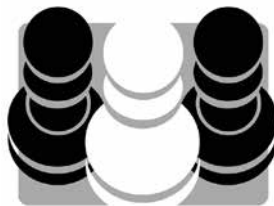


A Killer Guide to Attacking Chess

By

Jacob Aagaard



Quality Chess
www.qualitychess.co.uk

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Series Introduction

This is the first volume in this new series of Killer Guides, which will take a look at many different areas of chess. The first choice of book is what I personally consider to be the most difficult area of chess to master, if it does not come naturally to you: *the strategy of attacking chess*.

The choice to start at the end, so to speak, is a curious one, dictated by circumstances rather than logic. As a companion to this book, GM Sam Shankland is working on a book called *Grandmaster Training Camp 2 – Attack!*, which will see him solve hundreds of exercises on attacking play, provided by me. As a disclaimer, I should point out that his book will not be as accessible as this book, although it is intended to be useful for club players as well as professionals. On top of this, we at Quality Chess recently decided to let two of my previous books on attacking technique, *Attacking Manual 1* and *2*, go out of print. While these books had good information in them, and have appeared on many lists of recommended titles, some of the analysis has been overturned by powerful engines. Rather than rewriting them entirely, a new stab at the subject should be more interesting to both the author and the reader.

I have worked with a number of strong grandmasters who struggled with attacking play. It does not come naturally to all, and to gain a strong intuitive sense of it requires a lot of work. In this book I have displayed the core principles behind effective attacking play in as simple a way as I can. It is my intention for this book to be an easy read and for the ideas to come across in such a smooth way that they may seem banal. It is the nature of chess that it is easy to understand, but hard to do. Do not be deceived by how accessible these ideas are, into believing that they are easily replicated. If you want to develop understanding into a skill, I strongly recommend working with Sam's book, mentioned above.

Both this book and Sam's will be available in many formats – hardcover, paperback, eBook on Forward Chess, and Chessable with an accompanying video. No format is better than any other. What works well for some may work less well for others.

For a writer, working with all the modern tools, there is a temptation to press the spacebar often and populate the book with lots of variations. Often many fascinating and instructive variations can be shown; chess is after all a game played with actual moves on the board. In this book I have chosen to minimize the number of variations to the essentials. I will return to this subject later with the opposite approach, but this time around, I wanted to emphasize the ideas and understanding. To see the forest, not the trees.

If you are finding yourself asking “but what if?” throughout the book, you certainly should not hold back from pursuing this curiosity. My recommended approach to this book is to read it once, perhaps without using a chess board, as I have provided lots of diagrams to make the key moments stand out. Then return to it a second time, playing through the games on the board, finding these additional defensive opportunities for the “victims” and how to deal with them. There is nothing wrong with a book full of answers; but this is not it.

For the student that wishes to go deeper into the material, there are many unasked questions – and they all have answers. The simplicity of the presentation is a deliberate choice; underneath the tip of the iceberg there is a great mass of complications. Look for them if you are interested; if you are not, don't. The purpose of this book is to give you a strong insight into the elements of attacking skills, and hopefully a chance to implement some of them into your own play.

I hope you will enjoy this book as much as I enjoyed writing it.

