

JOHAN HELLSTEN

MASTERING  
ENDGAME  
STRATEGY

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# About the Author

**Johan Hellsten** is a Grandmaster and a former Swedish Champion. He has represented Sweden in numerous Chess Olympiads and team tournaments, and he won individual gold and bronze medals at the European Team Championships. He's a full-time chess teacher and lives in Riobamba, Ecuador.

**Also by the author:**

Play the Sicilian Kan

Mastering Chess Strategy

Mastering Opening Strategy

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# Introduction

Sometimes in my classes, I have felt the need of a book that covered major and minor strategic ideas in the last phase of the game. Finally, it turned out that I would write such a book myself, and I am now pleased to share it with the reader.

This book is intended to complement the traditional endgame manuals. From my experience, success in the endgame is determined mainly by three factors: 1) calculation skills; 2) knowledge of basic positions and their respective continuations; 3) knowledge of major and minor strategic ideas. Evidently, this book is aimed at helping you with the last aspect, although on occasion it could also raise your level in the second area. As for the first aspect, working through the exercises will definitely improve your abilities in that field.

The first five chapters of the book are dedicated to strategic ideas – or themes – with a close relation to a specific piece. In contrast, the last three chapters discuss themes of a more general nature. Note that many examples touch upon more than one theme, which explains why I often make references to earlier examples throughout the book.

I have used many sources in the process of writing this book, from which three could be emphasized:

1) Smyslov's endgame collection *Iskusstvo Endshpilya*. The seventh world champion left a wealth of instructive endgames, and here they are annotated by himself.

2) Shereshevsky's classic *Endgame Strategy*. This book is filled with well-annotated examples, and it is one of few other endgame works with an idea-based structure.

3) Baburin's *Endgame Kaleidoscope* column featured in *Chess Today*. In my opinion, this is an outstanding place for anyone interested in practical endgames.

Just like in my previous works, *Mastering Chess Strategy* and *Mastering Opening Strategy*, I have also relied a lot on the *Chess Informants* and the *ChessBase Megabase*. On occasion I have consulted Nalimov's tablebases.

The style and format of this book is similar to my previous ones – I have generally preferred verbal comments to explain what is going on at the board, the variation trees have been reduced to a minimum, and the total number of examples is rather big. At the end of the book you will find a number of related exercises, which will help you to put in practice the new (or reinforced) knowledge.

## *Mastering Endgame Strategy*

While primarily aimed at chess players, this book should also prove useful to trainers wishing to diversify their endgame classes. Thanks to my students in Riobamba for all their valuable input.

Johan Hellsten  
Riobamba, July 2013

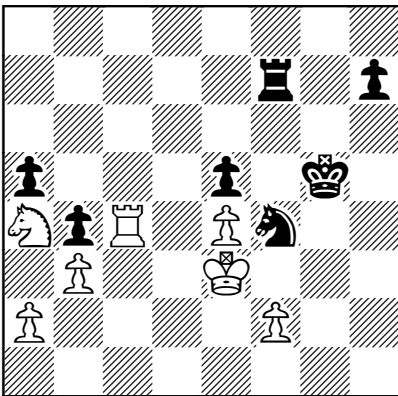
# Chapter Two

## Pawn Themes

### The passed pawn

The passed pawn holds a tremendous importance in the chess battle, and I investigated the subject quite extensively in *Mastering Chess Strategy*. Here are some more examples, with focus on the endgame stage.

*Example 52*  
**V.Korchnoi-G.Kasparov**  
 Wijk aan Zee 2000



Material is equal but Black has a clear

advantage thanks to his more active pieces (in particular, the enemy knight is very badly placed on a4) and superior pawn structure. Kasparov proceeds with the most obvious plan in the position.

**1...h5!**

Passed pawns should move forward, as the old saying goes.

**2 ♖c5 ♜g2+ 3 ♔e2 h4!**

Forward! The idea of enhancing a passed pawn at the cost of material is quite typical not only in the endgame, but in the middlegame as well.

**4 ♜xe5+ ♔g4 5 ♜e8**

Opting for a rear attack, usually a good option in the battle against a passed pawn, but here Black will be able to neutralize it with simple means. Nevertheless, after 5 ♔f1 ♜f4 6 ♜f5 ♜d7! or 5 f3+!? ♜xf3 6 ♜g5+ ♔xg5 7 ♔xf3 ♜e1+ 8 ♔f2 ♜d3+ 9 ♔f3 ♜e5+! 10 ♔g2 ♔g4, White is lost anyway; e.g. 11 ♜c5 h3+ 12 ♔f2 (or 12 ♔h2 ♔h4) 12...♔h4 13 ♜e6 ♜d3+ 14 ♔f3 ♜e1+ 15 ♔f2 h2 – Kasparov.

