

Cor van Wijgerden

Learning chess

**Manual for
independent learners**

Step 6

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Preface

The Step by Step learning system is a method of learning to play chess which has been officially acknowledged by the Dutch Chess Federation. It has been successfully adopted by many chess clubs and schools in the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Germany, Switzerland and Austria. Slowly but steadily the method is gaining popularity throughout the world.

The whole course consists of five manuals, specifically for chess teachers or trainers (the first steps are also suitable for parents), and fifteen workbooks (3 for each step) which can be used by the students themselves.

This book appeared in 1999 in Dutch. For the English translation the 3rd revised and expanded edition from 2010 has been used. It is advisable to go through this manual in combination with the workbook for Step 6.

The manual for Step 6 differs in some respects from the previous ones. Firstly, the target group has changed. This book is not a manual for trainers, but a self-study manual for anyone interested, in other words for the independent learner.

Secondly, Rob Brunia disappeared as a co-author. In the initial phase of developing the method (we started in 1987) we worked together closely. In 1991 Rob's professional duties (he coached highly gifted children) compelled him to end our cooperation. This was a pity, but not a real disaster, for the essence of the method had been devised. While the whole method has been extended and improved over the years, the nucleus has remained the same. At the end of 2004 Rob approached me to re-start the cooperation. Unfortunately, this was not to be: on the 9th of January 2005, Brunia died of a brain haemorrhage, at only 57 years old.

For the moment not all the books in the chess course have been translated into English. 18 out of 26 are in English. You will find updated information on our website at: **www.stappenmethode.nl**

For more information, please contact info@stappenmethode.nl

Cor van Wijgerden
Coevorden, July 2011

Step 6

Working through this book in combination with the Step 6 workbook which goes with it is only of any use if the first five steps have been properly mastered and the level of you own games is up to it. Those who have been working through the Steps with a good trainer have an advantage here.

A good trainer has been insisting on the following four areas from the Steps method:

- a lesson from the manual
- practice with the workbook
- a lot of practice in the form of games
- discussion / analysis of the games you played

We shall take as our starting point that you are going on to work independently with Step 6. You still have a trainer? So much the better, since he or she can offer help when you feel you need it.

What should you be expecting? The level of difficulty of the material is once more a notch higher than in the preceding Step. Strategy is a subject which will be dealt with in depth. It is a subject which is difficult for everybody, as we always find, and above all the exercises in the workbook. You will also come up against endgame exercises in many chapters. The study of such exercises is particularly important for improving playing strength. Tactics are dealt with in only one chapter.

The above mentioned areas are now considered in order.

Studying a lesson

Work through the lessons thoroughly. Studying chess books is very different from reading comics. When you are playing through games and game fragments make use of a real chess board and pieces. At the moments when side lines are shown, start by analysing on your own (partly in your head) and then compare your analysis with that in the book. You will learn more that way than by playing through analyses, when you will be tempted to imagine that you have understood everything. Pay particular attention to the general rules which are laid down (e.g. on page 9). You can make good use of such rules in your own games, even if the position is totally different.

When you are studying a specific subject it is much more useful to concentrate on it and learn how to master it than knowing a little about various different subjects. That will not help you much in your own games. World Champion Capablanca hit the nail on the head: “I may not know a lot, but I have mastered what I do know”.

Solving the exercises

You should only look at the workbook in conjunction with the instruction manual. If all you do is solving the exercises, then you are not working in the best possible way.

After the heading ‘WORKBOOK’ every lesson contains indications as to what you should pay attention to when solving the exercises. You can also make good use of these solving strategies in your own games.

Playing

Try to play as many serious games as you can, best of all against stronger players. But not only that, because winning is also important so that you keep on enjoying your chess. Always analyse after each game with your opponent, even if the latter is clearly weaker than you. After all, you appreciate when a stronger player who has just defeated you over the board takes time to look through the game with you. Explaining to a weaker player what went wrong also has its good points.

