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The How to Study Chess on Your Own Workbook

**Volume 1 - Exercises and Training for Club Players
(1800-2100 Elo)**

New In Chess 2022

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Preface

In my 2021 book *How to Study Chess on Your Own* (referred to as HTSCOYO from now on), I provided comprehensive advice on optimizing one's chess studies. Judging by the overwhelmingly positive feedback I received, I could tell that the book had largely succeeded in its primary goal. It inspired many chess players to approach their chess studies more thoroughly, independently, and in better-organized ways. I couldn't have asked for more.

Through this feedback, I have also learned a few more things. Firstly, some of the study methods I presented in HTSCOYO were relatively unfamiliar to the average reader. And secondly, the book could have used more exercises for practice. Combining these two insights, I decided to create a follow-up workbook (referred to as *Workbook* from now on) that would fill these gaps. Having the big picture of how to study chess is essential, but doing the actual work matters even more. With this book, I set out to enrich and diversify your chess training, move by move.

When designing training routines, I often ask myself: 'How can they best mimic the decision-making process of a real game?' In other words, how can I make chess training practical and relevant to the issues one will face over the board? I have found that training methods that encourage analytical thinking work best, and I decided to promote such an approach in this *Workbook*. In HTSCOYO, you could already get a taste of some of them, like 'find the best move', simulation, and deep analysis. The good news is that we will drill them here.

Of course, your task, in a nutshell, will still be to look for the best moves and variations in the exercises. However, how you arrive at the answers will be slightly different than what you might be used to in other chess workbooks. This is not your typical chess puzzle book with hundreds of diagrams with straightforward 'White/Black to move and win' puzzles. Instead, it is a collection of positions and games carefully selected to develop your practical skills and encourage deeper reflection.

As you work through the *Workbook*, you will ask yourself questions like: 'Who is more likely to have a tactic here, White or Black?' or 'Which plan is better, the one on the kingside or in the center?'. You will be assessing whether it is better to employ active or passive defense in various endgames, and have a chance to convert an advantage in training

positions. As you go along, I hope you will quickly get used to the new format and enjoy the fresh perspective it will provide to your chess training.

I thoroughly enjoyed creating the somewhat unconventional types of exercises for this Workbook that, in my view, can prepare you best for the realities of a chess game. Even though the target audience is broadly in the 1800-2100 FIDE Elo range, I am sure that any ambitious player can benefit from it. Whatever your current level, how much you will get from this Workbook depends mostly on how much effort you will be willing to put in. So, get your chess set out, and let's get to work! 😊

Finally, let me note that the material in the Workbook is very suitable for chess coaches and teachers and can be applied in one-on-one lessons, as well as in study groups in chess clubs, schools, or online classes. I hope that it will benefit ambitious chess players in pursuit of improvement and provide inspiration to other chess authors.

Davorin Kuljasevic,
Plovdiv, July 2022

CHAPTER 1

How to use the Workbook

In the Workbook, you will get a chance to train your skills in Tactics, in the Middlegame and in the Endgame, three of the five major study areas of the chess game that I elaborated on in HTSCOYO (note that in the Workbook, I refer to study areas as ‘training modules’). The other two, Openings and General Improvement, are not so well suited for this format, so I left them out.

Nevertheless, I am sure you will discover that the 120 exercises I provided here, 40 for each of the three training modules, will be good for many hours of chess training. We will talk a bit later about how I divided them into even more manageable chunks of work. But first, let me introduce the training methods you will use to solve the exercises. Note that in HTSCOYO, I referred to them as ‘study methods’. They can be used interchangeably, although I will use the term ‘training methods’ here because it sounds more appropriate in the context of the Workbook. Please refer to the table below for a quick overview:

Table 1: Overview of training methods in the Workbook

Training module/ Training method	Tactics 40 exercises	Middlegame 40 exercises	Endgame 40 exercises
Blindfold Chess	Visualization Bootcamp		
Find the best move	30 Find-a-hidden-tactic exercises	30 Find-a-mini-plan exercises	
Analysis	10 Tactical analysis exercises		20 Practical endgames
Simulation		10 Positional play/ Strategy model games	10 Model endgames
Playing out			10 Endgame training positions

If you have already had a chance to read HTSCOYO, you will probably recognize these five training methods. All five (in bold) score high on the quality criteria matrix below.

Table 2: 15 Study methods and quality criteria (excerpt from HTSCOYO)

Study method	Brief description	Practical relevance	Study intensity	Long-term learning potential
Playing over	briefly examining games or positions	2	1	2
Watching	watching chess videos, DVDs and similar media	3	2	3
Reading	reading chess books, magazines, surveys, and similar material	3	3	4
Light analysis	analyzing games or positions with a low to moderate level of intensity	4	3	4
Deep analysis	analyzing games or positions with full intensity	5	5	5
Computer-assisted analysis	analyzing games or positions with the help of a chess engine	4	3	4
Mutual analysis	analyzing games or positions with another person(s)	5	5	5
Find the best move	trying to find the best move in a given position(s)	4	5	4
Simulation	pretending to play a real game by guessing the next move	5	5	5
Reviewing	deliberately committing variations, positions, or games to memory	4	4*	4
Solving	trying to find a solution to a chess puzzle	4	5	4
Playing - sparring	playing a pre-arranged game or match	5	5	5

Playing - speed chess	playing games at blitz or rapid time controls	4	5	4
Blindfold	trying to see the board without visual aids	4	5	5
Playing against a computer	playing out positions or games with a chess engine as an opponent	4	5	5

Such high scores should give us confidence that using these methods consistently in our chess training will bear fruit in the long run. Empirical evidence of study habits of players who have ‘made it’ in chess, indicate that some mix of these has to be present for success.

Let me go ahead and introduce the methods one by one and explain how best to use them to solve the exercises in the Workbook.

Blindfold training

This kind of training aims to improve your visualization, undoubtedly one of the fundamental chess skills. Of course, you don’t need to wear an actual blindfold; the point is that you train yourself to imagine the chessboard and positions of chess pieces inside your mind without any visual aids. The degree to which you can do that accurately and reasonably quickly, is usually highly correlated with the level of your calculation skill.

Therefore, the next chapter of the Workbook, Visualization Bootcamp, is dedicated exclusively to blindfold training. It consists of exercises such as ‘How many available squares does a piece have?’ and ‘Name the remaining squares on the diagonal/knight route’. I invented the Blindfold Woodpecker Method, which I will introduce in Chapter 2 as a warm-up exercise before the tactical, middlegame, and endgame exercises that follow.

However, your visualization training does not have to be confined to this chapter alone. While you will need a chessboard for most exercises in the Workbook, you are welcome to try and solve any of them without it if you feel like your blindfold skills are strong enough.

