The Thinking Process in Chess

Exercises and Insights from a Coach's Perspective

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Graphic Artist: Dirk Dewitte

ISBN: 9789493435247
D/2026/31732/12

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All sales or enquiries should be directed to Thinkers Publishing, 9850 Landegem, Belgium.

E-mail: info@thinkerspublishing.com
Website: www.thinkerspublishing.com

First edition 2026 by Thinkers Publishing.
This book is printed on environmentally friendly paper.

The Thinking Process in Chess

Exercises and Insights from a Coach's Perspective

Lukasz Jarmula

Thinkers Publishing 2026

Key to Symbols

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

Table of Contents

Key to Symbols 4
Preface 6
Introduction 7

PART I
– Warm-up Exercises 1-50 11
– Warm-up Solutions 1-50 25
– Warm-up Exercises 51-100 35
– Warm-up Solutions 51-100 49

PART II
– Complexity Level 1 Puzzles 59
– Complexity Level 1 Solutions 69

PART III
– Complexity Level 2 Puzzles 103
– Complexity Level 2 Solutions 111

PART IV
– Complexity Level 3 Puzzles 141
– Complexity Level 3 Solutions 147

PART V
– Warm-down Exercises 1-50 183
– Warm-down Solutions 1-50 197
– Warm-down Exercises 51-100 207
– Warm-down Solutions 51-100 221

Preface

Dear reader,

I present to you an exercise book based on years of my work as a chess coach. I chose the positions presented as exercises here from the database of original training materials that I have created for the purposes of my private coaching sessions. I have worked on almost all of these positions with my students, and hence I had a good idea when writing this book of what the moves commonly suggested by players are/ what difficulties they tend to face, and I included that knowledge in the solutions.

This, I hope, is a major advantage of this book. The exercises are not presented "in a void", but based on experience. I strived for the solutions to be maximally explanatory both in terms of variations, and descriptions.

The purpose of this book is to provide a resource to aid the development of chess skill for advanced players. The benefits can be twofold:

- First, the exercise of concrete calculation and evaluation skill by solving the positions;
- Second, the absorption of more general concepts provided in the solutions on the basis of concrete examples.

I always try to take a specific example and not only explain it in itself, but also try to help the reader see what lessons for chess thinking processes in general can be derived from it. There is not a single overarching theme these exercises are supposed to illustrate, but the recurring motif is striving for optimal activity above all. This, in my evaluation, is not so much the feature of these specific positions, but rather a result of the nature of chess as a game; one that always turns out to reward active and attacking play above purely material or defensive concerns.

Introduction

The warm-up/warm-down chapters comprise 200 positions with relatively simple, self-explanatory winning or drawing combinations, with rather linear variations. You are advised to solve a few of these positions every time before approaching the main part of the book to get into good thinking rhythm.

The main part of the book consists of 75 exercises on 3 Complexity Levels, based on 47 different games. Some exercises are continued in later or earlier exercises, and they are presented with references at some distance from each other, in order not make the reader overly suggestible and try to deduce things about the earlier position from by the later position, or vice-versa.

You are presented with the position and the side to move and you have to make a decision as if in a practical game, without additional suggestions or preemptive knowledge of what you are supposed to achieve. The suggested thinking time for Level 1 is 10 min, for Level 2 - 20 min, for Level 3 - 30 min. If you're confident you have got the solution in less time, you can try to immediately check the solution, but it is not recommended. Usually there are enough nuances to still sit and think patiently and figure out the details, even when you think you have it all figured out.

Always remember that the point of these exercise is not merely to see the right first move and count it as a success, but rather to take a responsible decision based on seeing as deeply into the position as possible and needed. But if you really see all the major points of a certain position in a fraction of the alloted time, then all I can say is congratulations, you may be a really talented player.

Let me clarify the main ideas behind behind this format.

