

starting out: pawn endgames

GLENN FLEAR



EVERYMAN CHESS

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To my friend Jean-Claude

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Introduction

The book that you have in your hands is primarily intended for those who aren't that experienced in the endgame. I would include in this category those who have just started out on their chess adventure, club players (many of whom are useful middlegame exponents but whose endgames could do with improvement), and wise juniors who have come to realise that there is more to study than opening theory.

In my opinion pawn endings are the building blocks upon which all endgames are built and are an ideal place to start learning about the latter phase of the game.

How often do we see the inexperienced player hold his own for hours against the master, until in a simplified ending the draw seems virtually certain? Then, more often than not, the weaker player goes astray. The master's erudition tips the balance in his favour.

At some point we've all lost 'dead drawn' endings or 'missed an easy win' when everyone around claims to have seen it, or knows the technique etc. If you are tired of this happening to you, then read on!

Chess is at times a complicated game. There are six types of pieces with various rules concerning their movements and middlegames can therefore lead to a rich tapestry of variations and fascinating possibilities. So towards the end of a tiring struggle when mass exchanges lead to a simplified endgame, who can blame the inexperienced player for relaxing just a little...

It's so easy to let one's guard slip, and yet we will see in the pages that follow that one moment of inattention can mean that several hours of effort can be thrown away.

Endgames, and in particular pawn endings, involve limited material. But as the board clears the importance of each remaining chess piece increases as does an advantage in material. This seems understandable, but it also applies to errors and lack of understanding. Even serious blunders can sometimes be clawed back in the early part of a game, but towards the end a seemingly insignificant slip can be fatal.



WARNING: Mistakes in middlegames may be miserable, but errors in endgames are essentially the End!

There are many 'golden' rules concerning endgame play, and a great number

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concern pawn endings. These are best learnt in combination with thematic examples that reinforce the principle and we'll come across these throughout the book. This way the learning process is worthwhile and hopefully enjoyable.

It wasn't my intention to write (yet another!) endgame book so soon, but when the offer from Everyman Chess came I was happy to expand (and share with the reader) my appreciation of pure pawn endings, an area that I would have liked to have dealt with more comprehensively in my earlier books.

As a teenager I was a fan of Averbakh's series of endgame books and in particular I remember reading *Pawn Endings* that he co-wrote with Maizelis. I enjoyed and benefited greatly from that book, but it's very detailed and some sections are so complicated that I occasionally became confused. I have thus aimed to keep my book reasonably straightforward.

For those unfamiliar with various terms used in pawn endings and throughout the book then Chapter 1 is for you; it also gives a taste of what is to come. Chapters 2-9 are concerned with the fuller details of pawn endings. As pawn endings don't exist in isolation, I've also discussed the result of queening pawns, when sometimes the struggle continues (Chapter 10) and also the moment of exchanging into pawn endings (Chapter 11).

Exercises in each section should enable the reader to test his understanding, and Chapter 12 has eight further exercises for those who are really keen! Finally, Chapter 13 has all the answers. Well at least those concerning the exercises!

Better knowledge of pawn endings should lead to improvements in confidence, general understanding and results. However I also hope that after reading a few pages you'll learn that studying endgames can be great fun.

Glenn Flear,
France,
September 2004

Chapter One

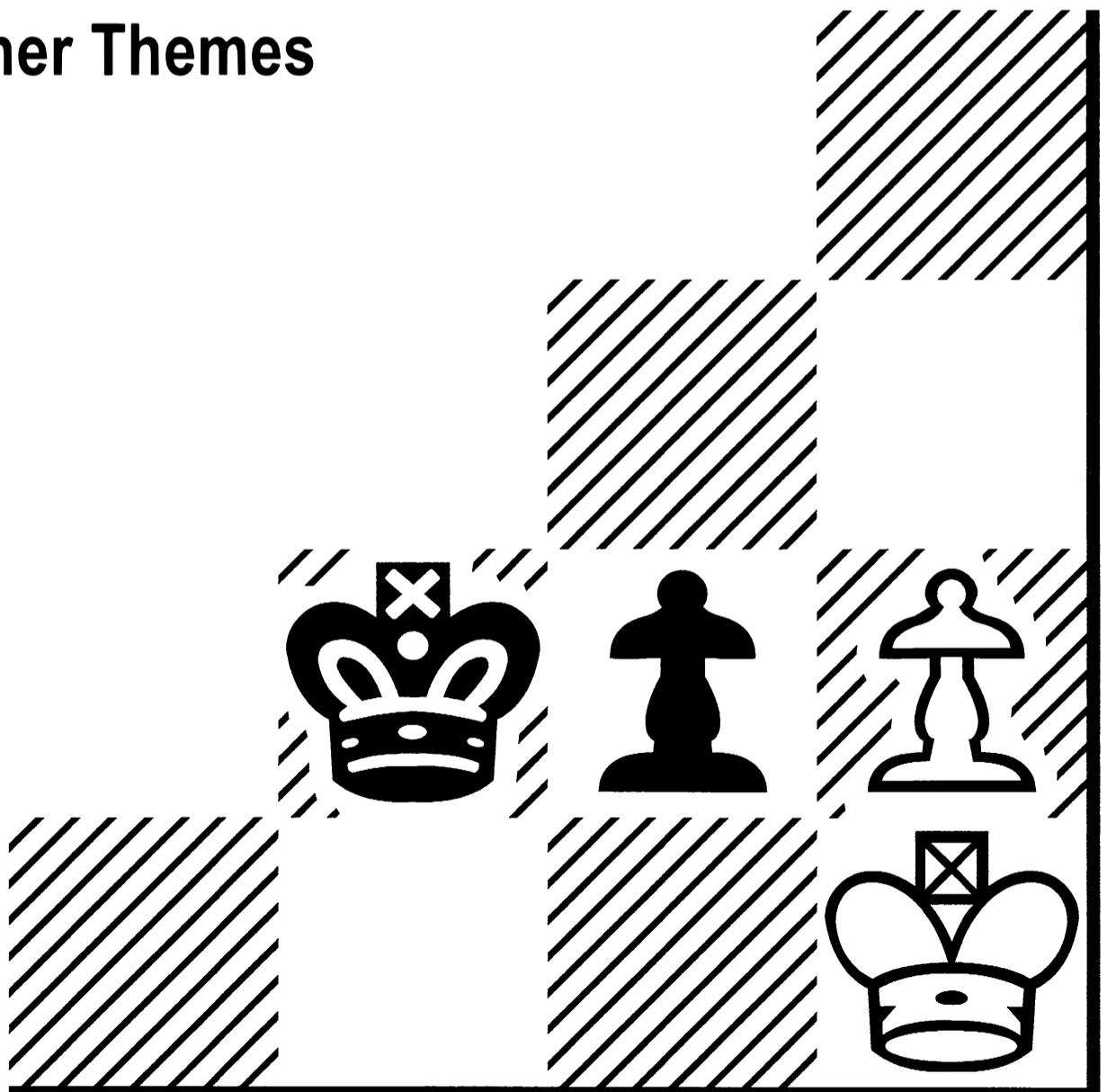
Pawn Endgames are Special!

