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Middlegame Motifs

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Sacrifices on g7

Sacrifices on g7 (or g2 if it is Black) are rather more unusual than those against f7 or h7. Part of the reason for this is that it isn't as easily targeted from common opening systems in which a white bishop goes to the a2–g8 or b1–h7 diagonal. It's also not going to happen against a kingside fianchetto which characterizes many opening systems.

So how can a g7 sacrifice be set up? First of all a bishop may be able to reach g7 from b2 providing everything is cleared out of the way. But a far more common scenario will arise if a knight is posted on f5 (or f4 if it is Black). Such situations typically arise in Open Games, because the moves 1.e4 and 1...e5 tend to leave f5 and f4 more vulnerable than in other openings, White can no longer put his e-pawn on e3 and Black can't put his on e6.

The following encounter is a typical example from José Raúl Capablanca's practice playing against Ossip Bernstein. Actually this was something of a needle match, because Bernstein had argued against the young and inexperienced Capablanca's inclusion in the tournament. Capablanca's twenty-eighth move must have given him plenty of satisfaction!

Capablanca, José Raúl – Bernstein, Ossip

San Sebastian (1), 20.02.1911

Ruy Lopez, Steinitz Defense [C66]

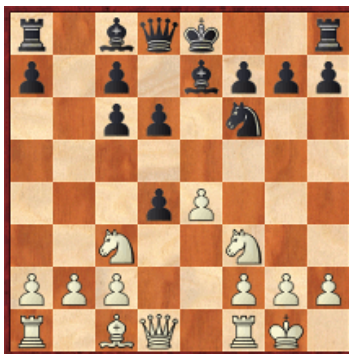
1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 Nf6

A precise move order that avoids one of White's more dangerous systems. After the immediate 3...d6, White can play 4.d4 Bd7 5.Nc3 Nf6 and now 6. Bxc6 Bxc6 7.Qd3 gets Black to concede the center when White still has queenside castling available. After 7...exd4 8.Nxd4 Bd7 9.Bg5 Be7 10.0–0–0 Ng4 11.Bxe7 Qxe7 12.Nd5 Qg5+ 13.f4 Qd8 14.h3 Nf6 15.Nc3, White had a clear advantage in Alekhine,A-Benitez,M, Caracas 1939.

4.0–0 Be7 5.Nc3 d6

Only now does Black play ...d7–d6, with White castled and his knight committed to c3. These old timers were not altogether ignorant about the openings.

6.Bxc6+ bxc6 7.d4 exd4



[FEN "r1bqk2r/p1p1bppp/2pp1n2/8/3pP3/2N2N2/PPP2PPP/R1BQ1RK1 w kq - 0 8"]

8.Nxd4

One of the reasons this position went out of fashion for Black was his current

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lack of space. But I think there's much to be said for his bishop-pair, the solid trio of pawns on c7, c6, and d6, and the half-open b- and e-files.

8...Bd7 9.Bg5 0-0 10.Re1 h6 11.Bh4 Nh7

Another typical Steinitz move, freeing his position with exchanges.

12.Bxe7 Qxe7 13.Qd3 Rab8 14.b3 Ng5?!

But this one I don't like so much because the knight isn't on a good circuit here and can be driven back. 14...Rfe8 is a better idea, occupying the half open e-file.

15.Rad1 Qe5 16.Qe3 Ne6 17.Nce2 Qa5 18.Nf5



[FEN "1r3rk1/p1pb1pp1/2ppn2p/q4N2/4P3/1P2Q3/P1P1NPPP/3RR1K1 b - - 0 18"]

An important moment as the knight menaces Black's kingside from this square, in particular g7. And it's far from easy to get rid of this beast.

18...Nc5 19.Ned4 Kh7 20.g4!?

Banking on pushing home his kingside attack. A more solid choice would have been 20.a3 when 20...Qxa3 21.Ra1 Qb4 22.Rxa7 gives White some pressure.

20...Rbe8 21.f3 Ne6 22.Ne2!?

Once again this is very sharp play. In later years I suspect Capablanca would have chosen 22.Kh1 instead.

22...Qxa2 23.Neg3?!

Continuing in a "gambit style," which seems quite untypical for the Cuban genius. 23.Qc3 would have left White just a single pawn down but with quite decent compensation.

23...Qxc2 24.Rc1 Qb2 25.Nh5 Rh8?

Overlooking White's combinative possibilities against g7. 25...g5! was much better, when it's far from easy for White to break through.

