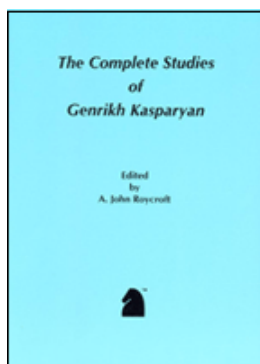




SKITTLES ROOM



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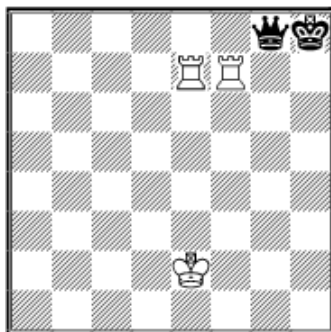
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The Incredible Usefulness of Studies

by Ian Rogers

Endgame studies are like jokes; lots of fun when they are first related to you, but often only the punchline stays in the memory while the detail fades from your mind.

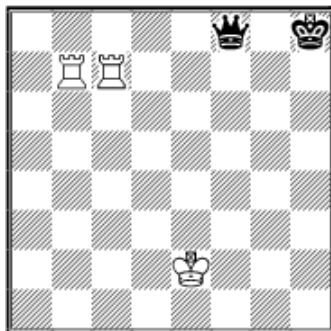
For years I half-remembered the punchline to a 1916 study by Rinck, which provided me with the seemingly useless piece of information that two rooks, without pawns, can beat a queen, from the following position:



Here White plays **1.Kf1** or (1. Kf2) and Black is in zugzwang and must lose his queen. (Any move of the queen along the back rank allows 2.Rh7+, 3.Reg7+ and 4. Rh8+)

Rather simple, but for those of you who like more than just a punchline to their jokes, the study my memory was

emasculating should look like this:



Now White wins only with very subtle play: **1.Rh7+ Kg8 2.Rhe7! Kh8 3.Rbc7!** (Stopping a check on c4 should Black defend with 3... Qg8 4.Kf1! Qf8 5.Rf7 Qg8 6. Rb7 giving a close relation to our first zugzwang position) **3...Kg8 4.Ra7 Kh8 5.Rf7 Qe8 + 6.Kf2 Kg8** (6...Qg8 7.Rab7) **7.Rg7+ Kf8 8.Rh7** and Black must lose his queen.

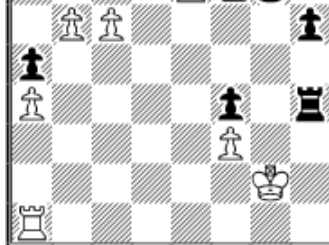
For twenty years this study was safely buried in the back of my mind, along with trivia such as the side on which Superman parts his hair – *the left* – and the fact that a cow has four stomachs.

Fast-forward to the last round of the Casino Open in Baden, Switzerland, in April 1998. I was playing black against Dejan Pikula and, with third place and 1,500 Swiss francs at stake, had been losing almost since the opening.

However, just after the time control had been reached, Pikula had a brainwave and decided to sacrifice a piece to obtain two connected passed pawns on the sixth rank. (A piece of useful information: two passed pawns on the sixth beat almost everything, up to a royal flush.)



Staring at this position, an endgame of two rooks versus queen looked like a remote dream, since tricky moves such as 46...Rg8 lose to 47.



Rg1! Kf6+ 48.Kf1, when the white pawns are unstoppable. Well, they are unstoppable anyway, I thought, so why not play **46...Kf6! 47.Rxf7+ Kxf7 48.Rg1** (48.b7 Rg8+ gives Black more than enough counterplay) **48...Rd8!** and try to generate some counterplay?

