The Hoffman Tutorial

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Hoffman is a program to solve chess endgames using retrograde analysis. A retrograde analysis program is much different from a conventional computer chess programs. Retrograde analysis is only useful in the endgame, runs very slowly, and produces enormous amounts of data. Its great advantage lies in its ability to completely solve the endgame. In a very real sense, a retrograde engine has no "move horizon" like a conventional chess engine. It sees everything. For those not up on Americana, the program is named after Trevor Hoffman, an All Star baseball pitcher who specializes in "closing" games. It was written specifically for The World vs. Arno Nickel game.

The first thing to understand is that Hoffman uses XML control files to govern its operation. Hoffman comes with an `xml` directory containing a number of these control files. I'll illustrate how Hoffman works using these examples. For example, Figure 1 shows about the simplest possible XML control file, for the king vs. king endgame, contained in the file `xml/kk.xml`.

What does this all mean? Well, the first two lines identify this as a Hoffman XML tablebase file; copy them verbatim at the top of any new Hoffman control file. The third line illustrates XML's comment format; anything between `<!--` and `-->` is a comment, in this case the identity of the Perl script that created this file. The bulk of the file is contained between the two lines `<tablebase>` and `</tablebase>`. `tablebase` is a simple example of an XML *element*, which come in basically two flavors: the simple kind and the complex kind. The simple kind, like, say, `piece`, have only a single tag that ends with a slash. The complex kind have both a beginning and an ending tag. The beginning tag does not have a slash, and the ending tag is identical to the beginning tag except that it starts with a slash (like `tablebase`). Complex elements allow you to put things between the starting and ending tags. Follow my lead; it'll start to make sense soon.

The `piece` elements are probably self-explanatory. Notice that I didn't specify where on the board the kings were. That's because we're going to compute results for every chess position possible with these two pieces. Their movements are completely unrestricted — they can be anywhere on the board. Later we'll see more complex piece elements that restrict where on the board the pieces can be.

Finally, we come to `output`, which tells the program where to put the output tablebase, in this case, into a file called

---

```
<?xml version="1.0"?>
<!DOCTYPE tablebase SYSTEM "http://www.freesoft.org/software/hoffman/tablebase.dtd">
<!-- Created by genctlfile.pl -->

<tablebase>
    <piece color="white" type="king"/>
    <piece color="black" type="king"/>
    <output filename="kk.htb"/>
</tablebase>
```

Figure 1: `kk.xml`

```
<?xml version="1.0"?>
<!DOCTYPE tablebase SYSTEM "http://www.freesoft.org/software/hoffman/tablebase.dtd">
<!-- Created by genctlfile.pl -->

<tablebase>
   <piece color="white" type="king"/>
   <piece color="black" type="king"/>
   <piece color="white" type="queen"/>
   <futurebase filename="kk.htb"/>
   <output filename ="kqk.htb"/>
</tablebase>
```

Figure 2: `kqk.xml`

`kk.htb`. You can rename the resulting tablebase file as you wish; the tablebase isn't tied to a particular filename.

Now you put all this into a file called something like `kk.xml`, (or just copy it from the `xml` directory) and run Hoffman like this:

```
C> hoffman -g kk.xml
Initializing tablebase
Checking futuremoves...
All futuremoves handled under move restrictions
Intra-table propagating
Pass 0 complete; 840 positions processed
Pass 1 complete; 0 positions processed
C>
```

There isn't much to see, of course. The "-g" option meant "generate". King vs king is nothing more than figuring out the difference between illegal positions and draws. But this information is important, because it's needed to back propagate from the (slightly) more complex three piece endgames, like the king and queen endgame whose XML configuration is shown in Figure 2.

Notice the new "futurebase" line. This tells Hoffman where to get the information about what happens when the black king can capture the white queen, because a tablebase contains information for *exactly* the piece configuration it is set up for — nothing more, nothing less.

So put all this in a file called `kqk.xml`, make sure the `kk.htb` file from the first run is present, and run Hoffman again:

```
C> ./hoffman -g -o kqk.htb kqk.xml
Initializing tablebase
Back propagating from 'kk.htb'
Checking futuremoves...
All futuremoves handled under move restrictions
Intra-table propagating
Pass 0 complete; 131516 positions processed
Pass 1 complete; 364 positions processed
Pass 2 complete; 2448 positions processed
Pass 3 complete; 1352 positions processed
```

```
Pass 4 complete; 5012 positions processed
Pass 5 complete; 2956 positions processed
Pass 6 complete; 9064 positions processed
Pass 7 complete; 7480 positions processed
Pass 8 complete; 19964 positions processed
Pass 9 complete; 14144 positions processed
Pass 10 complete; 26164 positions processed
Pass 11 complete; 25484 positions processed
Pass 12 complete; 32064 positions processed
Pass 13 complete; 39908 positions processed
Pass 14 complete; 32104 positions processed
Pass 15 complete; 54052 positions processed
Pass 16 complete; 15000 positions processed
Pass 17 complete; 43800 positions processed
Pass 18 complete; 2680 positions processed
Pass 19 complete; 11300 positions processed
Pass 20 complete; 8 positions processed
Pass 21 complete; 56 positions processed
Pass 22 complete; 0 positions processed
C>
```

See, it's a little more interesting this time, right?

