

SHERLOCK'S METHOD

THE WORKING TOOL
FOR THE CLUB PLAYER

by
Elshan Moradiabadi
and Sabina Francesca Foişor



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KEY TO SYMBOLS

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

*To our beloved parents, Cristina, Ovidiu, Fariborz and Shohreh
and grandparents without whom we wouldn't be who we are today.*

*Thank you for loving us and always pushing us forward on the heights
of success, even if at times we weren't ready to move forward.*

*And to our beloved sisters Ayrin and Veronica,
for your undivided support and love.*

FOREWORD

The year was 2001, and I was representing India in the Asian Junior Championship playing against some of the best young talents in Asia. It was the penultimate round, and I was up against this young Iranian player, Elshan Moradiabadi. Our ratings were similar indicating that our playing strengths were about equal. I went in aggressive, but Elshan was able to fend off my attack and push me to the brink of defeat with an extra pawn in a rook and pawn endgame. I had to fight for 81 moves before I could get a draw in that game. When I shook his hand with a sigh of relief, I did not realize that we would be entangled in this long journey of chess playing and teaching together. Over the years, Elshan and I have faced off in several other games against each other. While we both share a great friendship off the board, we have always fought hard over the board. That is how we have always played chess; that is the passion we share for this beautiful game.

I remember watching the US Women's Championship games live in 2017, and the clear favorite going into the last game was WGM Sabina Foisor. She had to deal with a lot of nerves and was facing an important game against the young and talented Apurva Virkud. I remember following the game closely, and thinking it is never easy for the player in the lead to win such games because they have everything to lose. I did not know Sabina personally at that time, but I was very happy to see that she not only came out with a win, but that she played in style with a nice queen sacrifice in the end. Since then, I have gotten to know Sabina personally, and I can say that she brings the same kind of sincerity and passion to the game of chess. Elshan and Sabina make a great team, just like Sherlock and Watson from their book.

The book covers exactly what it promises to cover; they have a bit of everything in the examples ranging from silent knight maneuvers to fancy sacrifices. Their idea in the book is to help players train for tournaments by working on all aspects of the game and looking at problems in a wholesome way. They have a wide variety of topics from a wide variety of players. For example, there is an exercise of beautiful tactical play by the former World Champion Viswanathan Anand against Super Grandmaster Alexander Grischuk. As you solve the problem and move on, you will see another exercise played by their students rated around 1300. This is a beautiful way to illustrate that chess is

chess, no matter who is playing the game. Just a heads-up to the reader, the latter is much harder to crack! Some of the examples like Jeffrey Xiong missing a queen trap or Nihal Sarin missing a simple way to control an open file to gain an advantage show that even the best of the best make mistakes. Even though there may be easy puzzles you can solve in a few minutes or real Titanic's that take hours to sink in, you must consistently train with them.

In chess, there are two main methods to come up with the best move: one is abstract, think in terms of ideas, and the other is exact, think in terms of moves and variations. In my opinion, this is one of the most difficult skills to acquire — knowing when to think in terms of moves and when to think in terms of ideas. Books usually try to address one or the other, but they do not give us the wholesome picture of the game. As promised in their book, Elshan and Sabina focus on all of this. By mixing the thinking process together, they keep the readers second guessing, and that is a very useful training practice when you are getting ready for an actual tournament. When Ding Liren is playing a game, no one is there to tell him to look for a forcing knight sacrifice to open his opponent's king rather than thinking about an abstract idea to improve his position. The same applies to Jobava's brilliant queen retreat to expose the Black king on a weak diagonal. In both cases, once the player found the idea/move, the game was essentially over, but they had to do it in real time.

Adding a nice storyline with Sherlock and Watson adds to the entertainment value of the book; it is a nice way to add fun to the hard chess training that readers are about to endure. By mixing the themes and varying the difficulty level, Elshan and Sabina have found a good training tool for tournament players. Most training methods focus on narrow topics to help familiarize the players with the hope that the sheer amount of work done in that topic will help a player recognize the pattern in a practical game. While learning each topic in depth is an irreplaceable method to study, it is always meant for the longer run, and it is also quite time consuming. The best training that you can do right before a tournament has to be something that can emulate the tournament situation as much as possible. In this book, Elshan and Sabina have catered to that requirement for players.

Cary, NC — May 2020

GM Magesh Panchanathan

INTRODUCTION

The book before you is a product of what happens when two chess players start a relationship (which started over six years ago) and enter a dialogue about how to get ready for the next tournament.

