Instructive Computer Games of Chess:

LCZero v0.21.1-nT40.T8.610 – Stockfish 19050918
May 12, 2019

TCEC S15 Superfinal, Game 12
C05 FRENCH, TARRASCH, CLOSED

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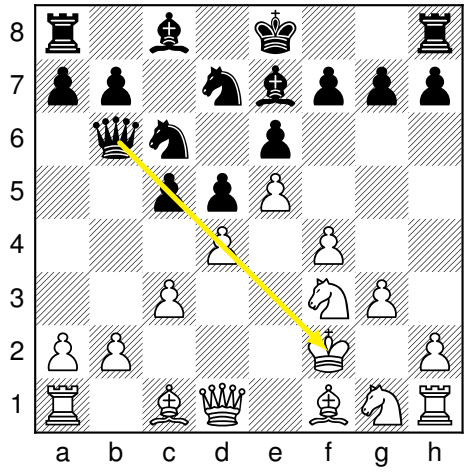
Following concepts exemplified:

1. Importance of the center to shelter the king when the king is not behind pawns
2. Tactical sequences for positional gains
3. Positional analysis to create a fortress
4. Advanced endgame techniques: deflection and skewer

1	**e4**	**e6**
2	**d4**	**d5**
3	**♘d2**	**♘f6**
4	**e5**	**♘fd7**
5	**f4**	**c5**
6	**c3**	**♘c6**
7	**♘df3**	**♕b6**
8	**g3**	**♗e7**

The most popular continuation here is 8...c×d4 9 c×d4 ♗b4+ 10 ♔f2 g5 11 f×g5 ♘d×e5 12 ♘×e5 ♘×e5 13 ♔g2 ♘c6 14 ♘f3 ♗f8 15 b3 ♗g7 16 ♗b2 ♗d7.

9	**♔f2**	



End of the opening book. This is a prophylaxis to avoid ♗b4 with a tempo after ... c×d4 c×d4 . See the mainline 8... c×d4 for details. But this move is not completely without drawbacks, and a potential pin has to be considered.

In positions such as this, where the king is not safely behind the pawns after the usual castling, trying to maintain a strong blockaded center is often a wise decision. The reason is quite simple: without the central pawns, black would be able to start attacking the white king using diagonal through the center, often with double attacks of forks and mate-threatening tactics. The importance of the central

pawns is exemplified by the queen on b6 eyeing the king.

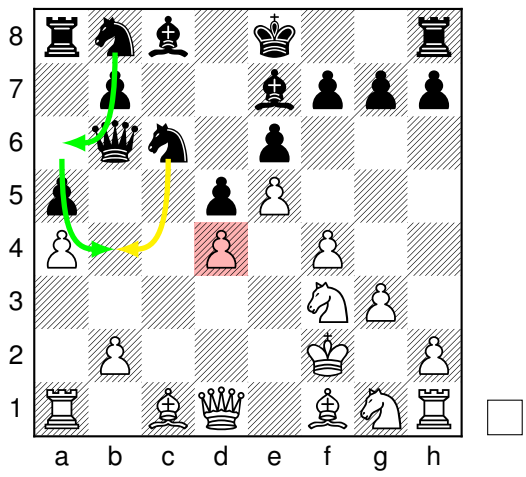
However, since the center is not yet solidified, white has to be careful. For instance, the e5-pawn cannot rely on the protection of the d4 pawn, since after ... c×d4 c×d4 , the white d4-pawn would be pinned. This is not a problem right now, since the e5-pawn is protected by the f4-pawn and the knight on f3. But, the potential pin has to be constantly factored in when calculating the responses to black's attempts to undermine the center with a typical plan of f6.

A slightly more popular move than 9. ♔f2 was to play 9. ♗h3, instead. This discourages . . . f6 ideas by exposing the resulting weakness in the e6-pawn.

