

Endgame Explorations 7: Underpromotion (Part 2)

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Knight promotions, we've seen in the previous column, come up with some regularity in actual play; an obligatory rook promotion is already out of the ordinary. But rarest of all is the forced bishop promotion, which has occurred only a handful of times in all of tournament practice. The most recent example known is the following endgame (thanks to Ron Birnbaum for locating the reference):

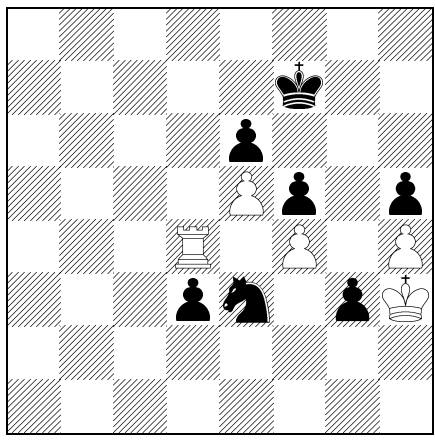


DIAGRAM1 (Chan-Depasquale, Laoag City 1985; Black to move)

White: Kh3,Rd4,e5,f4,h4; Black: Kf7,Ne3,d3,e6,f5,g3,h5

Play continued 1 ... g2! 2 Rxd3 [(Kh2 d2! snares the rook — a useful tactic) and now the expected g1Q? would run into 3 Rd7+ Ke8 4 Rd8+! with perpetual check or stalemate (Black cannot wriggle out with 3 ... Kg8 4 Rd8+ Kh7 5 Rd7+? Qg7! because 5 Rh8+! draws all the same), and 2 ... g1R 3 Rxe3 or g1N+ 3 Kh2 get Black nowhere, so...] 2 ... g1B!! and Black won after 3 Rd7+ Ke8 4 Rh7 Nd5 (with this knight on its ideal square the new bishop can't be stopped from gobbling white's weak pawns) 5 Rh8+ (hastens the end, but the immediate 5 Kg3 Be3 6 Rxh5 Bxf4+ wouldn't take long either) Kf7 6 Kg3 Be3 7 Rxh5 Bxf4+ 8 Kf3 Kg7! (oops! now the rook is trapped) 9 Kf2 Bh6 0-1.

Now it's not hard to construct a position where a bishop promotion is required either offensively to avoid stalemate (as in Chan-Depasquale above) or defensively to force it, as in our next study, from the turn of the century (# 1204 in Sutherland and Lommer's *1234*):

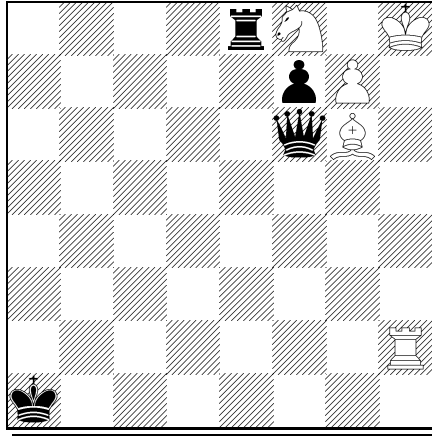


DIAGRAM2 (Traxler & Dedrle 1909; White to play and draw)

White: Kh8,Rh2,Bg6,Nf8,g7; Black: Ka1,Qf6,Re8,f7

Together with the advanced pawn at g7, White's two pieces would ordinarily balance the Black queen, but here they are both threatened and White's rook is loose too in such lines as 1 Kh7 fxg6 2 Rh1+ Kb2 3 g8Q Re7+ 4 Kh6 Qf4+ 5 Kxg6 Qg3+ 6 Kf6 Qxg8 7 Kxe7 Qg7+ 8 Ke8 Qe5+ and Qd5+. Hence the drawing combination: 1 Ra2+! Kxa2 2 Bxf7+ Qxf7 and now the startling 3 g8B!! forces Rxf8, stalemate!

