

Contents

Symbols	4
Material Values	4
Foreword by GM Hjörvar Steinn Gretarsson	5
Introduction	6
Part 1: Thinking Concepts	7
1 Progressive Thinking	7
2 Reciprocal Logic	16
3 The Method of Elimination	24
4 Tenacity	30
5 Optical Biases	39
6 Only One Way to Lose	48
7 Only Idea to Play For	53
8 Simplification as a Tool for Equalization	59
9 Overpressing	64
10 When Playing a Bad Move Wins a Good Game	75
11 When You Have to Go for It	83
12 Taking Risks in Bad Positions	89
Part 2: Positional Concepts	92
1 Playing without Weaknesses	92
2 Fighting against Centralized Pieces	105
3 Incorrect Piece Exchanges	121
4 Focal Points	131
5 Provoking Pawn-Weaknesses	142
6 Sliding Moves	150
7 Flank Thrusts	155
8 A Chronically Weak King	163
9 Playing with a Bad Queen	175
10 The Defensive Power of the Queen	182
11 Unlikely Draws	184
12 Painfully Slow Moves	195
13 Manoeuvring in Closed Positions	202
14 Neutral Bad Bishops	213
Part 3: Exercises	216
Exercises	216
Solutions	222
Index of Players	236
Index of Openings	239

12 Painfully Slow Moves

This refers to moves that look too slow, but are nevertheless strong. They are often short-range moves or moves that do not threaten anything apparent after, say, a piece sacrifice. Engines find such moves quite easily, but they are difficult for humans to play confidently over the board because we have a tendency to cut off our calculations when material down if there is nothing concrete. Psychologically we also tend not to notice all the subtle differences between, say, having a queen on b3 or a3. Sometimes there are actually four or five reasons why being one square away is superior. This is especially hard for players under 1800.

A quiet move following a material sacrifice is one of the most surprising types of moves in chess, because we expect a player who is material down to play with some urgency. This is another area where simply seeing a few examples of the basic idea can expand your way of thinking about material sacrifices at the board. There is often a certain paralysis for the defending side when the attacker is able to exploit the relative slowness of the position with quiet moves.

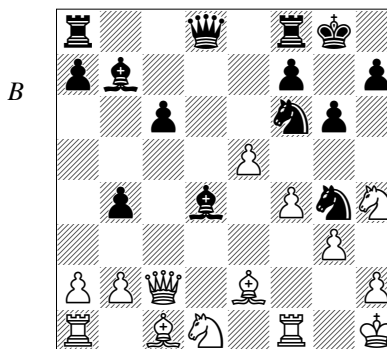
A conscious effort is needed to consider these slow but powerful moves. Otherwise we might quickly reject them, assuming without analysis that they cannot be vigorous enough to achieve our goals. Finding painfully slow moves requires us to realize that we dominate the position, at least for the time being. If the opponent has no immediate counterplay, you have time to build up dangerous threats.

Our first example features a quiet move in a sharp position in which we are expecting captures and direct threats. It is important to realize that sometimes the indirect threats we create with painfully slow moves have devastating and unstoppable consequences.

The position in the following diagram occurs in a sharp line of the Semi-Slav.

18...♖d7!

Black sacrifices a full piece, based solely on the fact that White's king position is tragically



weak and White cannot develop his queenside pieces. 18...c5+ 19 ♔f3 ♖d7 (19...♘d5 20 h3 ♘ge3 21 ♘xe3 ♙xe3 22 ♚h2 holds the balance for White) 20 exf6 transposes to the main line.

19 exf6

After 19 ♔f3 ♘d5 Black intends ...c5 with a large plus.

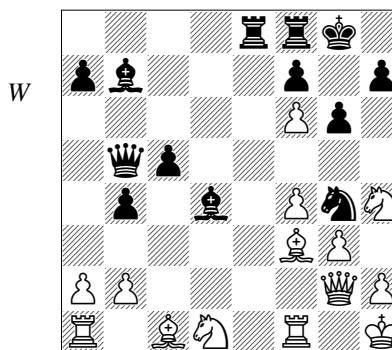
19...c5+ 20 ♔f3!

After 20 ♘f3? ♗fe8 Black threatens ...♗e4 and ...♗ae8, with serious pressure on the e2-bishop. ...♖f5 is also a threat.

20...♖b5!

Amazingly, Black is able to keep up the direct threats here. This is an amusing example of both a poor queen position and a poor king position for White.

