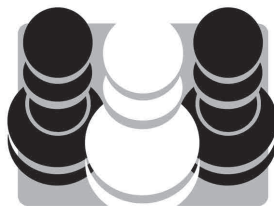


Chess Classics

The Science of Strategy

By

Alexander Kotov



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Publisher's Foreword

In his brief introduction the author writes about the contents of this book, not himself. So it feels appropriate to add a few words about Alexander Kotov. Nowadays Kotov is thought of primarily as an author, with *Think Like a Grandmaster* particularly famous. But he was also an immensely strong player – a Soviet Champion (jointly with Bronstein) and twice a Candidate for the world title. And also twice an Olympiad team gold medallist. Those wins, in 1952 and 1954, were the Soviet Union's first, and marked the start of Soviet domination of the Olympiads that lasted as long as the Soviet Union. The 1954 Soviet team is worth naming in full: Botvinnik, Smyslov, Bronstein, Keres, Geller, Kotov. A mighty team that won gold with plenty of room to spare – a seven-point margin. That team also hints at why Kotov's playing career is not so celebrated – his contemporaries and compatriots were some of the greatest-ever players.

As an author Kotov is well respected. In *The Science of Strategy* he takes a methodical approach, tackling one strategic element, or one type of centre, at a time to unlock its secrets. To quote the author from Chapter 8: *"In our day, a chess master armed with Steinitz's teaching applies himself to the position on the board in the manner of a chemist. In order to assess the position correctly, he first has to resolve it into its component parts."*

And shortly after: *"A chemist who breaks any substance down into its elements will draw his conclusions from this and then apply a method of synthesis. A chessplayer proceeds in exactly the same way when after concluding his analysis he composes his verdict on the position."*

A modern-day player is unlikely to have much faith in the scientific accuracy of our strategic judgement, partly perhaps because computers have shown our understanding is no match for a mighty number-cruncher that understands nothing. But we humans cannot analyse a billion positions per second, so improving our understanding is our best way forward. And Kotov's clear and methodical approach is an ideal guide to chess strategy. He shares his ideas in well-annotated positional games, with the likes of Alekhine, Botvinnik and Karpov featuring heavily. Kotov's style in this book is to describe the chess in words, with relatively few variations.

I hope the readers will enjoy this instructive book, and feel it is a worthy addition to our Classics series. In fact, it is a relatively modern book by Classics standards, with the most recent annotated game being from 1977.

John Shaw
Glasgow, February 2019

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Preface

The creative potential of a chessplayer depends to a significant degree on his analytical powers, his ability to discern the most important nuances of a position and evaluate them correctly.

At the start of this book we will discuss the important role of the pawn in chess. The reader will discover what a many-sided role the weakest fighting unit plays. In particular, we will demonstrate the possible game scenarios that are determined by the pawn structure in the centre.

We will then acquaint the reader with the strategic peculiarities of operations in the centre and on the queenside. We will analyse various cases where the fight is transferred from one wing to the other or from the centre to the wing; and we will also look at examples of a protracted struggle featuring an attack on *both* wings.

In the concluding chapter, building on what has gone before, we will turn to one of the most difficult aspects of chess – the ability to evaluate a position and act on the basis of this evaluation in accordance with a plan previously conceived. The discussion will be supported by analysis of games by distinguished grandmasters. In preparing this edition, the author has tried to supply the book liberally with games from contemporary tournaments with deep strategic content. The games that meet this criterion in the highest degree are those of World Champion Anatoly Karpov.

Alexander Kotov

Chapter 5

Manoeuvring

Earlier we looked at examples of operations in the centre, on the queenside, and on both wings. We then studied how to conduct a lengthy defence in the hope of obtaining chances for a counterattack. In all these cases the aim was clear enough: to save the game by repulsing the opponent's threats, or conversely to develop an offensive according to the familiar principle: "The player with the advantage must attack or risk losing it." But what do you do when the position is level, neither side has an advantage, and hence neither has a basis for attack or a reason to defend?

In such a case you need to manoeuvre. This means you need to provoke your opponent into ill-considered actions, to create weaknesses in his pawn structure, and to attempt to disturb the coordination of his fighting forces. It is only after creating weaknesses in his opponent's camp and achieving a distinct ascendancy that a chessplayer can (and must!) attack.

