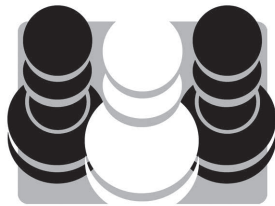


Key Elements of Chess Tactics

By

Georgy Lisitsin



Quality Chess
www.qualitychess.co.uk

Publisher's Foreword

Quality Chess have produced a number of books in their Classics series over the years. The list of these famous titles makes for impressive reading, among them *My System* and *Chess Praxis* by Aron Nimzowitsch; *Questions of Modern Chess Theory* by Isaac Lipnitsky; *Soviet Middlegame Technique* by Peter Romanovsky; and *The Soviet Chess Primer* by Ilya Maizelis.

This book by Georgy Lisitsin, *Key Elements of Chess Tactics*, together with its sister book, *Key Elements of Chess Strategy*, stands proudly within that company as an addition to the series. These books were originally written in 1952 as one large volume, *Strategy and Tactics of the Art of Chess*. The wait for an English translation has been a long one but it is finally over. Due to its length and the clear division of the chapters between tactics and strategy, the decision was taken by Quality Chess to publish the English edition in two volumes. Each book can be read separately from the other, but we would of course like you to buy both volumes.

Georgy Lisitsin was a strong international master from Leningrad who lived from 1909 to 1972. His books had a strong influence on countless Soviet players. In particular, these two books were a successful attempt to classify the underlying elements of tactics and strategy, each element being illustrated with a number of apt examples which both educate and entertain. Another notable feature of the work is the inclusion of a number of interesting endgame studies, in addition to examples from practical play. Some of the examples are famous and may well be familiar to you, in which case we hope you enjoy seeing them again – and if they are new to you, you are in for a particular treat! But there are also numerous examples from lesser-known games, particularly those played in the Soviet Union up to the early 1950s, which should be new to nearly all.

Another feature of the work is that, while it of course can be read and enjoyed as an instruction manual, it can also be used as a puzzle book to aid its pedagogical value. This is facilitated by the question in italics under each diagram, with the answer then being given in the narrative below.

It might be worth repeating here an explanation by the author of the organization of the book from the start of Chapter 1 (in case readers think from looking at the Contents page that some inadvertent duplication has taken place!):

“For convenience of study, all our material on tactics is split into two chapters. The general concepts and the tactical elements or devices are presented in Chapter 1. Examples that are more complex are given in Chapter 2, where the process of calculating tactical operations is also explained.”

As with previous Soviet classics, John Sugden performed an admirable translation into English, followed by the work of the team at Quality Chess.

Clearly with the passage of time and in particular the advent of modern engines, analytical mistakes can be found in older texts such as this one. We have no intention of ruining the flow of the text by pointing out every instance where Stockfish finds an improvement. On the other hand, if we left the original work completely unaltered, we would be doing an injustice to our readers. For example, some of you may wish to try solving the positions before checking your answer against the solution given. Well, good luck with solving a “White/Black to play and win” position when no winning continuation exists...

When you see a short *Editor’s note* in the text, it’s Quality Chess pointing out a brief correction. We hope you will agree that it’s worth the minor disruption in the text to point out a significant error, omission or alternative solution. If you are attempting to solve the exercises, you will find these notes invaluable. Even if you are just reading the book for pleasure, you might still find it interesting to observe the kind of hidden resources that Lisitsin, as well as some World Champions and other great players, overlooked. (The *Editor’s notes* inserted by Quality Chess are not to be confused with those marked as *Editor’s note to the Russian second edition*.)

Some of the more complicated examples featured multiple corrections and generally more detailed explanations. There were nine such cases, each marked with a numbered note in superscript (^{Note 1}, ^{Note 2} etc. up to ^{Note 9}). These are discussed in the Appendix, beginning on page 371.

On a personal note, I feel it is a shame that no English translation of the work was available in the 1970s when I was developing as a player in my teenage years. It would have been of great benefit to me then. Equally, we hope that the reader will now be able to benefit from the book finally being available in English, learning from a classic of the Soviet chess school.

Jeremy Hart
November 2023

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Key to Symbols used

- ? a weak move
- ?? a blunder
- ! a good move
- !! an excellent move
- !?! a move worth considering
- ?! a dubious move
- † check
- # mate





Chapter 2

Complex Combinations

This chapter continues and develops the preceding one which was devoted to elementary questions of tactics. The examples given here are distinguished by greater complexity. Some entirely new questions are also raised, requiring good tactical preparation on the reader's part.

The arrangement of the sections follows that of the first chapter except that the Mate (in General) section is omitted, as its content was wholly clarified before.

