

2026 Southern Open Puzzle Sheet

by Dr. Jeremy Mandelkern,
PhD in Applied Mathematics,
USCF Candidate Master,
USAT Champion Member, 2011,
“chesscoachtaipei” on chess.com



After attempting this activity, check your solutions with the provided key and let me know how you do!

I’m so much looking forward to continuing working with you in 2026 and seeing you all continue to climb the ranks, grow stronger, and achieve your chess goals!

All the best! Sincerely, Coach M

P.S. (*) Visit my website:

http://drmtutoring.com/en_US/chess-tutoring/

for more Chess Worksheets & Resources.

Sincerely,

Dr. J. Mandelkern (Coach M)

About the Author:

Hello, My name is Dr. Jeremy Mandelkern. I hold the USCF CM Title. You can check my website http://drmtutoring.com/en_US/chess-tutoring/ for my credentials. Want a Chess Coach to put you onto the FAST TRACK TO MASTERY? Let's get started! **Book Me for a Chess Lesson HERE:** drmtutoring.teachworks.com/b/0vL0JxaKTlzlF6qLfP15QQ

I began playing tournament chess in my 20's and have since played over 150 events. I'm currently rated USCF ~2180 but my strength is likely a bit higher as evidenced by my peak chess.com ratings in Rapid (my favorite chess format) being 2400+, whereas my peak Blitz and Bullet lag behind but are still a respectable ~2400+/2200+. My most memorable chess accolade to date was playing on the winning USAT National Champions Team "Armageddon Your Pieces" in 2011 and going 2-0 in the internet playoffs. I also hold a PhD in Applied Mathematics and have taught collegiate Mathematics for ~20 years. Now a father, I am for the time-being residing in Taipei, Taiwan and am currently looking to take on chess students and share my knowledge and passion for the game. I'm a patient teacher with a broad chess opening repertoire. Feel free to add me in chess.com and follow my rapid chess G10 time control games, most of which are unrated. Some of my favorite chess players are Magnus Carlsen, Hikaru Nakamura, John Nunn, Daniel King, Tigran Petrosian, Anatoly Karpov, and Alexey Dreev.

Thanks for Reading my Profile!

Dr. Jeremy Mandelkern

Testimonials:

"I began working with Dr. M in early 2022. Since then, my rating has risen more than 200 points, and I feel much more confident in my assessment of positions and in my positional understanding at the board. I have a larger and more effective opening repertoire than when we began, and I feel my tactical eye has sharpened, as well, especially with his "voice in my head" as I calculate. Highly recommended!" -Scott C.

"Coach M has a profound knowledge and skill in chess, and his class is both interesting and informative. Coach M tailors the class to fulfill the kid's requirements in different stages, with abundant supportive materials and activities to go with the student's needs. Taking Coach M's class brings a great sense of what a "chess tournament" is when there's not many tournaments to attend in Taiwan, helping the kid to achieve the rating quickly when the opportunity comes." – Chiayi

"It's not long since Raphael started his coaching lesson with Coach M, who has been instrumental in enhancing his strategic thinking and fostering his love for chess. The lessons are not only always informative but also incredibly fun and interactive, making learning an enjoyable experience. Raphael has grown in skill and confidence, thanks to Coach M's engaging and dedicated approach." - Jeannette

Coach M's Tip: If a puzzle position is proving too difficult, then set this position up on a physical chess board. After you've formulated your solutions for each position, check your work with the answers given in the back of the worksheet and/or by loading up the game position in an analysis board and switching on a chess engine. For each position given, the object is to either give the best move, identify the best line of play, or simply best answer the given chess question. Below is a scoring rubric.

NOTE: Some positions may have multiple solutions. This puzzle sheet has positions in the opening, middlegame, and endgame with all positions drawn from recent illustrative games played by Coach M in the 2026 Southern Open Chess Tournament. Scoring Rubric:

10/10	Super Grandmaster	Elo: 2700+
Miss only 1	Grandmaster	Elo: 2500-2700
Miss 2	International Master	Elo: 2400-2500
Miss 3	Fide Master	Elo: 2300-2400
Miss 4	Expert/Candidate/National Master	Elo: 2000-2300
Miss 5	Class B to Class A	Elo: 1600-2000
Miss 6	Class D to Class C	Elo: 1200-1600
Miss 7	Class E	Elo: 1000-1200
Miss 8 or more	Beginner	Elo: < 1000

Good Luck and Do Your Best!