21 ♖g2 ♗ae8!! (D)



This is an unbelievably slow move, seemingly from the Twilight Zone. Despite being a

full piece down, Black is able to play the unstoppable ... f2 .

22 fxb7 f2 23 h3 !

Or 23 f3 ?! fg2 :

a) 24 fg2 ?! e8 25 f3 f2 (White's queenside pieces still can't come out) 26 fxd4 cxd4 27 f5 f2 (threatening ... f2) 28 f1 d3 29 f4 f2 ! 30 ff1 d2 31 h3 f1 ! 32 hgx4 fxf1 + 33 fxf1 xf1 + 34 gh2 h5 ! -+.

b) 24 fg2 ! fxh2 25 f1 fxf3 26 fxf3 xf6 27 fd2 a5 f .

23... fxb7 !

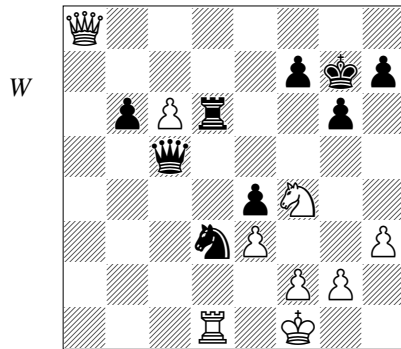
This move only exists because of White's poor king position. This is a famous tactical scheme, known for more than 100 years. It is interesting how weak White's king is despite having a stable pawn-shield.

24 hgx4 fxg2 25 fxg2 fa6 26 f1 fxf6 27 g5

27 fe3 fc8 f .

27... fg7 28 fe3 fc8 29 ff2 h6 30 gxb6 fxh6 31 fc1 c4 f

Black threatens to take on a2 and has solid potential to play for a win.



Khismatullin – Elianov
European Ch, Jerusalem 2015

40 fa1 + gh6

40... f6 41 fxd3 exd3 42 fc1 fb5 43 c7 d2 + 44 gh1 dxc1 f + 45 fxc1 fc6 46 c8 fxc8 47 fxc8 fc5 would have led to a stale draw and not allowed for this game to provide textbook material.

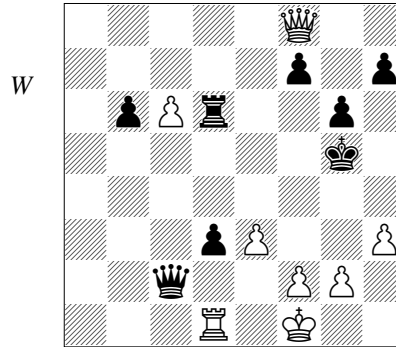
41 fxd3 exd3 42 fb8

White has the straightforward threat of ff8 + followed by fxf7 .

42... fc2 ?!

At first glance this looks like a good move, but Black was in for a big shock. 42... fxc6 43 fxd3 fc1 + 44 fe2 fc2 + 45 ff3 fxf2 + 46 fxf2 fc2 + =.

43 ff8 + gh5 (D)



44 gh1 !!

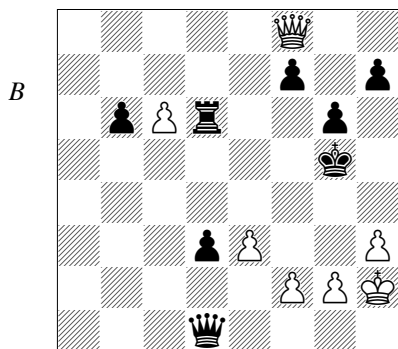
This move is reminiscent of Korchnoi's famous 30 h3 !! vs Spassky in the 1977 Candidates final, and has been written about as one of the greatest moves of modern times. That might be overstating matters, as Black could have defended with accurate play. Another point is that White's idea is based on direct and non-subtle mate threats, and has nothing abstract about it. I shall simply say that it is a very slow-looking move that is amazing because Black is given a full move to defend after taking the rook with check, but has no acceptable defence. It definitely worth bringing this example up for those who have not seen it because it shows interesting defensive possibilities if Black rejects taking the rook and the amazing lack of defensive options after the rook is taken.

44... fxd1 +?

