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Preface

The club player is unaware of the subtleties that exist in grandmaster chess both strategically and tactically. The psychology of the chess struggle is even less well understood. Grandmasters analyze chess at a depth that is unfathomable to amateurs; moreover, they have extensive knowledge of chess history and opening theory as well as extraordinary endgame technique and tactical vision. However, having reached such a high level can make it difficult to understand what is lacking in the mind of the amateur, and therefore, what to explain, what not to explain, what to assume, etc. The purpose of this book is to bridge the gap between grandmaster and amateur through a conversation between Grandmaster Boris Gulko, the only player to hold both the USSR and US championship titles, and student Joel R. Sneed, PhD, a professor of psychology and amateur chess player.

Introduction

Joel: Could you tell me a little bit about your development as a chess player, when you started and what that was like?

Boris: In 1959, at the age of 12, I entered the House of Pioneers chess club for the first time. My first impression of the game was that it was a world of adventure, a world where pawns become queens and the weak unexpectedly conquer the strong. One has to apply one's mind with all one's strength and miracles will come to pass on the board. As I gradually assimilated the logic of chess, its world began to acquire order. Thirteen years of training later and I learned to navigate the wild seas of complications, the calm waters of maneuvering, the labyrinths of strategy, and the depths of the endgame. In the following 37 years, I discovered for myself much that was new. When I lost my youth, first and foremost, I discovered a quality in myself useful in any endeavor: the nurturing of character. Like the acquisition of the depths of strategy, this process is never completed. At the beginning of the journey, I was excessively self-confident; in my mature years, I now and then underestimate myself, and chess always corrects my self-assessment.

Joel: One of the things that attract me to chess is how much you can learn about yourself through the game. What your central conflicts are as a person, how you cope with these conflicts. What powerful feelings you have and in what way you defend against and manage them (sometimes) in order to keep your wits about you. The fundamentals of psychic conflict, between love and hate (aggression), which Freud articulated so well at the turn of the century, are right there in front of you to see (if you choose to).

Boris: Yes, our game teaches us the faculty of combat in a high-stress situation. Your opponent is at a level close to yours and invests all his energy in the game. To succeed you must understand the dynamics of the struggle and be able to control yourself. Now, having completed my competitive journey, I have decided to share what I have learned with you and interested readers.

Joel: Can you tell us a little something about your chess achievements?

Boris: I had two chess careers. One in the Soviet Union (finished in 1979 when we applied for emigration) and the second started seven years later after I reached the US in 1986. The highlights of my first career are winning the Moscow Championship – 1974 and 1981. In 1975, I tied for second with three other players (Tal, Vaganian, and Romanishin) in the USSR Championship, and in 1977, I became co-champion.

Joel: Who were your major competitors at that time?

Boris: Petrosian, Tal, Karpov, Polugaevsky, Geller, and Smyslov among others.

Joel: Wow! That's amazing. I'm always so amazed that your "colleagues" in those years were world champions or world champion contenders.

Boris: Another big step for me was qualifying for the World Championship Interzonal tournament in 1975, when I tied for first with three others. I tied for first with Jan Timman in two international tournaments in Yugoslavia: Sombor 1974 and Niksic 1978. Interestingly, 27 years later I tied for first again with Jan Timman in the Malmö tournament in Sweden. I also won the Capablanca Memorial in Cuba (1976). This was the extent of my participation in international tournaments because I simply was not allowed to travel by the Soviet authorities. After I immigrated to the United States, I played in more international tournaments each year than I did my whole life in the USSR.

Joel: It sounds like you had quite a struggle with the Soviet system.

Boris: Well, you know, the most severe duel of my life came not in chess but in a battle with the Soviet system. We applied for immigration in May of 1979 but did not leave until seven years later. During those years my opponent was the "armed wing of the Communist party" – the KGB – which I wrote about in my book, *The KGB Plays Chess*. The culmination of this "game" with the KGB was a month of daily demonstrations with my wife Anna Akhsharumova (Gulko) when each day we were arrested. (By the way, my wife was also a very strong chess player who won both the USSR championship – twice – and the US championship.) Nevertheless, this campaign won our freedom. I am certain that my experience with struggle in chess helped in this engagement.

