

THE POWER OF
MIDDLEGAME KNOWLEDGE

**THE EXCHANGE SACRIFICE
UNLEASHED**

First edition 2023 by Thinkers Publishing
Copyright © 2023 All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission from the publisher.

All sales or enquiries should be directed to Thinkers Publishing, 9850 Landegem, Belgium.

Email: info@thinkerspublishing.com

Website: www.thinkerspublishing.com

Managing Editor: Daniël Vanheirzeele

Typesetting: Primož Žerdin, Primož Riegler

Proofreading: Andy Burnett

Cover Design: Iwan Kerkhof

Graphic Artist: Philippe Tonnard

Cartoons: Indigenius

Production: BestInGraphics

ISBN 9789464201697

D/2022/13733/39

THE POWER OF MIDDLEGAME KNOWLEDGE

The Exchange Sacrifice Unleashed

GEORG MOHR

Thinkers Publishing 2023



Key to symbols

!	a good move	±	White has a serious advantage
?	a weak move	∓	Black has a serious advantage
!!	an excellent move	+−	White has a decisive advantage
??	a blunder	−+	Black has a decisive advantage
!?	an interesting move	→	with an attack
?!	a dubious move	↑	with initiative
□	only move	⇝	with counterplay
=	equality	Δ	with the idea of
∞	unclear position	⊃	better is
≡	with compensation for the sacrificed material	N	novelty
±	White stands slightly better	+	check
∓	Black stands slightly better	#	mate

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	15
Terminology	19
Types of exchange sacrifices	19
The value of the exchange.....	20
The moment and the experience	21
Grandmasters about the exchange sacrifice.....	22
Concept	23

Chapter I

The Exchange Sacrifice for the Attack.....	27
King in the center (...).....	27
Schulten : Morphy.....	27
Spassky : Avtonomov	28
Geller : Karpov	29
Letelier : Fischer.....	30
Fischer : Camara	31
Portisch : Forintos.....	31
Kottnauer : Platz.....	32
Opening Files and Diagonals towards the king.....	33
Lputian : Sadler.....	33
Akopian : Illescas Cordoba.....	35
Korchnoi : Geller.....	38
Dreev : Peng.....	39
P. Nikolic : Ribli	39
Onischuk : P. Nikolic	40
Fischer : Minic.....	41
Tal : Timman.....	43
I. Sokolov : Van Wely	43

Magic knights.....	44
Vitolins : G. Timoschenko	44
Dreev : Smirin	46
Destroying the pawn structure in front of the king.....	47
Botvinnik : Portisch	47
Anand : Ivanchuk	48
Removing the defender.....	49
Sutovsky : Laznicka	49
Keres : Szabo.....	50
Good calculation	51
S. Kasparov : Solomon	51
Erdogdu : M. Gurevich.....	51
Ligterink : Mednis	52
To sacrifice or not?	54
Malakhov: Naiditsch	54
Riazantsev : Onischuk.....	56
Ni Hua : Zvjaginsev	57
Gelfand : Topalov.....	58

Chapter II

Defence!	61
When there is no choice	61
Timman : Korchnoi	62
Sevian : Kamsky	64
Fear	66
Reshevsky : Seidman	66
Pinter : Sakelsek	68
Salem : Giri	70
Petrosian's blockades.....	71
Reshevsky : Petrosian.....	71
Petrosian : Gligoric	75
Tal : Petrosian	77
Portisch : Petrosian	81
Hort : Petrosian	84

The best chance	86
Carlsen : Adams.....	86
Leko : Carlsen	87
Positional fortress.....	89
Aronian : Carlsen.....	89
Kramnik : Anand.....	91
Nepomniachtchi : Anand.....	93
So : Ding Liren.....	95

Chapter III

Ending	97
Rook against piece.....	97
Rook and pawn against minor piece.....	99
Em. Lasker : Ed. Lasker	99
Morozevich : Van Kampen.....	100
Rook and pawn(s) against rook and pawn(s)	101
Stefansson : Shirov	101
Reshevsky : Fischer	102
Leko : Beliavsky	103
Speelman : Kasparov	105
Exchange sacrifice for the realization.....	107
Tal : Bronstein.....	107
Mamedyarov : Gelfand	109
Isgandarova : Zimina	111
Romanishin : Smagin	111
Akobian : Shankland	112
The Capablanca Rule.....	114
Capablanca : Janowski	114
Przepiorka : Gruenfeld	116
Lombardy : Fischer	117
Ruan Lufei : Zhao Xue	117
Menzi : Stojkowska	118
Smejkal : Parma	118
Rogers : Tregubov	119

Geller : Mikhalchishin.....	120
Mikhalchishin : Bareev.....	120
Zherebukh : Bartel	121
Korchnoi : Serper	121
Djuraev : Solomon.....	122
Goryachkina : Arabidze.....	123
N. Kosintseva : Lomineishvili.....	123
Raimanov : Kovacs.....	124

Chapter IV

Exchange Sacrifice in the Opening.....	125
Reti Opening.....	127
Rashkovsky : Šulava.....	127
French defense.....	130
Berkovich : Mikhalchishin.....	130
Richter : Berg.....	133
Open games	136
Malakhov : Predojevic.....	136
Kuczynski : Naiditsch	138
Kurmann : Naiditsch.....	140
Tseshkovsky : Beliavsky	141
Sicilian wanderings	143
Bilek : Gheorghiu.....	143
Wang Hao : Timofeev	144
Sveshnikov variation	146
Solomon, S : Spasov	146
Dieks : Van der Sterren.....	147
Kasparov : Shirov	148
Paehzt : Kovalevskaya.....	151
 a1 for the black squares	153
Giri : Vitiugov	153
 f8 for black squares	156
Panov : Simagin.....	156
Khasin : Stein	159

