

True Lies in Chess

Think For yourself

written by

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True Lies in Chess

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Foreword

Deceived All Along

I still remember how excited I felt as a child at the magic moment of opening any chess book. What was shown there represented for me the key to gaining access to the hidden secrets of the royal game: new positional concepts, interesting opening systems, wonderful tactical blows, beautiful endgames. I eagerly devoured all the treasures I could find. I blindly believed in what the books said.

Then, when I got to the playing hall and tried to apply the knowledge thus acquired to my own games, I usually found myself confronted with enormous difficulties: it was not as easy as I had been led to believe.

At the beginning we only blame the deficiencies in our game on some vague flaw of our own, when applying in practice what we learnt in theory. Given time, young talents are expected to acquire greater ability and precision in this field, and therefore improve their results. However, time itself turns from an ally into an enemy: in the eyes of others, one is not making progress at the expected rate. People then talk about the promising young player reaching the limit of his potential. These turn out to be difficult years in no-man's land.

But life goes on and if one is really passionate about what one is doing, one keeps playing and studying, with more or less intensity, the art of chess. Stages come and go: the apprentice becomes a FIDE Master, then an International Master and eventually a Grandmaster and surprisingly... one discovers that one has been deceived all along.

It turns out that from that entire array of books that captivated us in our childhood, only a few were really worthwhile, and even these were full of lies and mistakes. The latter are caused by several reasons: the authors' lack of chess strength, scant ability to pass on their knowledge, superficial analysis, etc. This can have a damaging and enduring impact on our development as chess players.

The present book has as its goal, first of all, to warn the reader about this aspect: if one is not ready to confront the study of any material in a critical, deep and creative way, to think and research for oneself, one is doomed to the most resounding failure.

Secondly, in the present work I mount a staunch defence of chess ideas in the form of strategic concepts, positional principles, philosophies of the game, etc. Of late there has been a dangerous tendency to give clear precedence to concrete analysis over the written word. I would like to quote Lasker's opinion about this topic: "A spirit with a large and roomy brain who without error could keep in mind millions of variations would have no need of planning. Frail, weak man can clearly keep in mind only half a dozen variations since he has but little time to spare for Chess. And if he by chance had more time for it and in addition had genius for the game, to see through hundreds of variations would turn his brain. His reason was not made to be a substitute for a printed table. His mind has a marvellous faculty which enables him to conceive deep and far-sighted plans without being subject to the necessity of examining every possibility." [*Lasker's Manual of Chess*]

The faculty to which Lasker refers is abstraction. We human beings have developed an exceptionally powerful technique to treat complexity: we abstract from it. Unable to control complex objects in their entirety, we ignore the non-essential details, dealing instead with the ideal model of the object and focussing on its essential aspects. Thus language has been born, the concept and the principle is but a simplified view of reality in such a way that we can interact with it. Abstraction is an essential tool to handle the complex world of the 64 squares.

In my view a well-annotated game is one that encompasses the sum of, on the one hand, rigorous analysis, and, on the other, a generous written expression of the positional ideas underlying them. In this book I have tried to tackle the games with the aforementioned criteria.

Thirdly, and finally, this work is an appeal for the reader to be creative. The only beautiful thing in chess – or in any other discipline for that matter – is that which contributes something fresh and original to the field. What is already known becomes boring to us in the end.

Fortunately enough, chess is a tremendously complex and rich game. And I say fortunately because it means that there are still new and surprising horizons to be discovered. In order to delve more deeply into the unknown one only needs to be brave and to believe in oneself.

Therefore the reader will find interesting ideas and opinions that the author has been accumulating over years of experience. I hope that this introduction to the way a grandmaster thinks will be useful for all those who want to improve their chess.

Grandmaster Lluís Comas Fabrego

Chapter I

Do not Trust the Classics

Do not believe in anything simply because you have heard it.
Do not believe in traditions simply because they have been handed down for many generations.
Do not believe in anything simply because it is spoken and rumoured by many.
Do not believe in anything simply because it is found written in your religious books.
Do not believe in anything merely on the authority of your teachers and elders.
But when, after observation and analysis, you find anything that agrees with reason, and is conducive to the good and benefit of one and all, then accept it and live up to it.