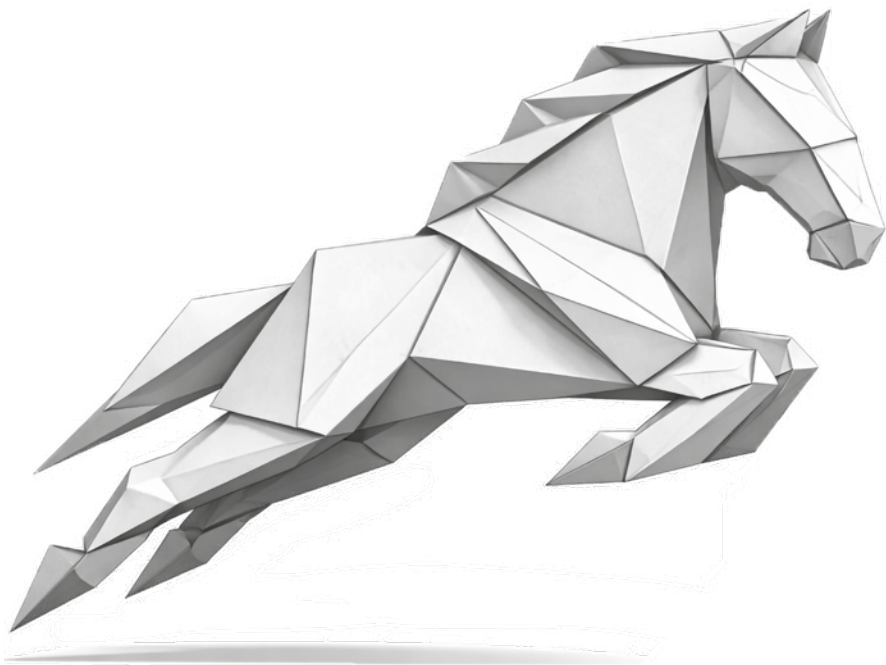
Jacob Aagaard

Glasgow, November 2025

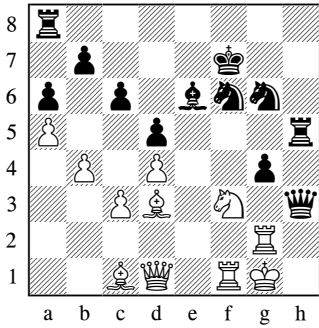


Chapter 1

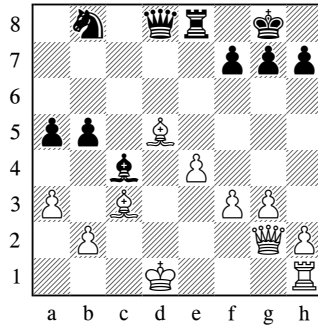
Momentum



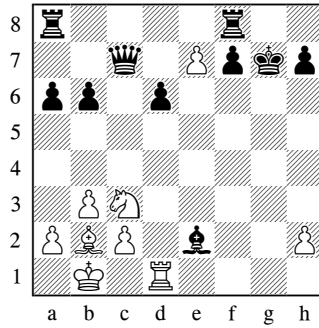
Preview Exercises



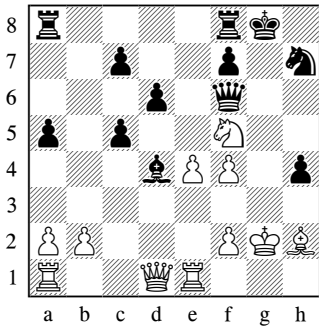
So many options!
(see page 24)



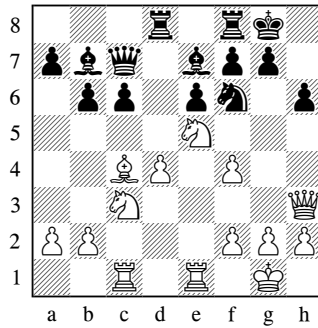
Time is of the essence!
(see page 34)



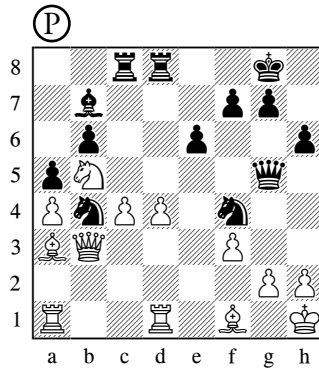
Time to calculate!
(see page 43)



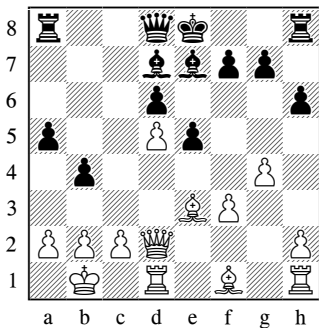
Act with great urgency!
(see page 26)



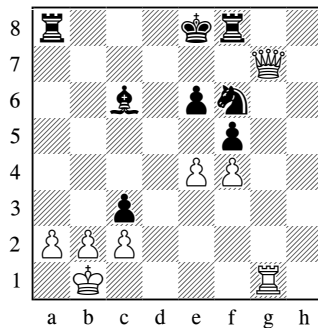
What did Alekhine not see?
(see page 35)



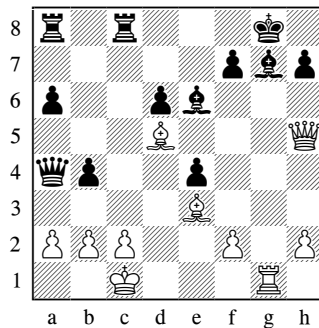
All the pieces are ready!
(see page 44)



How to start an attack?
(see page 28)



Black is not safe yet!
(see page 38)



Don't get mated!
(see page 54)

The feeling for momentum is the secret sauce in spicy attacking play. It is what is missing in the play of a lot of technical players, which can make their play appear quite wooden.

