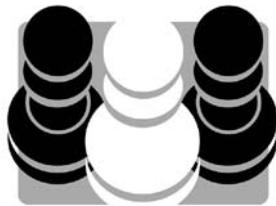


# Chess Lessons

By

# Vladimir Popov



Quality Chess  
[www.qualitychess.co.uk](http://www.qualitychess.co.uk)

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# Key to symbols used

±	White is slightly better
∓	Black is slightly better
±	White is better
∓	Black is better
+−	White has a decisive advantage
−+	Black has a decisive advantage
=	equality
≡	with compensation
↔	with counterplay
∞	unclear
?	a weak move
??	a blunder
!	a good move
!!	an excellent move
!?	a move worth considering
?!	a move of doubtful value
#	mate

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# Kosintseva Biography

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Tatiana and Nadezhda Kosintseva are rising stars of women's chess. The sisters, known familiarly as Tania and Nadia, are ranked, respectively, 4th and 6th in the world. They were born in Arkhangelsk, a city in the extreme north of western Russia and they share more in common than chess, as they are both studying law at Pomor University in their hometown.

In the 2010 Olympiad in Khanty-Mansiysk, Russia, the Kosintsevas played on the top two boards for the Russian Women's team, pushing World Champion Alexandra Kosteniuk down to Board 3. The pressure on the Russian top seeds must have been intense but they delivered in style, winning all eleven matches to take the team gold. Individually, Tatiana won the gold medal for the best score on Board 1 and Nadezhda matched this feat on Board 2. A dream result!

Nadia is the elder sister by a year, being born in 1985. As a junior Nadia won a hatful of gold medals including being European Youth Champion three times and World Under-14 Champion. Now an established star, Nadia was Russian Women's Champion in 2008 and is an International Master and Woman Grandmaster. The full Grandmaster title must surely arrive soon as her rating of 2576 far exceeds the minimum requirements. Nadia's résumé is already impressive but her greatest victories still lie ahead.

Tania Kosintseva, born in 1986, is a Grandmaster with a rating of 2581. Like her sister, she was a highly successful junior player with a highlight being winning the European Under-10 title. Even greater triumphs have followed as an adult including becoming Russian Women's Champion in 2002, 2004 and 2007, and Women's European Champion in 2007 and 2009. In 2010 she won the FIDE Women's Grand Prix in Nalchik with a performance rating of 2735. It is clear that Tania is still improving...

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# Preface

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In the last few years the finals of the Russian Junior Championships have traditionally been held in the Dagomys health resort. Hundreds of young chess players, their coaches and their parents congregate every year in the popular Black Sea holiday destination. The scale of this chess festival is impressive. For all the difficulties, chess in Russia is alive and has a future!

After making one of these trips, the thought of a book occurred to me. I had collected some ideas which I think should be of interest, whether the reader is a youth trainer or a player who has reached a reasonable standard and wishes to improve further.

There is no disputing that in order to improve your quality of play, the quantity of errors has to be reduced. An experienced teacher, going over a game with beginners, will point out the weak moves; afterwards there is a chance that in a similar situation the child will get it right. For a player who has reached a certain level, work on his own mistakes ought to have become a systematic process. A coach involved with talented children on a one-to-one basis should understand this very well.

Take the case of the Kosintseva sisters, Nadezhda (Nadia) and Tatiana (Tania). There was a time when a problem with their play, for all its great promise, was a large number of blunders. I had to choose suitable exercise positions for what was then their chief fault, and organize various solving contests followed up by serious critical discussion. As a result we basically succeeded in solving the problem – see the chapter on “Monitoring Counter-Threats”.

It is well said that “you learn from your mistakes.” And you can also learn from the mistakes of others. In this book you are shown many notable cases of inaccurate play by young chess players. However, the classification and description of the most frequently seen errors is not the author’s sole aim. The main task of this book is to help the reader to *minimize the quantity of errors in his games* through studying the material and solving the exercises.

The layout of the book is as follows.

(1) *Theoretical section.* Each chapter contains introductory material or a lesson on a particular theme; extracts from games illustrating that theme are given, and generalizations and conclusions are stated.

It is logical that coaches teach children using models of ideal play by World Champions and other stars. In our case we are speaking of a different approach. The idea of training inexperienced players by studying the *mistakes* of grandmasters seems inappropriate – in grandmaster play you can hardly find those obvious faults which characterize people to whom this book is addressed. Therefore in the theoretical part of my work I generally utilize extracts from games by young players.

An author writing about players’ mistakes needs to have a good grasp of the reasons behind each poor decision. Otherwise he may draw the wrong conclusions. For that reason, most of my examples are based on the negative experiences of my own pupils. In some chapters, I give examples of bad decisions they took during training sessions. I think this will be of interest to the reader.