♖a8 for the white squares!	161
Palac : Gurevich.....	161
Martin Grillo : Corrales Jimenez	163
♖c3 - the mother of all exchange sacrifices!.....	165
A few more Sicilian sacrifices	168
Sutovsky : Kozul	168
Large : Basman.....	172
Closed games	174
Ding Liren : Caruana.....	174
Fier : Dzagnidze	176
Edouard : Grandadam.....	178
Grünfeld!	180
Wang Yue : Carlsen	180
P.H. Nielsen : McShane	182
Grischuk : Nepomniachtchi.....	185

Chapter V

Critical Squares.....	187
Exchange sacrifice on c3/c6.....	188
Vladimir Simagin	188
Althausen : Simagin.....	189
Ravinsky : Simagin	190
Gipslis : Simagin.....	191
...♖c3 for the checkmate!.....	193
Matulovic : Velimirovic	193
Grandelius : Gajewski	195
Baron : Zubov	196
...♖c3 for the e4 pawn.....	198
Padevsky : Botvinnik	198
Ermenkov : Portisch	199
...♖c3 for positional pressure	201
Mnatsakanian : Rashkovsky	201
Naroditsky : Nakamura	203

♖c3 – different motives.....	205
Damjanovic : Stein.....	205
Grischuk : Topalov.....	208
Szabo : Petrosian.....	209
De Firmian : Ivanchuk.....	211
♖c6!	213
Grischuk : Mamedyarov.....	213
Duda : Iordachescu	214
And yet it's not always good!	215
Parma : Stein	215
Exchange sacrifice on e3/e6.....	217
Grigorian : Planinc	217
Tal : Kolarov	219
Polugaevsky : Petrosian	220
Timman : Kasparov	220
Lautier : Topalov	222
Grischuk : Riazantsev.....	223
Wang Hao : Timofeev	224
Kaplan : Isgandarova	226
Exchange sacrifice on h4/h5	227
Vakhidov : McDonald	227
Howell : Regan.....	229
Radjabov : Bartel.....	230
Bartel : Firman.....	232
Mohr : Leventic	233
J. Polgar : Smirin	235
Fischer : Larsen	236
Fischer : Gligoric	237
Exchange sacrifice on f3/f6	238
Alekhine : Rubinstein	239
Smyslov : Trifunovic	241
Portisch : Karpov	242
Larsen : Dehmelt	243
Shirov : Short	245
Shen Yang : Zhao Xue.....	248
Mitkov : Rublevsky.....	249

Chapter VI

The Positional Exchange Sacrifice.....	251
Exchange sacrifice to dominate the light squares	253
Shomoev : Vitiugov	253
Ragger : I. Saric	256
Petrosian : Fischer	258
Anand : Adams	260
Kramnik : McShane	264
Salomon : Vachier Lagrave	267
Adianto : Gunawan	268
Topalov : Svidler	270
Exchange sacrifice to dominate the black squares.....	272
Neverov : Pradeep	272
Gelfand : Kasimdzhanov	275
Bok : L'Ami	278
Lutz : Karpov	279
Adams : Khalifman	282
Grischuk : Ivanchuk	284
Strong knight	287
Hladik : Kriebel	287
Karpov : Hjartarson	289
Exchange sacrifice to activate a bishop.....	291
Obsivac : S. Kasparov	291
Ki. Georgiev : J. Polgar	293
Polugayesky : Ljubojevic	294
Aronian : Kramnik	295
Van Wely : Zhigalko	298
Rather a bishop than a rook!	300
Smejkal : Portisch	300
Almasi : Anand	303
Suba : Okhotnik	306
The Bishop pair	309
Aronian : Topalov	309
Malakhov : Wei Yi	311
Fischer : Schweber	313

Leko : Topalov	314
A passed pawn.....	316
Gelfand : Filippov.....	316
Sasikiran : Onischuk.....	318
Sasikiran : Shirov	320
Naiditsch : Hamdouchi.....	323
Aronian : Vachier-Lagrave	324
Sutovsky : Ki. Georgiev	327
The pawn center.....	329
Anand : Mamedyarov.....	329
Khismatullin : Tomashevsky	332
Breaking the pawns.....	335
Woitaszek : Popov.....	335
Van Wely : Macieja	337
A developmental advantage.....	340
Beliavsky : Kasparov	340
Domination	343
Karjakin : Caruana	343
Anand : Gelfand	346
Volokitin : Istratescu	350
Jakovenko : Ponkratov	351
Seirawan : Short.....	353
The fight for the initiative.....	355
Bacrot : Carlsen.....	355
Adams : Wang Hao	359
Ding Liren : Wang Hao	360
Shirov : Vallejo Pons.....	362
Adams : Topalov	364
Kramnik : Kasparov.....	366
Blockade	368
E. Hansen : Gonzalez Vidal	368
Brkic : Lalic.....	370
Le Quang Liem : Svidler.....	373
Breaking the blockade.....	375
Bareev : Yusupov.....	375

Piece exclusion	379
Dominguez Perez : Cox	379
Lautier : Grischuk	380
Elimination of the outpost.....	383
Philidor	383
Tolush : Botvinnik.....	386
Adhiban : Alekseev.....	388
Aronian : Leko	391
Nakamura : Gopal.....	392
Fork.....	395
De Saint Amant : Staunton	395
Selezniev : Alekhine	397
Ljubinski : Botvinnik	399
Spassky : Petrosian	401
Areshchenko : Timman	402
Svidler : Ponomarev	403
Calculation - decision!	405
Gaehwiler : Yu Yangyi	405
Ding Liren : Vachier-Lagrave.....	408
Topalov : Salov	411
Kasparov : Karpov	413
Leitao : Carlsen	415
Instead of a draw - a sacrifice!.....	416
Anand : Kramnik	416
Anand : Kramnik	418
Instead of sacrifice - acceptance!	420
Kim : Skacelik	420
Kosteniuk : Shirov	422
Engine - Practice	425
Karjakin : Svidler	425
A double-exchange sacrifice	428
Wojtaszek : Jakovenko	428
Kovalev : Praggnanandhaa.....	430
Troianescu : Petrosian	432
Topalov : Aronian.....	434

Timman : Van Wely	438
Spassky : Arutiuno	440
Melkumyan : Gunnarsson	441
Karpov : Topalov	443
Petrosian : Spassky	445

Chapter VII

World Champions and the Exchange Sacrifice..... 447

Anatoly Karpov 449

Karpov : Larsen	449
Karpov : Gelfand	453
Lautier : Karpov	455

Garry Kasparov 458

Kasparov : Seirawan	458
Smyslov : Kasparov	461
Movsesian : Kasparov	463

Vladimir Kramnik..... 466

Gustafsson : Kramnik	466
Kramnik : Fridman	468
Kramnik : Bluebaum	470

Viswanathan Anand 473

Anand : Kasparov	473
Anand : Ivanchuk	475
Anand : Svidler	478

Magnus Carlsen..... 482

Carlsen : Caruana	482
Carlsen : Caruana	485
Carlsen : Giri	488

Introduction

Dear readers!

