

Efstratios Grivas

MONSTER

YOUR MIDDLEGAME

PLANNING

VOLUME 1



Chess
Evolution

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Key to symbols.....	5
Foreword	7
Evaluation — Plan — Execution	9

CHAPTER 1. PAWN CONCEPTS

Backward Pawn	13
Blockaded Pawn	31
Central Strike	49
Doubled Pawns.....	65
Hanging Pawns.....	83
Isolated Pawn	101
Passed Pawn	123
Pawn Islands	143
Shattered Pawns	161

CHAPTER 2. FILES & DIAGONALS CONCEPTS

Open File.....	181
Semi-Open File.....	199
Forepost.....	217
Outpost.....	235
Index of Games.....	253
Index of Openings (ECO Classification)	257

KEY TO SYMBOLS

=	Equality or equal chances
±	White has a slight advantage
∓	Black has a slight advantage
±	White is better
∓	Black is better
+−	White has a decisive advantage
−+	Black has a decisive advantage
∞	unclear
∞	with compensation
↔	with counterplay
↑	with initiative
→	with an attack
Δ	with the idea
□	only move
N	novelty
!	a good move
!!	an excellent move
?	a weak move
??	a blunder
!?	an interesting move
?!	a dubious move
+	check
#	mate

FOREWORD

I would like to thank Mr. Vasilis Andronis, Mr. Antonis Vragoteris and Mr. Manolis Kotsifis for being the first testers of the book, advising me with some important thoughts and suggestions.

The MYMP offers training on a vital subject, the choice of the ‘best’ available plan. As is commonly accepted in the chess world, a correct Evaluation of the position, a strong Plan and an accurate Execution are the three important factors that separate ‘the expert from the amateur’. In a way, efficient training on the three above mentioned concepts can help a chess player mature and lead him to new successful paths.

Back in 2007 I published my first English language book on planning (Modern Chess Planning — Gambit), which was later translated and published in the Greek, Spanish and Iranian languages, making it a best-seller. I took seriously the various recommendations and notes of the readers and so in that respect I improved the writing and the presentation of the tests aiming to fulfil your expectations.

Now, as said, the format changed, with 25 thematic chapters, where in each of them 4 tests are included. Each theme is analysed by modern concepts and tips, which will drive the reader to the right path. For me solving the tests is not the most important feature. Understanding them and learning how to do the job in an over-the-board game is far more important and what counts in the end of the day!

With this book I have sought to provide a training guide that will be helpful mostly to players in the 1500–2200 range — corresponding to a lower club level up to those with aspirations for a FIDE title.

Of course, the book may well also be useful for players weaker than 1500, or for those stronger than 2200, but this is a decision these players should make for themselves!

In this book there are 78 tests, each based around a game. In each of these tests, the starting point is the first diagram. There is an evaluation of the diagrammed position, which helps the reader to understand some important facts about the position itself.

A presentation of three possible plans follows. Then the reader must decide which is the most valuable/best plan. The best plan receives a maximum of 50 points. The other, less good, bad or indifferent plans normally receive some points or none at all, depending on their actual value and correctness. Some of the plans receive no points at all; they are just bad!

After completing the work on each test, the reader must take a look at the solution, where he can find the answers. In the solutions, the game is analysed until its end, so the reader can better understand why the rewarded plan was the ‘best’ in the position and how it worked out. There are a few examples where the best available plan was overlooked, but these are exceptions and the games are nevertheless quite interesting.

By this point, you will have received some very good training. But then, it will do no harm to measure your ‘strength’ on this subject. The maximum score is 3900 points and you should divide your total score by 1.5.

Total Points	Planning Strength
2400–2500	Grandmaster
2300–2399	International Master
2200–2299	FIDE Master
2000–2199	Candidate Master
1800–1999	National Master
1600–1799	National A’ Category
1400–1699	National B’ Category
1200–1399	National C’ Category
835–1199	Should try harder!