As for 5 ♜xa5, after 5...h3 6 f3+ ♔h4 7 ♔f2 ♜f4 8 ♜a8 ♜h7! 9 ♔g1 ♜g7+ 10 ♔h1 ♜d3, heading for f2, Black is again winning



– Krasenkow.

**5...♟f4+ 6 ♔e3 h3 7 f3+**

Or 7 ♜g8+ ♔h4 with the decisive threat of ...♟h5, building a “bridge”.

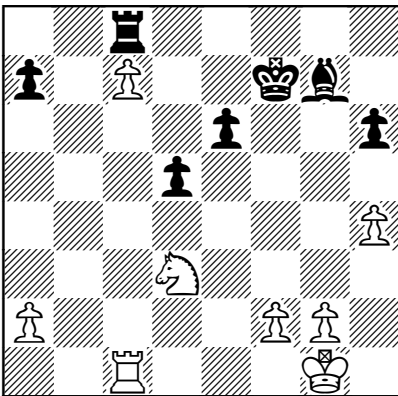
**7...♟h4**

In view of 8 ♜h8+ ♟h5 9 ♔f2 ♜g7! followed by ...h3-h2, White resigned.

A passed pawn has a kind of dual nature – it can be incredibly strong, exhausting all the enemy resources, but it can also turn into a weakness if insufficiently protected.

*Example 53*

**F.Vallejo Pons-S.Mamedyarov**  
Calvia Olympiad 2004



In the above position Black has just played ...♟g8-f7 in order to approach the c7-pawn, a plan that White must stop by any means.

**1 ♜c6! ♔e7 2 ♟c5!**

An important triumph for White – the opponent’s king cannot get any closer to the passed pawn.

**2...e5 3 h5**

By this move Vallejo signals the plan of a

new “front” on the kingside which, if successful, is bound to exhaust Black’s defences.

**3...e4 4 ♟f1 ♟d4 5 g4!**

Another tempting option was 5 ♟a6, when 5...♟d7 can be met by 6 ♟b8+, but Vallejo’s solution is more clear-cut.

**5...♟xc5 6 ♜xc5 ♔d6 7 ♜c1 ♔e5**

Both 7...♜xc7 8 ♜xc7 ♔xc7 9 g5 and 7...d4 8 g5 hxg5 9 h6 d3 10 ♟e1! ♟d5 11 h7 win for White – Finkel.

**8 g5! hxg5 9 ♜c6!**

Before pushing the h-pawn, White cuts off the enemy king from the sixth rank.

**9...d4 10 h6 ♔d5 11 ♜c1 ♔d6 12 h7 ♟d7**

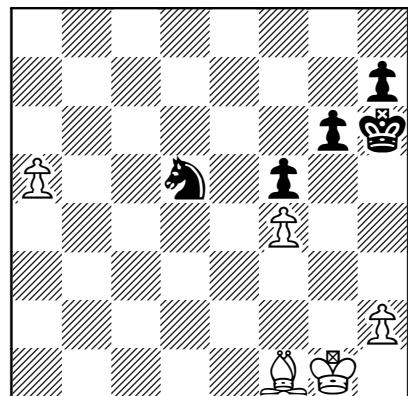
By now virtually any move wins for White, since Black will end up in zugzwang.

**13 ♜c4**

In view of lines like 13...d3 14 ♜d4+ ♔e7 15 ♜d8, Black resigned.

*Example 54*

**J.Hellsten-L.Fernandez Siles**  
Copenhagen 1996



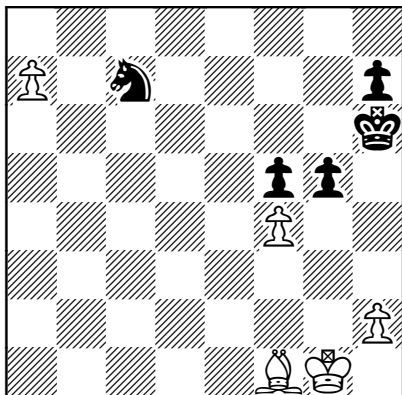
Material is equal but White has a magnificent passed pawn; besides, the bishop

tends to outperform the knight in open positions.

**1 a6**

The further this pawn gets, the stronger. Other moves are less convincing; e.g. 1 ♖c4?! ♜c7 2 a6? ♜xa6 3 ♖xa6 g5!, simplifying to a theoretical draw.

