

PRACTICAL CHESS PUZZLES

600 POSITIONS TO IMPROVE YOUR CALCULATION AND JUDGMENT

GUANNAN SONG DACHEY LIN EDWARD SONG

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About the Authors

Guannan Song is a FIDE Master (with one International Master norm) from Canada. He has won the Canadian Youth Chess Championships and has scored bronze at the North American Junior Chess Championships. He has also played for Team Canada on the international stage at the World Youth Chess Championships and the World Youth U16 Chess Olympiad. Guannan is a chess teacher with over seven years of experience and represents Western University on board one of its Championship team.

Dachey Lin is a FIDE Master from the United States, having attained the title in 2016. He is a seven-time All American Team member and participated in three World Youth Chess Championship events, tying for ninth place in 2009. Though he is not as active as the other authors, he enjoys following and helping other chess players and watching them develop and succeed.

Edward Song is an International Master from the United States. He won the 2014 US Cadet Championship, the 2017 Supernationals (tie) and the 2017 Denker Tournament of High School Champions (tie). He is also a four-time All American Team member and played two World Youth Chess Championships, achieving top ten both times. He is looking forward to making further progress towards the grandmaster title.

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Foreword

As a professional chess player, I have been coaching students for the past 20 years. Students and their parents often ask me to recommend a book where they can solve calculation and evaluation problems. My student Guannan Song and his friends, Dachey Lin and Edward Song, wrote this excellent book. Many beginning chess players do not know how to analyze games correctly, and this book will help you with this. In this book, you will find several commented games where the player explains his thoughts and options that he considered during the game. And carefully selected puzzles from tournaments of recent years will help you move to another level! Now I know which book to recommend to my budding students! Learn, decide, and enjoy the book.

GM Farrukh Amonatov, December 2019

Introduction

There are a great many chess puzzle books on the market – and for good reason – solving puzzles is a crucial aspect of chess improvement for any player. When writing this book, we explored other puzzle books and realized that there were many possible approaches. In the end, we decided our main aims would be practicality, self-assessment and entertainment. Our philosophy is not to teach puzzle solving but instead to teach good chess judgment and over-the-board decision-making.

This book is aimed at aspiring players from novice to National Master strength, or players rated approximately 1200-2200. That being said, players above this range may find this book helpful to sharpen and review their skills or simply for fun. Also, coaches and trainers may find this book to be a useful resource to use when teaching students. We have arranged the puzzles in each chapter in increasing difficulty. We used this design so that the reader can more accurately gauge what level they are at, self-assess what they need to work on as well as measure their improvement. For the more challenging puzzles, we recommend they be set up on a board and be tackled as in a real game. As you are working through this book, you may find some puzzles to be very challenging indeed – but that is deliberate!

The best training puzzles are those that can be solved but with some difficulty. Even if you fail to discover all the points outlined in the solutions, do not be discouraged. The work involved in attempting these puzzles, comparing your answer with the solution, and analyzing the points you missed should prove to be of excellent teaching value. However, if you find that you are consistently spending longer than 30 minutes on many puzzles and still failing to solve them, we recommend you move on to the next chapter.

We have not divided the book into exact sections, such as mate-in-three's, type of tactical motif, type of combination and so on. If you are told exactly what to look for, then the puzzle often becomes too easy and loses much of its instructional value. In a real game, no one tells you what to look for or, indeed, if there is anything at all. Therefore, we wanted these puzzles to mimic a real game where you need to figure out what to do in each position. In some puzzles, the solution is a devastating sacrifice that leads to mate. Others may require you to come up with the right strategic plan and determine the best way to execute it. For each puzzle, you will need to decide what the main objective is; whether that be find a checkmate, gain a strategic advantage, equalize, keep the position alive and so on. Also, some puzzles have more than one viable solution, as is sometimes the case in

chess. We have analyzed them in the solutions whenever they are significant. We felt it would be too artificial to pick and choose only puzzles that have one solution when, in real games, many positions arise where there is more than one good way to proceed. We have computer-checked every position in the book and strived to keep our annotations as concise, understandable and as instructive as possible.