1. OPENING PHASE: The “Ragozin Defense” to the queen’s pawn game (1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nf3 d5 4. Nc3 Bb4) can be one of the most effective defensive formations that black may use to minimize white’s opening edge in the queen’s pawn game (Ragozin Defense (Main Line) Statistics: ~+.15 - +.25 edge/~8% win rate gap). In this particular Ragozin game, Coach M has gained a more substantial opening edge due to opening inaccuracies played by black.

Diagrammed: Black has just blundered with Nh4?

White to play and exploit this mistake.

(Difficulty Level: Easy: 3/10)



Solution: _____

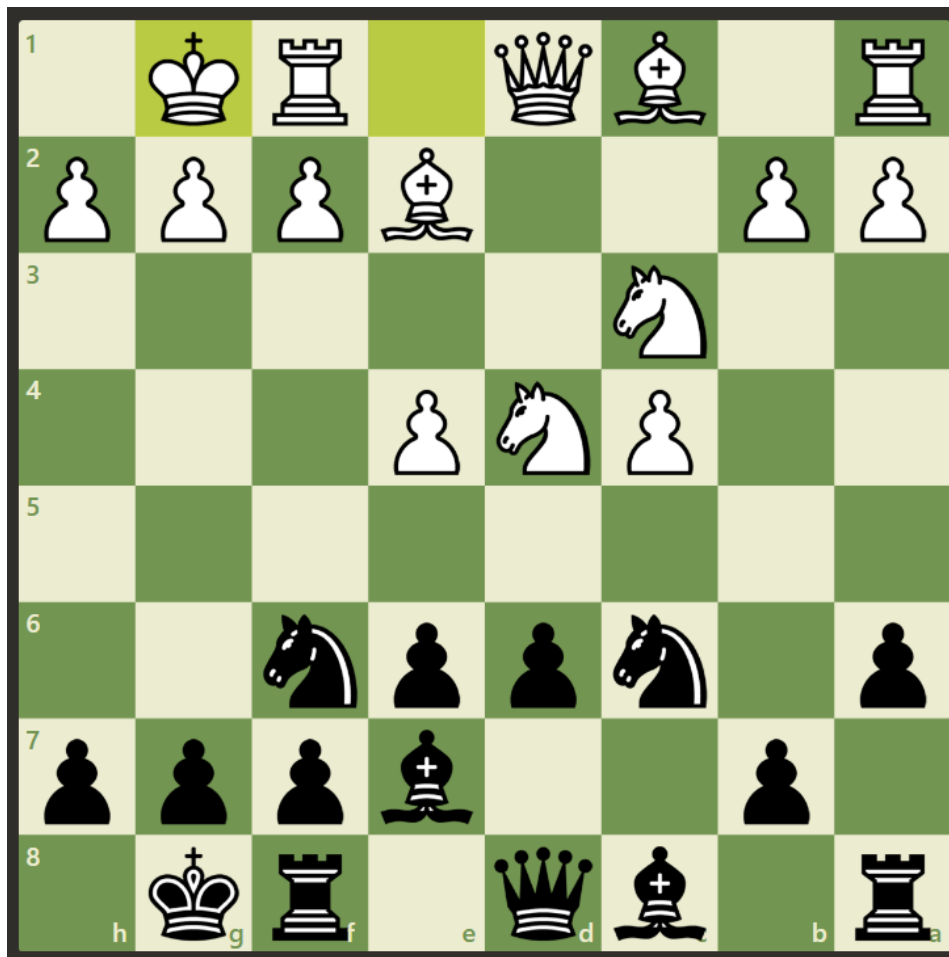
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2. OPENING PHASE: The “Maroczy Bind” transposition from the “Szen Variation” of the “Sicilian Defense” can be a formidable anti-“Taimanov” set-up (1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 e6 3. d4 cxd 4. Nxp Nc6 5. Nb5!?). Here, on move 10, Coach M had only one move that keeps white’s edge under +.5. What should black play here to keep white’s edge nominal?

Diagrammed: Maroczy Bind vs Taimanov opening position (main line).

Black to play and achieve near equality.

(Difficulty Level: Medium: 4/10)



Solution: _____

_____.

3. OPENING PHASE: One of white's most effective anti-Taimanov Sicilian set-ups involves white playing the moves Be2, 0-0, and a quick f4. This continuation usually also includes a rather peculiar 10th move for white which first appeared in the 1934 game L. Steiner vs S. Bogumir (at least according to the chess.com database). Observe the diagrammed position. What is this peculiar 10th move that white plays here to maintain an opening edge of ~+.3?