Momentum is difficult to get an intuitive grasp of, but not difficult to understand. Winning technically is most often a board-wide victory. It could be with what we call *the squeeze*, where a space advantage is exploited incrementally. An attack is different. It is a victory in a narrow area, maybe one as little as a single square. The technical win is a success of static features, such as material, space, and quality of the pieces. Advantages that are likely to be the same in five or ten moves, thus often referred to as *long-term* or *static* advantages. Ignoring the (frequent) scenarios where the defender gives up material to avoid being overrun, where it often makes sense to change into a technical approach to the game, winning from an attack is based on time and especially the short-term potential of the pieces (often referred to as *dynamics*).

For this reason, it makes sense to view the nature of the attack as a *race*. The attacker may risk everything, in his aim to arrive first at the opponent's king. But if the defenders arrive first, this investment may be something we live to regret. Given that it is a race, we should not worry too much about what we knock over on the way. We should approach attacking chess with a sense of urgency!

Momentum is a word from physics. It is used to describe the force or speed of an object in motion. Here the object is our attacking pieces; and the task for us is to evaluate if the “force or speed” of our attack is sufficient to make sacrifices or concessions for. At times, that bridge has already been crossed, and our job

is to seek the maximum momentum, allowing the attack to arrive with the greatest speed and force possible.

Remember, the strength of an impact is measured like this:

$$\text{speed} \times \text{mass} = \text{force}$$

This formula cannot be used to calculate the impact of an attack in chess – at least not without a lot of additional parameters, which makes it impractical on a logical level. But on an intuitive level, it is important. We need the attack to arrive with the greatest possible speed; but still to have enough “mass” to create a devastating impact.

The moment

Before we look deeply at the core theme of this chapter, it is useful to look at the word comprising the first six letters of it. Not all positions are attacking positions, nor should all positions be treated as attacking positions. But there are times when the best way to approach the position is to play for dynamics. If we ignore style and preferences, there are a few scenarios where we absolutely should play for dynamics. These could be scenarios where:

- the opponent's king is exposed
- the opponent is behind in development
- the opponent's pieces are busy elsewhere and the king is thus insufficiently protected
- our pieces are ready and the opponent is unready in other ways
- lines are opening
- there is an opportunity (sacrifice or combination), as well as:
- desperation

We can group all of these into the same category of *the moment*. This is defined as a chance that will not return. To become a good attacking player, it is important to get a good feeling for the moment.

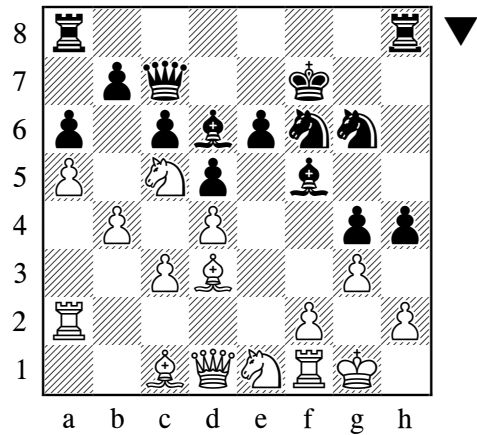
A key part of developing strong attacking intuition is to get a good feeling for the rhythm of the attack. The default is to get pieces into position, without delay, and then strike. But at times we do not have the luxury of time to line up all the guns before the moment has passed. Good attacking technique requires: a strong feeling for momentum (see the note to move 20 in the Giri – Artemiev game in the introduction, and the rest of this chapter); a feeling of urgency to include the remaining pieces in the attack (Chapter 2); and, finally, a feeling for when it is time to strike: the moment.

