## TACTICS

### FOR TACTICAL (CALCULATION) EXERCISES:

#### IDENTIFY THE TACTICAL MOTIFS
Look for patterns such as pins, forks, double attacks, discovered attacks, and skewers in the position.

#### CALCULATE VARIATIONS
Based on the tactical motifs you have identified, calculate various lines and variations to determine the best move.

#### CONSIDER THE CONSEQUENCES
Once you have calculated a few lines, evaluate the consequences of each move, and determine which line leads to the best outcome.

## STRATEGY

### FOR STRATEGIC (POSITIONAL) EXERCISES:

#### EVALUATE THE POSITION
Determine the strengths and weaknesses of both your and your opponent's position, including pawn structure, piece placement, king safety, and control of key squares.

#### IDENTIFY A PLAN
Based on your evaluation, come up with a plan that takes advantage of your strengths and exploits your opponent's weaknesses. This can involve improving the position of your pieces, controlling key squares, or creating threats.

#### CONSIDER ALTERNATIVES
Once you have a plan, consider alternative moves or variations that might also achieve your goals. Choose the move that best fits your overall plan.

# Aagaard's
# MasterClass
by **GM JACOB AAGAARD**

Photo by David Llada

**GM Jacob Aagaard** won the 2007 British Championship; but is mostly known as a trainer and writer. He co-founded Quality Chess and killerchesstraining. com. His books include the *Grandmaster Preparation* series, the *Decision Making* series with Boris Gelfand and latest *A Matter of Endgame Technique*. Jacob works day and night to help players of all levels improve their game and achieve their goals.

AAGAARD

SHANKLAND

California-based **GM Sam Shankland** is a leading American chess player. In 2018, Sam achieved several milestones, including winning the U.S. Championship, surpassing 2700 Elo, and claiming first place at the Capablanca Memorial and the American Continental Championship. He is author of two chess books from the series of *Small Steps to Giant Improvement*.

# PLAY IT ALONG WITH SAM

Get ready to take your chess skills to the next level with Jacob Aagaard's Masterclass! Each issue is packed with 12 challenging exercises − 6 tactics/calculation exercises and 6 positional/strategic exercises − carefully curated by GM Jacob Aagaard and tested by none other than GM Sam Shankland.

In early 2023, Sam and Jacob held a training camp to put these exercises to the test, using real game scenarios from the end of 2022 tournaments in Charlotte, New York, and Hollywood. You'll be facing off against some of the brightest young talents in U.S. chess, as well as established grandmasters and players.

But here's the best part: even Sam, a seasoned Grandmaster, did not solve all the exercises correctly. That means there's a real chance for you to compete with him and test your chess knowledge. Whether you're a seasoned player or a beginner looking to up your game, Jacob Aagaard's Masterclass is the perfect way to challenge yourself and become a stronger chess player.
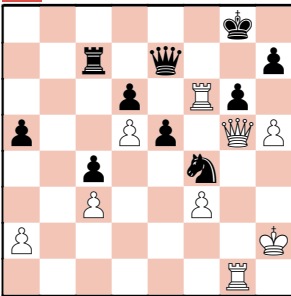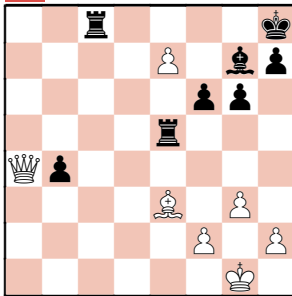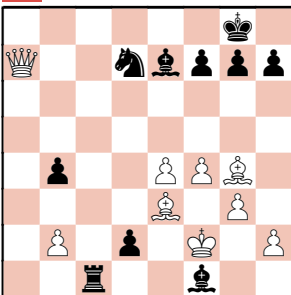
## TACTICS
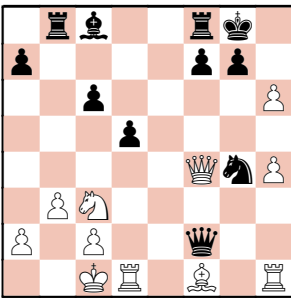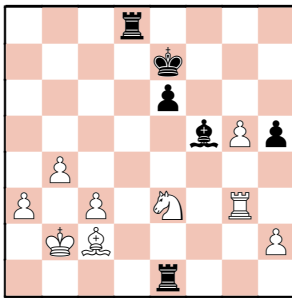
### T1 △
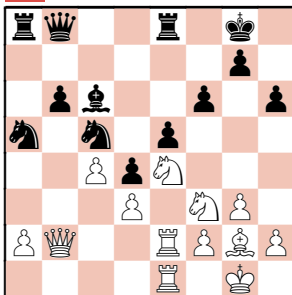### T2 ▼
### T3 △
### T4 △
### T5 ▼
### T6 △