As one might notice from the score-table, expectations are a little higher than usual for the categories listed, as in this book the evaluation of the position is given by the author beforehand, and this is a great help for the reader. A correct evaluation of any position is one of the most significant factors in chess, but that could be the subject for another book.

It is now time for you to work and train on that important chess concept, the plan. Have fun and train well!

Athens, 2019
Efstratios Grivas

EVALUATION – PLAN – EXECUTION

The most important element in modern chess practice is probably correct planning. The plan is associated with evaluation and execution, three valuable concepts that cannot be separated and which most of the time determine the fate of our positions.

During my training sessions I do ask from my trainees the famous EPE procedure, as below:

SOS Tip 1 — EPE
1. Evaluation (strategical & tactical)
2. Plan (ours and our opponent's)
3. Execution (calculation & move)

That's the right order, although many trainers/authors do not really follow it — they prefer to teach first to move and then to think. With this way they have some success but they will never have a GM or a player near such strength.

Chess is a mind game — it asks you to think to find solutions, even if these solutions are more or less obvious.

In every position you must know where you are (evaluation), where you want to go (plan) and how you will go there (execution). So simple, but we tend to forget this procedure in the heat of battle.

Nowadays, chess games between decent players are full of small plans of different types and ideas, based on purely strategic and tactical motives. The one who will evaluate, plan and execute better than the opponent earns the first option to win the game.

A closer examination of games played between strong players will prove that there is some harmony among their moves, some central idea that guides the movements of their forces. This is what we call a plan. A good chess player refuses to act without any plan, even if this plan sometimes turns out to be mistaken in the long run.

First of all, it is important to identify the most important strategic and tactical elements of each particular position. According to the needs of that certain position, we should create our plan and stick to it. Games where only one plan is used are rarely seen these

days. We are usually obliged to create several small plans, which of course are just parts of our main design: winning!

Many weak players are not able to construct an acceptable plan. This has nothing to do with intelligence, but just with basic chess education. Nowadays, with so many books, electronic help and trainers available, anything can be learned and, by constant practice, it can be understood and assimilated. Without basic chess education and knowledge we can't go very far. So, the first step is to understand the basic strategic and tactical elements that govern our game.

Plans are necessary and can be found in every phase of a chess game. From the early opening till the late endgame, chess players create the necessary plans, derived from such varied factors as the occupation of an important square to an aggressive attack.

More common are the plans we draw right after the end of the opening phase, but this is of course not the rule. Nowadays, with the open-

ing theory having gone very far, the choice of a certain opening very much depends on a plan we would like to use!

Some general advice could be presented to the reader as follows:

SOS Tip 2 — Planning
1. Notice and understand the main merits and disadvantages of each side.
2. Notice the immediate threats of both sides, but especially of your opponent!
3. Determine what is (are) the main, most significant target(s) and how the plan should be executed.
4. Examine what will be the opponent's reaction to your plan.
5. Examine what your opponent's possible main plan is (can be) and how you should react to it.
6. If you can choose among two or more good plans, opt for the one that you think can bring most benefits.
7. Follow your plan. Do not change it without a really good reason.

CHAPTER 1.
PAWN CONCEPTS

BACKWARD PAWN

Ex-World Champion Max Euwe and the great theoretician Ludek Pachman tried to give the terminology of the backward pawn: A pawn which has been left behind by neighbouring pawns and can no longer be supported by them.

Such a pawn is almost invariably a serious disadvantage. They also noticed that it is the square in front of the pawn which causes all the trouble.

Another good definition of the backward pawn is that a pawn is backward when it lies on a semi-open file (very important) and constitutes the last part in a pawn chain or group, and thus cannot be protected by another pawn. In several cases an isolated pawn can also be a backward pawn, when it is situated deep in its own camp.

THE OLD APPROACH

The backward pawn is the only strategic element regarding pawn structures that has only disadvantages and

almost no merits, and therefore one is advised to avoid such pawns unless there are considerable compensating factors.