Now is a good time to introduce the "-i" (information) option. Once you've got a bunch of .htb files sitting around, and you can't remember which XML control file was used to generate which tablebase, there's no need to panic. Everything from the original XML configuration is saved into the resulting tablebase, along with a bunch more information, and all of it can be retrieved from the tablebase using -i:

```
C> hoffman -i kqk.htb
Hoffman $Revision: 1.15 $ $Locker: baccala $
0 piece Nalimov tablebases found
<?xml version="1.0"?>
<!DOCTYPE tablebase SYSTEM "http://www.freesoft.org/software/hoffman/tablebase.dtd">
<tablebase offset="0x0fe4">
   <index type="compact" symmetry="8-way"/>
   <format><dtm bits="8"/></format>
   <piece color="white" type="king"/>
   <piece color="black" type="king"/>
   <piece color="white" type="queen"/>
   <futurebase filename="kk.htb"/>
   <tablebase-statistics>
      <indices>59136</indices>
      <PNTM-mated-positions>10152</PNTM-mated-positions>
      <legal-positions>47136</legal-positions>
      <stalemate-positions>115</stalemate-positions>
      <white-wins-positions>44183</white-wins-positions>
      <black-wins-positions>0</black-wins-positions>
      <forward-moves>686465</forward-moves>
      <futuremoves>2838</futuremoves>
      <max-dtm>11</max-dtm>
      <min-dtm>-11</min-dtm>
   </tablebase-statistics>
   <generation-statistics>
```

```
<?xml version="1.0"?>
<!DOCTYPE tablebase SYSTEM "http://www.freesoft.org/software/hoffman/tablebase.dtd">
<!-- Created by genctlfile.pl -->

<tablebase>
    <piece color="white" type="king"/>
    <piece color="black" type="king"/>
    <piece color="white" type="pawn"/>
    <futurebase filename="kk.htb"/>
    <futurebase filename="kqk.htb"/>
    <futurebase filename="krk.htb"/>
    <futurebase filename="kbk.htb"/>
    <futurebase filename="knk.htb"/>
    <output filename ="kpk.htb"/>
</tablebase>
```

Figure 3: `kpk.xml`

```
    <host>debian.freesoft.org</host>
    <program>Hoffman $Revision: 1.15 $ $Locker: baccala $</program>
    <args>./hoffman -g -o kqk.htb kqk.xml </args>
    <start-time>Sat Dec 16 02:11:28 2006 EST</start-time>
    <completion-time>Sat Dec 16 02:11:36 2006 EST</completion-time>
    <user-time>2.782s</user-time>
    <system-time>0.018s</system-time>
    <real-time>8.052s</real-time>

    ... about 60 more lines deleted ...

    </generation-statistics>
</tablebase>
```

We see the configuration information from the input XML file, plus a lot more information added by the program. We see the encoding scheme used to number the board positions (the `index` element), the type of information stored for each position (the `dtm` element – Distance To Mate), as well as two entire new sections — `tablebase-statistics` and `generation-statistics`. The first reports various interesting information the program determined about the tablebase, such as how many total indices there are, how many correspond to legal chess positions, how many white mates, or black mates, or stalemates there are, etc. The second reports information about the actual generation of this tablebase, like when it occured, which version of the program was used, and which computer actually computed it.

OK, so what's next? After `kk.xml` and `kqk.xml`, then you can easily understand `krk.xml`, `kbk.xml` and `knk.xml`. Once all five of these are processed, you're now ready to build `kpk.xml` (Figure 3).

Notice we've added a new type of `futurebase` — pawn promotion. Hoffman has to know what happens after that pawn transforms into a queen, rook, bishop, or knight to be able to understand what happens to the pawn!

It's starting to get more complex, right? So how do I know there isn't a bug in all of this complexity? Well, my most important blunder check is to verify the program's operation against the Nalimov tablebases. You can do this, too. If you download the appropriate Nalimov tablebases from the Internet (in this case, the two KPK files), you can verify that Hoffman's results are identical to Nalimov's using the "`-v`" (verify) and "`-n` *directory*" (location of Nalimov files) options, like this:

```
<?xml version="1.0"?>
<!DOCTYPE tablebase SYSTEM "http://www.freesoft.org/software/hoffman/tablebase.dtd">
<!-- Created by genctlfile.pl -->

<tablebase>
    <piece color="white" type="king"/>
    <piece color="black" type="king"/>
    <piece color="white" type="queen"/>
    <piece color="black" type="queen"/>
    <futurebase filename="kqk.htb" colors="invert"/>
    <futurebase filename="kqk.htb"/>
    <output filename ="kqkq.htb"/>
</tablebase>
```

Figure 4: `kqkq.xml`

```
C> ./hoffman -v -n Nalimov/ kpk.htb
Hoffman $Revision: 1.15 $ $Locker: baccala $
5 piece Nalimov tablebases found
Loading 'kpk.htb'
Verifying tablebase against Nalimov
C>
```

There were no complaints, so that means everything verified OK.

So now you've got all of the three piece tablebases. Ready to try a four piece? Figure 4 is `kqkq.xml`.

