

The Viveka Method

Find the candidates, rank them, check them: a Stockfish-calibrated method for choosing the better chess move

Scan → Score → Check



Calibrated on 19,007 Stockfish positions · every legal move scored
Second edition · Method v2.0 · October 2026

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Sigmoid Vedanta Technologies

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Engine analysis by Stockfish 19 (GPL v3). Data: the 19,070 engine positions of the Kuikma library, every legal move scored at depth 15 and the engine's top three moves at depth 22. No human games were used to build or test this edition.

The first edition (method v1.0) remains available to every buyer in their account and in the archive on the website.

"Viveka" (विवेक) is Sanskrit for discernment: the faculty of telling the better option from the worse.

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What is new in the second edition

The first edition gave one formula with six terms. It did not say how to *find* the moves worth scoring, and too many of its choices were catastrophic misses. Fixing both needed more evidence, so we rebuilt the study.

- **Engine data only, more than twice the training data** (13,058 training positions, against 6,000). All 19,070 positions of the library, every legal move scored by Stockfish 19 at depth 15, and the stored depth-22 analysis of the engine's top three moves. The best move of every position is now defined at depth 22. The human games used for testing in the first edition were dropped. Human moves contain mistakes, so they make a poor answer key.
- **Two prongs.** A *scan* of glance-level patterns that lists the candidates, then a *score* for those candidates only.
- **New dimensions.** Positional knowledge learned from 162,775 depth-22 positions. *Time*: what the opponent's last move changed, and what a good move does over the following plies. *Information*: how many good options a move leaves the opponent, and the *entropy* of your own scores, which flags critical positions.
- **A safety check** that makes "Is my move safe?" exact for forcing replies, including threats.

Measured the same way on the same unseen openings, the v1 formula's choice loses 80 centipawns on average against the depth-22 best move. The v2 score loses 64, and 66 when it only scores the eight scanned candidates, and 62 with the safety check. A one-ply engine search (Stockfish depth 1) loses 44 on the same positions and depth 4 loses 29. We set out to reach the depth-4 level. We did not: Chapter 11 shows exactly where the remaining gap lies. Almost all of it is a small tail of deep tactical disasters that no counting rule sees coming.

Part I

The method

1. Scan, score, check

1. **Scan.** Run your eye over every legal move and give it scan points for a few patterns you can see at a glance (Chapter 2). Keep the top eight. They are your candidates.
2. **Score.** For each candidate, count the exchanges and add the score terms (Chapter 3). One pawn is worth 100 points.
3. **Check.** For the best two or three, ask whether the opponent has a check, capture or threat that wins material against every answer (Chapter 4). If so, mark it down.
4. **Decide how long to think.** If one candidate's score stands far above the others, the position is probably critical. Calculate it. If several candidates are close, the choice matters less: play the top one and save your time (Chapter 5).

