

## Part 4 “Rude Awakening”

The summer of 2003 had the chess board calling to me again. With today’s internet, I searched for events in the area and set my sites on a Fall Getaway in Lowell MA. Not having played in a tournament in 7 years, the last of which was a wash, I knew I was rusty.

I attempted to prepare for this event in a vacuum. I had the latest Chess Master CD and played these virtual faces to warm up. I first set the computer to the rating I thought I was at ( 1500’s)and lost. Then I set it back to what my rating was according to USCF (1450) and still lost. Then I set it back 100 points more and finally won my first confidence builder.

The chess master had a “classroom” section that took you through beginner modes to intermediate modes. I walked through these as a goal prior to the event in the fall of 2003. I went through the opening trainer created by Yasser Sierrawan. I was beating the computer at my 1450 rating fairly consistently, occasionally beating it at the rating I thought I should have been at ( 1550) and had one break on a setting that was out of reach typically for me (1650). At one point in the late 1980’s I peaked into the 1600’s and had a 1632 “Class B” rating. I was hoping to regain that at some point after deflating my rating down to the 1400’s.

I also invested in Lev Albert’s 7 volume set on the “russian” school of Chess. I made it through the first couple of books and part way through the third. These seemed to focus on combinational motifs. It was a little different from the positional study of Aaron Nimzovitch’s My System I had studied 20 years earlier. The focus was on looking for and recognizing attacking potentials. It was an aggressive approach to the game.

The 2003 Fall Getaway was the first event I attended that had over 100 players in over 4 sections. In Maine, the most players seen at these events was on the order of 60 with 2 sections. My eyes were wide open like a little kid. I had never seen so many grandmasters in one place. I felt like I had to whisper in their presence. I was not worthy.

I played in the under 1700 section that had a prize for under 1500 that looked within reach. The first round had me knocking heads with a 1630 rated player who definitely outplayed me. Come to find out, he was playing in Europe for several years and had an FIDE rating of 1900. I didn’t feel so bad. Instead I asked for advice going over the game.

He spoke of the concept of themes in the opening. Certain openings seem to have a struggle around one of the key central squares. The first player who deviates from the theme seem to be the one with the disadvantage. It kind of made sense. So I spent the rest of the weekend looking for these themes in the hodge podge repertoire of openings I huddled to over the years. Unfortunately, I was looking at the wrong themes and lost all but one game.

I asked my first round adversary about his thoughts on the Lev Alburt series. He suggested I work on the themes first rather than looking for combinations. I found my entire weekend blundering pieces left and right in search of the combination that never was there. Not having practiced all that much on tactics in the first place, I would end up with a piece down after the dust settled.