Find a hidden tactic

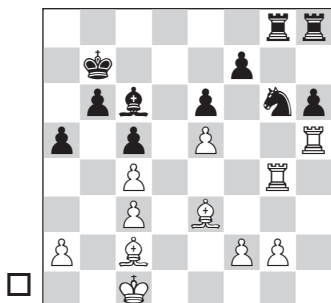
One of the most memorable moments in recent World Championship history occurred in the sixth game of the 2014 rematch for the World Title between Magnus Carlsen and Viswanathan Anand. The start of the game was relatively uneventful, as the players traded queens early and proceeded to maneuver their pieces in a quiet endgame. And then, after the 25th move of the game, something extraordinary happened.

Example 1

Magnus Carlsen 2863

Viswanathan Anand 2792

Sochi Wch 2014 (m/6)



The young World Champion played **26. ♖d2??**.

Naturally, he wanted to centralize his king in the endgame, but this move is an outright blunder due to the discovered attack with 26... ♗xe5!. In the video footage of the game, you could see Carlsen stopping for a moment right after he made his move and writing it down on the scoresheet with hesitation. Experienced chess players know what that means – he spotted his oversight and, filled with dread, started calculating what happens if Black takes the e5-pawn. Fortunately, it seems like he managed to keep his composure well enough not to reveal anything to Anand with his body language. And, just as astonishingly, the former World Champion returned the favor with

26... a4??.

After the game, Anand reported that he was so focused on obtaining

counterplay with the advance ...a5-a4-a3, that he realized too late that the unprotected g4-rook might be a target. Instead, he could have won two pawns by force with 26... ♗xe5! 27. ♖xg8 ♗xc4+ 28. ♔d3 ♗b2+! (this key intermezzo makes the whole combination work) 29. ♕e2 ♖xg8 and it would be silly to expect anything other than Black winning this endgame in a World Championship Match.

27. ♕e2±

Carlsen removed his king from harm's way, making 27... ♗xe5 impossible. Even though White's advantage in this endgame is only minimal due to his vulnerable pawn structure, Anand collapsed surprisingly quickly. Missing the opportunity to punish Carlsen's blunder on the move 26 might have played a part.

27... a3 28. f3 ♖d8 29. ♕e1 ♖d7 30. ♕c1 ♖a8 31. ♕e2 ♕a4 32. ♕e4+ ♕c6 33. ♕xg6 fxg6 34. ♖xg6 ♕a4 35. ♖xe6 ♖d1 36. ♕xa3 ♖a1 37. ♕e3 ♕c2 38. ♖e7+ ♕a6 39. ♖xh6 ♖xa2 40. ♕xc5

Black resigned.

How do we explain that the two best chess players in the world missed such a straightforward tactic, particularly for their standards? After the game, both admitted the primary reason for the mutual oversight. Neither had expected that there would be a tactic in such a position! Indeed, one usually doesn't look for discovered

attacks and intermediate checks in a technical endgame full of maneuvering.

As good as an average chess mortal might feel about top players making such blunders, for Carlsen and Anand such situations are exceptions rather than the rule. However, for most chess players,

particularly the target audience of this Workbook, missing or allowing unforeseen tactics like 26...♖xe5 is more common. So, the logical question to ask is: what is the best way to work on reducing such mistakes and improving your tactical alertness?

In HTSCOYO, I already explained the limitations of drilling tactical puzzles from diagrams for that purpose. While undoubtedly helpful in perfecting tactical pattern recognition and calculation of forcing variations, this popular training method has one major downside regarding its relevance to a real chess game. It virtually gives away half of the solution by telling you there is a tactic in the position!

For example, how long do you think it would take Anand to find a winning combination if he knew there was a tactic after 26.♔d2? Carlsen spotted it virtually the instant he played the move, so I do not doubt that it would also take Anand less than 15 seconds to see that 26...♖xe5 wins on the spot. However, no one will come and whisper into your ear during the game that you or your opponent have a tactical shot on the next move. This information would be particularly vital in apparently non-tactical positions, such as the one from the Carlsen-Anand game.

I tried to address this issue by designing a different type of tactical puzzle called ‘Find a hidden tactic’ (I will use the abbreviation FHT in some places in the book). In it, your task is to discover a tactic that is ‘hidden’ within a three-move sequence. However, two big unknowns make this exercise more challenging than a typical tactical puzzle. Firstly, you don’t know on which move the tactic is hidden; it can be on the first, second, or third move. Secondly, you have no information whether it is White or Black who has a tactic; it can be either side. Consequently, a tactic may be hidden in any of the sequence’s six positions (three for White and three for Black), and you will have to play detective to find out which one it is.

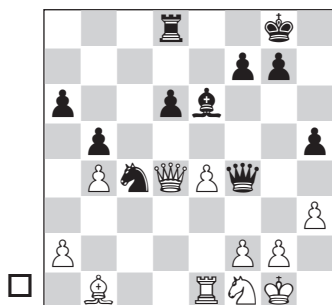
It’s important to note that you can move the pieces to examine only the given three-move sequence. However, you are not allowed to analyze other possibilities over the board, since the goal is to spot the hidden tactic without playing out the actual solution.

Let me demonstrate how this exercise works with the following simple example.

Find a hidden tactic – Example

Example 2

Blitz game, 2017



Your task is to find a ‘hidden’ tactic that was missed by one of the players in the following three-move sequence. Feel free to move back and forth through the segment as you try to find the answer.

27. ♖g3 h4 28. ♗e2 ♚e5 29. f4 ♚xd4+

Find a mini-plan

This training exercise is exclusively a part of the Middlegame training module. Like ‘Find a hidden tactic’, your task will be to examine a short, usually three-to-five move game segment. However, this exercise aims to train your strategic thinking instead of your tactical vision. More specifically, you will focus on recognizing essential positional features first. Then, you will form and execute relevant short plans based on that knowledge. Since positional and strategic questions in the middlegame are often complex, it’s advantageous to refine the skill of breaking them up into simpler, smaller ones. Thus, the primary purpose of this exercise is to help you hone your short-term planning.

As you do that, the principal themes to remember are improving pieces, controlling outposts, and pawn play. You also need to pay attention to the opponent’s intentions and sometimes adjust your plans according to what he does, e.g. prevent his maneuvers, exchange his strong pieces, etc.

Let’s check the solution.

27. ♖g3 h4?

This is a blunder, enabling White to carry out a ‘luring’ tactic:

28. ♚xg7+!

Just like in Carlsen-Anand, the oversight in this blitz game was mutual because the players were too focused on the maneuvering battle. It continued 28. ♗e2? ♚e5 29. f4 ♚xd4+ 30. ♗xd4, etc.

28... ♚xg7 29. ♗h5+ ♚h6 30. ♗xf4±

As a result of this petite combinaison, White can claim a healthy extra pawn in the endgame. This type of puzzle will form the backbone of the Tactical training module. Its primary purpose is to help you become tactically sharper by training the skill of spotting unexpected and unplanned tactics. In Chapter 3, I will provide a few more examples to get you fully prepared for the test section.