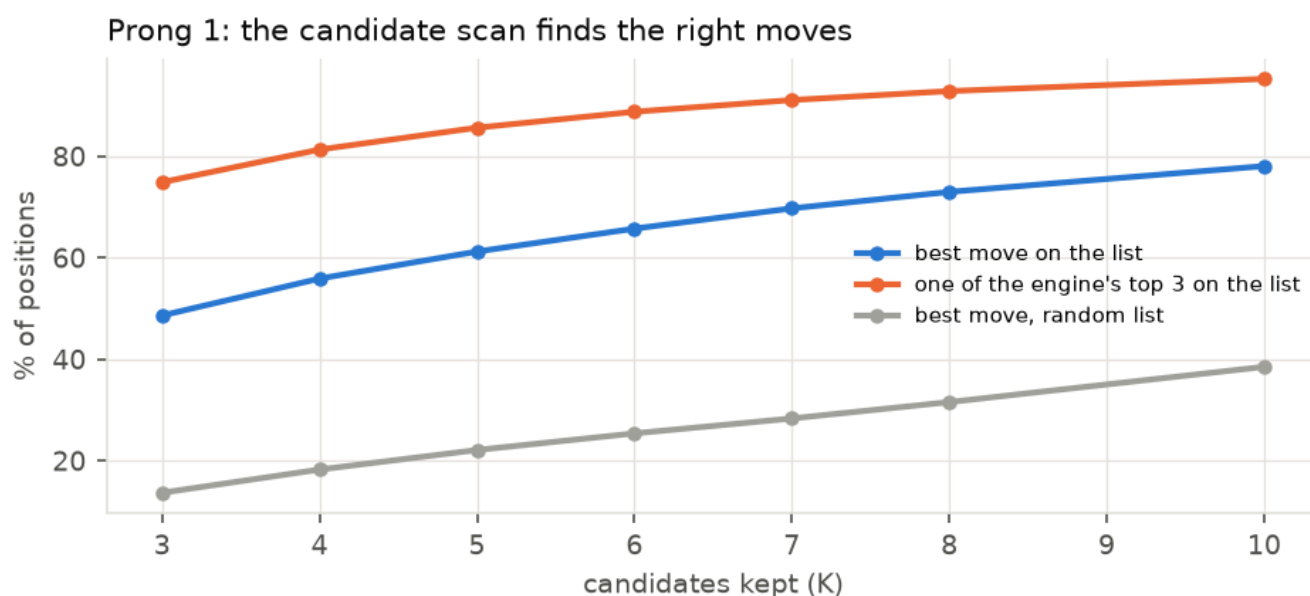
The scan replaces the hardest part of Kotov's method, knowing which moves to consider, with something measurable. On unseen openings its list of eight contains the engine's best move in 73% of positions and at least one of the engine's top three in 93%.

2. Prong one: finding the candidates

The scan uses only patterns you can see without calculating. Its points were fitted so that the engine's top moves, at depth 22, land on the list. The table shows the patterns that earned a place, ranked by how much they matter.

Pattern (a glance, no calculation)	Scan points
Lands where it can simply be taken	-12
Rescues an attacked piece	+10
Castles	+10
Recaptures	+9
Gives check	+6
Leaves another piece loose	-5
Moves the d- or e-pawn	+4
Develops a knight or bishop	+4
Guards an attacked piece	+4
Captures (per pawn taken)	+3
Each new target attacked	+2
Moves towards the centre (per ring)	+1

Read the negative entries as warnings. "Lands where it can simply be taken" (attacked by something cheaper, or attacked and undefended) is the single most useful glance in the scan: it knocks most bad moves off the list at once.



How often the scan's list contains the engine's best move, or one of its top three, by list length.

3. Prong two: scoring the candidates

For each candidate, add up these terms. Material after the exchanges is worth 100 points a pawn; every other term is on the same scale.

Term	Points	Ask yourself
Material after exchanges	+115	What do I win (or lose) once every capture sequence is played out? (pawns)
Opponent's safe moves	-2	How many safe moves does the opponent have after my move? (fewer is better)
Δ Knight on the rim	-30	Change caused by the move: does a knight go to (or leave) the edge of the board?
Their checks	-50	How much worse is it if they first play their best check? (pawns)
Δ Rook mobility	+4	Change caused by the move: how many safe squares do my rooks gain (open lines)?
Recapture	+130	Do I take back on the square they just captured on?
Capture	+5	What does the move capture?
Opponent's forcing moves	-11	How many checks and captures does the opponent have?
Δ Knight in the centre	+35	Change caused by the move: does a knight reach (or leave) the central 16 squares?
Castling	+135	Do I castle?
Develops a minor piece	+45	Does a knight or bishop leave its starting square?

Two things are new compared with v1. First, **material is counted to the end of every capture sequence**, on every square, not only the destination. Second, the score includes the **opponent's options**: every safe move you take away from the opponent is worth points. This was the second term the data chose, right after material. Chapter 9 shows why: the engine's best moves restrict the opponent at once.

On unseen openings the v2 score's top move loses 64 cp on average, and 66 cp when it scores only the eight candidates from the scan. Errors larger than a pawn happen in 16% of positions.

