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3 Strategic Planning

Inside every large problem there is a small one trying to get out.

(Hoare's law of large problems)

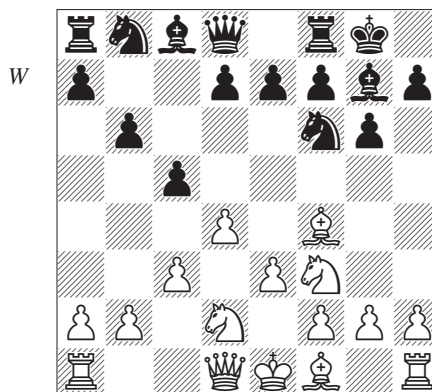
Strategic planning links the opening to the mid-game and even the ending. Evaluating the concrete features of a position, a player will concentrate on one of the possible scenarios that may ensue, and he will set about realizing it. In the process various details will be clarified, and the original design will often need to be corrected. It may even have to be revised completely, if something important was omitted in the first place or if the scenario devised by the opponent turns out better.

3.1 Positional Assessment: A Dualism of Factors

Given the rapidly changing conditions of play at the start of the game, the simplified strategic concepts to which we are accustomed often prove inadequate, reflecting the essence of the matter in a way that is too one-sided or downright erroneous. Thus it may not be obvious what exactly should count as a merit or a defect of the position. Suppose we are talking about the pawn-configuration: in some cases isolated, doubled and backward pawns are actually good, fulfilling very useful functions; the same applies equally to so-called 'bad' pieces. Therefore when provisionally examining some continuation, we should not rely too much on the visual impression alone; a move which appears wholly illogical may have a hidden logical foundation.

Bondarevsky – Bronstein
USSR Ch, Leningrad 1963

1 d4 ♘f6 2 ♗f3 g6 3 ♙f4 ♙g7 4 e3 0-0 5 ♗bd2 b6 6 c3 c5 (D)



7 h3

The players have entered a 'reversed' Réti Opening, which prompts us to talk once again about the strategy of reversed colours. In this example we see it applied ineffectively. White is simply copying the formation that is well known on the black side, and necessarily accepting the defensive functions associated with it; this is not the way to develop his own initiative. He could have done without prophylactic measures for the time being and played 7 ♙d3 (by analogy with Réti-Lasker, New York 1924 – the game in which the whole system originated). In that case, however, White's extra tempo would be essentially insignificant. An attempt at more active opening play should have been made much earlier – with 3 ♙g5 (or 3 c3 0-0 4 ♙g5) 3...♙g7 4 c3 0-0 5 ♗bd2, aiming to play e4 in one go.

7...d6 8 ♙e2 ♙a6

Deviating from the double fianchetto scheme devised by Réti. A basic merit of this move is that it can also be employed against 8 ♙d3 or 8 ♙c4. The bishop exchange alters the scope which the position offers to the players. The possibility of later pawn activity in the centre (e4 or conversely ...e5) loses much of its attractiveness. The result is a reduction of tension in

the strategic battle as a whole. That is why White, in Réti's Opening, usually avoids the corresponding manoeuvre ♙a3 .

9 ♙xa6 ♜xa6 **10** $0-0$ ♞d7 **11** ♞e2 ♝c7

The chances are approximately equal. Neither player so far can speak of any positional gains or problems. White now refrains from further manoeuvring on the lines of $12 \text{ a4 } \text{♞e6}$ ($12 \dots \text{♞ac8}$) $13 \text{ ♙h2 } \text{♞ac8}$ $14 \text{ ♞d3 } \text{♞c6}$, and does after all attempt to disturb the balance of the position.

