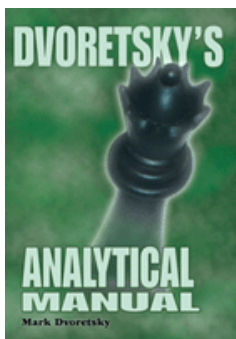




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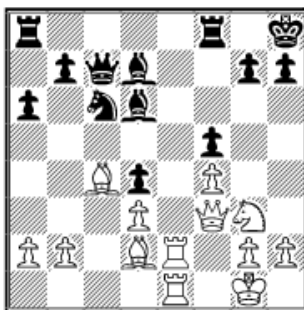
The Worst-Piece Principle

*Secrets of Positional Play*, by M. Dvoretsky and A. Yusupov (the fourth volume in our series, “School of Chess Excellence”) contains a lecture by Alexei Kosikov, entitled “Constructing a Plan in the Game of Chess.” In this lecture, Kosikov formulated his “worst-piece principle.”

*In situations involving strategic maneuvers (when the time factor is not of decisive importance), look for the piece which stands worse than the others. Making this piece more active will often turn out to be the surest way to improve your position as a whole.*

Offered for your consideration: a small selection of examples where using the worst-piece principle makes it easier to search for the strongest continuation. Some may wish to train themselves in the use of this technique: for them, the question mark beneath the diagrams (right after the indication of whose turn it is to move) denotes that the position would be a good one to use as an exercise.

*Nimzowitsch – Rubinstein*  
Dresden 1926



W?

White needs to get his knight involved in order to increase the pressure; currently, the knight does not stand well. Its place is at g5, coordinating with White’s light-squared bishop, rooks and queen.

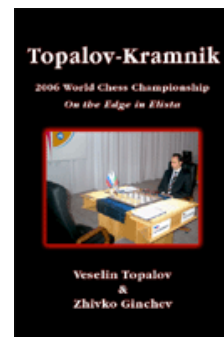
19.Ng3-h1!! Ra8-e8 20.Nh1-f2+/=

This is the position that occurred in the game (by transposition of moves – in the actual game, the white rook was on f1, and the black bishop on c8; after 18.Rfe1 Bd7, the diagrammed position was reached. The actual move order was 18.Nh1! Bd7 19.Nf2 Rae8 20.Rfe1.

It’s not a simple matter to decide which of two move orders is better, and I generally try to avoid using exercises with more than one possible solution. In the interests of improving an exercise’s quality, a trainer has the right to alter the position slightly, which I sometimes do.)

Note that in my demonstration of the rest of the game, I go from full notation to abbreviated notation. This is not accidental. A trainer should indicate, as much as possible, the boundary between the answer to the exercise (the moves that must be found) and further illustrative variations.

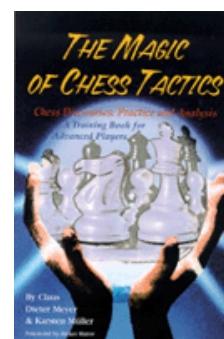
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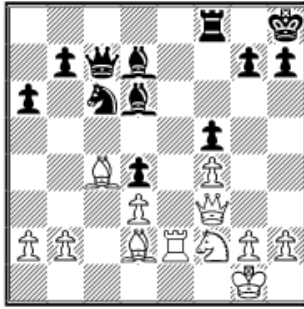
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This I do with the help of a change in notation.

**20...Rxe2 21.Rxe2**



**21...Nd8?**

Akiva Rubinstein overprotects the weak squares at f7 and e6. However, his defensive plan is too passive, and now Black's position becomes difficult.

21...Re8? is also poor. White has two good answers: 22.Qd5, forcing the rook back, or 22.Rxe8+ Bxe8 23.Qd5 Ne7 24.Qxd4.

Ilya Odessky suggested trading off the powerful c4-bishop: 21...Be8!? 22.Nh3 Bf7 23.Ng5 Bxc4 24.dc, and now Black can play 24...Nd8. Then the inviting 25.Qd5?! would not be good after 25...h6 26.Nf3 Nc6 (with the unpleasant threat of 27...Ne7!) 27.Nh4 Kh7 28.Nxf5 Bxf4. The stronger 25.Qd3 h6 (25...Bxf4?? 26.Qxf5!+) 26.Nf3 Nc6 (26...Bxf4 27.Bxf4 Qxf4 28.Qxd4) 27.g3 would maintain somewhat better chances.

