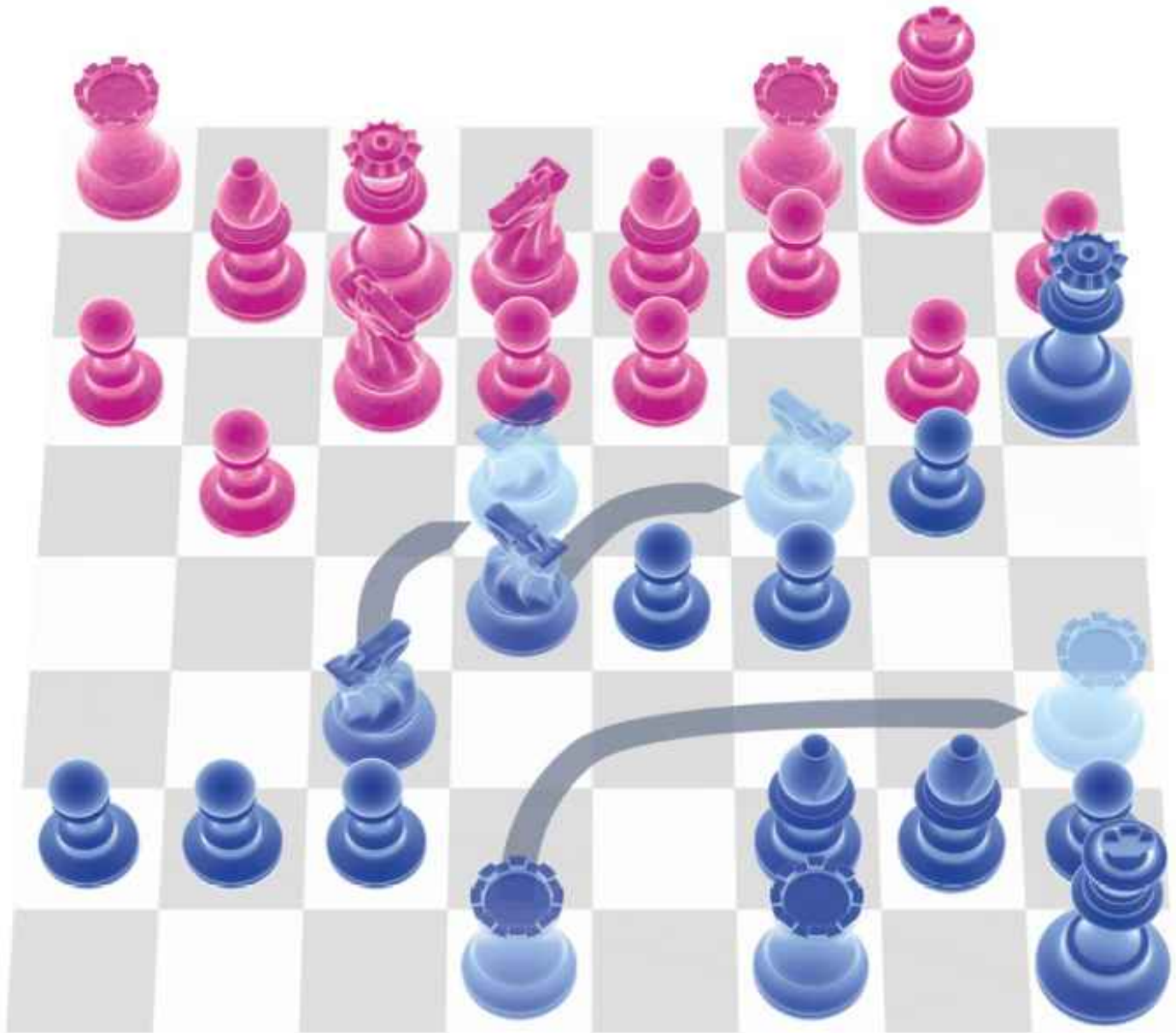


JOSHUA SHENG & GUANNAN SONG

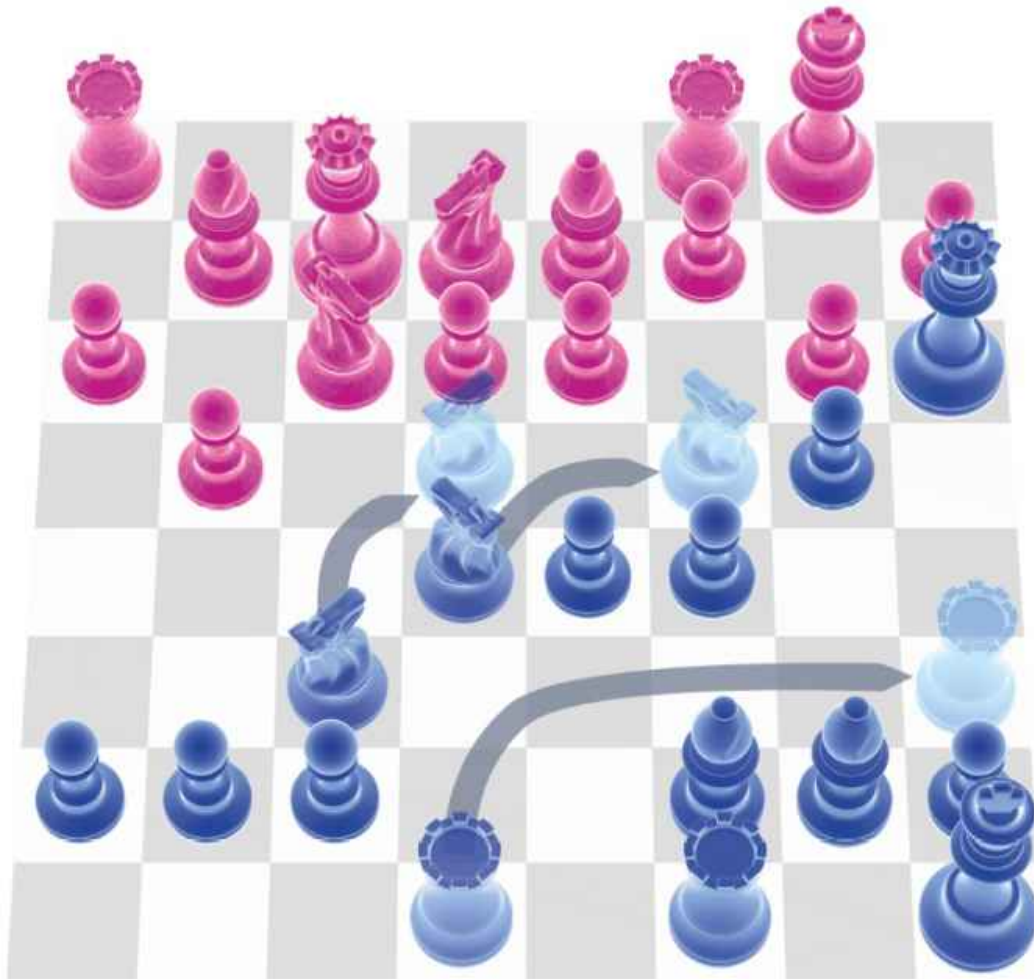
# MASTERING CHESS LOGIC



EVERYMAN CHESS

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**EVERYMAN CHESS**  
[www.everymanchess.com](http://www.everymanchess.com)

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*To our parents.*

*Thank you for inspiring and believing in us in every aspect of life.*

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**Guannan Song** is a FIDE Master with one International Master norm from Canada. His notable achievements include winning the Canadian Youth Chess Championships and scoring bronze at the North American Junior Chess Championships. He has represented Canada on the international stage at the World Youth Chess Championships and the World Youth U16 Chess Olympiad. He graduated from the University of Western Ontario in 2021. Guannan is an experienced chess coach and the author of *Practical Chess Puzzles: 600 Positions to Improve Your Calculation and Judgment* (with FM Dachev Lin and IM Edward Song).

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# Bibliography

As avid consumers of chess literature, it is difficult for us to imagine that the following sources were the only roots of inspiration for this work. However, we have endeavored to include all direct references here.

## Books

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Note: *Stockfish NNUE* was the primary analysis engine we used when working on this book.

# Foreword

I want to start by congratulating the readers on having such great taste in chess literature! At a time where it seems as if there is a chess book about every piece and square on the board, the authors take on an obscure topic that is essential to every chess player. Logic, the thought process in chess (and coincidentally a chess-loving Grammy-winning rapper), has seldom been written about and examined until now.

I am honored to have been approached by the authors to write the foreword for this book. The authors, with whom I have been close friends for many years, are both strong competitive players with years of experience teaching. *Mastering Chess Logic* exemplifies their coaching abilities through its organization and easy-to-understand explanations.

For many players, including myself, logic seems like a mysterious entity mentioned from afar, gifted to certain players who are just naturally better. They seem to pull moves out of thin air in positions where it is unclear how to continue. Such positions that are not dominated by tactics and concrete calculation occur frequently. This is where many players flounder, summoning books on positional, strategic, and dynamic play onto their bookshelf. However, how does a player decide which book to pull out and reference? This dilemma afflicts players of all levels and is one I often notice in my games. Although with hindsight it is obvious what the issues are, I still create the same problem repeatedly, simply because it is challenging to connect the dots correctly in real-time. I'm left scratching my head: what came over me in this position to think I should take a dynamic approach when there are no dynamics? The authors boil it down into four main concepts, adding an additional section of exercises to allow the reader to absorb the information better.

This book is well formulated, starting with the building blocks of positional play. These factors are immediately used in the subsequent chapter to evaluate positions. Here, the authors introduce MAPS, an acronym intended to guide the reader to evaluate a situation correctly. Throughout the book, there is a constant theme of presenting known concepts and converging them into something bigger, making it truly stand out. The game examples, many of which are the authors' own, excellently present this tying-in effect. Strategy is then added into the mix of concepts before exploring dynamic play. The readers are constantly tested with puzzles in each chapter.

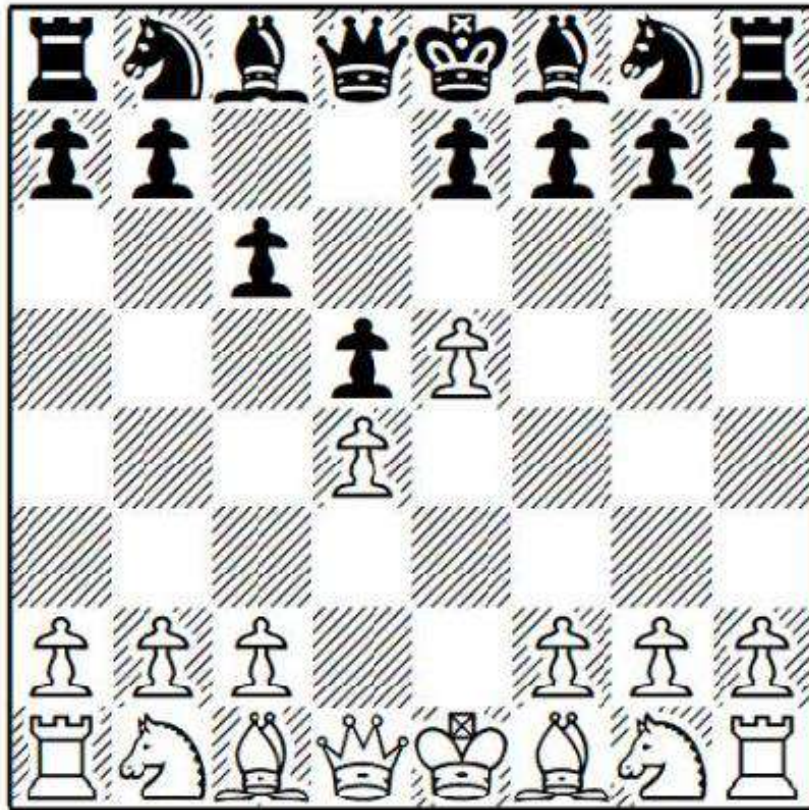
*Mastering Chess Logic* touches upon many significant chess concepts, compiling them together to be a necessary fixture for any player looking to improve their game.

WGM Jennifer Yu, US Women's Champion 2019, July 2021

# Introduction

Chess is a challenging enterprise, with the number of possible games dwarfing the estimated number of atoms in the universe. Given this vastness, it is remarkable we can say with any certainty that specific players are superior to others in any respect. However, what exactly makes the greats such as Carlsen, Fischer, or Kasparov so different from people like your humble authors? While the rudimentary aspects of chess (calculation, memorization of opening theory, and technical endgame ability) are of great importance, the more mysterious aspect of chess lies within the thought process; how does one evaluate some moves to be better than others? How does one improve their feel of the game? This work will attempt to tackle this underexplored aspect of chess: the logic behind the game. The intent of this book is to teach problem-solving abilities by expanding from preexisting knowledge.

According to the chess writer and coach Jacob Aagaard, English chess literature has traditionally been supported by three pillars: calculation, openings, and intuition, the last implying positional ability. This model is noted by Aagaard to be insufficient and somewhat elitist, suggesting that one needs talent to excel in this area. We believe that positions without tactics can still be explained in a logical way. Most such positions have multiple playable moves of roughly equivalent strength and all will accomplish something. This is more than can be said for moves occasionally seen from players of all levels, including grandmasters. Basic knowledge of topics such as “bad bishops” or “worst piece first” is often hard to utilize in games but can be extremely useful if applied correctly. For example:



Evaluate 3 ... e6

This position will likely be familiar to most readers; it is the starting point of the Advance Variation of the Caro-Kann Defense (1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 e5). 3 ... e6 is of special attention here because it is a move a student rated around 1400 played in a game. Clearly, it was not readily apparent to the student that the move is a mistake, and who can blame him? No one had taught him how to figure that out. However, this move can be explained to be poor with straightforward concepts:

- 1) The Advance Variation of the French Defense is an opening with the same position but with the pawn on c7 and an extra tempo for Black.
- 2) The black pawn on c7 in the Advance French usually advances to c5 in an effort to attack the “base” of White’s pawn chain.
- 3) The bishop on c8 is a common problem for Black in the French Defense, as it is considered a “bad” bishop by virtue of the black pawn structure

involving a light-squared chain of f7-e6-d5.

4) The Caro-Kann is played instead of the French because, despite involving an extra pawn move of ... c7-c6 on the way to c5, refraining from playing ... e6 so early prevents the caging of the c8-bishop, which is for now free to roam to g4 or f5.

From this, it follows naturally that 3 ... e6 is poor and 3 ... Bf5 is superior. These concepts are not difficult to understand, and the 1400 student is aware of all of them. However, when the time came, he failed to properly synthesize his knowledge of the game into the proper thought process for deciding his move. This book will attempt to target this issue, but not just to address people of that rating; the problem of playing inexplicable chess is rampant at all levels. *Mastering Chess Logic* endeavors to explain how chess works and thereby target this issue for the reader's benefit.

This book will be arranged primarily into sections where games will be analyzed, and your authors will talk. The talking and exposition will be predominantly done in the first person to ease communication. The beliefs and opinions held will generally be shared by both authors, although the primary voice will be Joshua's. At the end of each of the first four chapters, there will be 30 practical exercises intended to reinforce your understanding of the relevant topics. Chapter 5 will consist of another 150 exercises representing a more comprehensive synthesis of the explored material and are designed to test your overall knowledge and understanding. For the most part, we have intentionally avoided mentioning the end result or the game continuation after the point of interest from these exercises, as doing so might distract the reader from the primary point of them – developing your understanding. What matters is the decision-making process at the critical position shown in each puzzle. We have concluded each puzzle at an appropriate point that encapsulates the mini-lesson we want the reader to take away; what happens after this point is immaterial and irrelevant to fulfilling these objectives. The reader is encouraged to solve these puzzles by writing their answers down on paper (or on a computer, if you prefer) before checking the solutions. The puzzles are mostly designed to develop your understanding, as we believe that the justification of the moves is more important than the actual correct answer.

# Chapter One

## Building Blocks

Much as with conversation, it is vital to have some base assumptions before attempting to discuss the game of chess at a higher level. In this case, this will refer to the basics of positional chess as they allow us to draw conclusions about positions from them. To begin with, we ought to define what the ubiquitous term “positional chess” is actually referring to. To approach this problem, we must discuss what the components of chess really are.

In *The Art of War*, Sun Tzu famously noted that “Strategy without tactics is the slowest route to victory. Tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat.” It is no coincidence that as a metaphor for war, chess adopts much of the same terminology. However, while tactics are well defined as forcing sequences that follow certain generic themes (generally based on calculation or the ability to “see into the future”), the strategy component is quite hard to conceptualize. My definition of strategy and the “positional chess” it pertains to revolves around the parts of the game that are decided by judgment, such as improving one’s pieces, formulating plans, and evaluating the position. This is not to say that calculation and strategy are entirely separate, as chess is a holistic game, and it is readily apparent that there must be intersections between various aspects of chess. Neither can exist without the other, but it appears to me that knowledge of the latter element is insufficiently examined compared to the former.

The process of building a positional understanding is very underexplored in chess literary circles, in my opinion, at least. While I am of the belief that everyone should develop their own understanding, some concepts are well agreed upon. In his widely acclaimed book, *How to Reassess Your Chess*, the American IM Jeremy Silman sorts imbalances into six categories. However, I believe that this can be further condensed into material, piece activity, pawn structure, and space. Piece activity and pawn structure are both heavily swayed by the presence or absence of significant weaknesses. Thus, to properly analyze the ramifications of these imbalances, we must define the term “weakness”.

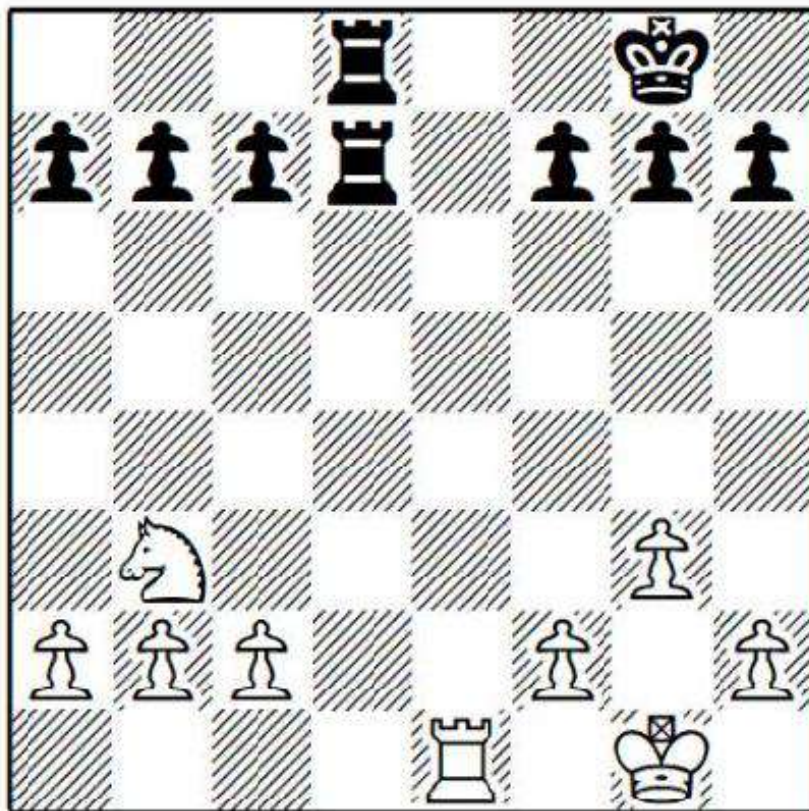
In his excellent book *Grandmaster Preparation: Positional Play*, GM Jacob Aagaard attempts to define a weakness as an important square (occupied or unoccupied) that is poorly defended and can be exploited. I think this is a wonderful definition and should serve the reader nicely. In

general, we should be looking to minimize our weaknesses and capitalize on those of the opponent.

With the base definitions out of the way, we can now demonstrate examples of these positional concepts for the reader.

## Material

### 1) Material - 1

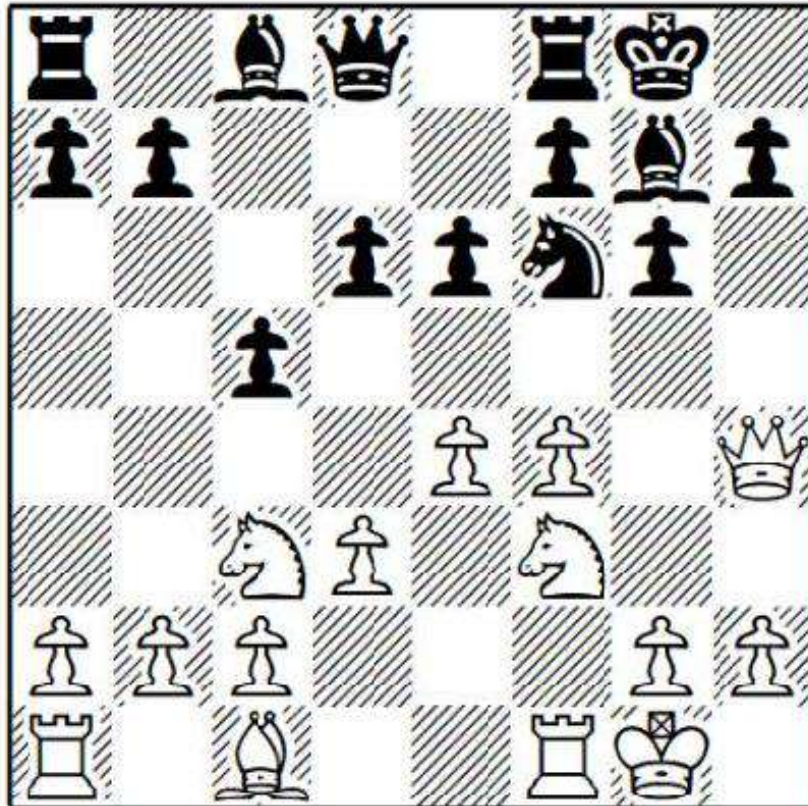


Material, as the reader is likely aware, is simply how many pieces you have. Having an advantage in material is useful, as it alleviates the pressure to embark on any immediate active operations. This is because endgames will generally be favorable to the side that has more material. When there are fewer pieces on the board, it becomes harder to generate active counterplay, and therefore it becomes easier to realize one's material advantage. This position shows an opportunity to trade pieces with

**1 ... Rd1!**

and White's defensive task will be rendered untenable by the removal of one pair of rooks.

## 2) Material - 2

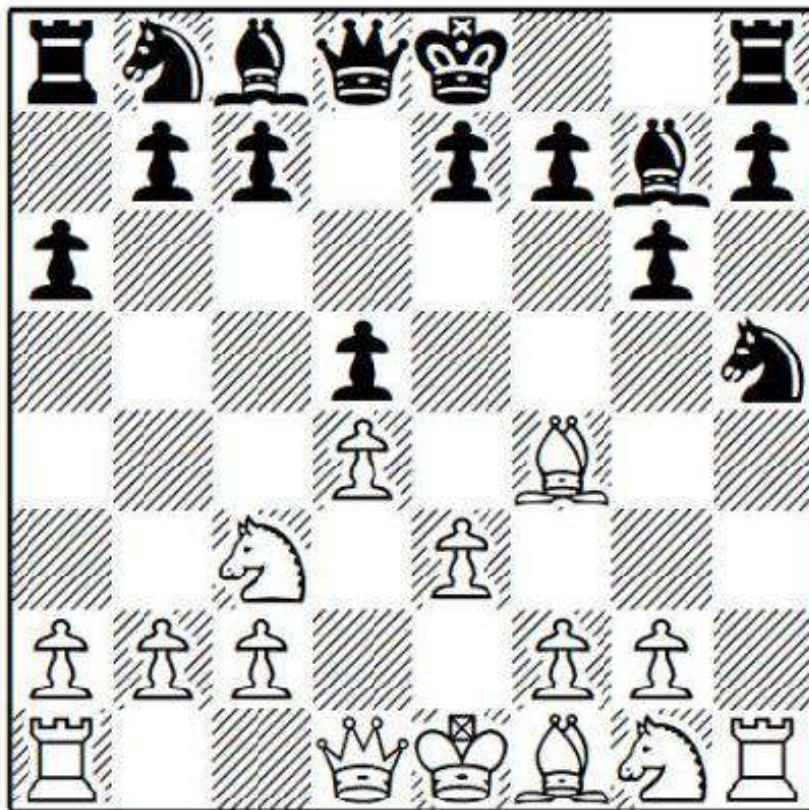


Material is indeed one of the most important imbalances and probably decides more games than any of the others. Hence, many players treat material as some infallible be-all-end-all of chess. However, it would be much more accurate to consider material as simply another imbalance that can be freely exchanged with others at will. For example, this position (crudely adapted from similar cases in the Sicilian Grand Prix Attack) sees a typical pawn sacrifice to bring the white dark-squared bishop into the attack.

**1 f5! exf5 2 Bg5**

and the pressure on Black's kingside is very dangerous.

### 3) Material - 3

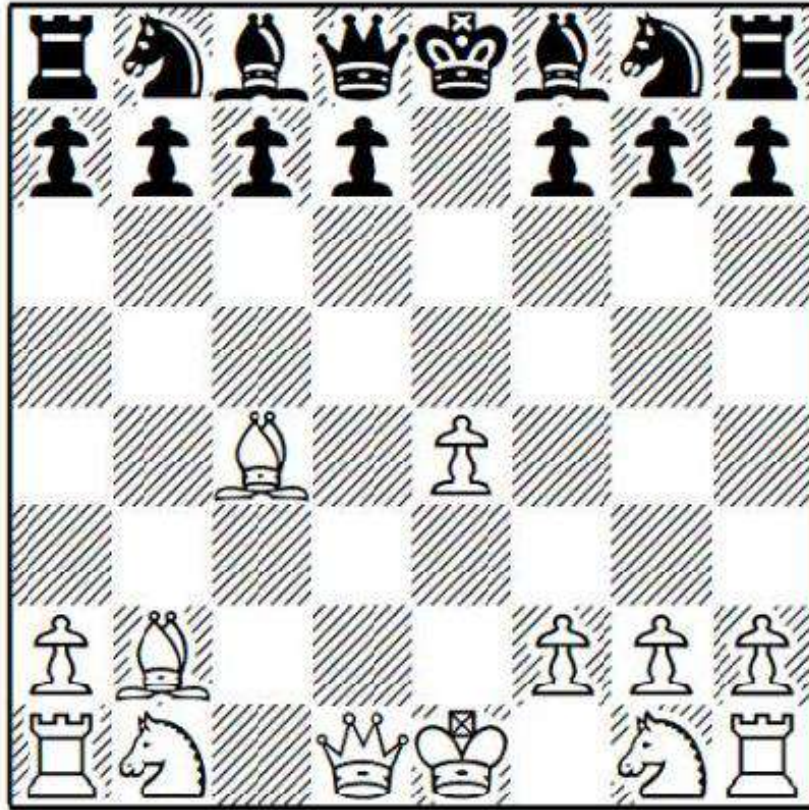


In a similar vein, material can also be sacrificed to damage the opponent's pawn structure. This case results from a typical opening line in the "Jobava Attack" (1 d4 d5 2 Nc3 Nf6 3 Bf4).

**1 Rxf5! gxh5 2 Qxf5**

and White's great piece activity along with Black's shattered kingside structure render White's position more pleasant.

### 4) Material - 4

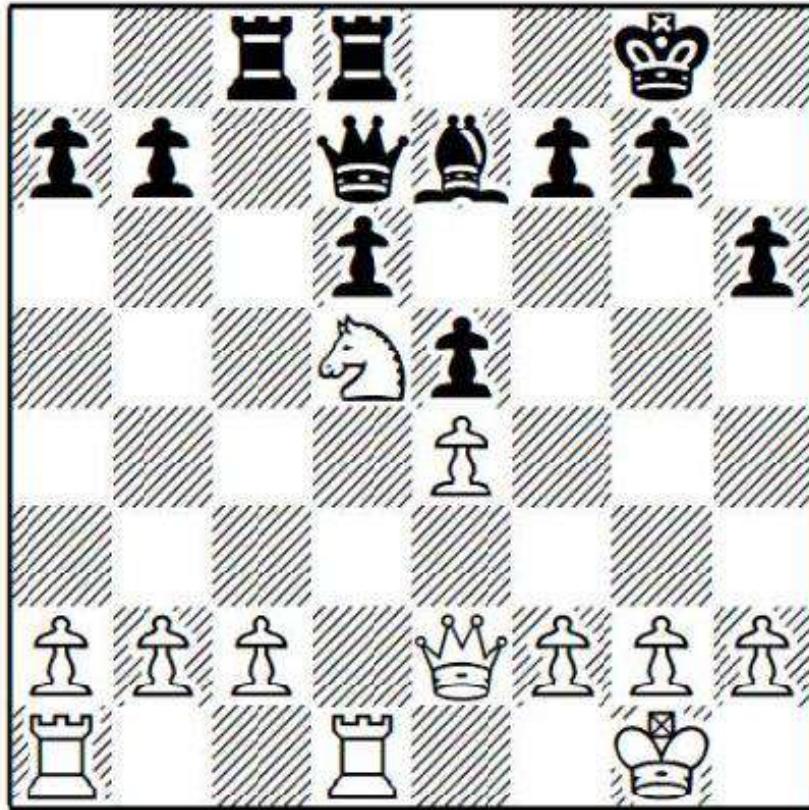


In a sort of combination between the concept of simplification and giving material for other imbalances, the side that is facing a severe attack in compensation for extra material can often return some material to improve their position or disrupt their opponent's rhythm. This position defines the somewhat eccentric Danish Gambit, and rather than endure White's initiative for the two pawns, Black's most straightforward response is usually considered to be

**5 ... d5! 6 Bxd5 Nf6 7 Bxf7+ Kxf7 8 Qxd8 Bb4+**  
with equality, or perhaps even a slight advantage for Black.

#### Piece Activity

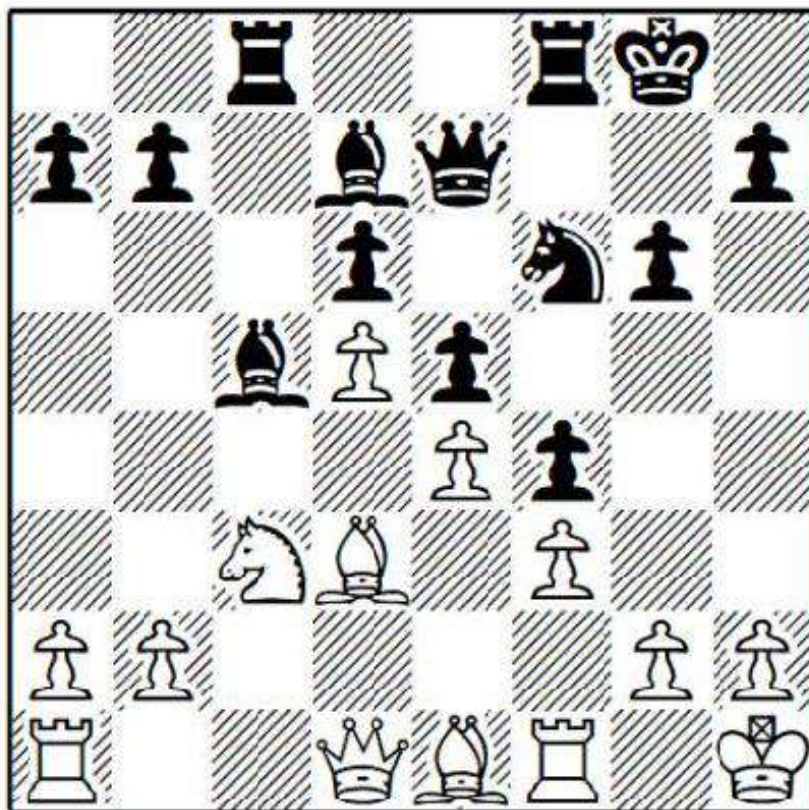
#### 5) Piece Activity - 1



The reader has likely heard of piece activity before, and the definition is probably self-evident. However, for the sake of the semantics that your authors are so captivated with, we can loosely define the imbalance of piece activity to refer to the differences in future prospects between the pieces of both sides. One prevalent variant of an imbalance in piece activity is the concept of a superior minor piece. In this caricature of a nightmare Sveshnikov Variation of the Sicilian Defense, it is fairly plain to see that the white knight on d5 is superior to the black dark-squared bishop. This knight is occupying what is known as an outpost, a square that cannot be easily controlled by enemy pawns (and usually pieces). This is significant as it means that the knight is very hard for Black to dislodge. Meanwhile, the black bishop is in a rather sorry state, blocked substantially by its own pawns on d6 and e5. We often call this type of bishop, which shares a color with one's own central pawns, a "bad" bishop; if Black instead had a light-squared bishop, he would be able to move it to e6 or c6 and trade off

White's mighty knight on d5.

## 6) Piece Activity - 2

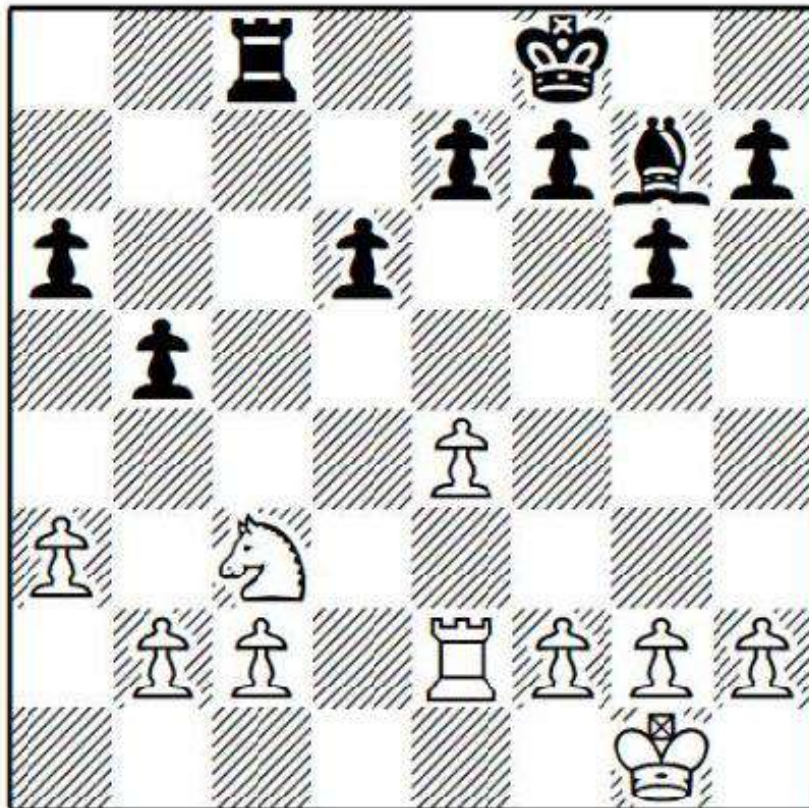


This is not to say that the “bad” bishop is always in such disrepair. In this example, which was constructed by your humble authors in imitation of an idealized state of the King’s Indian Defense, the black dark-squared bishop is quite happy with itself on c5, where it resides comfortably removed from the confines of the d6-e5-f4 pawn chain. “Bad” bishops are often quite serviceable pieces, and the c5-bishop, in this case, is no exception, exerting highly uncomfortable pressure on White’s kingside along the a7-g1 diagonal. White is practically obliged to exchange this powerful piece with the maneuver Be1-f2. However, in doing so, White would execute another solution to the bad bishop debacle in trading off the often problematic piece. After

**1 Bf2 Bxf2 2 Rxf2 Rc5**

Black has no problems and stands better, with the cruel irony of possessing a “good” bishop on d7 that is superior to White’s d3-bishop.

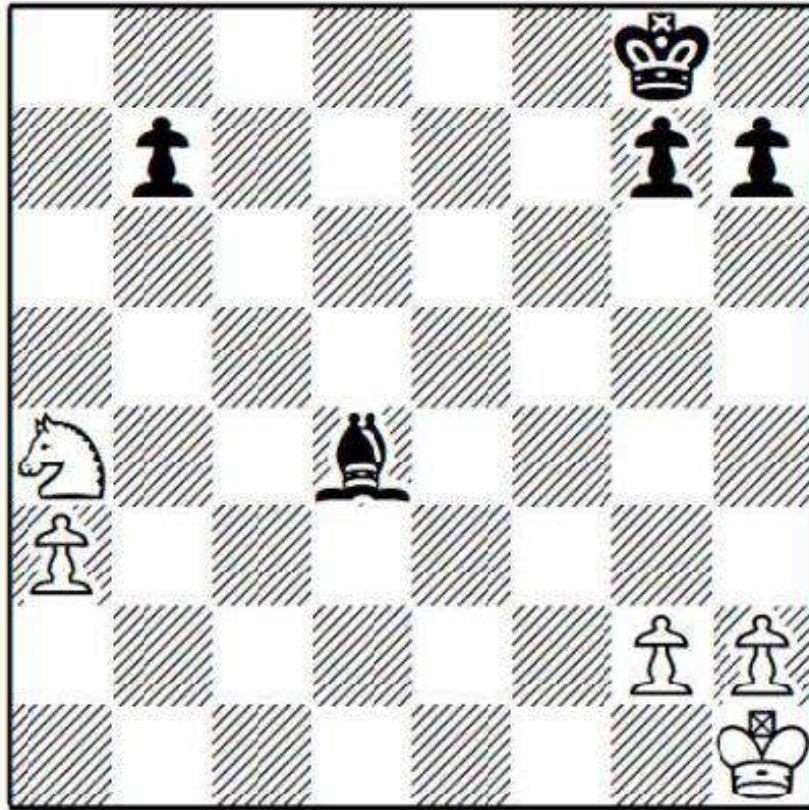
### 7) Piece Activity - 3



There has historically been a long-standing debate over the proverbial question of bishop vs. knight. With our first example, we illustrated a situation in which a knight dominates a bishop. Thus it is only fair that we examine a position (which could have originated from a Sicilian Dragon) in which the bishop proves better than the knight. As a general rule of thumb, bishops are superior to knights in open positions, and the converse of this statement implies that knights are better in more closed positions. This is because the bishop can cross the board in one fell swoop (for example, ... Bg7xc3 in this case), whereas the knight must hobble across the board two squares at a time. In contrast, this skillset matters much less in the event of a closed position that prominently features pawn chains, where it is much

more important to be able to control squares of both colors.

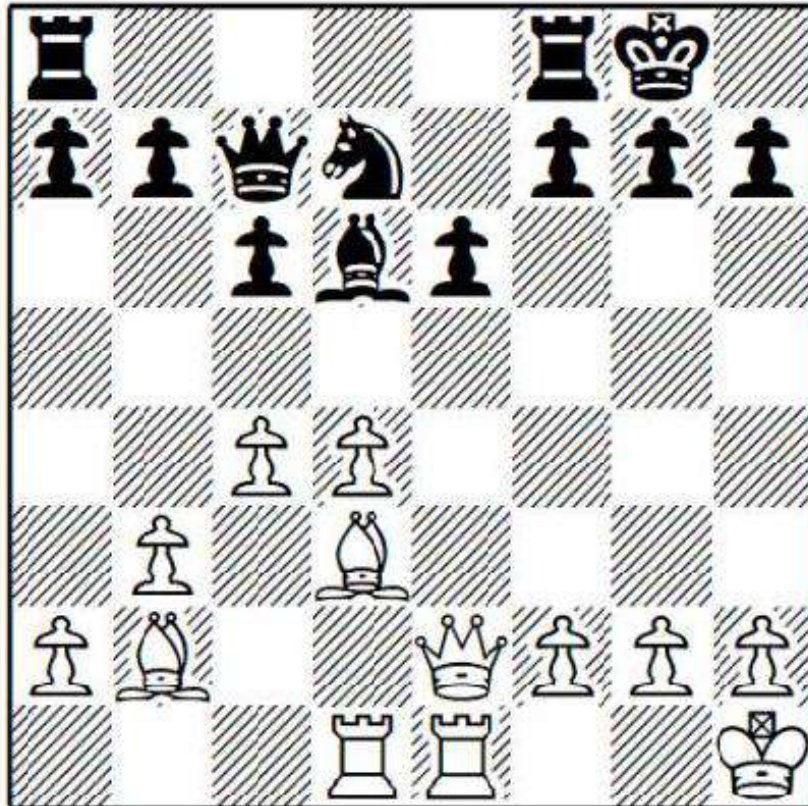
### 8) Piece Activity - 4



Although both minor pieces have their ups and downs, most strong players generally regard the bishop in a slightly better light. Garry Kasparov, one of the greatest players of all time, has been quoted as saying that the bishop is worth roughly  $3\frac{1}{2}$  points compared to the knight's meager 3. It is commonly stated that the worst bishop is better than the best knight. Despite this being a somewhat humorous exaggeration, the reasoning for it can perhaps best be attributed to the type of situation we see in this diagram. Unlike the reverse case, bishops are capable of singlehandedly dominating knights, especially those on the side of the board. In this particular instance, White cannot defend himself in any reasonable measure from the ensuing ... b7-b5, which will entrap and kill his knight. For example,

**1 g4 b5**  
and White will lose.

### 9) Piece Activity - 5



Another feature of the bishop is that being paired with its colleague – the so-called bishop pair (a relatively uncreative naming scheme, but quite effective in describing it) – erases the bishop's former greatest weakness (namely, its commitment to squares of a single color). This bishop pair is generally considered a great advantage and represents a superiority over the enemy when they do not possess it. When one has this advantage, it is vital to try to open the position as fast as possible so that the bishops show the horrors they are capable of. For example, this relatively innocuous position is, in fact, completely lost for Black.

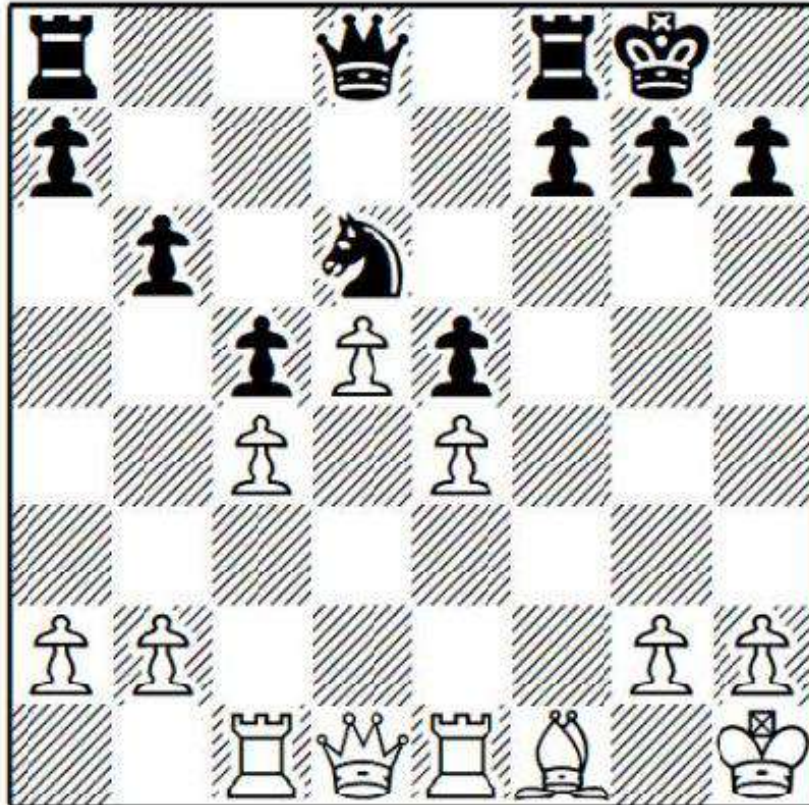
**1 d5!**

opens the position for the white bishops to devastating effect.

**1 ... cxd5 2 Bxh7+! Kxh7 3 Qh5+ Kg8 4 Bxg7!! Kxg7 5 Qg5+ Kh8 6 Re3**

The exposed black king will be eaten alive by the heavy pieces that the bishops so valiantly gave their lives to make way for.

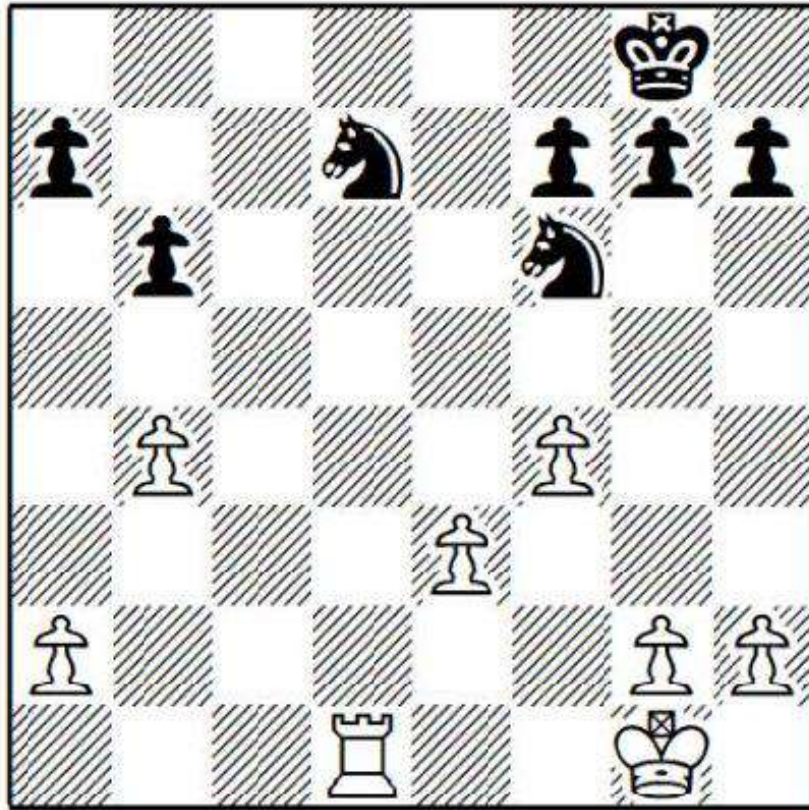
### 10) Piece Activity - 6



Despite their general inferiority to their papal rivals, the knights are markedly superior at blocking passed pawns. This is because their unorthodox mobility prevents them from being rendered passive by their newfound inability to move. For example, a protected passed pawn that is blockaded by a knight is both immobile and sees its defending pawn(s) under attack, as the current case displays for the pawns on c4 and e4. Coupled with the extreme passivity of White's "bad" light-squared bishop, this position is more comfortable for Black. Note that a black bishop on d6 taking the stalwart defender's place would make Black's position more

passive.

### 11) Piece Activity - 7



One problem that also counts against the knights is that a pair of them has no special synergy, unlike the bishops. In fact, having two knights that protect each other instead results in what the late Mark Dvoretsky (one of the best coaches and authors in chess of all time) coined as “superfluous knights”. These knights suffer from the lack of mobility their partner’s ailment affords them. For example, the diagram shows a situation in which material is even (two knights vs. a rook and pawn) in an endgame, but the knights’ clunkiness compared with the white rook means that Black is losing.

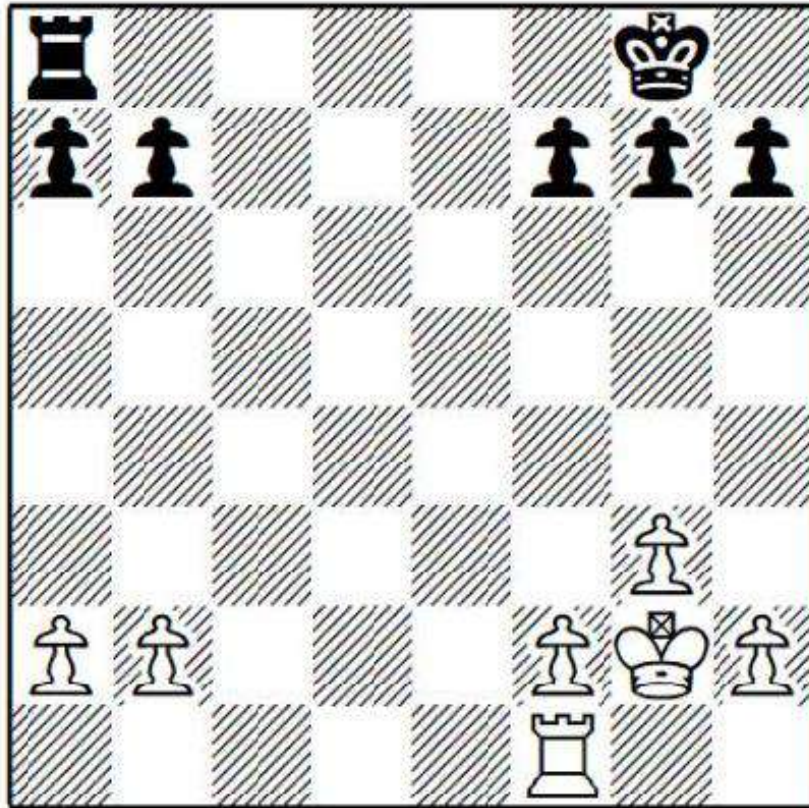
**1 e4!**

or 1 g4! both serve the purpose of harassing Black’s knights, with the threat of 2 e5 or 2 g5 respectively, and doom him to passivity.

**1 ... Nf8 2 e5 N6d7 3 Kf2**

and White is winning because Black has no effective way to coordinate his knights.

## 12) Piece Activity - 8

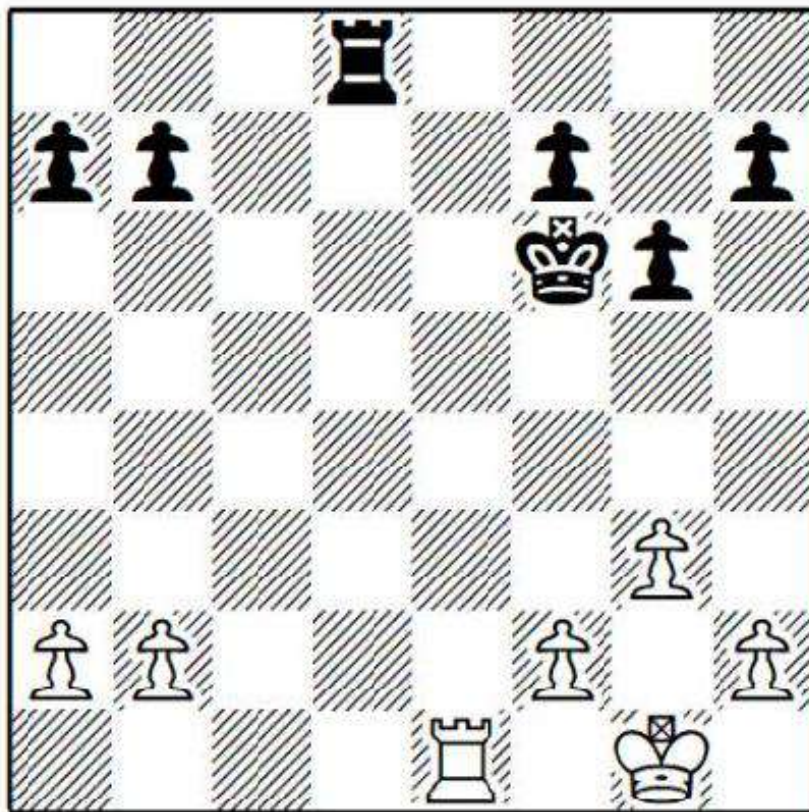


Rooks are also pieces of great nuance and are arguably more challenging to operate than knights and bishops. This position has even material, and so far it appears that piece activity is roughly equal. However, White can make use of his advantage in time with

**1 Rd1!**

or Rcl to seize an open file (an open file is a file without pawns on it, while a half-open file has none of your own pawns, with an opponent's pawn on it). This would allow the white rook access to the much-vaunted 7th rank, which is an optimal position for it.

### 13) Piece Activity - 9

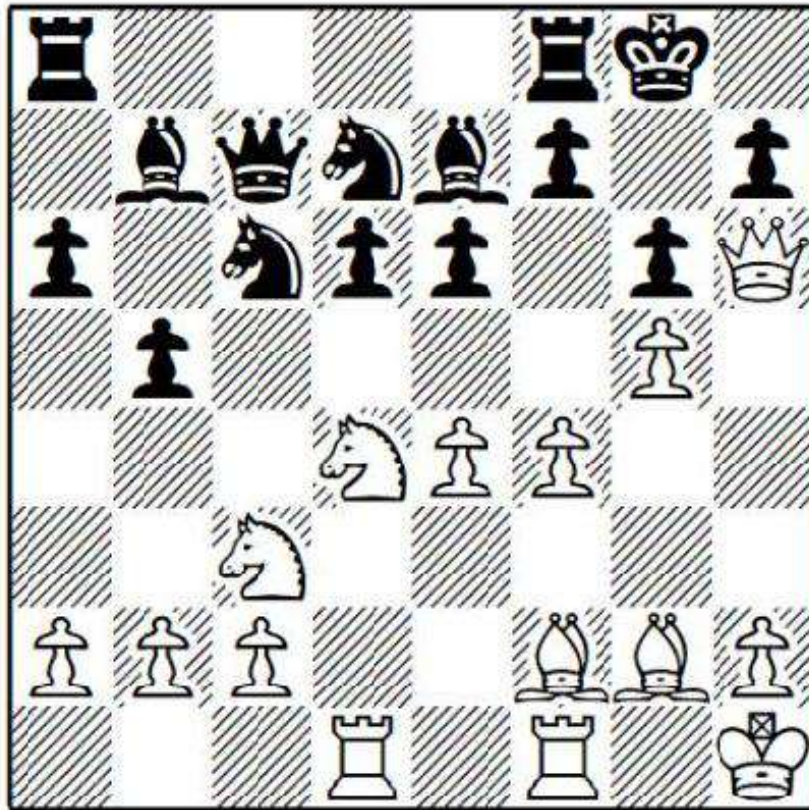


In this position, Black is fairly active, and the best way to take advantage of this is by bringing his rook to the “7th” rank with

**1 ... Rd2!**

The 7th (or 2nd, from Black’s point of view) rank is an important location because rooks here serve to cut off the opponent’s king from advancing while pressuring the other side’s pawns. White would have to play the unfortunate Rb1 here to defend the pawn. If it were White to move in the original position, he would play 1 Re2! to barricade the second rank, with a likely draw.

### 14) Piece Activity - 10



While rooks are commonly seen as endgame pieces because they are located so far from the center, they can still be devastating forces in the middlegame when allowed to participate. In this rather sad example of a Sicilian gone wrong for Black, the quickest win is

**1 Rd3!**

This so-called rook lift brings the rook to h3 and makes the attack completely irresistible.

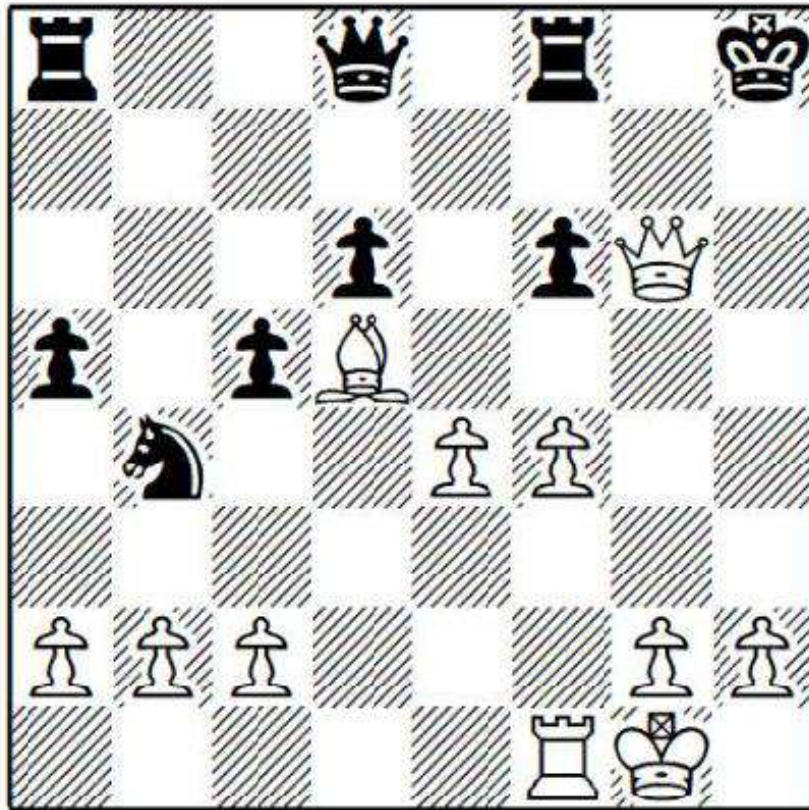
**1 ... Rfe8 2 Rh3 Nf8**

and White has many ways to win, with the computer's flashy

**3 Nf5!! gxf5 4 Nd5! exd5 5 exf5**

being especially spectacular.

## 15) Piece Activity - 11

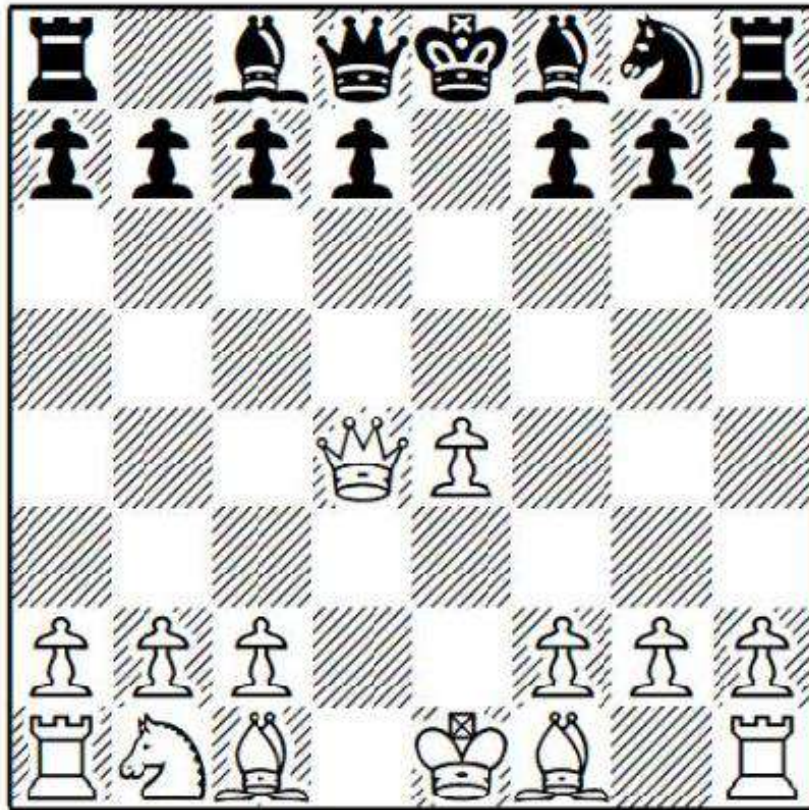


Rooks can also be remarkable defenders in the middlegame. One common theme involves a lateral defense along the second rank. For example, in this position, the only way for Black to sufficiently defend himself from all of White's threats and win the game is

**1 ... Ra7!**

and with ... Rh7 coming, White's attack is finished, and he will soon lose due to the material disadvantage.

## 16) Piece Activity - 12



The queen's proper utilization does not really follow such formulaic rules as its underlings (the knight, bishop, and rook) due to its superior mobility and versatility. The only "rule" that is of note is the power of a centralized queen. Although the centralized queen is usually confined to the endgame where it cannot be harassed by pieces of lesser value, it can be dominant when it is allowed to stabilize there. For example, in the rather innocent Scotch Game, after

**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 exd4 4 Nxd4 Nxd4? 5 Qxd4**

the white queen is very well situated to influence the game. Black already has immense difficulty developing, as 5 ... Be7? would drop the g7-pawn and

**5 ... Nf6?!**

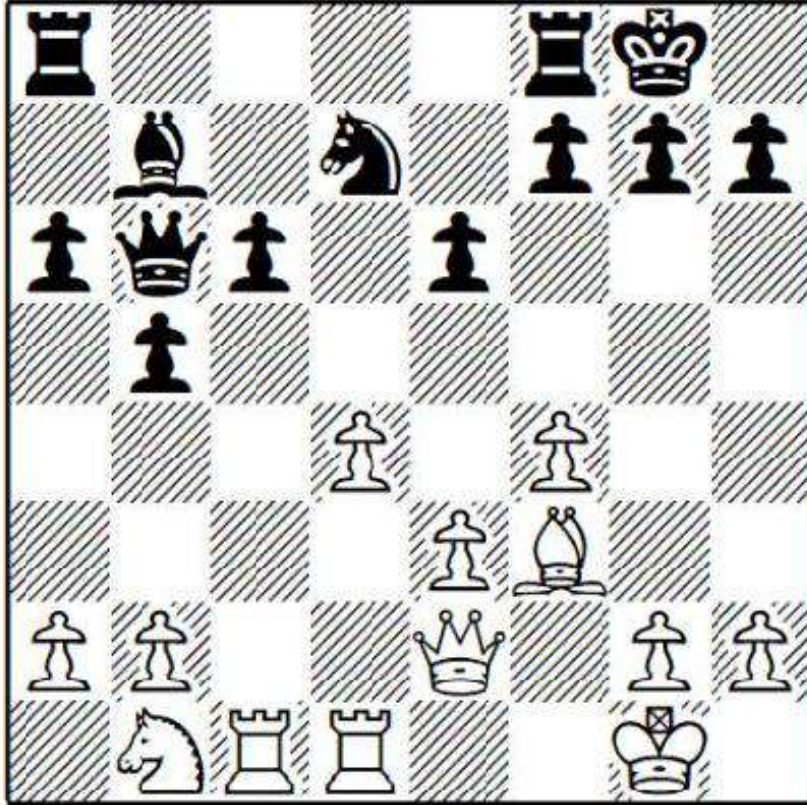
allows

**6 e5**

with a great advantage for White.

## Piece Improvement

### 17) Piece Improvement - Knight 1



The next few examples are more exercises than evaluative, with the general purpose of having the reader imagine the ideal position for their pieces. In this position, Black has a so-called “backward pawn” (which we will explore later) on c6, resulting in an outpost for White on c5. What is the best way for us to take advantage of this situation?

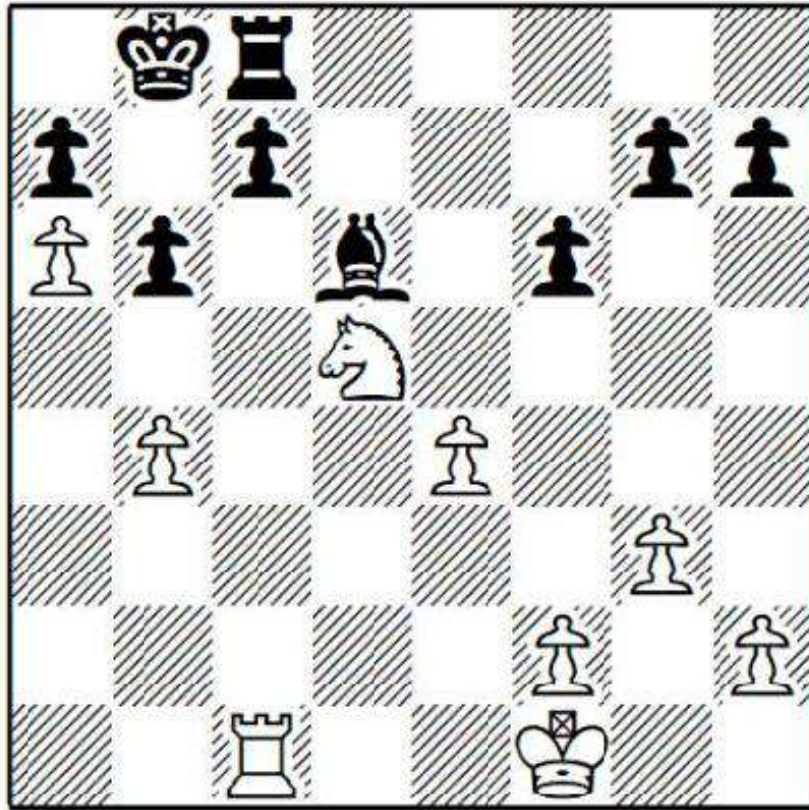
**1 Nd2!**

This move is best because it allows us to reach c5 via either b3 or e4. 1 Nc3?! is less good because it allows Black the opportunity to eliminate his bad pawn with the move 1 ... c5!, when to achieve more than a symbolic edge White must play 2 Bxb7 Qxb7 3 dxc5 Nxc5 4 Nxb5 axb5 5 Rxc5 Rxa2 6 Rxb5 Qc6 and Black has some compensation for his pawn deficit.

**1 ... Nf6 2 Nb3**

and White has an enormous advantage.

### 18) Piece Improvement - Knight 2

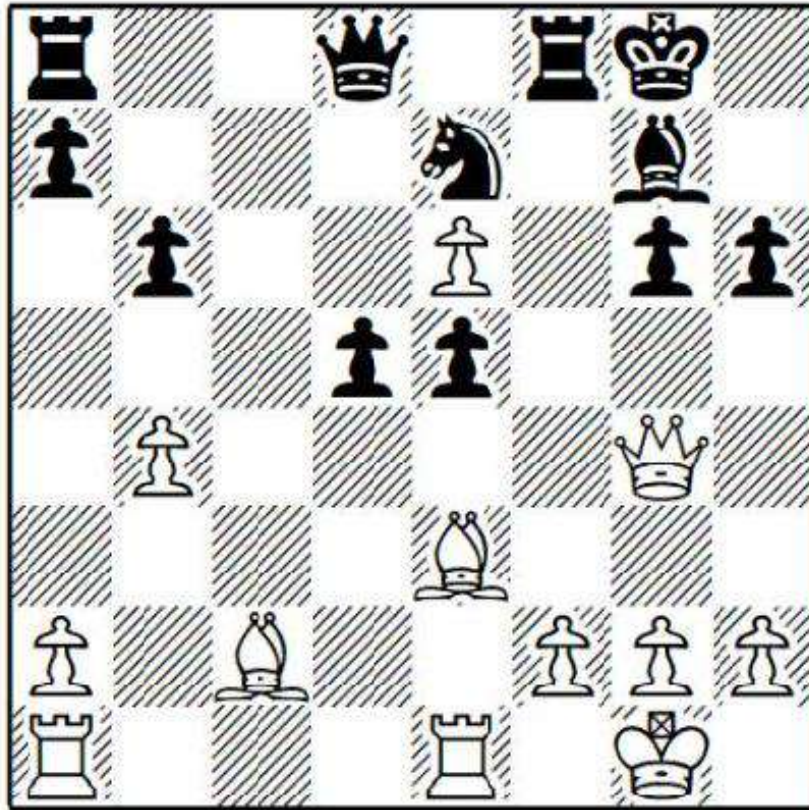


Black is threatening to remove the strong d5-knight from its outpost by playing ... c7-c6. By stopping this move, White can retain his mighty steed.

**1 b5!**

Prevents ... c6 and maintains a White advantage.

### 19) Piece Improvement - Bishop 1

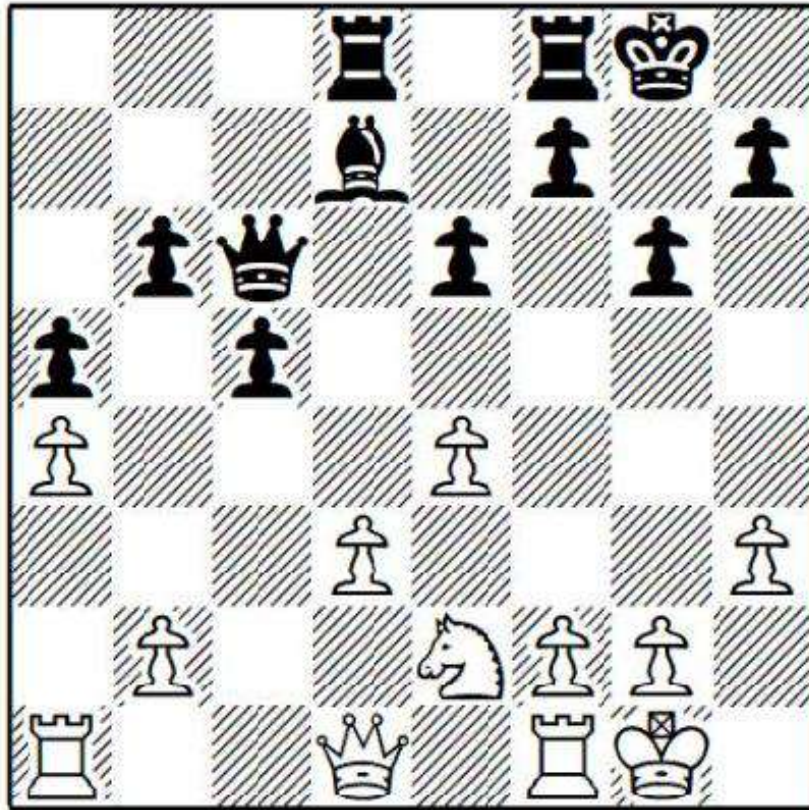


After this long sequence from a topical variation of the King's Indian Defense, Black's pawn on g6 is under attack.

**20 ... e4!**

The weaknesses of d5 and d4 are less important than unleashing the powerful bishop on g7, which is now no longer hindered by central pawns on dark squares. 20 ... Rf6 is rather passive.

## **20) Piece Improvement - Bishop 2**

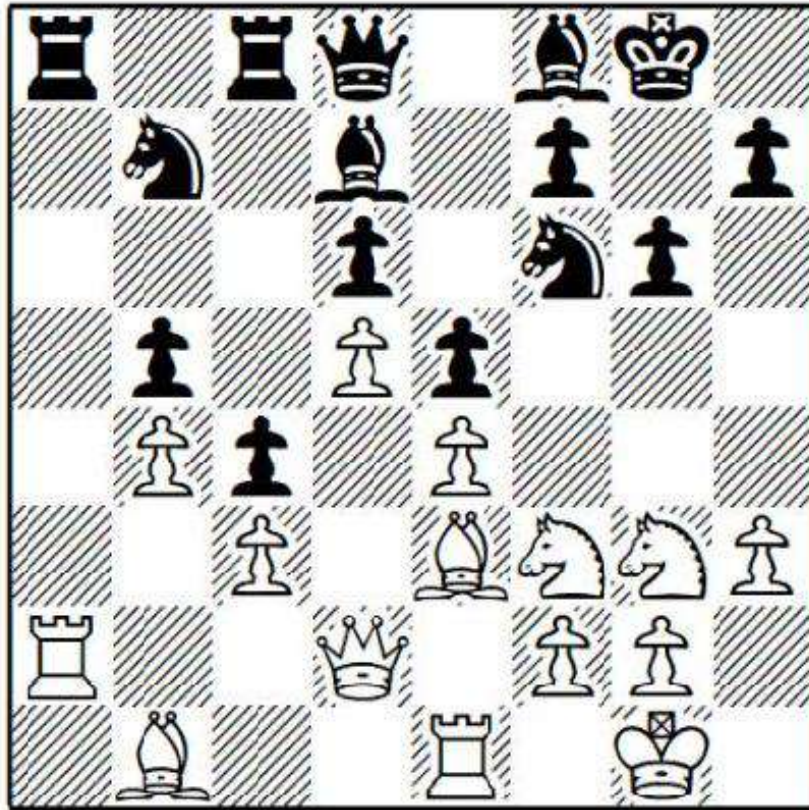


The main weakness in the White position is the pawn on d3. Our bishop on d7 is currently passive. How can we reroute it to serve our purposes better?

**1 ... Bc8!**

With the black bishop coming to a6 soon, White will face extreme pressure on d3 and be significantly worse.

## **21) Piece Improvement - Rook 1**

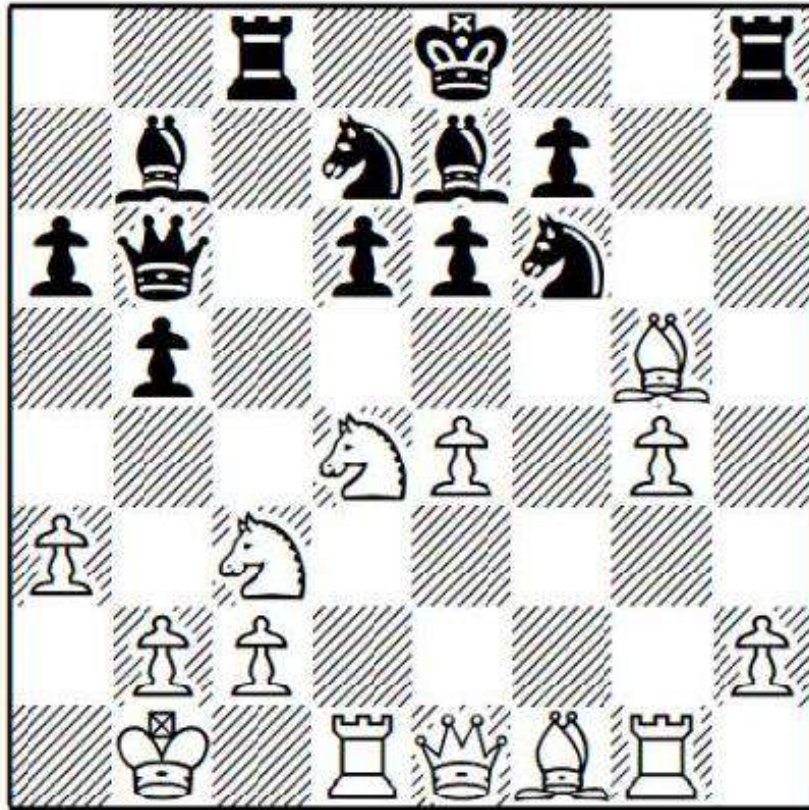


This position, unlike the others, is from an actual game between Karpov and Unzicker in 1974. Is it beneficial or not for White to trade rooks?

**24 Ba7!**

No! White benefits greatly from his pressure on the a-file and wants to double rooks. However, it is difficult for him to do, so Karpov blocks the a-file with his bishop's body to prepare Bc2 and Rea1 without trading rooks. The 12th world champion went on to win in his trademarked technical style.

## 22) Piece Improvement - Rook 2



After a long sequence from a topical variation of the Sicilian Najdorf, Black finds himself missing a pawn.

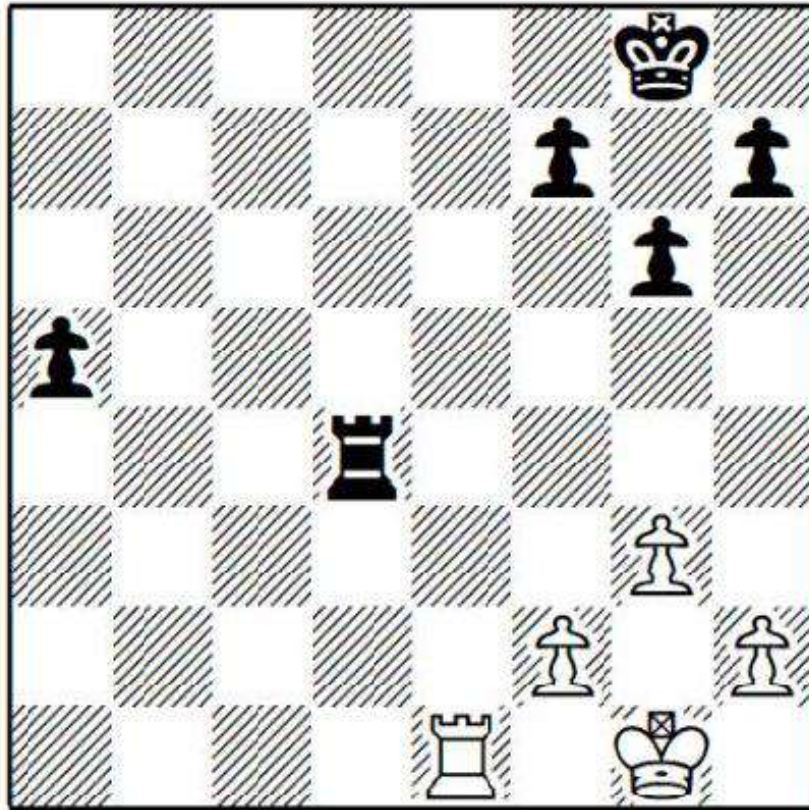
**17 ... Rxc3!**

So Black sacrifices even more material! In the middlegame, rooks are often less useful than their minor piece subordinates because they lack the flexibility of movement in more closed positions.

**18 Bxf6 Nxf6 19 Qxc3 Nxe4 20 Qe1 Rxh2**

with adequate compensation for the exchange.

### **23) Piece Improvement - Rook 3**



It is commonly stated that rooks belong behind passed pawns, whether they be yours or your opponent's. Thus, Black's best move is

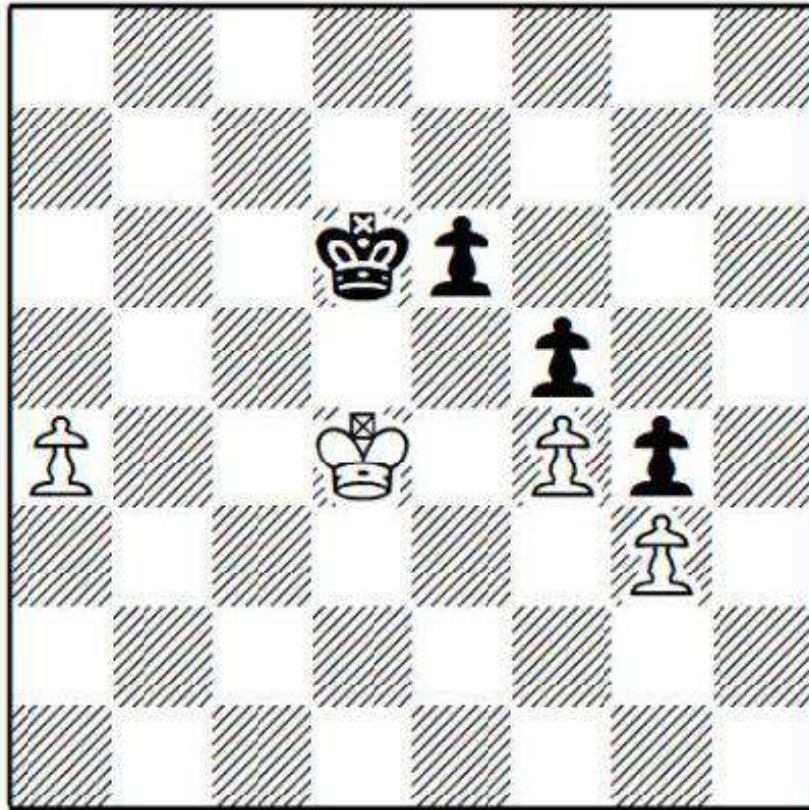
**1 ... Rd8!**

followed by ... Ra8. From there, the black a-pawn is free to advance and bind the white rook to passive defense in front of the pawn. Were it White to move, he would play 1 Re8+! followed by Ra8 and Black's plans would at least be momentarily halted.

### **Pawn Structure**

#### **24) Pawn Structure - 1**

The legendary François-André Danican Philidor once noted that "Pawns are the soul of chess." Although pawns are easy to think of as mere tools to be sacrificed to advance one's directives, mastery of proper pawn play is a critical skill to have. Pawn structure will be the main focus of pawns in this context.

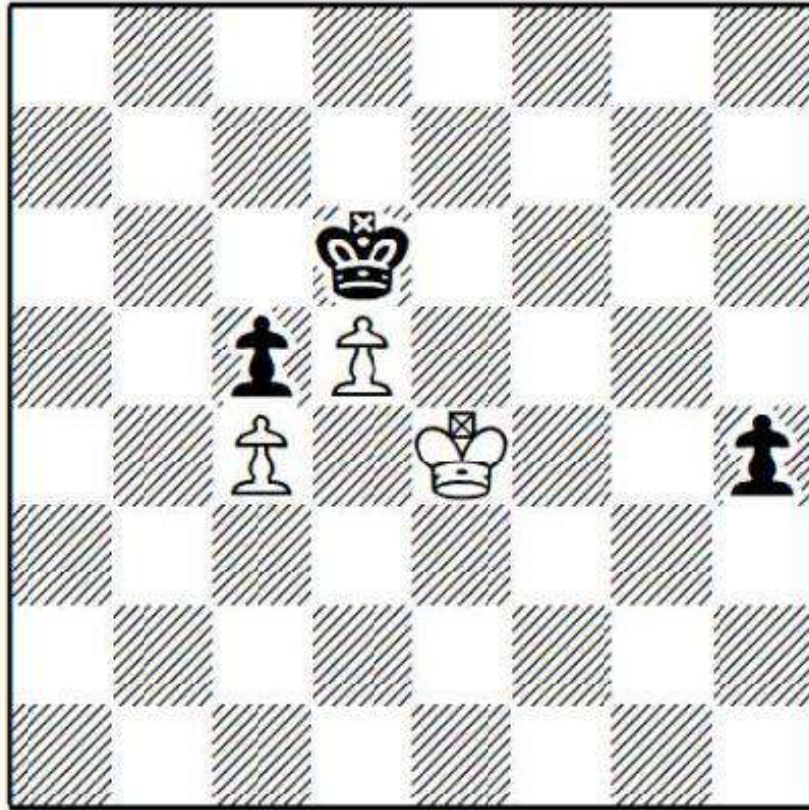


The most basic tenet of pawn structure to grasp is the so-called “passed pawn”. A passed pawn is simply a pawn that cannot be stopped by any pawns of the opposing side. Many endgames that culminate in a decisive result do so because one side cannot prevent such a pawn’s formation. The example here shows a subset of passed pawns known as the “outside” passed pawn. This kind of pawn is especially useful in the endgame because its sacrifice may be used to divert the enemy pieces (particularly the king) from the defense of the other flank. Despite the even material, Black is totally lost.

**1 a5 Kc6 2 Ke5**

Black’s pawns will fall, and White will win easily.

## 25) Pawn Structure - 2

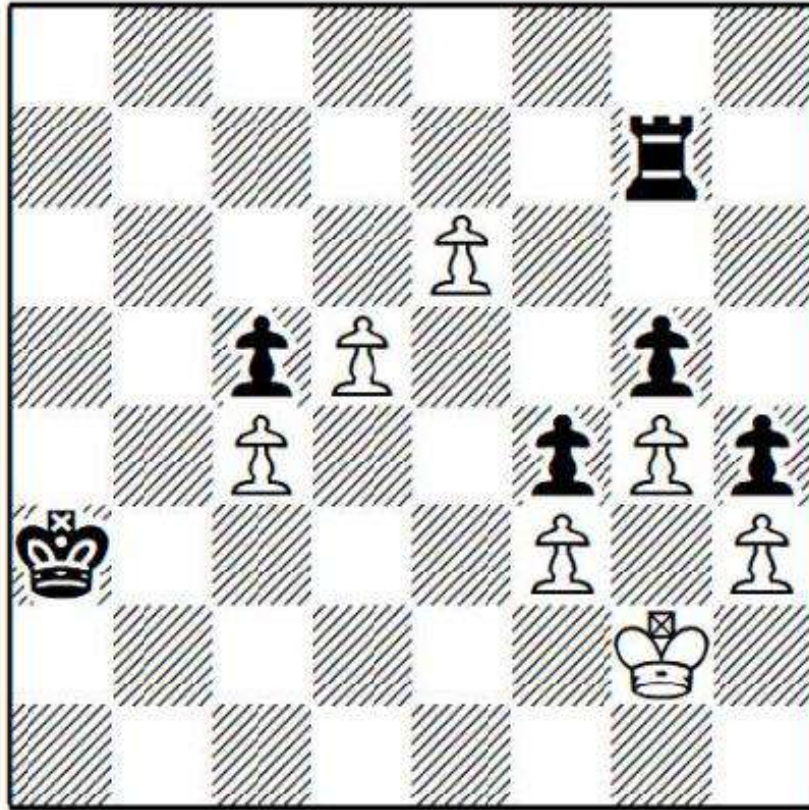


Another kind of abnormally strong passed pawn is the protected passed pawn. This variety of pawn is notable because it does not require the support of any of the “higher pieces”. For this reason, it is generally considered superior to the outside passed pawn in direct confrontation, as the king is free to capture the outside passed pawn. In contrast, the opposing king must babysit the protected passed pawn.

**1 Kf4 h3 2 Kg3 Ke5 3 Kxh3**

And because 3 ... Kd4 would allow 4 d6 and a swift promotion, Black is lost.

## 26) Pawn Structure - 3

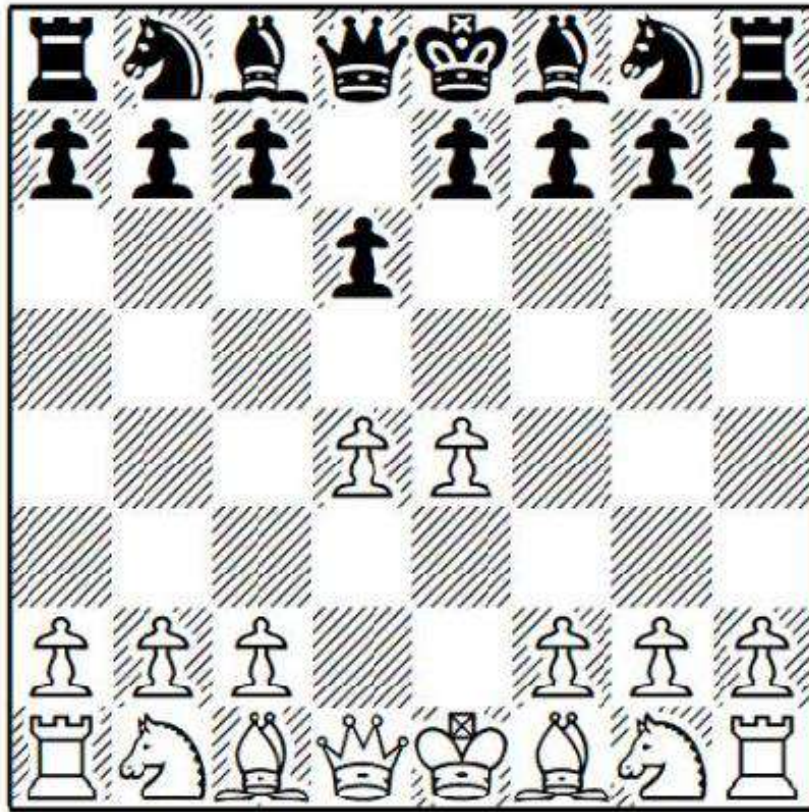


It is often considered desirable to attain connected passed pawns. This is because the pawns can support each other and advance without the protection of other pieces. Two such passed pawns on the 6th rank can even defeat a rook on their own!

**1 d6 Rg6 2 d7**

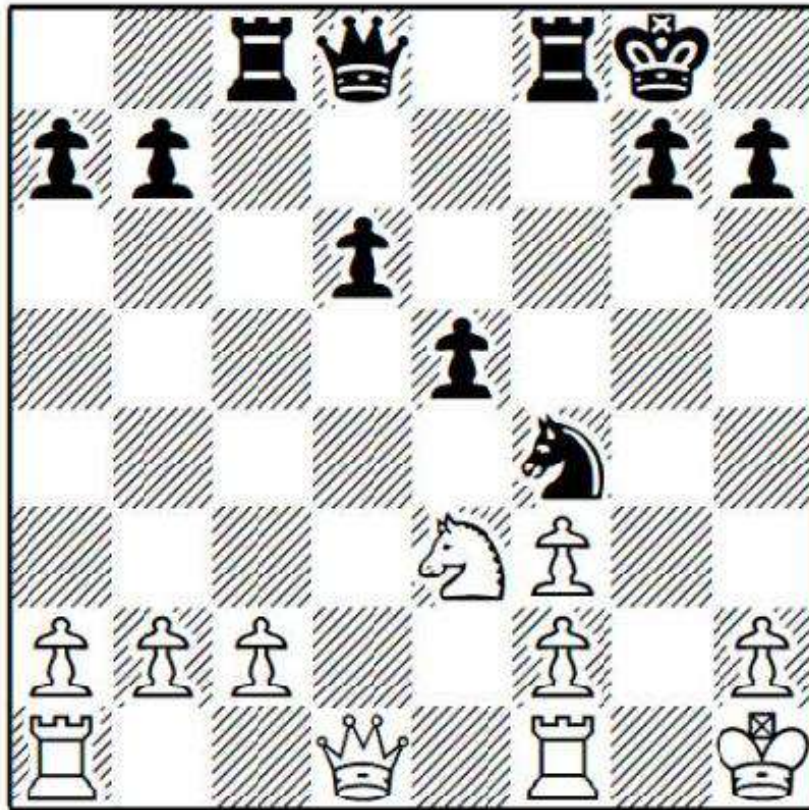
and one of White's pawns will promote.

## 27) Pawn Structure - 4



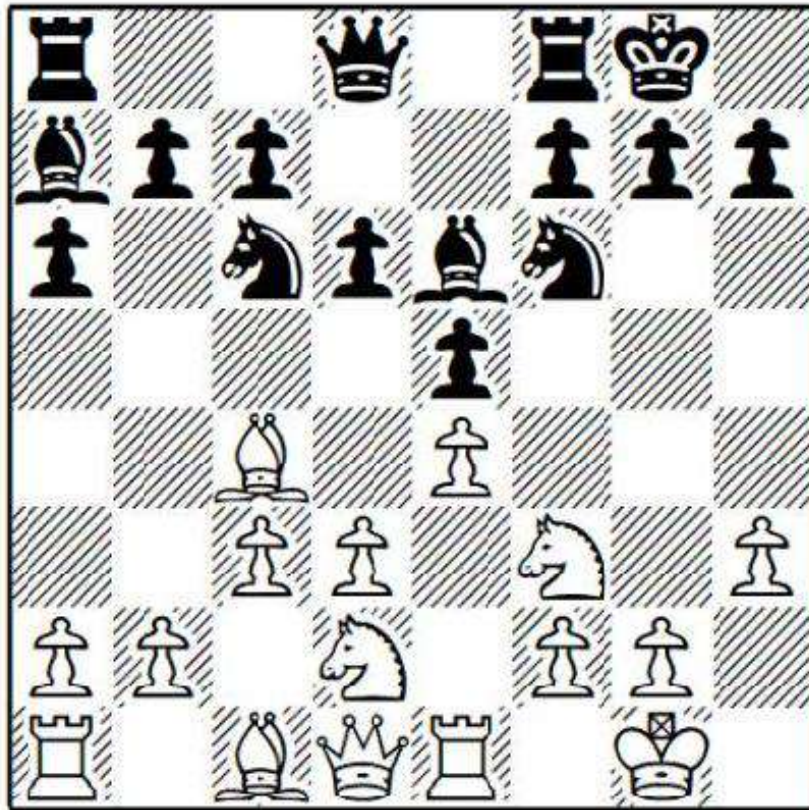
It is not just in the endgames that connected pawns can be advantageous. They control a significant volume of squares in front of them, meaning that connected pawns in the center will have great central influence and deny useful squares from the opponent's minor pieces. White sets out to occupy the center in most openings, and Black will try to challenge that. If he does not, as in the case of the Pirc shown here, White is often quite comfortable with his strong pawn center.

## 28) Pawn Structure - 5



There are also cases where the pawn structure can be bad. We generally classify weak pawns into three categories: doubled, isolated, and backward. The most recognizable type of weak pawn is the doubled pawn. Doubled pawns suffer from an inability to protect each other and similarly have no ability to control the squares in front of them. In this example, White's doubled f-pawns render the f4-knight untouchable; the f4-square can be called a "hole" as it is impervious to pawns. The pawns also represent a target for Black's rook on f8, which is conveniently situated on a half-open file.

## 29) Pawn Structure - 6



This is not to say that doubled pawns are always dreadful. When they are neighbored by another pawn, they can contribute to the defense of important squares. In this typical situation from the Italian game,

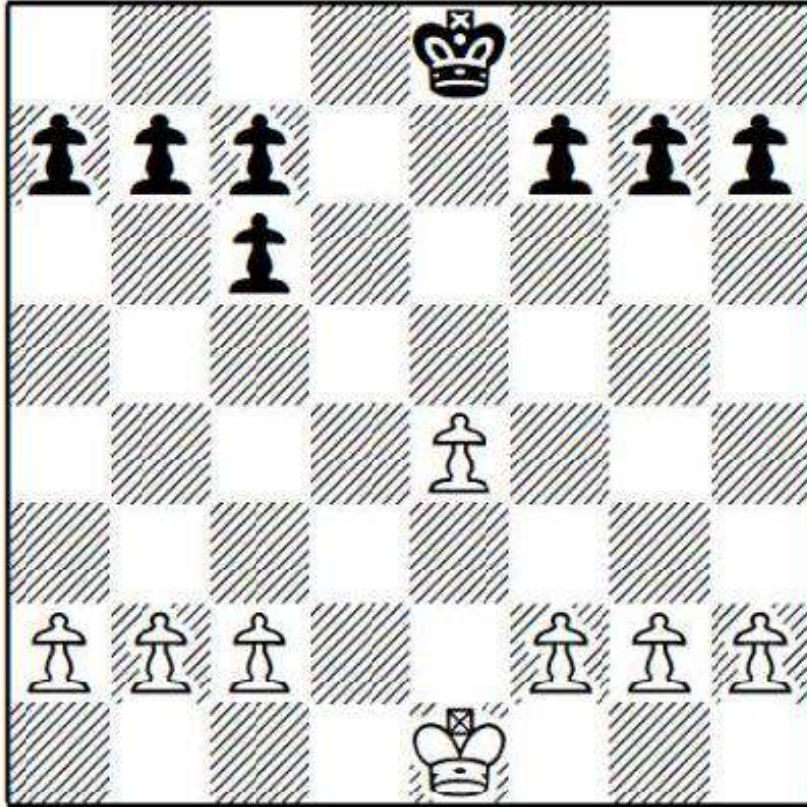
**1 Bb3!**

1 Bxe6?! fxe6 would be a mistake because Black's e-pawns can be defended quite easily. Meanwhile, the new e6-pawn does a great job protecting the f5- and d5-squares, and the f8-rook is enjoying its new half-open file.

**1 ... Bxb3 2 axb3**

does not negatively impact White's pawn structure because the exchange increases his central influence slightly by transforming the a-pawn into a b-pawn. Generally speaking, one should try to capture towards the center if they do so with pawns. Were it White's move again, he could play b4 and have a relatively flexible pawn structure.

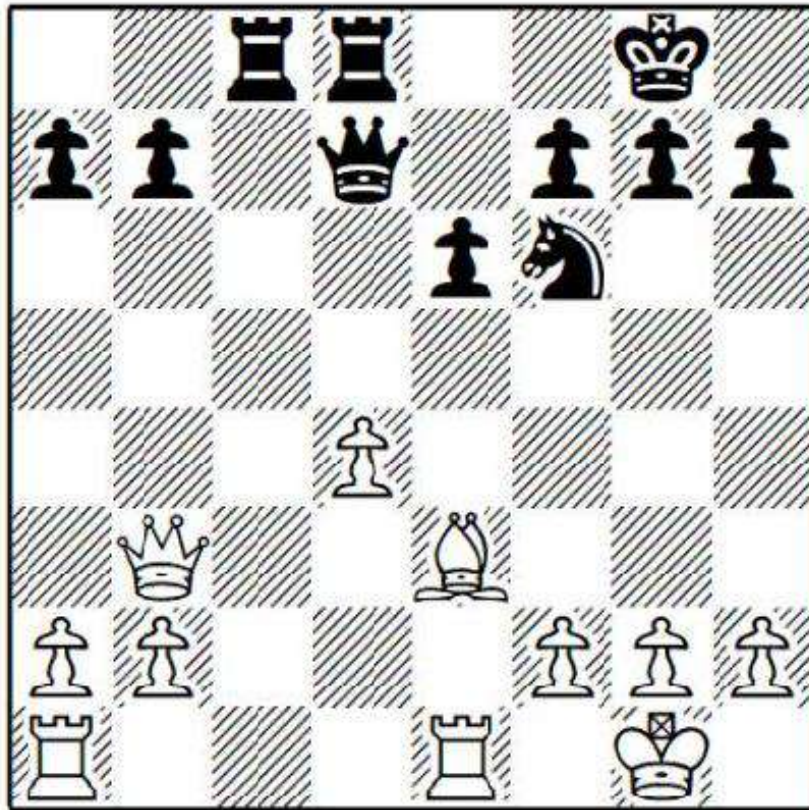
### 30) Pawn Structure - 7



Doubled pawns are also notable for their inflexibility. Usually, a pawn majority (having more pawns on one side of the board than your opponent) is enough to create a passed pawn (for example, White could play e5, f4, f5, and e6). However, Black's queenside majority features the prominent doubled c-pawns. As a result of these doubled pawns, he actually cannot make a passed pawn without his king's help, as this primitive example showcasing a pawn structure typical of the Ruy Lopez will show.

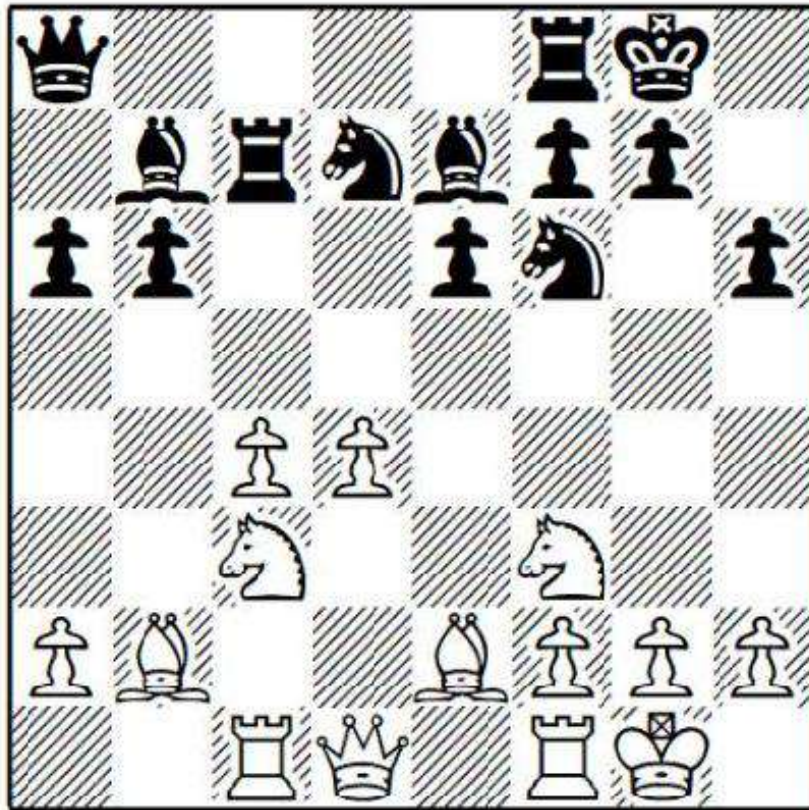
**1 f4 c5 2 g4 b5 3 h4 c4 4 Kf1 a5 5 Ke1 b4 6 c3 c5 7 a3**  
and Black's queenside expansion has been stopped.

### 31) Pawn Structure - 8



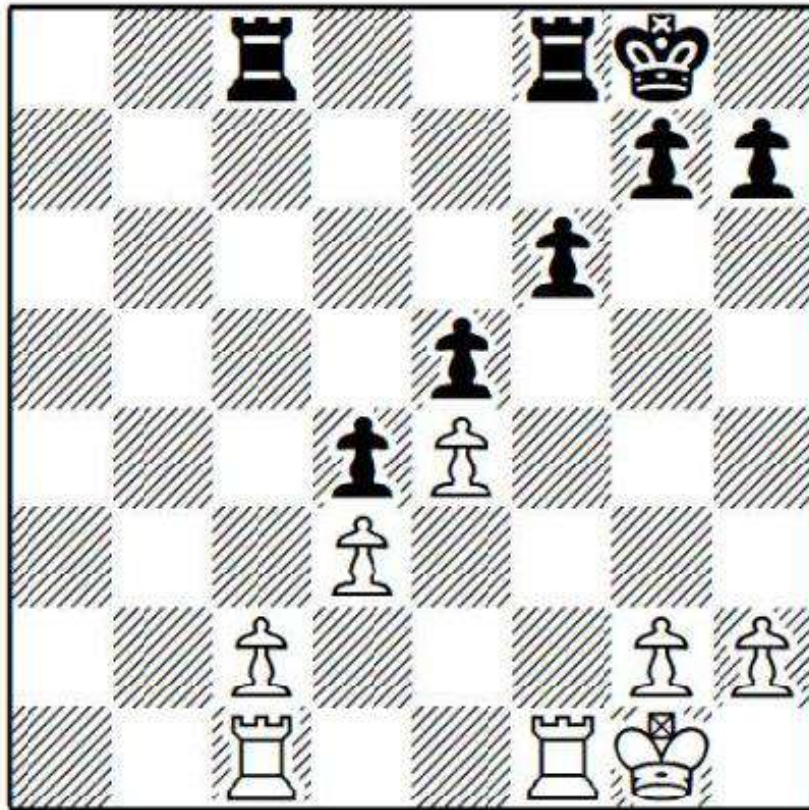
Another subdivision of weak pawn is the isolated pawn. Isolated pawns are those who do not have any neighboring friendly pawns. This is problematic because they cannot be defended by their comrades. Moreover, the lack of adjacent pawns means that the square in front of them cannot be covered and often becomes an outpost for the other side. In this position, Black's knight will soon come to a lovely home on d5, and he will stand better.

### 32) Pawn Structure - 9



The isolated pawn's distant cousin is the so-called "hanging pawns", which often refers to connected c- and d-pawns on the 4th (or 5th for Black) ranks without the b- and e-pawns. These pawns are not isolated in themselves and cover many important squares together but lack defense from other pawns. Pressure from the other side's pieces often forces one of them to be advanced, in which case a weakness is formed. Much like the isolated queen's pawn (IQP) in the previous example, hanging pawns are not weak in and of themselves, although they often are, as in this example.

### 33) Pawn Structure - 10

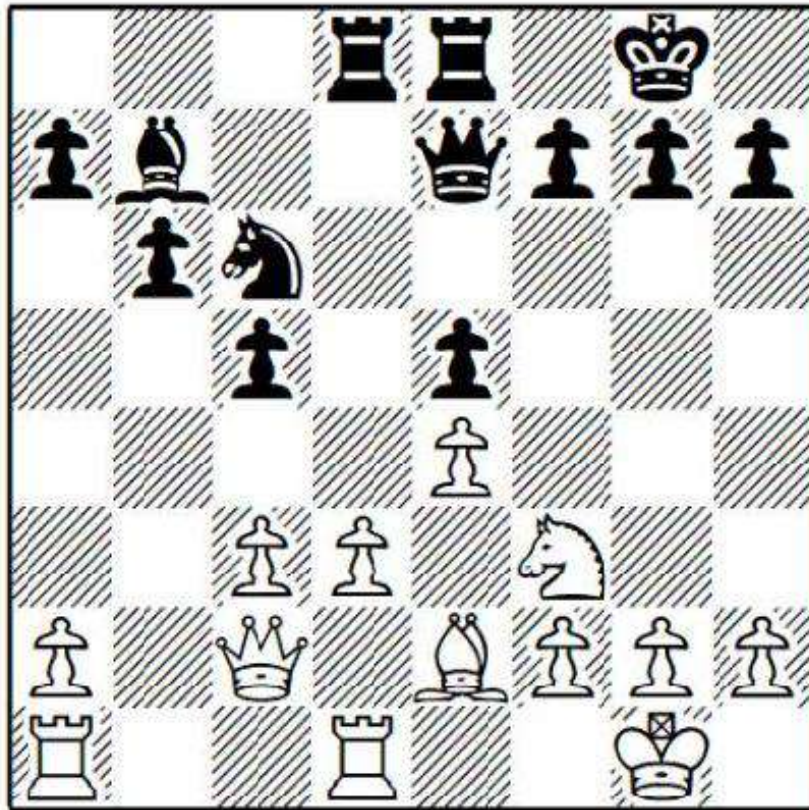


The third major category of weak pawns is the backward pawn. A backward pawn is one with no pawns “behind” it and cannot be advanced (usually due to enemy control of the square in front of it). This means that the pawn is difficult to defend and usually gives the opponent an outpost in front of it. This example shows a backward pawn on c2, forcing White to protect it with the passive Rc1, and grants Black an outpost on c3.

**1 ... Rc3!**

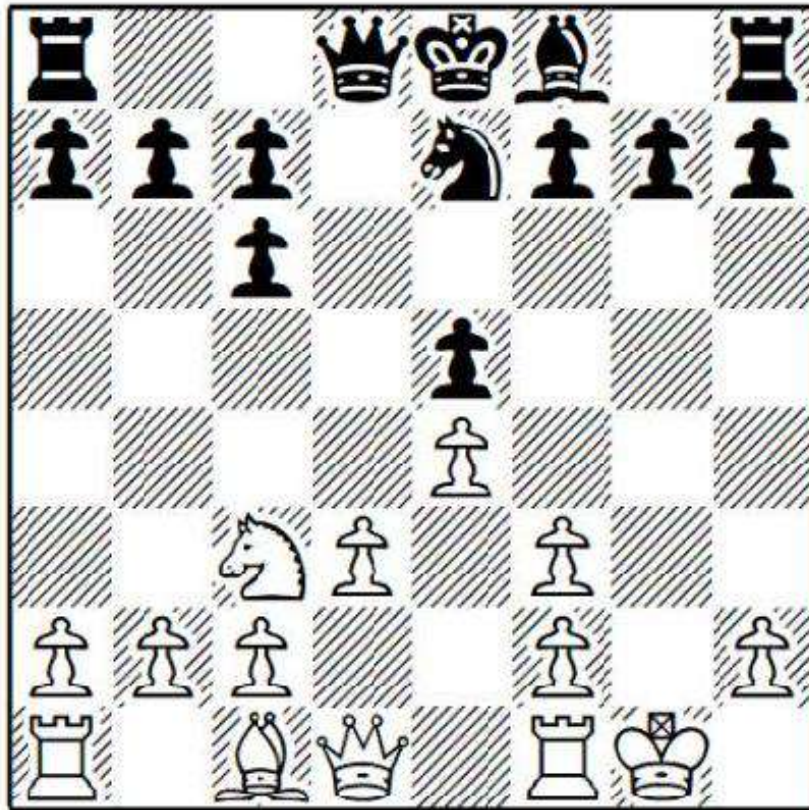
Followed by a doubling of the rooks with ...Rfc8 to maximize pressure on c2. White is nearly lost.

### **34) Pawn Structure - 11**



The d3-pawn here is another example of a backward pawn. Despite having a neighbor on c3 that does a wonderful job of protecting the d4-square, Black's control of d4 is so great that White's hopes of eliminating his weak pawn are mostly theoretical. Black can increase the pressure on the d-file by doubling rooks with perhaps ... Rd6 and Red8, as well as an eventual ... Ba6.

### 35) Pawn Structure - 12

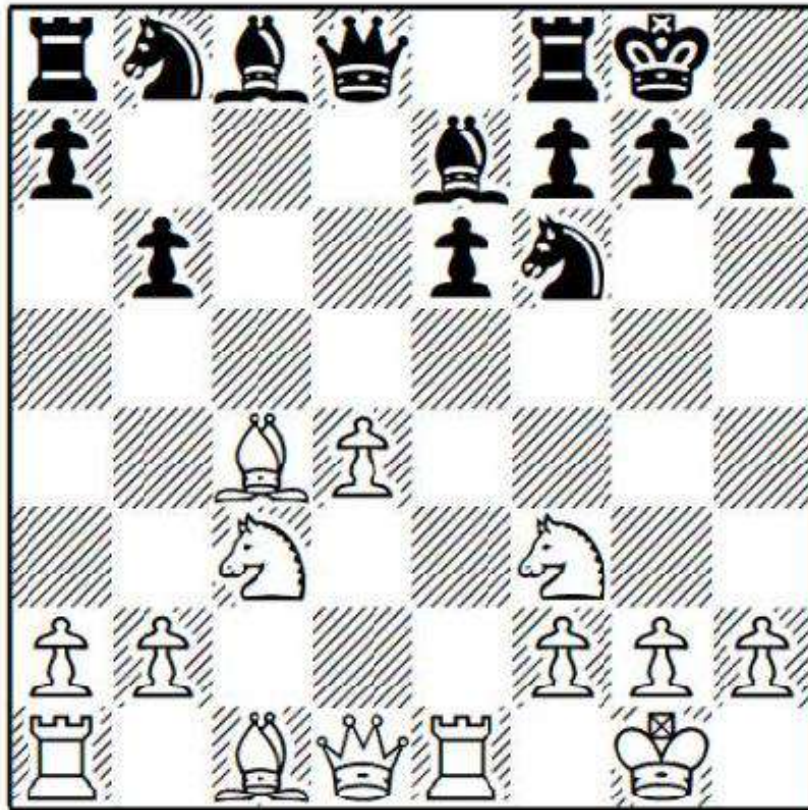


Because pawns lack the mobility of the more important pieces, the primary solution to having weak pawns is to try and exchange them. Were it Black to move in this position, he would play 1 ... g5! and White's f-pawns would remain that way forever. Fortunately for White, it is not Black's move, and he can equalize with

**1 f4!**

and the doubled pawns will not be an issue for long.

### 36) Pawn Structure - 13

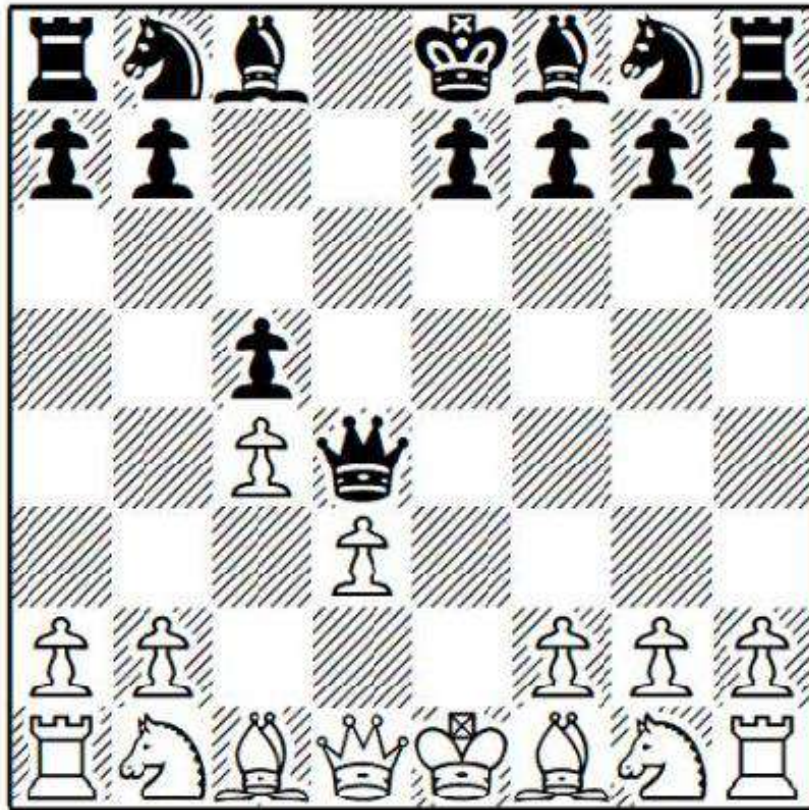


Trading off isolated pawns is often beneficial as well. In this idyllic IQP structure for White, Black is woefully underdeveloped, so we can open the position with

**1 d5! exd5 2 Nxd5**

and White is winning; his pieces will quickly overtake Black's ineffective forces.

### **37) Pawn Structure - 14**

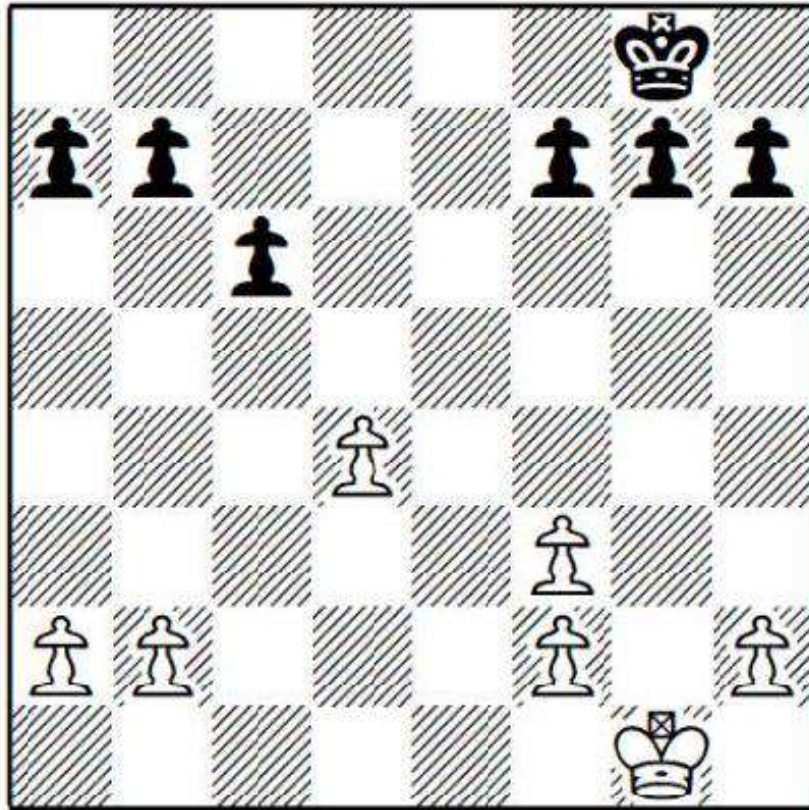


Backward pawns are especially satisfying to trade off. Like in the previous cases, the most critical aspect of doing so is taking control of the square in front of the backward pawn.

**1 Nf3! Qd6 2 d4**

and White has solved his pawn structure issues.

### **38) Pawn Structure - 15**

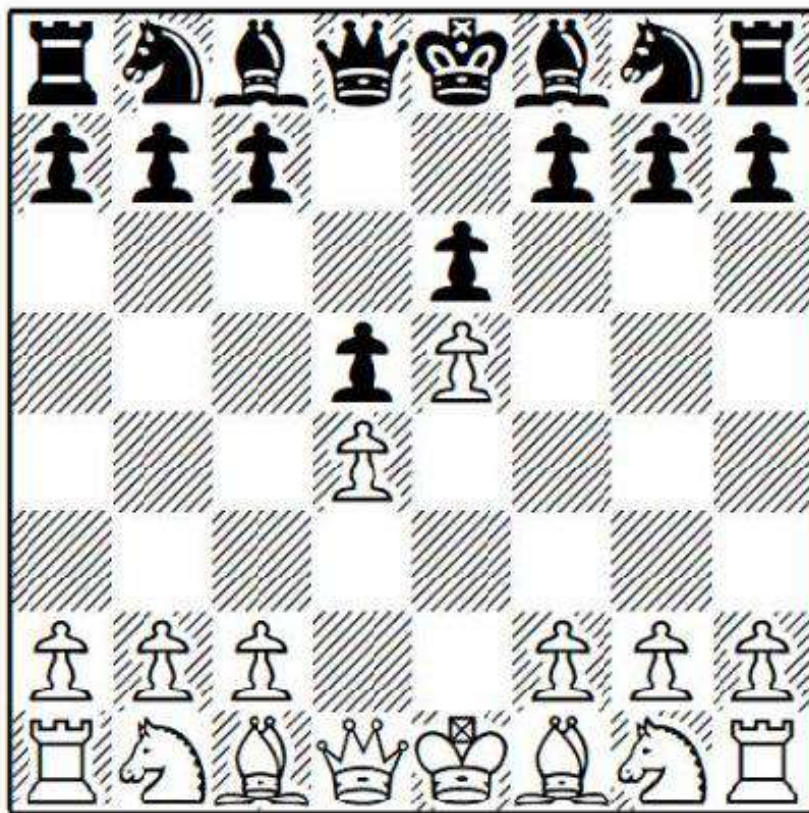


After the preceding brief overview, we now understand what pawns are generally considered weak (on a very surface level) and how to play around them. How can we contextualize pawn structure as an imbalance in the grand scheme of the position? Isolated pawns in particular fit in nicely with a common concept called pawn islands. A pawn island is a grouping of pawns that can defend one another, such as Black's harmonious a7-b7-c6 and f7-g7-h7 structures. While White's a2- and b2-pawns are housed in one pawn island, he actually has a total of 5 (!) pawn islands! The d4- and h2-pawns are isolated, meaning that they go into their own pawn islands as they cannot be defended. This is also true for the f2- and f3-pawns because (being doubled pawns) they also cannot defend one another. This is one of the major reasons that pawns that are both doubled and isolated are looked upon so poorly; their inability to protect each other and control relevant squares means that they represent different pawn islands. Generally, it is considered better to have fewer pawn islands, as this implies that one's

pawns are easier to defend. In this position, for example, White is lost despite the apparent material parity. The black king will enter the game and make short work of White's pawn weaknesses.

**1 ... Kf8 2 Kf1 Ke7 3 Ke2 Kf6 4 Ke3 Kf5 5 b4 h5 6 a4 h4 7 a5 a6**  
 is one example of what could happen.

### 39) Pawn Structure - 16

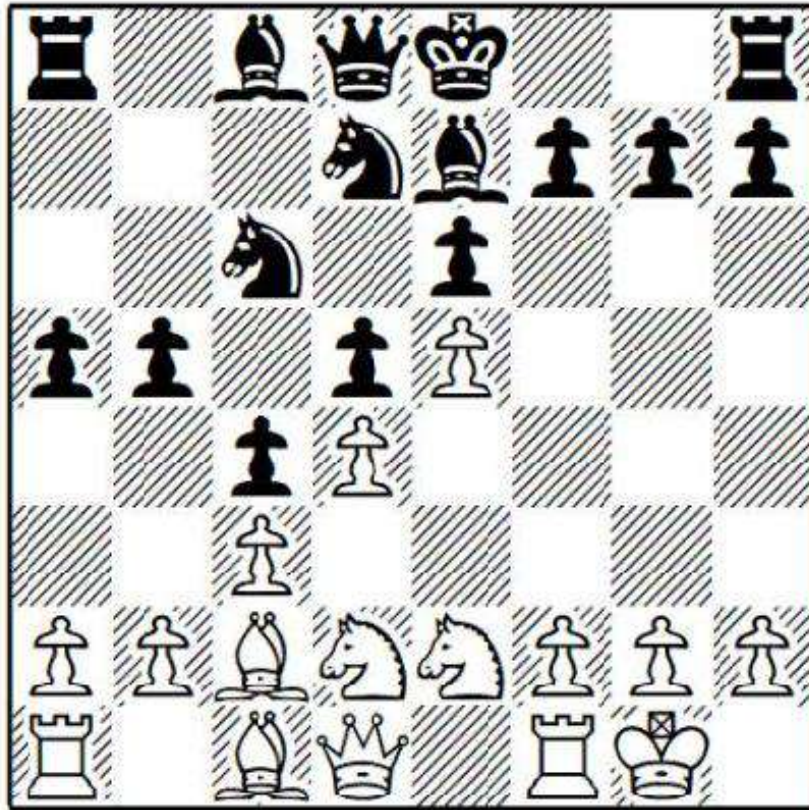


Many closed positions prominently feature what are often called pawn chains, which is a rather self-explanatory term describing a constellation of pawns that defend each other. One opening that almost invariably leads to the formation of opposing pawn chains on opposite colors is the pictured Advance Variation of the French Defense. In general, it is good to attack the base of the opponent's pawn chain as that will be the most difficult pawn to defend.

**3 ... c5! 4 c3 Nc6 5 Nf3 Qb6**

is a typical line showing Black's plans.

#### 40) Pawn Structure - 17



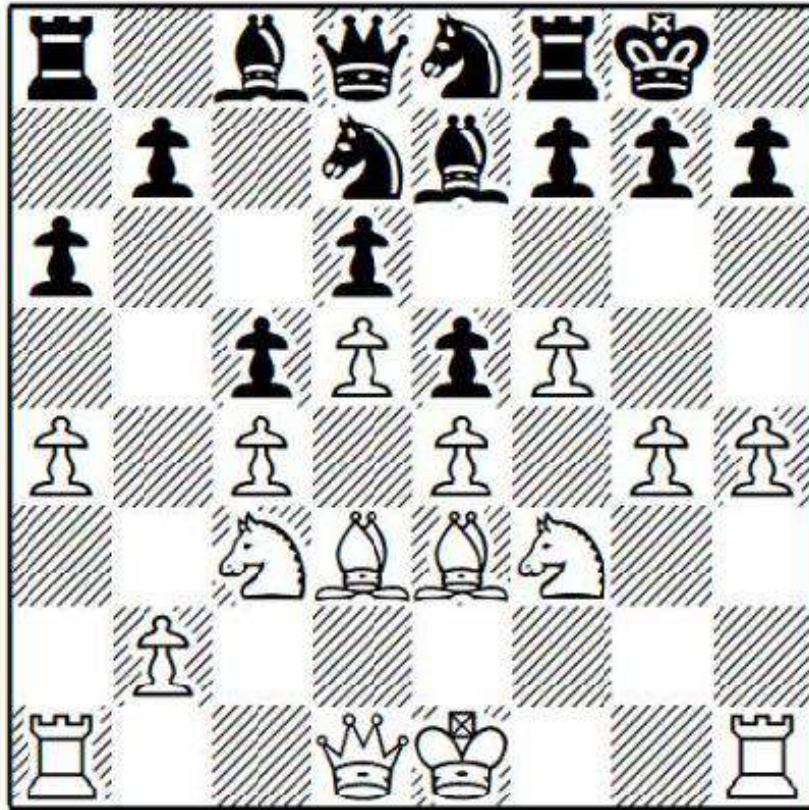
Students are often told that they should opt toward attacking on the side one's pawn chain is "pointing". This advice seems rather redundant, and the reason for this paradigm's ubiquity is that we should try to attack on the side we have more space on, which is virtually guaranteed to be where our pawn chain is directed toward. In this case, Black is going for ... b5-b4 to attack on the queenside where he has more space. White should play something like

**1 Nf4**

with a strong attack brewing.

**Space**

#### 41) Space - 1

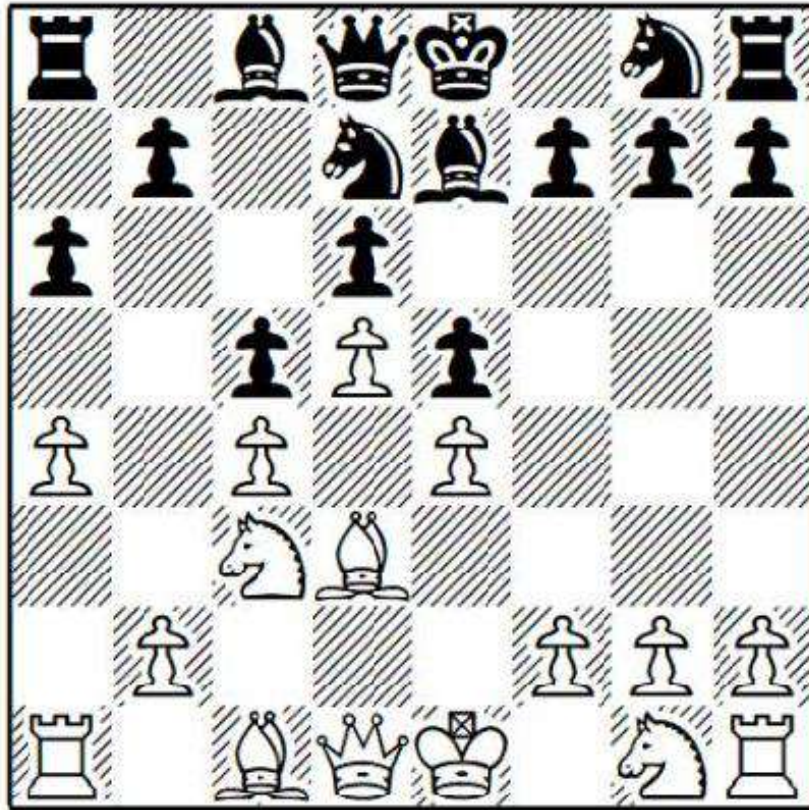


Other than pieces, one of the main imbalances we need to consider is space. Space is often broadly defined as the influence one side exerts on the board compared with that of the opponent. However, technical definitions usually do not do it justice, as the side with more space is frequently quite apparent with a visual test. This may seem abstract, but when we look at the present position in the diagram, we can clearly see that White has more space. The space advantage in this particular case is so extreme that Black has great difficulty in organizing his pieces, while White is free to maneuver and pursue active plans such as

**1 g5**

It is challenging to come up with a plan for Black, and he is already nearly losing.

**42) Space - 2**

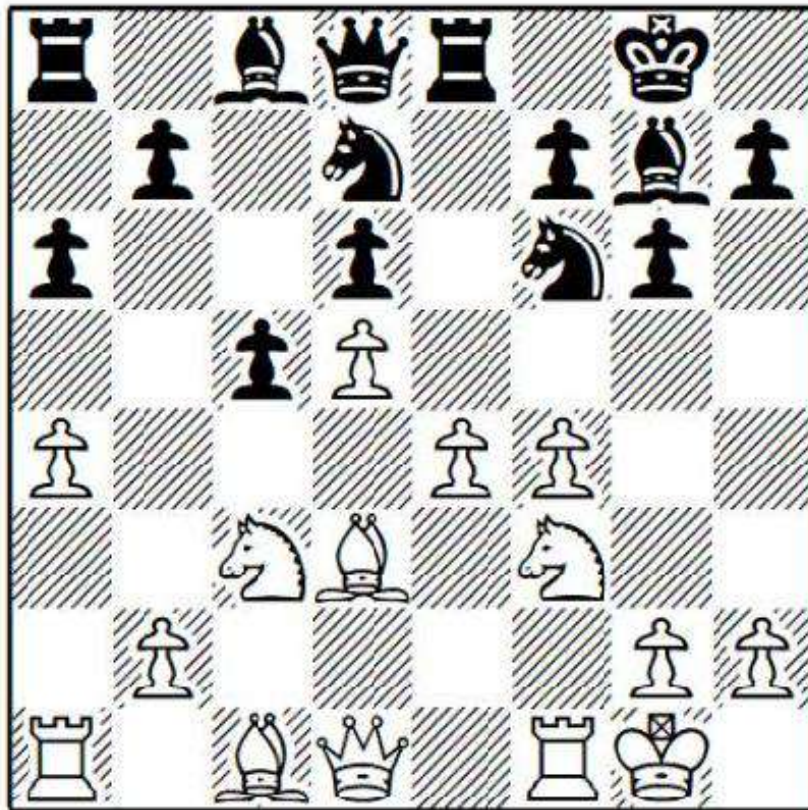


This is not to say that a lack of space is a death sentence. As mentioned in the last example, one of the main issues with having less space is an inability to maneuver the pieces. As such, it naturally follows that one way to combat this problem is by trading them off.

**1 ... Bg5**

and Black's game will significantly improve with these pieces gone.

**43) Space - 3**



Space is not by itself as important an imbalance as most of the others. Advancing too far creates weaknesses, especially in the pawn structure. The overextended pawns and pieces can be subject to attack. For example, if White were to continue his expansion of kingside space with

**1 f5?**

he would weaken the e5-square significantly, and Black is free to take advantage of White's newfound central instability with

**1 ... c4!**

or 1 ... Ng4 with strong control over the dark squares.

**2 Bc2 Nc5**

and Black has no problems.

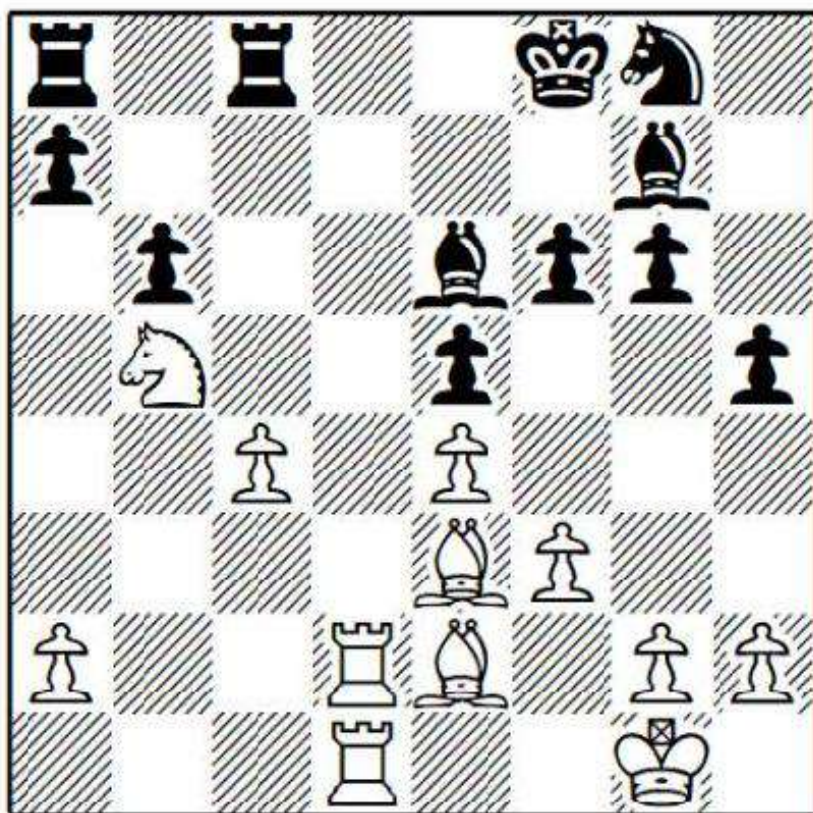
### Exercises

The following exercises will test your knowledge of the concepts discussed in this chapter.

**1) M.Arabidze-D.Jojua**

Tbilisi 2019

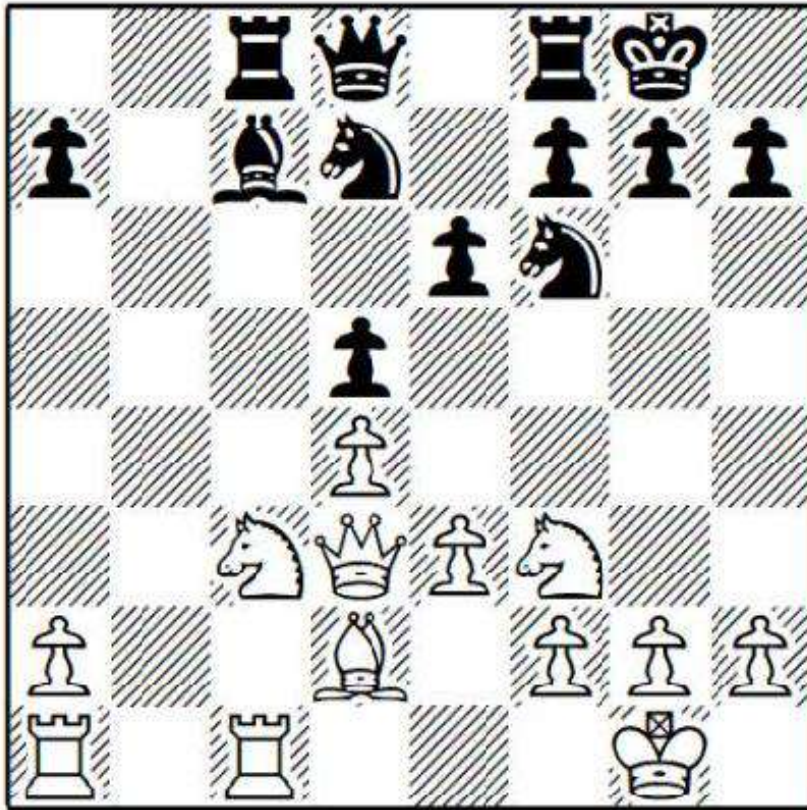
*Black to play*



Solution

2) A.Szeberenyi-A.Juhasz  
Budapest 2021

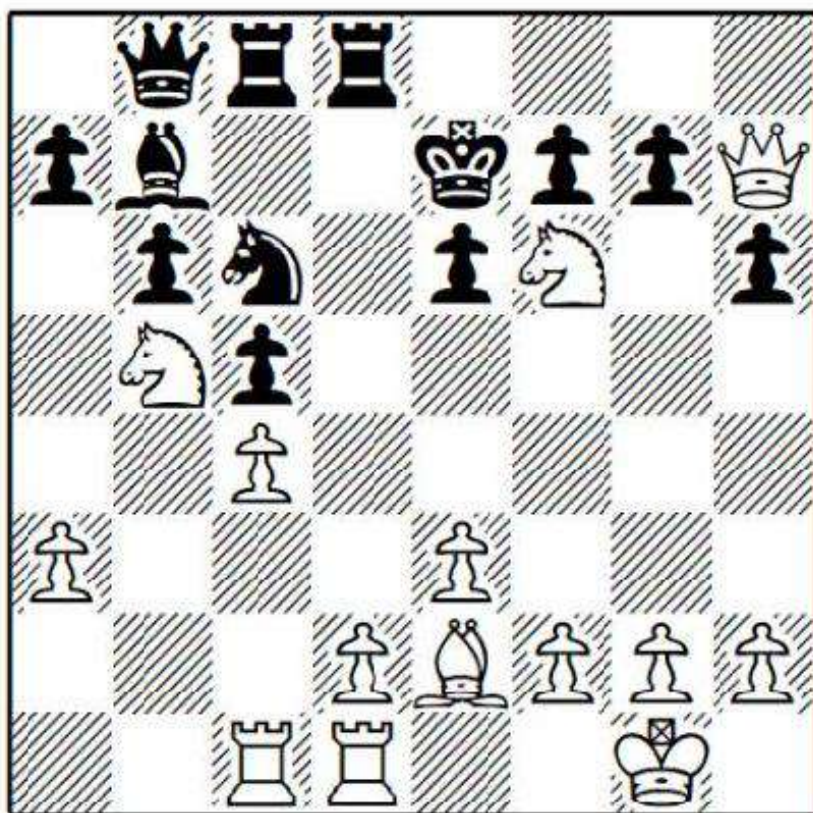
*White to play*



Solution

3) V.Burmakin-M.Mis  
Graz 2020

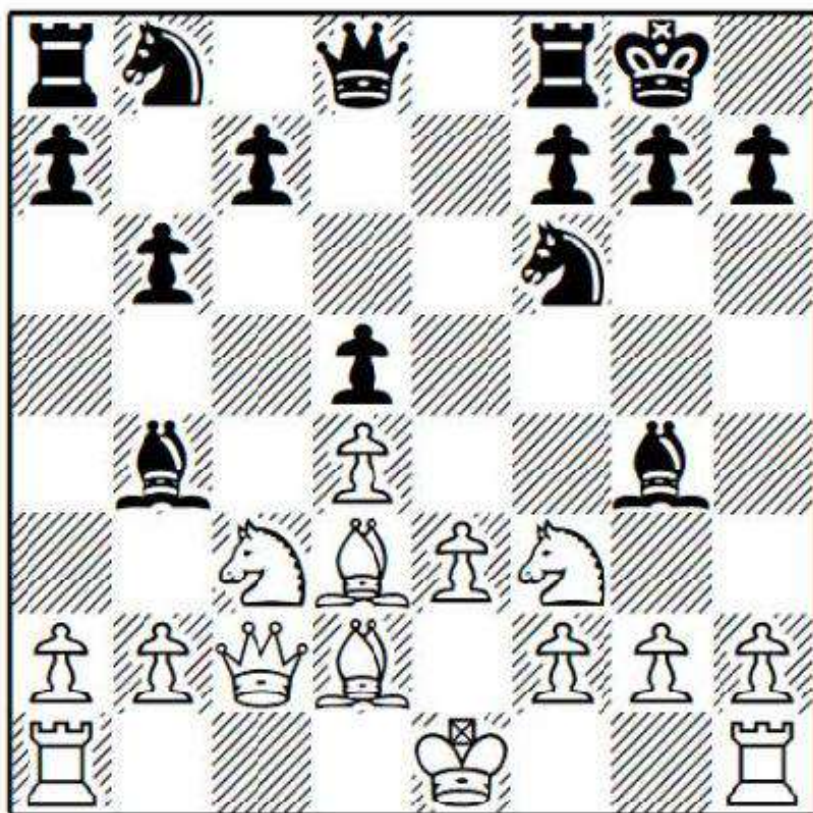
*Black to play*



**Solution**

**4) S.Ter Sahakyan-E.Danielian**  
Yerevan 2020

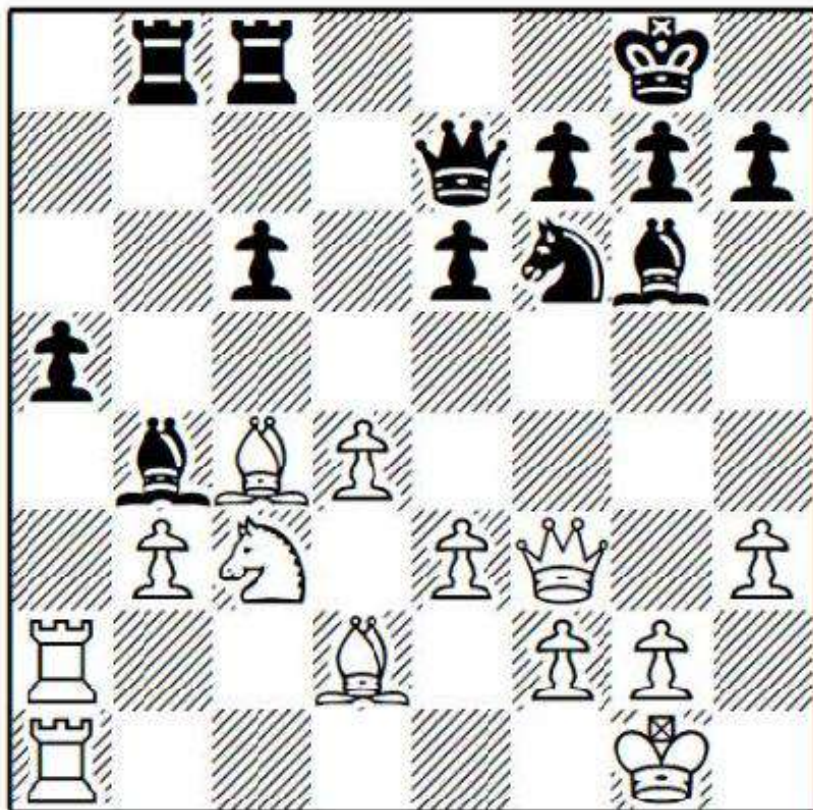
*Black to play*



**Solution**

**5) R.Makarian-V.Gunina**  
Moscow 2021

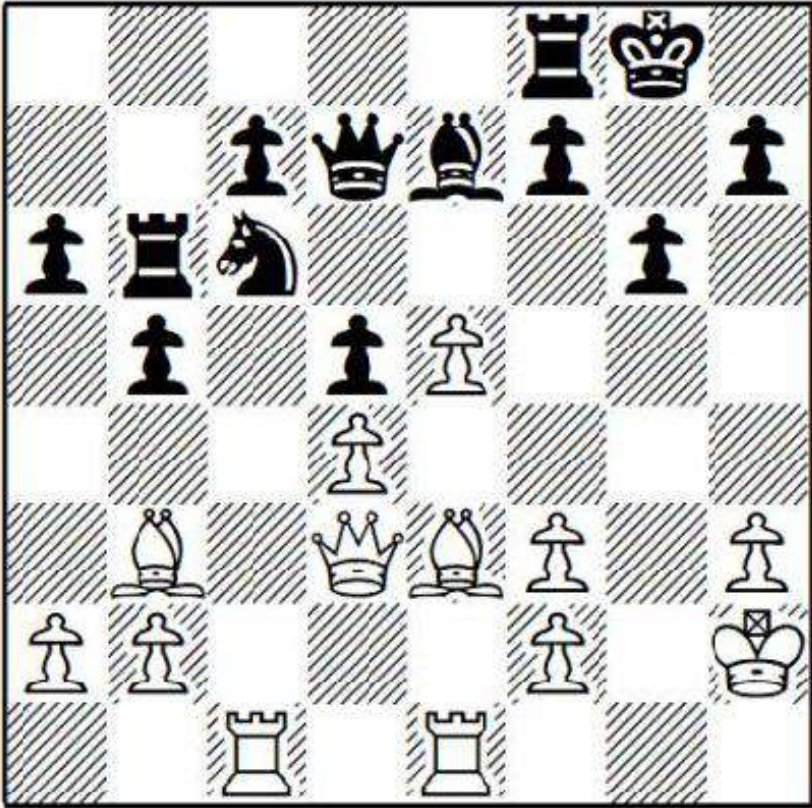
*White to play*



**Solution**

**6) D.Gomez Dieguez-J.Suarez Gomez**  
Santiago de Compostela 2020

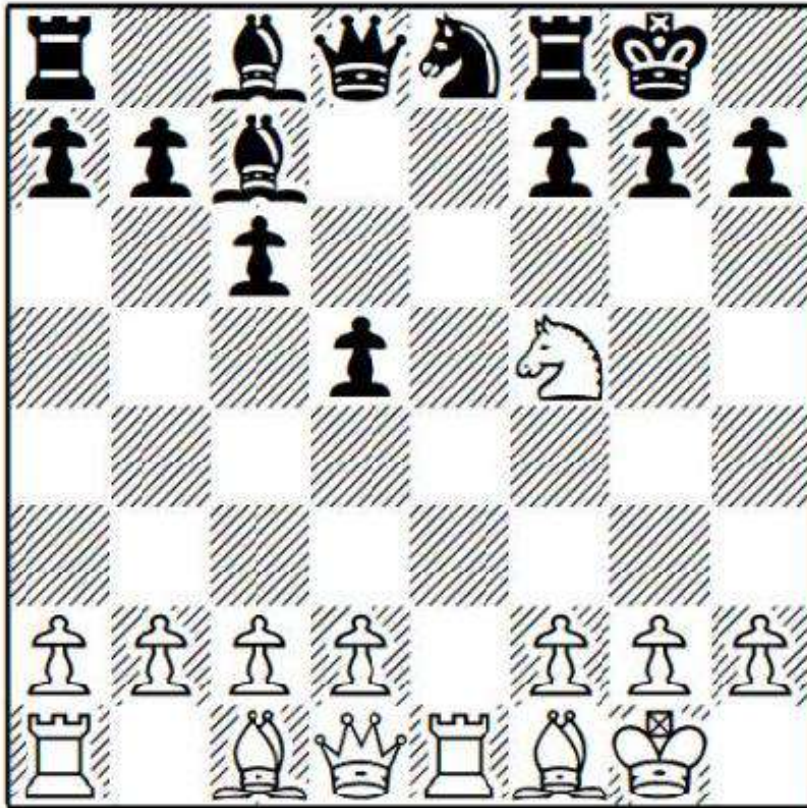
White to play



Solution

7) R.Bar-M.Roiz  
Netanya 2019

*White to play*



**Solution**

**8) E.Sedina-S.Choletti**

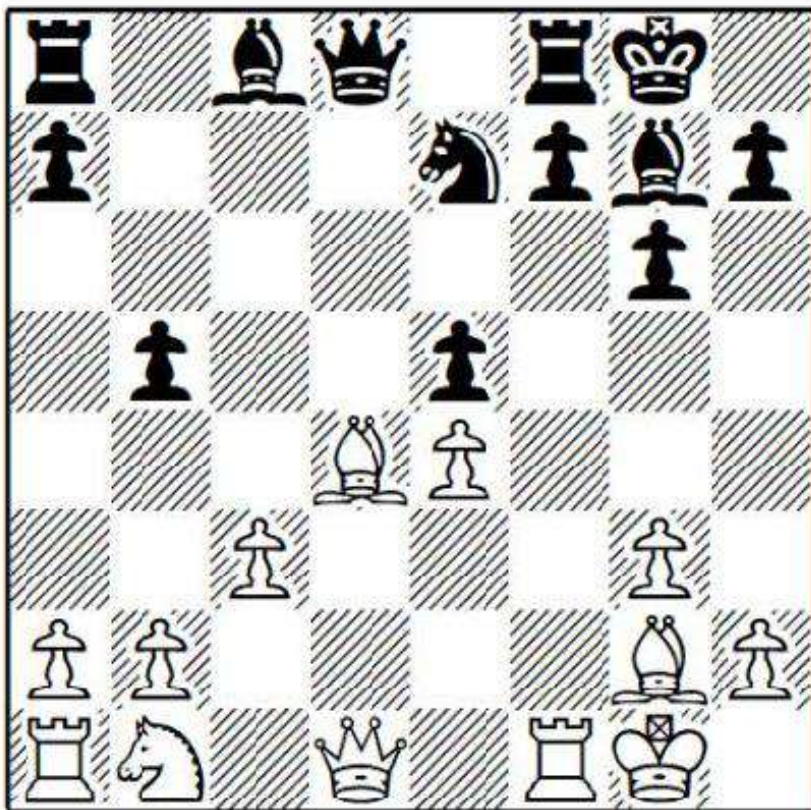
lichess.org 2021

*Black to play*

**9) A.Fedorov-S.Nitin**

Chennai 2020

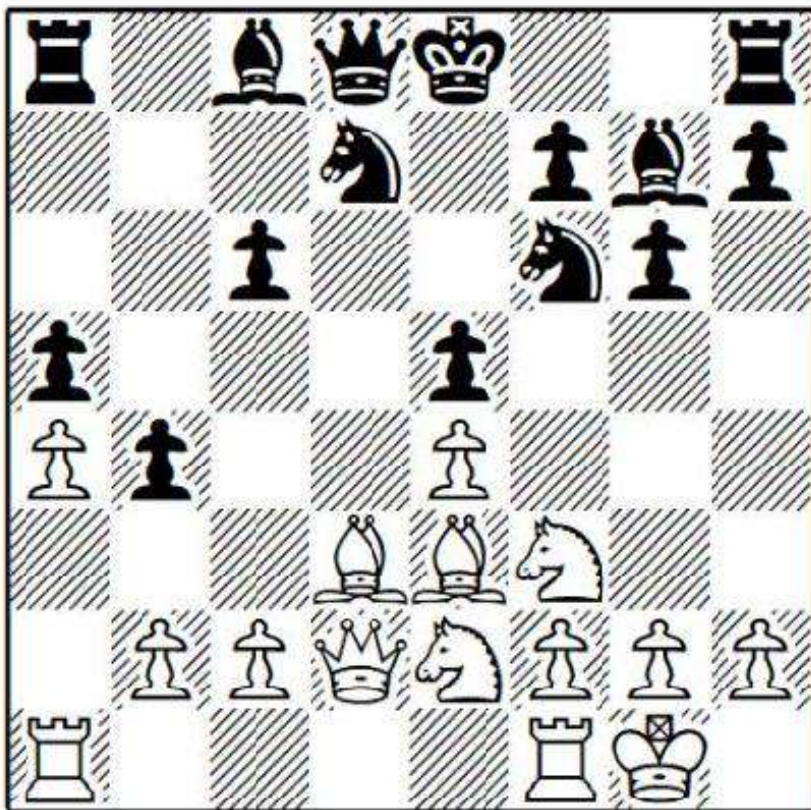
*White to play*



**Solution**

**10) C.Bauer-F.Guilleux**  
Cappelle la Grande 2020

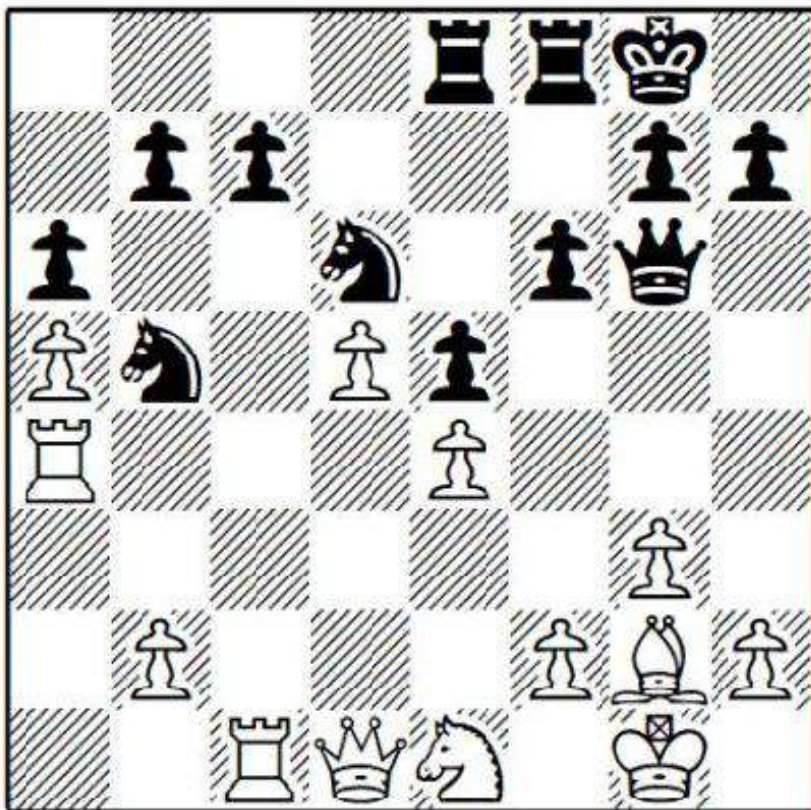
White to play



Solution

11) D.Saduakassova-A.Smirnov  
Wijk aan Zee 2020

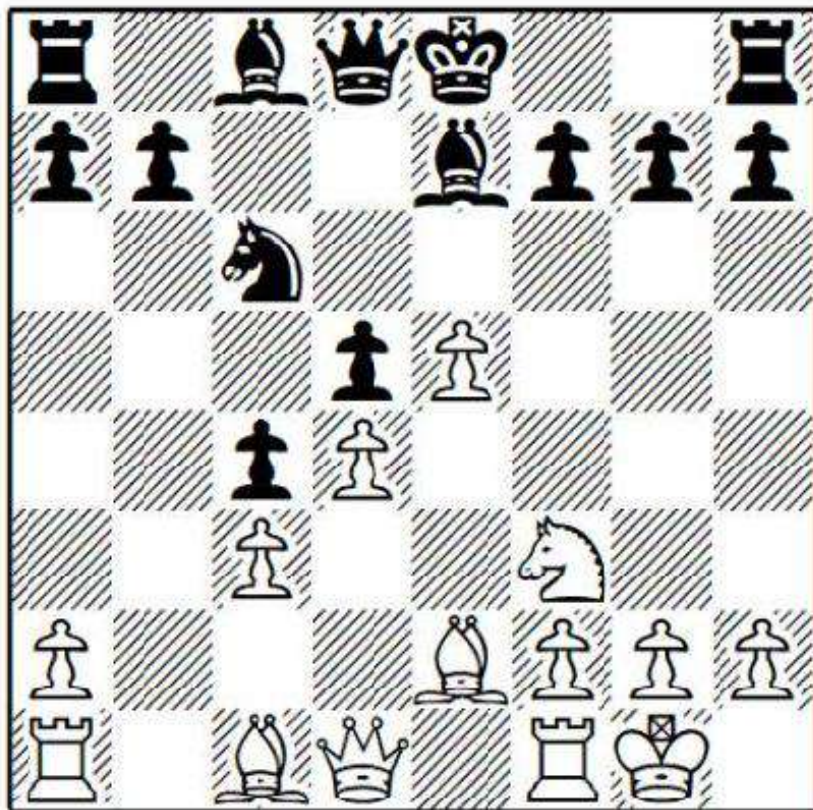
*White to play*



**Solution**

12) J.Suarez Gomez-J.Gonzalez Trigal  
Santiago de Compostela 2020

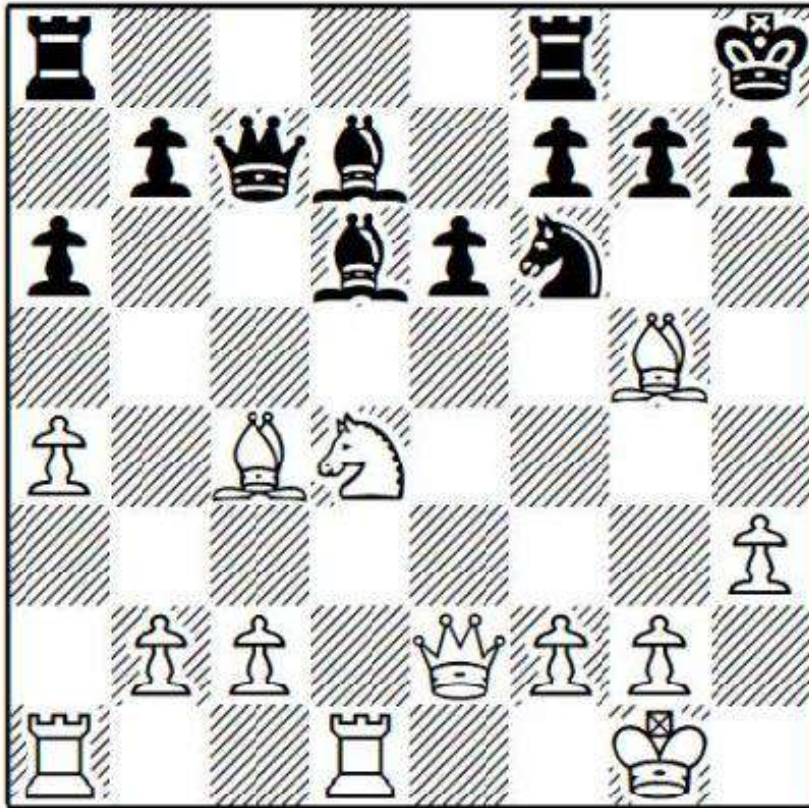
*White to play*



**Solution**

**13) B.Lajthajm-M.Milosevic**  
Novi Banovci 2020

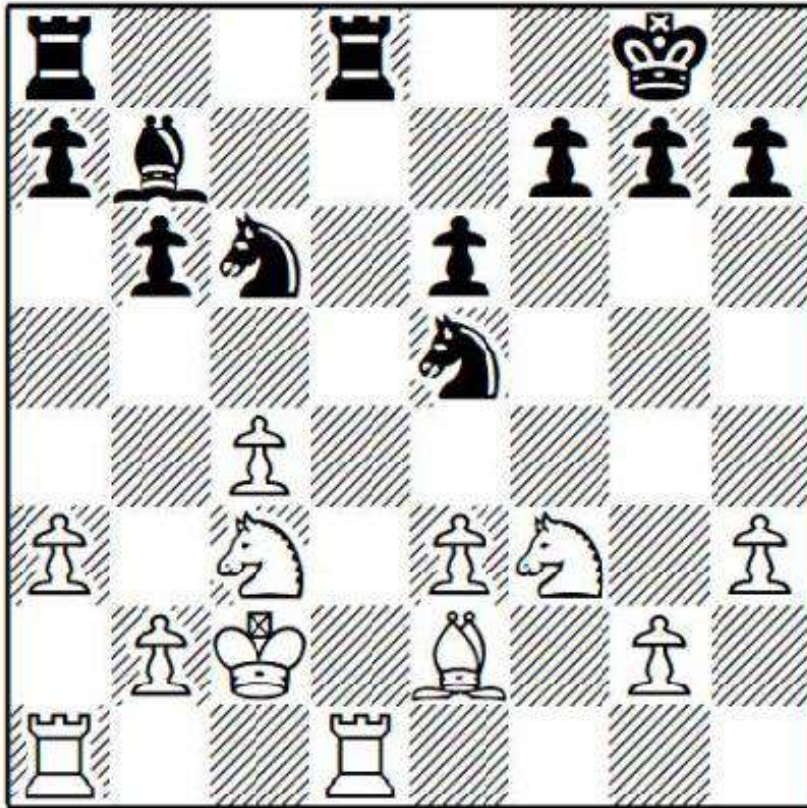
*White to play*



**Solution**

14) M.Strange-K.Kristensen  
Allerod 2019

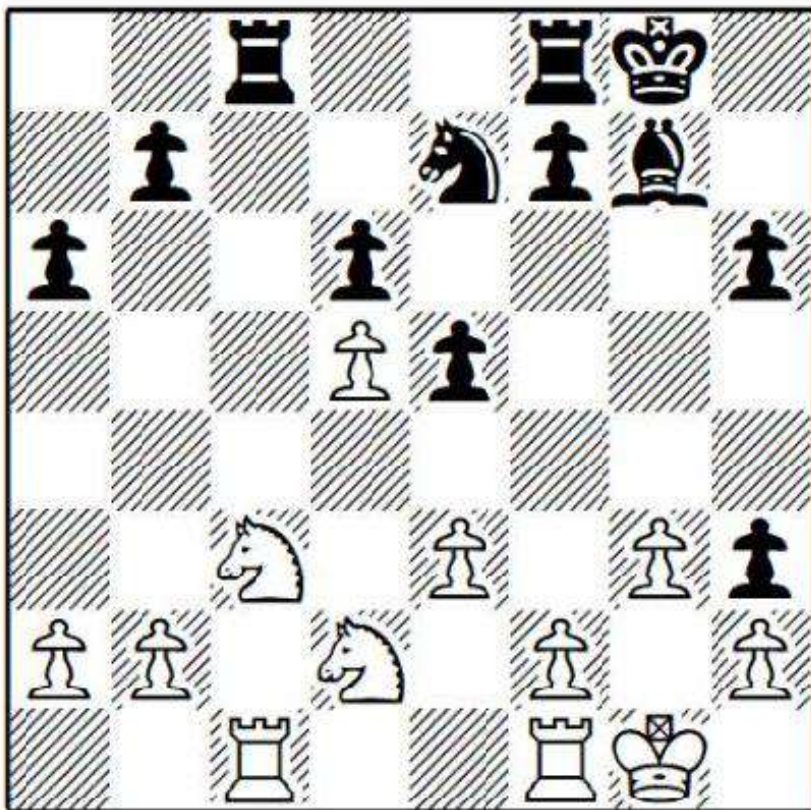
*White to play*



**Solution**

15) P.Nguyen-R.Padmini  
lichess.org 2021

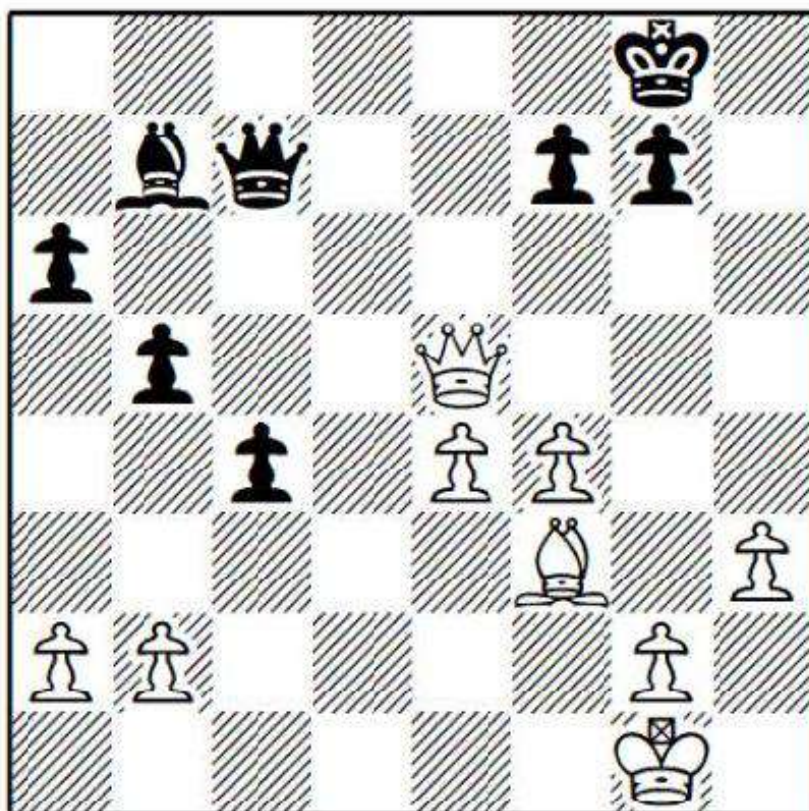
*White to play*



**Solution**

**16) T.Ongut-D.Horvath**  
Budapest 2021

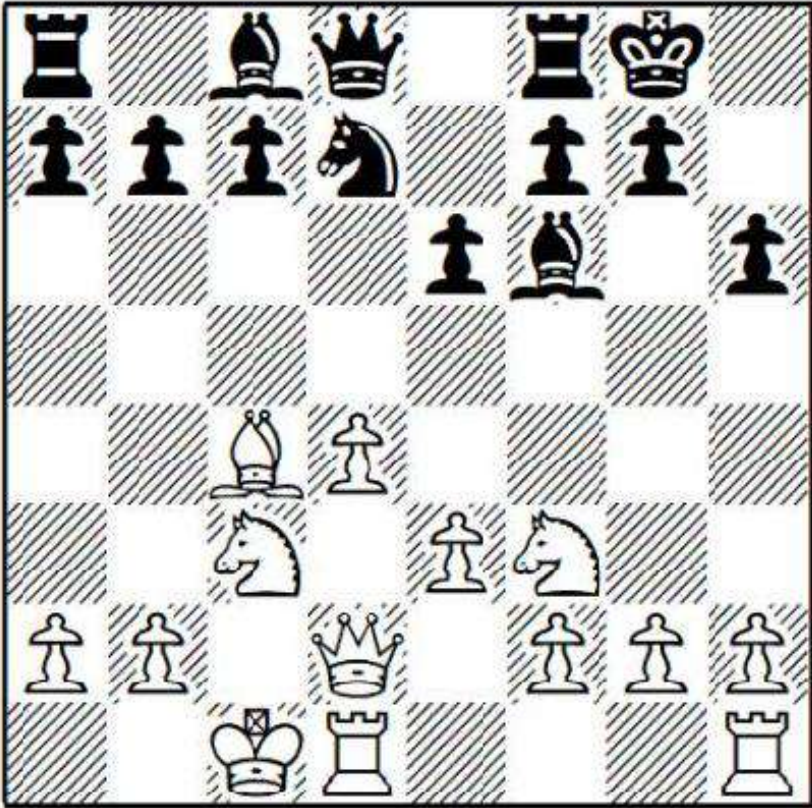
*Black to play*



**Solution**

17) M.Poleg-D.Zifroni  
Israel 2019

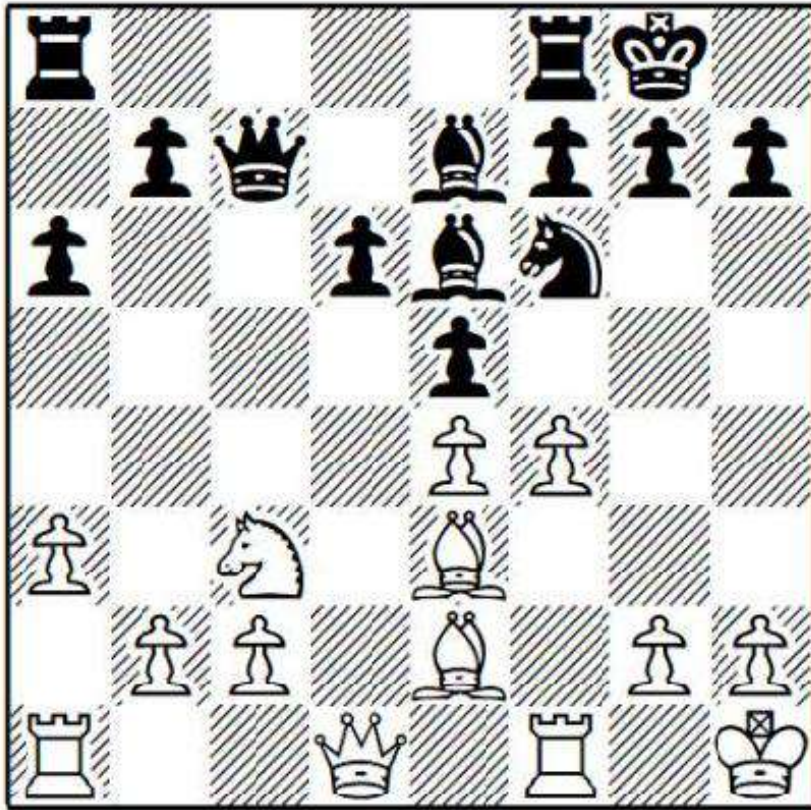
*Black to play*



**Solution**

18) Q.Zhou-A.Chumpitaz  
chess.com 2020

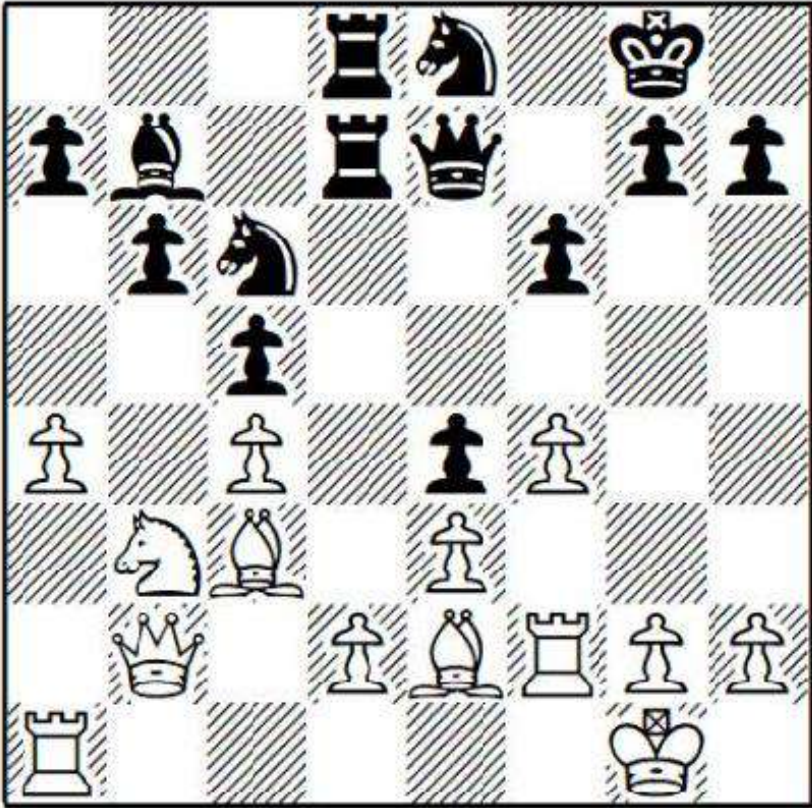
*White to play*



**Solution**

19) E.Shtembuliak-P.Balakrishnan  
chess.com 2021

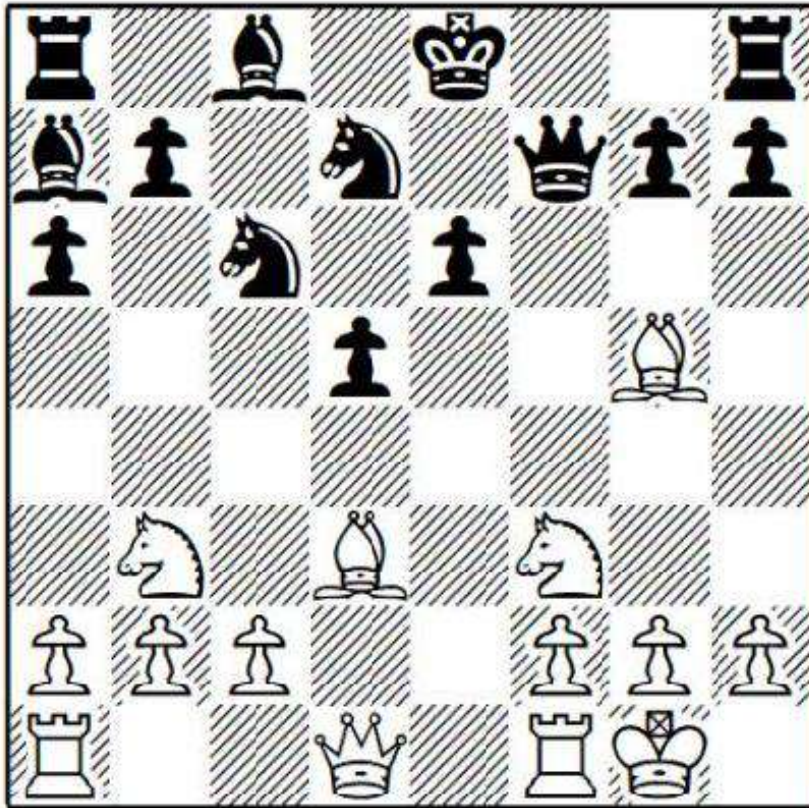
*Black to play*



**Solution**

20) M.Venkatesh-D.Eraschenkov  
Chennai 2020

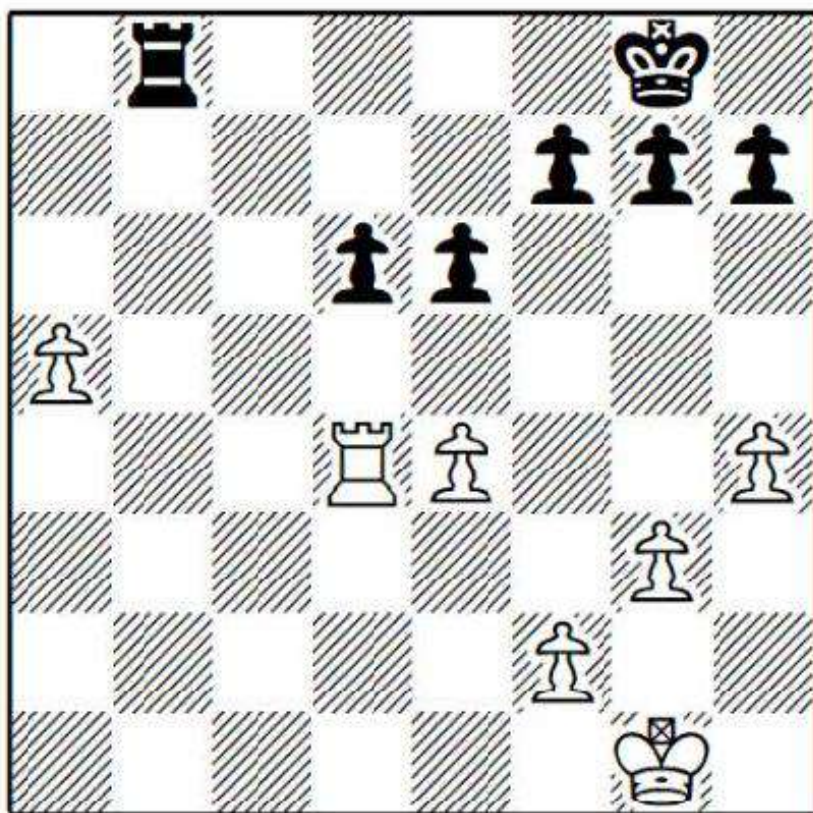
*White to play*



**Solution**

21) T.Willemze-E.Hoeksema  
Netherlands 2020

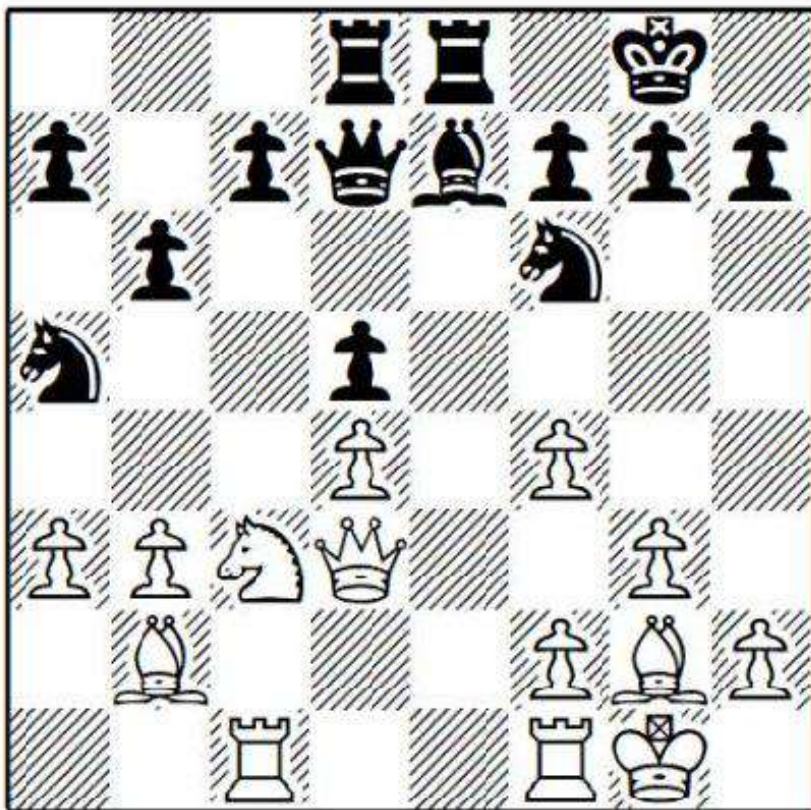
*Black to play*



**Solution**

22) E.Nguyen-G.Tokhirjonova  
chess.com 2021

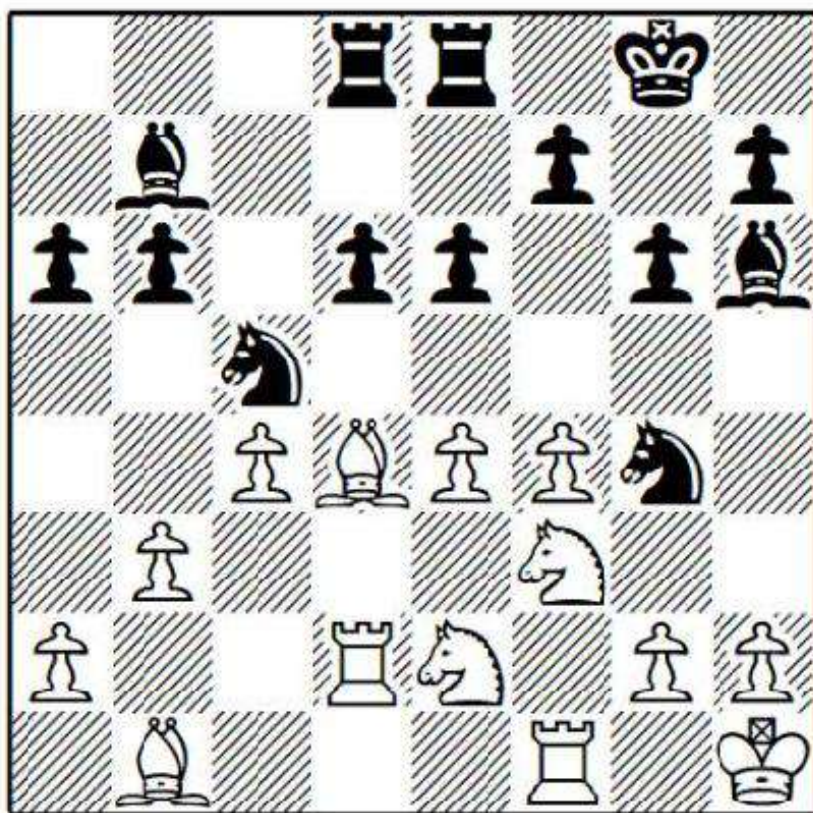
White to play



Solution

23) A.Pichot-L.Supi  
chess.com 2020

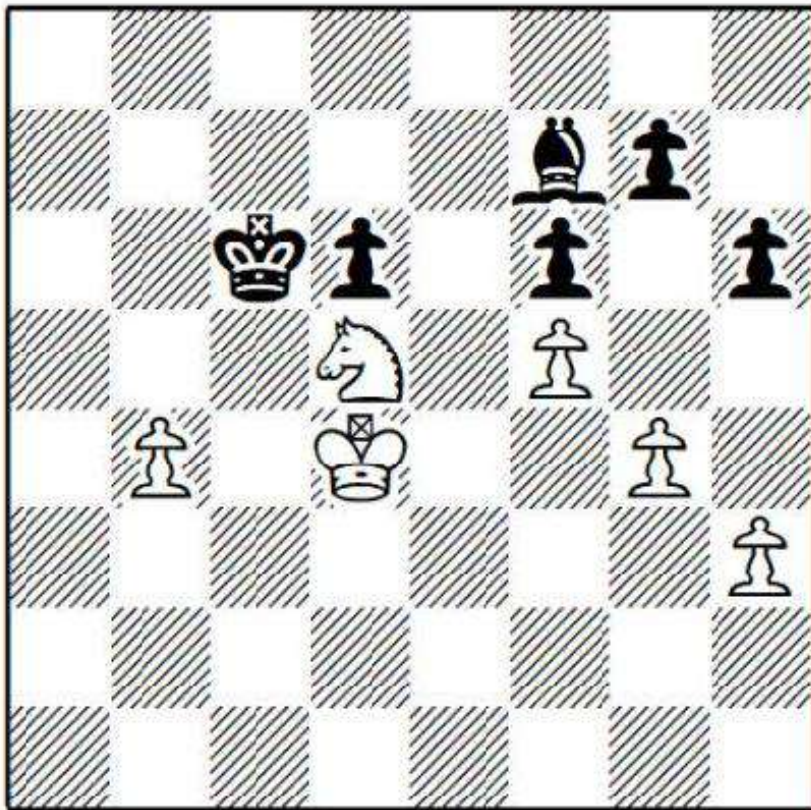
*Black to play*



[Solution](#)

