

And In The End

by Dana Muller

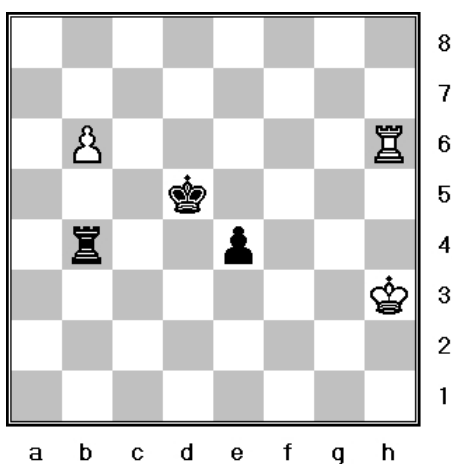


Last month we looked at an endgame that was clearly better, but not clearly winning. This month's installment will involve another common endgame situation, the position that is drawn, but there is a little play left in it.

As you will see, a good motto for this kind of ending is "never give up hope" – for either side!

David Butler – Dana Muller
2 Bit Open
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Before White's 45th move.



Black has a small edge here. His rook is in the classic position behind White's passed pawn, and his king is in position to aid the advance of his passed pawn. By contrast, while White's rook is fairly active (guarding his passed pawn from the side), the white king is a bit offside.

Having said this, the position is a draw, in fact even though white's defense is far from optimal, a draw remains possible until move 62.

45. Kg2

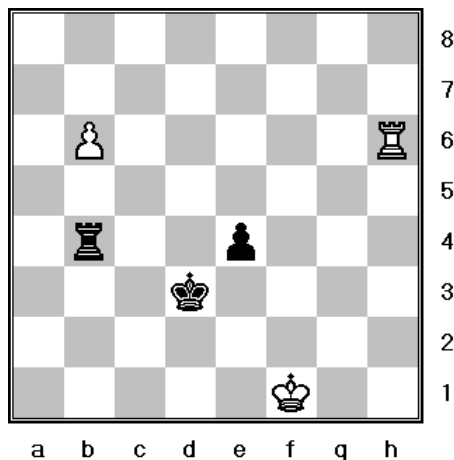
Not bad, but imprecise. 45. Kg3! Kd4 46. Kf4 is the easiest draw. The plan is to continue with Re6 (double attack on the e-pawn) followed by b7

(deflecting a piece from the defense of the e-pawn). For example 46. ...Rb3 47. Re6 Rf3+ 48. Kg4 Kd5 (48. ...Rb3 49. Kf4 e3 50. b7 Rxb7 51. Re4+! wins the e-pawn) 49. Re7 and it's hard to see how black can progress. White's pawn is ready to move forward and if the black rook moves behind the pawn (Rb3) then Kf4 again attacks the black pawn twice.

45. ...Kd4

Preparing to advance the e-pawn as far and as fast as possible.

46. Kf1 Kd3

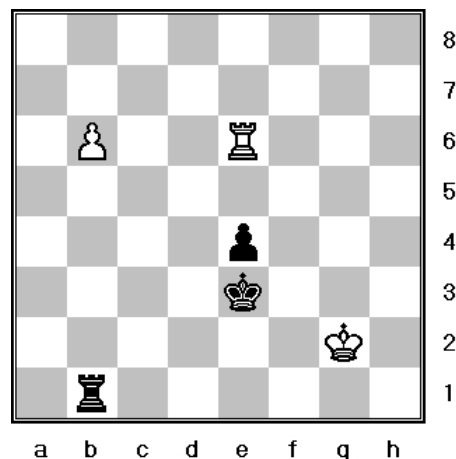


As opposed to an immediate Ke3, this sets a small (very small) trap. If 47. Rh3+? e3 48. Rh6 Rb1+ 49. Kg2 e2 wins. Of course Rh3 is illogical on several counts (removes protection from the b-pawn, insufficient checking distance on the kingside), but it costs nothing to test your opponent's vigilance.

47. Rd6+ Ke3 48. Re6 Rb1+

Forcing the white king away

49. Kg2



49. ...Kd3

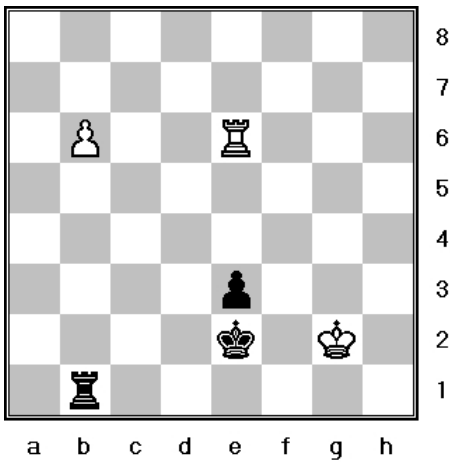
Beginning a typical zigzag king maneuver to advance the passed pawn.

