Checks, Captures and Threats

The CCT Method: Find Tactics Faster and Stop Blundering

Student Name: _____ **Date:** _____

Batch: _____ **Scholar No.:** _____

Before every move, ask three questions:

Checks · **C**aptures · **T**hreats

Then ask the same three questions about your opponent.

What is CCT? CCT is a simple routine for choosing a move. Instead of staring at the board and hoping an idea appears, you list every *forcing* move in a fixed order: first all your **checks**, then all your **captures**, then all your **threats**. Forcing moves limit what your opponent can do, so they are the quickest way to find a winning tactic. Run the same scan on your opponent's last move and you also catch the blunders before you play them.

Why it works

- **Most tactics start with a check, a capture or a threat.** Forks, pins, skewers, sacrifices and mating attacks almost always begin with one of them.
- **It gives you an order.** A fixed routine replaces guessing and stops you from skipping the obvious.
- **It protects you.** Many games are lost to a one-move oversight. Scanning your opponent's checks, captures and threats shows what they can do *after* your move.
- **It builds a habit.** After a few weeks you will run the scan in a few seconds, without thinking about it.

What is in this book

Part	Content
1. Checks	Kinds of checks, rules for using them, a worked example
2. Captures	Counting attackers and defenders, piece values, poisoned captures
3. Threats	Your threats, your opponent's threats, double threats
4. The CCT routine	A five-step checklist and a full worked example
5. Common mistakes & cheat sheet	What to avoid, one page to keep
6. Twenty problems	5 Easy · 5 Medium · 5 Difficult · 5 Very Difficult
Answer key	Solutions, main lines and engine-checked evaluations

Part 1: Checks

A **check** is a move that attacks the enemy king. The opponent *must* answer it: move the king, capture the checking piece, or block the line (a knight's check cannot be blocked). That is why checks are the most forcing moves in chess.

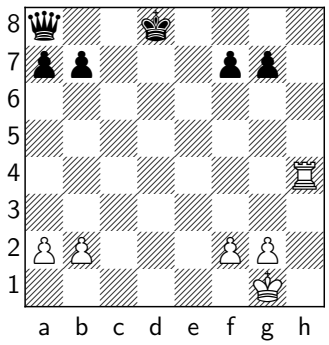
Kinds of checks

Kind	Description
Direct check	The piece you move gives check itself.
Discovered check	You move a piece and uncover a check from another piece behind it. The moved piece is free to do something else, such as attack the queen.
Double check	Two pieces check at once (usually a discovered check where the moving piece also checks). Only a king move can answer it.
Capture with check	You win material *and* force the reply in one move. Always look at these first.
Mating check	A check that takes away the last escape: the king cannot move, and the check cannot be captured or blocked.

Rules for using checks

1. **List all of them.** Say every check out loud (or write it down), even the ones that look silly.
2. **Look at where the king can go.** Count flight squares. A king with no flight squares and no way to capture or block is mated.
3. **Is the checking piece safe?** A check that loses the checking piece for nothing is just a blunder.
4. **Do not check just because you can.** A pointless check drives the king to a better square or wastes your attack. Ask: what does it win?

Worked example 1: scanning the checks.



White to move. White is a queen down, but the black king on d8 and the queen on a8 stand on the same rank.

Checks: Rh8+ and Rd4+.
Captures: none.
Analysis: 1.Rd4+ Kc7 achieves nothing, and White stays a queen down. But **1.Rh8+!** is a skewer: the king must step off the eighth rank, and 2.Rxa8 wins the queen (about +6.0 on the engine).
Lesson: two checks, only one wins. Find the check that attacks the king *and* something behind it.

Part 2: Captures

A **capture** wins material, or at least changes it. But a capture is only good if you have counted what happens afterwards.

Piece values

Pawn	Knight	Bishop	Rook	Queen	King
1	3	3	5	9	priceless

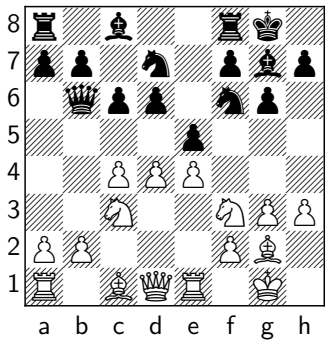
How to count a capture

1. **Count the attackers** on the target square (your pieces that can capture there).
2. **Count the defenders** (the enemy pieces that can recapture there).
3. **Play the exchange out in your head,** always capturing with the *cheapest* piece first.
4. **Compare the totals.** If you gain more than you lose, capture. If not, leave it.

