

GAMBIT

Desert Island Chess Puzzles 1



Supergrandmaster Wesley So

*100 world-class exercises to instruct while
providing hours of solving pleasure*

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Supergrandmaster Wesley So

100 world-class puzzles to instruct while providing hours of solving pleasure

GAMBIT

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ISBN-13: 978-1-911465-57-7

ISBN-10: 1-911465-57-0

Gambit Publications Ltd, 27 Queens Pine, Bracknell, Berks,
RG12 0TL, England.

E-mail:

Website (regularly updated):
www.gambitbooks.com

Edited by Graham Burgess

Kindle edition prepared by Graham Burgess

Cover illustration by Shane Mercer

Gambit Publications Ltd

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Wesley So is one of the world's top players. In 2016 he won two gold medals at the Olympiad and was overall winner of the Grand Chess Tour. He followed up with a 2017 US Championship victory, and in late 2019 became the Chess960 World Champion with a commanding 13½-2½ victory over Magnus Carlsen. Originally from the Philippines, he now lives in Minnesota.

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Introduction

I am grateful that my neighbour Graham Burgess came up

with the idea of a puzzle book. It had never occurred to me to create one before and the project gave my restlessness something to focus on as I re-examined several of my games from the years 2018 – 2020.

Rifling back through my files, I searched for instructive moments which were naturally supposed to be for other players “out there”. However, as these things often turn out, the subject-matter became educational material for my own studies in the way of self-examination.

“What in the world...?” “Why did I do that?” “Oh ... should have seen that ... thank God he didn’t!” “Where did that move come from???”

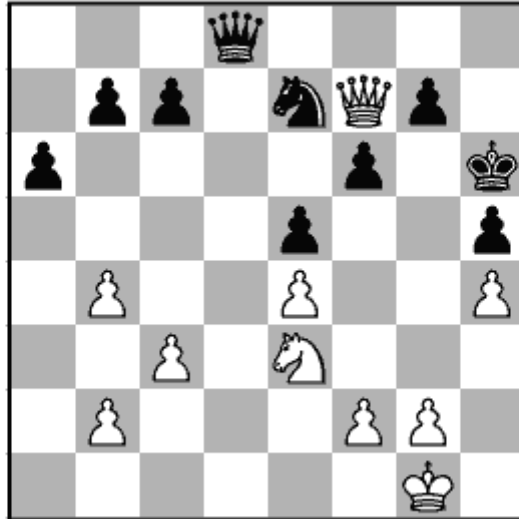
I am often guilty of moves both impulsive and/or instinctive, which sometimes work and sometimes don’t (why oh why don’t they?) but whichever way they were chosen, moves are best analysed as soon as possible after you’ve made them. Yet who has time for reflection when you are always on the move to the next tournament?

I sorted through my games and chose one hundred puzzling moments organized from easiest to hardest. I had to replay and rethink everything because they were not examined when they should have been. I have chosen puzzles from interesting games featuring a range of players from the likes of GM Carlsen and GM Caruana, to IM Roberto Carlos Sanchez Alvarez and GM Diego Flores. You do not have to be in the top ten to play great chess and produce wonderful moments. I have seen average club players do the same, so I hope you enjoy this collection. Puzzles are meant for fun and relaxation and there is always the random possibility you might learn a few things. (I know I did!)

Symbols

+	check
++	double check
#	checkmate
!!	brilliant move
!	good move
!?	interesting move
?!	dubious move
?	bad move
??	blunder
+−	White is winning
+/−	White is much better
+≈	White is slightly better
=	the game is equal
≈+	Black is slightly better
−/+	Black is much better
−+	Black is winning
Ch	championship
1-0	the game ends in a win for White
½-½	the game ends in a draw
0-1	the game ends in a win for Black
(D)	see next diagram

25 Fairly Easy Puzzles



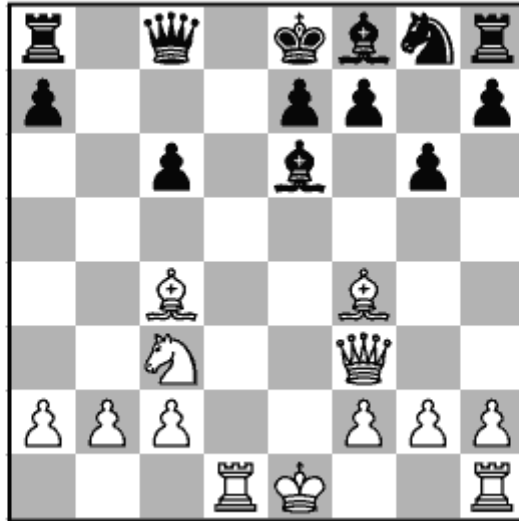
Puzzle 1: White to play

Wesley So – Sunilduth Lyna Narayanan

PRO League rapid 2020

Black has just played 32...Kh6, defending the h-pawn, but has he overlooked anything more significant?

[answer](#)



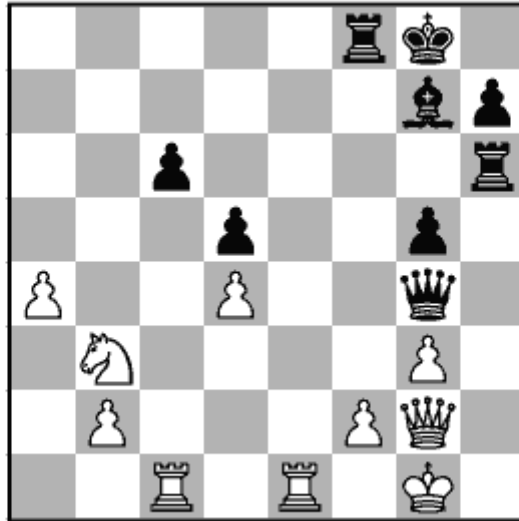
Puzzle 2: White to play

Wesley So – Maxime Vachier-Lagrave

chess.com rapid 2019

The opening has gone horribly wrong for Maxime. He is badly behind in development and his king is stuck in the centre. How can White win by force?

[answer](#)



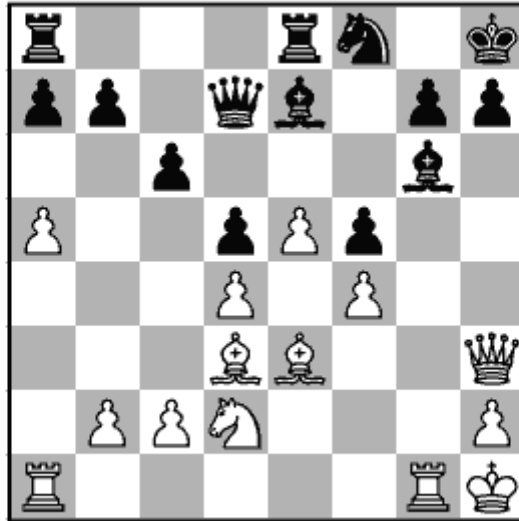
Puzzle 3: White to play

Le Tuan Minh – Wesley So

PRO League rapid 2019

It looks like Black has good compensation for the pawn, with pressure on the f-file and the h-file. What should White play?

[answer](#)



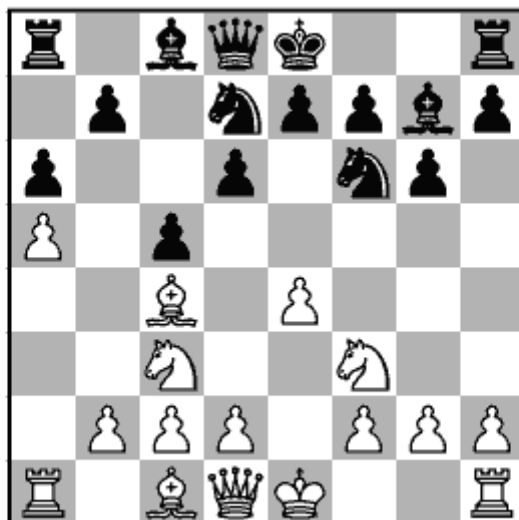
Puzzle 4: White to play

Wesley So – Vladislav Artemiev

chess.com rapid 2019

White has a large space advantage, and Black faces serious threats along the half-open g-file. How can White increase his advantage?

[answer](#)



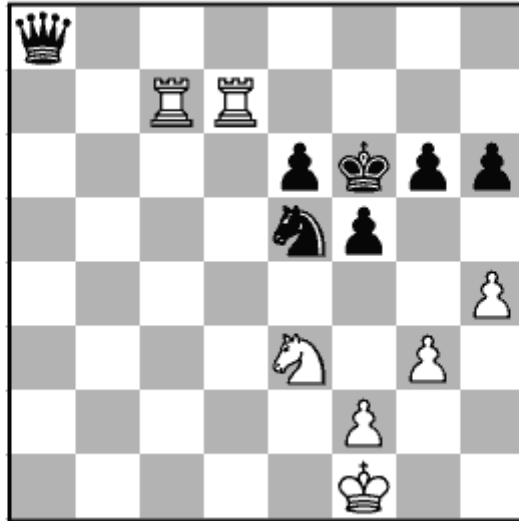
Puzzle 5: White to play

Rameshbabu Praggnanandhaa – Wesley So

Leon rapid 2018

In a popular variation of the Sicilian, the Indian prodigy (who was just thirteen years old at the time of the game!) managed to get me in an unfavourable position straight from the opening. My last move (7...Bg7) looks quite careless. How should White continue?

[answer](#)



Puzzle 6: White to play

Wesley So – Jan-Krzysztof Duda

chess.com blitz 2018

Black is slightly ahead on material, as queen + pawn are usually stronger than two rooks in the endgame. Can White do something about this?

[answer](#)



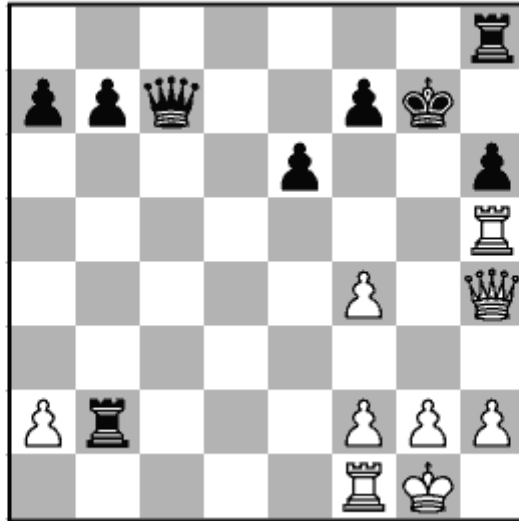
Puzzle 7: Black to play

Pascal Charbonneau – Wesley So

PRO League rapid 2019

Black has a large advantage, as White's pieces are misplaced. Can Black take drastic measures to exploit this?

[answer](#)



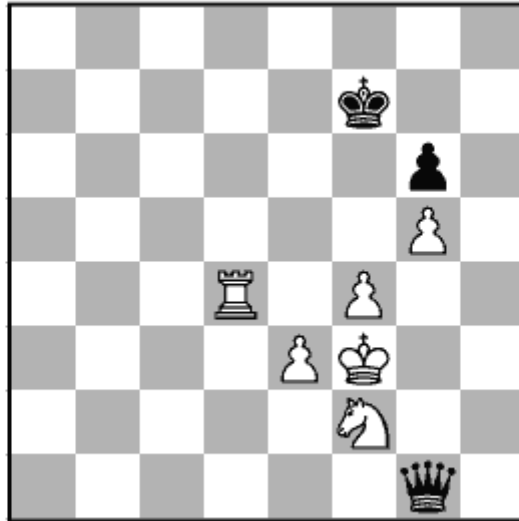
Puzzle 8: White to play

Wesley So – Peter Svidler

World Fischer Random, Høvikodden 2019

The black king looks very vulnerably placed and is without cover. White's queen and rook are hovering unpleasantly over it. How can you make good use of this?

[answer](#)



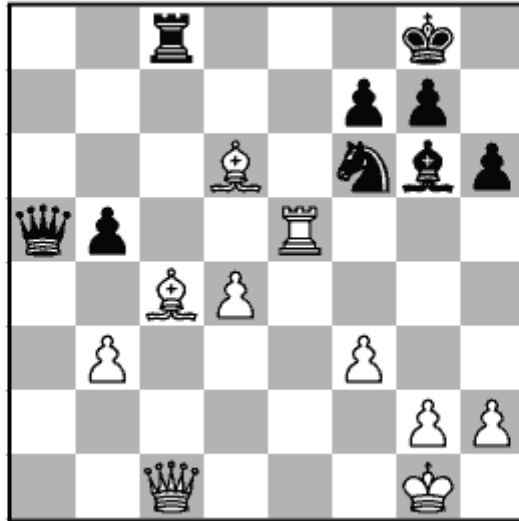
Puzzle 9: White to play

Wesley So – Vinay Bhat

PRO League rapid 2019

White is slightly ahead on material, but the normal result of rook + knight and pawns vs queen should be a draw, with so little left on the board. With his last move, 53...Qg1, Vinay gave me a sudden opportunity. What should White play?

[answer](#)



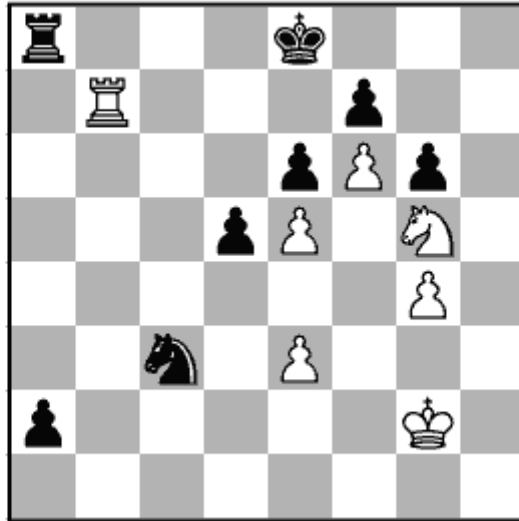
Puzzle 10: White to play

Pentala Harikrishna – Wesley So

Kolkata blitz 2018

White is a pawn up, but his bishop seems caught in a powerful pin along the c-file. Who is better in the position? What would you play as White?

[answer](#)



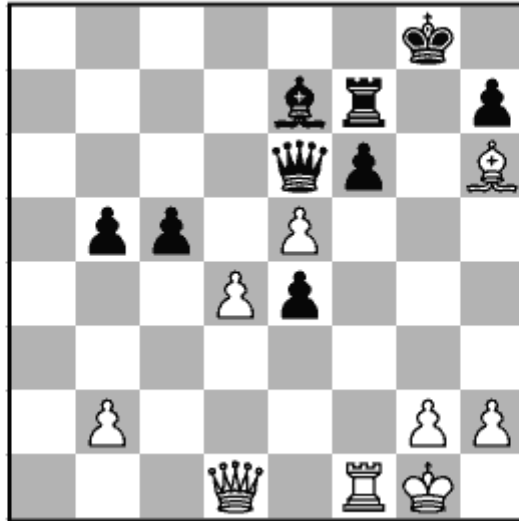
Puzzle 11: Black to play

Lazaro Bruzon – Wesley So

PRO League rapid 2020

Black's pawn is one step away from promotion, but should he actually queen it? What would you play as Black? Calculate carefully.

[answer](#)



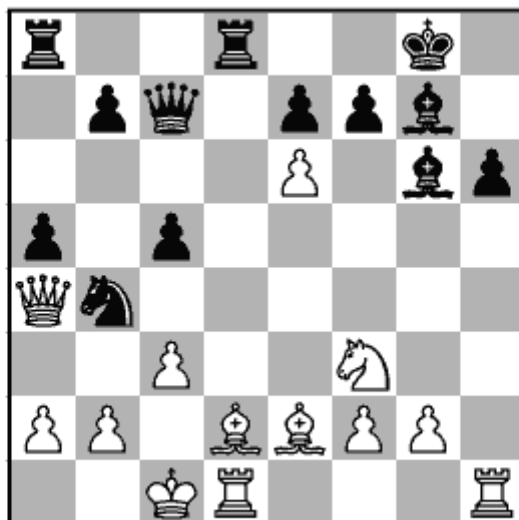
Puzzle 12: White to play

David Navara – Wesley So

Saint Louis rapid 2019

In a very complicated opening variation, I have just blundered by moving my queen to e6. What should White play here?

[answer](#)



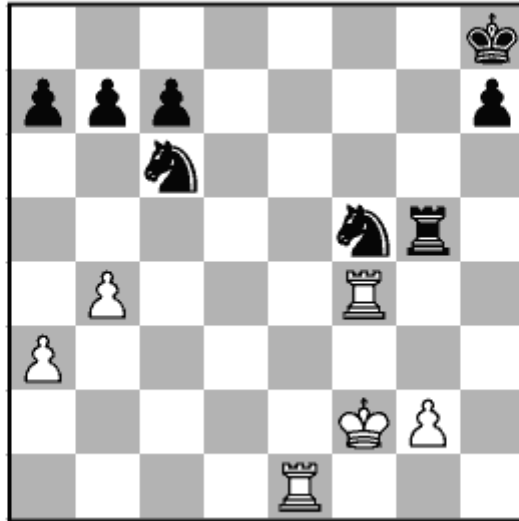
Puzzle 13: Black to play

Wesley So – Shakhriyar Mamedyarov

chess.com rapid 2019

Black's attack is clearly the stronger. White's king is stuck on the queenside and he is barely clinging on. What should Black play?

[answer](#)



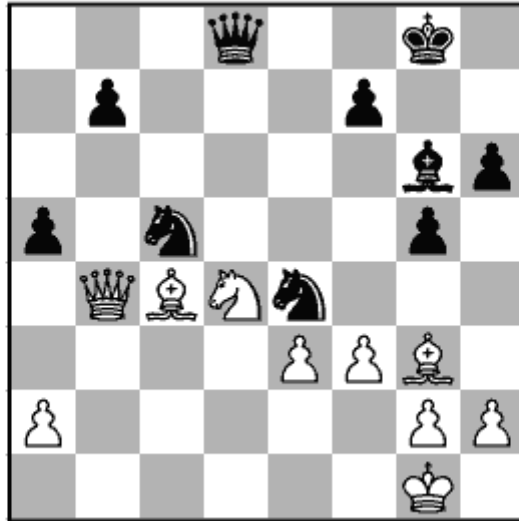
Puzzle 14: White to play

Wesley So – Steven Zierk

PRO League rapid 2020

White is down on material. Is there any way for him to save the game?

[answer](#)



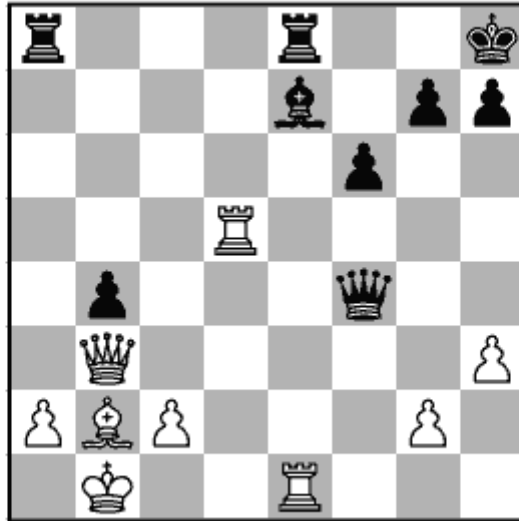
Puzzle 15: White to play

Alexander Grishchuk – Wesley So

PRO League rapid 2020

This game was played in the online PRO Chess League between the star-studded Chessbrahs and our team, St. Louis. In a crucial game against Grishchuk I found myself in a worse position after the opening. How should White continue here?

[answer](#)



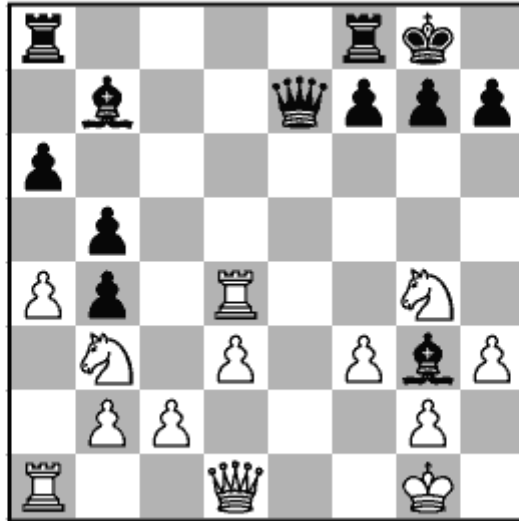
Puzzle 16: White to play

Wesley So – Francisco Vallejo Pons

Leon rapid 2018

This game was crucial to me as having lost the first game I badly needed to win the second one with the white pieces. Fortunately Paco has just committed a big mistake by playing 28...Rfe8. What should White play?

[answer](#)



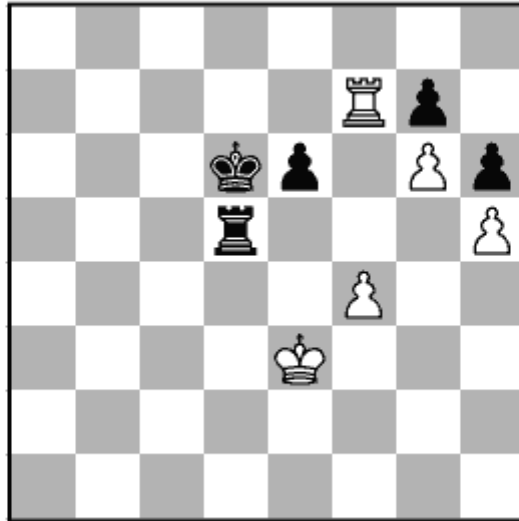
Puzzle 17: White to play

Maxime Vachier-Lagrave – Wesley So

chess.com rapid 2019

White is a pawn up, but his rook is misplaced and the opponent has two bishops. In particular the bishop on g3 seems very powerfully placed. How can White turn things around?

[answer](#)



Puzzle 18: White to play

Wesley So – Timur Gareyev

USA Ch, Saint Louis 2019

I had been pressing in a slightly better endgame for many moves, but with his last move, 49...Kd6, Timur made a big mistake. How can White make most of his chance?

[answer](#)



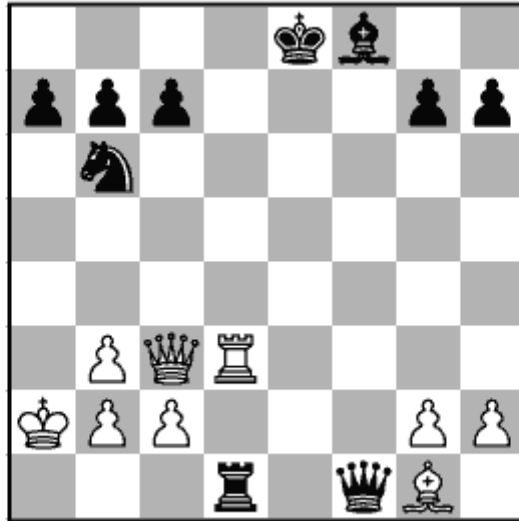
Puzzle 19: White to play

Wesley So – Fabiano Caruana

Bucharest blitz 2019

Black has just blundered by playing 13...f6?, weakening the light squares on his kingside. The rook on g3 is very well placed to start an attack on the enemy king. How should White proceed?

[answer](#)



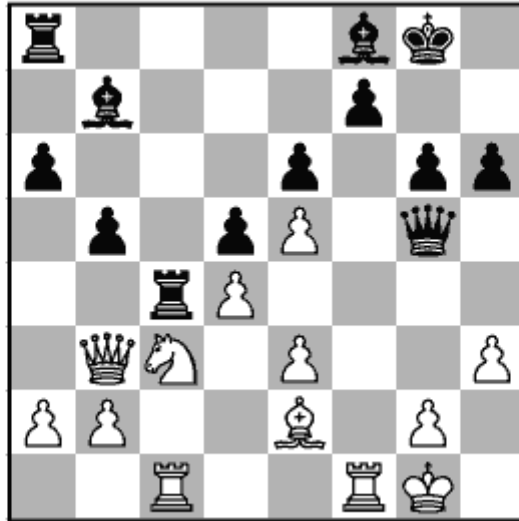
Puzzle 20: White to play

Veselin Topalov – Wesley So

Saint Louis blitz 2019

White is a piece down, but Black's king looks highly vulnerable at the moment. How can White take advantage of this?

[answer](#)



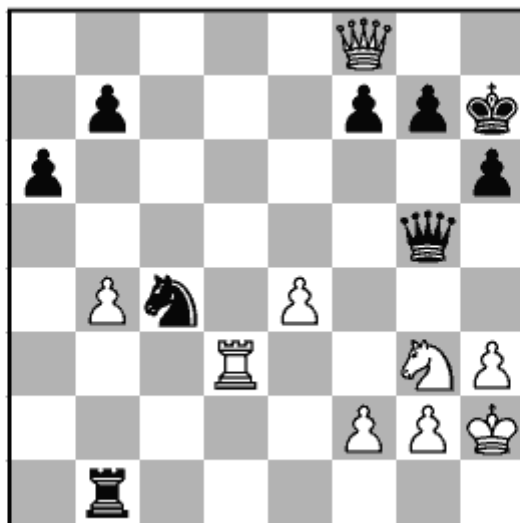
Puzzle 21: White to play

Nicolas Checa – Wesley So

PRO League rapid 2019

Black's forces look very threatening, with an active rook on c4 and a strong bishop-pair. I am also threatening to take the pawn on e3. How is White able to defend?

[answer](#)



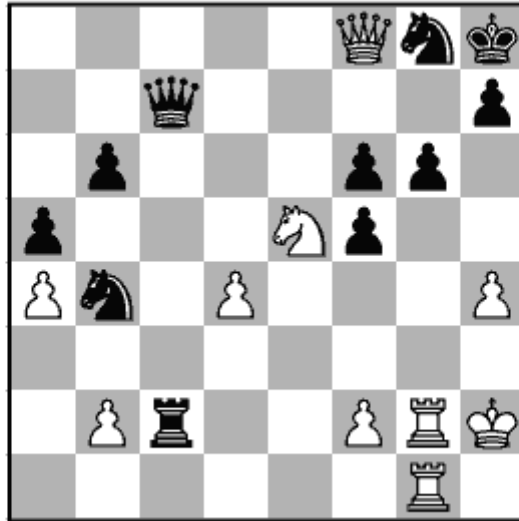
Puzzle 22: White to play

Wesley So – Illya Nyzhnyk

PRO League rapid 2020

This game was played in the online PRO Chess League with a time-limit of 10 minutes plus 2 seconds increment per player. My game with Nyzhnyk has proved to be very complicated, with the advantage swinging back and forth. We are both threatening the enemy king along the back rank. Could White's attack come first?

[answer](#)



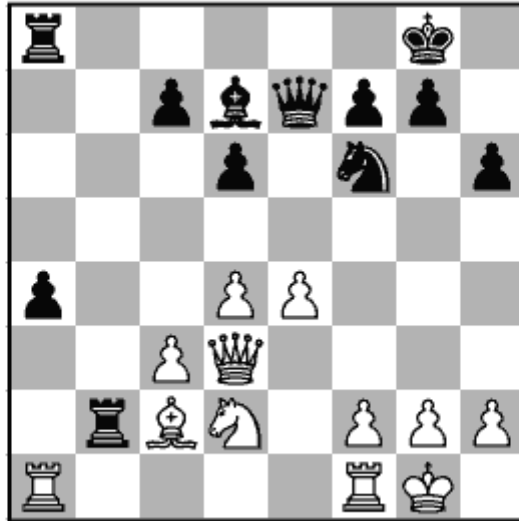
Puzzle 23: White to play

Wesley So – David Navara

Saint Louis blitz 2019

Black's kingside looks very shaky, but he has got our knight on e5 pinned and we have to act fast. What should White play?

[answer](#)



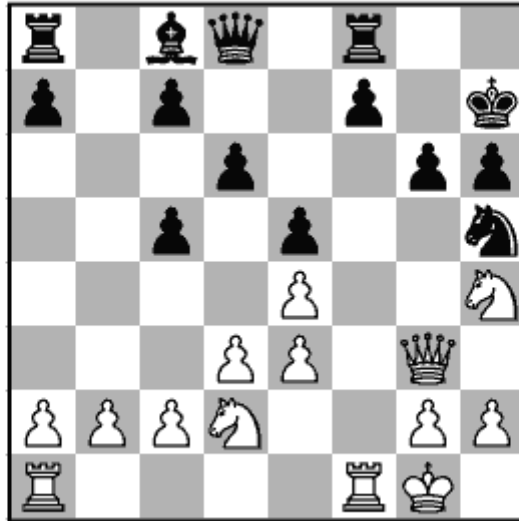
Puzzle 24: White to play

Wesley So – Vidit Gujrathi

chess.com rapid 2018

It looks like Black has an excellent position, but with his last move, 24...Ra8?, Vidit gave me an unexpected opportunity. How can White improve his position here?

[answer](#)



Puzzle 25: White to play

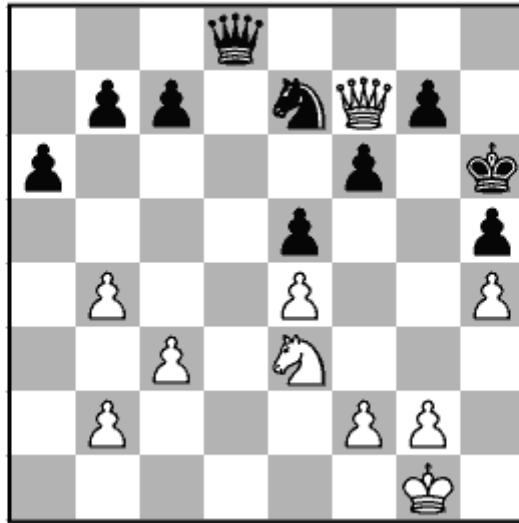
Vladislav Artemiev – Wesley So

chess.com rapid 2019

Black has slightly the better pawn-structure and therefore White must act quickly. What should he play?

[answer](#)

Solutions for 25 Fairly Easy Puzzles



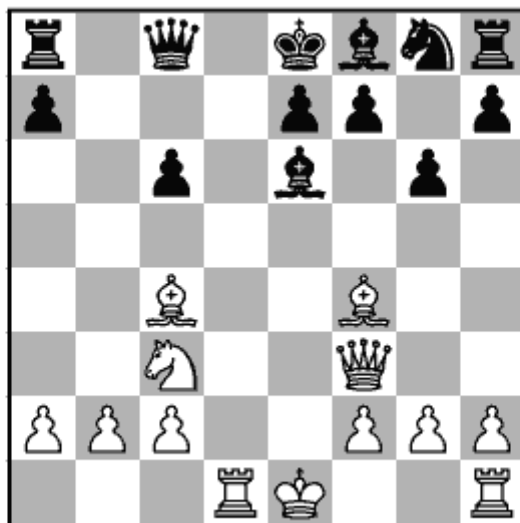
Solution 1: White to play

Wesley So – Sunilduth Lyna Narayanan

PRO League rapid 2020

33 Qxe7! wins a clean piece due to 33...Qxe7 34 Nf5+, so Black resigned. On a side note, 33 g4 wins cleanly just as well, as Black has nothing better than 33...Kh7 losing a pawn, and still completely immobilized.

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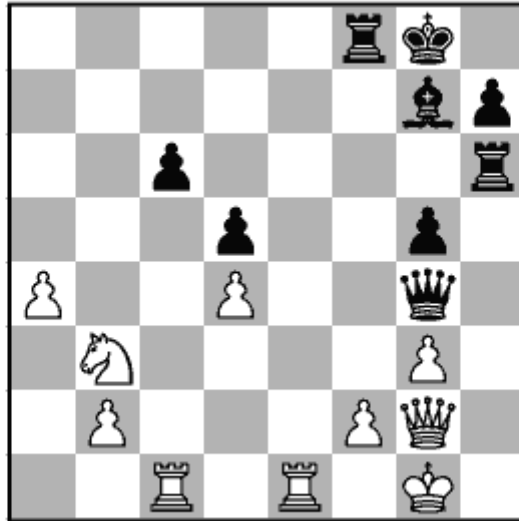
Solution 2: White to play

Wesley So – Maxime Vachier-Lagrave

chess.com rapid 2019

13 Nb5! wins very quickly. White threatens to win huge amounts of material with Nc7+ and taking the knight is even worse: **13...cxb5 14 Bxb5+** with mate coming very quickly.

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Solution 3: White to play

Le Tuan Minh – Wesley So

PRO League rapid 2019

30 Rxc6!

This move, which I pretty much missed, wins the game outright. Black has no counterplay or tricks left.

30...Rxc6 31 Qxd5+ Kh8 32 Qxc6

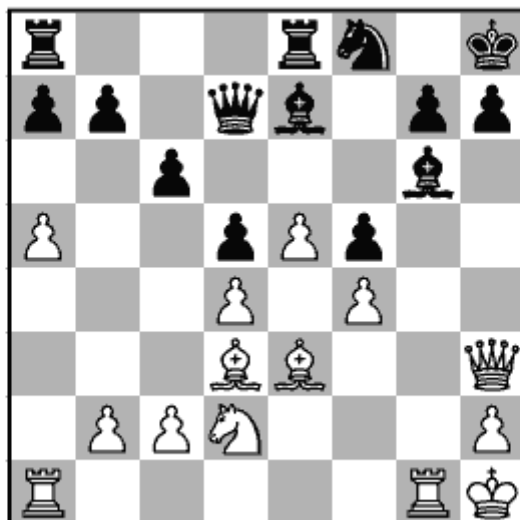
White is a full three pawns up and Black could safely resign here.

32...Qf5

32...Bxd4 33 Nxd4 Qxd4 34 Qc2 +–.

33 Re2 Qd3 34 Qc2 Qf3 35 Re3 Qg4 36 a5 +–

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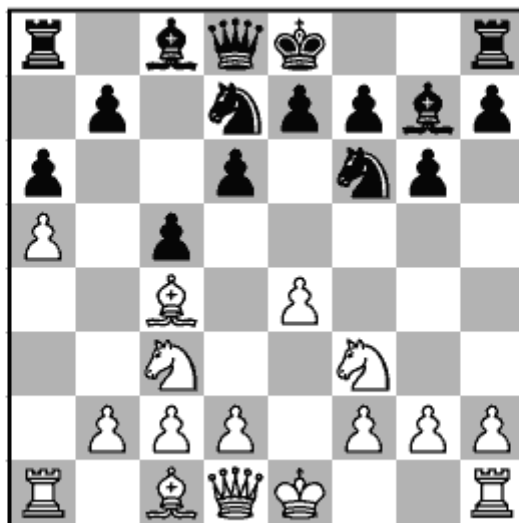
Solution 4: White to play

Wesley So – Vladislav Artemiev

chess.com rapid 2019

20 Rxf6! forced immediate resignation, as after **20...Nxf6** **21 Bxf5** White picks up the knight on g6, with decisive material gains.

[back](#)



Solution 5: White to play

Rameshbabu Praggnanandhaa – Wesley So

Leon rapid 2018

8 Bxf7+!

This wins the game outright for White. In the game we both missed the bishop sacrifice, and instead continued 8 d3?? 0-0 9 0-0 Nb8 10 e5 Ne8 when I managed to get a decent position, and later on win the game.

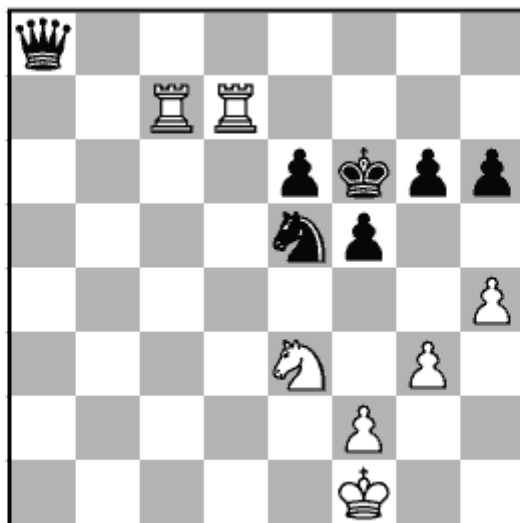
8...Kxf7 9 Ng5+ Kg8

9...Ke8 10 Ne6 does not help, as the black queen is trapped.

10 Ne6 Qe8 11 Nc7 Qd8 12 Nxa8

Black does not have any shred of compensation for his material disadvantage. The pawn on a5 seriously hampers his position, and ensures that the knight on a8 can get out safely.

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Solution 6: White to play

Wesley So – Jan-Krzysztof Duda

chess.com blitz 2018

44 Nd5+!

A simple yet very effective trick that wins the game.

44...Qxd5

44...exd5 allows mate in one: 45 Rd6#!

45 Rxd5 exd5 46 Ke2

46 f4 followed by Ke2 could possibly be even more accurate.

46...d4 47 f4 d3+ 48 Ke3 Ng4+ 49 Kxd3 h5 50 Rc6+ Kg7 51 Ra6

Black has no fortress and the white king gradually infiltrates the enemy position. The endgame should be easily winning for me.



Solution 7: Black to play

Pascal Charbonneau – Wesley So

PRO League rapid 2019

17...Nxd4!

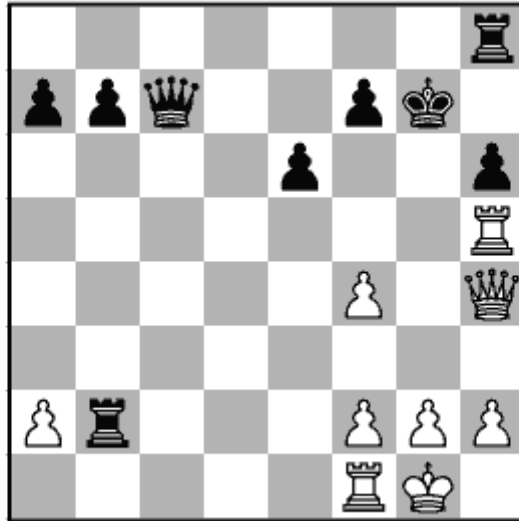
This just wins two pawns. 17...Na5 also looks positionally winning for Black, with firm control over the queenside light squares.

18 cxd4 Rxd4

Both the queen and the knight are attacked, and White cannot avoid decisive material losses.

19 Qb3 Bxe4 20 Bb2 Rd3 0-1

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Solution 8: White to play

Wesley So – Peter Svidler

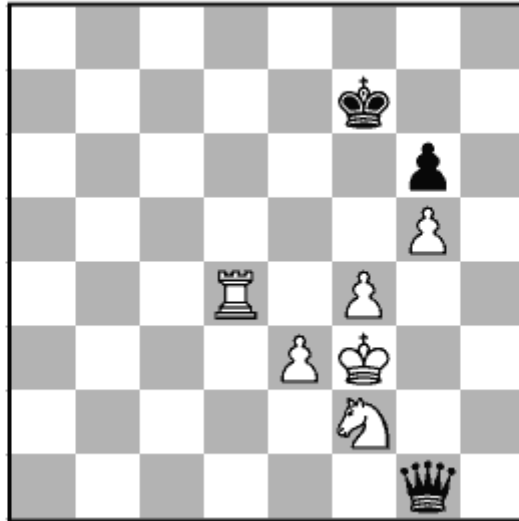
World Fischer Random, Høvikodden 2019

27 Qg3+

This simple move forced Peter's resignation. White wins in all lines:

- a) 27...Kf8 28 Qa3+ picks up the unfortunate black rook on b2.
- b) 27...Kf6 28 Rxh6+ Rxh6 29 Qg5# leads to checkmate.
- c) After 27...Kh7 28 Qg5 there is no defence to the mate threat on h6.

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Solution 9: White to play

Wesley So – Vinay Bhat

PRO League rapid 2019

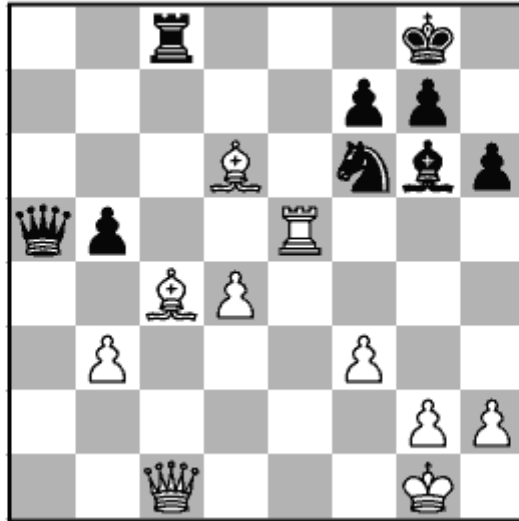
54 Rd1!

This move, which I did not find with seconds left on the clock, is rather amusing.

54...Qh2 55 Rh1

The enemy queen is trapped and Black can safely resign.

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Solution 10: White to play

Pentala Harikrishna – Wesley So

Kolkata blitz 2018

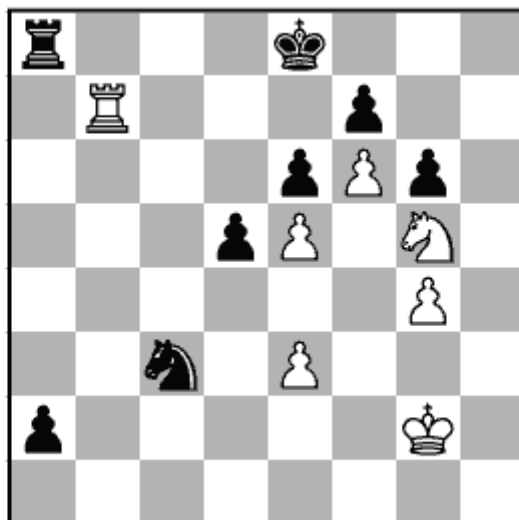
28 Bxf7+!

This tactical blow wins on the spot.

28...Kxf7 29 Re7+

White is going to pick up the enemy rook next move with check. I resigned here, as Black has absolutely no counterplay. After **29...Kg8 30 Qxc8+ Kh7 31 h3** the white king has a very safe shelter on h2 and he has a decisive lead in material.

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Solution 11: Black to play

Lazaro Bruzon – Wesley So

PRO League rapid 2020

43...Ne4!

This controls some key squares close to the black king. It is also the only winning move. Promoting right away would be a big mistake: 43...a1Q? 44 Re7+ Kd8 45 Nxf7+ Kc8 46 Nd6+ and Black cannot move his king to b8 due to Rb7#.

44 Re7+ Kd8 45 Nxf7+ Kc8

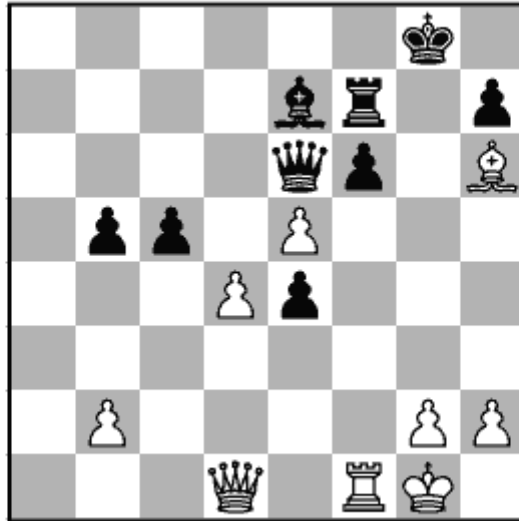
Now White has no perpetual check as d6 is covered.

46 Nd6+

46 Re8+ Kb7 47 Rxa8 Kxa8 leads nowhere for White.

46...Nxd6 47 exd6 a1Q 48 f7 Ra2+

White resigned as it is mate in four moves.



Solution 12: White to play

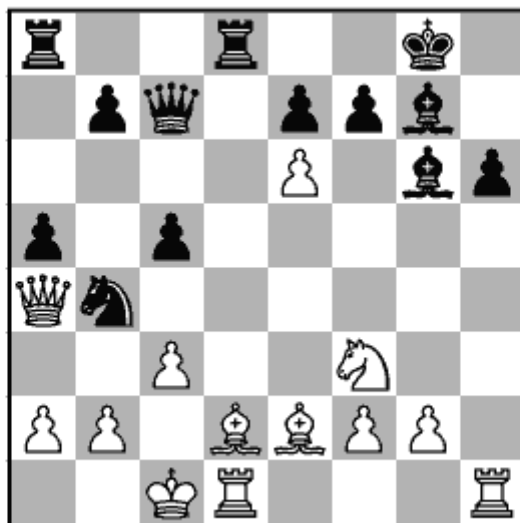
David Navara – Wesley So

Saint Louis rapid 2019

27 d5!

This powerful move, highlighting the vulnerability of the black king, forced immediate resignation. After **27...Qxe5** (27...Qb6 28 Qg4+ Kh8 29 e6 does not help, as the rook on f7 is trapped) **28 Qg4+ Kh8 29 Qc8+ Bf8 30 Bxf8** White wins a full piece for absolutely no compensation.

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Solution 13: Black to play

Wesley So – Shakhriyar Mamedyarov

chess.com rapid 2019

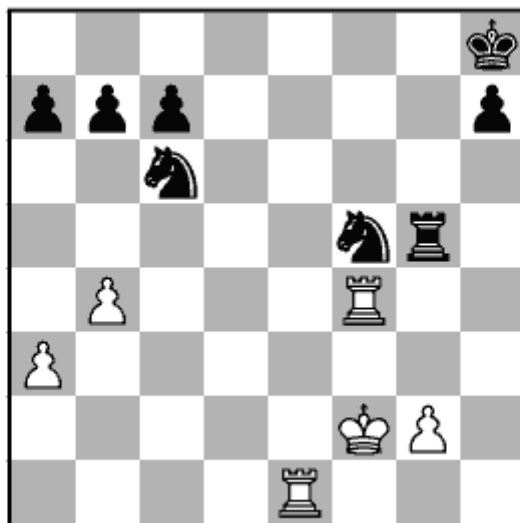
20...Qc6!

This is the knockout blow. White cannot take the queen due to mate on a2. 20...fxe6 also wins, but it is not as forcing. White can try to defend with 21 Rh4 although it should fail too.

21 exf7+ Kf8 22 b3 Qe4

I resigned, as it is mate very soon.

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Solution 14: White to play

Wesley So – Steven Zierk

PRO League rapid 2020

In fact, White can do far better than that:

27 b5!

It turns out that Black is unable to save one of his knights, and he ends up with a losing endgame.

27...Nce7

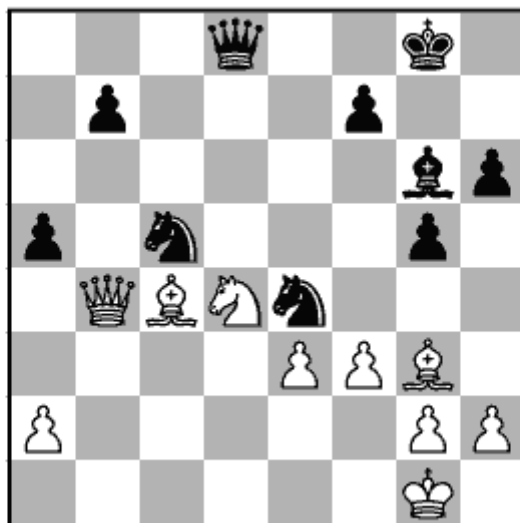
27...Na5 is met by 28 Re5, while 27...Nd8 28 Re8+ does not help Black one bit.

28 g4 Kg8 29 gxf5 Rxf5 30 Rxf5 Nxf5 31 Re8+

31 a4 followed by Rc1 wins even more simply; for example, 31...Nd6 32 Re7 +-.

31...Kf7 32 Rc8 Nd6 33 Rxc7+ Ke6 34 a4 Kd5 35 Ke2

and the endgame is easily winning for White.



