

Turbo-Charge Your Tactics 1

Drive Your Improvement

By

Oleksiyenko & Grabinsky



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Preface by Vladimir Grabinsky

“Whatever you do when you are preparing for the game, you will still sit in front of your opponent, and you will have to calculate variations. There is no other advice – you should improve your calculation.” – Alexander Beliavsky

In my opinion, there are two main reasons why people buy chess books. Some simply like chess and get a kick out of their favourite hobby. However, maybe even more common is for people to have a desire for self-improvement – learning something, training their brain, broadening their understanding. Of course, many potential readers have a combination of both; the enjoyment of chess and the effort to expand our horizons go hand in hand.

Why is this book worth your attention? A good reason would be that we sifted the material under a prism of chess beauty. Many problems did not make it into the book simply because they lacked the “Wow!” factor. We tried our best to guarantee aesthetic pleasure.

For readers mostly seeking progress, it is important to understand that there is no golden standard in chess training. Each coach has their own vision and methods. For example, some suggest studying openings by delving into the typical middlegame plans and standard ideas found in the corresponding pawn structures. Many focus on analysing students’ games to eradicate their mistakes. Others prefer improvement through familiarization with classical games.

In my opinion, tactics and calculation are the key elements of modern chess. They are not just two of many equally important factors, but rather the crucial factors that determine your current level. Therefore, training your calculation and tactical vision is the shortest path to improvement. Do you want to improve your rating? Find time to solve these puzzles for a month and then go to a tournament. You might be surprised by the results! At least, that’s what I believe, based on my coaching experience of training thirteen young players to grandmaster level: improving tactical vision and calculation makes the biggest difference.

Furthermore, a highlight of these books is that my co-author solved many of the puzzles himself. Whenever you read “I..” in the comments to a puzzle, it is Mykhaylo speaking to you. He calculated over the board in the positions from his own games, and carried out further analysis afterwards; he also solved positions from my database, as well as many puzzles from the Lichess database. He experienced all the nuances of these puzzles first-hand, so his comments will almost always be relatable to what you felt when solving the exercises yourself.

My hope is that you’ll find the insights from Mykhaylo’s “grandmaster thinking” to be interesting and instructive. Readers could also get the pleasure of trying to compete with or even outmatch Mykhaylo.

As the last argument in favour of these books, I'd like to cite economic efficiency. The cost of one volume of our series is much cheaper than one hour of training with Mykhaylo or me. Writing these books has taken four years of hard work, countless meetings, Skype calls, and independent work of each of the co-authors. Some things were crossed out, some things were added, and analyses were polished. We tried to be attentive to all the details, checking everything with engines, reading the text several times, and choosing the chess content carefully. In my mind, buying the result of our four years of work (even if it's only one of the two volumes) by paying the price of this book is a fantastic deal.

Vladimir Grabinsky
Lviv, November 2023

Preface by Mykhaylo Oleksiyenko

“A heuristic is a mental shortcut commonly used to simplify problems and avoid cognitive overload.”
– Investopedia

The book you are holding in your hands is the first volume of a series that differs from other books on tactics. Instead of focusing on teaching the reader basic patterns or just training their “calculation muscle”, the main mission of these books is to remove certain mental barriers that limit our calculation process. Chess players often dismiss certain moves and ideas without proper consideration, and that’s the problem we’re trying to address.

Here are some of the default settings that we may have:

- Do not leave a piece hanging
- Do not move a piece to a square where it can be captured
- Do not leave your king under possible discovered check
- Do not move pieces backwards
- Always castle
- Do not play “quiet” moves when the board is “on fire”
- Do not move pawns in front of a castled king
- Do not ruin your structure
- Do not move a knight to the edge of the board
- Do not give up your strong fianchettoed bishop

...And so on. You cannot do this, you should not do that, you can’t, you can’t, you can’t. Even when we do not necessarily verbalize these rules and prohibitions clearly, they still influence the moves we tend to consider and the ones we tend to disregard.

These strong recommendations work in most cases, yet they certainly do not work all the time. Chess is much deeper and more interesting than just a set of rules and recommendations that you need to follow.