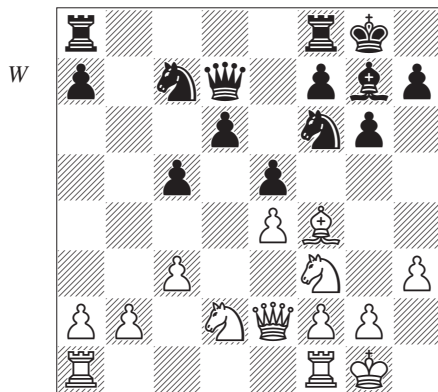
12 dxc5

Instead $12 \text{ e4 cxd4 } 13 \text{ cxd4}$ is wholly innocuous. White's pawn-centre is of purely formal significance and doesn't stop the black pieces from moving about in comfort: $13 \dots \text{♞ac8}$ or $13 \dots \text{♞e6}$ 14 ♙h2 d5 .

12 $\dots \text{bxc5}$ **13** e4

Preparing to post his knight on c4, setting up the threat of e5 in conjunction with pressure on the d-file. This scheme cannot be called particularly appropriate; in the variation $13 \dots \text{♞e6}$ $14 \text{ ♙h2 } \text{♞b7}$ $15 \text{ ♞ab1 } \text{♞d7}$, Black's position would already be a little 'more equal' than White's. However, Black prefers to react in a much more radical manner.

13 $\dots \text{e5}$ (D)



This turn of events most likely came as a big surprise to White. Black declares his intentions, which are based on a total rejection of purely outward criteria for positional evaluation. In Black's opinion:

1) The pawn on d6 is strong because it is preparing to advance. On the other hand the

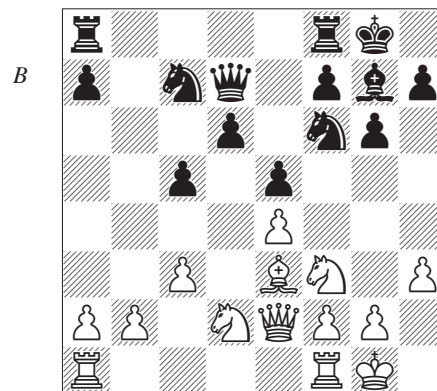
white e4-pawn is weak and will soon be attacked by $\dots \text{d5}$ and $\dots \text{f5}$ (the latter seems even more unpleasant). Then an exchange of pawns will deprive White of his only outpost in the centre.

2) Of the two dark-squared bishops, it is the white one that is 'bad'. Finding itself in the zone of hostilities, it can only envy its safely placed opposite number on g7.

3) Consequently by this time it is Black, not White, who is planning an offensive in the centre, taking advantage of the fact that if White tries to restrain him with c4, the knight on c7 will have the chance to settle on the central square d4.

14 ♙e3 (D)

Black's reasoning doesn't by any means amount to an incontrovertible truth, but it does seem entirely realistic – and White ought to be thinking how to resist his opponent's coming expansion in the centre. By continuing in the most natural way, he is following the line of least resistance. After $14 \text{ ♙g5 } \text{♞fe8}$ ($14 \dots \text{♞h5}$) $15 \text{ ♞c4 } \text{♞h8}$ ($15 \dots \text{h6 } 16 \text{ ♙e3 } \text{♞h7}$) he would be left with the same unsolved problems, but the unconventional $14 \text{ ♙h2}!$? is interesting; for the moment the bishop is taking a rest, but it is still observing the centre and not getting in the way of White's other pieces.



14 $\dots \text{♞ab8}$

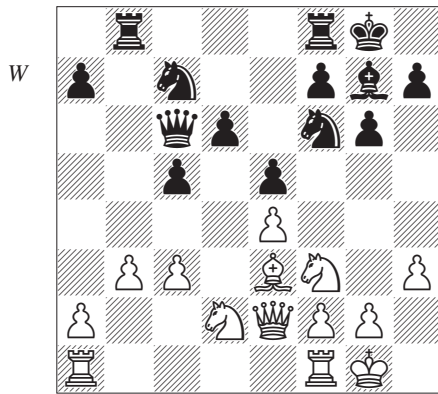
Black tries to provoke a weakening of c3 which would be useful to him. However, although 15 ♞c4 is now unplayable, the attack on the b-pawn is not forceful enough. It looks

more logical to play an immediate 14...♖c6, or 14...♗fe8 (e.g., 15 ♖d3 f5 16 ♙xc5 ♜f7), without getting sidetracked from the main direction of the fight.