Solution 15: White to play

Alexander Grishchuk – Wesley So

PRO League rapid 2020

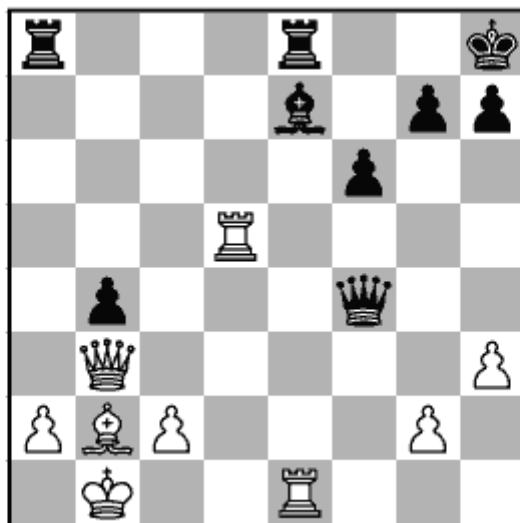
23 Qb1!

White wins a whole piece as the knight is pinned. In the game Grishchuk and I both missed this move, and play continued 23 Qa3 Nxc3 24 Qxc5 Nh5, when Black managed to hold a draw.

23...Nxc3 24 Qxc5

Black cannot recapture and he suffers terrible material losses.

[back](#)



Solution 16: White to play

Wesley So – Francisco Vallejo Pons

Leon rapid 2018

29 Rd4!

This simple move wins the game outright.

29...Qc7 30 Rde4

The pin along the e-file is deadly and Black has no way to recover.

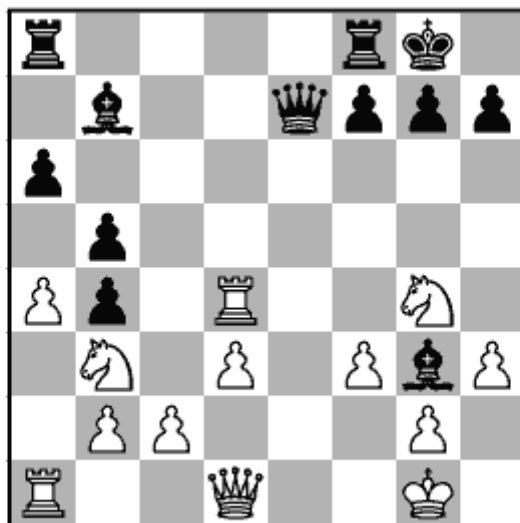
30...Qd7

White wins after 30...Ra7 31 Qf7 Qd7 32 Rxe7, as 32...Rxe7 33 Qf8# is just mate.

31 Qf7

and Black soon resigned.

[back](#)



Solution 17: White to play

Maxime Vachier-Lagrave – Wesley So

chess.com rapid 2019

23 Nh6+!

This powerful move is what Black missed. Other moves are clearly worse for White; for example, 23 axb5 f5 24 bxa6 Rfe8 –/+ with powerful threats along the e-file, or 23 Qd2 f5 24 Ne3 bxa4, when White is being pushed back despite being a pawn up.

23...gxh6

23...Kh8 24 Nf5 wins for White.

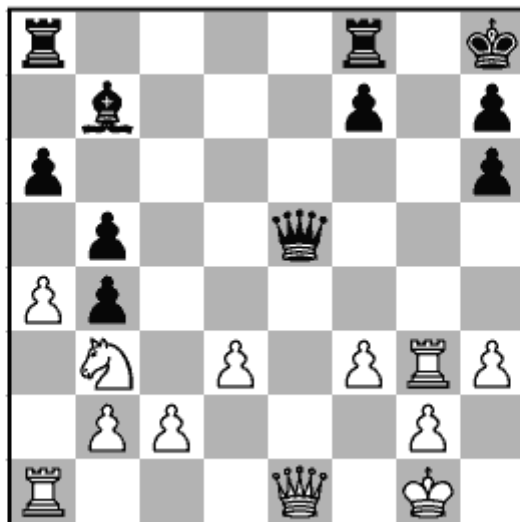
24 Rg4+

White regains the piece nicely and on top of that he has ruined Black's kingside pawn-structure.

24...Kh8 25 Rxc3 Qe5 26 Qe1 (D)

26 Rg4 might give Black a strong attack after 26...h5! 27 Rxb4 Rg8 with some threats along the g-file. With accurate

play White could be better, for example in the line 28 Qe1! Qd6 29 Qh4 Bxf3 30 Qd4+! Qxd4+ 31 Nxd4, but things are not clear-cut here.



Black to play

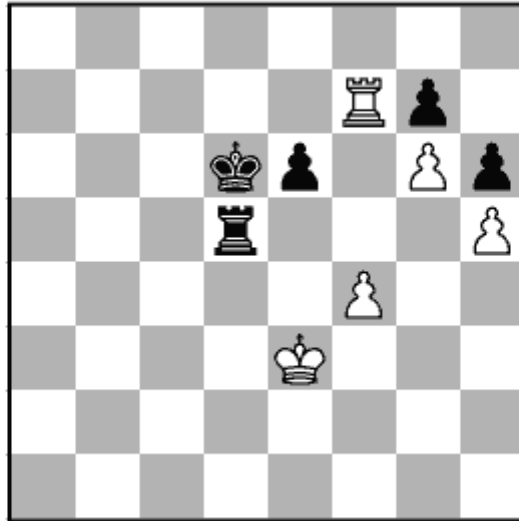
26...Qxe1+!

In the game I played 26...Qxb2?, which is just a horrible move. After 27 axb5 all of Black's pawns are weak and his king is vulnerable.

27 Rxe1 bxa4 28 Nc5 Bc6 29 Ra1 a5

Black is worse, but has real chances to hold this endgame.

[back](#)



Solution 18: White to play

Wesley So – Timur Gareyev

USA Ch, Saint Louis 2019

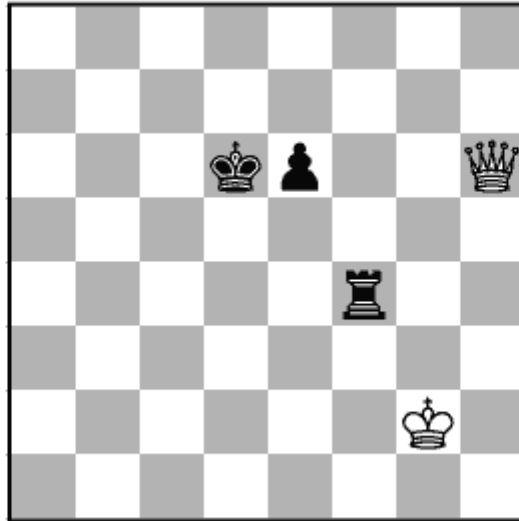
50 Rxc7 Rxc5 51 Rd7+!

A simple yet effective way to free the g-pawn: White sacrifices a rook for the sake of a tempo. This is the only way for White to win. Other rook moves are drawn: 51 Rf7? Rh4! 52 Kf3 h5 53 g7 Rg4 =, when White is unable to make progress thanks to the well-placed rook on g4, or 51 Ra7? e5 52 g7 exf4+ 53 Kxf4 Rg5 =. After 51 Rg8? Ke7 Black also draws with no problems.

51...Kxd7 52 g7 Rh3+ 53 Kf2

Black is unable to stop White from promoting his pawn.

53...Rh4 54 Kg3 Rh1 55 Kg2 Rh4 56 g8Q Rxf4 57 Qg7+ Kd6 58 Qxh6 (D)



Black to play

This queen vs rook + pawn endgame is winning as Black will lose his e-pawn sooner or later.

58...Rf5 59 Qg7 Kd5 60 Kg3 Kd6 61 Kg4 Kd5 62 Qc7

Now it's zugzwang. Black is unable to hold on to his e-pawn.

62...Kd4

After 62...Rf6 63 Qd8+ Ke5 64 Qh8! White pins the black rook and wins the game.

63 Qd6+ Rd5 64 Qxe6

Queen vs rook endings should be easily won.

**64...Re5 65 Qc6 Rc5 66 Qb6 Kd5 67 Kf5 Kd4+ 68 Ke6 Kc4
69 Kd6 Rd5+ 70 Kc6 Re5 71 Qa6+ Kd4 72 Qa2 Rf5 73
Qb2+ Ke4 74 Kd6**

Slowly but surely seizing ground.

**74...Rg5 75 Qc2+ Kf4 76 Ke6! Re5+ 77 Kf6 Re3 78 Qf5+
Kg3 79 Kg5 Kg2 80 Kh4 Kg1 81 Qf4 Re2 82 Kh3 Ra2 83
Qg4+ Kf1 84 Qc4+ Re2 85 Kg3 Ke1 86 Qc1# (1-0)**



Solution 19: White to play

Wesley So – Fabiano Caruana

Bucharest blitz 2019

14 Rxc7+!!

This just wins by force. It is also possible to take on d5 first: 14 Nxd5 exd5 followed by 15 Rxc7+ Kxc7 16 Qg6+ Kh8 17 Qxh6+ Kg8 18 Qg6+ Kh8 19 h6 Rg8 20 Bxf6+, when White also has a mating attack.

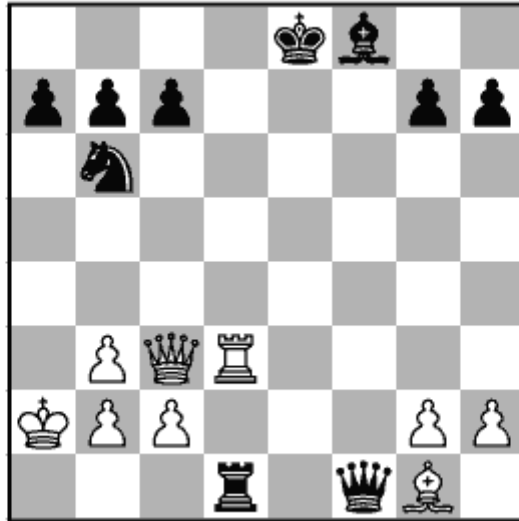
14...Kxc7 15 Qg6+ Kh8 16 Qxh6+

16 Bd3 right away mates even faster.

16...Kg8 17 Qg6+ Kh8 18 Bd3

There is no defence against mate, so Fabiano resigned.

[back](#)



Solution 20: White to play

Veselin Topalov – Wesley So

Saint Louis blitz 2019

25 Qe5+!

I had missed this simple move, with the idea of giving a couple of nasty checks.

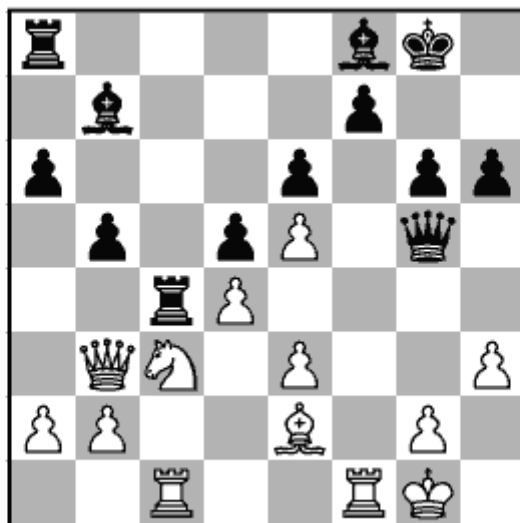
25...Be7 26 Qh5+

Picking up the rook on d1.

26...g6 27 Qxd1 Qxg2 28 Qe1 Qxc2 29 Rc3

White has a large advantage in material and Veselin converted this into a win very nicely.

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Solution 21: White to play

Nicolas Checa – Wesley So

PRO League rapid 2019

23 Ne4!

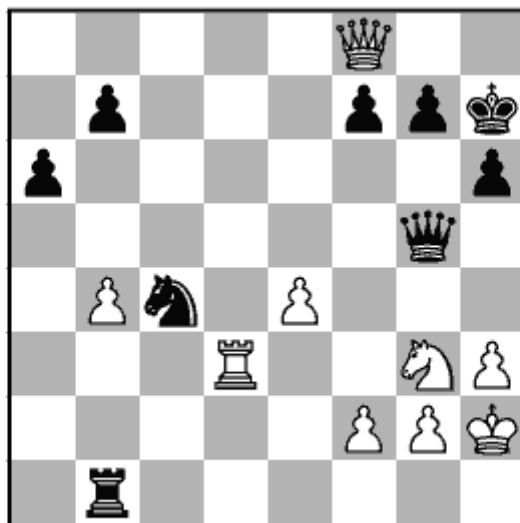
In fact White just wins with this move. In the game both Nicolas and I missed the Ne4 resource, and our game continued 23 Bxc4? Qxe3+ 24 Kh1 (24 Kh2 dxc4 25 Qd1 is much more stubborn, but even here Black is better after 25... Be7 with his bishop-pair and a target on d4) 24...dxc4 25 Nd5? Qxc1! 26 Qf3 Qxf1+ 27 Qxf1 Bxd5 and White was forced to resign.

23...dxe4

23...Rxc1 does not help. After 24 Nxg5 Rxf1+ 25 Bxf1 hxg5 Black does not have compensation for the queen and he just loses after 26 Qc3 Rc8 27 Qa5.

24 Bxc4

It turns out that Black cannot recapture on c4 as the bishop on b7 is hanging. White is totally winning after **24...Re8 25 Kh2.**



Solution 22: White to play

Wesley So – Illya Nyzhnyk

PRO League rapid 2020

After **36 Nf5!** the threat of Rg3 or Ne7 is too strong. Black has no defence. After **36...Nd2** (36...Ne5 37 Rg3 is likewise hopeless), threatening a check on f1, the simplest reply is **37 Rxd2** winning a clean piece.

Instead 36 Rd8? Ne5! allowed Black to defend easily in the game as he is also threatening ...Ng4+ followed by ...Qh4#! Then 37 Qg8+ Kg6 38 Rd6+ f6 39 Qe6 (39 Qe8+ Kh7 40 Qe6 is how our game went, which Illya won, after many more adventures!) 39...Kh7 = looks safe for Black.

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Solution 23: White to play

Wesley So – David Navara

Saint Louis blitz 2019

31 Rxg6!

This rook sacrifice breaks the enemy's defence. It turns out that Black's pieces are too far away to protect their king.

31...hxg6 32 Rxg6 Rxf2+

This just provides a single check.

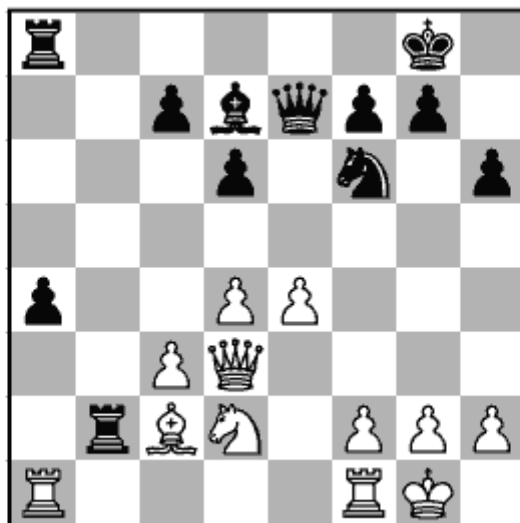
33 Kh3

Easily sidestepping the enemy checks. 33 Kg3 works just as well.

33...Rf3+ 34 Nxf3 Qh7 35 Rxf6 Nd5 36 Rxf5 Ne3 37 Rg5

and David resigned.

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Solution 24: White to play

Wesley So – Vidit Gujrathi

chess.com rapid 2018

25 e5!

Using some tactics, White wins material, taking advantage of Black's weird piece placement.

25...Rxc2

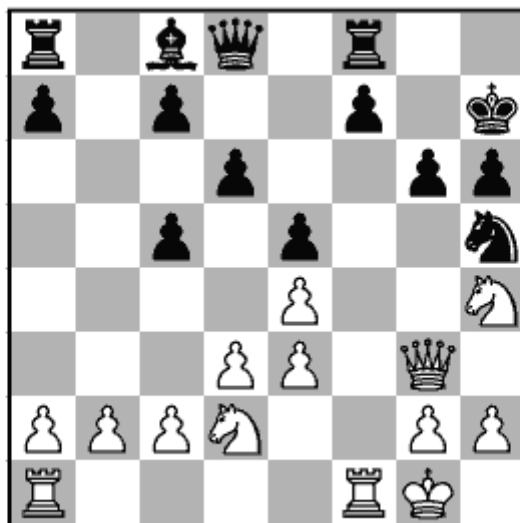
Black cannot move his knight due to the threat of Qh7+, so he must seek a different solution to his problems. The main point is that after 25...dxe5 26 dxe5 Qxe5 27 Nc4 White wins a piece, thanks to the fork of queen and rook. Following 27...Bb5 28 Nxe5 Bxd3 29 Bxd3 +- Black may resign.

26 Qxc2 dxe5 27 Rfe1!

The most precise way to convert.

27...Nd5 28 Rxe5 Qd6 29 Ne4 Qc6 30 Nc5 +-

White won easily with such a large material advantage.



Solution 25: White to play

Vladislav Artemiev – Wesley So

chess.com rapid 2019

15 Rxf7+!

White has to play this. It's now or never.

15...Rxf7 16 Qxg6+ Kh8 17 Qxh5!

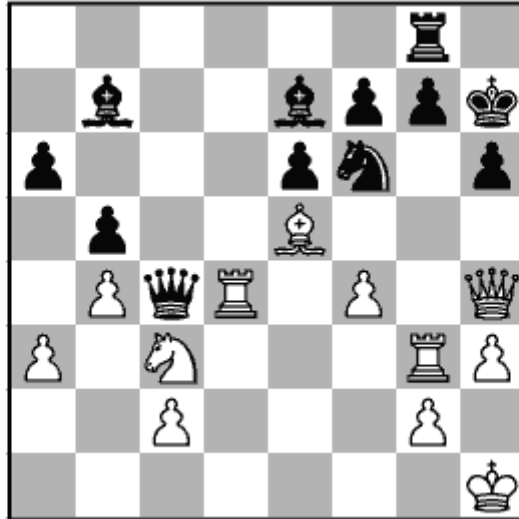
Taking the knight is much stronger than taking the rook. Now White gets two pawns and a powerful knight coming to f5 in return for the sacrificed rook. Also possible is 17 Qxf7 Qxh4 but here White has to find 18 Nf3! Qg4 19 h3 Be6 20 hxg4 Bxf7 21 gxh5 Bxh5 22 Nh4, when he is a pawn up and probably winning in the endgame.

17...Rf6 18 Nf5 Qf8 19 g4

With such a powerful knight on f5 and advancing pawns, White is close to winning.

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25 Tricky Positions



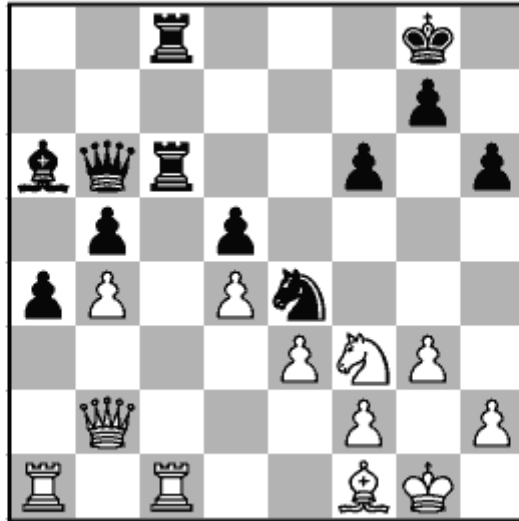
Puzzle 26: Black to play

Sergei Azarov – Wesley So

PRO League rapid 2019

Black is an exchange down, but he has two powerful bishops and counterplay against the enemy king. How should he continue the attack?

[answer](#)



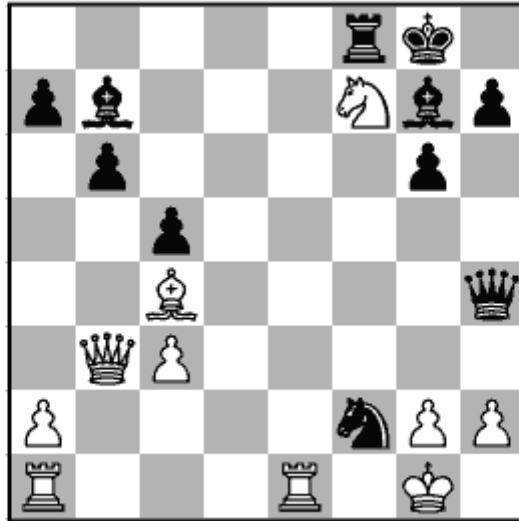
Puzzle 27: White to play

Wesley So – Vidit Gujrathi

chess.com blitz 2018

The position looks very complex and both sides have their trumps. Black has seemingly nice control over the c-file and a powerful knight on e4. How should White continue?

[answer](#)



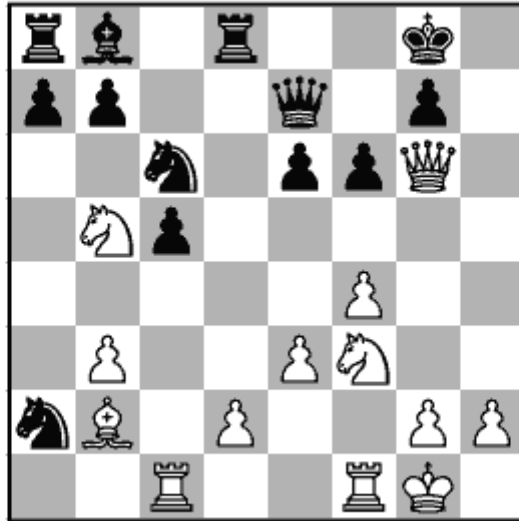
Puzzle 28: White to play

Wesley So – Shakhriyar Mamedyarov

Stavanger blitz 2019

Black is quite a bit of material down, but his pieces are creating serious threats so close to our king. How would you defend as White?

[answer](#)



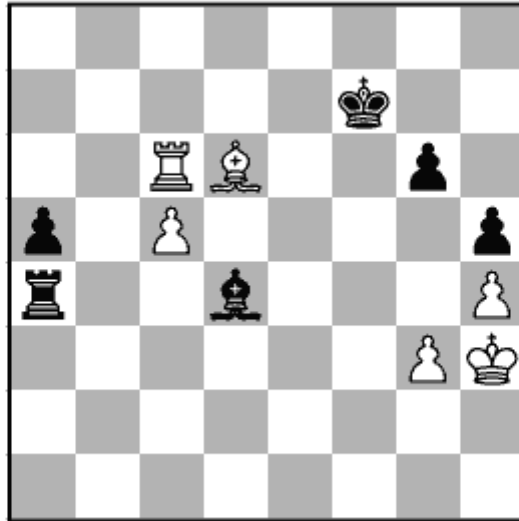
Puzzle 29: White to play

Vladislav Artemiev – Wesley So

chess.com rapid 2019

White has powerful threats on the kingside, while my forces are mostly out of play on the other flank. How can White most effectively cash in this position?

[answer](#)



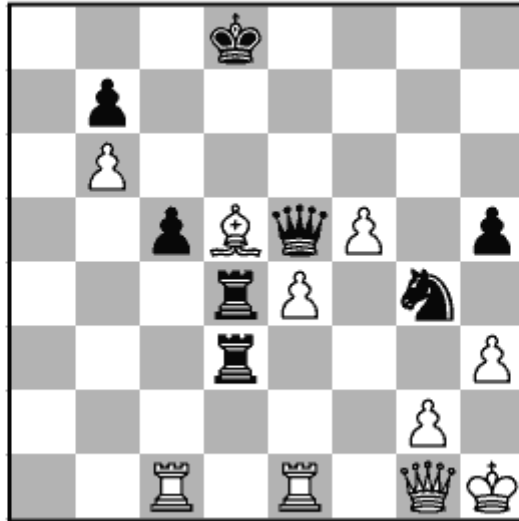
Puzzle 30: White to play

Fabiano Caruana – Wesley So

Grand Chess Tour rapid playoff (2), Saint Louis 2018

Black has a desperate endgame. White's passed c-pawn is well supported by his pieces and can advance very quickly. But what should White's next move be?

[answer](#)



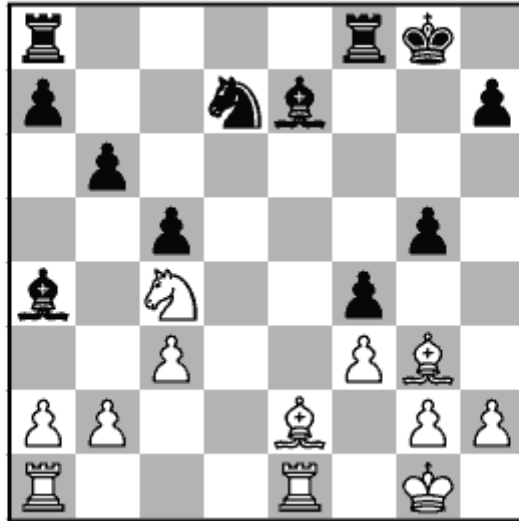
Puzzle 31: Black to play

Fabiano Caruana – Wesley So

Stavanger 2018

This game was played in the last round of Norway Chess in 2018, and decided the tournament winner. I had been lost for the last ten moves, but Fabiano's careless 40th move gave me a sudden chance. How can Black now save the game?

[answer](#)



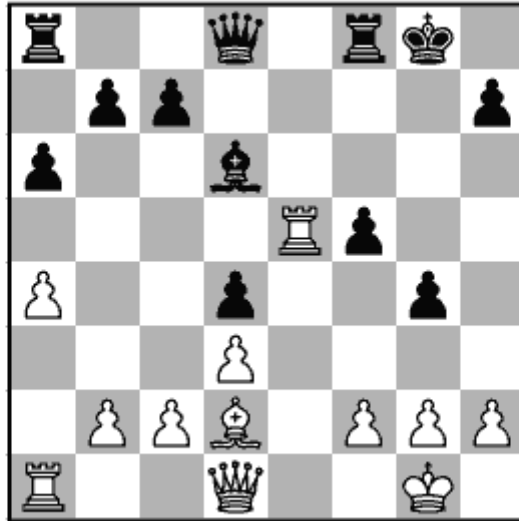
Puzzle 32: White to play

Wesley So – Maxime Vachier-Lagrave

Abidjan blitz 2019

White is better, but given time Black would be able to consolidate his forces. What should White play?

[answer](#)



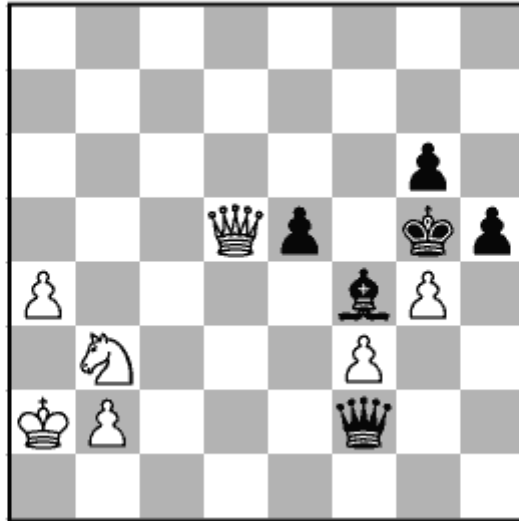
Puzzle 33: White to play

Sergey Kariakin – Wesley So

Zagreb 2019

The position looks approximately equal, with White's opening advantage dwindling away into sterile equality. Can White keep the game alive?

[answer](#)



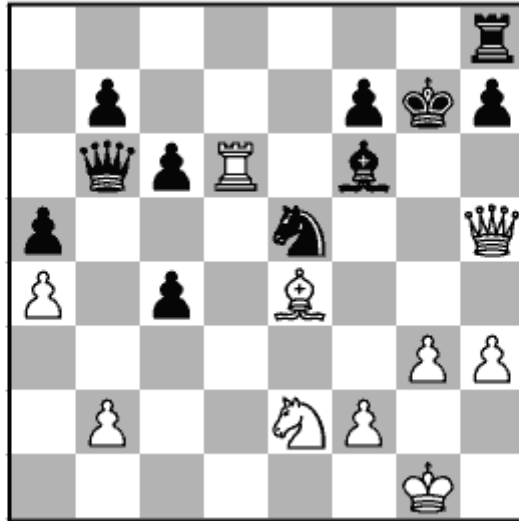
Puzzle 34: White to play

Wesley So – Vidit Gujrathi

Kolkata rapid 2018

White is a pawn up and should win this endgame in the long run. However, with his last move, 44...h5, Black is trying to complicate matters by creating an outside passed pawn. How should White continue?

[answer](#)



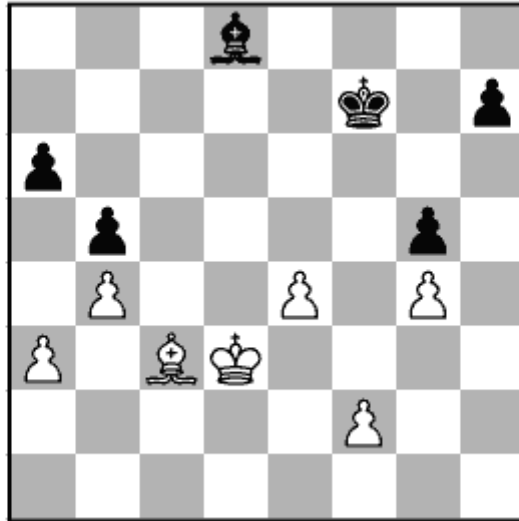
Puzzle 35: Black to play

Surya Shekhar Ganguly – Wesley So

Kolkata blitz 2018

Black is a pawn up, but the threats against his king look very dangerous. How is Black able to defend? There is just one move that keeps his position together.

[answer](#)



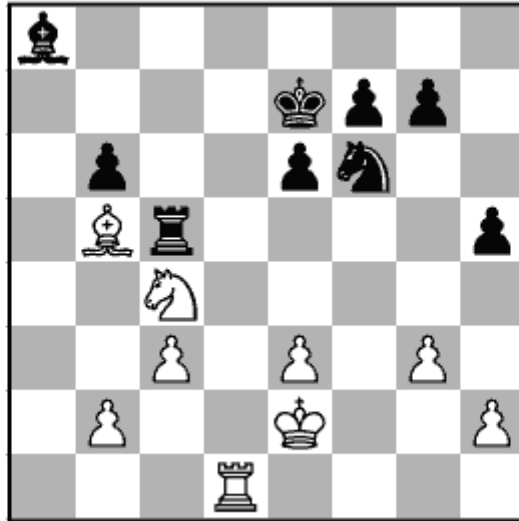
Puzzle 36: White to play

Wesley So – Alireza Firouzja

Wijk aan Zee 2020

This game was played recently in the Tata Steel tournament. My opponent was the sixteen-year-old phenom Firouzja, who recently broke into the FIDE 2700+ Elo rating threshold. He probably could have saved the draw a few moves back, but here the ending is already lost. How can White win this position?

[answer](#)



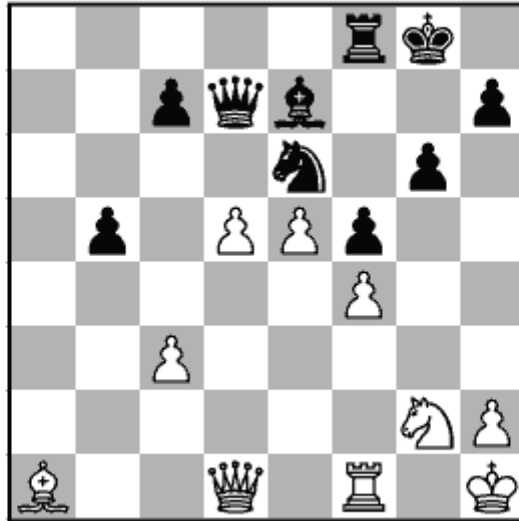
Puzzle 37: White to play

Harshit Raja – Wesley So

Douglas 2018

White has a very decent endgame position, but for the moment both his bishop and knight are attacked by the enemy rook. How should he deal with this threat?

[answer](#)



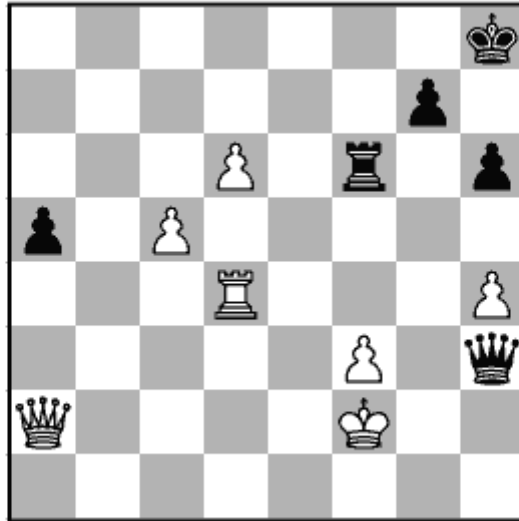
Puzzle 38: Black to play

Ray Robson – Wesley So

PRO League rapid 2019

White's pawns in the centre look threatening and it seems like Black is forced to move his knight away. How would you stop the enemy pawns?

[answer](#)



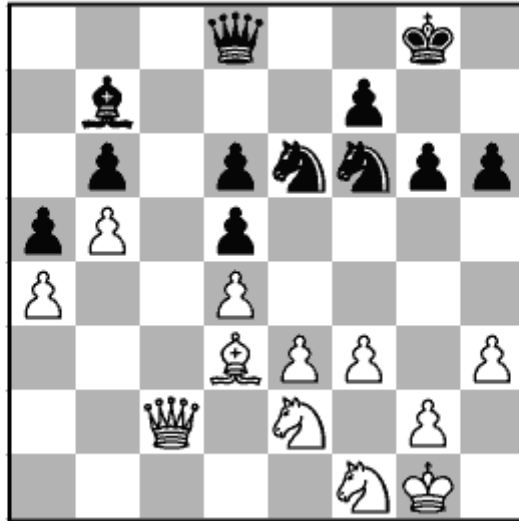
Puzzle 39: White to play

Ian Nepomniashchy – Wesley So

Zagreb 2019

This game was played in the Grand Chess Tour in 2019. My opponent was the top Russian grandmaster Ian Nepomniashchy, who had a really good season that year. At this point White is totally winning, and my previous moves had been nothing but desperation. What would you play as White?

[answer](#)



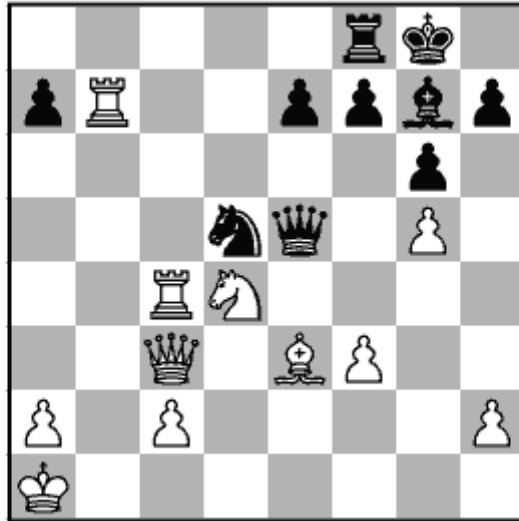
Puzzle 40: White to play

Wesley So – Sergey Kariakin

Leuven blitz 2018

White's position looks very pleasant, as he has a better pawn-structure, and the bishop on b7 is passive. But how do you break through from this position? Black's position remains solid, if ugly.

[answer](#)



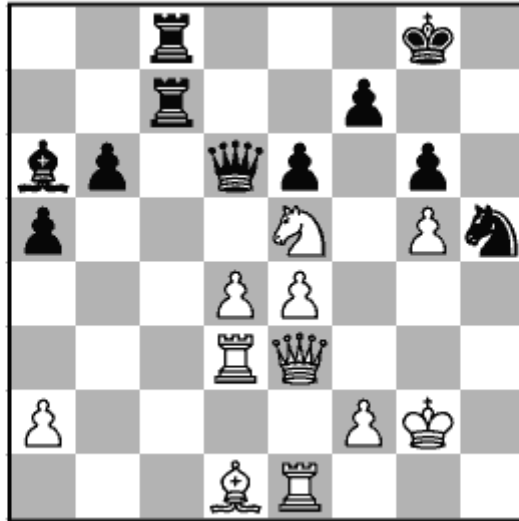
Puzzle 41: White to play

Wesley So – Jan-Krzysztof Duda

FIDE Grand Prix, Moscow 2019

Black is a rook down, but he will regain some material as both the white queen and the bishop are attacked. How should White consolidate his position?

[answer](#)



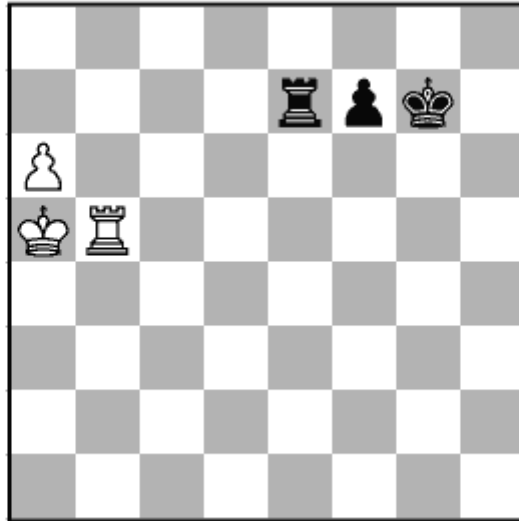
Puzzle 42: White to play

David Navara – Wesley So

Saint Louis rapid 2019

White clearly has a dominating position. Just compare the position of his knight on e5 with Black's on h5. What is the best way for White to make progress?

[answer](#)



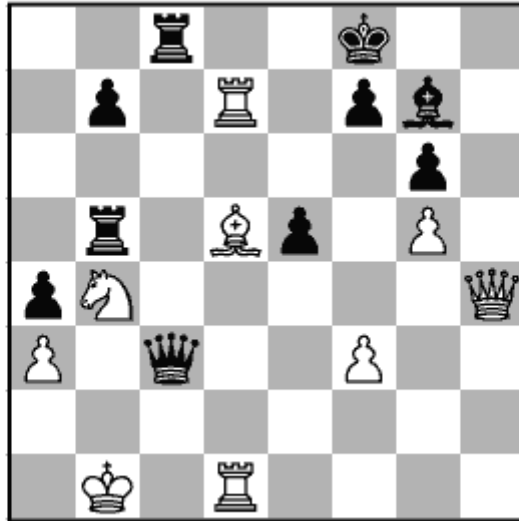
Puzzle 43: White to play

Wesley So – Vidit Gujrathi

FIDE World Cup, Khanty-Mansiisk 2019

White's pawn is very close to promotion and this endgame should be technically winning. How should White continue?

[answer](#)



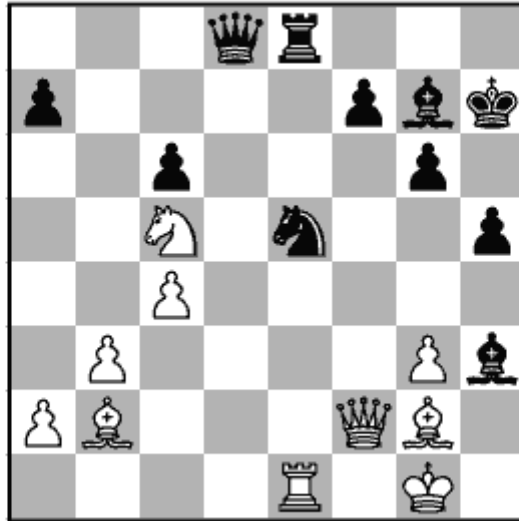
Puzzle 44: White to play

Wesley So – Vidit Gujrathi

chess.com blitz 2018

A couple of moves ago Black made a desperate sacrifice that should not have worked. White is ahead on material and has good attacking chances on the enemy king. How should White now continue?

[answer](#)



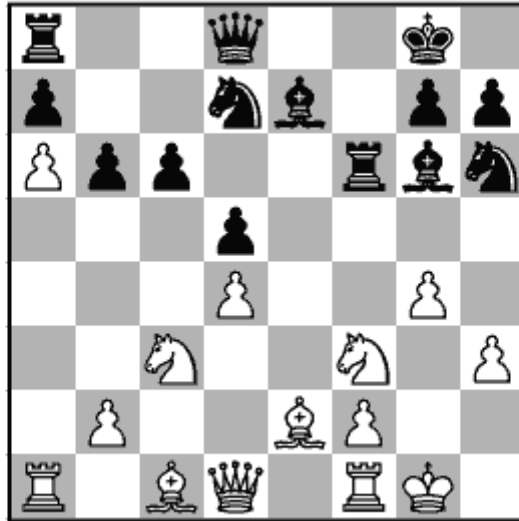
Puzzle 45: White to play

Wesley So – Shakhriyar Mamedyarov

Kolkata rapid 2018

Shakhriyar has just sacrificed his bishop on h3, planning to start a vicious attack on the kingside. Things look desperate for White. How can he defend this position?

[answer](#)



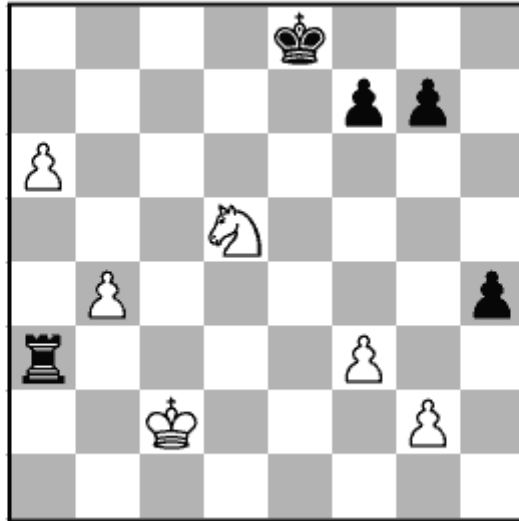
Puzzle 46: White to play

Wesley So – Vladislav Artemiev

chess.com rapid 2019

This position came from the Caro-Kann Defence. White has a solid space advantage, but at the same time he has some holes in his position which Black might be able to exploit given time. How best to increase White's advantage?

[answer](#)



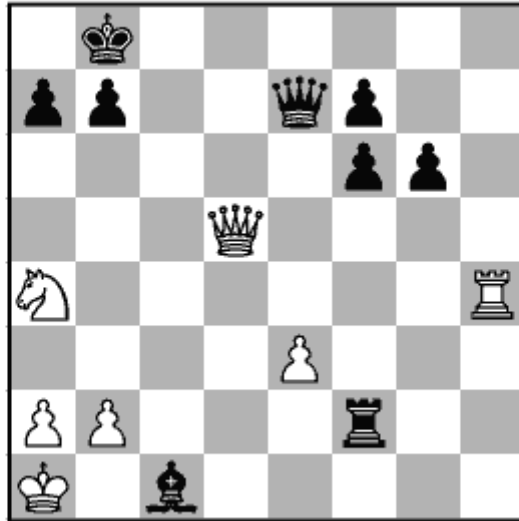
Puzzle 47: Black to play

Maxime Vachier-Lagrave – Wesley So

chess.com rapid 2019

White has just played 38 a6, taking advantage of the fact that Black cannot take it due to Nc7+. White's pawns on the queenside look threatening, but Black is the exchange up. How can he stop the enemy pawns?

[answer](#)



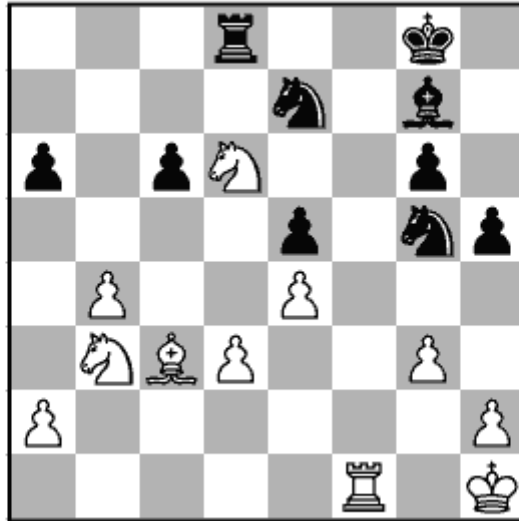
Puzzle 48: Black to play

Jan-Krzysztof Duda – Wesley So

chess.com rapid 2018

Black is two pawns up, but his bishop seems misplaced right now and White is threatening a powerful check on h8. How should you continue in order to convert the advantage?

[answer](#)



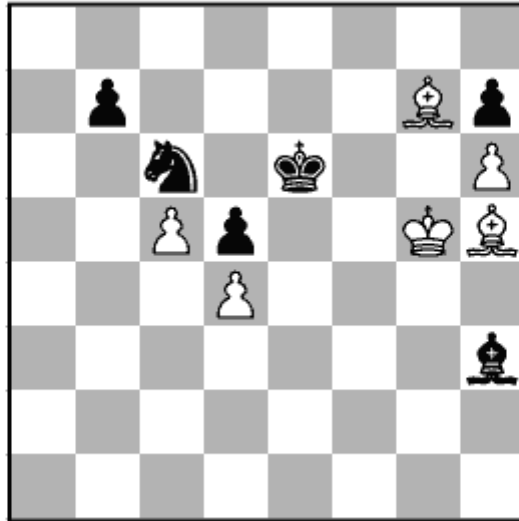
Puzzle 49: White to play

Wesley So – Hikaru Nakamura

World Fischer Random, Høvikodden 2019

White is a pawn up, but Black still has chances to hold. How should White proceed to create the best chances to convert his advantage?

[answer](#)



Puzzle 50: White to play

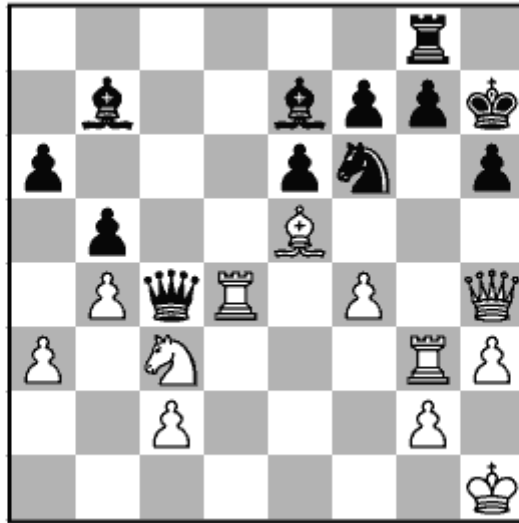
Wesley So – Levon Aronian

Kolkata blitz 2018

In this game I had been pushing for a long time with my bishop-pair, but to no avail. How can White break through in this endgame?

[answer](#)

Solutions for 25 Tricky Positions



Solution 26: Black to play

Sergei Azarov – Wesley So

PRO League rapid 2019

31...Ne4!

This allows Black to regain his material with interest. In the game I played 31...Qf1+? 32 Kh2 and followed up with 32...Nd5??, which is just a blunder. After 33 Qg4 White has a huge advantage in material and proceeded to win the game. 32...Rd8! is much stronger. After 33 Rdd3 Bc6 Black has some compensation for the exchange and the position remains unclear.

32 Rxc4

Even worse is 32 Qxe7 Nxg3+ 33 Kh2 Qc6, when Black protects his bishop and continues the attack. After 34 Nd5 exd5 35 Kxg3 f6 36 Bd6 Qc3+ 37 Rd3 Qxc2 Black wins thanks to his decisive material advantage.

32...Bxh4 33 Rxe4

33 Nxe4 Bxg3 34 Rc3 Bxf4! 35 Bxf4 Bxe4 should be a winning endgame for Black.

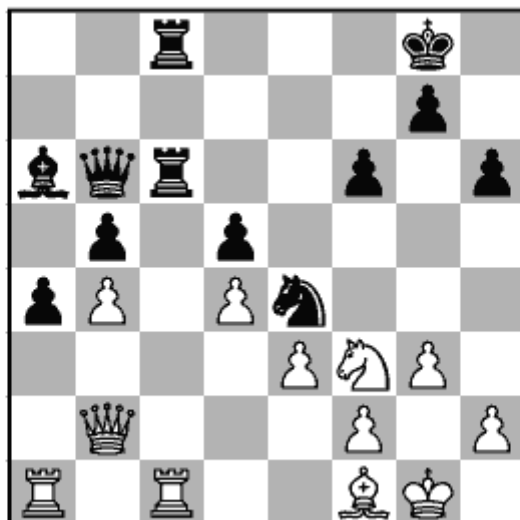
33...Bxg3

Maintaining the bishop-pair and a better pawn-structure too.