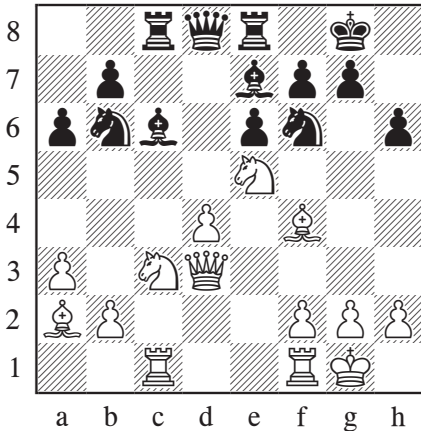
Seizure of Critical Points – Effect of the Long-Range Pieces

As we already know, critical and weak points – and in particular undefended pieces and pawns – are the Achilles Heel of the opponent's position. So a perfectly natural question arises: can't we play with the idea of *creating* critical and weak points, since they bring so much advantage?

We feel there is no point in playing in that way specifically. We should never be inordinately obsessed with tactical ideas and combinations, making tactics into an end in itself. But we can and must envisage the creation of critical points within an overall strategic plan. If, for example, at the end of the opening stage, we move the white knight from f3 to e5, we are not only increasing its significance but also, in some circumstances, making f7 a critical point. Critical points are also quite often created by placing a bishop on a half-open diagonal; the point e6 in the next two diagrams may serve as an example.

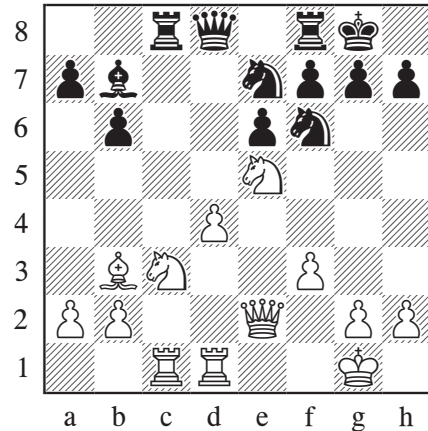
Alatortsev – Goglidze

Moscow 1935

*White to play and win*

Botvinnik – Batuev

Leningrad 1931

*White to play and win*

In this first example, White can exploit the critical point on f7 and others on e6 and h6, as well as the weak point g6. After **1. ♖xh6!** Black cannot play 1...gxf6 on account of 2. ♕xe6! fxe6 3. ♖g6† ♖h8 4. ♖f7#.

The game continued with: **1... ♕xa3** A counterblow. At this stage, as Alatortsev has shown, **2. ♖xg7!** would have won quickly – for example **2... ♖xg7** 3. ♖g3† ♖f8 4. bxa3 ♖xd4 5. ♖fd1 ♖c5 6. ♖d5!, or **2... ♕xb2** 3. ♕h6! ♖h5 4. ♖e2!

Editor's note: 1... ♖bd7! is Black's best attempt to avoid an immediate collapse, but 2. ♖xc6 ♖xc6 3. ♖g3 leaves White a pawn up and in complete control.

In the second example, White utilized the critical point e6. There followed **1. ♖xf7!** Eliminating the defence. **1... ♖xf7** **2. ♖xe6 ♖f8** Not 2... ♖ed5, in view of 3. ♖xd5 ♖xd5 4. ♕xd5 ♕xd5 5. ♖xc8. **3. ♖e4!** ♖xc1 **4. ♖xc1 ♖fd5** Otherwise, after exchanging twice on f7, White will play ♖e4-d6† and ♖xb7. **5. ♖d6 ♕a8** **6. ♖e1!** A remarkable move – the black pieces are obliged to defend each other, and White, taking account of this, strikes the final blow! **6... g6** **7. ♖xf7 ♖xf7** **8. ♖xe7! Black resigned.**

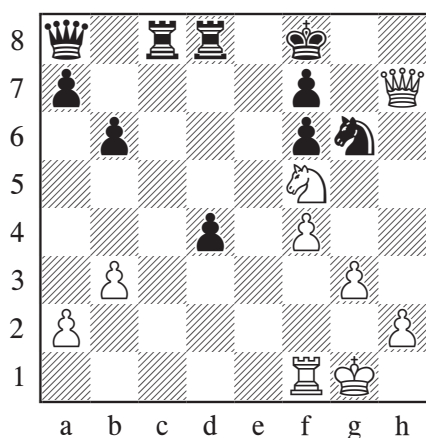
A point may be seized either *directly* or *indirectly*. In the former case, our piece or pawn immediately moves onto the square in question (for example with ♖f3-e5 White directly occupies the e5-point). In the latter case, our piece or pawn *attacks* the square (for example, the white knight on e5 has indirectly seized the points c6, d7, f7 and g6 in the black camp). The indirect seizure of critical points is of great significance both from the viewpoint of strategy and for tactical operations. It comes about largely through an improvement in

the position of our long-range pieces (queen, rook, bishop) when they are placed on open or half-open lines (files, ranks, diagonals).

The importance of indirectly seizing points with the long-range pieces in the conduct of tactical operations is demonstrated by the finale of Dus-Khotimirsky – Bannik.

