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Part 3: Target: The King in the Centre

Just as in Part 4 ('Target: The Castled King'), there are certain difficulties in classifying the combinations into categories. To start with, an attack on a king which is on its initial square is not the same as if the king is situated, say, on the fourth or fifth rank, i.e., the geometrical centre of the board.

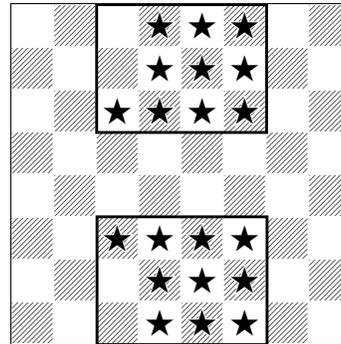
Thus for *king in the centre* we mean on one of the central files, but excluding the fourth and fifth ranks, since such attacks or combinations are unusual and, in any case, when a king is so exposed there should not be major difficulties in delivering mate.

This part of the book will be divided into three chapters, according to the position of the defender's king.

- 19: King on its Back Rank 206
- 20: King on its Second Rank 229
- 21: King on its Third Rank 240

In the following diagram we have marked with a star all the positions that we are classifying here as 'king in the centre'.

The king on c8 or c1 poses difficulties for our classification, since these squares can correspond to a king castled on the queenside. We have therefore only included such positions here when it is clear that the king is not on these



squares as a consequence of queenside castling, but through the vicissitudes of the game.

Similarly, the placing of the king on c2 or c7 is a situation which, generally speaking, would correspond to a king that has castled queenside. However, the king's location on such a square presupposes first of all a weakness in the castled position, since the c-pawn has been advanced and, secondly, the king has moved to occupy that square on its second rank, where it is more exposed, for which reason it could, possibly, be considered under the category 'king in the centre'.

Therefore when considering this type of position we shall decide according to the merits of the specific case whether to include it in this section or in Part 4, which discusses attacks on castled kings.

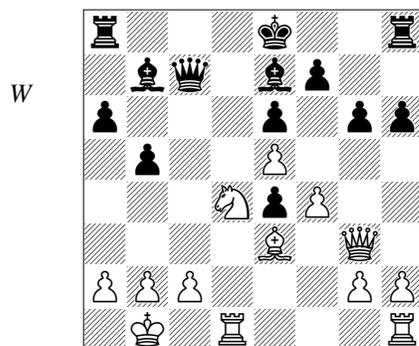
19 King on its Back Rank

In this chapter we study positions in which the exposed king is situated on one of the squares e8, d8, f8 and c8, divided into the following sections:

- 1: Knight Sacrifices 206
- 2: Bishop Sacrifices 211
- 3: Rook Sacrifices 215
- 4: Queen Sacrifices 217
- 5: Multiple Sacrifices 221

1: Knight Sacrifices

Sacrifices of a knight against an uncastled king take place usually on e6 and f7, although, of course, there are innumerable alternative possibilities, not counting possible *passive* sacrifices, i.e., sacrifices that occur when one side has a piece that is attacked, but declines to defend it or retreat it.



Ničevski – Grigorov

Pernik 1977

The position cries out for a knight sacrifice on e6. However, it is vital to see how to continue the attack effectively after the capture on g6.

1 ♖xe6! fxe6 2 ♜xg6+ ♕f8 3 f5!

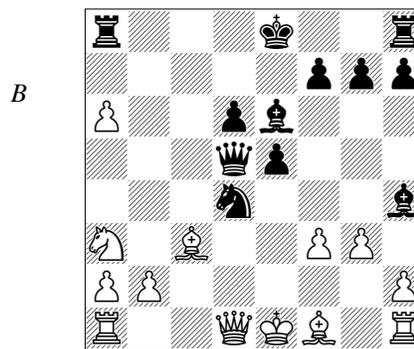
It is essential to activate the bishop, which now threatens to take on h6.

3...♗g5

3...exf5 is met by 4 e6. But now the black bishop has abandoned an important diagonal...

4 ♗c5+! 1-0

After 4...♞xc5 5 ♜d7 ♗e7 6 f6 White wins easily.



Holmsten – Couso

Stockholm 1998/9

Both kings are still on their initial squares, but White has numerous weaknesses in the vicinity of his king (the g1-a7 diagonal, for example). Black, on the other hand, has an advantage in development and is attacking the pawn on f3.

