

Foreword by Grandmaster Max Illingworth

What is the best way to improve your chess, and win more chess games?

In my playing career, my big surges in playing strength came when I solved a lot of tactics puzzles.

In late 2003, as a 10-year old, I decided to start solving lots of puzzles – at first checkmate puzzles – before moving on to tactics programs such as CT-ART. Solving these problems several times, and then applying the tactical themes regularly in tournaments, allowed me to surge from a 1400ish rating to over 1800 in about a year, and get a starting FIDE rating of over 2000 soon after.

I know that I wouldn't have become an Australian Junior Champion (Under 12), and then an Australian Champion (twice), if I hadn't done regular tactics solving. I'm sure you know that you can lose after playing a lot of great moves, just because you missed some 'trick' in the position, right?

That's why, in the many years I've spent coaching chess (starting with helping my primary school teammates to play better chess and win the school competitions), I've consistently recommended that anyone serious about improving their chess should solve tactics puzzles every day. It should eventually become a habit as natural as brushing your teeth or showering each day, if you have dreams of becoming a chess master or chess champion.

In fact, I once read that Shakhriyar Mamedyarov (the former no.3 player in the world) had solved about 250,000 chess puzzles! That explains where his amazing tactical vision and calculating ability comes from! In my case, I found that my Chess.com blitz quickly improved from a 2500 to a 2700+ level (back when such a rating meant a top 50 ranking) when I solved thousands and thousands of chess puzzles – I have solved about 150,000 chess puzzles (including repeating old puzzles) by now.

You know that the single best thing you can do to improve at chess, along with playing and learning from your games, is to solve tactics puzzles. So, why should you use Carsten's book for your training, as opposed to the many other resources out there?

First, I can vouch for Carsten as a quality author, whose dedication comes through in both his books and the many challenging puzzles he shares on social media. Indeed, even though I am currently retired from professional chess, I solve his puzzles regularly to stay tactically sharp for my lessons with my students. He's very willing to help others and he cares about you, and the results you get from working through his material.

Finally, what about those players that solve lots of tactics puzzles, but still don't improve? In my experience, this happens because they get into the habit of working through the puzzles too quickly, causing them to miss key variations when calculating in a real game. It's not enough to have good pattern recognition in chess – we also need to be able to slow our thinking down, and deliberating come up with good moves that don't come automatically to us.

Carsten's tactics puzzles are somewhat different from those you can find in other resources. He has a knack for picking positions where it's not enough to see the first move – you have to sit there, work out the variations, and spot some clever ideas along the way, much like in a tough chess game against a good player. He also doesn't rehash examples from other tactics books – his material is all original, so even if you've solved lots of tactics puzzles, you'll find little to no overlap with what you've solved before.

If you work through this book, your skill in both key areas – pattern recognition and calculation – will significantly improve.

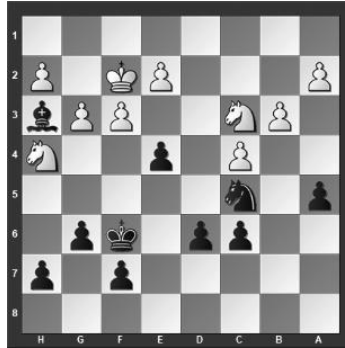
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Sydney
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Set 1

1.1



1.2



1.3



1.4



1.5



1.6



1.7



1.8





1.1

25.Re7+! Kf6 26.Kh5! Protecting the knight on g6 and thus taking that square away from the black king. White now threatens mate with Nd5+, Ng4+ and Rf1+, there is no way for Black to guard himself against all of them. **26...Rxb6 27.Nd5# 1–0 Shirov (2658) - Chukavin (2300)** Riga rapid 2019



