



COLUMNISTS

Middlegame Motifs

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Rooks on the Seventh

Most of us are familiar with the strength of a rook on the seventh once we are in an endgame. Yet this can also be a powerful place to have a rook in the middlegame. It is less common because having a larger number of pieces on the board will tend to take away entry points, but should a rook get there it can still be a devastating asset.

There are other major differences when a rook arrives on the seventh in the middlegame. It won't usually be associated with the harvesting of pawns or confining the enemy king to the back rank. Instead it will usually be associated with a direct attack on the opposing king. The following two games are classic illustrations of this motif by two of the greatest players in history, José Raúl Capablanca and Mikhail Botvinnik. The way these two maestros lay out their game is very different, but both feature devastating attacks using rooks on the seventh.

Alatortsev, Vladimir – Capablanca, José Raúl

Moscow Moscow (3), 17.02.1935

Queen's Gambit Declined [D53]

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 d5 4.Bg5

If White wants to play the Exchange Variation, then he should really do it now as after 4.cxd5 Nxd5 5.e4 he builds a broad pawn centre without allowing Black to free himself with the exchange of dark-squared bishops.

4...Be7 5.e3 0-0 6.cxd5 Nxd5

Here this is rather better than 6...exd5 as now the dark-squared bishops come off.

7.Bxe7 Qxe7



[FEN "rnb2rk1/ppp1qppp/4p3/3n4/3P4/2N1P3/PP3PPP/R2QKBNR w KQ - 0 8"]

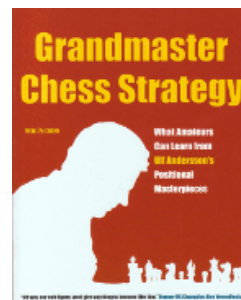
8.Nf3

In a later game Alatortsev thought better of this move and instead exchanged knights on d5: 8.Nxd5 exd5 9.Nf3 c6 10.Qb3 a5 11.a3 a4 12.Qc2 Nd7 13.Bd3 Nf6 14.0-0 Ne4 15.Bxe4 dxe4 16.Nd2 Re8 17.Rac1 Ra5 18.Rfe1 g6 19.Qd1 h5 20.Qc2 h4 21.f4 exf3 22.Nxf3 h3 23.g3 Bf5 24.Qd2 Qd8 ½-½ was Alatortsev, V-Liublinsky, V, Moscow 1949.

8...Nxc3 9.bxc3 b6 10.Be2 Bb7 11.0-0 c5

A typical concept which more often appears in openings like the Nimzo and

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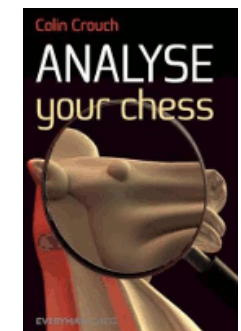
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Queen's Indian Defences. Black will be posting a rook on c8 to play along the c-file.

12.Ne5 Nc6 13.Nxc6 Bxc6 14.Bf3 Rac8



[FEN "2r2rk1/p3qppp/1pb1p3/2p5/3P4/2P1PB2/P4PPP/R2Q1RK1 w - - 0 15"]

Black is already very comfortably placed, in fact White must even be careful now because of Black's queenside pawn majority.

15.a4 cxd4 16.cxd4 g6 17.Bxc6

Other moves also leave Black with a slight edge; for example, 17.a5 b5 18. Bxc6 Rxc6 19.Qd3 a6 gives Black a strong protected passed pawn on b5; whilst 17.Rc1 Bxf3 18.Qxf3 Qd7 makes it difficult for White to protect his a-pawn.

17...Rxc6 18.Qd3 Qb7 19.Rfb1?!

White really needs a pair of rooks off in this position and this won't achieve that objective. In order to do this it was better to play 19.Rfc1 after which 19... Rfc8 20.Rxc6 Qxc6 21.h3 Qc2 can be met by 22.Qxc2 Rxc2 23.a5 b5 24.a6!, intending 25.Rb1, with a drawish rook endgame.

19...Rfc8 20.h3 a6 21.Qa3 Rc2 22.Qd6?



