

CONCEPTUAL ROOK ENDGAMES

JACOB AAGAARD

GRANDMASTER KNOWLEDGE

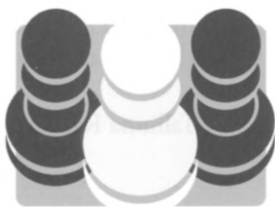


QUALITY CHESS

Conceptual Rook Endgames

By

Jacob Aagaard



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CONCEPTUAL ROOK ENDGAMES

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Foreword by Karsten Müller

Practice makes perfect

Rook endings are the type of theoretical ending which occur most often by far. They are worth studying as there are many positions which occur over the board regularly. Philidor's draw, Lucena's win and Vancura's draw are just the three most prominent examples. So there is already a vast literature on the subject. Why add two more books to the collection?

Rook endings can be regarded as having two aspects. One theoretical and one practical. So Quality Chess decided to cover each aspect in a separate book. Sam Shankland has a systematic style as he has proven in his excellent books on pawn play (*Small Steps to Giant Improvement* and *Small Steps 2 Success*). So he was a great choice for the theoretical work, the aptly named *Theoretical Rook Endgames*. Equally, Jacob Aagaard's creative genius, as demonstrated most recently in his *A Matter of Endgame Technique*, makes him an ideal choice for the sister work on practical rook endings, *Conceptual Rook Endgames*. Whilst the study of each book will be equally valuable to the practical player, it would be preferable for the reader to start by obtaining a full understanding of the theoretical aspects of rook endings from Sam's book. These provide the fundamental building blocks to the practical aspects of such endings as demonstrated in Jacob's book, which provides more advanced material.

In *Conceptual Rook Endgames*, Jacob Aagaard investigates certain important guidelines, such as passed pawns should be pushed and the defender should exchange pawns. Numerous motifs are also examined, one important example being zugzwang. It is well-known that this is a weapon generally used by the attacker. Readers may be less familiar with the fascinating concept of mutual zugzwang, where the side to play is in for a disappointment. This arises surprisingly often in practice. These guidelines and motifs and many others are explained in detail with many well-chosen examples. These examples clearly demonstrate that the real art of chess is not knowing the guidelines. It is to develop an intuition for the application of those guidelines and the recognition of when exceptions apply to them.

A particular feature of the work is the way in which it explores the difference between calculating concrete lines and schematic thinking. It also examines when to use one or the other of these techniques. This is an important practical skill to develop, both in rook endings and in chess more widely. Jacob explains it in depth with many further excellent examples.

The book also benefits from the source of the examples chosen by Jacob. Several of the games derive from the daily classes at his online academy, www.killerchesstraining.com. The beauty of this is that the analysis has benefited from the input during those classes of a large number of

Foreword by Karsten Müller

strong players, without the help of engine assistance. This brings a rich human element to the understanding of these examples (complemented of course by the view of the silicon monster). Furthermore, Jacob has included many games from very recent grandmaster practice. These prove both that rook endings often occur in practice, and that they are difficult to successfully navigate over the board. So make yourself familiar with the important concepts!

I hope that Jacob's work will give you as much pleasure as it has given me.

GM Dr Karsten Müller
Hamburg, April 2023

Preface

Rook endings have traditionally been looked at from the perspective of fixed positions with a few ideas on top. Rarely have the ideas been the main lens through which to look at this part of the endgame. A few writers have done it, particularly Edmar Mednis and Mark Dvoretsky, even though Mark also chose to look at the ideas as an afterthought. The ambitious concept of looking at the most common endgame in chess from two directions at the same time – with *Theoretical Rook Endgames* by Sam Shankland, and this book, which focuses on repeating ideas – is perhaps a novelty in chess literature. It is destined that there will be a difference in opinion on which book has the best approach. Be certain that those opinions will be strong and phrased in absolutes. However, it is our opinion that looking at a topic from several angles is the best way to approach it: to understand both the theoretical positions and to some extent memorise them and the key ideas, and to understand the general themes and ideas and work on applying them.

This is not going to be a simple journey. From understanding an explanation to consistently using it in your own games, there are quite a few stops. Understanding is not knowledge. And knowledge is not skill. You will recognise the themes in games and exercises you see and analyse, and play many games where they occur, before they become second nature.

All authors would love to say: read this book and you will play the rook endgame perfectly! But it would be a lie. All I can promise is that you will be able to see and understand patterns and that this will help you improve your decision making in rook endgames. Hopefully this will help you at the moment of greatest importance!

A small note on the style of this book:

This book has two different identities that I have tried to make co-exist.

On the one hand it is a part of the *Grandmaster Knowledge* series, which means that nothing is dumbed down or skipped in order to make the book more accessible.

At the same time, this is a book about ideas. Ideas can be represented by variations, but are more commonly supported by visuals, words and abstract concepts. Thus, variations have been kept to a minimum whenever possible. Another word on the role of variations is that they are often illustrative, and do not necessarily represent the only path forward, although sometimes they do, but can also be the most logical and coherent path.

The language of modern chess has changed from the days where games were analysed by hand and conclusions were hard to come by and up for debate. In those days a lot of annotation markers (!, ? and so on) were given on the basis of if a move improved the position or made it worse. Today, symbols are often used to indicate a clear change in the computer's evaluation of the position.

I have chosen to follow something closer to the outdated approach, where symbols are used to show if a position has become more difficult to play, or if the player has solved problems or managed to put problems for his opponent. Thus, a question mark does not have to change the evaluation of the position according to the computer, but simply indicates reduced chances of a favourable result in a practical game between two humans; most commonly the players in the game annotated.

Jacob Aagaard
Copenhagen, April 2023

Introduction

Structure

The basics are called the basics, not because they are simple or easy, as the word “basic” is occasionally used, but a reference to foundational knowledge that anyone with aspirations in a given field will need to master, in order to progress smoothly and get the most out of their talent and effort. In our work on understanding rook endings conceptually, we will look at both basic ideas, and powerful ideas/patterns/concepts/themes that are not necessarily foundational to understand additional ideas.

No apologies

Like other books in the *Grandmaster Knowledge* series, this book is unapologetic when it comes to complexity. I have not sought complexity and I have actively pruned all variation trees back as far as it could be done without losing something essential. The ideas are the key points I want to present, but I am not afraid of complexity, should it prove instructive or fascinating. This means that I have often ignored a lot of false avenues that have been suggested in training with strong players or at our academy, Killer Chess Training.

Rook endings come towards the end of the game and not in a vacuum. The players are tired and have already gone through an emotional journey. In this book you will see a lot of strong players making mistakes. Noting that mistakes were made is not a negative commentary on the players’ abilities, but rather a commentary on the complexity of the game and focused on conveying an understanding of how rook endgames work.

Many famous games and matches were decided in the rook endgame. The most famous rook endgames in chess history are probably Alekhine’s win against Capablanca in their 1927 match, Botvinnik holding the draw against Fischer in their 1962 Olympiad game and Korchnoi’s win against Karpov in their 1978 match. But there are also a lot of famous rook endings from the 21st century. Magnus Carlsen has won a number of remarkable rook endings, but the most famous rook ending of all time will probably have to be Gelfand’s botched conversion in the 2nd play-off game in the 2012 World Championship match in Moscow, where an unexplainable move (and I have asked!) ruined the Israeli’s dream of the world title. Even more recently, teenage superstar Alireza Firouzja won the following remarkable game in the 2021 Grand Swiss, on his way to winning the tournament and qualifying for the 2022 Candidates tournament.

Alireza Firouzja – Evgeniy Najer

Riga 2021

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.d4 ♗xe4 4.dxe5 d5
5.♗bd2 ♗xd2 6.♙xd2 ♙e7 7.c3 c5 8.♙d3
♗c6 9.0-0 ♙g4 10.♞e1 ♞d7 11.h3 ♙h5
12.♙f4 ♞e6 13.♙e2 0-0 14.♞d2 ♙g6?!

Releasing tension for no particular reason. White was better anyway, but Black still needed to get the pieces into the game.

15.♞ad1 ♙e4 16.♗g5 ♙xg5 17.♙xg5

White has the advantage of the bishop pair, as well as more active pieces.

17...d4 18.♙f1 ♞g6 19.♞f4 ♙c2 20.♞d2
♞ae8 21.♙h4 ♗h8 22.f3

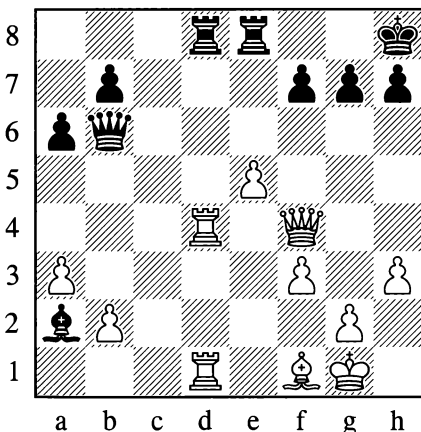
22.♙b5!? was stronger according to the computer, but it is not immediately clear to these human eyes what the purpose of the move is.

22...a6 23.♙f2 ♞d8 24.♞c1 ♙b1 25.cxd4
♗xd4 26.♙xd4 cxd4 27.a3 ♙a2 28.♞xd4?!

Entering unnecessary complications.

28.b4! would give White an improved version of the game.

28...♞b6 29.♞cd1 ♞fe8



This is where we will start our serious look at this game. We are about to transition from the middlegame into the endgame.

30.♗h2?

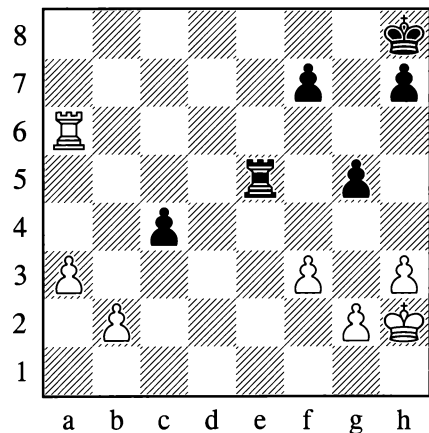
Only this is a serious mistake.

30.b4! would be less forcing and make up for the mistake of a few moves earlier. If Black plays forcingly, we can see the big difference to the game. 30...♞xd4 31.♞xd4 ♞xd4† 32.♞xd4 g5 33.♞d7 b5 34.♞d6 ♞xe5 35.♞xa6 White is winning. We shall see a position similar to this in the game, except with the pawn on b2, which makes all the difference.

30...♞xd4 31.♞xd4 ♞xd4 32.♞xd4 g5
33.♞d7 b5 34.♞d6 ♞xe5 35.♞xa6 ♙c4!!

The big difference. Now White has to take.

36.♙xc4 bxc4

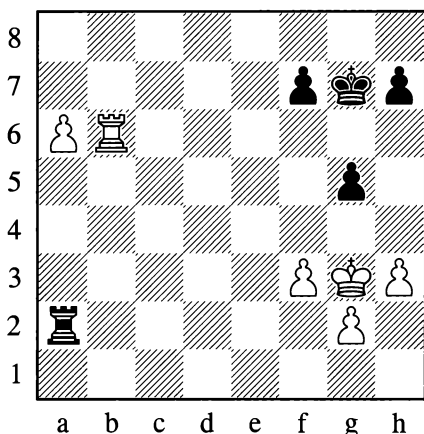


We now see that the b2-pawn is a bad backward pawn and that we are heading for a typical endgame where the extra pawn is rarely enough to win.

37.a4 ♞c5!

There are other ways to hold, but Najer is an experienced player, steering towards the endgame he knows draws.

38.♖b6 c3 39.bxc3 ♖xc3 40.a5 ♔g7 41.a6
♖a3 42.♔g3 ♖a2



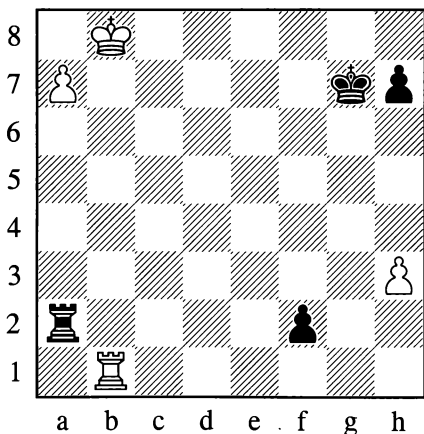
43.f4!?

An important part of being a strong chess player is to make great practical decisions. In this case, Firouzja manages to put to his opponent some practical problems for the cost of only a pawn.

43...gxf4† 44.♔xf4 ♖xg2 45.♔e5 ♖a2
46.♔d6 f5!

The only move. Black needs counterplay.

47.♔c7 f4 48.♔b8 f3 49.a7 f2 50.♖b1



Perhaps the most famous moment of the tournament. At this point it makes sense to

point out that there seems to be a decline of most players' abilities in their 40s. Najer is 44 years old. His best years are behind him. What appears to have happened in both this game and the game against Caruana is that he became fatigued. Remember: before the 4-5 hours of play that we see, there are 1-3 hours of looking over your preparation and perhaps finding something new to play. It is a full working day, in a stressful job.

50...f1=♖??

The explanation of this mistake can only be psychological. Najer obviously made a misevaluation somewhere, but where is not clear.

50...♖b2†! was unnecessary, but draws. 51.♖xb2 f1=♖ 52.♖b7† (52.a8=♖ ♖f8† 53.♔b7 ♖f3† is an immediate draw.) 52...♔g6 53.♖b6† (Or 53.a8=♖ ♖f8† 54.♔a7 ♖a3† with a draw.) 53...♔g7 54.a8=♖ ♖f8† Black draws. 55.♔b7 ♖e7† 56.♔b8 ♖f8† Black draws.

50...♔g6! (or h6 or f6) was however the most natural move in the position. What did Najer miss in this line? 51.a8=♖ (51.♖f1 is not an improvement. After 51...♖b2†, it is a draw.) 51...♖xa8† 52.♔xa8 ♔g5 53.♖f1 ♔h4 54.♖xf2 ♔xh3 Is it possible Najer somehow believed the rook would still be on the 1st rank here? Without asking someone who surely is deeply disappointed what he was thinking, there is no way to know.

51.♖xf1 ♖b2† 52.♔a8 ♖b3 53.♖c1 ♔g6

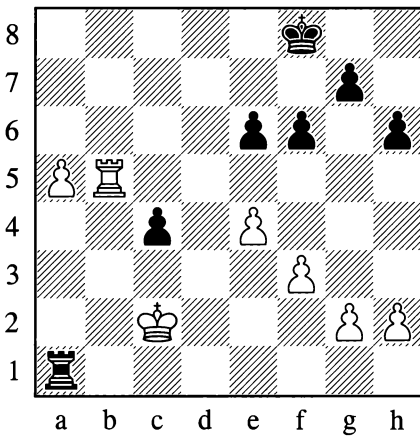
53...♖xh3 54.♖b1 ♖a3 55.♖b5! is the classical way to win such a position. The h-pawn is going nowhere.

54.♖c7 h5 55.♖b7 ♖xh3 56.♖b6† ♔g5
57.♔b7 ♖a3 58.♖a6 ♖b3† 59.♔c7
1-0

The following endgame was from the same tournament on the same day, six boards down. It is a big brutal fight with mind-boggling complexities. It cannot be diminished to verbal ideas; variations are needed to show the mechanisms that govern this endgame.

David Navara – Alexey Sarana

Riga 2021



White is pressing, but Black should be able to hold with accurate play. This is an improvement book. The goal of writing it is to help people play the rook endgame better and win, and thus enjoy chess more. Thus, I have tried to structure the book in a way so that one idea follows another and they build on top of each other, slowly expanding the readers' understanding of this fascinating part of the game. But it would be a mistake to believe that rook endings are all about the basics. Rook endings can be as complex, beautiful and perplexing as anything in chess. I hold a profound affection for the aesthetics of rook endings and this book is about that too.

59.♔c3 ♝a4 60.h4!

The traditional positional move. The plan is to play h4-h5 and fix the g7-pawn. Although this is the strongest play, it is not enough to force an advantage.

60...g5?

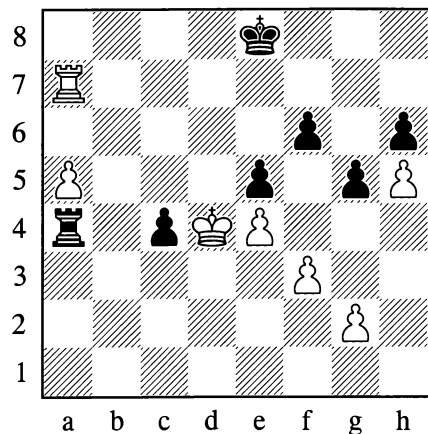
Sarana misevaluates that the pawn on h6 would be less weak than the pawn on g7, or at least that it would matter less. This is wrong, as after the h6-pawn falls, the h5-pawn becomes a passed pawn. This matters a lot in a race.

60...♔e7 was more prudent. 61.♔d4 (61.♝b7† ♔d6 62.♝xg7 ♝xa5 63.♝g6 ♔c5! would give Black active counterplay.) 61...e5† 62.♔c5 c3 63.♔b6 (63.♝b7† ♔e6 achieves nothing. If 64.♔b5?!, Black has 64...♝c4! 65.♔xc4 c2, when the c-pawn cannot be stopped.) 63...♝c4 64.♝b1 c2 65.♝c1 ♝c3 Creating a safe distance. 66.a6 ♝b3† The rook goes to b2/a2, forcing a draw.

61.h5! ♔e7 62.♔d4 ♔d7 63.♝b7† ♔e8 64.♝a7

I have long been speculating on where the rook is best placed in situations like this one: beside the pawn or in front of the pawn. In most cases it is probably in front, as the ability to advance the pawn disappears if the rook is next to it. But it depends a lot on which row the pawn has reached. The further up the board, the more the advantages of being beside the pawn come into play. Maybe from the 6th rank onwards. It really is a complicated question to answer! In this position, the rook is better placed in front.

64...e5†



65.♔c3?

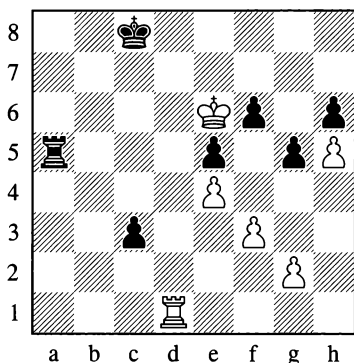
Navara commits a miscalculation and the position tips back over the edge from winning to barely holdable for Black.

The winning line was beautiful, but not especially difficult:

65.♔d5! c3 66.♕e6

66.♖c7 ♔d8 67.♖xc3 ♔d7 68.♖c5 ♖d4#

66...♔d8 67.♖d7+ ♔c8 68.♖d1 ♖xa5



The only moment of resistance.

69.♔f7!!

The target is the h6-pawn. You can see the ghost of 60...g5? at this moment.

69.♔xf6? ♖c5 is an immediate draw. White cannot get the king to d6 and cannot attack e5 and h6 at the same time, meaning that the rook can defend the c-pawn and whichever pawn White attacks.

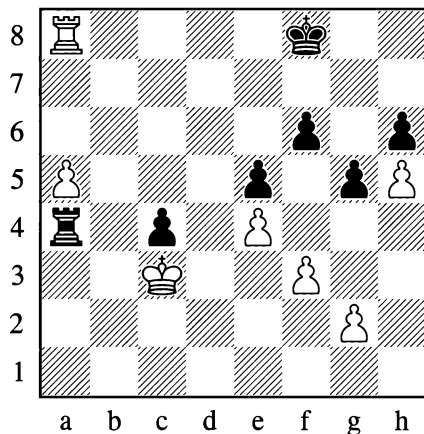
69.♔f5? ♖a6 70.♔g6 f5+!! 71.♔xf5 ♖a5 draws in exactly the same way.

69...♖a6 70.♔g7

White takes the h6-pawn and wins.

65...♔f8! 66.♖a8†

After 66.♖h7 ♖xa5 67.♔xc4 ♔g8 68.♖xh6 ♔g7 69.♖g6† ♔f7 the rook will never escape from the corner.

**66...♔g7?**

Sarana walks straight into the zugzwang, which will be explained below.

The way to avoid it was:

66...♔f7!!

Only this will make the draw.

67.g3!

The trickiest try.

67.a6 always fails if Black is not put in zugzwang. Below we shall see the importance of the ♖a6-a7-a8 manoeuvre.

67...♔e7!!

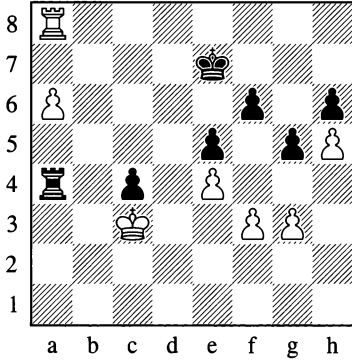
Another only move.

67...♔e6? fails to 68.a6 g4 69.a7 gxf3 70.♖e8†, showing why the king belongs on e7.

67...g4 68.fxg4 ♔g7 needs to be refuted by bringing the rook to the 6th rank, thus showing why pushing the a-pawn too soon is mistaken. 69.♖a6 ♔f7 70.g5! fxg5 71.g4 ♔g7 72.♖g6† ♔h7 73.a6 White wins.

68.a6

68.g4 ♔e6! Only now the king can go to this square. 69.a6 ♔f7 70.a7 ♔g7 With another draw.



68...g4!! 69.fxg4

69.a7? gxf3 would win for Black now. There is no check on e8.

69...♔f7

This is stunningly a draw. White cannot get the rook to the 6th rank, which would be the way to make something of the advantage.

67.♞a7†?

67.a6? would also fail, as it did in the game (see below). Black will not go for 67...♔f7? 68.a7 ♔g7 69.g4!, and Black is in zugzwang.

There were a number of convoluted wins, but all of them are parodies of:

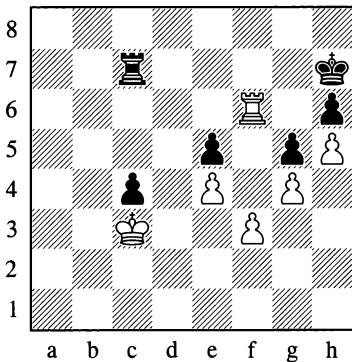
67.g4!

Black is in zugzwang again.

67...♔f7 68.a6 ♔g7 69.a7

Black has to make a serious concession.

69...♔h7 70.♞f8 ♞xa7 71.♞xf6 ♞c7

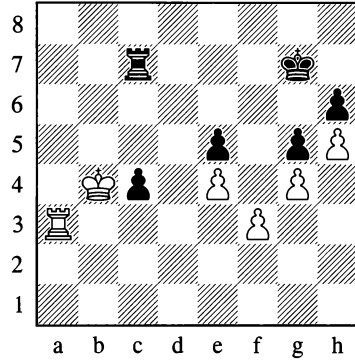


72.♞f5!

Forcing the rook to a poor square.

72...♞c5 73.♞f7† ♔g8 74.♞f6 ♔g7 75.♞g6† ♔h7 76.♞a6 ♔g7 77.♞a3 ♞c7 78.♔b4

White is about to win the c-pawn. Even here it is not obvious to all that White is winning, although I doubt either of the players would have been in doubt.



67...♔g8 68.♞a8† ♔g7?

We can see here that neither player understand the mutual zugzwang issue.

68...♔f7! was right.

69.♔b2 ♔f7 70.♞a7†?

70.g4! and we are back on the horse. 70...♔g7 71.♔c3 ♔f7 72.a6 ♔g7 73.a7 with zugzwang.

70...♔g8?

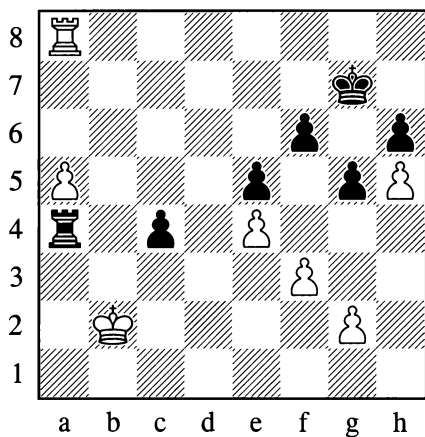
70...♔f8! gives the flexibility Black needs.

71.♞a6?

White would win after 71.♞a8† ♔g7 (71...♔f7 72.g4! is back to where we were) 72.g3!. This waiting move works when White has not advanced the a-pawn, and has the option to play ♞a6, as we saw above.

71...♔f7 72.♞a8 ♔g7?

72...♞b4† 73.♔c3 ♞a4 would make the draw.



73.a6?

Navara misses the last chance to win the game.

73.g3! ♔h7

73...♔f7 74.g4! and we are back on the right track.

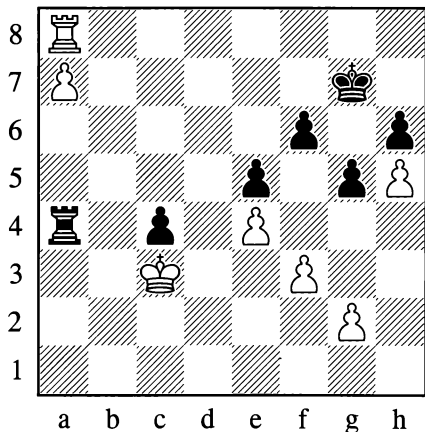
74.♔c3 g4

74...♔g7 75.g4 Black is in zugzwang again.

75.fxg4 ♔g7 76.♞a6! ♔f7 77.g5!

We have already seen how this wins above.

73...♔h7 74.♔c3 ♔g7 75.a7



Black is obviously under obligation to produce a move. If he moves the king, White will play ♞f8 and take on f6, with a winning position. But Black here has an additional option.

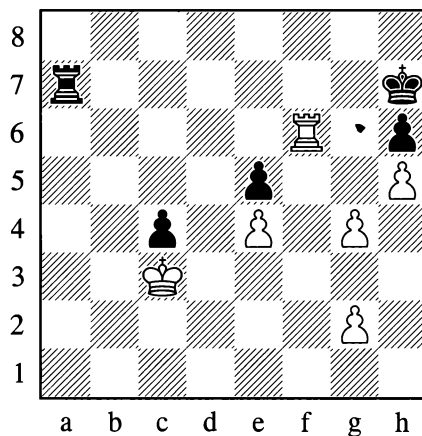
75...g4! 76.fxg4

White has no alternative to taking the free pawn, something that will ruin his pawn structure.

76...♔h7 77.♞f8

White has no way to make progress after 77.g3 ♔g7 78.g5 fxg5 79.g4 ♔h7.

77...♞xa7 78.♞xf6



78...♞d7!!

The saving move.

Perhaps Navara was counting on 78...♞g7 79.♔xc4 ♞xg4 80.♔d5, when White wins.

79.♞c6

79.♞f5 ♞d3†! 80.♔xc4 ♞d4† and Black holds.

79...♞d3† 80.♔b4 ♞e3 81.♞xc4

White is two pawns up, but will not create real problems for Black.

81...♗g7 82.♖b5 ♗f6 83.♟c6† ♗g5
 84.♟g6† ♗h4 85.♟xh6 ♗xg4 86.♟e6 ♟xe4
 87.h6 ♗g5 88.h7 ♟h4 89.♟xe5† ♗f6 90.♟e3
 ♟xh7 91.♟h3

½–½

About using engines

Young players today are often referred to as the “computer-generation”, which both makes sense and is a bit puzzling.

I personally learned to play chess in 1979, but after losing to my mother – and crying – the set was packed away and it was not until 1984 I got into the game again. I played with a friend at school and briefly there was a chess club in the school, although this only lasted a few sessions. My obsession with the game soon become full-blooded and I saved up to buy a chess-playing computer; one of those with real pieces and blinking lights indicating the moves the computer wanted to do. My first few years in chess was playing against a computer and slowly progressing to the point where I could beat the 8th and top level on the machine, which I guess was rated between 1200 and 1400. Which is the point. The computers were bad.

In the 1990 World Championship match, they still played with adjournments. It was briefly rumoured that Kasparov had had assistance from the Deep Blue team in finding the win, which the IBM team said was untrue – and the machine was not able to find the win anyway.

In 1996 Deep Blue lost 4–2 to Kasparov in a high-profile match, where the computer honestly looked feeble. It returned in 1997 to win a highly controversial match, where Kasparov resigned a position where he had been handed a chance to draw. Also, Kasparov played a highly risky bluff in Game 6, hoping

that the engine would not sacrifice a piece for compensation, leading to a devastating loss in 19 moves.

In 1997 I also won a game against John Emms based on computer preparation. Since then, engines have become stronger and stronger and there have since 2005 been fears of engine-supported cheating at the highest level. How founded in reality these have been in over the board chess is hard to say; but I gather it is limited to lower levels (like my own normal GM-level in some high-profile cases), mainly with using phones in the toilet.

The biggest influence on chess from computers has been through opening preparation, but also, the ability to analyse and understand games. Yusupov once told me that it was obvious that there would be so many young grandmasters, as the information they were receiving was much higher quality than the information he had received when he was young. But using engines is a skill that also has to be learned. And more so as the computers have become stronger. Especially with Stockfish 15 there was a shift, when most evaluations in the endgame are either +156 or 0.00. When you are analysing your games with an engine, it is impossible to see the difference between moves that equalise (meaning that both players have the same chances in a practical game – 0.00) and positions that hold with only the most amazing continuations (where no one will ever hold them – also 0.00).

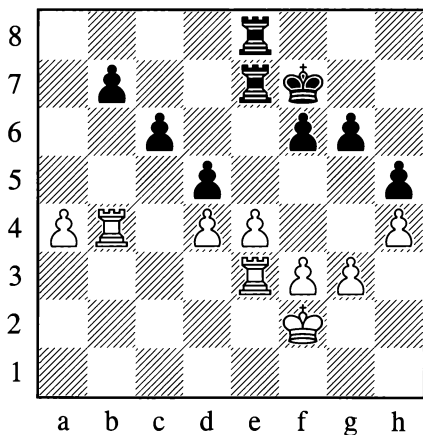
In this book I have tried to use the computer in this way: I accept with gratitude all the information it has given me, but without believing for one moment that I would have been able to understand or find most of it on my own. I believe it is professional to ensure that the chess in the book is correct and well analysed; but at the same time also remember

that chess is a game played by humans, with limitations. Therefore, you will see moves with question marks and exclamation marks that do not change the evaluation according to the computer. My goal is to help you play the endgame better; and to do this, I have tried to explain ideas, strategies and themes that will be useful when making decisions without digital interference.

The following example between a seasoned English Grandmaster and the biggest Scottish talent in a generation is a good example of this. I had a training session with Freddy after the game. We had both looked at the game with a computer, but we came to wildly different conclusions.

Mark Hebden – Frederick Waldhausen Gordon

Internet 2022



42...dxe4?!

I do not like this move. I prefer improving the king and keeping the tension with: 42...♔e6! and 43...♔d6.

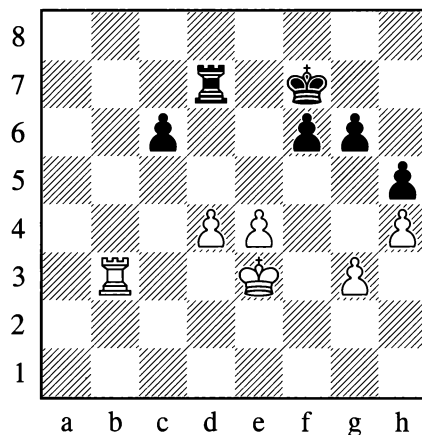
43.fx4 ♖d7 44.a5

To me, Black is under a bit of pressure. To Stockfish it is all 0.00.

44...♖a8!

A good practical decision.

45.♖eb3 ♖xa5 46.♖xb7 ♖a7 47.♖xd7† ♖xd7 48.♔e3



48...♔e7

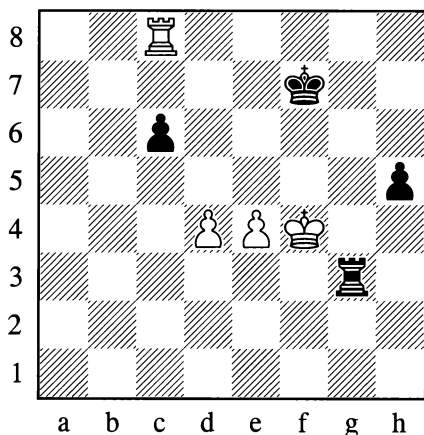
48...f5? looks tempting, but loses to a beautiful sequence. 49.♖c3! fx4 50.♖xc6 ♖a7 51.♖c3! The rook is not allowed to come to a3 (and d3). 51...♖e7 After the rook has occupied this passive spot, White regroups the rook to f4. 52.♖c2 ♖e8 53.♖f2† ♔e6 54.♔xe4 ♔d6† 55.♔d3 ♖g8 56.♖f6† ♔e7 57.♖a6 With many moves remaining, Stockfish gives White an 11.49 advantage...

49.♖b8 ♖a7 50.♖g8 ♖a3† 51.♔f4 ♔f7 52.♖c8 g5†?

A bad decision, which leads to Black having two weak pawns and an awful responsibility to defend them.

52...♖a6 with passive defence would still have held the game with a minimum of discomfort.

53.hxg5 fxg5† 54.♔xg5 ♖xg3† 55.♔f4



55...Bg4†?

A simple blunder, after which the game is lost.

Freddy said that “If I only had played:

55...Bg6?!

I would have made the draw.” “OK,” I said, “show me” and proceeded to put the position on the board. First off, I gave him a check.

56.Bc7†

Freddy immediately went to the wrong square (f8), losing.

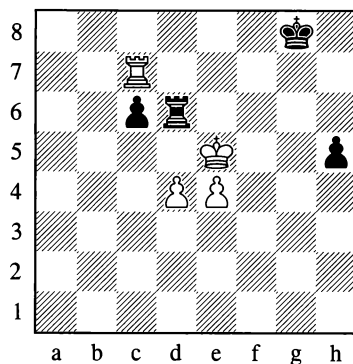
56...Qg8!

56...Qf8? 57.Bh7 We played around a few moves before he accepted that it was hopeless. Having changed his move, I gave Freddy the problem of finding the next move.

57.Qf5 Bb6!

Freddy chose 57...Bh6, when after 58.e5!, Black loses the h-pawn. One line goes: 58...h4 59.Qg5 h3 60.Qxh6 h2 61.Qg6! and White wins.

58.Qe5



58...Bg6!

Also a difficult move, not found in the first attempt.

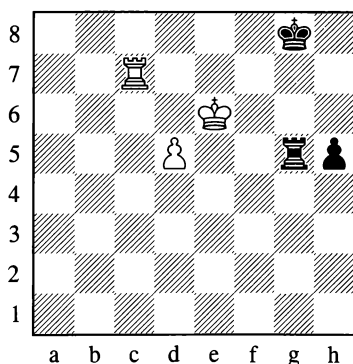
Freddy once again tried 58...Bh6?, but after looking at 59.d5 for a bit, he realised that White is winning. The pawn comes to d6 and the king goes to c6. The rook on h6 is entirely out of the game.

59.d5 cxd5 60.exd5 Bg5†!?

60...Qf8! is a Philidor draw. The text move is less practical, but still interesting to analyse.

61.Qe6

Another challenge. This time Black has two drawing moves; neither suggested by Freddy.



61...Bg3!!

The natural thing is to put the rook on g1, but in the main line below, this would lose. So, the rook is best placed here.

Also 61...Bg6†?! 62.Qf5 Ba6 63.Qe5 Ba5! 64.Qe6 Ba3! 65.d6 Be3† 66.Qd7 Bd3! holds, which is still not easy to determine for a grandmaster.

62.d6 ♖c3† 63.♙d7 ♖d3! 64.♞c5 h4

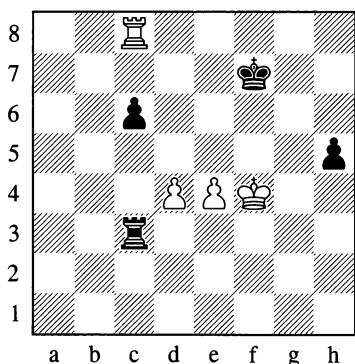
We now see that the pawn would be defended on the 3rd rank. To see more about this sort of thinking, go to the chapter on Anticipation (page 273).

65.♙c7 ♙f7 66.d7 ♙e7 67.♞e5† ♙f6 68.♞h5 ♞c3† 69.♙d8 h3

Black holds.

Having seen that 55...♞g6 holds on the computer is not enough. We need to understand why it holds – not just know the moves. We need to understand if it is repeatable. On which foundations it relies. The themes and ideas. And a good dose of realism concerning our own abilities to find or remember moves.

Incidentally, I prefer the other drawing line Black has: 55...♞c3!



When after 56.d5 ♙e7!! 57.dxc6 ♙d6 Black will be able to draw against the sole e-pawn with reasonable ease.

56.♙f5 ♞g1 57.♞c7† ♙e8 58.♞xc6

White wins.

58...h4 59.♞h6 ♞h1 60.♙e6 ♙f8 61.d5 ♙g7 62.♞f6 h3 63.e5 ♞e1 64.♞f2 ♙g6 65.♞h2 ♞e3 66.d6 ♙g5 67.d7 ♞d3 68.♞xh3 ♞xh3 69.d8=♙† ♙f4 70.♙f8†

1–0

This book is many things. It is built around simple ideas that can be understood by all and replicated. The foundation is deeply analysed games, hopefully without mistakes, but realistically, with few mistakes. Although a lot of the material in this book is advanced, the concepts explained are not. Nothing would be more complicated than navigating only by calculation. By using these themes and showing how they work with carefully chosen examples, I hope to give the reader an innate understanding of how rook endgames work. There are beautiful and amazing games and variations in this book. I love rook endings. They are no less beautiful to me than the most inspired attacking games. Still, a lot of variations have been omitted or cut short, to save trees, but also to spare the reader unnecessary headaches. I know from working with students that you can always put in more detail and everyone would want something else covered, but are indifferent to the rest. In the case of this book, I have tried to remove everything that was not a part of the story of the game, or the point I wanted to make. I hope what remains is a clarity concerning the themes and concepts.

General Concepts

Before we go into the ideas and concepts of rook endings, I want to briefly mention a few concepts which I believe anyone reading an advanced book on rook endings is already to some extent familiar with, but which it makes sense to remind you of.

Endgames are mostly about promoting pawns.

This may seem obvious, but it is often forgotten. The opening is often a fight for space, activity and structure, while the middlegame is often a fight either for technical advantages (like winning material or inflicting damage to the

opponent's structure), or based on dynamics, mainly mating attacks. In the opening and middlegame, the way you win games is either to deliver checkmate, or collect advantages to exploit in the endgame; broadly speaking. Meanwhile almost all endgames are decided by the advance and promotion of pawns. This leads to a few logical conclusions:

Passed pawns must be pushed

Such is the old adage. Obviously, there are some limitations. Again, intelligence on behalf of the receiver of such advice is expected. The further up the board a passed pawn is, the more valuable it is. If it is on the 5th rank, it has potential. If on the sixth, it requires attention. If it is on the 7th rank, it dominates the position (unless effectively blocked, as we shall see in many examples – but this still demands the full time attention of a piece). Of course, a passed pawn can be pushed too far, but in the about 1000 games I have analysed in preparation for this book, this is rare and often for extreme reasons, while a world class grandmaster not pushing the passer is something that frequently catches my eye. Throughout this book we shall look at many themes related to pawns, passed pawns, promoting passed pawns and so on, because queening pawns is the common path to success in endgames.

The defender frequently wants to exchange pawns

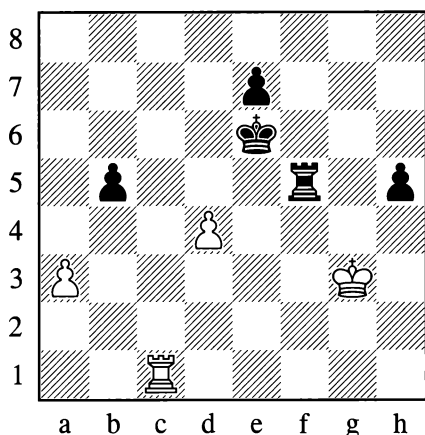
I wrote a longer chapter about exchanges in the endgame in *A Matter of Endgame Technique*, which often relates to multi-piece endings and other material distributions. One foundational idea is to give up your minor piece for the last pawn and draw automatically, a piece down. Obviously, this does not work in rook endings. But we frequently see that exchanging pawns benefits the defender nonetheless. Especially in situations where the defender loses the rook and tries to win the rook back with a passed pawn. In such situations, it is not good to have other liabilities (see Mazur – Malaniuk, page 93). Or if there are situations with multiple weaknesses, where it would be good not to lose too many pawns in the first example in this introduction, as well as Navara – Bartel, page 364 and others, where you will see this theme.

Schematic thinking

Schematic thinking is the process of thinking backwards from a goal position, rather than thinking ahead in traditional “I go there, he goes there” fashion. It can be used when we know where we are headed (could be a number of places; Swedish endgame legend Ulf Andersson would think up 15 fortresses, before you had realised it was your move). While I am generally sceptical about evaluating positions without having a concrete solution, it can be incredibly useful to think about which positions would be good for us, try to work them out in advance, and to use logic to do so. Another way to think schematically is to see what our problems are, find ways to solve them without variations, and only then apply variations.

Alexander Baburin – Sam Collins

Armstrong 2018



In the first example, White is in desperate trouble, being a full pawn down. Baburin, still Ireland's only grandmaster at the time of writing, lost to the man who will likely be Ireland's next grandmaster, seemingly without a fight.

48.♖c6† ♔d5 49.♖c5† ♔e4 50.♖c7 ♜f3†
51.♔g2 ♜xa3 52.♜b7 ♜b3 53.♔f2 h4
54.♜xe7† ♔xd4 55.♜h7 h3 56.♔e2 ♜c3
0-1

Thinking about the position logically, we can see that White has two major issues. The first is that he is a pawn down. The second is the weakness of the a3-pawn. Ideally he would like to exchange it, but ♜a1 and a3-a4 is met with ...b4, while a3-a4 immediately will just lose the pawn. It is not too great a leap from there to find:

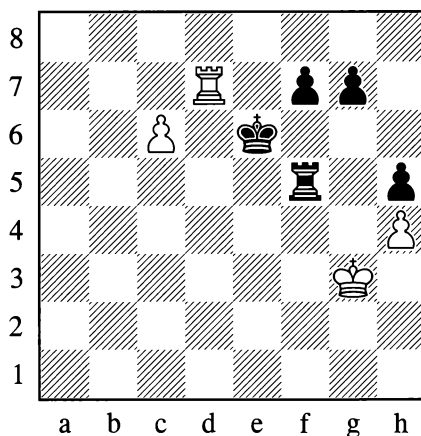
48.♜b1! ♔d6 49.♜b4! and 50.a4!, with a holdable ending.

I found the following perfect example of schematic thinking when working on *Decision Making in Major Piece Endings*, a book ghost- and co-written with Boris Gelfand,

based on his games and experiences. I gave it as an exercise to both Boris and Sam Shankland, and both struggled. Sam took an hour before he solved it, with some half-hearted suggestions from time to time. Boris solved it in a day, returning to it for ten minutes here and there, before he had to deal with kids, life and other stuff again. But impressive was GM John Shaw, the chief editor at Quality Chess, who solved it in ten minutes, while reading his morning emails and sipping coffee. Whether solving is generally easier with coffee and emails is an experiment for another time. What I believed worked was John's less concrete approach (partly based on lack of skill) of thinking logically and schematically. But before we discuss John's thinking, let's see how other suggestions have failed. The starting sequence is so logical that we can call it forced.