## STRATEGY

### S1 ▼
### S2 △
### S3 △
### S4 △
### S5 ▼
### S6 △
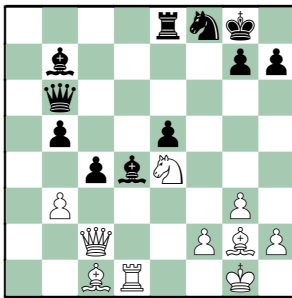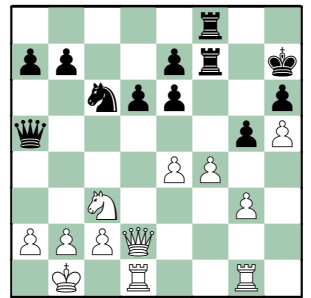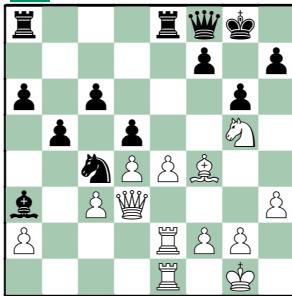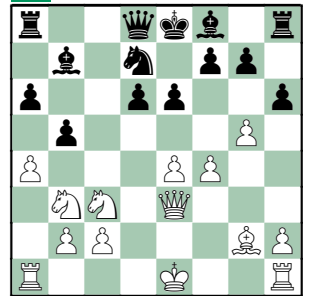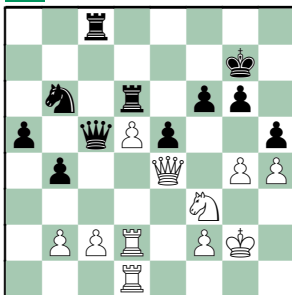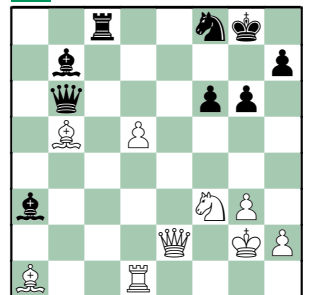
## T1

| James Canty | 2158 |
|---|---|
| Ehsan Ghaem Maghami | 2511 |

Charlotte 2022



**18.h7**+! Canty is a dangerous attacking player, a great streamer and promoter of our game, as well as an all-round lovely guy. I don't think his Iranian opponent felt loved here though...
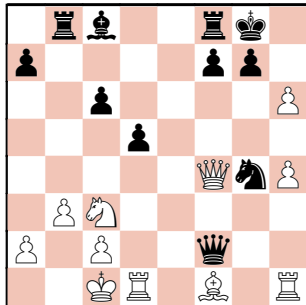
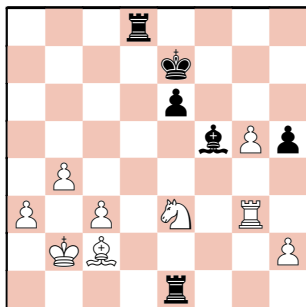18.♕xb8?? ♗f5 was Black's not too subtle idea.
**18...♔h8** 18...♔xh7 19.♗d3+ and there is no ...♗f5 with a threat of mate.
**19.♕xb8 ♘e3 20.♗d3 ♘xd1 21.♖xd1 ♕c5 22.♘e2 1-0**

## T2

| Michael Bodek | 2427 |
|---|---|
| Viktor Gazik | 2564 |

Charlotte 2022



I am not sure what went wrong for Gazik. Maybe he hoped to go a rook up?

**43...♗xc2? 44.♘xc2 ♖d2?** 44...♖e2 was stronger, but Black is doubling down.
**45.g6!** An important diversion of the black king from the queenside.
**45...♔f8 46.c4!** Preparing ♖g3-c3, after which the pawns are a-rolling. White is completely winning and only a later

blunder was to blame for the **draw** that resulted 20 moves later.

## SOLUTION

**43...♖xe3! 44.♖xe3 ♖d2** would have won a piece. We can presume that Gazik saw it, but did not feel that the conversion with a piece vs. three pawns would be effortless. He was right, of course, but Black is still completely winning, it will just take some time and accuracy – as it most often does. Sam also did not feel it was as simple as Stockfish does (+4.44), but there was nothing else that attracted him.

## T3

| Harshit Raja | 2461 |
|---|---|
| Lazaro Bruzon | 2615 |

Hollywood 2022
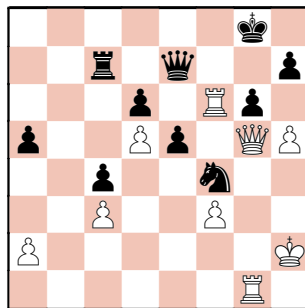


This is the first of the six training sheets presented throughout this year that Sam solved. He was jetlagged and had slept poorly, but void of excuses! In this position he made the same mistake as his young grandmaster colleague from India.

**39.hxg6?** Sam also could not make 39.♕f5 work. After 39...♘xh5 40.♖fxg6+ hxg6 41.♕xh5 it is vital for Black to find 41...♕f8!, but he had done so in advance.
**39...h6!** Sam had seen this, but decided to hope for an advantage, rather than find something better.
**40.♕f5 ♘xd5 41.♕e6+ ♕xe6 42.♖xe6 ♔g7** Black is fine and a **draw** was agreed.

## SOLUTION

Being able to see the entire board is an important skill!
**39.♖b1!** was the key move.
**39...♘xh5** seems to be the only critical move. 39...♖c8 40.hxg6 h6 41.♕f5 is hopeless.
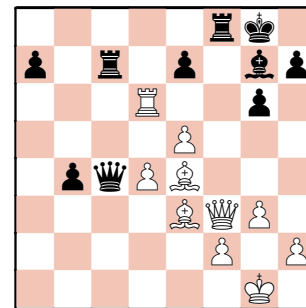
**40.♖xg6+!** is near-automatic, when after **40...hxg6 41.♕xg6+ ♘g7 42.♖b8+** White takes everything.

## T4

| Irakli Beradze | 2494 |
|---|---|
| John Burke | 2580 |

Charlotte 2022

To reach the main moment of this puzzle, it would be interesting to rewind the game several moves ago as it is certainly useful for calculation training.



Against a strong grandmaster you have to overcome several lines of defense, before you can win.
**35.♗d5+ ♔h8 36.♖f6!** A nice intermediate move.
**36...exf6 37.♗xc4 ♖xc4 38.♕d5 ♖cc8 39.e6** White is totally winning, but there is a lot of work still to do. Living on 30 seconds increment, it is still possible to make mistakes – which both players did:
**39...a5 40.♕b3!** Blocking the pawns.
**40...♖fd8 41.d5 a4!?** Black estimated that he would lose with passive defense, which is correct. White could maneuver the queen to a7 and play ♗d4 with the idea ♗xf6+, which it is hard for Black to defend against.
**42.♕xa4 ♖xd5 43.e7 ♖e5**
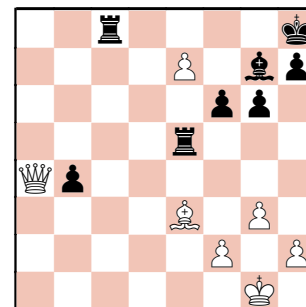
**44.♕xb4?** Missing the first win.