Allow me to introduce myself first. My name is Georg Mohr, I come from Slovenia, and I rose to become a Grandmaster in chess and more or less ended my playing career around the turn of the millennium. Lately I have been working as a coach and writing about my favourite game, so I dare say I have a lot of miles behind me and a lot of experience.

The book you have just started reading is about a very interesting and difficult concept: the exchange sacrifice. This is the moment in chess when basic mathematics breaks down, the moment when 3 counts equal to or even more than 5. So let us leave the mathematics aside and try to figure out why this simple calculation is so difficult to understand.

The answer is largely hidden in psychology, as the ninth World Champion, Tigran Petrosian, has often told us, as the man who brought this strategic-tactical chess concept to its first peak. Chess beginners were taught the value of pieces by their teachers (parents, grandparents, perhaps at school or even later in the beginners' sections of chess clubs). We explain the difference between piece values to children in the simplest way possible, with the help of a unit of measurement, and in chess those units are the pawns. They tell us that a rook is worth five pawns (units) and a knight and a bishop are worth about three each. They also tell us to always be careful, especially during exchanges, to ensure we take at least as much from our opponent as he or she took from us. So, one rook at a time, perhaps for a bishop and a knight next to two pawns. This "chess thinking" is done quickly and very strongly subconsciously in most, one could even say all. Therefore, when choosing moves, we will automatically reject unfavourable exchanges. But who trades a queen for a knight, a bishop for a pawn, and the like? We know from our own life experience that it is better to have ten coins in our pocket than three, and I prefer three to one! This psychological barrier is the most difficult step in making the decision to sacrifice. And so it is with the sacrifice of an exchange.

Five for three, that is! Even five for four, if we get a pawn for the rook along with the knight or the bishop. "I am not stupid," you think, "but who would agree to such an exchange?" And yet, over time, as we play chess longer and watch

different games or coaches try to explain this and that to us, we see that a material advantage is not always something to celebrate. Sometimes, and not only in a few cases, three counts for much more than five, and there are more than just a few examples when even a one beats a ten. So how? Why?

The answer to this is already a step into the higher school of chess. There we see that occasionally the knight or bishop defeats the rook, even if the player with the material advantage does everything right and produces the best moves until the end of the game. That's when we begin to realise that there is more to chess than a simple mathematical principle, that there is something more to our royal game. Compensation is a chess concept that we only fully understand when we enter the world of serious chess. The relative value of pieces is perhaps the most difficult chess concept of all to explain. It is one that every player must feel and believe in and can only be accepted with the help of our own practice, and when we feel it come together as though a part of us.

Why so much talk about such or similar sacrifices? Quite simply because we are afraid! We have been taught, and practice shows and proves the clear fact, that the closer we get to the last part of the game, the ending, the more pronounced a material advantage becomes. If in the middlegame we can still hope for sudden turns, for the influence of other pieces, this is negligible in the endgame. So the fear is not only justified, but completely justified: We are afraid that we will not be able to prove the compensation and sooner or later end up in the endgame with a fatal material deficit.

But do not think that this only affects the player who has sacrificed or is about to sacrifice - the opponent is going through hell too! Maybe less so with tactical sacrifices, where we immediately see what the sacrificer gets in return. There it is easier to decide whether to accept the sacrifice or not. It is much more difficult with positional sacrifices: how can we not accept the rook that the opponent offers us, when there is nothing concrete to see? One or two weaknesses perhaps, but they can be eliminated, and the material advantage and a secure victory in the endgame remains. Believe me, there are very few chess players, from beginners to World Champions, who are not tempted to make sacrifices. Therefore, do not be afraid: when you see a sacrifice and – as far as you can realistically estimate what you will get for it – always think about the opponent, who will most likely accept the sacrifice. And may have fallen into a trap ...

Therefore, in this book, in which I will try to shed as much light as possible across many chapters, many open questions will be raised in connection with the sacrifice of the exchange. We will ask ourselves why we encounter more and more of these sacrifices in modern games, why this sacrifice has become an almost commonplace strategic-tactical element. It is obvious that the game is

progressing, that the quality of the average chess player is greatly increasing, and that even the most complex concepts are becoming understandable to more and more players. Today we encounter the exchange sacrifice as a tactical element, when we use it to attack the king, but more and more often also as a strategic element, to which I will devote most of the chapters of this book.

After the introductory part, we will quickly move into the world of tactical play and look at some effective exchange sacrifices when attacking the king, as well as some where the sacrifice is used only as part of a tactical operation not directly related to attacking the king. In the next chapter we will see how we can use sacrifice for the defense - an element we encounter more and more often in modern chess practice. It is used not only by the best chess players in the world, but increasingly by masters and even club players! Interesting also is the next chapter, where we will study the exchange sacrifice in endings.

What follows is a walk through the openings, where we will take a brief look at the typical openings and opening positions in which the sacrifice is most often offered and taken. After the openings, we will focus on the critical squares, the squares where we sacrifice the most. And we are already at the main part of the book - the positional quality sacrifice. We will look at typical motifs and also the cases where we sacrifice both exchanges - and turn 3=5 into an even more incredible 6=10.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly: the games of World Champions and other great chess masters who put the exchange sacrifice on the chess map and who set (and still set) the guidelines and rules for this extremely complex strategic-tactical element.