44... fd5 !! 45 gh2 gf6 holds for Black; e.g., 46 e4 fc5 47 fd6 + gh7 48 fxd3 fxc6 49 fe5 + ff6 50 ff3 fc6 51 g3 b5 52 h4 b4 53 fb2 h6 54 g4 g5 55 h5 b3 56 ff5 fe6 57 gh1 fe7 58 fxf6 fxf6 59 fxb3 ff4 60 fb2 + gh7 61 fe2 gh7 62 gh2 gf6 63 fb2 + fe5 64 fb4 gh7 .

45 gh2 (D)

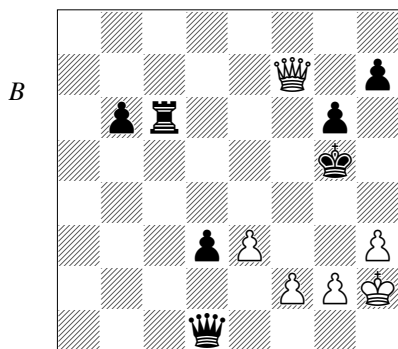
Many players would naturally feel that, given a tempo to defend and an extra rook to boot, there should be a way out of the mess Black has got himself into. Since there is not, the slowness of White's attack has an impressive quality to it.



45...♖xc6
Black takes the pawn in view of the dual threats of c7 and ♖xd6.

46 ♗e7+
White repeats moves to gain time presumably.

46...♔h6 47 ♖f8+ ♔g5 48 ♖xf7 (D)



White is a full rook down but has a winning position in view of Black's exposed king. The threat is ♖f4+ followed g4+. Black only has a few ways to prevent this, but they all lead to direct mate.

48...♖f6

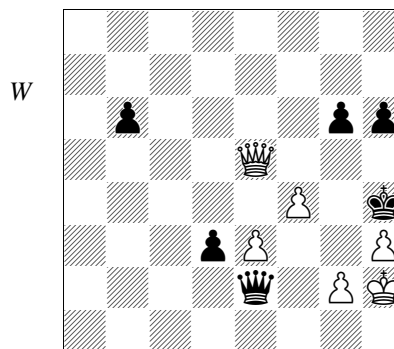
Or:

a) **48...♔h6 49 ♖f8+ ♔h5 (49...♔g5 50 ♖f4+ ♔h5 51 g4+ +-) 50 g4+ +-.**

b) **48...♖c4** is a critical try because it stops White's main idea of ♖f4+. After **49 f4+** (49 ♖xc4? ♔f6 is only a draw) **49...♔h6 50 ♖f8+ ♔h5 51 ♖g7** White threatens mate on h7. Amazingly, Black has no defence. **51...h6 52 ♖e5+** (52 g4+ is also a direct win) **52...g5 53 ♖e8+** and White mates with g3#.

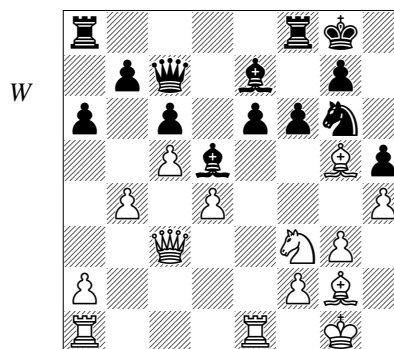
49 f4+ ♔h6 50 ♖xf6 ♖e2 51 ♖f8+ ♔h5 52 ♖g7 h6 53 ♖e5+ ♔h4 (D)

53...g5 54 ♖e8+ ♔h4 55 ♖g6 +-.



54 ♖f6+ ♔h5 55 f5 gxf5 56 ♖xf5+ ♔h4 57 ♖g6 1-0

Black resigned in view of mate coming up after taking on h6 and checking on f4.



N. Bridge – Broom

Portsmouth 2015

This example demonstrates some amusing situations in which calm and useful moves can be played to good effect. The g6-knight is quite an eyesore and Black must find a convenient way to secure this piece.

22 ♙d2

After **22 ♙c1, 22...♙d8!** is also the right way to play, essentially undeveloping this piece to increase the harmony among his other forces. Due to Black's rock-solid bishop on d5, he is able to get away with it. **23 ♘d2 ♖d7 24 ♖d3 ♙xg2 25 ♙xg2 ♖d5+ 26 ♔g1 f5!** gives Black sufficient counterplay.

22...e5?