24) K.Shevchenko-Y.Liu  
chess.com 2020

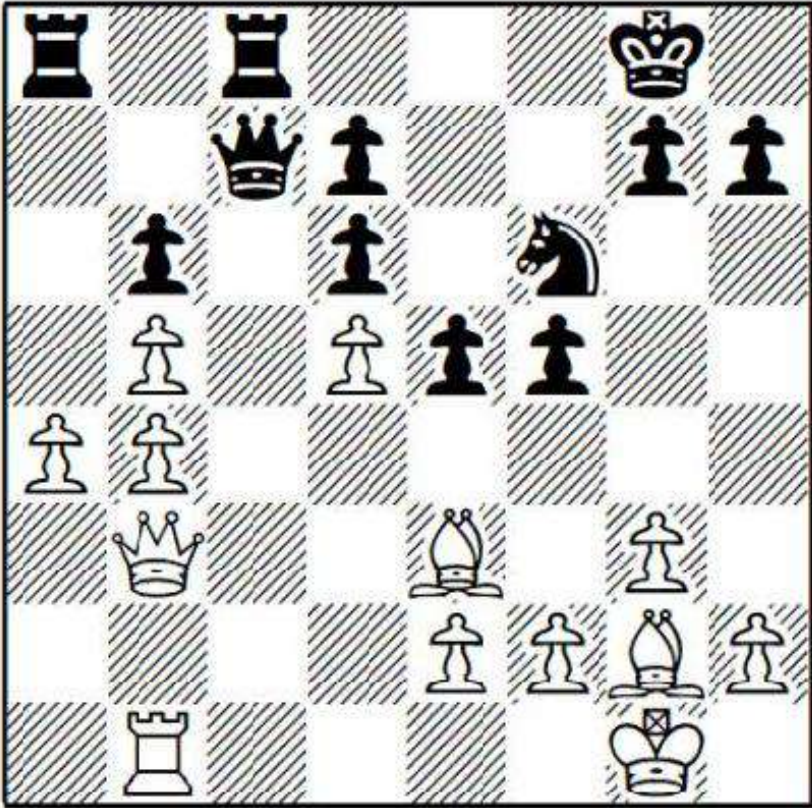
*White to play*



**Solution**

25) E.Postny-A.Lenderman  
chess.com 2019

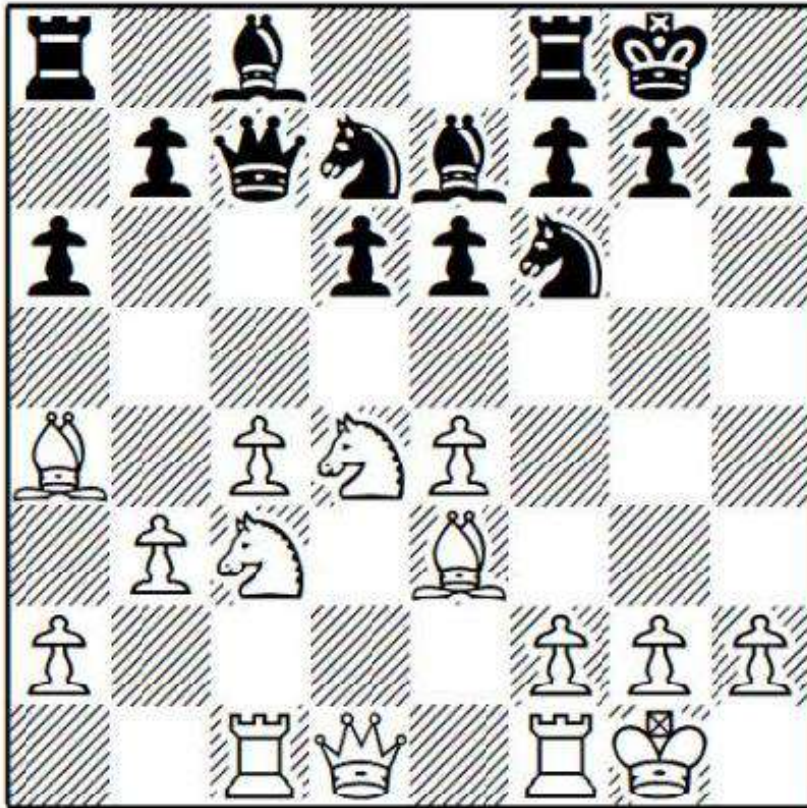
*Black to play*



**Solution**

26) T.Meurs-J.Martinez Alcantara  
Cappelle la Grande 2020

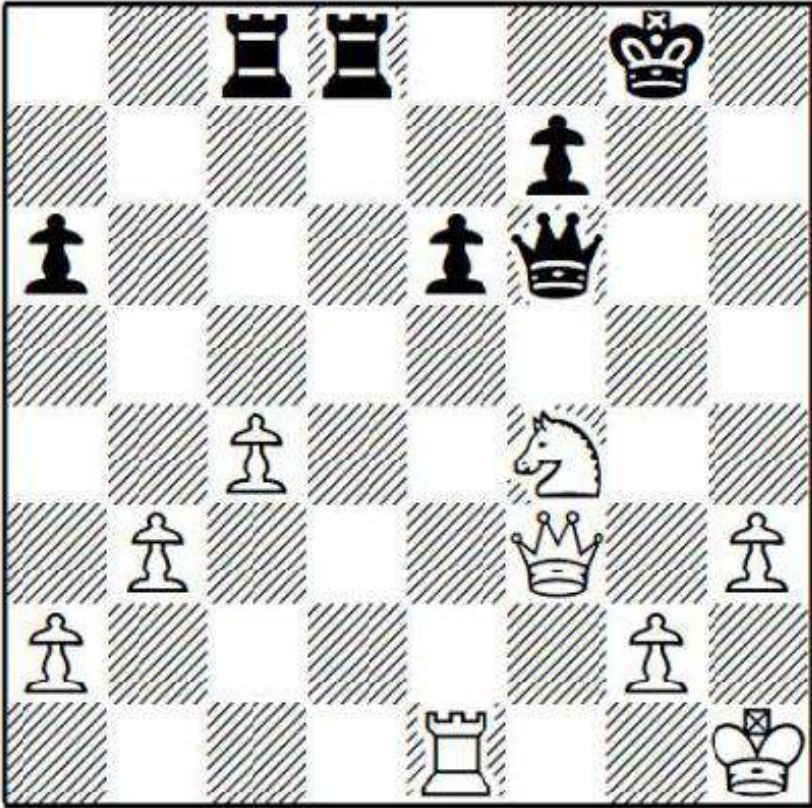
*White to play*



**Solution**

27) G.Yilmaz-A.Isik  
Antalya 2020

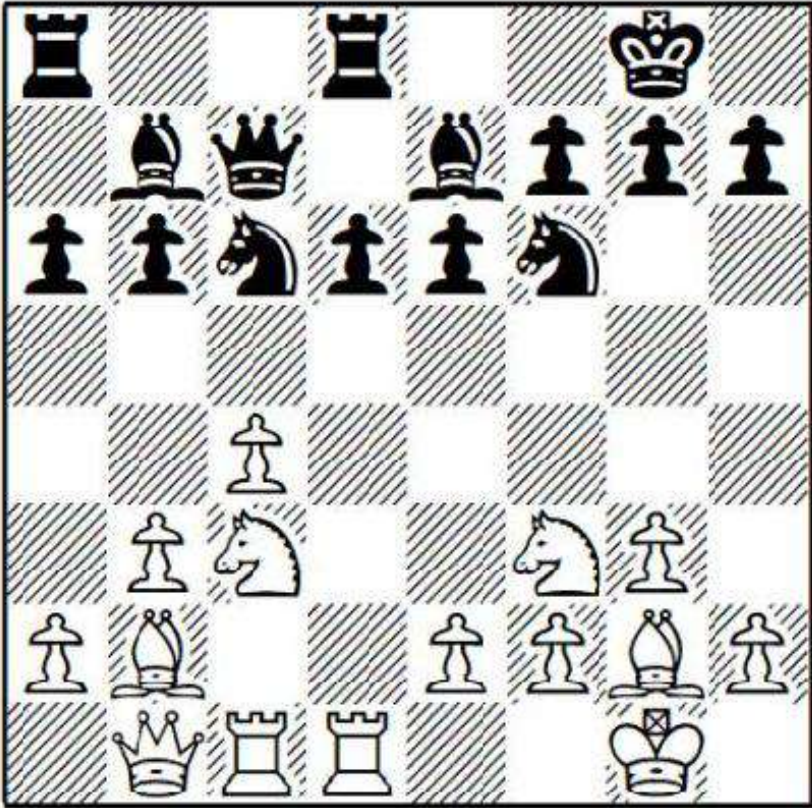
*Black to play*



Solution

28) J.Van Overdam-T.Mollema  
Netherlands 2020

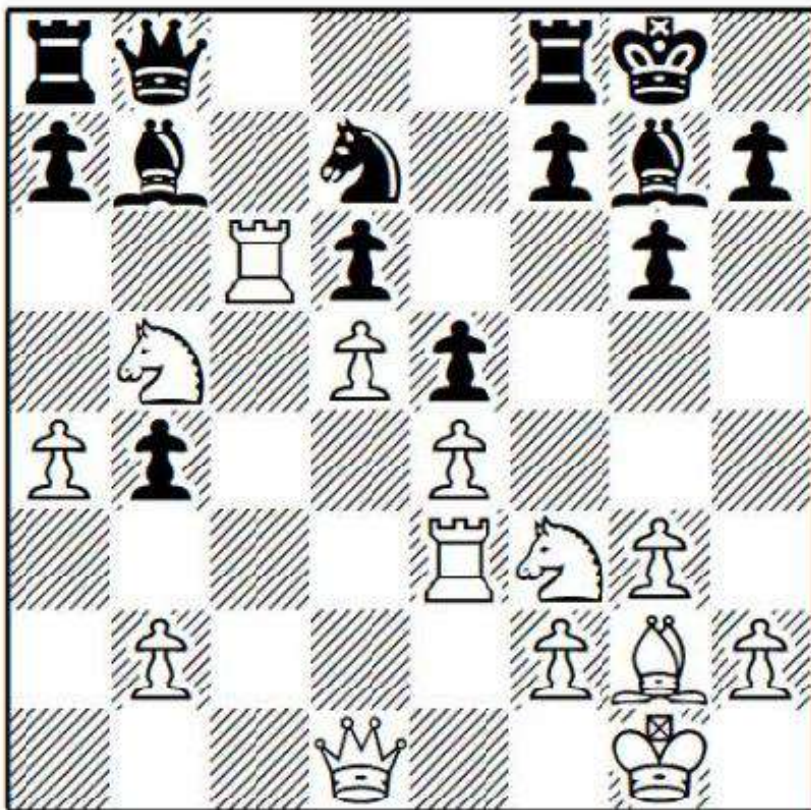
*Black to play*



**Solution**

29) S.Halkias-O.Almeida Quintana  
chess.com 2020

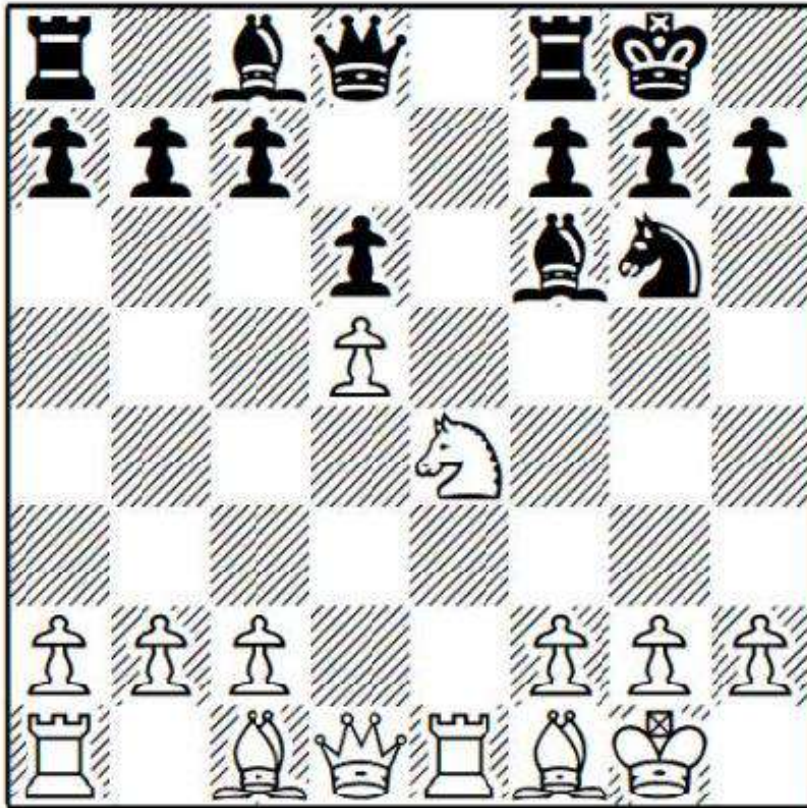
White to play



Solution

30) A.Hakobyan-H.Yeritsyan  
Yerevan 2020

*White to play*



### Solution

#### **Conclusion**

The preceding information provides a solid background in most of the basic concepts we will reference later in this book. The explanations have been relatively short, as it is not my goal to establish an exhaustive debate and analysis of each theme; many other books accomplish something of that nature, and I have no desire to replicate those in their entirety. On the other hand, many of the more experienced readers may have found this subject rather elementary and uninteresting. Still, I believe that the definitions and examples shown in this chapter can be of at least some utility. Chess is almost entirely about pattern recognition, and therefore it is paramount that the reader is familiarized with as many patterns as possible before we expand from there.

## Chapter Two

# Know What You Have

The term “positional chess” implies that our play has to do with the position we have. While this terminology is quite redundant, as all chess must do with the position we have, it embellishes the point that evaluating one’s position is a core value of positional chess. We can roughly equate this to when you are selling a printer for \$100 and some idiot messages you online offering \$20 and if he can have it delivered by Sunday. Unless you are aware of the value of what you have, it is not easy to proceed in the correct direction; the con artist (your opponent for our purposes) may even succeed in swaying your opinion. Perhaps you are wondering what this has to do with chess, but evaluation is a significant chunk of the puzzle that informs our decisions.

Evaluating positions is not an exact science; there are many people who have disparate ways with which they do so. The primary metrics that I endorse fall neatly into the acronym MAPS that I have devised:

**1) Material** – This point should be fairly self-explanatory. From the first chapter, we know that material is a serious imbalance and can frequently be the deciding factor in evaluating positions. The remaining points often serve as compensation for material.

**2) Activity** – Activity refers to the prospects of one’s pieces and how well they coordinate together. All else being equal, the side with “better” pieces should have a superior position.

**3) Pawn structure** – Pawn structure has largely been covered in Chapter 1. When evaluating positions in the middlegame, the most important factors tend to be weak pawns and pawn islands. We can often briefly summarize who has the better pawn structure by counting pawn islands.

**4) Safety** – Safety refers primarily to king safety. King safety literally decides 100% of games, as all the prior factors are roads through which the checkmate is delivered. Even without a direct mating attack in the immediate future, having a weak king is highly undesirable from a practical standpoint, as it ensures that we must keep checking that we are not getting killed at any given point. Safety will also extend to things like hanging pieces and combinations that do not necessarily fall under a function of the other pillars of MAPS.

The goal of MAPS, much like real maps, is to guide you when you are lost. Knowing how your position compares with your opponent’s allows you to better understand the game situation and how you should play. Rather

predictably, this is not universal, and different players will evaluate the same position differently; one of the games in this chapter will feature this strikingly. Additionally, the pillars of MAPS are not exclusive, as many factors are related to each other (such as safety and piece activity). Regardless, I think that MAPS is a great model for assessing positions.

I actually know several strong players, including grandmasters, that just treat anything between completely winning and completely lost as “playable”. There is certainly merit to this perspective, as one cannot allow their evaluation of the position to cloud their judgment on the correct move. Additionally, we as chess players are imperfect, and often the best move from a practical point of view is not the best one according to the computer. However, most positions we play in chess involve multiple decent moves, and thus we will have to assess our satisfaction with the predicted outcomes of these moves. This topic will be explored further in the following games.

### *Game 1*

#### **M.Botvinnik-J.R.Capablanca**

Netherlands 1938

The AVRO 1938 tournament was one of the strongest tournaments up to that time. Although he did not win the event, Botvinnik demonstrated that his strategic thinking was already superior to that of Capablanca (the great prodigy of the time). Perhaps this game, a clash between two famous names in chess history (the 6th and 3rd world champions, respectively), could be considered the beginning of the mythical “Soviet School” of chess that would dominate the sport for the remainder of the century (and arguably even today). I could hardly think of a more fitting example to use for the first game in this book.

**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e3 d5**

4 ... 0-0 is more fashionable nowadays as it maintains more flexibility with the central pawns.

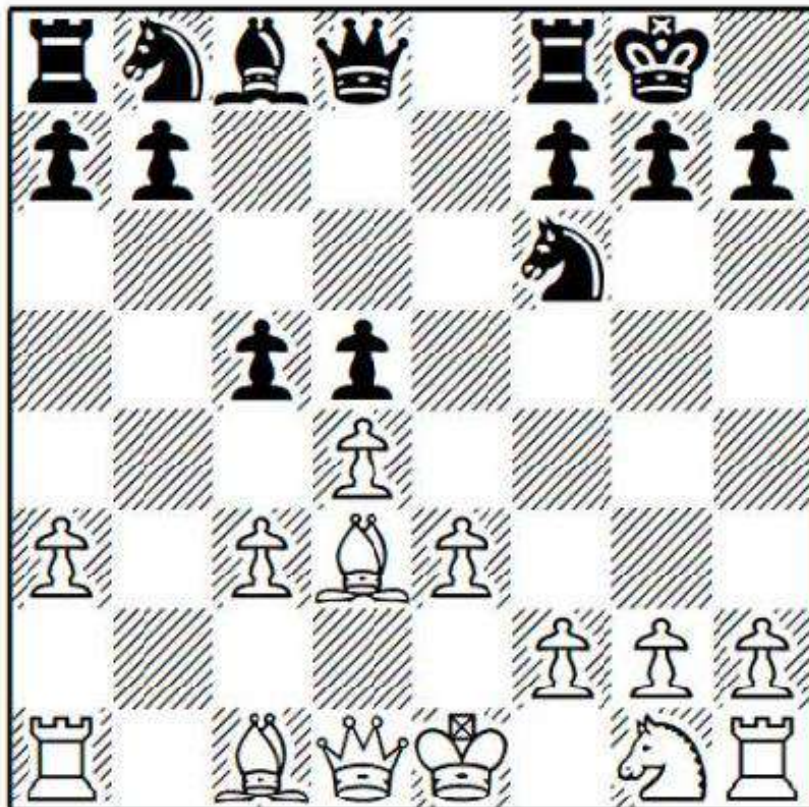
**5 a3 Bxc3+ 6 bxc3 c5**

This pawn structure that has arisen from a Nimzo-Indian is highly representative of the Ragozin Defense in the Queen’s Gambit Declined. It is a rich structure that can occur from many openings and allows for chances for both sides. Like in other openings, Black exchanges the bishop pair and his often-crucial dark-squared bishop to damage White’s pawn structure.

### 7 cxd5 exd5

The pawn structure often determines the plans for both sides. Black will try to target the isolated pawn on a3 and the backward pawn on c3. White's weak queenside indicates that endgames are not what he is aiming for. Instead, he should use his central majority to his advantage.

### 8 Bd3 0-0



How should White develop his pieces? What plan should he go for?

### 9 Ne2!

The white knight belongs on e2. It would hardly have a future on f3, as it would be driven away from e5 easily and be passive on d2. 9 Nf3? even permits 9 ... c4!? 10 Bc2 Ne4, when the weakness of c3 is telling.

### 9 ... b6 10 0-0 Ba6!

As we discussed in Chapter 1, Black should aim to trade off his “bad” light-squared bishop. This loss hurts White considerably, as the bishop on d3 is conveniently placed to support a breakthrough on the kingside or

center. After 10 ... Nc6?! 11 f3 Black's light-squared bishop is short of decent options.

### **11 Bxa6**

Given that White cannot really opt out of the bishop trade, it makes sense to misplace the black knight while doing so. The immediate 11 f3 is also sensible, as the white queen must eventually land on d3 anyway. Playing f3 first would prioritize the central break that is coming.

### **11 ... Nxa6**

Nothing is visually wrong with Black's position. The knight on a6, while not ideal, seemingly has infinite time to be included back into the game. Black has no weaknesses, and with White's pitiful dark-squared bishop, it is difficult to believe that Black will come under serious danger in the near future. At least, this must have been what the 3rd world champion was thinking. Botvinnik thought of the situation quite differently.

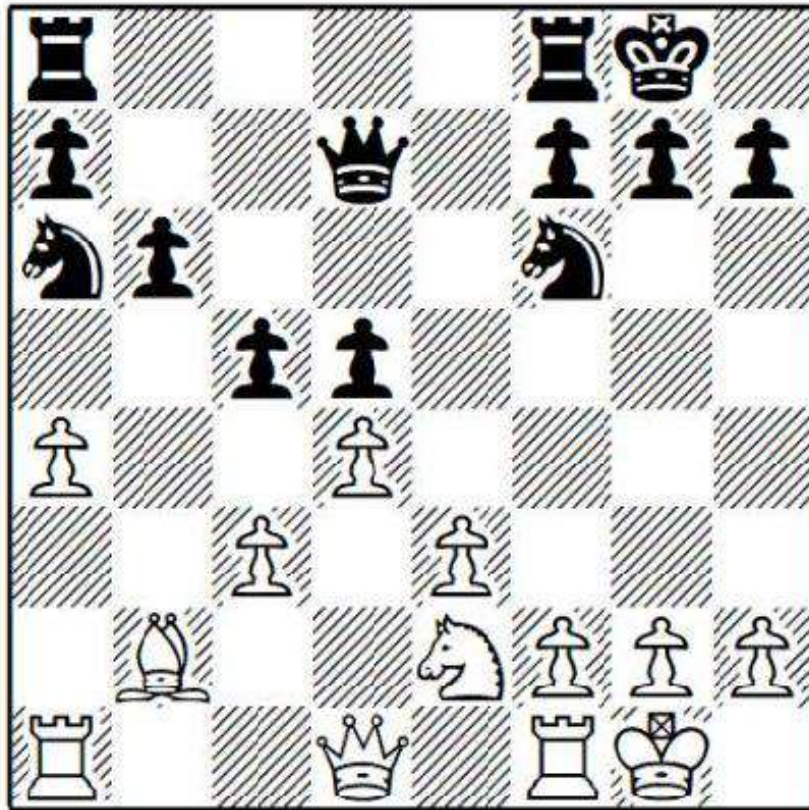
### **12 Bb2?**

You cannot make an omelet without breaking a few eggs. Botvinnik's great strategic mastery is perhaps slightly marred by the usage of an inaccurate move order. 12 Qd3 was necessary to avoid Black's following resource.

### **12 ... Qd7!**

Momentarily freezing White's queen.

### **13 a4**



Now Black has an opportunity to seize the initiative. 13 Qd3 is too late now, as 13 ... Qa4! would freeze White's queenside in place. The weakness of the light squares is highly apparent, and White's dark-squared bishop hardly has an opportunity into the game. We see a perfect illustration of the weakness of the isolated pawn; the a4-square is nearly impervious to attack.

### **13 ... Rfe8?!**

Although very natural, this move fails to capitalize on White's slow start. 13 ... cxd4 14 cxd4 Rfc8 would leave Black completely fine. Although 13 ... cxd4 is a structural concession that eliminates White's weak c3-pawn, the activity gained by the coming ... Rc4 and Rac8 is well worth it. Capablanca likely believed that the game position was better for him than it is, and there was no urgent need for simplification.

### **14 Qd3 c4**

Kasparov gave this move a '?' but I am a bit hesitant to do so given the engine's great optimism for it. In Capablanca's mind, White would not be

able to organize effective counterplay in time to deal with Black's slow but powerful ... Na6-b8-c6-a5-b3 maneuver. Unfortunately, the Cuban hero was not able to adequately understand the power of White's position. I believe that both players were pleased with their setups. As both you and I are beneficiaries of their wisdom, we can conduct a MAPS analysis of this position. Material is even, as it will often be in contentious scenarios. Activity is also close to equal, as, despite the b2-bishop's unfortunate situation, White can organize his other pieces very effectively shortly. Pawn structure is again debatable, but even with the white a4-pawn being exceptionally weak and almost certainly lost in the long term, the closed center allows for a quick f3 and e4, after which White will be able to build his position considerably. Safety is not a serious concern just yet, but Black will have some problems soon following White's kingside expansion. Most likely, the truth is somewhere in the middle, and the position is not too far from equal. However, White does have a plan that is of greater relevance than Black's, so practically speaking it should be easier to play White, as strange as that may sound looking at this position.

### **15 Qc2 Nb8**

It has probably been revealed in side notes along the way to this position that White aims to play f3 and e4 eventually. Why is this the case, you may ask? For one thing, when one has bishops vs. knights, it is often desirable to open the position so that the bishop can obtain its superiority. For example, we have previously noted the lump of dead wood on b2, but following e4 and Bc1-g5, it would spring to life. Additionally, Black's premature central closure has made it so that d4 will not be weakened by the e3-pawn's ascension. We have already noted that White has a majority in the center, meaning that we should expand in this area. The queenside is a lost cause, but Botvinnik was not deterred by this knowledge. 15 ... Nc7 is more prudent, when 16 Rae1 a5!? followed by ... b5 would allow much more rapid counterplay than the game. Again, Capablanca's misunderstanding about the efficacy of White's plan led him to play too slowly.

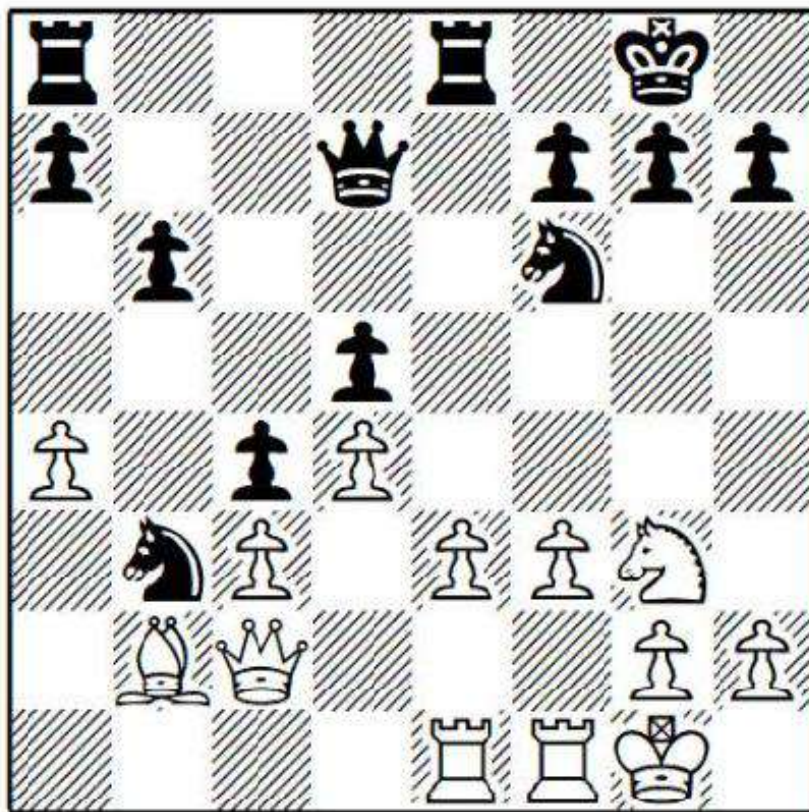
### **16 Rae1 Nc6 17 Ng3 Na5?!**

This move is consistent with Black's previous ones and completes the beautiful maneuver to the b3-outpost. However, it neglects White's plan entirely and is earmarked by *Stockfish* as already losing! Today's engines are terrifying in their complexity, but it is perhaps a solace that most

annotators since this game (and there have been many) find the position considerably in White's favor.

17 ... Ne4 is one try to exchange White's g3-knight. Considering that this trade would leave us with a pathetic bishop on b2 as our only remaining minor piece, it is hardly surprising that we are wont to decline: 18 Nh5! Qf5 19 Nf4 and White is slightly better, with f3 coming shortly. 18 Nh1!? is another way to do so and the most commonly suggested one, but the stone cold engine is unimpressed with its artistry and devises a brilliant solution for Black: 18 ... a5!? 19 f3 Nd6 20 e4 (if 20 Ng3 b5!, Black will have much stronger queenside counterplay than he did in the game) 20 ... Nb4!! 21 cxb4 axb4 with excellent compensation for the piece on account of the passed queenside pawns and sidelined knight on h1. However, this line is more or less irrelevant from a practical viewpoint, as ... Nb4 is so ridiculous it is only mentioned here as a nod to our silicon overlords.

**18 f3 Nb3**



The first time I was shown this game, I was told that both sides thought themselves nearly winning at this point. It is rare for strong players to disagree about the evaluation of a position to this extent. But the 1930s were uncharted territory, where the positional ideology that modern grandmasters are all so familiar with was not as well established, even among the world's elite. Today we can simply point at a computer, but at the board this is of course irrelevant. Modern players frequently rely too greatly on the engine's evaluations, which are largely arbitrary and often hinder the development of proper understanding. White is deemed winning by the newest neural network engines based on an understanding of the power behind the coming attack in the center and kingside, which cannot be avoided. The way this game ended was truly unexpected to my younger self.

**19 e4 Qxa4**

Kasparov called this diseased a-pawn “bait for the tiger”, and I am compelled to agree with him. The black queen has been successfully diverted from the defense. It does set a bit of a trap, however.

**20 e5 Nd7 21 Qf2!**

This queen move is a very nice piece of prophylaxis. An immediate 21 f4? would allow the quarantined steed on b3 to rejoin the game via 21 ... Nbc5! and the knight will land on d3. The fact that *Stockfish* believes White is still winning is immaterial; we should not allow our opponents to execute their ideas when there is no reason to. If we have multiple possibilities of comparable caliber and one rules out our opponent's counterplay, we should opt for that one on principle.

**21 ... g6**

Capablanca is still unimpressed. He was famous for his “efficient” and simple style that would accomplish tasks with the bare minimum in material utilization; he staves off the immediate threats, including Nf5-d6, while the remainder of his forces preserves his queenside superiority.

**22 f4**

White prepares a rudimentary but effective pawn storm via f4 and f5 to crack the Black position.

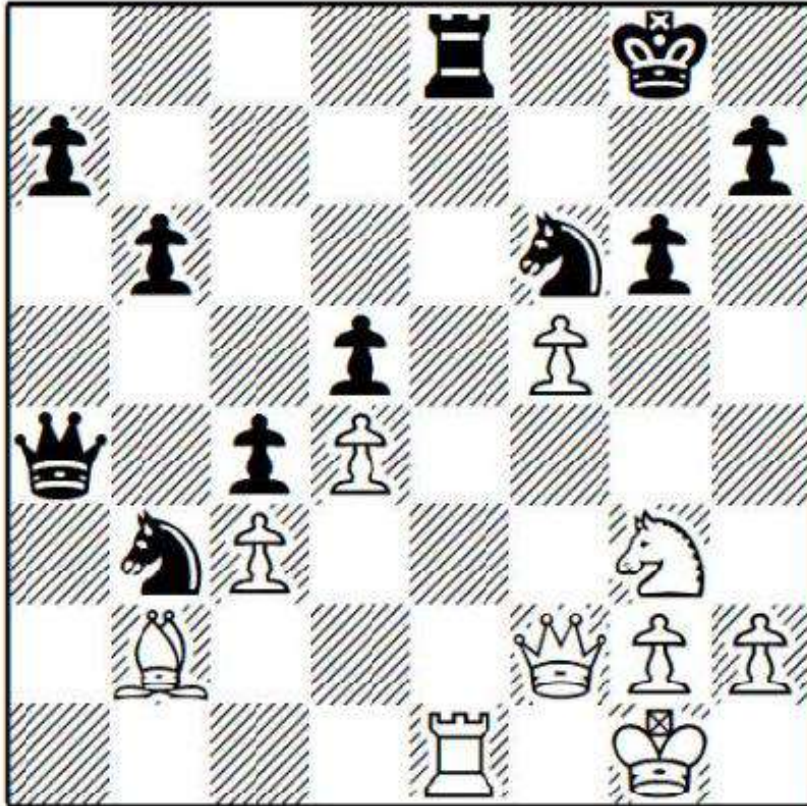
**22 ... f5**

By closing the kingside, Capablanca forces an opening of the e-file and an exchange of a pair of rooks, which should slightly ease his defensive task.

**23 exf6 Nxf6 24 f5!**

And Caesar crosses the Rubicon. A powerful resource, as this pawn break opens lines for the cavalry to infiltrate.

**24 ... Rxe1 25 Rxe1 Re8**



Cleverly using a tactic to defend the knight from fxc6. While the most resilient, this move does not help Black's situation as much as I am sure Capablanca must have thought. It is only because of this type of resilience that this game's finish has been included in so many tactics workbooks. After 25 ... Rf8 White would have many paths to a decisive attack. 26 Qf4 is likely the simplest, with multiple threats in the air. The engine likes the bizarre 26 h4!? best.

**26 Re6!**

26 fxc6 hxc6 27 Rxe8+ Nxe8 and Black would escape to an equal position.

**26 ... Rxe6**

The f-pawn's destiny now switches from a sacrificial lamb to the white queen's partner in crime. Its crowning on e8 is all but inevitable. 26 ... Kg7 fails to prevent an immediate breakthrough: 27 Rxf6! Kxf6 28 fxg6+ Kxg6 (or 28 ... Ke7 29 Qf7+ Kd8 30 gxh7 and a promotion will be happening shortly on h8) 29 Qf5+ Kg7 30 Nh5+ Kh6 31 h4! Rg8 32 g4 Qc6 33 Ba3! and mate will come swiftly with the bishop's entrance to Valhalla on f8.

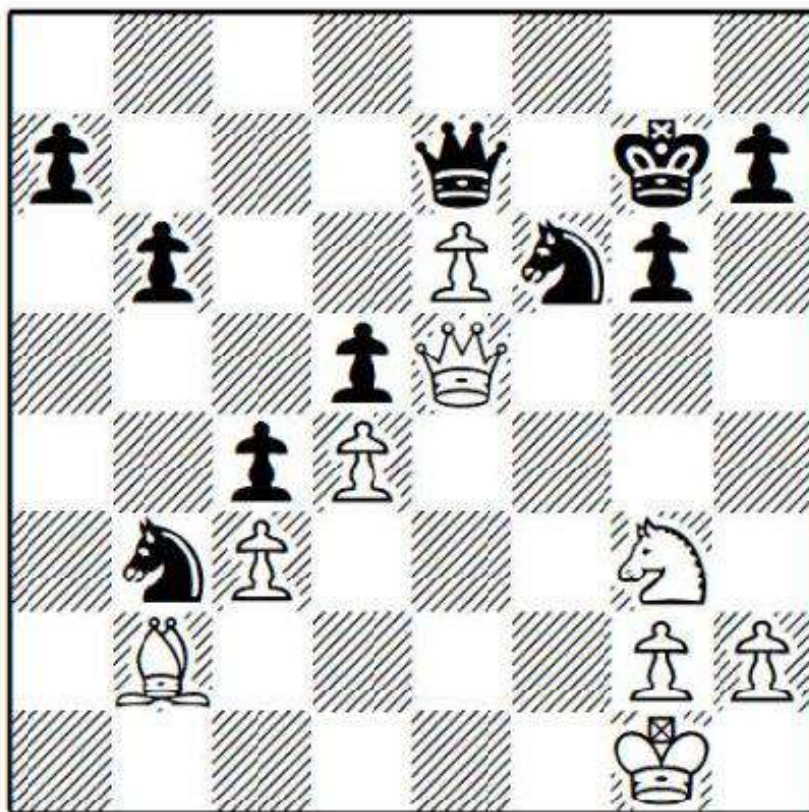
**27 fxe6 Kg7 28 Qf4**

The white queen slithers into Black's camp, with threats such as Qc7+ and Qe5.

**28 ... Qe8**

Of course, Black's queen has long overstayed its welcome on a4 and must return to assist in an attempt at defense. 28 ... Qa2? 29 Nf5+! checkmates shortly: 29 ... gxf5 30 Qg5+ and the game is over.

**29 Qe5 Qe7**



This is one of the most famous tactics that has ever been played in chess. I saw this position in one of my very first chess books, and it doubtlessly has appeared in many more. It seems that both armies are at a standstill. The dominant features of White's position are all more or less immobile. If Black had enough time, he could retreat the wayward b3-knight from its outpost via a5 and c6 to aid in the defense. This applies to White as well, and I am reminded of Aagaard's first chapter in his excellent book *Attacking Manual 1*: bring all your toys to the nursery party!

**30 Ba3!!**

In a satisfying twist, the dark-squared bishop we bullied for so long for its passivity on b2 has come to the party itself. Its suicide will divert the black queen from attending her monarch long enough for the white pieces to crash through in triumph. Meanwhile, the b3-knight Black was proud of for so long remains hopelessly futile in its vigil over the white queenside.

**30 ... Qxa3**

30 ... Qe8 31 Qc7+ Kg8 32 Be7! and White's bishop has metamorphosed into the star piece!

**31 Nh5+!**

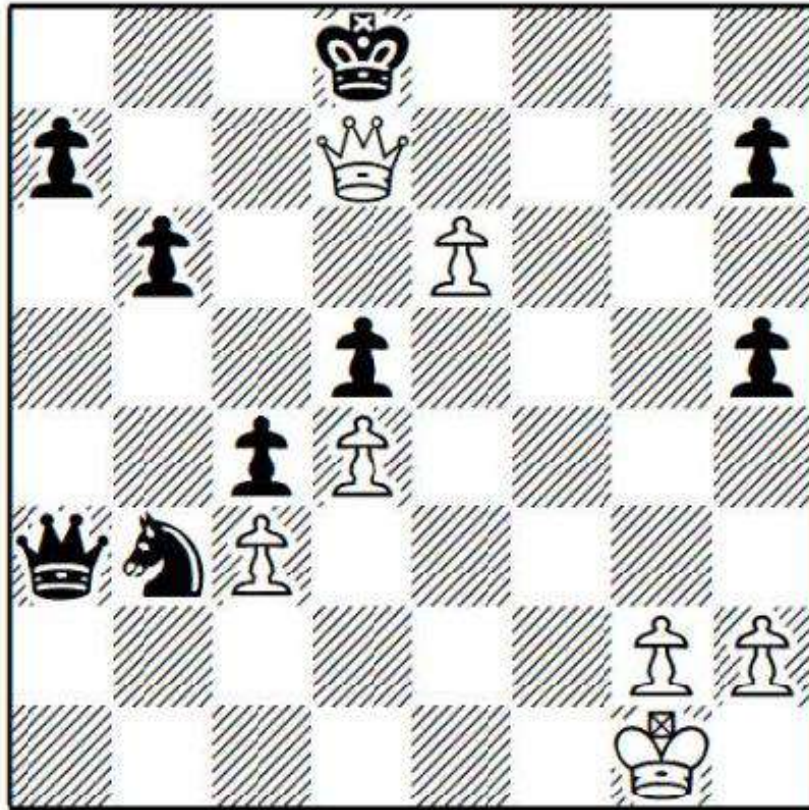
The second minor piece sacrifice serves to clear the way for the white queen to tear apart everything in its path and bring the e-pawn to fruition.

**31 ... gxh5**

31 ... Kh6 32 Nxf6 Qc1+ 33 Kf2 Qd2+ 34 Kg3 Qxc3+ 35 Kh4 Qxd4+ 36 Ng4+ and the knight even shields its king to deliver the end!

**32 Qg5+ Kf8 33 Qxf6+ Kg8**

33 ... Ke8 34 Qf7+ Kd8 35 Qd7 mate.



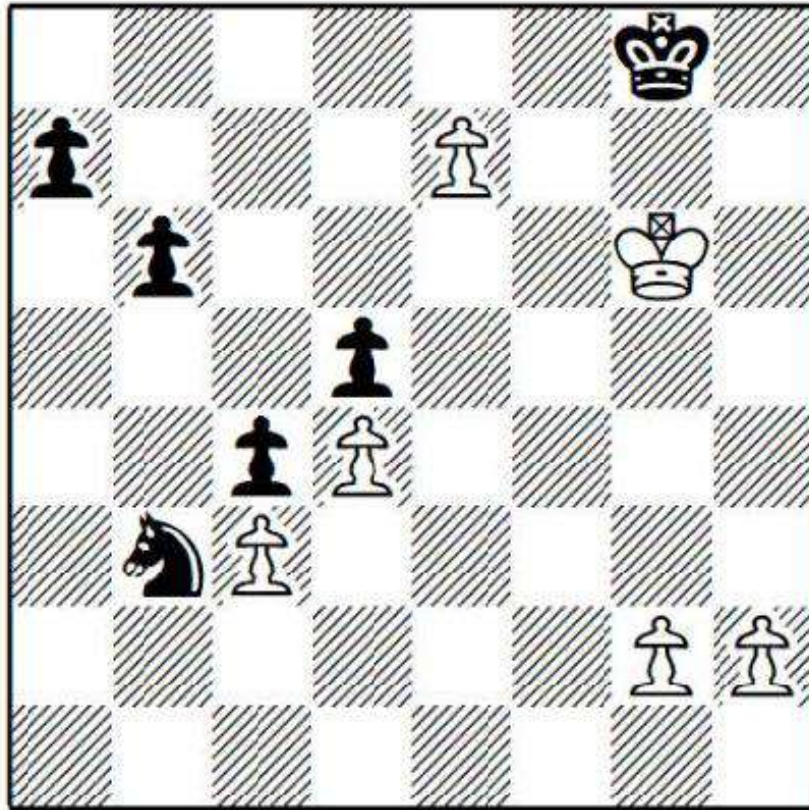
It is always satisfying to deliver a checkmate on the belly like this!

**34 e7**

They say it takes two to tango, and I would say that the queen on f6 and the e7-pawn have constructed a beautiful dance together. All that remains is to avoid the ghost of an attempt at perpetual check. 34 Qf7+ Kh8 35 g3! would suffice as well, allowing the white king to run to h3. The black knight's worthlessness is readily apparent. 35 e7?? would be a disaster, as White's queen no longer holds the g5-square: 35 ... Qc1+ 36 Kf2 Qd2+ 37 Kg3 Qg5+ 38 Kf3 Qg4+ 39 Kf2 Qh4+ 40 Kf1 Nd2+! (somehow, we have let the black knight back in!) 41 Ke2 Qg4+ 42 Kxd2 Qxg2+ with perpetual check.

**34 ... Qc1+ 35 Kf2 Qc2+ 36 Kg3 Qd3+ 37 Kh4 Qe4+ 38 Kxh5 Qe2+**

**38 ... Qg6+ 39 Qxg6+ hxg6+ 40 Kxg6** is quite picturesque.

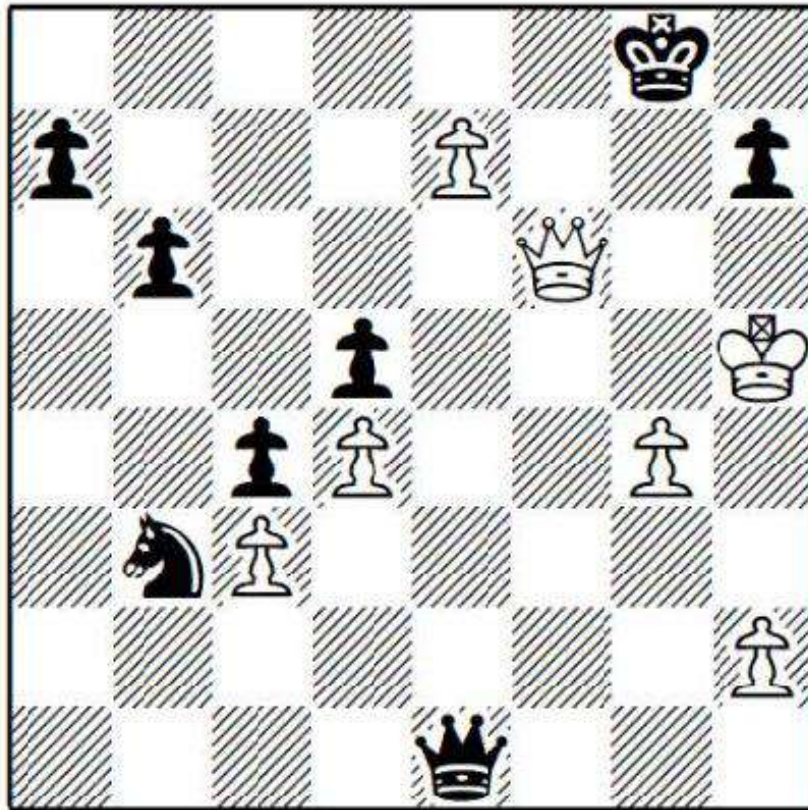


Once again, the knight on b3 cruelly eschews defense in favor of observation, while the e7-pawn, for all its hardships, inevitably delivers mate on the next move with a promotion to a queen or even a rook.

**39 Kh4 Qe4+ 40 g4**

The sad horse on b3 remains pointless to the end, a grim reminder of Black's strategic misunderstanding in the middlegame. It was not too late to drop the ball with 40 Kh3? h5! 41 Qf8+ Kh7 42 Qf7+ Kh6 43 Qf6+ Kh7 44 Qg5 Qe2! and Black draws. Chess is a game of inches, and we are never far from spoiling our situation.

**40 ... Qe1+ 41 Kh5 1-0**



And the game ends, with the sack of potatoes on b3 remaining stalwart in its redundancy.

From this game, not only can we recognize the victory of Botvinnik's school of thought over that of the older masters in magnificent style, we can also observe the importance of evaluating one's position and understanding the correct plans for both sides.

### *Game 2*

**E.Geller-M.Euwe**

Zurich 1953

In discussing how to judge whose position is better, we must understand the concept of an advantage. Broadly speaking, there are two main categories of advantages: static and dynamic. Static advantages are "permanent", such as material, superior pawn structure, and the bishop pair, as all of these

advantages cannot be spontaneously lost without an error. The other main category, the dynamic advantage, refers to the more ephemeral imbalances such as superior piece coordination, a lead in development, or the initiative; these characteristics will disappear when the opponent is given more time. However, advantages do not stay within these categories forever. Advantages often convert between these two categories, and this shift is often crucial. This game is nearly as old as the first, but the players, including one of the greatest to never seize the world title in Efim Geller and the 5th world champion Max Euwe, should surely not disappoint the reader.

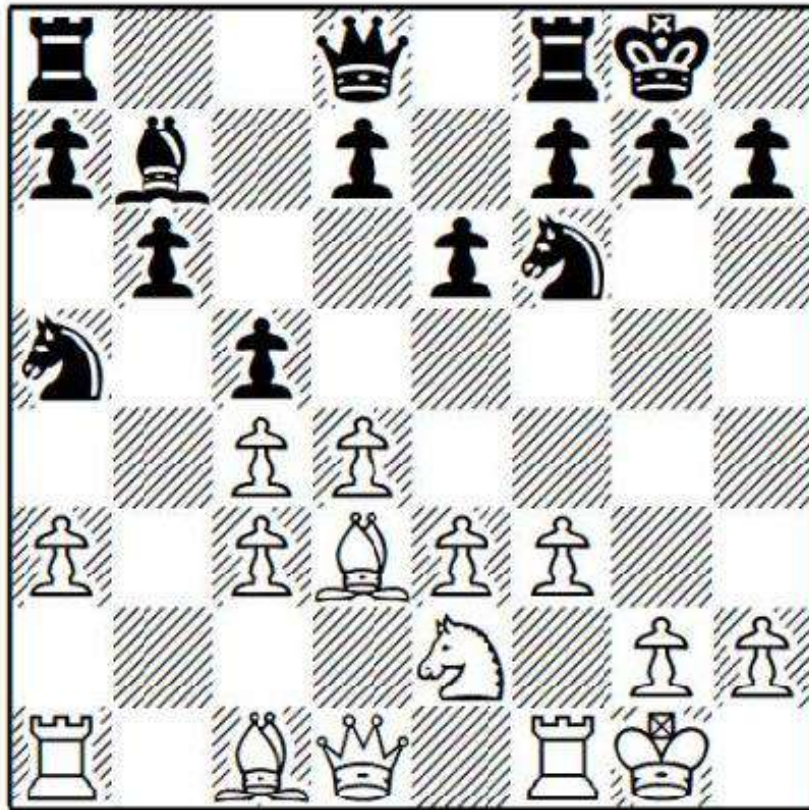
**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e3 c5 5 a3 Bxc3+ 6 bxc3**

We have a somewhat typical Nimzo-Indian situation yet again, with doubled c-pawns for White. However, the fact that Black has not played ... d5 makes the c4-pawn a subject for attack from Black's pieces.

**6 ... b6 7 Bd3 Bb7 8 f3!**

White correctly notes that his bishop pair and central majority support an expansion in the center.

**8 ... Nc6 9 Ne2 0-0 10 0-0 Na5!**



This move compounds the pressure on the c4-pawn. When followed by moves like ... Ba6, ... Rc8, and potentially even ... Ne8-d6, it is highly probable that it will be lost. In exchange for this pawn, White hopes to play e4 and shift his pieces to the kingside to whip up an attack. The position is close to equal, but we can recognize the division of advantages where White possesses a dynamic advantage while the weakness of c4 hands Black a static advantage.

**11 e4 Ne8**

This move prepares ... Nd6 to continue the assault on the c-pawn and preemptively removes the knight from White's e4-e5 push.

**12 Ng3**

12 dxc5! is an odd recommendation from *Stockfish*: 12 ... bxc5 (12 ... Qc7! and other moves like it are interesting, to sacrifice a pawn for great structural superiority: 13 cxb6 axb6 14 Nd4 and the position is close to

equal) 13 Bf4 and the weak c-pawns are balanced by White's activity to reach the vaunted triple 0.

### **12 ... cxd4**

This seems a bit premature to me; on principle, I cannot see why Black needs to open the position here. 12 ... Ba6! appears more sensible: 13 dxc5 Bxc4 and Black is at least equal. 13 Qe2 seems logical to defend the c4-pawn but leaves b3 woefully uncovered: 13 ... cxd4 14 cxd4 Nb3 and Black wins the d4-pawn with some advantage. 13 Re1 Bxc4 14 Bc2 may be the best practical course to preserve the central integrity, but after something like 14 ... d6 Black must be for choice here.

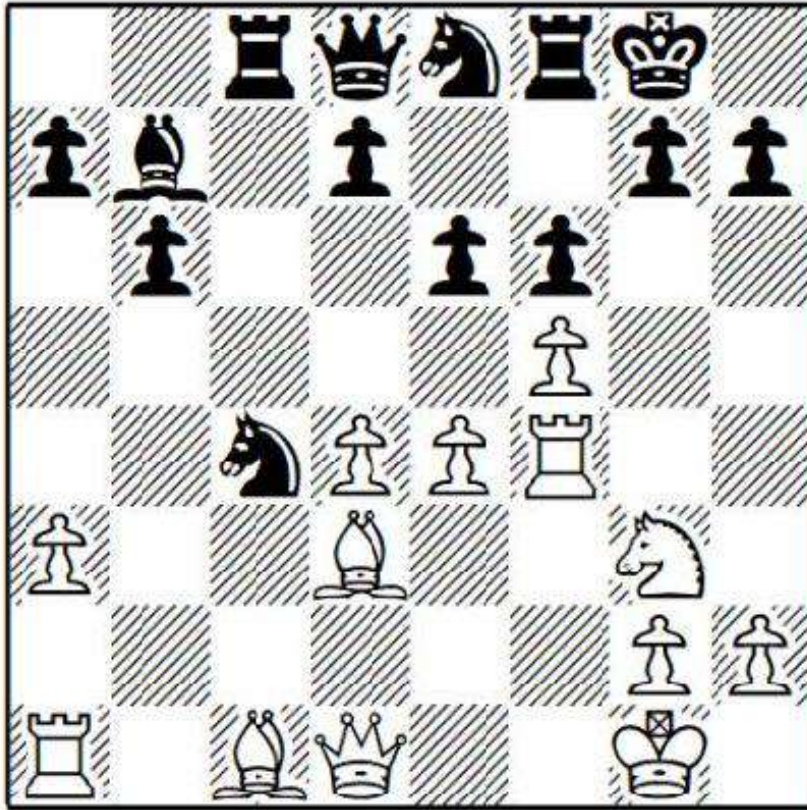
### **13 cxd4 Rc8**

13 ... Ba6 may be a tad more accurate to avoid the engine's suggestion against the text move.

### **14 f4**

14 c5!? is a strange-looking try. 14 ... bxc5 15 dxc5 Rxc5 16 Rb1 gives fascinating compensation for the pawn in the form of a potent bishop pair and poor Black coordination. I am reminded of Nimzowitsch's old adage stating that the threat is stronger than the execution; after winning the c-pawn, Black's queenside complex serves little purpose.

### **14 ... Nxc4 15 f5 f6 16 Rf4**



So far, White has used his aggressive opening setup to build a fearsome-looking attack, with Rh4 and Qh5 coming soon. We can see the transformation of advantages in full swing: White gives the c4-pawn to set up his attack. ... h6 would hardly be enough to safeguard the h7-square, as the bishop on c1 would give its life in a way that brings to mind the Mar del Plata Variation of the King's Indian Defense.

Perhaps a MAPS analysis here can lead us closer to the truth. Black is up a pawn here, but White appears to have a considerable advantage in activity with the coming Rh4 and Qh5. Pawn structure should slightly favor Black due to his extra pawn and solid central structure coupled with White's isolated a-pawn, but this is not too important here; the most critical aspect of this position is safety. At first, it seems that the black king will come under assault soon, but White also has weaknesses, which Euwe is very alert to!

**16 ... b5!**

A delightful move to play! Rather than wait to be attacked, Euwe correctly decides to target the d4-pawn (and the subsequent king on g1) with ... Qb6. Kasparov gives this move double acclaim, but I think that is slightly disingenuous. The engine provides Black an advantage of more than a pawn here. 16 ... e5!? is another possibility. The idea is to meet White's flank attack by nuking the center; hardly an original concept, but as they say, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it!" 17 Rh4 (17 dxe5 fxe5 18 Rf2 may be White's best course of action, but after 18 ... d5 the attack is over and Black has a pawn to the good) 17 ... d5!! 18 Qh5 dxe4 19 Qxh7+ Kf7 and Black wins.

### **17 Rh4 Qb6**

White must defend the d4-pawn, but the time to retreat has long since passed!

### **18 e5!**

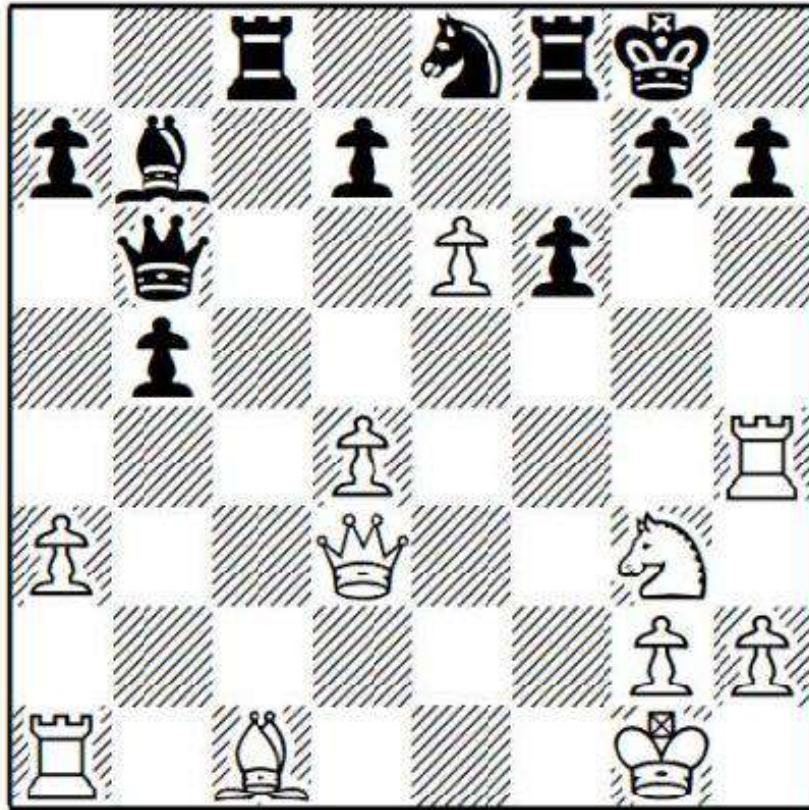
This move serves primarily to defend the d-pawn, but White's sacrifices are also not far from bearing fruit; h7 is indefensible by ordinary means! Not 18 Bb1? e5 and Black would win relatively easily with his two extra pawns after the queens depart.

### **18 ... Nxe5**

18 ... h6!? is also possible, according to the engine. 19 Bxh6 Nxe5!! is brilliant, with the obstruction of the h-file rendering Qh5 ineffective. After 20 Bf1 gxh6, while the situation is still rather hairy, Black should have the necessary resources to defend and win with his extra piece. *Stockfish* thinks White's best move here is a4, so it seems unnecessary to continue ...

### **19 fxe6 Nxd3 20 Qxd3**

20 exd7 Rxc1 21 Rxc1 Nxc1 and Black would win.



White now threatens the highly detestable Qxh7 mate. How should Black best avoid this?

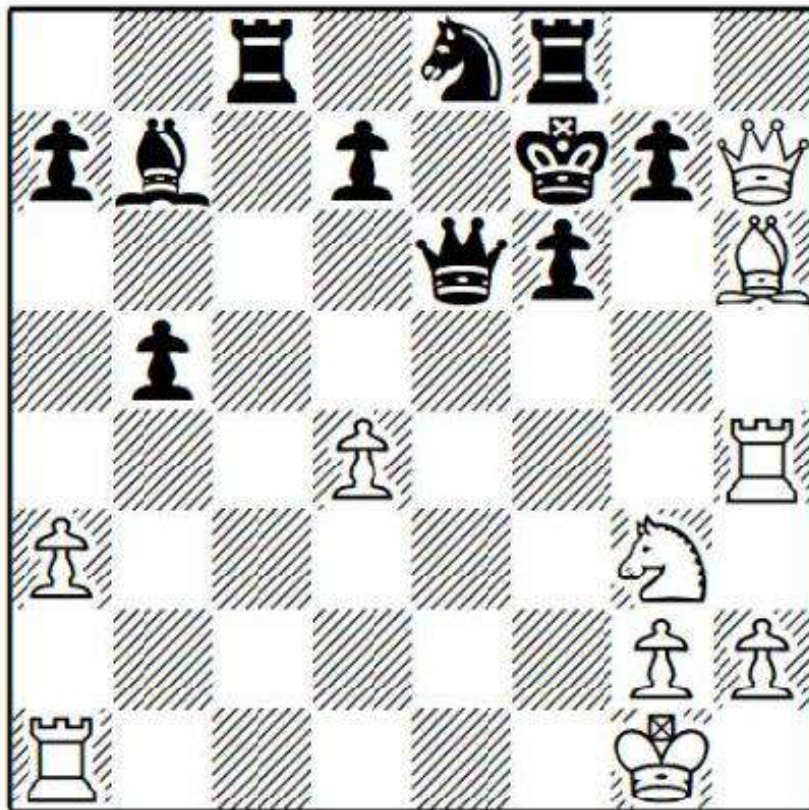
**20 ... Qxe6!**

The correct choice; Black's king is not in immediate danger on f7, making it more important to consolidate. 20 ... g6? hopes for 21 exd7? Qc6 and Black preserves the advantage. However, 21 Bh6! Ng7 (21 ... dxe6 22 Bxf8 Kxf8 23 Rxh7 gives a clear advantage for White) 22 Bxg7 Kxg7 23 Nf5+! gxf5 (23 ... Kh8 24 Qh3 h5 25 Rxh5+! mates as well) 24 Qxf5 mates shortly.

**21 Qxh7+ Kf7 22 Bh6**

Geller is not one to forget his toys before the nursery party. 22 Qh5+? does not help: 22 ... g6 23 Qh7+ (23 Qxb5? Rxc1+! 24 Rxc1 Qe3+) 23 ... Ng7 24 Bh6 Rg8 and the cessation of White's attack means that he is completely lost, with his queen out of play and the black rook swiftly coming to c2. The power of the bishop on b7 will tell. This is the problem

with dynamic advantages; if you cannot crash through, they are often meaningless!



### 22 ... Rh8!?

It is now Black's turn to sacrifice material for a dynamic advantage! We often speak of the defender throwing material back to disrupt the flow of the attack – but perhaps this is a bit too much!? The idea is to deflect the white queen from covering c2 so that the black rook may enter and create serious threats when coupled with the queen and bishop. Unfortunately, I cannot bring myself to give it a double or even single acclaim since it is not the best move and actually discards Black's advantage, but that does not detract from its conceptual brilliance!

After 22 ... Qd5 23 Re4 Black could preserve his advantage with 23 ... Rc6 (Kasparov's 23 ... Qc4? loses to the fantastical 24 Rg4! Ke7 25 Bd2!! – this last move is a bit unnecessary, but the bishop will land on a5 after Black's king is forced to d8; the attack is winning) 24 Rae1 Re6, although

the situation remains dangerous. 22 ... Rc3! is the best move, according to *Stockfish*. The idea is to meet the previously mentioned ... Qd5 Re4 sequence with ... Rxc3!. After 23 Rf1 Qd5 24 Ne4 (24 Re4? Rxc3) 24 ... Qxd4+ 25 Kh1 Bxe4 26 Rxe4 Rh8! the deflection brings Black some safety. The game is not over, but Black is up two pawns.

### **23 Qxh8 Rc2 24 Rc1?**

As is so often the case with situations where one goes from the hunter to the hunted, Geller loses the thread. This move is designed against the sequence ... Rxc2+, Kf1 Qc4+ but neglects to address the black queen's other avenues ...

The brilliant 24 d5!! was necessary to crack Black's wonderful coordination: 24 ... Bxd5 (24 ... Qb6+? would actually lose after 25 Kh1 Bxd5 26 Ne4 gxf6 27 Qh7+ Kf8 28 Qxf6+ Ke7 29 Qg6 and White is winning; we can say that White's initiative has been converted to a material advantage!) 25 Rd1! (planning to eliminate the weapons-grade bishop on d5) 25 ... Rxc2+ 26 Kf1 gxf6 and now 27 Qxf6 (but not 27 Rxf6?, which loses after 27 ... Rxc3! 28 hxc3 [or 28 Rh7+ Rg7 and the attack is over] 28 ... Bc4+ 29 Kg2 [or 29 Kg1 Qe3+ 30 Kh1 Qf3+ 31 Kh2 Qe2+ and the same] 29 ... Qe2+ 30 Kh3 Be6+ and the rook is lost, with no perpetual check in sight) 27 ... Bf3! (27 ... Ng7? 28 Rhd4! Bc6 29 Rxd7+ Bxd7 30 Kxc2 Qc6+ 31 Kg1 and White maintains an advantage with his extra exchange) 28 Rd2 and the position is close to equal.

26 Kf1 could also be met with 26 ... Ra2! 27 Bd2 Bc4+ 28 Rxc4 Qxc4+ 29 Ke1 (29 Kg1?? Qd4+ and Black takes his piece back to win with his three extra pawns; if 29 Kf2 Qg4! 30 Qh5+ Qxf5 31 Nxf5 a5, the endgame is slightly better for Black, who will have four pawns for the piece; 29 Ne2 Qg4! and the unfortunate positioning of the white queen renders White's coordination nearly untenable: 30 Ke1 Rxa3 with a clear advantage; Black has recuperated enough of the lost material and keeps a fearsome attack) 29 ... Qe6+ 30 Ne2 Qg4 with a highly unclear position that is rated as 0.00 by the engine. Material is "even" by the traditional metrics, but Black retains an immense advantage in activity. The difficulty to progress allows White to equalize with something like 31 Qh7 with the simple idea of returning the queen to civilization.

### **24 ... Rxc2+ 25 Kf1 Qb3!**

The infiltration on the light squares is nearly complete. ... Qf3+ or Qd3+ will conclude the game shortly.

## 26 Ke1 Qf3 0-1

White resigned in view of the mate threats. I hope the exploration of this fascinating game has allowed you to understand advantages in chess better. We will examine more examples of the use of a dynamic advantage in Chapter 4.

### *Game 3*

**N.Checa-J.Sheng**

Fort Worth 2018

It is somewhat unusual for me to be “paired up” (facing a higher-rated player) in the second round of an open tournament in the United States. It was especially curious that my opponent was not significantly higher rated than me, but I was grateful for the opportunity – it is always a good thing to play stronger players!

### **1 Nf3**

Already, a bit of a surprise from Nico. Prior to this game, I had never seen him not play 1 d4. Not to say he hadn't, but I just had never seen it. Thankfully (?), at this point, I was rather enamored with the Tarrasch Defense, and that setup can be employed quite reasonably against various White move orders.

**1 ... Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 g3 d5 4 Bg2 c5 5 d4 Be7 6 0-0 0-0 7 cxd5 exd5 8 Nc3 Nc6**

And we have rather uneventfully transposed to one of the main tabiyas of the Tarrasch Defense. Many players may find it a bit depressing, but I have yet to see anyone prove an advantage against theory. A point in its favor is that most White players do not study it very thoroughly.

### **9 Bg5**

Later in this event, IM Kacper Drozdowski employed the other main move, 9 dxc5, against me successfully.

### **9 ... c4**

The most modern way to play this opening. It is recommended by Aagaard and Ntirlis in their excellent book *Grandmaster Repertoire: The Tarrasch Defence*. 9 ... cxd4 is the older move, most famously employed by Kasparov on numerous occasions. However, it is relatively passive, and I believe White should be able to maintain an edge.

### **10 Ne5**

The most common move; White seeks to pressure the d5-pawn by unleashing the g2-bishop and aiming to damage the black queenside pawn structure.

**10 ... Be6 11 e3**

Keeping the position closed. 11 Nxc6 bxc6 12 b3 is more typical, usually leading to an endgame where Black can hold without too much suffering.

**11 ... h6**

In the absence of any immediate danger, Black takes the time to capture the bishop pair.

**12 Bxf6**

12 Nxc6 bxc6 13 Bf4? would place the dark-squared bishop in an unfortunate position, which Black could take advantage of immediately with 13 ... g5 14 Be5 Ng4 if desired.

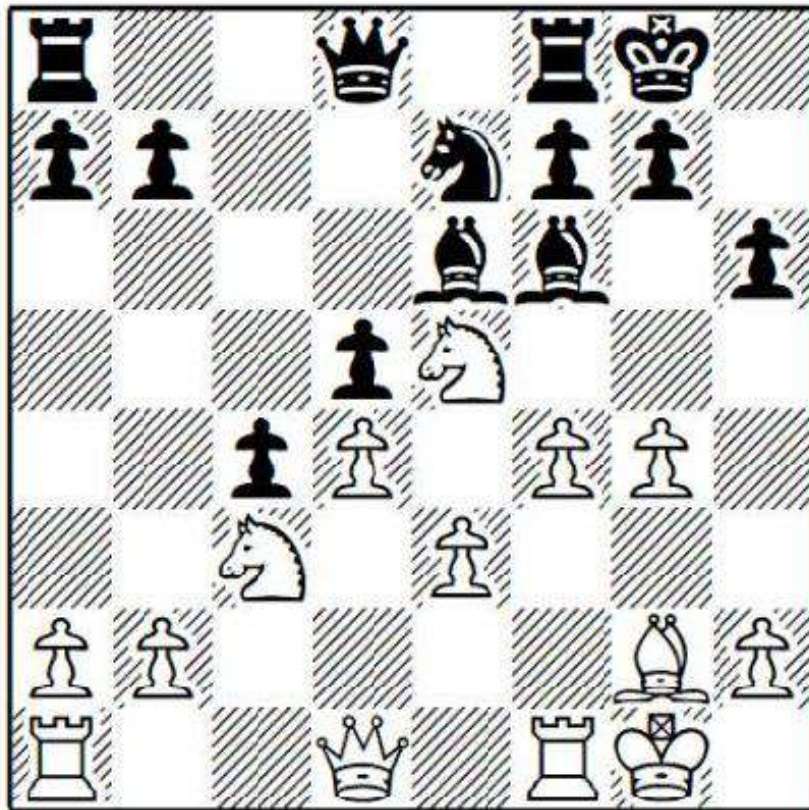
**12 ... Bxf6 13 f4**

Most common here and consistent with 11 e3. Now Black must contend with possibilities such as f5 or g4. After 13 Nxc6 bxc6 14 b3 cxb3 15 Qxb3 (if 15 axb3 c5!, Black frees himself with equality) 15 ... Rb8 16 Qc2 Qa5 Black looks fine to me. The weakness of the c6-pawn is well compensated for by the bishop pair and active piece placement.

**13 ... Ne7!**

The knight is not doing much on c6 at the moment. It is better suited to defend the light squares on the kingside and support the bishop on e6.

**14 g4?!**



This move is usual, but I think it is a bit hasty. The engine is more inclined towards waiting moves such as 14 Qc2 to prevent Black's next move, though I have difficulty imagining that Black could be worse.

**14 ... b5!**

Taking advantage of a small tactical nuance to engage in queenside expansion. Black has a pawn majority on the queenside and an edge in space on that wing, so increasing these advantages is highly desirable. Given White's difficulty in progressing on the kingside, Black is already slightly better.

**15 a3**

15 Nxb5? fails to 15 ... Rb8 16 Nc3 (not 16 Nxa7?? Qb6 and the knight will become trapped on a7) 16 ... Rxb2 and Black has a definite advantage. Instead, 15 f5 Bc8 16 Qf3 is a typical way for White to handle this position. However, after 16 ... Rb8 17 Nxd5 Nxd5 18 Qxd5 Qc7 Black is doing fabulously.

### **15 ... Rb8 16 Qf3 Qc7?!**

16 ... a5 appears to be more to the point. White has no serious threats, so ... Qc7 seems unneeded. I believe that I overrated my position here and therefore underestimated my need to get on with it. An incorrect evaluation of the position can negatively affect how one continues. 17 f5 Bc8 18 Nxd5 is probably what I feared, but once again after 18 ... Nxd5 19 Qxd5 Qc7 Black obtains excellent compensation for the pawn. *Stockfish* rates this position as nearly -1.

### **17 Qg3**

White has no immediate threats but is solid, possessing a strong knight on e5 that is not inferior to either of the black bishops. 17 f5 Bc8 18 Nxd5?? Nxd5 19 Qxd5 Bb7 would win a piece and the game.

### **17 ... Rfd8 18 Kh1?!**

This move is not accurate. I imagine that Nico was unsure how to make progress (admittedly, a valid concern here), but White would be better served with a more defensive move. 18 Rf2 is safer and was played in an earlier game. The idea is to meet 18 ... a5 with 19 a4 under more favorable conditions. The move Kh1 does little to help White.

### **18 ... a5 19 a4!**

Crucial to prevent an avalanche following ... b4.

### **19 ... bxa4 20 Nxa4 Rb4**

The pressure on the b-file puts Black firmly in the driver's seat. While the strong knight on a4 keeps things under control for now, White is very passive. The engine finds White's position defensible and rates it as equal, but this is highly unpleasant in a practical game.

### **21 Ra2?!**

The mysterious 21 Bf3 is marked best by the engine. The idea is to park the bishop on d1 and maintain the defensive structure on the queenside. However, this is an uninspiring idea, and it is hardly surprising that Nico, who obtained the grandmaster title just over a year after this game, refrained from such passive endeavors.

### **21 ... Bxe5**

21 ... Rdb8 would leave me with nothing better than to transpose to the game after White plays something like Qf2 or Rf2 to defend the b-pawn.

### **22 fxe5 Rdb8**

The situation is distasteful for White. How should he hold the queenside together?

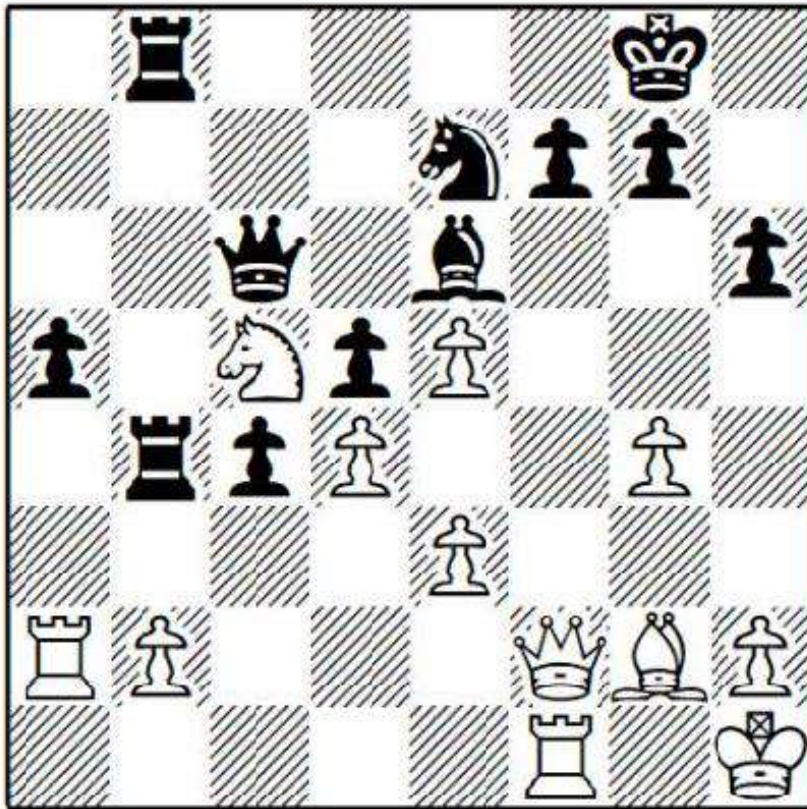
### 23 Qf2

With 23 Rf2!. It turns out the queen on g3 serves to generate some form of counterplay, and it is better to commit the rook to the defense. If Black proceeds in the same manner as the game, then after 23 ... Qc6 24 Nc5 White can consider playing h4 and g5 in the future. However, this is extremely difficult to contemplate, and it would be unfair to fault Nico's decision.

### 23 ... Qc6

Dislodging the knight from its excellent outpost on a4.

### 24 Nc5



The position looks optically cozy for Black, but it is tough to break into White's camp.

### 24 ... a4?!

This move was played to trade the a-pawn for White's b-pawn but misses some key details and discards Black's advantage. White's defense hinges on

the fact that something like 24 ... R4b5 would loosen Black's control of the a4-square enough for the knight to return to its designated home with 25 Na4. Instead, 24 ... R8b5 intends to sacrifice on c5 and demolish White's central complex. After 25 Na4, Qb7 would be a crude but promising angle of approach. The idea is to prepare ... Rb3, which should increase Black's advantage. There is no clear breakthrough in sight, but White's defensive task remains daunting.

**25 h3 R8b5 26 Nxa4**

26 Qd2! is annoying for Black. The attack on the b4-rook leaves Black's plans considerably stymied. *Stockfish* suggests the artificial 26 ... Qa8 27 Bf3 Qa5 to free the queenside complex, but White is not suffering here.

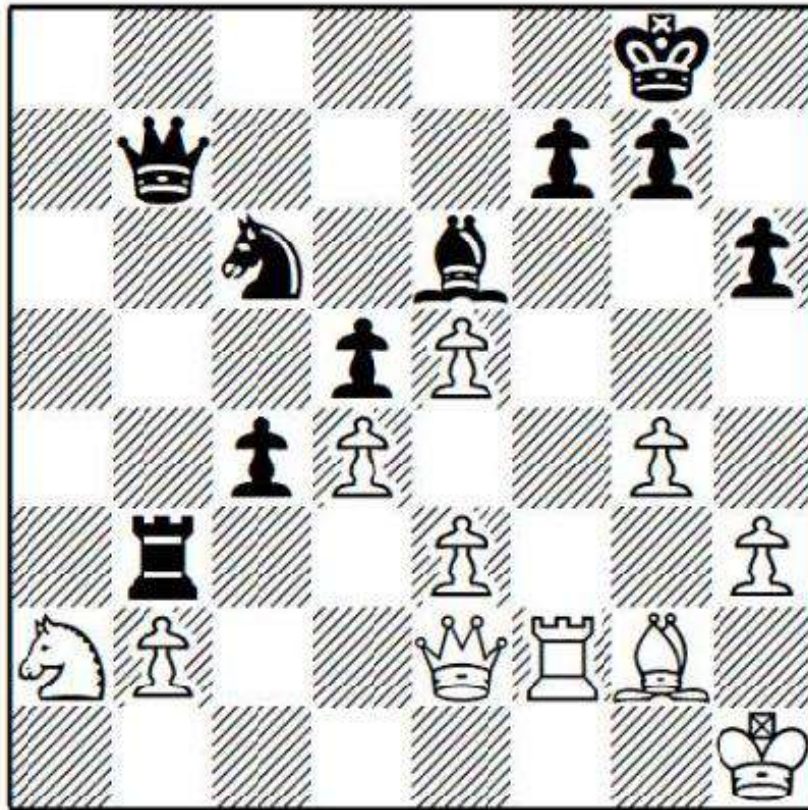
**26 ... Ra5 27 Nc3 Rxa2 28 Nxa2**

Instead of trading the pawns, Black has just lost the a-pawn for no reason. However, this is not the end of the world, and reasonable compensation still exists. A MAPS analysis indicates that although we are down a pawn, we have a considerable advantage in activity (especially the b4-rook). Our pawn structure is better (the b2-pawn remains a huge target), and White's kingside pawns are ineffectively placed for active operations, all of which make up for the lost pawn.

**28 ... Rb3 29 Qe2**

29 Nc3 is more accurate, with the idea to post the knight on a4 in defense of the b2-pawn. However, this idea is highly bizarre, and it is important that we are not fooled by the word of *Stockfish*. After 29 ... Qb6 30 Na4 Qb8 the white knight has been improved from its previous lame post on a2, but the maneuver itself remains peculiar. Even here, Black is not much worse, with the e7-knight returning to c6 to create counterplay via b4.

**29 ... Qb7 30 Rf2 Nc6!**



The knight attempts to enter the game through b4 and d3. However, it is still challenging for Black to make real progress, so the position is close to equal.

### 31 Kh2

31 Nc3 Nb4 would be convenient for Black: 32 Rf1 (32 e4!? Nd3 33 exd5 Nxf2+ 34 Qxf2 Bc8 is roughly equal but slightly more pleasant to play for White, what with the formidable-looking passed pawns in the center) 32 ... Nd3 33 Qf3 Rxb2 34 Nxd5 Kf8 and Black's compensation remains promising. White has to cash in now with 35 Nf4 Qxf3 36 Bxf3 Rd2 and there is sufficient play for a draw.

### 31 ... Qb8

It is hard for Black to improve his position if White doesn't actually do anything. After 31 ... Qa7 32 Nc3 there is some light pressure on d5, although 32 ... Qb8 is not too bad of an answer to it (32 ... Nb4 is similar to the game): 33 Qf3 (not 33 Nxd5? Nxe5! 34 dxe5 Bxd5 and Black seizes the

advantage) 33 ... Ne7 34 Qe2 should be best, with a repetition likely in the works.

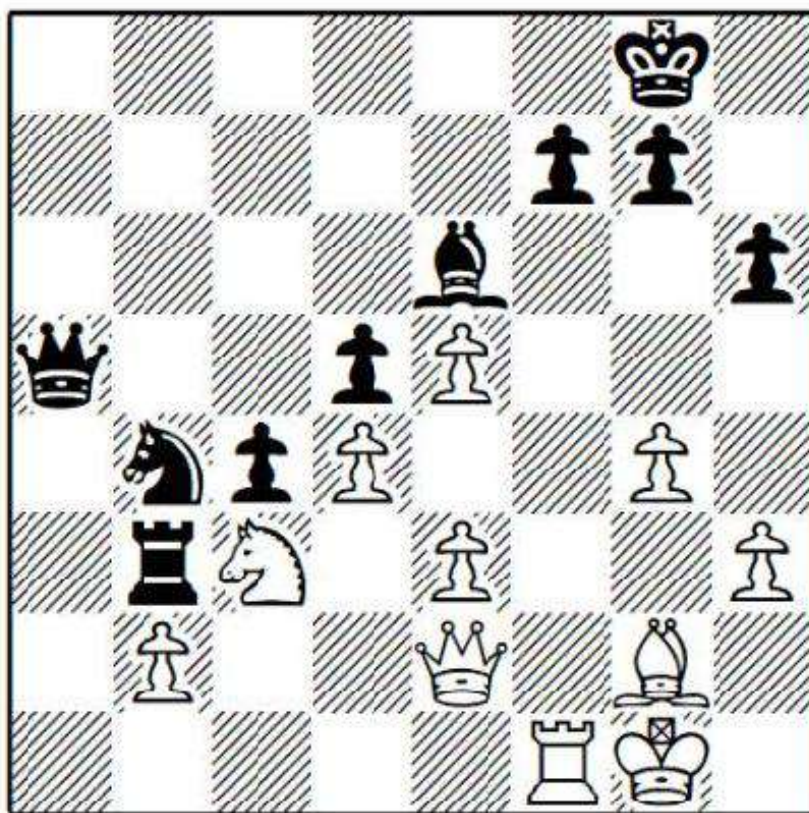
**32 Kg1 Qa7 33 Nc3**

33 Nc1 Qa1 34 Qd2 c3! 35 bxc3 Rxc3 36 Rf1 Qa3 permits Black to pick up the e3-pawn, with an edge.

**33 ... Nb4 34 Rf1**

After 34 Qf3 Qa5 both sides still have great difficulty improving their positions. The futility of White's kingside pawns is apparent.

**34 ... Qa5**



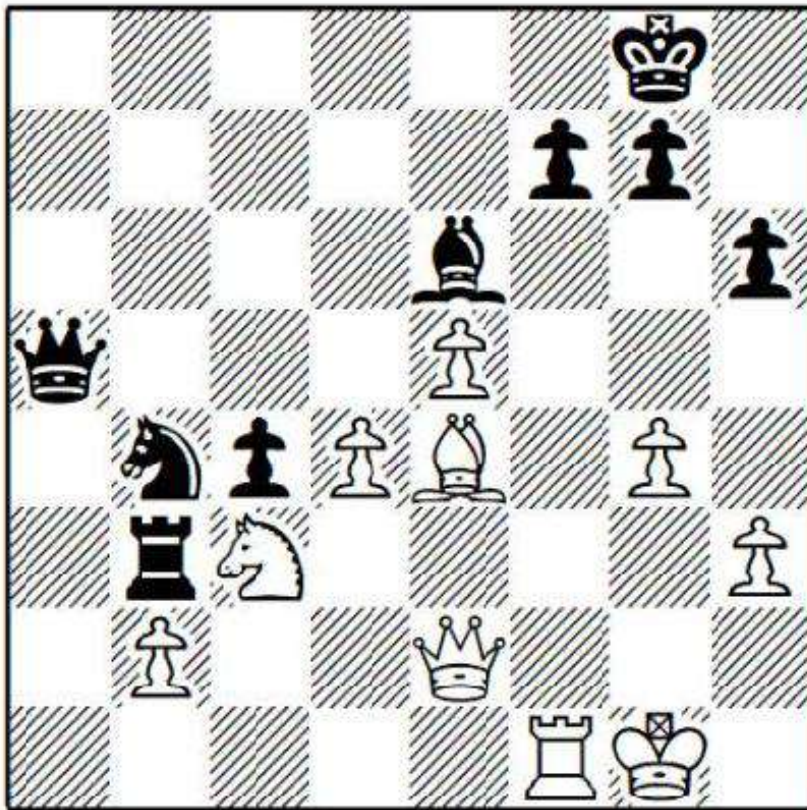
White has several choices here that can drastically alter the character of the position.

**35 e4?!**

An interesting try to escape the monotony. Even though nothing is wrong with this move from an objective standpoint, I consider it inaccurate because it places White in unnecessary danger. However, this risk is needed

if White wants to pose problems for Black. I believe this move resulted from Nico rating his position as better than it is; he probably misevaluated the position resulting from Black's 36th move. This shows how evaluation is tied to calculation; the candidate move that the player uses in the game is determined by the evaluation of the resulting positions. It is vital to conduct a detailed MAPS analysis whenever planning to change the position's character, which 35 e4 does. Instead, 35 Rb1 Na2!? 36 Nd1 Nb4 37 Nc3 is an amusing pendulum draw.

**35 ... dxe4 36 Bxe4**



Now that White's pieces coordinate properly, he will be safe after some consolidating moves. It is important to strike while the iron is hot.

**36 ... Nd3!**

The pressure on b2 forces a favorable set of exchanges.

**37 Bxd3 cxd3 38 Qxd3**

Surprisingly, not forced. 38 Qf2!? Qb4 39 d5 Rxb2 40 Qa7! is an absolutely insane line proposed by *Stockfish*. It is countered by the amazing 40 ... Bf5!! 41 Nd1 (if 41 Rxf5? Qxc3, not only does White lack access to perpetual check, he is actually lost!) 41 ... Re2 42 d6! Be4 43 Nf2 Kh7 44 d7 44 ... Qd2!! 45 Qd4 (not 45 d8Q? Qf4! and Black wins in style) 45 ... Qf4 46 Qxe4+ Rxe4 47 d8Q Qg3+ 48 Kh1 Rf4 49 Qd7 Rxf2 50 Rxf2 Qxf2 51 Qxd3+ is drawn. What a fitting end to this brilliant line!

### **38 ... Rxb2**

A MAPS analysis continues the theme that Black has a significant advantage in activity and safety in return for White's extra passed d-pawn. Because of White's somewhat hasty 35th move, he has opened the position and lost his light-squared bishop, meaning the king on g1 is much weaker than it was previously. However, the relative lack of material makes it difficult to convert these advantages. In the game, my impression was that I should not play for much more than equality, a sentiment that *Stockfish* agrees with.

### **39 d5**

39 Rf2 Rb3 40 Rc2 is a more defensive way to play. It is unlikely that Black holds the advantage, but White's position remains unpleasant.

### **39 ... Bc8 40 Qf3**

How best should Black address the threat to f7?

### **40 ... Qa7+!**

This move gains a tempo so that the black bishop can enter the game.

### **41 Kh1 Ba6! 42 Re1**

After 42 Ra1 Rc2! the threat of ... Be2 leaves White in a bad way.

### **42 ... Bb7**

By forcing the white rook off its imposing position on the f-file, the black bishop can attain its dream position along the a8-h1 diagonal. It exerts extreme pressure on the white king while restricting the advance of the passed central pawns.

### **43 Rf1**

43 e6 fxe6 44 Rxe6 is risky for both sides at this point. I would probably play ... Qb8 to maintain tension, but an immediate draw with 44 ... Qa1+ 45 Nd1 Qa8 46 Nxb2 Bxd5 47 Re8+ Kh7 48 Rxa8 Bxf3+ 49 Kg1 Bxa8 is not a bad way to go either.

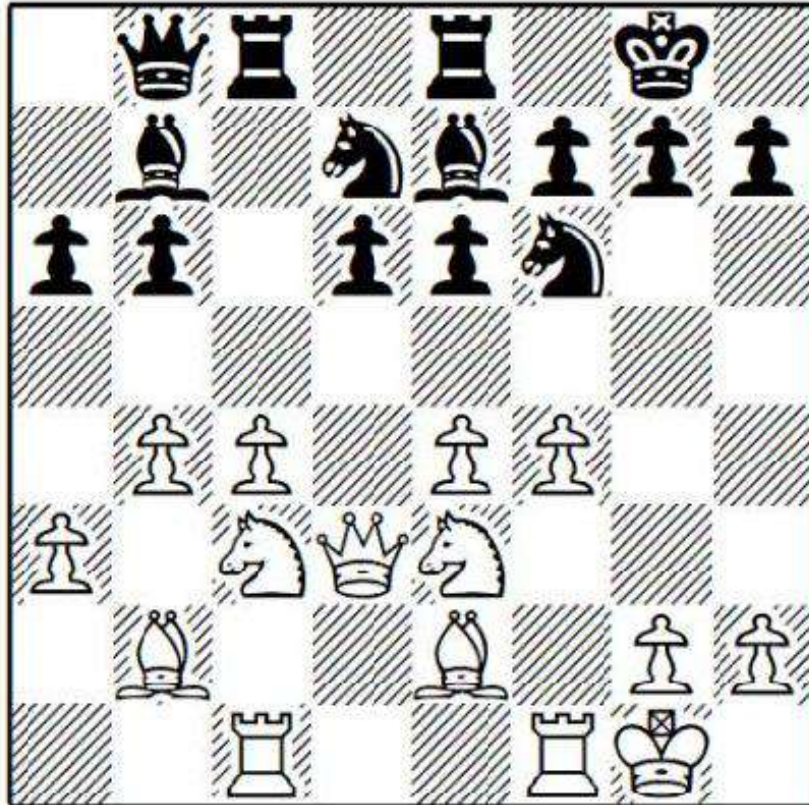
### **43 ... Ba8 44 Qe4**

44 g5!! hxg5 45 e6 fxe6 46 Qf8+ Kh7 47 Qe8 is an amazing way to set up a perpetual. After something like 47 ... Rb8 48 Qxe6 Black's exposed king gives White sufficient counterplay.

**44 ... Qc7**

Setting a devious trap by dislodging the c3-knight.

**45 Nd1?**



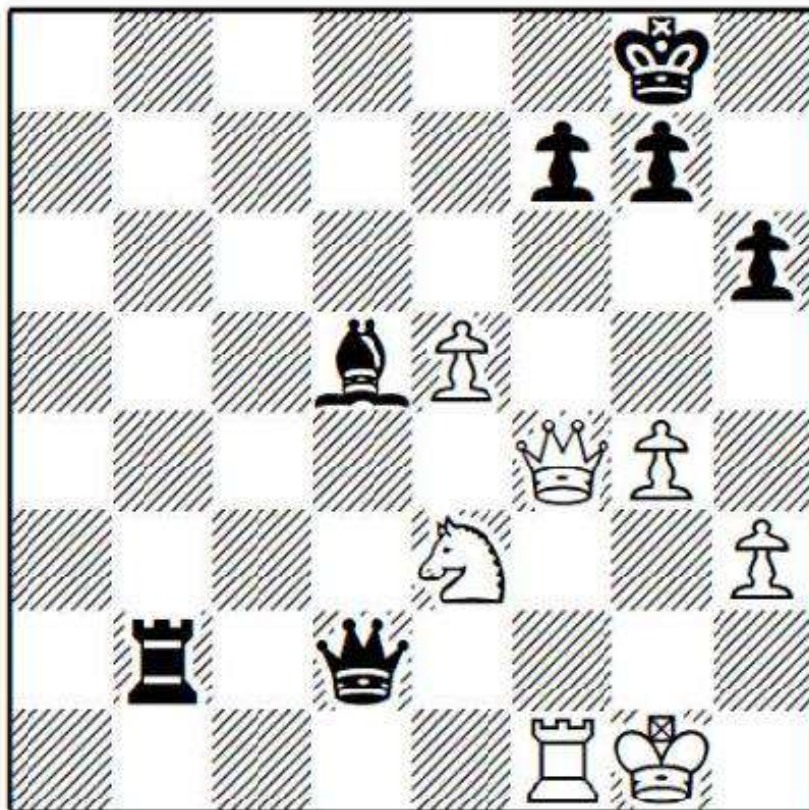
The first grave mistake made in this game. Unfortunately, it is also the last one allowed. 45 Rf3 was necessary, but with White being fairly low on time, it is understandably a bit fishy-looking to abandon the back rank like this.

How can Black take advantage of this error?

**45 ... Qa5!**

The removal of the c3-knight simultaneously weakens the d5-pawn and opens a new road to the d2-square, two points which ... Qa5 exploits effectively.

**46 Ne3 Qd2 47 Qf4 Bxd5+ 48 Kg1**



I don't remember exactly how my time was distributed over the moves surrounding this one, but I do know that I had over 30 minutes on move 45 and finished with less than 5. It was mostly a problem of board sight from here on out. I hope the reader is as enchanted as I was with the "windmill" around the g2-square, but how best to execute it?

**48 ... Qxe3+!**

Removing the defense of the white queen. Inserting 48 ... g5 49 Qg3 is possible, although not particularly useful. Not yet 48 ... Qg2+? 49 Nxc2 Rxc2+ 50 Kh1 and the lack of dangerous discoveries (the white rook guards the queen!) forces Black to seek a perpetual with something like 50 ... Rf2+ 51 Kg1 Rg2+.

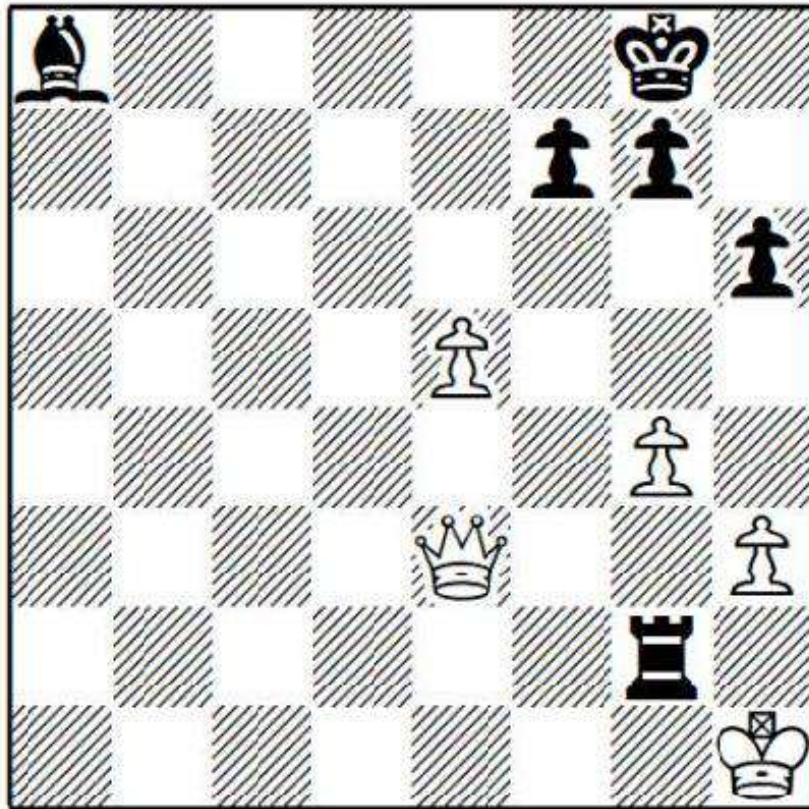
**49 Qxe3 Rg2+ 50 Kh1 Rg3+ 51 Rf3 Bxf3+**

51 ... Rxf3 looks tempting. From afar, it is not easy to determine why this fails: 52 Qc5! and there is no way for Black to hold the bishop and hit the white queen in a single rook move. It is with great amusement that we can note that 52 ... Rxf3 53 Kg1 Be6 still presents Black with a winning position, but of course this is highly unnecessary.

**52 Kh2 Rg2+ 53 Kh1**

Black has one move to retreat the bishop away from the harrying of the white queen. Where to go?

**53 ... Ba8! 0-1**



What a spectacular final position! Such moves are frequently more gratifying than sacrifices and deep calculations. How often is the queen ensnared in such a fashion? 53 ... Bd5? 54 Qc5, 53 ... Bc6? 54 Qb6, and 53 ... Bb7? 54 Qa7 are all similar to the note to 51 ... Rxf3. This leads us to

conclude that the white queen cannot be allowed to “outflank” the black bishop in such a manner.

This game featured many positions that were very difficult to evaluate. The critical thing to take away is how evaluations can influence our decisions, for better or worse.

*Game 4*

**K.Dragun-J.Sheng**

Fort Worth 2018

This game was played 24 hours after the Checa game just analyzed. I was matched with one of the highest seeds in the event. The game is not perfect by any means, but it is near and dear to my heart, and it showcases a number of practically relevant lessons.

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 a6**

I would like to say that this was a carefully devised choice of opening that I prepared extensively but, sadly, I essentially just played the same openings every game back in 2018. On the flip side, the Sicilian Kan, which I first discovered in 2013, remains one of my favorites to this day.

**5 c4 Nf6 6 Nc3 Qc7**

Nowadays I might prefer 6 ... Bb4 when playing against higher-rated opponents. It seems to lead to mostly forcing lines with good chances to reach a drawish endgame.

**7 Be2**

This move is not unknown but has always been considered sort of inferior to the main line until recently. 7 a3 is more common and leads to a standard Maroczy Bind Hedgehog system. It is rather ambiguously assessed as being better for White or close to equal. Sadly, we do not have the necessary print to conduct an exhaustive analysis of it here.

**7 ... Bb4 8 Qd3**

This move has started to become popular in the last several years. Perhaps Dragun was, in fact, quite the trendsetter? Back in 2015, I had several theoretical debates with a friend involving 8 0-0 0-0 (8 ... Bxc3 9 bxc3 Nxe4 10 Bf3 is uncomfortable for Black; the extra pawn can scarcely be worth allowing White’s dark-squared bishop such free reign over the board) 9 Bg5 Bxc3 10 Bxf6 Bxb2 (10 ... Bb4 is perhaps wiser) 11 Qd2! (11 Nxe6?! dxe6 12 Bxb2 Nc6 has been known to be decent for Black, with

moves such as ... e5 and Be6 coming) and the threat of Qg5 practically forces 11 ... gxf6 12 Qxb2, after which Black is under some pressure due to his poor development and weak kingside pawn structure. 8 Nc2!? is also fashionable now, with similar ideas to the game. It was covered extensively in Kotronias and Semkov's outstanding 2017 monograph *Attacking the Flexible Sicilian*, although developments in engine technology seem to have saved Black for the most part.

### **8 ... b6?!**

While standard in the Hedgehog, this move is pretty passive here. I did not know what to expect going into the game, and I did not look at much of the substance beforehand. 8 ... Nc6 is the most common, although not my preference. 9 Nc2!? is a bit fashionable, and Black will likely have to part with his beloved dark-squared bishop. 8 ... 0-0 is more flexible.

### **9 Nc2**

9 a3 seems more to the point; it is hardly reasonable for Black to capture on c3 anyways, so White may as well preserve his prized stallion on d4. Then 9 ... Be7 (9 ... Bxc3+ 10 Qxc3 Nxe4? 11 Nb5! axb5 12 Qxg7 is a well-known motif, with disastrous consequences for Black: 12 ... Rf8 13 Bh6 Qc5 14 f3 and Black will suffer substantial material losses) 10 f4 d6 11 b4 seems like an improvement over the game. Perhaps Dragun conflated this position with the 8 Nc2 line. In that position, Nc2 is superior to a3 because the queen would have the d4-square and, consequently, more direct access to dark squares in the event of ... Bxc3+. That does not apply in this variation because ... Bxc3+ a few moves ago was rendered unattractive by the queen's placement on d3, and therefore a3 is preferable to avoid misplacing the excellent knight on d4.

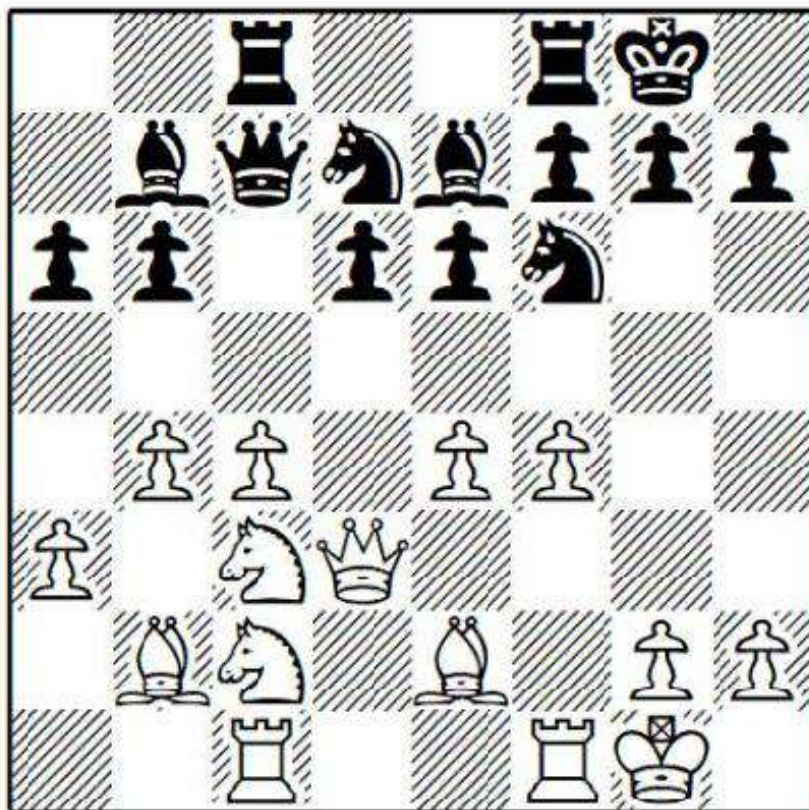
### **9 ... Be7 10 f4!?**

Unorthodox for the Maroczy structure, but Black's passive play justifies White's expansionist policy. f4 has become rather popular in other variants of the 7 Be2 Maroczy; once again, Dragun's fashion sense was quite powerful.

10 Qg3 is another interesting option, as the queen trade on g3 would result in a passive ending for Black. After 10 ... d6 (10 ... Qxg3 11 hxg3 Bb7 12 f3 d6 13 g4 and White has a significant advantage; he has a lot of space, and Black's prospects of executing the thematic d5-break are somewhat hindered by the f6-knight's newfound instability) 11 0-0 0-0 12 Bh6 Ne8 13 Nd4 Black's position is uncomfortable. Perhaps more "normal"

play with 10 0-0 Bb7 11 Be3 should be preferable for White as well in this case, although I would have been relieved to reach such a familiar setup.

**10 ... d6 11 0-0 Nbd7 12 b4 Bb7 13 Bb2 Rc8 14 Rac1 0-0 15 a3**



The opening phase is over, and we can conduct a MAPS analysis to assess the results. Material – not unusually, material is even for now. Activity – the white bishop on b2 is the dominant feature of White’s position, with its harrowing pressure down the a1-h8 diagonal unlikely to be challenged in the near future; its counterpart on e7 is primarily consigned to defensive tasks. The black knight on d7 is severely hampered by White’s offensive pawn placement, while even White’s passive-looking knight on c2 can search for greener pastures on d4 or e3. The knight on f6 and bishop on b7 could be argued to be slightly better than their counterparts, but the queen on c7 will likely be relegated to the passive b8-square soon while her opposite number can exert pressure on the kingside from g3 or h3. Pawn structure – while Black’s classic Hedgehog pawn structure is solid, he is

pretty passive without being able to execute an eventual pawn break. Meanwhile, the white infantry seizes lines and restricts Black's pieces to form a monopoly on space. Safety – it is hard to see immediate danger for either side, but the black king should be a bit worried about a potential white kingside expansion, especially with the artillery piece on b2. To conclude, we can summarize that White is solidly better, although exactly how much so is up to debate. Perhaps the biggest knock against Black's position is the lack of an active plan; it is not easy to organize the pieces effectively due to the aforementioned lack of space. This is likely the greatest advantage of having such a commanding space advantage: it often hinders the opponent's coordination. It is difficult even to suggest moves for Black, so giving concrete lines would seem a bit out of place.

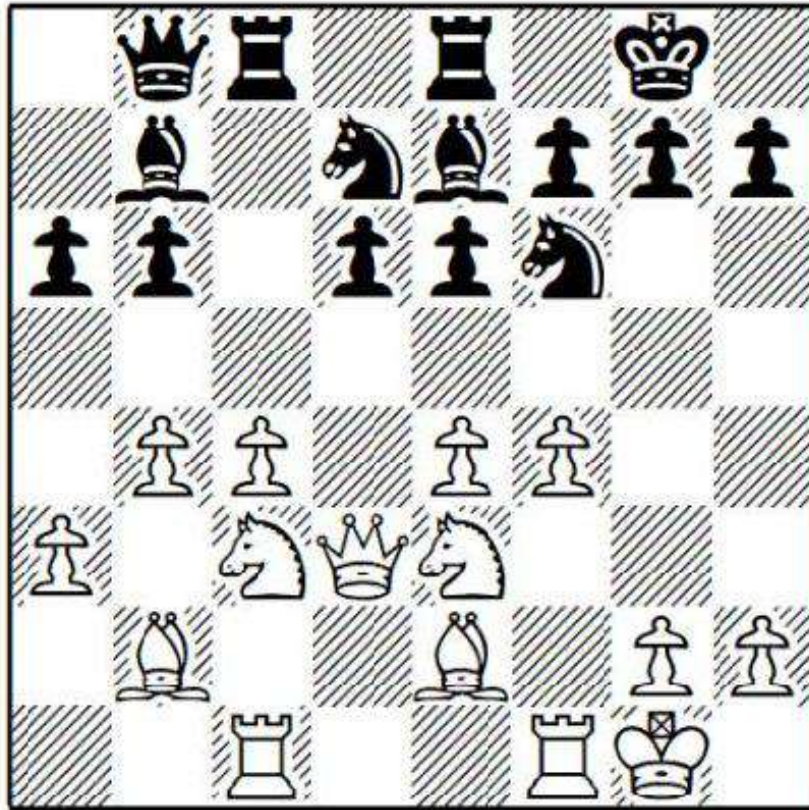
### **15 ... Rfe8**

A standard post for the black rook in the Sicilian; it overprotects e6 to prepare against an eventual White f4-f5 and preserves a pipe dream of eventually playing d5.

### **16 Ne3**

Although this move does not spoil anything, I am slightly confused about why Dragun was in such a hurry to deposit his knight here. I would be more inclined to leave it flexible and play some other improving move. 16 g4!? was played in the subsequent game Favarel-Monroy. While very ambitious, this could well be the time to do so: 16 ... h6 17 h4 Nh7 18 g5 with the makings of a dangerous kingside attack.

### **16 ... Qb8**

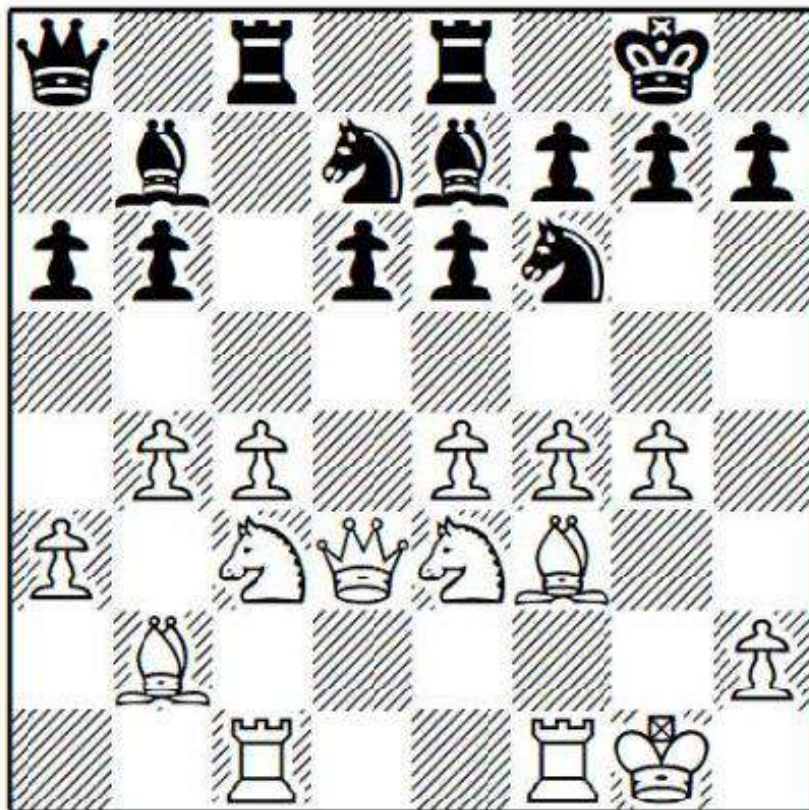


As mentioned previously, the black queen will likely be in the way anywhere else. The b8-square is the standard home for it in more typical Maroczy positions, but it is more or less useless for the imminent future. I thought it could eventually come to a8 and utilize the long diagonal, but it is unlikely that this plan will come to fruition.

### **17 g4?!**

This move does not receive its dubious marking due to its objective failures; according to *Stockfish*, it is the best move! So then, why do I not consider it the pinnacle of chess? To begin with, I believe that one's moves must be made with correct reasoning, and Dragun's time management and subsequent actions made it clear that he did not expect Black's coming plan. To preserve a serious advantage, one would have to anticipate the upcoming tactical resources, which my 2600 FIDE opponent did not.

17 ... Qa8 18 Bf3



White threatens g5 with a complete stranglehold over the black camp. From there, the f6-knight would see a great inconvenience, and Black would be nearly lost. How can Black free himself?

**18 ... g5!**

This move is extremely typical as far as the Sicilian goes, most commonly played in the 6 Bg5 variations of the Najdorf (as ... h6 gains a tempo there). Whenever the white g-pawn has passed g3, this idea is standard to gain control of the dark squares, particularly e5. Although this move does not save Black in this position, the most important thing is that it poses White some significant practical problems rather than dying quietly. In contrast, several moves ago, Black had no counterplay to speak of. This change is often very jarring to your opponent, and they will frequently commit errors in the resultant confusion.

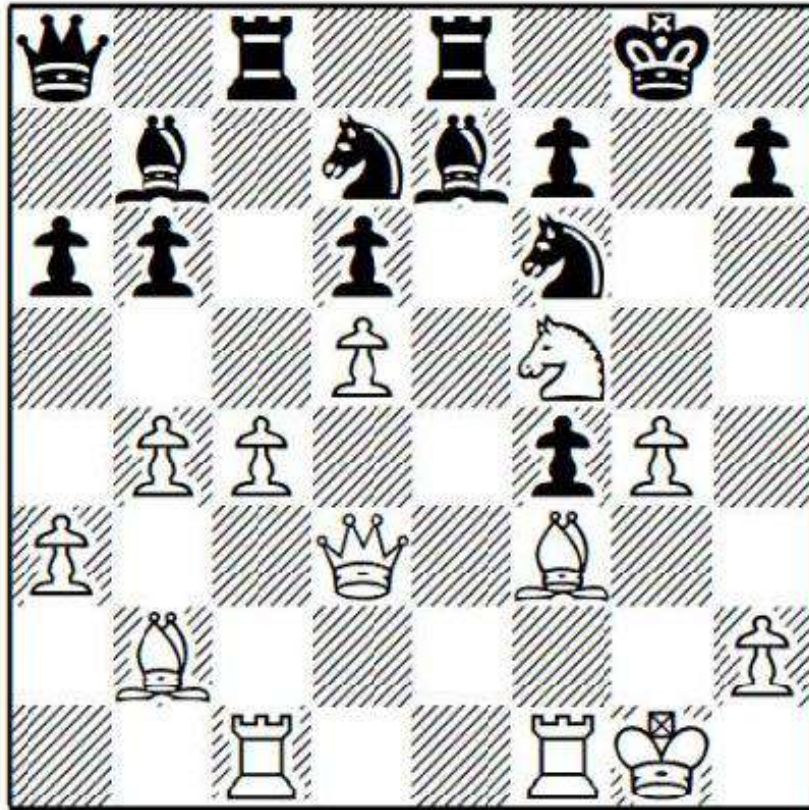
18 ... h6!? is also possible, with similar ideas. 19 h4 b5!? is a peculiar suggestion from the engine: 20 g5 bxc4 21 Nxc4 d5 22 gxf6 dxc4 23 Qxd7 Rcd8 24 Qxe7 Rxe7 25 fxe7 Re8 and White should have a decisive material advantage. 19 ... g5 is similar to the game, tactical refutation and all.

### **19 fxc5**

On this move, Dragun offered me a draw. As competitive players, you will probably be offered a draw by a higher-rated player at some point. Sometimes this is done with the full intention of acknowledging an equal situation, but most of the time, your IM or GM opponent does not want to draw you; most of them care about their ratings too! So whenever you receive a draw offer from a higher-rated player, it is important to weigh your options carefully. They most likely offered you the draw because there is something about their position that they find unsatisfactory. Because the draw is now on the table, you are completely free to spend as much time as you wish considering the position; if you spend too much time and find you no longer feel confident in playing on, you can accept the draw with no penalties bar the last hour you “wasted” thinking (and if you are anything like me, it is unlikely you would have done something more productive with your time anyways :)).

I want to take a moment here to talk about the cognitive bias inherent in such a decision. I can attest that declining a draw from some prestigious GM is a daunting prospect, and the evaluation of the position is likely to be colored by their influence. Whenever this happens, we should carefully evaluate the position with a MAPS analysis.

The engine points out that White can preserve a nearly winning position with 19 Ncd5!! exd5 20 exd5 gxf4 21 Nf5 with absolutely monstrous compensation for the piece.



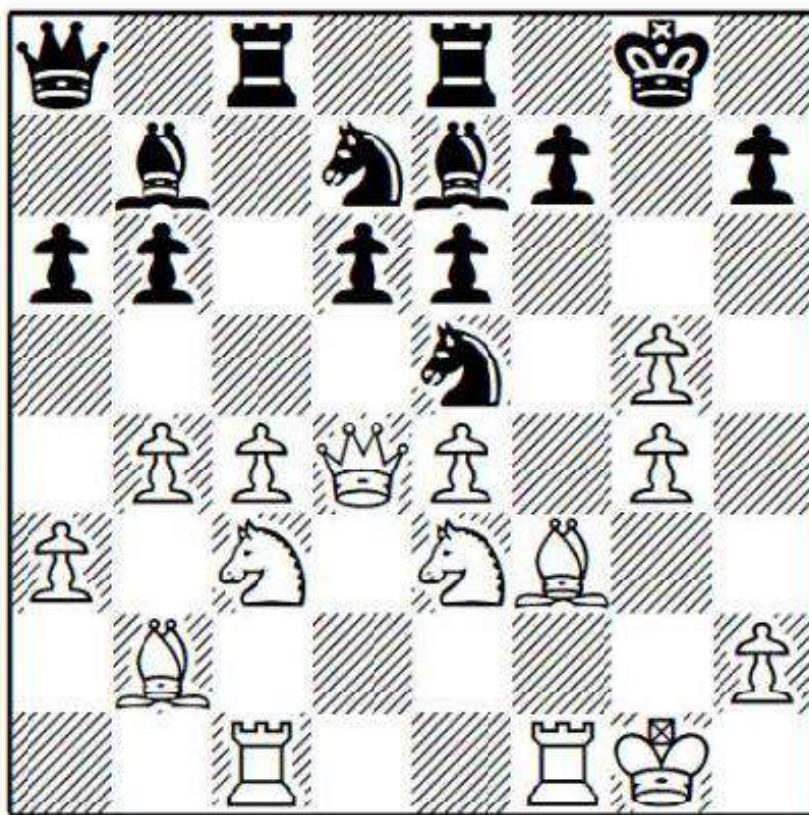
However, because of the indirect nature of White's play (there is no immediate checkmate, and White "wins" by inching his queen closer to g5), it is a challenging move to make over the board. For Dragun, who is a purveyor of clarity, it would not be easy to evaluate such a situation. Perhaps this is why I have such a good score against him; although he is much stronger than me, he appears to struggle a bit in these highly unclear situations that we seem to reach every time we have played. A MAPS analysis may have been helpful here. Material-wise, Black is doing fabulously, with an extra horse to his name. Unfortunately, this is the end of the good news, as the white bishop on b2 coupled with the domineering knight on f5 completely eclipse the rest of the black army by themselves. As a sad consequence of the bold 18 ... g5, Black's pawn structure has been ruined, and the king on g8 faces more than a stiff breeze. Black is all but lost, with *Stockfish* giving White an advantage of greater than two pawns.

**19 ... Ne5!**

This move is forced, so the exclamation mark may seem a bit out of place. But making this move rather than accepting the draw is a crucial decision. The MAPS analysis shows that, for the pawn, we have an extremely powerful outpost on e5, a crippled white pawn structure on the kingside, and a surprisingly safe king on g8 as a consequence. White appears overextended, and the black pieces can come to life quite easily.

### 20 Qe2?

I am proven correct in assuming that Dragun was unhappy with his position. In any event, the position is challenging to navigate for White, a sentiment I am sure Dragun would agree with. I do not really understand why Dragun refrained from 20 Qd4 with the simple goal of not losing the e4-pawn. Black would reply 20 ... Nfd7 and this is the position that is important to evaluate.

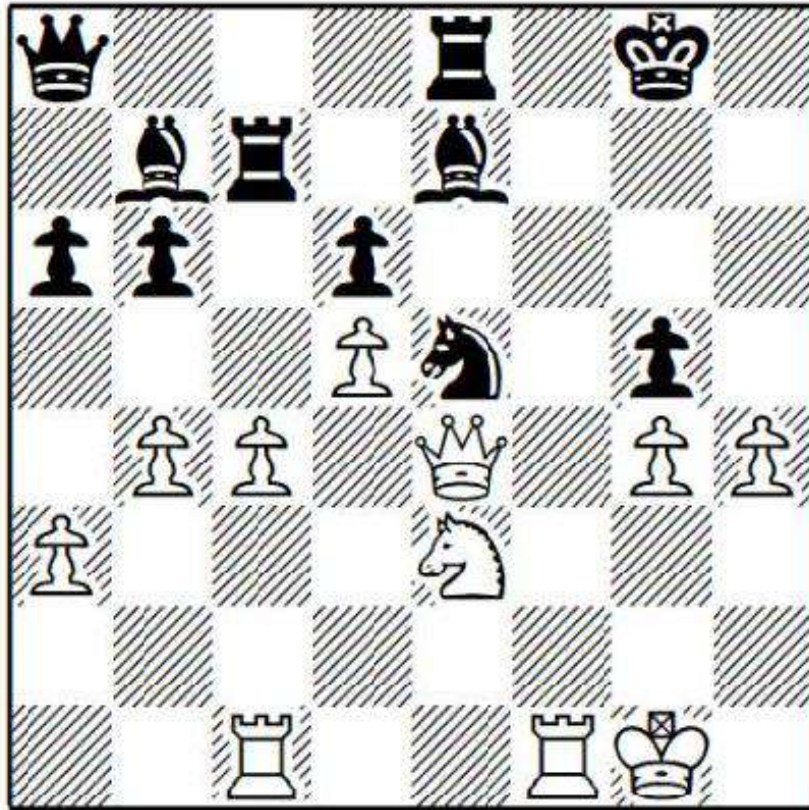


As previously mentioned, the black knight on e5 is a monster that exerts offensive pressure and shields the black king from the laser beam on b2.

The passive positioning of the white knights on c3 and e3 makes it difficult for White to challenge this knight meaningfully, and the knight on d7 makes for excellent support. While Black is down a pawn, White's extra pawn currently resides on g5, where it is more of a hindrance than an asset to White's ideal plan of giving checkmate on the kingside. *Stockfish* evaluates this position as equal with a "proper" ending by perpetual attack, but it seemed easier to play Black to me. After 21 h4 Black has many playable moves that range from pawn breaks to simple development. This is generally a sign that one has a sound position. Instead, 21 Be2 Bxg5 22 Rcd1 is initially given by *Stockfish*, with the planned ending 22 ... Nc6 23 Qd2 Nce5 24 Qd4 and a draw. However, Black could try many moves that are not 22 ... Nc6 and White remains without a solid plan (nor is he even up material anymore), so I can hardly think of a reason not to prefer Black's position in a practical game. 21 ... Bf8 is likely what I would have played in the game. There are so many options of roughly equivalent value for both sides that I do not see a point of listing them here, but the gist of it is that Black has little cause for concern.

Alternatively:

a) 21 ... f6!? is a clever idea from the computer. The lines below are mostly to sing its praises: 22 Ncd5! (22 gxf6 Bxf6 23 Qxd6 Rc6 24 Qd2 Bxh4 gives easily enough compensation for equality) 22 ... exd5 23 exd5 fxg5 (after 23 ... Rc7 24 Nf5 Qd8 25 Bd1!? we have quite a mess on our hands, but the computer favors White, and I find this defensive task highly unenviable) 24 Be4 Rc7 25 Bxh7+ Kxh7 26 Qe4+ Kg8 27 Bxe5 Nxe5



28 Rf7!! Nxf7 29 Qg6+ Kh8 30 Qh5+ and one of the strangest ways to reach a perpetual check I have ever seen has appeared on the board.

b) 21 ... b5 is another concrete idea. 22 cxb5? would be met with 22 ... Bd8! and Black will soon monopolize the a7-g1 diagonal with a strong initiative. 22 Ne2 does little to deter 22 ... Bd8! 23 Qxd6 Bc7 24 Qd4 Nxf3+ 25 Rxf3 Ne5 with extremely active play. Perhaps something like 22 Be2!? is more sensible, but after 22 ... bxc4 23 Nxc4 Bd8 the lines work out fine: 24 Nxe5! Bb6 25 Qxb6 Nxb6 26 Nxf7 e5 27 Nh6+ Kh8 and White gets out by the skin of his teeth.

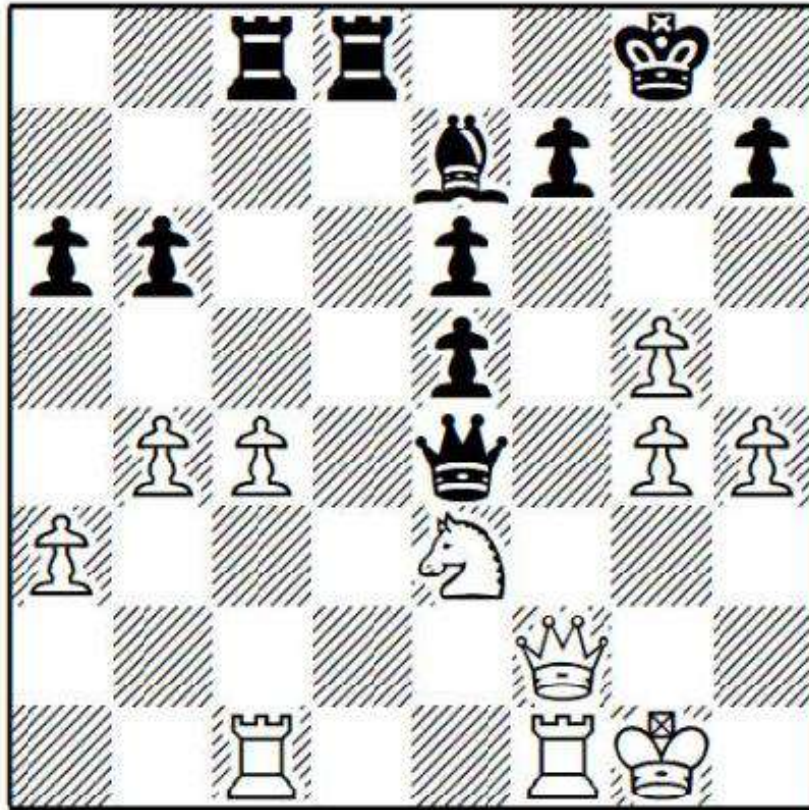
**20 ... Nxe4 21 Nxe4 Bxe4 22 Bxe5 dxe5**

Here Black regains the pawn with a clear advantage, due to having an (ironically) superior pawn structure (despite having more pawn islands, the black pawns control important squares in the center) and safer king. However, with just a dark-squared bishop, this latter point is challenging to exploit, and there is a lot of chess left to be played.

### 23 h4 Red8

The e8-rook now searches for new horizons.

### 24 Bxe4 Qxe4 25 Qf2



We reach somewhat of a crossroads here. What is the best way to address the threat to f7?

### 25 ... Qg6?

Failing to preserve the centralized queen in its dominant position. *Stockfish* actually prefers 25 ... Rf8, presumably to keep in mind future ... f6 ideas, but this move is somewhat difficult to play when the rook just went to d8 two moves ago!

### 26 Rcd1?!

26 c5! bxc5 27 Nc4 equalizes according to *Stockfish*, but it is a fairly hard sequence to see: 27 ... Qg7 28 Nxe5 Qxe5 29 Qxf7+ Kh8 30 Qxe7 Qg3+ and Black must give the perpetual this time.

### 26 ... Rd4!

A standard idea, preparing to double the rooks on the d-file with ... Rcd8 while inviting White to capture and give me connected passed pawns. The difference in pawn structure is highly apparent; my doubled e-pawns control key squares in the center, whereas White's kingside mass closely resembles a traffic jam.

**27 Qf3**

Preparing to get counterplay with moves such as Qb7 shortly.

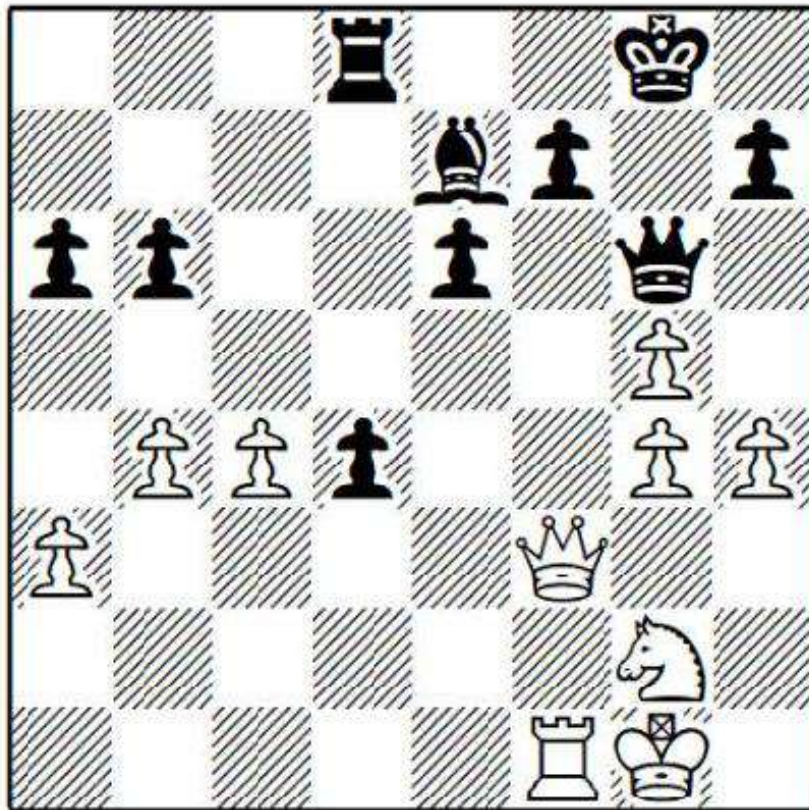
**27 ... Rcd8?!**

Natural, but not best. 27 ... Rf8! allows the black bishop to retreat to d8 in the event of the previously mentioned invasion of the white queen: 28 Qb7 Bd8 29 c5 bxc5 30 bxc5 h6 and Black has a sizable advantage.

**28 Rxd4**

After 28 Qb7! White gets very strong counterplay: 28 ... Kf8 (or 28 ... Bf8 29 Rxd4 exd4 30 Rf6! and the black queen will be relegated to the passive g7-square) 29 Rxd4 exd4 30 Ng2 e5 31 Qxa6 and the situation is still perilous for White but much messier than I would have liked.

**28 ... exd4 29 Ng2**



**29 ... e5!**

“Passed pawns must be pushed”, or so the saying goes, but in this case ... e5 is most important to prevent White’s knight from being activated via f4 and h5.

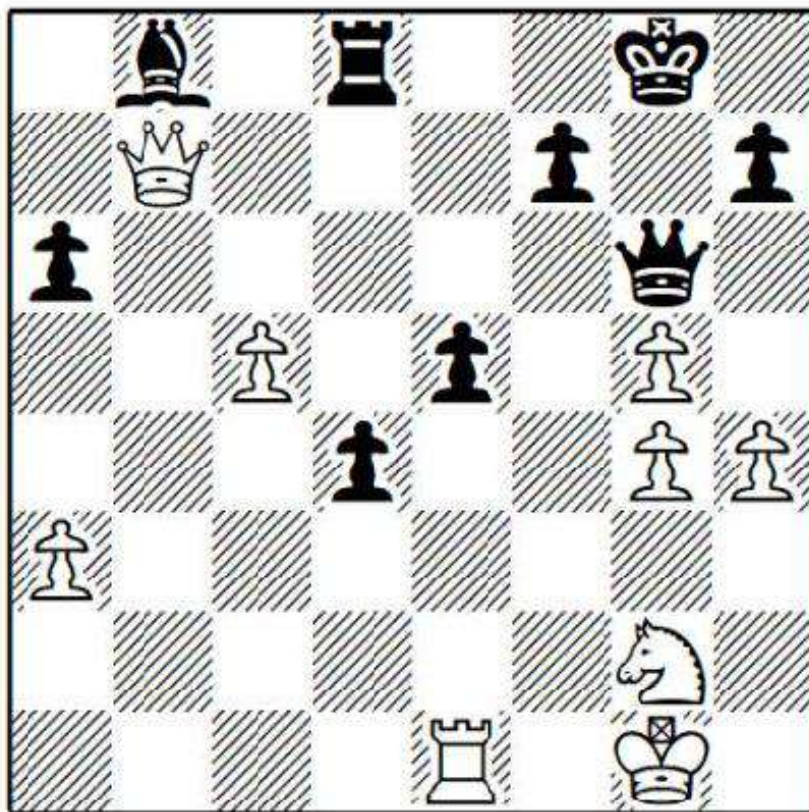
**30 Re1 Bd6 31 Qb7 Bb8**

31 ... Bf8!/? is an immensely difficult move to make in a real game, given that the bishop just came to d6 to protect e5. However, the somewhat arbitrary location of the white queen means the pawn is not easy to capture: 32 Rxe5 (if 32 Qc7 Qd6 33 Qxd6 Bxd6 34 Kf1 a5, the endgame is close to winning for Black) 32 ... d3 33 h5 d2 34 hxg6 d1Q+ 35 Re1 Qd4+ 36 Ne3 hxg6 and Black is dominating.

**32 c5**

32 Qe7 Qd6? (32 ... Rc8 followed by ... Qe6 should preserve a Black advantage) 33 Rxe5! is the difference from the previous line.

**32 ... bxc5 33 bxc5**



**33 ... Qe6!**

This move targets g4, moves the queen closer to the center, and prepares to stop the white c-pawn with ... Rc8.

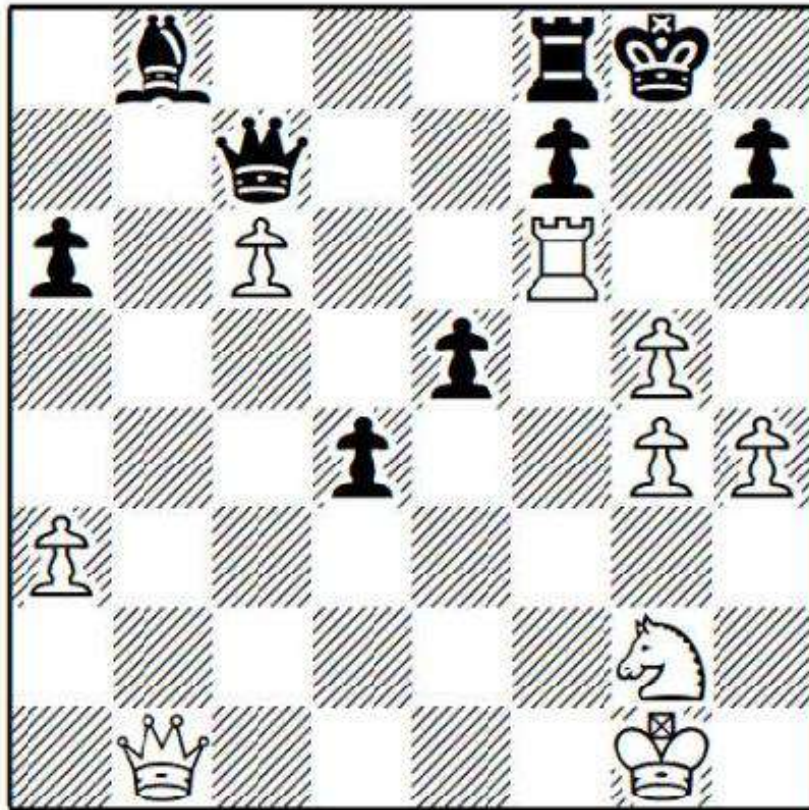
**34 c6 Qd6 35 Rf1 Rf8**

35 ... Bc7! is more accurate. Frankly, I am not sure why I did not play this, as the white queen is relatively isolated now and 36 Rf6 Qe7 is meaningless.

**36 Rf6 Qc7?**

This is actively bad, as there was no reason to play so defensively. 36 ... Qd5 or 36 ... Qc5 would have been much better. White has no realistic counterplay, so the black queen is free to come out and play.

**37 Qb1**



White is nearly out of the woods. The once offside white queen has returned to her own camp to exact a defense over the central light squares and stop Black's pawns while setting up threats to h7 (after Rh6). Both sides were short of time here (not unexpected, considering we are nearing move 40), so it is hardly surprising that I did not find the engine's beautiful resource.

### **37 ... Rd8**

Incredibly natural to stop White's threat of Rh6, but the silicon beast once again comes to play spoiler: 37 ... e4!! and the pawn lays down its life to allow a surprisingly decisive attack. Then 38 Qxe4 (38 Nf4 d3 would, of course, not be an option) 38 ... Qh2+ 39 Kf1 (or 39 Kf2 d3!! and a second diagonal-clearing sacrifice seals the deal: 40 Qxd3 Ba7+ and Black will pick up the g2-knight, then White's king) 39 ... Be5! 40 Rf5 Qh1+ 41 Kf2 Bc7 is winning after the black rook comes to b8! An incredibly

extraordinary line and one that could hardly have been found in the game, but *Stockfish* rates this position as almost -4.

