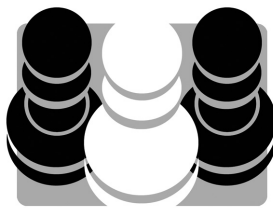


Grandmaster Preparation

Attack & Defence

By

Jacob Aagaard



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Preface

Originally this book was not meant to be a part of the *Grandmaster Preparation* series. But people on our blog suggested that it would be a good idea and as the concept and title came from there in the first place, I was already prone to listen to reason. Obviously it has made the project even more difficult to complete in the time-frame I had originally intended, but from experience I know that books are read a decade after they were written, so a slight delay in the publishing schedule was certainly not going to stop me writing a book that made perfect sense.

It took me nearly eight years to write *Attacking Manual 1 & 2*. As a result they turned out exactly the way I wanted them and to my delight, others shared this positive opinion of them. While this book builds very heavily on *Attacking Manual 1*, it can also be enjoyed in its own right. I will briefly explain the strategic ideas at the start of each chapter, making it possible for the reader to develop his own understanding through learning by doing. For a more elaborate description, please go to AM1.

This book does contain one extra theme compared to the manuals: *Kill zone*. It is not that I did not understand this concept previously, but I did not emphasize it enough. This has now been corrected and makes this a bit more than a simple workbook.

I have previously written a book on the theme of defence, *Practical Chess Defence*. But unlike that book I have decided here to spread out the exercises into the various thinking techniques, rather than focus exclusively on difficulty. If you have both books and cannot decide where to start, then this is the place; the other book is very difficult.

I hope the exercises in this book will both bring you delight and improve your chess.

Jacob Aagaard, August 2013

Attacking Theory in 60 Seconds

The general ideas of attacking chess are elaborately described in *Attacking Manual 1*, but rather than requiring you to read that book (I will recommend it though – it did win a few awards after all...) I have summarized the main headlines in small chapters before the relevant exercises. But there is still nothing like a good overview, which is what I will provide here.

Attacking chess is conceptually quite simple: the idea is that an advantage in a small area of the board can be more important than a breakdown on the rest of the board, if that small part of the board is where the king is located. The superiority is fleeting in nature and swift in execution. It is not that material does not matter, it is needed in order to deliver mate, but it comes second to the other great force of life, and chess, time.

For this reason it is probably counterintuitive that the first of the principles I have decided to focus on in attacking chess is of a material kind:

Include all the Pieces in the Attack

As a chess trainer this is the obvious place to start teaching how to attack, because this is the place where most of the readers will fail in their own games. I do not have statistics to prove this, but it is my experience, as fragile as subjective observations are, that this is where most amateur chess players go astray.

Including all the pieces in the attack is about overpowering your opponent in his keep, about having enough foot soldiers to give up in order for the one lonely killer to make it to the opponent's king. Many attacks fail because the last piece is missing in the attack. The piece that could have been there to clear the way, or even slip in the knife.

Obviously it is not always possible to bring all your pieces into the attack, but to be a good attacking player you need to develop a good feeling of when you can and when you cannot. In order to do this you need a good feeling for:

Momentum

Pawns are the soul of chess, Philidor mused. I would say that they are the soul of strategic chess, because the game is taking place around the structures the pawns establish, and creating the positions that benefit your pieces is what chess strategy is all about.

Dynamic chess on the other hand is all about momentum. If an attack is hanging on a knife edge and success by no means seems certain, it is not the pawn structure or the body count that matters the most, it is the speed with which the attack is carried out.

Now, obviously we can only make one move at a time, so momentum in chess is not like speed in other sports. There is no way for us to speed up and be able to make five moves while our opponents are only allowed to make three. But there are a few things we can do: we can avoid wasting time; we can threaten something that forces our opponent to make moves that do nothing for his defence – and so on...

A good feeling for momentum – an understanding of how to bend the laws of the physics in order to progress the attack – is needed if you want to become a good attacker. Many strong players have never fully developed this and in my opinion not understood that it exists, instead thinking that their attacks failed due to miscalculation.