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# Chapter 3

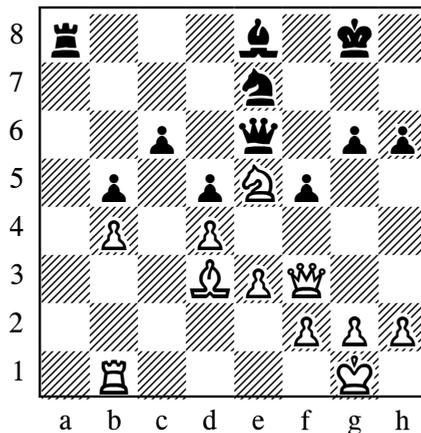
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## Planning

M. Taimanov – A. Kotov

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Zurich 1953



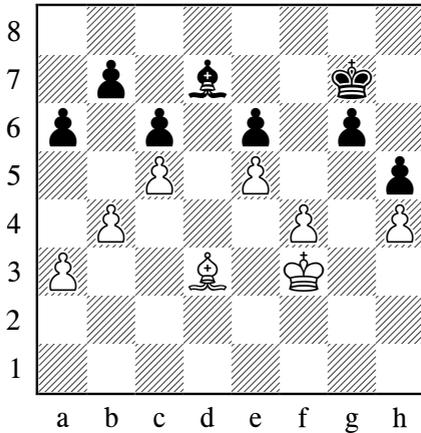
1.h4?

In coaching sessions with beginners, I offer a simple definition: a plan is a sequence of moves united by a single aim.

When speaking of planning, you need to bear in mind that situations where the opponent has no logical sequences of his own are very rare – they mostly occur in endgames. The following is an instructive example which I have always liked for its simplicity and logic.

## Baslavsky – Kondratiev

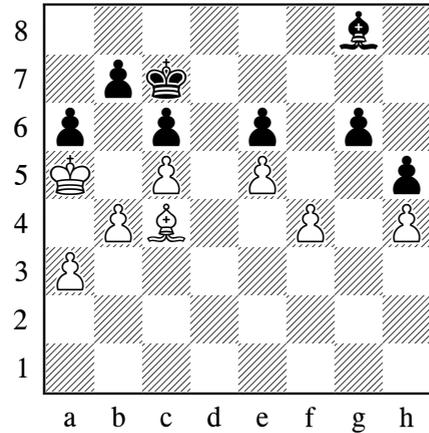
Soviet Union 1947



*White to move: Find a plan to improve his position*

To understand what forced Kondratiev to construct a cage for his own bishop would be a complicated matter. Black's lot is to defend passively – White's plan is obvious. He has to bring his king to the queenside, attempting to penetrate via b6. His opponent in turn may reach c7 in time, while guarding the g6-weakness with his bishop. White then has the resource of advancing his queenside pawns. In the position we are starting from, does it make sense to figure out the winning plan right to the end?

I don't think so, considering that in the diagram position White simply has no other way of playing. 1.♔e3 ♕f7 2.♕d4 ♖e8 3.♗c3 ♗e7 4.♗b3 ♗d8 5.♗a4 ♗c7 6.♗a5 ♖f7 7.♖c4! ♖g8 White has achieved what he wanted, but there is no zugzwang – Black can move his bishop to and fro between f7 and g8. White can now have a think about what to do next.



*White to move: Find the winning plan*

The task isn't complicated. Black is forced to mark time, so after a3-a4 and b4-b5 White pushes his pawn to b6, fixing a new weakness. Then the black monarch will be unable to switch to the kingside, in view of the threat of ♖a6. White wins by centralizing his king, after which he can break through via the f4-square by means of the sacrifice f4-f5. All this actually happened in the game.

**8.a4 ♖f7 9.b5 axb5 10.axb5 ♖g8** (10...cxb5 11.♖xb5 ♖g8 12.♖e8 ♖h7 13.♖f7+–) **11.b6†! ♗d8 12.♗b4 ♖f7 13.♗c3 ♗d7 14.♗d4 ♗d8 15.♗e3 ♗d7 16.f5! gx f5 17.♗f4 ♖g6 18.♗g5 ♖e8 19.♗f6 f4 20.♖e2 1–0**

In reality it is very hard for a practical player to obtain such comfortable conditions as White enjoyed in the ending we have just examined. When planning your game you are usually faced with the hostile designs of the other side – and scope for mistakes is opened up!