**44...♖e8?** 44...h5!± would make it hard for White to prove an advantage.

**45.♗c5 h5 46.♔f1?** 46.♕b6!? ♔h7 47.♕a7! was perhaps the easiest win White missed. There is no time to untangle himself and throw Black off the e-file.

**46...♖e6?** 46...f5! would have built a fortress. At some point White will have to win the exchange...
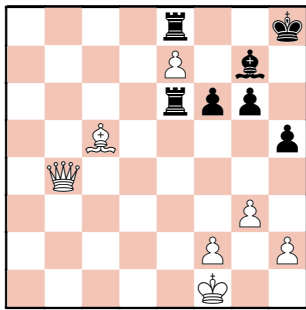


**47.♕b3?** 47.g4! would have cracked open Black's defense. The key tactical point comes after something quite far from perfect defense: 47...hxg4 48.♕xg4 f5 49.♕a4! ♖6xe7 50.♗xe7 ♖xe7 51.♕h4+ and White wins.

**47...♖6xe7 48.♗xe7 ♖xe7 49.h3 f5 50.♕d5 ♔h7 51.g4 hxg4 52.hxg4 fxg4 53.♕g2 ½-½**

## SOLUTION

**44.♕d7! ♖g8 45.♗f4!?** 45.♗d4! is simpler, but the main line is just too beautiful.

**45...♖e1+** 45...♖e4 46.f3 is over instantly.

**46.♔g2 b3 47.♗e3 b2 48.e8♕ ♖xe3!** After 48...b1♕ 49.♕xg8+ ♔xg8, it is vital to find 50.♕e6+.
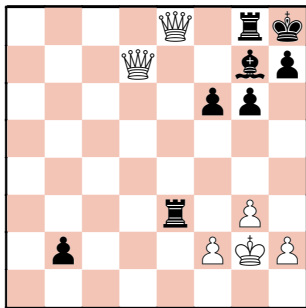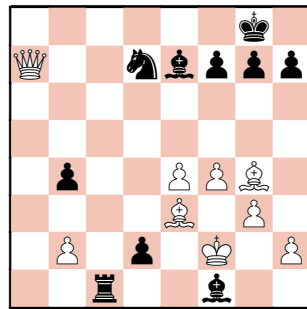


**49.♕xg6!!** The key move you would have had to see in advance.

**49...♖e7 50.♕h3** and White wins.

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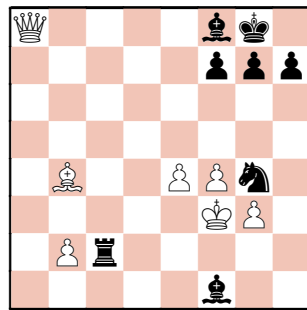**SAM MADE 3/6 ON THE TACTICS/CALCULATION PAGE**

## T5

| Terry Luo | 2365 |
|---|---|
| Daniel Naroditsky | 2617 |

Charlotte 2022



Sam fell for this trap, as did Naroditsky.

**35...♘f6?** Fortunately for Naroditsky, his opponent did not realize that this was a trap!

After **36.♕a8+? ♗f8** Black was back to his winning ways. **37.♗xd2 ♘xg4+ 38.♔f3 ♘xh2+ 39.♔e3 ♖c2 40.♗xb4 ♘g4+ 41.♔f3**



**41...h5! 42.♕xf8+ ♔h7 0-1**

Instead White had **36.♗d1!!** What a trick! After 36...♖xd1 37.♕xe7 and now 37...♘g4+ 38.♔f3 or 37...h5 38.♔f3!? (where White has ♕d8+ and ♗xd2) with full equality. Black can try for other things than a perpetual, but will be unable to prove an advantage.
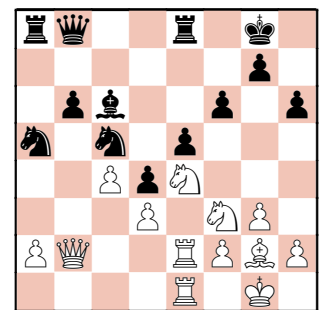
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## SOLUTION

Once you know the trap, you can find the win: **35...♗h3!! 36.♕xd7** 36.♕a8+ ♘f8 37.♗xd2 ♗c5+ will leave Black with three pieces for the queen, one of them a rook.

**36...♖f1+** Black wins.

## T6

| Oliver Barbosa | 2505 |
|---|---|
| Arthur Guo | 2432 |

New York 2022



Sam and Barbosa went for **24.♘h4? ♗xe4?!** 24...♕c7! was stronger. Black retains control over the light squares and a slight edge.

**25.♖xe4! ♘xd3?!** Risky! 25...♘ab7!? with unclear play was preferable.

**26.♕b1 ♘xe1 27.♖xe1 White** had strong compensation on the light squares and later **won** the game.

## SOLUTION

White had a great move: **24.♘xd4!! ♘xd3** Sam was not sure about this, although White has many strong continuations.

24...♗xe4?! 25.♗xe4 would just leave White a pawn up.

24...exd4 is met by 25.♘xf6+ gxf6 26.♗xc6 ♖xe2 27.♗d5+ ♖e6 after which White can either play 28.♕xd4! when everything hangs, or 28.♗xe6+ ♘xe6 29.♖xe6 with a powerful attack.

**25.♘xc6 ♘xc6 26.♕b1** White can also choose 26.♘xf6+!? gxf6 27.♕d2 ♘cb4 28.♕xh6 with a winning attack – and a few other sharp tries.

**26...♘xe1** 26...♘cb4 27.♕b3! ♘xe1 28.♖xe1 ♘a6 29.c5+ ♔h8 30.cxb6 is completely winning. The exchange is of no use, but the two passed pawns are.
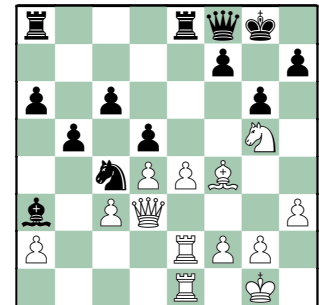
**27.♘xf6+ ♔f7** The knight cannot be captured.
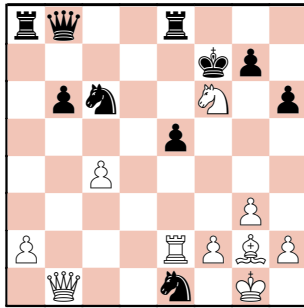
**28.♗xc6** Sam had only considered 28.♘xe8?, when 28...♘xg2 29.♕f5+ ♔xe8 30.♕e6+ ♘e7 31.♖xe5 ♕d8 holds everything together.

**28...♔xf6 29.♖xe1** White is completely winning. He can choose to regain the exchange with an extra pawn; although he may decide that the bishop is stronger than the rooks, as long as the black king is trapped in the middle. ◼

## STRATEGY

### S1

| Vladimir Belous | 2516 |
| --- | --- |
| Alexander Kaliksteyn | 2379 |

New York 2022



Black played **26...♖c8?∓** and the game was drawn.

### SOLUTION

Sam did not hesitate to point out **26...c3!−+**, when White is cramped and the b3 pawn is weaker than the b5 pawn. He was not surprised when I told him Black was close to winning.



**SAM SCORED 5/6
IN THE MIXED POSITIONS**
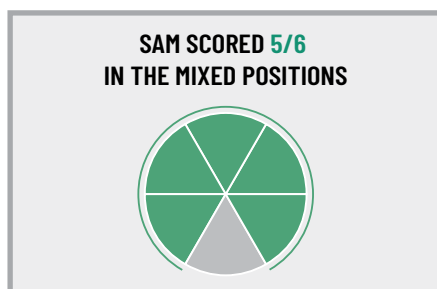
### S2

| Varun Krishnan | 2373 |
| --- | --- |
| Aryan Gutla | 2036 |

Hollywood 2022
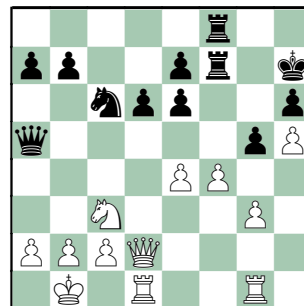


White stands better in more than one way. In the game he played **21.♕d3?**, when after **21...♕a6** much of his advantage had gone. Strongest now was perhaps 22.♘b5!?, and not **22.♕d2±**, as played in the game. In either case, White is only marginally better. He later **lost**.