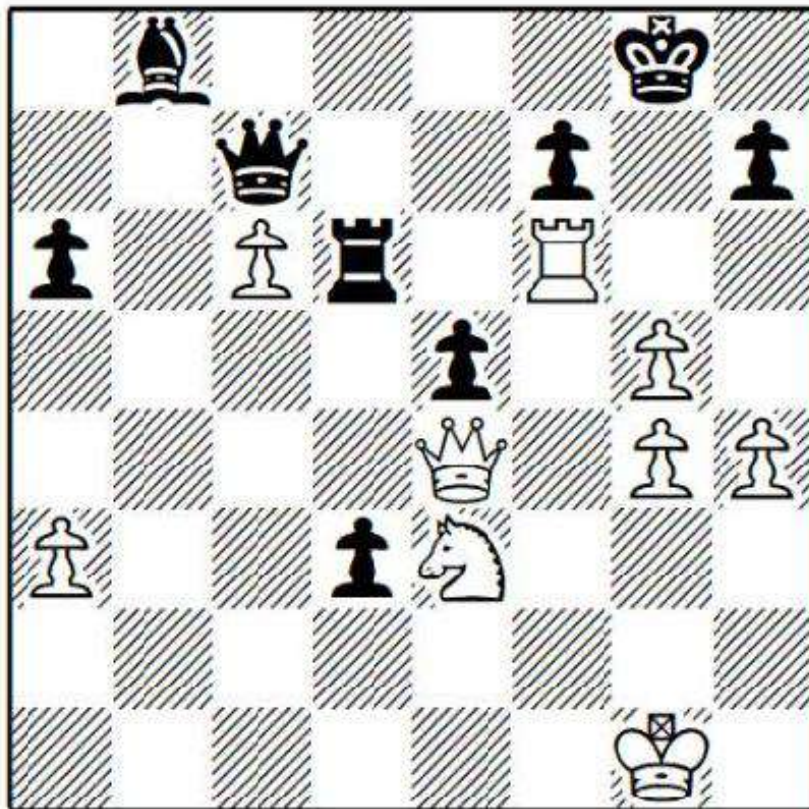
### 38 Qd3

38 Qf5! e4 39 Kf1! is the only way to survive, according to the computer. With Rh6 coming, White has sufficient play to make a draw. Again, very difficult and nigh impossible to find with mere minutes on the clock.

### 38 ... Rd6

This move prevents Rh6 and regains the advantage.

### 39 Qe4 d3 40 Ne3



The last move before the time control!

### 40 ... Rd4?

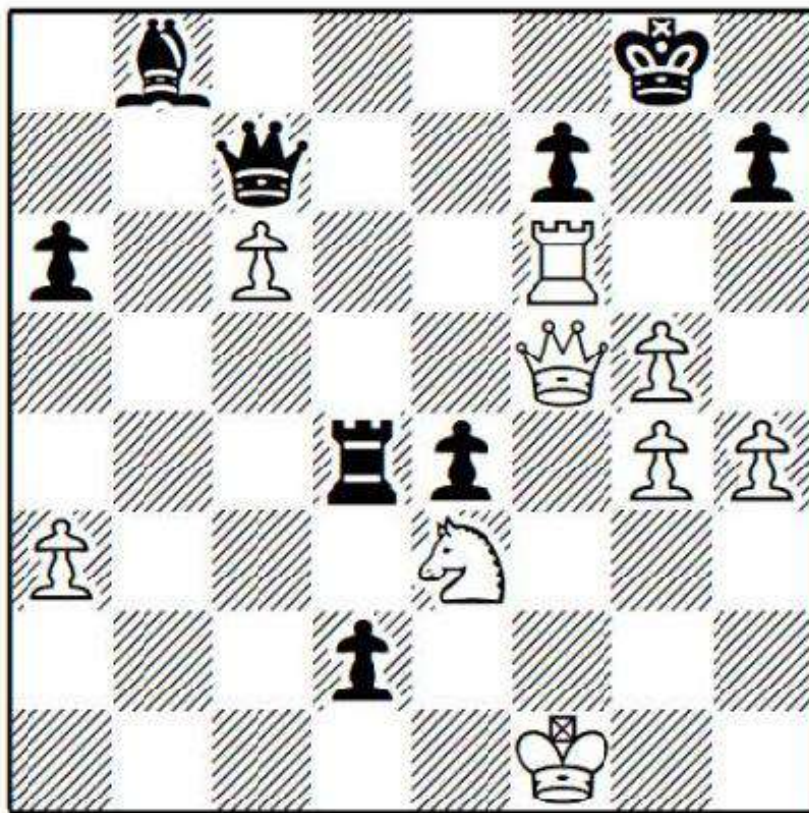
40 ... Ba7!! is marked best. The idea is to simply carry out ... d2. If 41 Rxd6 Qxd6 42 Kh2 d2 43 Nd1 Bb6 then ... Qc5 is not far off. Black is winning but, again, what an abstract sequence! The immediate 40 ... d2 also

preserves the advantage, but permits 41 Rxd6 Qxd6 42 Nd1 and White can still kick about.

**41 Qf5! e4 42 Kf1!**

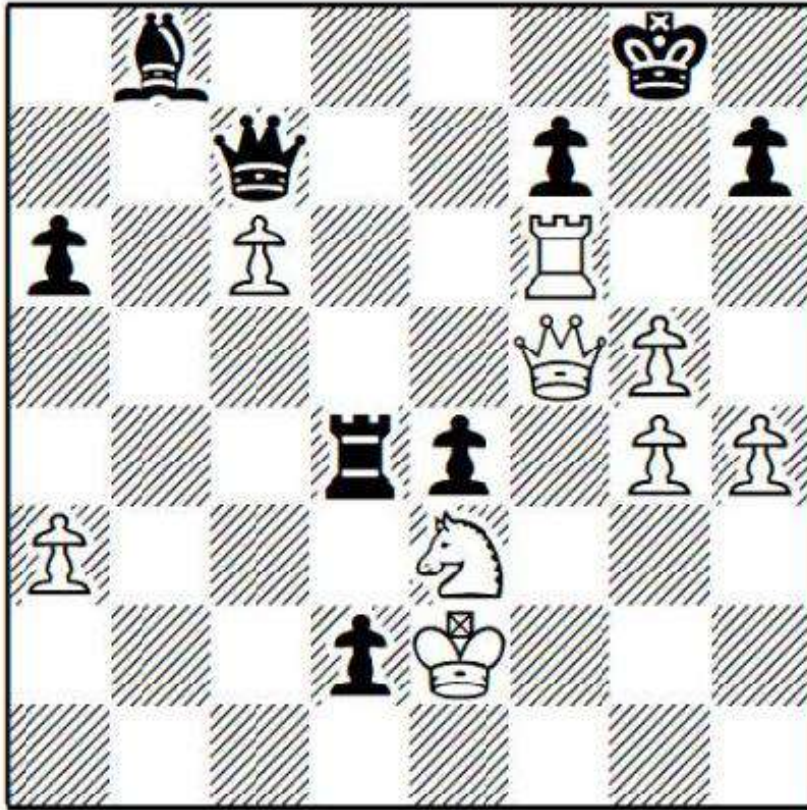
I overlooked this move. White prophylactically avoids the threats of ... Qh2+ and uses his king to blockade the central pawns! He has equalized, according to *Stockfish*.

**42 ... d2**



**43 Ke2**

After 43 Rh6! White would draw based on 43 ... d1Q+ (43 ... Qf4+ is probably the best try, but 44 Qxf4 Bxf4 45 Nd1 allows White a blockade on the light squares, with a draw as the most likely result) 44 Nxd1 Rxd1+ 45 Ke2, when the double threat to d1 and h7 forces Black to take a perpetual with something like 45 ... Re1+ 46 Kxe1 Qg3+ 47 Qf2 Qc3+ 48 Qd2 Bg3+ 49 Kd1 Qb3+ etc. It is a rather convoluted perpetual, but it is one nonetheless.



**43 ... d1Q+!**

The d-pawn, whom we have so tenderly nursed in its developmental cycle, lays down its life to clear lines in a savage twist that mirrors Botvinnik's f-pawn in the Capablanca game.

**44 Nxd1 Qd8**

The black rook will land on d2 shortly.

**45 Nf2 Rd2+ 46 Kf1 e3**

The knight's position is immutable.

**47 Qe4**

47 Ne4 e2+ 48 Ke1 Rd1+ 49 Kxe2 Qd3+ 50 Kf2 Qf1+ 51 Ke3 Rd3 is a satisfying checkmate!

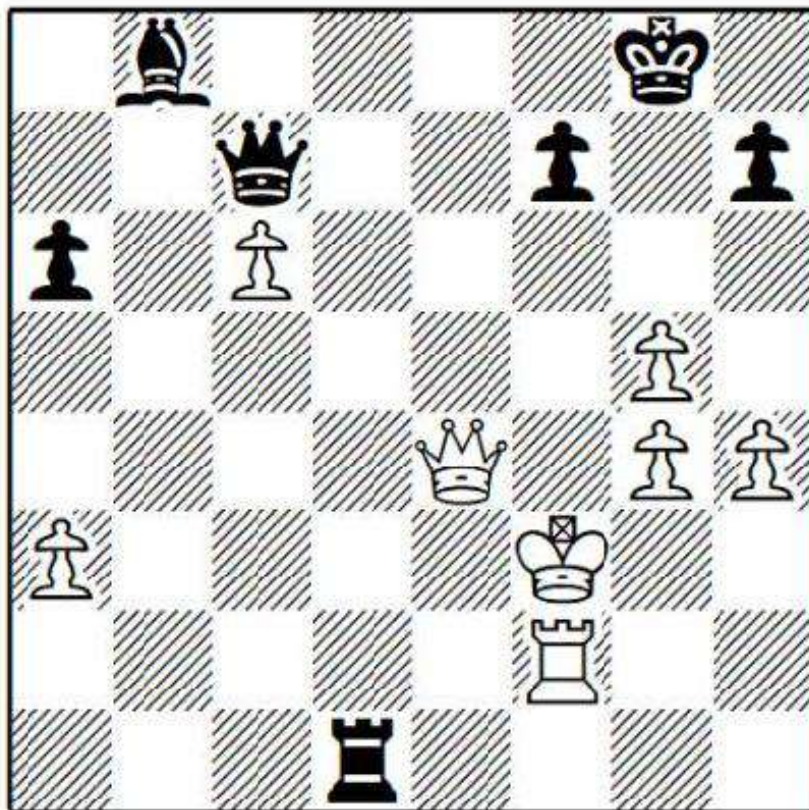
**47 ... exf2**

The extra piece should give Black an easy win.

**48 Rxf2 Rd1+ 49 Kg2 Qc7!**

The loss of White's knight does not deter Black's attack. 49 ... Qd6? allows 50 Qe8+, where the f-pawn's weakness forces 50 ... Qf8. While Black is still winning, why not go for the throat when we can?

**50 Kf3**



**50 ... Qd6!**

Despite this maneuver taking two moves, the ability to play ... Rd3+ is well worth the extension.

**51 h5 Rd3+ 52 Ke2 Rd2+ 53 Kf1 Rd1+**

This long-winded maneuver gives the black queen access to her hunting grounds.

**54 Ke2 Qd2+ 55 Kf3 Qc3+ 0-1**

Dragun resigned because Qe3 will be met with ... Rd3 and the loss of his queen.

Although unorthodox in the sense that my main alternative to 19...Ne5 was saying the word "draw", I sure am glad that I went for it; I hope my explanation of the evaluation and how it informed my decision-making is valuable to the reader. This game was actually quite messy compared with the

cold precision of *Stockfish* pointing out many mistakes from both sides, but, in my opinion, the chess was of a decent level, whatever that means.

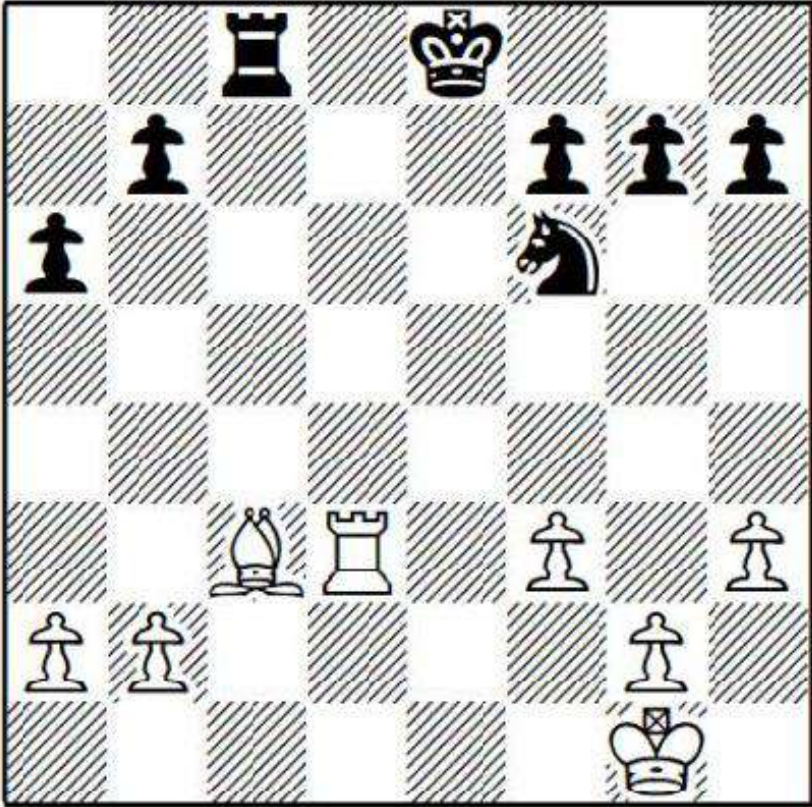
**Exercises**

The following exercises will test your knowledge of the concepts discussed in this chapter.

**31) B.Ahlander-N.Pedersen**

Denmark 2020

*White to play*

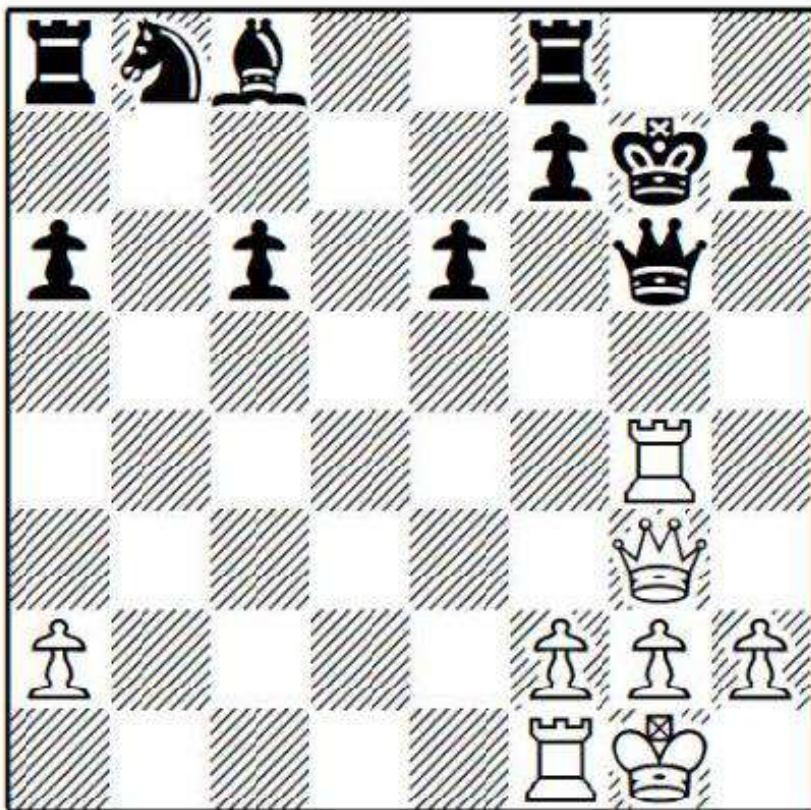


[Solution](#)

**32) D.Dvirnyy-A.Pichot**

chess.com 2020

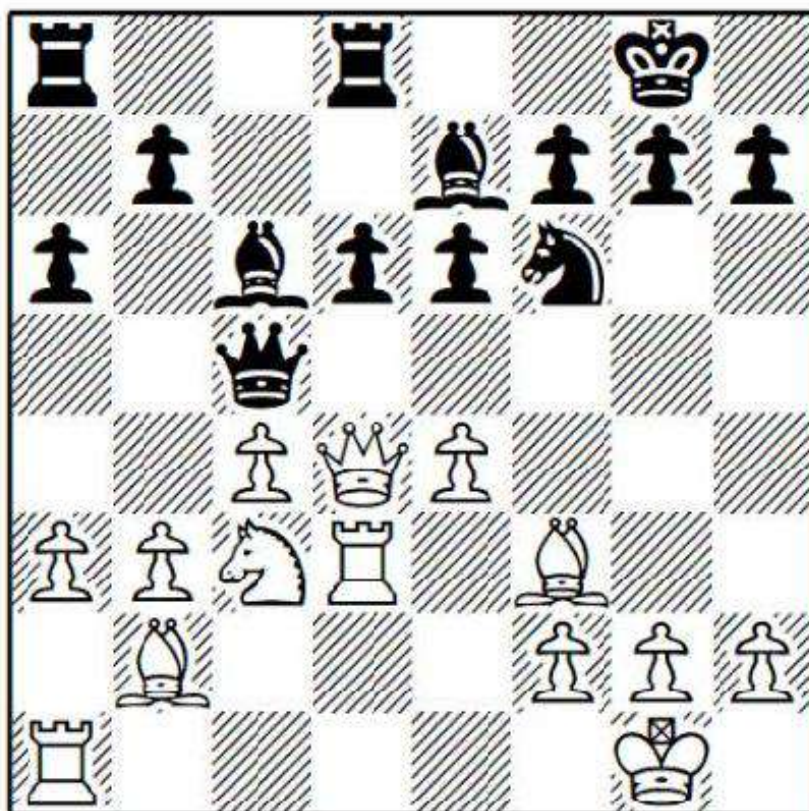
*White to play*



**Solution**

**33) A.Jimenez Ruano-E.Lever**  
Barcelona 2021

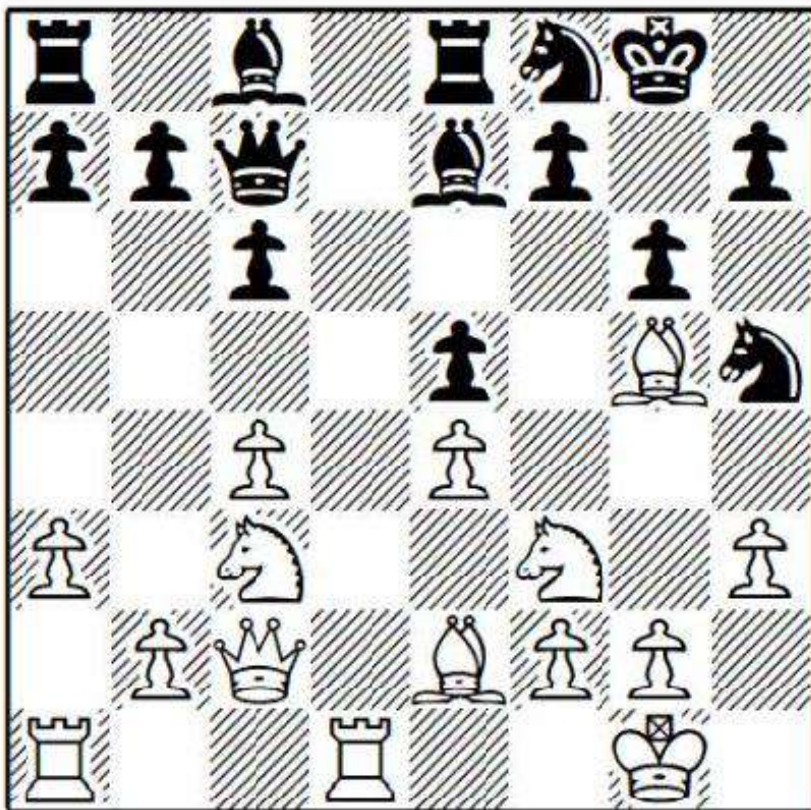
*Black to play*



**Solution**

34) M.Mrndjic-S.Zenelaj  
Konjic 2021

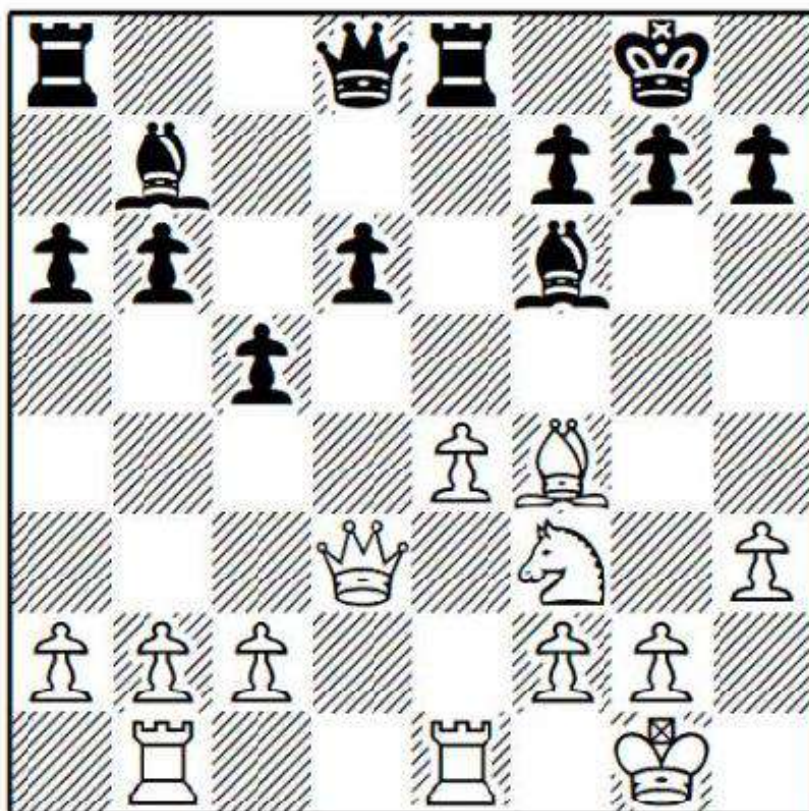
*White to play*



[Solution](#)

35) E.Grinberg-A.Ipatov  
chess.com 2021

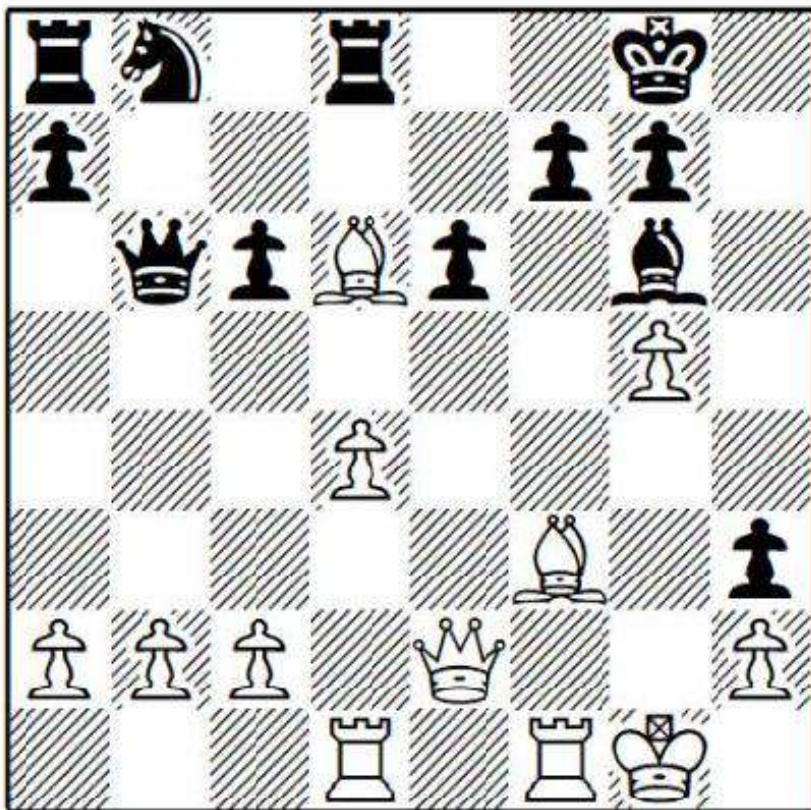
*Black to play*



**Solution**

**36) M.Iskandarov-B.Daneshvar**  
Rasht 2020

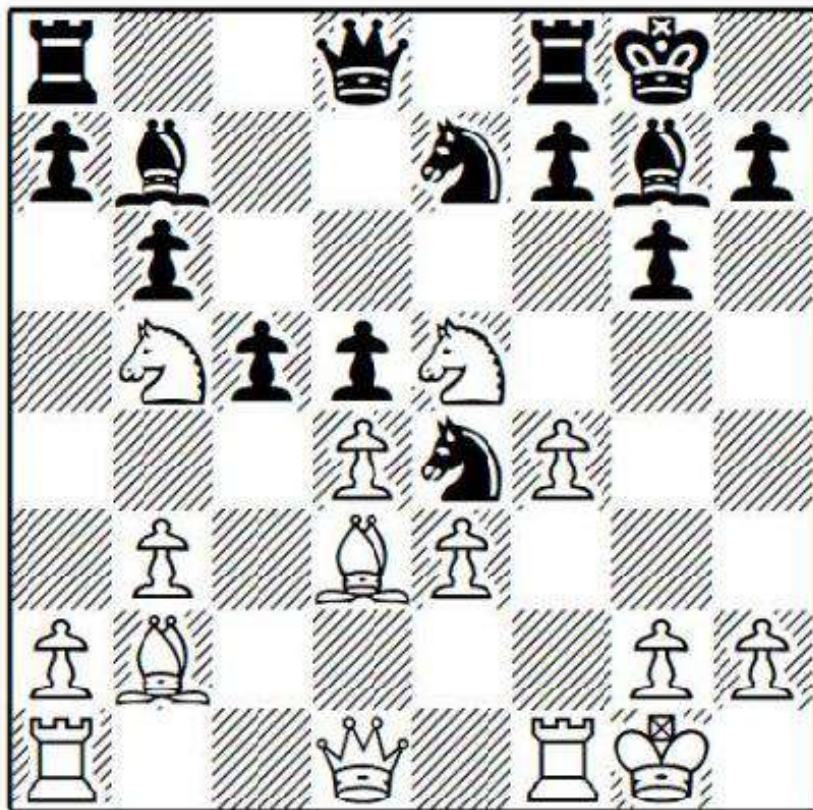
*White to play*



**Solution**

**37) A.Timofeev-B.Murtazin**  
Moscow 2020

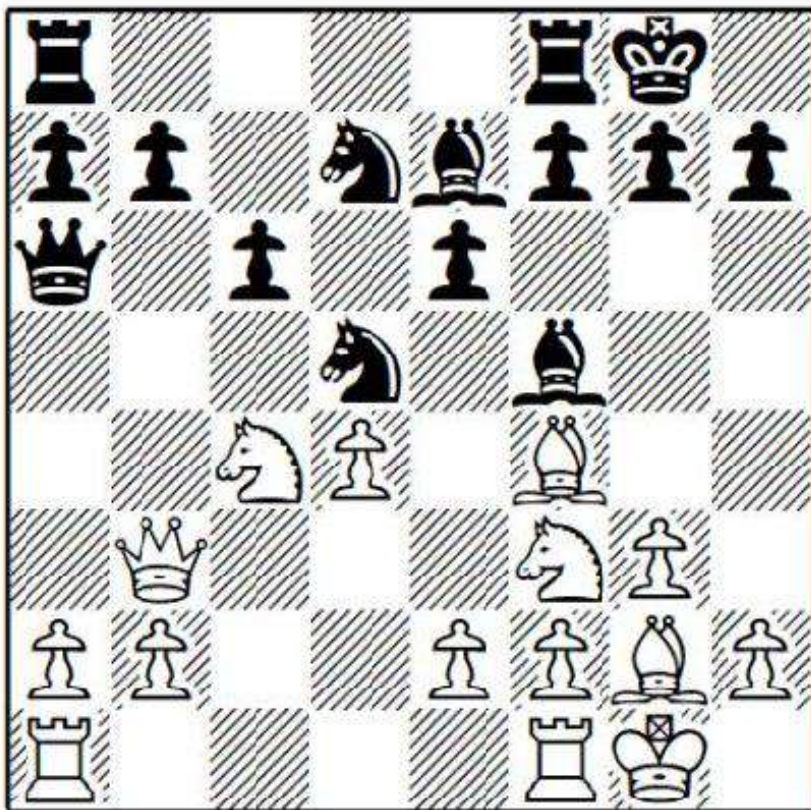
*White to play*



[Solution](#)

38) A.Zatonskih-O.Zimina  
chess.com 2020

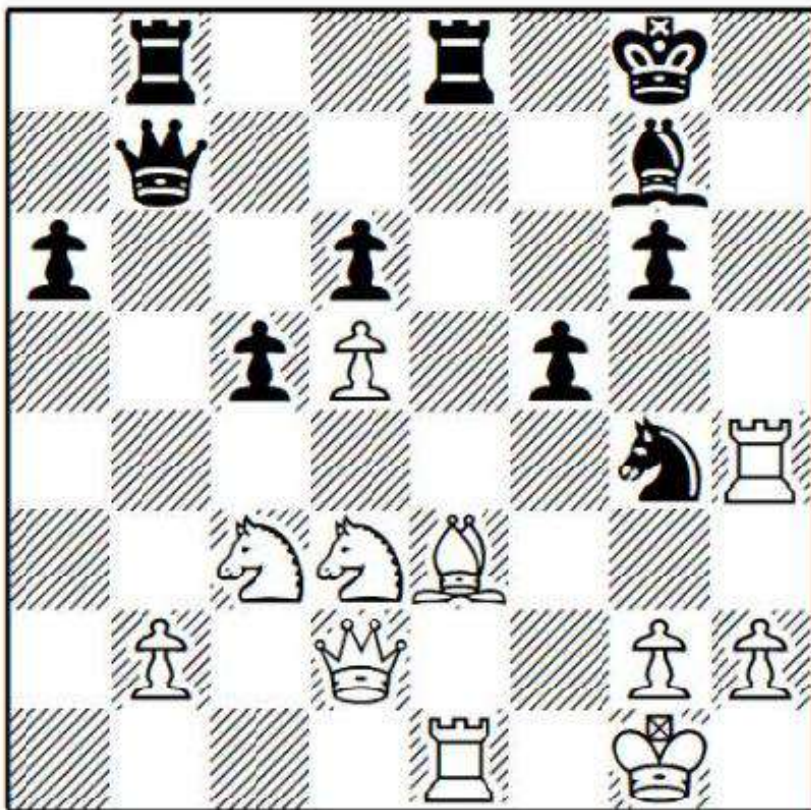
*White to play*



**Solution**

39) D.Espineira Gonzalez-A.Vidarte Morales  
Santo Tirso 2020

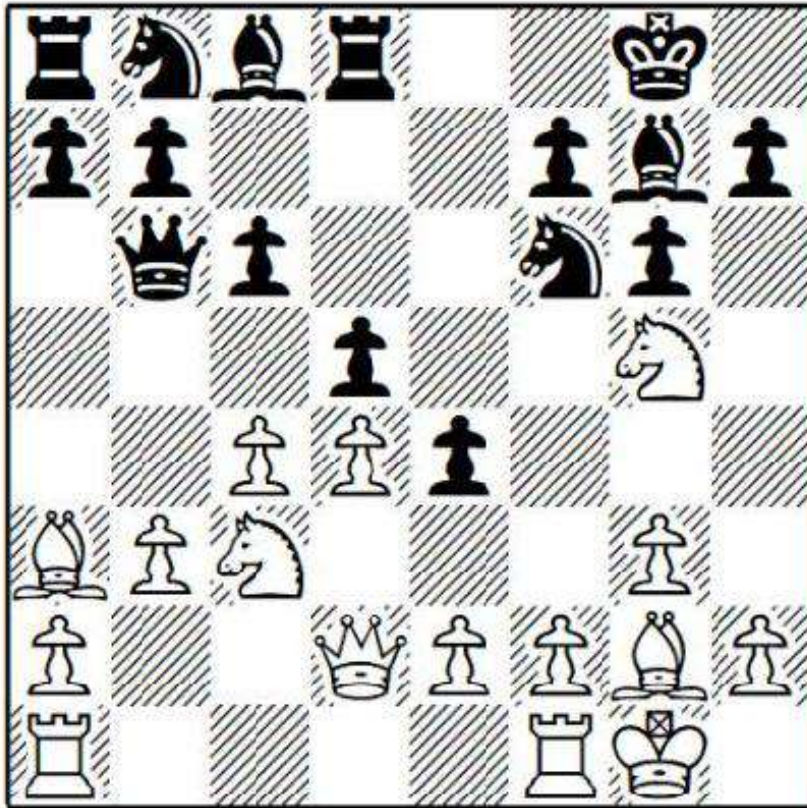
White to play



Solution

40) A.Saric-E.Gullaksen  
Prague 2020

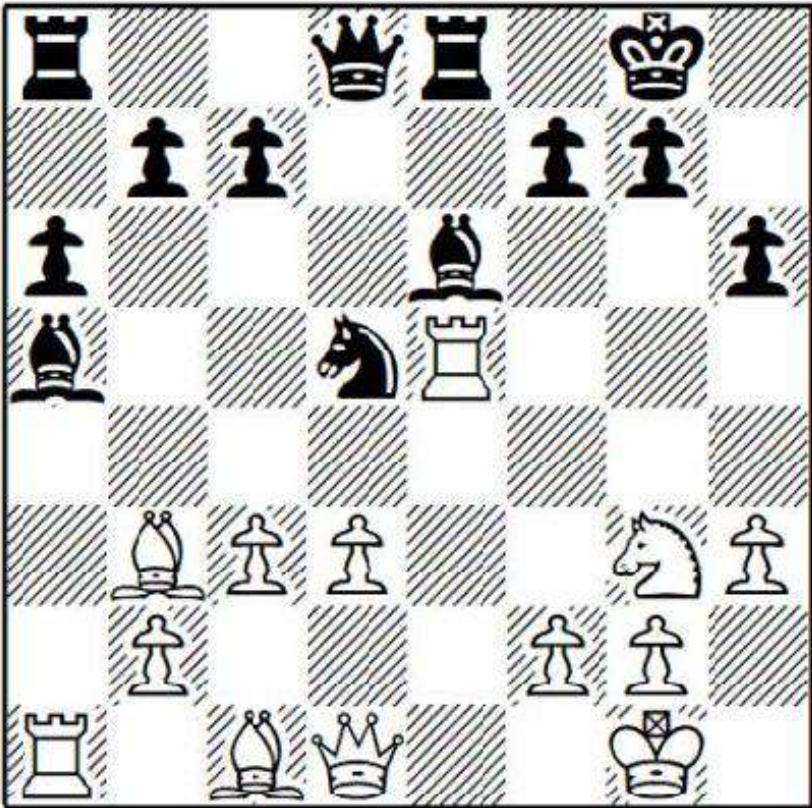
*White to play*



**Solution**

41) R.Li-C.Ali Marandi  
chess.com 2021

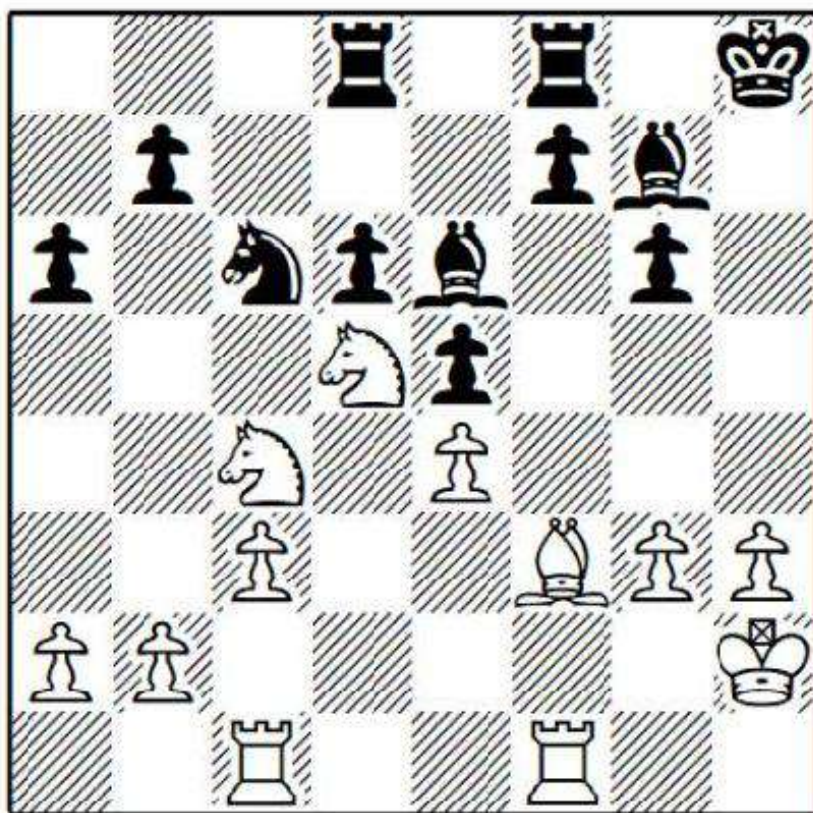
*Black to play*



Solution

42) D.Mijatovic-A.Moksh  
Paracin 2021

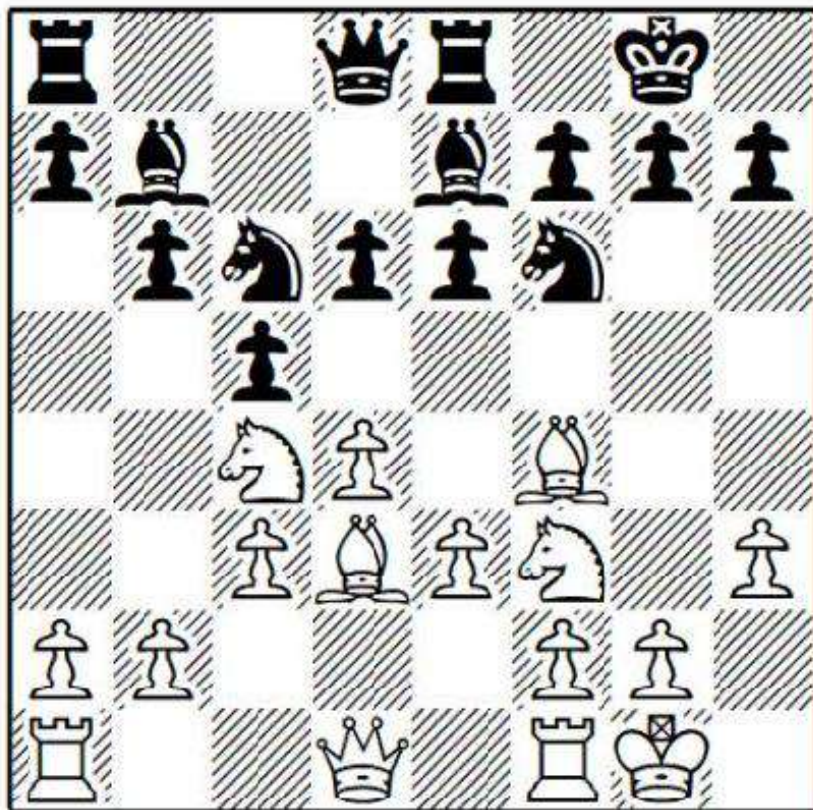
*Black to play*



Solution

43) J.Paprocki-D.Mischuk  
Pokrzywna 2020

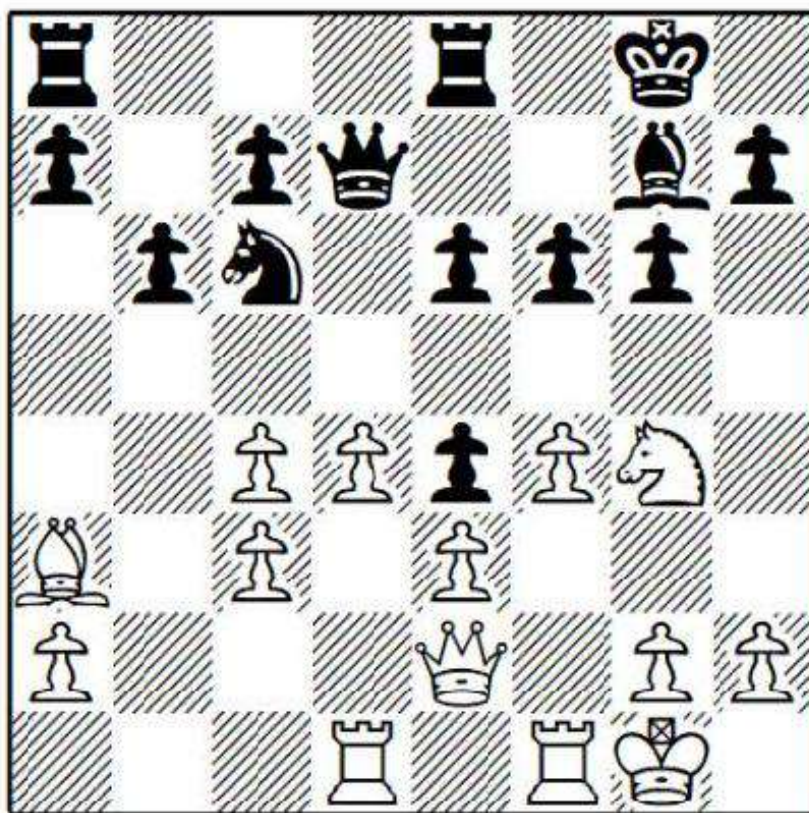
White to play



Solution

44) V.Platt-D.Kosic  
Budapest 2020

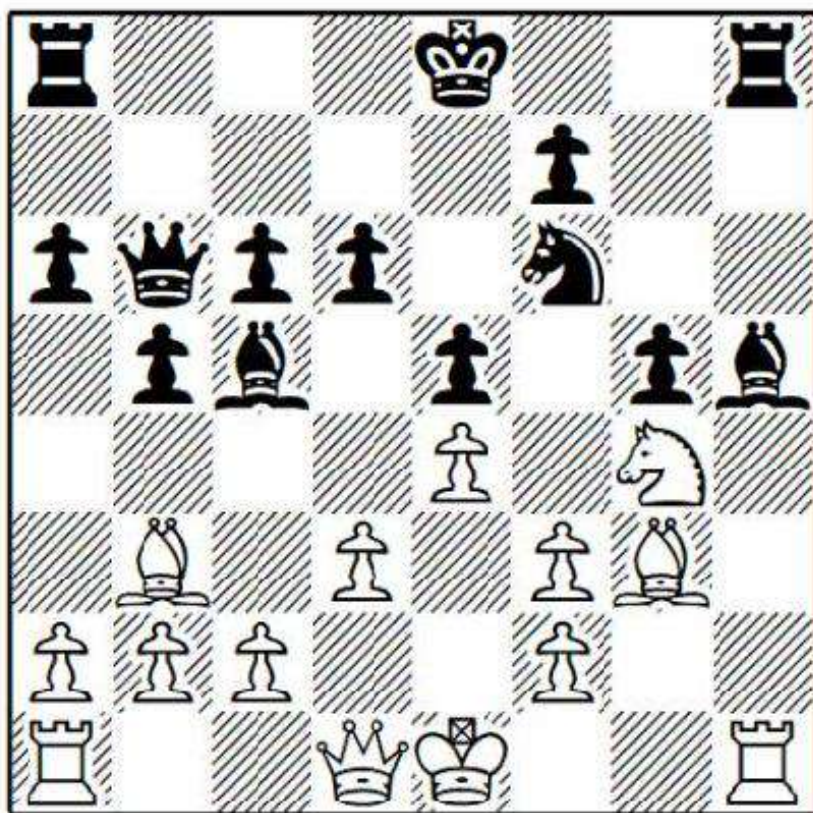
*Black to play*



**Solution**

45) O.Perez Mitjans-T.Sosa  
Barcelona 2020

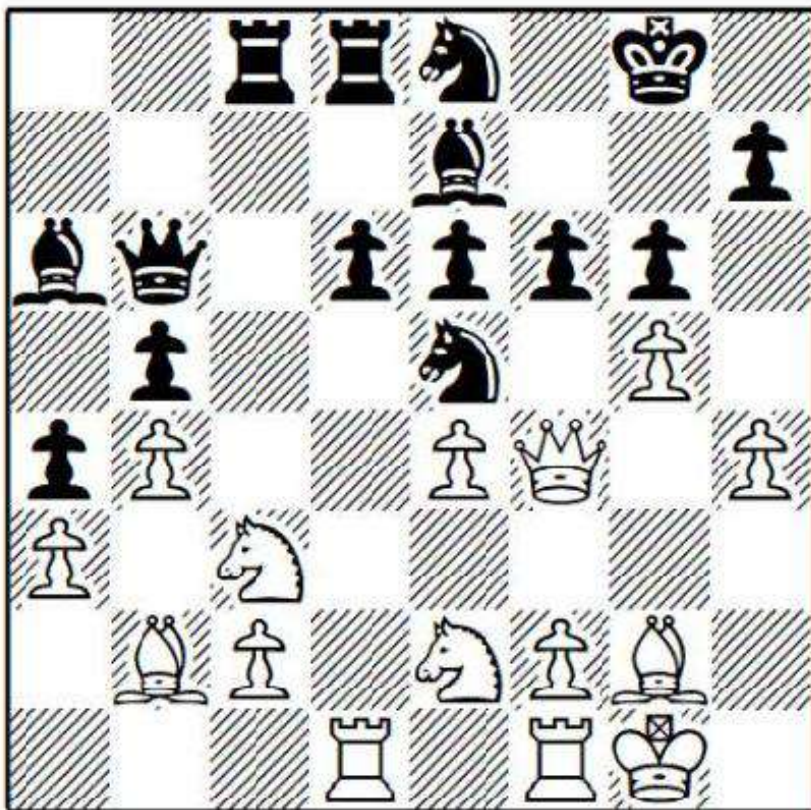
*Black to play*



**Solution**

**46) I.Ijiushenok-H.Hayrapetyan**  
Moscow 2019

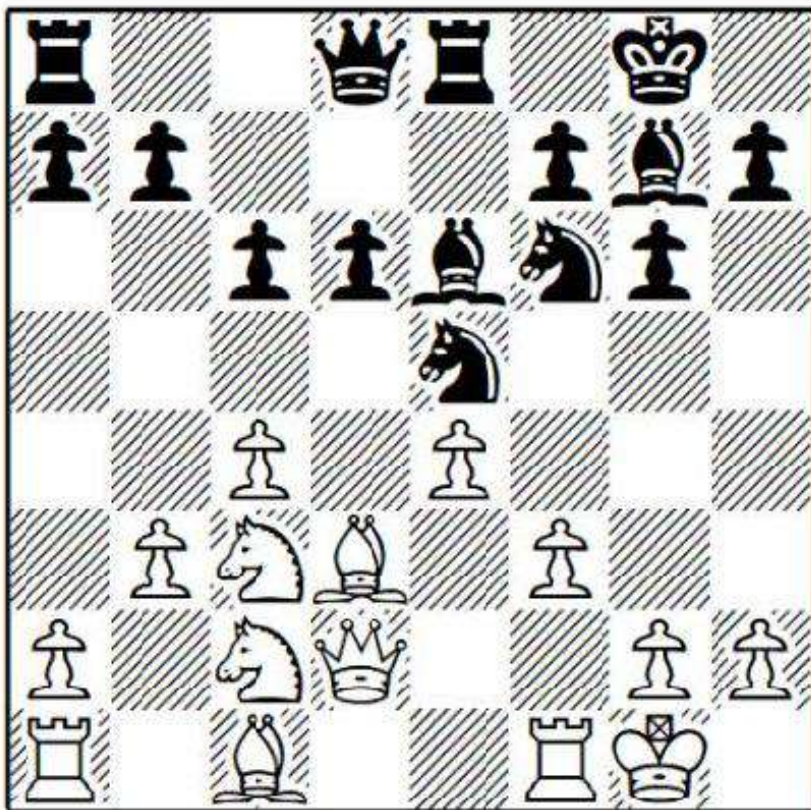
White to play



Solution

47) S.Dev-A.Kovalev  
Marianske Lazne 2020

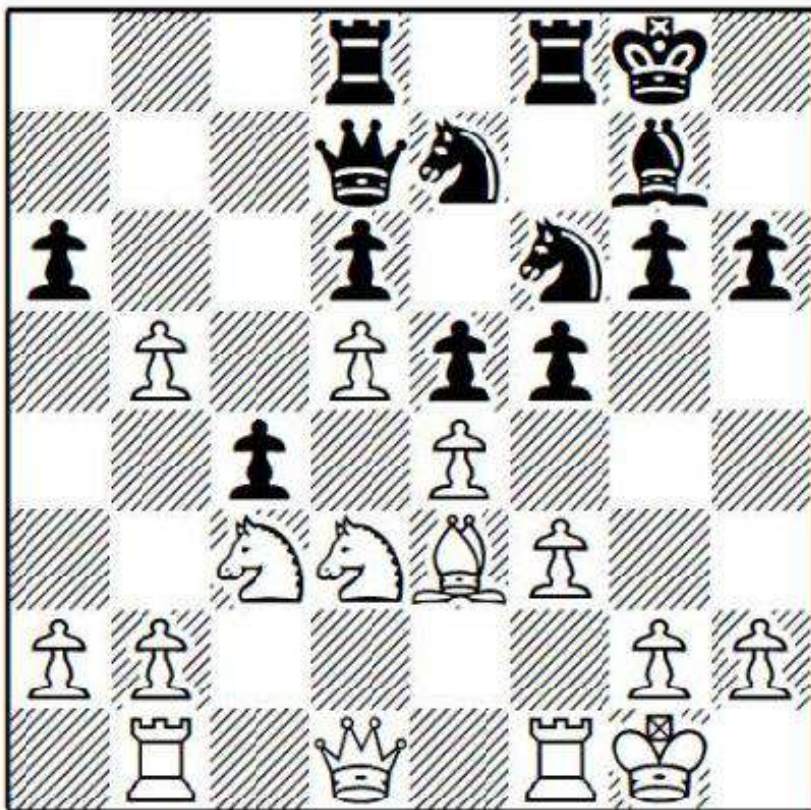
*White to play*



**Solution**

48) M.Gagunashvili-D.Lomsadze  
Tbilisi 2020

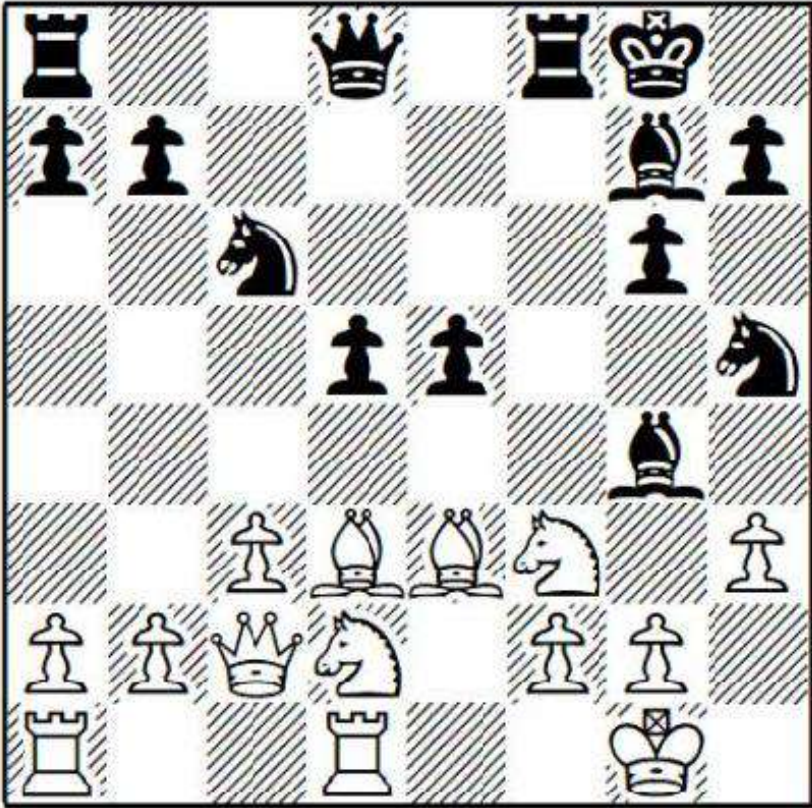
White to play



Solution

49) R.Kevlishvili-F.Pavic  
lichess.org 2021

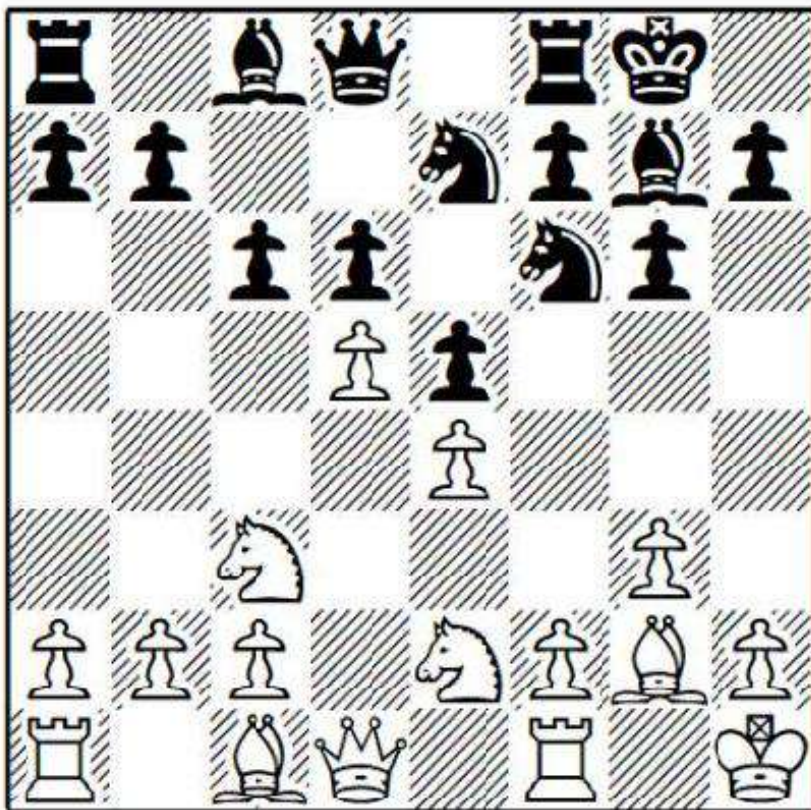
*Black to play*



Solution

50) M.Song-T.Gareev  
lichess.org 2021

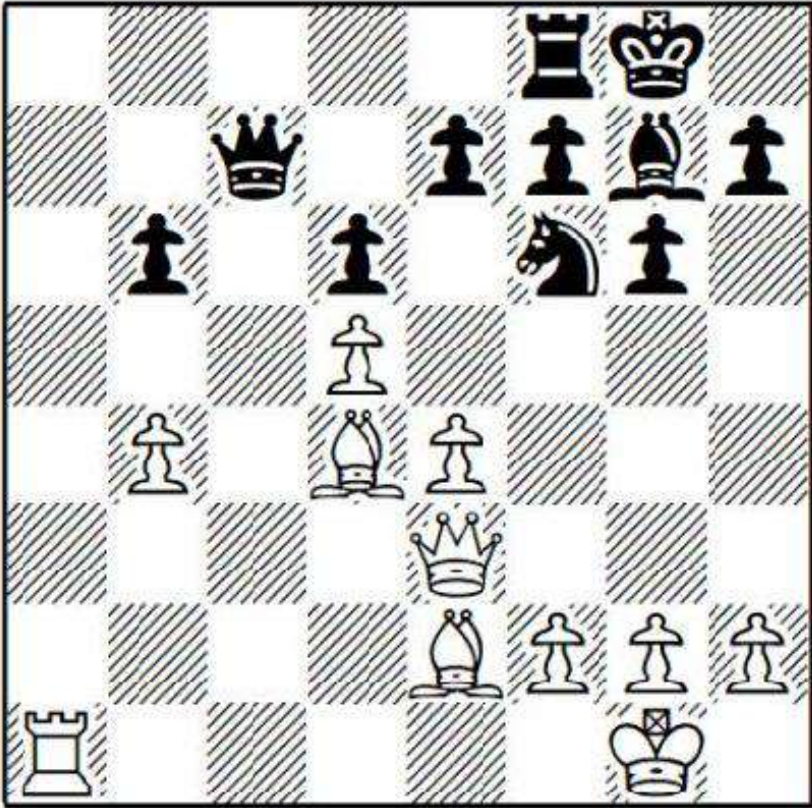
*White to play*



**Solution**

51) V.Asadli-A.Fidalgo  
Lisbon 2020

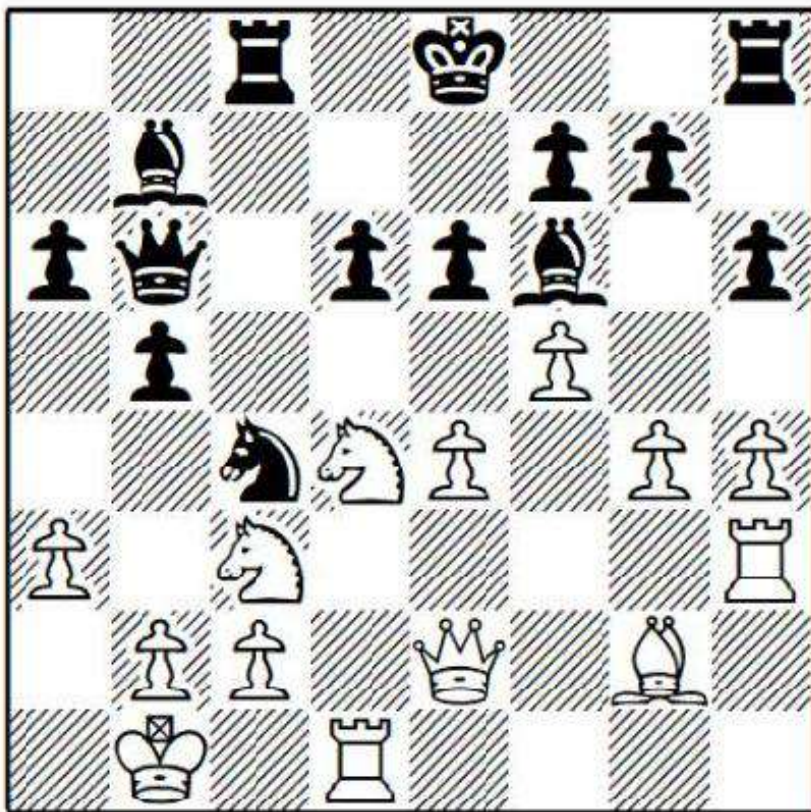
*Black to play*



Solution

52) M.Calzetta Ruiz-J.Seo  
Stockholm 2020

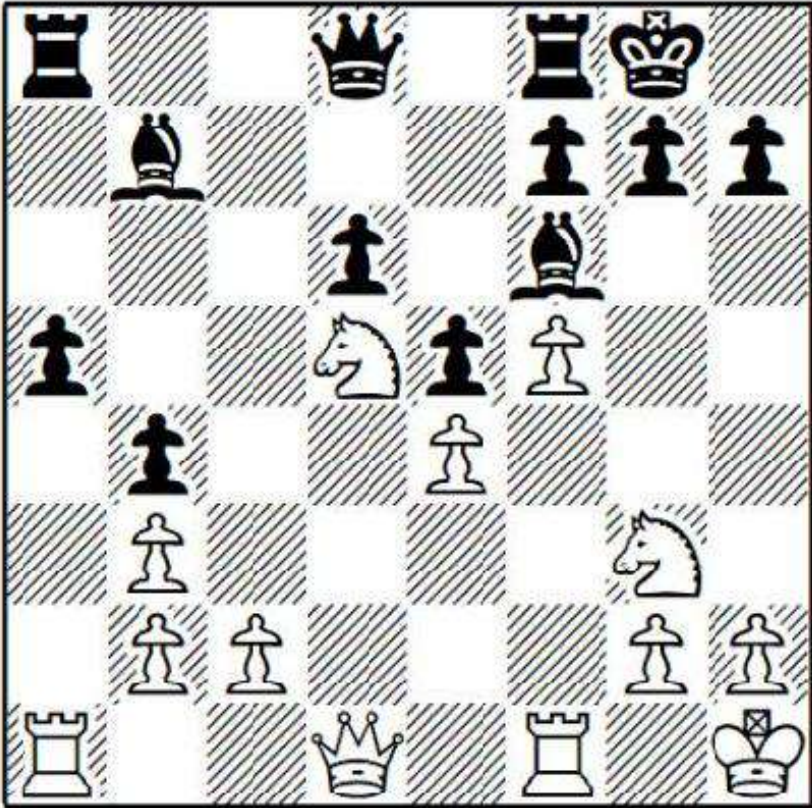
White to play



Solution

53) I.Borocz-M.Kobalia  
Gibraltar 2020

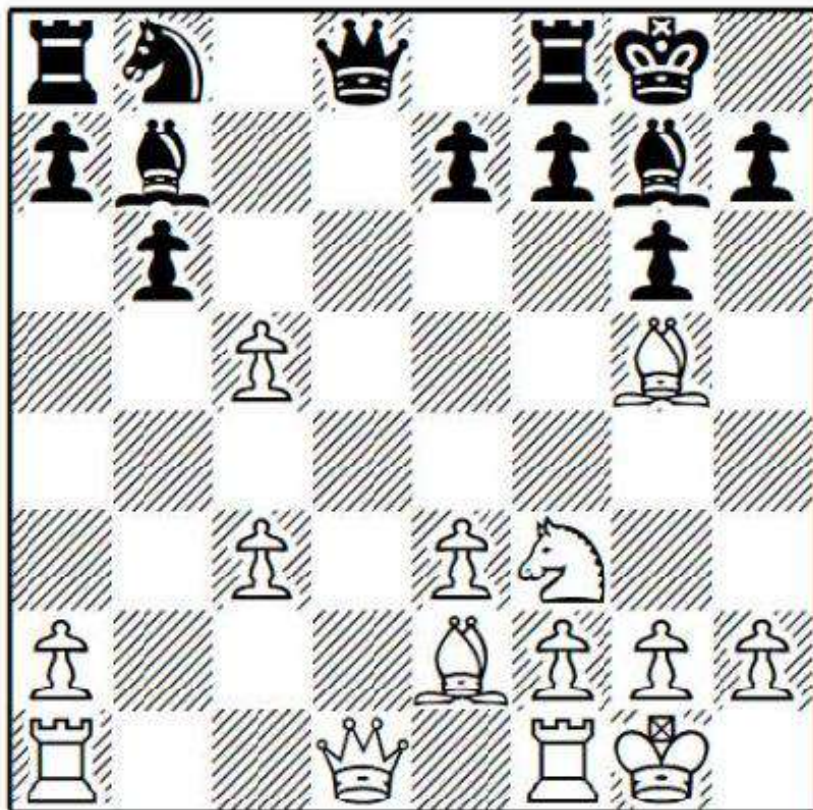
*Black to play*



Solution

54) A.Rychagov-S.Sevian  
lichess.org 2021

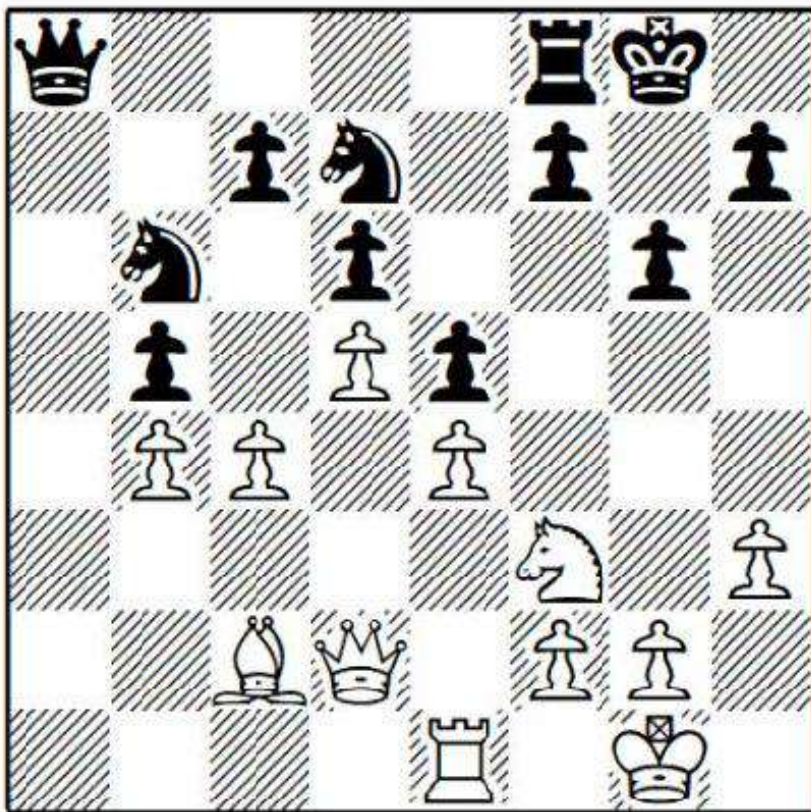
*Black to play*



Solution

55) G.Froewis-L.Leisch  
Austria 2021

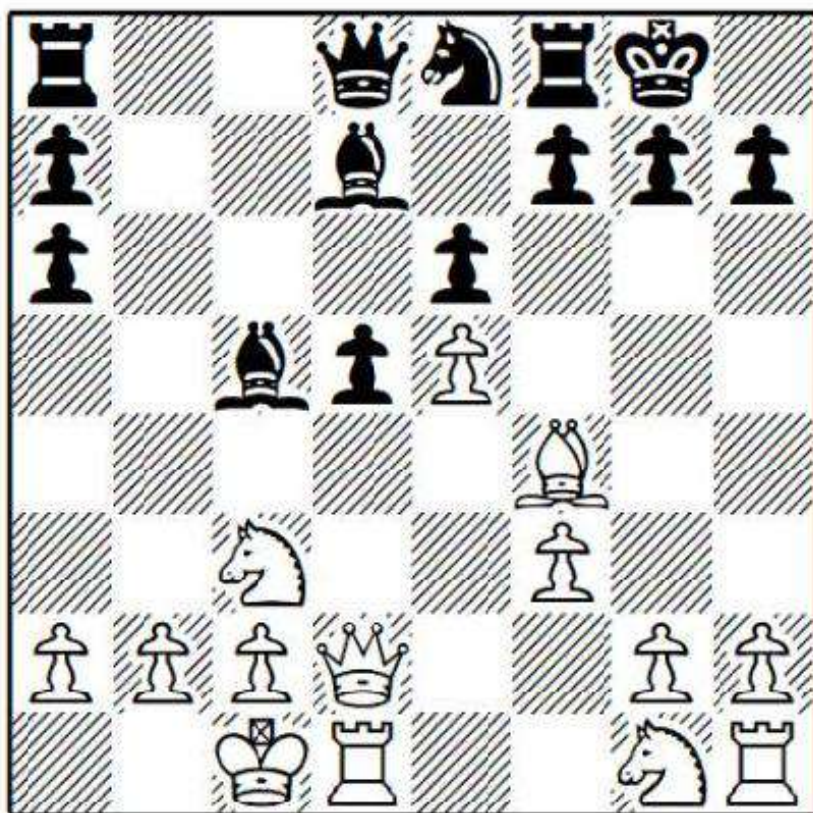
*White to play*



**Solution**

**56) S.Shankland-D.Anton Guijarro**  
Prague 2020

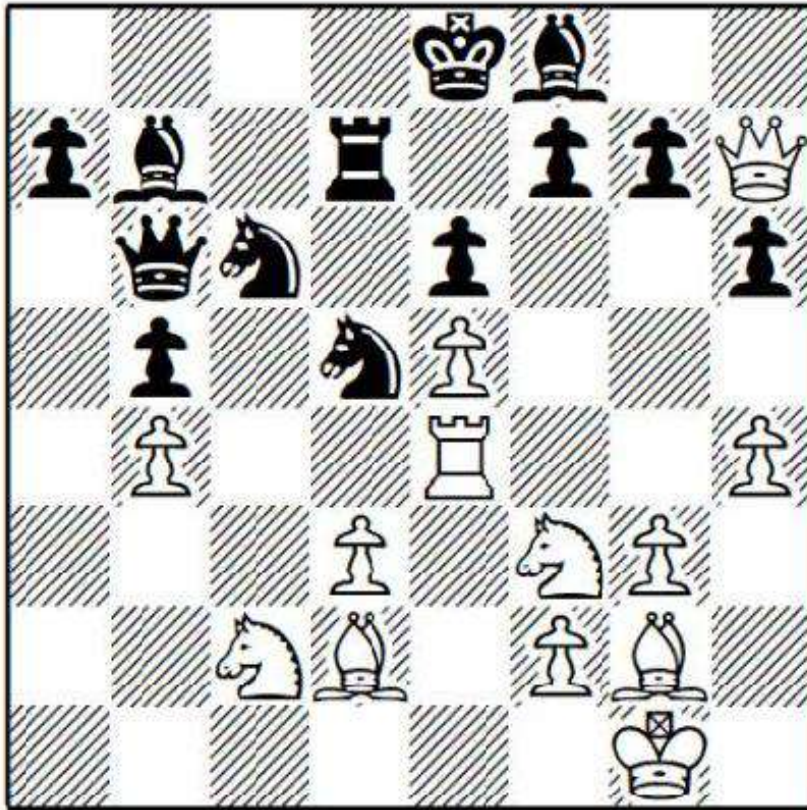
White to play



Solution

57) K.Jakubowski-O.Bilych  
Prague 2020

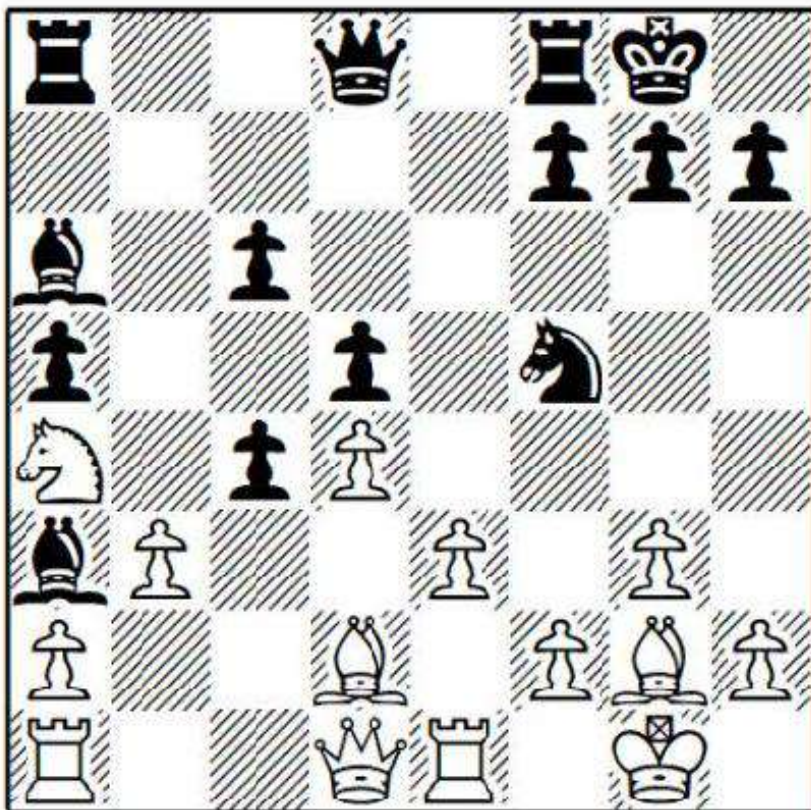
*White to play*



**Solution**

**58) A.Esipenko-R.Padmini**  
Gibraltar 2020

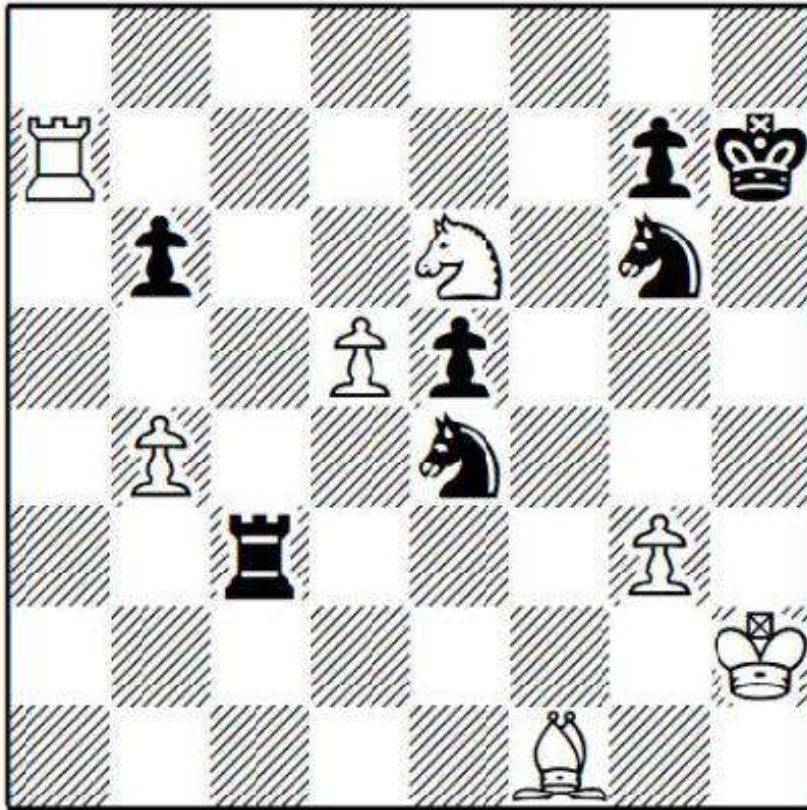
*White to play*



**Solution**

**59) S.Sargsyan-T.Petrosian**  
Yerevan 2021

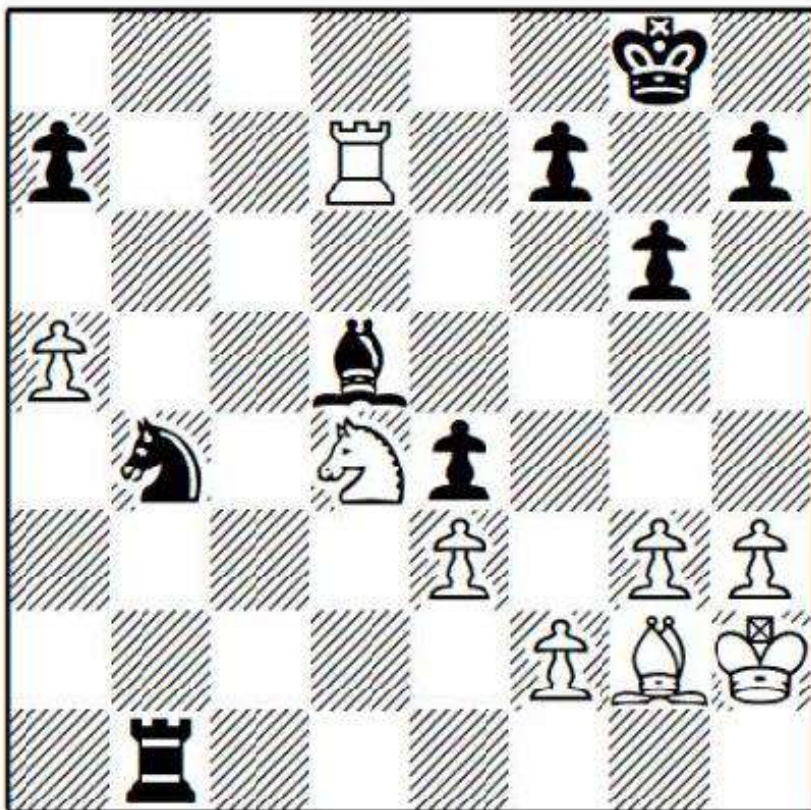
*White to play*



**Solution**

**60) N.Visakh-S.Yudin**  
Chennai 2020

*White to play*



### Solution

#### **Conclusion**

Evaluation is a much more complicated aspect of chess than I have probably made it appear. Nevertheless, my goal is less to give you an algorithm that will lead you to the truth in every position in chess, but more to improve your understanding of how to do so and why it is important. Each game analyzed here can teach crucial lessons regarding this field.

Botvinnik-Capablanca, one of the most classic and historically significant games in chess history, teaches us more about the evaluation process and how it can decide our planning. Geller-Euwe illustrates the differences between dynamic and static advantages and the conversions between them. Checa-Sheng shows us more of the impact of evaluation on decisions and is a game where the evaluation is challenging to do accurately; we must rely on our senses instead, in many cases. Dragun-Sheng is another example where practical decisions are informed by evaluation.

Despite not being perfect (particularly the latter two games, for some reason), I hope that these games proved instructive to the reader.

# Chapter Three

## Mise en Place

While Chapters 1 and 2 presented a great deal of knowledge that could be considered essential elements towards a baseline understanding of chess, it is improbable that you will read those two chapters and immediately find this information applicable to you in your games. I am sure that at least some of the concepts introduced within Chapter 1 would have been familiar to the reader already, and Chapter 2, while useful, does not present the process of finding the best move completely. This chapter aims to tie up some loose ends and enable us to identify the right candidate moves while playing. The chapter title, “Mise en place”, ties into this quite nicely; it is French for “everything in its place” and refers to preparing all of one’s ingredients and equipment before cooking.

While I am sure you are getting bored of the whole spiel about definitions that I have been so fervently pursuing before each chapter, a candidate move is simply a move you are considering playing. That’s it! While it may seem arbitrary for such a generic concept to have a dedicated term, I believe that this concept’s value is important enough to deserve one. In almost every chess position, we can identify multiple moves that appear acceptable, and choosing between them is the task that allows us to play the best move (which, of course, is the goal for any given chess position). In cases where one must consciously pick between candidate moves and the matter is of great importance, the selection process is dictated by a combination of evaluation (covered previously) and calculation (which is a subject that deserves its own separate volume). This chapter will primarily focus on identifying proper move candidates and how to play around plans.

I imagine the reader has found this explanation about finding candidate moves rather obscure, and that is not far from my opinion either. Chess is not a solved game, especially not for me. My attempt here to explain it fully with a formulaic approach is, needless to say, not going to represent a complete picture of how the game should be played (to call candidate moves the essence of how the game works is not an exaggeration, in my view). However, I hope that the following examples of stellar (or adequate, in the case of my own games) positional chess are of use to the reader. Because positional play (defined in Chapter 1 as chess based on judgment) encompasses so much, it would be hard to use anything but a demonstrative method to explain things, given that I am monologuing to my computer and you are reading a book. The best way to describe the theme I am trying to emphasize is to play moves that you can justify. This may sound extremely

simple in practice, but as we shall see, it is not always a given ...

### *Game 5*

**H.Niemann-J.Sheng**

Saint Louis 2019

This game was played in the prestigious U.S. Junior Championship in 2019 at the Saint Louis Chess Club and is one of my more memorable events. I had a lot of fun with my peers there and scored a very respectable  $6\frac{1}{2}/9$  (which would have been a GM norm had there been foreigners!). This game was played after beating three grandmasters, but I am much happier with the chess I played here than in any of those games.

**1 Nf3 d5 2 c4**

I am not sure whether it is appropriate to give 2 c4 a dubious mark, as the move is not incorrect. Nevertheless, I see no reason for White to play this move order instead of 1 c4 to avoid the situation in the game. However, I know that Niemann has a great appreciation of the Benoni structure, so I suppose he views this more favorably than I do.

**2 ... d4**

I do not have a high opinion of the reverse Benoni for White, but perhaps this is somewhat influenced by the fact that my analysis of the regular Benoni structures is not too pleasant for Black either.

**3 g3 Nc6**

3 ... c5 is possible, of course, but I think refraining from it avoids some b4 tricks and whatnot.

**4 Bg2 e5 5 d3 Bb4+**

This check slightly inconveniences White's development.

**6 Bd2**

After 6 Nbd2 a5 the white knight has been successfully diverted from its optimal post on a3.

**6 ... Bxd2+**

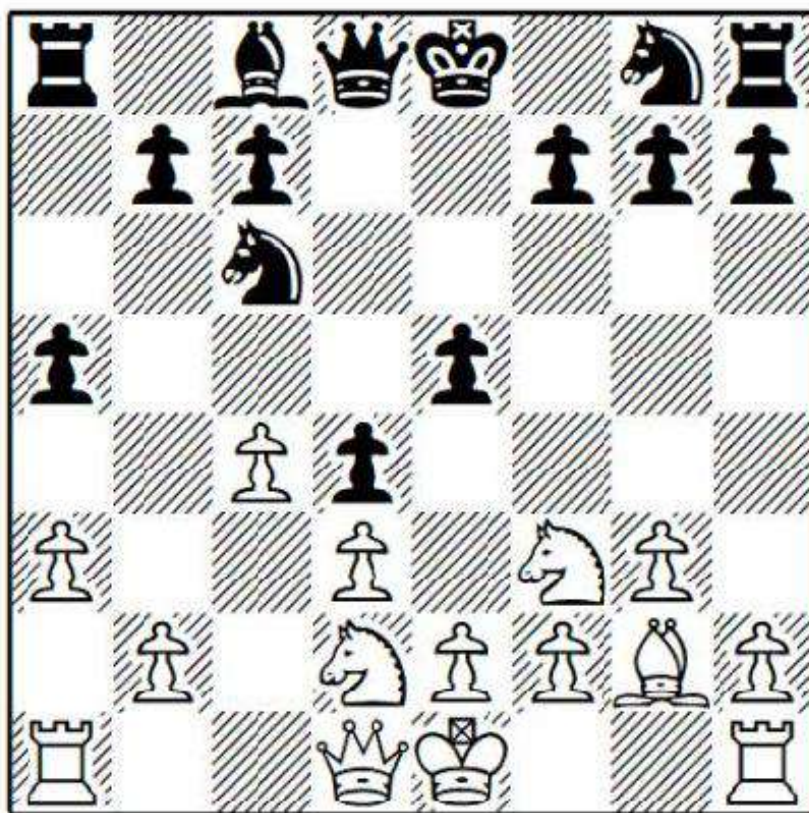
This move is rather odd. 6 ... a5 is much more natural, as 7 Bxb4 axb4 is nothing to worry about. I think I was concerned about a white knight reaching b3 soon, but this could hardly be considered problematic with Black's splendid pawn center.

**7 Nbx2 a5**

Despite not playing incredibly accurately, *Stockfish* gives Black a slight pull, which in my opinion is a pretty bad sign given that we are seven moves into the game.

### 8 a3

Standard fare, to advance b4 to weaken the black central complex. This is a very common idea in the Benoni pawn structure. We may note that White's e2-d3-c4 pawn chain points toward the queenside and therefore gives him more space. Having more space here suggests that he should aim for aggressive operations in this sector.



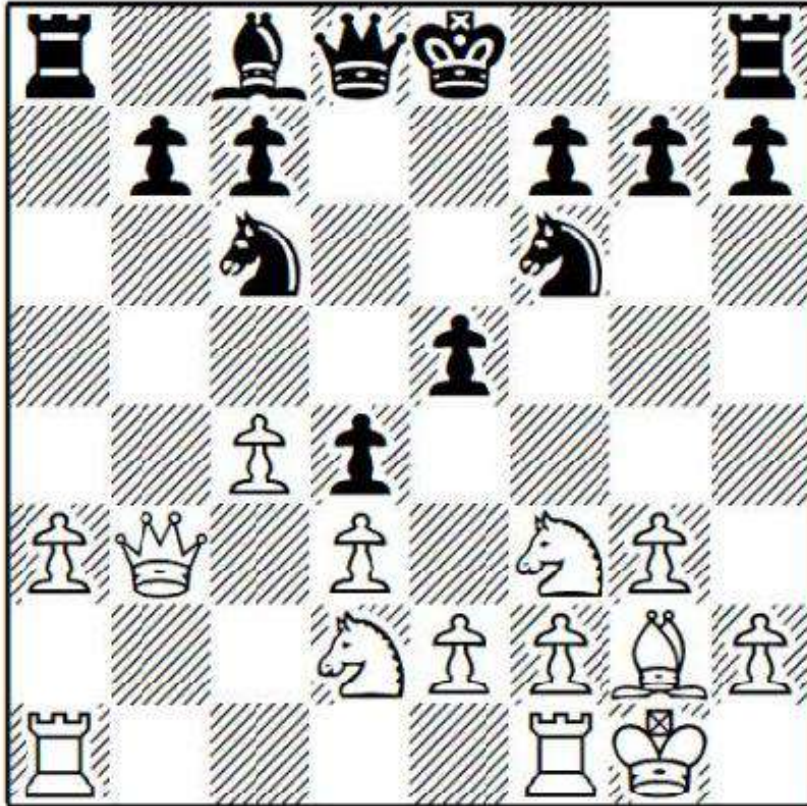
### 8 ... a4!

And just as typically, Black clamps down on the white queenside. Usually, White is somewhat hesitant to play this move when the roles are reversed, as Black will have active counterplay along the b-file; however, in this case, the black c-pawn is at home, and this type of counterplay is much weaker as a result.

**9 b4 axb3 10 Qxb3**

10 Nxb3 was also possible, allowing for the f3-knight to take its brother's place on d2.

**10 ... Nf6 11 0-0**



Here, we can note that while castling is perfectly acceptable, there is no urgent need for it. The weakness of the c5-square takes priority.

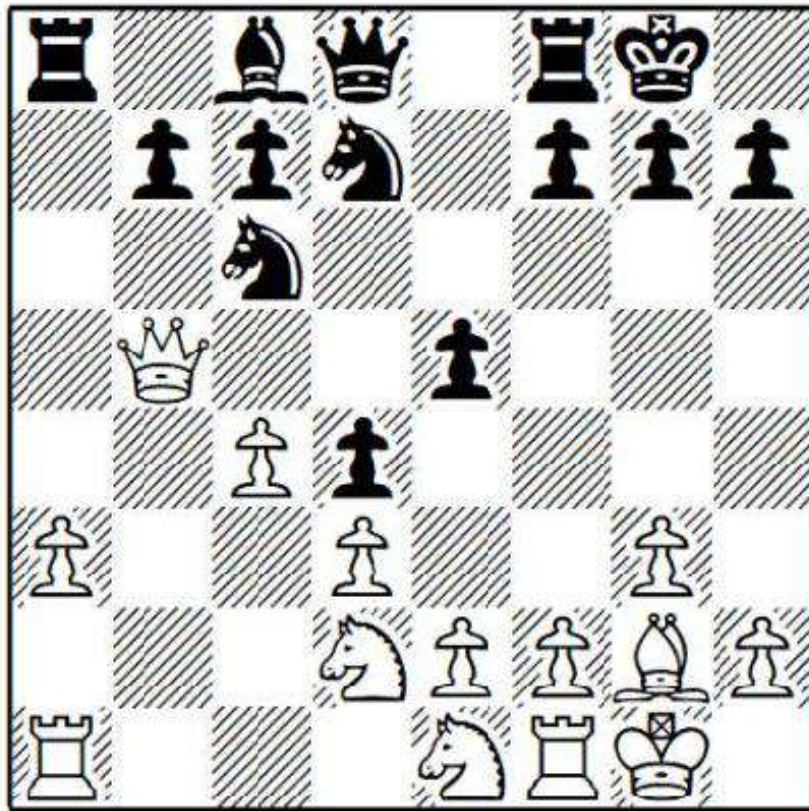
**11 ... Nd7**

This move delays castling and hinders the c8-bishop, but our king is not in danger, the h8-rook would not magically take over following an immediate castling, and the c8-bishop is doing a fine job defending b7 for now.

**12 Ne1?!**

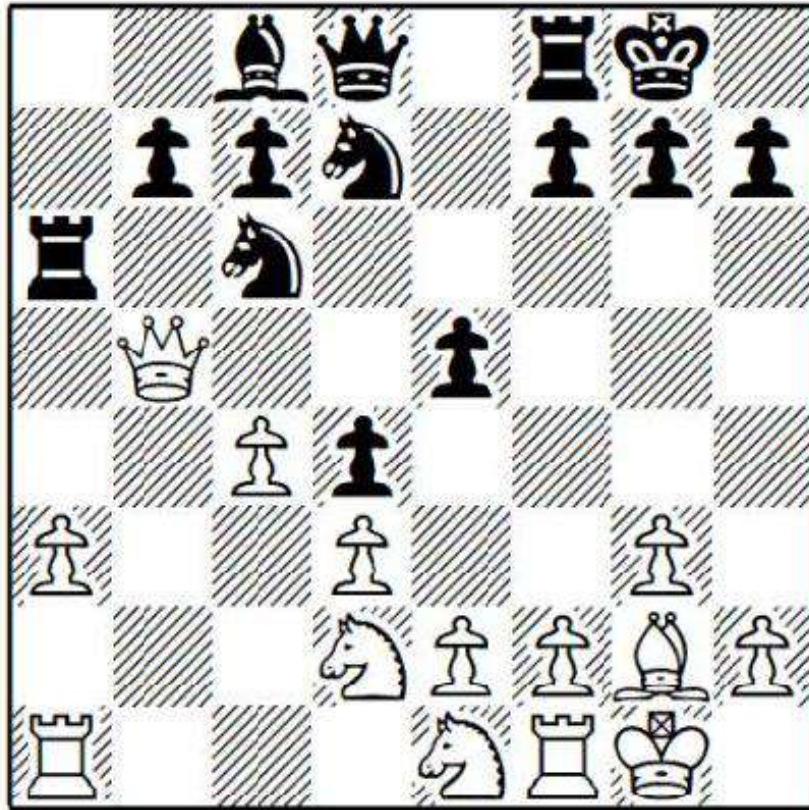
This move was likely played to bring the knight to c2 and b4, but I am not particularly impressed. The knight was relatively fine where it was. 12 Qc2 0-0 13 Nb3 is a better way for White to play.

12 ... 0-0 13 Qb5?



While Ne1 may have been misguided, this move is a train wreck. It threatens to take on c6 but does not do much else. Now that White has a threat, we can identify some candidate moves. How should Black address the threat? We certainly could move the knight away, perhaps to e7? ... Ra5 would force the white queen away but also subject the rook to a future Nb3. That leaves us with the most effective way of controlling c6, which also happens to contribute toward the battle for c5 ...

**13 ... Ra6!**



This move defends c6, plans to expel the extended white queen on b5, and takes aim at b2. Knowledge of essential information (such as White's inability to control c5 with pawns and that such squares are usually ideal for knights) can enable us to reach this decision. After 13 ... Ne7 14 a4 it is not clear what plan Black should opt for; or if 13 ... Ra5 14 Qb1 Nc5 15 Nb3, White can trade some pieces off and likely not be worse.

#### **14 f4??**

The weaknesses created by this move are disastrous. White is not justified in starting central action with his pieces placed so precariously. This flagrant error opens the e-file, removes control of e3, weakens the e2-pawn considerably, and fails to address Black's idea. While not wholly losing and perhaps slightly undeserving of the double question mark, the magnitude of White's error from a conceptual sense encourages me to deride it further.

14 Nb3 made more sense: 14 ... Rb6 15 Qa4 Ra6 is an option for the less ambitious, but after 16 Qb5 h6 or a similar quiet move, Black is much better because White's queen on b5 is so useless. I am reminded of the elementary adage to leave the queens at home in the opening for fear of their safety.

#### **14 ... Rb6!**

Perhaps this move was underestimated, but I don't think it is anything too out of the box. The departure of the white queen will open the c5-square to the knight.

#### **15 Qd5?**

The queen only has two moves, but this is not the correct one. She needs to return to her kingdom in support of the weaknesses created via the brazen f4 advance. 15 Qa4 is better, but not pleasant at all. The engine points out the eccentric 15 ... h5!? with a potent attack in the cards based on the advance ... h5-h4. Instead, 15 ... exf4 16 Rxf4 Qe7 is probably what I would have played in the game, with a clear advantage: 16 Qd1 (16 Nef3?! prevents the white rook from capturing back on f4; after 16 ... exf4 17 gxf4 Nf6 Black is much better on account of White's structural deficiencies) 16 ... Ne7 and Black is doing well; he has the makings of a kingside offensive shortly.

#### **15 ... Rb2**

White's weaknesses on the second rank can now be targeted due to the rook's earlier deployment along the 6th rank.

#### **16 Nef3 Ne7!**

The knight prepares to enter e3 via f5.

#### **17 Qa5**

17 Qe4?? f5 is pretty, although sadly not very plausible.

#### **17 ... b6**

This move gains another tempo on the white queen and, more importantly, prepares the arrival of a black knight on c5, where it squashes White's position.

#### **18 Qa4 exf4**

The white kingside has been dramatically softened by the rash central advance.

#### **19 Qd1**

19 gxf4 Nc5 20 Qd1 Nf5 transposes to the text; all roads lead to Rome.

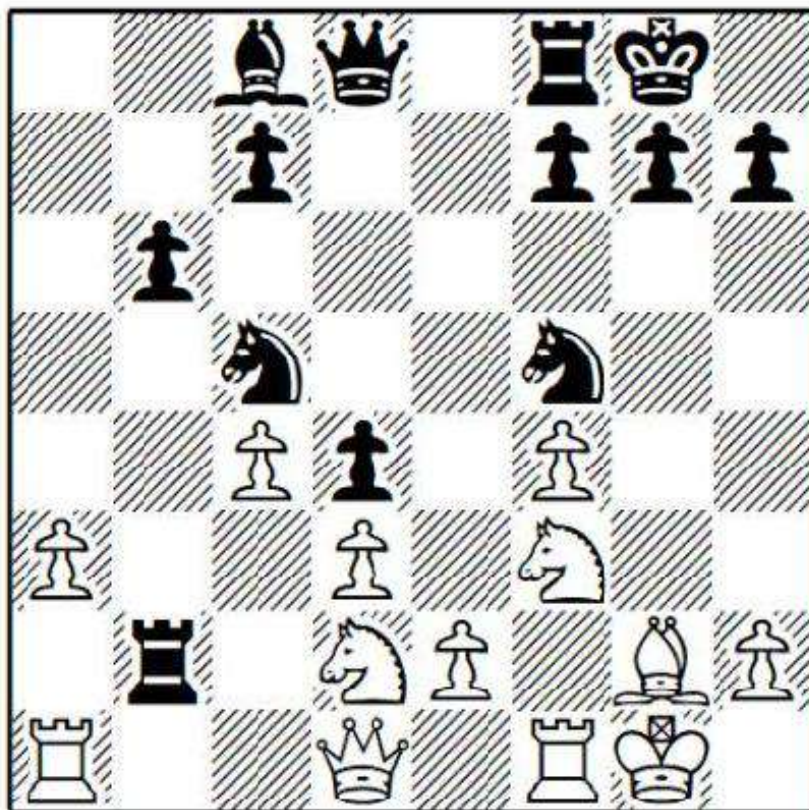
#### **19 ... Nc5**

19 ... fxc3 20 Qc1 should still win for Black, but it is unnecessary to pursue such frivolous sacrifices when the alternative is so solid and so ... winning, for lack of a better word.

**20 gxf4**

20 Qc1 Na4 is the difference from the previous line. The black knight secures its partner-in-crime on b2 and prepares to enter the c3-square.

**20 ... Nf5**



Despite the material parity, I should think that the rest of the MAPS analysis will cement Black a winning advantage. The weakness of the e3-square and its associates is criminal. It is hard to suggest moves for White from here onward, so the resultant analysis will not be too complex.

**21 Qc1 Na4 22 Rf2**

Preemptively defending the e2-pawn and removing the rook from attack by the upcoming ... Ne3, but any defensive measures taken at this point are too little, too late.

**22 ... Ne3**

The e3-knight resembles an octopus with its omnidirectional attack and renders all of White's remaining pieces close to useless.

**23 Ne1 Ng4!**

While the knight is gorgeous on e3, it also obscures the vision of the major pieces that are coming soon.

**24 Rf1 Qe7**

The threats along the e-file are indefensible.

**25 Ne4**

Ceding e2, but nothing was particularly helpful. 25 Be4 only provides respite for one move: 25 ... f5 26 Bd5+ Kh8 and the black queen will arrive on e2 or e3.

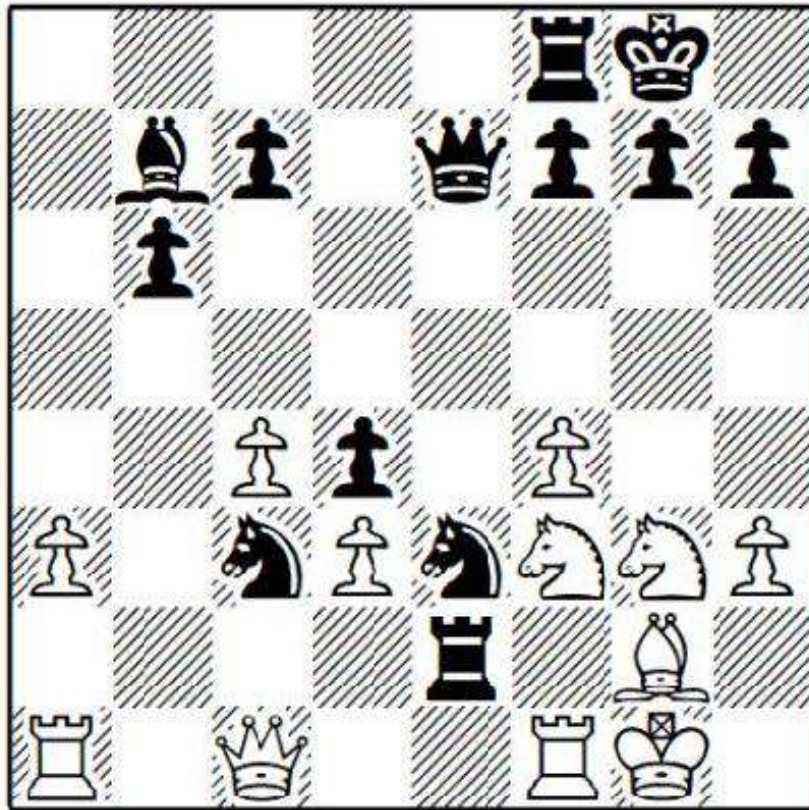
**25 ... Rxe2 26 Ng3 Nc3!**

Elementary, but pretty all the same.

**27 Nf3 Bb7**

The last minor piece enters the game, and it is well positioned to rain fire on the white kingside.

**28 h3 Ne3**



Black's knights make quite a picture here, no?

**29 Rf2 Rxf2 30 Kxf2 Qd6 0-1**

White's undoing can be traced back to several "anti-positional" decisions. The first was the queen sortie to b5, which only invited harassment from the black pieces. The real disaster started with 14 f4??, which irreparably ruined White's pawn structure and prematurely opened the position. To be honest, I cannot see any positive attribute of this pawn advance, and thereby it violates the core concept of this chapter: we should only play moves that we can explain. I am sure that Niemann had some rationale behind it at the time, but this move more or less cost him the game by itself.

*Game 6*

**R.J.Fischer-B.Spasky**

Reykjavik 1972

Like the Botvinnik-Capablanca game discussed in the previous chapter, this is one of the most famous games of all time, and the reader may have seen it before. However, this game truly deserves its status, and I hope that my insight here will prove valuable to the reader.

**1 c4**

In the later years of his career, Fischer deviated from his “best by test” 1 e4, usually choosing the English as his main alternative.

**1 ... e6 2 Nf3 d5 3 d4**

Despite his aversion to playing d4 on the first move, Fischer takes no offense from the Queen’s Gambit Declined.

**3 ... Nf6 4 Nc3 Be7 5 Bg5 0-0 6 e3 h6 7 Bh4 b6**

This move introduces the so-called “TMB” or Tartakower-Makagonov-Bondarevsky Defense. This is an esteemed variation and has remained a mainstay of high-level chess for decades.

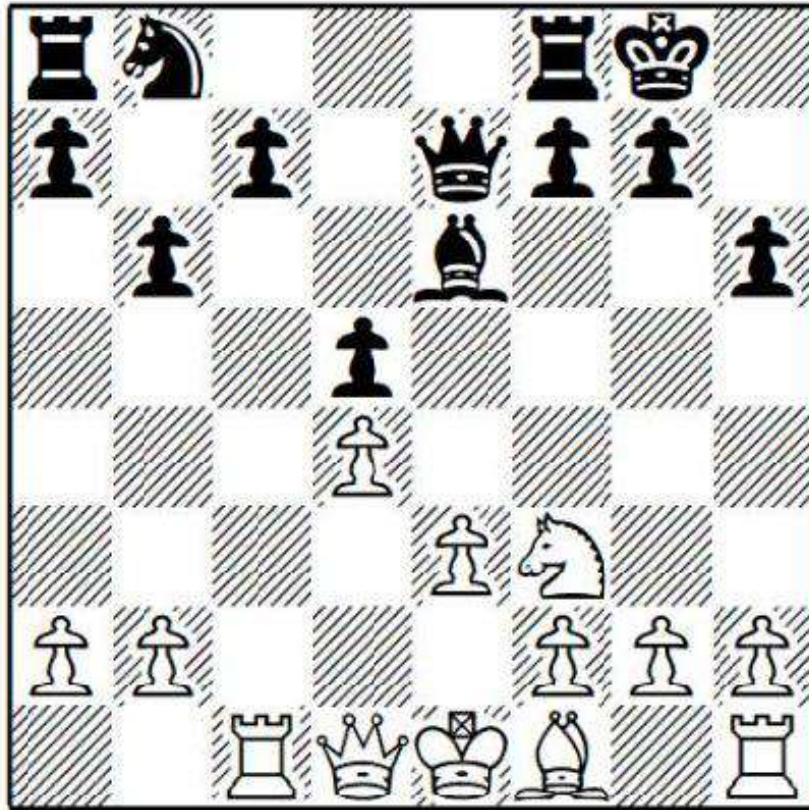
**8 cxd5**

The most common move. The central idea is that since Black has announced his intention to deploy his light-squared bishop on b7, ... exd5 would slightly hinder its influence.

**8 ... Nxd5**

Most popular, exchanging more pieces. Of course, 8 ... exd5 is not inherently poor either; it just leads to a different kind of game. Usually, Black follows with ... c5 shortly and reaches a reasonably solid position with hanging pawns.

**9 Bxe7 Qxe7 10 Nxd5 exd5 11 Rc1 Be6**



Although this position has occurred a thousand times before, I still think White's next move has some instructional value.

### **12 Qa4**

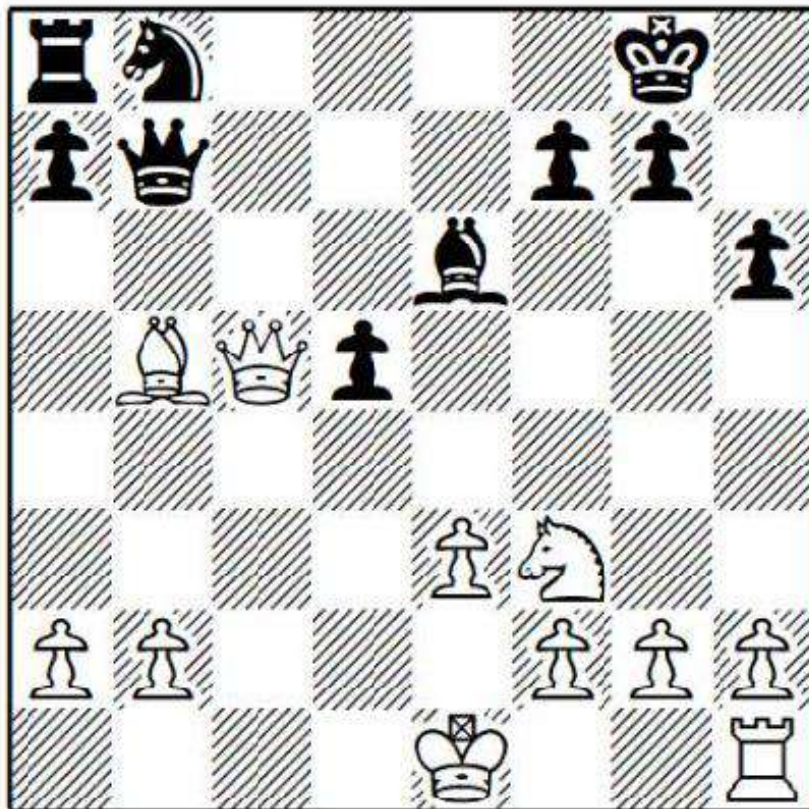
With the knowledge that Black aims to play ... c5, the white queen belongs on a3. 12 Bd3 looks logical but fails to pressure Black's plans: 12 ... c5 13 dxc5 bxc5 14 0-0 Nd7 and practice has demonstrated that Black is doing alright.

### **12 ... c5 13 Qa3 Rc8 14 Bb5?!**

This novelty is commonly attributed to Furman because of his 1970 victory over Geller, but my database indicates that its first deployment originated from Khasin in 1968. The idea is to discourage Black from supporting c5 with ... Nb8-d7. Sadly, it must receive a dubious marking here with the knowledge gleaned from subsequent developments. 14 Be2 is standard, with a balanced position.

### **14 ... a6?!**

This move is kind of redundant, as the bishop on b5 is not under any particular threat. Instead, 14 ... Nd7 permits White to execute his idea with 15 Bxd7 Bxd7 16 dxc5 bxc5 17 0-0 with Rfd1 coming and pressure on Black's queenside pawns. After losing to Furman, Geller improved with 14 ... Qb7!, which the engine considers leading to a slight edge for Black! After 15 dxc5 bxc5 16 Rxc5 Rxc5 17 Qxc5



17 ... Na6! numerous games have been played, starting with Timman-Geller 1973, with the consensus skewing toward Black. His pawn deficit will soon be well compensated for by the activation of some combination of his queen, rook, and knight.

**15 dxc5 bxc5**

15 ... Rxc5 16 0-0 leaves Black with an isolated d-pawn: 16 ... Qc7 17 Rxc5 Qxc5 18 Be2 and the endgame should be more pleasant for White.

**16 0-0 Ra7?**

Now the rook and queen defend each other, and Black also threatens 17 ... axb5, not to mention ... c5-c4. Yet, it is inadequate. Instead, Geller's idea 16 ... Qb7 is not as helpful as in the previous instance, as the b8-knight cannot feasibly escape the white bishop's vision. However, after 17 Ba4 Qb6 Black is doing fine, although somewhat passive. 16 ... Nc6 is possible, but the c5-pawn is a bit exposed following 17 Bxc6 Rxc6 18 Ne5 Rc7 19 Rfd1. 16 ... Qa7 is another way to escape the pins: 17 Be2 (17 Ba4? a5! allows the black knight to come out to a6) 17 ... Nd7 18 Qa5 and once again, Black is passive but doing okay. At this point, we can say that 14 Bb5 is likely not the most challenging way to attack Black's setup, but Spassky was underprepared for it. White is hard-pressed to do much to Black anyways in the modern day, so why not just play for positions you like?

### **17 Be2**

So far, we have followed Furman-Geller, Moscow 1970, as mentioned earlier.

### **17 ... Nd7**

Geller opted for 17 ... a5, which may well be superior. The stem game and both subsequent replications saw 18 Rc3, when Geller went for 18 ... Nd7. He was still doing fine, but after 19 Rfc1 Re8? 20 Bb5 the c-pawn was too weak, and he ended up losing.

### **18 Nd4!**

Fischer makes use of the tension between the queens to activate his knight.

### **18 ... Qf8?**

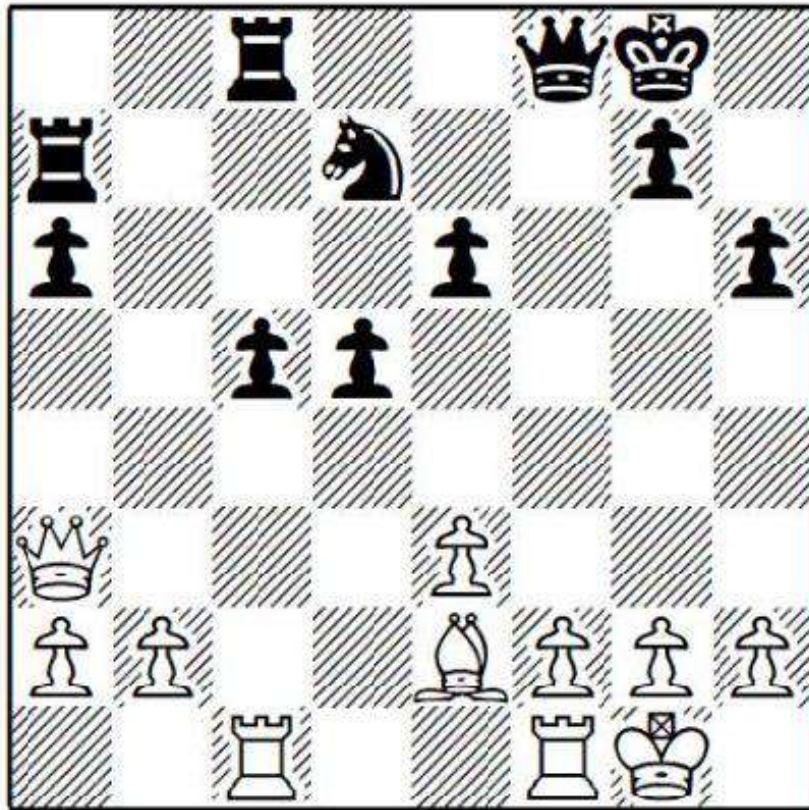
Anxious to get away from the pin, Spassky falls back on passive defense. However, capturing on e6 allows Black to fortify his hanging pawns. What to do?

18 ... Nf6! would essentially keep the balance: 19 Nb3 (19 Nxe6 is favored by *Stockfish*, but 19 ... fxe6 20 Rc2 c4 does not look particularly challenging for Black) 19 ... Rac7 and Black should be okay, although it looks a bit flimsy. 20 Bxa6? Ra8 shows that it is seldom good to pin oneself in such a manner, while 20 Qxa6? Ra7 21 Qb6 Rb7 22 Qa5 c4 cedes the b2-pawn and will transfer the initiative to Black.

### **19 Nxe6**

This move was played with a concrete idea in mind.

### **19 ... fxe6**



As mentioned before, this pawn structure is not inherently dangerous for Black. White must do something quickly before Black can play moves like ... Nf6, ... Qd6, ... Rc6, and ... Rac7.

**20 e4!**

Without this move, White's Nd4-Nxe6 idea would have no value. It is imperative to strike in the center to open up the light-squared bishop.

**20 ... d4?**

Opening the a2-g8 diagonal for the bishop plays into White's hands. Instead, 20 ... c4 was proposed by Tal after the game, and Kasparov determined that 21 Qh3 Rc6 was the best defense. However, chess engines have come a long way since then: 22 exd5 exd5 23 b3 and the position is significantly opened in White's favor. 20 ... dxe4 wins a pawn, but that is about the end of its redeeming qualities: after 21 Rc4 Nf6 22 g3 and Black has four pawn islands in four pawns. 20 ... a5!? is a computer suggestion I

cannot make much sense of: 21 Qh3 Qd6 and 22 b3 is just one example of a move that grants White a slight edge.

### **21 f4!**

Fischer notices Black relinquishing central control and takes the opportunity to seize kingside space. If we stop to consider a MAPS analysis, the difference in central pawn structure and prospects for the minor pieces (both features originating from Black's complete lack of light-squared control) allow us to conclude that White has a clear advantage.

### **21 ... Qe7**

A small mistake. 21 ... Kh8 was more accurate, though the situation remains highly troublesome.

### **22 e5**

Not the most accurate, but it is hard to blame Fischer for his lack of diligence when his position is so safe. 22 Qh3! is a bit stronger because Black's move order leaves him ill-equipped to hold e6. Black is hard-pressed to avoid defeat following Bc4 and e5 over the next few moves. 22 ... Nb6 prevents Bc4 but permits 23 f5!, and 23 ... e5?? 24 Qb3+ would drop a piece.

### **22 ... Rb8?!**

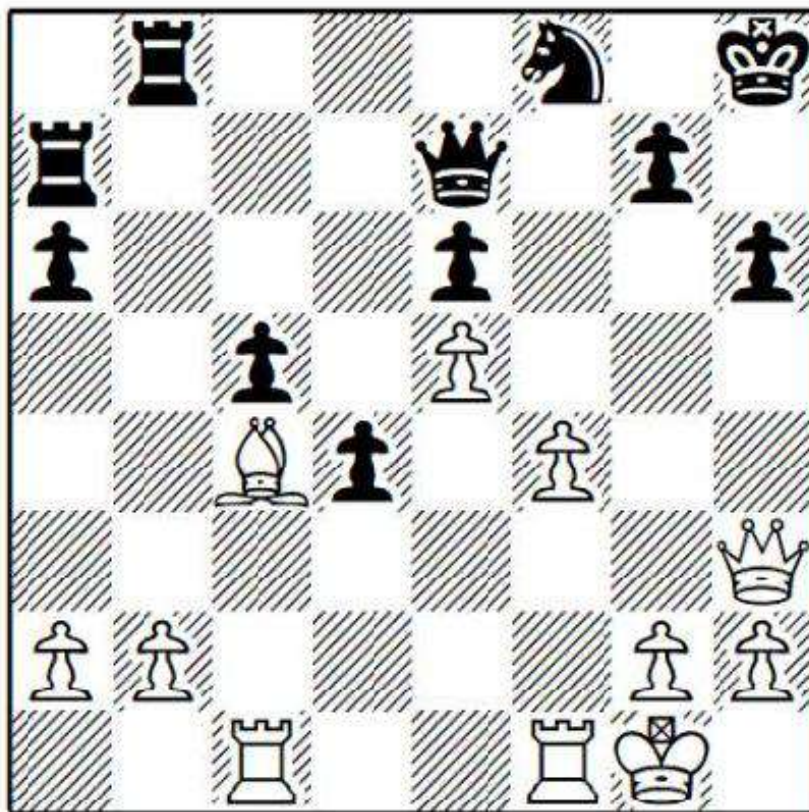
This move does little to dissuade White's intentions, and Black is pretty much completely lost from here on. The reason 22 Qh3 was more accurate is because here 22 ... Nb6 prevents the light-squared bishop from achieving its preferred post on c4. 23 Qd3! should still ensure White a nice position, with Qe4 and Bd3 likely to happen soon.

### **23 Bc4 Kh8**

23 ... Nb6? would be too late: 24 Qb3! wins the e-pawn.

### **24 Qh3 Nf8**

24 ... Rxb2 is perhaps preferable for practical games; it is not much better, but has the appearance of being more active. After 25 Bxe6 Rab7 Black can at least pretend to have some play, although 26 Bc4 followed by Qf5 hands White an easily winning advantage.



**25 b3!**

In the absence of a direct breakthrough, Fischer chooses to consolidate all of his pieces and pawns. This is generally good practice; when one has a very secure position with a discernable positional advantage, it is often best to deter all forms of tactical retribution preemptively. 25 f5 is technically possible but lets Black kick about further with 25 ... Qg5 26 fxe6 Ng6.

**25 ... a5 26 f5!**

With almost all of his pieces placed properly, Fischer now goes in.

**26 ... exf5**

26 ... Qg5 27 fxe6 Ng6 loses some of its effectiveness since ... Rxb2 is unavailable. After 28 Rce1 Black is not long for this world.

**27 Rxf5 Nh7**

27 ... Ng6 28 Qg3! guards everything. If 28 ... Qe8 29 Rcf1, Black will have to shed decisive levels of material soon.

**28 Rcf1**

28 Rf7?? Ng5 (one can never be too careful!) 29 Rxe7 Nxh3+ 30 gxh3 Rxe7 is, of course, below Fischer's pay grade but still represents an opportunity to throw the game away.

**28 ... Qd8**

If 28 ... Rf8?, then 29 Rxf8+ Nxf8 30 Qc8 conquers the back rank.

**29 Qg3 Re7 30 h4!**

Fischer continues accurately to deprive the black queen and knight of the g5-square. Not 30 Rf7? Rxf7 31 Rxf7 Qg5 and Black is not dead just yet.

**30 ... Rbb7 31 e6 Rbc7 32 Qe5 Qe8 33 a4**

Why not!? From here on out, Fischer plays with his food a bit. I think many players with Black here would have resigned some time ago. I will just point out that 33 Qe4 a4 34 Bd3 is one quick win. Several similar opportunities crop up over the next few moves, but it is inconsequential to explore them in much more detail; Black's position is hopeless, and Fischer is playing these quiet moves to illustrate that he can afford to make them.

**33 ... Qd8 34 R1f2 Qe8**

34 ... d3? 35 Rd2 is not too helpful.

**35 R2f3 Qd8 36 Bd3 Qe8**

36 ... Qg8 37 Rf7 leads to a death that resembles strangulation: 37 ... Rxf7 38 exf7 Rxf7 39 Bc4 is aesthetically quite gratifying.

**37 Qe4!**

Fischer finally sets up a battery.

**37 ... Nf6**

37 ... Rxe6 meets defeat in textbook fashion: 38 Rf8+! Nxf8 39 Rxf8+ Qxf8 40 Qh7 mate.

**38 Rxf6! gxf6 39 Rxf6 Kg8 40 Bc4 Kh8 41 Qf4 1-0**

Mate will follow soon. What a display from the 11th world champion!

*Game 7*

**J.Sheng-Y.Kim**

Middleton 2018

This game mainly revolves around building an advantage based on a few positional mistakes from the opponent. It is entirely possible to win without an extreme dynamic advantage.

**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4**

Although I have played the Italian as my principal weapon against 1 ... e5 for much of my career, I underwent a new study of it in 2018. Since then, I have had excellent results with it. I do not consider the opening to be super impressive, but I like most of the positions that arise from it.

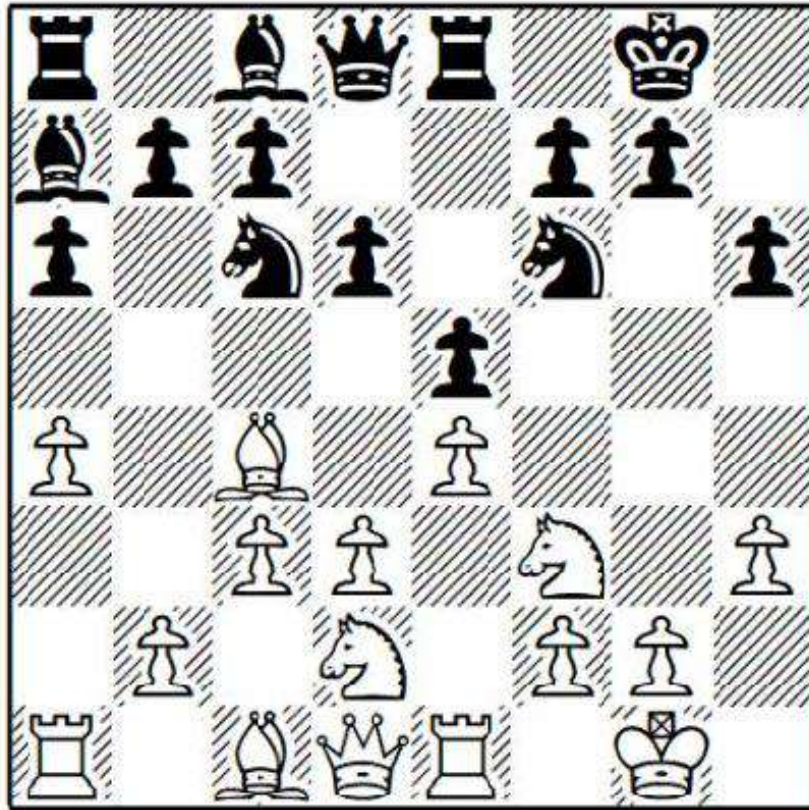
**3 ... Bc5 4 0-0 Nf6 5 d3 a6 6 c3 Ba7 7 a4**

This scheme is the more modern way to play the Italian. White will soon need to think of some way to guard the c4-bishop from a potential Black ... Na5. Historically, this was usually done by withdrawing the bishop to c2 via b3, but it is quite popular nowadays to leave the bishop on the more active a2-g8 diagonal with a4.

**7 ... d6 8 Re1 h6**

Nothing is wrong with 8 ... 0-0. I assume that Black feared 9 Bg5, which is a common enough way to play against Black's early castling. However, in this case, 9 ... h6 10 Bh4 g5 11 Bg3 Nh7! should lead to a Black advantage; White is not properly organized to deal with an upcoming advance of the h-pawn.

**9 Nbd2 0-0 10 h3 Re8**



All moves have been very standard so far. Black's latest move aims to support ... Be6 with his rook, but this is far from the only plan. 10 ... Be6 is also possible. Here we can see a virtue of the a4 system where White can play something like 11 Bxe6 fxe6 12 b4; this position is pretty debatable but is often regarded as pleasant for White because of Black's slight central congestion. 10 ... Ne7 is another prevalent idea, trying to transfer the knight to the solid g6-square: 11 Nf1 Ng6 12 Ng3 c6 13 Bb3 and this position is close to equal, though White may have some d4 ideas shortly.

**11 b4**

Taking more space on the queenside.

**11 ... Be6 12 Bxe6 Rxe6 13 Nb3**

This move is a bit mysterious. I think I intended to play something like b5 in the future, but I am unsure why this is such a big deal. However, it

does complicate Black's usual central break.

### **13 ... Ne7**

13 ... d5 is viable, but White is properly positioned to meet it: 14 Qc2 and it is not easy to determine how Black should proceed. 14 ... dxe4 15 dxe4 Nh5 occurs quite frequently, but after 16 Kh2 White is doing well.

### **14 Qc2 Ng6 15 c4?!**

I played this move to lock down on ... d5, and I thought that d4 would be inevitable on the next move. 15 d4 is safer. I was concerned about something like 15 ... Nh5, but White is solid after 16 Be3.

### **15 ... c6**

Preparing ... d5. However, it is a bit slow. 15 ... Nh5! would have forced some concessions. 16 Be3 (16 d4 is what I would prefer to play, but after 16 ... Nh4! Black suddenly has a lot more pieces on the kingside than White would like) 16 ... Rf6 and the threat of ... Rxf3 forces a retreat such as 17 Qd1, which is obviously undesirable. This position is about equal.

### **16 d4 Re8?!**

This move steps away from White's d5 push but gives too much. 16 ... d5! was necessary. 17 exd5 cxd5 18 dxe5 is the most apparent continuation, but after 18 ... dxc4 19 Qxc4 Rc8 20 Nc5 Bxc5 21 bxc5 Nd7 Black is doing fine. In the game, I believe I considered my bishop to be stronger here than it is. After 22 Be3 Ngxe5 23 Nxe5 Nxe5 24 Qb3 Rc7 Black does not have much to worry about.

### **17 dxe5**

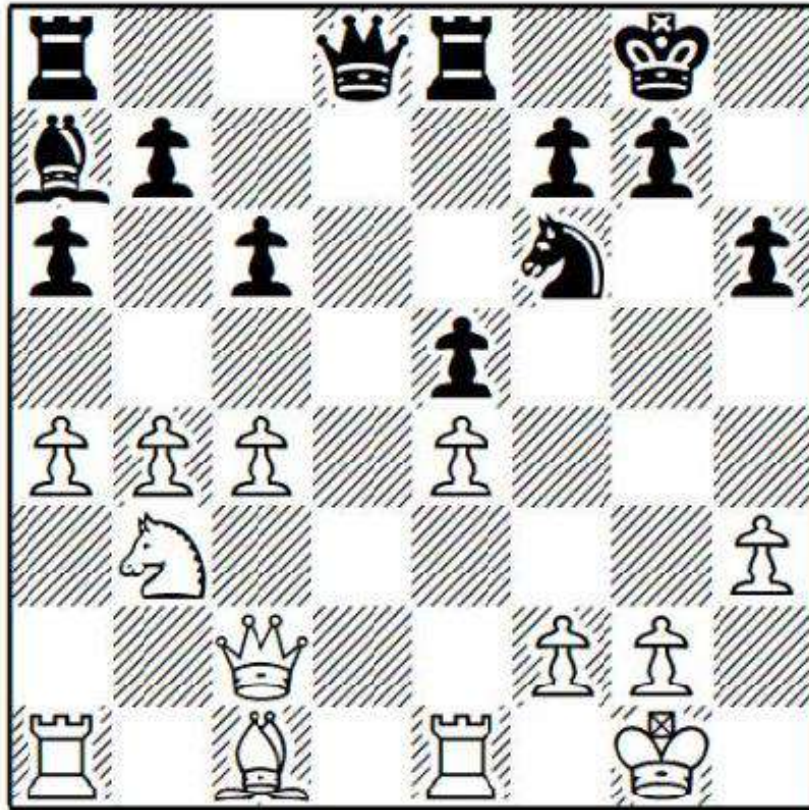
Now Black must concede central control or face exploitation of his queenside pawn structure.

### **17 ... Nxe5**

17 ... dxe5 is a worse version of the game.

### **18 Nxe5 dxe5**

Black chooses to maintain the central pawn. However, the loss of the d6-pawn allows White another opportunity, which will entomb the a7-bishop for the rest of the game. 18 ... Rxe5 19 Bf4 Re6 20 c5! would lead to a White advantage on account of the weakness of the d6-square: 20 ... dxc5 21 Nxc5 Bxc5 22 bxc5 and now the b7-pawn is exposed.



### 19 c5!

The black bishop's presence on the a7-g1 diagonal is sealed, and it is not easy to see where it can reroute. Additionally, any attempt to free it with ... b6 can either be ignored or result in a severely weakened black queenside after cxb6. The knight on f6 also suffers; it would love to come to d4, but it is far from reaching there. Meanwhile, no such impediments exist for White's minor pieces; the white knight is within close striking distance of the somewhat backward b-pawn through a5. Additionally, the a5-square also allows an inroad to c4, from where it exerts pressure over the key points b6, d6, and e5. Admittedly, the white bishop has fewer prospects, but it will do a fine job defending relevant squares (such as d4 and b6) from e3. White has a definite advantage.

### 19 ... Qe7?

Not the most efficient redeployment. 19 ... Bb8 was more to the point. Black should prioritize ... Bc7 as soon as possible, from where it defends

Black's dark-squared weaknesses: 20 Na5 Qc8 21 Nc4 Bc7 and while White is better after virtually any move here because of Black's futile minor pieces, Black's queenside structure is more solid than in the game.

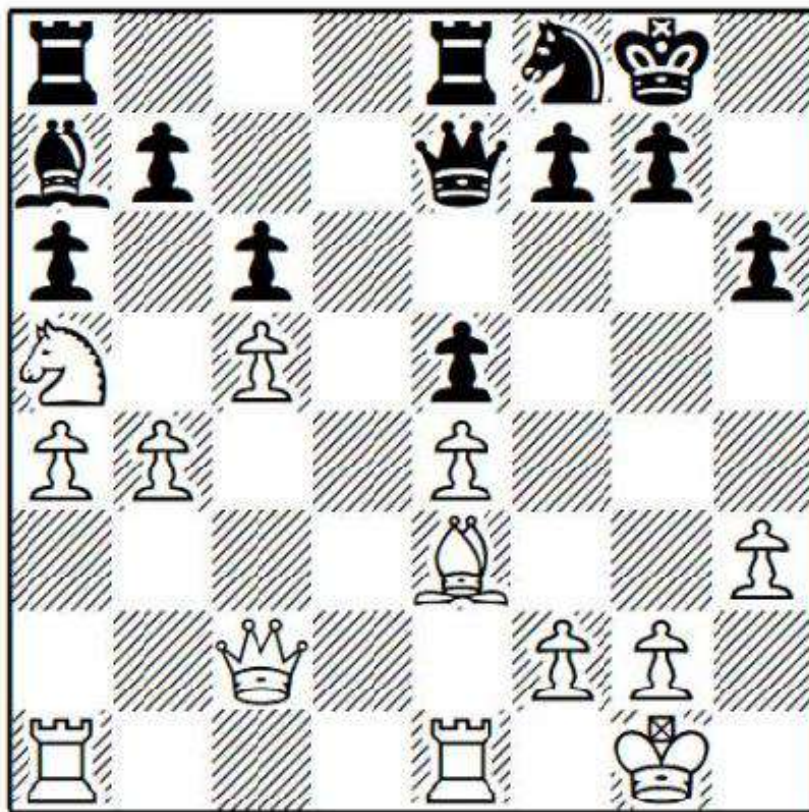
**20 Be3**

20 Na5 is also possible, but I did not see a big hurry, given that the b7-pawn's positioning ensures that ... Bb8-c7 is not feasible yet.

**20 ... Nd7**

Attempting to reroute the knight to e6 via f8, but this plan is a bit too ambitious. However, if 20 ... Bb8 21 Na5, because ... Bc7 would hang the b-pawn, Black is twisted into knots again.

**21 Na5 Nf8**



Most of White's pieces are placed about as well as they can be. Rad1 is optically pleasing but would allow Black to trade pieces with ... Rad8. The first move to consider is likely Nc4, but this move releases the b7-pawn and permits the black bishop back into the game through b8. That being said,

White must engage in an active plan before Black can coordinate his pieces with a sequence like ... Ne6 and ... Rad8.

**22 Nc4!**

Although the black bishop can escape from its prison, it is more important to pursue the b5-break.

**22 ... Bb8 23 Nb6 Ra7 24 Rab1**

Not the most obvious square for the rook, but it prepares the pawn break b5. This exposes the b7-pawn to further attack, which will force some concessions from Black.

Instead, 24 Rad1 is also possible and is rated more highly by the computer. However, it requires some concrete details that are not readily noticeable, and it is hard for me to recommend it when the alternative is straightforward and strong. After 24 ... Bc7 25 Rd2! (usually, it would be sinful to allow this minor piece exchange, but the computer soon reveals its idea) 25 ... Bxb6 26 cxb6 Raa8 27 Bc5! Qf6 28 Bxf8! the white rook's penetration to d7 will spell doom for Black, but to see this from the start is not easy, and it is much simpler to preserve White's static advantages.

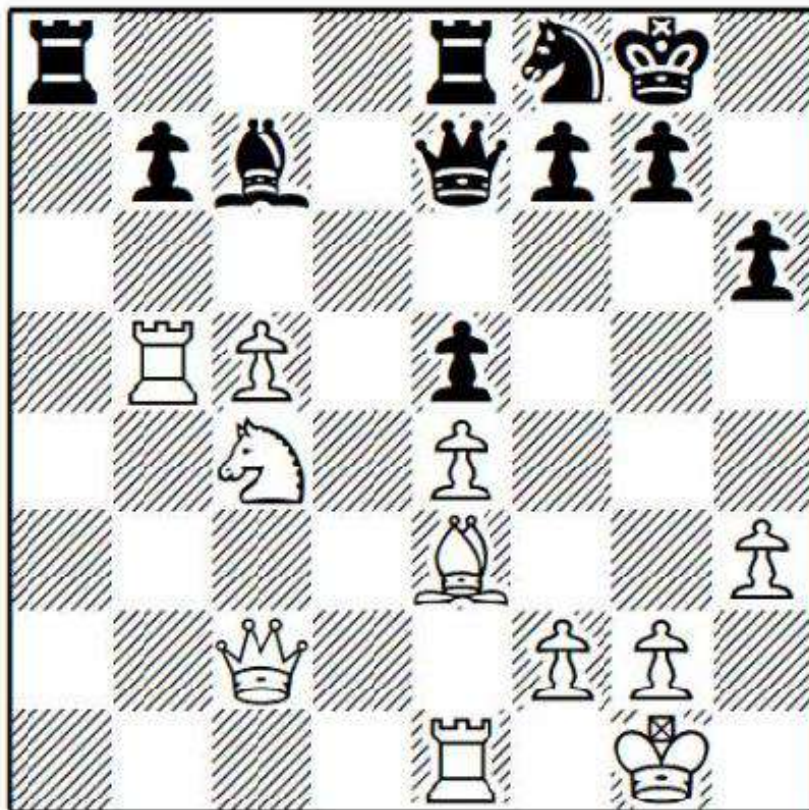
**24 ... Bc7 25 Nc4**

As mentioned before, the trade on b6 should be avoided when there is no urgent threat. 25 b5 axb5 26 axb5 does not immediately allow ... Bxb6 because of the weakness of the c6-pawn, but I feel that this opening of the position is premature: 26 ... Ra5 27 bxc6 bxc6 and White's advantage has diminished significantly. 25 Red1 is strong despite allowing Black to take on b6, with similar ideas to the previously explored line: 25 ... Bxb6 26 cxb6 Raa8 27 Bc5 Qf6 28 Bxf8 etc.

**25 ... Raa8**

The rook is useless on a7 and was in the line of the e3-bishop.

**26 b5 axb5 27 axb5 cxb5 28 Rxb5**



Despite pawn exchanges often overly simplifying the position, the weakness of the b7-pawn justifies White's play.

**28 ... Ne6 29 Qb2?!**

Minor improvements are sensible, but this move does little and misses some resources. For starters, it does not really attack e5. Note that 29 Rxb7? Nxc5 would spoil White's position. Although the black minor pieces are configured precariously, there is no direct way to take advantage of this, and the disappearance of the queenside pawns would minimize White's winning chances. 29 Qb3 may be best, and if 29 ... Nd4?! 30 Bxd4 exd4 31 e5, the white queen is better placed on b3 than b2.

**29 ... f6?!**

This move is unnecessary because e5 is not currently under direct attack. It receives its dubious marking primarily for weakening the light squares, not the existence of the unbelievable engine tries below that are not too realistic. It is technically the losing move, though it is hard to criticize it that

harshly. Instead, after 29 ... Nd4! 30 Bxd4 exd4 31 Qxd4 Rad8 Black somehow gets reasonable compensation for the pawn due to White's temporary back-rank weakness. 29 ... Ra6!? is a very enigmatic try. It is hard to figure out what to do next; if 30 Nxe5 then 30 ... Nxc5 and Black would equalize.

**30 Rc1**

With the rook pointing along the c-file, Black's indirect defense of b7 is neutralized, and he must undergo passive maneuvers.

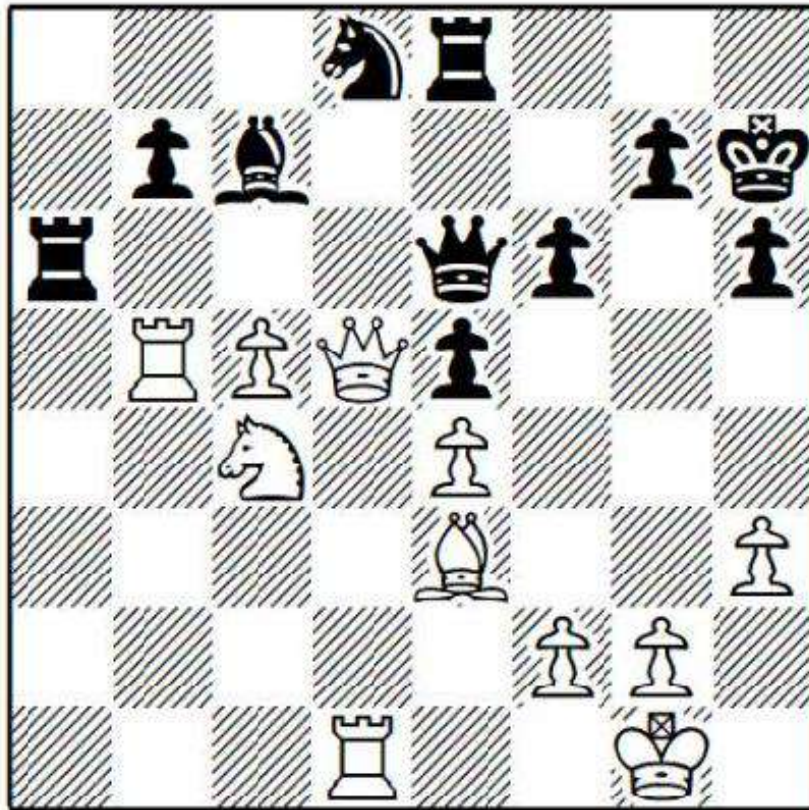
**30 ... Nd8 31 Qd2!**

This move has multiple purposes: it prepares an incursion along the d-file with Rd1, organizes an entry into the d5-square, and prepares a potential Nd6.

**31 ... Ra6 32 Qd5+ Kh7 33 Rd1**

The first two of the above points are promptly realized; Black cannot contest the d-file because of his lame knight on d8.

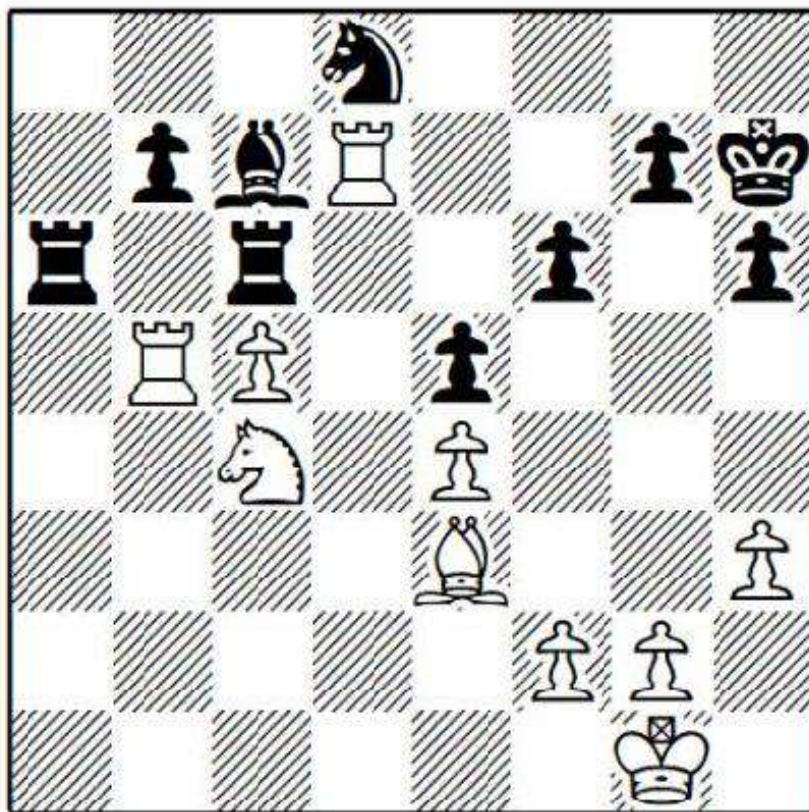
**33 ... Qe6**



**34 Qxe6!**

We typically are advised not to trade queens when we hold the initiative, but here it allows White a winning penetration.

**34 ... Rxe6 35 Rd7 Rec6**



### **36 Nb6!**

This move threatens Nd5, which would decisively demonstrate Black's inability to guard his bald head. c7, e7, b7, and d8 would all be critically weak. Black is practically forced to trade his bishop for the knight, which would be good on paper but fatally weakens d8 and, by extension, b7.

### **36 ... Bxb6**

After 36 ... Ne6 37 Nd5 Black has far too many holes to survive.

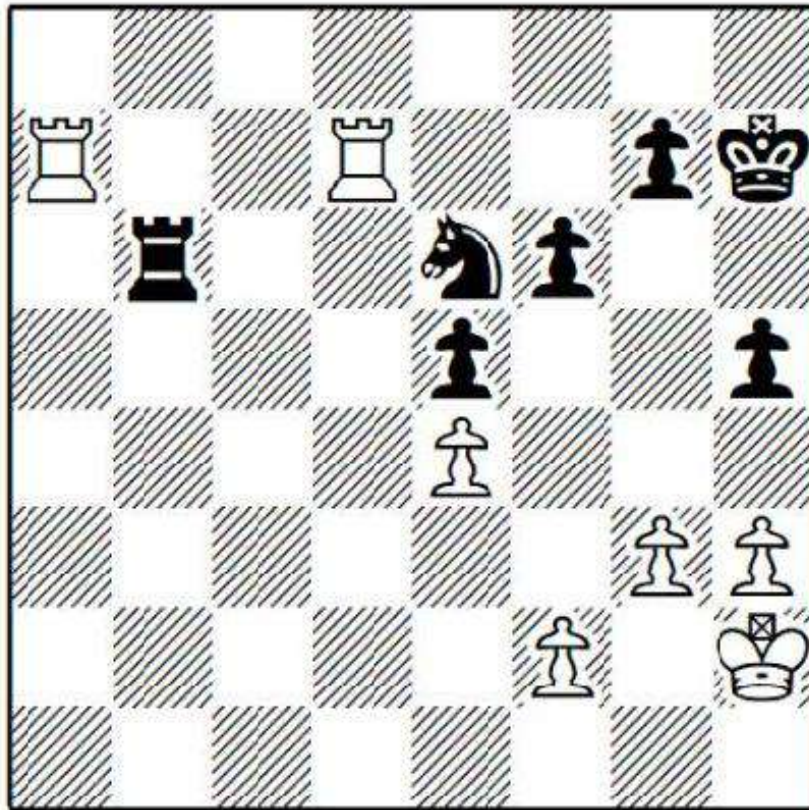
### **37 cxb6 Ra8 38 Rbd5 Ne6**

38 ... Rcc8 suggests itself, but this protection of the eighth rank has its own problems: 39 Re7! and to avoid the pawns from reaching the seventh, Black must part ways with the b7-pawn.

### **39 Rxb7**

The rest of the game should be quite trivial.

**39 ... Ra1+ 40 Kh2 Rb1 41 Rdd7 Rb4 42 Ra7 Rxb6 43 Bxb6 Rxb6 44 g3 h5**



**45 f4**

In theory, all chess games end with attacks, as checkmates should be preceded by attacks ...

**45 ... exf4 46 gxf4 Nxf4 47 Rxc7+ Kh6 48 Rh7+ Kg5 49 Rcg7+ 1-0**

Even in this game, which I would consider being very slow, there were many tactics. I believe that this should prove educative to the reader as, so far, we have treated tactics separately from the logical model we have demonstrated.

*Game 8*

**C.Yip-J.Sheng**

Kirkland 2020

This is the first game I played against my friend Carissa over the board. She is an exceptional player, but her opening repertoire was not up to par with

her rating at the time of this game, in my opinion. The night before, I spoiled an extremely promising position out of the opening against GM Gorovets, so I was looking for a victory here.

**1 e4 e5**

When this game was played, I believe Carissa frequently played the Scotch Gambit against 1 ... e5. I was not particularly afraid of this, so I found 1 ... e5 to be a good choice here.

**2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4**

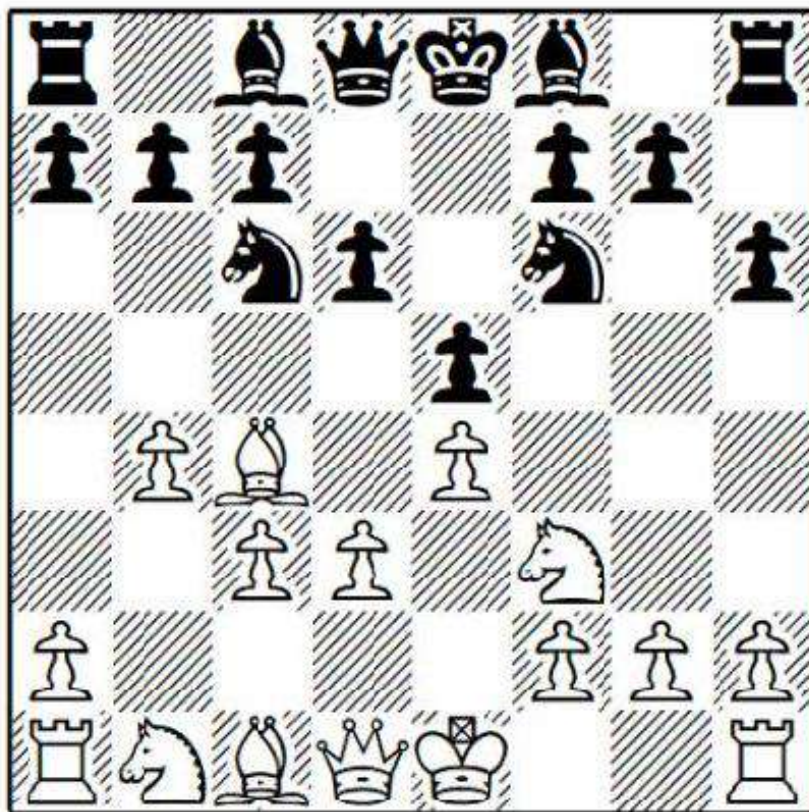
As far as I am aware, Carissa did not employ this move often, and I was a bit surprised by its appearance. Thankfully, as a connoisseur of the Italian Game, I am familiar with multiple ways to play against it.

**3 ... Nf6 4 d3 h6**

Not the most popular way to play against the Giuoco Piano, but I had recently been looking at some games with the early ... h6 and ... g5 idea. I do not consider it to be best, but it puts some pressure on White.

**5 c3 d6 6 b4!?**

This move is very rare, and I had never seen it before. It has since been employed by GM Andriasian, but I do not believe it is as strong as in other lines of the Italian. The black bishop that will soon arrive on g7 should be happy about the weakening of the long diagonal. After the more standard 6 0-0 I would have played 6 ... g5, a relatively new move that complicates White's central advance by introducing ... g4 ideas to displace the f3-knight.



### 6 ... g6

I was not as happy with 6 ... g5 here because White has not yet castled or hindered her f3-knight's retreat with Nbd2, which severely blunts the power of the ... g4 advance. Of course, this is not particularly disastrous, and I doubt that 6 ... g5 is much worse (if at all) than the game continuation. However, in the face of an unfamiliar move, I found it preferable to maintain more solidity. This is generally pretty good advice when one ends up in uncharted waters early on.

### 7 Qb3

From what I gather, this queen development is the true purpose of White's early b4 advance: a future ... Na5 is significantly complicated by White's queenside expansion.

### 7 ... Qe7

Black hardly has to twist himself into knots to avoid the threat to f7; the black bishop intends to come to g7 anyways, so any congestion induced

here is only temporary.

**8 Nbd2 Bg7 9 0-0 0-0 10 Re1**

Here we reach a junction, as Black has several possible plans.

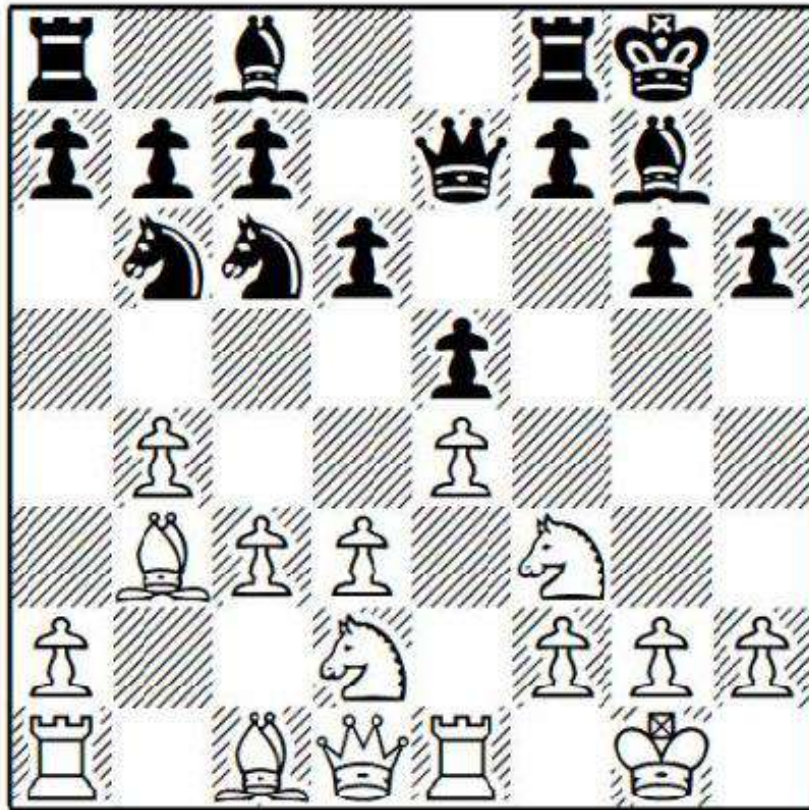
**10 ... Nd7**

Played to hassle the c4-bishop with ... Nb6, but not the most adventurous avenue for the knight. 10 ... Nh5 was my second favorite option and probably best; then 11 Nf1 looks natural to prevent an incursion on f4, but 11 ... Bg4 is mildly annoying for White. 10 ... a6 is also playable, with a “threat” of ... b5 to embarrass the white bishop. However, after 11 a4 I do not see how this inclusion is helpful for Black.

**11 Qd1**

Logical, to create a retreat path for the c4-bishop, but not forced. *Stockfish* suggests the peculiar 11 Bb2!? Nb6 12 d4 and just gives up the bishop pair. After 12 ... Nxc4 13 Nxc4 it counts on its superior piece activity to make up the difference, but I have difficulty believing that Black faces serious problems following 13 ... Bg4.

**11 ... Nb6 12 Bb3**



Black has positioned most of his pieces decently. How should he continue?

**12 ... a5!**

This move is vital to fight for queenside space. 12 ... Be6 is possible, but I am unsure that this exchange is favorable for Black. After 13 a4 Black faces a deficit in space; the knight on b6 is not very useful here.

**13 b5**

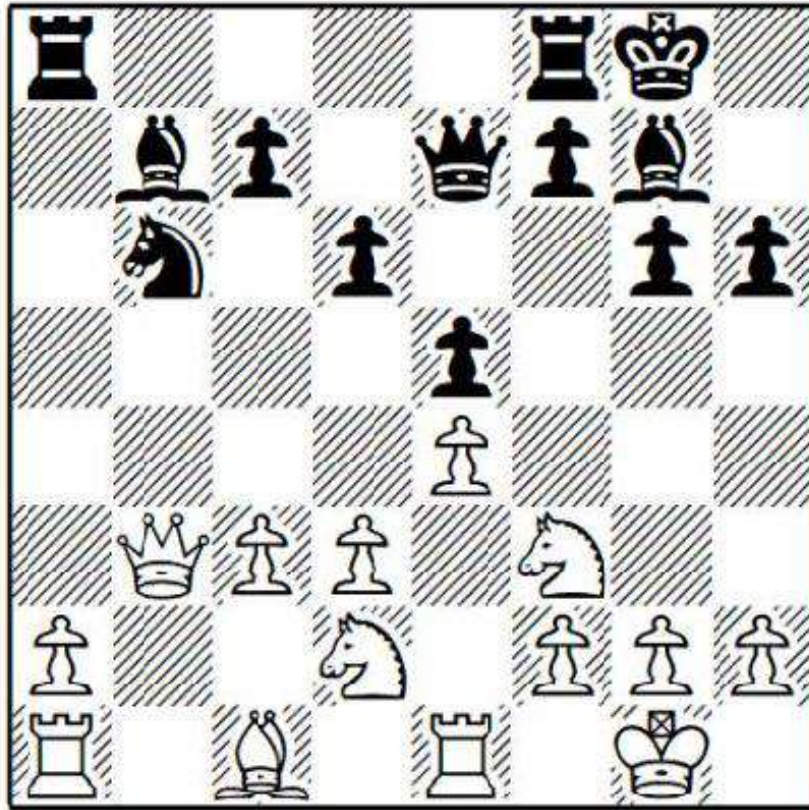
Naturally, Carissa elects to keep her queenside pawns together. Needless to say, 13 bxa5? Nxa5 14 Bc2 Be6 is not problematic for Black.

**13 ... a4!**

This move is crucial to the evaluation of 12 ... a5. Black should take the opportunity to prevent White from shoring up her queenside structure with her own a4 advance. It technically sacrifices a pawn, but I correctly judged that this was not concerning. After 13 ... Nd8 14 a4 White's queenside structure is essentially untouchable.

## 14 Bc2

Correctly spurning the offered pawn. Instead, 14 bxc6?! axb3 15 cxb7 Bxb7 16 Qxb3



leads to a situation where White wins a pawn but gives up the bishop pair and, with it, central control. The a-pawn is unlikely to be a concern for the foreseeable future, and Black can get counterplay along the b-file, among other tries. After 16 ... Bc6 17 d4 Rfb8 18 Qc2 Qd7 Black has clear compensation.

## 14 ... Nd8

Compared with 13 ... Nd8, the b5-pawn is now much less comfortable. White may well have to play c4 later to secure it, which would open the c5- and d4-squares for the black knight that is coming to e6. The a4-pawn is not particularly safe in itself, but White will have to undergo some gymnastics to collect it. The position is fairly balanced, and I was happy with the position I got against Carissa out of the opening.

### **15 Ba3**

I am uncertain why the bishop needs to go here. I think she intended d4 next, but Black has several paths around it. 15 Nf1 Ne6 16 Ne3 looked more sensible. *Stockfish* recommends 16 ... f5!?, which seems dangerous to me, but I typically don't find such positions objectionable.

### **15 ... Ne6 16 g3?!**

This move stops ... Nf4. However, Black's other pieces are not placed well enough for this to be relevant, and the weakening of the light squares is of greater importance. 16 Nf1 Nf4 17 Bc1 seems fine, although admitting one's errors in such a fashion is never fun.

### **16 ... Rd8?!**

Black had many different ways to exploit White's new kingside weaknesses, but this was not one of them. My idea was to prepare ... Qe8 so that I would not be facing the uncomfortable X-ray from a3-f8, but more direct measures were in order. I was a bit hesitant to play ... f7-f5 for much of the game in an attempt to preserve the integrity of my kingside, but after 16 ... f5 17 exf5 gxf5 Black is very comfortable. White's pieces are not well organized to punish Black's kingside aggression. 16 ... Qe8 17 Rb1 f5 is similar to 16 ... f5. 16 ... Ng5!? is also possible, aiming at the freshly weakened h3-square, while 17 Nxc5 hxc5 followed by ... g4 is quite promising.

