknesses: the d-pawn is a bit vulnerable and needs attention; the double b-pawns are moving closer to becoming a weakness (though it is still not clear how White will ever exploit it); and on the kingside Black would very much love to be without the move ...g5. Later we shall see how White proves that this move is indeed a weakness, by first fixing it and then attacking it, thus creating clear weaknesses in its back yard.

27...♖c7?!

It is again easy to dislike this move. The natural progression for Black was to send the knight to c4 without hesitation. From there it would defend d5 by blocking the white bishop, and put some pressure on b2 to occupy one of the white rooks.

27...♖d6! 28 ♖b4 ♖c4 is evaluated by Leko as slightly better for White. It is not obvious how White should proceed from here, but it is still clear that he is the one with the chances. Somehow the king should be brought into play and then considerations whether or not to exchange bishop for knight would eventually decide what kind of endgame arose. For the player who wants to get really deep into this endgame I suggest that you try out playing both sides against a computer program. But understand that you should pay more attention

to your own intuition than to the software, which will not be able to give you the answers to this position.

28 ♖b4



28...♗d8?

This is a bad mistake. Up to this moment I have my doubts that White would really be able to win the game against the best possible defence, but after this I have little faith in the black position. The problem is that the manoeuvre ...♖d6-c4 is now no longer possible. It is really difficult to explain how such a natural player as Michael Adams, a top ten player, fails to understand the necessity of becoming active.

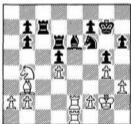
My suggested last try for Black would have been 28...♗a5! when, after 29 g4, 29...♖d6 would still be possible. The position is worse than it would have been after 27...♖d6!, but it is the last try. Now White is allowed to exploit the black weaknesses in peace.

29 g4!

An excellent move by Leko. White will now advance slowly on the kingside, kicking the knight away and then put pressure on the black pawns in order to prove his structural advantage.

**29...♖f6**

There is no longer time for 29...♖d6. It appears that after 30 ♗xd5 ♗xd5 31 ♖xd5 ♜c4 32 ♞d2 ♕b5 White cannot protect his pawn, but in fact Black is unlucky with the tactics and White wins with 33 ♖e3! ♖xd4 34 ♖g2 ♞a4 35 b3 ♞b4 36 ♞ed1 as there is no defence against 37 ♖f5 or 37 a3. This clearly shows that Black has no real dynamic potential anymore.

30 ♖g2 ♞d6

Black is in a terrible situation. He has more than one weakness and no activity. 30...♖g8, planning ...♖e7-c6 to neutralise the pressure on the centre, would be met strongly by 31 f4! gxh4 32 ♖d3 and the knight finally comes to f4 when the

black position is far beyond salvation. The knight will be fantastic on f4 and all the black pawns are weak.

31 f3!

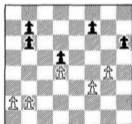
31 f4!? was possible, but why rush? Leko stays in character and improves his position slowly.

31...♗d7 32 ♖g3 ♖f8 33 h4!

The black pawn structure is being put under greater and greater pressure.

33...♗b5 34 ♞e5

Now Black can no longer hold the pawn on g5 and the disadvantage of the pawn advance has now been clearly proven. But there were disadvantages earlier on with every possible move. It is only that, when Adams chose to weaken his structure for dynamic considerations, he obliged himself to play as actively as possible afterwards, something he did not live up to.

34...gxh4+ 35 ♖xh4

Black's pawn structure is horrible

Black has problems with all his pawns. We will return to this discussion below under the heading 'pawn islands'. For now all we will say is that the white structure is more healthy.

35...♗c4 36 ♗c2 ♗b5

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36...♙xa2 37 b3 ♞xc2 38 ♜xc2 ♙xb3 was also pretty hopeless. White wins after 39 ♜e3 ♜d7 40 ♞c7! with the idea of 41 ♜f5. The white king will eat the h6-pawn and Black will have no defence at all. Here the limitation of doubled pawns in the endgame shows its face again. If Black had a- and b-pawns, he would have some chances of creating counterplay on the queenside. Here there is nothing.

37 a3 ♞d8 38 ♜g3

After creating a further weakness in the black camp Leko goes back to finding the best possible squares for his pieces. The king belongs on f4 and the knight on f5.

38...♜g7 39 ♙f5 ♜f8

If 39...♞c4 40 ♞d1 ♙a4 41 ♞d2 and White wins eventually.

40 ♞h1 ♜g7**41 ♜c2!**

White is threatening to put his knight on f5. Black manages to avoid this, but his kingside is so weak that White has no problem finding another way in.

41...♞e8

41...♞c4 gives White a wide range of possibilities, one of the best being 42 g5 hxg5 43 ♙d3 ♞c7 44 ♞xg5+ ♜f8 45

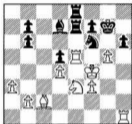
♞h8+ ♜e7 46 ♞e5+ ♜d7 47 ♙f5+ ♜d6 48 ♞xd8+ and White wins.