Gilberto Hernandez – Boris Gelfand

Merida (variation) 2003



63...♜c5

The ideal placement is behind the passed pawn (see Chapter 2).

64.♖c7 ♜c3†

For some reason everyone wants to win the tempo; but as White is not doing anything, this is not really necessary.

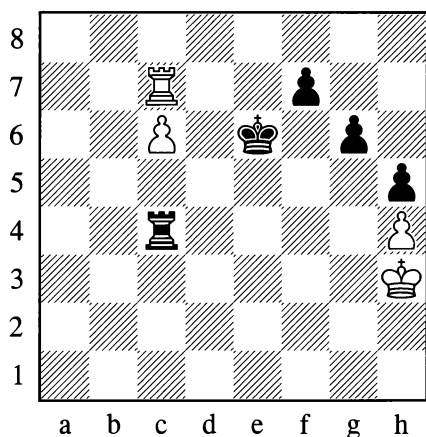
65.♟f2 ♞c4 66.♞g3

The black rook is optimally placed, aiming at both white pawns and tying down both the rook and the king. The next step is to improve the king and choose the best pawn structure. To be able to do this, it makes sense to understand what we are heading for. More below!

The most common suggestion here is to remove the pawns from the 7th rank first.

66...g6 67.♞h3

White can at least wait.

**67...f6**

The most logical continuation.

Before coming upon the strongest continuation, Sam tried regrouping the rook – a bit out of desperation. This also gives White a chance to regroup his rook, which could be better placed.

67...♞a4 68.♞d7! ♞a8

68...♞a6 makes more sense, but after 69.♞c7 ♞a8 70.♞g3 ♞f8 71.♞f4, or 70...♞e8 71.♞f4 ♞e7 72.♞b7!, White is doing fine. The king is coming to g5 next, unless Black blunders and allows 73.c7!, winning.

69.♞d3!

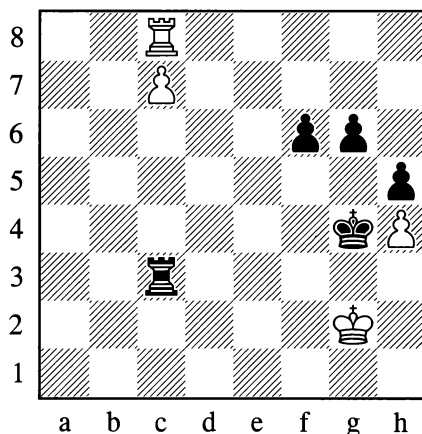
Activating the rook.

69...♞c8 70.♞e3† ♞d6 71.♞f3 ♞c7 72.♞g3 ♞xc6 73.♞f6† ♞d5 74.♞f4

Black cannot easily make progress. White holds.

68.♞c8 ♞f5

Black is ready to check on the 3rd rank and bring in the king. Sadly, White has a defence.

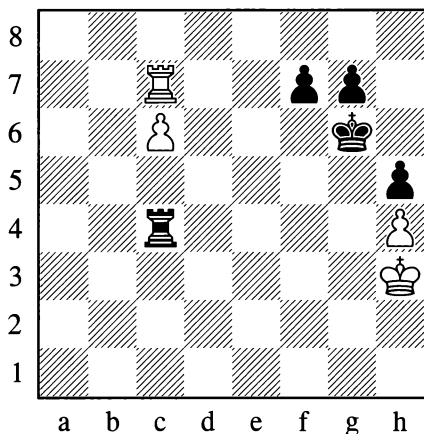
69.c7! ♞c3† 70.♞g2 ♞g4**71.♞g8!**

White holds in this theoretical endgame. Especially if he has read the excellent explanation by Sam Shankland in *Theoretical Rook Endgames*.

Returning to John's schematic thinking, there were a few elements, all constructed from a base knowledge of the endgame theory. First of all, he wanted to avoid the theoretically drawn endgame with the f- and h-pawn. So, holding on to his g-pawn was essential. Secondly, he knew that the endgame with the h- and g-pawn advancing was winning. So, looking at the white defensive idea, he understood that if his pieces were differently placed, the position was winning easily. Essentially, he wanted to play ...f6 and ...g5 without having to worry about the g-pawn. And he did not want to play ...g6 first, for reasons we have seen above.

Understanding that White is only waiting, he improved his position to the maximum before acting.

66...♙f6! 67.♙h3 ♙g6



68.♙g3 f6

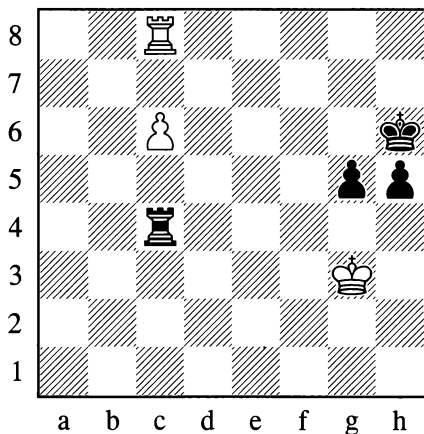
Played without dropping or moving the g-pawn.

69.♙h3

White can only wait.

The key point with keeping the pawn on g7 is that after 69.♙c8 ♙f5! 70.c7 ♙c3† 71.♙g2 ♙g4 72.♙g8 ♙xc7 the rook defends the pawn.

69...♙h6 70.♙g3 g5 71.hxg5† fxg5 72.♙c8



72...♙h7!

Knowing your endgame theory is helpful. The king needs to leave the g7-square for the rook. This did not have to happen on this move, but knowing it means we can do it right away.

73.c7 ♙c3† 74.♙g2 h4 75.♙g1 g4 76.♙a8

White can of course wait and hope Black will put the king on g7, but it is unlikely to happen.

76...♙xc7 77.♙a4 ♙g7

Black wins.

If I had shown you this example without telling you that two top players had spent an hour each finding the winning continuation, would you have seen it as entirely obvious? I think you would. Logic has that effect on people; once we understand it, we cannot emotionally return to the emotional place where we did not understand it.

The last game of this introduction is once again one of the most remarkable rook endings I have seen – as well as played between Navara and Sarana. This time David won, but only after remarkable events.

David Navara – Alexey Sarana

Belgrade 2022

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 d5 4.♘c3 ♙b4 5.♙a4† ♘c6 6.e3 0–0 7.♙c2 ♙e8 8.♙d2 ♙f8 9.a3 e5 10.dxe5 ♘xe5 11.cxd5 ♘xf3† 12.gxf3 ♘xd5 13.h4 ♘xc3 14.♙xc3 ♙d5 15.♙a4 ♙d7 16.♙f4 ♙d6 17.♙c4 ♙xf4 18.♙xd5 c6 19.♙e4 ♙h6?

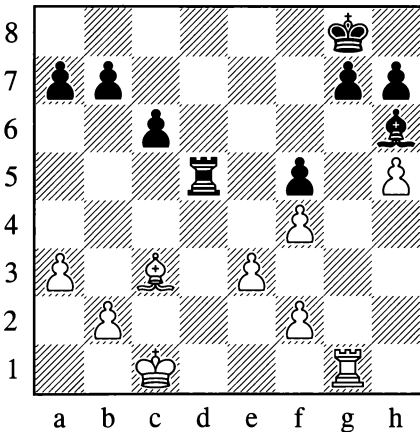
I presume this was meant as an ambitious decision, as otherwise it is just plain stupid (and grandmasters are usually only stupid on an advanced, not a plain, level).

The foundational rule on exchanges is that you want to exchange the opponent's good pieces for your inferior ones. In this case, this means 19...♙e5 and Black would have been fine.

20.0–0–0 ♖ad8 21.h5

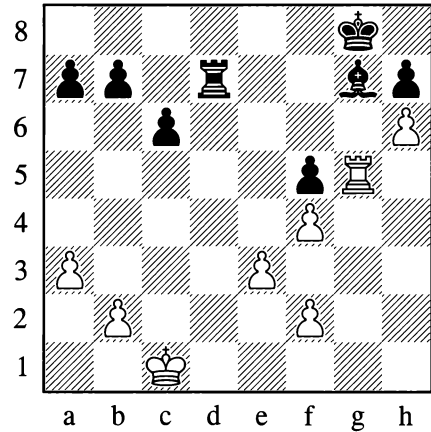
Black is under some pressure.

21...♙e6 22.♖xd8 ♖xd8 23.f4 f5 24.♙c2
♙d5 25.♖g1 ♙e4 26.♙b3† ♙d5 27.♙xd5†
♖xd5



This need not be a critical moment of the game, as White could have improved his position with 28.♙c2 and slowly advancing. The bishop on h6 is still stupid and White is better, but if it is enough to win is far from clear. Black has a plan of ...♙f7, ...♖d7 and ...g6, to bring the bishop back in the game. White can delay this by putting his rook on h1, but then it will also be sort of stuck there. It is certainly possible for White to develop active plans in that direction too. But on the other hand, he has a tempting option now that he must either take or forever let go. Navara decided to take it.

28.♙xg7!? ♙xg7 29.h6 ♖d7 30.♖g5



Our key moment of interest. What is the first thing you notice? For me it is the distant passed pawn Black would have in a pawn ending on both sides of the board and by default win all pawn endings. The second I see is that the pawn ending will not happen. White is planning to take on g7 and f5. We can look ahead and see that White is quite happy to lose both the f2-pawn and b2-pawn in return for taking the f-pawn, as the connected pawns in the centre would be powerful. Especially if they are supported by the king. The outlook is bleak and we have to start being creative.

30...♙h8?

An understandable move, which sadly happens to be losing.

The question that could have saved the game was: how will White actually win this position if Black does nothing? He will obviously want to take on g7 and f5, but we are not forced to give up the f-pawn. So, the white king will have to come up through the centre. But this can be blocked:

30...c5!! 31.hxg7

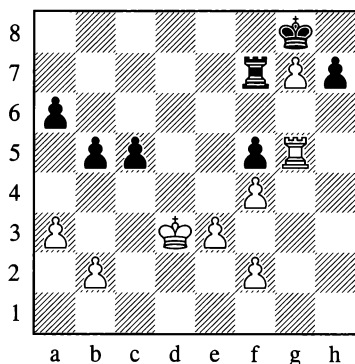
The natural continuation.

31.♙c2 is met with 31...b5.

If White plays 31.b4, Black will take on b4 and create a passed pawn with ...b6 and

...a5, creating enough counterplay on the queenside. An attempt to run through with the king in the centre would see the pawn running and supported by ...♞f7-a7 (or ...♞f6-a6), forcing the white rook to go to a1 to stop the pawn. Then the h-pawn would become a major asset and White will feel lucky he is not losing.

31...♞f7! 32.♠d2 b5 33.♠d3 a6



Black has set up a fortress. The rook will be able to oscillate between f7 and f6 and if the white king ever makes it to g3, Black will be able to play ...h6 and either win the pawn ending, or reply to ♞g5-h5 with ...♞f6 (if on f7) and ...♠xg7. White can also attempt to break through in the centre with the king, but it holds considerable risk and little chance of reward.

34.b4!? c4† 35.♠d4 ♞d7† 36.♠e5 c3 37.♞g1 c2 38.♞c1 ♞d2 39.f3 ♠xg7 40.♠xf5 ♠f7

Black will draw, unless White blunders.

41.e4?

The king needed to go to the g-file.

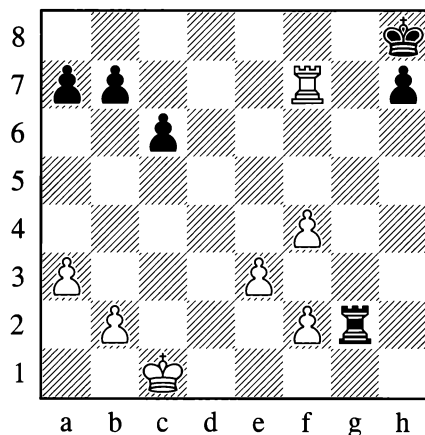
41...♞g2

Now it cannot. Black wins.

30...♞f7? does not work. White will be able to quickly invade through the d-file, as he does not have to spend a move on hxg7 just yet.

31.hxg7† ♞xg7 32.♞xf5 ♞g2 33.♞f7?

An innocuous mistake, allowing a truly unbelievable defensive opportunity. White had a lot of winning continuations. I like 33.f3!, which is exactly what Navara did when faced with this position again on move 37.



33...♞g7?

Black would also lose after 33...h5? 34.♞f5 ♞h2 35.♠d2 ♞xf2† 36.♠d3 ♞h2 37.e4 and we know what is happening.

The strongest continuation was:

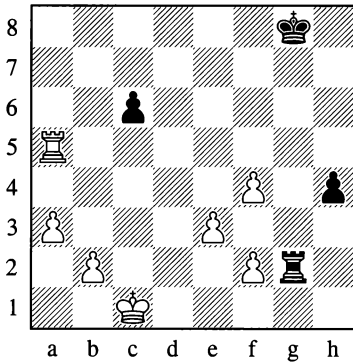
33...♠g8!! 34.♞xb7

34.♞f5 ♞xf2 is a wildly different situation than the game. Black is no worse. The white king is passive and the black king is in the game. If White goes e3-e4, Black has ...h5 with equality.

34...h5 35.♠d1!

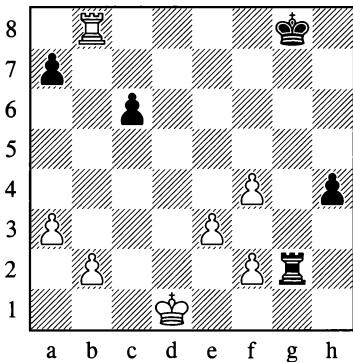
The best try.

A big part of me wants 35.♞xa7 to be the main line, as it holds the key idea of the defence. But it is so short and perfect! 35...h4 36.♞a5



36...Rg7!! Rook behind the passed pawn, which you will see a lot of soon enough and which was the one concept you definitely knew about already. 37.Rh5 R7 38.Rg5+ Rg7 With a draw by repetition. Ironically, this position would be winning for White, if the king was on b1, as R5-c1-h1 would be too many extra pawns.

35...h4 36.Rb8+



36...Rh7!!

36...Rh7? would be a mistake. The f-pawn will quickly give a check (after 37.Rh2!), winning a tempo that will force the king off the defence of the h-file.

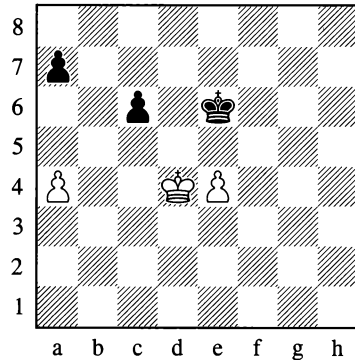
37.f5!?

Trying anyway.

37.Rh2 h3 would leave White with only 38.Rb7+ Rh6 39.Rb8 with a repetition of moves.

37...Rxf2 38.Rb4 Rh2

Generally, in this book I have avoided long variations, but here we will make an exception and give the variation till the end. 39.Rg4 h3 40.Rg3 Rh6 41.f6 Rxb2 42.Rxh3+ Rh6 43.Rf3 Rh7 44.e4 Rb5 45.Rd2 Re5 46.Rc3 Re6 47.Rd4 Rxf6 48.Rxf6+ Rh6 49.a4 Rh6



50.a5 Rh6 51.a6 Rh6 52.Rc5 Rh7 53.e5 Rh6 54.Rxc6 Rh5 55.Rb7 Rh6 56.Rxa7 Rh7 57.Ra8 Rh8 58.a7 Rh7

Stalemate!

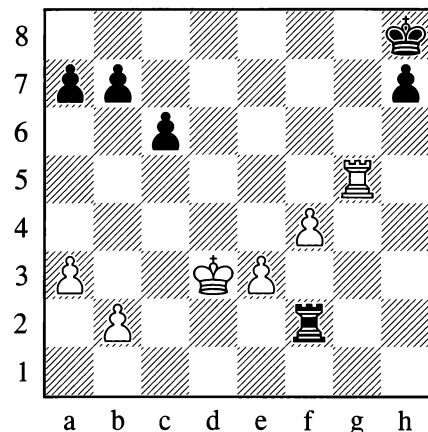
34.Rf8+ Rg8 35.Rf7 Rg7 36.Rf5

No draw!

36...Rg2 37.f3! Rf2 38.Rg5 Rxf3

Black cannot allow Rg5-g3 followed by the f-pawn advancing.

39.Rd2 Rf2+ 40.Rd3

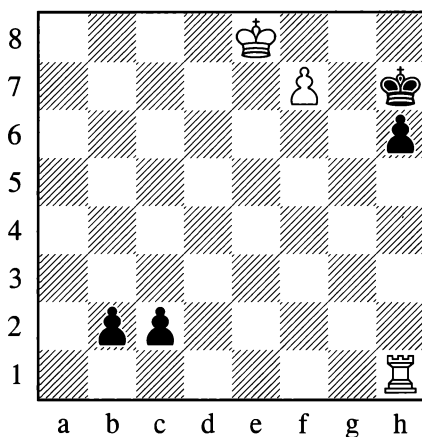


40...h6

40...♖xb2 41.e4 would be totally winning for White, as the black king is cut off and the connected passed pawns will pound down the board with tremendous force.

41.♞g1 a5 42.♙e4 ♜xb2 43.f5 b5 44.f6 ♞f2
45.♙e5 b4 46.axb4 axb4 47.e4 b3 48.♙e6
b2 49.e5 c5 50.♙f7 ♞g2 51.♞h1 ♙h7
51...♞h2 52.♞xh2!

52.e6 c4 53.e7 ♞e2 54.e8=♚ ♞xe8 55.♙xe8
c3 56.f7 c2

**57.♞xh6†!**

Queening the pawn also wins, but this is simpler.

1-0

You will see versions of the ideas covered in this introduction throughout the book. They are foundational for all endings and important to not just know and understand, but to feel in your bones.

Chapter 1

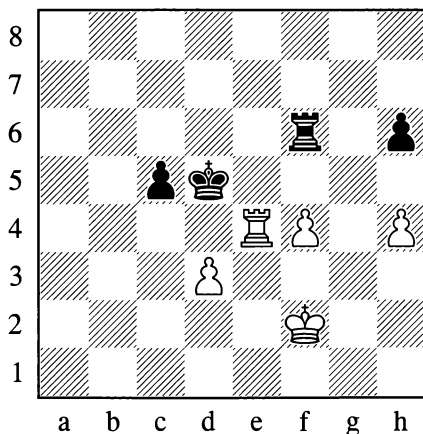
Activate the Rook First

A sound endgame idea that has been about for around a hundred years is that with few pieces on the board, it is important to get the most out of your most powerful piece. In the rook endgame, this is the rook (the rook can dominate the king, the king cannot dominate the rook), which is why both Mednis and Dvoretsky were talking warmly about the idea of “activate the rook first”, which is probably the smartest thing said about rook endings. The first thing you should look at in a rook ending is how to get your rook to work more.

Before we go to concrete examples, we should probably define active and passive. Active means: attacking, threatening, proactive, with more choice and ability to dictate events. Passive means: defending, protecting, reactive, with less choice and freedom. Active is the first choice of all, but at times things are worth defending or defending against. In a lot of rook endings, it is worth giving up a pawn in order to get active. While in others it would be a horrible mistake. We shall see more examples of it being clever in this book, but this does not mean that you should freely throw your pawns into the fire. Rather, you should look for active options, even when they cost material, and consider if the outcome of the variations you see is better than the alternatives.

Avital Boruchovsky – Erez Kupervaser

Israel 2022



Black could have held the draw in two ways.

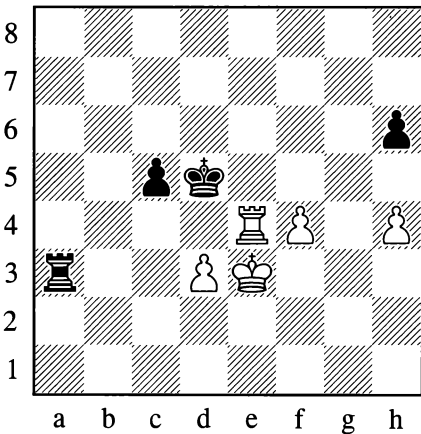
The first would have been 49...♖g6! followed by ...♖g4 and the activity of the rook would make the rest of the game easy for Black.

Another would be 49...♖f8, with the idea 50.♔e3 ♕d6 51.♖e5 ♖c8! with the idea ...c5-c4, making the draw with a considerably smaller margin. In both cases, the draw was secured by the rook doing all the lifting.

49...♖a6? 50.♔e3! ♖a3

Following up on the previous move is the logical move, offering White the most challenges.

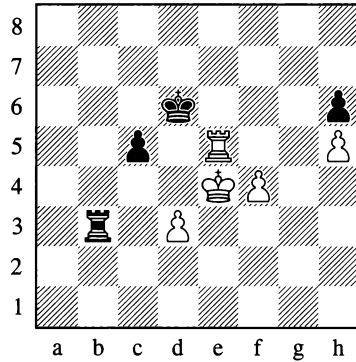
50...♖g6 would come too late. After 51.♖e5† ♕d6 52.♔e4 White has managed to push the black king backwards, making it too late for Black to seek activity.



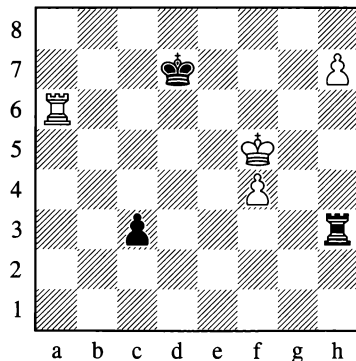
51.f5?

Jumping the gun! One of the fundamentals of endgame play is to understand when your opponent is unable to improve his position and you thus should be strengthening yours to the maximum before you take the game from the build-up phase to a time of consequences.

51.h5! would have secured an important tempo down the road. Black has no activity of his own and can either choose to seek a different avenue with the rook, or wait. If he waits, White wins because the h-pawn is further advanced in the coming race: 51...♖b3 52.♖e5† ♕d6 53.♔e4

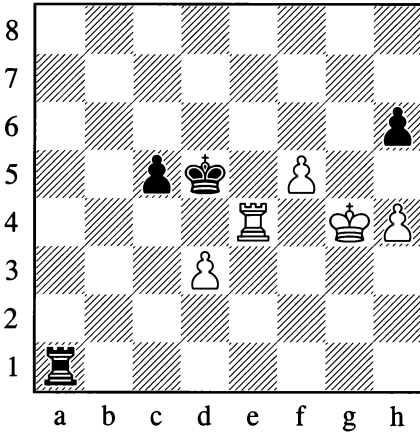


Threatening ♖e5-d5† followed by ♔e4-e5, and ♖d5-d6†. Active play comes too late. The following variation is a logical way for White to play. 53...♖b4† 54.♔f5 ♖d4 55.♖e6† ♕d7 56.♖xh6 ♖xd3 57.♖a6 c4 58.h6 ♖h3 59.h7 c3



60.♖a3 ♕d6 61.♖xc3 ♖xh7 62.♖e3 White wins, as the black rook is too close to be able to give checks from the front (see Defence from the Front on page 171).

51...♖a6 52.♔f4 ♖a1 53.♔g4



53...♖f1?

We will talk about putting the rook behind the passed pawn later. Here it is done a bit too automatically, as all it achieves is to attract the white rook to the same position.

Black had the chance to block the f-pawn in an oddly convenient way from the f6-square. 53...♖a6! White is unable to make significant progress. And if White plays 54.♔f4, Black can keep the rook active with 54...♖a1!. Black will draw after something like 55.♖e8 ♖f1† 56.♔g4 ♔d4! 57.♖d8† ♔e5! and although White can still pose Black some problems, the draw is not far away.

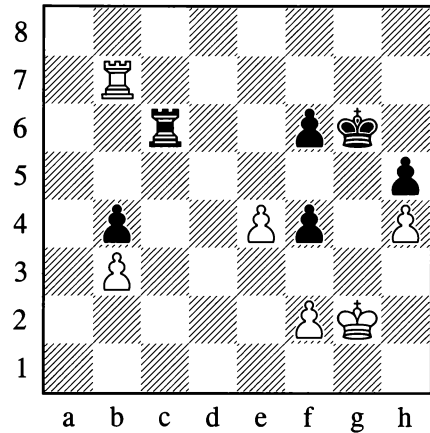
54.♖f4 ♖g1† 55.♔h5 ♔e5 56.f6!

Black resigned.

1–0

Vincent Keymer – Nodirbek Abdusattorov

Internet 2022

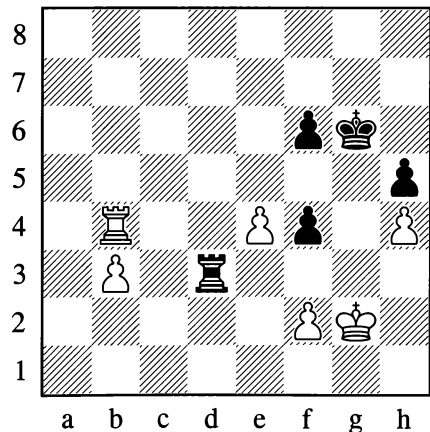


Black is in desperate trouble and about to lose a pawn. In the game the Rapid World Champion of the time had limited time to find the way to activate his rook.

56...♖c3?

Trying to place the rook in an active place, but failing.

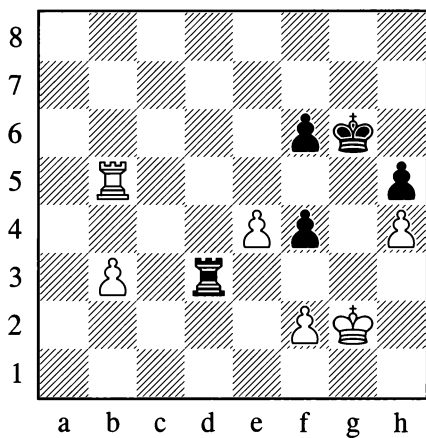
57.♖xb4 ♖d3



58.♖b5?

A logical-looking move, but this misses the chance to win an important tempo.

58.♖b6! would have threatened e4-e5. After 58...♔f7 59.b4 ♖b3 60.b5 White is winning. He will play 61.♖b8 and advance the b-pawn. Black can scoop up the b-pawn, but either the white rook will ravish the kingside, or a pawn ending will occur, where the black king is desperately far away on the queenside.



58...♖c3?

Passive play, giving White another chance.

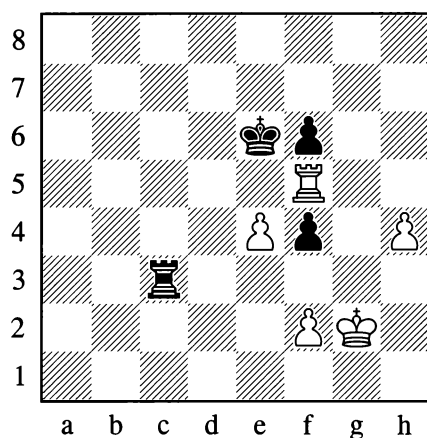
Abdusattorov was given a second chance to activate the rook with: 58...♖d4! 59.♔f3 Other concessions are also concessions (see what I did there?). 59...♖d3† 60.♔xf4 ♖h3 and Black is back within the drawing margin for reasons elaborated below.

59.♖b6 ♔f7 60.♖b7† ♔e6!?

Trying to activate the king, but this comes at a price.

60...♔g6 61.b4 did not look appealing either. The black king is out of play.

61.♖b5! ♖d3 62.♖xh5 ♖xb3 63.♖f5 ♖c3



64.h5!

The simplest way to exploit the material advantage is to push the passed pawn and head for a winning pawn endgame.

64.♖xf4? would be greedy and misplaced. 64...♔e5 65.♖g4 f5! would allow Black to escape with a narrow draw in a theoretical endgame.

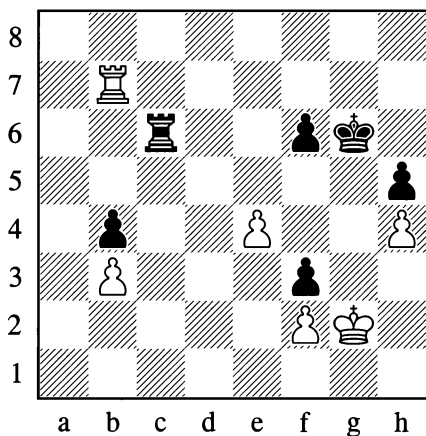
64...♖b3

White concluded the game in convincing style.

65.h6 ♔f7 66.e5 ♔e6 67.♖h5 ♖b8 68.h7 ♖h8 69.exf6 ♔xf6 70.♔f3 ♔g6 71.♔g4 f3 72.♖h3 ♔g7 73.♖h2 ♔g6 74.♔xf3 ♔g7 75.♔g4 ♔g6 76.♖h3 ♔f6 77.♖h6† ♔f7 78.♔g5 ♔g7 79.f4 ♔f7 80.♖h1 ♔g7 81.f5 1-0

If we return to the starting position, we may spot that a combination of tactics and strong dedication to keeping the rook active would be enough to make the draw. But only just!

56...f3†!



57.♔g3

White is not interested in exchanging pawns.

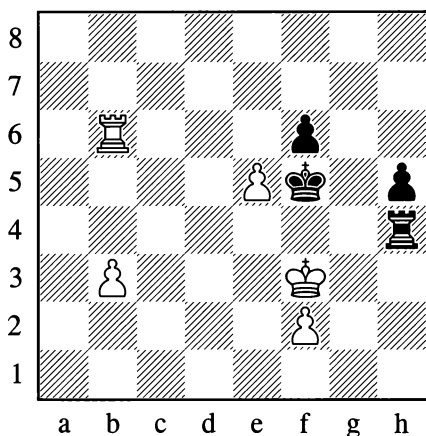
57...♖c1! 58.♖xb4 ♖g1† 59.♔xf3 ♖g4

Black wins the h-pawn and although he is a pawn down, he has reasons to be happy. His rook is active and soon he will have a passed pawn of his own with which he can create counterplay.

60.♖b6 ♖xh4!

Black is relying fully on activity.

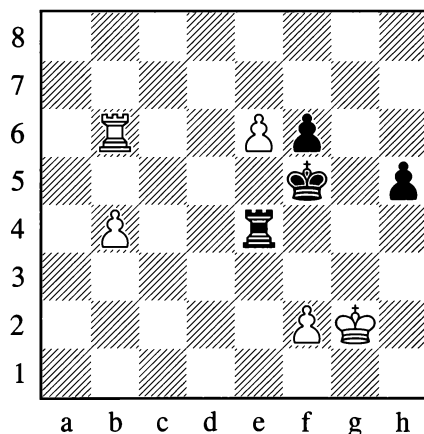
61.e5 ♕f5!



62.e6

62.exf6 ♖f4† followed by another check and ...♖f4(†), the moment the white king goes to the d- or h-file, as well as f1. White may be able to push the pawn to b5, but thereafter he will be unable to make progress without giving up one of his passed pawns, which defies the purpose.

62...♖f4† 63.♔g2 ♖e4 64.b4



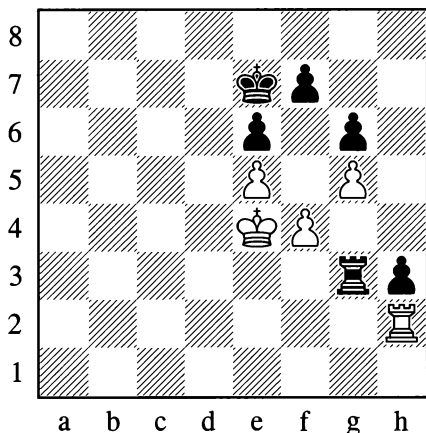
64...♔g5!

Black will play ...f5 and ...♔f6, securing the draw after probably a good deal more moves. The star behind this result would be the active black rook.

The next example, from the World Rapid Championship, was presumably played with limited time on the clock. White chose to play passively and lost without a fight.

**Maxime Vachier-Lagrave –
Rustam Kasimdzhanov**

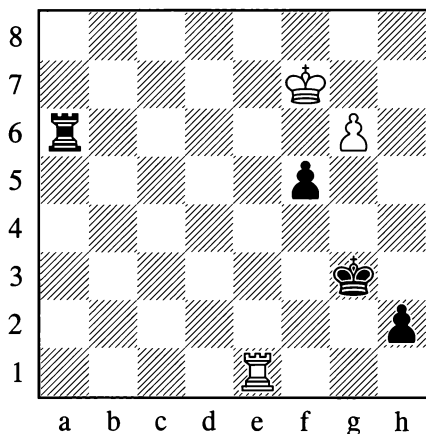
Berlin (rapid) 2015



61.♖h1? ♕d7 62.♕d4 ♕c6 63.♖c1† ♕b5
64.♖b1† ♕a4 65.♕c4 ♕a3 66.♖h1 ♕b2
67.♕c5 ♖d3 68.♕c4 ♖f3 69.♕c5 ♕c3
70.♕d6 ♕d4 71.f5 gxf5 72.♕e7 ♕xe5
73.♕xf7 ♖a3 74.♖e1† ♕f4 75.g6 ♖a7†

75...h2 76.g7 ♖a7† was perhaps a bit more accurate, but the game is good enough.

76.♕xe6 h2 77.♖h1 ♖a6† 78.♕f7 ♕g3
79.♖e1



79...♖xg6 80.♕xg6 f4 81.♕f5 f3 82.♕e4 f2
83.♖h1 ♕g2 84.♕e3 f1=♖
0-1

Activating the rook would have made the draw.

61.♖a2!

Black can try a number of things, but none of them appear as critical as...

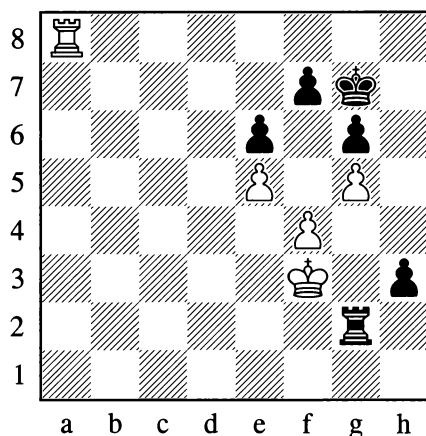
61...♖g2

...although White's path to a draw is quite simple.

62.♖a7† ♕f8

The king cannot go to the queenside. White takes the f7-pawn and also picks up the black h-pawn, after which Black will be on the defensive.

63.♖a8† ♕g7 64.♕f3



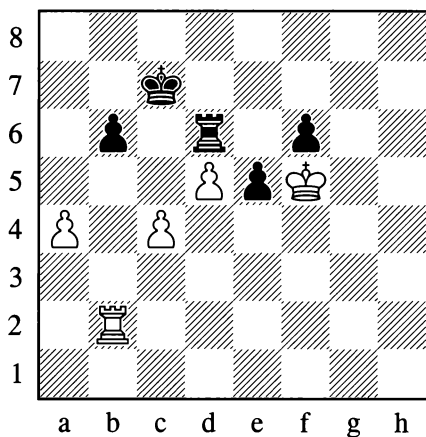
Black cannot avoid losing the h-pawn, if he wants to get the king out of the corner.

64...♖b2 65.♕g3 h2 66.♖a1

White picks up the h-pawn in good time before the black king can enter the game.

Brandon Jacobson – Christopher Yoo

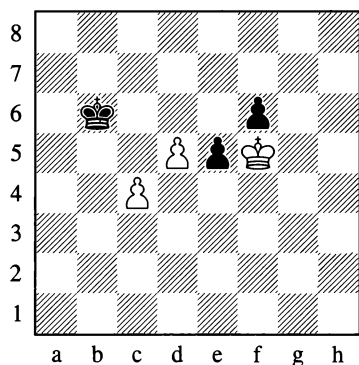
Charlotte 2019



This fight between two young American IMs, both close to achieving the grandmaster title, ended abruptly with a transition into a pawn ending in White's favour.

69...♙b7? 70.a5 ♕c7 71.♞xb6 ♞xb6 72.♙xb6 ♕b7

Black has no moves, once he sees: 72...♙xb6



73.d6 ♕c6 74.♕e6 and the pawn queens.

73.c5 ♕a6 74.d6

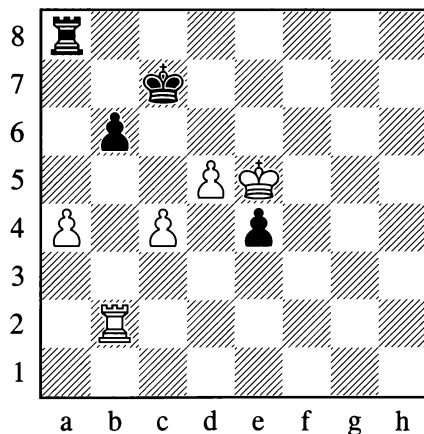
1–0

As in the previous example, Black was able to give up a pawn in return for activating his rook, reaching a simplified version of the endgame, where the black king would control the white d-pawn and the b-pawn would control the c-pawn.

69...♞d8! 70.♕xf6 e4

After 70...♞e8? 71.♕f7! ♞a8 72.♕e7, Black would lose the fight for the d6-square and have to deactivate the rook in order not to lose on the spot, bringing into question why he gave up a pawn in the first place.

71.♕e5 ♞a8!



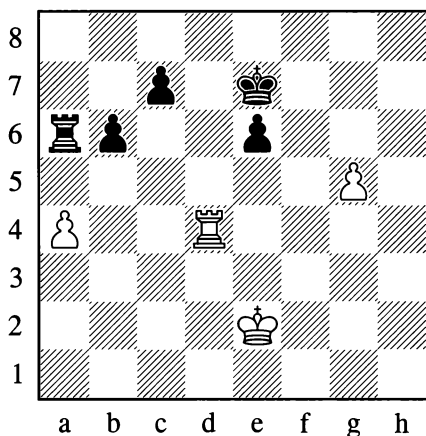
With the exchange of pawns, now or in a few moves, Black will reach an endgame where his active rook will be enough to hold an easy draw.

The next two games are more complex, and the role of active and passive rooks is crucial.

The first sees the great Russian Grandmaster Rakhmanov outplay an IM in the open Russian Championship.

Bogdan Belyakov – Aleksandr Rakhmanov

Sochi 2020



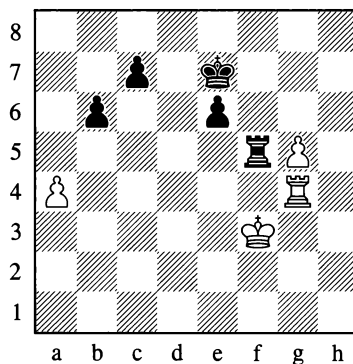
44...♞a5! 45.♞g4?!

A natural move, which could have been the first step towards losing the game.

45.♞c4! would have been stronger, harassing the c-pawn. After 45...♙d6 46.♞g4 ♙e5 47.g6 ♞a8, active play with the rook leads to the exchange of pawns needed to secure the draw. 48.♞c4 c5 49.♞g4 ♙f5 50.♞g1! ♞g8 51.♞b1 with a draw on the horizon.

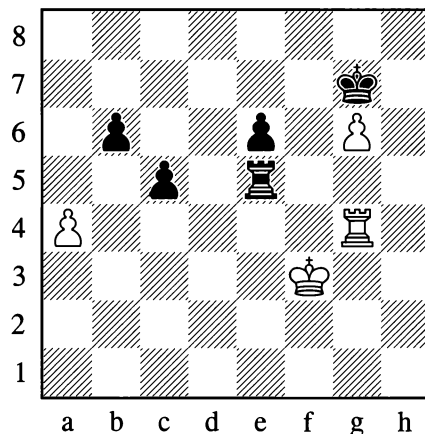
45...♙f7!?

Another way to make life difficult for White would be: 45...♞e5†!? 46.♙f3 ♞f5†



White would lose after normal play such as 47.♙e4 ♙f7, but can make a draw based on rook activity with: 47.♙e3! ♙f7 48.♞d4! ♙g6 49.♞e4 with a coming exchange of pawns.

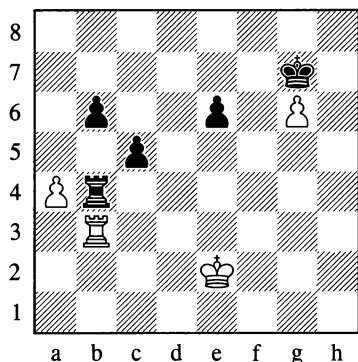
46.g6† ♙g7 47.♞e4 ♙f6 48.♞c4 ♞e5† 49.♙f3 c5 50.♞g4 ♙g7



White is under a lot of pressure and fails to find the only move.

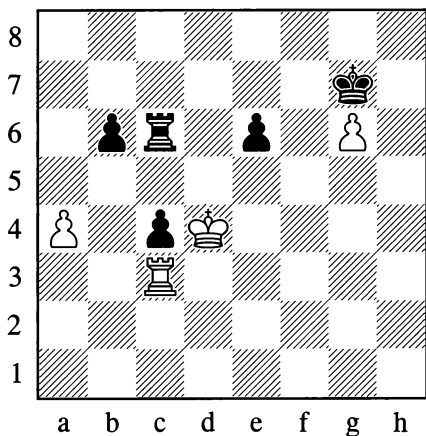
51.♞g1?

51.♞g3!! This move looks so weird, it can damage your iris and pupil if you stare at it too long. The point becomes clear after: 51...♞d5 52.♙e2 ♞d4 53.♞b3 ♞b4



We can see that the king is not in the way of the rook remaining active with 54. Rxe3!, holding the draw. This would not work with the rook shuffling on the 1st rank, where the white king would be in the way.

51... Rxd5 52. Qe4 Rxd6 53. Rg3 c4 54. Rxc3 Rxc6 55. Qd4



55... Qxg6

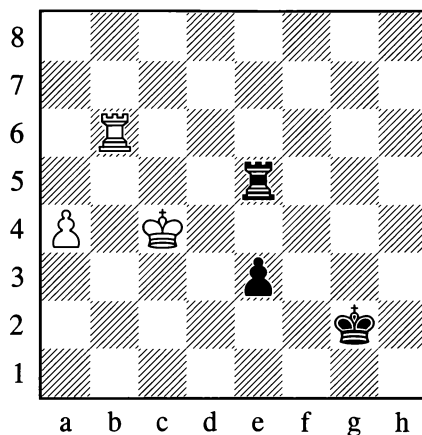
Good enough to win, but making it a bit of a task.

A waiting move would have made the win much easier. 55... Rxc5! would be a good choice.

56. Rg3+ Qf5 57. Qc3 e5 58. Rf3+ Qe4 59. Rf1 Rxc5 60. Rb1 Ra5 61. Re1+ Qf3 62. Qb4 e4 63. Rf1+ Qg2 64. Rf6 e3 65. Rxb6 Re5

65... e2!? 66. Rxe6 Qf2 67. Qxa5 c3 would also win.

66. Qxc4



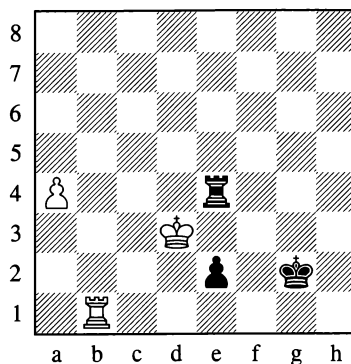
66... Rxe4!

