

Universal Chess Training

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Universal Chess Training

Wojciech Moranda

Thinkers Publishing 2020



Key to Symbols

!	a good move	±	White stands slightly better
?	a weak move	∓	Black stands slightly better
!!	an excellent move	±	White has a serious advantage
??	a blunder	∓	Black has a serious advantage
!?	an interesting move	+−	White has a decisive advantage
?!	a dubious move	−+	Black has a decisive advantage
□	only move	→	with an attack
N	novelty	↑	with initiative
⊙	lead in development	↔	with counterplay
⊙	zugzwang	Δ	with the idea of
=	equality	△	better is
∞	unclear position	≤	worse is
∞	with compensation for the sacrificed material	+	check
		#	mate

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Introduction

I. What is the purpose of this book?

I have always considered chess to be a difficult game to learn, especially for those of us who are mostly self-taught. The literally endless number of motifs, patterns or variations may seem overwhelming for many players. And then there is the need to apply this knowledge in practice. When confronted with such a vast amount of data, people tend very quickly to start looking for more general points of reference, or maybe even shortcuts intended to put them on the fast-track to mastery.

Before reaching the GM title at the age of 21 I used to be very principled, digesting book after book. I purchased whatever title appeared on the market – this was my method. With little or no access to professional coaching services, I believed that hard work (understood as memorizing idea after idea and maneuver after maneuver) would eventually pay off. There was little or no order within this ‘learning process’, nor was there any understanding of how to apply this knowledge in a tournament game. To give you an example, I knew every single pawn-structure that was ever discussed in textbooks, but I still felt lost like a babe in the woods whenever my games diverged from these studied structures.

Only when I started training others in my early twenties, as probably the youngest coach in the history of the Polish National Youth Chess Academy, did I discover that this ‘learning process’ was not the way. I witnessed some players working as I did in the past – training extremely hard, but only seeing the fruits of their labours after a long period of time. Indeed, so long that they were discouraged from further work. This experience as a young coach taught me one very important lesson: the training regime of every single player needs to be not only organized around whatever might be taking place on the board (plans and ideas in various stages of the game), but should also cover more concrete topics pertaining to thought processes and decision making.

Over time, this prompted me to develop my own training system. It enabled me to guide my students on their path to chess improvement in a systematic manner. Nowadays, and as a coach at my own chess school, I prepare the curricula of my pupils in accordance with the rule of ‘three tiers’:

Exemplary training curriculum		
Tier 1: Core Training	Tier 2: Personalized Program	Tier 3: Universal Chess Training
<i>Basic elements that need to be understood by every single player, irrespective of their playing strength and current knowledge</i>	<i>Targeted exercises, customized to the needs of the specific player and designed to eliminate their particular flaws</i>	<i>Thought processes and decision making in practice, whether this infers the application of knowledge or not</i>

Creating a distinct methodology for Tiers 1 and 2 was child's play, but how about Tier 3? To devise something truly instructive in this area I investigated a few thousand games of my students. My purpose was to seek to establish what type of mental mistakes they made most frequently. The results of my research surprised me. I discovered that whether the given player was rated 1600 or 2500 they were all most likely to experience difficulties when making use of the following five skills:

1. *Anticipation & Prophylaxis*
2. *Attack & Defense*
3. *Coordination*
4. *Statics & Dynamics*
5. *Weakness*

Statistically speaking, the above five skills were involved in more than 80% of the strategic problems my students were facing in their games. I quickly realized that mastering these five skills would mean that only 20%, or every fifth problem, would potentially come as a surprise to them. Taking an important exam and knowing upfront 80% of the material discussed therein sounds like quite a competitive edge to me!

As you can tell by now these skills are not something particularly concrete, but rather a general set of skills. Moreover, they are necessary if you are to learn the skill of handling your pieces properly. It will enable you to apply all the knowledge you have *in practice*. However, calling them 'soft skills' is not sufficient. I, therefore, prefer to speak of them as 'Universal Chess Training', because knowing them will most certainly help you play a good move whether the position seems familiar or not.

And this is exactly what this book is all about. Below you will find a short introduction to the essentials of these five aspects. It presents basic knowledge that will not only enhance your results but also facilitate your ability to negotiate the

rest of this book. The information given below represents merely a quantum of knowledge conveyed herein: every single game is meant to bring you deeper and deeper into the discussed subject matter.