The Buddha's Kalama Sutra

The tip of the iceberg

“Scepticism is the highest of duties; blind faith, the one unpardonable sin.” *Thomas Henry Huxley*
(1825-1895) English biologist

In the games that appear in the classic manuals the analysis is usually too one-sided. History is always written by the winners and often their research lacks objectivity. Later treatises blindly copy these “exemplary games” thus reinforcing the transmission of the inaccurate, sometimes utterly false, knowledge they try to show.

It is mostly young players and those who do not trust their own strength who are likely to be the victims of this partiality, this lack of honesty and rigorousness in the analysis. But because the proof is in the pudding, I am going to show a series of examples for the readers to familiarize themselves with the substance of this problem.

The next game, analysis and notes are from the books *My System* and *Chess Praxis* by Aron Nimzowitsch, and from *Secrets of Modern Chess Strategy* by John Watson. Naturally I have added my own opinions and corrections.

⋈ **Janowski**

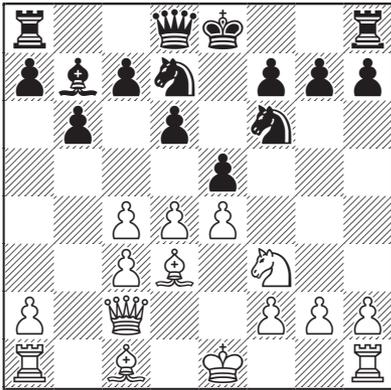
| **Nimzowitsch**

St Petersburg 1914, Nimzo-Indian [E43]

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♙b4 4.e3 b6 5.♙d3 ♙b7 6.♘f3 ♙xc3† 7.bxc3 d6 8.♙c2

The modern treatment of this variation starts with 8.0-0 0-0 9.♘d2 ♘bd7 (9...♘c6 10.e4 e5 11.♘b3) 10.e4 e5 11.♞e1 ♞e8 12.f3 ♘f8 13.♘f1, when White is slightly better: the knight can be transferred to the e3-square to target the important central points f5 and d5 without getting in the way of the plan based on the f3-f4 push.

8...♘bd7 9.e4 e5



“Now the position has taken on features typical of a Nimzo-Indian Defence. Please note the role of Black’s c-pawn. If Black has to play ...c5 in order to force White to play d5, then White’s queenside pawns will be hard to attack, e.g., Black won’t be able to play ...♘a5, ...♙a6, and ...♞d7-c6 to attack the forward c-pawn. On the other hand, if White plays d5 *without* being provoked by ...c5, Black gains two important advantages: a fine square c5 for his knights, and more importantly, the possibility of opening the position against White’s queenside by ...c6. See the note to Black’s 13th move.” (Watson)

10.0-0 0-0

As we will see, the b7-bishop is not best placed here in this system. On the one hand Black does not have enough resources to force the advance d4-d5 that he so desires without having to resort to the move ...c7-c5, and on the other, the absence of this bishop from its original diagonal will considerably weaken the f5-square, a typical target in this kind of central pawn structure.

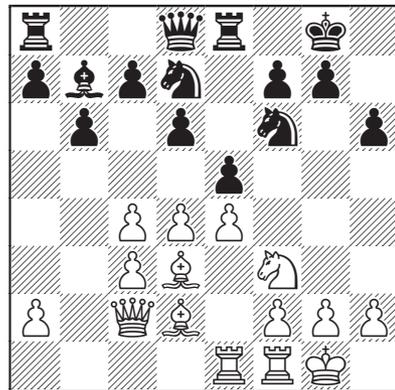
11.♙g5 h6 12.♙d2

White has provoked a slight weakening in the black kingside. If instead 12.♙h4?! ♞e8 followed by the manoeuvre ...♘d7-f8-g6 with a good game.

12...♞e8

If Black tries to achieve a general blockade of the position with 12...c5 13.d5 g5, there would follow the manoeuvre 14.h4! ♘h7 15.hxg5 hxg5 16.g3! with the idea of ♖g2, ♞h1, ♘h2 and ♙e2 with strong pressure against the enemy kingside.

13.♞a1



13...♘h7?!