Training games against friends are fun and are useful too. They bring you more than spending a lunchtime playing rapid chess against each other (though that too makes sense as long as the thinking time is at least 5 or 10 minutes). These blitz games often lead to interesting positions which you can analyse together.

Analysing your games

Get used to analysing all your games. With a good trainer, with a stronger player or on your own. Of course a chess program on your computer can also be helpful, but only after you have done the work; then you can compare variations and check your analysis. Reading analysis while entering your game into the computer does not make much sense. When you do this the information does not get any deeper than into your short-term memory. You will hardly be able to take in new insights properly.

Improving your playing strength

This is the interesting section, because who would not want to become a stronger player? After all the effort (study, solving exercises, playing,

analysing) we expect to have learned to play better chess. If your Elo continues to rise (this should be by 50 to 100 Elo per year), then you have been studying effectively and there is no reason to change the way you are going about studying chess. Unfortunately reality does not always come up to expectations. You aren't making progress and so feel less inclined to carry on your chess training.

You might come to the conclusion that you do not have enough talent, but that is unlikely. If you have reached Step 6, you should have no problems adding a few more hundred Elo points to your rating. It is much more likely that you have been studying inefficiently or even in the wrong way (for the sake of simplicity, let us admit that the causes might lie on a personal level).

From your rating you can more or less tell what progress you are making. However, becoming obsessed with the Elo rating is not a good idea. When he introduced the system in 1970, Prof. Arpad Elo took care to point out that the rating represents an average taken over a specific period in time. Points are of course lost after a defeat, but naturally that does not mean that you have become a weaker player! Perhaps you learned a lot from your defeat (“you learn the most from your losses!”).

Playing better chess means above all making fewer and fewer mistakes. The greatest profit lies in being able to eliminate one's own weaknesses. You can only find your weaknesses by specifically looking for them. That is more effective than buying yet another new book and working through it. You make mistakes when playing games and solving exercises. They can be of many different sorts, or perhaps it is always the same type of error which keeps cropping up. For that reason it is useful to divide the mistakes into groups. Give the mistakes a name (e.g. overlooking an X-ray defence), and create a (coded) list. Over time you will build up a picture of which mistakes you are making most often. A fifth mistake in visualisation is a clear indication of a problem. Or you keep on missing a tactical exchange of pieces? Pay a lot of attention to this subject and do some work on it. It might be a good idea to get a lower Step out of your bookcase in order to do so. There is no shame in that!

There can also often be problems of a mental or another nature. Resigning too soon, over-confidence, being disappointed after a mistake, over-estimating the opponent, stubbornness, bad time management and much more can be holding you back. Everybody must decide for herself or himself what is important and so everybody should draw up his or her own list.

Flick through this book and take a look at what you fancy and what you think you can learn a lot from. The mistakes in your games will be a clear indication of what subject you should be starting with.

The chapter on tactics is simple for those who have worked through all three workbooks for each of the other Steps. The chapters on strategic themes are relatively more demanding and require more of an effort. But a real chess player will not be put off by them.

Have a lot of fun studying and solving the exercises! The best of luck!

NO D O O P I N G



1

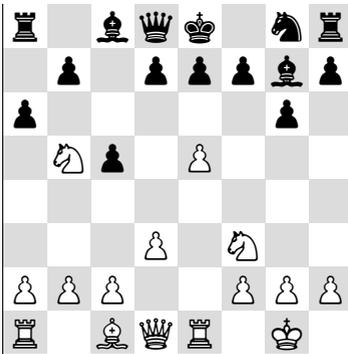
King in the middle

In the first chapter the most important role is played by the unsafe position of the king. In the game which follows, the king remains on its own in the middle of the board without a single defender near it.

