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An absent f-pawn makes the diagonal longer

The black f7-pawn is important for defence. If it has been moved, lost or exchanged, the castled king is often more vulnerable.

This is particularly the case when White has a bishop placed on the a2-g8 diagonal (usually on the c4- or b3-square). Black’s king is usually on the h8-square, shielded from attack by its own pawns on g7 and h7. The problem is that the black king has very few escape squares, as the white bishop controls the g8-square.

If White can administer a check with queen or rook on the h-file, the black king is invariably in major trouble. White’s goal is therefore to open the h-file in any way possible, which usually means a sacrifice.

Typical Pattern with the Missing f7-pawn

12a) White moves
The black king is currently shielded by the h7-pawn. White sacrifices his knight with 1 Ïxh7 Êxh7 (12b), opening the h-file.

DEADLY CHECKMATE 2

The Missing Defensive f-pawn

12b) White moves
There follows 2 Ëh5 checkmate. Note how the white bishop on c4 prevents the black king escaping (via g8) because there is no black pawn on f7.
13) **Black moves**

Here the h-file is already open, and the black rook is itching to exploit this. After 1...\textit{\&}xh2+ 2 \textit{\&}xh2 \textit{\&}h8+ White is mated following 3 \textit{\&}g3 \textit{\&}h4.

14) **White moves**

After 1 \textit{\&}xh7 \textit{\&}xh7 2 \textit{\&}h3+ \textit{\&}g6 White has to close in with the queen: 3 \textit{\&}g3+ \textit{\&}h7 (3...\textit{\&}f6 4 \textit{\&}g5 is mate) 4 \textit{\&}h4+ \textit{\&}g6 5 \textit{\&}g5+ \textit{\&}h7 6 \textit{\&}h5 mate.

15a) **White moves**

Before sacrificing the queen, it must be established that the black king cannot escape to safety via the g6-square. White plays 1 \textit{\&}xh7+ \textit{\&}xh7 2 \textit{\&}h5+ (15b).

15b) **Black moves**

The king can escape – but only temporarily. After 2...\textit{\&}g6 comes the pretty finish 3 \textit{\&}f7 checkmate.