

# Mastering Chess Exchanges

By

**Jacob Aagaard &  
Renier Castellanos**



Quality Chess  
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# Preface

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After finishing the *Grandmaster Preparation* series in 2017, I decided that I would take a few years off from writing books. What had started as a quick idea to monetise exercises I had collected for Boris Gelfand to use as training material in 2009-2013, became a serious series of improvement books with positive mentions and translations into many languages.

It is not a major secret that the idea for the books came from watching a poor cash flow forecast for Quality Chess in 2011 and the knowledge that the publishers do not have to pay the author royalties, when the author is one of the publishers. But when the series was finished, I felt I had inadvertently written something of value.

Especially the last volume, *Thinking Inside the Box*, came out exactly as I wanted it. IM Kostya Kavutskiy of ChessDojo named it his favourite book of the 21st century on a stream and many others had told me they found it helpful, so I am possibly not entirely misguided.

So the decision to let the series exist on its own for a while, not to be in competition with new books from the same author, came naturally.

However, I did not stop working on new material after publishing *Box*, but continued to collect material, give lessons, analyse and annotate games, and think about how chess is best played and best taught. If anything, I got even more obsessive.

Since the *Grandmaster Preparation* series I have been working on various ambitious projects. Some of these have been published recently, and others will come out as I complete them over the next few years. Some of them will be written by me alone and some with co-authors.

*A Matter of Endgame Technique* was published first and won the ECF Book of the Year 2023. Perhaps in terms of sheer bulk it had more chances to win than the other shortlisted books, as at 896 pages it was really six books in one. It is the start of the *Grandmaster Knowledge* series of books. *Endgame Labyrinths*, co-written with Danish composer Steffen Nielsen (World Champion at the time of publication and awarded GM of chess composition right after), came next, and is the first in the *Grandmaster Training* series. I do not hide the fact that I am a great admirer of Anish Giri, so his description of the book in Twitter-abbreviated style as “absolute gold” was a pleasing reward for the many years we spent on the book. Closely on its heels followed two more *Grandmaster Knowledge* books, *Conceptual Rook Endgames*, a guide to playing practical rook endgames, twinned with Sam Shankland’s *Theoretical Rook Endgames*. All these books have turned out exactly as I wanted them.

This book, *Mastering Exchanges in Chess*, is the first of hopefully many co-written with Renier Castellanos. I got to know Renier when he asked me various questions about *Box* online; I got to meet him first briefly at the Batumi Olympiad and then for real when he attended the Quality Chess Academy in the autumn of 2018. Our discussions about chess continued and when we founded our online training academy, [killerchesstraining.com](http://killerchesstraining.com), Renier became our most trusted trainer, always available to substitute if someone became unavailable at the last moment. The weekly Friendly Homework Club he hosts is appropriately named, although that does not mean that anyone gets all 18 exercises correct...

Our discussions about the thought process in chess have deepened over time and it was natural to take the next step and combine our ideas and material, writing books together that would be better than if we had written them on our own.

I would like to say that the work in this book is strictly 50/50, but I find it impossible to curtail my passion for what I do, always giving 110%, forcing my fiancée to ban me from pouring drinks for people. I found the idea of this book fascinating, have been thinking and dreaming about it for months. Now it is done, I hope you will find what Renier and I have produced to be helpful.

Jacob Aagaard  
March 2024





I am available for paid work.

Renier Castellanos  
March 2024

# Introduction

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Studying the games of strong grandmasters is a sobering experience. One of the fascinating things with chess is that it is possible to understand well, but entirely impossible to play well. Commonly referred to as *simple, yet difficult*. What this means in practice is that it is fully possible to explain why a decision is right or wrong and for most to understand it with confidence. But once we are faced with the task of making the decisions ourselves, this confidence evaporates. Thus, it is important for instructional manuals to balance the need for explaining the common patterns, ideas and thought processes in chess, with the need for practical engagement (i.e. decision-making).

As trainers we therefore focus a lot of our work with students on solving exercises and discussing their games with them. No matter the level. To amateurs at the early stages of their chess journey, we may spend more time explaining common themes, but to professionals already fighting for the highest titles in the game, we also spend a lot of time explaining these same common themes. It is our belief that anything worth knowing in chess can be explained in simple terms. Or said in a different way: if you cannot explain something in simple terms, you probably do not understand it. It hardly matters which sport we are discussing. Elite level is achieved through flawless application of the basics.

This is an important concept to understand as we take you through this book. We have done our outmost to make the explanations clean and clear. In the process it may appear that seasoned grandmasters do not understand what we are saying. While at times this may be true, we should remember that all considerations during a game will be *on the one hand, while on the other...* We do not profess to know for sure what the players were thinking, but we will take the liberty to imagine it, to ground our narrative in what is most important, the thought process.

With the hundreds of examples in this book, we will definitely be wrong in our speculation of what a player missed or misevaluated or generally imagined would happen a lot of the time. Nonetheless it is sometimes worth speculating what went wrong when a top player makes a mistake. Our experience as grandmasters and of working with students have given us a lot of insights into how chess players think, especially when the outcome is of low quality.

## Other works on exchanges

Up to this point there have not been a lot of serious books written on how to decide on what, when and how to exchange material in chess. It would be possible to argue that this is a reason why so many players are poor in this area. But we imagine that it is rather the other way around. Because this is a difficult area to understand, few chess writers have found it compelling to write about it.

Joel Benjamin wrote *Liquidation on the Chess Board* in 2015, a book on the transition into pawn endings. It is unfair to criticise a book for not being about something else, even if the title

can feel deceptive. Benjamin's book is about calculating the resulting pawn endings, rather than evaluating the positional and strategic properties of exchanges. The two books written by GM Rozentalis adopt a similar stance.