We will take a manoeuvre to mean the totality of movements with one or more pieces in the service of a specific aim. In a broad sense, the game itself amounts to a manoeuvre, inasmuch as it constitutes an aggregate of moves subordinated to a clear goal.

Manoeuvring is an art which can be mastered only through diligent study of the laws of strategy and tactics, and which requires an ability to assess the situation on the board with precision. This art comes with experience, as a player gradually obtains answers to other questions relating to the overall theory of chess. The ability to manoeuvre well is developed by persistent study of master games, by taking a critical view of your own play and subjecting your own games to detailed analysis.

Precise manoeuvring enables a player in a level position to gain the advantage and achieve victory. With the aid of a well-thought-out manoeuvre you can seize the initiative and break through your opponent's defensive lines. Even in the opening you need to manoeuvre in this way, to take over the initiative and force your opponent to defend. This art is of special importance in the endgame: quite often some monotonous manoeuvring helps you to exploit a minimal edge or even to win an equal position.

Nor should we ignore the psychological factors. Chess is played by people with their own individual faults and weaknesses. It is therefore most important to take account of your opponent's character traits: is he attentive or not, is he prone to blunder or is he impeccably precise? In equal positions you must foist on your opponent the type of game where he feels least at ease, so as to take advantage of his characteristic diffidence or, on the contrary, his reckless intrepidity.

As a rule, manoeuvring is a long-drawn-out affair; the pieces repeatedly undergo repositionings that tend to resemble one another. Such "stodgy" play is simply dictated by the situation on the board. If you don't hold an advantage, you must control your temperament and restrain your aggressive urges until a real preponderance has been attained, giving you the right to start

an attack. As long as the position is equal, keep manoeuvring and “tacking” to induce a weakening in your opponent’s camp. Your play may not have a very aesthetic appearance and someone may accuse you of not having a clear-cut plan, but don’t let it bother you. Chess does at times involve provocation, feints and traps – but all this is still chess.

However, it must not be supposed that manoeuvring can be carried out without a plan. That is not the case, and handling the plan is sometimes anything but simple. We recommend that the reader carefully studies the manoeuvres undertaken by the opponents in the games below.

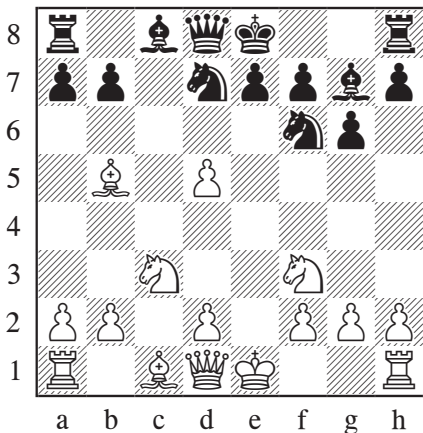
Alexander Alekhine – Movsas Feigin

Caro-Kann Defence
Kemer 1937

1.c4 c6 2.e4 d5 3.exd5 cxd5 4.cxd5 ♖f6 5.♙b5† ♜bd7!

A well-known variation of the Caro-Kann. Black sacrifices a pawn, but White can’t maintain his material plus. After ...g6, ...♙g7, ...0-0 and ...♜b6 Black wins the pawn back with an excellent position.

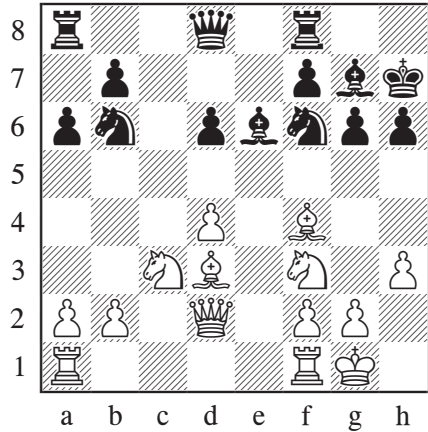
6.♜c3 g6 7.♜f3 ♙g7



8.d6

Concluding that the pawn on d5 is doomed, Alekhine returns it but endeavours to weaken Black’s pawn structure in the process.