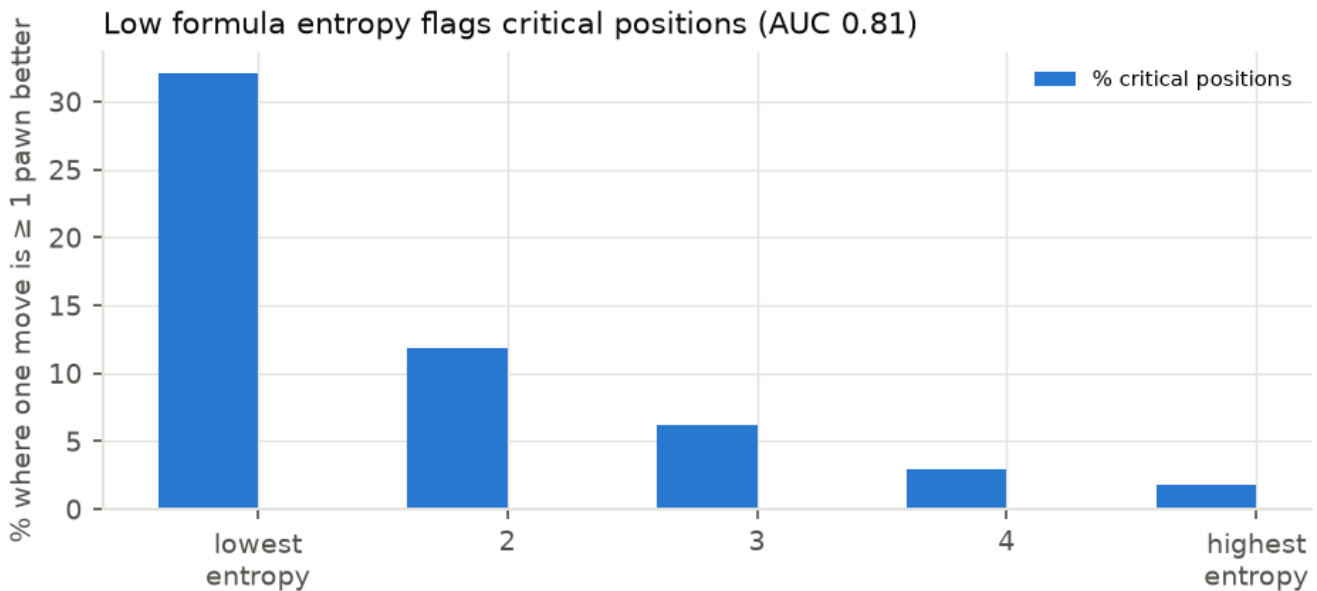
4. The check: is my move safe?

Dan Heisman's question, "Is my move safe?", becomes a procedure. After your candidate, list the opponent's *forcing* replies: every capture, every check, and every *threat*, meaning a move after which they could win material by an exchange if you did nothing. Answer each one with your best move and count the exchanges. If any reply wins material against all your answers, the candidate is not safe. Subtract the material at stake.

Applied to the eight candidates, the check changes the average loss from 66 to 62 cp, and errors larger than a pawn from 16% to 16%. It is a modest gain, and an honest one. The disasters it misses are deeper: pieces trapped two moves later, and slow mating nets (Chapter 11).

5. When to think harder: the entropy signal

Turn your candidates' scores into a distribution: the higher the score, the more likely the move. Its *entropy* measures how spread out the good options are. A low value means one move stands out. Across unseen positions, low formula entropy is a strong signal that the position is critical, meaning one move is at least a pawn better than every other (AUC 0.81). In the lowest-entropy fifth of positions, 32% are critical. In the highest-entropy fifth, only 1.8% are.

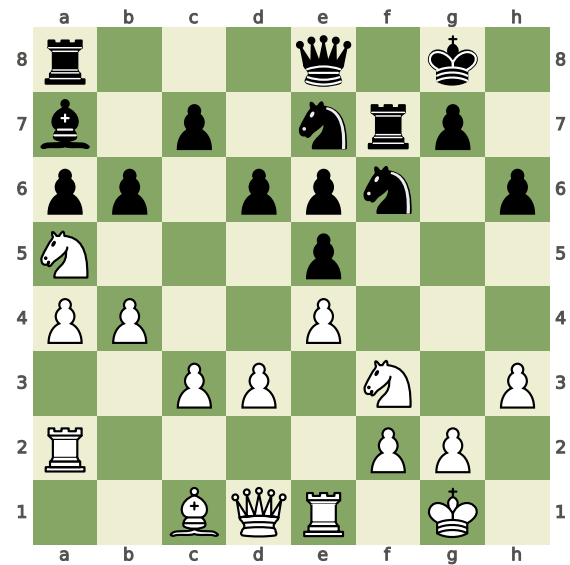


Share of critical positions by the formula's entropy (fifths of all test positions).