See Chapter 9, page 143, on the importance of checks in rook endgames. Here the white king is pushed back, as the other choices of losing the a-pawn, or blocking the retreat route for the rook, are unattractive.

66... e2? 67. Rb1 would allow White to escape.

67. Qd3 e2 68. Rg6+

White could have tried 68. Rb1!?, when Black needs to win a tempo getting the king closer to the queenside, where the final race focused on catching the white a-pawn will take place.

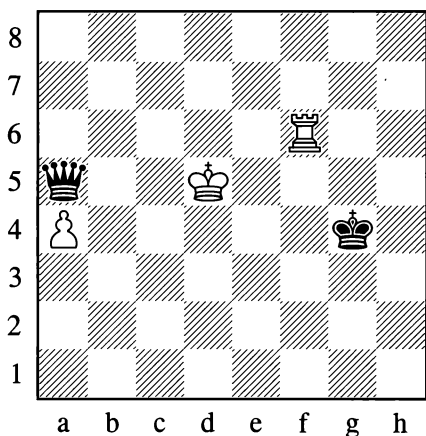


Here 68...e1=♚? would throw away the win. After 69.♖xe1 ♖xe1 70.♔c4! White is in time to make the draw. This sort of race we shall look more at in Chapter 2.

Correct is: 68...♔f3! 69.♖a1 White loses a tempo. (69.♖e1 would lose to 69...♖xa4, as the e-pawn is defended by tactics.) 69...e1=♚ 70.♖xe1 ♖xe1 71.♔c4 ♔e4 72.a5 ♖a1 Black is in time and wins.

68...♔f3 69.♖f6† ♔g4 70.♔xe4 e1=♚† 71.♔d5 ♖a5†

Black won this theoretical ending, which is a good deal more difficult to do against the best defence than most would think. Personally, I have won two out of the three times I have reached it.

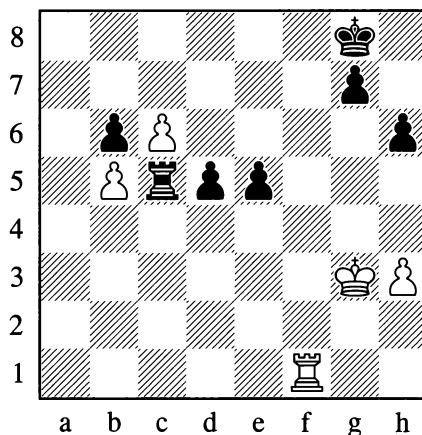


72.♔e6 ♔g5 73.♖f8 ♖b6† 74.♔d7 ♖b7†
 75.♔e6 ♖c6† 76.♔e7 ♔g6 77.a5 ♖c5†
 78.♔e8 ♖c7 79.a6 ♔g7 80.♖f1 ♖c8†
 81.♔e7 ♖c5† 82.♔d8 ♖d6† 83.♔e8 ♖e6†
 84.♔d8 ♖xa6 85.♖c1 ♖a5† 86.♔c8 ♔f7
 87.♖c6 ♔e7 88.♔b7 ♔d7 89.♖b6 ♖d5†
 90.♔b8 ♖e4 91.♖b5 ♔c6 92.♖b7 ♖e8†
 93.♔a7 ♖d8 94.♖h7 ♖a5† 95.♔b8 ♖b4†
 96.♔a7 ♖a3† 97.♔b8 ♖b3†
 0-1

The next example is a good illustration of how big the drawing margin can be in rook endings.

Piotr Murdzia – Radoslaw Psyk

Poland 2022



Another situation where activating the rook would have saved the draw – yet only with precise play. There is a lot wrong with the white position.

To start somewhere, he is down two pawns, the b5-pawn is under threat, (although it cannot be taken immediately, it would be catastrophic for White to get forced to defend the pawn passively from b1) and the two connected black pawns have a majestic potential. But there are also some plusses.

First of all, the strong pawn on c6, which, if even just for the moment, is safely guarded by the b5-pawn. The king is better placed than that of the opponent too.

All in all, there is still time to act, if only it is done now. Throughout this game we shall see how White gets in trouble because he does not make his rook work up to its full potential.

54.♔g4?

Trying to activate the wrong piece!

54.♖a1!

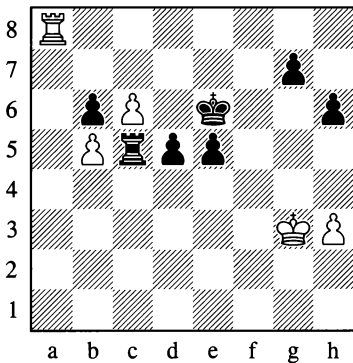
This was the only move. The b-pawn remains immune for the moment and if allowed, White will use this to his advantage and play ♖a6xb6 next, when Black's extra pawn on the kingside is too far back to play a decisive role in events.

54...♔f7

Stepping out of the 8th rank check (followed by c6-c7-c8=♚ under the right circumstances).

55.♖a8! ♕e6

55...d4 56.♔f3 would also hold. The king is meant to keep an eye on the black pawn combo.



56.♖b8!

White wins the b6-pawn and secures a draw.

The key variation is:

56...d4 57.♖xb6 ♕d5 58.♖b8 ♕e4 59.♖e8 d3 60.♔f2!

The king comes down to block the pawns and Black should take the draw before less is offered.

54...g6 55.h4

55.♖a1 no longer works, as White is lacking the ♔f2-e1 manoeuvre at the end.

55...d4 56.h5 ♔g7?

Caring about the wrong pawn.

56...e4! 57.hxg6 d3! would exploit the position of the white pieces to eliminate the white queenside pawns. White is missing the X...♖xb5 Y.♖c1 resource, due to Y...d2.

57.hxg6?

57.♖g1!

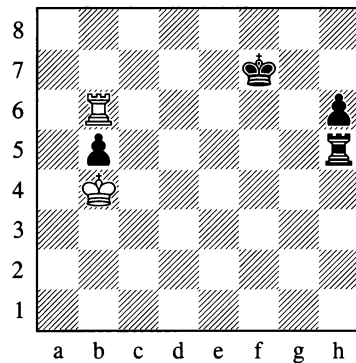
With the idea 58.♔f4 or 58.♔f3 with a gain of tempo, would have saved the game.

57...e4

This remains the critical try.

57...g5 58.♔f5! with ♖a1-a7† on the cards also gives White enough counterplay. 57...♖c3!? Trying to control the white king. 58.♖e1 gxh5† (58...♔f6 59.♖f1† with repetition) 59.♔f5 White has enough counterplay to make the draw.

58.♔f4 e3 59.♖xg6† ♔f7 60.♖g2 ♔e7 61.♔e4 ♖xb5 62.♔xd4 ♔d6 63.♔xe3 ♖xh5 64.♖g6† ♔c7 65.♔d4 b5 66.♖f6 ♔b6 67.♖g6 ♖h4† 68.♔d5 ♖h1 69.c7† ♔xc7 70.♔c5 ♖h5† 71.♔b4 ♔d7 72.♖a6 ♔e7 73.♖b6 ♔f7

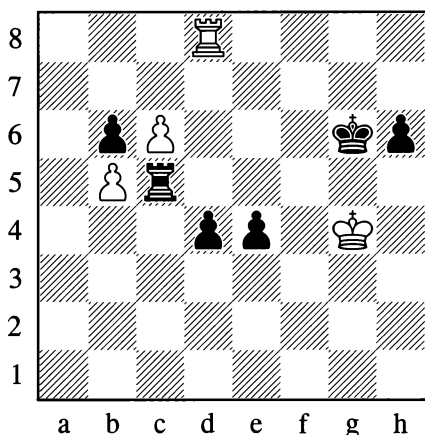


74.♔c3!

Keeping the king close enough to be able to exchange rooks on h5, as well as to hold the pawn-down rook ending.

74.♖a6? would lose to 74...♔g7 75.♖a7† ♔g6 76.♖a6† ♔f5 77.♔xb5 ♖h3!! 78.♔c4 h5 79.♔d4 h4 80.♖a8 ♖f3 and the white king is cut off for long enough to give Black the win.

57...♔xg6 58.♖f8 e4 59.♖d8



59...♔f6?

Played to avoid an annoying check on d6, but loses an important tempo.

59...h5†!

This was the winning move. The reason is simple: in the lines that follow, the pawn is no longer hanging on h6.

60.♔f4 e3 61.♞d6†

After 61.♔f3 Black's only obligation is not to panic. With 61...♞c4! he is able to keep his two pawn advantage. More moves can be made, including mistakes, but with decent play, Black should win.

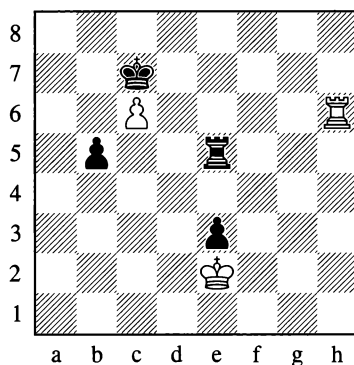
61...♔f7 62.♔f3

62.♞xd4 loses to 62...e2 63.♞e4 ♞c4!.

62...♞xb5 63.♞xd4 ♞c5

Black has achieved control, but converting the two pawn advantage can still go wrong, as the e-pawn is closely defended by the white king. The following line is not the only win, but it makes a lot of sense.

64.♞d6 ♔e7 65.♞h6 ♞e5! 66.♔e2 ♔d8
67.♞h7 b5 68.♞b7 h4 69.♞h7 h3 70.♞xh3
♔c7 71.♞h6



71...♞e8!

Sooner or later the rook has to focus on pushing the strongest pawn.

72.♞g6 b4 73.♞g4 b3 74.♞g1

74.♞b4 ♞b8 and Black wins.

74...♔xc6 75.♞b1 ♞b8 76.♔xe3 ♔c5 77.♔d3
♔b4

Black wins by a tempo; not that the win was close!

60.♔f4??

Presumably short on time, White missed the random chance 60.♞xd4, when the h6-pawn is hanging in the key lines.

60...e3 61.♔f3 ♔e5 62.♞b8 ♔d6 63.♞xb6

Losing fast, but White was going down slowly otherwise.

63...♞f5† 64.♔e2 ♞f2† 65.♔d3 ♞d2†
66.♔c4 e2 67.♔c7 ♔xc7 68.♞e6 d3

0-1

Chapter 2

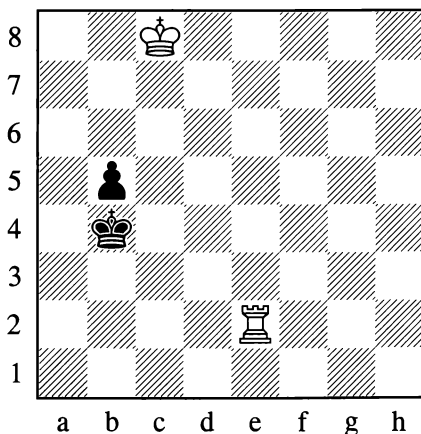
The Rook belongs behind the Passed Pawn

Dr Tarrasch's most famous quote is that "all rook endings are drawn", which must have been said in jest and is low on content. While it is true that rook endings have a higher drawing tendency than pawn or minor piece endings, they have a lower drawing tendency than opposite-coloured bishop endings and queen endings. I am a far greater fan of his second most famous quote, that "the rook belongs behind the passed pawn".

Not only is this strategically sound advice, it is also economically phrased. Saying nothing about attacking, defending or other circumstances, it manages to encompass all scenarios and be on point at the same time. The advice is correct, as endgames are about promoting pawns, no pawns are easier to promote than the passed ones and if the rook is to play a role, it needs to cover as many squares on the pawn's path as possible, without being in the way. And if you are the defending rook, you do not want to see yourself squeezed by an advancing pawn, you would rather want to see the opponent's rook lose activity in front of the pawn, as we saw in some examples in the previous chapter.

I. Krikheli

Magyar Sakkélet (no. 1742) 1986



1.♖e7!

White would not make any progress after 1.♖b7? ♕c3! 2.♖e3† ♕c2 3.♖e4 ♕c3.

1...♔a3!

1...♔c3 2.♖c7†! ♔d3 3.♖b7 ♔c4 4.♔c7 b4 5.♔b6! and the white king arrives on the right side of the pawn. We will discuss this more in the following chapter on “shouldering”.

2.♖a7†

Harassing the king, putting it in the path of the pawn, thus winning time.

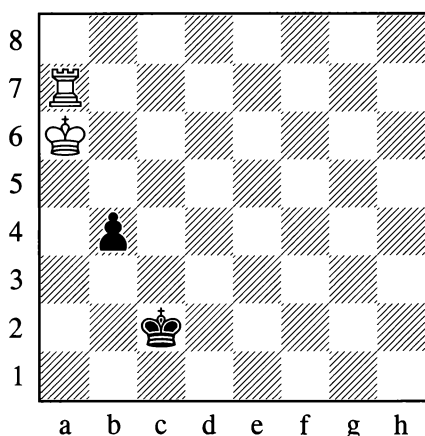
2...♔b3

Notice that if there was a file to the left of the a-file, White would still win. The key point here is the tempo won.

3.♔b7 b4 4.♔a6!

White is using shouldering again. If the black king was to go to the a-file, White would play 5.♔b5† and win a tempo.

4.♔b6? ♕c3! would allow Black to make the draw.

4...♔c2**5.♖c7†!**

An important trick to have in your bag. The black king is moved away from the b3-square and White thus wins a tempo.

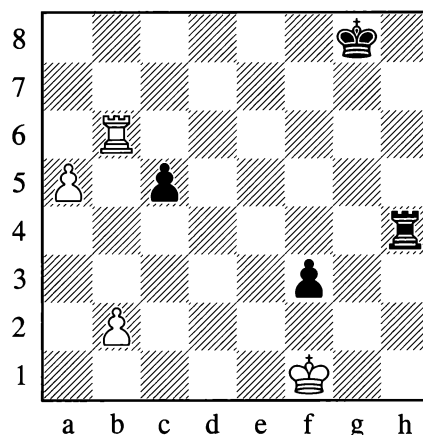
5...♔d2 6.♖b7 ♔c3 7.♔a5

White catches the pawn and wins.

1–0

Martin Jogstad – Ludvig Carlsson

Uppsala 2022



After 37.♖b5? ♕f7 38.♔f2 ♔e6 39.♔xf3 ♕d5 40.♔e3 ♖a4 the advantage was gone. White played on for another 20 moves but got nowhere.

If White had placed the rook behind the pawn with 37.♖b3! instead, he would have won effortlessly.

As stated, the basics are foundational, not simple or easy.

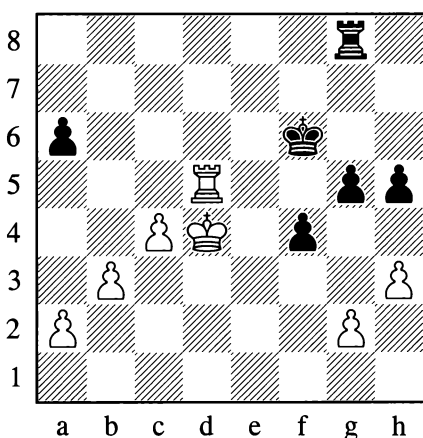
Understanding the core idea of the basics, such as “the rook belongs behind the passed pawn”, is already a bit more than remembering a catchphrase.

Chess is not a dogmatic game and we have to understand why and when, which is done from seeing a lot of examples. Several times in this book we shall see the rook going behind the passed pawn, instead of giving a check, being a crucial mistake. Once we understand it, it is still difficult to implement it into our games. There are ideas in this book grandmasters will encounter for the first time, but every

man and his dog knows the rook belongs behind the passed pawn! Still, implementing it requires imagination and attention to this idea at surprising moments, in order to make the most of it. In the next example, Black is a pawn down, but his pawns are more advanced on the kingside and because the pawn is on h3, he is able to create counterplay.

Grzegorz Nasuta – Damian Lewtak

Czech Republic 2022



43...Rxe8?

Too ambitious. Black is trying to win the g2-pawn and in this way make the most out of the advanced f-pawn. But this is time consuming and White could have exploited the extra time to push his pawn.

43...g4! 44.hxg4 (44.Rxh5?? loses to a basic breakthrough trick: 44...f3! 45.gxf3 g3!) 44...Rxg4! The threat of ...f3† wins a useful tempo. 45.Ke4 Rxc2 46.Kxf4 Rxa2 With the exchanges of pawns and the rook placed perfectly behind the white pawns, Black will be able to make a draw with ease.

44.Ke3?

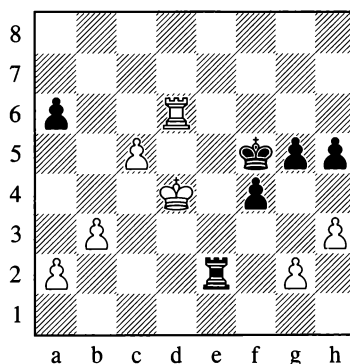
A passive move, which is rarely the way to go in rook endings. White was winning after 44.c5!? and some complications, but even stronger was:

44.Rd6†! Ke5

44...Ke7 would be a big admission. White can now play 45.Ke3, transfer the rook to the 2nd rank and shoot the king to a5, where it will threaten the a6-pawn, as well as help the queenside pawns get going.

45.c5 Re2

45...g4 46.c6! Taking on g4 first would be a massive mistake, as it would give Black access to the g4-square. 46...f3 47.gxf3 gxf3 48.c7 Re8 49.Rd8 Rxc7 50.Rf8† White wins in the long run.



46.Rd5†!

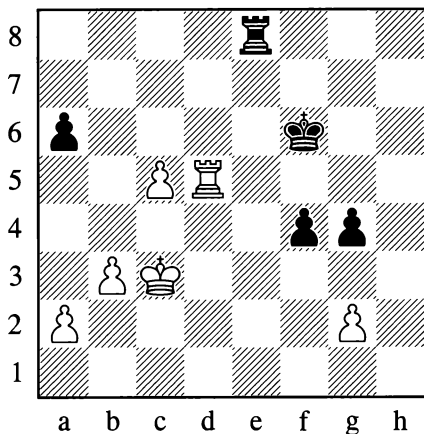
Pushing the pawn also wins, but as Black would not want to give up the g-pawn, this makes a lot of things easier.

46...Ke6 47.Kd3 Rxc2 48.c6

White will follow up with Rd5-c5 and the black rook will have to fight to make it back to c8, when he will have won back a pawn, but have lost all quality of his position and soon be faced with an advancing b-pawn, as well as threats to his pawns on the 5th rank.

44...g4 45.hxg4

No silly excursions to h5 please.

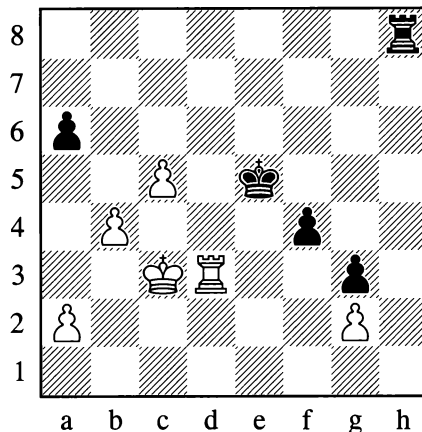
45...hxg4 46.c5**46...g3?**

This feels incredibly slow. Black is trying to balance two objectives: keeping the rook on the 8th rank for defensive purposes, and to create a passed pawn, either by removing the g2-pawn, or by pushing ...f3 at an opportune moment. But the lack of energy behind this move gives White a chance to regroup.

46...♖e1! 47.♔d2 ♖g1 would have given Black sufficient counterplay to hold the draw. There are lines where both sides promote, and lines where neither do. It is visually obvious that White is not making progress, while Black is. And the threat of coming behind the passed pawn with a check is the key reason for this. (After 47.♖d2 ♔e5 Black also holds. Whether a queen or a pawn ending a pawn down, the draw is not difficult.)

47.♖d2!?

47.♖d4 with the idea of ♖c4 followed by an advance of the queenside, while the king will run to f1 to stop the counterplay, was perhaps the most principled winning method.

47...♖g8 48.♖d3 ♔e5 49.b4 ♖h8**50.a4?**

A natural-looking move and a mistake many grandmasters would make. Hopefully, this book will save some of them from making it in the future.

50.♔b3! with the idea ♖d3-c3 was winning. It is hard to come up with variations, but here is an attempt. 50...♔e4!? 51.♖c3 ♔d5 Black is using the king to block the c-pawn, which is a key strategy discussed later, in Chapter 13. 52.♔a4 ♔c6 53.♖f3! ♖f8 54.♔a5 ♖f5 55.a4 and White will win slowly. At the right time, White will transfer the rook with ♖f1-d1 (or c1), winning.

50...♖h2?

Black returns the favour.

A draw was available if Black had placed his rook behind the passed pawns. The main line is highly instructive and the main reason why this example should be studied, but as you may have noticed, not the only one.

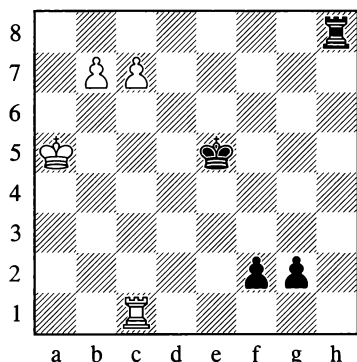
50...♖h1! 51.b5 axb5 52.axb5 ♖c1†!

Black gives three annoying checks, forcing the white king to where it would like to be for offensive purposes, but far away from its defensive duties. The draw is almost poetic in its simplicity thereafter.

53.♔b4 ♖b1†! 54.♕a5 ♖a1†! 55.♔b6 ♖a2
56.c6 ♖xg2

The black pawns are not worse than the white pawns, which is the reason why a draw can be found in all lines. Like this one:

57.♖c3 ♖h2 58.c7 ♖h8 59.♕a5 g2 60.♖c1 f3
61.b6 f2 62.b7



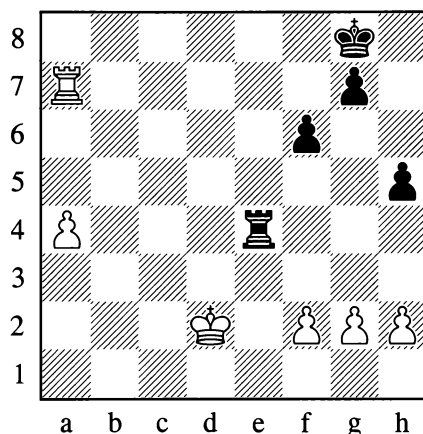
For no reason at all, I am stopping here. Stockfish says 0.00, while most of us would be entirely uncertain about everything at the board. But chess is a practical game, where making good decisions is everything. And Black is happy to be here, in this total mess, and not in the game, where he lost without a fight.

51.c6 ♖xg2 52.c7 ♖g1 53.♔b2 ♕e4 54.c8=♖
♕xd3 55.♖c2†
1-0

The next example starts within our theme, but then spins out of control in a direction that could have worked well in *Theoretical Rook Endgames* as well.

Bartosz Socko – Daniel Sadzikowski

Bydgoszcz 2021



White is completely winning, but also completely out of time. All the remaining moves by both players were made in 9 seconds or less.

35.a5?!

Not a major mistake, but allowing the black rook to come behind the passed pawn needlessly, making life awkward for the rook on a7.

The principled winning idea was to put the white rook behind the pawn instead: 35.♔c3! ♖e2 36.♖d7 ♖xf2 37.♖d2! and 38.♖a2 was an easy win.

35...♖a4 36.a6?

Proceeding down the same path.

White was still winning after: 36.♔c3 ♕h7 37.♔b3 ♖a1, with the idea 38.♔b4 ♖a2 39.♖c7 ♖xf2 40.♖c3 ♖xg2 41.a6 ♖e2 42.a7 ♖e8 43.♔b5 and White wins by a few tempos.

36...♕h7 37.♔c3 ♕g6 38.♔b3 ♖a1

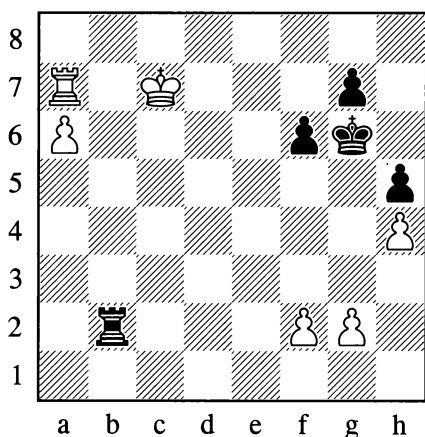
It was Dvoretsky's counting that this type of endgame has a drawing margin of two tempos.

Meaning, you can lose one tempo and still draw. Whether this is also the case with this particular configuration I cannot say, but if so, Black did manage to lose a tempo over the next 10 moves.

39.h4 ♖a5 40.♗b4 ♖a2 41.♗b5 ♜b2†
42.♗c6 ♜c2† 43.♗b6 ♜b2† 44.♗c5 ♜c2†
45.♗b6 ♜b2† 46.♗c6 ♜c2† 47.♗b6 ♜b2†

Black could have claimed a draw based on three-fold repetition, which it is not easy to spot in a rapid game where you do not write down the moves.

48.♗c7

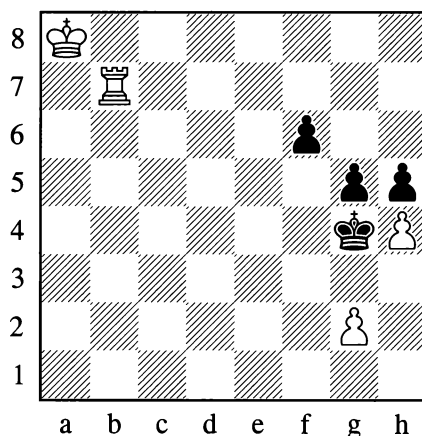


48...♜xf2?

It is not wrong to take the f-pawn on principle, but timing matters. The white rook is well placed on a7 to assist the a-pawn.

48...♜c2† 49.♗b8 ♖a2! would force White to misplace the rook with 50.♖a8, if he was to attempt to make progress, but now 50...♜xf2 is a tempo faster and will make the draw. We shall see this mistake (not checking the king to a worse square) repeated frequently throughout this book.

49.♜b7 ♖a2 50.a7 ♗f5 51.♗b8 g5 52.a8=♚
♜xa8† 53.♗xa8 ♗g4



54.♜b4†??

Time trouble causes insanity.

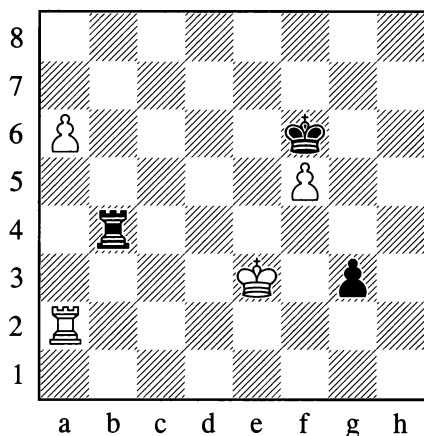
54.hxg5 fxg5 55.♜b5 would have won a lot of tempos and later the game.

54...♗g3 55.hxg5 fxg5 56.♜b2 g4 57.♗b7
h4 58.♗c6 h3 59.gxh3 gxh3 60.♗d5 h2
61.♜b1 ♗g2 62.♗e4 h1=♚ 63.♜xh1 ♗xh1
½-½

The rook is no less useful behind the opponent's pawns, as previously explained. The following examples will show various situations where the defending side missed the chance to make the most out of Tarrasch's advice.

Ivan Saric – Alojzije Jankovic

Croatia 2014



In the game, passive defence failed quickly:
 49...♖b8? 50.a7 ♖a8 51.♖a5! ♔g5 52.♕f3
 ♕h4 53.f6 1–0

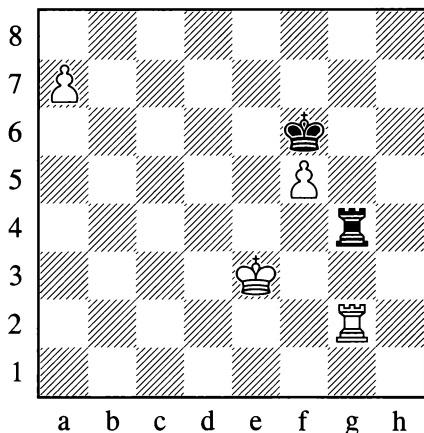
Better was:

49...♖g4! 50.a7

50.♕f3 ♖g8 51.a7 is different from the game. Black can play 51...g2! and use the doomed pawn to win a vital tempo.

50...g2 51.♖xg2

You would expect Jankovic to have seen this during the game and despaired, missing:

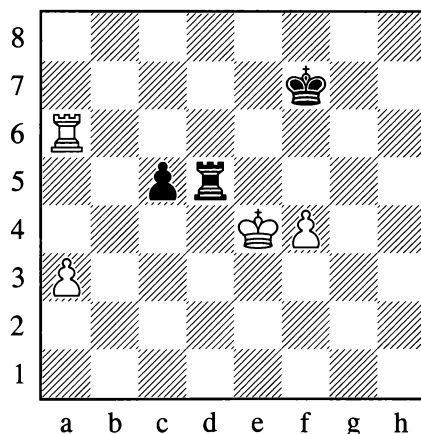
**51...♖a4!**

Black eliminates both white pawns and makes the draw.

One of India's seasoned grandmasters takes one of their many young grandmaster talents back to school with this beautiful display of endgame technique after Black's initial mistake.

Abhijeet Gupta – Aditya Mittal

Kanpur 2022

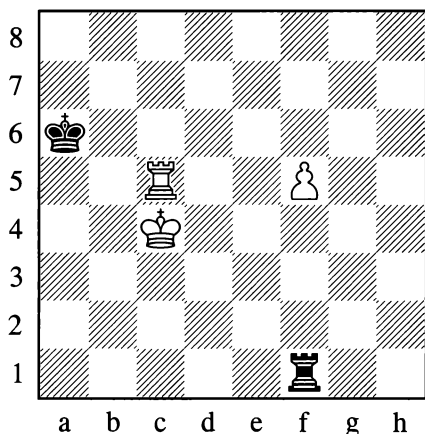
**60...♖d1?**

Going behind the white passers, but as the black king is passive and Black is a pawn down, this alone will not be enough to defend.

61.a4 ♕e7 62.a5 c4 63.♖c6

The white rook is perfectly placed. It assists the a-pawn and contains the c-pawn. White won slowly and safely.

63...♖a1 64.a6 ♕d7 65.♖h6 ♕c7 66.♕d4
 ♖a3 67.f5 ♖f3 68.♕e4 ♖f1 69.♖h7† ♕b8
 70.♖b7† ♕c8 71.♖f7 ♕b8 72.♕d4 ♖a1
 73.♖f6 ♖c1 74.♖c6 ♖f1 75.♖c5 ♕a7
 76.♕xc4 ♕xa6



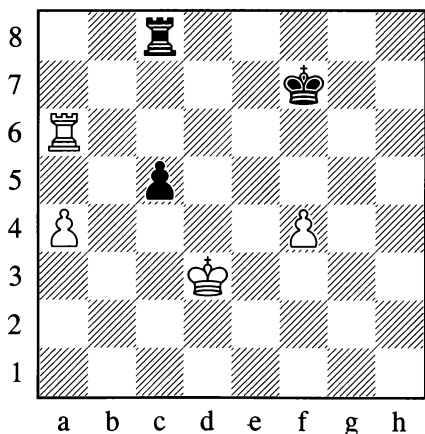
77. ♖e5! ♜b6 78. ♜d5 ♜c7 79. ♜e6 ♜d8
 80. ♜f7 ♜d7 81. f6 ♜g1 82. ♜d5† ♜c6
 83. ♜d2 ♜f1 84. ♜g7 ♜g1† 85. ♜f8 ♜f1 86. f7
 ♜g1 87. ♜d4 ♜c7 88. ♜e7 ♜e1† 89. ♜f6 ♜f1†
 90. ♜g6 ♜f2 91. ♜d5
 1–0

Black should have aimed to put the rook behind the passed pawn for counterplay:

60... ♜d8! 61. a4 ♜c8

White would now seek to block the c-pawn with the king.

62. ♜d3!



To play like this, Black would have had to find:

62... ♜d8†!

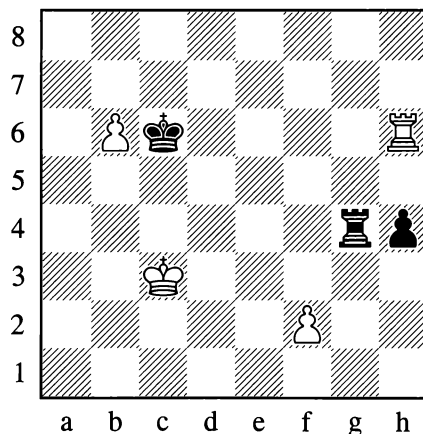
With the idea of ... ♜d4†, securing the draw.

White can try a few things, but if they involve the black rook on f4 cutting off the white king, they are not too threatening. Please notice how the two top principles of rook endings come together here. The rook seeks to be behind the passed pawn, but prefers activity to all else.

Sometimes it can be difficult to apply the most basic concepts, because they do not happen at the edge of the board and they have dynamic components.

Daniel Naroditsky – Jorden van Foreest

Internet 2021



Van Foreest played the natural-looking move, which would be the right move in 90% of positions with this check on h6. But in this case, the highest objective should be to get the rook behind the passed pawn.

64... ♜b7? 65. ♜d3 ♜a4 66. f3 ♜b4 67. ♜e3
 ♜xb6 68. ♜xb6† ♜xb6 69. ♜f4 ♜c5 70. ♜g4
 1–0

It was far stronger to keep the rook active, behind the passed pawn. As in previous examples, giving a check is a big part of why this works.

64...♔c5! 65.b7

Another key point is that after 65.♔d3 ♖b4 66.♔e3, Black can just wait. White is not threatening to do anything. But the only way to wait is to centralise the king. 66...♔d5!

65...♖c4†!

This check is crucial.

66.♔d3 ♖b4 67.♖h7 ♔c6

67...♔d5 68.♔e3 h3 The h-pawn is a distraction that will cause the b-pawn to fall, after which the game is immediately drawn.

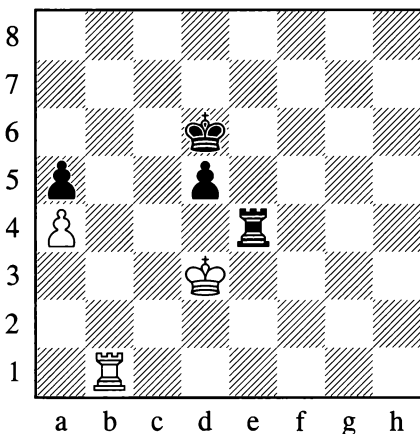
68.♔e3 h3 69.f3 ♔d5 70.♔f2 h2 71.♔g2 ♖b2† 72.♔h1 ♔e5

Black holds.

In the next example we shall see the full power of an active rook, placed behind the passed pawns. Passive play in positions where we are down material works so rarely that it becomes spectacular when it does. Here, too, it does not work.

Vincent Keymer – Le Quang Liem

Internet 2022



White lost this miserable-looking position after attempting a passive defence.

50.♖a1? ♔c5 51.♖a2 ♖d4† 52.♔c3 ♖h4 53.♖a1 ♖h3† 54.♔d2 ♔d4

Black's domination is total. The rest of the moves were quite unnecessary, but more than one person has dropped a rook with a mouse slip...

55.♔e2 ♖h2† 56.♔f3 ♖d2 57.♖h1 ♖a2 58.♖h4† ♔d3 59.♖h5 ♔c4 60.♖h4† d4 61.♔e4 ♖e2†

61...♖xa4 was perfectly fine too.

62.♔f3 ♖e8 63.♖h5 d3 64.♖h7 d2 65.♖c7† ♔b3 66.♖d7 ♔c2 67.♖c7† ♔d1 68.♖d7 ♔e1 0-1

As said, when you are a pawn down, passive defence is unlikely to work. Barring the few exceptional exceptions, it is better to seek active counterplay if you don't have time to think. And if you do have time to think, you need to be sure that the passive defence works, before choosing it instead of active defence.

50.♖b8! ♖xa4 51.♖a8

51.♖d8† ♔c6 52.♖c8† ♔d7 53.♖a8 ♖a1 54.♔d4 is similar.

51...♖a1

After 51...♔e5 52.♖e8†, there is nowhere for the black king to escape to.

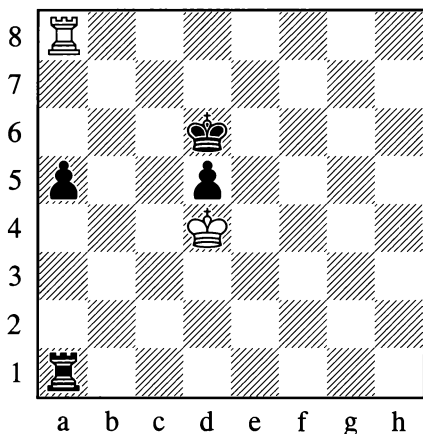
52.♔d4

Threatening ♖a6†, winning the d-pawn.

52...♖d1† 53.♔e3!

53.♔c3 ♖c1† and 54...♖c5 would allow Black to reorganise the pieces and stabilise the position.

53...♖a1 54.♔d4!



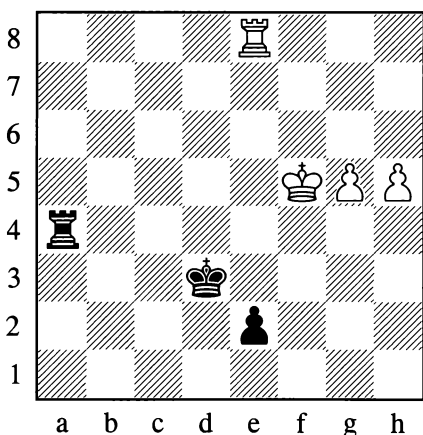
Black is unable to make progress.

The next example also comes from the Rapid World Championship. Black was one of the big winners of the tournament, as he was the coach of Nodirbek Abdusattorov, when he won the tournament and for that reason received a big cheque from the government of Uzbekistan.

Later he had a big score on Board 4 in the 2022 Olympiad as part of the sensational victory by the Uzbek team. At this time the “elder” (read in his 20s) Uzbek national got away a bit easier than he deserved...

Milosz Szpar – Jakhongir Vakhidov

Warsaw (rapid Wch) 2021



67...♖a5†? 68.♔g6?

White missed a not too tricky win: 68.♔f4! ♖a4† 69.♔f3 ♖a5 70.♖d8† and it is all over.

68...♖a4

Black had the chance to avoid the queen ending with: 68...♖a8!? 69.♖e7 ♖a7!, when White's only try is: 70.♖xe2!? ♔xe2 71.h6, when Black has to play a few accurate moves to make the draw. 71...♖a6†! 72.♔h5 ♔f3 73.h7 ♖a1! 74.g6 ♔f4 75.g7 ♔f5 With a well-known theoretical draw.

69.♔f5

More challenging was 69.h6! ♖e4, which leads to a queen and pawn vs queen ending that is objectively drawn, but still unpleasant to defend.

69...♖a5†? 70.♔f6?

70.♔f4!

70...♖a6† 71.♔g7 ♖a8 72.♖xe2 ♔xe2 73.g6 ♔f3 74.♔h7 ♔g4 75.h6
½–½

Black could have held a draw, without relying on assistance from the opponent, with a beautiful accurate sequence.

67...♖h4! 68.h6 ♖h1

We notice that because of the rook's placement behind the pawn, White is temporarily stalled in his advance.

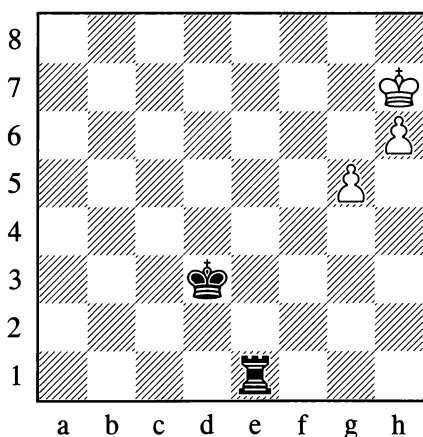
The queen ending after 68...♖h3?! 69.♔g6 ♖e3 70.♖xe3† ♔xe3 71.h7 e1=♖ 72.h8=♖ ♖b1† is a draw, but since it is not immediate perpetual, we should know that this ending is terribly difficult to hold in practical play and is best avoided.

69.♔g6

69.g6 leads to a little image all should have installed on their “hard drive”. 69...♖h5†! and Black is immediately fine. But amazingly, he also draws with 69...♖xh6!? 70.g7 ♖h1! 71.♖xe2 ♖f1† 72.♔e6 ♖g1!.

69...e1=♖ 70.♖xel ♖xel 71.♔h7

A dangerous moment for Black. White is threatening to advance the g-pawn with deadly effect.

**71...♖e7†!**

An important disruption.

72.♔g6

After 72.♔g8 ♔e4 the king arrives in time.

72...♔e4 73.h7

73.♔f6 ♖h7! is not progress.

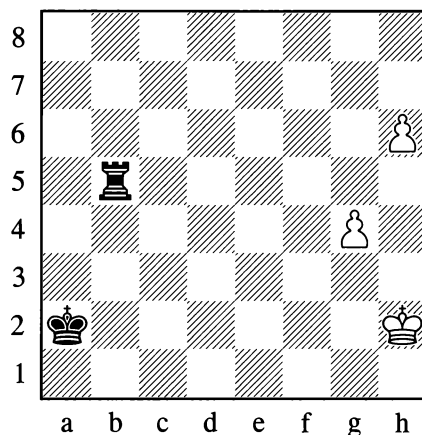
73...♖e8 74.♔f7 ♖h8 75.g6 ♔f5

Black arrives just in time.

The next game was played in the blitz championship on Killer Chess Training.

Sean Kelly – Kushal Jani

Internet 2021



Black played the most natural move and survived by sheer luck.

68...♔b3?

68...♖b8? also would not work against the advancing pawns. 69.g5 ♖h8 70.♔g3 ♔b3 71.♔g4 ♔c4 72.♔h5 ♔d5 73.g6 and the black king is arriving too late.

69.♔g3?

These are the things that happen in blitz games. White missed the immediate win with 69.h7! ♖b8 70.g5 and we are heading for a queen vs rook winning ending.

69...♔c4 70.♔f4 ♔d5 71.♔f5 ♖b1 72.h7 ♖h1 73.♔g6 ♔e5 74.g5 ♔f4 75.♔g7 ♔xg5 76.h8=♖ ♖xh8 77.♔xh8
½–½

Black draws by getting the rook behind the pawns with an incredibly important idea that often seems to escape players. Obviously, at the moment there is no space, so it has to be created.

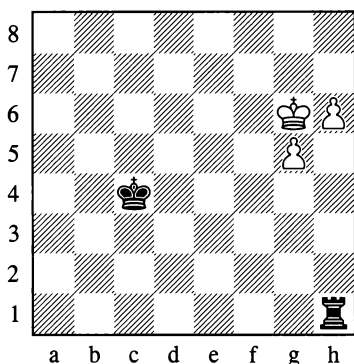
68...♖b2†!! 69.♔g3 ♜b1

White can keep blocking the rook's access to the g1/h1-squares, but only by repeating moves.