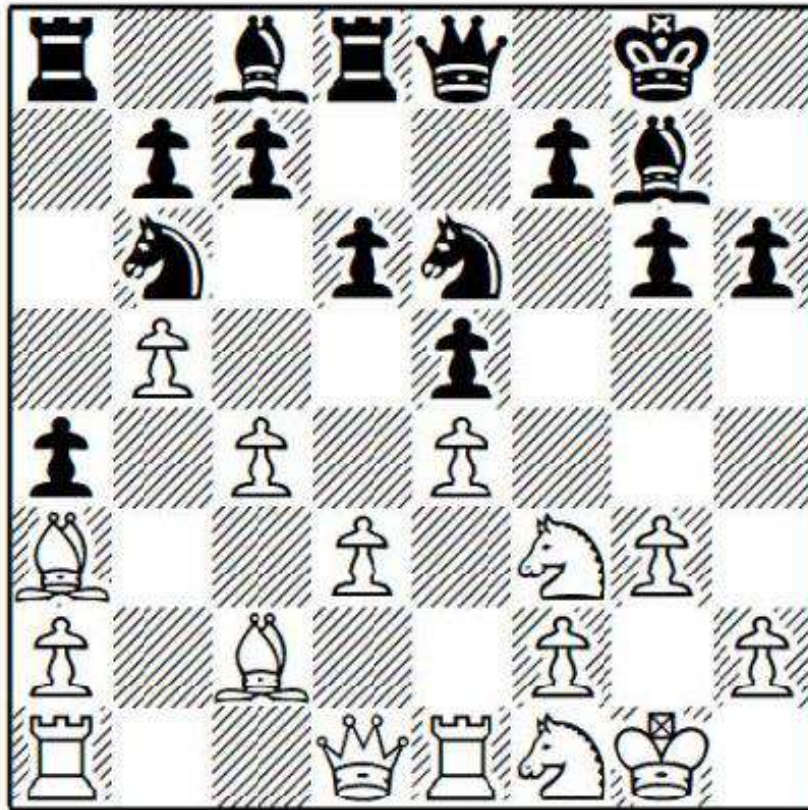
### **17 Nf1**

Simply trying to reach e3 but still neglects Black's previous ideas. 17 Qc1!? is a strange suggestion from the computer. The idea is to avoid the tension between the queen and black rook and meet 17 ... f5?! with 18 d4 to open the center, which is a bit awkward for Black to meet.

### **17 ... Qe8**

This move hits b5 and makes ... d5 possible by removing the queen from the a3-bishop's vision. 17 ... f5! 18 d4 f4 19 dxe5 Qf7! is the engine's proposal. The weakness on c3 means that Black will regain any lost material, but this is not easy to see in the game ...

### **18 c4**



This move holds both b5 and d5 but weakens the central dark squares. 18 Rb1 d5! would have been strong.

**18 ... f5!**

Better late than never!

**19 exf5**

It is crucial to leave the center open when the opposition is preparing a kingside attack. 19 Rc1? or a similar quiet move would allow 19 ... f4 and Black's advantage in kingside space begets a strong attack in the making. White's poor central control and lack of queenside play bring a disastrous sort of King's Indian to mind.

**19 ... gxf5 20 Rc1**

Carissa wisely removes her rook from the long diagonal to avoid any potential tricks with ... e4.

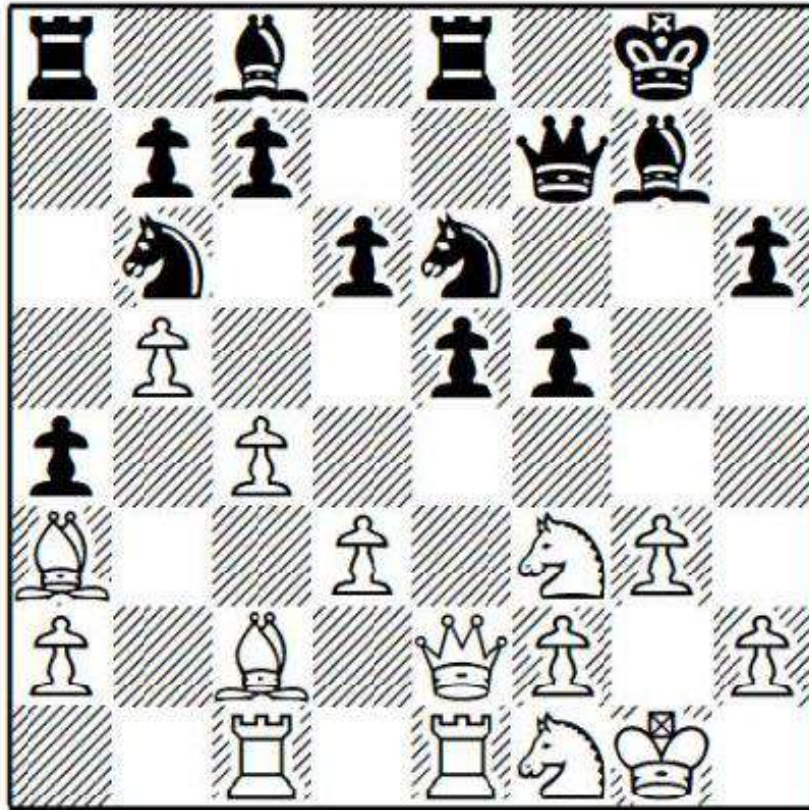
**20 ... Qf7**

In a similar vein, I found White's pressure along the e-file to be slightly annoying. Prophylaxis is a term in chess usually used to apply to defending against the opponent's threats, but it is even better to avoid the threats before they are made.

**21 Qe2**

And again! 21 c5? is premature: 21 ... dxc5 22 Nxe5 Bxe5 23 Rxe5 Nc4! wins material.

**21 ... Re8**



It is pretty clear that the rook has served its purpose on d8, so it returns to a more useful square. White was threatening c5, so shoring up the e5-pawn is wise. Perhaps on a more childish note, I found it humorous to follow the white queen like this. However, doing so does prevent White from playing Ne3.

**22 Bb4?**

Intending to bring the white dark-squared bishop back to civilization, but this was not a priority yet. It is more important to get the f1-knight into the game. 22 Ne3? Nd4 23 Qd1 (if 23 Nxd4?? exd4, the rook's true purpose on e8 is revealed!) 23 ... f4 is very unpleasant for White. 22 Bd1! is strongest, preparing Ne3 by defending f3 and thus weakening ... Nd4. Of course, this move is not easy to see, and it is hard to blame Carissa for not finding it. Then 22 ... Nd7 23 Ne3 f4 should be balanced, whereas 23 ... Nd4? 24 Qd2 is actually better for White! It is difficult for Black to defend all of his weak points after 24 ... Ne6 25 Nh4.

### **22 ... Nd7**

My b6-knight is no longer tied to the a4-pawn, so it is free to seek the more active c5-square. Despite the immobility of the c8-bishop and a8-rook, Black's superior pawn structure ensures an advantage and a relatively easy position to play.

### **23 Qd1**

Hitting a4 once again, but Black does not have to defend it immediately.

### **23 ... b6!**

As a consequence of White's earlier g3-induced weakening and poor bishop on c2, the a8-h1 diagonal is the perfect home for Black's light-squared bishop. 23 ... Ndc5? 24 Bxc5 Nxc5? 25 d4! would be disastrous. Black must still be careful about an opening of the position before he is properly developed.

### **24 Ne3**

White finally uses the knight in an attempt to shield her king from the bishop that is soon to arrive on b7. 24 Bxa4? e4! would win right away; White's position is too loose: 25 dxe4 (or 25 Nh4 Ne5! and the black pieces spring to life with a winning advantage) 25 ... fxe4 26 Rxe4 Rxa4! and the white queen is overloaded.

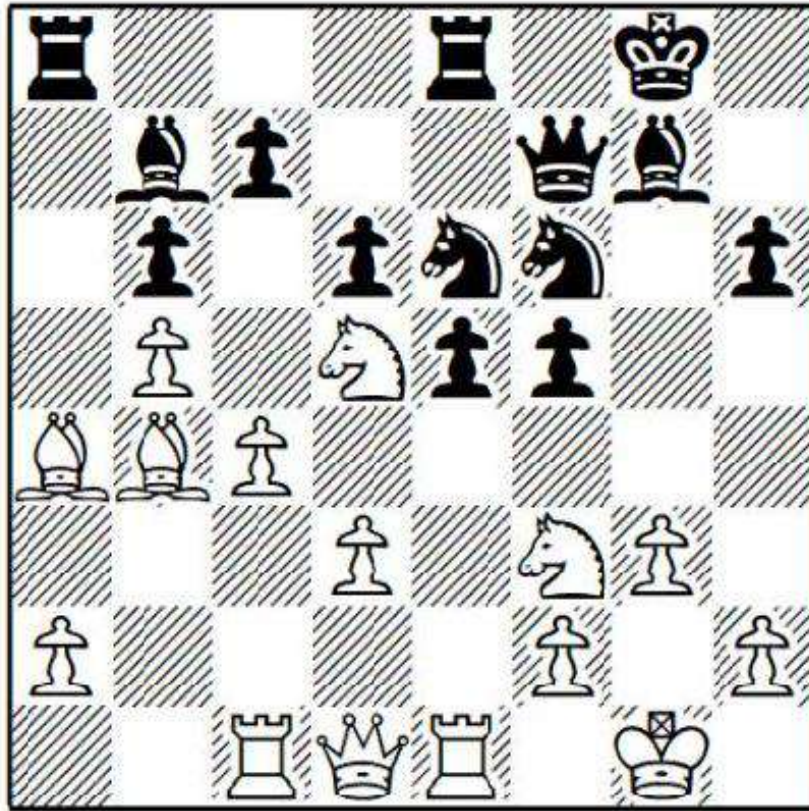
### **24 ... Bb7 25 Nd5**

25 Nh4 is technically better, but after 25 ... Nd4 26 Bc3 f4 I would have been very happy with my prospects. I do not think any of White's minor pieces are superior to their black counterparts.

### **25 ... Nf6!**

The knight on d5 is problematic, so we should trade it off. Not 25 ... Ndc5? 26 Bxc5 bxc5 27 Rb1! and the b6 idea gives White some counterplay. It is important not to allow White to trade off her hapless b4-bishop.

## 26 Bxa4



White's scattered pieces and the powerful bishop on b7 enable a strong positional sacrifice. 26 d4 is advised by *Stockfish*, but it is thoroughly unhelpful: 26 ... Bxd5 27 cxd5 Nxd5 28 Bd2 e4 and White is getting run over.

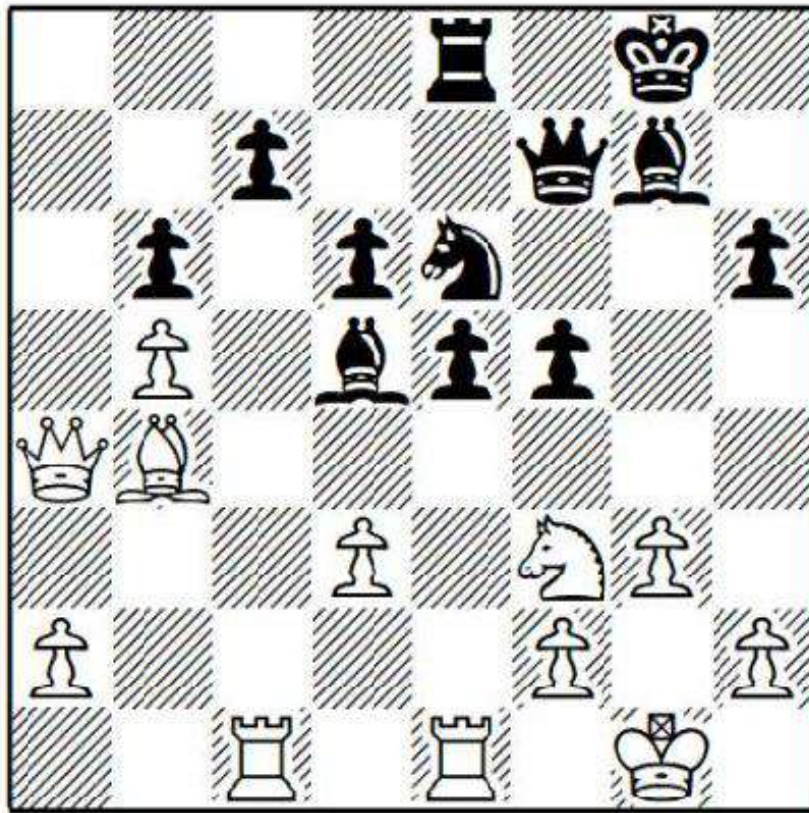
### 26 ... Rxa4!

It may seem strange to trade off the a8-rook for a bishop as useless as the one on a4, but the pieces coming off are immaterial: what matters is what stays on the board! 26 ... Nxd5 27 cxd5 Bxd5 was doubtlessly what White banked on, when 28 Bb3 returns the white light-squared bishop to the game, and the tension along the a2-g8 diagonal is somewhat annoying. Although Black is still clearly better, the game continuation is much more convincing.

### 27 Qxa4

27 Nxf6+ Bxf6 28 Qxa4 would drop the f3-knight thanks to White's earlier g2-g3 concession.

27 ... Nxd5 28 cxd5 Bxd5



Black has dominance over pawn structure, piece activity, and king safety. The d5-bishop, in particular, rules undisputed over the entire board. Coupled with Black's central control and an f4 advance coming soon, Black has a winning attack.

**29 Qd1 Rf8!**

There is no great hurry. 29 ... f4 30 Nd2 is somewhat inaccurate.

**30 Bc3**

Or 30 Nd2 Nf4! and the black pieces invade. It is important to stay flexible!

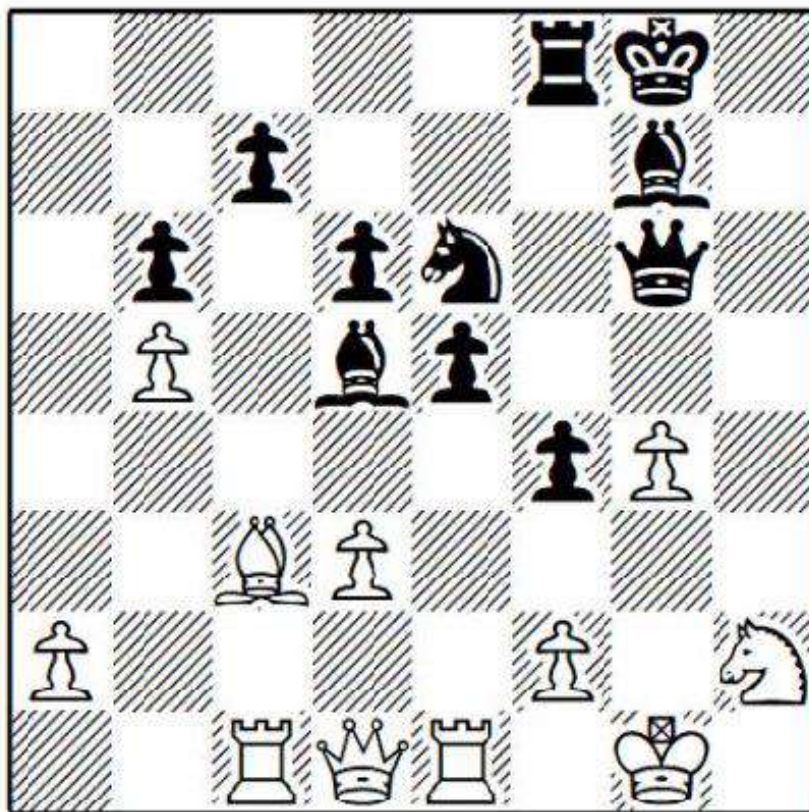
**30 ... f4**

Opening the f-file would be immediately decisive, so Carissa sensibly seals it:

**31 g4**

Of course, I am not content with this turn of events, and Black should strive to rip open the kingside.

**31 ... h5! 32 h3 hxg4 33 hxg4 Qg6 34 Nh2**



**34 ... f3!**

It is perhaps a bit awkward to block off my pride and joy on d5, but it is now time for the other pieces to enter the attack.

**35 Bd2**

Designed against ... Nf4, but now the g7-bishop sees an unexpected windfall:

**35 ... Bh6! 36 Bxh6 Qxh6 37 Re3 Rf7**

This rook's arrival on the h-file will end the game.

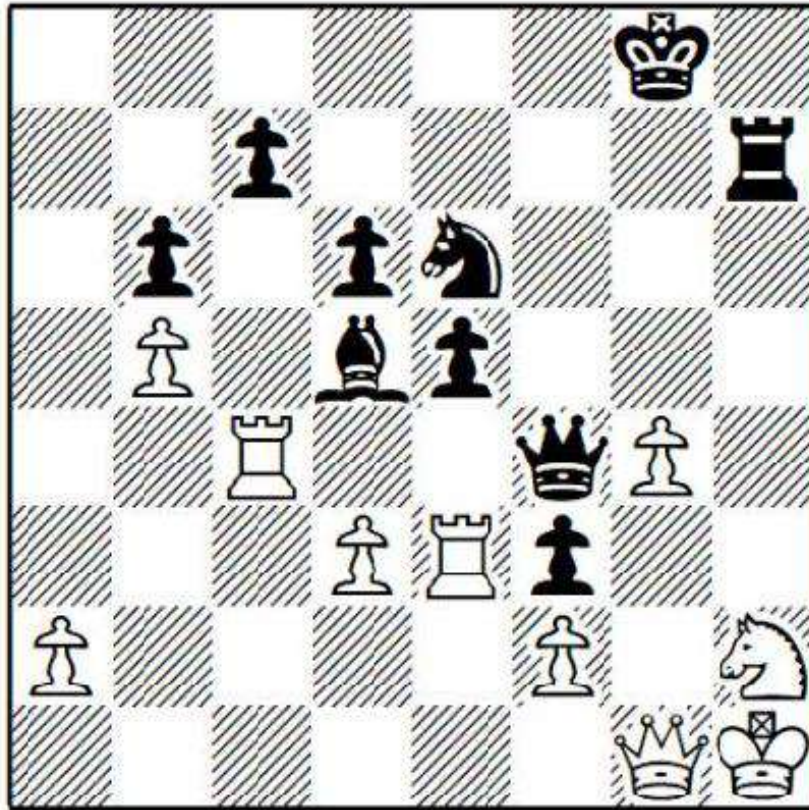
**38 Kh1**

38 Rxf3 Rh7! is unnecessary but quite elegant.

**38 ... Rh7 39 Qg1 Qf4**

Not the most precise, but precision can be dispensed with at this point ...

**40 Rc4**



**40 ... Qxe3! 0-1**

The queen gives her life in support of the d5-bishop – a fitting way to end the game.

The important things the reader should take away would be the liberal use of prophylaxis and the pawn structure utilization that I believe I did slightly better than my very strong opponent. Pawn structure, after all, is the field on which our pieces get to play.

*Game 9*

**M.Tal-Y.Rantanen**

Tallinn 1979

Mikhail Tal is most renowned for his handling of the attack, but as Fischer said: “tactics flow from a superior position.” The mating motif at the end of this game is now a staple for tactics books, but the entire game was played to a very high standard, and I believe it will be enlightening to the reader.

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5**

The Rossolimo Variation of the Sicilian Defense remains popular to this day. It is not notably better or worse than the more traditional Open Sicilian lines, but it bears a quieter character. Perhaps Tal found it prudent to avoid engaging in theoretical melees with his lower-rated opponent.

**3 ... e6**

This move is designed to avoid doubled c-pawns by preceding ... a6 with Nge7.

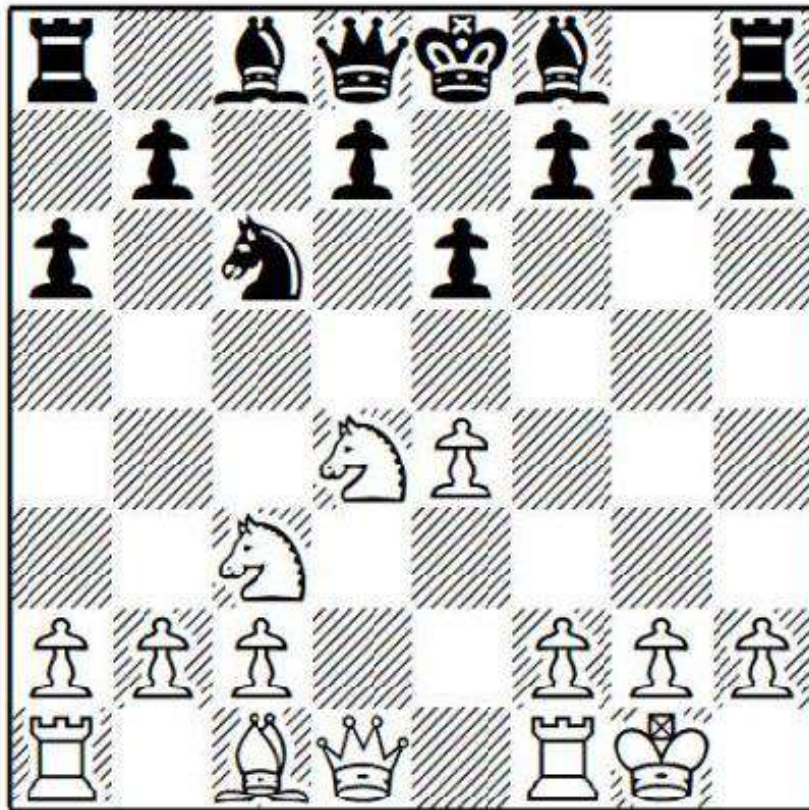
**4 0-0**

In light of the earlier comment, 4 Bxc6 is the more modern way to play; the bishop pair is given to damage Black’s pawn structure; 4 ... bxc6 5 d3 Ne7 6 Qe2 is the subject of many modern theoretical duels. I believe that the distinguished Moldovan trainer Viacheslav Chebanenko was the first to espouse this early bishop capture seriously, and Tal would not have been in time to see this new trend.

**4 ... Nge7 5 Nc3**

5 Re1 a6 6 Bf1 is more common nowadays to retain the possibility of constructing a pawn center with c3 and d4. Additionally, the superfluous knights on e7 and c6 slightly complicate Black’s development.

**5 ... a6 6 Bxc6 Nxc6 7 d4 cxd4 8 Nxd4**



We have essentially reached a sort of Open Sicilian where White has given up the bishop pair in exchange for some extra time. This should not be especially dangerous for Black, but if there were one player I would not want to give extra time, it would be Tal!

**8 ... d6?!**

Black accepts a compromise to his pawn structure without much reasoning. 8 ... Qc7 is evocative of the Taimanov Variation of the Sicilian. Then 9 Re1 is most popular (9 Nxc6 can now be met with 9 ... dxc6 and Black has a much sounder pawn structure than in the game), but the accurate 9 ... Bd6! dispels White's initiative.

**9 Re1 Bd7**

9 ... Be7 is more common, but 10 Nxc6 bxc6 11 Qg4 seems promising for White. 9 ... Qc7 no longer helps much: 10 Nxc6 Qxc6? would allow the typical 11 Nd5! and Black has severe issues with his development.

**10 Nxc6 bxc6**

10 ... Bxc6 11 Nd5 is similar in character to 9 ... Qc7; it is not in Black's best interest to trade his dark-squared bishop for the knight, so he runs into some struggles developing to his fullest potential. After 11 ... Be7 12 Nxe7 Qxe7 13 b3 the white bishop coming to a3 will exert uncomfortable pressure on the soft d6-pawn.

### **11 Qg4**

11 e5 d5 12 Qg4 is most prevalent, but after 12 ... h5! 13 Qg3 h4 14 Qg4 h3 Black has significant counterplay. 11 Re3!? looks like some computer-generated garbage, but it was first played by Horvath in 1996! The rook is handy on the third rank, especially on d3 or g3. It is already somewhat challenging for Black to continue; White won both games played, and the engine is quite happy with itself. 11 b3 is more standard-looking and also appears better for White.

### **11 ... e5 12 Qg3**

The queen eyes g7, and it is not easy for Black to develop.

### **12 ... f6**

This move is visually unappealing, but ... Kf7 will glue the kingside together sufficiently for the black bishop to depart its post on f8. Instead, 12 ... g6 looks normal to get the bishop to g7, but after 13 Rd1! Black has to make another concession to continue his development: 13 ... Be7 14 f4! is very troublesome for Black, as his center will fall apart. 12 ... Qf6 defends g7, but the queen's absence from the queenside weakens b6 considerably: 13 Na4! Rb8 14 Qd3! and Black will have to concede the a6-pawn.

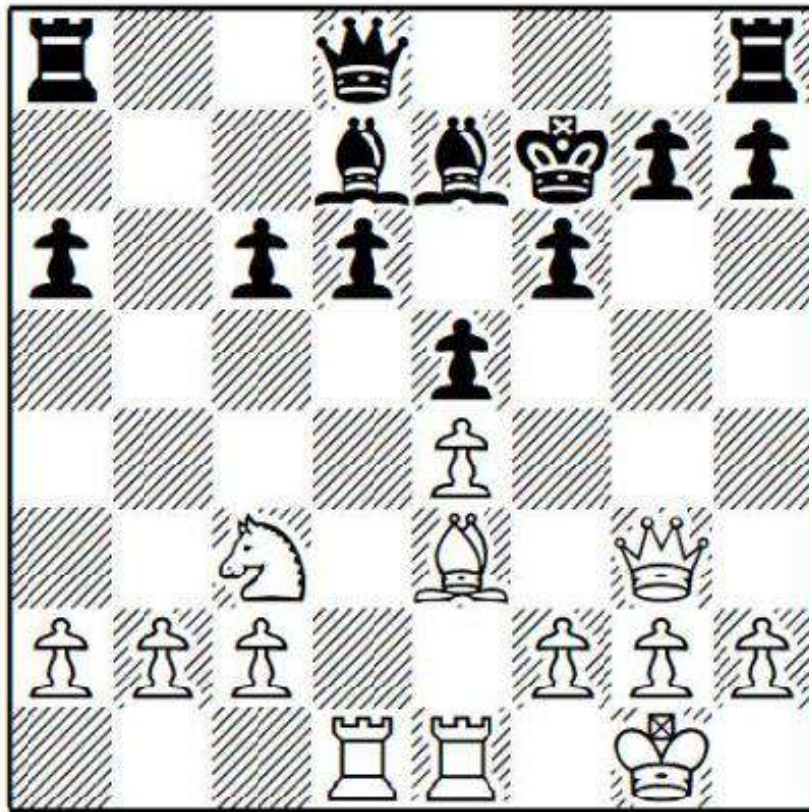
### **13 Be3**

It is unclear to me that this is the best location for the bishop. I find 13 b3 preferable, mostly for its increased flexibility. The bishop can come to b2 or a3, and this move also prepares Na4 in a situation where ... Qa5 will not be highly inconvenient.

### **13 ... Kf7 14 Rad1**

14 f4 is logical, but Tal cannot be criticized for developing his pieces.

### **14 ... Be7**



All of White's pieces have been developed to natural-looking squares. How should he continue? It is easy to note the superiority of our pieces, even just optically. However, Black is solid, and the primary deficiencies of his position we can target are the king on f7 and the slightly weak d6-pawn. This leads us to consider two main plans: one with a fast f4 advance and another option involving a further improvement of the c3-knight.

### **15 Na4!**

This move sets sights on the weak b6-square and also expedites an attack on d6. 15 f4 is possible but does not do much immediately: 15 ... Rf8 and Black will "castle by hand" in short order. 15 b3 is similar to the game but creates no direct threat, so Black can play more proactively with something like 15 ... h5! 16 Na4 h4 17 Qf3 h3, when the situation is extremely unclear.

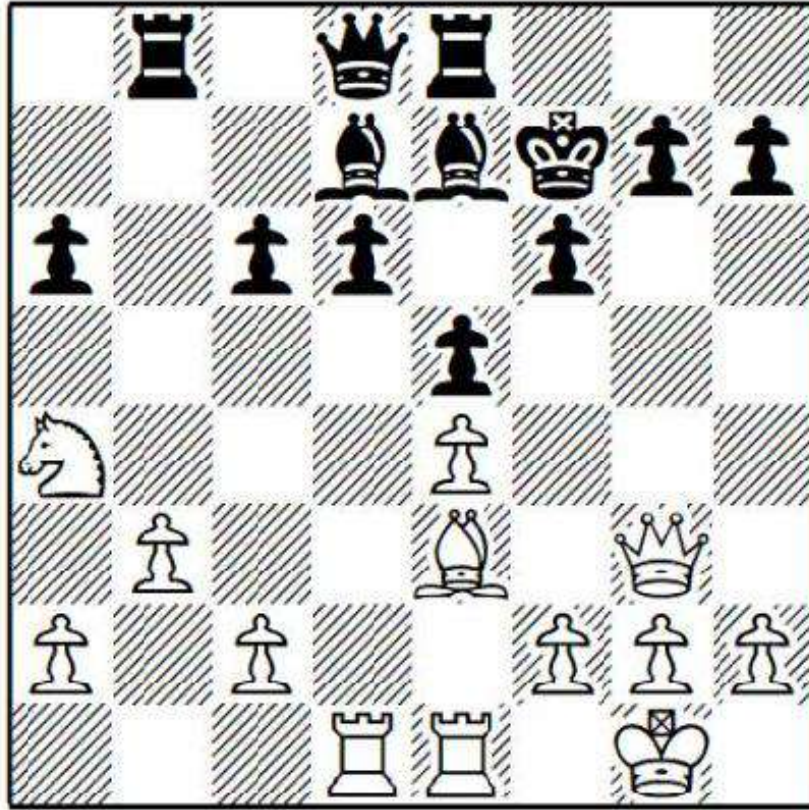
### **15 ... Rb8**

15 ... h5 16 f4 h4 17 Qf2 is not a problem for White. It is clear that Na4 is a more helpful move than b3.

## 16 b3

It is useful to guard the b-pawn against the gaze of the b8-rook.

## 16 ... Re8?!



This move is very natural, which makes it hard to criticize. Rantanen likely failed to realize how bad his situation was, and it was no longer sufficient to continue with slow play. On the other hand, we now have a critical moment for White. As mentioned before, Black has a slight weakness on d6. It is not easy to attack this pawn with pieces; if we do something like Bc1-a3 and double rooks on the d-file, Black will have adequate time to respond, at least with something like ... Qc7, ... Be6, ... Rbd8, and be relatively okay. Instead, it is best to bring a new attacker into the fray:

## 17 c4!

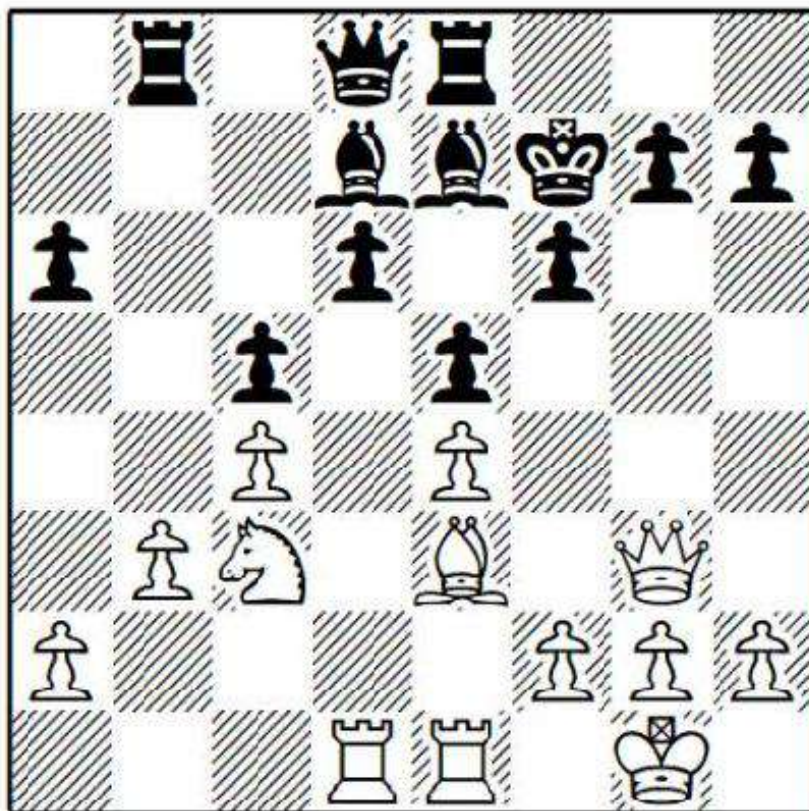
The threat is c5, which would attack d6. Usually, we do not consider pawns as viable attackers of opposing weak pawns because they can be

captured and rid the opponent of said weakness. However, meeting c5 with ... dxc5 would result in an isolated pawn on c6, which (unlike its compatriot on a6) resides on a half-open file and is a prime subject of attack for a white rook coming to c1. Black can prevent c5 directly, but this is not without its own problems ...

**17 ... c5**

17 ... Qa5! is an interesting try, after which White should switch directions with 18 f4! and Black's position is highly unattractive. 18 c5? would allow 18 ... d5! and the a4-knight's poor placement is telling.

**18 Nc3**



Black has prevented the c5 advance, but at what cost? Pawns cannot go backward, and the weakness of d5 is irreversible. Black can theoretically exchange a knight arriving here with his light-squared bishop, but this trade would leave Black with a hideous dark-squared bishop that is much closer in nature to a pawn. Even just visually, White has a serious advantage.

**18 ... Bf8 19 f4!**

There is no hurry to rush with 19 Nd5 as it does not threaten anything. Here Black has time to either trade off the knight with ... Be6 or, more pressingly, use the a4-square's newfound weakening to undermine White's pawn structure with 19 ... a5!, when Black's weak a-pawn will likely be exchanged soon.

**19 ... Kg8 20 Rf1**

Not a bad move at all; the f-file will soon come undone, so it is sensible to anticipate that by occupying it with a rook. Note the position's transformation over the last five moves! However, apparently even better was to play for the d-file with 20 Rd3!?, when Black is paralyzed. 20 ... Rb7 21 Red1 Kh8 22 fxe5 fxe5 23 Bg5 Qc8 24 Rf1 is one sample line, with a huge superiority.

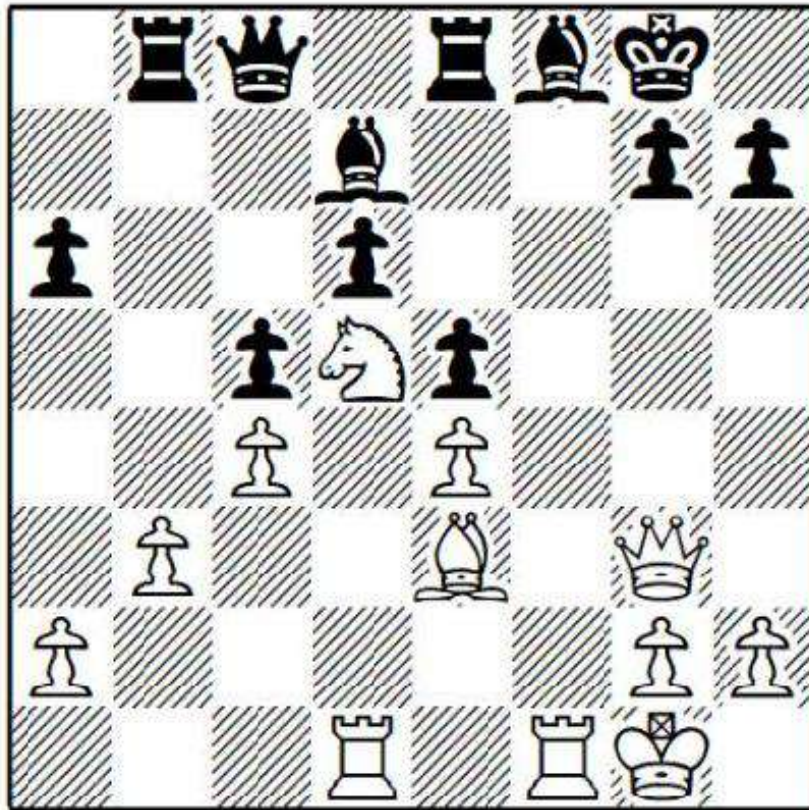
**20 ... Qc8?**

This move mostly hurts Black; now he is lost. 20 ... Kh8 staves off any quick invasions and shores up the f6-square by leaving the white queen's watchful eye, though the position remains borderline unplayable. Of course, White can revert to d-file play with Rd3, but it is always unpleasant to admit one's errors in such a fashion, and I am unsure what Tal would have actually played.

**21 fxe5!**

Unleashing the f1-rook. 21 f5! was another excellent way to play; Black is ill-equipped to defend against Rf3 and Qh4. 21 ... Qb7 22 Rf3 Bc6 23 Qh4 Rec8 24 Rh3 h6 25 Rg3 is a sample continuation; Black is waiting to be checkmated.

**21 ... fxe5 22 Nd5**



Now is the correct time to introduce the knight; the immediate threat is Nf6+.

**22 ... Kh8**

22 ... Bg4 is perhaps a tad more accurate but still fails to address the core issues behind Black's situation. After 23 Rd2 Kh8 24 Rdf2 Black is not long for this world.

**23 Rf7!**

Rooks on the seventh are powerful offensive tools.

**23 ... Bg4**

23 ... Be6 24 Rc7 Qd8 25 Bg5 highlights Black's pathetic lack of space.

**24 Nf6?!**

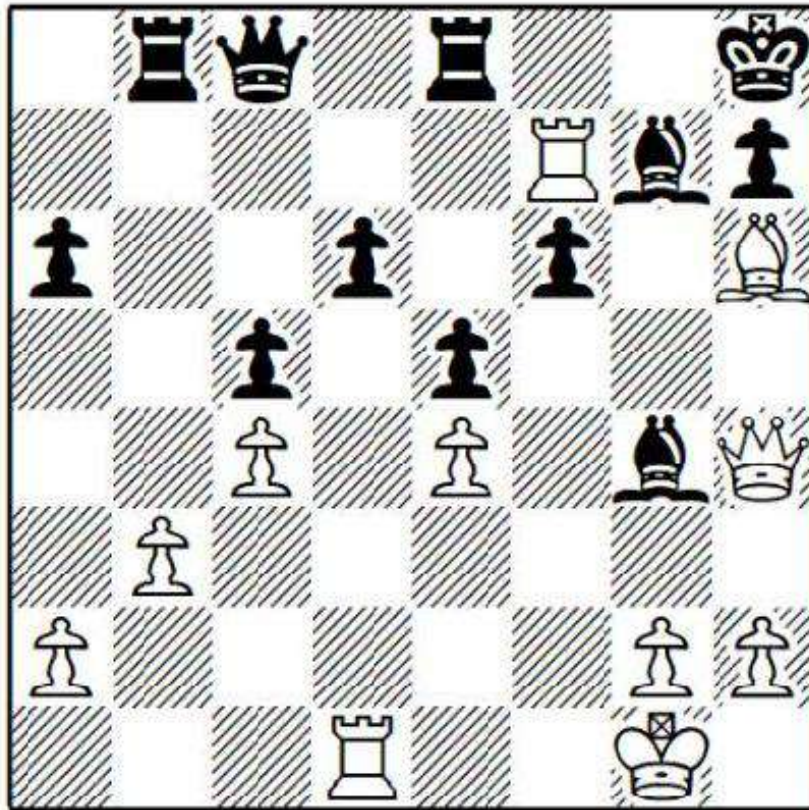
This move significantly complicates the game without much reason but leads to one of the most aesthetically pleasing finishes in chess history (at

least in my opinion). All the same, if any player were to consider artistic value over playing a “perfect game”, it would have been the Magician from Riga! 24 Qh4! would have been a stronger implementation of the same concept: 24 ... Qe6 25 Rdf1 Qg6 26 Nc7 Be6 (if 26 ... Rec8 27 h3!, this bishop’s lack of squares is almost as extreme as that of its brethren: 27 ... Bh5 28 Nxa6 Ra8 29 Nc7 Rab8 30 R7f5! and the game is over) 27 Nxe6 Qxe6 28 R1f6! (here, exchanging the rooks for the queen is good because of the passivity of Black’s remaining pieces) 28 ... Qxf6 (28 ... Qc8 29 Qh5 is merely temporary respite; Black will soon lose) 29 Rxf6 gxf6 30 Qxf6+ Kg8 31 Qg5+ Kh8 32 Qf5 and the endgame is winning; those who do not feel similarly should ask the f8-bishop what it thinks of the position!

**24 ... gxf6**

24 ... Bxd1 allows the white queen to enter the part: 25 Qh4! h5 (or 25 ... h6 26 Qxh6+ gxh6 27 Rh7 – it is always nice to get this checkmate in the middlegame!) 26 Qg5 and the white queen will inevitably reach h7, either through g6 or h6.

**25 Qh4 Bg7 26 Bh6!**

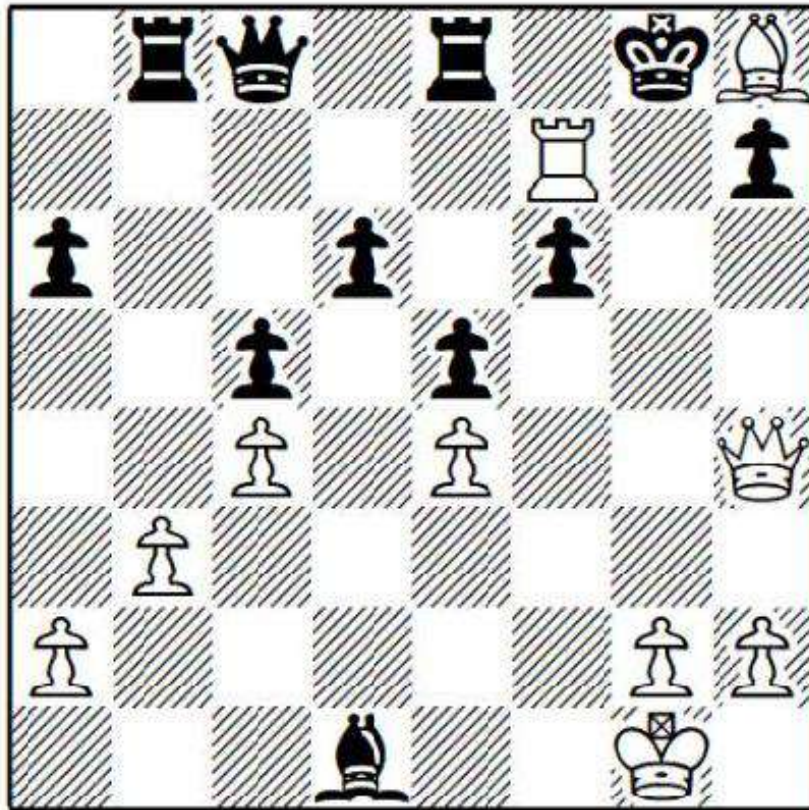


It seems appropriate that this dark-squared bishop, which has caused Black so much grief, is to be exchanged off to facilitate the checkmate!

**26 ... Bxd1?**

Tantamount to resignation. Perhaps it is a defeatist attitude, but this way Rantanen's name reached the history books! 26 ... Qe6 is more resilient, though not much more so: 27 Bxg7+ Kg8 28 Rxf6 Bxd1 29 Rxe6 Rxe6 and White should eventually win.

**27 Bxg7+ Kg8 28 Bh8!!**



A picture says a thousand words!

28 ... Kxf7 29 Qxf6+ Kg8 30 Qg7 mate

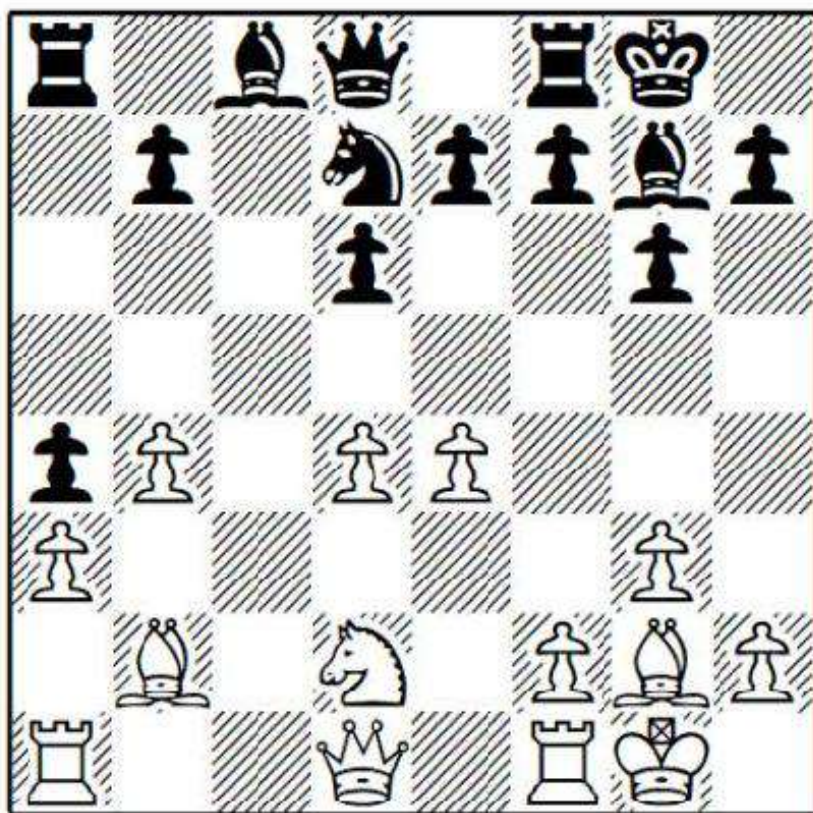
**Exercises**

The following exercises will test your knowledge of the concepts discussed in this chapter.

**61) B.Badea-M.Manolache**

Bucharest 2019

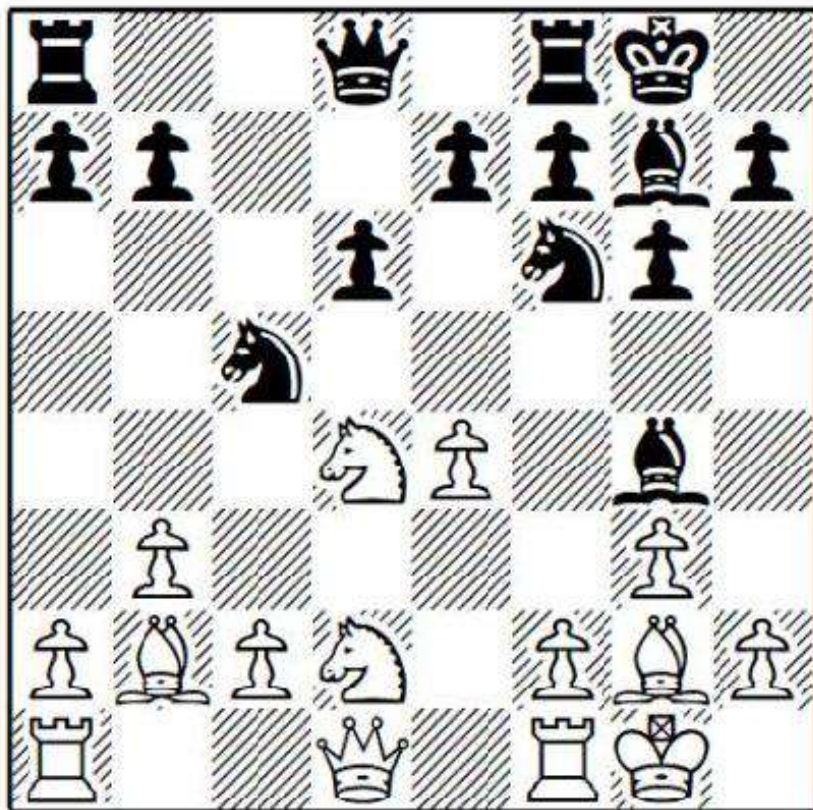
*Black to play*



**Solution**

62) J.Yu-G.Guseinov  
chess.com 2019

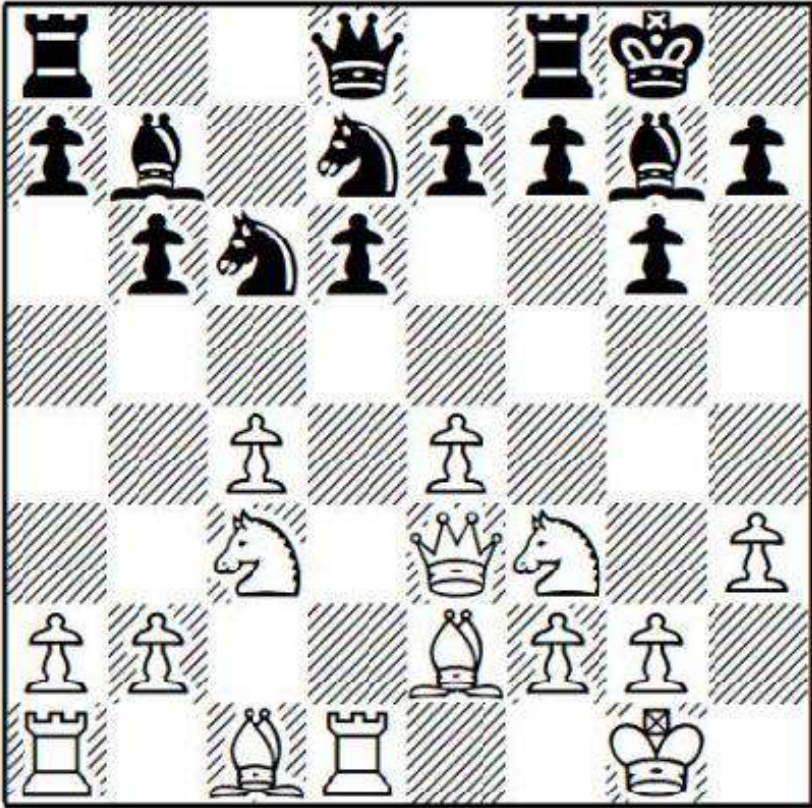
*White to play*



**Solution**

63) A.Pichot-N.Delgado Ramirez  
chess.com 2020

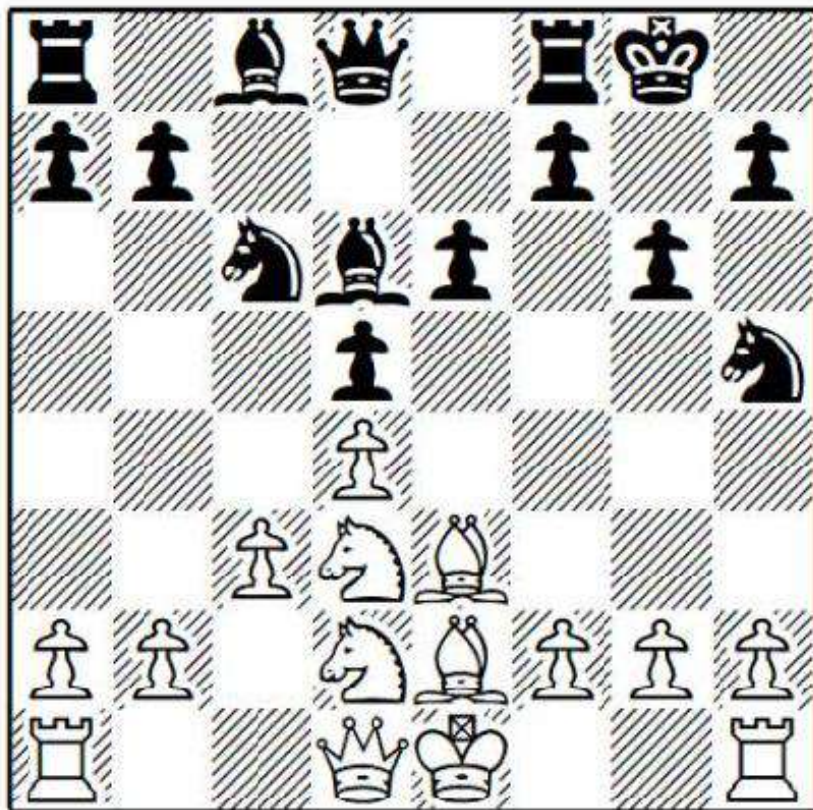
White to play



Solution

64) A.Kaliksteyn-J.Colas  
New York 2020

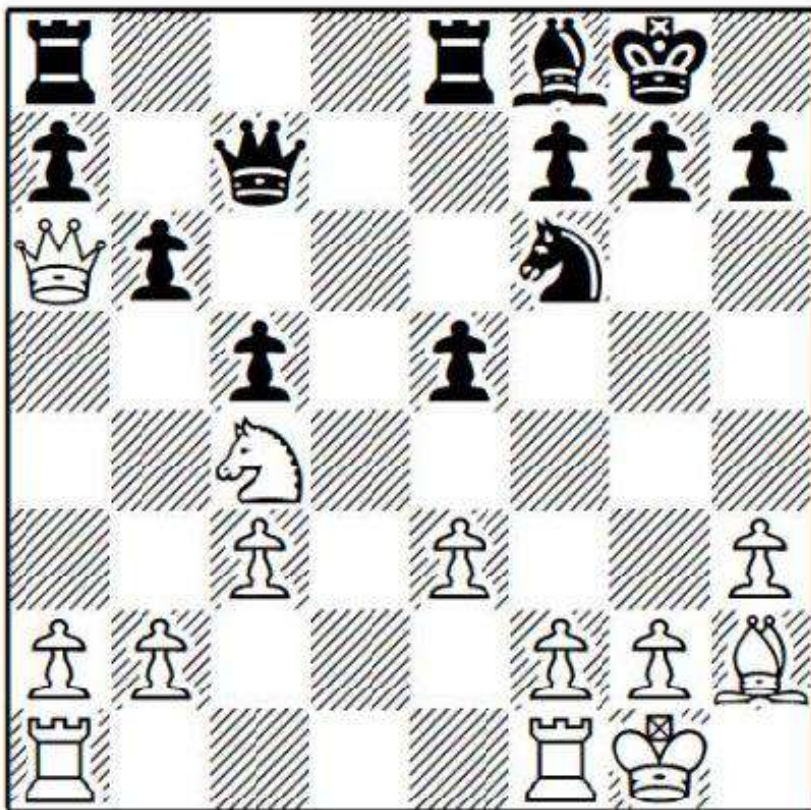
*Black to play*



Solution

65) D.Divya-M.Karthikeyan  
Gibraltar 2020

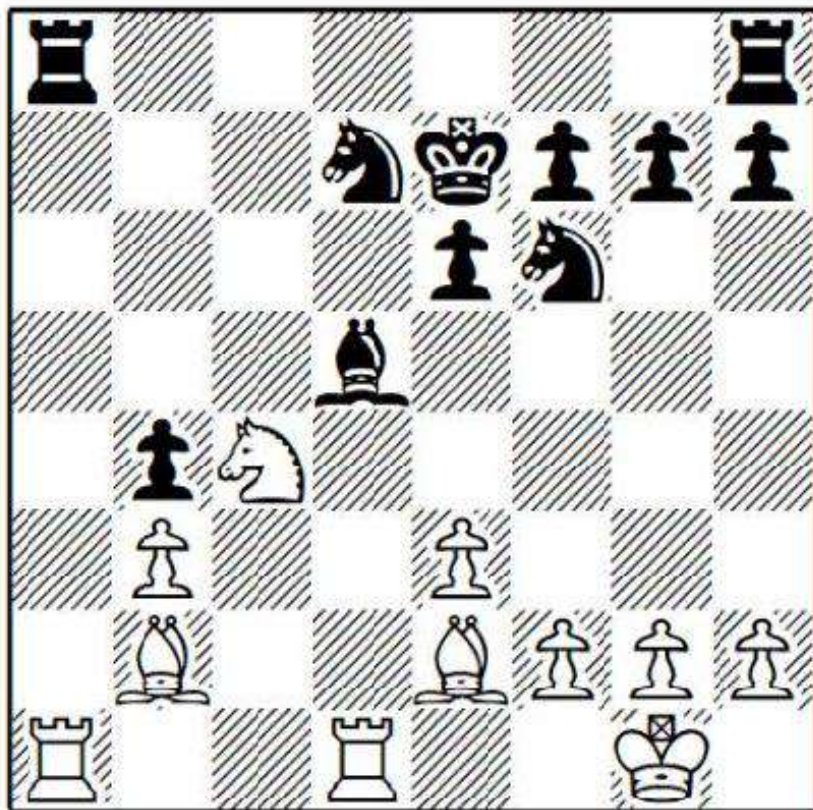
White to play



Solution

66) G.Sargissian-S.Halkias  
chess.com 2020

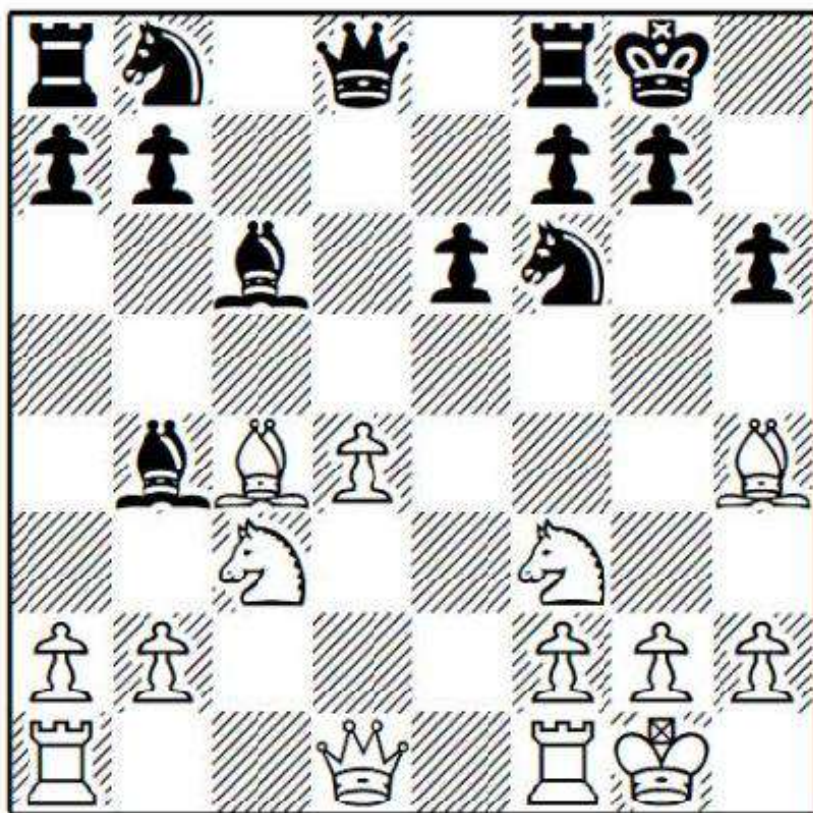
*White to play*



**Solution**

67) A.Shabalov-S.Sevian  
chess.com 2019

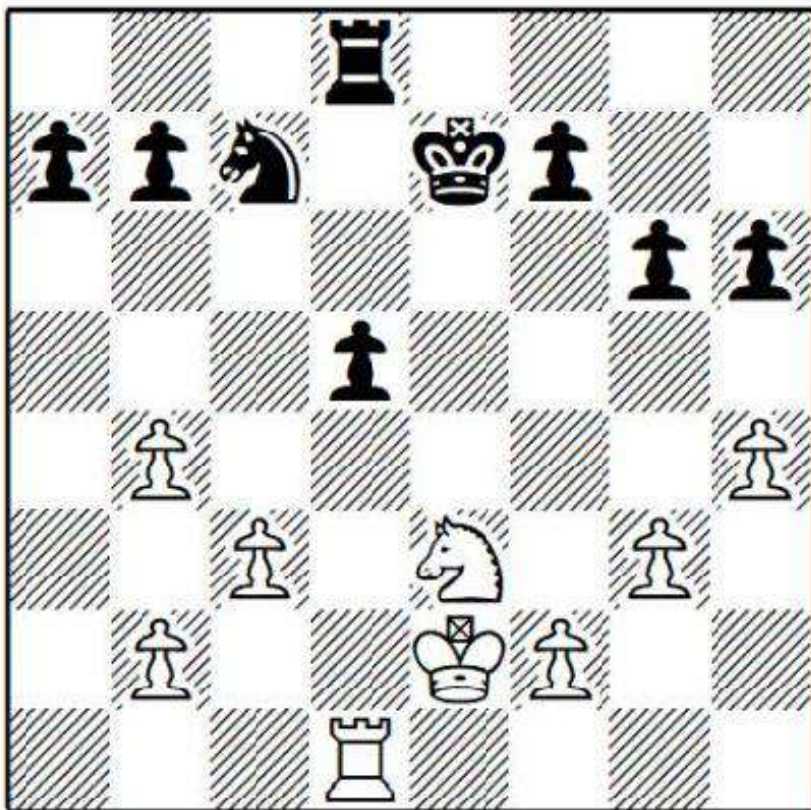
*Black to play*



Solution

68) R.Zhalmakhanov-Z.Agmanov  
Almaty 2020

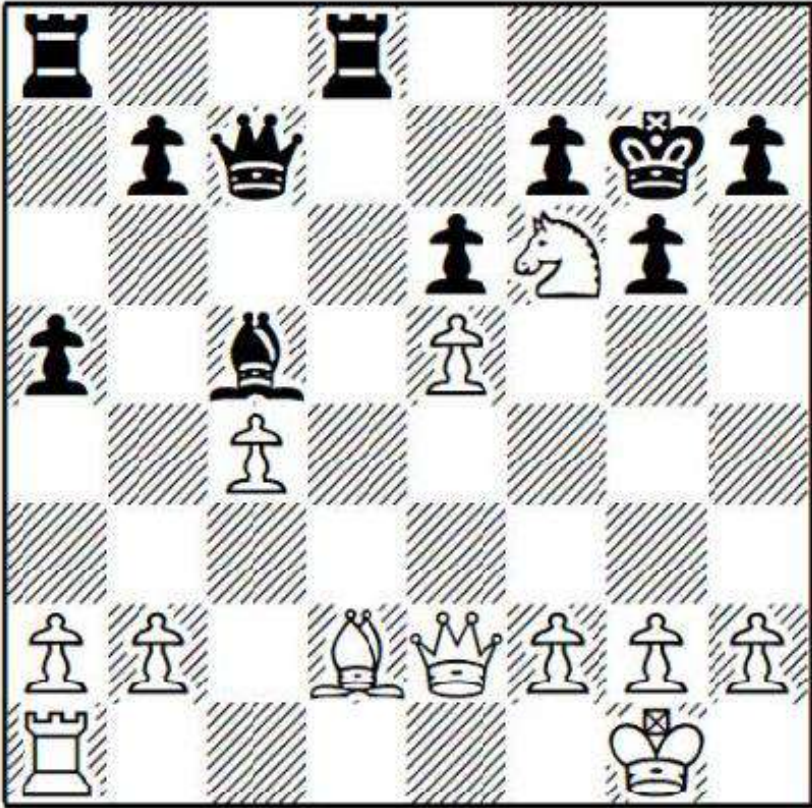
*White to play*



**Solution**

69) A.Pavlidis-M.Bartel  
chess.com 2020

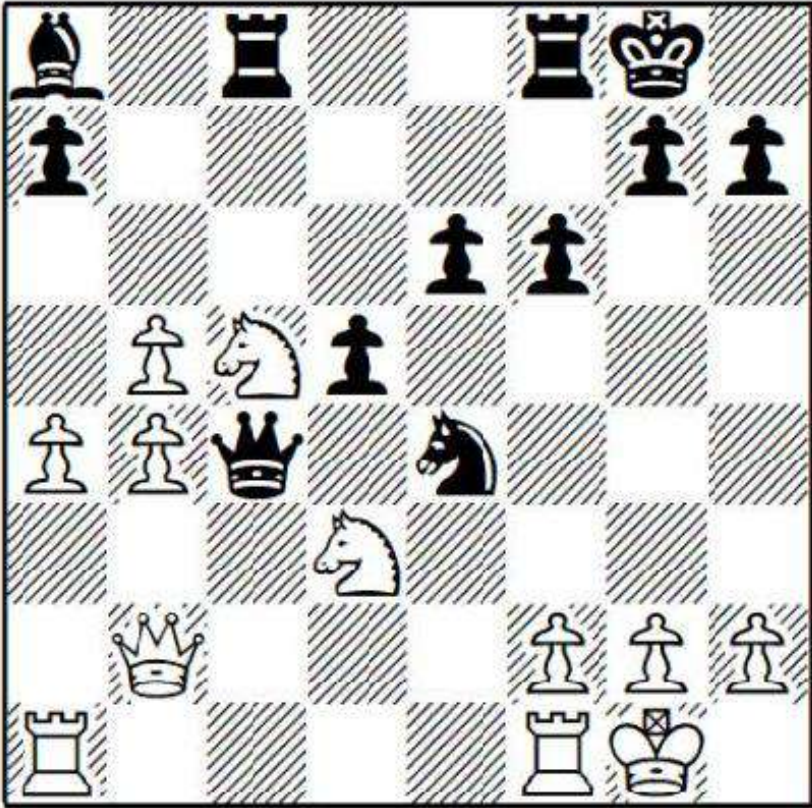
*Black to play*



Solution

70) J.Lopez-S.Rijnaarts  
Netherlands 2020

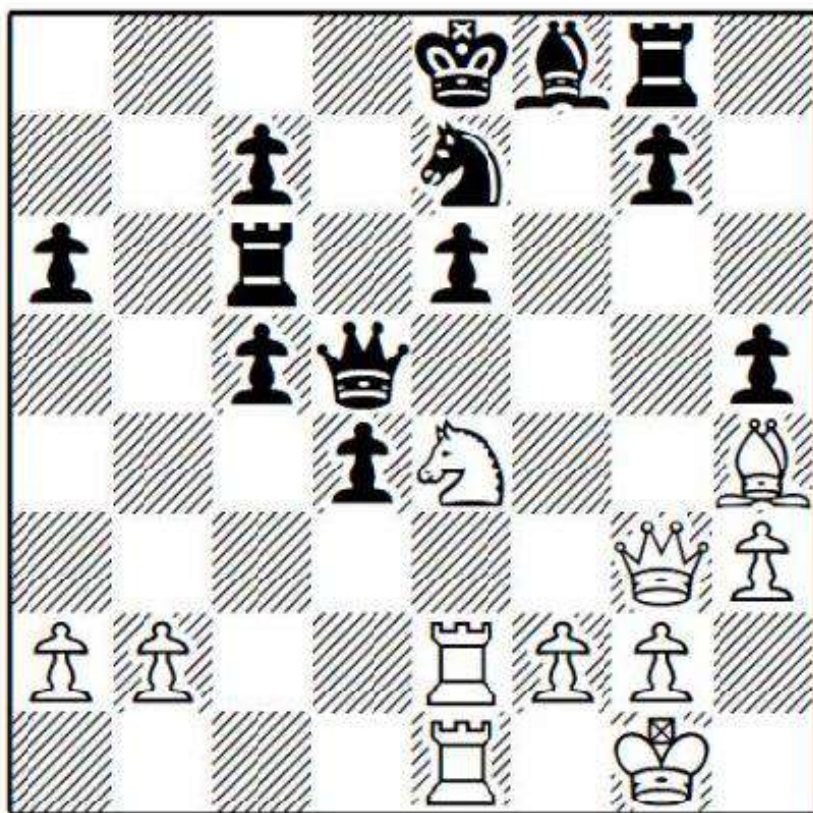
*Black to play*



**Solution**

71) C.Yoo-C.Hilby  
Burlingame 2019

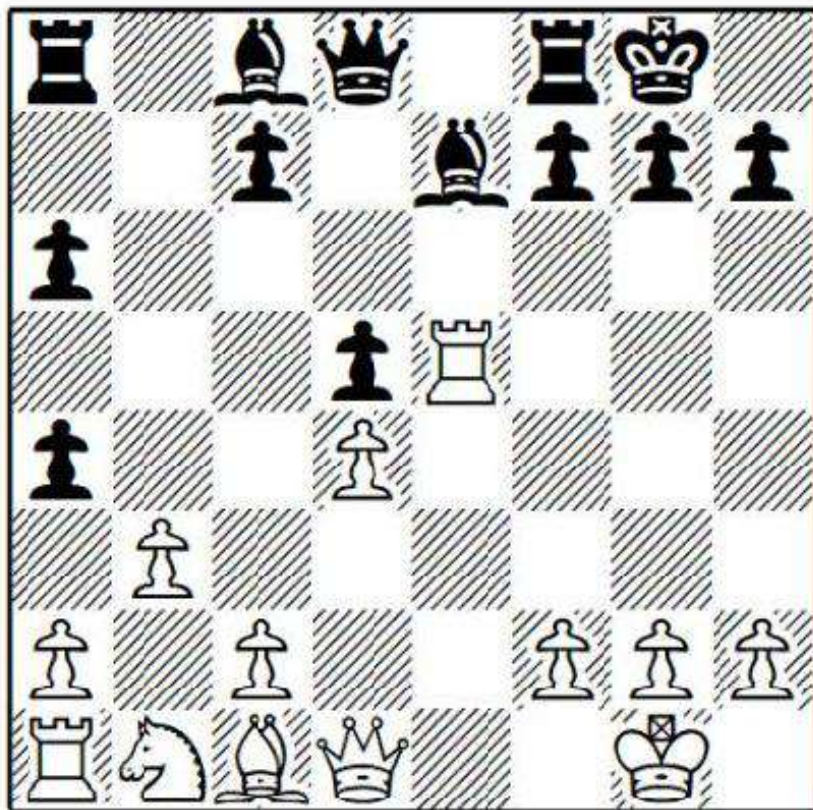
*Black to play*



**Solution**

72) S.Fedorchuk-G.Arnaudov  
Munich 2020

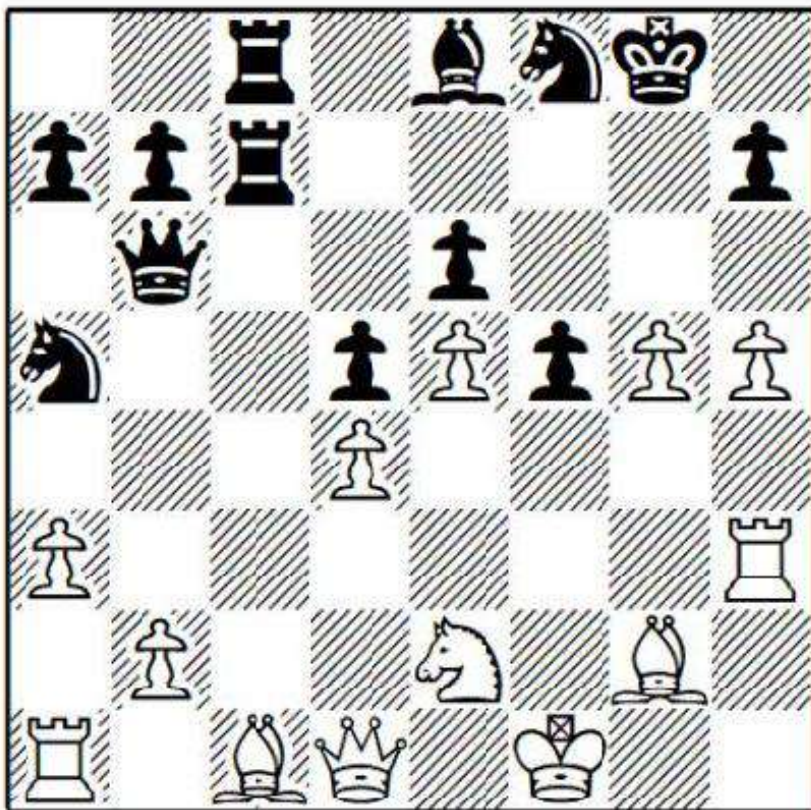
White to play



Solution

73) G.Ayats Llobera-R.Pogorelov  
Barcelona 2020

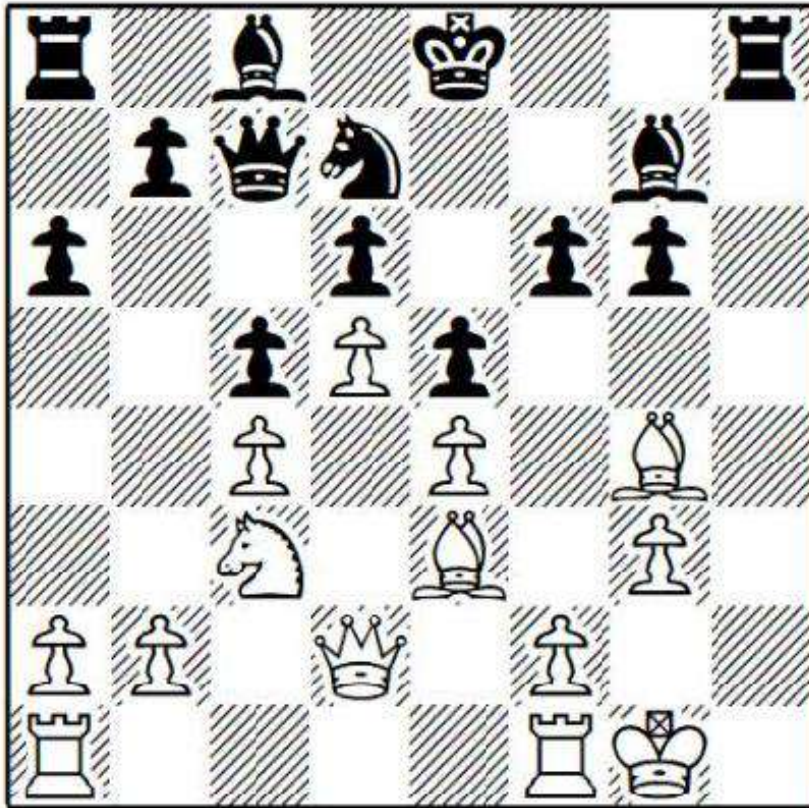
*White to play*



Solution

74) A.Sarana-A.Firouzja  
chess.com 2020

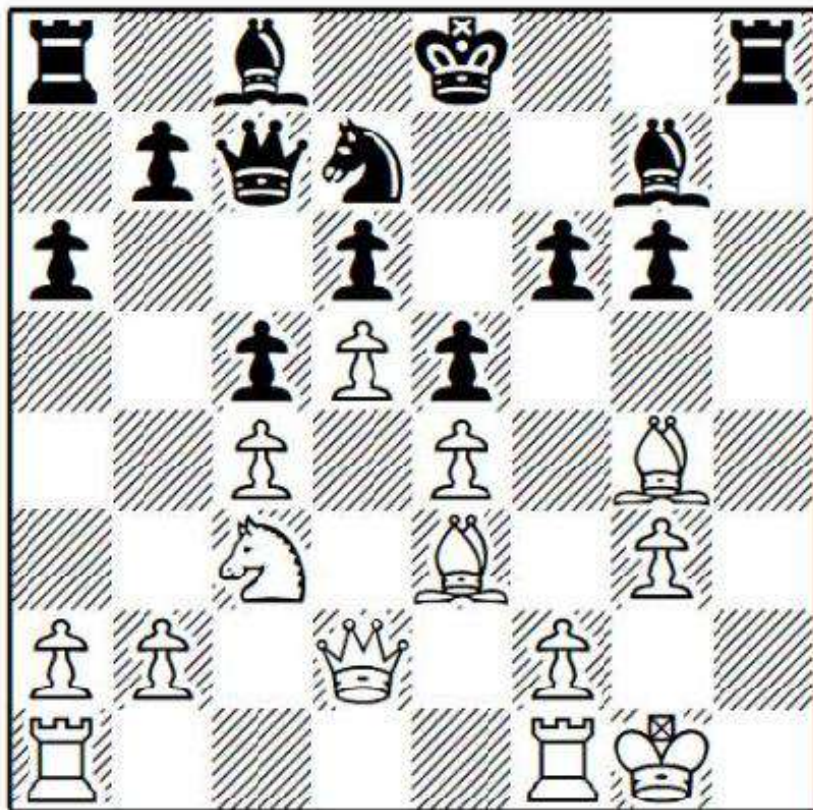
*White to play*



**Solution**

75) N.Meshkovs-J.Liang  
lichess.org 2021

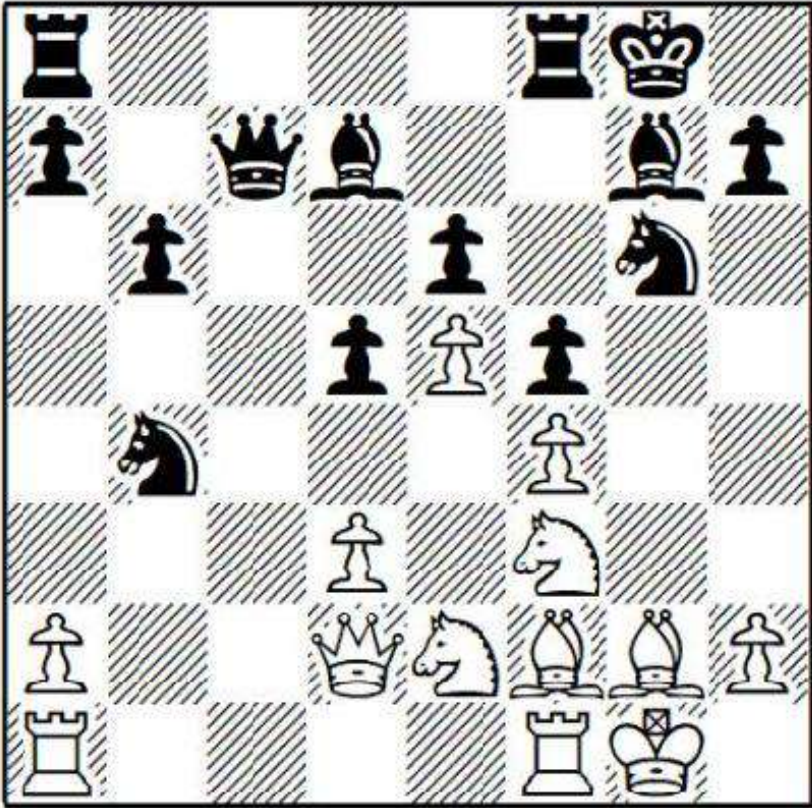
*Black to play*



Solution

76) C.Robledo-R.Duje  
Mendoza 2020

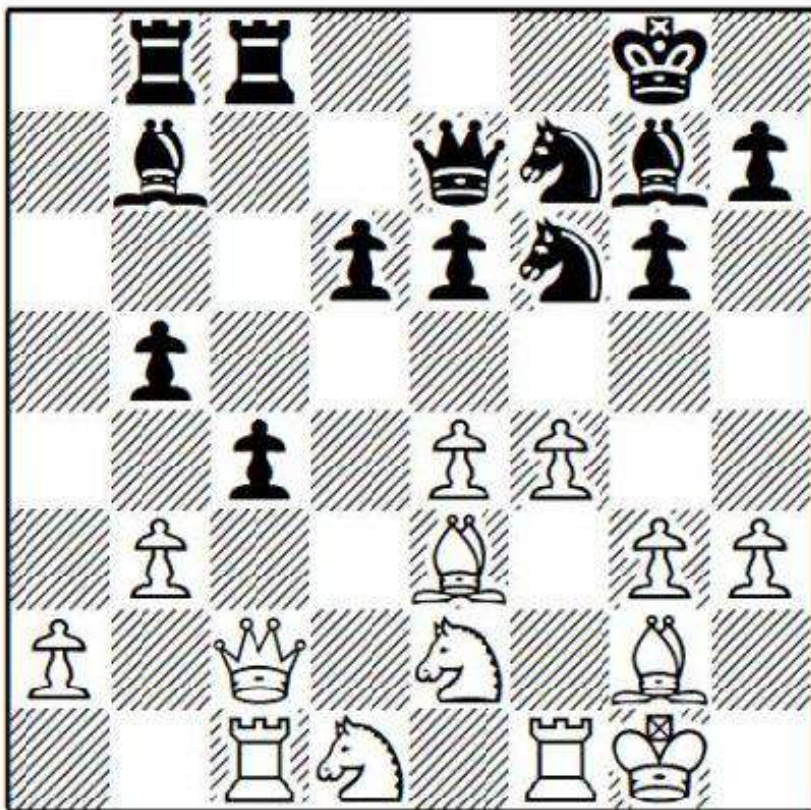
*Black to play*



Solution

77) M.Haast-F.Nijboer  
Netherlands 2020

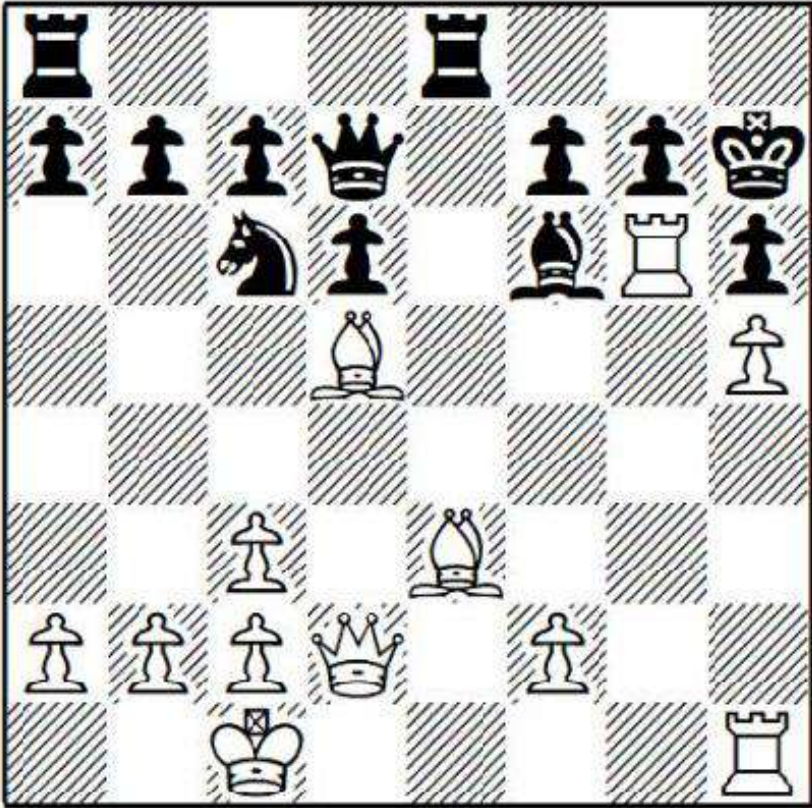
White to play



Solution

78) V.Nozdrachev-V.Zarubitski  
Orsha 2020

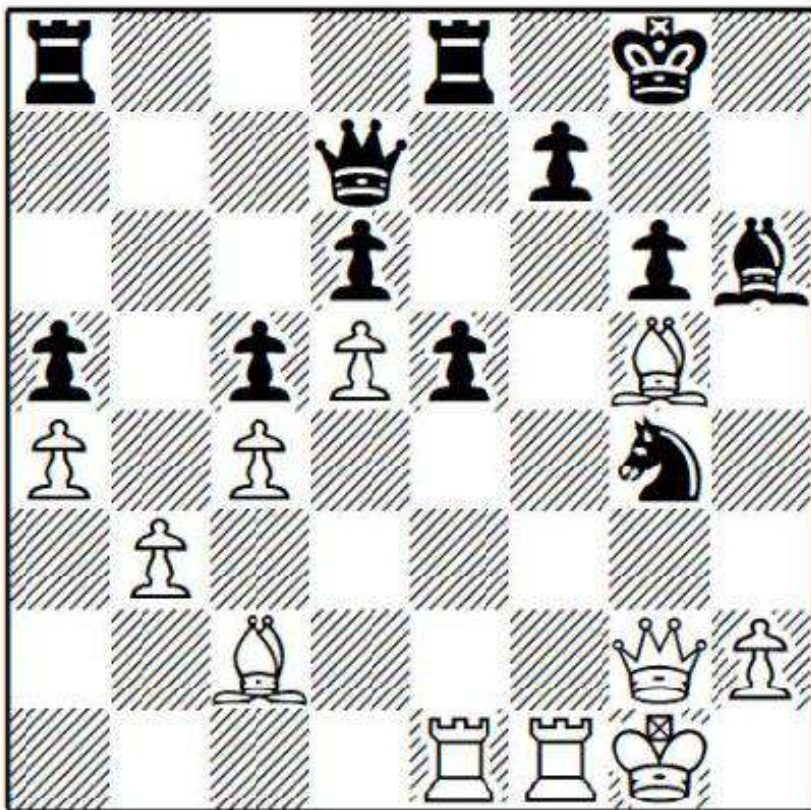
*Black to play*



**Solution**

79) E.Kupervaser-M.Nedobora  
Ramat Gan 2020

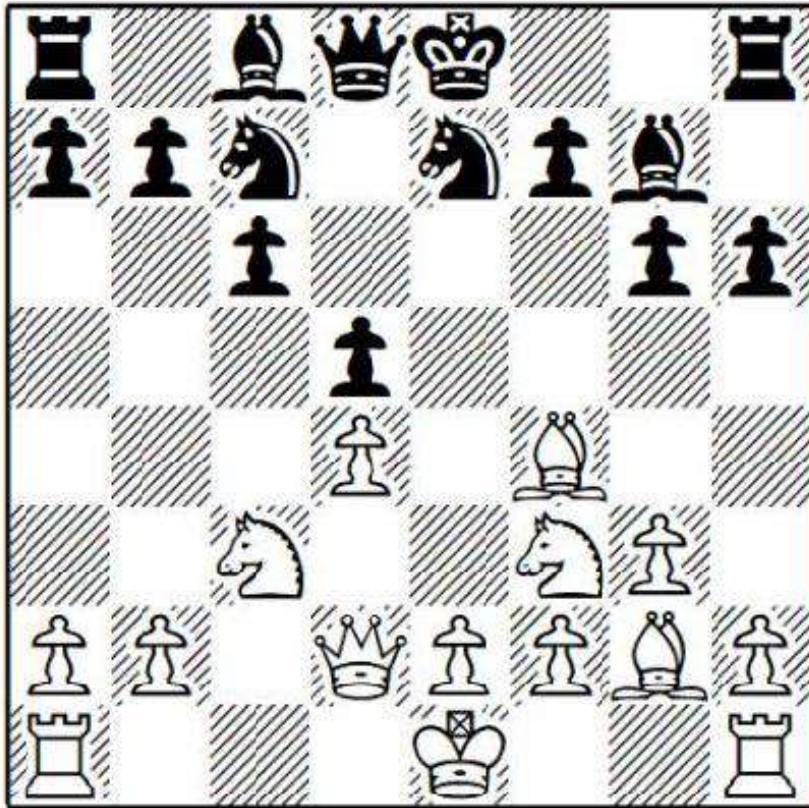
*White to play*



**Solution**

**80) J.Yu-P.Basso**  
Villorba 2021

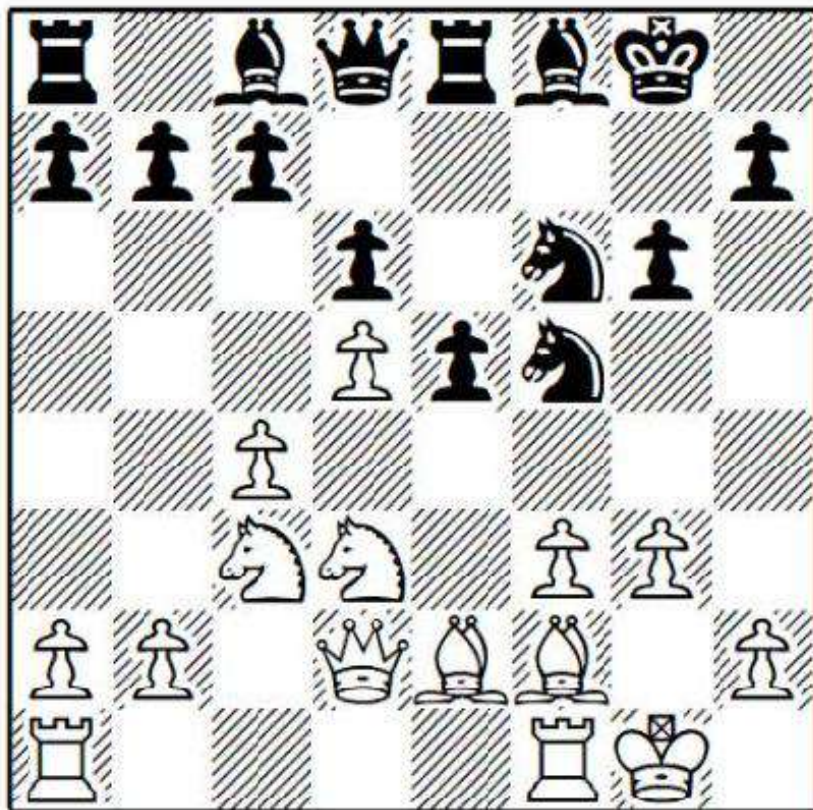
*White to play*



**Solution**

**81) H.Wang-D.Yuffa**  
Gibraltar 2020

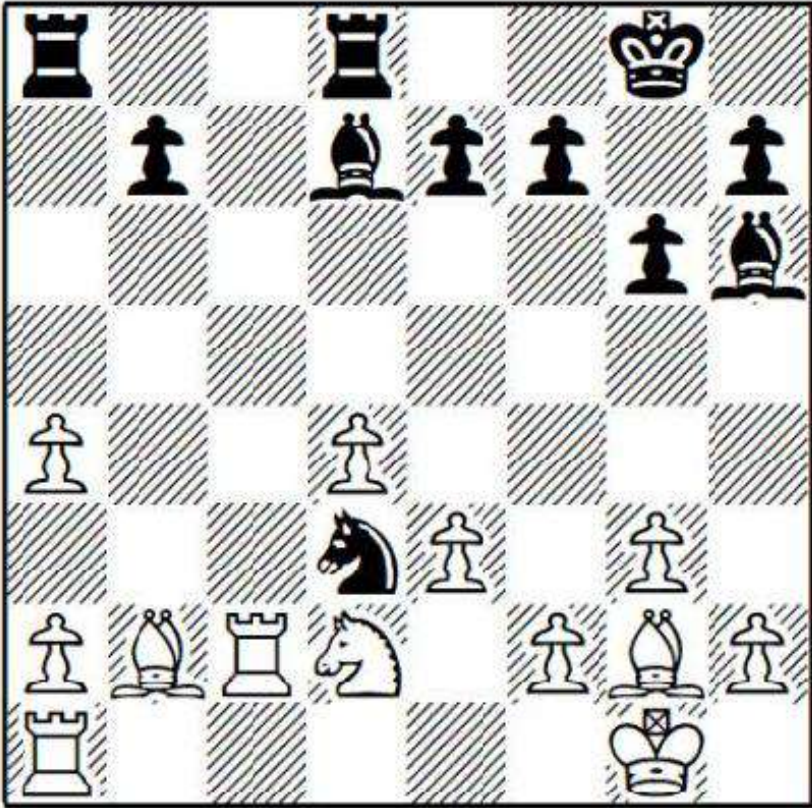
*White to play*



**Solution**

**82) D.Arutinian-I.Akhvlediani**  
Tbilisi 2020

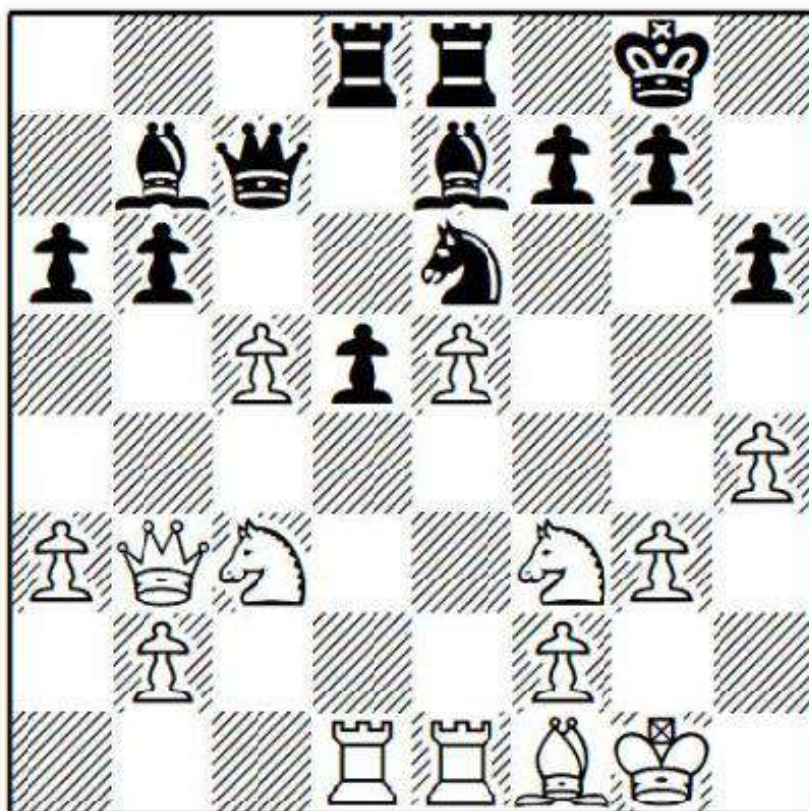
*Black to play*



**Solution**

**83) N.Dzagnidze-H.Koneru**  
Saint Louis 2020

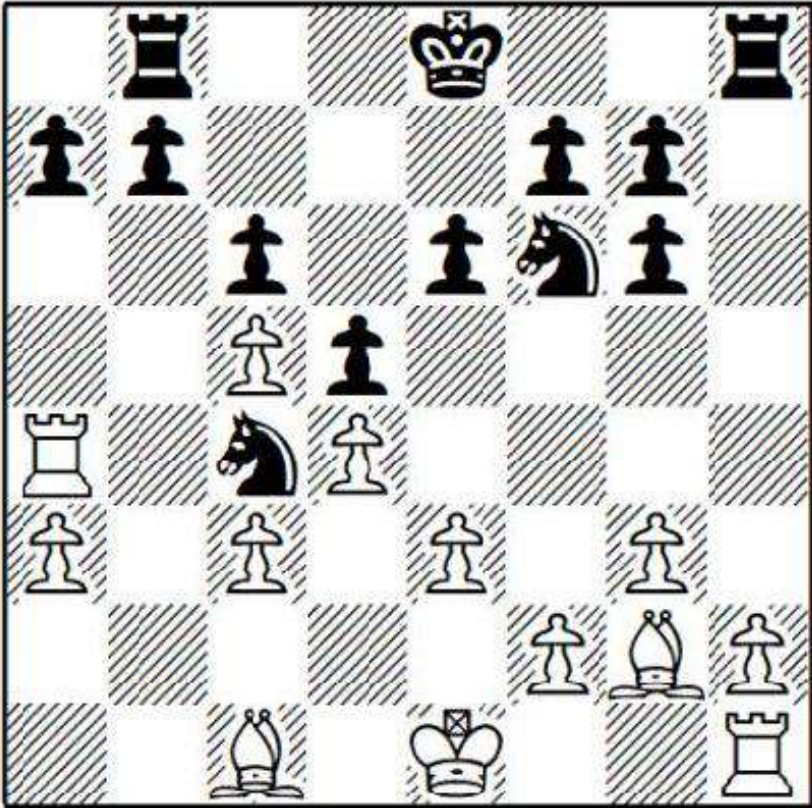
*Black to play*



**Solution**

**84) M.Gharibyan-D.Lazavik**  
Yerevan 2021

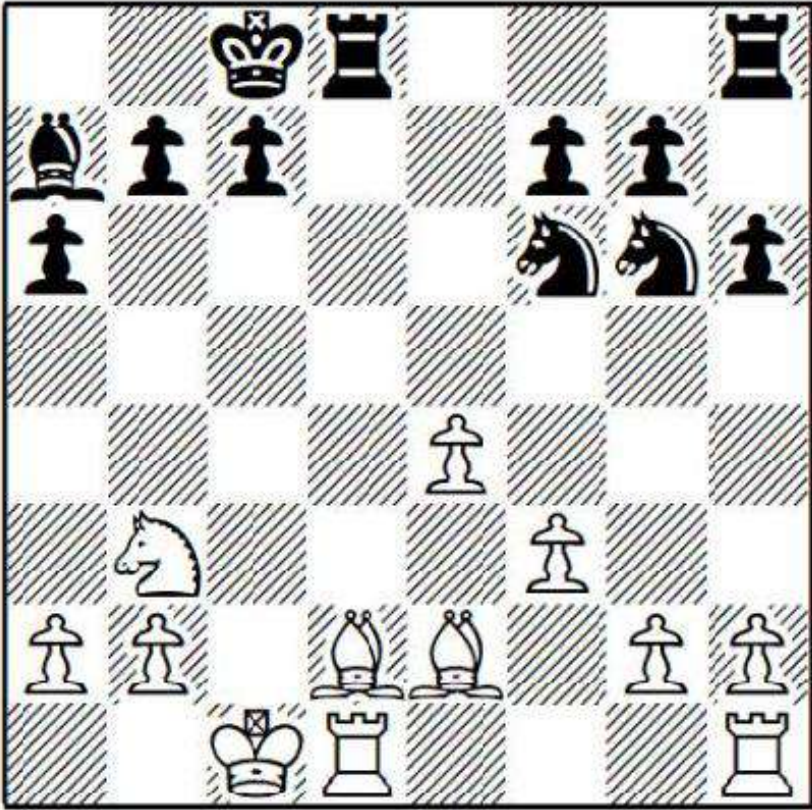
*Black to play*



Solution

85) E.Ozenir-G.Yilmaz  
Antalya 2020

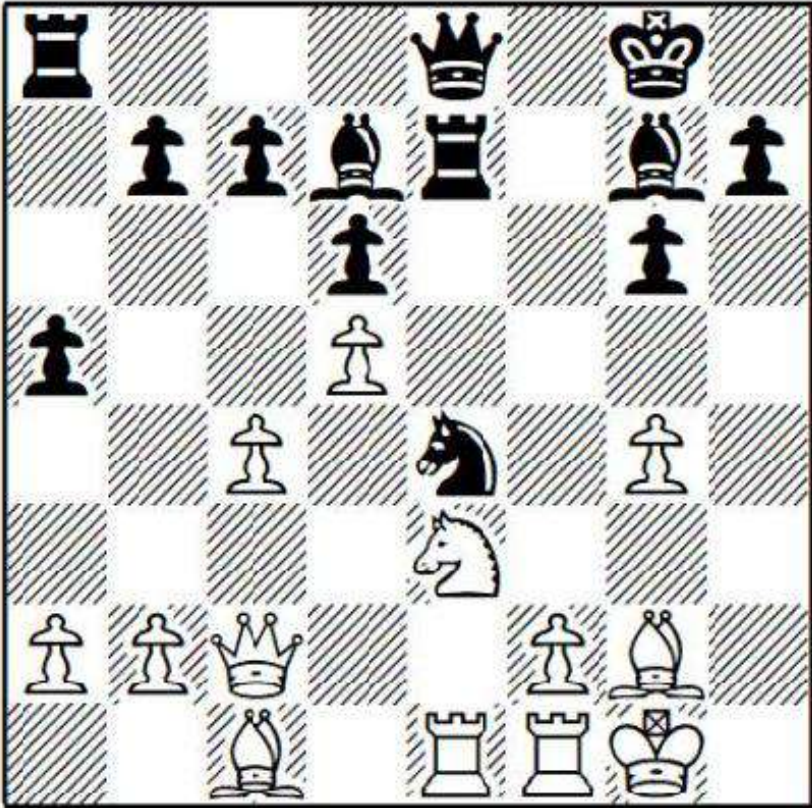
*Black to play*



**Solution**

**86) A.Shabalov-A.Lenderman**  
chess.com 2019

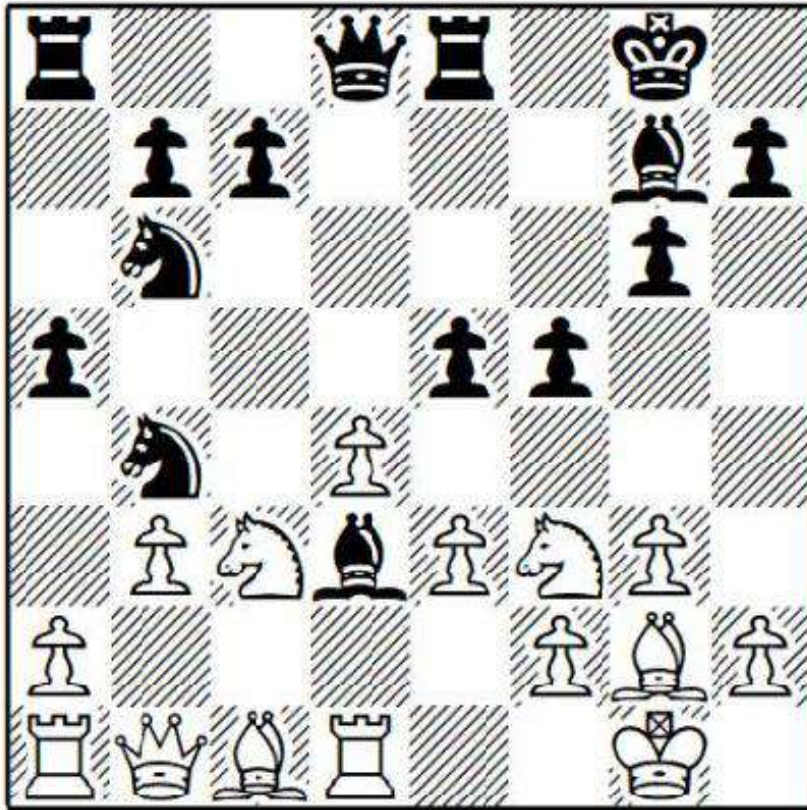
*Black to play*



Solution

87) B.Dhulipalla-A.Tari  
Gibraltar 2019

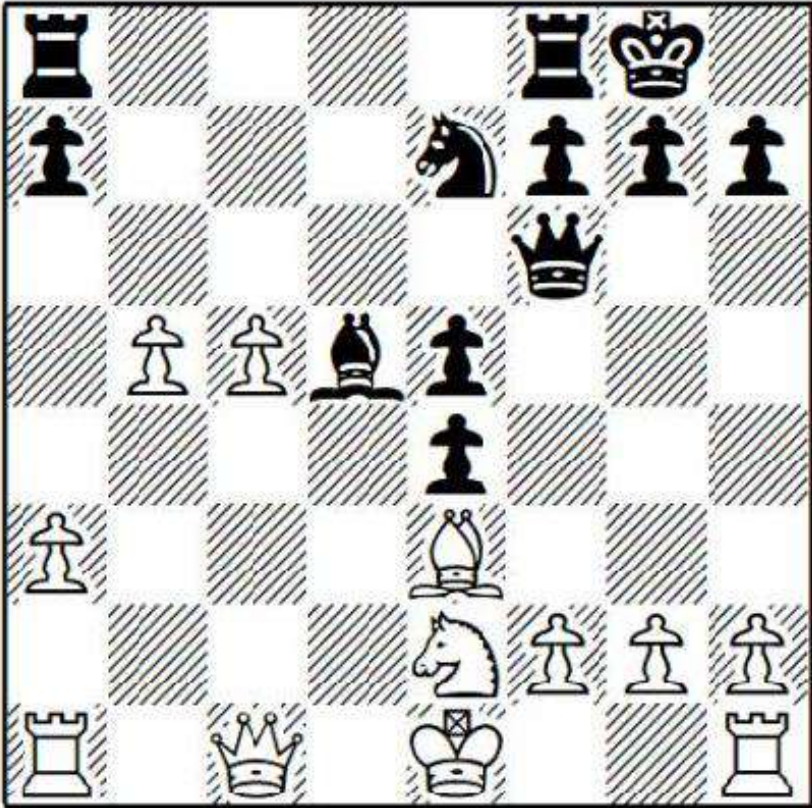
*White to play*



Solution

88) A.Suleymanli-G.Akash  
Wijk aan Zee 2020

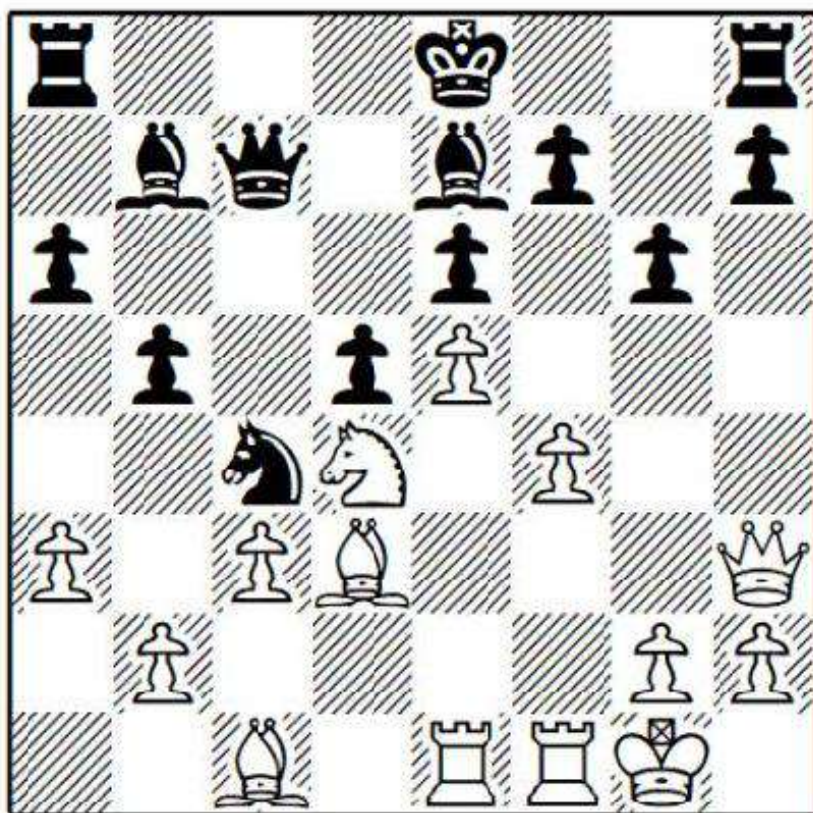
*Black to play*



Solution

89) A.Fier-G.Miguel  
Florianopolis 2020

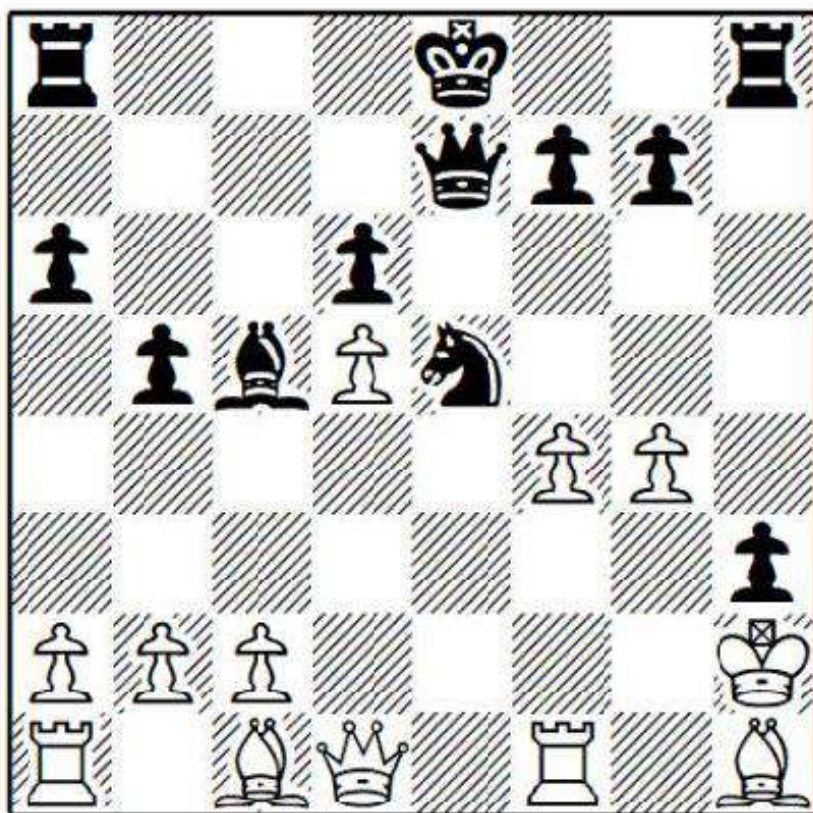
*Black to play*



**Solution**

90) A.Merario Alarcon-C.Bernabeu Lopez  
Roquetas de Mar 2021

*Black to play*



### Solution

#### **Conclusion**

I apologize that this chapter has vaguely defined parameters, but it would be foolhardy to suggest a universally applicable formula to all positions. As stated earlier, it is best to think of this chapter as a display of games that I deemed would be instructive for the reader, predominantly out of a fairly competent usage of pawn structure and pieces. Some new concepts such as prophylaxis were also introduced, but I am not too hung up on such semantics; contrary to what the reader may believe after judging from this work so far, I think showing is better than telling. I hope that the demonstration with explanations of the process behind the moves will lend to replication. It may be beneficial to leave behind an outline of the takeaways from the previous games.

Niemann-Sheng was a game primarily decided by the pawn structure. Niemann played a bit carelessly and had a loose position out of the opening, culminating in the suicidal 14 f4??, which decisively weakened White's structure. Note how I activated my knights through c5 and f5 to exploit the weak squares; we can directly see this principle explained in Chapter 1 (piece activity is defined by weaknesses).

Fischer-Spassky was a game of simple chess wherein the 11th world champion showcased his ability to use the superior minor piece. Fischer's subsequent kingside advance was able to transform this advantage into a winning attack. On the other hand, Sheng-Kim was not as accurate as I had believed at the time but does serve as a warning to avoid excessive passivity. We can see another conversion of advantages in this game; 26 b5 diminished White's advantage in pawn structure but activated the rook on b1 and freed the d5-square for the white queen's later entry.

The last two games are far more dynamic in nature, but I consider them more at home in this chapter than the next, as the buildup to the positions from which the attack materialized was of educational value. Yip-Sheng was defined primarily by my decision to play 13 ... a4!, which significantly hindered White's queenside play. The most notable thing from this game was the relatively slow way I played the attack; even after 18 ... f5, I made sure to play ... Qf7, ... Re8, ... Nd7, and ... b6 before going in for a breakthrough. It was only because of this inclusive attitude that 26 ... Rxa4 worked as well as it did. The final game, Tal-Rantanen, is a clear example of a difference in class. The principle maneuver to take note of involved 15 Na4 and 17 c4, provoking Black's 17 ... c5 advance and weakening of the light squares. Only from here was Tal able to develop his signature mating attack.

## Chapter Four

# The Big Game

So far, our discussion has revolved mainly around the subtler imbalances, such as material and pawn structure. We have seen our fair share of attacks, but they have chiefly been viewed as a natural conclusion from a superiority in one or several of the other imbalances. This chapter will look at what is inarguably the most important of the imbalances: safety, wherein the king is the most crucial weakness. More specifically, the concept that I will endeavor to disseminate here is the initiative.

The initiative is very challenging to define in a practically useful way. Most strong players who use this term employ it quite vaguely, without referring specifically to its usual meaning of “the capacity to make threats”. I have always felt that this interpretation is rather useless, as the ability to make threats is not exclusive to the attacking side. I am normally happy to attempt a more presentable definition, but the original definition is so insignificant that I would have a hard time describing anything but its meaning. To me, the initiative refers to a dynamic advantage that can be maintained over time. This description may seem to be a bit contradictory, but the easiest way to think about it is by comparing it with the concept of momentum. Dynamic advantages sometimes fizzle out as the opponent consolidates. Still, there are other instances in which they continue to build over time until they snowball into some kind of return, usually in the form of material gain or a mating attack.

As you may have figured out, the initiative is a necessary ingredient for victory, as all checkmates (assuming near-perfect play) are generated from advantages in time. Time could almost be considered an imbalance in itself, but it usually is sufficient to characterize it as a function of piece activity and safety. On a fundamental level, all attacks require piece activity, and as we delve into this chapter I am sure this notion of activating the pieces whenever possible will be ingrained into the reader’s mind. When coupled with a strong positional foundation and weaknesses in the opponent’s camp, the initiative can often generate a powerful offensive. These elements are generally vital; chess is a draw under perfect play, so a successful attack can only be executed as a consequence of the opponent's mistakes. Sun Tzu’s adage from Chapter 1 returns as we note that attacking without a solid line of reasoning is simply reckless. Proper usage of time advantages involves a delicate balance between buildup and combinations, and the critical points in which this equilibrium is shifted are better illustrated than explained. In

that vein, we can turn our attention to several games that I consider good examples of proper utilization of the initiative.

*Game 10*

**G.Kasparov-U.Andersson**

Tilburg 1981

Much as was the case with the Botvinnik-Capablanca game analyzed in Chapter 2, this game has been covered in virtually every treatise on dynamic chess written since its inception. Although the game itself is not indicative of an unattainable level of technical difficulty, its simplicity is not inherently a drawback. I would consider this game one of the most illuminating masterpieces I have ever witnessed. The universally famous 13th world champion successfully dismantles the Swedish defensive bulwark admirably.

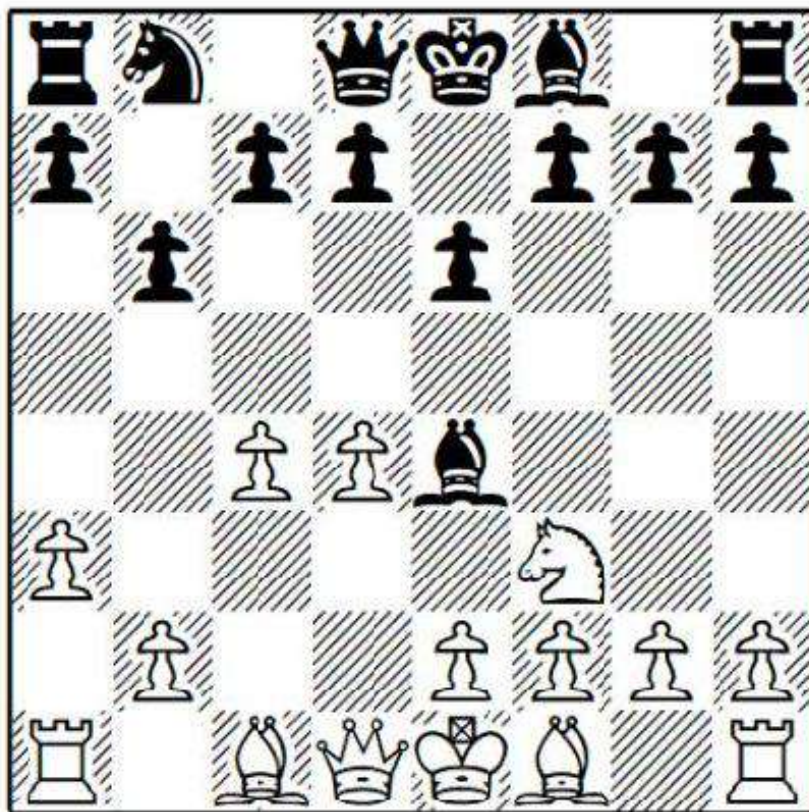
**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 b6 4 a3**

The Petrosian system of the Queen's Indian Defense. Kasparov loved this variation, and it was one of his weapons of choice against the QID. The idea is to prevent Nc3 from being met by ... Bb4 and indirectly support an eventual e4 advance.

**4 ... Bb7 5 Nc3 Ne4?!**

Andersson's idea here is rather ingenious, even if it is not strong. It goes to show that even positional players of Andersson's caliber can occasionally make poor judgments. 5 ... d5 is more common and best. Since White wishes to play for e4, Black should try to complicate this as much as possible. 6 cxd5 Nxd5 and ... Nxc3 will disrupt White's pawn structure enough to compensate for the lost central control.

**6 Nxe4 Bxe4**



Black's idea is to transfer the light-squared bishop to the kingside and place his queenside pawns on light squares. It is theoretically sound but takes too much time. With this plan in mind, one has to wonder why he refrained from playing the Slav instead.

**7 Nd2!**

White takes advantage of Black's overextended bishop to increase his central influence. 7 e3 is a more standard-looking move, but it does not do much to prevent Black from continuing his plans: 7 ... Be7 8 Be2 0-0 9 0-0 d5 and Black is doing okay.

**7 ... Bg6**

7 ... Bb7 should perhaps have been preferred, but it is hard to recommend playing the opening in such a way. I am sure that 8 e4 g6 9 Bd3 Bg7 10 Nf3 is not the kind of position Andersson would have wanted from the opening.

**8 g3!**

Now that the black bishop has vacated the long diagonal, White intends to put his own bishop there. 8 e4 Nc6 causes a disruption in the center because of White's slight congestion. After 9 d5 Nd4 Black is doing fine.

**8 ... Nc6 9 e3 a6?!**

While Black's entire opening scheme can be summarized as "too slow", this is too much so. The idea is to blockade on the light squares with moves such as ... Na7, ... b5, and ... c6 now that the light-squared bishop has left the pawn chain. But come on, just look at it ...

**10 b4**

10 Bg2 is also possible, but the light-squared bishop can go here at any time. Therefore, Kasparov decides that the more time-sensitive operation is the development of the dark-squared bishop.

**10 ... b5 11 cxb5 axb5 12 Bb2**

12 Bxb5? Nxb4 would be problematic.

**12 ... Na7**

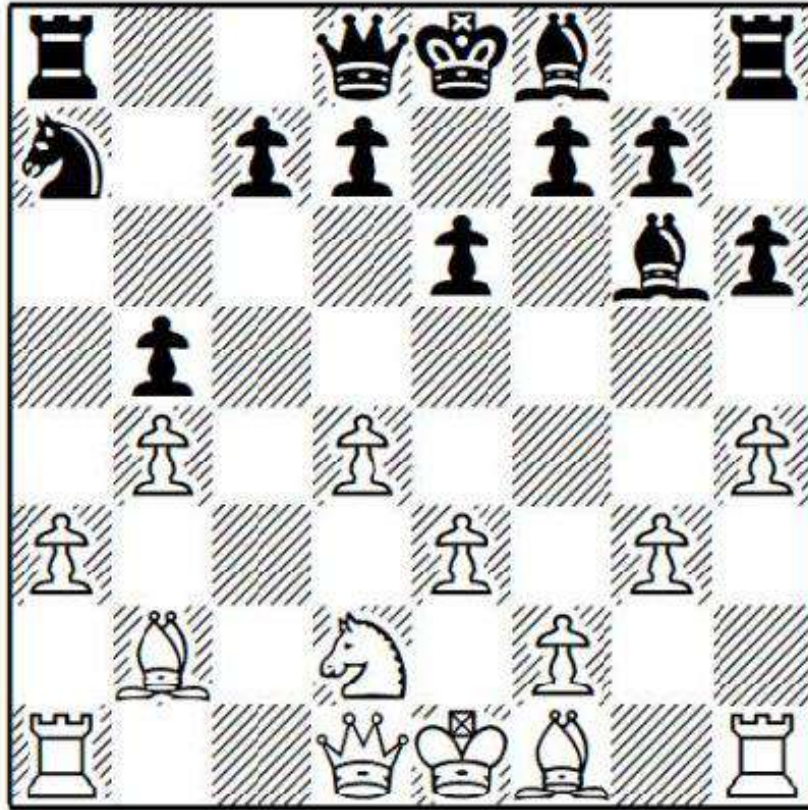
As has been stated ad nauseam before, Black's plan requires an excessive amount of time. It makes sense for White to try to punish this.

**13 h4!**

The threat to ensnare the black bishop with h5 and g4 is not hard to meet, but h4 benefits White more than a move like ... h6 or ... h5 would help Black.

**13 ... h6**

Upon realizing that a typical developing move such as Bg2 or Rc1 does nothing to interrupt Black's plans, we come to a critical moment. If Black is permitted to proceed with his initial plans of ... c6 and ... d5 without issue, White's dark-squared bishop would be permanently impaired, and Black would have a very solid position. As such, the time is ripe to take action. 13 ... h5 was better, to maintain more control over the light squares, but White can meet this in a similar fashion to the game.



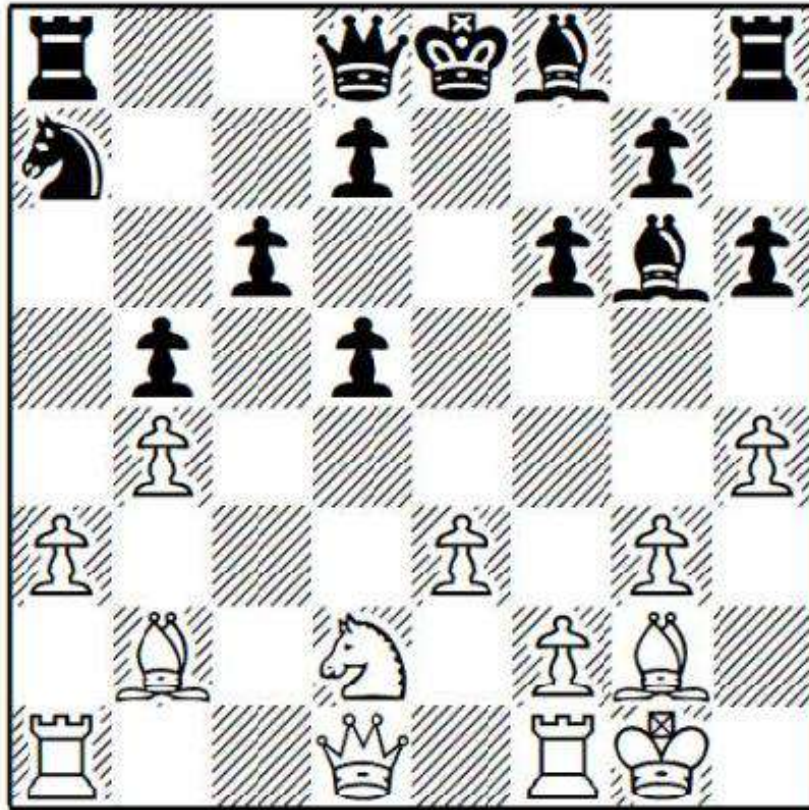
**14 d5!**

At first glance, it may seem that White is throwing away a pawn while failing to disrupt Black's light-squared pawn formation. However, the opening of the bishop on b2 is of greater significance.

**14 ... exd5 15 Bg2 c6 16 0-0**

Despite his recent material investment, Kasparov first safeguards his king before commencing active operations in the center. Admirable restraint, although perhaps it is helped a bit by the fact that most engines rate this position at nearly +4!

**16 ... f6**



We can already see an effect of White's earlier pawn sacrifice – Black's development is hindered considerably by the b2-bishop's piercing gaze. White has numerous good options to proceed with the attack here (and of course he should, given how poorly all of Black's pieces are placed). Noting Black's vulnerable light squares on the kingside (including an undefended light-squared bishop on g6), some candidate moves are Qg4, e4, and h5. These moves are perfectly viable, but Kasparov is not one to open the position without including as many of his pieces as possible.

### **17 Re1!**

This move is not actually better in the strict sense than the other candidate moves, but it is the most flexible. More crucially, it follows the principle of bringing all of the pieces into the game, a policy that Kasparov endorsed. Even if the other moves are of equivalent value, it is important to keep up with our principles. In this case, Black's lack of mobility means White can easily afford the apparent time loss. 17 Qg4 followed by h5 is

probably no weaker and likely to transpose, but since Black cannot stop the inevitable breakthrough, there is no reason to rush. 17 e4 is considered best by the engine but is not terribly different in character from the other alternatives.

**17 ... Be7**

A natural developing move that exposes g7.

**18 Qg4**

It is now clear that the earlier insertion of h4 and ... h6 has paid dividends.

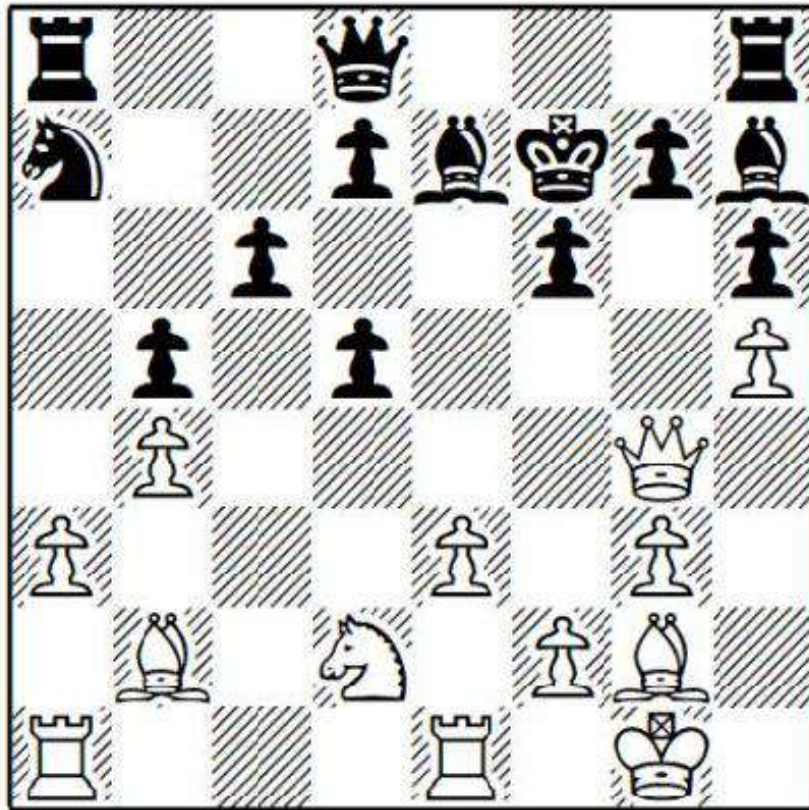
**18 ... Kf7**

The only way to protect g7 and g6, but this places the king in a dangerous spot on the light squares.

**19 h5!**

Kasparov notices Black's weakened light squares and decides to take further control of g6 before opening the center. The immediate 19 e4 enables Black to take back some light squares with 19 ... h5, evicting the white queen. White is still in a very good spot, but Kasparov is not one to give his opponent any reprieve.

**19 ... Bh7**



We now are at a point where White's position has been improved to nearly its peak. To progress, White must open the game to get at the black king. This situation is widespread and can be applied to almost all attacks; the key is to recognize at what point this dilemma is reached. Here, we can note that it is challenging for White to enhance his position more than Black can in one tempo. I have shown this position to students in the past, and some have suggested quiet moves that do not have the desired effect and give Black some respite. While White's positional advantage provides more than enough compensation for his pawn deficit even in the absence of a direct way in, the most active approach is the best here.

**20 e4!**

In addition to opening the center, this move allows White to remove the defender of g6.

**20 ... dxe4**

Black acquiesces to a probable defeat, hoping that White will somehow misplay the attack. This is a sad proposition when facing Kasparov, and I am sure that Andersson was bitterly regretting putting his knight on a7 ...

20 ... d4 is a try to return the pawn in a bid to survive the attack. Even ignoring the fact that 21 e5 renders this largely useless, almost any reasonable move preserves a vast advantage for White given the loss of Black's sole asset of material. In a practical game, this kind of move is tantamount to resignation, as Black essentially acknowledges that he will lose. As a titanic defender who staved off Kasparov's winning attempts numerous times in his career, Andersson was undoubtedly aware of this type of dilemma. This is also a point where we can review the perils of working too closely with engines: *Stockfish* will point out that 20 ... d4 is "only" +5 for White, but both situations are completely lost, and such practical considerations are beyond the computer's capabilities.

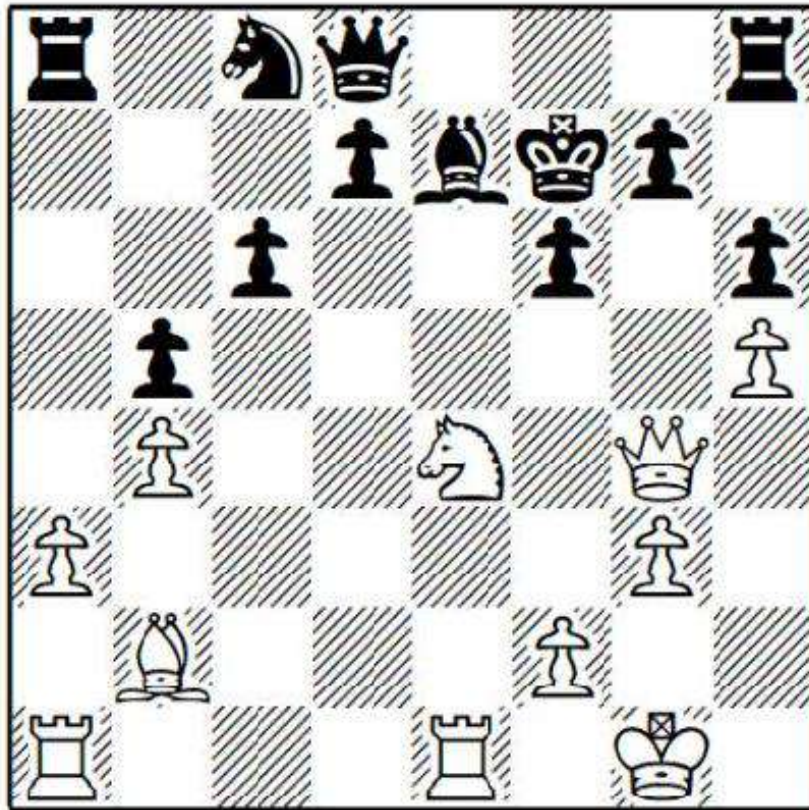
#### **21 Bxe4**

Kasparov recognizes that his light-squared bishop is less valuable than Black's in this position. As stated previously, the significance of 20 e4 is connected with removing Black's bishop on h7. The subsequently opened g6-square will provide the white queen with a comfortable home. 21 Nxe4? is visually attractive but does not actively contribute to a solid plan: 21 ... Re8 and Black can play a little bit, although his piece coordination remains tragic.

#### **21 ... Bxe4**

21 ... Nc8 is one of several moves that allow White to initiate the trade on h7. After 22 Bxh7 Rxh7 White could proceed normally, but there is also 23 Bxf6! Bxf6 24 Qg6+ and Black will have to concede too much material.

#### **22 Nxe4 Nc8**

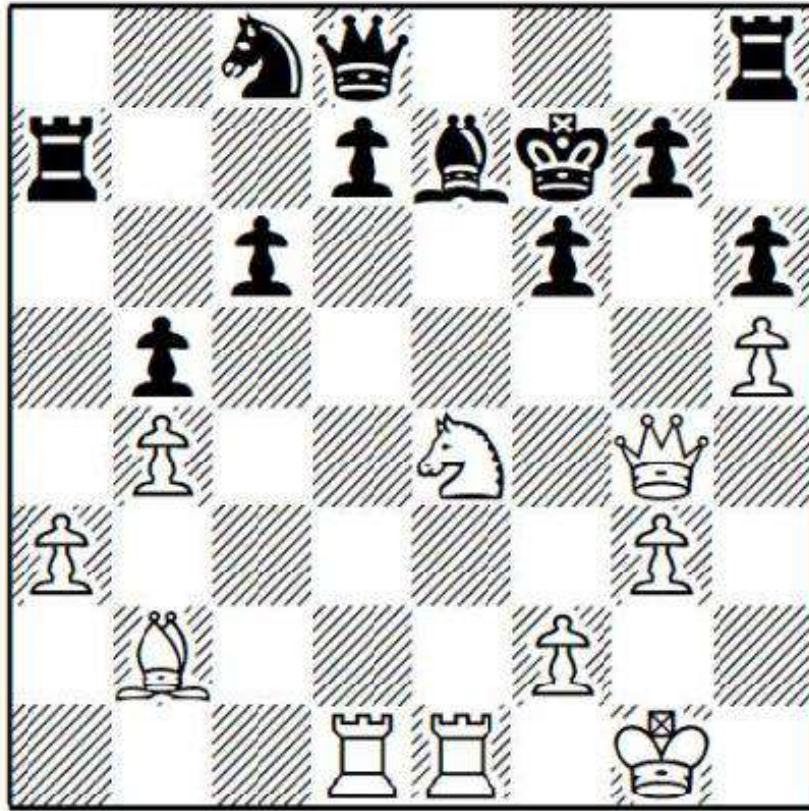


Andersson finally returns his knight toward the center. Better late than never, or so they say, at least. We have now arrived at a very interesting situation. There is hardly an end to the number of candidate moves White has at his disposal, but Kasparov's choice is impressive in its adherence to principle.

**23 Rad1!**

Whether or not this move is technically best is not particularly relevant. If one is to choose between moves of similar quality to one another (almost always the case in this game), it is generally preferable to include more pieces in the game. You never know when you may need them! Here, the weakness of d7 enables this to be done with tempo. 23 Bd4 is favored by *Stockfish*, with the intention of Nc5. I am unsure why this is of such importance, and I find the text move more intuitive. 23 Re2 intends to double rooks on the e-file, but again I am not sure that this is such a big deal. Kasparov's setup appears to be much more attractive.

23 ... Ra7



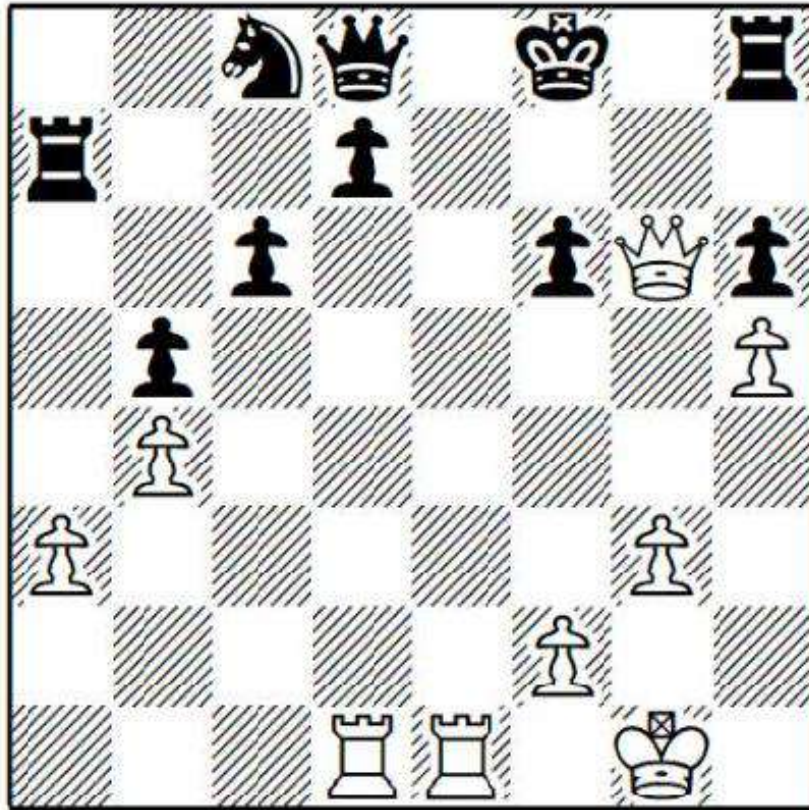
Once again, all of White's pieces have essentially reached the zenith of their possible placements. Black's pieces can barely speak to one another, and the precarious positioning of his king should prompt White to look for a breakthrough. 23 ... d5 24 Nd2 does not help Black much in light of the weakened e6-square: 24 ... Qd6 25 Qg6+ Kf8 26 Nf3 and Nd4 will facilitate a conclusive infiltration.

**24 Nxf6!**

The immediate Qg6+ leads to the same position, but Kasparov is evidently quite an advocate for cleanliness.

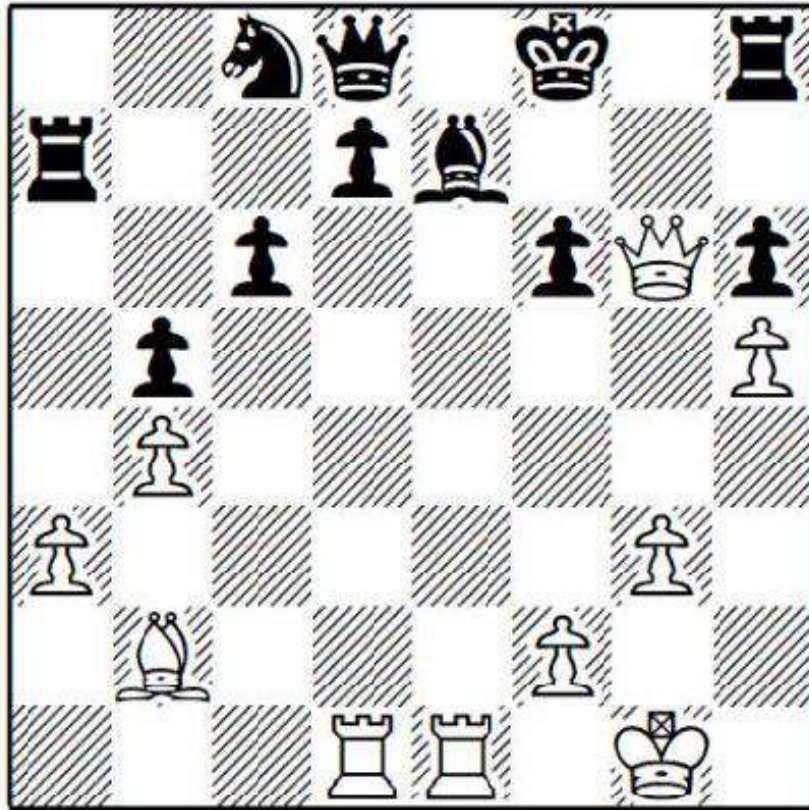
**24 ... gxf6**

24 ... Bxf6 loses beautifully: 25 Qg6+ Kf8 26 Bxf6 gxf6 (or 26 ... Qxf6 27 Re8 mate)



27 Re6! – the only winning move, and a dazzling one at that. The usefulness of 23 Rad1 is felt strongly as its partner targets the f6-pawn. Black must part with his queen soon to delay the mate.

**25 Qg6+ Kf8**

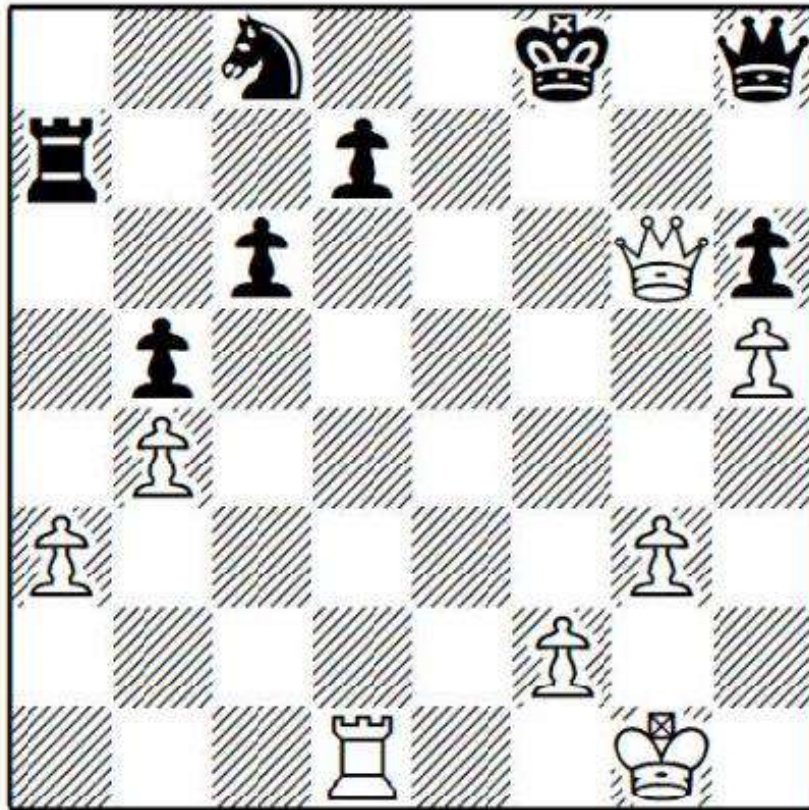


It is about time to clean up here.

**26 Bc1!**

What an elegant way to do so! Kasparov notes that the bishop on b2 has fulfilled its purpose and no longer does much there; it is better utilized to attack the weakness on h6.

There was also a more direct way to finish the job: 26 Rxe7! Qxe7 27 Bxf6 Qh7 28 Bxh8 Qxh8 (28 ... Qxg6 29 hxg6 is best but hopeless, of course)



29 Re1! Ne7 30 Qd6 and the dual threats to e7 and b8 will mop up a decisive amount of material. Whether or not Kasparov saw this, I am not certain. What I do know is that Kasparov's choice in the game is simpler and requires less work. When playing chess, it is often best to avoid doing "math" whenever possible to avoid tripping up. Even Kasparov, one of the most incredible calculators of all time, abides by this belief.

**26 ... d5**

Nothing is especially helpful here. After 26 ... Qe8 27 Bxh6+ Rxh6 28 Qxh6+ Kg8 29 Rd4 the rook will deliver a devastating check on g4, and 29 ... f5 30 Rg4+!! fxg4 31 Re4 is simply fantastic. Take a look at the black queenside!

**27 Rd4!**

27 Bxh6+ Rxh6 28 Qxh6+ Kg8 29 Qg6+ Kh8 30 Re6 is fine and all, but why not take the opportunity to bring another piece into the action?

**27 ... Nd6 28 Rg4 Nf7**

The black knight rushes over to the kingside in a rather sad attempt to hold h8, but it is too little too late. If only it had been on this wing sooner ...

**29 Bxh6+! Ke8**

29 ... Nxb6 30 Qg7+ wins a lot of material.

**30 Bg7 1-0**

White's h-pawn will run and claim a rook plus some interest.

If there is one thing I want to impart through the exploration of this game, it is to always include your pieces. We can contrast Kasparov's treatment of eschewing direct approaches in favor of building a solid positional base (17 Re1, 23 Rad1, and 26 Bc1) with Andersson sending his knight and then rook to a7.

*Game 11*

**J.Sheng-R.Preotu**

Dallas 2017

I was facing one of Canada's top players in this game: the talented GM Razvan Preotu. I have no doubt that Preotu is a highly skilled player, but, at least in my encounters with him, he plays in a provocative and perhaps "greedy" manner that has not boded well for him. When this game was played, I had been an IM for about a year, and he had a similar tenure as a GM.

**1 d4 Nf6 2 Nc3 d5 3 Bf4**

Around this time, I had grown dissatisfied with my repertoire against 1 e4 e5, so I learned some other openings to use whenever there was a non-zero chance that my opponent would play it. I had become captivated with this new system employed by Jobava, which I used to great effect between 2016 and 2017. My database indicates I have scored about 70% here, including games with GMs such as So and Sargissian from the PRO Chess League.

**3 ... a6**

This is one of many valid ways to address the opening. 3 ... c5 4 e3 cxd4 5 exd4 a6 is usually considered simpler. The central liquidation and poor white knight on c3 make this a safe Carlsbad structure for Black. 3 ... a6 is played to dissuade Nb5, which can be somewhat bothersome in many lines. For example, after 3 ... e6 White can play 4 Nb5 (4 e3 Bb4 is extremely annoying, in my opinion) 4 ... Na6 5 a3 c6 6 Nc3 and although Black is

fine, the knight on a6 is misplaced. I believe that GM Wesley So's handling of this position against me was best. He eventually beat me after I hung my queen from a winning position in time trouble ...

**4 e3 e6 5 Nf3 c5 6 dxc5**

6 Bd3 would be desirable before taking on c5 to encourage a tempo loss with the black dark-squared bishop. But here, Black can use his earlier ... a6 move to expand with 6 ... c4 7 Be2 b5 and I would take Black. It is difficult for White to arrange the e4 advance with the bishop on e2.

**6 ... Bxc5 7 Bd3 Nc6 8 0-0 h6**

I don't think this move is problematic just yet, but the idea behind it is foolhardy, to say the least. Preetu is an aggressive player but now is not the time. 8 ... 0-0 9 e4 dxe4 10 Nxe4 Nxe4 11 Bxe4 is more standard. I doubt White is better here, but I have a lot of experience in this pawn structure with both colors via the Tarrasch Variation of the French Defense. I believe that this is a better version of that situation because of White's well-placed bishops.

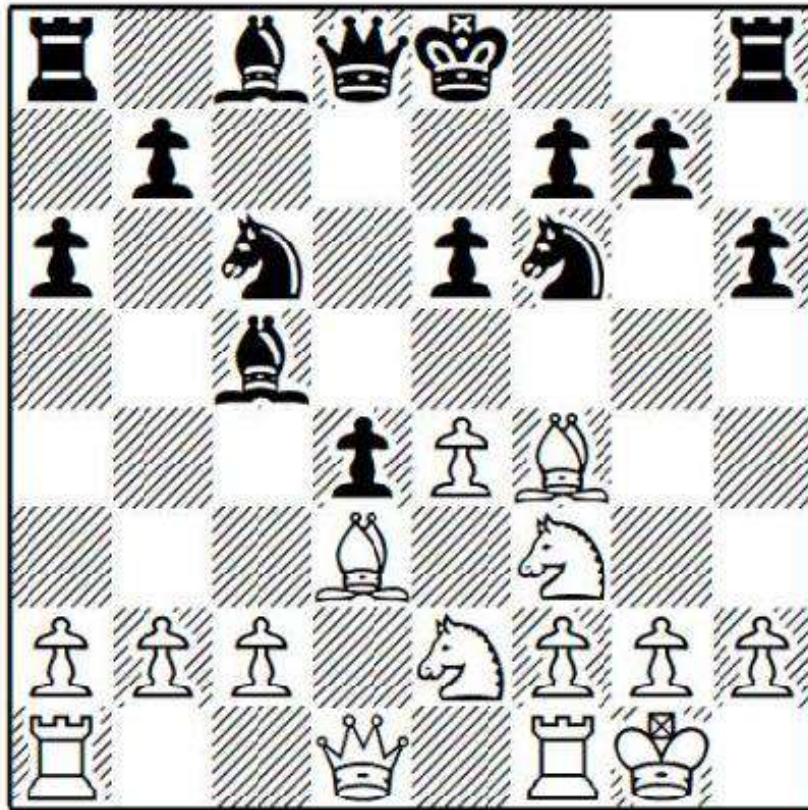
**9 e4**

This is the idea of White's setup. Ideally, White is looking to gain space in the center and on the kingside with an e5 advance. Should this happen, Black's pieces will be driven back, and an uncomfortable French-like situation will arise where White has excellent control of the d4-square, and the c8-bishop sees no convenient pathways to enter the game.

**9 ... d4**

The most common way to avoid the previously mentioned scenario. 9 ... dxe4 10 Nxe4 Nxe4 11 Bxe4 Qxd1 12 Raxd1 Bd7 was employed successfully by GM Anatoly Bykhovsky, but after 13 Ne5! Black's inadequate activity is reinforced.

**10 Ne2**



White aims to play e5. If Black has no reasonable reply to this, then it is questionable that 8 ... h6 should have been played in preference to 8 ... 0-0.

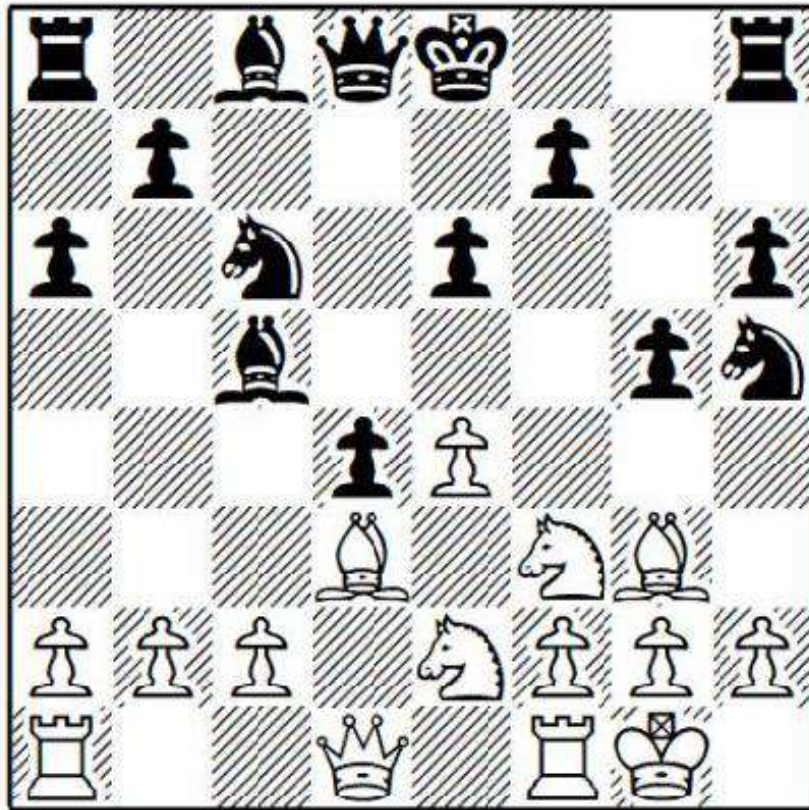
**10 ... g5?!**

While this move is not disastrous, I am unsure why it is necessary or what it accomplishes. Is Black really going to benefit from a kingside expansion? 10 ... Nh5 11 e5 Nxf4 12 Nxf4 is better, with chances for both sides.

**11 Bg3**

11 Bd2 is also possible, but I was not overly afraid of the bishop being targeted on g3; whereas after 11 ... g4 12 Ne1 h5 Black's kingside advance has a bit of potential.

**11 ... Nh5?**



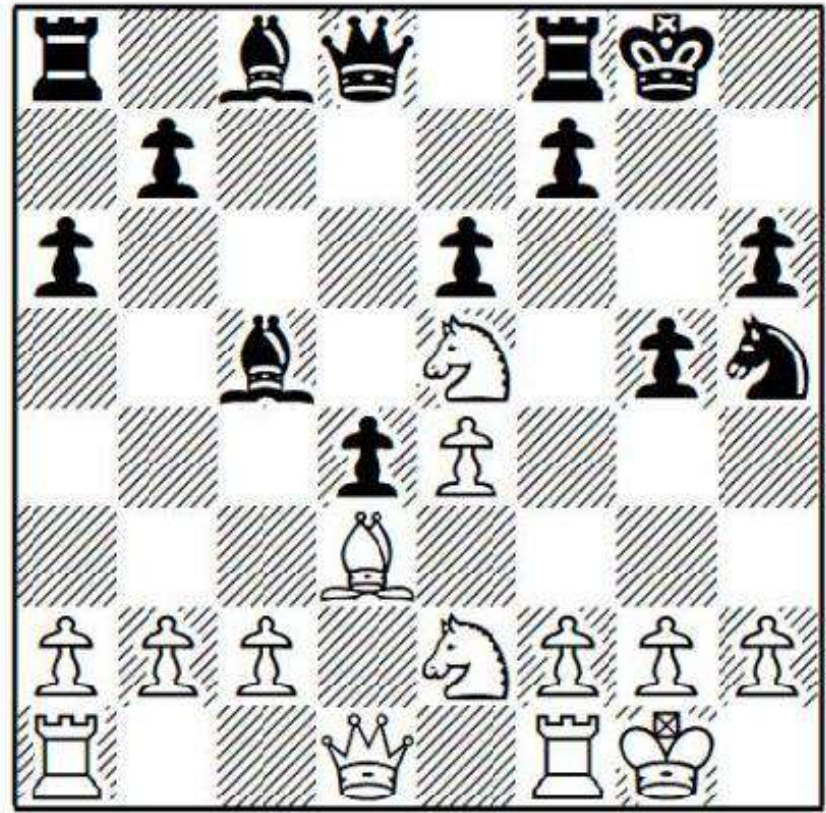
Consistent, but tactically flawed. This position is not of great importance to the theme of our book, in that it does not contribute much to our learning of how to play positionally, but the tactic itself is interesting. 11 ... g4? 12 Ne5! shows the advantage of keeping the bishop on g3. Black is not appropriately developed to give up the center in such a manner. 11 ... Bd7 is probably best, but I have trouble believing that ... g5 is an inclusion that helps Black. 12 Rb1!? is a strange computer try, preparing c3 and bxc3 to open the b-file.

### 12 Be5?

Anand once lost a game against Carlsen where the Norwegian blundered two pawns and Anand failed to seize the opportunity. When it was brought to his attention afterward, Anand said that “One does not take gifts that they are not expecting”, or something to that effect. While it is certainly not the best excuse, I sympathize with his plight and faced a similar predicament here, where I did not even contemplate the correct move.

Because 12 Be5 throws away the advantage according to the engine, we could theoretically consider Black's ... g5 and ... Nh5 configuration mistaken solely for tactical reasons. However, this would be disingenuous as the game reveals the problems of playing in such a positionally "loose" way. Instead, 12 Nxd4! picks up a pawn: 12 ... Nxc3 (12 ... Nxd4 is most challenging visually, but after 13 Be5! the weak points on d4, h8, and h5 are all under serious pressure: 13 ... Nxf3+ 14 Qxf3 and Black is unable to save both his rook and knight simultaneously; or if 12 ... Bxd4 13 Nxd4 Nxc3 then 14 Nxc6! is an excellent intermediate move that secures White a clean extra pawn) 13 Nxc6 Qc7 14 hxg3 Qxc6 15 e5. I am not sure what I missed exactly, but this move order escaped my attention for some reason. Most of my colleagues I have shown this tactic to also needed quite some time to find it though, so maybe it's not just me.

**12 ... Nxe5 13 Nxe5 0-0?**



This one is far too much. The combination of the g5 advance and castling is both optically distasteful and concretely dubious. Now that the black king is exposed, White should try to bring pieces toward the kingside. The vulnerable h5-knight enables this to be done with tempo. 13 ... Qc7 14 Ng4 e5 would have been more sensible, although after 15 Ng3 I still favor White despite the engine's indifference. 13 ... Nf6 is a good attempt to bring the knight back into the game; it is also safer than the game continuation.

### **14 Ng3**

This move is the most direct way to infiltrate the kingside. We can note the weakness of the h5-square created by Black's premature advances. Black has several knight moves available to deal with this issue, but none of them are compelling. 14 f4 Bd6! permits Black to defend on account of the weak central dark squares.

### **14 ... Nxf3?**

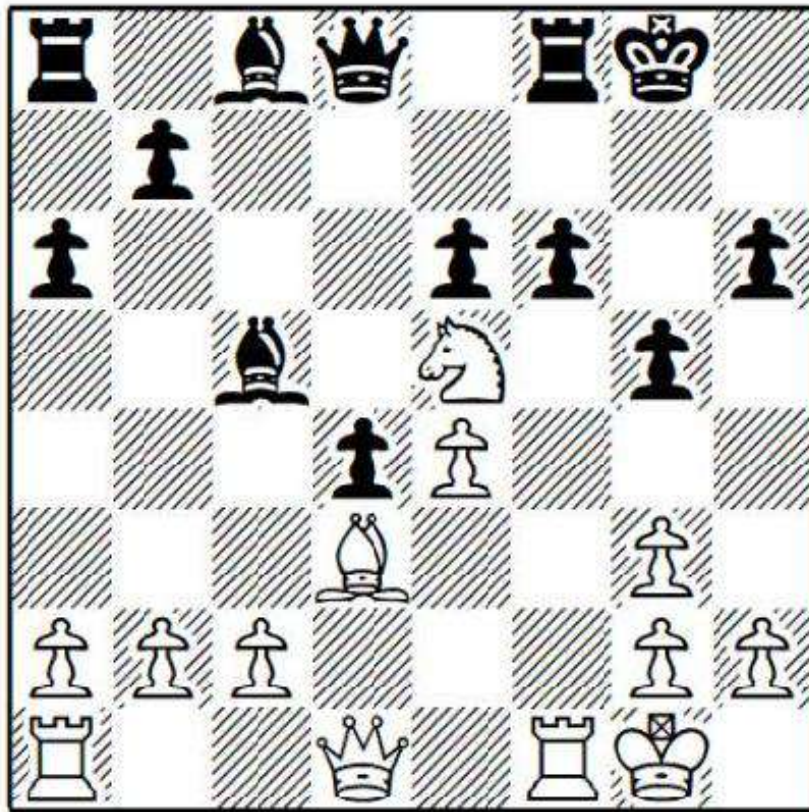
Black cannot afford to open the kingside like this. I do not think Preotu's defensive measures have been up to par with his strength thus far. This exchange gains time to play ... f6, but this is not a panacea by any means. If 14 ... Ng7 15 Ng4, Black has trouble defending h6; 15 ... f5 16 exf5 exf5 17 Nxf6+ Kh7 seems to trap the knight, but 18 Nxf5! Nxf5 19 Nxf5 Bxf5 20 Bxf5+ Rxf5 21 Qd3 unleashes a devastating pin. 14 ... Nf6 complicates the defense of the h6-g5 complex. How can we punish this directly? With 15 f4! Bd6 (15 ... gxf4 16 Rxf4 Bd6 wins the knight on e5, but White can take advantage of the weak h6-pawn: 17 Rh4! Bxe5 18 Qd2 and Black will have to shed a lot of material to stall the checkmate) 16 fxg5 Bxe5 17 gxf6 Bxf6 18 Qg4+ Bg7 19 h4 and Black has a hideous position. 14 ... Nf4 is likely best, but after 15 Nh5 Ng6 16 Ng4 Black is lamenting his earlier kingside aggression; 16 ... f5 17 e5! is a lovely point.