Colour

Coming past the big two main principles of attacking chess, we move into the more technical themes. Colour is a simple idea: that only the Rook and the King are truly colour blind. The Queen has some leanings, while the Knight, Bishop and Pawn can only control one colour of squares at one time.

For this reason it is standard that weaknesses will form on one colour of squares. This happens because we place our pawns to support our pieces. But this also means that the pieces at times will not support the pawns; it is a matter of rank.

If I had to rank the pieces in order of their attacking potential, I would rate them like this: queen, knight, bishop, pawn, rook and king; though I am a bit uncertain that the rook and pawn should be ordered that way around. Attacks are very difficult to carry out without queens or knights, but happen without pawns, rooks and kings all the time. For this reason it is natural that attacks will happen quite frequently in harmony on one colour of squares. A good feeling for this is a strong asset for the attacking player.

Quantity beats Quality

A logical follow-on from the basic ideas that pieces can only attack a square once, that time is more important than material and that rooks are not very agile attackers, is that the exchange sacrifice is a big part of attacking chess. But there are other sacrifices that can propel the attack from promising to decisive; all based on the same underlying principle as *include all the pieces in the attack*: a piece that does not participate in the attack has no value for the attack (though of course an attack that does not end in mate has an aftermath).

For this reason the quantity of attackers is often more important than the firepower of the attackers themselves. A mate delivered with a pawn is just as valid as a mate delivered with a queen; actually, most chess fans would intuitively prefer to see the show where the pawn stars.

Attack the Weakest Square

With this theme we are into basic chess theory; which is also relevant for attacking chess, of course. An attack of any sort, being the type we discuss in this book, or the slow creeping up of a bigger army, which is what can happen if our attack fails, will be directed at the weaknesses in

the position. A chain always breaks at its weakest link, as does a window pane. Only in rare cases where the force is so massive that it can go through anything, is this not the case.

Understanding where all of the opponent's weaknesses are and being quick to spot them is an important part of being a good chess player.

Attack the Strongest Square

This is more a technique than a theme; based on diversion. You attack one square that the opponent seemingly is in full control of, but because he has to defend it all the same, he will have to make concessions elsewhere in his position. The idea was originally formulated by Karpov's old trainer Igor Zaitsev, though it has of course been about forever. But it was Zaitsev who consciously made it into a method he used to find many novelties and other ideas in his analysis. He even wrote a book in Russian with this name.

Evolution/Revolution

While there is nothing new under the sun in the previous six themes, this one is perhaps a bit original; at least the naming of the beast.

The principle is quite simple: attacks happen in waves. First we build up our forces, looking for the right moment to go from mobilization to attack. The mobilization is the evolution; the execution that changes the position for good is the revolution.

What I am trying to teach with this theme is that the wave goes down as well as up. After the position changes, the conditions for our forces will have changed again, and it is often time to build up (evolution) a bit more before making further revolutions. It is an understanding of how a short regrouping can be vital for any attack being successful; even if we have invested a pawn, piece, rook, queen, or army in the attack. 'Don't panic!' is the short version, because this is all about psychology.

Kill Zone

Give a check – it might be mate is one of the worst pieces of advice ever given in chess. I personally have a lot of time for general concepts/strategies/advice in chess; I find that it is one of many useful ways to approach this game and one that fits well with the way our brains work. But to tell people (and let's be honest here, we are first and foremost talking about kids) to rely on hope and guesswork over systematic investigation of the position is just evil.

In military theory they talk about *Death Ground*, as being the place where an army has its back against a wall, a river or similar and thus nowhere to run. It can also be the one piece of land that they are willing to die for unconditionally. In chess we are never the defenders of the faith, the orphans or the meek. We are the aggressors, the colonialists, the oppressors. We need to create the death ground for the opponent's king – and then we have to make sure he does not escape from it! Giving random checks is often a way to chase the king away from his death bed, only to see him live to a ripe old age in the endgame...