The first game in this chapter illustrates the nature of the moment well. At various times, both players have chances that could appear random, but are no such thing. They appear because of the geometry of the pieces, the open files, and the lack of defenders around the king. We shall see that the players miss these chances. This is partly because the game is an online rapid game. But it is also because of the style of the players, both of whom have an active technical style. They both enjoy active pieces, but rarely go for an all-out attack. Without the necessary time to calculate at critical moments, one can sense the players' lack of feeling for both the moment and momentum as a whole.

Wesley So – Alireza Firouzja

Internet (rapid) 2021

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 ♟f5 4.♘f3 e6 5.♙e2
 ♚e7 6.0–0 h6 7.a4 g5 8.a5 a6 9.b4 ♘d7
 10.c3 f6 11.exf6 ♘g6 12.f7† ♙xf7 13.♘bd2
 ♙d6 14.♘b3 ♖c7 15.g3 ♘f6 16.♙d3 g4
 17.♘e1 h5 18.♞a2 h4 19.♘c5



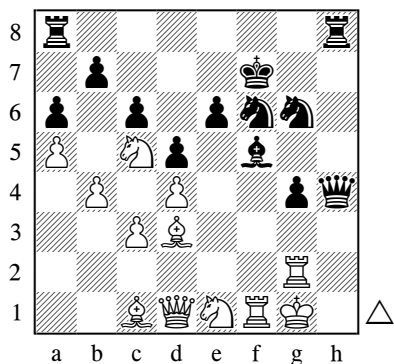
The early stages of the game have gone mildly in Black's favour. From being slightly under pressure, he is now the one applying the pressure. But Firouzja, a highly intuitive player, does not want to strike just yet, and in return gives his opponent a chance.

19...♞h5?

Doubling the rooks on the h-file is appealing, but it is also slow. It is the kind of attacking play we see from players that do not have a feeling for momentum, who don't attack with the sense of urgency of being in a race.

My attacking instincts tell me that Black should have taken the plunge:

19...hxc3 20.fxc3 ♙xc3!? 21.hxc3 ♖xc3†
 22.♞g2 ♖h4



The position is not at all easy to defend for White in practice. Black is threatening ...g4-g3, which would be devastating. White has to bring in reinforcements.

23...♙f4!

It is natural for Black to follow up with a forced sequence.

23...♙xd3 24.♜xc3 ♚h1† 25.♜f2 ♜e4†

It feels almost evil that this position is not winning for Black by force.

26.♜e2 ♜xc3† 27.♜d2 ♜xd1 28.♞xh1 ♞xh1

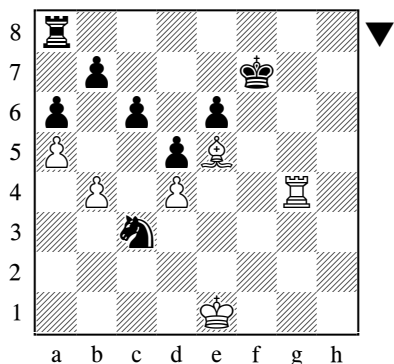
White is in danger of ending up in a difficult endgame, where a black rook and two pawns would be stronger than his two knights. But he can also play:

29.♞xg4!

Black has many options. The most challenging is probably:

29...♞xe1!? 30.♜xe1 ♜c3 31.♜e5† ♜xe5

32.♙xe5

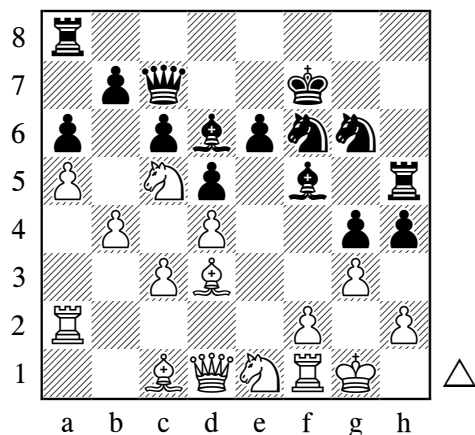


32...♞g8

Now White should play:

33.♞h4

This keeps active counterplay. Black has two extra pawns, but the white rook and bishop are so powerful that White will hold the endgame.



Because of the slightly awkward move from Black, the “moment” has now become White’s.