Joel: So you lost seven years of your career?

Boris: Yes, from the age of 32-39, but I finally immigrated to the United States in 1986 and started my second career in chess. In 1994, I qualified as one of eight

candidates for the match with Kasparov, along with Visly Anand, Nigel Short, and Vladimir Kramnik among others. I drew the match with Short but lost on tiebreak. I was in the top 16 for the World Championship in 2000 but again was unlucky in a tiebreak. I won the US Championship in 1994 with 7 wins, 6 draws, and no losses, 1½ points ahead of Yasser Seirawan and Larry Christiansen, who tied for second place. In 1999, I won the US Championship again. My other achievements included winning the US Open Championship in 1998 and 2007; I also won the World Open, American Open, and USA Masters. In addition, I won various international tournaments including:

France: Marseilles 1986 – 1; Paris 1987 – 1; Cannes 1987 – 1-2.

Switzerland: Biel 1987 – 1-2; Biel 1988 – 1-2; Berne 1994 – 1.

Spain: León 1992 – 1; Las Palmas 1996 – 1; San Sebastián 1986 – 2.

Italy: Rome 1988 – 1-3; Reggio Emilia 1991 – 2.

Denmark: Copenhagen 2000 – 1-3.

Sweden: Malmö 2001 – 1-2.

Holland: Amsterdam 1987 – 2-4; Amsterdam 1988 – 1-3.

Germany: Munich 1991 – 2-5.

Armenia: Yerevan 1994 – 3.

USA: San Francisco 1995– 2-3.

Canada: Montréal 1992 – 1.

Chile: Vina del Mar 1988 – 2; Curaçao 2003 – 1-3, 2004 – 1-2.

Colombia: Ibague 1997 – 1-2; Cali (continental championship) 2001 – 2-5.

Joel: Wow, that's amazing. You managed to accomplish quite a lot and in the face of tremendous adversity. It is a real privilege to be able to work with you. Let's tell the reader how we came to decide to write this book.

Boris: When I started to work with you, I found that your attitude towards studying chess was typical for American club players. You like others had a desire to study openings, which you thought could inevitably bring you to victory. When we went over your games you also focused on your openings and felt that the battle occurred there. We started with studying openings (of course you need to know a

little about it), but as we progressed I began to focus more and more on teaching you the elements of strategy and tactics as they occurred in high-level games. As we went through games, it seemed that games of my own were most instructive to you. Here your natural curiosity about psychology came through as you pressed me to explain how and why I made one decision over another. Here the idea came to us to take this conversation and make it available to everyone.

Joel: Right, I was especially interested in representing the average club player in the conversation, and thought that my training in interviewing and psychotherapy would enable me to help draw out some of the nuances that are not accessible to the average chess player.

Boris: But I know from my years of learning that familiarity with good examples only doesn't make a player develop the necessary problem solving skills. So I marked in the games we were working on critical moments and began asking you to find the correct way. I also marked each problem noting its level of complexity to give you a sense of what kind of effort was required in the position.

We started with less complicated games and moved to more complicated. I was satisfied as from lesson to lesson I could see an increase in your understanding of chess strategy. Of course, you were simultaneously learning elements of tactics and the dynamics of the chess struggle and its psychology. I found it especially interesting to discuss with you questions of chess psychology. As professor of psychology, you found deep connections between my practical advice and theoretical psychology. Maybe you could tell the reader a little bit about yourself?