34 Re3 Bf2 35 Re2 Bb6 -/+

Black keeps very good winning chances in this ending.

[back](#)



Solution 27: White to play

Wesley So – Vidit Gujrathi

chess.com blitz 2018

The answer really is quite simple. With two pawns protecting the outpost on c5, White should not even think twice about sacrificing the exchange:

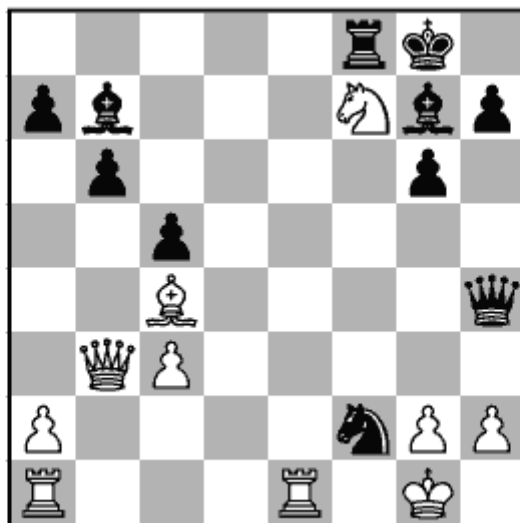
25 Rc5! Nxc5 26 dxc5 Qb7 27 Nd4

In addition the knight gets a powerful outpost on d4 and the pawns on b5 and d5 are highly vulnerable.

27...R6c7 28 Bg2 Re7 29 c6 Qb6 30 Bxd5+ Kh8

And now **31 Rc1**, followed by Rc5, gives White tremendous compensation for the exchange. He should win handily.

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Solution 28: White to play

Wesley So – Shakhriyar Mamedyarov

Stavanger blitz 2019

23 Re2!

This simple move, which guards the second rank and the squares close to White's king, just kills all of Black's counterplay. Now he may safely resign as he has no attack. Other moves here are not nearly as clear:

a) 23 Nd6+?, which I played in the game, is a mistake. After 23...Kh8 24 Nxb7 Black can go for perpetual check with 24...Nh3+ 25 gxh3 Qf2+, or aim for more with 24...Ng4 25 h3 Bh6! 26 Qb2 Bf4, when Black is playing for an attack even though he is a rook down. His threat of ...Qg3 is not easy to meet.

b) 23 Re3 is not as clear, as after 23...Qf4! 24 Rae1 Ng4 25 Nh6++ Kh8 26 Nxc4 Qxc4 27 Bd5 Qf5 Black can still resist for a while.

c) 23 Be6 is sufficient for a win. It protects the light squares on h3 and g4. Black may reply 23...Bf6 preparing ...Kg7, but

after 24 g3 Qh5 25 Rf1 White should be able to convert his advantage into victory.

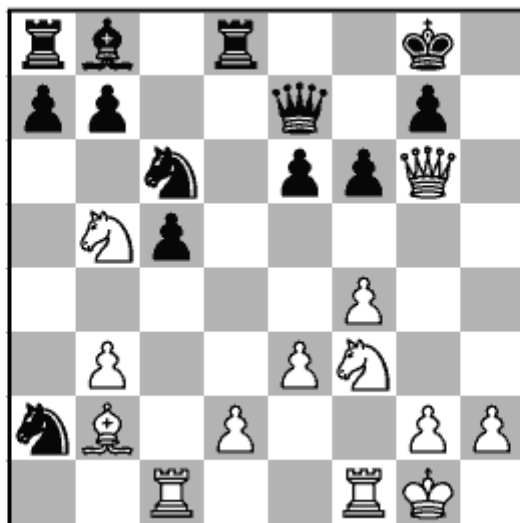
23...Ng4

23...Nh3+ 24 gxh3 does not lead anywhere as Black has no threatening checks, and 24...Bd4+ 25 cxd4 Qxd4+ 26 Qe3! Qxa1+ 27 Re1 wins handily for White. After 27...Qb2, 28 Nd6+ grabs the bishop on b7, leaving White two pieces up.

24 g3 Qh5 25 Rf1

Black has no more threats, and he faces decisive material losses.

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Solution 29: White to play

Vladislav Artemiev – Wesley So

chess.com rapid 2019

21 Rxc5!

This is the simplest, and wins by force. 21 Rc4 is also sufficient for a win, but Black may try to defend desperately after 21...Qf7 22 Qg4 f5 23 Qh4 Nab4, though it's probably still hopeless.

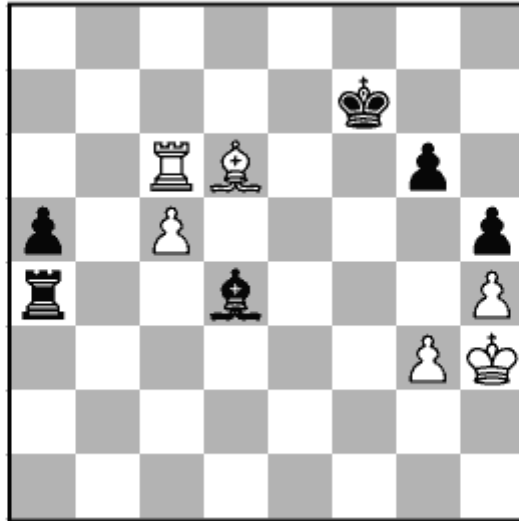
21...Qxc5 22 Bxf6

22 Ng5! is even more flashy. After 22...Qf5 23 Qf7+ Kh8 24 e4 White wins the queen or delivers checkmate: 24...Qxb5 25 Bxf6 +-.

22...Qf8 23 Bxd8 Qxd8 24 Qxe6+

White's attack is unstoppable and therefore Black resigned.

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Solution 30: White to play

Fabiano Caruana – Wesley So

Grand Chess Tour rapid playoff (2), Saint Louis 2018

56 Ra6!

This is the only winning move, but it is more than sufficient. The immediate threat is the quick advance of the pawn all the way to c7. Black is powerless to stop this.

56...Ke6

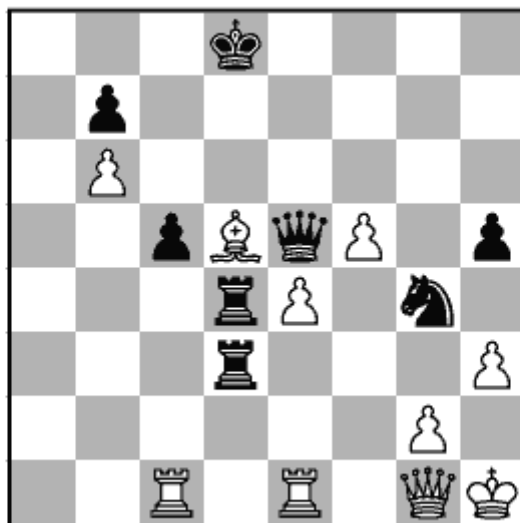
56...Rc4 57 c6 Ke6 58 Bf4 followed by c7 wins for White.

57 Bf4+ Kd5 58 c6 Rc4

58...Be5 59 c7 Bxc7 60 Bxc7 does not help one bit.

59 c7 a4

And here any move wins, but I assume that the simplest is **60 Rxa4**, when the pawn on the seventh rank decides the issue.



Solution 31: Black to play

Fabiano Caruana – Wesley So

Stavanger 2018

40...Rhx3+! 41 gxh3 Rd2!

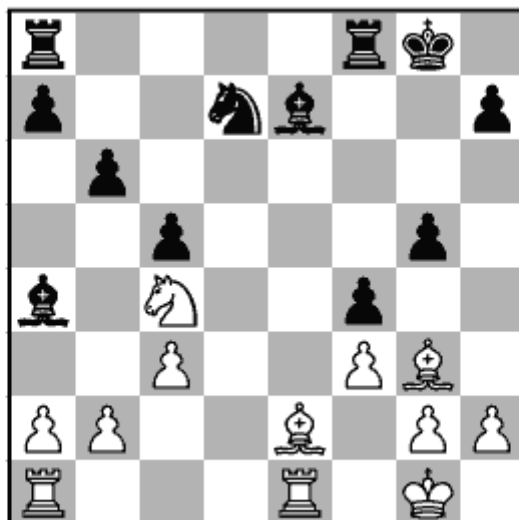
This spectacular idea salvages a draw for Black. It is not too difficult to spot actually. In the game I played too hastily by inertia, and went for 41...Rd3? but this just loses after 42 Qg2 Rg3 (42...Rhx3+ does not help as after 43 Qxh3 Nf2+ 44 Kg2 Nxh3 45 Kxh3 Qf4 46 Rg1 Black cannot even dream of a perpetual check) 43 hxg4 Rxg2 44 Kxg2, when White has way too many pieces for the queen.

42 hxg4 hxg4

White has no time to consolidate, as the threat of ...Qh8+ is impossible to ignore.

43 Qg2 Qh8+ 44 Kg1 Rxg2+ 45 Kxg2 Qh3+

The game ends in a perpetual check: **46 Kf2 Qf3+ 47 Kg1 Qg3+ =.**



Solution 32: White to play

Wesley So – Maxime Vachier-Lagrave

Abidjan blitz 2019

21 Bd1!

This takes advantage of Black's misplaced and hanging pieces.

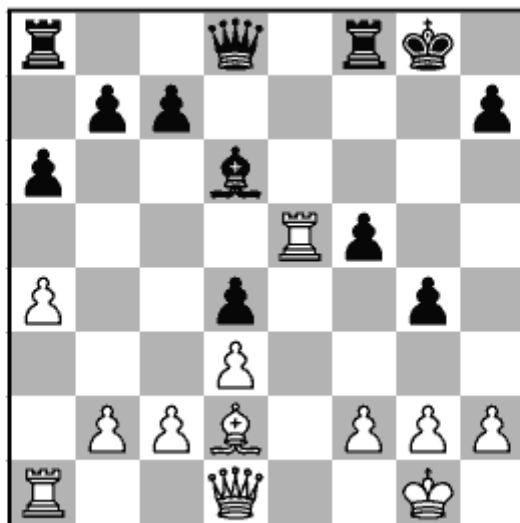
21...Bxd1 22 Raxd1 fxg3 23 hxg3!

White is in no rush to win his piece back. The knight and the bishop are hanging and Black cannot save both. White's control over the only open files is decisive. 23 Rxd7?! gxh2+ 24 Kxh2 Bf6 would allow Black to resist much more stubbornly.

23...Bf6 24 Rxd7 Rf7 25 Rxf7 Kxf7 26 Nd6+ Kg6 27 Re6

The endgame is easily winning for White.

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Solution 33: White to play

Sergey Kariakin – Wesley So

Zagreb 2019

21 Rxf5!

This elegant and simple move, which makes decisive material gains, was missed by both Sergey and myself. In the game Black held after 21 Re2? Qf6 22 c3 Rae8 23 g3 dxc3 24 Bxc3 Qf7 25 Rxe8 Rxe8 26 Qd2 Qe6 =, and we soon agreed to a draw.

21...Bxh2+

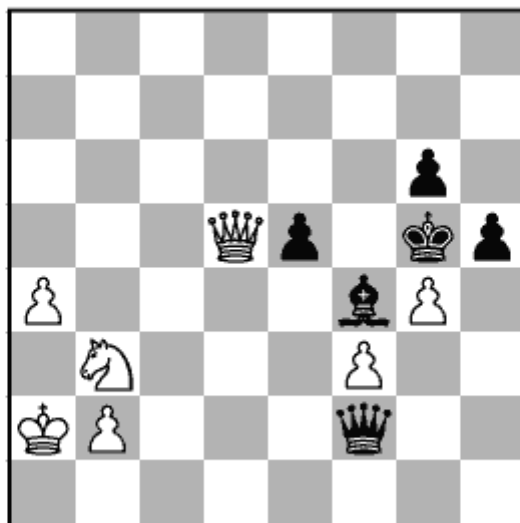
After 21...Rxf5 22 Qxg4+ White regains the rook, staying two pawns up.

22 Kh1!

A last important finesse. Not 22 Kxh2?? Qh4+ 23 Kg1 Rxf5, when the pawn on g4 is protected.

22...Qh4 23 Rg5+ Kh8 24 Rxc4

White wins, as 24...Qh5 loses right away due to 25 Rg8+.



Solution 34: White to play

Wesley So – Vidit Gujrathi

Kolkata rapid 2018

45 Qd8+

This is the easiest path to victory. 45 Nc5 Kh4 46 a5 should be enough for White to win too, but it is not as clear-cut.

45...Kh6 46 g5+!

This boxes the enemy king in the corner. 46 Qh8+ Kg5 achieves nothing; White must then retrace his steps by 47 Qd8+! if he is to win.

46...Kh7

46...Bxg5 allows mate in one: 47 Qh8#.

47 Qe7+ Kg8 48 Qe6+!

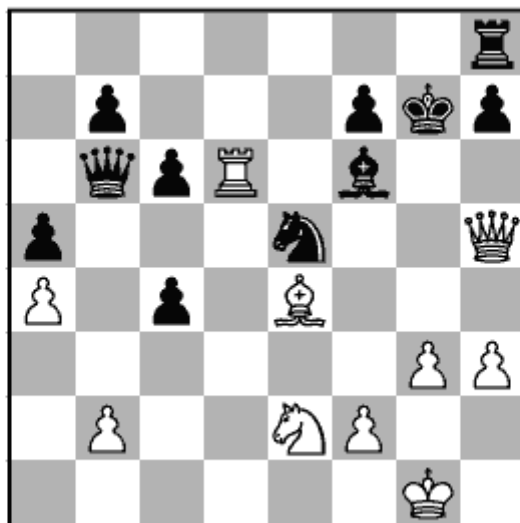
White is able to win the pawn on g6 with check!

48...Kg7 49 Qf6+ Kh7 50 Qf7+ Kh8 51 Qxg6

51 Qf8+ Kh7 52 Qh6+ would have been even more cruel.

51...Qxf3 52 Qe8+ Kg7 53 Qe7+ Kg8 54 g6 Qd5 55 Qh7+

and Vidit resigned.



Solution 35: Black to play

Surya Shekhar Ganguly – Wesley So

Kolkata blitz 2018

27...Ng6!

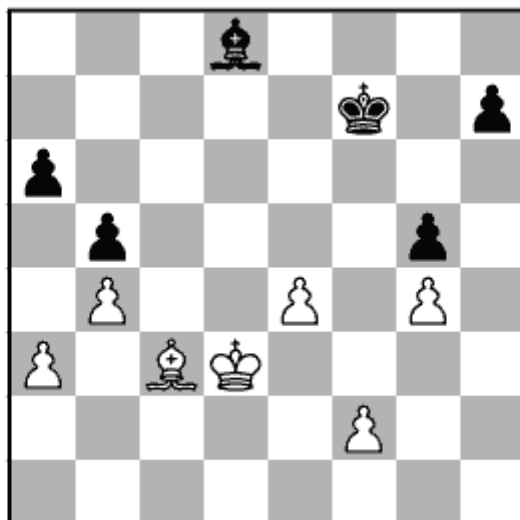
This move, which I missed, is the only way for Black to coordinate his defences. It prevents White's knight from jumping to d4 or f4. In the game I played 27...Qc5?, but had overlooked that after 28 Nd4 Black is totally lost due to the threat of Nf5+.

28 Rd7

28 Qf5 Qxb2 defends all of Black's pieces very well.

28...Rd8

White's attack is running out of steam. For example, after **29 Rxf7+ Kxf7 30 Qxh7+ Ke6 31 Bxg6 Kd6! 32 Qf7 Qxb2** –+ Black's king escapes from the attack, and White is terribly down on material.



Solution 36: White to play

Wesley So – Alireza Firouzja

Wijk aan Zee 2020

If Black had time to play ...Ke6 and ...Bb6 he would be able to set up a fortress, but it is White's turn to move.

39 Kd4!

This invasion by the king wins the game quickly.

39...Bb6+

After 39...Ke6 40 Kc5 the white king invades too.

40 Kd5 Bxf2

Black has won one pawn on f2, but it's too late. My pawn on g4 holds up his kingside majority.

41 Kc6

Threatening both Kb7 and Kd7.

41...Ke6

41...h5 loses to 42 Kd7, when the advance of the e-pawn cannot be prevented.

42 Kb7 Kd7

42...h5 clearly does not work as after 43 gxh5 g4 White has 44 h6, when he promotes first.

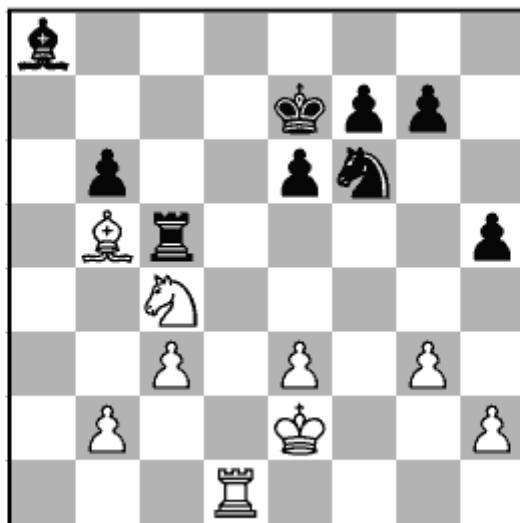
43 Kxa6 Kc6 44 e5 Be3

Black is unable to drum up any counterplay, and on top of that he is a pawn down.

45 e6 Bc1

Here White has more than one win but I played **46 a4 bxa4 47 Be5**, which looks the simplest as now Black is unable to prevent one of my pawns from promoting. Alireza therefore resigned.

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Solution 37: White to play

Harshit Raja – Wesley So

Douglas 2018

24 Nxb6!

Even 24 Ba6 is fine, but it merely leads to equality: 24...b5 25 Nb6 Bc6 26 Nc8+ Ke8 27 Nd6+ Kf8 28 Bb7 =. Meanwhile in the game Harshit blundered with 24 Ra1? Bd5 25 Ra7+ Kf8 26 Nd6 Rxb5! and Black wins as recapturing the rook is met by ...Bc4+, getting a large material advantage.

24...Rxb5

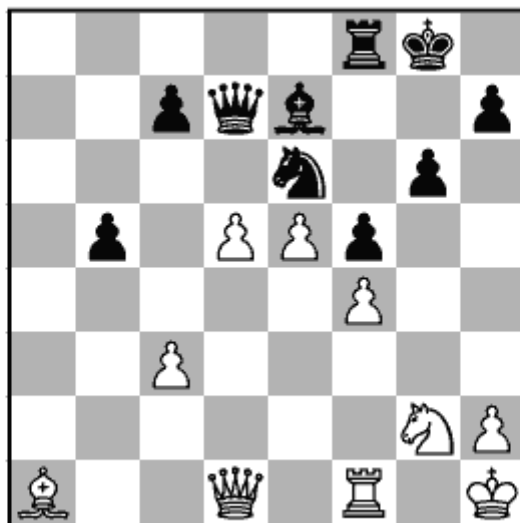
The best defence is 24...Bc6!, when Black can hope to defend the endgame a pawn down: 25 Nc8+ Ke8 26 Bxc6+ Rxc6 27 Nd6+ Ke7 28 Nb5 +/-.

25 Nc8+!

We both missed this simple resource. White wins material thanks to the knight fork. Not 25 Nxa8?? as b2 is hanging and the knight is almost trapped in the corner.

25...Kf8 26 Rd8+ Ne8 27 Rxe8+ Kxe8 28 Nd6+

This wins the rook back with interest. After 28...Kd7 29 Nxb5 White is a pawn up and should easily win the endgame.



Solution 38: Black to play

Ray Robson – Wesley So

PRO League rapid 2019

25...Rd8!

Making good use of the pin along the d-file, Black forces very favourable complications. 25...Nc5? merely leads to an unclear position after 26 Ne3 as White is threatening to play c4 and open up the long diagonal for his bishop. The computer gives 26...Qc8 as equal, but it's not so clear, and I might prefer White's position here.

26 Ne3

26 c4 bxc4 27 Ne3 Bc5 does not change much and leads to similar play as in the main line.

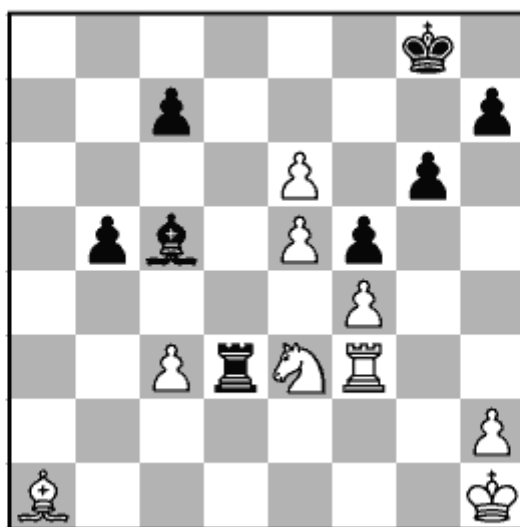
26...Bc5!

This is the point behind Black's last move. White's pawns are easily stopped and the endgame is horrendous for him.

27 dxe6

White cannot escape as after 27 Qf3 Bxe3 28 dxe6 Qd5 the endgame is lost: 29 e7 Qxf3+ 30 Rxf3 Rd1+ 31 Kg2 Rg1+! (an important check, forcing the white king to move farther away from the action) 32 Kh3 Kf7 33 Rxe3 (after 33 Bb2 Bc5 Black wins easily) 33...Rxa1 -+.

27...Qc6+ 28 Qf3 Qxf3+ 29 Rxf3 Rd3 (D)



White to play

This pin is deadly. White has no tricks left.

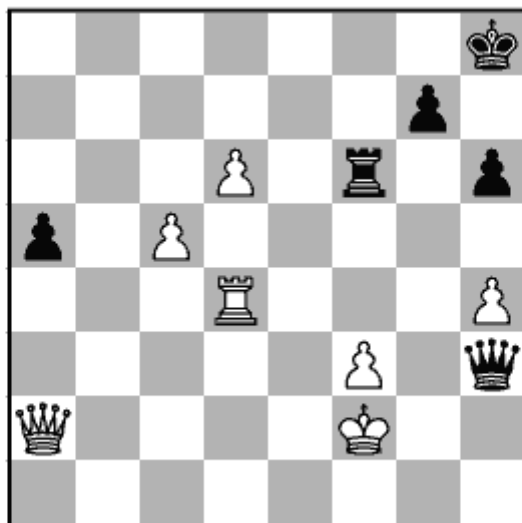
30 Rf1

30 e7 Kf7 31 e6+ Ke8 leads nowhere for White. His bishop on a1 is too passive in the corner and cannot participate in the game.

30...Bxe3 31 Bb2 Bc5

31...Kf8 with the idea of meeting 32 Ba3+ with 32...c5 is even faster, but what I played is good enough.

32 Ra1 Kf8 33 Ra8+ Ke7 34 Rc8 Bb6 35 Ba3+ Kxe6 36 Re8+ Kd7 37 Re7+ Kd8 38 Rxh7 Rxc3 39 Be7+ Kc8 40 Bf6 Re3 41 Rg7 b4 42 Kg2 b3 43 e6 Rxe6 0-1



Solution 39: White to play

Ian Nepomniashchy – Wesley So

Zagreb 2019

36 Qd5!

This move, centralizing the queen, is the only winning one but it is more than sufficient. Black has no perpetual check. In the game Ian went wrong. He played 36 Qe2? but after 36...Qh2+ 37 Ke3 Qg1+ it turned out that the white king cannot escape the checks: 38 Kd3 Qb1+ 39 Ke3 Qg1+ 40 Kd3 Qb1+ 41 Kd2 (41 Kc4 Qb4+ 42 Kd5 Rf5+ is fine for Black as well, as I win the c5-pawn) 41...Qb2+ and after 42 Kd3 we agreed to a draw, as it is threefold repetition after 42...Qb1+. The interesting move 42 Ke1!? leads to a draw as well, but following a very complicated variation. Basically the idea is that after 42...Qxd4 43 Qe8+ Kh7 44 Qe4+ Qxe4+ 45 fxe4 a4 the lone passed pawn is enough to hold a draw. You can analyse it yourself, and find the draw for Black.

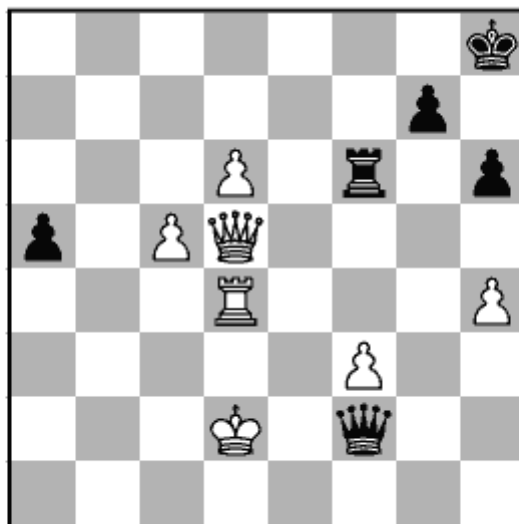
36...Qh2+ 37 Ke3

Even 37 Ke1 wins easily. The point is after 37...Rg6 38 Qa8+ Kh7 39 Qe4 the rook on g6 is pinned, and Black has no counterplay. After 39...Qg1+ 40 Kd2 Kh8 41 Kc3 the white

king is able to run away from the checks by advancing to the squares c4 and b5.

37...Qg1+ 38 Kd2 Qf2+ (D)

This is the best try as it forces White to play one last accurate move (38...Qg2+ 39 Kc3 Rxf3+ 40 Rd3 Rxd3+ 41 Qxd3 is easier for White).

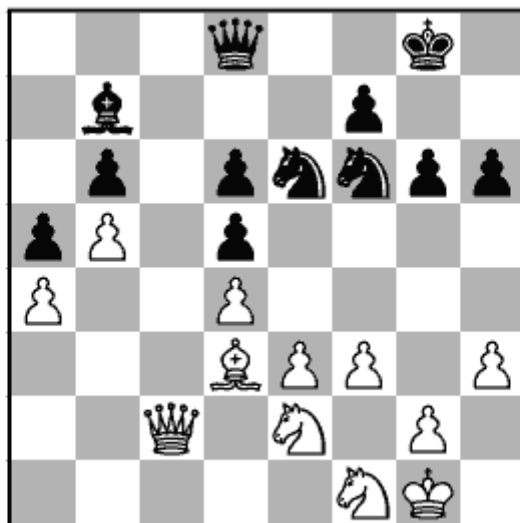


Extra Puzzle 39A: White to play

What would you play now as White?

[answer](#)

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Solution 40: White to play

Wesley So – Sergey Kariakin

Leuven blitz 2018

28 Bxg6!

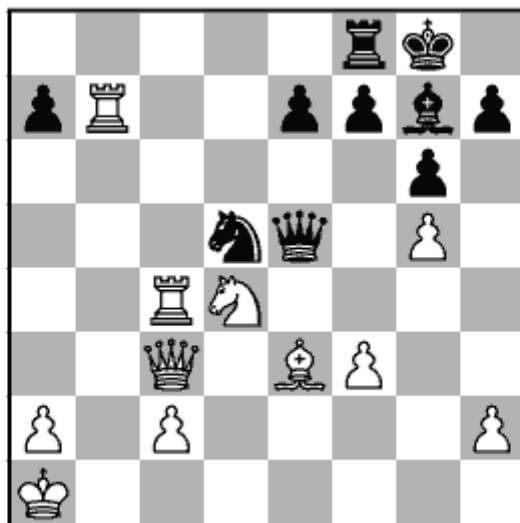
One should not miss chances like this. In return for the piece, White gets three connected passed pawns, and an attack on the enemy king. In the game I played 28 Kf2?! Qe7 but I was not given another chance to sacrifice advantageously on g6. After 29 g3 h5 30 h4 Qd7 31 Nf4 Ng7 White was much better, but in the end I was unable to break down Sergey's determined defence.

28...fxg6 29 Qxg6+ Ng7

29...Kf8 30 Qxh6+ Kf7 31 g4 looks very good for White as well. He has three connected passed pawns for the piece, while his opponent has no counterplay.

30 Qxh6

White's position is simply crushing. For example, **30...Qe7 31 g4 Bc8 32 Kf2 Bd7 33 Nfg3** +- and it's very unlikely that Black will be able to save his difficult position.



Solution 41: White to play

Wesley So – Jan-Krzysztof Duda

FIDE Grand Prix, Moscow 2019

27 Rc5

This is the only move for White, and heads to a favourable endgame.

27...Nxc3 28 Rxe5 Bxe5 29 Nc6!

And not 29 Rxe7? f6, when Black might even be better as White's forces are very clumsily placed.

29...Bg7

29...Nd5+ is a bit more stubborn, but 30 Nxe5 Nxe3 31 Rxe7 gives White good winning chances. His pieces are very actively placed, and a7 is hanging.

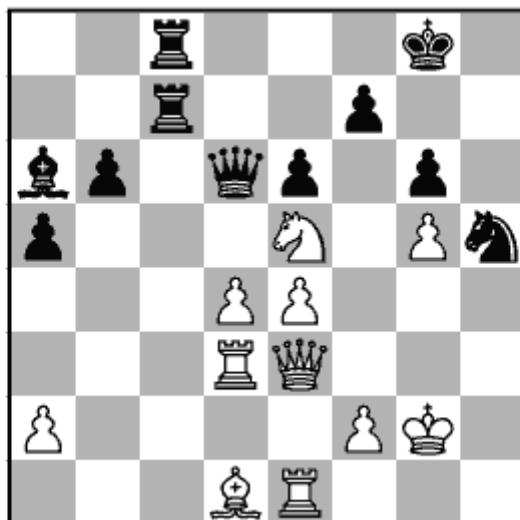
30 Bxa7

Grabbing a free pawn, and keeping all the pieces protected.

30...e5 31 Kb2 e4 32 fxe4 Nxe4+ 33 Kb3

White has a winning endgame. The game continued **33...Re8** (33...Nxb5 34 a4 followed by a5-a6 leads to a very quick pawn promotion) **34 a4 Re6 35 Nd4 Ra6 36 Rb8+ Bf8 37 Bb6 Kg7 38 a5 Bd6 39 Re8** and White soon won.

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Solution 42: White to play

David Navara – Wesley So

Saint Louis rapid 2019

29 Bxh5!

This wins in clear-cut fashion, and it avoids any of Black's counterplay.

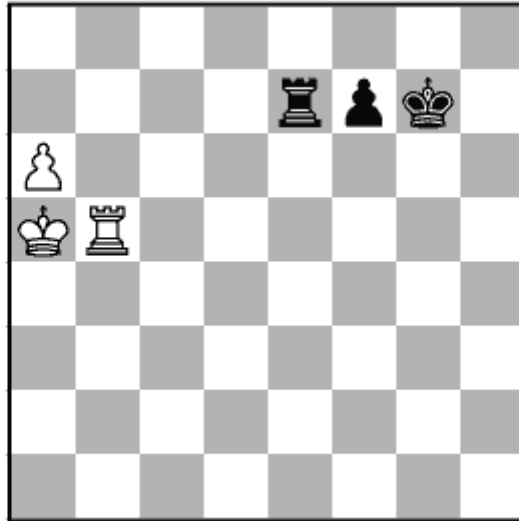
29...Bxd3

29...gxh5 30 Rdd1 Rc3 31 Qf4 is also winning for White.

30 Bf3 Rd8

30...Rc3 leads nowhere due to 31 Qf4 attacking f7. After 31...R8c7 32 Rh1 mate follows along the h-file.

After the move chosen, Black has no defence and I resigned in a couple of moves. In case of **31 Rh1 Qxd4 32 Qf4** Black is unable to create any counterplay, and the threat of Qf6 is decisive.



Solution 43: White to play

Wesley So – Vidit Gujrathi

FIDE World Cup, Khanty-Mansiisk 2019

78 Rc5!

This is the simplest way for White to make progress. I am intending to advance my king with Kb6, while the rook shields it against checks from the side. White has other moves that could win, but the idea is the same. For example: 78 Rg5+!? Kf6 79 Rc5 followed by Kb6 is basically no different. 78 Rd5 also preserves the win, but this is much more complex and unnecessary. After 78...Kg6 79 Kb6 Re6+ 80 Kb5 Re7 81 Kc6! f5 82 Ra5! White does win, but he has made the task more tricky.

78...Kg6

Preparing to create a passed pawn of his own, but Black is a tempo too late.

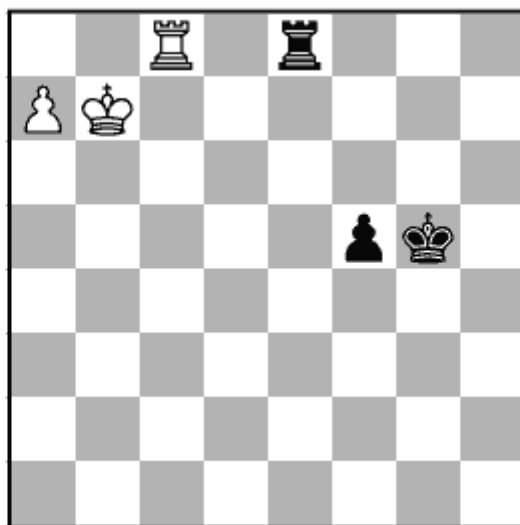
79 Kb6 f5 80 a7 Re8 81 Kb7

81 Ra5 is even faster, but what I played is good enough.

81...Kg5

Black has to advance his king first before pushing his pawn. After 81...f4 82 a8Q Rxa8 83 Kxa8 the black king is cut off along the 5th rank and 83...f3 84 Rc3 picks up the pawn.

82 Rc8! (D)



Black to play

This is the only move that wins. The rook has to go behind in order to give checks; meanwhile our king should be as close to the enemy pawn as possible.

82...Re7+ 83 Kb8 Rxa7 84 Kxa7

The white king has a very fast highway to run back via b6-c5-d4-e3, etc.

84...Kf4

Vidit tries to shoulder my king away from his pawn. Or 84...f4 85 Kb6 f3 86 Rf8 Kg4 87 Kc5 Kg3 88 Kd4 f2 89 Ke3, when Black loses by a single tempo.

85 Kb6 Ke3 86 Re8+!

This check is really important and is the only move that wins.
White pushes the enemy king away.

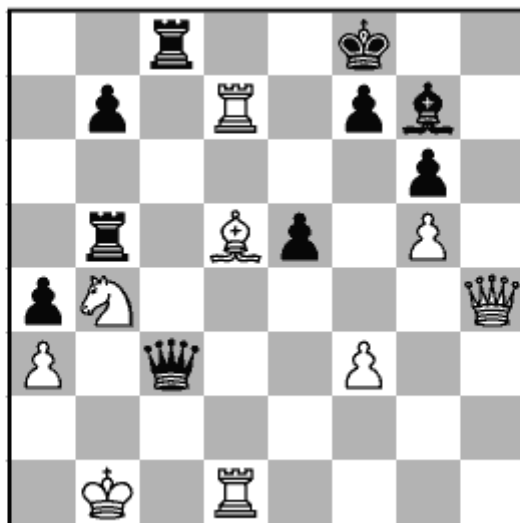
86...Kd3 87 Rf8

Winning a tempo by forcing Black to move his king to a worse square on e4.

87...Ke4 88 Kc5 f4 89 Kc4 Ke3 90 Kc3 f3 91 Re8+! Kf2 92 Kd2 Kf1 93 Ke3

White wins the pawn, so Black resigned.

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Solution 44: White to play

Wesley So – Vidit Gujrathi

chess.com blitz 2018

43 Rxf7+

Picking up an important pawn. 43 Qe4 also wins, as 43...Qxa3 44 Rxf7+ Ke8 transposes back to the 43 Rxf7+ line, but the text-move is more forcing.

43...Ke8 44 Qe4!

The key defensive move. From here the queen defends all the important squares close to our king. In the game I played 44 Rxc7??, but it allows to mate after 44...Qc2+.

44...Qxa3

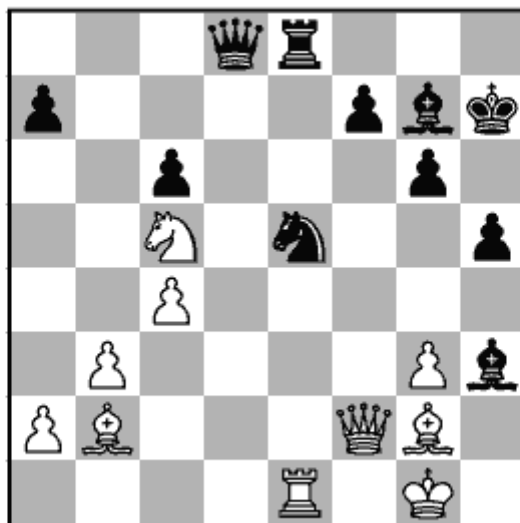
44...Rxb4+ does not work either. After 45 axb4 a3 White has 46 Qe2 Qxb4+ 47 Ka2, when he is simply a whole rook up.

45 Rxb7! Rxb7 46 Qxg6+

This check is decisive. It turns out that the black king has nowhere to hide.

46...Kf8 47 Qf5+ Ke7 48 Qe6+ +-

White picks up the enemy rooks with check and proceeds to deliver checkmate.



Solution 45: White to play

Wesley So – Shakhriyar Mamedyarov

Kolkata rapid 2018

29 Bxe5

White needs to eliminate the opponent's attacking forces. 29 Bxh3? loses to 29...Nf3+ 30 Qxf3 Rxe1+ followed by 31... Qd2+.

29...Bxe5

In case of 29...Rxe5 30 Rxe5 Bxe5 31 Qxf7+ Kh6 32 Bxh3 Bd4+ 33 Kg2 Bxc5 34 Bd7 = White easily holds the draw thanks to the opposite-coloured bishops.

30 Qxf7+ Kh6 31 Rxe5!

This is the only way for White to save the game. 31 Bxh3? Bd4+ 32 Kf1 loses due to 32...Rf8.

31...Rxe5

31...Qd4+ 32 Kh2 Rxe5 33 Qf8+ Kh7 34 Qf7+ is another way to draw the game.

32 Qf4+ Qg5 33 Qf8+ Kh7 34 Qf7+

and I was able to deliver perpetual check.

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Solution 46: White to play

Wesley So – Vladislav Artemiev

chess.com rapid 2019

16 g5!

Taking advantage of the position of Black's pieces. This move works out perfectly. 16 Ne1 is possible, with the idea of playing f4. However, there is no need to go for quiet positional moves when White has a more dynamic possibility.

16...Rxf3 17 Bxf3 Bxg5

17...Nf5 is possibly more resistant, when White has to find 18 Nxd5 cxd5 19 Bxd5+ Kh8 20 Qg4 with the idea of Be6 or Be4, maintaining a large advantage.

18 Nxd5! (D)



Black to play

This move had to be seen before playing 16 g5. The complications all work out well in White's favour.

18...cxd5

18...Bxc1 19 Qxc1 prevents the check on g5, and 19...cxd5 20 Bxd5+ Bf7 21 Bxa8 Qxa8 gives White a large material advantage, and a winning position after a move like 22 Qg5.

19 Bxd5+ Nf7

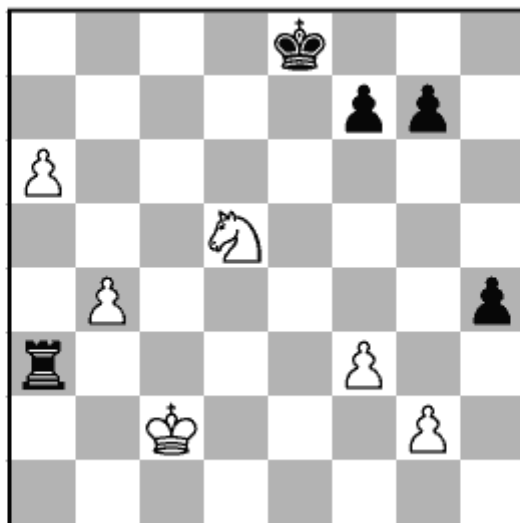
19...Kh8 does not help either. After 20 Bxa8 Bxc1 21 Rxc1 Qxa8 22 Rc7 Nf6 23 Qc1 the white pieces invade along the open files and Black does not have enough material to create any counterplay.

20 f4 Bf6 21 f5

Trapping the poor bishop on g6.

21...Nf8 22 Bxa8 Qxa8 23 fxg6 Nxg6 24 Qf3 Qe8 25 Be3

White is completely winning and the opponent could resign with a clear conscience in this position.



Solution 47: Black to play

Maxime Vachier-Lagrave – Wesley So

chess.com rapid 2019

38...Kd7

The easiest way is to put the king in front of the passed pawns, preventing them from advancing too far. 38...Kd8 39 b5 Kc8 works in a similar way too.

39 b5 Kc8!

Now White is unable to push his pawns and his forces are stuck. I played 39...Kd6? in the game but this allowed Maxime to play 40 b6, when the white pawns were unstoppable: 40...Ra2+ (40...Rxa6 41 b7 Ra2+ 42 Kc3 +-) 41 Kb3 Ra1 42 b7 Kxd5 43 a7 and White wins as he is able to queen.

40 Kb2

40 Nb4 is met by 40...Kc7 41 Nd5+ Kb8 42 Nb4 Ka7!, when the white pawns are unable to go any further.

40...Rd3 41 Ne7+

41 Nb6+ Kb8 42 Nc4 Ka7! also leads nowhere for White.

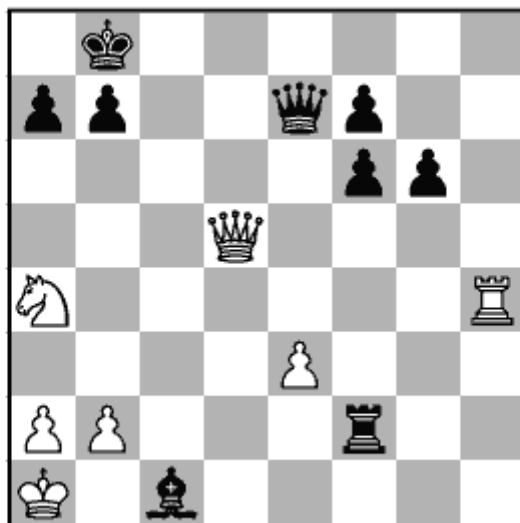
41...Kc7

41...Kb8 is sufficient to win too: 42 Kc2 Ra3 43 Kb2 Re3 44 Nc6+ Kc7 and the king controls the pawns.

42 Kc2 Rd7 43 Nf5 Rd5

Black wins the pawns and the game is over.

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Solution 48: Black to play

Jan-Krzysztof Duda – Wesley So

chess.com rapid 2018

30...Bxb2+!

This move is simple yet very effective.

31 Kb1

The main point of the exercise is that 31 Nxb2 Rf1+ 32 Nd1 Qe5+ 33 Qxe5+ (33 Rd4 Rxd1+ is also winning for Black as the rook on d4 is pinned) 33...fxe5 wins for Black as White is unable to rescue the knight on d1.

31...f5

It turns out that the bishop is protecting h8 and preventing any sort of counterplay by White. Black is completely winning.

32 Nc5 Bc3

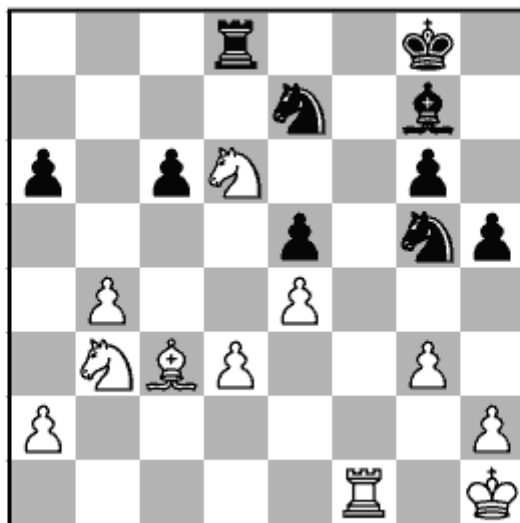
Preventing Rb4.

33 Rh3

Instead 33 Nd7+ is met by 33...Ka8, when 34 Rc4 Rb2+ 35 Kc1 (or 35 Ka1 Rb3+) 35...Qxe3+ leads to a quick checkmate.

After the move chosen, Black has a variety of wins. Our game continued **33...Rd2** (33...Qc7 with the idea of ...Qb6 is simple enough too) **34 Qc4 Bf6** and White could safely resign as he is three pawns down.

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Solution 49: White to play

Wesley So – Hikaru Nakamura

World Fischer Random, Høvikodden 2019

24 Bd2!

This is the only way for White to maintain a large advantage. It is important for the enemy knight to be pushed back to a much more passive position. In the game I played 24 Nc4? Rxd3 25 Bxe5 Bxe5 26 Nxe5 Re3 but here Black has enough counterplay to hold the game. After 27 Nd4 Nxe4 28 Ndxc6 Nxc6 29 Nxc6 Re2 30 a4 Black's position is not too hard to defend. For instance, after 30...Rc2 the activity along the second rank should compensate for the missing pawn.

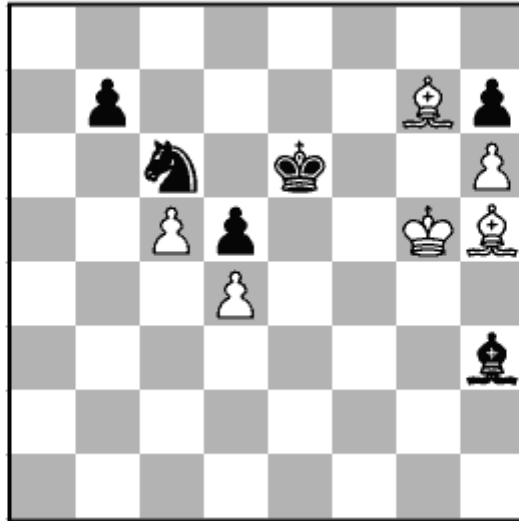
24...Ne6 25 Nc4

Now with the knight on e6 White can retreat his knight, safe in the knowledge that e4 is no longer attacked. Also good is 25 Nb7 Rxd3 26 Rc1 with a stable advantage thanks to White's better pawn-structure.

25...Rxd3 26 Kg2

Protecting his kingside and improving the position of the king. Together with his better structure, White's pieces are also more active and there are holes on the queenside (c5 and a5) that he can exploit. Black is hard-pressed to defend. For example after **26...Nc8 27 Rc1 Bf6 28 Nb2 Rd6 29 Be3** the weaknesses on c6 and a6 are not so easy to cover.

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Solution 50: White to play

Wesley So – Levon Aronian

Kolkata blitz 2018

72 Bg6!

72 Be2? Bf5 gives Black a fortress that is very difficult to crack. He just plays ...Ne7-c6, asking White what he can do. 73 Bf6 is met by 73...Na5.

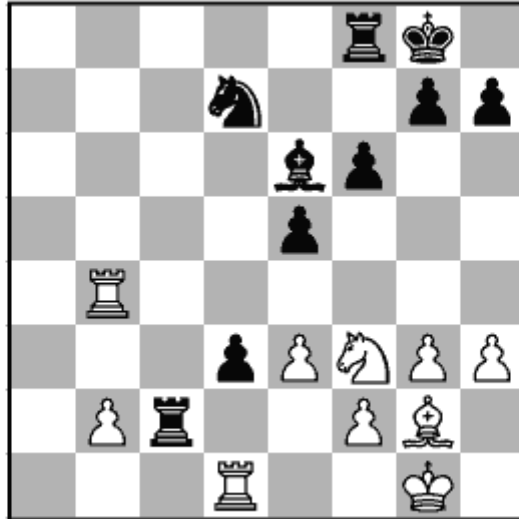
72...hxg6 73 Bf6!