42 ♜e3 ♞c7 43 ♜f4 ♙c6 44 ♙c2 ♙d7

Preventing ♜f5+, but...

45 g5! 1-0

Black loses both his h- and d-pawns, while White's position is only getting better. The final position deserves a diagram.



A superb strategic and technical effort by Peter Leko.

I hope this gave a deeper understanding of what books are. It will be a recurring topic in the rest of the book, so this is not the end of the story.

Pawn islands

'Together we stand, divided we fall' were the words Roger Waters sang in the classic Pink Floyd song *Hey You* from the album *The Wall*. It is really the chorus of the pawns, in chess as in war. Pawns which are divided are weak and likely to come under fatal pressure. We saw this in the end of the Leko-Adams game above. The position after move 35 is a textbook example of weak and divided pawns.

The real reason for pawns' weakness when divided, is that in open battle they are no match for the pieces. They are like peasants armed with a knife, fighting the cavalry. Only if taking a pawn entails certain recapture will a piece refrain. If the pawn is for free, the head will roll. So this means that pawns which are divided or otherwise isolated, need extra attention from the pieces. If both players have five pawns, it is naturally an advantage only to have to defend one of the pawns, because it is the root of a strong structure, than to have to defend many pawns, because they are divided and unable to defend themselves.

In the following example White inflicts a weak pawn structure on his opponent by means of a pawn sacrifice.

Bologan-Leitao
Pamplona 2001



We are still in the middlegame. White decides to exploit the weak constellation of the black centre to split the pawns. That it costs White one pawn is not important, as his compensation soon proves to be worth much more.

21 e5!

White had no manoeuvring possibili-

ties anyway, so this is a logical reaction. Only in this way can the black pawn structure be tested.

21...dxe5

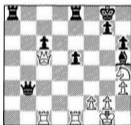
a) 21...fxe5 22 dxe5 dxe5 23 Qe4 and White would also have good play for the pawn, but in the middlegame.

b) 21...cxd4! was a lot stronger, and after 22 exf6 Qxf6 23 Qxd4 Qxc1+ 24 Qxe1 Qd5 25 Qdf3 chances are roughly even. Both players have two pawn islands, with the pluses and minuses they entail. In the game Black allowed a large exchange of pieces and pawns, hoping to make a draw in the endgame.

22 dxe5 Qxe5 23 Qxe5 fxe5 24 Qe4

Bologan thinks White is already better.

24...h6 25 Qxc5 Qxc5 26 Wxc5 Wxb3



This position could be called a middlegame, but it also has a lot of endgame properties. The main point is that, though Black is temporarily a pawn up, he now sits back with two pawn islands against one (once c6 is gone). The weakness of the black pawns is obvious.

27 Qf5 W6 28 Qd4!

White now wins the remaining pawn. Later he won the game, starting with...

28... ♖f7 29 ♜xc6 e4 30 ♜e5 ♖f5
 31 ♖c4+ ♜h7 32 ♖xe4 ♖xe4 33
 ♜xe4 ♜e7 34 ♜c5 ♜a2 35 g4 ♜e8
 36 ♜g2 ♜a6 37 ♜g3

White's winning chances are so great that, with good play, the position might actually be won against any defence. But this is not that interesting for the practical player. The important thing is that White has great practical chances, and eventually did win the position, after mistakes from both sides.

Another example of pawn islands being a liability is the following instructive endgame. White enters the endgame with a better pawn structure and is therefore able to place his pieces actively. Later he trades the advantage of fewer pawn islands for a passed pawn which, together with the weaknesses that are bound to arise on the queenside, proves decisive.

Shirov-Lutz
 Dortmund 2002



White has emerged from the opening with a structural advantage. Black hopes that his two bishops will give him active counterplay and that he will escape with

a draw. In the game White puts strong pressure on the weak f5-pawn and quickly sits back with a better structure, once Black has exchanged the light-squared bishops for him. Black could still have made a draw with accurate play, but he definitely had the more difficult task. Shirov's play in this game is in no way inferior to that presented by his peers Leko and Dreev above. His decisions have a rational and practical reasoning all the way, which has as its first goal to make the game as difficult as possible for Black. And as we shall see, Lutz eventually makes a few dubious moves, after which his position is beyond salvation.

23 g3!

This move is not really up for discussion. White cannot allow 23...♜c3+ followed by 24...f4! when the g2-pawn will suddenly be a weakness.

23...♜d7

Black plays the most obvious plan, based on rapid development. However, this is an endgame not an opening, and development is no longer a goal in itself, as it is in the opening. I am not saying that 23...♜d7 is not logical and good, only that it is less obvious than it would usually be.

Also interesting is 23...h5? in order to trade a pair of pawns. This would in principle leave White with a distant passed pawn, but it is not so easy to determine whether it would be a plus or a minus here. Black would after all be very active, and White would find it more difficult to put pressure on the f5-pawn. One point is that after 24 h4 f4! 25 gx4 ♜g4 26 ♜d3 ♜d8 Black would have excellent compensation for the pawn. The

bishops are really alive and Black will always be able to force a draw with the exchange on e2. Despite all of these arguments in favour of 23...h5?, it would still be my impression that White is better after the natural 24 ♖g2!, though only slightly.