Black lashes out for absolutely no reason, creating a ton of weaknesses. Playing a series of very slow consolidating moves would have kept everything airtight: **22...♙d8! 23 ♘h2 ♙xg2 24**

♖xg2 ♖f7 25 ♘f3 ♙c7 26 ♖c2 ♖fe8 27 ♗e4 e5 completely equalizes. Black was so solid that he had time to play slow moves that improved his position like ...♙d8, ...♖f7 and ...♙c7.

23 dxe5

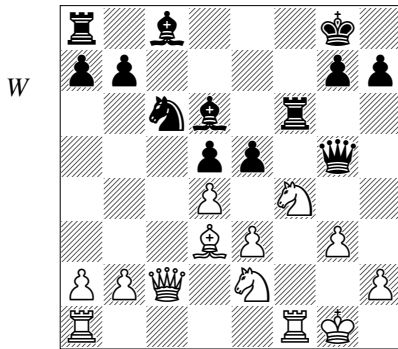
23 ♖c2! is even stronger, as 23...e4 is powerfully met by the exchange sacrifice 24 ♖xe4! +-.

23...fxe5 24 ♘g5?

24 ♖c2! ♙xf3 25 ♙xf3 ♖xf3 26 ♖xg6 gains material. 26...♖af8 27 ♙e3 ♖c8 (27...♖3f5 28 ♖e6+ ♖5f7 29 ♖ad1 ±) 28 ♖xh5 ±.

24...♙xg5 25 ♙xg5 ♖f7

With White having missed his best chances, Black eventually drew the game.



This example, from the French Defence, is very difficult because White is essentially forced to take on an isolated pawn in the centre of the board. What matters most is that he obtains it in the most favourable fashion possible that allows Black the least counterplay.

1 ♘xd5!

Or:

a) 1 ♙xh7+ is the first line I started to look at, but it appears to uncoordinate White's pieces. After 1...♖h8 2 ♘xd5 (2 h4 ♖h6 =), 2...♘b4! is a crucial shot, enabling Black to take on e3 with check and bring in his dormant c8-bishop. 3 ♘xb4 ♖xe3+ 4 ♖g2 ♙g4! (Black threatens to win immediately, so White must give up a piece while wasting a full move with his queen) 5 ♖xf6 gxf6 and due to Black's threats, he is able to coast into a drawable ending: 6 ♖d3 ♖xe2+ 7 ♖xe2 ♙xe2 8 ♙d3 ♙xb4 9 ♙xe2 ♖c8 leads to an ending in which White is a pawn up, but Black's active rook and the opposite-coloured bishops indicate Black will not lose with reasonable play.

b) 1 h4 ♖h6 2 ♘xd5 cuts out ...♖h6. After 2...♖xf1+ 3 ♖xf1 ♙e6 4 ♖b3 ♖e8 5 dxe5 ♘xe5 6 ♙f5 ♙f7 7 ♘ef4 White is certainly better, but this is not nearly as promising as our main line because here Black can keep his bishop-pair and it is hard to make progress.

1...♖h6!

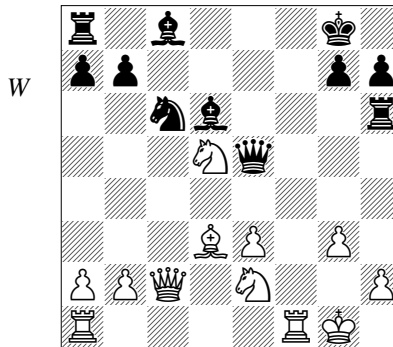
Black's threat is ...♙e6, since White's knight currently cannot retreat to f4. This move is surprisingly slow because Black is a pawn down at the moment and playing to keep tension on the board, rather than trying to regain his pawn immediately. Realizing he cannot regain it though, Black seeks to maintain the maximum amount of compensation.

After 1...♖xf1+ 2 ♖xf1 ♖h8 3 ♙f5 ± White shuts down Black's play.

2 dxe5

2 ♙f5 ♖h5 3 h4 exd4 4 exd4 ♖e8 5 ♖f2 is also very good for White.

2...♖xe5 (D)



3 ♖ad1!

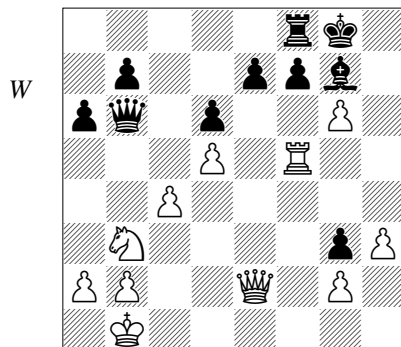
White needs to make sure his minor pieces are secure in the centre of the board now. If he can stabilize his d5-knight and d3-bishop, shutting out Black's activity, Black will have insufficient compensation for the pawn, despite his bishop-pair and White's isolated e3-pawn.