A very nice move, preventing ...Nd8 and preparing h7. The obvious 73 h7? does not win in view of 73...Nd8!, which is how my game with Levon went. Black wins the queen next move with ...Nf7+. 74 Kh4 Nf7 75 Kxh3 does not win either because of 75...Ng5+, forking the king and pawn.

The text-move leaves Black with no defence. After **73...Nd8 74 Bxd8 Kf7 75 Bf6 Kg8 76 Kxg6** he can no longer stop h7 next move.

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25 Difficult Exercises



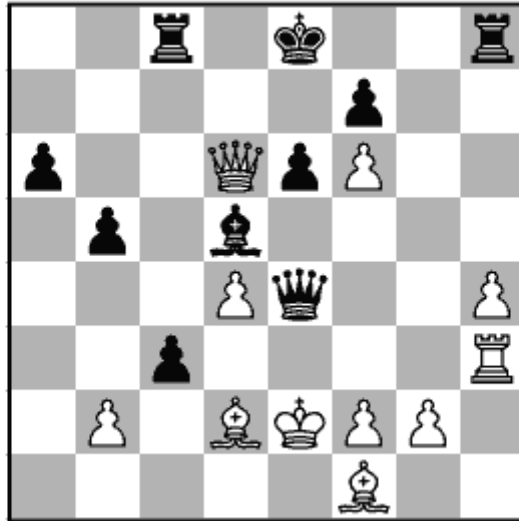
Puzzle 51: Black to play

Fabiano Caruana – Wesley So

USA Ch, Saint Louis 2019

A key game from the 2019 US Championship. Black got unexpected chances in the endgame. How can Black take advantage of his advantageous position and put pressure on White?

[answer](#)



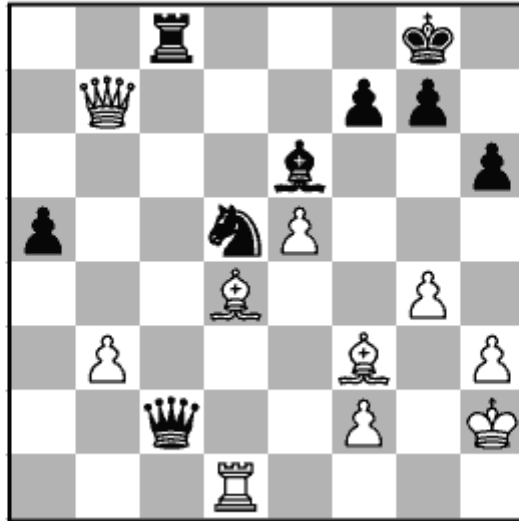
Puzzle 52: White to play

Kirill Shevchenko – Wesley So

PRO League rapid 2019

White is threatening mate on e7, but in the meantime his own king is being showered with checks. Can White survive? How would you continue as White?

[answer](#)



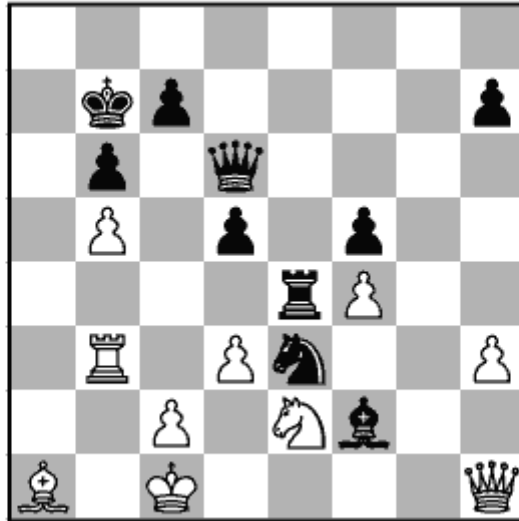
Puzzle 53: White to play

Wesley So – Yu Yangyi

FIDE Grand Prix, Jerusalem 2019

This game was played in the FIDE Grand Prix in Israel. This is the second game of our match and winning this would advance me to the second round. White is a pawn up, but converting it is not so simple. How should White continue?

[answer](#)



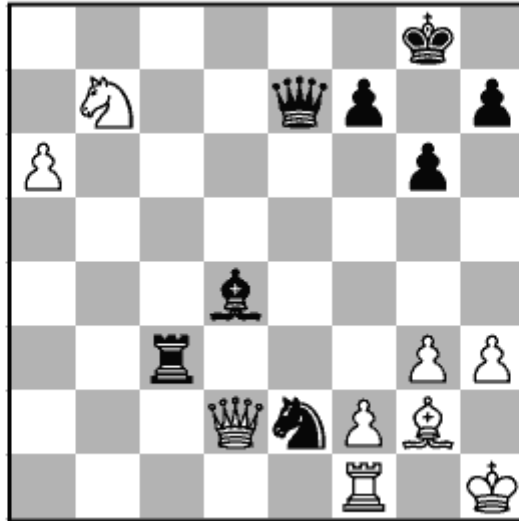
Puzzle 55: Black to play

Wesley So – Anish Giri

Saint Louis (Chess960 rapid) 2018

In this chaotic position Black's pieces look rather unfocused. However, they present a clear threat to the white king. How should Black coordinate them?

[answer](#)



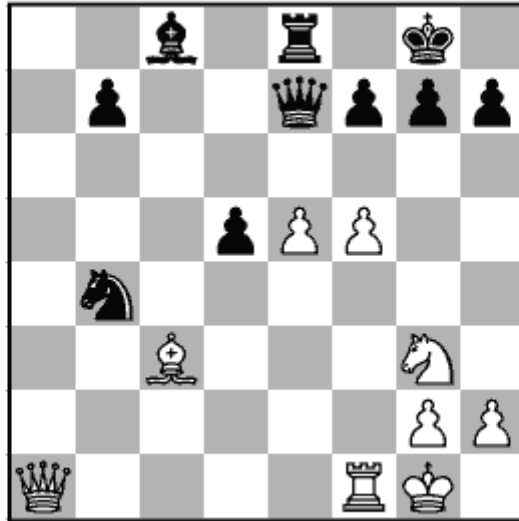
Puzzle 56: Black to play

Illya Nyzhnyk – Wesley So

PRO League rapid 2019

Black is a pawn down, but he has some compensation thanks to his active pieces and the misplaced knight on b7. You have to watch out though, as the position of our knight on e2 remains quite shaky. How would you continue with Black? You are trying to hold the draw here.

[answer](#)



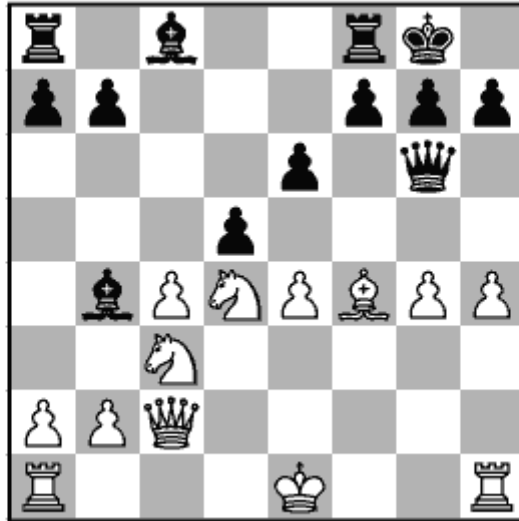
Puzzle 57: White to play

Wesley So – Hikaru Nakamura

Saint Louis blitz 2018

This position arose from a Nimzo-Indian Defence. After equalizing well in the opening, Hikaru gave me a chance to create a powerful pair of mobile pawns on the kingside. How is White able to break through in this position? Try to calculate and analyse deeper than just one move.

[answer](#)



Puzzle 58: Black to play

Francisco Vallejo Pons – Wesley So

Leon rapid 2018

In a theoretical position of the Nimzo-Indian, Black has just sacrificed a piece. How is he able to get enough compensation for it?

[answer](#)



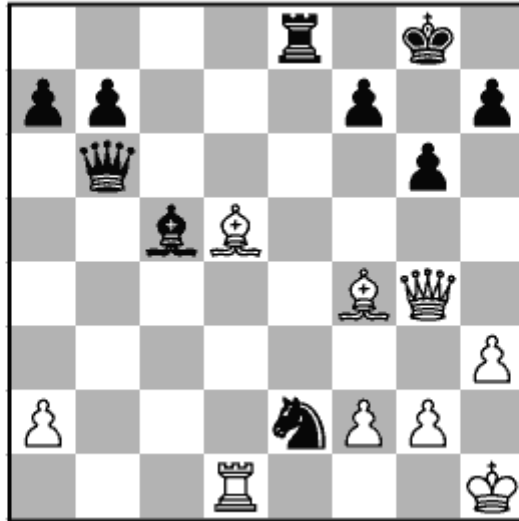
Puzzle 59: Black to play

Wesley So – Alexander Grishchuk

Saint Louis rapid 2018

The position is very complex, but Black has to hurry as his kingside initiative is petering out. How should he continue?

[answer](#)



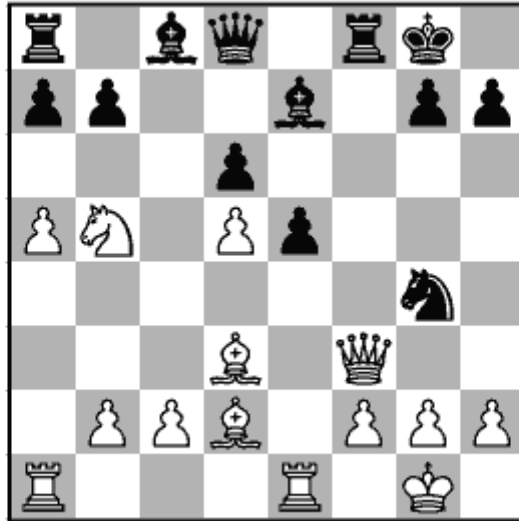
Puzzle 60: Black to play

Pentala Harikrishna – Wesley So

Kolkata rapid 2018

Black is a clean pawn up. Is there any way for him to convert the game nicely?

[answer](#)



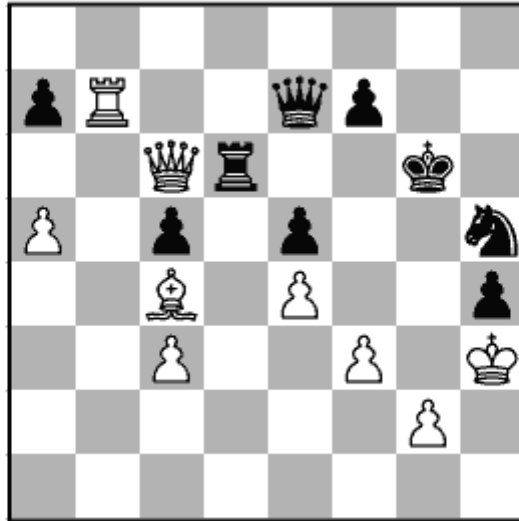
Puzzle 61: White to play

Wesley So – Daniel Sadzikowski

Caleta 2019

Black has just sacrificed his f-pawn for counterplay along that file. What is White's best way to defuse the opponent's activity?

[answer](#)



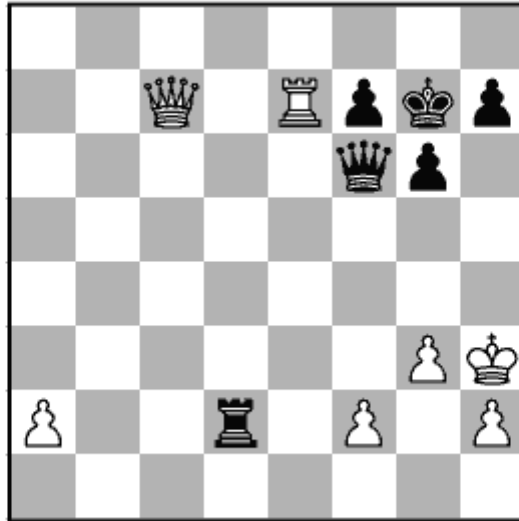
Puzzle 62: Black to play

David Navara – Wesley So

Saint Louis blitz 2019

This position arose in my speed match with David Navara in 2019. The position looks very complicated, with both kings under attack. How can Black generate enough counterplay to equalize?

[answer](#)



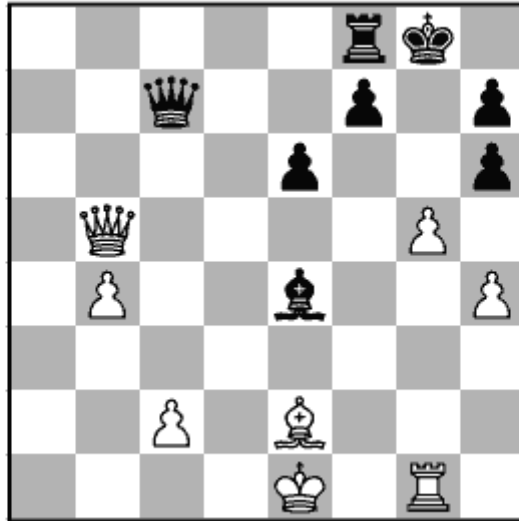
Puzzle 63: Black to play

Wesley So – Maxime Vachier-Lagrave

Stavanger blitz 2018

Black has a better position, true. He is going to win a pawn and press in the endgame. The question though is, how real are his winning chances? Which move gives him the best chances? Try to analyse at least three moves deep.

[answer](#)



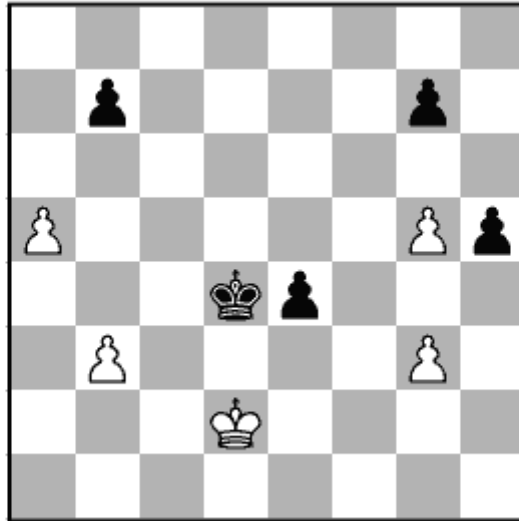
Puzzle 64: Black to play

Mario Villanueva – Wesley So

PRO League rapid 2020

This game came from the Najdorf Sicilian. Despite making a couple of mistakes in the opening, I was able to grab the initiative and here I hold a clear advantage. In this position White's king is very vulnerable. What is the best way for Black to convert his advantage? Try calculating a winning, knockout blow.

[answer](#)



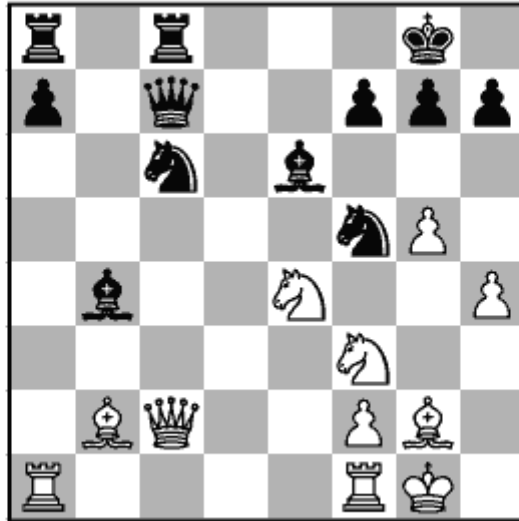
Puzzle 65: Black to play

Viswanathan Anand – Wesley So

Kolkata rapid 2018

This exercise is not particularly difficult, but it requires a fair amount of calculation. What is happening in this king and pawn ending? How would you continue as Black? Try to analyse all the way to the end.

[answer](#)



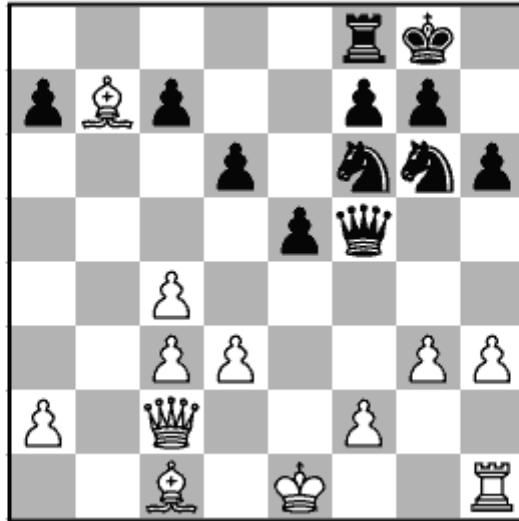
Puzzle 66: White to play

Wesley So – Sergey Kariakin

Saint Louis blitz 2018

White is a pawn down, but he has some compensation thanks to his two powerful bishops and active pieces. But he has to hurry or else Black will have time to consolidate. What should you play to keep the game level?

[answer](#)



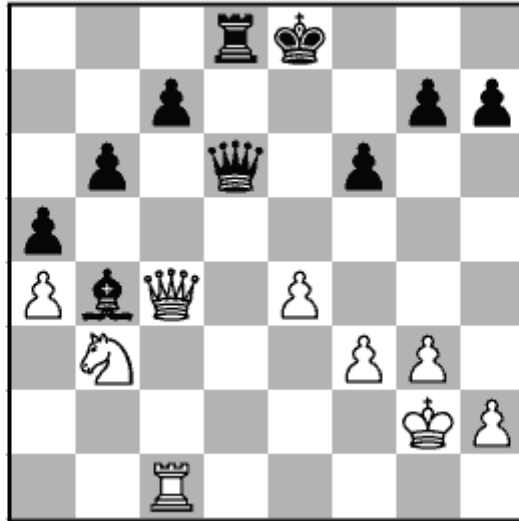
Puzzle 67: Black to play

Wesley So – Samuel Sevian

Douglas 2018

White has the bishop-pair, but his bishop is badly placed on b7 and his pawn-structure is shaky. How can Black best exploit this?

[answer](#)



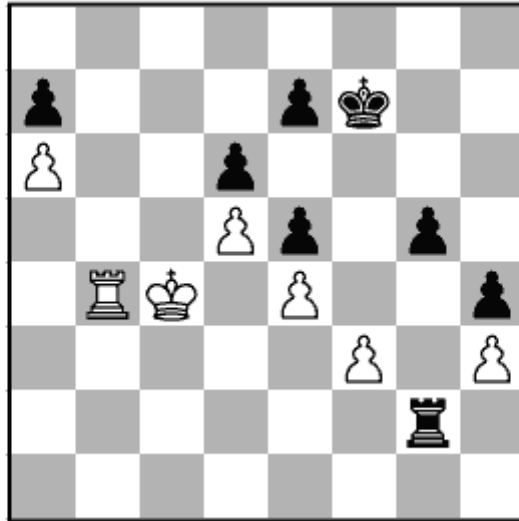
Puzzle 68: Black to play

Wesley So – Leinier Dominguez

USA Ch, Saint Louis 2019

My opponent in this US Championship game is a very strong GM who just recently made a federation switch from Cuba to the USA. My position is desperate and I am a pawn down. How should Black convert his advantage into a win?

[answer](#)



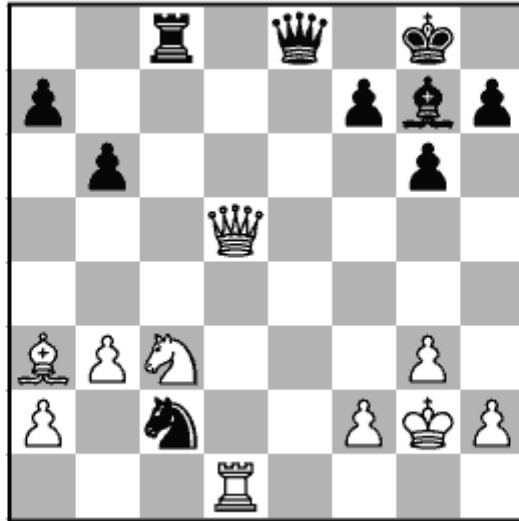
Puzzle 69: White to play

Vladimir Fedoseev – Wesley So

World Fischer Random, Høvikodden 2019

White looks in deep trouble in this rook endgame, as his pawns on f3 and h3 are falling soon. Is there still a way to save the game? If there is, how would you draw? Try to calculate deeply and give your solution in more than one or two moves.

[answer](#)



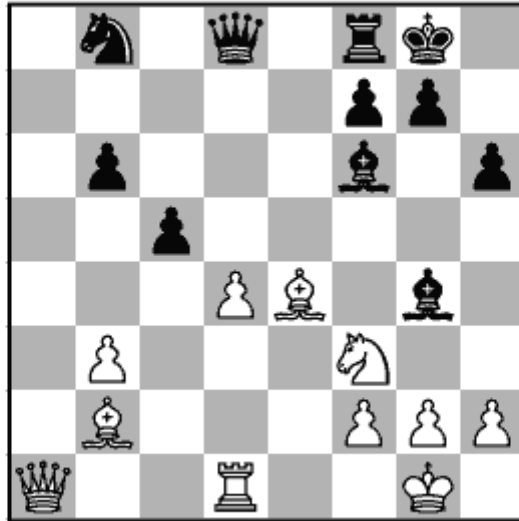
Puzzle 70: White to play

Vladimir Kramnik – Wesley So

Paris rapid 2018

Both minor pieces on a3 and c3 are threatened. White's position looks desperate, but he still has a defence.

[answer](#)



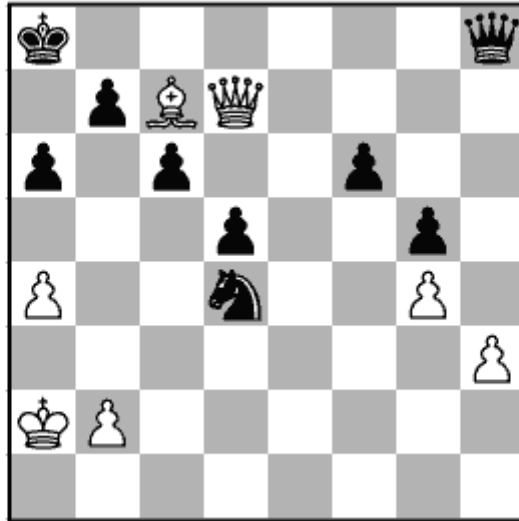
Puzzle 71: White to play

Shakhriyar Mamedyarov – Wesley So

Saint Louis blitz 2018

This game against Shakh has been quite depressing for me as I was forced to defend a difficult position right out of the opening. At this stage it seems that Black is close to equalizing, but Shakh still has a surprise in store for me. Could you find the best way for White to pose some problems?

[answer](#)



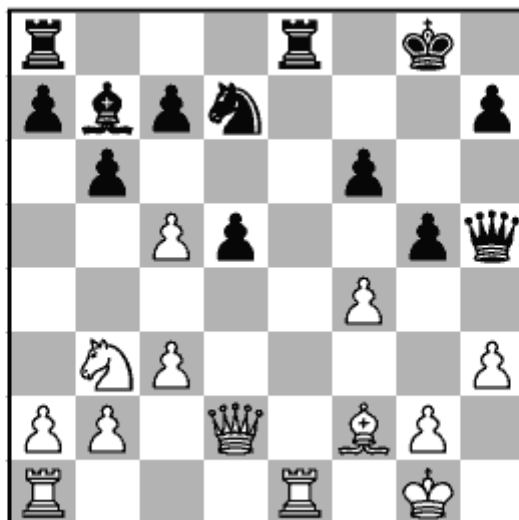
Puzzle 72: White to play

Le Quang Liem – Wesley So

Bucharest rapid 2019

White has a dangerous initiative on the queenside, and Black's king is perilously boxed in on a8. Does White have a winning blow in this position? How would you continue?

[answer](#)



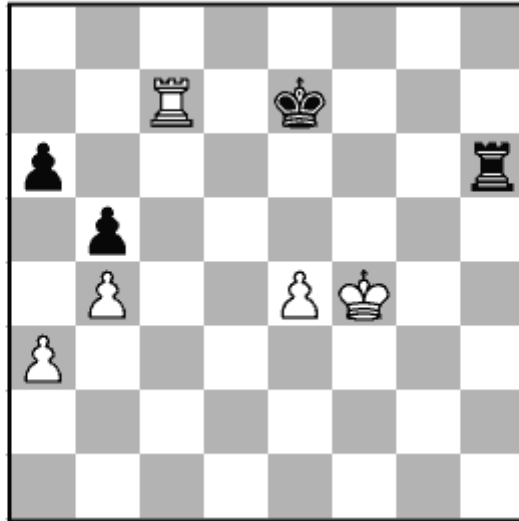
Puzzle 73: White to play

Wesley So – Shakhriyar Mamedyarov

Zagreb 2019

From the 2019 Grand Chess Tour leg in Croatia. My opponent is one of the most dynamic players in the world, but in this tournament he was out of form. White's position is better as he has stable control over the dark squares, while the bishop on b7 remains passive. Black's kingside also has a lot of holes and his queen is misplaced on h5. How would you take advantage of all this as White?

[answer](#)



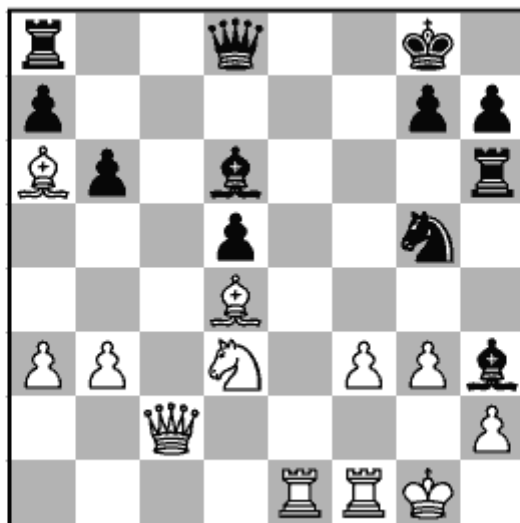
Puzzle 74: Black to play

Wesley So – Baskaran Adhiban

Wijk aan Zee 2018

Black is a pawn down with a desperate endgame position. Do you think you can hold this endgame with Black, or is it just lost? How would you defend?

[answer](#)



Puzzle 75: White to play

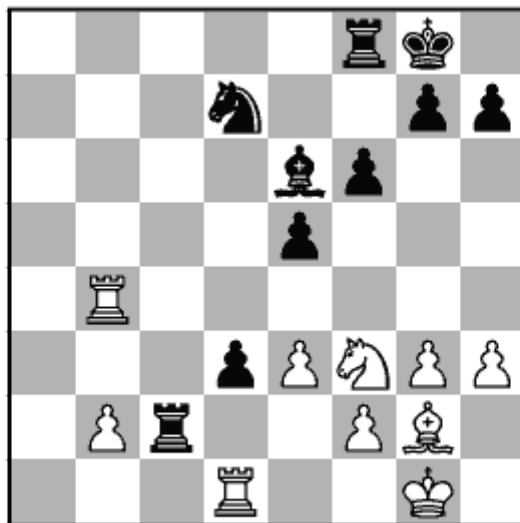
Wesley So – Aleksandr Lenderman

USA Ch, Saint Louis 2018

My opponent in this US Championship game is the strong grandmaster Lenderman. After an unusual opening we got into this very complex middlegame. Black has active pieces close to my king and White has to defend well in order not to run into trouble. Can you find the only way here for me to keep my position together?

[answer](#)

Solutions for 25 Difficult Exercises



Solution 51: Black to play

Fabiano Caruana – Wesley So

USA Ch, Saint Louis 2019

29...Rfc8!

This surprising move gives White serious problems to solve. He can probably hold with perfect defence, but at least Black gets some chances. Instead I played 29...Rb8?!, which allowed White an easy draw after 30 Rxb8+ Nxb8 31 Ne1 =.

30 Rxd3

30 Bf1 Rc1 is clearly in Black's favour too. For example after 31 Rxd3 e4! 32 Rxe4 Bxh3 White has a very tricky position. 33 Kh2 Bf5 -/+.

30...e4!

This is the point behind 29...Rfc8!.

31 Rxe4 Nc5

Black forks both rooks and wins the exchange.

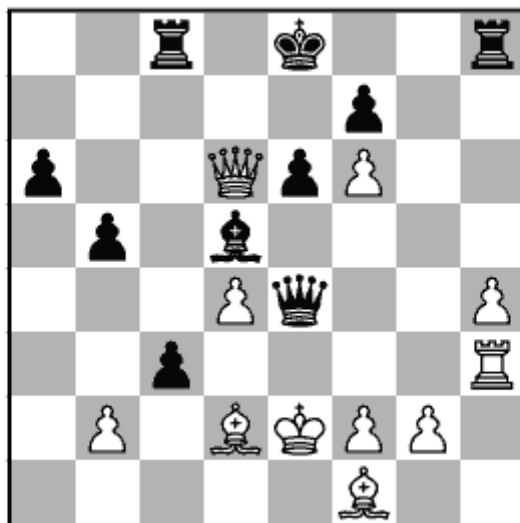
32 Rdd4 Nxe4 33 Rxe4 Ba2 34 Nd4

34 Rb4 Rc1+ 35 Kh2 R8c2 is dangerous for White, as f2 is falling.

34...Rxb2 35 Bf3

White should be able to hold this endgame, but Black has practical chances at least.

[back](#)



Solution 52: White to play

Kirill Shevchenko – Wesley So

PRO League rapid 2019

30 Re3

This easily defends against Black's threats to the king and he has no more than perpetual check.

30...Bc4+ 31 Kd1 Qb1+

31...Bb3+ 32 Ke2 also leads to a draw, as playing on with 32...Qb7 is too risky for Black: 33 Rxc3 Bc4+ 34 Ke1 Rd8 35 Qf4 and only White can be better here.

32 Bc1 Bb3+ 33 Ke2 Qc2+

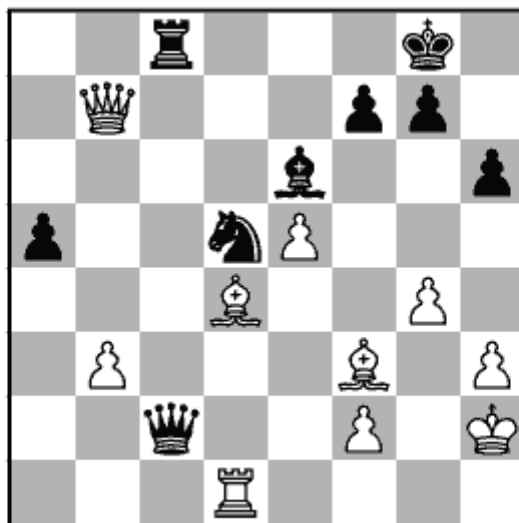
33...Bc4+ 34 Kd1 =.

34 Kf3 Qf5+ 35 Ke2

And not 35 Kg3? Qxf6, when Black is threatening to continue his attack by taking on h4 with check.

After the text-move Black should probably take the draw. Playing on with **35...Qxf6** is possible, but unlikely to be successful after **36 Qxa6 Bc4+ 37 Ke1**, when only Black could be worse in this unclear position.

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Solution 53: White to play

Wesley So – Yu Yangyi

FIDE Grand Prix, Jerusalem 2019

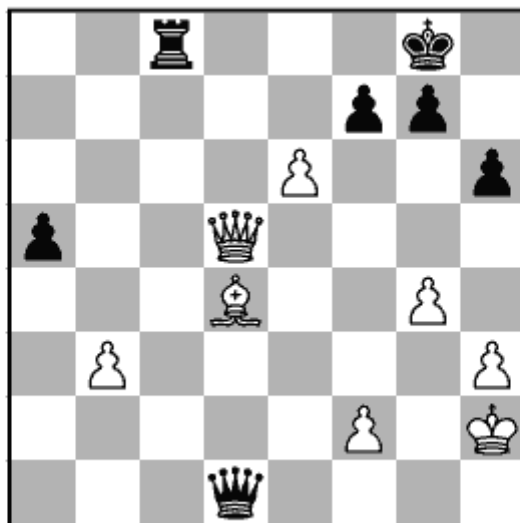
33 Bxd5!

This works tactically in all lines.

33...Bxd5?

The Chinese Super-grandmaster fails to put up a desperate resistance. 33...Qxd1 is much more stubborn, but White is better nonetheless. After 34 Bxe6 Rf8! Black regains some material. 35 Bc5 fxe6 36 Bxf8 Kxf8 37 Kg2 leaves White a pawn up with good winning chances in the queen endgame. It is certainly unpleasant to defend this as Black.

34 Qxd5 Qxd1 35 e6 (D)



Black to play

This is the point of White's combination. Suddenly Black's king comes under a powerful attack.

35...Qc2

35...f6 36 e7+ Kh8 37 Qd8+ does not help Black.

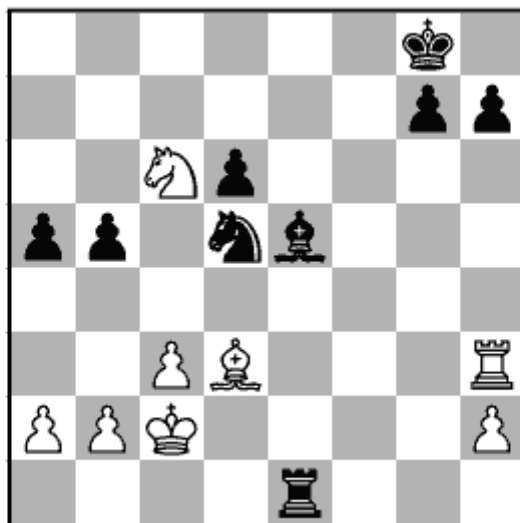
36 exf7+ Kh7?

Even after the best defence, 36...Kf8 37 Qd6+ Kxf7 38 Qd7+ Kf8 39 Qxg7+ Ke8 40 Qe5+, Black should lose in the long run as his king is very exposed. For example, after 40...Kd7 41 Qd5+ Ke7 42 Qxa5 Qxb3 43 Bc5+ Kd7 44 Qd2+! Kc6 45 Qd6+ Kb7 46 Be3 White will win a third pawn and have a decisive material advantage.

37 Qe5 Qg6 38 Qe7

Black resigned, as the f-pawn is unstoppable.

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Solution 54: White to play

Wesley So – Radoslaw Wojtaszek

Batumi Olympiad 2018

35 Bxb5!

This move is much better than taking on h7. Here White is winning because of his connected pawn majority on the queenside.

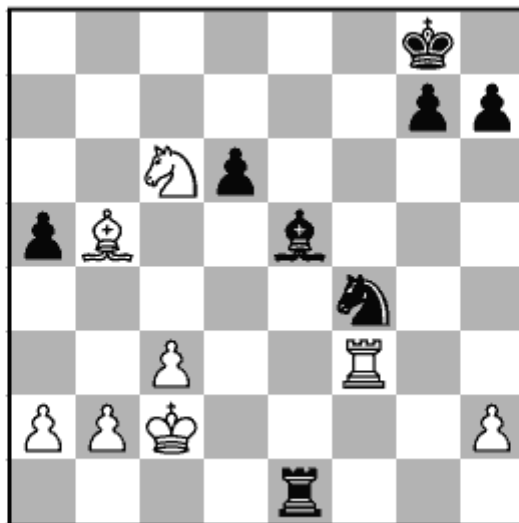
In the game I played 35 Bxh7+?! Kf7, when White's advantage does not look enough for a win. We continued 36 Bd3 Nf4 37 Rf3 b4, when Black had counterplay thanks to his well-placed pieces on e5 and f4. After 38 cxb4 axb4 39 Bc4+ (I went for 39 Nxb4 but Radoslaw had no problems holding the draw after 39...Ke6 40 Bf1 g5 41 h3 d5, thanks to his counterplay) 39...Kf6 40 Nxb4 g5 I think Black should be able to hold the game. For example, 41 Rf1 (after 41 a4 Rh1 42 Rf2 Bd4 43 Rd2 Bg1 Black wins the pawn on h2 and holds the game) 41...Re4 42 b3 Kg7 gives him enough counterplay.

35...Nf4

35...Nf6 does not change much in the position. After 36 Nxe5 (36 b4 axb4 37 cxb4 is a good option as well, as White's

pawns are ready to advance quickly) 36...dxe5 (36...Rxe5 is met by 37 a4) 37 b4 it is unlikely that Black can stop the enemy pawns on the queenside.

36 Rf3 (D)



Black to play

36...g5

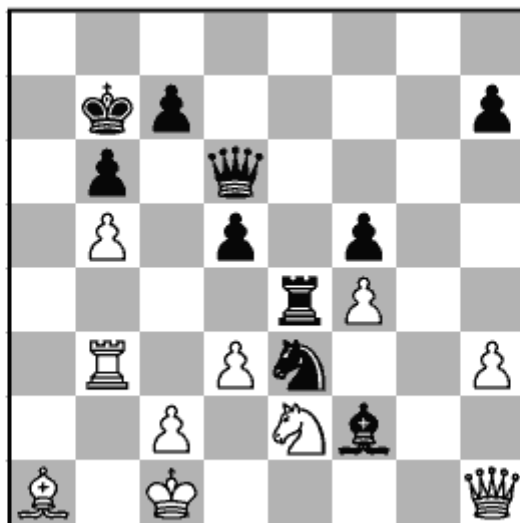
36...Rh1 does not change much after the simple reply 37 Rf2 followed by a4.

37 b4

Here White has many good options. 37 Rf1 Rxf1 38 Bxf1 is possible too. It is very difficult for Black to defend this ending. 37 Nxa5 is strong as well, simply grabbing a pawn.

37...axb4 38 cxb4 Rh1 39 Rf2

White's pawns are ready to advance, and they are well supported by all their pieces.



Solution 55: Black to play

Wesley So – Anish Giri

Saint Louis (Chess960 rapid) 2018

28...Qc5!

This seems best. Other moves:

a) 28...Re8? 29 Qf3 is bad for Black, as he is not threatening anything, and meanwhile his minor pieces are hanging. 29... Be1 30 Bd4 +-.

b) 28...Ra4?! is possible, but White defends easily after 29 Bd4 with the idea of Qf3 next move.

c) 28...Rb4?! looks like the most tempting option at first, but it does not lead to any advantage after 29 Rxb4 Qxb4 30 Bc3 Qxb5 (or 30...Qa4 31 Nd4) 31 Qf3 Qa4 32 Nd4 Bg1 33 Qh1 Bf2 34 Qf3 = and White's defence holds the game.

d) In the game Anish played 28...Nxc2?!, but this merely leads to an unclear position after 29 dxe4 Nxa1 30 Rb2, as the rook on b2 protects all the important squares close to his king:

d1) After 30...Qa3?, as chosen in the game, White could have played 31 Kb1 Nb3 (31...dxe4 is met by 32 Qd1 with the threat of Qd5+) 32 Qd1 with a winning position.

d2) 30...dxe4 31 Kb1 Bh4! 32 Qc1 Bf6 and the position remains very complicated.

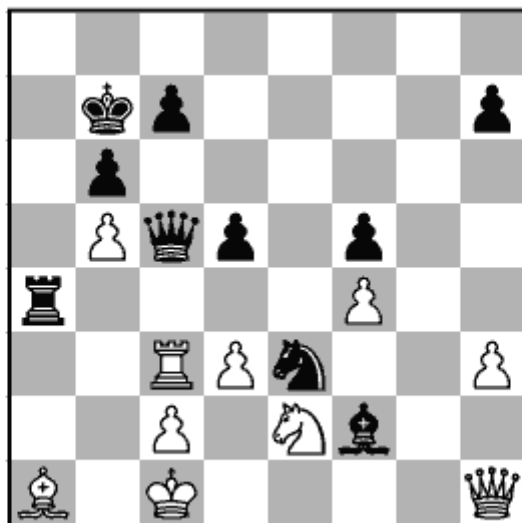
29 Rc3

Or 29 Bc3 Re8 30 Qf3 Be1 31 Qh5 Re7, when Black has a large advantage.

29...Ra4! (D)

This is the only winning move and is the point behind 28...Qc5!.

29...Qxb5? can lead to a draw in various ways, such as 30 dxe4 Qxe2 31 exd5 Kb8 32 d6 cxd6 33 Qc6 (33 Rc8+ Kxc8 34 Qc6+ also leads to a perpetual check) 33...Qf1+ 34 Kb2 Nd1+ 35 Kb3 Nxc3 36 Qxd6+ and White delivers perpetual check.



White to play

30 Bb2

White has to move his bishop, as his back rank was threatened.

30...Qxb5

Black has won a pawn and keeps an ongoing attack.

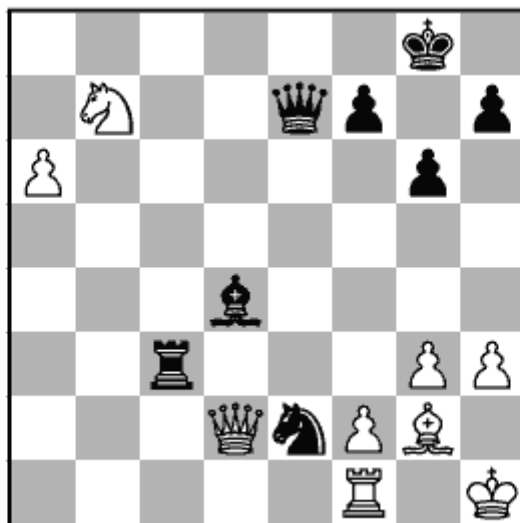
31 Rb3

31 Qf3 is another crucial move, but Black wins after 31...Qa5 32 Qxf2 (32 Kb1 Nd1 leads to a decisive attack) 32...Ra1+ 33 Bxa1 Qxa1+ 34 Kd2 Nf1+, winning the queen and the game.

31...Qc5 32 Rc3 Qa5 33 Kb1

Now both 33...c6, solidifying his king position, and 33...Rb4 offer Black very good winning chances.

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Solution 56: Black to play

Illya Nyzhnyk – Wesley So

PRO League rapid 2019

34...Rxc3!

A solid and safe alternative is 34...Qe6, threatening to capture the a-pawn, but after 35 Re1 (35 Nd8 Qxa6 36 Kh2 h5, with the idea of ...h4, also holds for Black) you have to see the move 35...Rc2!, which is not at all easy to find. After 36 Qxc2 Nxc3+ 37 Kh2 Qxe1 38 Kxc3 Qe5+ Black has enough to give perpetual check: 39 Kf3 (playing over-ambitiously with 39 f4?? is swiftly punished by 39...Qe1+, with checkmate coming) 39...Qh5+ 40 Kf4 Qh4+ =.

35 fxc3

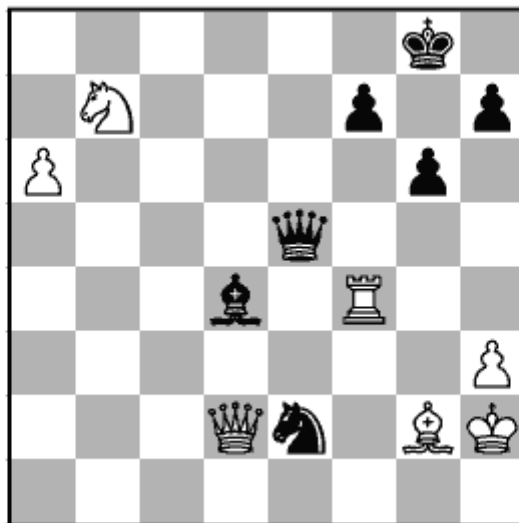
35 Re1? leads to mate after 35...Rxc3+! 36 Bxc3 Qe4+.

35...Nxc3+ 36 Kh2 Qe5!

This is the point of the rook sacrifice. Black has enough counterplay to draw, and can even aim for more if White makes a mistake.

37 Rf4 Ne2 (D)

Threatening the rook on f4.

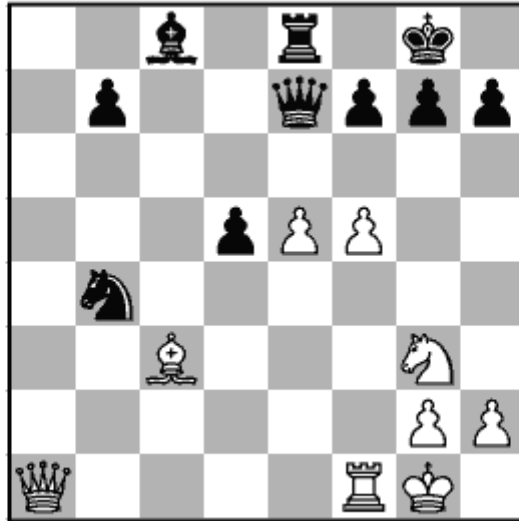


Extra Puzzle 56A: White to play

Now the question is on White. How can he keep his position together?

[answer](#)

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Solution 57: White to play

Wesley So – Hikaru Nakamura

Saint Louis blitz 2018

24 e6!

The first move is fairly obvious. White needs to open up the long diagonal for his bishop and queen. However, in the game I played too hastily: 24 f6? Qc5+ 25 Kh1 (25 Bd4 Qc4) but here Hikaru could just have played 25...g5 followed by ...h6, when he is a pawn up and his king is very safe for the moment.

24...f6

Closing the long diagonal. 24...fxe6? loses immediately due to 25 f6 gxf6 26 Bxb4 Qxb4 27 Nh5.

Now White has two winning solutions:

25 Qa5

This is the first one, just grabbing the enemy d-pawn, with an overwhelming position. The other move is 25 Nh5, simply threatening to break open Black's kingside. After 25...d4 (25...Rf8 26 Qa5 Nc6 27 Qxd5 is positionally crushing for

White) 26 Bxd4 Nc2 27 Qb2 Nxd4 28 Qxd4 b5 29 h3 White is in complete charge as the pawns on e6 and f5 suffocate the enemy position.

25 Rf4 is also not bad, planning to start an attack on the kingside by Nh5.

25...Nc2

Or 25...Nc6 26 Qxd5 Rd8 27 Qc4, when the pawns on e6 and f5 are very strong, and they take the life out of Black's passive position.

26 Rc1 d4 27 Rxc2 dxc3 28 Qxc3

White's position is absolutely dominant, and Black has no counterplay; e.g., **28...h6 29 Qc7**.

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Solution 58: Black to play

Francisco Vallejo Pons – Wesley So

Leon rapid 2018

17...e5!

This is the only move, opening up the e-file in order to create counterplay. Most Nimzo-Indian players probably know about this idea already. I actually played 17...Qf6?, which is a blunder and simply loses a piece: 18 Ne2 e5 19 Bg5 +–.

18 Bxe5

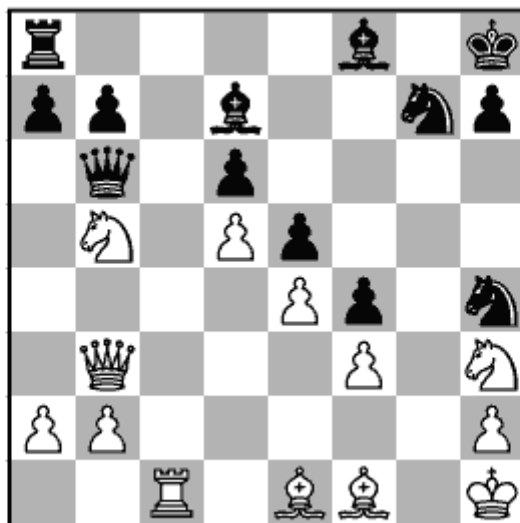
18 0-0-0 also leads to a very complex position: 18...Bxc3 19 Nf5 Bxf5 20 gxf5 Qa6 21 Qxc3 d4 22 Qd3 exf4 23 Kb1 is highly unclear.

18...Re8

18...Bxg4 is good for Black too, with the idea of 19 exd5 Rae8, regaining the bishop on e5.

19 0-0-0 Bxc3 20 bxc3 Bxg4 21 Rdg1 Rxe5 22 exd5 f5

Black has more than enough counterplay and could even be better in this position with pawn-majorities on opposing flanks.



Solution 59: Black to play

Wesley So – Alexander Grishchuk

Saint Louis rapid 2018

26...Nxf3!

