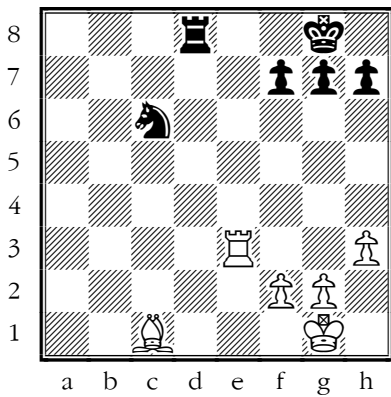


## Back Rank Mates.

The ultimate goal in chess is to deliver Checkmate. We will study some typical mating attacks on the 1st & 8th rows.



### #1a Black to move.

He can't resist the double attack and checks White.

**1...♖d1+?!**

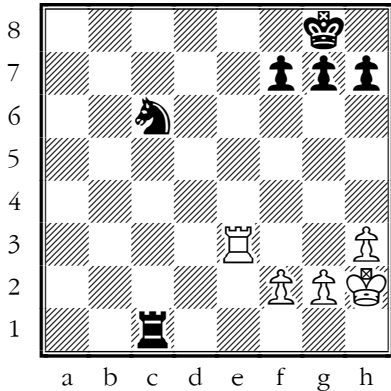
Note that White can hide his ♔ on the square h2. This escape square is called a 'flight square'.

**2.♘h2**

Black should provide some breathing room to his ♔ with 2...h6! but instead greedily captures the ♗.

**2...♖xc1??**

Black falls for a Back Rank Mate.



### #1b (After 2...♖xc1??) White to move.

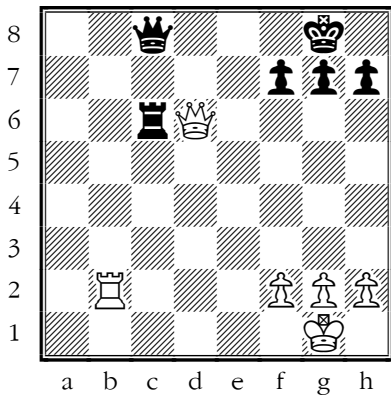
**3 conditions** have to be met for the back row tactic to be successful:

- The ♔ is exposed to an attack by a ♖ (♘) on the 8th (1st) rank.
- The ♔ has no flight square on the 7th (2nd) row.
- The ♔ has no defenders.

All conditions are met so White mates with ....

**3.♖e8#!**

**Back row mate!**



### #2. White to move.

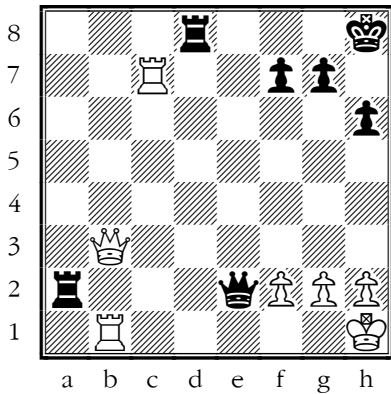
White's ♔ is attacked and Black also threatens a Back Rank Mate. White turns the tables with a cute tactic. White notices that the Black ♔ is overloaded: she defends the back row AND the Black ♖. White exploits the overload with a back rank combination.

**1.♘xc6!! ♖xc6?**

Black should not take the ♘.

**2.♖b8+! ♖e8 3.♖xc8#!**

**1-0**



**#3 Black to move.**

White's 1st rank is poorly guarded, but the invasion square d1 is firmly controlled by White. Black understands that White's ♖b3 and ♜b1 guard d1. Black destroys White's defensive setup with ...

**1...♜b2!!**

Black wins material or mates. The ♖ is under attack but the ♜ is 'taboo', e.g. 2.♜xb2? ♖d1+ 3.Qxd1 ♜xd1 #

White gets mated after 2.Rxb2? Let's return to the position after ...♜b2!!