70.g5 ♜h1!

The rook goes behind the pawns without delay.

70...♜g1†? would lose a tempo and do nothing else, except to show that Black is holding by said tempo. 71.♔f4 ♜h1 72.♔f5 ♔b3 73.♔g6 (73.g6? ♜h5†=) 73...♔c4



74.♔h7! This zigzag movement is another small image you should pay attention to. 74...♔d5 75.g6 ♔e6 76.g7 White wins.

71.♔g4 ♔b3 72.♔f5 ♔c4 73.♔g6 ♔d5

The king arrives just in time.

74.♔h7 ♔e6 75.g6 ♜g1 76.g7 ♔f7 77.♔h8 ♜g2 78.h7 ♜xg7

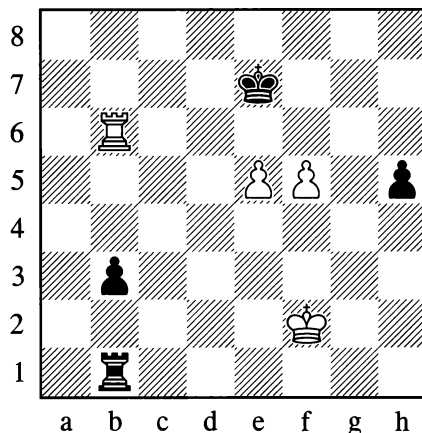
Stalemate.

Once we have seen the above example, it becomes possible to see the next one; which is part of the aim of this book: to provide you with a lot of snippets and ideas and images that you can hopefully remember on some level, when you are deep into your own rook ending.

But Urkedal had not seen it before and should have lost at once.

Prantik Roy – Frode Urkedal

Helsingor 2018



49...b2?

I hope there is a small flash of unpleasantness from you when seeing this move, remembering how the rook loses the last bit of activity, as seen a few times in Chapter 1.

50.♜b7†?

White missed a direct win. 50.f6† ♔f7 51.♜b7† and the advancing f-pawn just wins.

50...♔e8 51.♜b8† ♔e7?

Aiming to repeat, but walking into a deadly check. The king should have gone to one of the light squares.

51...♔f7! is the most natural move. After 52.e6† ♔f6, White has no advantage. For example: 53.♔g2 (53.♜b7? ♜h1 and Black wins.) 53...♔xf5 54.e7 ♜e1 with a draw.

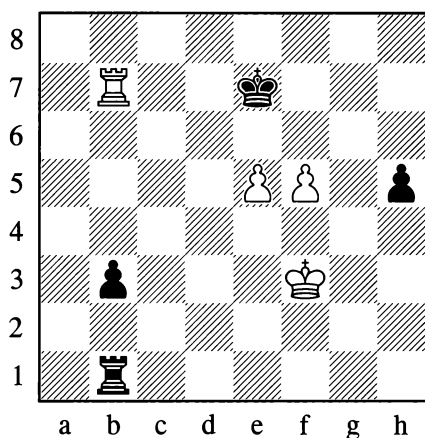
52.f6† ♔e6 53.♜b6†!

This is the difference. With the f-pawn advancing, the black king cannot hide behind the pawn.

53...♙f7 54.♖b7+ ♔g6 55.f7 ♙g7 56.e6
♖h1 57.♖b8
1–0

You already know how this goes, although there is a bit more to it than just giving the check.

49...♖b2+! 50.♙f3 ♖b1 51.♖b7+



51...♙f8!

Spotting the difference between two moves is not always easy.

White would win after 51...♙e8? 52.e6 h4 (52...b2 53.♙g2!) 53.♙e2 ♖b2+ 54.♙d3! ♖b1 55.f6, and the pawns cannot be stopped.

Also after 51...♙d8?, the pawns cannot be stopped. 52.e6 h4 53.♙e2! ♖b2+ 54.♙e3 ♖b1 55.e7+ ♙e8 56.f6 and there is no saving check on f1.

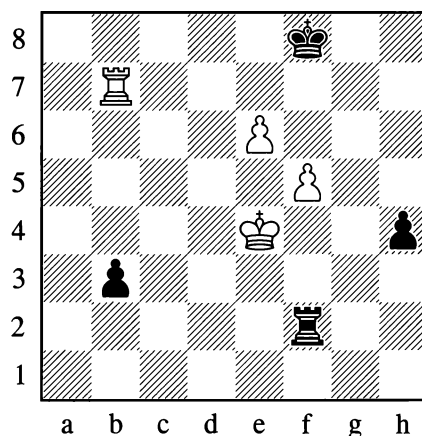
52.e6

After 52.f6 b2! Black is saved by having the resources ...♖e1 or ...♖f1, since the king is on the 3rd rank.

52...h4! 53.♙f2

After 53.♙g2, the most natural is 53...♖b2+ 54.♙h3 ♖f2, with a draw. But it should be noticed that 53...♖e1!? 54.♖xb3 ♖e5! 55.♖f3 ♖e4 also holds. The white king cannot escape the box: 56.♙f2 ♖e5 57.♖f4 h3! 58.♙g3 ♖e3+ 59.♙h2 ♙e8!, for example, and Black is holding a draw by the smallest margin.

53...♖b2+! 54.♙e3 ♖b1 55.♙e2 ♖b2+
56.♙d3 ♖f2 57.♙e4



57...h3!

The h-pawn is a far stronger asset, as the white rook cannot keep control of it from behind as effectively.

58.♖xb3

58.♙e5? h2 59.♙f6 will not lead to mate. Black wins after 59...♖xf5+.

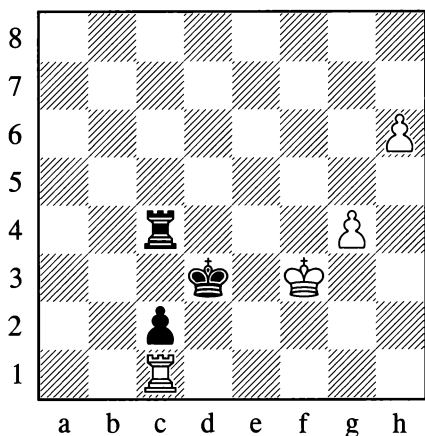
58...h2 59.♖h3 ♙e7 60.♖h6 ♙d6

White cannot make progress.

The next idea is equally simple, but important to have seen before, as you may otherwise miss it.

Daniel Hausrath – Volker Bub

Dortmund 2022



Black lost quickly after:

58...♔d2? 59.♖xc2† ♖xc2 60.h7 ♖c8 61.g5
♔d3 62.g6 ♖f8†

Black resigned without waiting for the white king to approach.

1–0

Black could have drawn the game by using tactics to get the rook behind the white pawns.

58...♖c3!!

Threatening ...♔d2†.

59.♔f4

59.♔g2 is an obvious step in the wrong direction, but Black still has to find a way to exploit that. Simplest is 59...♖c6! winning a pawn, securing the draw.

59...♔d2

59...♖c4†!? curiously also draws, although it is a poor move technically. The line is still instructive. 60.♔f5 ♖c5†! 61.♔g6 ♖c6† 62.♔h5 ♔d2 63.♖xc2† ♖xc2! 64.g5 ♔e3 65.g6 ♔f4 66.g7 ♔f5! 67.♔h4 ♖h2† 68.♔g3 ♖xh6 69.g8=♖ ♖g6† with a draw.

60.♖xc2† ♔xc2!

Usually, we need to take with the rook, to keep the king as close as possible. But because of the geometry of the chess board, the black king is not really further away from the action on c2 than on d2, but it is vital that the rook can get in behind the white pawns as quickly as possible.

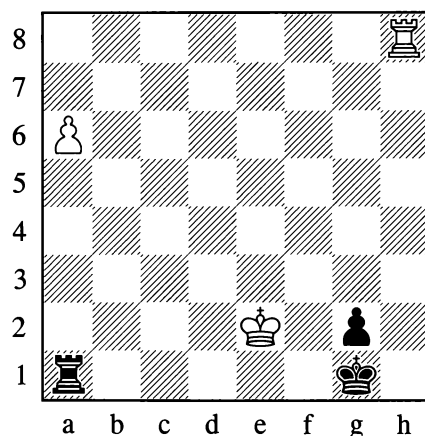
61.g5 ♖h3 62.♔f5 ♔d3 63.♔g6 ♔e4
64.♔h7 ♔f5 65.g6 ♔g5

Black makes the draw in the nick of time.

When you have a pawn on the 6th rank, you rarely lose these pawn vs pawn positions, as the pawn is so close to promotion it provides counterplay. But it is still possible to make mistakes.

Silvia-Raluca Sgircea – Daniel Alsina Leal

Benasque Open 2021



My good friend Raluca had been defending well, but here misplaced her rook and lost.

57.♖a8?

57.♖h6! would make an effortless draw. The rook will be able to fulfil the dual role of defending the a-pawn and preventing Black from promoting the g-pawn. It is hard to come up with a winning try for Black.

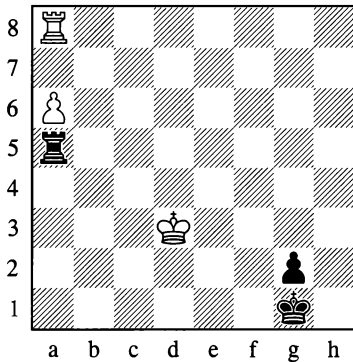
57...♞a2†?

57...♞a5! with the idea 58.♔e3 ♞g5!, heading for g7, is a winning idea, as executed on the next move.

58.♔e1?

White had the chance to run with the king.

After: 58.♔d3! ♞a5 (58...♔f1 59.♞f8†!)



59.♔c4 The king comes to assist the a-pawn, securing the draw. The key is that something like 59...♞f5 60.♞d8 is a simple draw. And after 59...♞g5 60.a7 ♞g7, White can defend against the threat of ...♞f7 with 61.♔b5! ♞f7 62.♔a6, freeing the rook to come out of the corner.

58...♞a5!

Regrouping the rook and winning.

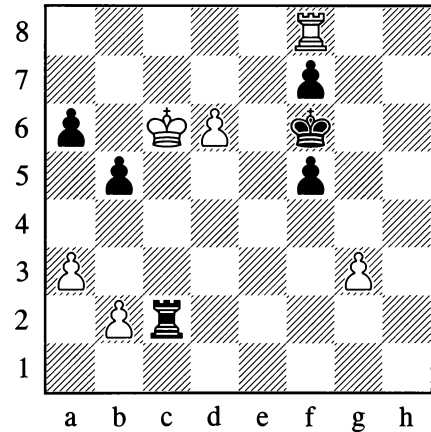
59.a7 ♞e5† 60.♔d2 ♞e7 61.♔d1 ♞h7
62.♔e2 ♔h2 63.♞g8 ♞xa7
0–1

In his aforementioned fabulous performance at the 2022 Olympiad, Vakhidov missed out on a win in a rook endgame, presumably missing the chance to put the rook behind the passed pawn. In this case this was a bit harder, as the visual pattern is one of putting the rook behind the pawn from afar (say the 1st rank), and not right behind the pawn on the 6th

rank. Also, with the king blocking the pawn, it can be a bit surprising that the rook still has to support the promotion of the pawn.

Jakhongir Vakhidov – Sam Shankland

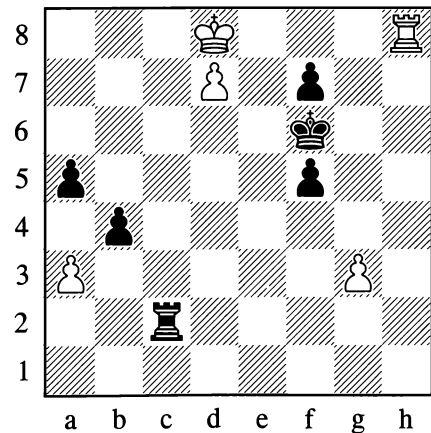
Chennai Olympiad 2022



48.♔d7!

48.♔b6? ♔e6 would lead to an immediate draw.

48...♞xb2 49.♔d8 a5 50.d7 ♞c2 51.♞h8 b4



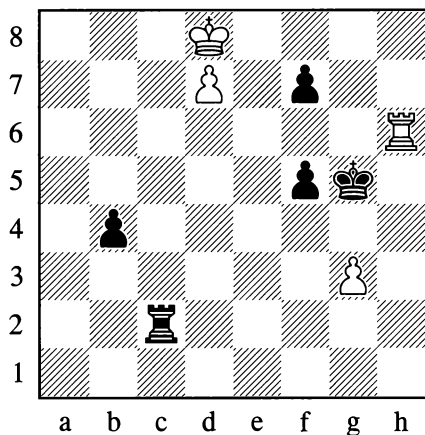
52.a4?

The winning continuation went like this:

52.axb4 axb4 53.♞h6†! ♔g5

The only move that makes sense. The king goes for the g3-pawn.

Online commentators were all focused on 53...♔g7, which is a truly bizarre move, but notably the first choice of Stockfish 15. White wins immediately after 54.♞b6 ♞c4 55.♕e7 ♞e4† 56.♕d6 ♞d4† 57.♕c7.



54.♞d6!!

The key move, placing the rook behind the passed pawn. Black is totally lost. White will play ♕e7xf7 on almost anything. The race is lost by a mile.

However, 54.♞b6? would lead to a draw after 54...♕g4! 55.♕e7 ♞c7 (or 55...♞e2†) 56.♕d6 ♞xd7† 57.♕xd7 ♕xg3, and the f-pawn will secure the half point.

52...b3 53.♞h6† ♕g7 54.♞b6

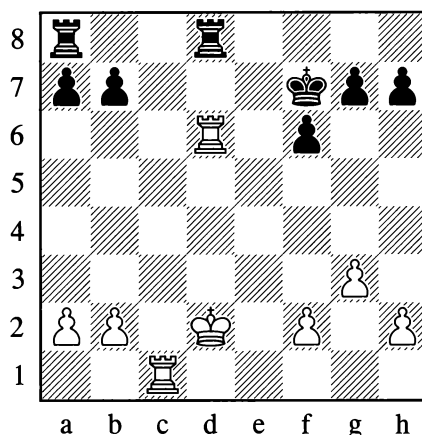
54.♞d6 b2 is a tempo-down version of the same draw.

54...b2 55.♞b5 ♕g6 56.♕e7 ♞e2† 57.♕d6 ♞d2† 58.♕c6 ♞c2† 59.♕b7 ♞d2 60.♕c7 ½-½

Combining the two main ideas that the rook needs to be active and that it is best placed behind the passed pawn, gives us the additional idea of trying to prevent the opponent's rook from coming behind the passed pawn.

Jon Ludvig Hammer – Vincent Keymer

Helsingor 2018



We start this rook endgame just out of the opening, which has gone awfully wrong for Black. Our theme will show up soon enough.

21.♞c7† ♕e8

Keymer understandably did not like the look of 21...♕g6 22.♞xd8 ♞xd8† 23.♕c3 where Black will have to attempt to defend passively, with little chance of success.

22.♞d3!

Forcing Black to improve the position of the white king.

22...♞xd3† 23.♕xd3 ♞d8† 24.♕c4!

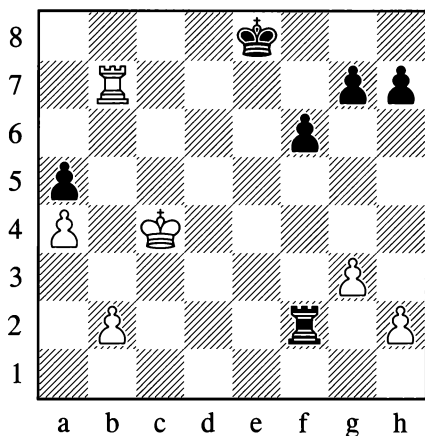
The king might need to go to d5 urgently, thus this is the best move.

24...♞d2

Black is forced to go on an adventure, as the pawn ending after 24...♞d7 25.♞xd7 ♕xd7 26.♕d5 is obviously hopeless.

25.♞xb7 ♞xf2 26.a4 a5

26...♞xh2 27.b4 is hopeless. Everything is talking against Black. His pawns have not exited the pit stop, his king is crashed into the barrier, and the rook is so far away we could consider it lapped. Leaving all the motorsport metaphors behind, the point is that we can see that White is going to win this race. Black has to try something else, thus 26...a5.



27.b3?

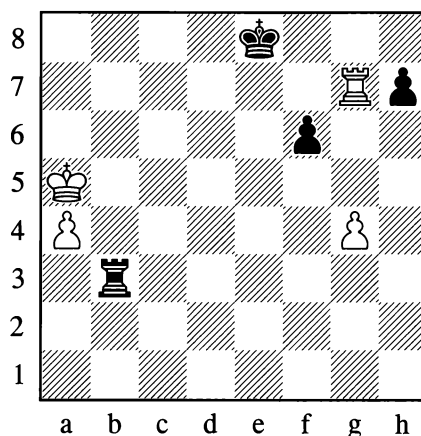
27.♞xg7? fails to 27...♞c2†! 28.♟b5 ♞xh2! 29.♞xa5 ♞xb2 30.♞xh7 f5, when we will soon find ourselves in a basic drawn theoretical ending.

The winning idea was: 27.b4! axb4 28.♟b3!! and the black rook cannot easily get behind the passed pawn. A small key point is that a check on f3 can be answered with ♟xb4, which explains why White needed to lose the pawn first. 28...♞f1 29.♞xg7 With the ambition to have extra material, as well as an overwhelming positional advantage. 29...♞b1† 30.♞a2 ♞d1 31.♞xh7 ♞d3 32.♟b2 ♞a3 33.♞a7 White wins. First the a-pawn is advanced, then the h-pawn.

27...♞xh2 28.♞xg7 ♞c2†!

Although this should not lose, I prefer 28...h5! to liquidate pawns. The draw cannot be far away.

29.♟b5 ♞b2 30.♞xa5 ♞xb3 31.g4



31...♞e3?

Later in the book we shall discuss the role of the king in rook endings (Chapter 13, page 189). Had Keymer read that chapter, it is likely he would have found 31...♟d8!, which should draw in many ways. One of them is 32.♞xh7 ♞g3!?, which is perhaps a bit too concrete, but which absolutely works.

32.♞xh7 ♞e5†!

Often checks are able to ruin the coordination of the opponent's pieces. But they can also be helpful, which is the case here. Black could have tried 32...♞e4!?, when White wins narrowly after 33.♟b5! ♟d8 34.♞g7!.

33.♟b6 ♞e6† 34.♟b7! ♞e5 35.♞h5! ♞e7† 36.♟c6 ♞e6† 37.♟c7 ♞e7† 38.♟d6 ♞e4 39.a5 ♞xg4 40.a6 ♞a4 41.♞h8† ♟f7 42.a7!

Finishing with a classic. Black resigns.

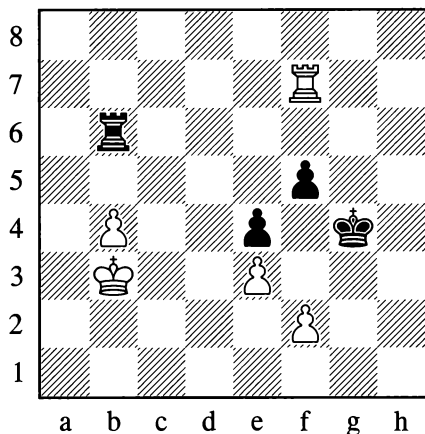
1–0

The final example is taken from a blitz game. Often blitz games between strong grandmasters will see them putting the pieces on good squares, but they have no chance of picking up the finesses and tactics of the positions. If we remember that we are not evaluating the players' performance, there can be

a lot of value in looking at high-quality blitz games.

Jeffery Xiong – Wesley So

St. Louis 2020

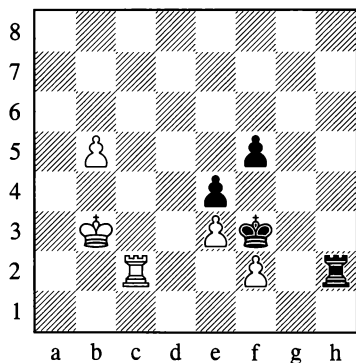


45. ♖f8?

A wasted tempo. There is no reason why the rook needs a checking distance in this position.

It will not surprise you that the winning idea was to bring the rook behind the passed pawn. But I have to say that the winning sequence is rather brilliant and precise.

45. ♖c7! ♔f3 46. ♖c2 ♖h6 47. b5 ♖h2



So far, so good. The white king now has to find the right square to avoid being checked

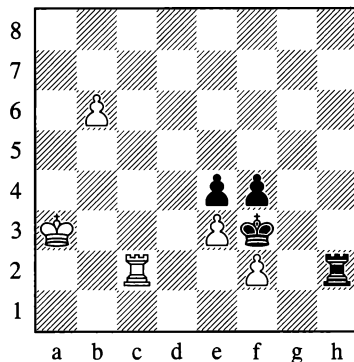
later, but at the same time controlling the b2-square.

48. ♔a3!!

48. ♔c3? f4 49. b6 fxe3 50. fxe3 ♖h8 51. ♔d4 ♖d8† and Black holds.

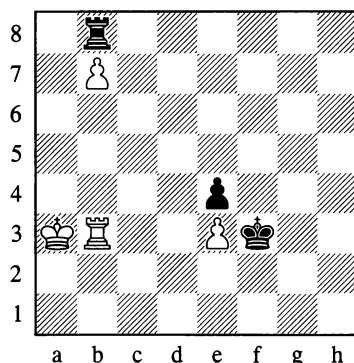
48...f4 49. b6

Black can try both active and passive defence. I prefer active defence 8.5 out of 10 times.



a) Passive defence is too slow, but still requires some accuracy to overturn.

49...♖h6 50. ♖b2 fxe3 51. fxe3 ♖h8 52. b7 ♖b8 53. ♖b3



White is in control. But winning the position still requires a bit of finesse. If the white king storms up the board, the black king will make it to c2, dislodging the white rook, before returning to attacking the e-pawn. The winning line for this reason looks like this:

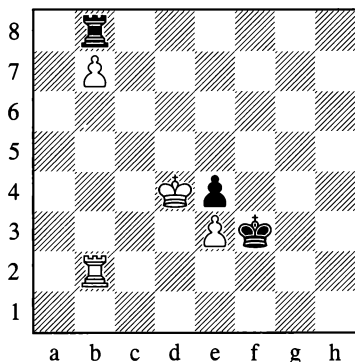
53...♔e2! 54.♔b2

54.♔a4?! ♕d2 55.♕a5 is wrong, although after 55...♔c2, White can still backtrack and win as in the main line with 56.♔a4.

54...♕d2 55.♔b1 ♕d1 56.♖b2!

Dominating the black king.

56...♕e1 57.♕c1 ♕f1 58.♕d1 ♕g1 59.♕e1 ♕h1 60.♕d2! ♕g2 61.♕c3† ♕f3 62.♕d4



Not really mutual zugzwang, as White to play would be happy to play ♖b2-b5 with the idea ♖f5† and ♖f7, followed by eliminating the e4-pawn.

62...♖d8† 63.♕c5 ♖b8 64.♖b3

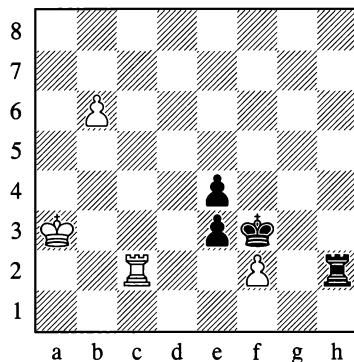
The white king is too close for Black to successfully give up the rook.

64...♔e2 65.♔b6

White wins.

b) Active defence fails faster, if you look at the length of the variation. But like the TV chef, the roast has been cooked in advance:

49...fxe3!?



50.fxe3!

The trick is that Black holds after 50.b7? ♖h8! 51.♖c8 ♖xc8 52.bxc8=♔ exf2, where the e4-pawn is a visual distraction. It will go and we will have a basic draw.

50...♖xc2 51.b7

White wins in the long run.

45.♖d7? does not work. It is easy to see that in variation b above, Black would have 51...♖d8. It is the only difference, but boy does it matter...

45...♖b7?

Likewise Black wastes the chance to activate his passive rook (in front of the passed pawn) with 45...♖h6!, which combined with ...♖h2, ...♕f3 and ...f4 will now be a tempo faster and hold effortlessly. 46.b5 (Against 46.♖a8, Black has 46...♕f3 47.♖a2 ♖h2 48.b5 f4!, which works as always.) 46...♖h1 47.♕c2 ♖h6 48.♕c3 ♖h1 49.b6 ♖b1 50.♖f6 ♕g5 51.♖d6 ♕g4

46.♖d8?

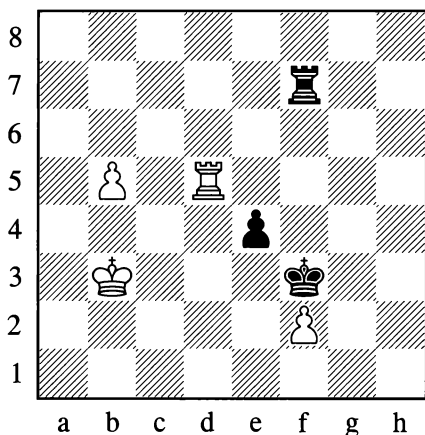
The right idea, but the wrong file. Later in this book we shall talk about the importance of keeping the rook on the adjacent file to the pawn you are trying to promote (see page 353 for example).

46.♖c8! worked again.

46...♙f3 47.♞d2 f4?

47...♞h7! holds as explained above.

48.exf4 ♙xf4 49.♞d5 ♞f7 50.b5 ♙f3



51.♞d2?

51.♞d4! would have been a powerful prophylactic move. After 51...♞e7, White can play 52.♞d2, having forced the rook to an inferior square (the e-pawn is not a passed pawn!). And after 51...♞f4, White wins by pushing the b-pawn.

51...♙g2 52.♞e2 ♙f3?

The type of mistakes you expect from a blitz game. With only seconds on the clock, it can be difficult to spot finesses such as 52...♞f4! with the idea of 53...♙f1 would have drawn. As always 53.b6 drops the pawn to 53...♞f6.

53.♞e3† ♙f4 54.♙b4 ♞f6 55.♙a5 ♞f5 56.♙a6 ♞c5 57.b6 ♞c2 58.b7 ♞a2† 59.♙b6 ♞b2† 60.♙c7 ♞c2† 61.♙d7 ♞b2 62.♙c6 ♞c2† 63.♙d5 ♞d2† 64.♙c4 ♞xf2 65.♞b3 ♞c2† 66.♙b5

In the final position the rook is also behind the passed pawn, even if its main job is to shelter the king from checks, it also prevents the black rook from getting behind the pawn.

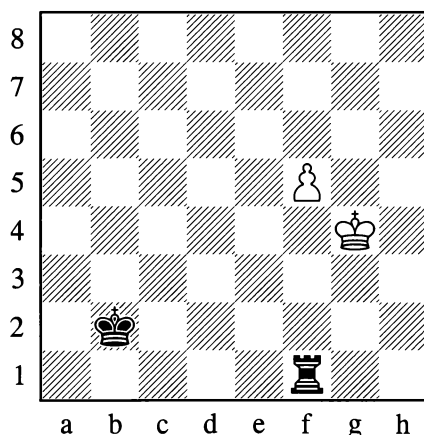
1-0

Chapter 3

Shouldering

The principle of shouldering (at times also called bodycheck, choosing to compare it to ice hockey over football) is simple. A king is helping the advance of a pawn, by at the same time controlling squares ahead of the pawn to support it, and interfering with the path of the returning king, trying to catch up with the pawn. When explained with words, this may sound complex and convoluted, but when illustrated with examples, it becomes easy to understand. A version of the following illustrative position once occurred in an engine game, but I prefer to show it in the classical form, with White to play.

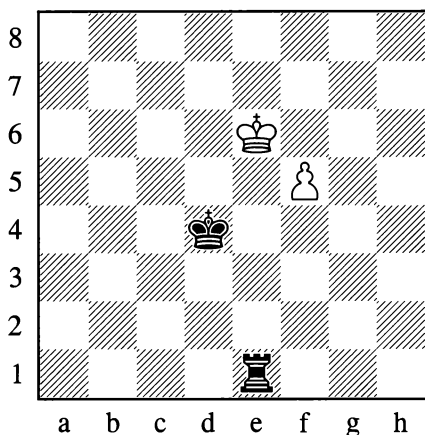
Basic Shouldering



1.♔g5 ♕c3 2.♕f6!

2.f6? would allow the black king to get close to the white pawn. 2...♕d4 3.♕g6 ♕e5 4.f7 ♕e6 and Black wins.

2...♕d4 3.♕e6 ♖e1†



4.♔d6!

Continuing to keep the black king at bay.

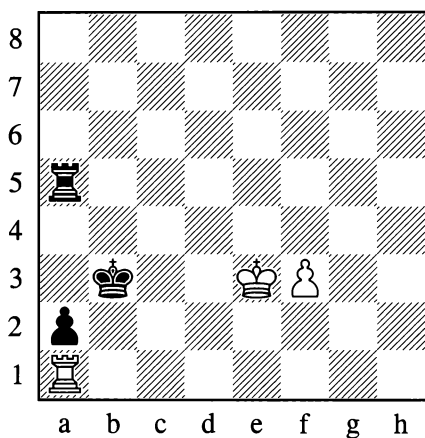
4...♖a1 5.f6 ♖a6† 6.♔e7 ♔e5 7.f7 ♖a7†
8.♔e8 ♔e6 9.f8=♖†!

White draws, as long as he keeps the knight close to the king.

What is remarkable is that this simple idea is often messed up by grandmasters.

Jan Michael Sprenger – Sergey Fedorchuk

Germany 2020



59.♔e4? ♔b2 60.♖xa2†

60.♖h1 a1=♖ 61.♖xa1 ♖xa1! also wins. The white pawn is not far enough up the board to make it.

60...♖xa2 61.f4 ♔c3 62.f5 ♔c4

Black is in good time.

63.f6 ♖e2† 64.♔f5 ♔d5 65.f7 ♖f2† 66.♔g6
♔e6

0–1

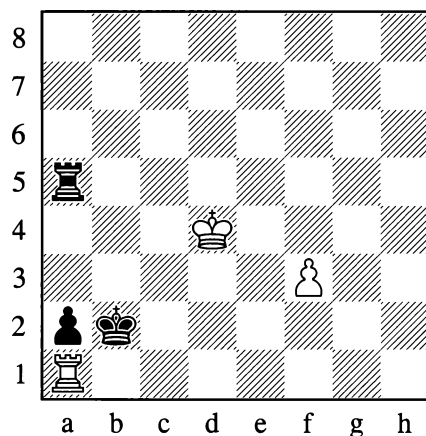
59.f4? would also lose, but only to 59...♖a4!, cutting off the white king along the 4th rank. If White wants to use the king to help the pawn, he will have to travel via f3–g4 to the far side of the pawn, losing, as he would not be able to prevent the black king from coming in on the opposite side of the pawn.

But White could draw without any drama with classic shouldering tactics.

59.♔d4!

The king stays close enough to the f-pawn to be able to defend it if needed. And at the same time, enough in the way of the black king to ruin Black's ability to bring the king back.

59...♔b2



60.♖h1!

60.♖xa2? would lose to 60...♔xa2!, as the white king is now cut off and would have to go to e4 to help the pawn advance.

60...a1=♚ 61.♖xa1 ♖xa1 62.f4 ♖f1 63.♔e5
♔c3 64.f5 ♔c4 65.f6 ♔c5 66.♔e6

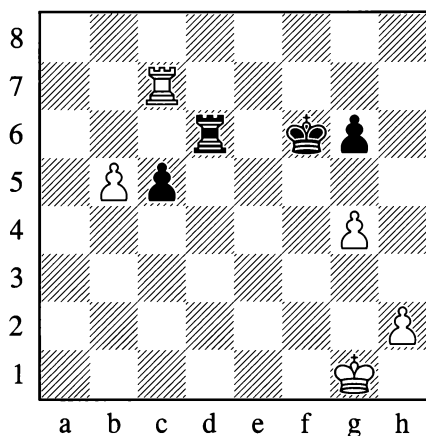
White makes the draw by a tempo.

At its core, shouldering is an easy principle and can be used almost without thinking in rook endings – which can be useful in time trouble. You try to keep the opponent's king away, if you are doing the shouldering, or you try to get your king close, if you have the rook. It is possible to find complicated examples (I recall a very difficult one that Kramnik got wrong over the board from *Grandmaster Preparation – Endgame Play*), but this is not truly desirable from an educational point of view. So, the following examples in this chapter will be focused on the difficulties good players have faced in implementing it in practice. Not to put them on the spot, but to provide the repetition that will make the principle stick.

The next game is between two strong Danish grandmasters, from when they were juniors and both defending European Champions in their age group (u18 and u14 respectively). After an exchange of knights, White has an extra pawn and is threatening to take another one.

Jesper Thybo – Jonas Buhl Bjerre

Svendborg 2018



43...♞d5?

We have already established that when you are a pawn down, it is dangerous to defend passively. Of course, there are exceptions, but usually they are based on concrete considerations, as we shall see in Chapter 22.

43...♔g5! would have activated the king and given a highly desired exchange of pawns. I will not confuse the matter with a variation.

44.h4?

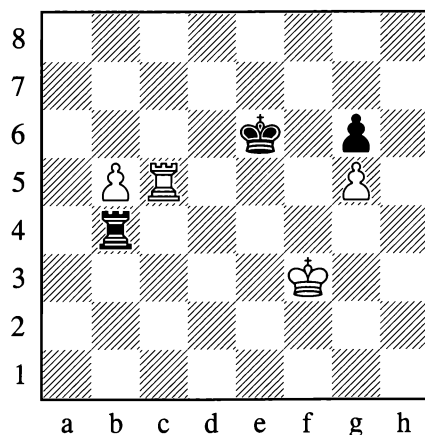
Preventing ...♔g5, but giving Black another chance to put the rook behind the passed pawn.

Passed pawns must be pushed! The endgame is about queening or otherwise exploiting the power of passed pawns more than anything. So, when you get the chance to put a pawn on the 7th rank, you take it. 44.b6! followed by b6-b7 would have won.

44...♞d4 45.g5†

45.♞c6†!? driving the king backwards was a better try, but with accurate play, Black will keep the balance.

45...♔e6 46.♞xc5 ♞xh4 47.♔f2 ♞b4 48.♔f3

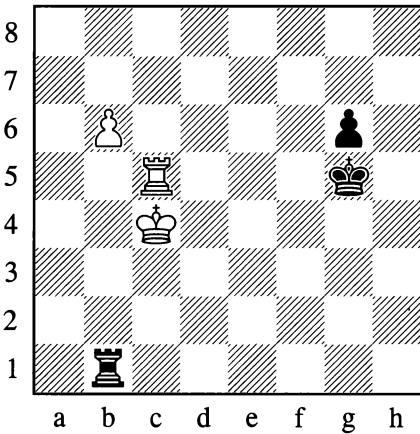


48...♖b3+!

Black has a chance to do something and instead treads water.

48...♗d6 49.♖c6+ ♔e5 would have drawn instantly.

49.♗e4 ♖b4+ 50.♗d3 ♗d6 51.♖c6+ ♔e5
52.b6 ♗f5 53.♗c3 ♖b1 54.♗c4 ♗xg5
55.♖c5+



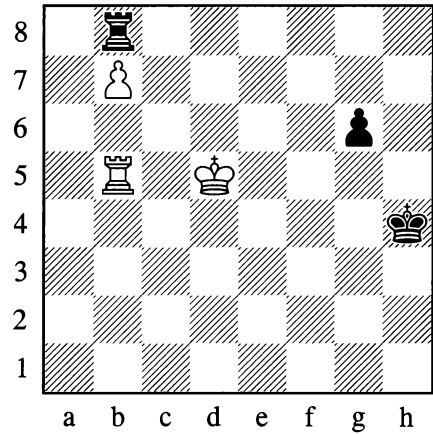
White has gained a few tempos from Black's dithering, but the position is still within the drawing margin, if shouldering is applied.

55...♗h4?

The wrong side of the pawn. Showing a lack of knowledge.

55...♗f4! would be the same endgame, just with the king on the correct side of the pawn.

56.♖b5 ♖c1+ 57.♗d5 ♖c8 58.b7 ♖b8

**59.♖b4+?**

Overthinking. White was winning with direct play:

59.♗c6! g5 60.♗c7 ♖xb7+ 61.♖xb7!

The rook needs to get behind the pawn as quickly as possible.

61...g4

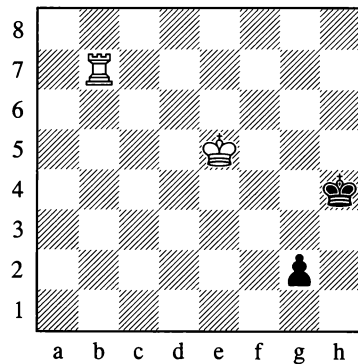
It is too late for Black to change strategy.

After 61...♗g3!? 62.♗d6 ♗f4 63.♗d5 g4 64.♗d4 ♗f3 65.♗d3 g3 66.♖f7+ White wins, as the king will come close to the pawn.

62.♗d6 g3 63.♗e5

The most elegant way to win, but prosaically putting the rook behind the pawn also works.

63...g2



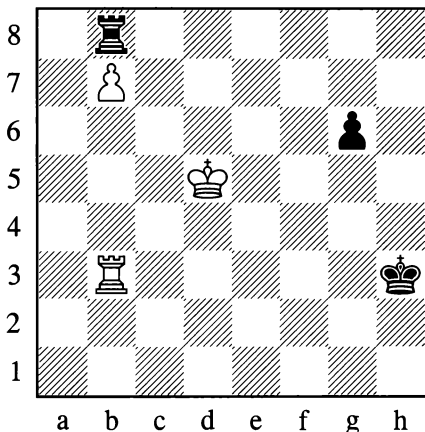
64.♗f4! g1=♚ 65.♖h7#

59...♔h3!

White's idea is that after 59...♔g3?, he can play 60.♕e5 and take the pawn, without the black king being able to join in.

60.♖b3†

60.♕c6 is worse now. After 60...g5 we can see that the black king was given a free tempo.

**60...♔h4?**

Keeping the king on the wrong side of the pawn in order not to obstruct it. This is not stupid, but what all would do if they do not understand shouldering. These players are both hugely talented and smarter than most people you will ever meet. But without knowledge, you will make this sort of mistake.

60...♔g4!! was the correct move. The king wants to be on the left side of the pawn, where it can keep the white king away. 61.♕c6 g5 62.♕c7 ♖xb7† 63.♖xb7 ♔f3! and Black makes the draw, as the white king cannot join the action.

61.♕e4?

This leads directly to a draw with no chances of winning at all.

61.♕c6! would transpose to the note above.

61...g5 62.♖b5 ♔h3 63.♕f3 g4† 64.♕f2 g3† 65.♕g1 ♕g4 66.♕g2 ♕f4

Going to the queenside to secure the draw.

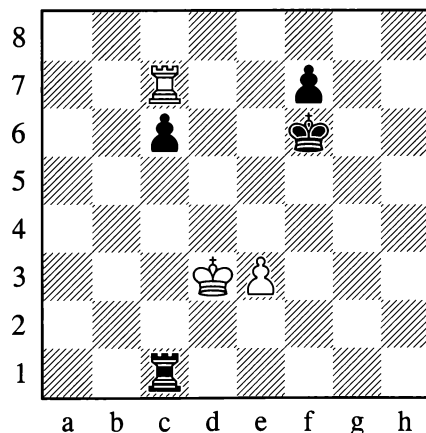
67.♖b4† ♕e5 68.♕xg3

½–½

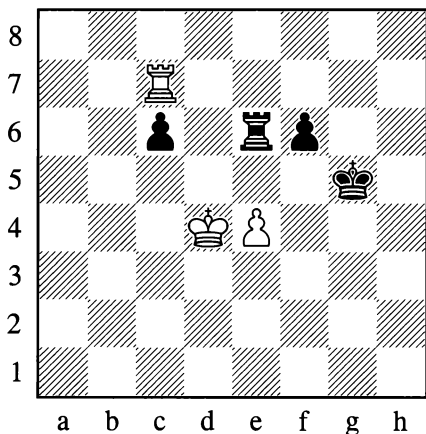
Mostly in this book, we will start at the critical moments, but it is good to remember that the game does not start there, but that a lot of play comes before them and they are not earmarked when they arrive. So, with this example, we start at move 41, just after the time control, where White is a pawn down, but with a lot of decent ways to defend. What is interesting is to see how Black improves his position by manoeuvring the rook to e6 and only then activating the king.

Bjorn Ahlander – Can Ertan

Sweden 2020



41.♕e4 ♕e6 42.♖c8 ♔d6 43.♖f8 ♖f1 44.♕d4 ♖d1† 45.♕e4 ♕e7 46.♖c8 ♕d7 47.♖f8 ♕e6 48.♖e8† ♕f6 49.♖c8 ♖d6 50.♕f4 ♕g6 51.e4 ♖f6† 52.♕e5 ♖e6† 53.♕f4 ♖f6† 54.♕e5 ♕g5 55.♖c7 ♖e6† 56.♕d4 f6



Black has made progress and we have now entered what Boris Gelfand refers to as the zone of one mistake. His argument is that getting your opponent into a situation where he can make fatal mistakes is a big achievement on the path to winning. It is hard to disagree.

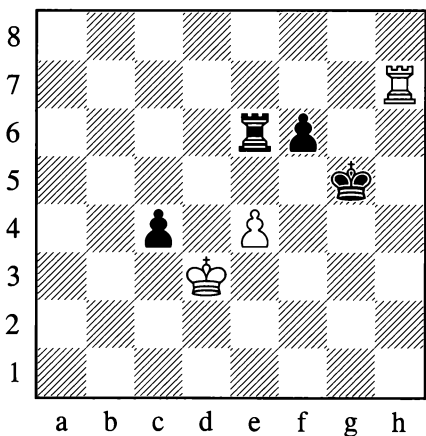
57.♖h7!

The only way to defend against ...♕f4.

57...c5† 58.♕d3

58.♕xc5 ♖xe4 would see the king cut off.

58...c4†



59.♕d4!

White has to keep the balance between defending the e-pawn and attacking the c-pawn.

59.♕xc4? ♖xe4† 60.♕d3 loses to 60...♖e1!, which will be explained in depth later (one of few theory positions included in this book). (60...f5? would allow White to defend from the front [see Chapter 11, page 171] with 61.♖h1! ♕g4 62.♖g1† ♕h3 63.♖f1 ♖e5 64.♕d4! and holds.) 61.♕d2 ♖e5! The white king is now far from being able to harass the rook. 62.♖h1 f5 63.♖g1† ♕h4 64.♖f1 ♕g4 65.♖g1† ♕h3 66.♖f1 ♕g2 Black wins.

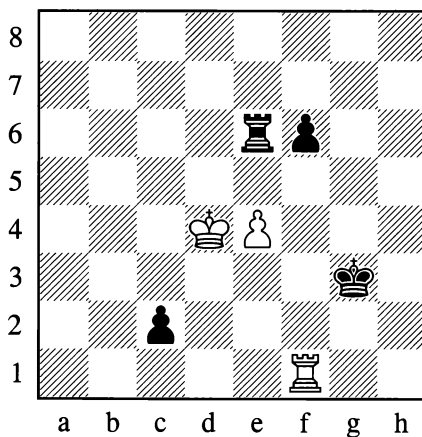
59...c3

White is also holding after 59...♖c6 60.♕c3 ♕f4 61.♖e7!.