[FEN "2r3k1/1q3p1p/pp1Qp1p1/8/P2P4/4P2P/2r2PP1/RR4K1 b - - 0 22"]

Missing the reply. Had White tried to simplify with 22.Rc1, the queen endgame arising after 22...Rxc1+ 23.Rxc1 Rxc1+ 24.Qxc1 b5 would have been bad for him because of Black's passed pawn (these are especially valuable with only queens on). On the other hand he had a much better defence in 22.Rb2!, defending his second rank whilst only allowing the exchange of one pair of rooks.

22...Rxf2!

A devastating combination.

23.Qg3

23.Kxf2 Rc2+ 24.Ke1 Qxg2 is every bit as disastrous.

23...Re2 0–1

This next game is one of Botvinnik's most famous efforts, a brilliant demolition of the great Hungarian GM, Lajos Portisch. In his later years Botvinnik became more closely associated with fine endgame play rather than combination, but given the right position he could play magnificent combinative chess.

Botvinnik, Mikhail – Portisch, Lajos

Monte Carlo, 1968

English Opening [A29]

1.c4 e5 2.Nc3 Nf6 3.g3 d5

White's move order would later go out of fashion because of Keres' treatment with 3...c6.

4.cxd5 Nxd5 5.Bg2 Be6 6.Nf3 Nc6 7.0–0 Nb6 8.d3 Be7 9.a3 a5



[FEN "r2qk2r/1pp1bPPP/1nn1b3/p3p3/8/P1NP1NP1/1P2PPBP/R1BQ1RK1 w kq a6 0 10"]

Preventing b2–b4 like this is no longer very fashionable but that's not to say it's necessarily bad.

10.Be3 0–0 11.Na4

In the later game, Polugaevsky,L-Hübner,R Bugojno 1982, White varied with 11.Rc1 and after 11...Nd5 12.Nxd5 Bxd5 13.Qa4 Bd6 14.Bc5 Ne7 15.e4 Bc6 16.Qc2 had quite strong pressure.

11...Nxa4

11...Nd5 12.Bc5 is probably a bit better for White, though Black can make it difficult with 12...Bd6! and take back on d6 with the c7-pawn to keep White's knight out of c5.

12.Qxa4 Bd5 13.Rfc1 Re8 14.Rc2

Cvitan later varied at this point with 14.Rc3!?, adding the idea of Rc3–b3 in some positions. After 14...Bf6?!, the game continued with 15.Rc5 Nd4 16.Rxd5 Nxe2+ 17.Kf1 Qxd5 18.Ne1 e4 19.dxe4 Qh5 20.Bf3 Qe5 (20...Qxh2 21.Kxe2 Bxb2 22.Rb1 is also very good for White) 21.Nd3 b5 22.Qd1 Nc3 23.Qc2 Qe6 24.bxc3, which should have been very good for White in Cvitan,O-Jobava,B Sibenik 2007 (in the end he only drew).

14...Bf8

14...Bd6 was certainly worth considering, lending support to both c7 and e5.

15.Rac1



[FEN "r2qrbk1/1pp2ppp/2n5/p2bp3/Q7/P2PBNP1/1PR1PPBP/2R3K1 b - - 0 15"]

15...Nb8?

A serious mistake by Portisch who underestimates the danger to his king after White captures on c7. His choice of this rather artificial knight move was probably inspired by the hope of blocking the c-file with ...c7–c6, together with the fact that the alternatives don't give him an easy life either. For example, after 15...e4 16.dxe4 Bxe4 17.Rd2 or 15...Bd6 16.Qb5!, Black is under pressure.

16.Rxc7 Bc6 17.R1xc6 bxc6 18.Rxf7! h6

It was probably White's last move that Portisch overlooked. After 18...Kxf7 19.Qc4+, White is winning in every variation; for example, 19...Kg6 20.Qg4+ Kf7 (Or 20...Kf6 21.Bg5+ wins the queen) 21.Ng5+ Kg8 22.Qc4+ Kh8 23.Nf7+, etc.

19.Rb7 Qc8 20.Qc4+ Kh8



[FEN "rnq1rb1k/1R4p1/2p4p/p3p3/2Q5/P2PBNP1/1P2PPBP/6K1 w - - 0 21"]

20...Qe6 21.Nxe5 would win a third pawn for the exchange and leave Black hopelessly placed in the endgame.

21.Nh4!

Playing for mate!

21...Qxb7 22.Ng6+ Kh7 23.Be4!