First of all, I'm a big proponent of simulating practical playing conditions in training. The situation when you know there is a win or a draw to be

achieved and are looking for it from the start is artificial – in a game you never have that guidance. To best improve real practical skill, I favour ”side to move, no extra knowledge” type of exercises.

Why Complexity Levels and not Difficulty Levels and what is the difference? Again, the idea is to optimally help in improvement of practical thinking and decision-making skills.

My concept of the Complexity Level is basically tied to how long and deep you can think in a certain position without that effort going to waste. I don’t claim that positions where I suggest the thinking time not to exceed 10 min are *easier* to make the right decision than those where I grant 30 min for thinking. Each position in this selection is challenging and intended for advanced players.

The point is rather that they aren’t complex enough to procrastinate too long on them in practical play circumstances. These are positions just above the complexity of a casual move in a classical game, which you should make in less than 5 min. They warrant a pause, but not an excessive pause. The Level 3 positions warrant a long think because there are more details to figure out, and usually the clarity as to the the evaluation and certainty as to the right path can only come to you after delving deeply into the lines. The Level 2 positions are somewhere in between Level 1 and 3.

Some of the positions could surely be thought longer about, but it is never a good idea in a game to think on a move for more than 30 min, as procractination and doubt tends to take over and the extra time tends to be wasted. You can argue than it is a bit different case in training. But my idea for this training material is to simulate practical, classical game decision-making, hence my suggestion not to exceed 30 min. Nevertheless I acknowledge that the material in this book could just as well be interpreted in a different format.

Good luck and may the book help you substantially in your chess progress!

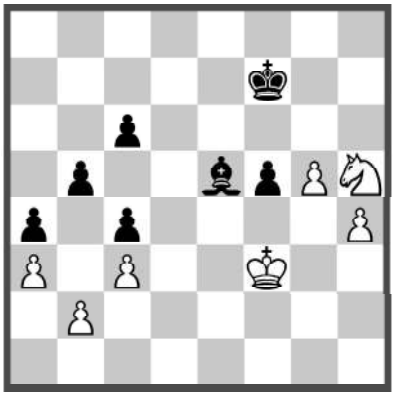
Lukasz Jarmula, 2026

1

Warm-up Exercises
1-50

🕮 1

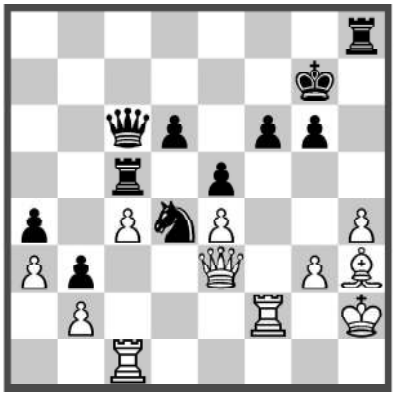
Quparadze, G. – Thybo, J.



■ 1...? –+

🕮 2

Popov, I. – Nepomniachtchi, I.



□ 1.? =

🕮 3

Vachier Lagrave, M. – Nepomniachtchi, I.

□ 1.? +–

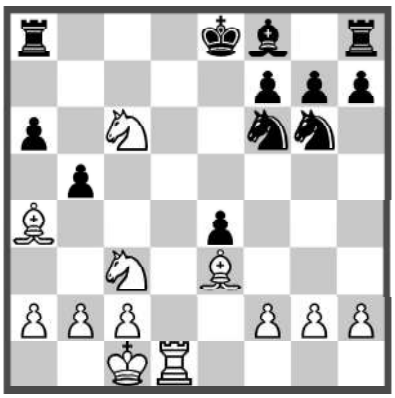
🕮 4

Vachier Lagrave, M. – Nepomniachtchi, I.

□ 1.? +–

📖 5

Jobava, B. – Oleksienko, M.



☐ 1.? +–

📖 6

Jobava, B. – Oleksienko, M.