II. Universal Chess Training

1. Anticipation & Prophylaxis

Anticipation is the ability to predict the future, to foresee the consequences of one's actions. Prophylaxis, on the other hand, represents the habit of constantly asking yourself 'What does my opponent want to do?' and/or 'How is the opponent going to respond to these intended actions of mine?'. Those are questions that may (and should!) be asked all the time and paying attention to the answers will very rarely let you down.

Those skills are so valuable because chess as such is all about being able to tell the future. If you can do that you are already halfway prepared for what is about to come. In case you are wondering, the difference between anticipation and prophylaxis is as follows: prophylaxis infers the possibility of preventing the opponent's intentions. Anticipation rather emphasizes the importance of understanding the direction in which the game is going.

Prophylaxis tends to have a negative psychological effect on the opponent, it is very difficult to play if your opponent predicts your actions in advance and prevents whatever you might be up to. At the same time, we must not forget that this is not a purely defensive weapon at all. More often than not, anticipation is going to assure us that it is the right time to attack, or even compel us to do so, otherwise we may face some hardships ourselves.

2. Attack & Defense

Attacking and defending are like reflections in a mirror. The same set of rules applies to both situations, with the only difference being perspective. In other words, when attacking, we are advised to include as many pieces as we can. If we are defending, however, we are doing the exact thing albeit with a slightly alternative goal: namely to exchange pieces to reduce the opponent's attacking potential.

Both approaches stem from the very same principle, known widely in chess literature as the 'Attack-Defense-Ratio'. In plain terms, the Attack-Defense-Ratio represents the difference between the number of pieces taking part in the attack and the number of pieces defending. If the difference is 2 or more the chances for success are relatively high. If it is lower than 2 do not even try! The reason for this is as follows: whenever you start an attack you need to take into consideration that the number of your pieces present on the board might decrease at quite a rapid pace, whether through possible exchanges or sacrifices. The surplus of 2 or more pieces means that, at the end of the day when the opponent's king is left alone and defenseless, you will still have enough forces at your disposal to mate him.

Obviously, this is a very crude rule and a multitude of reservations need to be mentioned. First, the issue is not solely about the *quantity* of the pieces taking part in the attack, but also about their *quality*. For example, you usually would not want to start an onslaught against a black king castled kingside without a knight drifting somewhere around the f5-square. Also, the coordination of your forces cannot be underestimated either. The last thing you want to see is a large number of your pieces failing to storm the barricades of the opponent's inferior position simply because his defensive arrangement happens to be better organized.

3. Coordination

Coordination means the number of possibilities your pieces happen to enjoy in a given position. This can pertain to a single piece or many pieces altogether. The most famous derivative of this rule is the principle of the weakest piece. According to this principal it takes only one piece of yours to be 'bad' to spoil your entire position. For this reason, the principle of the weakest piece should be considered as a practical guideline. Whenever you have time during a game, you may want to consider how to improve your weakest piece. Examples of 'bad' pieces include the light-squared bishop in the French Defense and knights on the edge of the board. But make sure that you do not follow this rule blindly. After all, some hypermodern openings like the King's Indian Defense may surprise you in this respect more than once.

In this book we divide the means required to improve the coordination of pieces into two groups: static and dynamic. Static means bringing one of your pieces to greener pastures. For example, re-routing White's dark-squared bishop in the Winawer to the splendid a3-square. Such endeavors clearly improve the situation on the board, but usually affect only the coordination of the piece involved.

Dynamic means, on the other hand, imply a drastic change to the character of the position, leading to a global modification of the capabilities of all of your pieces. This can happen in the form of a pawn-lever (e.g. the ...e6-e5 push in the French Defense), or after the material balance becomes disturbed (e.g. after a positional exchange-sacrifice on c3 in the Sicilian Defense).

Because chess involves two players, it is not only the coordination of your own pieces that need to be taken care of. You may also need to dedicate some time to spoiling the efforts of your opponent. If you can kill two birds with one stone, that would be even better!

