

Tigran Gyoalyan

**The King
Is a Powerful Piece**



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Foreword

I have known Tigran Gyoalyan almost since I started playing chess. Living in Vanadzor, Armenia, Tigran was highly respected in Yerevan's Central Chess Club, and whenever he would attend the Armenian Championship in the capital, with all of his students, he would always be most warmly received. And, considering that he is quite a well-read and sensitive soul, he has always been sought after as a conversationalist who would freely offer advice to my family and me in my growing years. Most of Tigran's students share certain important qualities: they are well educated and fearless. One of my seconds – as well as my friend – the grandmaster Samvel Ter-Sahakyan, possesses these good qualities, both as a player and a person, because he is Gyoalyan's student.

The theory the author presents was first introduced into practice by the very first world chess champion, Wilhelm Steinitz. Back then it was absolutely a brand-new idea, especially in a time when players would sacrifice a whole board's worth of pieces to drive the enemy king out for a walk. So Steinitz's idea was taken with a large grain of salt. Indeed, who ever heard of the king's taking care of itself?! It was a long time before players began to make use of the unguarded king; but even today, you can still see grandmasters who are afraid to leave their king in the center. This book shines a bright light on this rare theme; I hope that the reader will find inside it much that is new and unexpected about our beloved game.

*Levon Aronian, GM
Yerevan (Armenia), August 2016*

Preface

As a professional who has spent his whole life in the service of chess, and who continues serving chess as a trainer, I face a very important question – how do we combat and break down chess stereotypes? One of the chief stereotypes that a trainer must break in his young students in the early stages of training, is that the king is merely the weakest piece and requires constant protection. In later stages of training, this stereotype gets diluted somewhat as the trainer begins to explain endgame theory, as the king plays the decisive role in most cases. But here this is easy to understand: there aren't a lot of pieces around, you can see that.

Starting in childhood, we are told that “A” is good while “B” is bad. That motto stays with us throughout our lives, whereas deep inside we often know that in this concrete situation “B” doesn't look so bad, but “A” might lead to disaster. So it's hard to make up our minds, because we haven't learned to get rid of the stereotype. In this work, Tigran Gyoalyan presents many remarkable examples to combat the stereotype of the “weak king.” The most successful people on this planet are those who have overcome conventional thinking; and there are many examples – even people like the late Steve Jobs, who showed by his very existence the success of the algorithm of unfettered thought.

In this beautiful book, there are numerous examples of how the king behaves depending on the circumstances. When there are weaknesses in his camp, then he has to be the defender who takes care of his own world; when he lacks the resources to carry out the attack, he marches forward like a good soldier, instead of cowering in the rear, the way all the rules for playing good chess advise us to do; when the enemy's artillery is smashing his fortress open, then he should find safe shelter, that he might save the honor of his army. I well understand what a laborious task it was for Tigran to gather and sort through the mass of available material. This enormously difficult job may truly be compared to prospecting for oil: so many

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“dry holes” before you hit on the “black gold,” and you can taste the drillers’ joy! This may be compared to the joy experienced by my friend Tigran Gyoalyan, the first to explore this complex theme of the king’s role in the early and middle stages of the game.

I extend my heartfelt congratulations to Tigran for this outstanding book, and I recommend it to every methodical trainer working with chessplayers from 1600 level to candidate master. Let them use it to break down childhood stereotypes. But I also recommend it to all chessplayers, to broaden our horizons and enrich our thinking!

*Zurab Azmaiparashvili, GM
President, European Chess Union*

Chapter 1

The Aggressive King

It doesn't happen very often, but it *does* happen once in a while that one player's king can play a part in checkmating its counterpart.

As a rule, this only happens:

a) when the opposing forces are so restricted that they have no active counterplay;

b) when the king, extricating itself from its pursuers' attack, approaches its rival so closely that he can take the "i"; or

c) in a double-edged position, when the king itself takes the initiative and, instead of seeking shelter, gradually draws closer to its opponent.

In the latter two cases, the king often combines defense and attack.

Without a doubt, the study by the brilliant Sam Loyd, dedicated to Steinitz – which you will find at the end of this book in the problems section – provides a beautiful illustration of our theme.

Note also that the king's unexpected aggressiveness will have shock value against the opponent. A sharp change in circumstances can knock any player for a loop, greatly increasing the chances of his making a mistake.

The game below is far from the earliest known example of our theme. A position like this one occurred in a Steinitz–Zukertort game from London 1872; we will examine that game in our chapter on deliberately giving up the right to castle.

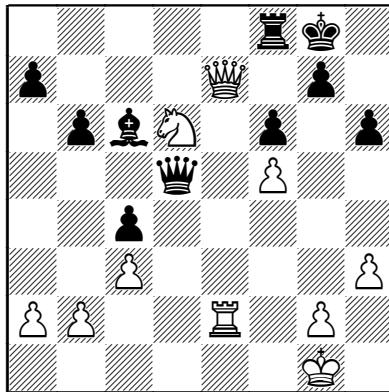
1. R. Teichmann – Allies

Glasgow 1902

I dare say that this is the best-known game of this sort. I remember first seeing it as a youngster. White's idea truly blew me away. To this day, I marvel at Rudolf Teichmann's imagination!