24 ♖h3

Now this opportunity exists. Shirov is not a guy to hesitate, and he immediately exploits his slight lead in development to put pressure on f5.

24...0-0-0 25 ♖hf1 ♖e3+ 26 ♖b1 ♖e6



Black hopes to obtain counterplay on the d-file, e.g. 27 ♖xd8+ ♖xd8 28 ♖xf5 ♖xf5 29 ♖xf5 ♖d1+ 30 ♖a2 ♖d2 when Black has excellent counterplay and should make the draw. For this reason White decides to keep the d-file closed with a move which is easy to miss.

27 ♖d3! ♖xd3 28 cxd3 ♖d8 29 ♖f3

There is no time to waste. 29 ♖c2 ♖d5 would allow Black to be active on the fifth rank, and after ...♖c5+ it is not clear that White can be optimistic about his position at all.

29...♖b6 30 ♖c3

Once again preventing ...♖d5. If White now had the time he would play

♖c2 and ♖xf5 with a winning position, so Black is forced to irritate him as much as possible. This is done by attacking one of the two white weaknesses, the pawn on h2.

If we talk pawn islands here, then it is clear that b2, d3 and h2 are all weak to some degree, though b2 less so than the others. In the same way it is clear that b7 and especially f7, f5 and h7 are all weak. White's advantage here is quite small, but it is enough to allow the opponent to make mistakes. As we shall see later it is easy to make slightly dubious moves that make the task of defence first harder, and in the end impossible, even for such a strong player as Lutz, who has written one of my favourite books on the endgame, *Endgame Secrets* from 1999.

30...♖g1!

Now White has to attend to his own Achilles' heel.

31 ♖e2



31...♖b6?!

Black has defended well. Not with particular brilliance, but then brilliancy was not in the position. Here, however, he commits a slight error, which only goes to show how difficult it can be to calculate even simply endgame positions

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in chess. A writer, assisted by a strong chess playing computer program and unlimited time, can find solid improvements on even the strongest player's games over and over again.

Black should have taken the challenge with 31...♙xh2!! after which the game would most likely have ended with a draw. The lines are very concrete:

a) 32 ♖f2 at first looks like the solution, but once we go deeper, we find that Black has nice counterplay with 32...♙xg3! 33 ♖xg3 ♖xd3 and now:

a1) 34 ♖c2+ ♜b8 35 ♖c3 ♖xc3 36 bxc3 f4 37 ♙xe6 fxg3 38 ♙h3 is not an endgame it is possible for Black to lose. White will be preoccupied on the kingside while the black king strolls forward and eliminates the white pawns. The question is how dangerous this endgame is for White!

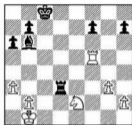
a2) 34 ♖g2 ♜c7 and Black has a lot of opportunities. He can bring his king to the centre; he can play ...f4 and force White to improve his pawns; he can even force White to play ♙xf5, which will be answered by ...♖xg3 securing two pawns for the exchange. As White has no passed pawns, it is hard to dream up a scenario where he will be able to win.

b) 32 ♙xf5 does not lead to an advantage either. After 32...♙xf5 33 ♖xf5 ♖xd3 White seems to have nothing better than 34 ♜c2 (not 34 ♖h5?! ♙xg3 35 ♖h3? ♖c3!! 36 ♖xg3 f5 and the endgame is suddenly very close to being lost for White!) 34...♖e3 35 ♜d2 ♖b3 36 ♜c2 ♖e3 with a repetition of moves.

32 ♙xf5!

32 ♜c2?! ♖d5 is still not in White's interest, so instead he goes for an endgame where he has a slight advantage of two

pawn islands against three. As we shall see this was a good practical decision.

32...♙xf5 33 ♖xf5 ♖xd3**34 ♜c2!**

In his excellent book of his own games, *Fire on Board*, Shirov writes that his best phase of the game is actually the endgame, since his accurate calculation often gives him an edge over the other players. Here he correctly evaluates that this is the most uncomfortable continuation for Black.

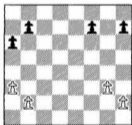
Of course 34 ♖xf7!? was a critical test. Shirov must have felt unsure about the consequences of 34...♖d2 35 ♖e7 ♙d8 36 ♖e4 b5! (not 36...♙f6? 37 ♖e4+ ♜d7 38 ♖c2 ♖d1+ 39 ♜a2 when White is a full pawn up; Black has bishop vs. knight and a more active king, so the win is not a mere formality, but it is probable) 37 ♖e3! (if 37 h4 ♙f6 38 b4 ♙b2 39 ♖e3 ♙xa3 40 ♖xa3 ♖xe2 41 ♖xa6 ♖e3 and Black makes a draw in the rook endgame) 37...♙f6 38 b4 and, while White retains his pawn for the moment, Black certainly has counterplay in this position. It is understandable that instead of trying to prove his advantage by clinging on to a shaky extra pawn, Shirov decided to give Black the chance to mess things up

in a passive defence.