I have tried to organize the material in such a way that you can easily find your way around the book and easily go through even the most complex chapters. You can open the book to any page and start reading this or that chapter, just as you like. The chapters are not directly related, but when put together as a whole, they open our eyes to this increasingly important strategic element in chess.

I am aware that some excellent works have already been written on the subject of the exchange sacrifice. The Belarusian grandmaster Sergei Kasparov wrote a book about it years ago, and before him the Greek grandmaster and famous trainer Efstratios Grivas. The book Magyar Imro Pal is a bit older. Even as a young man I was fascinated by an excellent book on sacrifices in chess, written by the lesser-known Russian master, Pavel Kondratiev. Even more material can be found in individual chapters of chess strategy and tactics books. The famous Austrian "chess knight" Rudolf Spielmann has written about this in great detail, followed by many chess masters and Grandmasters of all generations.

The main person responsible for my interest in this strategic element is and remains, of course, Tigran Petrosian. At first I was impressed by his examples from tournament practice, later even more by his articles and lectures on this subject. His Chess Lessons - a collection of his lectures and articles - are one of the pearls of world chess literature. It was this booklet that inspired the Russian-Dutch Grandmaster Sergey Tiviakov, who made an excellent DVD on the exchange sacrifice and transferred our topic to the modern, digital world. Interestingly, Tiviakov, like many before and after him, became interested in this once unusual sacrifice precisely because of Petrosian's games.

So here is a hint: go through the database with Petrosian's games and you'll come across a few dozen excellent examples. Generations have learned from him, including his great successors on the chess throne: Anatoly Karpov, Vladimir Kramnik and Viswanathan Anand took their mastery of the field to unimagined heights. Of course, many other masters have also taken advantage of the sacrifice, but more on that in chapter seven.

Rest assured, we have a long and very interesting journey ahead of us. I hope that I have succeeded in illuminating a complex subject from new angles, gathering enough useful material in one place so that the book will be helpful to everyone, from club players to Grandmasters, from chess enthusiasts to children, with the special wish that trainers will also use it.

Enjoy reading, and I hope that you will not only enjoy the book, but also learn something from it!

Georg Mohr, Slovenia, 2022

Terminology

Technically, we speak of an exchange sacrifice when a player exchanges his rook for a minor piece – a bishop or a knight belonging to the opponent. We speak of a sacrifice because the rook is higher on the scale of values of chess pieces: it is valued at five units (pawns), while the knight or bishop is valued at three, at most three and a half.

Therefore, gaining compensation for the expense of the exchange is necessary. It is about getting something in return for a numerical deficit that can only be assessed and evaluated by an experienced chess eye, and that cannot be counted with units. You will never hear that the compensation is worth one or two units: at most the compensation is adequate, more than sufficient, perhaps even worth more than the material sacrificed.

When we speak of an exchange sacrifice, we usually do not mean making the sacrifice out of necessity, such as when the opponent forces us to sacrifice and we simply have no other way out. Nor do we refer to a sacrifice for a final attack on a king or an effective combo. These types of sacrifices are called tactical and are easier for beginners to understand.

The positional exchange sacrifice is something quite different. We speak of it in cases where we do not receive anything concrete in return, but only certain strategic advantage(s). We cannot quickly exploit these strategic advantages, and they are often not obvious or visible at first glance. Therefore, a player who chooses an exchange sacrifice must be prepared for a long battle that will not be decided in a few moves.

Types of exchange sacrifices

The exchange sacrifices can be divided in various ways. We have already talked about the simplest classification, that of a forced sacrifice, when the opponent forces us to become a victim, usually because of his dangerous threats. Then to the tactical sacrifice, when the rook is sacrificed for a minor piece to further an attack or a successful combination and the result is immediately visible. And finally, the positional sacrifice, when we get nothing countable for the sacrificed material, but provide ourselves with one or more (improved) positional elements obtained in exchange.

The second subdivision was adopted from Grandmaster Grivas and his book *The Exchange Sacrifice*. Grivas subdivides the exchange sacrifice into ‘active exchange sacrifice’, when we proceed actively in exchange for lost (sacrificed) material and try to use one of the listed positional elements:

- ♘ Advantage in development.
- ♘ Weakening of the opponent’s pawn structure.
- ♘ Opening file(s) and penetration through it (them).
- ♘ Control of one or more important squares or the entire square complex.
- ♘ Important diagonal control.
- ♘ The initiative.

In the second group Grivas classified the so-called ‘passive exchange sacrifice’, where we pursue one of the following goals:

- ♘ We try to stop the opponent’s attack.
- ♘ We try to weaken or stop the opponent’s initiative.
- ♘ We try to disrupt the coordination between the opponent’s pieces.
- ♘ We gradually flirt with taking the initiative or launching a counterattack.

Of course, there are more possible divisions, and each author will offer you his own, which will be equally or even more correct. In the end, the technical classification into one type of sacrifice or another is not that important: when the sacrifice arrives, the motives can be added and changed, jumping from group to group. Square control can turn into diagonal or file control in a flash, a developing advantage evolves into a deadly checkmate attack, a deep defense can turn into a sharp counterattack in a few moves. Remember: all that matters is what happens on the chessboard, no matter how clever minds describe it one way or another and classify it into one group or another.