50. Rd6+

Again, this is OK, but 50. Kg3! with the idea of setting up a double attack on the e-pawn seems simpler. For example 50. ...e3 51. Kf3 followed by b7 or 50. ...Rb2 51. Kf4 or 50. ... Ke3 51. Kg2 repeats. I have to admit that during the game I failed to see this finesse as well, I thought Rd6+ was best.

50. Kf2! also reaches a well-known type of draw, even without the white b-pawn.

50. ...Ke2 51. Re6 e3



52. Rc6

I don't understand this move (52. Rd6 is more purposeful), as there is not enough room for horizontal checks and the rook does nothing on this square.

It doesn't throw away the draw, however.

52. ...Rb2 (!)

The threat of discovered check is an attempt to scare white into a mistake. 53. Rd6 is also a reasonable response.

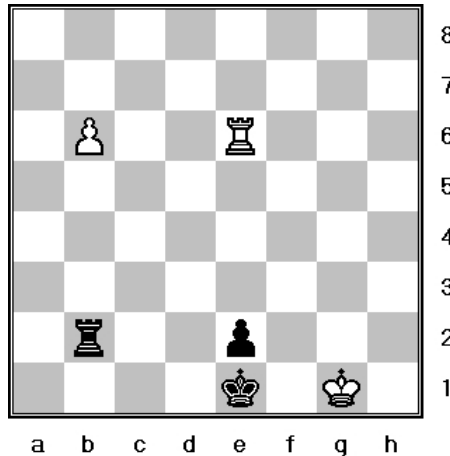
53. Kg1 Kd2

Once again, zigzagging to advance the e-pawn.

54. Rd6+ Ke1 55. Re6 e2

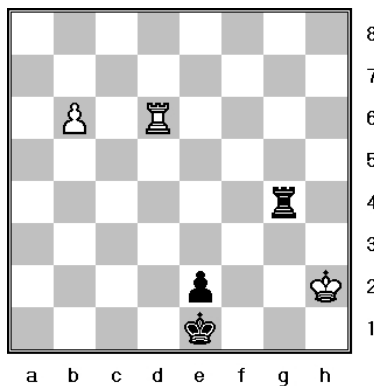
Black has done as much as he could from the starting position: the b-pawn hasn't moved further, the white king is still cut off from the queening square, and the black pawn is on the doorstep.

Despite all of these accomplishments, the position is still drawn!



56. Rd6 Rb5

Both players were suffering from the illusion that a check on the g-file would be deadly. It turns out that white can still draw after allowing a g-file check. Consider this position:



Analysis: Black to move

This resembles the Lucena position (a win for Black) except for a white pawn on b6. It turns out that pawn on b6 is just far enough advanced to draw.

Here are two tries:

(1) Lucena procedure 1. ... Kf2 2.

Rf6+ Ke3 3. Re6+ Re4 4. Rxe4+ Kxe4 5. b7 e1(Q) 6. b8(Q) draw.

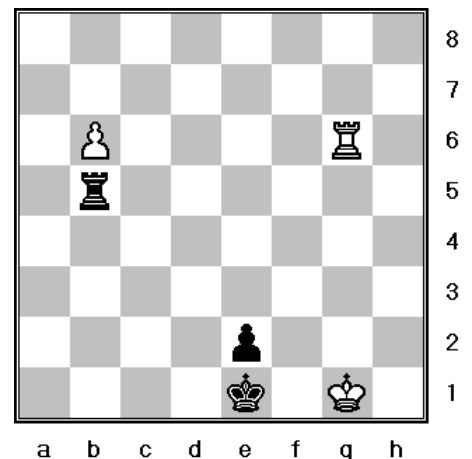
(2) 1. ...Rg7 (to hold up the b-pawn) 2. Kh3 waiting.

While Rg7 stops the b-pawn it also removes the Lucena "bridge." As soon as Black's king emerges from behind the pawn, White continues to check (or attack the e-pawn) until the black king is forced in front of the pawn once more. Since White can always move his king back and forth from h2 and h3 there are no zugzwangs.

The fact that both players thought the g-file check was the one serious threat and it needed to be stopped explains the next few moves. I realized after moving my rook to b5 that I really wanted it on b4 instead – b5 would be a better bridge square in a real Lucena position, but not here.