Pikula looked rather disconcerted, realising that Black could force a draw after 49.b7 Rd2+ 50.Kf1 Rhh2 51.Rg2! Rh1+ 52.Rg1 Rhh2. However, believing that by now he had little choice, Pikula took the pragmatic decision and played:

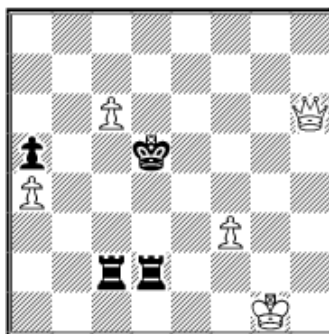
49.b7 Rd2+ 50.Kf1 Rhh2 51.Rg2!

Perhaps he was expecting the repetition and a draw to follow soon. However, here is where my long lost memory of the Rinck study kicked in; aren't two rooks on the seventh capable of beating a queen? True, Black will be losing a lot of his pawns but maybe, just maybe, Black can hide his king on a safe square, à la Rinck. Taking a deep breath, Black continued.

51...Rdxg2 52.b8(Q) Rc2

In his excellent *John Nunn's Chess Puzzle Book*, the English GM – who has just won the 2007 World Solving Champion (for problems and studies) – pointed out that, had White pushed his c-pawn rather than his b-pawn on move forty-nine, he would not have needed to take the f4-pawn and could now have forced an immediate draw with 53.Qf5+! keeping the black king from charging up the board.

53.Qxf4+ Ke6 54.Kg1 Rhd2 55.Qxh6+ Kd5



56.Qg5+ Kxc6

Black would prefer to find a safe haven for his king immediately with 56...Kc4, but 57.Qxd2! Rxd2 58.c7 would then be more than annoying.

57.Qb5+ Kd6 58.Qb6+ Ke7

Black cannot cross the fifth rank without losing his last pawn and so tries to find a safe square for his king; h4 seems the prime candidate.

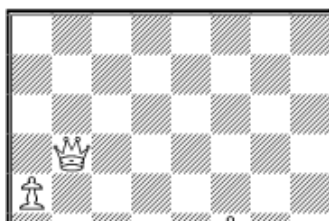
59.Qa7+ Kf6 60.Qb6+ Ke7!

Just in time, Black notices that h4 is not the perfect square for the black king, in view of 60...Kg5 61.Qxa5+ Kh4 62.Qb4+! and if 62...Kg3, then 63.Qg4 would be a little embarrassing. So it is time to try plan "B."

61.Qa7+ Kd6 62.Qb6+ Kd5! 63.Qxa5+ Kc4

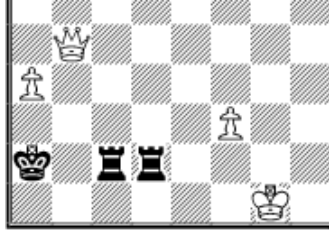
With no pawns left, Black must think like Rinck. This involves finding a way of avoiding the checks and, fortunately, White's pawns will be of some assistance in this endeavour.

64.Qb5+ Kc3 65.Qc5+ Kb2 66.Qe5+ Kb1 67.Qb5+ Ka2



68.Qf1

With no pawns White would have an immediate draw with 68.Qa4+, but now he is forced to adopt the sort of passive

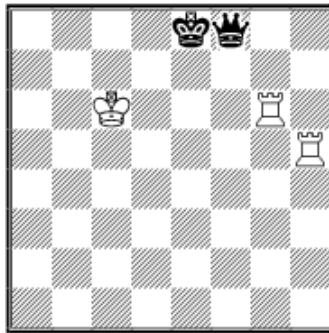


defence that failed in Rinck's study. Here Black cannot rely on zugzwang (White's pawns will simply advance, but he can use his king to create winning threats.)

68...Rb2! 0-1

After 69.Qc4+ Ka1, White is helpless.