Rules for captures

- **Look at everything that can be captured,** including pieces you think are protected. Sometimes the protector is pinned or overloaded.
- **Capture with the least valuable piece** when you have a choice (a pawn takes a knight before a queen does).
- **Beware poisoned pawns.** A "free" pawn can cost you the queen if a piece defends it.
- **After the capture, ask what you have left undefended.** The piece that captured may have been guarding something else.
- **Capture with check** is the strongest kind of capture: it wins material and forces the answer.

Worked example 2: counting before capturing.



Black to move. King's Indian, Fianchetto line; White has just played 10.Re1.

Checks: none.
Captures: . . . Qxb2, . . . exd4, . . . Qxd4, . . . Nxe4.
Analysis: . . . Qxb2 looks like a free pawn, but the bishop on c1 defends b2, so 11.Bxb2 simply wins the queen (about +7.0 for White). . . . exd4 is a sound capture instead (roughly equal).
Lesson: one defender is enough to make a "free" capture cost you everything.

Part 3: Threats

A **threat** is a move that, if your opponent did nothing, would win material or deliver mate on the next move. Threats are quieter than checks and captures, but they are how most attacks are built.

Kinds of threats

Threat	Meaning
Threat of mate	You threaten checkmate on the next move. The opponent must find a defence.
Threat to win material	You attack a loose or under-defended piece or pawn.
Fork threat	Your next move would attack two things at once with one piece.
Pin / skewer threat	Your next move would pin or skewer a piece to something more valuable.
Discovered threat	You move a piece to unmask an attack from another piece.
Double threat	One move creates two separate threats at once. The opponent can only stop one.

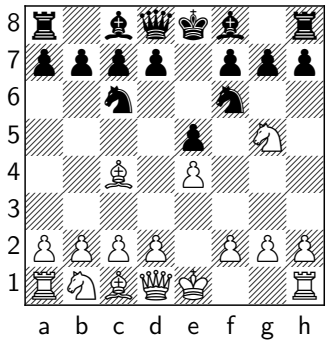
Your threats *and* your opponent's threats

Every time you move, ask two questions:

1. **What does my move threaten?** Look for moves that create *two* threats.
2. **What is my opponent threatening right now?** Imagine you pass and your opponent plays any move they like: what would they do? This "pass test" reveals threats you would otherwise miss.

If your opponent has a threat, you must either **stop it**, **move the piece away**, or **answer with a bigger threat of your own**.

Worked example 3: spotting the opponent's threat.



Black to move. White has just played 4.Ng5 in the Two Knights Defense.

Checks: none.
Captures: . . . Nxe4.
White's threat: Nxf7, forking the queen on d8 and the rook on h8.
Analysis: the move that meets the threat properly is **4. . . d5!**, blocking the bishop's line to f7. The others give White a clear edge: 4. . . Bc5? 5.Nxf7 (about +1.7), 4. . . Nxe4? 5.Bxf7+ (about +2.2), 4. . . Be7? 5.Nxf7 (about +5.6).
Lesson: if you do not see your opponent's threat, you will not see the move that stops it.

Part 4: The CCT Routine

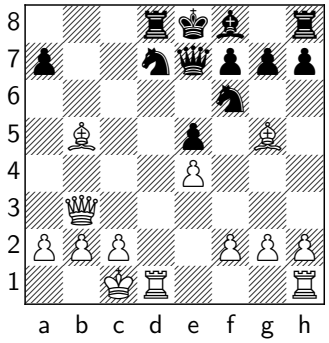
Use these five steps on every move. At first it will feel slow. Within a few weeks it takes seconds.

Step	Name	What to do
1	Their last move	What did it threaten? What did it attack, uncover or leave undefended? Run the opponent's CCT first.
2	My checks	List every check you have, even the strange ones.
3	My captures	List every capture. Count attackers and defenders for each.
4	My threats	List moves that threaten mate or material. Prefer moves with two threats.
5	Safety check	Before you play your move, scan again: after it, what are the opponent's checks, captures and threats?