The content of this book is a training program for players who plan to play an over-the-board tournament a few weeks from the time they start training with this book. This book, unlike other similar books in the field of improvement, does not have a central theme. In other words, we are not focused solely on openings, middlegames or endgames. Moreover, the book does not only concentrate on specific themes (calculation, positional decisions or other strategic aspects), though many of these concepts are addressed throughout the book. Instead, this book offers a holistic view on how to approach every single position in it, regardless of the phase of the game or the nature of the position. We try to teach players how to identify types of decisions in various positions, while pointing at the trade-off between a hardcore calculation and a heuristics judgment.

As you know, there is no replacement for hours of systematic training and months of planning. For elite players, the aforementioned process is simply a routine. Consider the world championship matches, where the champion and the challenger spend months preparing different openings with their coaches, honing calculation skills and getting into shape, both physically and psychologically for the demanding task of playing the highest level of chess.

We are aware that for most chess players, such extensive level of preparation is not pragmatic. Several chess players may have other jobs, or may work as coaches. These players (of which some are quite strong, and even include Grandmasters) do not spend as much time on chess as an elite professional does on a daily basis. They also cannot devote various necessary resources to their preparation as elite players can. This book is an attempt to help such players getting into shape in a short amount of time. We do

not expect such high-end training, but hope to help you reinforce the skills needed for your preparation process.

Like many books on practical chess, our method does not cover every single aspect of preparation. It focuses mainly on training one's brain to handle every position, as it is presented, in a timely fashion. Thus, despite our efforts to make the content uniformly distributed across different chess concepts, you may find more emphasis on certain topics than on others. These topics tend to appear more frequently than others in tournament games.

The material included in this book has been hand-picked from games and positions we reviewed over the past few years with the exception of a handful of older ones. While we wished to include all of them in here, it would have made the book impractical for the purpose of preparing for a tournament.

This book is composed of three parts, each broken down into two subsections. The parts are as follows: simple positions, endgames, and complex decisions. There are one hundred fifty (150) positions in the first part, one hundred twenty (120) in the second part, and forty-two (42) in the third part. The targeted readers for the book are players rated between 1700 and 2300. The range may seem rather wide, but the variety of concepts addressed makes it possible for the players in the aforementioned range to enjoy and learn from the book's content. At the same time, they can improve and adapt with the suggested ideas in the solutions. We believe the third part is rather difficult for players below 2000, but of course, everyone stands to gain from it!

We strongly suggest that you write down everything you think about during the course of solving the exercises. You are not just trying to find the right solution, but to think in the right direction with respect to the position before you. Make sure to compare your thinking process to the moves and comments in the solution section, as it is a quintessential part of training with this book.

While we are not setting a time limit for each exercise, we do not recommend exceeding fifteen (15) minutes per exercise in Parts I and II, and not more than an average of twenty five minutes (25) on each exercise in Part

III. We advise the players below 2000 to complete each exercise in one sitting. The solutions are very thorough and tailored to be like game commentary, so there are definitely more than just moves in there. Thus, we highly recommend that the reader not check the positions with chess engines and instead carefully read the answers at the end of each part. If you still have doubts, check the answers with a strong engine, but be sure to let the engine reach as high of a depth as a hardware allows.

Each part is also furnished with a set of lectures and content for the first subsection, in which we tried to cover more overarching concepts. These sections include model games, endgames and positions where you can train yourself on specific themes. This is where the readers embark on a short journey with none other than the legendary character of Mr. Sherlock Holmes, who plays the role of the chess master, training his good friend, Dr. John Watson, for his upcoming tournament. Two reasons motivated this choice. The first reason was that Sherlock Holmes had a rather (in our opinion) fixed approach to solving every single mystery, while having a sharp eye for details. The second was that he had an equally famous character and narrator (Dr. Watson) next to him, which we thought could amuse the readers while going through the book.

Finally, this is what we propose for how to read this book:

1. Pause for a few minutes on each diagram you reach, even the ones during a lecture or in the solution part.
2. Write down your ideas and thoughts and keep them for comparison purposes.
3. Read the solutions.
4. Once you are done with the exercises, go back to them in a week's time and repeat the same process.
5. Compare the notes and ponder on how your thinking process may have (or have not) changed!

Good luck with the exercises and your upcoming tournaments!