26.Re2 Qe5 27.f4 Qb5



[FEN "4r2r/p1pb1ppk/2ppn2p/1q3N1N/4PPP1/1P2Q3/4R2P/2R3K1 w - - 0 28"]

28.Nfxg7! Nc5??

Probably in shock, Bernstein's resistance caves in. 28...Ref8 would have been much tougher.

29.Nxe8 Bxe8

After 29...Rxe8 30.Nf6+ Kg7 31.Rxc5!, Black would suffer a ruinous loss of material.

30.Qc3 f6

Or 30...Rg8 31.Nf6+ etc.

31.Nxf6+ Kg6 32.Nh5 Rg8 33.f5+ Kg5 34.Qe3+ 1-0

Black is getting mated.

The other common situation in which g7 or g2 can become vulnerable is if a rook gains access to this square. Usually this will mean opposite-side castling plus a pawn storm or a rook lift; another possibility is illustrated by the following game.

Gofshtein, Leonid (2495) – Davies, Nigel (2510)

Rishon Le Zion (9), 1994

Closed Ruy Lopez [C92]

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 Be7 6.Re1 b5 7.Bb3 d6 8.c3 0-0 9.h3 Be6



[FEN "r2q1rk1/2p1bppp/p1npbn2/1p2p3/4P3/1BP2N1P/PP1P1PP1/RNBQR1K1 w - - 0 10"]

At the time of the game this was quite a specialty of mine, it seeks to exchange White's dangerous "Spanish Bishop" on b3.

10.d4 Bxb3 11.axb3

A much quieter way to play this for White is with 11.Qxb3, and there too Black has some trouble equalizing. For example, after 11...Qb8 12.Bg5 (12.Nbd2 Re8 13.d5 Nd8 14.Nf1 c6 15.Bg5 cxd5 16.Bxf6 Bxf6 17.Qxd5 was also

a bit better for White in Howell,D (2501)-Davies,N (2503), Sunningdale 2007.) 12...h6 13.Bxf6 Bxf6 14.d5 Na5 15.Qd1 c6 16.dxc6 Qc7 17.Na3 Qxc6 18.Nc2 Nc4 19.Nb4 Qc5 20.Qe2 and White's control of d5 gave him an edge in Rogers,I (2529)-Davies,N (2503), Sunningdale 2007.

11...exd4!?

This, followed the occupation of the b4-square, is the principled way to play for Black.

12.cxd4 Nb4



[FEN "r2q1rk1/2p1bppp/p2p1n2/1p6/1n1PP3/1P3N1P/1P3PP1/RNBQR1K1 w - - 0 13"]

13.d5

Critical. 13.Nc3 c5 is fine for Black.

13...c5 14.dxc6 d5

14...Nxc6 15.Nc3 is just an easy edge for White.

15.e5! Ne4 16.Nc3 Nxc3 17.bxc3 Nxc6 18.Qd3 Re8

This was my attempted improvement on 18...Qd7 19.Bg5! Rfe8 20.Bxe7 Nxe7 21.Nd4, which was simply better for White in Suetin,A-Kholmov,R, Leningrad 1962.

19.e6! fxe6 20.Rxe6 Qd7 21.Re2 b4!?



[FEN "r3r1k1/3qb1pp/p1n5/3p4/1p6/1PPQ1N1P/4RPP1/R1B3K1 w - - 0 22"]

22.c4

In a subsequent game against Leonid Shmuter, I naively repeated this line only to run into a powerful innovation here in 22.Bb2! after which 22...bxc3 23.Bxc3 a5 24.Ne5 Nxe5 25.Rxe5 placed me in a very difficult situation.

22...Bf6 23.Raa2 d4 24.Bg5 a5 25.Bxf6 gxf6

Although Black's king looks weak here, there is the open g-file as compensation. Later in the game this assumes great significance.

26.Nh4 Ne5 27.Qg3+ Kh8 28.Qf4 d3 29.Re4?!

Exchanging queens with 29.Qxf6+ is also precarious for White because of Black's passed pawns; for example, 29...Qg7 30.Qxg7+ Kxg7 31.Red2 a4! 32.Rxa4 Rxa4 33.bxa4 b3 etc. On the other hand, 29.Re3 was well worth considering.

29...Qc6 30.Rd4 Rg8 31.Kh2 a4 32.bxa4 Rad8 33.Rd5 Rde8 34.Rd2 b3 35.Nf3 Nxc4 36.R2xd3 b2 37.Rb5 Ne5 38.Rdb3?