Dus-Khotimirsky – Bannik

Vilnius 1949



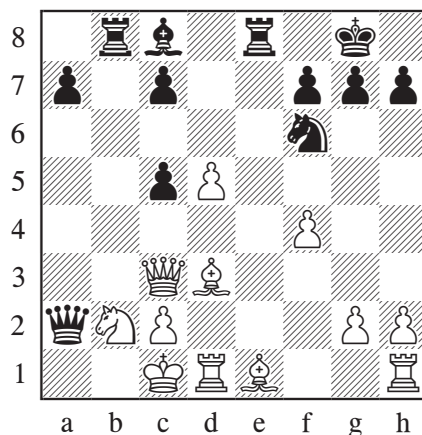
White to play and win

With **1. ♖e1!** White indirectly seized the points e7 and e8, cutting off the black king's flight. Black had to capitulate, as mate was inevitable.

We draw our readers' attention to this, as a similar method is used very often. But the indirect seizure of critical points isn't invariably carried out by the long-range pieces. In Chekhover – Kasparian on page 71, as we saw, White's winning move was 1.h5! since this move indirectly seized the g6-point and threatened mate – so that Black's reply 1... ♗xh5 was forced.

Slonim – Riumin

Moscow 1931



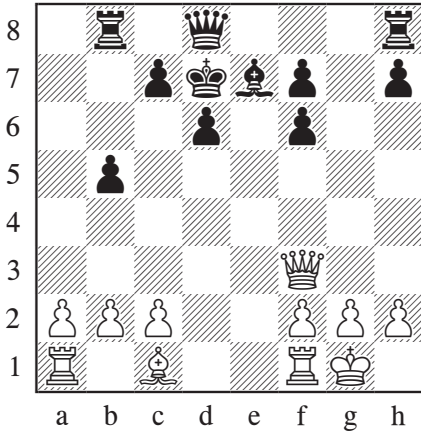
Black to play and win

Following the moves covered on page 200, Riumin won very prettily with **1... ♗e2!** For the purpose of indirectly seizing the d2-point or diverting the white bishop from the defence of e4. **2. ♕xe2 ♖e4!** White resigned here – thanks to Black's indirect seizure of d2, the white king cannot escape mate.

The creation of critical points is nothing other than a special case of the indirect seizure of those points.

Lisitsin – Birnov

Kalinin 1950

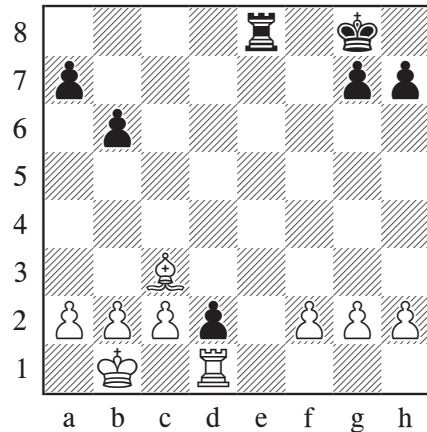


White to play

In Lisitsin – Birnov, White's advantage is not in doubt, but how is he to turn it into a win? He must of course initiate operations on the e-file combined with attacks on the pawn weaknesses and on Black's uncastled king, which is trying to reach the queenside via c8 or c6. He therefore played **1.♖e1!**, occupying the open file and envisaging the creation of a critical point on e7 – seeing that the black king is bound to move away. White's calculations were immediately borne out, for Black played **1...♔c8** and there followed: **2.♕h3† ♔b7** **2...♖d7** would lose the bishop. **3.♗b3! ♕d7** **4.a4!** Even better than **4.♖xf7**. **4...♗hg8** **5.axb5 d5** **6.b6!** With a won position for White. The game concluded: **6...cxb6** After **6...♖a8** **7.bxc7† ♔xc7** **8.♙f4†** White has an extra pawn and an attack. **7.♗xe7! ♖xe7** **8.♖xd5† ♔c8** **9.♙f4! ♖e6** **10.♖f3! ♗d8** **11.♖c3†** **Black resigned.**

So in the context of our overall strategic plan it is useful to envisage the creation of critical and weak points. These functions are best performed by a knight, bishop or rook, but also in specific cases by the queen.

The long-range pieces (queen, rook and bishop) possess one other characteristic. They are capable of creating critical points and exerting influence along the whole of the line where they are placed, reaching "through" enemy pieces and pawns.

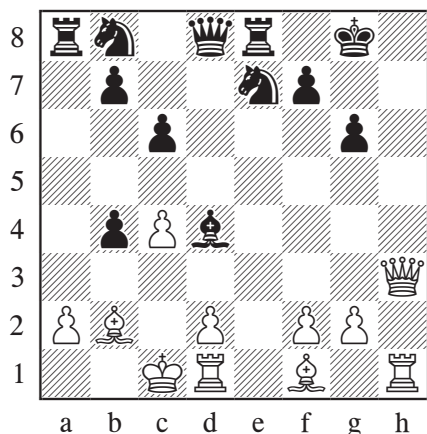


Discussion of **1...♗e1**

For instance, here Black is a piece down and it is time for him to resign – seeing that **1...♗e1** fails on account of the bishop's influence on this point, reaching through the pawn on d2. It follows that the point e1 is not critical. For Black (after **1...♗e1**) it is weak, and in consequence the d2-pawn is lost: **2.♗xe1 dxe1=♖†** **3.♙xe1**