☐ 1.? +–

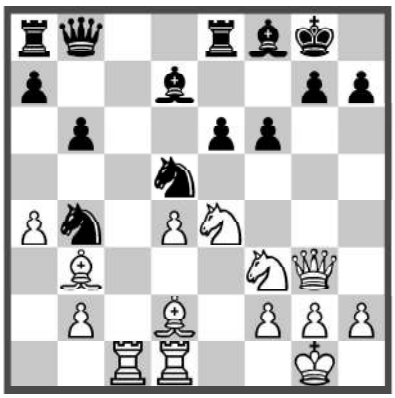
📖 7

Abdusattorov, N. – Giri, A.

☐ 1.? +–

📖 8

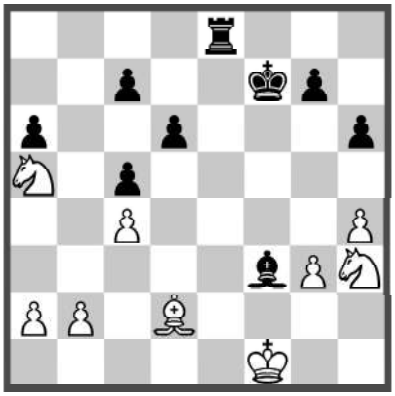
Jarmula, L. – Korpa, B.



☐ 1.? +–

📖 9

Shirov, A. – Jones, G.



■ 1...? –+

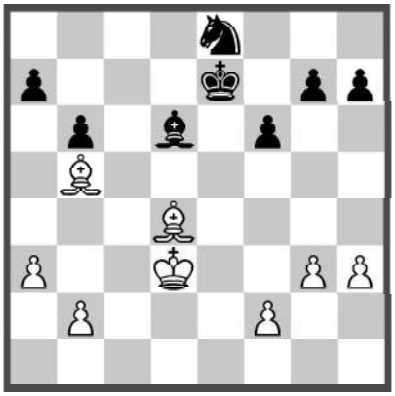
📖 10

Firouzja, A. – Bartel, M.

□ 1.? =

📖 11

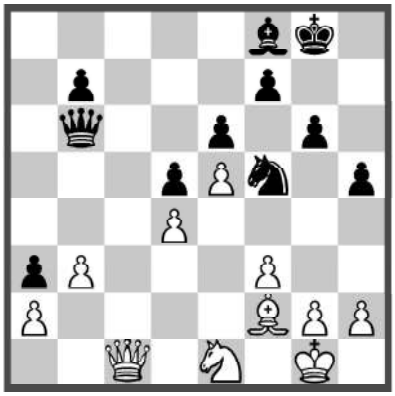
Wojtaszek, R. – Noy, E.



□ 1.? +–

📖 12

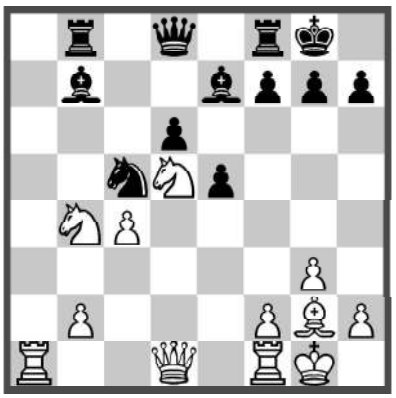
Antal, H. – Nisipeanu, L.



■ 1...? –+

📖 13

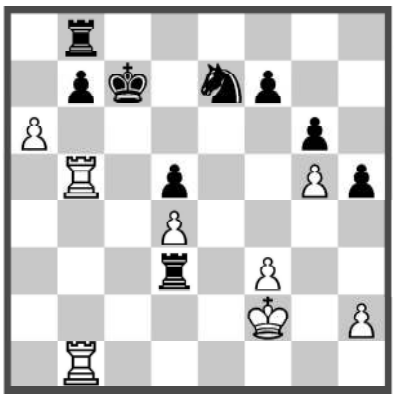
Tari, A. – Nemec, J.