*Rossolimo-Romanenko
Bad Gastein 1948*

**1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bb5
g6 4. 0-0 Bg7 5. Re1 Nf6 6.
Nc3 Nd4? 7. e5 Ng8 8. d3
Nxb5 9. Nxb5 a6?**

It is dangerous to have one of your opponent's knights in your half of the board, so it is chased away.



So far Black has made several mistakes. He:

- has neglected the three golden rules
- has made a wrong exchange
- has made an unnecessary pawn move

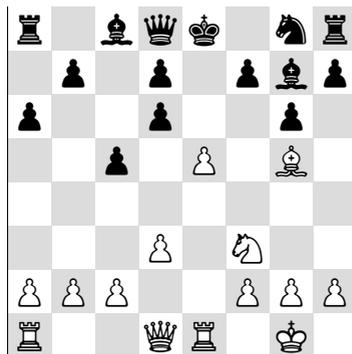
White can exploit the position of the black king by means of a knight sacrifice. As will become apparent, a king in the middle of the board will be in a much more dangerous position than one which has castled.

10. Nd6+ exd6

It is better to decline the offer with 10. ... Kf8, although White is then clearly better after 11. Ne4 b6 12. d4 because of his superior development.

11. Bg5!

An over-hasty capture on d6 would not achieve anything; White first brings his bishop into play with tempo in order to prevent Black from interposing with f6.



Black now has two squares for his queen, each of which has its advantages and disadvantages.

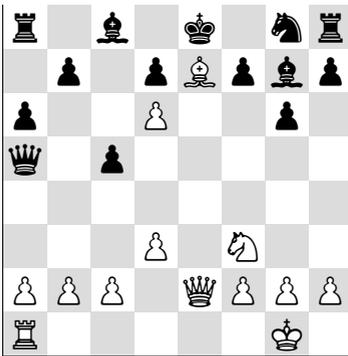
First there is the win after 11. ...

Qb6. White has the neat exchanges
 12. exd6+ Kf8 13. Re8+!! Kxe8
 14. Qe2+ Kf8 15. Be7+ Ke8 16.
 Re1.

After this quiet attacking move,
 there is no possible defence, e.g.
 after 16. ... Bf8 there is the deci-
 sive 17. Bg5+ Be7 18. Qxe7+
 Nxe7 19. Rxe7+ Kf8 20. Bh6+
 Kg8 21. Re8#.

The continuation in the game is
 very beautiful.

**11. ... Qa5 12. exd6+ Kf8 13.
 Re8+ Kxe8 14. Qe2+ Kf8
 15. Be7+ Ke8**



16. Bd8+!!

The bishop move makes the alter-
 native 16. Re1 superfluous. This
 move also wins: 16. ... Qxe1+
 (forced) 17. Qxe1 f6. Black has
 sufficient material, but cannot
 move: 18. Bxf6+ Kf8 19. Bxg7+
 Kxg7 20. Qe5+ Nf6 21. Qe7+ Kh6
 22. Qxf6, and Black is soon mated
 after 23. g4.

16. ... Kxd8 17. Ng5

Black resigned. The only way to
 defend against the mate on f7 is by

17. ... Nh6, but then he is mated
 on e7.

The player with White has made
 clever use of well-known attacking
 rules:

- bring about access to the oppo-
 sng king
- bring up his pieces
- use a combination as a weapon
 (attraction and discovered check)
- develop with tempo

Other useful rules which occur in
 the next game fragment are:

- prevent the exchange of attack-
 ing pieces
- maintain the tension
- provoke weaknesses
- keep the opposing king in the
 middle



Black is threatening to bring his
 king to safety by castling. The first
 move is obvious.

1. Re1

Black has five moves which are
 worth considering. The first moves
 are those which protect the bishop.