When reading and researching other puzzle books, we found that many of them re-used the same puzzles. We have determined to keep the puzzles completely original by only using recent games from the United States and Canada. Furthermore, most of the puzzles we have chosen are from games between players rated 2000-2450 (with a sprinkling of grandmaster games to illustrate key motifs). Other puzzle books use mostly grandmaster games, which can serve to alienate the reader. By mainly using games from a level likely to be closer to that of the reader, we hope they will be of more practical significance and inspire you to improve.

Our book consists of four parts:

Model Games

This chapter features six games, played by the authors, that are rich in instructional points. In these games, we share what we were thinking during the game at crucial moments and pinpoint the exact moments where a critical decision had to be made. The purpose of these games is to teach good chess judgment and over-the-board decision making and to prepare the reader for the puzzles in the remaining chapters. We believe that illustrating these concepts with real games will allow the reader to more easily grasp them than merely explaining them with words on the page.

Combinations

250 positions that emphasize combinational vision, calculation, and imagination.

Evaluation

100 positions that emphasize intuition, positional understanding, and logic.

Tests

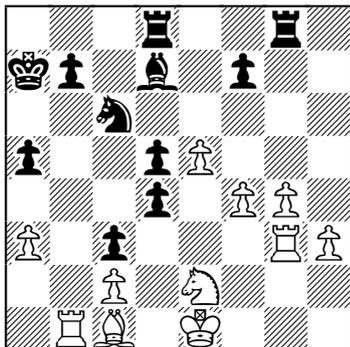
A mix of 250 combination- and evaluation-type positions that test your understanding of all the critical skills covered.

It is crucial to clarify that many games will feature more than one key aspect, and we have not tried to separate them with these chapters. We believe that organizing the puzzles by combinations and evaluation support our goal of keeping them of practical significance while providing the right amount of guidance to help you determine which areas you need to work on. The 600 positions we have carefully selected teach comprehensive coverage of the essential skills every chess player must have. These skills include recognizing tactical motifs, mating patterns, strategic elements and positional elements. Each puzzle should serve as a lesson in and of itself.

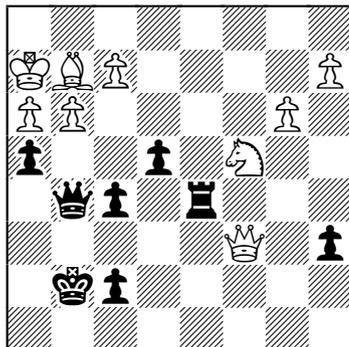
We hope you will find these puzzles of practical significance, instructive and have as much fun solving them as we did in writing this book.

Guannan Song, Dache Lin, and Edward Song,
December 2019

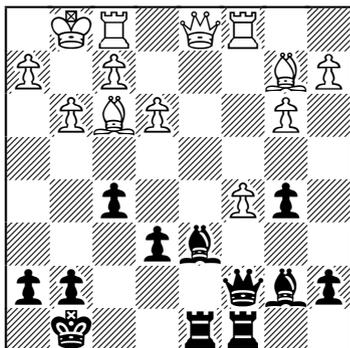
251) E.Song-D.Lin,
Las Vegas 2014
White to play



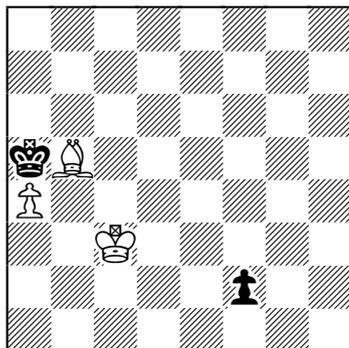
254) M.Feng-J.Yu,
St. Louis 2019
Black to play