Often the actions you have in mind will quickly need adjustment – after your opponent's first move in reply. This means that when we talk about planning, it is really a case of determining the rough direction of the play from the position under scrutiny – for instance by identifying the part of the board where you need to take action, deciding

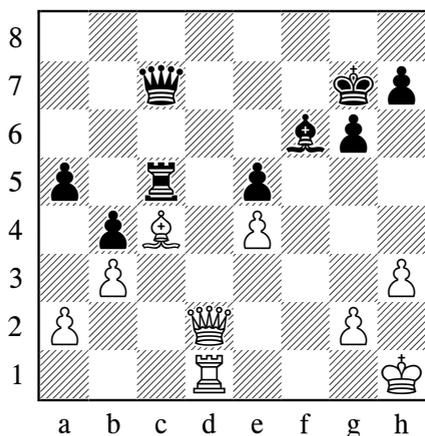
which regroupings of pieces, pawn thrusts or exchanges are sensible to aim for; and so on.

The ability to plan the game correctly is a valuable quality, and it can and must be developed. For work in this area, there are some positions for you to solve at the end of the chapter, and more positions for you to try playing.

But first let's look at some examples of wrong decisions. The theme of the next two positions is a confrontation between plans. To avoid errors, the player had to try to fathom the opponent's intentions.

### M. Botvinnik – L. Stein

Moscow 1963



White to move

White has seized the open file with his major pieces and has a tangible plus.

In the game, Botvinnik continued with **1.♖e2**. The idea of this move is to place the rook in front of the queen with **2.♞d3** and then **3.♖d2**. In the process, the illustrious player missed his opponent's counter-measure: **1...♗e7 2.♞d3 ♞c8** "This move – the only one, but fairly straightforward – is what White overlooked (when playing **1.♖e2**). He forgot that the d8-square would now be defended

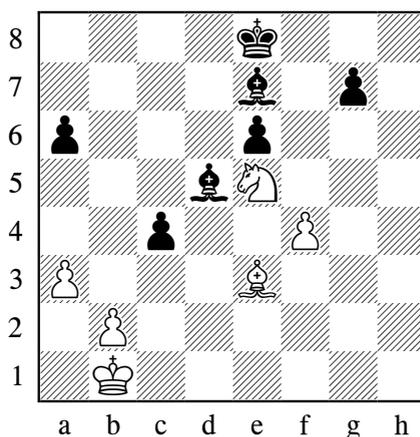
twice, and he would lose control of the file." (Botvinnik) As a result Black equalized, and the game concluded peacefully: **3.♞d5 ♞c5 4.♞d2 ♞g5 5.♞d1 ♞c8 6.g3 ♞d8 7.♞d5 ♞c5 8.♞d3 ♞f8 9.♞g2 ♞d8 ½–½**

White should have gone into an ending with: **1.♗d7†! ♗xd7 2.♞xd7† ♖h8 3.g3±** In his notes to the game, Botvinnik writes: "The pawn weaknesses and the bad position of the black king would have given White realistic winning chances."

In fact, Black should prefer **2...♖h6** but he would still face an awkward defence.

### Hoang Thanh Trang – T. Kosintseva

Women's World Championship, Elista 2004



Black to move

Black is a pawn up in the endgame. How should she improve her position? Tatiana decided to bring her king nearer the centre with **1...♞f6** and **2...♖e7**. However, White too has her own obvious plan, and her young opponent clearly underrated it. **1...♞f6 2.♞d4 ♖e7 3.♖c2** White has got in first – all she needs to do now is play **4.♖c3** and **5.♗xc4**. Black was therefore obliged to go into a drawn ending with: **3...♞xe5 4.♞xe5 ♖f7 5.♖c3**

♙g6 6.♙d4 ♜f5 7.♙xg7 ♜xf4 8.♙e5† ♜f3  
9.♙c5=

Let's go back to the initial position. Young Tatiana needed to adjust her plan by taking her opponent's possibilities into account. It was worth thinking about the prophylactic moves 1...c3 or 1...♙d8 2.♙c2 ♙a5, before bringing up the king with ...♙e7-f6-f5.

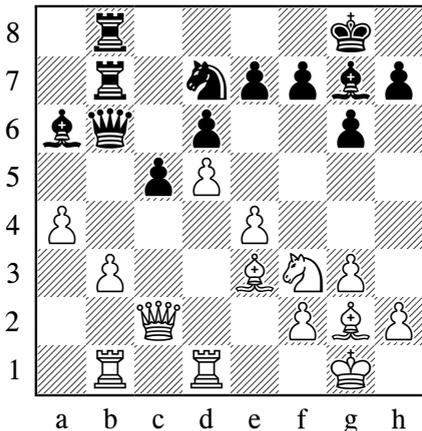
There was also another way, an aggressive one. Black could bring her bishop to g3 with the idea of ...g7-g5. Thus, 1...♙h4! 2.♙c2 ♙g3 3.♙c3 g5 4.♜xc4 gxf4 with winning chances.

Let's now look at some examples of faulty play where an outwardly attractive plan is chosen but has no chance of success in view of the opponent's straightforward counter-action.