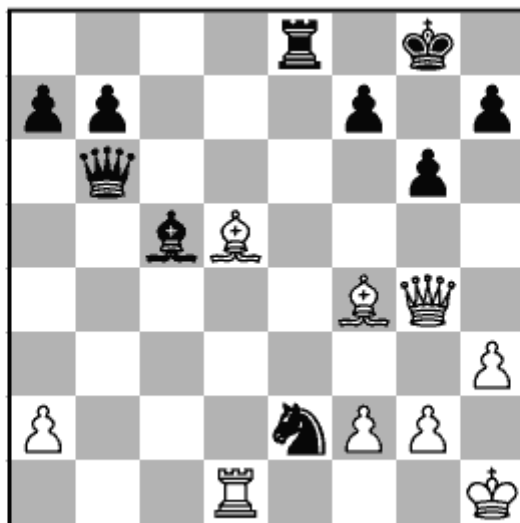
Black should go for this in order to create counterplay. In the game Grishchuk blundered with 26...Be7? 27 Bf2! Qd8 28 Bxh4 Bxh4 29 Nxd6 Qe7 30 Qxb7 +–, when White is winning tons of material.

A slow move like 26...Qd8? gives White a stable advantage after 27 Ng1, as Black's kingside attack is not going anywhere: 27...Nh5 28 Nc7 Rc8 (28...Rb8 29 Ne6 Bxe6 30 dxe6 does not change much: Black has no attack) 29 Qxb7 looks clearly in White's favour.

27 Bf2 Qa5! 28 Nc7

The position after 28 Qxf3 Bxb5 is OK for Black. White has compensation for the pawn, but no more than that. 29 Bxb5 Qxb5 30 Ng5 Qd7 =.

Now Black has a good choice: **28...Rc8** (or 28...Nd2 29 Qxb7 Rc8 30 Be1 Qa4 31 Bxd2 Qxe4+, when the position looks very chaotic) **29 Qxf3 Rxc7 30 b4 Rxc1 31 bxa5 Bb5**, with more than sufficient compensation for the queen.



Solution 60: Black to play

Pentala Harikrishna – Wesley So

Kolkata rapid 2018

31...Nc3!

This is the only way to win outright, and is by far the strongest move. The game ended 31...Nxf4? 32 Qxf4 Re7 33 Bb3 Kg7 34 Kg1 Qf6 35 Qxf6+ Kxf6 36 Kf1 b5 37 Rd8 Rc7 38 Ke2 Ke7 39 Rh8 Kf6 40 Rxb7 1/2-1/2.

32 Qd7

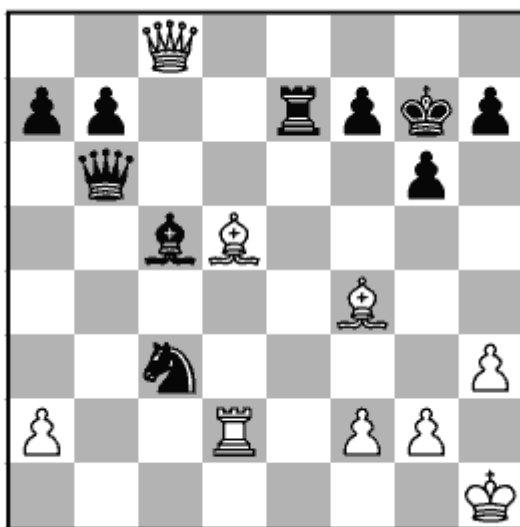
White must try this, as it gives him practical chances. After 32 Rd2 Bxf2 Black just grabs a second pawn and then proceeds to attack: 33 Kh2 Bg1+ 34 Kh1 Qb1 and Black wins.

32...Re7!

32...Rf8? 33 Bh6! is fine for White. He gets strong counterplay on the kingside.

33 Qc8+ Kg7 34 Rd2 (D)

34 Bh6+ Kxh6 35 Qf8+ Kg5 36 f4+ Kxf4 37 Qh6+ Kf5 38 g4+ Kf6 39 Rf1+ Ke5! 40 Bg2 and now any move wins, such as 40...Qb4.



Black to play

34...Ne2!?

This move is the most forceful. However, if Black wants a safer option he can play 34...Qf6, preventing the bishop sacrifice on h6. After 35 g3 (35 Qxc5 loses to 35...Re1+ 36 Kh2 Qxf4+) 35...Nxd5 36 Rxd5 b6 Black is a pawn up and has very good winning chances.

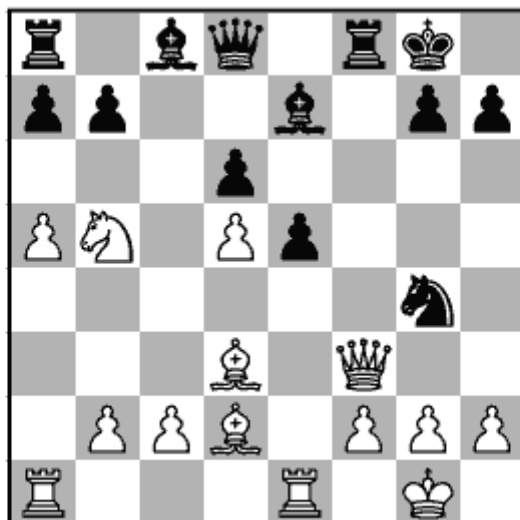
35 Bh6+

White has to try this, as he has no other moves. Black was threatening ...Qb1+ and mate on the back rank, amongst other things.

35...Kxh6 36 Qf8+ Kg5 37 h4+

The black king position looks very scary, but after the accurate **37...Kf6!** (other king moves are also winning, but much more complicated) **38 Qh8+ Kf5 39 Qc8+ Ke5** it turns out White does not have enough material to continue his attack. **40 Qh8+** (40 Bb3 Nd4 41 Qh8+ f6 is also easily winning) **40...f6 41**

Rxe2+ Kxd5 leaves Black a whole piece up and his king feels very safe in the centre.



Solution 61: White to play

Wesley So – Daniel Sadzikowski

Caleta 2019

17 Qe4!

This leads to a complex position that is clearly in White's favour. 17 Qh3?! g6 is much more complicated. After 18 f3?! Black gains counterplay with 18...Ne3, as White's queen is in serious danger.

17...Bf5

17...g6 loses to 18 f3 Nf6 19 Qc4, when White is simply a clean pawn up.

18 Qxf5!

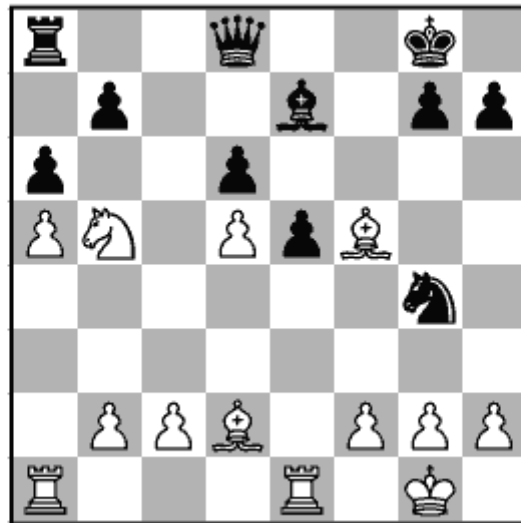
In return for the queen, White gets a rook, bishop and a pawn, which is more than enough. Add to that White's two strong bishops and it is clear that he has a large advantage.

18...Rxf5 19 Bxf5

White has full control over the light squares on the h3-c8 diagonal.

19...a6 (D)

19...Nf6 is met by 20 Be3, when White has a large positional advantage.



White to play

20 Nxd6!?

This leads to an open position with a clear plan for White to proceed. 20 Nc3 Nf6 21 Na4, followed by Nb6, also yields a large positional advantage. The knight comes to b6, and he can start pushing the queenside pawns.

20...Qxd6 21 Bxg4 Qxd5 22 Bc3 Bf6 23 Bf3

The two bishops are really powerful and in the game I was able to convert my advantage into victory quite nicely:

23...Qb5 24 Re4 +/- Rd8 25 g3 Qc5 26 Raa4 Rd7 27 Rac4 Qe7 28 Rc8+ Rd8 29 Rec4 e4 30 Bxe4 Bxc3 31 Rxc3 g6 32 Bxb7

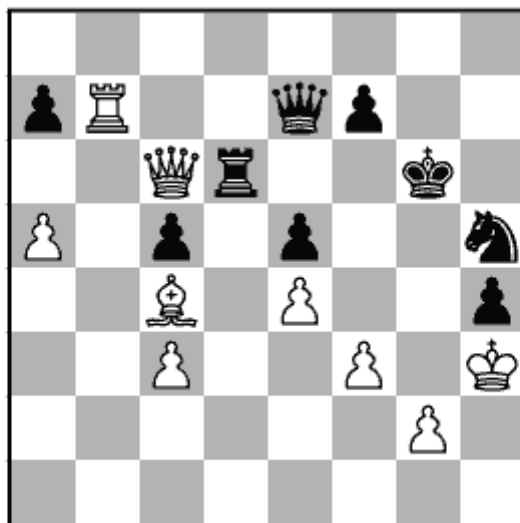
All of Black's pawns are falling.

32...Qe1+

32...Kg7 33 Rxd8 Qxd8 34 Bxa6 Qxa5 35 Bf1 also leads to an easily won position.

33 Kg2 Rxc8 34 Rxc8+ Kg7 35 c3 Qe2 36 b4 h5 37 Rc7+ Kh6 38 h4 g5 39 Bf3 Qb5 40 Rc5 1-0

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Solution 62: Black to play

David Navara – Wesley So

Saint Louis blitz 2019

35...Nf4+

Giving a check on f4 looks most natural, as the knight is very powerfully placed here. Black can also play first 35...Qd8 36 Bxf7+ Kh6 37 Qxc5 Nf4+ 38 Kh2 Rd2, when we transpose back to the main line after 35...Nf4+.

36 Kh2 Qd8!

This cool move is the key to Black's defence. His king is protected at the moment, and he is able to create just enough counterplay with ...Rd2 next move. Instead in the game, I played the hasty 36...Rxc6? 37 Rxe7 Rd6 intending to activate this rook by ...Rd2, but unfortunately it did not work after 38 Rxe5 Rd2 39 Bxf7+!. This is the powerful blow that I missed. Following 39...Kh6 40 Rf5 Nxc2 41 Kh3 +- Black soon resigned as all his pawns are falling.

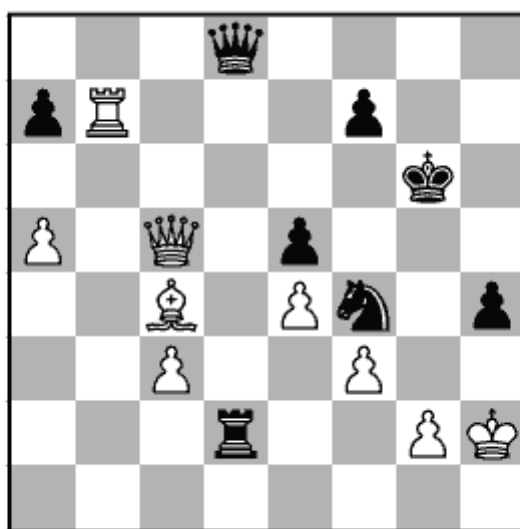
Instead 36...Qf6? fails to 37 Qc8, when both Qg8+ and Qg4+ are threatened, and after 37...Rd8 38 Qg4+ Qg5 39 Bxf7+

Kh6 40 Qxg5+ Kxg5 41 Bd5 White gets an easily won endgame.

37 Qxc5

37 Bxf7+ Kh6 38 Qe8 (38 Qxc5 Rd2 transposes to our main line after 37 Qxc5) does not look good for White. After 38... Qxe8 39 Bxe8 Rd2 Black's threats against g2 look quite dangerous.

37...Rd2 (D)



White to play

Black's counterplay on g2 is enough to hold the game.

38 Bxf7+ Kh6 39 Qc6+

White may try 39 Bd5 Rxc2+ 40 Kh1 but here Black has a variety of ways to make a draw, such as 40...Rg3, with the idea of ...Rh3+, or 40...Rd2 intending to give checks on d1 and d2.

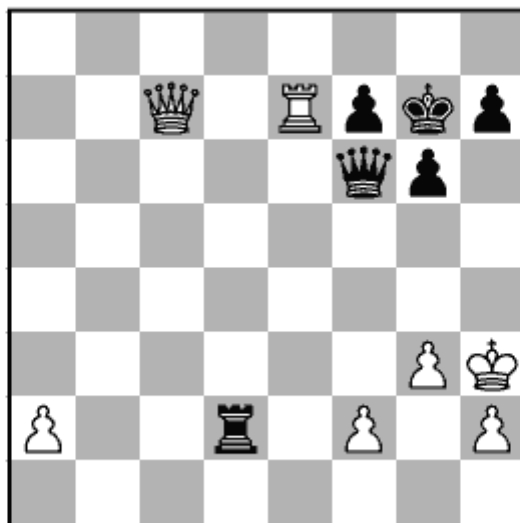
39...Rd6

This protects the black king from any attack. According to the computer, 39...Kg5!? is perfectly playable, based on 40 Bd5

Rxg2+ 41 Kh1 Qh8!, but to a human, this looks quite scary.
39...Rd6 is safer and seems more logical to me.

White has nothing better than a draw here. After **40 Qc7** (40 Qc5 Rd2 =) **40...Qxc7 41 Rxc7 Rd2** Black's play against g2 and his threat of ...h3 permit White no grounds to play for a win.

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Solution 63: Black to play

Wesley So – Maxime Vachier-Lagrave

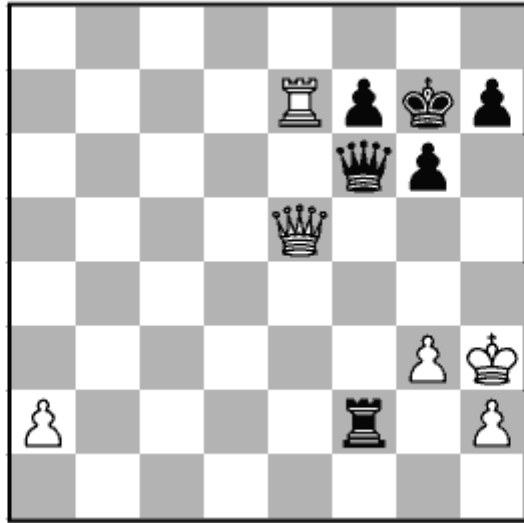
Stavanger blitz 2018

31...Rxf2!

This is the only move that gives Black any realistic winning chances. Objectively it's not enough against accurate defence by White, but it poses the most problems. If Black captures the pawn on a2 by 31...Rxa2?! White holds the game after 32 Qe5! Rxf2 33 g4!, heading to a theoretically drawn rook endgame with 3 vs 2 pawns on the same side. Of course Black can keep playing, but his chances to win are not realistic.

In the game Maxime played 31...Qf5+?! 32 g4 Qxf2 but this does not trouble White, and after the simple 33 Rxf7+ Qxf7 34 Qc3+ White makes a draw right away. 31...Qxf2?! leads to an immediate draw as well after 32 Rxf7+ Qxf7 33 Qc3+.

32 Qe5 (D)

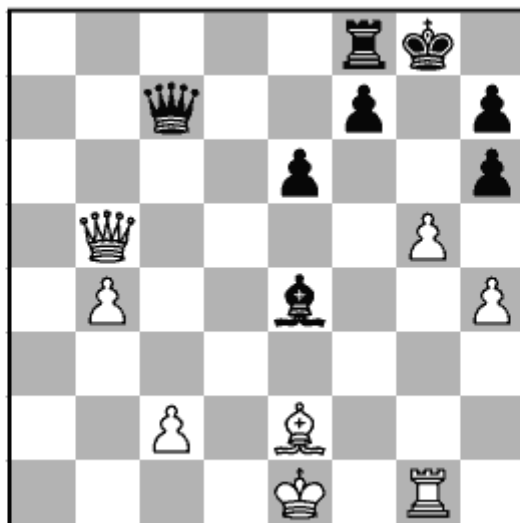


Extra Puzzle 63A: Black to play

Forcing the trade of queens. What should Black play now?

[answer](#)

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Solution 64: Black to play

Mario Villanueva – Wesley So

PRO League rapid 2020

25...Qc3+!

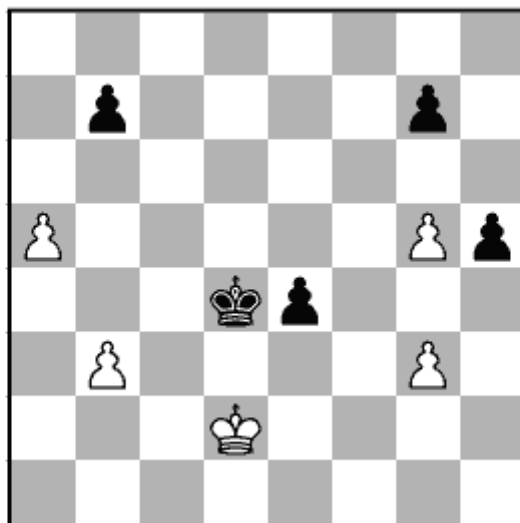
This move wins swiftly and does not give White any chances to come back. In the game I played instead 25...h5, closing the g-file. Black is also winning here, but it's not as clear-cut. 26 Qc5 Qf4 27 Qd4 (27 b5 Ra8 28 Qc3 Bf5 29 b6 Qxh4+ should be good for Black) and now instead of 27...Qxh4+?!, as I played in the game, much stronger is 27...e5! (27...Qxh4+?! 28 Qf2 Qxf2+ 29 Kxf2 Bxc2 is how our game went, but White has some drawing chances after 30 Rc1 thanks to his outside passed b-pawn) 28 Qc3 Rd8 with a decisive attack.

26 Kf2

26 Kf1 amounts to the same thing after 26...Qa1+ (26...Qh3+!?) 27 Kf2 Qd4+.

26...Qd4+ 27 Kf1

Now the winning move is **27...Ra8! 28 gxh6+ Kh8**, when the threat of ...Ra1 and mate is unstoppable and White does not have any desperate defence available to him.



Solution 65: Black to play

Viswanathan Anand – Wesley So

Kolkata rapid 2018

42...e3+

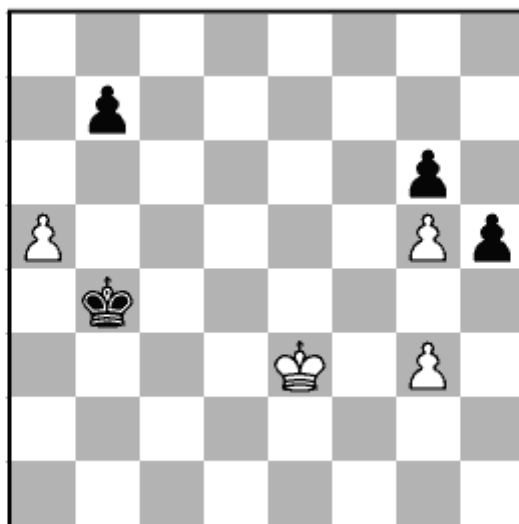
Black can also start with 42...g6! 43 Ke2 e3, transposing to the 42...e3+ main line.

43 Ke2 g6!

This little move wins a tempo and leads to a winning queen ending for Black. In the game I played 43...Kc3? 44 Kxe3 Kxb3 45 Ke4 Kb4 but compared to 43...g6!, here Black has lost a tempo because his king had to pass by b3 first before going to b4. Play continued 46 Kf5 Kxa5 47 Kg6 b5 48 Kxg7 b4 49 g6 b3 50 Kh6 b2 51 g7 b1Q 52 g8Q (White wins a pawn in this queen ending; this position is still a theoretical draw, but in the game I almost lost) 52...Qd1 53 Qg5+ Kb4 54 Qxh5 Qd6+ 55 Qg6 Qf8+ 56 Kg5 Qd8+ (56...Ka3 is probably simpler; the king needs to be in the corner of the board – b2, b1, a2 or a1 – for the position to be a theoretical draw) 57 Qf6 Qg8+ 58 Kh4 Qh7+ 59 Kg4 Qg8+ 60 Kh3 and now instead of 60...Kc5, as I played in the game, probably simpler is 60...Ka3 61 g4 Ka2, when the king is in the corner and Black

should be able to prevent White from promoting his pawn by delivering perpetual check.

44 b4 Kc4 45 Kxe3 Kxb4 (D)



White to play

Compared to what happened in my game against Vishy, my king does not have to waste a tempo by going to b3 and then to b4.

46 Ke4 Kxa5 47 Ke5 b5 48 Kf6 b4 49 Kxg6 b3

Black's pawn arrives there first.

50 Kf7 b2 51 g6 b1Q 52 g7 Qb3+ -+

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Solution 66: White to play

Wesley So – Sergey Kariakin

Saint Louis blitz 2018

22 Bxg7!

This piece sacrifice is necessary; otherwise White is simply a pawn down. I played 22 Ne5? in the game, but after 22...Nxe5 23 Qxc7 Rxc7 24 Bxe5 Rc4 all of Black's pieces are defended and I am still simply a pawn down. 22 Rfd1?! Bf8 is better for Black as all his forces are well defended and he may exploit the weaknesses on White's kingside (such as f4) at an opportune moment.

22...Kxg7

22...Nxc7? loses to 23 Nf6+ Kf8 24 Qxh7, when the attack is very strong.

23 Qb2+

Black's king will not be able to find a way to avoid perpetual check.

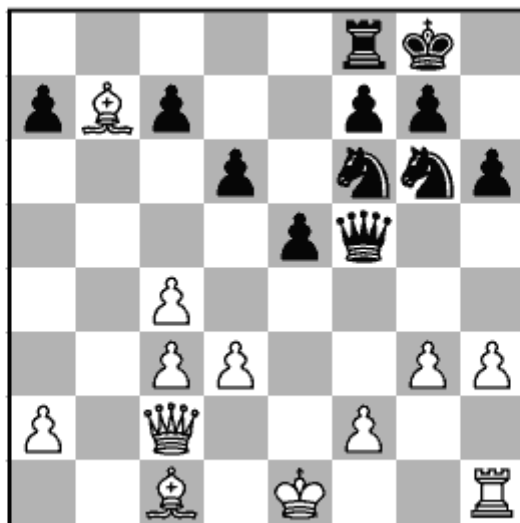
23...Kf8

23...Kg8 24 Nf6+ Kf8 25 Nxf7+ Kg8 also leads to a draw by perpetual after 26 Nf6+.

24 Qh8+ Ke7 25 Qf6+ Ke8 26 Qh8+ =

Both sides should be happy to take a draw here. Black's king cannot really go to d7 in view of a rook check on the d-file, and **26...Bf8?** would be a suicidal way to play for a win: **27 Rfe1** gives White a decisive attack.

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Solution 67: Black to play

Wesley So – Samuel Sevian

Douglas 2018

17...e4!

This is the best move. Black should take advantage of the fact that White's bishop is not safely on g2.

18 dxe4 Qe6

Also strong is 18...Qd7, when the bishop is horribly placed, and White's best bet seems to be 19 e5 Nxe5 20 Bg2 Nxc4 21 0-0, giving back two pawns just to rescue his light-squared bishop.

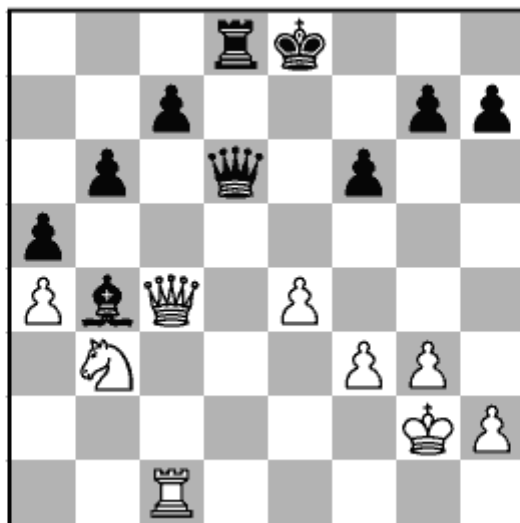
In the game Sevian played 18...Re8, which is a decent alternative as well, just not with his actual follow-up. After 19 Be3 (19 Bc6 Re7 20 Be3 Qe6 followed by ...Ne5 leaves my bishop stranded on c6) he played 19...Nxe4?! but it allowed me to equalize and the game ended in a draw after 20 0-0 c5 21 Bxc5! Nh4 22 gxh4 dxc5 23 Re1 Qg6+ 24 Kh2 Qd6+ 25 Kg2 Qg6+ =. Instead 19...Qd7! leaves my bishop on b7 in big trouble, and it can hardly be rescued. Black is much better: 20 Kf1 (sad but forced; White has nothing better: 20 c5 c6 21 Ba6

Nxe4 22 cxd6 Nxf3 -+) and now both 20...Rb8 21 Ba6 Qe6 -/+ and 20...c6 21 Ba6 Nxe4 22 Kg2 Nc5 23 Bxc5 dxc5 -/+ are greatly in Black's favour.

19 Bd5 Qd7

Black is clearly better.

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Solution 68: Black to play

Wesley So – Leinier Dominguez

USA Ch, Saint Louis 2019

32...c5!

The simple move was underestimated by both my opponent and myself. Now the c-file is closed, and the knight on b3 has no good squares it can go to.

32...Rd7 is sufficient for a large advantage too, but not winning. After 33 Qg8+ Qf8 34 Qe6+ Kd8 35 Qc6 Ke7 Black is well on the way to consolidating his pawn advantage, but White still has some tricks.

32...Kf8? is what Leinier played, but it allowed me to recover and after 33 Qxc7 Qxc7 34 Rxc7 Rd3 35 Nc1 Rd1?! (35... Re3! was the last chance for Black to pose some problems) 36 Ne2 Rd2 37 Kf1 Rd1+ 38 Kg2 = White equalized and we soon agreed to a draw.

33 Qg8+ Kd7

And definitely not 33...Qf8? 34 Qe6+, when White wins the b6-pawn.

34 Qxg7+ Kc6

It turns out that the black king is very safe on c6, while my attack has run out of steam.

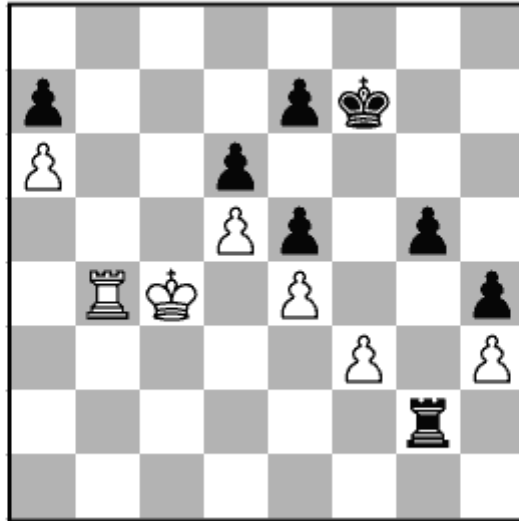
35 Qf7

35 Qxh7 is met by 35...Qe6 36 Rb1 Qc4, when White can almost resign due to the threat of ...Qc2+.

35...Rd7 36 Qg8 Kb7 37 Qc4 Qd3 –+

Black's position is easily winning, thanks to the horribly placed knight on b3.

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Solution 69: White to play

Vladimir Fedoseev – Wesley So

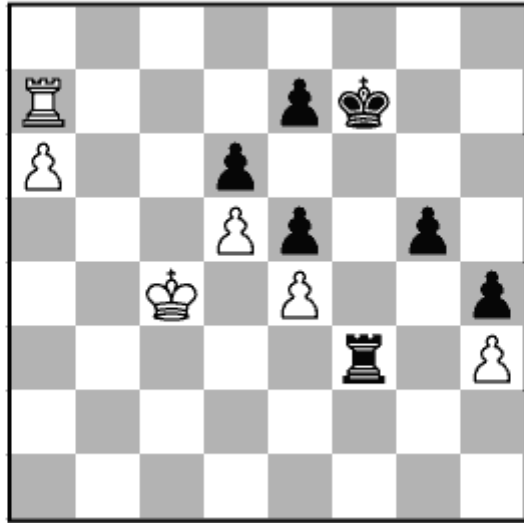
World Fischer Random, Høvikodden 2019

39 Rb7

The first move is quite obvious. White needs to get his passed pawn going.

39...Rg3 40 Rxa7 Rxf3 (D)

40...Rxf3? is a blunder due to 41 Rxe7+ followed by a7, when White promotes his pawn.

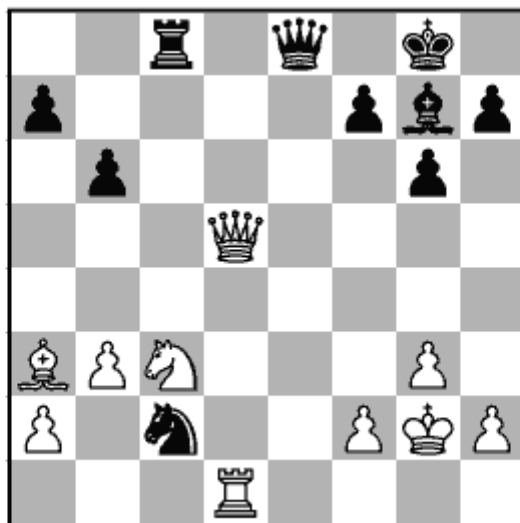


Extra Puzzle 69A: White to play

And now what would you play as White?

[answer](#)

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Solution 70: White to play

Vladimir Kramnik – Wesley So

Paris rapid 2018

22 Ne4!

This move holds comfortably for White. In the game Kramnik erred and went the other way with 22 Nb5?, but this allowed 22...Qe2!, when Black suddenly had a very strong initiative. 23 Bc1? (23 Kg1 is much more stubborn, but White is just a pawn down after 23...Nxa3 24 Nxa3 Qxa2 25 Nb5 Bf8) 23...Bf8! –+ and Black is winning due to the threat of ...Rc5 or ...Ne1+.

22...Nxa3 23 Nd6 Qf8 24 Nxc8 Qxc8

Now the easiest defence is 25 Qd7, when the position is fairly balanced, and the most likely result is a draw, for example after 25...Qc2 26 Re1 Bf8 27 Re8 Qc5 28 Rc8, when White has enough counterplay. The knight on a3 is misplaced and does not participate to the defence of his kingside.

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Solution 71: White to play

Shakhriyar Mamedyarov – Wesley So

Saint Louis blitz 2018

18 dxc5!

This is the start of a nice combination, leading to a superior endgame for White. White could play something quieter like 18 h3 Bxf3 19 Bxf3 Bxd4 but here Black has good chances to hold. After 20 Bxd4 cxd4 21 Qxd4 Qxd4 22 Rxd4 Na6 23 Rd6 Rb8 White is only a little better.

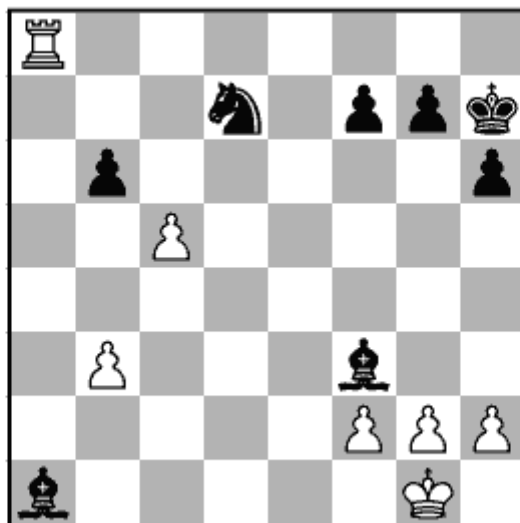
18...Bxb2 19 Rxd8 Bxa1 20 Bh7+!

This is the point behind 18 dxc5!. White needed to see this beforehand. If you did so, and concluded White was better, then you have basically solved the puzzle. But the rest of the game proved interesting and instructive:

20...Kxh7 21 Rxf8 Nd7 22 Ra8!

Gaining a tempo by attacking the a1-bishop.

22...Bxf3 (D)



White to play

23 gxf3?!

This is the only real mistake that Shakh made in this game. Stronger is 23 Rxa1! Be4 24 f3 Bf5 25 c6 Nf6 26 Rd1 with a clear endgame advantage.

23...Be5!

Now Black should be able to hold. His defence is surprisingly hard to break.

24 Re8

24 c6 Nb8 is perhaps what he missed.

24...Bf4 25 Re4 Bb8 26 Re8 Bf4 27 c6!? Ne5?

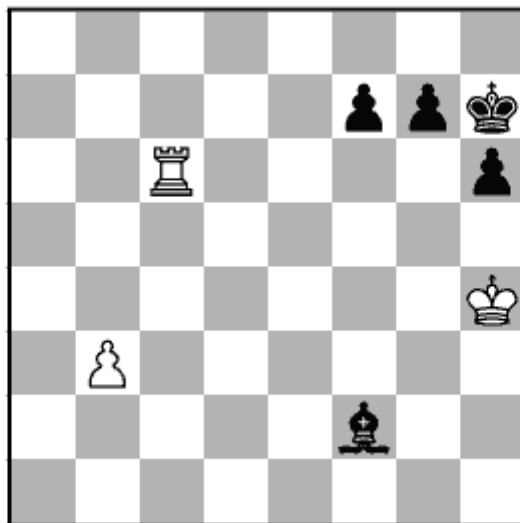
27...Nb8! would have solved all of my problems. 28 Re4 (28 Rc8? Kg6) 28...Bd6 =.

28 c7 Nxf3+ 29 Kg2 Nh4+ 30 Kh3 Bxc7 31 Rc8!

A very accurate move, which forces the win of the b6-pawn. Shakh now converted his advantage into victory more or less

perfectly (with just one hiccup that only a computer would spot). We continued:

31...Bd6 32 Kxh4 Bxh2 33 Rc6 Be5 34 Rxb6 Bd4 35 Rc6 Bxf2+ (D)



White to play

36 Kh3?

After I submitted these puzzles for editing, Graham Burgess checked the lines and found the more accurate 36 Kg4!!!. The king prevents the enemy pawns from advancing too quickly, and White wins, as the engines and their tablebases prove.

36...Be1 37 Rc4 g6 38 b4 h5+ 39 Kf3! (the white king controls a lot of squares from here) 39...h4 (39...g5 40 b5 g4+ 41 Kf4 also wins handily for White) 40 b5 g5 41 b6! (41 Kg4? Kg6 42 Rc6+ f6 =) 41...Kg6 (41...Bg3 is met by 42 Rg4! threatening Rxc3 and Rxc5) and now:

a) 42 b7? Bg3 = is a draw as Black sets up his fortress: 43 Rc8 (43 Rc6+ f6) 43...f5 44 b8Q (44 Rg8+ Kf6) 44...Bxb8 45 Rxb8 Kf7 =.

b) 42 Rc8! is correct. Black loses as he is unable to create his ideal fortress:

b1) 42...Bg3 43 Rg8+! Kf5 (43...Kh6 44 Kg4) 44 b7 Bf4 45 b8Q g4+ 46 Kf2 Bxb8 47 Rxb8 Kg5 48 Ke3 when White's king gets to f4.

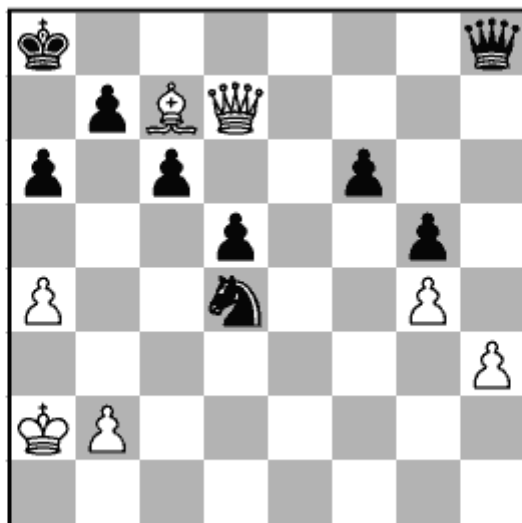
b2) 42...f5 43 Rc6+! Kh5 (43...Kg7 44 Rc7+ Kg6 45 b7) 44 Rf6! +-; e.g., 44...Ba5 (44...g4+ 45 Kf4) 45 b7 Bc7 46 Rxf5 h3 47 Rf8 g4+ 48 Ke2! h2 49 b8Q Bxb8 50 Rxb8.

36...Be1 37 Rc4 Kg6?

Shockingly the computer shows that Black still had a way to save the game here. According to the tablebase the position is a draw after 37...g5 38 b4 h5 39 b5 Kg6 40 b6 h4! 41 b7 Bg3 42 Rc8 f5 43 b8Q Bxb8 44 Rxb8 Kg7! =. It's very hard to believe, but the computer claims that this is an endgame fortress! Apparently the rook cannot make progress against Black's three connected passed pawns. I can find no way for White to win; for example: 45 Kg2 g4 46 Rb6 Kf7 47 Kf2 h3! (the three pawns are now sufficiently advanced to prevent White from winning any of them) 48 Kg3 Kg7 49 Kf4 Kf7 50 Rh6 Kg7 51 Rh5 Kg6 52 Rg5+ Kh6! 53 Rg8 Kh7 54 Ra8 and now 54...Kg6? loses to 55 Rf8 +-, but 54...Kg7! = is a draw! Don't ask me why!

38 b4 Kf5 39 b5 Bf2 40 Kg2 Ba7 41 Rc7 Bd4 42 Rc6 Kg4 43 Rc4 1-0

[back](#)



Solution 72: White to play

Le Quang Liem – Wesley So

Bucharest rapid 2019

46 h4!

A very powerful move. White closes the h-file and prevents any counterplay by the black queen. Meanwhile he is threatening to play Bd8.

In the game Liem blundered with 46 Bd8?, allowing an immediate draw after 46...Qxh3 47 Qc8+ Ka7 48 a5 Qb3+ 49 Kb1 Qd3+ 50 Ka2 Qc4+ 51 Kb1 = and our game ended in perpetual check.

46 Bb6? is not enough either. Black can reply 46...c5, gaining the stable square on c6 for his knight. 47 Bxc5 Nc6 48 Qxd5 Qe8 =.

46...c5

46...gxh4 loses to 47 Bd8! Ka7 48 Qc8 with the decisive threats of Bb6+ or a5 followed by Bb6#.

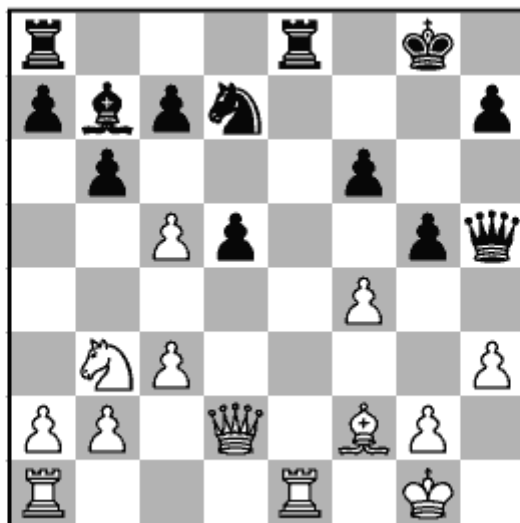
47 h5!

This passed h-pawn turns out to be the decisive factor.

47...Nc6 48 h6

White is threatening to play h7, when the pawn is unstoppable. Taking on h6 does not work as **48...Qxh6 49 Qc8+ Ka7 50 a5** leads to a quick checkmate: **50...Nxa5 (50...Nb4+ 51 Ka3 Qh3+ 52 Ka4) 51 Qb8#**.

[back](#)



Solution 73: White to play

Wesley So – Shakhriyar Mamedyarov

Zagreb 2019

20 c6!

I like this move, even though it is far from forced. It gives Black concrete problems to solve, and offers him the best chances to go wrong. White sacrifices a pawn to gain a tempo to bring his knight to b5.

A good alternative is 20 Qd4, preparing to harass Black's queenside with Qa4. This is White's second best move and is a fair solution to the exercise as well. Black's best bet is to sacrifice a pawn to open the long diagonal with 20...gxf4 21 Qxf4 d4, although White is better after 22 c6 Bxc6 23 Nxd4.

Exchanging rooks on the e-file brings nothing: after 20 Rxe8+?! Rxe8 21 Re1 h6 Black has good chances to hold, thanks to the opposite-coloured bishops.

20...Bxc6 21 Nd4 Bb7 22 Nb5

The threat to the c7- and a7-pawns is unpleasant to meet.

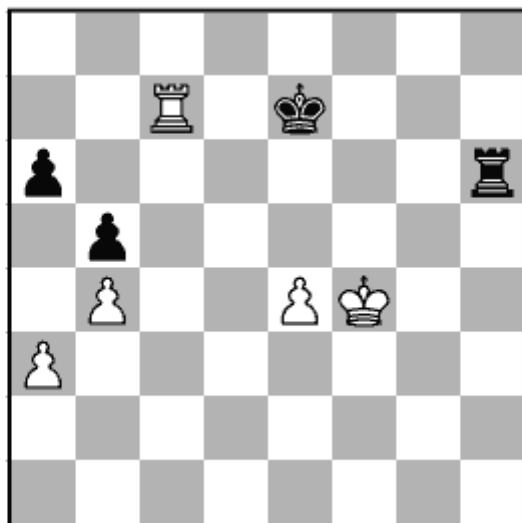
22...Rac8

This defends most stubbornly. In the game Shakh went for 22...Rxe1+ 23 Rxe1 Re8 but White is just winning after 24 Nxc7 Rxe1+ 25 Qxe1 d4 (or 25...gxf4 26 Qe7 Qf7 27 Qd8+ Nf8 28 Ne8) 26 Qe7 Qf7 27 Qd8+ Nf8 28 Bxd4 gxf4 29 Ne8 +-.

23 Nxa7 Rcd8 24 Nb5 Rc8 25 a4

White has a large advantage, as the enemy position has too many weaknesses. 25 fxg5 is a good option too.

[back](#)



Solution 74: Black to play

Wesley So – Baskaran Adhiban

Wijk aan Zee 2018

71...Kd6!

Right! The king has to defend very actively in the rook endgame. This is Black's only chance.

Passive defence would not work. In the game Adhiban played 71...Kd8? 72 Ra7 but then he had no counterplay. 72...Kc8 73 e5 Kb8 74 Rd7 a5 (74...Kc8 loses to 75 Rd3 as the king is cut off along the d-file) 75 bxa5 Ra6 76 Rd5 Rxa5 77 e6 Kc7 78 e7 Ra8 79 Kf5 Kc6 80 Rd8 and Adhiban resigned.

72 Ra7

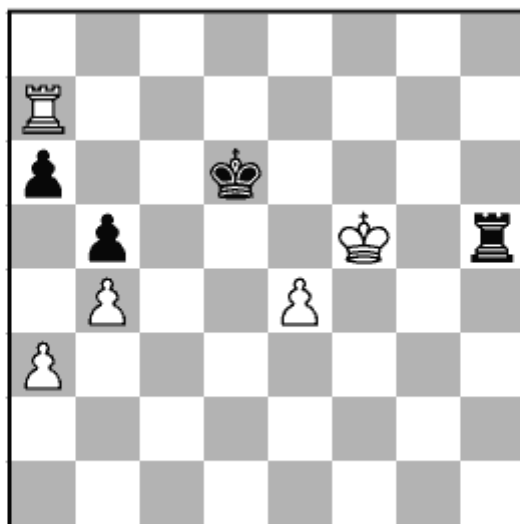
72 Rc3 is not enough to win. After 72...Rh4+ 73 Ke3 Rh1 the enemy rook is very active, giving checks from behind and from the side.

72...Rh4+!

Checking from the side gives Black enough counterplay to draw. 72...Rf6+? loses due to 73 Ke3 Ke5 74 Re7+ Kd6 75

e5+! Kxe7 76 exf6+ Kxf6 77 Kd4 Ke6 78 Kc5, when the king and pawn ending is hopeless for Black.

73 Kf5 Rh5+ (D)



White to play

This forces the white king away from control over the e5-square.

74 Kg4

Or 74 Kf6 Rh6+ 75 Kg5 Rh3.

74...Rh8!

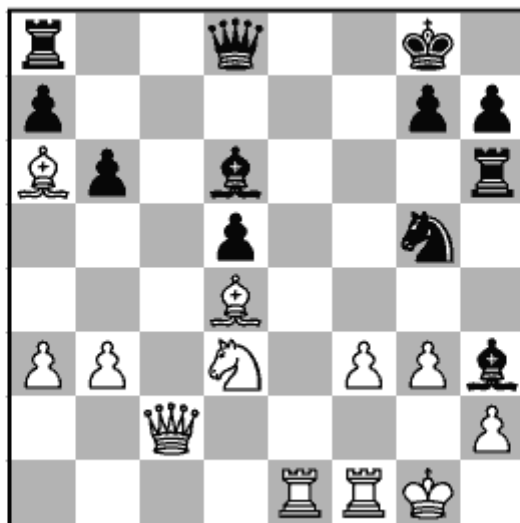
Again this is the only defence, the reasoning of which we'll see later. 74...Rh1? 75 Rxa6+ Ke5 76 Ra5 Kxe4 77 Rxb5 leads to a technically won rook and pawn endgame.

75 Rxa6+ Ke5 76 Ra5 Kxe4 77 Rxb5 Ra8!

Black saves the draw. This is the point behind 74...Rh8!.

White is unable to save his a-pawn as **78 Ra5 Rxa5 79 bxa5 Kd5** = leaves the black king just in time to go after the doubled a-pawns.

A very instructive endgame example.



Solution 75: White to play

Wesley So – Aleksandr Lenderman

USA Ch, Saint Louis 2018

27 Bb7!

This active move is the only way to hold the balance. The arising complications work just fine for White. 27 Rf2? loses right away due to 27...Bc8 threatening ...Nh3+ and my bishop on a6. 27 Be3? does not give White enough compensation for the exchange after 27...Bxf1 28 Rxf1 Kh8 – Black is ahead on material.

27...Bxf1 28 Kxf1!

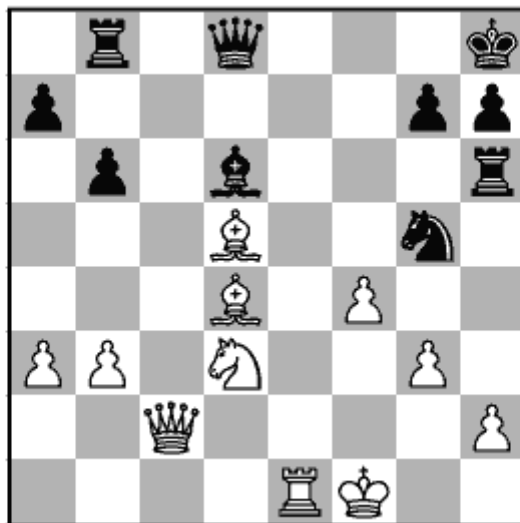
28 Rxf1? is worse, as White no longer has control over the e-file, and after 28...Rb8 29 Bxd5+ Kh8 30 f4 fails due to 30...Bc5 and there is a check on h3 coming.

28...Rb8

Alex plays solidly and logically. Black may try 28...Bxg3!? 29 hxg3 Nxf3, starting a dangerous attack on the white king, and now you have to find 30 Qc3! with a very complicated position where White seems to be holding. For example: 30...

Nxe1 (30...Rb8 31 Re8+! is the point behind 30 Qc3!: 31... Qxe8 32 Bxd5+ Re6 33 Nf4 with counterplay) 31 Nf4! is unclear.

