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How to Study Chess on Your Own

Creating a Plan that Works... and Sticking to it!

New In Chess 2021

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Preface

It is difficult to think of a question that chess players ask more often, yet get a satisfactory answer so rarely, than 'How should I study chess on my own?'. I have become increasingly aware of both the importance of this question and the complexity of its answer in recent years as I have gradually replaced my playing activities with coaching ones. As a professional chess player, you have the luxury of taking for granted all the studies that you have done to get to that level; however, as a coach, you are expected to transfer this knowledge to your students and other ambitious chess players that you come across. And then, when you are put on the spot by a hopeful chess student and all that you can come up with in response are a couple of quick study tips, you realize, perhaps just as much as the person that asked you, that you are not providing an adequate answer to this essential question.

Prompted by these realizations, I have recently decided to approach this subject more comprehensively, so that I would finally be able to provide answers that would satisfy both curious students of chess and myself. And so, at the peaceful beginning of what would turn out to be a turbulent 2020, I set out to identify and explore the most important aspects of effective self-study. After eight months of intensive work (more on that in a bit later!), I produced the book that is in front of you.

Naturally, I understood that a book with this title and subject matter would likely draw interest among a wide range of chess players (virtually everyone who learned what I am writing about sounded genuinely excited about it). Having this in mind, I have designed it for a broader audience, so that anyone from a casual club player to a chess professional could, at the very least, take away a reasonable number of original learning methods, useful study resources, and practical ideas from it. However, I did not intend for such an extensive subject to be merely a collection of self-contained study advice. The two greater purposes of this book are to:

1. Encourage readers to study with a proper structure; and
2. Help readers become independent in their studies.

Let me quickly elaborate on these two important points.

Structure

From my experience, many chess players would like to approach their studies in a structured way, but they lack either the tools or the discipline

to do so. Thus, I focused on providing a structured study methodology and philosophy that could have a long-term improvement value for chess players of various levels. For this purpose, I did two things. Firstly, I categorized and classified the key concepts, such as typical study methods, areas, and resources, in the individual chapters. Secondly, I have structured the chapters in such a way that they can help you systematically build your own study plan. The overview of the key issues in their respective chapters below should give you an idea about this process:

- What the right and wrong chess study mindsets are and how to optimize your learning processes (Chapter 1);
- How to develop good study habits and get rid of the useless ones (Chapter 2);
- Which study areas players should focus on in their chess study and how to distribute the time between them (Chapter 3);
- Which kinds of study resources are appropriate for players of different levels and how to make the best use of them (Chapter 4);
- How to study various aspects of openings, middlegames, and endgames effectively on your own (Chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8);
- How to design your own study plans and training schedules (Chapter 9).

As you can infer from this overview, the first two chapters broadly deal with how we should study, Chapters 3 and 4 with what we should study, while Chapters 5 through 8 contain specific study advice for different stages of the game. And then, in Chapter 9, which is a sort of the culmination of the book, we integrate all the previously discussed material into an actionable study plan. My hope is that this systematic approach will encourage you to organize your own chess studies in a similar way.

Be independent!

Yes, it is important to have the right study tools and this book will provide you with plenty of these, but perhaps its main purpose is to promote a quality of your chess study that is much more elusive – independence. I would like to stress that I have not envisioned this book to be some kind of a study program for you to follow literally. I think that we already have too much of that in chess; in fact, so much so that it has come to the point where many chess players, even those at a respectable 2000+ Elo level, tend to rely too heavily on external directions for their chess studies, such as assignments set by their coaches, online training courses, exercises from books, and similar

resources. I regularly meet chess players who are smart and accomplished people in everyday life, yet when it comes to studying chess independently, they often seem to be in the dark about the effective ways to do it, and fall short in terms of the time investment, quality, or creativity of their own work. Sometimes, they are not even aware that this might be the main reason behind their lack of improvement in chess. Therefore, one of the primary goals of this book is to teach you how to become an independent student of chess, someone who will not just follow instructions, but rather actively inquire, research, collect, analyze, experiment, challenge assumptions, challenge yourself, and find your own ways in chess study. It is often in these quiet inner moments of your study that future improvement resides.

Who will benefit the most from this book?

In my view, it would be self-motivated players of any level and age who are serious and disciplined about their chess study and have enough time to put the methods from the book into practice. If you are looking forward to doing regular game simulations like the one of Tomashevsky-Dubov (see page 95) or spending a couple of training sessions analyzing the Aronian-Anand endgame (see page 75), then you are just the kind of a reader that I have in mind. If you change the way you approach your tactics training after reading Chapter 6, or design a structured study plan similar to the one proposed in Chapter 9, then this book will have done something good for you. If even only the discussion from Chapter 1 helps you change your study mindsets for the better, I will consider this book a success. The study philosophy and methods laid out on its pages have worked for me, for many of my students, and, according to my observations, for many other successful chess players. At the end of the day, you should find in it what you think will be the most useful for you, apply it, and see if it works for you.

Let us now discuss some technical details that will help you study the book more easily.

