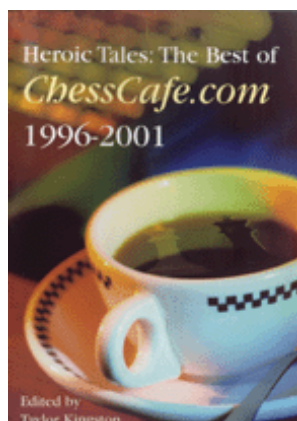




BOOK
REVIEWS

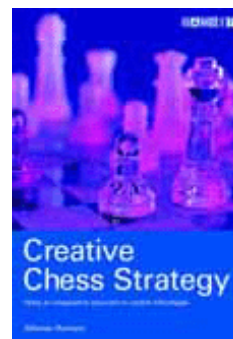


Creative Chess Analysis

Bill Kelleher

Creative Chess Strategy by Alfonso Romero, 2003 Gambit Publications, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Softcover, \$24.95

Thirty years ago, the young Jan Timman published *The Art of Chess Analysis*, in which he deeply analyzed a series of games between the top players of the era. It instantly became a classic of chess literature. After reading Timman's book, the reader became aware of the difficulty, and the amount of work, that was required to really determine the truth about what happened in a particular game. Timman's book made us realize how flimsy and superficial most annotations that appear in the chess literature were. Alfonso Romero of Spain has now produced a book, *Creative Chess Strategy*, that is a worthy successor to Timman's work.

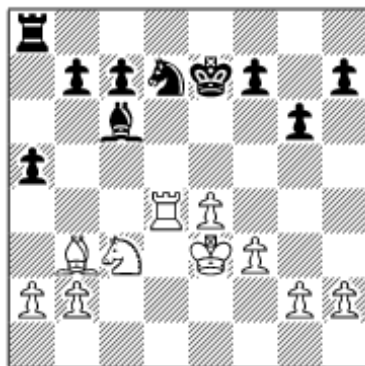


Romero is a 39-year old grandmaster who has represented Spain in several Olympiads, and even won the bronze medal on Board 3 at the Bled Olympiad in 2002. He is currently ranked fifth in his country. He is not exactly a household name in the chess world, but he is obviously a serious student of the game. In this book he sets himself the task of demonstrating that chess strategy is not just a matter of technique, but also requires considerable creativity.

In his introduction he quotes from the *Chess Dictionary*, which defines technique as "...the control of the battle in typical positions and, especially, the ability to profit from an acquired advantage by the shortest means...it has a more or less mechanical character." Romero disputes this definition saying that "However, my fundamental aim in this book is to show that the way we handle and interpret positions shouldn't become automatic or technical, but should always be original and innovative."

The layout is fairly typical for a book of this type. The author examines a variety of typical positions and situations that arise in the middle game. These include isolated-queen-pawn positions, blockade, the bishop-pair, control of a particular color complex, and other fundamental strategic concepts. Each topic is examined through the lens of carefully annotated games. As the author demonstrates, although the types of positions are typical, they all contain some unique features. This means that stereotyped play can often lead you astray. It is necessary to account for all the features of the position, and find a creative way to solve the problems they present. What this book is not, is a comprehensive guide to positional chess. Rather, it delves deeply into certain positional themes by looking closely at thematic games.

A good example of both Romero's thorough annotational style, and the creativity involved in implementing strategic ideas, can be seen in the game Karpov-Seirawan Skelleftea, 1989. Here is a fragment from that game:



Here Karpov played **20.Bd5!!** Romero comments that, "This is chess technique, entirely creative and astonishing. Few chess-players would have taken this decision, because the white bishop seems to be better than Black's. With this *coup de theatre*, Karpov is not looking for the exchange of bishops, but rather to make the situation of Black's pieces worse, opening a range of tactical possibilities."

20...Ra6 This is clearly a critical point in the game, and the author is up to the task of enlightening us about the intricacies of the position. Here is analysis of the position:

"Is there any other possible move? The direct exchange is bad, and weakening the pawn structure doesn't seem advisable. Then, as the only solution, we could suggest the defense of the bishop by 20...Nb8 (both minor pieces will be passive) and the text move, which seems more active. However, the rook will remain misplaced.

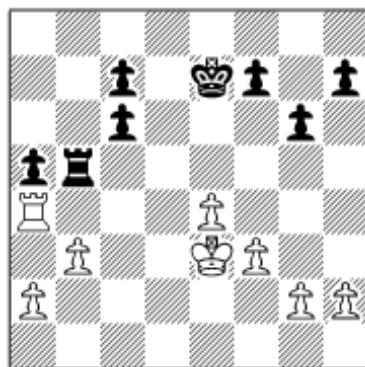
Something tells me that maybe it is interesting to accept the challenge and allow the doubled pawns. In return for this, Black would get active pieces and pressure on the b-file. Let us see: 20...Nb6!? 21.Bxc6 bxc6 (After all, we have managed to exchange the worst placed black piece for the most active of the opponent.) Black's next moves would without a doubt be 22...a4 and 23...Ra5, getting some relief. Of course White could prevent this in three different ways:

a) 22.a4!? intends b4, trying to exchange the b-pawn for the black a-pawn, thus obtaining a passed a-pawn. However there is not enough time, since Black replies 22...c5!?

