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Understanding Your Chess

by James Rizzitano

In the last year or two, one of the major chess publishers, Gambit, has released a number of books that have provided unique insight into improving and understanding the play of the game. Books by Watson, Stohl and and Eingorn come to mind. The latest in this line is Understanding Your Chess by James Rizzitano.

The author is an international master whose most active period, at least until now, was the 1980s. Although he has not played much recently, he certainly has not just been sitting idly and watching the chess world go by. His new book has been extremely well received. ChessCafe is pleased to present an excerpt from Jim Rizzitano's recently released Understanding Your Chess.

I recently returned to active tournament competition by playing in the 6th Foxwoods Open and during one of the late-night meals several players had a lively debate over the best 'unwritten books' in chess history. A sequel to Bobby Fischer's *My 60 Memorable Games* covering the period from 1968 through the 1972 World Chess Championship match may never be written, but everyone at the table agreed that a follow-up to Mikhail Tal's *Life and Games of Mikhail Tal* covering the period after 1975 would certainly have been another classic. My own game with the magician from Riga is one of the highlights of my chess career and of course I included it in my book. I also annotated a key position from one of Tal's most mind-boggling wins.

Battling Goliath: Encounter with a Legend

The Chicago organizers scored a tremendous coup by arranging the participation of the popular former world champion Mikhail Tal in his first American Swiss-System event. Like many young players I grew up dreaming about someday playing a game with Mikhail Tal - the battle would be a wild tactical slugfest with pieces being sacrificed all over the board. The actual game was more akin to shadow-boxing, but you won't hear any complaints from me - I'm just grateful to have had the opportunity to play him before he passed away in 1992. By this point in my chess career I had finally accepted the fact that main line openings are main lines for a reason - they are fundamentally sound. Prior to the game I resolved to play the opening in a 'correct' manner, but there were a few dangers lurking beneath the surface.

Mikhail Tal (2700) – James Rizzitano (2563)

National Open, Chicago 1988

B93 Sicilian Defence, Najdorf

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 a6 6 f4 e5 7 Nf3 Nbd7 8 a4 Be7 9 Bd3 0-0 10 0-0 exf4

A year later I chose a different variation against Gata Kamsky - the brief comments are by Walter Browne in *Blitz Chess*: 10...Qb6+ 11 Kh1 exf4 12 a5! Qc7! 13 Bxf4 Ne5 14 Nd4 Be6 15 Bg3 Rac8 (15...Rfe8!? is an interesting alternative) 16 Nf5 Bxf5 17 exf5?!

(17 Rxf5 Nc4 leads to an unclear position) 17...d5 18 Re1 Bd6 (a solid set-up for Black) 19 Bf1 Neg4! 20 Qd3 Bxg3 21 Qxg3 Qxg3 22 hxg3 d4 23 Ne2 Rxc2 24 Nxd4 Rxb2 25 Rac1 h5 26 Re7 Re8 27 Rxe8+ Nxe8 28 Rc8 Ngf6? (28...Kf8! with the idea of ...Rb1 wins) 29 Bc4 Rb1+ 30 Kh2 Ng4+ 31 Kh3 Rh1# (0-1) Kamsky-Rizzitano, US Open Blitz Ch, Chicago 1989.

11 Kh1

The pawn sacrifice 11 Bxf4!? Qb6+ 12 Kh1 Qxb2 13 Qe1 Qb6 with complex play became popular during the 1990s.

11...Ne5

Also possible is 11...Nh5!? 12 Nd5 Nc5 13 Nd4 Nf6 14 Bxf4 Nxd5 15 exd5 Bf6 and a draw was agreed in Svidler-Savon, St. Petersburg 1994.

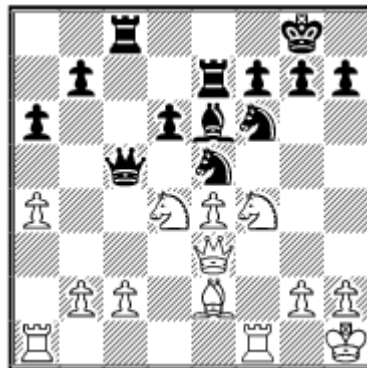
12 Bxf4 Qc7 13 Qd2 Be6 14 Nd4 Rac8 15 Nce2 Rfe8 16 Bg5

Or 16 Ng3 Nfd7 17 Ngf5 Bf6 with equal chances.

16...Nfd7 17 Bxe7 Rxe7 18 Nf4

With the idea of Nf5.