In my opinion a dubious move. “The idea is still that Black would like White to play d5 without ...c5 being in, since 13...c5 14.d5 gives White a free hand to prepare g4 and f4 with an attack.” (Watson)

Black had several interesting alternatives in order to try to provoke White’s problematic d4-d5 advance:

a) 13...♞e6 – Nimzowitsch (?!Comas) This move tries to increase the pressure on the e4-point, while at the same time hindering the f2-f4 break, one of the basic plans at the disposal of the first player in this kind of position with its goal being to activate White’s rooks and the bishop pair. Now:

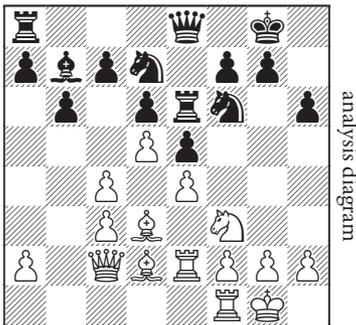
a1) 14.d5? ♞e8 15.♞e2 ♘c5 16.♘e1 c6 17.g3 cxd5 (17...♙a6! and Black is clearly better, the

idea being 18...♗xd3, exploiting the c4-pawn's weakness – Comas) 18.cxd5 ♗xd3 19.♗xd3 ♖c8 “The point of this line is that White can liquidate his doubled c-pawns and still be left with a seriously backward pawn on an open file, an idea which applies to many positions and was first enunciated by Nimzowitsch.” (Watson)

Nevertheless it is still necessary to note that the position is far from being clear due to White still having chances of counterplay on the kingside, e.g. f2-f3, ♖g2 followed by g3-g4-g5. Despite being on an open file, the c3-pawn is invulnerable.

a2) 14.♖e2 – Nimzowitsch. And now:

a21) 14...♗e8 15.d5!? – Comas (15.♖fe1 “White, with the utmost perseverance, continues the policy of marking time. However, Black also has a score to register; the chance for White to play f4 has receded into the dim future.” – Nimzowitsch)

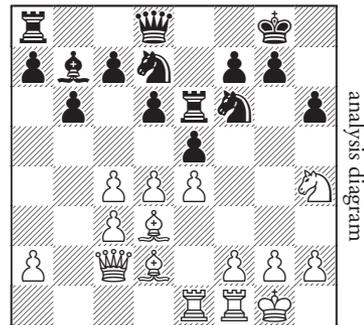


Time is a very important factor for carrying out our plans. At this point the advance is very promising since White's attack on kingside succeeds before Black's possible counterplay on the queenside. For instance: 15...♖e7 16.♗h4 ♗c5 (16...♗d8!? 17.♗f5 ♖e8 18.♖e3!? with the alternative plan of bringing the rook to the g3-square to exploit the weakening that the move ...h6 caused on Black's kingside) 17.♗f5 ♖d7 18.f4 exf4 19.♗xf4 (19.♖xf4!?) 19...♗g4 20.♖f3 White is clearly better.

a22) 14...♗f8!? (Watson) 15.♖fe1 ♖ae8 16.♗h4 g6 17.g3 ♗g7 (Quite a curious method of solving several problems at once: the

weakness of the f5-square and the development of the queenside, while increasing the pressure against White's d4 and e4 points in accord with Black's main plan) 18.♗g2 White is slightly better according to Watson. I think that after 18...♗h7!? (going after the weakness on d4: the idea is ...♗g5) Black has a very promising position: for example if 19.♗a4 ♖e7 20.♗xa7 then 20...exd4!.

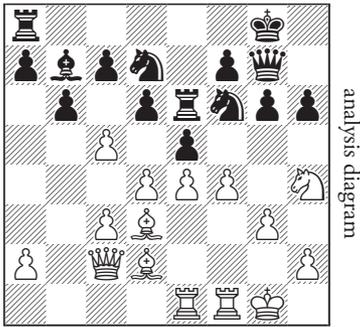
a3) 14.♗h4 – Nimzowitsch (! Comas)