WORKBOOK

31: *Pawn endings – Key squares: A*

The king still has to seize the key squares. That can be done with the help of the following rules:

- do not give ground too easily
- work with zugzwang
- make a careful choice about pawn moves from their starting squares (one square or two)
- watch out for a possible change of file on the part of the knight pawn (a rook pawn has only two key squares)

32 *Pawn endings – Key squares: B*

On this page the king has to defend the key squares. If you defend correctly you have good chances. Watch out for the following possibilities:

- changing the situation regarding the key squares by means of a pawn sacrifice, which pushes the key square one rank forward
- shouldering off the opposing king
- preventing your own king from being shouldered off
- moving a pawn towards the edge (a rook pawn has only two key squares)
- making use of stalemate

33 *Pawn endings – Key squares: C*

Shouldering off and shouldering off again. In order to keep the opposing king at a distance, the route your king follows is important. Which is the best route for it to choose? In addition, you must prevent your king from getting stuck in the corner. Watch out for zugzwang.

34: *Pawn endings – Race: A*

35: *Pawn endings – Race: B*

If the pawns are to be involved in a race, you must take a good look at the starting position to work out what will happen.

The following are options for you in pawn endings:

- aim to promote with check (promote the correct pawn)
- get your king into the square of the opposing pawn (think out what is the correct route, perhaps you can employ the Réti manoeuvre)
- keep the opposing king at a distance (shoulder it off)
- help your own pawns

- makes use of preparatory moves (luring away, clearing, bringing about a change of file, avoiding check)

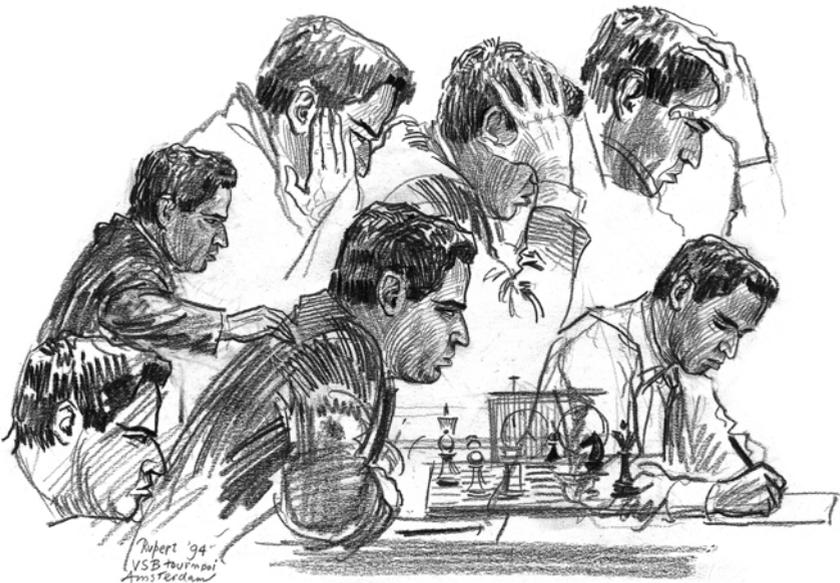
After the promotion you will either have queen against queen or queen against pawn.

- Queen against queen (make use of tactical tricks: mate, winning the queen, X-ray check or exchange queens to liquidate back to a won pawn ending)
- Queen against pawn (a rook pawn or a bishop pawn on the last rank but one usually means a draw)

36: *Pawn endings – Breakthrough: A*

Create a passed pawn by means of a breakthrough. Watch out for passed pawns which your opponent creates. Avoid them winning a tempo by check. You can keep the opposing king out of the square of the pawn by setting up a barrier.

Kasparov



For most of us winning as a result of an attack is the most satisfying way of deciding a game.

In Step 4 we dealt with the most important rules for an attack:

- bring up your pieces
- get access to the king
- eliminate defenders
- deliver mate

In our first game we shall test whether these rules still apply in Step 6.

*Geller-Papapavlou
Amsterdam 1950*

**1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nc3 d5
4. Nf3 c6 5. e3 Nbd7 6. Bd3
Bd6 7. e4 dxe4 8. Nxe4
Nxe4 9. Bxe4 Nf6**

Black would be better aiming for e5 and leaving the knight on d7.