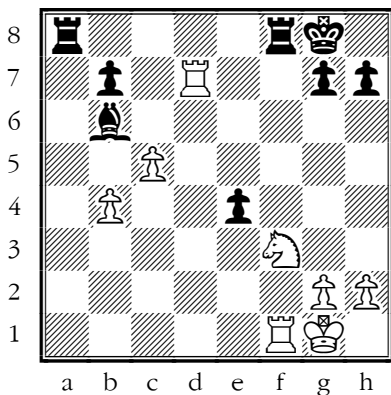
White does not fare any better with 2.♖xb2? for the same reason:

**2.♖xb2? ♖d1+!**

More elegant that 2...♜d1+

**3.♜xd1 ♜xd1 #**

**0-1**



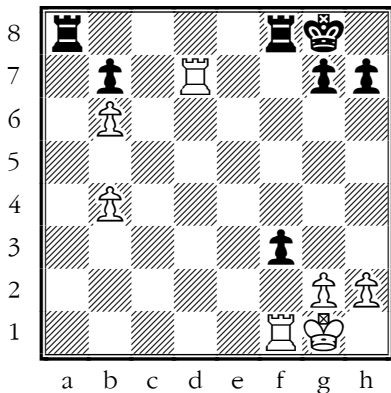
**#4a Black to move.**

Black plays the simple capture....

**1...exf3!**

White should play 2.♜xf3! with excellent drawing chances because of the advanced ♗s on the ♖side, but oblivious to the danger on his Back Row, White plays the naive capture ...

**2.cxb6??**



**#4b (After 2.cxb6??) Black to move.**

Black finds a pretty way to invade White's 1st row.

**2...f2+!**

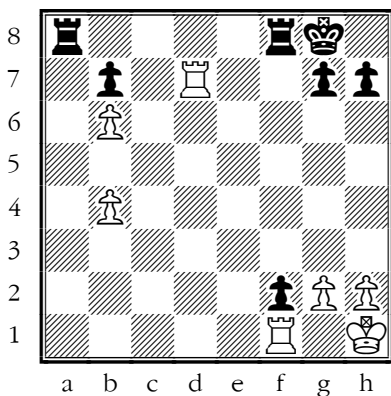
White can't capture the ♗ e.g. 3.♜xf2?? ♜a1+

when White can only delay the inevitable.back row mate

4.♜d1 ♜xd1+ 5.♜f1 ♜dxf1 #

**3.♖h1!**

The ♗ is firmly blocked on f2 or so White believes.



**#4c (After 3.♖h1!) Black to move.**

It would appear that White is completely safe

**3...♜a1!!**

Not so, this Promotion tric underlines White's shaky control of the 1st rank.

**4.♜7d1!**

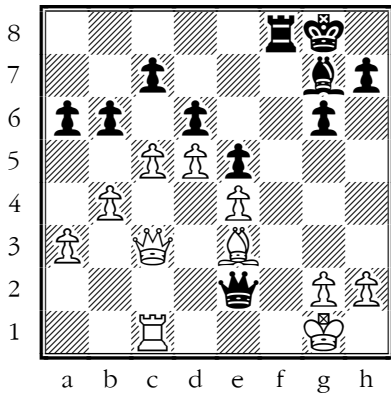
White realizes too late the weakness of the 1st row, he would be mated one move sooner with 4.♜xa1?? f1/♖+

**4...♜xd1! 5.♜xd1 f1/♖+!?**

The ♜ works fine for back row mates!

**6.♜xf1 ♜xf1 #**

**0-1**



**#5 Black to move.**

White's initiative on the ♖side looks dangerous but the weakness of the 1st rank allows Black to turn the tables.

**1...♙h6!!** The control of f2 gives access to f1! e.g. 2.♙xh6? ♜f2+! 3.♚h1 ♜f1+! 4.♞xf1 ♞xf1 #  
The poor ♙e3 has no safe retreat so White defends it ...

**2.♞e1 ♞f1+!!**

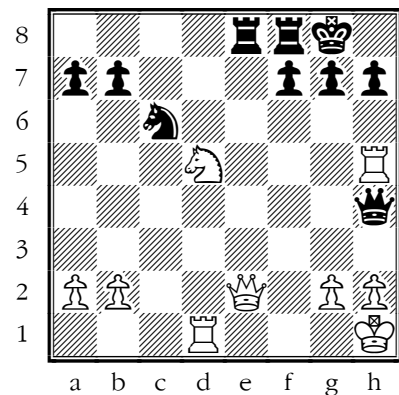
Black wins also with the prosaic 2...♙xe3+ 3.♜xe3 ♞f1+ but the text is flashier!