Artur Yusupov pointed out another good idea: playing to restrict the opposing knight by 21...g6 22.Nh3 h6!. Before bringing the knight out to h3, White might throw in the move 22.h4!, using the h-pawn as a battering ram to break down his opponent's kingside protection. Considering this, Black should probably change the order of his moves, and play 21...h6!? first.

**22.Nh3 Bc6**

The move 22...h6 would not prevent the knight from invading at g5.

The simplest response to 22...Re8 is 23.Rxe8+ Bxe8 24.Qd5. Another good line is 23.Qd5, forcing the rook back. But Aaron Nimzowitsch's recommendation 23.Qh5 Rxe2 24.Ng5 (expecting 24...h6? 25.Qg6 hg 26.Qh5#) fails, in view of 24...Rxc2+! 25.Kxc2 Bc6+ 26.Kg1 g6 (as found in 1970 by Dushko Bzhakov). For example, 27.Qh6 Qg7 (not 27...Qe7? 28.Bf7!), or 27.Qh4 h5 28.Nf7+ Nxf7 29.Qf6+ Kg8 30.Qxg6+ Kf8 31.Bxf7 Qxf7 32.Qxd6+ Kg8 =.

**23.Qh5 g6 24.Qh4 Kg7**



W?

Black has warded off the immediate threats (25.Ng5 h6 is no longer dangerous). White therefore uses the “two weaknesses principle” – he attacks the vulnerable d4-pawn in order to tie one of Black’s pieces to its defense and decoy it away from the kingside; then he will return once again to his attack on the king.

### 25.Qf2! Bc5

Nimzowitsch planned to answer 25...Qb6 with 26.b4!?, threatening 27. Bc3. But after 27...Re8!, things are not so clear, even though White could retain the upper hand by continuing 28.Bc3 (28.Rxe8 Bxe8 29.Bc3 Nc6 30.Ng5 Bd7 promises White less) 28...dc 29.Qxb6 Rxe2 30.Qd4+ Kh6 31.Qxc3 Rxc2+ 32.Kf1 Rxc2 33.Qd4!. Probably 26.Qe1! would be simpler: 26...Nf7 27.Ba5! Qa7 28.Bxf7 Rxf7 29.Ng5, or 26...Qc7 27. Ng5 h6?! 28.Ba5! b6 (28...Qd7 29.Bb6! hg 30.Bxd4+ Kh7 31.Qg3) 29. Bxb6! Qxb6 30.Re7+, and wins.

### 26.b4 Bb6 27.Qh4?!

27.Qe1! was more energetic and stronger (observe the typical placement of heavy pieces on the open file, with the queen behind the rook) 27... Be4 28.Nf2+– (Nimzowitsch).

### 27...Re8

If 27...Rf6, then 28.Ng5 h6 29.Nh7!+–.

### 28.Re5!

Black wants to trade rooks, but White offers to do so in a way more favorable to himself – on the e5-square – since that would open the c1-h6 diagonal for his dark-squared bishop.

### 28...Nf7?

On 28...h6, Nimzowitsch gives 29.g4! fg 30.f5!, or 29...g5 30.fg, with mate soon to follow. But Black has no reason to open lines like this: with 29...Qd7!, he maintains a defensible position. The immediate 28...Qd7!? isn’t bad either.

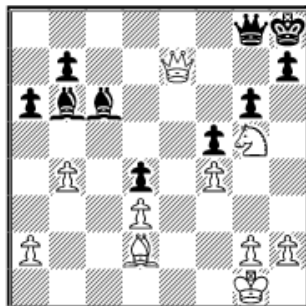
### 29.Bxf7 Qxf7

29...Rxe5 30.fe Qxf7 31.Ng5 Qg8 was more stubborn; and if 32.e6?! (Nimzowitsch), then 32...Bd8! 33.Qxd4+ Bf6. White wins by 32.Ne4!, threatening 33.Qf6# or 33.Nf6.

### 30.Ng5 Qg8 31.Rxe8 Bxe8 32.Qe1! Bc6

32...Kf8 was no improvement: 33.Qe5 Bd8 (33...Qxa2 34.Qf6+ Kg8 35. Ne6, or 34...Bf7 35.Nxf7 Qxf7 36.Qxb6) 34.Ne6+ Ke7 35.Qc5+! Kd7 36. Nf8+! (Nimzowitsch).