Joel: Of course. I am from New York City and attended NYU as an undergraduate where I majored in psychology. I received my PhD in clinical psychology at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, studying change in personality across the lifespan. After completing a postdoctoral fellowship in statistics, I began focusing my research on geriatric depression as a post-doctoral fellow at Columbia University and the New York State Psychiatric Institute. I am now Assistant Professor of Psychology at Queens College of the City University of New York, an adjunct Assistant Professor of Medical Psychology at Columbia University and the New York State Psychiatric Institute in the Departments of Geriatric Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology. I am Director of the Lifespan Lab and my research is funded by the National Institute of Mental Health. As a clinical psychologist, I have received extensive training in the assessment and treatment of psychopathology. (If readers would like to learn more about me or my research, they can visit <www.lifespanlab.org>.)

Boris: Very impressive. It seems to me that your background as a scientist may have created some additional problems for your progress in chess. I realized this early on because your method of thinking is too abstract. As a researcher, you want rules and general principles and to treat chess like science, but chess is part science, part art, and part sport, which is what makes it so fascinating. After reading some classical books in chess instruction like Nimzowitsch's *My System*, you were armed with knowledge about some common ideas, but under the influence of these books (and perhaps your scientific background) you developed too dogmatic an attitude for evaluating chess positions. This is one of the reasons I began to set problems for you in order of difficulty to make the process of thinking and solving chess problems more concrete. I think together we realized that it might be useful to prepare a book of my games using the method we developed, and so we set off on our journey.

Joel: And so we did.

Boris: Side by side we examined my games against: Karpov, discussing the struggle for an open file; Kasparov (two games), discussing questions about the strategy of defense; Hübner, learning about prophylaxis; Smyslov, studying weak squares; Korchnoi and Shabalov (as White), discussing the secret of positions with only major pieces. Throughout I tried to discuss with you the paradoxical problems inherent in chess strategy. In my games with Gelfand and Shabalov (as Black), it was a pawn sacrifice aimed at excluding from action one of my opponent's pieces; in the game with Yusupov, it was the premise for counterattack; with Hort and Adams, it was a discussion about real and phantom weaknesses; with Browne, we examined the advantages of double pawns in the center; with Hector, we focused on the sudden change of plans and a pawn storm for positional purposes; with Suetin, it was about the pluses of weak and isolated pawns, which leave for your peaces a lot of open files and diagonals; with Larsen, we concerned ourselves with the qualities of "bad" bishops; i.e. that they are not useful in defense but they can be very valuable when you have the initiative. The elements of chess strategy contained in these games make up a large portion of modern chess strategy often not discussed in classical manuals. My goal was to make this inner knowledge available to you.

As I indicated before, chess cannot be mastered simply by reading. As the remarkable training success of Mark Dvoretsky has shown, the best method of achieving mastery is the finding of solutions. Therefore, at appropriate moments I will suggest assignments to find the right path. The assignments will be at five levels of difficulty: (1) Uncomplicated. (2) More complicated. (3) Moderately complicated.

(4) Highly complicated. (5) Exceedingly complicated. In each of the games, I pose problems for you and the reader to solve, and you have been humble enough to make your thinking process known to everyone. I recommend that the reader solve these problems and to compare with both your analysis and mine. They will probably see similarities with your thinking process and my solutions are aimed to help correct the flaws in your reasoning.

Joel: Who is this book for?

Boris: I think this book will be extremely useful for club players who want to improve their understanding of chess strategy and broaden their arsenal of strategic ideas but I also think it will be interesting to professional players. When I played competitively, I used solving problems from practical games as an excellent tool for bringing myself to the best form, and the marked positions in the book can be used for this purpose for players of any strength.

Joel: Well, I think that about does it for our introduction unless you think we have left anything out?

Boris: No, I don't think so, let's get started. As I said, chess cannot be learned from reading!

Game Seven
B.Gulko-G.Kasparov
USSR Championship, Frunze 1981
Modern Benoni

Joel: Can you put this game in context? From a historical perspective.

Boris: The first time I played him was 1978. I was the favorite. I was the USSR Champion and he was a 15-year-old debutant, but he outplayed me and I drew with a miracle. By the time we played this game, he was already the favorite. He was winning all of the tournaments including this one (he tied for first with Psakhis). I was out of practice because I was a refusnik.

Joel: What is that and why were you out of practice?