**3.♞xf1 ♞xe3+**

White must give up the ♜ or get mated.

**4.♜xe3! ♜xe3+ 5.♚h1 ♜xe4**

0-1



**#6 White to move.**

Both ♜s are 'en prise' (French, literally 'in take').

**1.♜xe8!**

After 1...♞xe8 Black's own ♜ is hung.

**1...♜xh5??**

Black can't imagine that his Back Row is weak but White's next move brings him back to reality!

**2.♙e7+!!**

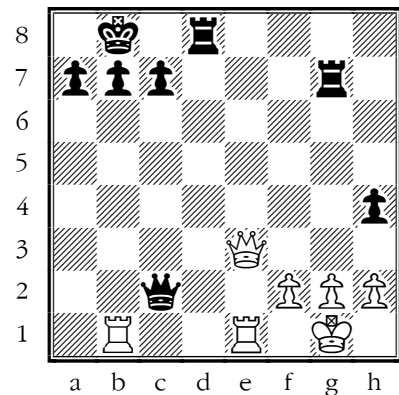
White clears the d-file for his ♞ and obstructs the flight square e7.

**2...♙xe7**

Black must take since 2...♜h8?? allows 3.♜xf8 #

**3.♜xf8+!! ♜xf8 4.♞d8 #**

1-0



**#7a White to move.**

Eager to show his knowledge on back row mates, White falls for a very subtle trap.

**1.♜d4??** White attacks both ♞s and the ♙h4, he only expects some mistakes by Black, e.g.

1...♞xd4?? 2.♞e8+ ♞d8 3.♞xd8 # or

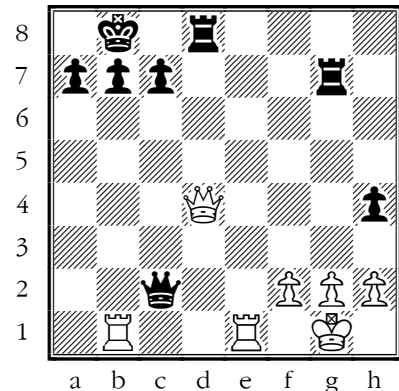
1...♞gd7?? 2.♜xd7! ♞xd7 3.♞e8+ ♞d8 4.♞xd8 # or

1...♞dg8?? 2.♜xg7 ♞xg7 3.♞e8 #

White expects Black to defend passively and cover the back rank with

1...♞7g8? when White wins a ♙ with 2.♜xh4

White realized correctly that Black needed to cover the 8th rank, but what White missed is that Black has a much better way than 1...♞7g8? An active defense grants him control of e8.



**#7b Black to move (After 1.♜d4??)**

**1...♞xg2+!!**

White's 1.♜d4?? is based on the fact that the ♞d8 is tied down to the defense of the invasion square e8. The ♞ sacrifice is designed to allow the Black ♜ to take control of the invasion square e8 with tempo e.g.

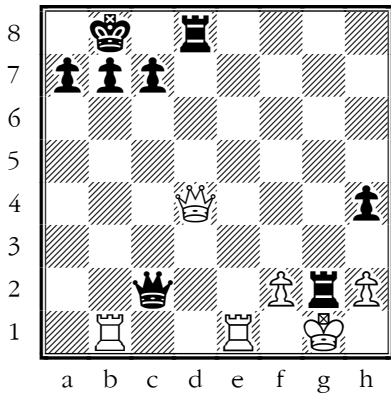
**2.♜xg2?? ♜g6+!**

From g6 the Black ♜ checks AND stops the White ♞ from penetrating on e8.

**3.♜f1 ♞xd4!**

Since e8 is covered, Black can safely capture the ♜.

Black wins.