1...♞xf3+ 2 ♕f2 ♞c5+!

Sacrificing the knight to launch a full-scale attack on the white king.

3 ♕xf3 ♗d5+ 4 ♕g4 ♗f6!? 5 ♗b5+ ♕e7

Both kings are exposed, but White's has already reached the fourth rank: a black mark against his royal career.

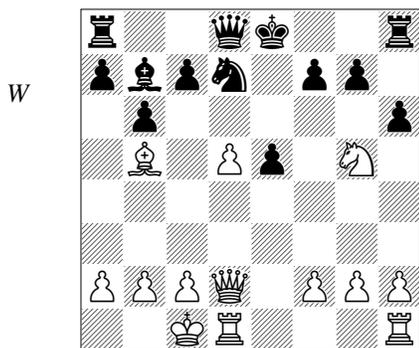
6 ♞a4 h5+ 7 ♕h3 ♞f2! 0-1

There is now no defence against the two threatened mates: 8...♗e6# and 8...♞g2#.

In the following position, Black is just about to castle, but here 'just about' = 'too late', allowing Kurt Richter to launch one of his famous attacks.

1 ♞e6!

A fairly obvious knight sacrifice, exploiting the pin on the black knight. International Master

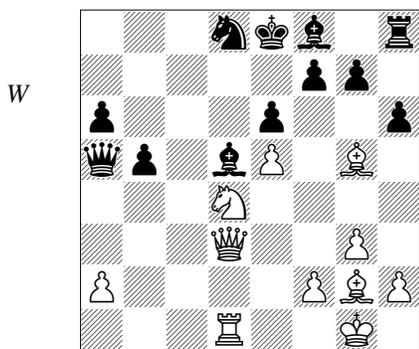


K. Richter – Brinckmann
German Ch, Aachen 1935

Rudolf Teschner commented: “Black had not foreseen this tremendous jump of the knight, a magical piece whose survival he is unable to permit. In any case, Black is already lost.”

1...fxe6 2 dxe6 0-0 3 ♖xd7 ♗g5+ 4 ♔b1 ♜ae8 5 ♗xc7 ♜e7 6 ♜d7 ♗xg2 7 ♜c1 ♜c8 8 ♜d8+ 1-0

Black resigned in view of 8...♔h7 9 ♗xe7 and 8...♜xd8 9 ♗xd8+ ♔h7 10 ♗xe7.



Tukmakov – Hulak
Croatian Team Ch, Pula 1999

White has mobilized all his pieces, unlike Black, whose king is also still in the centre. In such a situation, the extra pawn is unimportant and White now demonstrates the superiority of his position.

1 ♖xe6! fxe6

1...♗xe6? allows 2 ♗xd8+ ♗xd8 3 ♜xd8#, while 1...♖xe6? is met by 2 ♗xd5 hxg5 3 ♗c6+ ♔e7 4 ♗d6#.

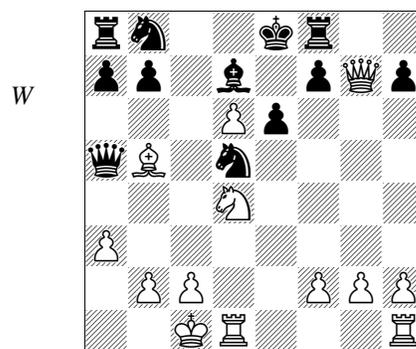
2 ♗g6+ ♖f7?

Here 2...♔d7 is better, but after 3 ♗xd8 ♔xd8 4 ♗xd5 exd5 5 ♜xd5+ ♔c7, White can continue with 6 ♗f7+ or 6 ♗e6, in both cases with a winning position.

3 ♗xd5

Even better was the queen sacrifice 3 ♗xe6+! ♗xe6 4 ♗c6+.

3...♗e7 4 ♗xe6 1-0



Beliaev – Silaev
Correspondence 1975-6

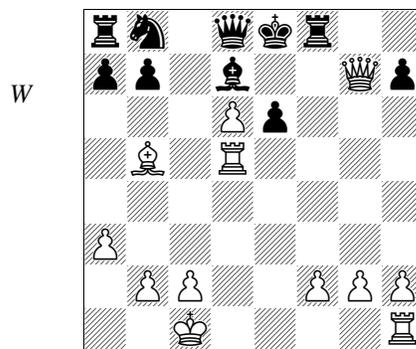
White has sacrificed a piece for two pawns in order to obtain this dominant position. But the two pawns are not his only compensation: the two undeveloped black pieces on the queen-side are another significant factor in the struggle.

