

Valeri Beim

The Enigma of Chess Intuition

Can You Mobilize Hidden Forces in Your Chess?

New In Chess 2012

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Foreword

To the person without whom this manuscript would hardly have seen the light of day.

In this book, as in all my previous ones, I have followed a principle which is well-known to my regular readers. It is as follows: that the majority of chess players, regardless of their age, playing strength or ambitions, want not only to learn about the existence of the various different chess principles, but also to learn how to exploit them themselves. Therefore, in my books, articles and training sessions, I work as follows: first, I tell about the fact of the existence of a certain principle or method of play, then I formulate it in the most general way, and after this, I present examples, showing all its possible sides. In this way, I try to show as clearly as possible how one can use this principle or method in one's own games, albeit not as well as a great master, but use it, all the same...!

I will use the same method in this book, although here, things are a little more complicated, since we are dealing with the most mysterious of all aspects of chess. Since we are concerned only with questions of intuition, albeit in as much detail as possible, I have often left out variations which seem to me to be superfluous, and not bearing on the matter in hand.

The subject I am attempting to tackle in this book is not the most specific and concrete of subjects. This is because of the rather mysterious essence of intuition itself. Where does it come from, how does it work, is it something concrete, or is it partly taken from the subconscious world? I will try to find answers to these questions, but only in relation to chess itself. I have not attempted to show exactly how intuition is constructed or how it works, but I try to explain how it comes into effect and where it takes us.

As always, I ask my readers not to be shy of telling me their opinion of my work. Praise and criticism will be received with equal gratitude. My e-mail address is: valeribeim@gmx.net

Valeri Beim, Vienna, March 2012

Chapter 1 – First Explorations

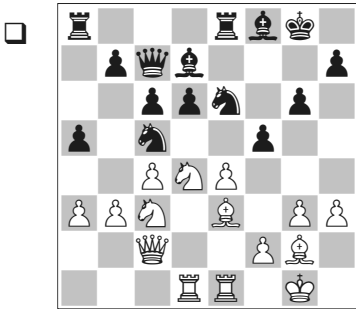
Almost everyone has heard about the existence of intuition in daily life, and many adults (I cannot say anything definite about intuition amongst children) have felt its influence in their own lives. But if such a thing exists, it can be manifested in any area of life. Its display will look similar in all cases, adjusted only for the specifics of the area of application. This means that in chess, intuition ought to, and does indeed, occupy its own niche.

The question of its role and place has not often been discussed in a serious way in chess literature, although such phrases as ‘this decision was taken intuitively’, ‘there was practically no time left to think, and it was necessary to trust to intuition’, and other similar versions, are quite often seen in game commentaries. But as a rule, here the discussion about intuition ends. I do not pretend to be familiar with all of the world’s chess literature, but in those books which I have had cause to pick up, I have only on a few occasions found interesting material about the mechanism of intuition in a game of chess or about the specific characteristics of those situations where a player should rely on intuition more than other methods. And even in these few cases, the treatment was not very systematic, and has only dealt with the issue partially, based on the specific aspects of the subject which have interested the author.

Almost everywhere, we can see examples which in varying degrees accord with the topic of this book, and we can come across the names of great players who are regarded as belonging to the so-called intuitive group of players. However, as soon as one gets to the point where it is time to discuss precisely what the mechanism of intuition is in the taking of decisions at the board, we encounter a wall of silence. This means that I will have to rely on only a small amount of helpful auxiliary material. But no matter, I will try to deal with the issue myself.

In the meantime, let us continue our discussion in a logical, step-by-step way, without jumping ahead. First of all, I would point out that a description of the mechanism of how exactly intuition functions is of not merely theoretical interest to those who play the game regularly, be they professionals or merely amateurs who play for pleasure. Nobody can doubt that in a chess player’s arsenal, in addition to well-known weapons, such as tactical skill, the ability to calculate variations, the technique of realising a material or positional advantage, the technique of positional play, plus specific theoretical knowledge of openings and endings, there is also a quality that, so far, has not been given any clear contours, namely intuition. On the basis of this mysterious, hard to identify quality,

Botvinnik, Mikhail
Pachman, Luděk
 Oberhausen Ech-tt, 1961



Attempting to break Botvinnik's positional chains, Black's last move was 29...f5, posing his opponent a choice. Botvinnik played

30. ♖d4xf5!