Notice several things. First, we no longer specify `kk.htb` as a futurebase. We're only interested in the single captures that lead out of the tablebase we're building. `kk.htb` has already been used to build `kqk.htb`, so its data is in there. Two queens can't be taken on a single move, so all we need to worry about is what happens if one of them is captured. That's why I use the `kqk.htb` tablebase. Notice that I use it twice, depending on which queen is being captured. The `kqk.htb` tablebase has a white queen in it, and the `colors="invert"` option to the `futurebase` element handles the case where the white queen is captured and we're left with a black queen on the board.

You'll notice also that a four piece tablebase takes a good bit longer to compute than a three piece one.

Oh, and I suppose having generating all of these tablebases, you now want to query them, huh?

You do that using the probe (-p) option, followed by a list of tablebases. Since we've got a small collection of simple tablebases, it's easiest to just load them all, like this:

```
C> ./hoffman -p *.htb
4 piece Nalimov tablebases found
Loading 'kk.htb'
Loading 'knk.htb'
Loading 'knkn.htb'
Loading 'knkp.htb'
Loading 'kpk.htb'
Loading 'kpkp.htb'
Loading 'kpkq.htb'
Loading 'kqk.htb'
```

```
Loading 'kqkn.htb'
Loading 'kqkp.htb'
Loading 'kqkq.htb'
Loading 'kqkr.htb'
Loading 'krk.htb'
Loading 'krkn.htb'
Loading 'krkp.htb'
Loading 'krkr.htb'
FEN? 8/8/8/8/p7/8/1P4k1/2K5 b
FEN 8/8/8/8/p7/8/1P4k1/2K5 b - -
Index 12658437
Draw

Nalimov score: DRAW
   g2h2    White moves and wins in 22
   g2f2    White moves and wins in 25
   g2g3    White moves and wins in 25
   g2g1    White moves and wins in 25
   g2f3    Draw
   g2h3    White moves and wins in 22
   g2f1    White moves and wins in 25
   g2h1    White moves and wins in 21
   a4a3    White moves and wins in 16
FEN or move? g2f3
FEN 8/8/8/8/p7/5k2/1P6/2K5 w - -
Index 12659332
Draw

Nalimov score: DRAW
   c1d1    Draw
   c1b1    Draw
   c1c2    Draw
   c1d2    Draw
   b2b3    Draw
   b2b4    Draw
FEN or move? b2b4
FEN 8/8/8/8/pP6/5k2/8/2K5 b - b3
Index 12593797
Draw

Nalimov score: DRAW
   f3g3    White moves and wins in 15
   f3e3    White moves and wins in 15
   f3f4    White moves and wins in 23
   f3f2    White moves and wins in 15
   f3e4    Draw
   f3g4    White moves and wins in 15
   f3e2    White moves and wins in 15
   f3g2    White moves and wins in 15
   a4xb3   Draw
FEN or move?
```

```
baccala@debian ~/src/endgame$
```

At the "FEN?" prompt you want to enter a chess position in FEN notation (you can leave off the castling rights and en passant square if you want). The program spits back its evaluation of the position (if it has one), along with a list of moves and how they evaluate. It has a history feature, so once you've typed a FEN position in once, if you end the program with a CNTL-D and not a CNTL-C, it will save everything to a history file, and you can retrieve it again on a later run using the up arrow key.

After you've put a FEN position in, you get a "FEN or move?" prompt, which allows you to enter moves and thus step forward in the game. The move parser isn't very smart right now; you can make illegal moves pretty easily and there's no way to back up. The quirkiest thing at the moment is that if you want to promote, you need to specify EXACTLY the piece you're promoting into; "b7b8=Q" is radically different from "b7b8=q"!!

`genctlfile.pl` is a Perl script that creates control files for ordinary tablebases, though actually generating larger tablebases can be quite demanding of a computer. Hoffman has been used to generate a complete set of five-piece tablebases, as well as a few sixes.

Hoffman can thus duplicate much of the functionality of the Nalimov programs, but that's not all it can do. It can also duplicate much of the functionality of Eiko Bleicher's Freezer (`http://www.freezerchess.com/`). Aside from Freezer's nice GUI, the only thing Hoffman lacks is the ability to use Nalimov tablebases as futurebases, which matters because 6 piece Nalimov tablebases are available on-line, while only 5 piece tablebases are currently available for Hoffman. For example, here is a 1901 composition by Lasker and Reichhelm, used as a demo on the Freezer website:
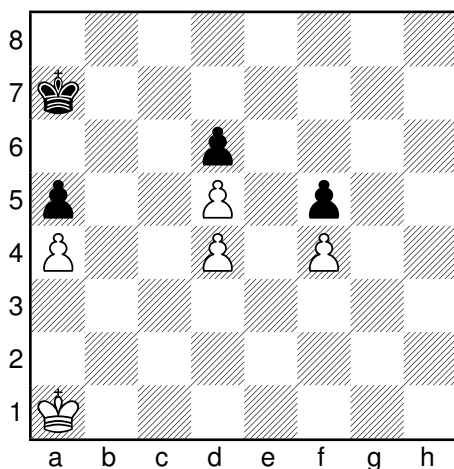
The Hoffman XML configuration for this problem (Figure 5), is in the `xml` directory as `lasker1901.xml`. Several new features in the configuration should be apparent.