Priority

Check the forcing moves in this order: **checks first** (they give the opponent the fewest options), **then captures**, **then threats**. If a forcing sequence wins, play it. If nothing wins, choose the best quiet move, but only *after* step 5.

Worked example 4: the full routine.



White to move (Morphy's Opera Game, Paris 1858). Black has just played 12... Rd8 to defend the knight on d7.

Step 1: the knight on d7 is pinned by the bishop on b5, and Black's king is still in the centre.
Step 2, checks: Bxd7+ and Qxf7+.
Step 3, captures: Bxf6, Bxd7+, Qxf7+, Rxd7.
Step 4, threats: Rxd7 removes a defender, and the second rook can then join on the open d-file.
Step 5: calculating each capture, the winner is **13.Rxd7!** (about +5.7). After 13... Rxd7 14.Rd1 Qe6 15.Bxd7+ Nxd7, White finishes with 16.Qb8+!! Nxb8 17.Rd8# (Problem 12).

Remember: checks, captures and threats are your *candidate moves*. Choosing between them still requires calculation, but CCT makes sure the winning move is on your list.

Part 5: Common Mistakes and Cheat Sheet

Ten common mistakes

1. Looking only at your own moves and ignoring your opponent's last move.
2. Capturing automatically without counting attackers and defenders.
3. Giving a check "because it is a check" without knowing what it wins.
4. Forgetting that the piece you move may have been defending something.
5. Missing quiet threats because they are not checks or captures.
6. Stopping the scan after the first good-looking move.
7. Skipping the safety check (step 5) when you are short of time.
8. Forgetting that a pinned piece cannot really defend.
9. Missing a *capture with check*, the strongest forcing move.
10. Calculating a long line without first listing all candidate checks, captures and threats.

CCT cheat sheet

Question	**Ask yourself**
Checks	Which checks do I have? Where can the king go? Can the checking piece be captured?
Captures	What can I take? How many attackers and defenders? Who captures first? What does my capturing piece leave behind?
Threats	What does this move threaten? Can it threaten two things at once?
Their threats	What happens if I pass? What are their checks, captures and threats after my move?

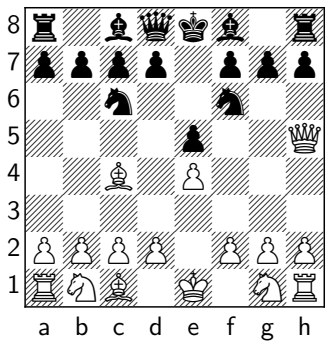
How to use the problems. For every position, *write down* your checks, captures and threats before you choose your move. The routine matters more than the answer. Easy problems score 1 point, Medium 2, Difficult 3 and Very Difficult 5 (maximum 55). Each problem's opening or game source is given in its hint or in the answer key.

Part 6: Twenty Problems

Set up each position on a real board if you can. Fill in the four lines for every problem: your **checks**, your **captures**, the **threats** (yours, or your opponent's when you must defend), and your **best move**. Then check the answer key.

Level: Easy (Problems 1–5)

Problem 1: Scholar's Mate *[Easy – 1 pt]*



White to move. *White has a queen and bishop both aimed at the same square.*

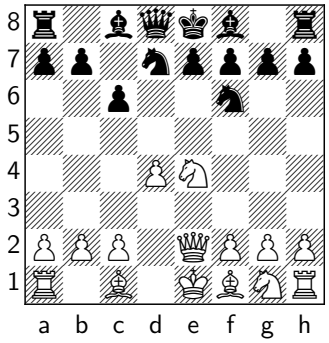
Checks: _____

Captures: _____

Threats: _____

Best move: _____

Problem 2: The Smothered Check *[Easy – 1 pt]*



White to move. *Black has just played 5... Ngf6. Look at every knight check.*

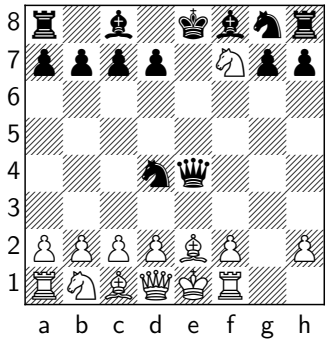
Checks: _____

Captures: _____

Threats: _____

Best move: _____

Problem 3: Knight Mate *[Easy – 1 pt]*



Black to move. *White has just played 7.Be2 to block a check. Is that bishop really free to move?*