Diagram previews

The first thing that you will see at the start of each chapter, with the exception of Chapters 9 and 10, are diagram previews. These are exercise-type collections of the most important or interesting positions from each chapter, and I would strongly recommend that you attempt to solve them before reading any further. This way, you will not only get a chance to practice your decision-making and evaluation skills, but also be better warmed up for the discussions that lie ahead.

Tables

Something else that you will probably quickly notice throughout the book are the multitude of tables, figures, and bullet-point lists. As I mentioned above, I decided to categorize and classify various important aspects of chess study to provide a solid self-study framework. Therefore, this book contains more textbook-type graphics than your regular chess prose. I hope that they will not take away from your reading experience, but rather provide you with a better overview and structure of the topic at hand.

Games and exercises

You will probably find it refreshing that the majority of games and exercises in the book are new in chess literature. Many of them are from recent grandmaster practice, while some of them are from my own games, analyses with my students, or their own games. Moreover, I have analyzed many illustrative examples from angles that are different from the usual annotating style, focusing on particular aspects of chess study, rather than just the major themes and variations. While going through them, you will not only have an opportunity to see interesting new material, but also learn how to apply certain study methods, e.g., how to analyze positions properly, how to memorize complex study material, how to research typical pawn structures, etc.

A quick word about the exercises in this book: there are not as many typical ‘end-of-the-chapter’ exercises as you might be used to from other chess books. While I have provided exercises in places where I saw fit, generally speaking, this is not an exercise book as much as it is an instructional work that aims to show you how to make the best of the plethora of other study material that is available out there.

Study vs training

By now, you have probably noticed that I prefer using the term ‘study’ over ‘training’ to describe chess activities of this type. The distinction between these two terms, especially in our context, is ever so slight, but I had to choose one for the sake of consistency. After consulting with my publisher, I eventually went with ‘study’ because I believe that it describes most activities of chess players a bit more accurately than ‘training’. That is not to say that I have completely abandoned the latter term; I have used it in certain situations, especially when describing comparatively more practical aspects of chess study, such as training sessions, tactics training, training partner, etc. I wanted to mention this so that you are not left scratching your head as to why I insist on ‘study methods’ and not

‘training methods’ and similar minor details. In most cases, anyway, these two terms can be used interchangeably.

Study vs playing

This is the final distinction that I would like to make, but it is a conceptual rather than a semantic one. This is a book about how to study chess; that is, everything that we do when we do not play chess. However, the importance of playing (especially rated tournament games with long time controls) cannot be overstated. As I explain in Chapter 1, playing and studying go together hand in hand and influence each other in many positive ways. The caveat is that it is best to have these two types of chess activities in a sort of equilibrium, because too much of one or the other is not good for your chess. On the one hand, to paraphrase Jack Nicholson’s well-known movie quote, too much studying and too little play can make you a dull chess player. On the other, I have witnessed many chess players, even very talented ones, who think that they can improve primarily on account of their practical experience and rather superficial study methods, only to hit a brick wall with their progress at some point. I believe that it is exactly then that they should be asking themselves the question from the beginning of this book.

Writing in the time of COVID-19

As I mentioned earlier, little did I know that from the time I had begun working on the book until I finished it, chess life as we have known it for decades would virtually evaporate within a couple of months. Since I had initially approached this project with an assumption that over-the-board chess would be here to stay for the foreseeable future, the developments of 2020 have had an unwelcome impact on my writing ambitions and overall inspiration. If I have to be completely honest, there were moments during this period when my motivation to write about this subject had dwindled to the point where I thought whether it made any sense. I mean, here I am writing a book telling people how to study chess better so that they could ultimately perform better in tournaments, increase their rating, make norms, etc., when all of a sudden, no one knows when and whether at all our normal ways of life, let alone the usual chess tournament activities, would be resumed. Add to these unpleasant life uncertainties another unexpected development – less than expected time to write due to parental duties of raising a curious little toddler, and you will understand why this turned out to be a mentally, emotionally, and logistically exhausting project. By comparison, writing my previous book *Beyond Material* was a walk in the park. Nevertheless, the very process of writing

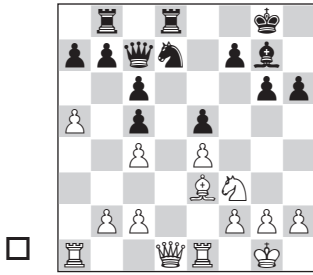
about such a fundamental and multi-faceted subject has been immensely joyful, and I hope that you will also enjoy the final product.

For the end, I would like to express my gratitude to two people without whom this book would not have been possible in its final form. Firstly, to my publisher Allard Hoogland who generously extended the original deadline for the submission of the book manuscript, which allowed me to complete it at the standard that I had set at the start.

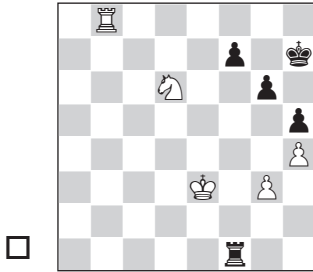
Secondly, my warmest thanks go to my wife Iva for her infinite patience and unconditional support while I was working on this project. I dedicate this book to her.