3 ♙e4! is good too. After 3...♖h8 Black has dynamic plans in mind like ...♙h3 followed by ...♖e8 and ...♘b4, which can destabilize White's pieces in the centre. However, 4 a3! is a good response. This is useful in preventing one of Black's main ideas and allows the rook to feel more comfortable when it slides over from a1 to e1. 4...♙g4 5 ♖ae1 ♖e8 6 ♘ec3 (White is almost done consolidating his position in the centre and getting ready to move forward) 6...♙e6

7 ♖d1! (this makes sense to keep a firm grip on d5 now that the g4-bishop no longer covers d1)
7...a6 8 ♕f5 ±.

3...♗e6 4 ♖ef4 ♕f7 5 ♕e4 ♖e8 6 ♜c3 ±

White intends ♖d2, with ♕d5 in mind to secure the d5-square for White's knights and remove Black's bishop-pair.



Kislik – Szalanczy
Budapest 2009

After outplaying my opponent, I expected there would be a clear forced win.

33 gxf7+?

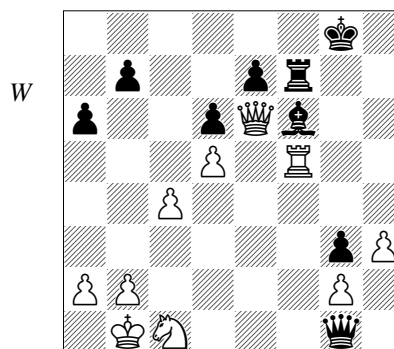
And there is, but this is not it! 33 ♖f4!! wins by threatening the very modest ♖xe7. I overlooked it, thinking that I needed to play more concretely, especially with a capture on f7 at my disposal. Painfully slow moves of this nature tend to exist due to the helplessness of the opponent. In this case, Black has absolutely nothing he can do to create meaningful threats or aid in the defence, causing his position to collapse right away. Then 33...♗h6 (33...fxg6 34 ♖e6+ ends things in view of the rook check on h4; 33...♖c7 34 ♖xf7 ♖xf7 35 ♖e6 +-) 34 gxf7+ ♖xf7 is clearly winning for White – the simplest way to continue is to take on f7, check on e6 and gobble up the e7-pawn, with two extra pawns and a continuing attack.

So what train of thought led to the text-move? 33 ♖xf7? ♖g1+! 34 ♖c2 (34 ♜c1 ♕h6! = was one issue here) 34...♖xf7 35 gxf7+ ♖f8! looked a little better for White but was not compelling. To avoid the check on g1 followed by ...♕h6 (in the line with the knight on c1), I opted for taking on f7 with the pawn.

33...♖xf7 34 ♖e6

Unfortunately, despite my searches, I could not find anything for White. I was completely shocked that Black was able to hold everything together. 34 ♖xf7 ♖xf7 is a line engines are initially excited about, but later realize offers very few actual winning chances for White. After 35 ♖c2 ♖b4 Black intends the modest ...♕f6. White has nothing special to show here and his queen is stuck defending c4.

34...♖g1+ 35 ♜c1 ♕f6 (D)



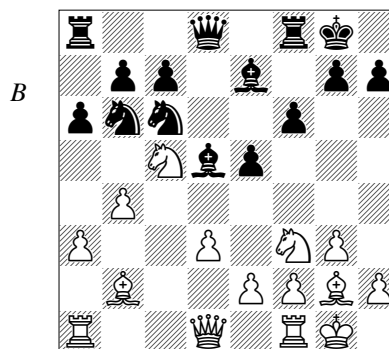
36 ♖f4

36 ♖c2 ♖xg2+ 37 ♜e2 b6 =.

36...♖xg2 37 ♖g4+ ♕g7

Black holds everything together.

38 ♖c8+ ♖f8 39 ♖e6+ ♖f7 40 ♖c8+ ♖f8 41 ♖e6+ 1/2-1/2



Dal Bianco – Alkire
Budapest 2014

Black has slightly mishandled the opening and White's knight has quickly reached c5, with immediate pressure on b7. Now the best line of play is as follows:

13...♜d7!?