9	**. . .**	**a5**
10	**a4**	**c×d4!**

This logical move has many upsides. First, it allows installation of a piece in b4, as c3 will no longer control it. Second, the pawn on d4 becomes a bit weak. Third, white has to spend a tempo in order to move the queen out of the pin soon. Fourth, the c-file is opened, which should favor black due to white's king safety issues if black is able to use by the rooks.

11	**c×d4**	**♘db8**



With a plan of ♘b8–a6–b4 installing an extra strong knight on b4. If white takes, there's another knight ready to step in. Potential weakness on d4 highlighted.

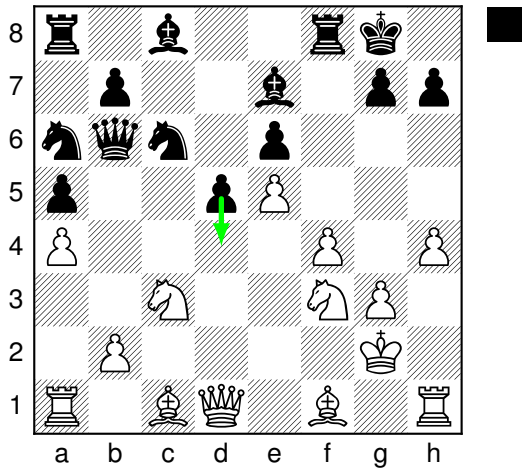
12	**♘e2**	**O-O**
13	**♔g2**	

Now avoiding the pin, simplifying white's play in response to . . . f6. An interesting alternative would have been to play ♗h3 first, allowing white to put some pressure on the pawn on e6, discouraging . . . f6 by positional arguments against the weakened e6.

13	**. . .**	**♘a6**
14	**♘c3?!**	

Here the validity of the move by white can be questioned. While there are certainly ideas of playing ♘a2 to challenge the b4 square and ♘b5 blocking black queen's access to the b-file, more importantly, the move also undermines the protection of the d4 pawn. This allows black to execute a better version of the f-pawn push, forcing white to recapture with the d-pawn instead of the f-pawn. White could have considered playing ♖b1 and ♗e3 first to solidify the d4 pawn, and only then playing ♘c3.

14	**. . .**	**f6!**
15	**h4**	**f×e5**
16	**d×e5**	



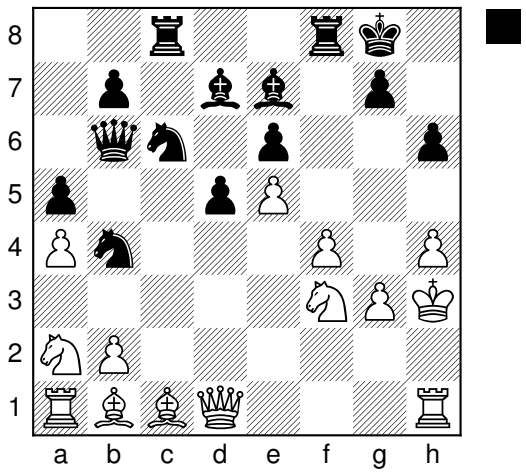
Now the argument against 14 ♘c3 has been made. Capturing with the f-pawn would now have allow black sacrificing the exchange for a knight and pawn as a direct consequence: 16 f×e5 ♖×f3! 17 ♕×f3 ♘×d4 18 ♕d1 with plenty of compensation. Also, the earlier 15. e×f6 ♗×f6 would not have been attractive either, as black would be able to put proper pressure on the pawn on d4. So, white was forced to capture with the d-pawn, and black has now a scary-looking protected potential passer on d5, which is now controlling important squares c4 and e4.

16	**...**	**h6**
17	**♗d3**	**♘ab4**

Black has now finally executed the plan to install an extra strong knight on b4. Sometimes, it is said that knights protecting each other are clumsy, because they're in each other's way. And surely, in endgames, this can be true, especially when the knights are the only thing protecting each other. However, this is different, since the knight on c6 serves as a replacement in case the knight on b4 is captured.