Diagrammed: An anti-Taimanov set-up (main line) with Be2, 0-0, and f4.

White to play and secure an advantageous position/opening edge ~+.3.

(Difficulty Level: Medium: 4/10)



Solution: _____

_____.

4. MIDDLE GAME PHASE: In this middle game position from a Ragozin Defense that has gone very wrong for black, Coach M, playing as white, has built up a crushing edge. How to dispatch black in the most efficient and riskless way?

Diagrammed: White has built up a crushing edge.

White to play and win in the most efficient and direct way.

(Difficulty Level: Easy: 3/10)



Solution: _____

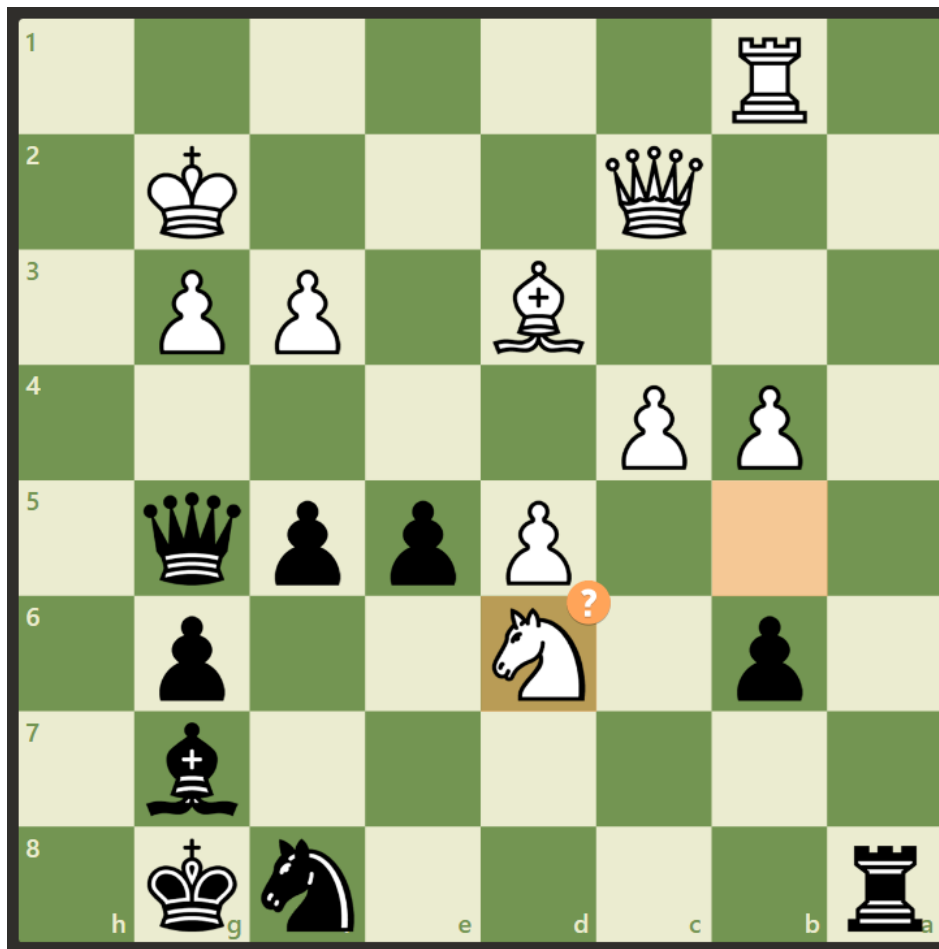
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5. MIDDLE GAME PHASE: In this late middle game position, Coach M, as black, has caught white in a nice trap with the move Qg5! which dangled a very tempting and very poisoned d-pawn lure. In time pressure, white has taken the bait with Nxd? and now black has a forced win. Can you spot the win that Coach M played here?

Diagrammed: White has just blundered with Nxd?

Black to play and win.