The value of the exchange

The value of the exchange (i.e., the difference between a rook and a minor piece) has been considered for decades. Dr. Siegbert Tarrasch put its value at 1½ pawns in the endgame, but not for the opening or the first part of the middlegame. This is generally accepted today, but Howard Staunton and José Raul Capablanca thought that the exchange was worth two pawns. Tigran Petrosian thought that one pawn was the right value. Wilhelm Steinitz thought that a rook was slightly

better than a knight and two pawns, but slightly worse than a bishop and two pawns. Cecil Purdy said that the value depends on the total number of pawns on the board. The reason is that with many pawns, the rooks have limited mobility because there are no open files. The exchange is hardly worth $1\frac{1}{2}$ points if there are 14 or more pawns on the board. Only when there are ten or fewer pawns can the exchange be worth 2 points (Soltis 2004:134). Purdy gives the value as $1\frac{1}{2}$ points in the opening and raises it to 2 points in the endgame. In the middle-game, the value would be $1\frac{1}{2}$ rather than 2 (Purdy 2003:146 -52). Max Euwe estimated the value in the middlegame at $1\frac{1}{2}$, saying that two pawns is more than sufficient compensation for the exchange. Larry Kaufman's computer research puts the value at $1\frac{3}{4}$ pawns, but only $1\frac{1}{4}$ pawns if the player with the smaller piece has the bishop pair. Hans Berliner puts the difference between a rook and a knight at 1.9 pawns and the difference between a rook and a bishop at 1.77 pawns. In practice, one pawn may be sufficient compensation for the loss of the exchange, while two pawns are almost always sufficient.

The moment and the experience

From what has been said and written so far, it quickly becomes clear that the correct exchange sacrifice requires, in addition to knowledge, a certain amount of feeling, courage, and perhaps the famous chess intuition (the feeling when we know something is right or wrong, but we cannot describe or explain it in any meaningful way).

That's why positional sacrifices are usually approached by better, already experienced chess players; it's more difficult for beginners and players with average playing strength to understand the concepts and all the necessary nuances. But do not worry: with practice and training, we will bring our understanding of this difficult chess theme to the point where we will no longer be afraid even of the positional sacrifice.

Let us not forget: a dry technical knowledge of motives and their correct exploitation is not enough for a successful sacrifice. It is just as important – or even more important – to choose the right time. For the successful sacrifice, we need to sense and choose the right moment when we will achieve the maximum effect with the sacrifice. But do not worry, choosing the right moment can also be easily learned with a little practice.

And a few more tips for a successful start. We must be aware that not every sacrifice will be successful, that we will often fail as well. Let us not let that stop us from making the next sacrifices: let us analyze defeats and failures carefully, especially with the wish that our next sacrifice will be more successful!

And finally. When we talk so much about sacrifices and urge you not to be afraid of them, let us never forget the simple fact: our opponent wants them too, he too wants to make a nice and successful exchange sacrifice: he too thinks that we, on the other hand, could hardly resist the offered material.

Grandmasters about the exchange sacrifice

Efstratios Grivas:

“The positional (or tactical) exchange sacrifice is a very important topic, which requires advanced skills and competitive experience. It is very a difficult subject to master, as the chess player is requested to overcome the dogmatic rules with which he has been brought up, in particular the quantitative evaluation of material.”

All clear. As an experienced instructor, Grivas goes on to explain that the beginner’s approach to learning, where pieces are evaluated in the classical way (A rook with five units and a bishop or a knight with 3 units), is correct because it is very easy to understand.



Efstratios Grivas

Sergey Tiviakov:

“Sometimes the real problem for the amateur is that the sacrifice is not seen, because one cannot see the benefits right away, and that makes it difficult to imagine it.”

Tiviakov also goes into the psychological part:

“Another aspect is also psychology. Many don’t realize it, but chess, for humans, is heavily influenced by individual psychology. There is a definite relationship between our own inner greediness and the way we play chess. Even for World Champions to reject the material offer is difficult.”

Jonathan Speelman:

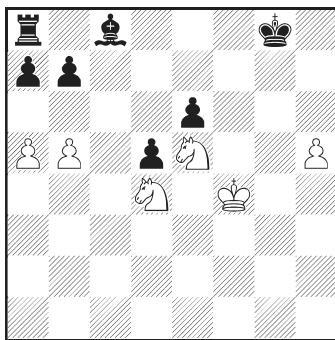
“As a general rule and in fact (almost all?) of the time you need other pieces on the board for an exchange sacrifice to work.”

Tigran Petrosian:

“Holy forgiveness! Of course, before I made this one move, I had to overcome a psychological barrier in myself. To put the rook directly under the bishop? And not even get a pawn for encouragement?”

Concept

To understand the positional quality sacrifice, it is perhaps easiest to start with the famous Nimzowitsch position (an artificially composed position), the famous diagram from the chapter PRO TERTIO, the third example with which this great master and father of hypermodern chess understanding explains the concept of blockade and compensation in chess in his book *Blockade*.



The position on the chessboard is very revealing. According to all the “basic rules” that explain to us the values of the pieces and the evaluation of the position, Black should have a big advantage, in fact he must be already winning. He has an advantage of an exchange (Five units for three), plus a pawn, for a total of three units of advantage! His king is safe and the game has moved to the endgame, where the material advantage gains even more value.

A closer look at the position shows that Black is in trouble and that White is basically playing to win! But why? The black pieces are trapped, and it will be difficult to get back into the game by accepting material losses. The two black pawns in the center are blocked, they can not advance, and they are in such an

unfortunate position that they even annoy Black, since they block the exit from the cage for the rook and bishop. It would be much better for Black not to have the d- and e-pawns at all! White is also well prepared to try to open up play on the queenside. After ...a7-a6 he will always reply with b5-b6, and after ...b7-b6 with a5-a6 and the blockade lives on!

Nimzowich assessed the situation as practically won for the White and his opinion was adopted by many commentators and followers of his capital work. Modern computer programs just do not see the whole thing so gloomily. For example:

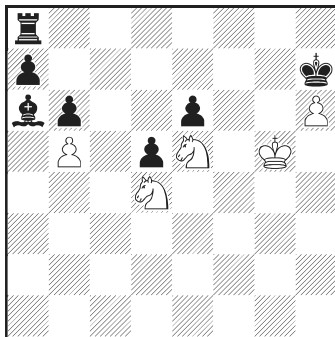
1. ♔g5 ♔h7

First, the restriction of the king, who wants to occupy the position on the sixth rank.

2. h6 b6!

Black, of course, saw and expected White's response, but prepared a counter-sacrifice:

3. a6 ♖a6!