The knight on b4 is ready to support push of the d-pawn up to d3.

18	**♗b1**	**♗d7**
19	**♘a2**	**♖ac8**
20	**♔h3**	



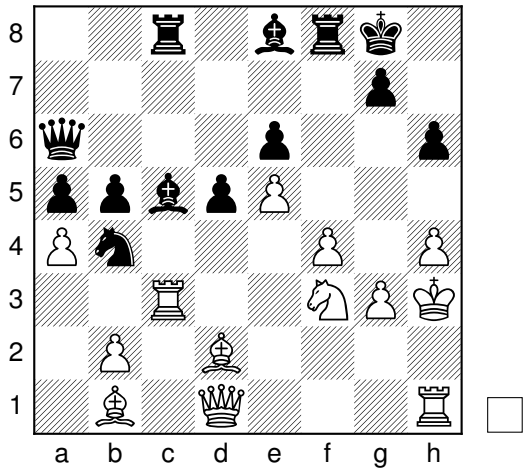
This little move deserves special attention. While 20. ♔h3 may look like a prophylaxis, and it is, it also puts the king in the same diagonal with ♗d7. This makes e6 pawn a bit less weak, since white has to spend an extra tempo to move the king away from the diagonal before e6 can be captured without a pin. However, with the king safety being somewhat questioned, being sheltered by an enemy pawn is probably better than leaving the king in g2 awaiting for tactics. After the knight moves away from c6, the king on g2 would be subject to ...d4 with a follow-up check through the a8-h1 diagonal with tempo gains.

20	**...**	**♗e8**
21	**♘×b4**	**♘×b4**
22	**♖a3**	**♗c5**
23	**♗d2**	**♕a6**
24	**♖c3**	

White is not quite in time to defuse black's pressure. If given a free tempo, say 24...♔h8 25 ♗e3 b6 26 ♘d4 ♗×d4 27 ♗×d4, and white would be able to blockade the d-pawn and perhaps starting to target the pawn on b6 or preparing g4 and f5 with the idea to create a passer on the e-file. However, tempi are a scarcity in chess.

Instead of trying to keep the tension with 24. ♖c3, maybe it was time to relieve the tension a bit with 24 ♗×b4 and go for a draw.

24 . . . b5



One thing that always amazes is how the computers so casually allow pins and leave pieces hanging. But of course, the computers are able to calculate through tactics. Many humans would understandably start looking into solidifying moves such as ♗d7 to prevent ♕c1 pinning the bishop on c5. Instead of solidifying the position and trying to untangle the pins, black complicates the position to win a pawn.

25 ♕c1

Taking the b-pawn would be problematic: 25 a×b5?! ♗×b5→ and white would have annoying threats such as . . . ♗e2 fork to deal with. Pinning the bishop was the better choice, although black can strenghten the protection of the bishop on c5 just in time.

25 . . . ♕b6
26 ♘d4 b×a4

This move was the point of the tactical complications of 24... b5 , changing the queen-side pawn structure to favor black. White is now left with a weak b-pawn against doubled a-pawns and a passer on d5.

27 ♗e3 ♗d7

Now black allows a tactical sequence by white winning an exchange. If black wanted, the next move could have been prevented by 27. . . ♖c7. White enters now in a forced sequence.

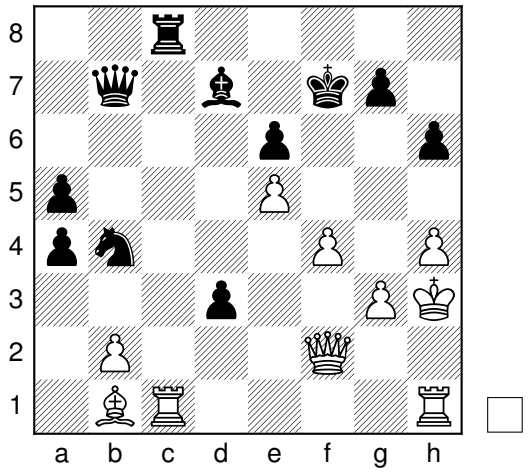
28 ♘f5!? ♗×e3!