While there is nothing wrong with using calculation as a tool to decide on exchanges in principle, it does have potential downsides. Many positions do not possess the forced nature that makes them conducive to calculation. At other times, calculation is simply too time consuming to be practical. While it is natural for players who calculate well to rely on this tool, it is perhaps even more important for them to develop additional skills and expand the scope of their thinking.

In this book we have not entirely avoided variations and calculation. Although we are focusing on positional themes, patterns and considerations, chess is ultimately a concrete game. Moves will have to be played. There are some books that include a lot of variations, sub-variations and further entrenched sub-variations. Often this is the most appropriate way to explain complex material, but at times it is simply easier to press the space bar than to find the core of the position and convey it in simple words to the readers.

What we have tried to do in this book is to provide simplicity and few variations. This is not a sign that these positions are easy, but rather the annotations are designed not to cut to the core of the positions.

This book is fundamentally an exercise book. We have chosen to go for the rarely used multiple-choice option, as it gives us a few advantages over the standard hint-free puzzle format, which felt greatly useful for this topic.

It is this aspect in particular which distinguishes this book from the recent book by Quality Chess, *Understanding Chess Exchanges* (UCE) by Bagheri and Salehzadeh. In some ways UCE can be regarded as a companion guide to this book – we of course would be delighted if you were to buy both books! UCE expands on the examples given in Chapter 2 of this book to illustrate the various principles behind when and when not to exchange, with an emphasis on the games of Magnus Carlsen. To draw out the distinction made in the Preface, UCE is primarily a book about knowledge, whereas this book is primarily about training.

### **The structure of this book**

This book is seeking to be both challenging and inviting at the same time. The structure we have chosen for it reflects this.

The first chapter is meant to impress upon you that we understand perfectly well how difficult it is to make these decisions ourselves. It includes three games from a recent tournament where Jacob made a lot of mistakes concerning exchanges, after obsessing about it for the previous few months.



The second chapter is a thematic walk-through of the reasoning we could have for choosing or avoiding possible exchanges. Such a list will never be fully comprehensive, nor how everyone would want to present it. For example, you will not find a perfect match between the themes referred to in UCE and those in this book. But it is our interpretation of the exercises we have selected for this book, with a bit extra.

Then we have the exercises, divided up into a few obvious sections. The exchanges of queens, rooks, minor pieces, pawns and exchanges in the endgame, followed by lots of solutions.

We have chosen to truncate most of the games, as the instructive moments have passed. It has nothing to do with the topic at hand that White was winning and then another 30 moves followed where his position deteriorated, after which he lost. Or won. We are not telling the story of the games, but mostly focusing on brief moments of special interest within those games.

### **The reliance on computers**

For us it would be unthinkable to write a book in the 21st century without a serious computer check. Stockfish, Leela and other fishy programs have been with us for three decades and have reached an amazing playing strength.

They are valuable for chess improvement, as they can give us instant feedback on our play. Where they can fail is that they are unable to explain anything. So far, any attempts to have automated analysis from ChessBase, Lichess and others are bordering on the ridiculous, if not directly invading that territory.

This can give us a misconception of chess being a game of calculation. One chess author went as far as to say that chess is all tactics, as computers outplay humans with ease and that for this reason, we should all focus exclusively on tactics. Come back when you have managed to match those 2 million moves per second and we will talk about the next stage of your chess development...

With this book, we have gone in a different direction. The advantage of having two authors means that we could look at the positions from both the view of digital certainty and human insecurity. We have been able to ask questions of the positions and variations that computers would not ask, but which matter far more than long variations.

This book is extensively computer checked but is written by humans for human consumption. Just because a computer thinks a move is marginally not best, does not mean that we must pay attention. We have only done so if we found that it improved the narrative. Often it would get in the way of the main point.

In other words, you can trust the accuracy of the exercises. There may be small details where we don't care what Stockfish says, but nothing wrong should be in this book. We understand that some of you will see this as a challenge. Please send your improvements to: [info@qualitychess.co.uk](mailto:info@qualitychess.co.uk)

### **The use of symbols to indicate an advantage**

Infrequently throughout the book we have used the classical symbols known as plus over equal and so on as shorthand. Before computers became our masters, they were used by most. The important thing is to not read too much into them. We use them when there is little to say, except to give an evaluation, or when they add a little bit of detail to an otherwise more important explanation.

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# Chapter 2

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## Reasons to Exchange – Or Not

In this chapter we shall outline the common themes we have discovered while working on the material for this book. They can roughly be divided into five categories:

1. **Piece evaluation**
2. **Structural considerations**
3. **Strategic themes**
4. **Dynamic themes**
5. **Endgame themes**

It is always possible to argue for some themes belonging under a different umbrella, but choices had to be made, and were made this way.

In line with tradition, we shall look at them in order of appearance.

### 1. Piece evaluation

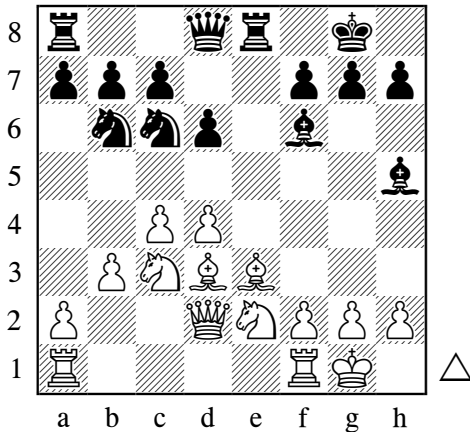
When considering exchanging a piece, there are a lot of questions you could ask yourself. The two most obvious is to compare the pieces.

#### 1.1 Which is the better piece?

Who wants to give up their best piece for the opponent's most ineffective piece? You do, but not without big rewards! In the homework we provide our students with at the Killer Chess Training academy, we frequently give them exercises where all they must do is to exchange to grab the two bishops. The following is a good example.