Up until a certain level, these rules are extremely useful, and we should generally follow them. However, problems begin when we cannot solve a problem with our “default algorithm”. At that point, these recommendations might start to limit our possibilities and narrow our field of vision.

Let me make a comparison to mathematics, another area close to my heart. Most people, according to my subjective observation, do not like mathematics. That is why I want to assure you that you will not find any more of it throughout the book. (Okay, I lied, but maybe it’ll only be once.) Nevertheless, please bear with me as I briefly talk about numbers and the way we study them.

First, we are taught that numbers (1, 2, 3...) exist, and that you can add and multiply them. They are called natural numbers. Afterwards, we learn that there are odd numbers, and there are even numbers. You cannot divide an odd number by two. Then we learn that you can subtract a smaller number from a bigger one, yet you cannot do the opposite.

Is that really true? I do not think so! At later stages, it turns out that you can subtract and divide any numbers you want with each other (except of course, division by 0). Problems arise again when we learn about a square root, for example. It turns out that you cannot take a square root of five or a negative number. However, this problem is again solved by introducing irrational and complex numbers.

Each time we learn something new, we can keep all our previous knowledge and build on it, using the newfound stuff to help us solve problems that we couldn't solve before. Why am I telling you all this? Because I think the readers of this series are ready to widen their chess understanding, leave aside all false preconceptions, and start solving a wider range of chess equations.

The puzzles in our two-volume tactical series will help you identify hidden taboos in your calculations. You will learn to consider the moves that break certain rules. Our hope is that these taboos can be transformed into: "Usually, such a move is not a good idea, but let us briefly check first. Maybe we have a beautiful exception on our hands!"

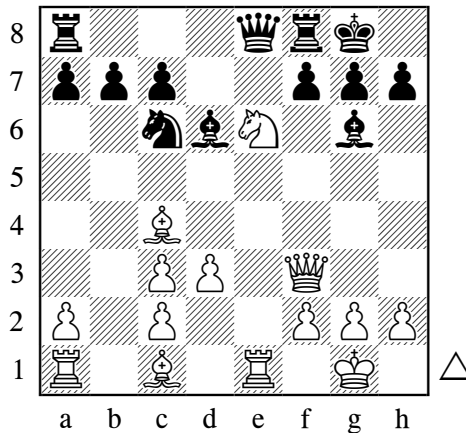
Mykhaylo Oleksiyenko
Lviv, November 2023



GM Mykhaylo Oleksiyenko & IM Vladimir Grabinsky

Introduction

Lichess Puzzle



The position in front of you was found by Stockfish while it was skimming through the millions of games played on Lichess. The puzzle was created automatically, as there is only one winning move. Before reading any further, try solving it for yourself!

Usually, these kinds of puzzles are either easy, or have a weird, incomprehensible, “computerish” note to them, leaving behind a bittersweet flavour in the mouth of the successful solver. This one, on the other hand, is quite instructive and aesthetically pleasing at the same time. Its usefulness stems from the clarity with which it exposes the “bugs” in our own chess “engines”.

I gave this position to many players, including strong GMs rated over 2600, and the success rate for solving it was not much above zero! The beauty of it is that you need to see just one move. The difficulty lies in the move being in a “blind zone” for many players, regardless of their strength. In fact, I failed this one myself. However, my failure was instructive, as it revealed a certain bias in my calculation process.

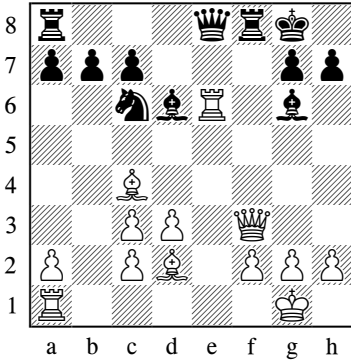
So, let’s see what we have here: White is one pawn up, but his knight is pinned and might be lost on the next move. However, taking it will expose the black king on the a2-g8 diagonal and set up a dangerous discovered check.

Let’s start going through some of White’s options.

1.♙d2?!

In my opinion, this is the most natural, protecting the rook and developing the bishop.

1...fxe6! 2.♖xe6



The position looks winning. The queen on e8 is under attack and, more importantly, White is about to deliver a lethal discovered check. Nevertheless, Black has a brilliant defence:

2...♗f7!!

