ChessCafe.com

COLUMNISTS

Novice Nook

Dan Heisman

Going to Sleep in the Endgame

Very often beginner and intermediate players miss "common sense" ideas that would not only make their endgame play much better, but also make winning (or drawing) a lot easier. One of my patented ideas is the "Go To Sleep" (GTS) move. This is a setup where you place a piece or two so that the opponent can make no progress no matter what he does. His helplessness, along with your ability to move another piece, allows you to leisurely make progress without worrying about any threats. A simple example will make this clear:
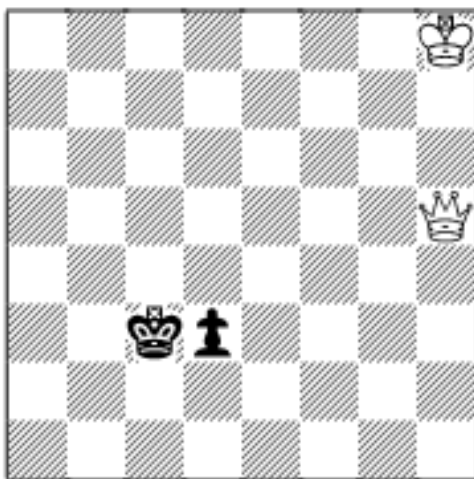
The diagram, with White to play, is a trivial case. Rather than any elaborate scheme to force Black's King in front of the pawn (as is necessary when the pawn is on the 7th rank), White just plays 1.Qd1. If White now leaves the Queen on d1, then Black can do nothing, and White can "Go to Sleep" by just bringing his King toward the pawn, "elbow" the Black King away from the pawn via zugzwang, eventually capture it and win easily, e.g. 1…Kd4 2.Kg7 Ke3 3.Kf6 Kd4 4.Kf5 Kc3 5.Ke4 d2 6.Ke3 etc.
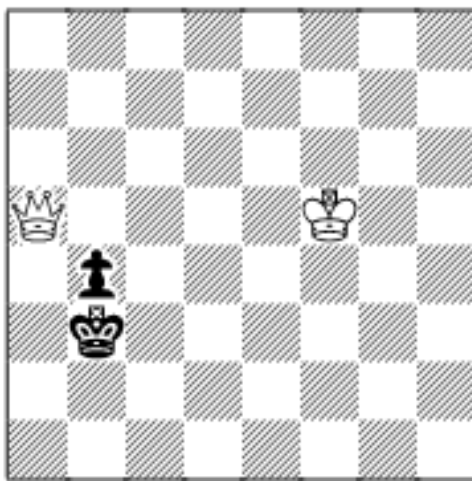
White (to move) has lots of ways to win the diagrammed position, but understanding GTS makes it easy. White just needs to move either his Queen or King to any of the three GTS squares b1, b2, or b3, and then Black cannot do anything. Since the Queen is the closer piece, it is likely that a GTS maneuver is possible: 1. Qa1 This threatens the GTS move 2.Qb1 and therefore Black must play 1…Kc2, but after 2.Qa2+ White is threatening to move to all three(!) GTS squares and Black cannot stop all of these, so after 2…Kc3 3.Qb1 White achieves a GTS position and wins easily in a manner similar to the first example.

The following position occurred earlier in the same game, when White could have avoided even the minor problems of the previous position (he drew!) with yet another GTS idea:
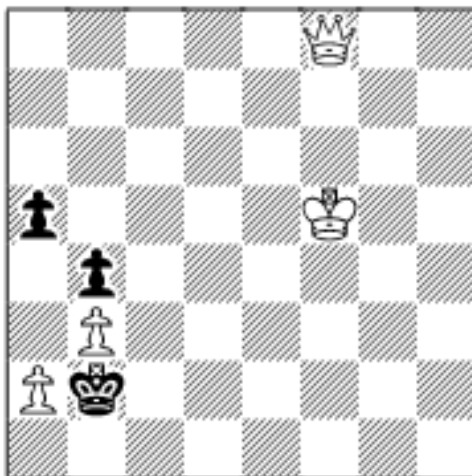
White has just promoted and should stop Black from getting a passed pawn. If his King were not on the f-file, Qf2+ would be easy. However, after only a moment's thought he played 1.Qd8 and after 1…Kxa2 2.Qxa5+ Kxb3 Black still had a prayer (as happened above), although against a good player he could still resign in clear conscience. Instead, he could have using a GTS maneuver and played 1.Qe8 Kxa2 2.Qa4+ and GTS!:

Novice Nook
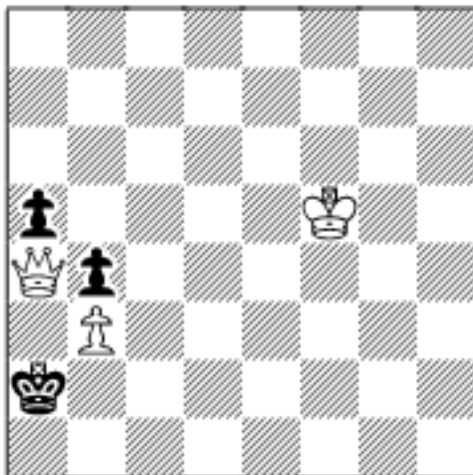
Black has absolutely no play. White simply marches his King over and picks up all the Black pawns.
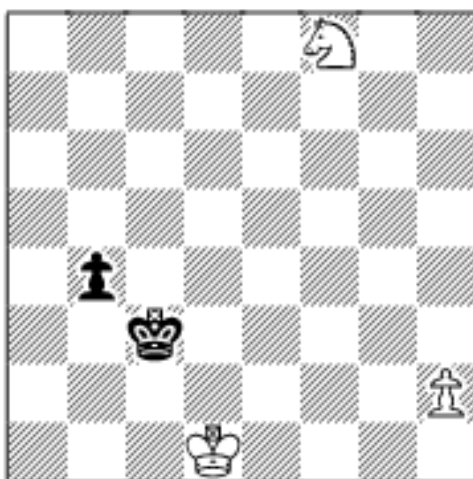
I made up the following example for a student. White starts by playing 1.Kc1! Since Black can no longer stop White's King from going to the GTS square b1, he should realize that staying queenside with his King is futile, and that he must stop the White pawn. White cannot just proceed to push the pawn to h7 (as looks tempting) willy-nilly, as Black has a nice defense: 1.Kc1 Kd4 2. h4 Ke5 3.h5 Kf6 4.h6 Kf7 5.h7 Kg7 because although Black cannot ever take the Knight without allowing h8Q and cannot legally capture the pawn, neither can White make progress, as after he captures the pawn and brings his King toward h7, Black's King shuttles between g7 and h8. If White ever guards the pawn with Kg6 or Kh6 so he can move the Knight, that results in stalemate:
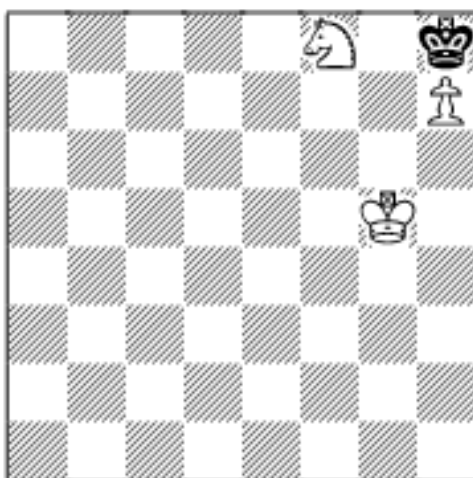
