Ramesh RB

Improve Your Chess Calculation

The Ramesh Chess Course, Volume 1

Contents

Foreword by Viswanathan Anand

RB Ramesh is one of the most illustrious personalities of Indian chess, who had a successful playing career being part of the Indian Olympic team in 1996 and 2002, subsequently becoming a grandmaster in 2003, with his most famous victory being the British Chess Championship in 2002.

After retiring from competitive chess in 2008, he established his training institute, the 'Chess Gurukul' which has been an impressive talent factory since its inception. He has been a trainer or coach of almost all the top Indian chess players since then, with Harikrishna, Adhiban, Sethuraman, Aravindh, Praggnanandhaa, Karthikeyan and Vaishali being an impressive array of top stars he has worked with. Befitting his training work, his wards have brought countless international titles and close to about 50 medals to the country.

Another of Ramesh's achievements is being the captain of the Indian chess team at the Chess Olympiad between 2012 and 2018, with the team bagging a historic bronze at Tromsø, Norway, 2014. I experienced his captaincy myself at the Batumi Olympiad 2018 and appreciated his perspective on chess.

The accolades which have come his way and the achievements of his students stand testimony to the hard work and dedication Ramesh has shown towards his profession. Ramesh has also invested a lot of time in chess research.

Working with so many chess talents has also resulted in Ramesh developing excellent structures in his coaching methods. The current series of books aim to share his knowledge as a player as well as a coach. He deals with calculation in this first one – the typical mistakes players make while calculating, the reasons such mistakes are made, and possible solutions. His experiences as a chess coach really shine through, as it is obvious that he developed his methods through practical experiences of his students over the years. Since he has worked with players in varying stages of their development, he is able to select positions that all can benefit from.

I know from both my junior days and my World Championship matches that carefully selected positions can challenge you to go deeper and also show you the weaknesses in your thought process, and I am confident that everyone will benefit from the exercises in this book.

Vishy Anand
Chennai, March 2022

Introduction

At the outset, I submit that I do not feel qualified to write about a vast, intricate, and at the same time essential subject like improvement in chess calculation skills. That I even attempted such an exercise is motivated by the following reasons. As a chess coach, I have realised that in this critical aspect of chess, many players struggle a lot to make significant progress. I have worked with many talented young players and many grandmasters over the last two decades. I have seen first-hand how these strong players made progress in their analytical skills in general and their calculation skills in particular. I hope this book will act as a medium to share the knowledge and experience I acquired with a larger audience.

This book is written more by an experienced and reasonably successful chess coach than by an author. English, not being my mother tongue, is something I learned poorly at school! So, there could be many places where the choice of words may not be appropriate or correct. Forgive me for any mistakes related to language/grammar. I have tried my best to convey my thoughts as well as I could.

During my days as a player (effectively, my playing days were from 1989-2008), I faced many practical problems related to different aspects of the game. Some of my chief concerns were: how to improve my calculation skills, endgame technique, positional understanding, building an opening repertoire, etc. Chess improvement is a journey from 'where we are' to 'where we should be', with its inherent challenges.

Until 1998 or so, we (my generation of players in India) did not have access to good chess books, computers, and coaches. Most of the solutions we came up with were mainly by trial and error and from personal experience. Such an approach to improvement had its virtues and shortcomings.

Subsequently, when I started reading chess books by acclaimed authors, initially I felt a world of information was thrown open to me. I could perceive things differently than earlier. I thought I had access to everything I needed to solve my doubts and problems. I am very thankful to all the great authors who have enriched my chess education. It felt as if becoming a stronger player was just a matter of time and hard work.

But with time, I also realised that there are a few critical areas where the books did not venture into with full conviction. One primarily ignored area was how to learn and acquire the necessary skills in chess education: the practical difficulties a player faces while trying to learn different aspects of the game, the reasons for such problems, and the methods to overcome them. A player must successfully navigate many psychological

battles to convert the knowledge he has acquired by reading a book into a practical skill to apply in his games.

Let me explain with an example. We can read in many books that 'we should develop our pieces quickly in the opening'. They give instances where one side ignores the development of pieces and is rightly punished for doing so. But despite reading or being taught all these principles with examples, I have seen in practice that most amateurs fail to develop their pieces properly. I have seen many instances where players rated up to even 2400 level make this kind of 'beginner's mistake'. Why does this happen?

The chess player is being influenced from two different directions all the time during a game. On one side is the player's own biases, prejudices, personality, fears, convictions, likes, dislikes, and belief systems. To put it in another way, his very nature. On the other side, he is being influenced by the chess principles, the knowledge acquired from books, typical reactions acquired through personal experience, and the demands of the position on the board.

In other words, a player has to constantly choose between what he wants to do and what he has been told/taught/learning to do. Every chess player will have his own natural way of doing things. The chess principles guide us on how to do things in the correct way. If the chess principles do not conflict with the nature of the player, the player is able to absorb those principles and apply them effectively in his games.

If the chess principles teach things that run contrary to the nature of the player, the player finds it very difficult to accept those principles and apply them in his games. Whenever there is a contradiction between the chess principles and the player's nature, the player usually chooses to rely on what his instincts tell him to do rather than the chess principles. Over time, this becomes his nature and his weakness.

Ideally, a chess player should combine his instinct, reactions, and manner of thinking with his skills acquired through training and experience to deliver what is required by the position. Some things come to us naturally, and other things we have to learn by modifying our ways of looking and thinking about things. Many players remain loyal slaves to the habits they formed during the early stages of their chess career and, as a result, find making progress in chess a daunting task.

At times, the right thing to do in a position will be exactly opposite to what we would want to do. For example, the situation may demand that the player exchange the queens and go into an endgame with a slight advantage that needs to be nursed and converted into a win after patient play. But the player could have an aggressive nature in chess, and might want to keep the queens on the board and play in the middlegame. Some

players may even consider the endgame phase of chess to be tedious and not to their liking. Such players may try to keep the queens on the board and avoid the endgame altogether.

In this book, I have tried to cover important instructions and examples about calculation, and a chapter is allotted to general chess improvement suggestions covering a wide variety of topics. An honest attempt has been made at sharing the training methods I use with my students to improve their calculation skills over the last two decades.

Happy learning!

RB Ramesh
Chennai, March 2022

Acknowledgements

Testimonials from students

I have trained with RB Ramesh *anna* (= brother) numerous times from my childhood days. Thanks to the team events like the Olympiad and World Teams where he was the team coach, I have had many opportunities to closely interact with him and exchange ideas. I have learnt of lot of things from him in chess as well as personally. His unmatched wisdom and his ability to quite quickly grasp the strength and weakness of any player amazes me. An intelligent coach who values smart work. And the historic bronze medal for Team India at the Tromsø Olympiad in 2014 is mainly due to his fantabulous guidance and the tremendous belief he had in us. Friendly, super-confident, passionate, and a person of great work ethic and moral values. His training material is absolutely world-class and I strongly believe that his series of books will be a treat for all chess lovers and chess learners.

Grandmaster Sethuraman Panayappan

I started working with Ramesh sir since the Baku Olympiad in 2016. I feel extremely lucky to work under his guidance. His dedication towards chess is immense and his contribution to Indian chess has been remarkable!

Grandmaster Karthikeyan Murali

I have known Ramesh *anna* very well for many years. He has always been a light-hearted and fun person... such a hard-working trainer, and he used to be online on Skype literally 24/7. Whenever we asked for some material, he used to send it to us instantly. He is one of the very few trainers in the world who is highly experienced and has worked with absolute beginners to elite players! I have learnt so many things from him, be it moral and ethical values or the bonding between trainer and trainee... makes us feel like home! I am very sure that he has given his very best for this book and that it will be useful for players of all levels, and I genuinely wish this book to also receive honours.
Grandmaster Shyam Sundar

After winning my first category national title in 2005, I had the opportunity to work with Ramesh *anna*; it was an enlightening experience. He taught me how to do opening preparation and some of the lines we worked on, I still follow to this day! A couple of years later I had the opportunity to work with him again during a training session for the Indian Olympiad team and this time he showed me how much he has grown as a coach and as a player by teaching me so many middlegame and endgame principles. 2018 was definitely one of my best career years so far. I won the Fischer Memorial (Reykjavik Open), qualified into the Indian team, and also won the strong closed round-robin event 'Tournament of Peace' in Zagreb. A big part of my success in 2018 I owe to Ramesh *anna*! I would dare to say that he directly influenced my play to cross 2700!
Grandmaster Adhiban Bhaskaran

I have been working with Ramesh Sir since 2014. From then on we started working on my calculations. Calculations became one of my strengths, which gave me a huge edge against my opponents when I was playing in my age category championships. I hope after reading this book you will also get better at calculation.
Grandmaster Praggnanandhaa

I've had the honor and privilege of working with GM Ramesh on my calculation abilities for approximately six months. Finding a trainer at my level is no easy matter, and I was looking for someone who would help me counteract a great deal of rustiness that emerged after four years of total inactivity due to university. I can confidently say that GM Ramesh has over-fulfilled every expectation I had. His skill in finding unique and fascinating material is unmatched: I have worked with over a dozen coaches in my chess career, and no one is as meticulous in analyzing and preparing fresh material as GM Ramesh. After only a month of intensive training, I could sense a seismic shift in both the precision of my calculation as well as my general level of sharpness.

Of course, GM Ramesh is knowledgeable in most other areas of chess as well. He is not merely a collector of material; his advice on topics ranging from chess psychology to schematic thinking to the use of intuition have informed my chess understanding and taken it to new heights. This advice stems from the massive amount of work he has done with leading grandmasters as well as his own accomplished tournament career.

I am confident that the book you hold in your hands is the product of meticulous work, and will take your tactical skills to the next level. No one I have come across is more qualified to write an illuminating book on tactics!

Grandmaster Daniel Naroditsky

How to use this book

1. Have a good look at every position and try to understand what is going on behind the scenes. Compare the king positions, piece placements, pawn structure, material parity, etc., before beginning your analysis.

2. Before we start analysing any move, we should make a list of reasonable looking moves and only then begin analysing them.

3. Sometimes I will suggest some moves apart from the main line to analyse for instructional purposes.

4. Do not move the pieces on the board while working on your calculation skills. We should try to visualise the variations in our mind until the next diagram, which becomes the new starting point, and carry on the same way forward. You can also try to play through the whole analysis in your mind if you can!

5. Multiple moves at times lead to the same evaluation: in such cases, I will try to give all instructive variations for training purposes. What one sees, another may not. If you are curious enough, try to work through both variations!