☐ 1.? +–

📖 14

Ivanchuk, V. – Travadon, L.



☐ 1.? +–

📖 15

Salimova, N. – Petkov, M.

■ 1...? –+

📖 16

Boyer, M. – Koutlas, N.

☐ 1.? +–

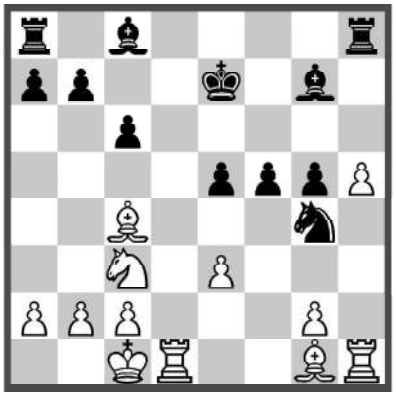
🕮 17

Brunello, S. – Kossobudzki, R.

■ 1...? –+

🕮 18

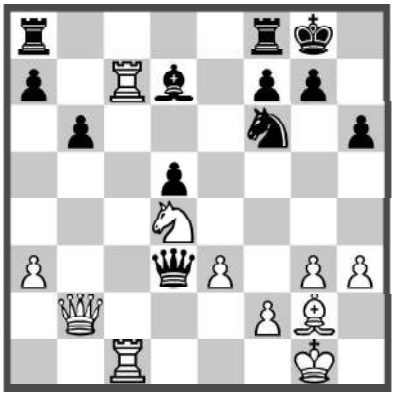
Sargsyan, S. – Klimkowski, J.



□ 1.? =

🕮 19

Kuzubov, Y. – Godena, M.



□ 1.? +–

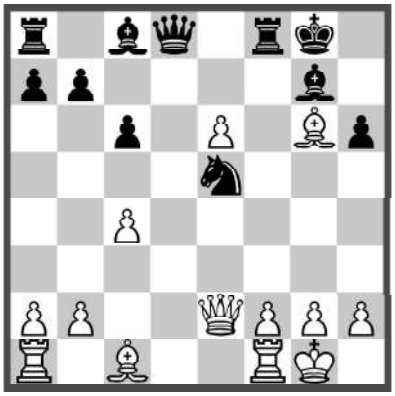
🕮 20

Magold, F. – Andersen, M.

■ 1...? =

📖 21

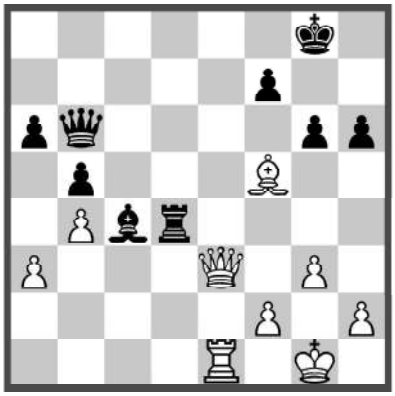
Vagman, R. – Paichadze, L.



☐ 1.? =

📖 22

Ivanchuk, V. – Ilko-Toth, A.



☐ 1.? +–

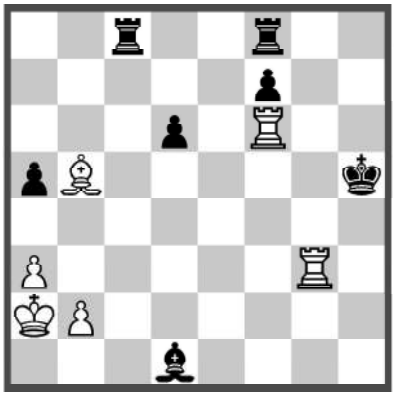
📖 23

Maurizzi, M. – Filindash, N.

☐ 1.? +–

📖 24

Can, I. – Przybylski, B.