Davorin Kuljasevic,
Plovdiv, March 2021

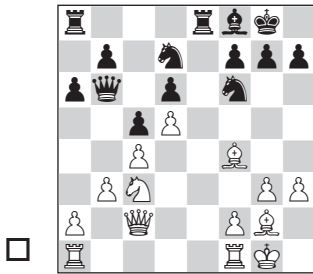
CHAPTER 2 – PREVIEW



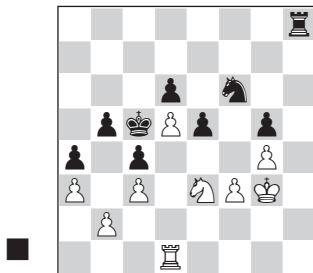
Please suggest a plan to improve the position.



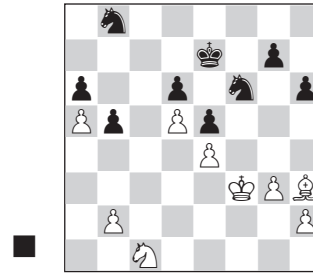
White to move and win by force!



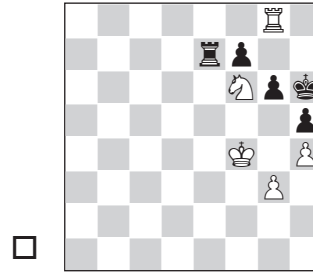
Please suggest the best plan.



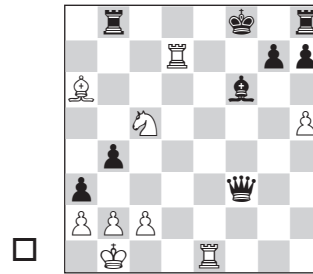
Please suggest the best way to execute the ...e5-e4 break.



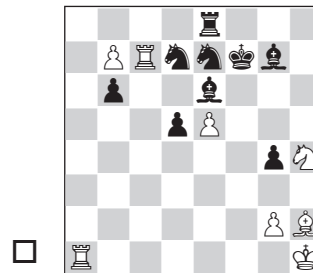
How would you evaluate White's winning chances in this endgame?



What is the best continuation?



White to move and win.



White to move and win.

CHAPTER 2

Fifteen study methods

From this point on, we start exploring concrete aspects of chess study. In this chapter, we will discuss study methods. Just to clarify, in this book we use the term *study method* to denote a general procedure by which one conducts chess study. Study methods are largely independent from particular *study areas* (such as tactics, endgames, strategy, etc.), which is another important term that we will use throughout the book. For instance, the study method ‘solving’ can be applied to virtually any study area – we can solve opening, tactical, positional, endgame, and other types of exercises. Study methods should also be differentiated from *study activities*, which can be much more specific. For instance, ‘playing a sparring game in blindfold mode’ or ‘deep analysis of a model game from my opening repertoire’ are examples of study activities. I wanted to make these things clear right off the bat because we will use these similar-sounding terms throughout the book quite frequently.

Another distinction that I would like to make is that not every chess-related activity should count as chess study. Here are some typical activities that chess players do for fun, entertainment, or to satisfy their intellectual curiosity:

- reading chess news and following chess results;
- communication on chess-related social platforms (e.g., chats, forums);
- multitasking while watching chess videos, streams, etc.;
- playing casual blitz or bullet chess;
- reading biographies of famous chess players, historical articles about chess, etc.; and
- analyzing material of little practical value (e.g., games of 19th-century players; rare theoretical endgames; chess problems, helpmates, and similar material).

I don’t want you to get the wrong impression – it’s cool to do all of these things, and sometimes you can pick up an interesting practical idea or a piece of advice in the process. But if you find yourself doing them frequently and for extended periods of time, you are wasting your study time. There are many more efficient and effective study methods, and we will discuss them now.

In the table below, I provide an overview of the 15 most common study methods, together with their brief descriptions and *three quality criteria*:

- practical relevance;
- study intensity; and
- long-term learning potential.

These criteria indicate the degree to which a certain method contributes to the quality of one's study. The scoring scale is from 1 to 5; 1 being low, 3 medium, and 5 a high score. The scores are approximate, though hopefully you will find them realistic and informative enough.

Table 2.1: Study methods and quality criteria

Study method	Brief description	Practical relevance	Study intensity	Long-term learning potential
Playing over	briefly examining games or positions	2	1	2
Watching	watching chess videos, DVDs and similar media	3	2	3
Reading	reading chess books, magazines, surveys, and similar material	3	3	4
Light analysis	analyzing games or positions with a low to moderate level of intensity	4	3	4
Deep analysis	analyzing games or positions with full intensity	5	5	5
Computer-assisted analysis	analyzing games or positions with the help of a chess engine	4	3	4
Mutual analysis	analyzing games or positions with another person(s)	4	4	5
'Find the best move'	trying to find the best move in a given position(s)	4	5	4
Simulation	pretending to play a real game by guessing the next move	5	5	5
Reviewing	deliberately committing variations, positions, or games to memory	4	4* ⁶	4
Solving	trying to find the solution to a chess puzzle	4	5	4
Playing – sparring	playing a pre-arranged game or match	5	5	5
Playing – speed chess	playing games at blitz or rapid time control	4	4	4
Blindfold	doing any of the other study methods without visual aids	4	5	5
Playing against a computer	playing out positions or games with a chess engine as an opponent	4	5	5

This overview should give you a good general idea about the pros and cons of each method. When you create your own study plans (which we will see how to do in Chapter 9), you can choose which among these study

⁶ Intensity level may vary from person to person, please check page 101 and 108 (in the 'Reviewing' section) for further explanation.

methods are appropriate for this or that study activity. To facilitate this, I provide a more detailed look at each of the 15 methods below.