First, note the new `location` parameter that can be specified for a piece to nail it down to a particular spot. You can actually specify a list of multiple squares, such as "`a4 a5 a6 a7`"; we'll see an example of this later.

Note also the disappearance of the `futurebase` element; it's been replaced by a pair of `prune` statements. The program pretty much has to have either `futurebase` or `prune` statements in order to figure out how to handle things like captures. In this case, we don't use futurebases at all (so this is a stand-alone analysis), and instead tell Hoffman to regard any pawn capture as an immediate victory for the capturing side (that's the `concede` part).

Finally, let me point out the `prune-enable` elements at the beginning of the `tablebase` section. They don't do very much, but they're very important because the program will refuse to process this tablebase without them. They're there because it's easy to lose track of pruning statements if they get buried inside futurebases. You could easily use a pruned futurebase to build a tablebase that wouldn't be accurate, but that also wouldn't be apparent just from look-

```
<?xml version="1.0"?>
<!DOCTYPE tablebase SYSTEM "http://www.freesoft.org/software/hoffman/tablebase.dtd">

<tablebase>
    <prune-enable color="white" type="concede"/>
    <prune-enable color="black" type="concede"/>

    <piece color="white" type="king"/>
    <piece color="black" type="king"/>
    <piece color="white" type="pawn" location="a4"/>
    <piece color="white" type="pawn" location="d4"/>
    <piece color="white" type="pawn" location="f4"/>
    <piece color="white" type="pawn" location="d5"/>
    <piece color="black" type="pawn" location="a5"/>
    <piece color="black" type="pawn" location="f5"/>
    <piece color="black" type="pawn" location="d6"/>

    <prune color="white" move="KxP" type="concede"/>
    <prune color="black" move="KxP" type="concede"/>

    <generation-controls>
        <output filename="lasker1901.htb"/>
    </generation-controls>
</tablebase>
```

Figure 5: `lasker1901.xml`

ing at the tablebase configuration. That's why the `prune-enable` elements are there. The program will refuse to allow any pruning statement, or pruned futurebase, unless there is a matching `prune-enable` at the beginning of the `tablebase` section. This prevents "hidden" prunes from slipping into an analysis by mistake. As their name suggests, the `prune-enable` elements "turn on" pruning; the program won't prune unless they're there.

OK, so by now we know how to generate `lasker1901.htb` (`hoffman -g lasker1901.xml`, right?), and we can probe the resulting tablebase for the original problem position:

```
C> ./hoffman -p lasker1901.htb
Hoffman $Revision: 1.15 $ $Locker: baccala $
0 piece Nalimov tablebases found
Loading 'lasker1901.htb'
FEN? 8/k7/3p4/p2P1p2/P2P1P2/8/8/K7 w
FEN 8/k7/3p4/p2P1p2/P2P1P2/8/8/K7 w - -
Index 2368
White moves and wins in 14
Can't find Nalimov tablebase
    Ka1b1    White wins in 14
    Ka1a2    Draw
    Ka1b2    Draw
FEN or move?
C>
```

So what's the point? Can White win in 14 moves? No. White can *capture a black pawn* in 14 moves, but only if he plays Kb1! Any other move would allow Black to "draw", i.e, to prevent White from capturing a pawn without allowing Black

to capture first. In fact, those other two moves allow Black to prevent White from capturing at all, but it's important to note that this Hoffman analysis doesn't guarantee that, since Black might be able to "win" by capturing a pawn. White might be able to capture a pawn, just not before Black can.

Question: What changes to the configuration would allow us to prove that Black can, in fact, completely prevent White from making any capture after a move like Ka2?

Answer: Change the black `prune-enable` and `prune` elements from `concede` to `discard`. Now the analysis will not consider any black captures, and the only kind of "draw" will be one that completely prevents white from making any kind of capture. There is one gotcha, however. White might put black in a position where his *has* to capture a pawn, but the new analysis would regard this as a stalemate. To avoid this problem, you should also add a third pruning element:
`<prune color="white" move="stalemate" type="concede"/>`

Here's another example, also from the Freezer website:
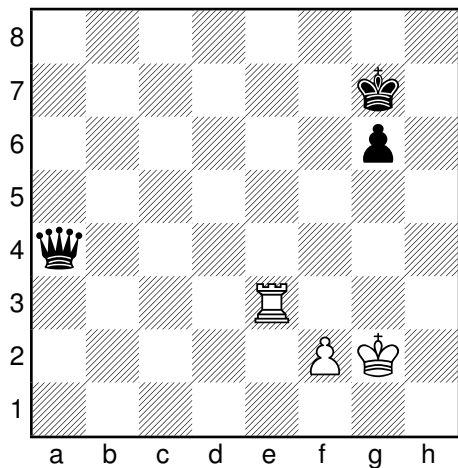
It's a fortress. We're playing White, and we're out to show that we can draw this position. There are several ways to approach this problem. First, it's a six piece ending, and all six piece endings have been completely analyzed, so we can simply download a pre-computed tablebase and input this position.

