

# LESSONS WITH A GRANDMASTER III

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Strategic and tactical ideas in modern chess

Boris Gulko & Dr. Joel R. Sneed

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# About the Authors

**Boris Gulko** is one of the most distinguished Grandmasters in the chess world. He's a former Soviet Champion and has also won the US Championship twice since his immigration in 1986, making him the only chess player ever to have held both the American and Soviet championship titles. He is also one of the few players to hold a plus score against Garry Kasparov.

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**Also by the Authors:**

*Lessons with a Grandmaster*

*Lessons with a Grandmaster 2*

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# Preface

The club player is unaware of the subtleties that exist in grandmaster chess both strategically and tactically. The psychology of the chess struggle is even less well understood. Grandmasters analyze chess at a depth that is unfathomable to amateurs; moreover, they have extensive knowledge of chess history and opening theory as well as extraordinary endgame technique and tactical vision. However, having reached such a high level can make it difficult to understand what is lacking in the mind of the amateur, and therefore, what to explain, what not to explain, what to assume, etc. The purpose of this book is to bridge the gap between grandmaster and amateur through a conversation between Grandmaster Boris Gulko, the only player to hold both the USSR and US championship titles, and student Joel R. Sneed, PhD, a professor of psychology and amateur chess player.

# Introduction

*Boris:* So we meet again to continue our studies. I hope you have benefitted from the lessons so far and that your chess is improving.

*Joel:* My game continues to improve. My rating is over 1900 now and I was able to take clear first in the Marshall Chess Club U200 tournament this year.

*Boris:* Very good! That's excellent progress.

*Joel:* What did you have in mind for this next installment of lessons?

*Boris:* Well, the first volume of this series was devoted mainly to strategic problems, and the second primarily to dynamic problems. This volume is devoted to the connection between strategic and dynamic factors and the psychology of the struggle inherent in chess. We will consider such topics as the weakness of squares of one color and how this translates to the fight for the initiative (see, for example, my games against Shabalov, Benjamin, and Kholmov), the struggle for the initiative, counterplay, prophylaxis, the struggle for the center, and the interconnections between these various themes.

Special chapters are devoted to the advantage of the bishop pair, the struggle of minor pieces, the dynamic power of the passed pawn on the d-file (my game against Ilya Gurevich), and provoking counterplay from the opponent with the purpose of using the weakness such counterplay creates against him (my game against Geller).

Some strategic ideas will also be considered that are specific to certain openings, such as the Sicilian (different ideas connected to Black's counterplay) and the Catalan (different ideas connected to White's struggle for the advantage). In all the games, we consider chess psychology, but the second one against Browne (Game 21) will be devoted exclusively to the topic of the psychology of chess thinking.

As in our previous two volumes, we will solve many different types of problems with different levels of complexity, ranging from 1 (easiest) to 6 (hardest). To get the most out of the book, I would recommend to the reader to try and solve these problems yourself before reading on.

*Joel:* That sounds great, let's get started!

## Chapter Six

# The Mysterious Passed Pawn on the d-file

The topic here is connected to that of the previous chapter: the struggle in the center. A passed pawn on the d-file for White has a strange quality. When the pawn is on d4 and blockaded on d5, it doesn't promise White any advantage. On d5, the pawn often restricts White's pieces, closing files and diagonals. (This was shown in the famous 16th game of the Karpov-Kasparov 1985 World Championship match, which Karpov lost because he didn't jettison this pawn at the appropriate moment in order to free his pieces.) If the pawn reaches d6, however, it gives great energy to White's pieces.

*Joel:* My understanding of isolated queen's pawn positions is that, very often, pushing the pawn to d5 at the right moment, even if it is sacrificed, gives White an attack because it unleashes the latent potential behind the pawn. It seems you are saying something different.

*Boris:* You are talking about *isolated*, rather than *passed* queen pawn positions. In isolated queen's pawn positions, in which the d-pawn is *not* passed, its advance is often very powerful, because it attacks e6 and, as you say, uncovers a great deal of attacking potential behind it. The situation is different when White's isolated queen's pawn is passed. In that case, the pawn on d5 is restrictive.

