
Foreword

In the last few years the finals of the Russian Junior Championships have traditionally been held in the Dagomys health resort. Hundreds of young chess players, their coaches and their parents congregate every year in the popular Black Sea holiday destination. The scale of this chess festival is impressive. For all the difficulties, chess in Russia is alive and has a future!

After making one of these trips, the thought of a book occurred to me. I had collected some ideas which I think should be of interest, whether the reader is a youth trainer or a young player who has attained a reasonable First Category standard (or that of Candidate Master) and is ambitious.

There is no disputing that in order to improve your quality of play, the quantity of errors has to be reduced. An experienced teacher, going over a game with beginners, will point out the weak moves; afterwards there is a chance that in a similar situation the child will get it right. For a player who has reached a certain level, work on his own mistakes ought to have become a systematic process. A coach involved with talented children on a one-to-one basis should understand this very well.

Take the case of the Kosintseva sisters, Nadezhda (Nadia) and Tatiana (Tania). There was a time when a problem with their play, for all its great promise, was a large number of blunders. I had to choose suitable exercise positions for what was then their chief fault, and organize various solving contests followed up by serious critical discussion. As a result we basically succeeded in solving the problem – see the chapter on “Monitoring Counter-threats”.

It is well said that “you learn from your mistakes.” And you can also learn from the mistakes of others. In this book you are shown many notable cases of inaccurate play by young chess players. However, the classification and description of the most frequently seen errors is not the author’s sole aim. The main task of this book is to help the reader to *minimize the quantity of errors in his games* through studying the material and solving the exercises.

The layout of the book is as follows.

(1) *Theoretical section.* Each chapter contains introductory material or a lesson on a particular theme; extracts from games illustrating that theme are given, and generalizations and conclusions are stated.

It is logical that coaches teach children using models of ideal play by World Champions and other stars. In our case we are speaking of a different approach. The idea of training inexperienced players by studying the *mistakes* of grandmasters seems inappropriate – in grandmaster play you can hardly find those obvious faults which characterize people to whom this book is addressed. Therefore in the theoretical part of my work I generally utilize extracts from games by young players.

An author writing about players’ mistakes needs to have a good grasp of the reasons behind each poor decision. Otherwise he may draw the wrong conclusions. For that reason, most of

my examples are based on the negative experiences of my own pupils. In some chapters, I give examples of bad decisions they took during training sessions. I think this will be of interest to the reader.

(2) *Practical section.* At the end of each chapter I give you a set of positions for training activities, under a coach's direction or on your own. The aim in each case has been to present a situation where, in trying to play the position or solve the exercise, you are liable to make a mistake in the category that is being studied. It will be splendid if you cope with the problem.

And if you do make a mistake, it will be better still. Compare your own analysis with the recommended line of play, and try to draw the right conclusion. I hope you will not go wrong next time in a similar situation.

(3) *Answers.* At the end of the book the answers to the exercises are given, and the reader is awarded points for correct solutions. In most cases you score one point for the correct first move, and either one or two more points for the reasoning behind it. You are given an assessment on the basis of your total score.

I should explain that the examples for solution and practice were selected on the principle that in each case there should be one objectively best line. Nonetheless it may be that in some situations there are alternative possibilities that merit approval.

If a chess player has a coach, it will be easy for the latter to organize work utilizing the material presented here. In the absence of a mentor, the reader can work with the book independently. After acquainting yourself with the first part of each chapter, you should turn to the practical section. Set up each position on your chessboard and try to find the strongest continuation within 10-20 minutes; make a note of the reasons for your choice, and write down the variations you have found. On solving all the positions in a batch, check your solutions against the recommended answers. Record the points scored for each solution and the assessment for the batch as a whole. Try to improve your showing when you attempt the next set of positions!

I am convinced you will make progress by systematically working with the material in this book. I wish you success!

Introduction

There are said to be two ways of improving as a chess player – by accumulating knowledge and by working on your shortcomings. For beginners, the acquisition of information is more important. For more experienced players, who already possess a solid theoretical grounding, efforts to eradicate a range of characteristic mistakes become no less important. This way, first one and then another component of their play is enhanced. Their class and their practical strength accordingly increase.

How do you work to overcome the defects in a young person's play? Where do you start?

To begin, *you must ascertain where their problems lie*; to this end it helps to conduct an analysis of your pupil's play after every tournament, identifying the chief negative factors.