60.♖h1!?

60.♖c7? ♕f4 would lose, but White could have played: 60.♕xc3! ♖xe4 61.♖h1! f5 62.♕d3!, holding as above.

60...c2 61.♖c1 ♕f4 62.♖f1† ♕g3



The critical position, where White was able to hold only by shouldering away the black king.

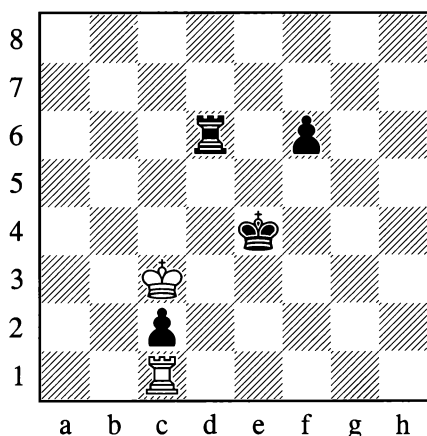
63.♞c1?

63.♟e3!! was the holding move. 63...♞c6 (63...f5 64.♞f3! is a remarkable way to survive with checks.) 64.♞c1 ♟g2 65.♟e2! White survives by keeping the black king in bay. The position is quite incredible.

63...♟f3

The black king comes in for the kill.

64.♟d3 ♞d6† 65.♟c3 ♞c6† 66.♟d3 ♞d6†
67.♟c3 ♟xe4



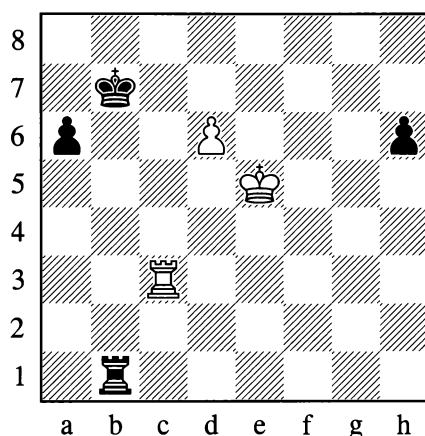
Black is winning. The white king is cut off.

68.♞e1† ♟f3 69.♟xc2 f5 70.♞f1† ♟g4
71.♞g1† ♟h3 72.♞f1 ♞d5 73.♞h1† ♟g2
74.♞h5 ♟g3 75.♞g5† ♟f4 76.♞g1 ♟e3
77.♞g5 ♟e4 78.♟c3 ♞d8 79.♞g2 f4 80.♞h2
♟e3 81.♞h7 ♞c8† 82.♟b2 f3 83.♞e7†
♟d2 84.♞d7† ♟e1 85.♞e7† ♟f1 86.♞e6 f2
87.♞f6 ♞e8 88.♟c2 ♟e2
0-1

The following game was not played between top players, nor was everything perfect, yet it had a lot of instructive moments. The game was in the last round, making it plausible that the players were reaching a stage of minor exhaustion. And it was already quite a long game by the time we come in.

Victor Torres – Andres Carlos Perez Javaloyes

Santander 2011

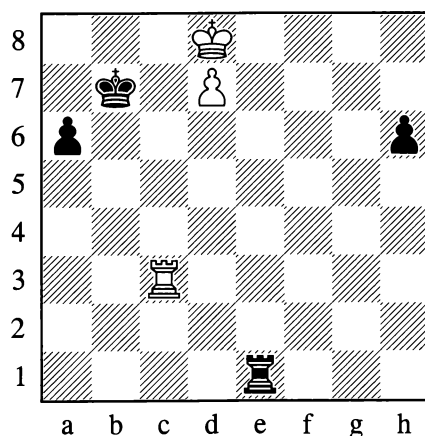


With the white pawn reaching the 7th rank, the likelihood of a rook vs pawns ending becomes highly likely. With two flank pawns, Black will continuously have to consider carefully where to run with the king.

51.d7 ♞e1†

Black gives checks until the white king hides in front of the pawn.

52.♟d6 ♞d1† 53.♟e6 ♞e1† 54.♟d6 ♞d1†
55.♟e7 ♞e1† 56.♟d8



Which pawn should Black push?

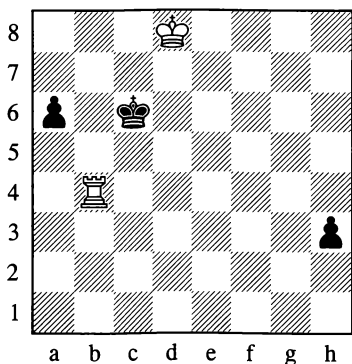
56...h5!

It is surprising that the h-pawn is the first to make a go for it. The reason is non-obvious. It is a decoy!

Thus 56...a5? would lose in beautiful fashion. 57.♖c5! a4 (Also after 57...♙a1 58.♞e5 Black would be lost. And after 57...♗b6 then 58.♞d5! with the threat of ♗d8-c8 would win on the spot.) 58.♖c4! Separating the king and the a-pawn. 58...a3 59.♞b4† ♗c6 60.♗c8 White queens the pawn and the a-pawn is already cut off from the herd. After 60...♞d1 61.d8=♞ ♞xd8† 62.♗xd8 ♗d5 63.♗e7 ♗e5 64.♙a4 ♗f5 65.♙xa3 h5 66.♙a5† White will win quickly.

57.♖c7†

The point in shipping the h-pawn down the river can be seen in the following variation. 57.♞b3† ♗c6 58.♞d3 ♗b7! Preventing the white king from escaping. 59.♞d5 h4 60.♞d4 h3 61.♞b4† ♗c6 62.♗c8 ♞d1 63.d8=♞ ♞xd8† 64.♗xd8



64...a5 Black makes the draw, as the king is already close to the pawn and can help it advance: 65.♞h4 ♗b5 66.♞xh3 a4 And so on.

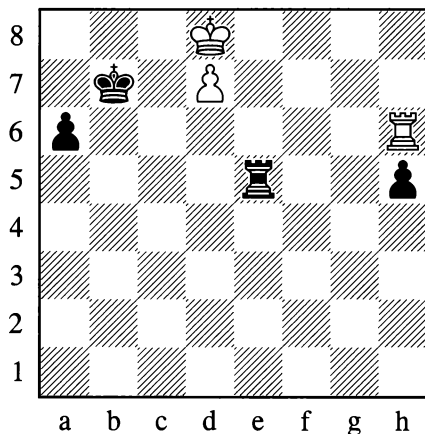
57...♗b8 58.♖c6!

Sneakily threatening ♞b6† and ♗c7.

58...♗b7! 59.♞h6 ♞e5?

An understandable mistake with a tricky refutation.

Instead, 59...♞d1! would have held the game. 60.♞xh5 ♗c6 61.♞h6† ♗b7! White would not be able to make progress without allowing the black king and pawn to advance freely.

**60.♞h7?**

60.♞h8! would have won in a very instructive line. 60...a5 61.♞e8 ♞d5 62.♗e7 ♗c6 63.d8=♞ ♞xd8 64.♞xd8 a4 65.♙a8 ♗b5 66.♗d6 ♗b4 67.♗d5 a3 68.♗d4 ♗b3 69.♗d3 a2 70.♞b8† ♗a3 71.♗c2 a1=♗† 72.♗c3 ♗a2 73.♞h8 ♗b1 74.♞xh5 and White soon wins the knight as well.

60...♞g5?

60...a5! 61.♞e7 ♞d5 62.♗e8 ♗c6 and the a-pawn saves the day for Black once again.

61.♞e7?

61.♗e7! ♞d5 62.d8=♞ ♞xd8 63.♗xd8† and 64.♞xh5 would cut off the black king on the 5th rank, which almost always wins.

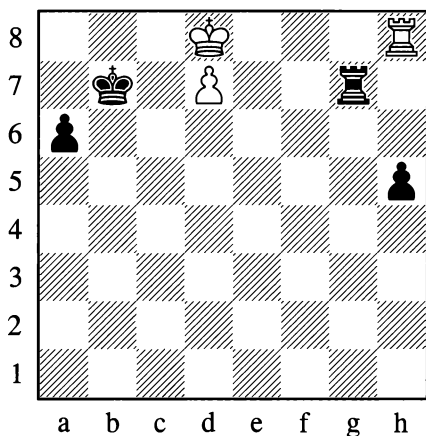
61...♞g8†?

61...a5! drew as above.

62.♞e8 ♞g7 63.♞h8?

63.♞f8! was a much better square for the rook, as can be seen in this variation: 63...♗c6 64.♞f6† ♗b5 65.♗e8, and White wins two tempos compared to the next note. Black has to take on d7, not only leaving the white king closer, but

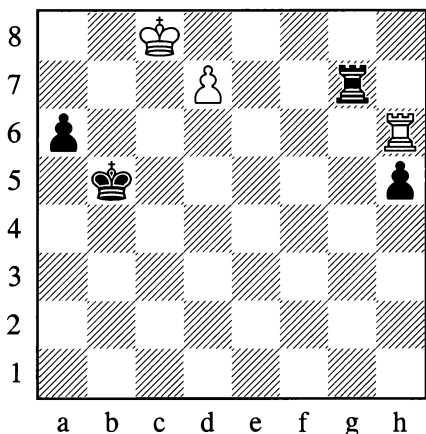
also without the benefit of him making a move first. All because 65...a5 66.d8=♖ ♖g8† can be answered with 67.♖f8!, and wins.



63...♖g5?

Black is losing the plot – and possibly also on time.

Black had a chance to make a draw with: 63...♖c6! It is important to threaten to steal the d-pawn. White has to give up a tempo. 64.♖h6† ♖b5 The king needs to make it to the 5th rank, or he will be cut off. Imagine that the pawn reaches a3. White will play ♖h3 and Black has to be able to play ...♖b4! to support the pawn, or it will be lost. 65.♖c8 (65.♖e8 a5! 66.d8=♖ ♖g8† transposes.)



65...♖g8†! It is important to keep the king as far away as possible. Later, we shall look into this topic in greater detail. 66.d8=♖ ♖xd8† 67.♖xd8 a5 68.♖d7 a4 69.♖xh5† ♖c4 70.♖c6 a3 71.♖h4† ♖c3 72.♖b5 a2 Black is in time to make the draw.

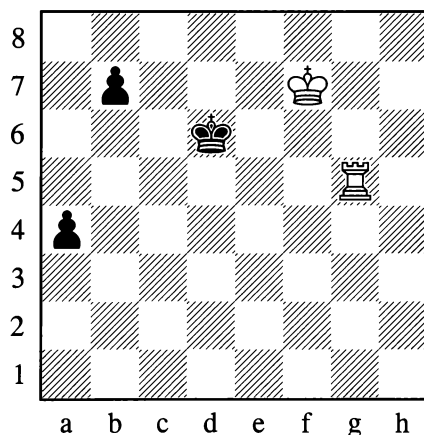
64.♖e7

Black resigned.

1-0

N. Griva & A. Zhukov

sp.hm Shakhmatnaya Kompozitsia 2018



There are situations where the king and the rook can seem to be in each other's way. And as tempos should not be carelessly discarded, knowing how to get the pieces to collaborate is useful. In the following study, the first blitz tries of the hand fail, even if the way to coordinate the pieces is not so surprising. This example could easily be in the chapter on Rook vs Pawn, or in the chapter about cutting off the king, but we are keeping it here to put a torchlight to the shouldering aspects of it.

3.♖a5?!

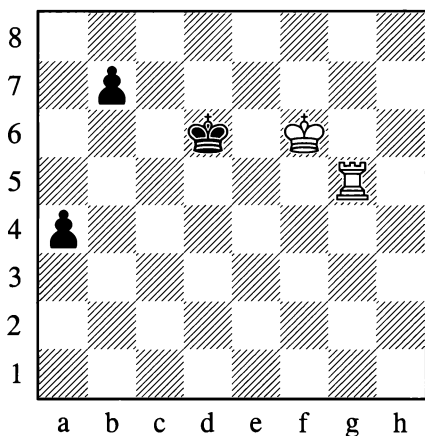
Premature. White allows the black king to join the game, at the cost of only a pawn.

3...♙c6 4.♖xa4 b5 5.♞a1 ♙d5!

Shouldering. Black draws.

A far more natural try is:

3.♙f6!?



But the king and the rook do not cooperate well like this.

3...b6!!

The key move. Taking away the a5-square from the rook is the best use of Black's turn.

4.♞e5

The necessity of manoeuvres is usually a bad sign.

4.♙f5 is met with 4...♙d5!, with classic shouldering.

4...a3! 5.♞e3 b5 6.♖xa3 ♙d5!

The standard move. Keep shouldering!

6...b4? 7.♞a5! would see the king cut off on the 5th rank, which is a death sentence. This stuff belongs in *Theoretical Rook Endgames*.

6...♙c5? is a more likely mistake, forgetting about shouldering, reacting on a human emotion that the king defends the pawn

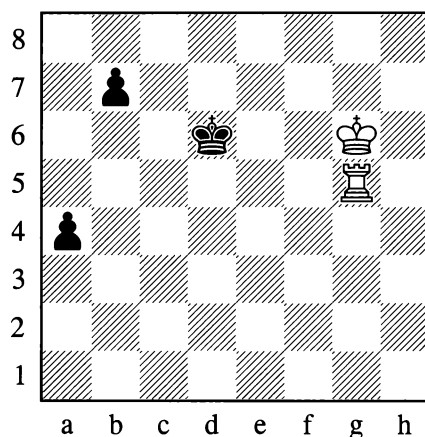
better from the c-file than the d-file, which is only the case if it is attacked. Which means protecting the pawn from d4 or d3 is better. Now 7.♙e5! b4 8.♞a8 ♙c4 9.♙e4 ♙c3 10.♙e3 b3 11.♞c8† and White wins by a tempo.

7.♞a8 b4

The draw is achieved.

The solution is to bring the king back without interfering with the rook's domination of the black king.

3.♙g6!



3...b6!?

The composer's main line. The point of the white position is that it is flexible and the king can still choose to go the fast path, if Black was to throw away a tempo:

3...♙c6 4.♙f5! ♙d5 The shouldering attempt. Black has no chances if he lets the white king come close. 5.♙f4† The black king is trapped between shouldering the white king and defending the pawns. After 5...♙d4 6.♞a5 b5 7.♞xb5 ♙c3 8.♞a5 ♙b3 9.♙e3 White is in time.

4.♙h5!

The not-so-surprising point.

4.♔f5? would fail to 4...♕d5 5.♕f4† ♕d4 and we can see the benefit of 3...b6, taking away the a5-square from the white rook.

4.♖f5? is also slow. There is no space for manoeuvring in a race. 4...a3 5.♖f3 b5 6.♖xa3 ♕d5 and Black makes the draw.

4...♕c6

4...a3 5.♖g3 is similar.

5.♕g4!

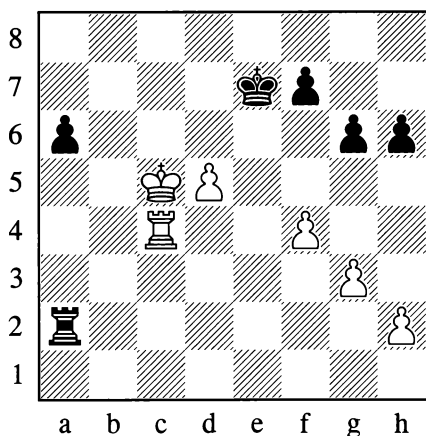
The king is in time. Move mores can (and should) be played, but the outcome is certain bar any silly slips.

1–0

The following example starts with White having a positional advantage through his more active king and strong central passed pawn. But quickly it becomes clear that the pawn will queen and claim the black rook in the process. The race that will decide the game is all relating to the counterplay Black will be able to create in the meantime.

Swapnil Dhopade – Tejas Bakre

New Delhi 2017



39.♕c6!

Fighting for the squares in front of the pawn.

39...♖d2

With this move Black accepts that he will lose the rook sooner or later, but hopes that the king will be able to create counterplay on the kingside before it happens.

The passive try was also difficult to refute:

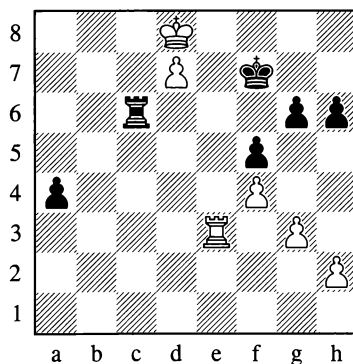
39...f5 40.♖c3!

Renewing the check on the e-file.

40...a5 41.♕c7! ♖d2 42.♖e3† ♕f7 43.d6 a4 44.d7!?

I think everyone would play this move, but there were more wins, most spectacularly: 44.♕d7! is sneaky and more beautiful, but besides noticing the idea of transferring the rook along the 8th rank after a check, we shall not pay too much attention to it.

44...♖c2† 45.♕d8 ♖c6



46.g4!!

A classic break.

46...fxg4 47.♖e7†

47.f5? is impatient. 47...gxf5 48.♖e5 ♕f6 49.♖d5 ♖a6! 50.♕c7 ♖a8 would allow Black to escape with a draw. The king will help the f-pawn advance.

47...♕f8 48.f5 gxf5

Otherwise fxg6, ♖e8† and ♕c7 will allow the white rook to get to a8 and the d-pawn to promote.

49.♖e5

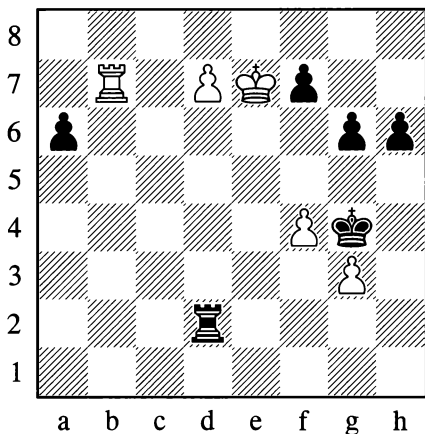
White wins.

39...♙d8?! 40.♙d6! ♜d2 41.♞c6! will allow the rook to go to a6 or c7, in either case with an easy win.

40.♞e4† ♙d8 41.♞a4 ♙e7 42.♞e4† ♙d8 43.♞b4 ♙e7 44.♞b7† ♙f6

44...♙e8 45.♙d6 ♙f8 46.♞a7 wins easily.

45.d6 ♞xh2 46.♙c7 ♞c2† 47.♙d8 ♜d2 48.d7 ♙f5 49.♙e7 ♙g4



50.♞b3!

A natural move, defending the backstopping pawn. White also had a direct win with all natural moves after: 50.d8=♞!? ♞xd8 51.♙xd8 ♙xg3 52.♞xf7 h5 53.♙e7! h4 54.♞h7 h3 55.♙f6 a5 56.♙xg6 a4 57.f5 h2 58.f6 a3 59.f7 a2 60.f8=♞ a1=♞ 61.♞d6† and mate to follow. But in time trouble, no one would trust their own accuracy in such a variation.

50...f5

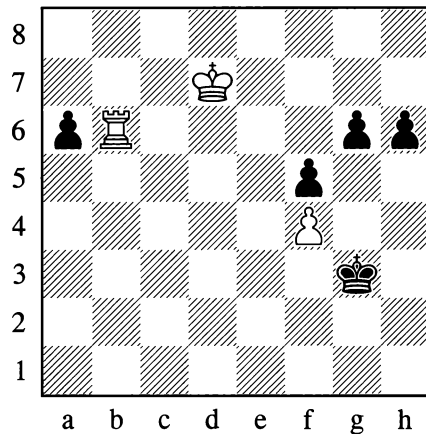
But now it is time to queen the pawn. Things will never get as favourable as now.

51.♞b6?!

Making things harder than they needed be.

51.d8=♞! could be calculated. 51...♞xd8 52.♙xd8 g5 53.♙e7 gxf4 54.gxf4 ♙xf4 55.♙f6 with an easy win.

51...♞xd7† 52.♙xd7 ♙xg3



53.♞xg6†

Swapnil misses out on the final chance to win the game. It is based on shouldering, so although it is a series of only moves, they are not impossible to find in a practical game.

53.♙e6! ♙xf4 54.♙f6! a5 55.♙xg6 ♙g4 56.♞b1! f4 57.♞g1† ♙h3 58.♞f1 ♙g3 59.♙f5! f3 60.♙e4 f2 61.♙e3 White wins.

53...♙xf4 54.♞xh6 ♙e4 55.♞e6† ♙d3! 56.♞d6† ♙e4 57.♞e6† ♙d3 58.♞f6 ♙e4 59.♞xa6 f4 60.♙e6 f3 61.♞a4†

½–½

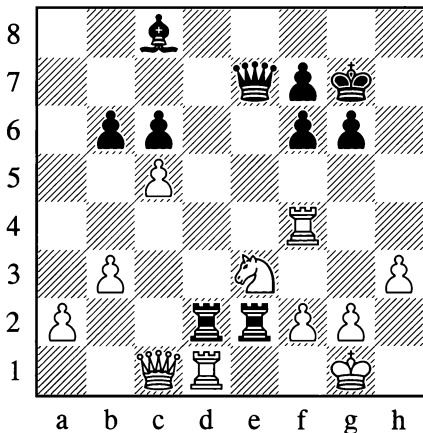
Shouldering with a rook each

The following examples are truly complex. The shouldering is happening in positions where both players have a rook, and thus should be understood in a somewhat different way, although it is still about keeping the opponent's king at bay.

The following game is a roller coaster ride, with a beautiful combination, botched in time trouble, followed by a deeply complicated rook endgame, where shouldering will occur in a profoundly different version than we are used to.

Peio Duboue – Matthias Bluebaum

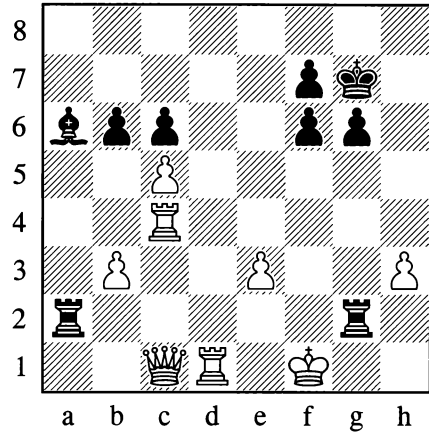
Chalons-en-Champagne 2021



31...♞xe3!

A wonderful queen sacrifice.

**32.fxex3 ♜xg2† 33.♔f1 ♙a6† 34.♞c4 ♞df2†
35.♔e1 ♞xa2 36.♔f1**



36...♞h2?

36...bxc5! was the winning move. Black takes a pawn, realising that White cannot do anything with the tempo he has been given. The transition into the rook ending afterwards would be deadly.

37.♔g1 ♞ag2† 38.♔f1 ♞c2

Finding there no longer is a forced win, Bluebaum tries his luck in the rook ending.

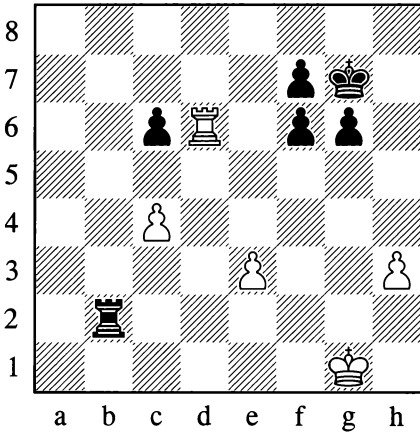
39.♞xc2 ♞xc2 40.cxb6 ♞b2

40...♙xc4†?? 41.bxc4 with the threat of c4-c5 would win for White. 41...♞xc4 42.♞b1! for example.

41.♔g1?!

41.♞d3 ♙xc4 42.bxc4 ♞xb6 43.♞d6! f5 44.♔f2 g5 45.♔f3 draws.

41...♙xc4 42.bxc4 ♞xb6 43.♞d6 ♞b2!

**44.♔f1!**

The h-pawn is traditionally the least useful pawn and White is right to let it go.

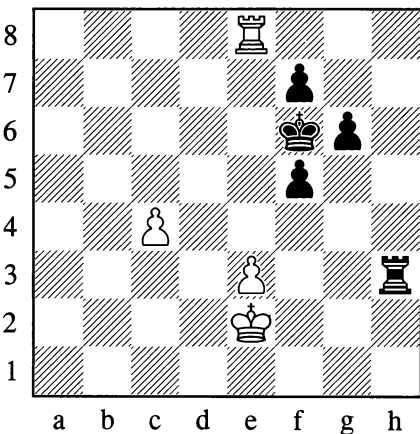
44.♞xc6 ♞e2 and wins.

44...c5 45.♞d5 ♞h2 46.♞xc5 ♞xh3

Black is a pawn up and definitely has winning chances in practice. Analysing an endgame like this with an engine can be highly misleading, as it will tell you when the position changes evaluation, from drawn to lost, for example, but is far less helpful in telling you when your position becomes more difficult. I have tried to speculate below, but this is always up for discussion.

47.♔e2 f5 48.♞c8 ♔f6 49.♞e8

I intuitively like this move.

**49...f4!**

A strong practical decision. Black needs passed pawns to win. Going from a pawn up to pressuring a weak pawn could be a step in that direction.

49...♞h1 50.c5 ♞c1 51.♞c8 followed by c5-c6, with the intention of snatching a pawn on the kingside in exchange for the c-pawn, looks like a draw too.

50.exf4 ♔f5 51.♞f8

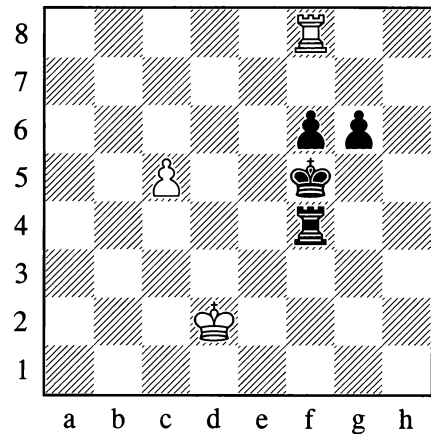
I dislike this decision intensely. I feel that there are more chances of making mistakes in a situation where White allows Black to have two passed pawns and relies on the c-pawn being a counterweight. Put simply, passed pawns are more likely to promote.

I personally would see getting the king to f3 as the path to a draw. After 51.♞e3! ♞h1 52.c5 ♞c1 53.♔f3 f6 54.c6 ♞c4!? 55.♔g3 ♞xc6 56.♞a3 I cannot find a way for Black to pose White with serious problems.

51...f6 52.♔d2

This is the idea of the previous move.

52.c5! ♞c3 53.♔f2 ♞xc5 54.♔f3 would be a way to keep the balance.

52...♞f3 53.c5 ♞xf4

54.c6?

This is a real mistake. White should not allow the black rook to get behind the c-pawn so easily. Especially with the king being passive.

54.♔d3 ♚f1 55.♔c4 would still give White enough counterplay. The black rook does come behind the c-pawn, but at least the white king is active. (55.♔d2? ♚e6 and Black wins)

54...♞c4 55.♞c8 g5?

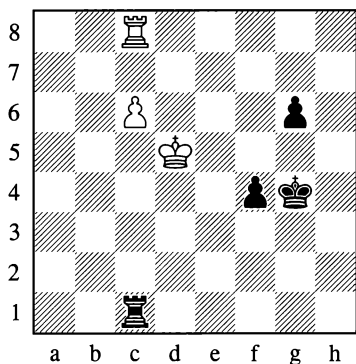
The most natural-looking move in the world and not for a second one you would suspect was a mistake. Once you see the defensive idea, you probably get confused more than inspired.

55...♔f4! looks natural, once you understand the defensive idea, as it takes away the ♔e3-d4 path for the white king. But it also involves giving up the rook and racing the two passed pawns down the board, winning by one tempo. Looking at it during the game must have been challenging.

55...♔g4!

This has the same issue. It does feel slightly more natural to me, as it prevents all ♞e4-c4 ideas, due to ...f1=♞ being with check. But honestly, it is a matter of experience and taste and not objective at all.

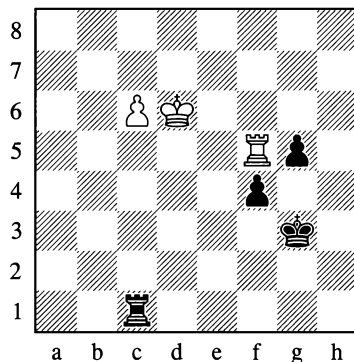
56.♔d3 ♞c1 57.♔d2 ♞c5 58.♔e3 f5 59.♔d4 ♞c1 60.♔d5 f4

**61.♞f8**

Because of the check on f1, this is now the only try.

61...g5 62.♔d6 ♔g3 63.♞f5

After 63.c7 f3 64.c8=♞ ♞xc8 65.♞xc8 f2 66.♞c1, the easiest is to shoulder with 66...♔f4!.



63...g4 64.♞c5 ♔d1† 65.♔e7 ♞a1 66.c7 ♞a8 67.c8=♞ ♞xc8 68.♞xc8 f3 69.♔e6 f2 70.♞c1 ♔h2

Black wins.

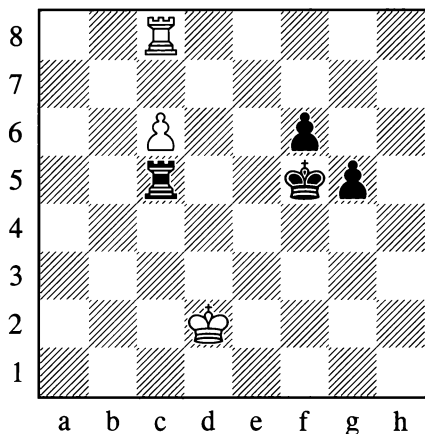
56.♔d3

Played after more than 4 minutes, after which White resigned. Prematurely, as the position still holds.

56...♞c1 57.♔d2!

57.♔d4? looks natural, and was probably what White was looking at that made him resign prematurely. But after 57...♔f4 58.♔d5 g4 59.♔d6, Black would have to find 59...f5! 60.♞g8 ♔g3! to win the game. It may look easy when you see it, but there are other options that look reasonable, just like 55...g5? did. For example, 59...g3?, where White holds after 60.♞g8!, with the core idea 60...♔f3 61.♞f8!.

57...♞c5



58.♔e3!!

Shouldering. This is a race between the white rook and black pawns, just with a lot of additional elements in the mix.

58.♔d3 ♔f4 59.♔d4 ♖c2 60.♔d5 g4 is hopeless.

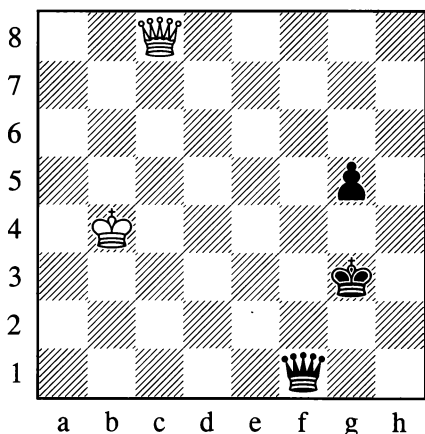
58...♔g4

The black king is kept at bay after 58...g4 59.c7 ♖c1 60.♔d2! ♖c6 61.♔e3!.

59.♔d4 ♖c1 60.♔d5 f5 61.♖e8 f4 62.♖e4! ♔g3

62...♔f5 63.♖c4 ♖xc4 64.♔xc4 ♔e6 65.♔b5 only makes things easier for White.

63.♖c4 ♖xc4 64.♔xc4 f3 65.c7 f2 66.c8=♖ f1=♖† 67.♔b4!

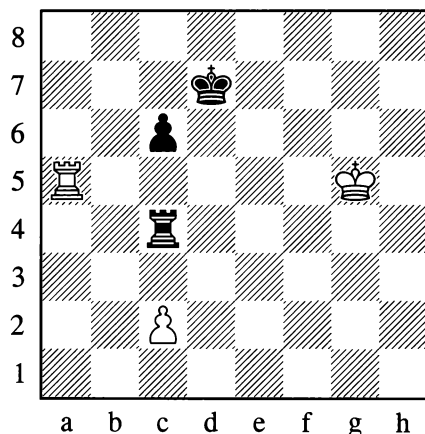


The king is headed for the faraway corner, as first discovered by Botvinnik. The endgame is still difficult, but objectively within drawing margins.

The following example is simpler.

Radek Kalod – Vitezslav Priehoda

Czech Republic 2021



54...♖xc2??

A simple move, played automatically.

55.♔f4 ♔d6 56.♔e3

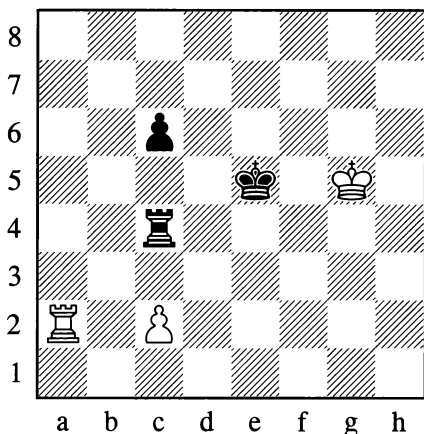
White drew.

Black would have won by shouldering.

54...♔e6!

would have the double effect of shouldering the white king (54...♔d6? 55.♔f5! holds for White) and putting White in zugzwang, unable to hold the blockade along the 5th rank.

55.♖a2 ♔e5



Black is winning in many ways. The best technical approach is to keep White tied down and improve the position as much as possible, which here means advancing the c-pawn.

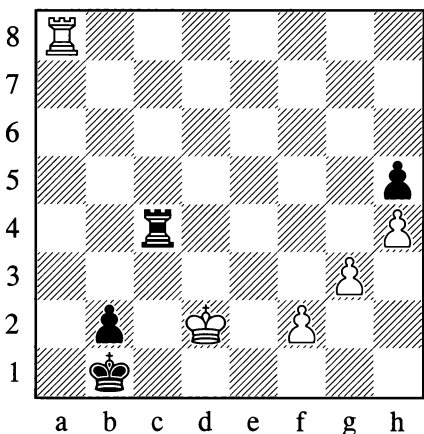
56. Bb2 c5 57. Ba2 Bc3 58. c4 59. Bb2 Ba3

Black wins the c-pawn at the right moment.

The following example is mind-blowingly complex, if you simply look at the variations and allow yourself to get confused. But with a knowledge of shouldering, it was possible to find the draw for White.

**Sarasadat Khadomalsharieh –
Mykhaylo Oleksiyenko**

Doha 2014



The game was a disaster for White.

52.f4?

52. Bb8? also does not work. Black has many ways to win, for example 52... Ba4 or 52... Bc2+ 53. c3 c1 and Black wins the race. We maybe cannot calculate this clearly, but we can see that it is slower than the alternatives, which is enough to discard it.

52... Bc5

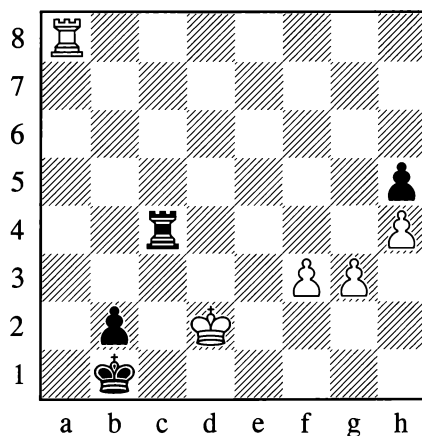
Going for the Lucena position. 52... Bc2+ 53. c3 d1 Bc3 was another good way to continue.

53. Ba7 Bd5+ 54. c3 c2 55. Bc7+ c3 56. Bb7+ c3 57. Bxb2 cxb2 58. c4 Bd8 59. f5 c3 60. f6 Bf8 61. c5 c4

0-1

White makes a draw by creating a passed pawn and using the king for shouldering.

52.f3!

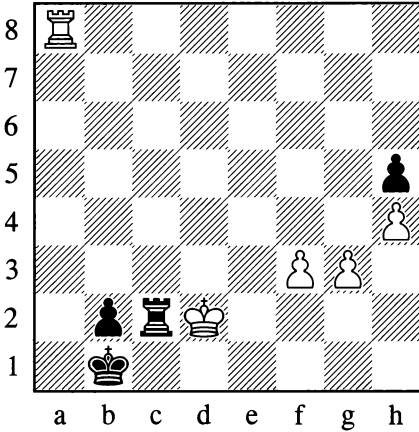


52... Bc2+

I assume that White believed that she would be lost after this move.

52... Bb4+ is less of a challenge. After 53. c3 Bb4 54. c2! Bb3, Black has made a small

improvement, but White will still be able to get herself a passed pawn with: 55.g4!, when the draw is available, as long as White remembers to run for the kingside with the king at the critical moment.



53.♔d3!!

A mixture between prophylaxis and shouldering. The power of this move cannot be fully understood without looking seriously at the alternatives.

53.♔d1? ♖c3 is hopeless.

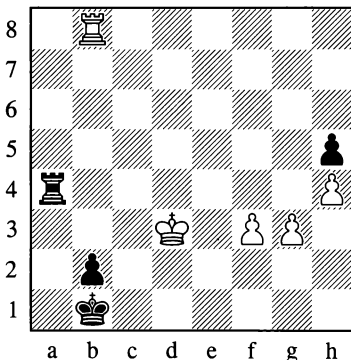
But it is more puzzling that White is lost after: 53.♔e3? ♔c1 54.♖b8

This would allow Black to cut off the white king with:

54...♖c4!! 55.♔d3 ♖a4

Black wins after:

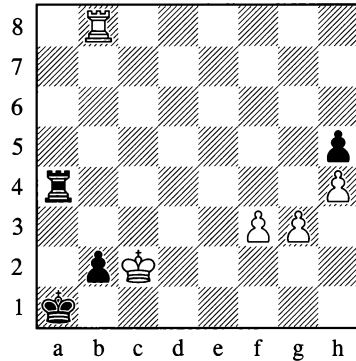
56.♖c8† ♔b1 57.♖b8



57...♔a1!

57...♔a2? would allow the white king back into the game: 58.♔c2! ♖c4† 59.♔d3 ♖c8 60.♖b7! (60.♖b6? would help the rook to get to a better rank. 60...♖c6! 61.♖b7 b1=♖† and Black wins narrowly.) White holds after both 60...♖c7 61.♖b8, and 60...b1=♖† 61.♖xb1 ♔xb1 62.♔e4!.

58.♔c2



58...♖a5!!

A fantastic waiting move. The rook is also OK placed on a6, but not a7.

58...♖a2 59.♔d3! ♖a4 60.♔c2 would give Black another chance, but not tell him what to play.

58...♖a7? fails after: 59.♖b4!! ♖c7† 60.♔d3 b1=♖† 61.♖xb1† ♔xb1 62.g4 ♔b2 63.♔e4 ♔c3 64.♔f5 ♔d4 65.gxh5 ♔d5 66.h6 and White draws.

58...♖a6!? does work too, but is less clear cut.

59.♖b4

59.g4 ♖a2 60.♔d3 hxg4 61.fxg4 ♖a4! would cut the king off at the 4th rank and decide the game.

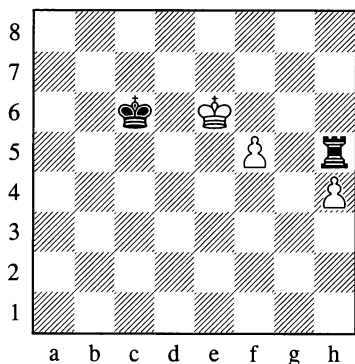
59...♖c5† 60.♔d3 b1=♖† 61.♖xb1† ♔xb1 62.g4

After 62.♔e4 ♔c2 63.g4 ♔c3 White is making no meaningful progress.

62...♔b2 63.gxh5

63.♔e4 ♔c3 Black wins.

63...♖xh5 64.♔e4 ♔c3 65.f4 ♔c4 66.f5 ♔c5 67.♔e5 ♔c6 68.♔e6



68...♔c7!

68...♖xh4? would be a mistake, as after 69.f6 ♖e4† 70.♕f5 ♖e1, White has 71.f7 ♕d7 72.f8=♖†! surviving.

69.f6

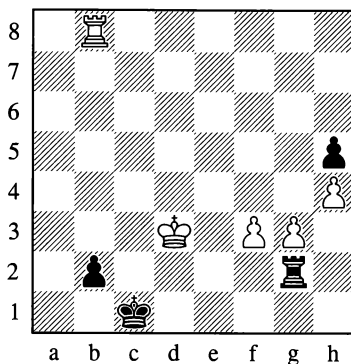
White cannot keep up with the black king and defend the f-pawn at the same time.

69...♕d8

The black king arrives in front of the pawn and wins the game.

53...♕c1 54.♖b8 b1=♚

54...♖g2!/? could be a small trap.



White should not jump the gun with 55.♕e4?, when Black wins with accurate play: 55...♖xg3 56.♖c8† ♕d1 57.♖d8† ♕e1 58.♖b8 ♖g2 59.f4 ♕d1 60.♕f3 ♖d2! 61.f5 ♕c1 62.♕f4 ♖d8! An important tempo-winning move you can find a number of times in this book. 63.♖b6 b1=♚ 64.♖xb1† ♕xb1 65.♕g5 ♖h8 66.f6 ♕c2 67.♕g6 ♕d3 68.♕g7 ♖a8 White is lost. The black king is returning too fast.

Rather, he should keep harassing the black king with 55.♖c8† ♕b1 56.♖g8!, when Black is not making progress.

55.♖xb1† ♕xb1 56.♕e4!

White draws.

56.g4? hxg4 57.fxg4 ♖g2 58.g5 ♖g4! on the other hand, would see the king cut off on the 4th rank, which is a death sentence.

Chapter 4

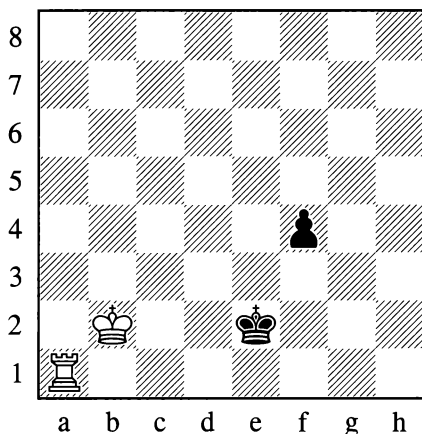
Rook vs Pawns

We have already considered rook vs pawn to a great extent in the previous chapter on shouldering. But in this chapter we shall take a greater look at this material constellation, as it is a frequent occurrence. Rook endings often see a pawn being promoted, winning the rook, but with the game going on. At their core, rook vs pawn endgames are races (exceptions at the end) with lots of finesse individual to each position, but also a lot of recurring themes and ideas. The two big themes are shouldering and checks (more about checks later in Chapter 9, page 143), but also about keeping the king as close as possible. While it is possible to talk at length about this in the abstract, it is more meaningful to look at practical examples and show the key points along the way.

The first position came from Irish GM Alexander Baburin and illustrates the finesse and check part.

Baburin

Chess Today 2019



1.♔c1!

Not the first move you would think of (which would be 1.♔c2), but actually it is the principled move, with the king aiming to come in front of the black pawn, which sounds irrelevant, until you combine it with the check on the 2nd rank. White could also reverse the order of the first two moves, but it would come across as a bit odd, even if it works.