White has the better position, thanks to his beautifully placed knight: by controlling the important f7 and e8 squares, it cuts off Black's rook from the rest of its army, securing his queen's location at e7. The light squares in Black's camp are weak, too – especially the g6 square. He only needs to add his rook to the attack, and Black's position collapses. But how to do this? For Black has his own trumps – the queen-and-bishop battery, for one.

The white king takes an unexpected stroll, not only escaping this terrible battery, but also joining in the attack itself. As a side benefit, this frees up White's rook. Analysis shows that, with correct play, Black could have saved the game. However, as we have noted already, an aggressive king has a shocking effect on one's opponent; and so Black starts to go astray.



1. ♔h2! b5

The Aggressive King

Here and on the next move, White could have played pragmatically with ♖e6+, with advantage; but to our great enjoyment, GM Teichmann at heart was more poet than scientist: he plans to march his king clear to g6!

2.♔g3!? a5

Black fails to sense the danger. By continuing with 2...♖d3+! 3.♔h4 (3.♔f2 a6) 3...♔h7!!, he might have improved the positions of both his king and rook and prevented White's attack: 4.♞e3 ♖d2 5.♞g3 ♞g8 when, apparently, this is one of those positions in which neither side can improve the position of his pieces, so dynamic equilibrium is maintained. But, you will agree, 3...♔h7 is not at all obvious.

3.♔h4!? g6

Black has been knocked for a loop. First he stops the king, then the rook; but he's helpless against the pawn. For those who love analysis, we offer the following variations for you to examine:

a) 3...♖c5 4.g4 ♖g1 5.♖c7 with a decisive penetration by the rook to the seventh rank;

b) 3...♞b8 4.♖c7 (not 4.♔h5?? ♞e8 – and suddenly it is *Black* who wins!) 4...♞f8 5.g4! ♔h7 6.♞e7 ♞g8 7.♔e4 wins;

c) 3...♞a8 (best) 4.♖e6+ ♖xe6 5.fxe6 ♞d8 6.♞d2!, with clearly better play.

4.♞e3 ♖xg2

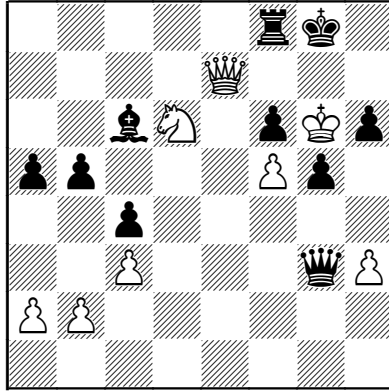
On 4...♖c5, 5.g4 (with the idea of taking on g6) would be strong for White. Black would have no useful moves here; after something like 5...♞a8, White plays 6.fxg6 ♖g5+ 7.♔g3 ♖xg6 8.♔f5 h5 9.♖d6, and again there's no satisfactory defense to the threat of the white rook's invasion at e7.

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We note also that a nice endgame awaits White after 5.♖g3 ♕f2 6.♔h5 ♜e5 7.♗e3 ♜xe7 8.♖xe7 ♜d8 9.♘b7 ♜d7 10.♖xd7 ♙xd7 11.♔xh6 ♙xf5 12.♘d6, with an obvious advantage.

5.♖g3 ♕f2

If 5...g5+, then 6.♔h5 ♜xg3 7.♔g6:



6.fxg6 ♜f4+ 7.♖g4 ♜f2+ 8.♔h5 1-0

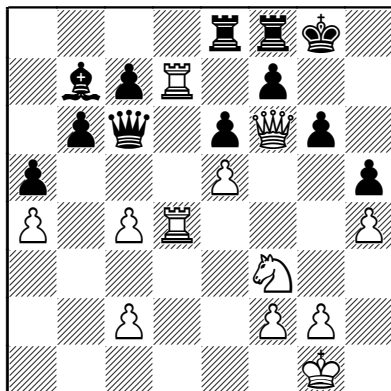
Almost ninety (!) years later, the same “king fling” occurred in a game between two prominent contemporary grandmasters: the same queen + bishop combo, the same weak-square complex – only this time, the action took place on the dark squares.

It would be interesting to know whether Nigel Short knew about Teichmann’s game. From my own experience as a trainer, I know that students will generally find the king’s aggressive forward march fairly easily, once they remember the Teichmann game.

The Aggressive King

2. N. Short – J. Timman

Tilburg 1991



White's advantage is indisputable. There are probably a lot of strong continuations here. But the way that GM Short chose was, without a doubt, the strongest – and original as well.

31.♔h2!

The most spectacular.