Boris: Refusniks were Russian Jews who applied for emigration but were refused, which is where the term comes from. We were refusniks for seven years. For two of those years they didn't let me play chess in any tournaments – until our first hunger strike, and only then they allowed us to play in 2 or 3 tournaments a year, so in 1981 I started to return to chess.

Joel: Who is us?

Boris: Me and my wife.

Joel: Was it highly publicized?

Boris: Yes, it was a dramatic struggle, which I document in my book, *The KGB Plays Chess*.

Joel: Was Kasparov considered in 1981 the way Magnus Carlsen is today?

Boris: Yes, exactly. It was clear he would be the next world champion.

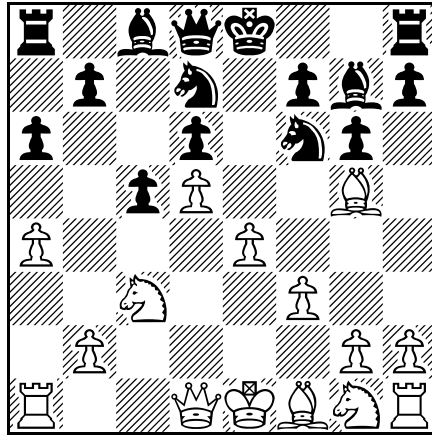
1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 c5 4 d5 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 e4 g6 7 f3

Joel: Can you say something about this move?

Boris: I transpose the game into a variation known from the Sämisch King's Indian. I started to play this line in the 1960s and won some important games, one against Geller. The idea behind this move is that in the Benoni White tries to play in the center with f2-f4 and e4-e5 because he has an extra pawn there. Here, with

the move f2-f3, White completely changes the plan. White wants a stable position in the center and expects Black to play on the queenside where White hopes to take advantage of weaknesses Black creates there.

7...Bg7 8 Bg5 a6 9 a4 Nbd7?!



Exercise: How can White prove that Black's last move was dubious? (difficulty level 2)

Boris: This natural move is a very serious mistake. For White, there is one problem: what to do with the knight on g1? From e2 it can only go to c1 (obviously not ideal) or g3 where it can get attacked by ...h5-h4. By playing 9...Nbd7, Black allows me to transfer the knight to f2 via h3 because he blocks his light-squared bishop. The f2-square is a very appropriate square for the knight in this system. The theory of this system with f2-f3 and Bg5 was only starting to develop and this was an important game as it became a very popular approach afterward.

Joel: What could he have played that would have prevented your knight maneuver?

Boris: Black should castle and keep the knight on b8 until I develop my knight from g1. This variation was very successful for White until Tal found the correct idea: 9...O-O 10 Nge2 h6 11 Be3 Re8 12 Ng3 h5 and now Black is ready to attack the white knight with the plan of ...Nh7 and ...f7-f5. The correct plan for Black in this variation is to play on the kingside not on the queenside. This was Tal's discovery.

Joel: Do you remember the game?

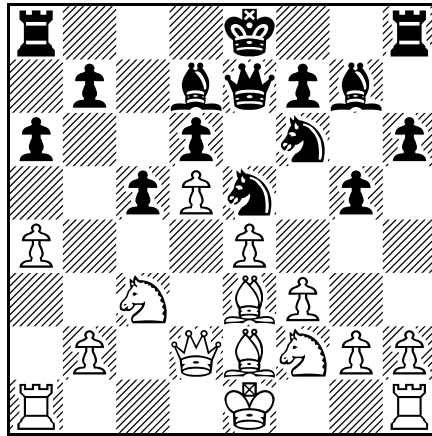
Boris: Well, it was not his game. He was helping Nakhimovskaya prepare for a game in a team competition and he showed her this plan. Therefore, although it was first played by Nakhimovskaya, it was Tal's plan.

10 Nh3! h6 11 Be3 Ne5 12 Nf2 Bd7 13 Be2 g5! 14 Qd2

Boris: An alternative plan for White is 14 f4!? gx4 15 Bxf4 Qe7 (15...0-0!?) 16 Qd2 h5 (16...Neg4!?) 17 Bg5!.