Sabina Francesca Foişor & Elshan Moradiabadi
Durham, North Carolina 2020

PART I. SIMPLE IDEAS

A. INTRODUCTION TO THE ART OF UNDERSTANDING ONE'S THINKING PROCESS IN CHESS

THE NARRATOR:
DOCTOR JOHN WATSON

It was only a few days since Sherlock had returned from a conference on cybersecurity and computer crimes in Boston, where he made a presentation (God knows of what kind since he had never used PowerPoint or Prezi before) about the thinking process and motives of cyber criminals with regard to different digital infrastructures. I didn't know much about the content of his presentation at the time. Sherlock was not eager to talk about it, so I deduced it was due to my assertive behavior earlier that month when I forced him to accept the invitation to that specific conference, despite his initial lack of interest in it. Yet, I was sure that his presentation was a successful one.

It was a nice Saturday morning, and given my practice is closed during the weekends, I was eager to learn more about Sherlock's travel, so I decided to pay him a visit.

Right before entering his building, I ran into his postman, who handed me over the daily advertisements, the papers, and Sherlock's check in a chic envelope. It was a handsome sum (I have to make sure Sherlock attends to these papers; he simply expects me to check his letters!) with an all-praise thank you note from the sponsor of the event, the kind that one would frame and put in his office. Knowing Sherlock long enough, I knew the paper would end up in his or Mrs. Hudson's fireplace next winter...

As I entered his office, I saw Sherlock grabbing his cup of coffee from his breakfast table and walking towards the window. The breakfast plate was almost empty, a rarity in Sherlock's case since he doesn't eat much in the first half of the day when he is at 221B Baker Street. His breakfast, which consisted of sunny-side up eggs, bacon, and hash

browns, was a new addition to his habits' 'repertoire' since he returned from Boston, or so I was told by Mrs. Hudson. Sherlock looked out of the window and took a big sip from his cup. He looked dazed for a few seconds. The jet lag was still haunting him even though he had been back for a week.

As I was hesitating between picking up a book or a newspaper to read (as a way to take a break from my ip-hone over the weekend), Mrs. Hudson walked in.

"Good morning, Dr. Watson!" said my kind and polite ex-landlady.

"Good day, Mrs. Hudson!" I said with a smile on my face.

"It was a delicious meal Mrs. Hudson! The coffee was OK too," said Sherlock with his usual tone when he wants to dismiss someone.

"I am glad," muttered Mrs. Hudson, as she was putting the dishes back in her tray to leave.

Although there isn't a difference between the basic preparation of an American and an English breakfast, Mrs. Hudson wasn't happy with this new addition to her home errands since Sherlock wasn't much of a breakfast person before.

Mrs. Hudson could bear the whole breakfast menu change, if Sherlock would have conceded to just that.

A couple of nights ago, while I was visiting Sherlock for the first time since he was back from Boston, Mrs. Hudson approached me and politely complained about Sherlock's desktop computer noise and the heat in the basement. She was not happy with the utility bill either, given that Sherlock would keep the computer on all the time so that he could analyze his correspondence chess games and other interesting positions.

As I saw Mrs. Hudson reaching for the door, I rushed to help her open it.

She turned to me and murmured, "What is it with this chess thing?" nodding at Sherlock's new addition to his apartment's furniture.

It was an antique chess set made of ivory on a board made of walnut wood. Mrs. Hudson was uncomfortable with the ivory set as it was against her belief in animal rights, a cause she generously donated to.

I smiled and said, "Just a new hobby, nothing more Mrs. Hudson."

As she was leaving the room she said, "Well it surely doesn't pay the

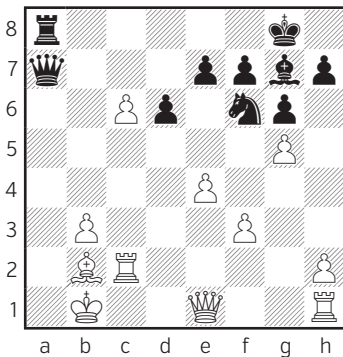
rent, but his expertise on security and criminology does!”

Mrs. Hudson was referring to the two months delay in paying the rent and other expenses, which Sherlock could finally attend to after his trip to Boston.

I turned my head back into the room toward Sherlock’s table, which was now all shiny and bright after he had pulled open the curtains.

“John, take a look at this position!” he said with all excitement and joy, the dazed look was long gone...

From a game between two 1300 USCF rated players, in a Scholastic tournament in Texas



Black to play

“Sherlock, since when did you start to compose studies on middlegame tactics?” I said while being amused

by this Saturday morning’s pleasant surprise.

“I know you have been working much more on your chess recently Sherlock, but you should stop the obsession; it is merely a hobby for you!”

“On the contrary, my dear fellow,” he uttered elatedly, “I am serious about it now as a correspondence player, and I intend to knock the rust off my brain and hone my skills in the royal game. I am even thinking about possibly playing in a few tournaments after ages away from the board!”