(Difficulty Level: Medium: 6/10)



Solution: _____

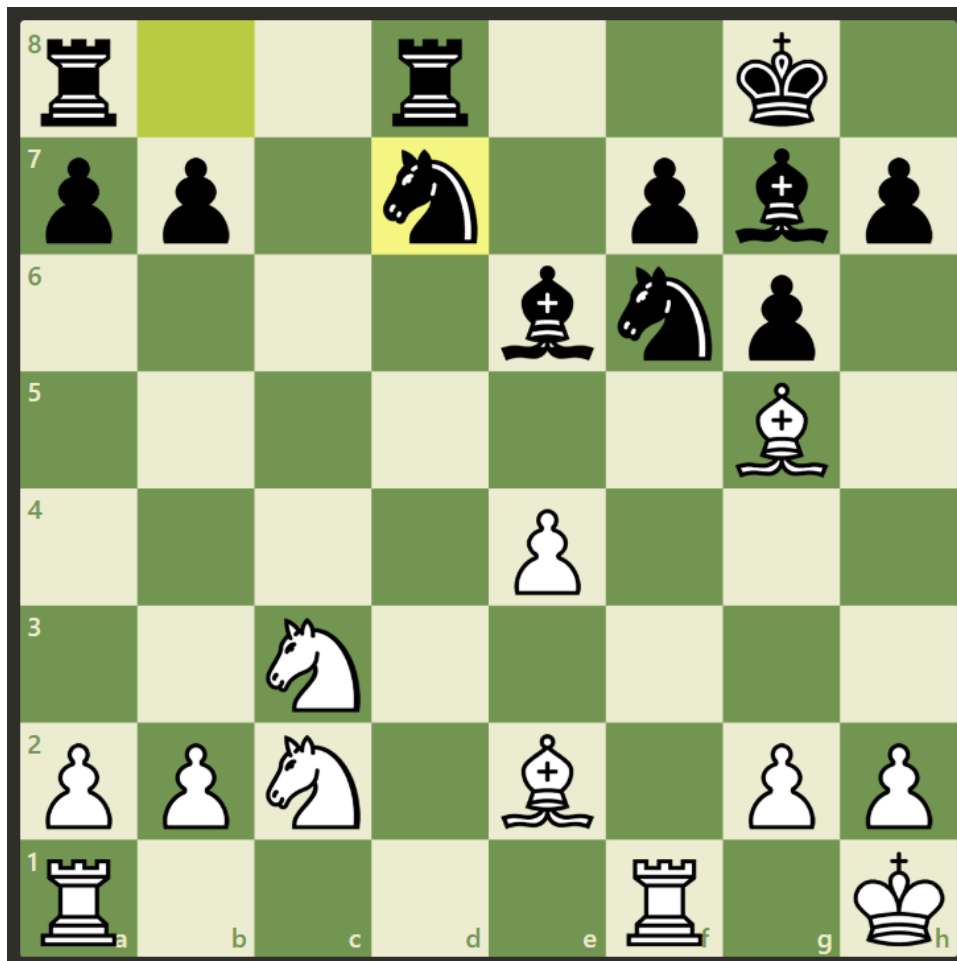
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6. MIDDLE GAME PHASE: In this early middle game position from a “Kings Indian Defense”, Coach M, playing as white, has built up a commanding edge due to some inaccuracies played by black.

Diagrammed: White has a commanding advantage by move 16.

White to play and optimize the edge. Give the best line of play for both players out to move 21. Give the computer evaluation to within +/- .5 of pawn.

(Difficulty Level: Medium: 6/10)



Solution (Best Line of Play, moves 16.-21. & evaluation): _____

_____.

7. MIDDLE GAME PHASE: In this middle game position, Coach M, playing as black, has two moves that give an advantage, one is easily winning (-3.0 edge) while the other is just a (-.50 edge). Your task is to find both moves and identify which of them is the easily winning continuation. Note: Unfortunately, Coach M played the weaker of the two moves and then went on to lose this game!

Diagrammed: Black has a winning position.

Black to play. Identify the two moves which give black an advantage and indicate which of these two moves is the winning continuation.

(Difficulty Level: Hard: 7/10)