The difference, as stated again and again in this book, is which player has to prove something in the position. After 34 ♖xf7 White has to prove he can consolidate his extra pawn by repelling Black's counterplay. After 34 ♔c2 Black has to prove that his position is drawn, by constantly answering the challenges set by White's manoeuvring, without ending his problems rapidly. White does not need to play perfectly on every move in the game. He can try something, see if Black reacts correctly, and if he does, then give him a new test. This is actually what happens and, as in so many games before, it proves much harder to play the defensive side.

34...♞d7 35 ♔c3

The knight is heading for d5.

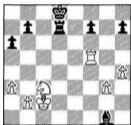


The Pawn Islands

Here we have the concept of pawn islands illustrated in its purest form. White has two pawn structures and therefore has two potential pawn weaknesses at b2 and h2, while Black, with his three pawn islands, has problems with b7, f7 and h7. But this is not just about pawn weaknesses: Black's pawns also work less well.

The effect is that White has a strong rook on f5 and, in just a moment, a strong knight on d5. Though these factors should not be overestimated, they are obviously still an advantage for White.

35...♞g1 36 h4 ♔d8!



Lutz is a very experienced grandmaster and here he performs a good defensive manoeuvre. The king goes to the kingside to protect the weakest spots.

37 ♔d5 ♞d6

White has established control with the pieces, so it is time for the king to join the game.

38 ♔d3 ♔e8 39 ♔e4 ♔f8 40 g4 ♞c6!

Now that the king has taken over the job of safeguarding the weakest pawns, Black can activate the rook. He is still under pressure, but there are good reasons to believe that this is of a temporary nature.

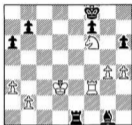
41 ♞f3 ♞e6+ 42 ♔d3 ♞e1

Though not a mistake, I am not completely happy with this move. It looks active, but allows White to trade advantages and create a passed pawn. The move that makes most sense is probably 42...♞h2?, with the idea of 43...♞e5,

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after which it is hard to imagine that Black will not succeed in defending. White would then have to try to improve his position slowly with b4, a4 and b5, make some progress at the kingside, and improve the position of the rook. Whether he would have been successful or not is questionable.

43 ♖f6 h6



43...♔g7 44 g5 is not completely comfortable for the black monarch either, but it was an equal alternative.

44 g5!?

Shirov is a great master of endgame principles, just like another great attacking player, Alexander Alekhine. The point is that attacking players are as bound as positional players to end in endgames (though perhaps a pawn or exchange down more often, having unsuccessfully sacrificed on the altar of the attack). Here Shirov has accurately calculated a long sequence leading to a continued advantage. It is nothing critical for Black objectively, but it is easy to imagine Black's clock ticking away while he has constantly to defend against all these minor details in the position.

44...hxg5 45 ♖h7+

The point. White of course wants to

retain his h-pawn.

45...♔e7 46 ♖xg5 f6 47 ♖e4 ♚d1+ 48 ♗c2 ♚d4 49 ♖g3

This move had to be anticipated, otherwise everything would have been in vain.

49...♗f7 50 ♖f5 ♚d8 51 h5?!

Black has defended well so far and White's advantage has almost been neutralised. But this is only the objective evaluation. It is still Black who will have to prove it.

Here White could have considered keeping his options more open with 51 ♚g3! and, though it is not clear that he has any real advantage after 51...♔h2! 52 ♚g7+ ♗e6 53 ♖c3 b5, it is still uncomfortable for Black in view of the passed white h-pawn. In the game Black was just one move from a draw.

51...♚h8 52 h6

52 ♚h3 again looked slightly better, being less committal.



52...♔e6?!

Black has played well for a very long time and was probably running short on time. This is the beginning of a series of minor inaccuracies that in the end lead to the downfall of the black position.

Strongest was 52...♔c5! when Black

can immediately neutralise the white h-pawn with ...♙f8 and ...♖g6. White no longer has the advantage:

a) 53 ♖d3 ♙f8! 54 ♖e4 ♙xb6 (also possible is 54...♙h7!? 55 ♙h3 ♖g6 56 ♙g3+ ♖f7 with a repetition of moves) 55 ♖d6+ ♖g6 56 ♖xb7 ♙b8 57 ♖c5 ♙xb2 58 ♖xa6 with a draw.

b) 53 ♙c3 ♙f8 54 ♙c8 (54 ♙c7+ ♖g6 55 ♖d4 ♙h7! would be a serious attempt at losing the game) 54...♙h7! 55 b4 ♖g6 56 ♖h4+ ♖f7 57 ♖f5 ♖g6 with a draw.

53 ♖d3 ♖e5

The king is well centralised here, but Black did not solve the problem of the h-pawn, and is therefore in for a little bit of defending again. This is the nature of such technical endgames: if you are on the defending side, you can make a lot of excellent moves for a long time, but one slip and you suddenly have to make a lot of good defensive moves again. If you then make another slip, as Lutz does in this game, you can soon find yourself in trouble.