### **15 fxg3!**

Opening the f-file takes priority here over capturing toward the center. The pressure on f6 and f7 from the white rook virtually obligates Black to play his next move.

### **15 ... f6**

A must, but this offers no respite. 15 ... Qd6 or anything similar allows 16 Ng4 with an invasion into f6 on the table.



We now reach a crossroads where White must choose to go backward or forward.

### **16 Qh5!**

This move is not technically the strongest, but it essentially forces Black to take on e5. After this capture, White can make a draw with Qg6+ and Qxh6+ at the minimum. There is great utility in playing with the draw “in hand”, so to speak, as chess is a game of inches, and the elimination of risk allows us to opt-out in the event of a computational error. 16 Ng4?! is quite slow, and Black will not die quietly following 16 ... Kg7 17 e5 f5.

16 Ng6! is another good way to proceed. I believe that it falls behind 16 Qh5 in practicality, but of course if you see everything, there is no need for such considerations: 16 ... Rf7 17 Qh5 Qe8 (17 ... Kg7 18 Ne5 I foresaw, but Black can be slightly more tenacious; 17 ... Rh7 is only a temporary solace, as after 18 Rf2 the doubling of the rooks along the f-file would present Black with insurmountable problems; being an impatient 17-year-

old at the time, I was searching for a more direct approach) 18 Ne5! picks up the exchange.

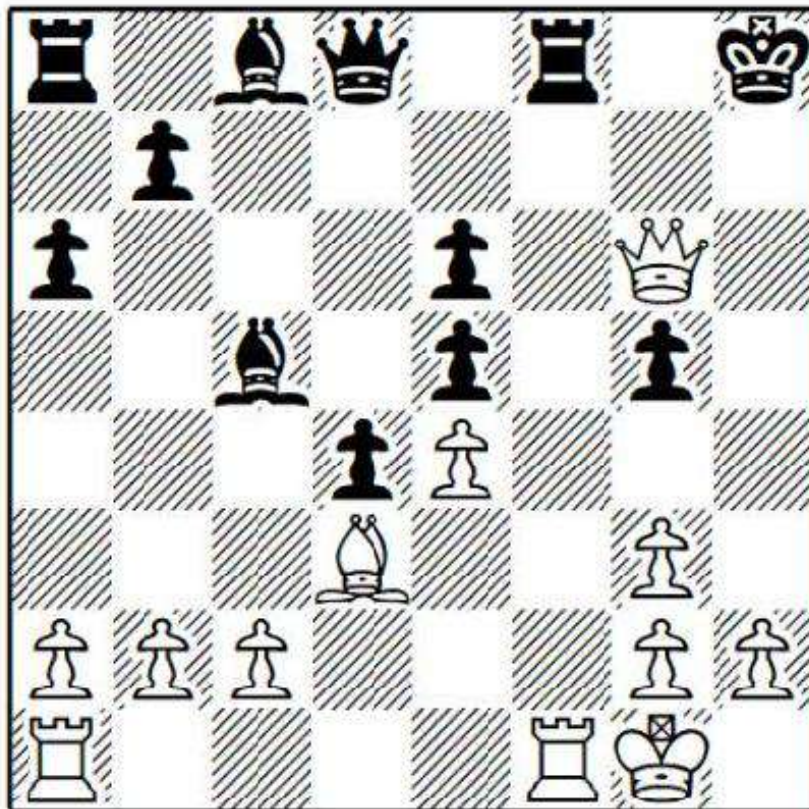
**16 ... fxe5**

16 ... Qe8 17 Qxe8 Rxe8 18 Rxf6 does not help; the ending is hopeless because of the extra pawn and kingside attack that endures through the queen exchange.

**17 Qg6+ Kh8 18 Qxh6+ Kg8 19 Qg6+**

It is always nice to repeat a position with a pawn missing from our opponent's side.

**19 ... Kh8**



At this point in a game, it is vital to think deeply. As mentioned earlier, it is important to recognize that we can draw on demand from this type of situation. This means that it does not matter how much clock time is spent here, as you can take the half point if you don't see anything convincing. While finding the correct continuation in this specific case is not too

complicated, to reiterate, the main takeaway is that this is a scenario with effectively unlimited time, as chess is a practical game. The reader is probably studying this book to improve their playing ability, not their ability to wax poetic on the machinations of engine chess.

### **20 Rxf8+!**

The exclamation point is likely egregious, as the rest of the game is not so hard. But this capture essentially represents the decision to play on, and the mechanics of it mostly involve the inclusion of the a1-rook to the action. A large part of chess consists of bringing the pieces into the game, as playing with sixteen is far more effective than with one.

### **20 ... Bxf8**

20 ... Qxf8 21 Rf1 Qg7 22 Qe8+ Qg8 23 Qh5+ Qh7 24 Qxg5 is also losing for Black. There is no immediate checkmate in sight, but that is hardly relevant when Black is playing without half of his army.

### **21 Rf1**

The rook's invasion to the seventh rank is both inevitable and decisive.

### **21 ... Bg7 22 Rf7 Qg8**

Black has covered all the relevant points under direct threat of checkmate, but this is insufficient given the rest of his position.

### **23 Re7 1-0**

Any affront to the threat of Re8 is useless, so Black saw no point in continuing. The black queenside is so poorly developed that it renders the rest of the game unplayable, a sharp contrast to White's dominating major pieces. You will probably notice that many of the games in this chapter revolve around this theme; proper utilization of the pieces is indeed how chess is played.

## *Game 12*

**J.Sheng-A.Mishra**

Sturbridge 2019

I had started this tournament rather poorly, with suboptimal results in my first few rounds. I was determined to change this with some aggressive play against my talented young opponent.

### **1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6**

As far as I know, Mishra had never played anything but the Taimanov up to this point. He told me after the game that he had seen some recent games

indicating the Scheveningen's viability, but I think this shift primarily originated from some poor results in the g3 Taimanov shortly before this event. 4 ... Nc6 5 Nc3 Qc7 6 g3 a6 7 Bg2 Nf6 8 0-0 Be7 9 Re1 0-0 10 Nxc6 dxc6 11 e5 had been employed against Mishra by my good friends, the IMs Craig Hilby and Advait Patel, just a month prior. The line is a bit unpleasant to play for Black, and after both defeats I imagine he was looking for a fresh approach.

### **5 Nc3 d6**

I do not think the Scheveningen has such a good reputation these days. What I always found worst about it was that not only is the Keres Attack at least somewhat troublesome for Black, I can't see anything better for Black after Be3 than eventually playing ... a6.

### **6 g4**

6 Be3 a6 is a common continuation, after which we have returned to the Najdorf.

### **6 ... h6 7 Rg1!?**

To my knowledge, this move is invented mainly by Kotronias and Semkov in their book *Attacking the Flexible Sicilian*. They pointed out some trouble regarding forced lines in the much more common 7 h4 line, where Black may be able to draw. I had not reviewed my Scheveningen files in quite a while because it is not a common guest in this day and age, and my opponent had never played it before. However, I was fairly sure Black's whole opening setup isn't the greatest, so I felt confident at the board. 7 h4 Nc6 8 Rg1 d5 9 exd5 Nxd5 10 Nxd5 Qxd5 11 Bg2 Qc4 is the "problem", if I can remember correctly. White should be better, but it is not easy to convert.

### **7 ... Nc6 8 Be3!?**

The idea is to reduce the effectiveness of Black's ... d5 counter by first developing some pieces and potentially castling before going for a flank attack with h4-g5. 8 h4 d5 is a simple transposition.

### **8 ... a6 9 h4 h5**

After 9 ... d5 10 exd5 Nxd5 11 Nxd5 Qxd5 12 Bg2 Qc4 (it is noticeable that the inclusion of the moves ... a6 and Be3 have benefitted White greatly) 13 Nxc6 bxc6 14 Qd2 Black will have immense difficulty defending.

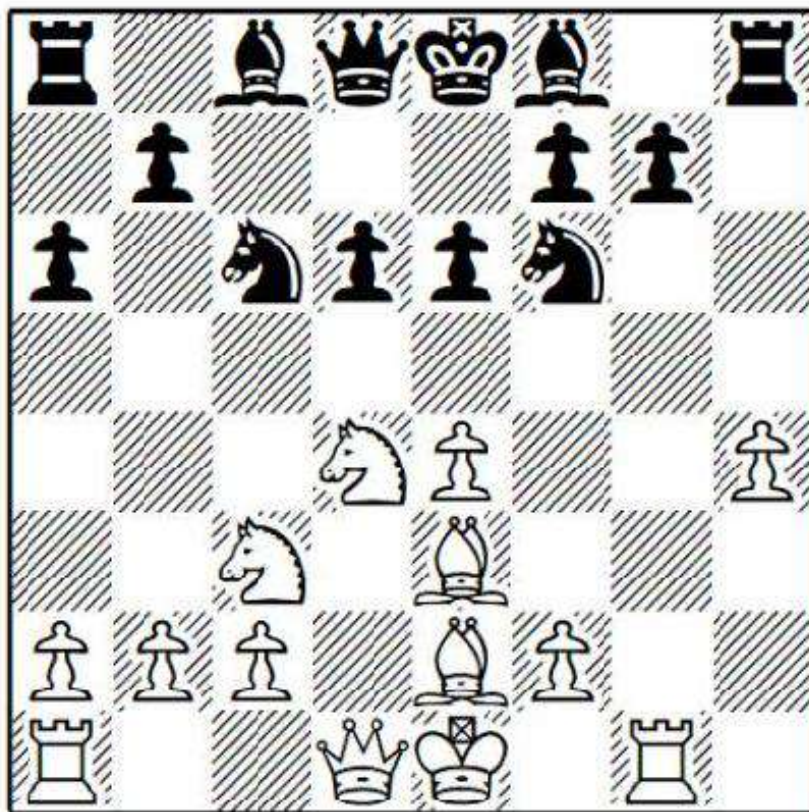
### **10 gxh5 Nxh5 11 Be2**

11 Qd2 is a better move since I should not be too worried about Black capturing the h-pawn. I know Kotronias and Semkov did a great deal of

analysis here that I have saved but not memorized, but I believe the general idea is that White's position is very pleasant. After 11 ... Nxd4 12 Qxd4 Qxh4 13 0-0-0 Black's troubles are hardly worth this pawn.

### 11 ... Nf6

Here 11 ... Qxh4?? 12 Bg5 Qh3 (12 ... Qh2 13 Nf3 fares no better) 13 Bg4 Qh2 14 Nf3 is quite amusing. 11 ... g6!? was a move I thought might be played. I figured that Black doesn't want to let White play h5. However, after 12 Qd2 Be7 (if 12 ... Bg7 13 0-0-0, d6 is criminally weak as a consequence of the f8-bishop's activation on g7) 13 0-0-0 it looks like White has gained a lot of time, and there may be some problems on the dark squares for Black: 13 ... Bd7 (or 13 ... Nf6 14 Bg5) 14 Nb3 and a subsequent Bg5 will pry the black bishop from its defense of d6.

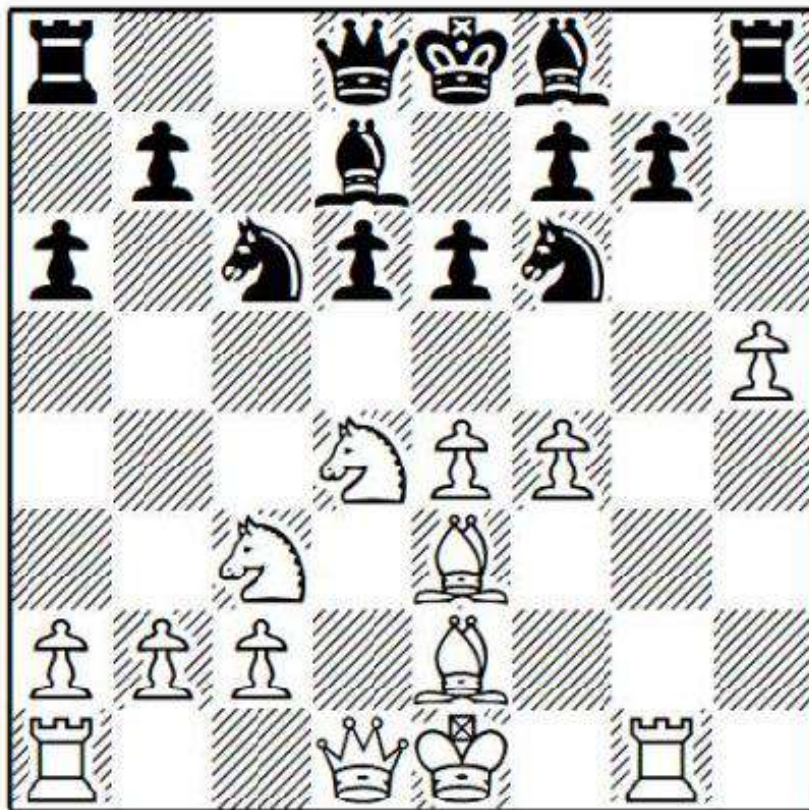


Black has made some overt concessions so far. How should White increase the pressure?

### 12 h5

Preventing Black from playing a future ... g6 and thus tying the f8-bishop to the g7-pawn for the foreseeable future. The position is optically excellent for White, but Black remains very solid, and I was unsure how I would break through.

**12 ... Bd7 13 f4?!**



This move is designed to gain space and control the e5-square. Unfortunately, it has some concrete issues. Instead, 13 Qd2 Nxd4 14 Qxd4 would cause me to lose a tempo, but this is not disastrous by any means. White preserves a healthy advantage.

**13 ... Nxd4?!**

A serious concession, but I felt Black was starting to run out of moves. 13 ... Qc7 14 Qd2 (14 Nb3 is not best, but likely what I would have played: Black's standard plan in this kind of situation is to play ... Na5, and after 14 ... Na5 15 Nxa5 Qxa5 he will have expended two tempi with his queen instead of one to capture on a5; however, this does not seem to be

detrimental to Black's well-being) 14 ... Nxd4 15 Bxd4! Bc6 16 Qe3 allows White a monopoly over the dark squares. 13 ... Nxf5!? 14 Rh1 g6 15 Bxf5 gxf5 looks very loose for Black but may well be playable.

Apparently, I was just wrong about Black's predicament in the game. 13 ... e5! 14 Nxc6 Bxc6 lands Black serious counterplay. In my defense, ... e5 is not an easy move to consider because it weakens control of the d5-square.

#### **14 Qxd4**

White displays a great superiority in central force, with the linchpin being the beautifully placed queen on d4.

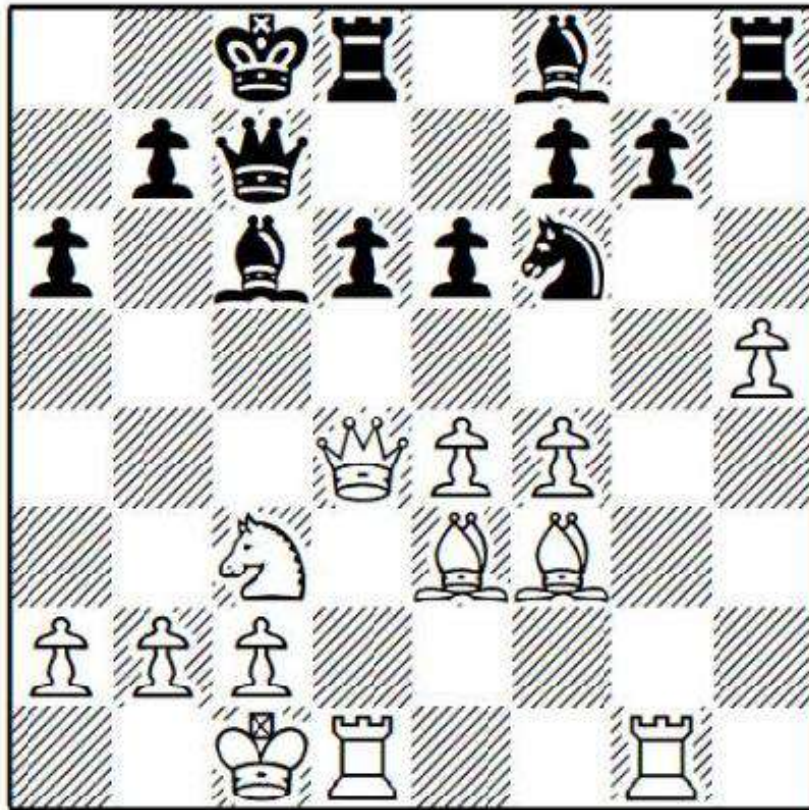
#### **14 ... Bc6 15 0-0-0 Qc7**

It is not clear that Black's king is safe on the queenside, but finding another constructive plan is hard.

#### **16 Bf3**

This move overprotects e4 and slightly improves the e2-bishop. 16 e5 is tempting but not terribly helpful at first glance; after 16 ... dxe5 17 fxe5 Nd7 the situation has gotten considerably messier, although *Stockfish* points out an exact path to an advantage: 18 Qh4! Qxe5 (or 18 ... Nxe5 19 h6!! gxf6 20 Qf6 and White's attack is unstoppable) 19 Bd4 Be7 20 Qg4 and White is doing just fine. However, I should clarify that computer-like sequences such as this should not be favored over simple advantages. 16 Kb1 is another possible waiting move, when 16 ... 0-0-0 17 f5 resembles the game.

#### **16 ... 0-0-0**



White has an advantage, but how should he proceed?

**17 f5!**

It was pretty clear to me I would not get e5 to work, so it is better to soften e6. If Black wants to avoid the creation of a potential weakness on that square, he must play ... e5 himself and freeze the kingside. It is important to note that the weakening of the e5-square is insignificant; one of the main benefits of having such an advantage in coordination is that the opponent is often unequipped to exploit weaknesses, and that holds true here.

**17 ... e5**

I was not too fond of this decision, as it wasn't entirely evident to me how I was going to attack the pawn on e6. That being said, I suppose the more serious problem is what Black should do instead, so ... e5 may be the best of Black's options. 17 ... exf5? 18 Nd5 Bxd5 19 exd5 wins a pawn, but the resulting position is horrendous; Black retains all of his previous

problems on the kingside and center while being exposed to an attack after Rd3-c3. 17 ... Re8 18 fxe6 (18 h6 is also playable, exploiting the loose knight on f6; if 18 ... e5 19 hxg7 Bxg7 20 Qxd6, White is up a clean pawn in the endgame) 18 ... fxe6 19 Kb1 leaves Black with a rook on e8 and a miserable position. 17 ... d5? is frequently desirable in the Sicilian, but this does not work well here: 18 exd5 Nxd5 (18 ... Bxd5 19 Nxd5 Nxd5 20 Qa7! is also disastrous) 19 Bxd5 Bxd5 20 h6! and the pin on g7 will ruin Black's day.

### **18 Qc4**

Black's ... e5 advance loosened the central light squares, so White's queen should take advantage of them. The White pieces already aim toward the queenside, so transferring the queen to b3 is a logical choice. Black is seriously cramped. 18 Qa7!? is suggested by the engine, but this is a bit eccentric to my eyes.

### **18 ... Kb8**

18 ... Nxb5 19 Rh1 g6 would have been the best practical choice, in my opinion. I like to be up material, and I would say that it is better to suffer for a pawn than for nothing. However, this does not solve Black's problems by any stretch of the imagination. After 20 Kb1! Black is still uncoordinated (the more natural 20 fxg6 fxg6 21 Qe6+ Kb8 22 Qxg6 is probably what I would have played in the game, but 22 ... Nf4 diminishes a lot of White's advantage) and 20 ... Bh6 21 Bg1 will almost certainly be followed by some active operations on the queenside.

### **19 Qb3 Rc8 20 Rh1**

White has many options of roughly comparable value. This one is not rated particularly highly by *Stockfish* compared with the others, but it prevents any future ... Nxb5 shenanigans. In my mind, it is always better to prevent the opponent's counterplay whenever possible. 20 Kb1 and 20 a3 were some of *Stockfish*'s preferences, but neither of these moves does anything special. The general gist is that it's not looking good for Black.

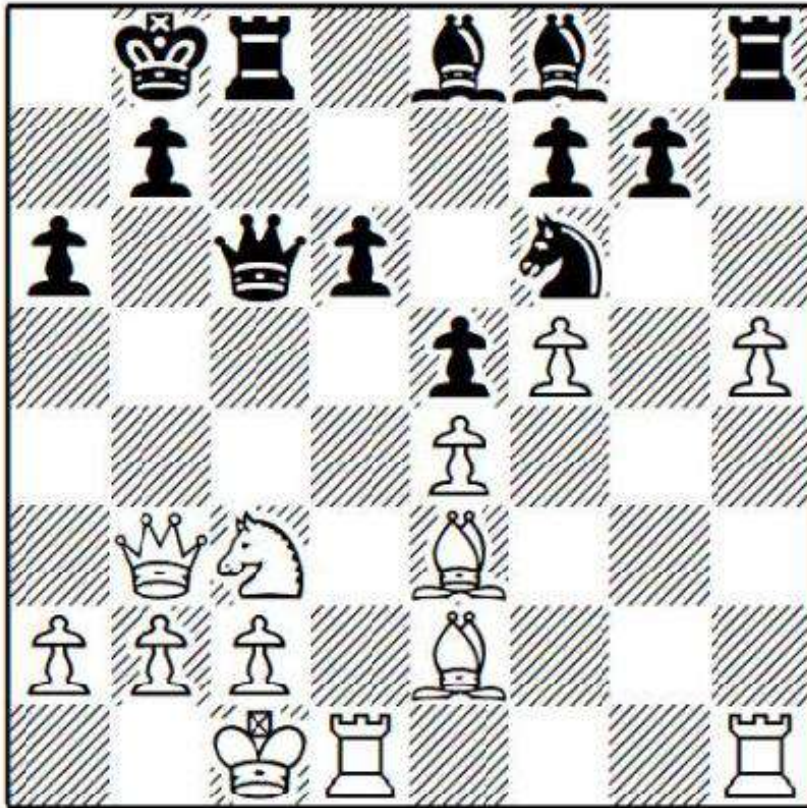
### **20 ... Be8?!**

Mishra intends to develop the dark-squared bishop to e7 without hanging f7. But it is hard to recommend un-developing one of Black's few useful pieces. The fact that 20 ... Bb5 is considered best by the engine is pretty funny to me. After 21 Nxb5 axb5 22 Rd3 Black is nearly lost, but I would consider this situation more palatable than the game continuation; at least Black is not being mated here!

## 21 Be2

Now that its services are no longer needed on f3, the light-squared bishop can join the attack by pressuring a6 and preventing a queen trade associated with ... Qc4.

## 21 ... Qc6



It is unnecessary to find a breakthrough at this specific point, but I believe that White's next move does a wonderful job of bringing the toys to the nursery party.

## 22 Rd5

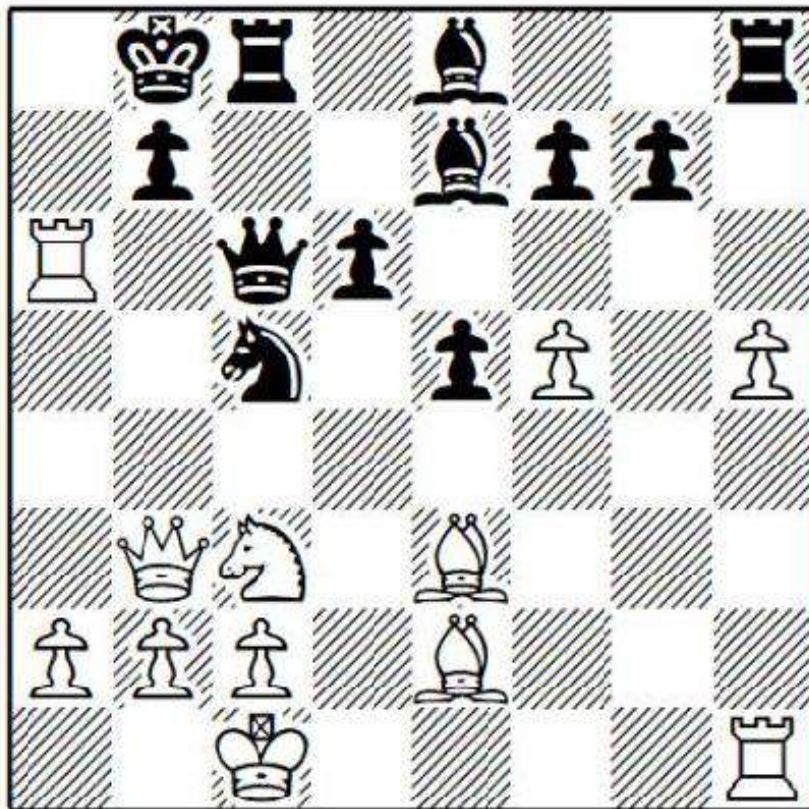
I was very proud of this decision. I thought Black would be obliged to take the rook to spare himself from Ra5, but once again the silicon beast comes to rain on my parade. Note that 22 Nd5? Nxd5 23 exd5 Qa4! is one of the points of ... Qc6; White still keeps an advantage, but allowing Black to trade queens is distasteful to me. The game continuation sacrifices more material, but this is not too important in the resultant position. 22 Rh4! is

praised highly by the computer, and it is a good choice to continue with defensive operations before continuing the offense. However, I didn't think my opponent even deserved the privilege of developing with ... Be7 !

### 22 ... Nxd5?

Too compliant. Now White's attack will decide the game.

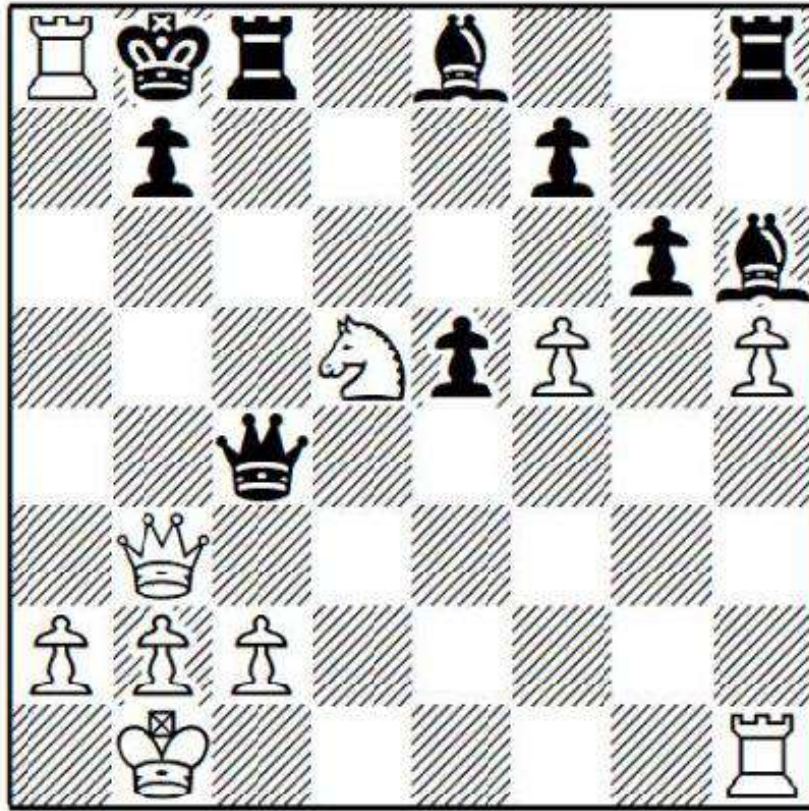
22 ... Be7 and moves like this do not help Black's position much. 23 Rg1 prepares Ra5. I am a bit ashamed to say that I likely would have played 23 Ra5? immediately, which would spoil a good bit of the advantage due to 23 ... Nxe4 24 Nd5 (not 24 Rxa6? – I want to think I wouldn't have played this way in the game, but who knows – 24 ... Nc5!



and the hanging rook on h1 will cost White the game) 24 ... Nc5 25 Bxc5 dxc5 26 Rxa6 Bg5+! 27 Kb1 c4 28 Bxc4 Qc5 29 Nb6 Bc6 and Black is in a much better situation than he was before.

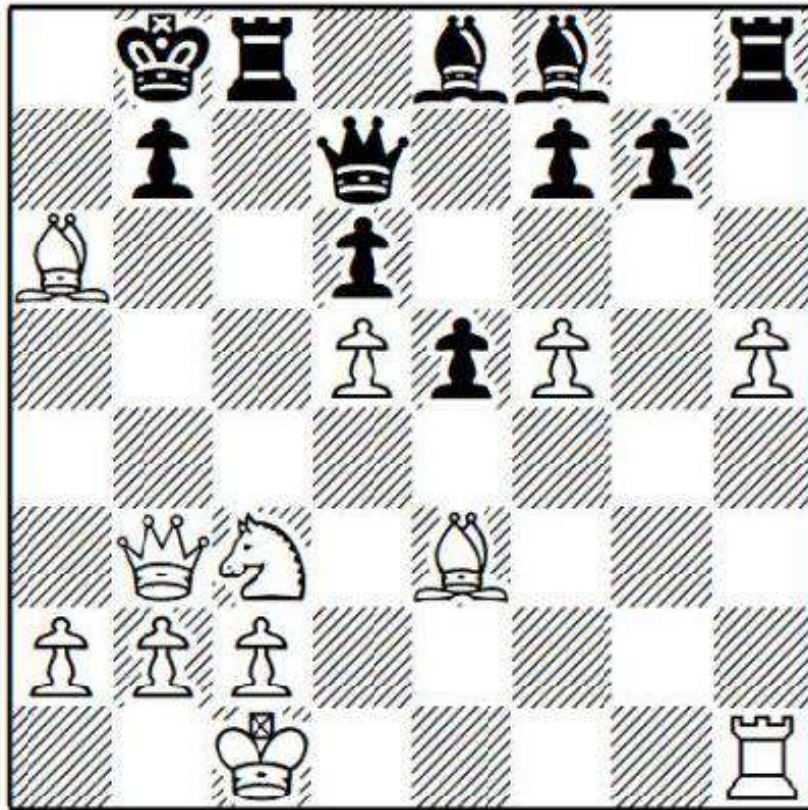
Instead, 22 ... g6! is an ingenious engine solution to activate the dark-squared bishop: 23 Ra5 Bh6 (23 ... Nxe4 24 Nd5 is winning this time: 24 ...

Nc5 25 Bxc5 dxc5 26 Rxa6 Bh6+ 27 Kb1 c4 28 Bxc4! Qxc4 29 Ra8+!



picks up the queen in a fantastic way; or if 28 ... Qc5 29 Nb6 Bc6, the difference from the previous line is that White can now take on g6 whichever way he chooses and come out with a winning advantage) 24 Bxh6 Rxh6 25 fxg6 fxg6 26 Bxa6 is still an extra pawn combined with a reasonable attack, but White's position in the game is even better than this.

**23 exd5 Qd7 24 Bxa6**



Despite missing an exchange, White's attack will decide the game. Simple math dictates that White's material deficit is merely an illusion; the f8-bishop and h8-rook will never contribute to the action, which is exclusively on the queenside. Meanwhile, even the passive-looking rook on h1 can join in at a moment's notice with Rh4.

**24 ... Rxc3!?**

I don't think Black's position is holdable, but this seems needed to allow the king some space. 24 ... Be7 25 Qb6 looks over.

**25 bxc3 Kc8 26 Rh4!**

It is rather elementary to see the bishop on a6 is immune from capture, so the worst-placed piece comes in to finish the attack. The futility of the black kingside is readily apparent.

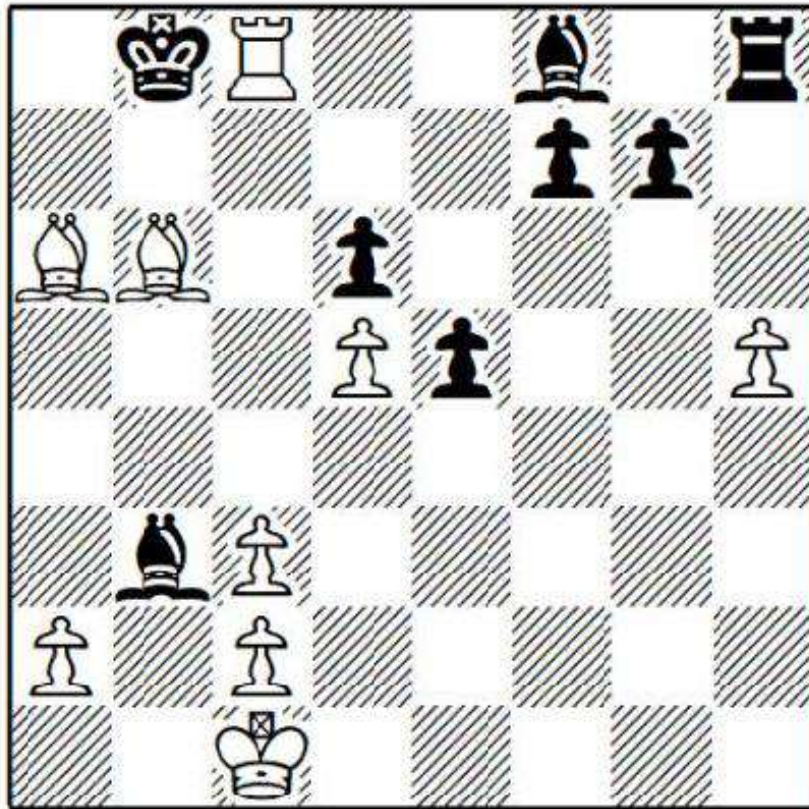
**26 ... Kd8**

After 26 ... bxa6 27 Rc4+ Kd8 28 Qb8+ Ke7 29 Rc7 losing the queen will cost Black the game, given the state of the rest of his pieces: 29 ... Kf6

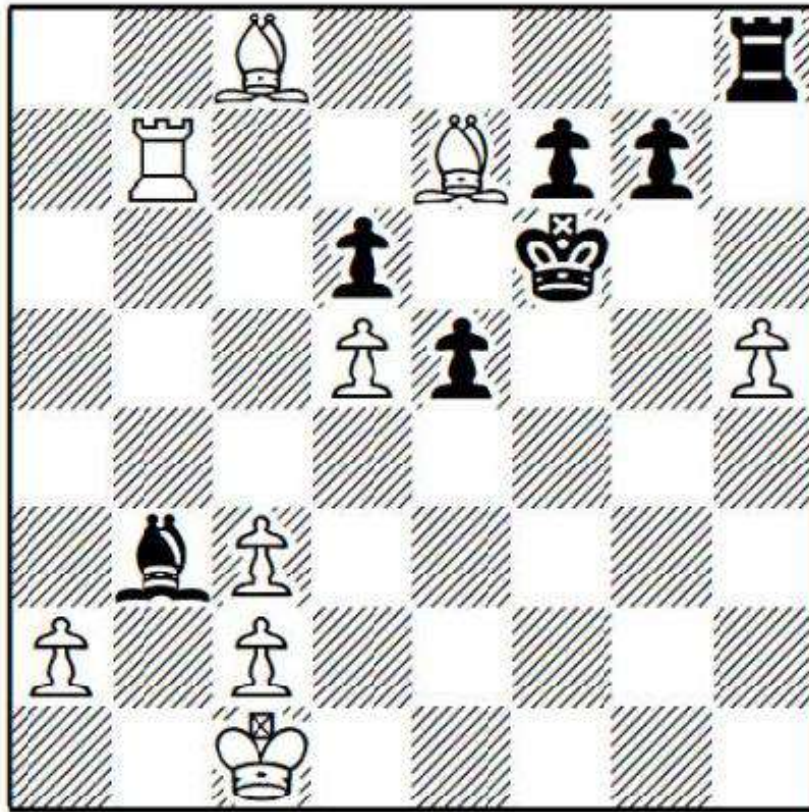
30 Rxd7 Bxd7 31 Qd8+.

**27 Bxb7**

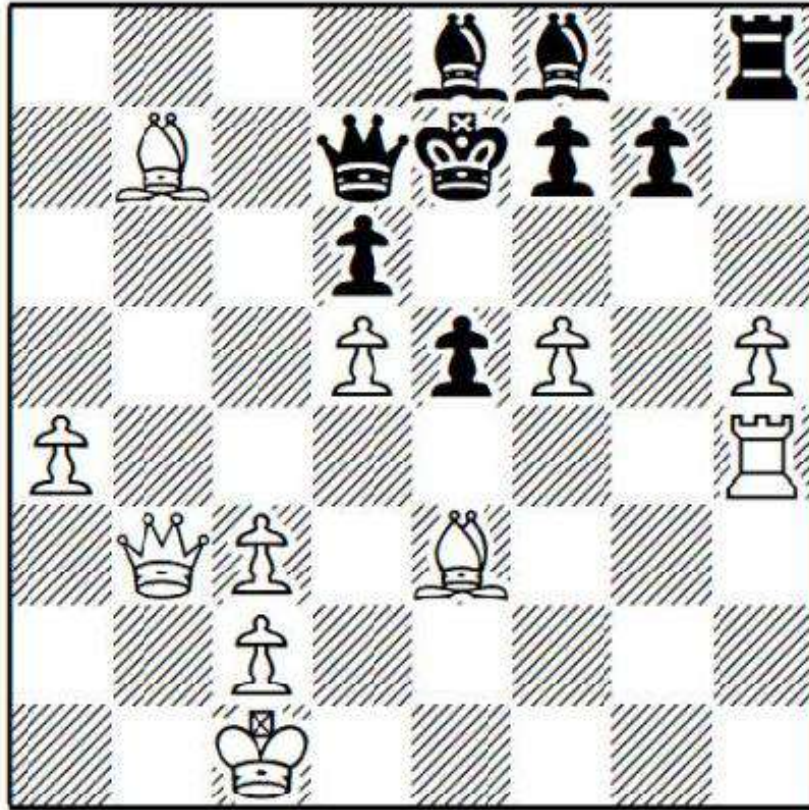
This move is fine and winning, but I consider it slightly unfortunate I did not crown the attack in the most deserving way. I badly wanted 27 Rc4! to work and saw some brilliant lines, but not the whole truth: 27 ... Qxf5 28 Rc7!! was my initial idea, but then I saw 28 ... Ba4!! and concluded that I would have to play 29 Qxa4 and allow 29 ... Kxc7. Instead, 29 Rxb7!! is probably not too difficult to find, but I didn't look further than ... Ba4 (given that my position is so obviously winning without this kind of thing). Then 29 ... Bxb3 30 Bb6+ Kc8 31 Re7+ Kb8 32 Re8+ Qc8 33 Rxc8 mate



would have been a picturesque finish, had I seen it; or if 30 ... Ke8 then 31 Bb5+ Qd7 32 Bxd7+ Ke7 33 Bc8+ Kf6 34 Bd8+ Be7 35 Bxe7 mate



and this one even more so!  
**27 ... Ke7 28 a4!**



I consider this position's aesthetic value highly as well. Despite Black's many pieces, the a-pawn cannot be stopped. Develop your pieces!

**28 ... Qxf5 29 a5 Qf3 30 c4 Qf1+ 31 Kb2 Qe1**

A cute try to force White to part with some material.

**32 a6**

The pawn will soon become a queen; Black can have the rook.

**32 ... Qxh4 33 a7 Kf6 34 a8Q Be7 35 Bc6 Qe1 36 Bxe8 Rxh5 37 Qa1 Qe2 38 Qd3 1-0**

Since Qaf1+ will decide the game.

I was once told that there are two kinds of Black openings out there: ones that accept a small disadvantage to equalize and those that make a concession to fight for an advantage. If you are to play those in the latter category, you really ought to know what you are doing, or you may run into some trouble. I am sure Mishra has learned this lesson well, as his opening pool has morphed into an ocean, and he has just broken the youngest

grandmaster record at the time of writing this book.

*Game 13*

**J.Sheng-A.Shabalov**

Philadelphia 2018

The previous games in this chapter may have created an illusion that attacks are a natural result of opening dominance that persists over the entire game. However, this is not an accurate portrayal of how most games will pan out, as it is unlikely that you will regularly attain such positions. In this game, my situation out of the opening was not especially impressive, and I believe that this is an emblematic example of developing an initiative from a relatively humble position.

**1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3**

I can't really think of any reason to favor the text move over 3 Nd2, as Black has no practical alternatives to 3 ... dxe4 in this case.

**3 ... g6**

Not a standard line, but I am sure this was why the renowned GM Alexander Shabalov selected it. It is a pretty well-earned stereotype that junior players focus substantially on openings, and many people I know tend to choose less theoretically heavy openings against younger opponents.

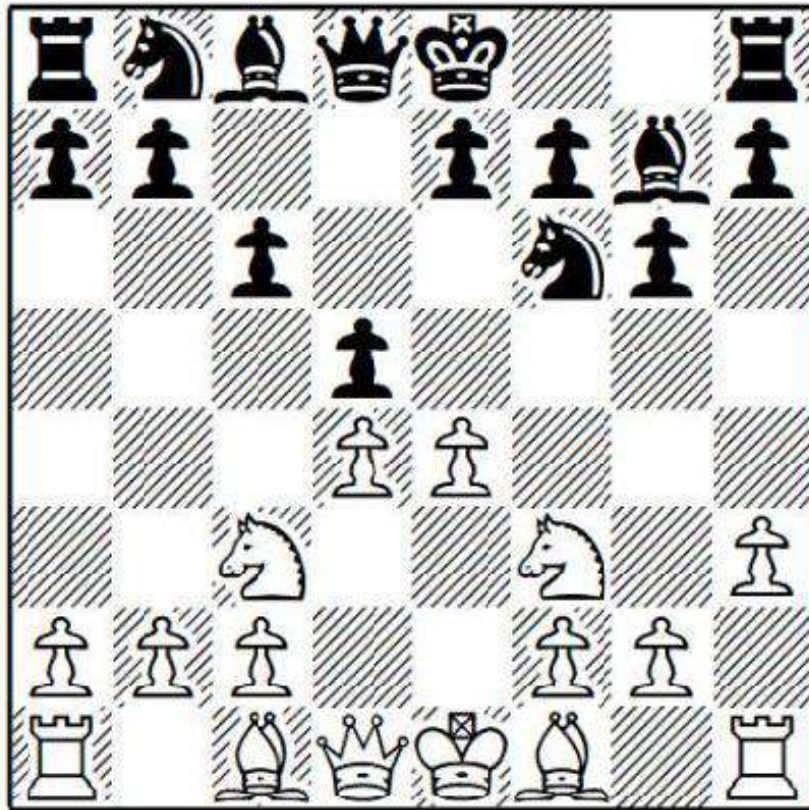
**4 h3**

Fairly conventional in order to play Nf3 without dealing with ... Bg4.

**4 ... Bg7 5 Nf3**

I believe 5 e5 is stronger. It is not straightforward for Black to choose a good developmental scheme. If 5 ... Nh6 6 Nf3 f6 7 Bf4, White has a decent edge.

**5 ... Nf6**



There is a small junction here in how to deal with the central tension.

**6 Bd3?!**

Exchanges should be avoided when one has more space. 6 e5 Ne4 was what I was concerned about, but there is little to fear from the doubling of the c-pawns: 7 Bd3 (7 Nxe4 dxe4 8 Ng5 c5 is another alternative, with many possibilities for White) 7 ... Nxc3 8 bxc3 c5 9 0-0 and the black dark-squared bishop cannot be happy on g7.

**6 ... Nxe4! 7 Nxe4 dxe4 8 Bxe4 Nd7**

From here, the knight can deploy to f6 or support a c5 push. Meanwhile, White's e4-bishop is exposed, and it is unclear how White should arrange his pieces.

**9 0-0 0-0 10 c3**

Common and logical to return the e4-bishop to c2. 10 Bg5 is playable to deter ... c5. Black has too many viable moves to discuss comprehensively,

and he does not have anything to worry about. The position should be approximately equal.

### **10 ... c5**

10 ... e5 is perhaps even simpler. A future ... exd4 Nxd4 will lead to a symmetrical pawn structure that should not concern Black.

### **11 Bc2**

It seems sensible to withdraw the bishop from the center, as it can easily be subject to attack from Black's knight there.

### **11 ... cxd4 12 Nxd4 Qb6**

Black is not threatening ... Bxd4, as the loss of the dark-squared bishop and subsequent weakening of the kingside outweighs the detriment to White's pawn structure. However, the queen is considerably active here and vacates the d-file for a rook. Additionally, the pressure on b2 makes it troublesome to move White's dark-squared bishop.

### **13 Re1 e5**

13 ... Bxd4? is awful and leads to a big disadvantage after either recapture. White's bishop pair is the dominant facet of the position. Keeping the queens on with 14 cxd4 makes things more dangerous for Black in this situation: after 14 ... Nf6 15 Bh6 Re8 16 d5 the dark-squared bishop's absence is noticeable. 14 Qxd4 Qxd4 15 cxd4 e6 16 Bg5 is also unpleasant for Black, though.

### **14 Nb3**

I wanted to guard b2 to develop the c1-bishop. 14 Nf3 Qc7 15 Qd5!? is a bizarre way to pressure e5 and impede Black's development, and 15 ... Nb6 16 Qa5 results in a slightly restrictive pin on the knight.

### **14 ... Qc7**

The queen leaves the path of the coming white bishop on e3 and prepares to activate the d7-knight via b6.

### **15 Be3**

15 Qd5 is possible again, with similar ideas. I cannot say that I considered anything along these lines during the game.

### **15 ... Nb6 16 Qe2 Nd5**

16 ... Nc4? 17 Bc5! is a major point behind the previously played Qe2. Then 17 ... Nd6 18 Rad1 Rd8 19 Qd2! is awkward for Black.

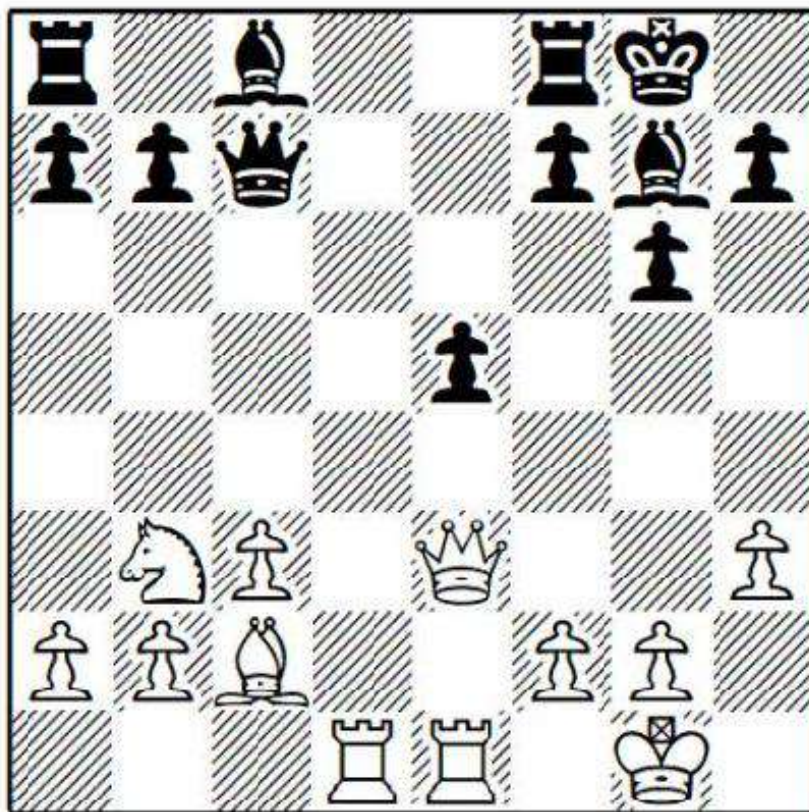
### **17 Rad1**

I wasn't satisfied with any of the reasonable ways to preserve the bishop. 17 Bd2 is very passive; Black can do basically anything. 17 ... a5 is one try

that aims to take advantage of the b3-knight's newfound inability to access the d2-square. 17 Bc5 Rd8 is not useful; the bishop on c5 is ineffective and becomes a target for a potential ... b6.

**17 ... Nxe3 18 Qxe3**

We can stop to take stock here. White is missing the bishop pair but has active rooks, and almost all of his pieces are participating. The position is about balanced, but as an ambitious youth and aficionado of the bishops, I was not content with it at the time. Despite what I thought then, White has available pathways to improve his minor pieces, particularly with Bb3 in the future.



**18 ... b6**

18 ... Be6 19 Nc5 is very annoying.

**19 Nd2**

Now that the b6-pawn controls c5, the white knight no longer contributes anything on b3. It is better on c4 or e4.

### **19 ... Kh8**

Black decides to be exceptionally cautious and sidesteps the a2-g8 diagonal preemptively. 19 ... Bb7 20 Bb3 Rad8 21 Ne4 Bxe4 22 Qxe4 Kh8 is similarly safe for Black; and 19 ... Be6 20 Bb3 Bxb3 21 axb3 Rad8 is also a stable way for Black to play.

### **20 Bb3 Ba6**

Played to take the c4-square away from the knight, but the bishop is not well placed here. 20 ... f5 21 Nc4 e4 is more consistent with 19 ... Kh8. After 22 Nd6 Ba6 Black is doing okay; the knight on d6 is strong, but it can be removed with something like ... Bf6 and Rad8.

### **21 Ne4 h6?!**

I assume Shabalov was trying to prepare ... f5 without having to worry about Ng5. However, this move is very slow, and I am sure he wished he had played 20 ... f5. After this, Black is compelled into passivity, and White has great freedom to improve his position. I was pleasantly surprised to have landed in such a situation from the relatively tame position just a few moves ago. 21 ... f5? here permits 22 Ng5 with an imminent invasion on e6. 21 ... Rad8 or 21 ... Rae8 would have been more prudent. Black will maintain a better chance of defending from the knight intrusion by bringing his rook into the game.

### **22 Nd6**

Now Black has severe difficulty driving the knight away from d6, where it controls his light-squared bishop. The a6-bishop is confined in its movement, and the f7-pawn is a clear target.

### **22 ... f5?**

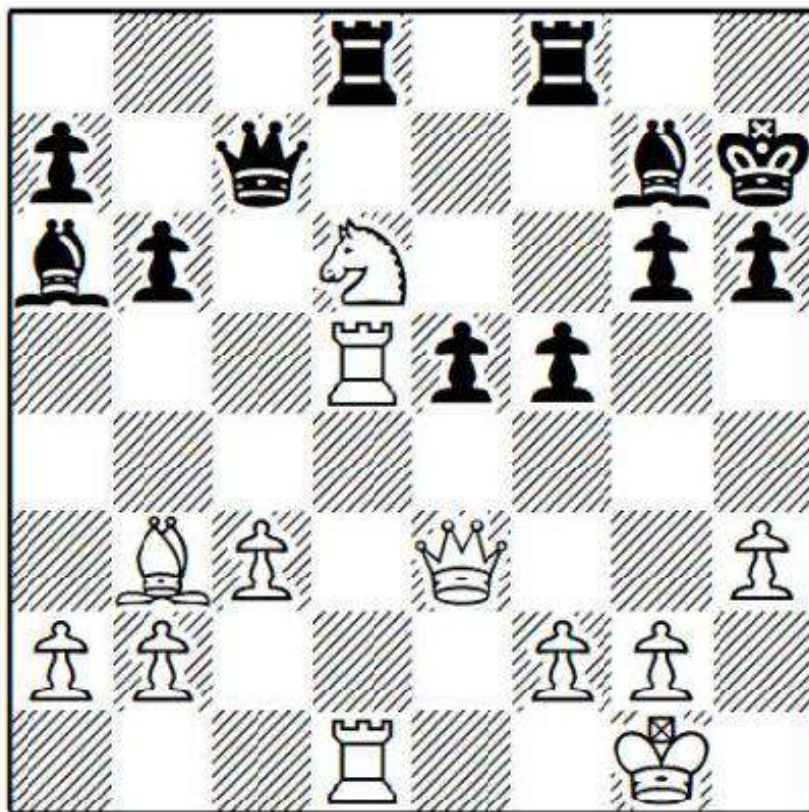
This move does not accomplish much and only loosens Black's kingside further. 22 ... Rad8?? would have been the best way to challenge the d6-knight if not for 23 Nxf7+, so 22 ... Kh7 makes sense to prepare it. This does not expel the knight as White has time to stack his rooks due to Black's sluggish play. But it does avoid any additional weakening and develops another piece. 23 Rd5 Rad8 24 Red1 Bc8 is not glamorous, but is better than what transpired in the game.

### **23 Rd5**

Doubling the rooks is logical and assigns the e1-rook to a place of more influence. The immediate 23 h4!? was also possible, but the justification 23

... h5 24 g4!! is tough to spot. The computer zeroes in on the g6-pawn in a way that humans cannot be expected to replicate.

**23 ... Kh7 24 Red1 Rad8**



Most of White's pieces have been improved to their maximum point. As has been emphasized before, this type of situation usually calls for a concrete punishment from the more active side. Here, we notice that the a6-bishop's isolation leaves Black's light squares on the kingside in disarray; g6 is the most readily approachable target.

**25 h4!**

White threatens h5, which would undermine the g6-f5 complex.

**25 ... h5**

Arguably the lesser of two evils. Black saves his light squares but allows a nice knight maneuver into g5. If 25 ... Bc8 26 h5 gxh5 27 Qh3, Black is hard-pressed to cover everything on the shattered kingside.

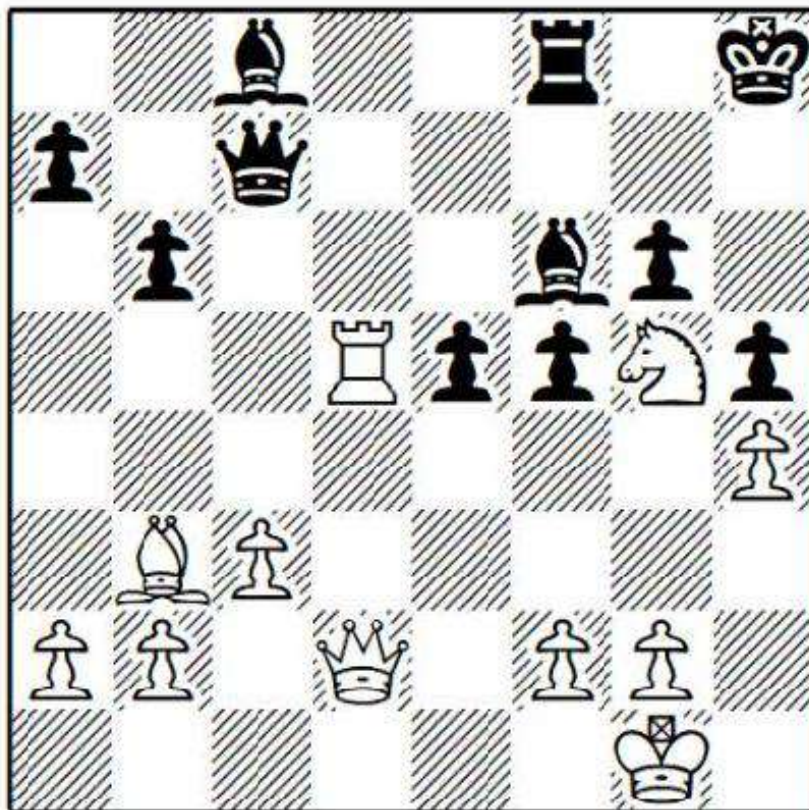
**26 Nf7!**

This must be foreseen before h4; the knight reaches the g5-square with tempo on account of the tension on the d-file.

**26 ... Rxd5 27 Ng5+ Kh8 28 Rxd5 Bc8 29 Qd2**

Further cementing White's control over the d-file and setting up Rd6.

**29 ... Bf6**



This is another one of those scenarios where it is difficult to build our position without direct means. When our opponent can improve (the point behind Black's last was to prepare ... Kg7) and we cannot, the attacker is virtually obligated to look for a way in. Thankfully, ... Bf6 abandons control of h6. The rest is a matter of calculation.

**30 Nf7+!!**

It is not so hard to see that this move enables the white queen into h6. However, both sides have many options throughout the line, and I played this move after 25 minutes of deliberation. 30 Ne4 Bg7 leaves the knight with nothing better than returning to g5.

**30 ... Rxf7**

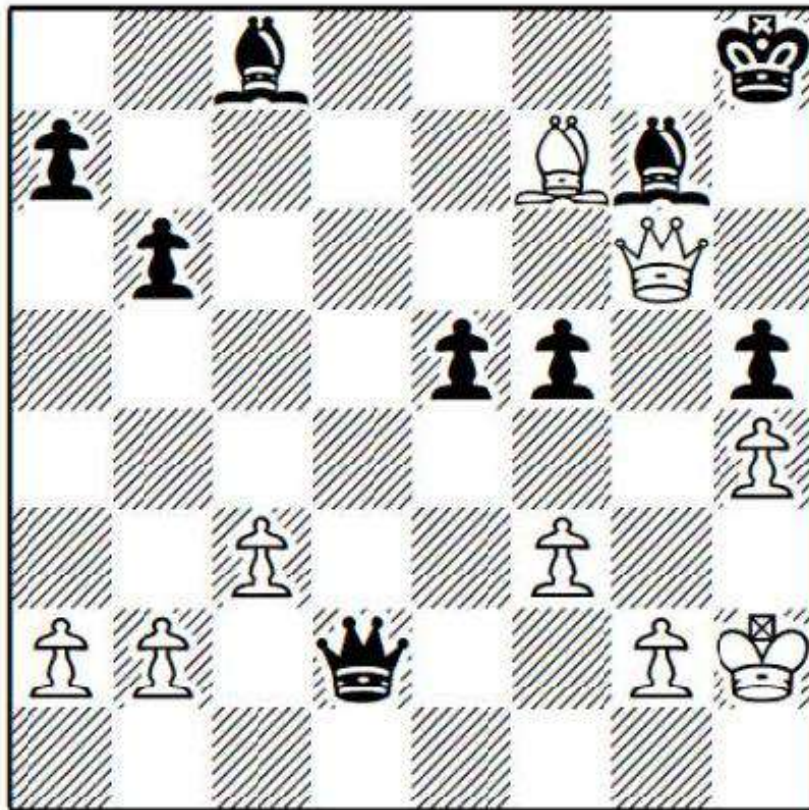
30 ... Qxf7 31 Qh6+ Kg8 32 Rd6 wins the queen, while after 30 ... Kg8 31 Rd6 Black is unable to cover the sixth rank.

**31 Qh6+ Kg8**

31 ... Rh7 32 Qf8 is an attractive mate!

**32 Qxg6+**

As odd as it might sound, this was actually a difficult decision to make when I was considering 30 Nf7+, as I initially intended to play Rd6 here. I realized that this was not good when I found Black's defense, but it is so ridiculous that I couldn't believe my eyes when I first discovered it! 32 Rd6?? Qxd6 33 Qxg6+ Kh8 34 Bxf7 looks over; Black needs to cover f6, g8, h6, and h5 simultaneously. After 34 ... Qd1+! 35 Kh2 Bg7 it turns out he can! Even 36 f3 is inadequate because of 36 ... Qd2!,



when White must exhibit extreme caution to avoid defeat.

**32 ... Kf8**

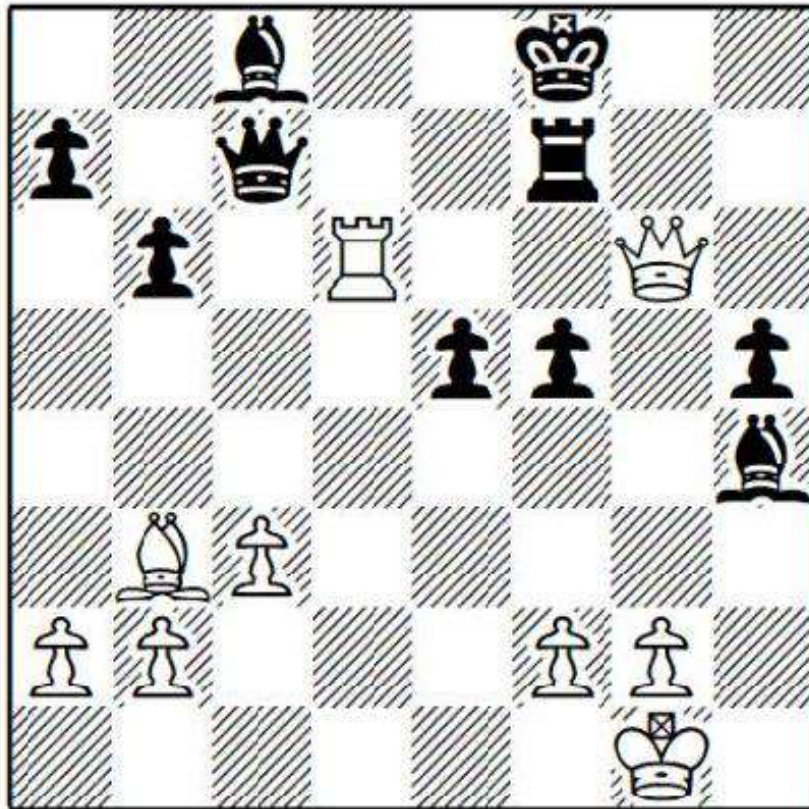
This square is available to the black king, and thus there is no immediate mate. However, Black still has serious issues. On 32 ... Bg7, 33 Rd3 would have been my pick. The pressure on f7 and d8 will cost Black a decisive amount of material.

**33 Rd6**

There is no plausible defense to White's plethora of threats.

**33 ... Bxh4**

33 ... Ke7 34 Qxf7+ Kxd6 35 Qxf6+ is no real defense for Black. While there is no checkmate, there hardly needs to be one. 33 ... Bg7 34 Bxf7 is easy enough.



**34 Rc6!**

The black queen is overloaded between c8 and f7.

**34 ... Rg7 35 Qh6 1-0**

The queen will take the backdoor into h8 and end Black's life. I hope this game embodies a realistic model of developing an initiative from a quiet position.

*Game 14*

**Hydra-R.Ponomariov**

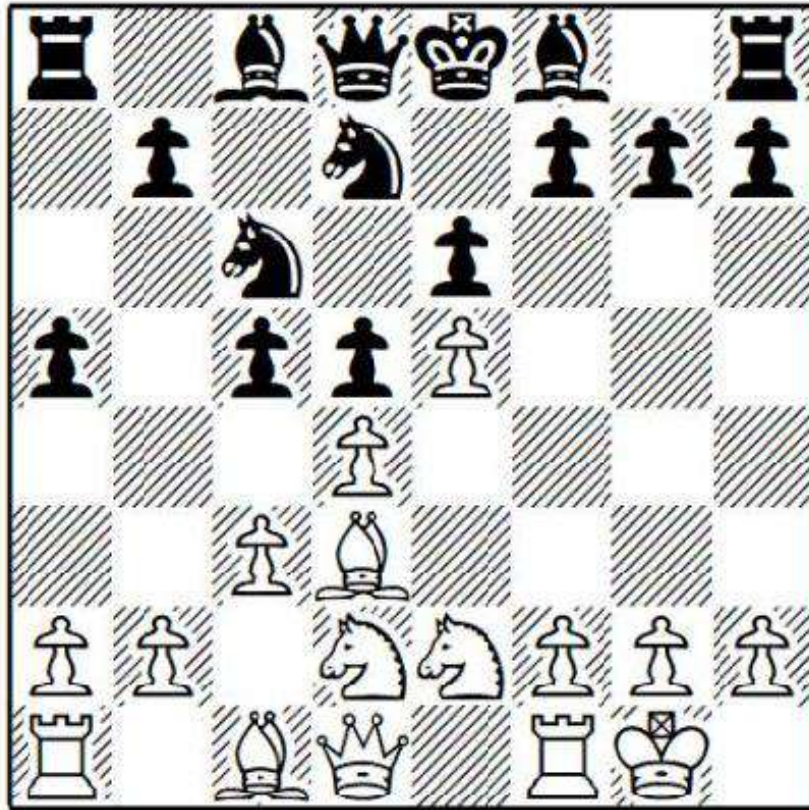
Bilbao 2005

In stark contrast to the past few cases of a practical buildup by someone outside the top echelon of chess, I have elected to finish this chapter with an example of one of the most breathtaking games ever played. You may remember that our previous discussions have lifted significance away from imitating computers, as engines do not rationalize their moves, and the sheer depth that they can reach is entirely unachievable for humans in actual games. Although some of the moves played in this game may make it appear somewhat conflicting to the objectives of this book, I believe that it nevertheless demonstrates tremendous educational value and consists of play that we can learn from. It is not easy to crash through with a devastating attack against a strong opponent, and I am sure the reader will not find a former world champion disagreeable in this respect. Additionally, chess is an avenue for art, and this game is truly beautiful.

**1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 Nf6 4 e5 Nfd7 5 Bd3 c5 6 c3 Nc6 7 Ne2 a5**

This is a rare sideline. The intention is to engage in queenside play before deciding matters on the kingside. 7 ... cxd4 8 cxd4 f6 is more standard.

**8 0-0**



This would ordinarily not be a position of significance, as it remains within theoretical bounds and Black has many acceptable options. However, I believe it is helpful to determine whether or not the reader would make the same decision as Ponomariov.

### **8 ... c4?**

In the earlier days of computer chess, it was considered viable to close the position as much as possible to minimize the engine's advantage in calculation. However, even as far back as 2005, this strategy was starting to show cracks, and to do the same against today's machines would be the height of foolishness. This move removes the counterplay against d4 (in his excellent notes to this game in *ChessBase Magazine*, GM Evgeny Postny called the ... c4 advance "forbidden"), the linchpin of the French Defense, and thus grants White a free hand on the kingside. While modern engines assess this position poorly for Black, I think he should opt for something more consistent with his previous play, such as 8 ... a4.

## **9 Bc2 b5**

Now that d4 is immovable, Black must concentrate his efforts on c3.

## **10 b3!?**

This move is fascinating, not because it is a phenomenal move in itself, but because it is unthinkable to most humans to view the opening of the b-file as a positive here. *Hydra* takes note of Black's poor development and concludes that opening as many lines as it can is wise. Instead, 10 f4 seems logical, but after 10 ... g6 the follow-up with 11 g4?! is met with the typical 11 ... h5! and the position becomes messy. 10 Nf4 is a better way to continue building pressure on the kingside, with Qg4 and Nh5 coming.

## **10 ... Nb6 11 bxc4 bxc4**

11 ... dxc4 is natural to gain the d5-square and preserve the mobile pawn phalanx on the queenside. However, the loss of the e4-square is of more importance: 12 Ne4 Be7 13 N2g3 and Black has serious trouble holding everything together; Black's queenside space advantage is not that relevant here.

## **12 Rb1 Kd7!?**

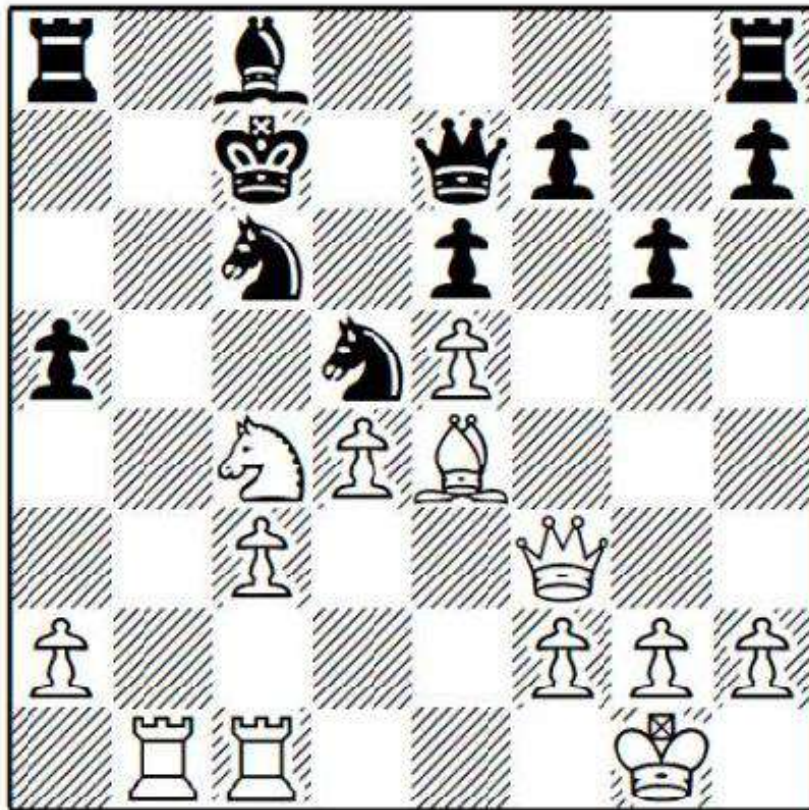
Ponomarev transfers his king to the queenside, away from the direction of White's knights and queen. It would be more straightforward to play 12 ... Be7 and castle, but it is unlikely Black can survive following an attack with Nf4 and Qg4 or Qh5. 12 ... Bd7 develops, but this does not help matters: 13 Nf4 Rb8 14 Nh5 and Black faces huge problems.

## **13 Nf4 Kc7 14 Qf3**

14 Nh5 may have been slightly more preferable to maintain flexibility with the white queen between f3 and g4. Engines are not capable of picking up on this sort of nuance.

## **14 ... Rb8**

14 ... g6 keeps the knight out of h5, but this is a tragic move to play. 15 Re1 followed by Nf1 gives White a safe advantage, but 15 Nh3 Qe7 16 Ng5! exposes the weakness on f7. The continuation 16 ... Bh6 (or 16 ... Qxg5 17 Nxc4 and White wins) 17 Nge4!! (17 Nxf7? Rf8 18 Nxe6 Rxf3 is wholly unnecessary for White to permit) 17 ... dxe4 18 Bxe4 Nd5 (or 18 ... Bb7 19 Rxb6! Kxb6 20 Nxc4+ Kc7 21 Bxe6 and White is not even down material!) 19 Nxc4 Bxc1 20 Rfxc1



looks so ludicrous I can barely take it seriously. *Stockfish* assigns it around +6, for what that's worth.

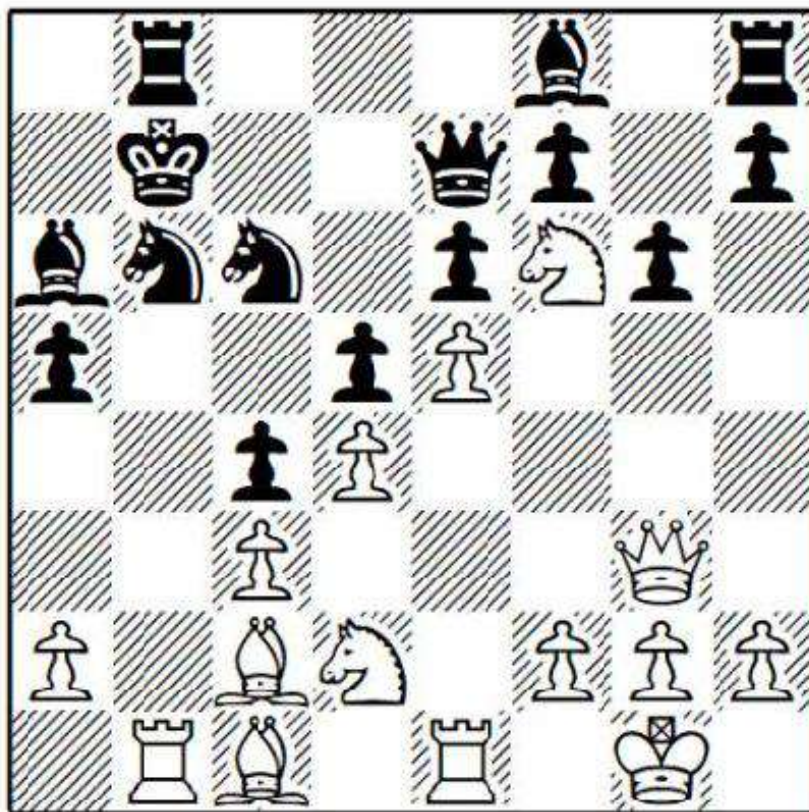
**15 Nh5! Qe7 16 Re1 Ba6?!**

It is unclear what the bishop does here. This is sometimes a reasonable location in the French, but it is ineffective with the pawn chain where it is. 16 ... Bd7 is a more cohesive way to develop, though after something like 17 Qg3 Kb7 18 a4 I am not envious of Black's position.

**17 Qg3 g6?**

Since White is not threatening to take on g7, I am uncertain why Ponomarev felt compelled to abandon the f6-square. More to the point was 17 ... Kb7 to bring the king to a7. This position is still garbage, but White is momentarily denied the pleasure of 18 Nxc7?? Rg8 19 Nf5 Rxc7 20 Nxe7 Rxc3, when it is Black who is almost winning!

**18 Nf6 Kb7**



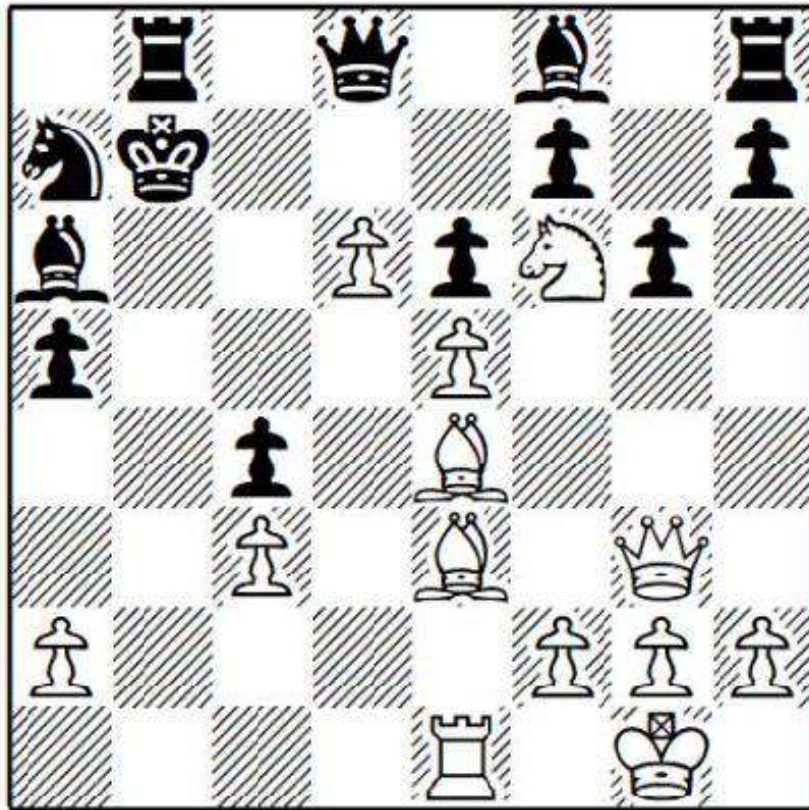
Distinguishing this as a vital moment is not obvious. However, it does fall in line with previous instances of significant places where we cannot make a “slow” move that is more beneficial than Black’s upcoming ... Ka7. At the same time, identifying White’s actual resource here is absurdly difficult. I encourage the reader to give it a try for fun, but not to lose any sleep over it. 18 ... Rb7 would maybe have been more sensible, but Ponomariov can hardly be admonished for missing White’s next move.

**19 Nde4!!**

The theme behind this move is not that unprecedented, in my opinion, but considering it as a candidate is quite challenging.

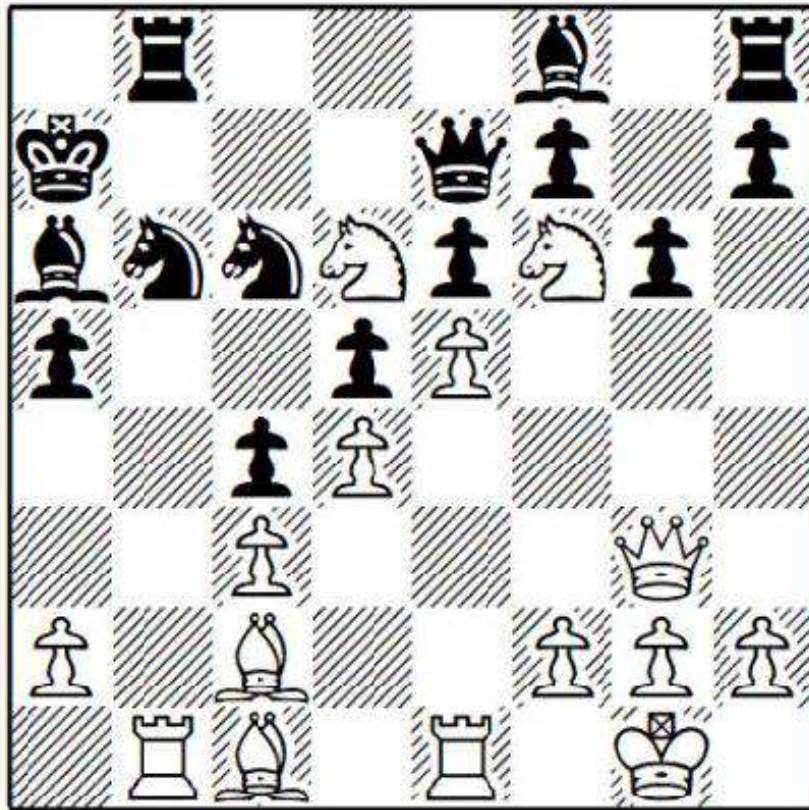
**19 ... Ka7**

After 19 ... dxe4 20 d5! Na7 (or 20 ... exd5 21 Nxd5 and Black’s badly placed king costs him everything) 21 Rxb6+! Kxb6 22 d6 Qd8 23 Be3+ Kb7 24 Bxe4+



the white bishops in the center are dominant.

**20 Nd6**

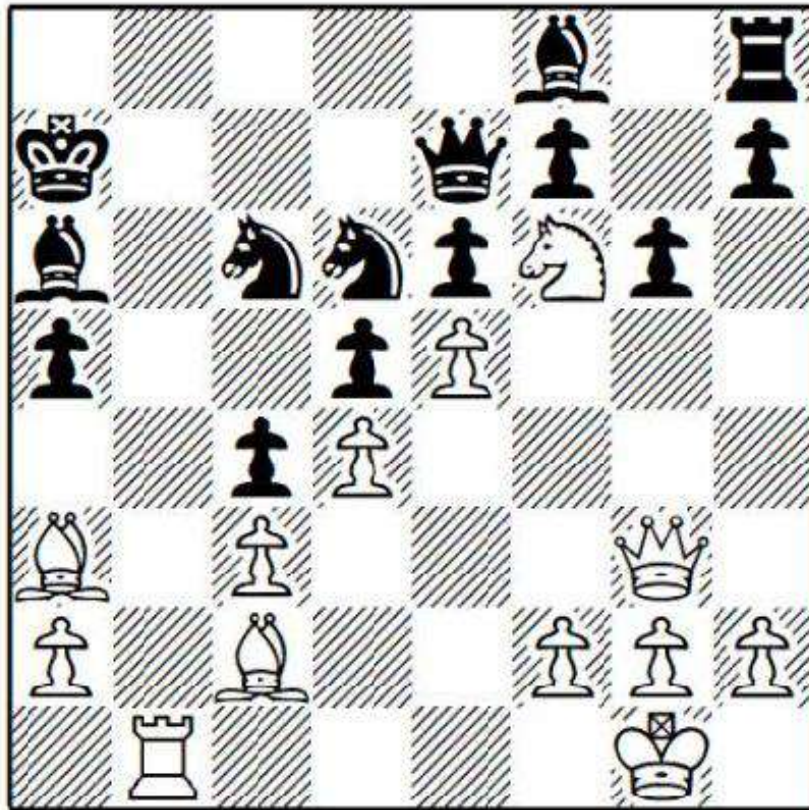


The diagram here is to appreciate the beauty of *Hydra's* steeds. I am sure anyone who has ever played against the French Defense has dreamed of such a situation! White's knights have obtained maximum penetration, and Ponomariov must have been regretting his earlier decisions regarding the pawn structure.

**20 ... Nc8 21 Ba3**

Given that it was named after a many-headed serpent, it is not surprising that *Hydra* chooses to introduce all of its pieces.

**21 ... Rxb1 22 Rxb1 Nxd6**



In such positions, suggesting alternatives for the defender is practically impossible. Of course, this is assuming that what is happening here resembles defense in the first place. We cannot fault Ponomarev for this, as this is simply how chess works in the modern day. 22 ... Ka8 23 Bc5 does nothing to improve Black's predicament, but it deprives the engine of the opportunity to close the game in such a stylish fashion.

**23 Bc5+!**

23 Bxd6 Qd8 concedes Black some breathing room. This is still winning, but the computer is not willing to settle for something that is "only" +5. I usually advocate for safety in this kind of decision, but that can hardly take precedence over a visible mating opportunity.

**23 ... Ka8 24 Ba4!**

The silicon beast is conducting a symphony.

**24 ... Bb7**

24 ... Qc7 25 exd6 is brutal.

**25 exd6!**

Another “unnecessary” sacrifice, but disputing *Hydra*’s tactical prowess at this point is sheer folly.

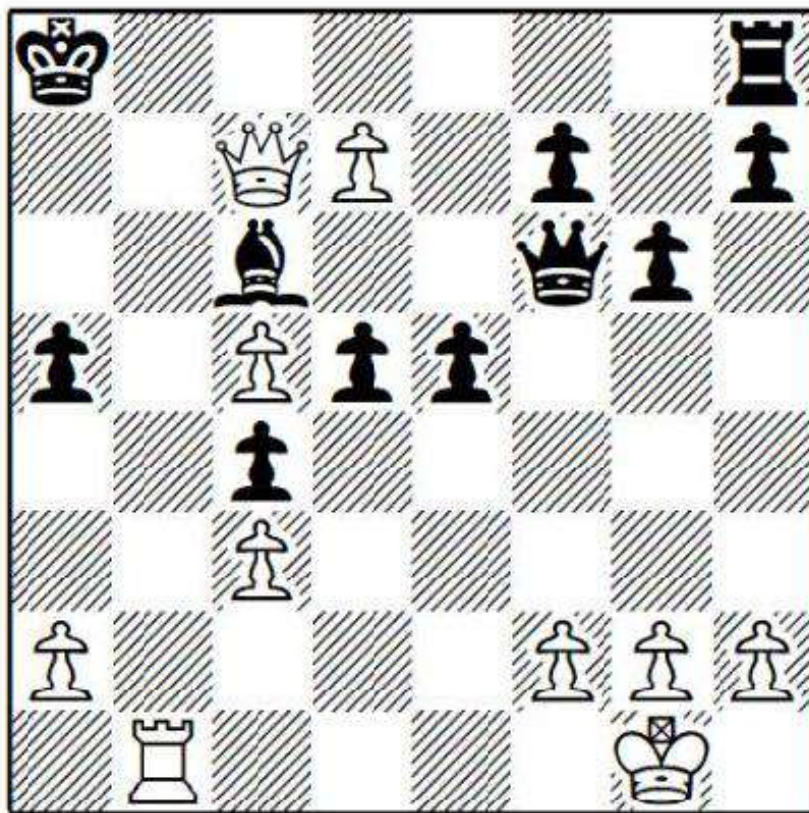
**25 ... Qxf6 26 Bxc6 Bxc6 27 d7!**

Leaving out the strongest piece is, of course, below *Hydra*’s pay grade.

**27 ... Bxc5 28 Qc7**

The threats to c6 and a5 cannot be parried.

**28 ... e5 29 dxc5 1-0**



My notes to this game have not been too extensive, as a clinical dissection would be rather disrespectful to such a masterpiece. Postny called White’s level of play “something unreachable”, which I find interesting to consider. *Hydra* was not capable of scoring 100% against the top grandmasters of its time and had an estimated equivalent playing strength of around 3000 FIDE. The *Stockfish NNUE* I analyzed this game with is estimated to be rated around 3600 as of the last TCEC (Top Chess Engine Championship). Consequently, it should theoretically beat someone who would always defeat a 2800 FIDE rated player, assuming I understand how that works. Once again, this great strength does not mean we should worship these computers; they still have their shortcomings. However, I believe that all of White’s moves in this game adhered to basic principles applied on a very high level. This Mona Lisa-esque beauty represents something that the reader can aspire toward,

if nothing else.

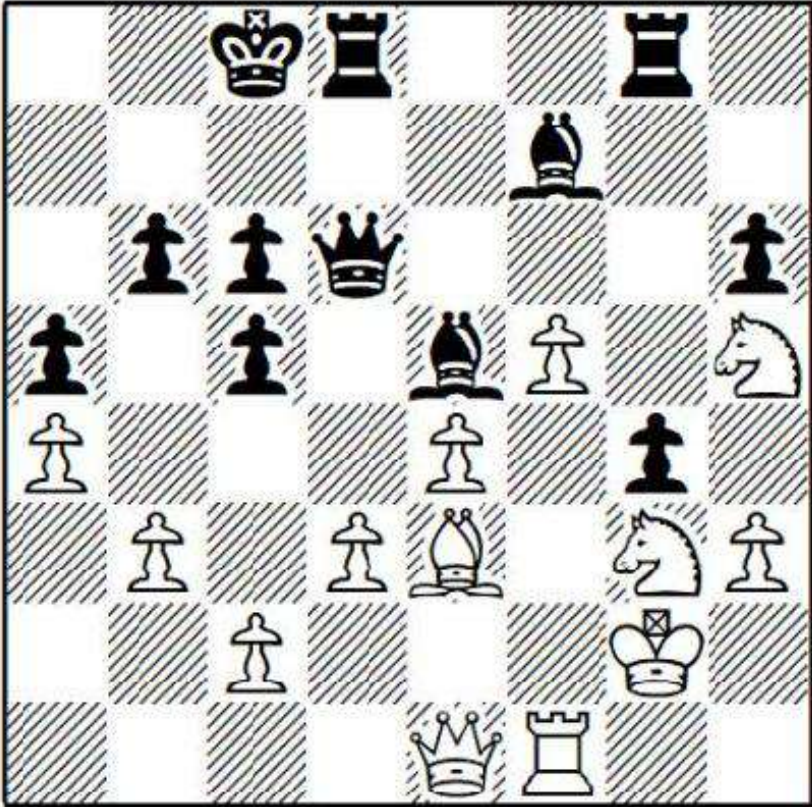
**Exercises**

The following exercises will test your knowledge of the concepts discussed in this chapter.

**91) Y.Hou-I.Gaponenko**

chess.com 2020

*White to play*

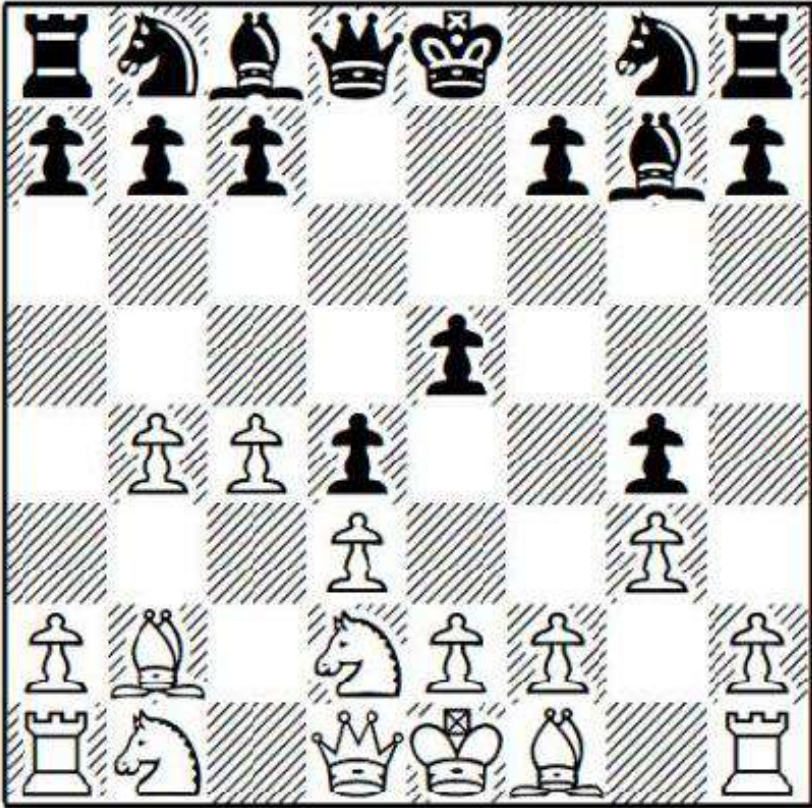


Solution

**92) A.Aguilar-M.Antipov**

Gibraltar 2019

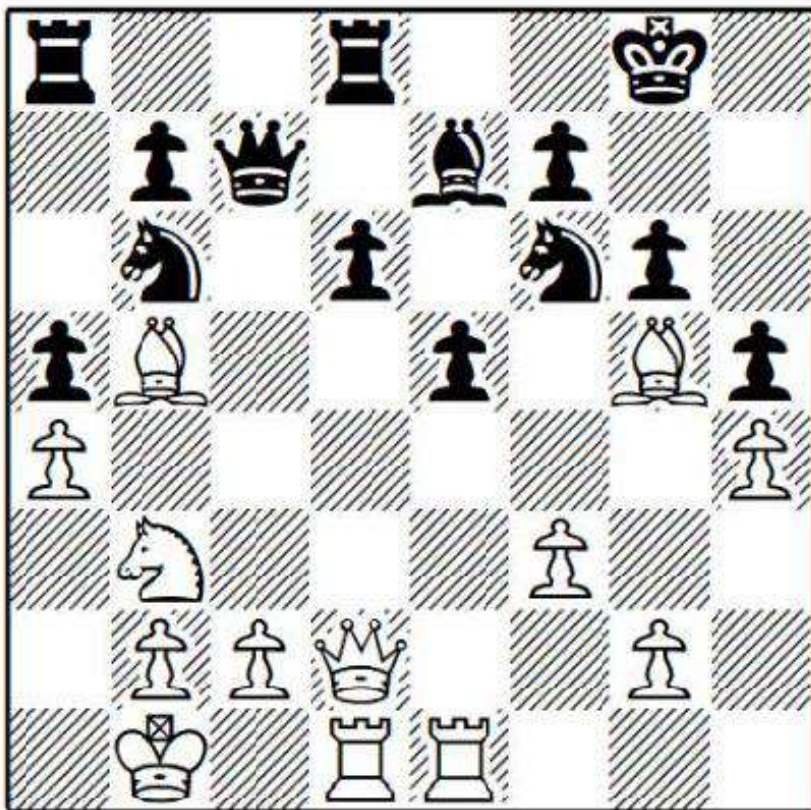
*Black to play*



**Solution**

93) A.Mista-A.Guo  
Charlotte 2021

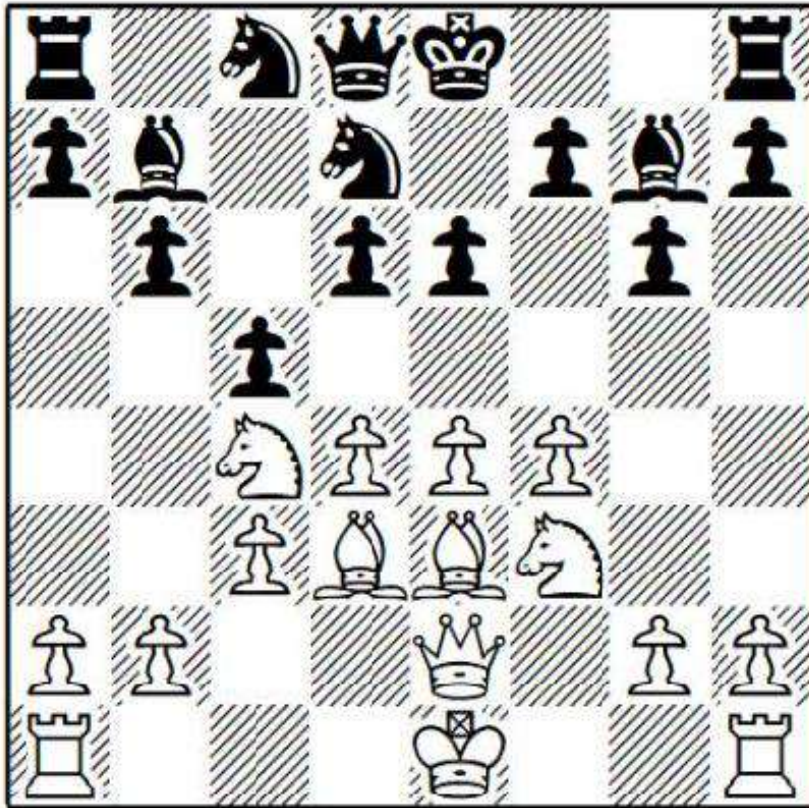
*White to play*



**Solution**

**94) D.Kirillov-I.Chekletsov**  
Moscow 2020

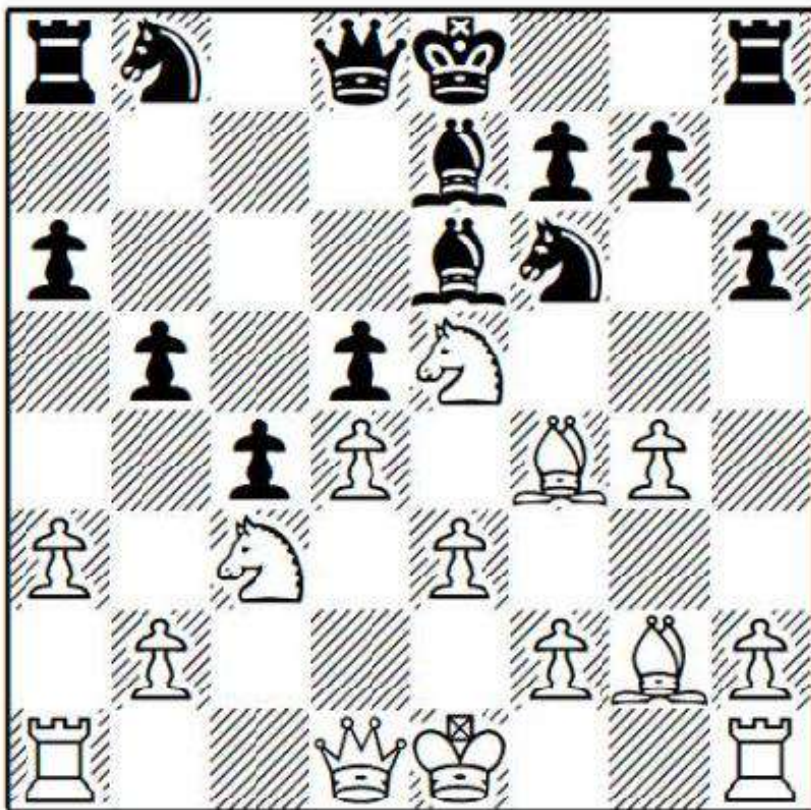
*White to play*



**Solution**

95) F.Ynojosa-A.Lenderman  
lichess.org 2021

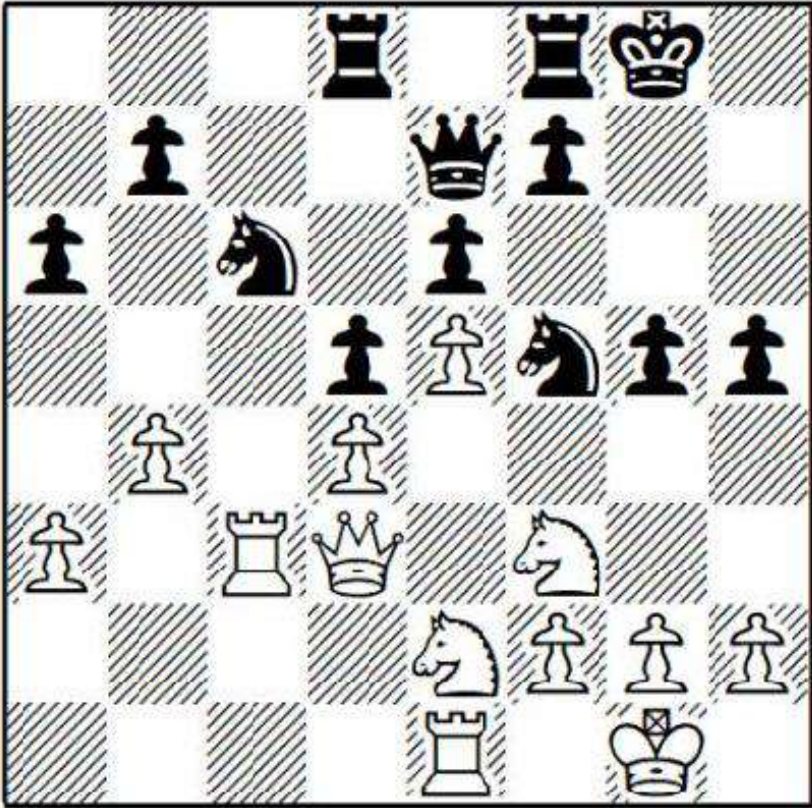
*White to play*



**Solution**

**96) M.Pacher-J.Seemann**  
Budapest 2021

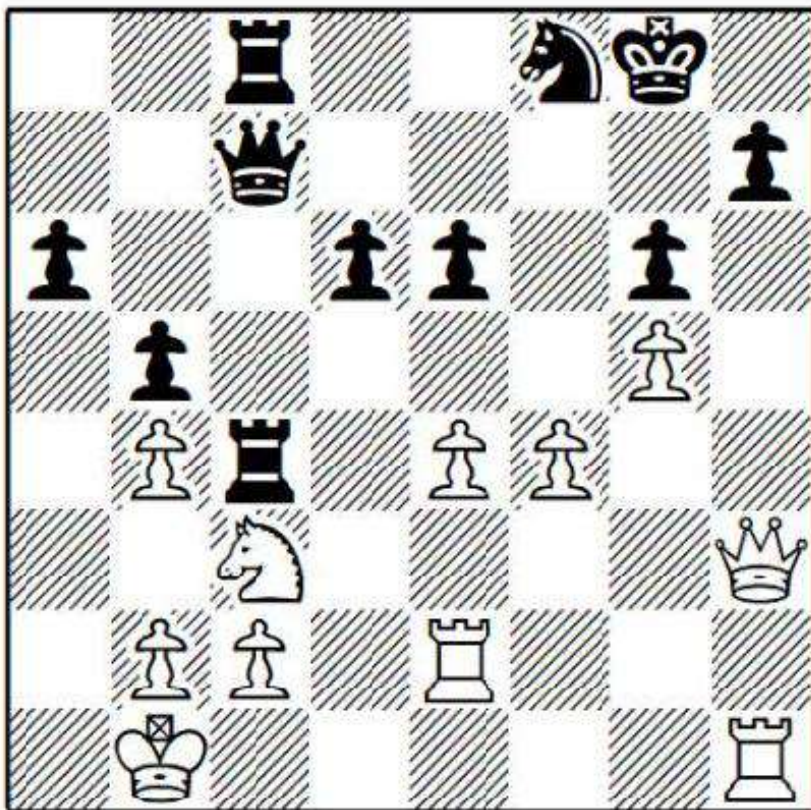
White to play



Solution

97) N.Tutisani-K.Shanava  
Tbilisi 2019

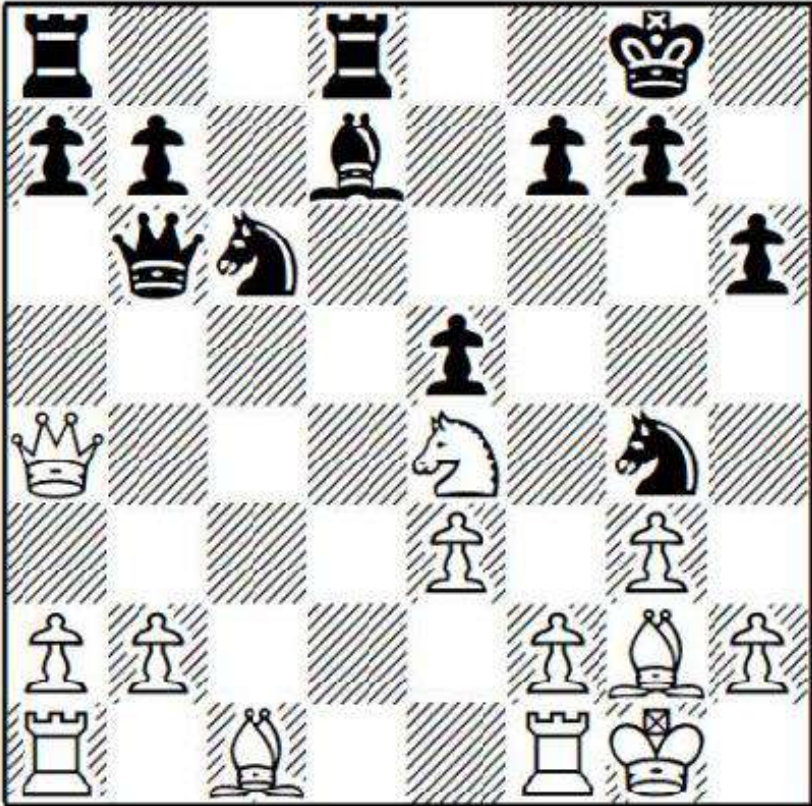
*White to play*



**Solution**

98) J.Seemann-M.Mis  
Krakow 2021

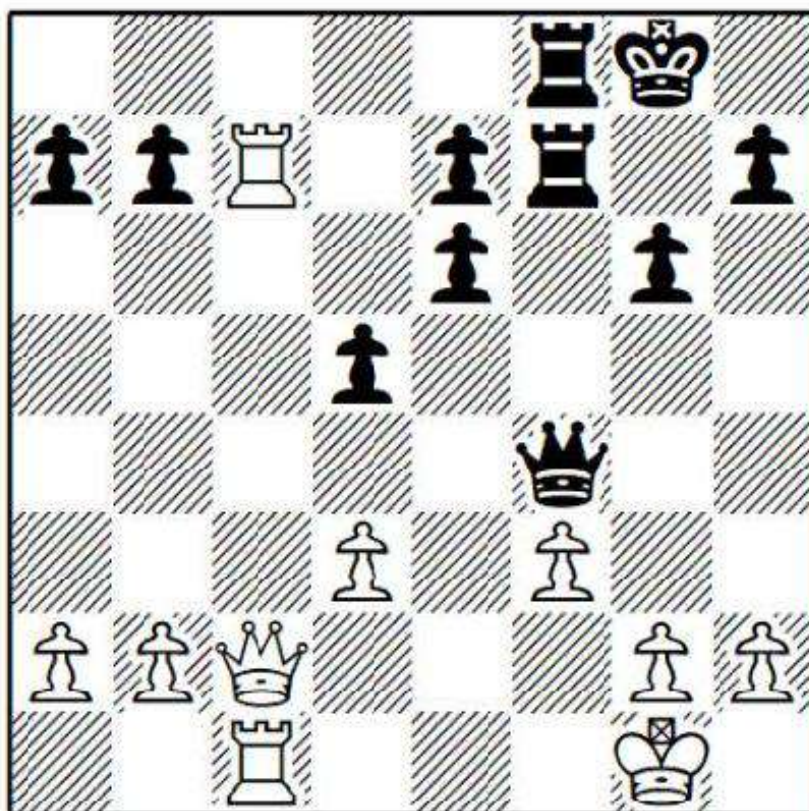
*Black to play*



**Solution**

99) E.Sutovsky-A.Kundin  
Israel 2019

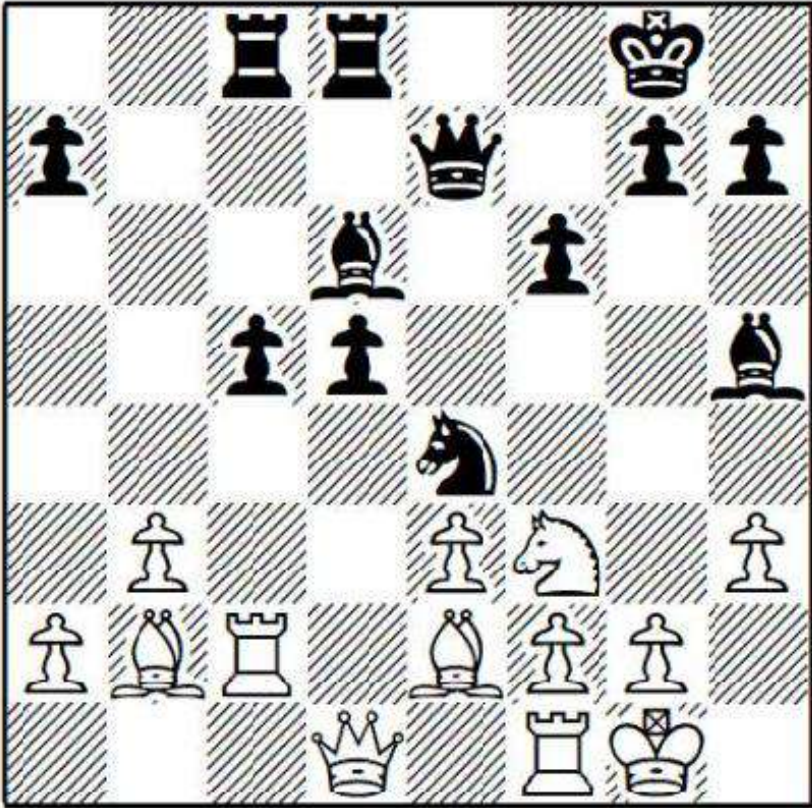
*Black to play*



[Solution](#)

100) B.Saidov-S.Pogosyan  
Sochi 2020

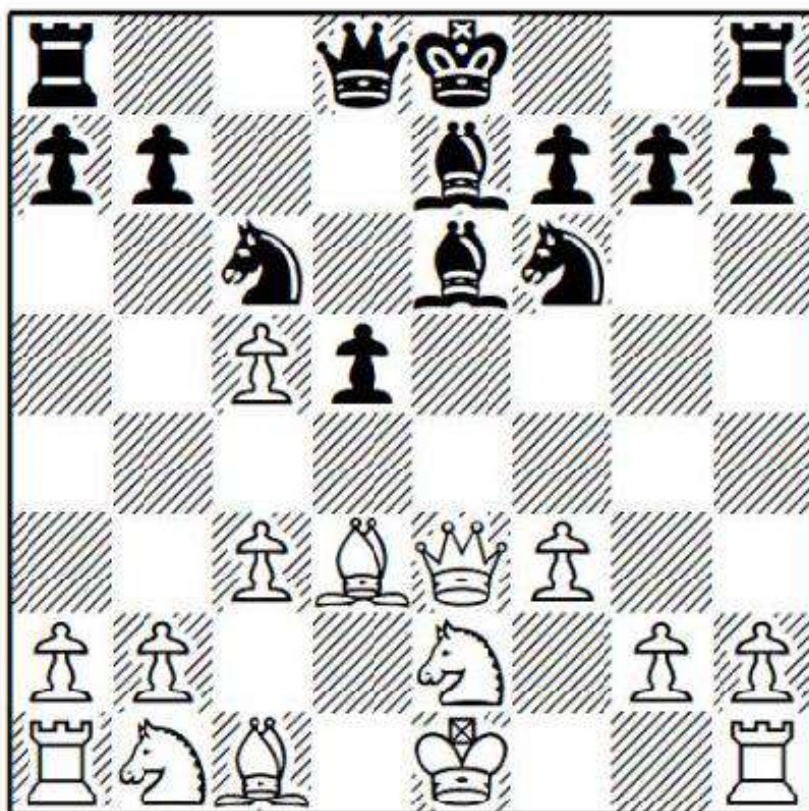
*Black to play*



**Solution**

101) L.Mazi-D.Fridman  
lichess.org 2021

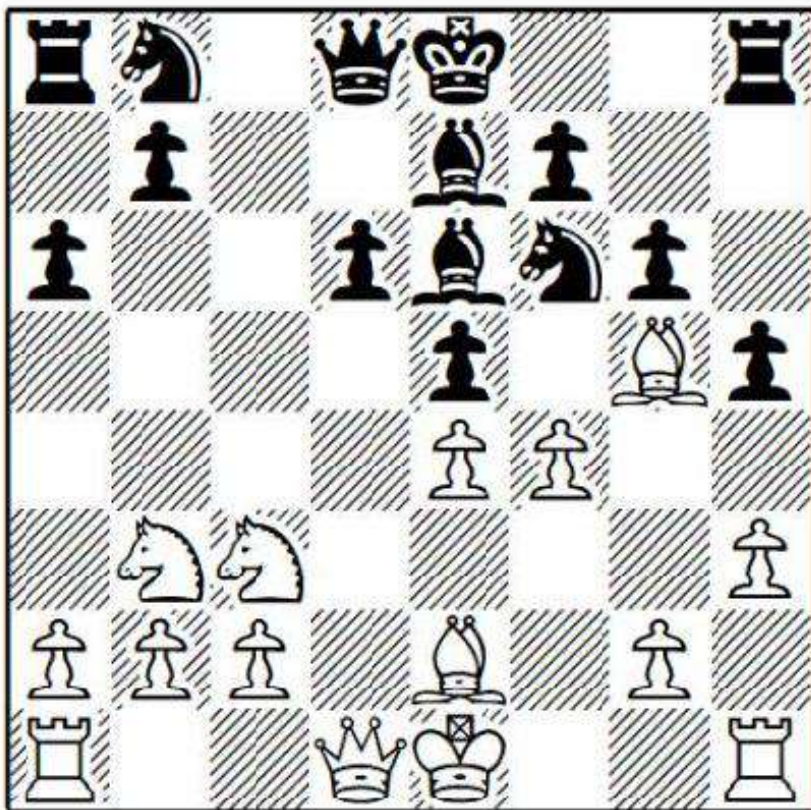
*Black to play*



**Solution**

**102) A.Fier-N.Delgado Ramirez**  
Florianopolis 2021

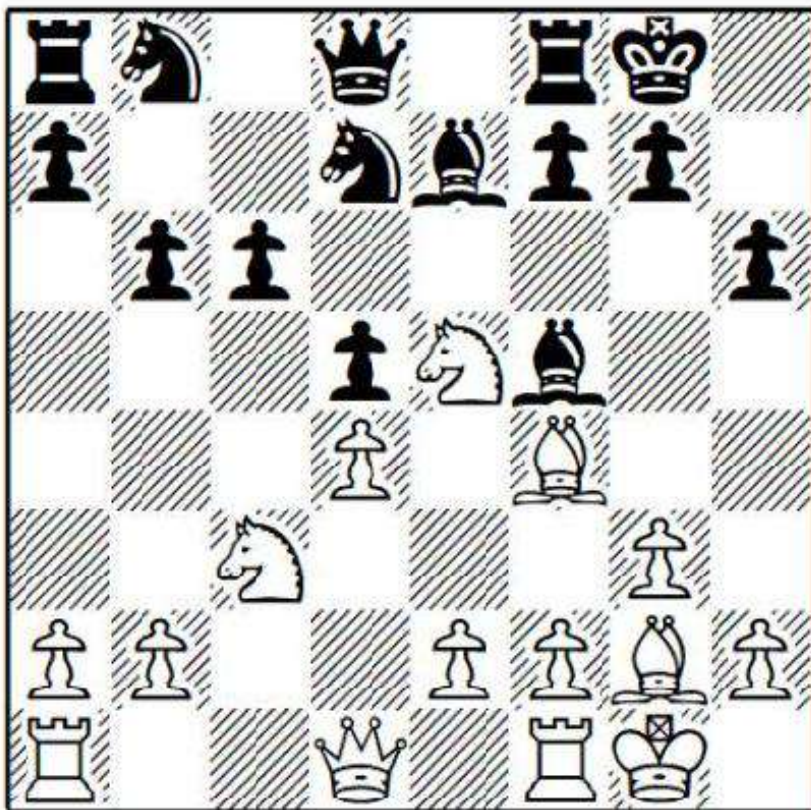
White to play



Solution

103) A.Grischuk-R.Haria  
chess.com 2020

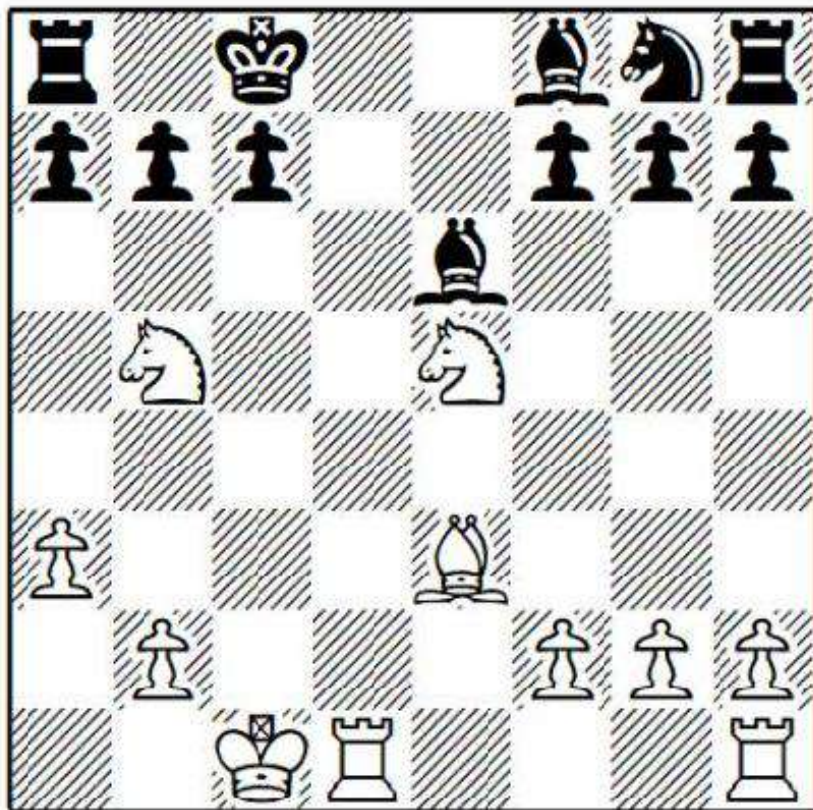
*White to play*



**Solution**

**104) A.Sorokin-A.Gubajdullin**  
St Petersburg 2019

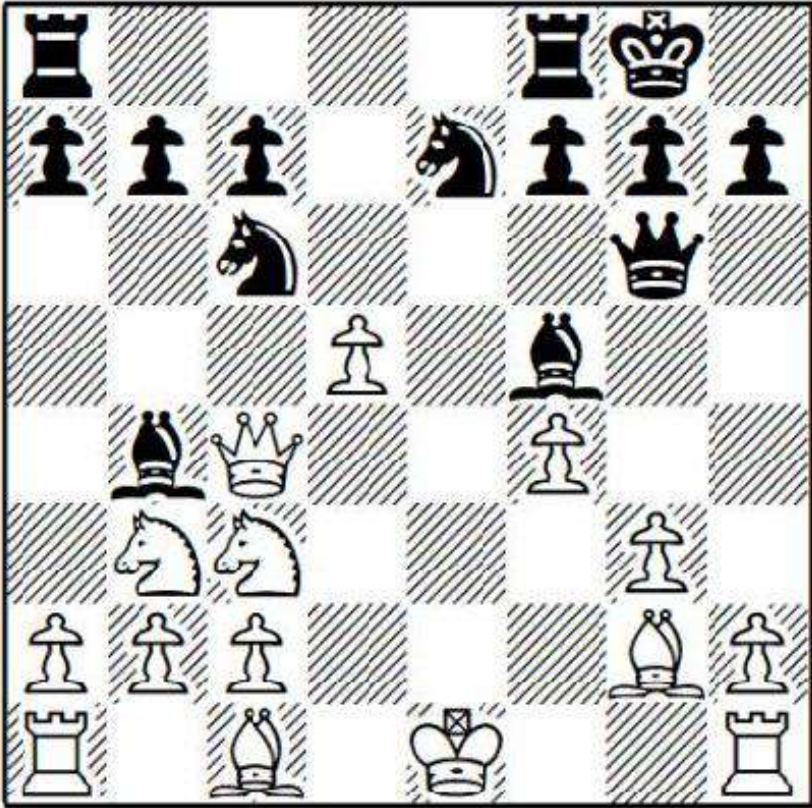
*Black to play*



**Solution**

**105) J.Santos-A.Tari**  
Lisbon 2020

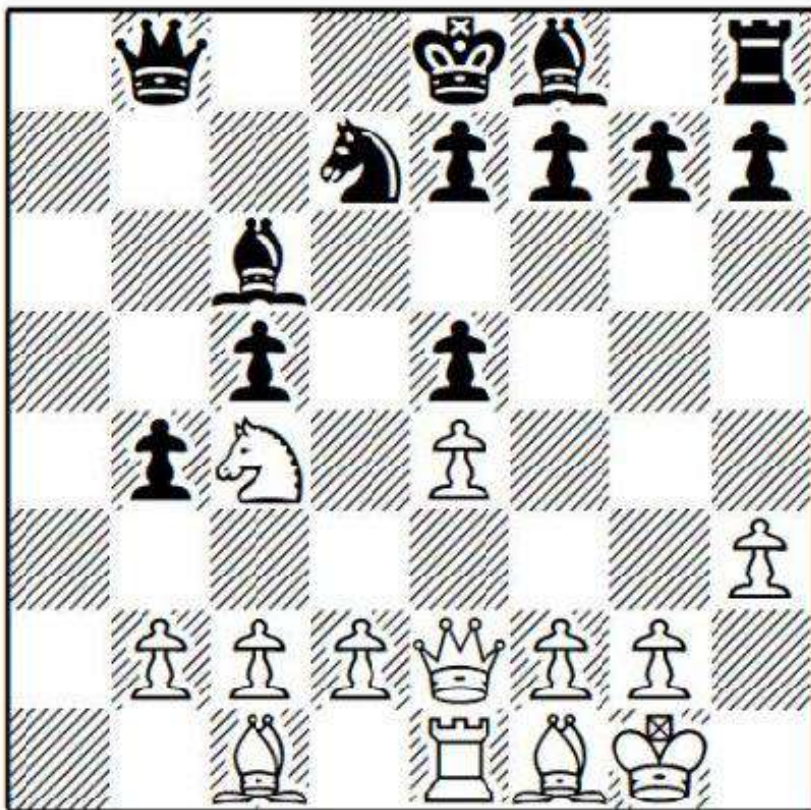
*Black to play*



**Solution**

106) S.Mareco-C.Albornoz Cabrera  
chess.com 2021

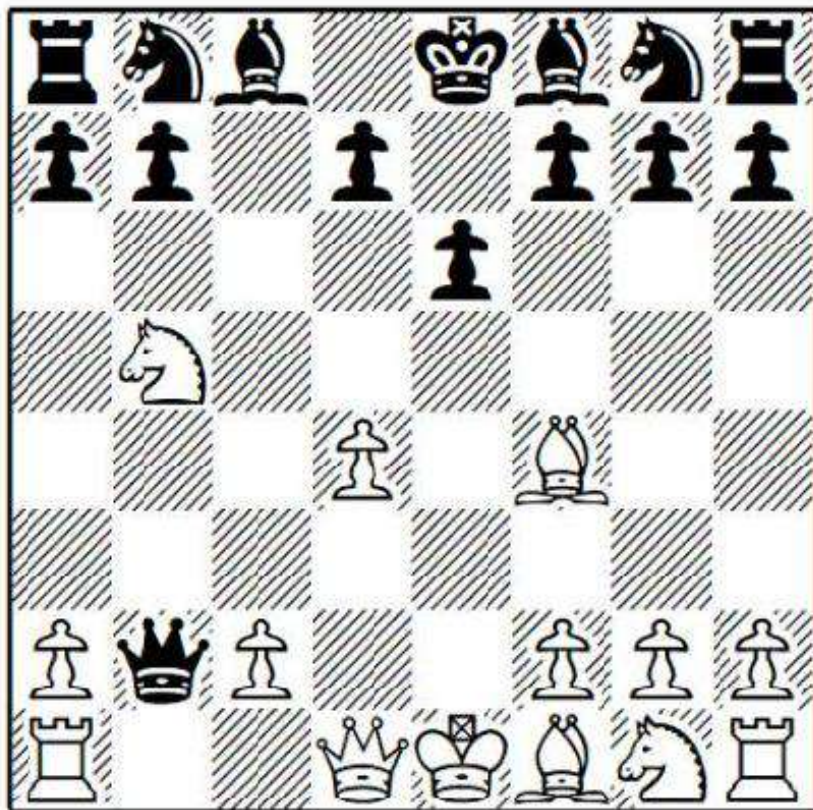
*White to play*



**Solution**

**107) S.Tologontegin-P.Kostenko**  
Chelyabinsk 2021

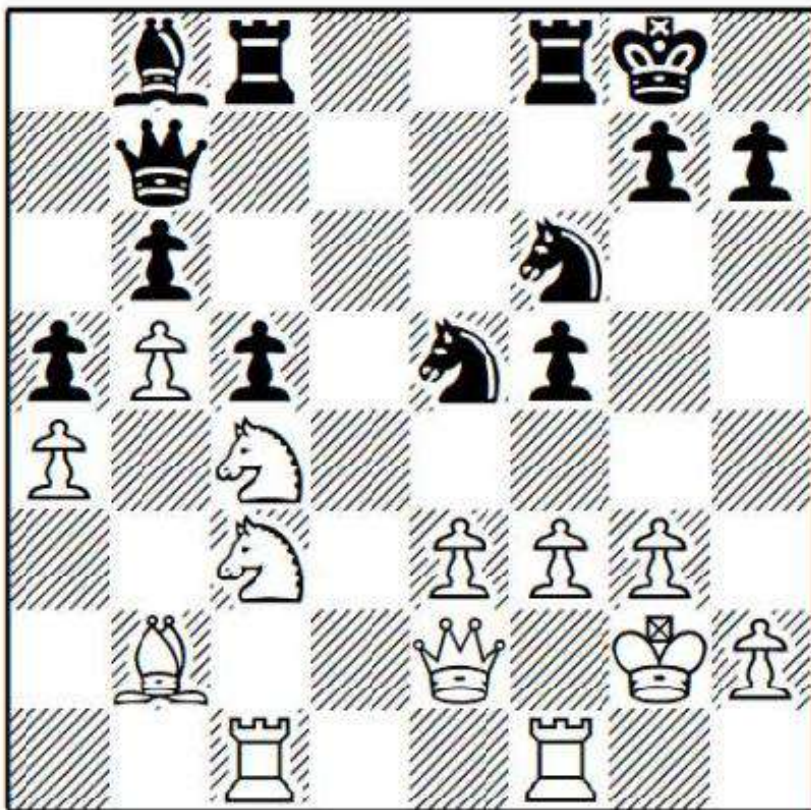
*Black to play*



Solution

108) D.Fernandez-G.Lane  
Dublin 2019

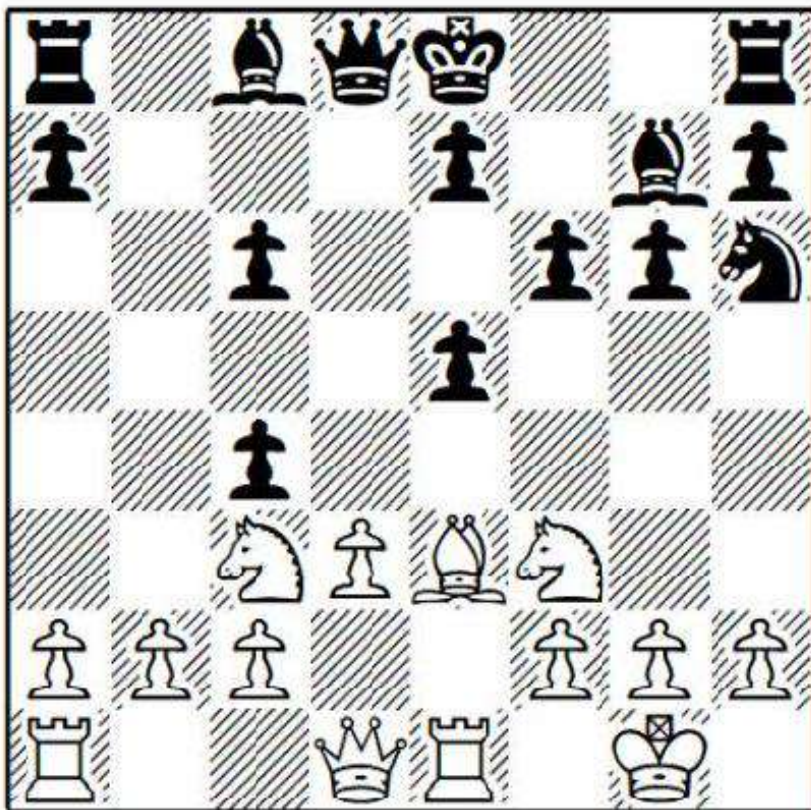
White to play



Solution

109) G.Kilgus-B.Korpa  
Austria 2021

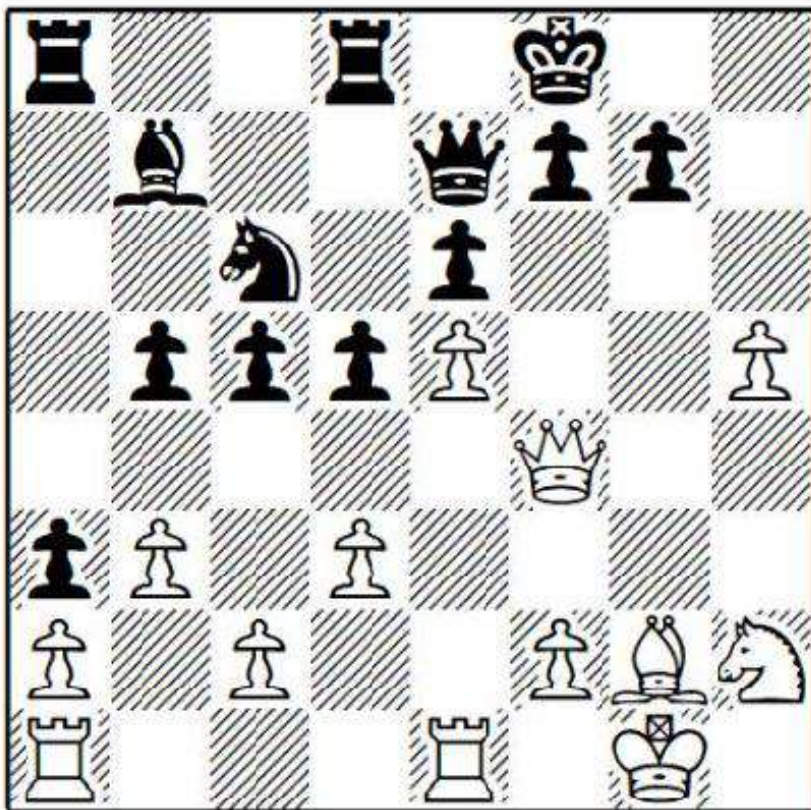
*White to play*



Solution

110) K.Larsen-J.Sylvan  
Denmark 2020

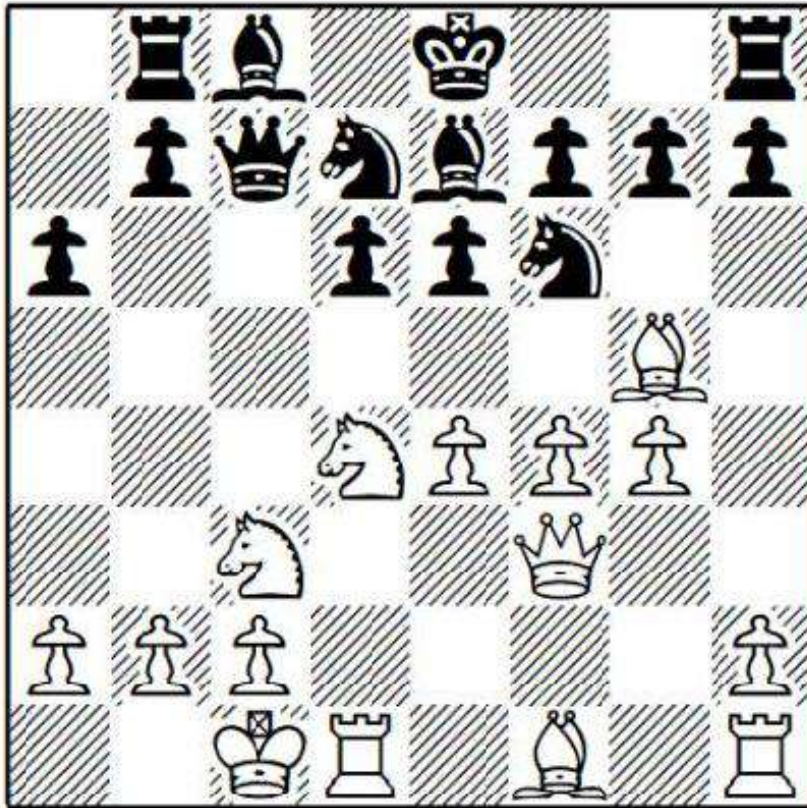
*White to play*



**Solution**

111) N.Aliavdin-K.Dzida  
Pokrzywna 2020

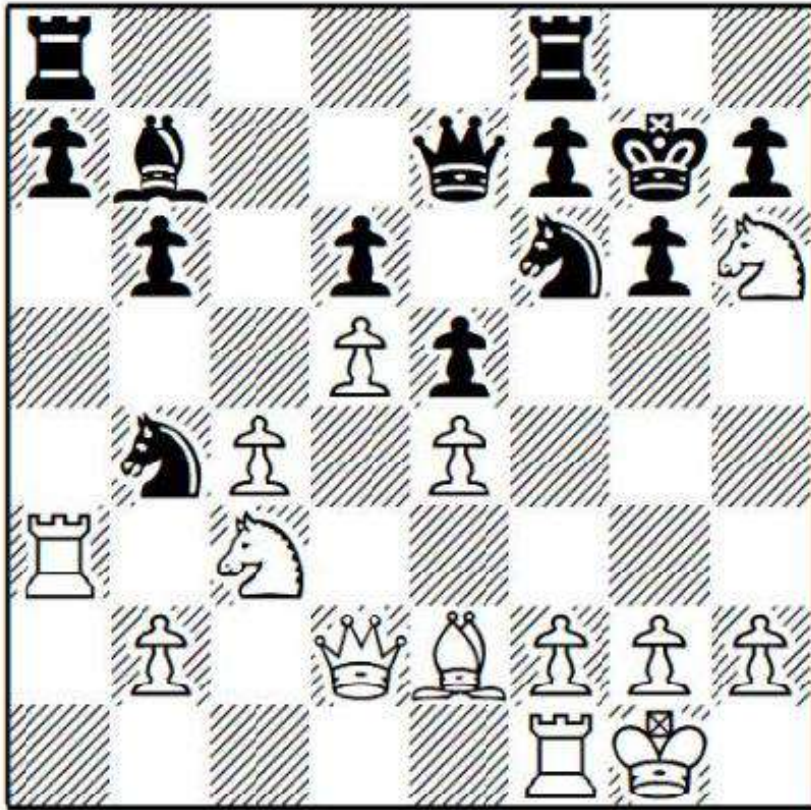
*White to play*



**Solution**

112) H.Banikas-E.Cordova  
chess.com 2020

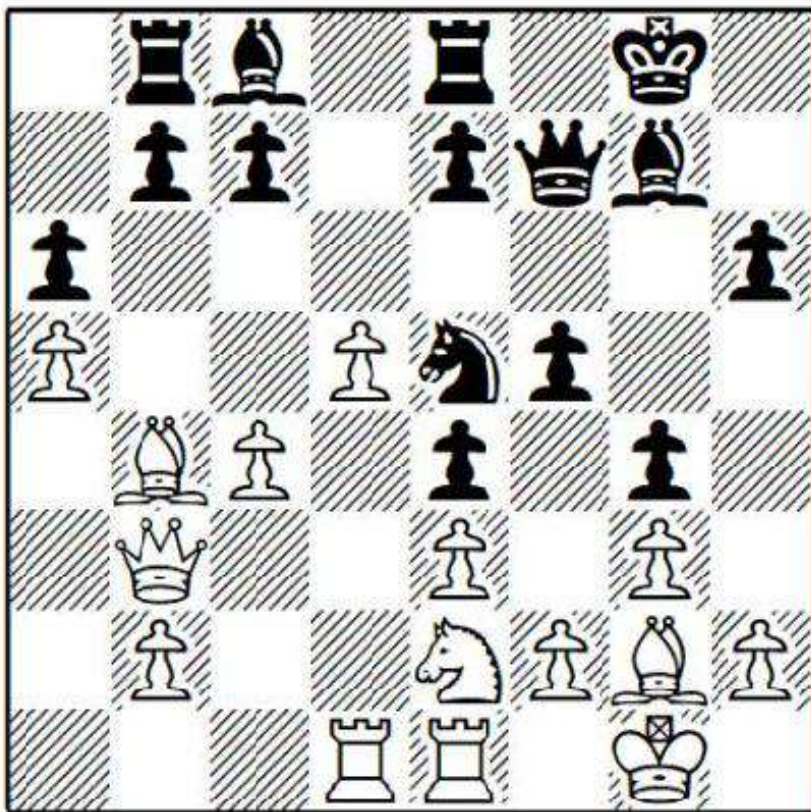
*White to play*



**Solution**

**113) S.Dev-A.Ansat**  
Paracin 2021

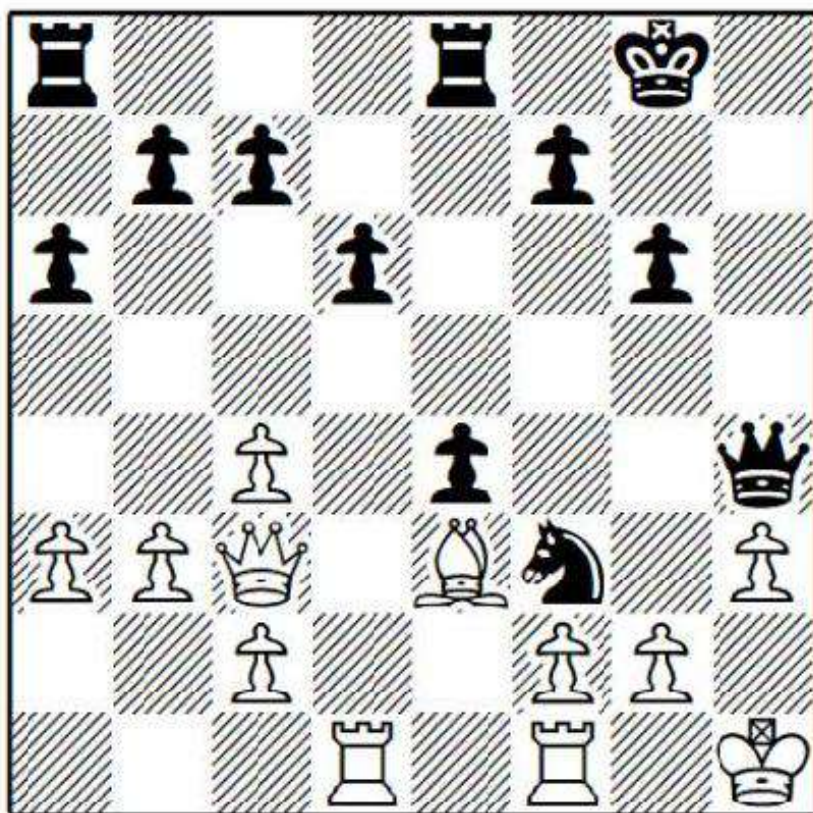
White to play



Solution

114) L.Babujian-M.Gharibyan  
Yerevan 2021

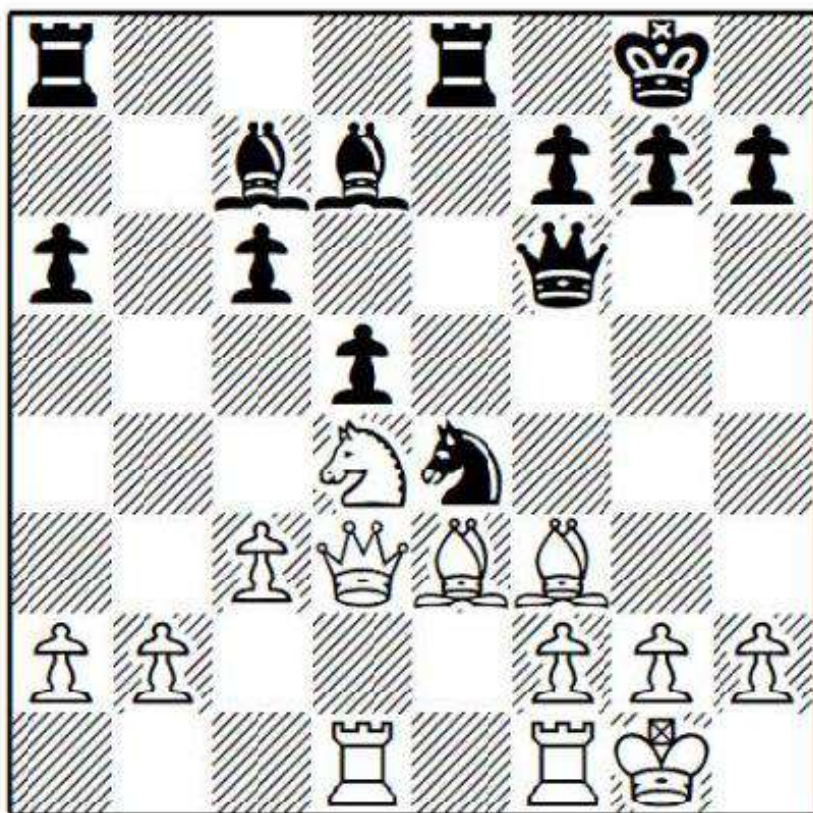
*Black to play*



**Solution**

**115) E.Bruaset-M.Tratar**  
Nova Gorica 2020

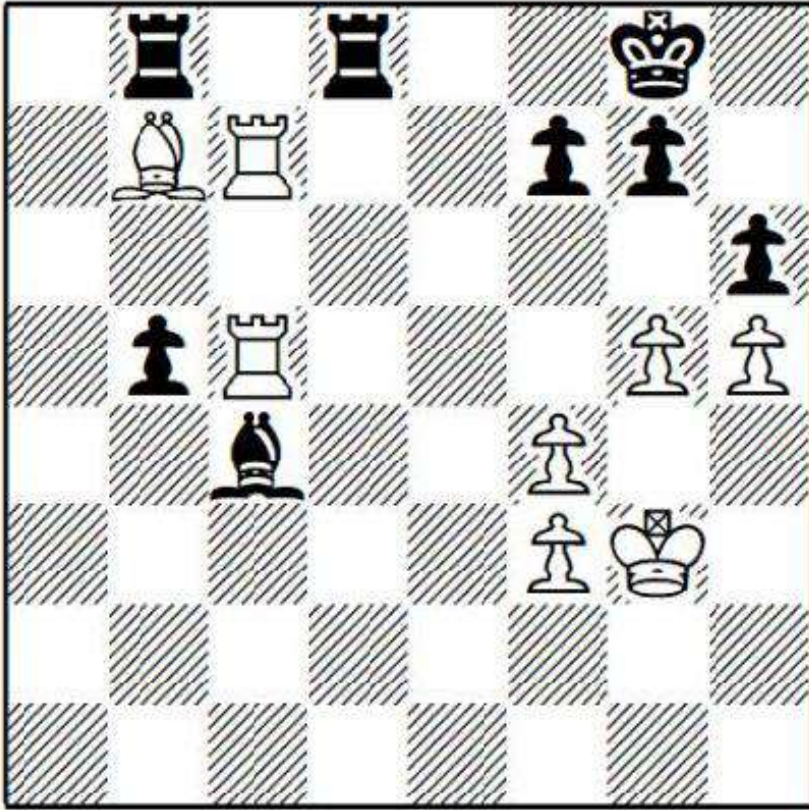
*Black to play*



**Solution**

**116) A.Serikbay-O.Babiy**  
lichess.org 2021

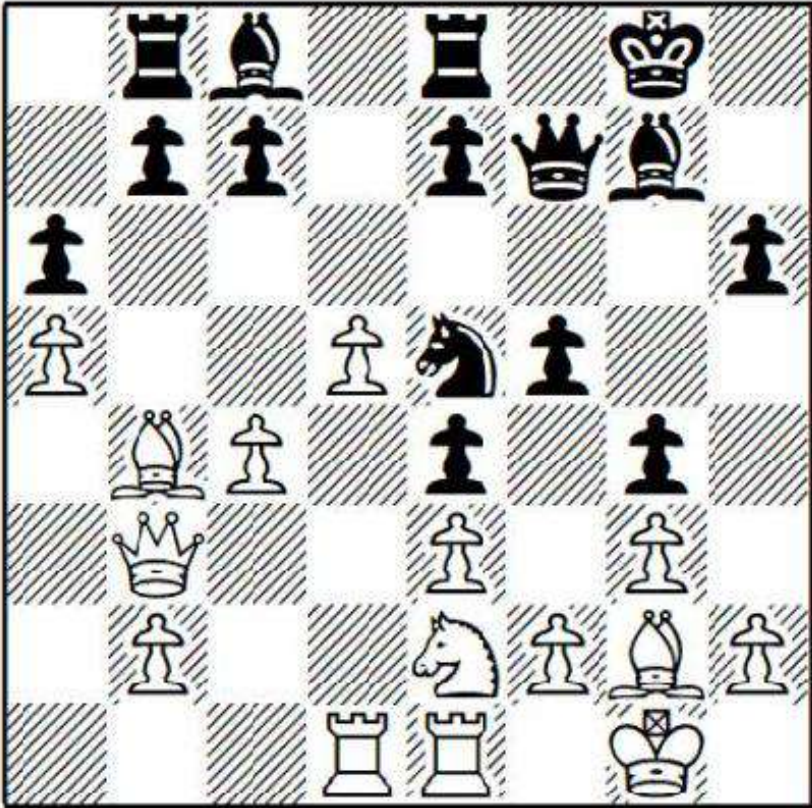
*White to play*



**Solution**

117) P.Eljanov-G.Lane  
Gibraltar 2019

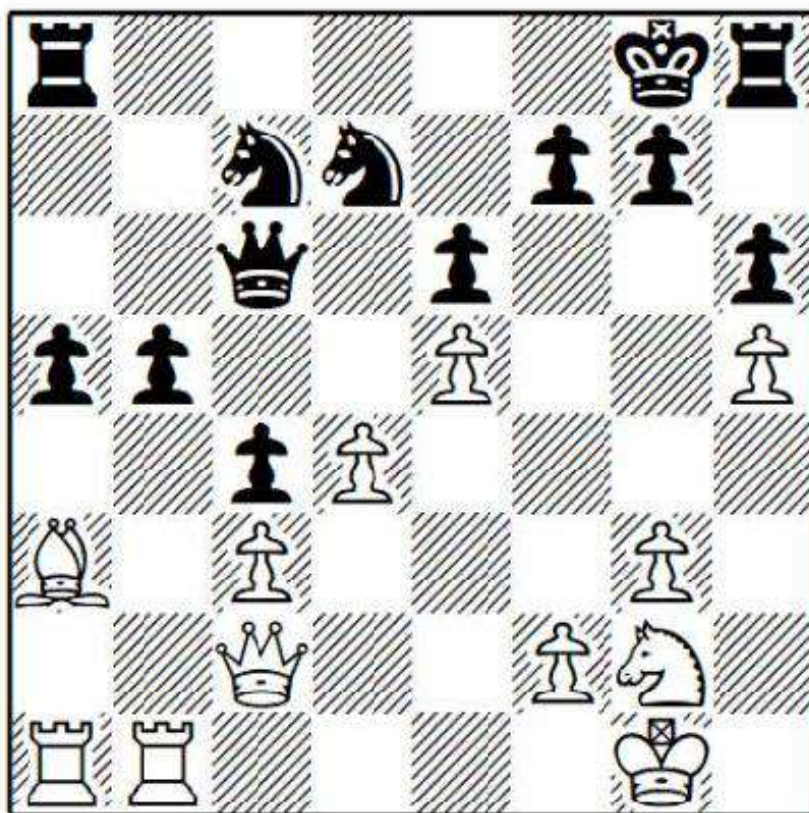
*Black to play*



Solution

118) R.Sturt-N.Delgado Ramirez  
Florianopolis 2021

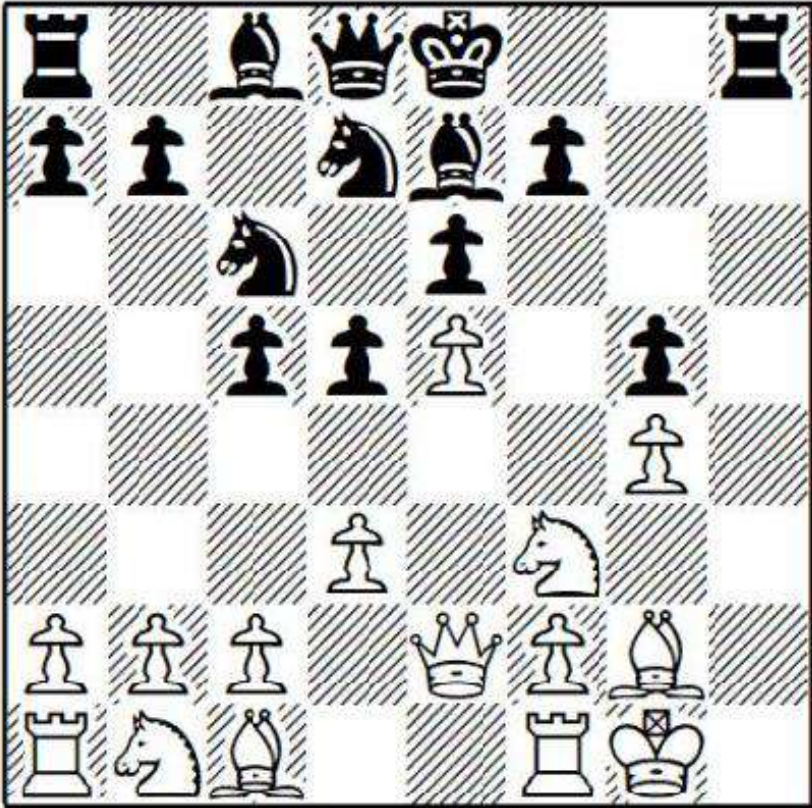
*Black to play*



**Solution**

**119) S.Beukema-T.Beerdsen**  
Wijk aan Zee 2020

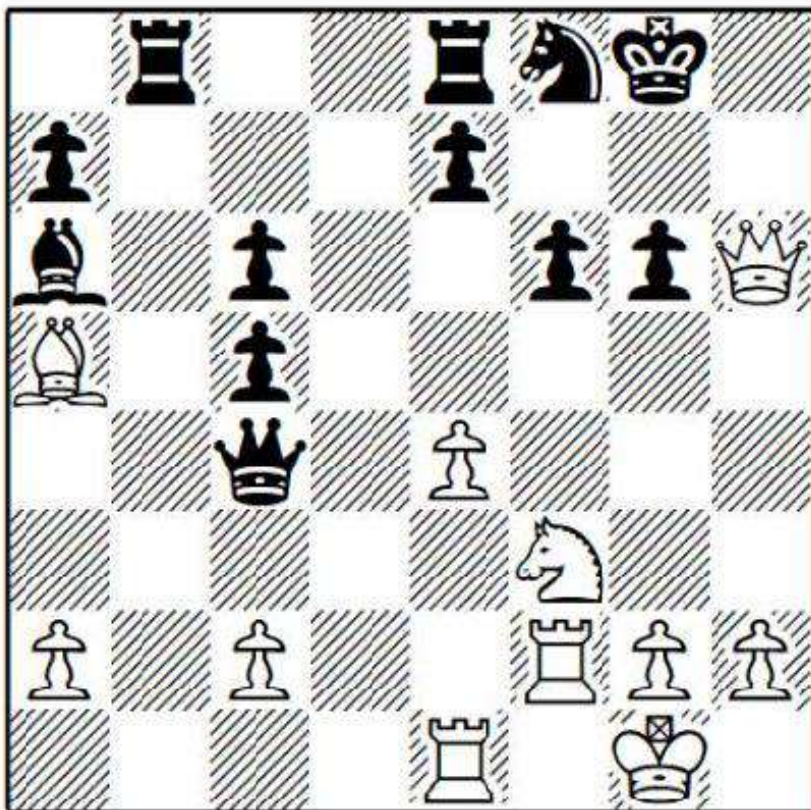
*Black to play*



Solution

120) S.Giemsa-R.Vazquez Igarza  
Gibraltar 2019

*White to play*



### Solution

#### **Conclusion**

As stated previously, it is hard to simplify any facet of chess, and this is an especially unenviable task to perform with such few pages. My ambition and desire have been to imbue the reader with knowledge of general principles of how to conduct an attack, most particularly related to including pieces and identifying when to strike. Each game represents some different lessons, so it would be most helpful to break things down on a per-game basis.

Kasparov-Andersson is a classic game that, to me at least, embodies the epitome of attacking chess. I hope I will not be ostracized for saying that the game's technical difficulty is not absurdly high, but it is a perfect demonstration of how attacks work in straightforward terms. Kasparov plays chess in a very efficient manner, and the way he prioritized his piece development in the game is something that every chess player can appreciate and learn from.

Of course, the games that I played are not as impressive in comparison. Sheng-Preotu is not as high-quality a game compared to its predecessor, but

even considering it was a mere IM that played White, I was able to punish Black's positional errors and provocative advances. By playing both ... g5 and castling short, Black exposed his king and decisively weakened the h5-square, which I exploited effectively. Additionally, the concept of playing with a draw in hand was introduced, which will almost certainly appear in the reader's games.

Sheng-Mishra primarily demonstrates the importance of activating the pieces and knowing when to settle with a safer continuation. The sacrifices I made in the game, most notably 22 Rd5, were conducted in the name of bringing in more pieces; this difference in force was the deciding factor of the game. Many of the sub-variations involved show a careful balance between preserving a secure advantage or initiating a combination. I am usually an advocate for the safer side these days. Sheng-Shabalov displayed a bit of the opposite case; Shabalov made relatively minor unforced errors, and my quick play secured an initiative.

*Hydra*-Ponomarev is about as close to perfection as we will see in a game with at least one human player. This game is somewhat of an antithesis to the Kasparov one in that its technical details seem straight from a fairy tale. With extensive training and practice, we humans can still barely hope to approach this monstrous feat. However, we can note that the engine plays in a very cohesive way that considers the inclusion of pieces absolutely paramount. The game is considered by many to symbolize an unreachable level of play, but it nonetheless contains many valuable lessons the reader can take away.

# Chapter Five

## Beginning and End

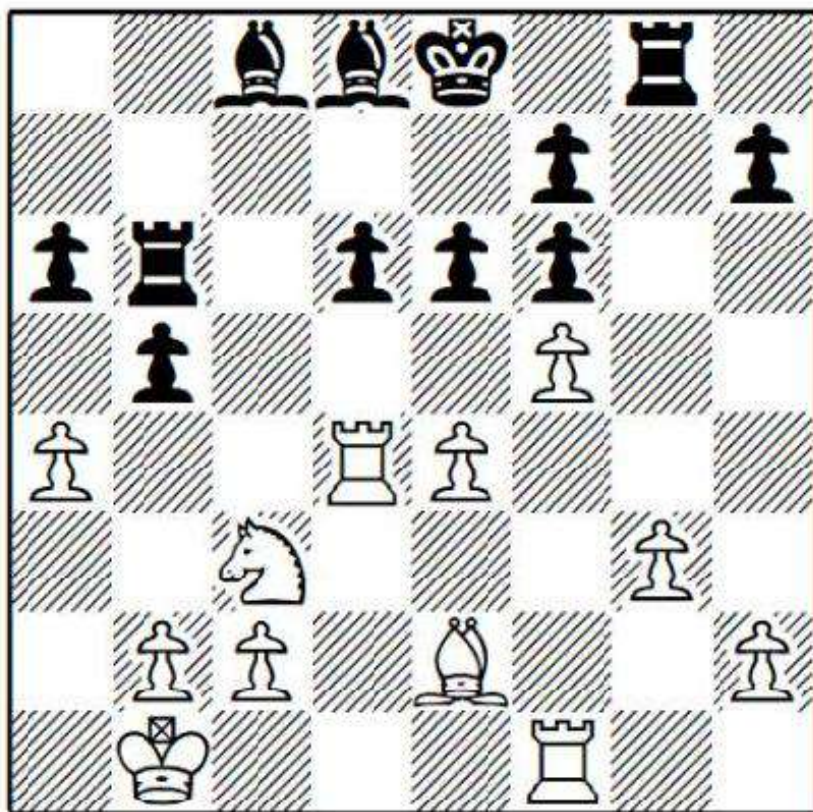
We are almost at the end of our journey together, and we thank the reader for putting up with us for so long. We hope you will be in a better place upon finishing this book regarding your practical play and ability to approach decisions logically. Perhaps you even enjoyed the ride!?

The following 150 exercises have been carefully selected from actual games (like the prior exercises in each chapter) to test the reader primarily on conceptual thinking related to previously discussed topics. There is no particular theme, but the puzzles are largely divided into categories related to the motifs of each chapter. The ordering has been randomized to better allow the reader to test their knowledge and understanding. Chess is a game of pattern recognition and, while we cannot possibly hope to account for every pattern, the transferable skills picked up should prove helpful in your chess career.