 Introduction

 Zugzwang

 King Themes

 Other Themes



Introduction

With no other pieces on the board except for kings and pawns, the aims of the players are less evident than in a middlegame. Kings naturally play a bigger role, and the timing of pawn moves is of particular importance. Direct mates are rare but trying to obtain a queen is often the primary aim once a side has obtained a clear advantage.

Here in this chapter we will make an overview of those idiosyncratic themes that occur in pawn endings and get to know the special terms that have come to be associated with this phase of the game.

I think as you play through the following examples you too will understand why pawn endings are special!

Example 1: Thinking about the rules

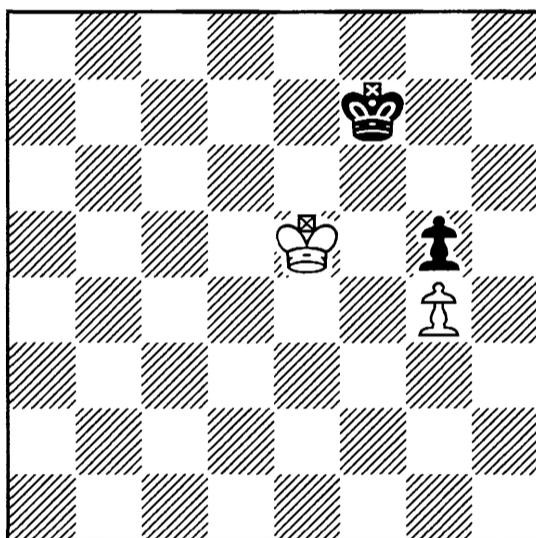


Diagram 1 (B)
Thinking about rules

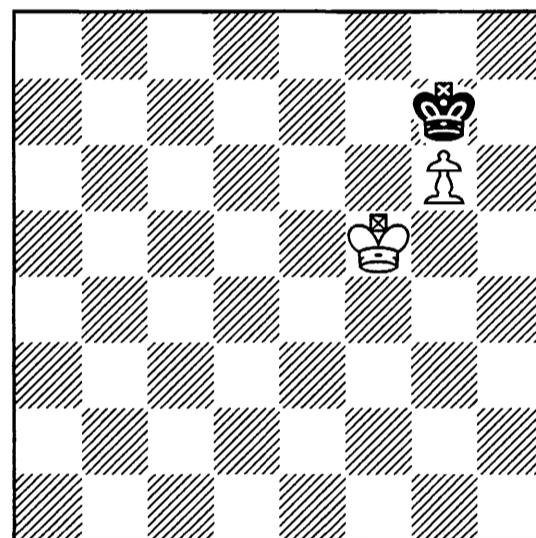


Diagram 2 (B)
Black draws

When we learn how to play chess we first learn how the pieces move individually, and then how they interact. This involves special rules such as pawn captures, en passant, promotions and castling. Then once we've learnt them we take them for granted.

To start with I'm going to look at how certain rules influence play in pawn endings. One rule that is accepted by club players but isn't obvious to beginners is the rule whereby *kings aren't allowed to move to squares that are adjacent to their counterparts*.

Let's play through the following example to see how this and other rules fundamentally affect play in pawn endings.

(Diagram 1) 1...Ke7

Black isn't allowed to go to the f6-square, so he shadows his adversary.

He could also try to defend with 1...Kg6. After 2 Ke6, Black's king would be happy to sit where he is all day but it's his turn and in chess *we are obliged to move if we can*. 2...Kg7 3 Kf5 Kh6 4 Kf6 (Black now has to move his king away from his g-pawn) 4...Kh7 5 Kxg5 Kg7 and we are back in the main game

after Black's third move.

2 Kf5 Kf7 3 Kxg5

Winning a pawn, but not the game against correct play.

3...Kg7!

White would like to advance to the sixth rank but the presence of Black's king on g7 means that an advance to any of f6, g6 or h6 is illegal.

4 Kf5 Kf7

Again White is denied access to the sixth rank, so there is only one try left.

5 g5 Kg7 6 g6 (Diagram 2)

6 Ke6 looks silly after 6...Kg6.

6...Kg8!

Black does well to retreat as 6...Kh6?? allows White a free road to the queen-square with 7 Kf6 Kh5 8 g7.

Otherwise 6...Kf8?? 7 Kf6 is bad news for Black as it's his turn to move: 7...Kg8 8 g7 (now Black has no choice and has to give up his control of the f7-square) 8...Kh7 9 Kf7 (the king makes it to the seventh and prepares the pawn's advance) 9...Kh6 10 g8Q Kh5 11 Qg3 Kh6 12 Qg6 mate.

This theme will be developed throughout the book, but here we are seeing the first stage in the thinking behind an idea called *the opposition*. This will be explained shortly.

7 Kf6 Kf8

White's king achieves a posting on the sixth rank and supports his pawn, but White is unable to advance his king to the seventh.

8 g7+ Kg8 9 Kg6

An example of stalemate, which means the game is drawn! Another rule that we have to learn about early on!