CHAPTER 3

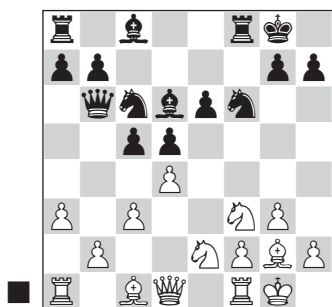
Tactics Training

The Tactics module consists of two types of exercises, as already presented in Chapter 1: ‘Find a hidden tactic’ and ‘Tactical analysis’. You will find them neatly arranged in five training sets of eight exercises. Each set contains a balanced mix of both type of exercises. Overall, the sets gradually increase in difficulty, although you might find specific exercises less challenging than those preceding them, and vice versa.

Before you start, I would like to give you a chance to warm up with a mini-set of two FHT and one tactical analysis exercise. As we work through them, I will provide suggestions to facilitate your work.

Find a hidden tactic – Example

Example 1



Please find a ‘hidden’ tactic in the following three-move sequence:

**12... ♖d7 13. ♜b1 ♜ae8 14. ♙f4 ♙xf4
15. ♘xf4**

Let’s see the solution:

12... ♖d7 13. ♜b1?

With this logical-looking move White overprotects the b2-pawn, preparing 14. ♙f4 or 14. b4 next.

In predominantly maneuvering battles, such as this one, it is very easy to focus so much on improving our position, that we lose sight of tactical details. Now that the rook is undefended on b1, Black can take advantage with

13... cxd4!

Still in the ‘maneuvering mode’, the black player was not alert to this tactical cue and kept improving his position with 13... ♜ae8? 14. ♙f4 ♙xf4 15. ♘xf4 cxd4 16. cxd4 ♘e4, with a typical French middlegame.

14. cxd4 ♙xa3

One point. The pawn is pinned to the undefended piece on b1, so Black emerges with a clear extra pawn.

Your score = ___ / 1 pt

Tactical triggers

You will increase your chances of finding hidden tactics in the upcoming exercises if you focus on two particular ‘tactical triggers’:

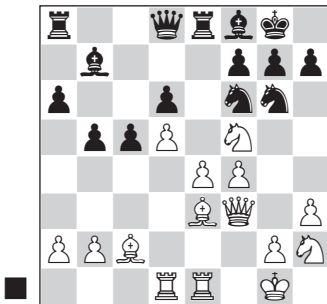
1. **Undefended pieces;** and
2. **Pieces in contact.**

As you scan the three-move sequences in this chapter, pay attention to pieces that are, or suddenly become, undefended. As the previous example showed, such pieces often provide the basis for tactical operations.

The following demonstrates how to scan for the second typical tactical trigger, a piece in contact.

Find a hidden tactic – Example

Example 2



Please find a ‘hidden’ tactic in the following three-move sequence.

Note: This is a slightly advanced puzzle (for 2100+ Elo).

23...♙c8 24.♘g4 ♘xg4 25.hxg4 a5 26.g3

White is clearly better in this Ruy Lopez/Benoni middlegame thanks to his excellent central control and a mighty knight on f5. Black, on the other hand, struggles with a lack of space. With his next move **23...♙c8**

he puts his bishop in ‘contact’ with the opponent’s most active piece. We will see shortly how this tactical detail will prove to be crucial.

24.♘g4?

With this move, White was hoping to strengthen his case for a kingside attack after 24...♘xg4 25.hxg4, followed by 26.g2-g3, ♔g2, ♖h1, etc. However, this is a tactical mistake! On a side note, having given this puzzle to several students already, I have noticed that most had a bias toward the white position. For minutes on end, they often unsuccessfully tried to find a tactic for White in this position. Here are some of their attempts:

A) 24.e5 fails to 24...♙xf5 25.♙xf5 ♘h4;

B) 24.♘xd6 ♙xd6 25.e5 doesn’t work because of 25...♘xe5 26.fxe5 ♖xe5; and

C) 24.♙xc5 dxc5 25.e5 is even worse due to 25...♙xf5 26.♙xf5 ♘h4.

Objectively speaking, the best move was 24.g4. Since White overprotects the f5-knight now, Black doesn’t have any tactical shots left up his sleeve. On the prophylactic side,

if you want to prevent unexpected tactics, it's best to have your pieces overprotecting each other. We will get back to this point in simulations of games of Tigran Petrosian in the Middlegame Training Module.

24... ♖xe4!

This surprising tactical shot turns the tables! White got too carried away preparing his kingside attack and forgot about this sacrifice.

Let's also note some wrong solutions:

A) 24... ♖xf5 25. exf5 ♖h4 26. ♖g3 ♖xg4 27. hxg4 and the knight will get trapped on h4;

B) 24... ♖h4 is interesting, but White has a big advantage after both 25. ♖xf6+ ♖xf6 26. ♖xh4 ♖xh4 27. ♖f2 and 25. ♖xh4 ♖xg4 26. hxg4 ♖xh4 27. f5;

C) Black went along with White's plans in the game, and after 24... ♖xg4? 25. hxg4 a5 26. g3 he ended up in an unenviable position. Coming back to the combination starting with 24... ♖xe4!, the point is that after

25. ♖xe4 ♖xf5 26. ♖xf5

Black gets his piece back by force with

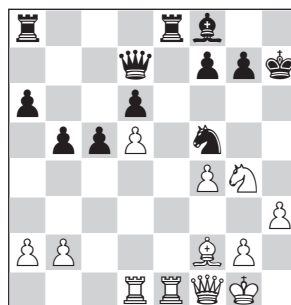
26... ♖h4!

Two points. The unfortunate aspect (from White's perspective) of 24. ♖g4 is that it blocks the queen from moving there. White's best choice is to restore the material balance with

27. ♖xh7+ ♖xh7.

Nevertheless, Black can claim a nice positional edge after

28. ♖f1 ♖f5 29. ♖f2 ♖d7.



Even though Black didn't win any material, the position turned around completely. Not only did he break free from the opponent's positional squeeze, but now Black is the one with a strong knight on f5!

Your score = ____ / 2 pts

Let's try to reconstruct how this unexpected combination occurred. On move 24, the c8-bishop came into contact with the white knight on f5. At the same time, the f6-knight was already in contact with the white pawn on e4. By 'contact' we usually mean that the opponent's piece is protected, but only loosely. In other words, if we could destroy or deflect the defender of that piece, it could become an undefended piece.

That's precisely what happened as a result of the combination starting with 24... ♖xe4!; on move 26, the f5-bishop became undefended, and we could fork it with 26... ♖h4. White's tactical mistake obviously was in not strengthening the e4-♖f5 axis after Black put the knight in contact with 23... ♖c8.

