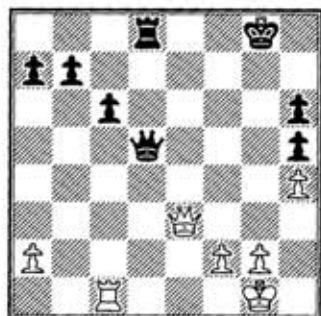


## Chapter Six: Winnability

Any experienced player can figure out when he has an advantage, particularly a big advantage. A master knows when his advantage is big *enough*.

Enough to win. When a position is that good, a master knows that he doesn't have to look for elaborate plans or to calculate risk-taking variations. He should be able to win with relatively simple moves, especially one-move and two-move threats, and simple precautions to eliminate counterplay.



McShane – So  
Wijk aan Zee 2011

*Black to play*

After the game, White was surprised to find that his computer claimed he was only slightly better here. He knew the evaluation must be wrong. Black's weak king is what matters most, by far.

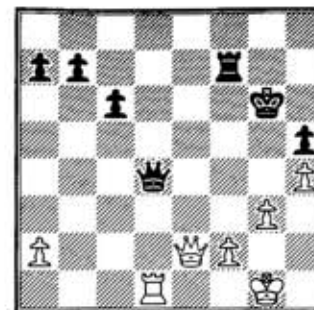
Aside from the immediate threat of ♖xh6, White can make solid progress with straightforward ideas such as ♜c5-e5 followed by ♜e7 or ♜e6. Once his rook penetrates, Black's situation should be hopeless.

Black understood this, too, so he seized the initiative with 1 ... ♜d7 2 ♖xh6 ♜g7, threatening mate on g2. Then came 3 g3 ♖d4, with another threat, 4 ... ♜xg3+.

However, it should be easy to see that White doesn't have enough weaknesses to enable Black to keep making threats. Black, on the other hand, has plenty of weaknesses and that's why White has a won game.

After a brief period of defense, 4 ♖e6+ ♜f7 5 ♖e2 ♖g7 6 ♜f1, he was ready to consolidate with ♖g2 and regain the initiative.

This happened quickly because 6 ... ♖g6 allowed him to substitute for ♖g2 with 7 ♜d1!.



*Black to play*

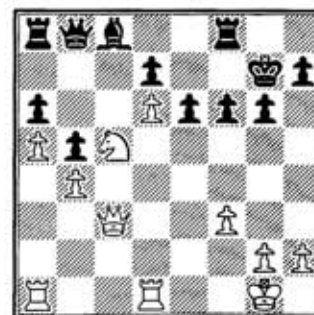
White would win after 7 ... ♜xf2? 8 ♖e8+!. Black had to pull back and resignation was getting closer after 7 ... ♖f6 8 ♖e3 b6 9 ♜d4! ♜e7 10 ♖d3+ ♖g7 11 ♜f4.

This was more than a case of 'just moving around' in a superior position. White had a general plan of getting his rook closer to the Black king, ideally to g5.

In fact, **Black resigned** after 11 ... ♖e6 12 ♜f5 ♜f7, when he realized that two precise moves, 13 ♜g5+! ♖h6 14 ♖d1!, would make resistance futile.

A master is able to win more often because he has a better understanding of what it takes to win. He sees winning potential in positions that other players – even computers – think are only mildly favorable. A master also rejects moves that lead to positions that are favorable – but not favorable *enough*.

Most of all, a master has a better sense of when to trade pieces when he has an advantage. This is critical when a player faces a choice of whether to liquidate a very good position or press for a better one.



Kovalev – Kuznetsov  
Alushta 2004

*White to play*

White has what annotators like to call a queenside bind. It's not a winning position and there are no indefensible Black weaknesses. White's pieces are simply much better placed than Black's.

But there's some urgency. Black can unravel by means of ... ♜f7 and ... ♖b7. Then he threatens to consolidate with ... ♖d5 and even grab a second pawn, ... ♖xd6. Given time, Black is winning.