**10. Bc2 0-0 11. 0-0 c5 12.
Bg5 cxd4**

A weak exchange. It allows White to bring his queen into the attack with no effort on his part. It is pleasant when your opponent helps you assemble your pieces!

13. Qxd4 Be7 14. Qh4

Geller will have thought: with a decisive advantage. Anyone who has reached the level of Step 6 should in future find carrying out such an attack pretty easy.

14. ... h6

Black has no choice. After 14. ... g6 15. Rad1 Bd7 16. Ne5 Re8 17. Qf4 White wins material. The game move is weakening and it becomes apparent that the white attack is already strong enough to allow him to breach the opposing king position with a piece sacrifice.

15. Bxh6! gxh6 16. Qxh6



With his three attacking pieces, White has the black position well in his grip. He may not be able to win immediately, but there is nothing Black can do.

16. ... Qa5 17. Ng5

An important position. Because of the possibility of Bh7+ and a discovered check, Black cannot leave anything unprotected on a white square. In addition, not only must f7 remain under the protection of the rook (or else there follows

Bh7+ and Nxf7+), but so must e6 under that of the bishop (or else there follows Bh7+, Bf5+ and Nxe6). For mate, White will have to bring up another piece into the attack, but that takes him a little time. So the prevention of any counterplay by Black is important.

17. ... e5 18. Bh7+ Kh8

19. Be4+ Kg8

White now has the time to bring up more pieces.

20. Rae1 Bg4 21. Re3 Rad8

22. Rg3 Rd4 23. Ne6

Black resigned.

We saw in this game the bringing up of pieces, the creation of a breach in the castled position and the finishing off of the game. There was no example of the elimination of defenders, because there were no defenders....

The next game will make up for that.

Dobias-Podgorny, Prague 1952

1. e4 e6 2. d4 d5 3. Nc3 dxe4

4. Nxe4 Nd7 5. Nf3 Be7 6.

Bd3 Ngf6 7. Qe2 0-0 8. 0-0

Nxe4?

A bad exchange. White can now transfer his queen to the kingside with tempo. Black's position is passive, but 8. ... b6 is playable.

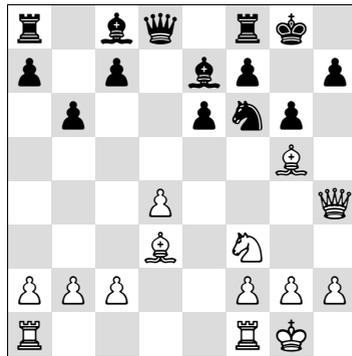
9. Qxe4 Nf6 10. Qh4 b6

Black wants to develop but his king is already in danger. He should perhaps have played 10. ... Re8. This move, though strange at

first sight, is played for a reason. It prevents 11. Bg5, because then Black must still weaken his king position, but he will do so with the tempo winning 11. ... h6. The sacrifice seen in the previous game achieves nothing: 12. Bxh6 gxh6 13. Qxh6 Bf8.

After 10. ... Re8 White's best move is 11. Re1, after which he is much better, e.g. 11. ... b6 12. Bg5 h6 13. Bxf6 Bxf6 14. Qe4 Bd7 15. Ne5.

11. Bg5 g6



12. c4!

This attacking move is a preparation for the elimination of Black's best defensive piece, the bishop on e7. The pawn move also prevents 12. ... Nd5, which Black would play to try and exchange pieces. Neither 12. Ne5 Nd5 13. f4 f6 14. Bxg6 hxg6 15. Nxc6 Ne3 with complications, nor 12. Be4 Rb8 13. Ne5 Nd5 14. f4 give White less advantage.

12. ... Bb7 13. d5!

The point of 12. c4. Sooner or later Black must take.

1. Ng4

The threat of 2. Nf6+ can only be avoided by the advance of the f-pawn.