4. Statics & Dynamics

To speak of things 'static' in chess means everything that is stable and subject to changes only under a considerable amount of force, e.g. the pawn-structure or the material balance in an otherwise calm position. Enjoying a static edge usually implies that if nothing changes this type of advantage is going to allow us to bring the full point home without any undue adventures. By comparison 'dynamics' take place in a game of chess when the balance is disturbed, e.g. when one of the players sacrifices material for something intangible be it an attack or initiative. The nature of a dynamic edge tends to be ephemeral – it can be raging at a given moment only to disappear completely two moves later if mishandled.

The above distinction is not only of theoretical importance as we must be able to grasp what kind of position we have in front of us. It means that we will know when we need to change the nature of the position. Suppose we are being dominated by our opponent and we need to break his progress. When doing so, however, there are two guidelines that need to be followed:

- a. If our opponent has a strategically superior position (e.g. due to a smaller amount of pawn-weaknesses in his camp), you would usually be advised to 'wiggle', that is to destabilize the position by seeking tactical/dynamic opportunities.
- b. However, when finding yourself under dynamic pressure (e.g. when under attack or when the opponent has the initiative), the best way of countering this will be to drain the activity out of the opponent's position. If successful, whatever remains of the position afterwards should favor us, especially if it was positionally advantageous for us from the start.

5. Weakness

In general, a ‘weakness’ represents an element of the position which is not defended well enough. Moreover, this weakness should be defended due to its importance for the assessment of the position as a whole. There can be as many types of weaknesses as there are elements in chess: pawns, pieces, files, ranks, diagonals, even a whole color complex of squares can be a weakness. What is even more interesting, there are elements in chess that are considered weak or strong relative to the stage of the game (an IQP in the middlegame/endgame) or the nature of the pawn-structure (bishop-pair in open/closed positions).

There is one more thing that needs to be mentioned in the context of weaknesses. Namely, if you are ever struggling to find a plan during the game, focus your attention on the weaknesses in the position. It is not a coincidence that more experienced players repeatedly say that ‘If you see a weakness, you already have a plan!’. The weaknesses of your opponent may represent some kind of inducement for you to start active action. However, in the absence of such weaknesses, there is nothing wrong in fixing whatever holes you see in your position before embarking on actions directed strictly at your foe.

III. How to work with this book?

I am a huge fan of the science of life optimization, in ‘maxing out’ whatever I can achieve in every aspect of life to which I turn my attention. Because of that, the book that you have in your hands is constructed in a very specific manner. Here are a few principles that I followed while writing it in order to make sure that you profit from it the most:

1. Original content: One specific difficulty related to studying chess as a whole is the lack of high-quality material on the market. There are, in fact, some very good publishing houses out there but if you are serious about chess you will soon notice the limited number of books that have actually enriched you as a player. What is even worse, after a while you will notice that examples tend endlessly to repeat themselves. For some strange reason, many authors seem to love repeating games from the past, despite them having been commented on in other sources numerous times before. Another typical ‘sin’ of chess-authors is to give their workbook a concrete title (e.g., ‘Prophylaxis’), when perhaps only 25% of their material is

strictly relevant to their topic. They offer valuable training material, but the remaining 75% function merely as padding. Additionally, even today many examples cited in books are not checked with engines, which means that they are objectively incorrect or feature two or three alternative solutions. Given all of this, you might sometimes feel demotivated before even starting.

Why anyone would produce books like that beats me. But I do know that working with such books is not going to profit you as much as analyzing original, well-annotated content. Hence, I decided that this book is going to be different. The 90 games selected for this book have been cherry-picked out of thousands, without resorting to other books or commentaries available online. Most of them come from the years 2018-2019; only a handful are slightly older. Simply put what you are getting here is value for what you paid.

2. Three levels of difficulty: This book is aimed to benefit a very wide chess audience starting from 1600 upwards. The first part, titled 'What every Russian schoolboy solves' is aimed at players rated 1600-1900. It also includes the highest number of motifs considered 'typical' in modern chess-literature. The second part ('Enter at your own risk: Puzzles may bite') is designed for 1900-2200 players. They are, therefore, more complex in nature. The third and last section is titled 'Grandmasters wept solving these'... and there is a reason for this. The only thing I can say about them without spoiling the fun is that they require the highest level of abstract thinking to be solved.

