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# Chess Endgame Magic & Tactics:

## Smyslov

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2022  
CarstenChess

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# From Chapter 1: White to Play and Win Studies

In each of these studies, your assignment will be to force White's win. This won't be such an easy task since, in many of them, you will get the eerie feeling that White is actually losing or drawing at best.

(1)

**V.Smyslov**  
64, 1936



**White wins**

This was Smyslov's first published study when he was only in his mid-teens. Let's take stock:

1. White is down a queen for a rook.
2. It's not as bad as it seems in number 1 on the list since White can win a piece back with 1 Rxc3. Black's queen must capture the h-pawn rather than the rook.
3. We note disharmony in the geometry of the black queen and king. If White gives a knight check on d6, then Black's king must move to b8; moving to c7 allows a knight fork on e8, and moving to d8 allows White an attraction/knight fork combination after h8(Q)+, followed by a knight fork on f7.
4. After Black's king moves to b8, White can give a rook check on b1. This forces Black's king into a box on a8 since king and queen are again forked on c7.

5. Then we can play 3.Ne8, threatening both Nxc7 and Nc7 mate. This forces 3...Qg3+ since Qe5?? to cover c7, loses to a decoy/pawn promotion/weak back rank combination with 4 Nc7+ and 5.h8(R) and mate next move.

6. White then plays 4 Ka4!. Black must respond with 4...Bd4 to cover the h-pawn's attempt to promote.

7. Now we have the killing interference/overloaded defender shot 5.e5!, winning.

**Exercise planning/visualization/combination alert:** There is no need to solve this problem. Carsten and I already did that for you. Your job is to visualize the entire description in your mind's eye without moving the pieces and discover exactly why 7.e5! wins.

**Answer:**

**1.Nd6+!**

After 1.Rxc3? Qxh7, White has good chances to draw but zero to win.

**1...Kb8**

Forced.

a) 1...Kc7?? 2.Ne8+ forks.

b) 1...Kd8?? 2.h8Q+! Attraction. 2...Qxh8 3.Nf7+ Fork.

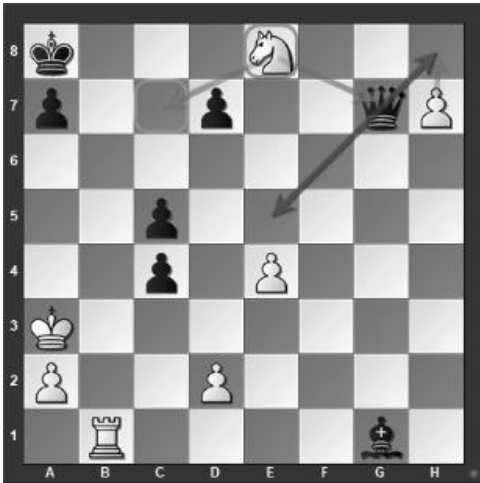
**2.Rb1+!**

We display our true colors: we aren't playing for a draw, and we want the full point.

2.Rxc3? is a feeble attempt to bail out to a fortress draw after 2...Qxh7 3.Kb2 c3+!

4.Kxc3 Kc7 5.Nf5 Qh2 6.Rg3 Qh1! White is unlikely to hold the draw.

**2...Ka8 3.Ne8!**



Now we are getting somewhere. We threaten both Nc7 mate and Nxg7.

**3...Qg3+**

3...Qe5?? allows 4.Nc7+! (decoy/pawn promotion/weak back rank) 4...Qxc7 5.h8R+ Qb8 6.Rbxb8#.

