

Chapter I

Restricting the enemy pieces

'If one piece is badly placed, then your whole game is bad'

The whole of the first chapter is devoted to this adage from the Russian chess school. It illustrates different techniques for excluding an opposing piece from the action by means of clever pawn play and it presents the subtle consequences of this – which sometimes reach far into the endgame.

Putting the knight in chains

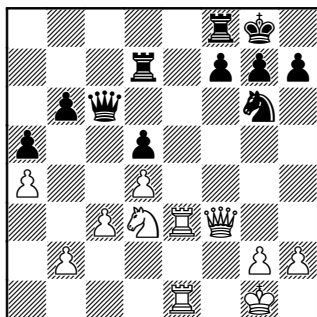
Technique No. 1

I. Paralysing the knight with the duo of wing pawns

We start with the surprisingly frequent motif of restricting a knight by the *wing pawns*: $\text{♟g3}/\text{♟h4}$ against a ♞g6 is the main subject with various mirror image variations. The opponent is frequently faced with a choice only between different evils: Opposing with his own rook pawn (...h5 or ...a5) creates weaknesses or is not really possible. Allowing h4-h5 or a4-a5 leaves him at a disadvantage in space, and for the rest of its days the knight can often never find a good square.

► 1.1 Botvinnik–Boleslavsky

Moscow (USSR Ch) 1941



The last move was 24... ♞d6-c6 .

'Black wants to tie in one of the opposing pieces to the protection of the ♖a4. In that case the development of White's initiative would slow down. But White has at his disposal a clear attacking plan: drive away the ♞g6 so as to gain access to the e7-square for his rook and to the e5- and f4-squares for the knight. For that reason White ignores the petty threat posed by his opponent' (Botvinnik).

25.g3! ♜d6

The continuation **25...♞xa4 26.h4** was extremely dangerous for Black, e.g. **26...♜d6** (or **26...♜f8 27.h5 ♞f8 28.h6**, and according to Botvinnik White's attack plays itself) **27.h5 ♞h8 28.♞f4±.**

26.h4! f6

So as to control the e5-square.

27.♞f5! ♞c8

27...♞xa4 was quite bad on account of **28.h5 ♞h8 29.♞f4**, e.g. **29...♞f7 30.♞e6! ♜b8 31.♞g4 ♞g5 32.♞xg5**

fxg5 33.♖e7 h6 34.♗f5+- or 29...♗d7
30.♗xd7 ♖xd7 31.♖e7 ♖xe7 32.♖xe7
♜f7 33.♜xd5+-.

**28.♗xc8 ♖xc8 29.h5 ♜f8 30.♖e7
♖cd8**

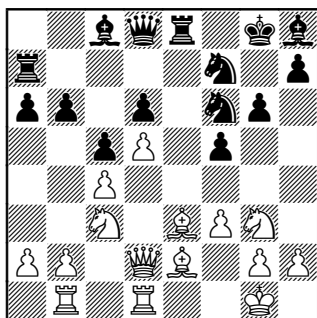
30...♖c4 31.♖b7 ♖xa4 32.♖ee7+-.

31.♜f4±,

and White won on move 49.

► 1.2 Tamburini–Botvinnik

Leipzig (Olympiad) 1960



Before looking at the further course of the game, I should like to draw your attention to Black's queen's rook, which is ready to pop up on the e-file in a single move – we shall delve more deeply into this idea and similar ones under ⇒ *Technique No. 32*, 'The rook lift.'

21...h5!

Δ...h5-h4, ...♜f6-h5.

22.♙f1 h4 23.♜ge2 ♜h5

A further gain of space on the kingside is the threat after ...g6-g5, ...f5-f4, when the ♙c8 becomes active; in addition the ♙h8 is now no longer blocked and can thus exert strong pressure along the long diagonal.

As far as White's position is concerned, one can sense a certain lack of harmony – the constellation ♜e2/♙f1 looks really

unnatural. The game ended surprisingly quickly.

24.♜f4??

Of course White's desire to swap off his badly posted knight is an easy one to fulfil, but ...