### 33.Qe7+ Kh8



W

Here, of course, all roads lead to Rome; for example, 34.Ne6 h5 35.Qf6+ Kh7 36.g4!. Nimzowitsch selects what may have been the method with the purest idea: bringing his only non-participating piece – the bishop – into the attack.

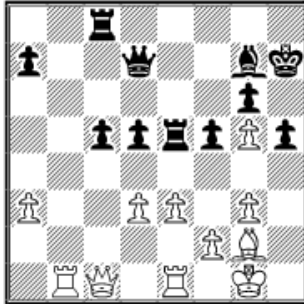
**34.b5!**

34...ab runs into 35.Ne6 h5 36.Qf6+ Kh7 37.Ng5+ Kh6 38.Bb4.

**34...Qg7 35.Qxg7+ Kxg7 36.bc**, and White won easily.

**Larsen – Browne**

Buenos Aires 1980



W?

28.e4? would be premature, and met strongly by 28...c4!; if then 29.d4 Rxe4+/. And on 28.Qd2, Black could try 28...d4!? 29.e4 (29.Rb7 de 30. fe Rc7=+) 29...fe 30.Rxe4 Rxe4 (30...Rce8!?) 31.Bxe4 Qg4 32.Rb7 h4.

We shall use the worst-piece principle here. The rook on e1 isn't in the game – it ought to be on either b2 or c2.

**28.Re1-e2!+/=**

By making this rook active, White creates pressure on his opponent's position.

Black responded with **28...Re7?! Too passive!** If he must retreat, then 28...Re6 29.Rc2 Rb6 was more solid, although White would retain somewhat better chances by continuing 30.Rxb6 ab 31.d4 c4 32.Qb1 b5 33.Rb2. But there were more aggressive tries that were worth considering:

28...h4?! 29.f4! (29.gh f4, with counterplay) 29...Re7 30.gh+/=;

28...d4! 29.e4 c4 (39...fe!? 40.Rxe4 Rxe4 41.Bxe4 Qg4) 30.dc d3 31. Re3 d2 (31...Qd4 32.ef+/=; 31...Rce8!?) 32.Qc2 Qd4 33.Rd3! (33.Rd1 Rxc4 34.Qxd2 Qxd2 35.Rxd2 fe =) 33...Qxc4 (33...Rxc4? 34.Qxd2 Qc5 35.Rd7+→) 34.Qxd2 fe 35.Rd7 Rc7 36.Rb7 Rxb7 37.Rxb7 e3!, with chances for both sides.

**29.Rc2 Qd6 30.a4! Rec7 31.a5 Qe6 32.Qd1 d4?! 33.e4 c4 34.Rb5!**

When there are opposite-colored bishops, the most important thing is to seize the initiative, and force the opponent on the defensive. It's well-known that in the middlegame, opposite-colored bishops add impetus to the attack.

**34...Rc5?!**

He should have preferred 34...cd 35.Rxc7 Rxc7, although after 36.Qxd3! (36.ef Qe2 is inferior), White would maintain pressure on his opponent's

position.

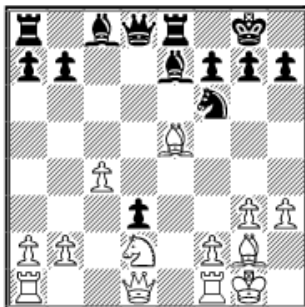
**35.Rxc5 Rxc5 36.Bh3+/- Qe7** (36...Rxa5 37.ef; 36...c3 37.ef gf 38.Qxh5 +) **37.ef Qxg5 38.fg+ Kxg6**

After 38...Qxg6 39.Rxc4 Rxa5 40.Bg2 or 39...Rxc4 40.dc and 41.Qf3, White has a strong attack. 38...Kh6!? was worth considering.

**39.dc** (39.Rxc4?! Rxc4 40.dc Qxa5 = would have been weaker.) **39... Rxa5 40.Re2 Ra6 41.Qd3+ Kh6 42.c5 Rg6** (42...Rc6 43.Bg2 Rxc5 44. Re6+ Bf6 45.Qxd4 Rf5 46.Be4 Re5 47.Qxa7, and wins.) **43.Bf5 Rf6 44. Re5 h4 45.g4 Rf8 46.Rd5 Qf4 47.Rd7! Qc1+ 48.Kg2 Rf6** (48...Qxc5 49. Qd2#) **49.Qh3 1-0** Black resigned, in view of 49...Qg5 50.f4.