**#7c Black to move (After 1...♖xg2+!!)**

White could do better than 2.♖xg2??, let's go back to this critical position. White can try 2 other moves: 2.Kf1? and 2.Kh1! Let's study them in order:

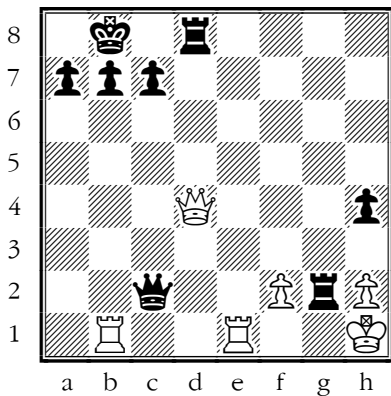
if **2.♖f1? ♜g1+!!**

Black wants to check on g6 with the ♜

**3.♖xg1 ♜g6+!**

Black captures the ♜ next with 4...♞xd4(!)

so 2.♖f1? doesn't work either.



**#7d Black to move (After 2.♖h1!)**

Let's see White's most resilient attempt.

**2.♖h1! ♞g1+!!**

This thematic ♞ sacrifice creates an invisible tie between Black's back row and the White ♜.

**3.♞xg1!** Of course 3.♖xg1?? loses to 3...Qg6+!

**3...♜c6+!** 3...♞xd4 loses to the ritual 4.♞g8+

**4.f3** Just a delaying move.

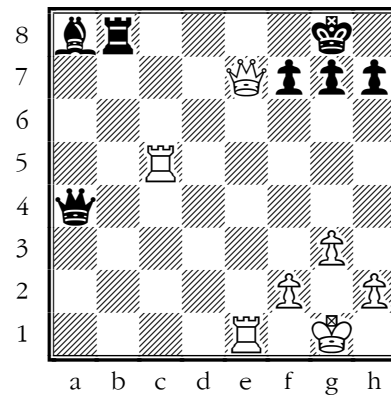
**4...♜xf3+** White has to walk into a Pin

**5.♞g2**

Finally, Black can safely capture the ♜.

**5...♞xd4** White resigns.

0-1



**#8a White to move.**

In this late middlegame White is the exchange up (difference between a ♞ and a Minor Piece). Black's back rank is weak but the invasion square e8 is well guarded by Black's ♜ and ♞.

Let's first consider **1.♞a5??**

Not a true sacrifice since 1...♜xa5?? loses to ♜e8+! ♞xe8 3.♞xe8#

Black can do much better with **1...♜c6!**

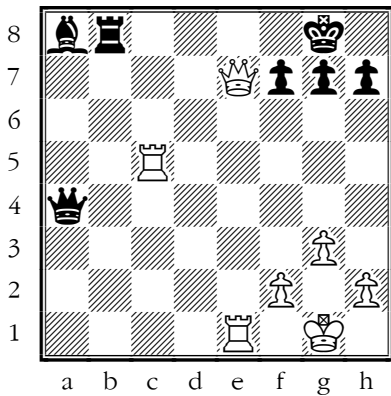
A perfect example of active defense. Black defends e8 and threatens mate along the white squared diagonal a8-h1 on g2 or h1.

**2.♞a6??** White should take on a8 instead.

**2...♜g2# 0-1**

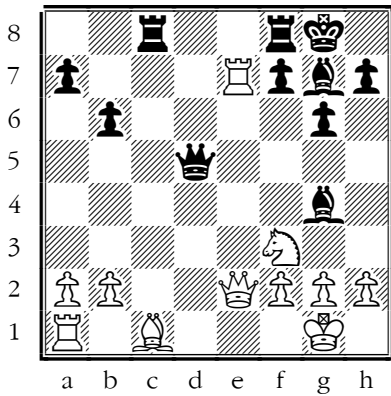
Let's go back to the position before 1.♞a5?? and see the correct continuation of the attack.

White has to find some way to deflect those pieces away from the defense of the square e8.