### SOLUTION

I found the solution automatically, as did Sam. White has to "attack the strongest square".

**21.e5!** The idea is 21...dxe5 22.fxg5, with destruction of the kingside.

Sam wondered about **21...gxf4 22.gxf4 dxe5** as well. Here 23.♖g6 is strong, but his intended **23.♕g2 ♔h8 24.♕g6 ♖h7** "is fantastic, although I did not see an immediate mate." Now **25.♘e2!?** is entirely winning.

### S3

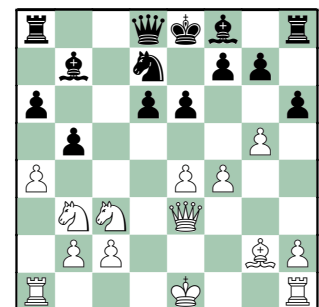| Zurab Javakhadze | 2479 |
| --- | --- |
| Emilio Cordova | 2554 |

Hollywood 2022



**22.e5!±** "100% automatic," Sam said. White takes control of important squares on the kingside and cuts off the black minor pieces from the defense, leaving Black in grave danger.

**22...f6?!** A big concession, weakening the king. But it is hard to sit and wait while White advances on the kingside, and continuations such as 22...h6 23.♘f3 g5 24.♗g3 ♕g7 25.♘h2 look miserable.

**23.exf6 ♖xe2 24.♕xe2 ♕xf6 25.♕g4!** **White** has a big advantage and **won** by move 43.

### S4

| Nicholas Vettese 2310 |
| --- |
| Josiah Stearman 2377 |

New York 2022



**White won** a tumultuous game after **15.axb5? hxg5 16.f5** in 43 moves. At this point strongest was 16...♗e7!, when Black would have stood a little better.
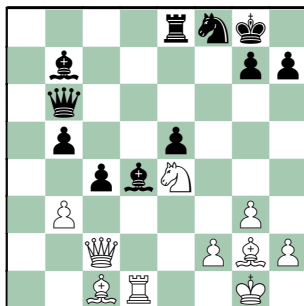
### SOLUTION

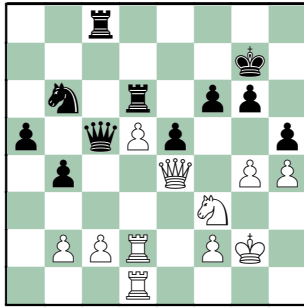Sam felt the same as me, that White had to play **15.g6!**, when the only move we

could think White was fearful of was: **15...♛h4+** Not 15...fxg6?! when 16.♕g3 ♔f7 17.0-0-0 looks totally overwhelming. **16.♔d2**, and now after **16...fxg6** 17.axb5 or **16...♝e7** 17.♘a5, White has a big advantage in an admittedly chaotic position.

## S5

| Jagadeesh Siddharth | 2407 |
|---|---|
| Ryo Chen | 2269 |

Charlotte 2022

"This one was more difficult," Sam said. Ryo played **29...♕c4?**, missing **30.♘d4!**, when White was back in the game. After **30...♖cd8 31.gxh5** and a few additional moves, the game was **drawn**. 31...♔h8! would have been strongest here, when Black is a bit better.

## SOLUTION
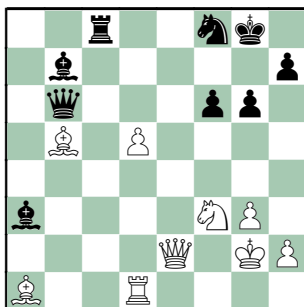
Despite the difficulty, Sam found the best way to play: **29...hxg4 30.♕xg4 ♖h8!**, when Black is in control and White's position full of weaknesses. For example: **31.b3 ♕c8!** and Black has a winning advantage.

