

**Attacking Chess
in the
21st Century**

Zenón Franco

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ATTACKING CHESS IN THE 21st CENTURY

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Introduction

Some years ago I wrote a book called “The Art of Attacking Chess”; the present book is also about attacking, but in the annotated games an additional focus has been provided. Attention has been paid not only to what happens on the board but also, wherever possible, to the influence of the analysis engines not only on a player’s preparation for the game, something that has become more important in these early years of the new century, but also on the practical context of the game.

In wanting to shed light on this growing influence I was helped by the invaluable information given by the players themselves, whenever I was able to obtain it.

The influence of the engines can be seen in the attack itself but much more so in the player’s preparation in the openings, which now, in games played at the highest level, have a depth unthinkable in the last century, only twenty-three years ago.

With regard to attacking play, as I commented in my previous book on this subject, you don’t need to be Tal to be able to go into a game knowing that you’re going to be able to attack.

Nevertheless, there need to be factors in the position that justify and, according to Steinitz, even oblige a player to attack; as the first World Champion advised: “When a sufficient advantage has been obtained, a player must attack or the advantage will be dissipated”.

There are some truly excellent attacking players, but in modern chess we see more players whose style is multifaceted, and who are capable of playing all types of positions equally well.

This is the so-called ‘universal style’, a term most associated in the past with Boris Spassky and nowadays with Magnus Carlsen, among many others.

Mastering attacking play in chess is a dream that we all long to achieve, but of course the art of attack does not arise by itself. Constructing positions which favour the attack is the most difficult task. In this book we shall see games with brilliant finishes, but we shall also draw attention to the different phases through which the struggle passes, in order make such finishes possible.

The games are annotated in the ‘move by move’ format, which is useful for personal training and learning as well as for teaching.

Once again I should like to say that, as always happens to me, every stage in the production of this book has been a great pleasure, from the beginning, when there is no set course, then the phase in which the book seems to take on a life of its own and plot its own course, and finally the stage of checking and correcting; the whole process has been a source of great pleasure to me. I hope this comes through in the book and that the reader derives just as much pleasure in reading it.

GM Zenón Franco Ocampos
Ponteareas, June 2023

Dedicated to Yudania

The structure of the book

The book consists of 36 games divided into four chapters. The games are prefaced by brief biographical information and a short description of the events of the game. After each game some lessons are highlighted.

Chapter 1

The king in the centre

This chapter contains ten games, in each of which at least one of the kings is in the centre, which influences the course of the struggle.

Chapter 2

Kings castled on the same side

In this chapter we view twelve attacking games in which both sides have castled on the same side.

In the last two games that we shall see, the queens are soon exchanged but nevertheless positions arise in which the kings come under attack.

Chapter 3

Kings castled on opposite sides

This chapter contains six games in which the attack develops against kings castled on opposite wings.

Chapter 4

Attack, defence and counterattack

In the final chapter there are eight games in which the roles of attacker and defender are not permanent, giving rise to counterattacks.

Chapter 1

The king in the centre

In this chapter we shall look at ten games in which at least one side's king remains in the centre and becomes an object of attack.

Game 1

“Romanishin, the romantic”

This was the title Oliver Reeh gave to his *Chessbase* column when commenting on this game in his excellent training section.

Oleg Mikhailovich Romanishin (Lviv, Ukraine 1952) was European Junior Champion in 1973. He was a member of the USSR team in the 1978 Olympiad in Buenos Aires and later played for Ukraine in five Olympiads, from 1992 to 2000. He was also a member of the victorious USSR teams in the European Team Championships in 1977, 1980 and 1983, where he also won the individual gold medal for his board. He was also in the Ukrainian team in 1992 (team silver), 1999 and 2001.

He has won a large number of international tournaments; from 1977 to 1983 he was frequently listed as one of the ten best chess players in the world.

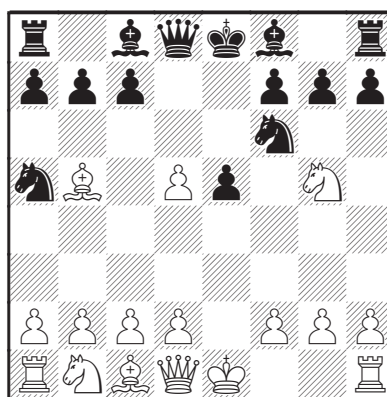
His style is considered to be aggressive and dynamic with a penchant for secondary lines in the openings based on his own ideas, such as 4.g3 in the Nimzo-Indian Defence, revitalised by Romanishin in the 1970s.