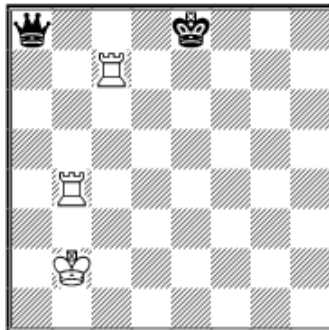
A terribly unjust victory I thought – and Nunn later showed that with precise play on moves fifty-five, fifty-eight or sixty-two, White might have been able to scramble a draw. Nonetheless I was quite pleased with the finish, since how often do you see two rooks (and no pawns) beating a queen? To be truthful, quite often, as I later discovered, and in a much more artistic manner than I had achieved. Compare, for example, the following study by Prokes:



White's king looks rather vulnerable to checks to hope for a win, but it turns out that after **1.Re6+ Kd8 2.Ra5!**, Black is doomed, eg. 2...Qf3+ 3.Rd5+ and wins.

Or perhaps the following equally unlikely study by Feitjer (anticipated many years earlier by Prokop) can add to the feeling that a

victory by the rooks is almost an everyday occurrence:



Now White wins with **1.Rg7 Kf8 2.Rgb7! Qa5 3.R7b5!** when, incredibly, Black's queen is trapped on an open board.

But of course Rinck was the specialist in this material imbalance, at least until the perfect five-piece endgame program was invented a few years ago.

To conclude here are four magical studies by Rinck, all White to move and win, which the reader could perhaps attempt to solve before checking up the solutions. They are in ascending order of difficulty, with the fourth being one of the most challenging five-piece studies I have ever seen.

Diagram 1

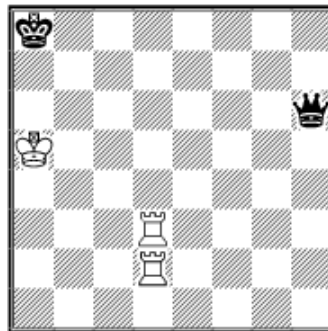


Diagram 2

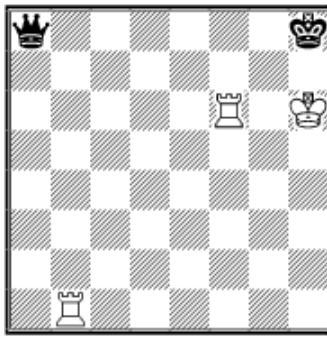


Diagram 3

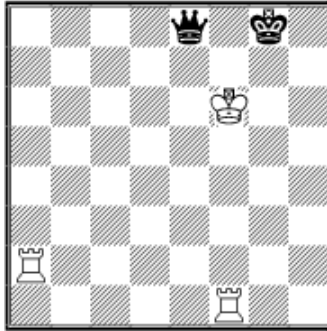
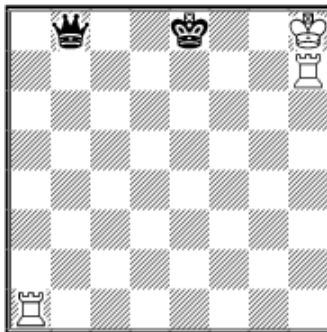


Diagram 4



Solutions

Diagram 1 1.Kb5 (threatening mate with 2.Rd8+ and 3.R2d7) 1...Qh5 + 2.Ka6! Qg6+ 3.Rd6 the checks are finished.

Diagram 2 Avoiding stalemate is a factor here, but after 1.Rb7! Qg8 2.Rbf7 Qg7+! 3.Kh5!!, Black has no more tricks since if 3...Qg6+, 4.Kxg6 relieves the stalemate.

Diagram 3 The real question here is how to move White's king out of the line of fire of his attacking rooks. The answer lies in the step-ladder manoeuvre 1.Rg2+ Kf8 2.Kg5+! Kg7 3.Kf4+! Kf6 4.Kg3+! Kg5 5.Kf2+ Kf6 6.Kg1+! and Black must step on to the e-file and lose his queen.

Diagram 4 The white rooks can provide protection from checks for the white king only through 1.Rg7 Qh2+ 2.Kg8 Qb8 3.Ra3!!, when 3...Qd8 allows 4.Re3+, and 3...Qc8 4.Kh8! surprisingly leaves White in a check-free zone.

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