Example 2: Stalemate

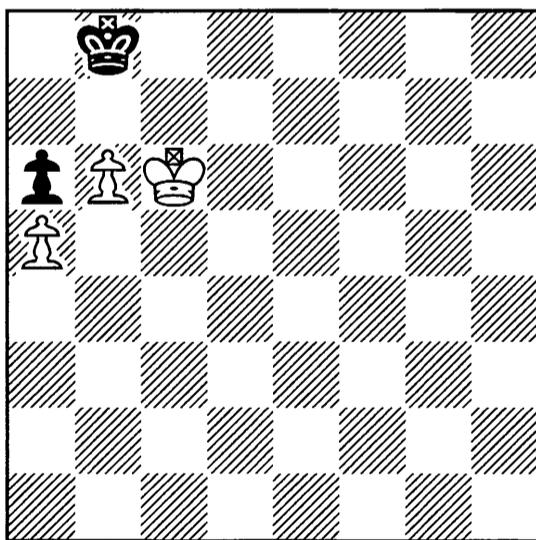


Diagram 3 (W)
White cannot win

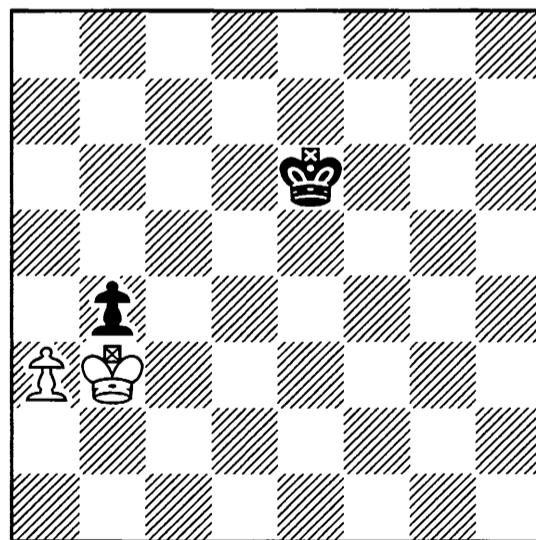


Diagram 4 (W)
White wins

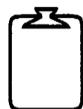
(Diagram 3) Stalemate is a common theme. Here White has an advanced

passed pawn but cannot win because of the edge of the board.

1 b7 Ka7 2 Kc7 stalemate

With Black to move in the initial position the result isn't changed but the stalemate is different.

Example 2a: Another stalemate



NOTE: Throughout the book, if an example has an 'a' after its number then it means that it's the same initial position as the previous example *but with the other player to move*.

(Diagram 3) **1...Kc8**

Or **1..Ka8 2 Kc7.**

2 b7+ Kb8 3 Kb6 and yet again it's a draw due to stalemate.

Example 3: The rook's pawn

(Diagram 4) In many pawn endings a passed rook's pawn (meaning either an a- or h-pawn, i.e. those pawns on the files where rooks start the game) is less dangerous for the defender. Here is an example.

1 axb4!

Following **1 Kxb4?** (erroneously eschewing the chance to convert his a-pawn into a b-pawn) **1...Kd6 2 Kb5 Kc7 3 Ka6 Kb8 4 a4 Ka8 5 a5 Kb8 6 Kb6 Ka8** White cannot win.

1...Kd6 2 Ka4 Kc6 3 Ka5 Kb7 4 Kb5 Kc7 5 Ka6 Kb8 6 Kb6

and White wins as will be explained in Chapter 2.

Example 4: The square of a pawn

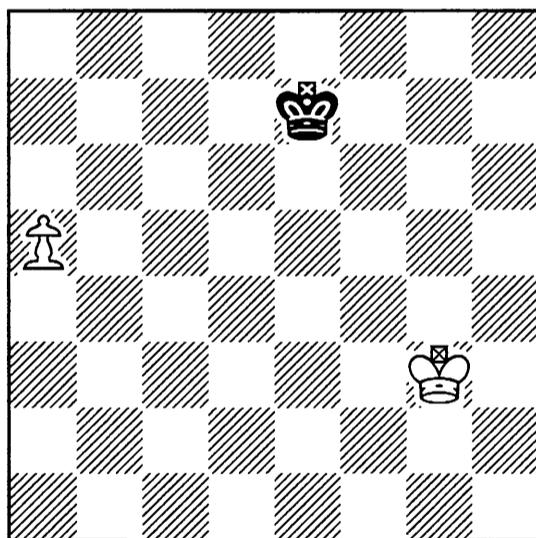


Diagram 5 (B)
Reaching the square

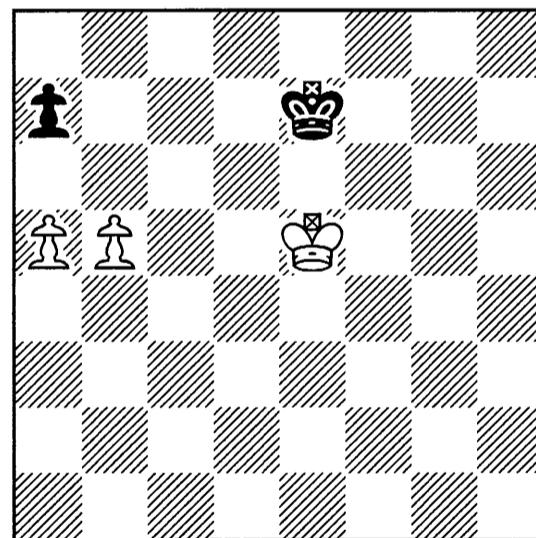


Diagram 6 (W)
Breakthrough

(Diagram 5) White's king is too far away to influence matters. The question is can Black stop the pawn: 1) With White to play? 2) With Black to play? In pawn endings there aren't any other pieces to help out so a king has to stop and round up opposing passed pawns on his own.

1...Kd7 2 a6 Kc7 3 a7 Kb7 4 a8Q+ Kxa8

Just in time! Instead of calculating move-by-move, there is another way of seeing if a king can stop passed pawns.

From the diagram, draw an imaginary line diagonally from a5-d8 and then consider this as the diagonal of a square consisting of d8-a8-a5-d5-d8. This is called *the square of the pawn* or *the square* for short. If the defending king, to move, can enter the square he can cut off the pawn in time. The move 1...Kd7 enters the square so, yes he holds.

With White to move in **Diagram 6 (4a)**, Black's king never enters *the square* and the pawn is able to promote unscathed.

1 a6 Kd7 2 a7 Kc7 3 a8Q etc.

Example 5: Breakthroughs!

White wins with what is known as a *breakthrough*.

1 b6! axb6 2 a6! and the pawn queens as Black cannot enter the square of the a-pawn.

Zugzwang

This is one of the most important themes of pawn endings.