☐ 1.? +–

📖 25

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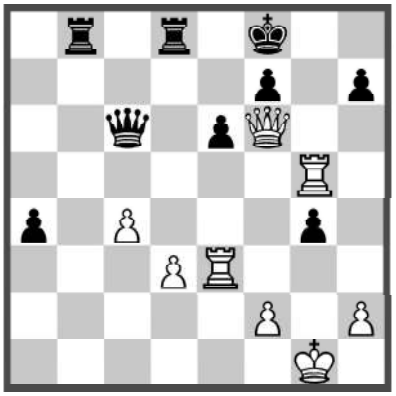
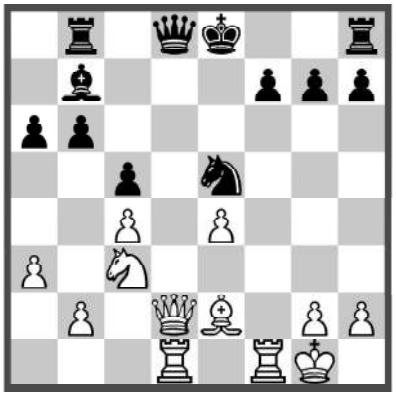


☐ 1.? +–

📖 26

Can, E. – Drazic, S.



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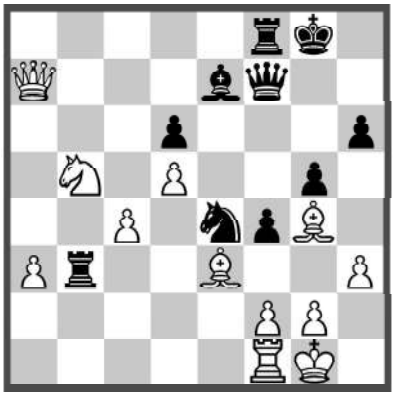
📖 27

Ringuet, N. – Razafindratsima, T.



■ 1...? –+

📖 28

Piorun, K. – Pycinski, W.

☐ 1.? +–

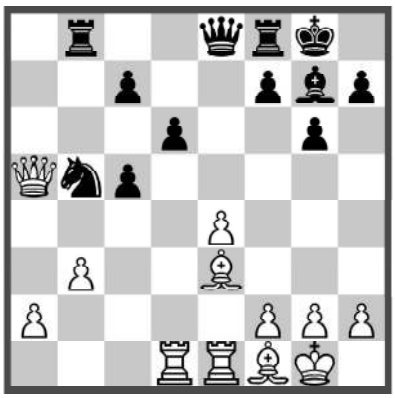
📖 29

Bitbol-Delaveyne, M. – Davtyan, A.

☐ 1.? +–

📖 30

Akhvlediani, I. – Zhuk, I.



☐ 1.? +–

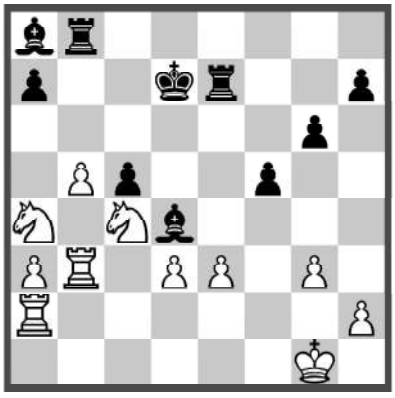
📖 31

Sieciechowicz, M. – Wasiluk, M.

☐ 1.? +–

📖 32

Ioannidis, E. – Brzezina, P.