8...exd6 9.0-0 0-0 10.d4 h6 11.♙f4 ♜b6 12.♗d2 a6 13.♙d3 ♜h7 14.h3 ♙e6



The opening stage is at an end. A careful study of the position allows us to conclude that the game is about even. Whether in the centre or on the wings, neither player has an advantage or any noticeable weaknesses. Both sides now have to draw up their plans. What should White be striving for? He needs to manoeuvre in a way that makes his opponent weaken his pawns and drives the black pieces from their good posts.

In this context we would again draw your attention to one important point. This type of play must not be viewed as though it consisted of disjointed, fortuitous moves independent of any unified plan. On the contrary: here more than anywhere else, the aim to be pursued must be precisely defined.

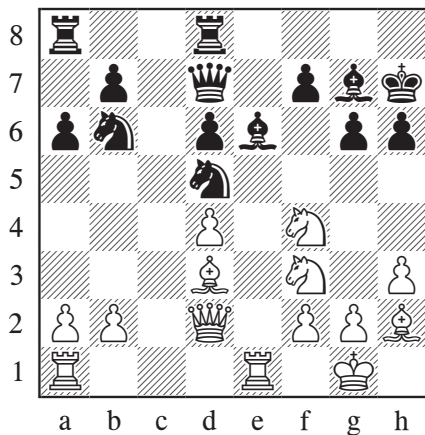
In the present case Alekhine sets out to accomplish the following tasks: first, to conquer the important d5-point; and secondly, to provoke some pawn moves on the queenside, so as to station his own pieces on the squares that those moves have weakened and begin an attack in that sector of the board.

The reader should pay attention to the way that White's moves – which at first sight look unsystematic and repetitive – are actually pursuing a specific goal which is eventually achieved. Alekhine's operations appear clumsy – manoeuvring *is* sometimes characterized by monotony and a sluggish pace – but they enable him to solve the task he has set himself, for the moves are all subordinated to a unified design.

15. ♖fe1 ♗d7 16. ♕h2

White frees the f4-square for the knight on c3.

16... ♘fd5 17. ♘e2 ♖fd8 18. ♘f4



18... ♕f5

In a manoeuvring game, each step has to be precisely calculated – all the underlying subtleties of the position must be allowed for. Here Feigin goes wrong. His bishop move is out of place, and allows Alekhine to work up serious pressure on the queenside with his energetic response. It was essential to play 18... ♘xf4 19. ♖xf4 ♘d5, with ...b5 to follow.

19. ♘xd5 ♘xd5 20. ♕c4! ♕e6 21. a4

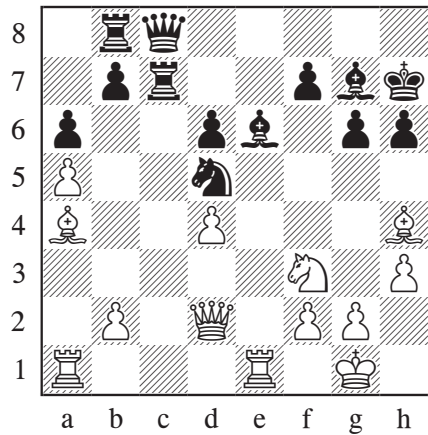
Aiming to block the enemy queenside pawns. Black should now play 21...b5, even though this does cause his pawns to be weakened. His

irresolute and planless play leads to the total paralysis of his queenside.

21... ♖ac8 22. ♕b3 ♖c7 23. a5

White has made distinct progress, but we cannot speak of a big advantage. Black has a robust position and has managed to avoid incurring any serious weaknesses. Alekhine now goes about accomplishing the next stage of his plan – seizure of the key square d5.

23... ♖d7 24. ♕a4 ♖e7 25. ♕g3 ♖c7 26. ♕b3 ♖d7 27. ♕h4 ♖b8 28. ♕a4 ♖c8

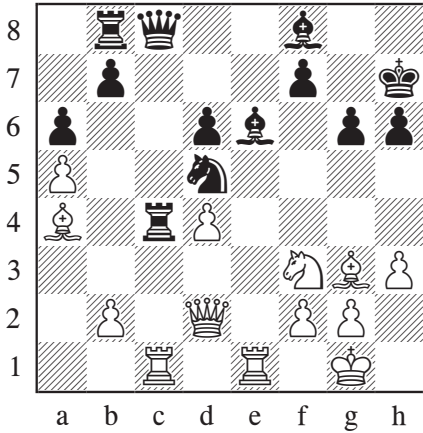


The next five moves will prove crucial. What has White achieved so far? At first glance, nothing substantial. And yet the position is gradually changing in his favour: the rook on b8 is very poorly placed, and this impairs the harmonious coordination of the black pieces.