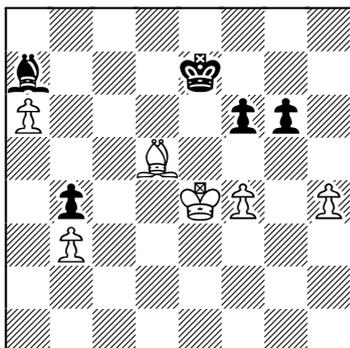
252) B.Li-E.Song,
Columbus 2014
Black to play



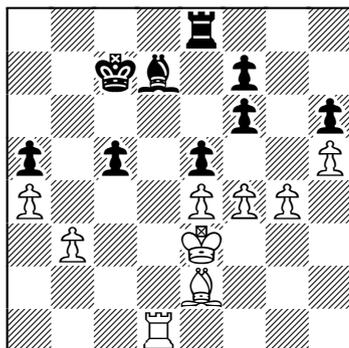
255) G.Song-A.Adriaanse,
Ottawa 2013
White to play



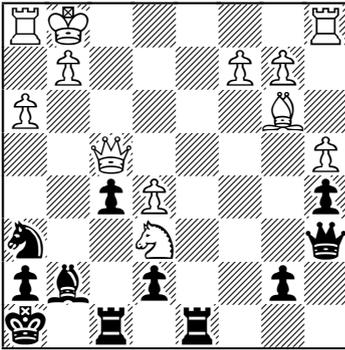
253) J.Yu-C.Yip,
St. Louis 2019
White to play



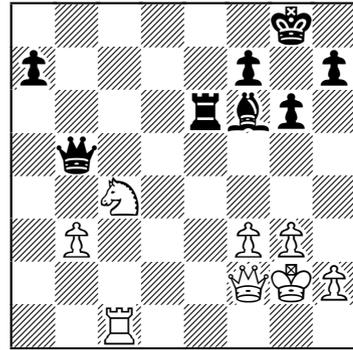
256) D.Naroditsky-C.Matamoros,
Las Vegas 2014
White to play



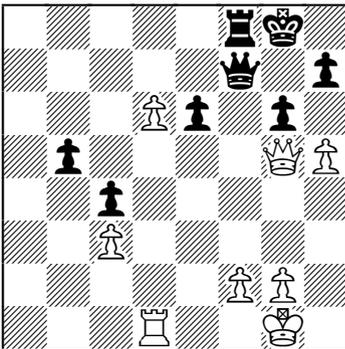
257) Z.Dukic-M.Plotkin,
Kingston 2019
Black to play



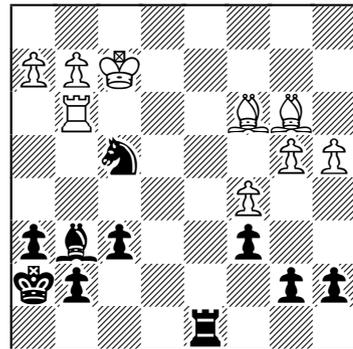
260) E.Karp-E.Song,
Nashville 2017
White to play



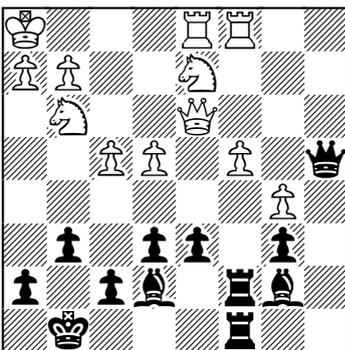
258) E.Song-S.Ramer,
Wheeling 2019
White to play



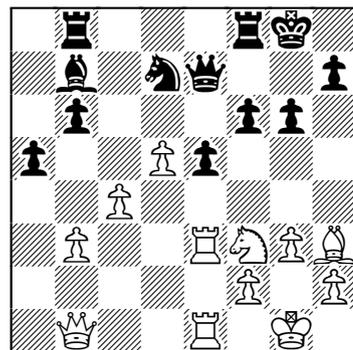
261) M.Kleinman-V.Pechenkin,
Toronto 2010
Black to play