Voluntarily running straight into the pin!

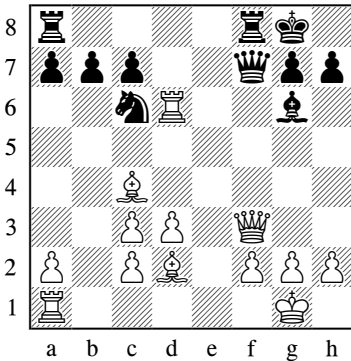
2...♞xf3? 3.♞xe8# is a cute checkmate.

3.♞xd6

The obvious choice.

I did not consider 3.♗e2 in my calculations but still, it fails to get the job done: 3...♘a5!

4.♞f6 gxf6 5.♙xf7† ♞xf7 Black has a lot of material for the queen.



3...♗xc4!

The idea behind ...♗f7 on the previous move.

4.dxc4 ♞xf3 5.♞xg6 hxg6 6.gxf3

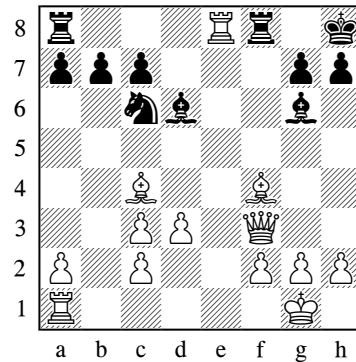
White is two pawns up, but the pawn structure is horrible so Black has a lot of compensation.

What else can we do? The next move that came to my mind was:

1.♙f4?

White had two problems in the starting position. The rook on e1 was undefended, and the queen on f3 was under X-ray pressure from the f8-rook. The text move seemed to be solving both problems at once, and I calculated the obvious line:

1...fxe6! 2.♖xe6 ♔h8! 3.♞xe8



3...♞axe8??

In my mind, an automatic reaction.

3...♙xe8!! was completely out of my sight! Why on earth would I do that instead of developing the rook to the open file? In reality, the reason is quite simple: the bishop on f4 is lost in this version.

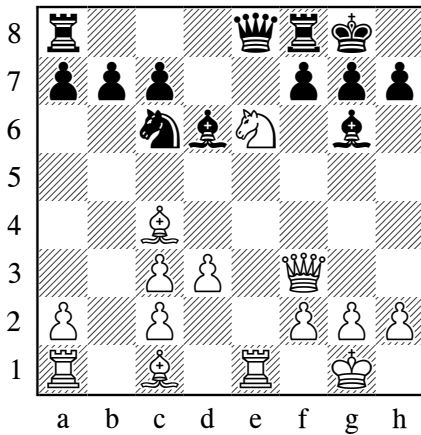
These kinds of moves are difficult to see since they are not good strategically. We were taught to connect our rooks and develop them to open files. This move does exactly the opposite of that, making it very hard even for very experienced players to be able to consider it. After 4.g3 g5! Black is better,

since the rook and two minor pieces should be stronger than the queen and a couple of pawns.

4.g3

When deciding on the first move of the puzzle, I stopped my calculation here. I arrived at a correct conclusion – White has a lot of extra material. Still, the correct conclusion was based on a false assumption! Taking back with the rook on e8 wasn't forced!

Let's go back to the starting position of the puzzle:



1. ♔d1!!

All you need to see is this move. It fixes both problems White had at the same time. The rook is protected, and the queen is out of the f-file. I am not even sure which line to mention. It is just an easy win for White!

Why was it so hard for me and many others? This is a backward move, the queen goes to a “worse”, more “passive” square, it is reversing development and the rooks will not be connected. Those kinds of moves go against our “understanding” of chess, challenging our intuition and thus, making them much harder to spot. This book will try to cure your brain of these types of blind spots.

