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# CHESS BLUEPRINTS

Planning *in the* Middlegame



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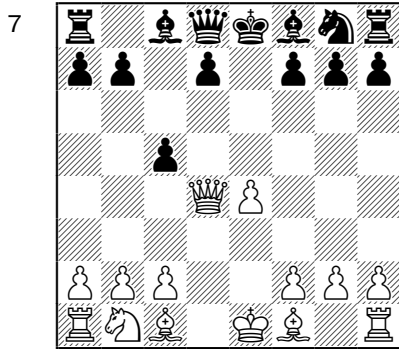
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## Chapter I

# Strongpoints and Weaknesses

### No. 1: Pawns and Weak Squares



*Q. Black has just played 5...c7-c5. Is this move: a) useful, as it gains the initiative; or b) harmful because it weakens the center squares?*

**5...                      c5?**

It's definitely weakening! There is no doubt that the fate of this weak pawn is connected with the outcome of the whole battle. It is as if a demon pushes it towards the last rank, where it can become what it was truly meant to be – a powerful queen. However, as the pawn marches forward it loses the support of

its comrades and can become subject to attack.

This is what an experienced chess-player should determine when looking at this popular position from the Scotch Game. It is difficult to say how many times this move has been played, but, in the author's experience, this move is popular among beginners who can't resist hitting their opponent's queen. Experienced players are not so rash; however, this very fact makes it hard to explain why the move was made by a member of a national team, in the game **Troianescu–K. Benites** (Moscow Olympiad 1956).

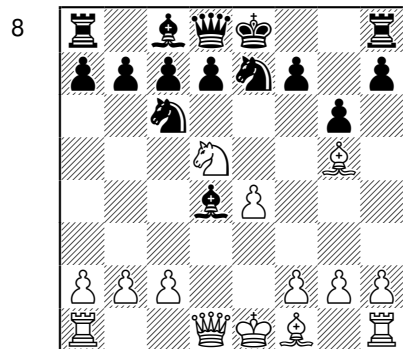
Before we look at the game analysis, let's talk a little about the role of pawns. Philidor famously wrote that, "Pawns are the soul of chess." What gives these puny infantrymen their strength, allowing them to dictate conditions? The answer is the wisdom of the rules of chess. The inability of the pawns to capture directly forward makes it possible to create a front line of opposing pawn chains between the two enemy armies.

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Now let us look at the role of the pawns in the game under consideration.

The move 5... c5? weakens the central squares in Black's camp and makes his position difficult. The theory of weak squares was formulated by the first world champion, Wilhelm Steinitz. It is still one of the cornerstones of a positional game. According to this theory, a weak square is one that cannot be defended by a pawn. This weak square is called a "hole." It is best to explain this concept with an example.

Diagram 8 is the position from the game **M. Movsisyan–T. Patton** (Tulsa 2004), after the opening moves 1. e4 e5 2. ♘f3 ♘c6 3. ♗c3 g6 4. d4 exd4 5. ♗d5 ♙g7 6. ♙g5 ♗ge7? 7. ♗xd4 ♙xd4:



White's next move comes as a bolt from the blue: 8. ♗xd4! and after 8... ♗xd4, White characteristically checkmates the black king: 9. ♗f6+ ♙f8 10. ♙h6#. This was possible because of the weak dark squares. In particular, f6 was weakened by the destruction of the dark-squared bishop.

So a weak square is one that can safely be occupied by enemy pieces, thereby creating an important stronghold in the position. While the defender is focused

on the task of expelling these pieces, the attacker will have time to strengthen his position further. He will be able to maneuver his other pieces and redirect his attack. It is especially difficult to defend when this strongpoint is in the vicinity of your king.

Weak squares are also dangerous in the endgame. When the major pieces have disappeared and the kings become active, you should take possible pawn moves into account. It is very important to be able to advance a pawn, depending on the circumstances, one or two squares. The player with the fewer weak points will have an edge in the fight.

The most important feature of pawns is that they can only move forward. If you mistakenly move a piece, it is possible to return it to its former square on the next turn. This is not possible with a pawn. It is much more difficult to improve the position of the pawns; for this reason a player should be very careful with each pawn move.

Steinitz was the first to express the idea that the pawns are strongest in the initial position. Unfortunately, it is impossible to keep the pawn chain intact; it will inevitably be modified during the game. Diagram 7 allows you to see that the defensive ability of the black pawns has decreased considerably after the move ...c7-c5. The d5 square has no natural defender, and enemy pieces can occupy it easily. In the game, this weak square attracts White's pieces like a magnet. A knight will be especially well placed on d5, so Black should use his pieces to cover that point.