## Nguyen Thanh Thuy Tien – Mykola Bortnyk

Reston 2020



If it was Black to play, the most sensible move would probably be ...♗g6, exchanging White's good bishop for the somewhat wayward light-squared bishop.

White played 13.♖ac1, which is not a bad move at all. Although she later lost the game, she was still better.

But stronger was 13.♘f4! ♗g6 14.♘xg6 hxg6 15.♗c4, when White would have secured a strategically winning position. The two bishops give a lasting advantage, assisted by the control of the light squares and the additional space. Even if you cannot see it at this point, the two bishops provide a long-term advantage to be reckoned with, as countless games have shown. It is one of the examples where you can follow the wisdom of others with confidence. It does not apply in all positions and is rarely as overwhelming as here. But unless you can see a reason for the two bishops not being a force to reckon with, they most likely will be.

The first guideline for exchanges is simply, **if the piece you take is better than the piece you part with, you should probably do it.** Things are not often without complications in chess, and navigating competing considerations is what makes chess strategy interesting. But when things are simple, we should not make them more difficult than they are!

The next game has several instances with similar considerations. The first revolving around the notion of good and bad bishops. We all know that a good bishop is one that is not restricted by the pawns of its own army, while the bad bishop is. We have noticed that our students understand these things just fine, but tend to emphasize concrete action (read forcing lines) over plans that improve their hardware. The players would certainly be able to explain the notion of exchanging your bad bishop with ease, and why it is a good thing. But in practice they get caught up with other concerns.

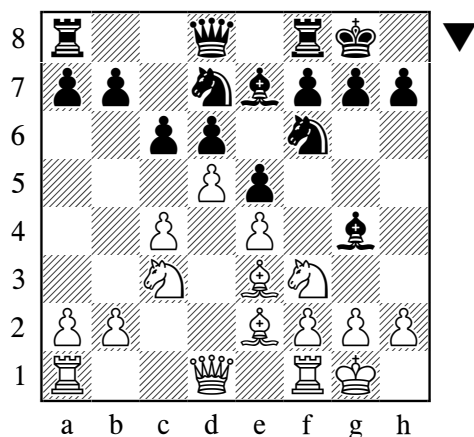
Mike Forster is a member of the Killer Chess Training academy and put this game on our internal forum pages, as we were writing this chapter. It was played in a London League game, with slightly less than the full classical time control. Serendipitously, the critical decisions in the game were predominantly about exchanges.

While you look through the game, see if you can guess Mike's rating.

## Michael Forster – Mark Broom

London 2022

1.e4 c6 2.c4 e5 3.♘f3 d6 4.d4 ♙g4 5.♙e2  
 ♘d7 6.♘c3 ♘gf6 7.0–0 ♙e7 8.♙e3 0–0 9.d5



9...c5?

This provides Black with a cramped position. The opening choice was already rather passive, but after this Black will find his position short of space.

In such positions having lots of minor pieces on the board is not advisable for Black, as Boris Gelfand explained in *Positional Decision Making in Chess*. He also explained that in positions with a space advantage, White's advantage can often increase with the exchange of major pieces, as it makes it possible to invade the black position.

10.♘e1!

The only piece White is eager to exchange is Black's good bishop. In the game Black does manage to get the bad bishop into the game via d8-a5, but it takes time to organise, and it should not have been that great on a5.

10...♙xc2 11.♙xe2 a6 12.a4 ♖b8 13.g3 ♗c8

14.f4!?

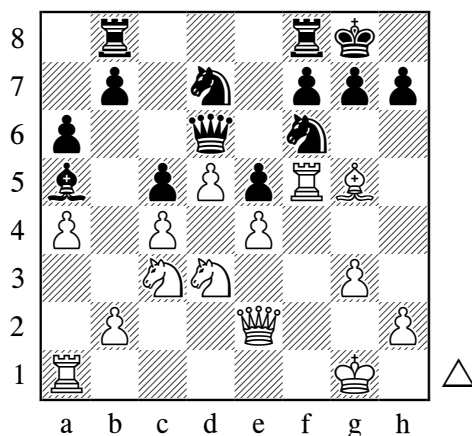
Not the most conventional plan, but White is much better no matter what.

14...♙d8 15.♘d3 ♙a5 16.♙d2 ♖d8 17.fxe5

There are good reasons for this exchange. White can build up on the f-file and will create a passed d5-pawn.

But it should be mentioned that White could also play 17.f5!?, keeping the centre closed to build up a pawn storm on the kingside.

17...dxe5 18.♖f5 ♗e7 19.♙g5 ♖d6

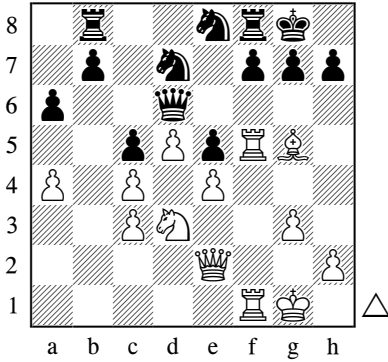


White still has the advantage. It was now time to include the rook from a1 into the game, before making any additional decisions.

20.♙xf6?

A poor decision, dependent on a miscalculation. It should have made White suspicious that the black knights are passive and fighting for the same squares.

20.♖af1 would create serious threats. The only thing to worry about would be 20...♙xc3 21.bxc3 ♘e8, when White either has a knockout blow, or has misplaced all his pieces.

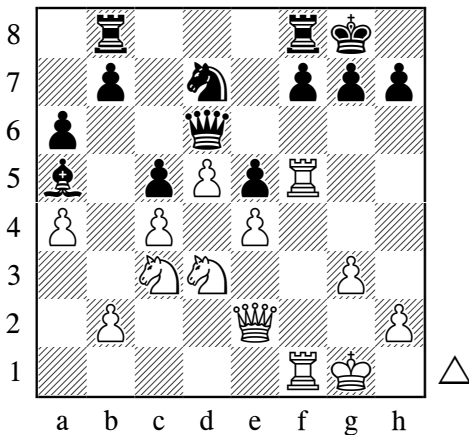


In this case, the knockout blow is there: 22. ♖xe5! ♜xe5 23. ♙f4 and White wins.