6. Hide the moves in the book with an opaque object. In this way, the training becomes more effective by finding the moves by yourself, rather than reading them from the book without making any attempt to analyse the position.

7. You will be given small tasks throughout the book with the amount of time given to analyse the position. Try not to look at the solution before you analyse it well on your own.

8. Think about the amount of time suggested. If you need more time to analyse, please take more time where necessary.

9. I will be using the word he/him to denote a person, more for simplicity than anything else.

10. I have divided the material into five categories:

Level 1 = Elo rating 1200-1600
Level 2 = 1600-2000
Level 3 = 2000-2400
Level 4 = 2400-2600
Level 5 = 2600 & above

The above is, of course, a general indication, and players with better calculation skills will be able to solve positions above their rating level. Similarly, some players could struggle to solve positions belonging to their rating level if their current calculation skills are not in good shape.

If you wish to gain more!

1. Once you have arrived at any conclusions in your analysis, try to go through the analysis you have just made and look for any possible mistakes. Writing down your analysis is also acceptable. Not writing down your analysis is also fine, so do what is comfortable for you.

2. Checking your analysis, finding mistakes and correcting them is the best way to improve your analytical skills.

3. This book aims to expose you to many exciting positions where we will face various problems. The way we face them and solve them is a good source of information about how our mind works.

4. After completing and checking our analysis, we should compare our conclusions with the book's analysis. Whenever our findings have some flaws, do not get disheartened. Getting disheartened is not the point of working to improve our chess skills. The mistakes we make should make us more curious about ourselves. They should enable us to make the necessary corrections in our priorities and thinking process. The ability to change oneself is the basis for effective learning. If we stick to our viewpoint too firmly, we miss the opportunity to evolve and grow.

5. It is essential for the work we do to translate into improvement in our analytical and problem-solving skills. For that to happen effectively, my suggestions are:
• Do not move the pieces while solving or analysing a position;
• Try to find good defensive resources for your opponent as well;
• Finding the first few moves is not enough; try to find the complete solution wherever possible;
• The solution we come up with eventually should be correct;
• Do all the above with efficient use of time/effort/energy.

6. Start with appropriate positions for your level and try to apply the guidelines given in point 7. Then progressively move to more challenging parts.

7. I have given the positions in this book to most of my students in the past. They try to analyse these positions without moving the pieces on a chessboard from the initial position until the end. Of course, I guide them in the right direction during this process without giving too many clues.

8. If you can find a helper, ask them to keep the book's initial position on the chessboard. You should then use the time suggested in the book to think, come up with your analysis and present it to your helper. He will compare your conclusions with the analysis given in the book. If there is any mistake in your findings, he can tell you. Sometimes he can point out the exact moment where you made a mistake. Then you can try again to find the correct analysis. Such a manner of training will be a time-

consuming and slow process. But we will learn the importance of being responsible for our analysis and the need to be good at it.

9. The positions are chosen mainly for the instructive value they offer in the form of the moves/ideas that were played or in some cases the moves/ideas that were not found during the game. If a player missed an important concept, that does not reflect in any way on the strength of the player. We all make mistakes, and miss things occasionally. I thank all the players and composers who have been a source of material for this book.

10. In many places, some could get the feeling that there is an overdose of variations. I have seen in my experience as a coach that it is possible to analyse deep variations even for lower-rated players. When they learn to see more variations in less time with fewer mistakes, their playing strength increases phenomenally in a short time. I have seen 1800-rated players analyse Level 4 positions without moving pieces on the board (with clues and suggestions provided by me at the right time in the process though).

Dynamic and static positions

When I was a young chess player, I heard other players use terms to describe a position like open, closed, simple, quiet, or complex. I never used to pay much attention to these terms but understood the concepts in general.

Once I became a coach, I realised the importance of classifying positions in a more practical manner, which can be understood by correlation and applied by all in their thinking process.

In this context, I would like to classify positions into two major categories: **dynamic** and **static**.

In his book *The Method in Chess*, Iossif Dorfman briefly introduced the terms dynamic and static. To quote Dorfman:

'In many games the hierarchy of strategic factors, determining the evaluation of a position, varies, and plans and ideas are transformed. It is this that constitutes dynamism in Chess.

This short paragraph comprises in concentrated form the move search algorithm in Chess. Thus to foresee the modification of the hierarchy of strategic factors is nothing other than to be able to define critical positions. I suggest analysing essential positions on the basis of their static state without taking account of dynamic factors. This aim is served by the proposed static balance. Candidate moves are chosen in accordance with the static balance. Here we should perhaps dwell on the concepts of 'static' and 'dynamic' factors. By 'static' are implied factors that have an enduring effect. Whereas dynamic factors are associated with a change in the state of a position, with the energy of a breakthrough, with the coming into contact with the opposing army. With the passage of time their role diminishes and reduces to nought.

If for one of the players the static balance is negative, he must without hesitation employ dynamic means and be ready to go in for extreme measures.'

The manner, purpose, and the whole concept of classifying positions into dynamic and static by me, I believe, is vastly different from what was attempted by Dorfman. Let me elaborate.

Dynamic positions: By this, I mean positions where things are changing quickly, there is plenty of action, and many factors are constantly evolving and in flux. **Complex, open, attacking positions, positions with pawn breaks, and positions where forcing moves are possible can be categorised as dynamic positions**. Almost all the positions we will see in this book belong to this category, and hence we will not be giving any examples now.

Static positions: By this, I mean positions in which things are not changing quickly – they are relatively quiet, calm, and lacking concrete action. **Closed, quiet, simple, calm positions, positions with fixed pawn structures, and positions in which forcing moves are not possible can be categorised as static positions.**

All types of chess positions can come under either the 'dynamic' or the 'static' umbrella. Of course, in most positions, both the dynamic and static elements play their respective roles together in exerting their influence on the evaluation of the position. Chess has become more dynamic and concrete after the arrival of computers. In dynamic positions, factors like king safety, time and the quality of the pieces will have more value than quantity (material parity) and static factors like pawn structure etc.

By the time factor, I mean how quickly one can achieve one's objective. For example, to develop the bishop on the queenside, White can play either b2-b3 and ♗b2 (2 moves) or a2-a3, b2-b4 and ♗b2 (3 moves). The former takes less time to achieve our objective than the latter.

In static positions, the time factor is not that relevant, but factors like the quantity and quality of chess units and positional factors like pawn structures, space, weaknesses etc., will have more value.

A good chess player should be able to handle both dynamic and static positions equally well. In a game, the nature of the positions keeps fluctuating from dynamic to static. There are games that remain largely static or dynamic throughout, but these are rare in modern chess.

Most players are partial towards either dynamic or static positions by nature. Back in the old days, if one could call himself an attacking player or a positional player, it was considered a virtue. Not anymore. Mikhail Tal was considered an 'attacking player', while Tigran Petrosian was considered a 'positional genius'. These days, when access to information is universal, it is possible to learn to play both kinds of positions equally well.

Under the circumstances, it will significantly help chess players if we know in what areas we should train ourselves to gain mastery over dynamic and static positions.

In my view, the following plan would greatly help in this regard.

Critical areas to learn for dynamic positions

1. Calculation: I will elaborate on calculation in the third chapter under the heading 'Personal interpretation of chess terminology'.

2. Attack: There are a few critical questions related to attacking:

a) whether to attack with pawns or pieces;

b) the need for the presence of weaknesses as a target to attack;

c) to attack from the front or from the flank;

d) to attack immediately or to prepare the attack by delaying it; and

e) should the attack involve sacrificing material, or is that not necessary?

To handle dynamic positions well, a player should have good attacking skills.

Game 1 Level 1		Game 2 Level 3	
Magnus Carlsen	2862	**Frank Darnstädt**	2360
Maxime Vachier-Lagrave	2784	**Markus Schäfer**	2455
chess24.com 2021 (2.13)		Berlin 1993 (6)	
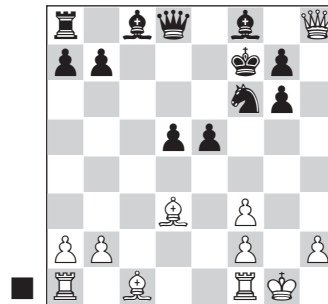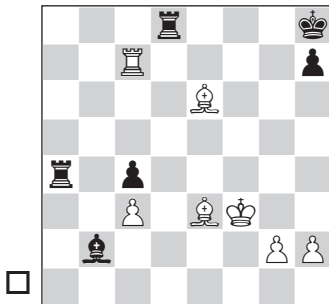
TASK: *Time to think: 2 minutes.*

34.♖c8!

34.♗h6 ♗xc3; 34.♗d4+? was played in this online rapid game. An understandable lapse of concentration in a speed game. It helped us get an interesting position to solve! 34...♖xd4 35.cxd4 ♗xd4 was unclear, though Magnus won the game anyway!

34...♖xc8

34...♖a8 35.♖xa8 ♖xa8 36.♗d4#.

35.♗d4#

TASK 1: *Time to think: 5 to 8 minutes.*

16...e4!

Prophylaxis against 17.♗xg6+. 16...♘h5? tries to shut the white queen out of the game: 17.♗xg6+! ♔xg6 18.♔h1 (threatening 19.♖g1) 18...♕h4! (18...♘f6? – Black is not paying attention – 19.♖g1+ ♔f7 20.♖xg7+! ♔e6 21.♖g5+−) 19.♕xf8 ♔h7 20.♖g1 ♕h3 (20...♕xf2?! 21.♕a3! ♗f5 22.♕e3 ♕xe3 23.♗xe3 d4 24.♗d2 ♘f6±) 21.♕a3! and White gets sufficient counterplay, for

example: 21...♗f5! (21...♗d7? 22.♗d2
♔g8 (22...♗c6 23.♖g5 d4 24.♕g1+−)
23.♖g5 ♖f8 24.f4! ♘xf4 25.♗xf4
♖xf4 26.♕xh3 ♗xh3 27.♖xe5±)
22.♗d2 ♖c8 23.♖ac1 d4! 24.♖xc8
d3! 25.♖cc1 ♕xf3+ 26.♔g2 ♗h3
27.♖cg1 ♗xg2+ 28.♖xg2 ♘f4 29.♗xf4
♕d1+=.

