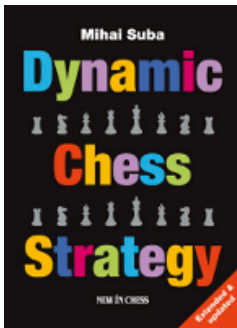




Book Reviews

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Just Like Riding a Bike

Steven B. Dowd

Dynamic Chess Strategy, by Mihai Suba, New in Chess 2010, Paperback, Figurine Algebraic Notation, 207pp. \$19.95 (ChessCafe Price: \$16.95)

It's difficult to take on the task of reviewing any revision of a book that has been hailed as a modern classic. Originally published in 1991, this book won the BCF Book of the Year Award in 1992, but then also rapidly went out-of-print. The author calls it a new book with roots in the original one. John Watson, probably the most important modern chess theorist, has been noted as agreeing, for the most part, with Suba in his [Secrets of Modern Chess Strategy](#), and I revisited the bibliography section of his book to refresh myself on what he actually said about Suba:

"Next, for a truly modern and eccentric point of view as well as a lot of fun, Suba's *Dynamic Chess Strategy* is highly recommended. My first impression of his book was that, apart from the superb games, it was rather exaggerated and superficial. But when I was preparing my own work, I realized he was perhaps the only writer who had worried about the same topics and come to the same conclusions as I had, and what's more he had expressed his views eloquently and humorously."

Suba is indeed quite the story-teller, and the book is a blast to read just for the stories. Just as one example – as it is difficult to extract these stories for a review, Suba indicates he has no idea what to place in his foreword, and gives an impression of missing the old days, when all he would have had to have done, was "just mention the **Big Father of the Big Neighbouring Country**, or when in Romania the password was **Genius of the Carpathians** (President Ceausescu).

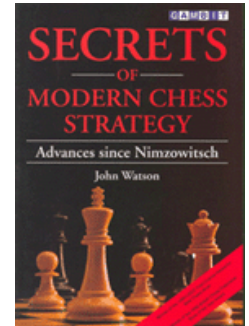
I was glad to see it took Watson even a few reads to get the full point of what Suba is trying to convey. Watson and Suba can be seen as two very different teachers covering similar topics: one drier, more factual, and to the point; the other a great storyteller where the points are not as clear until you think about them, often much later. However, Suba is definitely more "eccentric" as Watson notes, with his stories. I don't think this is bad at all; Suba's humor reminds me of a latter-day Tartakower.

Like Watson, Suba attempts to break us free of the dogma that has pervaded chess planning for many years. Others have tried and failed for various reasons, usually because of their own dogmatism, trying to throw out the old models and redefine chess planning entirely. I think both Watson and Suba succeed because their emphasis is on re-building the old models to include greater emphasis on dynamism rather than the "throw the baby out with the bath water approach." Suba even gives models of classical chess a nod with a chapter showing how such models can work in the right circumstances.

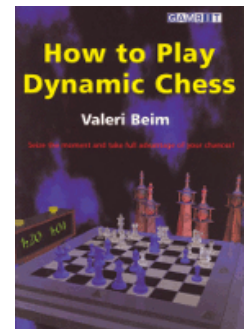
Suba makes one point abundantly clear in the beginning – this book is not for players who cannot be considered advanced, and by that he means not for children (unless they are prodigies) and not for players under 1900 Elo. An Internet poster noted that many lower-rated players "fool themselves" into thinking they understand very advanced chess books because "they read them like novels" without ever really grasping the main points. As Suba is such an entertaining writer – he has an incredible wit – there is a danger lower-rated players may fall into this trap here.

There are eight chapters:

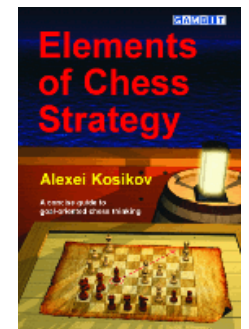
Purchases from our [chess shop](#) help keep [ChessCafe.com](#) freely accessible:



[Secrets of Modern Chess Strategy](#)
by John Watson



[How to Play Dynamic Chess](#)
by Valeri Beim



[Elements of Chess Strategy](#)
by Alexei Kosikov

- Dynamic Chess Strategy, Revisited
- The Beginning
- Why Rethink Chess Strategy?
- What is Strategy?
- Dynamic Strategy in Attack and Defense
- Lest we Forget the Classics
- Black Wins After All!
- Quiz Solutions

Chapter One includes some quiz questions that are best seen as not too difficult "discussion opener" types of questions – this book is definitely not a workbook of any kind. They are the kind of questions a skilled teacher asks to provide a basic framework for the more difficult concepts to come later.

Here Suba notes that classical positional principles provide a good tool in helping weak players become stronger, but surprisingly this may hinder their progress as strong players because the principles may function most of the time but not all the time. This is very similar to Watson's "rule-independence"; there are simply positions where you cannot rely on general rules as a guide but you have to calculate possible continuations based on the position at hand.

The most interesting point I took away from this chapter on the first read was Suba's comparison of thinking in chess (during a game) to thinking in cycling – that is, when you are on a bike, you don't think about what you are doing, you just do it – and in fact thinking about it (worrying you might fall, for example, may actually make you fall!) can be detrimental. The time to think about cycling is before you get on the bike and after you get off of it – but obsessing over it while you are riding is a sure recipe for disaster.