1 ♖xe6! fxe6

The capture is forced, in view of the threat of mate on f8.

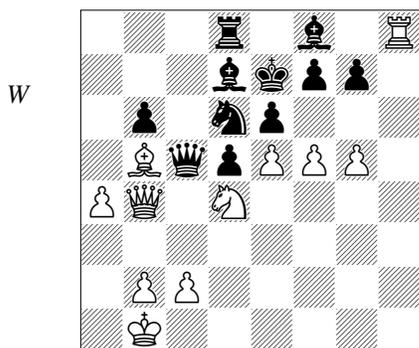
2 ♜xd5! ♗d8 (D)

2...exd5 allows 3 ♗e7#.



3 ♜f5!! ♜xf5 4 ♗g8+ 1-0

4...♜f8 5 ♗xe6+ and mate.



Zinser – Lombardy
Zagreb 1969

The position is explosive, but what is clear is that Black is very cramped and White has an overwhelming space advantage. This, added to the fact that the four white pieces are all very active, proves decisive.

1 f6+

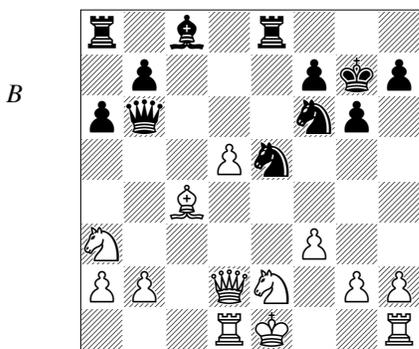
In the game White played 1 exd6+?, squandering much of his advantage.

1...gxf6 2 gxf6+ ♖e8 3 ♜xe6!! ♖g1+

Naturally, 3...♖xb4 loses to 4 ♜c7# or 4 ♜xf8#, while 3...fxe6 is met by 4 ♖g4, threatening both 5 ♖xe6# and 5 ♖g6#.

4 ♖a2

Now the queen covers g4, but if 4...fxe6, then 5 ♖xd6, winning.



Kotov – Bondarevsky
USSR Ch, Moscow 1945

Black's command of the g1-a7 diagonal proves decisive, and the presence of the black rook on the e-file is also important, since the white king remains on its original square.

1...♗h3! 2 ♖f1

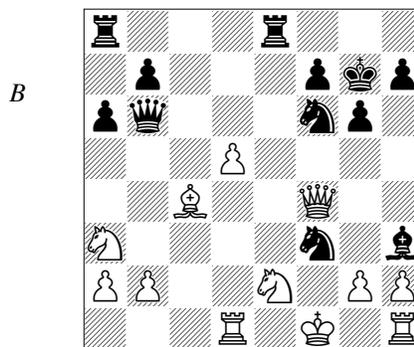
Obviously the bishop is taboo because of the fork on f3: 2 gxf3? ♜xf3+ 3 ♖f1 ♜xd2+.

2...♜xf3!

Neither of the two black pieces can be taken.

3 ♖f4 (D)

3 ♖c3 ♜e3.

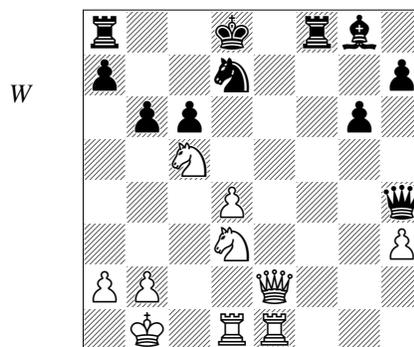


3...♜g4!?

Here is the knight sacrifice.

4 ♖xf3 ♜e3+ 5 ♖e1 ♗xg2 6 ♖f2 ♗xh1

White resigned a few moves later.



V. Milov – Kelečević
Lenk 1996

The situation of a king on one of the central files cries out for the opening of lines, the motif that inspires the majority of sacrifices. In this case, White already has his artillery occupying ideal posts, but he has sacrificed a pawn and must employ urgent methods to speed up his attack on the enemy king.

1 d5!!

The opening of the d-file is a necessity and furthermore it proves decisive.