Note that giving up the exchange early with 28. . . ♖×f5 29 ♖×c5 ♖×c5 would have given white two pleasant options: (1) 30. ♗×c5 ♕a6 31. ♗×f5 e×f5± taking the exchange with roughly equal pawn structure, as white also has a passer; or (2) 30. ♕×c5 ♕×c5 31. ♗×c5 ♖f7 32. ♗g6 ♗b5 33. ♗×f7+ ♔×f7± delaying the taking of the exchange a bit, keeping the pawn structure but simplifying the positions with exchanges. Both variations are likely winning for white.

29 ♘e7+ ♔f7
30 ♘×c8 ♖×c8
31 ♕×e3 d4

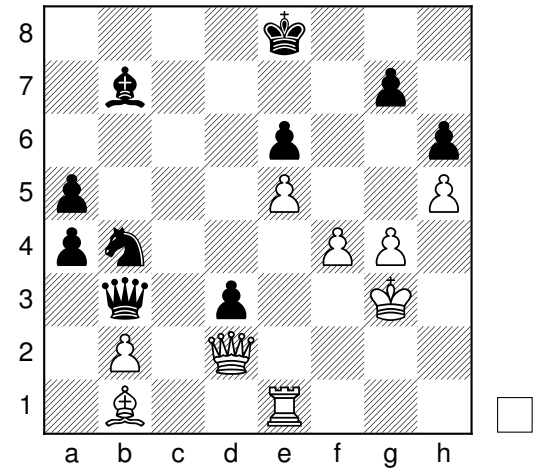
Forcing sequence ends. Here white could have also untangled from the fork by 32. ♕d2, as 32... d×c3?? would fall for 33. ♕×d7+ ♔f8 34. ♕×c8+ with mate soon to follow.

32 ♕f2 ♕b7
33 ♖cc1 d3



Now black has finally been able to push the d-pawn to d3. Since the pawn is protected by the strong knight on b4 and black can enforce the protection by the light square bishop, white has no good way to challenge the pawn on d3. Note that the white king cannot come to assist in the capture either, because after the exchanges, white's king-side pawns would be subject to be captured by the black king.

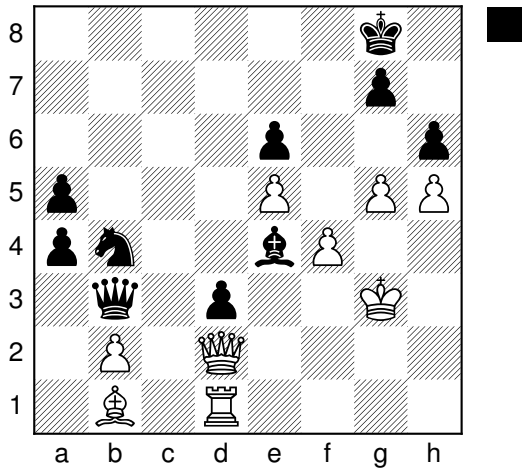
We are now going to fast forward to the next critical position.



The pawn move f5 here is interesting, and it seems a way for white to force a draw, although the play is not forced by either side. For example, 45 f5 e×f5 46 g×f5 ♕d5 47 ♖e3 and black can still hang on to the d3 pawn with 47... ♗c8 with the idea of 48. ♗×d3?? ♗×f5! . But after 48. e6 ♕×f5 49. ♗×d3 it would be black who has to be careful.