The backward pawn is the cause of multiple problems and disharmony, as it forces one's pieces to occupy passive positions in order to ensure its adequate protection.

The dangers facing the possessor of such a pawn are serious, because its presence usually leads to passivity and inactivity. The side that is attacking the pawn or is generally trying to exploit its presence has several viable plans at its disposal.

The first plan is simple and concerns the pawn itself. The opponent's pieces focus on it and eventually capture it, securing a material advantage.

The second plan revolves around the passivity of the defending pieces, which allows the opponent's army to develop a dangerous initiative on other parts of the board. This is the most common plan in practice, as the defending side usually succeeds in protecting the pawn.

The third plan consists of exploiting the outpost that is usually created right in front of the backward pawn.

Piece exchanges exacerbate the weakness of the backward pawn and increase its vulnerability in the endgame, as also happens with all pawn weaknesses in general.

It is also important to understand what exactly the term ‘backward pawn’ means and when such a pawn really constitutes a weakness for its side in each concrete position.

For example, in many variations of the ‘Sicilian Defence’ the backward black pawn on d6 is not such a serious weakness, as Black enjoys active counterplay as a compensating factor while White finds it very hard to approach the pawn.

THE MODERN APPROACH

Of course the old approach is definitely correct, but modern chess players are no longer as dogmatic as

they used to be. The modern players are more willing to take on backward pawns, although this mostly happens in particular openings with known characteristics.

So, we can say that backward pawns are in general less of a disadvantage than classical theory would imagine, and in some cases, no disadvantage at all.

With regard to this last point, John Watson quotes the ultra rebel GM Mihai Suba: ‘Bad bishops protect good pawns!’ A rather shocking principle, which he even modified to ‘Bad bishops protect bad pawns, but for good reasons!’

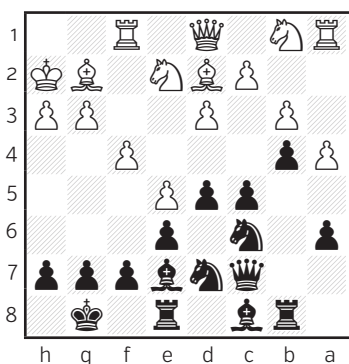
The idea puts the accent chiefly on the play of the pieces, their activity being sufficient to compensate for the weakness of the backward pawn.

Of course we can draw some important conclusions from the above facts, such as: a backward pawn needs its pieces on the board, does not like endgames and is ready to punish the dogmatic player who does not use his mind in a proper way!

EXERCISE 1

▷ **Frendzas Panayotis**▶ **Grivas Efstratios****B23** Athens 1996

1.e4 c5 2.♘c3 ♘c6 3.♘ge2 e6 4.g3
 ♞f6 5.♙g2 ♙e7 6.o-o o-o 7.h3 a6
 8.d3 ♖e8 9.f4 d5 10.e5 ♞d7 11.♚h2
 b5 12.a4 ♜b8 13.b3 ♚c7 14.♙d2 b4
 15.♘b1



EVALUATION

I have the feeling that my opponent is playing without a concrete plan, as it looks a bit of strange strategy to try to play on both sides. In these pawn structures White usually tries his cards on the kingside and Black on the queenside; both of them trying to open files and diagonals in their area. But it looks like I can create initiative on both the queenside and the centre, so I have to find the safest and long-term plan which suits better my position.

PLAN – EXECUTION

PLAN A

I feel that it is time to hit in the centre by **15...f6**. After the forced **16.exf6 ♙xf6** **17.♖a2**, I can continue with **17...♙b7**, with the idea of **...♖ad8**, centralising all my forces. Then, later, I will try to get a timed **...e5**, gaining the upper hand in the centre.

PLAN B

I can prepare for opening lines on the queenside, where is my main area of ‘operations’, so starting with **15...♞a5**, preparing **...c4**, looks like a great idea, especially as my opponent is not able to become ‘annoying’ on the their flank.