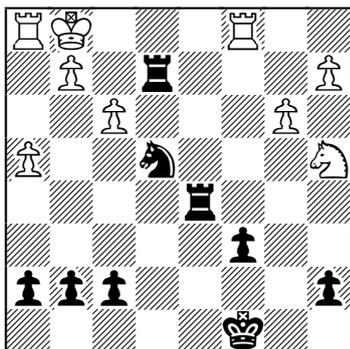
259) T.Krnan-L.McShane,
Toronto 2010
Black to play



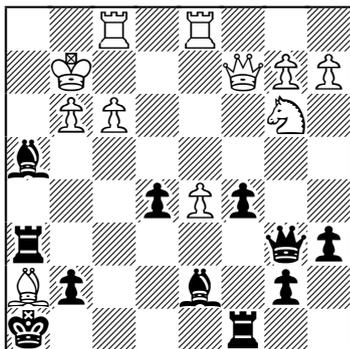
262) A.Yermolinsky-K.Kavutskiy,
Las Vegas 2014
White to play



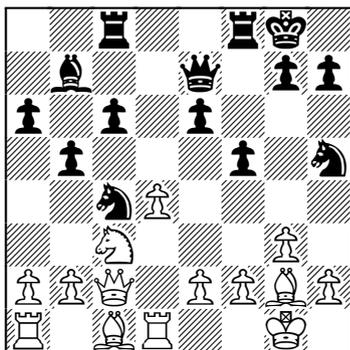
263) S.Lipnowski-G.Melamedoff,
Winnipeg 2010
Black to play



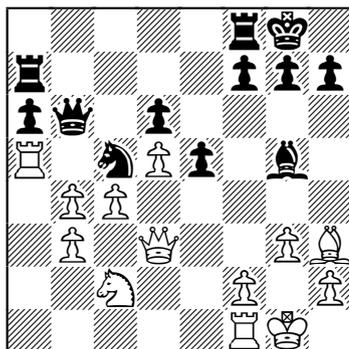
264) J.Peng-G.Song,
Kitchener 2014
Black to play



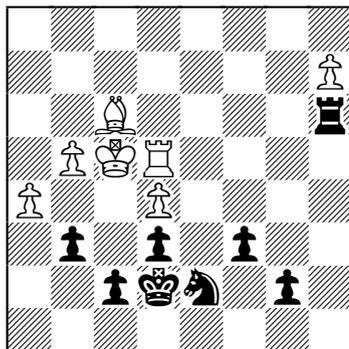
265) B.Avrukh-J.Cao,
Arlington 2015
White to play



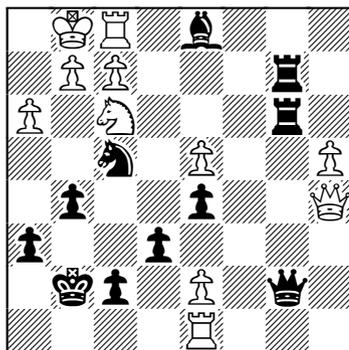
266) G.Song-J.Cai,
Guelph 2015
White to play



267) S.Sevian-M.Roiz,
Santa Clara 2014
Black to play



268) T.Kung-S.Thavandiran,
Burlingame 2019
Black to play



249) Y.Shulman-Z.Amanov, Wheeling 2012

27 ♖f3!

Stopping Black's threats of ...♗f6 and ...♘h4 and threatening to play ♗h6.

27 ♗g4! was also winning, e.g. 27...♙f6 28 ♖f3 e4 (or 28...♗h8 29 ♙xg6+! with more than enough compensation for the exchange.) 29 ♗xg6 and wins.

27...♗h8

This wins the queen but his position remains lost.

28 ♙xh8

28 ♙xg6+! was even more convincing, e.g. 28...♙xg6 29 ♗xh8 ♙f6 30 ♖xe5 with a dominating position.

28...♖xh8 29 ♖xe5+ ♙f6 30 ♗xh8 g5 31 ♗f8+ 1-0

250) C.Yip-T.Abrahamyan, St. Louis 2019

White's pieces, especially the queen on d3, are a little strangely placed and her position looks a bit shaky. One tactic and her position can easily collapse.

13...c4!! 14 ♙xc4 ♖xe5!

The point of 13...c4.

15 ♖xe5 ♙b5

Now the queen is trapped.

16 ♙xf5 ♙xc4 **17** ♖xc4 ♙c6 **18** ♙h3 b5

Although White has three pieces for the queen, her position is very loose with many weaknesses. It will be very difficult to defend against Black's initiative here, and eventually Black won on move 36.

251) E.Song-D.Lin, Las Vegas 2014

23 a4?

One must be wary of tactical elements. Here Black's king and d4-pawn are on the same diagonal, but the bishop is currently unable to pin and pick up the pawn. The correct way to go is 23 ♖xd4! ♖xd4 24 ♙e3 and White will be a pawn up with a dominating position thanks to his kingside pawns.

23...♖b4

Though White is still better, Black still has some counterplay and eventually the game ended in a win for Black on move 58.

252) B.Li-E.Song, Columbus 2014

It is important to remember that recaptures are often automatically played in a practical game but are sometimes not a good idea. Here White may have forgotten that, as the d8-rook is eyeing White's queen, the d6-bishop is free to basically go anywhere.

19...♙xg3! 20 fxg3?

There's no need to give up the queen. After 20 ♙e2 ♙xh2+ 21 ♙g2 and White can still fight.

20...♗xd1 21 ♙xd1 ♙d8!

Intending ...♙d5. White is dead lost and went on to lose on move 28.

253) J.Yu-C.Yip, St. Louis 2019

In endgames, one of the strongest assets to have is an outside passed pawn. Here White has an outside passer on a6, but the Black bishop guards it. Thus, White should create another passed pawn.

50 f5!

Black cannot prevent the h-pawn from being a passed pawn.

50...g5 51 h5 ♖f8 52 h6

The black bishop and king are stuck, so all White needs to do is bring the king to g6, allowing the h-pawn to promote. Black cannot do anything about it, so she resigned.

254) M.Feng-J.Yu, St. Louis 2019

Black had a lost position a move before, but...

37 ♖xc6

...was a careless move by White that completely turned the tables. Black's only way of getting counterplay is an attack on the king. Thus, the correct solution is...

37...hxg3+ 38 fxg3 f4!

Somewhat surprisingly White has no defense to Black's newly created attack.

39 ♖c7

This leads to mate, but 39 g4 f3 does not help anyway

39...♖xg3+ 40 ♔g1 ♜d1 mate

255) G.Song-A.Adriaanse, Ottawa 2013

66 ♔d2??

A horrific, careless blunder. Instead 66 ♖b3 simply wins, of course. For example, 66...♖b6 67 ♖b4 ♖b7 68 a5 ♖c7 69 ♖c5 ♖b7 70 a6+ ♖c7 71 ♔f1 ♖c8 72 ♖b6 and wins.

66...f1 ♖ 1/2-1/2

256) D.Naroditsky-C.Matamoros, Las Vegas 2014

The king and pawn endgame is easily winning for White.

39 ♜xd7+ ♔xd7 40 ♙b5+ ♔e7 41 ♙xe8 ♖xe8 42 fxe5 fxe5 43 ♔d3 1-0

Black cannot stop White's king from entering the queenside and keep tabs on the g5 break. He has no time to get in f6.

257) Z.Dukic-M.Plotkin, Kingston 2019

Black was completely lost for much of this game, but one important thing to do in a lost position is to look for counterplay.

30...♖e2!

Invading the White camp with dangerous threats. From here on, although White is still better, Zach was completely flustered, and the tables were turned within the next few moves.

31 ♗c4?

Panic. 31 ♗xg7 ♗d2! forces White to start defending with 32 ♖f3 (32 ♗h2 misplaces the rook, e.g. 32...♗d1+ 33 ♗xd1 ♖xd1+ 34 ♖f1 [34 ♖f2 ♗d8! with counterplay] 34...♖d4+ 35 ♖h1 ♖xg7) 32...♖xg7 33 ♖xe2 ♗xe2 and White is no longer winning.

31 ♗xf8 is the best move but after 31...♗xf8 the e5-pawn will fall and Black will still have counterplay, despite being clearly worse.

31...♖xc2 32 ♗c1? ♖xb2

Now Black has even equalized.

33 ♗xg7? ♗d2!

Cutting the queen from defending the rook on c1 while at the same time attacking g2. White is now lost.

34 ♖f1 ♖d4+ 35 ♖h2 ♖xe5+ 0-1

258) E.Song-S.Ramer, Wheeling 2019

We should always be mindful of our opponent's threats. At the same time some threats can be ignored. It is our job to evaluate what threats we can ignore and see if we should pursue our own plans.

48 d7! ♖xf2+ 49 ♖h1

Black has no attack and not even checks, while the d-pawn cannot be prevented from promoting, so Black resigned.

259) T.Krnan-L.McShane, Toronto 2010

Black's pieces are all in their optimal positions. The rooks are stacked on the c-file and the queen is active, so it is the best time for a pawn break in the center.

30...d5! 31 ♗a1 dxc4 32 ♗xa4 cxd3

Black easily converted the pawn-up position.

33 ♗d4 ♗c1 34 ♗xc1 ♗xc1+ 35 ♗gf1 e5 36 ♗c4 ♗xc4 37 ♗xc4 exf4 38 ♗xb6 ♗c5 39 ♗c4 ♗xe4 40 ♗fd2 ♗d5 41 ♗b2 ♗e3 42 ♗f3 d2 43 b6 ♗g7 44 h4 ♗f6 0-1

260) E.Karp-E.Song, Nashville 2017

White is slightly worse because of his weaker king, but the position is not easy to win for Black if White just stays solid.

32 ♖xa7?

Even if this move does not outright lose (which it does), such a move should never be considered. It is intuitively never a good idea to allow Black to play 32...♗e2+ with serious threats to the white king. This is even the case when it wins a pawn and especially when White was in time trouble.

Thus, the point of this puzzle is to recognize that sometimes outright calculation isn't the best way to judge a position, and you need a certain amount of intuition to understand the dangers of risky moves as well. 32 ♖c2 would have been playable.

32...♗e2+ 33 ♖h1 ♖xb3?

Missing 33...♗h5 which wins the game immediately.

34 ♖a8+?

After 34 ♖a3 ♖xa3 35 ♗xa3 ♗e3 (35...♗b2 36 ♗c8+) 36 ♗c4 ♗xf3 White can still try to draw the endgame.

34...♗g7 35 g4

Now 35 ♖a3 does not work because of 35...♗xa3 36 ♗xa3 ♗b2 and there is no check on c8.

35...♗b2?

Allowing White to escape.

36 ♖d5?

36 ♗xb2 ♖xb2 37 ♖a1! ♗xh2+ 38 ♗g1 gives White chances to hold.

36...♗xc1 37 ♖d4+ ♗h6 38 g5+ ♗g5 39 ♖g1

White resigned before Black could play 39...♖xf3+.

261) M.Kleinman-V.Pechenkin, Toronto 2010**32...a5!**

Breaking up White's queenside pawn structure.

33 ♗e3 ♗xg2+! 34 ♗f3

34 ♗xg2 ♗d3+ recovers the piece.

34...♗h4+ 35 ♗e2 axb4 36 ♗xb4 ♗f5 37 ♗h3 ♗d4+ 38 ♗f2 ♗f5 39 ♗e3 ♗xb3 40 ♗xb3 ♗c2

Black has too many extra pawns and eventually converted the opposite-colored bishop and rook ending on move 63.

262) A.Yermolinsky-K.Kavutskiy, Las Vegas 2014**23 ♗d4! ♗c5 24 f4**

This has ideas of breaking with b4, f5, and bringing a piece to e6. White has a dominating position and won shortly.

263) S.Lipnowski-G.Melamedoff, Winnipeg 2010

White is threatening to capture the knight and if it moves, White plans ♖c3, forking the two Black rooks.

23...♖dd2!

This move defends.