Example 6: Zugzwang

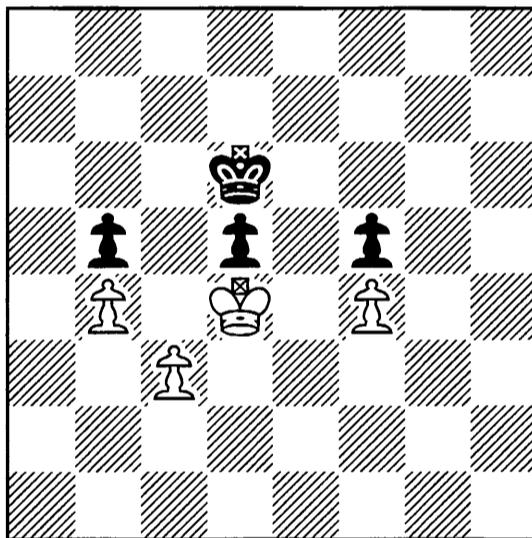


Diagram 7 (B)
Zugzwang

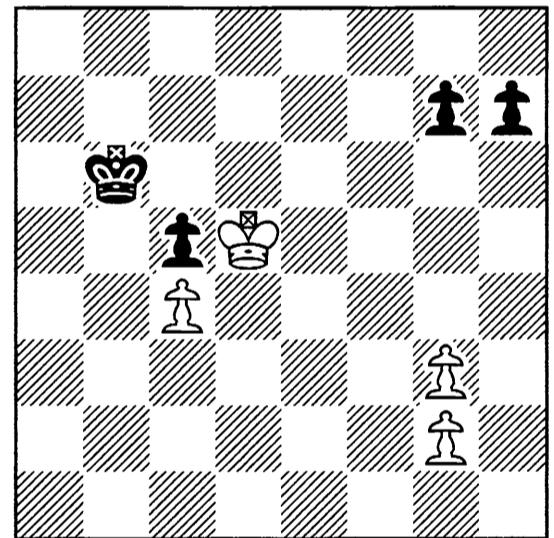


Diagram 8 (W)
Black runs out of moves

(Diagram 7) Zugzwang is commonplace. Here, for instance, Black is obliged to move and must allow White to enter into c5 or e5.

1...Kc6 2 Ke5 and White wins.



NOTE: Zugzwang is a German word meaning 'obliged to move' even though it's definitely not in one's interest!

There are a couple of specific zugzwangs that follow, but although the name is commonplace it's interpreted differently by other authors. In some books the term *reciprocal zugzwang* is used for positions such as this one where

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'White to play draws; Black to play loses', i.e. a position where having the move is unsolicited and affects the result of the game decisively.

Positions where one side runs out of tempi and loses sooner or later from zugzwang is sometimes called a *squeeze* or simply *zugzwang*.

I don't consider it necessary for our purposes to rigorously distinguish between the two, as the term *zugzwang* is adequate.

With White to move (6a) he must retreat his king and Black is out of danger. However, each time White brings his king to d4 Black must react with the only move ...Kd6.

(Diagram 7) 1 Ke3 Ke7 2 Kd3 Ke6 3 Kd4 Kd6

The only good move!

4 Kd3 Ke6 5 Ke2 Ke7 6 Kf3 Kf6 7 Kg3 Kf7 8 Kh4 Kg6

and the position is clearly drawn.

Example 7: Squeeze

(Diagram 8) An example of a *squeeze*. On the queenside Black is in zugzwang and it doesn't matter who has the move or how many tempi he has to spare. Ultimately he has to move his king and lose the c-pawn.

1 Kd6 h5 2 Kd5 g6 3 Kd6 g5 4 Kd5 h4 5 g4

and it's time for the inevitable...

5...Kb7 6 Kxc5 Kc7 7 Kd5 Kd7 8 c5 and White wins.

Example 8: The opposition

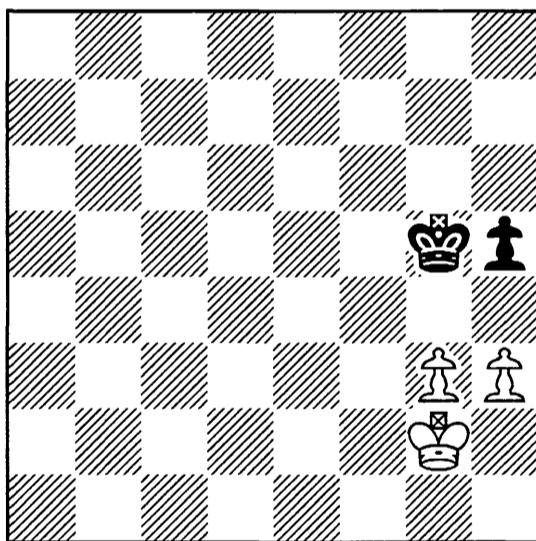


Diagram 9 (B)
Black should draw

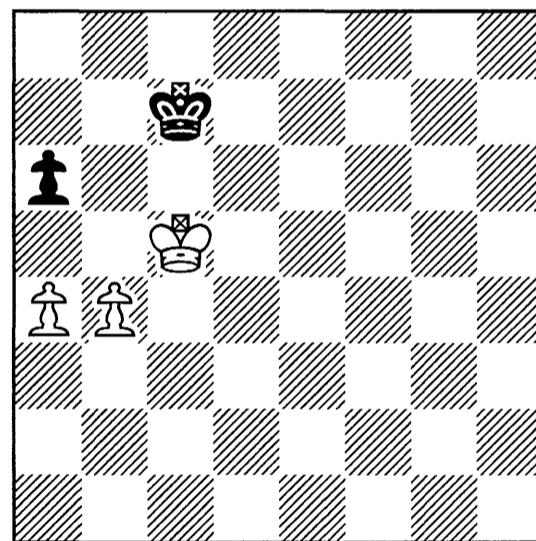


Diagram 10 (W)
Spare tempi

The opposition is a type of zugzwang mainly known from pawn endings. It's as if the kings face each other off, the first to move losing the argument.

(Diagram 9) 1...Kf5?

If 1...Kf6 then 2 Kf2 (the king's are then opposed four files apart – the *distant opposition* which quickly reduces to the 'direct' case) 2...Ke5 3 Ke3 (with the *direct opposition*) 3...Kf5 4 Kd4 (White doesn't maintain the opposition blindly but undertakes a by-passing manoeuvre to outflank his opponent) 4...Kf6 5

Ke4 Ke6 6 Kf4 Kf6 7 h4 (now White retakes the opposition which enables him to take control of some further advanced squares and ultimately he wins the h-pawn) 7...Kg6 8 Ke5 Kg7 9 Kf5 Kh6 10 Kf6 Kh7 11 Kg5 Kg7 12 Kxh5 and White wins.