20.♞e2?

20.f3!!

A highly forcing move, seeking to open up the file from the f1-rook to the black king. Black cannot take on f3, as the knight would jump to g5 in a jiffy.

20...hxg3!

Black’s practical chances exist in making the position as complicated as possible.

21.fxg4 g2

The natural move, opening space for the dark-squared bishop. Luckily for White, the rook is waiting in the wings.

22.♞xg2 ♙xh2† 23.♜f2

White is winning a piece, but the complications are considerable. The main line is simply mad:

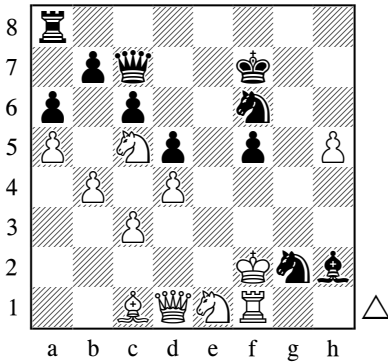
23...♜h4!?

Trying to remove the rook as a defender.

24.♙xf5!

A true desperado shot.

24...exf5 25.gxh5 ♜xg2



26. ♖d3!!

Defending the g3-square.

26... ♜xe1 27. ♜xf5 ♜g3† 28. ♔e2 ♜e8†
29. ♔d1

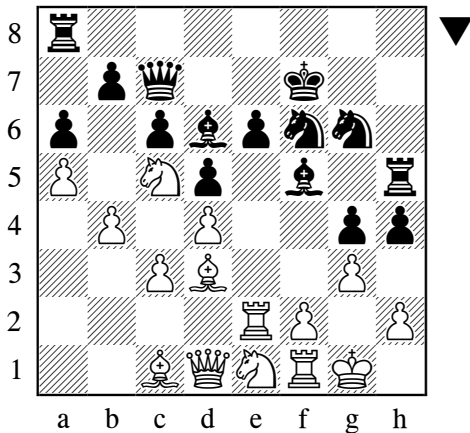
The king has escaped the claws of the black pieces.

29... ♔g8 30. ♔g5

White has a winning position. The threat of the check on g6 is devastating and forces Black into a lost endgame after:

30... ♜g4† 31. ♜xg4 ♜xg4 32. ♜xe1

The extra pawn, and the positional advantage, are too much to face.



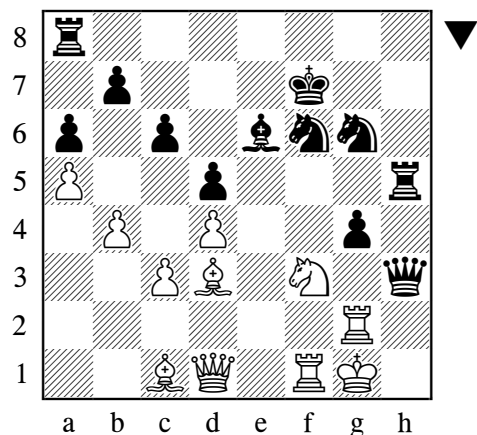
Firouzja probably realised his mistake already while his opponent was thinking.

20... ♜xg3 21. ♜xg3 ♔xg3! 22. ♜xg3 ♜xg3†
23. ♜g2 ♜h3

Black's attack is highly dangerous and So must not have liked what he was seeing. Thus, he decided to make a counter-sacrifice to shake things up. I don't believe for a moment he did this with confidence, or believed that it would provide him with a way out of the problems he was facing. Rather, he saw a chance to change the direction of the game, away from the waterfall he could hear rumbling in the distance.

24. ♜xe6!? ♔xe6 25. ♜f3

The next moment has arrived. Firouzja is a great speed chess player, as well as a master of defeating players under 2700, the likes of which we have rarely seen in the history of the game. His great run, winning the Grand Swiss and scoring 8/9 on Board 1 in the European Team Championship, both in November 2021, saw him fully exploit his high understanding of the game, and his ability to destabilise the game enough to make weaker opponents make mistakes. What Firouzja lacks in his game, is the razor-sharp accuracy only a few players have. Given enough time on the clock he can overcome this obstacle, but in online rapid games he often misses this kind of chance.



25... ♜h4?

Black had a chance to keep the attack going with the ferocious: