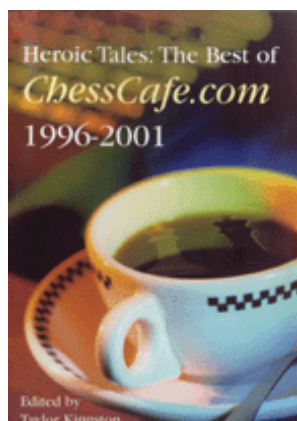




BOOK
REVIEWS



I Re-Think, Therefore I Am

Baldomero Garcia

Rethinking the Chess Pieces by Andrew Soltis, 2004 Batsford, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Softcover, 224 pages, \$21.95

American Grandmaster Andrew Soltis is a well-known chess writer. He is the author of the column *Chess to Enjoy* in *Chess Life* (which I do enjoy reading, by the way). Additionally, he has written a large number of opening, historical, and instructional chess books. Though sometimes castigated by reviewers for his lackluster efforts with opening books, his instructional and historical books are normally of high quality. Let us see if *Rethinking the Chess Pieces* follows this pattern, as this is an instructional book.



The book is divided into two sections and ten chapters:

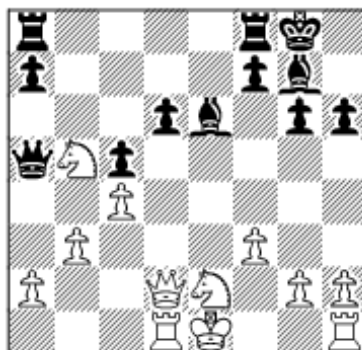
- Section One: Piece Values
- Chapter 1: "Pawn Equals One, Knight Equals Three..." (18 pages)
- Chapter 2: Mobility and Targets (11 pages)
- Chapter 3: Board Range (11 pages)
- Chapter 4: Cooperation and Redundancy (17 pages)
- Chapter 5: The Personalities of the Pieces (25 pages)
- Section Two: Material Imbalances
- Chapter 6: Transactions (23 pages)
- Chapter 7: The Exchange (25 pages)
- Chapter 8: Queen Versus Pieces (34 pages)
- Chapter 9: Bishops vs. Knights vs. Pawns (32 pages)
- Chapter 10: Rook Versus Pieces (23 pages)

The first thing I noticed was that there was no introduction by the author. I think this is important because it tells us why he wrote the book and why we (the readers) should bother buying it. However, after reading Chapter 1, it is clear that it serves as the introduction. In this chapter, Soltis brings up the point that chess isn't arithmetic. For example, if one side has a Rook and Pawn in exchange for a Bishop and Knight, the exchange is not necessarily equal. We're all familiar with point charts that award 1 point for a pawn, 3 for a Knight, etc., so if Rook (5) plus Pawn (1) equals 6, why isn't it a fair trade against Knight (3) plus Bishop (3)? Soltis gives his views on this matter. For the more experienced player, these explanations will seem like common sense, but I think the lower-rated player will start seeing the light after reading the author's examples.

In Chapter 2, Soltis makes the point that the value of a piece is determined not only by its mobility, but also the targets it can attack. Let's look at an example from page 32:

Even in a relatively open position, two knights can outplay two bishops when the bishops don't have targets.

**Petrosian – Borisenko
Soviet Championship 1950**



Black to play

Black will lose the d-pawn but he has good chances of saving the game with 1...Qxd2+ 2 Rxd2 d5!.

For instance, 3 Nc7 dxc4 4 Nxa8 cxb3! 5 axb3 Rxa8 and the target at b3 gives Black at least equality. Or 3 cxd5 Bd7 4 Na3 (4 Nbc3 c4! 5 bxc4 Rfc8 but 4 Nd6 and Ne4 may be best) a5! 5 Nc4 Rfb8 and ...a4.

1...Qxb6? 2 Qxd6 Rfd8 3 Qxb6 Rxd1+ 4 Kxd1 axb6 5 Nec3

Black seems to have improved his chances by connecting his queenside pawns and gaining the half-open a-file. In reality, his chances have deteriorated since the diagram because his pieces have nothing to attack on the queenside. 'White's knights are in no way weaker than Black's bishops,' wrote Boleslavsky in the tournament book.

The only question is whether Black can inflict damage on the kingside. He didn't:

**5...Be5 6 g3 g5 7 Re1 Rd8+ 8 Ke2! h5 9 Kf2 f6 10 Rd1 Ra8
11 a4 h4 12 Nd5 hxg3+ 13 hxg3 Bxd5 (or 13...Rb8 14 Ne7+
and Nc6) 14 Rxd5 Kf7 15 Rd7+ Ke6 16 Rb7** and wins.

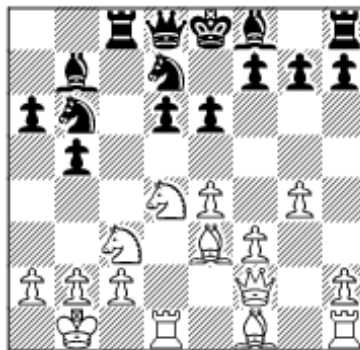
Chapter 3 deals with board range. Here, Soltis starts out by pointing out that the value of pieces would be different if the board were of a different size. For example, in a 6x6 board without bishops, the knight is stronger than the rook and almost as strong as the queen. Obviously, the size of the board doesn't change in chess. However, when all the pawns in one flank have been exchanged, the battleground has shrunk and the minor pieces benefit. This is something to keep in mind when deciding certain pawn exchanges. Soltis quotes Larsen: "When is a bishop stronger than a knight? In an open position, say the books, but they should add, if there is play on both sides of

the board”.

We find throughout the book that Soltis did his research and quotes the views of players such as Tarrasch, Lasker, Capablanca, Euwe, Botvinnik, etc. Overall, I found a few new ideas, such as the Larsen quote above.

I found Chapter 6 “Transactions” to be one of the more interesting chapters. I’ve never been a Sicilian player, but when I played 1 e4 and met the Sicilian, I was always happy when my opponent sacrificed the exchange, as in the following example from page 102:

**Movsesian – Kasparov
Sarajevo 2000**



White to play

1 Bd3? Rxc3!

...Kasparov ridiculed his opponent’s lack of judgment. You simply can’t allow such a sack, he suggested. ‘From my perspective, it’s a matter of chess culture.’ Black had the initiative after 2 bxc3 Qc7 3 Ne2 Be7 4 g5 0-0 and ...Na4 and won.

However, as can be seen from the example above, Black gets good compensation. This is something that I never fully understood and appreciated. My greedy little mind was simply happy to be up an exchange.

But Soltis doesn’t stop there. He goes on to give us two more examples, showing the historical progression of this exchange sacrifice. Nowadays it’s such a common occurrence, that it is no longer thought as a sacrifice, but rather a simple exchange of pieces.

Then Chapter 7 “The Exchange” continues to cover other, less standard, exchange sacrifices. I believe this is a must for the aspiring player.

Elsewhere in the text, Soltis comments that sacrificing a pawn is sometimes more difficult than sacrificing the exchange. What to do when you must lose material is not discussed in the book directly, but after reading it, you should have a good understanding. Should you give up the exchange or the pawn? Or should you give up a piece for pawns?

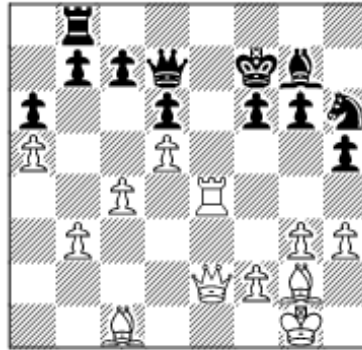
Chapter 9 “Bishop vs Knights vs Pawns” was also important. Other authors, such as IM Silman, talk about the minor piece imbalance in their books. GM Timman even wrote a book on the subject. Quite simply, this is also another

subject that needs to be mastered by the aspiring player.

Let's take a look at an example from this chapter, in the opposite colored bishops section, page 182:

Once you appreciate the inexorable nature of an attack based on bishops of opposite color, you can make decisions with confidence in positions like this:

**Speelman – Haznedaroglu
Plovdiv 2003**



White to play

There are reasonable plans for White involving Bb2 and g3-g4. But he appreciated how weak his opponent is on light squares – and that the piece that best defends them is the knight.

1 Bxh6! Bxh6 2 Re6

White has iron control of the e-file (2...Re8 3 Be4 f5? 4 Bxf5 or 3...Rxe6? 4 dxe6+ Qxe6 5 Bd5). This means he has a free hand to attack g6, the most vulnerable light square.

2...Bg7

The bishop has a wonderful diagonal at h6, but no targets. White's bishop is slightly bad but it has a target. Verdict: White is the only player who has serious winning prospects.

3 g4 Rh8

Better was 3...h4 but White continues the pressure with 4 Be4 Rg8 5 Qd3 Bf8 6 Qf3 Bg7? (6...Be7) 7 g5 f5 8 Bxf5 or 7...Qd8 8 Qg4.

4 Be4 f5 5 gxf5 g5 6 f6! Bxf6 7 Rxf6+ Resigns

Overall, I found Soltis's approach to be balanced. He mixed examples from classic games, as well as more modern battles from the 90's up to 2004. There is material for the C and D player as well as more advanced subjects for expert-level players. His style of writing is pleasant and easy to read. There is historical background and the positions presented are relevant.

One thing I should point out is that this is not a middle-game book, per se. There is also some endgame discussion, which should be helpful for a lot of players. I recommend this book to players rated below master level.

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by Andrew Soltis

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