29. ♖ac1 ♖c4

A grave error, upsetting the shaky equilibrium. With 29...b5 there was an excellent chance that things would go well for Black. If 30. ♕b3, then 30... ♖bb7 followed by ... ♖xc1 and ... ♖c7. Or if 30. axb6, then 30... ♖xb6 with adequate counterplay. But now White obtains the advantage, since he seizes the c-file and then also gains possession of the important d5-point.

30. ♖g3 ♗f8



31. h4!

An important link in White’s plan. The black pieces have gravitated towards the queenside and forgotten about the defence of their own king. Alekhine has taken note of this and created the threat of an attack on the king’s shield of pawns, by means of h4-h5. To avoid a new weakening of his position, Black is compelled to remove his knight from d5. This is just the result that Alekhine has been striving for.

Manoeuvring means consistently creating “small” threats that force slight changes in the position. The process is a long-drawn-out one, but it is the only way you can tip the scales in your own favour. Excessive haste, untimely activity, can spoil the whole enterprise. Patience and still more patience – this alone can help you achieve success in a balanced position.

31... ♖f6 32. ♖b3 ♗xc1 33. ♗xc1 ♖d7 34. d5!

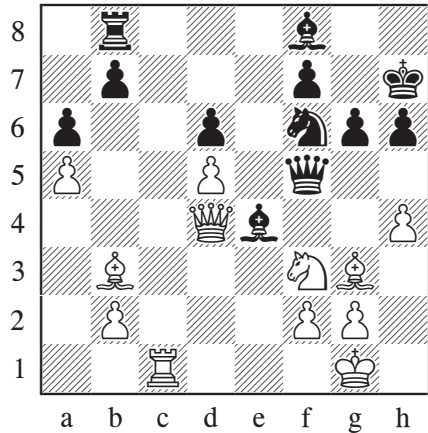
At last White succeeds in carrying out this extremely important move. The black pieces are deprived of their strongpoints and forced to regroup. For nearly twenty moves Alekhine has been labouring to make possible this little step with the pawn – such is the length of time that a manoeuvring process may take. There is nothing surprising here – in a level position,

attaining an advantage is the most difficult thing.

34... ♖f5 35. ♗b4 ♖e4

Unlike Alekhine, Feigin manoeuvres without a definite plan. Rather than make useless moves with the bishop, it would be better to transfer the knight at once via e4 to c5.

36. ♗d4! ♖f5



37. ♗d2!

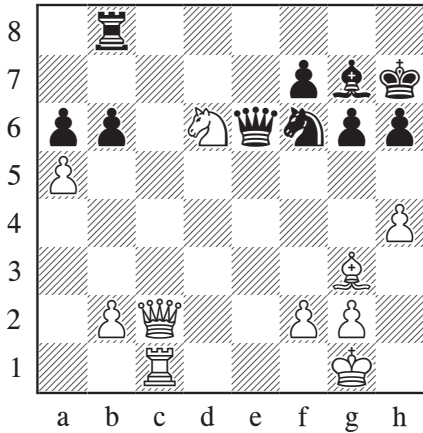
The concrete approach, based on exact calculation. White gives up a pawn to create a tense situation in the centre, rich in tactical possibilities.

37... ♖xd5 38. ♖xd5 ♗xd5 39. ♗e4

With the simple threat of 40. ♗xd5 followed by 41. ♗f6†. Black is compelled to give up his d6-pawn.

39... ♖g7 40. ♗xd6 ♖e6 41. ♗d2 ♗f6 42. ♗c2 b6?

Tarrasch once observed that in a difficult position there isn’t long to wait for mistakes to come. It isn’t easy for Black to endure the clamp on his queenside, and he resolves to free himself somehow or other. But the new weakening of his position leads to a quick catastrophe.