In conclusion, let me give you another practical tip that could make you more effective in finding unexpected tactics: focus on the position with the highest tactical tension. These will usually be the positions where many pieces are in contact.

In most cases, you should be able to find the solution to the ‘Find a hidden tactic’ puzzle within the first 5-10 minutes. For the more difficult ones, you might need up to 15 minutes. However, if you struggle to spot a hidden tactic after 20 minutes, you can quit and look at the answer. You are likely running in circles at that point, and your chances of finding the solution are pretty slim.

However, if you are intent on finding the solution and don’t want to give up, I can suggest a small trick that has worked for me fairly often. When I feel stuck with a puzzle, I take a complete break from it for about half an hour and distract myself from chess. Sometimes, the solution hits me while I am busy doing something unrelated. Other times, it appears in front of me a minute or two after I revisit the puzzle for the second time. It’s an interesting phenomenon. My explanation is that the subconscious mind works on the puzzle’s solution and all we need to do is just to give it some space 😊.

To complete our warm-up, let’s analyze one tactical position.

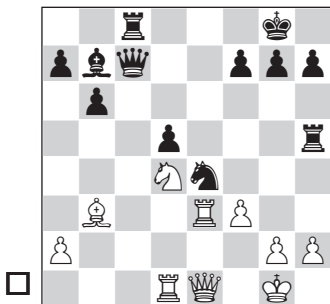
Tactical analysis – Example

Example 3

Nodirbek Abdusattorov 2634

Sayed Javad Alavi Moghaddam 2432

Titled Tuesday blitz 2021 (7)



White has sacrificed two pawns for the initiative. With his last move, 21...♖h5, Black is looking for counterplay on the kingside. Before we try to determine how White should meet this counterattack, let me give you some methodical pieces of advice.

The goal of analysis exercises is to practice both the width and the depth of your calculation. When I say ‘width’, I mean that you consider all forcing candidate moves, both for White and for Black. I will guide you through this process to a degree by providing the most critical lines for analysis. Your other task will be to explore the depth, that is, to keep examining these lines until forcing moves have been exhausted for

both sides and a relatively precise positional evaluation can be made. The tactical exercises that I have selected are quite forced, so you don't have to worry that you will have to analyze some abstract variations. For this exercise, please analyze the following variations:

- A) 22.fxe4
- B) 22.g3
- C1) 22.h4 ♘d6 23.♗b5
- C2) 22.h4 ♘d6 23.♞e7
- C3) 22.h4 ♘d6 23.g4

Please remember that I give credit for a thorough analysis of all the variations. You will not do yourself a favor if you only focus on one or two lines that seem most promising, as you will not earn points for the other lines. With this scoring system, I would like to help you avoid 'tunnel vision' (a mental obstacle I have already described in HTSCOYO). Instead of focusing only on your tactical resources and calculating a narrow critical line, I encourage you to pay attention to a broader array of tactical resources, for yourself and your opponent. After completing your analysis, you can compare it to the solution provided below.

A) 22.fxe4?

leads to a double-edged position needlessly. Not only does Black get his material back after 22... ♗xh2+ 23.♔f2 dxe4, but our king doesn't feel very safe, either. You get one point for analyzing this variation.

B) 22.g3?! ♘f6

is not nearly as strong as the text, but you still get one point if you found

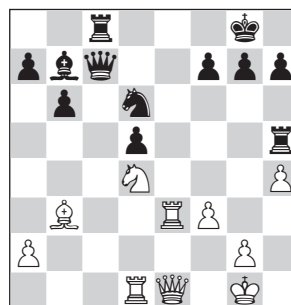
23.h4!↑.

This move isolates the rook on h5. Otherwise, you receive no credit for 23.♞e7 ♗b8∞.

Let it also be noted that 22.h3? is White's least inspiring option. After 22...♘f6, he is down two pawns with only some symbolic compensation.

C) 22.h4!

is White's best option. After 22...♘d6



White has three forced moves at his disposal:

C1) 23.♗b5?

looks very tempting, but the deflection/back-rank tactic doesn't quite work in view of 23... ♗c5 24.♘xd6 ♗xd6 25.♞e8+ ♜xe8 26. ♗xe8+ ♗f8 and Black is fine. You get one point for analyzing this variation.

C2) 23.♞e7?!

is too slow. After 23... ♗d8 24.g4 ♜h6∞

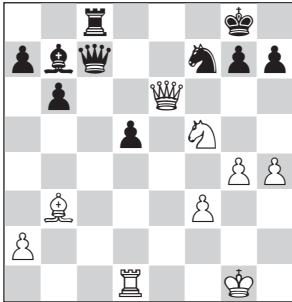
(one point) Black is fine since 25.g5 loses to 25...♖xh4!

C3) 23.g4! ♖h6 24.♗f5!+-

You get one point for this discovery. White is winning now, but you earned extra credit if you don't stop here and continued with your analysis:

24...♗e6 25.♖xe6 fxe6

26.♗xe6+ ♗f7



How to calculate a total score

I already explained the essential features of scoring individual exercises in the first chapter. When you complete your work, you will surely be eager to learn how well you did on the whole Tactical training module.

First, you tally your exercise and training set scores. Then, you go to the very end of the chapter. There, you will find empty fields where you can insert and add up the scores for the five training sets. Finally, if you compare your total score against the grading scale, you will see in which of the four general categories it falls (percentages are based on total points excluding the extra credit points):

- A score between 0 and 49% (you will see this score in points instead of percentage in the Scores and Grading section) corresponds approximately to the 1800-1900 rating range (please note that I have International FIDE Elo in mind, and not national or online ratings);
- A score of 50-74% corresponds to 1900-2000;
- A score of 75%-89% corresponds to 2000-2100;
- A score of 90%+ corresponds to 2100+.

27.♗xd5!

Two extra points. This is the only move that wins on the spot.

You get no credit for the hasty 27.♗e7+? ♗f8 28.♗xc8, because it allows 28...♗g3+=. 27.♗g2?! (one extra point) stops the check on g3, but it also enables Black to consolidate somewhat with 27...♖f8.

27...♗xd5 28.♗xc8+

Alternatively, 28.♗e7+!? ♗f8 29.♗xc8+ is also worth two extra points.

28...♗xc8 29.♗e7++-

and White wins a decisive amount of material.