As we discussed, a weak square is one that cannot be defended by pawns and



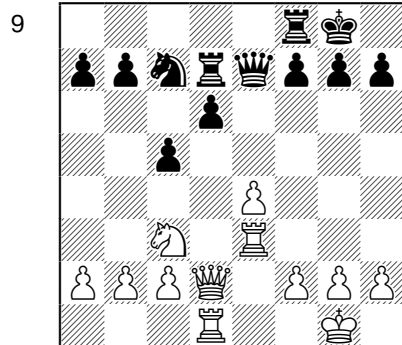
## Strongpoints and Weaknesses

can be used as an outpost by the opponent to improve his position. In this case, the weakness at d5 is exacerbated by its central location. We will discuss the importance of the center in a later chapter.

6. ♖d1                      d6  
7. ♗b5+                    ...

This move is ideal. It helps White to exchange the light-squared bishops, decreasing the number of defenders of d5. Besides, White intends later to put his pawns on c4 and e4. In such circumstances the bishop can become “bad,” as the pawns will limit the bishop’s scope. Here we can see how moves in the opening are closely connected to plans in the middlegame.

7...                              ♗d7  
8. ♗xd7+                    ♖xd7  
9. 0-0                         ♖f6  
10. ♞c3                        ♗e7  
11. ♗g5                       0-0  
12. ♖d2                       ♖ad8  
13. ♖ad1                      ♞e8  
14. ♖fe1                      ♞c7  
15. ♗xe7                      ♖xe7  
16. ♖e3                       ♖d7



17. ♞d5                      ...

White’s play during the previous stage of the game is very clear. He de-

veloped his pieces and castled. The exchanges were not useful to Black because they resulted in a better position for White. White’s knight is well posted, and Black has a number of problems. Because the c-pawn pushed forward on move 5, Black’s d-pawn lacks the support of a neighboring pawn.

17...                            ♖d8  
18. ♞xc7                      ...

The question is: what to do with the beautifully placed knight? We need to remember that *putting the knight in the center is not the end in itself* – it’s only the means! It can be compared to beginning chess-players giving unnecessary checks without understanding that the move is only meant to force an opponent to defend his king. And perhaps, after a number of thoughtless attacks, the king may find a safe haven. A similar idea applies here.

18...                            ♖xc7  
19. ♖d3                        ...

The frontal attack on the weak square d6 follows. Certainly, this is only a short-term plan, but it should be reinforced on every move. While Black is stuck defending d6, White can focus his efforts elsewhere and soon Black’s fortress will fall!

19...                            ♖fd8  
20. c4                         ...

White has very effectively arrested the d-pawn by putting his infantrymen on e4 and c4.

20...                            f6

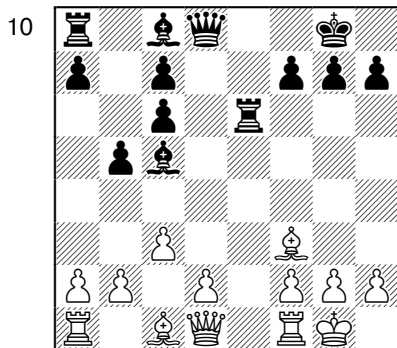
The advance e4-e5 was a real threat, but this weakens the kingside. The moves against the d-pawn were at a standstill; however, White’s attacking possibilities are not yet exhausted. The previous moves led to a situation where Black’s

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forces were tied to defending the center pawn. This allows White to focus on the kingside.

Winning chess often involves application of the *principle of two weaknesses*. If one side's position has a weakness, it can often be defended as many times as it is attacked. In that case, the attacker should aim to create a second weakness, making it difficult or impossible for the defender to protect both.

The concept of a "weakness" applies beyond the notion of an isolated pawn that is subject to attack. Briefly stated, a weakness is a positional flaw. This includes an open file that can be occupied by the opponent's major pieces, a remote passed pawn, an inactive piece, a cut-off king, and the like. Here are some examples:

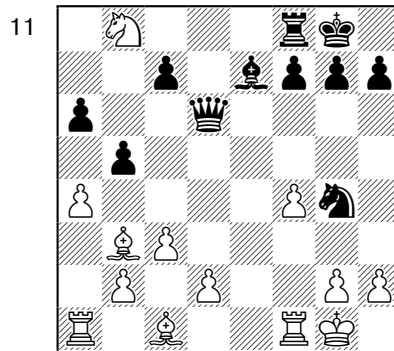


The American chess genius Paul Morphy not only excelled in beautiful and unexpected combinations, he also had a superior understanding of positional factors. He was inclined to the fast mobilization of forces, but at the same time he aimed to slow the development of the opponent's forces.

In the game **Paulsen–Morphy** (New York 1857), Black took advantage of his

opponent's oversight by creating a significant weakness on the d3 square, and occupying it with the queen: 12...♙d3!