Let me give an example from my own practice as a coach. In 2002 an interesting tournament was held in Arkhangelsk, my home town. It was a double-round event with six contestants. Among them were Grandmasters Malaniuk and Moiseenko from the Ukraine, Alexander Ivanov from the USA, and his namesake (sharing his first name and surname) – Ivanov the master from Arkhangelsk. And there were two schoolgirls, the sisters Tania and Nadia Kosintseva. The girls acquitted themselves creditably, though they didn't finish as prize-winners.

I still have a record of my preliminary analysis of their performance. Here are some extracts.

Nadia

Round 2:

Ivanov (Arkh.) – Nadia, 1-0.

Black had a promising position out of the opening. 24...f5 was an error (missing a “counter-threat”). Instead of 27...f8, she had the clearly stronger 27...e8 (resource: f5-f4), when Black is not worse. Mistake of *judgement* typical of Nadia...

33...g5 – a blunder. After the *queen exchange*, a second weakness appears on h5...

Hard to defend such positions in *time trouble*.

From this game you notice Nadia's weak play in *technical positions and the ending*.

Round 7:

Ivanov (USA) – Nadia, 1-0. In the Rauzer Attack, Black would have had a good game after the active 19...b4! 20.d5 dxd5 21.exd5 e6! – a *standard idea*. But Nadia played the whole game *passively*. After the colourless 19...e6, there is no way for Black to attack the king – no active *plan*.

22...e5? is wholly bad, Black gets a backward pawn on g7 by force. Counter-threat missed. In defence she *lacked persistence*; instead of 28...h7? she had the better 28...xd5!, not giving up the pawn.

Round 8:

Nadia – Moiseenko, 0-1. Chelyabinsk Variation played. Instead of 16.♔d3! with some edge, as written down, she played 16.♔b6?! – she *forgot*.

She didn't find the correct plan: 22.♖c1, ♘a5-c6, ♖c3, ♗fc1, with queenside play...

31.♘b6?? misses the counter-threat. With an unfamiliar structure, Nadia clearly had a poor understanding of what to do. Conclusion: master this variation as we mastered the Rauzer.

Nadia showed weak play in the endgame. You are struck by her passive handling of some positions. In defence she didn't play with due persistence. She showed a high standard of play in some individual games but performed unevenly overall.

Well then, let's suppose that a boy or girl knows his or her own problems. Where do we go from there?

It is of course essential to work on the shortcomings you have exposed. A possible form that such work may take is the playing and solving of specially selected examples.

This book deals with errors of which you may rid yourself by means of solving exercises. Errors linked to psychological factors, time shortage and so on, are a topic for a different discussion.

I would like to say that all the errors described in this book are characteristic of any chess player. But some particular faults may predominate. For instance one of my former pupils is mostly prone to positional errors, especially in connection with exchanging pieces; another has problems with the technique of calculation, failing to anticipate the opponent's play. Naturally in such cases you have to concern yourself first and foremost with eradicating the main shortcomings.

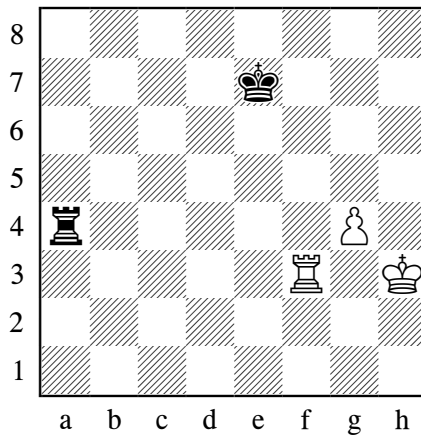
But then it is not worth treating the book as material for liquidating just two or three basic flaws. I advise you to use it as a kind of "training apparatus" for *improving all elements* of a young person's game, through studying, playing and solving the sample positions supplied.

Chapter 1

Errors Due to Lack of Knowledge

R.J. Fischer – J. Sherwin

Portoroz Interzonal 1958



1...♔e6?

As an introduction to the topic of this book, let me do something to classify the numerous errors made by chess players in the course of a game. I think we can identify two major categories. In one of them, we group mistakes due to *ignorance*. It is no surprise that an inexperienced player should often prove unfamiliar with some opening line or other, or be unacquainted with the standard ideas and plans for the middlegame or the important endgame positions. The best way to combat inadequacies of this kind is to absorb the necessary information by utilizing books and a computer and by working with a coach.