■ 1...? –+

📖 33

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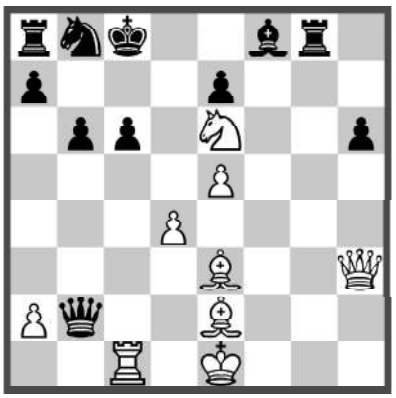

☐ 1.? +–

📖 34

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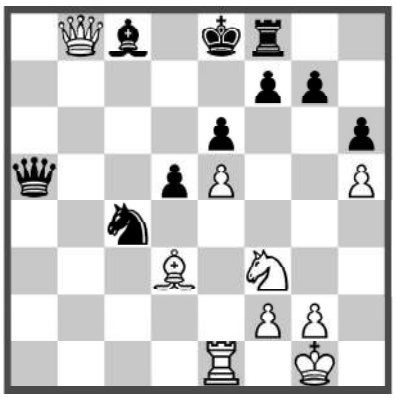

■ 1...? =

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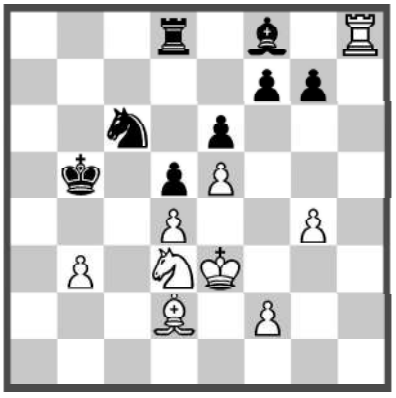
Kadric, D. – Pastar, S.



■ 1...? =

📖 36

Hakobyan, E. – Gasparyan, E.

■ 1...? +=

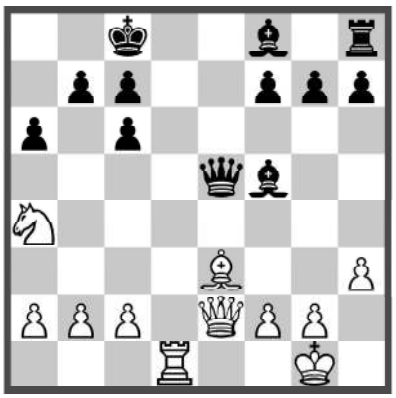
📖 37

Shirov, A. – Kuderinov, K.

☐ 1.? +–

📖 38

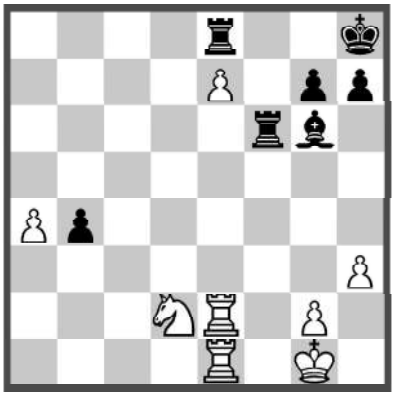
Bulmaga, I. – Atalik, E.



☐ 1.? +–

📖 39

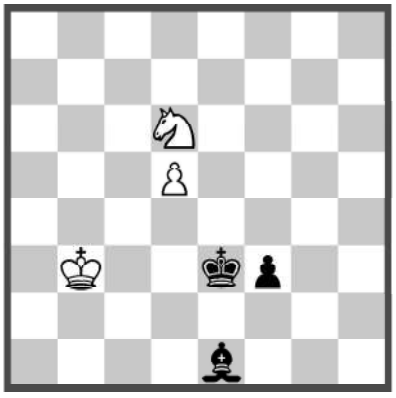
Socko, B. – Mamedyarov, S.



☐ 1.? +–

📖 40

Duda, J. – Caruana, F.



☐ 1.? =

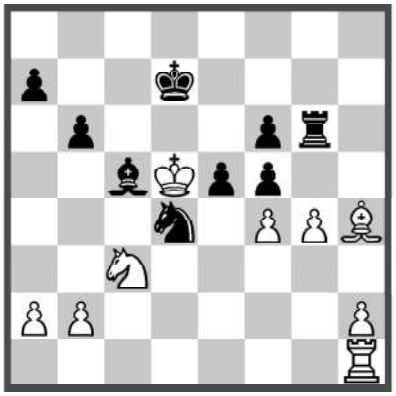
📖 41

Gibala, A. – Jarmula, L.