We call 20. ♖af1 the **Shankland Rule**, which states that if you have a preferred move, but it faces obstacles, you should look to see if these obstacles have a solution. If they do, we can play the preferred move. If we cannot find one, we should accept the harsh injustice of the universe.

20... ♜xf6 21. ♖af1 ♜d7?

Black misses the chance to throw in the exchange on c3. Maybe he missed the in-between check on d4, while moving a bit fast? 21... ♙xc3! 22. bxc3 ♜d7 would give Black a reasonable position.



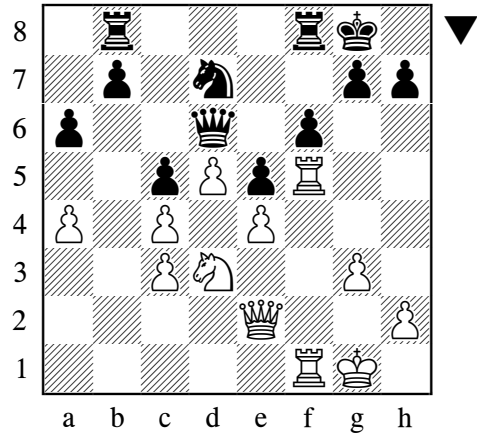
22. ♙h5?

White had the chance to escape with the knight, leaving Black's bad bishop stranded on a5. 22. ♜d1! Black has little else than 22...b5, when after 23. axb5 axb5 24. ♜e3! it is hard for him to create real counterplay. The bishop remains bad, and White has a firm grip on the light squares. The black position should be strategically lost.

22... ♙xc3!

Black does not need a second chance to rid himself of the bad bishop.

23. bxc3 f6 24. ♙e2



24...b5?!

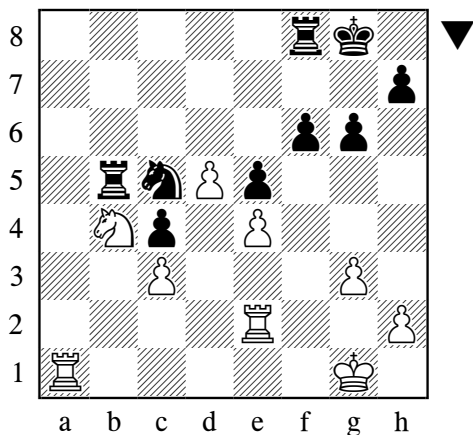
Another poor exchange decision. Black forces the elimination of the weak white pawns on the queenside. It is psychologically difficult not to go for this thematic break when you have placed the rook on b8. Say A, say ...b5.

24... ♜b6! would have put some pressure on the white pawns on the queenside, forcing White into a passive position. The key point is that the knight is transferring to d6 via c8, where it will put eternal pressure on the e4- and c4-pawns. It is not a catastrophe for White, but the unpleasantness of the structural problems will linger for a long time.

25.  $\text{axb5}$   $\text{axb5}$  26.  $\text{cxb5}$   $\text{c4}$  27.  $\text{Ab4}$   $\text{Kc5}$ †  
 28.  $\text{Wf2}$   $\text{Rxb5}$  29.  $\text{Ra1}$   $\text{g6}$  30.  $\text{Rf3}$   $\text{Wxf2}$ †

Not bad, but 30... $\text{Ra5}$ ! was a serious alternative. We don't see a compelling reason to exchange queens and bring the f3-rook into the game.

31.  $\text{Rxf2}$   $\text{Ac5}$  32.  $\text{Re2}$



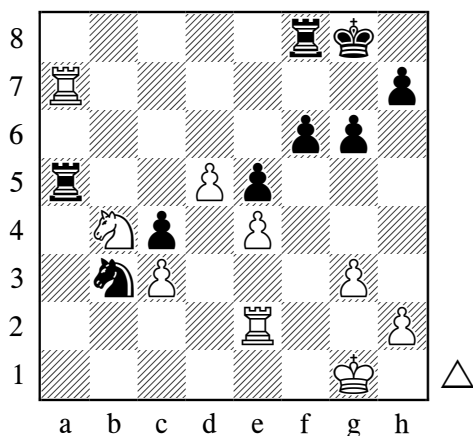
Black does not “have to” do anything here, but to me his position is marginally worse. White has the a-file and the protected passed pawn on d5. This might not seem like a lot at this point, but in practice, it is something. And in the end these factors decide the game.

32...  $\text{Ab3}$ !?

For the reasons given above, Black could have played 32... $\text{Ad3}$ !, when both 33.  $\text{Ac6}$   $\text{Rb3}$  and 33.  $\text{Ad3}$   $\text{cxd3}$  34.  $\text{Re3}$   $\text{f5}$ ! give active counterplay and a speedy path to the draw.

33.  $\text{Ra7}$   $\text{Ra5}$ ?

33... $\text{Rf7}$ ! was necessary to remove the intruder. Exchanging the opponent's strongest piece for your worst is generally a good idea.



34.  $\text{Rxa5}$ ?

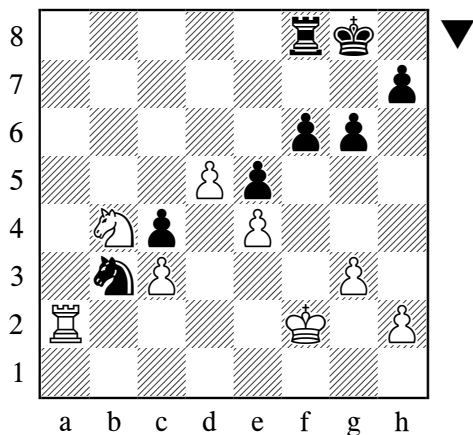
Why would you exchange your rook on the seventh rank Mike? Oh, to activate the rook on e2. But the rook on a5 is stupid and the rook on the seventh rank is great.