The other category comprises errors due to *lack of skill*. We are talking here about deficiencies in the technique for finding the right move during play. Understandably, by no means all young men and women know how to devise a game plan, by no means all are trained to engage in prophylaxis

and anticipate threats, or to calculate variations correctly (we shall deal with these themes in the corresponding chapters).

Let's first discuss mistakes arising chiefly from inadequate knowledge. I would like to show you a noteworthy sample of play by Karmen Mar, the Slovenian Girls' Champion. Though she holds the Woman International Master title, there are quite a few gaps in her chess education.

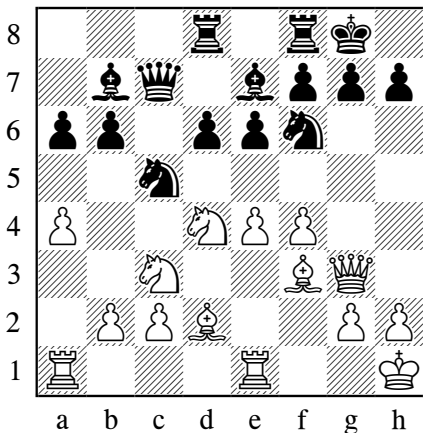
The game given below was played in the women's team tournament which traditionally takes place in autumn in that well-known health resort, the little town of Bled. I happened to be present at that event as Karmen's trainer.

It was some while after the start of the round. I was pleased that the girl had emerged from the opening with no particular problems (see the diagram below), and I decided to take a stroll round the lake. An hour and a half later, returning to the tournament hall from my walk, I was astonished to discover that all the black pieces were in the same places as before, whereas White had noticeably improved her position...

M. Hocevar – K. Mar

Bled 2005

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6
5.♘c3 e6 6.♙e2 a6 7.a4 b6 8.0–0 ♘bd7 9.f4
♙b7 10.♙f3 ♖c7 11.♖h1 ♙e7 12.♗e1 ♜d8
13.♗g3 0–0 14.♞e1 ♘c5 15.♙d2



So Karmen has confidently developed her pieces according to well-known patterns. But how is she to carry on? The girl started looking for a possibility to improve her position, but did not find one. Black's following actions are curious.

15...♖h8? 16.♞ad1 ♘g8? 17.♙c1 ♗d7?
18.b3 ♗c7 19.♙b2 ♘f6?

And so on. It is clear that in the course of five moves Karmen has achieved little, contriving to lose four whole tempos.

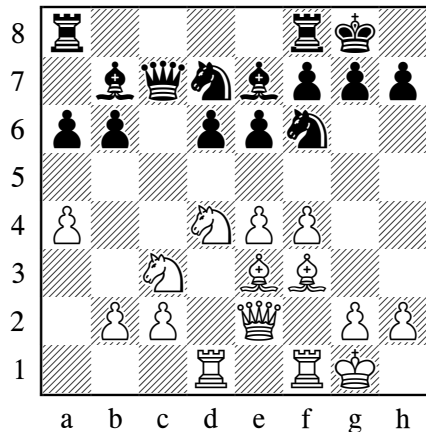
It is worth noting that the cause of the girl's mistake (or mistakes) is understandable. Similar faults are characteristic of many inexperienced chess players. While knowing variations in the opening, such players have only a vague notion of the ideas of the resulting middlegame.

Before answering the question as to how Black ought to continue from the diagram, let's examine two other positions and the play arising from them.

Idea 1: preparing ...e6-e5

R. Byrne – A. Machulsky

Philadelphia 1992



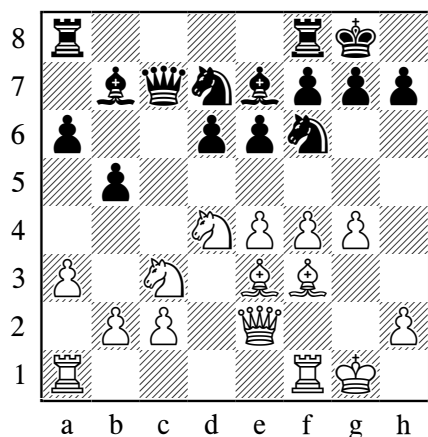
Black to move

1...♖fe8 An essential preparatory move.
 2.♜b3 Or 2.♔h1 e5 3.♞f5 ♕f8, with
 counterplay. 2...e5 3.♗f2 exf4 4.♙xf4 ♜e5
 5.h3 ♜c4 6.♙c1 ♕f8=

