

Contents

Symbols	6
Acknowledgements	7
Bibliography	9
Preface: Why Zebras?	11
Part 1: Improving Our Capacity to Improve	13
1 What to Do When You Think There is a Hole in Your Bucket	15
Learning and Unlearning	16
Hindsight and Foresight	18
Knowledge and Skill	24
The Intelligent Unconscious	26
Developing Skill	28
2 Psycho-Logics	30
The Importance of Not Having a Clue	35
Identity	36
Folk Psychology	41
3 Storytelling	44
Chess Narratives	46
Vague Narratives	46
Opening Narratives	48
'Reading' the Position and 'Writing' the Position	50
Fabulation	50
4 Which Myth are You Playing By?	53
Myths and Style	54
The Sacrificial Attacker	54
The Thwarted Genius	58
The Noble Apprentice	58
5 Concentrate! Concentrate? Concentrate.	64
Learning to Concentrate	65

The Lazy Detective	68
Can You Make any Useful Moves before Your First Move?	74
Part 2: A Mental Toolkit for the Exponential Jungle	78
6 Why is Chess so Difficult?	79
The Exponential Problem	79
Words	80
'Anomie'	82
Planning in Pencil and Playing in Pen	85
Moves and Ideas	89
'Control'	92
Finding Beauty in Ugly Moves	95
Learning from Proteus	101
7 Something that Works for Me	102
The Four Dimensions <i>Redux</i>	104
<i>Material</i>	104
<i>Opportunity</i>	110
<i>Time</i>	112
<i>Quality</i>	116
Psychology as a Fifth Dimension?	137
8 Doing and Being	139
Chess and Taoism	141
Modes of Being	147
Why is the Threat Stronger than its Execution?	147
Keeping the Tension	148
Brilliance without Dazzle	150
9 Why Shouldn't I Be Defensive?	157
Losing a Pawn to Gain a Position	160
The Spirit of Resistance	165
10 Glorious Grinding	172
And the Rest is Just a Lack of Technique...	172
Staying Power	176
Gumption Revisited	180
When 'Simple' is Not So Simple	185
Intrinsic Motivation	187

Part 3: Thinking Colourfully about Black and White	192
11 Three Types of Theory and What They Mean in Practice	193
Will Ceteris find Paribus on the Chessboard?	193
Hypertheory	201
Elite Theory	206
Our Theory	208
Who's Afraid of the Plusequs?	209
Practice	212
12 White's Advantage	217
The Initiative	217
Serve-and-Volley Chess	219
The Draw Bully	222
13 Black's Advantage	225
Is Adorjan OK?	226
'Zugzwang Lite'	230
Is Suba's Joke Funny?	235
Black's Potential	236
What's so Special about the Sicilian?	243
14 Finally...	246
Endnotes	252
Index of Players	254
Index of Openings	255

13 Black's Advantage

The soft overcomes the hard; the gentle overcomes the rigid. Everyone knows this is true, but few can put it into practice.

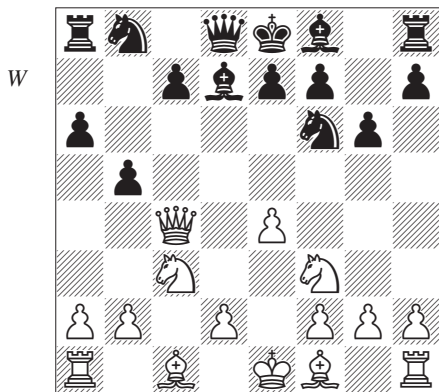
LAO TZU

Given that White begins the game with certain obvious advantages, whatever advantages Black might begin the game with must be relatively subtle, if they exist at all. Nonetheless, I do believe that there are certain advantages to playing with Black, and certain ways of playing that make it more likely for these advantages to become relevant. In short, Black's advantage arises from the expectations that White's advantage creates, and also from a deep understanding of the limitations of the initiative.

Conquest – Rowson

Torshavn 2000

1 ♞f3 ♜f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♝c3 d5 4 ♖a4+ ♚d7 5 ♗b3 dxc4 6 ♗xc4 a6 7 e4 b5 (D)



8 ♗e2!