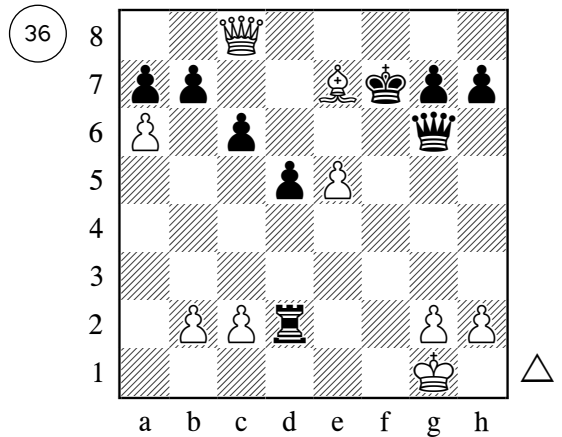
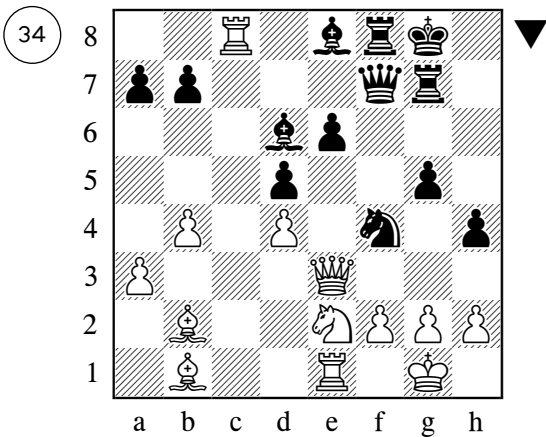
Chapter 3

Exercises 34-58

Welcome to the next chapter, consisting of positions taken from my own games. Now that you are familiar with some of the main concepts, let's continue our adventure by scaling the difficulty up a notch. Still, nothing too crazy – but it should be more of a challenge compared to the previous set.

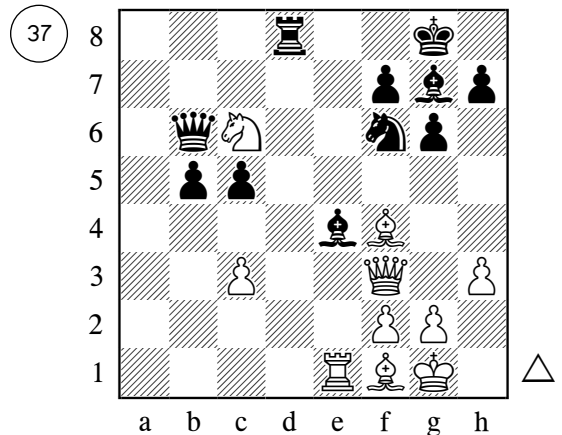
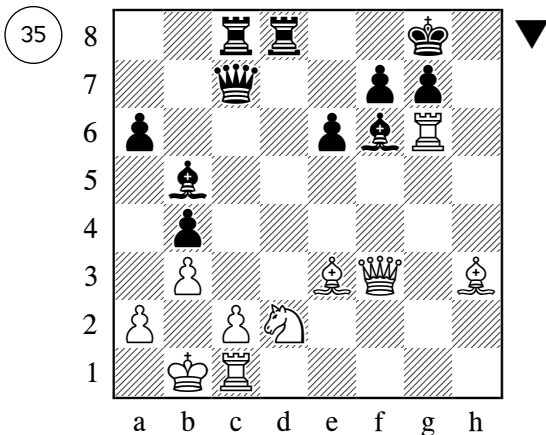
Oleksiyenko – P. Karthikeyan, Chennai 2012

Oleksiyenko – Grandelius, Reykjavik 2009



Oleksiyenko – Koziak, Sautron 2012

Sarichev – Oleksiyenko, Minsk 2005



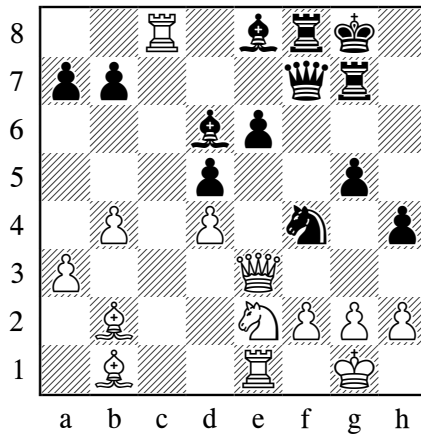
Chapter 4

Solutions 34-58

As you will see, many of the examples in this segment feature misses by me or my opponents. What can we say? Chess is difficult! The ticking clock and pressure of a competitive situation are elements which cannot truly be replicated at home. However, you certainly can train your imagination and calculation. Let's move on to the solutions, and we'll see if you found some of the ideas that my opponents and I missed!