Idea 2: carrying out ...d6-d5

A. Shchekachev – G. Ginsburg

Smolensk 1992



White intends g4-g5. It is therefore worth considering 1...d5!? 2.exd5 (2.e5 ♜e4 with counterplay) 2...♞xd5 3.♞xd5 ♙xd5 4.♙xd5 exd5 5.♞f5 ♖fe8 6.♗f2 ♜f6 7.♙d4 ♜e4 8.♗g2 ♙c5, with a good position for Black. The advance ...d6-d5 was especially effective once White had weakened his king position with g2-g4.

The examples I have quoted illustrate two playable schemes in the opening in question. Karmen should have pondered which one of these to choose. Should she carry out the standard plan of 15...♖fe8 and 16...♙f8 with ...e6-e5 to follow? Or should she go for 15...d5 16.e5 ♜fe4? In either case Black has adequate counterplay.

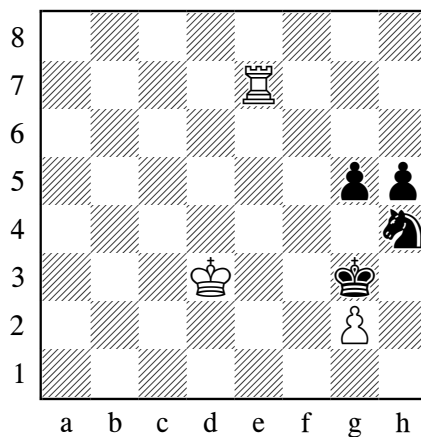
A mundane piece of advice may be given to young chess players and their coaches: when

you study opening schemes, *it pays first of all to work through the typical ideas of the ensuing middlegame* – and only then concentrate on specific variations. A very important point is that even if your memory is merely average, ideas tend not to be forgotten – unlike the myriad theoretical lines which require constant cramming.

Now let's talk a little about errors committed through ignorance of standard *devices* (or their inept application). A description and classification of tactical devices can be found in plenty of books. The theme of "strategic devices" has been less fully elaborated, but that doesn't excuse a young player for neglecting it. The endgame too has its own specific devices.

T. Kosintseva – I. Dudukin

Russian u18 Championship, Dagomys 2002



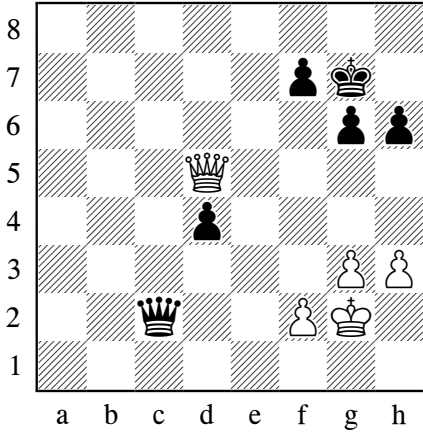
White to move

In time trouble the players traded blunders:
 1.♖h7? ♜g6? (1...♞xg2-+) 2.♔e4=

To force the draw, it was essential for White to *harass* the pawns with: 1.♙e5! ♔f4 2.♙e4† ♔g3 3.♙e5=

D. Kokarev – T. Kosintseva

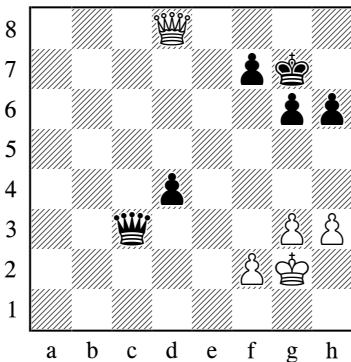
Russian u20 Championship, Kazan 2001



Black to move

The girl continued simply with **1...d3?**, overlooking her more experienced opponent's obvious counterplay: **2.♖d4† ♕h7** **3.♗d5 ♕g7** **4.♗d4† ♕g8** Sadly Tania now had no means of shaking off the “harassing” queen, so the players agreed a draw.