17.fxe4

17.♗c2 ♘h5−+; 17.♗e2!? ♘h5!
18.♖d1 (18.♗e3 ♕h4−+) 18...♗e6!
(18...♕h4? 19.♖xd5 ♗e6 20.♗g5!
♕h3 21.♗c4!±) 19.f4 (19.fxe4?! ♕h4!
20.♗xh5 gxh5−+) 19...♕h4 20.f5!?
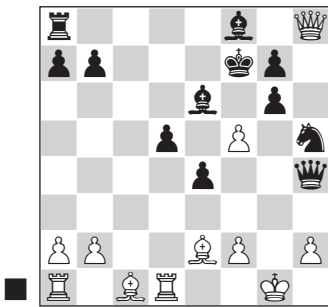
analysis diagram

TASK 2: *Time to think: 8 to 10 minutes.*

20...♔f6!! (20...♗xf5? 21.♖xd5+−;
20...♗d6!? 21.fxg6+ ♔xg6 22.♕xh5+
♕xh5 23.♗xh5+ ♔xh5 24.♗e3∞)
21.♕h7 (21.fxg6 ♗g4! 22.♖xd5 ♗xe2
23.♗g5+ ♕xg5 24.♖xg5 ♔xg5
25.♖c1 ♖d8−+, the white queen is
not going to join the game anytime
soon!; 21.♗xh5 gxh5−+) 21...♔xf5!
(only with this king walk can Black
keep the advantage! 21...♗f5?
22.♖xd5 ♗e6! 23.♕g8+ ♔f6
24.♗e3 ♘f4 25.♗d4+ ♔g5 26.♗e3
♔f6 27.♗d4+=) 22.♗xh5 ♕xh5
23.♕xh5+ gxh5 24.♗e3 ♗d6−+.

17...♘h5! 18.♗e3?!
A) 18.exd5!?
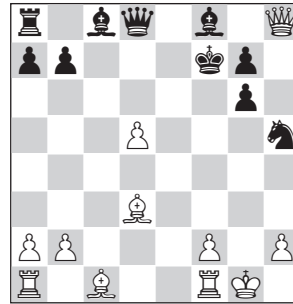
analysis diagram

TASK 3: *Time to think: 5 minutes.*

A1) 18...♕h4?! 19.♗xg6+! ♔xg6
20.♕xf8 ♗f5!? 21.♕a3! (21.♕d6+?
♔h7 22.f3 ♖e8−+) 21...♕g4+
22.♔h1=;

A2) 18...♕xd5! is the other option,
but the next move should be found
and assessed properly: 19.♖d1 ♕e6!!
and Black retains a strong attack,
for example 20.♗e3 ♕g4+ 21.♔h1
(21.♔f1 ♕h4−+) 21...b5−+;

A3) 18...♕f6! 19.♕h7 ♗d6−+.
B) 18.♕h7 ♕h4−+;
C) 18.e5!? is probably the best
defence. I have been showing
this position to my students
for some years now and when I
was checking the lines closely
for this book, I was shocked to
find that this position arose in
a correspondence game in 2014!
18...♕h4 19.♗xg6+ ♔xg6 20.♕xf8
♕g4+ 21.♔h1 ♗f5 22.♕a3 ♕e2!
23.♖g1+ ♔h7 24.f3 ♗d3! 25.♗g5
♕xf3+ 26.♖g2 ♖f8 0-1, Jarabinsky-
Postupa, cr 2014.

18...♕h4 19.f3 ♗h3!

19...♗d6? 20.♖f2+−.
20.♕h7
20.♖f2 ♗c5−+ (20...♗d6? 21.♕xa8
♗xh2+ 22.♔xh2!+−).
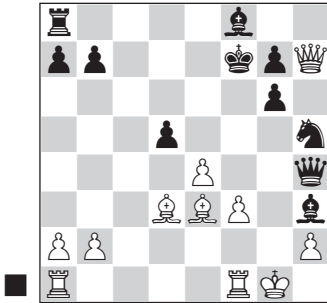
TASK 4: *Time to think: 5 minutes.*

**20...♗c5! 21.♗xc5 ♕g5+ 22.♔f2
♕d2+ 23.♗e2 ♘f4!**
23...d4? 24.♖ad1 ♕e3+ 25.♔e1+−.
24.♔g3
24.♖fe1 ♘d3+ 25.♔g3 ♕g5+
26.♔xh3 ♘f4#.
24...♗xf1
24...♕xe2? 25.♖f2+−.
25.♗xf1 ♘h5+ 26.♔h3 ♖c8
26...♕g5! 27.♗d6 ♕f6! (27...♘f6??
28.♕h4 ♕g1 29.e5 g5 30.e6+ ♔xe6
31.♖e1+) 28.♗g3 ♕xf3 29.♖c1 ♖c8
(29...♖h8 30.♕xh8 (30.♖c7+ ♔f6
31.e5+ ♔g5−+) 30...♘f4+ 31.♔h4
g5+ 32.♔xg5 ♘e6+ 33.♔h4 g5+
34.♔h3 ♘f4#) 30.♖xc8 ♕xf1+
31.♔h4 ♕f6+ 32.♔h3 ♕e6+ 33.♔g2
♕xc8 34.exd5 ♕c2+ 35.♔f3 ♕d3+
36.♔f2 ♕d2+−+; 26...♘f6 27.♕h4 g5
28.♕f2+−.
27.♗d6
27.b4 ♖xc5 (27...♕c3) 28.bxc5 ♕g5.
27...♘f6!
The drawback of 27.♗d6 is that
...♕f2 is now possible.

28.♕h4 g5 29.♕g3
29.♗f4 gxf4.
29...♖h8+
White resigned.
A nice attacking effort from Black!

Game 3   Level 3
Zoltan Almasi   2667
Victor Mikhalevski   2632
Heviz 2008
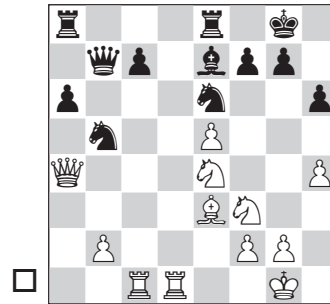
TASK 1: *Time to think: 10 minutes.*

Let us first try to assess the
position before embarking on the
analysis. White has completed
his development, his piece
coordination is better, and there
is potential for an attack against
Black's king. Black's pieces are
scattered and not in harmony, and
his queenside pawn structure is
broken.
21.♘g3!
21.♘f6+!? is a very tempting conti-
nuation for White. In training at
least, we should try to go as deep
as possible before coming to a clear
conclusion as there is no limitation
of time pressure related to winning
and losing or the fear of losing

points. The only limitation could be our lack of motivation to improve our chess strength by investing our time, energy and effort.

Let us delve deep into the position and try to ascertain the truth to the best of our ability.

21...gxf6 is the critical continuation, of course. After 22.♕g4+, we should pause a little and realise that Black has several options or at least that his reply is not forced. Once the move we are analysing for Black is refuted subsequently, we should come back to this point and consider other possibilities for Black and refute them all. Alternatively, we can make a list and eliminate the easily-refutable moves first and then focus more effort on refuting the main line.

  A) 22...♘g7? is the move that can be refuted with the least effort: 23.♗xh6 ♗f8 24.♗xg7 ♗xg7 25.exf6+−. Once we eliminate such easily-refutable moves, it makes our job easier. There will be less clutter in our mind and we will have a clear sense of direction where we should focus more;

  B) 22...♔h7? can be refuted in multiple ways:

  B1) 23.♕h5 ♕e4 (23...♔g8 24.♖c4+−) 24.♕xf7+ ♘g7 25.exf6; or

  B2) 23.♕f5+ ♔g7 24.exf6+ ♗xf6 25.♗xh6+ ♔xh6 26.♕xf6+ ♔h7 27.♕xf7+ ♘g7 28.♖d7.

White wins easily in both cases.

  C) 22...♔h8. Having eliminated the other two options for Black, we can conclude that this is the main line, and if we can refute this too, the sacrifice 21.♘f6 is winning for White. If we are not able to find a win against 22...♔h8, we should conclude that 21.♘f6 is not winning for White and look for alternatives on move 21.

  C1) 23.♕h5

analysis diagram
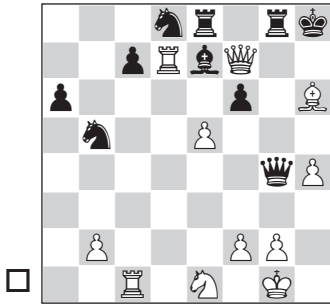
TASK 2: *Time to think: 3 to 5 minutes.*

23...♕e4! 24.♕xf7 (24.exf6 ♗d6! 25.♗xh6 ♕h7⇄) and now:

  C11) 24...♖g8? 25.♕xe7 ♕xf3 26.♗g5!+−, a very pretty move, refuting 24...♖g8;

  C12) 24...♕f5? 25.♗xh6 ♗f8 (25...♖g8 26.♕xe7 ♕xf3 27.♗g5!+− is very similar to the variation above) 26.♗g5! ♘xg5 27.hxg5 ♖e7 (27...♕h7 28.♕xf6+ ♗g7 29.♕c6 and among other things, White has time for threats like g2-g3, ♔g2 and ♖h1; such is the dominating nature of his position) 28.♕xf6+ ♕xf6 29.gxf6 and the two pawns will soon win the game for White;

  C13) 24...♕g4! and now:

  C131) 25.♗xh6? ♖g8! (25...♕g8? 26.♕h5+−) 26.♘e1 ♖ae8 27.♖d7 ♘d8!? (27...♘bd4)
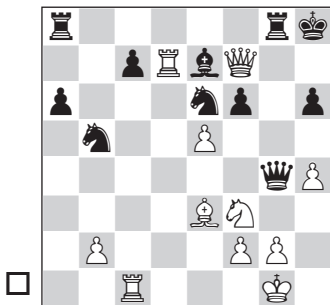
analysis diagram

TASK 3: *Time to think: 3 to 5 minutes.*

28.♗g7+! ♕xg7 (28...♔h7!? 29.♖xd8!
♖xg7 (29...♗xd8? 30.♗xf6+ ♔h6
31.♖c6!+−) 30.♕xe8 ♗xd8 31.♕xd8
♘d4=) 29.♕h5+ ♕h7 30.♕xh7+
♔xh7 31.exf6∞;
  C132) 25.exf6? ♘d6−+;
 C133) 25.♖d7! ♖g8! (25...♘f4??
26.♗xf4 ♕xd7 27.exf6+−)

analysis diagram

TASK 4: *Time to think: 3 to 5 minutes.*

26.♘g5! ♘xg5! (26...hxg5? 27.♖xe7
♖g7 28.♕xf6+−) 27.♗xg5! (27.♕xe7?
♘f3+! (27...♘h3+?! 28.♔f1 ♕xg2+
29.♔e1 ♕g1+ 30.♔d2 ♕g7 31.exf6=;
not 31.♕e6?? ♕xd7+−+) 28.♔f1
♕xg2+ 29.♔e2 ♕g6!. 30.h5 ♕f5
31.♕xf6+ ♕xf6 32.exf6 ♘g5 and

