

CHESS MIDDLEGAME STRATEGIES

Volume 1

by

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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 |

PREFACE

The 'work database' collection for this book which I started about two years ago meant the initial plan was for just one volume on Chess Middlegame Strategies.

However, the way my work and material built up and progressed, it soon became obvious that this 'one volume' would be approximately 500 pages long – so, the decision was taken to split the material into two volumes. The second volume is planned for the second half of 2017.

In this first volume I have annotated 37 games representing different aspects (chapters) of 'chess middlegame strategies'.

Readers will see that the vast majority of the games selected belong to the works of 'contemporary artists'.

Notwithstanding the 'traditional/golden classics selection', I preferred to use the 'contemporary learning examples' feeling that: A) younger/middle generation reader will more easily associate with them and B) they perfectly mirror the middlegame strategies used in modern top-class chess (i.e. today's chess at the highest level).

Opening play is in general not the subject of this book, although I did pay attention to opening ideas in the cases where I felt I had something useful to say on the subject (in the particular game selected).

The aim of this book is to offer the reader a spectrum of middlegame ideas/strategies, thereby inspiring and improving their practical tournament play.

Besides this book's 'practical aim', I hope that the reader will also gain purely aesthetic pleasure from playing over the games selected (and variations given).

Enjoy!
Ivan Sokolov

December 4th 2016

1. UNUSUAL ROOK LIFTS

The rook lift is a very common (mostly attacking) theme/manoeuvre dealt with in many books (including my own ‘Sacrifice & Initiative’ 2013).

The most common purpose of a rook lift is to bring the ‘heavy artillery’ to a flank and exert pressure on the enemy there.

In this chapter, I deal with unusual rook lift(s) — anyhow I (based on my knowledge/experience) have found them ‘non-standard’.

So, let me give some explanation (one-by-one) as to why I chose them for this book.

FIRST EXAMPLE SEIRAWAN-KARPOV

An original ‘out-of-the-box’ idea by Seirawan in a very popular variation. The idea found no followers (only three games — all played by Yasser). This should help the reader to also think ‘out-of-the-box’ in similar positions and can also be used as opening preparation (the idea is sound and the opening line is topical).

SECOND EXAMPLE SALOV-KARPOV

The aim of this example is to understand the extra possibilities/strategies in hedgehog positions in which the white knight is developed to d2 (instead of the more common c3 square). This knowledge can be used in similar positions in practical play. I understood the full scope of the concept only after deeply analysing the game mentioned. I have also included some general guidelines for the opening line here.

THIRD EXAMPLE TOPALOV-CORI

Topalov’s plan of attack in this game can be used by White in a closed Catalan, KID attack (i.e. KIA as White), French (as in this game). The rook lift played by Topalov (non-standard in such positions), combined with (on several occasions) a ♖g5 piece sacrifice — sacrificing a piece to open the h-file route to the enemy king — is very instructive!

FOURTH EXAMPLE ALEKHINE-KMOCH

‘Chess from the last century’ ☺. In standard isolated pawn positions a rook lift is a ‘common thing’, while a double rook lift is not. Using a double rook lift, Alekhine skilfully sustains the pressure until his opponent collapses.

FIFTH EXAMPLE TOMASHEVSKY- MCHEDLISHVILI

I was walking around the boards at the European Team Championships in Reykjavik, saw this game, remembered Alekhine-Kmoch, and almost instantly had a ‘dejà vu’ moment! A standard isolated pawn position, a double rook lift, skilful play by Tomashevsky.

In both these games (fourth and fifth) please notice that, contrary to ‘common knowledge’, the exchange of the light pieces did not help the side fighting against the isolated pawn, as the double rook lift provided the opposition with extra attacking possibilities.

I hope these five examples prove useful (to give you ideas) in similar positions in your practical play.

1

▷ Y. Seirawan

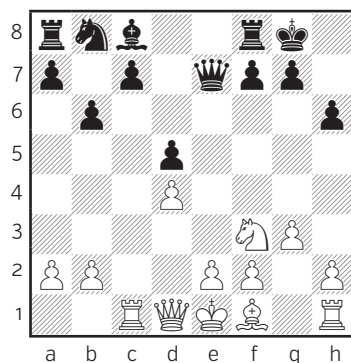
▷ A. Karpov

London, 1982 [D53]

1. Nf3 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nc3 d5 4. d4 Oe7
5. Og5 h6 6. $\text{O} \text{h4}$ o-o 7. Rc1 b6

Karpov goes for his favourite Bondarevsky/Makagovov (or also in many books called Tartakower) variation.