29 Bxd5+ Kh8 30 f4 (D)



Black to play

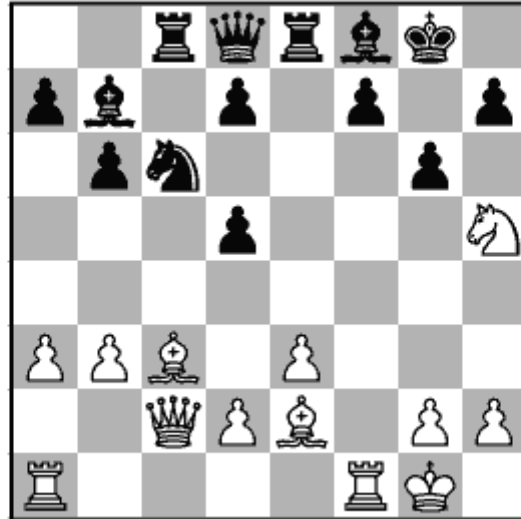
30...Bc5

This holds the game comfortably for Black. 30...Bxa3!? is also possible, but it is unnecessary to complicate the game further.

31 fxg5 Bxd4 32 gxh6 Qxd5 33 hxg7+ Bxg7 34 Nf2 Rf8

Black's compensation for the pawn is enough to hold the balance. Our game continued **35 Re4 Bd4** (35...Qd6!?) **36 Rf4 Rxf4 37 gxf4** and now instead of 37...a5, as he played in the game, simpler is **37...Qf7**, when Black should not have too many problems holding the draw. After **38 Qc8+ Kg7 39 Qg4+ Kf8 40 Qf3 Bxf2 41 Kxf2 Qc7** White is a pawn up, but his king is unable to find a safe shelter from the coming checks.

25 Complex Cases



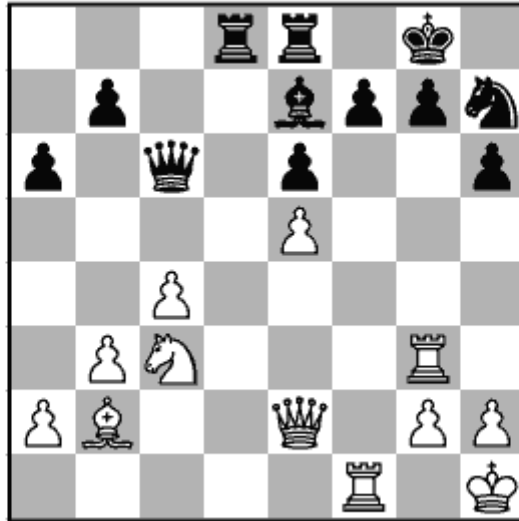
Puzzle 76: Black to play

Diego Flores – Wesley So

PRO League rapid 2020

White has just played 20 Nh5, planning to start a powerful attack on the kingside using the pressure along the f-file. How are you able to defend as Black? Do you have a way to keep an advantage?

[answer](#)



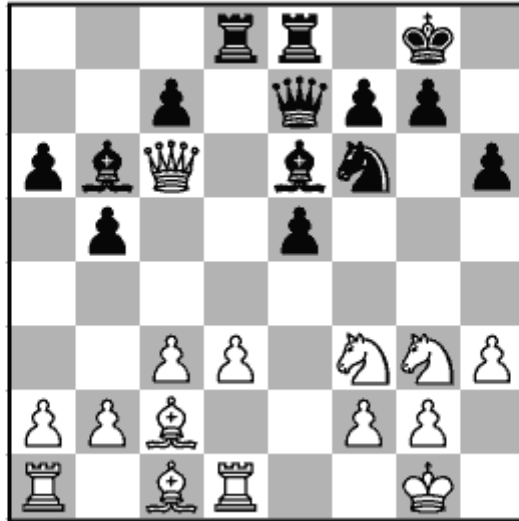
Puzzle 77: White to play

Wesley So – Anton Korobov

Bucharest rapid 2019

Black's position looks awful. White has strong pressure on the f7- and g7-pawns, and it seems unlikely that Black can defend all his weaknesses. But is there a knockout blow? How can you win the game by force from this position?

[answer](#)



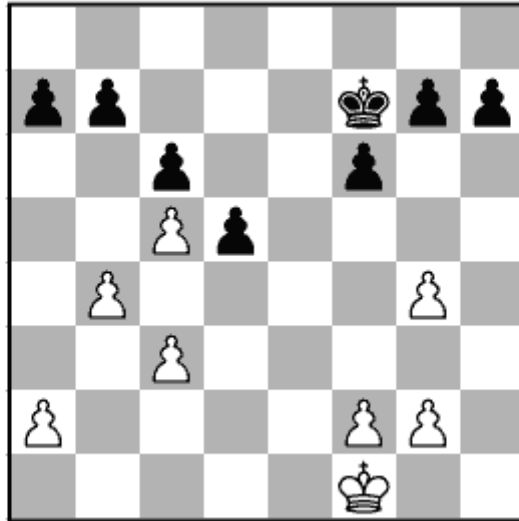
Puzzle 78: White to play

Wesley So – Pentala Harikrishna

FIDE Grand Prix, Riga 2019

The white queen has just grabbed a knight on c6, but now has no easy way to escape. How can you help her get out, or else gain enough pieces to compensate for the queen later?

[answer](#)



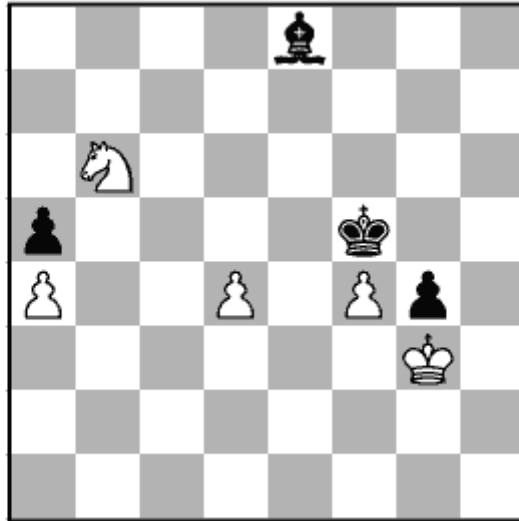
Puzzle 79: Black to play

Alexander Grishchuk – Wesley So

Leuven rapid 2018

Black is better in this tricky king and pawn ending. His king is closer to the action and White has two sets of doubled pawns. Can you find a winning line for Black?

[answer](#)



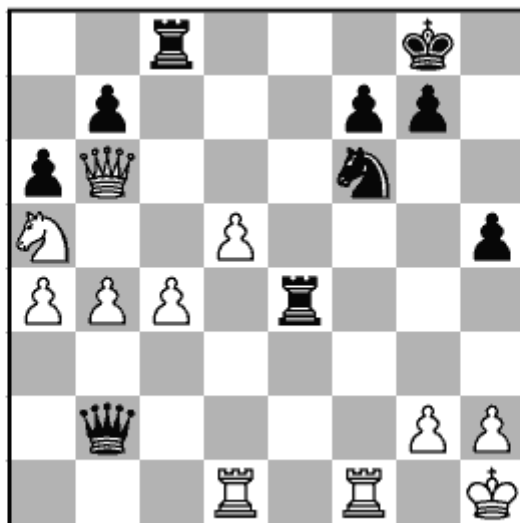
Puzzle 80: Black to play

Maxime Vachier-Lagrave – Wesley So

Abidjan blitz 2019

Black is a pawn down, and the knight is solidly protecting his guy on a4. Is there a way for Black to save the draw?

[answer](#)



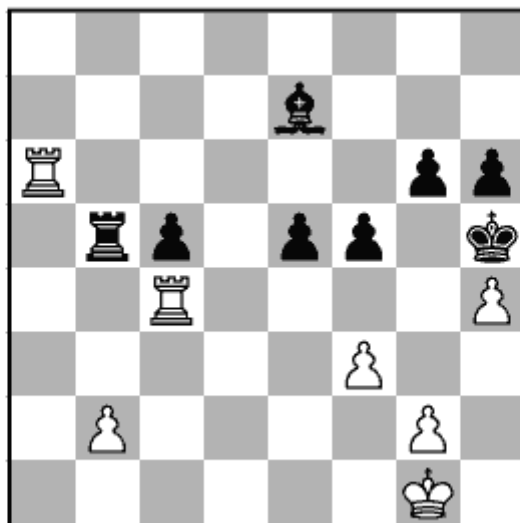
Puzzle 81: Black to play

Wesley So – Roberto Sanchez Alvarez

Batumi Olympiad 2018

This game was played in the first round of the Olympiad. My opponent is a strong IM from Panama, and so far he's played the game very well. I had won a pawn, but he has some initiative towards my king, and my pieces are far away on the other side of the board. What would you play as Black here? Objectively your initiative should be at least sufficient for equality.

[answer](#)



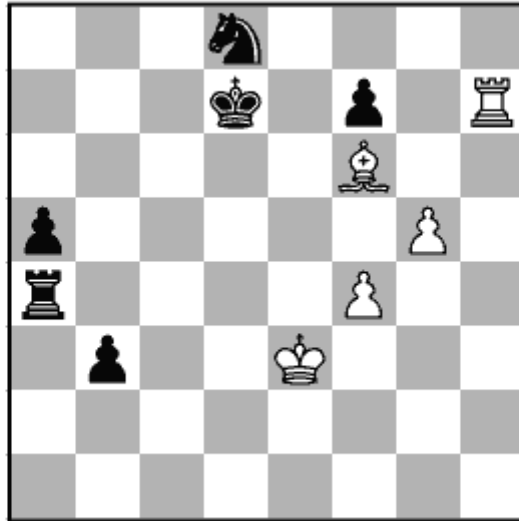
Puzzle 82: White to play

Wesley So – Surya Shekhar Ganguly

FIDE Grand Swiss, Douglas 2019

This game was played in the Grand Swiss, a qualifying event for the Candidates. My opponent is a very strong grandmaster from India who in the past has worked as Vishy Anand's researcher. He defended well to reach this endgame, but with his last move, 36...Be7, he gave me renewed hopes. What should White play to get winning chances?

[answer](#)



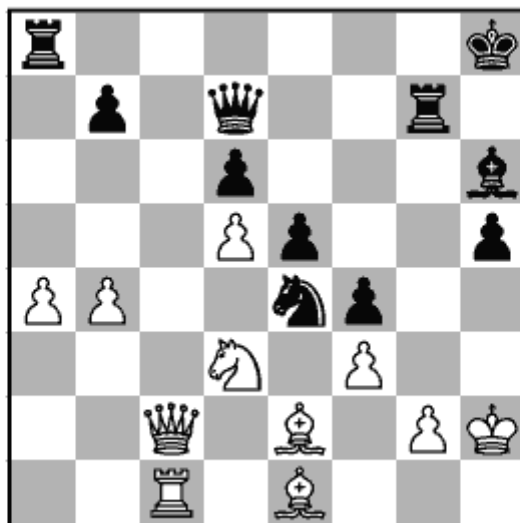
Puzzle 83: Black to play

Hikaru Nakamura – Wesley So

PRO League rapid 2020

In this complicated ending, Black is a pawn up and his pawns are advanced, but the enemy bishop is controlling a lot of squares. How should you continue in order to keep good winning chances if you're Black here?

[answer](#)



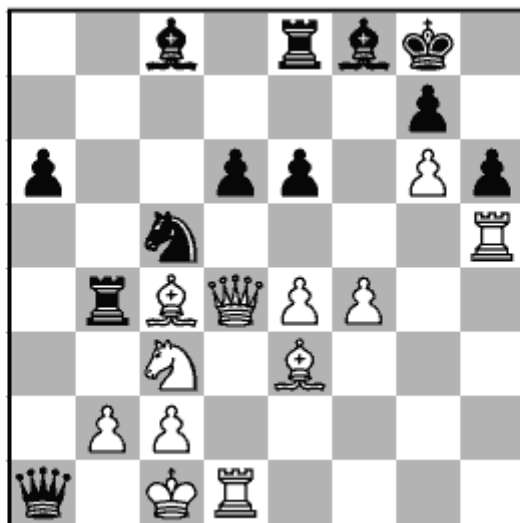
Puzzle 84: White to play

Wesley So – Jan-Krzysztof Duda

chess.com blitz 2018

This complicated position arose from the King's Indian. Can White safely take the knight on e4? If not, what would you play instead?

[answer](#)



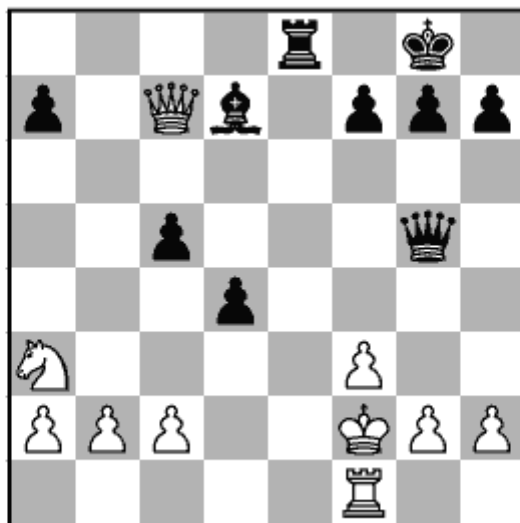
Puzzle 85: White to play

Wesley So – Nils Grandelius

Caleta 2019

This position arose from a very complicated opening: the Najdorf Sicilian. Both sides are attacking on opposite flanks, and now White has a tricky choice. Should he move his king or block with his knight on b1? Try to analyse deeper than just one or two moves. With perfect play White should be close to winning here objectively.

[answer](#)



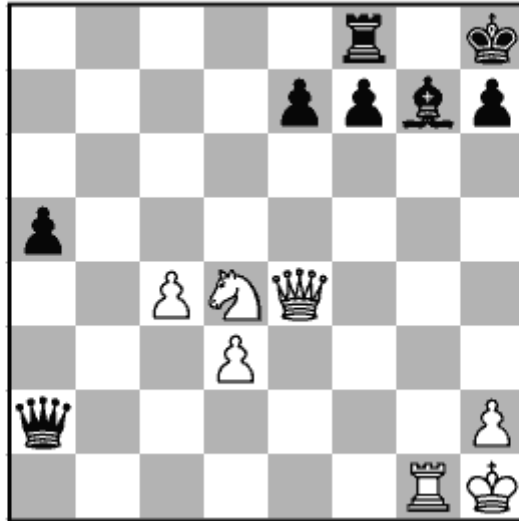
Puzzle 86: Black to play

Magnus Carlsen – Wesley So

Stavanger blitz 2019

Black has the initiative, and the enemy king is highly vulnerable, but how does Black win in the most efficient manner?

[answer](#)



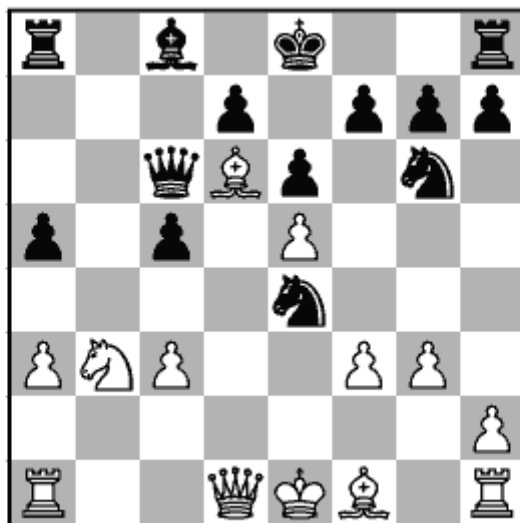
Puzzle 87: Black to play

Alexander Grishchuk – Wesley So

Saint Louis 2018

This complicated position arose in the 2018 Sinquefeld Cup. Black is better; I have an extra pawn. My king is a bit unsafe, and White has counterplay along the g-file and also with his pesky knight. Imagine you are playing Black here. How can you consolidate your advantage? What would you play?

[answer](#)



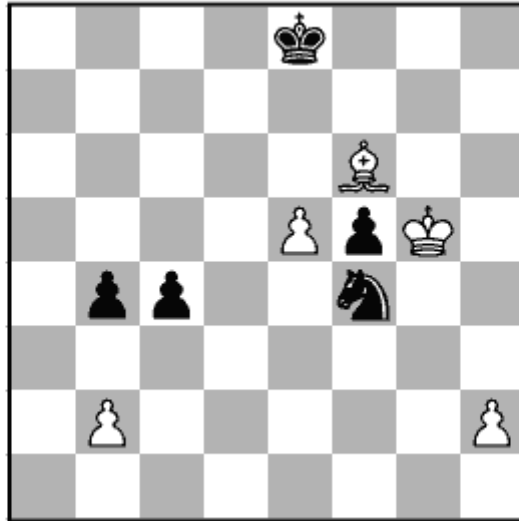
Puzzle 88: White to play

Wesley So – David Navara

Saint Louis blitz 2019

This game arose from a theoretical duel in a highly fashionable line of the English Opening. White has sacrificed a pawn in the opening in return for getting his bishop to the powerful outpost on d6. How would you continue and what do you think is the objective assessment of the position?

[answer](#)



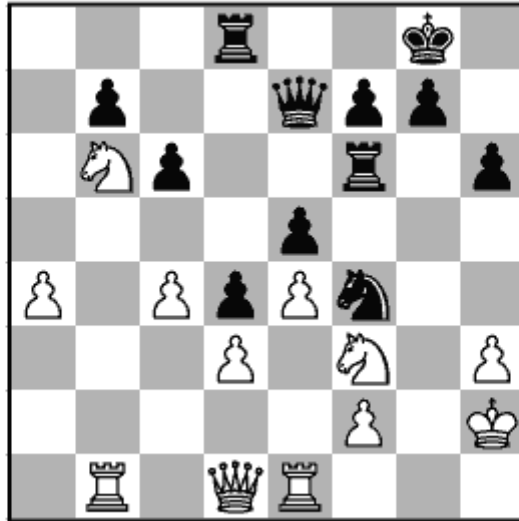
Puzzle 89: White to play

Wesley So – Leinier Dominguez

Saint Louis rapid 2018

I had managed to make a mess out of this game and Leinier took advantage by forcing me to make a difficult decision. White only has one way to save the game in this complicated ending. Can you find it?

[answer](#)



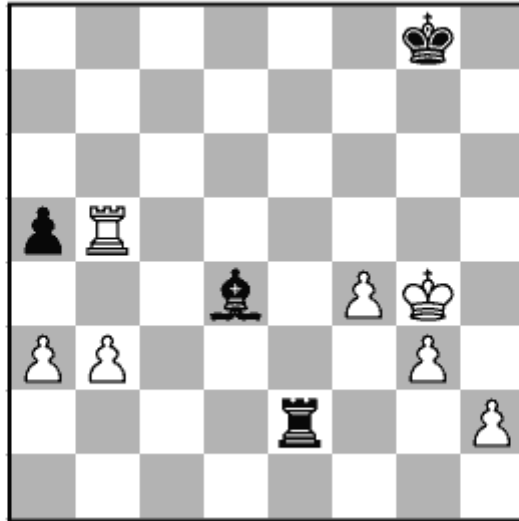
Puzzle 90: Black to play

Wesley So – Pentala Harikrishna

FIDE Grand Prix, Riga 2019

Black sacrificed a piece earlier, in order to start an attack and install his knight on the wonderful outpost on f4. Does Black have enough compensation for the piece? If so, how should you continue?

[answer](#)



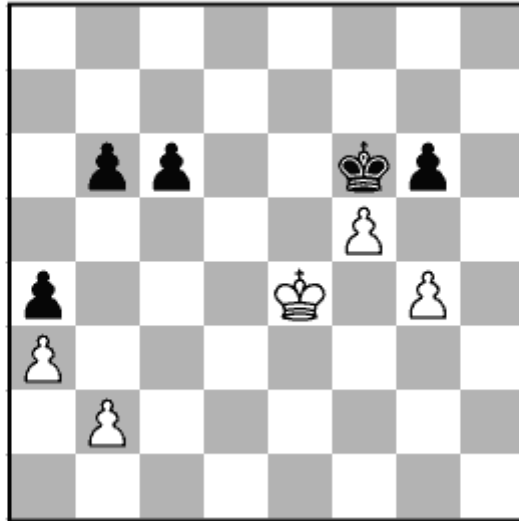
Puzzle 91: Black to play

Magnus Carlsen – Wesley So

Wijk aan Zee 2018

In this game I was struggling for a long time against an energized and in-form Magnus Carlsen. Thanks to dogged resistance I managed to escape into a tenable but still difficult endgame. White has four pawns for the bishop, and that seems a lot. Can Black still somehow hold this ending?

[answer](#)



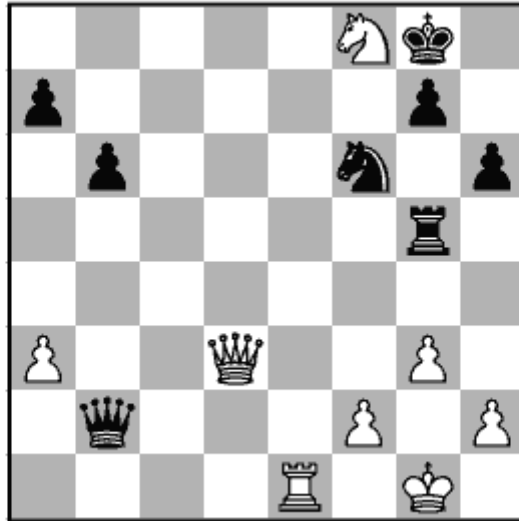
Puzzle 92: Black to play

Hikaru Nakamura – Wesley So

chess.com rapid 2018

White has just played 46 f5, hoping to eliminate all the kingside pawns and win on the queenside, as his king can come over there much faster. Is this king and pawn ending winning for White, or does Black have any drawing chances? What would you play? Try to calculate the ending all the way to the end, if possible.

[answer](#)



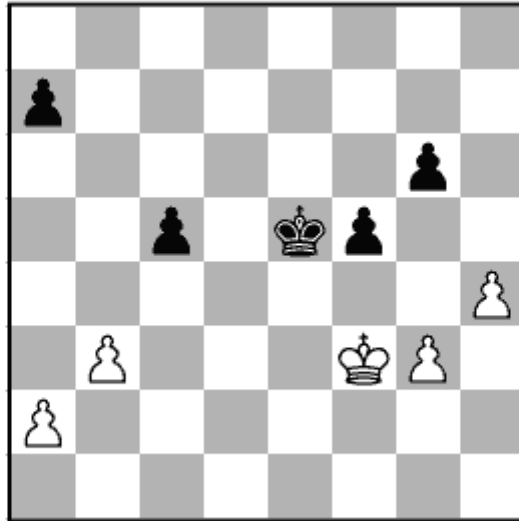
Puzzle 93: White to play

Hikaru Nakamura – Wesley So

Kolkata blitz 2019

This game is from the Grand Chess Tour blitz section in India. I had a desperate position the entire middlegame, but this being speed chess I aimed to make the most of my chances. In this position, White should be winning but things remain quite tricky and in the game Hikaru failed to win it. How would you continue as White?

[answer](#)



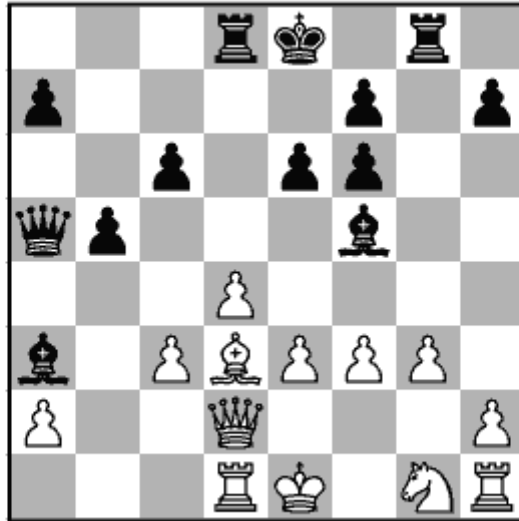
Puzzle 94: Black to play

Wesley So – Hikaru Nakamura

Zagreb 2019

This position arose in the 2019 Grand Chess Tour leg in Croatia. Do not get fooled by the simple nature of this king and pawn ending; this exercise is very difficult! I made a mistake a few moves earlier and gave Hikaru a chance to come back into the game. Here Black has a way to draw, but there is only one solution. Try to calculate deeply and see if you can save this position.

[answer](#)



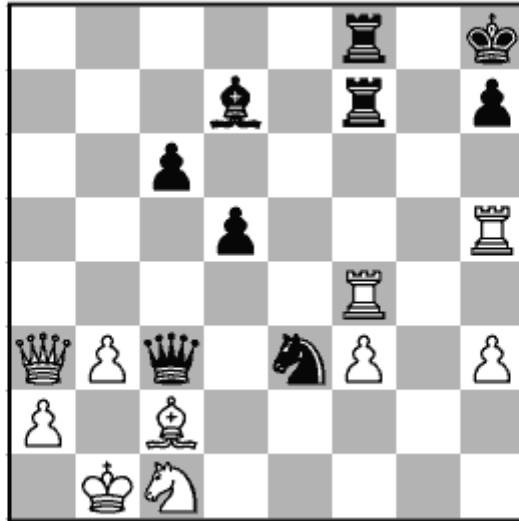
Puzzle 96: Black to play

Wesley So – Rameshbabu Pragganandhaa

Leon rapid 2018

This game was played in the third game of my rapid match with the young prodigy Prag. At this point the score was tied 1-1, and I was eager to seize the initiative in the match. However, Prag was playing wonderfully here. What should Black play?

[answer](#)



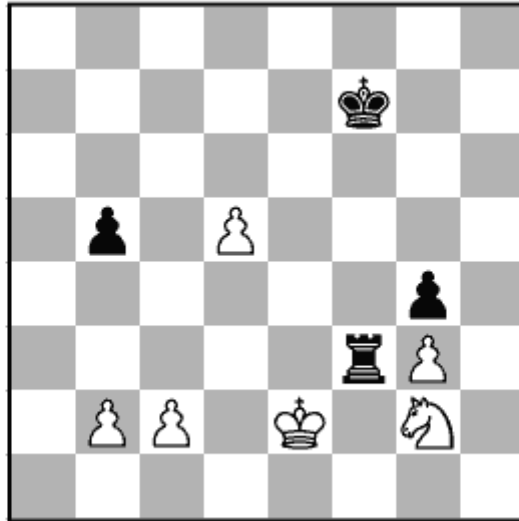
Puzzle 97: White to play

Wesley So – Aleksandr Lenderman

USA Ch, Saint Louis 2019

This complicated position arose in the 2019 US Championship. Both sides are trying to attack each other's king. Which attack is stronger? Does White have a decisive blow in this position? Try to calculate deeply and find the combination for White.

[answer](#)



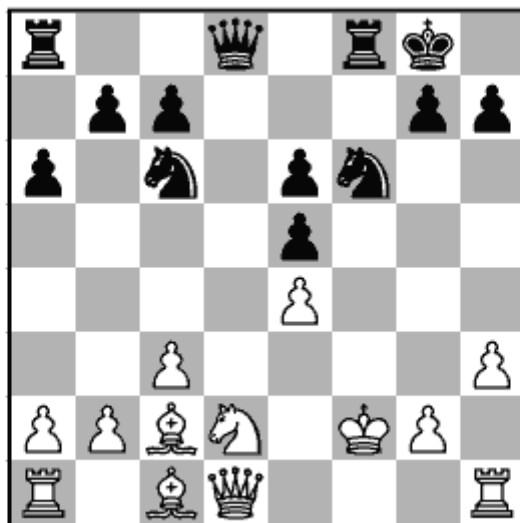
Puzzle 98: White to play

Wesley So – Fabiano Caruana

Candidates tournament, Berlin 2018

This game was played in the eighth round of the 2018 Candidates tournament, which was won convincingly by Fabiano Caruana. White is hard-pressed to make a draw, but it is still there. How can you hold this endgame an exchange down?

[answer](#)



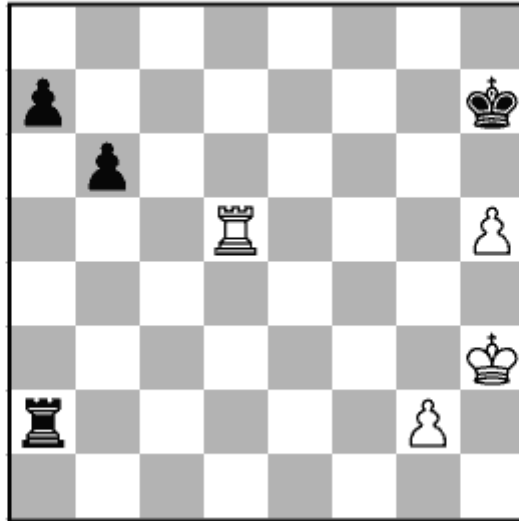
Puzzle 99: Black to play

Wesley So – Viswanathan Anand

Wijk aan Zee 2020

This position arose in the 2020 edition of Tata Steel. Anand has just sacrificed a bishop on f2 to start an attack. This exercise is very difficult I must say, and even Vishy made a mistake later on. But with perfect play Black's attack should be sufficient to achieve the draw. Can you find it? This is probably the most difficult exercise in this book.

[answer](#)



Puzzle 100: Black to play

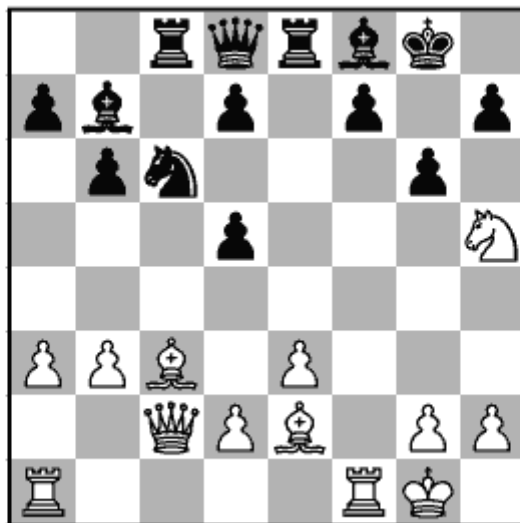
Shakhriyar Mamedyarov – Wesley So

Saint Louis 2018

This game was played in the first round of the Sinquefield Cup in 2018. My opponent is the very strong GM from Azerbaijan, Shakhriyar Mamedyarov, who had an Elo rating of over 2800 at the time of the game. White's pawns on the kingside look very dangerous and he is on the verge of winning. Do you think that Black can still save this rook endgame? If so how? Try to calculate deeper than two or three moves. I must warn you though that this rook endgame exercise is very, very difficult, but at the same time it is instructive.

[answer](#)

Solutions for 25 Complex Cases



Solution 76: Black to play

Diego Flores – Wesley So

PRO League rapid 2020

20...Nd4!

This fantastic tactical blow forces White to go on to the defensive. The complications that arise are clearly in Black's favour.

In the game I erred with 20...d4? 21 Nf6+ Kh8 22 Nxe8 Qxe8 23 Bb2, but here White is simply an exchange up. After 23... Bg7, instead of 24 Bf3?, White could have played 24 Rac1, fighting for control of the c-file.

20...gxh5?? loses on the spot to 21 Qf5! (21 Rxf7? Re4! 22 Raf1 Bh6 is, surprisingly, not as clear) 21...Qe7 22 Bd3.

The natural continuation 20...Be7? covers f6, but Black is worse after 21 Nf6+ Bxf6 22 Bxf6, since White's dark-squared bishop is powerful and has no opponent. 22...Nd4 (22...Qc7 23 Qd1) 23 Qd3 Nxe2+ 24 Qxe2 Qc7 25 Rf2 and we are suffering in the defence.

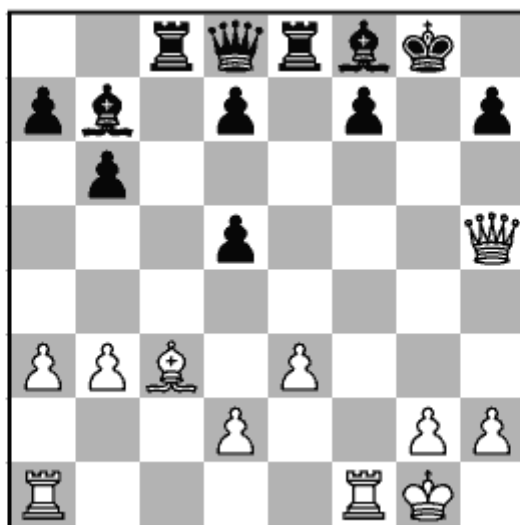
Black is also slightly worse after 20...Re6? 21 Nf6+ Kh8 22 Nxd5+ Ne5 23 Nf4 Re8 24 Qb2 Bg7 25 Rac1.

21 Qd1

If 21 Qd3 Black has the blow 21...Rxc3!, winning some material. After 22 Qxd4 (22 dxc3 Nxe2+ 23 Qxe2 gxh5 24 Qxh5 Qe7 -+) 22...Rc6 23 Nf6+ Rxf6 24 Qxf6 Qxf6 25 Rxf6 Bg7 Black is a clear pawn up in the endgame, with good winning chances.

21 exd4? Rxe2 wins for Black as the long diagonal is covered. 22 Qd3 Re6 -+.

21...Nxe2+ 22 Qxe2 gxh5 23 Qxh5 (D)



Black to play

23...Rxc3!

The dark-squared bishop needs to be eliminated to quench White's attack. Now Black is able to defend his king quite easily.

24 Rxf7 Bh6 25 Qf5

Or 25 dxc3 Qg5 –/+.

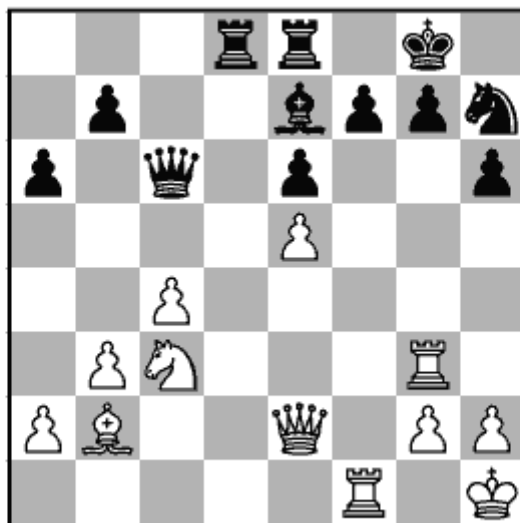
25...Bg7 26 Rxd7

26 dxc3 is met by 26...Re6 27 Rf1 Qe8, when Black is ahead on material and everything is well defended for now.

26...Qf6 27 Qxf6 Bxf6 28 dxc3 Bc8 –/+

Black has a clearly better ending with his two powerful bishops.

[back](#)



Solution 77: White to play

Wesley So – Anton Korobov

Bucharest rapid 2019

21 Qg4!

This is the most efficient way for White to win, and it does not give his opponent any chances. In the game I played 21 Qh5?! winning a pawn, but it's not a knockout blow. Korobov was able to defend with 21...Bg5! 22 Rxf7 (if 22 h4 he has 22...g6 23 Qg4 h5) 22...Rf8 23 Rxf8+ Nxf8. Black is only a pawn down and in the game I became over-ambitious and ended up overstepping the limit. White's other natural moves such as 21 Ne4 Ng5 and 21 Bc1!? keep a large positional advantage, but compared to 21 Qg4, it is not outright winning.

21...Bf8

21...g6 22 Qf4 and 21...Bg5 22 h4 are also easily winning for White.

22 Ba3!

This is the main idea behind 21 Qg4!. 22 Ne4 followed by Nd6 is positionally crushing as well.

22...g5

Black has nothing better than weakening his kingside. 22...g6 loses to 23 Rxf7 +–.

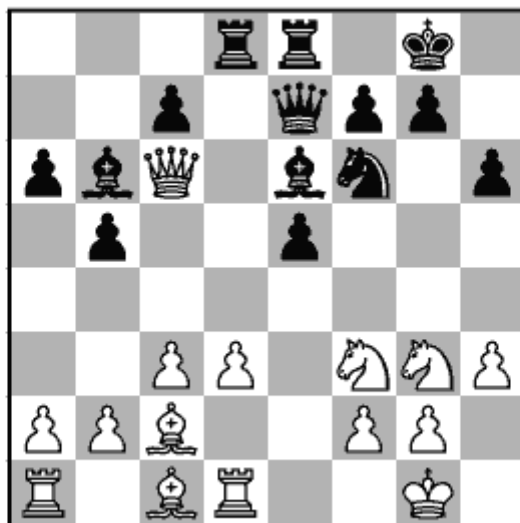
23 Bxf8

23 Qh5!? also works out very nicely, and could be even simpler.

23...Rxf8 24 Ne4

White kingside attack smashes through. Black defences can't hold; for example, **24...Qc7** (24...Rd4 25 Nf6+) **25 Nf6+ Nxf6 26 exf6** +– with a decisive attack.

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Solution 78: White to play

Wesley So – Pentala Harikrishna

FIDE Grand Prix, Riga 2019

19 d4!

This is the only way for White to rescue the queen and keep a large advantage. After 19 Nxe5?! Bd5 20 d4 Bxc6 21 Nxc6 Qd6 22 Nxd8 Qxd8 White's compensation for the queen is not enough for more than equality.

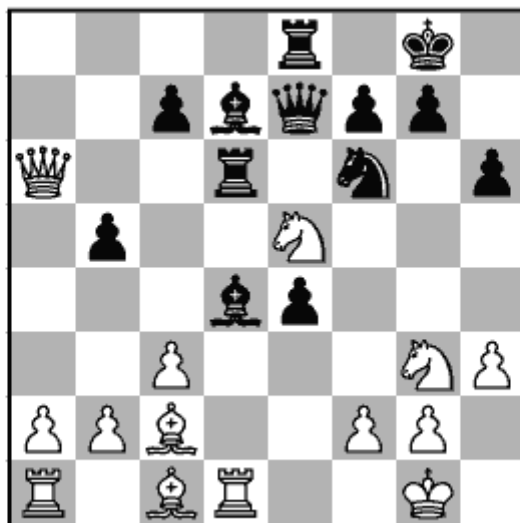
19...e4

19...Bd5 runs into 20 Nf5, attacking the enemy queen in return. After 20...Bxc6 (20...Qf8? loses due to 21 Qxf6! followed by Bxh6 next move) 21 Nxe7+ Rxe7 22 Nxe5 White is simply a pawn up in the endgame.

20 Ne5 Rd6

Or 20...Bd5 21 Nf5, when White will get a lot of material for his queen.

21 Qb7 Bc8 22 Qa8 Bd7 23 Qxa6 Bxd4 (D)



White to play

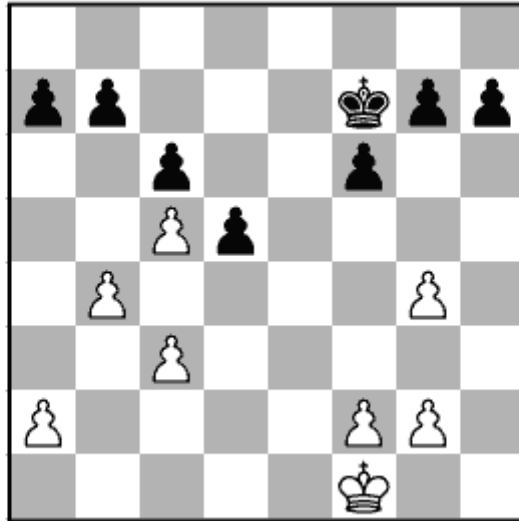
24 Qxd6!

White gains three pieces in return for the queen.

24...Bxf2+ 25 Kxf2 cxd6 26 Nxd7 e3+ 27 Kg1 Qxd7

We are still following my game with Pentala. Here I played 28 Re1, but instead **28 Ne2** is the simplest response. The pawn on e3 is blockaded and Black has no threats. Meanwhile White may improve his position by playing a4, opening up the file for his queenside rook. The two bishops should be enough to guarantee victory here; e.g., **28...Ne4 29 Rd3 +-.**

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Solution 79: Black to play

Alexander Grishchuk – Wesley So

Leuven rapid 2018

31...Kg6!

Activating the king first and foremost. In the game I played 31...f5? 32 gxf5 h5 33 Ke2 Kf6 but White can draw with 34 f4! (Alexander played 34 Ke3? but ended up losing after 34...Kxf5) 34...Kxf5 35 Kf3, when White sets up a barrier with his f-pawn and holds after 35...h4 36 a3! a6 37 a4 g5 38 g4+! (and not 38 fxf5? Kxf5 39 g3 h3!, when Black wins the pawn ending) 38...hxf3 39 fxf3 Kxf3 40 Kxf3 Kf5 41 Kf3 =.

31...Ke6! is also good, with the points 32 f4 d4! and 32 Ke2 f5! 33 g5 f4!.

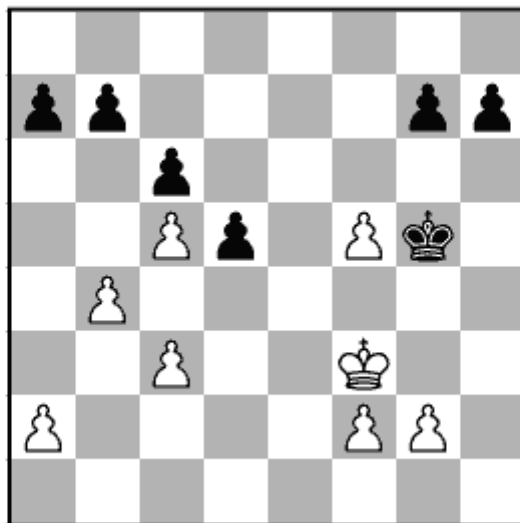
32 Ke2 Kg5

32...f5 33 Kf3 Kg5 just transposes back to the 32...Kg5 main line.

33 Kf3

33 f3 is even worse as after 33...Kh4 34 Kf2 g6 sooner or later White has to give way and allow a decisive invasion by the enemy king to g3.

33...f5 34 gxf5 (D)



Black to play

34...h5!

This wins, as Black prevents White from playing g4. His own pawns are now ready to advance, and White is unable to generate counterplay or set up a fortress. 34...Kxf5? just leads to a draw after 35 g4+! Ke5 (35...Kg5 36 Kg3) 36 Ke3 g5 37 f3 =.

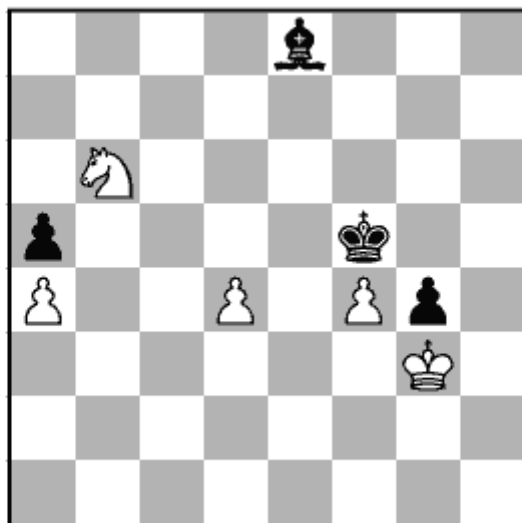
After the text-move, the pawn ending is easily winning for Black, as you can see from the lines below.

35 f6

Or 35 Kg3 Kxf5 36 Kh4 Ke4!.

35...Kxf6 36 Kf4 g5+ 37 Kf3 Kf5 38 Ke3 Kg4

Black slowly but surely makes progress as he advances his kingside pawns.



Solution 80: Black to play

Maxime Vachier-Lagrave – Wesley So

Abidjan blitz 2019

53...Ke6!

This is the only way to give Black chances, but amazingly, White is unable to win despite being a pawn up. In the game I erred with 53...Bf7? 54 d5, when White just pushes his pawn all the way to d7, and wins the endgame easily.

54 Kxg4 Kd6

The king slowly approaches the enemy knight, removing the main support of the a4-pawn.

55 f5

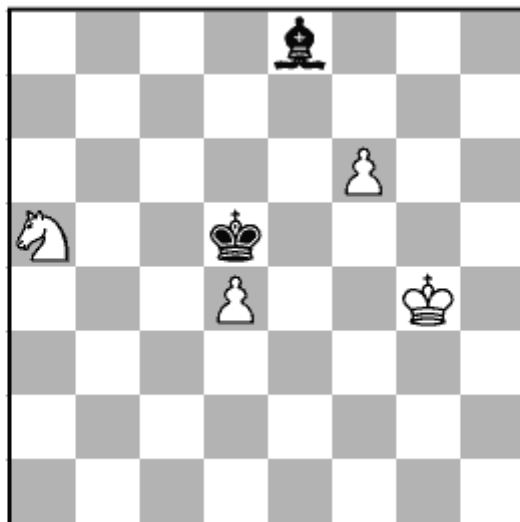
55 Kf5 Kc6 56 Nc4 Kd5 makes Black's job easier.

55...Kc6 56 Nc4

After 56 Na8 (or 56 Nc8 Kc7) 56...Kb7 (56...Kd6 is also sufficient to hold the draw) 57 f6 Kxa8 58 Kf5 Bf7 White is

unable to find winning ideas; e.g., 59 Ke5 (59 Kg5 Kb7 60 Kh6 Kc6 61 Kg7 Bh5 =) 59...Kb7 60 Kd6 Bg8 61 d5 Bf7 =.

56...Kd5 57 Nxa5 Bxa4 58 f6 Be8 (D)



White to play

59 Kf5

Perhaps 59 Nb7 is a trickier try for White. The point is that Black has to show some care and not take on d4 right away:

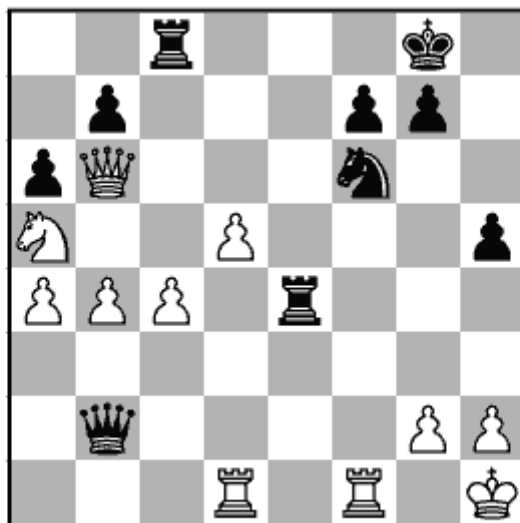
a) The hasty 59...Kxd4? loses due to 60 Nd6 Bd7+ (60...Bg6 61 Kg5) 61 Nf5+!. White plays f7 next move and promotes his pawn!

b) With 59...Kc6 60 Nd8+ (60 Nc5 Kd5) 60...Kd5 61 Kf5 Kxd4 Black hangs on to the draw: 62 Ne6+ Ke3 =.

59...Kxd4 60 Ke6 Ke4 =

The king goes behind the enemy pawn while his bishop protects f7. White is unable to make progress here.

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Solution 81: Black to play

Wesley So – Roberto Sanchez Alvarez

Batumi Olympiad 2018

27...h4!

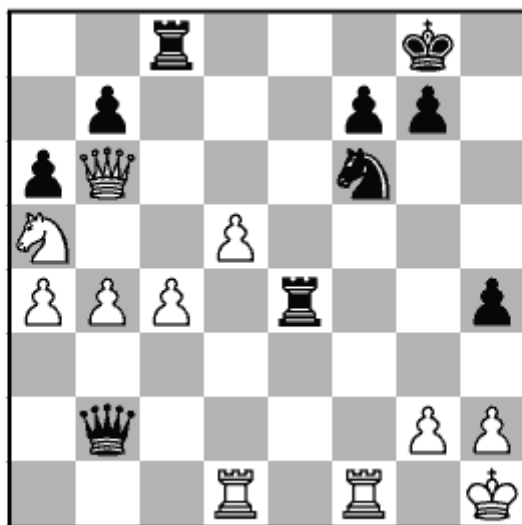
This is the best move here, as it poses White some problems to solve around his king. For starters, Black is threatening to play ...h3.

Black has another good option in 27...Rg4!?, which maintains the dynamic balance, even though I prefer the text-move as it is easier to understand. After 28 Rf2 Qc3 Black threatens ... Re8 or ...Ne4, and the lines that arise look very complex. After 29 Qxb7 (29 Re2!? is interesting, fighting for control of the e-file) 29...Re8 30 Rdf1 Rge4 Black is going to play ... Re1 next move, seizing control of the back rank. He has enough counterplay to secure dynamic equality.