1.♔c2? f3 2.♖a8 f2 3.♖e8† ♔f3! Black would make a draw.

1...f3 2.♖a2†!

Winning an important tempo. Black has to keep the shouldering with:

2...♔e1

But now the king is misplaced. But going to the 3rd rank would allow the white king to approach.

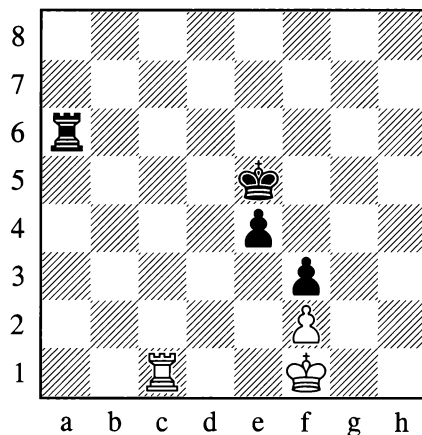
3.♖a8 f2 4.♖e8†

White wins.

There are generally speaking two defensive strategies in chess and the same is the case in rook endings: passive and active. Without making it into a general case, passive defence is rarely successful in queen and rook endings. The heavy pieces are too strong and can inflict too much damage. But there are exceptions. For example, the next position, which belongs in a book on endgame theory, and not on concepts (that comes a bit later). Part of the reason for White needing to play passively is the lack of targets for active counterplay.

Elisabeth Paetz – Jan Gustafsson

Germany 2015

**103.♔e1?**

But in the centre the king is exposed. Most players' intuition is created more from opening and middlegame considerations, than for positions with a minimum of pieces on the board. In the middlegame or early endgame, we would try to centralise the king, but in this endgame, the king is better off on h2, where it is less of a target and less in the way of the rook's ability to operate from the side (see the chapter on Checking Distance, page 163).

The correct way to defend the position is thus 103.♔g1! ♔f4 104.♖c8 ♖a1† 105.♔h2 ♖f1 106.♖c2, where Black does not have a way to break through. With the king on d2, the rook cannot defend the pawn from the side.

103...♔f4 104.♖c8 ♖a1† 105.♔d2 e3† 106.fxe3† ♔g3 107.♖g8† ♔h2!

The practical move.

107...♔f2 won faster according to the tablebases, but I prefer Gustafsson's technique, where a few moves are spent getting the king to the preferable f1-square, making the win technically easier, which is a different thing than "moves to mate".

108.♖h8† ♕g2 109.♖g8† ♕f1 110.e4 f2!?

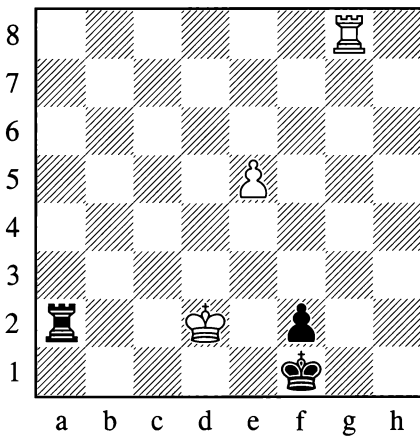
110...♖e1 was more natural.

111.e5 ♖a2†?

An understandable mistake. The win was far from easy:

111...♖e1 112.♖g5 ♖e2†! These small checks are so helpful; we will have a full chapter on them (see page 143). 113.♕d1 ♖a2 The rook is manoeuvred to the best possible square, which happens to be in the d-file. 114.e6 ♖a6 115.♖g6 (115.♖e5 looks clever, but after 115...♖a1† 116.♕d2 ♖e1, the outcome is the same.) 115...♖d6† 116.♕c2 ♕e1 117.e7 ♖d2† 118.♕c3 ♖e2 And Black wins.

Our key moment of interest.



It is useful to develop a good feeling for when the race for counterplay with a pawn against a rook is likely to be successful, so you can make these type of decisions confidently, even if tired after a long defence and under time pressure. Paehtz certainly considered eloping, as she spent 1 minute and 38 seconds on this decision and was down to seconds afterwards. But the hope that passive defence can hold here turned out to be misplaced.

112.♕d1?

112.♕d3? would also lose. After 112...♕e1 113.♖f8 ♖a4! the king is cut off at the 4th rank and the pawn is unable to provide any counterplay. We will talk more about cutting off the king in Chapter 12, page 175.

112.♕e3! followed by giving up the rook is however a draw. It is difficult to see what Paehtz was afraid of, but at the same time, anyone with practical experience of defending endings where there are so many plausible moves and so little time to consider them, will know the difficulties she faced. The point of this book is to give the reader a lot of experience with typical situations and thus the tools to make this type of decision correctly and confidently in their games.

112...♖a5

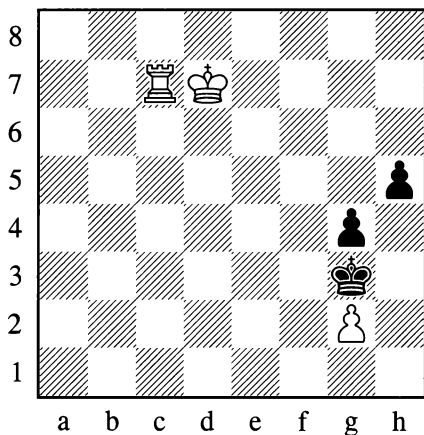
Black wins.

113.e6 ♖d5† 114.♕c2 ♖e5 115.♖g6 ♕e1
0–1

The goal for the side with the rook is almost always the same: to get both the rook and the king close to the scene of action, in order to stop the promotion of a pawn. It does not greatly matter if the weaker side has one or more pawns. If the king and rook are both there, they can deal with a lot, even if it is not always trivial to do so.

**Sebastian Donoso Diaz –
Gonzalo Ivan Recabarren Gajardo**

Antofagasta 2016



Black made an effortless draw after:

49. ♖c2? h4

Now the white king will not get back in time.

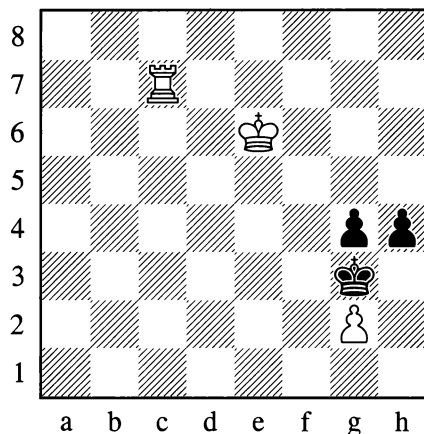
**50. ♔e6 h3 51. gxh3 gxh3 52. ♔f5 h2 53. ♖c1
♔g2
½–½**

White would have won easily if he had brought in the king:

49. ♔e6 h4

Losing the g-pawn does not matter. Remember that Black will not be able to advance both of his passed pawns at the same time, so those two connected passed pawns are not that valuable.

49... ♔xg2 50. ♔f5 g3 51. ♔f4 h4 52. ♔g4 and the check from c2 will decide against 52...h3, while 52... ♔h2 loses to 53. ♖h7!.



50. ♔f5 h3 51. ♖c3†

Taking on h3 first is a transposition.

51... ♔xg2

51... ♔h2 is refuted most simply by taking on h3 and playing ♔f5-g4, but 52.g3 is cute.

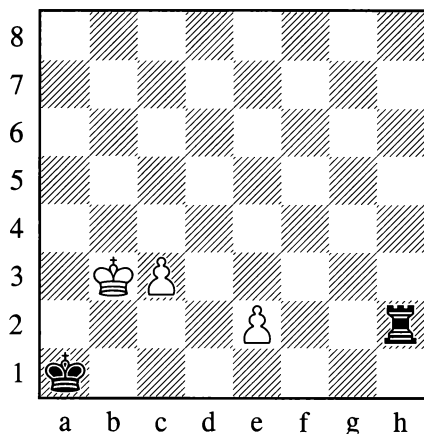
**52. ♔xg4 h2 53. ♖c2† ♔g1 54. ♔g3 h1=♔†
55. ♔f3**

And the knight is trapped and lost.

The next study is a lot about shouldering, but it starts off with a deep finesse, which matters in the coordination of the pieces in the race for the 8th rank.

R. Reti

Shakhmatny Listok #369 1929



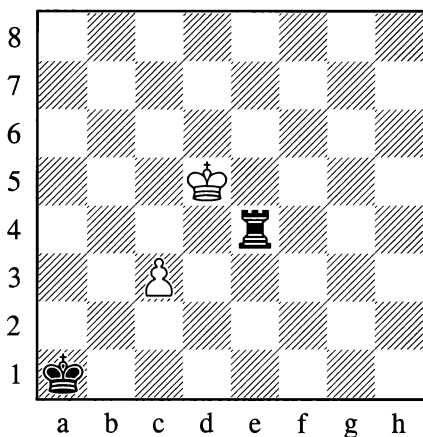
The most natural attempt is to advance the e-pawn.

1.e4? ♖e2 2.♔c4!

White needs to activate the king and wins a few tempos by giving up the e-pawn.

2.c4 ♜xe4 3.♗b4 ♕b2 White is lost because of the pin on the 4th row. Black will continue ...♕c3-d4-e5.

2...♜xe4† 3.♗d5



3...♞e8!!

The instinct is to place the rook behind the passed pawn, but no advice is so good that it should be followed in all circumstances. But it is easy to see someone missing this option; try to choose the best move at move 1. To me, this is the move that makes the study.

3...♞e1? 4.c4 ♜d1† looks tempting, but if you have truly understood the previous chapter on shouldering, you will know where the white king belongs. 5.♕c6!! ♕b2 6.♗b6 and the c-pawn is running down the main strait to the finish line. We now see the point of 3...♞e8!!, which is to win a tempo on the white king, when giving the check from c8, forcing the white king back to the 5th rank, winning a vital tempo.

4.c4 ♜d8† 5.♕c6

5.♕e6 ♜c8 6.♕d5 ♕b2 Black wins by a tempo.

5...♞c8†!

As said, this is key.

6.♗b5 ♕b2 7.c5 ♕c3 8.c6 ♕d4

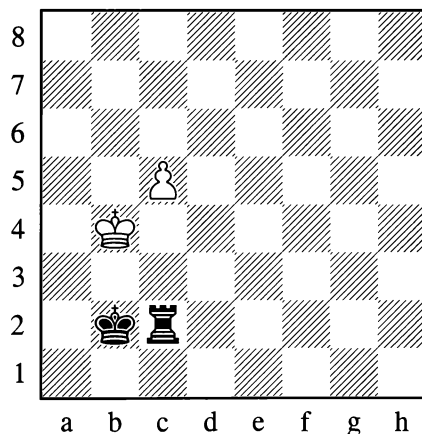
Black wins.

An even weaker attempt is:

1.c4? ♜xe2 2.♗b4

2.c5 ♜e4 cuts off the king at the 4th rank and wins instantly.

2...♕b2 3.c5 ♜c2!



The rook usually belongs here.

4.♗b5 ♕c3

Basic anti-shouldering tactics. Black wins.

The surprising solution is to save the pawn, but not push it to the max.

1.e3! ♕b1

The college try.

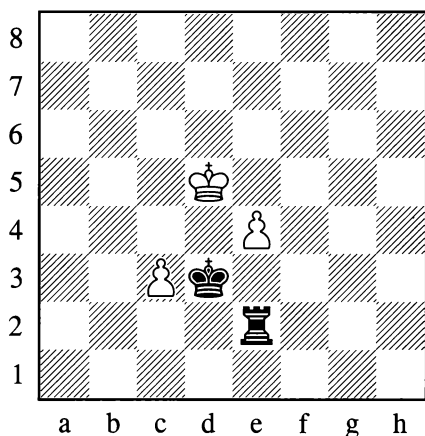
Reti's original main line went like this: 1...♖e2 2.c4 ♜xe3† 3.♙b4 ♙b2 4.c5 and the pawn draws. The key comparison with 1.e4 being the lack of a pin on the 4th rank.

2.♙c4 ♙c2 3.e4 ♜e2 4.♙d5 ♙d3!?

Trying to get the king around the e-pawn, only to face a new problem.

After 4...♜d2† 5.♙c4! Black is clearly not making progress. But going to c6 draws too.

After 4...♙xc3 5.e5 White draws by a tempo.



5.c4!

The most accurate way to play. White is shifting his front runner, to prevent Black from being on the winning side of the pawn.

5.e5 is a bit less accurate, as you will have to defend knight against rook, which is not too difficult, but can still go wrong on rare occasions. 5...♙e3 6.c4! ♙f4 7.c5 ♙f5 8.♙d6 ♜d2† 9.♙e7! Shouldering to benefit the c-pawn. White makes the draw, promoting to a knight.

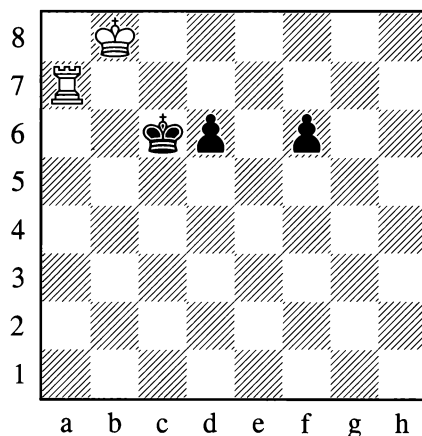
5...♜xe4 6.c5 ♜d4† 7.♙e6

White draws.

The next study comes from the simple question: what would happen if we moved the pawns over a row? It turns out that the position is winning and for this reason, to follow study-convention, I have made the first move and reversed the colours, as well as not looked up if Reti did this study too, to avoid disappointment.

Aagaard

Original 2023



1.♙c8! ♙d5

1...d5 2.♜a6† ♙c5 loses to simple shouldering. The white king needs to be on the other side of the pawn. The f6-pawn does not matter. 3.♙d7 d4 4.♙e6 d3 5.♜d6 ♙c4 6.♙f5 and White wins.

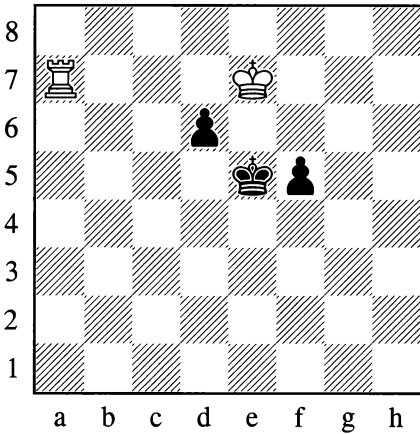
2.♙d7

2.♜f7? fails to 2...♙e4, when Black is in time. (2...f5? is tempting, but after 3.♜xf5† ♙e4 4.♜f1 d5 5.♜e1†! White wins by a tempo, as in the Reti study above.) A key point is that after 3.♜e7† Black only draws with 3...♙d5!!, when the white king is shouldered.

2...f5 3.♙e7

3.♜a5†? ♙e4 4.♙xd6 f4 would allow Black to run away.

3...♔e5



4.♔f7!!

This is the key move. The white king is preparing to leap in either direction, while space is made for the rook to give the disruptive check.

4...d5 5.♞e7† ♔f4

The best try to keep the shouldering going.

6.♔e6

The king goes opposite, to avoid the shouldering.

6...♔e4

Black is just lost. For example: 6...d4 7.♔d5 d3 8.♔c4! d2 9.♞d7 ♔e3 10.♔c3 Winning.

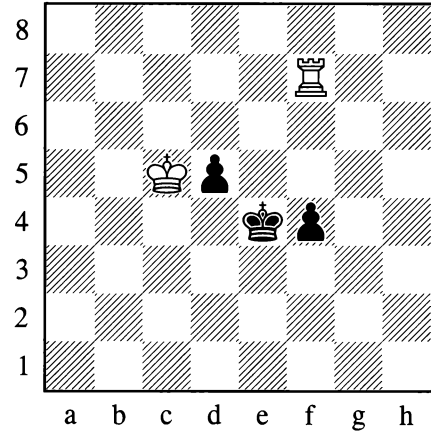
7.♔d6†

7.♔f6†!? works in the same way, just mirrored. There are exactly enough ranks to make it work.

7...♔d4 8.♞f7 ♔e4

8...♔e3 9.♞xf5 d4 loses to: 10.♞e5†!, winning an important tempo, as shown above. 10...♔f3 11.♞d5 ♔e3 12.♔c5

9.♔c5 f4



10.♔b4!!

To me this is the beautiful move. White is aiming to come back to the 1st rank to block the black pawns. The curve on the route is irrelevant to its effectiveness, but even after close to 40 years with chess, I still struggle with this optically.

10...d4

10...f3 11.♔c3 would also allow the white king to reach the 1st rank.

11.♔b3 ♔e3 12.♔c2 f3 13.♔d1

White wins. Black will be out of moves soon enough.

Delaying giving up the rook

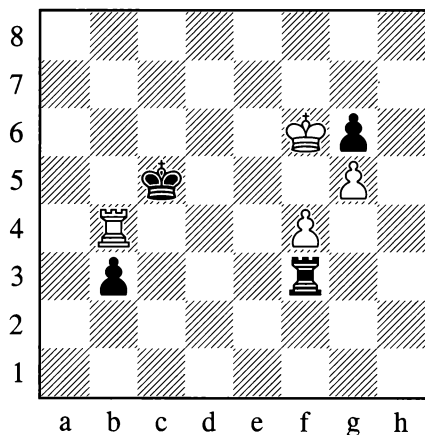
Focusing on the rook vs pawn endgame as a race helps to clarify some things. In a race there is a finish line. We have that: it's the 1st/8th rank. Forgetting for a moment that the race is an obstacle race, let's notice that the two sides often start at different distances from the finish line, or race in groups that move at different speeds. While this can lead to a lot of complications, there are also some things that can be simplified. The key point is that it is in the interest of each side to be as close as possible, and to keep the opponent as far as possible from the finish line. While this may sound abstract, it has a simple strategy that should be

implemented as often as possible, which is to delay the moment when the defending side is losing the rook for a passed pawn as much as possible. What we would seek to achieve is to get the opponent's king to be as far away from the finish line as possible, which is frequently at the other end of the board.

The players in the next example may not be world class, but they are still strong amateurs and as we shall see below, the mistakes they are making may be easy to explain and understand, but stronger players make them as well with great certainty.

Tamas Tancsa – Zala Urh

Terme Catez 2022

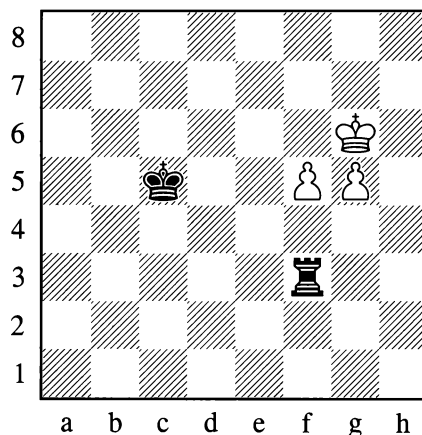


46. ♖xb3??

As explained, White needs to delay the capture of the black pawn as long as possible. 10 out of 19 of the students at Killer Chess Training nevertheless suggested this move. One IM being “100% certain” that it was the right way to play. White draws with ♖b7, ♖b8 and ♖e4. All delaying the moment when the rook is lost. White only needs one pawn to draw. As we discussed above, the extra pawn rarely helps, as only one can be successfully pushed anyway. But the black king being close matters greatly.

46. ♖b8 was the most natural way to make the draw. 46... ♖xf4† 47. ♔xg6 ♖b4 48. ♖c8† ♔d4 49. ♖c1 and White will have enough time to save the draw with the g-pawn against a rook. Notice that with the rook on b1, the black king will have to come to the 2nd rank for the pawn to draw blood. This is far away from the 8th rank.

46... ♖xb3 47. ♔xg6 ♖f3 48. f5



48... ♔d5??

At the Academy, the first fifteen suggested the right move, and only those overthinking (when asked not to), ignored their instincts and suggested something else.

48... ♔d6! 49. ♔f6 (49. f6 loses to 49... ♖g3!, which can be missed) 49... ♔d7! would win the race to the 8th rank. The king comes in front of the pawns and the win is easy.

49. ♔f6!

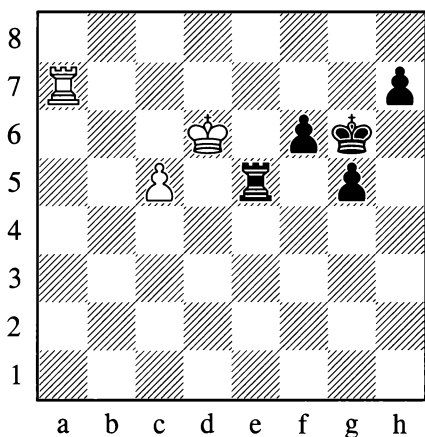
49. f6 leads to the lesser draw, relying on defending knight against rook. The move played in the game claims the rook by advancing the pawn furthest away from the black king.

49...♔e4 50.g6 ♖xf5† 51.♔e6 ♖a5 52.g7
 ♖a8 53.♔f7 ♔f5 54.g8=♚ ♖xg8 55.♔xg8
 ½–½

The next example is thematically not too different. There are a few extra pieces, the race has more possible outcomes and a theoretical fortress is suddenly possible. But at its core, it is the same. Black will lose the rook, but should make sure he does so at the latest possible moment.

Viktor Haarmark Nielsen – Casper Yukun Liu

Svendborg 2019



48.♖e7!

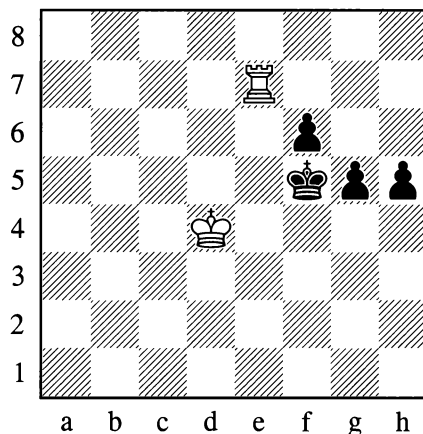
The exclamation mark is added due to the practical strength. This move won the game.

48...♖xc5?

48...♖xe7? 49.♔xe7 g4 is also a bad race for Black. White queens first and gives a check on g8, picking up the newly-crowned black queen.

49.♔xc5 h5 50.♔d4 ♔f5

Black is a tempo short on setting up a fortress. After 50...h4 51.♖e8 g4 52.♔e4 f5† 53.♔f4 h3 White wins with 54.♖f8!.



51.♖f7?

51.♔e3! would prevent Black from creating counterplay, while at the same time also making it impossible for him to set up the fortress missed on the next move. Also, as this is still to some extent a race, it not only arrives at the finish line first, but it also prevents Black from approaching it with his king. 51...♔g6 52.♔e4! h4 53.♖e6!

51...g4?

A mistake committed due to lack of knowledge. I cannot suggest frequently enough that you read *Theoretical Rook Endgames* by Sam Shankland and memorise some basic positions. You will still make mistakes, but fewer.

51...h4 52.♔e3 ♔g6! 53.♖f8 ♔g7 54.♖a8 f5 followed by ...g4 and ...h3 leads to a theoretically drawn position, which we will see later in this chapter too. (But you should still read Sam's book!)

52.♔e3 ♔g5 53.♖g7† ♔h4 54.♔f4

White wins.

**54...♔h3 55.♖h7 h4 56.♖h6 g3 57.♔f3 f5
 58.♖h7 f4 59.♖h8 g2 60.♖g8 ♔h2 61.♖xg2†
 ♔h1 62.♖a2 h3 63.♔xf4**

1–0

Black would have drawn easily, as well as given his opponent the chance to go overboard, if he had made the most of his rook for as long as possible.

48...♖f5! 49.c6 ♖f1

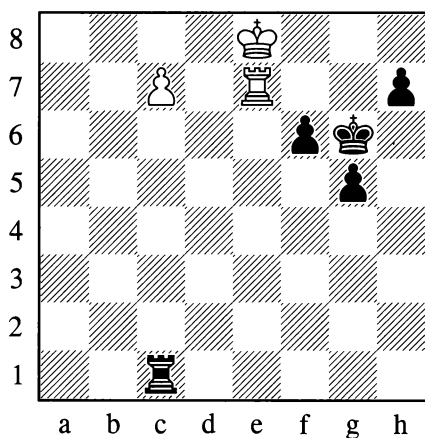
Heading for the natural place behind the passed pawn.

50.c7 ♖d1!

Tempting White to get the king to the 8th rank. Going behind the c-pawn also draws, but is practically a good deal worse.

51.♔c6 ♖c1† 52.♔d7 ♖d1† 53.♔e8 ♖c1

Only now, when the checks have run out.



54.♔d7!!

One exclamation mark for the strength of the move, another for the realism. White already could have aimed for a draw with 52.♔d6!, inviting a perpetual, but here it is so tempting to force the promotion of the c-pawn, that you can forget that the road back is long and the black connected pawns are strong.

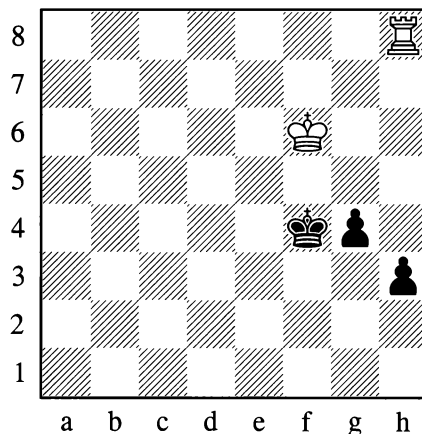
54.♔d8? loses to rolling the g- and h-pawns up the board. For example: 54...h5 55.c8=♖ ♖xc8† 56.♔xc8 g4 57.♖e8 h4 58.♖h8 ♔g5 59.♔d7 g3 60.♔e6 ♔g4 and it is all over.

54...h5 55.♖e8!

We shall see this idea repeated endlessly below.

55.c8=♖? transposes to the previous note.

55...h4 56.c8=♖ ♖xc8 57.♖xc8 g4 58.♔e6 ♔g5 59.♖g8† ♔f4 60.♔xf6 h3 61.♖h8!



White holds the draw, not least because of:

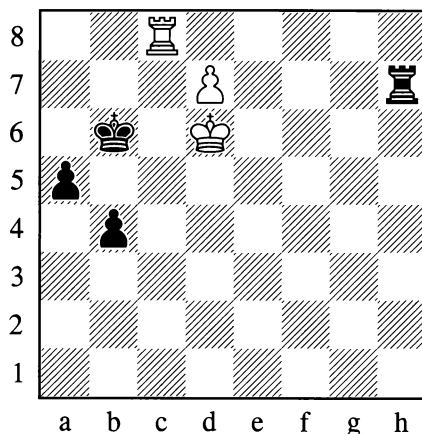
61...g3 62.♖h4†

Although 62.♖xh3 g2 63.♖h4† ♔f3 64.♖h3† also holds.

One more!

Jesus Galvan – Marc Narciso Dublan

Barbera del Valles 2017



Black lost after giving up the rook.

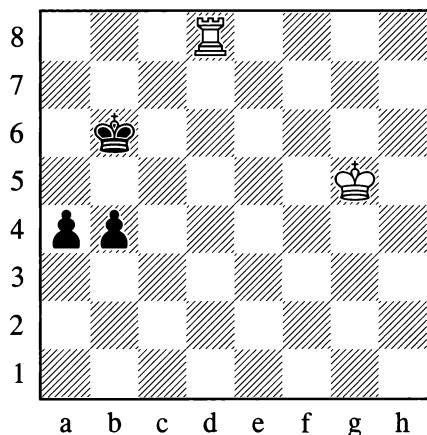
70...♖xd7? 71.♔xd7 ♕b5 72.♔d6 b3
73.♔d5 ♕b4 74.♔d4 a4 75.♖b8† ♕a3
76.♔c3 ♕a2 77.♖b4! ♕a3 78.♖h4 b2
79.♔c2
1–0

Again, delaying the moment where the rook is surrendered was the way to hold.

70...♖h6†! 71.♔e5

White cannot hide from the checks. He has to approach the black rook.

71...♖h5† 72.♔f4 ♖h4† 73.♔g5 ♖d4
74.d8=♖† ♖xd8 75.♖xd8 a4!



Pushing the pawn furthest away from the white king.

76.♔f4 a3 77.♖a8 ♔c5

Going to b5 also works, but this is the principled move.

78.♔e3 ♔c4 79.♔d2 ♔b3 80.♔c1 ♔a2

Black holds. For example:

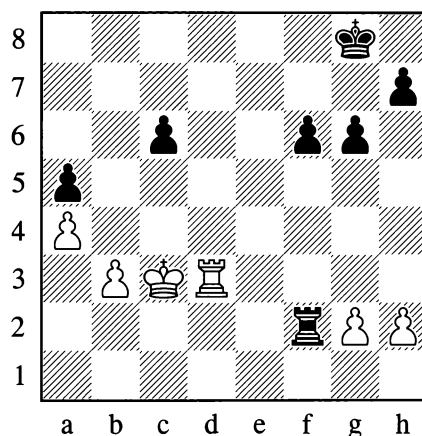
81.♖b8 b3 82.♖b7 b2† 83.♔c2 b1=♖†
84.♖xb1

Stalemate.

The following endgame follows much of the same narrative as the two previous games. The players are much stronger, with the white player arguably world class. And although the mistakes are more complex, the guidelines for how to play the position are entirely the same.

Jorden van Foreest – Jure Borisek

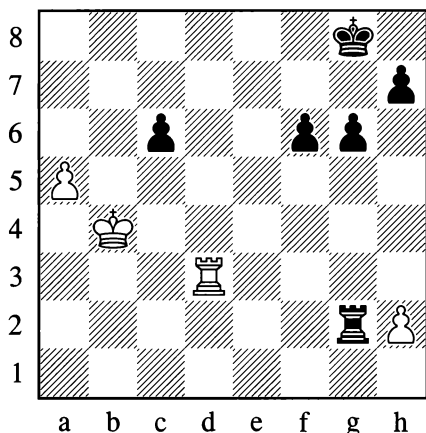
Terme Catež 2021



We enter the game at a moment of balance. White is a pawn down, but his king is more active and he is able to create a passed pawn far from the black king's sphere of influence.

32.b4 axb4† 33.♔xb4 ♖xg2 34.a5

It could be argued that 34.♖a3 was more accurate, but compared to the game, Black is a tempo better off after 34...♖xh2 35.a5 ♖e2 36.a6 ♖e8 37.a7 ♖a8 38.♔c5 ♔f7 39.♔xc6 ♔e6 when the draw is fine.



34...♖xh2?

Although this is not a losing move, it is certainly a big mistake. Black did not have to get into trouble.

34...♖g4†! 35.♔c5 ♖g5† 36.♔b4 ♖g4† would have secured the draw already (see the chapters on checks, starting on page 143).

In the above line, notice that White would lose the race after 36.♔b6? ♖b5† 37.♔a6 ♖b2 and when White eventually gets his pieces untangled, Black will have advanced his army of passed pawns far up the board.

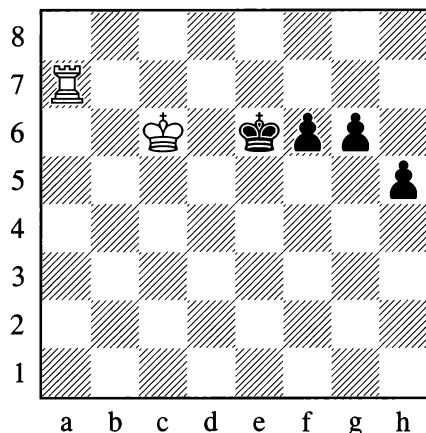
35.a6 ♖a2 36.♖a3! ♖b2† 37.♔c5 ♖b8 38.a7 ♖a8 39.♔xc6

We will return to this moment below. Despite the earlier mistake, Black could still make the draw.

39...h5? 40.♔b7 ♖xa7† 41.♖xa7!

Because this is a race for the f3/g2-squares, and because the rook is often best placed behind the passed pawns, the automatic capture of the rook in these races, is with the rook. Chess remains complex, and automatic is not always best. The gut feeling stats give it as 90% of the time as the right capture.

41...♔f7 42.♔c6† ♔e6



Black has two cards to play for: the race to the 1st rank and the fortress with the pawns on f5, g4 and h3. The latter is hard to achieve and the first fails to the white king running back.

43.♔c5! ♔e5 44.♔c4! ♔e4 45.♔c3!

Insisting on making it to the 1st rank, rather than taking out the weakest link in the black pawn chain.

After 45.♖a6? h4 46.♖xf6 h3, the h-pawn would secure the draw.

45...g5!

Giving up on the idea of shouldering the white king, as he is too late anyway.

45...♔e3?! 46.♖a6! would have made the conversion much easier for White.

46.♔d2! ♔f3!

The best practical chance, as the game documents.

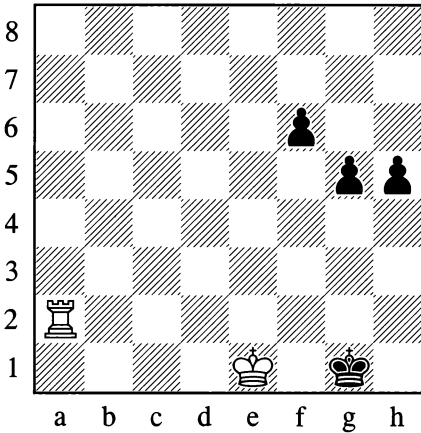
Playing for the fortress does not work. After 46...h4 47.♔e2 g4 48.♖h7 h3 49.♖g7 f5 50.♔f2 ♔f4 51.♖g6!, Black is lost.

47.♔e1!

47.♖f7? would again erroneously go for winning a pawn, rather than winning the race.

47...h4 48.♖xf6† ♕g2! 49.♞g6 h3 and Black makes the draw.

47...♕g2 48.♞a2†! ♕g1



White did not win the race for the 1st rank, but only one player from the black team made it across the finish line. As the purpose is for a pawn to reach the 1st rank, this does not quite work. But surprisingly, brute force does not win for White.

49.♕e2?

Black would also make a draw after: 49.♞f2? h4! 50.♕e2 g4 51.♞f4 f5! and the important pawns will stay alive for long enough.

The remarkable 49.♞a4!! was the winning idea. The key idea is zugzwang. After 49...♕g2 50.♕e2, Black loses because of zugzwang only, something he would never be able to avoid, as White can pass the move by shuffling the rook on the 4th rank (not making it mutual zugzwang). 49...g4 loses to concrete play. 50.♞f4! and for example: 50...g3 51.♞h4 f5 52.♞xh5 f4 53.♕e2 ♕g2 54.♞f5, winning.

49...♕g2?

Black is given a chance to bring the pawns forward and misses it. 49...g4! was the drawing move. It both advances the pawn and takes the

f3-square from the king. 50.♕e3 h4 51.♕f4 f5! This is the key move. To take the pawns, White has to run in the wrong direction. 52.♕xf5 (52.♞a5 g3 53.♕f3 f4 is quite similar) 52...g3 53.♕g4 g2 54.♕h3 ♕h1! 55.♞xg2 Stalemate.

50.♕e3†?

The wrong direction.

50.♞a4! g4 51.♞f4! was the winning idea again.

50...♕g3 51.♞a1?

White was still winning after 51.♕e2 ♕g2 52.♞a4!, but it is rare that a player spots an idea like this after having missed it only a few moves ago.

51...♕g2?

Black had the chance to draw once again: 51...g4! 52.♞g1† ♕h2 53.♕f2 f5! and the pawns are rolling.

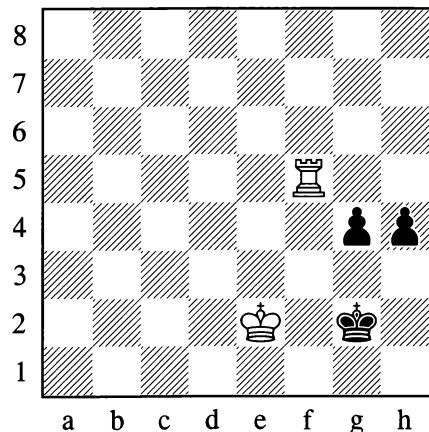
52.♞a2†! ♕g3 53.♕e2! ♕g2

53...h4 would give up on the race, and after 54.♕f1 ♕f4 55.♕g2 ♕f5 56.♕h3 ♕g6 57.♞a6! Black would not be able to set up the fortress.

54.♞a4!

Van Foreest finally finds the right idea.

54...f5 55.♞a5! h4 56.♞xf5! g4



57.♖f2†!

A cleaner win than 57.♖f4 directly.

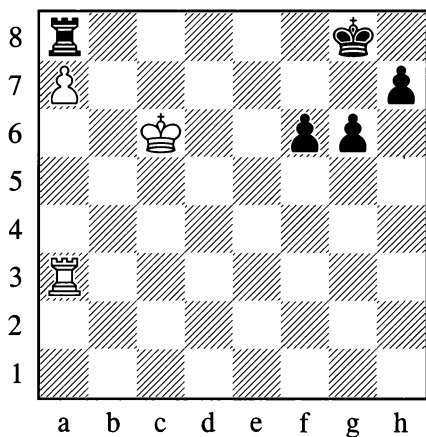
57...♔g1

57...♔g3 58.♔f1! is the key idea. The race is over.

58.♖f4 g3 59.♖xh4! g2 60.♖g4

1-0

Black's way to draw would rely on accurate play and a single tempo. Obviously, it was crazy for Black to ever arrive in this position, but although difficult to hold, it is still within the drawing margin.



39...♔f7! 40.♔b7 ♖f8!

The rook can also go to d8 and g8, both squares where a check on the 7th rank exists afterwards, and where the rook will not get skewered after ...♔e6 is met by ♖e3†.

40...♖xa7†? 41.♖xa7! ♔e6 42.♔c6 would transpose to the game.

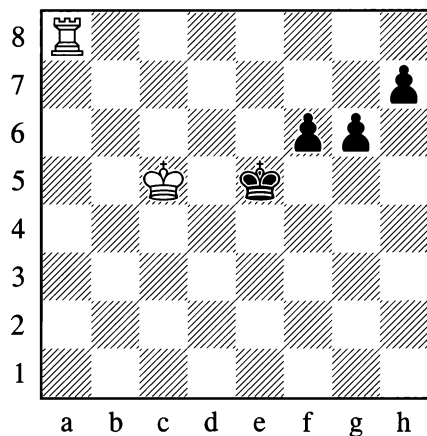
41.a8=♖ ♖xa8 42.♖xa8

(Almost) always with the rook!

42...♔e6!

Shouldering and the key difference from the game.

43.♔c6 ♔e5 44.♔c5



44...f5!

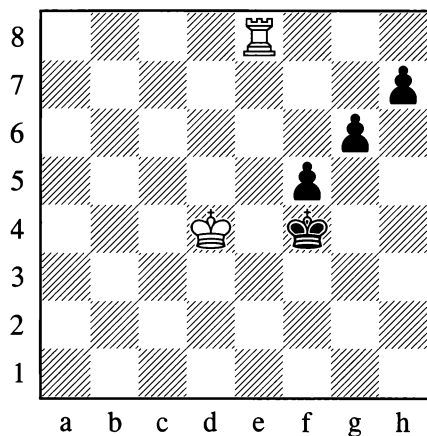
The most difficult move. The key to understanding it is to notice that the only pawn hanging is the h7-pawn, which is the backward pawn.

44...♔e4? would lose to 45.♖a4†!!, when White either wins a tempo, or is able to go for the black pawns after 45...♔e3 46.♔d5.

45.♖e8†

45.♔c4 ♔e4 46.♔c3 ♔e3 47.♖e8† ♔f2 48.♔d2 f4 49.♖h8 h5 50.♖h6 f3 51.♖xg6 h4 52.♖h6 ♔g2 53.♖xh4 f2 also draws, after many only moves.

45...♔f4 46.♔d4



46...♔f3!!

46...h5? would lose to 47.♔d3 ♕f3, when White has 48.♖g8, picking up a vital pawn, and 46...g5? 47.♖f8! followed by ♔d3-e2, which Black will be unable to deal with, now the pawn on f5 is under fire.

47.♖h8

Black is holding a draw in all lines:

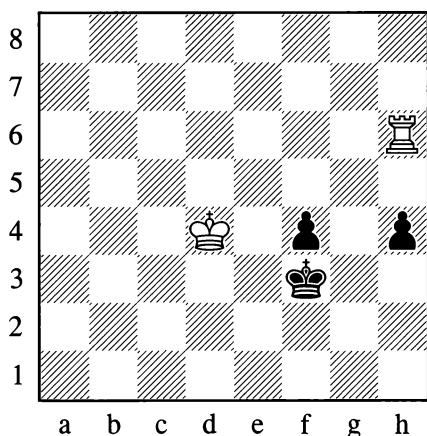
47.♔e5 h5 and ...h4 should draw without effort.

47.♖e3† ♕f2! 48.♖a3 is also not dangerous. For example: 48...f4 49.♔e4 g5 50.♔f5 f3 51.♔g4 ♕g2 and White should look for the draw now.

47.♔d3 f4 48.♔d2 gives Black a number of ways to draw. For example: 48...g5 49.♔e1 ♕g2 50.♖e2† ♕g1! and the black king continues to keep the white king at bay.

47...h5 48.♖h6

White cannot allow ...h5-h4.

48...f4 49.♖xg6 h4 50.♖h6**50...♔e2!**

Shouldering.

50...h3? 51.♖xh3† ♕g2 52.♖h8 and 53.♖g8† wins.

Also 50...♔g3? 51.♔d3 f3 52.♔e3 and 51...h3 52.♔e2 win for White.

51.♖xh4

51.♔e4 f3 also holds.

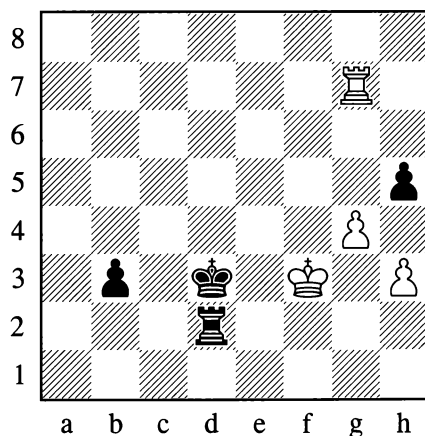
51...f3 52.♖e4† ♔d2!

Black holds.

As talked about in the Introduction on Schematic Thinking, exchanges of pawns are often in favour of the defender. The following example is one of these.

Stefan Mazur – Vladimir Malaniuk

Koszalin 2014

**53...b2? 54.♖b7 ♔c2**

54...h4 comes too late. After 55.♔f4! ♖h2 56.♔g5 White is in time to take the h4-pawn and secure the draw.

55.♖c7†

This check is usually good, as it forces the king a bit further away. However, here it does not make too great a difference.

55...♔d1 56.♖b7 hxg4†

Or 56...♔c1 57.gxh5, with a draw. 57...♖d4 58.♔g3 b1=♚ 59.♖xb1† ♔xb1 60.h6 ♖d6 61.♔g4 for example.

57.hxg4 ♔c1 58.♔e4

This shouldering move is not needed, but a good habit.

58...b1=♚† 59.♖xb1† ♔xb1 60.g5

A draw was agreed.