*Kiss – Hulak*

Oberwart 1988



**B?**

Black stands well, but it's not easy to choose a plan of action. The key to the position turns out to be the unexpected activation of the "worst-piece principle": it's the rook on a8 that's out of play.

**15...a7-a5!**

Black intends Ra6-e6. If 16.Nf3, then 16...Ra6 17.Nd4? Bc5—+. On 16. Qb3 Ra6 17.a3 (intending 18.Qc3), the reply 17...Nd7! is unpleasant.

**16.Re1 Ra6 17.Nf3?**

White chooses a bad plan, and soon his position becomes difficult. 17. Re3!? was better, when Black would need to play 17...Re6 (17...Bf5 – expecting 18.Bxb7 Re6 19.g4 Bg6 – is dubious because of 18.Qf3). Another possibility worth looking into was 17.Bc3!? Re6 19.Rxe6 Bxe6, with mutual chances.

**17...Bf5 18.Nd4 Bb4! 19.Re3**

After 19.Nxf5 Bxe1 20.Qxe1, Black can win the exchange by 20...d2 21. Qe2 Rxe5 22.Qxe5 Re6 23.Qc3 d1Q+ 24.Rxd1 Qxd1+ 25.Kh2, but 20... Nd7! 21.f4 f6 is probably stronger, with advantage to Black.

White's position is also clearly worse after 19.Bxf6 Rxe1+ 20.Qxe1 Rxf6 21.Qe5 Bg6.

**19...Bg6 20.Nb3**

White would lose after 20.Bxb7? Rxe5 21.Rxe5 Qxd4, but the knight should have gone to b5.

**20...Rae6 21.a3 Bf8**

21...Bd6!? 22.Bd4 Rxe3 23.Bxe3 Bxg3—+ was another possibility.

22.Bf4 a4 23.Nd2 Bc5, and Black won.

**J. Polgar – Hübner**

Munich 1991

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 Nxe4 6.d4 b5 7.Bb3 d5 8.  
de Be6 9.c3 Be7 10.Bc2 Bg4 (10...0-0) 11.h3 Bxf3 12.gf Nc5 13.f4 Qd7  
14.Qf3 Rd8?!

14...f5! at once was better, since now White could have prevented this important move by 15.Be3! f5? 16.ef.

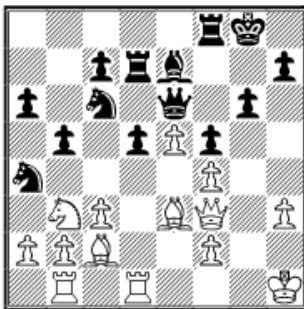
**15.Rd1 f5! 16.Be3 Qe6**

16...0-0? is bad, because of 17.Bxc5 Bxc5 18.Rxd5!.

**17.Nd2 0-0 (17...Ne4!?) 18.Nb3 Na4?**

A serious positional error: “A knight on the rim is dim!” 18...Ne4! would have led to an unclear position. Perhaps Robert Hübner feared the reply 19.Qg2, when the complications after 19...g5?! 20.f3 would not have been in his favor. However, he could have played 19...Rf7!, preparing 20...g5 21.f3 Rg7, without fearing an immediate 20.f3, because of 20...Nf6.

**19.Rab1! Rd7?! (19...Kh8) 20.Kh1** (prophylaxis against g7-g5) **20...g6**



**W?**

White's light-squared bishop is not yet in play. It must be brought to the h1-a8 diagonal, in order to increase the pressure on d5.

**21.Bc2-d3!+/-**

An excellent maneuver: White intends to continue Bd3-f1-g2. The central pawn will prove difficult to defend: if the knight leaves c6 (to prepare c7-c6 or c7-c5), White immediately replies Nd4.

White also had at her disposal a different, yet no less promising regrouping: 21.Rd2!? followed by Qg2 and Bc2-d1-f3.

In her annotations, Judit Polgar pointed out a number of elegant tactical variations (after 21.Bd3), which underscored the unfortunate position of the knight at a4, and illustrate the difficulties Black faces.

21...Nd8 22. Nd4 Qf7 23.Nxb5!+/-;

21...Qf7 22.Qe2!? (threatening 23.Bxb5) 22...Rb8 23.Ba7!+/- (threatening 24.e6). And here's a second solution: 22. Bf1!? Nd8 23.Bg2 c6 24.Nd4! Nc5 25.Nxc6! Nxc6 26.Rxd5+/-.