**4.Ka4!**

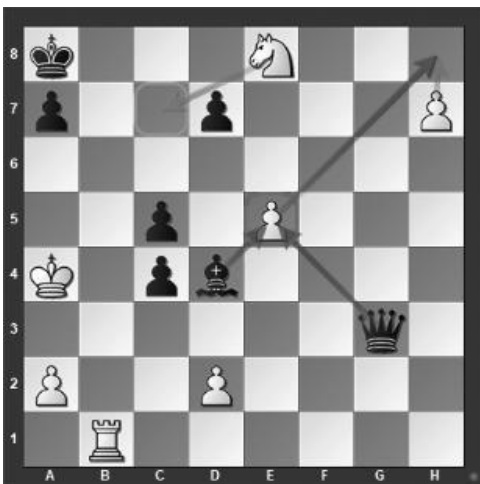
White's king is safe from checks on a4.

**4...Bd4**

Of course, promotion on h8 must be prevented.

4...Qe5?? 5.Nc7+! (decoy/pawn promotion) 5...Qxc7 6.h8R+ Qb8 7.Rbxb8#.

**5.e5!**



Interference/overloaded defenders. Our move - which is no bluff - has the feel of an unpleasant truth Black doesn't want to hear.

**5...Bxe5**

5...Qxe5 allows 6.h8Q! (decoy) 6...Qxh8 7.Nc7#

**6.Nc7+!**

Removal of the guard/pawn promotion.

**6...Bxc7**

Deals with the devil never end well for the one who signs in blood. This piece grab will be expensive for Black.

**7.h8Q+ Bb8**



This one is easy.

**Exercise (calculation):** White forces mate in 3:

**Answer:** Simply give a queen check on the h1-a8 diagonal. Black is rudderless and helplessly underprotected on the light squares, with only two spite blocks before getting mated.

**8.Qh1+ Qg2**

Black's queen is the homely woman who enters the beauty salon, not realizing: if the raw materials are not there, then the rest is just window dressing. Of course, this block is entirely ineffective.

**9.Qxg2+ d5**

Black's "defense" has come down to a one-act farce.

**10.Qxd5# 1-0**

## From Chapter 2: Drawing Studies

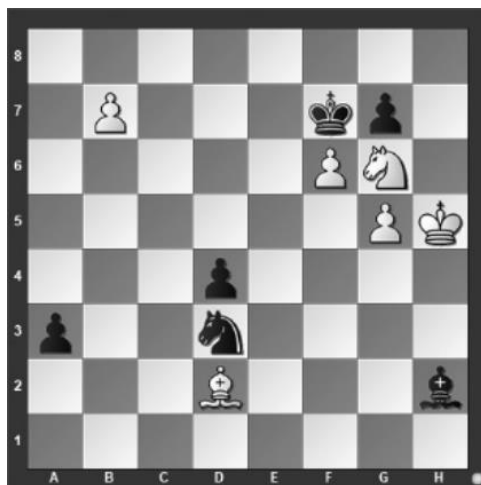
Are you a grim, solemn, humorless pessimist who rarely smiles? Are you? Great. Then this chapter is perfect for you. A philosophical question for the reader: if you are a staunch atheist, convinced that you agree to be stalked by a vampire, are you willing to wear the crucifix? Our advice in this chapter is: wear it. In the next massive batch of studies in the book, your assignment, should you choose to accept it, is to find a path for White to draw the game.

Now, most of us associate draws with disappointment. On Facebook, your writers had to endure daily whining when the first five games of the Carlsen-Nepomniachtchi world championship match were drawn. Then everyone wept with joy when Carlsen started to win games. Not so with composed works since drawing studies are in no way, shape, or form considered inferior to the standard White to Play and Win studies. In fact, some of the most beautiful studies of the book are in this chapter. In some cases, you will feel as if White's chances to hold a draw range from the combined number of atoms in the universe to 1! But rest assured, White has a path to the draw in each example.

(50)

**V.Smyslov**

*Shakhmaty v SSSR, 1937*



### White draws

Defending White's position will not be a joyful task. Our giant problem is that Black's bishop covered our passed b-pawn's promotion square, while Black's passed a-pawn can't be halted from its promotion square. Let's not resign just yet and maybe give a spite check with our knight.

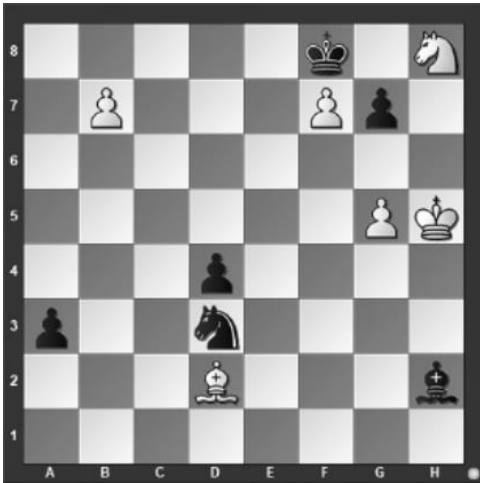
#### **1.Nh8+! Kg8**

a) 1...Kf8 2.Ng6+ is drawn. Black must not play for a win with 2...Ke8?? 3.fxg7 Kf7 4.Kh6! (threat: Kh7! and g8(Q) mate) 4...a2 (4...Kg8 5.Bf4! - Interference/pawn promotion - 5...Bxf4 6.Nxf4, White promotes on b8 and it's mate in 3) 5.Kh7 a1Q 6.g8Q#.

b) 1...Ke6?? 2.fxg7 White promotes on g8, with a check.

#### **2.f7+ Kf8 (D)**

2...Kxh8?? would be a wonderful gift. 3.f8R+ Kh7 4.g6#.



**Exercise (planning):** White has access to a deeply hidden drawing plan. What would you play here?

**Answer:** Entombment/stalemate.

### 3.Kg6!!

The idea is to follow with Kh7 and g5–g6!, after which stalemate tricks suddenly appear.

### 3...a2 4.Kh7! a1Q

4...g6?? 5.Nxg6+ Kxf7 6.Nf4! (interference; White's b-pawn can now promote, not to mention White's g-pawn) 6...Bxf4 7.g6+ Ke7 8.Bxf4 a1Q 9.b8Q Nxf4 10.Qxf4 and Black fights for the draw since White's g-pawn is the more dangerous of the two passers.

### 5.g6!



Do you see what we did? We self-sealed White's king, and stalemate threats begin to arise.

### 5...Qh1

Threat: ...Bf4 mate.

5...Nc5 6.Bf4! Bxf4 7.b8Q+ Bxb8 stalemate.

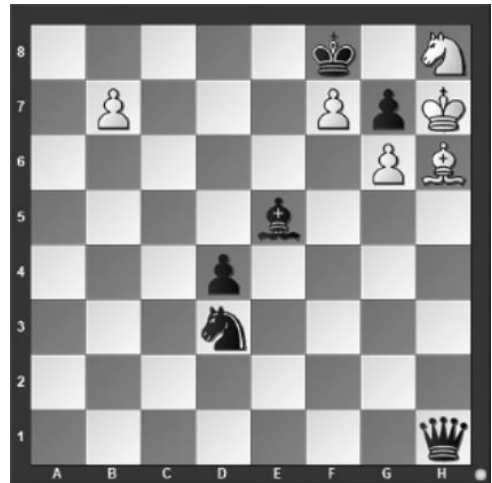
### 6.Bh6!

Threat: Bxg7+, followed by f8(Q).

### 6...Be5 (D)

a) 6...Bf4 7.b8Q+! (decoy) 7...Bxb8 stalemate.

b) 6...Ke7?? 7.Kxg7! Qf3 8.Kg8 Qxb7 9.f8Q+ Ke6 10.Nf7 and White is winning due to the promotion possibilities of the deeply passed g6–pawn.



**Exercise (combination alert):** This one isn't a brain-buster. White to play and force a draw:

**Answer:** Step 1: Decoy.

### 7.b8Q+!

Even the wizard Merlin would be envious of Smyslov's command of magic.

### 7...Bxb8

Step 2: ...Oh, wait, there is no Step 2 since it's stalemate and White's drawing trap snapped closed.