The Kill Zone theme is all about the death ground.

Defence

If I had included all the material I have on attacking chess, I could easily have created a double volume. But making choices is a good habit and for this reason I decided that this book would include a few chapters on defensive ideas as well.

Only Move

At the heart of defensive chess is the concept of the only move; that there are positions where only one move does not lose and we are able to find this. It can of course also be the only move that fends off the attack, while others allow the opponent to escape unharmed from an overreaching attack.

There will be a lot of techniques with which we can find the only move. Elimination is the most common one, but it does not really matter. The main thing is that we do *not* play a move that we should have worked out was doomed to fail.

Comparison

We always choose the wrong rook, as Bent Larsen used to say. In this short chapter, the job will among others be to choose the right rook; to decide if you should throw in the check or not and so on. Using the technique of comparison we can more easily make this decision.

Prophylaxis

In defending, nothing is more important than a good feeling for your opponent's ideas, options and desires. Knowing what they are, when to react against them, when to ignore them or just slightly rejig your plans to take them into consideration, is priceless.

The question "what is my opponent's idea?" should be one we ask ourselves often. In this chapter not asking it will be a blockade to solving the exercises.

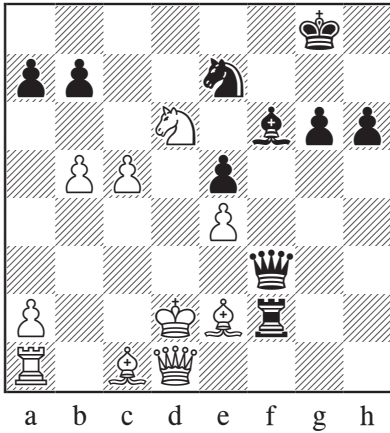
Active Defence

Attack is the best defence; or so the saying goes. As with most things in life, this is true, but only sometimes. There are times when a dubious-looking position can be saved with a perpetual check, forcing a drawable endgame or just by reacting actively to seemingly devastating threats. Just because we are on the defensive, we should not be blind to reacting actively.

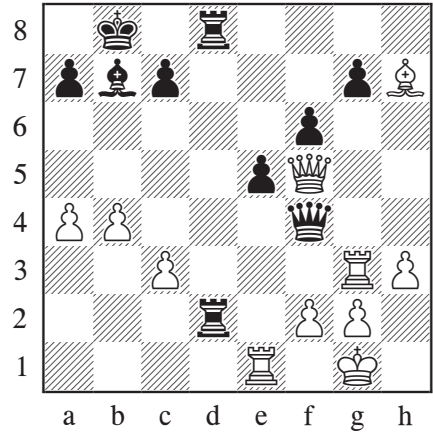
Van Wely – Stellwagen, Amsterdam 2009

Maroczy – Marshall, San Sebastian 1911

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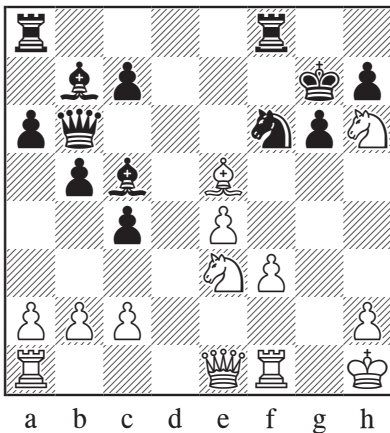
Naiditsch – Caruana, Baden-Baden 2013



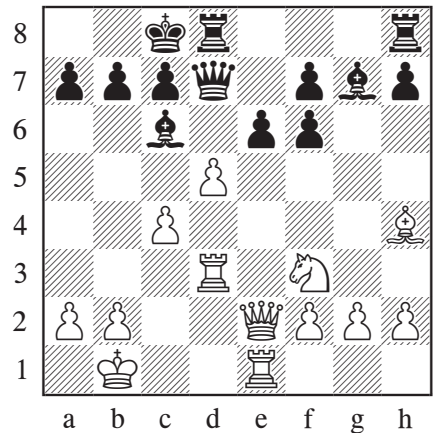
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Nohr – Schmidt, Copenhagen 2013