Playing over (PR = 2; IN = 1; LT = 2)

This is the simplest way to get acquainted with new material, such as games, opening variations, instructive examples, etc. Typically, we play over the games from chess books, magazines, databases, chess websites, or using e-readers. There is something appealing about playing out the moves with your own hand on the chessboard, though this is obviously a more time-consuming way to do it. The main purpose of playing over games is to get quick and easy access to chess information, and perhaps pick up a new idea or two without investing too much time and mental effort. While it is a very accessible method that has its place in a study plan, relatively low scores across the three quality criteria indicate that this study method alone is not a game changer.

Watching (PR = 3; IN = 2; LT = 3)

Learning chess via audiovisual media has become increasingly popular in the 21st century. Chess DVDs, video courses, live commentary, streaming, banter blitz, YouTube channels... there are so many interactive ways to present chess these days, which is great. I have even had one student who claimed that he learned most things in chess only by watching chess videos. And while there is nothing wrong with this approach as long as one is focused on learning, reading should still be the better study method of the two. It has been scientifically proven that reading engages your brain in a way that stimulates important cognitive processes such as comprehension, abstract thinking, and imagination. Watching, on the other hand, leaves your brain somewhat more passive in these segments. It is a variation of the well-known 'books vs movies debate' in which books usually prevail.

Another small disadvantage of watching as a study medium, as compared to reading, is that there are more distractions in the audiovisual media. I mean, if Scarlett Johansson explained move orders in the Najdorf, I am sure that it would be the most-watched chess video ever, but I doubt that it would be particularly useful in chess terms. This is an extreme example, of course, but I am sure that you get the point.

With that said, I would like to point out several watching activities that I believe are particularly useful:

1. Opening video courses

Opening videos are an excellent way to learn openings. In fact, I have often found them to be a better media for that purpose than books/

databases, because they allow for a more interactive way of presenting, at times, rather dry theoretical material. Also, in good opening video courses you may pick up insights or explanations that you normally wouldn't get from other opening resources.

2. Middlegame/endgame video courses or series

There are hundreds of video courses out there on all sorts of middlegame and endgame topics. Many of them are well-structured, well-explained and with good instructive examples, so they can definitely serve as useful learning tools. One video course that I can say I enjoyed immensely was 'Calculation' by the late Mark Dvoretsky (co-hosted by GM Jan Gustafsson) on the chess24 website. I even did not mind Dvoretsky's limited English vocabulary and strong Russian accent that much because, from a pure chess perspective, his examples and, in particular, his explanations were top-notch and I feel like there is a lot to learn from them. A course like that can be an eye-opener as much as any great chess book.

3. Live commentary

Live game commentaries by strong players, such as two brilliant Peters, Svidler and Leko, are a treat to watch and a good learning experience, because one can get exclusive access into the way these top players think. There are, of course, many more excellent chess-commentators who may not be top-level players, but provide valuable insights for chess players of various levels. Once again, the key is watching the live commentary for educational rather than entertainment purposes, so you should make sure that you have the chat on 'off'!

I have to admit that I am not a big fan of the: 'Incredible! Here the computer shows that Aronian made a huge mistake!' kind of live commentary. While I understand that this may be a more accessible way for the larger chess audience to follow the games of top players, I don't think that it is nearly as insightful as seeing the commentator actually break some mental sweat to figure out what is going on in the game. This gives you, as a viewer, an opportunity to think on your own and compare your thoughts to those of a strong player in real time, almost as if you were analyzing with him.

4. YouTube speed chess videos

This is a study activity that one can do even while eating breakfast. You simply find a YouTube video of a game from the World Rapid or Blitz Championship (for example). They are usually filmed from a good angle, so the viewer can see the board and the players well. You can take it as a sort of a timed 'Find the best move' activity (more on this study method shortly) and try to predict the move that the players will make. As they start getting low on time, so does your task of finding the right move get

more difficult. All the while, you can see players' reactions, which are often good indicators of whether they like their position or not, what was the critical moment (spending a lot of time) or a turning point (change in body language). It is a nice light calculation exercise and, thus, could make for a good warm-up practice before a more intense training session.