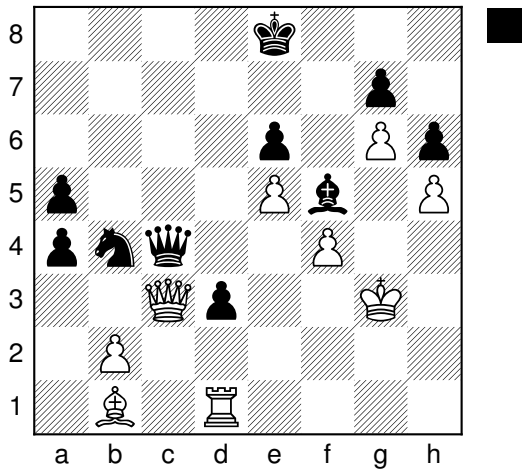
An interesting alternative play for black would be 46... ♘c2 . White has no oblication to take on c2, but it would lead in a nice way to force a draw. 47. ♗×c2 d×c2+ 48. ♖e3 ♕×b2 49. f6. Here black could promote to get another queen, but white would be just in time with 49... c1♕ 50. f7+ ♔×f7 51. ♕d7+ ♔g8 52. ♕e8+ ♔h7 53. ♕g6+ ♔g8 54. ♕e8+ , drawing with perpetual checks.

34	**h5**	**♖×c1**
35	**♖×c1**	**♕d5**
36	**♔h4**	**♗c6**
37	**g4**	**♔e8**
38	**♖f1**	**♕d8+**
39	**♔g3**	**♕d5**
40	**♖d1**	**♕b3**
41	**♖d2**	**♕c4**
42	**♖d1**	**♕b3**
43	**♕d2**	**♗e4**
44	**♖e1**	**♗b7**
45	**♖d1**	**♗e4**
46	**♔h4**	**♕d5**
47	**♕c3**	**♔f7**
48	**♕c7+**	**♔g8**
49	**♕c3**	**♔h7**
50	**♔h3**	**♔g8**
51	**♔h4**	**♔h7**
52	**♔g3**	**♔g8**
53	**♕c8+**	**♔h7**
54	**♕c1**	**♕b3**
55	**♕d2**	**♔g8**
56	**g5**	



Taking the pawn on g5 here might be a small inaccuracy: 56...h×g5 57 f×g5 g6 to prevent white from playing g6 himself with backrank mate threats. An example contituation: 58. ♖c1 ♘c2 59. ♔f4 ♕b7 60. ♗×c2 d×c2 61. ♕d8+ ♔h7 62. ♕f8 g×h5 63. ♕h6+ ♔g8 64. ♕×e6+ , but this should still be about equal.

56	**...**	**♔f8**
57	**g6**	**♔e7**
58	**♔h3**	**♔e8**
59	**♔h4**	**♕c4**
60	**♔g3**	**♗f5**
61	**♕c3**	

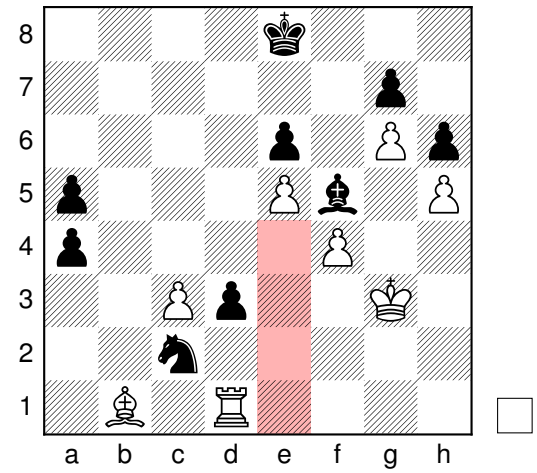


This is a committal move, offering the queen exchange, which black accepts. While the game has been objectively close to a draw and still is, only black can press for the win. With queens on the board, there was always a possibility for some dynamic play.

61	**...**	**♕×c3**
62	**b×c3**	

It is possible that white thought that at this position, the d3-pawn could be somehow won, possibly by giving the exchange back. If that was the case, then white king could hold or take the black pawns on the a-file. However, the d-pawn can never be taken without losing the game.