Exploiting the temporary weakness of the f5-square and planning the prophylactic move f2-f3, firmly strengthening the e4-square: 14...g6 15.g3! (Comas – with the idea of securing the centre once and for all with 16.f3; the only line analysed by Nimzowitsch is 15.f4, when he gives the following variations: 15...exf4 16.♗xf4 ♗e8 [16...♗h5 17.♗f2 ♖f6 18.g3 g5 19.e5 ♗xf4 20.gxf4 ♖xf4, winning; 16...g5!]) 17.d5 ♖e7 18.♗xh6 ♗g4 19.♗g5 f6 20.♗c1 ♗ge5 Black has a good game) 15...♗f8 and now:

a31) 16.f3!? (following a constructive strategy without any hurry) 16...♖ae8 17.♖e2 c6! The idea is to play ...d6-d5, exploiting the remote situation of the h4-knight, with a complex game. If Black plays passively White will have a strong attack after ♖g2 and g3-g4.

a32) 16.f4! (this attack is completely justified in the given situation due to the poor location of the black forces) 16...♗g7 (16...♖e7 17.c5! exf4 [17...bxc5 18.fxex5 dxe5 19.♗b3 with a winning advantage] 18.cxd6 cxd6 19.gxf4 d5 20.e5 ♗e4 21.♗xe4 dxe4 22.f5 White is clearly better) 17.c5!



In this sort of position sometimes one has to act very vigorously. The pawn is offered with the object of opening important lines for White's heavy pieces. The following variations show how dangerous White's attack is:

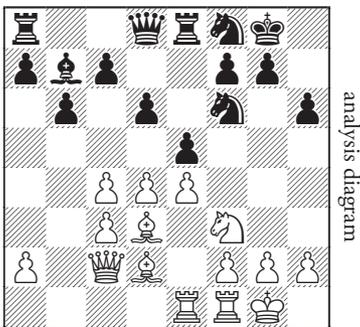
a321) 17...bxc5 18.f5! with a decisive advantage (18.dxe5 dxe5 19.♖xg6 and White is clearly better).

a322) 17...exf4 18.d5 and White is clearly better.

a323) 17...exd4 18.cxd4 ♖xe4 19.c6 ♖xd2 20.♞xe6 ♖xf1 21.cxb7 ♞b8 22.♞e7 ♖xg3 23.hxg3 ♞xd4† 24.♔g2 ♖c5 25.♙xg6 and White is winning.

a324) 17...♞e7 18.♞a4! (18.cxd6 cxd6 19.fxe5 dxe5 20.d5 and the position is unclear; 18.fxe5 dxe5 19.♞c1 ♔h7) 18...bxc5 19.fxe5 dxe5 20.d5 ♞e8 (20...♖b6 21.♞a3) 21.c4 and White is clearly better.

b) 13...♖f8 Nimzowitsch (! Comas)



I think this is the best move as Black prevents White's most effective plans: the transfer of the

knight to f5 and the f2-f4 break. Now:

b1) 14.h3 ♖g6 15.♖h2

b11) 15...♞e7 16.f4 (16.♖g4 – Watson – is good: 16...♖xg4 17.hxg4 ♞d7 18.f3 and White is slightly better) 16...exf4 17.♙xf4 ♞e8 18.♙xh6 ♖xe4 and Black is slightly better according to Watson.

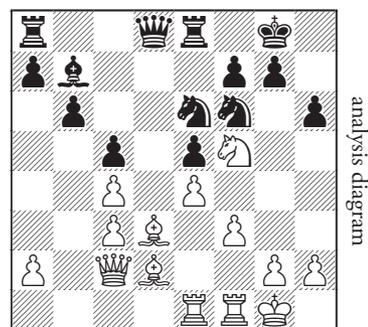
b12) 15...♞d7!? 16.f4 (16.f3?! ♖h5 Black has the initiative due to the weakness of the dark squares on the kingside) 16...exf4 17.♙xf4 ♖xf4 18.♞xf4 and White's position has more prospects.

b13) 15...c5! 16.d5 ♙c8 Black's position is very good.

b2) 14.♖h4!? Again this seems to me the most ambitious option. 14...c5! (Exploiting the weakness of the unprotected white knight. If instead 14...♖g6!? then White could either play 15.♖f5 ♖e7 16.♖g3 and be slightly better, or 15.♖xg6!? fxg6 which leads to a pawn formation that is very interesting: Black threatens to block the kingside by means of the advance ...g6-g5. 16.c5! One always has to keep an eye on the advance of the doubled pawns! [also interesting is 16.f4 with an initiative] 16...dxc5 17.dxe5 ♞xe5 18.f4 ♞e7 19.e5 ♞d7 20.♙c4† and White is clearly better.) After 14...c5!? White has a choice:

b21) 15.♖f5 (15.d5? ♖xd5) 15...cxd4 16.cxd4 ♖e6 or 16...exd4 with very complex positions.