An important moment! It is vital to know that the player with a material advantage can always give back part of the material (maybe even all of it) and brutally change the course of events. When we sacrifice an exchange (or other material) we must always take this fact into account and never forget it.

4. ba6 ♖g8

The material balance of power on the board has changed dramatically: Black has a rook and two pawns for two knights, that is, seven units against six, and in theory is still in the lead. The reality is somewhat different: White has blocked the black pawns, he himself is dangerously threatening with his free wing pawn, which could quickly make its way to promotion with the help of the two knights, and

he has an active king. So, Black continues to fight for survival and needs to make some good moves to achieve a draw.

5. ♔h5 ♖g3 6. ♘g4

The threat is 6... ♗h3 when the h6-pawn falls.

6... ♗g3!

And Black puts the white pieces under maximum pressure. As soon as the d4-knight moves (to e6, for example), Black will quickly run his b-pawn, e.g.: 7. ♘e6 b5 8. ♕f5 ♗f3 9. ♕e5 ♗g3! and Black clings to the lifeline. But if anything, only White is still fighting for a full point!

A classic example of a position with compensation for the sacrificed exchange. Of course, it's far from always just a blockade - there are plenty of motives for replacing an exchange.

In the first chapter, let us take a look at those sacrifices where a player strikes with a clear goal in mind: to checkmate the opponent's king, or at least to execute a combination that takes him from a material deficit to a decisive material advantage!



Chapter I

The Exchange Sacrifice for the Attack

King in the center (...)

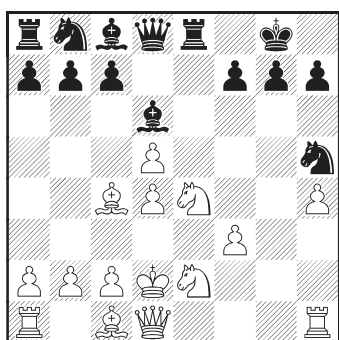
We will place exchange sacrifices for attack and possible checkmate in the category of so-called ‘tactical sacrifices’. These can be further subdivided in various ways and we will start with sacrifices related to the position of the king in the center.

Who else but Paul Morphy, considered by many to be one of the most

gifted chess players of all time, and certainly a chess player who paved the way for open games in the mid-nineteenth century, can better demonstrate the importance of time in positions where the opposing king stands uncastled? The exchange sacrifice in this case only underlined Black’s great superiority and led to a quick finish.

Schulten : Morphy

New York 1858



After a wild start in the then very popular King’s Gambit, White simply could not hold back and boldly continued his

king’s march, probably believing that his majesty would find a safe haven on the queenside.

12. ♖c3?!

Much better is 12.c3 or 12. ♔g1, when Black has the initiative, but nothing more.

12...b5!?

A Morphy-style move – Black wants to open lines against the white king. 12...c6 is another option.

13. ♖b5 c6 14. ♘d6 ♔d6 15. ♖a4?

This is already a serious mistake, which also allows Black's light-squared bishop to attack. The correct move is 15. ♖d3.

15... ♖a6! –+ 16. ♔e1 ♘d7

Black rushes to prepare an exchange sacrifice, although he could easily take 16... ♖d5.

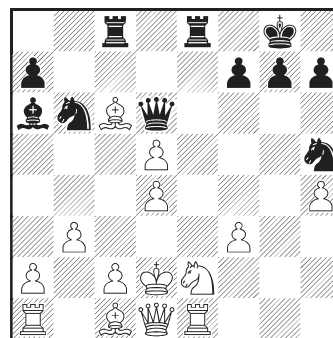
17. b3 ♘b6!

Morphy naturally saw taking on c6 when both rooks are attacked:

18. ♖c6 ♗ac8 19. ♖d2

A better defense for White is the incredible 19. ♖b2 ♗c6 20. dc6 ♖e2 21. ♗b1! (21. ♗e2 ♘a4! 22. ♖b1 ♘c3 23. ♖b2 ♘d1 - check!) 21... ♘a4! (21... ♖e2?? 22. ♗e8.) 22. ♖a1! (22. ba4 ♗b8 and ♖d1.) 22... ♘c3 23. ♗d2 ♗c6, with a complicated position. But that was probably too much

for the relatively average American master ... Now everything is simple:



19... ♗c6! 20. dc6 ♖e2 21. ♗b1! ♗d4 22. ♖e1 ♗g1 23. ♖d2 ♗d8

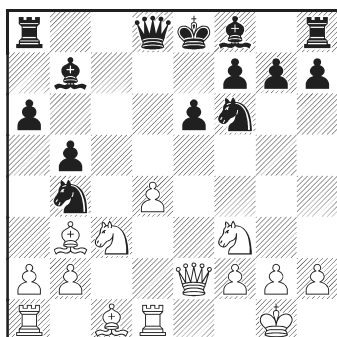
This intermediate check was probably overlooked by Schulten.

24. ♖c3 ♗c5 25. ♖b2 ♘a4 26. ba4 ♗b4# 0:1.

The tenth world champion, Boris Vasilievich Spassky, had an even simpler task in one of his youth games:

Spassky : Avtonomov

Leningrad 1949



An instructive position! Black has

played the position against the isolated pawn very inaccurately, leaving the initiative with White. At only 12 years old (!), Spassky knew how to punish this vigorously:

12. d5!

Characteristic penetration in the center. White opens lines and diagonals against the black king, still in the center, and with the advance of the pawn

he has also cleared the d4-square for the knight, as in the famous game Steinitz : Von Bardeleben, Hastings 1895.

12...♘bd5 13.♙g5

From now on everything will be more or less forced.

13...♙e7 14.♙f6 gxf6 15.♘d5 ♙d5 16.♙d5 ed5 17.♘d4 ♖f8

After 17...O-O? 18.♘c6+-

18.♘f5

With the idea of 19.♚h5.

19...h5 19.♖d5!

A simple sacrifice that presents Black with a difficult dilemma: get checkmated or lose the queen?