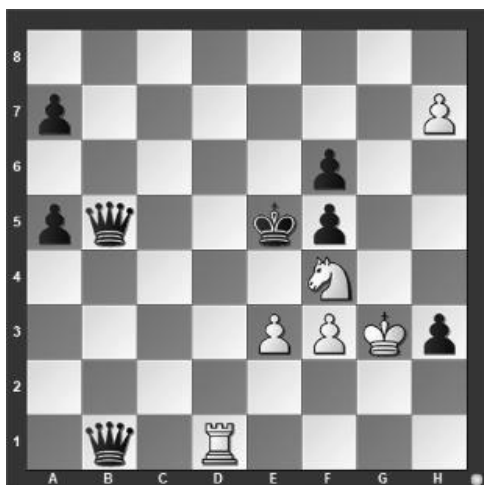
1/2–1/2

## From Chapter 3: Composed Mating Problems

In this chapter, we truncated some studies to turn them into composed mating problems. You **MUST** be within the stipulation number. For example, if it's a mate in 2 and you find several mates in 3, you failed the problem. Mate in 2 means a mate in 2 and no more!

(115)

**V.Smyslov**  
*Moi Etyudy, 2000*



**Mate in 2**

*Exercise (combination alert):* Find White's mate in 2.

**Answer:** Underpromotion.

**5.h8N!**

Threats: Ng6 mate and Nf7 mate.

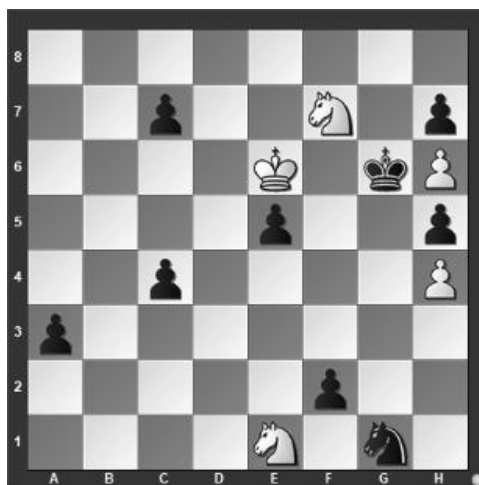
**5...Qxd1**

5...Qe8 If Jefferey Dahmer claimed to be a vegan, would you believe him? This innocent try will not ward off mate, even though the move covers both g6 and f7. The trouble is it cost Black loss of control over d5. 6.Rd5#.

**6.Nf7# 1-0**

(116)

**V.Smyslov**  
*Moi Etyudy, 2005*



**Mate in 4**

*Exercise (combination alert):* Our problem is that the natural mating theme of a knight check on h8, followed by Kf6, fails miserably since Black promotes on f1, with check. How do we get around this issue?

**Answer:** Interference.

**3.Nf3!!**

White's county is under attack. A volunteer army won't do, and it needs a draft.

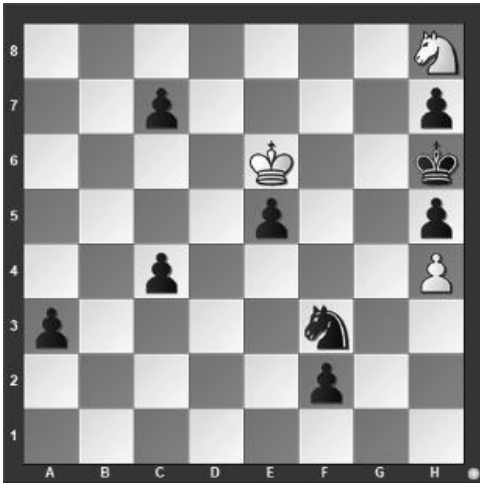
Black's knight clogs the f-file, preventing Black's future queen from giving a check.

We can't meet Black halfway with 3.Nh8+?? Kxh6 4.Kf6 when the threat of Nf7 mate is foiled with the simple 4...f1Q+ and Black wins.