b22) 15.dxe5!? Carrying out a plan that was played for the first time by Botvinnik. 15...dxe5 16.♖f5 ♖e6 17.f3

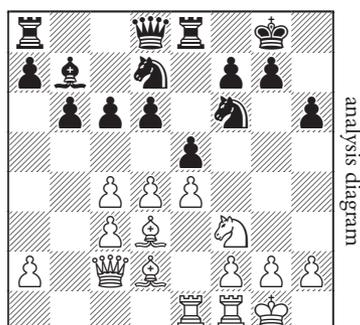


The idea is to transfer the knight to d5 eventually, although there is also the possibility

of carrying out manoeuvres such as ♖e1-b1, ♖f1-d1 and ♗d3-f1 and ♗d2-e3 with very promising positions.

Note that Black cannot use the d4-square as a base of operations thanks to the doubled-pawn complex c4-c3.

c) 13...c6!? – (Comas)



This is quite an original alternative, which no other author has pointed out. Black prepares to answer White's plan (removing the knight from f3 followed by the advance of the f-pawn) with a break in the centre, leading to complex play.

14.h3

Watson recommends 14.g3 and I agree with him that it is a better option. There could follow 14...♗g5 (14...♖f6!? seems an annoying move, trying to prevent ♗h4 by putting pressure on d4, but 15.♗h4! exd4 [15...♗g5 16.f4 exf4 17.♗xf4 with some initiative] 16.e5 ♗g5 17.♗xg5 ♖xg5 18.f4 ♖d8 19.cxd4 and White is clearly better) and now:

a) 15.♗h4 ♗f6 (15...♗e6 16.♗f5) 16.f3 and White is slightly better (Watson).

b) I prefer 15.♗xg5 hxg5 16.♖d1 and White is clearly better due to the weakness of the g5-pawn.

14...♗hf8

A prophylactic move trying to prevent White's f2-f4 break. (14...♖f6 – Nimzowitsch)

15.♗h2 ♗e6 16.♗e3 c5!?

"Nimzowitsch shows a typically modern flexibility; if he can't force d5 without playing ...c5, well, he'll play ...c5 anyway, but at a time when he has kingside prospects!" (Watson)

If the truth be told, this manoeuvre can be carried out here because Black has good prospects on the kingside due to the not-very-fortunate sequence h3, ♗f3-h2 which consolidated the position of the black knight on f4. Now driving it away with g2-g3 is much more difficult to accomplish and, furthermore, the exchange would not be very advisable because of the weakness that would appear on the e5-square right after this. The possibility Watson recommends, 16...♖f6!?, was also interesting, and if 17.♗g4, then ...♖h4 with the idea ...♗d7-f6, offering to exchange a minor piece, which in theory would benefit Black since he has less space to manoeuvre.

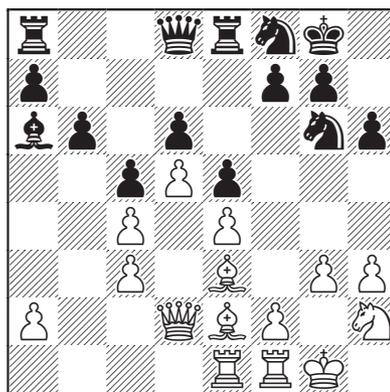
17.d5 ♗f4 18.♗e2 ♗f8

Better was 18...♗f6! with the idea ...♗c8.

19.♗g4 ♗c8

This leads us to a different subject: good bishop versus bad bishop.

20.♖d2 ♗a6 21.g3 ♗4g6 22.♗e2



The position is unclear. Apparently White has achieved all that he initially wanted: Black has only been able to force d4-d5 by ...c7-c5 (now it becomes obvious how difficult it is to put pressure on the "weak" c4-pawn) and secondly, it looks as if the advance f2-f4 will come sooner or later.