This definitely came as a surprise to me. Through my correspondence with a childhood friend of Sherlock’s, who resides now in Port Moresby, the capital of Papua and New Guinea, I learned that Sherlock was a huge chess talent as a young boy, spending hours playing with his brother Mycroft at the Diogenes Club. Sherlock’s friend noted that Sherlock was impressive at “spotting a position’s need”, and although he was not “the brightest tactician” out there, “Sherlock would rarely lose a game.” Nevertheless, Sherlock ended his over-the-board chess career altogether once he entered college. It is only the emergence of online chess that brought back his

passion years after he had passed his prime, or so I thought.

In spite of leaving the chess scene for decades, Sherlock's library was filled with as many chess books as he had on subjects like criminology, chemistry, and forensic sciences. Thus, if he is studying chess this way, there is a merit in his method. After all, it is Sherlock Holmes we are talking about!

"What do you make of this position, John?" he demanded.

I spent a good part of two minutes, trying to understand what is happening on the board before even making a comment. I used to play chess regularly with my army fellows and I was a solid 1700 level player. Thus, I wasn't intimidated by seeing a position like this, but it seemed that the game had developed in a random fashion.

"White is ahead a substantial amount of material: a rook and two pawns for a knight. The c6-pawn is two squares away from promotion, so Black's only hope is the attack along the a-file. Given the fact that the bishop on b2 covers the checkmate square on a1, and Black's knight is hanging on f6, a knight jump should be the only and decisive solution for Black, focusing all

of Black's power over the a1-square. The knight's backward moves barely create any threat, so I guess the forward Nxe4 move should be the answer."

"Great work, Watson! Excellent deduction!"

"Thank you, Sherlock," I replied, delighted that I managed to dazzle Sherlock in the department of intelligence and creativity.

"Now John, what would be your answer? Do you have a clear line in mind? What is your exact conclusion? Remember, it is a position with a cut-throat answer, which makes it much easier to calculate!"

"You are asking a lot of questions Sherlock. Do I at least get to spend a few minutes on this position?"

"Absolutely, by all means!" he replied.

Consequently, I sat there looking at the ivory chess set with the shiny pieces. They were a bit greasy, an indication their age or a result of a careless owner. Nevertheless, they were where they were supposed to be. Sherlock's dining table is where he studies chess and ponders his clients' eccentric cases. In fact, this very table I am sitting at

is where Sherlock spends his days, except when he leaves the room on two occasions: a refreshingly long stroll down Baker Street, or hours of analysis with his noisy desktop in the basement.

Having my self-confidence boosted by Sherlock's compliment, I carefully considered different knight moves, and within a few seconds dismissed all of them in favor of Nxe4 .

After about ten minutes of thinking and calculation I shouted with aplomb, " $\text{Nxe4! Bxg7 Kxg7 Bb2}$, and now I cannot see anything particularly strong for Black. Then, I think after Nc5 , he can go ahead and win the c-pawn, after which White's king is permanently weak! I think Black should be OK, Sherlock!" I said with a sheepish smile.

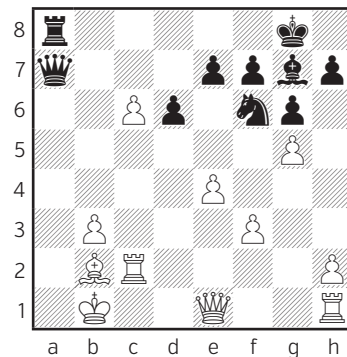
"Bravo, John, what a remarkable deductive work! Could you be kind enough to elucidate your thought process?" he said.

I looked back at the position and continued, "Well, as we discussed before, I started to think and realized that nothing could be achieved unless Black manages to create meaningful threats along the a-file. After all, Black's only chance to justify material deficiency is to address White's king safety."

After a short pause I added, "I don't think I have anything more to add here, Sherlock."

"Splendid Watson! Let us now carefully examine the position."

A game in Texas scholastic
U1300, 2017



1... Nd5!!

"A delightful move, Watson," said Sherlock contentedly, leaning back on his favorite chair.

"By process of elimination, one can simply deduce that if one of the two knight jumps doesn't work, the other should be the only remedy."

1... Nxe4 2. Bxg7 Kxg7 3. Bb2 Nxc5 leads only to a complex position.

2.e5

White needs his bishop to protect his king.