Your score = ____ / 7 pts

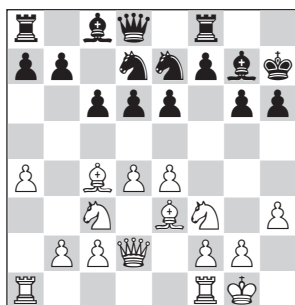
Exercise 8 – Middlegame simulation

Alexander Alekhine

Vladas Mikenas

Folkestone 1933 (10)

1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♘g7 3.♞c3 d6 4.♜f3
 ♜d7 5.♙c4 e6 6.0-0 ♜e7 7.a4 0-0
 8.♙e3 h6 9.♚d2 ♚h7 10.h3 c6



It is somewhat understandable that some of Alekhine's opponents, fearing his tactical genius, played very conservatively against him, as Mikenas did in this game. However, by the time he became World Champion in 1918, Alekhine was already a master of maneuvering. This game is an excellent example of that. Black hasn't crossed the sixth rank within the first ten moves, and now he is shyly preparing to do that by pushing 11...d5.

Exercise: How would you continue?

11. ♙f4

One point. Alekhine immediately spotted a potential weakness in Black's camp due to Mikenas' previous move. There were many other reasonable moves, such as 11.a5, 11.♚fe1, or 11.♙d3, and you also get full credit for any of those.

11...d5

It's worth noting that Alekhine was more than happy to lose two tempi with his bishop to invite his opponent to play 11...e5 12.dxe5 dxe5 13.♙e3 f5, because the opening of the d-file would be in his favor; for example, 14.♚ad1! f4 15.♙c5 and **Black is in trouble.**

12. ♙d3

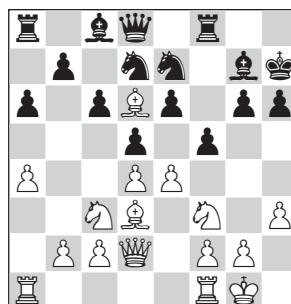
Two points. The bishop will be most useful here, as it controls two important diagonals, b1-h7 and f1-a6. Thus, 12.♙b3 (one point) is certainly a worse choice.

12...a6

13. ♙d6

Two points. We should not miss an opportunity to play this paralyzing move. White would also keep a significant positional advantage after 13.exd5 cxd5 14.a5 (one point). However, 13.e5 (no credit) would be a significant inaccuracy, because it would allow Black to break free with 13...c5, ...♜e7-c6, etc., to follow. 13.a5 (no credit) is similarly ineffective due to 13...c5. These lines make it clear why we need the bishop on d6.

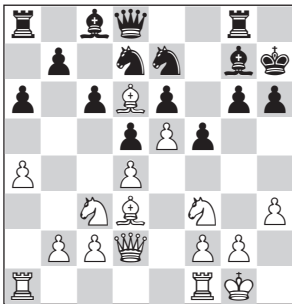
13...f5



14.e5

Two points. This is the most principled move now that ...c6-c5 is not an option. Even though Black seems out of immediate danger, his position remains difficult. White can maneuver more effectively than his opponent thanks to an enormous space advantage. This fact also allows Alekhine to open the position with a well-timed pawn break.

Instead, opening the e-file with 14.exf5 (one point) 14...exf5 15.♖fe1 is also sensible. However, after 15...♗f7, Black may, at least, attempt to activate his pieces via ...♘d7-f6-e4. After the text, Black remains confined to the last two ranks.

14...♗g8**15.h4**

One point. While there were many good moves here for White, Alekhine decided to limit Mikenas' counterplay on the kingside by stopping 15...g6-g5. Nevertheless, even if we played something like 15.a5, it would be difficult to imagine that 15...g5 could pose any problems to White, considering

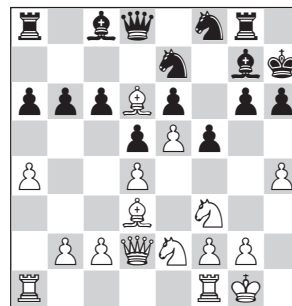
how passive Black's pieces are. Long story short, you get full credit for any other reasonable 15th move.

15...b6**16.♘e2**

Two points. This is a start of a necessary regrouping. 16.a5 (two points) was another strong move that would help us fix Black's queenside weaknesses. You receive one point for any other reasonable move.

16...♘f8

Black is planning to transfer his knight to h7 to support the g6-g5 break, but this plan is, not surprisingly, much too slow to bother White. On the other hand, if he tried to gain some space on the queenside with 16...c5, he would lose a pawn after 17.♘f4!. Also, 16...a5 would only help White open files on the queenside with 17.b4.

**17.a5**

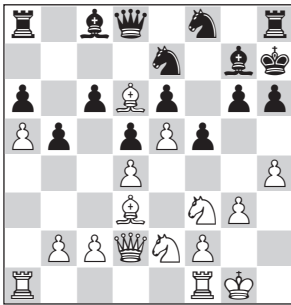
One point. A thematic move. The black pawn structure on the queenside will become inflexible and vulnerable. You also get full credit for 17.♘f4 and 17.♗b4, but only if you plan to meet 17...♗a7 with 18.a5 anyway.

17...b5

18.g3

One point. Alekhine had several good ways to strengthen his position. This choice testifies to his skill of prophylactic thinking. Once we fix the queenside, Black's only counterplay can come from the kingside. And so, he decided to take preventive measures on that side of the board, entirely tying Mikenas down before the final storm. You also earn full credit if your choice is 18.♘f4 or 18.b3.

18...♖h8



19.♔g2

One point. We are continuing with the plan. Nonetheless, you can add one point to your tally for any other reasonable move.

19...♔g8

20.♖h1

One point. Alternatives get no credit here, though. We have to complete our mini-plan of discouraging the ...g6-g5 break.

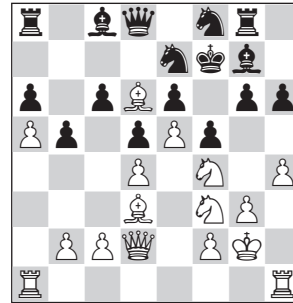
20...♔f7

21.♘f4

One point. The knight is placed comfortably on this outpost now, so we don't have to fear that Black will be able to push ...g6-g5 any time

soon (in view of ♘f4-h5-f6). You also get full credit for 21.b3, preparing to open the c-file with 22.c4.

21...♖g8



22.b3

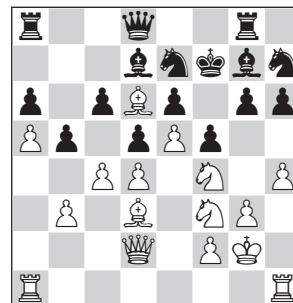
One point. The most straightforward continuation. We have done all the necessary preparations to open the position, and there is nothing to wait for any longer. If you planned to open the game on the other flank with 22.♖ag1 ♔e8 23.♔f1 followed by g3-g4, you also get one point.

22...♘h7

23.c4

One point.

23...♗d7



24.♖ac1

Two points. We should leverage our ability to open the c-file at the best possible moment, something Black

cannot do. Therefore, this move is better than 24.cxb5 cxb5 25.♖ac1 (one point) when Black could oppose us on the c-file with 25...♖c8.