8. cxd5 Nxd5 9. Nxd5 exd5 10. Oxe7
 Oxe7 11. g3

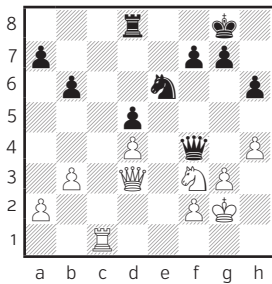


11... Re8

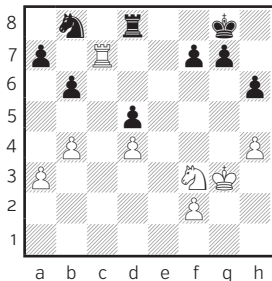
The other main move here is 11... Oa6 (at the top level Black has also tried here some other bishop moves, such as 11... Ob7 and 11... Of5) 12. e3 c5 There is a very instructive game from Tigran Petrosian I would like to show here: 13. Oxa6 (13. dxc5 was the theoretical subject in Korchnoi, V (2695)—Karpov, A (2700) Merano 1981) 13... Nxa6 14. o-o Nc7 15. b3 Rac8 16. Re1 Rfd8 17. h4 Ne6 18. $\text{O} \text{d3}$ $\text{O} \text{f6}$ 19. $\text{O} \text{g2}$ cxd4 20. exd4 Rxc1 21. Rxc1 Because

of his c-file control White has a small advantage. Black wants to neutralize this by active play. 21...♖f4 Black utilises tactics. White's rook is attacked, and if it moves Black will play ...♗g4 creating the threat of ...♟f4. Black's queen on f4 'obviously' cannot be taken as Black will recapture with his knight and, owing to a simple fork, White will 'lose' a pawn.

Here comes a moment of superb judgement from Petrosian!!



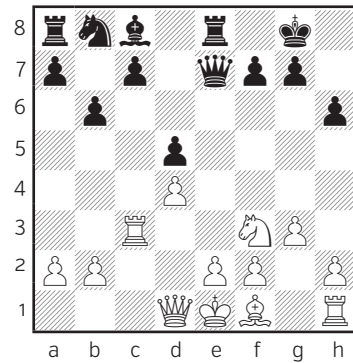
22.gxf4!! The ninth World Champion allows Black to execute his idea! In the resulting endgame White will have lasting pressure worth more than the sacrificed pawn. Simply great judgement by Petrosian! 22...♟xf4+ 23.♗g3 ♟xd3 24.♖c3 ♟b4 25.a3 ♟a6 26.b4 ♟b8 27.♖c7



The resulting position of White's pawn sacrifice idea. The active rook on c7 compensates for more than

a pawn here and Black is doomed to a passive defence. 27...a5 28.b5 ♟d7 29.♗f4 h5 (29...♟f8 30.♖c6 ♟g6+ 31.♗g4 ♖b8 32.h5 does not improve Black's situation.) 30.♟e5! ♟f8 (30...♟xe5 31.♗xe5±) 31.♖b7 f6 32.♟c6 ♟g6+ 33.♗g3 ♖d6 34.♖xb6 ♖e6 35.♖b8+ ♟f8 36.♖a8 ♖e1 37.♟d8 ♗h7 38.b6 ♟b1 39.b7 ♟d7 40.♖xa5 1-0 Petrosian,T (2640)—Portisch,L (2645) Palma de Mallorca 1974.

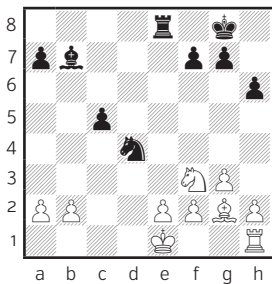
12. ♖c3!?



A very unusual rook lift (for such a standard QGD position). White's idea has a tactical element, combining the already existing c-file pressure with a timely ♖e3 threat (after developing his queen to a4). With the ♖e3 move White also breaks Black e-file pressure. The drawback of this 12. ♖c3!? Idea? It costs time by delaying the white kingside's development. It is interesting that this original idea from Yasser Seirawan did not find any followers (!). In my database all three games were played by Yasser himself. 12. ♗g2 is a common move here, seen in many top games.