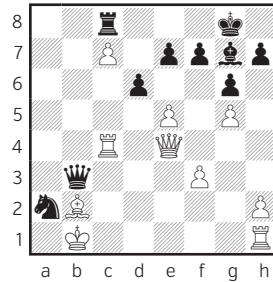
2. ♔xg7 e5! The key move! Sherlock loved this move immensely. He continued showing me the line with a feverish passion, his long fingers weeping across the board as he moved the pieces back and forth. If his fingers were good enough to make him a mediocre violin player, their movements across the chessboard were nothing short of magical. 3. ♖b2□ (3. ♖c1 ♕d4 and the king has no way to get himself out of the mating net.) 3... ♗e3! Now White's king is trapped. White cannot get out of the mating net, unless he concedes to a colossal loss of material. 4. ♖c1 ♕a1+ 5. ♖b1 ♕d4 6. ♕d2 ♕c5+ [6... ♖a2 is another tantalizing winning move, but it is less efficient. 7. ♖b2 (7. ♕xd4 ♖c2#) 7... ♖a1+ 8. ♖b1 ♖xb1+ 9. ♖xb1] 7. ♖b2 ♗c4+ 8. bxc4 ♕xc4 And to my surprise and Holmes's content, White is out of defensive resources despite massive material advantage. One can easily see that the bishop on g7 and the rook on h1 are of little use. White is hopeless and Holmes declared mate in three. 9. ♖bd1 (9. ♕c3 ♖a2+ 10. ♖c1 ♕xc3+ 11. ♖d1 ♕d2#; 9. ♔xe5 ♖a2#) 9... ♖a2+ 10. ♖b1 ♕b3+-+.

2... ♕a2+ 3. ♖c1 ♕xb3 4.c7

4. ♕e4 ♗b4 5.c7 ♖c8 transposes.

4... ♖c8 5. ♕e4 ♗b4 6.exd6

a) 6. ♖c4 ♗a2+ 7. ♖b1



7...d5! A cunning tactic based on double pins. 8. ♕d4 dxc4 9. ♕d8+ ♔f8 10. ♕xc8 ♗c3+ 11. ♖c1 ♗e2+ 12. ♖d2 the king needs to run. 12... ♕xb2+ 13. ♖e3 (13. ♖e1 ♗f4 14. ♕xf8+ ♖xf8 15. c8 ♕+ ♖g7 16. ♕xc4 ♗g2+ And wherever the king goes the check on e3 wins the queen and the checkmate follows soon.) 13... ♕xe5+ 14. ♖f2 ♗f4 15. ♕xf8+ ♖xf8 16. c8 ♕+ ♖g7 17. ♕xc4 ♕xg5 and White's king doesn't have the necessary means to keep himself covered from Black's second wave of attack. The h and f-pawns will fall in a few moves. 18. ♖b1 ♗h3+ 19. ♖e2 ♕g2+ 20. ♖d3 ♕xf3+ 21. ♖d2 ♕f2+ 22. ♖c3 ♕xh2-+;

b) 6. ♕c4 ♕xc2+ 7. ♕xc2 ♗xc2 8. ♖xc2 ♖xc7+ 9. ♖d2 ♔xe5 with a winning two pawns up rook endgame for Black.

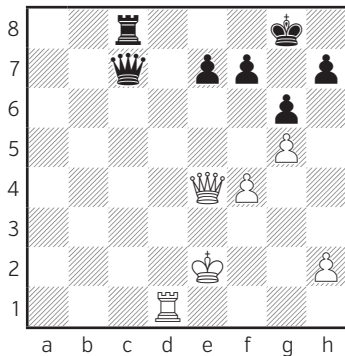
6... ♔xb2+ 7. ♖xb2 ♗d3+ 8. ♖d2 ♕xb2+ 9. ♖xd3 ♕a3+!

A key move, Black collects both c- and d-pawns, keeping the rest of his pawns intact.

10. ♖e2 ♜xd6 11.f4

11. ♖c1 ♜xc7 12. ♜xc7 ♜xh2+ A key in-between move which secures a two pawns up queen endgame.

11... ♜xc7 12. ♜d1



Here Holmes asked, “What do you make of this, Watson? Use our method, and don’t waste cognitive resources on it!” I smiled and played.

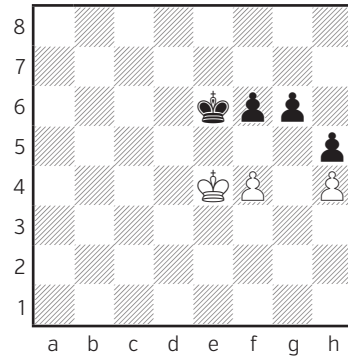
12... ♜c2+

“Marvelous, Watson!” shouted Holmes. While there are other moves, this move is much simpler.

13. ♜xc2 ♜xc2+ 14. ♜d2

14. ♖f3 ♜xh2 The endgame is winning, though not-trivial.