PLAN C

Playing on the queenside should be my primary thought. And I think that I can be forceful by the direct **15...c4**. As I am threatening to lock in the b1-knight by **...c3**, my opponent is obliged to take twice on c4, creating weak pawn structure. The pawn on c4 will be regained easily by a timed **...♘a5**.

Choose Your Plan		
A	B	C

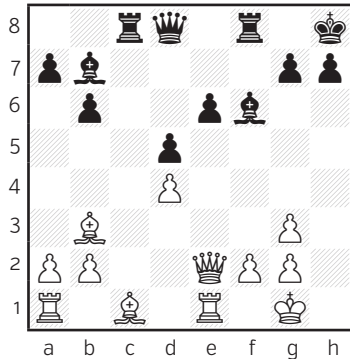
EXERCISE 2

▷ **Morozevich Alexander**

▶ **Petrushin Alexander**

B50 Krasnodar 1997

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.♙c4 ♘f6 4.d3
 ♘c6 5.c3 e6 6.♙b3 ♙e7 7.o-o o-o
 8.♖e1 b6 9.♘bd2 ♙b7 10.♘f1 ♖c8
 11.♘g3 ♘e5 12.d4 ♘xf3+ 13.♚xf3
 cxd4 14.cxd4 d5 15.e5 ♘e4 16.♚g4
 ♘xg3 17.hxg3 ♙h8 18.♚e2 f5 19.exf6
 ♙xf6



EVALUATION

I can be assured that I emerged with the slightly better pawn structure out of the opening phase. Of course my opponent's weak backward e-pawn is partly compensated by his own pressure on my d4-pawn, but I do not think that it is so serious. My primary plan should be to exert pressure on the backward e-pawn.

PLAN – EXECUTION

PLAN A

I should also care for my development, so starting with 20. ♙e3, following by ♖ad1, looks like a great setup. I can later go for ♚h5 and g4-g5, creating too many problems for my opponent, especially I will get the diagonal b1-h7 for my bishop.

PLAN B

A good idea should be to exchange the darksquared bishops, eliminating any primary pressure on my d4-pawn. So, I should try to get the ♙f4-e5 idea, but this needs some preparation, as my d4-pawn is hanging. So, I will start with 20. ♚d3 ♚d7 21. ♙f4, getting ready for ♙e5. After this exchange, Black will be passive and he will have just to defend his weakness on e6.

PLAN C

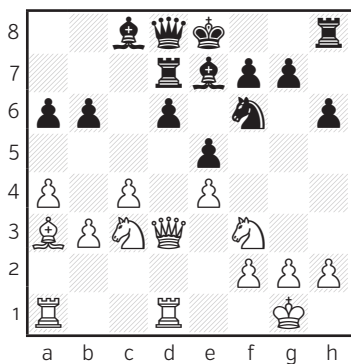
My thoughts are the same as in Plan B, but the way to do it should be different; I will go for 20. ♖d1 ♚d7 21. ♙f4, preparing the exchange of the darksquared bishops, which will put my opponent into a passive position.

Choose Your Plan		
A	B	C

EXERCISE 3

- ▷ Tiviakov Sergei
 ▶ Anand Viswanathan
 B51 Baden Baden 2012

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.♙b5+ ♘d7 4.d4
 cxd4 5.♚xd4 a6 6.♙xd7+ ♙xd7
 7.c4 e5 8.♚d3 h6 9.♘c3 ♘f6 10.o-o
 ♙e7 11.a4 b6 12.b3 ♖a7 13.♖d1 ♙c8
 14.♙a3 ♗d7



EVALUATION

A backward pawn position, typical of the ‘Sicilian Defence’ is on the board. But this is quite unpleasant for my opponent, and while he is in no immediate danger, nor does he have any active prospects. I should mainly try to exploit the weaknesses of the backward pawn and especially the square in front of it. The bishop pair of my opponent is irrelevant in this position, as no activity can be emerged.