14...Qe7?!

Boris: It was better to play 14...Rb8 and if 15 a5 then 15...b5 16 axb6 Rxb6, sacrificing a pawn for questionable compensation.



Exercise: How does White have to play? (difficulty level 2)

15 a5!

Boris: Black's last move allowed me to fix his queenside and start to attack it.

15...Rb8 16 Na4

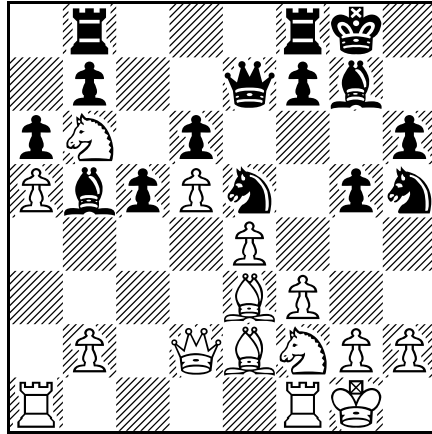
Joel: After 16 Na4 he can't move his b-pawn.

16...Nh5!?

Boris: With this move we see that Black is a great player. He sees that his game is

hopeless on the queenside so he starts to make something happen on the kingside at all costs. In the case of the natural 16...Bb5!? 17 O-O! I am ready to play Nh1-g3-f5 and his position is hopeless. (17 Nb6 Nfd7 was inferior for White.)

17 Nb6 Bb5 18 O-O O-O



Exercise: How does White proceed with his plan? (difficulty level 2)

19 b4!

Boris: This move is the culmination of White's queenside strategy.

19...c4!?

Boris: With this move he tries to decoy my pieces and, in the time it takes me to win the c-pawn, he hopes to create an attack on the kingside. In the case of 19...Bxe2 20 Qxe2 cxb4 21 Rab1 White would have a big advantage in a quiet situation.

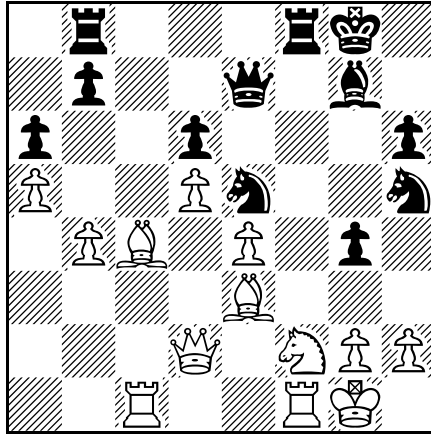
20 Rac1 f5!? 21 Nxc4 Bxc4 22 Bxc4 g4! 23 fxg4!

Boris: 23 f4?! Nxc4 24 Rxc4 g3! 25 hxg3 Nxc3 26 Rfc1 fxe4 would be wrong for White.

Joel: Why is this wrong?

Boris: Because in the final position there are equal pawns and Black has active opportunities.

23...fxg4



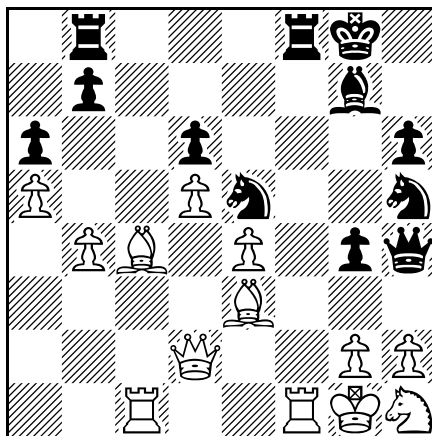
Exercise: How can White extinguish Black's activity on the kingside? (difficulty level 3)

Joel: White has the advantage. He is up a pawn (although it is backward) and has the bishop pair (although the light-squared bishop is currently obstructed by the e4- and d5-pawns). Black is trying to generate a kingside attack as the endgame would be bad for him. The pawn push ...g4-g3 must be part of this plan because exchanging would give Black a strong knight on g3, which could lead to a mating attack with ...Qh4 and ...Rxf2. Therefore, White should prevent this move. Also, White should aim to kill Black's counterplay and exchange pieces, heading towards the endgame when his extra pawn and bishop pair will give him a decisive advantage. The move 24 Nh1! accomplishes both of these goals.