12...♖a6

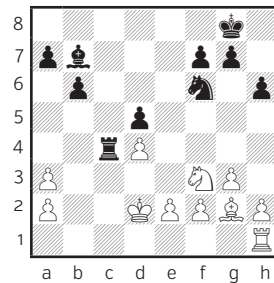
Direct central play with 12...c5, aiming to take advantage of White's delayed kingside development, looks perhaps the most principled response for Black and was played by another QGD connoisseur Efim Petrovich Geller: 13.dxc5 bxc5 (13...♘c6 14.cxb6 (14.♙g2? ♙a6♣) 14...♙b7 15.♙g2 axb6 (15...♙a6 16.0-0! ♙xe2 17.♚xd5±) 16.0-0±) 14.♚xd5 ♙b7 15.♚d2 ♘c6 16.♞e3 (16.♙g2 ♞ad8 17.♞e3! ♚f8 transposes to the game.) 16...♚f8 17.♙g2 ♞ad8 18.♞xe8 ♚xe8 19.♚e3 ♘d4 20.♚xe8+ ♚xe8



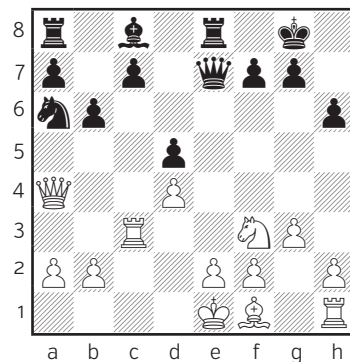
21.♙d1 (21.♘xd4 may be an improvement on the game: 21...♙xg2 22.♞g1 ♙d5 White seems (to me) to have a small advantage in this ending. 23.♘b3 (23.♘f5 ♙xa2 24.♙d2 ♙e6 25.♘e3↑) 23...♞b8 24.♙d2 c4 (24...♙xb3 25.axb3 ♞xb3 26.♙c2± This rook ending should be a draw, but it is definitely better to sit behind the white pieces here.) 25.♘c1 ♞xb2+ 26.♙c3↑) 21...♞d8 22.♘e1 ♙xg2 23.♘xg2 ♞b8 24.♙c1 (24.b3 c4=) 24...♘xe2+ 25.♙c2 ♘d4+= 1/2-1/2 Seirawan,Y (2600)—Geller, E (2575) Linares 1983;

12...♙b7 can lead to interesting complications: 13.♚a4 ♘d7! 14.♞xc7 ♞ac8 15.♞xc8 (15.♞xd7 ♚e4!-+) 15...

♞xc8 16.♙g2 ♞c1+ 17.♙d2 ♞c4 18.♚a3 ♚xa3 19.bxa3 ♘f6∞

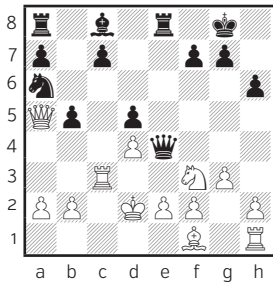


This is a tactically sharp ending; while the engine evaluation is around 0.00, to a human it simply looks like 'sharp play'. 20.♘e5 ♞xd4+ 21.♙c3 ♞a4 22.♞c1 ♚xa3+ 23.♙b2 ♞a5 24.♘xf7 (24.♞c7 ♞b5+ 25.♙a1 d4!♣) 24...♞b5+ 25.♙a1; 12...♙a6 13.♚a4 leads to some White plus, for example: 13...c6 14.♞e3 (14.e3!?) 14...♚d8 15.♞xe8+ ♚xe8 16.e3 ♚e4 17.♙xa6 ♚xf3 18.0-0 ♘xa6 19.♚xa6±

13.♚a4**13...c5?**

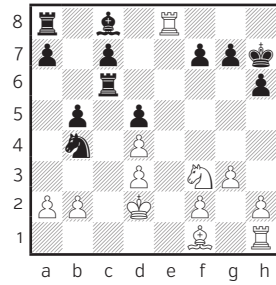
Facing a novel idea, Karpov goes for a tactical solution and definitely overlooks something in his calculations. 12.♞c3!? The idea will now (for

White) work to perfection! Facing the same position (against the same opponent!) for the second time, the 12th World Champion came better prepared and went for 13...b5! removing the white queen from the a4-e8 diagonal in order to, after 14. ♖a5, play actively (14. ♖xb5? ♜b8?) with 14... ♖e4! 15. ♔d2!