Euwe – Loman

Rotterdam 1923

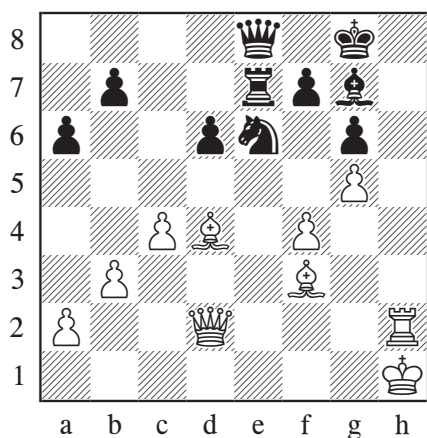


White to play and win (mate in two moves)

In Euwe – Loman, the bishop on b2 exerts its influence all the way along the a1-h8 diagonal, right through the enemy bishop on d4. White played **1. ♖h8†** and Black resigned in view of **1... ♗xh8 2. ♖xh8#**.

Rabinovich – Kan

Tbilisi 1937

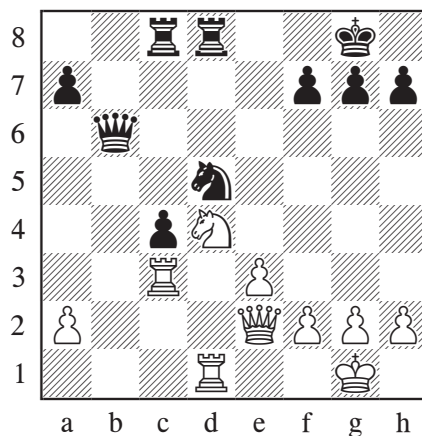


White to play and win

Rabinovich splendidly exploited his advantage in his game with Kan. **1. ♗f6!** White will soon create a threat of mate on h8 thanks to the strong position of his bishop. Black cannot exchange bishops, in view of: **1... ♗xf6 2. gxf6 ♖d7 3. f5! ♜f8** Or **3... gxf5 4. ♖h6. 4. ♖h8†! ♜xh8 5. ♖h6† ♜g8 6. ♖g7#** Meanwhile there is a threat of **♖d2-e1-h4-h8†** and **♖xh8#**, against which Black is defenceless. The game continued **1... b5 2. ♖e1 ♜xg5 3. ♖xe7 ♖xe7 4. ♗xe7 ♜xf3 5. ♖f2 ♜d4 6. ♗xd6 bxc4 7. bxc4 f5 8. ♖b2 ♜f7 9. ♖b7† ♜e6 10. ♗c5 ♗h8 11. ♖e7†** and **Black resigned**.

Bernstein – Capablanca

Moscow 1914



Is 1. ♖xc4 playable?

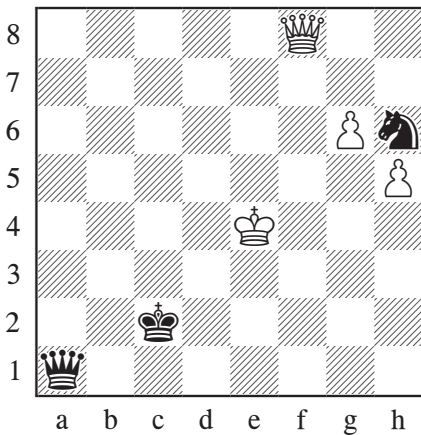
Capablanca has just played **... ♜f6-d5**. Why can't White take the pawn on c4 with his rook? The answer is that the black rook on c8 is then exerting influence on the whole of the c-file – in particular, on c3 – through the white rook on c4. After **1. ♖xc4?? ♜c3** White comes away the exchange down.

Exchanges and Positional Combinations

Positional combinations and exchanges don't give a material advantage to the player who initiates them, but they transform the character of the position. In specific cases, an exchange of pieces is a good strategic and tactical device.

Geller – Lipnitsky

Kiev 1940

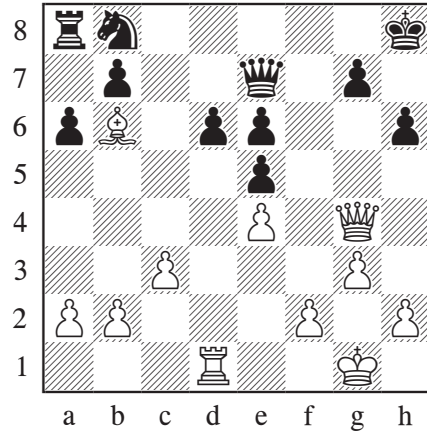


White to play and win

In this position it is imperative for White to exchange queens, and the battle will then end in victory for him. Geller found a simple method: **1. ♖c5†!** No matter where the black king goes, it will be subjected to a double attack forcing a queen exchange – for example, **1... ♔b3** **2. ♖b5† ♔c2** **3. ♖d3† ♔b2** **4. ♖d4†**; or **1... ♔d2** **2. ♖f2† ♔c1** **3. ♖e1† ♔b2** **4. ♖xa1† ♔xa1**, after which White wins by **5.g7 ♔a2** **6. ♔f4 ♖g8** **7. ♔g5 ♔c3** **8.h6**.

