



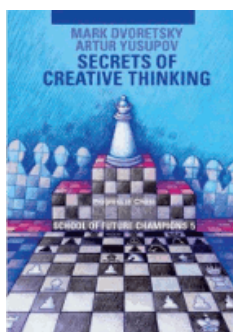
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The Transit Square

The following game attracted my attention because of its clearly-expressed strategic picture. All of Black's play revolved around just one square on the board, and not even a central one. Our strategy is often based on seizing an important square, but here it only served as a transit square for almost all the black pieces, which occupied it one by one so that they could proceed further or implement a favorable exchange.

Kovacevic, Vladimir – Ilic, Zoran
Yugoslavia, 1980
Modern Benoni [A64]

1.d4 c5 2.d5 Nf6 3.c4 e6 4.Nc3 ed 5.cd d6 6.Nf3 g6 7.g3 Bg7 8.Bg2 0-0 9.0-0 Nbd7 10.Nd2 a6 11.a4 Re8 12.h3 Rb8 13.Nc4 Nb6 (13...Ne5) 14.Ne3 Nbd7 15.Nc4 Nb6 16.Na3 Bd7 17.a5 Nc8 18.Nc4



[FEN "1mqr1k1/1p1b1pbp/p2p1np1/P1pP4/2N5/2N3PP/1P2PPB1/R1BQ1RK1 b - - 0 18"]

1...?

The opening variation that has been played, despite White's additional space, doesn't promise him any advantage. True, he has prepared to open the b-file: in the event of b7-b5 an exchange of pawns on b6 with a subsequent Nc4-a5 follows – a knight invasion on c6 will be very unpleasant for Black. An example is the game Kovacevic – Andersson, Titovo Uzice, 1978: 18...Qc7 19.Bd2 b5?! (on 19...Bb5 Kovacevic mentions 20.b3, but after 20...Bxc4! 21.bc b5 22.ab Nxb6 Black has sufficient counterplay) 20.ab Nxb6 21.Na5 Bb5 (21...c4?! 22.Nc6 Ra8 23.e4 – Kovacevic) 22.b3 Ra8 23.Re1 Nfd7 24.Rc1, and the position is in White's favor.

Black's counterplay in this variation is associated with possession of the b5-square. First, it's occupied by the bishop with the aim of exchanging off the formidable enemy knight on c4.

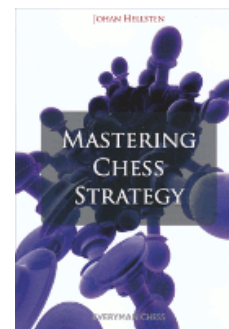
18...Bd7-b5! 19.Qd1-b3 Bb5xc4 20.Qb3xc4 Nf6-d7 21.Ra1-a3

White didn't play the best way in the game Liberzon – Yusupov, Lone Pine 1981: 21.Qd3?! Ne5 22.Qc2. Black sent his knight to the transit square b5, and after 22...Na7! 23.Rd1 Nb5 24.Nxb5 ab he obtained better play.

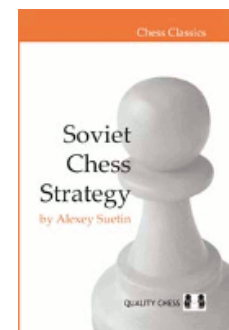
21.Kh2, 21.Ra2, 21.Ne4 has also been tried, and Artur Yusupov's recommendation 21.e4 deserves attention, but White doesn't manage to prove his advantage anywhere.

21...Nd7-e5

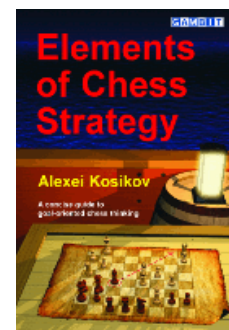
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A knight transfer to f5 is also promising, as tried in the game Rubineti – Gheorghiu, Buenos Aires 1979: 21...Ne7!? 22.Qa2 Nf5 23.e3 Ne5 24.Rd1 Qc7 25.Ra4 Rec8 26.Kh2 h5, and Black is doing superbly.

22.Qc4-a2



[FEN"1rnqr1k1/1p3pbp/p2p2p1/P1pPn3/8/R1N3PP/QP2PPB1/2B2RK1 b - - 0 22"]

1...?

22...Nc8-a7

The knight goes to the transit square b5. From there it attacks the rook and when necessary will threaten an invasion on d4. White tries to interfere with his opponent's idea by taking control of the b5-square.