After 34.  $\text{Rc7}$ ! Black would have felt the truth of these words. If White was afraid of 34... $\text{Rc5}$ , he hid it well during the class. Either way, White has 35.  $\text{Ac6}$ ! with a big advantage. For example: 35... $\text{Rf7}$  36.  $\text{Rxf7}$   $\text{Kxf7}$  37.  $\text{Ra2}$  and the second rook takes the glory.

34...  $\text{Axa5}$  35.  $\text{Ra2}$   $\text{Ab3}$

The knight has a stronger path available. After 35... $\text{Ab7}$ ! 36.  $\text{Ac6}$   $\text{Ad6}$  37.  $\text{Ac3}$   $\text{Ab5}$  Black is no worse.

36.  $\text{Ac6}$



**36...f5?**

A natural-looking break, but there is no counterplay to be had from it.

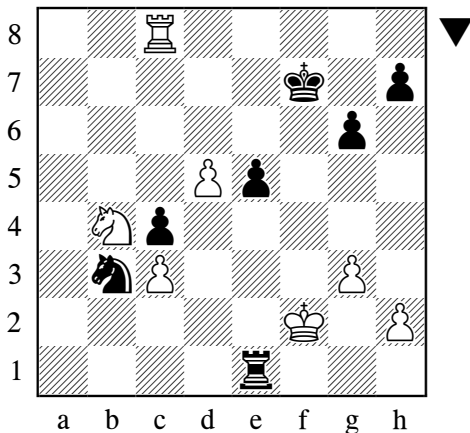
36...♘c5 was a necessary intermediate move. The key point is that 37.♙e3 f5 38.exf5 gxf5 39.♘c6 would give Black 39...f4† 40.gxf4 ♖xf4!, with counterplay.

**37.exf5 ♖xf5†**

Black would be in big trouble after 37...gxf5 38.♘c6 as well. The pawns are lacking the purpose offered in the variation after 36...♘c5.

**38.♙e3 ♖f1 39.♖a8†?**

The final two mistakes of the game stand out by not being about exchanges. At this point the dominating 39.♖a7! was much stronger.

**39...♙f7 40.♖c8 ♖e1† 41.♙f2****41...♖e4?**

Trying to hold on to the c-pawn, which is rather insignificant.

41...♖h1 42.♙g2 ♖d1 should have held the game after some discomfort. The key variation to understand is probably 43.♖xc4 ♙e7 44.♖c7† ♙d6 45.♖xh7 ♖c1! 46.♖h6 ♖xc3 47.♖xg6† ♙c5 where Black may still lose, but only if he makes one or two bad mistakes.

**42.♖c7† ♙e8 43.d6 ♘a5 44.♖a7**

Black resigned.

**1-0**

Mike is rated just below 2300, while his opponent does not appear to have an active FIDE rating.



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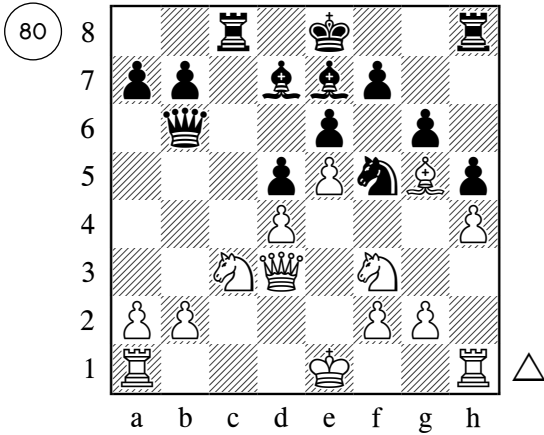
# Chapter 4

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## Small Nuances or Tricks

With its 99 exercises, this is the biggest section of the book. While there were close to no tactics involved in the previous exercises, you will now find that there are small nuances and tricks in the solutions that make all the difference. Not in all positions, but in some. So stay alert!

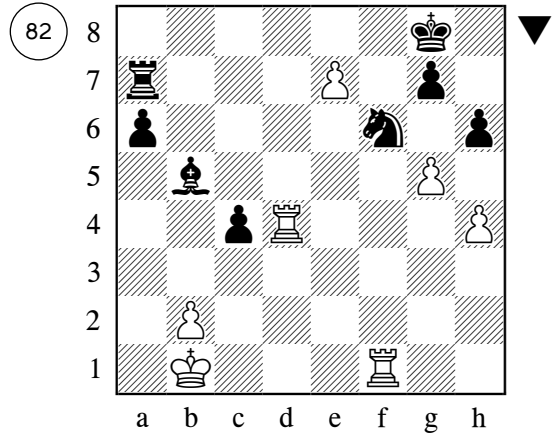
**Sliwicki – Budzisz, Katowice (blitz) 2021**



*Should White:*

- A) exchange bishops with 16. ♗xe7, or
- B) defer the exchange?

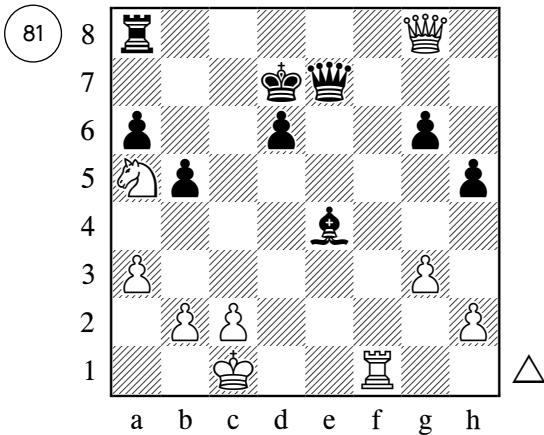
**Khukhashvili – Alinasab, Ankara (var) 2022**



*Should Black:*

- A) exchange on g5 with 38...hxg5, or
- B) play 38... ♖e8?