**R. Farakhov – N. Kosintseva**

Russian u20 Championship, Essentuki 2003

1.d4 ♜f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5 4.cxb5 a6 5.bxa6  
g6 6.♜c3 ♙xa6 7.g3 ♙g7 8.♙g2 0-0 9.♜f3  
d6 10.0-0 ♜bd7 11.♞b1 ♜e8 12.♞c2 ♜c7  
13.♜h4? ♜b5 14.♜xb5 ♙xb5 15.b3 ♞b6  
16.a4 ♙a6 17.♜f3 ♞ab8 18.♞d1 ♞b7 19.e4  
♞fb8 20.♙e3



Black to move

In the Benko Gambit the 18-year-old Nadia has gained adequate compensation for the pawn. The best move here was 20...♞b4! with the idea of 21...♞c3, putting pressure on the weakness on b3. But the Kosintseva sisters always play for a win, and in this uncompromising spirit Nadia was put off by the possible draw after 21.♙d2 ♞a3 22.♙c1 ♞b4 23.♙d2.

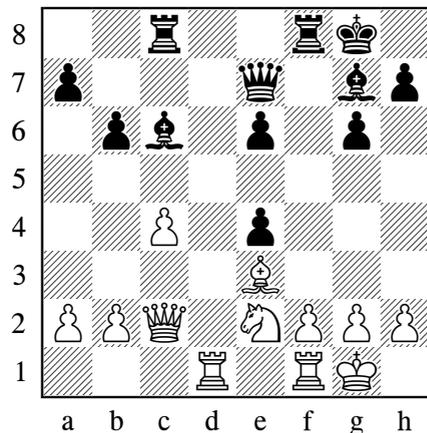
She therefore decided to increase the pressure on the backward pawn by other means – by placing the queen behind the rook with 20...♞d8, then ...♞b6 and ...♞c8-b7.

*Was Nadezhda right?*

There followed: 21.h3 ♞b6 22.♙d2! Alas, 22...♞c8 is now useless on account of 23.♙a5. So the rook has to go back again. In other words, Black's plan was unrealistic. After 22...♞6b7 23.♙f1 ♙xf1 24.♞xf1 ♞c8 25.♞fc1 White had the better position.

**S. Novikov – N. Kosintseva**

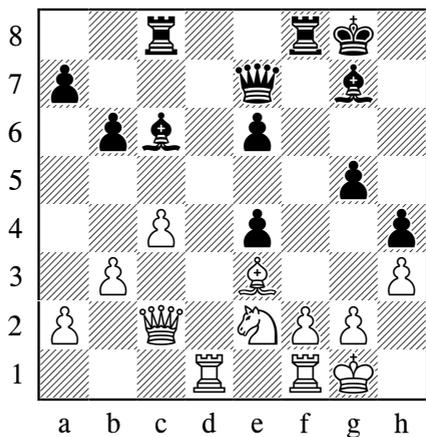
Russian u18 Championship, Dagomys 2003



Black to move: find a way of improving her position.

What counts for more in this position – the weak pawns on the e-file or the activity of Black’s pieces? The first-mentioned factor is a long-term one, whereas the initiative may quickly evaporate if the play is steered in the wrong direction.

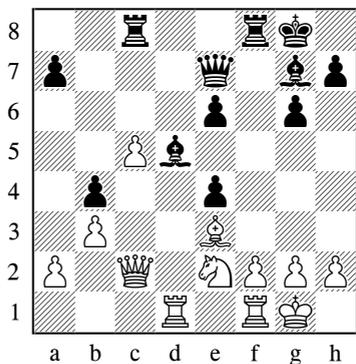
That is what happened in the game. Nadezhda decided to attack with her kingside pawns, but only weakened her own position: **1...h5? 2.b3 h4? 3.h3 g5?**



*White to move: how can he exploit his opponent’s ill-judged play?*

The answer to this question is fairly simple: **4.♖d4! ♗a8 5.♙e2!+** – The queen now breaks into the enemy camp via the weakened squares; Black is defenceless.

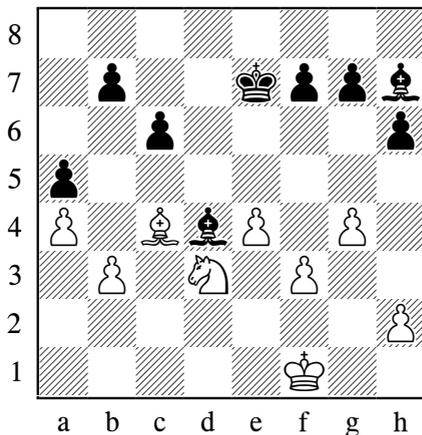
Instead, Nadia could have played something like **1...♗d5!?** 2.b3 b5 3.c5 b4 with counterplay.



I gave the girls the following example as an exercise to solve.

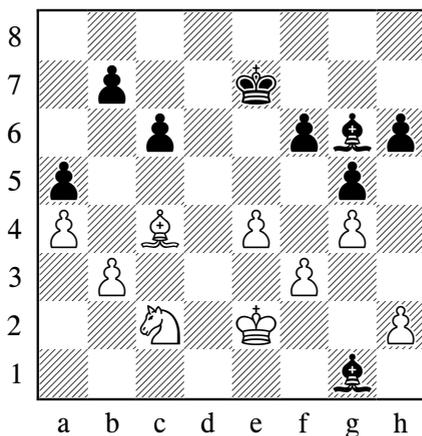
**V. Mikenas – V. Smyslov**

Soviet Championship 1944



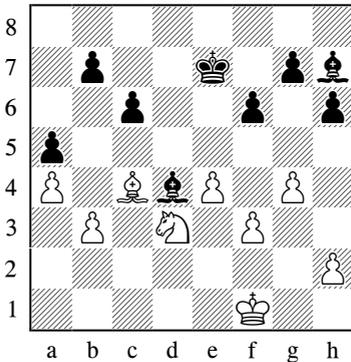
*Black to move: Find a plan to improve his position*

In this ending the fairly obvious point is that Black holds the advantage of the two bishops – although one of them is not participating. The indicated plan, therefore, is to bring this badly placed piece into play with: **1...g5! 2.♖e2 f6 3.♗e1 ♗g6 4.♗c2 ♗g1**



**5.h3 ♖d6+** That is how the game went.

On the other hand 1...f6, the move chosen by young Nadia, doesn't work because of the following riposte:



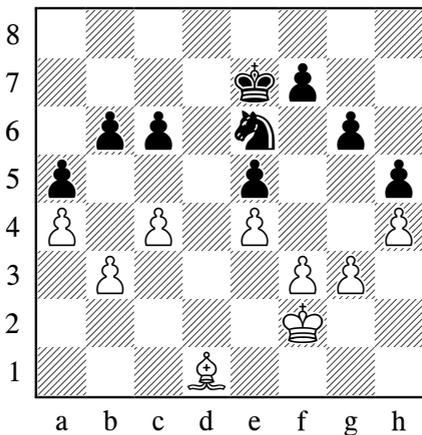
2.h4! ♕g6 (2...g5 3.h5!) 3.♖f4 Now the bishop can't be preserved from exchange, as if 3...♗e8? then 4.♗e6. This means that White's problems disappear.

Let's state the conclusion that emerges: *in devising your game plan, don't forget about your opponent's possibilities!*

Indeed, in the following game Black formulated his plan in a more sophisticated way.

### A. Malkov – Z. Levin

Arkhangelsk 2001



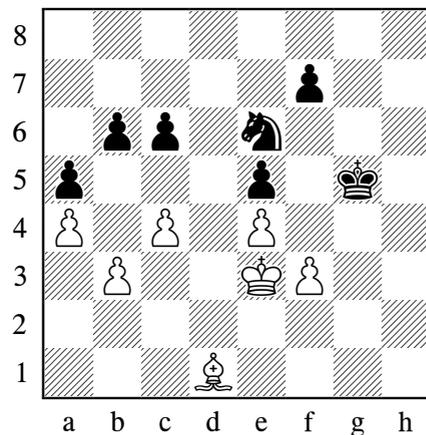
*Black to move: what plan would you choose to exploit his positional plus?*

At first glance, Black's line of play is obvious – he brings his king to b4. Then he plays ...♗d4 or ...♗c5, attacking the weakness on b3. But it isn't as simple as that, as White will not be standing still. His counter-measures are easy to understand: ♖e3 and f3-f4, to obtain active play. Black's kingside pawns are arranged on the same colour as the bishop, which means that not everything is so bleak for Malkov.

Zhenia Levin, the eleven-year-old *Wunderkind* from Arkhangelsk, proceeded very cannily – he *modified his plan* to allow for the possibility of counterplay.

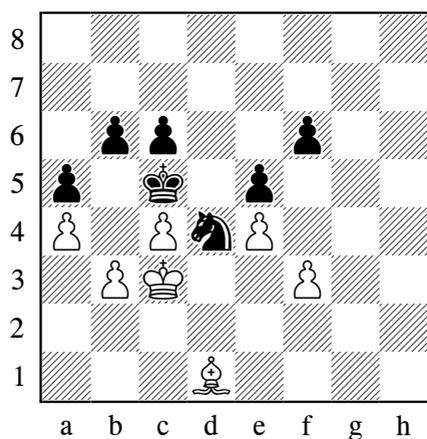
The boy reasoned more or less like this: “First I need to make the kingside safe by playing ...♖e7-f6 and ...g6-g5. My opponent will have to take on g5, otherwise I'll exchange on h4 myself and obtain the f4-square for the knight. After retaking with ...♗f6xg5 I can play ...h5-h4, getting rid of the pawns on light squares once and for all, and at the same time securing f4 for my knight or king. Black should win by breaking through on one of the wings.”

Let's see how Zhenia carried out his plan: **1...♗f6! 2.♖e3 g5 3.hxg5♗ ♗xg5 4.♗c2 h4 5.gxh4♗ ♗xh4 6.♗d1 ♖g5**



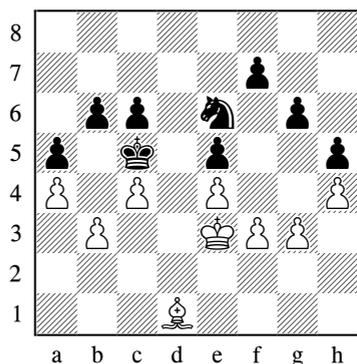
Having deprived his opponent of any chances on the kingside, Black can now head across towards b4! **7.♗c2 ♗f6 (7...♗d4? 8.f4♗)**

8.♙d1 ♔e7 9.♙c2 ♔d6 10.♔d3 ♘d4  
11.♙d1 ♔c5 12.♔c3 f6



*Zugzwang! Black wins*

With the aid of some sample variations, let's test whether a different line could have given White counterplay: 1...♔d6? 2.♔e3 ♔c5



3.f4 ♔b4 (3...f6 4.f5 gxf5 5.♙xh5) 4.fxe5 ♘c5? 5.g4 hxg4= 6.♙xg4 ♔xb3? 7.h5 gxh5 8.♙xh5, and now White is winning! Naturally, Black can improve on this line (for example, by playing ...♔c3 on either move 4 or 6) but the fact remains that the “obvious” 1...♔d6? is inaccurate.

For the sake of completeness, note that 1...f6! was also strong with a similar idea to the main line: 2.♔e3 g5! So in this case, there were two good answers, but they rely on the same process – anticipate and prevent White's counterplay.

In this chapter we have done no more than touch on a vast topic. The planning process will be discussed further – its elements, essentially, are those positional operations (piece play, pawn play, exchanging) which we shall treat in the next chapters.

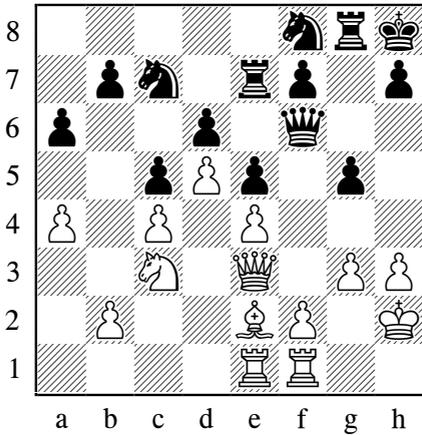
*Errors in planning are no rarity. A young player must work on rectifying this defect. Finding the solution or continuation in specially selected positions is helpful; the player should analyse his solutions and draw appropriate conclusions.*

Below I offer six *positions to solve*, as examples of the theme we are studying. You must:

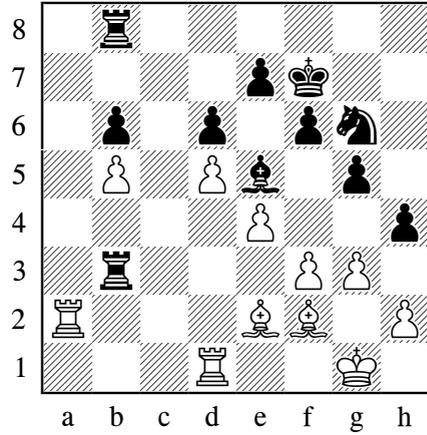
- (a) Find the outline plan for improving the position (2 points)
- (b) Make the first move in accordance with this plan (1 point)

There are also four endgames *for you to practise playing* with your sparring partner or trainer. In the initial position you need to find the right plan.

