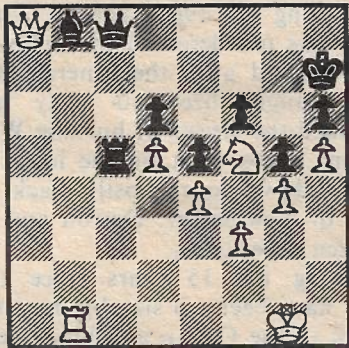


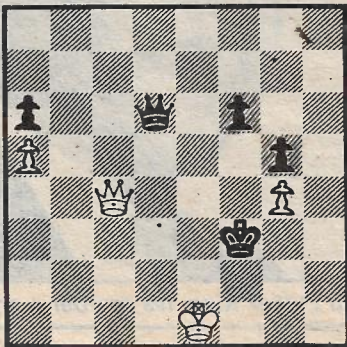
Never give up hope

ALTHOUGH the word stalemate is borrowed for frequent usage outside of chess, its actual occurrence during a game is fairly rare. It is an underlying theme in many endgames where the material is nearly even but these are usually agreed drawn well before the stalemate point. Yet, as the following remarkable combination shows, one can never afford to forget about the possibility — even in the middlegame.

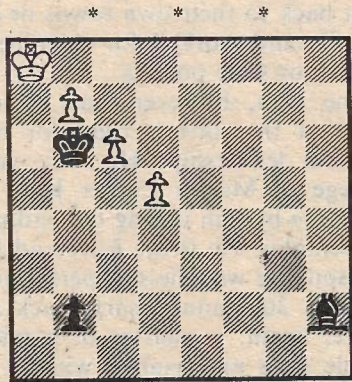


White to play
 Reefschlager v Seppur, West Germany 1983. I saw this one in Hamburg recently. Unsuspectingly Reefschlager (a professional player) moved 1.Qxb8? (instead 1.Rb7 ch Rc7 2.Nxd6 wins easily). There followed 1...Rc1 ch 2.Kh2 Qc2 ch 3.Kh3, and now White waited happily for either 3...Rxh1 or 3...Qxb1 when 4.Qa7 mates. Instead there followed the rude shock 3...Rh1 ch!! 4.Rxh1 Qg2 ch!! and after 5.Kxg2 Black is stalemated.

The following positions are somewhat less spectacular but they all illustrate one thing: never give up hope until you have examined possibilities for stalemate.

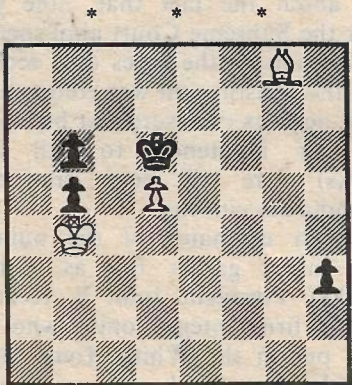


(1) White to play
 Matulovic v Botvinnik, Belgrade 1970. Soviet former World Champion Mikhail Botvinnik was so busy calculating the intricacies of this Queen and Pawn endgame that he missed a standard stalemate trap. How did White draw instantly from here?

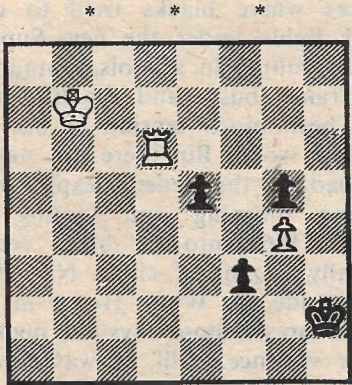


(2) White to play

Composed by Rubesamen. Onto studies now. I have taken this position from the fine Pergamon book, *Six Hundred Endings* by Sarkozy and Lajos Portisch. Although the black pawn is only one move from queening, White can escape if he correctly calculates the order of his sacrifices.



(3) White to play
 Composed by A. Larsen. Black's h-pawn cannot be stopped. Just the sort of position one might dismiss as hopeless during a game — or is it? Hint: note how many squares, if the b5 pawn is protected, that White's King is already deprived of.



(4) White to play
 Composed by V. Platov and M. Platov. Although a rook for two pawns ahead, White looks to be losing hopelessly due to the fast advancing black e and f pawns. Chasing the pawns with 1.Kc6 e4 2.Kd5 e3 looks pointless. Can you find the defence?

Solutions:
 (1) Matulovic played 1.Qd3 ch! as 1...Qxd3 leaves White with no legal move.
 (2) 1.d6 Bxd6 2.b8=Q ch Bxb8 3.c7 Bxc7 (or 3...Kxc7) stalemate.
 (3) 1.Bh7 Kxd5 (1...Ke5 2.d6 draws) 2.Bf5 h2 3.Bc8 (intending the skewer 3...h1=Q 4.Bb7 ch) 3...Kc6 4.Bg4! h1=Q (luckily promoting to a bishop still only draws) 5.Bf3 ch!! Qxf3 stalemate.
 (4) Chasing the unstoppable pawns does look pointless, but in fact it enables the King to reach a faraway stalemate nook: 1.Kc6 e4 2.Kd5 e3 3.Ke4 e2 (3...f2 4.Rf6 is a draw) 4.Kxf3 e1=Q 5.Rh6 ch Kgl 6.Rh1 ch Kxh1 stalemate. If you spotted that you are probably a difficult opponent to beat!

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