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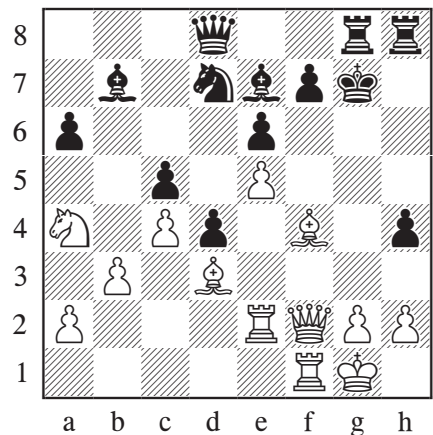
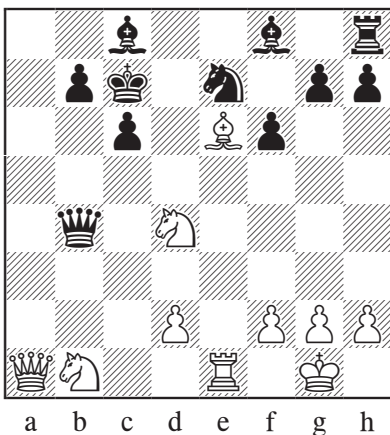
Berczes – Prusikin, Baden 2012



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Karjakin – Ivanchuk, Loo 2013

26



29

24. Loek van Wely – Daniel Stellwagen, Amsterdam 2009

The problem for Black is: how to include the minor pieces in the attack. Stellwagen found a nice way to make the most of both of them, without losing momentum. **26...♖d5!! 27.exd5** 27.♖e1 is refuted with 27...♞f1† 28.♙xf1 ♙h4† 29.♗d2 ♙g5† and either White loses the queen after 30.♗c2 ♖b4† or the king after 30.♖e1 ♞g3† 31.♖e2 ♖c3#. 27.♙b2 ♙g5† is also decisive: 28.♖e1 ♞h1† 29.♗xf2 ♙h4# **27...e4** Threatening ...♞c3#. **28.♖e1** 28.♖xe4 ♞xe4 does nothing for White's position. Black can for example take the white rook when he wants to. **28...♞g2** Stellwagen misses the direct wins; here 28...♙c3†! 29.♙d2 ♞g3!! 30.♙xc3 e3 and 31...♞f1†, winning. **29.♗d2 ♙xa1?†** Black won on move 47, but could still have forced checkmate after 29...♞f3! 30.♖e1 ♙c3† and so on.

25. Arkadij Naiditsch – Fabiano Caruana, Baden-Baden 2013

Naiditsch missed two big chances to win this game. **25.♖eg4?** Quite a natural move, but the knight was already attacking; the rook on a1 was not. 25.♖hg4?! would have continued the attack as well, but this is not as strong as the solution below. **25...♙d4?** A difficult position to defend. The correct way was 25...♞ae8! when White can win the exchange on f6, but probably not claim a great success thereafter. Or he can try 26.♞d1!? ♞xe5 27.♖xe5 ♗xh6 28.♖d7 ♖xd7 29.♞h4† ♗g7 30.♞xd7† ♞f7 31.♞xf7† ♗xf7 32.♞xh7†, which will only give him a perpetual check. **26.♙xd4 ♞xd4 27.♞d1 ♞xb2** 27...♞b6 might be better, but White has a pleasant life after 28.♞c3±. We will continue this game in Exercise 19 of Chapter 3 on page 77.