■ 1...? –+

📖 42

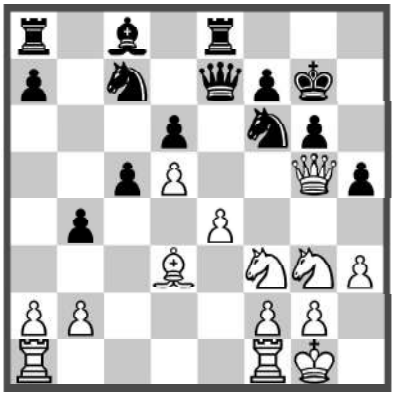
Carlsen, M. – Fedoseev, V.



■ 1...? –+

📖 43

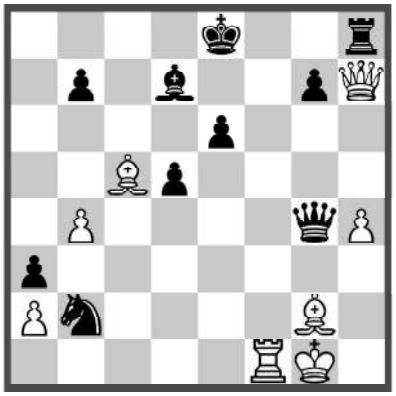
Psakhis, L. – Chatalbashev, B.



□ 1.? +–

📖 44

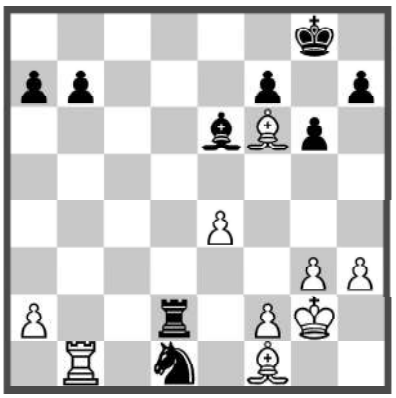
Gukesh D – Ding, L.



■ 1...? –+

📖 45

Jarmula, L. – Jocev, M.



☐ 1.? +–

📖 46

Robson, R. – Xiong, J.

☐ 1.? +–

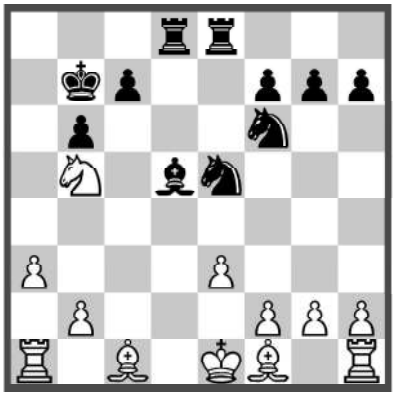
📖 47

Jarmula, L. – Koziorowicz, M.

■ 1...? –+

📖 48

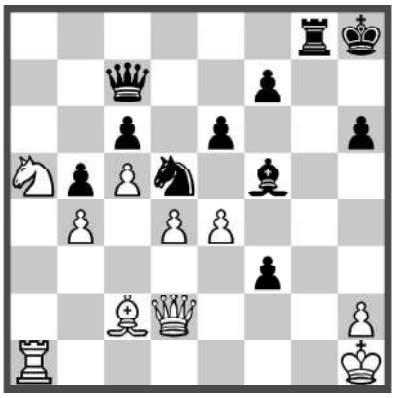
Marzano, C. – Ahmad, K.



■ 1...? –+

📖 49

Stan, A. – Lymar, V.



■ 1...? –+

📖 50

Gurel, E. – Klimkowski, J.

□ 1.? +–

1

Warm-up Solutions
1-50