Correct is 1...Kg6! 2 Kf2 (or if 2 Kf3 then 2...Kf5) 2...Kf6 3 Ke3 Ke5 4 Kf3 Kf5 5 Ke3 Ke5 (Black's king shadows its counterpart stopping any ideas of enemy progress up the board) 6 Kd3 Kd5 7 Ke3 Ke5 8 Kf3 Kf5 9 h4 Ke5 10 Ke3 Kf5 and White cannot win.

2 Kf3

The kings are 'opposed' two ranks apart. Black's king has to move and so White can outflank.

2...Ke5 3 Ke3 Kf5 4 Kd4! Kf6 5 Ke4 Ke6 6 Kf4 Kf6 7 h4! Kg6 8 Ke5 Kg7 9 Kf5 Kh6 10 Kf6 Kh7 11 Kg5 and White wins.

Example 9: The opposition but...

(Diagram 10) This is analogous to Example 8 but not the same. Opposition is simply an idea, not the 'be all and end all'. Here Black has faced down the white king and it is White to move, but White wins with...

1 a5

...and it is Black that must give way.

So the presence of spare tempi (pawn moves) can reverse the opposition or zugzwangs. Here White's king was more favourably placed (fifth rank) than in the previous example and the pawn move made a difference. There it didn't. So, take the opposition into account but don't forget to bear in mind the individual characteristics of a position.

1...Kb7 2 Kd6 Kb8 3 Kc6 Ka7 4 Kc7 Ka8 5 Kb6 and White wins.

Example 10: Trébuchet

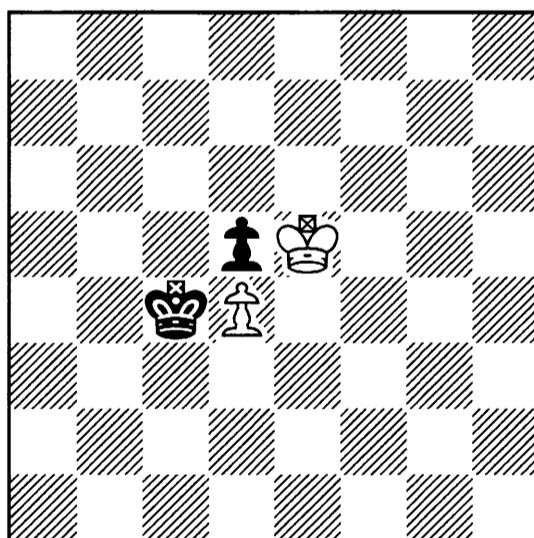


Diagram 11
A trébuchet

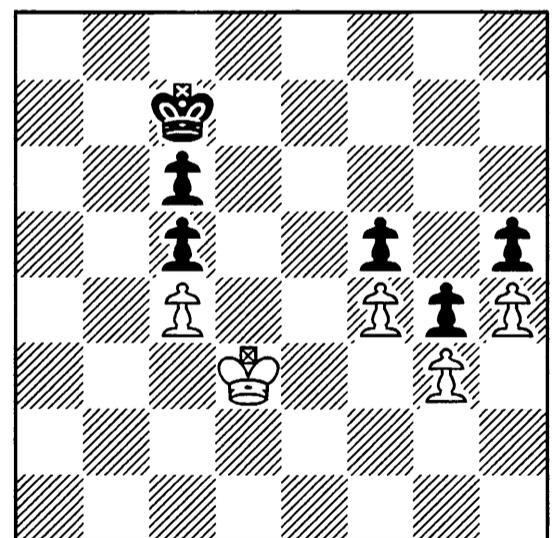


Diagram 12 (B)
A barrier

(Diagram 11) A trébuchet. An extreme type of zugzwang where whoever to play loses.

Example 11: A barrier

(Diagram 12) Black's extra pawn is nigh on useless as he has little chance to invade. After...

1...Kb6 2 Kc3 Ka5 3 Kb3

...White's barricade holds. If you glance across the middle of the board you will note that there is a *barrier* across which Black cannot pass: a4 and b4 are covered by White's king and d5 and e5 by the white pawns. Equally White cannot invade through the centre as d4 and e4 are inaccessible to his king and Black's king stops any entry via a5. So Black also has a *barrier*.

Example 12: A spare tempo

Sometimes a defensive barrier can be breached using zugzwang. A common way of bringing this about is the use of pawn moves held in reserve often for this very purpose.

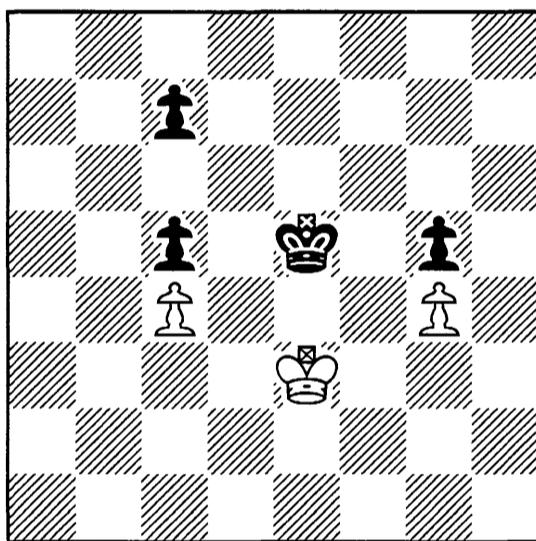


Diagram 13 (B)
A spare pawn move

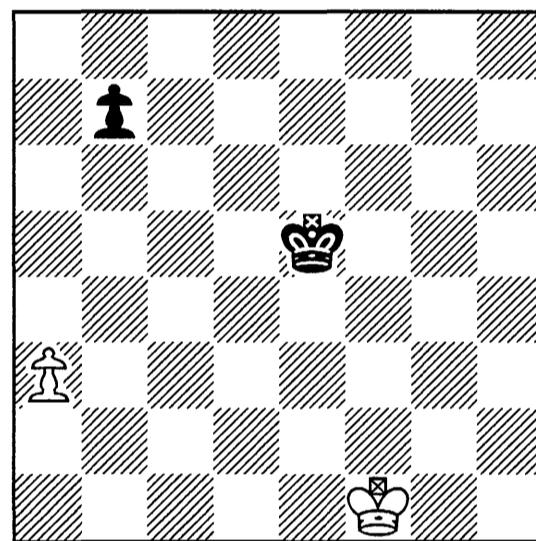


Diagram 14 (B)
Black wins

(Diagram 13) White's king faces off his opponent but Black has a *spare* pawn move or *tempo* that forces invasion.