As a result of this maneuver, Black has a strongpoint in White's position that seriously restricts the mobility of White's pieces and pawns. The d2-pawn is tightly blocked, and White's queen's bishop is cut off from the game. These circumstances gave Black excellent prospects for a successful attack.



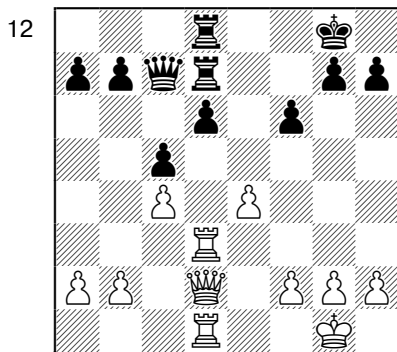
The same idea can be seen in modern practice. Moreover, average players can add this arrow to their quivers. (See *Diagram 11*.) In the game **G. Goldberg–Hermlin** (Moscow 1958), the young Estonian, then a Class B player, made an extremely strong positional move: 16... Qd6-d3!, occupying the weak square with the queen. The idea is analogous to the one Morphy executed a century earlier.

Now let's return to the principle of the two weaknesses. The further course of the game will consist of alternately attacking both weaknesses. The opponent will be forced to constantly shift his attention from one weakness to another, until his forces will eventually reach the breaking point.

## Strongpoints and Weaknesses

The attacking side relies mainly on his space advantage and the harmonious coordination of his pieces. The game can be won because the defender's forces get in each other's way and are slower to regroup.

Returning to Troianescu-Benites, White begins to loosen the pawn shield around the king through direct attack.



21. ♖h3!           g6

Black should only make this move after the possible maneuver ♗d5-h5.

22. ♖d3           a6

23. ♗f4           ♔g7

24. h4           ...

White continues to undo Black's position on the kingside by advancing the rook's pawn. In general, if the black pawn is advanced to the g6 square, the forward rush of the h-pawn sharply raises the temperature of the attack.

24...           b5

The natural reaction in this situation is to seek counterplay. Here this results in the loss of material and a hastening of the end. The further course of events requires no comment.

25. cxb5         axb5

26. h5           c4

27. h6+         ...

As a result of h-pawn's march, Black is decidedly weak on the dark squares. In addition to defending the d6-pawn, Black must watch g7, where the white queen aspires to go. Once the f6-pawn is weakened, Black's position can no longer be defended.

27...           ♔g8

28. ♖d5           ♔f7

29. ♖xb5         c3

30. bxc3         ♗xc3

31. ♖bd5         ♗a3

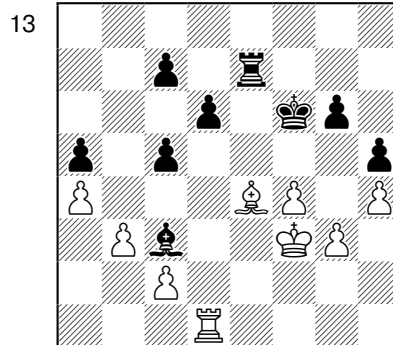
32. e5!          f5

33. ♗g5

1-0

## No. 2:

### Two Weaknesses in the Ending



*Q. Evaluate the position and suggest a plan for White.*

This position is from **Faibisovich–Westerinen** (Leningrad 1969). Material is equal, and if it were not for the rooks, the players could agree to a draw because of the bishops of opposite color. However, the presence of the major pieces radically alters the situation.

The condition of the pawn structure is vital. The weakness of the a5- and g6-

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pawns forces Black to adopt a defensive stance. At first sight, it seems like these weaknesses can be easily defended, but White can alternately shift his pieces to attack one side or the other. Besides, White constantly threatens the thrust f4-f5, which would undermine the h5-pawn.

44. ♖d5! ...

The white rook occupies the specific staging area from which it can access g5 in order to pin Black's forces to the defense of the g6-pawn.

44... ♜g7

45. ♖g5 ♘d2

46. ♚e2 ♘c3

47. ♚d3 ...

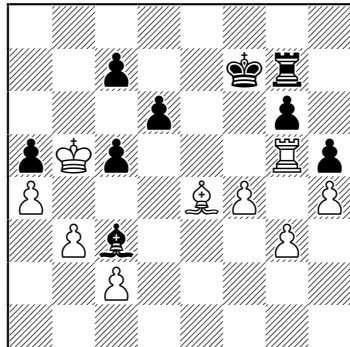
The white king's route becomes clear: he should attack the a5-pawn. Here is the principle of two weaknesses at work!

47... ♘e1

48. ♚c4 ♚a7

49. ♚b5 ♘c3

14



50. ♜d5! ...

The rook returns to its staging area. Faibisovich intends to maneuver the rook over to d3 and block the e1-a5 diagonal with c2-c3. Black has no way to oppose White's plan.