This move came as a surprise (I only knew that 8 ♗b3?! c5! is comfortable for Black) but it had been played a few times before this game with devastating effect and I should really have

known about it. White threatens all sorts of nasty tricks with e5 and ♞g5 , with ♗f3 or e6 to follow. This is quite a good example of 'the initiative' in action. White is 'doing things' here. He is creating threats, and Black does not seem to be fully ready to deal with what is coming his way. However, the following shows why we shouldn't be unduly afraid of the initiative and how accurate play can absorb it.

8... ♚c8!!

A powerful and paradoxical move. It is powerful because it takes the sting out of White's idea of playing e5, increases the queen's control over d4 and increases Black's options (e.g., ... ♚b7 and ... ♚g4 are both possible). The move is paradoxical because Black's problems seemed to stem from his lack of development, and superficially this retreat to the back rank just makes them worse. However, the move is a good illustration of the kind of thinking Black needs to keep the initiative under control.

8 ♗e2 is a very tricky move, but it is also artificial, and compromises the coordination of White's position considerably. This means that if White cannot use his current configuration to make something of his initiative, he will need to take time to reorganize his position, and during that time Black will catch up in development and start causing problems.

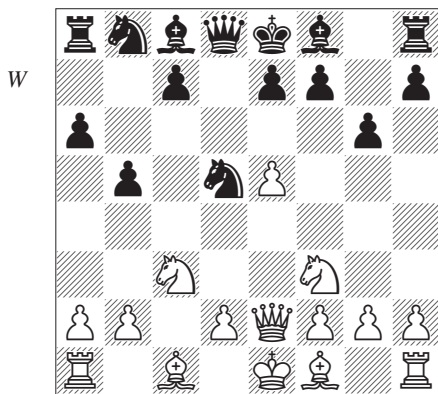
Moreover, $8... \text{♚c8}$ is not as difficult to find as you might think. If you look at the position without prejudice, you find that it arises from the needs of the position. Black definitely needs to meet e5 with ... ♞d5 ; otherwise he will be pushed back and lose coordination. Playing ...e6 or ...c6 uses precious time and further weakens the black position. Therefore, in order to make ... ♞d5 possible, the bishop needs to move from d7. Where should it go? If it goes to c6 the c-pawn is hampered and the b8-knight grumbles: after $8... \text{♚c6}$ 9 a3 ♚g7 10 d4 White

is very comfortable. If it goes to e6, Black will have to lose further time and move the bishop again to avoid being rolled over in the centre: 8...♙e6 9 d4 ♙c4 10 ♖c2 ♙xf1 11 ♗xf1 is much better for White; g3 and ♗g2 will follow and White's centre is strong while Black's queenside is weak. If the bishop goes to g4 there is a more immediate problem: 8...♙g4 9 e5 ♗d5 10 ♖e4! ♙xf3 11 ♖xf3 e6 12 ♗xd5 ♖xd5 13 ♖xd5 exd5 14 d4 with a comfortable edge in the ending. Therefore, as Sherlock Holmes once put it: once you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth. Hence 8...♙c8!!.

9 e5

After 9 d4 ♙g7 Black can carry on with his kingside development and decide what to do with his c8-bishop in the future.

9...♗d5 (D)



10 ♗g5

10 d4 ♙g7 looks fine for Black because I will be able to castle safely and counterattack in the centre with ...c5 or ...f6.

10...e6

Necessary to support the knight on d5.

11 d4 ♙e7!

Gaining some time to catch up in development. In general the bishop would rather be on g7, but given that White's queen is on e2, I felt that both sides will probably have to rearrange their forces at a later stage and that the priority at this stage was to make the g5-knight declare its intentions.

12 h4!

A worthwhile move, more or less forcing me to have a weak pawn on h6. 12 ♗f3 ♙b7 13 ♙h6 ♗d7 with ...c5 to follow looks comfortable for Black.

12...h6 13 ♗f3

13 ♗ge4 ♙b7 (13...♗c6!?) 14 g3 ♗d7 15 ♙g2 c5 16 dxc5 ♗xc3 17 bxc3 ♗xc5 18 0-0 ♗xe4 19 ♙xe4 ♙xe4 20 ♖xe4 ♖c8 and now Black's structural advantage is balanced by his lag in development and the fact that he has to lose further time in order to connect his rooks (e.g. with ...♗f8-g7).

13...♙b7 14 g3 c5!