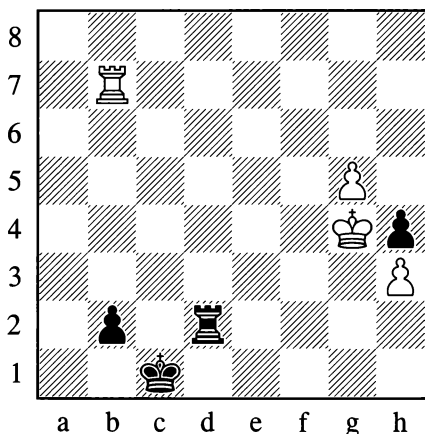
½–½

Black should not have allowed the exchange of pawns and instead played:

53...h4! 54.g5

There is not time to play 54.♔f4 at this point, as Black has 54...♖h2! and the h3-pawn falls.

54...b2 55.♖b7 ♔c2 56.♖c7† ♔d1 57.♖b7 ♔c1 58.♔g4



58...♖d4†!

The big difference. After:

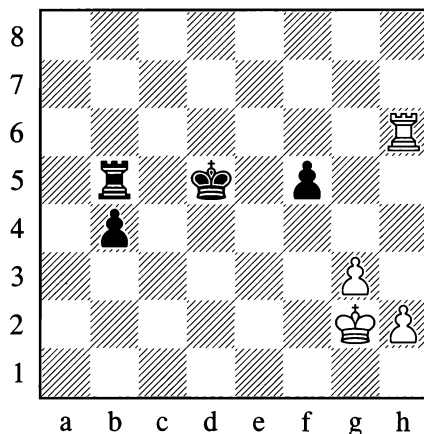
59.♔h5 b1=♚ 60.♖xb1† ♔xb1 61.g6 ♔c2 62.g7 ♖d8 63.♔xh4 ♖g8 64.♔g5 ♖xg7† 65.♔f5 ♖h7 66.♔g4 ♔d3

Black is clearly in time to win.

In the next example White is obviously completely lost, but still she managed to hold the draw, since Black struggled with the basics as explained above.

Julianna Terbe – Elena-Luminita Cosma

Bucharest 2021



47.♖h8 b3 48.♖d8† ♔c4 49.♖d1 b2 50.♖b1 ♔c3 51.♔f3 ♖b4?!

Aiming to keep the king cut off on the 4th rank, but simply a lost tempo, as the rook cannot stay on the 4th rank.

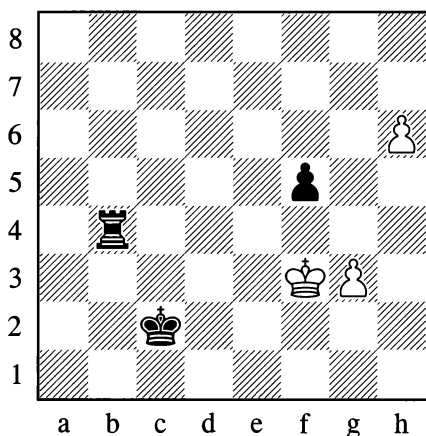
The easiest win would have been 51...♔c2 52.♖e1 b1=♚ 53.♖xb1 ♖xb1!.

52.h4 ♔c2 53.♖h1 b1=♚ 54.♖xb1 ♔xb1?!

Black is continuing to try to cut off the white king, but the h-pawn will draw the rook away.

54...♖xb1! won without effort.

55.h5 ♔c2 56.h6

**56...Bb6?**

An understandable mistake. Black is trying to stop the h-pawn as quickly as possible, but this allows White to exchange the h-pawn for the black pawn, giving her a basic draw.

Black was winning after 56...♔d3 57.h7 ♖b8 58.♔f4 ♜f8!, where White is way short of time. If the f5- and g3-pawns were not there, the draw would be easy. But as long as the f5-pawn survives, Black wins by taking the g3-pawn with the king. And after 59.g4 fxg4† 60.♔xg4 ♜h8 wins easily. But it is a pattern I have seen frequently over the years. The first win or even the first few wins, are easy, but if missed, each win will be more demanding. Thus, it is valuable to play with concentration and take the chances when they are given, not hope for an easier one down the line. They rarely come.

57.♔f4!

Terbe does not miss her chance.

57...♜xh6 58.♔xf5 ♜h5† 59.♔f6! ♔d3 60.g4 ♜a5 61.g5 ♔e4 62.g6 ♜a6† 63.♔f7 ♔f5 64.g7 ♜a7† 65.♔g8 ♔f6 66.♔h8 ♜xg7

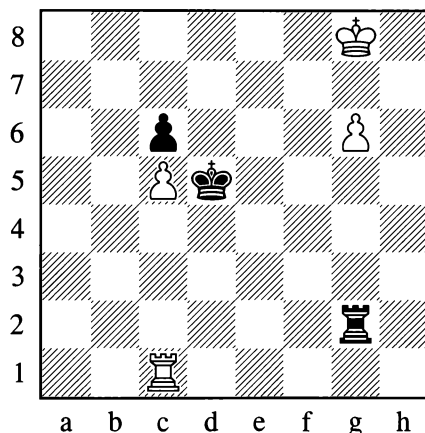
Stalemate.

½–½

In the next example, the race to the 1st rank is decided by White keeping the king as far away from the finish line as possible. Dhopade had slowly seen his advantage evaporate, before missing the final (and as so often difficult) win.

Swapnil Dhopade – Romain Edouard

Gibraltar 2018

**81.g7?**

Probably the last move Swapnil suspected to have cost him half a point, before checking the game with an engine afterwards.

81...♜g3!

White has to make concessions to make progress, so all Black has to do is wait.

81...♔d4? loses to 82.♔f7 ♜f2† 83.♔e6 ♜g2 84.♔d6 and White wins on the queenside. 84...♜g6† 85.♔c7 ♔d5 86.♔b6 and we are near the end.

82.♔f7

82.♜f1 ♔xc5 83.♔f7 ♔d4 84.♜f6 ♜xg7† 85.♔xg7 c5 and Black draws.

82...♜f3† 83.♔g8 ♜g3 84.♜h1 ♔xc5 85.♜h6 ♔d5 86.♔f7 ♜xg7† 87.♔xg7 c5

Black draws in well-known fashion.

88.♔f6 c4 89.♔f5 c3 90.♖h8 ♔d4 91.♔f4
c2 92.♖c8 ♔d3 93.♔f3 ♔d2 94.♖d8† ♔c3
½–½

The win is based on keeping the white king as close to the 1st rank as possible, which is the 6th rank. To do so, it is a mistake to push the g-pawn prematurely; which is far from intuitive!

81.♔g7!!

Preparing to assist the rook to get to g5, where it serves multiple functions.

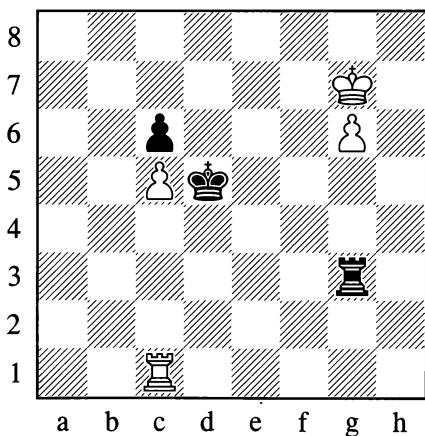
81.♔f7 ♖f2† 82.♔g7 transposes.

81...♖g3

Black has nothing better than waiting. But as this also fails, the alternatives cannot be said to be inferior:

81...♔d4 82.♖f1 ♔xc5 83.♔f6 ♔d4 loses to the same point as the main line: 84.♖f4†! ♔d3 85.♖f5! and the prophylaxis against ...c5 and the threat of ♖f5-g5 wins.

81...♖f2 82.♖g1 ♔xc5 83.♔h6 ♖h2† 84.♔g5 ♖h8 85.g7 ♖g8 86.♔f6 ♔d4 87.♖g4†! wins in the same way as the main line.



82.♖f1!

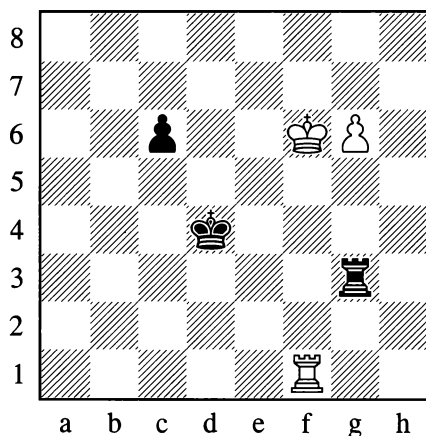
Sooner or later White will have to find this idea.

82...♔xc5 83.♔f6

This is the key concept. It can be reached by many paths, but they all end here. White is winning.

83...♔d4

83...♖g2 84.♖f5† Now the only way for Black to avoid ♖f5-g5 is 84...♔d6, but the king is now cut off and White wins with 85.g7.



84.♖f4†!

Check the checks! The black king is pushed away from the c-pawn, thus winning White a tempo.

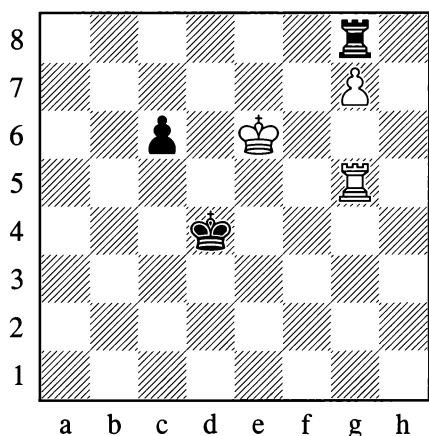
84...♔d3 85.♖f5!

White wins. For example:

85...♖e3

Giving up the rook feels premature, as Black cannot easily push the pawn up the board. 85...♖xg6† 86.♔xg6 ♔d4 87.♔g5 c5 88.♔f4 c4 89.♖f8 White wins by a tempo as seen several places already.

86.g7 ♖e8 87.♖c5 ♖c8 88.♔e6 ♔d4 89.♖g5 ♖g8



90. ♖g4†!

Winning an important tempo.

90... ♔e3

The king has to seek to harass the white rook.
90... ♔d3 91. ♔d6 and White wins.

91. ♔f7

91. ♔d6? ♔f3 92. ♖g1 ♔e4 would allow Black to draw, as the white king cannot both hold the pawn back and prevent the black king from coming to assist on the kingside.

91... ♖c8 92. ♔f6!? c5 93. ♖h4 ♖g8!

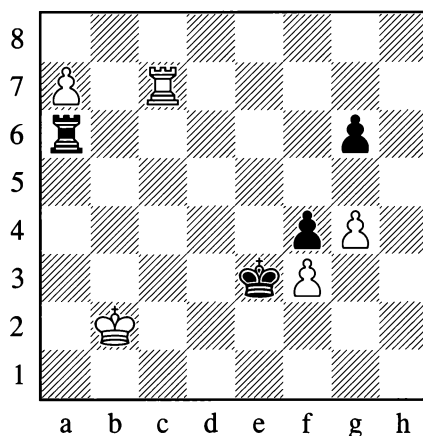
The move that offers most resistance.

94. ♖c4 ♖c8 95. ♖xc5

White has to win queen vs rook, which not all GMs have succeeded in, but hopefully we will...

Pavel Eljanov – Arkady Naiditsch

Dubai 2014



Naiditsch lost the following endgame trivially.

**75... ♔xf3 76. ♖c3† ♔xg4? 77. ♖a3 ♖xa7
78. ♖xa7 g5 79. ♔c2 ♔g3 80. ♔d2 f3 81. ♔e3
g4 82. ♖g7
1–0**

The draw was unsurprising. The point of having a passed pawn is to queen it.

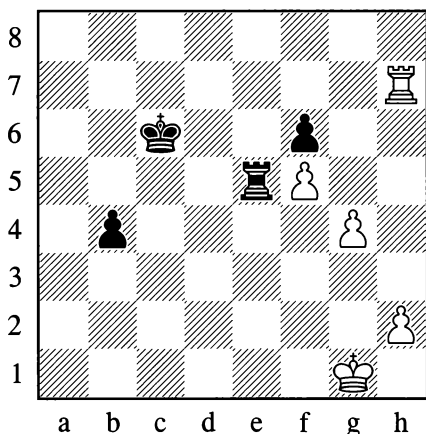
**76... ♔g2! 77. ♖a3 ♖xa7 78. ♖xa7 f3 79. ♔c3
f2 80. ♖a1 f1=♖ 81. ♖xf1 ♔xf1 82. ♔d4 ♔g2
83. ♔e5 ♔f3**

This forces White to make a draw with 84. ♔f6, as 84. g5? would even lose after 84... ♔g4 85. ♔f6 ♔h5.

The following endgame between two talented young players is full of instructive moments and finesses, and thus a brilliant example of the richness of ideas in what appears to be a basic race.

Kulkarni Bhakti – Gabriel Flom

Gibraltar 2020



42.♖f7?

We have seen this mistake above as well. White spends too much time winning the f6-pawn and gets herself into difficulties.

42.♖h3! to put the rook behind a passed pawn, and to block the black passer, was a solid drawing move.

After 42...♔d5 White plays 43.♖f3!?, followed by g4-g5 transforming the extra pawn to something tangible, a passed pawn.

And after 42...♞e4 43.♞g3 ♔d5 44.h4 White clearly has enough counterplay to draw too.

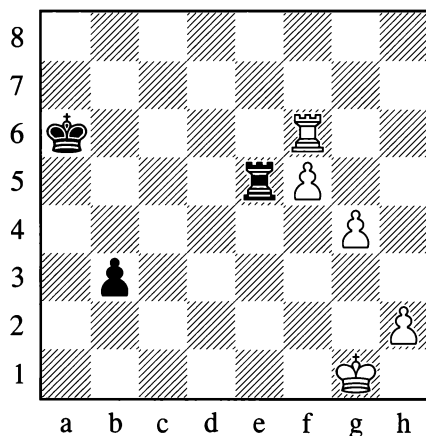
42...♞b5 feels like the principled move, forcing the white rook to be passive. 43.♞b3 ♔d5 44.♔f2 ♔c4 45.♞b1 b3 46.♔g3 ♔c3 47.♔h4 White will lose the rook, but she is doing just fine in the race and will draw without difficulties.

42...b3! 43.♞xf6† ♔c7!?

This is not yet the mistake, but as all White can do is give checks that give Black more time to think, it is hard to criticise this decision.

43...♔c5! 44.♞f8 ♔b4! gives the same win as on move 47 for Black. The difference is the king's placement; but luckily this matters little, as f8 or g4 are equally far away from the b4- and b5-squares.

44.♞f7† ♔c6 45.♞f6† ♔b7 46.♞f7† ♔a6 47.♞f6†



47...♔a5?

The winning path was:

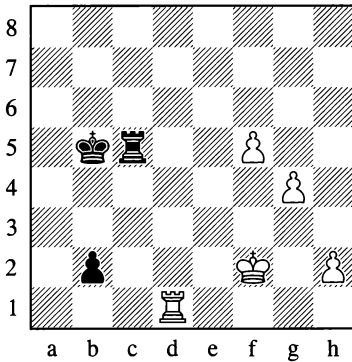
47...♔b5! 48.♞d6

48.♞f8 ♔b4! will lead to the same lines.

48...b2 49.♞d1 ♞c5

A top-20 student of mine was incredibly pleased to have found an alternative win here: 49...♞e2!? 50.♞b1 (50.f6 ♞c2 51.f7 ♞c1 52.f8=♞ ♞xd1† 53.♔g2 b1=♞ is also winning for Black, and far easier than could be believed at first glance. The king takes the g4-pawn and then skates to c1, where it will no longer be effectively checked.) 50...♞c2 51.♞xb2† ♞xb2 52.f6 ♔c5 and Black wins by a tempo.

50.♔f2



50...Rc2+!

Forcing the king to the 3rd rank, which might look like an improvement for White. But it also allows a lethal check, winning the most important tempo imaginable.

The most natural sequence in the world fails: 50...Rc1?! 51.Rd8 ♔c4? (Repeating with 51...Rc6 52.Rd1 and this time finding 52...Rc2+! would still work.) 52.Rb8 b1=♚ (52...Rc2+ 53.♔g1 ♔d5 54.f6 ♔e6 55.g5) 53.Rxb1 Rxb1 54.♔g2! followed by f5-f6, g4-g5 and h2-h4 would set up the impenetrable fortress.

51.♔f3 Rc1 52.Rd8 ♔c4 53.Rb8

53.Rc8+ ♔d5 54.Rb8 b1=♚ and Black wins.

53...Rc3+ 54.♔f2 Rb3

Black wins. White will be able to give up the rook for the black pawn, but only after checking the black king until it reaches e5.

48.Rd6 b2

48...Re1+ 49.♔f2 b2 50.Rd8! is not different from the game, although it is worth noticing that 50.♔xe1 b1=♚+ 51.♔f2 loses, but only to 51...Rb2+!, when White has no convenient moves.

49.Rd1 Rc5 50.♔f2 Rc1 51.Rd8

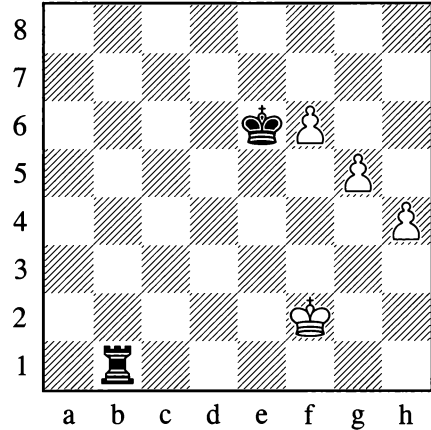
White is lucky to be able to lose the rook.

After 51.Rd5+? ♔a6 52.Rd6+ ♔b7 the pawn would be unstoppable.

51...b1=♚ 52.Ra8+ ♔b6 53.Rb8+ ♔c7 54.Rxb1 Rxb1 55.f6 ♔d6 56.h4?

56.♔g2! or 56.g5 ♔e6 57.♔g2! would draw.

56...♔e6 57.g5



We have reached the fortress pawn setup. But one thing is missing: the king needs to prevent the black rook from coming to h1. If the rook gets there, Black wins – otherwise it is a draw, as you can read about in *Theoretical Rook Endgames*.

57...♔f5?

Allowing White to set up the fortress after all.

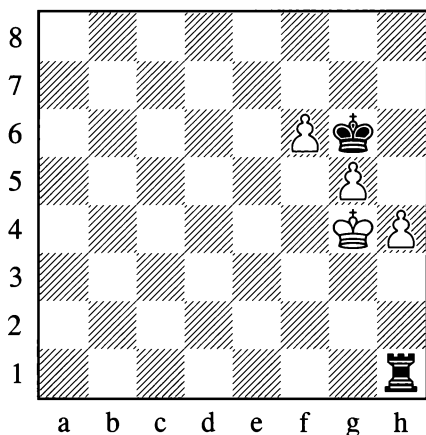
Black wins after 57...Rb1!, which is only possible because the king is not on g2. After 58.♔g3 ♔f7 59.♔g4 ♔g6 White is in zugzwang, making the win elementary for Black. 60.♔g3 ♔h5 61.♔f3 Rb3+! Below we shall see what would happen if it was Black to play.

58.♔g3 Rb3+ 59.♔g2

The players shuffled around for quite a while, before Black allowed the pawns to advance, only to give up the rook for them. Draw in 83 moves.

Aagaard

Unoriginal 2021



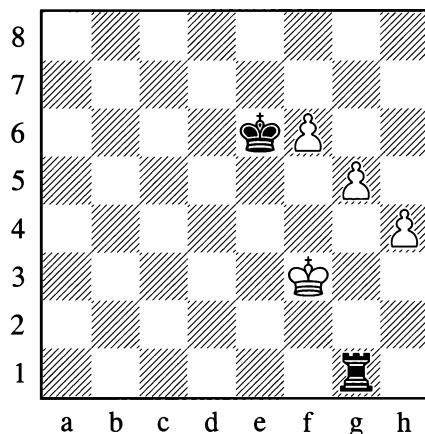
This position arose in my analysis of the previous game and I realised that Black was winning because White was in zugzwang. But it was not immediately apparent to me what would happen if it was Black to move. There is no move saying “pass” as in previous examples, so I wondered if this was a case of mutual zugzwang. It is not. But the way Black needs to lose a tempo is sensational.

By the way, I intentionally broke the study convention of “White to play”, because this position almost happened in the game and we care more about this than anything else.

60...♖g1† 61.♔f4 ♕f7 62.♔f3 ♕f8! 63.♔f4 ♕e8 64.♔f5 ♕f7 65.♔f4 ♕e6

This is now possible.

66.♔f3



66...♔d7!!

But Black needs a second triangulation in order to win.

66...♔e5?! is premature. White draws after 67.♔e2!, if Black does not backtrack with the king and get the triangulation right next time.

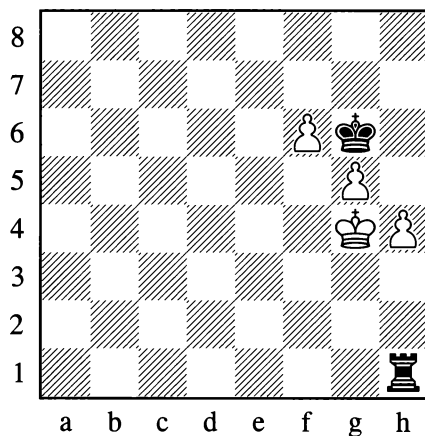
67.♔f4 ♖h1 68.♔g3

White is also lost after: 68.g6 ♖xh4† 69.♔g5 ♖h1 70.g7 ♖g1† 71.♔h6 ♕e8!

68...♔d6 69.♔g4 ♕e6

This is the key position. White is in zugzwang.

70.♔h5 ♕f7 71.♔g4 ♕g6



We have reached the position Flom could have achieved in the game, which was also our starting point. But this time with White to play and thus in a horrible zugzwang.

72.♙g3 ♜h5 73.♙f3 ♜h3†!

73...♜xh4? 74.♙g2! would allow White to make a surprise draw.

74.♙g2 ♜xh4

Black wins.

After showing this “study” to World Champion Steffen Nielsen, he told me that Kopaev had done a similar study, but with the pawns in the centre. The winning method should thus be considered entirely human, as the composer found it without the help of an engine in 1966. It turns out that this double triangulation works in the centre and all other positions too. I should note that Danish GM Mads Andersen found this manoeuvre too. This is impressive, but having seen move 56 of his game with Korley (see page 168), you will notice that this is not the first time he found an impressive king triangulation in a rook endgame.

Chapter 5

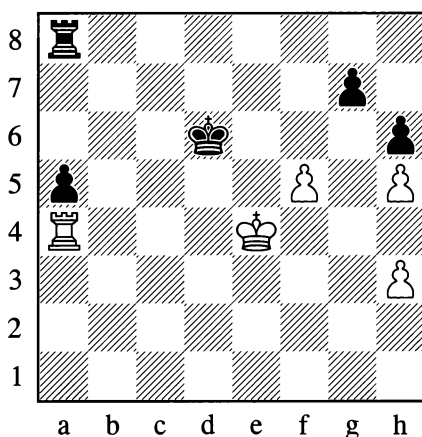
Passed Pawns

As mentioned in the Introduction on Schematic Thinking, success in the endgame comes from creating and exploiting passed pawns. This is a deeper truth about the endgame than anything else, still I have seen world-class grandmasters fail to create or push passed pawns so many times you begin to wonder if they all have that basic truth engraved in the way it should be.

The first example is a basic example of this.

Victor Bologan – Alexandr Triapishko

Sochi 2018



63.f6!

Passive defence has no future.

63...gxf6 64.♔f5 ♚a6 65.♔xf6??

It is hard to imagine what Bologan expected would happen after this. Most likely he had too little time to think – or just forgot to.

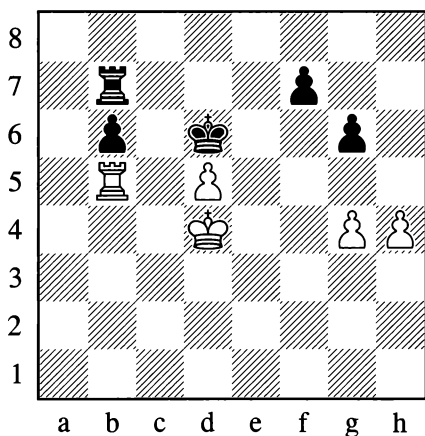
65.♔g6! and taking the h-pawn would create counterplay and draw without great effort.

65...♔c5† 66.♔g7 ♔b5 67.♖f4 a4 68.♖f5†
 ♔c4 69.♖f4† ♔d5 70.♖xa4 ♖xa4 71.♔xh6
 ♔e6 72.♔g7 ♖a7† 73.♔g6 ♖a3 74.h6 ♖g3†
 75.♔h7 ♔f7 76.♔h8 ♖g8† 77.♔h7 ♖g6
 0–1

In the next example, White has the advantage, but his reluctance to use it gives Black a chance to equalise.

Rudik Makarian – David Gevorgyan

Chelyabinsk 2022



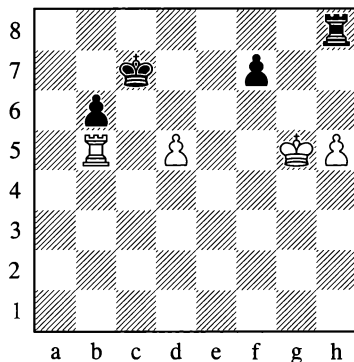
43.♔e4? ♖b8!?

In principle I like the idea of activating the rook and using the king to defend the b6-pawn. It's textbook after all.

However, at this point Black could also have played prophylactically with 43...f6!, when after 44.h5 gxh5 45.gxh5, he would be able to force a draw with 45...♖h7!, with an easy draw.

44.♔f4

44.h5!? feels more challenging. But Black is in time. After 44...gxh5 45.gxh5 ♔c7 46.♔f5 ♖h8 47.♔g5 he will only have to find these thematic moves:



47...f5! Pushing the passed pawn! Not with the hope that it will queen, but with the belief that its potential to queen will at some point create counter-chances. 48.h6 f4 49.♖b3 ♖f8! 50.h7 (50.♖f3 ♔d6!) 50...♖h8 51.♔g6 ♔d6 Black will draw in the rook vs pawn race by a tempo. It is highly convenient to have two passed pawns to push!

44...f6 45.♔e4 ♖e8† 46.♔d4 ♔c7 47.♖b1 f5 48.gxf5 gxf5 49.♖h1 ♖e4† 50.♔d3 ♔d6 51.h5 ♔xd5 52.h6

½–½

White would have won if he had pushed the passed pawn. For a grandmaster, this should be the first choice. But it is really hard to see what he disliked about it.

43.h5! gxh5

43...f5 44.hxg6 fxg4 45.♔e4 g3 46.♖b3! would soon leave White a pawn up.

43...♖b8 would be met with 44.h6. Threatening g4-g5, cementing the pawn and clearing a route for the king to g7. 44...f6 45.♖b1 ♖h8 (45...♖b7 46.h7! is a neat little tactic) 46.♖xb6† ♔c7 47.♖xf6 ♖xh6 48.g5 and White wins.

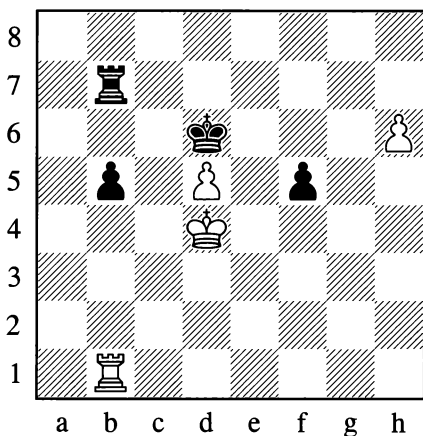
44.gxh5 f6!?

An attempt to avoid zugzwang.

45.h6 f5 46.♖b1!

46.♖b3? would allow Black to escape after 46...f4 47.♖h3 ♖h7 48.♔e4 f3!, and we can see that there was no advantage to putting the rook on the 3rd row.

46...b5



47.♖g1!

White wins. For example:

47...♖h7 48.♖g6† ♔e7 49.♖g7†

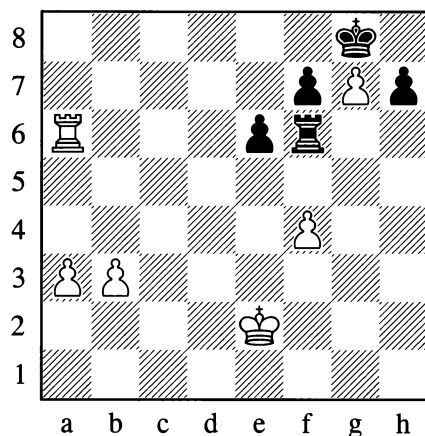
White's passers are further up the pitch, ready to queen.

The quality of passed pawns

We have previously discussed how the creation, pushing and promotion of passed pawns is the core purpose of most endgames (we will talk more about promotion of pawns in the next chapter). From this flows naturally that we should be looking to push the most valuable pawns. Chasing material is a middlegame strategy in many circumstances, which we should focus less on in the endgame. The following endgame sees White winning, when Black wastes time, rather than getting his strongest pawn up the road.

Krzysztof Jakubowski – Michal Koziarowicz

Poland 2022



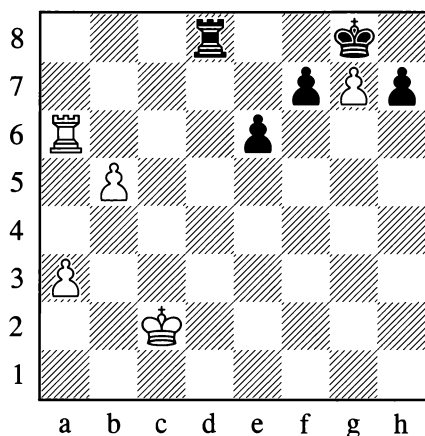
34...♖xf4? 35.b4! ♖e4†

It is too late to push the h-pawn. Black would have to bring the rook to the queenside to stop the b-pawn, after which the white king can come over to stop the h-pawn.

36.♔d3!

36.♔f3? would be a mistake, as the king will fail to block the h-pawn's advance. 36...♖h4 37.b5 ♔xg7 38.b6 ♖h3† 39.♔g2 ♖b3 40.a4 ♖b2†! Black will keep checking until the white king reaches the d-file, when the h-pawn will start its surprisingly short sprint to the 1st rank.

36...♖e1 37.b5 ♖d1† 38.♔c2 ♖d8

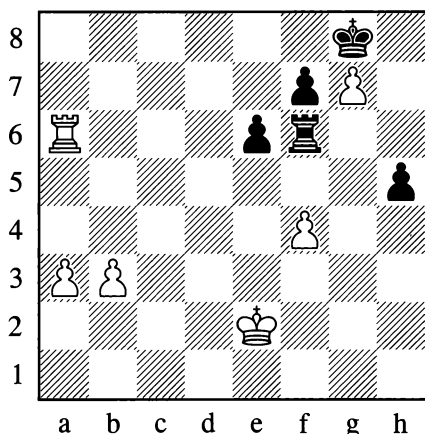


39.♖c6

39.♖a4! is the principled move, but the position is entirely winning no matter what.

39...♙xg7 40.b6 ♕f6 41.a4 ♕e7 42.a5 ♕d7 43.♖c7† ♕d6 44.a6 ♖b8 45.a7! ♖xb6 46.♖c8
1-0

Black could have secured the draw by playing to the strengths of his position.

34...h5!

The key points of pushing the h-pawn are that it is already passed and it will have to be the white rook that comes home to stop it.

35.♖c6

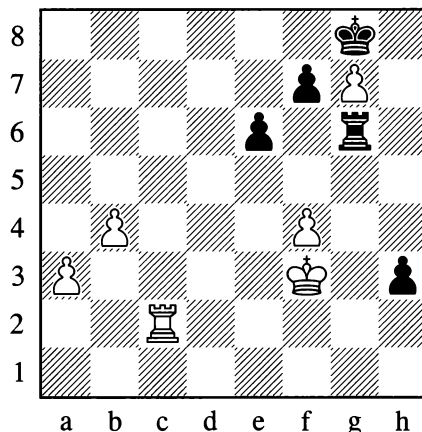
35.b4 h4 36.♙f3 ♖g6! is quite similar.

35...h4 36.b4

36.♖c3 ♖xf4 37.b4 is also too slow. Black will make the draw after 37...♙xg7 38.♖b3 ♖f5!? for example, when 39.b5 h3! and 39.a4 ♖f4 followed by ...h3 lead to immediate draws.

36...h3!

The simplest. Black also holds in the wild variations where all the pawns are in play, but the margin here is wider.

37.♙f3 ♖g6 38.♖c2**38...♖g1!**

The rook will go behind the white passed pawns, securing an immediate draw.

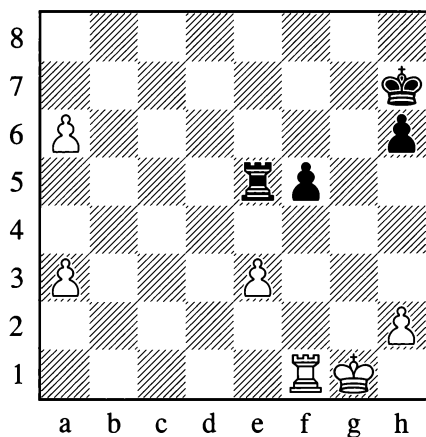
Passed pawns must be pushed

The first of two mini-chapters on pushing the pawn forward. The idea in the first of these is as contentious as it will be in the second; but here we go. Passed pawns must be pushed – except when you lose control. It smells an awful lot like Truman's request for a one-armed economist, being tired of all these "on the other hand" reservations.

So, let's be clear. A pawn is generally better further up the board. But there can certainly be situations where we lose control of the pawn, important squares it was controlling, or even simply lose it. Later we shall also see examples where the rook is sort of trapped in front of a passed pawn on the 7th rank, leading to zugzwang. The first example is a great example of White missing a win by not pushing the pawn when he had the chance.

Luka Budisavljevic – Alexander Donchenko

Biel 2021



32. ♖f2?

A natural-looking move, but as so often, the focus is on the wrong pawn.

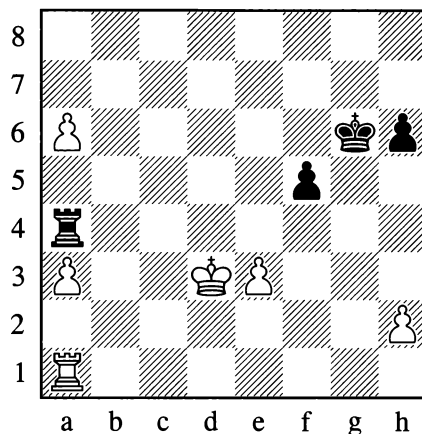
32... ♖a5 33. ♖a1 ♖a4!!

The big, surprising difference.

34. ♖e2

The key point of the black defence is shown in the following variation: 34.a7 ♖g6 35.a8=♖ ♖xa8 36.a4 ♖a5! Blocking the pawn immediately. 37.♖e2 ♖h5 38.♖d3 ♖g4 39.♖c4 h5! 40.♖b4 ♖a8 41.a5 ♖f3 42.♖a3 ♖g2 43.h4 ♖g3 44.e4† ♖xh4 45.exf5 ♖g5 Black makes the draw. The variation could have been quite different, but the result would be the same.

34... ♖g6 35. ♖d3



35... ♖f6?

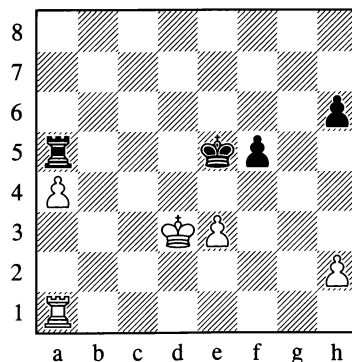
The wrong direction with the king. It has to be able to attack both white pawns.

35... ♖h5 36.♖c3 ♖g4! was the way to fight for counterplay again, drawing as above (with minor variations).

36. ♖c3?

Budisavljevic missed a win which we all would have missed...

36.a7! ♖e5 37.a8=♖ ♖xa8 38.a4 ♖a5



So far it is all possible to find. But now...

39. ♖c3!!

39.♖c4? ♖d6 holds narrowly for Black.

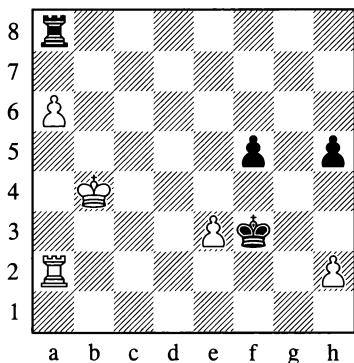
39... ♖e4

39... ♖d6 would allow 40.♖d1†! when the rook comes to d4 and gives White a chance to keep control and regroup the king to f4.

40.♔b4 ♖a8 41.♖a3

White is winning, although precision is still required.

41...♙f3 42.a5 h5 43.a6 ♙g2 44.♖a2† ♙f3



45.♙c5!!

Aiming for the kingside.

45...♙xe3 46.♙d5 f4 47.♖a3† ♙f2 48.♙e4 f3 49.♖xf3† ♙g2 50.♖a3 ♙xh2 51.a7

White wins by first eliminating the h-pawn and then exploiting that the black king is entirely cut off by moving to b7 with the king and queening the pawn. Individually, we could have found all of these moves. But finding all of them is close to impossible.

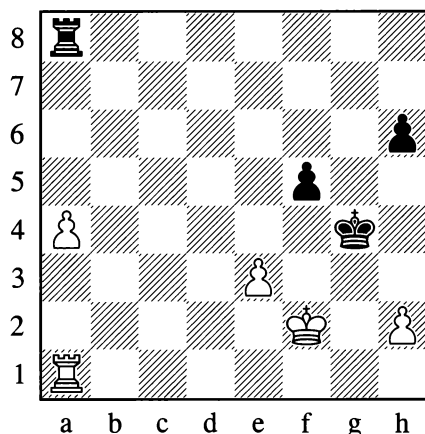
36...♙e5 37.♙b3 ♖xa6 38.a4 ♙e4 39.♖e1 ♖a8 40.♙a3 h5 41.♙b4

Having passed the time control, White realised there was no chance of winning the game and offered a draw.

1/2–1/2

White could have won by advancing the a-pawn.

32.a4! ♖a5 33.♖a1 ♙g6 34.♙f2 ♙g5 35.a7 ♙g4 36.a8=♖ ♖xa8



37.a5

The pawn is one row higher than in the game, which is a big enough difference.

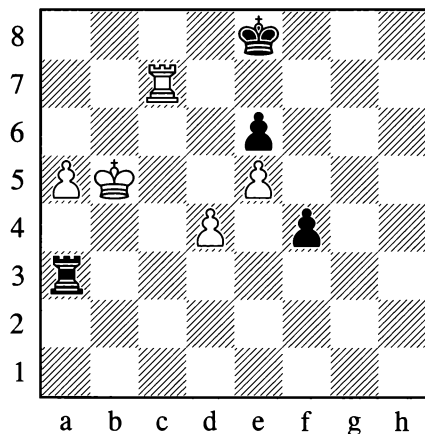
37...♖a6 38.♙e2 ♙h3 39.♙f3 ♙xh2 40.♖a2† ♙h3 41.♙f4

White wins.

There is a lot to be happy about with the white position below, but the moment the a-pawn was pushed too far, he entirely lost control.

Alexander Krastev – Yannick Pelletier

Corti 2022



48.a6? f3 49.♖c2 ♙d7 50.♖h2 ♙e7?

This move makes little sense.

The black king's job was to prevent the a-pawn from promoting (as it cannot help the f-pawn). See Chapter 13, page 189.

50...♔c7 51.♖h7† ♕d8! This was the difficult move. Black is drawing.

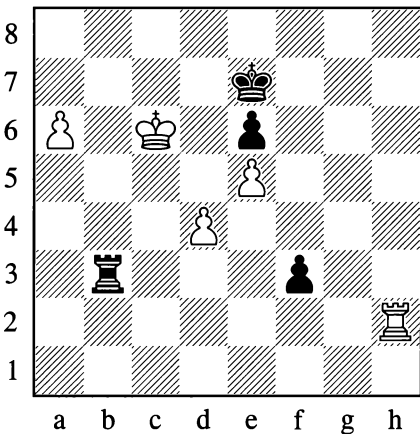
But not 51...♔b8? 52.♖f7 ♕a8 53.a7 and White wins. Black cannot prevent the white king from going for the e-pawn. The black king is entirely sidelined.

51...♔c8!? also works. The king is close enough to make it to e8 in time from c8 too. But it makes little sense. 52.a7 f2 53.♖f7 ♖xa7 54.♖xf2 ♖a1 Black is making a draw. If the white king makes it to d6, Black has ...♖a6†, and if the black king is on e7, Black can give checks from behind.

51.♔b6?

51.♔b2! was the winning idea. There are no checks from the back. See more in the short section on Rook on the Adjacent File, page 353.

51...♖b3† 52.♔c6



52...♖c3†?

52...♖a3 53.♔b5 ♕d8!! was the draw. See more on this type of manoeuvre in the chapter on The King's Role.

53.♔b7?

53.♔b5! ♖a3 54.♖b2 was winning again.

53...♖b3† 54.♔c7 ♖c3† 55.♔b8 ♖b3† 56.♔c8 ♖c3† 57.♔b7 ♖b3† 58.♔c6 ♖c3†? 58...♖a3!, as above.

59.♔b5! ♖a3 60.a7?

60.♖b2! was winning once again.

60...f2 61.♖xf2 ♖xa7

The game was drawn 50 moves later.

White was winning in a lot of ways.

48.♖c2

48.♖h7!? to regroup the rook to f6 was perhaps an even simpler win. Once the rook is on f6, White plays ♔b5-b4, when the black rook has to decide if it wants to defend the f-pawn or leave the a-file.

48...♖b3† 49.♔c4 ♖a3 50.♔b4 ♖a1 51.♖f2

The f-pawn drops and White wins.

I am not sure there is a lot of advice available in this chapter. I would suggest that you check the games Laznicka – Naiditsch (page 381) and Kravtsiv – Ding (page 372) in the final chapter in this book to see more examples of the importance of pushing pawns.

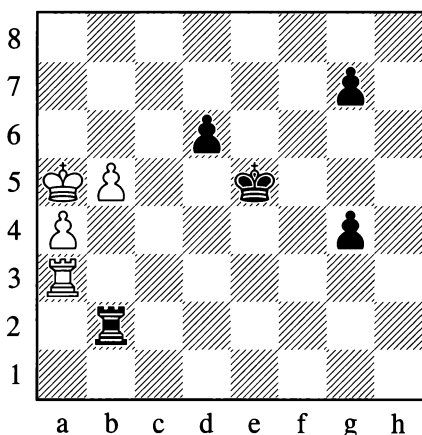
King in front of the Pawns

In his modern classic *Small Steps to Giant Improvement*, Sam Shankland explained how we frequently see the king being best placed in front of the passed pawn. The reason for this is simple: the goal is for the pawn to advance safely. To do so, we need control of the squares in front of the pawn. The king cannot do this from behind the pawn, it has to do so from the side of the pawn, or in front of it. And when it is in front of it, it is always only one square away from where it wants to be, while shouldering the opponent's king away.