From this Suba gives a nice framework for chess thinking encompassing two modes – frame mode and glide mode. When he is in frame mode, you absorb the position on the board, calculate, evaluate, and decide what you plan to do and to what extent. These sorts of decisions he makes when he is on move. When he is not on move, he switches to glide, where he will fantasize about future positions or phases of the game, notice things did not see or remember in frame mode, redo some calculations, and evaluate based on future potential positions.

Chapter Two covers from the beginning of author's career to when he started formulating some of his concepts. Since I have long believed that unlike biology, phylogeny **does** recapitulate ontogeny in chess development, this short discussion of how he started to reformulate chess planning is most interesting. There is, of course, the game where he first started to use the Hedgehog formation (Suba also wrote an excellent book on this opening system as well), and began to understand what "dynamic potential" really meant.

In Chapter Three it starts to get meaty, in a chess sense. One of the most interesting statements I found here was the idea that extrapolating endgame notions to the middlegame is a mistake; "in most cases endgame principles are reversed, for example Alekhine's note that a Q-side majority may be important in the ending but in the middlegame a central majority is much more important." And what is the main goal in adopting a dynamic approach to chess? Suba says,

"The main goal of dynamic strategy is to develop the personality of a player, to discover everyone's uniqueness and turn it to good account. ... Tactics and dynamics are becoming predominant in chess. This favours young players and there is no mystery about the increasing number of child prodigies in chess. This is because they are not slaves of a rigid system of rules and dogmas, and their personalities express themselves naturally."

Finally, here he provides a "brief presentation of the classic and modern strategic themes touched on in the book," such as overall plan, partial planning, and equalizing. Key pieces, semi-open files, center, economy, and

many others.

Chapter Four indicates that strategy has basic functions: to reach a superficial evaluation of the position, to understand and/or anticipate the opponent's plan, to understand and/or anticipate the opponent's other weapons, especially when they don't seem to conform to a logical plan, and to establish a plan. I particularly found interesting the notion that strategy not the opposite of tactics, it is the theory of tactics. And as regards definitions, again, very Watsonian: "I am against definitions. Either you get a truism out of it, or you get confused with even more difficult terms which themselves need to be defined, and so forth endlessly." Consider a position given earlier in the book (**Garcia-Padron – Suba**, Las Palmas 1979):



```
[FEN "1q2r1k1/5pbp/r3pnp1/3b3n/Np1N1P2/1P4PP/PB3QBK/2RR4 w - - 0 29"]
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Here Suba notes

"... the black knights have accumulated a large amount of energy. A Romanian player once discovered a principle, somewhat different from Tarrasch's verse, "Ein Springer am Rande ist immer eine Schande (i.e. a knight on the rim is always dim). This principle of "dissipation of energy" states that a knight is stronger at the edge of the board, because its energy is not dissipated on too many squares!"

I was reminded of another chess genius and eccentric, Michael Basman, who once stated that a knight on h1 stood well "because all it could do is improve its position" (to say nothing of the fact that it actually guarded key squares in the king's camp, as Basman well knew). In discussing his ideas of dynamic potential, Suba often borrows from the physical sciences, as above, and those analogies work very well for me.

The game continued **29.Nc6 Qb7 30.Ne5 Raa8** (the computers consider this a mistake) **31.Nc5** (White centralizes his knight on the rim!) **31...Qb8**, and now **32.Bd4** looks best (Suba even quite honestly rates his position as slightly worse in that case), but Black's strategy of placing the knight on the rim as a target and "possessor of superior potential energy" takes hold when White falls into the trap – **32.g4?? Nxf4!** and after **33.Qxf4 Rxa2** Black was well on his way to winning.

Whereas some other authors have made bold statements about dynamism being totally ignored in chess prior to the arrival of "their" book on the scene, Suba knows his chess history better and cites the excellent post-war book by RN Coles, *Dynamic Chess*, published in 1956, and covers some of the principles expounded by Gyula Breyer. Breyer might be the one who started what Suba calls the "Dynamic Revolution." Indeed, I always thought the genius Gyula Breyer was somewhat underappreciated (like Max Lange, Breyer made contributions to all aspects of chess from opening theory to problem composition), and hope someday someone does him justice by bringing out a book that discusses him further in historical and modern context.

Chapter Six is Suba's bow to the classical approach to chess. His pragmatism shines through when he notes, "To win a classical game in our day you need your opponent's cooperation at least in the opening. Such a performance is called "an easy win." Having been an adherent of classical principles all of

my chess life, this matter-of-fact statement has given me something to think about again. And these statements are peppered throughout the book; earlier, Suba notes that classical approaches can be such a bind on our imagination and prevent us "from finding brilliant moves."

Chapter Seven covers the Black pieces, and Suba pronounces that Adorjan did indeed have the correct idea; those who play better with Black are not passive defenders but often understand dynamic potential better than other players - "Understanding and trusting dynamic structures, and their hidden, undermining possibilities, offers the key to success with black." With only two illustrative games, this chapter is a little weak compared to the others, and could have used some expansion with newer material.

So what to say of this book in short? I have only one critique, and that is that no more games were added to the examples from the first edition. After all, there is Suba's success in the 2008 World Senior Championship, which probably could have made a new chapter in itself.

If you are a lower-rated player who still wants to tackle Suba, try Beim's [How To Play Dynamic Chess](#) first. Any player who aspires to USCF Expert or above needs this book. However, such a player also needs to realize, just as my brief summary of the above is inadequate because a book like this needs to be digested properly, over time, that to really understand what Suba is presenting here takes many readings and much study – and most of all, much thinking. After all, you think about cycling before you get on the bike, not while you are riding it.

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by Mihai Suba

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