The simplest solution. 14...♗xc3 15 bxc3 ♖d5 and 14...♗d7 15 ♙g2 ♗xc3 16 bxc3 ♗b6 are also possible, but less clear-cut because White's centre remains relatively firm. After 14...c5 the following sequence is almost forced and Black emerges with a slight edge.

15 dxc5 ♗xc3 16 bxc3 ♗d7 17 ♙g2 ♗xc5 18 0-0 ♖d3

I was very satisfied with the way the game had gone, and wanted to end the tournament with a positive feeling so I offered a draw. However, I underestimated my position a little, and could perhaps have played on, though after 19 ♖xd3 ♗xd3 20 a4! the position is drawish in any case.

1/2-1/2

I like the move 8...♙c8!! because it maximizes the potential in Black's position, and by doing so it absorbs the white initiative. We shall look at the role of 'potential' in more detail later in this chapter, when we revisit some of Mihai Suba's ideas from *Dynamic Chess Strategy*. Suba's ideas are subtle, which is appropriate given that, as I've said, Black's advantages are subtle too. However, to set the scene for Suba's ideas about playing Black, we need to begin by considering the ideas of another chess theorist, Andras Adorjan.

Is Adorjan OK?

Adorjan is often considered to be a bit of a maverick, but his contention that 'Black is OK!' is one of the most important chess ideas of the last

two decades. It is an important idea because it has shaken our assumption that White begins the game with some advantage, and revealed its ideological nature (see Chapter 11). I should make it clear immediately that I don't agree with much of what Adorjan says, and I often don't like the way he says it, but any discussion of 'Black's advantage' in chess would feel empty without some consideration of Adorjan, and what he has been trying to impress upon a bemused chess world for most of his life.

My overall feeling is that Adorjan's writings shed more heat than light on the issue of the first-move advantage. The heat is important, because it makes ideological claims uncomfortable, and encourages players to question the assumption that White is better. **However, I have always felt that a simple point knocks the steam out of Adorjan's ideas: 'White is better' and 'Black is OK' need not be mutually exclusive claims.** We only begin to shed light on the first-move issue when we look more closely at what it means (if anything) to say that White is 'better' and in what sorts of ways Black can ensure that he is 'OK'.

Adorjan's books and articles are freely available, so rather than repeat all of his ideas I have selected only the most compelling points, and those that seem to be worth developing:

1) *One of Black's advantages is that White has a certain responsibility to play for a win. In most cases, after the pieces have been developed, White is the first one to try to do something. Some players don't like this, and are not so good at it.*

This strikes me as true, and I know that in my own case there are certain players I would rather play as Black, because they take the responsibility of 'White's advantage' seriously and often make mistakes as a result. However, this point has limited applicability because in my experience most players are itching to 'do something' with both colours (see Chapter 8)!

2) *Neither side should be trying to 'equalize' from the starting position because the starting position is equal.*

This is a conflation of 'drawn' and 'equal' based on a failure to distinguish between theory and hyper-theory. We do not know for a fact that the starting position is drawn, but it does seem like a safe assumption from a hypertheoretical point of view. However, it is something entirely different to say that the position is 'equal' because this is a theoretical assessment, not a 'hypertheoretical' one. The alternative to the position being drawn is that it is winning for White or winning for Black, but the alternative to it being equal is that it is a bit better for White or for Black. That said, I agree that the idea of Black trying to 'equalize' is questionable. I think that it has limited application to a few openings, rather than being an opening prescription for Black in general.

3) *In many opening books, where an assessment is given as equal, if you look closely you find that Black is already better.*

I am not sure about this, and I certainly don't agree with the extent to which Adorjan seems to think it is true. However, there is some similarity between this point and what I say about 'the plusequs' in Chapter 11. 'Chess ideology' does affect the assessments given in opening books.

4) *Adorjan quotes Lajos Portisch as saying that about two-thirds of chess openings are disadvantageous for Black. So there is the remaining one-third, and all Black has to do is play these openings and defences, and then he has nothing to fear.*

I don't know exactly what Portisch said, but this strikes me as an important point. I was recently chatting to Michael Adams about the various problems with 1 e4 and why I chose to switch, for now, to 1 d4 in most games. He agreed that there were problems, particularly in certain Sicilian lines, but seemed to accept this as normal and added with typical wit: "Well, you can't play against the Pirc every day." No offence is intended to Pirc players, but you have probably noticed that it is rarely played at the very highest levels. At my level it is still a viable opening, but I think the elite players consider it too generous to White.