1.2

24...e3+! 25.Kg1 Or 25.Kxe3 g5, trapping the knight. **25...g5 26.Ng2 Bxb2 27.Kxb2** White has saved the knight but now the white king is stuck behind his pawns and Black is much better in the endgame. **27...Ke5 28.h4?** White is trying to create counterplay but this move only makes matters worse. Instead 28.Nd1 was necessary. **28...Kd4 29.Nd1 gxh4 30.g4** Or 30.gxh4 Nd3! (intending ...Nc1) 31.exd3? e2 and the pawn queens. **30...Ne6** and with ...Nf4+ coming, White resigned. **0–1 Ustiyanovich (2376) - Yuffa (2582)** Riga rapid 2019



1.3

26...Qf3+! 27.Kg1 Rxe7 Also 27...cxb3 wins, e.g., 28.Nxe8 Qg4+ 29.Kh1 Rxe8 30.axb3 f4 31.Bxf4 Qf3+ 32.Kg1 Rxe7 and Black is winning. **28.Be3 Rxe3** and White resigned. **0–1 Klimakovs (2313) – A.Moiseenko (2628)** Riga rapid 2019



1.4

22...Re3! The d-pawn was blocked on d4, after the text move, it once more moves forward. **23.Bxe3 dxe3 24.Rd1** Or 24.Rfe1 Ne5! 25.Nxe5 (also 25.Rxe3 Bxe3 26.Qxe3 Qc6 27.Kg2 Re8 28.Qc3 Nxc4 wins for Black) 25...exf2! 26.Re2 Rd8! 27.Qb1 (27.Qxd8 f1Q+ wins easily for Black) 27...Rxd1+ 28.Qxd1 Qc8 29.Qb1 Ne4!! 30.Kg2 (or 30.Rxe4 Qxf5) 30...Qxf5 31.Rxe4 f1Q+ 32.Qxf1 Qxe4+ 33.Nf3 Qc2+ and Black is much better in the endgame. **24...Rd8 25.Qb3??** White should have played 25.Qc2 when 25...Nd4 26.Nxd4 Rxd4 27.Nd1 Ne4 28.Rxe3 Rxd1 29.Qxd1 Bxe3 30.Qe2 Bd2 with a clear advantage for Black. **25...e2** Now White is simply lost. **26.Nd3 exf1Q+ 27.Rxf1** and White resigned at the same time. **0–1 Lanka (2395) - Volokitin (2546)** Riga rapid 2019



1.5

10.Nxd5! Nxd5 11.cxd5 Bxd2 12.Nxd2 Bxd5 13.Qc2
 White sets up dual threats against h7 and c7. **13...Nf6**
14.Qxc7 Qxc7 15.Rxc7 Bxa2 Black has temporarily
 regained the pawn but the troubles are not yet over. **16.Ra1**
Nd5 17.Rb7 Nb4 18.Rxb6 Nxd3 19.Rxa2 and White has
 won a pawn. **Aleksandrov (2571) – Solozhenkina (2324)**
 Riga rapid 2019



1.6

27...Re1+! 28.Kf2 Qe8! This threatens ...Re2 with
 devastating effect. **29.Bc3 Rc1** Threatening not just the
 bishop on c3 but also ...Qe1#. **30.Qe3 Rf1+** and White
 resigned. **0–1**
Pogosyan (2334) - Parligras (2638) Riga rapid 2019



1.7

19...Rxd4! This is best although Black has two alternatives
 that also win: a) 19...b6 20.Qa3 Bxd4+ 21.cxd4 Rxd4
 22.Qc3 Qc5 or 19...Bxd4+ 20.cxd4 Rxd4 21.Qc3 Qc5 and
 White loses a piece and ends up with a lost position..
20.cxd4 Bxd4+ 21.Kh1 Nxh2! Cracking a devastating hole
 in White's king shelter. **22.Rf4 Ng4 23.Qe1 Nf2+!** Also
 23...Rf8! wins. **24.Rxf2 Qh4+ 25.Kg1 Bxc4 26.Be2 Rf8**
 The point behind the previous moves. **27.Bf3 Rxf3!** White
 resigned. **0–1 Kanep (2432) - Alekseev (2645)** Riga rapid
 2019