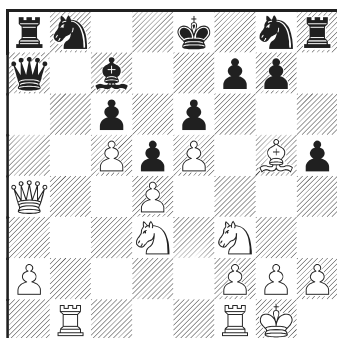
19...♚d5 20.♚e7 ♔g8 21.♚f6

He chose the third option and signed for defeat. **1:0.**

How dangerous it is to play with the king in the center was also felt by Anatoly Karpov at his first national championships as a World Champion, when he was coached by his future trainer and head of professional staff, Efim Geller.

Geller : Karpov

USSR 1976



21.♖b8!

An exchange sacrifice in an otherwise already won position – the reason why we were allowed to include this wonderful game in our book!

21...♚b8

21...♙b8 22.♚c6+-

22.♚c6 ♔f8 23.♘f4

The sacrifice was not too hard; White has a knight and two pawns for the rook, along with all the advantages already described. The job is completed by two white knights.

23...♖a7

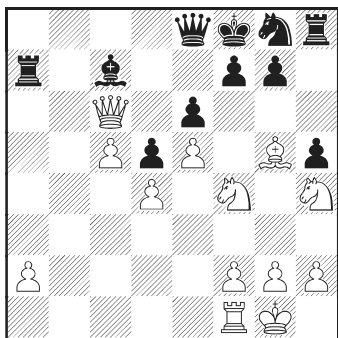
Or 23...♖a2 and White can choose between 24.♘h4 or 24.♘e6 or 23...♘e7 24.♘e6 fe6 25.♚e6 ♚e8 26.♘h4+-

24.♘h4

Or 24.♘e6 fe6 25.♚e6 ♚e8 26.♚d5 and White has no less than five pawns for the rook (!), in addition to everything else, of course.

24...♔e8

24...♘e7 25.♗e6! fe6 26.♔e6 ♕d8
27.♕e7 ♕e7 28.♘g6 ♖e8 29.♗h8+–



25.♔e6!+–

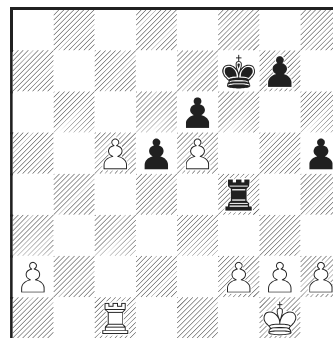
A queen sacrifice – such a wonderful game decoration!

25...fe6 26.♗hg6 ♔g6

26...♖f7 27.♗h8 ♖f8 28.♗fg6+–

27.♗g6 ♖e8 28.♗h8 ♔a4 29.♔d1 ♗e7
30.♕e7 ♖e7 31.♗g6 ♖f7 32.♗f4 ♕e5

33.de5 ♔f4 34.♔c1!+–

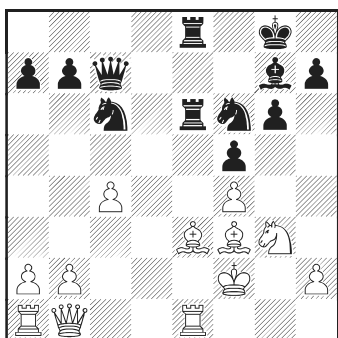


And after a few more moves Karpov signed for his heaviest defeat as World Champion! **1:0 (42).**

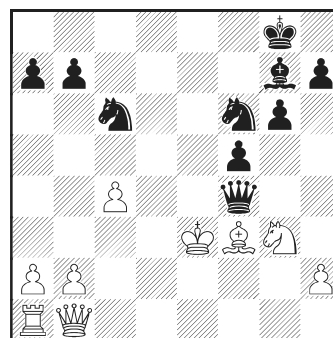
Attacking the king in the center is one of the first tactical operations we learn in chess. Especially instructive are the examples when champions attack. Let us see how elegantly Robert James ‘Bobby’ Fischer finished his attacks against the king in the center!

Letelier : Fischer

Leipzig 1960



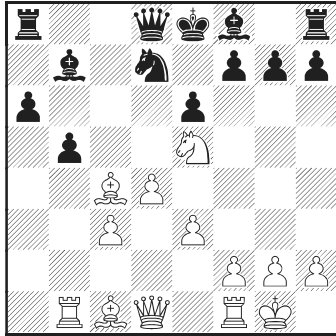
21...♔e3! 22.♔e3 ♔e3 23.♖e3 ♔f4!!



24.♖f4 ♕h6 mate!; 24.♖e2 ♗d4;
24.♖f2 ♗g4. **0:1.**

Fischer : Camara

Siegen 1970



If 19...♚d7 20.♚c4 or 19...♘d7 20.♙g7.

20.♘b5!

If nothing else, 21.♘a7! and especially, of course, 21.♚d1 ♖e8 22.♙f6 ♙f6 23.♘d6! is threatened.

20...♚c6 21.♚d1 ♖e8 22.♘c7 ♚c7
23.♙c7 ♚c7 24.♚b5 1:0.

White has a big developmental advantage, the decisive factor being the black king trapped in the center. But with the very next move, Black threatens to castle, when his bishop pair might eventually also make itself heard. So, Fischer struck without delay:

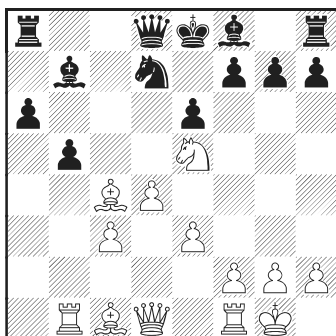
19.♚d7! ♖d7

We will encounter the Hungarian, Lajos Portisch, many times in our book. A master of positional play, he always strove for active, tactical solutions.

This time he felt he had to vigorously and effectively punish Black's impudent play, which had neglected development on the kingside!

Portisch : Forintos

Budapest 1958



13.♚b5!

Not such a difficult exchange sacrifice,

aimed at keeping the black king in the center.