b) 22.b3 c5!? Nd5+ Kd6 followed by ...Kc6

c) 22.Na4!? seeks a good rook ending

c1) We see this after 22...Nxa4 23.Rxa4 Rb8 24.b3 Rb5

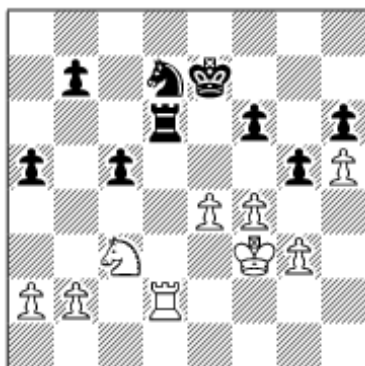


c11) White's advantage after the natural sequence 25.f4 f6 26.g4 h5 27.h3 hxg4 28.hxg4 g5 is beyond question, but is it enough to win? The pawn ending arising after 29.f5 Rc5! 30.Rc4 Rxc4 31.bxc4 Kxd6 is a draw. The reader can continue the analysis until he is convinced that there is a forced draw, including the curious 32.a4 Ke5 33.c5 with stalemate in the centre of the board.

c12) White should not force events; better is 25.Rc4 Kd6 26.f4 f6 27. g4 h5! (White was threatening h4 and g5) 28.h3 hxg4 29.hxg4; e.g. 29...g5? 30.e5+! fxe5 31.fxg5 (and 31.f5) gives White good prospects of realizing his advantage, as does 29...Rb8? 30.e5+! fxe5 31.fxe5+ Kd5 32.Kf4.

c2) Another possibility for Black once he has gone for this 'active' line, is to preserve the knights with 22...Nd7!?, following up with ...Rb8 and ...Rb5. The action of the black rook, formerly purely symbolic, would gain in value. Maybe in the near future Black could offer an exchange of rooks on b4. The white knight should stay on a4, guarding against black's threats of counterplay on the queenside.

21.f4 f6 22.h4 h6(?) 23.g3 Bxd5 24.Nxd5+ Kd8 25.Nc3! Rb6 26.Rd2 c6 27.h5! g5 28.Kf3 Ke7 29.Ne2! c5 30.Nc3 Rd6



31.Rd5! Of this move Romero says, "Another finesse. Karpov is extremely efficient in winning positions, and doesn't move in for the kill until everything is ready. The gain of a tempo after the rook exchange is reason enough to justify this move, but his idea doesn't end here. Karpov wants to force Black to play 31...b6 if he aims to activate his knight, but in doing so, paradoxically, he denies this piece its potentially best square. Black must now make an

important decision, because waiting moves are forcibly punished: 31...Ke6 32. Kg4! Rxd5 33.exd5+! Kf7 and both 34.Kf5 and 34.Ne4 are decisive.

31...Rxd5 32.Nxd5+ Ke6 33.Ne3 b5 34.Nf5 Nb6 35.Nxh6 Nc4 36.Nf5 Kf7 37.b3 Nd2+ 38.Ke3 Nf1+ 1-0

After another of Karpov's games given in this book Romero says, "Analyzing this game will no doubt take the reader several hours of hard work. I hope you don't despair! I am convinced that after this intense chess session, your strategic chess level will have gone up many steps." This can also be said of the above game, as well as a number of others in this book. However, to reiterate what the author says, a conscientious reading of this book will well repay the effort involved.

The game, Miles-Hübner, Wijk aan Zee, 1984, after Black's 15th move, demonstrates a different type of strategic problem.



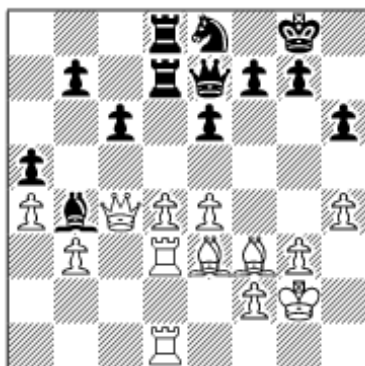
White has the bishop pair and a clear space advantage. However black's position, although passive, is structurally sound. Moreover Black is solidly defending d5, ruling out any central breakthrough. How does White proceed in this type of position? Romero makes the following comment about this position:

Bishops are a little more awkward in semi-closed positions than in open ones, but little by little they will succeed in improving their position. From

now on, White's space advantage will enable him to improve his pieces one by one in a typical maneuvering middlegame. Miles carries out this task with near-perfection.