Let's use a Syzygy tablebase that gives win-draw-loss information without any distance metrics (sometimes called a *bitbase*). I downloaded `KQPvKRP.rtbw` (440 MB)[1], loaded it into Hoffman, and probed the problem FEN:

```
baccala@ideapad-S510p:~/src/hoffman$ ./hoffman -p ./KQPvKRP.rtbw
Hoffman Version 1030
Loading './KQPvKRP.rtbw'
Index or FEN? 8/6k1/6p1/8/q7/4R3/5PK1/8 w
Index 38660992097 (./KQPvKRP.rtbw)
Draw
   Pf2f3    (33581942176)  Black wins
   Pf2f4    (27656383936)  NO SCORE AVAILABLE
   Kg2h2    (38660992094)  Draw
   Kg2g3    (38646883608)  Draw
   Kg2g1    (39507500432)  Draw
   Kg2f3    (38646883610)  Black wins
   Kg2h3    (38646883606)  Draw
   Kg2f1    (39507500434)  Draw
```

---

[1]from http://tablebase.sesse.net/

```
    Kg2h1      (39507500430)  Draw
    Re3f3      (38646883624)  Black wins
    Re3g3      (38632775152)  Draw
    Re3h3      (38618666680)  Draw
    Re3d3      (38675100568)  Black wins
    Re3c3      (38689209040)  Black wins
    Re3b3      (38703317512)  NO SCORE AVAILABLE
    Re3a3      (38717425984)  NO SCORE AVAILABLE
    Re3e4      (38562232792)  NO SCORE AVAILABLE
    Re3e5      (38449365016)  Black wins
    Re3e6      (38336497240)  Black wins
    Re3e7      (38237737936)  Draw
    Re3e8      (38138978632)  NO SCORE AVAILABLE
    Re3e2      (39606259720)  Black wins
    Re3e1      (39719127496)  Draw
8 | . . . . . . . .
7 | . . . . . . k .
6 | . . . . . . p .
5 | . . . . . . . .
4 | q . . . . . . .
3 | . . . . R . . .
2 | . . . . . P K .
1 | . . . . . . . .
  +----------------
    a b c d e f g h
FEN 8/6k1/6p1/8/q7/4R3/5PK1/8 w - -
Index, FEN or move?
```

The Syzygy tablebase confirms that this position is a draw, but notice that some of the moves are labeled "NO SCORE AVAILABLE". This is a peculiar feature of Syzygy tablebases, which achieve a high compression rate by discarding information. You need to download the `KQPvKR.rtbw` (2.0 MB) and `KQPvKP.rtbw` (2.4 MB) tablebases to get a complete result. Load all three tablebases into Hoffman to see the complete result:

```
baccala@ideapad-S510p:~/src/hoffman$ ./hoffman -p ./KQPvKRP.rtbw ./KQPvKR.rtbw ./KQPvF
Hoffman Version 1030
Loading './KQPvKRP.rtbw'
Loading './KQPvKR.rtbw'
Loading './KQPvKP.rtbw'
Index or FEN? 8/6k1/6p1/8/q7/4R3/5PK1/8 w
Index 38660992097 (./KQPvKRP.rtbw)
Draw
    Pf2f3      (33581942176)  Black wins
    Pf2f4      (27656383936)  Black wins
    Kg2h2      (38660992094)  Draw
    Kg2g3      (38646883608)  Draw
    Kg2g1      (39507500432)  Draw
    Kg2f3      (38646883610)  Black wins
    Kg2h3      (38646883606)  Draw
    Kg2f1      (39507500434)  Draw
    Kg2h1      (39507500430)  Draw
```

```
    Re3f3      (38646883624) Black wins
    Re3g3      (38632775152) Draw
    Re3h3      (38618666680) Draw
    Re3d3      (38675100568) Black wins
    Re3c3      (38689209040) Black wins
    Re3b3      (38703317512) Black wins
    Re3a3      (38717425984) Black wins
    Re3e4      (38562232792) Black wins
    Re3e5      (38449365016) Black wins
    Re3e6      (38336497240) Black wins
    Re3e7      (38237737936) Draw
    Re3e8      (38138978632) Black wins
    Re3e2      (39606259720) Black wins
    Re3e1      (39719127496) Draw
8 | . . . . . . . .
7 | . . . . . . k .
6 | . . . . . . p .
5 | . . . . . . . .
4 | q . . . . . . .
3 | . . . . R . . .
2 | . . . . . P K .
1 | . . . . . . . .
  +----------------
    a b c d e f g h
FEN 8/6k1/6p1/8/q7/4R3/5PK1/8 w - -
Index, FEN or move?
```