1...♗xc5

Or: 1...bxc5 2 dxc6; 1...cxd5 2 ♖e6+ ♕xe6 3 ♖xe6 ♖f6 4 ♖xd5 ♜c8 5 ♗c5; 1...♕xd5 2 ♗e6+ ♕xe6 3 ♖xe6 ♖f6 4 ♗c5! ♖xe6 5 ♗xe6+ ♗c8 6 ♗xf8 ♗xf8 7 ♜e8+ ♗b7 8 ♜xa8 ♗xa8 9 ♜d8+ ♗b7 10 ♜xf8.

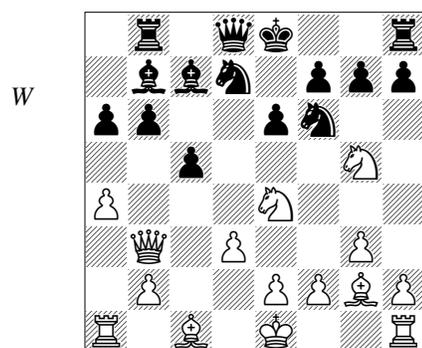
2 ♗xc5 ♕xd5

Or 2...bxc5 3 dxc6+ ♗c7 (3...♗c8 4 ♖a6+ ♗c7 5 ♖b7#) 4 ♖a6, threatening both 5 ♖b7# and 5 ♜d7+.

3 ♖e6

Threatening mate on d7, and 3...bxc5 is met by 4 ♖xc6, threatening 5 ♜d5# and 5 ♖xa8+.

1-0



Lalić – Hulak

Croatia Cup, Pula 1996

The pawn duo f7+e6 is self-supporting, but is vulnerable since, as is well known, the squares f7 and f2 are the weakest on the board and the black king still has not castled.

1 ♗xf7!

A manoeuvre to draw out the black king.

1...♗xf7 2 ♗g5+ ♗g6?

This loses, though the reason isn't very obvious. 2...♗e7?? 3 ♖xe6+ ♗f8 4 ♖f7#, 2...♗g8?? 3 ♖xe6+ ♗f8 4 ♖f7# and 2...♗f8?? 3 ♕xb7 (intending ♗xe6+) are all clearly hopeless. The best defence was 2...♗e8 3 ♗xe6 ♕xg2 4 ♗xd8 ♗xd8 5 ♜g1 ♕d5, when all is not lost.

3 ♕xb7 ♜xb7 4 d4

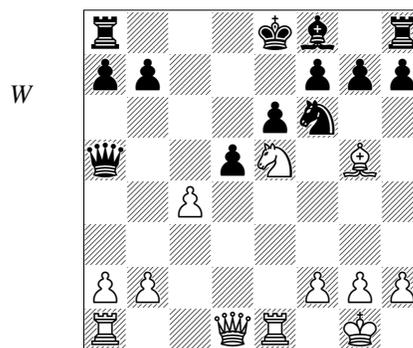
Threatening 5 ♖d3+.

4...e5 5 ♖f7+ ♗f5

When the king reaches its fourth rank, it is usually all over.

6 e4+ 1-0

6...♗g4 7 f3#.



Nezhmetdinov – Kamyshev

Russian Ch, Gorky 1950

There is no great mystery about White's advantage here; all his pieces are developed and Black's are not. To achieve this, and also to detain the enemy king in the centre, White has invested a pawn.

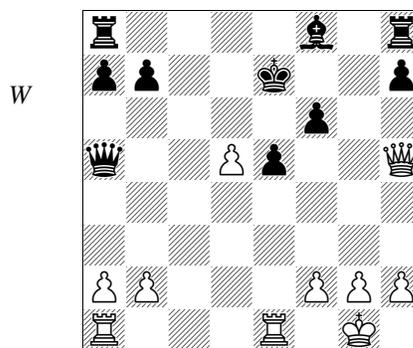
1 ♕xf6

Opening the position by 1 cxd5 is a very strong alternative.

1...gxf6 2 ♗xf7?!

A typical sacrifice in such positions, when the white forces are ready to create serious problems for the king in the centre. That said, once again 2 cxd5! is a clearer way to continue the attack on the king.

2...♗xf7 3 ♖h5+ ♗e7 4 cxd5 e5 (D)



5 f4! ♖xd5?

In reality, this struggle is less about material than position. With this capture of the d5-pawn, all Black does is open more lines of attack against his own king. There are a number of better defensive tries, such as 5...♜d8 6 fxe5 ♗d7 and 5...♖b6+ 6 ♗h1 ♕g7.