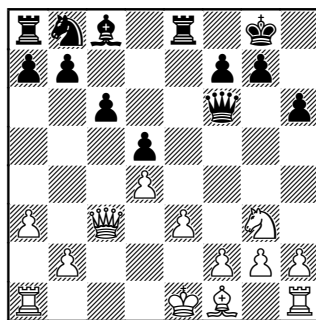
24...♜xf4 25.♙xf4 ♙d4+ 0-1

After 26.♙h1 g5 White loses the ♙f4.

So there was no longer any need for the rook lift to e7 – White had already abandoned his position.

► 1.3 Petrosian–Botvinnik

Moscow (1st WCh game) 1963



White has at his disposal the usual plan of the minority attack on the queenside (b2-b4-b5). And what about Black's counterplay?

12...g6!

Intending ...h6-h5-h4.

13.f3?!

As Botvinnik writes in his notes on this game, the only possible reason for this move is as preparation for queenside castling – the pawn would otherwise be left hanging on f2.

Of course there would be another reason for 13.f3, namely to prepare e3-e4. But for the moment that does not look like a realistic option and in fact in the future course of the game White manages neither

e3-e4 nor queenside castling, and thus f2-f3 turns out just to be a waste of time and a weakening of his own position.

13.♙d3!? looked much more natural and much sounder, though Black would also then get considerable counter-chances on the kingside after 13...h5 (intending to follow up with ...h5-h4 at the appropriate moment).

13...h5!

△...h5-h4.

14.♙e2

After **14.0-0-0** h4 15.♖e2 ♙f5 Black has the initiative.

14...♖d7

Black takes his time about ...h5-h4, as long as White has not decided on where to place his king. But **15.0-0?!** would immediately be followed by 15...h4, and after 16.♖h1 ♗g5 17.♙f2 ♖f6 the ♖h1 looks like some insignificant bystander, who is not allowed to take part in the game. On the other hand **15.0-0-0** is followed by 15...♗g5 16.♞d3 ♖f6, and the ♙e3 is under pressure.

15.♙f2 h4!

Now Black should no longer delay this move, or else on the next move White could bring the ♞h1 into action.

16.♖f1 ♖f8 17.♖d2

Actually the knight is pretty well placed on f1, from where it protects the ♙e3 – but the ♞h1 has to be freed and that costs White two extra tempi (♖f1-d2-f1).

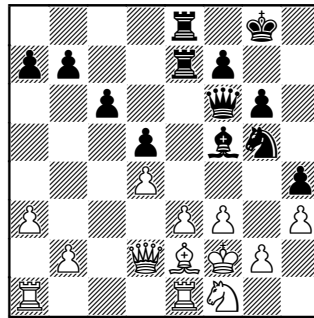
17...♞e7 18.♞he1 ♙f5 19.h3

‘This move has only one advantage – from now on White has no need to calculate any variations with ...h4-h3. But its disadvantages are obvious: the g3-square is weakened and the option of g2-g4 is no longer viable’ (Botvinnik).

19...♞ae8 20.♖f1 ♖e6 21.♗d2

And now, as Botvinnik explains, Black could by

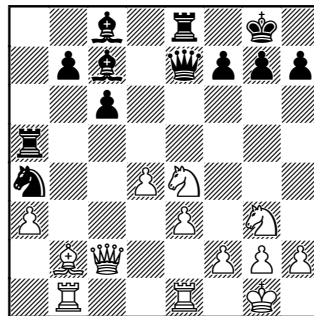
21...♖g5!



immediately bring about a won position, e.g. **22.♙g1 ♙xh3! 23.gxh3 ♖xh3+ 24.♙h1** (24.♙h2 ♞xe3! 25.♖xe3 ♗f4+ 26.♙h1 ♖f2+ 27.♙g1 ♗g3+ 28.♙f1 ♖h3 29.♙d1 ♗g1+ 30.♙e2 ♖f4#) **24...♗g5! 25.♙h2 ♗g1+ 26.♙xh3 ♞xe3** (with the deadly threats of ...g6-g5 or ...♞e8-e4) **27.♙xh4 ♞8e4+! 28.fxe4** (28.♙h3 g5-+) **28...g5+ 29.♙h5 ♞h3#** or **22.♗d1 ♙xh3! 23.gxh3 ♖e4+! 24.♙g2 ♗g5+ 25.♙h2 ♖f2 26.♗d2 ♞xe3 27.♙d1 ♗f4+ 28.♙g2 ♖xd1 29.♞axd1 ♗xf3+ 30.♙g1 ♞e2 31.♞xe2 ♞xe2 32.♗g5 ♗f2+ 33.♙h1 ♞xb2-+.**