**1...g5 2 a7 ♜c7**



**3 ♖f2**

Heading for the queenside to assist the passed pawn. Of course 3 ♖g2?! gxf4 4 a8♚? ♜xa8 5 ♖xa8 also had to be avoided.

**3...gxf4 4 ♖f3 ♖g5 5 ♖c4**

Due to the knight's inability to lose tempi, Black will soon end up in zugzwang.

**5...♜a8 6 ♖d5 ♜c7 7 ♖c6 ♖g6**

7...h6 8 ♖b7 doesn't change anything.

**8 ♖xf4 ♖f6 9 ♖b7 h6 10 ♖e3!**

Heading for b6, a plan that Black can only prevent temporarily.

**10...♖e5 11 ♖d3 ♖d6 12 ♖c4 ♖d7**

Or 12...f4 13 ♖f3 is similar.

**13 ♖c5 ♖d8 14 ♖c6 ♖e7 15 ♖b6 ♖d8 16 ♖b7 f4 17 ♖e4!**

Losing a tempo.

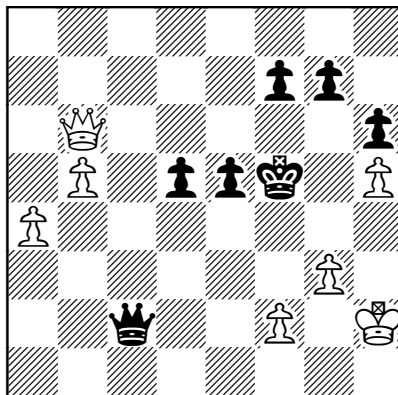
**17...♖d7 18 ♖f3 ♖d8 19 ♖c6**

Finding himself in a fatal zugzwang, Black resigned.

*Example 55*

**B.Larsen-U.Andersson**

Stockholm (7th matchgame) 1975



As we discussed in Example 49 (Krush-Akopian), the queen is an excellent companion of the passed pawn, something that converts the latter into the key factor of many queen endings.

**1 a5!**

White pins all his hopes on the passed pawns.

**1...d4 2 ♚b7! ♚xf2+**

Or 2...d3 3 ♚xf7+ ♖e4 4 b6 with an easy win.

**3 ♚g2 ♚e3 4 b6!**

But not 4 a6? d3 and the pawns can't advance any further.

**4...♚b3?**

This attempt to control the passed pawns fails fatally to White's next move. The brave 4...d3! 5 b7 d2 had to be tried; e.g. 6 b8♚ (or 6 ♚f1+?! ♖g4! 7 b8♚ ♚xg3+ 8 ♖h1 ♚h4+ with a perpetual) 6...d1♚ 7 ♚h3+ ♖f6 8 ♚h4+ g5! 9 hxg6+ ♚g5 10 ♚b6+ ♖g7 and Black is still alive.

**5 a6!**

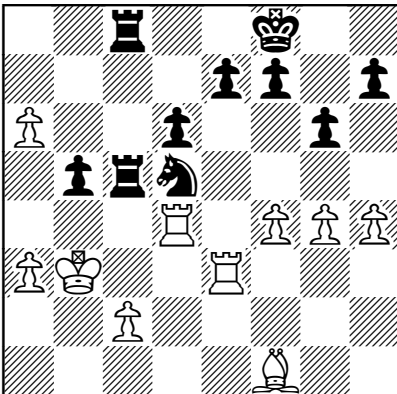
An elegant sacrifice which secures the promotion of the a-pawn.

**5...♖xb6 6 ♗b7 ♖a5 7 a7**

In view of 7...♗a2+ 8 ♔h3, Black resigned.

Here is one more example illustrating the principle that the passed pawn annuls any other positional factors.

*Example 56*  
**A.Karpov-A.Miles**  
London 1982



**1 ♖xd5!**

A splendid exchange sacrifice to support the a6-pawn.

**1...♖xd5 2 ♖c3! ♖d8**

After 2...♖a8? 3 ♔g2 or 2...♖xc3+ 3 ♖xc3 ♖c5+ 4 ♔b4 ♖c7 5 ♔g2 White is winning – Karpov; and 2...♖dc5 3 ♖xc5 dxc5 4 ♔g2! is similar.

**3 ♖c7!?**

A flexible choice. Obviously, 3 ♔g2? ♖d4 4 a7 d5! had to be avoided, but the straightforward 3 a7 was equally strong; e.g. 3...b4 (or 3...♖d1 4 ♔xb5 ♖a8 5 ♖c7 with similar

play to the game) 4 axb4 ♖d1 5 ♔a6 ♖a1 6 b5 ♖a8 7 ♖c7, followed by ♔b4, c4-c5 etc, with the king entering the enemy camp sooner or later.