Although I did my best to sort these games in an order based on their complexity, this division remains very subjective. Some of the exercises from the first part are not necessarily much easier than the ones designed for more experienced players. At the same time aspiring amateurs stand a chance at solving the entirety of the puzzles in every chapter. That said, some of the finer points here and there will likely remain harder to grasp. Knowledge is surely going to help you out sometimes, but because the majority of examples are, in a certain sense, innovative, what will matter most is how good a chess-thinker you are.

3. Mixed exercises with no hints: To further advance your learning curve I decided that the puzzles should not be sorted according to themes. They are only sorted according to difficulty. In my view offering a hint about the topic of a given exercise will bias the person solving them, and in so doing neutralize the learning effect. As a result, you will not know beforehand what the given exercise is all about and which of the skills mentioned above will be useful in solving it. It follows that

training with this book will resemble a practical game as much as possible. The solutions, however, will not only indicate the underlying idea behind each puzzle, but will also elaborate in detail upon both the suggested continuation and, very often, on additional problems of practical value that could also be meaningful in the given case.

4. Focus on what remained behind the scenes: The average playing strength of the chess populace may, indeed, be rising globally. But it has still been an arduous task to find suitable training material. The book that you are holding represents the result of approximately 400 hours of hard work with a quarter of these hours dedicated exclusively to the selection of games. It became apparent at the beginning of the process that full games, as played even by strong grandmasters, are marred by bad mistakes, and therefore seldom represent solid training material. Although some model games played at the board are still going to be included, the vast majority of the examples in this book start only the moment one of the players missed a great resource. There will be a particular focus on explaining what went wrong and how this mistake could have been avoided or the play improved upon. As most of the games constitute high-profile encounters, every puzzle you solve is simultaneously going to mean that you did better than a strong grandmaster!

IV. Acknowledgements

This book would not have been published had it not been for the invaluable help of a few people that I would like to mention.

First of all, I would like to thank my parents for their love and never-ending support. Without them I would never have been able to pursue my chess passion.

A special thanks also goes to my dear wife who was kind enough to take over most of the duties relating to the care of our infant daughter when I was writing – you are a real hero!

Furthermore, I cannot help but mention students of my chess school, most notably Phillip Eltakchi, Kyron Griffith, Daniel Maxwell and Sebastian Mueer. I cordially thank them for all the invaluable advice and comments, which inspired me to go the extra mile more than once.

Lastly, I would like to thank you for purchasing this book to spend some quality time herein – may you find it both instructive and entertaining.

Any comments or criticism you might have is very much welcome and can be sent to my e-mail address: wojciech.moranda@gmail.com.

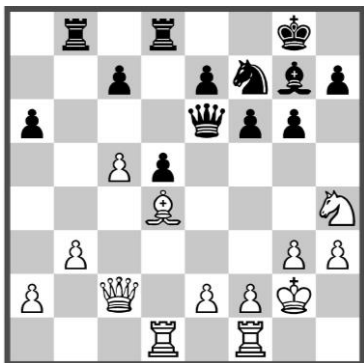
GM Wojciech Moranda
Wroclaw, September 2020

Chapter One

**What every Russian
schoolboy solves**

📖 1

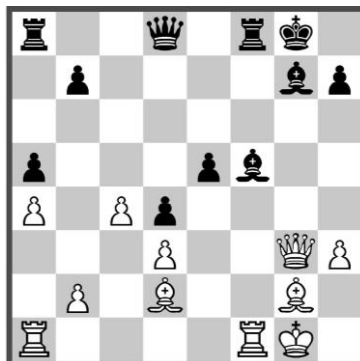
Winterberg – Lubbe
Magdeburg 2019



□ 22.?

📖 2

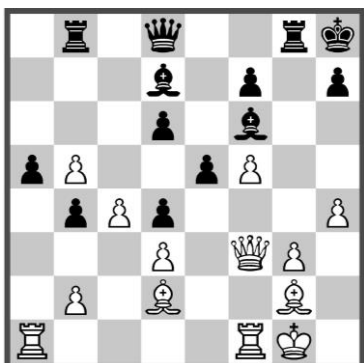
Shahinyan – Minasian
Yerevan 2019



■ 23...?