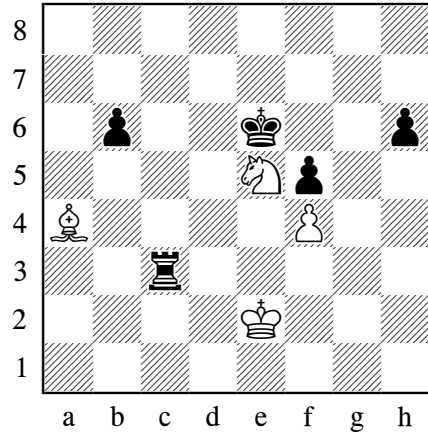
If the fifteen-year old had been more attentive she would definitely have found another way – **1...♗c3!**. For example, **2.♗e5† ♕h7** **3.♗d5** (**3.♗f4 ♗c4**) **3...♕g8** **4.♗d8† ♕g7**



Accurate defence should lead to a draw, but Black retains serious practical chances.

N. Kosintseva – A. Muzychuk

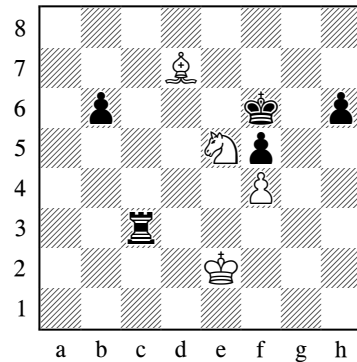
European Women's Championship
Warsaw 2001



White to move

After the move in the game, **1.♕b5?**, Black still retains winning chances.

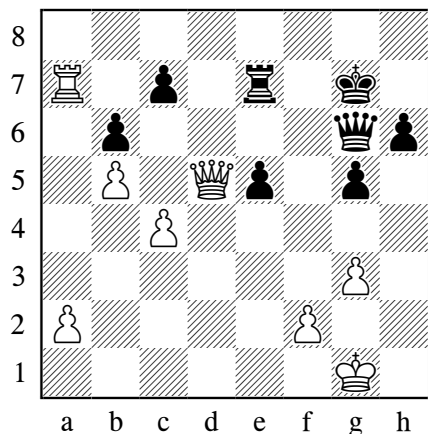
Nadezhda had an unexpected opportunity to force a draw by means of a “harassing” ploy that is characteristic of endgames: **1.♕d7†! ♕f6** **2.♕a4!** (threatening to win a pawn with **♖d7†**) **2...♕g7** (**2...♗a3** **3.♖d7†**) **3.♕d7!** **♕f6**



4.♕a4! =

E. Danielian – N. Kosintseva

European Women's Championship
Varna 2002



Black to move

The impression is that White stands better on account of her active pieces and safer shelter for her king. In time trouble Black decided to play safe with $1... \text{♞f6}$, but after $2. \text{♞a3} \text{ ♝f7}$ $3. \text{♞d2}$ she had to live through quite a few more minutes of unpleasant defence.

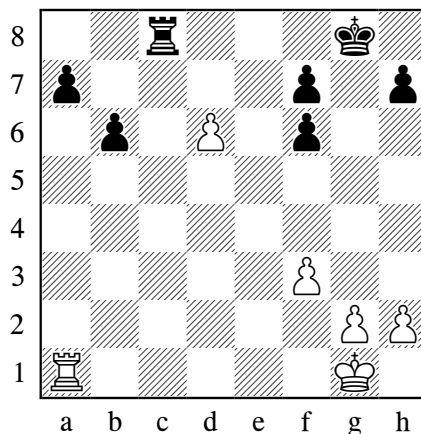
A different possibility looks stronger: $1... \text{♞b1} \uparrow!$ $2. \text{♔g2} \text{ ♞b2}$, with the idea of $3... \text{♝f7}$. Black's major pieces are activated, latching on to the pawn on f2.

Having a set of ideas and devices in his arsenal, any chess player ought also to be *acquainted with a stock of specific positions and their evaluation*. By way of illustration I shall quote a piece of play between two arch-rivals – the Kosintseva sisters.

I was always astonished and delighted by the way the little girls would play against each other in training sessions with maximum effort and concentration.