The rule of thumb at the board: if your best candidate's score is far ahead of the rest, slow down and calculate. If several candidates are close, any of them is fine, so play quickly.

6. One position, start to finish

The scan gives every legal move its points. The eight best become candidates; the engine's best move is marked ★. Each candidate is then scored and checked. The "Check" column is the extra material the safety check reveals.



Position 36 of Part III · White to move · Bishop's Opening (C23)

Move	Scan	Candidate?	Score	Check	Engine
Nc4 ★	12	yes	-17	0	+0.26
Nb7	11	yes	-48	2	-4.03
Nb3	11	yes	-52	0	+0.19
Be3	6	yes	-242	0	-5.73
Ba3	4	yes	-250	0	-6.28
Bd2	5	yes	-254	0	-6.08
Bb2	5	yes	-262	0	-6.18
d4	5	yes	-304	0	-5.01

The highest score is **Nc4**, and Stockfish's choice at depth 22 is **Nc4** (Nc4 b5 Ne3 Ng6 Ng4 Nxg4).

Part III

One hundred positions

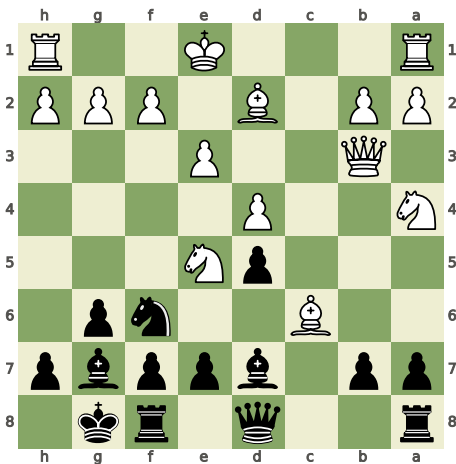
How to use Part III

Cover the table. Scan the position, list your eight candidates, score them and check the best ones. Then compare. "Scan" is the candidate points, "List" whether the move made the eight, "Score" the v2 score, "Check" the material the safety check reveals, "Eval" Stockfish's evaluation from the mover's side (pawns), and "Loss" the distance from the engine's best (★) in centipawns.

The positions were chosen by a fixed rule before we looked at the outcomes: held-out openings only, at least eight legal moves, and the best move at least 40 cp better than the fourth, so the choice matters. On these hundred the method matches the engine in 41 and is within 50 cp in 51, with an average loss of 97 cp. The first edition's formula averaged 125 cp on the same positions. The engine's move made the scan's list in 80 of them.

Openings

1 Black to move · King's Indian Defense (E60) · **critical** (low entropy)



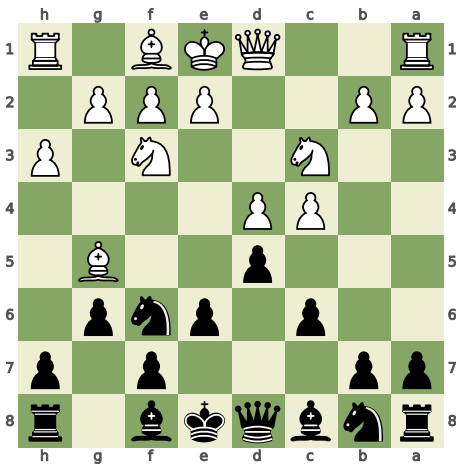
Move	Scan	List	Score	Check	Eval	Loss
Bxc6 ★	23	✓	365	0	-0.09	0
bxc6	29	✓	363	0	-0.95	86
Qc7	5	✓	-263	0	-7.26	717
Rb8	4	✓	-279	0	-6.76	667
e6	5	✓	-283	0	-6.91	682
Qc8	4	✓	-320	0	-7.39	730
b6	5	✓	-449	0	-8.33	824
Qb8	4	✓	-515	0	-9.25	916

Method: Bxc6 · Engine: Bxc6 · loss 0 cp

Method and engine agree.