Of course what I thought was clever tempo maneuver to regain this position is complete rubbish since White doesn't have to fear the g-file check

57. Rg6??



57. ...Rb4?

Fixating on the g-file check and the Lucena method causes tunnel vision. Black really does have a win with 57. ...Rd5!, planning ...Kd1 and ...e1 – with



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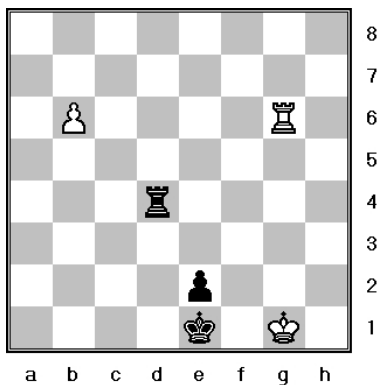
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check! Thus: 58. b7 Kd1 59. b8/Q e1/Q+ 60. Kg2 Qe4+ 61. Kf2 (others get mated more quickly) 61. ...Qxg6 (there's probably a forced mate that's faster here, but this seems pretty elegant) 62. Qb3+ Qc2+ and it's all over.

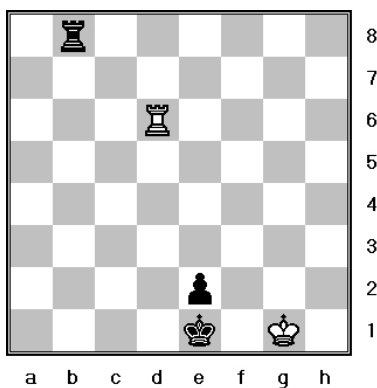
58. Kg2 Rb2 59. Rd6 Rb5 60. Rg6 Rb4 61. Kg1 Re4?

The reason for wanting the rook on b4: a bridge is built to the e3 square. At the time I believed this to be the winning move, but now I regard it as an excellent attempt to scare white.

It's especially unfortunate, because 61. ...Rd4!, now that the white king is back on g1, wins analogously to the win Black missed on move 57.

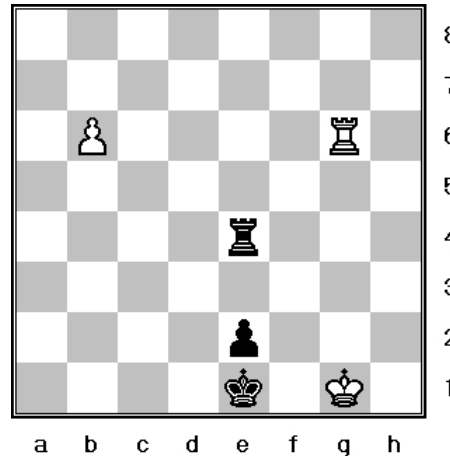


For example: 62. b7 (62. Re6 Rd7!) 62. ...Kd1 63. Re6 (63. b8/Q e1/Q+) 63. ...Rd8! 64.Kf2 Rf8+, or 64. b8/Q Rxb8 65. Rd6+ Ke1:



We've reached a real Lucena position, and there's actually a threatened

check on the g-file followed by ...Rg5 and building a bridge.



62. b7??

I expected this (still believing the g-file check would win), but 62. Rd6! Rg4+ 63. Kh2 leads to the previous (drawn) analysis diagram.

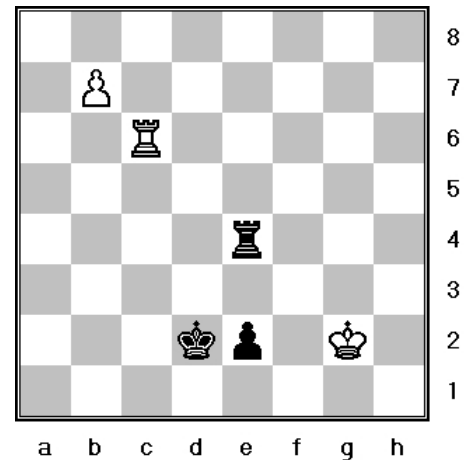
62. ...Kd1

Now Black really will queen with check.

63. Rd6+ Kc2 64. Rc6+ Kd2 65. Kg2

OK, he doesn't allow the queening

with check, but the effect is the same.



65. ...e1/Q 66. b8/Q Rg4+ 67. Kh3 Qh4#

Lessons to be learned?

(1) If better, keep pressing until it's very clearly drawn.

(2) Beware taking analogies too far (i.e. Lucena position); do the calculations to make sure the analogy is appropriate.

(3) Avoid tunnel vision, and pay attention when opportunity knocks.

(4) Sometimes you get lucky!

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