Tania – Nadia

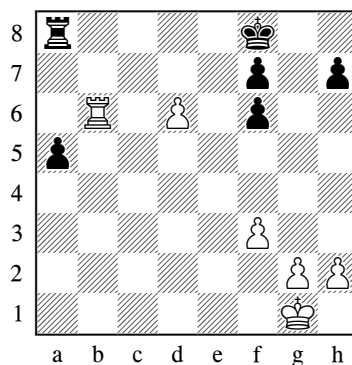
Training game



Black to move

The position comes from a game between J. Donner and T. van Scheltinga. Nadezhda – like Van Scheltinga – went into a clear drawing line: $1... \text{♝d8?}$ $2. \text{♞xa7} \text{ ♝xd6}$ $3. \text{♞b7} =$ Evidently the reason for the error was Black's ignorance of the precise verdict on the resulting standard position.

Black could, you see, have played differently: $1... \text{a5!}$ $2. \text{♞b1} \text{ ♔f8!}$ $3. \text{♞xb6} \text{ ♞a8!}$



The king takes care of the d-pawn while the rook “propels” the passed a-pawn. This is the ideal allocation of tasks! Black should win.

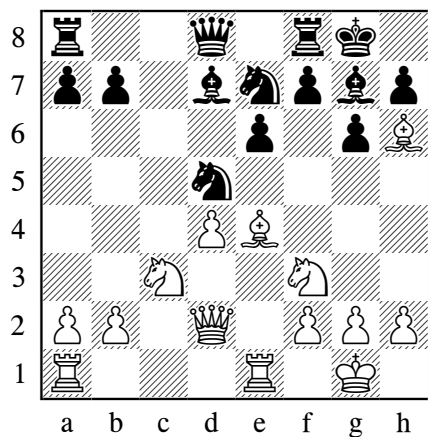
In chess there are plenty of such ideas and devices, and also precise positions, which can and must be studied.

My own work has a different agenda. Its aim is to help a player to reduce the number of errors in situations where the ability to think in the correct manner is of greater importance for finding the right move. To this the following chapters are devoted. I believe that the skills acquired through our training procedures should make it easier for the reader to take correct decisions in a tournament game.

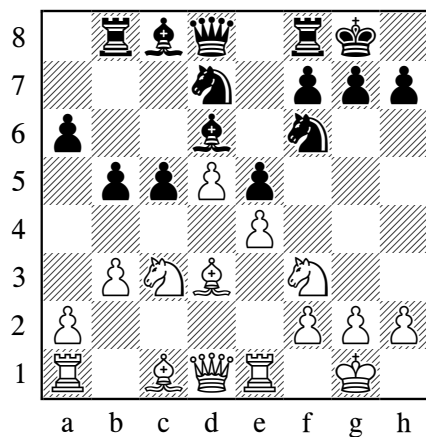
On the next page I give you six positions by way of a test.

They require you to demonstrate your erudition and knowledge of ideas. You should write down the correct first move (1 point) and the rough continuation (2 points), culminating in an evaluation.

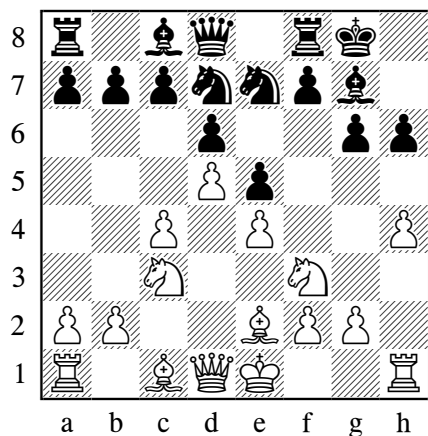
The aim of the test is to gauge the level of your chess knowledge. A class player should have a precise conception of how to play with typical pawn structures, and should also be versed in the most important endgame ideas. If you could not cope with solving these examples, you need to study some chess textbooks.