Solution: _____

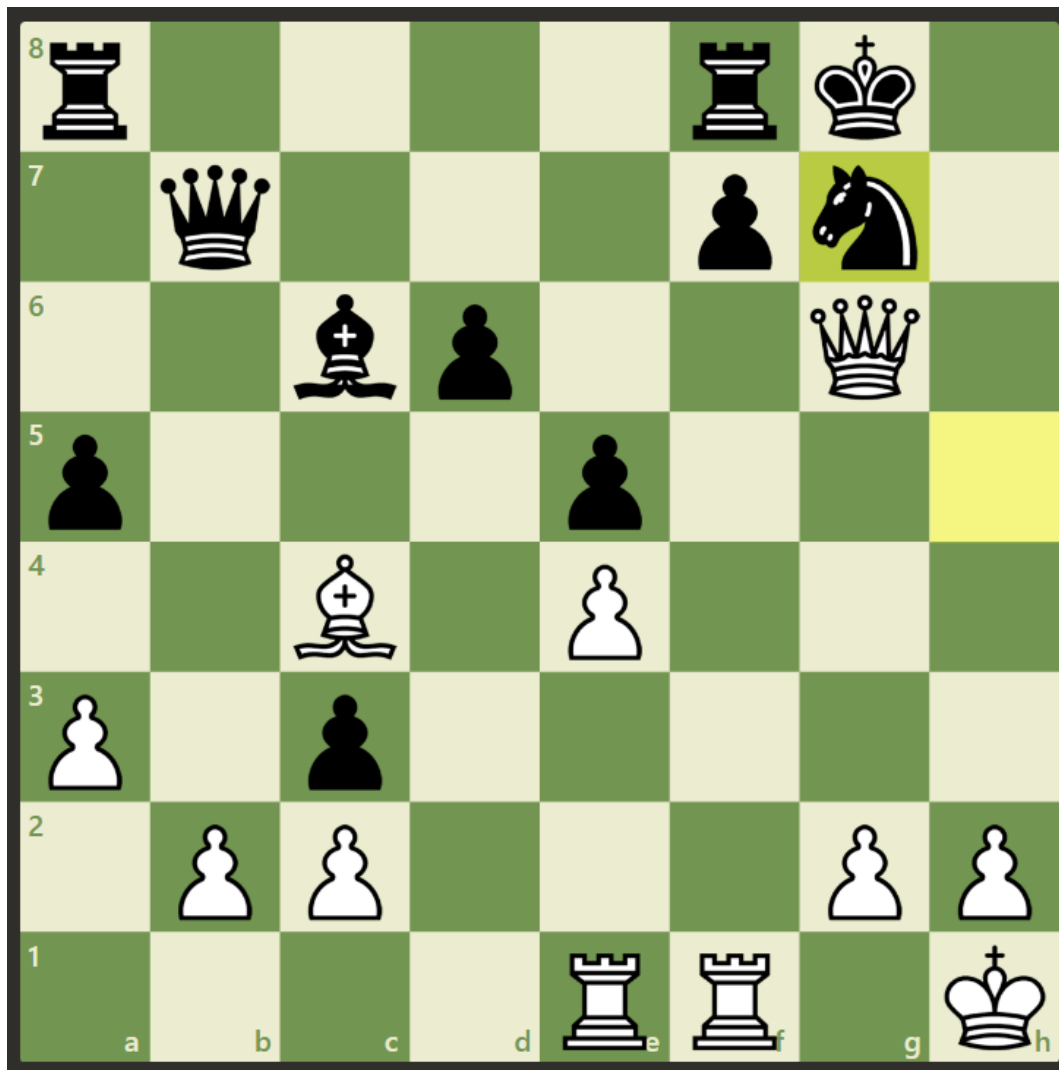
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8. ENDGAME PHASE: In this endgame position, Coach M, playing as black, has overlooked a stunning continuation which wins cleanly for white. What is the one move which wins for white here?

Diagrammed: White has a winning position.

White to play. Find the only decisive continuation.

(Difficulty Level: Very Hard: 9/10)