Smyslov – Reshevsky

Moscow 1948

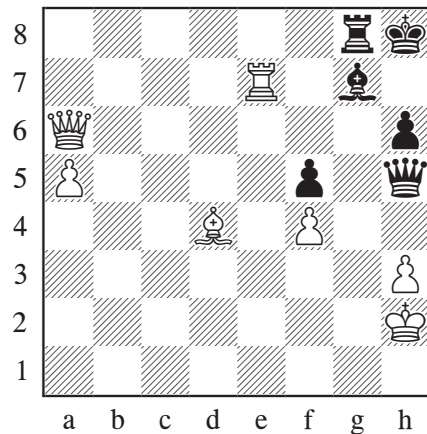


White to play and win

Smyslov's play in this game also makes an impression of great simplicity: **1. ♖h4!** **♙d7** After an exchange of queens, the backward d6-pawn perishes. **2. ♖d8†!** **♜xd8** **3. ♗xd8 ♞d7** **4. ♗c7 ♞c5** **5. ♗xd6 ♗c8** **6. ♗b6 ♞a4** **7. ♗xe6 ♞xb2** **8. ♗xe5**, and White won the endgame.

Tolush – Liublinsky

Moscow 1950

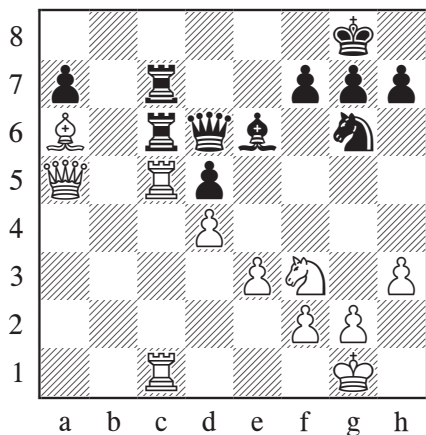


White to play and win

White just needs to simplify this position in order to win, seeing that his king is open and might suffer perpetual check. He played **1.♙xg7†**, and Black resigned in view of the variation **1...♖xg7 2.♜f6 ♜g6 3.♜xg7† ♜xg7 4.♖xg7 ♘g7 5.a6**, after which there is no stopping the pawn! We should note that **1.♜f6**, as suggested by Zakharov, is also playable.

Reshevsky – Treysman

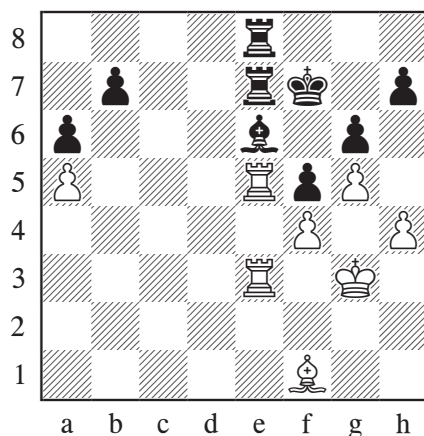
USA 1936



White to play and win

Reshevsky won here by **1.♙b7! ♖xc5 2.dxc5 ♜e7 3.c6**, as Black can't avoid losing a pawn on a7 or d5. After: **3...♙c8 4.♙xc8 ♖xc8 5.♜xd5 ♜e6 6.♜c5 ♖c7 7.♘d4 ♜e7 8.♘b5** **Black resigned.**

The purpose of transforming the position may be to go into an ending (to realize an advantage or achieve a draw), or it may be to simplify the game and thus avoid the opponent's counterplay.

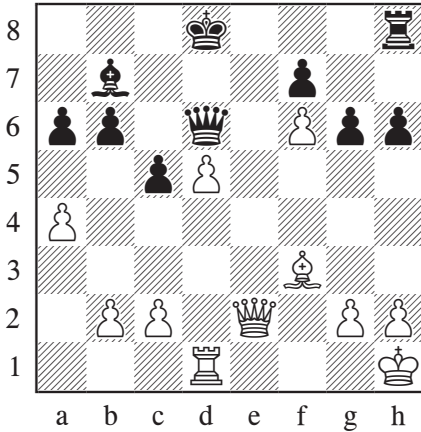


White to play and win

The positional combination in this example is a standard type. It has been seen in all kinds of versions. Its main theme is a pin: **1.♖xe6! ♖xe6 2.♙c4!** Now all Black can do is move his rook from e8 to e7 and back (otherwise the one on e6 would be lost). Meanwhile White greatly improves his position. **2...♖e7 3.♖e5 ♖e8 4.♙f3 ♖e7 5.♙e3 ♖e8 6.♙d5!** Preparing ♙e3-d4. **6...♖e7 7.♙d4 ♖e8 8.♖xe6! ♖xe6 9.♙c5!** He shouldn't be in a hurry to take on e6. **9...♙e7 10.♙xe6 ♙xe6 11.♙b6** and wins, for example: **11...♙d6 12.♙xb7 ♙c5 13.♙xa6 ♙c6 14.♙a7 ♙c7 15.a6 ♙c8 16.♙b6 ♙b8 17.a7†** White could also go after the kingside pawns. **17...♙a8 18.♙a6 h5 19.gxh5 g5 20.h7** And mate next move.