Multiple promotions are naturally much more challenging. Here's a modern setting in which the theme of Diag.2 is multiplied, White having to promote two bishops to extract a draw:

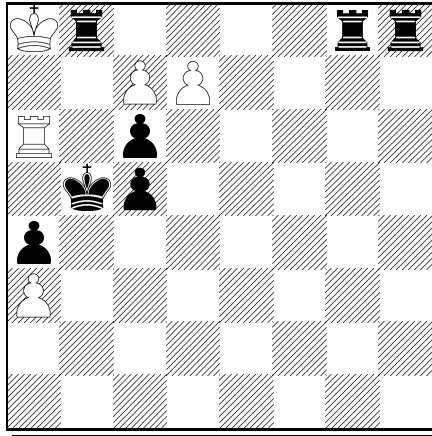


DIAGRAM3 (White to play and draw)

White: Ka8,Ra6,a3,c7,d7; Black: Kb5,Rg8,Rh8,Bb8,a4,c5,c6

This study earned Y.Afek a Commendation in the 1981 Guanabara Jubilee Tourney. The natural stalemate try 1 c8Q?! Rxc8 2 dxc8Q Rxc8 3 Rb6+! fails to Kc4!, but contains the germ of the solution: 1 Rb6+! Kxb6! (forced here

since after Kc4?? 2 Rxb8 Black even loses; but with the White rook now gone the stalemate tries 2 c8(d8)Q fail to B(x)c7!. Thus:) 2 d8B!! Ba7! (White has his way after Bxc7 or Rxd8 3 cxd8Q+ Rxd8 stalemate as well as the tricky 2 ... Kb5!/? 3 c8Q Rxd8 (or B-any) 4 Qa6+!. Now 3 c8Q+? Rxd8 wins, so of course White continues:) 3 c8B+!! (again!) Kb5 4 Ba6+! Kxa6, and for all of Black's squirming it's stalemate after all!

We turn back to offensive underpromotions in the next example, showing all three underpromotions by the same pawn in three variations:

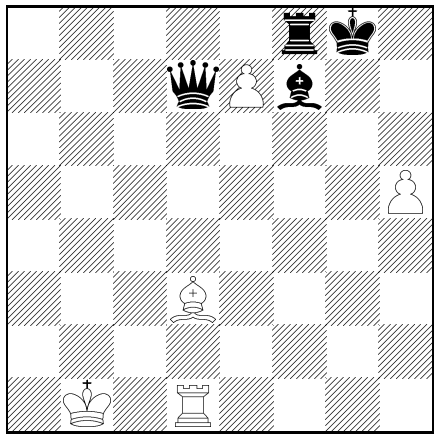


DIAGRAM4 (White to play and win)

White: Kb1,Rd1,Bd3,e7,h5; Black: Qd7,Kg8,Rf8,Bf7

This is Herbstmann's second-prize study in *Tyovaen Skakki* (1934); a similar position, with six more pieces but showing all four promotions (the "Allumwandlung" task—German for "omnipromotion") by the same pawn, was published by Lommer a year earlier. The key is 1 Bh7+! (Rg1+? Bg6! =) and now Kxh7 loses to 2 exf8N+! Kg7 3 Nxd7 (not Rxd7? Kxf8 4 h6 Kg8 5 h7+ Kh8! =), and the stalemate tries 1 ... Kh8(g7)!/? 2 exf8Q+? Kxh7! 3 Rxd7 (else White drops the rook or allows a perpetual) fail to 2 exf8R(B)+! and 3 Rxd7 winning.

And finally a comical orgy of knight promotions by Korolkov (1937):

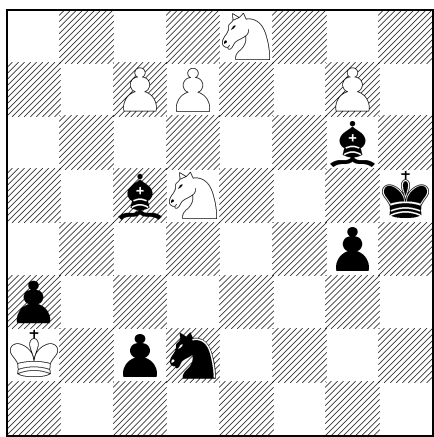


DIAGRAM5 (White to play and win)

White: Ka2,Nd5,Ne8,c7,d7,g7; Black: Kh5,Bc5,Bg6,Nd2,a3,c2,g4

The first knighting marks Black's threat: 1 ... c1N+! 2 Ka1 Ndb3# or Bd4#. Thus White must start checking: 1 Nf4+ Kh6 (here and later Kg5(h4)? allows 2 d8Q+; that's why White did not check on f6) 2 g8N+ Kh7 3 Ngf6+ Kh6 (Kh8 4 Nxg6#!) 4 Nxg4+ Kh7 5 Nef6+ (now the eighth rank is off limits) Kg7 6 Ne6+ Kf7 7 d8N+! Ke7 8 c8N#! A "model mate" (each of the king's escape squares guarded just once) administered by FIVE knights!

This concludes our exposition of underpromotions; the next column will feature more slapstick along the lines of Diagram 5.