Other continuations gave Black good play, after both 30.exf5 ♜xd4 31.♙xd4 ♙xf5, and 30.♜xe6 ♙xe6. Therefore, in a higher sense, White's decision can be considered forced.

30. ... g6xf5
31. e4xf5 ♜e6-g7
32. g3-g4



Botvinnik had aimed for this position at move 30, when considering how to

meet the typical King's Indian advance of the black pawn to f5. Thus, Botvinnik writes:

'The white pawns are very strong. The disharmony among his pieces and open position of his king render Black's position critical.'

I would draw your attention to the fact that we have before us, in pure form, a very short, but precise summary of a position which is quite complicated, in the sense of the number of pieces on the board and the non-standard outward appearance of the position. The result of the game now depends on exactly the correctness of this far from immediately obvious assessment. Botvinnik convincingly shows that he is right.

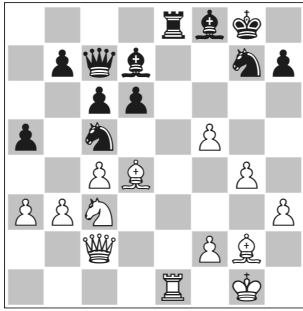
32. ... ♙e8-e5?!

In Botvinnik's opinion, it was better to go in for the variation 32...♜xf5 33.gxf5 ♙e5. But the silicon friend corrects this: 34.♙xc5! ♙xc5 (34...♙xf5? loses after 35.♙e4! ♙xe4 36.♜xe4 dxc5 37.♜f6+ ♜h8 38.♙xe5) 35.f6 with an indisputable advantage. Even so, I have left in the dubious mark against the text, suggesting that Black instead try the simple 32...♙e7.

33. ♙e3-d4!

Excellently played. The exchange of a pair of rooks is forced, the latter being currently Black's most active piece, reducing his chances of creating counterplay, which Black desperately needs in this position.

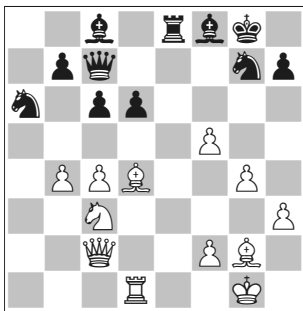
33. ... ♙e5xe1+
34. ♜d1xe1 ♙a8-e8



35. ♖e1-d1!

It is interesting that this very strong decision, based more on assessment than calculation (the importance to White of retaining one rook soon becomes clear), is not only not commented on by Botvinnik, but he does not even punctuate the move!

35. ... ♔d7-c8
 36. b3-b4 a5xb4
 37. a3xb4 ♘c5-a6



38. ♘c3-e4! ♖e8xe4

Necessary. 38...♖d8 loses quickly: 39.♘f6+ ♖h8 40.♗d2 ♗f7 41.♙e4! ♙e7 42.♘xh7 and so on.

39. ♙g2xe4 ♘a6xb4
 40. ♗c2-d2 d6-d5
 41. c4xd5 c6xd5

After 41...♘xd5 White has a nice forced win: 42.♙xd5+! cxd5 43.♙xg7 ♗xg7 44.♗xd5+ ♖h8 45.f6! ♗xf6 46.♗d8! ♗f3 47.♖d3.

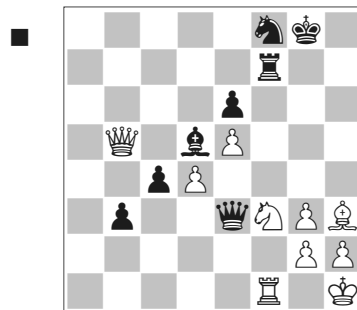
42. ♙e4-f3

In this position, the game was adjourned and Pachman sealed his move. However, seeing that his position was hopeless, and knowing of Botvinnik's fantastic analytical ability, he resigned without resuming, thereby giving himself and his opponent an extra free day.