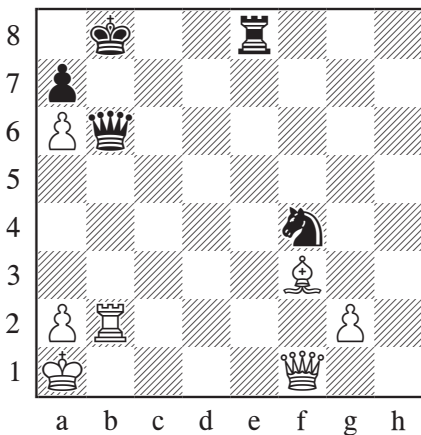
Botvinnik – Kan

Sverdlovsk 1943



White to play and win

There was a fine finish in this game. Botvinnik has an extra pawn, but there is nothing to defend it with. Why then (you may ask) did White aim for this position? The game continuation gives us a comprehensive answer: **1. ♖e7† ♜xe7 2. fxe7† ♔d7** After **2... ♕xe7 3. d6† ♗xf3 4. gxf3** White has executed a positional combination based on a discovered attack. The game lasted another 15 moves and Botvinnik duly won.

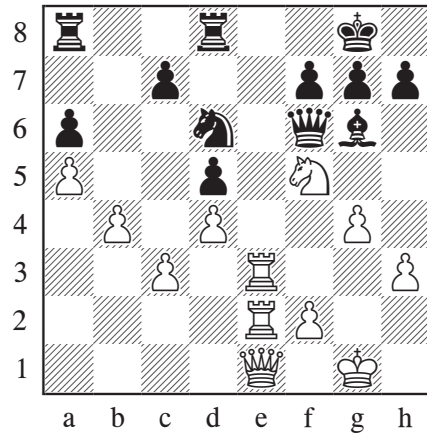


Black to play and draw

This example shows us Black achieving a draw with the aid of a positional combination in a situation where defeat might have seemed inevitable. The game went **1... ♖e1†! 2. ♜xe1 ♜xb2†! 3. ♔xb2 ♖d3† 4. ♕c3 ♖xe1 5. ♗e4 ♖xg2!**, with a drawn position. The extra bishop does not win here. The combination consisted in attracting a piece to a critical square then carrying out a fork, culminating in a positional draw.

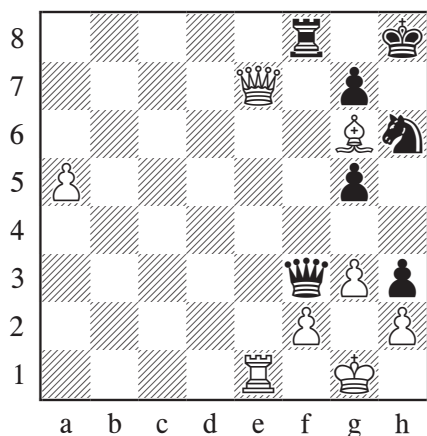
Capablanca

1936



White to play and win

The transition to an endgame can involve the destruction of a large quantity of pieces and pawns on both sides. Capablanca gives an interesting illustration in his primer. White wins here by exchanging off all the pieces: **1. ♖xd6 ♜xd6** After **1...h5** White remains with an extra pawn in a good position. **2. ♖e8† ♗xe8 3. ♗xe8† ♗xe8 4. ♜xe8† ♜f8 5. ♜xf8† ♔xf8 6. b5! ♗d3** Or **6...axb5 7. a6 7. b6!**, and a pawn queens.



*White to play and win –
draw with black pawn on g4 instead of g5*

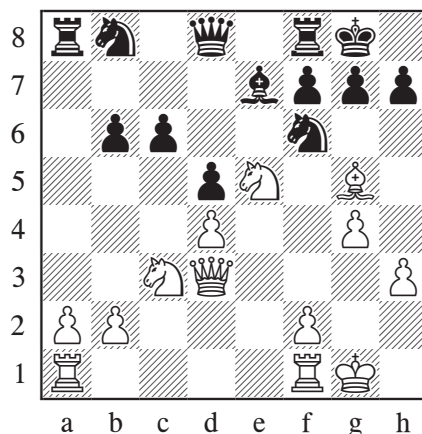
White is threatened with mate, either on g2 or by 1...♖xf2† 2.♔h1 ♖f1† 3.♖xf1 ♖xf1#. He does not, however, lose but wins by 1.♖xf8† ♖xf8 2.♖e8 ♖xe8 3.♔xe8 ♖f5 4.a6 ♖d6 5.a7 and 6.a8=♖. The whole combination can be broken down into two tactical elements: drawing a piece to a critical square (1.♖xf8†) and pinning that piece (2.♖e8). Thanks to this combination, the game is reduced to an ending with an extra passed pawn for White.

If the black pawn on g5 is transferred to g4, there is no win: 1.♖xf8† ♖xf8 2.♖e8 ♖g8! 3.♖xf8 Stalemate.