Reading (PR = 3; IN = 3; LT = 4)

Reading chess books, magazines and articles gives you access to condensed chess knowledge, and this is the greatest strength of reading as a study method. An important feature of this way of studying is that you have plenty of time to pause and reflect on what you have read and make your own conclusions (which, to revisit the old debate, is much easier than constantly pausing and skipping back and forth through the video to do the same). Let's point out some other benefits of reading books, beyond the general ones already mentioned in the 'Watching' section:

- In books, you can get many practical ideas and deep insights that you might have never thought of yourself. One might say that you can get the same kind of information from chess videos, but a big difference between the two media is that writers have a luxury of thinking through, reviewing, and revising their thoughts and conclusions. This allows them to usually provide deeper and more accurate insights as compared to video presenters, who cannot make 'j'adoube' once they have said something and may also not always articulate their thoughts in the most concise manner.
- Reading enables you to learn about chess history, and not only about great players and great tournaments of the past, but also about the development of ideas in chess. I am aware that knowing the order of World Champions and how each of them contributed to the development of chess is probably not going to help you make better moves over the board (which is the only thing that matters to some people), but it does make you a more well-rounded chess player. This becomes especially valuable if you decide to pass on your knowledge to other chess players someday, so you may also consider reading as a long-term investment.
- Reading creates a large knowledge base that gives you confidence that you have made the right decision during the game. It is easier to play a certain move if you have already read about something similar in a best games collection of a strong player.

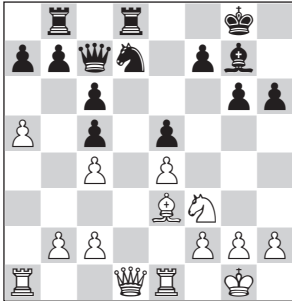
Let me give you an example.

Game 16

Analysis with a student

2020

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 g6 4.0-0
 ♙g7 5.♖e1 e5 6.♙xc6 dxc6 7.d3
 ♗c7 8.a4 ♘f6 9.a5 ♖b8 10.♘bd2
 ♙e6 11.♘c4 ♘d7 12.♘g5 ♙xc4
 13.dxc4 0-0 14.♙e3 h6 15.♘f3 ♖fd8



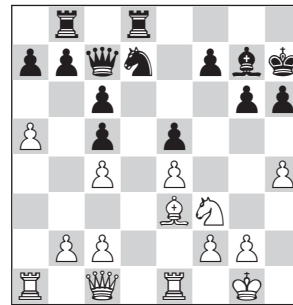
A student showed me this position from a blitz game in a chess.com's Titled Tuesday tournament. He had the white pieces and naturally considered his position better. Yet, he lost the game after failing to find the right plan for White. Since I also considered that White should have a slight edge in this structure, mostly due to the passive black bishop, we set out to find a way to prove it. At first, our analytical efforts were based around the c2-c3/b2-b4 break, with the aim to exploit vulnerable pawns on c5 and a7. However, as you can see in the line 16.c3 below, this amounts to little or nothing with Black's best play. At some point during these futile attempts to prove White's advantage I realized that our most passive piece is the knight.

Then an idea dawned on me – we could activate it by playing on the kingside! Thus, we changed the course of analysis and embarked upon

16.♗c1

Initially, our main direction was 16.c3 ♖h7 (16...♘f8? 17.♗c1 wins a pawn for White) 17.♗c2 (we had also looked at 17.♗b1 and 17.♗a4 without success) 17...b6 18.axb6 axb6 19.b4 cxb4 20.cxb4 ♘f8=.

16...♖h7 17.h4!



As I realized that White should play on the kingside, I immediately got a flashback from the game Gelfand-Van Wely that was analyzed by Boris Gelfand in his book *Positional Decision Making in Chess*. As you can see in the next game, in a similar position in the Rossolimo, he also launched his h-pawn to provoke weaknesses in Black's pawn structure and combine positional pressure on both wings.

17...b6

If Black prevents h4-h5 by playing 17...h5 himself, White would succeed in his plan to activate the knight: 18.♘g5+ ♖g8 19.♖f1!; by

preparing f2-f4, and White would take the initiative on the kingside.

18.b3

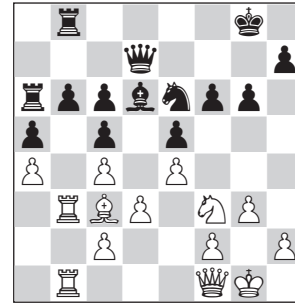
Waiting for Black to commit his knight. 18.h5?! is premature, in view of 18...g5! 19.♘h2 ♘f6.

18...♘f8

If 18...♘f6, 19.♙d2±, preparing ♙c3, takes advantage of the knight's position on f6.

19.h5! ♘e6 20.hxg6+ fxg6 21.axb6 axb6 22.c3±

Having provoked the weakening of Black's kingside, White has more long-term trumps to play for a win, even though the position is still only slightly better for him.



24.h4!

In the book, Gelfand gives a diagram after 24.h4 (although he omits the exclamation mark), while also providing the following comment: 'If I were allowed, I would love to play h4-h5 in order to create more weaknesses.' Simple, instructive, and easy to remember and apply in a similar position.