14... ♜xd2+ 15. ♖xd2 h6 16.h4 f6
17.gxf6 exf6 18. ♖e3 ♖f7 19. ♖d4
♖e6 20. ♖e4 h5!



Using the last reserved tempo; f5 was equally good!

21.f5+ gxf5+ 22. ♖f4 ♖e7!

Important triangulation.

23. ♖xf5 ♖f7 24. ♖f4 ♖e6 25. ♖e4
f5+ 26. ♖f4 ♖f6 27. ♖f3 ♖e5 28. ♖e3
f4+ 29. ♖f3 ♖f5

And the h-pawn falls.

“Wow, I hope you didn’t expect me to see all of that, Sherlock!” I said, still enchanted while examining the board.

“Not at all, John. In fact, I doubt any strong player, maybe even some GMs, would spend so much time trying to see everything in these lines, although most of the lines are rather forced, except for 1... ♗d5 2.e5!”

After taking a sip from the remainder of his now cold coffee he continued, "The most important thing in studying positions like this one is to have a clear thinking process formulated for an over-the-board game. It doesn't matter how you reach the end as long as you find your way through the maze of doubts, blind spots, and miscalculations. Some of these problems, a few of which I just mentioned, could be improved over time with consistent practice of an existing training method. This is what professional players do given enough time; they learn to work on those obstacles! Other problems, such as blind-spots, the fear of an existing threat where there isn't any, overconfidence and disregarding the opponent's resources, are carved in a human's cognition and psychology and could only be remedied by building good habits and working around them!"

"I can see where you are going with that, Sherlock. However, I still don't hear any solution or suggestion!" (I knew when to tease Sherlock.) With a swift move toward his desk, Sherlock Holmes picked up his walking stick, cap, and his cell phone from his workstation.

"It is a good time to take a stroll, Watson, but I have a surprise for

you! Don't you play a tournament in about two weeks' time?" he asked.

The question came as a surprise, so I stammered, "I am supposed to, but what does that have to do with a nice weekend walk?"

"Well, my dear fellow, I am afraid you have some work to do instead of joining me for a walk to Madame Tussauds Museum," he uttered, while carefully picking up a few printed pages with positions and explanations, including hand-written notes added to them here and there.

That was the Sherlock Holmes I knew! You tease him and he puts you up to a challenge such that you would regret what you had just said! I knew I could politely refrain from his challenge, but now I was tempted to see what was in Sherlock's stock for chess. I was sure Sherlock's papers would offer a method to improve over-the-board skills. I knew him well enough by then to recognize that for the entire morning he had been cooking a plan on how to lure me into working on his method. Before I got the chance to ask him any questions, I saw him closing the door swiftly.

I could hear him running down the stairs while almost yelling, "Good day, Mrs. Hudson!"

I looked away from the door and glanced through the open window, which was offering a splendid sunlight reflection through the open curtains. Then, I looked back at the papers I was holding in my hands. I ordered them numerically and started reading; it was easy to recognize Sherlock's spidery hand-writing:

My dear friend John,

I have recently noticed that you have started to take your over-the-board chess games more seriously than just a chess aficionado. Whether it is your background in the army or your competitive nature, you fight like a valiant warrior, but every fighter, my dear friend, needs a well-crafted set of means to compete. You need a method to prepare ahead of your competitions. To do so, I have developed a series of exercises and lectures for you. I will gradually explain everything to you in the next two weeks.

First, let us start with your thinking process. My dear John, from the day I got the privilege to know you, I found you a profound man when it came to observations. You have done a great job of documenting my adventures and you have an impeccable eye for details. However, when it comes to playing a game of chess where the clock is ticking, the adrenaline is rushing through your veins, and your mouth is turning dry, you need a simplified system — a list

of heuristics for your thinking process to be able to solve the position before you. While I don't discount the great need for thorough calculation when enough time is at your disposal (every single classical game you play for instance), you need to learn when to trade off between accuracy and the practical aspects of a game.

From what I have observed, John, chess has become an extremely practical game these days. Thus, managing one's time, controlling nerves, ensuring suitable positions (middlegames, endgames), and having a good grasp of technical positions are just a few of many characteristics a player needs to excel at in order to maintain his/her competitiveness within a class or level.

Here, I am going to present you with a few lectures on simple themes like development, king safety, and the technique of creating and fending off an attack. More than the content of these lectures, I would like you to adopt the thinking process I am going to address here. Only a few in this world can play chess at such an exalted level, and it is absurd to expect that regular players could ever see or calculate in this fashion. However, we can at least learn the correct thinking process and calculate, although not perfectly, in the right direction.