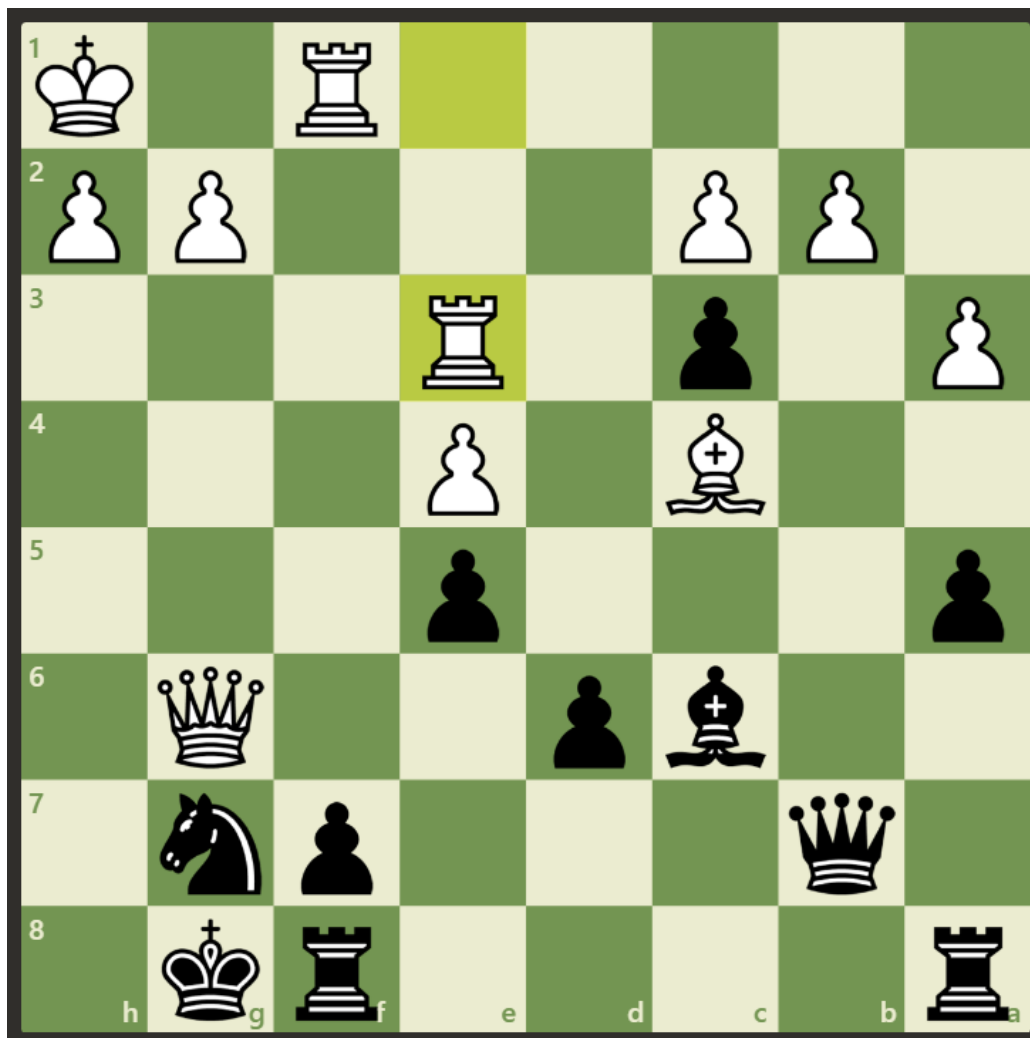


Solution: _____

9. ENDGAME PHASE: White chose the wrong continuation in the prior position and now black has a significant edge! How does black turn the tables and secure a large edge (~-1.5).

Black to play. Identify the table-turning resource that black can use to secure a large edge (~-1.5). Give the full forcing line, moves 25 through 30 for black to secure a -1.5 edge.

(Difficulty Level: Hard: 8/10)



Solution: _____

_____.

10. ENDGAME PHASE: Coach M, playing as black, has reciprocated with his own big blunder and now is totally lost to a brilliant finish.

Diagrammed: White has a stunning win in this position.

White to play. Give the brilliant forced checkmating sequence. Is it a mate in 3, 4, 5, 6, etc...?

(Difficulty Level: Hard: 8/10)



Solution: _____

Solutions:

1. **NxN!** is strongest and considerably less risky than the other strong play, **Ne5!?** After this “best” continuation, **NxN! QxN cxd! exd**, white can win black’s undefended c-pawn.
2. **...d5!** is the only play for black to achieve near equality. All other continuations give white a +.5 edge or more.
3. **Qe1!** is the most promising continuation to net an ~+.3 edge.
4. **gxf!** wins a clean extra pawn and forces a Q exchange.
5. **Nxd?** is refuted by **e4!** since **fxe** fails to **Be4!** with a crushing position.
6. **16. e5! Nxe 17. BxN BxB 18. RxB Bf5 19. Ne3 Kg7 20. RxB gxR 21. Nxf+** nets an ~+1.6 pawn edge.
7. **QxQ+!** and **Nd4!?** are both strong but only **QxQ+!** wins outright. After **QxQ+! KxQ Ne5!!** wins a piece.
8. **Rf3!!** is the only winning move in this position. For instance **d5** is met with **Qf6!** and black is hopeless to stop **Rg3**.
9. **25. Bxe!! Qh6 26. Bxg+ Kg8 27. BxR Rg3 28. Qg7+! RxQ 29. BxR KxB 30. cxb** gives black a sizeable edge of ~-1.5.
10. **d5** is refuted by **QxN!!** which forces checkmate in 6 moves. 1. **QxN!! KxQ** 2. **Rg3+ Kh6** (or **Kh8** with same result) 3. **Rf6+ Kh7** 4. **Rf5 Kh6** 5. **Be2!!** any move 6. **Rh5#**.

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