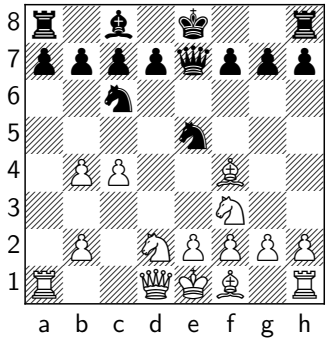
Checks: _____

Captures: _____

Threats: _____

Best move: _____

Problem 4: The Budapest Trap *[Easy – 1 pt]*



Black to move. *White has just played 8.axb4, grabbing a bishop. One knight move ends the game.*

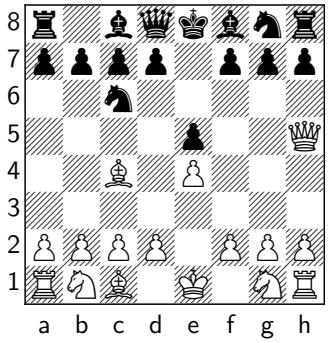
Checks: _____

Captures: _____

Threats: _____

Best move: _____

Problem 5: What Is White Threatening? *[Easy – 1 pt]*



Black to move. *Find White's threat first, then the best defence.*

Checks: _____

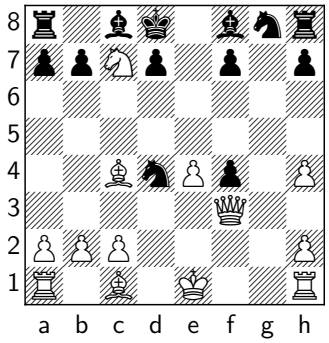
Captures: _____

Threats: _____

Best move: _____

Level: Medium (Problems 6–10)

Problem 6: Capture With Check *[Medium – 2 pts]*



Black to move. *White's knight on c7 attacks the rook on a8. Black has something much stronger.*

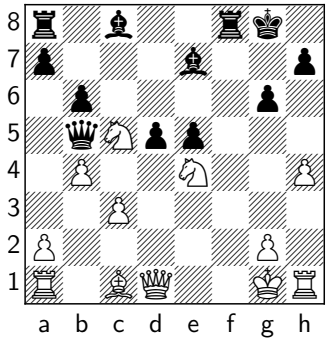
Checks: _____

Captures: _____

Threats: _____

Best move: _____

Problem 7: Check, Then Capture *[Medium – 2 pts]*



White to move. *A pawn capture comes with check. What is the queen looking at afterwards?*

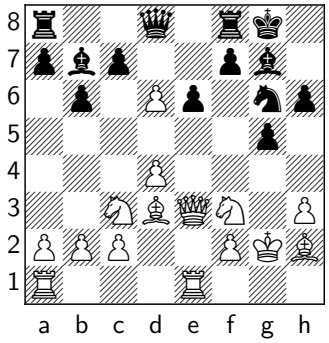
Checks: _____

Captures: _____

Threats: _____

Best move: _____

Problem 8: A Check Before the Fork *[Medium – 2 pts]*



Black to move. *Look at the long light-squared diagonal before you check.*

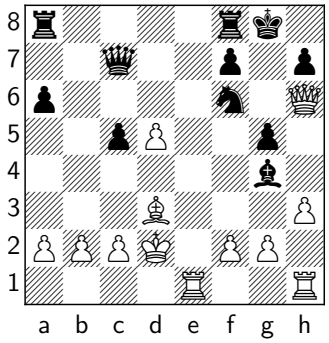
Checks: _____

Captures: _____

Threats: _____

Best move: _____

Problem 9: Check and Collect *[Medium – 2 pts]*



Black to move. *White's queen on h6 is close to Black's king. Black must act with force.*