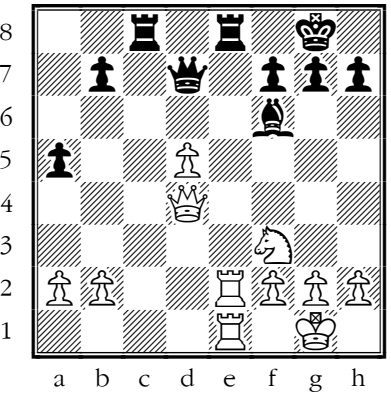
**#8b White to move.**

**1. ♖c4!!** White attacks the Black ♔ AND prevents the counter-attack  
 1... ♗c6 at the same time. Of course 1... ♗xc4?? is impossible; 2. ♗e8+! ♖xe8  
 3. ♖xe8#  
**1... ♗b5!**  
 Black has no other safe square for the ♗ to defend e8.  
**2. ♖b4!!**  
 The final deflection.  
**2... ♕xb4** What else? Black also hopes for the automatic 3. ♗e8+?? ♖xe8  
 4. ♖xe8+ ♗f8! 5. ♖xf8+ ♗xf8 A ♖ up, Black wins. Of course White has a  
 much better move than 3. ♗e8+??  
**3. ♗xb4! ♖xb4??** Black should not take the ♗. **4. ♖e8# 1-0**



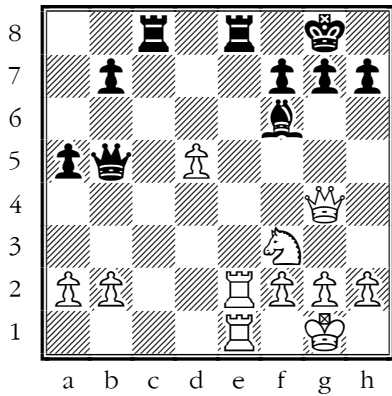
**#9. Black to move.**

Black's initial move weakens White's control of the 1st row. **1... ♕xf3!**  
 White can't recapture with the Pawn because of a ♗ —♔! e.g. 2. gxf3?? ♖xc1+!  
 3. ♖xc1 ♗g5+! **2. ♗xf3** The back rank appears to be correctly defended but  
 Black's next move points out the problem.  
**2... ♗xa2!!** Black wants to invade on c1! For example 3. ♖xa2?? fails ♖xc1+  
 4. ♗d1 ♖xd1+ 5. ♖e1 ♖xe1# 3. ♖xa7?? loses for the same reason e.g. 3... ♗xa7  
 4. ♖xa7 ♖xc1+ White tries an other move to save the ♖a1  
**3. ♗a3 ♗xa3!**  
 The Pin on the b-Pawn pays off.  
**4. bxa3 ♕xa1!**  
 A ♖ down White resigns.  
 0-1

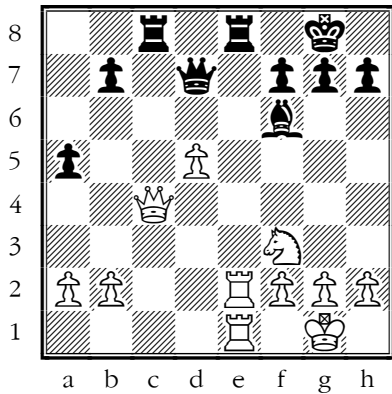


**#10a White to move.**

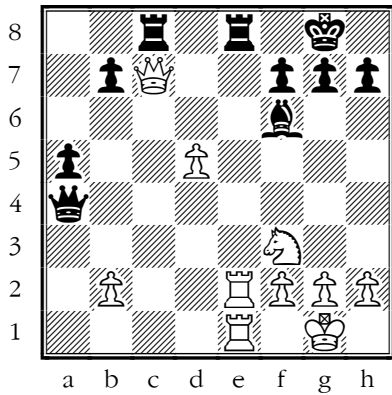
Let's watch some fireworks to conclude this lesson on the Back Row Mates!  
 White to move. Black's ♖ e8 is defended by the ♗ d7 and the  
 ♖c8.  
 White initiates some spectacular series of deflection sacrifices with  
 a ♗ offer.  
**1. ♗g4!!**  
 Of course the ♗ can't be captured because of the Back Rank Mate.  
**1... ♗b5!**  
 The only available way to keep on defending the ♖ e8.  
 Note that Black threatens a counter-attack against White's own back row!  
 For example on the natural ♖ attack 2. a4?? Black turns the tables!  
 2. a4?? ♗xe2! 3. ♖xe2 ♖c1+ 4. ♖e1 ♖xe1+! 5. ♖xe1 ♖xe1#  
 White can do much better than 2. a4??