**3...Nxf3**

The natural move, 3...f1Q? is mistakenly predicated upon the false belief that both kings are equally vulnerable: 4.N3xe5#.

**4.Nh8+ Kxh6**



This one is not so tough. White mates in 2.

*Answer:* Just move the king closer on f6.

**5.Kf6! f1Q**

5...Ng5 6.hxg5#.

**6.Nf7# 1-0**



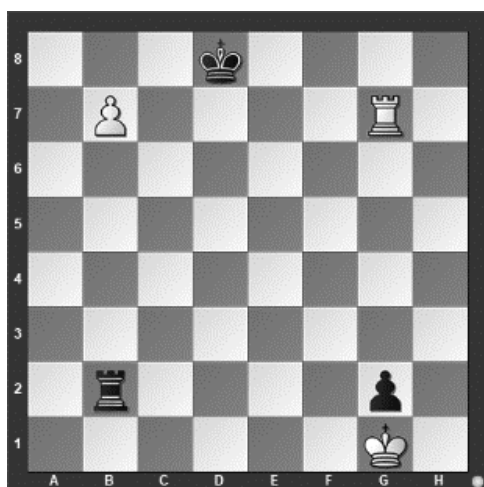
## From Chapter 4: Practical Rook Endings

Rook endings seem to be poorly understood technology, especially among club and coffeehouse level players, and there are few higher educational priorities than learning some basics. Unlike some other more dramatic chapters of this book, in this chapter, there will be no point in the movie where the teens get chainsawed in a bloody spray on the screen. Instead of excitement, chills, and thrills, we look at a series of somewhat stodgy rook ending studies which are of great applied, hands-on value since such positions are anything but esoteric. They frequently arise in our games. The studies in this chapter were co-composed with Grigory Levenfish, a top Russian Grandmaster and endgame expert of the old Soviet Union. These are blue-collar, middle-class-level studies that don't require a college degree or much book learning yet are of incredible practical value.

(125)

**G.Levenfish/V.Smyslov**

*Teoria Ladeinikh Okonchani*, 1957



**White wins**

Exercise (planning): A single powerful idea wins:

Answer: Moving the king to h2 creates zugzwang.

**8.Kh2! Rb1**

Of course, Black's rook must remain covering the b8–promotion square.

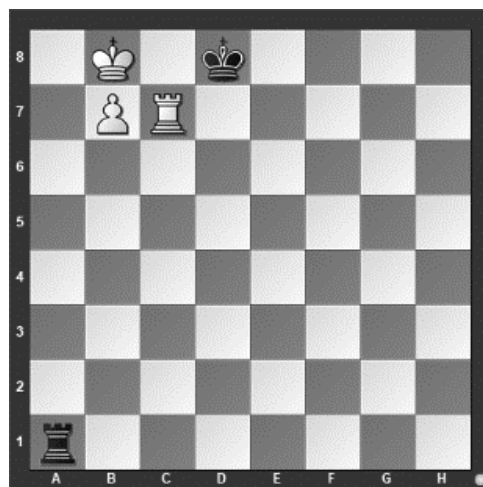
**9.Kxg2 Rb3**

The rook does its best to keep our king cut off, yet this state is only temporary.

**10.Kf2 Rb6 11.Ke3 Rb4 12.Kd3 Rb6 13.Kc4 Rb1 14.Kc5 Rc1+ 15.Kb6**

Our king will hide from the rook check on b8.