In situations like this, with a stable centre, White often carefully prepares a breakthrough on the kingside by advancing his pawns. Miles decides against any plan involving playing f4, and instead give the main role to his h- and g-pawns. For this reason he drops the bishop back to f3, providing the g2-square for the King so as to bring his rooks into the attack on Black's king.

16.Bf3 Nf6 17.e4 Rad8 18.Be3 Qc7 19.Rac1 Qd7 20.Rc3 Bb4 21.Rcd3 Qe7 22.Kg2 Rd7 23.b3 Rfd8 24.Bg5! h6 25.Bc1 Ba3 26.Be3 Bb4 27.h4 Ne8!



White has begun to advance on the kingside, but his pieces, especially the queen, are not optimally placed for an attack. Here Miles finds a brilliant reorganization of his forces reminiscent of Botvinnik or Karpov at the height of their powers.

28.Qc2! Nc7 29.Qe2 Na6 30.Kg1 Bd6 31.Bg2 Nb4 32.R3d2 Bc7 33.Qg4! Kf8, 34.Bf1! Bb6 35.Bc4. All white's pieces are now on their optimal squares. Miles

went on to win by advancing his g- and h-pawns.

One of the hallmarks of the games of such great positional players as Botvinnik and Petrosian is the positional exchange sacrifice. This type of sacrifice usually does not require extensive calculation of variations, but rather these sacrifices are the result both of deep insight into the true nature of a particular position, and the understanding of what features of that position enable a minor piece to be superior to a rook. Romero annotates a particularly beautiful example of this type of sacrifice that occurred in the game Martin Gonzalez – Dolmatov, Barcelona, 1983. This is the position after White's move **10.g4**.



Here Romero comments:

This is consistent with his previous move. Martin is playing in an excessively risky style, in my opinion. Given the total absence of defenders on Black's kingside, the idea of getting the g-file for the rook seems attractive, but only from a superficial approach.

White didn't assess well the consequences of weakening his pawn-structure, and this factor will be like a millstone around his neck for the rest of the game. My opinion is that moves like this should only be carried out when there are many factors justifying it.

Black finds a fantastic idea to refute his opponents aggressive play.

10...Bd7! The author points out the dangers that faced Black after inaccurate play:

The Bishop arrives just in time to defend the king. the seemingly natural 10...b6, to counter 11.Bd3 with 11...Ba6, doesn't work on account of the fine reply 11.Bg5!. Then 11...Qe8 is met by 12.Qxe8 Rxe8 13.gxf5 exf5 14.Bg2! followed by c4 eventually. This ending is very advantageous since White can activate the bishops not only with the break c4, but also with the advance of the h-pawn. Black could avoid the ending, but this involves a regression in his initial plan. After 11...Qd7 12.gxf5! (12.Bd3 Ba6 13.gxf5 Bxd3! 14.fxe6 Qxe6 15.cxd3 is bad for White, since both 15...c5 and 15...Qf5! leave Black with a very comfortable game) 12...Rxf5 13.Bd3 Qf7 14.Qg4 Nd7 (if 14...Rf3, 15.Bf6!) 15.Bxf5 exf5 16.Qg3 c5 followed by the blockading maneuver ...Nf8-e6, it seems Black gets some compensation and is ready to defend his king properly, but this is not entirely true: the black bishop is not playing along its best diagonal, while White's attack, with the advance of the h-pawn, proceeds smoothly.

11.gxf5 Rxf5 12.Qh3 12...Be8! This is the idea! Black will sacrifice the exchange on f5, but in return his white-squared bishop, usually a problem-child in the French Defense, will become the dominant piece on the board. After the further moves, **13.Bd3 Bg6 14.Rg1 Qf8 15.Bxf5 Bxf5**, Black achieved a large advantage and went on to win the game.

Jan Timman, whose excellent book I praised at the beginning of this review, recently wrote a column in *New in Chess* entitled "The Stronger the Player the Better the Comments." In this column, he reiterated the column title by saying that "It is an old argument of mine...Top players are better at explaining top level games than other players."

I don't completely agree with this statement, because much depends on the amount of effort the annotator is willing to invest in a particular game. One need only leaf through any Informant to find slovenly, even meretricious, examples of bad analysis by top players.

Romero, although a grandmaster, is not a world-class player. Nonetheless, by dint of hard work and scrupulous analysis, he has produced a work that can stand in comparison with the best in the literature of chess. I highly recommend this book.

Order *Creative Chess Strategy*
by Alfonso Romero



[\[ChessCafe Home Page\]](#) [\[Book Review\]](#) [\[Bulletin Board\]](#) [\[Columnists\]](#)
[\[Endgame Study\]](#) [\[Skittles Room\]](#) [\[Archives\]](#)
[\[Links\]](#) [\[Online Bookstore\]](#) [\[About ChessCafe.com\]](#) [\[Contact Us\]](#)

Copyright 2004 CyberCafes, LLC. All Rights Reserved.

"**The Chess Cafe**®" is a registered trademark of Russell Enterprises, Inc.