Game 19  
**B.Gulko-I.Gurevich**  
Philadelphia 1991  
*Grünfeld Defense*

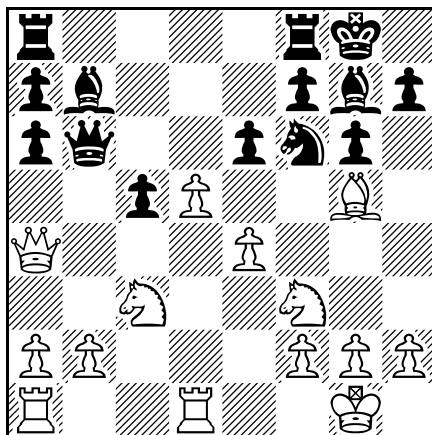
1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 d5 4 ♘f3 ♙g7 5 ♚b3 dxc4 6 ♚xc4 0-0 7 e4 ♘a6 8 ♚a4

Not the usual move; theory at that time considered the position equal for Black, citing W.Uhlmann-L.Polugaevsky, Skopje 1968. I disagreed, though, and thought that the final estimation of the position from that game favored White, so I went in for this variation.

**8...c5 9 d5 ♖b6?!**

Black followed the theoretical recommendation in those years. During the game, I noticed that Black had a promising pawn sacrifice in 9...e6! 10 ♙xa6 bxa6 11 dxe6 ♙xe6 12 ♖xa6 ♖b6. After my game with Gurevich, which received some attention, this sacrifice was discovered and it gives Black excellent compensation.

**10 ♙xa6 bxa6 11 0-0 e6 12 ♖d1 ♙b7 13 ♙g5**



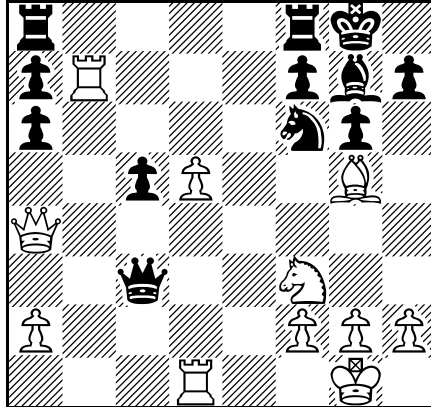
**13...exd5**

Here Gurevich deviated from Uhlmann-Polugaevsky, which continued 13...h6 14 ♙xf6 ♙xf6 15 ♖d2 ♖b4 16 ♖c2 ♖fe8 17 dxe6 (it is here that I thought White had an improvement in 17 ♖ad1!, when his pawn will reach the crucial d6-square) 17...♖xe6 and at this moment the players agreed on a draw.

**14 exd5 ♖xb2?!**

It seems that Black didn't like the look of 14...h6 15 ♙xf6 ♙xf6 16 ♖d2, when we reach a position similar to the one after my intended 17 ♖ad1 in the Uhlmann-Polugaevsky game. Instead, Gurevich goes in for complications.

**15 ♖ab1! ♖xc3 16 ♖xb7**



**16...♖fb8**

Black is already in great danger. He would lose material after 16...♗fd8? 17 ♔d2 ♕d3 18 ♘a5, or 16...h6 17 ♔d2 ♕d3 18 ♘h6, while 16...♗fe8 17 d6 gives White a big advantage. The moved played in the game is best.

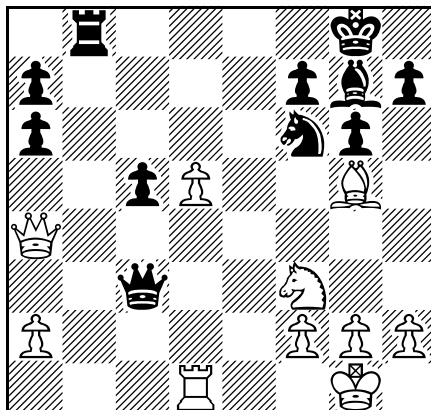
**17 ♗xb8+**

White doesn't have anything better. In the case of 17 ♕xa6 ♖c2! 18 ♗c1 ♕f5 19 d6 ♕d5, White's pieces lose their coordination; and 17 ♔d2 doesn't work this time: 17...♕d3 18 ♔f4 (18 ♗xb8+? ♗xb8 19 ♔f4 ♗b1 is even worse, and 18 ♗xf7 ♗b1 19 ♗e7 ♕b5 20 ♕xb5 ♗xd1+ 21 ♕f1 ♗xf1+ 22 ♔xf1 ♗xd5 is good for Black too) 18...♕xd1+ 19 ♕xd1 ♗xb7 and the two rooks are stronger than White's queen.

