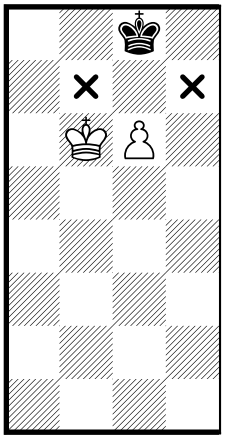
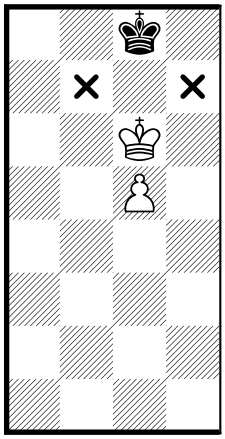
CRITICAL OR KEY SQUARES. INVASION POINTS

Here are a few elementary examples to help the reader comprehend some basic principles of endgame theory.

1 +/=



2



1: In the first example White wins if he is able to queen his pawn. If White moves first, then 1 P-B7 K-Q2 2 K-N7 and 3 P-B8=Q. When the white king stands on Q6, after 1 P-B7 K-N2 White obtains the same result with 2 K-Q7. However, if Black moves first and plays 1... K-N1 (or 1... K-Q1 when the white king is on Q6) 2 P-B7+K-B1, he draws. How is this possible?

In the first variation White's king assures the promotion of his pawn by occupying QN7 (or Q7). On the other hand, if Black moves first this manoeuvre is impossible.

We are forced to clude that the game is decided by the white king's occupation of QN7 (or Q7). We shall call squares such as these *critical*, because when White controls them Black is placed in a critical position. Even more correct is to refer to them as *key* positions, for White must set up that situation in order to queen his pawn.

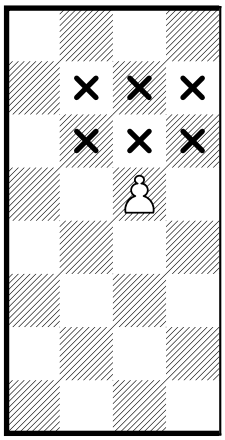
Black to move draws precisely because he can prevent White's control of the key squares. He accomplishes this by placing his king directly opposite the white king, i.e., he takes the opposition.

Thus, the *opposition* is a tactical device, a weapon used in the struggle for key squares (but, as we -shall see later, far from the only device).

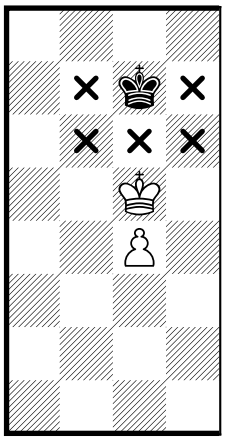
We come to the conclusion that in endgame No. 1 struggle towards completing the ultimate goal–queening the pawn–resolves into a fight for control of particularly important *key* squares (decisive points of invasion).

2: In position No. 2 (the white king can also be on QN6 or Q6) simple analysis shows that White wins no matter who moves first; that is, here opposition does not play an important role.

3



4



So, QN6, QB6 and Q6 are the key squares. Their possession affects the occupation of the primary key squares QN7 and Q7; thus, the pawn's promotion. As a result, the passed pawn on QB5 acquires a system of key squares as indicated in diagram *No. 3.* If the white king seizes one of these six squares, his pawn will queen regardless of where the black king is or who has the first move. (Except, of course, if Black can capture the pawn.)

The critical squares for Black are QN3, QB3 and Q3 only because the edge of the board limits his king. In No. 2, where the white pawn has passed the board's midline, Black loses after 1 K-N6 K-N1 2 P-B6 K-B1 3 P-B7 zugzwang, since he lacks a retreat square.

4: Position No. 4, in which the pawn has not passed the middle of the board, is totally different: after 1 K-N5 K-N2 2 P-B5 K-B2 3 P-B6, Black plays 3... K-B1 and draws. The white king's domination of N5, B5 and Q5 does not endanger Black. But White's control of the squares QN6, QB6 and Q6, which are situated one rank from the pawn on the identical and two adjacent files, is critical for Black. If White occupies any one of these critical (key) squares, White's BP will queen.

In No. 4, if Black moves first he must immediately abandon one of the invasion points to the next rank, i.e., either his QN3 or Q3 (allowing White to bypass!), after which further resistance is useless. If White moves first he is unable to seize any of the key squares, since Black takes the opposition and · blocks the white king's passage.

These endings will be examined further in Chapter 1 . For now we shall summarize our results so far:

a) A passed pawn has a system of critical or key squares;

b) If the attacking king seizes one of the key squares, then the endgame goal of pawn promotion is ensured;

c) The struggle in the type of endgame centres around the control of key squares.

from "Pawn Endings" Yuri Averbakh, I.Maizelis (1974) Batsford to LaTeX 浦壁