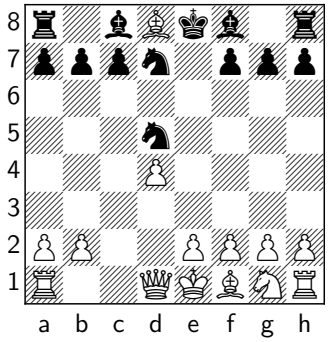
Checks: _____

Captures: _____

Threats: _____

Best move: _____

Problem 10: The Only Move *[Medium – 2 pts]*



Black to move. *White has just captured the queen with 7.Bxd8. Is Black lost?*

Checks: _____

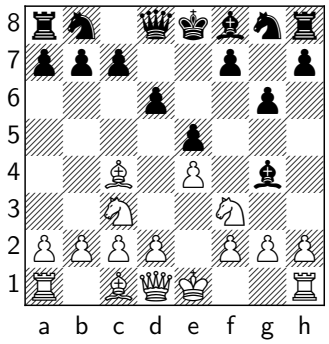
Captures: _____

Threats: _____

Best move: _____

Level: Difficult (Problems 11–15)

Problem 11: A Capture That Creates a Threat *[Difficult – 3 pts]*



White to move. *A capture that seems to hang the queen. Calculate what Black can do.*

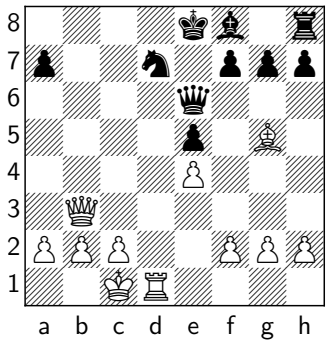
Checks: _____

Captures: _____

Threats: _____

Best move: _____

Problem 12: Queen Sacrifice, Mate in 2 *[Difficult – 3 pts]*



White to move. *Morphy, Paris 1858. White to mate in two.*

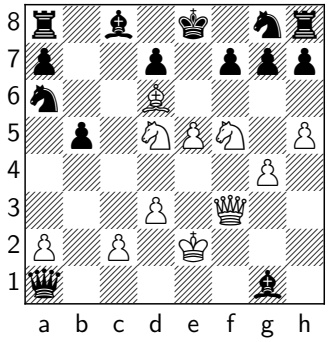
Checks: _____

Captures: _____

Threats: _____

Best move: _____

Problem 13: Mate in 3 *[Difficult – 3 pts]*



White to move. *Anderssen, London 1851. White has given up both rooks. Mate in three.*

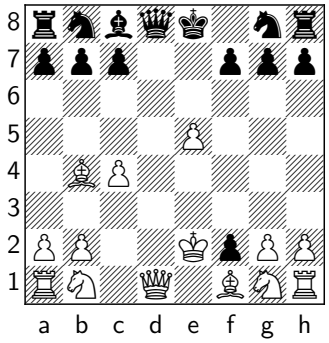
Checks: _____

Captures: _____

Threats: _____

Best move: _____

Problem 14: The Albin Trap *[Difficult – 3 pts]*



Black to move. *White has just played 7.Ke2. Promote, but think about which piece.*

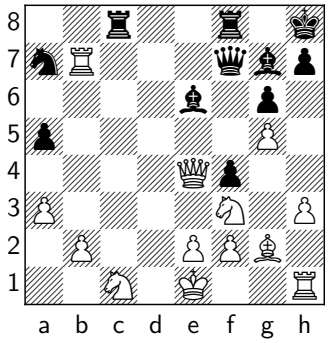
Checks: _____

Captures: _____

Threats: _____

Best move: _____

Problem 15: Rook Sacrifice With Check *[Difficult – 3 pts]*



Black to move. *White's rook on b7 attacks the queen and the knight. Use a forcing move first.*

Checks: _____

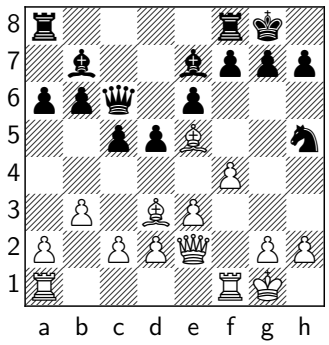
Captures: _____

Threats: _____

Best move: _____

Level: Very Difficult (Problems 16–20)

Problem 16: The Double Bishop Sacrifice *[Very Difficult – 5 pts]*



White to move. *Lasker – Bauer, Amsterdam 1889. Two pieces are aimed at Black's king.*