13...ab5 14.♙b5 ♙d6

14...♙c8 15.♚f3+-

15.♙d7 ♖e7

Or 15...♖f8 16.c4, with the idea of c4-c5-c6.

16.♘c6 ♙c6 17.♙c6

White has more than enough

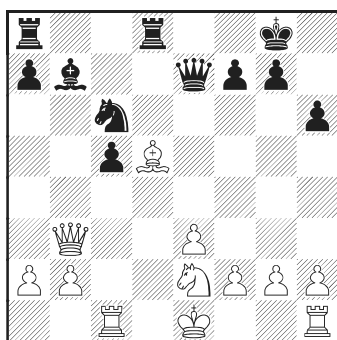
compensation for the exchange: two pawns, bishop pair, black king in the center. If 17...♗h2 18.♔h1! ♚c8 19.♗b5 ♗d6 20.c4.) ...1:0.



Greed is often to blame for opening disasters. The player gets carried away by the prospect of winning material, perhaps a pawn or two, while neglecting the development and security of the king, often leaving it in the center. The punishment can be cruel and merciless!

Kottnauer : Platz

Budapest 1952



16...♚d5! 17.♔d5 ♘e5 18.♔b3 ♗g2

The king in the center cannot survive.

19.f4 ♔h4 20.♘g3 ♗h1 21.fe5 ♔h2

22.♘e2 ♗f3 0:1.

Opening Files and Diagonals towards the king

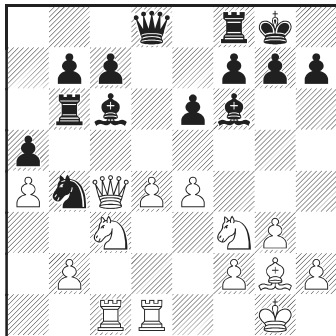
Things are a bit more complicated if Black has already castled (short or long). Then the exchange sacrifice can help us open the lines (or diagonals) towards the king, which is defended in its castle by the pawns in front of it.

First of all, let us look at how elegantly and “according to the rules” the

attack was executed by the Armenian Grandmaster, Smbat Lputian. With the help of an exchange sacrifice, he opened the way for his pieces to ruthlessly dispatch the black monarch in just a few moves.

Lputian : Sadler

Lucerne 1997



16.h4!

With idea of ♖g5 at an opportune moment.

16...h6

Black will regret this weakening later on. ♖g5 was still not a threat, so why weaken the pawn structure around the king?

17.♙e2 ♜e8 18.♞d2 ♞d7 19.♙d1

Preparation for d4-d5. Igor Stohl: “Model strategy by White. He

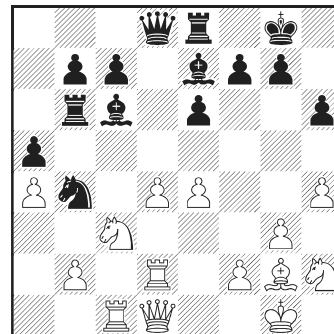
consolidates his position in the center before starting action anywhere else.”

19...♞d8 20.♞h2

Black is passive and completely without counter play.

20...♞e7

20...g6, with the idea of bringing the bishop to g7, is only a new weakness: 21.h5 g5 22.♞g4 ♞g7 23.♞e3!, with strong pressure all over the board.



21.♞g4 ♜f8

Losing time to create a passive retreat for the bishop on e8.

22. ♖e5 ♗e8

Black wants to keep his bishop pair at all costs.

23. ♗f1!

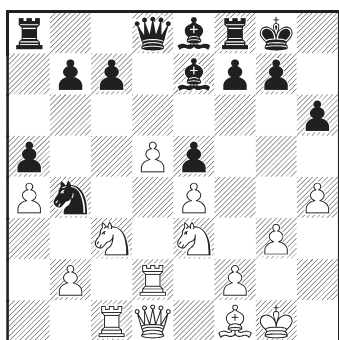
This dominates Black's rook.

23... ♖d6 24. ♘c4 ♖a6

24... ♖d7? 25. ♘a5+–

25. ♘e3 ♖a8 26. d5! e5

Practically the only move. After 26...ed5 27. ♘cd5 ♘d5 28. ♘d5 White is much better.



27. ♘f5

White's knight enters the attack

27... ♗c5 28. ♗b5!±

Lubomir Ftacnik: "The exchange of the white-squared bishop is the key to success; Black will be vulnerable on the squares he used to cover."

28... ♖h7

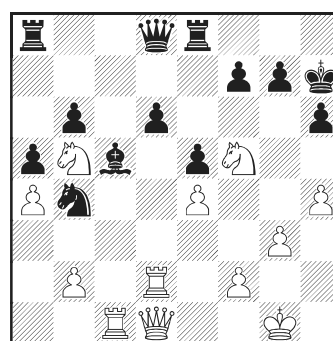
Or 28...b6 29. ♗e8 ♖e8 30. ♘b5, with the idea of 31.d6 or 31. ♖g4.

After 28... ♖f6 29. ♗e8 ♖ae8 30. ♘b5±

29. ♗e8 ♖e8 30. ♘b5 b6?!

Black did not see White's threat. But, it is already very difficult to offer good advice, e.g. 30... ♗d6 31. ♘fd6 cd6 32. ♘c7 or 30... ♗b6 31.d6!

31.d6! cd6



32. ♖c5!

This exchange sacrifice wins by force. White opens files against the black king, and all the white pieces will join the attack very quickly.

32...bc5 33. ♖d6 ♖c8

Or 33... ♖b8 34. ♖h6! gh6 35. ♖h5.

34. ♖h5!+–

Black's king is obviously helpless against so many white pieces.

34... ♖a6

34... ♖e6 35. ♖f7+–; 34...f6 35. ♖f6 gf6 36. ♖f7 ♖h8 37. ♖g7#; 34... ♖g8 35. ♖h6! gh6 36. ♖g4.

35. ♖f7 ♖g8 36. ♖g6 ♖h8 37. ♖a6 1:0

37. ♖a6 ♖a6 (37... ♘a6) 38. ♘bd6+–