[FEN "4r1rk/7p/2q2p2/1R2n3/P4Q2/1R3N1P/1p3PPK/8 b - - 0 38"]

Allowing the following devastating combination. White should have tried 38.Re3 after which 38...Nxf3+ 39.Qxf3 Qd6+ 40.g3 Rxe3 41.fxe3 Rb8 42.Rxb8+ Qxb8 43.Qxf6+ Kg8 44.Qe6+ Kh8 would be a draw by perpetual check.

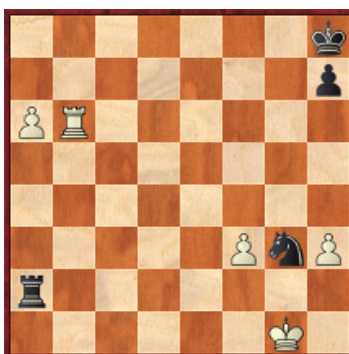
38...Rxb3+!

This unexpected combination overloads the rook on b3.

39.Kxg2 Rg8+ 40.Kh2 b1Q! 41.Rxb1 Nxf3+ 42.Kh1 Nd4+ 43.f3 Ne2! 44.Rb6

Although this leads to a lost endgame, it's the best chance for White. 44.Qe3 Ng3+ 45.Kh2 Qc2+ 46.Kg1 Nf5+ leads to mate.

44...Qxb6 45.Rxb6 Nxf4 46.Rxf6 Nh5 47.Rb6 Rc8 48.a5 Rc2 49.a6 Ra2 50.Kg1 Ng3



[FEN "7k/7p/PR6/8/8/5PnP/r7/6K1 w - - 0 51"]

Tying White up after which I can set about improving the position of my king.

51.Rd6 Kg7 52.Rb6 h6 53.h4

53.Rd6 Ne2+ 54.Kf2 Nd4+ wins the f3-pawn, because White's king cannot go to g3 or e3.

53...Nf5 54.h5 Nd4 55.Rg6+ Kh7 56.Rf6 Kg7 57.Rg6+ Kh7 58.Rf6 Ne2+ 59.Kf1 Ng3+ 60.Ke1 Nxh5 61.Rd6 Ng3 62.Rd7+ Kg6 63.a7 Nf5 64.f4 h5 65.Rb7 h4 66.Rb2 0-1



[FEN "r2br1k1/5ppp/1qp1bn2/pp1p1NB1/
3P1P1P/5QN1/PPP3P1/2K1R2R w - - 0 19"]

White to play set in motion a devastating attack; how did he do it?



[FEN "3r2k1/1bq1np1p/p5p1/1p2p3/2p1Pn2/
2P1Q3/PPBNNPPP/R5K1 b - - 0 23"]

Black to play has a surprising combination, what was it?

Solutions to last month's exercises

Forintos, Gyoza (2425) – Baldauf, Markus (2200)

Berliner Sommer 02nd Berlin West (7), 1984



[FEN "1rbq1r1k/1ppn1p1P/p2p1n1R/3Pp1B1/
2P1P2Q/2N5/PP3PP1/2KR4 w - - 0 22"]

White to play successfully exploited the pin on Black's f6-knight. What was his next move?

22.Rxf6! 1–0 Black resigned because 22...Nxf6 23.Bxf6+ wins Black's queen.

Bronstein, David – Najdorf, Miguel

Candidates Tournament Budapest (5), 1950



[FEN"r2qnrk1/p4ppp/bnp4/2p1pP2/2PPP3/
P1PB4/4N1PP/R1BQ1RK1 w - - 0 13"]

White to play used a pinning concept to set in motion a deadly attack. What did he do?

13.f6! Kh8 13...Nxf6 14.Bg5 would set up a devastating pin that White threatens to exploit with Ne2-g3-h5. And should Black try to escape with 14... Qd7, then 15.Bxf6 gxf6 16.Ng3! Kh8 17.Nh5 would be too strong. **14.d5 Na5 15.Ng3 gxf6** Here too 15...Nxf6 16.Bg5 would be too strong. **16.Nf5 Bc8 17. Qh5** Now the attack breaks through along the h-file. **17...Bxf5 18.exf5 Rg8 19.Rf3 Rg7 20.Bh6 Rg8 21.Rh3 1-0** 21.Rh3 Ng7 22.Qh4 would leave Black defenseless.

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