54 b4 b5

Why this improves the black position is not obvious. Normally we prefer to have the base of the pawn chain as far back as possible. On a6 it is more susceptible to attack than on b7.

55 ♙f1 ♙b6?!

Again Lutz fails to make the most of his bishop. Black has tried many ways to activate his rook, and now plans to do so with a check. But this never really solves the problem of the h-pawn. Again Black should try to do this in the only way possible: to attack it with the bishop. This could be achieved from f4, so the right move in the position was 55...♙h2!, after

which White can try all he wants but there is no advantage.

56 ♖e7!



A sneaky move by White. With the aid of tactics he manages to reorganise the knight, exploiting the brief moment when Black is preoccupied with taking care of the h-pawn.

56...♖e6

Black of course realised that 56...♙xh6?? 57 ♙e1+! would cost him a piece. He also saw that 56...♙d8+!? (to prevent ♖d5) 57 ♖e2 ♖e6 58 ♖g6 was uncomfortable, though in fact this was neither worse nor better than the game. Black has some problems to solve, and if he does so, the draw is his.

57 ♙e1+ ♖f7 58 ♖d5



*Excelling at Technical Chess***58...♙d8?**

After having been under pressure for some hours – basically all of the game – Lutz commits the final mistake. He could still have held his position together with the ugly 58...♙d8 and after 59 ♖h1 we have:

a) The passive 59...♙g6 is met with yet another tactical motif: 60 h7! ♙g7 (not 60...♙xh7?? 61 ♖f4+ ♙g7 62 ♖e6+ and wins) 61 ♖f4 ♙e7 62 ♖e6+! (62 ♙g1+ ♙f7 63 ♖h1 with a draw is always possible, but White wants to win) 62...♙g6 63 ♖e7 ♙xh7 64 ♙xh7 ♙xh7 65 ♖xa6 ♙d6 66 ♖c5 ♙g6 67 ♙d4! (67 ♖b3 ♙e5! and Black makes a draw) 67...f5 68 ♖d3 f4 69 ♙d5 ♙b8 70 ♙c6 f3 71 ♙xb5 ♙f5 72 a4 ♙e4 73 ♙c4 ♙g3 74 a5 f2 75 ♖xf2+ ♙xf2 76 b5 ♙e5 (76...♙e1 also makes the draw) 77 b6 ♙d6 78 ♙b5 ♙d7 79 a6 ♙c8 80 ♙c6 ♙xb6 and Black makes a draw, though not a comfortable draw: one tempo all the way was all he had between him and the edge.

b) 59...f5! (planning 60...♙g5) is the simplest way to make the draw. 60 ♖h5 still gives White some pressure, but the position can be defended: 60...♙h7 61 ♙xf5+ ♙g6 62 ♙f8 ♙d7 63 ♙c4 ♙xb6 64 ♙e8 ♙g7 65 ♙e6 a5 and Black cannot lose.

59 ♙e7+!

Now White is able to attack the queenside.

59...♙g6 60 ♙e4 ♙f2 61 ♙e6 ♙h4 62 ♙xa6 ♙xh6

Black no longer has an adequate defence. If 62...♙b8!? 63 h7 ♙xh7 64 ♖xf6+ ♙xf6 65 ♙xf6 ♙g7 66 ♙f5 ♙g6 67 ♙c5 followed by ♙e4-d5-c6 and the rook endgame is winning. The black king

is cut off and White will easily achieve the Lucena position.

63 ♖xf6

White now clearly has two advantages. He will win the b-pawn and Black will have to resign.

63...♙g5 64 ♙e5 ♙e1 65 ♖e4+ ♙g4 66 ♖d6 ♙f3

66...♙g3+ 67 ♙d5 changes nothing.

67 ♖xb5 ♙g3+ 68 ♙e6 ♙e4 69 ♖d6+ 1-0**Doubled pawns**

I am not going to go deeply into this aspect of weaknesses. It is probably well known that having your pawns doubled is a weakening of the pawn structure, but can also give some advantages. If you go back to the Leko-Adams game, you will see that the doubled b-pawns never really caused Black much trouble. They could not be attacked frontally, nor from the sides, and therefore were less weak than one might think, though still suffering from the problem of being two and being divided in some sense. In the Andersson-Ivanov game the black pawns were really weak on the kingside, but the main problem was that the h7-pawn was weak, not so much the f6- and f7-pawns. That doubled pawns are fragile to frontal attack and to attack from the sides is intrinsic to their nature. They are not a long line of connected pawns (not usually anyway). On the other hand they can have good defensive attributes. In the Leko-Adams position the black pawns safely guard a5, a6, c5 and c6 and in this way assist the rooks on these open and half-open files. Doubled pawns are very rarely good at moving forwards. They have a defensive aspect to them, and

they need to be assisted by pieces in order to do well.

Here we are going to see a short example of how doubled pawns can affect a position. It is important to underline that this game is not representative of the theme in itself, but is just a good background for some general comments.