[Work it in the online calculator →](#)

2 Black to move · King's Indian Defense (E60)



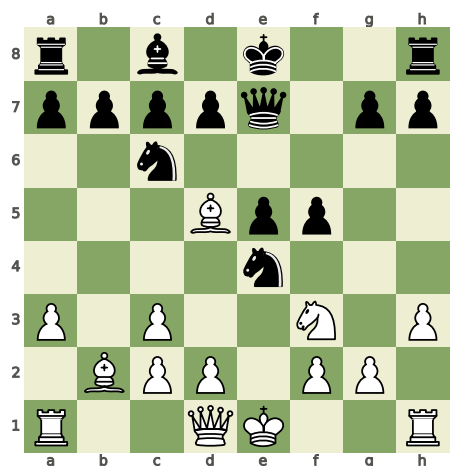
Move	Scan	List	Score	Check	Eval	Loss
dx4	6	✓	45	0	-1.16	78
Nbd7	5	✓	-26	0	-0.49	11
Bb4	5	✓	-41	0	-1.18	80
Bd6	6	✓	-54	0	-1.62	124
Na6	4	✓	-56	0	-1.74	136
Bg7	5	✓	-58	0	-0.59	21
Be7	5	✓	-58	0	-0.94	56
Bd7	5	✓	-60	0	-1.68	130
h6 ★	2	—	-114		-0.38	0

Method: dx4 · Engine: h6 · loss 78 cp

Engine line: h6 Bh4 dx4 e4 b5 e5. After dx4: dx4 e4 h6 Bxf6 Qxf6. The engine's move did not make the scan's list.

[Work it in the online calculator →](#)

3 White to move · Four Knights Game (C47)



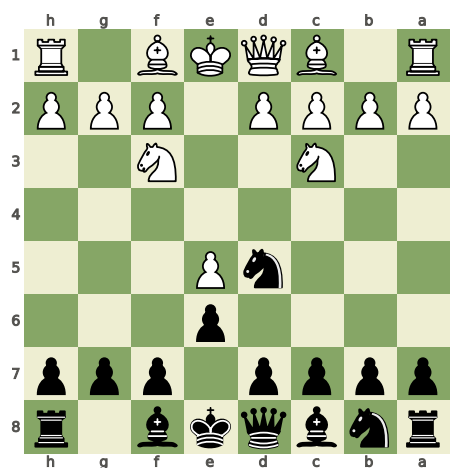
Move	Scan	List	Score	Check	Eval	Loss
O-O ★	10	✓	23	0	-0.21	0
d3	7	✓	-91	0	-0.90	69
Qe2	1	✓	-98	0	-1.07	86
Rg1	0	✓	-108	0	-3.28	307
Rh2	0	✓	-112	0	-4.60	439
d4	6	✓	-113	0	-2.06	185
g4	2	✓	-117	0	-4.19	398
Ke2	1	✓	-122	0	-6.80	659

Method: O-O · Engine: O-O · loss 0 cp

Method and engine agree.

[Work it in the online calculator →](#)

4 Black to move · French Defense (C00)



Move	Scan	List	Score	Check	Eval	Loss
Nc6	6	✓	55	0	-0.35	7
Bc5	6	✓	-10	0	-1.34	106
Be7	5	✓	-12	0	-0.75	47
Bb4	5	✓	-12	0	-0.92	64
Na6	4	✓	-25	0	-1.10	82
Qe7	1	✓	-61	0	-1.03	75
Ke7	1	✓	-65	0	-1.76	148
d6 ★	5	✓	-85	0	-0.28	0

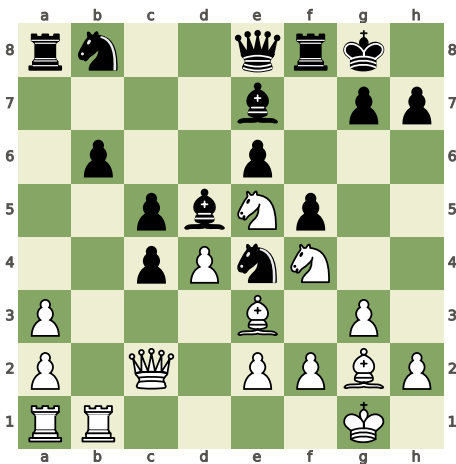
Method: Nc6 · Engine: d6 · loss 7 cp

Within 7 cp of the engine: a practical equal.