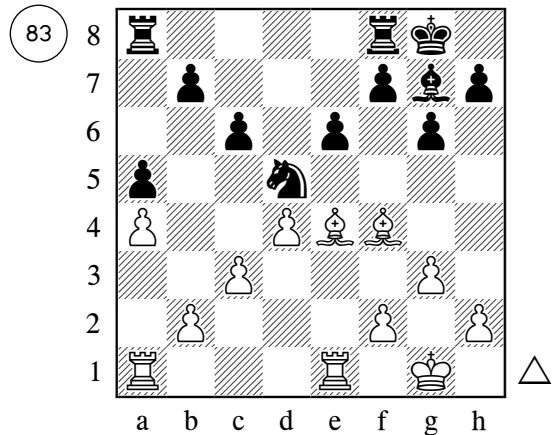
**Warmerdam – Lemmers, Germany 2022**



*Should White:*

- A) exchange queens with 29. ♖f7, or
- B) retreat with 29. ♖b3?

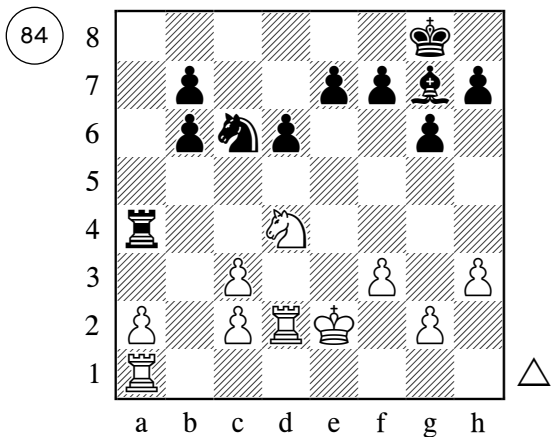
**Swiercz – Rakhmanov, Internet (rapid) 2022**



*Should White:*

- A) take on d5, or
- B) retreat the bishop with 17. ♗d2?

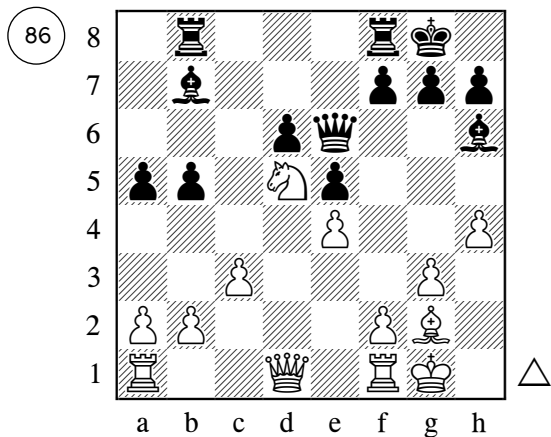
**Thybo – Manish Anto**, Nova Gorica 2022



*Should White:*

- A) exchange knights with 21. ♖xc6, or
- B) repeat the position with 21. ♖b5 ♗a7 22. ♗d4 ♗c6?

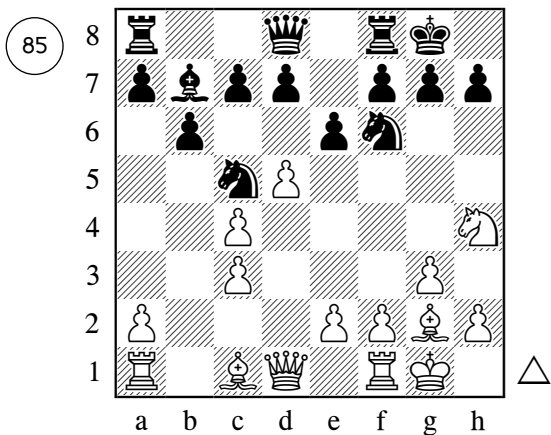
**Ribera – Blohberger**, Chennai (ol) 2022



*Should White:*

- A) play on the queenside with 21. a4, or
- B) go for a repetition with 21. ♗c7 ♖d7 22. ♗d5?

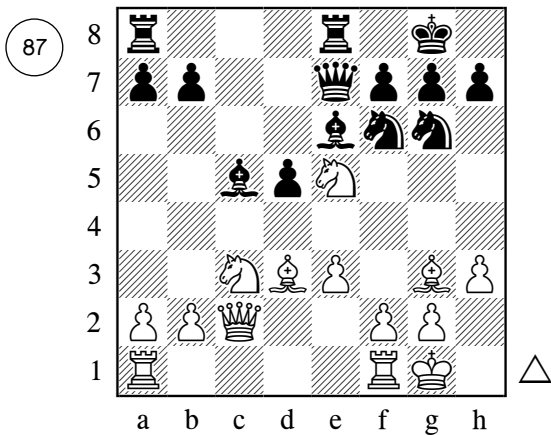
**Urh – Niemann**, Plovdiv 2021



*Should White:*

- A) play to exchange on c5 with 11. ♕a3, or
- B) centralise her queen with 11. ♖d4?

**Maurizzi – Jumabayev**, Wijk aan Zee 2022



*Should White:*

- A) play 17. ♗f3, or
- B) give Black a doubled pawn with 17. ♗xg6?