18...Qc5 19 Be2 Nf6 20 Qe3



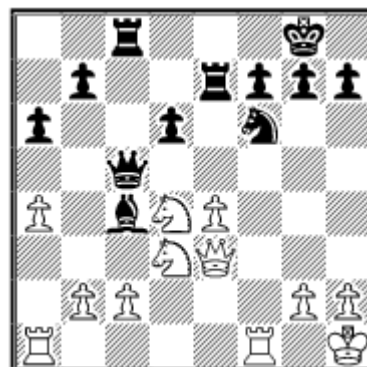
20...Nc4?

The weakness of White's e4-pawn can be exploited by the powerful retreat 20...Bd7!, with the following possibilities:

- 1) 21 Rae1 Nc6 22 Nxc6 Bxc6 23 Qxc5 dxc5 wins the e4-pawn.
- 2) 21 c3 Nc4 22 Bxc4 Qxc4 and Black again wins the e4-pawn.

3) 21 Nd3 Nc4! 22 Nxc5 Nxe3 23 Nxd7 Nxd7 24 Rf4 (24 Rfe1 Rxe4 25 Bf3 Rxd4 is good for Black) 24...g5 25 Nf5 Nxf5 26 Rxf5 Rxc2 27 Rxc5+ Kf8 28 Bf3 Nc5 and Black has an advantageous endgame.

21 Bxc4 Bxc4 22 Nd3

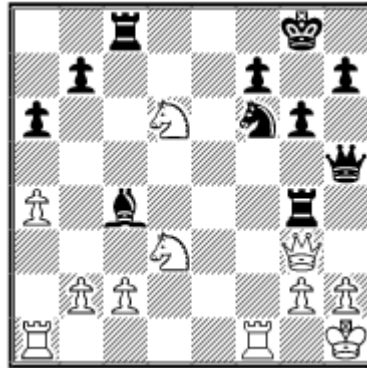


22...Ng4!

This move was my initial idea and it felt right intuitively. I thought for almost 45 minutes here as Black has an interesting alternative which was difficult to calculate: 22...Qh5!? (I simply did not trust this because of the looseness of the black pieces; another reasonable idea is 22...Bxd3! 23 cxd3 Ng4 24 Qg1 transposing into the note to Black's 23rd move) 23 Nf5! (23 Rf5?? loses to Qxh2+! - not much chance of my opponent falling for that one!) 23...Rxe4 24 Qg3 with the following

possibilities:

1) 24...g6!? (a provocative move) 25 Nxd6 (25 Qxd6 Ng4) 25...Rg4



and now White has:

1a) 26 Qf2? and then:

1a1) 26...Ne4 27 Nxe4 Rxe4 28 Rae1 Rxe1 29 Rxe1 Bxd3 30 cxd3 Qd5 31 Rf1 with equal chances.

1a2) 26...Bd5!? giving White the choice of:

1a21) 27 Nf4 Rxg2!! 28 Nxg2 Ng4 29 Qf4 (29 Qg3 Rxc2 wins for Black) 29...Qh3 30 Qg3 (30 Rf2 Nxf2+ 31 Qxf2 Rc6 32 Ne8 Qe6 33 Rd1

Bxg2+ 34 Qxg2 Qxe8 with an extra pawn) 30...Qxg3 31 hxg3 Rxc2 (the attack rages on even though Black is a rook down) 32 Rg1 Ne3 33 Kh2 Bxg2 34 Rgc1 Rd2 and Black wins.

1a22) 27 Nxc8 Bxg2+ 28 Qxg2 Rxg2 29 Kxg2 Ng4 30 Kg3 Ne3 with a strong attack; for example, 31 Rf4 g5 32 Re4 Qe2 33 Rg1 f5 and Black wins.

1a3) 26...Rxg2! (note how well-coordinated all of the black pieces are after this move) giving White the choice of:

1a31) 27 Kxg2 Bd5+ 28 Kg1 Rxc2! 29 Qxc2 Qg4+ 30 Kf2 Qg2+ 31 Ke3 Ng4+ 32 Kd4 Qxc2 and Black wins.

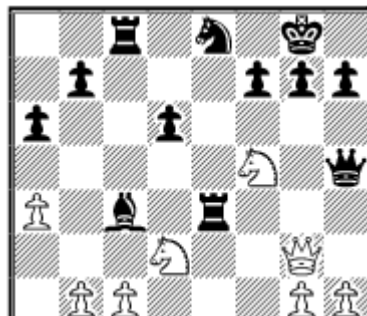
1a32) 27 Qxg2 Bd5 28 Nxc8 Bxg2+ 29 Kxg2 Ng4 transposes into line '1a22' above.