📖 3

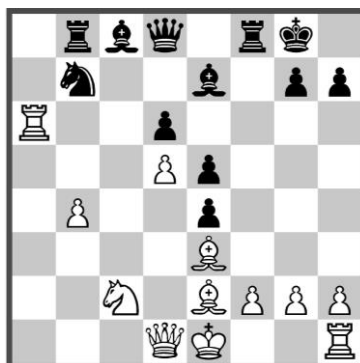
Demchenko – Jones
St Petersburg 2018



■ 23...?

📖 4

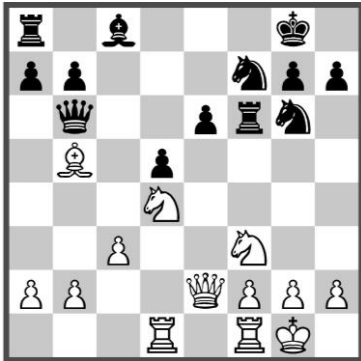
Lagarde – Colin
Brest 2019



■ 19...?

📖 5

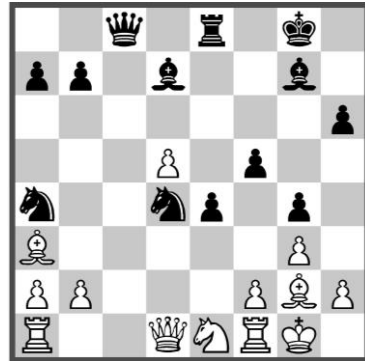
Zanan – Boruchovsky
Israel 2019



□ 17.?

📖 6

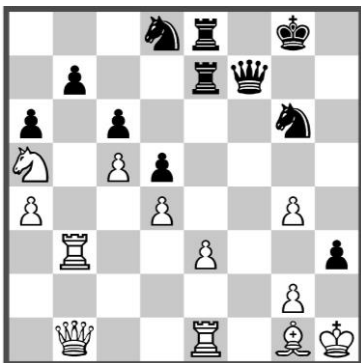
Nguyen – Yip
Saint Louis 2019



□ 25.?

📖 7

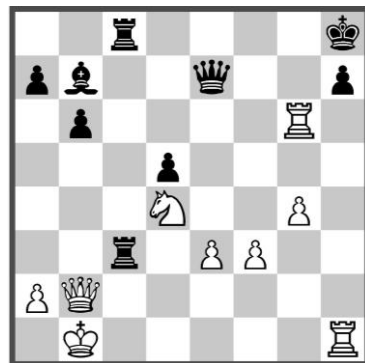
Guseva – Styazhkina
Sochi 2019



□ 40.?

📖 8

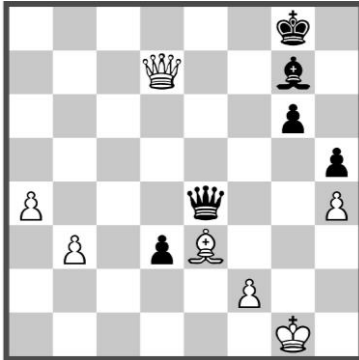
Moranda – Robson
chess.com 2019



■ 29...?

📖 9

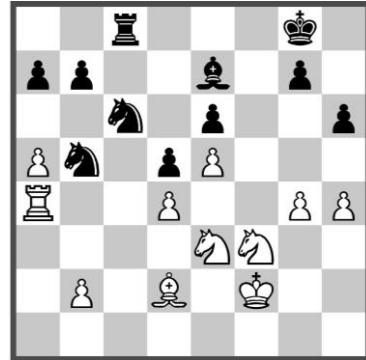
Gasanov – Melkumyan
St Petersburg 2018



■ 40...?

📖 10

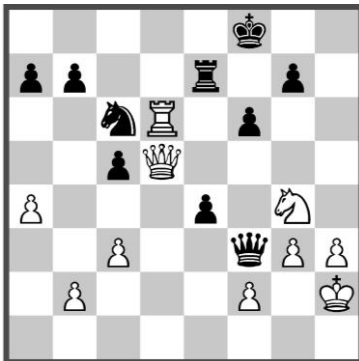
Solozhenkina – Korneev
Sochi 2019



■ 30...?