1-0

So, what is interesting for our purposes in what we have seen so far? We can already claim with some confidence that the degree of proof (we could also call it the degree of convincingness) is greater when variations predominate over positional considerations. We will speak more of this later, but for now, I will give a simple example of how intuition shows itself.

Kramnik, Vladimir
Anand, Viswanathan
 Belgrade Investbanka, 1997



Here too, we give the microphone to the winner:

Szabo, Laszlo
Smyslov, Vasily

Moscow Alekhine mem, 1956

1. c2-c4 ♘g8-f6
2. d2-d4 e7-e6
3. ♘b1-c3 ♙f8-b4
4. e2-e3 0-0
5. ♙f1-d3 c7-c5
6. a2-a3 ♙b4xc3+
7. b2xc3 ♘b8-c6
8. e3-e4

Szabo's novelty. The usual continuation was 8. ♘e2.



8. ... c5xd4

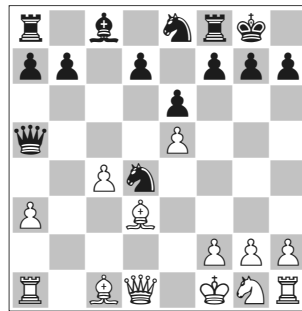
Thus, Smyslov is faced with a novelty and has to think. Actually, one could argue that there was not a great deal to think about at this point, since taking the pawn appears to be forced, otherwise White will get everything he has ever dreamed of in this variation, at no cost.

But things are not so simple, mainly because there is also the move 8...d5, with a complicated and unclear position. At the same time, taking the pawn leads to many complications, which will undoubtedly have been studied at home by the opponent.

So there was plenty to think about, in fact, and a very important decision to be taken. And this is what ensued.

9. c3xd4 ♘c6xd4
10. e4-e5 ♙d8-a5+
11. ♙e1-f1 ♘f6-e8

The pawn cannot be taken, because of the loss of the knight: 11... ♙xe5? 12. ♙b2 ♙c5 13. ♙xd4 ♙xd4? 14. ♙xh7+.



Thus far, starting at move eight, play has been forced.

12. ♙c1-d2

Even in our day, this variation is still occasionally the subject of debate. Black almost always follows in Smyslov's footsteps, the exceptions being rare, and almost always unsuccessful. White usually prefers 12. ♙b2 here. All this convincingly confirms the correctness of Smyslov's decision at move eight. As we will soon see, it is extremely difficult to work out all the ramifications and it is hardly possible to get by without relying on intuition.

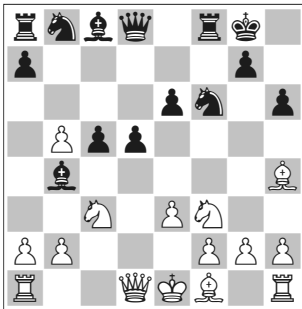
12. ... ♙a5-d8!

12... ♙c7 is weaker because of 13. ♙b4 ♙xe5? 14. ♙c3.

The following game also belongs to the list of Tal's intuitive masterpieces. The game is complicated, and analysing it is not easy, and for this reason, there will be many diagrams!

Spassky, Boris
Tal, Mikhail
 Tallinn, 1973

1. d2-d4 ♘g8-f6
2. c2-c4 e7-e6
3. ♘b1-c3 ♙f8-b4
4. ♙c1-g5 h7-h6
5. ♙g5-h4 c7-c5
6. d4-d5 b7-b5!?
7. d5xe6 f7xe6
8. c4xb5 d7-d5
9. e2-e3 0-0
10. ♘g1-f3



Possibly not the strongest. More is promised by 10.a3! or 10.♙d3.

10. ... ♙d8-a5!

This natural queen move was a novelty at this time and a very good one.