Black retains good winning chances)
27...♖g7 (27...♕xd7!? 28.♗xf6+ ♗xf6
29.♕xd7 ♗xe5∞) 28.♕d5 fxg5!?
(28...♖ag8?? 29.exf6+−; 28...♖f8?
29.♗xh6+−; 28...hxg5!? 29.exf6
♗xf6 30.♕xa8+ ♔h7 31.♖xg7+
♔xg7 32.♕xa6 ♕f5∞) 29.♕xa8+
♔h7 30.♕d5! (30.♖d3?? gxh4 31.♕d5
c5−+) 30...gxh4 31.♕d3+ (31.♖c4 ♕f5
32.♕e4=) 31...♔h8 32.♕d5=.
  C2) 23.♗xh6 ♖g8 (most 2100
level students gave 23...♗f8? as
the main defence when they
were analysing from the initial
position. They completely missed
or underestimated the ...♖g8-♖g6
defensive idea; 24.♗xf8 ♖xf8
25.♖c4 will end in checkmate
soon) 24.♕h5 ♖g6! (24...♕e4?
25.exf6 ♗xf6 26.♗g5++−) 25.♖d7!
(White is throwing everything at
Black's king; 25.♗f8+? is tempting
and greedy and it does not work:
25...♔g8 26.♗xe7 ♖xg2+!−+)
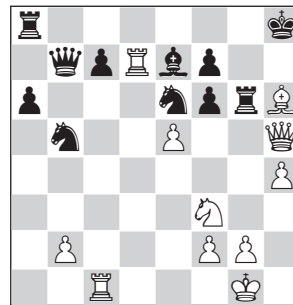
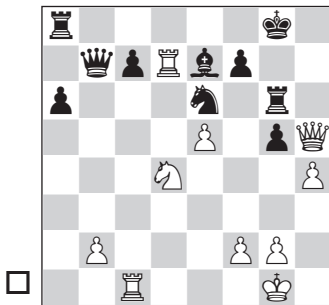analysis diagram

TASK 5: *Time to think: 3 to 5 minutes.*

  C21) 25...♖e8? is the most obvious
move and so it is wrong! One of the
common bad habits most upcoming
players have is their complete trust

in obvious moves. Best moves are found by those who can overcome this impulsiveness. We should teach ourselves to think beyond the obvious. The learning is in the details! 26.exf6 ♗xf6 27.♖xf7;

C22) 25...♘bd4!. A fantastic defensive resource! In tough situations, it is important to not panic and lose the battle due to our emotions. We have to somehow collect our thoughts, calm ourselves and keep finding tough resources. 26.♗g5+!? (26.♖cxc7 ♕xf3; 26.♖c3∞) 26...♔g8 27.♘xd4

C221) 27...fxg5

analysis diagram

TASK 6: *Time to think: 3 to 5 minutes.*

28.♘c6! (28.♘xe6? ♖xe6=) 28...♗f8 29.♕f3+−;

C222) 27...♘f4?? 28.♕g4+−;

C223) 27...♘xd4! 28.♖xe7 fxg5! 29.♖cxc7 ♕e4 30.♖xf7 ♘e2+ 31.♔f1! (31.♔h2? ♕xh4+∓) 31...♕b1+ 32.♔xe2 ♕e4+ (32...♕xb2+? 33.♔f3!+−) 33.♔d2 ♖d8+ 34.♖fd7! (34.♖cd7 ♕b4+=) 34...♕f4+! 35.♔e1 ♕e4+ 36.♕e2 ♕b1+=.

21...♖ed8 22.♕g4 ♔h8 23.♕h5 ♔g8 24.♖xd8+!

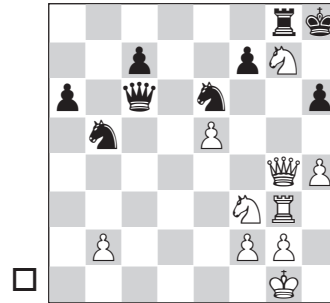24.♗xh6! gxh6 (24...♖xd1+ 25.♖xd1 gxh6 26.♘f5+−) 25.♘f5 ♗f8 26.♖xd8 ♘xd8 (26...♖xd8 27.♖c4! ♘bd4 28.♘3xd4 ♘xd4 29.♘xd4+−) 27.♖c4 ♕b6 28.♖g4+ ♔h8 29.♖g3!? ♕e6 30.♕g4 (30.♘h2! ♕xe5 31.♕g4) 30...♕g6 31.♕e4 ♕c6 32.♕f4 ♘e6 33.♕g4 ♗g7 34.♘xg7 ♖g8

analysis diagram

TASK 7: *Time to think: 3 to 5 minutes.*

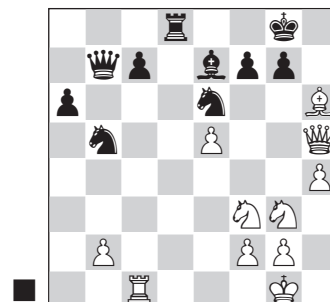35.♘g5! ♖xg5 (35...hxg5 36.♘xe6+−) 36.♘f5! ♕e6 37.♕f4! ♘h7 38.♖xg8+ ♔xg8 39.♕g4+ ♔f8 40.♕g7+ ♔e8 41.♕xh7+−.
24...♖xd8 25.♗xh6?
This keeps ♖c4 options open for White; 25.♘f5 ♗f8 26.♖c4!+−.

TASK 8: *Time to think: 3 to 5 minutes.*

25...gxh6?

It is seen many times that a player spends lots of time looking at the board, apparently thinking about the position, but the outcome is not as desired. Some players get distracted, bored, overly-excited, despairing, scared, etc. This affects their concentration and the resulting quality of their analysis. **A chess player needs to possess certain qualities to sustain an optimum level of attention and bring out his best qualities during the game.**

What are those qualities?
1. The ability to handle distracting thoughts and emotions during the game.
2. The emotional stability in not allowing our past negative experiences (loss in the previous round, current bad form, drop in rating, etc.) or future expectations (possible gain of rating, norm requirements, final placing in the tournament, prize money, etc.) to interfere with our present objectivity. **We can be mildly influenced but not heavily interrupted.**
3. To keep our reactions to emotions and events on the board in balance.

Suppose a player manages to learn the process of efficient analysis. In that case, all that remains is acquiring more knowledge in critical areas of the game, sharpening his analytical ability, and learning multiple openings in-depth, building breadth and depth in his chess arsenal as a firm foundation.

In other words, the priority is to create an 'assembly line' to manufacture a product. Once that is done, all that remains is to manufacture the product. Make necessary modifications as per changes in technology and future requirements, but the primary assembly line is in place.
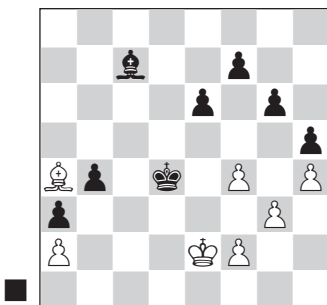
Game 42　Level 5
Tornike Sanikidze　　　　2585
Abhijeet Gupta　　　　　2637
Istanbul ol 2012

TASK 1: *Time to think: 10 minutes. How can Black continue the game?*

74...♗xf4!?
This was a must-win game for India as we were trailing by a point against Georgia. After some initial hesitation, Abhijeet went for this sacrifice, which is practically the only way to play for a win in this opposite-coloured bishops ending. The position is objectively equal, especially if you have the luxury of being able to analyse the position with powerful computer engines.

Many times, a player has to take decisions, the consequences of which one cannot be sure about. I have seen quite a few players (more than 10) who avoid taking risks at every opportunity, settle for less and are still happy about it. I know many young players and their parents who feel extremely proud of making draws against higher-rated players consistently. The player increases his rating after every such draw, and at the outset, it looks like everything is going in the right direction. But if we look deeply at such draws, the player would have got a good advantage in most cases and would have been the person to offer the draw in the first place. Over a period of time, the player develops a deep inferiority complex or a lack of self-confidence and becomes what chess players call a 'draw master'. The player, after increasing his rating steadily in the initial phase of his career, begins to stagnate and rarely scores wins against higher-rated players anymore. Why does this happen?

When a player is young, he should primarily focus on improving his practical skills as a player, accumulate knowledge, make mistakes and learn from them, correct his way of thinking constantly as per requirements, and become a stronger player. Instead, many young players (with abundant encouragement from parents and coaches) focus on increasing their rating quickly without upgrading

their playing strength. When we offer a draw from a better position to a higher-rated opponent, it also means that we are not sure about our ability to defeat a higher-rated player even from a better position. We start giving too much respect to an opponent if he is higher rated and, over a period of time, start fearing him. When we cannot play against a higher-rated opponent from a better position, we obviously will not be comfortable playing him in equal or slightly worse positions.

75.gxf4 ♚e4 76.♚d2

76.f3+?? ♚xf4 77.♚f2 f6 78.♚g2 e5−+.

76...♚xf4 77.♚c2

77.♗d1? g5! 78.hxg5 h4−+, as the bishop cannot handle the advanced passed pawns on both flanks.
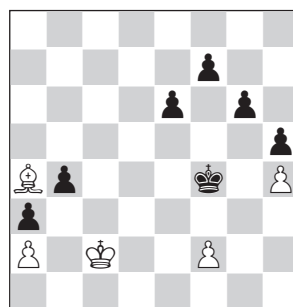
The position is equal and Black has many ways to equalise, but he wants to play for a win. In such situations, we should identify continuations where our opponent will be forced to solve tough practical problems continuously, thereby increasing the chances of him making mistakes.