1b) 26 Qe5! (this centralizing move is best) 26...Qxe5 27 Nxe5 Bxf1 28 Nxg4 Bxg2+ 29 Kg1! (stronger than 29 Kxg2 Rxc2+ 30 Kf3 Nxg4 31 Kxg4 Rxb2 with an unclear position) 29...Rxc2 (29...Nxg4 30 Nxc8 with a clear advantage) 30 Nxf6+ Kg7 (I evaluated this position as unclear in my *Informator* notes, but White has a few arrows left in the quiver) 31 Nde8+! and now Black has:

1b1) 31...Kh6 32 Ng4+ Kg5 33 Ne3 Re2 34 Nxg2 Rxe8 35 Re1 and the knight is stronger than the two pawns.

1b2) 31...Kf8 32 Re1 Bc6 33 Nxf7+ Kg8 34 Nhf6+ Kf8 35 b3 Rg2+ 36 Kf1 Rxh2 37 Re3 and again the knight is stronger than the two pawns.

2) 24... Ne8!



(safest) and now White has:

2a) 25 h3 Qg6 26 Qf3 Qe6 27 Qxe4 Qxe4 28 Rae1 (a strange way to trap the queen) 28...Qxe1 29 Rxe1 Kf8 and Black has an extra pawn.

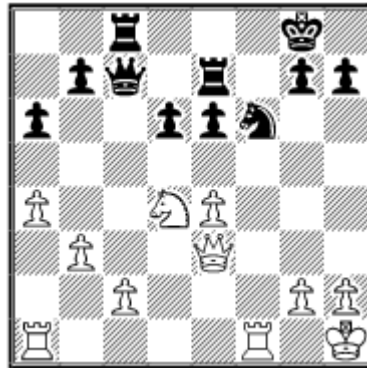
2b) 25 Nxd6 Nxd6 26 Qxd6 Qg5 looks a little better for Black.

2c) 25 Rae1! Rxe1 26 Qxe1 Rb8 27 Qe3 with good compensation for the pawn.

23 Qg1 Qc7

Black should play the straightforward line 23...Bxd3! 24 cxd3 Rec7 with a slight initiative.

24 b3 Be6 25 Nf4 Nf6 26 Nfxe6 fxe6 27 Qe3



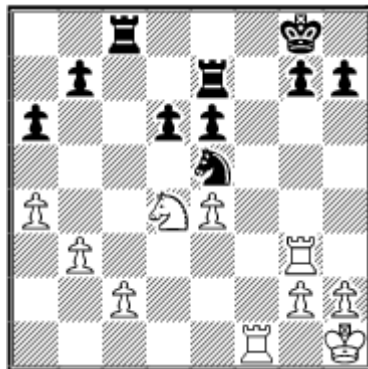
27...Qc3

Also possible is the spectacular 27...d5!? 28 exd5 Qxh2+! 29 Kxh2 Ng4+ 30 Kg3 Nxe3, and now:

1) 31 Nxe6 Nxd5! (stronger than 31...Nxf1+ 32 Rxf1 Rc3+ 33 Rf3 Rxf3+ 34 Kxf3 with a murky endgame) 32 Rae1 Rce8 33 Re5 (33 Rf5 Nb4 34 Rfe5 transposes) 33...Nb4 34 Rfe1 Nxc2 35 R1e4 b6 and Black has an extra pawn.

2) 31 dxe6! Nxf1+ 32 Rxf1 g6 and Black has some winning chances if he can active his rooks in conjunction with ...Kf8-e7 to restrain the passed e6-pawn.

28 Rae1 Qxe3 29 Rxe3 Ng4 30 Rg3 Ne5



The complications have dissipated into an equal endgame.

31 Rd1 g6 32 Kg1 Ree8 33 c4 Kf7 34 Rh3 Rh8 35 Kf1 Ke7 36 Ke2 Rcf8 37 Nf3 Nxf3 38 Rxf3 Rxf3 39 Kxf3 ½-½

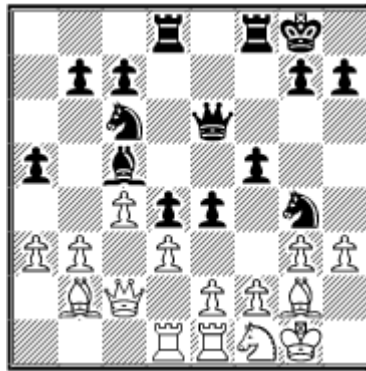
The post-mortem featured an analytical stream-of-consciousness from my legendary opponent. The lasting impression I have of it was his tremendous modesty and almost child-like enthusiasm for exploring intricate side variations. Later I told Maxim Dlugy that I was amazed at the depth and breadth of variations Mikhail Tal had analysed during the game. After he had stopped laughing long enough to speak, Maxim said "Yes, Jim, what were you expecting?"