PLAN – EXECUTION

PLAN A

I should try to add more weaknesses to my opponent’s position, so it seems good to go for 15. ♙b4 o-o (15...a5 16. ♙a3, weakens square b5 as well) 16.a5, when a new weakness on the queenside will appear soon; the a6-pawn.

PLAN B

Landing with a knight on d5-square seems like a good policy. I should get both my knights ready for this, so I should transfer my f3 one to e3 via d2-f1 or e1-c2. So, I should opt for 15. ♘d2 o-o 16. ♘f1 ♙b7 17. ♘e3. If all light pieces are exchanged later on d5, the remaining army suits my position.

PLAN C

My opponent is guarding quite well his backward pawn, so I have little to expect from. I should change my policy and go for 15. ♘d5 ♘xd5 16.cxd5, where I will benefit from the opening of the c-file, as my pieces are far much more mobile than my opponent’s.

Choose Your Plan		
A	B	C

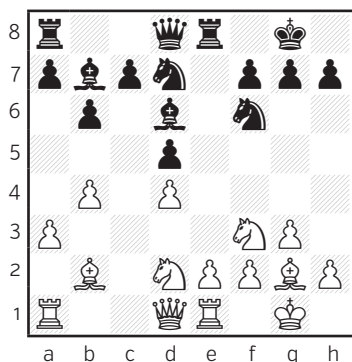
EXERCISE 4

▷ Grivas Efstratios

▷ Klimis Laertis

E11 Athens 2007

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♕b4+
 4.♘bd2 d5 5.a3 ♖e7 6.g3 o-o 7.♕g2
 ♘bd7 8.o-o b6 9.cxd5 exd5 10.b4
 ♖e8 11.♕b2 ♖d6 12.♖e1 ♕b7



EVALUATION

As I have obtained a somewhat spatial advantage, I should stand slightly better, but far from something extraordinary. I think that Black has to go for the ...c5 advance sooner or later, when an isolated pawn structure position will arise after all captures on c5. I might also be slightly better then, but the absence of the b-pawns usually works fine for Black, so I should think of how to make it difficult for my opponent.

PLAN – EXECUTION

PLAN A

13.b5, stopping the ...c5 advance and creating a kind of a backward c7-pawn, as its advance will create an isolated pawn on d5 (13...c5 14.bxc6), seems like a good strategy. Then I could think of exchanging the dark-squared bishops (a4 and ♕a3), further weakening the c7-pawn.

PLAN B

I can stop the immediate ...c5 advance by 13.♖b3, which also develops my queen and connect my rooks. Then I can go for a4-a5, creating an initiative on the queenside.

PLAN C

I do not see any trouble going for a position with an isolated pawn to play against, so I should calmly continue with my rook development 13.♖c1. After 13...c5?! 14.dxc5! (14.bxc5 bxc5 15.dxc5 ♘xc5 16.♘b3, also looks good for me) 14...bxc5 15.♕xf6 ♖xf6 16.♕h3, I should be on the top.

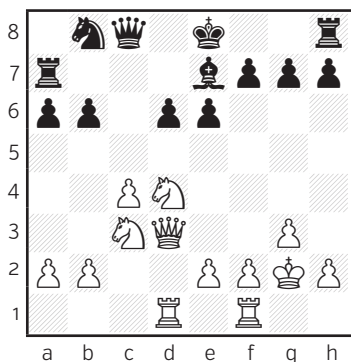
Choose Your Plan

Choose Your Plan		
A	B	C

EXERCISE 5

- ▷ **Suba Mihai**
 ▶ **Nicholson John**
A30 Malaga 2001

1. c4 ♘f6 2. ♘f3 c5 3. ♘c3 e6 4. g3 b6
 5. ♖g2 ♙b7 6. o-o ♙e7 7. d4 cxd4
 8. ♚xd4 d6 9. ♙g5 a6 10. ♙xf6 ♙xf6
 11. ♚d3 ♖a7 12. ♗ad1 ♙e7 13. ♘d4
 ♙xg2 14. ♙xg2 ♚c8



EVALUATION

I have gained a spatial advantage and my opponent's backward d6-pawn can be a target as well, although it can be protected by his bishop and the rooks. I have no weaknesses and I just have to care for my opponent's potential advances of ...b5 or ...d5, which can be annoying. I should stand slightly better but maybe no more...