62	**...**	**♘c2**



This knight now becomes a very annoying piece. Together with the pawn and the bishop, all white king's access squares to the d-pawn are controlled.

63	**♔f2**	

White now has a threat of ♗×c2, and white would be just in time to stop the black pawns.

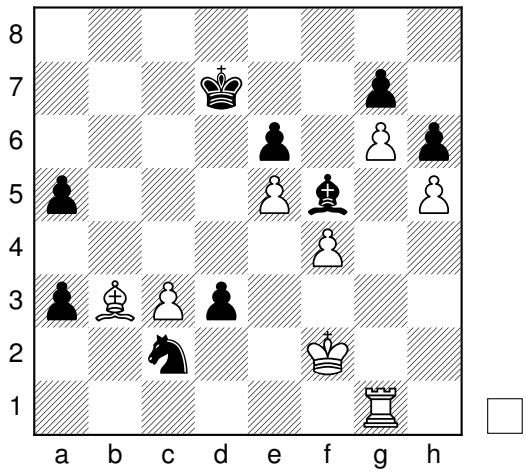
63	**...**	**a3!**

Parries the threat of Bxc2. Now black king is just in time to escort the a-pawns.

64 ♗a2

Taking the c2-pawn would have been a huge blunder. 64 ♗×c2 d×c2 65 ♖c1 ♔d7 66 ♔e3 ♔c6 67 ♔d2 ♔b5 68 ♖×c2 ♔c4! Taking the rook with Bxc2 would have been a huge blunder, since white has a winning king-side pawn break. 69. ♖c1 ♔b3 70. ♖e1 a2 and there's no way of stopping a1♕ other than giving up the rook.

64 ... ♔d7
65 ♗b3 ♔c7
66 ♖g1 ♔d7



This is the final position in the game where the game was still objectively a draw.

67 ♔f3?

Computer analysis suggests that white had at seven moves which would have maintained the draw. Unfortunately, the move played was none of them. The problem with 67. ♔f3? is that it allows 67... d2 with precise tactics as played, winning the game.

The key for white maintaining the draw is to set up a dynamic fortress, preventing black's progress. Let us take a closer look.

Perhaps the easiest way to set up the defenses is the straightforward Ba4+.

67. ♗a4+ ♔c7 68. ♗b3. The bishop on b3 and the pawn on c3 guard the entry squares for the black king, and the bishop additionally stops the immediate a2 and a4. The rook's job is to create enough harassment to prevent the black bishop to enter a square to protect the d1 promotion square, and the d-pawn push. Black would need two tempi to prepare d1♕, but will never have enough time with the best defense.

68... ♔c6 69. ♖d1. This is the easiest plan. Now ♗g4 is prevented, as d3 would be hanging.

69... ♔b5 70. ♖b1. The only move. Black has to move the king away to prevent Bxc2+ exposure check, and thus, a4 or ♗g4 here is prevented.

Black has to be careful not to overextend, and thus has to retreat. The c5-square is off limits for the king here, since that would allow the white rook to enter the 8th rank. For example: 70... ♔c5? 71. ♗a2! ♔c6. 72. ♖b8 , and the white rook would start picking up the black pawns. There is also no time for black to play d2 in this line, since the rook would simply move to the d-file to pick up the pawn.

70... ♔c6 71. ♖d1 to prevent ♗g4. Black has no way to make progress. The final attempt is to play a4 after Ba2.

71... ♔c7 72. ♗a2 a4. However, ♗a2 and c3 will control the entry squares for the king, and without the king, the d-pawn can never promote successfully.

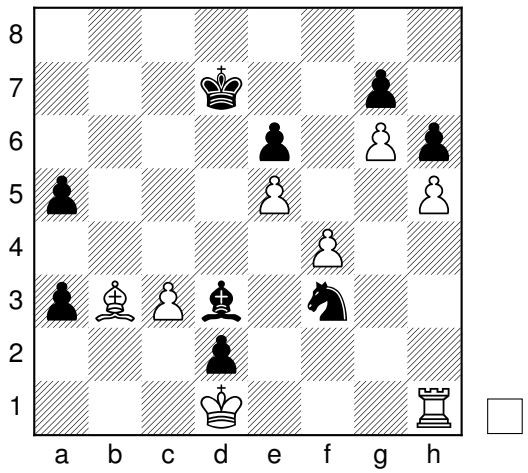
67 ... d2!
68 ♔e2 ♘e1!