25.♞d1! was the right move. **25...♙xe3** 25...♞ad8 loses in many ways. The most convincing is: 26.♖ef5†! gxf5 (if 26...♗h8 then 27.♖f7† ends the need for variations) 27.♞g3† ♗h8 28.♞xd8 and Black is mated. **26.♞d7† ♗h8 27.♖g4** Probably this is the position Arkadij could not fully work out. White is winning, but at the moment he is a piece down. Still, the threat of ♖xf6 ending with an extra exchange is quite strong, so Black has to look towards **27...♙g5** when White wins with: **28.♖xf6! ♞xf6** 28...♙xf6 29.♞h4 h5 30.♞g5 leads straight to mate. **29.♞g3! ♙h6** 29...h6 30.h4+– **30.♙d4 ♞c6 31.♞xc7** Black loses material.

26. David Berczes – Michael Prusikin, Baden 2012

To develop your initiative correctly is definitely an art form that is difficult to master. **19.♖a3!** This slightly odd-looking prophylactic move was very strong. Black will be overrun quite quickly. In the game White played more weakly: 19.♖c3? ♗b8 20.♙xc8 ♞xd4! This keeps Black in the game. 21.♙h3 f5!? 22.♞a5? (22.♙xf5 ♞a7 23.♞c1 would have kept some pressure on Black, but some of the advantage has disappeared.) 22...g6! Black won on move 54. **19...♗b8** 19...♖g6 20.♖ab5†! cxb5 21.♞b1 gives White a winning attack after 21...♞c5 22.♙xc8 as well as 21...♞xd4 22.♞xd4 ♙xe6 23.♞xb5 ♙d6 24.♞c3†! winning, on account of 24...♗b8 25.♞c6 with a double threat. **20.♙xc8 ♗xc8** 20...♖xc8 21.♖xc6† and White wins. **21.♖ab5 cxb5 22.♞a8† ♗d7 23.♖e6** White's attack cannot be resisted.

27. Geza Maroczy – Frank James Marshall, San Sebastian 1911

A golden oldie discovered by Colin McNab. In the game Black sacrificed the queen and only made a draw: **24...♞xg3? 25.fxg3 ♞xg2† 26.♗f1 ♙dd2** The threat of ...♞h2 looks quite strong, but unfortunately White has a defence. **27.♞e4! ♙xe4 28.♞xe4 ♞df2† 29.♖e1 ♞a2 30.♗f1 ♞af2† 31.♖e1 ♞a2 32.♗f1 ♞gf2† 33.♗g1 ♞fe2 34.♞b1 ♞g2† 35.♗h1 ♞h2† 36.♗g1 ♞ag2† 37.♗f1 ♞b2 38.♞e4 ♞a2** And a draw was agreed.

The winner was: **24...g5!!** 24...♞d1 25.♞xd1 ♞xd1† 26.♔h2 gets Black nowhere. **25.♞g4** If White does nothing, for example with 25.c4, then Black wins with: 25...♞d1 26.♞ge3 (26.♞xd1 ♞xd1† 27.♔h2 ♞c1 28.♞g4 ♞h1† 29.♔g3 ♞xh3† with mate.) 26...♞xe3! 27.fxe3 ♞xe1† 28.♔f2 ♞c1 Black wins in the long run. After 25.♞xf4 exf4 26.♞g4 the rook would be trapped. For example 26...♞c8 just wins. **25...♞d1! 26.♞xf4 ♞xe1† 27.♔h2 gxf4!** The right pawn. 27...exf4 28.♞xf6 ♞dd1 29.♞f8† ♞c8 30.g3 is less clear, though Black still has winning chances after 30...♞g1!. **28.♞xf6 ♞dd1 29.♞f8† ♞c8 30.g3 e4!** Black wins.