43.♞c7!

This move, attacking two pawns and the rook, must have been missed by Black. His reply is forced.

43...♘d7 44.♘xf7!

A simple little combination on the theme of a pin, pawn promotion and overloading. If the knight is taken, White wins with 45.♞d1. But other continuations leave Black with no saving chances either.

44...♞f8 45.♘d8 ♞f6

Here the game was adjourned, and Black resigned without resuming. After 46.♞d1! (which White sealed), resistance is useless. The manoeuvres by which White weakened his opponent's pawn structure and worsened the placing of the enemy pieces are highly instructive.

1-0

Very often the purpose of the manoeuvring is to transfer a particular piece to an important square. We shall see this kind of scenario in our next two games.

Movsas Feigin – Salo Flohr

Grünfeld Defence

Kemerl 1937

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 d5 4.♞b3 dxc4
5.♞xc4 ♙e6 6.♞b5† ♘c6

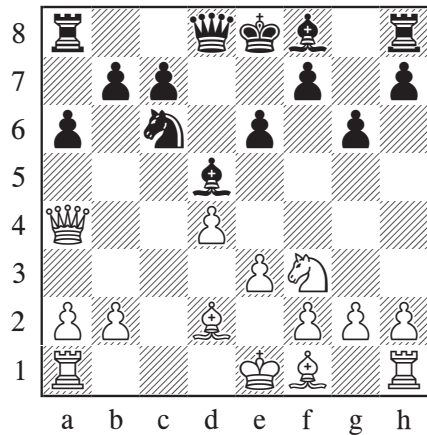
A sharp Grünfeld variation which at that time was little studied. Today this method of fighting for the centre squares has already gone out of fashion.

7.♘f3 ♘d5

White can't play 8.♞xb7, as after 8...♘db4 Black is threatening to trap the queen with 9...♞b8 – and against 9.♞b5 he gains the advantage with 9...♙d7 10.♞a4 ♘xd4.

White's best continuation, with which he can hope to obtain a small plus, is 8.e4!. The exchange of knights, on the other hand, leads to complete equality.

8.♘xd5 ♙xd5 9.e3 e6 10.♙d2 a6 11.♞a4



The position is completely level. Neither Black nor White has any noticeable weaknesses or problems with his development. There is parity in the centre as well.

What should be the players' plans now? At first glance it looks as if Black should bring his

bishop out to g7, castle short, and afterwards think how to carry on from there. But such an approach is mistaken – it would lead to a colourless draw at best, or even to defeat.

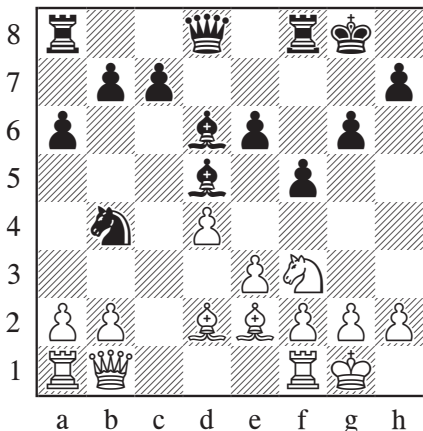
Flohr approaches the problem in a creative manner. What should he do in this position? The answer is simple: he must improve the placing of his pieces to the maximum, in such a way as to direct their activity against his opponent’s kingside. It would be dangerous for White to castle long, as Black could start a queenside pawn storm with ...b5. The king will therefore have to hide on “its own” wing – at which Black’s forces must aim. These considerations explain his next move.

11...♗d6!

Brilliant! The bishop doesn’t go to the g7-square that was prepared for it, but occupies the h2-b8 diagonal. The aim of the move is not only to organize a kingside attack or prepare a direct sacrifice of the bishop. A manoeuvre like this, based on an exact assessment of the situation, is the fruit of serious deliberations.

12.♙e2 0-0 13.♖c2 ♘b4 14.♗b1 f5 15.0-0

Development is complete, the kings have occupied their destined places. The manoeuvring phase begins. Try to guess Flohr’s next move now!



15...♞c6!!