Topalov-Anand
Monte Carlo 1999



In this (presumably blindfold) game from the yearly Amber rapid/blind tournament in Monaco, Black has offered White the chance to give him tripled pawns, for which Black will achieve control over the a4, c4 and d5 squares. This might seem real compensation for the flawed pawn structure, but Black's decision is probably unsound since he does not have enough knights to use these squares for anything. White's strategy is simple. The weakness of the tripled pawns will not go away, so instead he plays on the kingside where he hopes to create a further weakness.

It should be said that the tripled pawns are only one weakness, not three. Only the front b5-pawn can be attacked, although once it falls then b6 becomes a

weakness immediately.

16 ♖xb5 cxb5 17 ♜xb6 axb6 18 ♙xe7 ♜xe7 19 a3 ♞hd8 20 c3

With these natural moves White restrains the black pawns, though accepts that he will not be able to make pawn pushes himself.

20...h5 21 f3!

A strong move, anticipating g2-g4 and controlling the e4-square.

21...g6 22 ♞ae1 ♞d5 23 ♜f2 ♜f8 24 ♜e4 ♜g7 25 ♞e2 ♜g8 26 ♞fe1 ♜e7 27 ♜g5!

The beginning of a strong manoeuvre. White will be better once his knight arrives at f4. From there it both supports a kingside pawn advance and controls the d5-square.

27...♜f5

This move is pretty useless. Black should instead play ...♞h8 or prepare ...♜d5.

28 g3 ♜e7

What Black achieved here is not at all clear.

29 ♜h3 ♜c6

It was hardly the intention behind Black's decision in the opening to allow tripled pawns, that the knight should guard the penetration square e5. But after 29...♞d7 30 ♞e5 ♜d5 31 g4 hxg4 32 fxg4 followed by ♜g3 and ♜f4 White again has all the chances.

30 ♜f4 ♞d6 31 g4

Now everything is perfect for White. The h5-pawn is used as a hook and the black pieces are passive.

31...hxg4 32 fxg4 ♞ad8 33 ♜g3 ♞h8

Again it was hard to guess what Black intended here.

34 ♞f1 ♞d7 35 h5 g5 36 ♜d3 ♞e8



37 ♖e5!

Black now falls to tactics.

37...♙xe5

If 37...♗de7 38 h6+ ♙xh6 39 ♖xf7+ ♗g6 40 ♗cf2 and White wins at least a pawn. This is another good illustration of how advantages can change character, and how important it is to remain aware of this. The variation ends with 40...♗g8 41 ♗f6+ ♗h7 42 ♖d6 and the b5-pawn has finally proved to be a weakness. This is the important thing to understand about such weaknesses: they exist, but do not by themselves decide the game; they are just a factor like everything else. Once the opponent is able to take control, then the weaknesses will be felt.

38 ♗xe5 f6



39 ♗xb5

The rook endgame is hopeless for Black.

39...♗d6 40 ♗e1 ♗f7 41 a4!

This opens a route for further attack on the doubled pawns, and clearly illustrates that isolated doubled pawns are weak to frontal attack, something Black had hoped he never needed to think about here.

41...♗a8 42 ♗a1 ♗g7 43 ♗a3 ♗h6 44 ♗ab3 ♗a6 45 ♗3b4 f5 46 ♗c4 ♗a8 47 ♗cb4 ♗a6 48 ♗e5 ♗a8 49 gxf5 exf5 50 ♗xf5 ♗xh5 51 ♗bb5 ♗g8 52 ♗f7

And they are fragile to attack from the sides too. Black now loses the remaining pawns on the queenside.

52...♗e6 53 ♗h7+ ♗g6 54 ♗xb7 ♗e3+ 55 ♗g4 ♗e4+ 56 ♗f3 ♗f4+ 57 ♗g3 ♗gf8 58 ♗5xb6+ ♗f5 59 ♗e7 ♗g4+ 60 ♗f3 ♗f4+ 61 ♗e2 ♗g4 62 a5 ♗g3 63 a6 1-0

I think it goes without saying that this game is way below the level we would usually expect from Anand. But then again Anand is a funny character who has spoken publicly about his crisis of motivation as a reason for his occasional weak play. It is obvious that if a player does not care about the result or the game itself, it is hard to play good moves. Especially when we talk about Anand, who used to play very quickly as a young man. Here it is possible that he fell into these old habits.

These will be the final words on weaknesses for now, at least in this chapter. For the improving player I can only once again recommend the book *Secrets of Positional Chess* by Marovic. I think the

examples in this book are well chosen and the text and explanations should be easy to follow for most club players. The first chapter, concerned exclusively with weak squares, is essential knowledge for all players wishing to grasp even an iota of chess strategy. And it is my experience as a chess coach, that many club players have a very weak understanding of these phenomena. I simply hope that my text here and Marovic's book will be a help to those wanting to understand this aspect of chess better.

3) Domination

An important thinking tool in the endgame, which is not usually seen in the middlegame or the opening, is *domination*. With very few pieces on the board it is more likely to be the case that one piece is able to dominate another piece, or maybe two pieces dominate two others. In the following pages we shall consider such situations.