Knowing your ability to read and absorb knowledge rapidly, I trust that you

can study the following two annotated games by the time I am back from the museum.

*Yours truly,
Sherlock Holmes*

“Here they come!” I thought, and I turned to the next page.

- ▷ **Carlos Martin Sanchez [2367]**
 - ▶ **Frank Schubert [2393]**
corr., 2010

1.e4

Maybe surprisingly for you, our first game is a correspondence game.

These games are known for their high quality (especially in the past 10 years) and accuracy. This game as well as the game embedded within are good examples of taking advantage of a lead in development.

1...c5 2.c3

Alapin is not a common guest at correspondence or elite level chess, but it is a simple opening. White is trying to build the dream center.

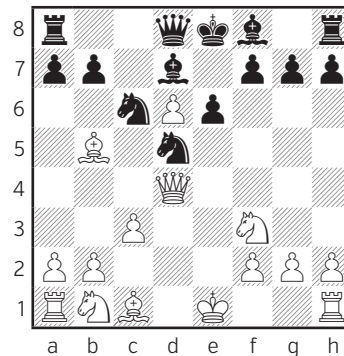
2...♘f6 3.e5 ♘d5 4.♘f3 d6 5.d4 cxd4 6.♚xd4?!

I am not sure if I like this move. We have all seen that capturing on d4

with the queen is a possibility in the Alapin; however, I always ask myself, “Why should I choose an opening which advocates bringing the queen out so early in the game?”

6.♙c4 ♖b6 (6...dxe5 7.♘xe5 e6 and now both ♚xd4 and cxd4 lead to normal positions. You may be surprised as the reason why ♚xd4 is fine here. The reason is simple: White has gained a tempo with ♙c4 compared to the game, while his knight is better placed on e5.) **7.♙b3 ♘c6** transposes to the main line.

6...e6 7.exd6 ♘c6 8.♙b5 ♙d7!



A strong move Watson!

Black is rapidly developing his pieces. It is almost sure that he will recoup his pawn by taking on d6 a move or two later. Now White faces a critical decision. Should he let go of his bishop in favor of faster development or should he opt for an additional queen move?

9. ♖xc6?!

“I hope this was not your choice Watson. I can see two reasons why this move could be your choice, but we will discuss them as we advance through the game.” 9. ♖d1! White needed to concede to this retreat. 9... a6 10. ♖a4 ♖xd6 11. c4 ♖b4+ 12. ♖d2 ♖xd2+ 13. ♗bxd2 ♗de7 14. 0-0 (14. ♗e4?! ♗a5+ forces ♗c3) 14...0-0 and the position is balanced. Although White has not achieved anything out of the opening, he has not given up anything either. 9. ♗g4 ♗f6 10. ♗h4 ♖xd6 11. ♗bd2 0-0 12. ♖d3 ♖e8 13. 0-0 h6 14. ♗c4 ♖c7 15. ♖e1 ♗d5. Luckily for White, his queen’s maneuvering around didn’t cost him much, and the position is drawish by repetition. 16. ♗h5 ♗f6 17. ♗h4=.

9... ♖xc6 10.0-0

10.c4? “This may be the first reason you considered ♖xc6. You may have planned this followed by c5, as a punishment for Black, letting White’s pawn to sit on d6 too long. Unfortunately, this move is a tactical blunder.” 10... ♗b4! threatening ♗c2. 11. ♖c3 ♖xf3! and now ♖xf3 is not possible while 12. gxf3 (12. ♗xb4 ♖xd6 13. c5 ♖c7 alas, ♖a5 is a strong threat! Beware of pins, skewers, and forks in the openings! They are the most common tactical themes in

this phase of the game. 14.0-0 ♖c6 Black’s bishops are mightily aiming at White’s king. His majority on the kingside will gradually decide the game.) leads to 12... ♖xd6 13. a3 ♗c6 14. ♗xg7 ♖e5 15. ♗g5 ♖d3 and it is only a matter of time before Black wins with a strong mating attack.

10... ♗xd6 11. ♖d1

“The second reason you may have chosen ♖xc6 is that you probably thought that Black cannot move his bishop because it would hang the pawn on g7.”

11... ♗c7!

An attempt on play for a win.

a) 11... ♖c5 as well as the pawn sacrifice with ♖e7 are two other possible options for Black;

b) 11... ♖e7 12. c4 ♗b4 13. ♗xd6 ♖xd6 14. ♖xd6 ♗c2 15. ♗e1 ♗xa1 16. ♖e3 is an unnecessary complication for Black.