We shall see a demonstration of this treatment of the opening in our game.

Robert Baskin (1999) is a young German FM and trainer.

▷ **Robert Baskin**
 ▶ **Oleg Romanishin**
Two Knights Defence [C58]
 Sharjah (7), 23.09.2021

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♞c6 3.♙c4 ♞f6 4.♘g5
 d5 5.exd5 ♞a5 6.♙b5+



6...♙d7

Question: This doesn't seem like a safe decision to me; I'm not familiar with this line, but I thought that 6...c6 was practically forced. Is this a new move? Why does Black deviate?

Answer: It can't be described as new, since it had already been played in the 19th century, but it's true that it has begun to be played more frequently in recent years.

The reason for deviating from the more usual line is generally to get away from theory with excessive analysis, in order to play new positions.

Your scepticism is shared by the 2023 analysis engines, which also prefer 6...c6.

7. ♖e2

White wants to keep the extra pawn, which would not be the case after 7. ♙xd7+ or the retreat of the bishop.

7... ♗e7

Question: Why e7, occupying the e-file?, wouldn't 7... ♗d6 be more active?

Answer: Of course it's possible, but Black prefers to create 'X-ray' pressure on the g5-knight.

After e.g. 7... ♗d6 8. ♙xd7+ ♖xd7 9. ♘c3 the d5-pawn is defended and after 9...0-0 10.a3! is unpleasant, as Morozevich demonstrated, threatening b2-b4.

Instead of castling Black should sacrifice the pawn with 9...c6, gaining some compensation, but with a sound position for White after 10.dxc6 ♘xc6 11.d3.

8. ♘f3

The alternative is 8. ♘c3, but here 8. ♙xd7+ ♖xd7 9. ♘c3 is less good due to 9... ♘xd5!, and White must look for a way to equalise; it would be a mistake to play 10. ♖xe5 ♘b4 11. ♖xa5 ♘xc2+ 12. ♔d1 ♘xa1, with advantage to Black, the bad situation of the white king and the poor coordination of his pieces prevents him from taking advantage of the offside positioning of the black knight.

8...e4

The sharpest move but it isn't clear whether it's better than 8...0-0 or 8... ♘xd5; in the latter case Black need not fear 9. ♙xd7+ ♖xd7 10. ♘xe5 ♖e6, or 10... ♖f5, while after 9. ♘xe5 c6 10. ♙d3 ♙e6, with plans of castling and/or playing ... ♘f4, ... ♗d6, e.g. Black would have reasonable compensation for the pawn.

9. ♘e5 c6

Question: Why sacrifice the pawn immediately instead of playing e.g. 9...0-0, postponing the decision? Is Black's move better?

Answer: The sacrifice of the pawn is inevitable; after 9...0-0 10. ♘xd7 ♘xd7 11. ♖xe4 ♘f6 12. ♖f3 Black's compensation for the pawn is doubtful; White is about to castle, the ♘a5 needs to get back into the game and the play is simple.

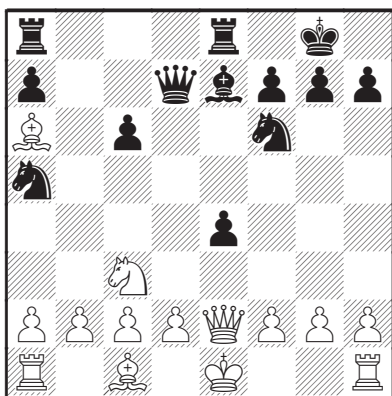
Black prefers to sacrifice it and keep the position rather unclear.

There is already no way back. It's possible that the conclusion is that objectively both 8...0-0 and 8...♘xd5 are preferable, but in practice it's another matter, because it isn't simple for White to find the most accurate way.

10.dxc6 bxc6 11.♘xd7

White exchanges before the bishop moves to e6, threatening 12...♖d4.