24...♙f8



25.♙e2

Two points. Alekhine starts another effective regrouping. You also get full credit for 25.cxd5 cxd5 26.♖c7 or one point for any other reasonable move.

25...♘c8

26.cxd5

One point. This is equivalent to 26.♙xf8 ♘xf8 27.cxd5 cxd5 (one point).

26...cxd5

27.♙xf8

One point. The simplest. Black will be defenseless on the dark squares now. 27.♙c7 (one point) is not wrong, yet it feels unnecessary if we know that trading bishops will be in our favor.

27...♘xf8

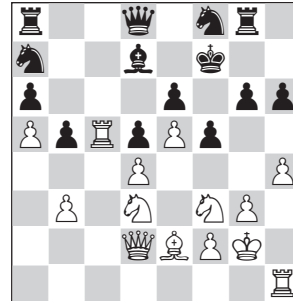
28.♖c5

One point. The invasion of the dark squares is in full swing. You also receive full credit for the alternatives 28.♘d3 and 28.♖c2.

28...♘a7

28...g5 29.hxg5 hxg5 would only speed up Black's demise, as 30.♘h5 followed by ♗f6 would be lethal to his king.

29.♘d3



One point. This was Alekhine's plan when he retreated the bishop to e2 a couple of moves ago. From here, the knight can start exploiting other dark squares, like b4 and c5. Meanwhile, White wins a tempo by attacking the h6-pawn with his queen. 29.♖hc1 (one point) is just as good.

29...♙g7

30.♖hc1

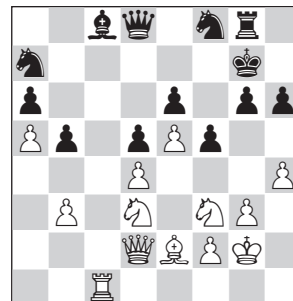
One point.

30...♖c8

31.♖xc8

One point.

31...♙xc8



32. ♖c3

One point. Everything is ready for the final breakthrough on the c-file. Black will not have the strength to oppose it. The other queen moves 32. ♖c2 and 32. ♖b4 are just as good and also deserve full credit.

32... ♕h7

33. ♖c5

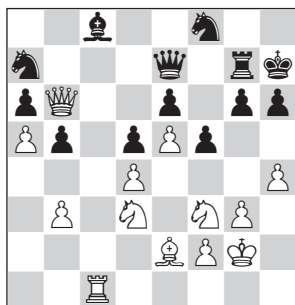
One point. We are slowly inching our way into Black's side of the board. You get one point for virtually any other move apart from 33. ♖c7+. This would be a grave strategic mistake (no credit), because the queen trade after 33... ♖xc7 34. ♖xc7+ ♖g7 would facilitate Black's defensive task significantly.

33... ♖g7

34. ♖b6

One point. Simple and strong.

34... ♖e7



35. ♗f4

One point. Black has managed to limit the damage on the open c-file, but he cannot defend the pawn on a6 anymore. 35. ♗f4 (one point) is a slower approach that also works. In that case, White secures himself against the pawn break ...g6-g5 and prepares to maneuver the other

knight to the outpost on c5 via squares e1 and d3.

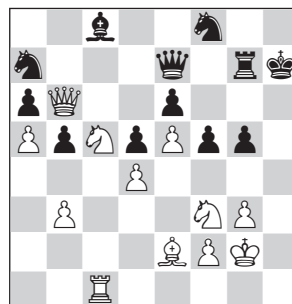
35...g5

Realizing that the situation on the queenside is hopeless, Mikenas goes for a desperate kingside break.

36.hxg5

One point. 36.h5 (one point) was even more merciless, eliminating any counterplay, for example, 36... g4 37. ♗h4 ♖g5 38. ♗d3 ♖xh5 39. ♖c7+.

36...hxg5



37. ♗e1

Two points. A nice bit of prophylaxis. White wants a ready answer to any pawn advance on the kingside. The preliminary 37. ♖h1+ (two points) was also fine. However, the greedy 37. ♗xa6 ♗xa6 38. ♖xa6 (one point) would needlessly allow Black to achieve some counterplay via 38...g4 followed by 39...f5-f4, ...♗g6, etc.

37...♗g6

37...g4 could now be met by 38. ♗ed3, whereas 37...f4 would be neutralized by 38.g4.

38. ♗ed3

One point. The safest move, although this time there was no issue with 38. ♗xa6 (one point) 38... ♗xa6

39. ♖xa6, since 39...g4 could be met by 40. ♘d3.

38...f4

39. ♖h1+

Two points. One cannot argue against this handy check. You also get full credit for 39. ♘g4. Other reasonable moves get one point.

39... ♖g8



40. ♘g4

Two points. The best continuation (you get one point for any other reasonable move). This way, we simultaneously attack the weakness on e6 and prophylactically block the g-file, which could open after a sacrifice with ...♗h4 at some point. White's piece coordination is picture-perfect! We can stop our game simulation here. White's position is completely winning, and Alekhine quickly refuted Black's last desperate try to complicate matters:

40...fxg3 41.fxg3 ♗h4+ 42.gxh4 gxh4

43. ♗f2 ♖f7 44. ♗xe6 ♖h7 45. ♖d6

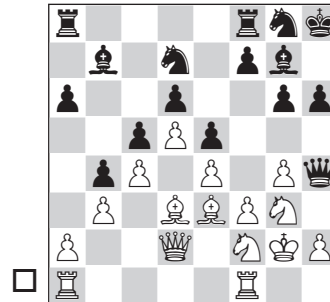
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Your score = ____ / 39 pts

Middlegame Training Set 2

'Iron Tigran has a cunning plan'

Exercise 9 – Find a mini-plan



18.a3

Two points. White opens a front on the queenside. His space advantage and the fact that the black queen is far away from the a-file provide ample reason to do so.

If you considered playing on the kingside instead with 18.g5 hxg5, then only 19. ♗d3! gets you two points. Black is under serious pressure after 19...f6 20. ♘f2, with 21. ♖h1 and h2-h4 coming. This strong attacking idea is not easy to find, though. If your main line is more straightforward with 19. ♘g5, then you earn only one point, since Black can simplify into an only slightly worse endgame after 19...♗h6! 20. ♘xh4 ♘xd2.

You also get two points for 18. ♘e2, but only if your mini-plan included the moves ♗d3 and ♘f2 to exploit the vulnerable position of the black queen. For example, 18...a5 19. ♗d3 ♗e7 20. ♘f2, and Black is forced to enter a worse endgame after 20...♖g5 21. ♖xg5 hxg5.

Any other reasonable move for White gets one point.

18...a5

19. ♖a2

One point. White should mobilize his rooks before opening the file. You get no credit for opening the a-file hastily with 19.axb4. After 19...axb4 20. ♖b2 ♖xa1 21. ♖xa1 f5!, Black gets serious counterplay on the kingside.