1.8

15...e3! The game continuation was 15...Ng4 16.h3 e3
 17.hxg4 e2 18.Qa4 exf1Q+ 19.Nxf1 Nc4 20.gxf5 Nxb2
 21.Qb3 (Demidov (2546) - Smirnov (2421) Riga blitz 2019)
 and here Black should have played 21...Bxd4 with a winning
 position. **16.fxe3 Ng4** and White is busted, the e3–pawn
 cannot be protected after which Black's knights penetrate
 the white position with devastating effect, e.g., **17.Qc1**
Nxe3 18.Rf2 Qd7 19.Ra2 Or 19.a4 Nc2 and Black is
 winning. **19...Bh6 20.Nf1 Ng4** and White loses material.

Set 2

2.1



2.2



2.3



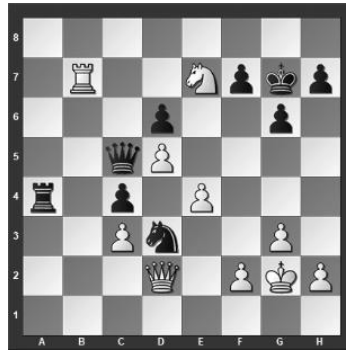
2.4



2.5



2.6



2.7



2.8





2.1

28.d6! This is by far the best move, forcing the black bishop on e7 away from the defense of the f6-pawn. That being said, both 28.Bb5 and 28.Bd3 f5 29.Bxf5! Rb6 30.Bc2 should also win for White. But again, not as convincingly as the game continuation. **28...Bxd6** Anything else simply loses a piece. **29.Qxf6 Bf8** and Black resigned at the same time. After 29...Qf7, the most convincing win is 30.Bc4 (capturing on d6 obviously also wins) 30...Re6 31.Bxe6 Nxe6 32.Qxf7+ Kxf7 33.Rxd6 and White is a full rook up. **1-0 Guseinov (2533) - Barskij (2389)** Riga blitz 2019



2.2

12...Be6! This is best. In the game, Black instead gave preference to 12...Ba6!? with the same idea as in our main line, but Black's pieces are slightly less well-placed: 13.b3 Nxc4 14.Bg5 Qc8 15.bxc4 Bxc3 16.Rac1?! (16.Rab1 would have been a better choice although Black, of course, has the better chances) 16...Bg7 17.Rfd1 Re8 18.Qc2 Rb8 with a clear advantage for Black.; Black can also insert 12...Bg4!? 13.f3 before returning to 13...Be6 14.b3 Nxc4 and it is a matter of taste what matters more: White's weakening of the dark squares with f2-f3 or Black having access to the g4-square; I tend to prefer the latter; after 15.Bg5 Qb8 (after 15...Qd7 16.Rac1 Ne5 as in our main line, Black would probably prefer to have the g4-square available) 16.Rac1 Qb4 17.Nd1 Ne5 with an advantage for Black. **13.b3 Nxc4! 14.Bg5 Qd7 15.Rac1 Ne5** and Black has an extra pawn and a clear advantage. **Usmanov (2443) - Ziska (2546)** Riga blitz 2019



2.3

25.Bxg7! Best, although both 25.Rxc7 Qxd4 26.Be3 Qd8 27.h6 and 25.d5!? Qxd5 26.Bxg7 Bxg7 27.h6 Qe5 28.Rd2 also should win for White. **25...Bxg7 26.h6 Qxd4 27.Rd2 Qe5 28.Rc5!?** and Black resigned. Also 28.f4! wins on the spot. **1-0 Guseinov (2636) - Shishkov (2390)** Riga blitz 2019



2.4

26...Ra8! An important move, chasing the white bishop away, something that becomes crucial for Black's follow-up. **27.Bd3??** A gross blunder. White overlooks Black's simple follow-up. Instead 27.Bf1 would have been better. After 27...Bc6 28.Bg2 Bxg2 29.Kxg2 Kd6 30.Rc3 Rxa2, Black has an extra pawn and excellent winning chances in the rook ending. **27...Bc6 28.b4 Kd6** and the White rook is trapped. White resigned. **0-1 Guseinov (2654) - Grachev (2621)** Riga blitz 2019