15... ♜e6

(15... ♖b1 can lead to complications resulting in a peaceful ending: 16. ♖xb5 c6 17. ♙g2 ♖xh1 (17... ♖xa2 18. ♖b3 ♖a5 19. ♖a3 ♖b5 20. ♗e5 ♜b8 21. ♜a1±) 18. ♖xc6 ♙d7 (18... ♖xg2?? 19. ♖xe8+ ♗h7 20. ♜xc8+-) 19. ♙xh1 ♙xc6 20. ♜xc6 ♗b4 21. ♜c5 ♗xa2 22. ♗e5 ♗b4 23. ♙xd5 ♗xd5 24. ♜xd5 ♜ed8= This ending should be a draw.) 16.b3? The move Yasser played in the actual game, but White simply does not have the time (here) for such a (positional) approach. Karpov takes advantage of White's tempo loss and swiftly develops a mating attack. (16. ♜e3! is definitely the move Yasser wanted to play when facing Geller a year later. Play is sharp and White has reasonable hopes for an advantage: 16... ♖b1 17. ♖a3 ♜c6 18. ♜e8+ ♗h7 19. ♖d3+ ♖xd3+ 20.exd3 ♗b4

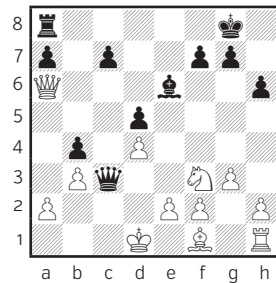


An unusual position with many ideas. I prefer White. 21.a3 (21. ♗e1 ♗xa2 22. ♗c2) 21... ♜c2+ 22. ♙e3 ♗c6 23.h4

a) 23. ♙g2 ♜xb2 24. ♜c1 ♙b7 25. ♜xa8 ♙xa8 26. ♙h3± (26. ♗h4 b4!) 26...b4 27.axb4 ♜xb4 28. ♙f5+ g6 29. ♙d7↑;

b) 23. ♙h3?! ♙xh3 24. ♜xa8 ♗e7±;

23... ♜b8 24. ♙e2 b4 (24... ♙e6 25. ♜xb8 ♗xb8 26. ♜b1±) 25.axb4 (25. ♙d1 ♜xb2 26. ♗g5+? hxg5 27.hxg5+ ♙g6 28.f4 ♙g4!-+; 25.a4 ♜xb2 26. ♜c1 b3! 27. ♜xc6?? ♜xe2+! 28. ♙xe2 b2-+) 25... ♗xb4 26. ♜b1↑) 16...b4 17. ♜e3 (17. ♜d3 c5-+) 17... ♖b1 18. ♜xe6 ♖b2+ 19. ♙d1 ♙xe6 20. ♖xa6 ♖a1+ 21. ♙d2 ♖c3+ 22. ♙d1

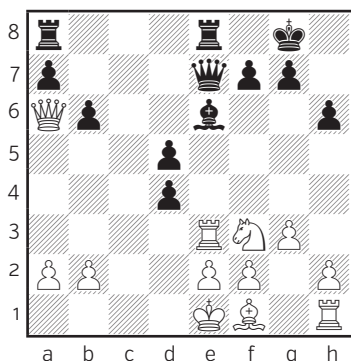


Obviously Black (here) wants more than a draw. 22... ♙f5! 23. ♗e1 ♜b8-+ Another rook lift brings the black rook to the c-file, aiding

the queen in attack and deciding the battle. 24. ♖xa7 (or 24.e3 ♖b6 25. ♖xa7 ♖c6-+) 24... ♖b6 25.e3 ♖c6 26. ♙c4 ♖a1+ 27. ♗e2 ♖b2+ 28. ♗d1 (28. ♗f1 ♙h3+ 29. ♗g1 ♖c3-+) 28... dxc4 29. ♖a8+ ♗h7 30. ♖xc6 c3 0-1 Seirawan, Y (2595)—Karpov, A (2700) Hamburg 1982;

An immediate 13... ♖e4? runs into a nice tactical refutation: 14. ♗d2! ♙d7 15. ♖xd7 ♖xh1 16. ♖a4!± and Black loses his knight on a6.

14. ♖e3! ♙e6 15. ♖xa6 cxd4



16. ♖b3!+-

White will evacuate his king and his material advantage will prove decisive.

16... ♙f5

16... ♖c5 17. ♖d3 ♙f5 18. ♖xd4 ♖a5+ 19. ♖d2 ♖xa2 20. ♗d4+-

17. ♙g2 ♙c2 18. ♗xd4 ♙xb3 19. ♗xb3

Black is running out of threats and White has a material advantage. Bringing his king to a 'safe place' will mean the game has been decided.