1. ... f5 2. Qg6+ Qg7

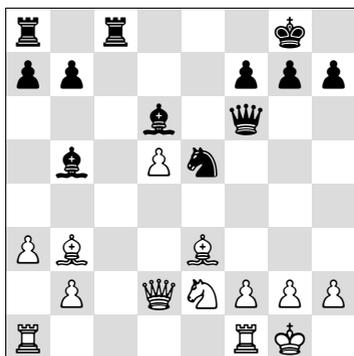
After 2. ... Kh8 then 3. Bg5 decides matters.

3. Nf6+ Kf8 4. Bh6

White wins.

Generally speaking, winning positions with an open king position does not pose too many problems. What is often harder to answer is the question: how do I bring about such positions?

In the positions which follow we do away with the g-pawn to leave the king open and defenceless. The first example is simple.



Black opens the king position with a sacrifice.

1. ... Nf3+ 2. gxf3

White must capture. Black continues with a attracting move to eliminate the defence f3-f4.

2. ... Bxe2 3. Qxe2 Qg6+ 4. Kh1 Qh5

Black mates on h2.



Exchanging on f6 is an easy way to force gxf6.

1. Bxf6 gxf6

Taking with the queen costs an exchange after 2. Nh7.

2. Qh5

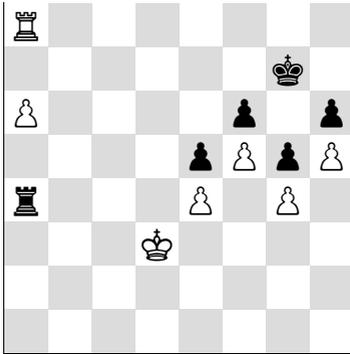
This threatens both 2. Qxh6 and 2. Nxe6.

This type of position without a g-pawn and with sufficient attacking pieces is totally lost. The win is no longer a matter of chance. In our last example White also wins with 3. Qxh6 Bxd3 4. e4 or with 3. Bxa6 Rxa6 4. Qxh6 fxg5 5. hxg5 or in case of need also with 3. Bc2. There are different reasons why the defender might not be able to recapture on f6 with a piece.

The defending side can be forced into the weakening gxf6 for the following reasons:

- 1. ... Bxf6 2. Nd7 (wins the exchange)
- 1. ... Bxf6 2. dxc5 (loses a pawn)
- 1. ... Qxf6 2. Rxd7 (loses a

a winning liquidation to a pawn ending.



1. a7

The black rook remains tied to the a-file, so that you no longer have to worry about the e-pawn.

1. ... Kh7 2. Kc3 Kg7 3. Kb3

Ra1 4. Kb4 Ra2 5. Kb5 Ra1

6. Kb6 Rb1+ 7. Kc6 Rc1+

Or 7. ... Ra1 8. Rd8 Rxa7 9. Rd7+ Rxd7 10. Kxd7 Kf7 11. Kd6 winning.

8. Kd6 Ra1 9. Rc8 Ra6+ 10.

Rc6 Rxa7 11. Rc7+ Rxc7

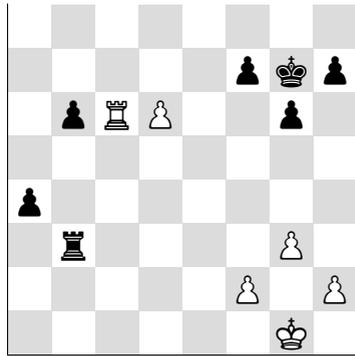
12. Kxc7 Kf7 13. Kd7

White wins the pawn on f6.

AND A BONUS...

The final game fragment in this book comes from the game between Erwin L'Ami (grandmaster nowadays) and Frank Erwich for the Youth Championship of the Netherlands 1998 (under 14s).

This game allows us to show some useful and instructive tips.