19... ♘df6

20. ♖fa1

One point.

20... ♘h7

21.axb4

One point. Now we are ready to seize control over the a-file.

21...axb4

22. ♖xa8

One point. 22. ♖a7 gets no credit, since it gives the opponent just enough time to bring back the queen with 22... ♖e7.

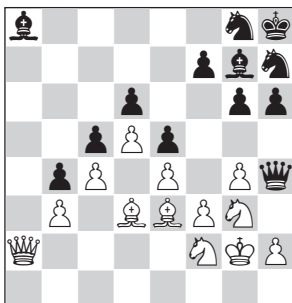
22... ♖xa8

23. ♖xa8

One point.

23... ♙xa8

24. ♖a2

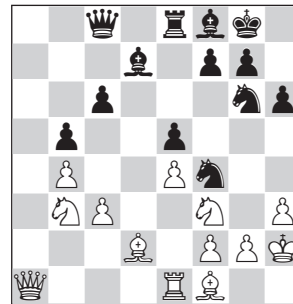


One point. White wins the battle for the a-file. The queen will penetrate and start exerting pressure on the

d6-pawn and other black weaknesses. Spassky-Penrose, Palma de Mallorca 1969, 1-0 (49).

Your score = ____ / 8 pts

Exercise 10 – Find a mini-plan



24. ♙e3

Two points. Recognizing that we can exploit a weak c5-square in the black camp is essential. There is also nothing wrong if we do it at once: 24. ♘c5 ♙xc5 25.bxc5 (two points). We get excellent control over the dark squares in return for a slightly compromised pawn structure.

24. ♖a7 (one point) is a natural move considering our dominance on the a-file (as we have seen in the previous exercise). However, Black can counter it with 24...f5 when the white queen might start to feel a bit disconnected on a7.

24... ♙e6

It is important to note that 24...f5 can now be met by 25. ♘fd2!, keeping everything under control.

25. ♘c5

One point.

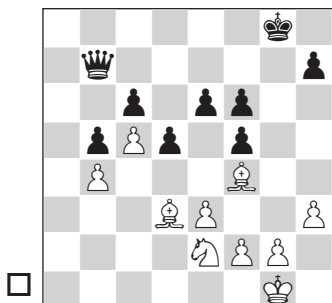
25... ♙xc5

Exercise 14 – Endgame simulation

Magnus Carlsen 2862

Andrew Tang 2316

Norway sim Chess.com rapid 2014 (1)



We have an unusual material balance on the board. What will prevail: a queen and a pawn, or three minor pieces? There is only one way to find out! Please take the white pieces and try to guess the Norwegian World Champion's next moves.

27. ♖d6

Two points. The bishop needs to assume the d6 outpost before Black can cut it off with 27...e5. 27.♘h2 or any other move gets no credit due to 27...e5.

27... ♜a6

28. ♞d4

One point. A natural follow-up. The knight simultaneously attacks the black pawn on e6 and, more importantly, the pawn on c6, thereby indirectly protecting White's only weakness, the pawn on b4.

28... ♞f7

Note: Feel free to take more than the usual five minutes here.

29. ♗e2

Three points. After we have improved our dark-squared bishop and the knight, it is time to put the light-squared bishop to work. The h5-square will be a perfect outpost for it.

29.g3 or any other reasonable move gets one point. However, trying to secure the d4-outpost with 29.f4 would be a grave mistake because of 29...♞a3, so it gets no credit.

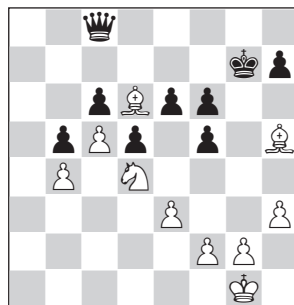
29... ♜c8

As we shall see, passive defense will not work for Black. 29...f4! was his last chance for an active defense, taking advantage of some tactical tricks to set up counterplay against the white king: 30.exf4 ♞a1+ and 30.♗xf4 e5.

30. ♗h5+

One point.

30... ♞g7



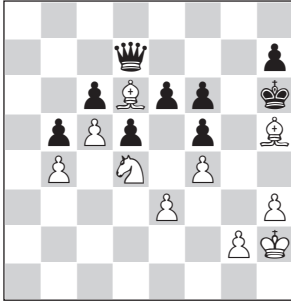
31.f4

Two points. It is essential to ensure that the knight will remain on its dominant post on d4. 31.g4 (two points) was another way to accomplish this goal: 31...fxg4 32.♗xg4 f5 33.♗e5+.

31... ♜d7

32. ♖h2

Two points. Never forget about your king in the endgame! 32. ♖f2 also gets full credit, as well as the immediate 32. g4 fxg4 33. ♙xg4.

32... ♖h6**33. g4**

Two points. Perhaps White could make another preparatory move or two, but this pawn break is his main trump. It is the first step to breaking down Black's fortress. Please give yourself one point for any other reasonable move.

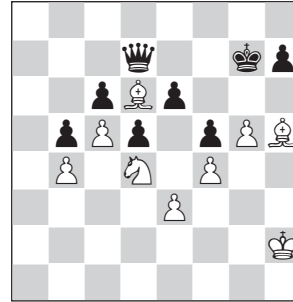
33... fxg4**34. hxg4**

Two points. Not only do we recapture toward the center, but we also win a tempo by threatening 35. ♙f8+. 34. ♙xg4 (one point) isn't much worse, although Black can resist better than in the game after 34...f5.

34... ♖g7**35. g5**

Three points. This is the key move, because it allows us to weaken Black's pawn structure on the kingside and increase the scope of our light-squared bishop. 35. f5 (one point) is also reasonable, but it has the downside of allowing

Black to exchange his weak e6-pawn and live with only one real weakness on c6 after 35...exf5 36. ♗xf5+ ♖h8. 35. ♖g3 or any other slow move gets no credit as it would allow Black to prevent our pawn break by playing 35...h6!.

35... f5

Black fortifies his position, eliminating the option of ♙g4 and hoping that White will not find a way through with his three minor pieces and the king. Can you?

36. ♖g3

Two points. 36. ♖h3 works just as well. The minor pieces cannot do the job on their own – they need to enlist the help of their monarch! The intermediate check 36. ♙e5+ also gets full credit.

36... ♖g8**37. ♙e5**

One point. We are preparing for the final break. You also get one point for 37. ♖h4 because it's a part of the plan.

37... ♗c8**38. g6**

Two points. We need to open the gates for our king to enter; we might as well do it sooner rather

than later. 38.♔h4 would also work fine (two points).