2.5

20.Qd5! This is simplest and best although White also wins after 20.Be3 Qe5 21.Bd4 Bg5 22.Bxe5 Bxd2+ 23.Rxd2 dxe5 24.bxa4 or 20.Bxd6 exd6 21.Qxd6 Qxd6 22.Nxd6+ Kf8 23.bxa4, in both cases with winning positions for White. **20...Bc6 21.Nxd6+!** Forcing mate. In the game continuation, White preferred 21.Qxf7+ Kd7 22.Rxd6+ Kc8 23.Be6+ Kb7 24.Rxc6 Kxc6 25.Bd5+ Kb6 26.Qe6+ Ka5 27.Bxa8 Qc3 28.Qd5+ Kb6 29.Qb7+ Ka5 30.Bc7+ and Black resigned. **21...exd6 22.Qxf7+ Kd8 23.Bxd6** and Black will have to give up material just to delay mate. **Guseinov (2636) - Gretarsson (2412)** Riga blitz 2019



2.6

28.Nf5+! 28.Rb8 also wins but the text move is best. **28...Kf6** Or 28...gxf5 29.Qg5+ Kf8 30.Rb8+ with mate. **29.Nh6! Ra7 30.Ng4+!** Black resigned. He would get mated after 30.Ng4+ Kg7 31.Qh6+ Kg8 32.Nf6+ Kh8 33.Qxh7#. **1-0 Lupulescu (2649) - Antoms (2337)** Riga blitz 2019



2.7

20...Rxf2! In the game, Black continued with 20...Bxe3!? and soon won after 21.Nxf8 Bd2+ 22.Ke2 Qh5+ 23.Kf1 Rxf8 24.Bxe4 Qh4 25.Qe2 Bxe4 26.Qxd2 Bxh1 and White resigned. **21.Nd4 Rxb2!** 21...Rxc2 also wins. **22.0-0-0 Ba3!** and White can't avoid heavy material losses. **Krakops (2510) - Predke (2632)** Riga blitz 2019



2.8

28.Qd6! Kg7 White also wins after the alternatives 28...Rcxd7 29.Qxb8; or 28...Rdxd7 29.Qxf6, in both cases winning material for White. **29.Re8! Kh6** Or 29...Rxe8 30.dxe8Q Qxe8 31.Qxc7 and White has won a rook. Black resigned after the text move. The fastest win is 29...Kh6 30.Qf8+! Kh5 31.g4+! fxg4 (or 31...Kxg4 32.Qh6! with mate to follow) 32.Rd5+ with mate in a few moves. **1-0 Potapov (2485) - Frolov (2453)** Pardubice rapid 2019

Set 3

3.1



3.2



3.3



3.4



3.5



3.6



3.7



3.8





3.1

18...Qb6+! In the game, Black continued with the less accurate 18...Bxh3 19.Qxh3 Kxe7 20.Qh4+?! (20.Qb3!? was a much better choice although Black is clearly better) 20...f6 21.e5? Qxe5+ 22.Rd4 g5 23.Qf2 Kf7 24.Re1 Qc7 25.Qf5 Qc3+ 26.Ka2 Qxd4 and White resigned. **19.Kc1** Or 19.Ka1 Rxc2 20.Bxd7+ Kxe7 when preventing mate will cost White an army of material. **19...Qh6+**, winning the bishop on h3. **J.Geller (2525) - Movsesian (2649)** Pardubice rapid 2019



3.2

29...Qa6! Threatening ...Bd3, forcing the queen away from b1 and the protection detail of the a2-square. 29...Qa5!? to transfer the rook to a8 is also very strong and wins for Black. **30.Rf2** In the game, White blundered with 30.Kc2?? and after 30...Bd3+, he resigned. **30...Rxf2** Black also wins after 30...Nf6; and 30...Ra8. **31.Bxf2** Ng5 with ...Bd3 to follow and White can resign. **Sahidi (2369) - Mirzoev (2493)** Pardubice rapid 2019