📖 11

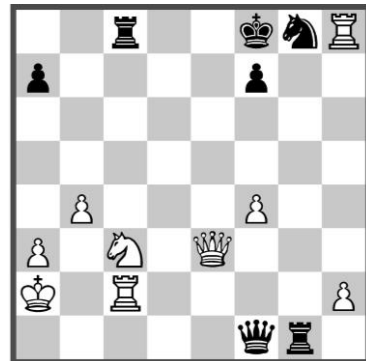
Van Foreest – Stevic
Skopje 2018




□ 36.?

📖 12

Kaspi – Rozentalis
Israel 2019



■ 39...?

 13

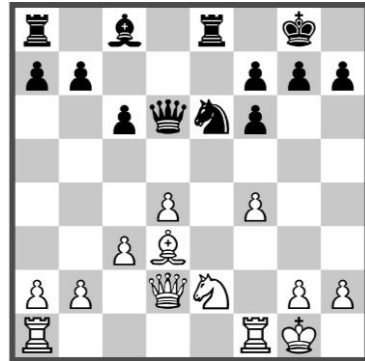
Lewicki – Delchev
Skopje 2018




■ 14...?

 14

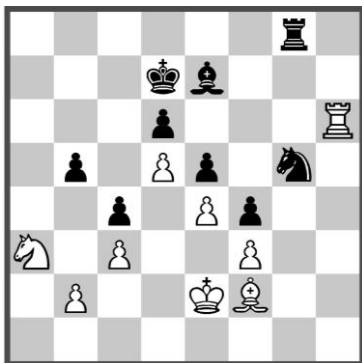
Simacek – Michalik
Ostrava 2019



■ 13...?

 15

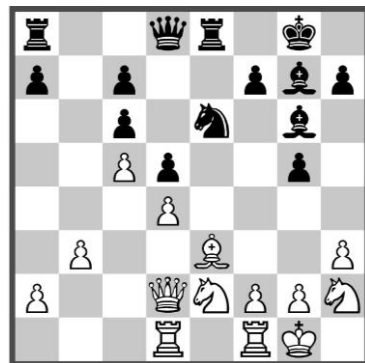
Abdusattorov – Zvjaginsev
St Petersburg 2018



□ 42.?

 16

Srinath – Markus
Budapest 2019



■ 21...?

17

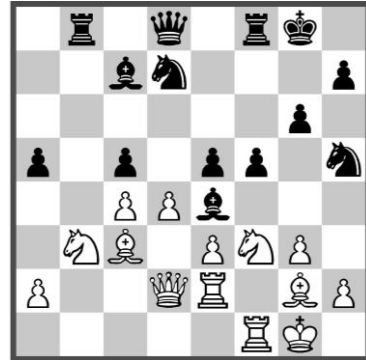
Sebag – Rakhmangulova
Antalya 2019



□ 22.?

18

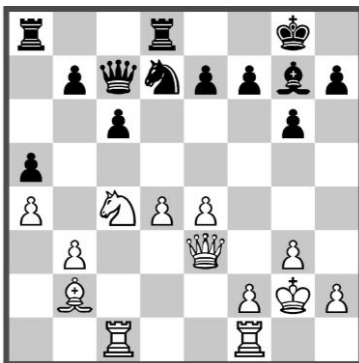
Gaal – Froewis
Radenci 2019



■ 25...?

19

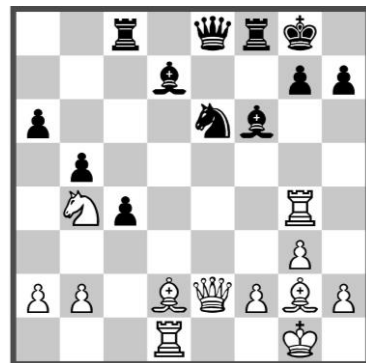
Zickus – Sakalauskas
Lithuania 2019




■ 19...?

20

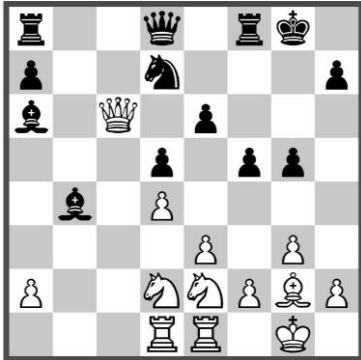
Tabatabaei – Sethuraman
Makati 2018



□ 26.?