34. Oleksiyenko – Pandian Karthikeyan

Chennai 2012



28...♘h3†!!

The game continued: 28...♙d7? 29.♖xf8† ♚xf8 30.♘xf4!? gxf4 31.♚f3 Black is only slightly better, and a draw was agreed after a few moves.

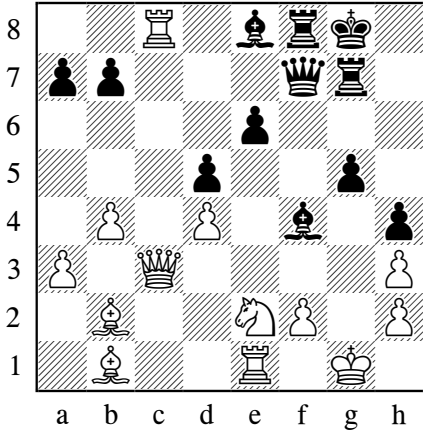
29.gxh3 ♙f4!

Brilliant use of the rook on g7. The bishop cannot be captured, so the queen must run.

30.♚c3

The queen tries to protect the loose rook on e1.

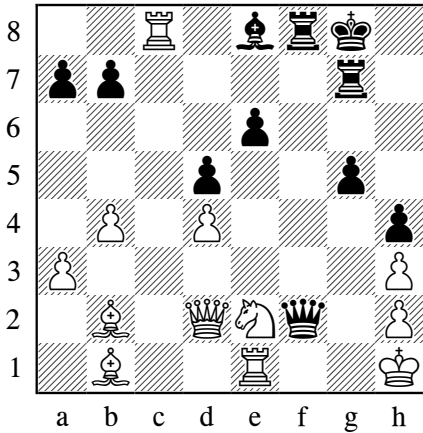
30. ♖d3 would lose immediately to:
 30... ♗xh2†! 31. ♔h1 ♖xf2 The attack is
 overwhelming.



30... ♗d2!!

The f2-pawn will fall with devastating effect.

31. ♖xd2 ♖xf2† 32. ♔h1



32... ♗h5!

32... g4!? is also winning.

33. ♗h7†

A tenacious defensive try.

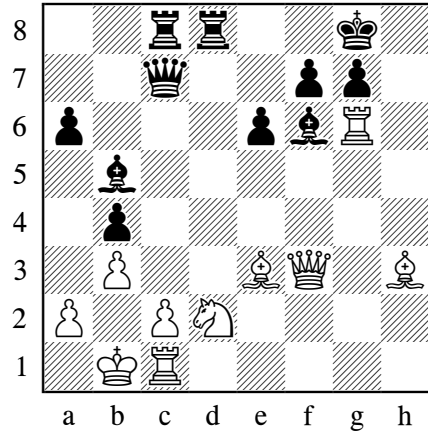
If 33. ♖xf8† ♔xf8, then ... ♗f3† will decide the
 game on the next move.

33... ♖xh7! 34. ♖xg5† ♖g7 35. ♖xf8† ♔xf8
 36. ♖f4† ♖xf4 37. ♗xf4 ♗f3†

Despite White's noble efforts, there is no
 stopping Black's attack.

35. Oleksiyenko – Vitali Koziak

Sautron 2012



White has just captured a knight on g6.
 Black isn't forced to recapture.

30... ♗d3!!

The move both players had overlooked.
 Mate in two is coming, and there is not much
 else to discuss.

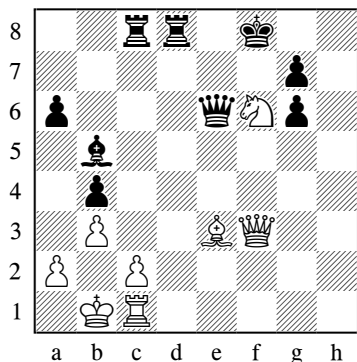
If 30... ♖e5? 31. ♖xf6! (31. ♖xf6!? is also good)
 31... ♖xf6 32. ♖xf6 gxf6, Black is definitely not
 winning. In fact, White is slightly for choice.