24...h5 25.♖h3 ♙c7 26.♙d2 ♖d8 27.♘h1 ♘h7 28.♖g1 ♖aa8 29.g4 ♘g7 30.♘h2 hxg4 31.♖xg4 ♘h5 32.♖b1 ♖g8 33.♖bg1 ♙d6 34.♖g2 ♖f7 35.♖g5 ♙e7 36.♖g4 ♙f8 37.♖b1 ♖a6 38.♘g1 ♙h6 39.♙xh6 ♘xh6 40.♘h3 ♘h7 41.♘h1 ♖g7 42.f4 exf4 43.♘xf4 ♘xf4 44.♖xf4 ♖a8 45.♖f2 ♖f8 46.♖xb6 ♖c7 47.♖b1 ♖e5 48.h5 gxh5 49.♖f5 ♖e8 50.♖xc5 ♘h6 51.♖bf1 ♖g6 52.♖e3+ ♘h7 53.♖h3 ♘h6 54.e5 ♖gf7 55.♖e3+ ♘h7 56.♖f3 1-0

Game 17

Boris Gelfand 2703
Loek van Wely 2654

Plovdiv Ech-tt 2003 (6)

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 g6 4.0-0 ♙g7 5.♖e1 e5 6.♙xc6 dxc6 7.d3 ♖e7 8.♘bd2 ♘f6 9.♘c4 ♘d7 10.♙d2 0-0 11.a3 b6 12.♙c3 a5 13.a4 ♙a6 14.b3 ♖fb8 15.g3 ♙xc4 16.bxc4 ♘f8 17.♖c1 ♖c7 18.♖b2 f6 19.♖a3 ♘e6 20.♖b3 ♙f8 21.♖b1 ♖a6 22.♖c1 ♙d6 23.♖f1 ♖d7

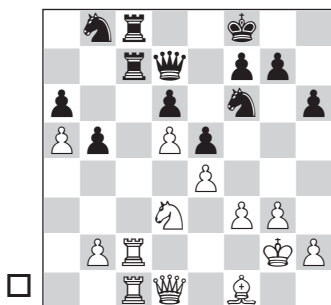
Before concluding this section, I would like to make one general remark about reading chess books: they are not novels. If you go through a chess book in a couple of days, you are missing the point. The most important part of reading is the process, not the result; in other words – what you have learned from reading the book (both consciously and subconsciously!), and not the fact that you have finished reading it. Here are some tips to get the most out of your reading:

- If there is a passage that you do not fully comprehend, reread it a few times. If you feel like it, reread the whole book once more! I have reread each of my first couple of chess books probably about 5-6 times over the years and some parts of them even more than that.
- Make your own notes as you read or add post-it-notes in the book (e.g., important examples, noteworthy concepts, favorite quotes).
- If game continuations of interesting positions in the text are just below the diagram, cover them with a sheet of paper or your hand and try to solve them before looking at the moves in the book.
- Challenge the author's assumptions. Here is an example.

Game 18

Boris Gelfand 2693**Daniel Campora** 2549

Izmir tt 2004 (2) (analysis)



While we are with Gelfand's *Positional Decision Making in Chess*, I should say that I was impressed with the following example from the book. In this position, Gelfand decided to exchange 'heavy artillery', as he puts it, and tried to win the endgame with two pairs of minor pieces.

26. ♖xc7 ♜xc7 27. ♖xc7 ♝xc7

28. ♝c1 ♝xc1 29. ♗xc1 ♗fd7 30. ♖f2

In the game, Campora continued 30...♗c5, and after that Gelfand created an endgame masterpiece. However, he also noted: 'Still,

I cannot shake the idea that if Black had played ...f7-f5, I am not absolutely sure if I could win the game. I would have to show great technique, put the bishop on c8, maneuver the knight around and see what happened. Probably it is winning, but I do not feel the same degree of certainty.' Since Gelfand didn't provide any variations to support his belief that the endgame after

30...f5!

would indeed probably be winning for White, I decided to find out.

By the way, the game continued:

30...♗c5 31.♖e3 ♖e7 32.b4! ♗cd7 33.♗h3! (this stopped ...f7-f5 for good and doomed Black to eternal passivity) 33...♗f6 34.♗d3 ♗e8 35.f4 f6 36.♗c8 ♗c7 37.♖f3 ♖d8 38.♗f5 ♗d7 39.h4! ♗f8 40.h5 ♗e8 41.♗f2! ♗c7 42.♗d1 ♗e8 43.♗e3 ♗c7 44.♗h3 ♗e8 45.♗f5 ♗c7 46.♗g6! (the key move, clearing the path for destruction of g7-pawn) 46...♗xg6 47.hxg6 ♗e8 48.♗f5 ♖d7 49.♖g4! ♖d8 50.♖h5 ♖d7 51.♗xg7! ♗xg7+ 52.♖xh6 f5 53.♖xg7 fxe4 54.♖f7 e3 55.g7 e2 56.g8♝ e1♝ 57.♝e8+ 1-0.

4. The opponent has to make difficult and time-consuming decisions for many moves in a row; and
5. There is a small downside and a reasonable upside, i.e., very few chances that you can get a worse position if the opponent plays the best moves, but a decent chance that your opponent will get a bad position if he makes an inaccuracy.

The 13. ♖g5! idea that we have just analyzed contains most of these elements. There are more than a few ways for Black to neutralize the attack, but there are probably just as many ways for him to go wrong and succumb to it. Therefore, I consider this idea to be a good practical weapon against this important line of the Neo-Arkhangelsk. The more such 'proprietary' ideas you have in your opening repertoire, the more a dangerous opponent you are.

Studying openings into the endgame

It is possible to study some openings all the way into the endgame. In such cases, it is recommended that you study the arising endgame carefully, even if the variations that you analyze are not forced. Such analysis not only helps you understand typical endgames that you might get over the board but also improves your overall endgame skill. I would like to show you one recent game in which I prepared an interesting (opening?!) novelty in the endgame.