Boris: Good! I would add that with this move I also kill the activity of his knight on h5. This reminds me of a very deep thought of Nimzowitsch's: *when we are attacking the best moves are very often the most beautiful, but when we are defending the best moves very often look ugly.*

24 Nh1! Qh4

Boris: During the game I considered the knight sacrifice as Black's last chance, but playing accurately White refutes the idea: 24...Nf3+!? 25 gxf3 gxf3 26 Ng3 Nxc3 27 hxg3 Qxe4 28 Bd3 Qg4 29 Qh2! Bd4 30 Bf2!.



25 Be2!

Joel: Why is this such a good move?

Boris: With this move I continue playing against the h5-knight and simultaneously over-protect the f3-square.

25...g3 26 Nxc3

Boris: Of course White has to get rid of his knight on h1 and trade off Black's knight on h5. It would be a mistake to take with the h-pawn; for example, 26 hxg3? Rxf1+ 27 Rxf1 Qxe4 28 Bxh5 Nc4 29 Nf2 Qxe3 and Black has escaped his troubles.

26...Nxc3 27 hxg3 Qxe4 28 Rxf8+ Rxf8 29 Bf4!

Joel: Why do you give this an exclamation point? It seems to me that you are just shutting down the kingside and consolidating your advantage.

Boris: After this move Black's initiative has evaporated. White has an extra pawn and a much better position. Generally speaking, the game is won.

29...h5 30 Rc7 Qb1+ 31 Qc1 Qg6

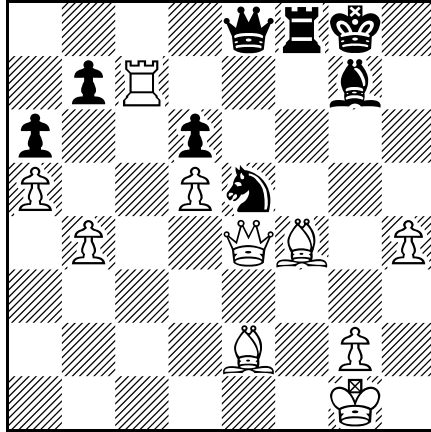
Boris: Black doesn't have 31...Qxb4 because of 32 Rxc7+ Kxc7 33 Bh6+ and White is winning.

32 Qc2 Qe8 33 Qe4

Boris: I planned a small combination here but during the game forgot about it and

made a move that is not worse but not so spectacular. I planned 33 Bh6! Nd7 (if 33...Nf7 34 Qg6 wins) 34 Bxg7 Kxg7 35 Bxh5 and wins.

33...h4 34 gxh4



34...Qd8

Boris: If 34...Ng6 then 35 Qxe8 Rxe8 36 Bh5 wins.

35 Rxb7 Qc8

Boris: If 35...Qxh4 then 36 Rxg7+ Kh8 37 g3 wins.

36 Re7 Qd8 37 Bg5 1-0

Boris: The game shows that a bad strategy in the opening can bring disaster even to the greatest of players. After White achieved the advantage on the queenside, Black tried everything to get active on the kingside but, using prophylaxis, White was able to extinguish Black's chances.

Joel: What I liked about the game, beside your prophylactic moves such as 24 Nh1, was actually how Kasparov tried his best to activate on the kingside. It demonstrates what you have often said that all great players will try to muddy the waters rather than suffer in a hopeless position. I know for myself that I have sat there lifeless and suffered defeat when I should have taken active chances.

Boris: That's correct. We will discuss this topic of muddying the waters in much greater detail when we analyze my game against Korchnoi (Game Sixteen).