This quiet move sets up decisive threats.

23...Bd6 24.Nxe5+ g6 25.Bxg6+ Kg7 26.Bxh6+ 1–0

26.Bxh6+ Kxh6 27.Qh4+ Kg7 28.Qh7+ Kf8 29.Qxb7 wins both Black's queen and the rook on a8.

Exercises (solutions next month)



[FEN "4r1k1/pR3pp1/1n3P1p/q2p4/5N1P/P1rQpP2/8/2B2RK1 w - - 0 20"]

White to play. How did he use the rook on b7 to launch a devastating attack?



[FEN "r5rk/2RN1Rp1/b3p2p/3p1p1P/p2P1K2/Pp2PPP1/1P6/8 w - - 0 36"]

Although the position has simplified White still has a devastating combinative sequence at his disposal. What is it?

Solutions to last month's exercises

Autowicz, Z – Pinkas, K
Poland, 1975



[FEN "r2qk1nr/1pp3pp/p1np4/8/B3p2b/2Pb3R/PP1P1PPP/RNBQN1K1 b kq - 0 12"]

Black to play must deal with the threat of 13.Qh5+ as well as the threat to eliminate his bishop on d3. How should he do it?

12...Bxf2+! This immediate bishop sacrifice is necessary and has occurred in several games. **13.Kxf2 Qf6+ 14.Rf3?!** White has a better defence in 14.Kg3 when Black can repeat the position if he likes with 14...Qe5+ 15.Kf2 and now 15...Qf6+. But it looks like he can also play for more with 15...Qf4+; for example, 16.Rf3 exf3 17.Nxd3 Qxh2 18.Bxc6+ bxc6 19.Qxf3 Ne7 gives Black a rook and pawn for the two minor pieces plus ongoing attacking chances. Two other games featured the move 14.Nf3 at this point, but Black then recovers all of his material with much the better game. For example, 14...Nge7 (14...exf3 15.Bxc6+ bxc6 16.Qxf3 Qxf3+ 17.Rxf3 Bg6 was just a bit better for Black in Kreie,G-Cygon,J, Detmold 1976.) 15.Na3 0-0 16.Nc2 Ne5 17.Nce1 exf3 18.gxf3 N7g6 19.Qb3+ Kh8 20.Qxb7 Nf4 and Black had a

winning attack in Voitsekhovsky,S-Yandemirov,V, Moscow 1996. **14...exf3 15.Bxc6+ bxc6 16.Nxd3 fxg2+ 17.Kg1** 17.Kxg2 Qg6+ 18.Kf2 Qxd3 leaves Black the exchange up for nothing. **17...Ne7 18.Qe2 0-0 19.Qxg2 Qf5 20.Qe2** 20.Nf2 Nd5 21.d4 Rae8 would also leave White defenceless. **20...Ng6 0-1**

Paulsen, Louis – Morphy, Paul

First U.S. Chess Congress New York (4.6), 1857



[FEN "4r1k1/p1pb1ppp/Qbp1r3/8/1P6/2Pq1B2/R2P1PPP/2B2RK1 b - - 0 17"]

White's development has been severely impeded by the queen on d3. But how did Black to play deliver the knock out punch?

17...Qxf3! This queen sacrifice decides matters because White's pieces cannot get over to defend. **18.gxf3 Rg6+ 19.Kh1 Bh3 20.Rd1** 20.Rg1 Rxe1+ 21. Kxe1 Re1+ is an immediate mate; but 20.Qd3 would have been a better try. After 20...f5 21.Rd1 Bg2+ 22.Kg1 Bxf3+ 23.Kf1 Bxd1, Black has enough material for the queen and a strong attack into the bargain. But it would have been harder than the game. **20...Bg2+ 21.Kg1 Bxf3+ 22.Kf1 Bg2+** Missing a quicker win with 22...Rg2!, intending 23...Rxe2 and mate on h1. But Black is winning here in any case. **23.Kg1 Bh3+ 24.Kh1 Bxf2** Threatening 25...Bg2 mate. **25.Qf1 Bxf1 26.Rxf1 Re2 27.Ra1 Rh6 28.d4 Be3 0-1** After 28...Be3 29.Bxe3, there would follow 29...Rxe3+ 30.Kg1 Rg2# mate.

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