**15...Rb1+ 16.Ka7 Ra1+ 17.Kb8 Ra3 18.Rc7! Ra1**



**Exercise (planning):** Do you know how to reach Lucena's position, which wins for White?

**Answer:** Step 1: We must first drive Black's king to the e-file.

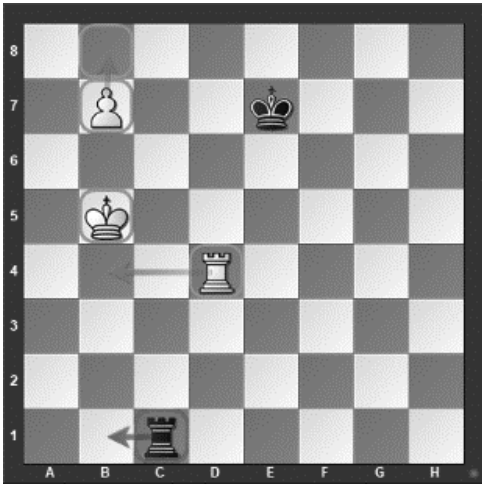
**19.Rc4! Kd7 20.Rd4+ Ke7**

20...Kc6 21.Kc8 and we promote next move.

**21.Kc7**

Step 2: Do prepare to build a bridge with king and rook, eventually blocking out all black rook checks.

**21...Rc1+ 22.Kb6 Rb1+ 23.Kc6 Rc1+ 24.Kb5!**



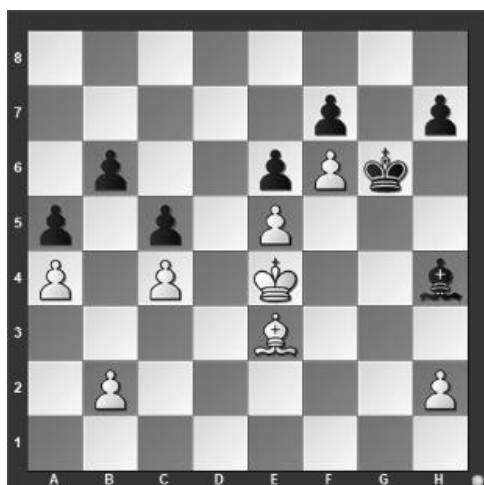
**1-0**      **24...Rb1+ 25.Rb4** White promotes.

## From Chapter 5: Real Life

This chapter looks at some of Smyslov's best endgames played in his tournament and match games. Within them, we offer the reader planning, calculation, critical decision, and combinational exercises.

(132)

**V.Smyslov - Yastrabov**  
Moscow 1936



White to move

**Exercise (planning/combinational alert):**

1. White has king position.
2. White must be careful to avoid a bishop swap and enter a king and pawn ending since doing so can easily lead to zugzwang, followed by the loss of the base e5-pawn.
3. The position looks too blocked for White to win by maneuvering alone. Do we have a combinational breakthrough?

**Answer:** We do, based on the fact that Black's awkwardly placed has a difficult time preventing Smyslov's (future) passed a-pawn from promotion.

**1.b4!!**

This is clearly the devil's work.

a) 1.Bf4?? Bf2! 2.b3 Kh5! 3.Kf3 Bd4 4.h3 Kh4 5.Kg2 Bb2! (zugzwang) 6.Bg3+ Kg5 7.Kf3 Kf5 The e-pawn falls and White must resign.

b) 1.Bg1? Be1 2.Be3 Kh5 3.Kf4 Kh4 4.Kf3 Kh3 5.Ke2 Bb4 6.Kf3 Kxh2 7.Kg4 Kg2 8.Bg5 Be1 9.Bh4! Bd2 (9...Bxh4?? loses to 10.Kxh4 Kf3 11.Kg5 Ke4 12.Kh6 Kxe5 13.Kg7! when White promotes first and wins) 10.Bg5 Be1 with a repetition draw. White must take the draw and avoid 11.Kh5?? Kf3 12.Kh6 Kg4 13.Bc1 Bg3 14.Kg7 Bxe5 15.Kxf7 Kf5 wins.

**1...axb4**

1...cxb4 2.Bxb6 b3 3.Kd3! Be1 4.c5 Bf2 5.Kc3 Kf5 6.Kxb3 Kxe5 7.Kc4 Kxf6 8.Bd8+ Ke5 9.Bxa5 f5 10.Bc3+ Ke4 11.a5 and White promotes faster, since Black's lousy bishop obstructs the path of his f-pawn, while the klutzy black king sits on a square where White promotes with check, on a8.