Tip 1: Activate the king (it will relieve the rook)

Tip 2: Do not exchange strong pawns for weaker ones

After 1. ... Kf6 even the world champion would have no hope! After 2. d7 Ke7 3. Rd6 Kd8 Black can advance his queenside pawns. Black was afraid of 2. Rc4, because after 2. ... b5 White wins with 3. Rd4, but 2. ... a3! is decisive and Black promotes with check.

Next came the much weaker:

1. ... a3

Now White can exchange his weak d-pawn for one of the connected pawns. An additional advantage is that the white rook can become active, since it no longer needs to protect its own pawn. The position can now no longer be won.

2. d7 Rd3 3. Rxb6 Rxd7 4.

Ra6 Rd3 5. Kg2 Kf8 6. Ra7

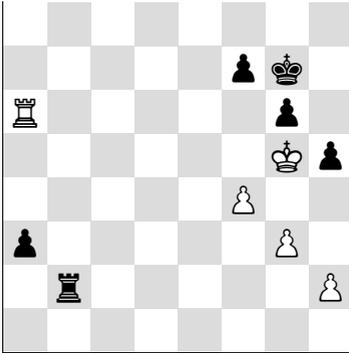
Ke8 7. Kh3 h5 8. f4 Rb3 9.

Kh4 Kf8 10. Kg5

Tip 3: Only become active when you are really threatening your opponent, not at the cost of your own safety.

The “attack” by the king can simply be beaten off.

10. ... Kg7 11. Ra6 Rb2?

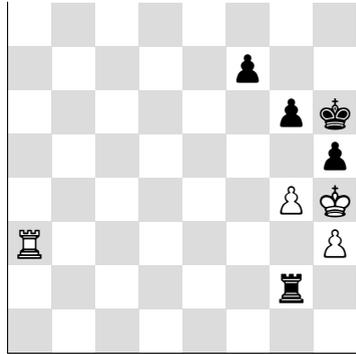


Tip 4: Win a tempo whenever possible

It is good to first give check on b5 and only then to move the rook to b2: 11. ... Rb5+ 12. Kh4 Rb2 13. h3 (or 13. Kh3) 13. ... a2. When the pawn is only one square away from promotion, then Black can bring his king over to b1 without

the white rook being able to go pawn-grabbing.

**12. f5 Rb5 13. Rxa3 Rxf5+
14. Kh4 Rf2 15. h3 Kh6
16. g4 Rg2**



Tip 5: Always check whether there is more than one threat

Black is not only threatening mate with g5, but also f6. The first threat was enough to divert White’s attention. He played **17. Ra5?**, and after **17. ... f6** had to give up a pawn with **18. g5+** and lost.

The correct move is 17. Ra6! with a draw since both threats have then been parried.

The Step-by-Step Method



Books

The following books are available in the 'Step-by-Step' series:

Manuals for chess trainers: **Step 1, Step 2, Step 3, Step 4, Step 5**
Workbooks: **Stepping stones 1, Stepping stones 2, Step 1, Step 2, Step 3, Step 4, Step 5, Step 6**
Extra workbooks: **Step 1 extra, Step 2 extra, Step 3 extra, Step 4 extra, Step 5 extra**
Plus workbooks: **Step 1 plus, Step 2 plus, Step 3 plus, Step 4 plus, Step 5 plus**
Manual for independent learners: **Step 6**
Thinking ahead: *Step 2, Step 3*

The English books have been represented in boldface. The other titles are in Dutch (all of them also available in German).

Updated information can be found at our website:

www.stappenmethode.nl

All books can be ordered from this website for worldwide delivery:

www.stappenmethode.nl

Software

The Chess Tutor for Windows is a series of chess learning software based on the 'Step-by-Step Method'.

Chess Tutor Step 1, Chess Tutor Step 2 and Chess Tutor step 3 are available as download or as CD-ROM. You can first try the Chess Tutor using a free demo version.

More information at: <http://www.chesstutor.eu/en>