*Joel:* How can you tell?

*Boris:* Black's rooks are well coordinated, they have open files, and White's d-pawn will be lost.

**17...♗xb8**



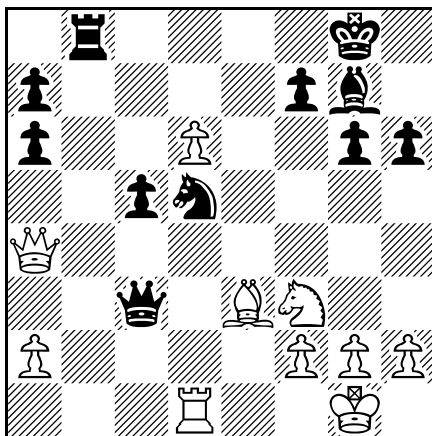


**Exercise:** What does White have to play? (difficulty level 2)

*Joel:* Well, given our conversation, d5-d6 looks good.

*Boris:* Correct. The d-pawn becomes more and more powerful the further it advances.

**18 d6! h6 19 ♖e3 ♜d5!?**



**Exercise:** What should White play here? (difficulty level 3)

*Joel:* I like 20 ♖d2, threatening d6-d7 and ♖a5. I looked at 20 ♜xd5 but didn't like the back rank counterplay Black gets.

*Boris:* The problem with 20 ♖d2 is that you close the d-file, reducing the power of your d-pawn. For example, after 20...♜b2 21 d7 ♜b6, Black has sufficient counterplay.

In the case of 20 ♜xd5 ♜b1+ 21 ♜d1 ♜a1 22 ♜e8+ ♜h7 23 ♜xb1 ♜xb1+ 24 ♖c1 ♜xc1+ 25 ♜e1 ♜c4 26 d7 ♖f6 27 d8 ♜ ♖xd8 28 ♜xd8 ♜xa2, Black's chances are not worse because it is difficult for White to stop the a-pawn.

The correct solution, therefore, is to push the d-pawn immediately.

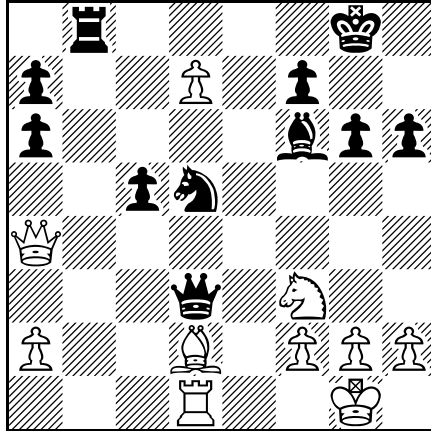
**20 d7!**

If the pawn is powerful on d6, its strength increases exponentially on d7.

**20...♖f6 21 ♖xh6**

The start of a complicated combination. Taking the knight would lead to a draw: 21 ♜xd5 ♜b1+ 22 ♜d1 ♜a1 and White doesn't have more than a perpetual with 23 d8 ♜+ ♖xd8 24 ♜e8+ ♜g7 25 ♖xh6+! ♜xh6 26 ♜f8+ ♜h7 27 ♜xf7+ ♜h6 etc.

However, your suggestion on the previous move is now very strong: 21 ♖d2! and if 21...♜d3? then:

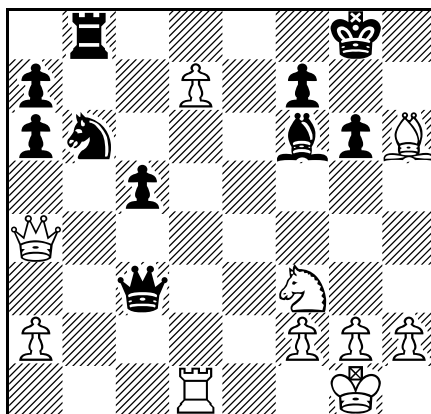


**Exercise:** What does White have to play? (difficulty level 3)

*Joel:* It seems that Black has ...♖b1 in all lines.