[Work it in the online calculator →](#)

Middlegames

35 White to move · Dutch Defense (A80)

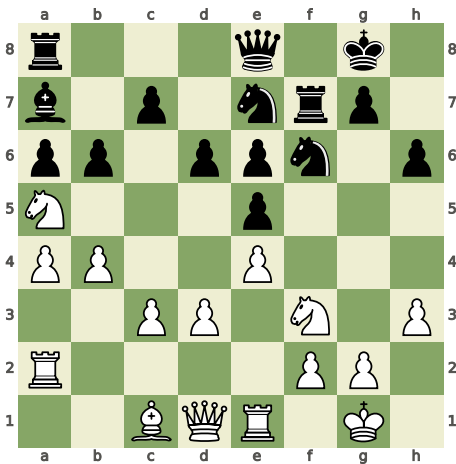


Move	Scan	List	Score	Check	Eval	Loss
Nxd5	9	✓	139	0	+0.00	159
Rxb6	4	✓	46	0	+1.18	41
Nxc4	8	✓	-1	0	+0.84	75
dxcc5 ★	8	✓	-4	0	+1.59	0
Rb2	3	✓	-102	0	-0.21	180
a4	10	✓	-111	0	-0.07	166
Qb2	6	✓	-118	0	-0.70	229
Qc1	3	✓	-122	1	-0.62	221

Method: Nxd5 · Engine: dxcc5 · loss 159 cp
Engine line: dxcc5 bxc5 Nxc4 Nd7 Rd1 Qf7. After Nxd5: Nxd5 exd5 f3 Rxa3 fxe4.

[Work it in the online calculator →](#)

36 White to move · Bishop's Opening (C23)

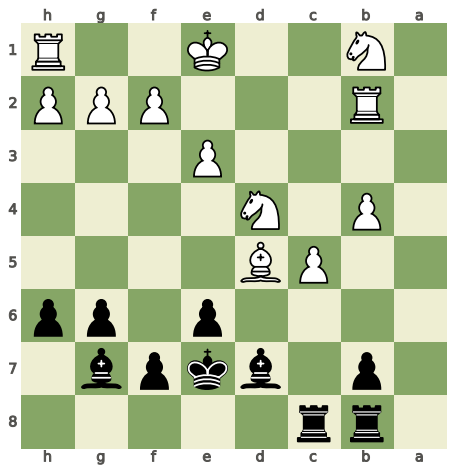


Move	Scan	List	Score	Check	Eval	Loss
Nc4 ★	12	✓	-17	0	+0.26	0
Nb7	11	✓	-48	2	-4.03	429
Nb3	11	✓	-52	0	+0.19	7
Be3	6	✓	-242	0	-5.73	599
Ba3	4	✓	-250	0	-6.28	654
Bd2	5	✓	-254	0	-6.08	634
Bb2	5	✓	-262	0	-6.18	644
d4	5	✓	-304	0	-5.01	527

Method: Nc4 · Engine: Nc4 · loss 0 cp
Method and engine agree.

[Work it in the online calculator →](#)

37 Black to move · London System (D02) · critical (low entropy)



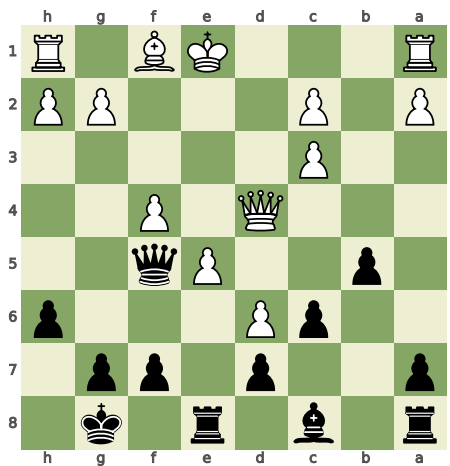
Move	Scan	List	Score	Check	Eval	Loss
exd5 ★	23	✓	416	0	-0.07	0
Bxd4	1	✓	300	0	-3.56	349
Kf6	1	✓	-105	0	-6.17	610
e5	7	✓	-112	0	-6.17	610
Rc7	1	✓	-123	0	-5.38	531
Be5	2	✓	-127	0	-5.90	583
Bf6	1	✓	-127	0	-5.82	575
Bc6	3	✓	-129	0	-6.63	656

Method: exd5 · **Engine:** exd5 · loss 0 cp

Method and engine agree.