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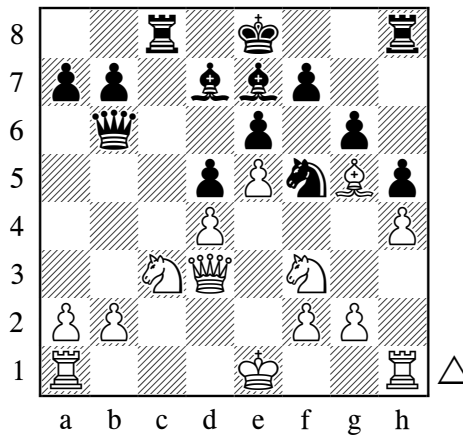
# Chapter 9

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## Solutions to Chapter 4

### 80. Damian Sliwicki – Adrian Budzisz

Katowice (blitz) 2021 (*Tactical reasons*)



16. ♕xe7? was a blunder that should have been punished. 16... ♖xb2! would have led to a winning position. (The game went: 16... ♕xe7? 17. 0-0 ♖xb2 18. ♖fc1∞ ♖a3?? 19. ♗xd5†! 1-0) 17. ♖b1 ♖xc3† 18. ♖xc3 ♖xc3 19. ♕f6 0-0 20. ♕d2 ♖a3→

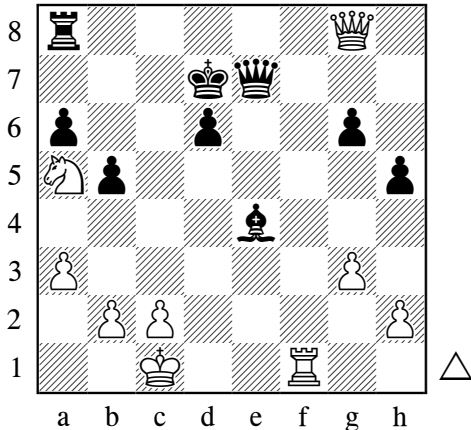
When deciding whether to make an exchange, it is important to check if our opponent is forced to recapture the piece we are taking.

#### 16. ♖d2!?

This is prudent.

**81. Max Warmerdam – Oscar Lemmers**

Germany 2022 (*Better pieces*)



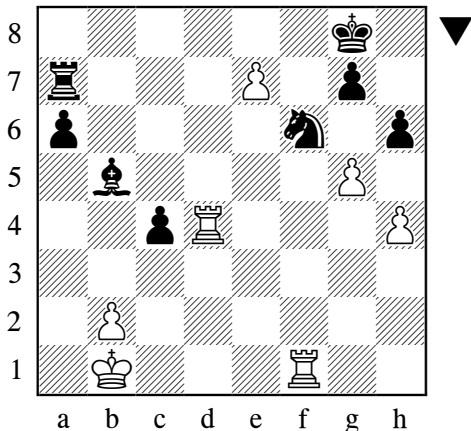
The horribly optimistic 29.♖b3? was played. 29...♗f5?± was good enough to give a clear advantage. But stronger was the exchange of rooks with 29...♞f8!±, and especially the tactical solution with 29...♗xc2!. But to exchange queens, we do not need to see this trick.

29.♖f7!

This would have kept the balance. Black's bishop is a bit better, but the same can be said of the white structure.

**82. Sopiko Khukhashvili – Mobina Alinasab**

Ankara (var) 2022 (*Preventing counterplay*)



38...♗e8!=

The exchange of pawns on g5 doesn't make any sense for Black. It doesn't create a weak pawn, on the contrary it opens a file that White can use to attack the king. These types of exchanges are not automatic decisions, and we should always ask ourselves who benefits more from them.

After 38...hxg5?? Black falls into a mating net. 39.hxg5 ♗e8 40.g6! ♞xe7 41.♞h4! ♗f6 42.♞fh1 ♖f8 43.♞h8† ♗g8 44.♞f1†+–

39.gxh6

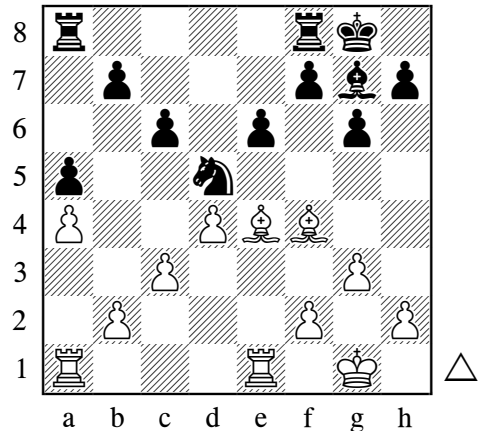
39.g6? fails to: 39...♞xe7+–

39...♞xe7

With an equal game.

**83. Dariusz Swiercz – Aleksandr Rakhmanov**

Internet (rapid) 2022 (*Creating weaknesses*)



17.♗d2? was played and was a missed chance to inflict pain. White won on move 54 anyway, but at this point he barely has an advantage, if one at all.

17.♗xd5! cxd5

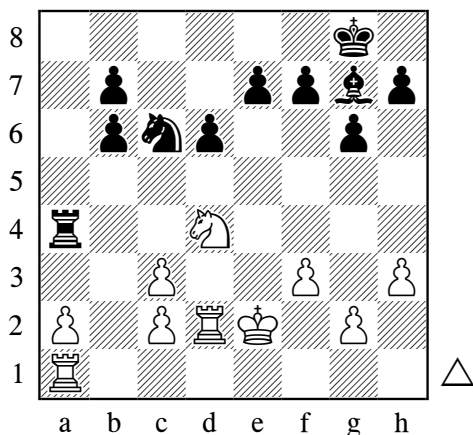
Black cannot let the white rook invade on e7.

**18. ♖a3!±**

The rook will be placed on b5 soon, creating a lot of discomfort for Black. The white king will come to d3 and White will then slowly improve his position, giving him great chances in a long endgame.