Game Lessons:

- 1) Black achieved a reasonable position by playing into the main line of a heavily-analysed variation - no extraordinary measures were required.
- 2) Clock-time management is an important consideration in complex positions. The speculative 22...Qh5!? defied accurate calculation during the game, so Black opted for the solid 22...Ng4! after expending a lot of time.
- 3) The lost time could have been used more productively several moves later when Black chose the tame 27...Qc3 instead of the more aggressive 27...d5!?

Runaway Tactics: The Endless Combination

Miroslav Filip - Mikhail Tal
Sochi 1973

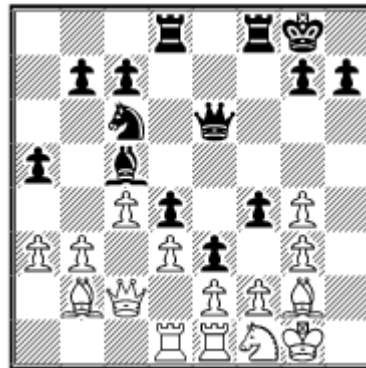


Mikhail Tal had an unmatched ability to create complex positions which simply defied analysis. This is one of my favorite games because it features a seemingly endless combination; as a teenager I spent many enjoyable hours analysing it.

19...e3!?

The simple 19...Nf6 20 e3 Rfe8 looks strong for Black, but the game continuation was probably irresistible.

20 hxg4 f4!



21 Bd5

The alternative is 21 gxf4 Rxf4, and now:

1) 22 f3 Rdf8 23 Ng3 Qe7 24 Rf1 (24 Nf5 R8xf5 25 gxf5 Qh4 26 Rf1 Qg3 with a mating attack) 24...Qh4 25 Ne4 Rxe4 26 fxe4 Rf2 27 Rxf2 Qxf2+ 28 Kh1 Qh4+ 29 Kg1 Bd6 30 e5 Bxe5 and Black has a mating attack.

2) 22 fxe3 Rxc4 and now White has:

2a) 23 e4 Rxc2+! 24 Kxc2 Qg4+ 25 Kh1 (25 Ng3 Bd6 26 e3 Bxc3 27 Qe2 Qg5 28 Rf1 Be5+ 29 Kh1 Rd6 and Black has a winning attack) 25...Rd6 26 Nh2 Rh6 27 e5 (27 Bc1 Rxc2+ mates; 27 e3 Bd6 28 Re2 Qf3+ 29 Kg1 Rg6+ 30 Rg2 Rxc2+ 31 Qxc2 Qxd1+ 32 Nf1 Qxd3 and Black has a clear advantage) 27...Nxe5 28 Bc1 Rxc2+! (the never-ending combination) 29 Kxc2 Bd6 30 Kh1 Qh3+ 31 Kg1 Qg3+ 32 Kh1 (32 Kf1 Qh2 mates) 32...Ng4 33 e4 Nf2+ 34 Qxf2 Qxf2 35 e5 Bxe5! 36 Rxe5 Qf3+ 37 Kh2 Qxd1 and Black wins.

2b) 23 exd4 Nxd4 24 Bxd4 Rxd4 25 e3 Rxc2+! and White has a choice of recaptures:

2b1) 26 Kxc2 Rg4+ 27 Ng3 (27 Kh1 Qc6+ 28 e4 Rg1+ 29 Kh2 Qh6#) 27...Bd6 28 Qf2 Qg6! (clearer than 28...Bxc3 29 Qxc3 Rxc3+ 30 Kxc3 Qd6+ 31 Kf3 Qxa3) 29 Kf1 Rxc3 30 c5 Bxc5 31 b4 Be7 and Black has a strong attack.

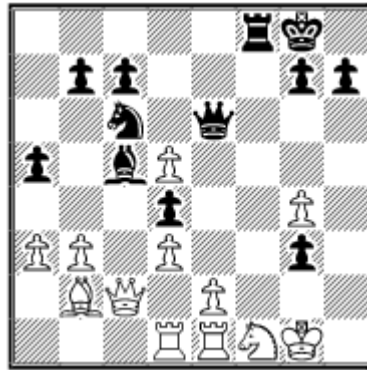
2b2) 26 Qxc2 Rg4 27 Ng3 Bxe3+ 28 Kf1 and now Black has:

2b21) 28...Qf6+? 29 Ke2 Qb2+ 30 Kf3 Rf4+ 31 Kxe3 Qxc2 32 Kxf4 g5+ 33 Kg4 h5+ 34 Kxh5! Qxc3 35 Rg1 Qh4+ 36 Kg6 and White has some advantage.