But as the continuation of the game shows, Black has enough resources to fight against the aforementioned break. This is to a great extent because of the bad situation of White's h-pawn,

which would be better off on its initial square. Moreover, the weakness of the pawn structure on the queenside takes its toll at the end of the game.

22...♖h7 23.h4 ♗f6 24.♙d3 ♖b8 25.♗e2 ♖b7 26.♙c1 ♖be7

A prophylactic manoeuvre to hinder White's plans.

27.♔h1 ♙c8 28.♖g1 ♔f8 29.h5 ♗h8 30.g4

After this move White can no longer achieve the long desired f2-f4 under ideal conditions.

30...♗h7 31.♙c2?!

If 31.g5!? hxg5 32.♙xg5 ♗xg5 33.♖xg5 f6 34.♖g3 ♗f7 35.♖eg1 ♗g5! 36.♗f3, then 36...♗h3! and Black is clearly better.

31...♖b7 32.f4 f6

Black's position is very solid.

33.fxe5?! dxe5 34.♗f3 ♗f7 35.♖ef1 ♔g8 36.♗h4 ♗d6

Black is now clearly better.

37.♗f5 ♙xf5!

In this sort of blockade position a good bishop is usually as ineffective as a bad one.

38.gxf5 ♗g5 39.♙xg5 hxg5 40.♙a4 ♖f8 41.♙c6 ♖b8 42.a4 ♔f7 43.♔g2 ♖h8 44.♖h1 ♖h6 45.♖a1 ♗c7 46.♔f2 ♖bh8 47.♔e3 ♔g8 48.♔d3 ♗f7 49.a5 ♖xh5 50.♖xh5 ♖xh5 51.axb6 ♖h3† 52.♔c2 axb6 53.♖a8† ♔h7 54.♖d8 ♗a7 55.♖a8 ♗f7 56.♔b3 ♗h5 57.♗xh5† ♖xh5 58.♙e8 ♗xe8 59.♖xe8 ♖h2 60.♖a8 g4 61.♖a1 ♔h6 62.♔a4 ♔g5 63.♔b5 ♔f4 64.♖g1 ♔xe4 65.♖xg4† ♔xf5 66.♖xg7 ♖b2† 67.♔c6 e4 68.d6 ♖d2 69.d7 e3 70.♔xb6 e2 71.♖e7 ♖xd7 72.♖xe2 ♖d3 73.♖c2 ♖d1

½-½

What conclusions can be drawn and lessons learnt after studying this game? In my opinion, there are several:

1. Who among us, in our youth, would dare challenge the great Nimzowitsch's authority and defend White's cause? Let me tell you: very few. Why? Because of what I told you before: classic games are usually annotated one-sidedly by the winners or by authors hardly bent on serious and

rigorous analysis, and in their notes everything goes the winner's, or alternatively the superior player's, way. When these games are subjected to serious investigation we can always find new ideas, correct established evaluations and discover mistakes that have passed unnoticed for several generations. It is precisely because of this that I would like to challenge the readers, daring them to play this sort of position with both colours. That's why I'm going to sum up the typical plans for both sides from the main diagram after White's 13th move.

White

- The f2-f4 break to activate both the rooks and the bishops (remember that when in possession of the bishop pair one has to open up the position—always with caution, though) and begin an attack on Black's king.

- The transfer of the white knight to the outpost on f5 followed by:

- A piece attack on the kingside via ♖e1-e3-g3.

- A pawn storm on that flank, going after the contact point on g5 with f2-f3, g2-g4 and ♖e1-e2-g2.

- The sacrifice c4-c5 to activate the bishop on c4 and disrupt Black's pawn structure.

- A pawn storm with the pieces posted behind the pawns; for instance g2-g3, ♗h4 (e1)-g2 and f2-f4.

- In the event of Black playing ...c7-c5, the possibility of taking dxe5(c5) and playing for the central d5-square.

Black

- To put pressure on White's centre with the aim of provoking the positional concession d4-d5, if possible without having to resort to the move ...c7-c5.

- To take prophylactic measures against White's aforementioned plans, of which the move ♗f3-h4 is the common element.

- The innovative plan of going for the central break ...c6, ...d6-d5 while White is preparing his attack on the kingside: the only place where the latter actually has any prospects.