*Boris:* You're right. The solution to the problem, therefore, is to promote the pawn straight away: 22 d8♚+! ♕xd8? (but if 22...♖xd8 then 23 ♕a5 wins) 23 ♚e8+ ♗h7 (or 23...♔g7 24 ♕xh6+) 24 ♚xf7+ ♔h8 25 ♘e5, winning. The importance of this pawn is that, by its promotion, you destroy the coordination of Black's pieces.

If Black tries 21...♚b2 instead, then White continues 22 ♚e4 ♘c7 23 ♕f4, winning. Again, the major point is that the passed pawn on d7 disrupts Black's forces decisively. **21...♘b6**

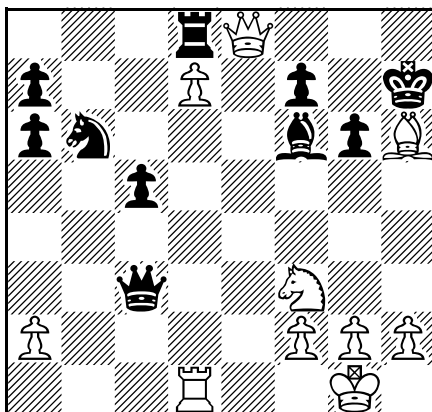


**Exercise:** Where does White's queen have to go? (difficulty level 3)

Joel: I like 22 ♕e4. The queen is centralized and threatens ♕e8+, which looks winning.

Boris: Correct. 22 ♕c6 would be inferior due to 22... ♖c2! 23 ♜c1 ♗f5 24 ♜xc5 ♕xd7 and Black escapes from his problems.

22 ♕e4! ♜d8 23 ♕e8+ ♖h7



**Exercise:** Find a winning combination. (difficulty level 6)

Joel: 24 ♗g5+ ♖xh6 25 ♗xf7+ looks good.

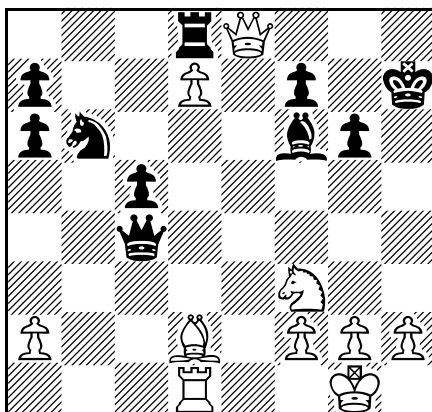
Boris: And what about 24... ♗xg5 - ?

Joel: 25 ♗xg5 and White loses his d-pawn.

Boris: Right. The first move is very subtle but you offered it earlier.

24 ♗d2! ♕c4

Otherwise White will just take on f7 with check. Now Black has protected all of his weak squares, but his pieces are overloaded.

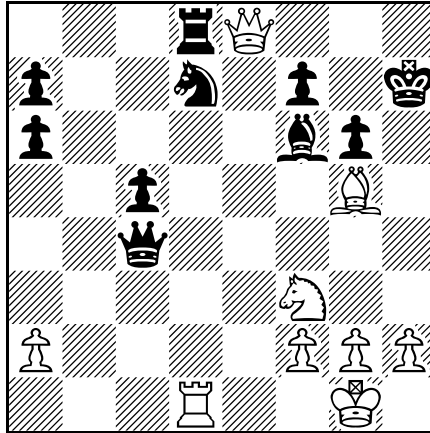


**Exercise:** How does White go about breaking Black's defense? (difficulty level 5)

25 ♖g5!

The attractive-looking 25 ♖g5+ leads to a drawish endgame after some interesting complications: 25...♔g7 26 ♘xf7 ♚c2! (26...♚xf7 is impossible due to 27 ♕h6+) 27 ♕h6+ (27 ♖f1 ♗xd7 28 ♘e5 ♗e7 29 ♕h6+! ♔h7! 30 ♚f8 ♚f5 is unclear) 27...♔h7 28 ♗c1 ♗xd7 29 ♚xd7 ♚xc1+ 30 ♕xc1 ♘xd7 31 ♘d6.