Game 43

Mario Zovko

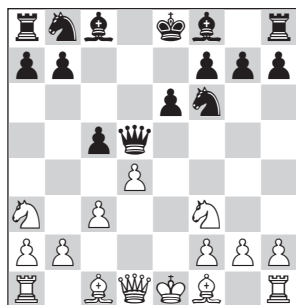
2324

Davorin Kuljasevic

2550

Croatia tt 2019 (9)

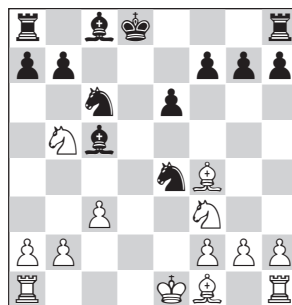
1.e4 c5 2.c3 d5 3.exd5 ♖xd5 4.d4
 ♟f6 5.♟f3 e6 6.♟a3



This was my opponent's pet line.

It usually leads to pretty risk-free positions for White, so I tried to find something not completely drawish in my preparation.

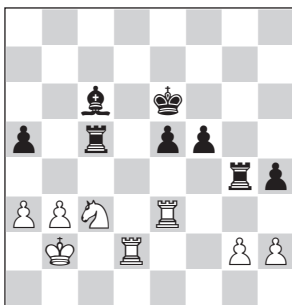
6... ♟c6 7.♟b5 ♜d8 8.dxc5 ♙xc5
 9. ♜xd8+ ♟xd8 10. ♙f4 ♟e4



All of this is fairly well-known opening theory in the Alapin Sicilian. The arising endgame is roughly equal, but the asymmetry of the pawn majorities on opposite flanks makes it possible to play for a win. White has many options here and the one played by my opponent is considered to be the best.

11. ♖d1+

Perhaps the most well-known game in this line, and a sort of an inspiration to play it in the first place, is Predojevic-Carlsen, Lillehammer rapid 2013. It continued 11. ♖g5 ♜xg5 12. ♙xg5+ f6 13. ♙e3 ♙xe3 14. fxe3 ♚e7 15. 0-0-0 ♜e5 16. ♙e2 ♙d7 17. ♜d4 ♝ac8 18. ♝d2 ♝c5 19. ♞hd1 ♞hc8 20. ♜f3 ♙a4 21. ♞e1 ♜f7 22. c4 ♙c6 23. b3 ♜d6 24. ♚b2 a5 25. ♜d4 ♙e8 26. ♞ed1 ♞e5 27. ♙f3 ♜e4 28. ♙xe4 ♝xe4 29. ♞e1 ♝c5 30. ♜c2 e5 31. ♜a3 ♝g4 32. ♜b1 b5 33. cxb5 ♙xb5 34. ♜c3 ♙c6 35. e4 h5 36. a3 h4 37. ♞e3 ♚e6 38. ♞e1 g6 39. ♞e3 f5 40. exf5+ gxf5.



analysis diagram

Interestingly enough, a very similar endgame was eventually reached in our game! 41.g3 ♙h1 42. ♜e2 ♝d5 43. ♝c2 ♙e4 44. ♝c4 ♝d2+ 45. ♚c1

♞a2 46.h3 ♝xe2 47. ♝xe2 ♝xg3 48. ♝c5 ♝xh3 49. ♝xa5 ♝xb3 50. ♞a6+ ♜d5 51. ♞a5+ ♜d4 52. ♞a4+ ♜d3 53. ♝h2 f4 54. ♝xh4 ♜e3 55. ♝b4 ♝xb4 56. axb4 f3 57. ♝h1 0-1.

11... ♙d7!

This is more accurate than 11... ♚e7 for tactical reasons.

11... ♚e7 12. ♜bd4 ♜xd4 13. ♜xd4=.

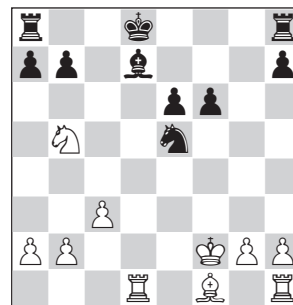
12. ♜g5

Now 12. ♜bd4?! ♜xd4 13. ♜xd4 is strongly met by 13... e5! 14. ♙xe5 ♞e8 15. f4 f6=.

12... ♙xf2+!?N

This is an improvement that I had prepared before the game. It leads to a more imbalanced type of endgame than 12... ♜g5 13. ♙xg5+ f6, which my opponent had previously faced in this position. 14. ♙h4?! ♚e7 15. ♙g3= ½-½ Zovko-Marjanovic, Zadar 2016. I reckon that his improvement would have been 14. ♙c1=.

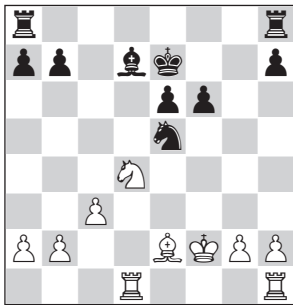
13. ♚e2 ♜xg5 14. ♙xg5+ f6 15. ♙xf6+ gxf6 16. ♚xf2 ♜e5



All of this has been forced from move 12. I assessed this endgame as approximately equal, but not completely drawish. A strong centralized knight, semi-open files

for the rooks and the flexibility of the pawn structure give Black chances to gradually outplay his opponent. I analyzed the endgame for another 10-15 minutes (as much as my preparation time allowed since there were other lines and positions to look at), which helped me to realize that there is also a 'hidden' trump for Black in this position – the e-pawn. At the end, this little pawn won the game.