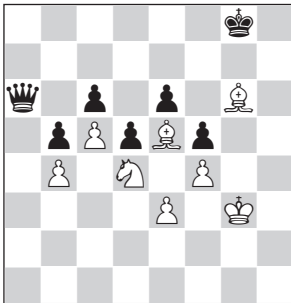
However, a piece regrouping with 38.♖f3 ♗a8 39.♙d4, planning to go 40.♗e5, would allow Black to achieve counterplay via the a-file 39...♗a4. Even though White is still winning, the conversion would become unnecessarily messy, so this move receives only one point.

38...hxg6

39.♙xg6

One point. The bishops are in full control of the squares on the kingside now.

39...♗a6



40.♔h4

One point. It is time to invade with all our forces! 40.♗xe6 (one point) is a bit greedier but still works just fine, e.g. 40...♗a3 41.♔h4 ♗xe3 42.♔g5+-.

40...♗a1

41.♔g5

One point.

41...♗a7

42.♗xc6

One point. You also receive full credit for 42.♗xe6 ♗e7+ 43.♔xf5, as well as 42.♔h6, preparing to launch a mating attack after the knight transfers to square g5!

42...♗d7

43.♗d4

One point.

43...♗e7+

44.♙f6

Two points. This is the most accurate way to get out of the check. 44.♔h6 (one point) 44...♗h4+ 45.♙h5 is still winning, but why give Black any chances?

44...♗f8

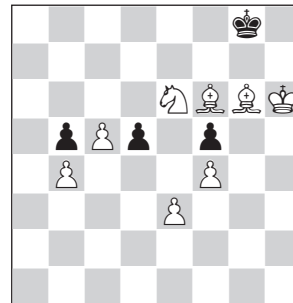
45.♗xe6

You get two points, but only if you have seen Black's last 'trick' (on the next move). Otherwise, be honest and give yourself only one point in case you missed Black's next move.

45...♗h6+

A stalemate attempt, but fortunately, it is only an attempt.

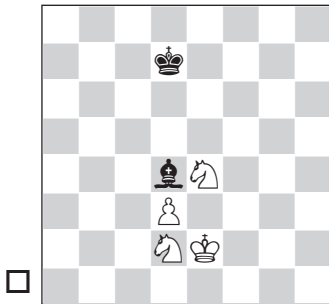
46.♔xh6



One point. Black still has a d-pawn, so he resigned. Technically speaking, it is a mistake not to consider 45...♗h6+ on your previous move, because if Black did not have 46...d4, you would be in for a big disappointment! On the aesthetic side, White's final piece arrangement is a sight to behold.

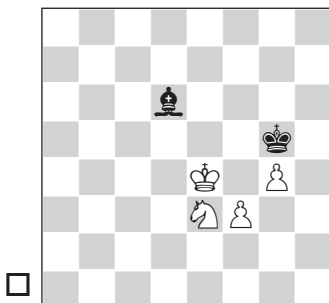
Your score = ____ / 33 pts

Exercise 15 – Endgame training position



White should be able to win this endgame in numerous ways; he just needs to be careful not to let his opponent sacrifice the bishop for the pawn on any of the dark squares d4, d6, or d8. It is beneficial to play out this endgame to get a better feel for coordination between the two knights and the tactical aspects of knight geometry.

Exercise 16 – Endgame training position



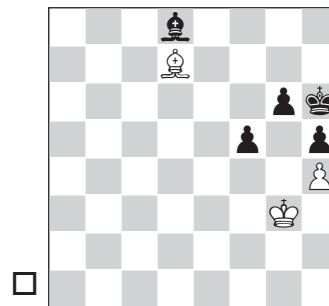
White's winning plan in this position is not too difficult to understand: he needs to push the black king away with f3-f4. Achieving this will require you to maneuver your king and knight purposefully. While doing that,

you should ensure that Black does not obtain counterplay against the f3-pawn with ...♙f4 or ...♙g5-h4-g3. Also, please keep the 50-move rule in mind!

Endgame Training Set 3

'Mind your diagonals' (p.198)

Exercise 17 – Endgame analysis

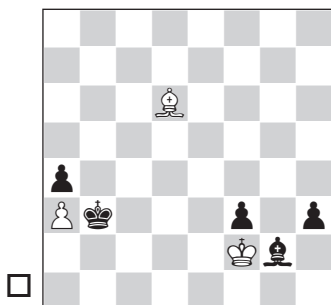


White has good chances to make a draw in the opposite-colored bishops endgame, despite being down two pawns. To achieve this, which option is better?

- A)** A passive defense with **70. ♖h3**
- B)** Try to force a draw directly with **70. ♖f4 ♗xh4 71. ♗xf5**, hoping to reach the h1-square with the king in the bishop + pawn vs. king endgame.

Please check both variations carefully before forming the conclusion.

Exercise 18 – Endgame analysis



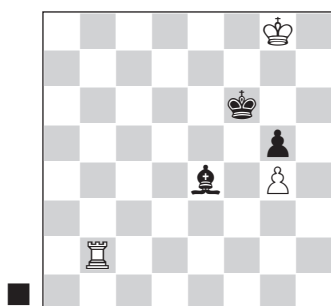
Thanks to the blockade of the black passed pawns, White seems close to holding a draw in this opposite-colored bishops endgame. He has a choice between two similar looking (but sharply different!) continuations:

- A) 75. ♖g3 ♗b2 76. ♙c5
- B) 75. ♖g1 ♗b2 76. ♙c5

Please analyze both variations to determine which king move we should choose.

Hint: Only one of them draws!

Exercise 19 – Endgame analysis



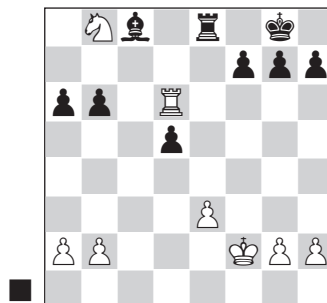
Black would have good chances to draw if he could eliminate the last white pawn. Now he needs to decide which is the better way to defend:

- A) Passively with 91... ♙d3
- B) Actively with 91... ♗e5

Please analyze these two options and, in particular, these variations:

- B1) 91... ♗e5 93. ♖b4
- B2) 91... ♗e5 93. ♖f2

Exercise 20 – Endgame analysis



Black is up a pawn at the moment, though White will return it by force, retaining a more active position. The question for Black is what kind of endgame to go for?

- A) 28... ♙b7, which leads into a minor piece (♙ vs ♘) endgame after 29. ♘d7 ♖e6 30. ♖xb6 ♖xb6 31. ♘xb6
- B) 28... b5, which leads into a pure rook vs. rook endgame after 29. ♘xa6 ♙xa6 30. ♖xa6
- C) 28... g6, which leads into an endgame with rooks and a minor piece after 29. ♖xb6 a5

Your task is to analyze all three possibilities as deeply as possible to determine which of them gives Black the best chance to hold this endgame.