23.f2-f4 Ne5-d7 24.Qa2-c4 Qd8-c8!

Well played. Having reinforced the a6-pawn with his queen, Black has prepared b7-b5. After opening the b-file, the move Nb5 again becomes possible.

25.e2-e4?

A positional mistake: he shouldn't have weakened the central square d4. 25.e3 b5 26.ab Rxb6 27.Ra5 Nb5 28.Bd2 led to an unclear situation.

25...b7-b5 26.a5xb6 Rb8xb6 27.Ra4-a5



[FEN"2q1r1k1/n2n1pbp/pr1p2p1/R1pP4/2Q1PP2/2N3PP/1P4B1/2B2RK1 b - - 0 27"]

1...?

27...Na7-b5!

All the efforts to prevent a knight invasion on b5 have been in vain: the knight has occupied that square anyway. 28.Nxb5 ab 29.Rxb5? loses because of 29... Qa6.

28.Bc1-d2 Nb5-d4

Threatening both 29...Nb3 and 29...Rxb2.

29.Nc3-a4

A restrained 29.Ra2 is preferable, intending, Nd1 and Bc3.



[FEN"2q1r1k1/3n1pbp/pr1p2p1/R1pP4/
N1QnPP2/6PP/1P1B2B1/5RK1 b - - 0 29"]

1...?

29...Rb6-b5!

The b5-square has also worked for the rook! 29...Nb3? 30.Nxb6 Nxd2 31. Nxc8 Nxc4 32.Ra4 Nxb2 33.Nxd6 was a blunder, with a winning position for White.

30.Bd2-c3 Qc8-b7

30...Ne2+?! 31.Qxe2 Bxc3 32.Rxb5 Bd4+ 33.Kh2 ab 34.Qxb5 didn't work. But now a check on e2 is already threatened.

The computer suggests a different path: 30...Bf6, with the idea of 31...Bd8.

31.Rf1-f2



[FEN"4r1k1/1q1n1pbp/p2p2p1/RrpP4/
N1QnPP2/2B3PP/1P3RB1/6K1 b - - 0 31"]

1...?

How can Black further develop his initiative? An attempt to undermine the center, 31...f5?!, is a mistake because of 32.e5! (32...de?? 33.d6+ and 34. Bxb7). On 31...Nb3?!, there follows 32.Rxb5 Qxb5 33.Bf1!, and White manages to consolidate.

The solution is to exploit the same b5-square for yet another piece.

31...Rb5xa5! 32.Bc3xa5 Qb7-b5! 33.Qc4xb5

Forced. But now Black's pawn structure improves, and he achieves decisive superiority.

33...a6xb5 34.Na4-b6

If 34.Nc3, then 34...b4 (cutting off the road back for the white bishop) 35.Nd1

Ra8 36.Bc7 Nb5, and the bishop is caught.



[FEN"4r1k1/3n1pbp/1N1p2p1/BppP4/
3nPP2/6PP/1P3RB1/6K1 b - - 0 34"]

1...?

34...Nd4-b3?!

All that remained was to make another precise move, 34...Nf8!, and White wouldn't have managed to avoid big material losses because of the absurd position of his bishop and knight. There's no satisfactory defense to 35...Rb8 or 35...Nb3 (with the additional threat of Bd4).

35.Ne5xd7 Nb3xa5 36.e4-e5! d6xe5 37.f4xe5

In the case of 37.Nxc5, both 37...e4 (Ilic) 38.Nxe4 Bd4 39.Kf1 Bxf2 40.Nf6+ (40.Kxf2 Rc8) 40...Kf8 41.Nxe8 Bxg3 42.Nc7 b4 and 37...ef 38.Rxf4 Bxb2 39.Rb4 (39.d6!? Ba3! 40.Ne4 Rd8-/+) 39...Nc4 40.Rxb5 Bd4+ 41.Kh2 Re2 are strong.

37...Bg7xe5 38.Nd7xe5 Re8xe5 39.Rf2-f6

A hopeless minor piece ending arose with 39.d6 Re1+ 40.Rf1 (otherwise 40...Rd1) 40...Rxf1+ 41.Bxf1 (41.Kxf1 Kf8) 41...c4.

39...Re5-e2 40.Rf6-a6?!

40.Rb6 b4 41.d6!? (41.Rb5 Nb3 42.Bf1 Rxb2) 41...Rd2 42.Bf1 is more stubborn, but here, too, after 42...Kg7 White's position is difficult.

40...Na5-c4 41.Ra6-c6 Re2xb2 42.Rc6xc5 Kg8-g7 0-1

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