17. ♖e2 ♔e7 18. ♘d4



The overall strategy for Black is to patiently improve the position and provoke White into making small concessions. However, I did have a concrete idea of what to do as soon as I connect my rooks:

18...h5!

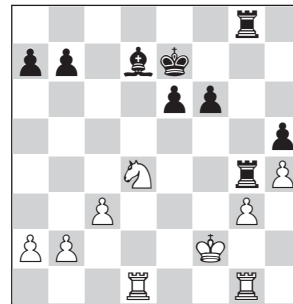
This idea was still a part of my opening/endgame preparation. The point behind advancing the pawn is to create a potential target on the kingside.

19.h4?!

White immediately overreacts. He 'fixes' the h5-pawn, but also creates weaknesses along the way and makes his kingside structure less flexible. A calmer reaction would

have been 19. ♖he1 ♖ag8 20.h3 h4 21. ♕f1, when White's centralization should be enough to keep the balance, although the position remains easier for Black to play.

19... ♖ag8 20. ♖he1 ♖g6 21.g3 ♖hg8 22. ♖g1 ♗g4+ 23. ♕xg4 ♖xg4



By exchanging the knight for the bishop, Black transformed his advantage into a more long-term one. His e-pawn can now move forward, taking away the d4- and f4-outposts from the white knight.

In such endgames, the bishop can usually assert its domination over the knight, as in Carlsen's game above, for example. At this point, it was clear that my opening preparation was a success and that I can play a pleasant endgame with only two possible results. I provide the remainder of the game with a couple of comments at the critical moments.

24. ♖ge1 e5 25. ♖e3 ♖c8 26. ♖d2

♖gg8 27. ♗c2 ♕f5 28. ♗d4 ♕d7

29. ♗c2 ♕f5 30. ♗d4 ♕g6 31.a4?

While White has made a couple of inaccuracies earlier, I think that this move is already a clear mistake. Why put the pawn on the color of

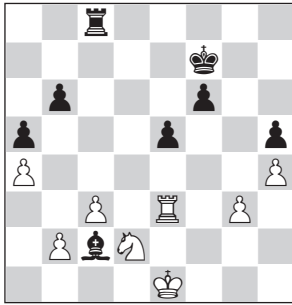
the bishop? 31.a3 would have been better.

31...♖g8 32.♔e1 a5!

Fixing the pawn on the light square.

It is also important to note that by violating the ‘do not hurry’ principle with h2-h4 and a2-a4, White has lost all flexibility of his pawn structure on the flanks, so Black has a clear advantage with his mobile connected pawns in the center.

33.♟b3 b6 34.♟d4 ♟f7 35.♟f3 ♖xd2 36.♟xd2 ♙c2



I believe that after forcing 37.b3, Black should be technically winning, or at least very close to it.

37.b3 ♟e6 38.♟f3 ♟f5 39.c4 ♖d8

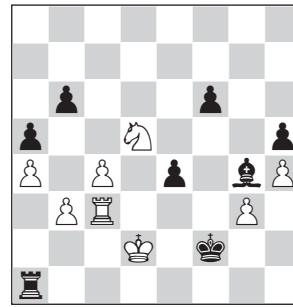
Correspondence games

For those who want (or need) to be at the cutting edge of opening theory, correspondence games are what insider information is to a stock trader. Well not exactly, of course; using insider information is illegal, while correspondence games are (still) not. Also, correspondence games are publicly available for anyone who wants to make use of them. However, there is some similarity with this analogy in a sense that chess players who study correspondence games carefully can sometimes get an ‘unfair’ advantage in the opening, even over otherwise theoretically well-prepared opponents. You may be fully booked up in a certain variation, having analyzed every single relevant OTB game and checked it with a strong engine, but if you haven’t consulted the correspondence games database, you might run into a profound idea, such as the following one.

40.♟e2 ♙d1+ 41.♟e1 ♙c2 42.♟e2 ♟g4!?

Black probably had other ways to win, but the methodical king invasion to h3 and later g2 was inspired by classical games such as Petrosian-Botvinnik and Sveshnikov-Browne (see Chapter 7).

43.♟d2 ♙f5 44.♖c3 ♟h3 45.♟f1 ♙g4+ 46.♟f2 ♖d1 47.♟e3 ♖d2+ 48.♟e1 ♖a2 49.♟d5 ♟g2 50.♖e3 ♖a1+ 51.♟d2 ♟f2! 52.♖c3 e4!



It is finally time for Black’s main trump to come to the fore.

53.♟e3 ♙f3 54.♟f5 ♖a2+ 55.♟c1 ♖e2! 56.c5 bxc5 57.♖xc5 e3 58.♟d4 ♖e1+ 59.♟b2 ♙e4 60.♖xh5 ♖d1 0-1