Another possibility to use Nalimov tablebases. They are much larger (all of the `kqpkrp` files total 8.9 GB), but will give distance-to-mate information. Loading them into Hoffman, we obtain the same overall result (that the position is a draw), but with more detailed information about the possible losing moves:

```
baccala@ideapad-S510p:~/src/hoffman$ ./hoffman -p kqpkrp.0.nbb.emd
Hoffman Version 1030
6 piece Nalimov tablebases found
Loading 'kqpkrp.0.nbb.emd'
Index or FEN? 8/6k1/6p1/8/q7/4R3/5PK1/8 w
Index 43039462109 (kqpkrp.0.nbb.emd)
Draw

Nalimov score: DRAW
    Pf2f3      (36718866652) Black wins in 27
    Pf2f4      (30398271196) Black wins in 19
    Kg2h2      (43039462106) Draw
    Kg2g3      (43039462092) Draw
    Kg2g1      (43039462124) Draw
    Kg2f3      (43039462094) Black wins in 30
    Kg2h3      (43039462090) Draw
    Kg2f1      (43039462126) Draw
    Kg2h1      (43039462122) Draw
    Re3f3      (43024898524) Black wins in 30
```

```
    Re3g3     (43010334940)  Draw
    Re3h3     (42995771356)  Draw
    Re3d3     (43054025692)  Black wins in 28
    Re3c3     (43068589276)  Black wins in 30
    Re3b3     (43083152860)  Black wins in 8
    Re3a3     (43097716444)  Black wins in 9
    Re3e4     (42937517020)  Black wins in 7
    Re3e5     (42821008348)  Black wins in 30
    Re3e6     (42704499676)  Black wins in 9
    Re3e7     (42602554588)  Draw
    Re3e8     (42486045916)  Black wins in 8
    Re3e2     (44058912988)  Black wins in 29
    Re3e1     (44175421660)  Draw
8 | . . . . . . . .
7 | . . . . . . k .
6 | . . . . . . p .
5 | . . . . . . . .
4 | q . . . . . . .
3 | . . . . R . . .
2 | . . . . . P K .
1 | . . . . . . . .
  +----------------
    a b c d e f g h
FEN 8/6k1/6p1/8/q7/4R3/5PK1/8 w - -
Index, FEN or move?
```

Hoffman can build six piece tablebases, just like Nalimov or Syzygy tablebases, but with several major caveats. First, Hoffman is significantly slower than its competitors. I ran a timed analysis to generate a full set of five piece tablebases. Roland de Man's Syzygy program took two hours and eighteen minutes, while Hoffman required over two and a half *days*. Also, Nalimov and especially Syzygy tablebases are far more compact than their Hoffman counterparts. Finally, Nalimov (up to six piece) and Syzygy (up to seven piece) tablebases have been precomputed and available for download. Thus, for problems with seven pieces or fewer, there's really no reason to compute your own tablebases – just download what you need from the Internet.

It's also possible to analyze this position by building a restricted tablebase that curtails the movements of the black pieces and thus reduces the complexity of the problem. For a six piece problem, there's really no reason to do this except as an illustration of how the technique can be used for more complex problems.

My restricted Hoffman analysis is in the "`fortress*.xml`" files in the `xml` directory. You need to have several of the four-piece tablebases built in order to process them. I'm not going to copy them all into this document; I'll just ask you to study them on your own while I point out some salient features.

Notice how `futurebase` and `prune` elements can be used together in a single configuration file (in case you were wondering). Notice how wildcards can be used in `prune` statements. Notice how a piece can be restricted to more than one square. Notice how comments can be put into XML configurations.

The `pawngen` element provides a different way of handling pawns – a table is made of all possible pawn configurations that can arise from a given start.

The next example is position 67 from Reuben Fine's book "Basic Chess ndings". There are too many pieces in play (eight) for Nalimov or Syzygy, and the pawn captures are too complicated for Freezer.
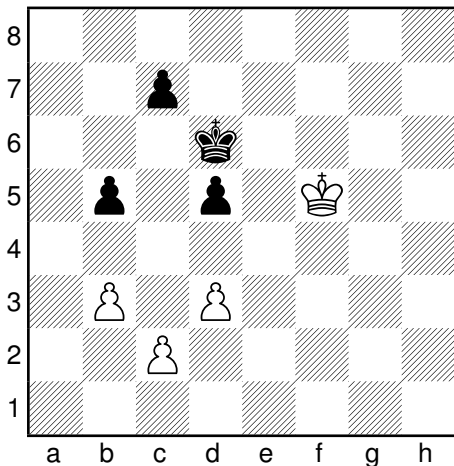
```
<?xml version="1.0"?>
<!DOCTYPE tablebase SYSTEM "http://www.freesoft.org/software/hoffman/tablebase.dtd">
<!-- Diagram 67 from Rubin Fine's "Basic Chess Endings" -->
<!-- Problem position 8/2p5/3k4/1p1p1K2/8/1P1P4/2P5/8 w -->

<tablebase>
    <prune-enable color="white" type="concede"/>
    <prune-enable color="black" type="concede"/>
    <dtm/>
    <piece color="white" type="king"/>
    <piece color="black" type="king"/>
    <pawngen white-pawn-locations="b3 c2 d3" black-pawn-locations="b5 c7 d5"/>
    <futurebase filename="kpkp.htb"/>
    <futurebase filename="kppk.htb"/>
    <futurebase filename="kppk.htb" colors="invert"/>
    <prune color="white" type="concede" move="P=?"/>
    <prune color="black" type="concede" move="P=?"/>
</tablebase>
```

Figure 6: `fine67.xml`

The XML configuration (Figure 6) is `fine67.xml`, but this file can not be processed directly by Hoffman, because the program requires the number and color of pieces to be fixed. A starting pawn position with three pawns on each side can lead to pawn positions with anywhere from zero to three pawns on each side, after captures. Also, Hoffman only handles captures using futurebases; there is no option for inter-tablebase captures. Attempting to process this file directly produces an error message:

```
C> ./hoffman -o fine67.htb -g fine67.xml
Hoffman $Revision: 1.15 $ $Locker: baccala $
terminate called after throwing an instance of 'xmlpp::validity_error'
  what():
Validity error:
Element pawngen does not carry attribute black-pawns-required
Element pawngen does not carry attribute white-pawns-required
```

Instead of using Hoffman directly, we need to run the Perl script "pawngen" on `fine67.xml`. Pawngen will output a series of interlinked control files that Hoffman can process. Obviously, considering all possible promotions in this case would result in positions with multiple queens that would be impossible for Hoffman to process. Pawngen, however, does honor the `prune` elements. For this example, pawngen ignored all promotion possibilities (note the `prune` elements) and created 10 control files. Run the actual Hoffman analysis by typing "make". Both Perl (needed to run pawngen) and make are fairly standard on Linux and other UNIX variants, but neither are included in the Hoffman distribution. On Microsoft systems, I've used the cygwin distribution (which includes both programs) successfully.