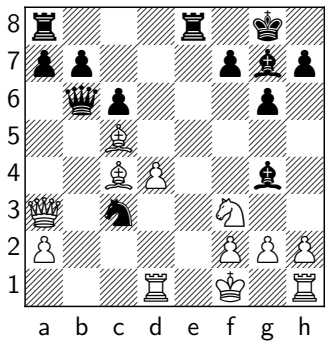
Checks: _____

Captures: _____

Threats: _____

Best move: _____

Problem 17: The Game of the Century *[Very Difficult – 5 pts]*



Black to move. *Byrne – Fischer, New York 1956. Black's queen is attacked. Must it move?*

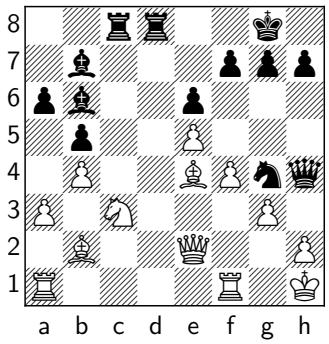
Checks: _____

Captures: _____

Threats: _____

Best move: _____

Problem 18: Rubinstein's Immortal *[Very Difficult – 5 pts]*



Black to move. *Rotlewi – Rubinstein, Łódź 1907. Black to move and win by force.*

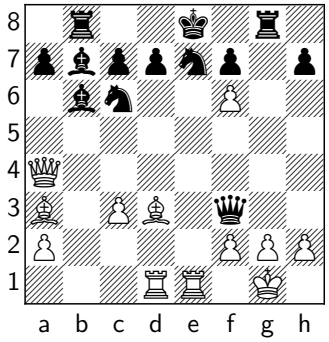
Checks: _____

Captures: _____

Threats: _____

Best move: _____

Problem 19: The Evergreen Game *[Very Difficult – 5 pts]*



White to move. *Anderssen – Dufresne, Berlin 1852 (the "Evergreen Game"). Black has just taken a knight.*

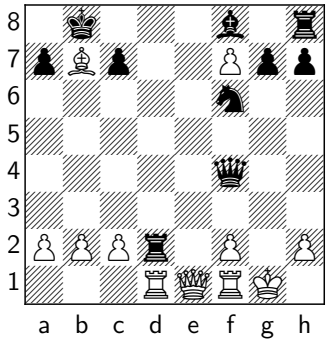
Checks: _____

Captures: _____

Threats: _____

Best move: _____

Problem 20: A Quiet Move That Mates *[Very Difficult – 5 pts]*



Black to move. *White threatens to promote with f8=Q. Black has a quiet move that is stronger than any check.*

Checks: _____

Captures: _____

Threats: _____

Best move: _____

Scoring

Easy: 1 point each (5). Medium: 2 points each (10). Difficult: 3 points each (15). Very Difficult: 5 points each (25). Total: 55.

Score	Level
0 – 15	Keep practising the routine: write all three lists every time.
16 – 30	Solid. You find most forcing moves; work on the difficult ones.
31 – 45	Strong tactical vision.
46 – 55	Excellent. You are ready for serious calculation training.

My score: _____ / 55

Easy: _____ **Medium:** _____ **Difficult:** _____ **Very Difficult:** _____

Answer Key

Evaluations are from a Stockfish check, from the point of view of the side to move in each problem ("+3.0" means about three pawns ahead). Use them as a guide: games are won by finding the idea, not by decimals.

Easy

1. **4.Qxf7#.** The queen captures with check. The king cannot recapture because the bishop on c4 also guards f7. Black's 3...Nf6?? blocked nothing and lost on the spot.
2. **6.Nd6#.** A smothered mate: the black king on e8 is surrounded by its own pieces, and the e7 pawn is pinned by the queen on e2, so it cannot capture the knight. A famous Caro-Kann trap.
3. **7...Nf3#.** The knight checks from f3. The bishop on e2 cannot take it because it is pinned by the queen on e4. The king has no squares. (The Blackburne Shilling Gambit trap.)
4. **8...Nd3#.** The knight checks from d3. The e2 pawn cannot capture because the queen on e7 pins it along the e-file. (The Budapest Gambit trap.)
5. White threatens **Qxf7#**. Best is **3...g6!**, which blocks the queen and attacks it (Black is slightly better, about +0.3). 3...Qe7 also holds. But 3...Nf6?? loses to 4.Qxf7# (Problem 1).