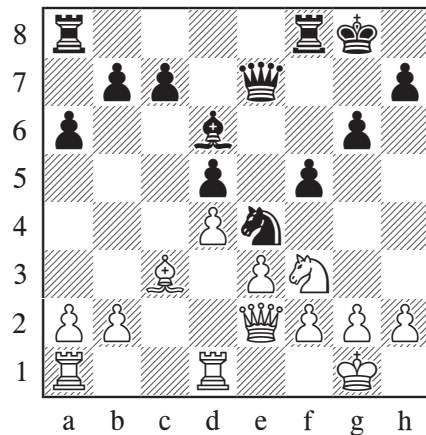
The knight voluntarily abandons its strong post and goes back where it came from. Has it lost its bearings? Not at all – the knight is performing an important manoeuvre. It is marching along the route b8-d7-f6 towards the e4-square, where it will be beautifully placed. It is just such purposeful moves that distinguish a well-planned and deeply thought-out manoeuvring game.

Not surprisingly, this manoeuvre enables Black to upset the established balance and eventually tip the scales in his favour.

16.♙c3 ♖e7 17.♞d1 ♘b8! 18.♞d2 ♞d7 19.♙f3 ♞f6 20.♗d3 ♞e4

It’s easy to see how Black’s central position has been strengthened by the knight’s arrival at its appointed post. There is already a threat of a bishop sacrifice on h2 followed by a check on h4.

21.♗e2 ♞g5 22.♙xd5 exd5 23.♞f3 ♞e4



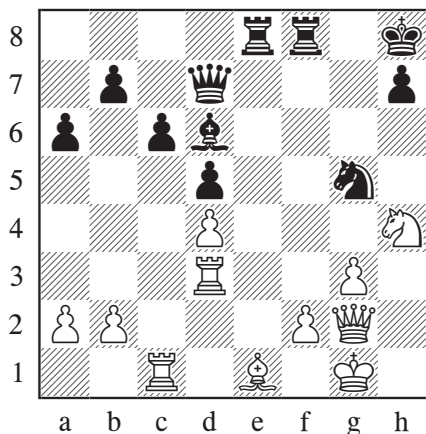
How do we assess the situation now? The bishop on d6 is a good deal stronger than its counterpart on c3, and the knights too are unequal in the possibilities open to them. But the main point is that Black is not only threatening to attack the white king by means of ..g5-g4 and ...♞f6-h6; the remarkable

knight manoeuvre has radically altered the correlation of forces on the board, and Black now possesses a decisive positional advantage.

24.♖ac1 c6 25.♙e1 ♖ae8 26.g3 ♗d7 27.♗f1 g5

Black has every reason to begin the assault on his opponent's king position. The centre is firmly closed; White lacks possibilities to deliver a counter-stroke and is forced to watch passively as the hostile army approaches.

28.♞d3 f4 29.exf4 gxf4 30.♘h4 ♔h8 31.♗g2 fxg3 32.hxg3 ♘g5



Setting up a threat of ...♘h3† among other things. But even more importantly, the rook on e8 is enabled to invade the second rank.

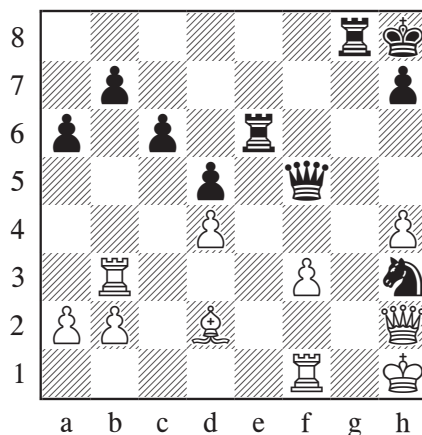
33.f3 ♘h3† 34.♔h1

Instead 34.♔h2 comes up against 34...♘f4! 35.gxf4 ♖xf4!

34...♙e7 35.♙d2 ♙xh4 36.gxh4 ♗f5 37.♖b3 ♖g8

Winning the game. White's kingside pawns are shattered and his king is left without cover. No wonder it will very quickly succumb to the onslaught of Black's active pieces.

38.♗h2 ♖e6 39.♖f1



39...♘f2†

If 40.♖xf2, then 40...♗b1†; while after 40.♗xd2 ♗h3†, mate follows.

0-1