### 121) D.Nomin Erdene-N.Meshkovs

Graz 2020

*Black to play*

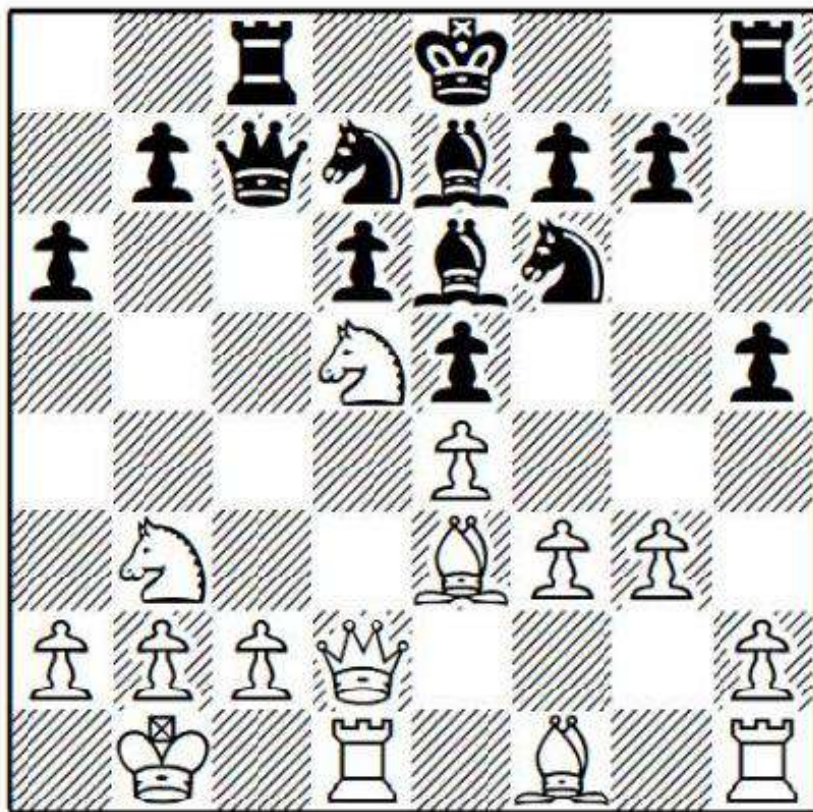


Solution

122) T.Stijve-C.Albornoz Cabrera

Bad Ragaz 2020

*Black to play*

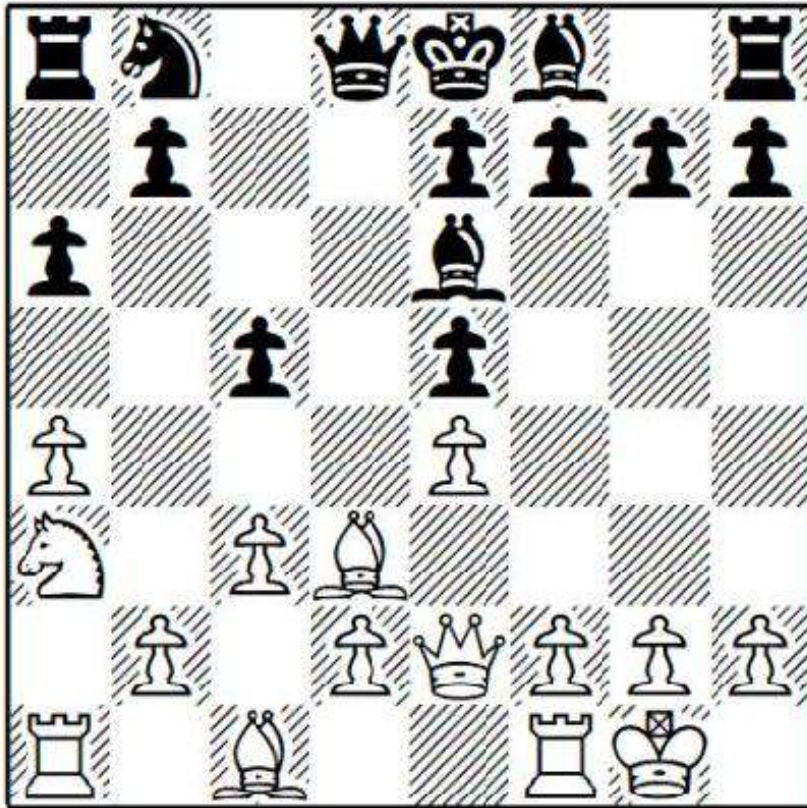


Solution

123) M.Kobalia-B.Savchenko

Moscow 2021

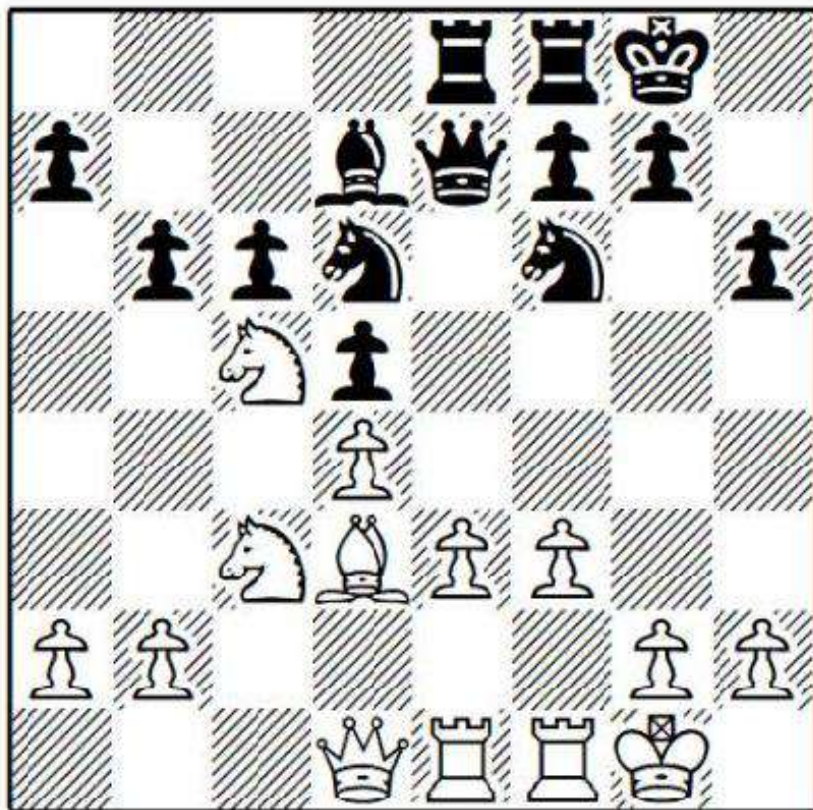
*White to play*



**Solution**

124) M.Aditya-A.Kozak  
Moscow 2020

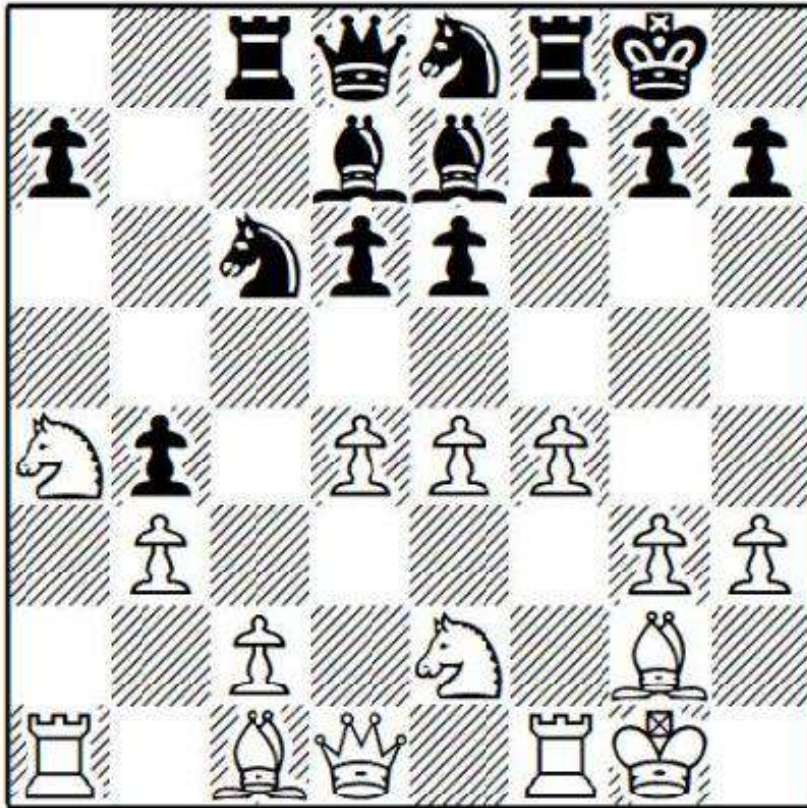
*White to play*



**Solution**

125) A.Fedorov-K.Petrova  
Prague 2020

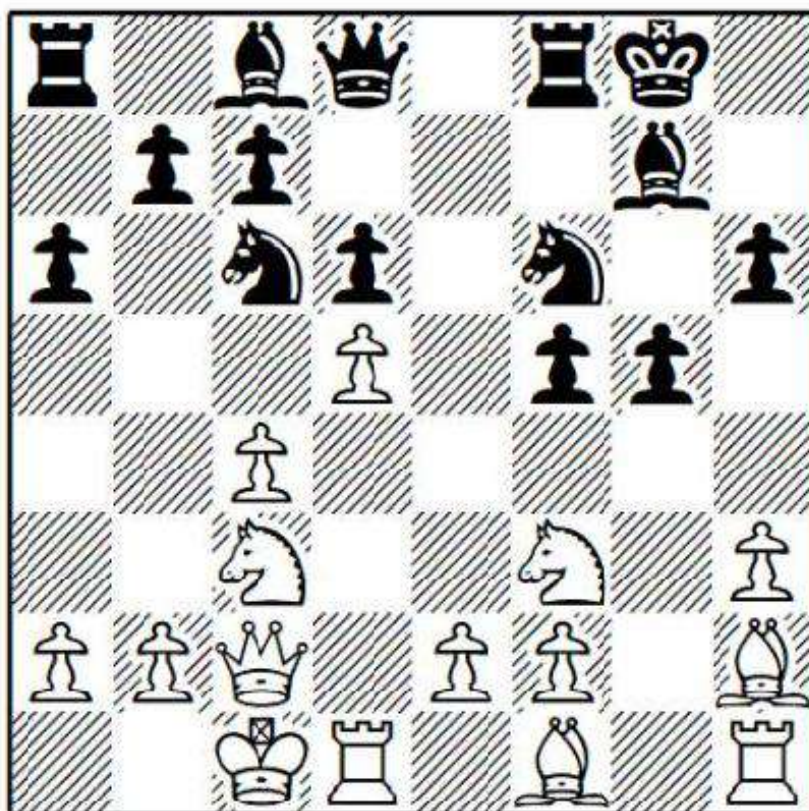
*White to play*



**Solution**

126) N.Mohammad-M.Lagarde  
Cappelle la Grande 2020

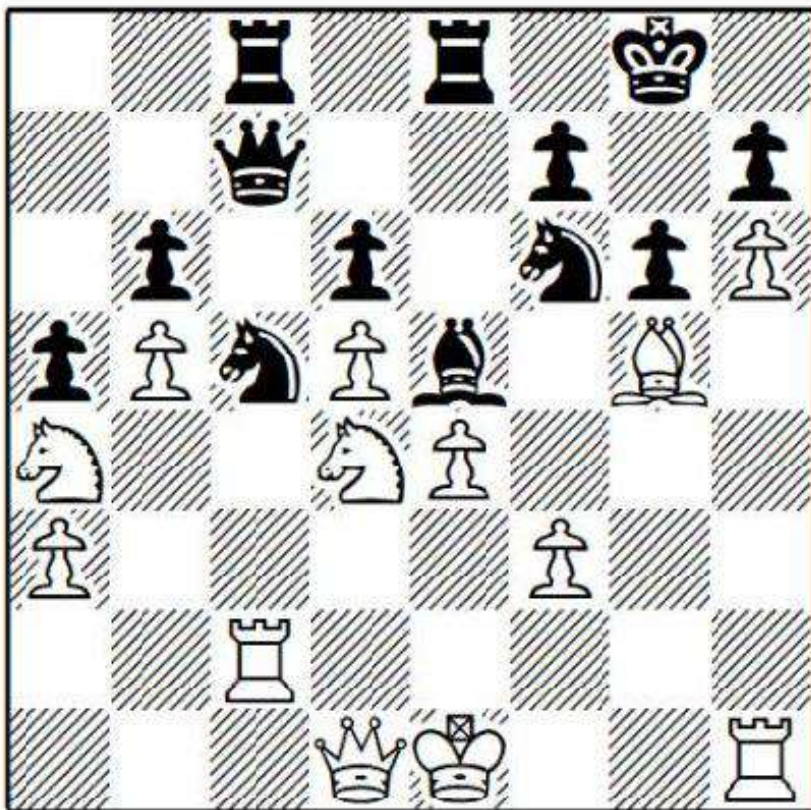
*Black to play*



**Solution**

127) J.Bures-M.Jurcik  
Czech Republic 2020

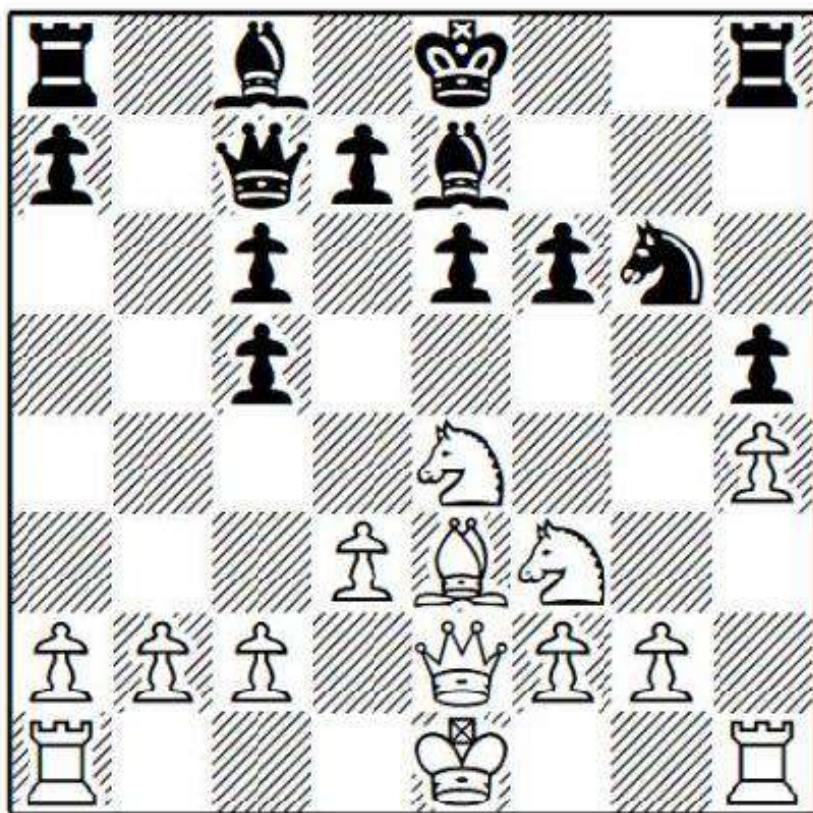
White to play



Solution

128) L.Babujian-H.Martirosyan  
Yerevan 2021

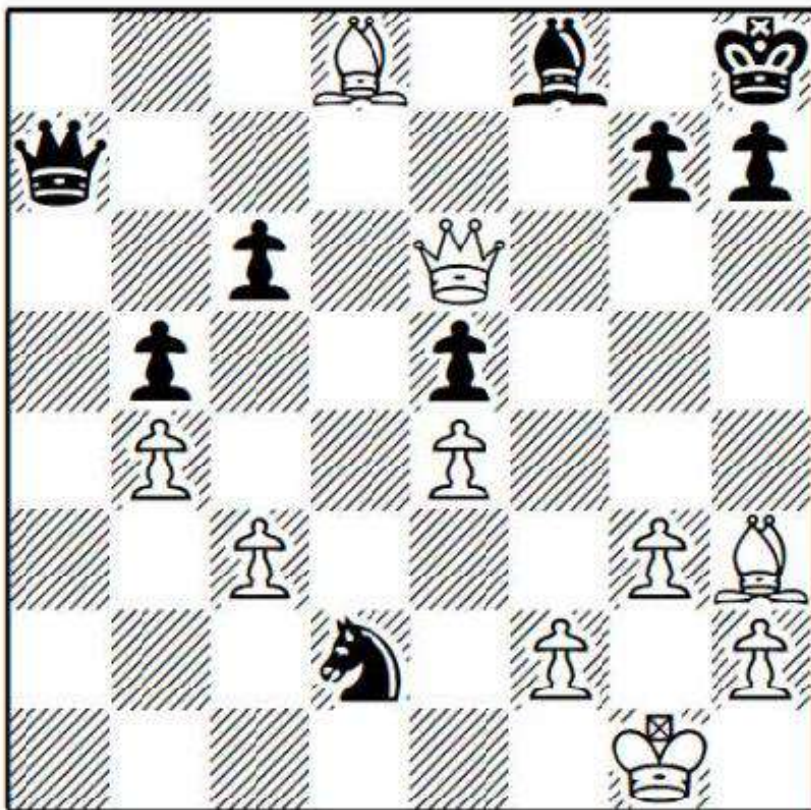
*Black to play*



Solution

129) S.Gaboyan-E.Smirnova  
lichess.org 2021

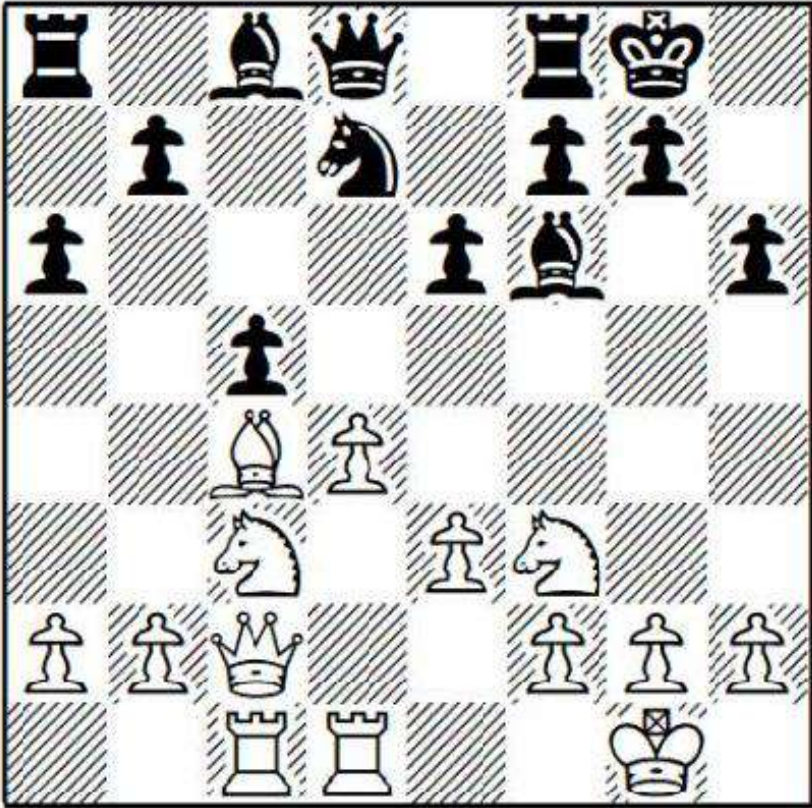
*White to play*



**Solution**

**130) D.Lazavik-S.Lobanov**  
Yerevan 2021

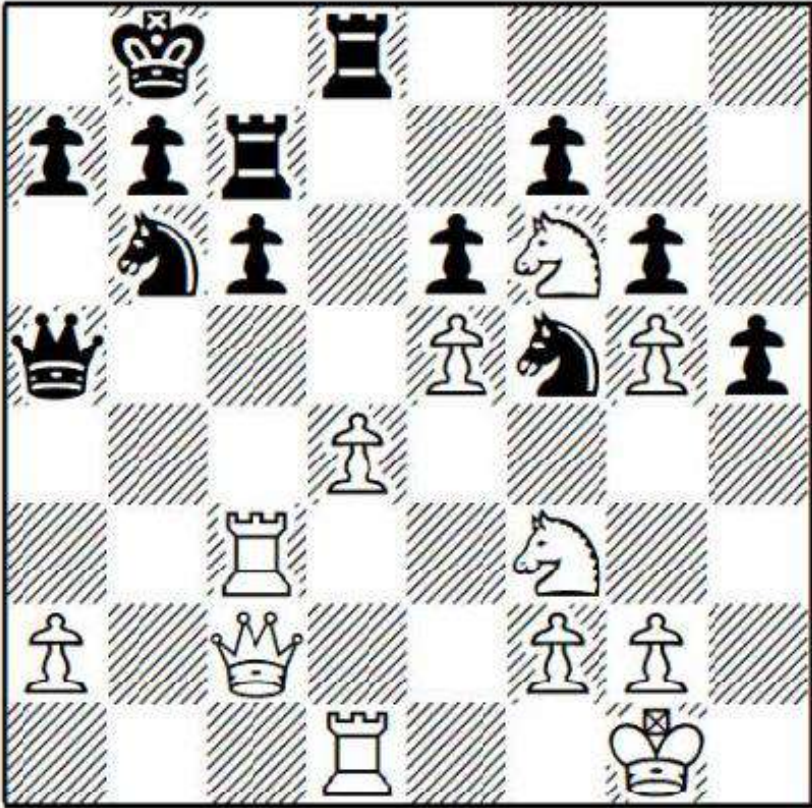
*Black to play*



Solution

131) S.Sevian-A.Liang  
chess.com 2019

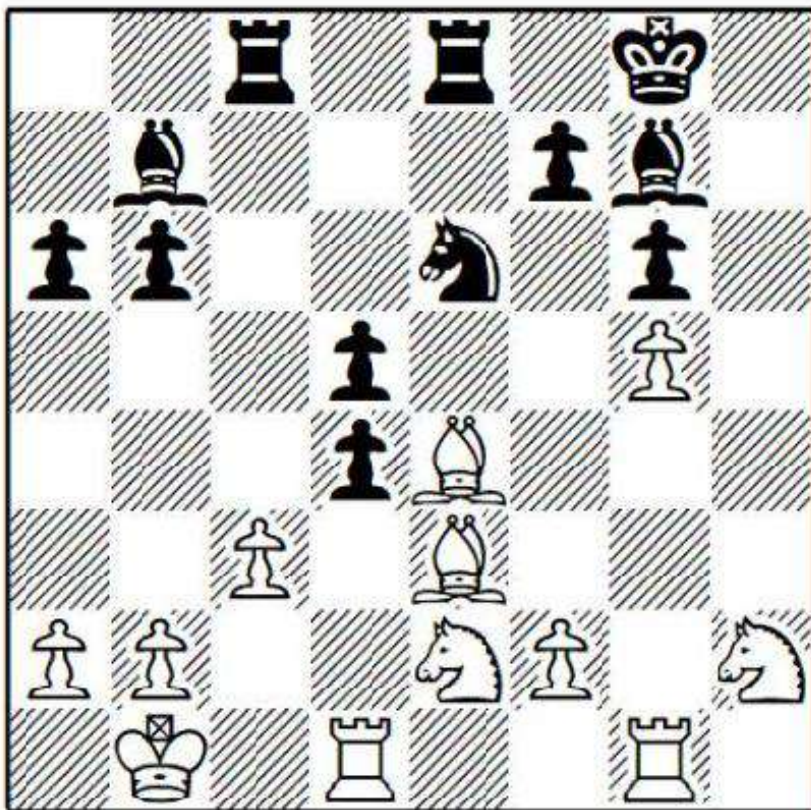
*Black to play*



Solution

132) A.Gabrielian-V.Skatchkov  
Chelyabinsk 2020

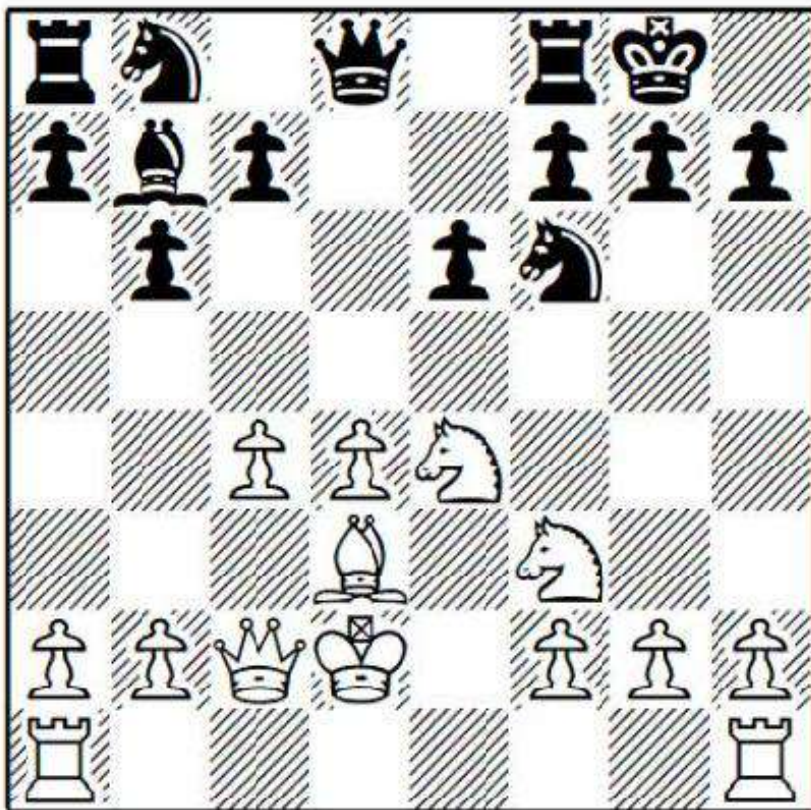
White to play



Solution

133) J.Yu-B.Bellahcene  
Villorba 2021

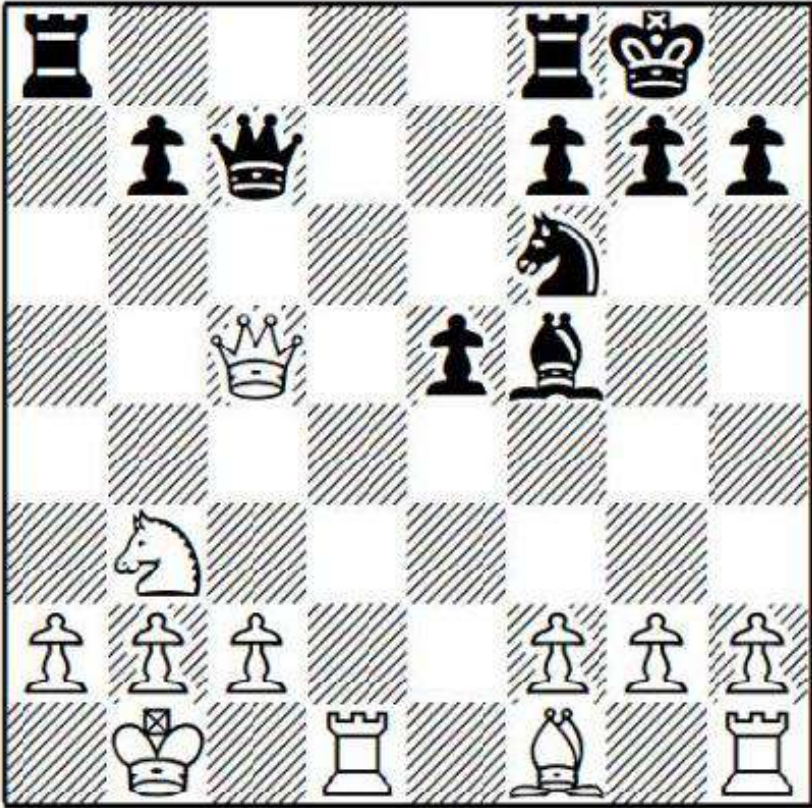
*Black to play*



**Solution**

**134) S.Poormosavi-A.Gholami**  
Tehran 2020

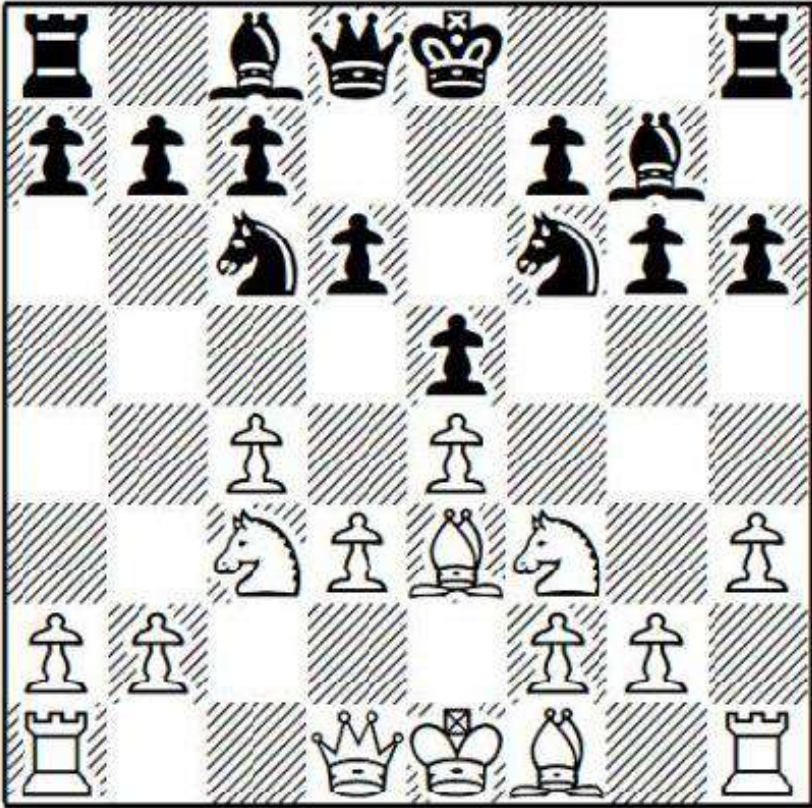
*Black to play*



**Solution**

135) A.Herbrig-S.Skembris  
Schwaebisch Gmuend 2019

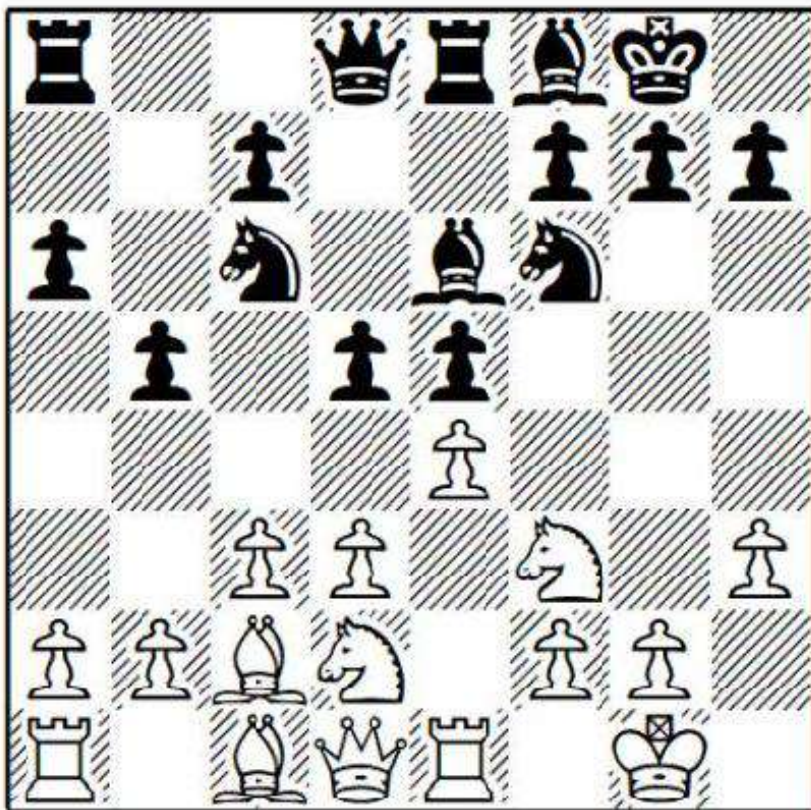
*Black to play*



Solution

136) D.Ozen-S.Yaran  
Antalya 2020

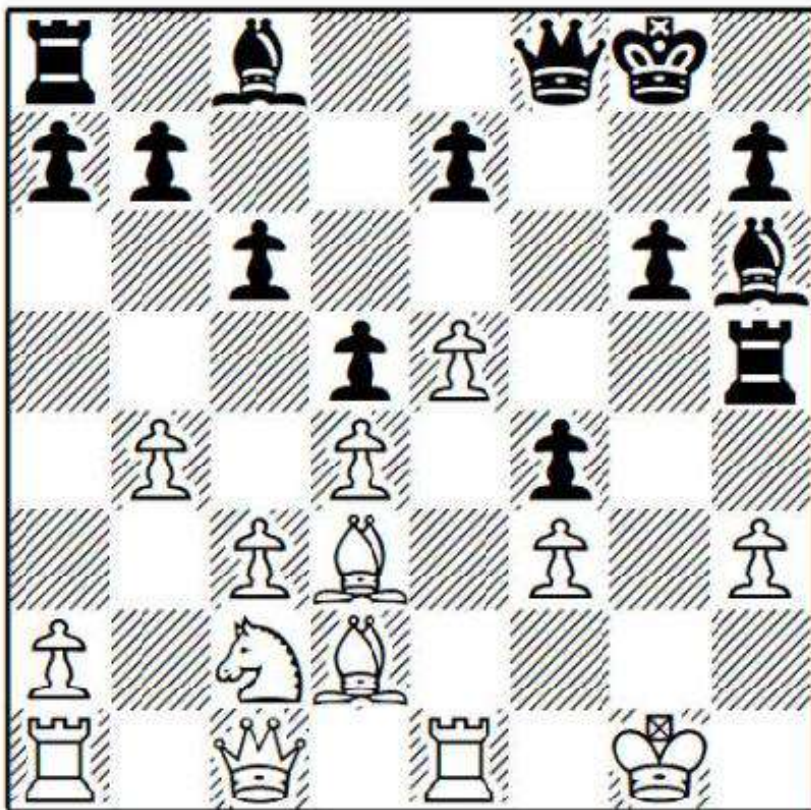
*White to play*



**Solution**

137) V.Kirchei-D.Tsoi  
Moscow 2020

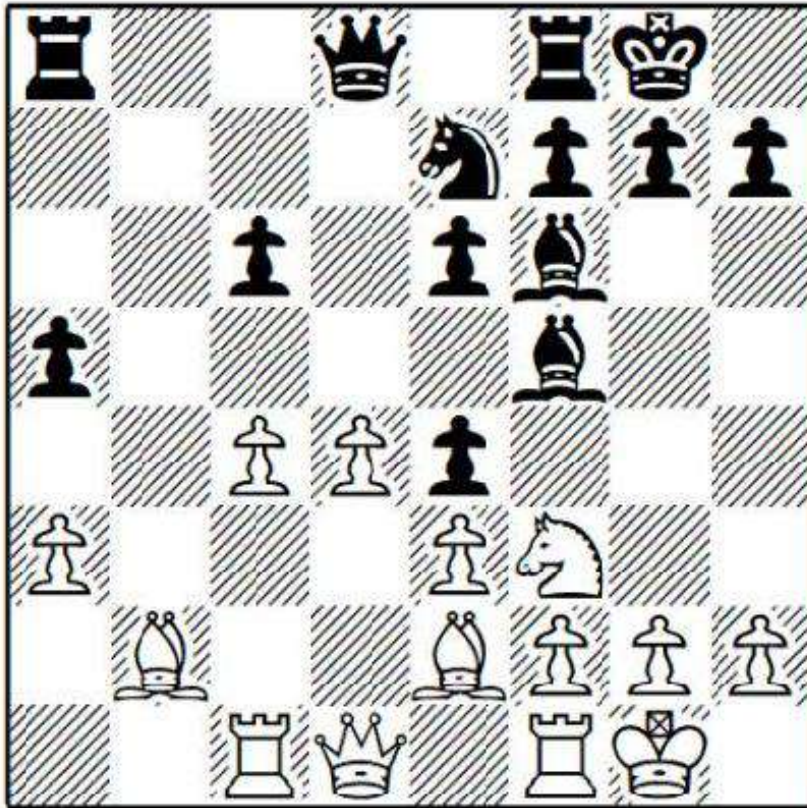
White to play



Solution

138) V.Erdos-X.Xu  
chess.com 2020

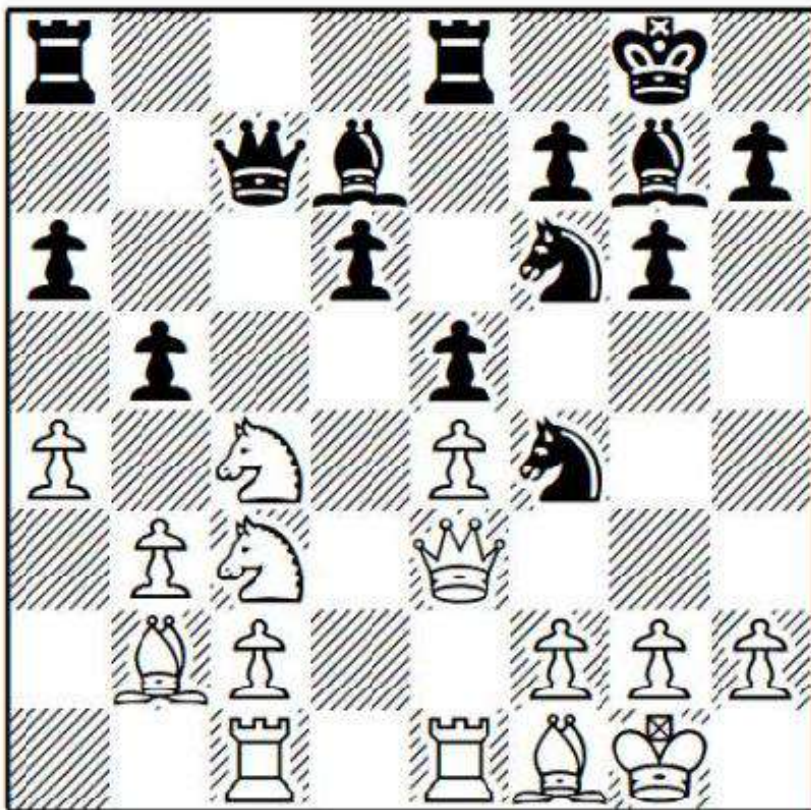
*White to play*



**Solution**

139) H.Heimisson-M.Haubro  
Aarhus 2020

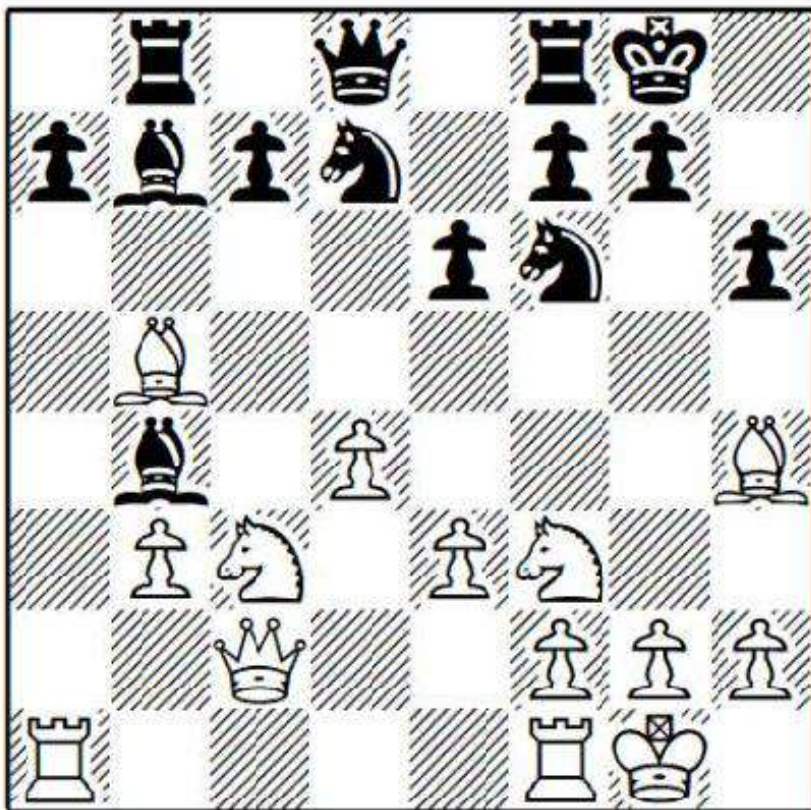
White to play



Solution

140) H.Sorensen-C.Fernandez Diaz  
Santo Tirso 2020

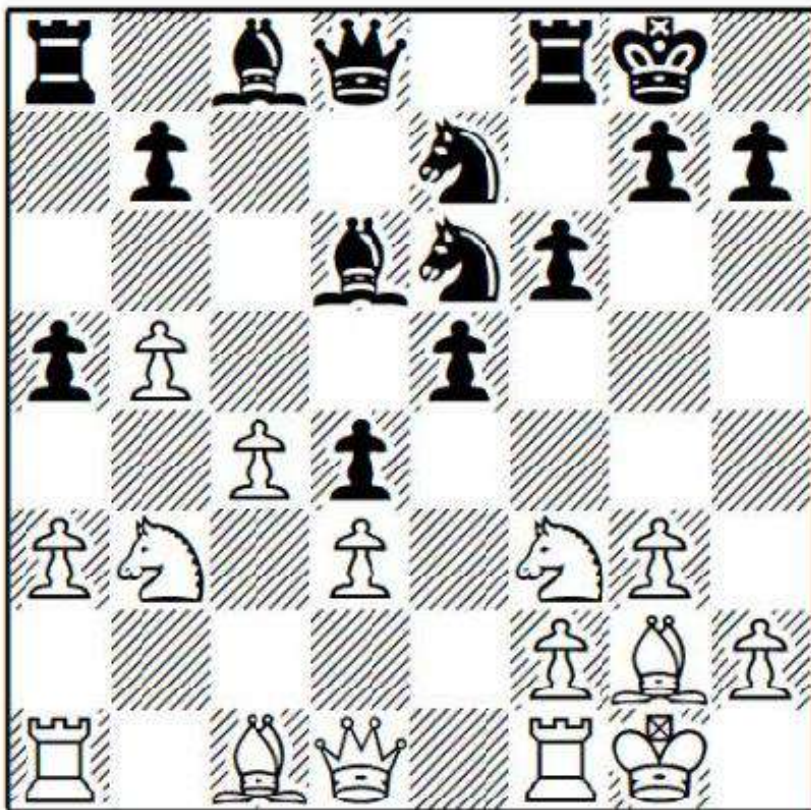
*White to play*



**Solution**

**141) D.Khegay-E.Burmakin**  
Moscow 2020

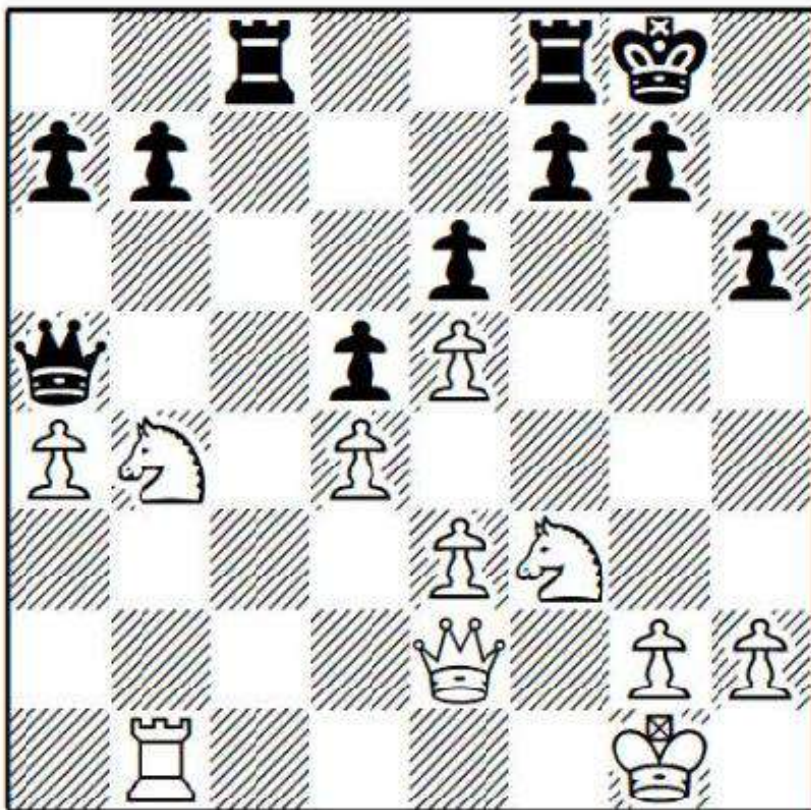
*White to play*



**Solution**

142) R.Robson-G.Vazquez  
chess.com 2020

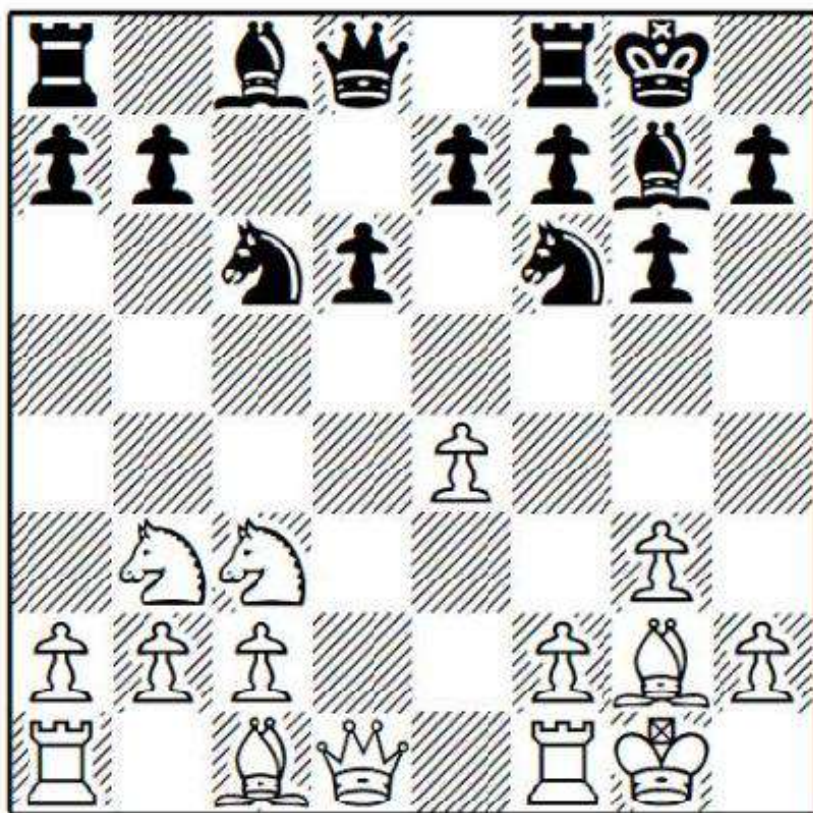
*White to play*



[Solution](#)

143) R.Makarian-M.Stukan  
Sochi 2020

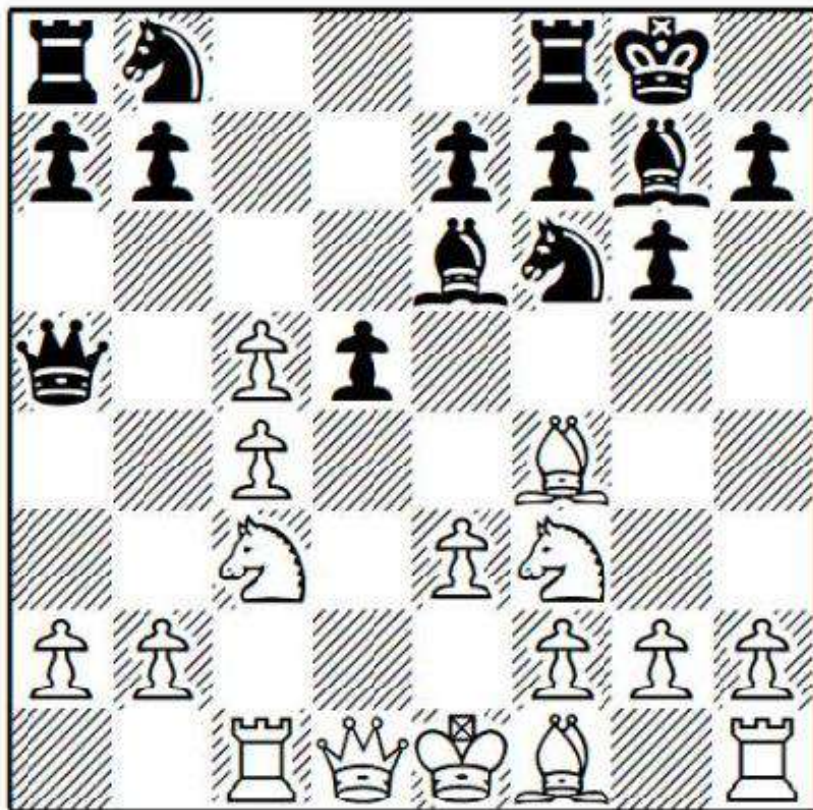
*Black to play*



**Solution**

**144) T.Salemgareev-A.Drygalov**  
Chelyabinsk 2020

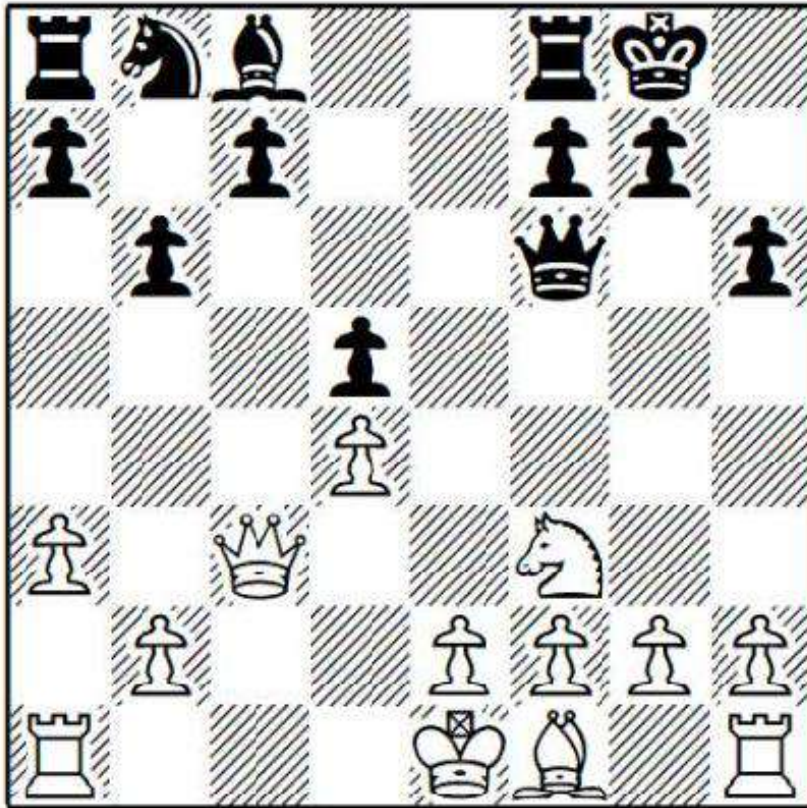
White to play



Solution

145) K.Dragun-T.Virtanen  
chess.com 2021

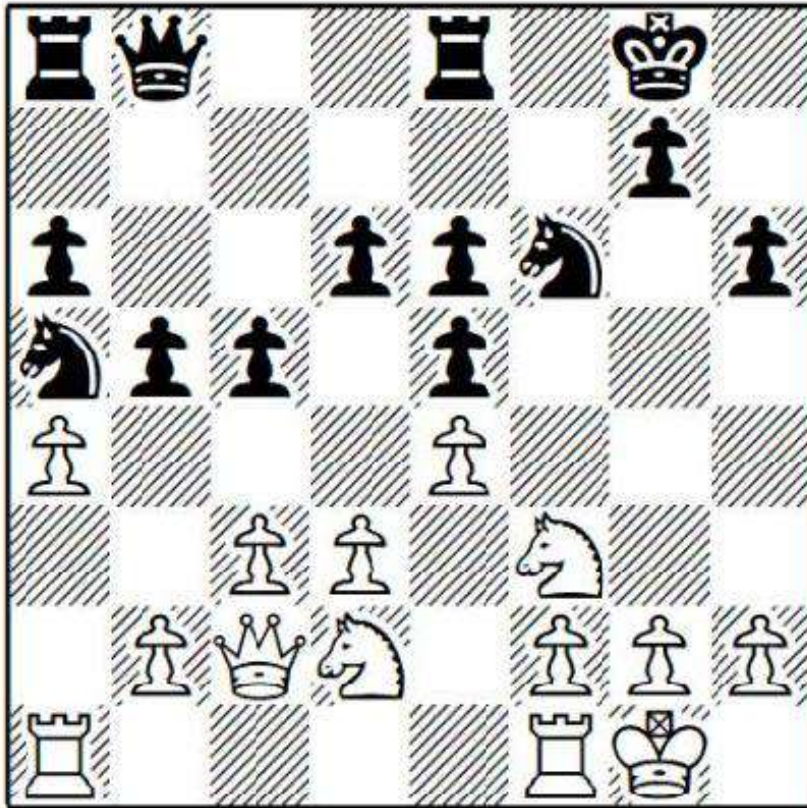
*White to play*



**Solution**

**146) G.Von Buelow-D.Guimaraes**  
Florianopolis 2021

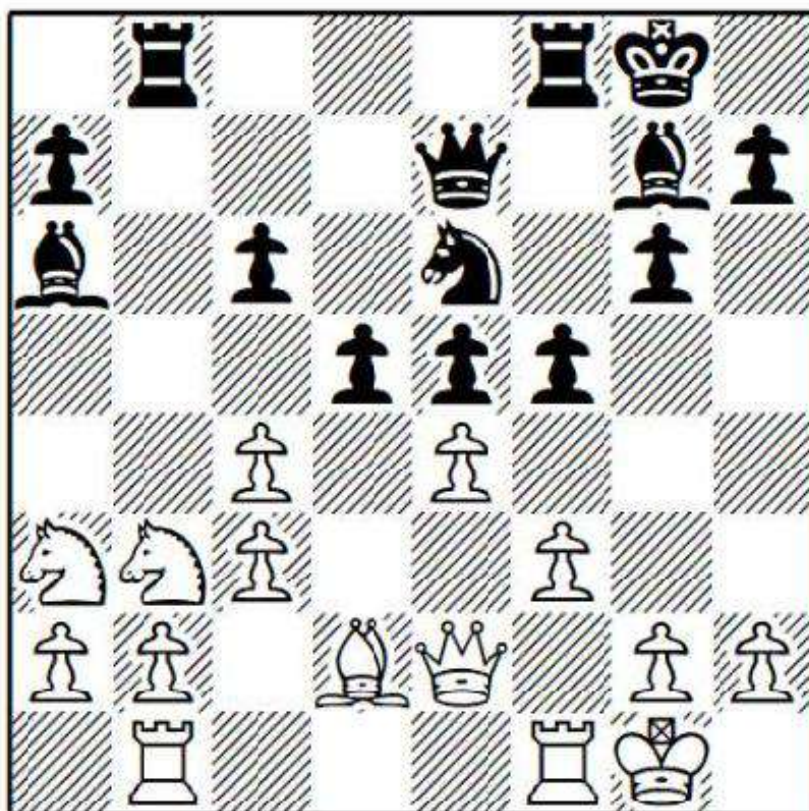
*White to play*



**Solution**

147) Z.Amdouni-A.Zaibi  
Sousse 2020

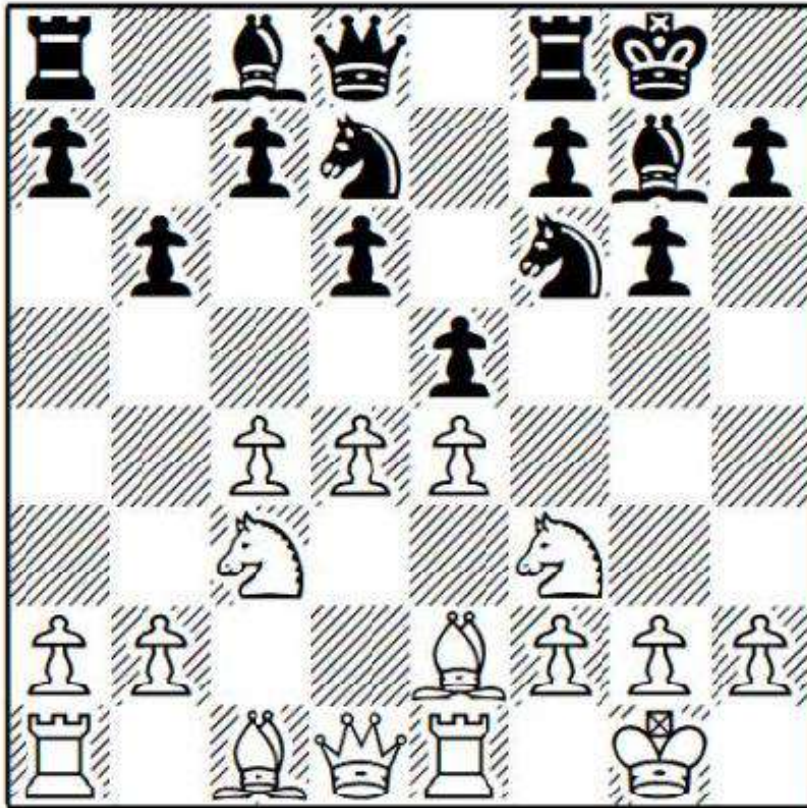
*Black to play*



**Solution**

**148) M.Hammes-M.Bosboom**  
Belgium 2020

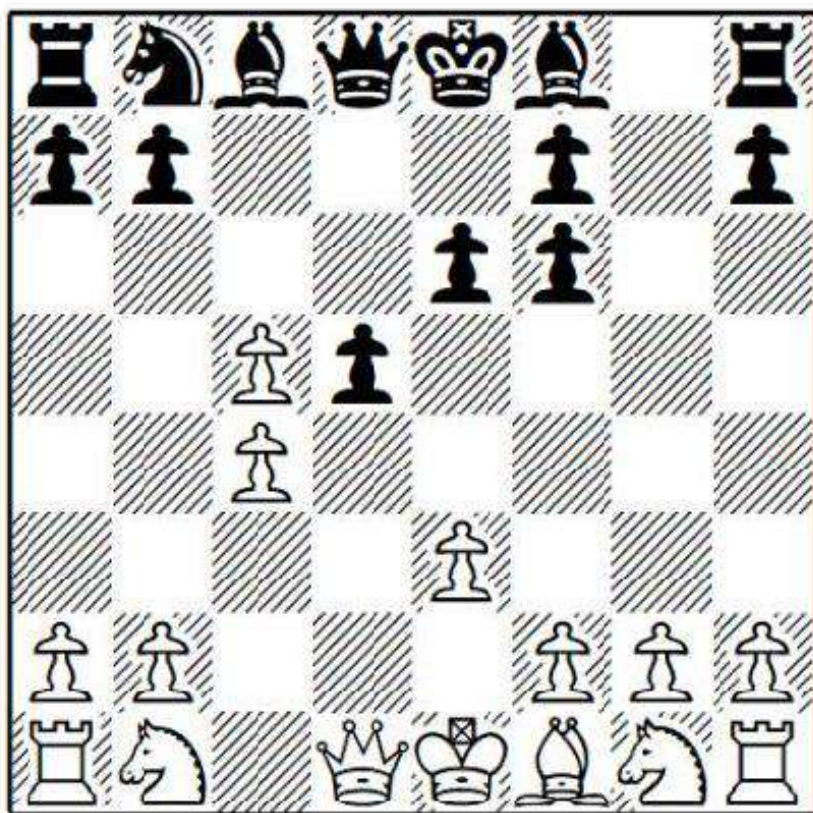
*White to play*



**Solution**

**149) K.Oliva Castaneda-J.Morales**  
Sant Adria de Besos 2019

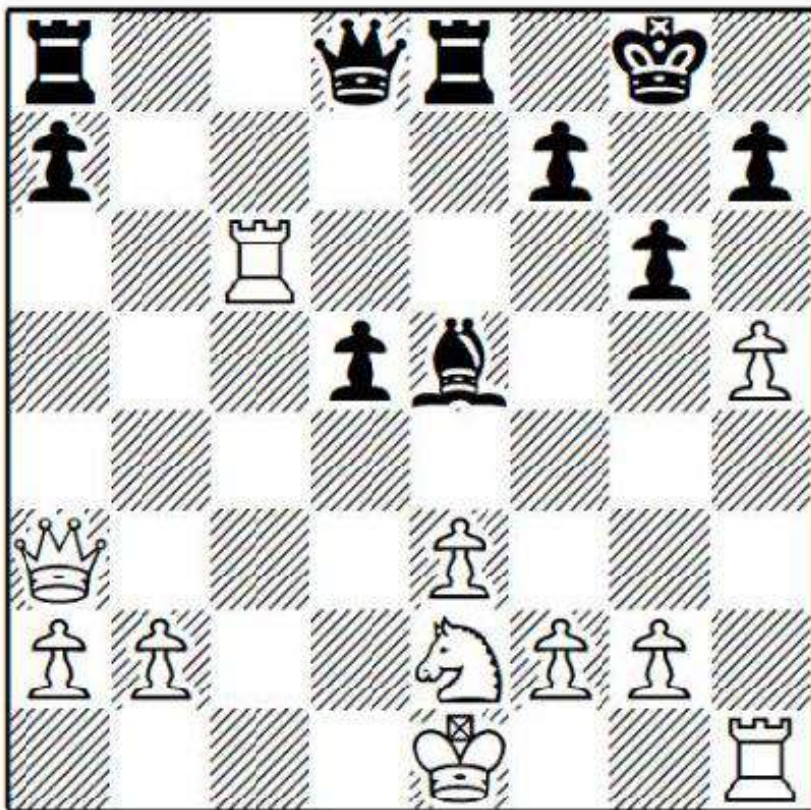
*Black to play*



**Solution**

**150) I.Khmelniker-A.Zubov**  
Netanya 2019

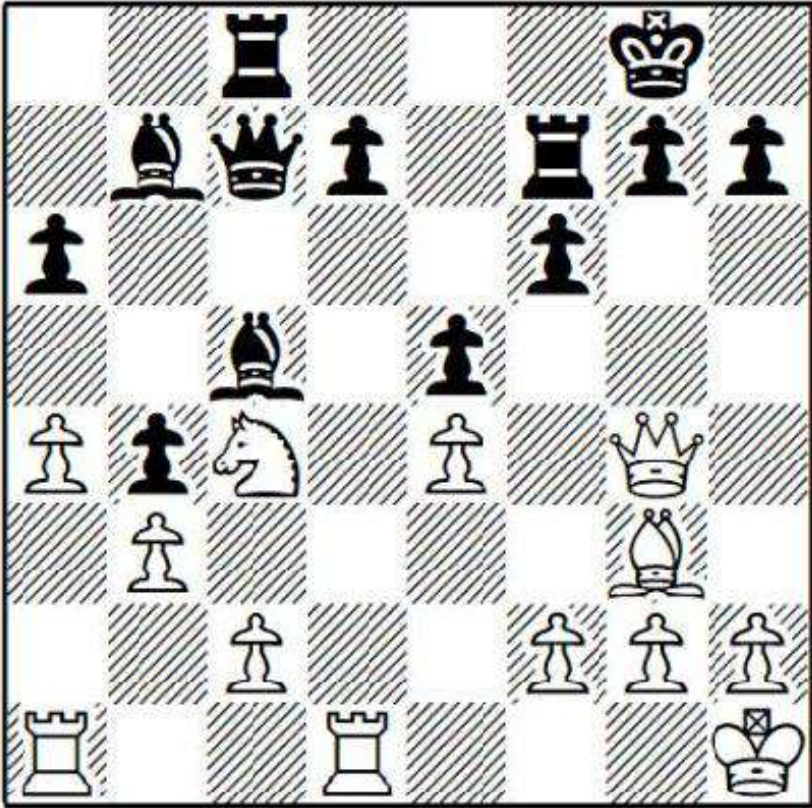
*Black to play*



**Solution**

**151) T.Melamed-S.Papp**  
Germany 2020

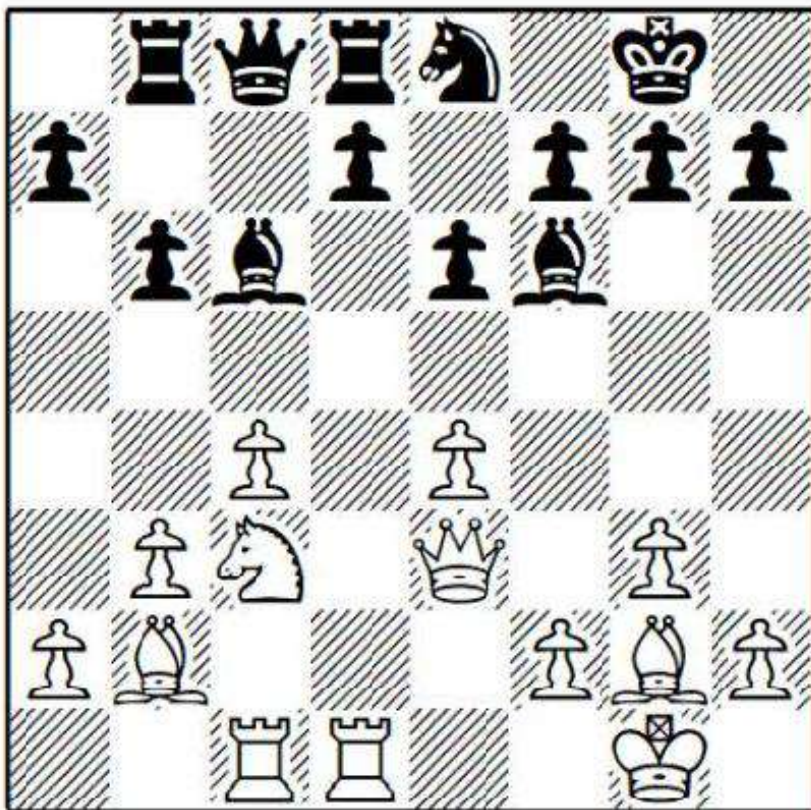
*Black to play*



**Solution**

152) D.Anton Guijarro-E.Doluhanova  
Gibraltar 2019

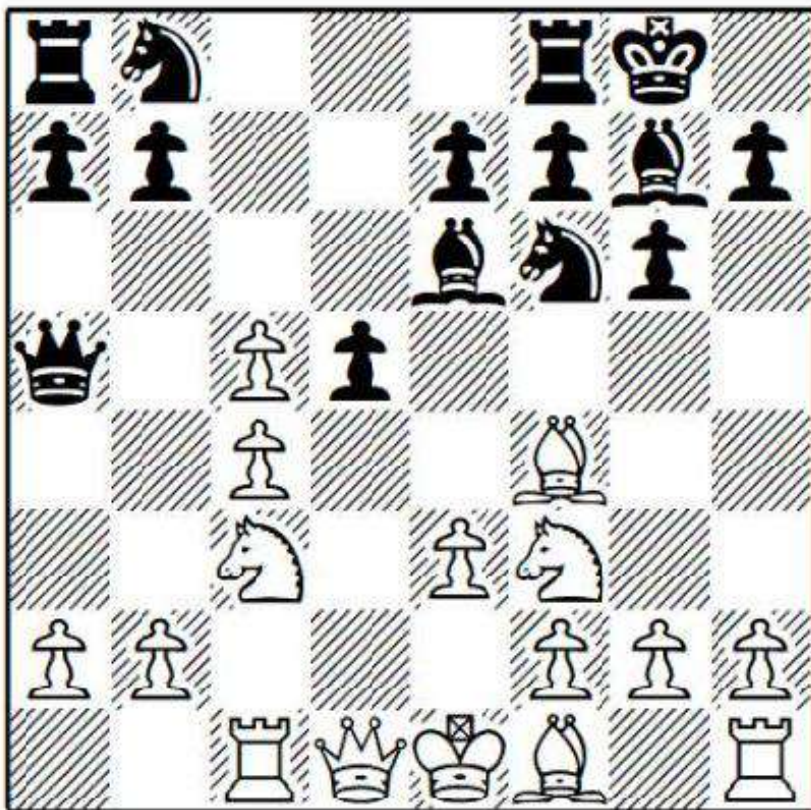
White to play



Solution

153) S.Grishchenko-G.Hjorth  
Sundsvall 2019

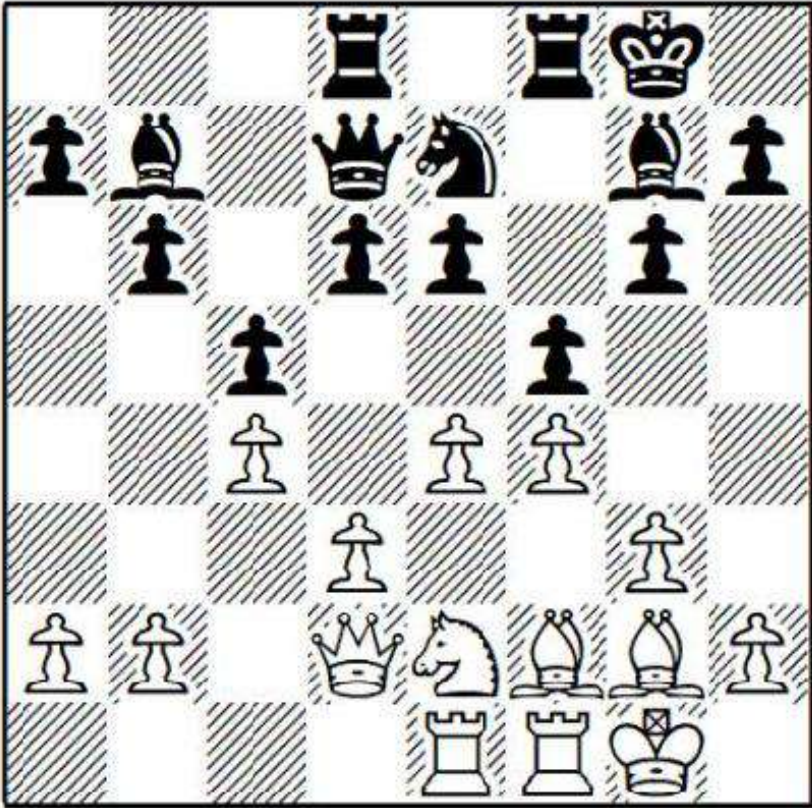
White to play



[Solution](#)

154) Z.Andriasian-V.Mikhalevski  
chess.com 2020

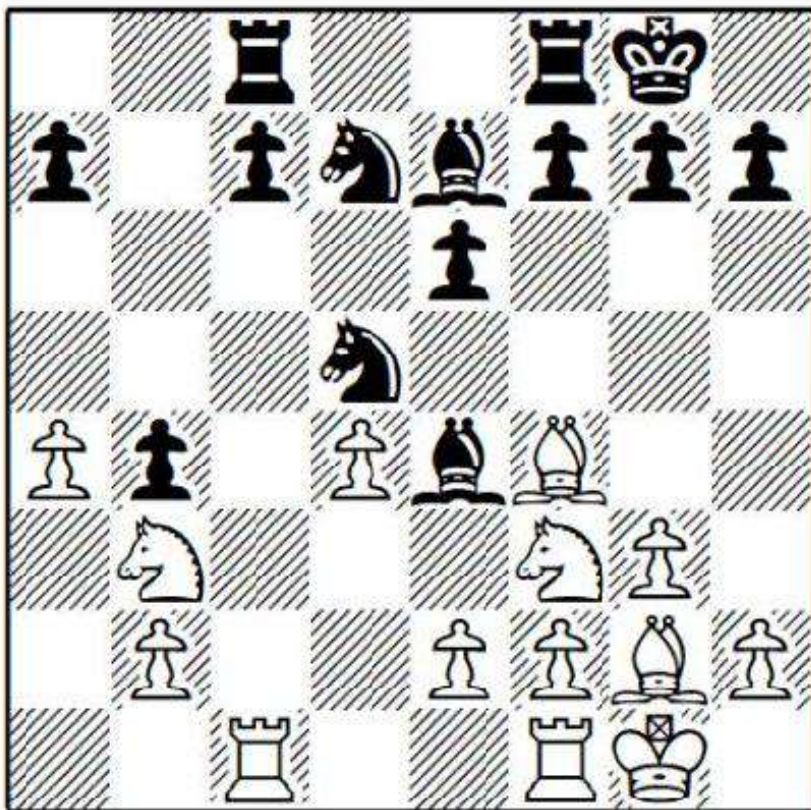
*Black to play*



**Solution**

155) M.Berdnyk-K.Ning  
chess.com 2020

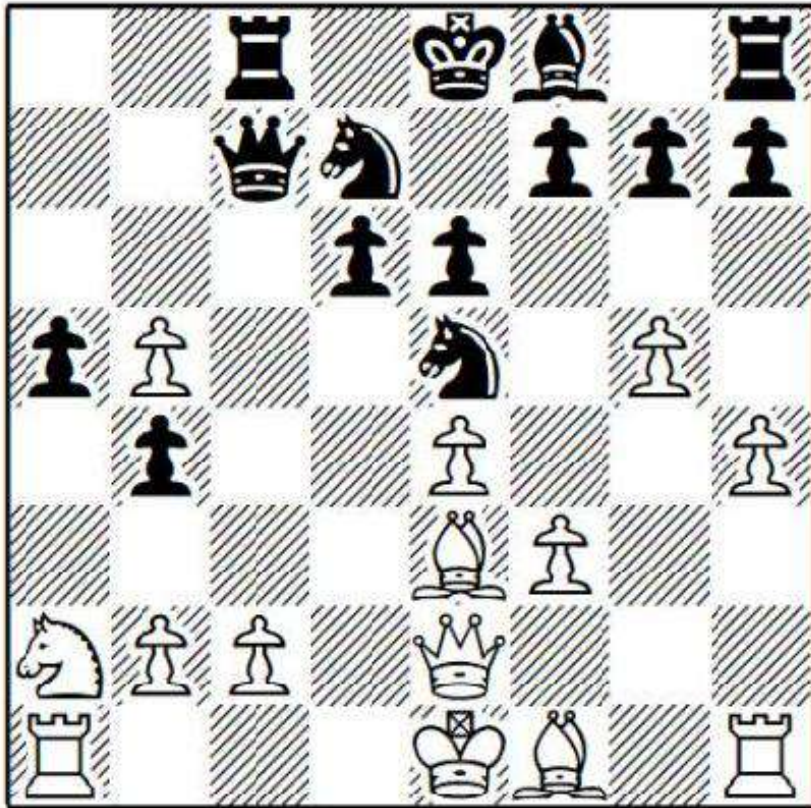
*White to play*



**Solution**

**156) E. Van Haastert-N.Guliyev**  
Netherlands 2020

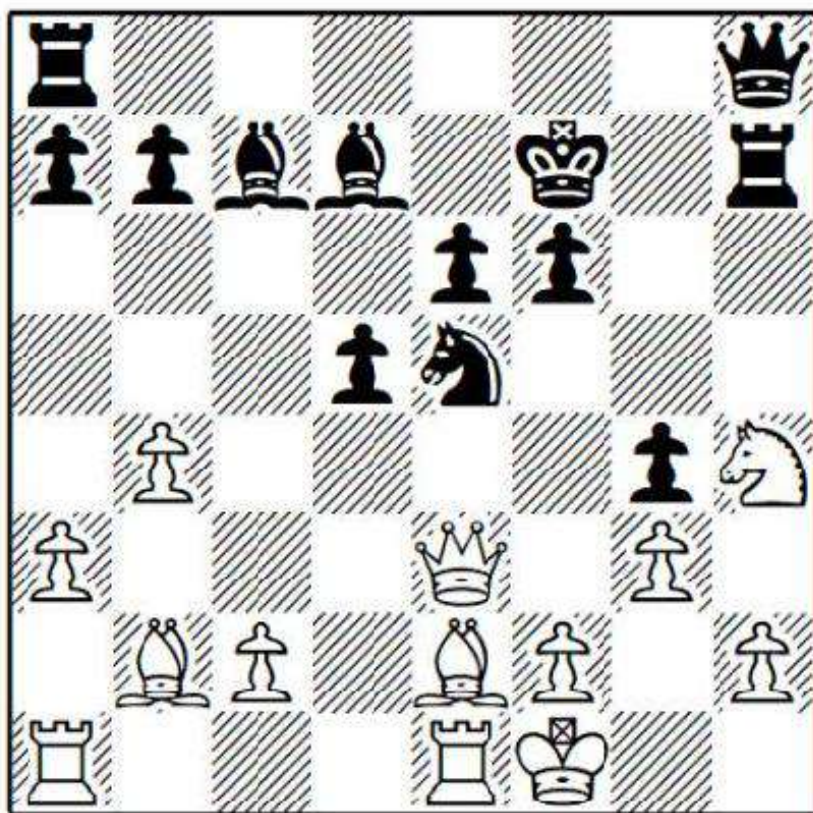
*White to play*



Solution

157) B.Daggupati-A.Ostrovskiy  
Charlotte 2021

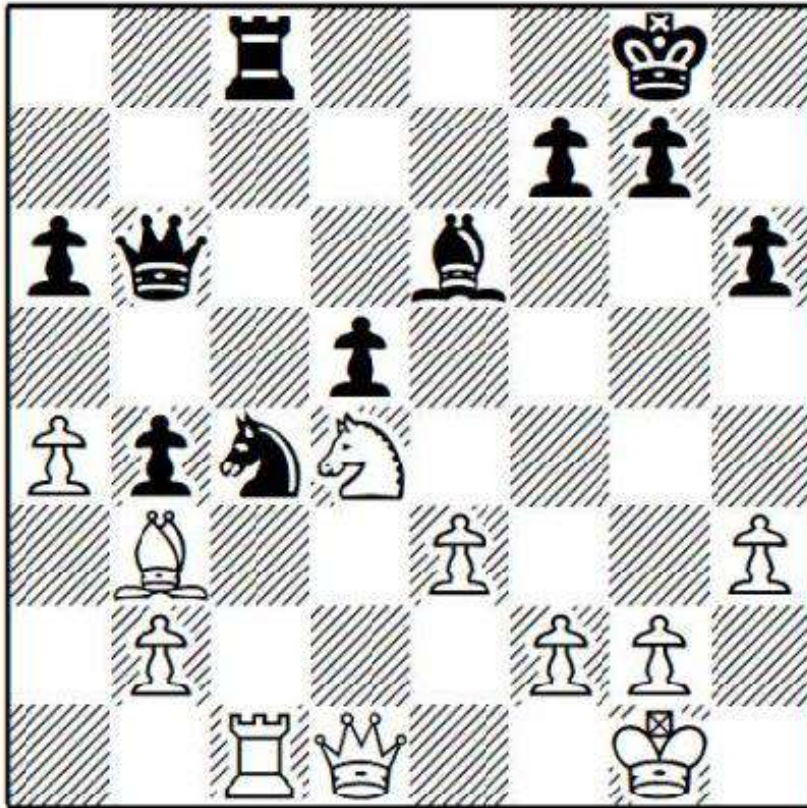
*Black to play*



**Solution**

**158) A.Kukhmazov-V.Mikhailovsky**  
Moscow 2021

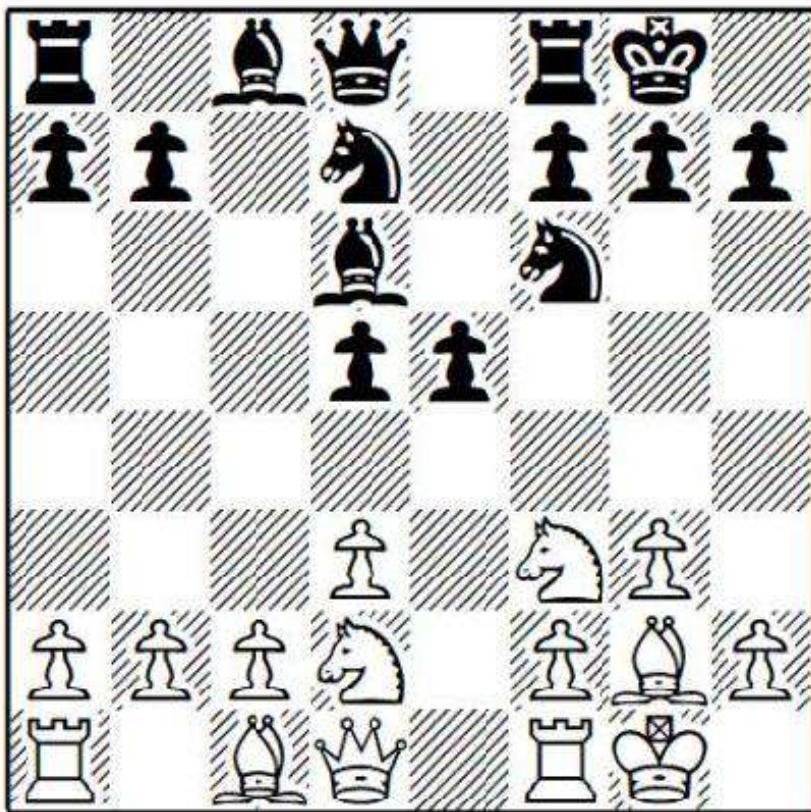
*White to play*



**Solution**

**159) G.Rechlis-A.Korobov**  
Netanya 2019

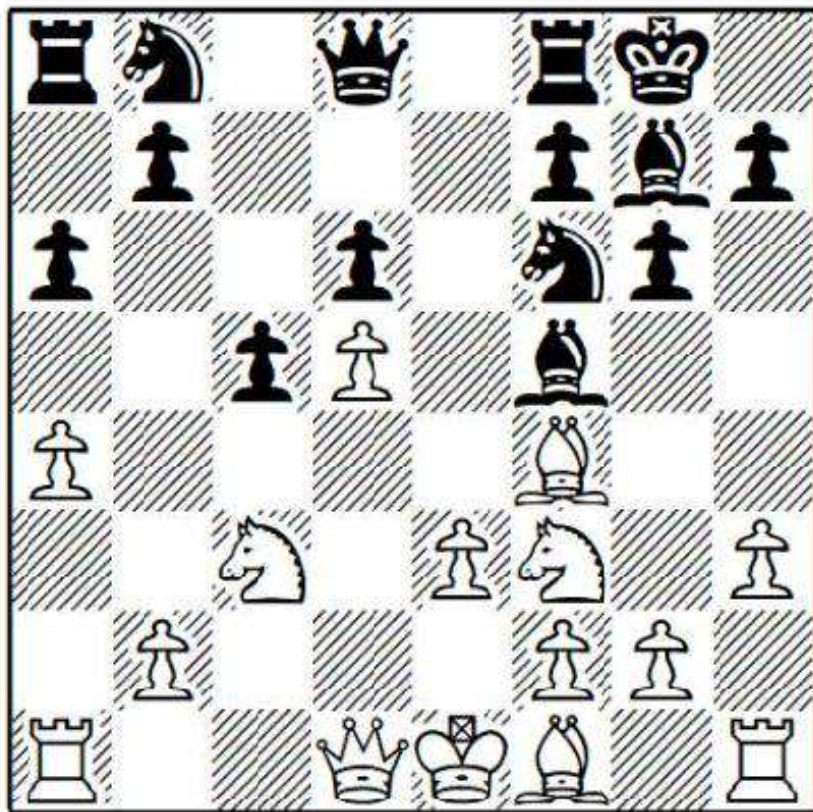
*White to play*



Solution

160) N.Checa-J.Song  
Villorba 2021

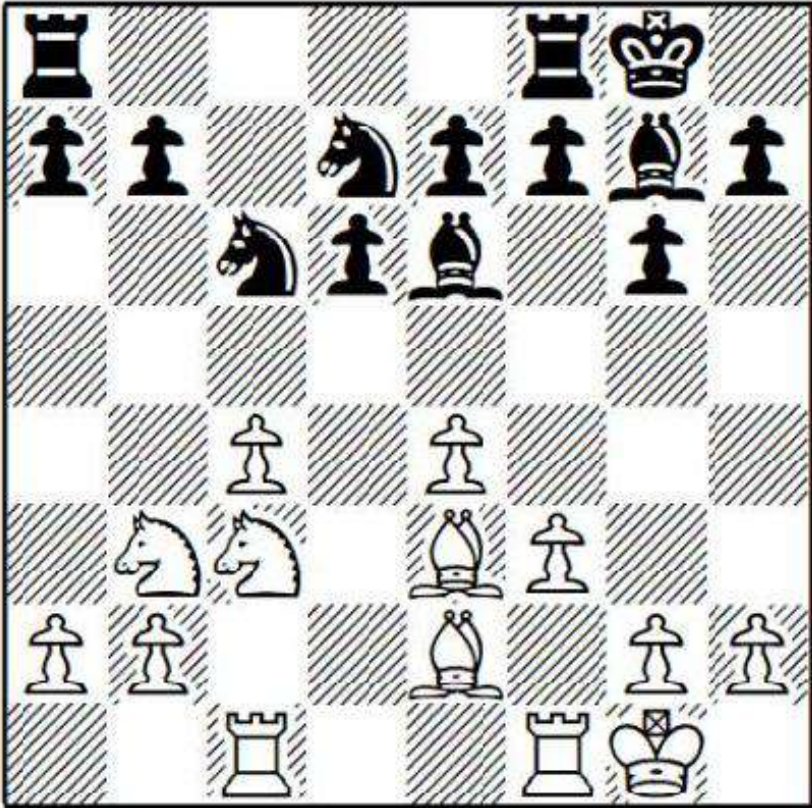
*White to play*



Solution

161) J.Baum-T.Ochedzan  
Krakow 2021

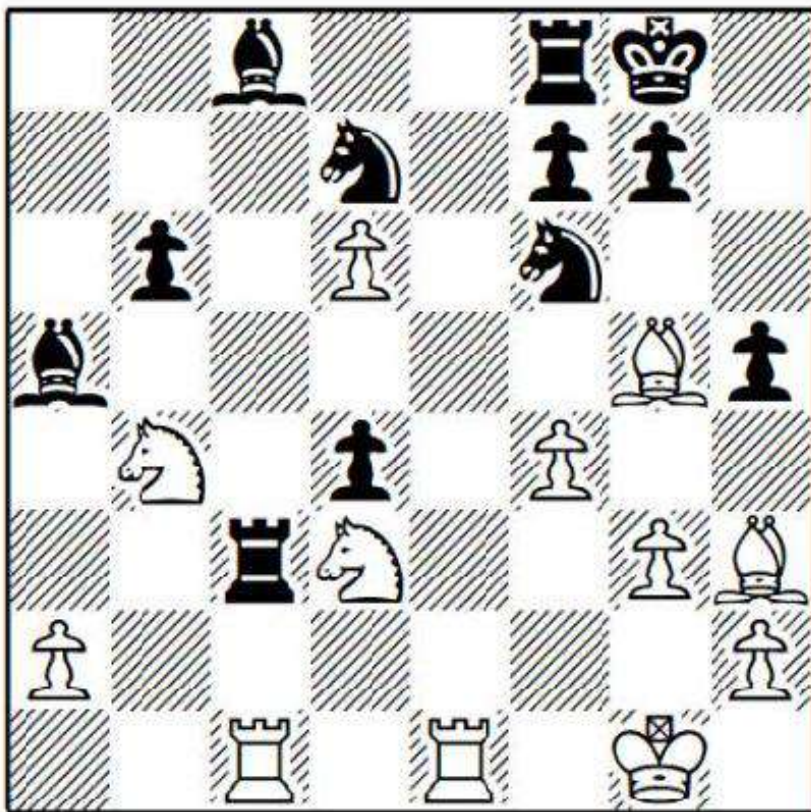
*Black to play*



**Solution**

**162) D.Fernandez-M.Quinn**  
Dublin 2019

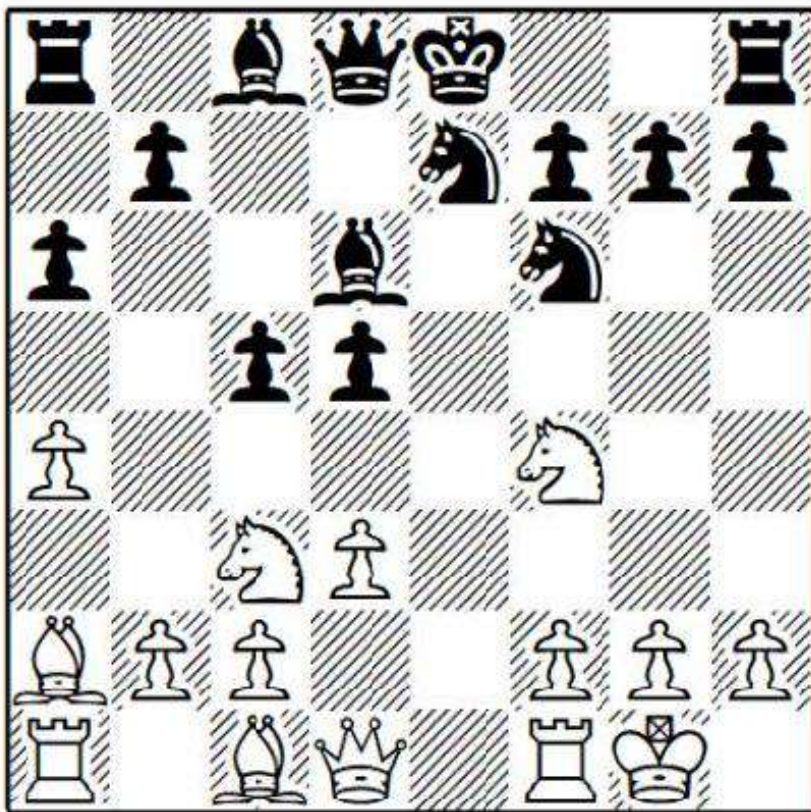
*White to play*



**Solution**

**163) G.Harutjunyan-R.Samadov**  
Moscow 2020

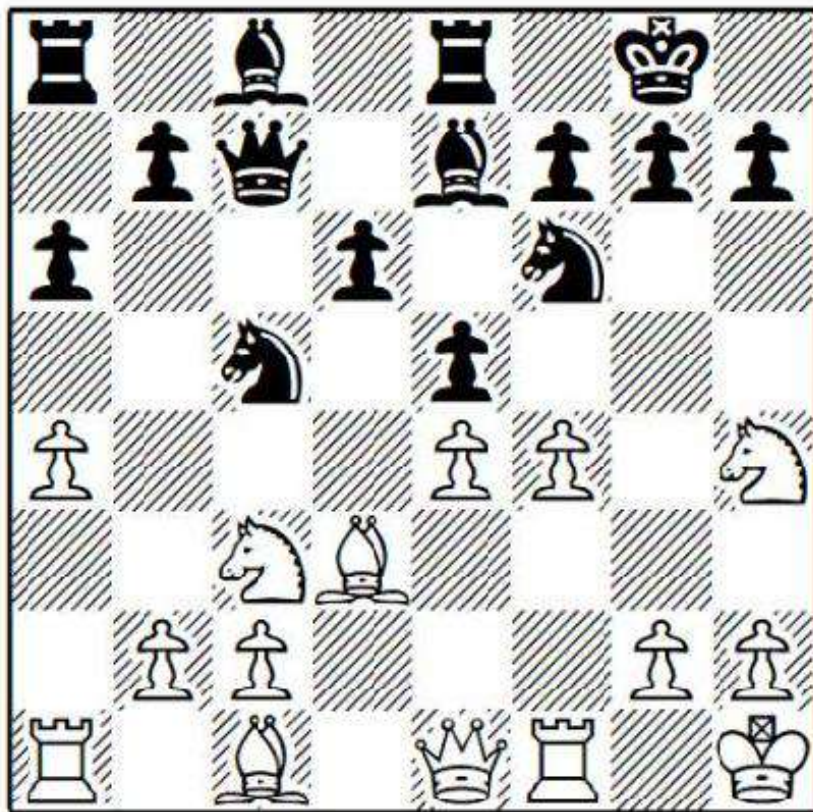
White to play



Solution

164) B.Maryasin-N.Steinberg  
Israel 2020

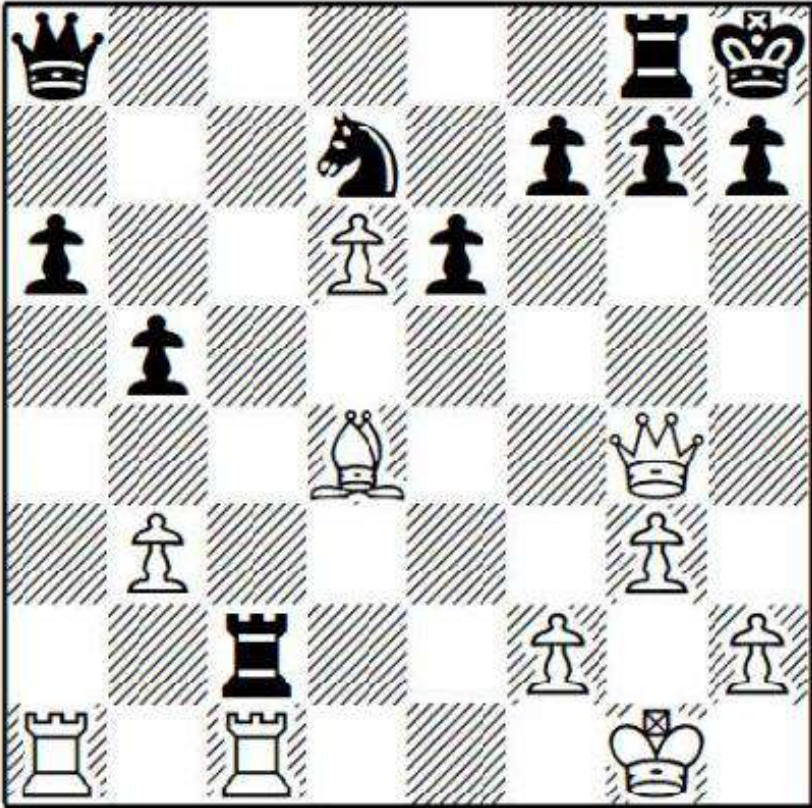
*Black to play*



Solution

165) F.Sonis-J.Bjerre  
Villorba 2021

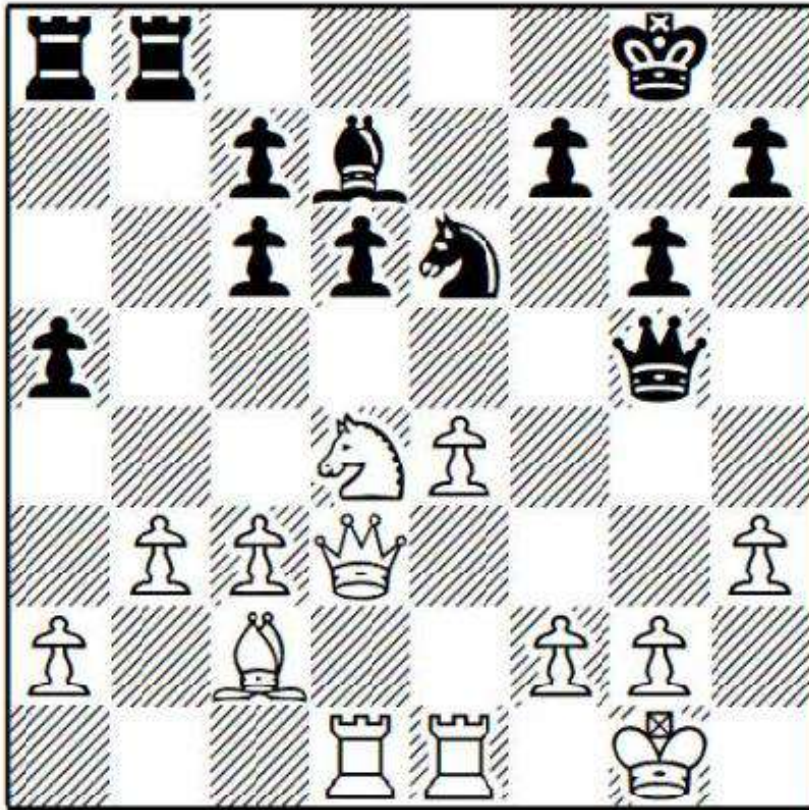
*Black to play*



Solution

166) L.Jirasek-Y.Kambrath  
chess.com 2021

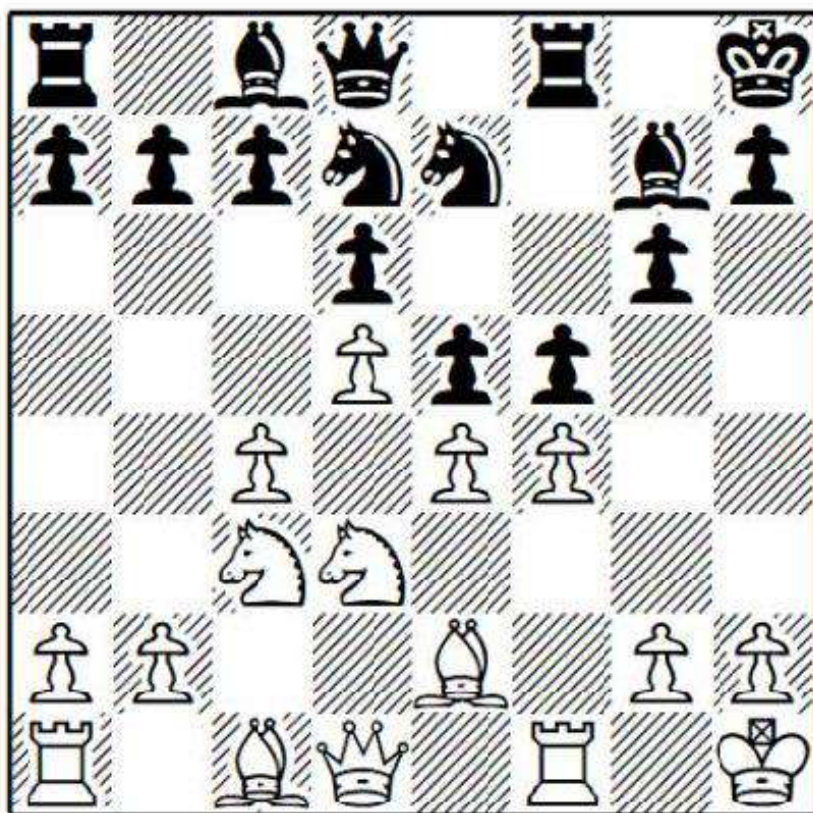
*White to play*



**Solution**

167) N.Sedlak-I.Sharma  
Novi Sad 2021

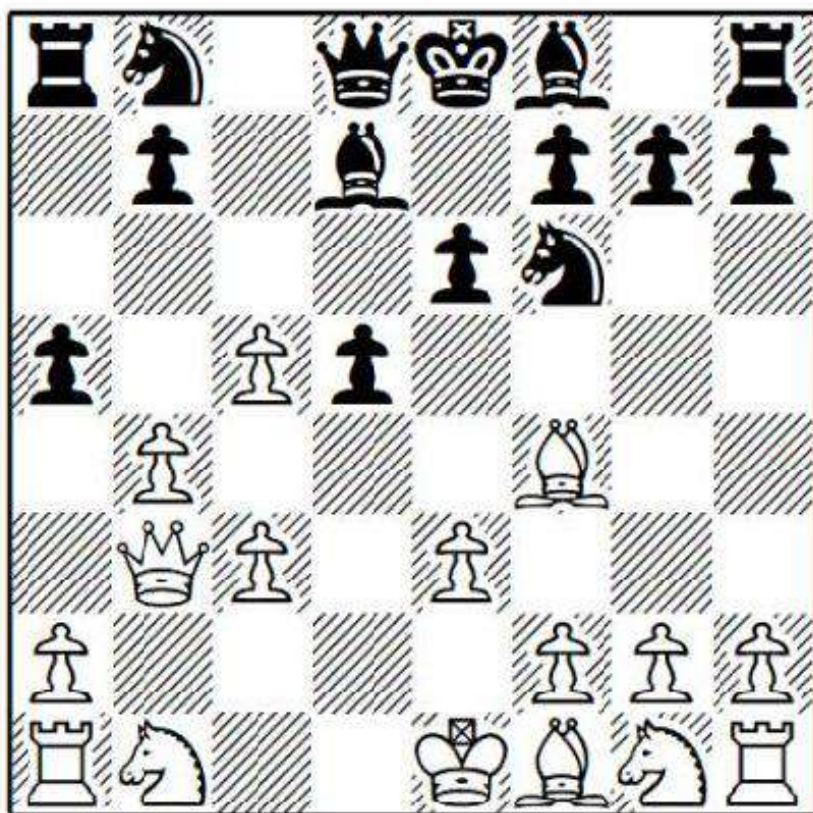
*Black to play*



**Solution**

168) L.Moroni-Z.Hracek  
Bremen 2020

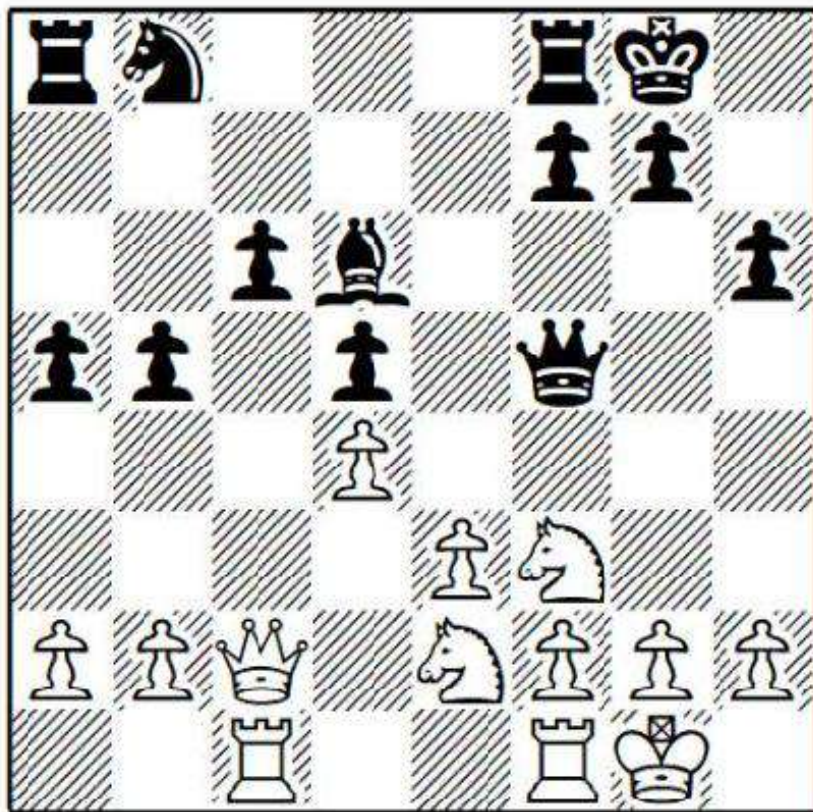
*Black to play*



**Solution**

169) M.Mis-J.Kokoszczyński  
Krakow 2021

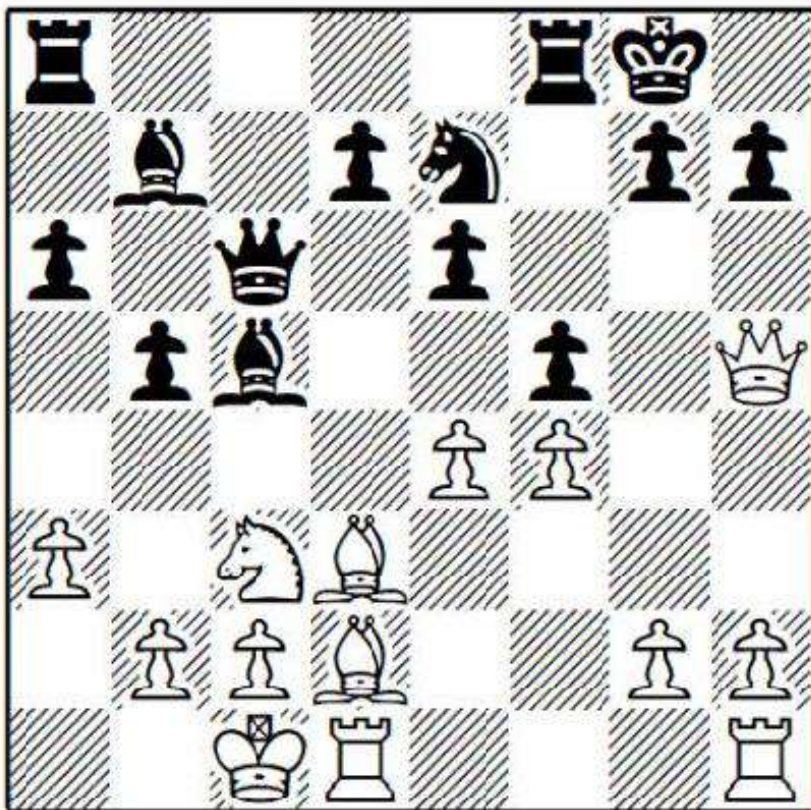
*Black to play*



**Solution**

170) G.Ayats Llobera-C.Hernandez  
Barcelona 2020

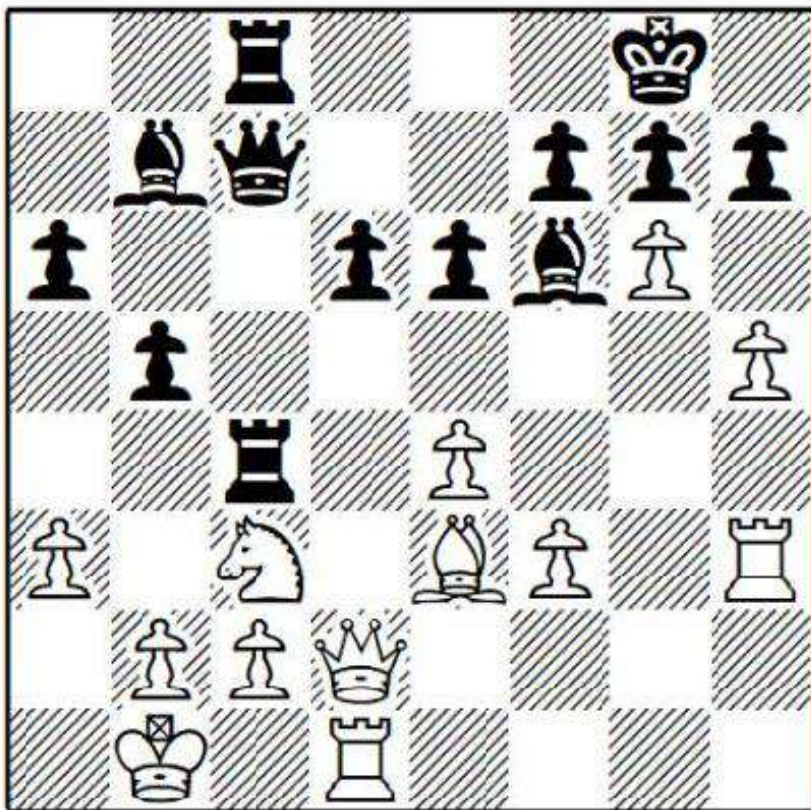
*White to play*



**Solution**

171) A.Puranik-E.Zanan  
Moscow 2020

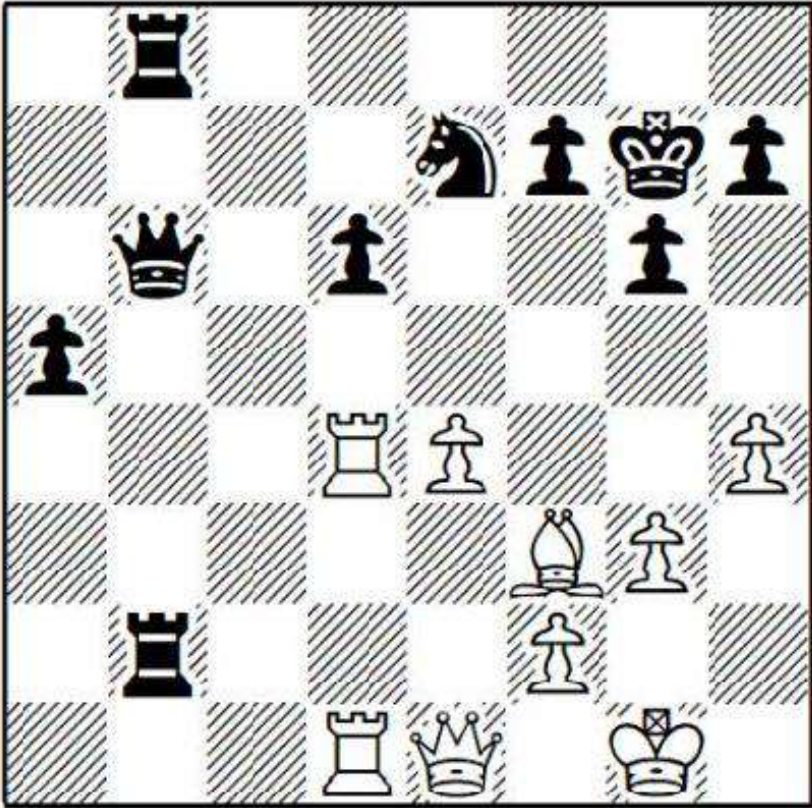
White to play



Solution

172) A.Gabrielian-A.Bivol  
Chelyabinsk 2021

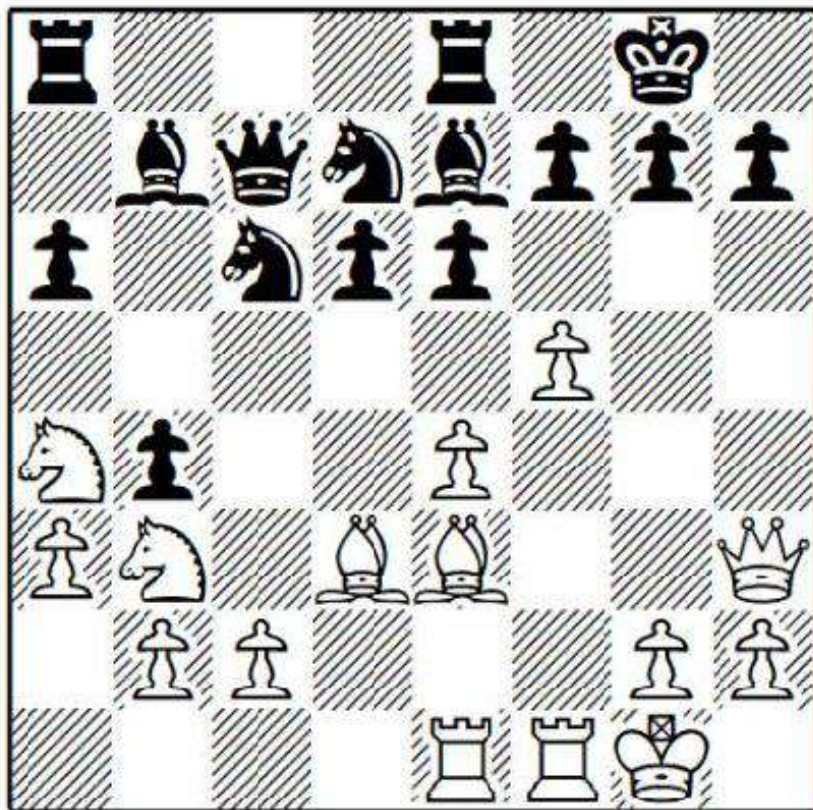
*Black to play*



**Solution**

173) T.Kanyamarala-C.Lupulescu  
Dublin 2020

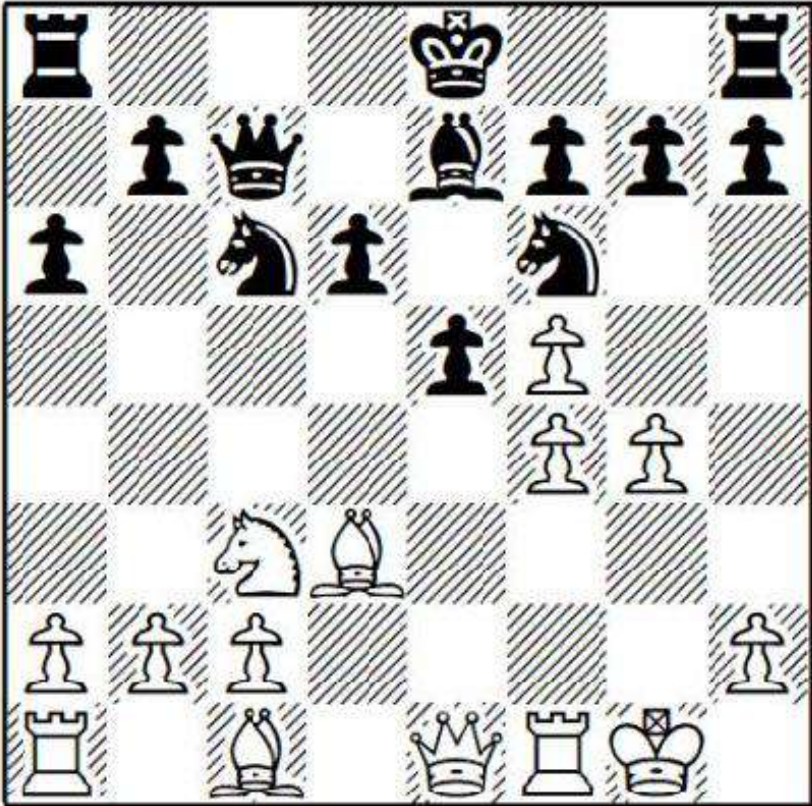
*Black to play*



**Solution**

174) J.Moussard-R.Pogorelov  
Barcelona 2020

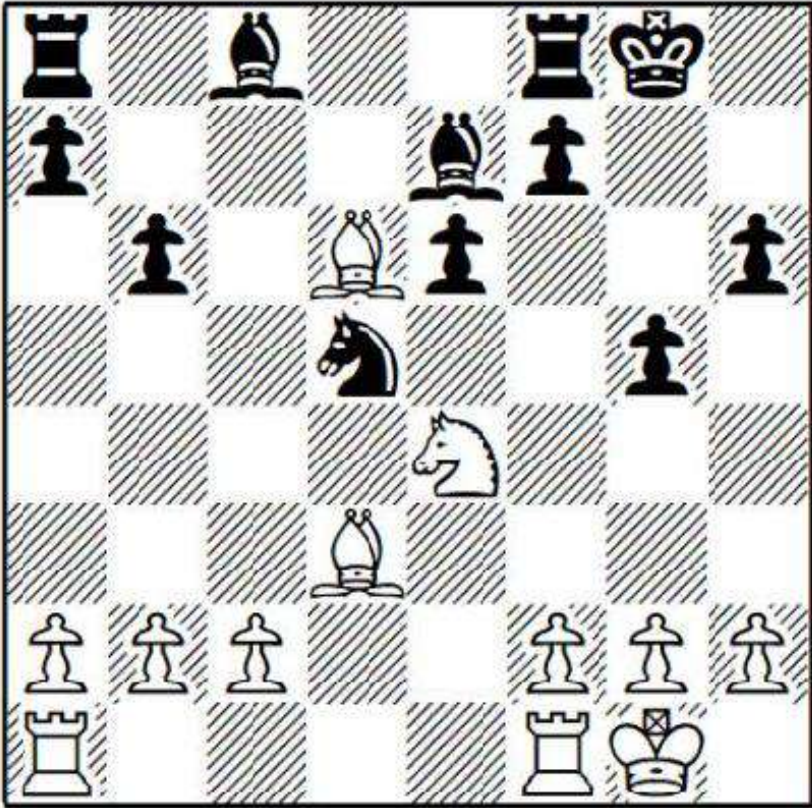
*Black to play*



**Solution**

175) A.Delchev-J.Duda  
chess.com 2020

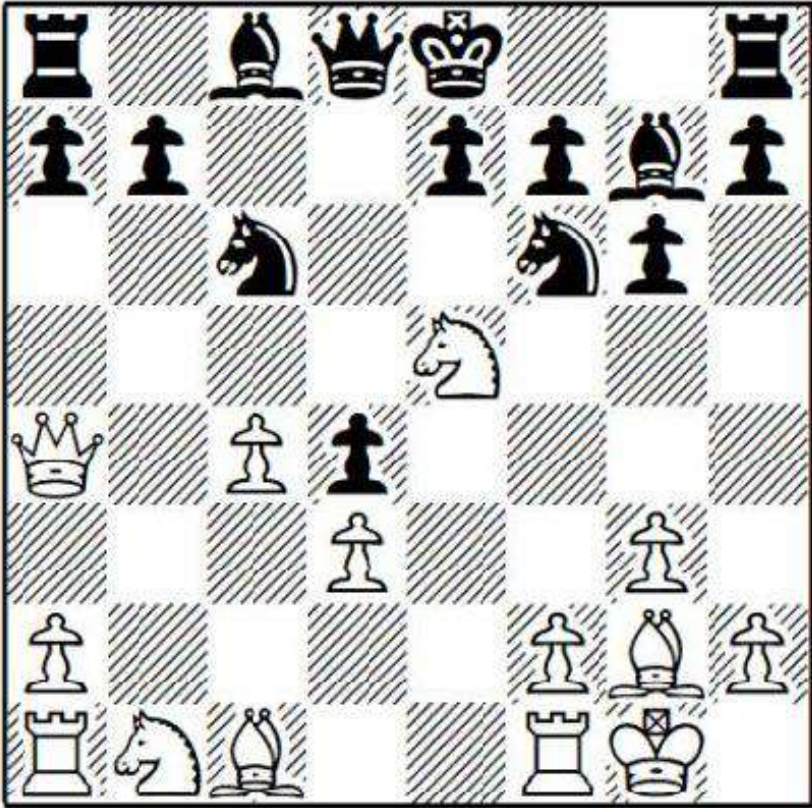
*Black to play*



Solution

176) J.Gonzalez Zamora-A.Pichot  
chess.com 2021

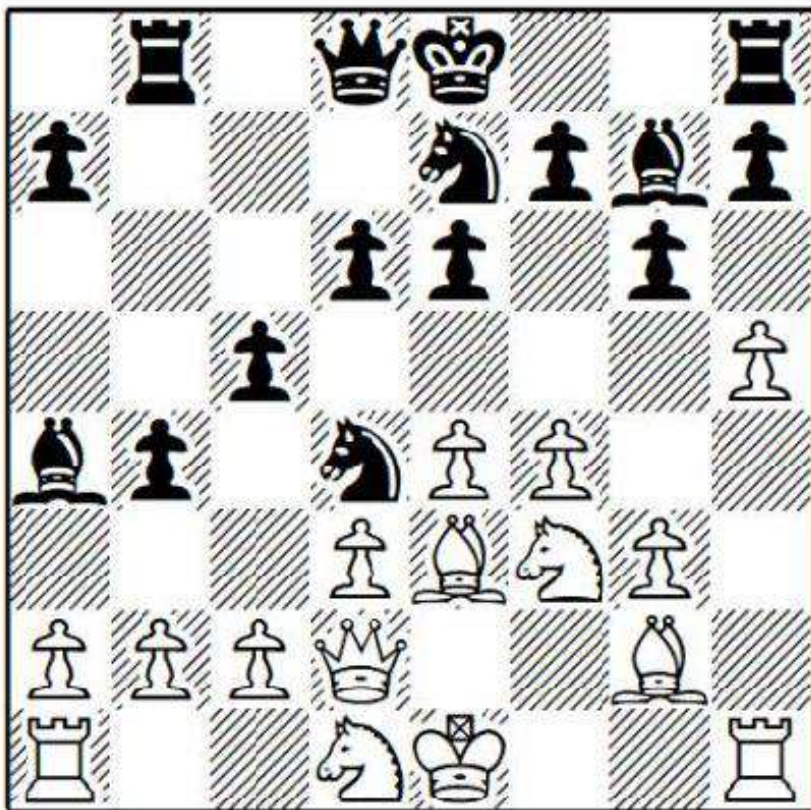
*Black to play*



**Solution**

177) V.Gunina-D.Harika  
Saint Louis 2020

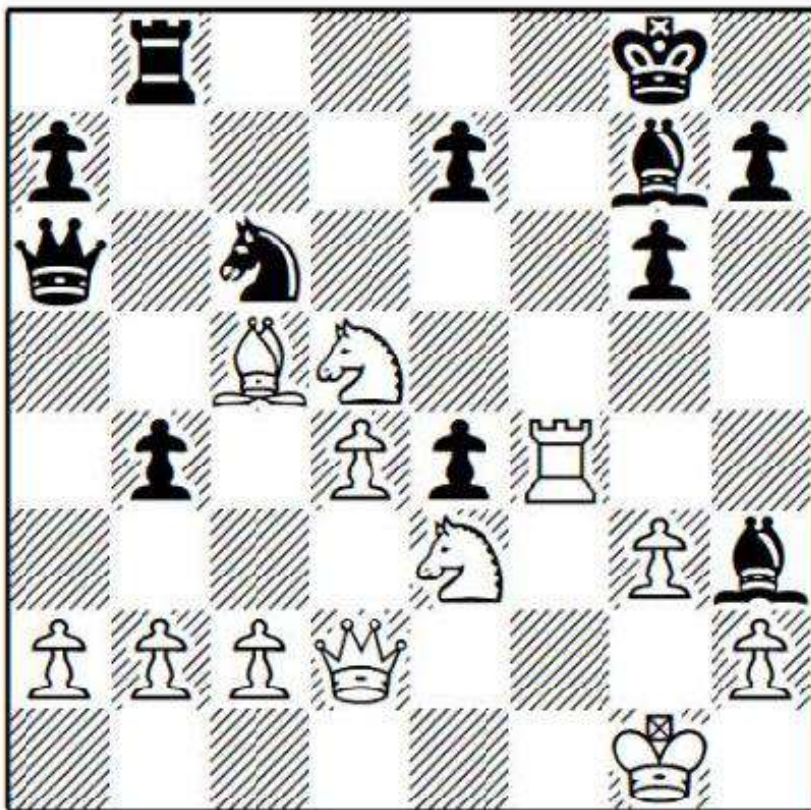
*White to play*



**Solution**

**178) A.Krapivin-V.Kunin**  
Moscow 2020

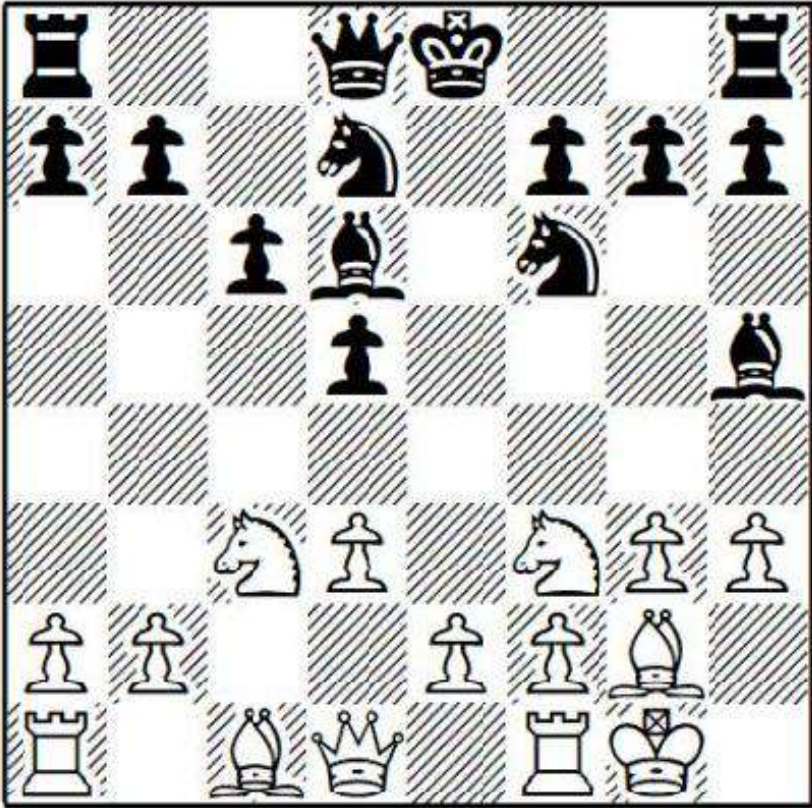
*White to play*



[Solution](#)

179) G.Meier-O.Sanchez Enriquez  
chess.com 2021

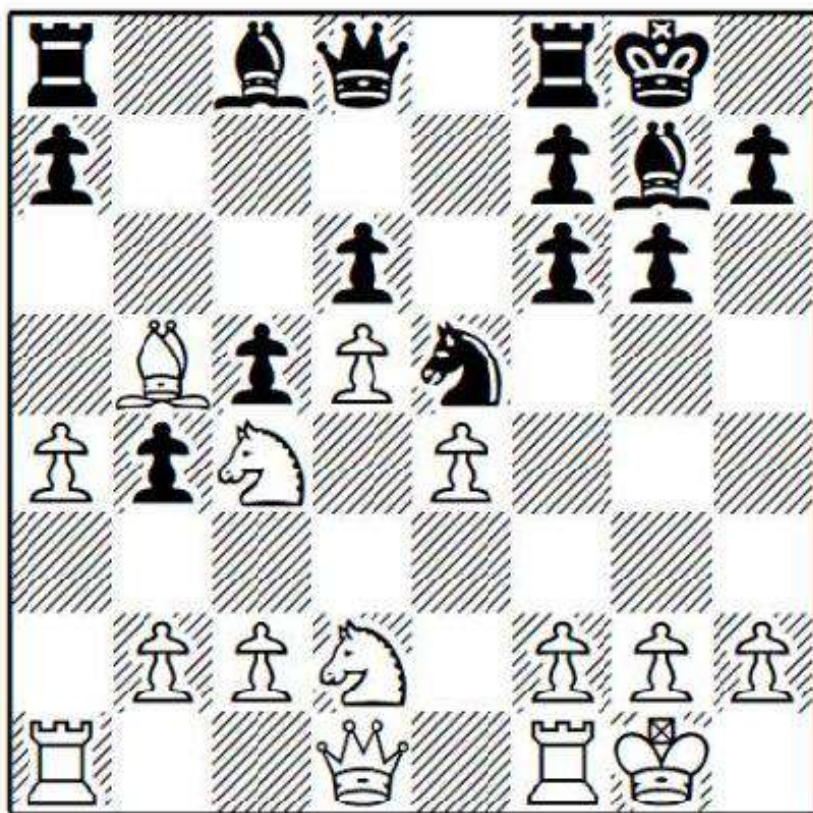
White to play



Solution

180) D.Mardov-T.Wang  
Charlotte 2021

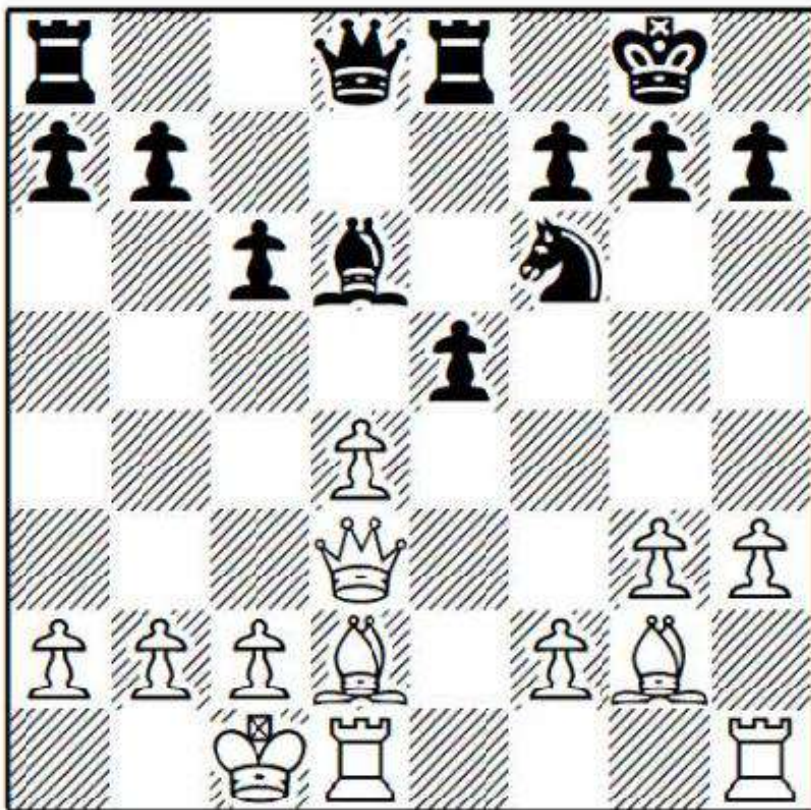
*Black to play*



**Solution**

181) A.Pasti-P.Chylewski  
Krakow 2021

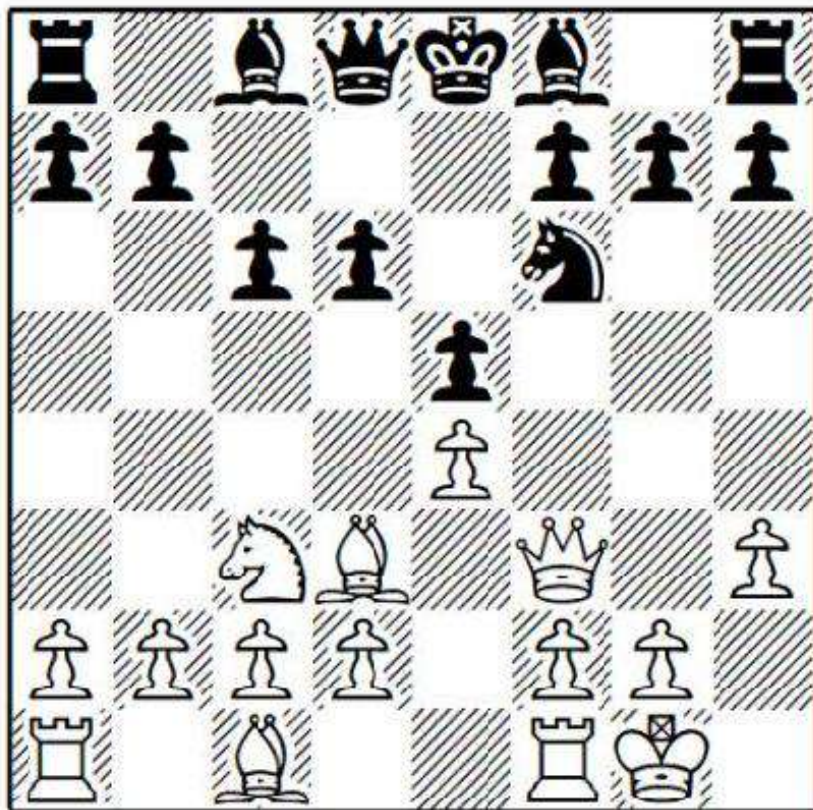
*White to play*



**Solution**

**182) D.Fitzsimons-M.Turner**  
Dublin 2020

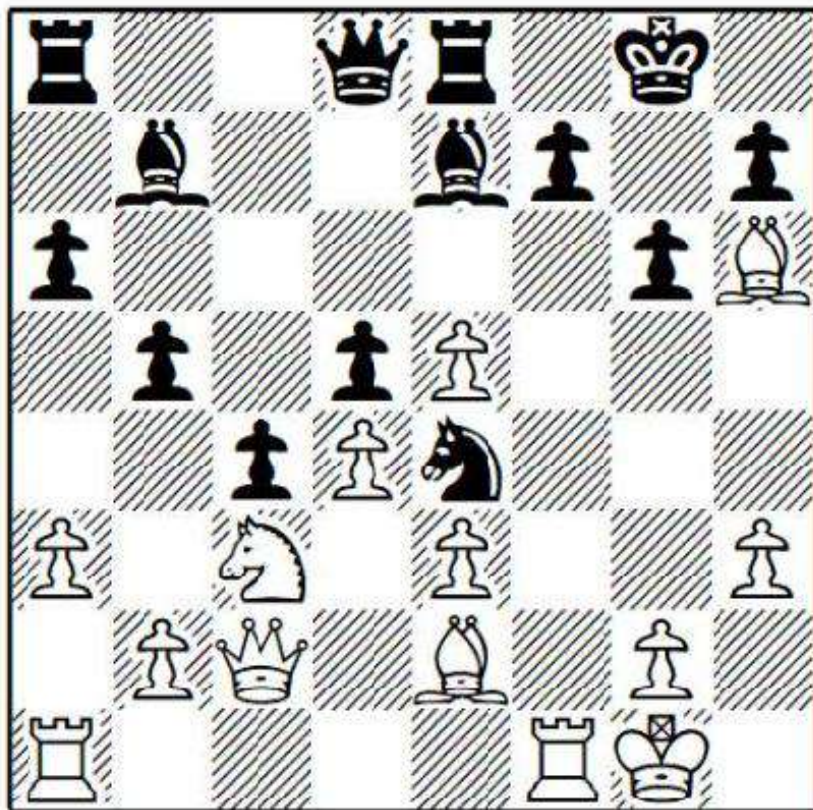
*Black to play*



Solution

183) H.Sorensen-D.Espineira Gonzalez  
Santo Tirso 2020

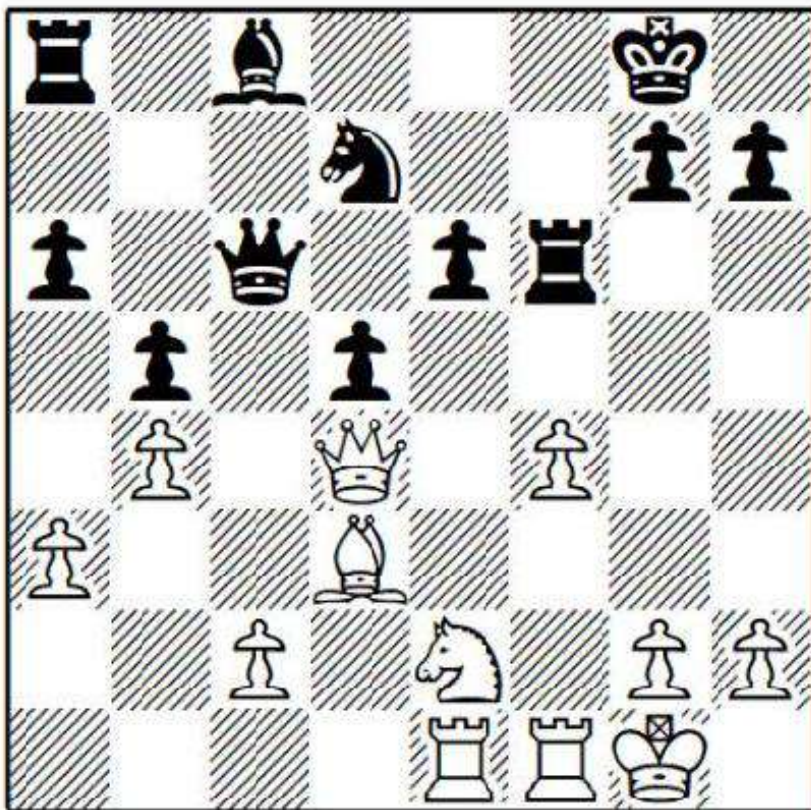
White to play



Solution

184) D.Garcia Ramos-Y.Santiago  
Barcelona 2020

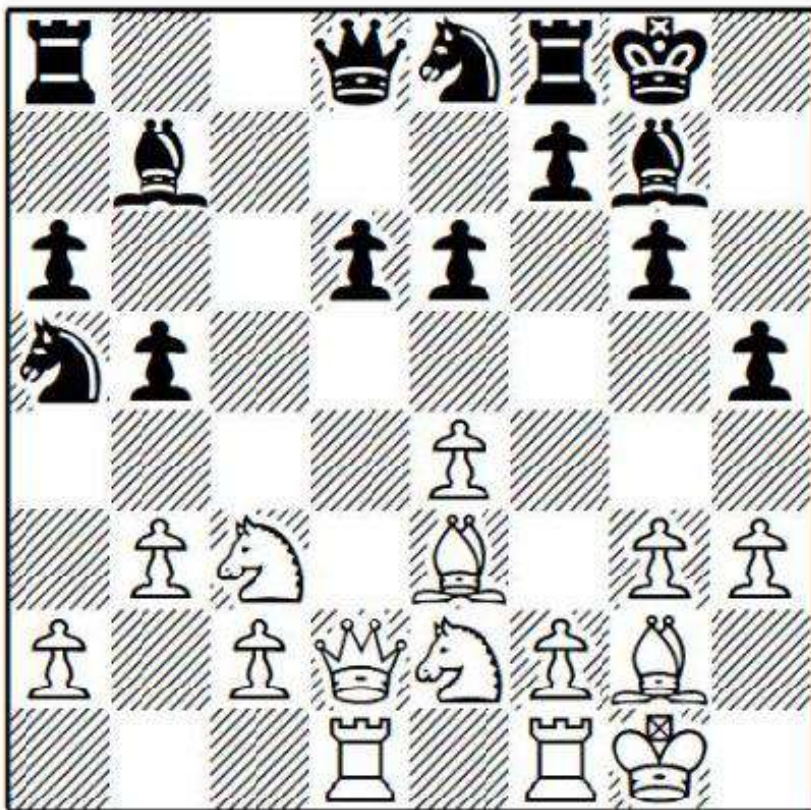
*White to play*



**Solution**

185) A.Sargsyan-H.Hayrapetyan  
Yerevan 2021

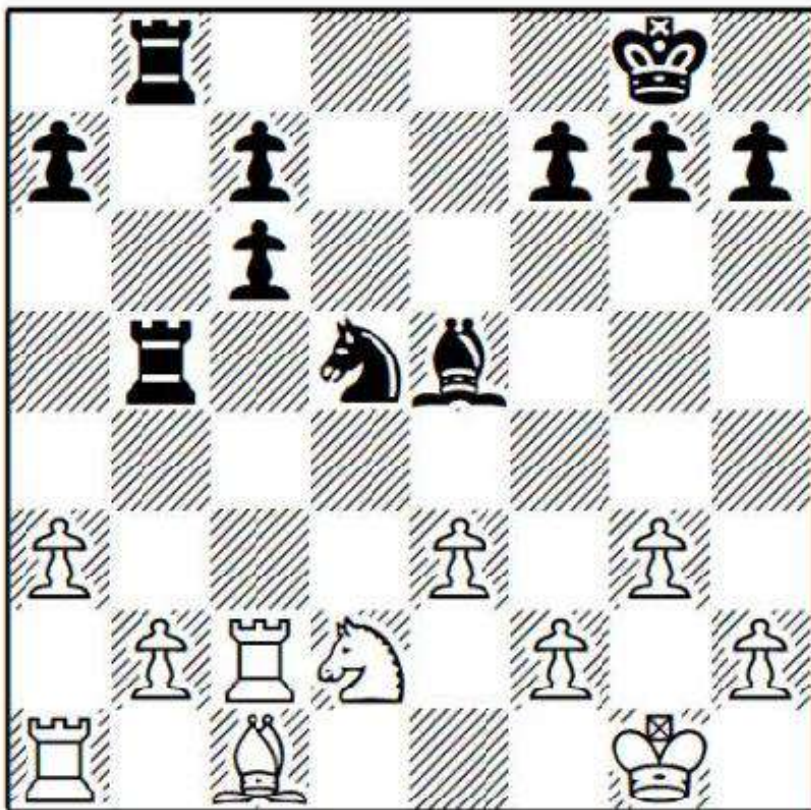
White to play



Solution

186) J.Bjerre-B.Bellahcene  
Villorba 2021

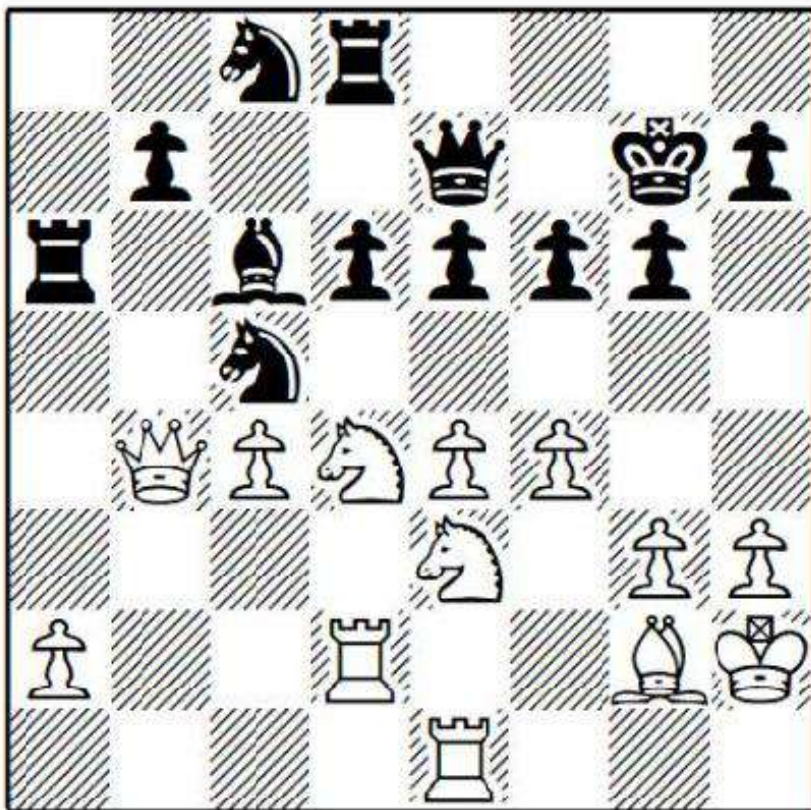
*White to play*



**Solution**

187) G.Ayats Llobera-J.Moussard  
Barcelona 2020

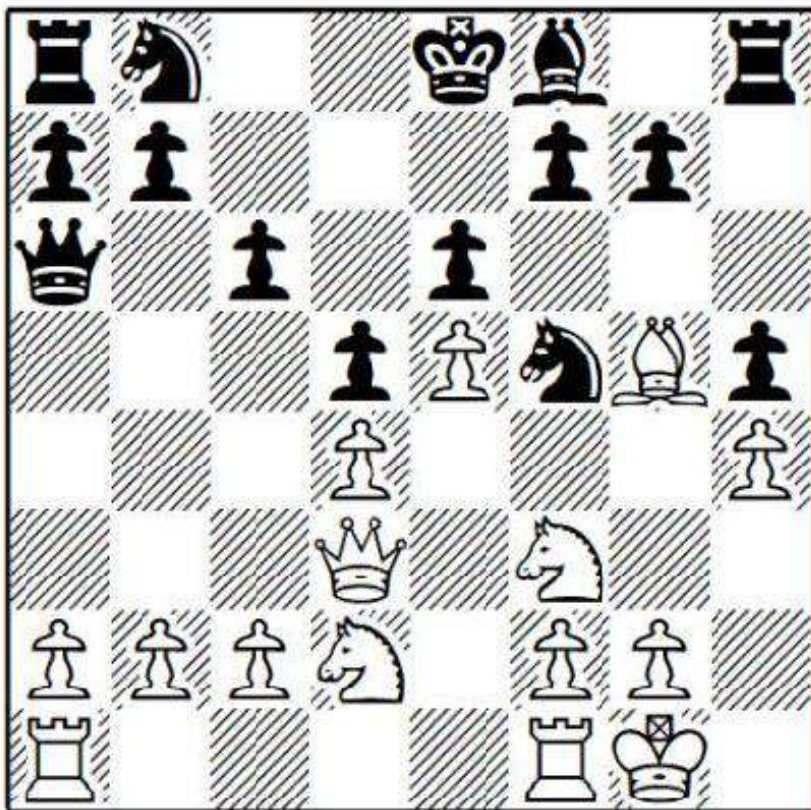
White to play



Solution

188) T.Sosa-R.Pogorelov  
Barcelona 2020

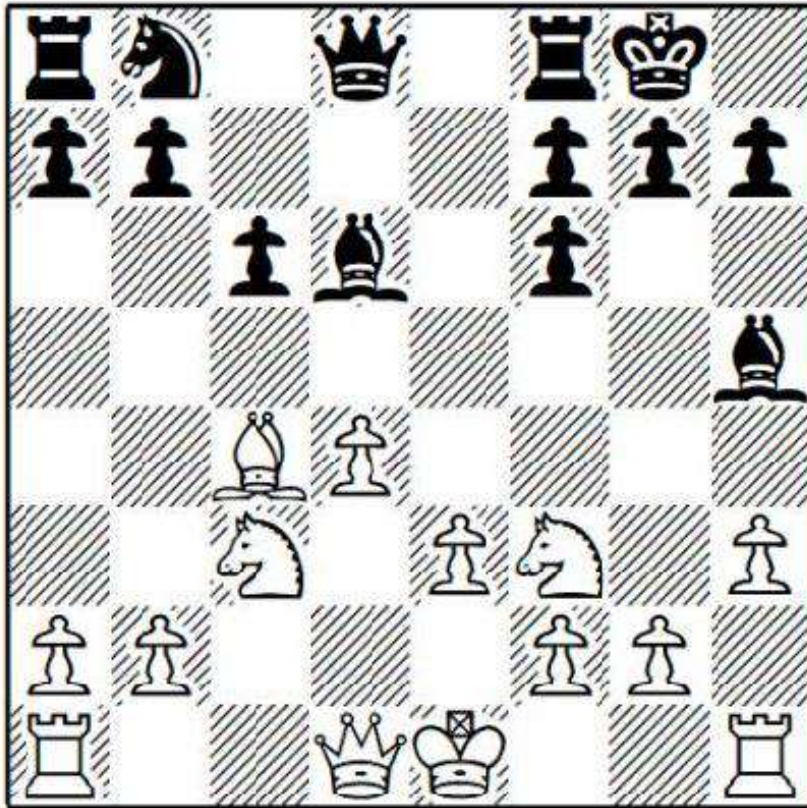
*White to play*



[Solution](#)

189) L.Babujian-S.Gaboyan  
Yerevan 2020

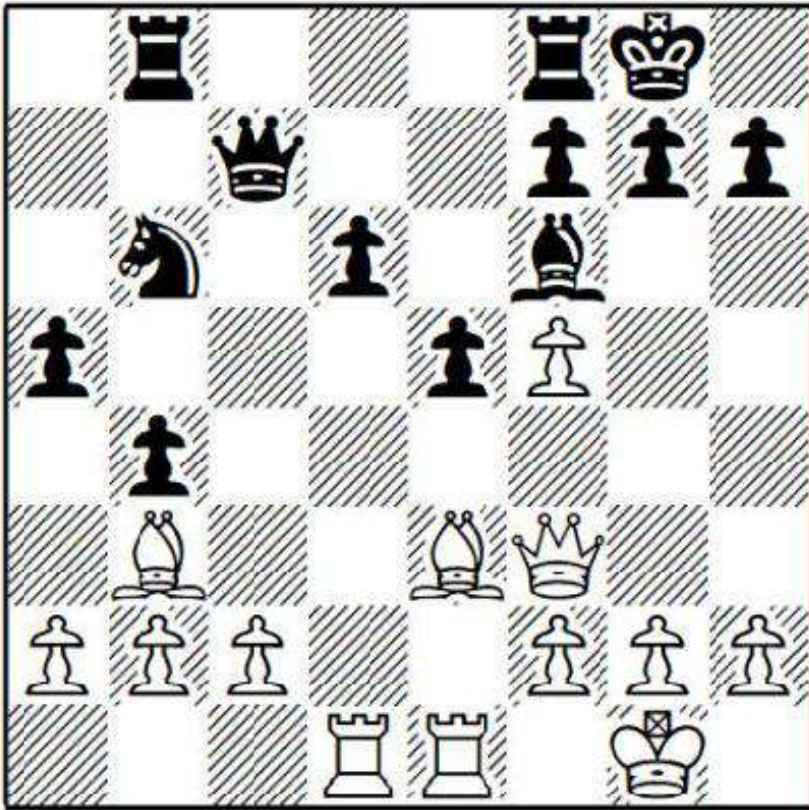
*White to play*



Solution

190) P.Harikrishna-M.Vachier Lagrave  
Wijk aan Zee 2021

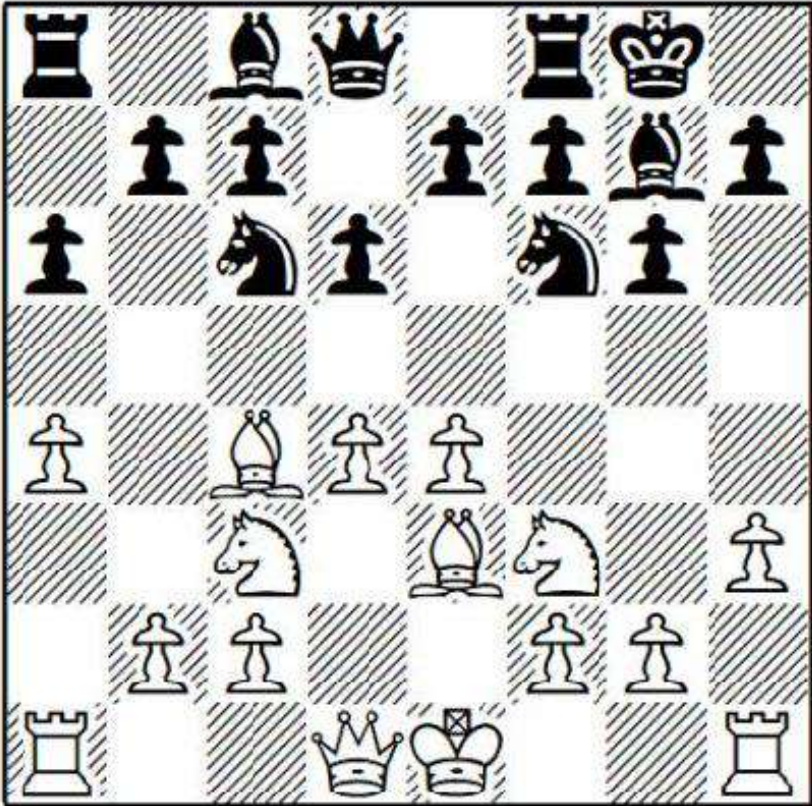
*White to play*



**Solution**

**191) I.Glek-D.Fitzsimons**  
Dublin 2019

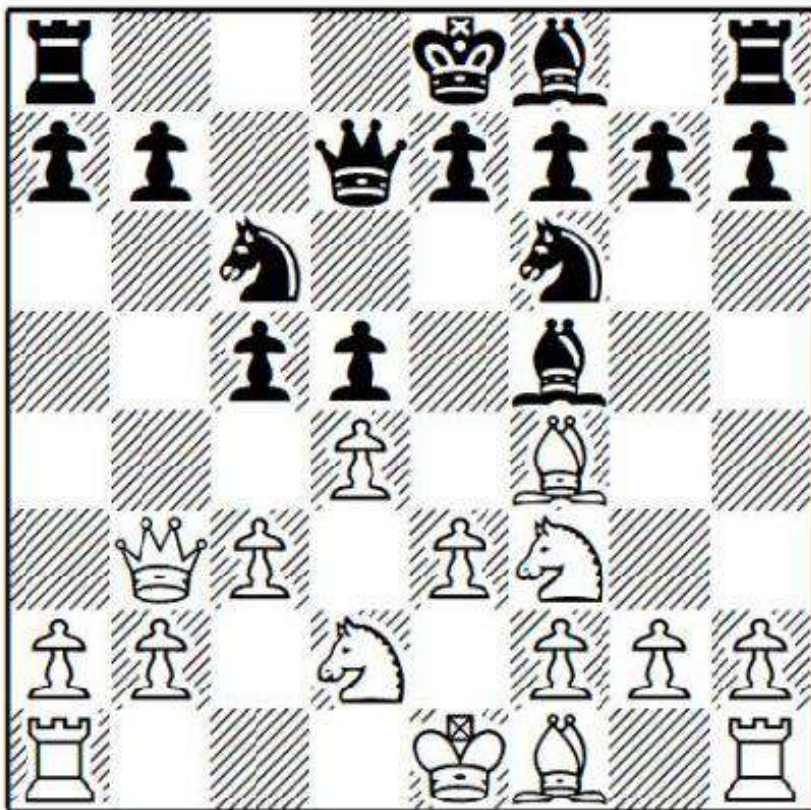
Black to play



Solution

192) L.Deglmann-A.Saric  
Austria 2021

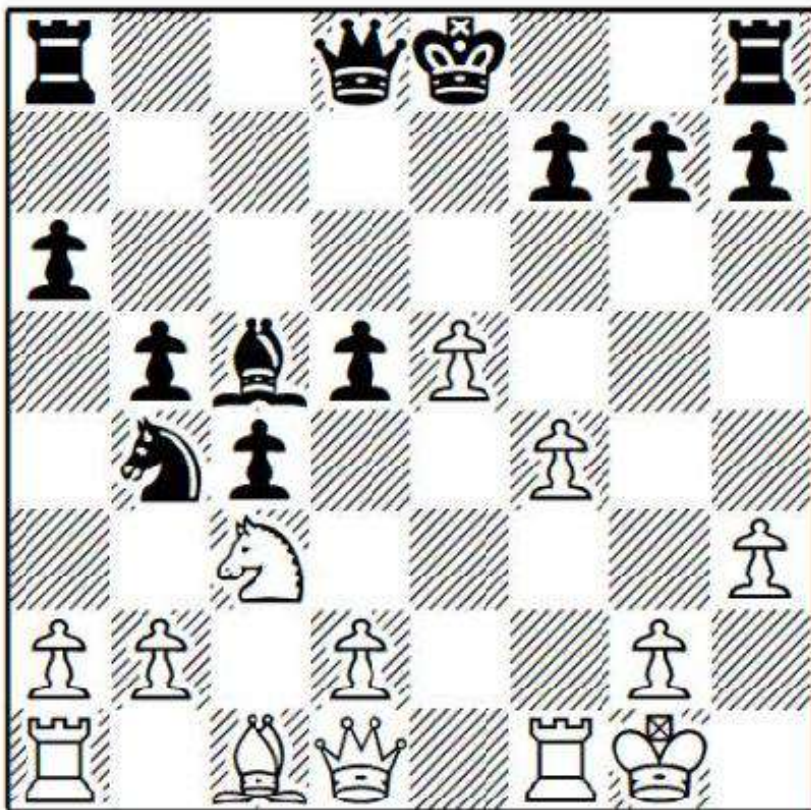
*Black to play*



**Solution**

193) P.Ponkratov-L.Livaic  
chess.com 2020

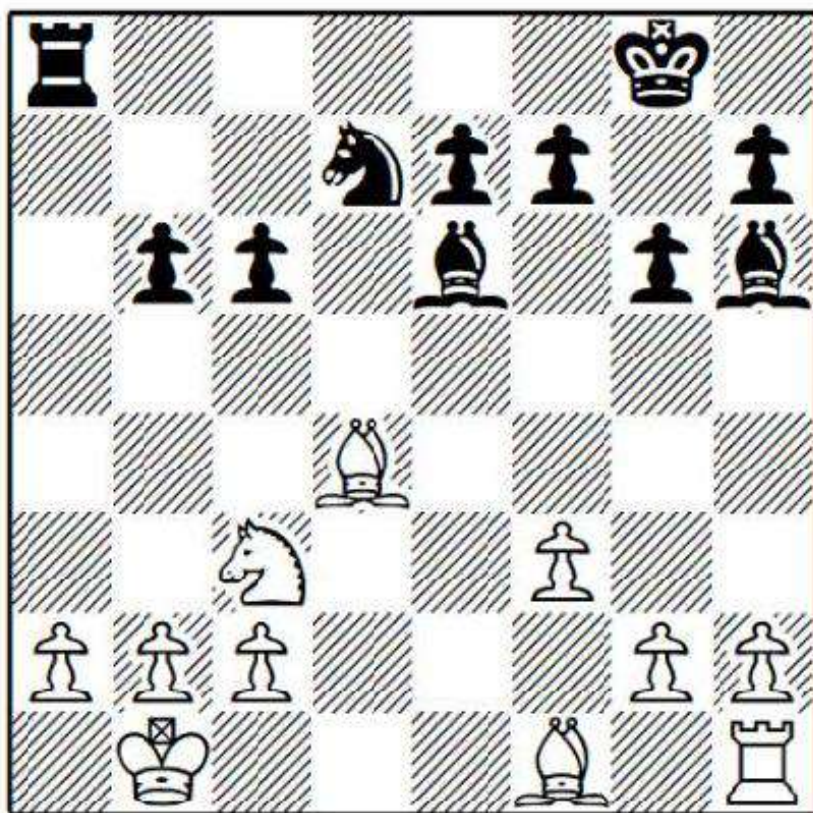
White to play



Solution

194) J.Kyc-P.Brodowski  
Krakow 2021

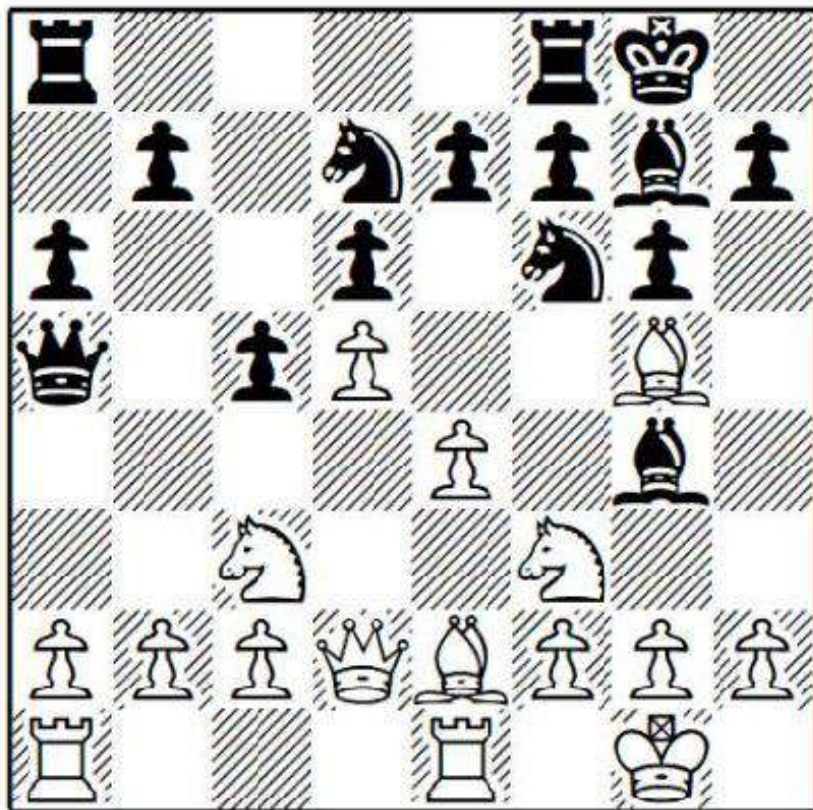
*Black to play*



**Solution**

195) A.Sergeyev-V.Zvjaginsev  
Sochi 2020

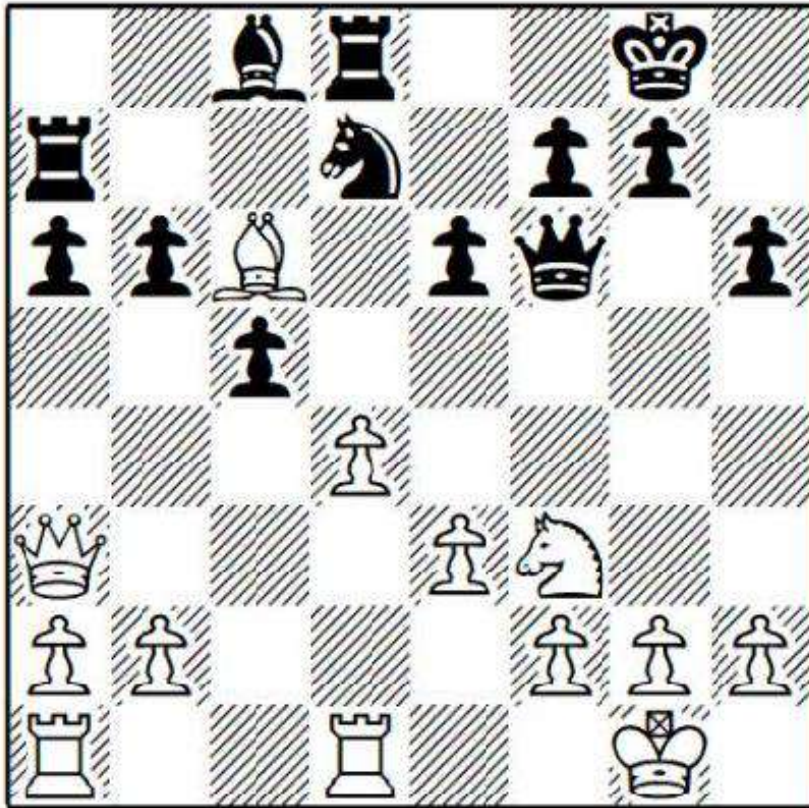
*White to play*



[Solution](#)