1...c6 ...and White must allow a decisive invasion to f4 or d4.

King Themes

A number of king manoeuvres are given special names.

Example 13: Holding off

(Diagram 14) In this position from an actual game Black won as follows:

1...Kd4 2 Ke2 Kc3 3 Ke3 b5!

Using the fact that Black's king *holds off* White's approach to the queenside to gain a decisive tempo. 3...Kb3? allows a draw with 4 Kd4 Kxa3 5 Kc5.

After 3...b5 White resigned due to 4 Ke2 Kb3 5 Kd3 Kxa3 6 Kc2 b4 7 Kb1 Kb3 8 Ka1 Kc2 etc.

Example 14: The feint

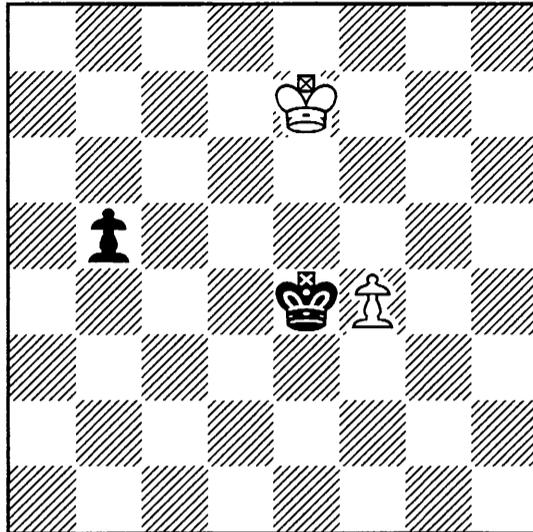


Diagram 15 (W)
White can draw

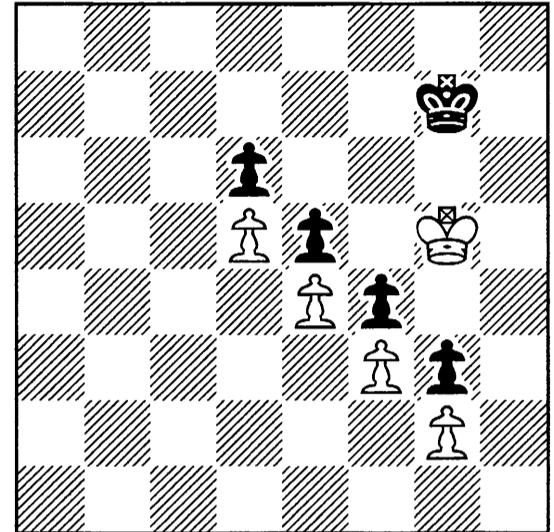


Diagram 16 (B)
White captures all pawns

(Diagram 15) A *feint* really means a double-purpose move.

1 Ke6!

Preparing to support the f-pawn or get into the square of Black's b-pawn.

1...b4

After 1...Kxf4 White wins the b-pawn with 2 Kd5 etc.

2 f5 b3 3 f6 b2 4 f7 b1Q 5 f8Q and draws.

Example 15: Outflanking

(Diagram 16) Black to move loses his pawns one after another. He is *out-flanked*.

1...Kf7 2 Kf5 Ke7 3 Kg6 Ke8 4 Kf6 Kd7 5 Kf7 Kd8 6 Ke6 Kc7 7 Ke7 Kc8 8 Kxd6 Kd8 9 Kxe5 Ke7 10 Kxf4

A bit sadistic and not at all necessary, but tempting!

10...Kd6 11 Kxg3 and so on.

Example 16: Triangulation

One of the most famous and elegant manoeuvres is called *triangulation*.

(Diagram 17) White would like to have this position with Black to play so he proceeds as follows.

1 Kd2 Kd6 2 Kc2 Kc5

If 2...Kd5 then 3 Kd3.

3 Kc3 Kd5 4 Kd3

and we are back in the initial position, but this time with Black to move.

NOTE: White's *triangulation* manoeuvre is sometimes called *losing a move*.



The first name is used because of the use of the d3-c2-c3 'triangle' and the second because White has taken an extra move to get back to where he

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started. White is now able to outmanoeuvre his opponent but must take care not to get carried away with his success so far!

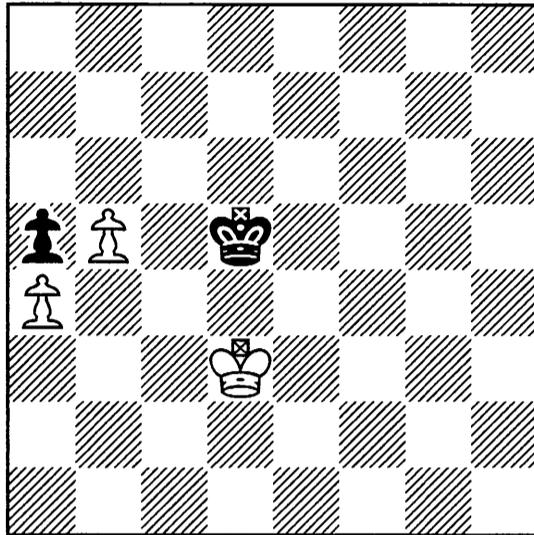


Diagram 17 (W)
White triangulates

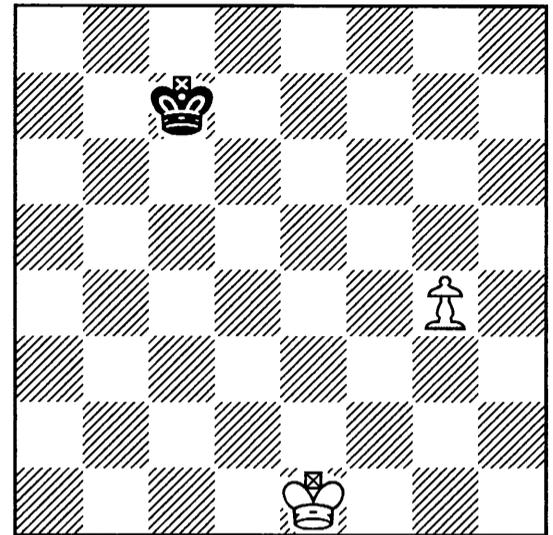


Diagram 18 (W)
White wins

4...Kc5 5 Ke4

Another example of White *outflanking* his opponent.