77...f5

A) 77...g5!? 78.hxg5 h4 79.♔b3 ♔xg5 (79...h3? is careless: 80.♗c6 e5 81.♗h1!+−, just in time before Black closes the gate for White's bishop) 80.♔xb4 e5 (after 80... h3?? 81.♗c6, White would capture the a-pawn, place his bishop on h1 and nurse his passed a-pawn to queen) 81.♗c6 (81.♔xa3?? e4−+; Black permanently shuts the white bishop's route to stop the passed h-pawn) 81...f5 82.♗g2! e4 83.♔xa3 ♔g4 84.♔b4 f4! (this is a highly instructive method for Black to defend the position; we will see this idea being repeated a few times in our analysis) 85.♗xe4 f3 (85...h3? 86.♗h1+−) 86.♗c6 h3 87.♗d7+ ♔h4 88.♗c6 ♔g4=;

B) 77...♔g4 and now:

B1) Even though 78.♗e8?! does not spoil the balance, White has to play accurately from here to keep the balance. 78...f5
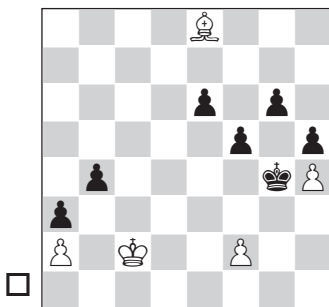
analysis diagram

TASK 2: *Time to think: 3 minutes.*

79.♗f7! (79.♗xg6? ♔xh4 80.♗f7 e5−+; as we saw earlier, White is indeed too slow to stop the h-passer) 79...♔xh4 80.♗xe6 ♔g4 81.♔b3 h4 and now:

B11) 82.♗d5? is premature: 82...f4 83.♗h1 (to reach the corner to stop the h-pawn before Black shuts the diagonal by playing f2-f3; 83.♔xb4 f3 84.♔xa3 g5 85.♔b4 ♔f4−+, followed by advancing his g-pawn) 83...g5 84.♔xb4 f3 85.♔xa3 ♔f4 86.♔b4 g4 87.a4 g3, and Black is much faster;

B12) Keeping the pin on the f5-pawn for one move is important, not letting it advance to f3 and block the h1-a8 diagonal: 82.♔xb4 ♔f3 83.♔xa3 h3 84.♔b4 h2 85.♗d5+ ♔f2 86.a4 f4 87.♗h1! ♔g1 88.♗c6 ♔f2=. Most of the moves were more or less forced. A nice draw in the end.

B2) 78.♔b3 ♔xh4 79.♔xb4 f5 80.♗c6.

It is incredibly important to stop a very fine tempi gainer of White's at the very next move. In order to understand this, let us study the following line:

B21) 80...e5?? 81.♗g2! (White brings his bishop within striking distance of the kingside, to take away squares from the opponent's king and also delay Black from pushing his passed pawn. Every tempo gained is vital in the resulting pawn race) 81...♔g4. Black aims to advance the f- and h-pawns quickly, giving White the critical choice of where to move his bishop, which will determine the further course of the game: 82.♔xa3 f4 83.♔b4 h4 84.a4 f3
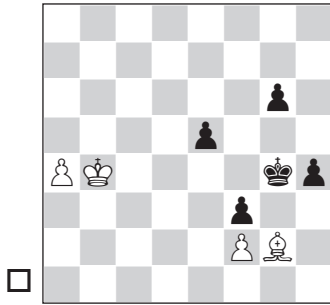
analysis diagram

TASK 3: *Time to think: 3 to 5 minutes. Which is the correct square for the bishop?*

85.♗h1! (if 85.♗f1? e4 (85...h3 86.♗xh3+ ♔xh3 87.a5 e4! 88.a6 e3=) 86.a5 e3! 87.fxe3 h3 88.♗xh3+ ♔xh3 89.a6 f2 Black escapes with a draw) 85...e4 86.a5 e3 87.♗xf3+! (this is the critical point) 87...♔xf3 88.fxe3+−. Even though Black queens first, White's a-pawn promotes with a check and picks up his counterpart on the long diagonal!;

B22) 80...♔h3!= 81.♔xa3. We are able to get a good picture these days of positions that were almost impossible to analyse without mistakes, thanks to the engines: 81... e5 82.♔b4 e4 83.a4 h4 84.a5 ♔g2 85.a6 h3 86.a7 h2=.

C) 77...♔f3? 78.♗e8! ♔xf2 79.♗xf7 ♔g3 80.♗xg6 ♔xh4 (Black spent too much time on winning the f2- and h4-pawns) 81.♔b3 (81.♗e4 ♔g3 82.♔b3 h4 83.♔xb4 ♔f4 84.♗h1! e5 85.♔c4! e4 86.♔d4 e3 87.♔d3 is another way to win) 81...♔g5 82.♗e4 ♔f4 83.♗h1! (as we saw in an earlier variation, h1 is a beautiful

square for the white bishop here) 83...e5 84.♔xb4 e4 85.♔c3 ♔e3 86.♔c2 h4 87.♔c3 h3
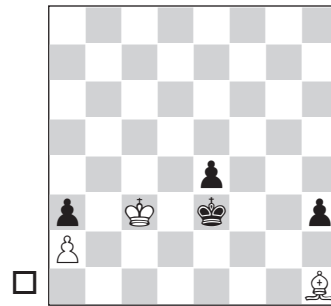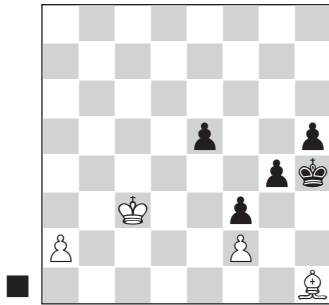

analysis diagram

TASK 4: *Time to think: 2 minutes.*

88.♔c4! (88.♔c2? ♔d4! 89.♔d2 h2 90.♗g2 e3+ 91.♔e2 ♔c3 92.♔xe3 ♔b2=) 88...h2 89.♔c3! (Black falls into zugzwang) 89...♔f4 90.♔d4 e3 91.♔d3. White's king danced very well to force Black into zugzwang. Now he will pick up the e- and h-pawns and win the game.

78.♗c6 e5

78...♔g4!? 79.♔b3 ♔xh4 80.♗g2 (80.♔xb4 ♔h3 81.♔xa3 e5 transposes to the line we saw earlier) 80... g5 (80...f4 will transpose to 80.... g5) 81.♔xb4 g4 (81...f4 82.♔xa3) 82.♔xa3 f4 (82...♔g5 83.♔b3 h4 84.a4 h3 85.♗h1 f4 86.a5 g3 87.fxg3 fxg3 88.a6=) 83.♔b4 f3 84.♗h1! (84.♗f1?? ♔g5−+, followed by the advance of the h-pawn; 84.♗xf3! is the simplest, e.g. 84...gxf3 85.a4 ♔g5 86.a5 h4 87.a6 h3 88.a7 h2 89.a8♕ h1♕=) 84...e5! (it looks like this is too slow, but it works! 84...g3?? 85.fxg3+ ♔xg3 86.♗xf3, and the a-pawn will promote with check)

A) 85.♔c3??. White is trying to halt the central black pawn from advancing and then advance his a-pawn, but this loses valuable time, especially in a pawn race situation.
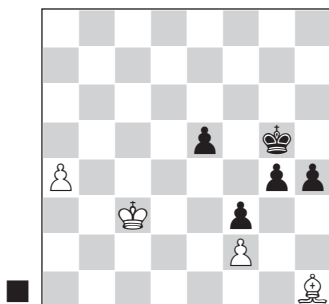

analysis diagram

TASK 5: *Time to think: 3 minutes.*

A1) 85...e4? is too hasty, as White's king can stop the black pawns: 86.♔d4 g3 87.fxg3+ ♔xg3 88.♔e3!=;

A2) 85...g3? 86.fxg3+ ♔xg3 87.♔d2! e4 (87...♔f2?, threatening to advance the central pawn, backfires badly for Black after 88.♔d3+–) 88.♔e3=;

A3) 85...♔g5?? lets the white bishop survive, which will play a damaging role at the right time, as the following lines show: 86.a4 h4

analysis diagram

TASK 6: *Time to think: 3 minutes.*

87.♔d2! (87.a5? e4! 88.a6 e3! 89.fxe3 f2 90.a7 (90.♗g2?? h3–+) 90...f1♕ 91.a8♕, and Black survives) 87...♔f4 88.a5 g3 89.fxg3+ hxg3. It looks like the black pawns are formidable and too advanced, but with accurate play, White emerges on top: 90.♔e1! e4 91.a6 e3. Black's pawns look scary, but... 92.♗xf3! (the key point behind the whole variation) 92...♔xf3 93.a7+–;

A4) 85...♔h3!–+. His majesty marches forward to capture the white bishop that is stuck in the corner like a sitting duck, and then Black advances his g-pawn to promote. Since White's king is within range to stop Black's central pawn, this is the way forward: 86.a4 and now:

A41) The direct advance of the king with 86...♔h2? does not work, due to 87.♗xf3! (it makes sense to lose the bishop in the best possible way, by preventing the dangerous g-pawn from moving forward) 87... gxf3 88.a5 e4 89.♔d4 ♔g2 90.♔e3 h4= as both sides promote at the same time;

A42) 86...e4!, to prevent the sacrifice by the bishop and losing the passed g-pawn in the process: 87.♔d2 (87.♔d4 g3–+; 87...♔h2 also wins) 87...♔h2 (Black cold-bloodedly goes to collect White's imprisoned bishop on h1. For this, he needed to support his f3-pawn with the move 86...e4. After taking the bishop, Black queens faster and wins) 88.a5 ♔xh1 89.a6 g3–+. Black has too many pawns, and bringing

his king towards the centre did not really help White.

B) 85.♔c5?? ♔h3–+;

C) 85.a4! e4 86.a5 e3 (86...g3=) 87.fxe3 ♔h3 88.♗xf3! (this is a simple solution to the problem; although the position after 88.a6?! f2 89.a7 f1♕ 90.a8♕ is objectively equal, the danger is more for White as Black's pawn advance can become tricky to handle if White is not careful) 88...gxf3 89.a6 f2 90.a7 f1♕ 91.a8♕=.