► 1.4 Spraggett–Ehlvest

Clermont-Ferrand 1989



For now White has an extra pawn, but it is Black's move – of course, Black can recover the ♖a3 whenever he feels like it.

21...h5!

But first Ehlvest plays ...h7-h5-h4 to push the ♖g3 into a passive position and at the same time gains space on the kingside.

22.f3 h4 23.♖f1 ♖xb2 24.♗xb2 ♜xa3 25.♞a1 ♞xa1 26.♞xa1 ♕f5!

Black has an obvious advantage – the white knights cannot rival the activity of the black bishop pair, the ♖f1 is really passive (but should remain on this square to protect h2), whilst the ♖e4 may well be centralised but its position is insecure. At the same time, thanks to his space advantage on the kingside Black (on account of ...h7-h5-h4!) has good attacking chances.

27.♞a7

27.♖fd2 ♕b8! (Δ...♗c7) 28.♗b6 ♕g6!± (Δ...f5).

27...b6

With the threat of 28...♕xh2+.

28.♗a2 ♞d8 29.h3 ♞d7

Renewing the threat of ...♕h2+.

30.♞a8+ ♖h7 31.♗c2

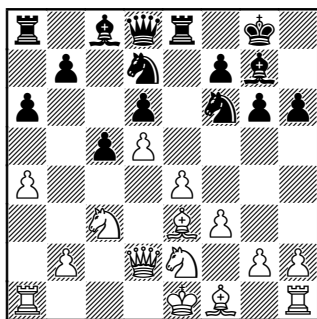
Or 31.♖fd2 c5! 32.dxc5 bxc5±, intending ...♗e5 with an attack.

31...♞d6! 32.♖fd2 ♞g6±

Black has outstanding attacking prospects.

► 1.5 Yevseev–Loginov

St. Petersburg 1998



What we have here is a well-known position from the Modern Benoni Defence. **13.♕xh6** would be followed by **13...♖xe4!** and after 14.♖xe4 ♗h4+ 15.g3 ♗xh6 16.♗xh6 ♕xh6 17.♖xd6 ♞d8 Black obtains good compensation for the pawn he has sacrificed. If the first player does not want to see play follow this course then he has to look round for other options.

13.♖g3

GM Stohl criticises this move, and not without good reason – after Black's reply the knight can hardly feel comfortable.

Possible alternatives might be **13.♖c1** Δ♕e2, 0-0 or **13.♖d1** Δ♖ec3, ♕e2, 0-0, ♖f2.

13...h5! 14.♕e2 h4!

Black drives the knight back and at the same time gains space on the kingside.

15.♖f1

After this, Black must in any case deal with the threat of ♕g5.

15...♖h7!

A pitiful knight on f1 – it is preventing the chance of castling, the ♖h4 is denying it the g3-square, whilst the ♗d2 and ♕e3 have occupied other desirable squares. For that reason, White has to regroup his forces, which of course costs him time.

16.♕f2

16.♗c2!±.

16...♖e5 17.♖e3 ♕h6

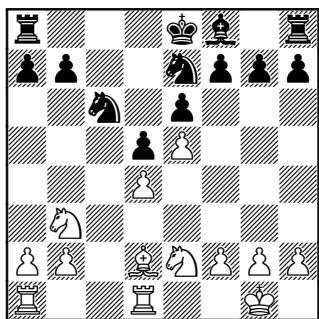
Δ...f7-f5.

Black has an easy and active game.