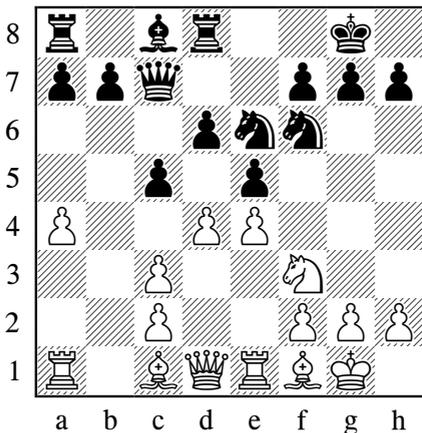
## Positions for Solving



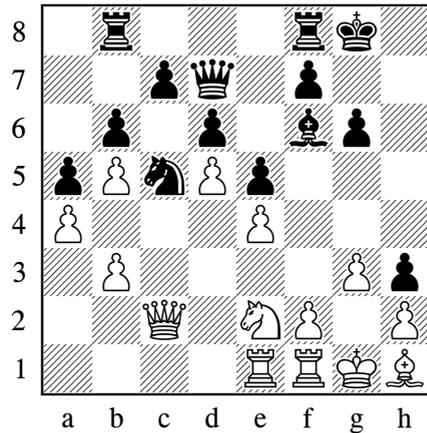
(1) White to move



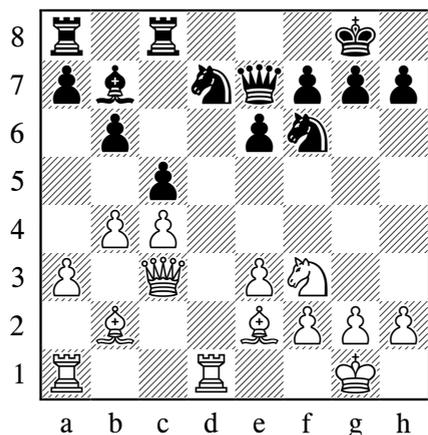
(3) Black to move



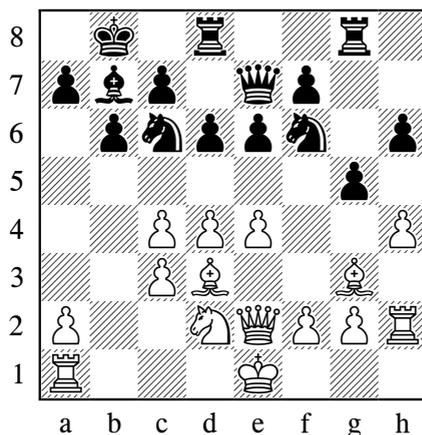
(2) White to move



(4) White to move

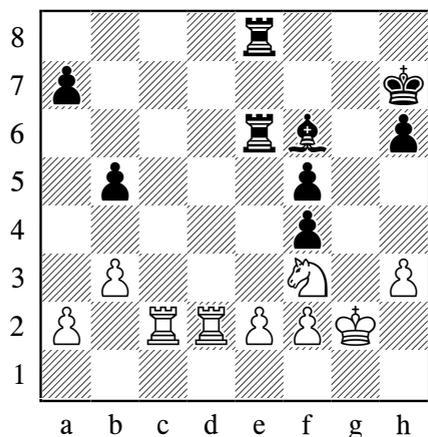


(5) Black to move

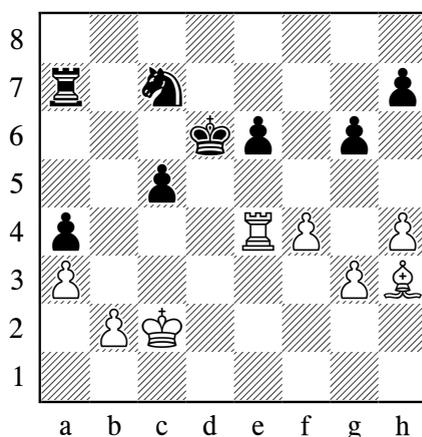


(6) Black to move

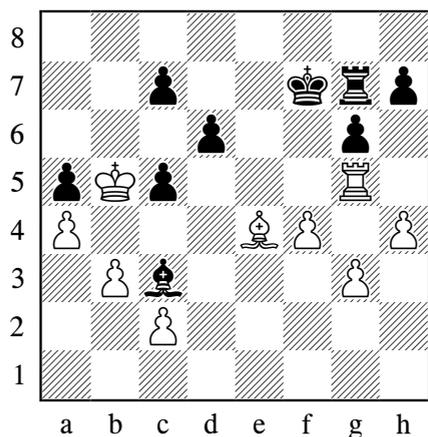
## Positions for Practice



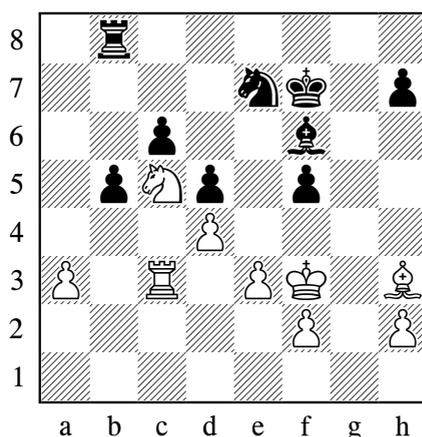
(1) White to move



(3) White to move



(2) White to move



(4) White to move

### Positions for Solving

#### (1) V. Popov – Shipov (1982)

The right idea is to carry out b2-b4. White therefore needs to play **1.a5** (1 point), as otherwise ...a6-a5 would follow. The game continued: **1...♖e8 2.♖b1 ♗g6 3.b4** (2 points) **3...♞c7 4.bxc5 dxc5 5.♗a4+–**