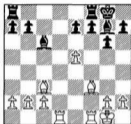
In his *Endgame Manual* Mark Dvoretsky only considers positions with complete domination. But his book also defines the endgame as a position where both players have no more than one piece. Here we are talking about any number of pieces, and also about different degrees of domination. In order to explain how a bishop can possibly be better than a knight in an endgame where the bishop is unable to attack anything, it is impossible to exclude the concept of domination. Together a king and a bishop will at times dominate knight and king. For one example, see the game Lesiege-Andersson in Chapter 3.

Often an active piece dominates a passive piece indirectly, by forcing it to

stay passive and defend a certain weakness. This is what is happening in the following example.

Kiroski-Bogdanovsky

Struga 1991



This example is actually a bit frightening as both players seem to have an off day. But it is still instructive how Black drifts into a bad position almost without resistance.

17...♞fd8!

This move cannot be questioned. After 17...♞xf3? 18 ♞xf3 ♞fd8 19 ♞fd3 White is better.

18 ♞xc6 bxc6 19 ♚f2!

White wisely brings his king to the centre. Black now chooses to do the same.

19...♚f8?!

But it is not really the same. The black king on e8 will not be as active as the white king on e4. It was better to activate the rooks (the strongest piece, remember): 19...♞d5! 20 ♞xd5 cxd5 21 ♞d1 e6 22 ♚e3 ♞c8 is close to equal, although Black still has some defending to do.

20 ♚e3 ♚e8 21 ♚e4 ♞ab8?

This allows White to improve his position, while it is not easy to see in what

Excelling at Technical Chess

way this move is meant to improve Black's own position. 21...♞xd1 22 ♞xd1 ♞d8 was the right choice. The white rooks are better so it seems wiser for Black to enter a bishop ending. Note that after 23 ♞d4 f5+! 24 exf6 exf6 White is objectively better because he is more active, but Black has freed himself considerably compared to the game.



22 g4!

Preventing ...f5.

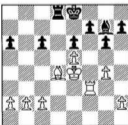
22...e6

With the intention of ...♞d5, but now of course White will not allow it.

23 ♞xd8+! ♞xd8 24 ♔d4

Closing the d-file. After 24 ♞f3 ♞d1! Black would have counterplay.

24...a6 25 ♞f3?



This walks into a trap that Black did not even realise he had set. Instead 25 b4! ♞a8 26 a4 would give White a clear advantage. He retains the possibility of creating a passed pawn on the queenside later, and at the same time is much better on the kingside as well, even though a pawn down there!

25...♔f8??

But Black just plays passively and allows White is to dominate. The only move was the cunning 25...c5!, with the point that after 26 ♔xc5 (or 26 ♔c3 ♞d1 and Black has counterplay) 26...♔xe5! 27 ♔xe5 ♞d5+ the black rook will be very active, and White is in no way better anymore.

26 ♞b3

Now Black will be completely dominated, as the rook will have to protect the a-pawn and the bishop simply cannot get out: the white bishop on d4 limits its options crucially.

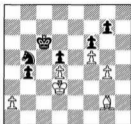
26...c5 27 ♔e3 ♔e7 28 ♞b6 ♞a8 29 ♞b7 ♞c8 30 ♞b6 ♞a8 31 b3 ♔d8 32 ♞b7 a5 33 a4 ♔e8 34 ♞b5 c4 1-0

The point of showing this game is to state clearly what I mean about domination: which is when your own pieces are playing and, at the same time, you do not allow your opponent's pieces to play. You restrict his possibilities to an absolute minimum.

The following brilliant endgame is a great illustration of how domination and zugzwang often go hand in hand in the endgame. In this position White has many difficulties, so it is no surprise that Black is able to use them to his advantage.

Nepomnjatschij-Polovodin

Leningrad 1988

**1...Qc3!**

This attack on a2 is based on a nice tactic. Black now wins a pawn.

2 ♖f3

The a-pawn can no longer be defended so White tries to bring the bishop to the queenside. 2 ♖a3? might look like an option, but Black has the killer blow 2...Qe2!! and after 3 ♖xe2 bxa3 the pawn cannot be stopped.

2...Qxa2 3 ♔d1 b3!

The pawn ending will win for Black, so he uses this chance to advance the pawn to the second rank.

4 ♖d2

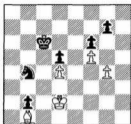
If 4 ♖xb3 Qc1+ 5 ♖c2 Qxb3 6 ♖xb3 ♖b5 and White finds himself in zugzwang.

4...b2 5 ♔c2

Again a matter of domination. In confined space the knight is often stronger than the bishop. If 5 ♖c2 Qc3! White can resign.

5...Qb4 6 ♔b1

Again the bishop is completely dominated. Now it is time to think. Everything is going Black's way, but that could easily end here.

**6...♖b6!**

Not 6...♖b5? 7 ♖c3 Qc6 (or 7...♖a4 8 ♖xb2 and Black has no good move) 8 ♔a2 Qe7 9 ♖b3! and Black has no way to make progress.