**196) D.Dubov-Y.Yu**  
Wijk aan Zee 2020

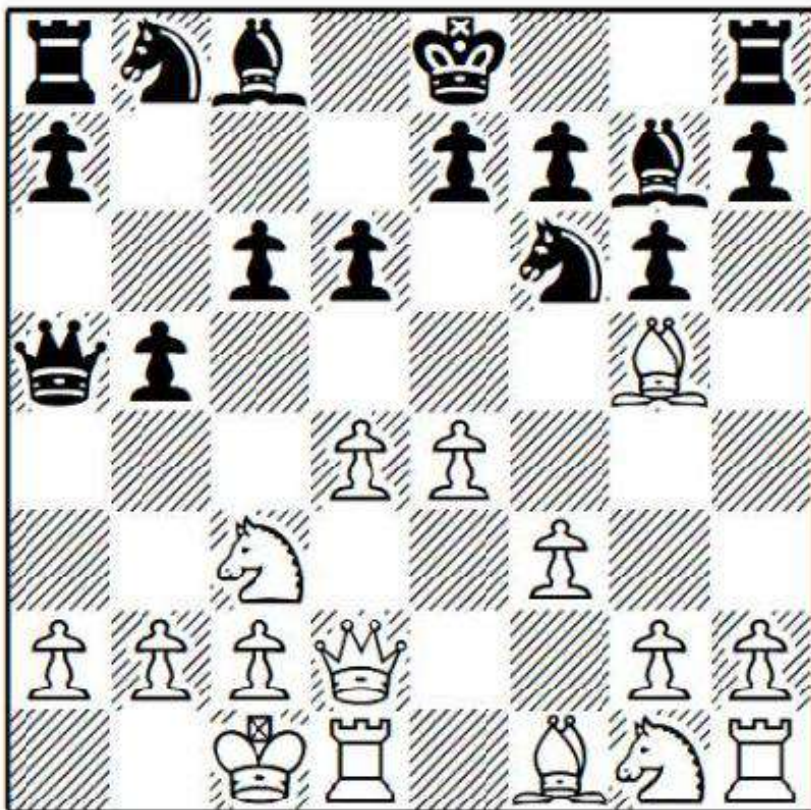
*White to play*



**Solution**

197) Y.Sivan-T.Baron  
Netanya 2019

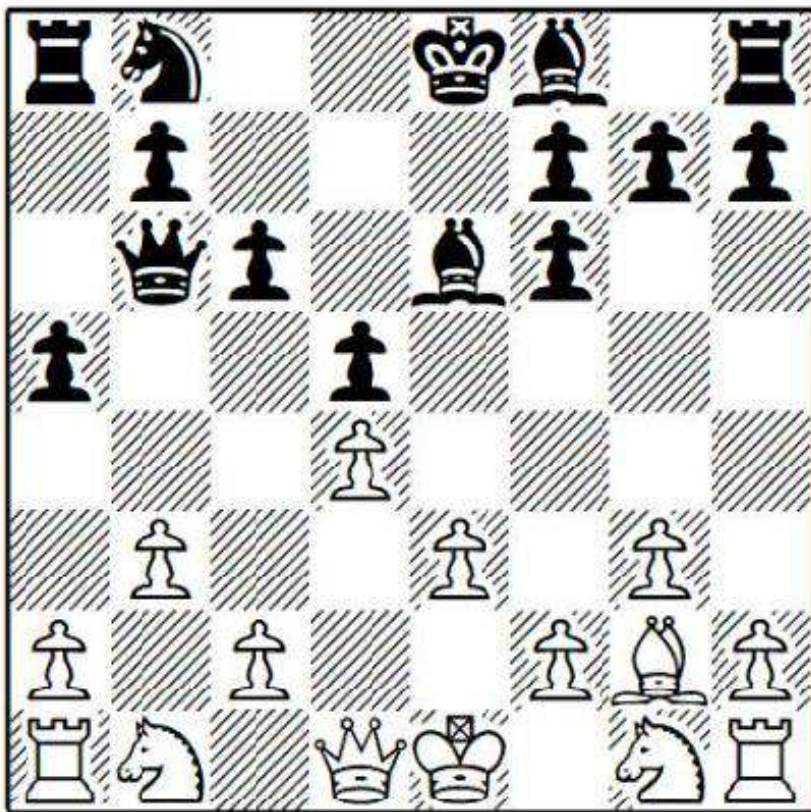
*White to play*



**Solution**

**198) P.Brodowski-A.Donchenko**  
Krakow 2021

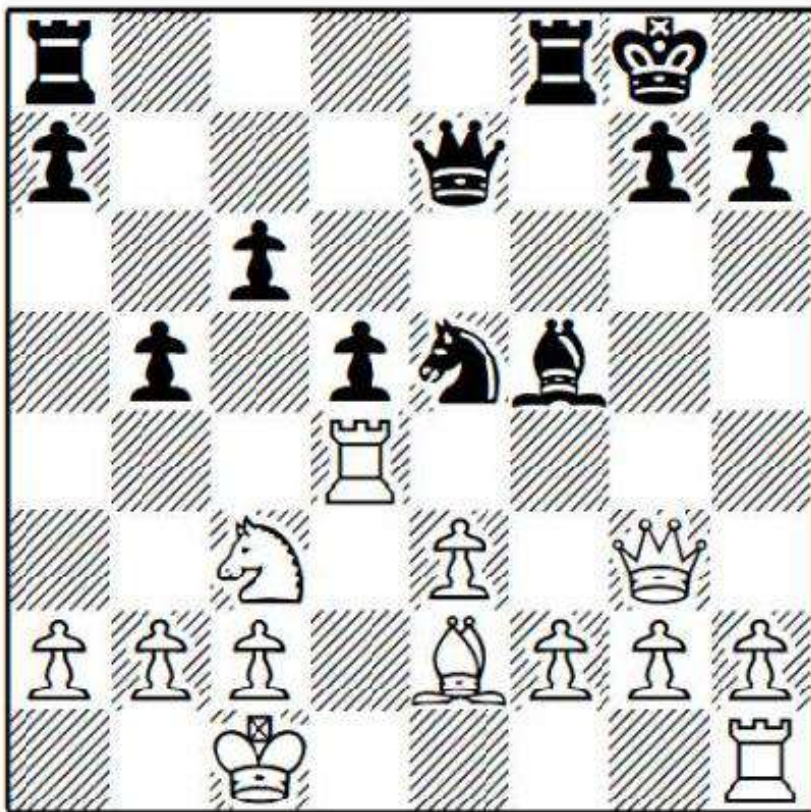
White to play



Solution

199) A.Esipenko-R.Makarian  
Moscow 2021

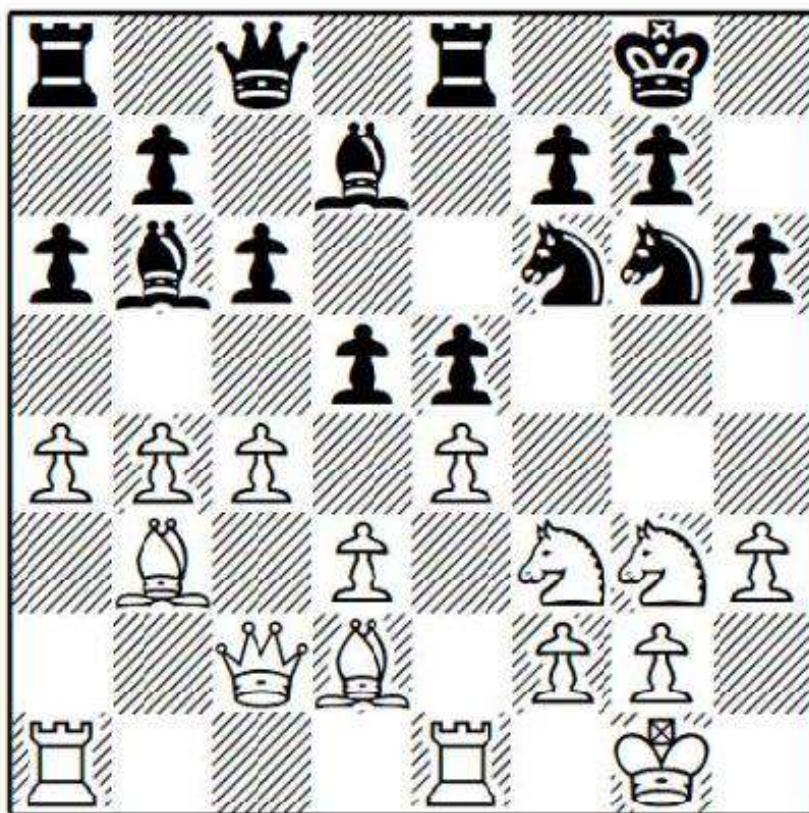
*White to play*



**Solution**

**200) R.Thogersen-S.Pedersen**  
Denmark 2020

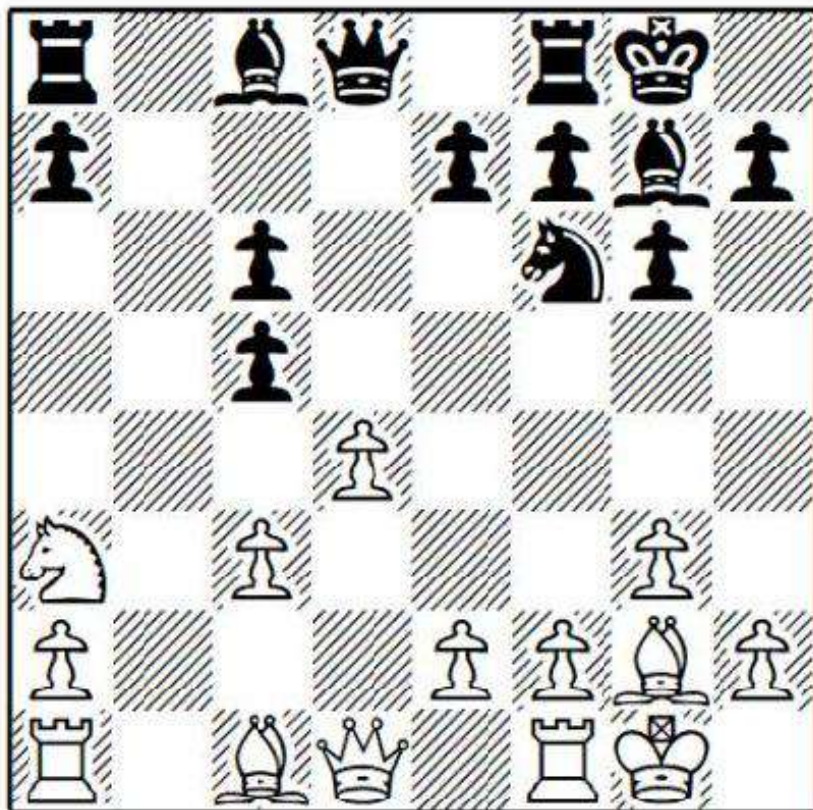
*Black to play*



**Solution**

**201) N.Ustyanovich-M.Sieciechowicz**  
Krakow 2021

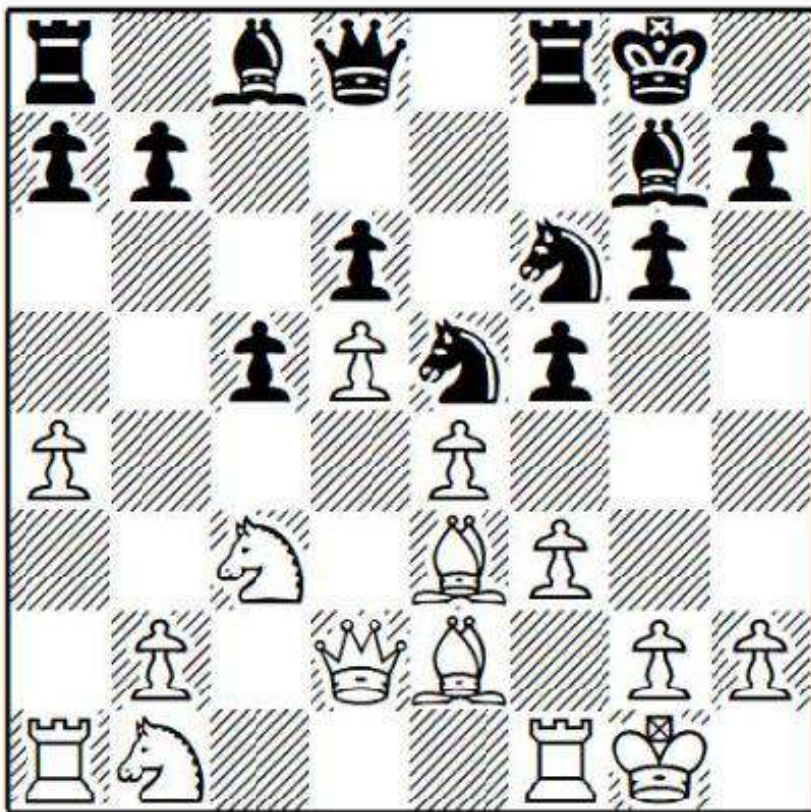
*White to play*



[Solution](#)

202) V.Ivanchuk-P.Guichard  
Gibraltar 2019

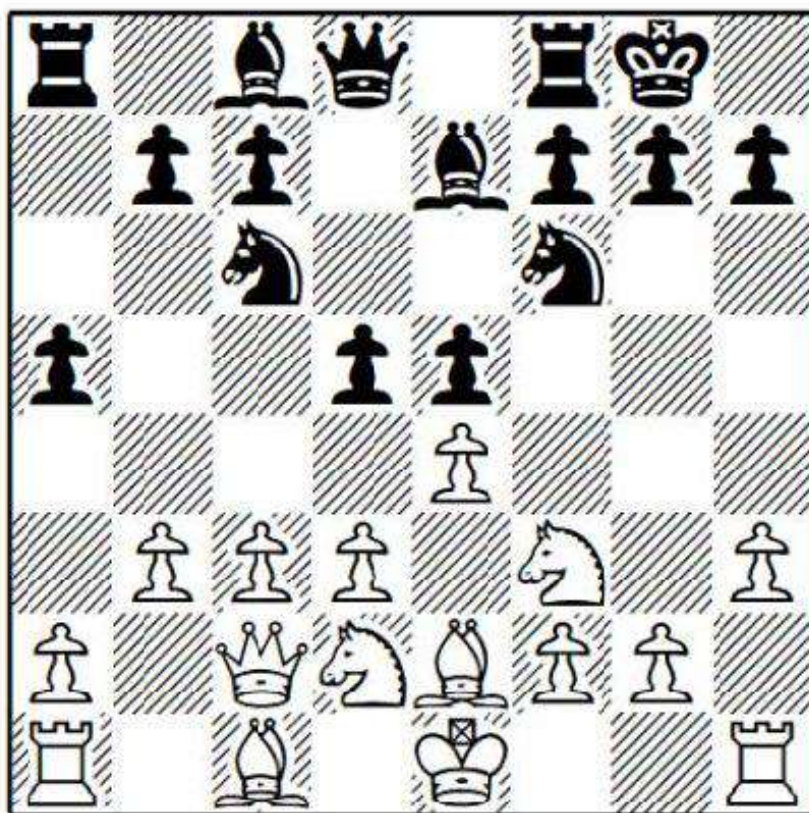
*White to play*



**Solution**

203) P.Senner-T.Nguyen  
Villorba 2021

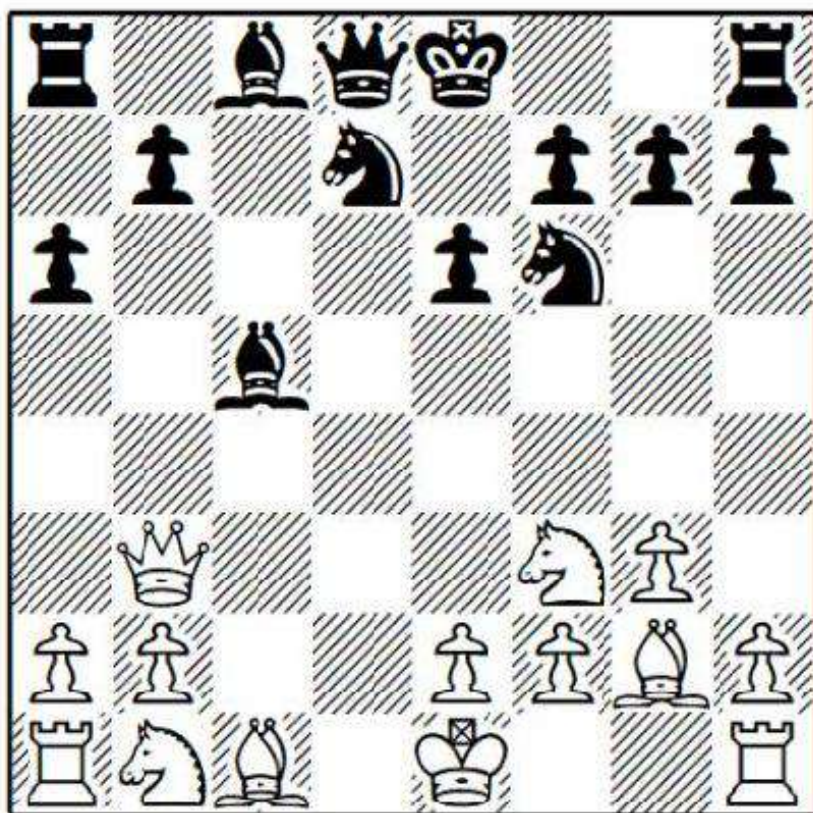
*Black to play*



Solution

204) E.Gleizerov-R.Kavyev  
Chelyabinsk 2020

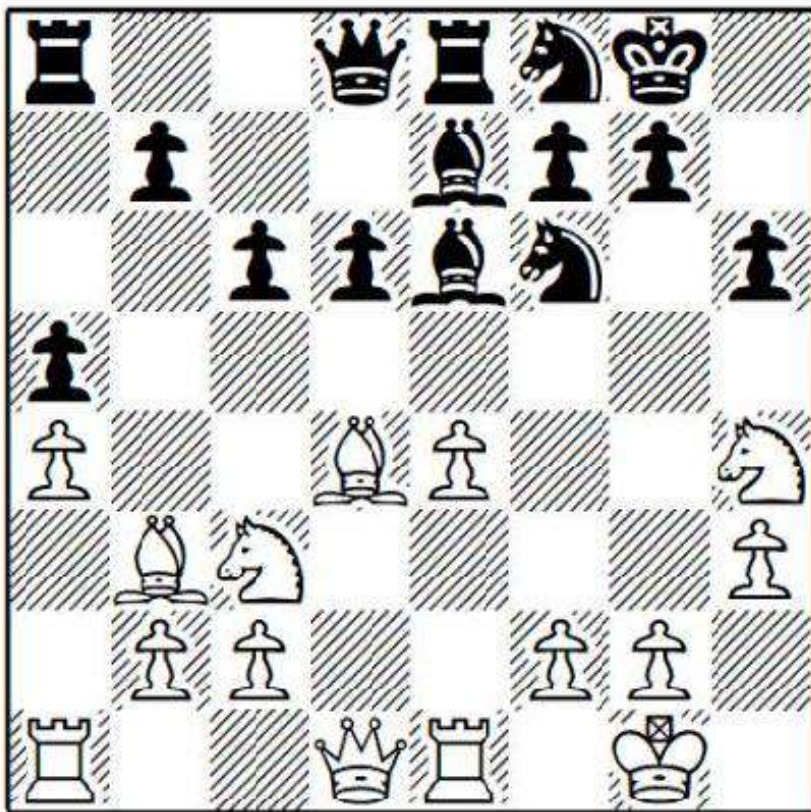
*Black to play*



Solution

205) I.Godzwon-J.Kosakowski  
Pokrzywna 2020

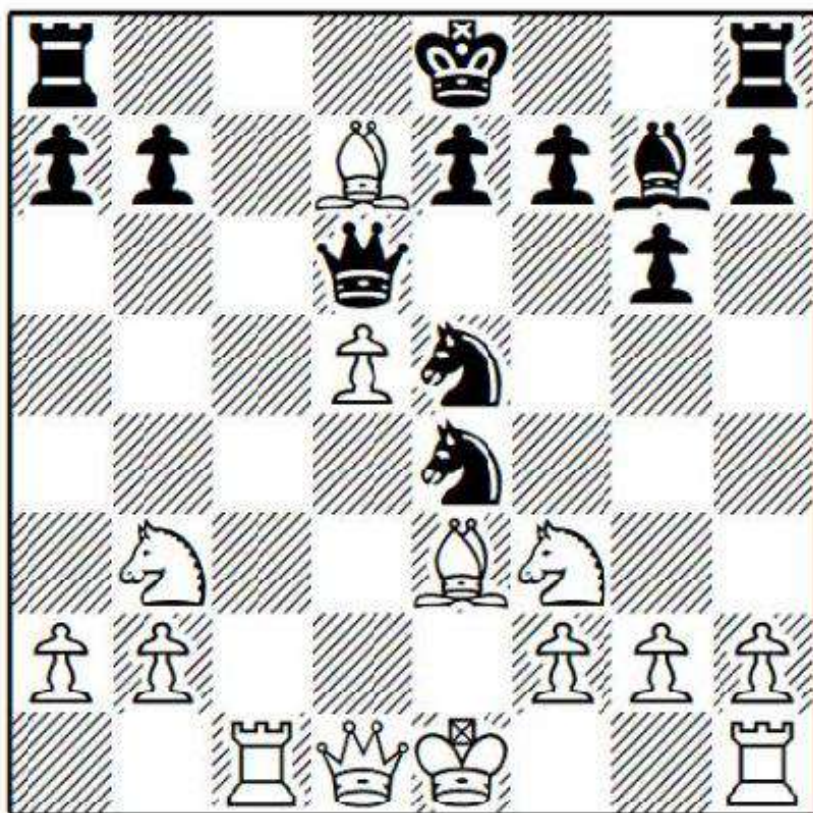
*White to play*



**Solution**

**206) N.Dzagnidze-W.Ju**  
Saint Louis 2020

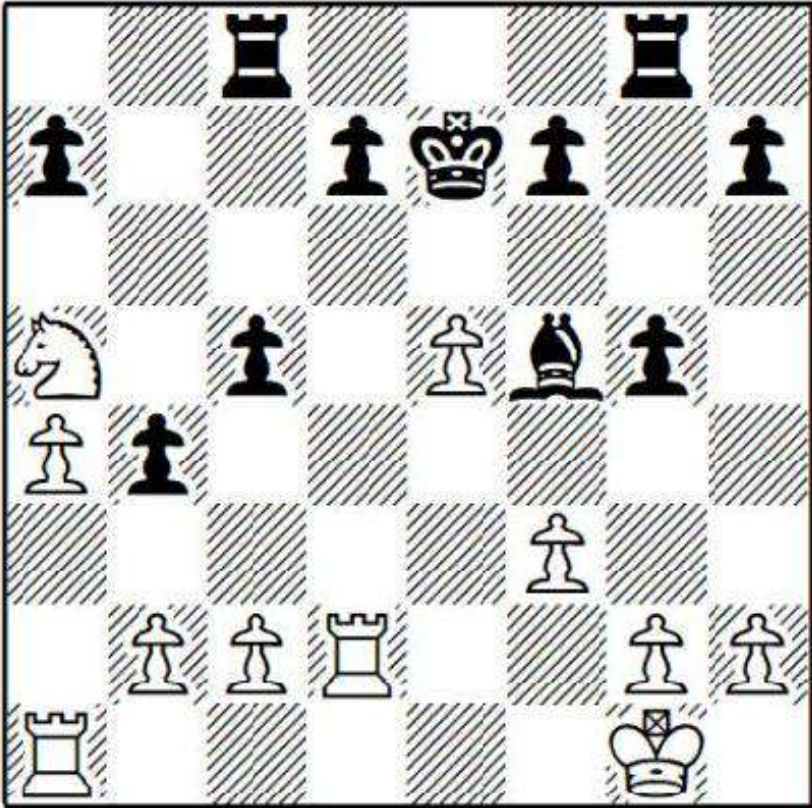
*Black to play*



**Solution**

207) A.Mnatsakanian-B.Murtazin  
Moscow 2019

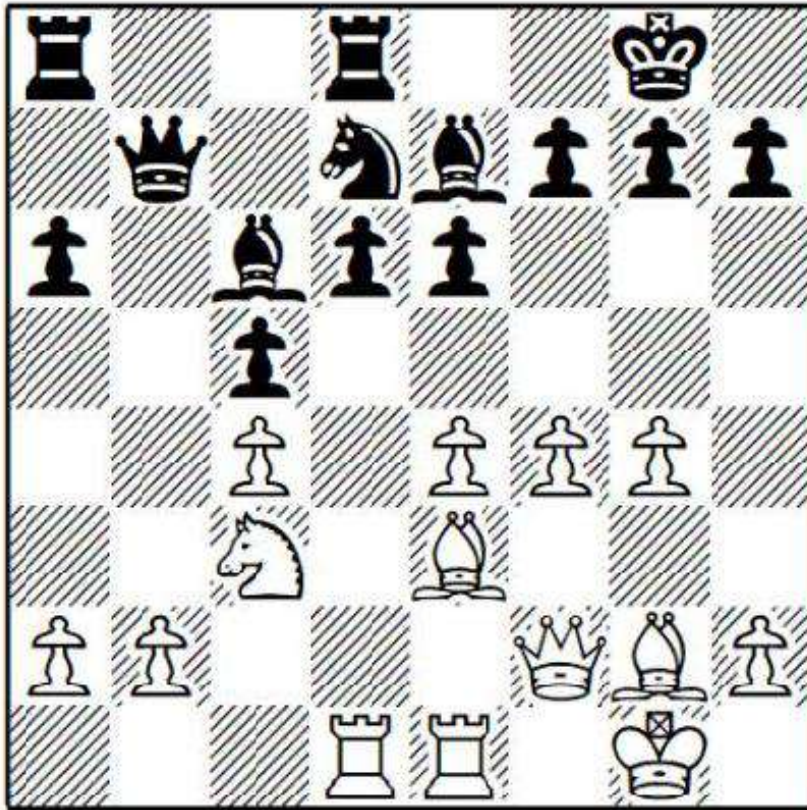
Black to play



Solution

208) D.Perrine-D.Mardov  
Charlotte 2021

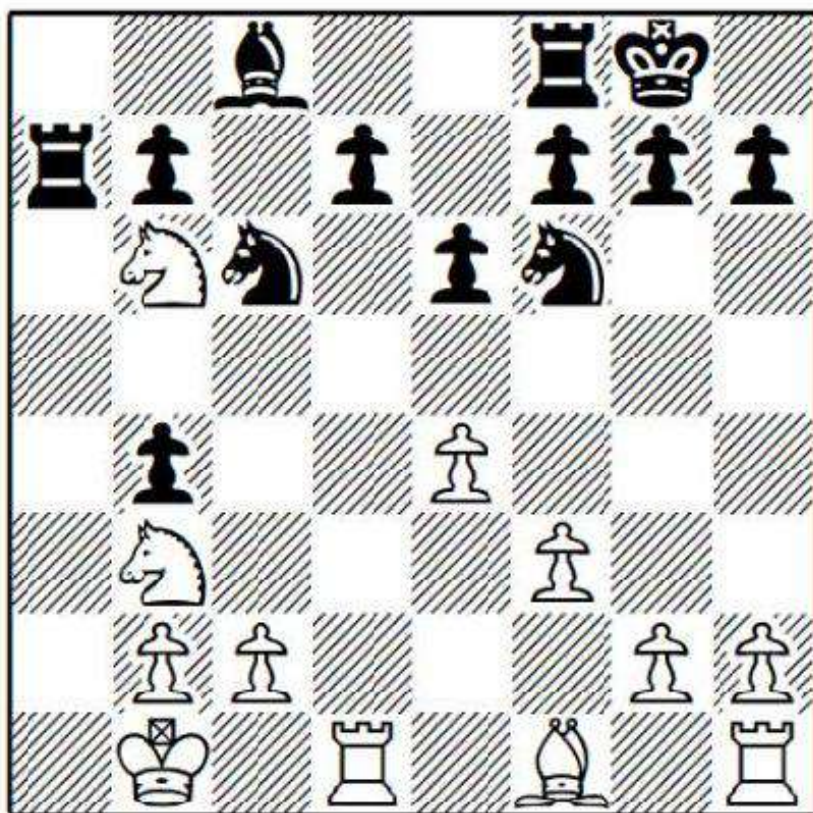
*White to play*



**Solution**

209) M.Rafiee-R.Baskin  
chess.com 2021

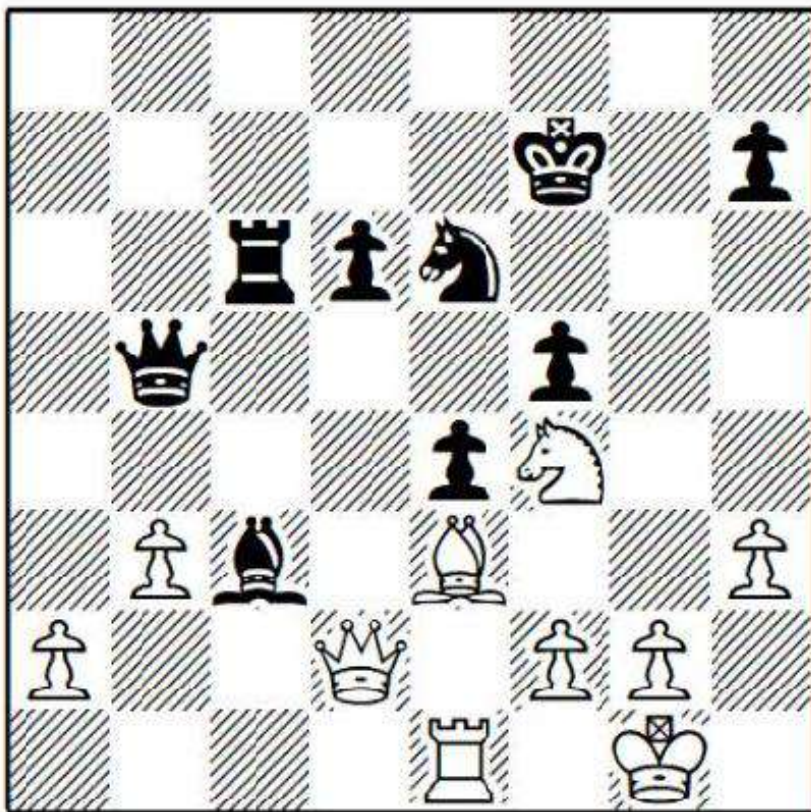
*Black to play*



**Solution**

210) Z.Runic-E.Muratovic  
Konjic 2021

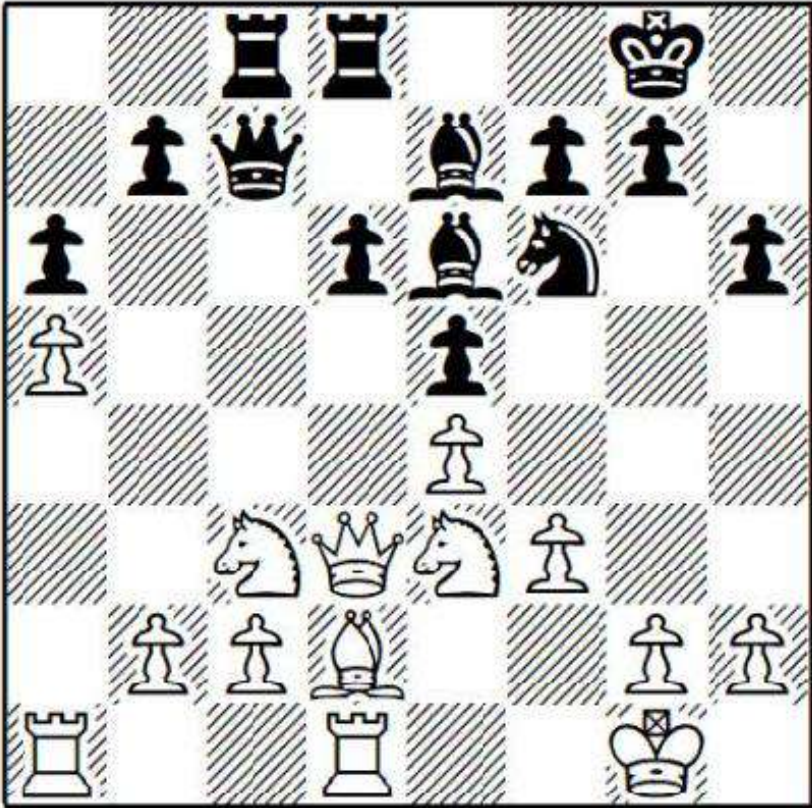
*White to play*



**Solution**

211) A.Isik-J.Stocko  
Konjic 2021

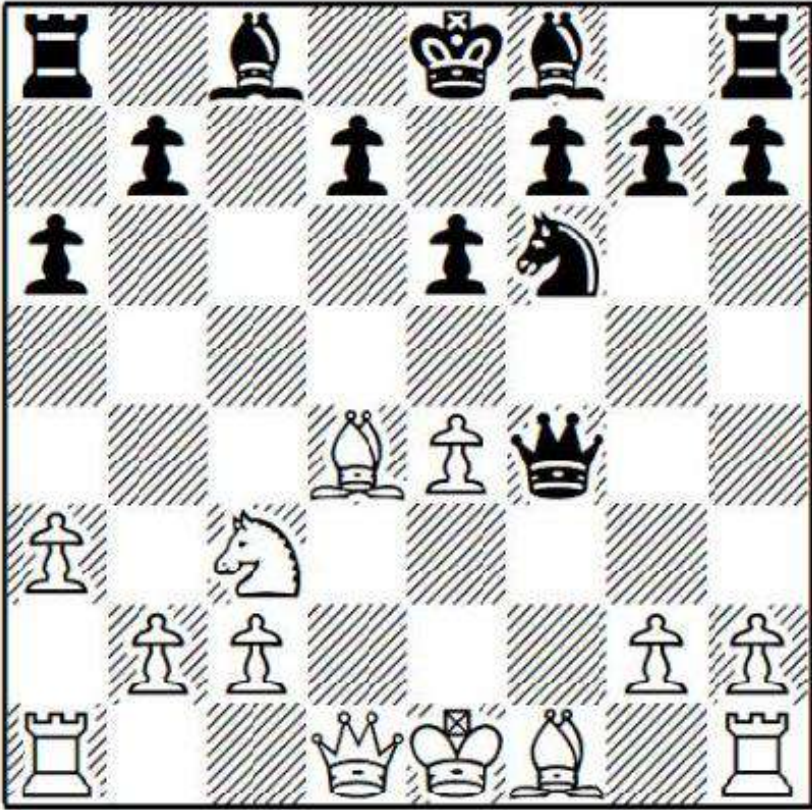
*Black to play*



Solution

212) Z.Tsydypov-N.Chasin  
lichess.org 2021

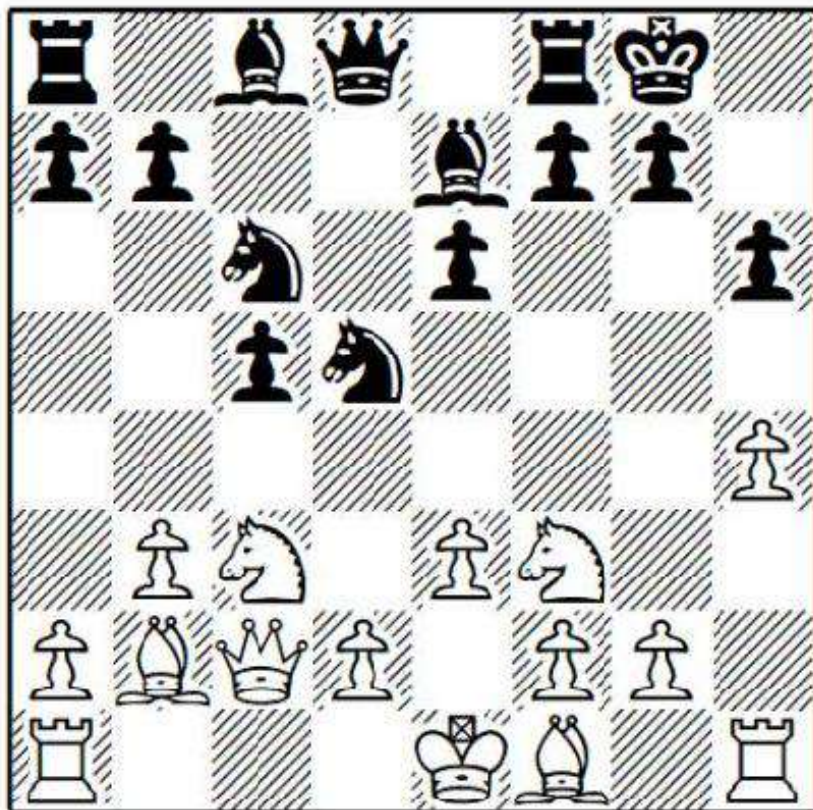
White to play



Solution

213) J.Salomon-J.Lopez  
chess.com 2019

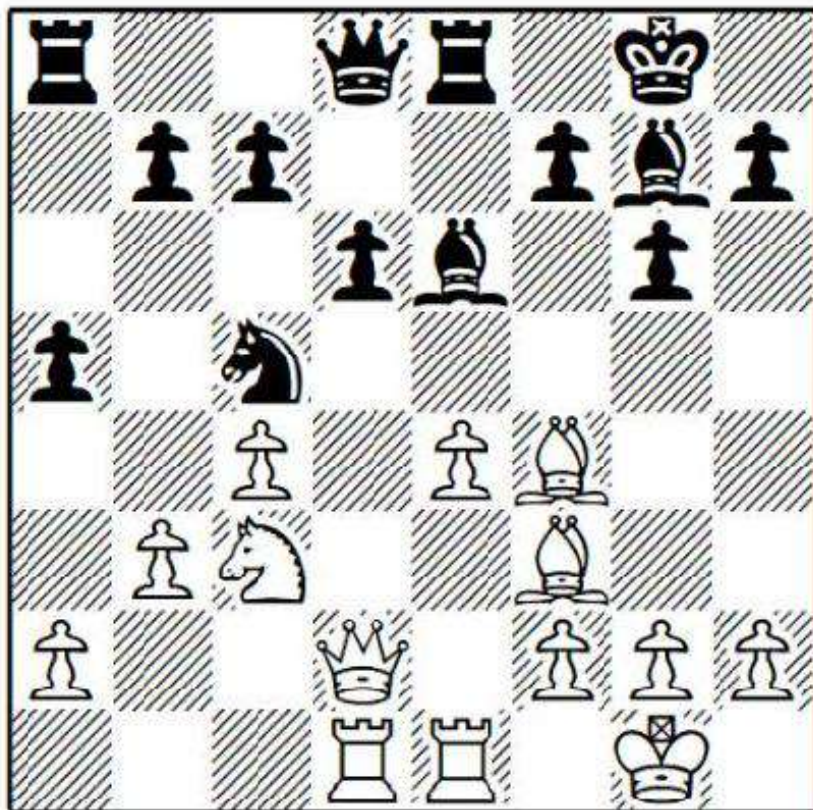
*White to play*



**Solution**

214) M.Arabidze-D.Jojua  
Tbilisi 2019

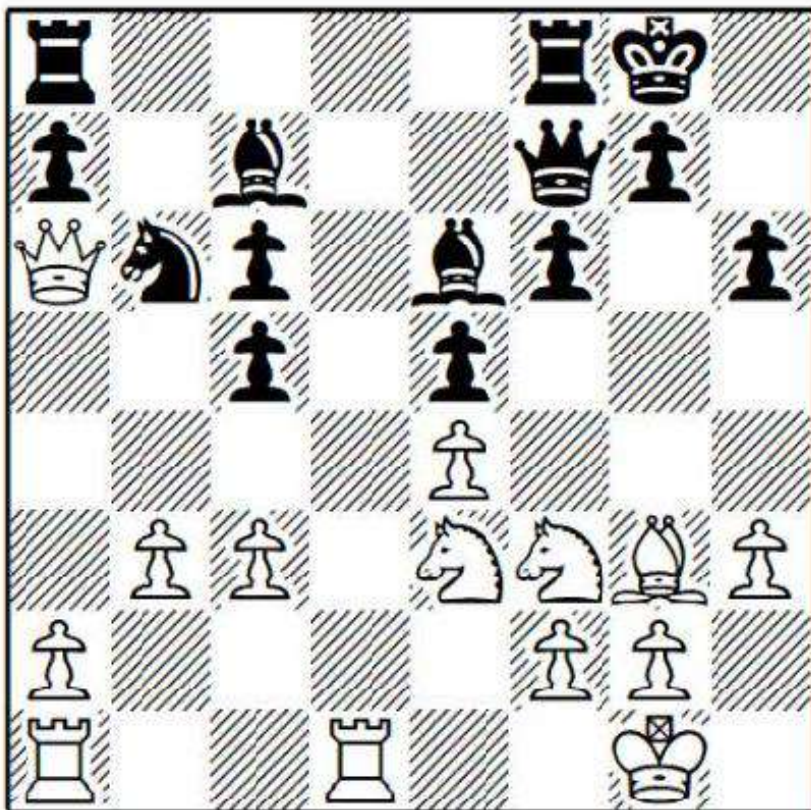
*White to play*



**Solution**

215) E.Khubukshanov-V.Zakhartsov  
Moscow 2020

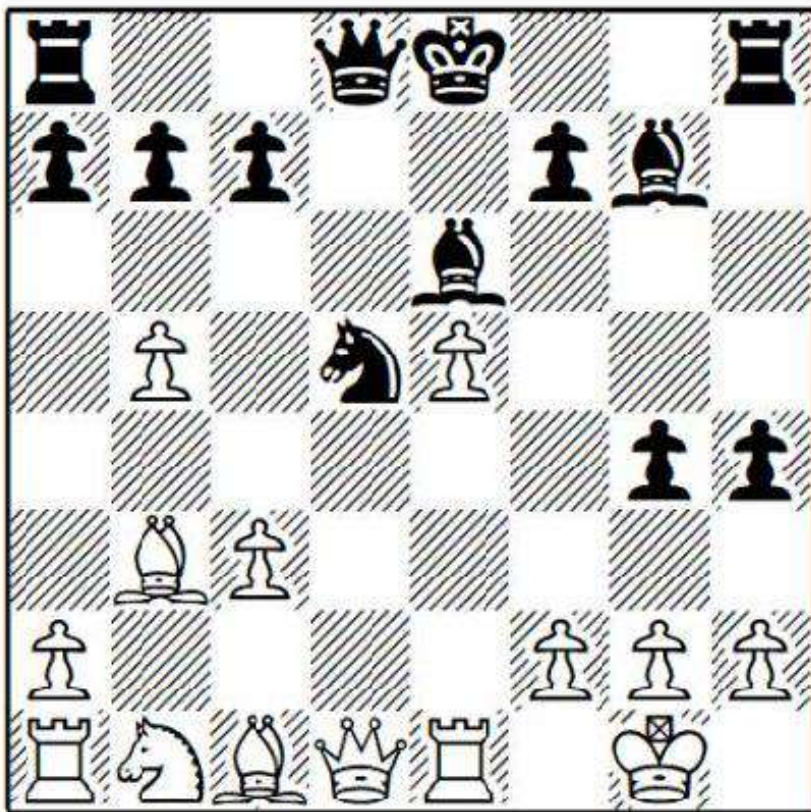
*White to play*



**Solution**

216) S.Sevian-N.Matinian  
lichess.org 2021

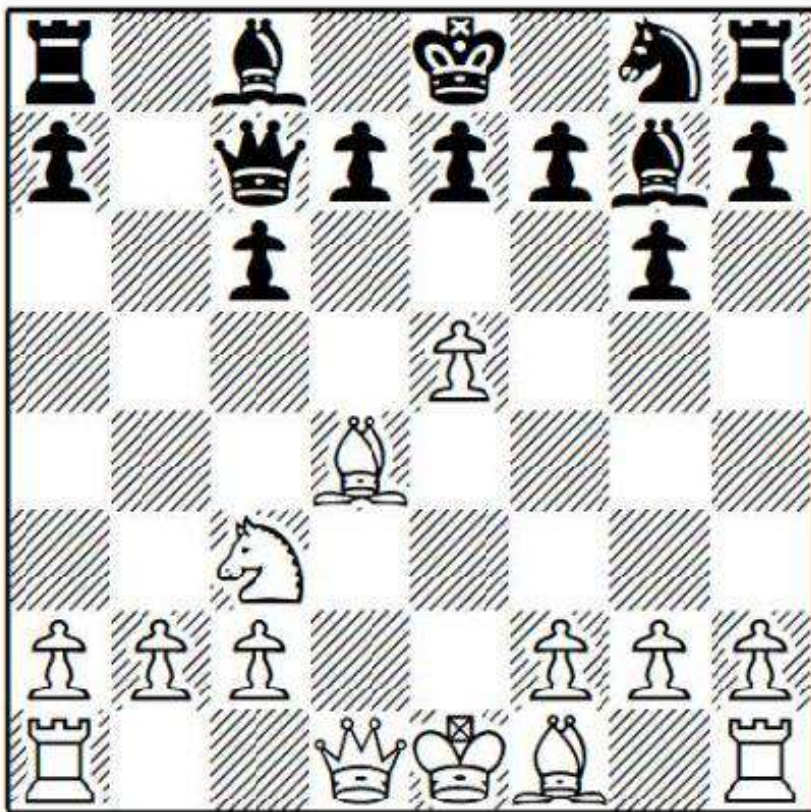
*White to play*



**Solution**

**217) B.Nugumanov-M.Scherbakov**  
Chelyabinsk 2020

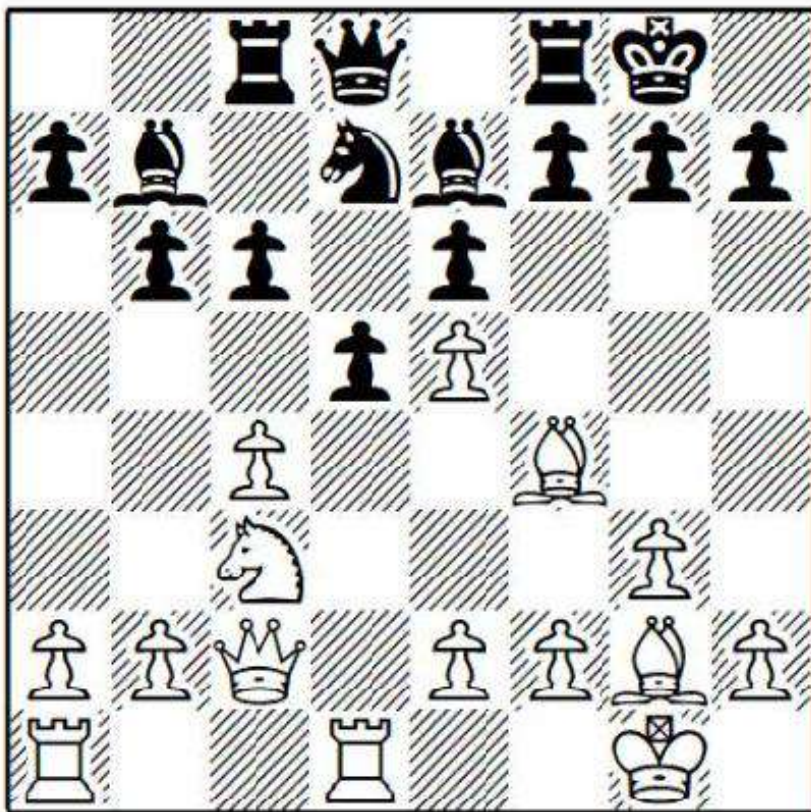
*White to play*



[Solution](#)

218) D.Makhmev-A.Akhmetov  
Almaty 2020

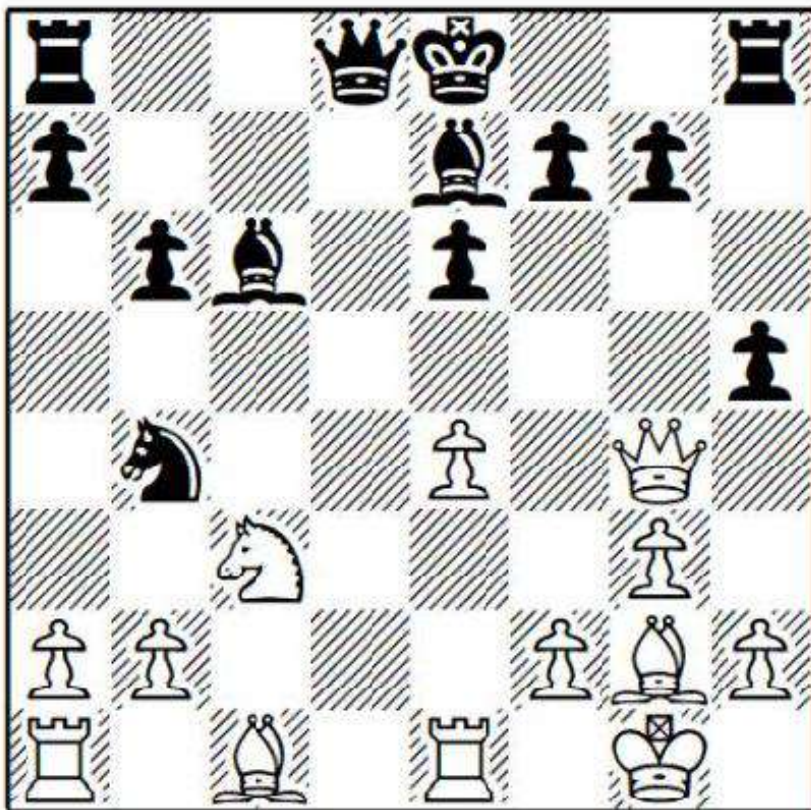
*White to play*



**Solution**

219) N.Afanasiev-L.Nozdrachev  
Orsha 2020

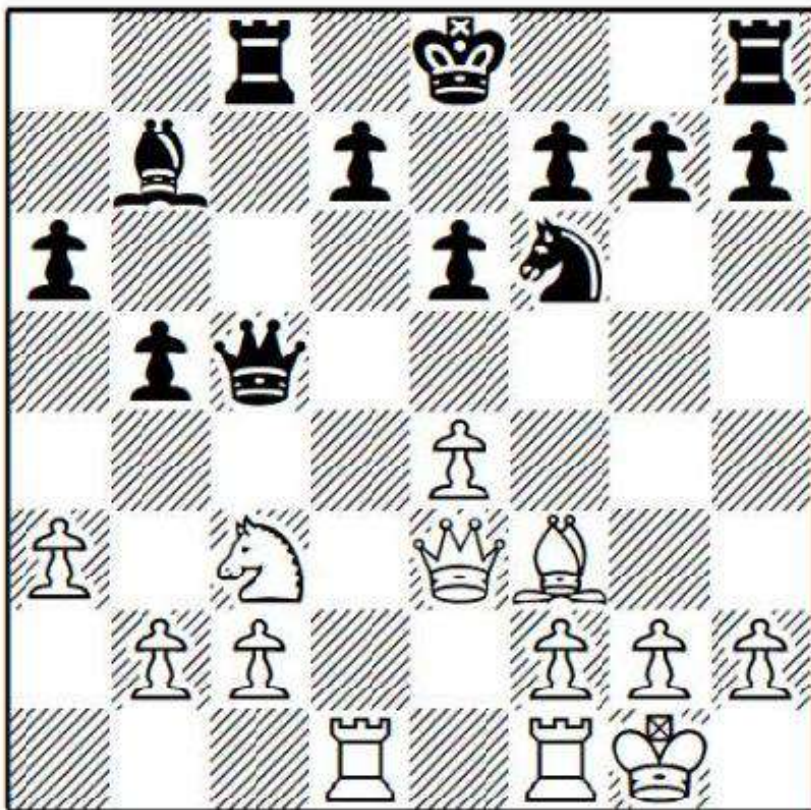
*White to play*



Solution

220) O.Mihok-M.Palczert  
Budapest 2021

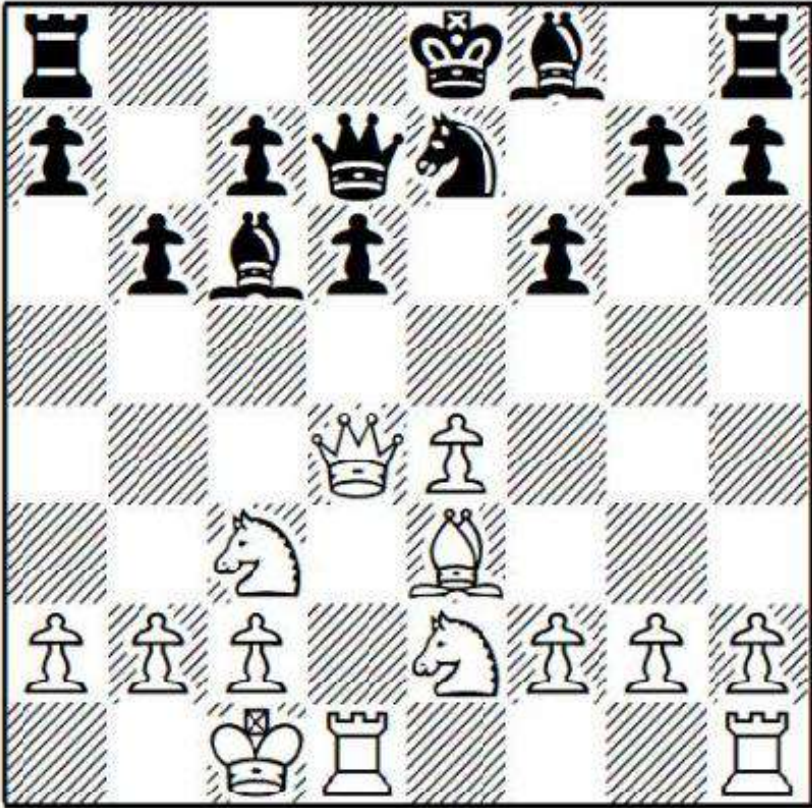
White to play



Solution

221) D.Kojovic-D.Kovacevic  
Novi Banovci 2020

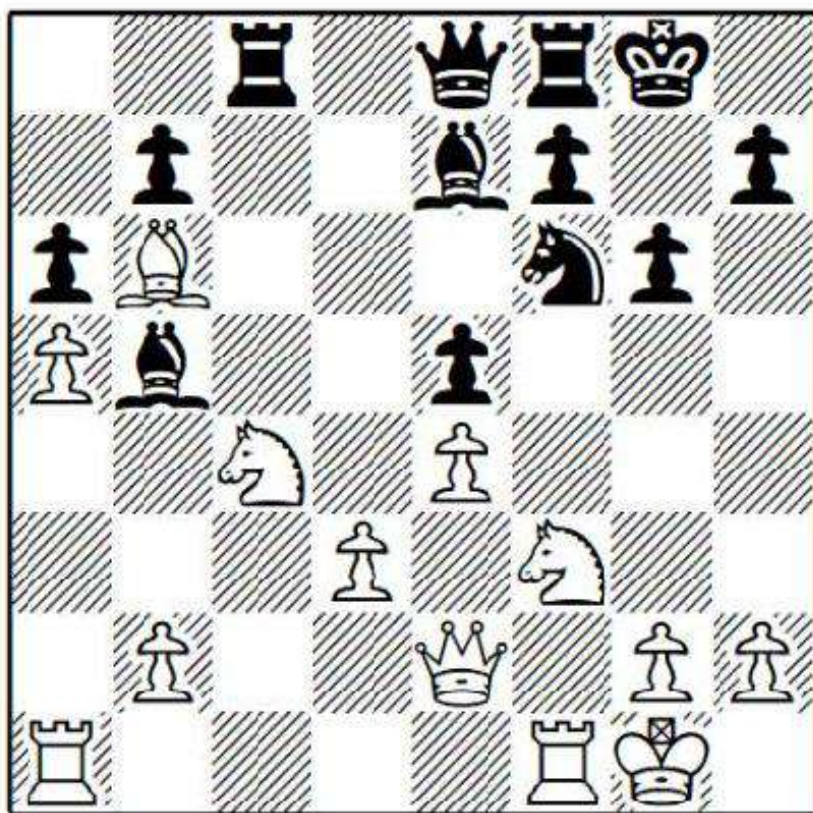
*Black to play*



Solution

222) B.Nugumanov-A.Frolov  
Chelyabinsk 2020

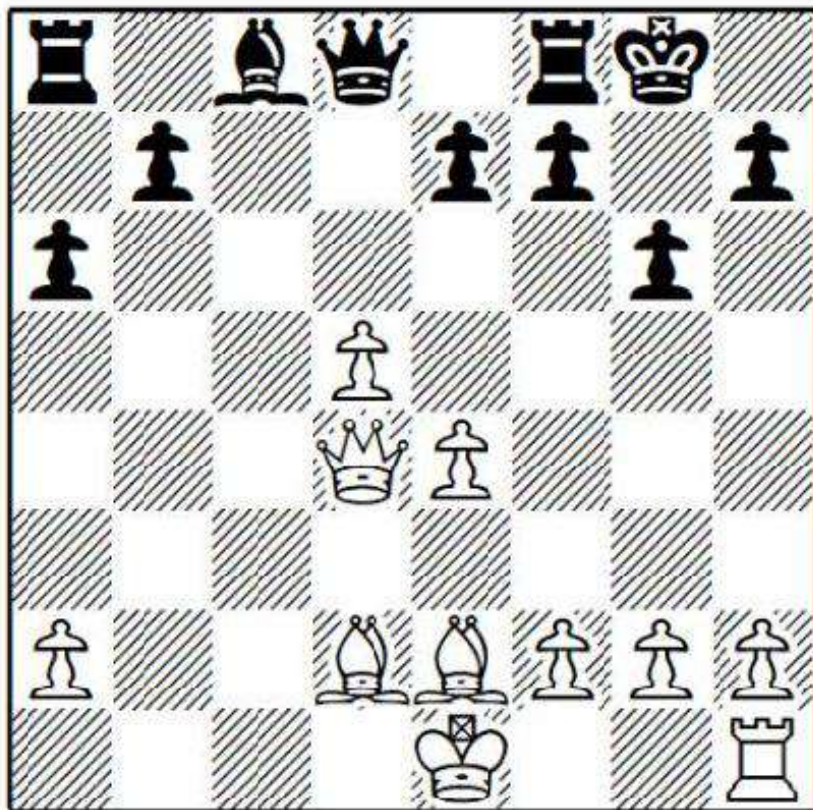
*Black to play*



**Solution**

223) A.Suleymenov-M.Nikologorsky  
Moscow 2021

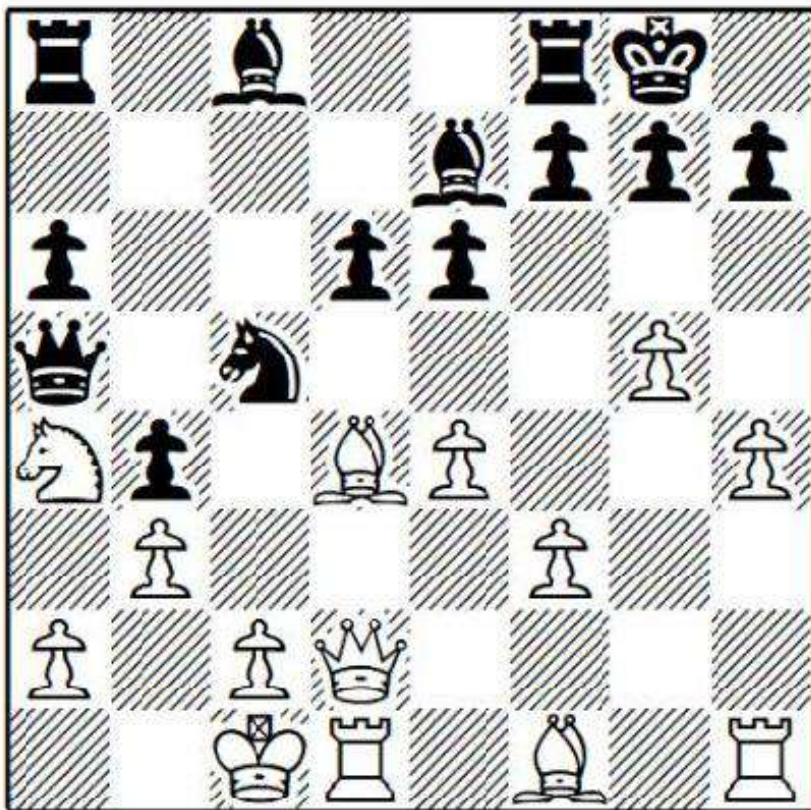
*White to play*



**Solution**

224) A.Motylev-N.Bashirli  
Lisbon 2020

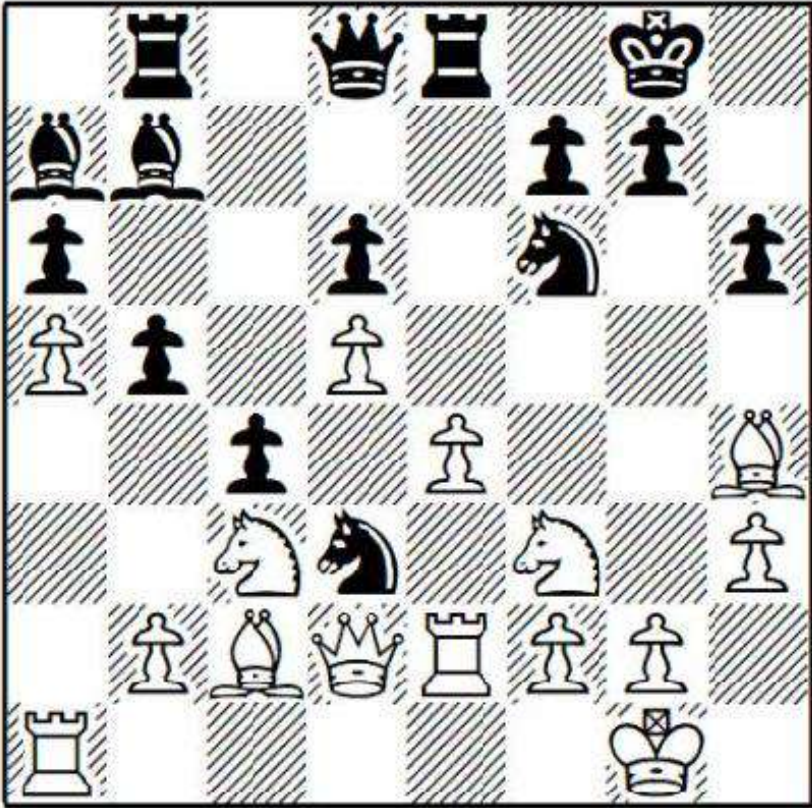
*White to play*



**Solution**

225) R.Psyk-I.Janik  
Pokrzywna 2020

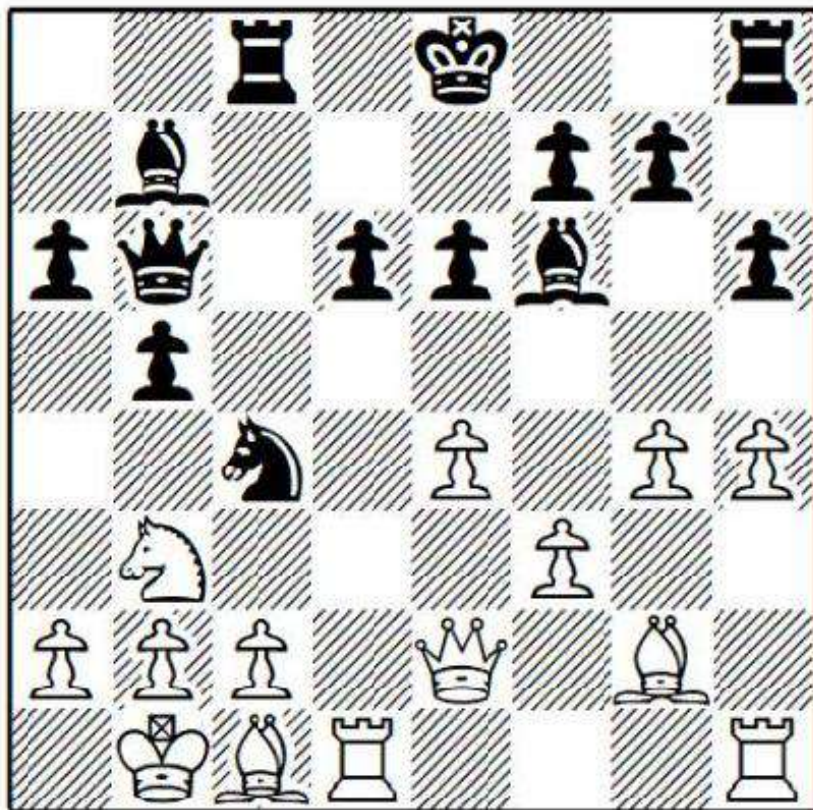
Black to play



Solution

226) C.Manish Anto-M.Annaberdiev  
Budapest 2020

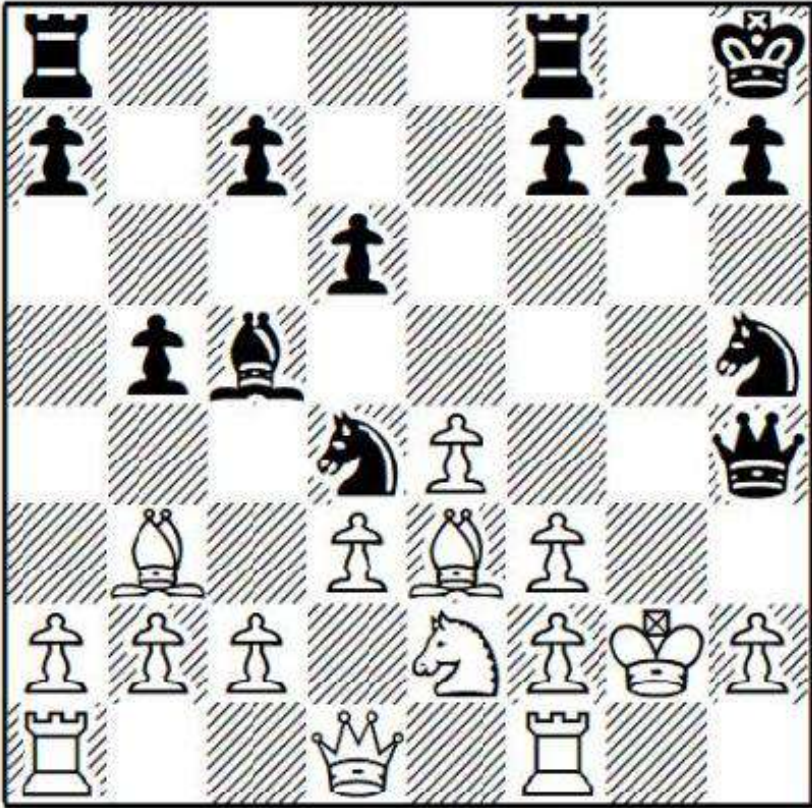
*Black to play*



Solution

227) F.Nijboer-A.Feuerstack  
Amsterdam 2020

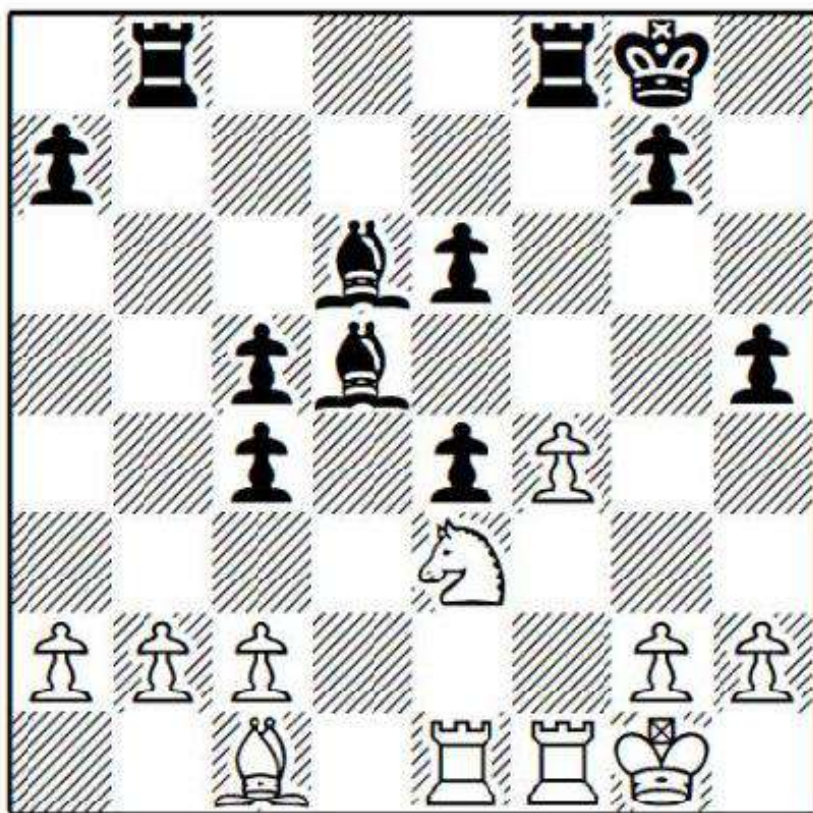
*Black to play*



**Solution**

228) Z.Low-D.Kosic  
Budapest 2020

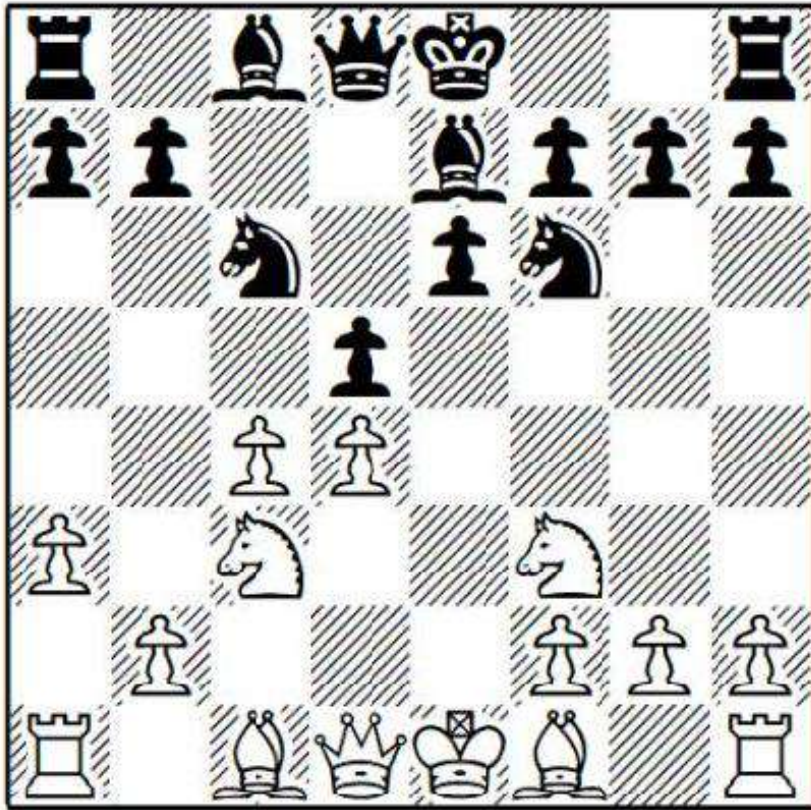
*Black to play*



**Solution**

229) A.Kozak-J.Kyc  
Krakow 2021

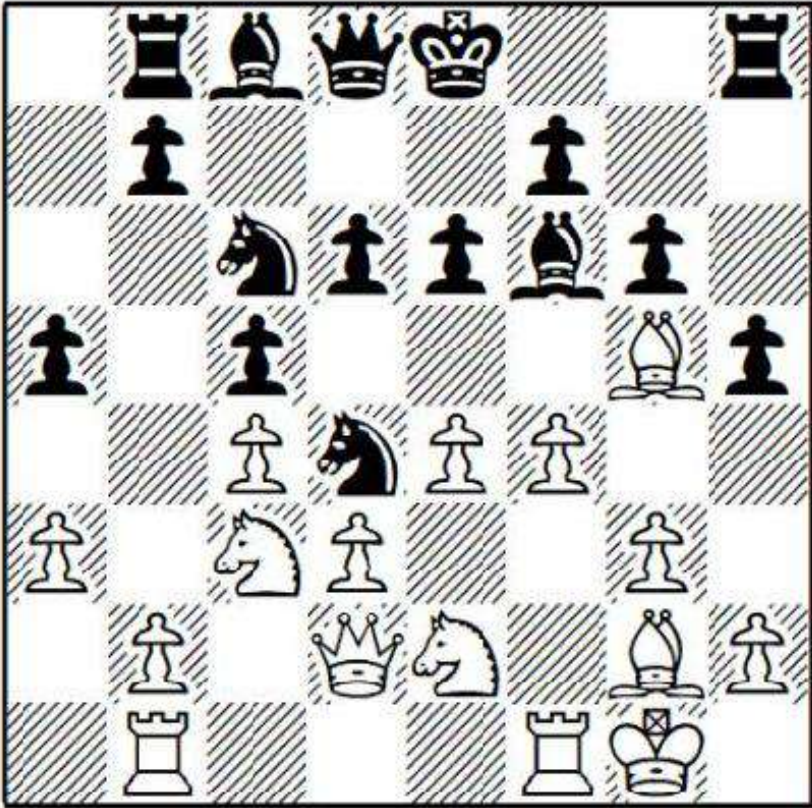
*White to play*



Solution

230) A.Balleisen-C.Hilby  
chess.com 2021

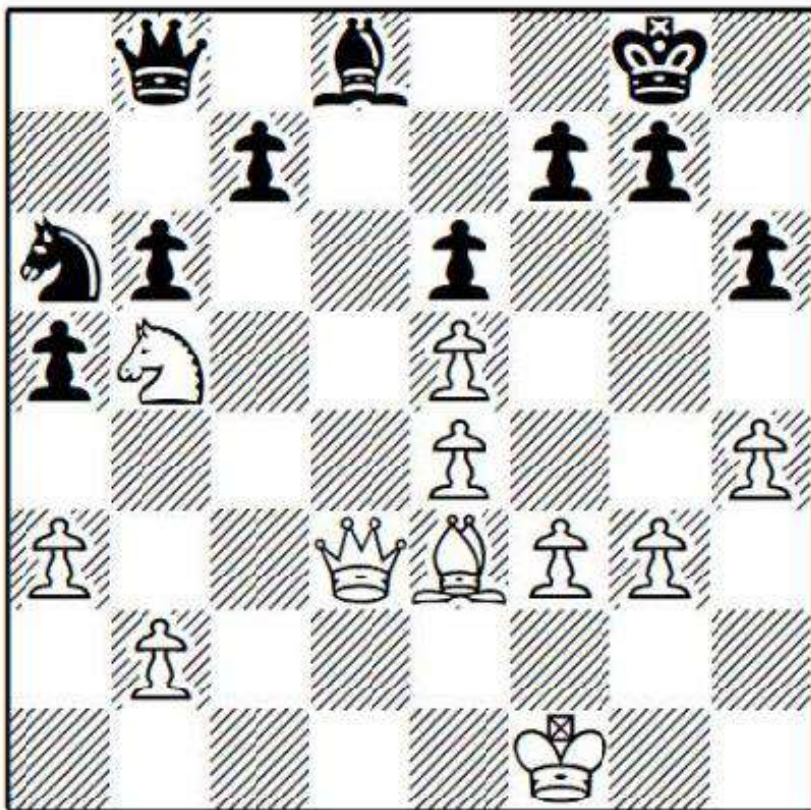
*Black to play*



**Solution**

231) T.Lammens-M.Dorohin  
Utrecht 2020

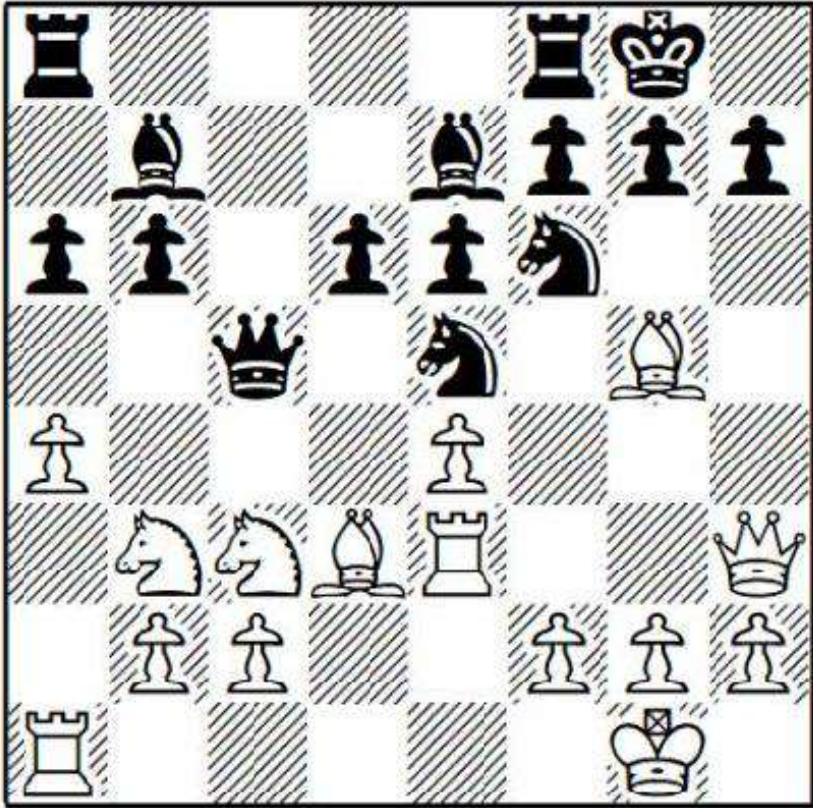
White to play



Solution

232) R.Issa-L.Mendonca  
Budapest 2020

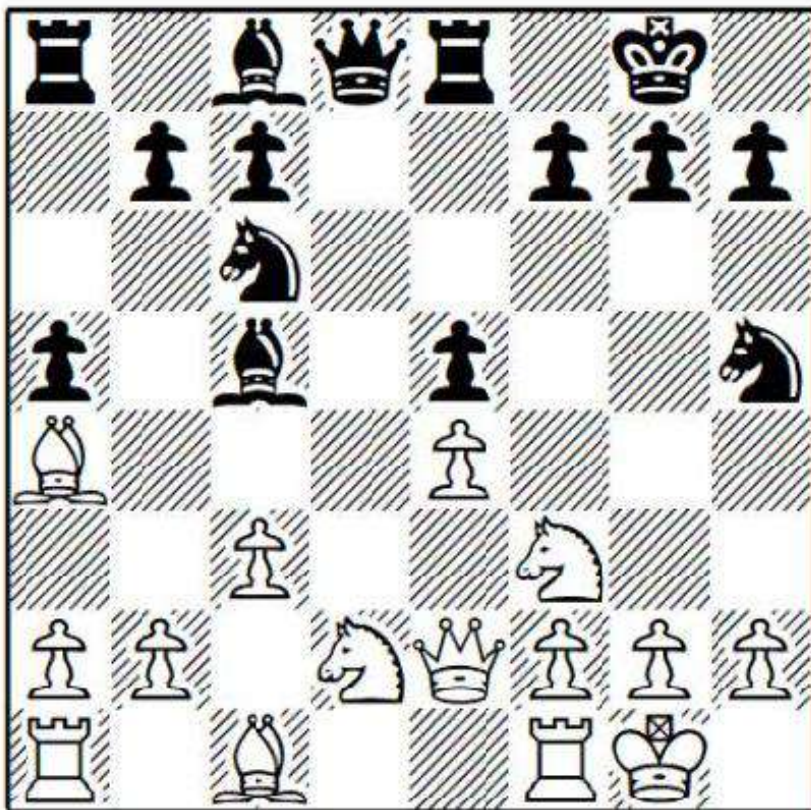
Black to play



**Solution**

233) J.Moussard-D.Garcia Ramos  
Barcelona 2020

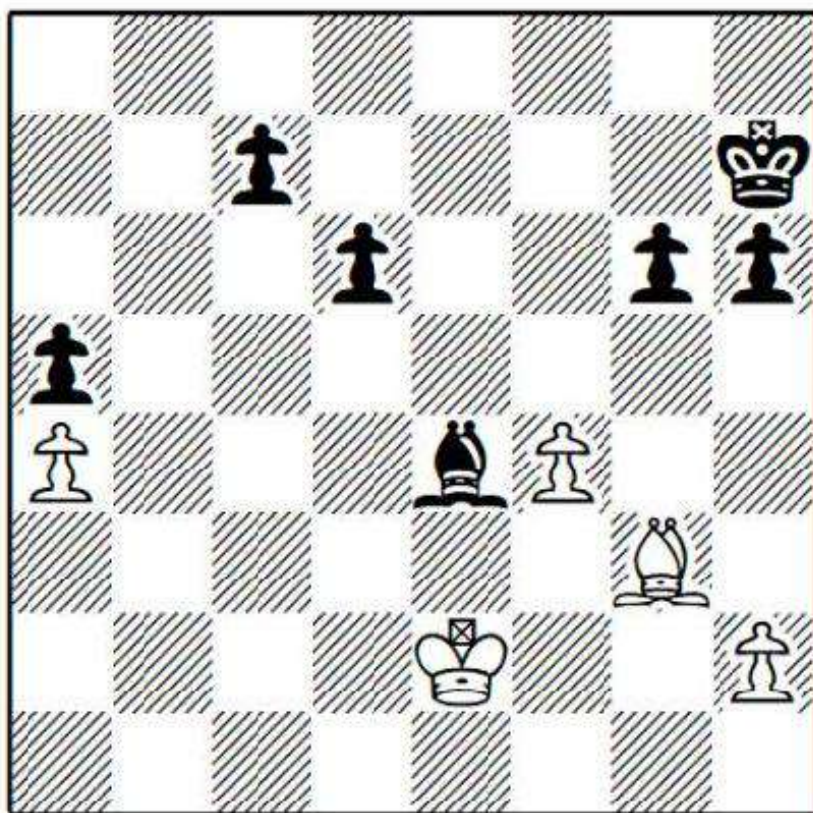
White to play



Solution

234) L.Licznanski-J.Paprocki  
Pokrzywna 2020

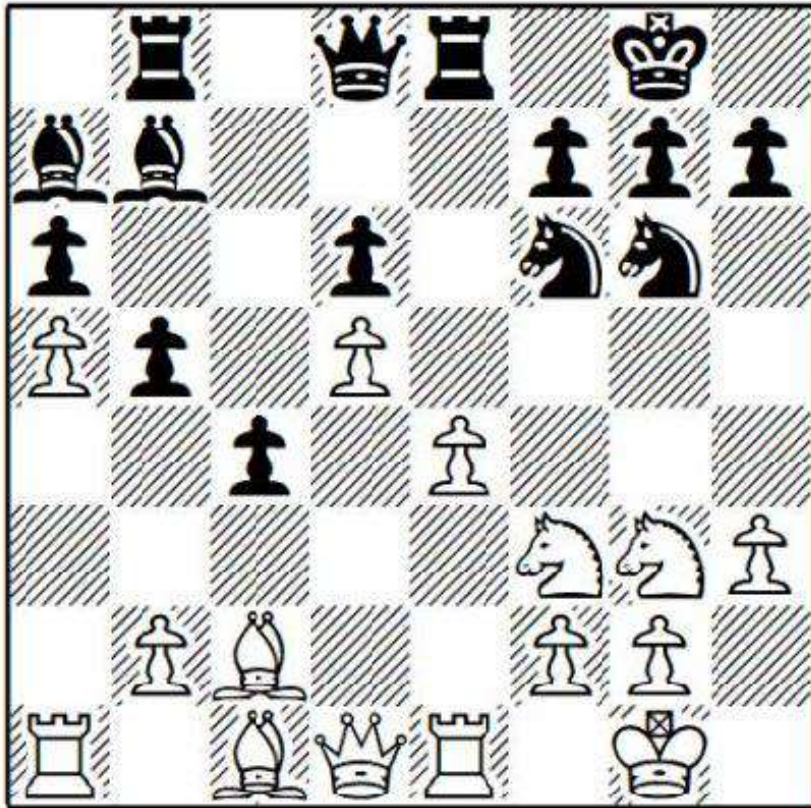
*Black to play*



**Solution**

235) M.Vachier Lagrave-D.Dubov  
chess24.com 2021

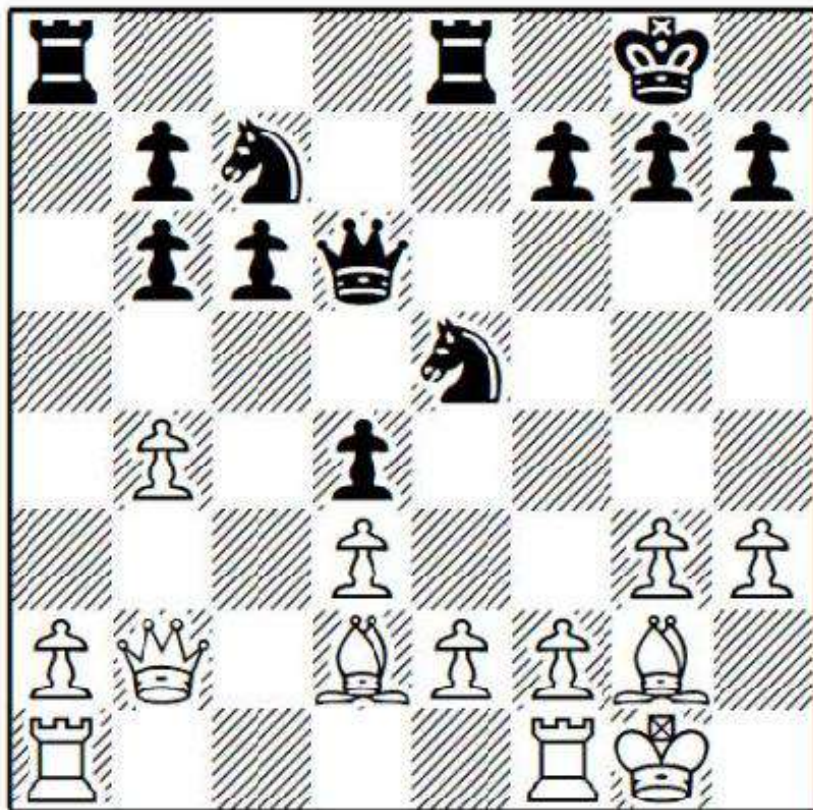
*White to play*



**Solution**

236) D.Naroditsky-B.Dhulipalla  
lichess.org 2021

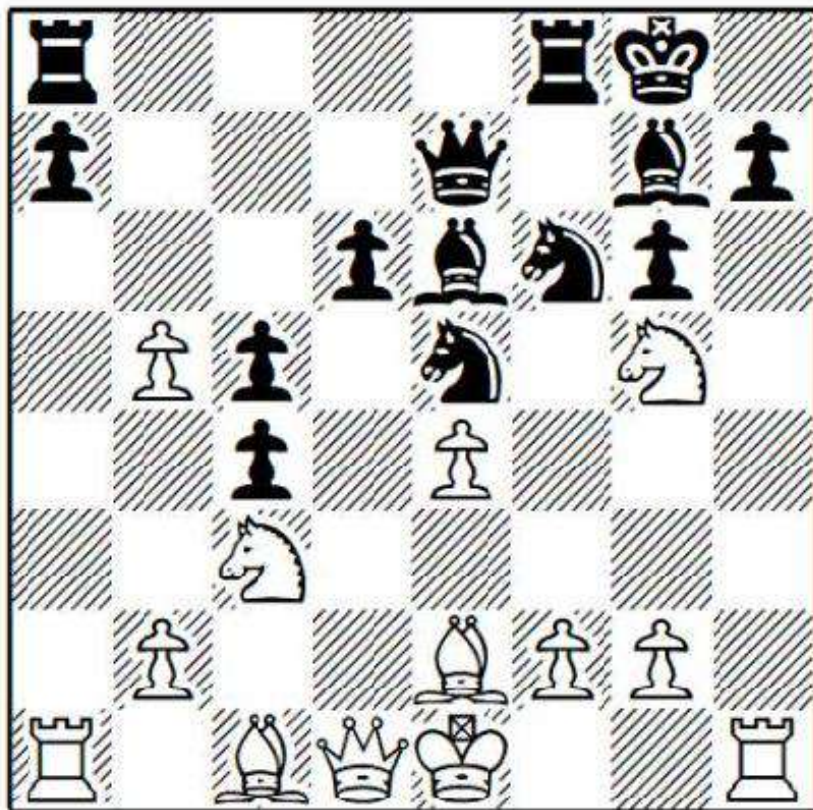
*White to play*



**Solution**

237) A.Mikaelyan-L.Babujian  
Yerevan 2021

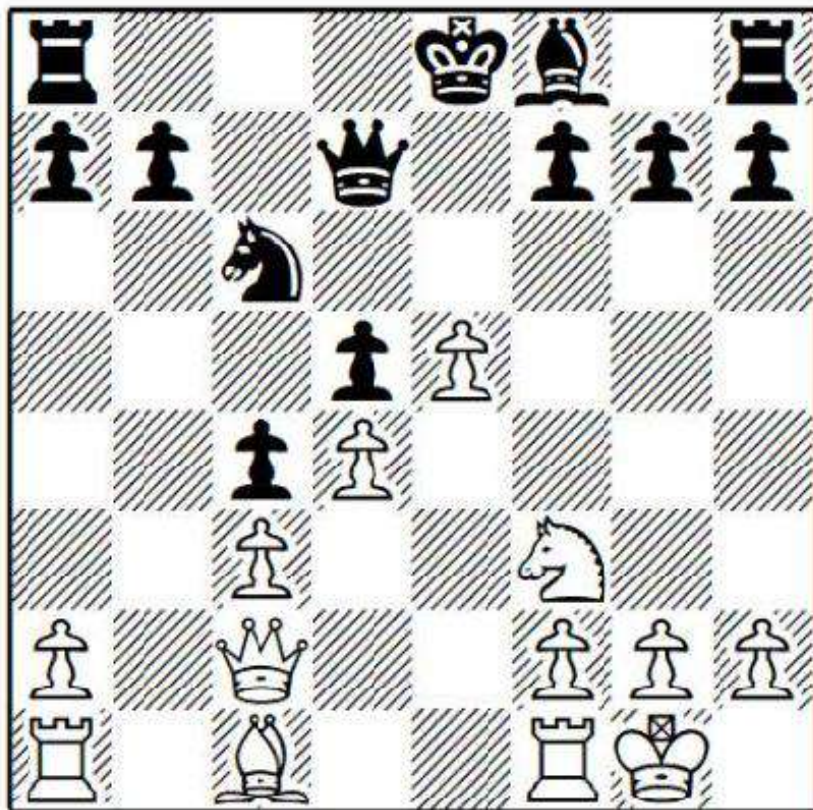
*White to play*



Solution

238) P.Ponkratov-T.Fakhrutdinov  
Moscow 2019

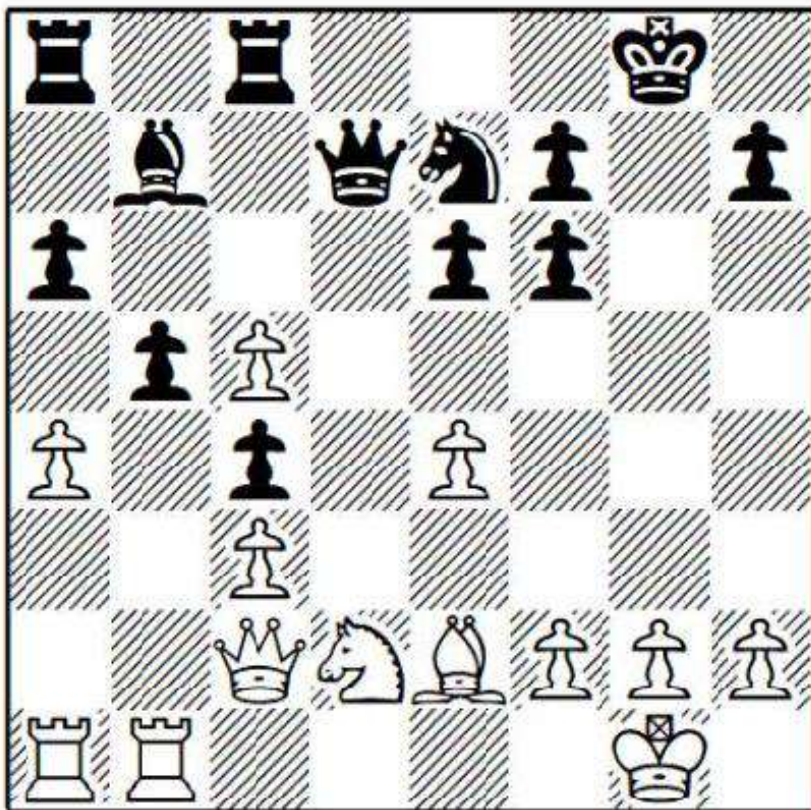
*Black to play*



Solution

239) T.Piceu-N.Georgiadis  
Munich 2020

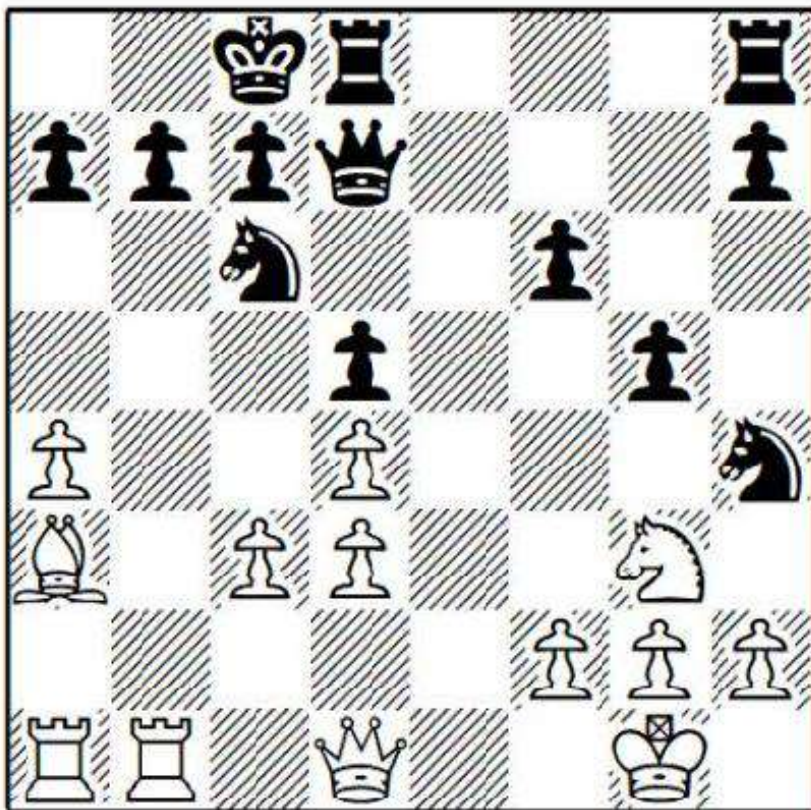
White to play



Solution

240) A.Domingo Nunez-A.Vidarte Morales  
Santo Tirso 2020

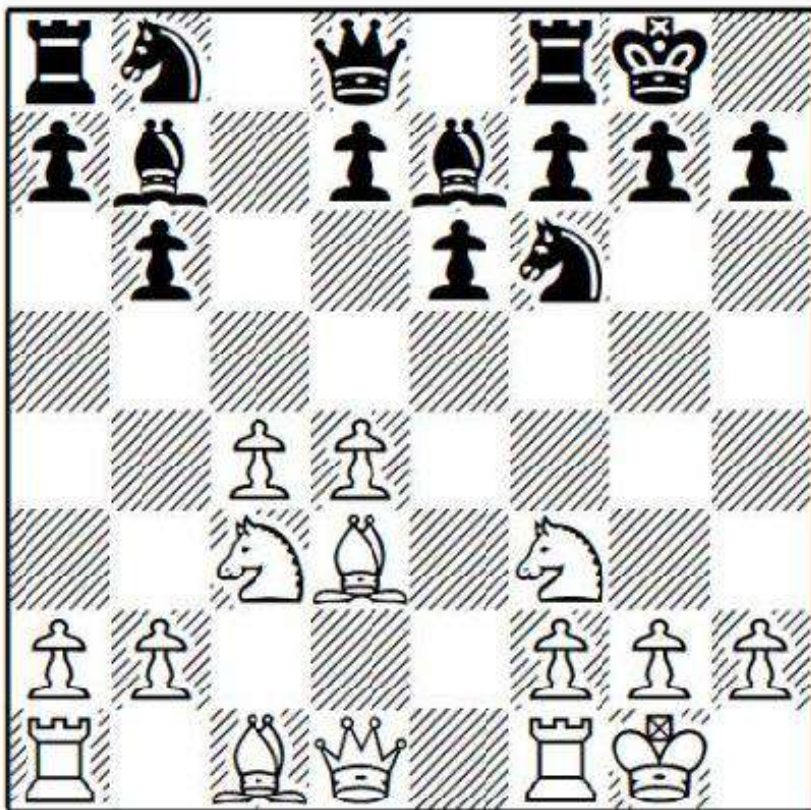
White to play



Solution

241) A.Barseghyan-H.Hayrapetyan  
Yerevan 2021

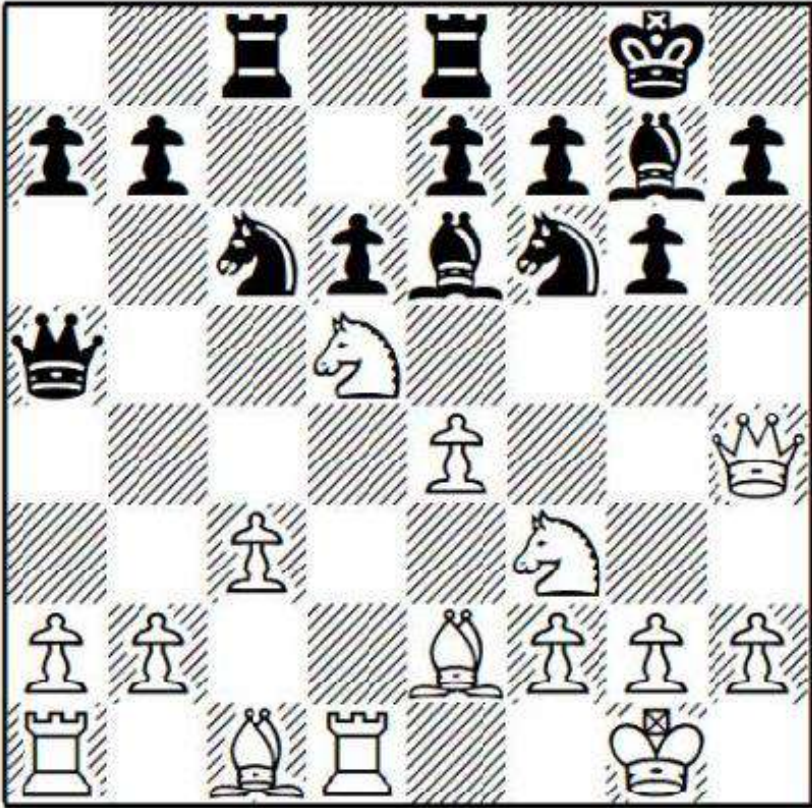
*White to play*



**Solution**

242) A.Esipenko-M.Vachier Lagrave  
Wijk aan Zee 2021

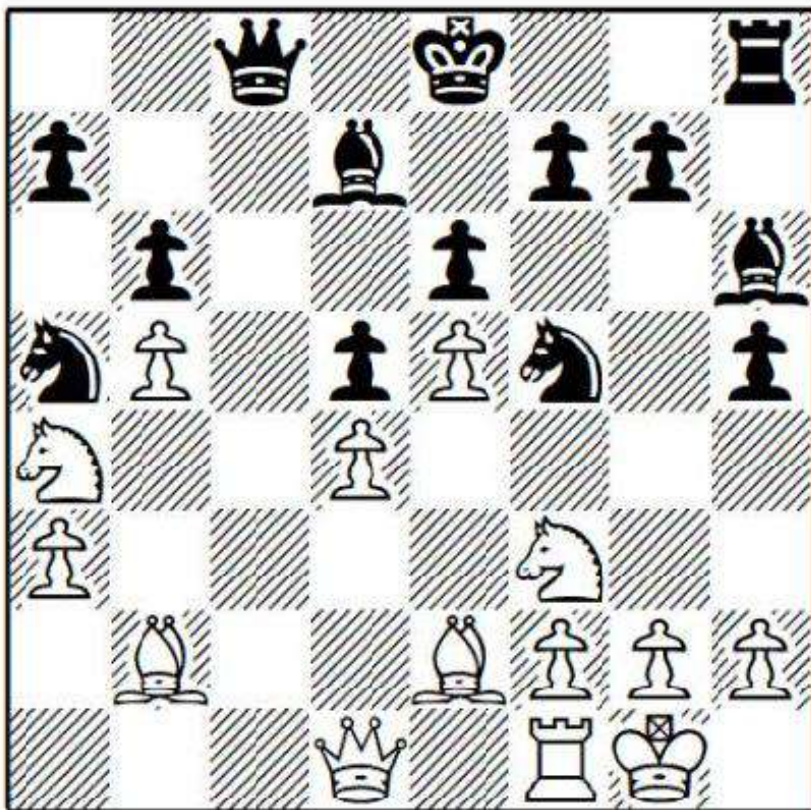
*Black to play*



**Solution**

243) G.Wall-A.Greet  
Dublin 2019

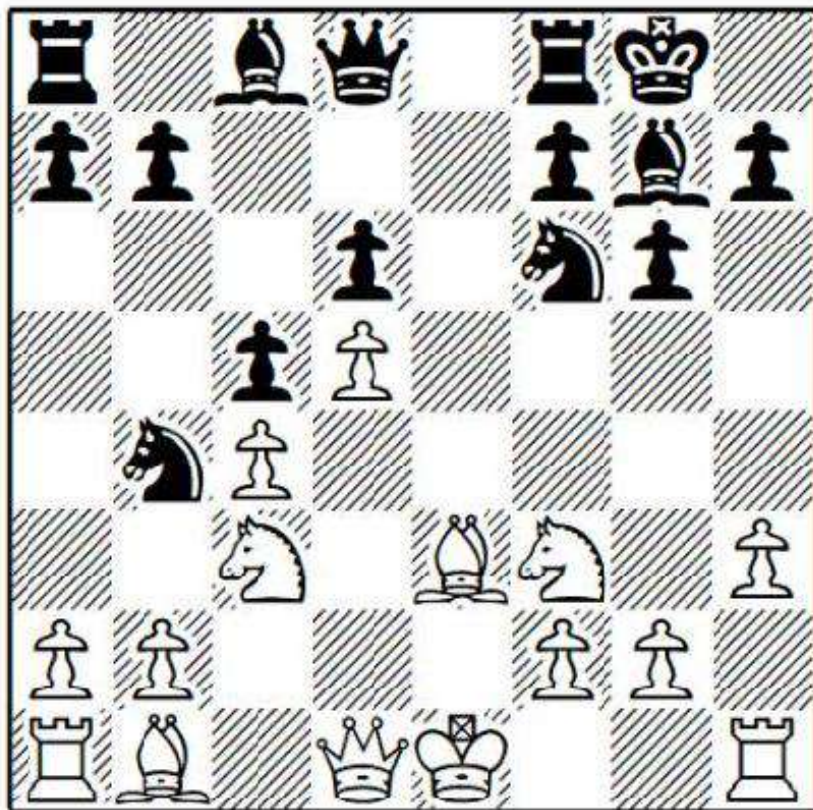
White to play



Solution

244) A.Igambergenov-A.Audi  
Moscow 2020

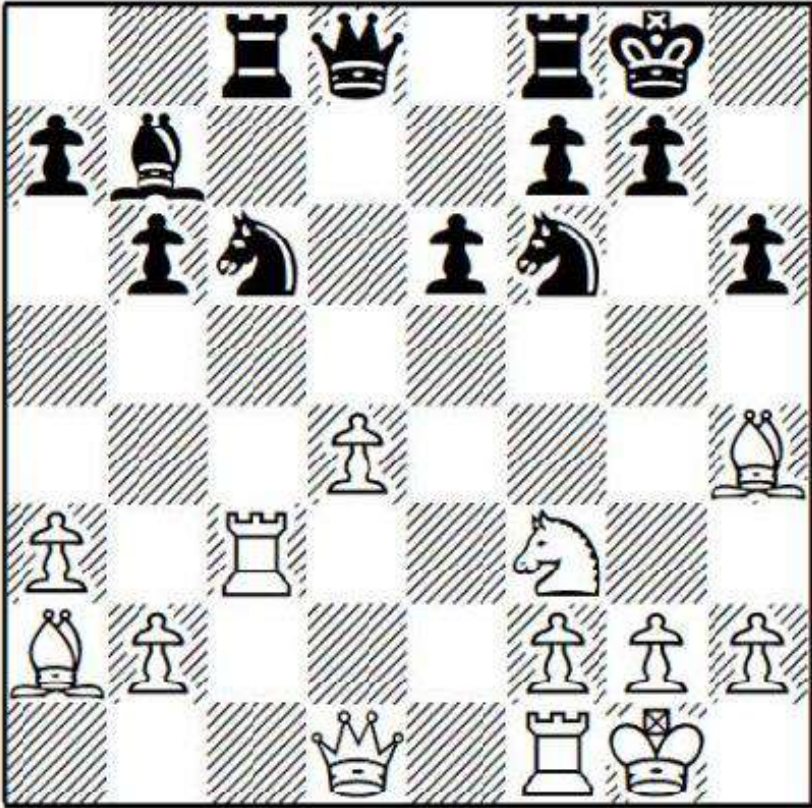
*Black to play*



**Solution**

**245) T.Koch-M.Santos Ruiz**  
Munich 2020

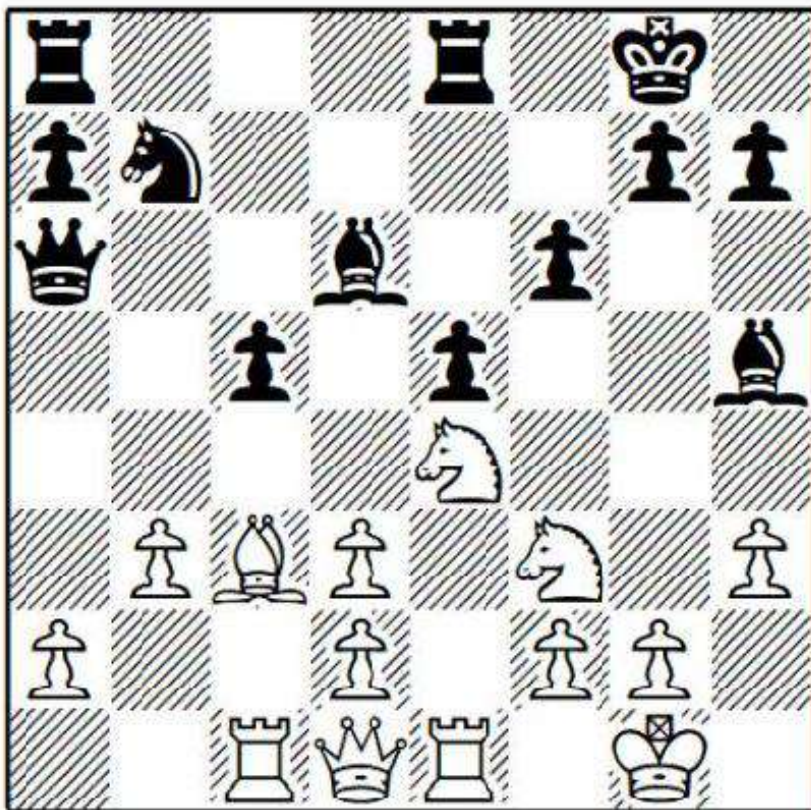
*Black to play*



**Solution**

246) S.Sargsyan-M.Pranesh  
Moscow 2020

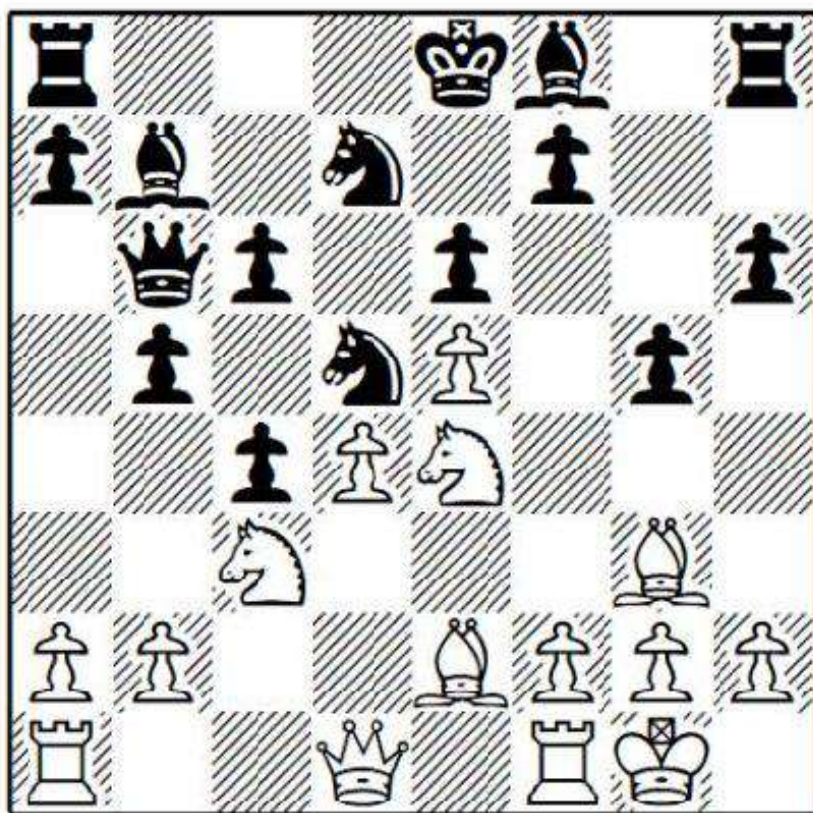
*White to play*



**Solution**

247) L.Babujian-B.Daneshvar  
Yerevan 2021

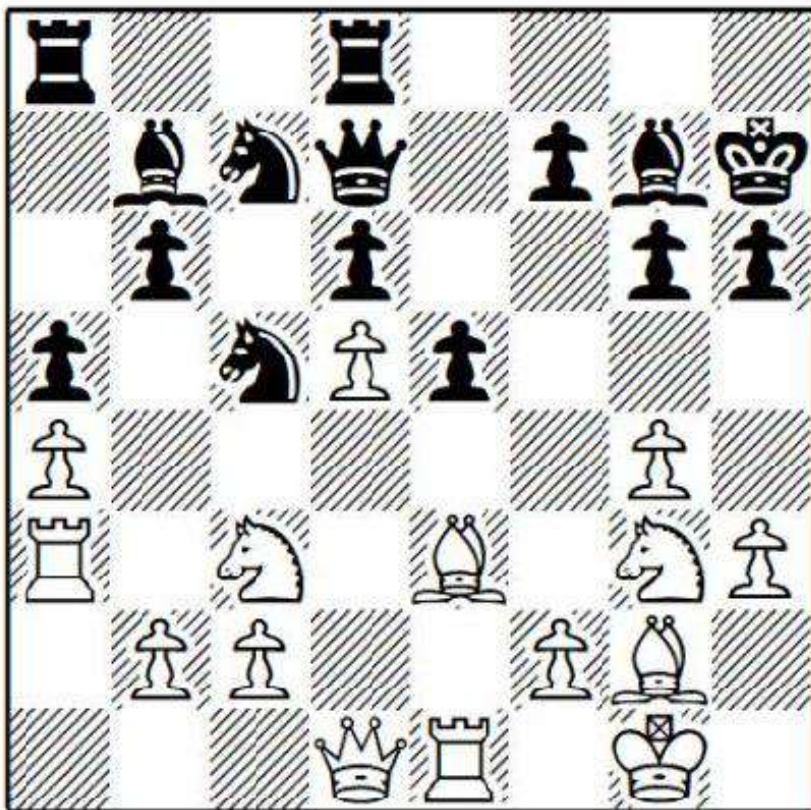
*Black to play*



**Solution**

248) N.Afanasiev-A.Zhukov  
Moscow 2021

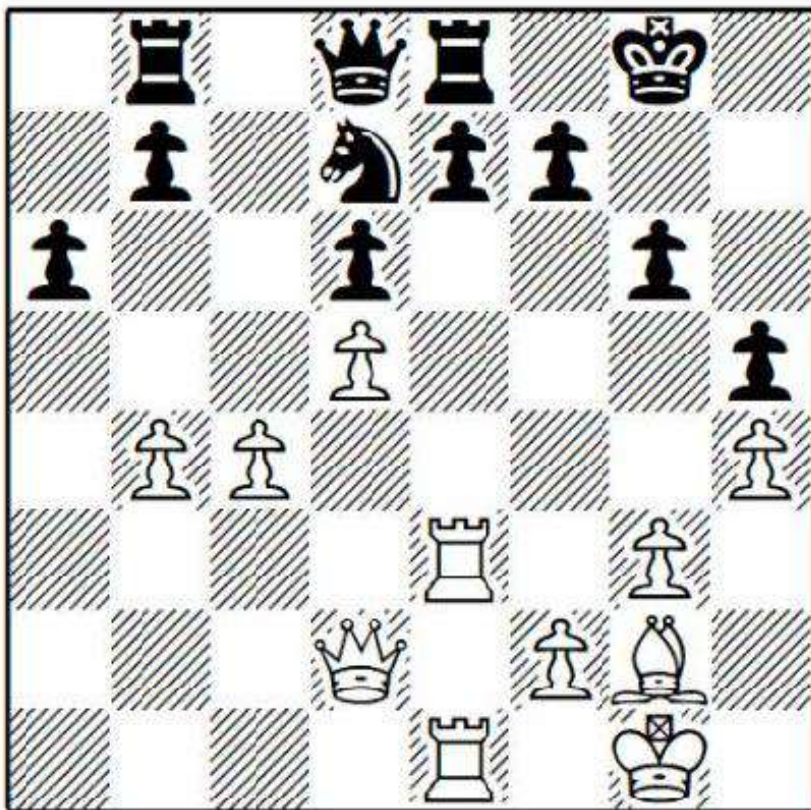
White to play



Solution

249) F.Hellers-V.Levchenkov  
Riga 2020

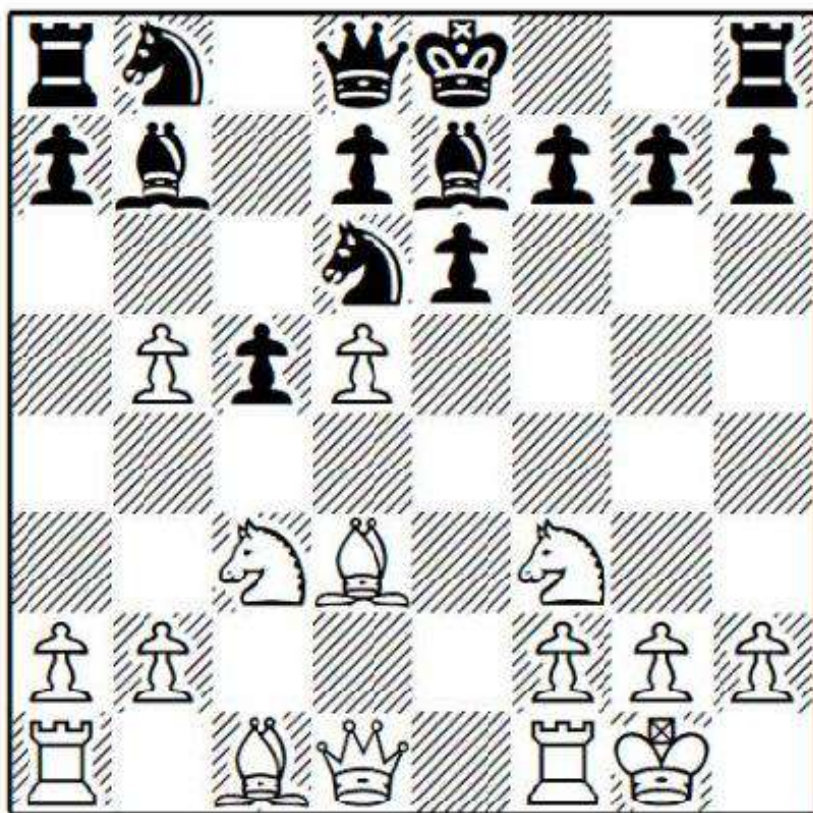
White to play



Solution

250) J.Jurek-A.Nguyen  
Marianske Lazne 2020

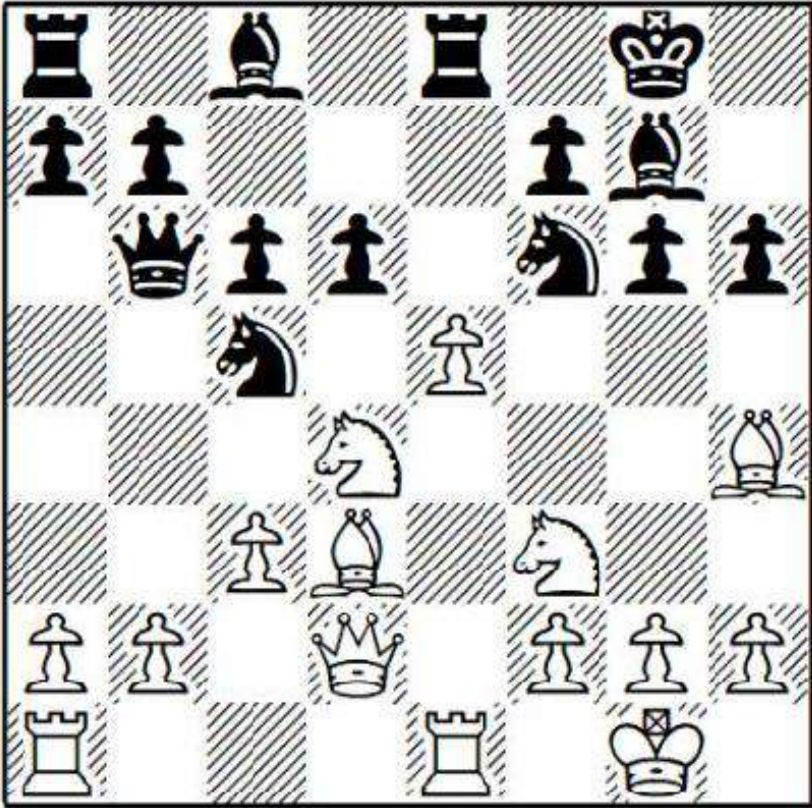
*Black to play*



**Solution**

**251) D.Gomez Dieguez-A.Strikovic**  
Santiago de Compostela 2020

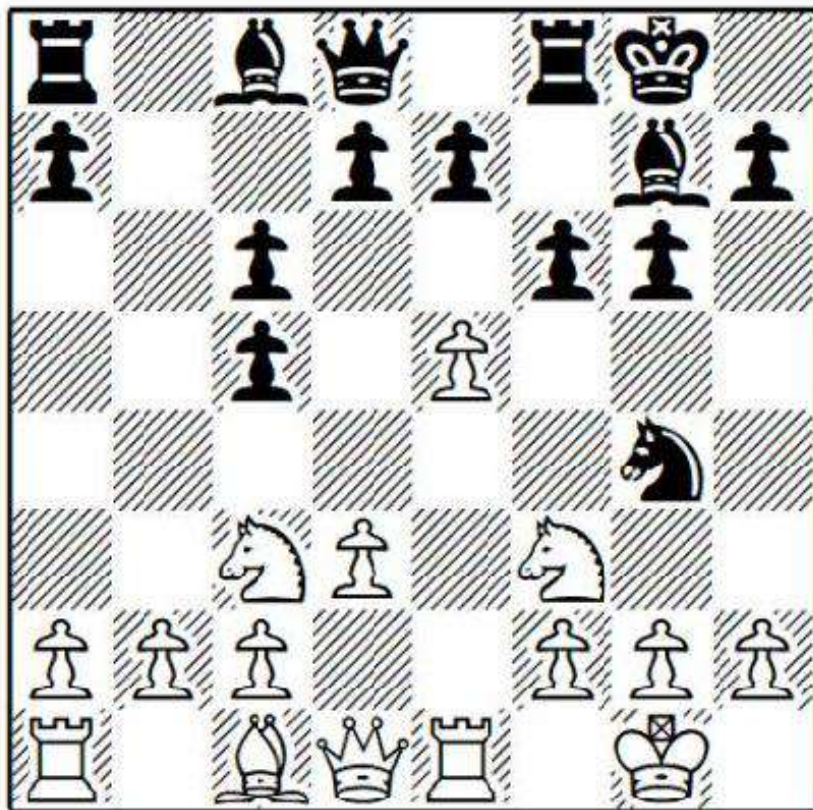
*Black to play*



**Solution**

252) D.Lima-A.Fier  
Florianopolis 2021

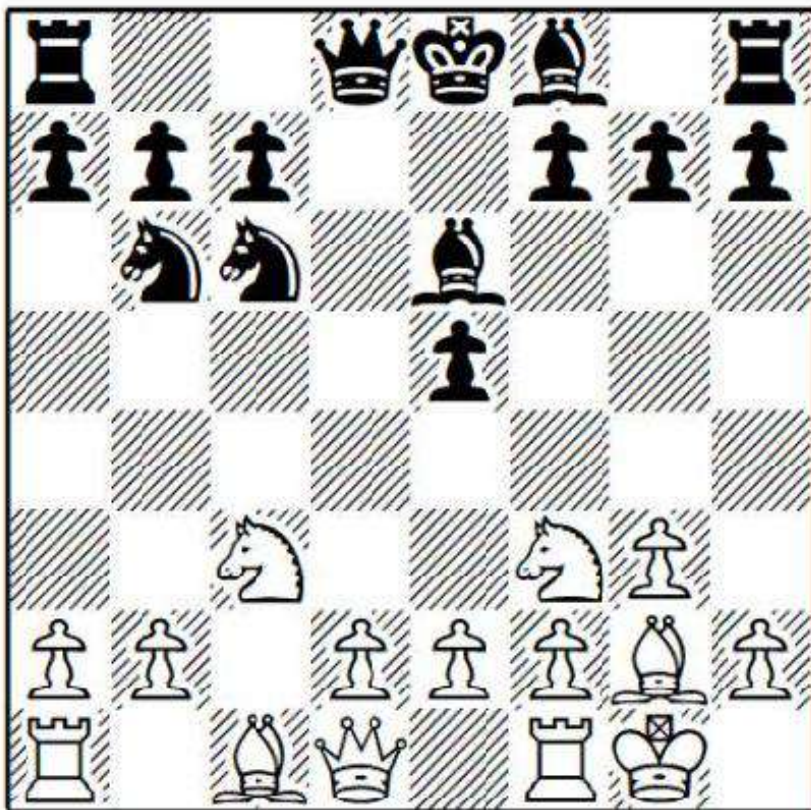
White to play



Solution

253) E.Chibukhchyan-S.Golubov  
Moscow 2019

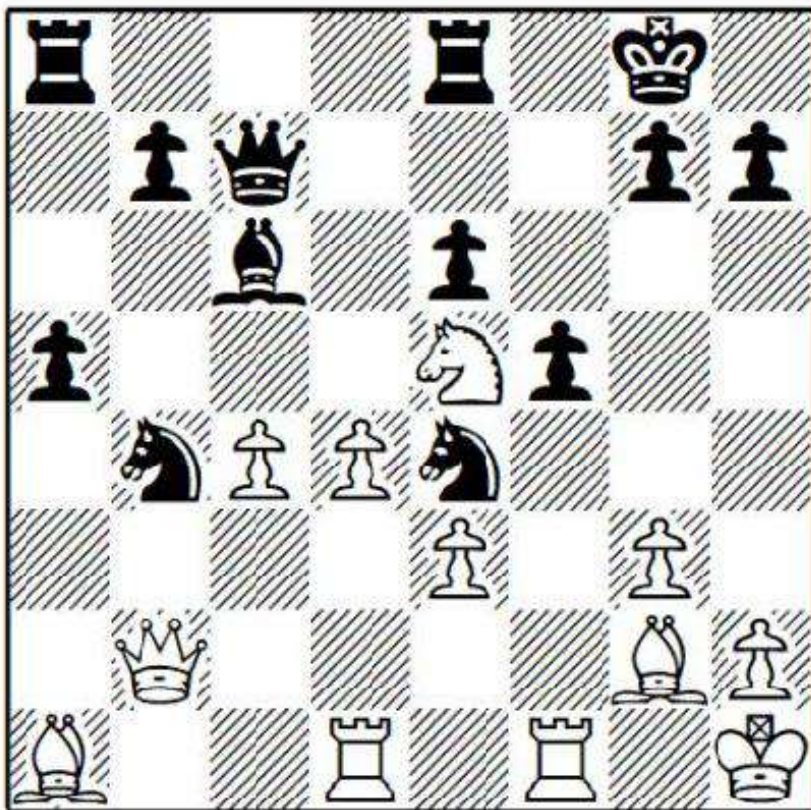
*White to play*



**Solution**

**254) I.Iljiushenok-E.Goltseva**  
Moscow 2020

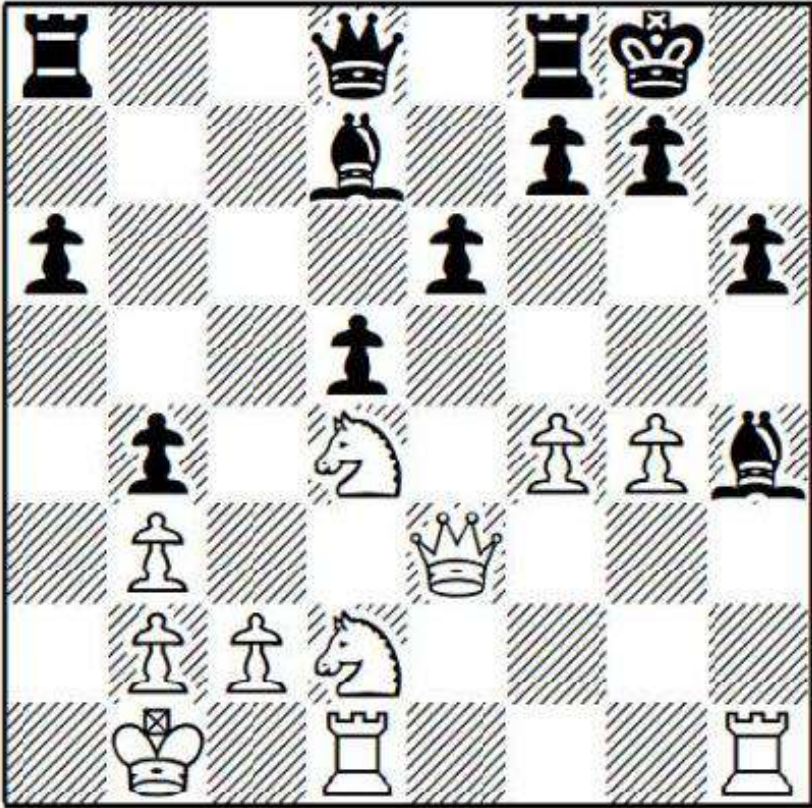
*White to play*



**Solution**

255) N.Bashirli-K.Grigoryan  
Lisbon 2020

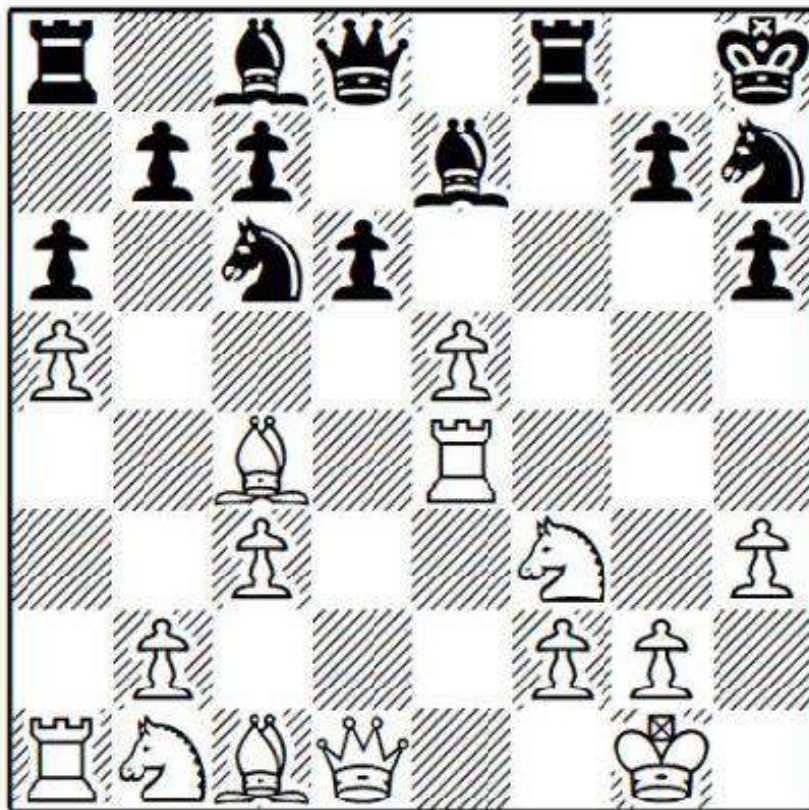
*Black to play*



**Solution**

256) J.Sheng-N.Khomeriki  
Philadelphia 2019

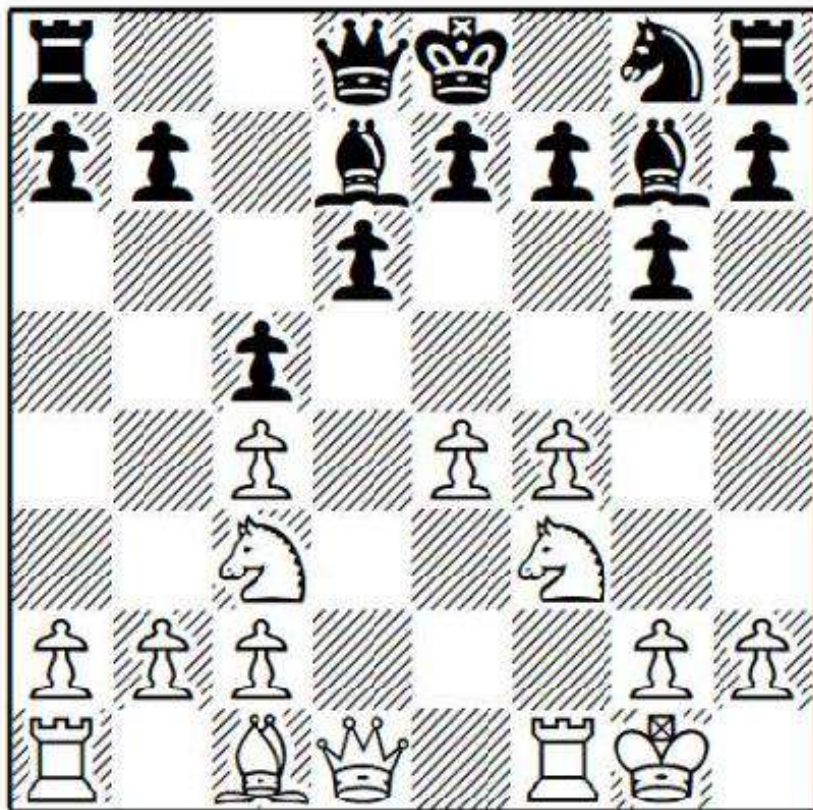
*Black to play*



**Solution**

257) N.Delgado Ramirez-N.Filgueiras  
Florianopolis 2021

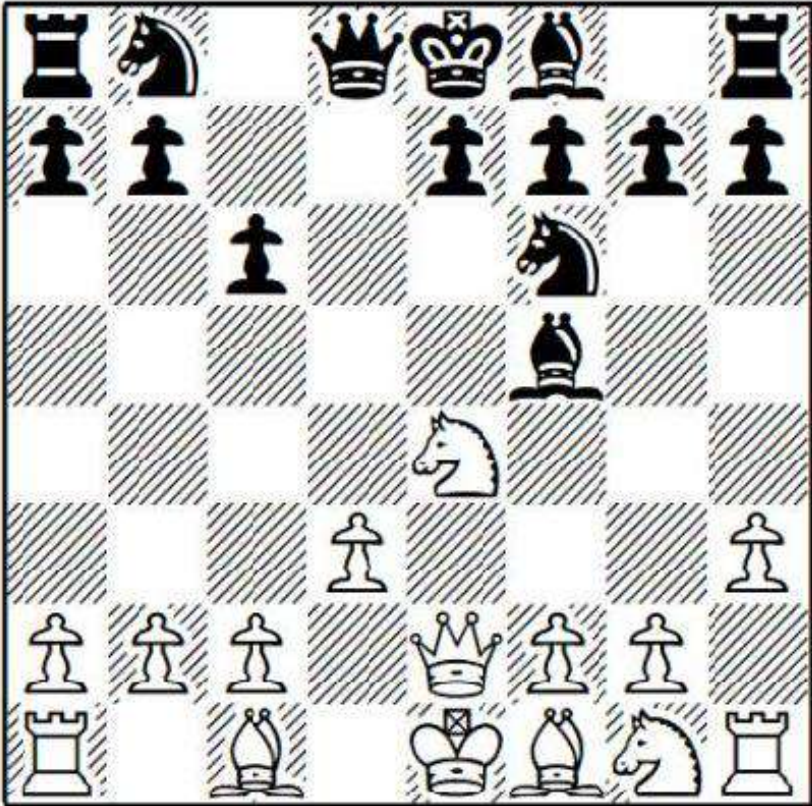
*Black to play*



Solution

258) M.Quinn-C.O'Donnell  
Dublin 2019

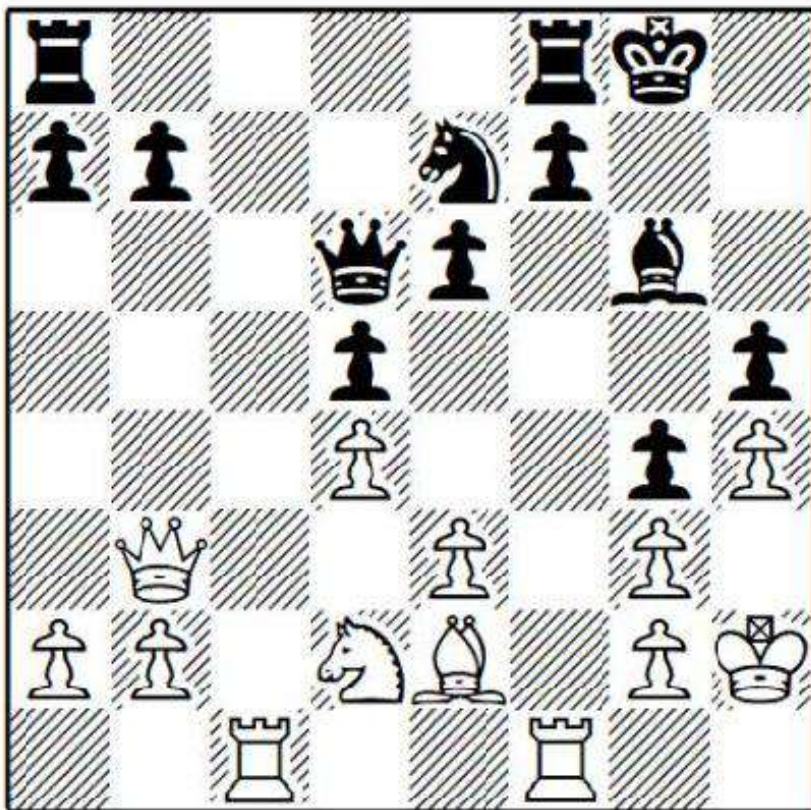
*Black to play*



**Solution**

259) X.Xu-B.Gledura  
chess.com 2020

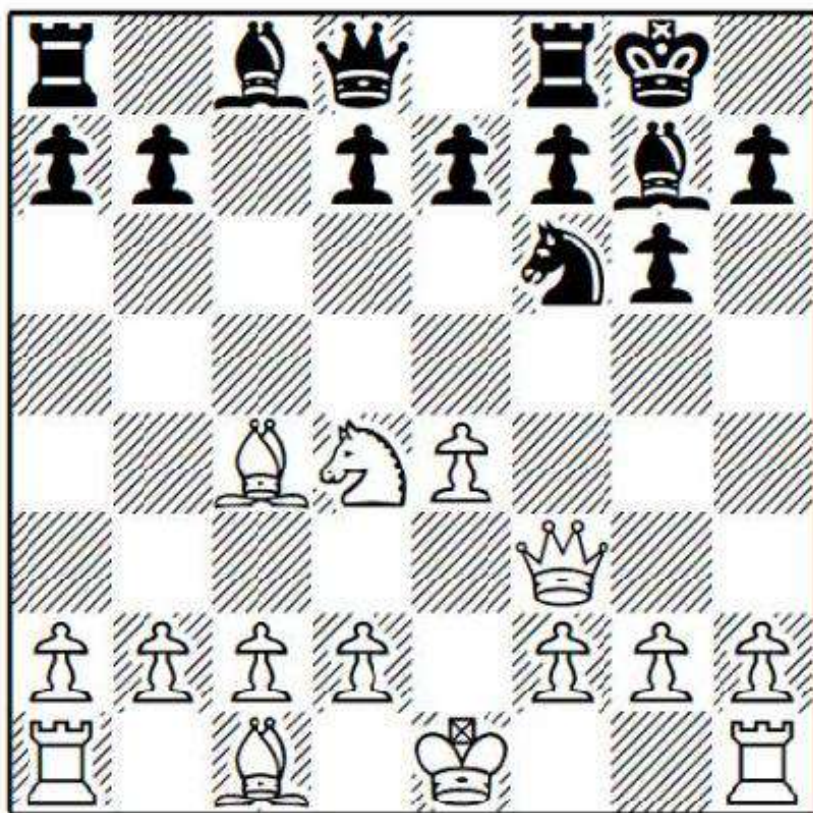
*White to play*



**Solution**

**260) A.Smith-P.Lindgren**  
Sweden 2020

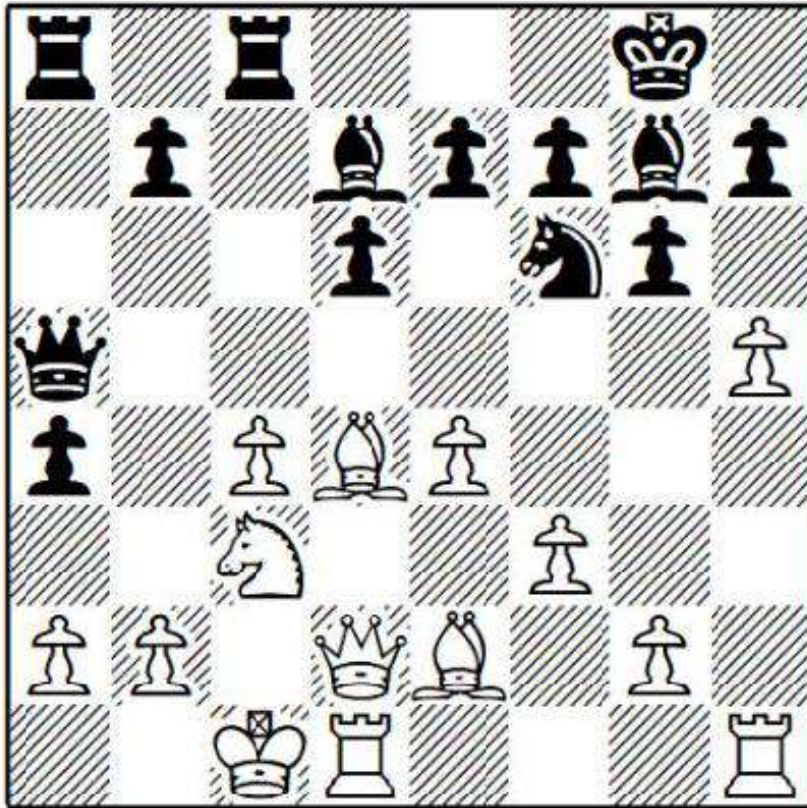
*Black to play*



Solution

261) P.Golubka-M.Redzisz  
Krakow 2021

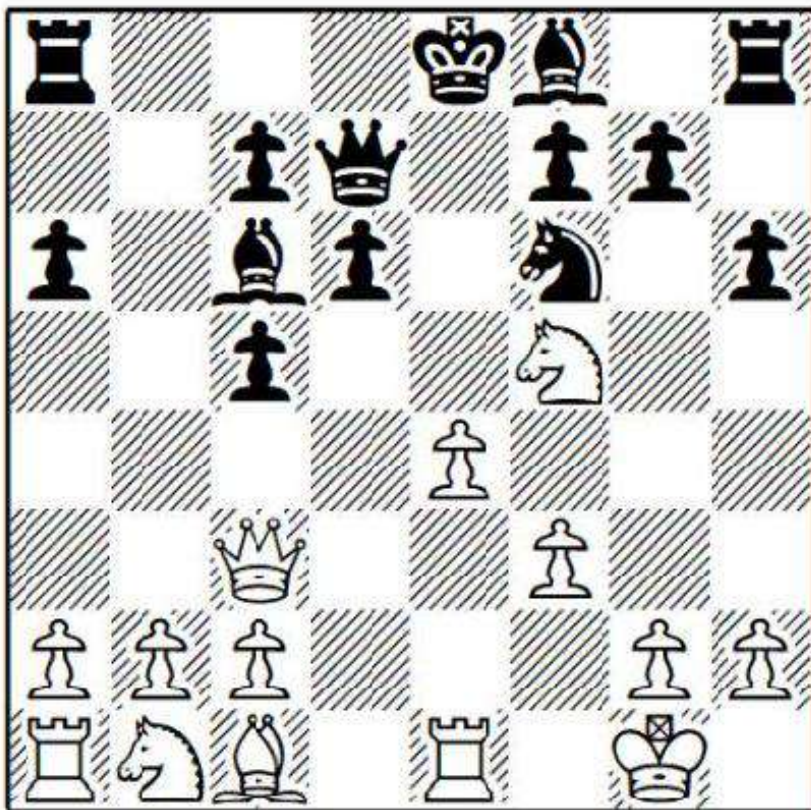
*White to play*



Solution

262) C.Yoo-H.Niemann  
New York 2020

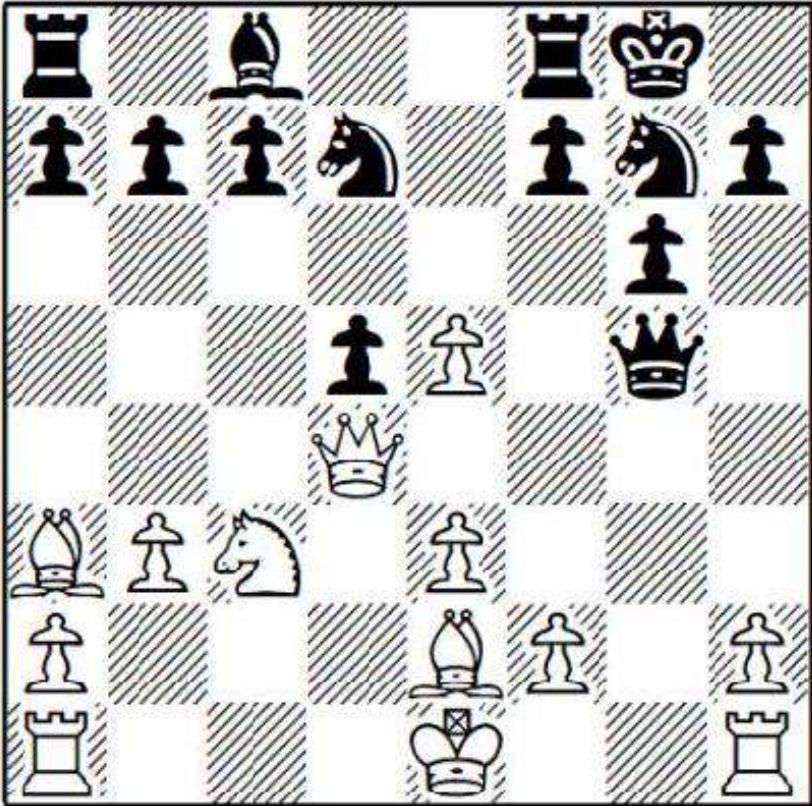
*Black to play*



**Solution**

263) R.Gajek-K.Ozturk  
Graz 2020

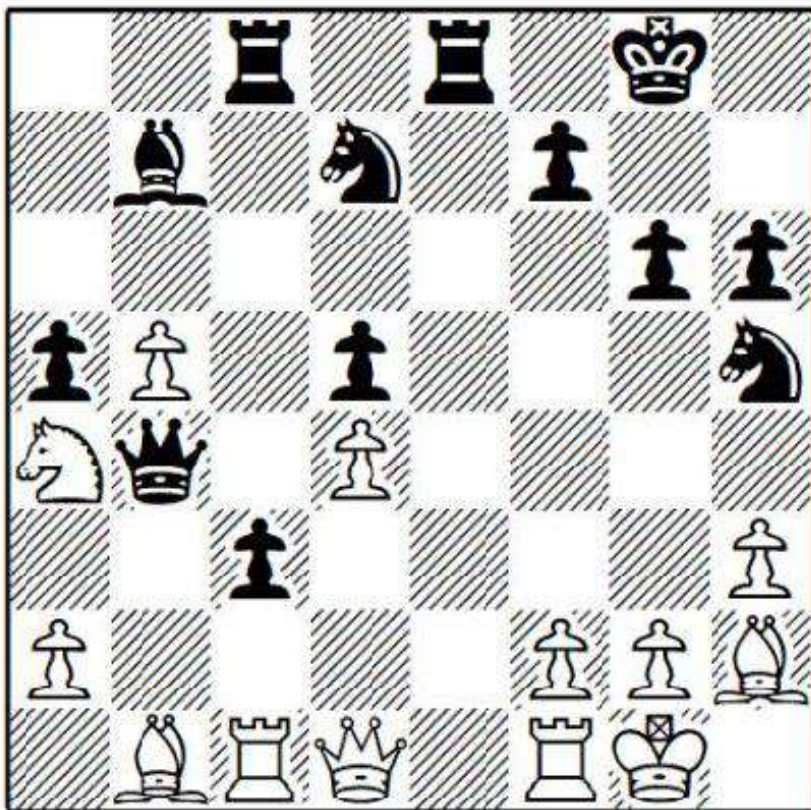
*Black to play*



**Solution**

**264) B.Daneshvar-A.Sargsyan**  
Yerevan 2021

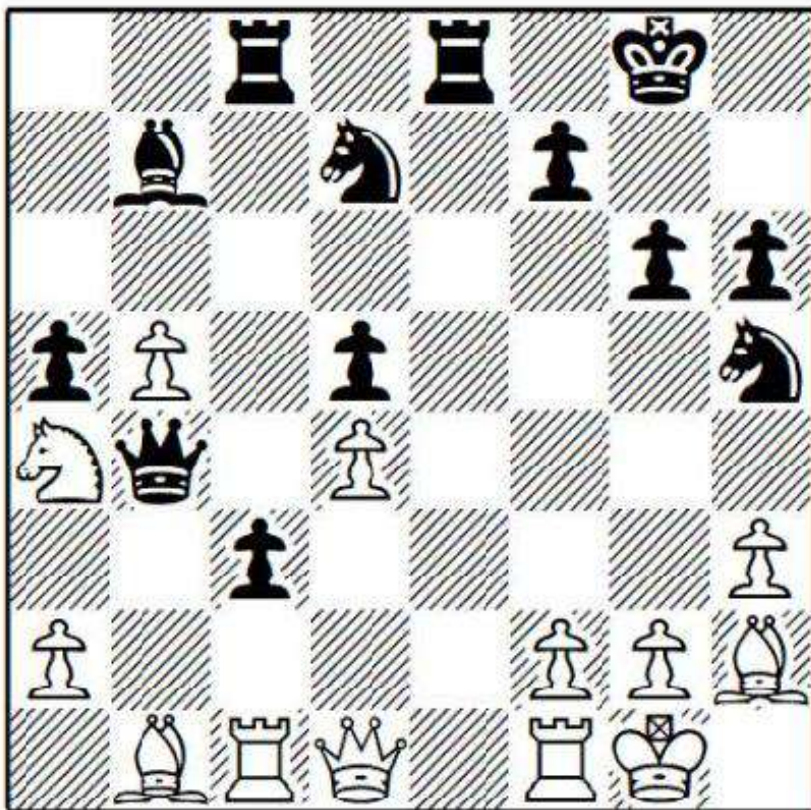
White to play



Solution

265) J.Sheng-A.Hevia  
chess.com 2021

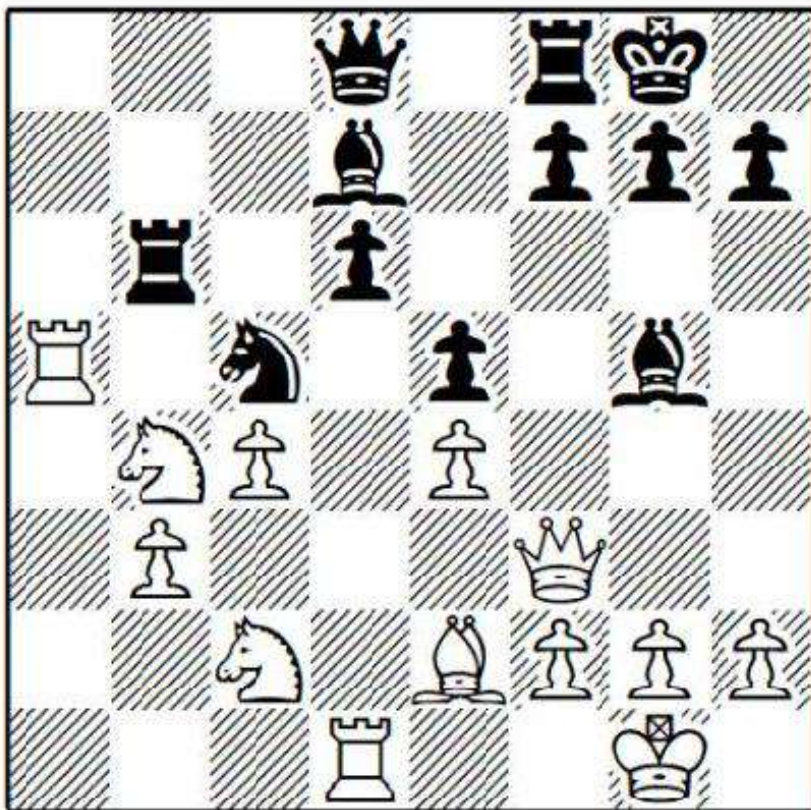
White to play



Solution

266) M.Dobrikov-M.Sebenik  
Villorba 2021

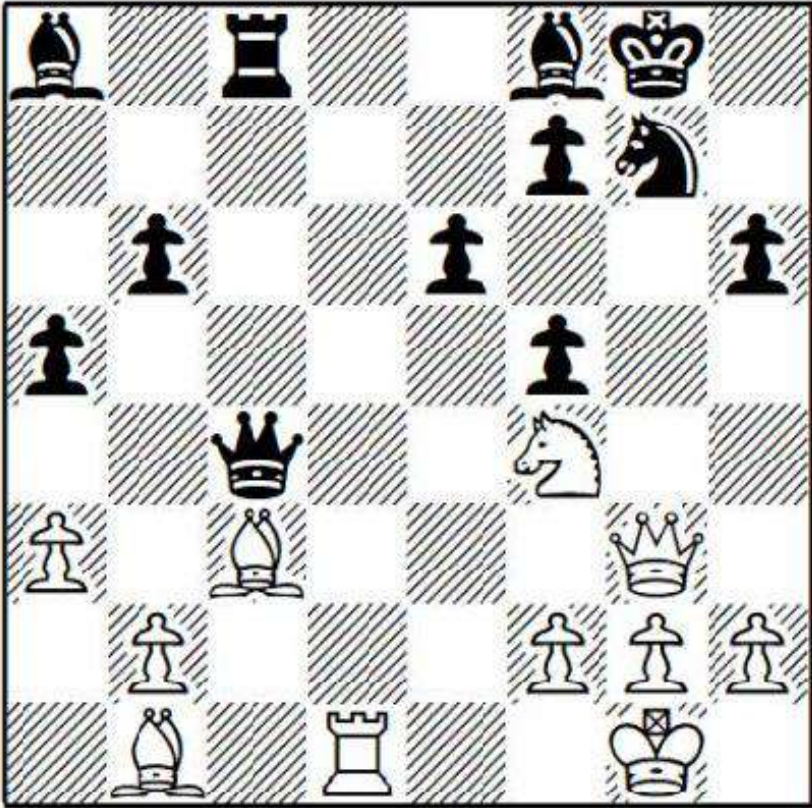
*White to play*



**Solution**

267) A.Maltsevskaya-A.Nesterov  
Moscow 2021

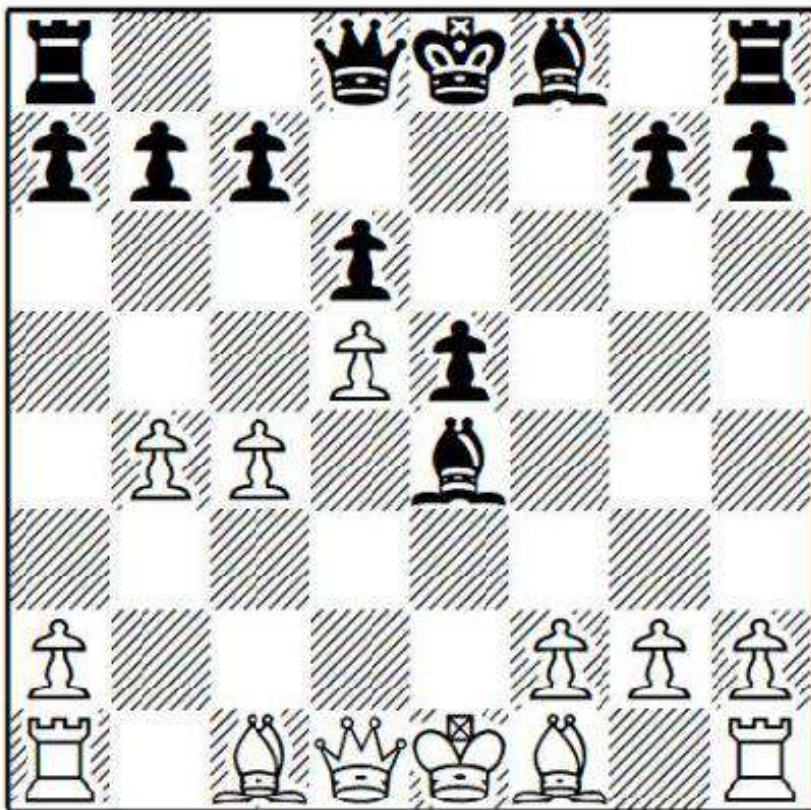
*Black to play*



**Solution**

**268) B.Krasteva-V.Bernadskiy**  
Villorba 2021

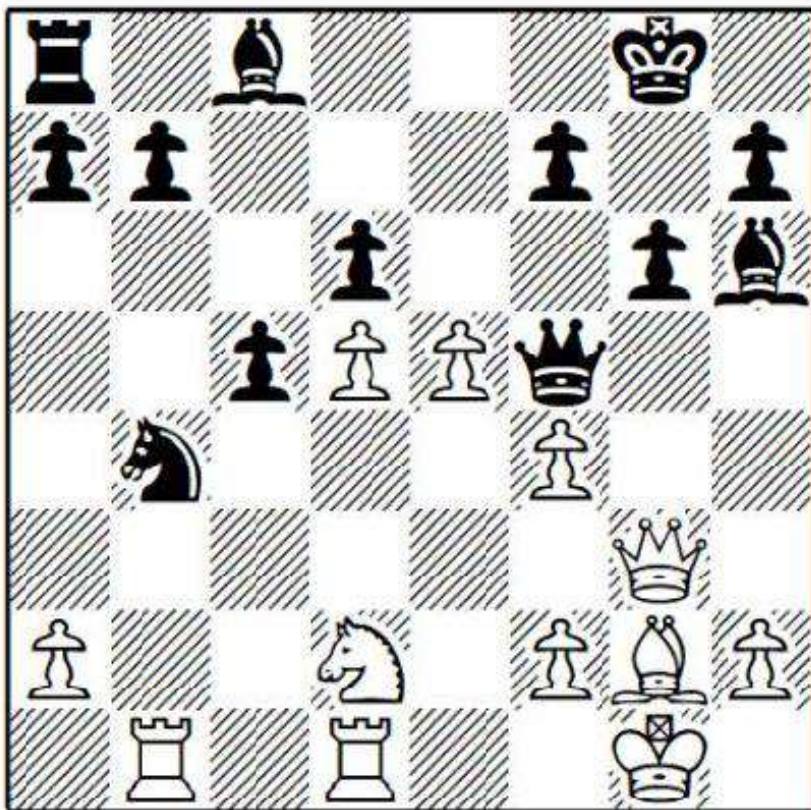
*White to play*



**Solution**

269) M.Bryakin-V.Moiseenko  
Orsha 2020

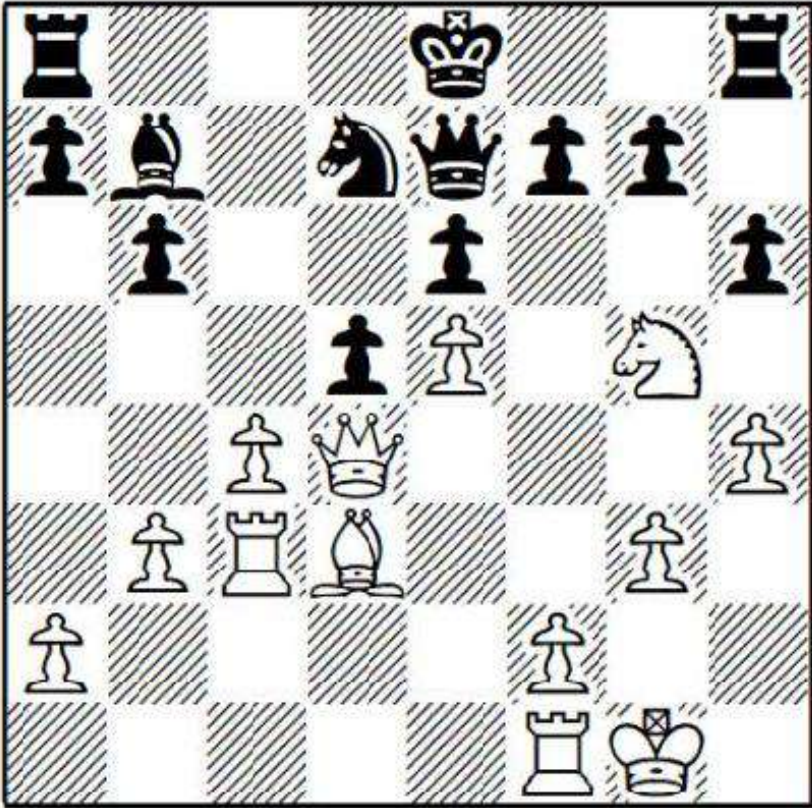
*White to play*



**Solution**

270) V.Gunina-M.Guseva  
Moscow 2021

White to play



[Solution](#)

# Chapter Six

## Solutions

### Chapter 1 Solutions

1) M.Arabidze-D.Jojua, Tbilisi 2019

**20 ... Bh6!**

Black finds a great opportunity to force a trade of dark-squared bishops, getting rid of his weak blunted piece on g7 and its strong counterpart on e3. A lax move like 20 ... Ke7? would lose the opportunity to trade bishops after 21 Bf2.