24 ♖h2 ♖c2 25 ♖d1 ♗g3

Suddenly Black is much better. After some inaccuracies, Black lost his newfound advantage and drew the game on move 59.

264) J.Peng-G.Song, Kitchener 2014

24...♗f6!

With the simple but deadly threat of 25...♗g5.

25 ♖e4

25 ♗xh4 loses to 25...♗xh4 26 ♖h1 ♖h3+ while after 25 ♖h1 ♗g5 26 ♖xh4 ♖xh4 27 ♖e4 ♖h3 wins the exchange and keeps a strong attack.

25...♗g5 26 ♖f2 ♖xg3+ 0-1

265) B.Avrukh-J.Cao, Arlington 2015

19 ♗a4!

Bringing the knight to the outpost on c5.

19...♗f6

Sacrificing a pawn with 19...c5 to trade off his rotten bishop was a better try. After 20 ♖xb7 ♗xb7 21 ♗xc5 White is slightly better.

20 ♗c5

Positionally winning. White's pieces are better, he has many targets to go after and Black has no counterplay.

20...♗d5 21 b3 ♗d6 22 e3 a5 23 ♖d2 ♖a8 24 ♖ac1 ♖fc8 25 f3 ♗b4 26 ♖xb4 axb4 27 ♗d2 ♖c7 28 ♖c2 ♖c8 29 f4 ♖d7 30 ♗xb4 1-0

266) G.Song-J.Cai, Guelph 2015

23 bxc5!

Sacrificing an exchange to take the initiative and create two dangerous passed pawns.

23 ♖xc5 is also good and leads to a similar position after 23...dxc5 24 bxc5 ♗xc5 25 b4.

23...♗xa5 24 b4 ♗d8 25 cxd6 ♗xd6 26 c5

Black has no counterplay, and White plans to steamroll the passed pawns down the board. White eventually won on move 37.

267) S.Sevian-M.Roiz, Santa Clara 2014**35...g5+!**

A key zwischenzug before taking the pawn on a2. This prevents the passed h-pawn from becoming a problem and forces White's king back.

35...♖xa2? would give White a far-advanced outside protected passed pawn on the sixth rank and throw away most of Black's advantage, e.g. 36 h6 ♗c5 37 ♖d4 ♗h2 38 g5 favors Black.

36 ♖g3 ♖xa2 37 h6 ♖a8 38 ♖b4 ♗xe5 39 ♖xb7+ ♖f6 40 h7 ♗h8 41 ♗e4 ♗g6

Black converted this position and won on move 62.

268) T.Kung-S.Thavandiran, Burlingame 2019

White's d-pawn is about to promote and Black can't prevent this. But just because White will have two queens doesn't mean he will win! In fact, his king will be defenseless.

29...♗xf3!

Ignoring White's d-pawn.

30 ♖g8+ ♖xg8 31 d8♖+ ♖g7

White's queens are so far from the real battle that they are unable to do anything. This demonstrates that piece quality is more important than how much the piece is worth in material terms.

32 gxf3 ♖b1 33 ♖xb1 ♖xb1+ 34 ♖h2 ♖b2 0-1

269) A.Bayar-E.Song, Wheeling 2018

Here Black had just a few seconds to reach move 40. He is already up a pawn so it's a good idea to consolidate.

38...♖xb2?

There was no need to be greedy and allow White chances. Black should start by disturbing the White knight with 38...h5!. After 39 ♖xf8+ ♖xf8 40 ♗e5 ♖xb2 41 ♗g6+ ♖f7 42 ♗e5+ ♖f6 43 ♗xc6 ♗e6 Black has good chances to grind this endgame to a win.

39 h4! ♗f7??

This is the real blunder. But by now it isn't so easy for Black to come up with a move. The computer gives 39...♗e4 as the best way to sacrifice the knight but this is a hard move to see. After 40 ♖xf8+ ♖xf8 41 fxe4 ♖xa2 the game is approximately equal.

40 ♖e7

Now White gets an attack, wins the knight, and went on to win.