**#10b (After 1...♖b5!) White to move**  
 White can stop 2...♗xe2 and threaten Black's defensive setup with a new ♖ sacrifice!  
**2.♖c4!!**  
 Note that the White ♖ is immune on c4.  
**2...♗d7!**  
 Black hangs in there!

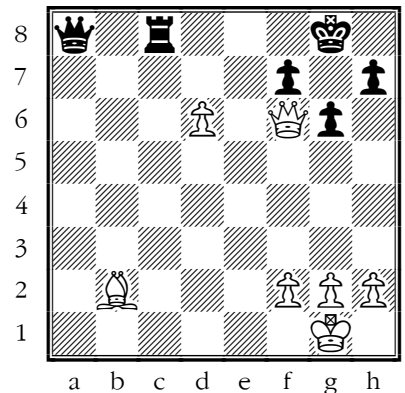
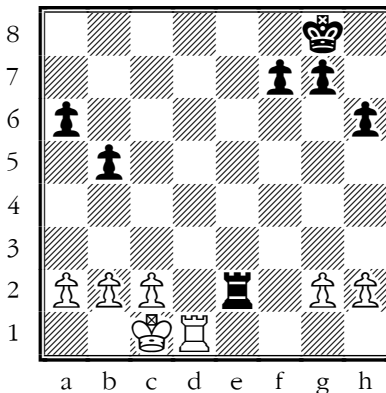
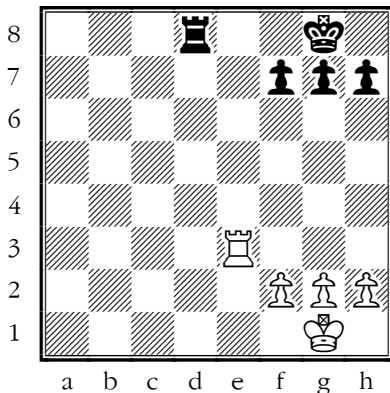


**#10c (After 2...♗d7!) White to move**  
**3.♖c7!!**  
 The third ♖ offer.  
**3...♗b5!**  
 Black is ready to meet 4.♖xb7?? with ♗xe2!  
**4.a4!**  
 The ♖ hunt goes on! Black must take the Pawn since the capture 4...♗xe2?? leads nowhere e.g. 5.♞xe2 when Black still has an annoying back rank pain! So let's return to the position after 4.a4!

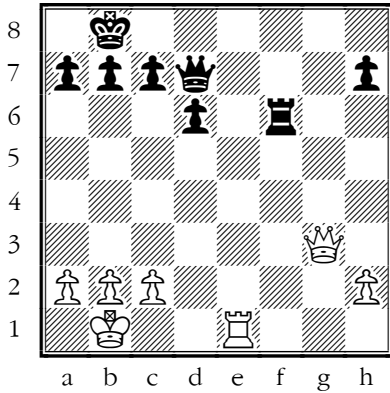


**#10d (After 4...♗xa4!) White to move**  
 Black's only way to stay in contact with e8.  
**5.♞e4!!**  
 Black's main weapon in the preceding variations was the counter sacrifice ...♗xe2, so White vacates e2 with gain of time! Black has no time to give 'luft' (German for 'air') to the ♖ing e.g. 5...h6?? 6.♗xc8! ♞xc8 7.♞xa4 When White is a ♞ up. Black must retreat with the ♖ again.  
**5...♗b5! 6.♖xb7!!**  
 By this, the fourth offer of the ♖, her rival is denied access to all the intercepting squares (d7, c6, b5, a4).  
**Black resigns.**  
 0-1