PLAN – EXECUTION

PLAN A

A natural idea is to exert pressure on the backward d6-pawn. So I will re-shuffle my pieces by 15. ♘e4 o-o 16. ♘f3 and then double my rooks on the d-file, increasing the pressure on Black's camp.

PLAN B

For the time being nothing annoying can be done, so I should go for a prophylactic move like 15. b3. After 15...o-o 16. ♘f3 ♖d8 17. ♚e3, I feel that I can exert good pressure in the centre and on the backward d6-pawn, my only real target.

PLAN C

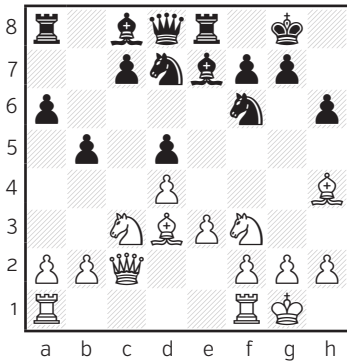
Not much to be achieved by a single target; the d6-pawn, taking also into account that it is well protected for the time being. I should try to create a second front, preferably on the kingside. So, I should go for 15. f4, trying to create this second target on e6 or gaining the d5-square (after ...e5). After 15...♘c6 16. ♖f3 o-o 17. ♘xc6 ♚xc6 18. f5, I should have the upper hand.

Choose Your Plan		
A	B	C

EXERCISE 6

- ▷ **Grivas Efstratios**
 ▶ **Papadopoulos Panayotis**
D53 Anogia 2017

1. ♘f3 ♘f6 2. c4 e6 3. ♘c3 d5 4. d4 a6
 5. cxd5 exd5 6. ♖g5 ♖e7 7. e3 ♞bd7
 8. ♙d3 o-o 9. o-o ♜e8 10. ♚c2 h6
 11. ♙h4 b5



EVALUATION

With his last move my opponent created a backward c-pawn in his camp. Well this is not a permanent factor, as he can push it to c5, but then he will remain with an isolated d-pawn, after my replay dxc5. So, things shouldn't be easy for him, but still I will have to plan how I will go on.

PLAN – EXECUTION

PLAN A

Making ...c5 'difficult' should be my primary thought. Also, piece exchanges should be also helpful — especially pieces that control squares on the c-file! So, 12. ♙f5, seems to be a good start. My opponent can opt for 12...c5 13. dxc5 ♞xc5 14. ♜fd1, where I will stand better.

PLAN B

Fixing the backward c-pawn should be my primary thought. So I should quickly opt for 12. ♜ab1 and b4, making my opponent's life miserable! If he goes for 12...c5, then his isolated d-pawn will be a clear target for me.

PLAN C

There is nothing to be done immediately, except of stopping the backward c-pawn to be pushed on c5. A good way to do this is to opt for 12. ♞e2 ♙d6 (12...c5? 13. ♙xf6!) 13. ♙g3!, where I do not see how my opponent will succeed in pushing his bad pawn. Later I will follow with doubling rooks on the c-file and exert pressure on the weak backward c-pawn.

Choose Your Plan

A	B	C

SOLUTION 1

Plan A is good as well, but nothing is clear-cut after **15...f6 16.exf6 ♕xf6 17.♖a2 ♕b7 18.♕e1 ♗e7 19.♗d2**.

Black stands better but without concrete targets.