The d2-pawn is untouchable, 69. ♔×d2 ♘f3+ and black picks up the rook.

69 ♔d1 ♘f3

The pawn on d2 is now protected. However, precise play is still needed for conversion, but that is no problem for Stockfish.

70	**♖h1**	**♗d3**



Black's threat here is to play ♗b1 and then deflect the white bishop with a4, and when the bishop is no longer controlling the a2-square, then play a2 and a1♕. But that has to be prepared by moving the queen out of ♗×a4+ check.

71	**♗a4+**	**♔e7**
72	**♗b3**	**♗b1**

Now the a4 deflecting threat is enabled. Now, white is really out of moves.

73	**♖h3**	

Another try was 73 ♖f1 a4 74 ♗c4 ♗d3! 75 ♗×c3 a2, but that does not work, either.

73	**...**	**♗e4**
74	**♖h1**	**♘×e5**

Picks up a pawn. White cannot give the exchange back: 75 f×e5 ♗×h1 76 ♔×d2 a4 77 ♗a2 ♗f3 78 c4 ♗×h5 79 ♔c3 ♗×g6 80 c5 ♗e4 81 ♗c4 h5 and white cannot stop both a and h-pawns.

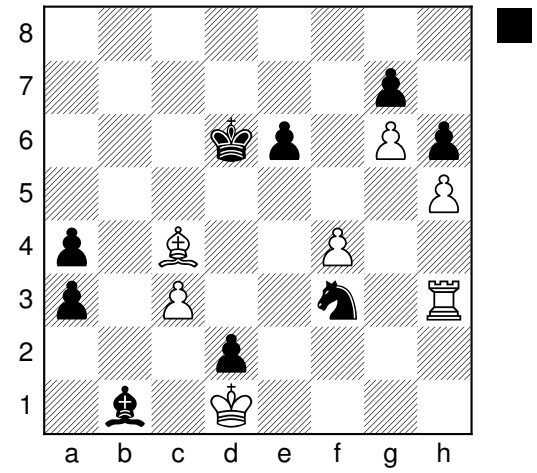
75	**♖f1**	**a4**
76	**♗a2**	

76 f×e5 a×b3 with connected unstoppable passers for black.

76	**...**	**♘f3**
77	**♖h1**	**♗d3**
78	**♖h3**	**♗f5**
79	**♖h1**	

The knight cannot be taken due to skewer. 79 ♖×f3 ♗g4 80 ♔e2 ♗×f3+ 81 ♔×d2 and black picks up white's h5 and g6 pawns.

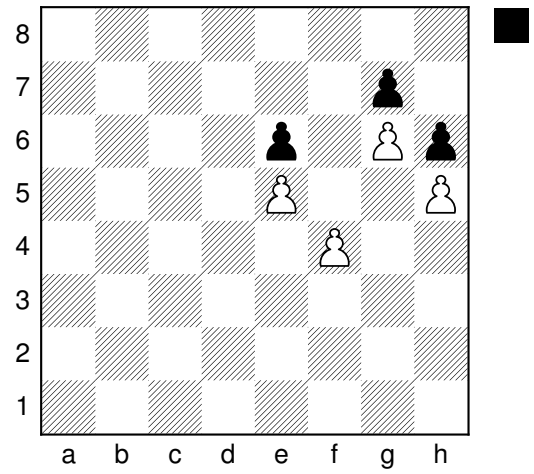
79	**...**	**♔d6**
80	**♗c4**	**♗b1**
81	**♖h3**	



0-1. Black wins by adjudication.