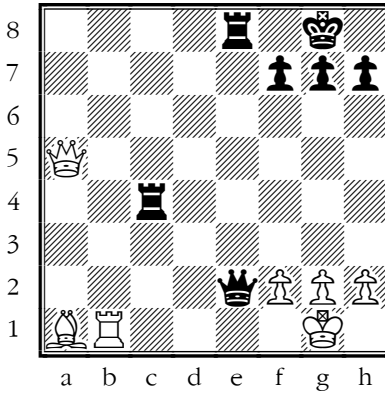
**Test on back rank mates.**



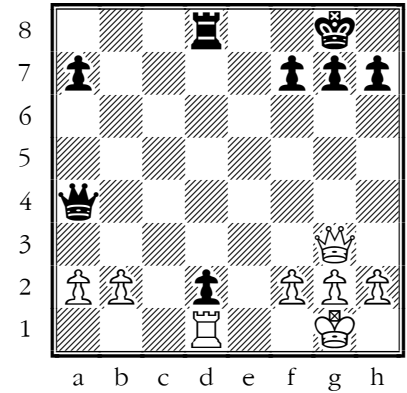
# 1 Can Black mate? (Y/N)



# 2. Can White mate? (Y/N)



# 3. Can Black mate (Y?N)



#4. White to move.

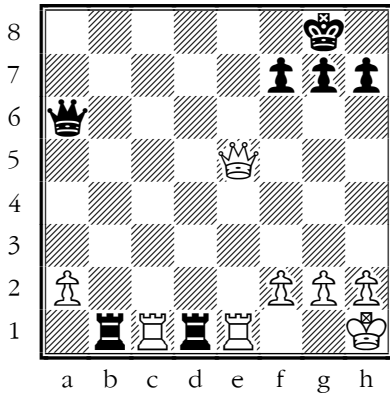
(A) 1. ♖g8+ (B) 1. ♖g7 (C) 1. ♘e7

#5 Black to move.

(A) 1... ♖a4 (B) 1... ♖c5

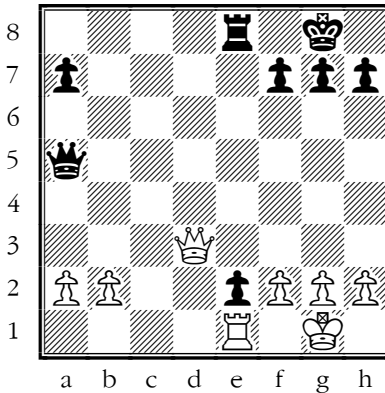
#6 White to move.

Can White play 1. ♘xd2 safely? (Y/N)



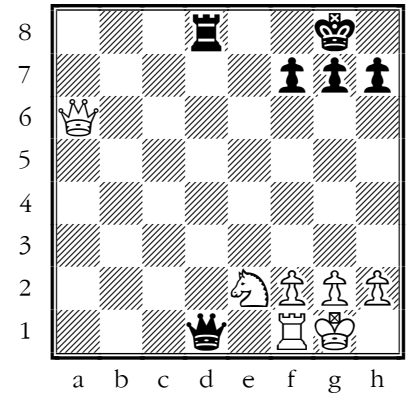
#7. Black to move.

(A) 1... ♖xe1+ (B) 1... ♖dxc1  
(C) 1... ♖bxc1 (D) 1... ♖f1+



#8. White to move.

Can White play 1. ♘xe2 safely? (Y/N)

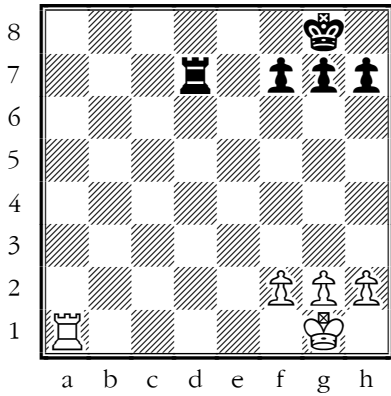


#9. Black to move

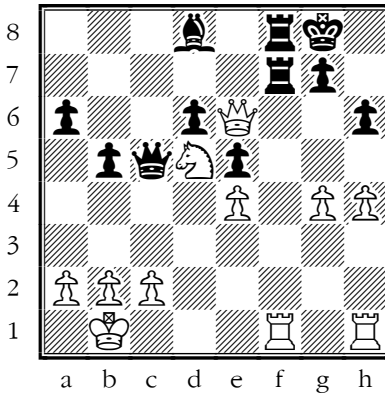
Can Black force Checkmate? (Y/N)