Now let us turn to the 'other' rook pawn, the a-pawn. In the next example, White does play a2-a4 to defend against his knight being pushed back, but nevertheless the knight on b3 is a blot on the landscape and also the weakening of the b4-square has its consequences in the long run.

► 1.6 Atkins–Capablanca

London 1922

**14...a5**

Perhaps the move order **14...b6!?** **15.♖ac1 a5** would have been a bit more precise, because White could now try the variation **15.♘c5!?** b6 **16.♘a4** Δ ♘c3-b5.

15.♖ac1 b6!

Now the ♘b3 is really hemmed in.

16.a4

This prevents ...a5-a4, but weakens the b4-square.

16...♗d7 17.♘c3

Δ ♘c3-b5.

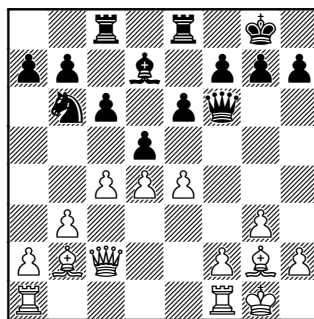
17...♘a7 18.♗f1 ♘ec6 19.♗e2 ♖c8 20.♗e1 ♗e7 21.♘b1 f5 22. exf6 ♗xf6 23.♗c3 ♘b4 24.♗d2 ♘ac6

On account of the unchanged passive position of the ♘b3 (which may well be protecting d4, but is not achieving anything else) and the chronic need of protection of d4 Black's chances are clearly preferable.

In the following example, after a4-a5 and ...♘b6-a8-c7-a6 the knight can no longer find a safe perch. Black feels the consequences of this right into the endgame:

► 1.7 Réti–Ed. Lasker

New York 1924

**17.a4!**

The plan is naturally 18.a5.

17...♖ed8

17...a5? 18.c5 ♘a8 19.♗c3 ♖d8 20.♖d2+–.

18.a5 ♘a8 19.e5 ♖g6 20.♖e2 ♘c7

Of course this knight felt wretched on a8, but things are not that much better for it on c7 – it does not have a sensible square at its disposal.

21.♗a3 ♘a6 22.♖fe1 ♗e8

Black is hoping to get in ...c6-c5 and by doing so to make the position of his knight on a6 look a bit more sensible. But White's next move thwarts this intention.

23.♗d6! f5

23...c5? 24.cxd5+–.

24.f4 ♖h6 25.♗f3

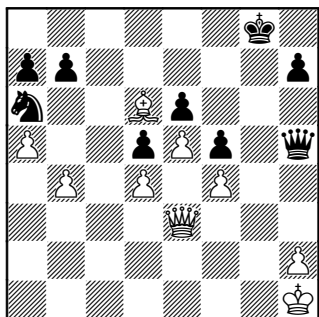
The ♘a6 remains completely out of the game, and even the ♗e8 is for the moment ineffective, and in addition White has a major advantage in space.

25...g5

Black tries to become active on the king-side. But his problem is that, on account of sad position of the ♘a6, he is, for all practical purposes, playing with a knight less, which makes itself felt more and more with each succeeding exchange.

26.♖a2

26.fxg5!? ♖xg5 27.♖e3±.
 28...gxf4 27.gxf4 ♜d7
 27...♖xf4 28.♖f2 ♜d7 29.♔h1 ♔h8
 30.♙g1 with an attack.
 28.♖e3 ♜g7+ 29.♜g2 ♜xg2+ 30.
 ♔xg2 ♔h5 31.♔xh5 ♖xh5 32.♜g1
 ♔f7 33.♔h1 ♜g8 34.♜xg8 ♔xg8
 35.cxd5 cxd5 36.b4!



In the long run, Black's operations on the kingside have led to major simplifications, which once more leaves him with a hopeless endgame because the ♔a6 is not only ineffectual, but also in great danger on account of the threat of b4-b5. In addition, the dark squares in Black's camp are hopelessly weak. White simply has to watch out for a few tactical tricks.

36...♔f7 37.♖d3
 37.b5? would be premature on account of
 37...♖d1+ 38.♔g2 ♔c7! 39.♔xc7 ♖c2+=.