Plan B is not best, as after **15...♗a5 16.♕e3 c4 17.♗d2**, White has at least developed his pieces.

Plan C is the best — see the game.

Marks for Plans		
A	B	C
30	10	50

15...c4! 16.dxc4 dxc4 17.bxc4

Forced, due to the threat of **17...c3**.

17...♗a5

Now the backward c2-pawn will come under strong pressure.

18.♗d4 ♕b7 19.♕xb7 ♖xb7 20.♗b3 ♗xc4

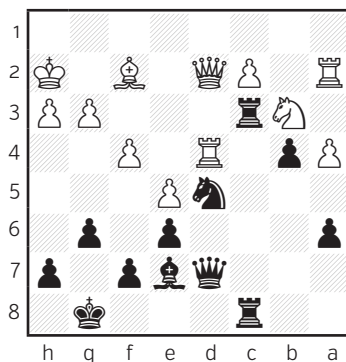
With his last few moves, Black has exchanged the strong g2-bishop and improved the c6-knight's prospects. His advantage is big, as he controls several central squares and has at his disposal

a clear plan, to exploit the backward c2-pawn.

21.♖e2 ♗db6 22.♕e1 ♗d5 23.♕f2 ♖c8 24.♖a2 ♗d7 25.♖d1 g6

Both sides manoeuvre, but with different aims: White is defending, Black is attacking. In these 'charmless' cases, the attacker can rarely go wrong!

26.♖d4 ♖bc7 27.♗1d2 ♗xd2 28.♖xd2 ♖c3!



Black's advantage is clear and is not based solely on the presence of the backward c2-pawn, but also on the better placement of his pieces in comparison with White's, the power of which is totally 'wasted' on guarding the weak pawn. If we also take the weakness of the white king into account, we can consider that Black's superiority is nearly decisive.

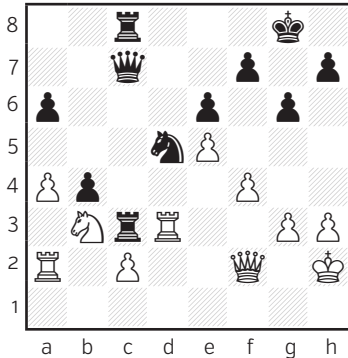
29.♖d3 ♗c7 30.♗d4

30.♖xc3? ♗xc3 31.♖a1 ♗e4 would be easy.

30... ♖c5!

Exchanging a minor piece will further highlight White's weaknesses on both flanks.

31. ♘b3 ♙xf2 32. ♚xf2



32...h5!

An instructive moment. Black could immediately win the weak white pawn on c2, but then he would have to exchange his good pieces for White's useless ones. As a result he would have won a pawn that is doomed anyway, but he would also have missed the chance to increase his superiority. This is a good example of non-trivial exploitation of this superiority.

33. ♘d4 ♙c4! 34. ♖xc3 ♘xc3 35. ♖a1 ♖d8! 36. ♘f3 ♘d1! 37. ♙g2 ♘e3 38. ♙f2 ♘xc2

The weak c2-pawn has been lost...

39. ♖b1 ♘d4! 40. ♖b2 ♘xf3+ 41. ♙xf3 a5 42. h4 ♙c1 43. ♖f2 ♙d1 44. ♙b7 ♙e1 45. ♖c2 ♖d3 46. ♙g2 ♙g7 o-1

SOLUTION 2

Plan A is a not satisfactory one, especially as Black can go on after 20. ♙e3, with 20...e5! 21.dxe5 ♙xe5, getting rid of his backward pawn.

Plan B is the best — see the game.

Plan C is not the best as well; rooks belong to open or semi-files and not to closed files where just only passively protect their army!

Marks for Plans		
A	B	C
10	50	25

20. ♙d3!

The queen protects temporarily the weak pawn, allowing the e1-rook to concentrate on its pressure to the opponent e6-pawn.

20... ♙d7 21. ♙f4!