In the game my opponent played too naturally with 27...Re2? 28 Qxb7 Rce8 29 d6, when the passed pawn on the d-file proved to be too fast and g2 is guarded. After 29...R8e4 (29... Rd2! is more stubborn, but after 30 Qf3 Black is lost anyway) 30 d7 Rxc2 31 d8Q+ Kh7 32 Qxe4+ Nxe4 33 Qh4 Qe2 34 Rde1 Black is simply too much material down.

27...Rh4?! threatens ...Ng4 or ...Qe5, and looks very tempting. The white king's safety is in serious question. Yet the defence is there: 28 Qf2! Rxh2+ 29 Kg1 Qxb4 and White is better after both 30 Qe1 and 30 Qf5.

We now return to 27...h4! (D):



White to play

28 h3

Preventing ...h3, but now Black has the unpleasant idea of bringing his knight over to g3. Other moves do not bring much joy either:

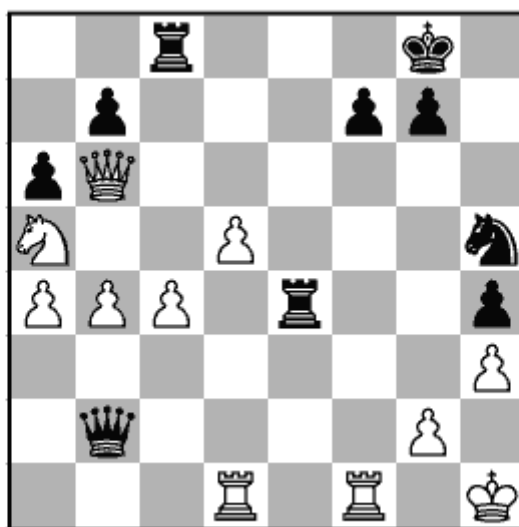
a) 28 Rb1 is possible, chasing the black queen away. Yet after 28...Qc3 29 Rbc1 Qe5 White is unable to solve all his problems yet. Black has a strong initiative.

b) 28 d6 h3! 29 gxh3 Re2 30 Qg1 looks very dangerous for White. The queen is not meant to defend passively like this! After 30...Ne4 31 Rb1 Qd2 32 Rbd1 White is barely hanging on, but I would not be surprised if Black is able to find a way to break his position.

c) 28 Qxb7 is a serious alternative, and very ambitious, as White grabs another pawn. Both sides have to play accurately

now. 28...Rce8 29 h3 R4e7! (a very important move: Black protects the f7-pawn so that he can move his knight) 30 Qc6 Nh5 31 d6 Ng3+ 32 Kg1 is a hard position to assess or calculate, but if Black wants he can just take the draw here and get on with his life: 32...Ne2+ 33 Kh1 Ng3+ =.

28...Nh5 (*D*)

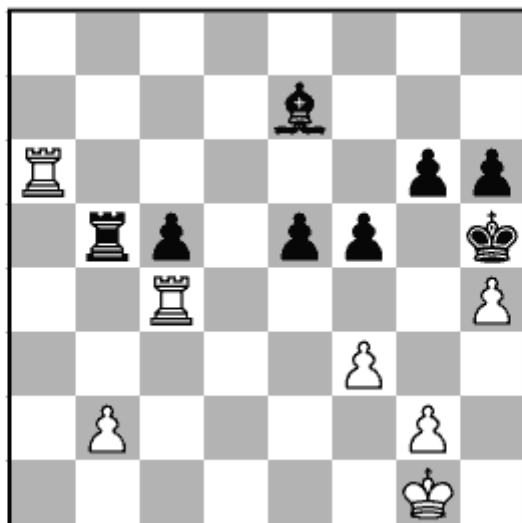


Extra Puzzle 81A: White to play

The knight immediately creates serious counterplay on g3. What should White play now to try to hang on?

[answer](#)

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Solution 82: White to play

Wesley So – Surya Shekhar Ganguly

FIDE Grand Swiss, Douglas 2019

37 g4+

Other moves are not as effective. After 37 g3 Rxb2 38 Kf1 (38 Re6 is met by 38...Bf8, when 39 Rxe5 runs into 39...Bd6, attacking the g3-pawn) 38...Rb3 39 Kg2 Rd3 White is unable to make progress because of the opponent's control of the third rank. After 40 Re6 Bd6 Black should hold the endgame because of his active pieces.

37...fxg4 38 Re6!

This trick is very important. White gains a tempo on the bishop and attacks the e5-pawn as well. Both 38 Rxd4? Bxd4 39 Rxd4 Rxb2 40 Rxd4 Kf5 41 Rg6+ Kf5 and 38 fxg4+ Kxh4 39 Rxd4 Bg5 = only lead to a draw.

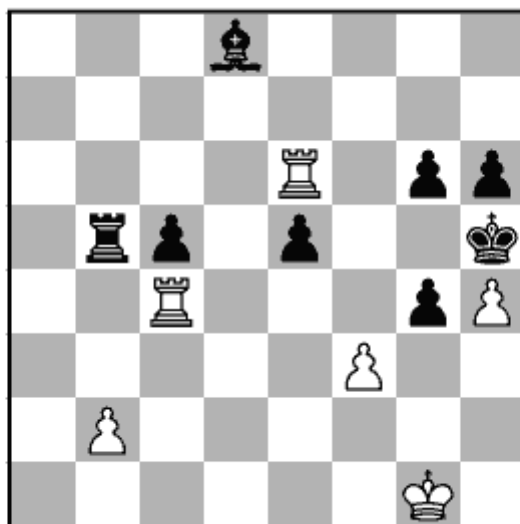
38...Bd8!

This forces White to continue very accurately.

In the game Ganguly played 38...Bxh4? but it loses right away since after 39 Rxe5+ g5 (39...Bg5 leaves the bishop trapped after 40 f4) 40 fxg4+ Kg6 41 Rexc5 Rxb2 42 Rc6+ Kg7 43 Rd6 Black is unable to hold on to his h-pawn. After 43...Rb1+ (43...Rb7 44 Rcc6 +-) 44 Kg2 Rb2+ 45 Kf3 Rf2+ 46 Ke3 Rf6 47 Rc7+ Kg6 48 Rxf6+ Kxf6 49 Ke4 Bf2 50 Rc6+ Kg7 51 Kf5 h5 52 gxh5 Kh7 53 h6 Be3 54 Kg4 Bf4 55 Re6 Bd2 56 Kh5 Black resigned.

After 38...Rb7 39 Rxe5+ g5 40 Rxc4 (40 hxg5? gxf3! 41 gxh6+ Kxh6) I'm not sure if Black can hold this endgame – it does not look like he can.

We now return to 38...Bd8! (D):



White to play

39 Rxc4

This is the right recapture, as it attacks both the e5- and g6-pawns.

39 Rxe5+?! allows Black to defend stubbornly with 39...g5 40 Rxc4 (40 hxg5 gxf3!) 40...Rb3, when he has good drawing chances thanks to the decreasing number of pawns left on the board; e.g., 41 Rf5 Rxf3 42 Rgxg5+ hxg5 43 Rxf3 gxh4 44 Kg2 Kg4 = followed by ...Be7, defending the pawn on c5.

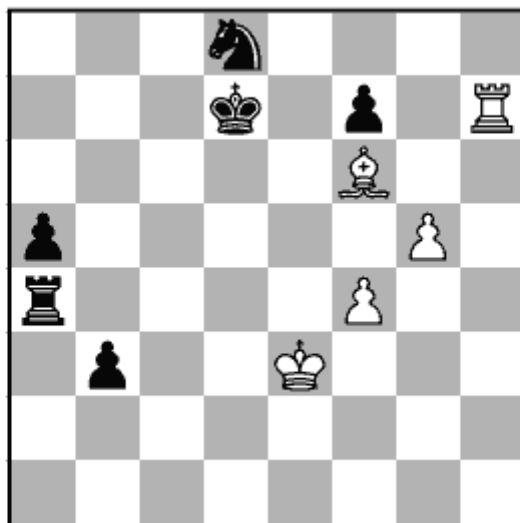
39...Bxh4

Or 39...Rxb2 40 Rxe5+ g5 41 hxg5 hxg5 42 Rd5, when White has very good practical winning chances. After 42...Be7 43 Re4 Rb7 44 Kf2 his rooks are dominant and his king is ready to join the game.

40 Rxe5+ g5 41 Re2

White should win this position in the long run. All his pawns are protected and he has a target to attack on c5. For example, **41...Kg6 42 Kg2 h5 43 Ra4 Kf5 44 Kh3 Rb3 45 Ra3 Rb4 46 Rc3** and I like White's chances to win.

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Solution 83: Black to play

Hikaru Nakamura – Wesley So

PRO League rapid 2020

46...Ke6!

This nice move is Black's best try and poses the opponent some unpleasant problems to solve. Against best play it is not enough to win, but it forces White to find an accurate defence. Other moves just lead to an almost automatic draw:

a) 46...Rb4 47 g6 (there is also nothing wrong with the simple 47 Bb2 Ke6 48 Rh6+ Kd5 49 Rh5) 47...b2 48 Bxb2 (48 gxf7!?) 48...Rxb2 49 g7 Rg2 50 Kf3 and White's passed g-pawn is sufficient to make a draw. For example: 50...Rg1 (or 50...Rg6 51 f5 Rg5 52 f6) 51 Kf2 Rg6 52 f5 Rg5 53 f6 Ne6 and now White has 54 Rh5 Rg6 55 Rh6!, chasing the black rook wherever it goes: 55...Rxb6 56 g8Q Rxf6+ 57 Ke3 =.

b) 46...Ra2 47 g6 b2 48 gxf7!/? (or 48 Bxb2 Rxb2 49 g7) 48...b1Q 49 f8Q+ Qxh7 50 Qxd8+ Kc6 51 Qc8+ and the black king is unable to hide from the checks. The queen and the bishop work well together to deliver perpetual check: 51...Kd5 52 Qa8+ Kc5 53 Qc8+ or 51...Kb5 52 Qe8+ Kb4 53 Be7+ =.

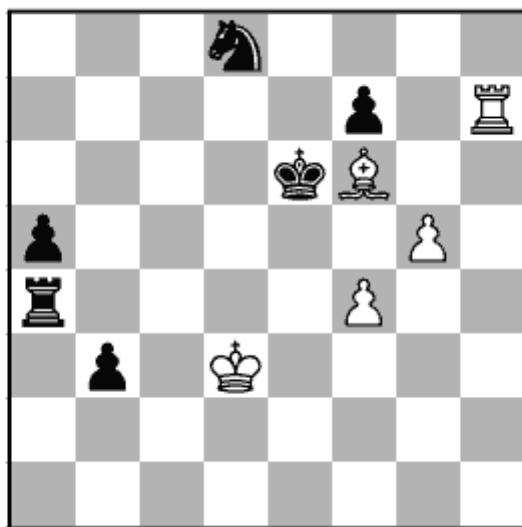
47 Kd3!

47 Bc3 probably makes a draw too, although it is much more complex: 47...Kf5 48 Rh5! Re4+ 49 Kd3 Ne6 50 g6+ Kxg6 51 Rxa5.

In the game, Hikaru chose 47 Rh6? but after 47...Nc6 Black is simply winning. 48 Bb2+ Kd5 49 Rh5 (49 Rf6 Ra2 50 Bc3 b2 51 Bxb2 Rxb2 52 Rxf7 a4 and Black wins) 49...Re4+! 50 Kd2 (50 Kd3 Nb4+ 51 Kc3 Re3+ also does not help White) 50...Kc4 51 f5 Nd4 and due to the threat of ...Nf3+ and ...Nxf5, Black wins.

47 Bxd8? loses immediately because after 47...b2 White is unable to stop the pawn from promoting. 48 Rh1 (48 Rh6+ Kf5 49 Rb6 Rb4) 48...Ra1 49 Rh6+ Kf5 50 Rf6+ Kg4 51 Rb6 Re1+ 52 Kd4 b1Q 53 Rxb1 Rxb1 and Black wins.

We now return to 47 Kd3! (D):



Black to play

47...Rb4

Or:

a) 47...Rxf4 48 Bxd8 a4 is not enough for a win either. White can just play 49 Rh6+ (or 49 Kc3) 49...Kd7 50 Bf6 =.

b) White barely hangs on as well after 47...Nb7 48 f5+! Kxf5 49 Rxf7 Nc5+ 50 Kc3 Rb4 51 Kb2 Nd3+ 52 Ka3 =.

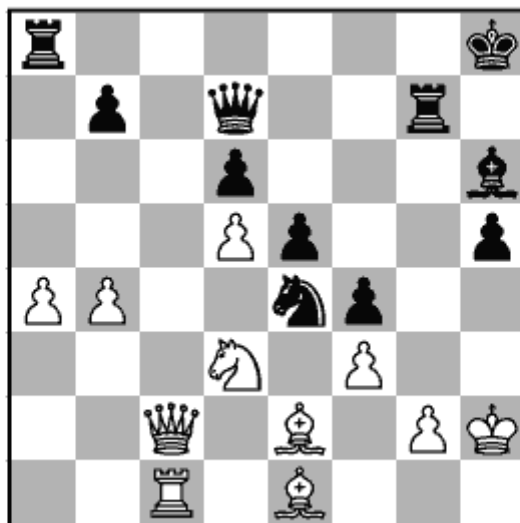
c) Another try is 47...Nc6 48 Kc3 Rb4 (48...Rxf4 49 Kxb3 Ne5 is interesting; White has to defend carefully to make a draw here) 49 Kb2 a4 50 f5+! Kxf5 51 Rxf7 (White's bishop is powerfully placed on f6, and he has enough counterplay to avoid any trouble) 51...Ke6 52 Rh7 Na5 53 Ka3 =.

48 f5+!

White is able to save this game thanks to this combination:
48...Kxf5 49 Bxd8 b2 50 Rxf7+ (eliminating all of Black's pawns) **50...Kg4 51 Rf1 b1Q+ 52 Rxb1 Rxb1 53 Bxa5 Kxg5** = and the game ends in a draw.

Still, 46...Ke6! is a good practical try, as White must find a couple of 'only' moves to save the game.

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Solution 84: White to play

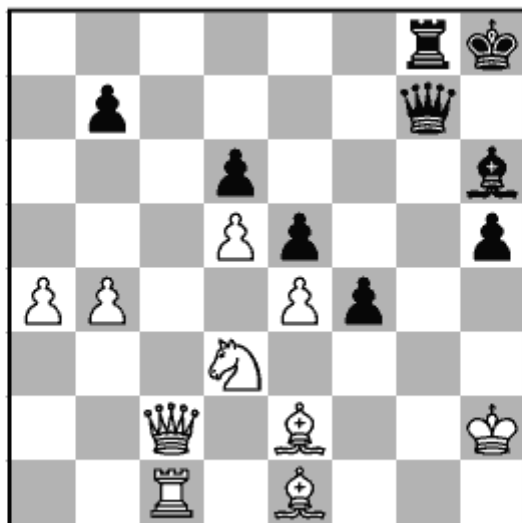
Wesley So – Jan-Krzysztof Duda

chess.com blitz 2018

29 Nxe5!

This saves the day for White, and on top of that he is able to keep a stable advantage.

The obvious recapture 29 fxe4? loses right away after 29... Rxe4+! (and not 29... f3? 30 Bxf3 Bxc1 31 Qxc1, when White's three coordinated minor pieces more than compensate for the opponent's two rooks) 30 Kxe4 Rg8+ 31 Kh2 (31 Kf2 Qh3) 31... Qg7 (D).



White to play

White has no defence. Unfortunately, this is how my game with Duda went! Now:

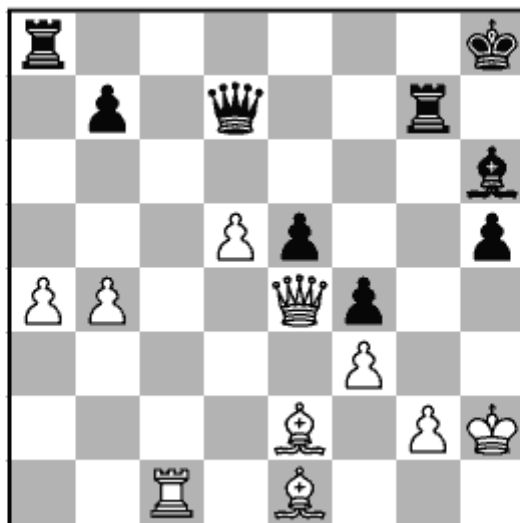
a) After 32 Bf3 Qg1+ 33 Kh3 Rg3+ 34 Kh4 the simplest win for Black is 34...Bg5+ 35 Kxh5 Bd8!, preventing any back-rank checks and mating White after 36 Bxg3 Qxg3 37 Qg2 Qh4+ 38 Kg6 Qh7#. An insane variation!

b) 32 Bg4 Qxg4 33 Qf2 f3 34 Rc7 leaves Black with a totally crushing game. His simplest win here is 34...Qxe4.

29...dxe5

29...Qf5 30 Bd3 Qxe5 31 Bxe4 is also better for White, as his threat of Bc3 next move is rather powerful.

30 Qxe4 (D)



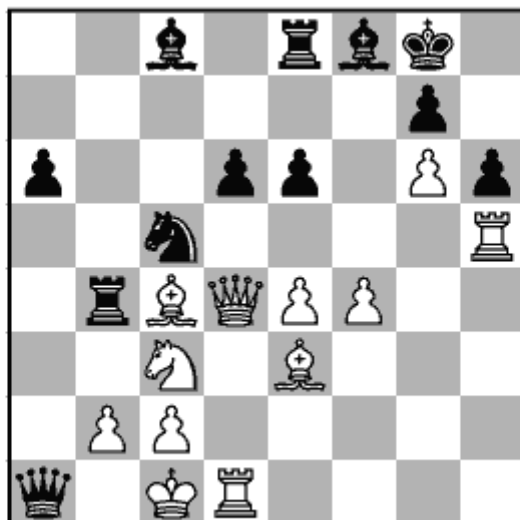
Black to play

30...Bg5!

30...Rag8? loses to 31 Qxe5, when the black rook is pinned and White wins.

The position remains very complicated, with White for choice after the energetic **31 Bd3** (31 Qxe5 Re8 32 Qb2 Bf6 was the point behind 30...Bg5!) **31...Bf6 32 d6!** with the idea of **32... Qxd6** (32...Rag8 33 Rc2) **33 Qf5** +/-, when the complications are favourable to White.

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Solution 85: White to play

Wesley So – Nils Grandelius

Caleta 2019

23 Kd2

This king advance is the best, as the complications are well in White's favour. Unfortunately in the game I chose 23 Nb1?, a move that I must admit looks cowardly. After 23...Nxe4! –+ the tactics all work for Black. After 24 Rd3 the simplest way for him to win is 24...Ng3 25 Ra3 Qxb2+ 26 Qxb2 Rxb2 27 Kxb2 Nxe4, when Black is ahead on material and should win the ending handily.

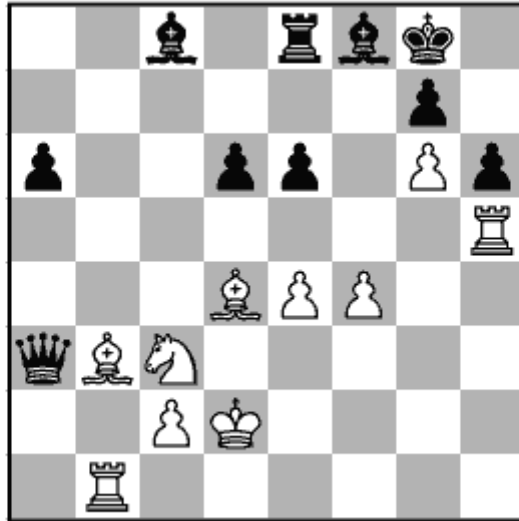
23...Qxb2 24 Rb1!

24 f5!? is an interesting try, but according to the computer Black has the insane reply 24...Rb3! threatening ...Qxc3+.

24...Nb3+

Black grabs the enemy queen. 24...Qa3? is just a blunder due to 25 Rxb4 Qxb4 26 Bxe6+.

25 Bxb3 Rxd4+ 26 Bxd4 Qa3 (D)



Extra Puzzle 85A: White to play

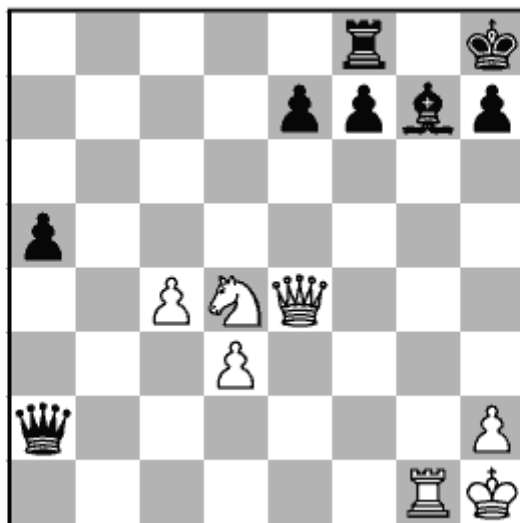
So far this has all been forced after 23 Kd2. What would you play now?

[answer](#)

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Now 26...Qxd3? 27 Rg1 would allow White to equalize, but **26...Qf2!** is a very elegant way to win the game. White cannot take on f2 due to back-rank issues, and after **27 Rg1 Re1 28 Qd8+ Be8** White is forced to give up his queen in order to prevent checkmate.

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Solution 87: Black to play

Alexander Grishchuk – Wesley So

Saint Louis 2018

30...Qf2!

The best place for our queen is on f2, from where it controls a lot of crucial squares close to the enemy king. Black may also start with 30...Bf6, meeting 31 Nf5 with 31...Qf2!, which transposes back to our main line after 30...Qf2!.

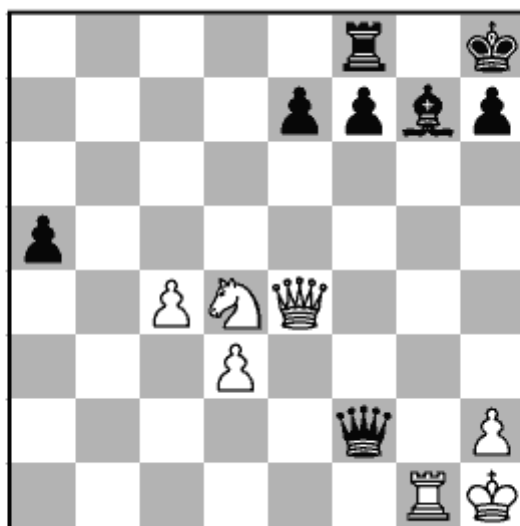
After 30...e6? White draws with the amazing 31 Rxc7!? Kxc7 32 Nxe6+! fxe6 33 Qg4+, when the black king cannot avoid perpetual check.

In the game I played 30...Qb2? but White had enough counterplay after 31 Nf5:

a) In the game 31...Be5 32 Rg2 led to unclear play, and it ended in a draw after 32...Qc1+ 33 Rg1 Qb2 (I could try 33...Qf4 34 Qxf4 Bxf4 35 Nxe7 a4 but White is not worse after 36 Ra1 Ra8 37 d4 a3 38 c5, when his two connected passed pawns are not to be underestimated one bit) 34 Rg2 Qc1+ 35 Rg1 Qb2 36 Rg2 =.

b) 31...Bf6 is a better try, but things are not simple any more. For example, after the natural continuation 32 d4 e6 33 Nd6 Qxd4 White has the powerful move 34 Qf3!, when he is somehow holding. 34...a4 (34...Qh4 is a more serious try, but White also has enough play here after 35 c5) 35 Rg4 Qa1+ 36 Rg1 and Black should repeat moves. 36...Qb2? would be a terrible blunder as 37 Nxf7+ leads to a quick mate.

We now return to 30...Qf2! (*D*):



White to play

31 Nf5

31 Nc6 is met by 31...a4, when the a-pawn is advancing very quickly and White is unable to halt it. 31 Nf3 is more stubborn, but Black is still a pawn up after 31...Bf6 -/+.

31...Bf6 32 Rg2

White tries to dislodge our queen from its powerful outpost on f2.

32 Nxe7? is not a good idea here as after 32...Bxe7 33 Qxe7 Qf3+ 34 Rg2 Rg8 the rook on g2 is hopelessly pinned and Black reaches a won king and pawn ending after 35 Qe2 (35 Qe5+ does not do anything due to 35...f6) 35...Qxg2+ 36

Qxg2 Rxc2 37 Kxc2 Kg7 –+. The black king blockades the enemy pawns, while White is unable to stop our a-pawn from promoting.

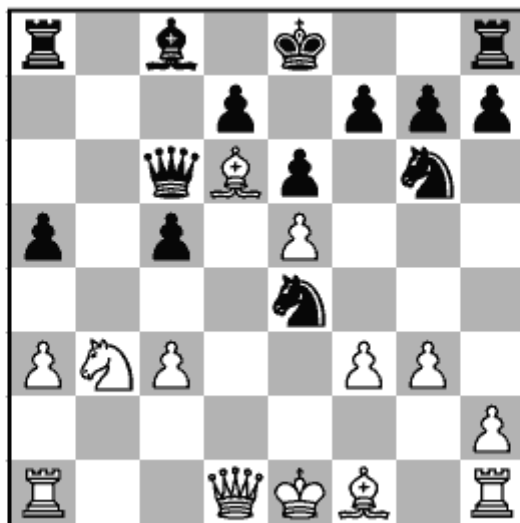
32...Qf1+

32...Qc5 is an equally good place for the queen.

33 Rg1 Qh3 34 c5 a4

White is in serious danger. Black's a-pawn is very fast, and White's counterplay is not rapid enough. A possible continuation is **35 d4 a3 36 Rg3 Qf1+ 37 Rg1 Qa6**, when Black is winning, although he still has to play accurately.

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Solution 88: White to play

Wesley So – David Navara

Saint Louis blitz 2019

16 Bb5!

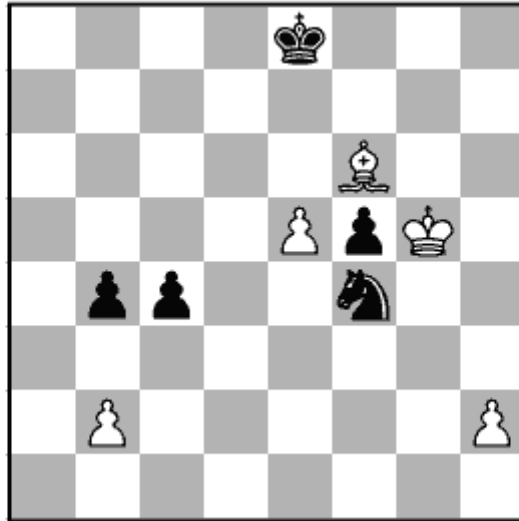
This is the best move, and it allows White decent chances in a complex and unbalanced position. The computer assesses this position as equal (“0.00”) but it’s hard to imagine why at first. The powerful bishop on d6 compensates for White’s pawn deficit.

In the game I played 16 fxe4?, sacrificing the rook on h1. 16... Qxe4+ 17 Qe2 (17 Kf2 Qxh1 18 Nxc5 Bb7 does not give White enough compensation for the exchange either) 17... Qxh1 but it turns out that only Black can be better here. White’s compensation for his exchange is insufficient. 18 Nxc5 (18 0-0-0 Bb7 is also good for Black, as after 19 Nxc5 he has the move 19...Bf3) 18...Bb7 19 Nxb7 Qxb7 20 Bg2 Qb3 21 Qd3? Qb2 and Navara mopped up the game quite easily from here.

16...Qxb5 17 fxe4

White's compensation for the pawn is sufficient for a complex game. A sample line is **17...Qc4** (or 17...Ba6 18 Rb1 Qc4 19 Kf2 Rc8 20 Qf3 with unclear play) **18 Qc2 a4 19 Nd2 Qa6 20 0-0-0!?** with a very unclear game ahead.

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Solution 89: White to play

Wesley So – Leinier Dominguez

Saint Louis rapid 2018

50 e6

This is the only way for White to save the game. 50 Kxf5? happened in the game, but after 50...c3 51 bxc3 b3 White is unable to prevent Black from queening.

50...Nd5!

This gives Black the best practical winning chances. After 50...Nxe6+ 51 Kxf5 White draws right away, while after 50...c3 51 bxc3 (51 Bxc3 is also more than sufficient) 51...b3 52 c4 White controls the b2-square.

51 Bd4!

Again, this is White's only move.

51...f4 52 Kg4 Ke7

After 52...b3 White draws by pushing his h-pawn a.s.a.p.: 53 h4. Then 53...Ke7 is met by 54 h5 with a quick h6-h7 to

follow, while after 53...c3 54 Bxc3 Nxc3 White saves the draw thanks to his outside passed pawn: 55 h5 (55 Kxf4 Nd1 56 h5 is enough for a draw too) 55...Nd5 56 h6 Ke7 57 h7 Nf6+ 58 Kxf4 Nxe7 59 Ke5 and White captures the b-pawn by force: 59...Ng5 60 Kd4 Nxe6+ 61 Kc4 =.

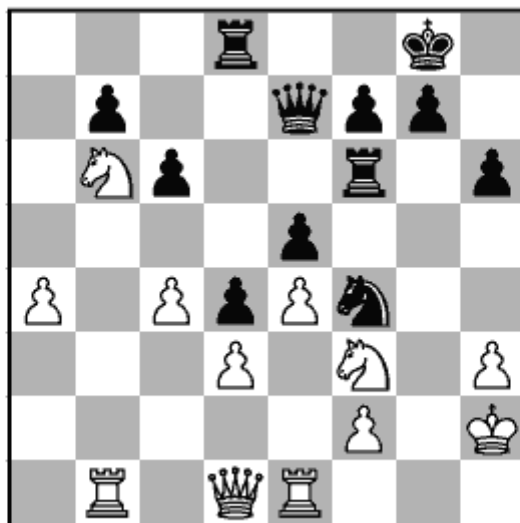
53 Bc5+!

Another 'only' move.

53...Kxe6 54 Bxb4 Nxb4 55 Kxf4 Nd3+ 56 Ke4 Nxb2 57 Kd4 =

White will win the last pawn with Kc3, and finally ensures a draw after some accurate defence.

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Solution 90: Black to play

Wesley So – Pentala Harikrishna

FIDE Grand Prix, Riga 2019

27...Qe6!

A good start. Black forces the enemy knight to a passive location on g1. Otherwise:

a) 27...Nxb3? does not work on account of 28 Kxh3 Qe6+ 29 Kh2 Qg4 30 Rg1 +-.

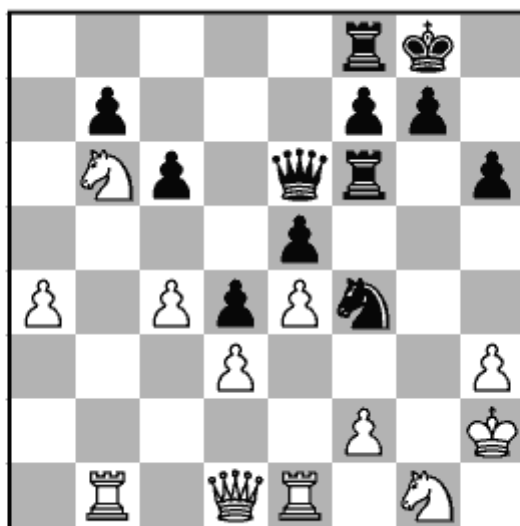
b) In the game Pentala played 27...Rg6? but this is not the best move. After 28 Rg1 Rxd6 (28...Qe6 29 Qf1 Rxd6 30 Nxd6 f5 31 f3 is also better for White) 29 Nxd6 the most stubborn defence is 29...Qa3! (Pentala went for 29...Rd6 but after 30 Nc8 Qh4 31 Qf3 Rg6 32 Rxb7 Rg2+ 33 Qxg2 Nxd6 34 Kxg2 White is easily winning, as I have too many pieces) but I don't think Black can hold the position after 30 Nf3 Nxd3 31 Rb3 Nxf2 32 Rxa3 Nxd1 33 Nxe5.

28 Ng1 Rf8!

28...Rg6?! 29 Qf3 is playable but here Black is only fighting to equalize. 29...Rf8 (29...Rg5!?) 30 Ne2 Rg2+ 31 Kh1 (31

Qxg2 Nxf2 32 Kxf2 f5 gives White enough for the queen, but due to his vulnerable king, I'm not sure if he can play for a win) 31...Rxf2! 32 Nxf4 (32 Qxf2 Qxh3+ 33 Kg1 Qg4+ 34 Kf1 Qh3+ = leads to perpetual check) 32...Rxf3 33 Nxe6 fxe6 gives Black a lot of pawns, and this allows him to expect to draw. After 34 Nd7! Rxh3+ 35 Kg1 Rff3 Black's counterplay should be sufficient in this weird endgame.

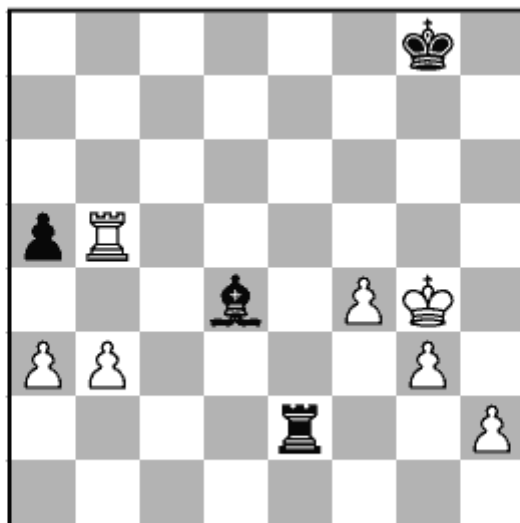
We now return to 28...Rf8! (*D*):



White to play

This brilliant move is the solution of this exercise. I know it's a very hard move to find, as neither I nor Pentala saw this idea during the game. Black intends to play ...Rg6 followed by a quick ...f5.

Now, even after the best defence, **29 Rb2** (29 f3 Rg6 30 Rb2 transposes, while 29 Qf3? loses to 29...Nxd3!! 30 Qxd3 Rxf2+, the main point being 31 Kg3 f5!) **29...Rg6 30 f3 f5** (30...Qe7 with the idea of ...Qh4 deserves attention too) **31 Rf1 Qe7** (31...Rff6!?, intending to double rooks on the g-file, also makes sense) **32 Rd2!**, White is barely hanging on, despite the extra piece. His forces are passive and the knight on b6 is not participating in the defence.



Solution 91: Black to play

Magnus Carlsen – Wesley So

Wijk aan Zee 2018

49...a4!

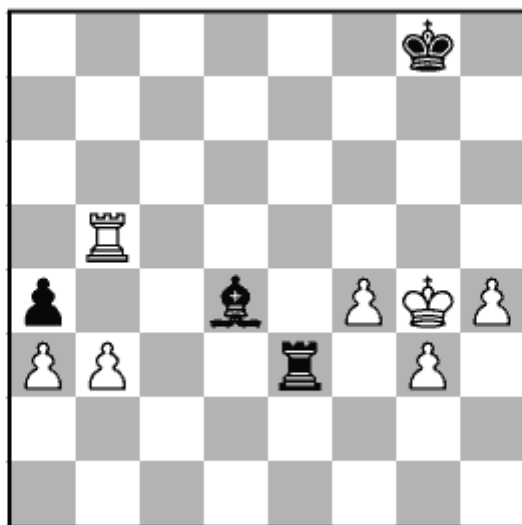
In the game I played 49...Rxf2? but it loses. After 50 Rxa5 White simply has way too many pawns. The game continued 50...Re2 (50...Kf7 is more stubborn but White still makes progress: 51 Rd5 Bf6 52 Kf5 Rh5+ 53 Ke4 Rh1 54 g4 Ke6 55 Rb5 Re1+ 56 Kd3) 51 Rd5! (kicking the bishop out of its powerful place in the centre; the game is over) 51...Bb2 52 a4 Bc3 53 Kf5 +- Re8 54 g4 Rf8+ 55 Ke4 Rb8 56 Rb5 Re8+ 57 Kd3 Be1 58 a5 Bf2 59 b4 Re3+ 60 Kc4 Re4+ 61 Kb3 Kf7 62 Re5 Rd4 63 b5 Rd3+ 64 Kc2 Rg3 65 g5 Bd4 66 Rd5 Be3 67 Rd3 Rg2+ 68 Kb3 Bc1 69 b6 Ke6 70 Rd4 Rb2+ 71 Ka4 Kf5 72 Rb4 Ra2+ 73 Kb5 Bxf4 74 Rxf4+ Kxf4 75 b7 and Black resigned.

50 h4

Or 50 bxa4 Rxf2, while 50 b4 can be met by 50...Ra2 or 50...Rxf2 51 Ra5 Rc2 52 Rxa4 Rc3 – in both cases the a3-pawn proves to be an important target.

50...Re3! (D)

It turns out that the pawns on a3 and g3 are the real targets that Black should attack. 50...axb3 51 Rxb3 is better for White as his pawns are well protected. After 51...Bc5 52 Kh5 he has good chances to make progress.



White to play

51 bxa4 Rxa3 52 Kh5

This is his best try, in order to advance the kingside pawns. 52 a5 Bf2 is a draw right away, as after 53 Rg5+ Kf7 (53...Kh7 54 Kh3 Be1 =) 54 Kh3 Be1 White is too passive to make any progress.

52...Rxa4

And not 52...Rxc3? 53 Rg5+ Rxc3 54 hxc3, when White wins as he can advance his pawns and then switch his king over to the queenside.

53 g4

Black still has to be careful about his defence here, but the game should end in a draw. His bishop should stay behind and attack h4, while the rook should come over to e4, in order to

keep an eye on White's pawns and to have the possibility of covering the king along the e-file.

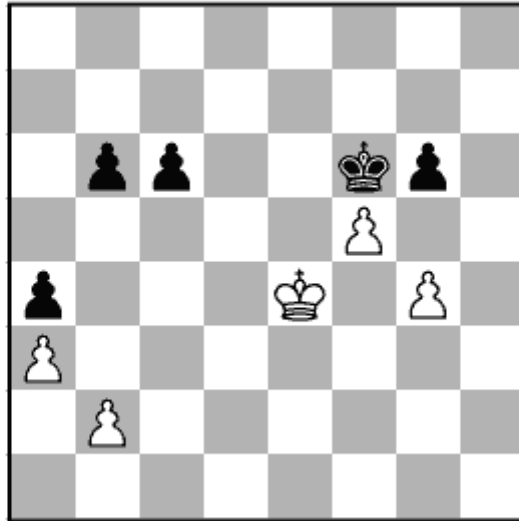
53...Bf2 54 f5 Re4 55 Rb8+

55 Kg5 Be3+ is also fine, while after 55 g5 Bxh4 56 Kg6 the simplest move is 56...Re8 57 f6 Ra8 58 Rb7 Bxg5 59 Kxg5 Ra1 with a draw.

55...Kf7 56 Rb7+ Kf8 =

I don't think White is able to make progress in this position.

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Solution 92: Black to play

Hikaru Nakamura – Wesley So

chess.com rapid 2018

46...gxf5+

It turns out that Black just barely hangs on to a draw here. After 46...g5? 47 Kd4 White wins of course, as he has a protected passed pawn on f5, and he can safely collect all of the enemy queenside pawns.

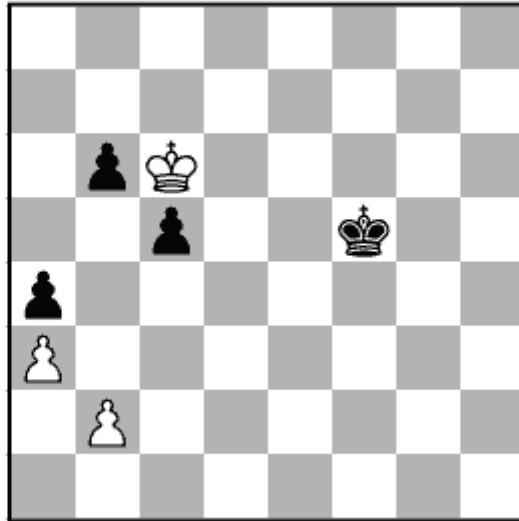
47 gxf5 c5

Black has to advance his queenside pawns in the hope of making a draw. 47...Ke7? loses to 48 Ke5.

48 Kd5

48 Kf4 just leads to a draw after 48...b5 49 Ke4 b4 50 Kd5 bxa3 51 bxa3 Kxf5 52 Kxc5 Ke6 =, as White is stuck with a rook's pawn.

48...Kxf5 49 Kc6 (D)

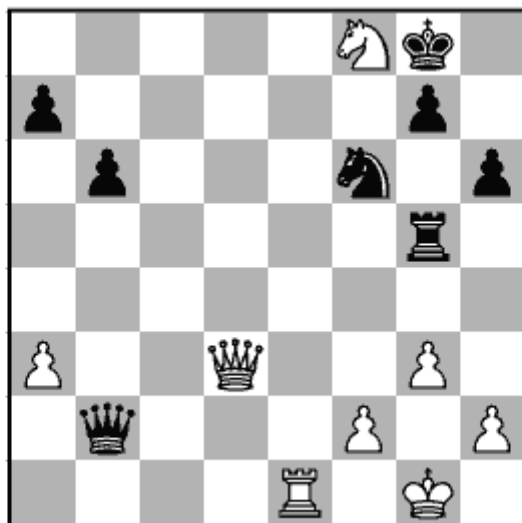


Extra Puzzle 92A: Black to play

It looks at first sight that White's king is just too quick in this ending, but there is a miracle save here. Can you spot it?

[answer](#)

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Solution 93: White to play

Hikaru Nakamura – Wesley So

Kolkata blitz 2019

40 Nh7!

This move looks absolutely insane. But it works, and it wins right away.

In the game Hikaru played the natural 40 Qd8?! but I was able to hold the game somehow with 40...Rf5! – it turns out that Black's position is more resilient than it looks. Even after White's best try, 41 Ne6+ Kh7 42 Rf1 Black is able to defend, just barely: 42...Qxa3! 43 Qc7 Ne8 44 Qd7 (44 Qc2 g6 is unclear) 44...Qd6! 45 Qxe8 Re5! 46 Nf8+ Kg8 47 Ne6+ Kh7 with an insanely crazy draw.

The other good try for a win is 40 Ng6 but Black can resist with 40...Ra5!. Surprisingly enough, finding a win for White is not easy: 41 Ne7+ (41 Qd8+ Kh7 42 Nf8+ Kh8 43 Ne6+ Ng8! is unclear) 41...Kh8 42 Re6! (this is the only move that keeps a big plus, but is very far from obvious) 42...Qc1+ (White's idea is that after 42...Rxa3 43 Qd8+ Kh7 he has 44 Rxf6, threatening mate on g8) 43 Kg2 Qc7! and even though

White has good winning chances here after 44 Qg6 Black is still alive for now.

40...Nxb7

40...Ng4 does not work either due to 41 Re8+ Kf7 42 Rf8+ Ke7 43 Qd8+.

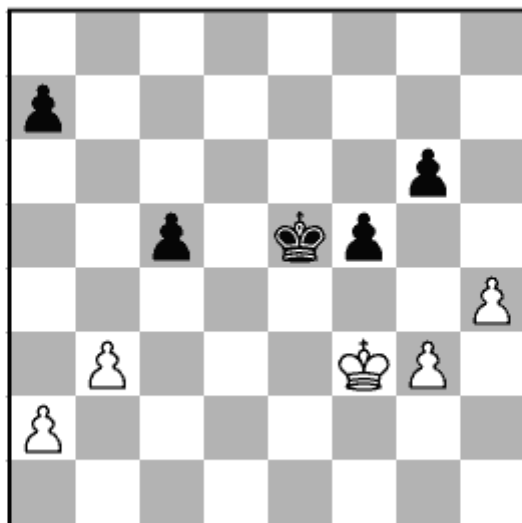
41 Qc4+!

The black king is too vulnerable. White has a decisive attack.

41...Kh8 42 Re8+ Nf8 43 Rxf8+ Kh7

Here White has a variety of wins, the simplest being **44 Qg8+ Kg6 45 Qf7+ Kh7 46 Qe8**, threatening Rh8#. Black is unable to cope with all the enemy threats around his king.

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Solution 94: Black to play

Wesley So – Hikaru Nakamura

Zagreb 2019

47...a6!

This move holds the draw. Hikaru missed this insane defence during the game. He instead played 47...Ke6? but after 48 Kf4 Kf6 49 a3! White wins, as Black is in zugzwang:

a) 49...a5 loses to 50 a4 as Black is forced to give the opponent entry into g5: 50...Kf7 51 Kg5 Kg7 52 h5 gxh5 53 Kxf5 Kh6 54 Kf6 +-.

b) The game ended 49...a6 50 b4 c4 (50...cxb4 51 axb4 followed by Kg5 is also winning for White; note that if it were White to move, this position would be a draw) 51 a4 Ke6 52 Ke3 Kd5 53 Kd2 Kd4 (after 53...Kc6 54 Kc3 Kd5 55 a5 Black loses the c-pawn and the game) 54 Kc2 c3 55 b5 1-0.

47...a5? loses to 48 Ke3, when Black's king is forced to give way. After 48...Kd5 49 Kf4 Kd4 compared to the main line with 47...a6!, here Black's counterplay is too slow and after 50 Kg5 White promotes his pawn much earlier than Black.

48 Ke3

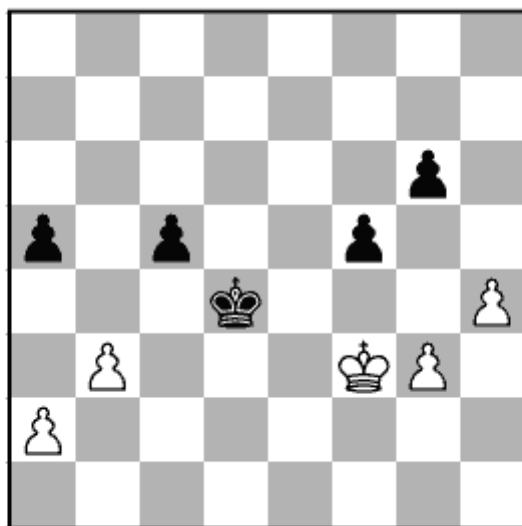
This is the only winning try. 48 g4 fxg4+ 49 Kxg4 Kf6 allows Black to hold easily. After 50 Kf4 Ke6 51 Kg5 Kf7 = White is unable to make further progress.

48...a5 49 Kf3

49 Kd3 f4 also gives Black enough counterplay to draw, for example after 50 g4 Kf6 51 Ke4 g5 =.

49...Kd4! (D)

It turns out that Black's counterplay is fast enough. Not 49...a4? 50 bxa4 Kd4 because here the white king can come back to the queenside with 51 Ke2 Kc4 52 a5 Kb5 53 Kd3 Kxa5 54 Kc4 +-.



White to play

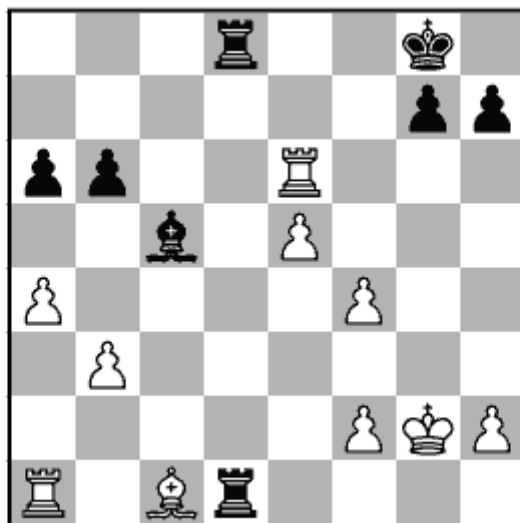
50 Kf4 a4 51 Kg5 axb3 52 axb3 Kc3 53 Kxg6 Kxb3

In the pawn race White queens first, but the arising queen and pawn ending is a theoretical draw.