In the game, Black automatically replied with:

30... fxc6? 31. ♗xe6†

White has seized the initiative and even won
 the game in the end:

31... ♔f8 32. ♗e4! ♖e5 33. ♗xf6! ♖xe6

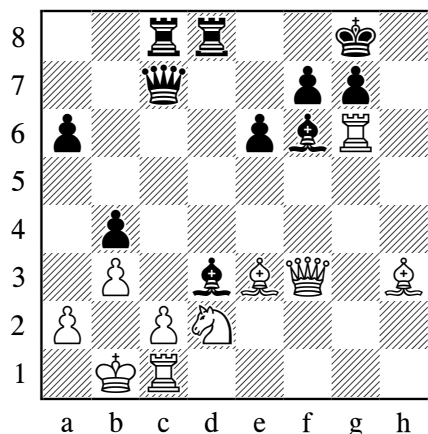


30. ♖h7†! ♕e8?

34... ♕g8 was the only move, but after 35. ♖g5 White has a very strong attack. Black has to scramble to find ways to survive.

35. ♖f8† ♕d7 36. ♖d1† ♕c7 37. ♖c5† ♖c6 38. ♖a7† ♖b7 39. ♖xd8 ♖xd8 40. ♖b6†

Black resigned after a few more moves.



31. ♖xf6

After 31. ♖c4 ♖xg6! Black has too much extra material.

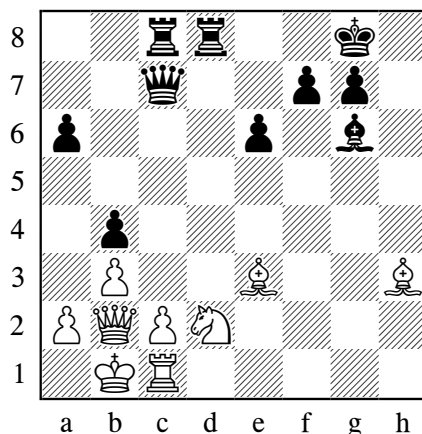
31. ♖xf6 also does not help: 31... ♖xc2† 32. ♕b2 ♖c3#

31... ♖xg6!

31... ♖xc2†!? also wins: 32. ♕a1 ♖xg6 33. ♖x7 gxf6 34. ♖xc8 ♖xc8 The black pawns should decide.

32. ♖b2

After 32. ♖xg6 fxe6 33. ♖xe6† ♕f8 the black king escapes.

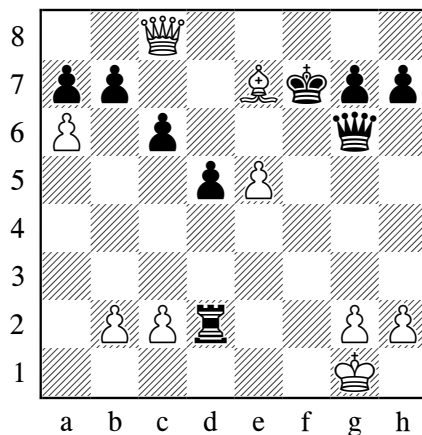


32... ♖g3!

The final detail. One of the bishops drops, and Black has a huge material advantage.

36. Oleksiyenko – Nils Grandelius

Reykjavik 2009



White's options are limited due to the checkmate threat on g2.

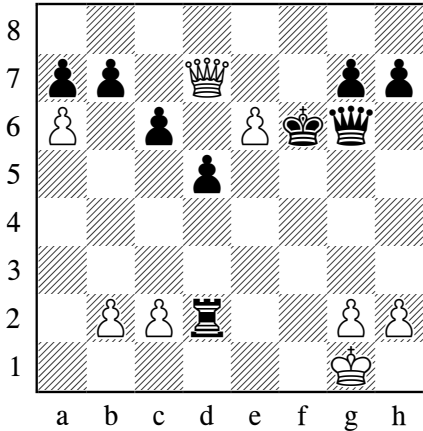
24. e6†!