However, White can be clever with a second GTS maneuver from the original position (there are actually several ways he can do this): 1. Kc1 Kd4 2. h4 Ke5 3.h5 Kf6 4.Ng6! Kg5 5.Nf4! Here you can see that the trailing Knight is invulnerable and thus the pawn is too: GTS!
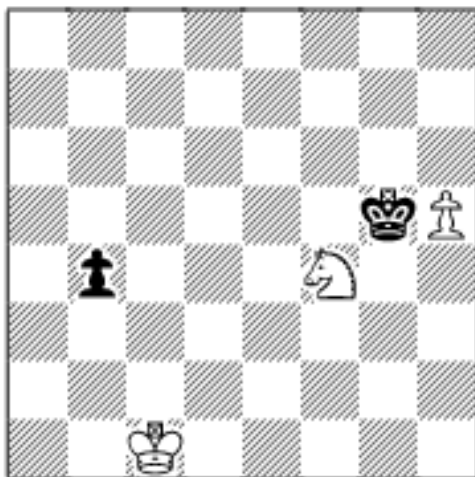
White's King can leisurely pick up the pawn on b4 and then proceed to help the pawn queen, e.g. 5…Kh6 6.Kb2 Kg5 7.Kb3 Kh6 8.Kxb4 Kg5 9.Kc5 Kh6 10.Kd5 Kg5 11.Ke5 Kh6 12.Kf6 Kh7 13.Kg5 Kg7 14.h6+ Kh7 15.Nh3 (the GTS part is over and now White has to think a little. The Knight is heading for f7.) 15...Kg8 16.Kg6 Kh8 17.Ng5 (17.h7?? is stalemate – the King always comes first!) 17...Kg8 18.Nf7 (this is the position you should always aim for; it would be a win no matter who is to move, as Black can no longer go in the corner.) 18...Kf8 19.h7 and White queens.
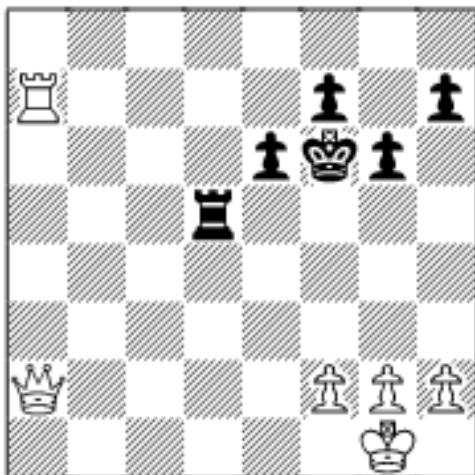
In this position a beginner with White who sometimes loses or draws this type of advantage due to back rank mates and skewers can eliminate all doubt with some good GTS logic:

"Hmm. Black is threatening a back-rank mate. I can make luft, but when ahead, trade pieces, so long as the pieces left are still far superior to the opponents." So 1.Qxd5 is reasonable. "There goes the only piece which can really hurt me." 1…exd5 2.Kf1 "I will activate my only inactive piece, not making any weakening pawn moves. Since the only possible thing that can go wrong now is Black queening his pawn on d1, I will put my King on the d-file first: GTS!" 2…Ke6 3. Ke2 h5 (what else?) 4. Kd3 f6 5. Kd4 g5 6. Ra5 (or Ra6+ with removal of the guard) and the Black pawns fall one by one, either by double attack or zugzwang. The possible winning idea for Black of playing a sacrificial breakthrough with pawns on f4-g4-h4 vs. f2-g2-h2 (as shown in last month's column) is not possible here since White always has a Rook to retreat to the back rank in case of emergency.

GTS can be used in slightly less absolute manner. For example, experienced players know that two connected passed pawns can beat a Rook if the King cannot come back to help. It follows that with Black pawns on the 5th and 6th, a White Rook to move should

be able to stop the pawns, but how?
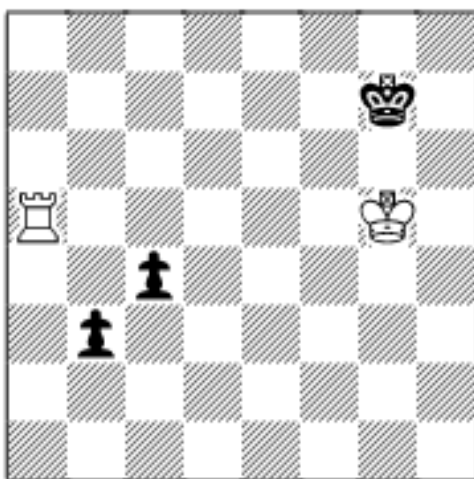
White, to play, needs to proceed immediately against the threat of …c3. Playing 1.Ra7+ Kf8 does not really accomplish much (although in similar positions it may be correct to force the King back). 1. Rc5? Attacking the vulnerable pawn just causes big problems for White after 1…b2. Instead the right move is 1.Rb5!, putting the Rook behind the protected pawn. If either pawn advances the Rook captures the b-pawn first and then the c-pawn. GTS! The best Black can do is play 1…Kf7, but after 2.Kf5 the White King just marches over to the Queenside and White easily picks up both pawns.
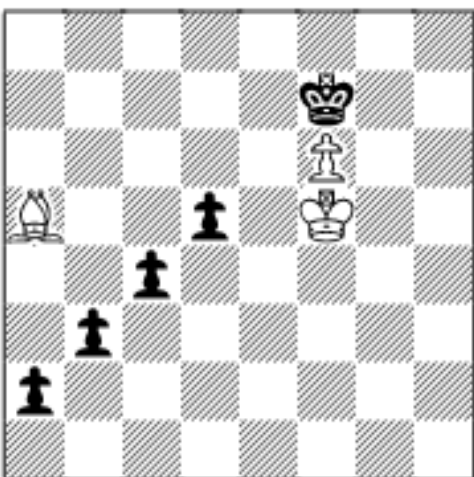
It is only fair to let the Bishop have a try at GTS. At first glance Black's pawns may look menacing, but one move changes all that: 1.Bc3 and it is somewhat of a GTS position. Not only does White blockade all the pawns, but he essentially enters a King and pawn endgame where his Bishop is an infinite tempo machine: 1…Kf8 (it is correct to go straight back if it were just King and pawn versus King, so it cannot be wrong here to try it.) 2.Kg6 (This is easier to play than 2.Ke6 Ke8 3.f7+ Kf8 when White needs to calculate whether his Bishop checks on the a3-f8 diagonal will lead to checkmate after promotion as otherwise Black will try to give away all his pawns to achieve a stalemate.) Kg8 3.f7+ Kf8 4.Bb4#.
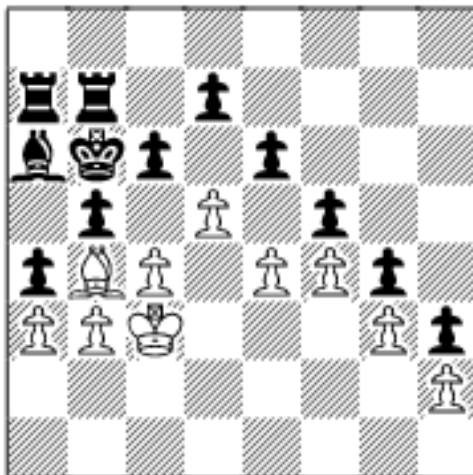
Finally, in this simplified version of a famous problem, White achieves a different type of GTS: Draw by blockade: 1. Ba5+ Kxa5 (1…Kc5 2.Bb4+ can lead to three-fold repetition of position if Black refuses to capture.) 2. b4+ Kb6 3.c5+ Kc7 4.d6+ K moves 5.e5 and, despite his extra Bishop and two Rooks, Black is completely helpless to make progress. White should GTS!