11...♖xd7 12.♗a6 0-0 13.♘c3 ♖fe8



14.b3

Question: White could have castled earlier and could also castle now; is this move better?

Answer: White wants to castle kingside; if he manages to do so he will be much better protected than on the queenside.

White's move isn't bad, although it isn't better than 14.0-0!; it's true that 14...♗d6 with the idea of ...♘g4 is unpleasant and forces White to calculate accurately after 15.d3! ♘g4 16.h3 ♘h2 17.♖d1 ♘f3+, when, although scary, Black's initiative splutters out after 18.♗h1 ♘d4 19.♖d2 and it's even possible to play 18.gxf3

♖xh3 19.f4 ♗e6 20.♘xe4, and White can defend against the attack.

14...♘d5

Black tries to keep the game complicated, in order to force White to take decisions and will need to continue to play accurately.

15.♗b2?!

A questionable decision, at least from a practical viewpoint.

It was better to eliminate the knight with 15.♘xd5 cxd5 and now it's very important to play 16.♗b5!, inconveniencing the black pieces with the pin, and then after 16...♘c6 continuing with 17.♗b2, followed by a decision about where to place the king.

Instead, 16.♗b2 can be answered with 16...♖ab8! and White is forced to castle kingside, since 17.0-0? runs into 17...♖b6! and White is almost lost; Black threatens 18...♖c6, winning a piece.

If the bishop retreats after 18.♖f1 ♖c6 Black gains a mating attack with 19...♖ec8.

If 18.♗d4 Black also launches a decisive offensive with 18...♖eb8!, e.g. 19.♗xb6 ♖xb6 and now if 20.♖f1 in order to retreat the bishop Black has the devastating 20...♖a4!.

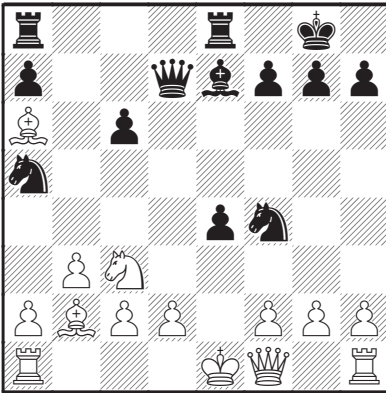
Exercise (easy): How did Black respond?

Answer:

15...♘f4

Of course, as a first step the knight is activated with gain of tempo.

16.♖f1



Exercise: How did Romanishin continue?

Answer:

16... ♔g4!

Preventing castling and putting pressure on g2.

17. ♞e2?

This really is an error, one which costs the game; White tries to castle, trusting that 17... ♞xg2+ leaves the knight pinned and opens the g file in White's favour.

Correct was 17. ♞e2!, with a good position after 17... ♞xg2 18.0-0-0.

Exercise: On the other hand the obvious 17.g3? is a mistake, why?

Answer: Because of the lovely sequence 17... ♞a3! 18. ♞xa3 ♞d3+!, winning.

Exercise: How did Romanishin respond to 17. ♞e2?

Answer:

17... ♞xg2+

Without fearing ghosts; the insecurity of White's king will make it impossible for him to take advantage of the pin and the opening of the g-file.

18. ♔d1

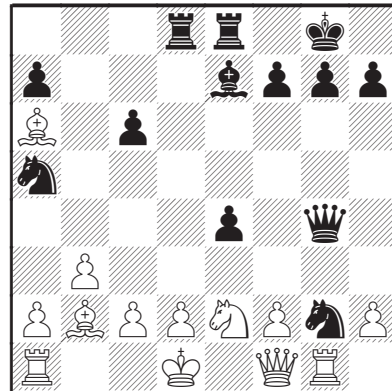
Exercise (easy): What to do now?

Answer:

18... ♖ad8!

Bringing the inactive rook into play; on the other hand 18... ♞f4? is punished with 19. ♖g1 and the tables are turned.

19. ♖g1



Exercise: How did Romanishin demonstrate the romanticism mentioned by Oliver Reeh?

Answer:

19... ♖xd2+

The White King is forced to 'take a walk'.

20. ♔xd2

Exercise: How to continue now?

Answer:

20... ♞g5+!