7 ♖c3 ♖b5!

Now White is in zugzwang again. White's next is forced, since if 8 ♖xb2 ♖c4 with a direct win.

8 ♖b3 Qc6 9 ♖c3

If 9 ♔d3+ ♖a5 10 ♖xb2 ♖b4! followed by ...Qxd4, and Black will win with his extra pawn.

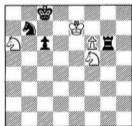
9...♖a4 10 ♖xb2

Or 10 ♔a2 ♖a3 11 ♔b1 Qb4 12 ♔d2 ♖b3 13 ♔d1 ♖c3 14 ♖c2 Qc2 followed by 15...Qa3 and Black wins.

10...Qb4 11 ♖c3 ♖a3! 0-1

The final finesse. White is once more in zugzwang. He cannot accept the pawn ending, and on 12 ♔d2 comes 12...♖b2.

Before we move on to examples of domination in more complex settings, here are six studies for solving. An exercise, for those who wish to do so, is to set the positions up and play them against *Fritz* or a similar program. It is necessary to give the computer only a few seconds to decide upon its moves. White is to play and win in all positions.

F.Sackmann*Deutsche Schachzeitung 1908***A.Troitsky***Deutsche Schachzeitung 1911***H.Rinck***150 Fins de Partie 1909***H.Rinck***Deutsche Schachzeitung 1903***G.Slepjan***EG 1998***B.Horwitz***The Chess Monthly 1885*

The solutions can be found on page 61.

The following game is an almost flawless performance by Polish grandmaster Krasenkow, who gets a slight space advantage from the opening and then sets up a strong knight on e5. After this he successfully dominates the black knight – except for a single slip, where he offers his top-50 opponent real counterplay under the assumption that the resulting knight endgame would be won for him. Sakaev believes him and loses with seemingly no chances at all for survival. We shall see that the correct way for White to play this endgame was to focus on dominating the black knight and prevent all counterplay.

Krasenkow-Sakaev

Copenhagen 2003

Queen's Indian Defence

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘f3 b6 4 ♘c3 ♗b7 5 a3 d5 6 cxd5 ♘xd5 7 ♖c2 ♘xc3 8 bxc3 ♗e7 9 e4 0-0 10 ♗d3 c5 11 0-0 ♖c8 12 ♖e2 ♗a6 13 ♗d1 ♗xd3 14 ♗xd3 ♘d7 15 e5 ♖c6 16 ♗g5 ♗ae8 17 ♗ad1 f6 18 exf6 ♗xf6 19 ♗xf6 ♘xf6 20 ♘e5 ♖c7



21 c4!

To some players this must seem an automatic move, but I cannot help being impressed. With this move White takes d5 away from the black knight, accepting that the c-pawn will be isolated. But this is all appearances. The strong knight on e5 cannot be challenged and protects c4 just fine. One should also note that White had no way to avoid getting an isolated pawn, so it is hardly a concession.

21...cxd4 22 ♗xd4 ♗d8

I am not sure these exchanges are in Black's interest. It will be harder for him to create counterplay with only one pair of rooks on the board.

23 ♖e3 ♗xd4 24 ♖xd4 ♗c8 25 g4!

White decides that he has such firm control over the centre that he can afford to weaken his own kingside to challenge the black knight. I think he is right, but the game should not be over for that reason.

25...h6 26 h4 ♖c5?

This is really weak and seems to indicate that, while Sakaev might have great strength in positions with a technical advantage, he has little talent for defence (relative to his peers, that is; I do not compare him with me). White has control over the centre, a brilliant knight, and control over the d-file; whereas Black has problems with his own knight and cannot get his pieces to work. The only plus he has right now is that White has opened his king. So by forcing the exchange of queens Black is basically doing White's job for him. All dangers to White's king disappear and all his advantages remain.

A better idea was 26...♗f8! to apply

EXCELLING AT TECHNICAL CHESS

'And the rest is a matter of technique' is an annoyingly common phrase used in chess literature. The implication from the author is that the task of converting a typically winning position into a full point or converting a drawing position into half-a-point is relatively straightforward. However, as all of us practical players realise, it's not always as simple as this, and many hard-earned points are wasted through 'a lack of technique'.

In this valuable book Jacob Aagaard aims to solve this perennial problem. He arms the reader with several endgame weapons that every strong technical player has in his toolbox. These include important skills such as schematic thinking, domination, preventing counterplay, building fortresses and utilising zugzwang. These tools are illustrated in deeply analysed games containing numerous different themes. A serious study of this book will ensure that the reader need no longer need fear the word 'technique'!

- Ideal for club and tournament players
- Includes all the principal tools of technique
- Written by an experienced endgames expert

Jacob Aagaard is an International Master from Denmark who has earned himself a deserved reputation as an industrious and no-nonsense chess author.

His recent books for Everyman include *Queen's Indian Defence* and *Excelling at Positional Chess*, while his earlier work, *Excelling at Chess*, was very well received by critics and the chess-playing public alike, and it won the prestigious ChessCafe.com Book of the Year Award.

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