Positional combinations may be encountered in any phase of a game of chess. The following position is taken from a game of Botvinnik's.

Tartakower – Botvinnik

Groningen 1946

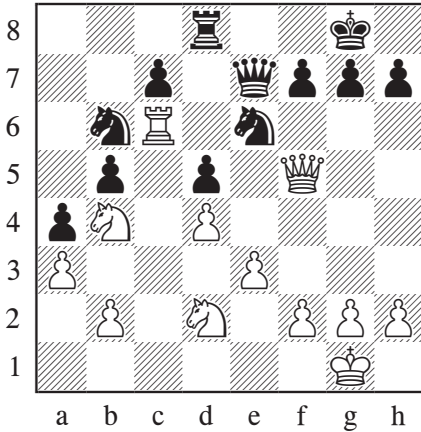


Black to play

White's last move was ♔g5?. There followed: 1...♖xg4! 2.♖xc6 2...♔xe7 ♖xe5 3.♔xd8 ♖xd3 4.♔xb6 ♖xb2 leaves Black a pawn up – Botvinnik has shown that the best way out for White would be 2.hxg4 ♔xg5 3.♔g2 after which, despite losing the pawn, he could still continue the struggle. 2...♖xc6 3.♔xe7 ♖xe7 4.hxg4 f5! Now 5.gxf5 would be answered by 5...♖xf5, and Black would have every chance of a successful attack on the white king's position. Tartakower therefore abandoned the g4-pawn but was unable to save the game.

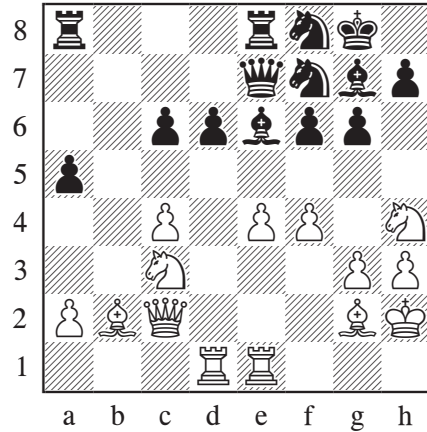
Botvinnik – Keres

Moscow 1948

*White to play*

Botvinnik – Bondarevsky

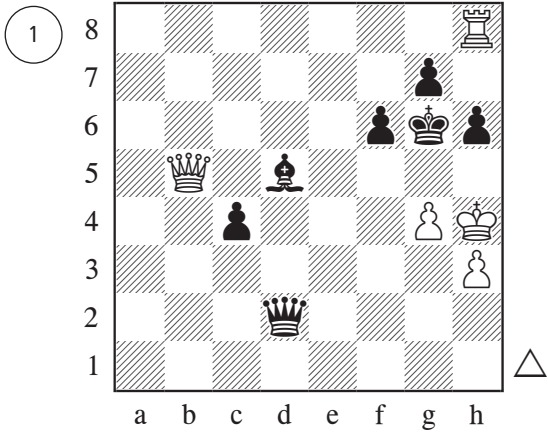
Moscow 1945

*White to play*

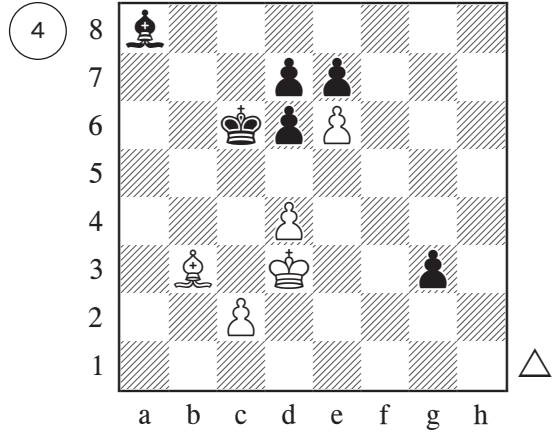
In tactical operations for positional ends, the clearance of a square is a device frequently used. Botvinnik went into a favourable endgame as follows: **1. ♖xb6! cxb6 2. ♘c6 ♖c7 3. ♘xd8 ♖xd8 4. ♖c2** As the black pawns on the b-file are doubled, White is practically playing with a pawn extra, and he succeeded in winning the game.

We will show a few more interesting positional combinations that are important for practice. The aim of these combinations is to open lines and subsequently seize them, or to weaken the opponent's position.