## S6

| Oliver Barbosa | 2505 |
|---|---|
| Kassa Korley | 2400 |

New York 2022

White missed the chance to strike and instead played **32.♝c4?!**, when after **32...♕d6** Black is under some pressure (33.h4!), but in charge of a defensible position. After **33.♝b3 White** soon **won**, but 33...♘d7! would have been completely even.

## SOLUTION

**32.d6!**

● After **32...♝xd6** White will take on f6 with a clear advantage. Sam was dreaming of some big sacrificial attack, but could not make it work (because it was junk). But the variation the players were thinking about must have been the following highly entertaining mess: **33.♝xf6 ♔f7** "The only move." **34.♝d4 ♕c7 35.♔g1** gives White a winning attack. After **35...♕c2** he can for example play **36.♘g5+ ♔g8 37.♕xc2 ♖xc2**
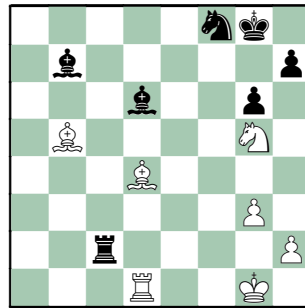
**38.♝a4!** Curiously, Sam wanted to put the king on h3 in this line, but then ...♝c8+ would lead to mate. Nothing similar exists here. But this decision could be changed along the way, when we are closer. **38...♖g2+ 39.♔f1 ♝d5 40.♝c3** winning.

● On the other hand, I am sure that the players were focused entirely on a different continuation, which Sam at first ignored. **32...♝xf3+!?** Certainly the critical move. **33.♔xf3 ♕b7+** It seems as if Black has counterplay. It would not be far-fetched to assume that both players believed Black was fine, as the refutation comes by a telegram from hell... **34.♔g4!** White has no advantage after 34.♔f2 ♝c5+ 35.♝d4 ♝xd4+ 36.♖xd4 ♕b6, when the black king is safe. 37.♝c4+ ♔h8 38.♕e3 ♘d7!? followed by ...♘e5, for example. **34...h5+ 35.♔h4!** 35.♔h3 ♘h7! and

Black has a lot of counterplay. 36.d7 ♘g5+ 37.♔h4 ♘f3+! is the big point. White has to agree to a draw, as 38.♕xf3? g5+ would lose the queen with check. **35...g5+** 35...♘h7 36.d7 and White will win.
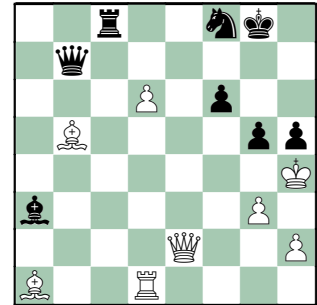
**36.♔xh5!** Incredibly the white king is entirely safe, and faced with plenty of threats all Black can do is to check him back. Not 36.♔h3?? g4+ 37.♔h4 ♘g6+ 38.♔xh5 ♖c5+! and White is checkmated. **36...♕h7+ 37.♔g4 f5+ 38.♔f3 ♕b7+ 39.♔f2!** A pawn up, White is happy to exchange bishops now. **39...♝c5+ 40.♝d4 ♝xd4+ 41.♖xd4 ♕b6**
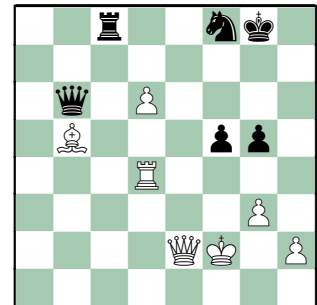
**42.♝c4+** We now see that White has not just won a pawn, he has also lured the black pawns forward. **42...♔h7 43.♕e7+ ♔g6 44.♕e3** and White is completely winning. ■

**HIS OVERALL SCORE THIS TIME WAS 8/12**