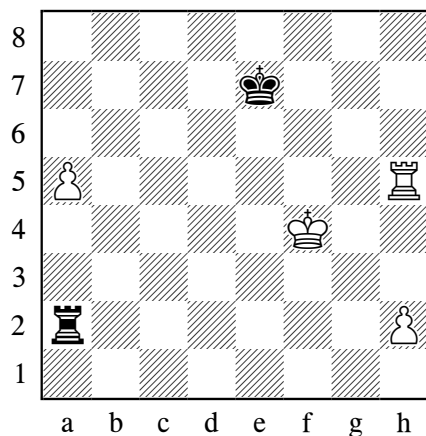
(1) White to move



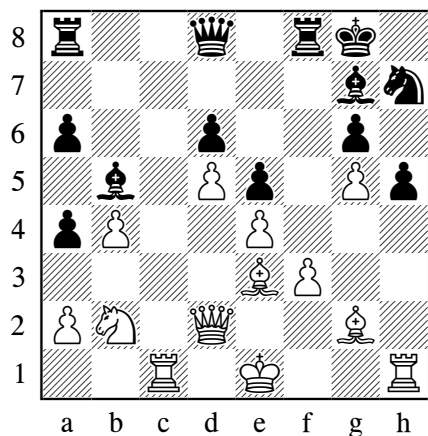
(4) White to move



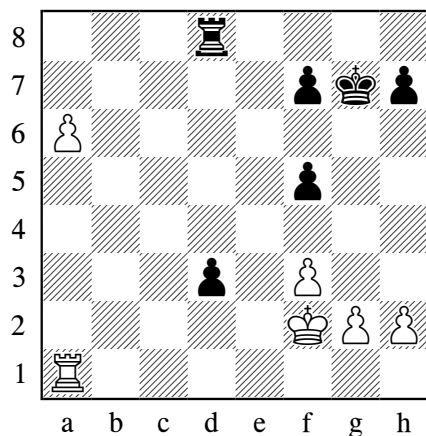
(2) White to move



(5) Black to move



(3) Black to move



(6) Black to move

(1) **A. Gipslis – A. Mikenas**, Correspondence 1988

White carries out a pair of exchanges in order to arrive at a typical structure with the better minor pieces: **1.♙xg7 ♗xg7 2.♙xd5 exd5** (2...♗xd5 3.♗xd5 exd5 4.♞e5 ♙c6 5.♞ae1±) **3.♞f4** (3 points) **3...f6 4.♞e2±**

(2) **B. Avrukh – V. Kirilov**, Katowice 1993

White needs to seal the kingside with: **1.h5!** (1 point) **1...g5 2.g4 ♗f6 3.♗d2 c5** The remaining play is on the other side of the board, where White is traditionally stronger. **4.a3! ♗e8 5.b4** (2 points) **5...b6 6.f3 ♙f6 7.♗f2 ♗g7 8.♗g2 ♗g8 9.♗f1 ♙e7 10.♗g3 ♗gf6 11.♙e3 ♗h7 12.♙d3 f6 13.♙c2 ♞f7 14.♙a4 ♗f8 15.♙c6 ♞b8 16.♞a4 ♙d7 17.♞hd1 ♞c8 18.♞xa7 1–0**

(3) **R. Avery – S. Gligorić**, USA 1971

After the stock sacrifice **1...♞f4!** (1 point) **2.♙xf4 exf4 3.♗d3 ♞xg5** (2 points), Black obtains good compensation for the exchange.

(4) **L. Polugaevsky – P. Biyiasas**, Petropolis 1973

White has to prepare a2-a4. The immediate 1.a4? provokes the standard reaction 1...c4! 2.bxc4 b4 3.♗e2 ♗c5, with counterplay.

Lev Polugaevsky first made the preparatory move **1.♙f1!** (1 point). It was only after **1...♞e8** that he played **2.a4 b4** (2...c4? 3.axb5 axb5 4.bxc4 b4 5.♗b5) **3.♗b1 ♗b6 4.♗bd2±** (2 points) **4...♞e7 5.♙b2 ♗e8 6.♞c1 f6 7.a5 ♗a8 8.♗c4** with the better position.

(5) **V. Osnos – Y. Averbakh**, Soviet Union 1967

Black reaches a drawn position of theoretical importance, after bringing his king to the queenside: **1...♗d7!** (1 point) **2.♗e4** (2.h3 ♞a3!)= **2...♗c7 3.♗d4 ♗b7 4.h3 ♞a3!** (2 points) The plan of defence is quite simple – the rook covers the h-pawn from the side, while the king stops the a-pawn: **5.♗c4 ♗a6 6.♗b4 ♞f3 7.♞h6† ♗a7=**

(6) **V. Korchnoi – A. Karpov**, Baguio City (23) 1978

Black must remember the device of “cutting off” the king: **1...♞e8!** (1 point) **2.♞a2 ♞e7!** (2 points) **3.♞d2 ♞e6 4.a7 ½–½**

A score of 15 points or more is in the “excellent” class; 12–14 is “good”.

If your total is under 9, you have failed the test.