[Work it in the online calculator →](#)

38 Black to move · Four Knights Game (C47)



Move	Scan	List	Score	Check	Eval	Loss
Qxc2	2	✓	56	0	-3.38	210
Bb7	5	✓	-15	0	-4.52	324
Ba6	4	✓	-15	0	-5.21	393
Kh8	0	✓	-72	0	-5.19	391
Qg6	1	✓	-76	0	-5.18	390
Re6	2	✓	-80	0	-5.97	469
Kf8	0	✓	-80	0	-5.82	454
f6 ★	1	✓	-109	0	-1.28	0

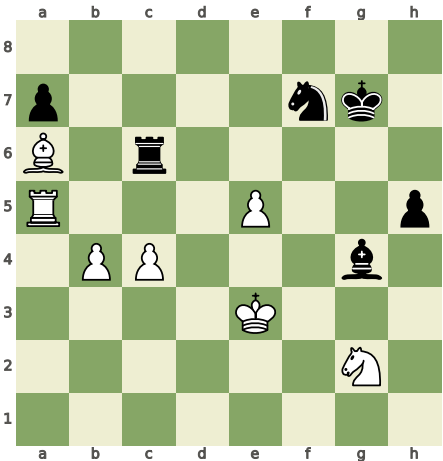
Method: Qxc2 · **Engine:** f6 · loss 210 cp

Engine line: f6 O-O-O fxe5 fxe5 Rxe5 Bd3. After Qxc2: Qxc2 Bd3 Qxg2 Rg1 Qf3.

[Work it in the online calculator →](#)

Endgames

68 White to move · Sicilian Defense: Dragon (B70)

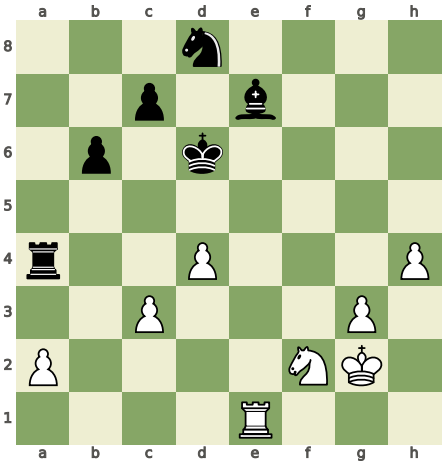


Move	Scan	List	Score	Check	Eval	Loss
Nf4 ★	1	✓	-40	0	+2.89	0
Kf4	0	✓	-90	0	+1.61	128
Kd4	1	✓	-96	0	+1.99	90
Ke4	1	✓	-125	0	+1.18	171
Kf2	-1	✓	-246	0	+0.07	282
Kd2	-1	✓	-246	0	+0.26	263
Kd3	0	✓	-270	0	+0.30	259
Rc5	-1	✓	-432	0	-2.78	567

Method: Nf4 · Engine: Nf4 · loss 0 cp
Method and engine agree.

[Work it in the online calculator →](#)

69 White to move · Dutch Defense (A80)



Move	Scan	List	Score	Check	Eval	Loss
Ne4+	8	✓	11	0	-0.47	17
Re2 ★	5	✓	-91	0	-0.30	0
Ra1	4	✓	-101	0	-1.16	86
Nd3	1	✓	-179	0	-1.25	95
Kf3	1	✓	-210	0	-0.83	53
Re5	3	✓	-214	0	-1.35	105
Re4	3	✓	-230	0	-1.32	102
Re3	2	✓	-230	0	-1.11	81

Method: Ne4+ · Engine: Re2 · loss 17 cp
Within 17 cp of the engine: a practical equal.

[Work it in the online calculator →](#)

End of the free sample

The full second edition adds Part II (the complete evidence) and all one hundred worked positions. Order it at **bobbycarlsen.com/book**.