79.♗g2 e4

A) 79...♔g4 80.♔b3 f4 (80...♔xh4? 81.♔xb4 f4 82.♔xa3 g5 83.♔b3 g4 84.♗e4 f3 85.a4 ♔g5 86.a5 h4 87.a6 h3 88.a7 h2 89.a8♕ h1♕ 90.♕d8+ ♔f4 91.♗c2 ♕h6 92.♕d2#) and now:

A1) 81.♗e4?? ♔xh4 82.♔xb4 ♔g4 83.♔xa3 h4 84.♔b4 f3 85.♗d5 ♔f4 86.♗e6 e4–+;

A2) 81.♔xb4!? f3
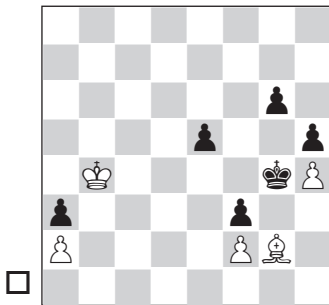
analysis diagram

TASK 7: *Time to think: 3 minutes.*

A21) 82.♗h1 e4 83.♔xa3 e3 84.fxe3 f2 85.♗g2 ♔xh4 86.e4 ♔g3 87.♗f1 h4 88.e5 h3 89.e6 h2 90.e7

h1♕ 91.e8♕ ♕xf1 92.♕xg6+ ♔h2 93.♕d6+ ♔g1–+;

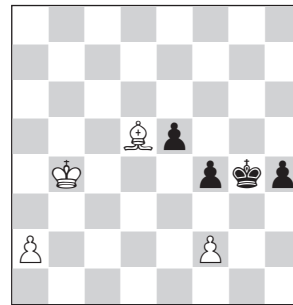A22) 82.♗f1! ♔xh4 (82...e4 83.♔c3=) 83.♔xa3 and now:

A221) 83...♔g4 84.♔b4 h4 85.a4 h3 86.♗xh3+ ♔xh3 87.a5 e4 88.a6 e3 89.fxe3 f2 90.a7 f1♕ 91.a8♕ ♕e1+ 92.♔c4 ♕xe3∓;

A222) 83...e4 84.♔b4 e3 85.♔c3 (85.fxe3 ♔g3 86.e4 h4 87.e5 h3 88.♗xh3 ♔xh3 89.e6 f2=) 85...e2 86.♗xe2 fxe2 87.♔d2 ♔g4 88.♔xe2 ♔f4 89.a4=;

A223) 83...g5 84.♔b3 g4 85.a4 g3 86.fxg3+ ♔xg3 87.a5 e4 88.a6 e3 89.a7 e2 90.♗xe2=.

A3) 81.♗d5 and now:

A31) 81...g5 82.hxg5 ♔xg5 83.♔xb4 ♔g4 84.♔xa3 h4 85.♔b4

analysis diagram

TASK 8: *Find the only way for Black to hold the position. Time to think: 3 minutes.*

85...e4! 86.♗xe4 f3 87.♗c6 h3 88.♗d7+ ♔h4 89.♗c6=;

A32) 81...♔xh4 82.♔xb4 ♔g4 83.♔xa3 h4 (83...f3 84.♔b2 h4 85.♗e6+ ♔f4 86.a4 e4 87.a5 e3 88.fxe3+ ♔g3! (88...♔xe3? 89.a6

f2 90.♗h3+−) 89.a6 h3 90.a7 h2
91.a8♕ h1♕=) 84.♔b3 and now:
  A321) 84...f3 85.♗e6+ ♔f4 86.a4 e4
87.a5 e3 88.fxe3+ ♔g3! 89.a6 h3 (89...
f2?? 90.♗c4+− (90.a7 f1♕ 91.a8♕∓))
90.♗xh3 ♔xh3 91.a7 f2 92.a8♕ f1♕=;
  A322) 84...h3 85.♗h1! e4= 86.♔c3
e3 87.fxe3 f3 88.♔d3 ♔g3 89.e4! g5
90.e5 g4 91.e6 ♔h2 92.♗xf3 gxf3
93.♔e3 ♔g2 94.e7=;
  A323) 84...e4 85.♗xe4 f3
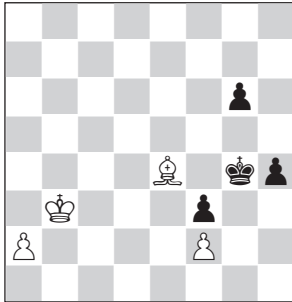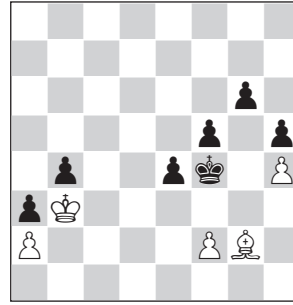
analysis diagram

TASK 9: *Is there a difference between moving the bishop to c6 or b7? Time to think: 3 to 5 minutes.*

86.♗b7! (although 86.♗c6? looks similar to 86.♗b7, we will soon see that this makes all the difference between drawing and losing: 86...♔f4 87.♗d7 g5 88.a4 g4 89.a5 g3 90.a6 g2 91.a7 g1♕ 92.a8♕ ♕d1+!−+; the whole point!) 86...h3 (86...♔f4 87.♗c8 g5 88.a4 g4 89.a5 h3 90.a6 h2 91.a7 h1♕ 92.a8♕=) 87.♗c8+ ♔h4 88.♗b7=.
  B) 79...g5 80.hxg5 ♔xg5 81.♔b3 h4 82.♔xb4 e4 83.♔xa3 ♔g4 84.♔b4 f4 (we saw this idea earlier) 85.♗xe4 f3 86.♗c6 h3 87.♗d7+ ♔h4 88.♗c6=.
80.♔b3

TASK 10: *Find the only way for Black to hold the position. Time to think: 5 minutes.*

80...♔e5??
This is a big blunder and could have easily backfired had White played correctly. To be fair, both players were running short of time, and this was already a long game and tiredness was setting in as well. It goes to show the importance of having strong nerves and good stamina.
  A) 80...e3?? 81.fxe3+ ♔xe3 82.♔xb4 f4 83.♗d5 (83.♔xa3? f3 84.♗h1 f2 85.♗g2 ♔e2 86.♔b4 f1♕ 87.♗xf1+ ♔xf1 88.a4 g5 89.hxg5 h4 90.g6 h3 91.g7 h2 92.g8♕ h1♕ 93.♕c4+ ♔f2=) 83...f3 84.♔xa3 f2 85.♗c4+−;
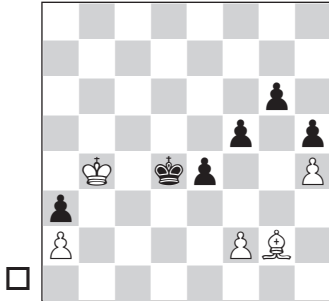 B) 80...♔g4? 81.♔xb4 ♔xh4 82.♔xa3 e3 83.fxe3 ♔g3 84.♗c6+−;
  C) 80...g5! is the only move: 81.hxg5 ♔xg5 82.♔xb4 ♔g4 83.♔xa3 h4 84.♔b4 f4!, transposing to our by now familiar drawing mechanism: 85.♗xe4 f3 86.♗c6 h3 87.♗d7+=.
81.♔xb4
It is White who is now winning.
**81...♔d4**

81...f4 82.♔xa3+−.

TASK 11: *White to play and win. Time to think: 3 to 5 minutes.*

82.♔xa3??
This natural move throws away the win. A nice reverse manoeuvre of bringing the bishop outside Black's pawn wall, this time once again to take squares away from Black's king, is the only way to win: 82.♗f1! f4 83.♗b5! (this puts Black in zugzwang by not allowing the black king to improve its position; 83.♔xa3? still threw away the win: 83...♔c3! 84.♗g2 e3 85.fxe3 fxe3 86.♗f3 ♔d3 87.♔b2 e2 88.♗xe2+ ♔xe2 89.♔c3 ♔f2 90.a4 g5 91.hxg5 h4=) 83...e3 84.fxe3+ ♔xe3 85.♔xa3+−.
82...♔d3= 83.♗f1+ ♔d2
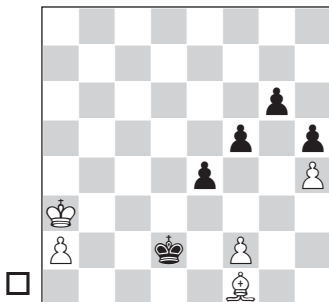
TASK 12: *Time to think: 3 to 5 minutes.*

Find a creative way for White to make a draw.
84.♔b2!?
84.f3! exf3 (84...e3?? 85.♔b4 g5 86.hxg5 h4 87.g6 h3 88.g7 h2 89.g8♕ h1♕ 90.♕d5++−) 85.♔b2 f2 86.a4 ♔e1 87.♗h3 f1♗ 88.♗xf1 ♔xf1 89.a5 f4 90.a6 f3 91.a7 ♔g1 92.a8♕ f2. Due to the positioning of the remaining pawns on the kingside, this position is a draw.
84...♔e1 85.♗c4 ♔xf2 86.a4 e3 87.a5 f4 88.a6 f3 89.a7 e2 90.a8♕ e1♕. 91.♕d5 ♔g2 92.♗d3??
Finally, it is White's turn to blunder after all the hard work. Time trouble and nerves are the likely reasons.
92.♕g5+ ♕g3 93.♕f6 f2 94.♔c2=.
92...♕xh4−+ 93.♗e4 ♕f4 94.♔b1 h4 95.♗xg6 h3 96.♗e4 h2 97.♕g8+ ♔f2 98.♕a2+ ♔e3 99.♗xf3 ♕b4+ 100.♔c1 ♕e1+ 101.♗d1 ♕c3+ 102.♔b1 ♕b4+ 103.♔c1 ♕c5+ 104.♔b1 h1♕ 105.♕e2+ ♔f4
And White resigned.
After the piece sacrifice in the opposite-coloured bishops endgame, the game became incredibly tense. The fact that it was still in dynamic balance is not that relevant to a practical player. As we saw, all three results were possible at various points in time due to various mistakes by both sides. But this is only a natural consequence of Gupta's risk-taking idea, which let us observe a heart-throbbing fight until the very end! Full credit to Gupta for the courageous decision and for making it work!

3. Not making a list of candidate moves before or while analysing

Many players start analysing the first move that comes to their mind, their first attraction, and do not look for other alternatives available in the position before having taken a plunge into the analysis of their preferred move. There is nothing wrong with this approach per se. When things do not turn out the way we want them to be in our analysis, we should return to these exact moments to find better alternatives.

The problem with this approach is that once we are deeply committed to a move, we spend significant time and energy trying to make it work. We raise our hopes, only to realise later that our initial presumption was not correct. Under the circumstances, it is not easy to regain our composure and start the process again with a different starting point.

To precisely avoid such a scenario, it makes sense to identify the moments when our moves are forced in our analysis. The moves we are considering for analysis are not forced. We should realise that there could be other possibilities, and, with that realisation, analyse the moves that look promising. When things go wrong, we go back to those exact moments when branches are possible. Now, it makes sense to make a list of candidate moves and then continue our analysis.