"make" runs Hoffman 10 times and produces 10 tablebases. Once this is done, we use Hoffman to probe the tablebases:

```
C> ./hoffman -p fine67-*.htb
Hoffman $Revision: 1.15 $ $Locker: baccala $
Loading 'fine67-0-3.htb'
Loading 'fine67-1-2.htb'
Loading 'fine67-1-3.htb'
Loading 'fine67-2-1.htb'
Loading 'fine67-2-2.htb'
Loading 'fine67-2-3.htb'
Loading 'fine67-3-0.htb'
Loading 'fine67-3-1.htb'
Loading 'fine67-3-2.htb'
Loading 'fine67-3-3.htb'
Index or FEN? 8/2p5/3k4/1p1p1K2/8/1P1P4/2P5/8 w
Index 1080618 (fine67-3-3.htb)
White wins in 27
   Pc2c3     (755539)  Draw
   Pc2c4     (632731)  Black wins in 19
   Pb3b4     (928915)  White wins in 27
   Pd3d4     (936139)  Draw
   Kf5g5     (1080729) Black wins in 18
   Kf5f6     (1081517) Draw
   Kf5f4     (1079721) Draw
   Kf5g6     (1081627) Black wins in 22
   Kf5g4     (1079831) Black wins in 24
FEN 8/2p5/3k4/1p1p1K2/8/1P1P4/2P5/8 w - -
Index, FEN or move?
```

This analysis confirms Fine's analysis that b4 is White's only winning move in this position, although the pruning in the Hoffman analysis only guarantees that White can force a queen before Black can. In particular, d4 only draws because Black has the recourse b4 which allows him to blockade the position.

Of course, we'd really like to know if White can win, not just force a queen. A more sophisticated analysis (Figures 7 and 8) is `fine67a.xml` and `fine67b.xml`. Notice the `white-queens-required` attribute on the `pawngen` element. This attribute indicates that the white queen in the analysis arose from a pawn being queened. In particular, in `fine67a.xml` we only consider pawn positions that arise after one white pawn has queened.

`fine67a.xml` analyses the position *after* a white pawn has queened. To analyse the original problem position, we feed these results to `fine67b.xml`, which is quite similar to the original `fine67.xml`, except that we no longer discard queen promotions and include the `fine67a` futurebases.

Pawngen, when run on `fine67a.xml`, produces 8 control files, and `fine67b.xml` yields 10 control files. When

```
<?xml version="1.0"?>
<!DOCTYPE tablebase SYSTEM "http://www.freesoft.org/software/hoffman/tablebase.dtd">
<!-- Diagram 67 from Rubin Fine's "Basic Chess Endings" -->
<!-- Problem position 8/2p5/3k4/1p1p1K2/8/1P1P4/2P5/8 w -->

<tablebase>
   <prune-enable color="white" type="discard"/>
   <prune-enable color="black" type="concede"/>
   <dtm/>
   <piece color="white" type="king"/>
   <piece color="black" type="king"/>
   <piece color="white" type="queen"/>
   <pawngen white-pawn-locations="b3 c2 d3" black-pawn-locations="b5 c7 d5" white-queens-requi
   <futurebase filename="kqkp.htb"/>
   <futurebase filename="kqpk.htb"/>
   <prune color="white" type="discard" move="P=?"/>
   <prune color="black" type="concede" move="P*=?"/>
   <prune color="black" type="concede" move="?xQ"/>
</tablebase>
```

Figure 7: `fine67a.xml`

```
<?xml version="1.0"?>
<!DOCTYPE tablebase SYSTEM "http://www.freesoft.org/software/hoffman/tablebase.dtd">
<!-- Diagram 67 from Rubin Fine's "Basic Chess Endings" -->
<!-- Problem position 8/2p5/3k4/1p1p1K2/8/1P1P4/2P5/8 w -->

<tablebase>
   <prune-enable color="white" type="discard"/>
   <prune-enable color="black" type="concede"/>
   <dtm/>
   <piece color="white" type="king"/>
   <piece color="black" type="king"/>
   <pawngen white-pawn-locations="b3 c2 d3" black-pawn-locations="b5 c7 d5"/>
   <futurebase filename="fine67a-*.htb"/>
   <futurebase filename="kpkp.htb"/>
   <futurebase filename="kppk.htb"/>
   <futurebase filename="kppk.htb" colors="invert"/>
   <prune color="white" type="discard" move="P=[NBR]"/>
   <prune color="black" type="concede" move="P=?"/>
</tablebase>
```