37...♖h4 38.♖f1
 38.b5? ♖e1+ 39.♔g2 ♔b4.
 38...♖d8 39.♖h3 ♔g8 40.♖g3+
 ♔f7 41.♖g5! ♖c8

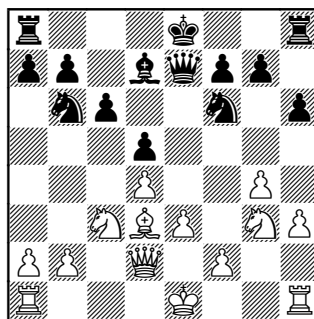
Or 41...♖xg5 42.fxg5 ♔g6, and then finally 43.b5+.

42.b5 ♖c1+ 43.♔g2 ♖d2+
 Or 43...♖b2+ 44.♔g3 ♖xb5 (44...♖c3+
 45.♔h4 ♖e1+ 46.♔h5 ♖e2+ 47.♔h6
 ♖xh2+ 48.♖h5+ +-) 45.♖f6+ +-.
 44.♔h3 ♖e3+ 45.♔h4 ♖e1+
 46.♔h5 ♖e2+ 47.♔h6 ♖xh2+

48.♖h5+ ♖xh5+ 49.♔xh5 ♔g7
 50.bxa6 bxa6 51.♔c5,
 and White won in a few moves.

► 1.8 Kasparov–Spassky

Barcelona 1989



White is planning the central breakthrough e3-e4, but first of all measures need to be taken against ...♔b6-c4.

14.b3! g6 15.a4!? a5

Or else Black would have to reckon with the further advance of the a-pawn. But now his own a-pawn tends to be weak.

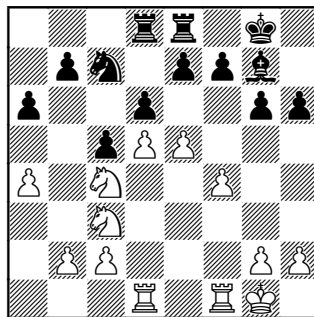
16.f3 h5 17.g5 ♖d6 18.♔ge2
 ♔g8 19.e4

White has the initiative.

In the next example a4-a5! only apparently opens up a prospect for the ♔c7 on b5:

► 1.9 Eingorn–Hickl

Zagreb (Interzonal tournament) 1987



Black is very cramped, but nevertheless he is hoping to get some counterplay by means of ...b7-b5.

20.a5!

This nails down the ♖b7. But it looks as if Black can activate his knight with his next move, doesn't it?

20...♟b5 21.♟a4!

A lovely idea. White does not exchange the knight, but wishes to rob it of its freedom of movement by c2-c3.

21...g5

After **21...♟d4 22.c3 ♟f5 23.g4 ♟h4 24.♟f2 g5 25.♞fe1!** (Δ26.exd6 exd6 27.♞xe8+ ♞xe8 28.♟xd6) 25...♟f8 26.f5+- the poor knight on h4 would feel even worse than ever.

22.g3 gxf4 23.gxf4 ♟h7

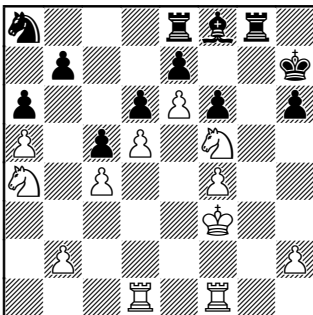
After **23...♟d4 24.c3 ♟f5 25.♟f2** too, the knight is hardly very effective, but this was the lesser evil.

24.c3!

Black now has absolutely no counterplay.