#### (2) N.V. Pedersen – M. Notkin (1995)

When planning your play it is essential to take account of your opponent's possibilities. In the game White failed to do so: **1.g3? d5 2.exd5 ♗xd5 3.♞xe5 ♗xc3 4.♞e1 cxd4 5.♗xd4 ♞xd4 6.♗b2 ♞xa4 7.♗xc3 ♞xa1 8.♗xa1 ♗d7+**

He had to play differently with 1.d5! (1 point) 1...♗f8 2.♗d2, aiming for ♗d2-c4 and then f2-f4 (2 points).

#### (3) W. Schmidt – R. Kuczynski (1988)

Black has a weakness on b6; the correct plan is to free the rook on b8 from defending it: **1...♗c3!** (1 point), with the idea of ...♗a5 or ...♗b4-c5 (2 points). The continuation was: **2.♗g2 ♗a5** (or 2...♗b4!? with ...♗c5 in view) **3.♞c1 hxc3 4.hxc3 ♗e5 5.♞h1 ♗g7 6.♞c2 ♗d3 7.♞c7 ♗xf2! 8.♗xf2 ♞e8=**

#### (4) M. Botvinnik – V. Smyslov (1954)

Black's knight has to be exchanged off: **1.♗c1 ♗g7 2.♗d3!** (3 points) **2...f5 3.♗xc5 dxc5 4.♗f3** Preparing g3-g4. **4...♞d6 5.g4 f4 6.g5! ♗f7 7.♗h1±**

#### (5) V. Kramnik – A. Karpov (2002)

By playing **1...♗e8!** (1 point) and then ...f7-f6 and ...e6-e5 (2 points), Black curbs the activity of the enemy pieces (in particular the b2-bishop and the queen). The knight can be transferred to an active post on d6. In the game there followed: **2.b5 f6! 3.a4 a5 4.bxa6 ♞xa6 5.a5 ♞ca8** With counterplay.

#### (6) E. Bareev – P. Leko (1995)

Black has to prepare the advance ...e6-e5, but it doesn't pay to be hasty: **1...e5? 2.d5 ♗a5 3.♗b3±**

The Hungarian grandmaster made the preparatory move **1...♗a8!** (1 point) and equalized after: **2.♗b3 e5 3.d5 ♗b8** (2 points) **4.a4 a5=**

*More than 14 points – “excellent”; 12-14 – “good”; under 9 – failure.*

### Positions for Practice

(1) **A. Karpov – M. Gurevich** (1991)

By means of the regrouping **1. ♖e1!**, with a view to **2. ♕f3** and then **♖e1-d3(g2)**, White should win the weak pawn on f4. The game went: **1...a5 2. ♕f3 a4 3. ♖d7† ♜8e7 4. ♞xe7† ♞xe7 5. ♖d3 axb3 6. axb3 1–0**

(2) **V. Faibisovich – H. Westerinen** (1969)

White's plan is to bring his rook over to d3, after which the pawn on a5 will fall: **1. ♖d5! ♙e1 2. ♖d3 ♕f6 3. c3 ♞e7 4. ♙b7 ♞e2 5. ♕xa5 ♞c2 6. ♕b5 ♙xc3 7. a5+–**

(3) **I. Boleslavsky – B. Goldenov** (1952)

Here White's plan is to attack the weak pawn on a4. To this end he needs to bring his bishop to d1 and move his king away. He must play accurately to limit his opponent's counterplay. **1. ♙g4 ♞a8 (1...♕d5 2. ♞e5† ♕d6 3. ♕c1) 2. ♕c1! ♞a7 3. ♙d1** The aim is achieved – the pawn falls. **3...♖b5 4. ♙xa4 ♖d4 5. ♙d1 ♖f5 6. ♙g4 ♞b7 7. ♙xf5 exf5 8. ♞c3+–**

(4) **N. Kosintseva – T. Kosintseva**

White's plan should be to rid herself of the weak pawn on a3 – but not at once! In the coaching session, the play went **1. a4? bxa4 2. ♖xa4** (better **2. ♞a3!**) **2...♞b1**, and Black's rook was activated.

The advance a3-a4 had to be prepared: **1. ♙f1! ♞a8 (1...♖c8? 2. ♖d7+–) 2. ♙d3 ♞a7 (2...♖c8? 3. ♙xf5+–) 3. ♙c2 ♞a8 4. a4 bxa4 (4...b4 5. ♞b3 ♞b8 6. ♖d3+–) 5. ♙xa4** With advantage.