## Exercises on back rank mates.

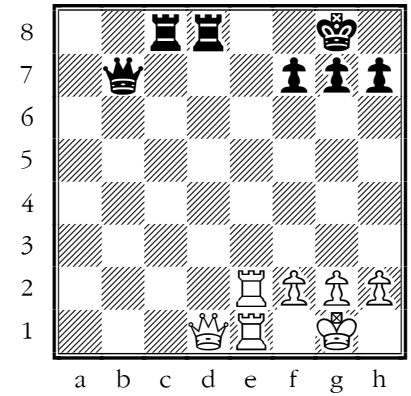
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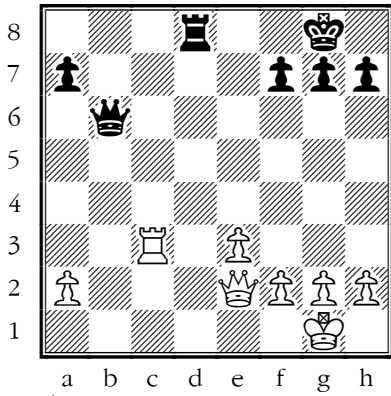
#1. White wins.



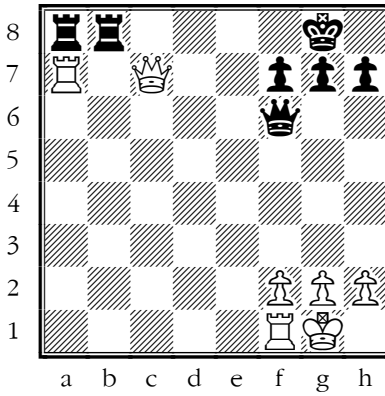
#2. Black wins.



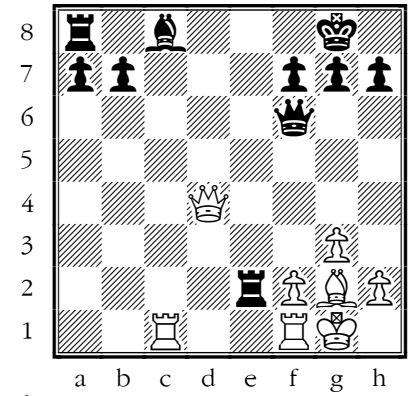
#3. White wins



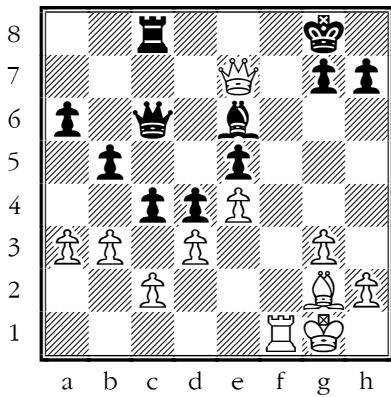
#4. Black wins.



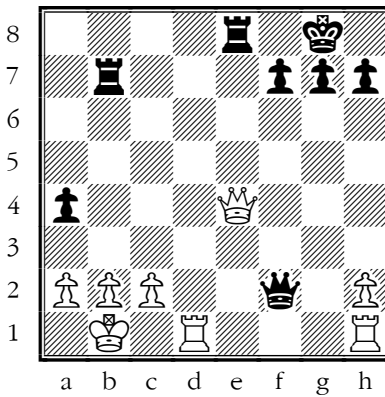
#5. White wins.



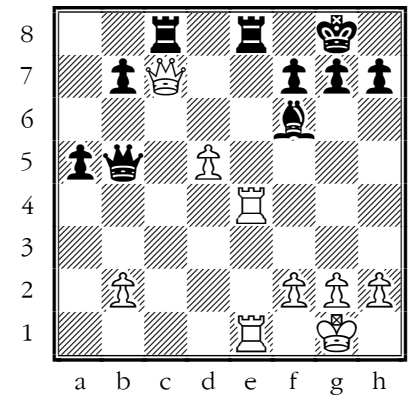
#6. White wins.



#7. White wins.



#8. Black wins the crown.



#9. White wins.