**3...♖d1**

3...♖d4 now fails to 4 ♔xb5, and 3...♖c5 was still bad due to 4 ♖xc5 dxc5 5 ♔g2.

**4 ♔xb5 e5 5 a7!**

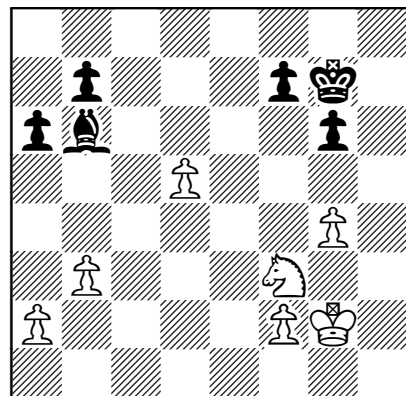
Enjoying sufficient support, the passed pawn finally advances with decisive effect.

**5...exf4 6 ♖b7 ♖b1+ 7 ♔a4 ♖xb5 8 ♖xb5 f3 9 ♖b8 f2 10 ♖xd8+**

Black resigned.

Of course a passed pawn doesn't mean an automatic win. In the example below, Black, despite being a pawn down, managed to save himself by launching a direct attack on the d5-pawn.

*Example 57*  
**A.Karpov-V.Korchnoi**  
Candidates final  
(8th matchgame), Moscow 1974



**1...♔f6!**

The king should approach the pawn

while it is insufficiently protected, and this is the right route. In contrast, 1...♙f8?! permits 2 ♖e5! ♙c7 3 f4 with ♙f3-e4 coming up.

**2 ♙f1**

The attempt to create a “barrier” (more on this topic in Chapter Four) by 2 ♖d2 ♙c7 3 ♖c4 fails to 3...b5.

**2...♙e7 3 ♖d2**

Or 3 ♙e2 ♙d6 4 ♖g5 f5! – Speelman.

**3...♙c7!**

Some prophylaxis is required, since the immediate 3...♙d6? would fail to 4 ♖c4+ ♙c5 5 d6 ♙c6 6 d7 ♙c7 7 ♖e5+! ♙d6 8 d8♙+! ♙xd8 9 ♖xf7+ ♙e7 10 ♖xd8 ♙xd8 11 f4 etc – Speelman.

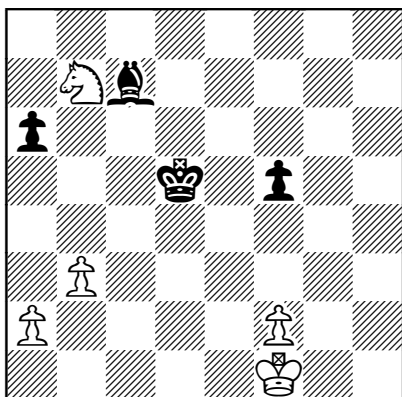
**4 ♖e4**

Or 4 ♖c4 b5 5 ♖e3 ♙d6, followed by ...♙b6, and the d-pawn falls anyway.

**4...f5!**

Preventing 5 g5 with a decisive barrier. Besides, pawn exchanges tend to help the defender.

**5 gxf5 gxf5 6 ♖c5 ♙d6! 7 ♖xb7+ ♙xd5**



White remains a pawn up, but he is now forced to weaken his pawn structure in order to save the badly placed knight.

**8 b4 ♙c4! 9 ♖c5**

Or 9 a3 ♙b3 10 ♖c5+ ♙xa3 11 ♖xa6 ♙b6 12 ♙e2 ♙a4, followed by ...♙b5 – Speelman.

**9...♙b6!**

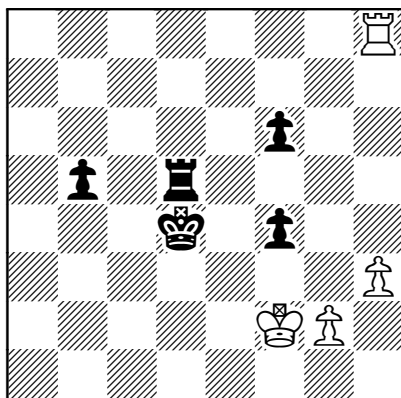
Obviously, both 9...♙xb4?? 10 ♖xa6+ and 9...a5? 10 ♖e6! had to be avoided.

**10 ♖xa6 ♙b5 11 ♖c5 ♙xb4 12 ♖b3 ♙a3**

Draw agreed, in view of 13 ♖c1 ♙b2.