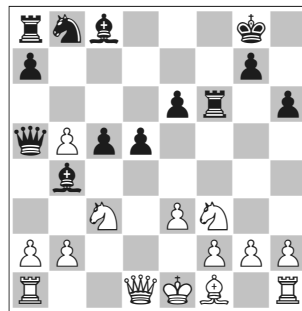
11. ♙h4xf6?!

This exchange is questionable. It looks forced, so as to meet the threat of

11...♗e4, but for the moment, it could have been dispensed with: 11.♙c2 and now 11...♗e4 will be met by 12.♙d3! ♗xc3 13.0-0! with good play for White, for example: 13...♗xb5 14.a3.

Better is 11...c4!?, but then there follows 12.♙xf6 ♗xf6 13.♙e2 with equal chances.

11. ... ♗f8xf6



12. ♙d1-d2?!

Another inaccuracy, more significant this time. Spassky plays the opening imprecisely. Correct was 12.♙c1 a6! 13.♙e2!? axb5 14.0-0 ♙xc3!? 15.bxc3 ♗c6 16.e4 and White's advantage is not all that great.

12. ... a7-a6
 13. b5xa6

Black has achieved several obvious advantages: a lead in development, a strong pawn centre and the bishop pair. All of these factors are usually exploited by active play. Tal did not need to be asked twice in such situations!

13. ... ♗b8-c6!
 14. ♙f1-e2

The second question: let us suppose that your home preparation works, and you secure a large advantage; still the game goes on, and you will have to play some more moves of your own at the board. So won't you still need to call on all your abilities, including intuition?

As we will see, it is not wise to ignore the ability to play chess well, even in our day, no matter how great one's preparation or how large an arsenal of modern weapons one may have. It may be that there is no need to say any more on this, but I would very much like to illustrate what I have said. To do so, I will again employ the method of comparison, and present a pair of examples taken from the practice of two long-time bitter rivals.

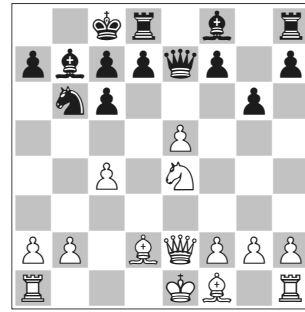
Shirov,Alexey
Kramnik,Vladimir

Wijk aan Zee Tata Steel A, 2011

- | | |
|-----------|--------|
| 1. e2-e4 | e7-e5 |
| 2. ♘g1-f3 | ♘b8-c6 |
| 3. d2-d4 | e5xd4 |
| 4. ♘f3xd4 | ♘g8-f6 |
| 5. ♘d4xc6 | b7xc6 |
| 6. e4-e5 | ♙d8-e7 |
| 7. ♚d1-e2 | ♘f6-d5 |
| 8. c2-c4 | ♘d5-b6 |
| 9. ♘b1-c3 | ♙c8-b7 |

This is not the most popular continuation. More common is 9...♙e6 10.♙e4.

- | | |
|------------|-------|
| 10. ♙c1-d2 | g7-g6 |
| 11. ♘c3-e4 | 0-0-0 |



12. a2-a4

A new move. Previously, White had played 12.f4. So, it is Shirov who plays the novelty, but... he falls into Kramnik's preparation, and it soon becomes clear that the latter knew significantly more about the position than his opponent! Such things happen in contemporary chess.

- | | |
|------------|--------|
| 12. ... | ♙b7-a6 |
| 13. ♙e2-e3 | |

The position is crammed with variations, and playing it 'blind', when the opponent has studied it at home, is extremely hard.

Firstly, White must examine the line 13.a5 ♘xc4! and then choose between 14.♙c3, and maybe other possibilities too. It is not appropriate for us to get into this here, especially as more games will probably be played in this line very soon.

- | | |
|------------|---------|
| 13. ... | ♙e7xe5! |
| 14. ♙d2-c3 | |

14.a5? loses: 14...♙xb2 15.♙c3 ♙b4 etc.

- | | |
|---------|---------|
| 14. ... | ♙f8-b4! |
|---------|---------|

There is no other move.