**21 Kf2 Bxe3+ 22 Kxe3 Nh6**

Black redeploys the knight to f7, ensuring White will have a hard time invading the d-file. Black has equalized.

2) A.Szeberenyi-A.Juhasz, Budapest 2021

**15 Qa6!**

This move targets the a7-pawn and prepares Nb5.

**15 ... Bb8**

Or 15 ... Ne4 16 Nb5 Nxd2 17 Nxd2 Bb6 18 a4 and White has an edge.

**16 Nb5**

and Black is unable to hold both the a-pawn and the c-file.

3) V.Burmakin-M.Mis, Graz 2020

**19 ... gxf6?**

There is no need for Black to damage his pawn structure here. After 19 ... Kxf6! White does not have a follow-up, and Black has no obvious positional deformities.

**20 d4**

Now it is difficult for Black to find a safe place for his king.

4) S.Ter Sahakyan-E.Danielian, Yerevan 2020

**9 ... Bxf3! 10 gxf3**

It looks like White will be able to use the open g-file and castle queenside. However, Black has the thematic

**10 ... c5! 11 a3**

If 11 0-0-0?! c4, Black's queenside pawns will roll down the board before White gets anything going on the kingside. Best was 11 dxc5 to open the diagonal for the dark-squared bishop after 11 ... bxc5 12 a3 Bxc3 13 Bxc3. However, Black can play 13 ... d4 14 0-0-0 Nc6 and be absolutely fine.

**11 ... Bxc3 12 Bxc3 Nc6**

12 ... c4! was better, as the bishop pair's effectiveness would have largely been sealed. Black stands better.

**5) R.Makarian-V.Gunina, Moscow 2021**

**21 Na4!**

The b4-bishop defends Black's weaknesses on a5 and c5. Therefore, it is a good idea to trade it off. Na4 also aims to plant the knight on c5 directly.

**21 ... Bxd2 22 Rxd2 Ne4 23 Rda2 e5 24 Nc5!**

and White is better due to his control of the a-file.

**6) D.Gomez Dieguez-J.Suarez Gomez, Santiago de Compostela 2020**

**20 Bh6!**

It is important to play this move before f4.

**20 ... Re8 21 f4**

Here we see the bishop is much more actively placed on h6 compared to e3. This obligates Black to part with his good bishop to trade it off, leaving White with a pleasant position.

**7) R.Bar-M.Roiz, Netanya 2019**

**14 Ne7+**

It feels a bit unnatural to trade a knight that has moved so many times for an undeveloped bishop. However, White gets the two bishops, and Black cannot do much with the extra tempi. Also, the alternative moves are not as good.

**14 ... Kh8 15 Nxc8 Rxc8 16 d3 Nf6 17 g3**

White has a small advantage.

**8) E.Sedina-S.Cholleti, lichess.org 2021**

**14 ... c5!**

It may appear strange to help liquidate White's isolated d4-pawn, but it is more important to destabilize the e5-knight and open the position for

Black's bishop pair.

**15 Qb3 Be6?!**

Missing a strong opportunity. 15 ... cxd4! 16 Nxd5 Bxe5 17 Bg5 Be6! would have been much better for Black: 18 Nxe7+ (18 Bxe7 Bxh2+ 19 Kh1 Bxd5 20 Bxd6 Bxb3 21 Bxh2 d3 would result in a Black victory following shortly) 18 ... Qxe7 19 Rxe5 Qxg5 20 Qxe6 fxe6 21 Rxg5 Rc2 lends Black great winning chances.

**16 Ne4**

and now White is fine.

**9) A.Fedorov-S.Nitin, Chennai 2020**

**14 Bc5**

After studying the position, we notice Black is doing well; White does not have clear targets, has an isolated pawn on e4, and a slightly exposed king. Thus, White should strive to equalize by forcing some trades and activating his bishop. 14 Be3 is playable but passive: 14 ... Be6 and Black is slightly better; 14 Bf2? puts the bishop on a passive square and should be avoided.

**14 ... Qc7 15 Qd6 Qxd6 16 Bxd6 Re8 17 a4**

17 Na3 was preferable, after which the game is pretty much equal.

**10) C.Bauer-F.Guilleux, Cappelle la Grande 2020**

**12 c3!**

White is ahead in development, so he tries to capitalize on it with this move. The c-file will be opened for the rooks, and the resulting black pawn on b4 will be weak.

**12 ... Qe7**

After 12 ... bxc3 13 Qxc3 Qc7 14 Rac1 Bb7 15 h3 0-0 16 Rfd1 White has a pleasant position and can continue with piece improvement. Black's pieces are much more passive, and he has to contend with his weak pawns on c6 and a5.

**13 cxb4 axb4 14 Rfc1 c5 15 Qc2**

Here White has a pleasant position due to his strong control over the light squares.

**11) D.Saduakassova-A.Smirnov, Wijk aan Zee 2020**

**26 Nf3**

Covering d4, but not the best way to utilize the knight. 26 Nd3! was better, rerouting to e6 via c5.

**12) J.Suarez Gomez-J.Gonzalez Trigal, Santiago de Compostela 2020**  
**11 Ne1!**

Preparing f4, f5, and a possible f6 to compound White's kingside space advantage. Meanwhile, the knight reroutes to the active e3-square via c2, supporting White's plan. White has a clear edge.

**11 ... Be6 12 Nc2 Qd7 13 Ne3**

The knight is optimally placed on e3, controlling the d5- and f5-squares.

**13) B.Lajthajm-M.Milosevic, Novi Banovci 2020**  
**16 c3**

The preservation of the status quo supersedes the desire to double Black's pawns, as it makes no noticeable detriment to Black's king safety and instead robs White the privilege of the bishop pair. While doubling the opponents' pawns is often a good start, here the price is too great: after the simple 16 Bxf6? gxf6, Black has an advantage with his bishop pair. Also, the open g-file is not much of a concern thanks to an eventual ... Rg8.

**14) M.Strange-K.Kristensen, Allerod 2019**  
**17 Nb5**

17 b4! was the only way to try for an advantage. It helps White gain space on the queenside and threatens the immediate b5 to force Black to decide what to do with the knight on e5. After 17 ... Nd7 (17 ... Nxf3?! 18 Bxf3 gives White unnecessary pressure along the h1-a8 diagonal) 18 Nb5, White gets a better version of the position in the game.

**17 ... Rxd1?!**

17 ... Kf8 was preferable, as there was no reason to cede control of the d-file.

**18 Rxd1 Kf8 19 Nd6 Rb8 20 Nxb7 Rxb7**

Black's knight remains on e5, which is now a permanent outpost.

**15) P.Nguyen-R.Padmini, lichess.org 2021**  
**20 a4?!**

20 Nde4 is quite obvious, but 20 ... Rfd8 21 g4! is the key; locking down the f5-square keeps White's knight on e4 forever. Black's passive g7-bishop

leaves her without much play. Starting with 20 g4 is also good, with similar lines.

**20 ... f5**

and Black is actually better; it is difficult to think of a promising plan for White.

**16) T.Ongut-D.Horvath**, Budapest 2021

**30 ... Qxe5?**

It is tempting to double the white pawns and ruin his majority, but the white king is left with an avenue to invade the dark squares. 30 ... Qd8 or some similar queen retreat was necessary; White is still a pawn up, but it is not easy to push these pawns, and the position should be within the drawing range.

**31 fxe5 b4 32 Kf2**

and the white king should win the game when it reaches the queenside.

**17) M.Poleg-D.Zifroni**, Israel 2019

**10 ... a6?!**

Preparing ... b5, but a little slowly. A better move would be 10 ... c5! to help open the a1-h8 diagonal for the bishop. A sample line is 11 Qe2 Rb8 12 Kb1 Qa5 13 Nd2 cxd4 14 Nb3 Qc7 and Black has a comfortable game.

**11 g4?**

White is not in time to play h4 and g5, so this move only weakens the pawn structure and the knight on f3. White shortly found himself in a worse position. He could have set up a strong center with 11 Bb3 b5 12 e4 c5 13 e5 cxd4 14 Qxd4 Be7 with a balanced game.

**18) Q.Zhou-A.Chumpitaz**, chess.com 2020

**14 Qe1?**

The best move was 14 f5!, kicking the bishop away from controlling the d5-square. A possible continuation would be 14 ... Bd7 15 Bg5 Rac8 16 Bxf6 Bxf6 17 Rc1 and White wins the outpost on d5.

**14 ... Bc4?!**

Here Black missed the thematic break 14 ... d5!, which would have equalized.

**19) E.Shtembuliak-P.Balakrishnan**, chess.com 2021

**20 ... a5!**

This move is critical to prevent White from playing a5 himself and potentially softening up the b6-pawn. While it may look like it opens a hole on b5, White is thoroughly un-equipped to exploit this, and Black is well prepared for ... Nb4.

**20) M.Venkatesh-D.Eraschenkov**, Chennai 2020

**13 Be3!**

Trading off Black's best piece to fight for control of crucial dark squares. This move also frees the g5-square for a white knight and dares Black to open the f-file for White's rook.

**13 ... h6**

13 ... Bxe3 14 fxe3 opens a file for the rook, with an imminent e4 pawn break to follow.

**14 Bxa7 Rxa7 15 Nh4 Nde5 16 f4**

Forcing more favorable trades.

**16 ... Nxd3 17 Qxd3 0-0 18 Ng6 Re8 19 Rae1**

White has a commanding position due to his active pieces and grip over the dark squares.

**21) T.Willemze-E.Hoeksema**, Netherlands 2020

**29 ... Rd8?**

While it might seem to be the obvious choice, this move demotes the rook to passive defense, and White is able to win the d-pawn anyway. 29 ... Rb1+ 30 Kg2 Ra1 would equalize. Rooks belong behind passed pawns! If 31 Rxd6 g5!, White must either give up his a-pawn or allow Black to fix the kingside pawn structure favorably.

**30 a6 Kf8 31 Rb4! Ra8 32 Rb6**

and now ... Ke7 is met with Rb7+ and a7, so Black resigned.

**22) E.Nguyen-G.Tokhirjonova**, chess.com 2021

**16 Nd1**

Not the best way to address the threat to b3. 16 Nb1! was superior. The knight is much appier using the route b1-d2-f3-e5 than d1-e3.

**23) A.Pichot-L.Supi**, chess.com 2020

**25 ... e5!**

A thematic break to open the e-file. It also wins a pawn.

**26 h3 exd4?!**

Here Black missed 26 ... Nf6 which would win the e4-pawn.

**27 hxg4 d3 28 Bxd3 Nxd3 29 Rxd3 Rxe4**

After some mild fireworks, Black holds an advantage because of his bishop pair and control of the e-file.

**24) K.Shevchenko-Y.Liu**, chess.com 2020

**53 Nc3?**

53 Nf4! would have ended the game, as after 53 ... Kd7 54 Nh5 Bxh5 55 gxh5 White has the outside passed pawn, which guarantees a win.

**53 ... Bb3?**

Black missed the freeing 53 ... h5!, trading off the kingside pawns to bring the game closer to a draw.

**54 Ne2**

Now White is winning again.

**25) E.Postny-A.Lenderman**, chess.com 2019

**22 ... Ng4?**

22 ... Qc4! or 22 ... Qc2! was necessary. Since Black is up the exchange, it makes sense to force the queen trade to make White's pawns weaker. 22 ... Qc3? 23 Qxc3 Rxc3 does not work because after 24 a5 bxa5 25 bxa5, Black cannot take the pawn due to 25 ... Rxa5?! 26 Bd2. If the black rook were on c2 or c4 instead, this move would not be a pin.

**23 Rc1**

Black cannot immediately trade queens anymore, so White has good holding chances.

**26) T.Meurs-J.Martinez Alcantara**, Cappelle la Grande 2020

**13 b4?!**

While this move is highly tempting for the prospect of rescuing the bishop on a4 from the clutches of the coming ... Nc5 and to gain space, it also weakens the c4-pawn considerably. Better was improving the position with something like 13 f3 Nc5 14 Qd2. Losing the light-squared bishop here is not a cause for concern.

**13 ... Ne5 14 Bb3 Bd7 15 h3 Rac8**

Black got counterplay and equalized.

**27) G.Yilmaz-A.Isik, Antalya 2020**

**27 ... Rc5!**

Black activates the rook horizontally. While it might look more attractive to invade the d-file with a move like 27 ... Rd2?!, it is not as dangerous as it looks, and after 28 Re4 Rxa2 29 Qg3+ Qg7 30 Qf3 White, with threats of Nxe6 and Rg4, can force a repetition.

**28 Rf1?**

The white rook moves to a defensive position, which is a mistake. 28 Qe3 was necessary to unpin the queen and avoid trades.

**28 ... Rf5?**

Black errs back, giving White a crucial tempo to control squares on the 5th rank. 28 ... Rd4 was better. Black is doing very well after 29 g4 Re5.

**29 g4**

and the black rook is repulsed from its commanding post on f5.

**28) J.Van Overdam-T.Mollema, Netherlands 2020**

**14 ... Ne5!**

We can see that the rook on c1 and queen on c7 have some uncomfortable tension, with Nd5 being an immediate threat in typical Hedgehog fashion. Black's queen is not comfortable elsewhere, so he should opt to move the c6-knight instead. The doubled e-pawns may seem weak, but White cannot take advantage of them.

**15 Nxe5 dxe5 16 Ne4 Nxe4**

16 ... Nd7 was best, with equality. The white knight may look impressive, but it does not do much.

**29) S.Halkias-O.Almeida Quintana, chess.com 2020**

**18 Nxd6!**

Sacrificing the exchange. 18 Rxd6? would be met by 18 ... a6 19 Rxd7 axb5 and the rook on d7 is trapped by an eventual ... Bc8 and Qd6.

**18 ... Bxc6 19 dxc6 Nc5 20 Qd5**

Though White is down material, the strong knight on d6 and the passive position of all of Black's pieces give White a winning advantage. The c-pawn is close to promoting, and with Bh3 coming up White will easily

regain the exchange while retaining his other positional plusses.

**30) A.Hakobyan-H.Yeritsyan, Yerevan 2020**

**14 Qh5?!**

Missing an important opportunity. White could have taken the bishop pair and activated his rook on a1 with 14 Nxf6+ Qxf6 15 a4!, when Black will have a tough time after Ra3-f3.

**14 ... Bd7 15 Bd3**

15 Nxf6+ would have still presented White with a slight advantage after 15 ... Qxf6 16 Qg5.

**15 ... Re8 16 Bd2**

Black has managed to deploy his pieces successfully. While White's space advantage gives him some practical chances, the position is now balanced.

## **Chapter 2 Solutions**

**31) B.Ahlander-N.Pedersen, Denmark 2020**

**29 g4?!**

White misses an important chance and pursues a slower, less effective plan instead. White should have played 29 Bxf6! to ruin Black's pawn structure. Then after 29 ... gxf6 30 Rd6 f5 (30 ... Rc2? 31 Rb6) 31 Rb6 Rc7 32 Kh2 Black's pieces are tied down to defending his weak pawns, and White will walk the king in and win material.

**29 ... Rc6**

Black has equalized. However, with the bishop against a weaker knight and pawns on both flanks, White is still pressing and went on to win.

**32) D.Dvirnyy-A.Pichot, chess.com 2020**

**20 Rxc6+?**

There is no need to take the queen immediately since there is no way that Black can unpin it. Better is 20 h4! threatening h5. Now Black must spend time parrying this threat with something like 20 ... Kh8 21 Rxc6 hxc6 22 h5, when Black's material advantage is roughly mitigated by his complete lack of development and somewhat unsafe king.

**20 ... hxc6 21 Rd1?!**

21 h4 was still best, but not as strong as before.

**33) A.Jimenez Ruano-E.Lever, Barcelona 2021**

**17 ... Qxd4!**

In positions like this, where White has a Maroczy-type pawn structure, Black almost always wants the queens off the board, as it will make it a lot easier to defend the pawn on d6 and generate counterplay. 17 ... Nd7?! would be a good move, if not for 18 Nd5! and Black only has enough for equality after 18 ... Qxd4 (18 ... Bf8 19 Ne7+ would allow White to trade off the light-squared bishop on c6, with a slight edge) 19 Nxe7+ Kf8 20 Bxd4 Kxe7 21 Bxg7 Nc5 22 Re3 e5.

**18 Rxd4 Nd7**

Black may relocate the dark-squared bishop to f6 and the knight to c5 or e5. White's light-squared bishop stands passively on f3, and it is not clear that his Maroczy Bind is so useful here. Black stands better.

**34) M.Mrndjic-S.Zenelaj, Konjic 2021**

**16 Bxe7?!**

White willingly trades off his best piece in the position. 16 Be3 should have been preferred, as after 16 ... Nf4 17 Bf1 Black feels more cramped because no pieces have been traded, and White has stronger support for an eventual queenside expansion with b4 and c5.

**16 ... Qxe7**

White cannot immediately take advantage of the d-file, so Black can slowly improve his position. Also, note how the pawns on c4 and e4 hinder White's remaining bishop.

**35) E.Grinberg-A.Ipatov, chess.com 2021**

**17 ... Be5?**

Black protects his d6-pawn but gives away the two-bishop advantage. 17 ... Re6! was a greatly superior way to continue. A subsequent ... Qe8 would place insurmountable pressure on e4. After 18 Rbd1 Qe8 19 Qb3 b5 20 Bxd6 c4 Black retains the bishop pair, recovers the pawn on the next move, and maintains pressure on White's position.

**18 Bxe5 dxe5 19 Qc3**

Now the pawn structure is symmetrical, and the position is even.

**36) M.Iskandarov-B.Daneshvar**, Rasht 2020

**22 c4!**

White protects the b-pawn and tactically saves the bishop while preserving material parity and a sizable advantage. Less good is 22 Bg3?! Qa5 and Black wins the g-pawn or a-pawn.

**37) A.Timofeev-B.Murtazin**, Moscow 2020

White realizes he can force a favorable trade of pieces with

**15 Bxe4! dxe4 16 dxc5 bxc5**

and now White has an edge due to Black's isolated c-pawn.

**17 Qxd8?**

Keeping queens on the board with 17 Qe2 was better than the game continuation, presenting White with a small advantage.

**17 ... Rfxd8**

With the queens gone, it is surprisingly not as easy to target the c5-pawn.

**38) A.Zatonskih-O.Zimina**, chess.com 2020

**13 Bd6!**

White trades off Black's dark-squared bishop, exposing the weak dark squares in Black's position.

**39) D.Espineira Gonzalez-A.Vidarte Morales**, Santo Tirso 2020

**31 Rxc4?**

While this may look attractive, it does not work since White does not have much of a follow-up. 31 Bg5 was best, although any bishop move should suffice to keep White's winning advantage. After 31 ... c4 32 h3 White is a healthy piece ahead.

**31 ... fxg4 32 Nd1 Qxd5**

Black's king is safe, while White's pieces look sad and clumped.

**40) A.Saric-E.Gullaksen**, Prague 2020

**12 Bc5!**

White puts a question to the queen to drive it away from hitting d4. 12 Be7?! immediately would not work due to 12 ... Re8 13 Na4 (not 13 Bxf6? Bxf6 14 Qf4 Qxd4 and we see why the black queen needed to be driven off b6) 13 ... Qc7 14 Bxf6 Bxf6 and Black has no problems.

**12 ... Qa6**

If 12 ... Qc7 13 cxd5 cxd5 14 Nb5!, the a-pawn is not salvageable.

**13 Be7 Re8 14 Bxf6 Bxf6 15 Qf4**

Here, Black cannot take on d4 with his queen, so White gains the bishop back and gets pressure on the d5-square while relieving pressure off d4. The ensuing weakness of the d5-pawn will prove decisive.

**15 ... Bxg5 16 Qxg5 Be6 17 cxd5**

White is up a clean pawn.

**41) R.Li-C.Ali Marandi**, chess.com 2021

**17 ... Nxc3?**

Black goes material hunting, severely underestimating White's attack. Best was the prudent 17 ... Bb6 18 Nh5 Nf6 and the game goes on.

**18 bxc3 Bxc3 19 Rxe6! Rxe6 20 Bxe6 Bxa1 21 Ba2**

With all of White's remaining pieces pointing at Black's king, it will be hard to survive the imminent onslaught. While not entirely perfect, White conducted the rest of the game in spectacular fashion:

**21 ... Bd4 22 Qg4?!**

22 Nf5 should be preferred; there is no reason to commit the queen so quickly.

**22 ... Kh8?**

22 ... Qf6 23 Nf5 Re8! gives Black sufficient play for equality.

**23 Nf5 Bf6 24 Bxh6! g6**

24 ... gxh6 25 Nxh6 and Nxf7 will win.

**25 Bxf7! gxf5 26 Bg7+!! Bxg7 27 Qh5+ 1-0**

**42) D.Mijatovic-A.Moksh**, Paracin 2021

**23 ... f5?**

Black misses the opportunity to harm White's pawn structure: 23 ... Bxd5! 24 exd5 Ne7 and with ... f5 coming Black's central formation demonstrates a clear superiority.

**24 Nce3**

24 Ncb6 was a slightly better way of reinforcing the knight on d5.

**24 ... Bh6 25 Rcd1**

Now White has cemented the d5-knight, and the position is balanced.

**43) J.Paprocki-D.Mischuk**, Pokrzywna 2020

**11 dxc5!**

White favorably changes the central pawn situation.

**11 ... bxc5?**

11 ... dxc5 was best, although 12 a4! still results in a White advantage by virtue of the domineering knight on c4.

**12 Bxd6**

The piece on d6 is protected by the Bxh7+ tactic.

**44) V.Platt-D.Kosic, Budapest 2020**

**17 ... f5!**

Kicking the knight to f2.

**18 Nf2**

After 18 Ne5 Nxe5 19 fxe5 Qa4 Black can pressure the c-pawn by setting up ... c5 and ... Rac8. Most of White's pawns are on the same color as Black's bishop, making them more vulnerable and targetable.

**18 ... Na5**

Now that the white knight cannot move to e5, Black redeploys his knight to a better location.

**45) O.Perez Mitjans-T.Sosa, Barcelona 2020**

**17 ... Ke7!**

The best move. Black would want to avoid 17 ... Nd7? 18 Qd2 and all of a sudden, the kingside is weak; if 18 ... 0-0-0 then 19 Ke2 f6 20 Be6 with serious pressure.

**18 Nxf6 Kxf6 19 Qe2 Ke7 20 0-0-0 a5**

Black's king is actually quite safe in the center. It is White who needs to be careful that his king does not become exposed on the queenside.

**46) I.Iljiushenok-H.Hayrapetyan, Moscow 2019**

**22 Qg3?**

White miscalculates the position and goes for the slow f4-f5, missing an important opportunity: 22 gxf6! Nxf6 23 Bh3 and, surprisingly, Black has no way to defend the pawn on e6, since 23 ... Kf7 24 Nd4 White is crushing.

**22 ... Ng7 23 Kh1 f5**

Now Black's kingside structure is solid, and White's f4-f5 push is nothing but a dream.

**47) S.Dev-A.Kovalev**, Marianske Lazne 2020

**14 Ba3?**

White is only thinking about his own plans, but this is not the place for that. White already had to recognize that ... d5 was inevitable and try to defend with 14 Be2 d5 15 cxd5 cxd5 16 f4 Qb6+ 17 Kh1 Neg4 18 Bxg4 Nxg4 19 e5; while he may be slightly worse, the end is quite far for White.

**14 ... d5!**

This is a thematic move whenever White has pawns on c4 and e4. Black blasts open the position, and White's piece coordination is so poor that he is actually lost.

**48) M.Gagunashvili-D.Lomsadze**, Tbilisi 2020

**18 Nb4?**

Missing an important chance: 18 bxa6! cxd3 19 b4 and White's queenside pawns are rolling and provide more than enough compensation for the missing piece.

**18 ... axb5**

While White still retains an edge, 18 bxa6 was much stronger.

**49) R.Kevlishvili-F.Pavic**, lichess.org 2021

**14 ... Bxf3?**

14 ... Bf5 would have been superior. The important thing in this exercise is to refrain from making the tempting exchange sacrifice on f3.

**15 Nxf3 Rxf3?**

Consistent, but not enough.

**16 gxf3 Qh4 17 Qb3!**

Black's army is insufficient to put real pressure on the white king, and counterplay against the center will grant White a winning advantage.

**50) M.Song-T.Gareev**, lichess.org 2021

**10 b3?!**

Not the best way to deal with the central tension. Better would have been 10 dxc6 bxc6 11 f4 to gain influence on the kingside and (more importantly) prevent ... cxd5.

**10 ... cxd5**

Black uses the opportunity to transform the central pawn structure favorably.

**11 Nxd5 Nexd5 12 exd5 Bf5**  
and Black stands well.

**51) V.Asadli-A.Fidalgo**, Lisbon 2020

**19 ... Nd7?!**

Black decides to trade bishops to ease the pressure. However, this is a mistake. Black did not have to defend the pawn and could instead activate his rook because after 19 ... Rc8! 20 Bxb6 Qc2! White cannot defend the e-pawn and prevent ... Nxd5 at the same time.

**20 Bxg7 Kxg7 21 Bb5!**

White gets the bishop to c6, where it becomes a monster. Meanwhile, Black's knight does not have as much mobility and is less well placed.

**52) M.Calzetta Ruiz-J.Seo**, Stockholm 2020

**18 e5!**

An important freeing move to prevent a piece blockade on e5.

**18 ... dxe5 19 Bxb7?**

A crucial mistake. White had to find the incredible 19 Nxe6! to hold the balance: 19 ... fxe6 20 g5 hxg5 21 hxg5 Rxh3 22 gxf6 and somehow, the pawn on f6 promises sufficient play, with Black's pieces being ineffective at stopping it. If 22 ... Rh4 23 fxg7 Ke7 24 fxe6 Rd4 25 Bxb7 Rxd1+ 26 Qxd1 Qxb7 27 Qh5, the g7-pawn will most likely claim Black's rook, with a draw.

**19 ... Qxb7 20 Nb3 exf5**

Now Black will be a clear pawn up with a safe king.

**53) I.Borocz-M.Kobalia**, Gibraltar 2020

**17 ... Bxd5!**

As ugly as this move looks, Black recognizes that giving up the bishop pair is better than living with the knight on d5. It is important the white knight on g3 cannot be easily transferred to d5. The bishop on f6 is not ideal, but it can come to g5 to inhibit a future Rc1; the pawn on c2 is quite weak.

**18 Qxd5 Qc7! 19 Nh5 Bg5 20 Qd3 Rfc8**

It is surprisingly difficult for White to hold c2, and his prospects on the kingside are not looking so promising. Black should be better here.

**54) A.Rychagov-S.Sevian**, lichess.org 2021

**11 ... Bxc3?**

Black goes for a forceful continuation, but this is ill-advised. 11 ... Nd7! was the way to go. After 12 cxb6 axb6 White's dark-squared bishop is not well placed to protect the weak c3-pawn, and Black will be able to utilize the open a- and c-files to recoup the pawn later in the game. 11 ... Qc7! was also viable, with similar ideas.

**12 Qxd8 Rxd8 13 Bxe7 Re8 14 Rac1 Bb4? 15 Bd6?**

15 a3! would have won: 15 ... Ba6 (or 15 ... Bxa3?! 16 c6 Rxe7 17 cxb7 Rxb7 18 Rc8+ Kg7 19 Nd4 with the unstoppable threat of Bf3) 16 Bxa6 Nxa6 17 axb4 Rxe7 18 Rc4 and White should convert this position to a win.

**15 ... Ba6**

White is only slightly better now, and Black eventually drew the game.

**55) G.Froewis-L.Leisch**, Austria 2021

**24 c5?!**

Normally in King's Indian structures this is a thematic pawn breakthrough. However, with the lack of minor pieces on the board here, it is not as strong or threatening. 24 cxb5! was best here. It is surprisingly hard to attack the doubled isolated b-pawns, which are defended by White's bad bishop. White gets to target Black's backward pawn on c7, and the pawn on b4 prevents Black from establishing a blockade on c5.

**24 ... Nc4**

Black's knight finds an annoying outpost on c4, and White no longer has an advantage.

**56) S.Shankland-D.Anton Guijarro**, Prague 2020

**11 Nxd5?**

While attractive at first sight, White has to evaluate the consequences of the sacrifice correctly. It turns out Black has a strong resource that was missed in the game. 11 Be3! was necessary to try and consolidate the position.

**11 ... exd5 12 Qxd5 Qb6?**

Here Black missed 12 ... Qa5! 13 Qxa8 Nd6 14 Qd5 Be6 and White must cede his queen to stave off the attack.

**13 Qxd7**

White has a clear advantage, being up two pawns. However, Black does have some compensation due to White's more exposed king and undeveloped kingside.

**57) K.Jakubowski-O.Bilych, Prague 2020**

**27 Rg4!**

Noticing the weakness of the kingside, White devises a plan involving an exchange sacrifice.

**27 ... f5 28 Rg6**

An interesting sharp line is 28 Qg6+!? Ke7 29 Ncd4 fxe4 30 Nxc6+ Qxc6 31 Ng5 Kd8 32 Nxe6+ Ke7 33 Be3 Nf4 34 Nxf4 Qxg6 35 Nxc6+ Ke8 36 e6 Rc7 37 Bf4 Bxe2 38 Bxc7 Bd5 and the endgame is most likely drawn.

**28 ... Nce7?**

28 ... Nd8 was best, but White can keep up the pressure with 29 Nfd4 planning Bf3-h5. Black must continue playing accurately with 29 ... Rf7 to stay in the game.

**29 Rxe7!**

Now White is winning due to Black's exposed structure, many weaknesses, and less active pieces.

**58) A.Esipenko-R.Padmini, Gibraltar 2020**

**16 bxc4?!**

This move misses out on a combination that would have led to a highly favorable position. Esipenko likely misevaluated the position following 16 Nc5! Bxc5 17 dxc5 Qe7, where White can actually attain a nearly winning advantage with something like 18 Qg4 g6 19 bxc4 Bxc4 20 e4!.

**59) S.Sargsyan-T.Petrosian, Yerevan 2021**

**39 Nxe7?**

39 Rxe7+! is obvious enough, but the follow-up is crucial: 39 ... Kh6 40 Bg2! is presumably what White missed; the precariously placed knight on e4 puts Black in a very unfortunate situation. After 40 ... Rc2 (or 40 ... Nxe7? 41 d6 and wins) 41 Rb7 the b6-pawn's fall will soon lead to Black's defeat.

**39 ... Kh6!**

was probably underestimated; the g7-knight is now quite misplaced for the purposes of advancing the d-pawn. The position should be drawn with best play.

**60) N.Visakh-S.Yudin**, Chennai 2020

**33 Rxd5?**

White miscalculates the resulting simplifications. After 33 Rxa7?! Rb2, too, White is only slightly better, as Black gets counterplay. The correct move was 33 Nc2! Nxc2 34 Rxd5 and now ... Rb2 is prevented by Rd2, the a5-pawn is covered, and Black's e4- or a7-pawn will soon fall with a likely victory for White.

**33 ... Nxd5 34 Bxe4 Ra1!**

and Black wins the a-pawn, guaranteeing sufficient counterplay to hold a draw.

### Chapter 3 Solutions

**61) B.Badea-M.Manolache**, Bucharest 2019

**14 ... Nb8?**

Black moves his knight out of the way to develop the bishop. However, on b8, the knight blocks the rook's development, and it will eventually have to return to its lowly post on d7 again because the c6- and a6-squares are not viable. A better redeployment of the knight would have been 14 ... Nb6 preparing ... Be6 and ... d5. Here the knight at least targets the c4-square.

**15 Nc4 Bd7 16 Qd2 Bb5 17 Rfc1**

White's knight occupies the strong c4-square, which would not have been possible if Black had played 14 ... Nb6.

**62) J.Yu-G.Guseinov**, chess.com 2019

**11 f3?**

Black played ... Bg4 to provoke f3, and White willingly played it. This pawn move weakens the dark squares and lessens the influence of the light-squared bishop. A move like 11 Qe1 would have been better. White can prepare h3 instead of f3 to kick the bishop and control the g4-square.

**11 ... Bd7**

White would love to have the pawn on f2 here.

**63) A.Pichot-N.Delgado Ramirez**, chess.com 2020

**12 Rb1!**

This is a common move to prepare b4 and prevent any tricks Black may have on the a1-h8 diagonal. An example of such a trick would be 12 b3?! Nb4!, when Black can capitalize on the pin by winning the pawn on e4 after 13 Rd2 Bxe4. 12 a3?! looks nice to prepare b4, but Black can take advantage of the fresh weakness on b3 by playing 12 ... Nc5.

**12 ... Nc5 13 b4**

Here Black does not have access to the b3-square.

**64) A.Kaliksteyn-J.Colas**, New York 2020

**11 ... Ng7!**

Rerouting the knight to f5, where it will target the white bishop. 11 ... Nf6 would be inferior because the knight would not do much on f6 or e4.

**65) D.Divya-M.Karthikeyan**, Gibraltar 2020

**17 a4!**

White notes that Black's queenside pawn constellation is fixed by the dominant queen on a6 and knight on c4. Therefore, she aims to create a weakness on b6 via the pawn thrust a4-a5.

**66) G.Sargissian-S.Halkias**, chess.com 2020

**20 f3!**

White should aim to play e4, gaining central space and driving Black's bishop from the d5-square.

**20 ... Rxa1 21 Rxa1 Ra8 22 Rxa8 Bxa8 23 e4 Nc5 24 Na5**

White's bishop pair coupled with the weakness of the b4-pawn will spell Black's doom.

**67) A.Shabalov-S.Sevian**, chess.com 2019

**12 ... Nbd7?!**

Allowing White to fix the one weakness in his position. A move that did not block the queen from its control of d5 like 12 ... Be7 would have been more accurate. 12 ... Bxc3 was also possible, reducing White's central influence to prepare ... Nbd7.

**13 d5!**

With this freeing move, White now gets an edge thanks to the pin on the h4-d8 diagonal.

**68) R.Zhalmakhanov-Z.Agmanov, Almaty 2020**

**35 h5!**

White creates a second weakness on the kingside.

**35 ... gxh5**

Black cannot play 35 ... g5? because 36 Nf5+ wins a pawn.

**36 Rh1 Kf6 37 Rxh5**

and White has an advantage due to his superior pawn structure.

**69) A.Pavlidis-M.Bartel, chess.com 2020**

**24 ... Rxd2!**

Black gives back the exchange to relieve pressure. Hanging on to the exchange with 24 ... Bd4?! 25 Bf4 Rac8 26 Rc1 b5 is not as convincing; White may develop some counterplay on the kingside with 27 h4 bxc4 28 h5.

**25 Qxd2 Qxe5 26 Ng4 Qd4**

Here Black's queen and bishop are much better than White's queen and knight. If White exchanges queens, the bishop on d4 will control the b2-pawn and restrict the awkwardly placed knight on g4.

**70) J.Lopez-S.Rijnaarts, Netherlands 2020**

**23 ... Nxc5?!**

Black missed the chance to play the strong 23 ... Nc3! 24 Rac1 d4 and the knight is well protected on c3. The upcoming march of the e-pawn will grant Black a huge advantage.

**24 Nxc5 d4**

Compare this to the solution; this is a worse version because the white knight on d3 was superfluous, and the black knight on c3 would have been strong. Here White has a much easier time defending.

**71) C.Yoo-C.Hilby, Burlingame 2019**

**22 ... Kd7!**

Black brings the king off the dangerous e-file and protects the pawn on e6.

**23 Qf3**

Now if 23 Ng5 Nf5 White has no intermediate checks, so he loses material after 24 Qf4 Bd6.

**23 ... Qf5 24 Qb3 g5 25 Bg3 h4 26 Bh2 c4**

Despite being in the center, Black's king is very safe behind the strong pawns on the c- and d-files. Black is up two pawns and has a winning advantage.

**72) S.Fedorchuk-G.Arnaudov, Munich 2020**

**12 Ba3!**

White seizes the chance to trade off Black's good bishop. 12 Nc3, while tempting, would not be as good: 12 ... c6 13 Nxa4 Bd6 14 Re3 f5 and Black's bishop pair promises him good compensation for the pawn.

**12 ... Bxa3 13 Nxa3**

White gets a favorable knight versus bishop position, with great grinding chances.

**73) G.Ayats Llobera-R.Pogorelov, Barcelona 2020**

**23 b4!**

White rebuffs Black's attack on the queenside and frees the bishop to develop.

**23 ... Nc4**

Black gets this nice outpost for the knight, but it blocks the influence of the rooks, and he cannot do much with just the knight alone.

**24 Kg1?!**

24 Bf3! a5 25 Qe1 was better, as an attack on the kingside is coming soon; the black rooks are quite useless when blocked by the strong-looking knight on c4.

**74) A.Sarana-A.Firouzja, chess.com 2020**

**17 b3?**

White relaxes for one move, underestimating the power of Black's attack. 17 Kg2! should have been played to bring the rooks over to control the h-file. Then 17 ... f5 18 Be2 does not work as well for Black; Rh1 on the next move will neutralize Black's threats.

**17 ... f5!**

and Black's position springs to life.

**18 Bf3?!**

Slightly better is 18 exf5, but still unpleasant due to 18 ... Nf6 and Black gets a strong pawn formation.

**18 ... f4 19 gxf4 exf4 20 Bxf4 Ne5**

Black has an immense attack against White's open king.

**75) N.Meshkovs-J.Liang**, lichess.org 2021

**20 ... b5?**

We are always tempted to push pawns where the other side's king is, but it is also important to consider the opponent's intentions of doing the same. 20 ... h5! would have stopped 21 g4? in view of 21 ... hxg4 22 Rxg4?? Rxb2 winning a piece. 21 h3 is more prudent, but Black retains an edge following something like 21 ... Qe4.

**21 g4**

and g5 will pick up the d-pawn, with approximate equality.

**76) C.Robledo-R.Duje**, Mendoza 2020

**18 ... Qc2!**

Up a pawn, Black makes the right decision to liquidate material. The more passive 18 ... Nc6? cedes a lot of play to White on the queenside, giving up a lot of compensation for the pawn. After 19 Rac1, the position is roughly balanced; the b6-pawn is unlikely to make a meaningful contribution for quite some time.

**19 Qxb4 Qxe2**

Though it looks dangerous, the queen is safe, and Black does not have to worry about pins on the queenside as much.

**77) M.Haast-F.Nijboer**, Netherlands 2020

**21 Nf2**

21 b4! was White's best try, cementing b5 as a target and securing c3 for the white knight. After 21 ... e5 22 Ndc3 exf4 23 Nxf4 Ne5 Black's strong c-pawn and White's weak e-pawn are counter-balanced by White's pressure on the b5-pawn and open lines for his pieces.

**21 ... e5**

White is forced to open the b-file, which only helps Black.

**22 bxc4**

22 b4 now allows 22 ... d5! and the awkward positioning of White's pieces gets exposed.

**78) V.Nozdrachev-V.Zarubitski, Orsha 2020**

**17 ... Re5!**

A strong defensive rook lift to provide more safety in front of the king. Of course, not 17 ... fxg6?? 18 hxg6+ and Black loses, as 18 ... Kxg6 (18 ... Kh8 19 Bxh6 leads to inevitable mate) 19 Qd3+ Qf5 20 Bf7+ forces the black king away from the defense of his queen.

**18 Rxf6?!**

White sacrifices an exchange, but Black can sacrifice it right back to quell White's attack. 18 a3? allows one idea of 17 ... Re5 to be revealed: 18 ... fxg6 19 hxg6+ Kxg6 20 Qd3+ Qf5 and there is no Bf7+ tactic to win Black's queen. Instead, 18 Rg2 Qe7 prepares ... Bg5 and Black is fine.

**18 ... gxf6 19 Bf4 Rxd5! 20 Qxd5 Qe6**

and Black is better.

**79) E.Kupervaser-M.Nedobora, Ramat Gan 2020**

**25 h4?**

25 Re4! is the best way to defend: 25 ... Bxg5 (25 ... f5?? 26 Rxc4 fxg4 27 Bxh6 is of course not an option) 26 Rxc4 and White is doing absolutely fine.

**25 ... Bxg5 26 hxg5 e4!**

and the black knight's return to e5 gives him an advantage.

**80) J.Yu-P.Basso, Villorba 2021**

**11 Be5!**

Seeing as Black intends to remove the f4-bishop with ... Ne6 anyways, White correctly decides to provoke the weakening ... f6 before exchanging it.

**11 ... f6 12 Bxc7 Qxc7 13 b4!**

and with the g7-bishop rendered ineffective for now, only White can be better here.

**81) H.Wang-D.Yuffa, Gibraltar 2020**

**17 Rfe1?**

White misses Black's idea. 17 g4! might look bad because it weakens the f4-square, but Black's dark-squared bishop is doomed to passivity. After 17 ... Nd4 18 Rae1 White has a slight advantage. Black's visually impressive

d4-knight fails to facilitate any active operations. 17 Be3 does not promise White anything: 17 ... Nxe3 18 Qxe3 Kh8 with the idea of ... Ng8, followed by Bh6, and re-routing the knight to f5.

**17 ... Bh6 18 Qd1 Be3**

Now Black gets a favorable bishop trade. 18 ... e4! was even stronger: 19 fxe4 Nxe4 20 Nxe4 Rxe4 and Black's pieces are very active.

**82) D.Arutinian-I.Akhvlediani, Tbilisi 2020**

**24 ... Bxa4?**

Missing an important chance. 24 ... Rdc8! 25 Rxc8+ Rxc8 would have secured compensation, as Black is ready to put his rook on c2; after 26 Ba3 Rc2 27 Nf1 Nxf2, Black is able to weaken White's kingside structure and allow the bishop on h6 to take part.

**25 Nb3**

Now White can meet a rook move to c8 with Rd2; White's bishop on g2 is much better than Black's bishop on h6.

**83) N.Dzagnidze-H.Koneru, Saint Louis 2020**

**21 ... Nxc5?!**

Not best, as it moves the knight away from its post on e6, while 21 ... bxc5? simply loses a pawn after 22 Nxd5 Qc6 23 Bc4. Instead, 21 ... Bxc5! was the best recapture, keeping the queenside pawns connected and activating the bishop: 22 Bg2 (not 22 Nxd5?? Qc6) 22 ... d4 and Black is better.

**22 Qa2**

The main difference between this and 21 ... Bxc5 is that here Black does not have control over the d4-square. The position is balanced.

**22 ... Ne4?**

is ambitious, but fails to 23 Nxe4 dxe4 24 e6! and White is doing fine.

**84) M.Gharibyan-D.Lazavik, Yerevan 2021**

**16 ... b6!**

Black correctly identifies that control over the b-file should be regarded more highly than material considerations.

**17 Rxa7**

17 cxb6 axb6 would leave White with very poor pawns on c3 and a3 that also cage in the poor c1-bishop.

**17 ... bxc5 18 Rc7**

Or 18 dxc5 Nd7 and after Black captures on c5, he will be left with a tangible advantage.

**18 ... Na5 19 0-0 0-0**

and Black has a greatly superior pawn structure.

**85) E.Ozenir-G.Yilmaz, Antalya 2020**

**18 ... Rhe8?**

This is a normal developing move, but it does not coordinate well with the knights on f6 and g6. Black had a strong plan to improve the position of the knights with 18 ... h5 followed by ... h4, ... Nh5, and ... Nf4 to take advantage of the weaker dark squares.

**19 g3!**

Note how the pawns on f3 and g3 restrict the movement of the knights on f6 and g6 and also the rook on e8. White's bishop pair now has room to exert a greater influence on the position.

**86) A.Shabalov-A.Lenderman, chess.com 2019**

**26 ... Nc5!**

A logical move and the only winning one, highlighting the fragility of White's position and the lack of targets for his pieces. It is important to remove the black knight from the offending hands of the g2-bishop. Black prepares ... Qf7 and ... b5, and White's position will collapse from having too many weaknesses. 26 ... b5?! allows 27 Bxe4 (trading off the strong knight) 27 ... Rxe4 28 Ng2 and White is worse, but less so than in the game.

**87) B.Dhulipalla-A.Tari, Gibraltar 2019**

**17 Qb2?**

White saves material, but concedes his position. Better was 17 Rxd3! Nxd3 18 Qxd3 e4 19 Qc2 exf3 20 Bxf3 and even though White is down the exchange, his light-squared bishop is powerful, and the pawn structure prevents Black from infiltrating with the rooks. White has a slight advantage.

**17 ... e4**

White's position is cramped, and the monster on d3 almost dominates White on its own.

**88) A.Suleymanli-G.Akash, Wijk aan Zee 2020**

**19 ... Qe6!**

Black anticipates that White is about to castle, so he sets up for it by preparing ... Bc4 and ... f5. The inclusion of 19 ... a6? 20 a4 only helps White in creating connected passed pawns.

**20 0-0 Bc4 21 Qb2 f5**

Though advanced and connected, White's pawns do not exert as much pressure on the position as Black's formidable kingside phalanx.

**89) A.Fier-G.Miguel, Florianopolis 2020**

**19 ... Bc5?**

Black delays castling and getting the king to safety, which turns out to be a mistake. 19 ... 0-0-0 should have been played.

**20 Kh1?**

However, White fails to capitalize. Here White could have made a decisive strike with the move 20 f5! gxf5 21 Bxf5 exf5 (or 21 ... 0-0-0 22 Bg4 and the weak f7-pawn indicates a winning advantage for White) 22 Qxf5 Qe7 23 e6 f6 24 Qh5+ Kd8 25 Rxf6! and White wins.

**90) A.Merario Alarcon-C.Bernabeu Lopez, Roquetas de Mar 2021**

**20 ... Qh4?!**

Tempting when one finds the trick. Instead, 20 ... g5! is very pretty; this move controls the f4-square and prevents White from capturing the knight. The strong knight will remain and ensure good counterplay.

**21 Qe1!**

21 Qe2 is also fine. 21 fxe5?? Bg1+!! is picturesque, but we can hardly expect our opponents to play like this :).

**21 ... Bf2 22 Rxf2 Qxf2+ 23 Qxf2 Nxf2 24 Kg3 Nxf2 25 Kxf2**

and White should win this endgame.

#### Chapter 4 Solutions

**91) Y.Hou-I.Gaponenko, chess.com 2020**

**28 h4!**

White denies Black any play on the kingside. Despite being down an exchange, White has a huge advantage largely thanks to her extra pawn and superiority in pawn structure. 28 Qf2? gxh3+ would leave White's king too open.

**92) A.Aguilar-M.Antipov, Gibraltar 2019**

**7 ... h5!**

Planning ... h4. White's pieces are not optimally placed to counter this push, so this is good timing from Black's part. Black enjoys a great space advantage after

**8 h4 f5**

**93) A.Mista-A.Guo, Charlotte 2021**

**20 g4!**

A typical move in this kingside structure. White sacrifices a pawn to open lines to the enemy king.

**20 ... hxg4 21 fxg4 d5 22 Qh2!**

And the weakness on e5 proves problematic.

**22 ... Rac8**

22 ... Ne4 was better, but after 23 Bxe7 Qxe7 24 g5 Black's position is very scattered, and White will have a decisive advantage after the nearly unavoidable h5 advance.

**94) D.Kirillov-I.Chekletsov, Moscow 2020**

**11 f5!**

White has developed all his pieces and gotten a strong center while Black has been maneuvering his pieces around more passively. Thus, it makes sense to strike immediately.

**11 ... b5 12 Ncd2 c4 13 Bc2 exf5 14 Bg5**

White does not need to recapture on f5 right away or at all; Black's pieces are not placed optimally to deal with the opening of the center.

**95) F.Ynojosa-A.Lenderman, lichess.org 2021**

**12 h4!**

The logical continuation of putting a pawn on g4. White aims to play g5, displacing the knight from its protection of the d-pawn. The opening of the kingside and removal of the f6-knight grant White a winning advantage, as strange as that may seem.

**96) M.Pacher-J.Seemann, Budapest 2021**

**20 h4!**

White induces weaknesses on the kingside so his knights can invade the dark squares. The rook on c3 may also swing over to help in the near future.

**20 ... Nxb4**

20 ... g4? 21 Ng5 would be very unpleasant for Black in light of the h4-pawn's immunity. 20 ... gxh4 was better, but 21 Nf4 still spells trouble for Black.

**21 Nxb4**

Here 21 Qd2! immediately would have been even stronger since it is impossible to defend the pawn on g5. After 21 ... f6 (21 ... g4? 22 Nxb4 Qxb4 23 Qh6 is deadly; or 21 ... Nxf3+? 22 Rxf3 and the white rook will settle on f6, where it will facilitate a winning attack) 22 exf6 Qxf6 23 Qxg5+ Qxg5 24 Nxe5 White will win the e-pawn or h-pawn next, ensuring a winning advantage in the endgame.

**21 ... gxh4 22 Qd2 Kh7 23 Rf3 Rg8 24 Rf6**

White's rook is beautifully placed here.

**97) N.Tutisani-K.Shanava, Tbilisi 2019**

**27 f5!**

White's queenside is falling apart, so now is a good time to break through on the kingside.

**27 ... Rxb4 28 Na2?**

An unfortunate error which saves the knight, but forgets one small detail. 28 Re3! would have won the game, as Black's kingside collapses: 28 ... d5 29 fxg6 and Black cannot capture on g6 because e6 and the h-file are both weak. 29 ... d4 30 Rf3 dxc3 appears a bit frightening, but 31 Rxf8+! wins following 31 ... Rxf8 (or 31 ... Kxf8 32 Rf1+ Kg8 33 Rf7 Rxb2+ 34 Kc1) 32 Qxe6+ Kh8 33 b3!! and White's threats win out.

**28 ... Rxe4!**

Black wins two pawns and the game.

**98) J.Seemann-M.Mis, Krakow 2021**

**19 ... Nb4!**

Black kicks White's queen back with tempo.

**20 Qd1**

Or 20 Qb3 Be6 21 Qa4 Bc4 22 Re1 Rac8 and Black is dominating.

**20 ... h5!**

and Black is able to launch a decisive initiative, with ... Bb5 being a strong threat.

**99) E.Sutovsky-A.Kundin**, Israel 2019

**24 ... e5?**

Weakening the central pawn structure. Black could have conjured up an attack immediately with 24 ... g5!, trying to open the f-file while keeping the center under control. If 25 h3 h5 26 Qe2 Rf6, Black has the initiative.

**25 Re1 g5**

Now this g5-g4 push is weaker because it is less convenient with the pawn on e5 and the white rook off c1. Also, if White manages to trade queens, the pawn complex is much harder to defend than if the pawn was on e6.

**100) B.Saidov-S.Pogosyan**, Sochi 2020

**20 ... Bb8**

The best way to defend the d-pawn. Black pressures White's king by stacking the queen and bishop on the h2-b8 diagonal. A center break does not work: 20 ... d4? can be simply met by 21 exd4 cxd4 22 Rxc8 Rxc8 23 Nxd4 with an extra pawn.

**21 Re1 Qd6**

Black has decent pressure thanks to his space advantage and stable "hanging pawns" on d5 and c5.

**101) L.Mazi-D.Fridman**, lichess.org 2021

**10 ... 0-0?!**

Black misses a chance to grab the initiative. 10 ... Nd7! was better, trying to take advantage of White's lack of development. After 11 Nf4 (or 11 Nd2?! Bxc5 and the white pieces are all tripping over each other) 11 ... Bxc5 Black is doing very well with the more active and developed pieces.

**11 Nd2**

Now White can respond to ... Nd7 with Nb3, delaying the recapture of the pawn until more pieces have been developed.

**102) A.Fier-N.Delgado Ramirez**, Florianopolis 2021

**11 fxe5!**

The correct decision. White notices Black is less developed, so starts attacking as fast as possible before Black can consolidate.

**11 ... dxe5**

11 ... Nfd7 was best, but is nothing for White to worry about: 12 Bxe7 Qxe7 13 exd6 Qh4+ 14 Kf1 and White's material advantage takes precedence over his temporarily misplaced king.

**12 Qxd8+ Kxd8 13 Nc5!**

A strong move, bringing in another piece into the attack and trading off Black's light-squared bishop. Despite the queen exchange, Black is more or less lost here.

**103) A.Grischuk-R.Haria**, chess.com 2020

**12 e4!**

Opening the middle of the board is the correct way to punish Black's lack of central presence. White may get an isolated pawn, but Black's pawn on c6 is significantly weaker, and the opening of the h1-a8 diagonal will make it very hard for Black to develop the knight on b8. A normal developing move such as 12 Rc1? would be bad because Black gets time to play 12 ... Nxe5 13 Bxe5 Nd7 and complete development; while if 12 Nd3?! Nf6, Black is only doing slightly worse.

**12 ... dxe4 13 Nxe4 Nxe5 14 dxe5**

Now White has strong control of the d6-square and his pieces are active. White has a significant edge here.

**104) A.Sorokin-A.Gubajdullin**, St Petersburg 2019

**13 ... b6?!**

Protecting a7, but giving White unnecessary activity. 13 ... Nf6 was better. Black takes advantage of the a7-pawn's temporary immunity to develop his pieces, as 14 Nxa7+? Rxa7 15 Bxa7 b6 traps the bishop.

**14 Nc6 Ne7 15 Rd8+ Kb7 16 Rxa8**

Black should now give the exchange to preserve any hope of an edge.

**16 ... Nxc6!**

16 ... Kxa8?! 17 Nxc7+ Kb7 18 Nxe6 would be very comfortable for White.

**105) J.Santos-A.Tari**, Lisbon 2020

**13 ... b5!**

The only real way to avoid losing a piece. Also, since White's king is uncastled, it makes sense to start the attack immediately. Not 13 ... Bxc3+? 14 bxc3 b5 15 Qe2 and White remains safe.

**14 Qxb5**

14 Qe2 was White's best try, though the position remains unpleasant.

**14 ... Rab8 15 Qc4 Na5**

Black can win the pawn on c2 to regain material equality after White castles.

**106) S.Mareco-C.Albornoz Cabrera, chess.com 2021**

**16 d3?**

Missing a key opportunity. While Black's kingside pieces are undeveloped, White could have played 16 Na5! with the idea of trading off Black's good light-squared bishop. After 16 ... Qc7 (not 16 ... Ba8? 17 Qa6 and with Bb5 coming, it is unlikely that Black will stave off the attack) 17 Nxc6 Qxc6 18 Qb5 Qxb5 19 Bxb5 White's rook gets to the a-file first, giving him a significant advantage in the endgame.

**107) S.Tologontegin-P.Kostenko, Chelyabinsk 2021**

**6 ... Na6?**

Black saves his rook, but White's plan was more sinister. An essential move to include was 6 ... Bb4+!, disrupting White's pieces. 7 Ke2 Nc6! is the crucial move, when White should settle for a draw, with the easiest way being 8 Rb1 (a move like 8 Nf3? would be disastrous after 8 ... Nf6 9 Nc7+ Kd8 10 a3 Ne4 and all of a sudden, Black has a winning attack; or 8 Nc7+? Kd8 9 Nxa8 Nxd4+ and Black wins trivially) 8 ... Qxa2 9 Ra1 Qb2 with a perpetual, since 9 ... Qc4+? 10 Ke3!! is a fabulous way to trap the queen.

**7 a3!**

Now Black cannot play ... Bb4+ anymore and must shed decisive amounts of material to save his queen.

**108) D.Fernandez-G.Lane, Dublin 2019**

**20 e4!**

While the knight is still on e5, White takes the opportunity to play this move and force some favorable trades.

**20 ... f4?**

20 ... Nxc4 was Black's best try, but White retains a significant advantage after 21 Qxc4+ Qf7 22 Qxf7+ Kxf7 23 exf5. Not 20 ... fxe4? 21 Nxe4 Nxe4 22 Bxe5 Bxe5 23 Nxe5 and the white knight goes to c6, with an overwhelming position.

**21 Nd5**

21 Rcd1! was even stronger: 21 ... Rce8 (21 ... Rcd8 22 Nd5 Nxd5 23 Bxe5 Ne3+ 24 Nxe3 Bxe5 25 Rxd8 Rxd8 26 Nc4 would have led to a superior version of the game continuation.) 22 Nd5 Nxc4 23 Qxc4 Nxd5 24 Qxd5+ Qf7 25 Qxf7+ Rxf7 26 Rd5 with a winning position.

**21 ... Nxd5 22 Bxe5 Ne3+ 23 Nxe3 Bxe5 24 Qc4+ Kh8 25 Qd5 Qe7 26 Nc4**

After some forcing moves, White emerges with a good knight vs. bad bishop matchup and a clear advantage.

**109) G.Kilgus-B.Korpa, Austria 2021**

**11 dxc4?**

White recovers the pawn, but gives up any chances of breaking into Black's position. 11 d4! was the way to go, opening the e-file. After 11 ... Nf5 12 Qe2 Nxe3 13 Qxe3 exd4 14 Nxd4 e5 15 Nxc6 White regains the pawn and keeps the initiative.

**11 ... Qxd1 12 Raxd1 Nf5**

and Black's bishop pair and powerful center lend him good chances.

**110) K.Larsen-J.Sylvan, Denmark 2020**

**24 Ng4?**

White is too hasty and misses Black's response. Seeing as White only had the queen and knight participating in the attack, it would have been better to bring in a third piece with 24 Re3. Black does not have an immediate way to fix the kingside situation here, further justifying the rook lift to target the weakness on g7. If 24 ... Nd4 25 Rc1 b4 then 26 Bh3 followed by Nf3 will remove the d4-knight and result in a White advantage.

**24 ... Qh4!**

Now White's attack is stifled. Queens are strong pieces, and their active forays can often disrupt the gears behind the opponent's plans.

**111) N.Aliavdin-K.Dzida, Pokrzywna 2020**

**11 e5!**

While this may look like it loses a pawn, the h2-b8 diagonal can be utilized to exploit the queen on c7 and rook on b8.

**11 ... dxe5 12 fxe5 Nxe5**

Black is forced to take the pawn because the f6-knight does not have any good squares to run to.

**13 Qg3 b5 14 Bf4 Nfd7**

14 ... Bd6? runs into 15 Ndx5! axb5 16 Rxd6 and White wins.

**15 Nf3 f6 16 g5! Bb7 17 gxf6 gxf6**

Now Black's king is permanently weak, and White has a decisive advantage.

**112) H.Banikas-E.Cordova, chess.com 2020**

**17 Qg5?**

White tries to pressure Black with just the queen and knight, which does not get anywhere. 17 f4! was better, including the rook in the attack. Black can get the e5-square, but with the dark-squared bishops off the board and a knight on b4, this does not mean much: 17 ... exf4?! (17 ... a5 18 f5 followed by g4-g5 also gives White a lot of kingside space to work with) 18 Rxf4 with a huge attack for White.

**17 ... Bc8**

This covers f5 sufficiently.

**18 h4 Nc2 19 Ra2 Nd4**

Black is totally fine here.

**113) S.Dev-A.Ansat, Paracin 2021**

**16 f3?**

Solid, but there was better. White could have taken advantage of the weak d6-pawn by playing 16 Bf4! Nh7 17 Nf5! Bxf5 (or 17 ... gxf5? 18 Bxd6) 18 exf5 Qxe1+ 19 Rxe1 Rxe1+ 20 Bf1 with a dominating position. Despite having two rooks for the queen, Black's position has too many weaknesses to be sustainable.

**114) L.Babujian-M.Gharibyan, Yerevan 2021**

**22 ... Re5?**

Black misevaluates his chances of generating a kingside attack. Best would have been to be patient with a move like 22 ... Rad8! to hinder White's counterplay. 23 c5 (not 23 Rd5? c6) now allows Black to close the

center, when White must jump through some hoops to survive the attack: 23 ... d5 24 c6! b6 25 Bxb6! cxb6 26 c7 Rc8 27 Rxd5 b5 28 gxf3 Qxh3+ 29 Kg1 exf3 30 Rg5 Re7 31 Rg3 Qe6 gives Black good chances to win.

**23 Rd5!**

An excellent move to prevent rook lift ideas.

**23 ... Rae8 24 Rfd1 g5?**

Black had to recognize that he is no longer better and play something like 24 ... b6.

**25 c5!**

White responds to the flank push with a break in the center. It looks quite scary, but White is actually winning here!

**115) E.Bruaset-M.Tratar**, Nova Gorica 2020

**18 ... h5!**

With all of the pieces developed, now is a good time for Black to make progress on the kingside.

**19 Nb3 Bg4?!**

Stronger was 19 ... Bf5! 20 Qe2 h4, keeping pressure on the white king.

**116) A.Serikbay-O.Babiy**, lichess.org 2021

**39 gxf6?**

White gives up all hopes of a kingside attack. Best was 39 g6!, targeting the light squares. After 39 ... Kf8 (not 39 ... fxg6? 40 hxg6 and White's incursion onto the seventh rank cannot be prevented) 40 Be4 Black must tread carefully. For example, 40 ... Re8?! 41 Bd3! wins the b-pawn, as 41 ... Bxd3? would lose to 42 Rxf7+ Kg8 43 Rcc7.

**39 ... gxf6**

Now it is much harder for White to make progress and a draw was eventually made in the game.

**117) P.Eljanov-G.Lane**, Gibraltar 2019

**21 ... Nf3+?!**

This move looks appealing but is too hasty. The knight on e5 is much better than the bishop on g2 because the bishop is hemmed in by Black's kingside pawns, while the knight eyes other juicy squares like d3 and c4. Better was 21 ... b5! to activate the dormant rook on b8. After 22 axb6 Rxb6 the pin on the b4-bishop is quite annoying.

**22 Bxf3 gxf3 23 Nf4**

Black's queen will not be reaching h3 anytime soon, and White can trade off pieces to alleviate the pressure in the meantime.

**118) R.Sturt-N.Delgado Ramirez, Florianopolis 2021**

**26 ... Nd5?**

Taking advantage of the outpost on d5 but missing a positional shot. Black had to find 26 ... b4!, denying White's bishop access to the d6-square and opening the b5-square for his own knight. After 27 cxb4 Nb5 28 Bb2 c3 29 Nf4 Rc8, White should sacrifice his bishop with 30 Ne2, but Black's extra piece gives him an advantage after 30 ... cxb2 31 Qxb2 Kh7 32 bxa5 Na7.

**27 Bd6**

White's bishop is well placed here and difficult to kick. While Black can continue to push, the position is now balanced.

**119) S.Beukema-T.Beerdsen, Wijk aan Zee 2020**

**11 ... f5!**

Black chips away at White's kingside and activates the knight. 11 ... f6! with the same idea also worked.

**12 exf6 Nxf6 13 Nxf5 Nd4**

and Black has a winning attack.

**120) S.Giemsma-R.Vazquez Igarza, Gibraltar 2019**

**22 Ne5!!**

White stumbles on a brilliant resource but fails to see it through. 22 e5! is the move we were looking for. Given Black's huge queenside presence, White must make complications and go for the enemy king. After 22 ... Qf7 23 Bc3 Qh7 24 Qe3 Bc4 25 Qf4 Bd5 26 exf6 exf6 27 Rxe8 Rxe8 28 Qxf6 White crashes through.

**22 ... Qxa2?**

This loses. 22 ... fxe5 23 h4! is the point and, surprisingly, the plan of h5 followed by Re3-g3 is unstoppable. If you found this idea in advance, you may congratulate yourself on likely being outside the scope of this book.

**23 Nxf6 Qxa5 24 Qh8+ Kf7 25 Ne5+ Ke6 26 Qh3+?**

All heroes are wont to stumble at the finish line. White had to find 26 Rd1!! to cut off the black king. Then 26 ... Kxe5 27 Qh3! forces Black to

shed decisive amounts of material to delay the inevitable checkmate.

**26 ... Kd6**

The king escapes, and now Black is winning.

## Chapter 5 Solutions

**121) D.Nomin Erdene-N.Meshkovs, Graz 2020**

**19 ... b4**

followed by ... a5 is a strong thematic response to an a4 thrust. 19 ... Bd7? is good in some cases, but here the pawn on b5 is weak and lost to 20 axb5 axb5 21 Rb4.

**20 a5**

A challenging try. After 20 Na2 a5 Black is pretty solid.

**20 ... Rb8 21 Na2 Bxa5 22 fxe6 Bxe6 23 Rxd6**

and although Black immediately hung the b4-pawn with

**23 ... Bb6?**

23 ... b3! 24 cxb3 Rxb3 would have lent him great activity in return for the a6-pawn.

**122) T.Stijve-C.Albornoz Cabrera, Bad Ragaz 2020**

**13 ... Nxd5**

13 ... Bxd5?! is inferior because after 14 exd5 Black will lack control of the light squares, and the white bishop on f1 can easily become strong. For example, after 14 ... b5 15 Bh3, White has some pressure.

**14 exd5 Bf5 15 Rc1**

Here White's best move is 15 Bd3 Bxd3 16 Qxd3, relieving some pressure off the c2-pawn, but Black is more comfortable than in the previous note because fewer pieces are on the board; White's space advantage is less significant, and his light-squared bishop is gone. The position is roughly balanced.

**123) M.Kobalia-B.Savchenko, Moscow 2021**

**11 Bc4!**

This move frees the d2-pawn to advance to d3 and lets the c1-bishop out of its cage. Additionally, Bc4 gains a tempo by attempting to trade off Black's e6-bishop.

**11 ... Bd7 12 f4!**

and we can see the other point: Black is criminally far behind in development.

**12 ... exf4 13 d4**

and the position has opened decisively in White's favor.

**124) M.Aditya-A.Kozak, Moscow 2020**

**19 Nxd7!**

Recognizing that Black wants to push ... c5, White ensures he gets in the e4 break first; Black's ... b6 advance makes the c6-pawn weaker, which is further exacerbated after 20 e4.

**19 ... Qxd7 20 e4 dxe4 21 fxe4**

White gets a strong center and drives Black's knights back to obtain a significant advantage.

**125) A.Fedorov-K.Petrova, Prague 2020**

**15 d5!**

White plays d5, pushing the knight back and preventing Black from playing the same move. If instead 15 Be3 d5! 16 e5 g6, Black maintains a solid position.

**15 ... exd5 16 exd5 Nb8 17 Be3**

Black's pieces have been forced back to the first and second ranks. White has a significant space advantage here.

**126) N.Mohammad-M.Lagarde, Cappelle la Grande 2020**

**12 ... Ne7?**

Retreating the knight did not offer Black many prospects. Best was 12 ... Nb4! 13 Qb3 a5 and the b4-knight can relocate to c5 via a6 if needed. On c5, it will facilitate aggressive operations such as ... Nfe4.

**13 Nd4 b5 14 cxb5?**

14 e3 would have maintained the balance.

**14 ... axb5 15 Ndxb5 Bd7**

Black has huge compensation in view of White's exposed king and poor bishops.

**127) J.Bures-M.Jurcik, Czech Republic 2020**

**25 Nxc5!**

This is required; playing Nc6 would hang the a4-knight. This trade forces Black to allow White either a passed b-pawn or a passed d-pawn.

**25 ... dxc5 26 Nc6**

White's pawns are on light squares, and the knight is untouchable. White has a great position despite not castling.

**128) L.Babujian-H.Martirosyan**, Yerevan 2021

**12 ... d5! 13 Nxc5 e5**

Black recognizes the importance of setting up a strong center. He prepares ... Bg4 to activate the bishop and ... Rb8 and ... Rg8 to activate the rooks. Despite being a pawn down, Black has much better positions for his pieces and strong central control, giving him an advantage.

**129) S.Gaboyan-E.Smirnova**, lichess.org 2021

**29 Bf1?**

“One can never be too careful”, or so they say, but this is much too conservative. 29 Ba5! was a much stronger way to ward off ... Qa1+. White will inevitably either win the black queenside pawns or make significant gains on the eighth rank.

**29 ... Qa1**

Now White must demonstrate accuracy to stay in the game.

**130) D.Lazavik-S.Lobanov**, Yerevan 2021

**13 ... cxd4?!**

Black is not well developed enough to open the position in this Queen's Gambit Declined. 13 ... b5! is stronger; Black develops the bishop to the most logical diagonal. He just has to make sure he is fine after 14 dxc5 (14 Bd3 cxd4 15 exd4 Bb7 is not problematic) 14 ... bxc4 15 c6 Rb8 16 cxd7 Bxd7, where the two bishops compensate for the minor deficiency in pawn structure.

**14 Nxd4**

and White is doing well.

**131) S.Sevian-A.Liang**, chess.com 2019

**26 ... Qa4!**

Black opts to trade queens; a wise choice when up a pawn and under attack. Although other moves likely retain the advantage, this move is the

cleanest, as avoiding the queen trade will force White into another concession.

**27 Qd3 c5!**

and Black's later defeat was not a result of his current position, which is completely winning.

**132) A.Gabrielian-V.Skatchkov, Chelyabinsk 2020**

**31 cxd4?**

Not the best recapture. White is now saddled with an isolated pawn, which he no doubt wished to push to d5 in the future; it was more important to note the weakness of the dark squares here. Better was 31 Nxd4 dxe4 32 Nxe6 Rxe6 33 Ng4 and White would get control over f6. Notice how the bishop can go to d4 in this line.

**31 ... dxe4**

and the isolated pawn on d4 is not a point of pride; White's plus is pretty much gone.

**133) J.Yu-B.Bellahcene, Villorba 2021**

**11 ... Nc6?!**

Black develops too normally. When the opponent voluntarily places their king on d2, it is usually a good idea to open the center. 11 ... c5! would have decisively opened the position. The white king on d2 is quite sad.

**12 Qc3**

Even here, White is worse due to her unorthodox king placement.

**134) S.Poormosavi-A.Gholami, Tehran 2020**

**18 ... Qb8?**

Black allows White to develop and consolidate. 18 ... Qxc5! had to be played. The queen trade does not diminish Black's initiative, giving him enough compensation for the pawn. 19 Nxc5 Rfc8 20 Nd3 Ne4 21 a3 Nxf2 22 Nxf2 Bxc2+ 23 Ka2 Bxd1 24 Nxd1 Rc1 25 Ne3 Re1 is approximately equal.

**19 Bd3**

White has plenty of pieces that can help defend the king, and after he consolidates, the pawn advantage should make a difference in the long run.

**135) A.Herbrig-S.Skembris**, Schwaebisch Gmuend 2019

**8 ... Nd7**

Maneuvering the knight to c5 and preparing ... Nd4. Alternatively, 8 ... Nh7!? was an interesting try, aiming for 9 g3 Ng5. The knight is quite well placed on g5, where it hits the f3- and h3-squares and can also go to d4 via e6.

**9 g3 Nc5 10 a3 Nd4 11 Bxd4 exd4**

Black has a decent position.

**136) D.Ozen-S.Yaran**, Antalya 2020

**15 Ng5!**

A wise choice, forcing a concession of either the bishop pair or the light squares.

**15 ... dxe4**

15 ... Bc8? is a poor try at retaining the bishop. After 16 exd5 Black is unable to recapture on d5, since 16 ... Nxd5? (or 16 ... Qxd5? 17 Bb3) 17 Qh5 wins trivially.

**16 Nxe6 Rxe6 17 dxe4**

After the trades, White has an incredibly strong light-squared bishop; in particular, White can apply pressure on the a2-g8 diagonal. With the two bishops and some open lines, White is better here.

**137) V.Kirchei-D.Tsoi**, Moscow 2020

**21 Kf2!**

White's king skedaddles over to the queenside and prepares to bring the major pieces to the g- and h-files to help with the defense. It is okay to give away a few pawns since, after the king is safe, the extra knight will have a much greater impact on the position. 21 Bf1? is not good due to 21 ... Bxh3 22 Bxh3 Rxh3 and the black queen invades via f5-h5.

**21 ... Bg5 22 Rh1 Qh6 23 Bf1**

and White is up a piece. 23 Qg1!? is an even more picturesque way to run!

**138) V.Erdos-X.Xu**, chess.com 2020

**15 Ne5?!**

It is clear that Black wants to play ... c5, and this is not the best way to anticipate it. The knight is better positioned with 15 Nd2! c5 (or 15 ... Qc7

16 Qc2 and the e4-pawn is quite weak) 16 Nb3 cxd4 17 Nxd4 and with a strong passed c-pawn, White stands significantly better.

**15 ... c5 16 Qa4 cxd4?**

White's advantage would have dissipated after 16 ... Bxe5 17 dxe5 Ng6 18 Bc3 Qg5 19 Kh1 Bg4 and Black is able to trade off the light-squared bishops, leaving him with the superior minor piece.

**17 Bxd4**

Now White regains the advantage.

**139) H.Heimisson-M.Haubro**, Aarhus 2020

**19 Qb6!**

White trades queens, removing an important defender of the d6-pawn. Including 19 axb5?! Bxb5 20 Nxb5 axb5 would not be preferable because 21 Qb6 Qxb6 22 Nxb6 allows 22 ... Ra2! and Black is better.

**19 ... Qd8 20 Qxd8 Rxd8 21 Nb6**

White gets at least a pawn here due to Black's weak pawns on b5 and a6.

**140) H.Sorensen-C.Fernandez Diaz**, Santo Tirso 2020

**16 Bc4?!**

White misses a simple way to damage Black's pawn structure. He almost certainly considered 16 Bxd7!, when 16 ... Qxd7 17 Ne5! is very good for White, but probably rejected it because of 16 ... Bxf3!. However, after 17 gxf3 Qxd7 18 Bxf6 Bxc3 19 Qxc3 gxf6 20 Kh1 White can claim an advantage as his pawn structure is still better than Black's.

**16 ... c5**

Now Black is able to trade off an isolated pawn and equalize.

**141) D.Khegay-E.Burmakin**, Moscow 2020

**14 a4!**

White prevents Black from playing ... a4 himself and maintains the knight on b3 for future c5 ideas; whereas after 14 Re1 a4 15 Nbd2 White is okay but a bit cramped.

**142) R.Robson-G.Vazquez**, chess.com 2020

**26 Nd3?**

White should try to protect the pawn and trade off Black's active pieces with 26 Qb5! and after 26 ... Qc7 27 Nd3 White is doing okay.

**26 ... Qxa4**

Black has a significant edge due to his passed queenside pawns.

**143) R.Makarian-M.Stukan, Sochi 2020**

**9 ... Bg4!**

Black provokes a concession before retreating to a more suitable square.

**10 f3**

10 Qd2 Qd7 sets up ... Bh3. 10 Ne2 Qc8 is similar; the knight on e2 is extremely passive.

**10 ... Be6**

Eduard Gufeld would say to ask the g2-bishop what it thinks of the pawn on f3!

**144) T.Salemgareev-A.Drygalov, Chelyabinsk 2020**

**17 Bg2?**

Targeting d5 but allowing an unfavorable inclusion of moves. There was no need to move the bishop, as it controls squares like d7 and c8 and is not easily attacked. After 17 dxc5 Nxc5 18 Nd4, White stands slightly better. The bishop on h3 serves a useful purpose in controlling the c8-square.

**17 ... Rc8**

With the extra tempo, Black improves the position of the rook.

**18 dxc5 Bxc5**

Now Black develops pressure on the c3-knight.

**145) K.Dragun-T.Virtanen, chess.com 2021**

**11 Qxc7!**

White, noticing that Black's pieces are not developed, correctly decides that he will not be punished for pawn-grabbing. Not 11 e3?! c6 and Black equalizes.

**11 ... Ba6 12 e3**

and despite having to make a slight concession to facilitate development, White's extra pawn should count in the long run.

**146) G.Von Buelow-D.Guimaraes, Florianopolis 2021**

**17 b4!**

White forces the knight backward, as is customary in the Ruy Lopez.

**17 ... cxb4**

17 ... Nc6? would be bad because after 18 bxc5 dxc5 19 Rfb1 the b-pawn will soon fall. Additionally, the black e-pawns sorely miss their former neighbor.

**18 cxb4 Nb7**

18 ... Nc6!? was Black's best try, but White still keeps a large advantage after 19 Qxc6! Rc8 20 Qxa8 Qxa8 21 axb5.

**19 axb5 axb5 20 Rxa8 Qxa8 21 Qc6 Rc8 22 Qxb5**

White wins a pawn and secures a decisive advantage.

**147) Z.Amdouni-A.Zaibi, Sousse 2020**

**18 ... Nf4?**

Black allows White to favorably release the tension. 18 ... fxe4 19 fxe4 Nf4 20 Bxf4 exf4 was better. Comparing this variation to the game, the kingside is more open, the offside nature of White's knights is more apparent, and Black exerts a greater influence on the game. In general, having the bishop pair means opening the position more is good.

**19 Bxf4 exf4 20 e5!**

White gives back the pawn to close the position and shut down Black's play.

**148) M.Hammes-M.Bosboom, Belgium 2020**

**9 d5?**

White willingly releases the tension. It was better to play a move like 9 Be3 and not define the pawn structure yet. White is not afraid of 9 ... exd4, as 10 Nxd4 Nc5 11 f3 leaves him with a better position.

**9 ... Nc5**

Now Black gets a comfortable version of the King's Indian Defense.

**149) K.Oliva Castaneda-J.Morales, Sant Adria de Besos 2019**

**6 ... dxc4!**

Usually, this move is unwise when White's light-squared bishop has not developed. However, here it is important for Black not to saddle himself with an isolated pawn on d5. Black is not afraid of the queen trade since White has no follow-up.

**7 Qxd8+ Kxd8 8 Bxc4 Bxc5 9 Nc3 Ke7**

and Black's two bishops ensure him a bright future.

**150) I.Khmelniker-A.Zubov, Netanya 2019**

**19 ... d4!**

Down a pawn and facing kingside pressure, it makes sense to try and break open the e-file immediately to open lines to White's king.

**20 hxd4 hxd4 21 Nxd4?**

White misses Black's powerful response. White should have played 21 0-0 dxe3 22 Qb3 Kg7 23 fxe3 with a dynamically balanced game.

**21 ... Qd5!**

Now Black is winning; the threats in the center and on g2 are too strong.

**151) T.Melamed-S.Papp, Germany 2020**

**22 ... d6?!**

A waste of time. The strongest plan was 22 ... a5!, setting up ... Ba6 to eliminate the strong knight on c4. 22 ... Rd8 also made sense, preparing ... d5. Black stands well here too.

**152) D.Anton Guijarro-E.Doluhanova, Gibraltar 2019**

**17 Nd5!**

An excellent move. White opens the c-file, emphasizing Black's poorly-placed pieces.

**17 ... exd5**

17 ... Bxb2?? 18 Ne7+ would be quite a tragedy.

**18 Bxf6 Nxf6 19 cxd5 Qa6?**

19 ... Qb7 was better, but White still maintains a large advantage with 20 dxc6 dxc6 21 Qf4 Nd7 22 e5.

**20 dxc6 dxc6 21 Rxd8+ Rxd8 22 e5**

White's play has culminated in a strong e-pawn push, which will favorably open the position. White has a winning advantage.

**153) S.Grishchenko-G.Hjorth, Sundsvall 2019**

**9 Nd4!**

Attacking the bishop on e6, which is the best way to defend the pawn on c4. Here 9 cxd5? Nxd5 10 Be5 may look tempting, but White is too far behind in development to get anything from it. After 10 ... Bxe5 11 Nxe5 Nc6 12 Nxc6 bxc6 13 Qa4 Qxc5 14 Ba6 Rab8 15 0-0 Rxb2, Black wins a pawn.

**9 ... Ne4 10 Nb3?**

It was important to play 10 Be2 to castle as fast as possible and keep the upper hand.

**10 ... Nxc3?**

Here Black missed 10 ... Bxc3+ 11 bxc3 Qxa2 12 Be2 dxc4 13 Nd4 Nxc5 which would have ended the game.

**11 Nxa5 Nxd1 12 Rxd1 Bxb2 13 cxd5**

and White is much better.

**154) Z.Andriasian-V.Mikhalevski, chess.com 2020**

**17 ... d5!**

Black correctly chooses to break in the center, seeing that White's minor pieces will be poorly placed after the center opens.

**18 cxd5 exd5?**

This move allows White to close the center and mask his poor piece placement. Black had to make the intermediate move 18 ... fxe4! to break the position open even more. After 19 dxe4 exd5 White's b4 idea in the game is less effective, and Black stands better.

**19 e5 d4 20 Bxb7 Qxb7 21 b4!**

White is able to generate play.

**155) M.Berdnyk-K.Ning, chess.com 2020**

**16 Ne5!**

White is happy to trade pieces, as it exposes the weakness of c7. White is fine with allowing the exchange of her bishop on f4 for the knight on d5.

**16 ... Bxg2 17 Kxg2 Nxf4+ 18 gxf4 Nxe5 19 fxe5**

White can pile up the rooks on the c-file and claim a decisive advantage.

**156) E.Van Haastert-N.Guliyev, Netherlands 2020**

**18 f4!**

White kicks and trades off the annoying knight on e5. 18 Rc1? would be a mistake due to 18 ... d5!, when White's king position will be weakened after 19 exd5 Bc5 20 Bxc5 Qxc5.

**18 ... Nc4 19 Qxc4 Qxc4 20 Bxc4 Rxc4 21 Nc1 Rxe4 22 Kd2**

and with a5 falling, White has a nearly winning advantage.

**157) B.Daggupati-A.Ostrovskiy, Charlotte 2021**

**25 ... Rg8**

Not spoiling anything so far, but wholly unnecessary. Best was 25 ... Rxh4! immediately, as after 26 gxh4 Qxh4 27 Qg3 Rh8 Black will get more than enough in the way of pawns and piece activity to compensate for the lost exchange. Black has a winning advantage.

**26 c4 dxc4?**

Black delays playing ... Rxh4 until it is too late. 26 ... Rxh4 here was the only winning move for Black.

**27 Bxe5 Bxe5 28 Bxc4 Rxh4 29 gxh4 Qxh4 30 Rad1**

Now the position is highly chaotic, and the players eventually drew.

**158) A.Kukhmazov-V.Mikhailovsky, Moscow 2021**

**28 Qe2?**

Logical, but not the most accurate way to continue. A typical idea in isolated pawn positions is 28 Nxe6 fxe6 (28 ... Qxe6?! 29 Qd4 is even worse for Black) 29 e4!, targeting the pawn on d5. The knight on c4 is rather loose in this case as well.

**28 ... Rc5?**

28 ... a5 was better, with a roughly balanced position. For example, 29 Nxe6 Qxe6 30 e4 Qe5 does not present Black with any problems.

**159) G.Rechlis-A.Korobov, Netanya 2019**

**9 b3?!**

White misses a chance to equalize. He should have played the thematic 9 c4! d4 and transpose into a Reversed Benoni position. Since Black's knight is not optimally placed on d7, White is quite comfortable here and will play for a b4 push as well as Ng5-e4.

**9 ... h6**

Now c4 does not work as well because it does not pair with b3. White still targets the center, but Black keeps an edge because of his stable central pawns.

**160) N.Checa-J.Song, Villorba 2021**

**11 Nd2!**

A common idea in Benoni structures – the knight reroutes itself to c4, where it helps attack the d6-pawn. The d2-knight also covers e4, preventing a Black invasion and potentially allowing White to push e3-e4 himself.

**161) J.Baum-T.Ochedzan, Krakow 2021**

**15 ... Rac8?!**

A touch slow. 15 ... a5! removes the b3-knight and will allow a black knight to settle on c5 in typical Accelerated Dragon fashion; additionally, Black may consider playing ... a3 later to damage the white pawn structure. The new weakness on b5 is more or less irrelevant, and Black is slightly better.

**162) D.Fernandez-M.Quinn, Dublin 2019**

**25 Rxc3!**

White trades off pieces, weakening Black's queenside pawns and highlighting his better piece placement. If 25 a3? then 25 ... Nb8 would prevent Nc6.

**25 ... dxc3 26 Nc6!**

White's active pieces and passed d-pawn ensure him a decisive advantage.

**163) G.Harutjunyan-R.Samadov, Moscow 2020**

**12 Nh5!**

White trades off the knight to increase the pressure on d5.

**12 ... Nxe5 13 Qxe5 Be6 14 Bg5**

Black cannot break the pin with f6, so White bags the d5-pawn.

**164) B.Maryasin-N.Steinberg, Israel 2020**

**13 ... exf4**

A typical move in Sicilian structures. Black does not mind the isolated pawn on d6, as it is easily defended and controls the e5-square. However, this move misses out on a great opportunity: 13 ... d5! 14 fxe5 Nfxe4 15 Nxd5 Qxe5 liquidates the center (remember that when d5 is possible in this pawn structure, it often liberates the pieces quite a bit). Black has an advantage due to the scattered nature of the white forces.

**165) F.Sonis-J.Bjerre, Villorba 2021**

**29 ... Rc6!**

Black correctly avoids initiating the exchange of rooks and returns to consolidate his position. Not 29 ... Rxc1+? 30 Rxc1, when the threat of Rc7

forces a concession from Black. 30 ... Qd5?? would be ideal, but dreams are not always meant to be: 31 Qxg7+ Rxd7 32 Rc8+ Nf8 33 Rxf8 mate.

**30 Bb2**

30 Qf4 would defend d6, but after 30 ... f6 it is clear that this arrangement is only temporary.

**30 ... Rxd6**

Black is up two pawns.

**166) L.Jirasek-Y.Kambrath**, chess.com 2021

**21 Nf3!**

White kicks the black queen and avoids the trade of knights before carrying out the plan of pushing e5. Not yet 21 e5? Nf4 and Black equalizes.

**21 ... Qh5 22 Qe3 Re8? 23 Kh2?**

Too slow. Here White missed 23 e5! d5 24 Nh2! with ideas of bringing the knight to f6, breaking the center with c4, and pushing the f-pawn.

**23 ... f6**

and Black is quite solid.

**167) N.Sedlak-I.Sharma**, Novi Sad 2021

**12 ... Ng8?**

Black plays too slowly, allowing White to establish a favorable pawn structure. Best was 12 ... exf4! 13 Nxf4 Nc5 14 Be3 Nxe4 15 Bd4 Be5 and Black is fine, while after 15 Nxe4?! fxe4 Black may lose the e-pawn, but she will be able to finish developing her other pieces and have a better position.

**13 exf5 gxf5 14 Be3**

White is very comfortable here, as Black's position is quite loose.

**168) L.Moroni-Z.Hracek**, Bremen 2020

**7 ... axb4!**

This might look bad since it releases the tension, but Black realizes that White will easily consolidate if he does not strike immediately. 7 ... b6?! right away would not be as effective due to 8 cxb6 Qxb6 9 bxa5! and the threat of Bxb8 prevents Black from capturing on a5.

**8 cxb4 b6!**

Opening the position to exploit White's overextended setup.

### **9 Bd6?**

Not 9 cxb6? Qxb6 10 b5 Qa5+ 11 Nd2 Bb4 and White is not having fun, to put it mildly. White had to play 9 Bd3 bxc5 10 bxc5 Bxc5 11 Nf3 and accept a bad position.

### **9 ... bxc5 10 Bxf8 Rxf8 11 bxc5 Ne4**

White's attempts to retain his material advantage have resulted in a case where he will soon lose both his extra pawn and his life. The woefully neglected kingside is soon to receive the black queen's attention.

### **169) M.Mis-J.Kokoszczyński, Krakow 2021**

#### **15 ... Qxc2?!**

Black chooses to trade queens, weakening his backward c-pawn. It was better to play something like 15 ... Qe6. With queens on the board, Black will have an easier time defending his c6-pawn.

#### **16 Rxc2**

Now White gets a two-result game because Black has no play.

### **170) G.Ayats Llobera-C.Hernandez, Barcelona 2020**

#### **14 g4!**

A great move to play when launching an attack on the enemy king. Lines and diagonals are opened.

#### **14 ... d5 15 gxf5 exf5 16 exf5 Bc8**

Now White's attack leads to a winning position after 17 f6! g6 18 Qf3 Rxf6 19 Ne4 dxe4 20 Bxe4

### **171) A.Puranik-E.Zanan, Moscow 2020**

#### **21 Qxd6?**

White errs, missing Black's response. White had to change up the move order by playing 21 gxf7+ Kxf7 to include 22 h6! to weaken the pawn structure; after 22 ... g6 (22 ... Bxc3? 23 bxc3 Rxc3 24 hxg7 would win for White) 23 Qxd6 Rxc3 24 bxc3 Qxc3 25 Qd7+ Kg8 26 Qxe6+! Kh8?? (26 ... Kf8 27 Qd6+ is a draw by perpetual check), there is 27 Qxf6+ Qxf6 28 Bd4! and White wins.

#### **21 ... Rxc3!**

White should not let Black win instantly with this thematic exchange sacrifice.

**172) A.Gabrielian-A.Bivol**, Chelyabinsk 2021

**27 ... Qb3?**

27 ... Qc5! would have maintained a large advantage. On c5, the queen covers d6, opens up the b-file for the rook on b8, and keeps an eye on the f2-square. The a-pawn also remains a dangerous asset; for instance, 28 Rxd6? a4 would let the a-pawn through.

**28 R4d3 Qb4 29 Rxd6**

White has regained the pawn and equalized.

**173) T.Kanyamarala-C.Lupulescu**, Dublin 2020

**17 ... e5**

A reasonable move that shuts off the influence of the d3-bishop and grabs control of the d4-square. However, Black had a better option. Not 17 ... Bf6? 18 fxe6 fxe6 19 Nb6!! (after 19 e5 White gets a piece to h7, but there are bigger fish to fry!) 19 ... Nxb6 20 e5 and the knight's absence from d7 means the near-imminent Qxh7+ can be followed with Rxf6+. Instead, 17 ... exf5! was best. Black favorably resolves the situation in the center, opens lines for his pieces, and can utilize the e5-square. Black does not have to worry about the isolated pawn on d6 as it is hard to attack directly. After 18 Qxf5 Bf6 Black is doing well.

**18 Qg4?**

18 g4 was a better way to facilitate a kingside expansion.

**18 ... Nf6 19 Qe2 d5!**

Black lands this thematic break and is now better.

**174) J.Moussard-R.Pogorelov**, Barcelona 2020

**12 ... Nb4?!**

Black should not let White get away with his risky g4 push. Objectively, Black has made no obvious mistakes so far, so he should not be worse. He was likely afraid of 12 ... Nxc4! 13 Nd5 Qd8 14 Qg3, but after 14 ... h5 Black is fine despite his inability to castle.

**13 g5**

Here White gets strong kingside pressure.

**175) A.Delchev-J.Duda**, chess.com 2020

**18 ... Bxd6**

18 ... f5?! would allow White to get into an opposite-colored bishop ending with 19 Bc4 fxe4 (19 ... Bxd6 20 Nxd6 Rd8 21 Bxd5 exd5 22 Nxc8 Raxc8 is a better version of the game for White) 20 Bxd5 exd5 21 Bxe7 and Black is not better.

**19 Nxd6 Rd8 20 Nxc8 Raxc8**

Black has an advantage in light of his active rooks.

**176) J.Gonzalez Zamora-A.Pichot**, chess.com 2021

**11 ... Bd7?!**

Three things are clear: Black will lose a pawn due to the pressure on c6, he needs to castle at some point, and his bishop will want to go to f5 to target the d3-pawn. Thus, this move wastes a vital tempo. 11 ... 0-0! is the best continuation. The bishop goes to f5 in one move, and Black stands better. After 12 Nxc6 bxc6 13 Bxc6 Bf5! 14 Bxa8 Qxa8 White has substantial problems on the light squares.

**12 Nxc6 bxc6 13 Nd2 0-0 14 Nb3 Bf5 15 Nc5**

White has effectively utilized the tempo gifted to him and is no longer worse.

**177) V.Gunina-D.Harika**, Saint Louis 2020

**14 Rc1?!**

A logical move, but there was a better option. White could have noticed the weak dark squares in Black's position and played 14 Bxd4!. After 14 ... cxd4 (if 14 ... Bxd4 15 Nxd4 cxd4 16 b3 Bc6 17 hxg6 fxg6 18 Nb2, Black's pawn structure leaves a lot to be desired) 15 h6 Bf8 16 Nxd4 White emerges a healthy pawn ahead.

**178) A.Krapivin-V.Kunin**, Moscow 2020

**21 Rh4!**

White plays an intermediate move to drive the bishop away from the king. 21 Rxe4?! immediately runs into 21 ... Qxa2 22 Nxe7+ Nxe7, when 23 Rxe7 does not attack a bishop on d7; compare this to the game continuation.

**21 ... Bd7 22 Rxe4 Qxa2 23 Nxe7+ Nxe7 24 Rxe7**

Now White gets an extra tempo on the bishop and keeps an advantage.

**179) G.Meier-O.Sanchez Enriquez**, chess.com 2021

**10 e4!**

This Reti-like system has resulted in a central majority, which can be utilized directly.

**10 ... 0-0 11 exd5 cxd5 12 g4**

12 d4! would have led to a safe advantage due to White's better pieces.

**180) D.Mardov-T.Wang**, Charlotte 2021

**12 ... a6?!**

Black forces White to help him undouble his f-pawns, but the resulting pawn on e5 blocks his own bishop. 12 ... f5! would be a better way to undouble, keeping the dark-squared bishop's diagonal open. The clumsy positioning of the white pieces renders Black slightly better.

**13 Nxe5 fxe5**

Now the dark-squared bishop's diagonal is closed.

**181) A.Pasti-P.Chylewski**, Krakow 2021

**15 Rhe1**

looks natural, but this move allows Black counterplay. Whereas after 15 dxe5! Bxe5 (15 ... Rxe5?? 16 Bf4 wins a lot of things) 16 Qxd8 Raxd8 17 Be3, the bishop pair promises White a considerable edge in the endgame.

**15 ... Qb6! 16 Bc3 Qc7?!**

Missing 16 ... exd4! 17 Bxd4 Bc5 and Black is not overly concerned with the doubling of his kingside pawns: 18 Bxf6 gxf6 19 Rxe8+ Rxe8 and Black is fine.

**182) D.Fitzsimons-M.Turner**, Dublin 2020

**8 ... g5!**

Given the awkward placement of the white bishop on d3, Black seizes the chance to open lines on the kingside. Simply developing with 8 ... Be6 was also fine, but if you can play ... g5, then why not?

**9 Bc4 g4 10 hxg4 Bxg4**

Black gets to work with the open g-file and will castle queenside eventually, while White will have to spend a bit of time bringing pieces back home for defense.

**183) H.Sorensen-D.Espineira Gonzalez, Santo Tirso 2020**

**19 Rf4?!**

An inaccurate way of adding on pressure. The best way to bring more of White's pieces to squares around Black's king was 19 Bg4! Qb6 20 Nxe4 dxe4 21 Qf2, with a large advantage.

**19 ... f5**

somewhat mitigates the attack, although White is still better.

**184) D.Garcia Ramos-Y.Santiago, Barcelona 2020**

**21 Qe3!**

Clearing the way for Nd4. Thanks to the weak dark squares in Black's camp, White stands much better.

**185) A.Sargsyan-H.Hayrapetyan, Yerevan 2021**

**16 a4!**

Black's pieces suffer from poor coordination, and the b5-pawn is often a prime target in the Sicilian. 16 Bh6?! is not so scary for Black, as after 16 ... Nc6 17 Bxg7 Kxg7 White cannot sufficiently attack the weakened dark squares.

**186) J.Bjerre-B.Bellahcene, Villorba 2021**

**21 Ra2!**

Protecting the pawn on b2. Black's weak c-pawn is not going away. 21 Rxc6?! Bxb2 22 Bxb2 Rxb2 would allow Black to equalize.

**187) G.Ayats Llobera-J.Moussard, Barcelona 2020**

**33 f5!**

Black's pieces seem oddly placed, while White has improved his pieces to the best they can be. Thus, now is a good time to open the position.

**33 ... Qf7**

Not 33 ... e5? 34 fxg6! and the f5-square is opened up for a white knight.

**34 e5!**

34 fxg6 hxg6 35 Ng4, targeting the f6-pawn, was also an option.

**34 ... gxf5 35 exd6**

White gets a menacing pawn on d6 and has a winning position.

**188) T.Sosa-R.Pogorelov, Barcelona 2020**

**11 c4!**

White wisely avoids a queen trade and tries to open the position to exploit his lead in development.

**11 ... dxc4?!**

11 ... Bb4 was best, though White keeps an edge after 12 Rfc1 Nd7 13 b3.

**12 Nxc4**

White's space advantage and lead in development more than compensate for his backward pawn on d4. White has a significant advantage.

**189) L.Babujian-S.Gaboyan, Yerevan 2020**

**10 g4!**

As White's king is not castled yet, this ambitious pawn thrust is good. White gets to trade off Black's bishop with Nh4 and can castle long later.

**10 ... Bg6 11 Nh4 Qe7 12 Nxc4 hxc4**

Black's kingside pawns are both hilarious to look at and highly inflexible.

**13 Qc2**

White could play something like 13 h4, with h5 coming shortly and a powerful attack.

**190) P.Harikrishna-M.Vachier Lagrave, Wijk aan Zee 2021**

**20 Bxb6!**

Most strong players prefer bishops to knights on general principle. However, this exchange cements White's monopoly over the central light squares. The remaining minor piece imbalance of opposite-colored bishops leaves Black's defensive prospects rather sparse.

**20 ... Rxb6 21 Rd5 Rc6 22 Red1 h6 23 Ba4 Rc4 24 Rxd6**

and White has excellent chances to win, although MVL's tenacity prevented Harikrishna from doing so in the game.

**191) I.Glek-D.Fitzsimons, Dublin 2019**

**8 ... Nxe4!**

The ... Nxe4 and ... d5 pattern shows up a lot in several openings, and when it can be played, it is usually the best move. Black gets a favorable trade and opens the d-file for his rook.

**9 Nxe4 d5 10 Bd3 dxe4 11 Bxe4 Qd6?!**

Too slow. 11 ... e5! would open the center and simplify to equality. It is needed for full credit! After 12 Bxc6 exd4! 13 Bxd4 bxc6 the position is approximately equal because the open files for Black's rooks compensate for his weak c-pawns.

**12 0-0**

Now White is slightly better on account of his space advantage.

**192) L.Deglmann-A.Saric, Austria 2021**

**7 ... c4**

Driving the white pieces backward. Not 7 ... e6?! 8 Bb5 and the poorly-placed queen on d7 leads to some problems for Black.

**8 Qd1 e6 9 Nh4 b5 10 Be2**

Black is not afraid of 10 Nxf5 exf5 because he will maintain strong control of the e4-square.

**10 ... Bd6**

Black has a comfortable position.

**193) P.Ponkratov-L.Livaic, chess.com 2020**

**17 d4!**

This loses a pawn to a one-move en-passant trick, but freeing the bishop to finish development takes precedence. Not 17 Kh2? Nd3 and White's bishop is entombed.

**17 ... Bb6?**

Not taking the free pawn and giving White a free hand in the center. Even after the more challenging 17 ... cxd3+ 18 Kh2, White still has a decent position.

**194) J.Kyc-P.Brodowski, Krakow 2021**

**22 ... c5!**

This move loosens White's control over c3 and, by extension, a2.

**23 Bf2 Bd2!**

and ... Bxc3 will pick up the a-pawn.

**195) A.Sergeyev-V.Zvjaginsev, Sochi 2020**

**11 Bh6**

White initiates the trade of bishops, but this is not the right decision here because White has no means with which to capitalize on the weakened dark squares. White should have played 11 a4! to stop ... b5. The move a4 is a common response whenever Black plays ... a6, with the idea of preventing Black from generating queenside play. After 11 ... Qb4 12 Ra3 White can chase the queen out and paralyze Black on the queenside.

**11 ... Bxh6 12 Qxh6 Bxf3 13 Bxf3 Qb4**

Black has equalized, as White's queen on h6 cannot deliver mate by itself.

**196) D.Dubov-Y.Yu, Wijk aan Zee 2020**

**17 dxc5!**

White realizes that after 17 Ne5?! Nxe5 18 dxe5 Qe7 Black is fine.

**17 ... Nxc5 18 Qb4!**

There is no good way to defend the b-pawn. Black went with

**18 ... Nd7 19 Qd6**

but here White has a strong bind on the position that can be converted to a material advantage later.

**197) Y.Sivan-T.Baron, Netanya 2019**

**8 Kb1?!**

Protecting the a-pawn, but missing an opportunity to gain an edge. With knights on c3 and f6, White should always keep e5 ideas in mind. After 8 e5! b4 9 exf6 bxc3 White has 10 fxg7! cxd2+ 11 Bxd2 Qxd2+ 12 Rxd2 Rg8 13 h4 Rxc7 14 h5 and is better prepared for the endgame.

**8 ... Nbd7**

Now e5 is no longer possible, and Black is doing okay.

**198) P.Brodowski-A.Donchenko, Krakow 2021**

**8 a4?!**

White stops Black's ... a4 push but weakens the b4-square considerably. White had no reason to be scared; better was 8 Ne2 a4 9 Nd2 and finishing development quickly with rough equality. Black's bishop pair and inflexible doubled f-pawns roughly negate each other in typical Trompowsky fashion.

**8 ... Na6**

White cannot be happy with his pawn advance.

**199) A.Esipenko-R.Makarian, Moscow 2021**

**18 Rhd1?!**

Not best. White should have met Black's pawn attacks on the flank with central demonstrations immediately. 18 e4! dxe4 19 Nxe4 Nf7 (19 ... c5 20 Rd5! is important) 20 f3 is a clean extra pawn for White.

**200) R.Thogersen-S.Pedersen, Denmark 2020**

**17 ... Bxh3!**

Black strikes, seeing that White's pieces do not come easily to the aid of the king. After a delaying move like 17 ... Ba7?!, White could play 18 cxd5 and after 18 ... Bxh3 19 dxc6 bxc6 20 d4 Black is forced to retreat the bishop.

**18 gxh3 Qxh3**

One advantage of the sacrifice on h3 here is that the knight on g3 is hanging, so White will have to spend a tempo to take care of it. Additionally, the white bishop on b3 cannot get to its defensive setup on f1.

**19 c5 Ng4?!**

19 ... Bc7! was more accurate. ... Nf4 on the next move is lethal.

**201) N.Ustiyonovich-M.Sieciechowicz, Krakow 2021**

**11 Bxc6?!**

White grabs a pawn but misses an important response from Black. 11 Nc4 would have been more prudent to bring the knight to the center, with a balanced game.

**11 ... Bh3!**

Black finds an amazing resource that gives him a favorable position.

**12 Re1 Nd5!**

The point – Black powerfully brings his knight into the center, as he realizes White's bishop is more valuable than the rook on a8.

**13 Bb2**

13 Bxa8?! Qxa8 would be very bad for White; to prevent the mate threat, White has to play 14 e4 Nxc3 15 Qd3 cxd4 and Black is doing excellently.

**13 ... Rb8 14 Qd2?**

14 e4 Rxb2 15 exd5 was best, though Black still stands better due to his initiative.

**14 ... Nxc3 15 Bxc3 cxd4 16 Bb4 Qb6 17 Bb5 a6**

Black soon recovered the piece with a winning advantage.

**202) V.Ivanchuk-P.Guichard, Gibraltar 2019**

**14 exf5!**

Although this helps Black activate her bishop, it is crucial to prevent Black from capturing on e4. 14 Na3?! fxe4 15 fxe4 hands Black an eternal outpost on e5.

**14 ... Bxf5 15 Na3**

Black's bishop may be kicked by a later g4, and the knight on e5 by a timely f4.

**203) P.Senner-T.Nguyen, Villorba 2021**

**9 ... Nh5!**

Black takes advantage of White's slow play (almost reminiscent of a reversed Philidor) to provoke some weaknesses.

**10 g3**

The logical choice to prevent ... Nf4, but now White will have a harder time castling because the h3-square is weak. Black is not afraid of 10 Nxe5? Nxe5 11 Bxh5 dxe4, when White should return the pawn. 12 dxe4? would be inadvisable on account of 12 ... Nd3+ 13 Kf1 Bc5, where Black's piece coordination is vastly superior to White's.

**10 ... g6?!**

10 ... Be6 would grant Black a slight advantage because of White's loose pawn structure.

**204) E.Gleizerov-R.Kavyev, Chelyabinsk 2020**

**9 ... Ra7**

A common idea to prepare the b5 advance by avoiding tactics on the long diagonal. However, in this case, the absence of direct threats means Black has no reason to refrain from immediately playing 9 ... b5! 10 0-0 (10 Ne5? Nxe5 11 Bxa8 Nfg4 would be extremely dangerous for White, and 12 0-0 Qb6 13 e3 h5 would give Black an enormous attack; please develop your pieces before engaging in active operations!) 10 ... Bb7 with an advantage in activity.

**205) I.Godzwon-J.Kosakowski, Pokrzywna 2020**

**14 Nf5?**

While it is tempting to bring a knight to f5 in this pawn structure, we must always carefully examine the effects of Black exchanging his bishop for it. 14 Bxe6 fxe6 15 e5 would be a better way to play; after 15 ... N6d7 16 Nf3 d5 17 Ne2 White has no problems.

**14 ... Bxf5! 15 exf5 d5**

and the scope of White's bishop on b3 and knight on c3 are very restricted. Black has a clear edge.

**206) N.Dzagnidze-W.Ju, Saint Louis 2020**

**15 ... Qxd7?!**

A better recapture was 15 ... Nxd7 16 Qd3 Nef6 and Black wins the d-pawn without having to worry about a loose knight on e4.

**16 Nxe5 Bxe5 17 0-0**

White keeps the pawn on d5, and the position is even.

**17 ... Bxb2 18 Bd4?**

Here White could have kept the position dynamically balanced with 18 Rc4 Nd6 19 Nc5.

**18 ... Bxd4 19 Qxd4 Nf6**

and Black has an extra pawn for negligible compensation.

**207) A.Mnatsakanian-B.Murtazin, Moscow 2019**

**23 ... Be6?!**

Controlling c4, but White still has the b7-square for the knight. A much better way to control the c4-square was 23 ... c4!, occupying the contested square and threatening ... c3. After 24 Rd4 (24 Nb7? can now be met with 24 ... c3! and White's pawn structure will come undone) 24 ... c3 25 Rxb4 cxb2 26 Rxb2 Rxc2 27 Rxc2 Bxc2 Black has an edge thanks to White's weak e-pawn.

**24 Nb7 c4**

Now the ... c3 idea is not as effective because the bishop is not targeting c2 anymore. White can untangle with

**25 Rd4**

**208) D.Perrine-D.Mardov, Charlotte 2021**

**18 Nd5?**

A thematic knight sacrifice. Here it does not accomplish much because of a concrete failing. 18 g5 was the safer and better option, grabbing a kingside space advantage.

**18 ... exd5 19 exd5 Ba4 20 b3 Nf6! 21 h3?**

White should have recovered the piece, but Black is still doing well: 21 g5 Ng4 22 Qg3 Nxe3 23 Qxe3 Bf8 24 bxa4 Qd7 and White's extra pawn resides on a4, where it does not do much aside from being weak.

**21 ... Be8**

Retreating the bishop to d7 was even stronger to keep the pieces better coordinated. But regardless of either bishop move, Black is just up a piece.

**209) M.Rafiee-R.Baskin**, chess.com 2021

**15 ... d5!**

Black returns his extra pawn to complete development, preventing White from setting up a positional bind on the dark squares.

**16 exd5 Nxd5 17 Nxd5 exd5 18 Rxd5 Be6**

Black's pressure on the a-file promises a strong attack, even without the queens.

**210) Z.Runic-E.Muratovic**, Konjic 2021

**34 Qe2?!**

The queen exchange removes White's dynamic chances. 34 Qd1! was better to preserve counterplay against Black's king. After 34 ... Nxf4 35 Bxf4 Bxe1 36 Qxe1 White's queen can dance around the board, threatening annoying checks while helping the queenside pawns advance.

**34 ... Qxe2 35 Rxe2 Nxf4 36 Bxf4 Bb4**

The position is objectively equal but not easy to play for White. He eventually lost the endgame.

**211) A.Isik-J.Stocko**, Konjic 2021

**17 ... d5!**

The thematic freeing move in Sicilians where Black has played ... e5. Here it looks like White wins a pawn, but Black is able to recover it.

**18 Nexd5 Bxd5 19 exd5 Bb4! 20 Be3 Bxc3 21 d6 Qc6**

21 ... Qb8! 22 bxc3 Rc6 was the best way to play; the white pawn structure will be quite sad following the loss of the d-pawn.

**212) Z.Tsydypov-N.Chasin**, lichess.org 2021

**10 Bd3?**

Too casual. Black has just taken a pawn, so White needed to play more energetically to maximize compensation: 10 g3! Qh6 11 e5 and now Black does not have a good square to move the knight; after 11 ... Nd5 12 Nxd5 exd5 13 Bg2 White stands better.

**10 ... Qg5?!**

10 ... d6 was better to prevent e5, with a clear advantage. White's compensation for the pawn is doubtful.

**11 e5?**

11 Qe2 would still be slightly worse for White, but Black has some logistical problems developing: 11 ... d6 12 0-0 Be7 13 Rf3 and there is some counterplay.

**11 ... Bc5!**

Black now wins a pawn with tactics, only possible due to White's positional weaknesses.

**213) J.Salomon-J.Lopez, chess.com 2019**

**10 g4!**

With the pawn on h4, the bishop and queen on diagonals eyeing the black kingside, and Black's pawn on e6, now is the perfect time to open lines against the black king.

**10 ... Nxc3 11 dxc3**

11 Bxc3 would have preserved pressure on the long diagonal.

**11 ... e5 12 g5 h5 13 Qe4?!**

While the queen is well placed on e4, it does not achieve much on its own here. 13 Rd1 Qc7 14 g6 was superior.

**214) M.Arabidze-D.Jojua, Tbilisi 2019**

**15 Nb5!**

White activates her knight to add pressure to the c7- and d6-squares and prevents Black's idea of ... Be5. 15 Bh6? may look attractive, but it does not do anything. Black can simply play 15 ... Be5 and be perfectly fine. 15 Nd5? is another pretty-looking move, but in fact is an error: 15 ... Bxd5! 16 cxd5 Be5 and Black is completely fine, as the tall pawn on f3 contributes very little to White's play.

**215) E.Khubukshanov-V.Zakhartsov, Moscow 2020**

**21 Qb7?!**

White recognizes the weakness on c6 and pounces. However, Black gets plenty of compensation for the pawn. 21 c4! was the move, fixing the weak c-pawns. There was no need to rush.

**21 ... c4**

and Black is fine. In the game, White erred with

**22 b4??**

and was immediately lost following

**22 ... Na4 23 Rac1 Nb2 24 Rf1 Bb6 25 Qxc6 Rac8 26 Qb5 Qb7 27 Nd5 Bxf2+**

**216) S.Sevian-N.Matinian, lichess.org 2021**

**17 Re4?!**

White mobilizes the rook but neglects queenside development. In a situation like this where Black needs to castle, every move matters, and the more pieces White can activate, the better. 17 Nd2! was logical to bring the knight to e4 and help deploy the bishop to g5. Now:

a) If Black tries to castle quickly with 17 ... Qd7 18 Ne4 0-0-0, then White can win with a continuation such as 19 Bg5 Rdf8 20 Nc5 Qxb5 21 Nxe6 fxe6 22 Qxg4.

b) 17 ... Rh5 is creative, but White still gets a decisive advantage: 18 Ne4 Rxe5 19 Bg5! Ne7 (or 19 ... Rxc5 20 Nxc5 Qxc5 21 Bxd5 and White is up a clear exchange; 21 ... Rd8 22 Qa4 Qxd5 23 Rad1 does not help Black) 20 Qc2 Qd7 21 Nf6+ Bxf6 22 Bxf6 Rxe1+ 23 Rxe1 0-0-0 24 Bxh4 and White is winning.

c) 17 ... g3 18 Ne4 gxf2+ 19 Kxf2 c6 20 Nd6+ Kf8 21 Qf3 and White is crushing.

**217) B.Nugumanov-M.Scherbakov, Chelyabinsk 2020**

**10 e6?!**

While this may look tempting because of the discovered attack, this pawn push only helps Black develop the knight while loosening White's grip of the center. Better was 10 Qe2 Nh6 11 g4, restricting Black's knight and keeping a space advantage.

**10 ... Nf6 11 exd7+**

11 exf7+ Kxf7 is actually good for Black, as White cannot prevent artificial castling. Additionally, Black has two center pawns that will soon be pushed, while White has none.

**11 ... Bxd7**

Black has equalized here, with the isolated c-pawn more than compensated for by fast development and open b- and d-files.

**218) D.Makhmev-A.Akhmetov, Almaty 2020****14 cxd5**

It is important to include this move before playing e4. 14 e4? would be a poor decision because after 14 ... dxc4 Black has an extra pawn, and the passivity of the white bishops resulting from the central congestion lends Black a serious advantage.

**14 ... cxd5 15 e4**

Now Black has to allow the opening of the center or give a pawn with ... d4 to at least keep the diagonal closed.

**15 ... d4**

15 ... dxe4 16 Bxe4 Bxe4 17 Qxe4 is no solace; Black has great difficulty untangling.

**16 Rxd4**

White has an extra pawn and strong control of the d-file, giving him an edge.

**219) N.Afanasiev-L.Nozdrachev, Orsha 2020****14 Qf3!**

It is often hard to decide what square is best to retreat to when a piece is attacked. Here White notices Black's awkward knight placement and thus opts to avoid a queen trade. Not 14 Qe2?! Qd3! and Black's king will feel a lot safer after the queens are exchanged. 14 Qh3? avoids a queen trade but makes no sense; in fact, the queen will find itself in trouble after 14 ... Bd7. And 14 Qxg7?? Bf6 would be highly unfortunate.

**14 ... Nc2**

14 ... Qd3 15 Be3! is the difference compared to the 14 Qe2 line.

**15 Rd1**

White has to see this response to 14 ... Nc2, after which he is doing very well thanks to his lead in development.

**220) O.Mihok-M.Palczert, Budapest 2021****15 e5!**

White clamps down on the d6-square, which has been significantly weakened by the exchange of dark-squared bishops.

**15 ... Bxf3**

White is not scared of the doubled pawns after 15 ... Qxe3 16 fxe3 Bxf3 (or 16 ... Nd5 17 Ne4! and with the knight coming to d6, White stands better) 17 gxf3, as White's pawn structure has been improved, and he can claim an advantage.

**16 gxf3 Nd5**

Black gives a pawn to prevent White's knight from landing on d6 and becoming a superhero. Not 16 ... Ng8? 17 Qg5 and the weak dark squares will tell.

**17 Nxd5 exd5 18 c3**

White will win the d-pawn and possibly the game.

**221) D.Kojovic-D.Kovacevic, Novi Banovci 2020**

**11 ... 0-0-0?!**

A move that looks logical, since castling kingside would take quite a few tempi. However, this allows White to keep an edge with his center and better pieces. Black had the stronger move 11 ... f5! to contest the center before castling: 12 Qc4 fxe4 13 Rhe1 d5 14 Qa6 Qc8 15 Qxc8+ Rxc8 16 Nf4 Rd8 with a dynamically balanced game.

**222) B.Nugumanov-A.Frolov, Chelyabinsk 2020**

**22 ... Bc5+?**

Black has a few ways of responding to the attack on the e5-pawn, but this is not one of the good options. Better was 22 ... Bxc4! 23 dxc4 Qc6 24 Nxe5 Qe6 25 Nd3 Rxc4 and White is the only one left with a weak pawn. 22 ... Nd7 was also a good move. White cannot play 23 Nfxe5?! due to 23 ... Nxb6 24 axb6 f6 25 Nf3 Bxc4 26 dxc4 Qc6 and White's pawns are weak; Black will eventually recoup the pawn.

**23 Bxc5 Rxc5 24 b4**

Now White wins the pawn on e5, leaving Black with minimal compensation.

**223) A.Suleymenov-M.Nikologorsky, Moscow 2021**

**15 h4!**

Down an exchange, White has to act fast before Black has time to consolidate. Thus, castling is not a priority here.

**15 ... f6 16 h5 g5**

16 ... e5 was a better way to hold the position. Black is relatively fine here.

**17 h6 b5 18 0-0**

Now that Black's kingside structure is thoroughly weakened, White finally castles. White has a lot of compensation for the exchange and has a serious advantage.

#### **224) A.Motylev-N.Bashirli, Lisbon 2020**

**16 a3?!**

A typical trick to take advantage of the queen on a5. However, here White has to evaluate whether it is worth it to win a pawn while opening up his king. Intuitively, it does not feel correct to open up the king like this, and Black does in fact have compensation for the pawn. Instead of playing for material, White should have gone for 16 Nxc5! dxc5 17 Bb2 and Black has no play at all, giving White a comfortable plus. White is not afraid of 17 ... Qxa2? since Black has no immediate follow-up. With the king secured, the black kingside can come under siege in multiple ways. Several moves give White a winning attack, such as 18 Qf4.

**16 ... Nxa4 17 axb4**

The point of the previous move.

**17 ... Qc7 18 bxa4 Bd7?!**

18 ... e5! was stronger, and after 19 Bb2 Be6 Black would have full compensation for the pawn.

**19 a5**

White deprives Black of file-opening pawn breaks and creates an outpost for his bishop on b6, which will hinder Black's play.

#### **225) R.Psyk-I.Janik, Pokrzywna 2020**

**22 ... b4?!**

Black pushes too hastily on the queenside. 22 ... Nxb2 was possible, planning to trade the knight for the bishop after 23 Rb1 Nd3 24 Bxd3 cxd3 25 Qxd3, but White has sufficient counterplay on the kingside to complicate the issue considerably. Instead, 22 ... Ne5! was superior, preserving the desirable aspects of his position while preparing to remove the h4-d8 pin

with ... Ng6. After 23 Nd4 (or 23 Nxe5 dxe5! and the passive c2-bishop and c3-knight will leave White significantly worse) 23 ... Ng6 Black is better.

**23 Na4 Nxb2 24 Nxb2 c3 25 Qd3**

After 25 Qd1 cxb2 26 Rb1 the position is roughly balanced.

**226) C.Manish Anto-M.Annaberdiev, Budapest 2020**

**20 ... g5!**

Black stops White's kingside expansion in its tracks. White cannot win the g-pawn because his b-pawn would be hanging. Also viable was 20 ... g6 to keep the bishop on the a1-h8 diagonal.

**21 hxg5 hxg5 22 Rxh8+ Bxh8**

Black has strong pressure on b2 and enjoys a good position.

**227) F.Nijboer-A.Feuerstack, Amsterdam 2020**

**14 ... Nxf3?!**

White is up a pawn, so Black needs to play actively to stay in the game. However, this sacrifice does not work, as there are not enough pieces to help with the follow-up. Better was 14 ... Nxe2 15 Qxe2 Bd4!, relocating the bishop to e5 where it would help control the dark squares on f4 and h2.

**15 Ng3 Qxh2+ 16 Kxf3 Nxf3 17 Bf4! f5 18 Bxf3**

White is ready to meet ... Qh3 with d4. The king escapes safely to the queenside.

**228) Z.Low-D.Kosic, Budapest 2020**

Black solves the problem of his weak doubled c-pawns with

**23 ... c3!**

A move like 23 ... Bc7?! would allow White to stop the idea of ... c3 with 24 Nd1.

**24 b3**

Or 24 bxc3 c4 and Black is doing well. White can hardly move anything!

**24 ... Be7**

The bishop reroutes to d4, which has become a permanent outpost thanks to 23 ... c3 previously.

**229) A.Kozak-J.Kyc, Krakow 2021**

**8 c5!**

In this position that commonly arises from the English, Black has delayed capturing on c4, so White does not give him another chance. With strong control of the e5-square, White grabs a healthy space advantage and can expand on the queenside in the future.

**230) A.Balleisen-C.Hilby**, chess.com 2021

**14 ... 0-0?**

Black should be more mindful of White's kingside presence. 14 ... Bxg5! was a favorable simplification: 15 fxg5 Nxe2+ 16 Nxe2 allows 16 ... b5! and Black can favorably open the queenside. The f6-square appears weak, but it is more or less impossible for White's knight to arrive there. Instead, 16 Qxe2!? Qxg5 17 e5! is an interesting try from the engine to bring the c3-knight to f6 via e4, but two pawns is a steep price to pay: 17 ... Qxe5 18 Bxc6+ bxc6 19 Qxe5 dxe5 20 Ne4 Ke7 and although White will have a strong knight on c5 in the near future, Black should have a small advantage in light of his extra material.

**15 Kh1?**

Allowing ... Bxg5 once again. 15 Bxf6 Qxf6 16 e5! dxe5 17 Nxd4 Nxd4 18 Ne4 Qd8 19 fxe5 would have been stronger, when f6 is under White's dominion. From there, the white knight will facilitate a devastating attack.

**231) T.Lammens-M.Dorohin**, Utrecht 2020

**30 Qd7!**

Fully restricting the movement of Black's pieces and stopping the freeing ... c6.

**30 ... Kf8? 31 Na7!**

The only winning move, rerouting the knight to the dominant c6-square. 31 Nd4? Be7 leaves White unable to play Nc8, and Black is fine.

**31 ... Be7 32 Nc8!**

and White wins; the queen on b8 is in a very sad spot.

**232) R.Issa-L.Mendonca**, Budapest 2020

**17 ... Nf3+?**

Black makes a good positional trade of knight for bishop but misses White's tactical resource. A move like 17 ... Qb4 or 17 ... Qc7 would be fine for Black.

**18 Rxf3 Qxg5 19 e5!**

The point. White wins two pieces for a rook thanks to the checkmate threat.

**19 ... Qxe5**

19 ... Nh5 20 exd6 Bxd6 21 Be4 only appears unclear; a white knight will land on e4 shortly and cause Black's house of cards to collapse.

**20 Rxf6**

**233) J.Moussard-D.Garcia Ramos, Barcelona 2020**

**11 Nb3**

White goes for a plan to restrict the black bishop's activity, which ends up working somehow. Stronger was 11 Qb5! to harass Black's bishop and bring the knight to c4. The queen is surprisingly safe on b5. Then 11 ... Qe7 12 Nc4 results in a bizarre-looking sort of bind on Black's pieces.

**11 ... Bb6 12 c4 Qf6?**

12 ... Qe7 would have covered c5 and been fine for Black.

**13 c5**

and the black dark-squared bishop will be doomed to passivity.

**234) L.Licznerski-J.Paprocki, Pokrzywna 2020**

**44 ... Bc2?**

Black miscalculates the resulting simplification. He had to bring the king in, in order to place his pawns on dark squares: 44 ... Kg7! 45 Be1 c5 46 Bxa5 Kf6 47 Bc7 Ke6 and the pawns are protected; Black's strategy is to keep the pawns on the color of White's bishop so that they cannot be blockaded. Black does not worry about not capturing White's a-pawn because his bishop can always keep it under control. Retaining a favorable pawn structure is more important than maximizing a material surplus in this kind of endgame.

**45 Be1 Bxa4 46 Bxa5 c6 47 Ke3**

Though Black is up two pawns, White has an active king, and the queenside pawns are soon forced onto light squares where the bishop can easily blockade them.

**235) M.Vachier Lagrave-D.Dubov, chess24.com 2021**

**19 b4!**

A typical way to control c5 in the Ruy Lopez. White closes off the queenside to prevent Black's advances there and is not worried about the protected passed c-pawn because his bishops will block it. Meanwhile,

White will generate play on the kingside. 19 b3 would be less effective due to 19 ... Rc8 and White should probably play b4 here anyway.

**19 ... cxb3 20 Bxb3**

Black regains the c5-square, but at the cost of a lot of space.

**236) D.Naroditsky-B.Dhulipalla**, lichess.org 2021

**19 a4?!**

Too slow. 19 b5! was superior to attack Black's queenside. The pawn is immune, and following with a4 will ensure lasting pressure on this side of the board: 19 ... Rab8 (19 ... cxb5 20 Bxb7 is of course an unpleasant structure for Black; while 19 ... Nxb5 20 a4 Nc7 21 Qxb6 leaves Black with a pseudo-backward pawn on b7) 20 a4 and White has a clear advantage.

**19 ... b5!**

The queenside is now sealed, with White's chance to play b5 gone forever. Black is fine.

**237) A.Mikaelyan-L.Babujian**, Yerevan 2021

**15 Nxe6?**

White trades off the bishop too early without a good follow-up. Best was to activate the rook with 15 Ra6! Rfd8 (15 ... Rad8 16 Rxa7! Qxa7 17 Nxe6 picks up a pawn and secures the bishop pair; Black's various weaknesses will significantly complicate his defensive task) 16 Bf4 Nf7 17 Nxe6 Qxe6 18 0-0 and White has a clear advantage. Despite being a pawn down, White will easily recover at least one of the pawns on c4, d6, or a7.

**15 ... Qxe6 16 0-0**

Playing 16 Ra6 here would not work as well as on the previous move due to 16 ... Rad8 17 Rxa7 d5 18 Rxc7+ Kxc7 19 Bh6+ Kg8 20 Bxf8 d4!! and Black gets counterplay.

**238) P.Ponkratov-T.Fakhrutdinov**, Moscow 2019

**13 ... Be7?**

A casual developing move that misses an important idea. Best was 13 ... b5! followed by ... b4, creating a passed pawn before White plays a4 first. White has no way to break through in the center immediately, so Black can delay castling for a move to keep his hopes for queenside play alive.

**14 Ng5?**

White also misses the important idea. White could have played 14 a4! to stymie Black's queenside advance.

**14 ... Qg4**

14 ... b5 was still playable.

**239) T.Piceu-N.Georgiadis**, Munich 2020

**18 Nf1**

White makes the best choice among the options, repositioning his knight. 18 Bxc4? may look interesting, but Black emerges with a winning position after 18 ... bxc4 19 Nxc4 Rxc5 20 Nb6 Qc7 21 Nxa8 Bxa8; and it does not help White to release the tension with 18 axb5?! axb5 19 Rxa8 Rxa8.

**18 ... Ng6**

If 18 ... Rxc5?! 19 axb5 axb5 20 Rxa8+ Bxa8 21 Ng3, White has compensation in the form of Black's open kingside, backward pawn, and weak bishop.

**19 Ng3**

White has enough compensation for the pawn that will be lost on c5.

**240) A.Domingo Nunez-A.Vidarte Morales**, Santo Tirso 2020

**17 Qb3?!**

A logical-looking move, but there were better options. White could have stifled Black's play and kept a better position with 17 Nh5! Qf7 18 g3 Nf5 19 Qg4.

**17 ... b6 18 Qb5 Nb8?**

18 ... Rhe8 was best, with a balanced position.

**19 Re1 Ng6 20 Qxd7+ Nxd7 21 Nf5**

Now White's more active pieces promise him an advantage.

**241) A.Barseghyan-H.Hayrapetyan**, Yerevan 2021

**9 d5!**

Black's poor handling of the opening allows White to prevent ... d5 while gaining a space advantage and hindering the black light-squared bishop.

**9 ... Na6**

Here 9 ... exd5 10 cxd5 Nxd5 11 Nxd5 Bxd5 12 Bxh7+ Kxh7 13 Qxd5 is great for White, in light of Black's isolated d7-pawn.

**242) A.Esipenko-M.Vachier Lagrave, Wijk aan Zee 2021**

**13 ... Nxd5?!**

Black has to decide which piece he wants to remain on d5. In the game, he chooses the bishop and, after the resulting forced continuation, ends up with a solid position. Unfortunately, there is also not much to play for there. If Black chose to keep the knight instead with 13 ... Bxd5! 14 exd5 Nxd5 then after 15 b4 Ncxb4 16 cxb4 Qxb4 17 Qxb4 Nxb4 18 Rb1 Nxa2, he would get an endgame with four pawns versus a piece, lending him a small advantage.

**14 exd5 Bxd5 15 b4 Bxf3 16 bxa5 Bxe2 17 Rd5 Bxc3 18 Rb1 Nb4 19 Rd4 Bxd4 20 Qxd4**

Black is not better here.

**243) G.Wall-A.Greet, Dublin 2019**

**19 Bc1?**

At a glance, White holds a space advantage and control over the c-file. However, with this move, White starts to remove important defenders from his d4-pawn, giving Black a way back into the game. Though it looks like White is trading away a bad bishop for Black's good bishop, the white bishop on b2 is actually a strong defensive piece. Better was 19 Bd3!, preparing h3-g4 or Nc3-Bxf5-Nxd5. After 19 ... Qd8 20 Nc3 Black has to move the f5-knight to avoid tricks on d5.

**19 ... Bxc1 20 Qxc1 Qxc1 21 Rxc1 Kd8**

Now ... Nc4 is on the menu, and with it Black's light-squared bishop finally gets some space to breathe. The subsequent weakening of the b5-pawn will result in an advantage for Black.

**244) A.Igambergenov-A.Audi, Moscow 2020**

**11 ... b5!**

Black takes advantage of White's uncastled king to strike in the center. If not for this idea, then White would be very happy here, as the knight on b4 will be kicked away with an eventual a3 move, while Black's light-squared bishop does not have many places to go to.

**12 a3**

Not 12 cxb5? Bb7 and Black wins the d-pawn; or 12 Nxb5?! Ba6! and Black's initiative will ensure that the material investment will be returned with interest.

**12 ... Qa5 13 Nd2?**

13 0-0 should have been preferred, though Black retains a comfortable position after 13 ... bxc4.

**13 ... bxc4 14 Nxc4 Qa6**

With the c4-pawn off the board, Black parks the queen on a6, which makes it very hard for White to castle.

**245) T.Koch-M.Santos Ruiz, Munich 2020**

**15 ... Ne7!**

Black emphasizes control over d5. 15 ... Nb8?, planning to move the knight to d7, would not be as good because White has 16 Rxc8 Bxc8 17 Ne5, intercepting Black's plan.

**16 Rxc8**

Black is not afraid of 16 Bxf6 gxf6 because White does not have enough pieces to take advantage of the weakened kingside pawns.

**16 ... Qxc8**

Black is doing fine here.

**246) S.Sargsyan-M.Pranesh, Moscow 2020**

**21 g4!**

White is positionally worse thanks to his doubled pawns and Black's strong bind on the center, so White needs to make play quickly or face a worse position. The plan of opening the g-file with g4-g5 sharpens the game, giving White exactly what he needs.

**21 ... Bf7 22 g5 Be7**

22 ... f5? would be ideal, but it fatally weakens e5. After 23 Nxd6 Qxd6 24 Nxe5 two pawns is too many.

**23 gxf6 Bxf6 24 Nxf6+ gxf6 25 Nh4**

Now White can prepare f4 to turn his dormant dark-squared bishop into a monster.

**247) L.Babujian-B.Daneshvar, Yerevan 2021**

**13 ... 0-0-0?!**

In this typical Semi-Slav situation, it is important for Black to break White's central superiority as soon as possible: 13 ... c5! 14 dxc5 Bxc5 solves the problem of the blunted light-squared bishop and keeps the extra pawn.

**14 a4**

Now White gets a free attack against the black king.

**248) N.Afanasiev-A.Zhukov, Moscow 2021**

**21 h4!**

White notices that Black's pieces are mostly on the queenside, and it will take time for them to shuffle over to the kingside. This indicates that the time is ripe to launch a kingside offensive.

**21 ... Qe7 22 h5 Qh4?**

Not very useful, but it was not easy to stave off White's attack in any case.

**23 g5! hxg5 24 hxg6+ fxg6**

Or 24 ... Kxg6 25 Bxc5 bxc5 26 Qd3+ and the weak light squares will tell.

**25 Nce4**

Black is completely lost.

**249) F.Hellers-V.Levchenkov, Riga 2020**

**26 g4!**

Seeing that Black's knight is not on f6, White sneaks in this move to break open the kingside. Black's pieces are not properly placed to defend against this attack.

**26 ... Nf6?!**

26 ... hxg4 is the natural reply, but 27 h5! still blasts open the kingside. If 27 ... gxh5, then 28 Re6! and Qg5+ will be decisive.

**27 gxh5 Nxh5 28 Bf3?!**

28 c5! was better, promising White a clear advantage. The black knight's absence from the queenside allows for the mobilization of White's queenside pawns.

**28 ... Nf6**

28 ... Nf4! 29 Re4 e5 would have more or less saved Black.

**29 h5**

and White has a decisive attack.

**250) J.Jurek-A.Nguyen, Marianske Lazne 2020**

**9 ... exd5?**

A big mistake. Opening the e-file while the king is still uncastled cannot be good. A move like 9 ... a6 was required, trading off the pawn on b5 to help develop the knight on b8.

**10 Re1**

White threatens Qe2, which would end Black's hopes of castling, so he castles immediately.

**10 ... 0-0 11 Nxd5!**

But now White is able to win back his pawn while maintaining an enormous advantage in activity that will likely win him the game soon.

**11 ... Bf6**

If 11 ... Bxd5 12 Bxh7+ Kxh7 13 Qxd5, Black is forced to give back another piece to avoid losing the rook.

**12 Nxf6+ Qxf6 13 Bg5**

with a winning advantage.

**251) D.Gomez Dieguez-A.Strikovic**, Santiago de Compostela 2020

**14 ... dxe5?!**

Starting with 14 ... Nxd3! first was better to remove any possibilities of White sacrificing on the kingside. Black is not afraid of 15 exf6? Nxe1 16 Rxe1 Rxe1+ 17 Qxe1 Bf8.

**15 Nxe5?**

White misses a nice idea. He had 15 Bxf6 Bxf6 16 Bxg6! fxg6 17 Qxh6 Qd8 18 Qxg6+ Kf8 19 Nf5 and Black's position is shaky, giving White full compensation for the sacrificed piece.

**15 ... Nxd3**

Black transposes to 14 ... Nxd3, with an advantage.

**252) D.Lima-A.Fier**, Florianopolis 2021

**10 e6?!**

A typical move to weaken Black's pawn structure, but not the best here. 10 exf6 Nxf6 11 Qe2 was the right way to proceed, making use of the semi-open e-file.

**10 ... dxe6?**

Black voluntarily isolates his c-pawns. 10 ... d6 looks ugly, but Black preserves his pawn structure and secures the e5-square for his knight. The white e-pawn is rather lonely in Black's camp.

**11 h3 Nh6 12 Be3**

Now White will win back his pawn investment, with a better structure to boot.

**253) E.Chibukhchyan-S.Golubov, Moscow 2019**

**8 d4!**

White temporarily sacrifices a pawn to open up lines since Black will need to spend a few moves to finish development.

**8 ... exd4 9 Nb5 a6?**

Trying to keep the pawn is inadvisable. Nor 9 ... Bc5?! 10 Qc2 Bc4 11 Bf4! and White holds a significant advantage. Returning the pawn with 9 ... Qd7 was best, although White is not complaining after 10 Nbx4 Nxd4 11 Qxd4.

**10 Nbx4 Nxd4 11 Nxd4 Bd5 12 e4?!**

12 Bxd5 Qxd5 13 e4! was more accurate.

**12 ... Bc4 13 Re1 Bb4 14 Bd2 Bxd2 15 Qxd2**

The black knight on b6 has no prospects, and the bishop on c4 is placed very awkwardly. In the meantime, White will follow with moves like b3 and Rad1, with a large advantage.

**254) I.Iljiushenok-E.Goltseva, Moscow 2020**

**22 d5?!**

White breaks in the center, but this is not as scary as it looks. The best move was 22 g4! to weaken Black's control of the center: 22 ... Ba4 (not 22 ... fxg4? 23 Nxc6 and the knight falls) 23 gxf5! Bxd1 24 Bxe4 Bh5 25 f6! Rf8 26 Qg2 and White's pieces coordinate very well to give him a dominating position.

**22 ... exd5?**

Black blunders right back. She had to find 22 ... Ba4 23 Rc1 Nc5 to keep the tension in the center and cover f5. The position remains unpleasant, but Black is still fighting.

**23 Rxf5 Re7 24 cxd5 Bxd5 25 Rxd5 Nxd5 26 Bxe4**

With all of his pieces pointing towards the kingside, White is dominating.

**255) N.Bashirli-K.Grigoryan, Lisbon 2020**

It may appear that White has the safer king with his pieces oriented rather

menacingly towards the black kingside. However, Black is able to play a splendid break here.

**24 ... e5!! 25 fxe5 Bxg4?!**

25 ... Bg5 would have been even better because the g4-pawn makes a negative contribution to White's aggressive intentions. A future ... a5-a4 would pry open the a-file and result in a great attack for Black.

**26 Rdg1**

and Black must find ... Qg5, after which the situation is still favorable for him, but much messier than with 25 ... Bg5.

### **256) J.Sheng-N.Khomeriki, Philadelphia 2019**

White's clumsy central positioning set him up for a shock.

**13 ... Rxf3! 14 gxf3**

14 Qxf3? d5! is the very clever point, with a Black victory likely to happen shortly.

**14 ... Nxe5**

Black has fabulous compensation for her material deficit, although 14 ... Bf5 15 Rg4 Nxe5 is even stronger. In the game, White collapsed with

**15 Bf1?!**

15 Rxe5! dxe5 16 Qxd8+ Bxd8 is practically forced, after which it is about equal.

**15 ... Qe8 16 Nd2? Qh5**

and Black has a very serious attack and a clear advantage. White lost in short order.

### **257) N.Delgado Ramirez-N.Filgueiras, Florianopolis 2021**

**9 ... Bxc3!**

Giving away the dark-squared bishop to triple White's pawns. White's bishop does not have a good way of taking advantage of the dark squares due to the unfortunately placed pawn on f4.

**10 bxc3 Bc6 11 Qe1 Nf6?**

Black missteps, allowing White to simplify into an opposite-colored bishop situation. 11 ... Qd7 would have led to a clear advantage for Black, with long castling on the cards.

**12 e5 Ne4 13 Ng5 Nxe5 14 fxe5**

White's pawn structure resembles a train wreck, but his position is more tenable following the recent exchanges.

**258) M.Quinn-C.O'Donnell**, Dublin 2019

**6 ... Bxe4!**

Black finds a way to exploit White's slow play.

**7 dxe4 Qa5+ 8 c3 Qe5**

The queen is well placed on e5, and Black actually wins a pawn here.

**9 f4?**

9 f3 was best but would be met by 9 ... Nh5, forcing White to play 10 f4 to prevent ... Ng3. This is not inherently disastrous for White; the main task of this puzzle is to evaluate the resulting position. After 10 ... Nxf4 11 Qg4 Qxe4+ 12 Kd1 Qd5+ 13 Kc2 Black can either repeat moves with ... Qe4+ or play on with ... Ne6. According to *Stockfish*, the position is close to equal, though the onus is more on White to play accurately.

**9 ... Qxe4**

is a clear pawn.

**259) X.Xu-B.Gledura**, chess.com 2020

**19 Bd3!**

Black's technically "bad" bishop is actually superior to White's good one because it is actively positioned on the b1-h7 diagonal. The black pawns on light squares also hinder White's bishop more than Black's. Thus, White should exchange bishops with a roughly equal position.

**260) A.Smith-P.Lindgren**, Sweden 2020

**9 ... d5! 10 exd5 e5!**

Black is down material, so it is paramount that he continues to play actively to generate counterplay.

**11 Ne2 e4?**

A forcing move that turns out to be bad. Best was 11 ... Bf5 12 Qb3 b5! 13 Qxb5 (not 13 Bxb5? Rb8 and it will be difficult to hold on to the bishop) 13 ... Bxc2 and Black has compensation for the pawns due to White's lack of development and exposed queenside.

**12 Qb3 b5 13 Qxb5 Bd7 14 Qa6 Bc8 15 Qa3**

White is now able to consolidate and went on to win.

**261) P.Golubka-M.Redzisz**, Krakow 2021

**15 hxg6?!**

This is a typical move to open the h-file. However, White's pieces are not optimally placed to take advantage, so it would have been better to take a slower approach. Playing positionally with 15 h6! Bh8 16 Kb1, followed by queenside play with moves such as Nd5, would have promised White an advantage. The pawn on h6 hinders the black kingside and, despite Black's optically fearsome queenside setup, White has a safe position and a space advantage.

**15 ... hxg6 16 g4 Be6 17 g5 Nh5**

As is customary for many Dragon-type setups, the knight on h5 serves a useful function in blocking the h-file. White's attack has reached a halt.

**262) C.Yoo-H.Niemann, New York 2020**

**13 ... 0-0-0!**

Normally one does not castle into a weakened pawn structure. However, here this is the best way to vacate the king from the center.

**14 Bxh6? d5!**

Further weakening his own pawn structure but opening the h1-a8 diagonal for the light-squared bishop. In fact, it is White's king that will soon come under fire.

**263) R.Gajek-K.Ozturk, Graz 2020**

**14 ... c5?**

White's position may look open with the uncastled king, but Black's pieces are not well placed to take advantage of it. This move makes sense to save the rook but loses the important d-pawn. Better was the solid 14 ... c6! 15 Bxf8 Ne6 16 Qd2 Ndx8 and, despite being down the exchange, Black gets at least one pawn for it. Her superiority in pawn structure gives her a better position. Not 14 ... Re8? 15 Nxd5, threatening a fork on c7.

**15 Qxd5 Re8 16 Ne4?**

16 0-0-0! would actually be winning for White. He has a great advantage in activity.

**16 ... Qxe5 17 Qxe5 Rxe5**

Black is technically up a pawn, but the monstrous bishop pair ensures White an advantage.

**264) B.Daneshvar-A.Sargsyan, Yerevan 2021**

**24 Qb3?**

It turns out that defending b5 is unnecessary. 24 Bc2! followed by Rb1 would be quite strong: 24 ... Qxb5? (if 24 ... Rc4 25 Rb1 Rxd4 26 Qf3, White will pick up c3 with a small advantage) 25 Bd3! Qc6 26 Nxc3 is much better for White in light of Black's coordination problems.

**24 ... Qxd4 25 Nxc3 Nf4**

Allowing White tries like Bxf4, Qd1, and Rcd1. Instead, after 25 ... Nb6 Black would be better; the white bishop pair is thoroughly useless here.

**265) J.Sheng-A.Hevia, chess.com 2021**

This type of situation is quite common in the French Winawer with ... b6, where Black expends a great deal of time to maintain a solid pawn structure and hopefully exchange his problematic light-squared bishop via a6. However, the loss of time allows White to prevent Black's plan with

**8 b4!**

and all variations favor White. While this position was theoretically known before, I believe that my novelty has rendered it silent.

**8 ... a6?!**

8 ... Ba6 9 b5 Bb7 10 Nf3 is already winning, as Black has no reasonable way to develop. If 8 ... c5 9 bxc5 bxc5 10 Nb5, White is winning again, as Nd6+ will pry the black bishop off the g7-pawn. And 8 ... Bxb4? 9 Qxg7 Bxc3+ 10 Bd2 reveals the problem behind Black's earlier setup: the bishop is immobile on f8! Black's best try is 8 ... f5 9 Qg6+ Qf7 10 Qxf7+ Kxf7 11 a3, but the exchange of queens fails to diminish White's positional advantage.

**9 a3?!**

This move is unnecessary, as Black still cannot capture on b4. Despite this inaccuracy, White retained a serious edge and went on to win. More active would be 9 Nf3 where 9 ... c5? 10 bxc5 bxc5 11 dxc5 would have given White a decisive advantage. Apparently, Black should play 9 ... Kd8!? 10 a3 Qe8!! to preserve a position that is just shy of lost. I am unsure how one would reach such a conclusion, but *Stockfish* is quite mysterious ...

**266) M.Dobrikov-M.Sebenik, Villorba 2021**

**24 Ra3?**

Preparing Nd5, but missing Black's response. 24 Rb5! Bxb5 25 cxb5 would guarantee immense compensation for the material investment.

Black's counterplay along the b-file is sealed, and the prospects of him contesting the light squares in the near future are not great.

**24 ... f5?**

24 ... Qb8! would have won the b3-pawn with a skewer: 25 Nd5 Rxb3 26 Rxb3 Qxb3 and Black is doing fine.

**25 Nd5**

Now White is back in the driver's seat.

**267) A.Maltsevskaya-A.Nesterov, Moscow 2021**

**30 ... Qc7?**

A little passive, giving White the initiative. The only way to try for an advantage was 30 ... Qa4! 31 Rd2 Rxc3! to eliminate the fearsome bishop on c3 and win the a-pawn for the exchange. After 32 bxc3 Qxa3 33 Ne2 Qa1, despite lacking a rook, Black is better here on account of the passed a-pawn and passive White pieces.

**31 Qh4 Ne8 32 Nh5 1-0**

**268) B.Krasteva-V.Bernadskiy, Villorba 2021**

**12 h4!**

Gaining space and hindering the black light-squared bishop. In standard King's Indian fashion, White could try to force a trade of bishops with 12 Bd3?! Bxd3 (not 12 ... Bxg2?? 13 Qh5+ and Black is shortly mated) 13 Qxd3 Be7, but there are not enough minor pieces left to take advantage of the weak light squares in Black's camp. Black is doing fine here.

**12 ... Bg6**

12 ... Be7? 13 Qg4 reveals another point behind h4: defending g7 is impossible.

**13 h5 Bf7 14 Bd3 Be7 15 Qc2 h6 16 Bg6**

and White's dominion over the light squares is apparent.

**269) M.Bryakin-V.Moiseenko, Orsha 2020**

**20 Be4?**

White should have played more actively with 20 Qh4! Qxf4 21 Qd8+ Bf8 22 Ne4 Qxe5 23 Nf6+ Kg7 24 Ne8+ Kg8 25 Re1 and the attack is winning.

**20 ... Qxf4**

Here Black is very comfortable, and White has no targets.

**270) V.Gunina-M.Guseva, Moscow 2021**

**19 Nh3?**

White misses a beautiful opportunity and allows Black to take the upper hand. White could have exploited her lead in development with the brilliant 19 cxd5! Bxd5 (after 19 ... hxg5? 20 d6 Qd8 21 Rc7 White has massive compensation for the sacrificed piece in the form of the protected passed pawn on d6, immense pressure on the seventh rank, and a raging attack; a subsequent Bb5 will present Black with unsolvable problems) 20 Nh7!! (preventing Black from castling and setting up a rook invasion along the c-file) 20 ... a5 21 Rc7 Qb4 22 Qxb4 axb4 23 Bb5 Rd8 24 Rfc1! Rxh7 25 Rxd7 Rxd7 26 Rc7 and the active rook gives White a winning position. The more modest 20 Ne4 would have also led to an advantage.

**19 ... Qc5 20 Qxc5 Nxc5**

With queens off the board, Black's bishop is powerful on the h1-a8 diagonal. White's inability to defend against the d-pawn's advance results in a clear advantage for Black.

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