The passed pawn can also be used as a defensive weapon, as in the next example.

*Example 58*  
**V.Salov-S.Gligoric**  
Belgrade 1987



Black’s passed b-pawn is a huge asset; even so, White could have saved this endgame by accurate defence.

**1 h4!**

Pinning his hopes on his own passed pawn. In contrast, the game went 1 ♙f3? b4 2 ♙xf4 b3 3 ♙b8 ♙c3! (in order to create a bridge by ...♖d4-b4) 4 ♙c8+ ♙b4 5 ♙c1 ♖h5! (less convincing is 5...b2? 6 ♙b1 ♙c3 7 g4 ♙c2 8 ♙xb2+ ♙xb2 9 h4 – Gligoric) 6 ♙b1 ♙c3 7 ♙h1 b2 8 g4 ♙a5! (winning a tempo

by the threat ...♖a1) 9 ♖b1 ♖a1 10 ♖xb2 ♜xb2 11 ♜f5 ♜f1+ 12 ♜g6 ♜c3 13 h4 ♜d4 14 h5 ♜e5 15 h6 ♜g1 and in view of 16 h7 ♜xg4+ 17 ♜h5 ♜g1, White resigned.

**1...b4 2 h5 b3 3 h6 b2**

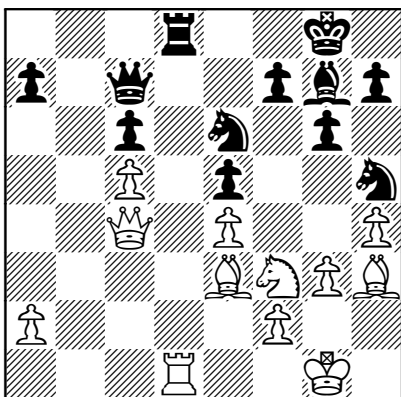
Or 3...♗h5 4 h7 b2 5 ♖b8 ♖xh7 6 ♖xb2 with a dead draw, whereas after 3...♖b5?! 4 h7 b2 5 ♜d8+, followed by h8♖, only White is playing for a win, since he will have the first check.

**4 ♖b8 ♜c3 5 ♜c8+!**

Black can't make progress – Gligoric; for example 5...♜d2 6 ♖b8 ♜c1 7 ♜c8+ ♜d1 8 ♖b8.

Next, let's see a few examples from earlier stages of the game, where the passed pawn is yet to be created, and by different means.

*Example 59*  
**V.Salov-J.Lautier**  
Wijk aan Zee 1991

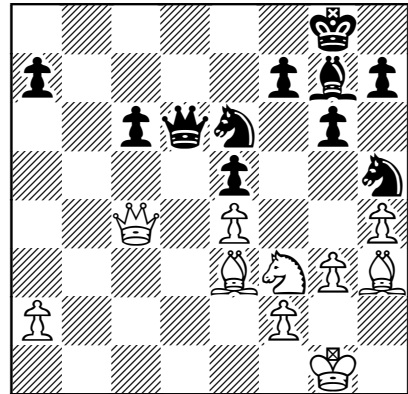


Black has just played ...♖a8-d8, contesting the open file. Salov found an elegant way of transposing to a superior endgame.

**22 ♜d6! ♜xd6**

It is hard to see any alternative; e.g. 22...♜f8 23 ♜g5!, intending 23...♜f6 24 ♜xc6!; or 22...♜f8 23 ♜xe6! fxe6 24 ♜xe6+, followed by 25 ♜xe5 with a huge advantage.

**23 cxd6 ♜xd6**



**24 ♜xe6!**

Damaging the enemy pawn structure and avoiding any tactical pitfalls, such as 24 ♜xa7? ♜d1+ 25 ♜g2 ♜ef4+! 26 gxf4 ♜xf4+ 27 ♜g3 ♜h5+ with a draw.

**24...♜xe6**

Or 24...fxe6 25 ♜g5, followed by ♜xe6, and Black will even have problems with his king.

**25 ♜xe6 fxe6 26 ♜xa7**

This is what White was aiming at four moves ago: the passed a-pawn is a giant, and Black's minor pieces are too remotely placed to challenge it.

**26...♜f6 27 a4! ♜d7**

Or if 27...♜xe4 28 a5 ♜c3 29 a6 ♜d5 30 ♜c5 ♜c7 31 a7 e4 32 ♜g5 is winning – Salov.

**28 a5 ♜f8 29 a6 c5 30 ♜d2 ♜f7 31 ♜c4**

Faced with threats like 32 ♜b8 ♜xb8 33 a7, Black resigned.