The game did not go on for much longer:

24...f6?! 25.e6 ♞g8 26.♟f2 ♟c7 27.♟e3 ♟a8 28.♟f5 ♞de8 29.♟f3 ♟f8 30.c4

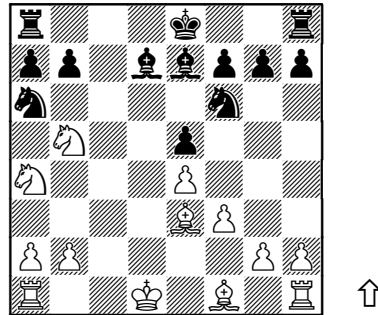


30...♞b8 31.♞d3 ♟g6 32.♞g1+ ♟h7 33.♞xg8 ♟xg8 34.♟g4 ♟h7 35.♟h5 1-0

In the final example it is exceptionally the pawn formation a3/b4, which keeps the black knight out of the action:

► 1.10 Rubinstein–Tarrasch

Berlin 1928



What is more important here: the somewhat awkward position of the white king or the passive position of the ♟a6?

13.♞c1

Additionally, the rook also takes control of the c5- and c7-squares – that makes life even harder for the ♟a6.

13...0-0 14.a3!

Preventing ...♟b4.

14...♞fd8 15.♟e1 ♟e8 16.♟e2 ♟d6

After **16...♟xb5 17.♟xb5 ♟ac7** the knight would finally get into the game, but it would mean that White would get the advantage of the bishop pair. However, that would perhaps have been the lesser evil.

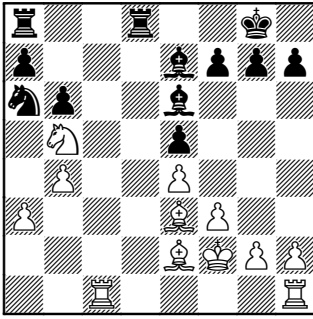
17.♟ac3!

Naturally not **17.♟xd6 ♟xd6 18.♟c3 ♟c7** (or **18...♟c5!**), and the black knight can breathe again.

17...♟xb5 18.♟xb5 b6

Δ...♟c5.

19.b4! ♟e6 20.♟f2



And the white king has found a comfortable square, whereas the ♖a6 is still languishing in its prison.

20...♖d7 21.♖hd1 ♖xd1 22.♖xd1 ♜f8 23.g3! ♜e8 24.f4!

White is practically playing with an extra piece, and this will be felt most clearly

in the forthcoming hand-to-hand struggle.

24...f6 25.fxe5 fxe5 26.♙c1!

△26.♙b2.

26...♙c8

Protects the ♖a6.

27.♙b2 ♙f6 28.♖d6+ ♜e7 29. ♖c4!

29. ♖xc8+?! ♜xc8 △30.♙xa6? ♜c2+ =.

29...♜e6

29...♙b7 30.♙xe5 ♙xe5 31.♖xe5+-.

30.♖xe5! ♖c7

30...♙xe5 31.♙c4+ ♜f6 32.♖d6+ +-.

31.♙c4+ ♜e7 32.♖c6+ ♜f8 33.

♙xf6 gxf6 34.♖d8+ ♖e8 35.b5

♙b7 36.♖d7 ♙xc6 37.bxc6

And Black resigned.

Technique No. 2

II. Other ways of dominating the knight

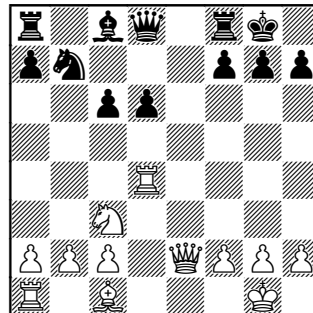
As well as the very typical procedure with the wing pawns (b3/a4, g3/h4 etc., which we have just seen) there are a lot of other possible ways of limiting the mobility of an opposing knight.

The selection which follows is somewhat unsystematic, but that should help it sharpen the reader's eye in his search for the various ways of dominating an opposing knight. As we will see, sometimes the main work falls on the pawns, and at other times on the pieces.

Let us begin with two examples which are mirror images of the same motif 'the ♖b4 restricts the ♖b7' or 'the ♖g4 restricts the ♖g7':

► 2.1 Keres–Unzicker

Hamburg (3rd match game) 1956



14.b4

Keres hems in the opposing knight, and in addition he plans to play b4-b5 when appropriate. A further point: the ♖b4 is preventing his opponent from getting the central pawn pair d5/c5.

14...♖e8