 21

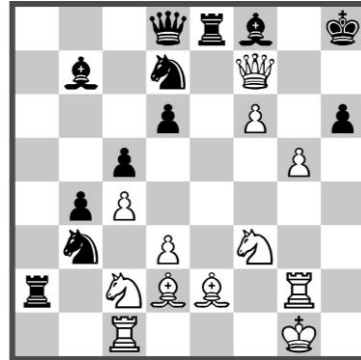
Antonsen – Ochsner
Svendborg 2019




■ 18...?

 22

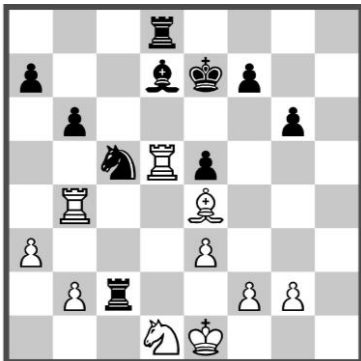
Bodnaruk – Mikadze
Antalya 2019



■ 29...?

 23

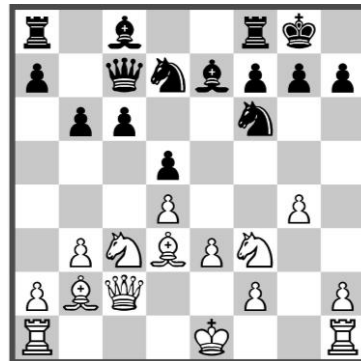
Krejci – Michalik
Prague 2019



■ 29...?

 24

Pasko – Abdulla
Batumi 2019



■ 11...?

📖 25

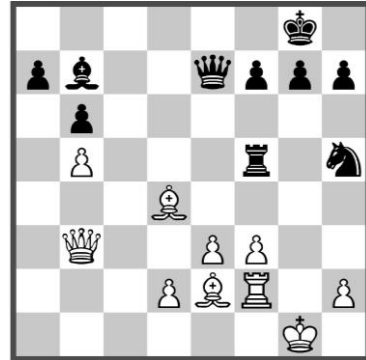
Bernadskiy – Gschnitzer
Budapest 2019



■ 31...?

📖 26

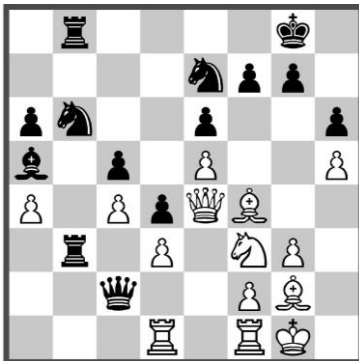
Strikovic – Mannion
Dublin 2019



■ 26...?

📖 27

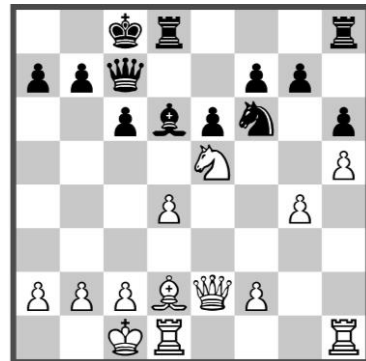
Adams – Kuzubov
Wolfhagen 2019



□ 28.?

📖 28

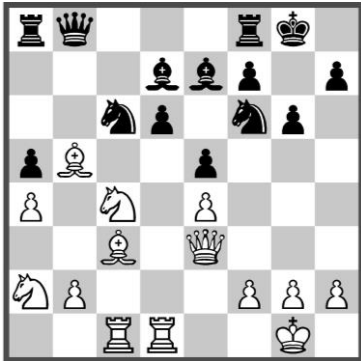
Muzychuk – Gunina
Hengshui 2019



■ 17...?

📖 29

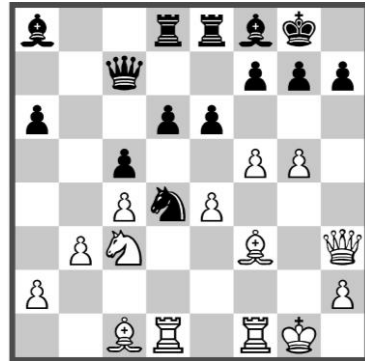
Buksa – Gevorgyan
Astana 2019



■ 21...?

📖 30

Hovhannisyan – Petrosyan
Yerevan 2019



□ 24.?