15 b3

Again the simplest reply, but it was worth considering 15 ♖d3 to curb Black's aggressive ambitions. If then 15...♖c6, White has 16 ♙g5, and the knight can't move from f6 on account of 17 ♙e7. There would be unclear play after 15...♜fe8!?, while in the event of 15...♞xb2 16 ♗c4 ♞bb8 17 ♖xd6 ♖xd6 18 ♗xd6 ♜fd8 19 ♞ad1 Black would need to work for equality.

15...♖c6 (D)



In the short interval since 13...e5, Black has made more progress than his opponent. At this point White has the following options:

a) 16 ♙g5 ♗d7 (16...♗h5) 17 ♗c4 (Black has the same answer to 17 ♞ad1 or 17 ♜fd1) 17...d5 (the exchange sacrifice 17...f5 18 ♙e7 fxe4 19 ♗fd2 d5 isn't entirely adequate in view of 20 ♙xf8 ♞xf8 21 ♗e3, with the idea of 22 c4) 18 exd5 ♗xd5, and Black is a little better.

b) 16 ♖d3 ♜fe8 (16...♗fe8 17 ♖c4!?) 17 c4 stabilizes the position, but after 17...♗e6 the initiative belongs to Black, thanks to the constant threat of the knight invading on d4.

We can draw the provisional conclusion that the position after 15...♖c6 is already a little worse for White, yet in the above variations his difficulties don't seem at all excessive. It is only with his next move that his real troubles begin.

16 ♖c4?

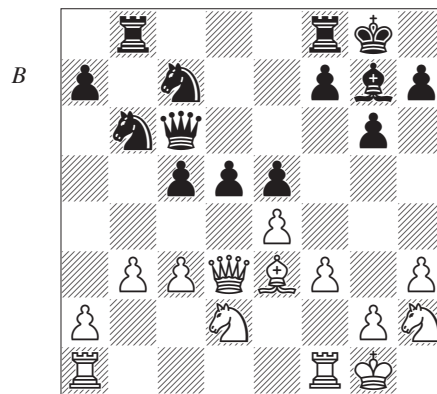
Essentially the decisive error, allowing the opponent to gain an important tempo and carry his attack through successfully. Having failed to oppose Black's plan, White is left with no means at all of influencing the situation in the centre.

16...♗d7 17 ♗h2?!

This square would have suited the bishop better... The attempt at counterplay with 17 b4 ♗b6 18 ♖b3 (or 18 ♖e2 f5 19 bxc5 dxc5 20 ♗b3) 18...c4 19 ♖c2 f5 20 a4 is none too attractive, but now the entire white army starts re-treating.

17...♗b6 18 ♖d3 d5 19 f3 (D)

If 19 exd5 ♗cxd5 20 c4, then 20...♗xe3 21 ♖xe3 f5 is not good for White. He is also incapable of maintaining the e4-point for long, and his game is going rapidly downhill. Now and later, Black's one real difficulty lies in choosing between a number of good continuations.



19...♞bd8 20 ♖c2

It's no use playing 20 ♗g4, if only because of the simple 20...h5 21 ♗f2 f5.

20...f5 21 ♞ad1 ♗e6

A simpler way was 21...d4, immediately consolidating the gains of his efficacious strategy. In permitting White to exchange on d5 in relatively painless circumstances, Black wants to go over to a direct attack on the king – but this isn't the most reliable way to exploit his advantage.

22 exd5 ♗xd5

Again refraining from a positional solution with 22...♞xd5.