28. Finn Nohr – Horst Hubert Schmidt, Copenhagen 2013

My close friend Finn was the anti-hero of parts of *Excelling at Chess* 12 years ago. Here he misses a brilliant win, showing that he still fits the part. **18.♔d4!** In the game White played: 18.♞e3?! ♔b8? (After 18...b6 Black is worse, but not desperately so.) 19.♞a3 White won on move 30. **18...exd5** This is probably what Black would have played in the game. 18...♞a4 19.♞g3 leaves Black with no way to support his kingside. 19...♞hg8 20.b3 is of course a part of that story; now ...dxc4 does not come with a tempo on the rook. **19.♔xc6!** A slight surprise, but because of the bishop on g7, Black has to recapture with the pawn. **19...bxc6 20.cxd5** Now after 20...cxd5 21.♞g3! we see the point behind White's play. The weakening of the king is not just theoretical. It is life and death. **20...♞de8?** Just to try something. **21.dxc6 ♞xc6 22.♞g4† ♔b8 23.♞ed1 ♞hg8 24.♞g3** White has a winning attack.

29. Sergey Karjakin – Vassily Ivanchuk, Loo 2013

This is the prequel to Exercise 17. In the game White played: 23.♔b2? ♞e8 (23...h3!?) 24.♞e4 ♞xe4 25.♞xe4 ♞h5 26.♞e2 ♞f5?? (26...♞h7± was the right move) We have now arrived at Exercise 17.

The right move was: **23.♞g5!! ♞e8** I see no other moves.

For example: 23...♞f8 24.♔xc5!! This is a very hard move to see; the idea is entirely astonishing. 24...♞xg5 (24...♔xc5 25.♔f6† ♔g8 26.♞f4 is over) 25.♔xb7 ♞c7 26.♔d6 ♞e3 The only testing move. (26...f5 27.exf6† ♞xf6 28.♞xd4 and White wins on points) 27.♞xe3 dxe3 28.♞f4 and White has a winning attack. Black is lacking a move: 28...♞h7 29.♔e8† for example.

23...♞xg5 is critical, but not too hard to work out: 24.♞xf7† ♔h6 25.♞xe6† ♔h5 (25...♔f6 26.exf6 is entirely winning) 26.g4†! Black is mated. 26...hxxg3 27.hxxg3 ♞e3† 28.♞xe3 dxe3 29.♞h3† ♔g5 30.♞f5† ♔g6 31.♞f6† ♔g5 32.♞f5#

24.♞f6† ♞xf6 25.♔xc5!! This is a truly spectacular move; White is after the king. Still the lines are very complicated. 25.exf6† ♔f8 26.♞f4 e5 27.♞d2 ♞xg2! (27...♞a8? 28.♞f5!+) 28.♞xg2 e4 29.♞e2 ♞xg2† 30.♔xg2 e3 31.♞a5 d3 32.♔xc5 h3† 33.♔h1 dxe2 34.♔xd7† ♞xd7 35.♞c5† ♔e8 36.♞xe3† ♔d8 37.♞xe2 ♞e8 38.♞f3 ♔c7± White has conversion problems here, but good chances too. **25...♞xe5** 25...♔xc5 26.exf6† ♔f8 27.♞xd4 ♞g5 28.♞f5!! ♞xf5 29.♞xf5 ♔d7 30.♞d6† ♔g8 31.♞f4 ♔f8 32.♞g5 White has a winning attack. Black only has desperation left. **26.♔xb7!** Black is relieved of his strong bishop. 26.♔xd7 is less clear: 26...♞xd7 (26...♞xh2† 27.♔xh2 ♞xd7 28.♞f6† ♔f8 29.♞f4 ♞e7 30.♞e5 ♞c8 31.♞g6! and White wins.) 27.♞xe5 ♔f8! 28.♞e4± ♞g4 29.♞f6 ♞hg8 30.♞xb7 ♞xb7 31.♞d8† ♔g7 32.♞g5† ♔h6 33.♞f6† ♞g6 34.♞xg6† fxxg6 35.♞f2 ♞e4± I think Black should hold this. **26...♞h6 27.c5** This pawn should not be underestimated. **27...♞f6 28.♞xh4 ♞e7 29.♞ef2 ♞h8 30.♞g4† ♔f8 31.g3** White is winning, but it will take some time to claim the full point.