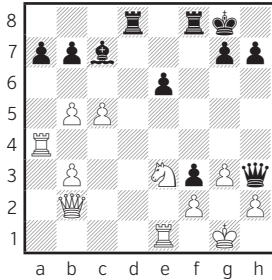
12.c4?!

12.a4 was played in another correspondence game, which I will cover from this diagram after this game. 0-1 Pospisil, L (2510)-Ljubcic, L (2630) ICCF email 2012

White is in serious trouble now.

23. ♖c2

23. c5 ♖c7 24. ♗f1 ♜h5 25. b5 ♜h3
26. ♗e3



26...g5! a strong prophylactic move, preventing ♜h4. Now Black goes after the knight on e3. 27. ♖c3 ♜d5 28. ♖c4 ♜e5 29. ♖f1 ♖xf1+ 30. ♗xf1 ♜xc5+, and White's pawns fall one after the other.

23... ♜h5 24. ♖e4 ♜f6 25. ♜xa7 ♖f8
26. ♗f1??

The final blunder, which puts a beautiful end to this game.

26. ♜a5 was the last chance, though Black still picks up some material. 26... ♜h3 27. ♗xf3 ♖xb4 28. ♜aa1 (28. ♗g5?? ♖h5+) 28... ♖xe1 29. ♜xe1 ♖f5 30. ♖xf5 exf5 and Black should be able to win this game with good endgame technique.

26... ♜h3 27. ♗e3 ♜d4!

A beautiful deflection!

28. ♖xb7

28. ♖xd4 ♜h6 29. ♖h4 ♜xh4
30. gxh4 ♖d6 and mate in four follows. "Make sure you know how, my dear fellow!"

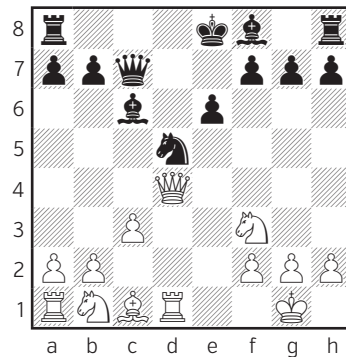
28... ♜d3

And White's fate is sealed.

Now please go back to move 12, so that we can examine the move 12.a4.

0-1

► Ludvik Pospisil (2510)
► Leonardo Ljubicic (2630)
corr, 2012



12.a4?!

A move which is hard to explain. White probably believed that Black cannot move his bishop on f8.

12... ♕e7!

Ljubicic had another opinion after days of careful consideration.

13. ♖xg7?

“A typical psychological reaction, Watson. White believed that Black could not play ♕e7. When Black accepted the challenge, White played this move which, my dear fellow, is erroneous. This is an example of what some people call a cognitive bias. It is either called an ‘escalation of commitment bias’ or a ‘sunk-cost fallacy’. It occurs in situations where one invests specific capital (e.g. money, time, energy, or in this case, strategical decision) into an idea and then something other than the expected results. Yet, despite getting negative results, we invest ourselves even more. We will talk about this when I next see you my dear fellow.”

13. ♖a3 o-o (13... ♕f6 14. ♖c5 and Black needs to retreat his bishop to e7.) 14. ♖b5 ♖b6 15. ♖xb6 ♖xb6 16. ♖e5 Black has two bishops and better development, but the position still allows for mistakes to be made on either side. It is easier for White to make a draw than for Black to win this position.

13...o-o-o!

Now Black has a very strong attack against White’s king.

14. ♖e5

14. ♖xf7?? ♖f4 15. ♖xd8+ ♖xd8 16. ♖d4 ♖f8 17. ♖g7 ♖g8-+ and White’s king will be mated soon.

14... ♕d6 15. ♖e2 ♖dg8 16. ♖d4

16. ♖a3 runs into 16... ♕xh2+ 17. ♖f1 (17. ♖xh2 ♖xg2+ 18. ♖xg2 ♖xc3+ 19. ♖f3 ♖g8+-+) 17... ♖f4 18. ♕xf4 ♖xf4 19. ♖b5 ♖b8 and Black’s attack is close to decisive.

16... ♕xh2+!

Same idea.

17. ♖f1 e5 18. ♖h4 ♖f4 19. ♕xf4 ♕xf4 20. ♖a3 a6 21. ♖c2 f5 22. ♖b4 ♕e4

And Black converted his decisive advantage in a rather long game.

o-1

I was overjoyed reading the content of the printed material in my hands.

First of all, the games were printed from a PGN file, which meant that it was not the usual ‘Sherlock’s mess.’ Secondly, it has been a while since I have studied chess, so this