54 h5 c4 55 h6 c3 56 h7 c2 57 h8Q c1Q 58 Qb8+ Ka2! 59 Kxf5 Qc2+ =

Black should hold this endgame quite easily. The secret is that his king should remain in the southwest corner of the board (on a1, b1, b2 or b1) in order to hide from the white checks. White is unable to promote his pawn and prevent perpetual check at the same time.

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Solution 95: Black to play

Vidit Gujrathi – Wesley So

chess.com rapid 2018

29...a5!

This is the only way for Black to maintain the balance. With one move, he prevents White's freeing ideas of b4 and a5. Let's see why other moves don't succeed:

a) I played 29...Bd4? in the game, but after 30 Rb1 Rc8 31 Rd6 Black was just lost thanks to the pin on the d-file. After 31...Rc2 32 Be3 Rxb1 33 Bxd4 Rxb3 34 e6 +- I was unable to stop White's pawns and was soon forced to resign.

b) 29...Rc8? looks tempting, but White has the move 30 b4! freeing his position, when after 30...Bd4 (30...Bxb4 31 Rxb6 a5 32 Bb2 Rd2 33 Ba3 +-) 31 Rd6 Black is unable to shake off the pin on the d-file. He loses after 31...Rc2 (31...Kf8 32 b5) 32 Be3! Rxa1 33 Bxd4, as the white pawns are unstoppable: 33...Rxa4 34 e6 Kf8 35 Rd7 +-.

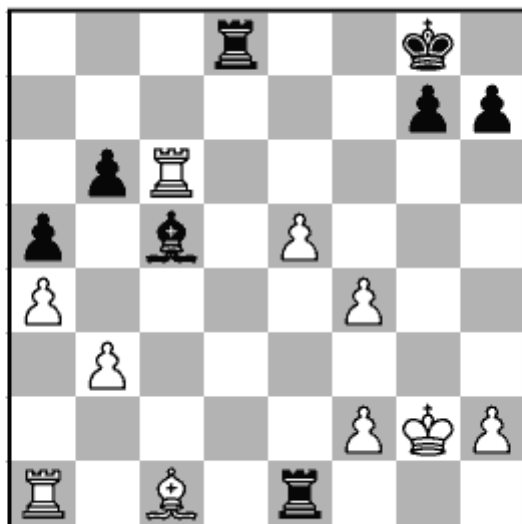
c) 29...Re1? also fails due to 30 b4!, dislodging our powerful bishop. After 30...Bd4 (30...Bxb4 31 Rxb6 a5 32 Bb2 Re2 33

Ba3 +-) 31 Rb1 Rc8 32 Rd6 Black does not have any compensation for his two pawns.

30 Rc6

This is White's best try. He is hoping to start advancing his pawns in the centre. Not 30 Bb2? R1d2.

30...Re1! (D)



White to play

Keeping an eye on the e-pawn and preparing counterplay with ...Re2. Black's activity is just enough to hold the balance here.

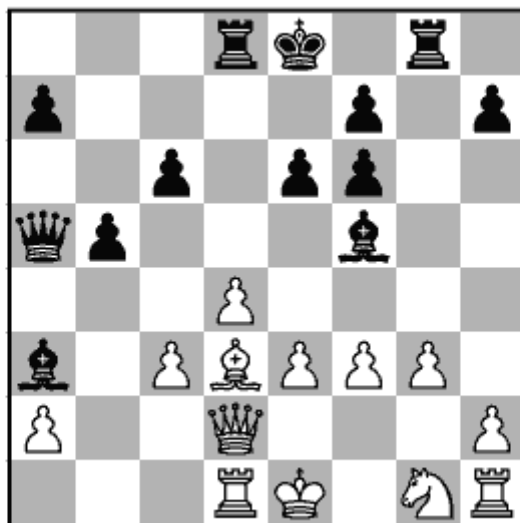
31 e6

The other critical line is 31 b4 axb4 (31...Bxb4 loses pressure on the f2-pawn and allows White to activate his forces thanks to 32 Bb2 Re2 33 Ba3) 32 a5 Bd4! 33 Ra2 bxa5 34 Rxa5 Rb8, when Black has enough counterplay thanks to his supported passed b-pawn.

31...Re2 32 Kg3 g6!

White's king is in slight danger now, and he has nothing better than to play 33 Be3 Bxe3 34 fxe3 Rd3 35 Kg4 Kg7, when

Black has enough counterplay to hold the rook endgame.



Solution 96: Black to play

Wesley So – Rameshbabu Praggnanandhaa

Leon rapid 2018

17...b4!

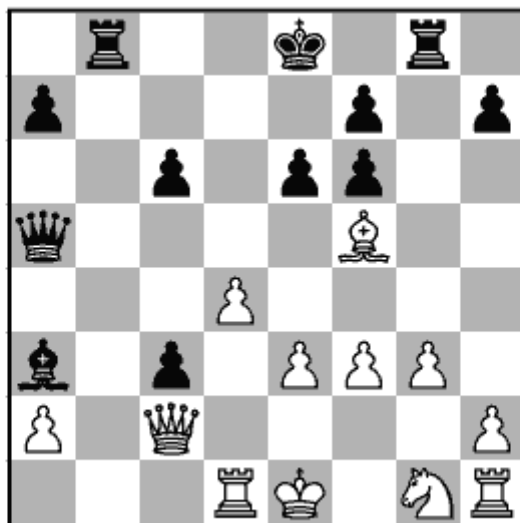
This is the best and most energetic move, as it aims to fight for the initiative.

18 Ne2!

This is White's best defence. He needs to finish his development as soon as possible.

18 c4? fails due to 18...Bxd3 19 Qxd3 b3+ 20 Kf1 bxa2 21 Qb3 and here Black even has the move 21...Bc1 winning material by promoting his pawn next move.

I chose 18 Bxf5? but it runs into 18...bxc3 19 Qc2 Rb8! (*D*) (and not 19...exf5? 20 Ne2 Rb8 21 0-0, when White is better thanks to his far superior pawn-structure) – this brilliant move is the point of the whole exercise! In the game Prag found it relatively easily.



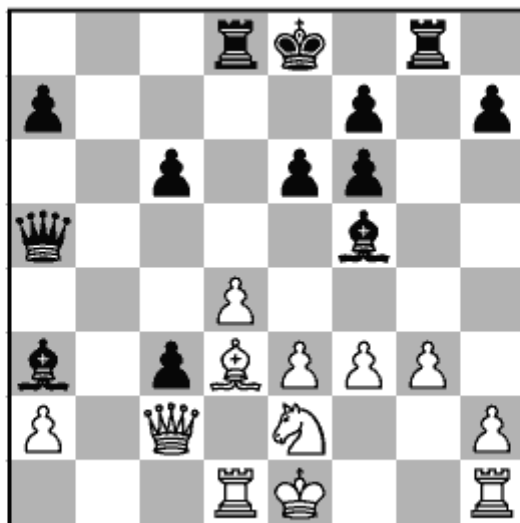
White to play

Now White is lost:

a) 20 Kf1 does not change anything after 20...Rb2 21 Qd3 Qxf5 22 Qxc3 Qb5+ 23 Qd3 Rxa2 24 Ne2 Ke7 and Black has a winning endgame, thanks to his extra pawn and control over the second rank.

b) 20 Be4 Rb2 21 Bxc6+ Ke7 22 Qa4 Qxa4 23 Bxa4 c2 24 Bxc2 Rxc2 25 Nh3 (25 Ne2 Rb8 followed by ...Rbb2 looks really bad for White) 25...Bb4+! 26 Kf1 and now instead of 26...Rgc8, as he played in the game, 26...Rxa2 followed by pushing his a-pawn should be sufficient for a clean victory.

18...bxc3 19 Qc2 (D)



Black to play

19...Bg6

Now if 19...Rb8 we may simply castle: 20 0-0 with a slightly worse but tenable position.

20 0-0 Bb2

Protecting the pawn this way makes sense. 20...Bb4 may be met by 21 Ra1 with the idea of playing a3.

21 Bxg6 Rxg6

After 21...hxg6 22 Rd3 c5 23 Nxc3 White's position should be good enough to hold a draw; for example:

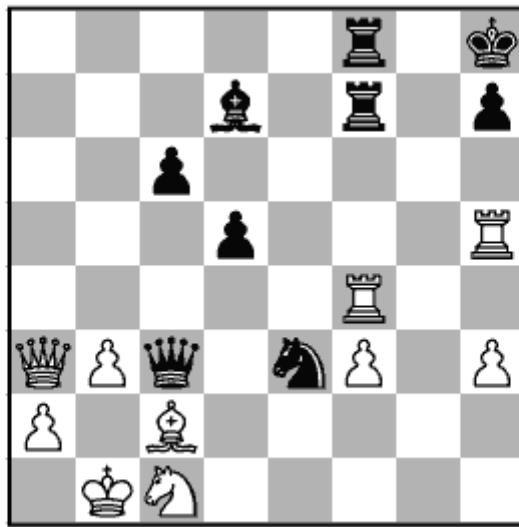
a) 23...c4 24 Ne4! cxd3 25 Nxf6+ Kf8 26 Qxb2 Rh8 27 d5! threatens Nd7+, and gives White enough counterplay for the exchange. After 27...exd5 28 Nd7+ Ke7 29 Qf6+ Kxd7 30 Qxf7+ Kd6 31 Qxg6+ Kc7 32 Qg7+ White is able to deliver perpetual check in a strange way.

b) 23...Bxc3 24 Qxc3 Qxc3 25 Rxc3 cxd4 26 exd4 Rxd4 27 Rc8+ Rd8 28 Rfc1 and this rook endgame should be quite easy to hold.

22 Rd3

If White is able to eliminate the powerful c3-pawn, then all his problems will be over. **22...c5** is strongly met by **23 d5!**, sacrificing a pawn for unclear complications: **23...c4 24 Rd4 Rxd5** (24...exd5 25 Rfd1 with compensation) **25 Rxc4 Rd2** (25...Rc5 26 Rh4 h5 27 Rd1 also gives White good practical play for his pawn) **26 Qe4** and the position remains very complex, with both sides having chances. The important thing is that White is fighting hard, and his position is no longer worse.

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Solution 97: White to play

Wesley So – Aleksandr Lenderman

USA Ch, Saint Louis 2019

43 Bxh7!

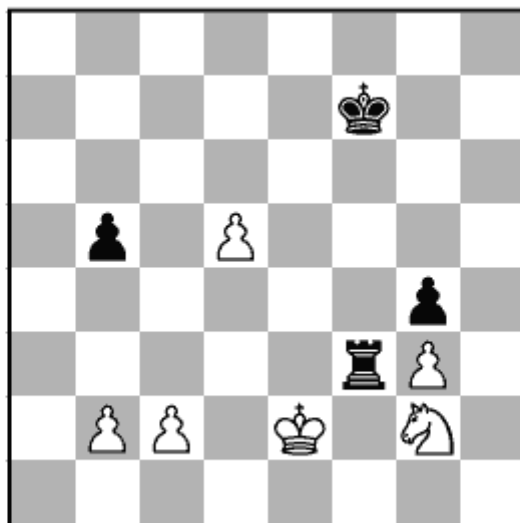
A good start. This is the only winning move for White. 43 Rxh7+? fails due to the simple 43...Kg8.

43...Rxf4 (D)



Extra Puzzle 97A: White to play

Now can you find the win for White? There is only one solution.



Solution 98: White to play

Wesley So – Fabiano Caruana

Candidates tournament, Berlin 2018

46 Ne3

The knight needs to create counterplay in conjunction with his passed pawns. White can also start with 46 c4 bxc4 47 Ne3 Rxc3, transposing to the main line.

46...Rxc3 47 c4!

White needs to create counterplay and eliminate Black's remaining pawns.

47...bxc4

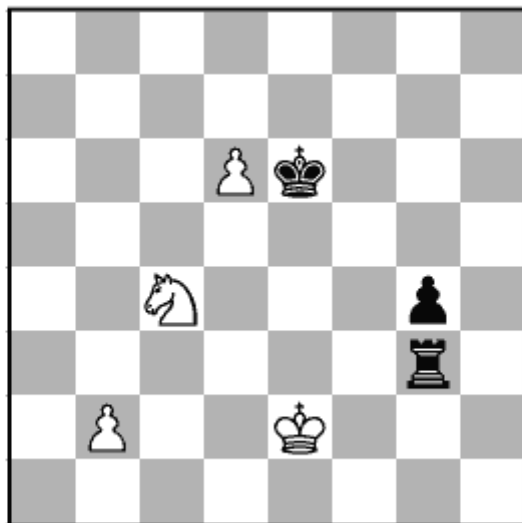
47...b4 is interesting, but White holds here too thanks to his pawns: 48 c5 Rg1 49 c6 g3 50 d6, when the connected passers are actually quite dangerous.

48 d6!?

Using the passed d-pawn to distract Black's king. White may also take on c4 first: 48 Nxc4 Kf6 49 d6 Rb3 50 d7 Ke7 51

Kf1 with a draw.

48...Ke6 49 Nxc4 (D)



Black to play

49...Rf3

A draw also results from 49...Rb3 50 d7! Ke7 (after 50... Kxd7 51 Ne5+ White wins the g-pawn, when the endgame with rook vs knight is very easy to hold) 51 Kf1 g3, and now:

a) Not 52 Kg2?? Kxd7, when White cannot capture the g3-pawn. 53 Ne5+ Ke6 54 Nf3 Kd5! (note that the king can't use the direct route through f5!) 55 Kxg3 Ke4 -+ and Black wins.

b) After the accurate 52 Nd2! White holds easily. 52...Rxb2 (52...Rb4 is answered with 53 b3 followed by Kg2) 53 Ne4 g2+ 54 Kg1 Kxd7 55 Nf2 =.

50 d7!

The d-pawn is used as a distraction while White hunts down the g-pawn. Not 50 Ne3? Rf4 – here the white king is cut off from crossing the f-file and he is unable to capture Black's last pawn.

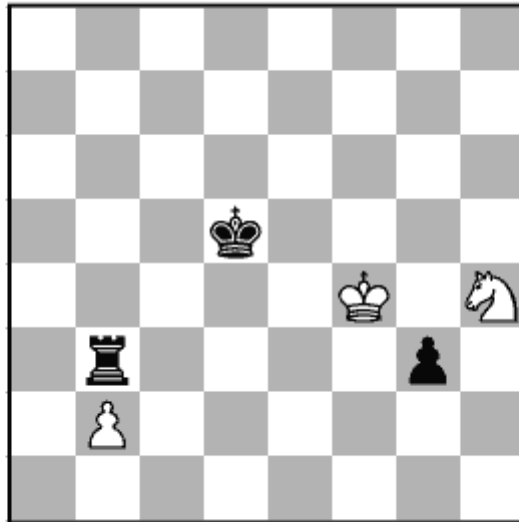
50...Rf8 51 Ne3 g3 52 d8Q Rxd8 53 Kf3 Rd3

Pinning the knight sideways. After 53...Rg8 Black protects his pawn, but can't make progress. 54 b4 is the simplest response. 54...Rg5 (54...Kd6 loses the g-pawn after 55 Nf5+) 55 b5 Kd6 56 b6 Kc6 57 Kg2 Kxb6 58 Nf1 Kc5 59 Nxg3 Kd4 60 Kf3 and White holds.

54 Kf4

Cutting off the black king and preventing him from approaching his g-pawn.

54...Rb3 55 Ng2 Kd5 56 Nh4 (D)



Black to play

Black is unable to make progress. The king on f4 does a good job keeping the enemy king away.

56...Kc4 57 Kg4 Rd3

57...Kd5 58 Kf4 =.

58 b4

Using this pawn to move the black king further away. 58 Kh3 Kd4 59 Kg4 is sufficient too: Black can make no progress.

58...Rb3

58...Kxb4 59 Kh3 works well now, as the black king is too far away: 59...Kc4 60 Nf5 Kd5 61 Nxf3 Ke5 62 Kg4 =.

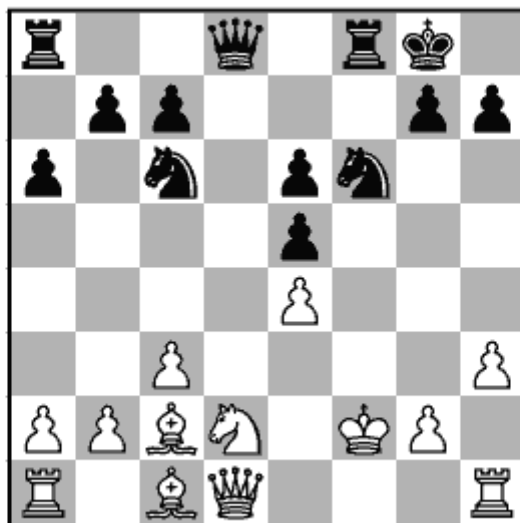
59 b5 Kd5 60 b6 Ke4

60...Kc6 is met by 61 Kh3 followed by Nf5xf3.

61 b7 Rxb7 62 Kxf3 Rg7+ 63 Kf2 Rg4 64 Ng2 Rxf2+ 65 Kxf2 ½-½

Fabiano finally gave up trying to win this game!

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Solution 99: Black to play

Wesley So – Viswanathan Anand

Wijk aan Zee 2020

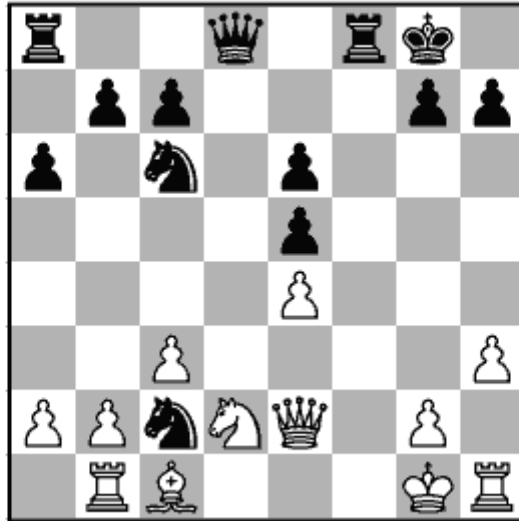
13...Ng4++!

Black has to keep the b1-h7 diagonal closed. After 13... Nxe4++? 14 Kg1 Nf2 15 Qh5 g6 16 Qe2 White starts an attack of his own.

14 Kg1 Ne3

14...Nf2? 15 Qe2 Nxe1 16 Kxe1 does not give Black compensation for his material deficit.

15 Qe2 Nxc2 16 Rb1 (D)

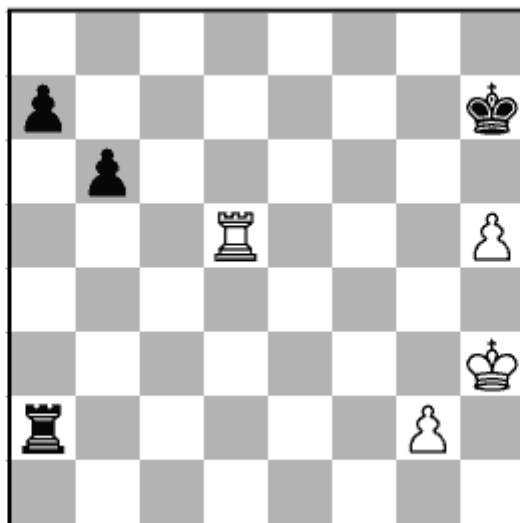


Extra Puzzle 99A: Black to play

If you've reached this position, well done. You are on the right track. But what now? The knight on c2 is still trapped and White is threatening to capture it with Nf3.

[answer](#)

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Solution 100: Black to play

Shakhriyar Mamedyarov – Wesley So

Saint Louis 2018

36...Kh6!

The king has to remain active in this ending if Black is to have saving chances. Other moves:

a) Also possible is 36...Ra5 37 Rd7+ Kh6 38 g4 Ra1!, with the same idea of giving checks from behind, but compared to 36...Kh6!, here Black is a tempo down.

b) In the game I was unable to find the correct defence and I just pushed the a-pawn with 36...a5?, but this proved to be too slow: 37 g4 a4 38 g5 (White's pawns are too far advanced) 38...a3 39 Rd7+ Kg8 40 Rd8+ Kh7 41 g6+ Kh6 42 Rh8+ Kg7 43 Rh7+ Kg8 44 Ra7 Ra1 45 Kg2 and Black soon resigned.

37 g4 Ra1!

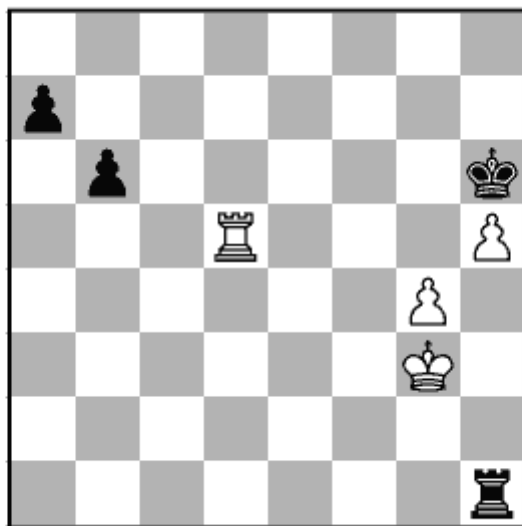
Again this is the only move. The black rook has to start giving checks from behind in order to hinder White's progress. 37...a5? loses after 38 Kg3 a4 39 Rd6+, when 39...Kg5 is not possible due to 40 Rg6#.

38 Kh4

38 Rd6+ Kg5 (38...Kh7? 39 g5) 39 Rg6+ Kf4 40 h6 (after 40 Rf6+ Kg5 41 Rf5+ Kh6 42 Kg2 Rc1 = it is difficult for White to make progress) 40...Rh1+ 41 Kg2 Rh4 42 g5 Kf5 43 Rg7 a5 44 h7 a4 45 g6 a3 46 Rg8 a2 =.

38 Kg3 Rg1+ transposes to the main variation after 38 Kh4.

38...Rh1+ 39 Kg3 (D)



Black to play

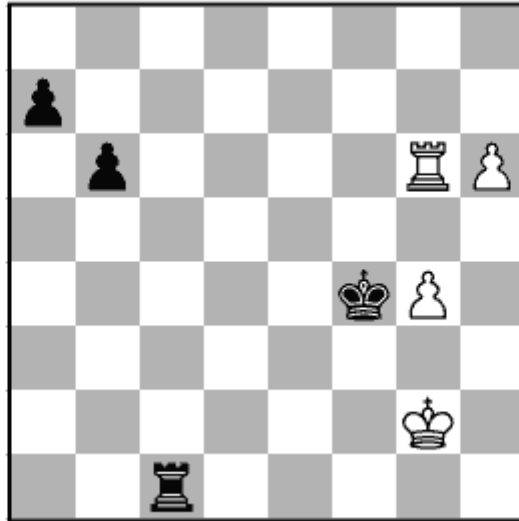
39...Rg1+!

Black has to check from behind to dislodge the white king from g3. He was threatening to play 40 Rd6+, when 40...Kg5 is not possible due to 41 Rg6#.

40 Kf3 Rf1+ 41 Kg2 Rc1!

This is the best square for the rook, since it can give checks from behind or from the side.

42 Rd6+ Kg5 43 Rg6+ Kf4 44 h6 (D)



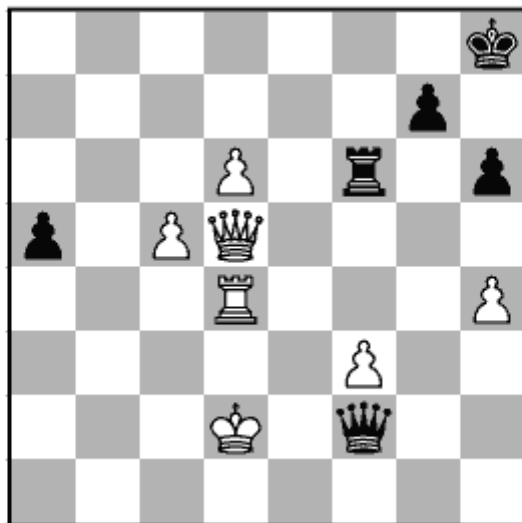
Extra Puzzle 100A: Black to play

This is the other critical position of the exercise. The white pawns look unstoppable and Black has to play a series of ‘only’ moves. How can you defend now?

[answer](#)

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Solutions to Extra Puzzles



Solution to Extra Puzzle 39A: White to play

39 Kd1!

This is the only move that wins. The point is that Black has no check on c3 later on. But the variations are very deep of course, which is why White has to calculate it well.

Other moves allow Black to draw: 39 Kc3? Rxf3+ 40 Rd3 Rf5 = gives Black sufficient counterplay, while after 39 Kc1? Rxf3 40 Rd2 (40 d7?? does not work here in view of 40...Rc3+ 41 Kd1 Qf1+ followed by ...Qc1+ and mate) 40...Qe3, thanks to the threat of ...Qa3+, Black has enough threats to make a draw.

39...Rxf3

39...Rf5 can simply be met by 40 Qxf5 Qxd4+ 41 Ke2 with an easily winning queen endgame.

Or 39...Rg6 40 Rd2 Rg1+ 41 Kc2 Qf1 42 d7 and again White can escape from the checks by moving his king up to d4.

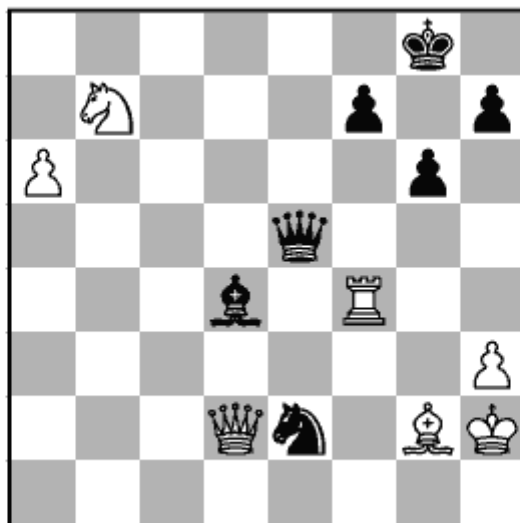
40 d7

Now Black's checks are not enough for a draw:

40...Qg1+ 41 Kc2 Rf2+ 42 Rd2 Rxd2+ 43 Kxd2 +-

White wins easily. Quite a tough exercise (though you might have identified the initial move – 36 Qd5! – on ‘general centralizing grounds’), where White has to find a couple of ‘only’ moves in order to seal the victory.

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Solution to Extra Puzzle 56A: White to play

Illya Nyzhnyk – Wesley So

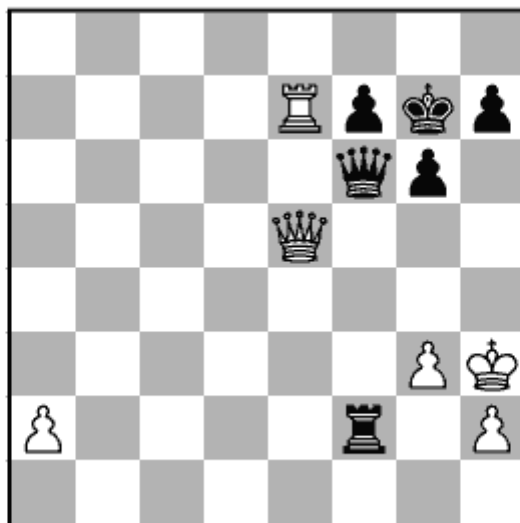
PRO League rapid 2019

38 Na5!

This is the only defence, which Illya failed to find in our game. The knight has to be brought back into play on c6, and this is enough for White to draw. Missing this key idea, he played instead 38 Qxe2? Qxe2 39 Re4 Be5+ –+, when White was just dead lost.

Now Black is unable to win the game. The ending arising after **38...Be3** (38...Bc5 is similar after 39 Qd8+ Kg7 40 Qf6+ Qxf6 41 Rxf6 Kxf6 42 Nc6 =) **39 Qd8+ Kg7 40 Qf6+! Qxf6 41 Rxf6 Kxf6 42 Nc6 =** is a clear draw, as White wins a piece by playing a7 next move, after which he does not have enough pawns to play for a win.

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Solution to Extra Puzzle 63A: Black to play

32...h5!

This is the only move that poses White problems. Black wants to fix the enemy pawns on g3 and h2, and to keep the king sidelined on h3. Not 32...Rxa2?! 33 g4, when White prevents the move ...h5, and he holds the game.

33 Qxf6+

33 a4? g5 is probably close to winning for Black. After the forced 34 g4 Rf3+ 35 Kg2 hxg4 36 Qxf6+ Kxf6 it's unlikely that White can hold this endgame. Black has the simple plan of advancing his kingside pawns.

33...Kxf6 34 Re4!

Preparing to play g4 in order to free the white king. 34 Ra7? loses due to 34...g5 35 g4 Rf3+.

34...Kf5

After 34...Rxa2 35 g4 hxg4+ 36 Rxc4 Kf5 37 Rb4 White should hold the draw, but with some difficulty.

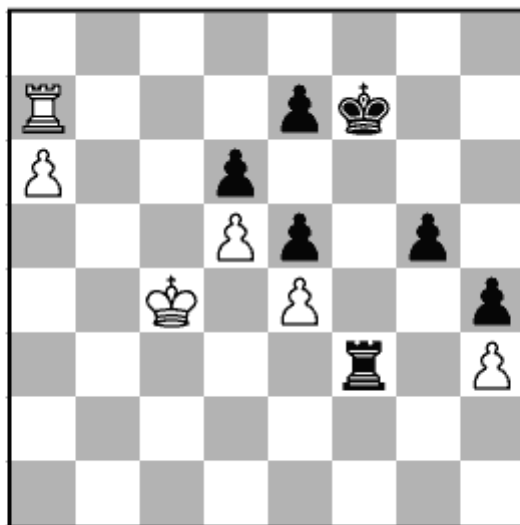
35 Ra4 g5 36 g4+ hxg4+ 37 Rxc4

37 Kg3? Rf3+ 38 Kg2 Rc3.

37...Rxa2 38 Rb4

White should probably be able to hold this rook endgame with accurate play. But it's not so simple. For example: **38...g4+ 39 Kg3** (39 Rxc4? Rxh2+) **39...Ra3+ 40 Kg2 Kg5 41 Rb8 f5 42 Rb5 Ra4 43 Rc5 Kf4 44 Rc2 Ra3 45 Rc4+ Kg5 46 Rc5 =** and White can hold if he defends energetically.

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Solution to Extra Puzzle 69A: White to play

Vladimir Fedoseev – Wesley So

World Fischer Random, Høvikodden 2019

41 Kb4!!

This is White's saving move and the only way to hold the draw. He controls the a3-square and prevents the enemy rook from attacking his passed pawn from behind.

In the game Fedoseev failed to find 41 Kb4 and played 41 Ra8? Rxh3, but this is totally lost as Black has two passed pawns on the kingside against White's one.

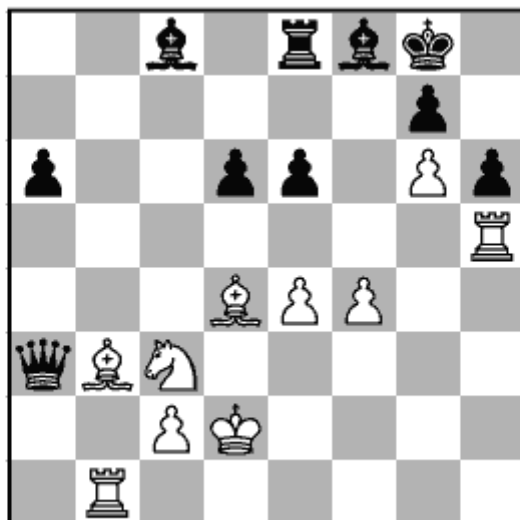
41...g4

41...Rxh3? loses to 42 Rxe7+ Kxe7 43 a7, when the queen vs rook endgame should be easily winning.

41...Rf1 is playable, as the rook can now come over to a1 to defend against the passed pawn. But since the pawn on h3 is still alive, White draws after 42 Rc7 Ra1 43 Kb5 followed by a7.

42 hxg4 h3 43 Rc7 Rf1 44 Rc2 Ra1 45 Kb5

White draws easily. A sample line could be **45...Kg6 46 Rh2 Ra3 47 Kb6 Kg5 48 a7 Kxg4 49 Kb7 Kg3 50 Rb2 h2 51 Rb1 Kg2 52 Rb2+ Kh3 53 Rb1** and Black is unable to win this ending.



Solution to Extra Puzzle 85A: White to play

27 f5!

This is the crucial continuation. It turns out that White's attack is just unstoppable. The black king is too vulnerable along the a2-g8 diagonal.

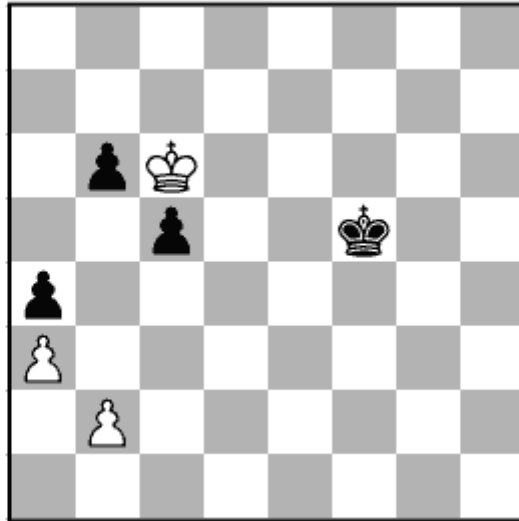
27...d5

27...Qb4 loses due to 28 Bxe6+, while 27...Qa5 is met by 28 f6!.

28 Nxd5!

White's attack is too strong. For example, after **28...Qd6** (28...exd5 29 Bxd5+ wins as 29...Kh8 is not possible due to 30 Rxh6# since the g7-pawn is pinned) **29 Rg1!** White's threat of f6 is very strong, and Black has no real defence. He can try **29...a5** but after **30 c3**, supporting the bishop, f6 comes next move with decisive effect.

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Solution to Extra Puzzle 92A: Black to play

Hikaru Nakamura – Wesley So

chess.com rapid 2018

49...Ke5 50 Kxb6 Kd4

It does not matter much where Black puts his king. Also possible is 50...Kd5 51 Kb5 Kd4 52 Kxa4 Kc4!

51 Kb5 Kd5!

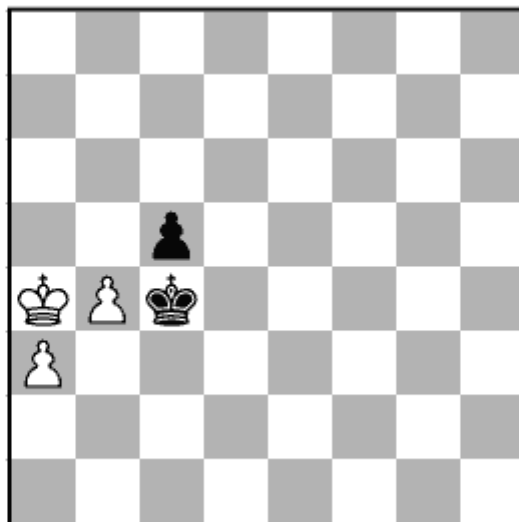
This is Black's miracle draw. He needs to be able to meet Kxa4 with ...Kc4! In the game I was unable to find the correct defence, and I blundered with 51...c4?? 52 Kxa4 c3 53 bxc3+ Kxc3 54 Kb5 1-0.

52 Kxa4 Kc4!

A fascinating defence. It turns out that Black's counterplay with his active king is just fast enough. Not 52...Kc6? due to 53 Ka5 followed by Kb5, etc.

53 b4 (D)

After 53 Ka5 Kb3 54 Kb5 Kxb2 Black also holds, as after 55 a4 Kb3! 56 a5 c4 = both sides promote at the same time. Or 53 b3+ Kd4 54 Kb5 Kc3! 55 a4 Kxb3, also with a draw.

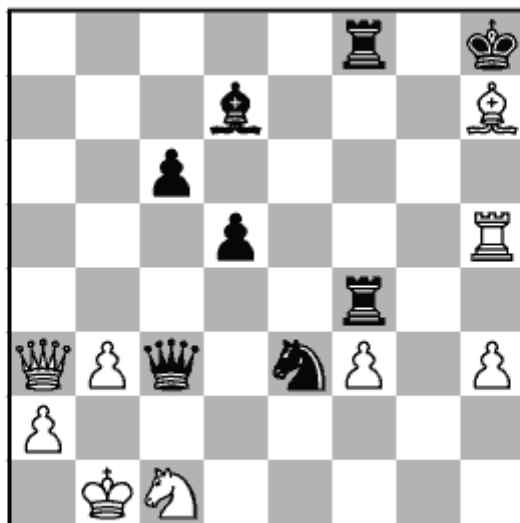


Extra Puzzle 92B: Black to play

The final question. What does Black play now?

[answer](#)

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Solution to Extra Puzzle 97A: White to play

Wesley So – Aleksandr Lenderman

USA Ch, Saint Louis 2019

44 Bd3+!

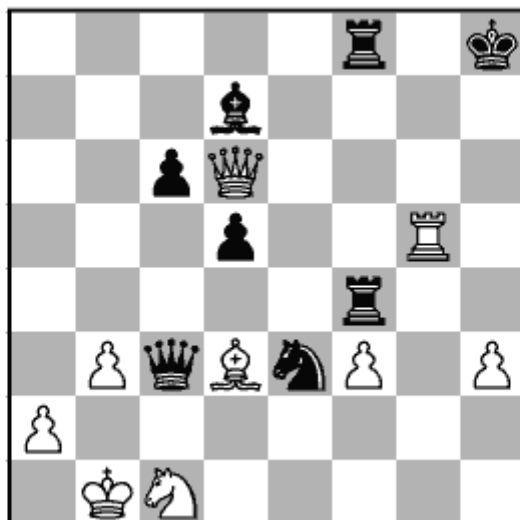
This is the safest place for the bishop. I played 44 Qd6? in the game, but here Black has a miracle defence: 44...Qg7! repels all the threats to his king, and after 45 Bf5+ Kg8 46 Bxd7 R4f7! the position remains super-complicated and both sides have chances.

44 Be4+? Kg8 45 Qe7 is also not enough for a win due to 45...R4f7! 46 Bh7+ Kh8!, when White has no more than a draw!

44...Kg8 45 Rg5+!

45 Qd6? does not work here, as Black has the defence 45...Qg7 amongst others.

45...Kh8 46 Qd6 (D)



Black to play

If you found this move, congratulations! You just solved one of the most difficult exercises in this book. Now White's attack crashes through.

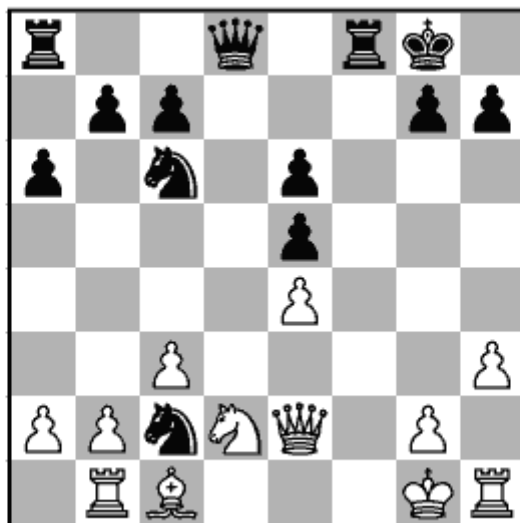
46...Qf6 47 Rh5+

47 Qxd7 is also sufficient: 47...Rh4 48 Rg6 Qf7 49 Qxc6.

47...Kg8 48 Qxd7

White is totally winning, and just needs to play some more logical moves in order to convert his advantage into victory. For example: **48...Qf7 49 Rg5+ Kh8 50 Qd6 Qf6 51 Qc7 Rh4 52 Rg6** +–.

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Solution to Extra Puzzle 99A: Black to play

Wesley So – Viswanathan Anand

Wijk aan Zee 2020

16...N6d4!

Black has no way to rescue his knight, but instead he starts an attack before White is fully developed.

17 cxd4 Qxd4+!

17...Nxd4? 18 Qe1 with the idea of Kh2 or Qg3 wins for White. 17...exd4? likewise gives Black compensation, but not enough after 18 b3 d3 19 Qg4.

18 Kh2 Rf2

This is all forced. Black has to attack!

19 Qg4 Ne3

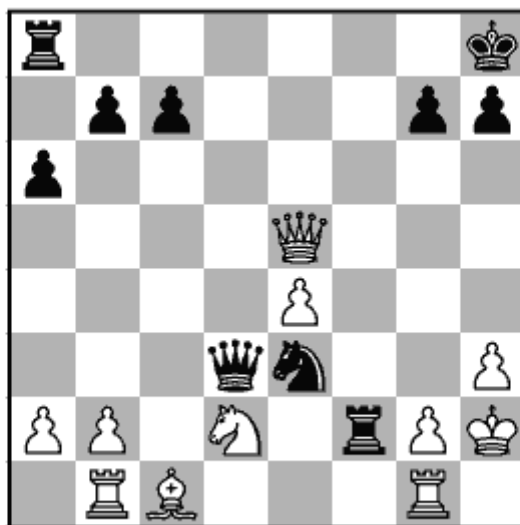
Black has no time to defend the e6-pawn, as White was threatening to defend with Nf3.

20 Qxe6+ Kh8 21 Rg1 Qd3!

21...Raf8 does not work due to 22 Nb3 followed by taking the knight on e3.

22 Qxe5 (D)

22 Qe7 Raf8 is OK for Black. He has strong compensation for the piece after 23 Qg5 c5, as White can hardly move.

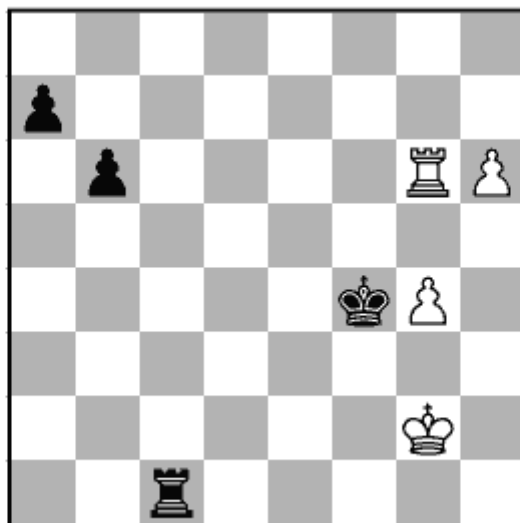


Extra Puzzle 99B: Black to play

Now Black needs to find one really good move to hold. What is it?

[answer](#)

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Solution to Extra Puzzle 100A: Black to play

44...Rc2+! 45 Kh3 Rc1!

The rook has to be able to give checks from behind in order to prevent the white pawns from advancing. It's hard to explain why, but Black holds the endgame thanks to some kind of a miracle.

45...b5? loses due to 46 h7 Rc1 47 Rf6+ Kg5 48 Rf5+ Kg6, when 49 h8N+! Kg7 50 Nf7 leaves White a piece up, and he wins this ending handily.

46 g5 b5!

This is the only move that does not lose. Black's queenside counterplay is fast enough.

47 Rg7 b4 48 h7 b3! 49 g6

49 Rf7+ Kxg5 50 Rg7+ Kf4 51 Kh2 Rc2+ 52 Rg2 Rxc2+ 53 Kxc2 b2 =.

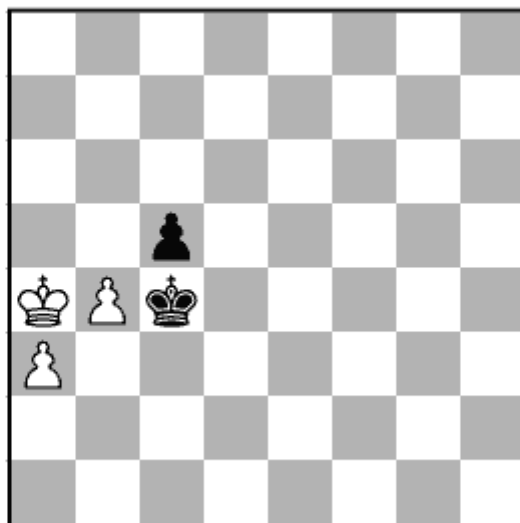
49...Kf5!

49...b2? loses due to 50 Rf7+ Ke4 51 Rb7 b1Q 52 Rxb1 Rxb1 53 Kg3 and one of White's pawns queens.

50 Kg2 Rc2+ 51 Kg3 Rc3+ 52 Kh4 Rc1 =

Black just barely hangs on by the skin of his teeth. This was such a difficult endgame that I will not blame you one bit if you did not find the long solution. Hopefully you solved some parts of it or discovered a few of the main ideas, and in any case found it as instructive as I did!

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Solution to Extra Puzzle 92B: Black to play

53...Kd5!

This move hangs on, incredibly enough. Other moves lose. After 53...Kd4? White wins with 54 Kb3!

54 b5

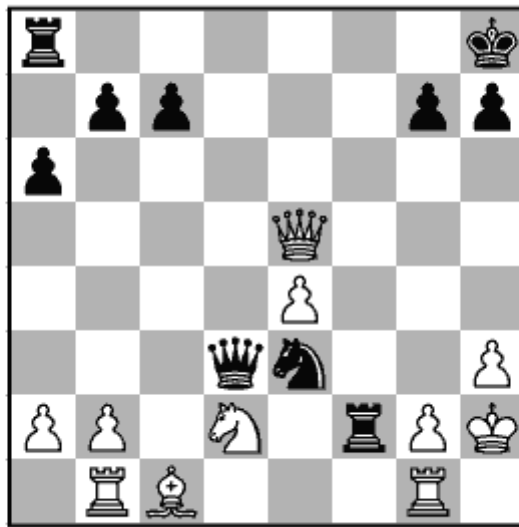
Or 54 Kb3 cxb4 55 axb4 Kc6 56 Ka4 Kb6 =, when Black gains the opposition.

54...c4 55 Kb4

55 b6 Kc6 =.

55...Kd4 56 b6 c3 57 b7 c2 58 b8Q c1Q

White has an extra pawn in this queen ending, but it should not be too hard to draw. After **59 Qd6+ Ke4 60 a4 Qb1+** Black has a lot of checks, and all he needs is to maintain a certain degree of accuracy. A sample line could go: **61 Kc5 Qc2+ 62 Kb5 Qe2+ 63 Ka5 Kf3 =**. The black king aims for the corner squares (h1, g1, h2 or g2) in order to avoid counterchecks. This is a theoretically drawn ending.



Solution to Extra Puzzle 99B: Black to play
Wesley So – Viswanathan Anand

Wijk aan Zee 2020

22...Nxc2!

This move is very tricky to spot, and I won't blame you if you did not find it.

In the game Vishy erred with 22...Raf8? 23 Qg3, when White was securing his position: 23...Qe2 24 b4 Rxc2+ 25 Rxc2 Nxc2 and after 26 Qg4 he resigned. 26 Bb2 wins very quickly as well, thanks to the counterplay on the g7-pawn: 26...Nf4+ 27 Kh1 Nh5 28 Qg2 Rf2 29 Rf1 +–.

23 Rxc2

Black is also holding after 23 Kh1 Raf8! (if 23...Qxh3+ White has 24 Qh2 Qg4 25 b4 with the idea of activating his other rook to b3) 24 Qc3 Qe2 25 Qg3 R8f7 26 b3 (26 Rxc2 Rxc2 27 Qxc2 Rf2 leads to a draw after 28 Qg3 Qe1+ 29 Qg1 Qe3 30 Qg4 Qe1+ =) 26...Nf4 intending ...Nh5, when the threats around White's king look quite scary.

23...Rxc2+ 24 Kxc2 Qe2+

Black equalizes or gives perpetual check. For example, after **25 Kg3** (or 25 Kg1 Qe3+ =) **25...Qe1+** (25...Rf8 is also enough) **26 Kg4 Rf8 27 Nf3 Qe2 28 Bf4 Qg2+ 29 Kh4 Qxf3** = Black's attack is enough to draw the game.