The game ended as follows: **21...Bh4?! 22.Bf1 Rdd8 23.Bg2 Ne7 24. Nd4 Qf7 25.Qe2!**

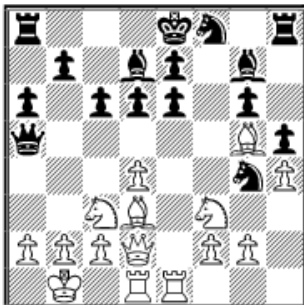
The bishop has fallen into a trap at h4: White threatens 26.Nf3. Polgar confidently turns her advantage into victory.

25...g5 26.Rg1 c5 27.Nf3 Ng6 28.fg f4 29.Bd2 Qf5 30.b3 Nb6 31.Rbe1 Rfe8 32.Bf1 (threatening 33.Rg4) 32...d4 33.cd cd 34.Ba5 Qe6 35.Rg4 Rd5 36.Qd2 Nd7 37.Nxh4 Ndx5 38.Bg2 1-0

*Hodgson – Hillarp Persson*

Erevan Olympiad, 1996

1.d4 d6 2.e4 g6 3.Nc3 Bg7 4.Be3 a6 5.Qd2 Nd7 6.h4 h5 7.Nf3 Ngf6 8.e5!? Ng4 9.e6 fe 10.Bd3 Nf8 11.0-0-0 Bd7 12.Rhe1 c6 13.Bg5 Qa5 14.Kb1



**B?**

Black is a pawn up; but his pieces are scattered, and there's no self-evident means of completing his development (castling is impossible, in view of the loss of the e7-pawn). 14...c5? would be a mistake, because of 15.Nd5! (15.Be7!? cd 16.Bxf8) 15...Qxd2 16.Rxd2+/-.

**14...Rh8-h7!**

Black prepares 15...Bh8 and 16...Rf7. In this way, he develops his inactive rook to the half-open f-file, and defends the e7-pawn as well, making queenside castling possible.

**15.Qe2 Bh8 (15...c5!?) 16.Bd2 Rf7 17.Ne4 Qb6! 18.Bc1 (18.c3!?) 18...a5!? 19.Nfg5 Rf5! 20.f3 Nf6 21.Nc3 Rd5!**

An excellent exchange sacrifice. Instead, the tempting 21...Nd5?! would have led to a difficult position for Black after 22.Nxd5 Rxd5 23.c3.

**22.Nxd5 Nxd5 (23...Nc3+ was threatened) 23.Qd2 Bxd4 24.Bxg6+ Nxc6 25.Qxd4 Qxd4 26.Rxd4 e5 27.Rd2 b5! 28.g3 b4 (28...a4!?) 29.Rd3 Bf5 30.Ne4 Kd7 31.Ka1**



**B?**

Black's knight stands badly on g6 – it ought to go to e6, which would also clear the g-file for the rook.

**31...Ng6-f8!/=+**

### 32.c4 bc 33.bc Ne6 34.Ba3 Rg8?!

A disappointing error, marring the course of an excellently played game by Black. As Jonathan Rowson has pointed out, he could have played 34...Kc7!?, meeting 35.c4 with 35...Nf6. But the strongest was another prophylactic move: 34...Nb6!, taking control of the important c4-square.

**35.c4! Bxe4 36.Rxe4 Nb4 37.Bxb4 ab 38.Rxe5 Rxb3 39.Ra5 c5 40.Ra7 + Nc7**

Now the position has become unclear.

**41.a3! Kc6!? 42.ab cb 43.Kb2 e5 (43...Rh3)**

In Rowson's book and in the computerized database, the continuation given is: 44.Rb3 e4? (Black keeps equality after 44...Rh3 – it's unclear why Black simply gives up a pawn, and also why White doesn't take it.

**45.Re3?! ef??**

45...Kb6 was necessary, only then to be followed by 46...ef, maintaining equality). Here a draw was agreed, even though 46.Re7 would have won knight and game.

Everything makes sense, if you assume that the king, and not the rook, was the piece which went to b3. After 44.Kb3!? e4 45.Re3 ef, the draw agreement is justified: 46.Re7 f2+ 47.Kxb4 f1Q 48.Rexc7+, with perpetual check.

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