2b22) 28...c6! (a rook behind, Black calmly pauses to control the d5-square) 29 Qf3 (29 Rb1 Qe5 keeps up the pressure) 29...Rf4 30 Kg2 (30 Qxf4 loses to 30...Qh3+ 31 Ke2 Bxf4) 30...Rxf3 31 Kxf3 h5! 32 Nxh5 (32 Rxe3 Qg4+ 33 Kf2 Qxd1 wins for Black) 32...Qh6 and the black queen is superior to the white rooks.

The key idea to note in the above variations is the inability of White's rooks to participate in the defence of his king.

21...Rxd5 22 cxd5 exf2+ 23 Kxf2 fvg3++ 24 Kg1



24...Qxg4?!

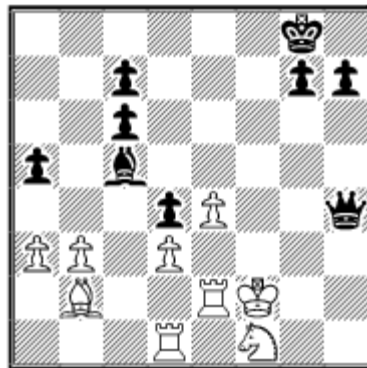
I think Black should play 24...Qh6!, threatening ...Rxf1+. Then:

1) 25 e4 Ne5 26 Bc1 Qh3 27 Qg2 Nf3+ 28 Qxf3 Rxf3 and Black wins.

2) 25 Nxg3 Qe3+ 26 Kh1 Qxg3 27 Rf1 (27 e4 loses to 27...Rf2) 27...Qh3+ (the beginning of a long manoeuvre aimed at capturing the d5-pawn with check) 28 Kg1 Qxg4+ 29 Kh1 Qh5+ 30 Kg1 Qg5+ 31 Kh1 (31 Kh2 Bd6+ mates) 31...Qxd5+

32 Kg1 (32 e4 dxe3+ 33 Qg2 Qh5+ 34 Qh2 Qxh2+ 35 Kxh2 Bd4 and Black should win the ending) 32...Qg5+ 33 Kh1 Qh5+ 34 Kg1 Qg4+ 35 Kh1 Qh3+ 36 Kg1 Qg3+ 37 Kh1 Rxf1+ 38 Rxf1 Bd6 39 e4 dxe3 40 Qe2 Qh4+ 41 Kg2 (41 Kg1 Bg3 intending ...Bf2+ gives Black has a decisive advantage) 41...Qh2+ 42 Kf3 Qh3+ 43 Ke4 Ne7 and Black has a large advantage.

25 dxc6 Qh3 26 e4 Rf2 27 Qxf2 gxf2+ 28 Kxf2 bxc6 29 Re2 Qh4+



Necessary as the white king runs away after 29...Be7 30 Ke1.

30 Ng3

More aggressive than 30 Kg2 Qg4+ 31 Kf2 Be7!?, and now:

1) 32 Bxd4?? Bh4+ 33 Ke3 Qg1+ 34 Kd2 Qxd4 and Black wins.

2) 32 Ke1 Bh4+ 33 Kd2 Bg5+ 34 Ke1 Qh4+!? (34...Bh4+ repeats the position) 35 Rf2 Be3 36

Rdd2 c5 37 Rde2 Bxf2+ 38 Rxf2 h5!?! with a complete mess.

3) 32 Nh2 Bh4+ 33 Kf1 Qh3+ 34 Rg2 c5 35 Bc1 Bg3 36 Nf3 Qh1+ 37 Ng1 Qh5 with an unclear position.

30...Bd6 31 e5 Bxe5 32 Rg1 g6!?

Also possible is 32...Qh2+ 33 Rg2 Bxg3+ 34 Kf3 Qh3 35 Rxxg3 Qf1+ 36 Rf2 Qxd3+ 37 Kf4 Qd1 with an unclear position.

33 Re4??

Walking into disaster; White has alternatives:

1) 33 Rxe5? Qf4+ 34 Kg2 Qxe5 and Black wins.

2) 33 Bc1 Qh2+ 34 Kf1 Qh3+ 35 Kf2 Qh4 with a draw.

3) 33 Rg2! c5 34 Bc1 and White has some advantage.

33...Qh2+ 34 Rg2 Bxg3+ 35 Kf3 Qh3 36 Rxg3 Qf1+ 37 Kg4 Qf5+ 0-1

38 Kh4 Qh5# completes the circle.

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