50... ♘e1

51. ♜d3 ♚f6

24

52. c3 ...

By blocking the line of the black bishop, White wins the a5-pawn. Although the c3-pawn will soon be lost, it has served its purpose: the white a-pawn becomes passed.

52... ♜e7

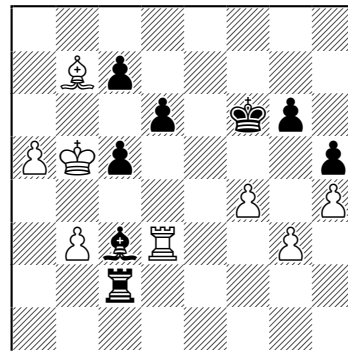
53. ♘b7 ♜e2

54. ♚xa5 ♜c2

55. ♚b5 ♘xc3

56. a5 ...

15



Black has restored material equality, but nothing can stop White's passed pawn from promoting. Though Black correctly puts up stiff resistance, the outcome of the game is decided.

56... ♘e1

57. a6 c4

Black tries the best practical chance.

58. bxc4 ♘f2

59. ♜a3 c6+

If Black used the bishop to stop the pawn by 59...♘a7, then 60. ♘d5 could follow, followed by putting the king on c6.

60. ♚xc6 ♜xc4+

61. ♚xd6 ♘a7

62. ♘c6 ♜b4

63. ♚d7 ♜b1

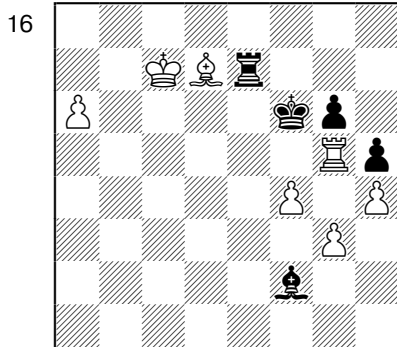
64. ♜a5 ♜b3

65. ♜g5 ...

## Strongpoints and Weaknesses

White again reminds the opponent that the g6-pawn is weak.

65... ♖e3  
 66. ♔c7 ♖e7+  
 67. ♕d7 ♕f2



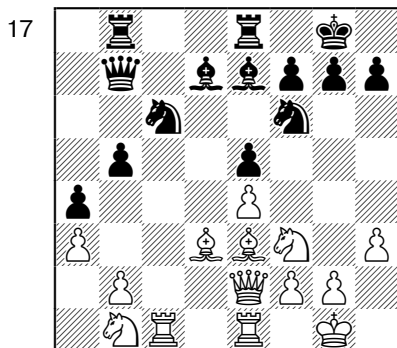
Black's last move was not a mistake. Even after 24...♕e3 25. ♖a5 ♕a7 26. ♖d5 ♕g1 27. ♔b7, the white pawn could reach the promotion square. Now White gets one more opportunity.

68. f5! ...

The game continued 68...♖e3 69. ♖xg6+ ♔f7 70. ♕e6+ ♔e7 71. ♖g7+ ♔f8 72. ♖f7+ ♔e8 73. a7, when Black finally capitulated.

This game was an excellent example of the principle of two weaknesses.

### No. 3: Invasion Point



*Q. In the diagram position, Black played 23...♕d8. Is this continuation correct, strengthening Black's position; or is it wrong, giving White greater chances to win?*

23... ♕d8?!

In the game **Karpov–Hort** (Lucerne Olympiad 1982), in response to 24. ♖c3 Black prepared the answer 24...♕a5. He intended to transfer the bishop to b6, thereby strengthening the pressure on d4. Nonetheless, this continuation is misconceived. In this case, Black loses control over c5, which is very important in this type of position. Besides, a prospective bishop attack on f6 becomes unpleasant.

Black should continue 23...b4, when Karpov indicated 24. ♕a6 ♖a8 25. ♕c4 h6 would lead to a situation with limited prospects for White, and Black's position would remain strong enough.

24. ♖c5! ...

White immediately capitalizes on his opponent's oversight and grabs the initiative. The squares b5 and e5 are threatened.

24... b4

As Black cannot defend both weaknesses, he is forced to advance this pawn in worse circumstances than one move ago. Until this point, I have abstained from providing long variations, but this one is not too complicated: 24...♕b6 25. ♖xb5 ♖d4 26. ♕xd4 (but not 26. ♖xd4 because of 26... exd4 27. ♕xd4 ♕xb5) 26...♕xb5 27. ♕xb5 ♕xd4 28. ♕xe8 ♖xe8 29. ♖xd4 exd4 30. ♖c4 ♖xb2 31. e5. White's advantage is evident because the weakness of the opponent's pawns will demand constant attention. Besides, Black's knight has little mobility, hindered as it is by the e-pawn.