6 fxe5 f5 7 e6

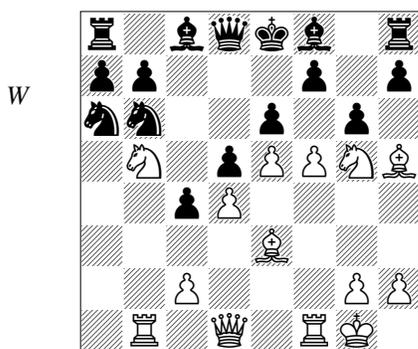
Threatening 8 ♖f7+ and the black king is unable to go to the d-file because of ♜ad1.

7...♙f6 8 h4!

Threatening 9 ♖g5# and 9 ♖f7#, now that the escape-square g5 is covered.

8...♙c5+ 9 ♙h1 ♖xe6 10 ♖h6+ 1-0

After 10...♙f7 (or 10...♙e7) 11 ♖xe6+, it will soon be mate.



B. Lawson – Hervieux

New York State Ch, New York 1999

As in the previous case, poor development is here the main motif of the combination that follows. White has sacrificed two pawns to create direct threats against a king which has remained in the centre. Note that Black still has four pieces to bring into play, as well as the queen.

1 ♖xf7! ♙xf7 2 fxg6++ ♙g7

2...♙g8 3 ♖f3 ♖e7 4 g7! ♖xg7 (4...♙xg7 5 ♖g3+; 4...♙xg7 5 ♙g5) 5 ♙f7+.

3 ♖f7+ ♙g8 4 ♖g4 ♙g7

4...h6 5 g7!.

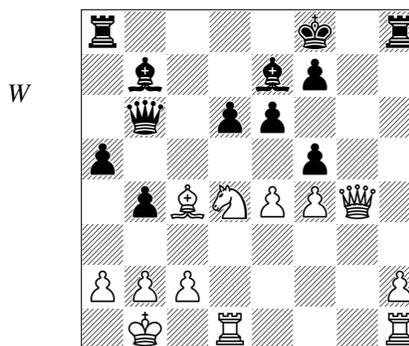
5 ♖xg7+! 1-0

5...♙xg7 6 gxh7+ ♙f8 (6...♙xh7 7 ♖g6#) 7 ♙h6+ ♙e7 8 ♖g7#.

In the next position there is too much pressure on the points e6 and f5, and although Black has already mobilized his queenside pawns, the struggle between these two grandmasters is clearly tilting in White's favour. Adams conducts the attack in model fashion.

1 ♘xe6+!

This opens invasion routes along the light-square diagonals dominated by White's bishop and queen.



Adams – Serper

New York 1996

1...fxe6 2 ♖g6 ♖c7

Or 2...♖d8 3 ♙xe6, with the possible continuation 3...♖e8 4 ♖xf5+ ♙g7 5 ♖hg1+ ♙h6 6 ♜d3 intending ♜h3+.

3 ♖xe6 ♙e8 4 ♖hg1

4 ♙b5+ ♙d8 (or 4...♙c6 5 e5!) 5 e5 is a little more forceful.

4...♙xe4 5 ♖g7

White keeps extending his tentacles.

5...♙d8

Or: 5...♖c8 6 ♙b5+; 5...♖b8 6 ♖dg1 ♖f8 7 ♖g8; 5...♖d7 6 ♙b5!.

6 ♖xe7! ♖xe7 7 ♖xd6+ ♖xd6

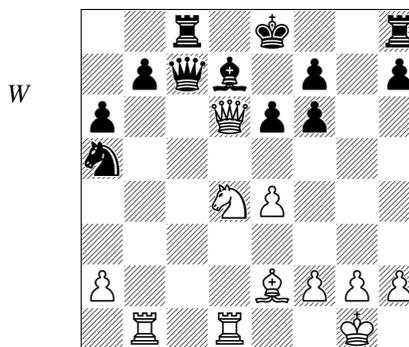
7...♙e8 8 ♖g6+ ♙f8 9 ♖f6+.

8 ♖xd6+ ♙e8

8...♙c8 9 ♙a6+ ♖xa6 (9...♙b7 10 ♖c6+) 10 ♖xa6+.

9 ♖e5+ 1-0

The finish would be 9...♙d7 10 ♙b5+ ♙c6 11 ♖d5+.



Kasparov – Hjartarson

Tilburg 1989