Figure 8: `fine67b.xml`

complete, its output tablebases can be queried for the original position:

```
C> ./hoffman -p fine67[ab]*.htb
Hoffman $Revision: 1.15 $ $Locker: baccala $
Loading 'fine67a-0-2.htb'
Loading 'fine67a-0-3.htb'
Loading 'fine67a-1-1.htb'
Loading 'fine67a-1-2.htb'
Loading 'fine67a-1-3.htb'
Loading 'fine67a-2-0.htb'
Loading 'fine67a-2-1.htb'
Loading 'fine67a-2-2.htb'
Loading 'fine67b-0-3.htb'
Loading 'fine67b-1-2.htb'
Loading 'fine67b-1-3.htb'
Loading 'fine67b-2-1.htb'
Loading 'fine67b-2-2.htb'
Loading 'fine67b-2-3.htb'
Loading 'fine67b-3-0.htb'
Loading 'fine67b-3-1.htb'
Loading 'fine67b-3-2.htb'
Loading 'fine67b-3-3.htb'
Index or FEN? 8/2p5/3k4/1p1p1K2/8/1P1P4/2P5/8 w
Index 1080618 (fine67b-3-3.htb)
White wins in 27
   Pc2c3    (755539) Draw
   Pc2c4    (632731) Black wins in 19
   Pb3b4    (928915) White wins in 27
   Pd3d4    (936139) Draw
   Kf5g5    (1080729) Black wins in 18
   Kf5f6    (1081517) Draw
   Kf5f4    (1079721) Draw
   Kf5g6    (1081627) Black wins in 22
   Kf5g4    (1079831) Black wins in 24
FEN 8/2p5/3k4/1p1p1K2/8/1P1P4/2P5/8 w - -
Index, FEN or move?
```

Again, we show a white win with b4. This time, however, we know that this is actually a white *win* and not just a queening solution.

Here's a position that Ivan Konobeev has studied extensively using FinalGen, which can only conclude that Re8 is black's only hope, without being able to establish it definitely as a win or a draw.
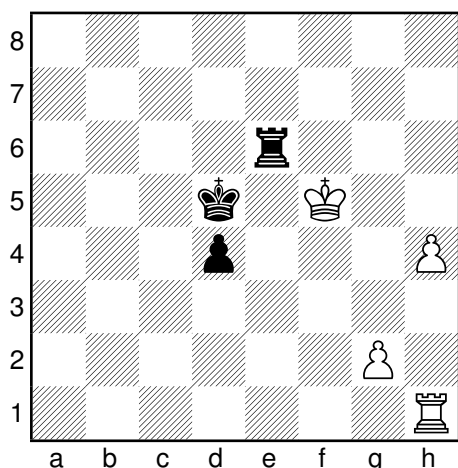
The files `ivand.xml`, `ivane.xml`, and `ivanf.xml` contain a Hoffman analysis, with all promotion possibilities conceded as wins. Hoffman reaches a similar conclusion as FinalGen:

```
C> ./hoffman -p test/ivan[def]*.htb
Hoffman $Revision: 1.15 $ $Locker: baccala $
Loading 'test/ivand-2-0.htb'
Loading 'test/ivand-2-1.htb'
Loading 'test/ivane-2-0.htb'
Loading 'test/ivane-2-1.htb'
Loading 'test/ivanf-1-1.htb'
Loading 'test/ivanf-2-0.htb'
Loading 'test/ivanf-2-1.htb'
Index or FEN? 8/8/4r3/3k1K2/3p3P/8/6P1/7R b
Index 1876257633 (test/ivanf-2-1.htb)
Draw
   Pd4d3    (1766972960) White wins in 32
   Kd5c5    (1876257630) White wins in 6
   Kd5d6    (1876257642) White wins in 23
   Kd5c6    (1876257640) White wins in 6
   Kd5c4    (1876257620) White wins in 13
   Re6f6    (1876705520) White wins in 8
   Re6g6    (1877153408) White wins in 8
   Re6h6    (1877601296) White wins in 24
   Re6d6    (1875809744) White wins in 23
   Re6c6    (1875361856) White wins in 23
   Re6b6    (1874913968) White wins in 23
   Re6a6    (1874466080) White wins in 23
   Re6e7    (1879840736) White wins in 25
   Re6e8    (1883423840) Draw
   Re6e5    (1873122416) White wins in 35
   Re6e4    (1869987200) White wins in 25
   Re6e3    (1866404096) White wins in 25
   Re6e2    (1862820992) White wins in 25
   Re6e1    (1859685776) White wins in 6
FEN 8/8/4r3/3k1K2/3p3P/8/6P1/7R b - -
Index, FEN or move?
```

Specifically, all black moves other than Re8 allow white to force a queen before black, while Re8 allows each side to prevent the other from promoting.

The files `ivana.xml`, `ivanb.xml`, and `ivanc.xml` contain a Hoffman analysis with black promotions discarded, but since white has the advantage in this position, this isn't a very enlightening analysis. More interesting would be to discard white promotions, but an intuitive evaluation of the diagrammed position suggests that white is unlikely to mate without promoting.

A more detailed analysis would require allowing queens into the position along with the rooks.

See the Hoffman Reference Guide for more details on these and other Hoffman XML elements.