25...♘xd7



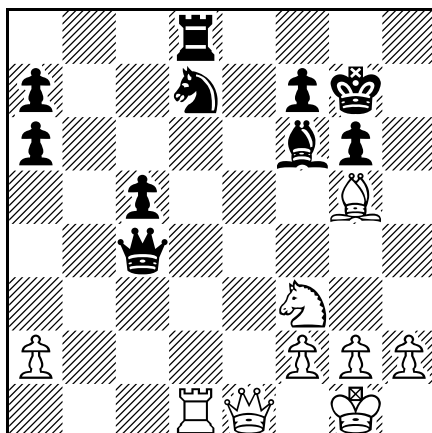
**Exercise:** What should White play now? (difficulty level 4)

Joel: I don't see anything.

Boris: The decisive move is 26 ♚e1!! ♚a4. For the price of a pawn, White has removed all coordination between Black's pieces – a heroic career for the mysterious d-pawn. Now there is no defense.

26 ♚e1!! ♚a4

After 26...♕xg5 27 ♘xg5+ ♔g7 28 ♚e7, White wins easily; while 26...♔g7 is equally hopeless:

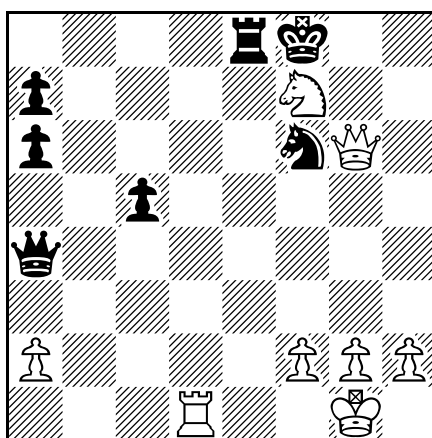


**Exercise:** Find a winning combination. (difficulty level 2)

*Joel:* It looks like 27 ♕xf6+ wins.

*Boris:* Correct! For example, 27...♔xf6 28 ♖xd7 ♗xd7 29 ♕e5 mate.

27 ♕xf6 ♔e8 28 ♖g5+ ♔h6 29 ♗xf7+ ♔h7 30 ♗g5+ ♔h6 31 ♖f7+ ♔h7 32 ♕d2! ♗xf6 33 ♕h6+ ♔g8 34 ♕xg6+ ♔f8



**Exercise:** Where should the white rook go? (difficulty level 3)

*Joel:* I guess I would play 35 ♖b1.

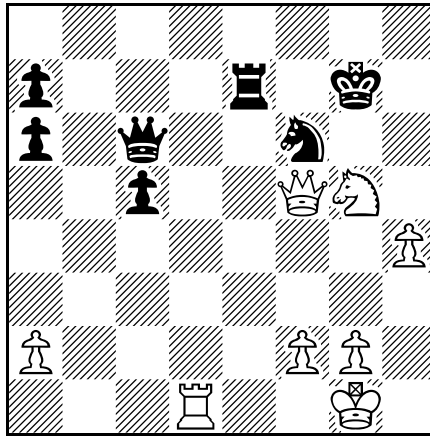
*Boris:* You have to be careful. Black's position is bad but if you transpose to an endgame, the struggle would start anew. For example, after 35 ♖b1, Black has 35...♕e4, forcing an

exchange of queens, and all of a sudden Black's passed c-pawn becomes strong. Or if you play 35 ♖c1, Black has the surprising 35...♚c4!, winning a piece. The correct move, which eliminates any counterplay, is 35 ♖f1.

35 ♖f1! ♚c6 36 ♘g5 ♜e7 37 ♜d1 ♜g7 38 ♚f5

White could win material with 38 ♜d8+ ♔e7 39 ♜e8+! etc, but already he doesn't need such flashy moves.

38...♜e7 39 h4 ♔g7



**Exercise:** What is the most precise move? (difficulty level 1)

*Joel:* I would play 40 h5.

*Boris:* Good, that is the most accurate, and Black now resigned.

**40 h5 1-0**

This game demonstrated how the passed d-pawn became stronger and stronger the further it advanced into the enemy camp, eventually sacrificing itself to destroy the coordination of Black's forces.