A possible continuation: 81...♗d3 82 ♗a2 ♗e2+ 83 ♔×e2 ♘g1+ 84 ♔×d2 ♘×h3 85 ♔e3 e5 86 f5 ♘f4 87 f6 ♘×h5 88 f7 ♔e7 89 ♔e4 ♘f4 90 ♔×e5 ♘d3+ 91 ♔e4 ♘c1 92 ♗b1 a2 93 ♗×a2 ♘×a2 94 ♔d3 ♘c1+ 95 ♔d2 ♘b3+ 96 ♔c2 h5. White king cannot stop both a and h-pawns.

Appendix



When evaluating transitions to endings, it is often useful to analyze specific pawn structures on the board and whether they're winning or not given the remaining pieces.

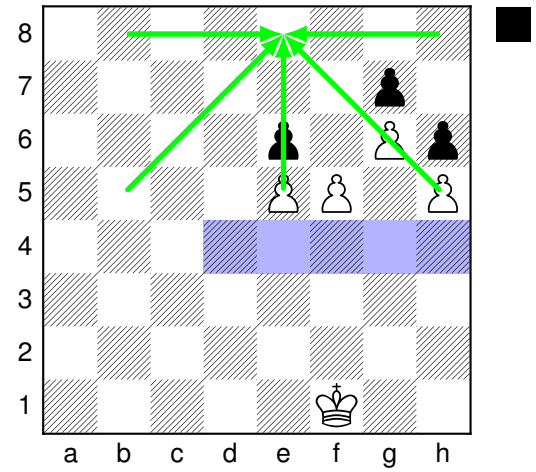
The pawn structure in the figure is winning for white, unless there is a black piece to stop the queening. The plan for white is to play f5, and then:

(a) if black takes, push the e-pawn. Full variation: 1. f5 e×f5 2. e6 f4 and the e-pawn runs.

(b) if black doesn't take, push the f-pawn again. Full variation: 1. f5 and 2. f6 g×f6 3. g7 and the g-pawn queens on the next move.

(c) if black still doesn't take, take the g-pawn with the f-pawn. Full variation: 1. f5 and 2. f6 and 3. f×g7 and the g-pawn queens on the next move.

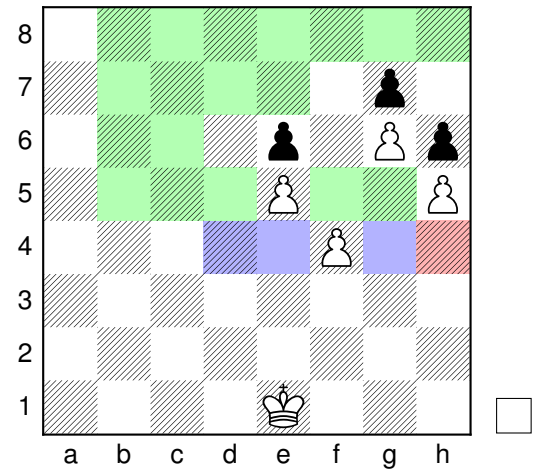
Now, when considering a king-pawn ending with this structure, it is quite straightforward to determine the area where the black king has to be in order to stop the queening, provided white king is far away. Consider that 1. f5 has been played.



Plan (a) works for black, as long as the king is somewhere along the green arrows and has a path for the pawn when white makes the move. When so, the king can still catch the pawn after 1... e×f5.

For plans (b) and (c) to work for black, the king has to be able to catch the breaking pawn. Thus, black king can be in any of the blue squares after 1. f5 and still catch the queener, provided there is a clear path.

Combining, since black can choose the plan, the king has to be one of the green or blue squares to prevent queening when it is white to move:



The only square for the king where the path becomes a problem is h4. Consider 1. f5 ♔×h5 2.

f×e6 ♔×g6 and now the doubled pawns prevent the black king from intercepting. On the other hand, the white pawns cannot advance, either.