3.3

27...Bxg5! The simple and straight-forward 27...Bxb4 is also much better for Black. **28.Qxg5 Rd5!?** Or 28...Rd7 followed by ...Qc4 winning for Black. **29.Rc1?** Or 29.Qe3 Qc4 and Black is winning. **29...Rxd4!** and White resigned as the queen on c7 can't be captured due to ...Rd1#. **0-1 Najdin (2314) - Deepan (2532)** Pardubice rapid 2019



3.4

30.Bd2! White also wins after 30.Ne4 Rc4 31.Rba2! Rb4 32.Rxb8+ Bxb8 33.Rc2! and White is winning.; The game continuation was 30.Bd2! when Black resigned on the spot. **30...Rc4 31.Ba5! Ra4 32.Rc2!** and Black can't defend without facing heavy material losses. **Andreikin (2727) - Ding Liren (2812)** Wenzhou rapid 2019



3.5

18...Rxc4! The game continuation was 18...Qb6 19.b3 Nxc4 20.Rxc4 Rxc4 21.a5 Qb5 22.bxc4 b3 23.cxb5 bxa2 24.e4 Bg6 25.Rxa2 f5 26.Bb4 Rc8 27.exf5 Bxf5 28.a6 b6 and White has the better chances. **19.Rxc4 b3! 20.Bb4 Qa6!** and White ends up a piece down. **V.Ikonnikov (2499) - Lenaerts (2355)** Leiden 2019



3.6

27...Ra1+! The text move forces mate. Black also wins after 27...Qxb2+. **28.Kc2** Or 28.Bxa1 Rxa1+ 29.Kd2 Qb2+ 30.Kd3 Rd1+ 31.Ke4 Rd4+ 32.Kf3 Qxc3+ 33.Kg4 Ne5+ 34.Kh4 Qe1+ with mate in a few moves. **28...Qxb2+!** In the game, after 28...Qxb2+, White understandably resigned. A possible continuation was **29.Kxb2 R8a2+ 30.Kb3 Nd4+ 31.Kb4 Ra4#** **S.Ivanov (2496) - Sandipan (2516)** Leiden 2019



3.7

26.Nb5! Another way to an advantage is 26.Bxf6! Bxf6 27.Nb5! Qxa4 (or 27...axb5 28.Rxc4 bxc4 29.Qb4 and White has a large advantage) 28.Nxd6 Rf8 29.Nxb7 and White is winning. **26...Qxa4?** Or 26...axb5 27.Rxc4 bxc4 28.Bxf6 Bxf6 29.Qb4 and White has, like mentioned above, a clear advantage. **27.Nxd6 Nxe4 28.Nxe4 Bxd4 29.b3!** and Black resigned. **1–0 Sanikidze (2509) - Tutisani (2460)** Poti 2019



3.8

26.hxg6! This is much better than 26.Nf6 Nc4 27.h6+ Kh8 28.Rhe1 when White has a large advantage but it is not yet decisive. **26...Qxe4** Or 26...dxe4 27.Rh7+! Kg8 (also 27...Kxg6 28.Qh5+ Kf6 29.Rh6+ Kg7 30.Qg4+ Kxh6 31.Rh1+ leads to mate) 28.Qc3! Qg5+ 29.Kb1 f6 30.Rh8+! Kg7 (30...Kxh8 31.Qh3+ with mate) 31.Qc7+! with mate. **27.Rh7+ Kxg6 28.Rh6+!** In the game, White continued with 28.Qg3+ Kf6 29.Qd6+ and Black resigned. **28...Kxh6 29.Qf6+ Kh5 30.g4+!** and Black will get mated in a few moves. **Tang (2495) - Hilby (2433)** USA Junior ch 2019 (Saint Louis) 2019