5...Kd6 6 Kd4 Kc7 7 Kd5

Note that 7 Kc5 Kb7 8 b6? Ka6! leads after 9 Kc6 to stalemate!

7...Kb6 8 Kd6 Kb7 9 Kc5 Kc7 10 b6+ Kb7 11 Kb5 and White wins.

Example 17: Underpass

(Diagram 18) White wins with an unusual manoeuvre.

1 Kf2 Kd6 2 Kg3 Ke5 3 Kh4 Kf6 4 Kh5 Kg7 5 Kg5 Kf7 6 Kh6 etc.

Going this side of the pawn is called an *underpass*.

Example 18: Skirting manoeuvre

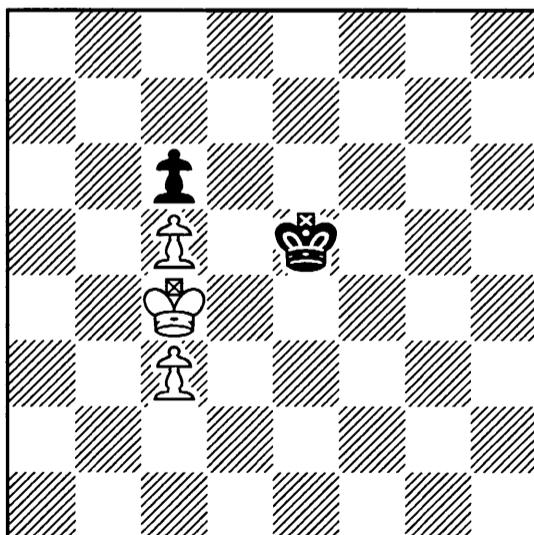


Diagram 19 (W)
White wins

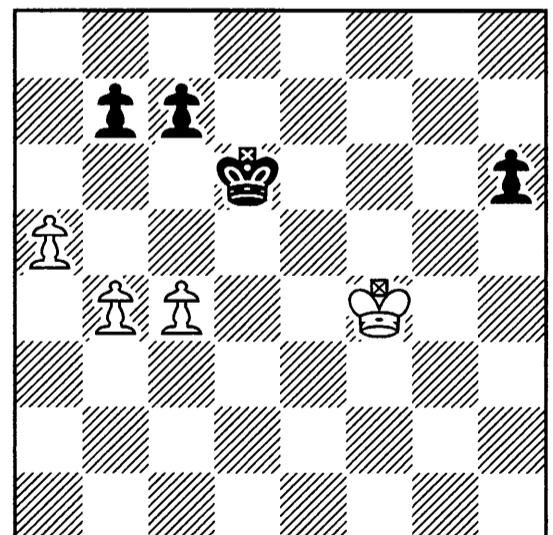


Diagram 20 (W)
Black seeks sanctuary

(Diagram 19) White again goes around his pawn. He can win by invading on the queenside, but only if he avoids going to b4 where he would be zugzwanged.

1 Kb3!

1 Kb4? loses the forward c-pawn to 1...Kd5 2 c4+ Kd4.

1...Ke4

If 1...Kd5 then 2 Kb4 and it's Black's turn to be zugzwanged.

2 Ka4 Ke5 3 Ka5 Ke6

Now 3...Kd5 can be met by 4 Kb6.

4 Kb6 Kd5 5 c4+ and wins.



NOTE: The king's route can be described as a *skirting manoeuvre* as he circumnavigates the zugzwang square.

Example 19: Sanctuary

(Diagram 20) Black's defensive strategy in this example can be likened to hiding in a rabbit hole! A slightly humiliating way of keeping out of trouble but it can be effective!

1 b5 Kd7 2 Kg4 Kc8 3 Kh5 Kb8 4 Kxh6 Ka7 5 Kg6 c6 6 Kf6

The continuation 6 bxc6 bxc6 7 Kf6 Ka6 8 Ke6 Kxa5 9 Kd6 Kb4 10 Kxc6 Kxc4 also draws.

6...cxb5 7 cxb5 Kb8 8 Ke6 Kc7 9 Ke7 Kc8 10 Kd6 Kd8 11 b6

Or here 11 a6 bxa6 12 bxa6 Kc8.

11...Kc8 12 Ke7 Kb8 13 Kd7 Ka8 14 a6 Kb8!

and White cannot smoke out his opponent!

The word *fortress* is sometimes used to describe a small but impregnable defensive zone. However I tend to associate this mainly with endgames involving pieces. I prefer the term *sanctuary* like in medieval times when the hunted man was immune from capture whilst he stayed inside a holy building.

Other Themes

Example 20: A clear pawn up and decoys

One of the first things we learn about endgames is that pawn endings with an extra pawn are often simple wins. This following type of position is typical.

In a similar ending with pieces on the board the advantage of an extra pawn can be difficult to convert. In pawn endings the standard technique a clear pawn up is to reduce the pawns on one wing to a unique passed pawn and then use it as a *decoy* to get into the remaining pawns on the other wing.

(Diagram 21) **1 b5+ axb5+ 2 axb5+ Kb6 3 Kb4 Kb7 4 Kc5 Kc7 5 Kd5!**

White makes a beeline for the kingside.

5...Kb6 6 Ke5 Kxb5 7 Kf6 Kc6 8 Kxf7 Kd7 9 Kxg6

and Black of course has no defence.

A typical plan in various endings a clear pawn up is to exchange off all the pieces. The win is easier without interference from defending pieces and the above technique can often be applied.