Medium

6. **11...Nxf3+!** The knight takes the queen with check: 12.Ke2 Nd4+ 13.Kd3 Kxc7 and Black is a queen for a knight up (about +3.9). Recapturing at once with 11...Kxc7? loses to 12.Bxf4+.
7. **20.Qxd5+!** The capture comes with check, and the queen now also attacks the rook on a8: 20...Rf7 21.Qxa8 wins a full rook (about +6.0).
8. **17...Nh4+!** The knight on f3 is pinned by the bishop on b7, so it cannot capture on h4. After 18.Kh1 Nxf3 Black wins a piece (about +1.8). If 18.Kg1? Nxf3+ forks the king and the queen on e3.
9. **23...Qf4+!** 24.Re3 Qxf2+ 25.Kc1 Qxe3+ and Black collects a pawn and the rook with checks (about +5.0). Slower moves let White's queen and bishop attack the king (e.g. 23...Qa5+ is about −2.2).
10. **7...Bb4+!** The Elephant Trap. After 8.Qd2 Bxd2+ 9.Kxd2 Kxd8, Black has regained the queen and is a full piece up (about +3.9). Taking back at once with 7...Kxd8? lets White keep the extra material (about −4.4 for Black).

Difficult

11. **5.Nxe5!** (Légal's trap). The capture threatens Nxg4 and also sets a trap: if 5...Bxd1?? then 6.Bxf7+ Ke7 7.Nd5#. Black's best is 5...dxe5 6.Qxg4, and White has simply won a pawn (about +1.9).
12. **16.Qb8+!!** Nxb8 17.Rd8#. A queen sacrifice with check deflects the knight from d7 and the rook delivers mate, supported by the bishop on g5.
13. **21.Nxg7+** Kd8 22.Qf6+!! Nxf6 23.Be7#. Anderssen gave up both rooks, a bishop and his queen; the minor pieces deliver mate.
14. **7...fxg1=N+!** Underpromotion to a knight with check (the Lasker Trap). After 8.Ke1 Qh4+ (or 8.Rxg1 Bg4+, winning White's queen) Black is winning (about +5.7). Promoting to a queen, 7...fxg1=Q?, allows 8.Qxd8+ Kxd8 9.Rxg1 with equality.
15. **23...Rxc1+!** The rook takes the knight with check, gaining time to deal with the attack on f7: 24.Kd2 Rc7 25.Ne5 Rd8+ and Black is a piece up (about +4.4). Without this, Black is only equal (23...Qg8).

Very Difficult

16. 15.Bxh7+! Kxh7 16.Qxh5+ Kg8 17.Bxg7!! Kxg7 18.Qg4+ Kh7 19.Rf3, and the rook joins the attack via h3 (about +4.3). This is the original double bishop sacrifice; in the game Black had to give up his queen.

17. 17. . . Be6!! Black leaves the queen en prise. If 18.Bxb6 Bxc4+ 19.Kg1 Ne2+ 20.Kf1 Nxd4+ 21.Kg1 Ne2+ 22.Kf1 Nc3+ 23.Kg1 axb6: a "windmill" of discovered checks, and Black has a rook, two bishops and a pawn for the queen (about −5.7 for White after 24.Qb4 Ra4 25.Qxb6 Nxd1). White's best, 18.Qxc3 Qxc5 19.dxc5 Bxc3, still leaves Black a piece up (about +2.0).

18. 22. . . Rxc3!! In the game: 23.gxh4 Rd2!! 24.Qxd2 Bxe4+ 25.Qg2 Rh3, and mate is unstoppable. Even the best defence, 23.Bxb7 Rxg3, leaves Black completely winning (about +6.5).

19. 20.Rxe7+! In the game: 20. . . Nxe7 21.Qxd7+!! Kxd7 22.Bf5+ Ke8 23.Bd7+ Kf8 24.Bxe7#. Against the best defence, 20. . . Kd8 21.Rxd7+ Kc8 22.Rd8+ Kxd8 23.Bf5+, White still wins (about +3.4).

20. 17. . . Bd6!! A quiet move: the bishop lines up behind the queen on the b8–h2 diagonal, so . . . Qxh2 will be mate. White has no defence: 18.Qe8+ Nxe8 19.fxe8=Q+ Rxe8 20.Kg2 Qxh2+ 21.Kf3 Qh3#. Grabbing material with 17. . . Rxd1 also wins, but much more slowly.

Check. Capture. Threaten. Then look again.