31...♝c8

Black plays a waiting move, apparently mistaking White's last move as itself a waiting move. He only came to realize what was really going on when the white king was breathing down his neck.

Truth be told, it was already too late for Black to save himself; although, from a practical standpoint, unquestionably it would have been a good idea to take his last chance. I'm talking about 31...♕c8:

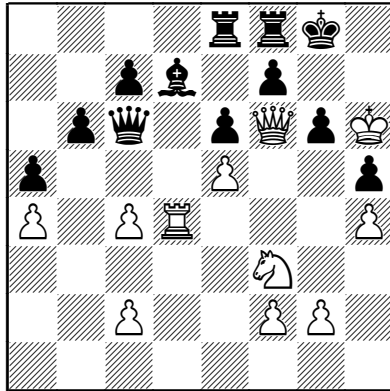
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all the more so in that White would still need to show exceptional resourcefulness, which he could only do by playing 37.♖d2!! (see the comments at the end of the game).

Now, we have seen that the king's march into the enemy king's den, in this example and the previous one, was only rendered possible at all, as we chessplayers put it, by a sort of stalemating of the enemy pieces – in other words, when there is no strong counterplay. I sometimes refer to this condition as, “frozen pieces.”

32.♔g3! ♚ce8 33.♕f4! ♜c8 34.♔g5! 1-0

If 34...♜xd7, then 35.♕h6 mates:



Now I'd like to present the following variations:

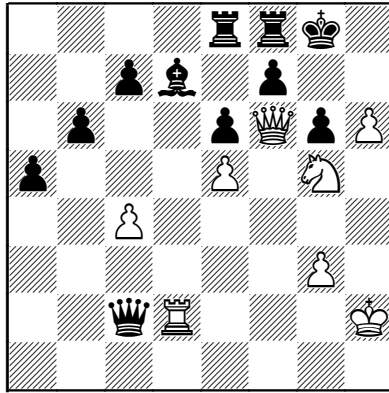
31...♜c8 32.g4! hxg4, otherwise:

a) 32...♜xd7 33.gxh5 wins;

b) 32...♜b7 33.♖d3 ♜e4 34.gxh5 ♜f5 35.♘g5 ♜c6 (35...♜g4 36.♖g3 ♜xh4+ 37.♖h3 ♜g4 38.f3) 36.♖xc7, and the win is not far off.

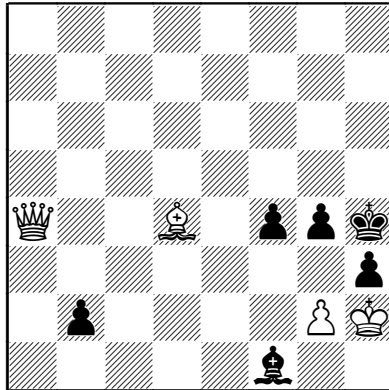
33.♘g5 ♜xd7 34.h5! g3+ 35.fxg3 ♜xa4 36.h6 ♜xc2+ 37.♖d2!!:

The Aggressive King



37...♙xd2+ 38.♚h3 – time for Black to resign, what do you think?

As for 37.♜d2!!, I assume that Timman was familiar with the outstanding study by A. Herbstmann and G. Nadareishvili (published in *Shakhmatnaya Moskva*, 1968, 1st prize), where White's bishop has just captured a black pawn on d4:

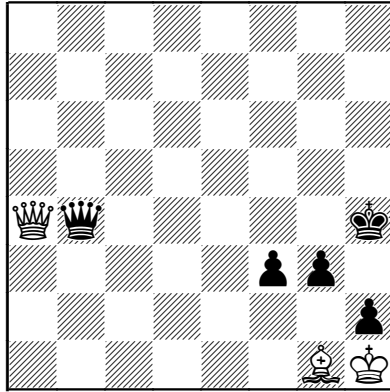


Black to move – White draws

**1...g3+ 2.♚g1 h2+ 3.♚h1 ♙xg2+ 4.♚xg2 f3+ 5.♚h1 b1♙+
6.♙g1+ ♚b4!!**

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Black sacrifices his own queen, simply to change the color of the white queen's diagonal! And now it is White, with his overwhelming preponderance of material, who must fight for the draw. A truly unique situation!



7. ♖xb4+ ♔h3 8. ♙xh2 f2 9. ♖h4+!! ♔xh4 10. ♙xg3+ ♔xg3

Stalemate!

A remarkable study! Finally, we note that the idea – interference, plus the simultaneous sacrifice of a major piece – belongs to the chess composer Leopold Mitrofanov.

The Boomerang Effect

In our first two examples, we noted that the aggressive king was possible only because the other side was somewhat restricted and had no active counterplay.

Now we move on to cases where the attacker lures the opposing king out of its fortress. In the heat of battle, if the attacker underestimates the defending king's hidden possibilities, then the latter can turn from prey into predator! Getting close to its opposite number, it'll become a threatening piece itself. Even during the most dangerous of attacks, one must always maintain a sense of proportion.