19... ♖ac8

19... ♖b4+ 20. ♗f1+-

20. ♙f3 ♖c2 21. 0-0 ♖xb2 22. ♖d1 ♖d8

23. ♗d4 ♖d7 24. ♗c6 ♖e8 25. ♗xa7

♖c7 26. a4 ♖a8 27. ♖xd5 ♖xa7

28. ♖d8+ ♗h7 29. ♖d3+ f5 30. ♖xf5+

g6 31. ♖e6 1-0

2

▷ V. Salov

▷ A. Karpov

Hoogovens Wijk aan Zee [7],
24.01.1998 [E15]

1.d4 ♗f6 2.c4 e6 3. ♗f3 b6 4.g3 ♙a6
5. ♗bd2

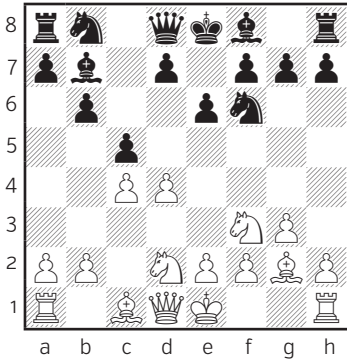
This development of the white knight leads to different strategic possibilities compared to standard (♗c3 development) positions.

In this game, the positions we will examine will be hedgehog-related. After I once lost (a terrible) game to Lembit Oll (mentioned later in the comments) and later analysing positions coming from this game (hedgehog-type play), I have formed the opinion that aiming for ...d5 — and (often) hanging pawns in the centre after subsequent Black ...c5 positions is Black's best. The reason is that the white knight developed on d2 (compared to ♗c3) is not pressuring Black's centre (compared to a ♗c3 hitting the central d5 square). This opinion, however, is personal and is a matter of taste.

5... ♖b7

5...d5 for example can (later) lead to 'hanging pawns in the centre'-type positions.

6. ♗g2 c5



Black is aiming for a hedgehog-type position and here we often get plenty of 'direct play' lines also. 6... ♗e7 7.0-0 0-0 8.b3 d5 9.cxd5 exd5 as seen in many games, leads to a strategically different kind of play, where White (as already mentioned above) needs to prove that his knight developed on d2 brings him advantages (again compared to the 'standard' ♖c3 development).

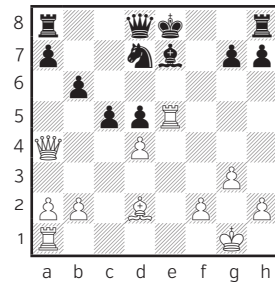
7.e4!

White wants to take advantage of Black's loss of time with 4... ♗a6 and then 5... ♗b7 and so opts for tactical-based, dynamic central play (aiming to take space).

7...cxd4

7... ♖xe4?? is a blunder and should lead to an opening disaster for Black: 8. ♖e5 d5 (8... ♖c3 loses a piece to

9. ♖h5 g6 10. ♖h3!+- ♖d5 11.cxd5 exd5 12.0-0 1-0 Oll,L (2600)—Guimaraes,J (2305) Oviedo 1992) 9.cxd5 exd5 (9... ♖xd2 10. ♖a4+ ♖d7 11. ♗xd2 ♗xd5 12. ♗xd5 exd5 13.0-0 with Black's king in the middle of the board, White has a winning advantage here. 13...f6 14. ♖fe1 fxe5 15. ♖xe5+ ♗e7



16. ♖ae1 (16. ♗g5? strangely enough, lets it slip 16...b5!= 17. ♖xb5 ♖b8 18. ♖c6 ♖b6 19. ♖a4 ♖b4 20. ♖c6 ♖b6 1/2-1/2 Goldin,A (2535)—Smirin,I (2490) Moscow 1989) 16...0-0 17. ♖xe7 ♖f6 18. ♗g5 ♖d6 19. ♖1e6+-) 10. ♖a4+ ♗e7 (10... ♖c6 11. ♖xe4+-; 10... ♖d7 11. ♖xe4 dxe4 12. ♗h3 is hopeless for Black as 12... ♗c8 loses to 13. ♖c6! ♖b8 14. ♖xf7!+-) 11. ♖xe4 dxe4 12.dxc5 ♖e8 (12... ♖d5 13. ♗f4 f5 14. ♗g5+ 1-0 Skytte,R (2416)—Nikcevic,N (2429) Budapest, 2014) 13.c6 ♖xc6 14. ♖xe4 ♖xe5 15. ♖xb7+ ♗f6 16.0-0 ♖b8 17. ♖e4 g6 18. ♖e1 ♗d6 19. ♖h4+ 1-0 Chernin,A (2605)—Podolchenko,E (2463) Ohrid 2009.

8.0-0!

Arguably the most challenging move for Black to face! White completes his development, maintaining the tension. 8.e5