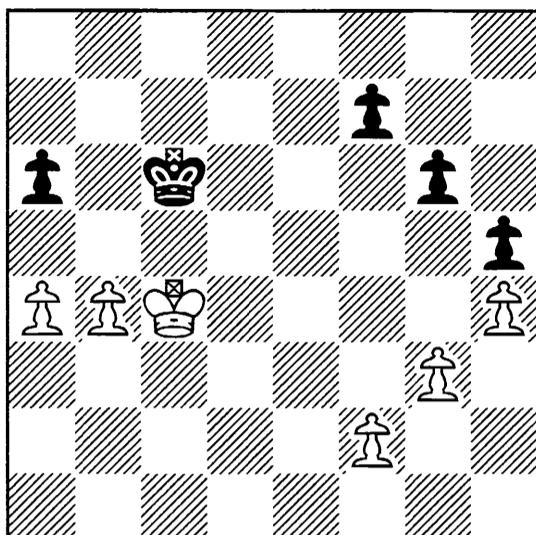


Diagram 21 (W)
Using the extra pawn

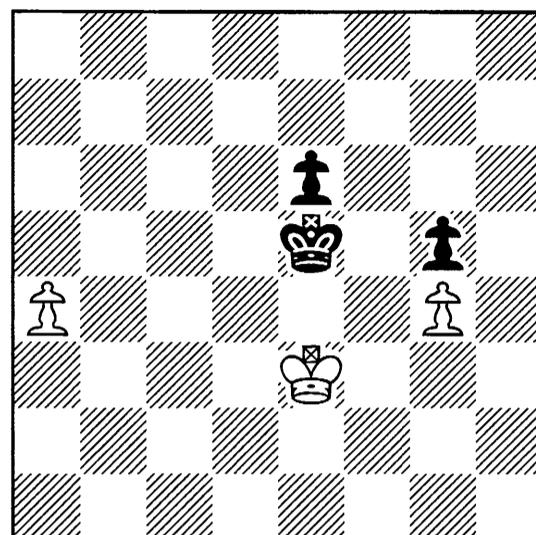


Diagram 22 (W)
White has an outside passed pawn

Example 21: Outside passed pawn

In the next case material is equal but the win is rather similar. (**Diagram 22**) White's a-pawn is an example of an *outside passed pawn*. It's the passed pawn furthest from the main body of pawns. Black's king will have to go over to the a-file to neutralise it and this takes him far away from his kingside.

1 a5 Kd5 2 a6 Kc6 3 Ke4 Kb6 4 Ke5 Kxa6 5 Kxe6 Kb6 6 Kf6 Kc6 7 Kxg5 Kd7 8 Kf6 Ke8 9 Kg7 and wins.

Example 22: Queening squares, races and skewers

There are a few terms associated with *races* and queen endgames.

(**Diagram 23**) The *queening square* of the h-pawn is h1 i.e. the square where the pawn reaches the eighth rank and is promoted (generally to a queen). White's a-pawn will head towards a8, its *queening square*.

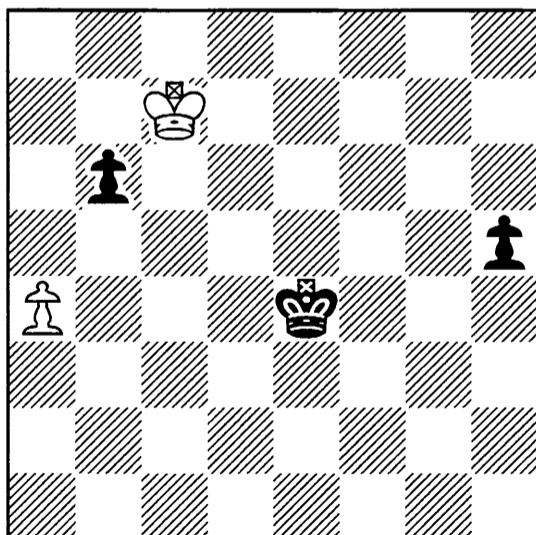


Diagram 23 (W)
It's a race

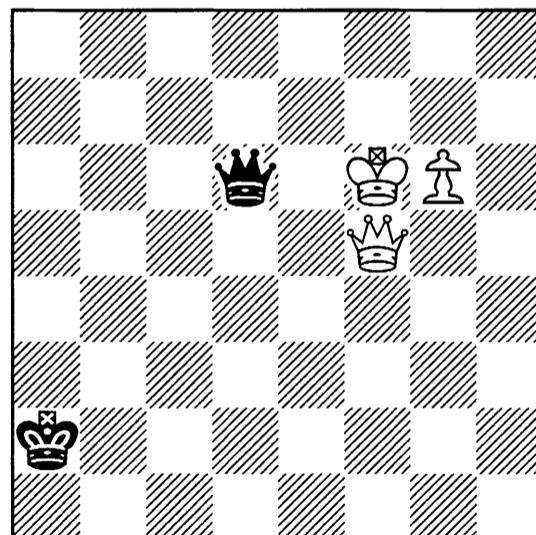


Diagram 24 (W)
White wins

1 Kxb6

Now it's a *race*, i.e. the opposing passed pawns rush forward to try and promote, normally as quickly as possible. Arriving first is an important aim.



NOTE: In races a typical technique is *counting*, i.e. the players anticipate the result by counting the number of moves it takes for each side to promote its pawn (here it's four moves in each case).

1...h4 2 a5 h3 3 a6 h2 4 a7 h1Q

Black arrives first but...

5 a8Q+ ...White queens with check and wins due to a *skewer*.

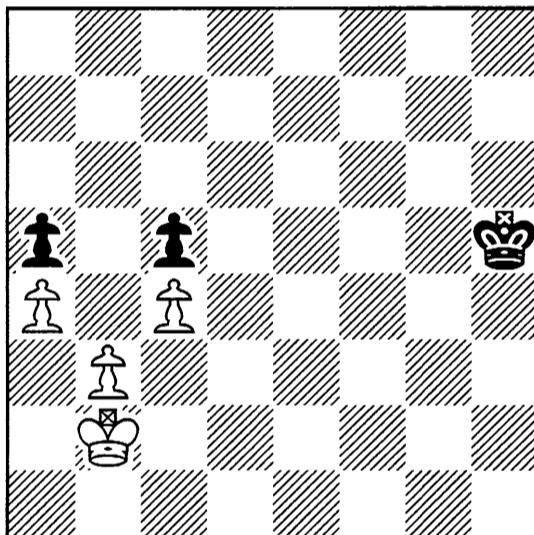
Example 23: The Cross-check

This feature is important in queen endings.

(Diagram 24) 1 Qe6+!

Meeting a check with a check and effectively finishing the game in his favour.

Example 24: Try it yourself!



Exercise 0 (White to play)

Exercise 0: Any ideas as to what White should play?

At the end of the other chapters, there are a few exercises to test if you have understood and can apply the lessons. For instance, something like this one: I suggest that you really try and solve the positions to the best of your ability before turning to the answers in Chapter 13. Some of them are easier than others!

The penultimate chapter consists of eight more-involved positions for those who want some challenging examples to test themselves on. These would be best undertaken after having read the other chapters and done the other exercises first of all.

Oh yes... the solution to the demo exercise is 1 b4! and however Black replies White obtains a passed pawn that can't be stopped. Black's king is outside of the square of the pawn.