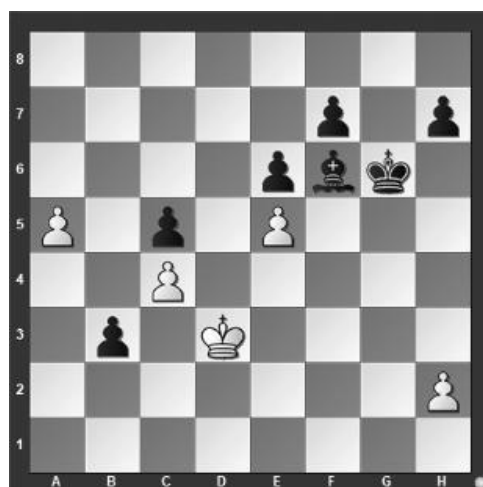
**2.Bxc5!**

Step 2: Piece sacrifice/pawn promotion. The sacrifice allows White to race the a-pawn to its promotion square.

**2...bxc5**

2...b3 3.Kd3 bxc5 4.a5 transposes.

**3.a5 b3 4.Kd3 Bxf6!**



Both players have the same idea.

**Exercise (critical decision/calculation):**

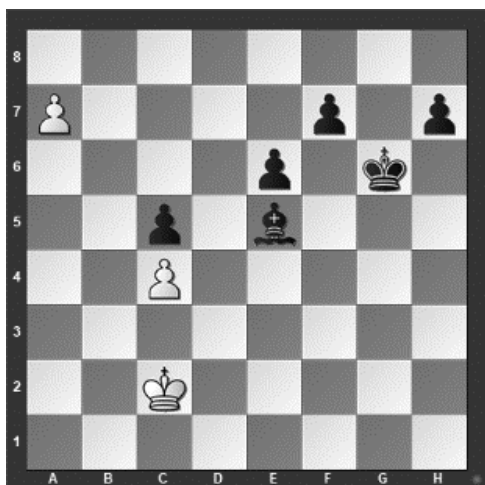
Should we accept the offer of Black's bishop? Or should we decline and push our a-pawn?

*Answer:* We should decline and push the a-pawn. Taking the bishop falls into Black's trap.

**5.a6!**

Smyslov refuses to be fooled, and he alertly avoids 5.exf6?? A wild guess tends not to be informative in positions requiring absolute mathematical precision. 5...e5 6.a6 e4+ 7.Kc3 e3 8.a7 e2 9.Kd2 e1Q+ 10.Kxe1 b2 11.a8Q b1Q+, and White is losing since pawns soon fall.

**5...Bxe5 6.a7 b2 7.Kc2 Bxh2 8.Kxb2 Be5+ 9.Kc2**



The databases have Black resigning here. Let's play on and look at what White's winning technique would be. Please don't blame Carsten for Black's poor play. I (Cyrus) played Black against Stockfish, who, as you may have surmised, made a total fool of me and the illusion of resistance:

**9...Bd4**

I also tried 9...Bd6, and again Stockfish won easily after 10.a8Q Kg7 11.Kb3 Be7 (Can Black create a fortress draw? Don't answer that. It was a rhetorical question) 12.Ka4 Bd6 13.Kb5 Be7 14.Qg2+ Kf8 15.Qb2 (Stockfish threatens mate in one on h8) 15...Kg8 16.Qe5 Bf8 17.Kc6 h6 18.Kd7 Bg7 19.Qg3 h5 20.Ke7 h4 21.Qb8+ Kh7 22.Kxf7, and once again, I was forced to resign.

**10.a8Q h5 11.Qg8+ Bg7 12.Kb3 h4 13.Qd8 Bf6 14.Qd3+ Kh6 15.Qe3+**

The c5-pawn falls and with it, so does and Black's resistance.

**15...Bg5 16.Qxc5 1-0**

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