**84. Jesper Sondergaard Thybo –  
Manish Anto Cristiano**

Nova Gorica 2022 (*Dynamics*)



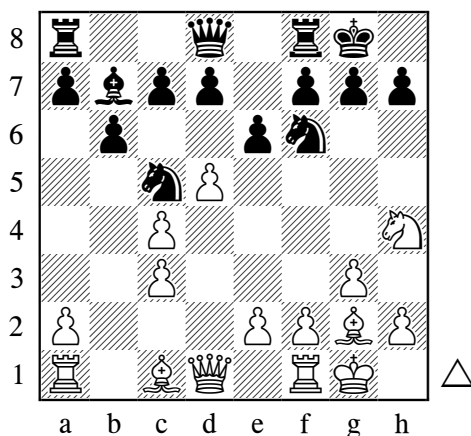
Sometimes the will to win takes over rational thinking and we believe that is what happened here when White decided to go for: 21. ♖xc6? bxc6 22. ♖d3 b5 23. ♖e3 e6 24. g3 d5 It's easy to see that White has too many weaknesses and the rooks don't have any chance of being active. The position is dead lost and Black eventually won the game on move 68.

**19. ♖b5! ♖a7 20. ♖d4 ♖c6 21. ♖b5=**

It is important to keep alive the only piece capable of defending weaknesses. White can never be better, but if he keeps the knight on b5 and plays a2-a3, at least the rooks will be free and it's enough to hold the game.

**85. Zala Urh – Hans Moke Niemann**

Plovdiv 2021 (*Better pieces*)



In the game, White was soon in desperate trouble: 11. ♖d4? ♖e8 12. e4 d6 13. f4 exd5 14. exd5 and Black won on move 46. Strongest is 14... ♖d7+.

11. ♗e3?! is weaker than the solution, as after 11... ♖e7, Black keeps his strong structure. Critical is 12. d6! ♖e8! 13. dxc7 ♗xc7 14. ♖xc7 ♖e7, when White has to prove she is not worse.

**11. ♗a3!**

This is an important move. White seeks to provide Black with a small blemish in his structure.

**11... ♖b8!**

11... ♖e7?! is less effective here, as White can play 12. e4, when after 12... d6 13. ♗xc5 bxc5 14. ♖b1± the black position is a bit cramped.

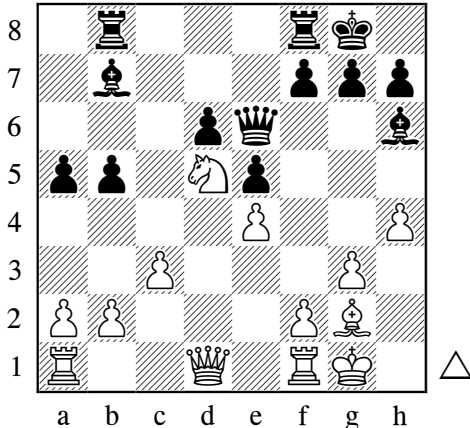
Interesting is 11... d6!? 12. ♗xc5 dxc5 13. dxe6 ♗xc7 14. exf7† ♖xf7 15. ♖xc7 ♖d7, where Black has compensation for the pawn, but no more.

**12. ♖b1 ♗a8 13. e4**

The position is strategically equal.

### 86. Josep Maria Ribera Veganzones – Felix Blohberger

Chennai Olympiad 2022 (Structure)



21.a4?!

This ambitious approach was a misunderstanding of who was on the verge of being better:

21...♙xd5! 22.exd5 ♖d7?!

22...♖e8! turns out to be a bit more accurate. You do not need to have seen this to make the right decision, but it is a nice detail. After 23.b4!? axb4 24.cxb4 bxa4 25.♖xa4 the queen is better placed on the e-file, and protected, as Black is better after: 25...♙d2! 26.♖fb1 e4!☞

23.axb5

White would have been close to equality after 23.b4!.

23...♖xb5☞

Black is already a bit better in practice – which simply means that White has problems to solve in order to keep the balance. In the game he did not manage to do so.

24.♖a4 ♖b7 25.♖fb1? ♖xb2 26.♖xb2 ♖xb2  
27.♖a3 ♖xa3 28.♖xa3 ♖a8

Black won on move 52.

21.♘c7!

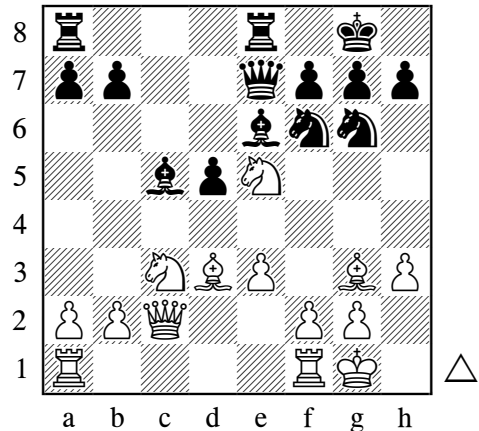
This is the wise choice.

21...♖d7 22.♘d5

Black has no advantage.

### 87. Marc'Andria Maurizzi – Rinat Jumabayev

Wijk aan Zee 2022 (Structure)



The move played, 17.♘xg6?, loses control of the d4-square, making it easy for Black to get rid of his isolated central pawn. 17...hxg6 18.♘a4 (Otherwise Black will play ...a7-a6, ...♖ad8 and ...d5-d4. For example: 18.♖fd1 a6 19.♙e2 ♖ad8 20.♙f3 d4) 18...♙b4 19.a3 ♖ac8 20.♖d1 ♙d6 The game was soon drawn.

17.♘f3!±

The knight has a good function on f3, controlling the d4-square and preventing Black from executing the ...d5-d4 break. One possible line is:

17...♖ad8

This looks natural, but Black has nowhere to go. The knight would be better on c6, helping to control the d4-square.

Or: 17...♖ac8 18.♖fd1±

18.♖ac1 a6 19.♖fd1 ♙a7 20.a3±

White has a stable positional advantage, due to his superior pawn structure and better piece coordination.