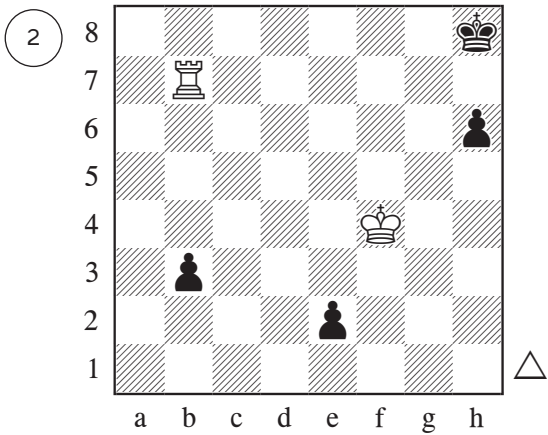
The most characteristic case arose in Botvinnik-Bondarevsky, which continued: **1. ♘f5! ♖b7 1...gxf5 2.exf5 ♙xf5 3. ♖xf5 ♖xe1 4. ♖xe1 ♖xe1 5. ♘e4** is to White's advantage. **2. ♘xg7 ♖xg7** As a result, White has greatly weakened the black king's position by exchanging the bishop on g7. **3.c5 dxc5 4. ♘a4 ♖b4 5. ♘xc5 ♙c4 6. ♖f2 ♖ab8 7. ♙a1 ♖ed8 8.e5!** Black proved to be in a difficult situation and resigned soon after.



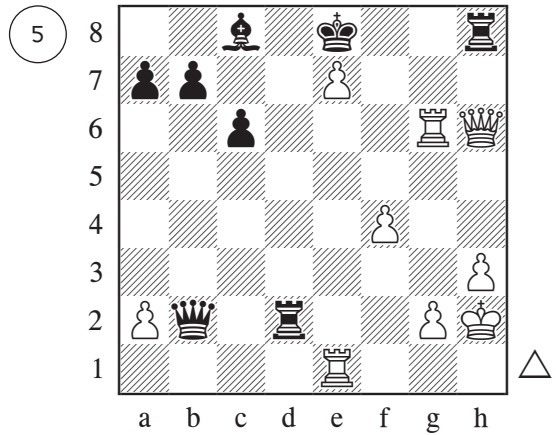
White to play and win



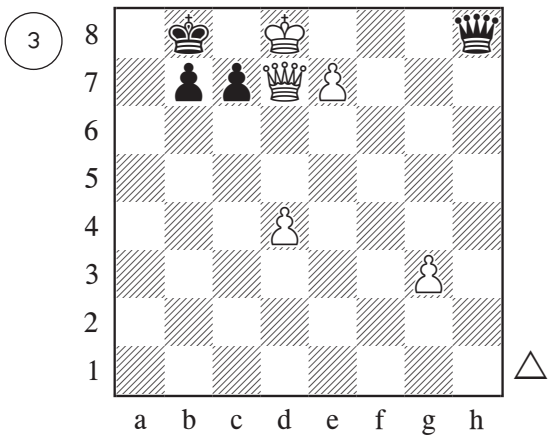
White to play and win



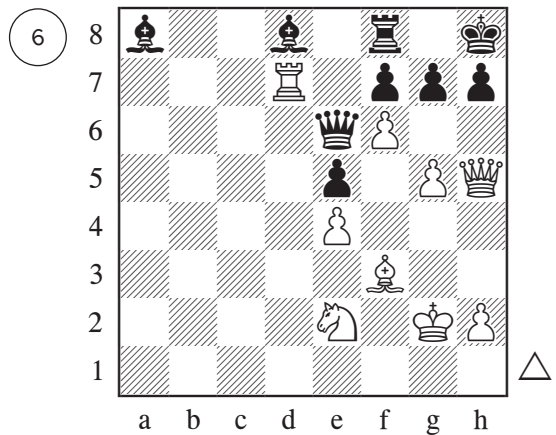
White to play and draw



White to play and win



White to play and win



White to play and win

1. Lutikov – Arseniev, Leningrad 1955

1. ♖e8†! To block the f7-square and divert the bishop. **1... ♙f7** **2. ♖e4†** and Black is mated.

2. Training Position

1. ♖b8†! ♙g7 **2. ♖b7† ♙f6** Or **2... ♙g6** **3. ♖b6† ♙h5** **4. ♖b5† ♙h4?** **5. ♖e5 b2** **6. ♖xe2** and wins. The correct **4... ♙g6** draws. **3. ♖b6† ♙e7** To avoid repetition, the king must go to the e-file. **4. ♖xb3! e1=♖** **5. ♖e3† ♖xe3** **6. ♙xe3** With a theoretical draw.

3. Training Position

1.e8=♘ **1.e8=♗**, **1.e8=♖** or **1.e8=♙** would all allow a draw by perpetual check. Black is now helpless. Interestingly, **1.e8=♗?** actually occurred in the game.

4. Rinck

1. ♙d5†! ♙xd5 **2. exd7 g2** **3. d8=♘!** **g1=♖** **4. c4#**

5. Maroczy – Romi, San Remo 1930

1. ♖h5! Threatening **2. ♖g8†**. **1... ♖xg2†** If **1... ♙d7**, then **2.e8=♖†**. **2. ♖xg2† ♖xh5** **3. ♖xb2 ♖xh3†** **4. ♙g1** The rest is fairly simple, as White is the exchange up with the better position.

6. Kopaev – Alatortsev, Leningrad 1938

1.g6! h6 **2. ♖xh6†!** To divert the g7-pawn. **2... gxh6** **3.g7† ♙g8** **4. gxf8=♖† ♙xf8** **5. ♖xd8† ♖e8** **6. ♖xe8† ♙xe8** **7. ♘g3** White emerges with an extra knight.