Imagine travelling by car from city X to city Y (in pre-Google Maps/GPS days) without knowing the exact route. Imagine we are travelling on the main road. If the road is going straight all the way, there is no way we can make a mistake. But when there are branches on the main road, you can also take a right or left turn; then, at that moment, we should hesitate because we have several options before us. If we choose the wrong road, we might have to come back to this point and try the other options.

Imagine we did not even realise that we could either take a left or right turn or go straight at one point. We went straight ahead and hit a dead end. We realise we made a mistake somewhere, but we have no way of knowing where to correct our error since, in our perception, the road was a straight line without any turns. If we have mentally noticed that we had options at some point, it is possible to go back to that exact place and try other options. Similarly, if we know that we had choices at certain moments, we can go back to those very moments and try different options.

A few important points to remember here are:
  a) We should make a list of candidate moves not only for ourselves but for our opponent as well.
  b) It is not enough to make a list of candidate moves at the beginning of a variation, but throughout the variation(s) when the moves are neither forced nor the only move.

Game 89   Level 4
Javokhir Sindarov   2537
Rameshbabu Praggnanandhaa   2602
Moscow 2020 (7)

This is a battle between two promising young players in their early teens and already accomplished grandmasters. Both have huge potential and it remains to be seen how far they can go. Although the game ended in a draw, there were fascinating moments when things could have gone either way.
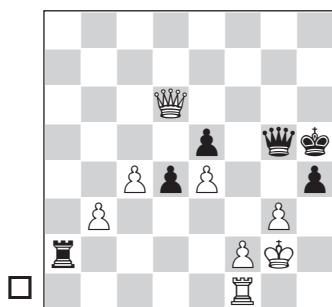

TASK 1: *Calculate as deeply as possible. Time to think: 10 to 15 minutes.*

33.♔g1??

In this position, White is much better if he can find the correct continuation, which Javokhir failed to do during the game, probably due to time trouble. He instinctively understood the king had to move, but chose the incorrect square.

  A) 33.♕d7?? ♕xg3+ 34.♔h1 ♕f3+ 35.♔g1 ♕g4+ (the active king, rook and the two distant passed pawns give Black a winning advantage) 36.♕xg4+ ♔xg4 37.c5 ♔f3 38.b4 (38. c6 ♖c2) 38...d3–+;

  B) 33.♔h1! hxg3 34.fxg3 (34. f4?? ♕h4+) 34...♖a1!? (the critical defensive idea that will demand very accurate play from White; 34... d3? 35.♖f5) 35.♖xa1 ♕xg3. White unfortunately is not able to give any checks and has to find a way out of the threatened perpetual check.
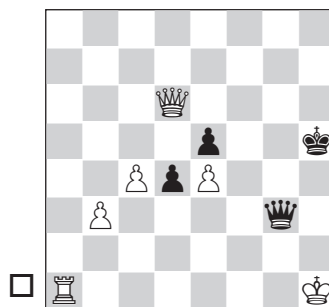
analysis diagram

TASK 2: *Find the only way for White to play for a win and calculate the consequences. Time to think: 10 minutes.*

  B1) 36.♕f6 seems to create hurdles on Black's path to give checks, or at least the queen may be able to come back and interpose Black's checks at the right moment. But... 36...♕h3+ 37.♔g1 ♕g3+ 38.♔f1 ♕h3+ 39.♔f2 ♕h2+ 40.♔e1 ♕g3+ 41.♕f2 (if the king tries to go to the queenside, Black's queen can pursue it successfully due to the pawn on d4. As a result, White has to give back the extra rook and take his chances in the resulting king and pawn ending) 41...♕c3+ 42.♕d2 ♕xa1+ 43.♕d1+. This is the point of White's play, but... 43...♕xd1+ 44.♔xd1 ♔g5... this is a drawn pawn ending. Black has a protected

passed pawn in the centre and his king will block White's queenside passed pawns. In the resultant position, White cannot make any progress, as his king will be tied to holding back the d-pawn: 45.c5 ♔f6 46.♔c2 ♔e6 47.♔d3 ♔d7 48.♔c4 ♔c6 49.b4 ♔c7 50.b5 ♔b7=;

B2) 36.♕a3!! ♕h3+ 37.♔g1 ♕g3+ 38.♔f1 ♕f3+ 39.♔e1 ♕xe4+ 40.♔d2 ♕e3+ 41.♔c2 ♕e2+ (41...d3+ 42.♔c3) 42.♔b1 d3 (we have reached a position in which Black will soon run out of checks and be completely lost. Before that happens, Black includes one more unit into the action just when White's pieces are apparently lacking coordination and will need some time to get them to act together; 42...♕d1+ 43.♔a2 ♕d2+ 44.♕b2 ♕a5+ 45.♔b1 ♕e1+ 46.♕c1 ♕e4+ 47.♔b2+−) 43.♖a2 d2 44.♖xd2 ♕xd2, and now comes the critical move: 45.♕c1! (45.♕b2? ♕e3=; the e-pawn will advance and give sufficient counterplay for Black to hold the balance) 45...♕g2 46.c5. This pawn is much faster than Black's e-pawn and is well backed up by the queen.

33...hxg3
Now it is Black who is in the driver's seat, but again with very little time on the clock.
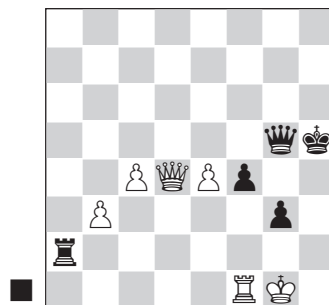33...♖xf2? 34.♖xf2 ♕xg3+ 35.♖g2 will end in a perpetual check draw.
34.f4!?
This is a good way to complicate the game and probably the reason why Javokhir chose to go 33.♔g1, so that Black would not have the possibility

to give ...♕h4 check when the king had gone to h1 earlier.
34...exf4 35.♕xd4!?
35.♖xf4 g2−+; 35.♕xf4 ♕xf4 36.♖xf4 d3−+.

The final critical moment in the game. The move Black plays here will decide the outcome, and unfortunately Pragg went astray:

TASK 3: *Time to think: 5 minutes.*

35...♖e2?
This allows an easy draw. 35...♖a8!! ensures that White will not find it easy to give checks to the black king. Black is doing well for the following reasons: his king is now comparatively safer, and his two passed pawns are more advanced and can advance further at the right moment, creating dangerous threats to White's king. White's passed pawns are currently not a worry for Black. White's rook is not doing much either. Black can slowly create a good cooperation between his pieces and then advance his pawns.
A) 36.♕d7 ♕c5+ (36...♕e5 37.♖d1) 37.♔h1 g2+! (a nice tactic to open up lines around the white king) 38.♔xg2 ♕g5+−+;

B) 36.♔g2 ♖d8 37.♕c3 (37.♖h1+
♔g4 38.♕c3 ♖d2+!) 37...♖d2+!
38.♔g1 (38.♕xd2?? f3+−+) 38...♕c5
with mate to follow;

C) 36.♕d1+ ♔h4! 37.♕f3 ♕c5+!
38.♔h1 ♕e3! 39.♕xf4+ (39.♕xe3
fxe3, and the rook and pawn ending
is completely lost for White: 40.♔g2
♔g4 41.♖e1 ♖a2+ 42.♔g1 ♔f3
43.♖f1+ ♖f2 44.♖e1 e2−+) 39...♕xf4
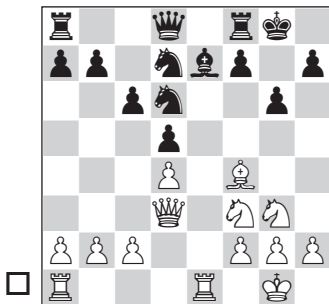40.♖xf4+ ♔h3−+;

D) 36.e5 ♕h4 37.♕d2 f3−+.

**36.♕h8+ ♔g4 37.♕c8+ ♔h4
38.♕h8+ ♔g4 ½-½**

Game 90   Level 4
Rameshbabu Praggnanandhaa 2507
Konstantin Landa 2613
Reykjavik 2018 (7)

15.♖e2?!
The knight on d6 is the key
defensive piece from Black's point
of view. So, White first takes steps
to shake its stability.

A) 15.♕a3!

A1) 15...♘e4 16.♕b3 ♘xg3 17.hxg3
♘b6 (17...b6 18.♖e2 ♗f6 19.♖ae1 ♕c8
20.g4!? – note how Black's pieces are
stepping on each other's toes and
have absolutely no coordination;
White keeps gaining space and
has various attacking ideas, such
as c2-c4 and g4-g5 and infiltrating
along the e-file) 18.a4, and Black
faces an uphill task defending the
b7-pawn;

A2) 15...♘c8 16.♕b3! ♕b6
(16...♘cb6 17.a4 a5 18.♖e2+−;
16...♘d6 17.♖e2±) 17.♕d3! ♕xb2?
(17...♕d8 18.♖e2, and White calmly
improves by doubling on the e-file
now. Importantly, Black lacks
coordination because of his knight
on c8) 18.♘f5!! (while Black's pieces
are caught napping on the other
flank, White uses a sacrifice to get
at Black's king) 18...gxf5 19.♖ab1
♕a3 20.♕xf5+−.

B) Also possible, though not as
strong, was 15.♕b3 ♘b6 16.a4 ♖e8
17.a5 ♘bc4 18.a6 b6±;

C) 15.h4 ♘f6 16.♘g5 ♕d7 17.♖e2
♖fe8=.

15...♖e8 16.♖ae1 ♗f8 ½-½
The presence of the knight on d6
holds Black's position together.
In this game, Pragg played a move
that looked obvious at first sight,
but he did not go deeply into the
position. As a result, the best move
in the position was not found.

A few reasons why upcoming players do not make a list of candidate moves
are:
  a) An inner fear that making a list of candidate moves could increase the
complexity of the whole process.

b) As the complexity increases, the possibility of making mistakes increases too.

c) It could make the whole process time-consuming.

d) A feeling that when I analyse one variation, I make multiple mistakes. If I start seeing numerous variations, I will make many more mistakes. Let me see one variation and try to do this without committing errors.

e) The whole process is too confusing.

f) Some players resist any change; they feel more comfortable with the status quo.

Solution:

Read more about it, try practising it, become better at it until it becomes a subconscious process. It is tough to master something when we are not ready to take the first step of trying to do it ourselves. For further reading on this issue, I would recommend John Nunn's book *Secrets of Practical Chess* and the chapter 'Wandering in the Jungle' by Michal Krasenkow in the book *Attack and Defence* by Mark Dvoretsky.