In the event of 24. ♖f8†?? ♕e6 25. ♖c8† ♕xe5!, there is no perpetual, and Black wins!

24...♔xe7

After 24...♖xe6 25.♗xe6† ♔xe6 26.axb7 the pawn promotes.

25.♗d7†! ♔f6



26.♗f7†!!

I guess my talented opponent forgot about the fact that I can exchange queens while being a rook down.

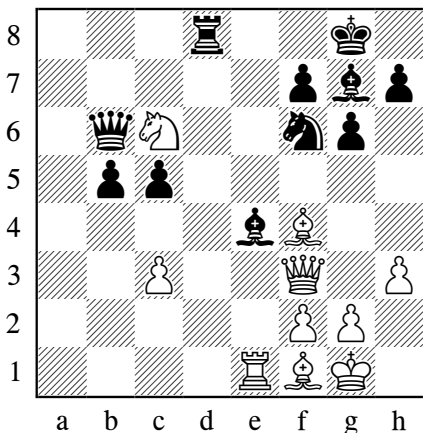
26...♗xf7 27.exf7 ♖d1† 28.♔f2 ♔xf7 29.axb7

Black resigned.

1-0

37. Sergey Sarichev – Oleksiyenko

Minsk 2005



The queen and the knight are hanging. White has only two options: take the bishop on e4 or give the check on e7. As tempting as it was to give the check, White should have chosen the less intuitive option at his disposal.

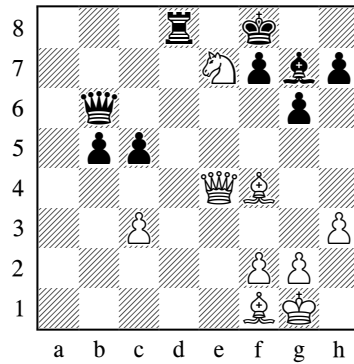
24.♖xe4!

The game continued:

24.♘e7†?

Missing a chance to equalize.

24...♔f8 25.♖xe4 ♘xe4 26.♗xe4



26...♗e6!

The key move. White's minor pieces are in trouble.

27.♗xe6 fxe6 28.♘c6 ♖d1!

Black has huge winning chances. The rook is active, the pawn on c3 will be lost, the bishop on f1 is pinned, the knight on c6 is out of play and the king on f8 is close to the centre. White is hanging by a thread, and in the game he lost in just a few moves.

24...♗xc6

It looks like the rook has to move, and White will end up in a really bad endgame after ...♗xf3 followed by ...c5-c4. However, there is a way out.

25.♖d4!!

The "invisible" move White must have missed.

After the more “normal” 25.♖e1? ♜xf3 26.gxf3 c4!? White ends up in a losing endgame.

25...♖d5!?

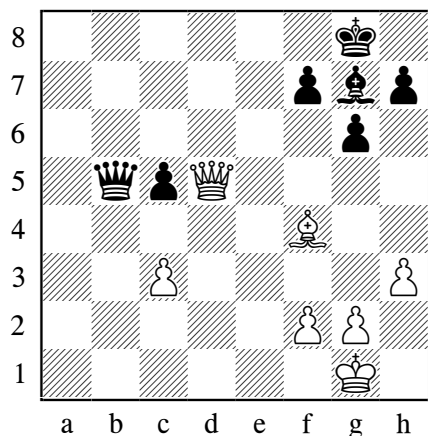
An interesting try to keep the material advantage, but it doesn't work.

Of course, Black should refrain from 25...♜xf3?? 26.♖xd8†! and White wins.

Moving the queen to any square that protects the rook is the same, for example, 25...♜c8 26.♖xd8† ♜xd8 27.♙xb5 is just equal.

Blocking the diagonal with the knight instead of the rook also doesn't impress: 25...♞d5 26.♙xb5!? With equality.

26.♙xb5! ♜xb5 27.♖xd5 ♞xd5 28.♜xd5



28...♙xc3

White has many ways to secure a draw. For example:

29.♜d8†!?

29.♙d6!? is also good enough.

29...♞g7 30.♙d6!?

White will give a perpetual or win the c5-pawn.