A related problem is that some players forget a move in the list they made some time ago! We need to keep our energy levels and concentration high throughout the game.

Calculate the following positions until the end with all its branches correct.

Game 91   Level 3
Jacek Tomczak   2614
**Christian Bauer**   2629
Batumi ol 2018 (5)

There are two main ways to train ourselves to improve our calculation.

One way that is very commonly followed by the majority of chess players is to take an interesting position and spend some time to analyse it. Usually, we see some interesting ideas, some interesting variations and sometimes we get the complete solution correctly too!

The only issue I have with this approach is that, many times, the truth is just a consequence and not the quest. The probability of making mistakes in our analysis with this method is much higher. We also limit ourselves to analysis that is lacking in depth at times. But this method has its own merits too. We constantly teach our mind how to calculate, making it stronger in the process.

The alternative method, which is my favourite, is to ruthlessly pursue the truth in the position. This means trying to push ourselves to the extreme, and trying to analyse as many variations as possible, and trying to squeeze every drop of juice out of the position.

For the second method, it will be efficient to do it with the help of a second or a coach. With this method, we analyse one complex position for a few hours, and in the process we improve our visualisation, calculation, concentration and durability.

It is better to use the first method of training on a daily basis and the second method of training once every few days, if finding a helper to assist is tough.
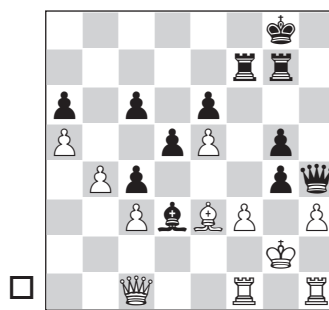
analysis diagram
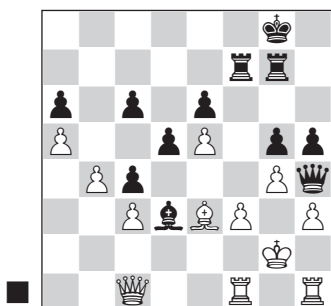
TASK 1: *Time to think: 10 minutes.*

As we see, Black's queen on h4 is in trouble.

Black had three forcing moves and an interesting alternative in the initial position.

The forcing moves are 33...hxg4, 33...♝xf1+ and 33...♜xf3, and the interesting fourth alternative suggested by many players is 33...♝e4. In the game, no doubt also due to a shortage of time on the clock, Black could not find the correct solution. But even with sufficient time, the resource is hard to find.
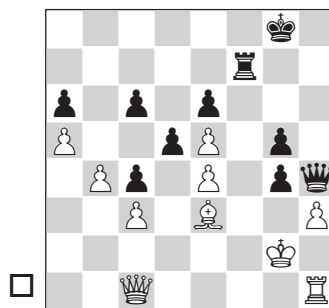
  A) 33...hxg4?

analysis diagram

TASK 2: *Refute 33....hxg4?. Time to think: 3 to 5 minutes.*

34.hxg4 ♜xf3 35.♜xf3 ♛xg4+ 36.♔f2 ♝e4 37.♛d1! (37.♜hh3 ♝xf3 38.♜xf3 ♛h4+ 39.♔g2 g4 40.♜g3 ♜h7 41.♛g1±) 37...♝xf3 38.♛xf3 ♜f7 39.♜h8+!+−, this is the key move in the whole variation!;

  B) 33...♝e4? 34.fxe4 (34.♝f2? ♜xf3 35.♝xh4 ♜xc3+ 36.♔h2 ♜xc1−+) 34...hxg4 35.♜xf7! (a relevant sequence of moves needs to be found for White) 35...♜xf7 (35... gxh3+ 36.♔h2 ♜xf7 37.♜g1!+−)

analysis diagram

TASK 3: *Find the correct continuation for White. Time to think: 3 to 5 minutes.*

  B1) 36.exd5! is one of the two resources available to White. If the

player finds any one of them, it is good enough. But the important resources relevant to that choice should be found: 36...♖f3!? (36...gxh3+!? 37.♖xh3 ♕e4+ 38.♔h2 cxd5 39.♕e1!+−) 37.♕e1! (since the ♗f2 resource to control the g3-square is not available as in the 36.♕c2 line, this becomes essential) 37...♕h7 38.♗f2 ♕f5 39.h4 (39.hxg4 ♕xg4+ 40.♗g3 cxd5 41.♖f1+−) 39...♖d3 40.♕e2 and White wins;

B2) 36.♕c2! is a tough move to find. Its purpose is to play ♕g6 check after exd5 and also to play ♗f2, which is very critical as we will see: 36...dxe4!? (36...♖f3 37.♗f2! ♕h5 38.exd5+−) 37.♗f2! ♕h5 38.♕d2!+−, a very important consolidating move that establishes White's superiority without doubt.

C) 33...♗xf1+! 34.♕xf1 ♖h7! (this is probably the most difficult move to find; without it, finding the solution would not be possible; 34...♖f8 35.♕d1+−; 34...hxg4 35.hxg4 ♕xg4+ 36.fxg4 ♖xf1) 35.♗f2 ♖xf3!= (the second important shot, but many players considered 33...♖xf3 on the first move, so it will not be so hard to find here) 36.♔xf3 hxg4+ 37.♔g2 (37.♔e2?? g3 38.♗c5 ♕e4+ 39.♔d2 ♖f7−+) 37...gxh3+ 38.♔h2 ♕f4+ 39.♗g3 ♕e4∞ (finally Black gets a position he can be satisfied with, after extreme effort no doubt!) 40.♖g1 ♖f7.

33...♖xf3?? 34.♖xf3 hxg4
34...♗e4 35.♗f2 ♗xf3+ 36.♔g1!+−.
35.♖g3 ♗e4+ 36.♔h2
It is all over now for Black.

**36...♖h7**
36...♗xh1 37.♖xg4+−.
37.♖d1 ♖h5 38.♗c5 gxh3 39.♗e7 ♔f7 40.♗xg5 ♕xg3+ 41.♔xg3 1-0

Here is a study by Yochanan Afek based on his favourite underpromotion theme. A variety of different promotions are seen, and at various points a unique underpromotion works, making the study even more challenging. This is a good exercise in staying alert, apart from the aesthetic viewpoint, of course!

Game 92   Level 4
Yochanan Afek
Study, 1974
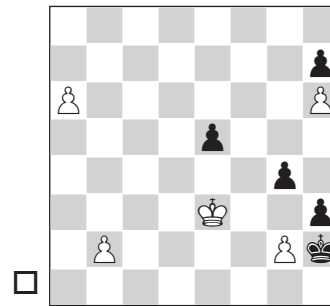
White to play and win

1.g3!
1.gxh3? g3=.
1...♔xg3
1...♔g1 loses without any fight after 2.a7 h2 3.a8♕ h1♕ 4.♕xh1+ ♔xh1 5.b4 ♔g2 6.b5 ♔xg3 7.b6 ♔h2 8.b7 g3 9.b8♕ g2 10.♕xe5++−.
2.a7 e4!
2...h2?! 3.a8♗! (the natural move 3.a8♕? does not work: 3...e4! 4.♕xe4 (4.♕b8+ ♔h3!=) 4...h1♕ 5.♕xh1 ends in a beautiful

stalemate) 3...♔h3 4.♔f2 g3+ 5.♔f1. White's king and bishop have stopped Black's passed pawns, and the passed b-pawn will win the game easily for White.
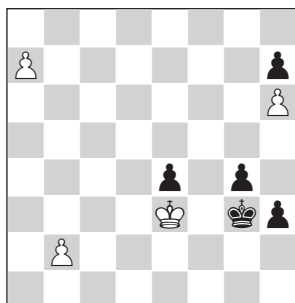
3.a8♖!!

A typical Afek under-promotion!

  A) 3.a8♕? h2 and now:

  A1) 4.♕b8+ ♔h3! (4...♔g2?? 5.♕f4 h1♕ 6.♕xg4+ ♔f1 (6...♔h2 7.♕h4+ ♔g2 8.♕xh1+ ♔xh1 9.b4+–) 7.♕e2+ ♔g1 8.♕f2#) 5.♕b5 (5.♔f2 e3+ 6.♔xe3 h1♕) 5...h1♕ 6.♕h5+ ♔g3;

  A2) 4.♕e8 h1♕ 5.♕e5+ ♔h4 6.♕e7+ ♔g3;

  A3) 4.♕xe4 h1♕ 5.♕xh1=.

  B) 3.a8♗? also backfires badly for White: 3...♔h2! 4.♗xe4 g3–+.

3...♔h2!

3...h2 4.♖a1 ♔g2 5.♔xe4 g3 6.♔f4! ♔f2 (6...♔h3 7.♔g5 g2 (7...♔g2 8.♔g4+–) 8.♖a3# is a creative mating pattern!) 7.♖h1! (this comes as a cold shower. It appeared as if Black's passed pawns were very strong and on the verge of queening, but White shows this is not the case at all!) 7...♔g2 8.♖c1! ♔f2 9.♖c2+ ♔g1 10.♔xg3 h1♘+ 11.♔f3 and this position is won even without any pawns on the board.
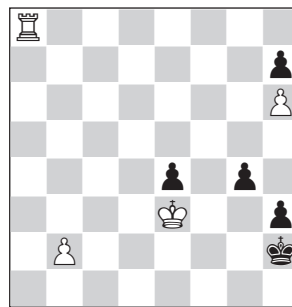
4.♖a7!

4.♖h8? ♔g2! 5.♖xh7 h2–+.

4...♔g2!

4...g3 5.♖xh7! g2 6.♖g7 g1♕+ 7.♖xg1 ♔xg1 8.h7 h2 9.h8♕ h1♕ 10.♕xh1+ ♔xh1 11.b4+–.

5.♔xe4!

The right move order is also very important as always. For example, 5.♖a1? does not work after 5...g3! 6.♔xe4 (6.b4 h2 7.♔f4 ♔h3 8.b5 g2) 6...♔f2! and Black wins (but not 6...h2? 7.♔f4+–).

5...g3 6.♔f4! h2

6...♔f2 7.b4+–.

7.♖a1 ♔f2

7...♔h3 8.♔g5+–.

8.♖h1! ♔g2 9.♖c1! ♔f2 10.♖c2

And White wins.

The way the rook and king took care of the opponent's advanced passed pawns was very admirable. This teaches us something about similar endgames with a rook against pawns. It is very important to see all the variations in our analysis by making a list of candidate moves at each turn for both White and Black wherever the moves are not forced. Otherwise, it is easy to miss some important variations in our analysis.