In the two examples we shall see here, connected passed pawns are involved. The king often takes a zigzag manoeuvre in front of the pawns for several reasons. One of them is that the rook is behind one pawn and we therefore want to push the other pawn. The king can guide, protect and assist them from the space in front of the pawn. And usually it wins a tempo, as the rook will have to spend this tempo to get behind the other pawn.

Jan Sodoma – Erdene Baasansuren

Pardubice 2017



46.♔b6!

46.b6? illustrates how slow it is to push the pawn already under the supervision of the black rook. 46...♕f4 47.♕a6 g3 48.a5 g2 49.♖a1 ♕f3 Black is in time to make a draw. After 50.♕b7 ♖a2! Black makes a draw immediately, and 50.b7 just delays things after: 50...d5 51.♕a7 ♖a2! 52.♖xa2 g1=♖ 53.♕a8 ♖g6!! 54.a6 ♖c6 White has no way to make progress. The most obvious continuation is 55.a7 ♖e8† 56.b8=♖ ♖c6† with perpetual, although everything ends in a draw around here.

46...♕f4 47.a5 g3 48.♖a1 g2 49.a6 ♖f2

After 49...♕f3 50.a7 we see the great difference between the two methods of

advancing the pawns. 50...♖a2 is probably best met with 51.♖xa2, but moving the rook along the 1st rank will also do it.

50.♖g1 ♕f3 51.a7 ♖a2 52.♕b7 ♕f2 53.♖xg2† ♕xg2 54.a8=♖ ♖xa8 55.♕xa8 g5

Sometimes you wonder if people are unfamiliar with the option of resigning. But certainly, weird things have happened before and today could be your lucky day!

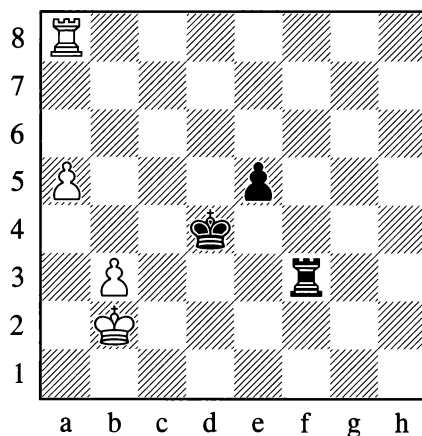
56.b6 g4 57.b7 g3 58.b8=♖ ♕h1 59.♖h8† ♕g1 60.♖d4† ♕h1 61.♖h4† ♕g2 62.♕b7 ♕f3 63.♖f6† ♕e3 64.♖g5† ♕f3 65.♖f5† ♕e3 66.♖g4 ♕f2 67.♖f4† 1–0

The next example is far more complex. It could also have been placed in the later chapter on drawing against connected pawns, as many themes covered there are visible here.

The game is from the mid-1990s, at the time when Topalov went from being another promising teenager to the number three player in the world.

Veselin Topalov – Alexander Beliavsky

Linares 1995



61...♖f6?

A passive move. There is not enough time for Black to manoeuvre the rook to e6, although it would be the perfect square for the rook. Rarely do manoeuvres work in a race.

Passed pawns should be pushed. There is no reason not to get going here. 61...e4! is the principled move.

After 62.♞d8† ♔c5! Black manages to create counterplay with all of his pieces. The king against the white pawns, the e-pawn diverting the white forces and the rook harassing the king and attacking the pawns.

And 62.a6 is rather harmless.

Black can bring the king back immediately, but simplest is a version of the game: 62...♞f7!, when the a-pawn is far away from the white king. The black king will arrive at the queenside sooner. 63.a7 ♞d7! The e-pawn secures a draw. The moment the white king comes to the d-file, Black will be able to go to the c-file with a discovered check and then the b-file, ready to eliminate the a7-pawn.

And after 62...♔c5, Black can draw with 63.♞b8 ♞f2† 64.♔a3 ♞f1.

61...♞f2† 62.♔a3 e4 63.a6 ♔c5 was also holding.

62.♞e8?

62.b4 ♔c4 63.♔a3 looks more natural to me. White wins rather mechanically, as far as I can tell.

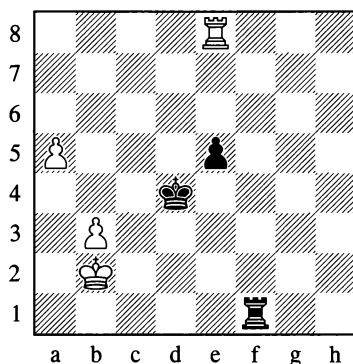
The game still wins against best defence, but would require at least one difficult decision.

62...e4?

A stronger defence was possible with:

62...♞f1!

This is direct prophylaxis against b4 and ♔a3, as given above. White will therefore have to find a rather beautiful, but far from simple win.

**63.♞b8!!**

How easy would it be for Topalov to go to the b-file, the move after placing the rook behind the passed e-pawn? Especially since it is based on a long variation that is not obviously winning.

63.a6? looks natural, but after 63...♞f2†! 64.♔a3 ♞f6! 65.♞a8 ♔c5 we have a direct draw.

63.♞d8†? ♔c5 64.♞b8 looks like it is winning a tempo, but the black king is well placed, taking care of the white passers. 64...e4! There are two tries from this position, both are very instructive.

a) 65.b4† ♔c4 66.b5 e3 67.a6 e2 68.♞e8 e1=♙ 69.♞xe1 ♞xe1 70.b6 ♞e2† is a famous draw, first described by Horwitz and Kling in 1851. Checks and the threats of mate will rob White of the necessary time to advance the otherwise unstoppable pawns. 71.♔c1 ♔c3 72.♔d1 ♔d3 73.b7 ♞h2 74.♔c1 ♔c3 and so on. In those old studies, White managed to get both of the pawns to the 7th rank, so in this discount version, Black is laughing.

b) Therefore, 65.a6!? seems more testing. 65...♞f2† 66.♔a3 ♞f1 67.♔b2 ♞f2† 68.♔c3

♖a2! 69.b4† ♕d5 70.b5 e3 71.♗b4 ♖b2† 72.♗a5 e2 73.♞e8 ♕c5! The counterplay against the b5-pawn secures the draw. White cannot make progress.

63...e4 64.a6 ♖f7

The key idea behind 63.♖b8!! is revealed after 64...♖f2† 65.♗a3 ♖f6, when 66.♖b4†! and 67.a7 wins.

65.♖b7 ♖f2† 66.♗a3 e3 67.a7 ♖f1 68.♗b4 ♖a1 69.♞d7† ♕e5 70.♗b5 ♕e6 71.♞d3! ♖xa7 72.♞xe3† ♕d7 73.♗b6

White is in time for a theoretical win.

63.b4 e3

63...♕c4 64.♗a3! would also win for White.

64.♗b3 ♖f1

With the rook ideally placed and Black having no direct way to improve his position, Topalov now showed his poor endgame intuition. This was probably one of the games that convinced Danailov to send Topalov on a two-week trip to Moscow to learn to play endings with Mark Dvoretsky. Once there, Dvoretsky noticed that Topalov was struggling with calculating variations and focused as much on that as on endgames. The year after, Topalov beat Kasparov and shared first place with him in Dos Hermanas, and won the tournament in Novgorod.

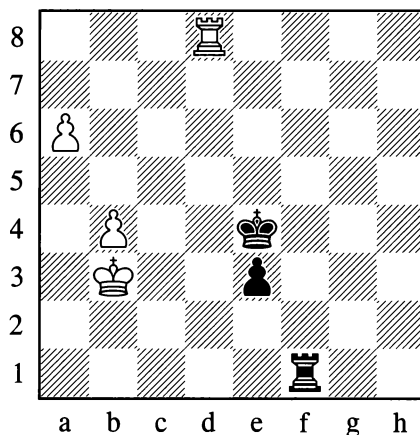
65.♞d8†?

A rather peculiar mistake. Since this was the mid-90s, it would be fair to guess that rampant time trouble was not the culprit. I think Topalov calculated a clear line and went for it, missing that Black has an escape hatch.

The most natural continuation is 65.a6! ♖a1 66.♞d8† only now, when the white pawns are connected and the rook has lost its flexibility and already committed to the a1-square. After 66...♗e4 67.b5 e2 68.♞e8† we have transposed to the game.

Black draws after 65.♗a4? ♕c4 66.♞xe3 ♖a1† 67.♖a3 ♖b1!.

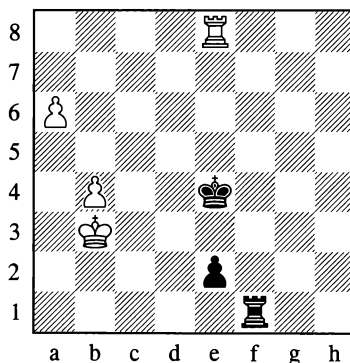
65...♗e4 66.a6



66...♖a1?

This looks like an only move, and it is easy to believe that Beliavsky might have been making automatic moves by this point, not realising that he had a surprising defence.

66...e2! 67.♞e8†



67...♕d5!!

Following our guidelines of letting the king deal with the passed pawns.

67...♕d3? loses to a familiar tactic: 68.a7 ♖a1 69.a8=♞! ♖xa8 70.♞xa8 e1=♞ 71.♞d8†

68.♞xe2 ♔c6 69.♞e5

69.♞a2 ♞b1† 70.♔c2 ♞h1 also holds, on account of 71.a7 ♞h2†.

69...♔b6 70.b5 ♞h1

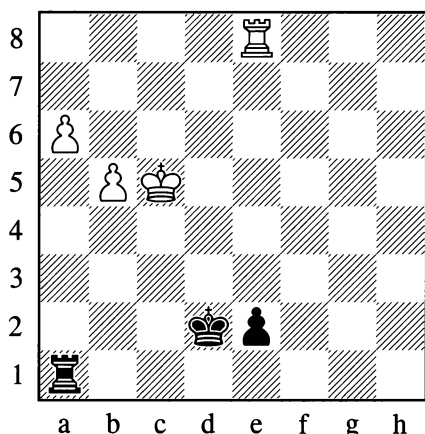
White has two extra pawns, but they are entirely dominated. We shall look more at this endgame on page 302, when everything that is solid shall melt into air...

A disclaimer is in order: tablebases do not distinguish between 66...e2 and 66...♞a1. Computers may analyse chess better than we do, but they do not understand the concept of a game.

67.b5 e2 68.♞e8† ♔d3

68...♔d5 69.♞xe2 ♔c5 70.♞a2 and White wins.

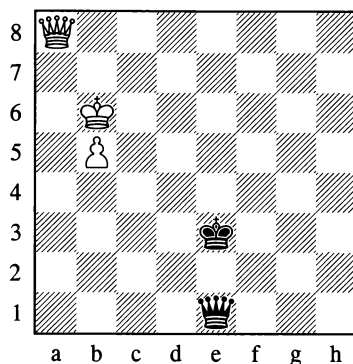
69.♔b4 ♔d2 70.♔c5



70...e1=♞?

The final mistake, where the tablebases finally give up on Black's chances.

Black has a few versions of transposing into the queen endgame with: 70...♞a3! 71.♔b6 (Black would be in time to make the draw after 71.♞xe2† ♔xe2 72.♔b6 ♔d3!) 71...♞e3 72.♞xe3 ♔xe3 73.a7 e1=♞ 74.a8=♞



If you ask computers, this endgame is a draw. My experience is somewhat different. My friends Sam Shankland and Abhi Mishra have both lost this endgame; the latter to another friend of mine, Boris Gelfand, who has won the endgame a few times (we annotated the win against Jobava in *Decisions in Major Piece Endings*, pages 213-222).

In theory it should be a draw. The black king hides in the faraway corner and the queen will be able to give a lot of checks. But the difference between theory and practice has always been none in theory, but immense in practice.

After Abhi lost to Boris, Sam convinced me that in practice the endgame is not holdable, even in classical chess. I was all fired up to write an article about it and got ahead of myself, agreeing to write it for a magazine, before I did the research... (sigh).

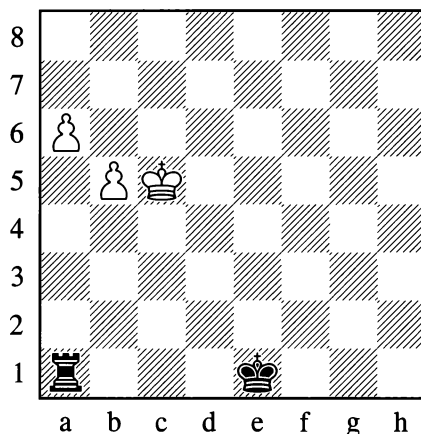
The reality is that it is holdable. It is quite complex. And I did not fully understand why it is holdable in some situations, but immensely difficult in others. It has a lot to do with the correct waiting moves in situations where checks are not working. But I did not understand, in a way I could put into words, how you can create this scenario. Simply, it appeared that some held it seemingly effortlessly, while others lost without a real chance.

After 20 minutes I decided that if I needed many hours to understand it, a magazine article aimed at an under 2000 rated audience would sink.

So this endgame is a theoretical draw. Yet I believe the chances of Beliavsky holding it would be less than 50% at the time of the game. Topalov had youth, energy and cunning on his side. And Beliavsky seemed spent, failing to even reach it.

For this reason, I seriously believe that the losing mistake was on move 66, while here he could have retained a fighting chance. But if you call this endgame a draw, you are banned from talking about advantage ever again. Only winning, drawn and lost can exist in your vocabulary.

71.♖xe1 ♔xe1



This is the moment Dvoretsky comes in. He points out that the clever-looking 72.b6? is a mistake because of 72...♖a5†! and Black makes a draw instantly. Instead, we use the good old zig-zag motion with the king.

72.♔b6! ♔d2 73.♔a7
1-0

Chapter 6

Promoting Passed Pawns

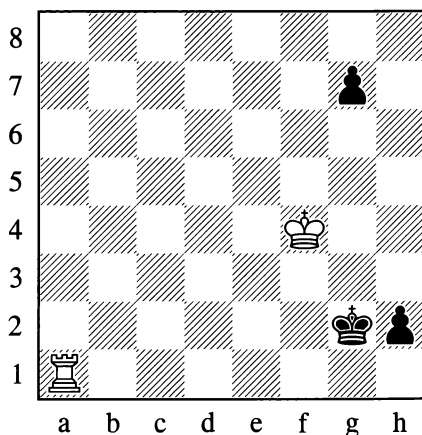
In this chapter we shall investigate various challenges and themes relating to promoting pawns. While the main focus is on the collaboration between the king, pawn and rook, we will start with a few peculiar tactics.

While the key strategic aim in endgames is to promote pawns, the core goal remains checkmate. Promoting a pawn can be the end of the struggle, but often it is not. At times both players get a queen, at times a queen cannot be had, due to the threat of mate, and we have to promote to a knight (sometimes losing; often not). Chess is a game of obvious surprises. A move can be a surprise when played and obvious the second after.

The following game is hopefully a valuable lesson in remaining concentrated until the game is over.

Peng Xiongjian – Shahin Lorparizangeneh

Orbis 2019



Both players have played hard for a win at various stages of the game, but at this point it seems that a draw is inevitable. After repeating moves, White tried a final trap.

79. ♖a2† ♕h3 80. ♖a3† ♕g2 81. ♕g4!? h1=♚

Black promotes the pawn with the expectation that White will take the queen and then the g7-pawn, resulting in a vacuum draw.

82. ♖a2†

Leaving Black with two legal moves; one of them losing.

82... ♕g1??

Careless and unimaginative.

82... ♕f1 was still a draw.

83. ♕g3!

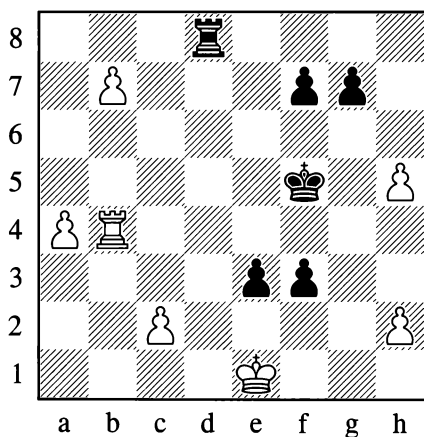
Black is lost! This is possible due to the g7-pawn. Without it Black would have ... ♚h8! defending the a1-square.

1-0

In situations like the next one, where both sides are about to queen, tactics are often front and centre.

Wei Yi – Zhou Jianchao

Xinghua 2015



37... ♖d2?

With the double intention of playing ...f2† and ...♖d1†, and ...♖xh2 and ...♖h1#. But a simple trick has been missed.

37...e2? would fail to 38. ♖b1.

38. ♖f4†!

Ouch! Black has to take the rook, or the f3-pawn falls.

38... ♕xf4 39. b8=♚† ♕f5 40. ♚c8† ♕e5 41. ♚c7† ♕e4 42. ♚e7† ♕d4 43. ♚b4† ♕d5 44. ♚b7†

Black resigned.

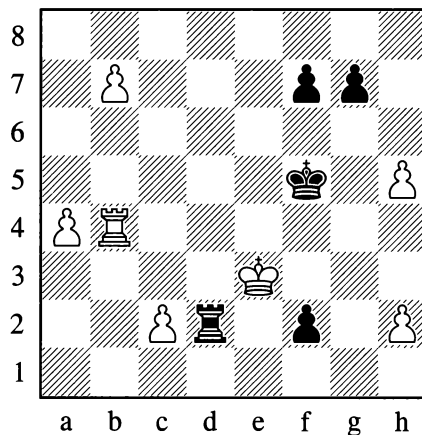
1-0

Black should have forced a perpetual.

37...f2†! 38. ♕e2 ♖d2†

38... ♖d1? fails to 39. ♖f4†! again.

39. ♕xe3



39...f1=♘†!

Underpromotion, here with perpetual check as the saving grace. The unusual thing about this perpetual is that the knight is on the 1st rank and the king on the 3rd. Usually, it is the other way around.

39...f1=♚? would lose to 40. ♕xd2, although there are more moves to be played before Black has to resign.

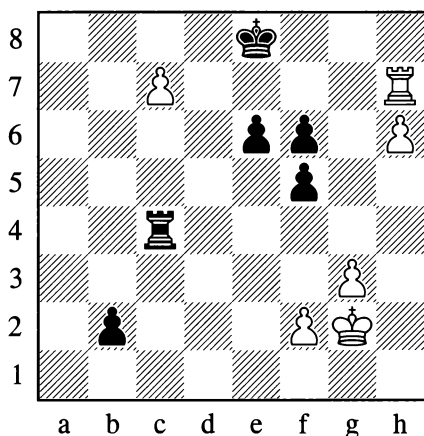
40. ♕f3 ♘xh2†

White can only avoid the draw by allowing mate, which is not recommended.

The following example is even more unusual. Again, both players are about to queen and at first it looks as if Black has the better hand. Indeed, in the game, he won quickly.

Mariano Ortega Amarelle – S. Yogit

Ciutat de Mont 2016



43. ♖h8†?

43. ♜g7? was also possible. Black would play 43... ♗f8!, when White should give up the c-pawn to stop the b-pawn.

43... ♗f7 44. c8=♞?

A strange decision.

44. ♜b8 would give good drawing chances.

44... ♜xc8 45. ♜xc8?

There was still time for 45. ♜h7† ♗g6 46. ♜b7 ♗xh6 47. ♜xb2, when White should hold, although Black will try.

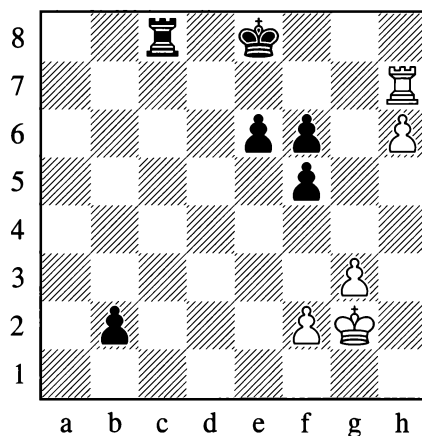
45... b1=♞

We can now guess that White missed the check on b7. He is just lost.

46. ♜c7† ♗g8 47. h7† ♗h8 48. ♗h3 ♞f1†
0-1

I feel great sympathy for White that he misplayed the position. Not because he lost; we have all done so and this is a part of the game. But because he missed the chance for immortality with:

43. c8=♞†! ♜xc8



44. ♜a7!!

A strange-looking move. Certainly, the rook belongs behind the passed pawn? No! After 44. ♜b7? b1=♞! we will have a draw similar to others seen above. Now, White wins.

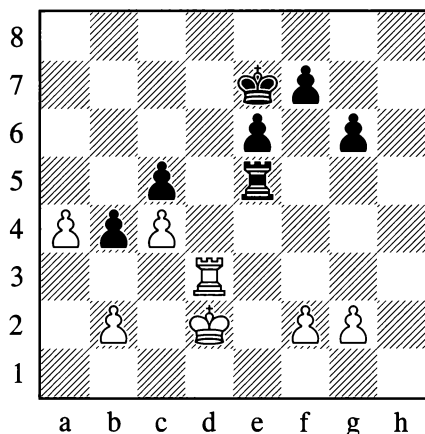
44... b1=♞ 45. h7 ♞e4† 46. ♗h2

A remarkable position.

The next example is a classic I remember seeing when I was a child. It made a great impression on me, but as so often, what we learn in our childhood seems simple and convincing at the time, but when we revisit it later in life, it is far more complicated.

Alekhine – NN

Groningen (simul) 1933



In this simul game, Alekhine found a nice promotion tactic.

1.g4! 2.a5 3.xg4 4.a6 5.h4

Other records indicate that the game went: 3...g1 4.a7 a1 5.a3! But it is possible that the game was a construction altogether, as Alekhine is suspected to be a little too creative with the descriptions of his own achievements...

4.a6 5.h4 6.g5 7.f5 8.g6 9.g7

And Black resigned. But looking at this with Sam Shankland, we both noticed that this was as a minimum premature.

After:

5...g1 6.a8=Q 7.e7

The rook will transfer to the 5th rank and defend the c5-pawn. Whether or not Black's fortress can be breached takes some work with a computer to determine. Karsten Müller pushed me to do it, and I can confirm that it can be breached, slowly... and not easily.

Looking deeper, Sam and I found another winning line for White.

1.a5! 2.h5 3.c2!

With dual purpose.

2...h3? is a mistake. White will not win the pawn ending with an h-pawn. The finish is rather curious. 2...g3 3.gxh3 4.d7 5.b3 6.c6 7.e3 8.b7 9.f4 f6 10.h4 a6 11.g4 12.xa5 13.h5 f5! An important intermediate move. 10.g5 gxh5 11.xh5 12.b6 13.g5 14.c6 15.f6 16.d6 17.f4! 18.d7 19.e5 e7! Stalemate.

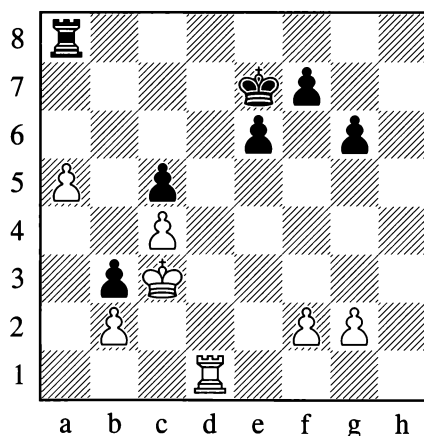
2...h1

2...h8 3.b3 and White wins.

3.d1 b3+

The pawn ending after 3...d1 4.xd1 5.d6 is different. White has the g-pawn and wins. 5.b3 6.c6 7.g4 f6 8.e2 9.b7 10.e3 11.a6 12.g5! and the king breaks through.

4.d2 5.h8 6.c3 7.a8



6.a1

The tactics are over and White has a massive advantage with his strong passed pawn and the more active rook. The winning line is simple.

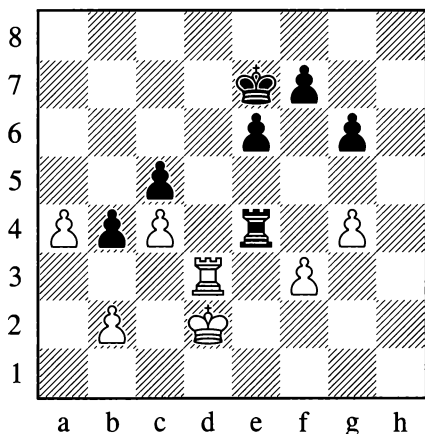
6...d7 7.xb3 8.c6 9.c3 e5 10.b4 cxb4+ 11.xb4 f5 12.a6 e4 13.c5 f4 14.c4 e3 15.fxe3 fxe3 16.a2 17.c7 18.d3 19.c6

17.♖a5

And so on... White wins.

Sam thus came up with an improved version after 1.g4! ♖e4:

2.f3!



White is closing one path back for the rook. Another exists, but it is less effective.

2...♖xc4 3.a5 b3 4.♖xb3 ♖a4 5.♖a3

White now wins the pawn ending with not one, but two distant passed pawns on the a-file after 5...♖xa3 6.bxa3.

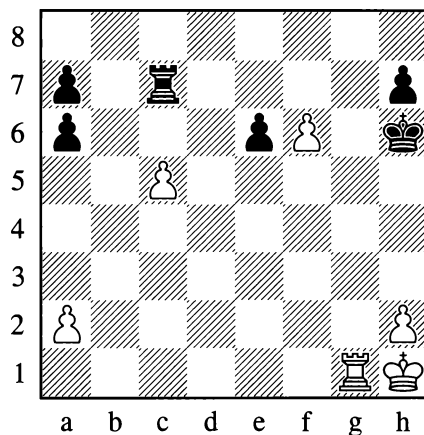
Black can try 5...♖b4 and a desperate dash to a8 is possible, but it does not hold. 6.♔c3 ♔d6 7.a6 ♖b8 8.a7 ♖a8 9.g5

Two passed pawns working together

In the next example White has two well-advanced passed pawns, while the black king is brutally cut off. It should be possible to queen one of the pawns without too much of a fuss.

Ronan Le Goff – Abyl Kizatbay

Helsingor 2018



50.♖g8?

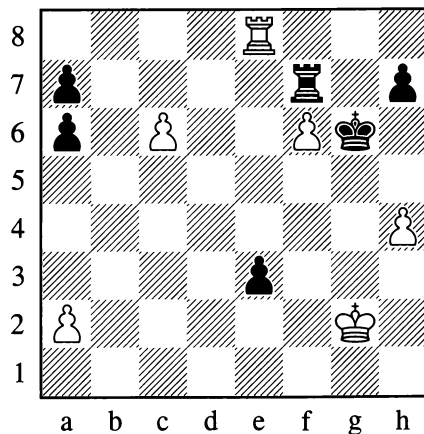
50.c6! with the threat of 51.♖f1, was winning on the spot. After 50...♖xc6 51.f7 ♖c8 52.♖g8 the pawn queens.

50...♖f7 51.c6 e5! 52.♔g2 e4 53.h4! e3?

Black could have drawn with 53...♖c7! followed by further accurate moves.

54.♖e8 ♔g6

54...♖c7 would also have lost. White has 55.f7! ♖xf7 56.♖xe3 ♖c7 57.♖e6†! followed by bringing the king in.



55.♖e7?

White was still winning after: 55.♖xe3! ♜c7 56.♖e6! ♜f5 57.♞d6 ♜e5, when he has the clever intermediate move 58.f7!! ♜xf7 59.♞d7 ♜f4 60.c7 ♜c4 61.♞xh7 and the two passed pawns win the game.

55...♞xf6 56.c7 ♞f2!?

Perhaps White was hoping for 56...♞c6 57.♖e6†!.

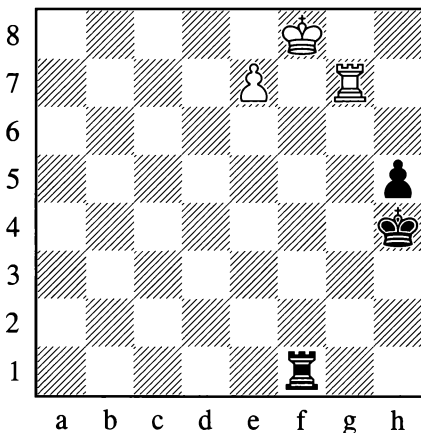
57.♜g3 ♞c2 58.♜f3 e2

The game was drawn almost 20 moves later.

We shall see more than once in this chapter that promoting passed pawns is difficult and can be mishandled even by World Champions. In the next example Magnus Carlsen has the excuse of limited time, as the game was a rapid game, but he will still have been kicking himself afterwards for messing this up.

Magnus Carlsen – Wei Yi

Internet 2022

**69.♞f7?**

The wrong path.

69...♞e1 70.e8=♞?

70.♞g7! still won.

70...♞xe8† 71.♜xe8 ♜g3

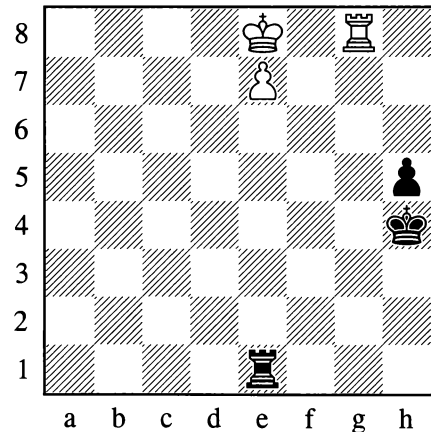
Black draws.

72.♞g7† ♜f3 73.♞h7 ♜g4 74.♜e7 h4 75.♜e6 h3 76.♜e5 ♜g3 77.♜e4 h2 78.♜e3 ♜g2 79.♜e2 h1=♞ 80.♞xh1 ♜xh1
1/2–1/2

The principle of this endgame is that Black draws if White wins the black rook by taking it with the king on the 8th rank. The technique to win time in the race is to make sure the black rook is captured with the white rook. White also needs to keep the king cut off.

69.♜e8! ♞e1

There are other tries, but they are thematically similar. In some lines (as below) the white rook comes to g6, threatening ♞g6-e6, forcing Black to take the pawn on the 7th rank, thus saving a tempo for White.

70.♞g8!

This is the idea.

70...♞e2

A waiting move.

After 70...♜h3 71.♜f7 h4 72.♞g6! White also wins.

71.♔f7 ♖f2† 72.♔g6 ♖g2† 73.♔h7 ♖e2
74.e8=♖ ♖xe8 75.♖xe8 ♔g3 76.♔g6
h4 77.♔g5 h3 78.♖e3† ♔g2 79.♔g4 h2
80.♖e2† ♔g1 81.♔g3

A well-known theoretical position. The knight is trapped in the corner.

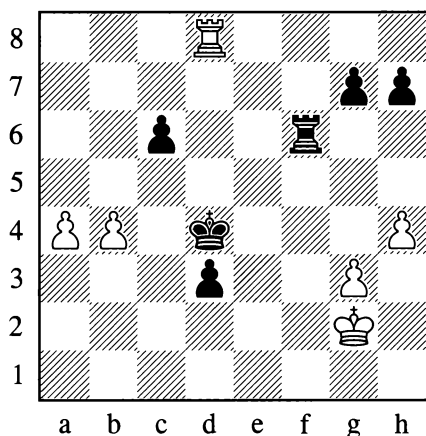
81...h1=♔† 82.♔f3 ♔f1 83.♖g2

White wins.

When we have to queen a pawn, it is often inevitable that we will have to hide the king in front of the pawn when harassed by a perfectly placed enemy rook. In this case, we should pay attention to the details and make sure we do it in the most efficient way possible. In this case, this means making sure the pawn makes it to the 2nd rank before getting blocked.

Max Blau – Vasily Smyslov

Moscow Olympiad 1956



51...♔e3?! 52.♖e8† ♔d2?

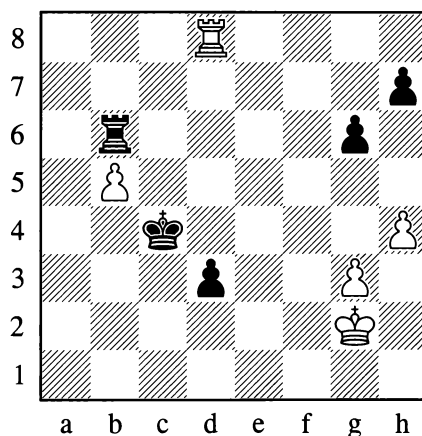
Black could still return and go the other way around with the king.

53.b5! cxb5

I presume that Smyslov was shocked he was not winning after 53...♔c2 54.b6 d2 55.♖d8 ♖f7 (55...♖f8 56.♖xf8! d1=♖ 57.b7 only gives Black opportunities to lose.) 56.a5 ♖b7, where

the d-pawn will queen, but also where the black rook has found itself in the most horrid place possible. After 57.♔f3! Black would lose, were he to queen the pawn. So, the game should end in a draw after something like 57...♖b8 58.♖d6 c5 59.♔e2 ♖e8† 60.♔f2 ♖b8 61.♔e2 with a repetition of moves.

54.axb5 ♔c3 55.♖c8† ♔b4 56.♖d8 ♔c4
57.♖d7 g6 58.♖d8 ♖b6



59.♔f3!

White escapes as in a miracle. Smyslov tried a few things, but the deal is done.

59...♔c3

59...♖xb5 60.♔e4 is the key point.

60.♔e3 ♖e6† 61.♔f2 d2 62.♖c8† ♔d3
63.♖d8† ♔c2 64.♖c8† ♔d1 65.♖c6 ♖e2†
66.♔f1 ♖e3 67.♔f2 ♖b3 68.b6 ♖b2 69.♔f1
♖b3 70.♔f2 ♖b1 71.♖d6 ♔c2 72.♖c6† ♔d3
73.♖d6† ♔c3 74.♖c6†

½-½

The winning manoeuvre exploits the temporarily half-closed c-file to make White advance the b-pawn. Then, by threatening to take the pawn, Black forces the white rook to the 5th rank, where the checking distance is too short.

51...♙c3! 52.b5

52.a5 does not work. After 52...♚f7! Black is ready to take the white queenside pawns and win with the c-pawn.

52...cxb5 53.axb5 d2 54.♚c8† ♕b2 55.♚d8 ♕c2 56.♚c8† ♕d1 57.♚c7 ♚b6 58.♚c5

The black king is too close for White to have any chances after taking the kingside and giving up the rook for the d-pawn. Black's next few moves would be ...♚xb5, ...♚d5! and ...♕e2, winning. But on the 5th rank, the rook will soon find that the checking distance is one row too short.

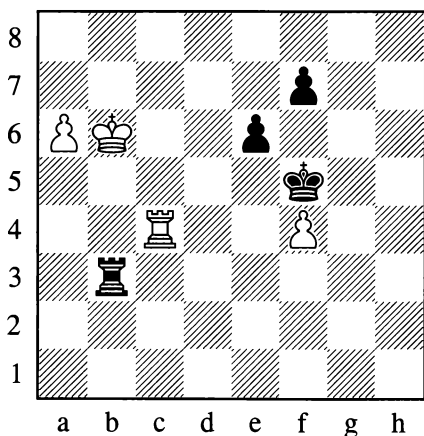
58...♕e2 59.♚e5† ♕d3 60.♚d5† ♕c3 61.♚c5† ♕d4

The checks have dried up and White has no defence against ...♚e6-e1.

The following missed win by my friend Sabino is one we could all have replicated.

Sabino Brunello – Erwin L'Ami

Reykjavik 2018

**52.♙a5?**

The king is now too far from a8.

52...♚b8 53.a7 ♚a8 54.♙a6 e5 55.fxe5 ♕xe5 56.♙b7 ♚xa7† 57.♙xa7 f5 58.♙b6 f4 59.♚c8 ♕d4!

Not necessary, but good technique.

60.♚f8 ♕e3 61.♙c5 f3 62.♙c4 f2 63.♚xf2 ♕xf2 ½–½

The winning triangulation is highly instructive.

52.♙c6! ♚a3

Otherwise, White puts the rook behind the pawn.

53.♙b5! e5

53...♚a1 54.♚a4 ♚b1† 55.♙c6 ♚b8 56.a7 ♚a8 57.♙b7 ♚f8 58.a8=♚ ♚xa8 59.♚xa8! Almost always the correct capture. 59...♙xf4 60.♙c6 White is in time.

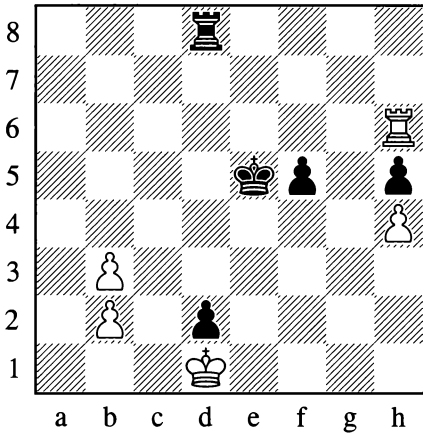
54.fxe5 ♕xe5 55.♚a4 ♚b3† 56.♙c6 ♚b8 57.a7 ♚a8 58.♙b7 ♚xa7† 59.♚xa7! f5 60.♙c6 f4 61.♙c5 ♕e4 62.♙c4 ♕e3 63.♙c3 f3 64.♚e7†

White wins.

The following example of conversion of an advantage from Emil Sutovsky, before he gave up playing for politics, is a great example of how to use one passed pawn to remove counterplay and win time to do what we really want to do.

Dmitrij Kollars – Emil Sutovsky

Gibraltar 2018



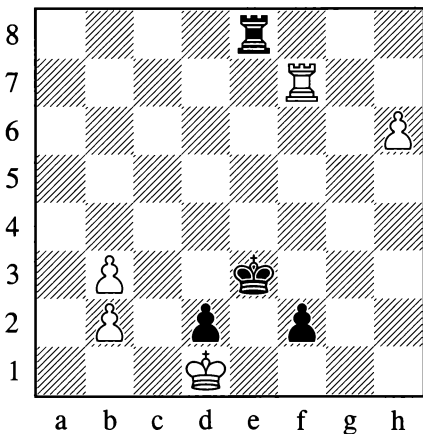
43...f4! 44.♖xh5† ♔e4 45.♖h7 f3! 46.♗e7†
 ♔d3 47.♗f7 ♔e3 48.♗e7† ♔d3 49.♗f7 ♔e3
 50.♗e7† ♔f4!

50...♔d3 51.♗f7 would be three-time repetition.

51.♗f7† ♔g3

Threatening to win the h-pawn, thus gaining a tempo.

52.h5 f2! 53.h6 ♔g2 54.♗g7† ♔f3 55.♗f7†
 ♔e3 56.♗e7† ♔d3 57.♗f7 ♗e8 58.♗d7†
 ♔e3 59.♗f7



59...f1=♖†

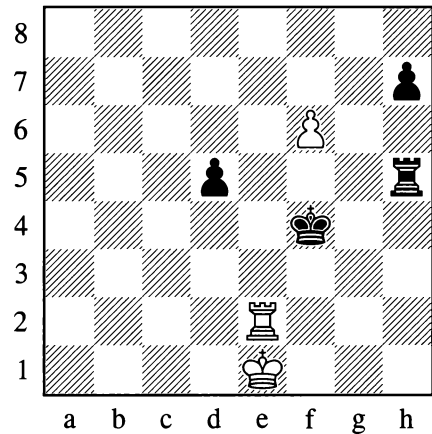
White resigned in view of 60.♗xf1 ♖c8!.

0-1

The following game is from the 2021 World Rapid Championship, where every move is made with a ten-second increment. The mistakes are easy to understand and forgive, but also valuable as free lessons for the rest of us. Black is in trouble. He is a pawn up, but the f6-pawn is dangerously close to promotion and Black has to find a way to get the rook back quickly. If this was all that was happening, this example would be in the chapter on Rook behind passed pawns, but the miss by White is what places this example here.

Aditya Mittal – Andrew Tang

Warsaw (rapid Wch) 2021



The unfathomably low rating of the Indian Wizkid (1488) is his rapid rating. Don't worry about it.

66...♖h1†?

An understandable check, but a losing one.

66...♖f5? would be a total blunder. 67.♖f2† and wins.

67.♔d2?

White missed the chance to play: 67.♔f2!, when the king is ready to help the rook get to f2. 67...♖h5 68.f7 ♖f5 69.♔g2 and White wins.

67...♖f1! 68.♖e1 ♖f2† 69.♖e2 ♖f3 70.♖e3 ♖f2† 71.♖e2
1/2–1/2

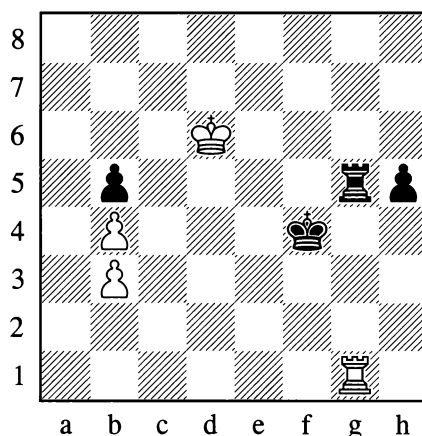
White cannot be prevented from getting the rook behind the passed pawn. But by playing the moves in the right order, Black can use a check to prevent White from queening the pawn.

66...♔g3! was the key move. After **67.♖f2 ♖e5† 68.♔f1 ♖e8** Black holds.

The next example sees Black with a passed pawn and the advantage. Still, White is within the narrow drawing range we so often see in rook endings. Under time pressure, in a rapid game, the players were not able to give their best, but the game was fascinating all the same.

Matthias Bluebaum – Shakhriyar Mamedyarov

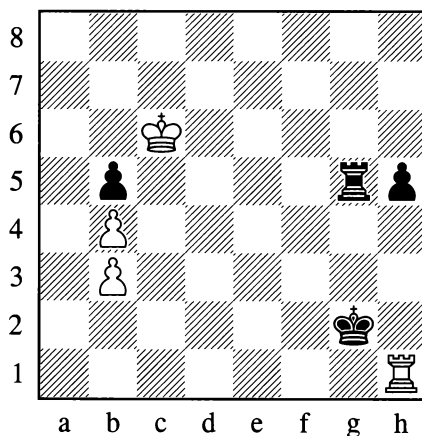
Warsaw (rapid Wch) 2021

**74.♖f1†?**

It seems reasonable to believe that this check makes things easier for White. But Black can win on both sides of the board.

74...♔e3! 75.♖h1 ♔f2?

75...♔d4! would have won. Black is threatening ...♔c3, winning a pawn, as well as ...♖g6† and ...♖h6. White cannot defend against both.

76.♔c6 ♔g2

77. ♖h4?

White should not have a chance with passive defence in this endgame, but it turns out it is more difficult to overcome than a first impression reveals.

At this moment, when the black king is as far away as it possibly can be, White can draw with a continuation which is both simple and logical, yet at the same time incredibly surprising:

77. ♖c1! h4 78. ♖c5 ♖xc5† 79. bxc5 h3 80. ♔b6!!

This is the truly surprising move. If the king goes to b7, Black wins a tempo by moving the king with a check, which brings it closer to the action in the queen ending, on the queenside. This underlines how narrowly White draws the queen ending.

80...h2 81. c6 h1=♚ 82. c7

The position is a tablebase draw, although in practice White might draw it half the time at most.

77...♔g3 78. ♖d4 h4 79. ♖d3† ♔g4 80. ♖d4† ♔h5?!

Black needed to create stability. This could be done with: 80...♔g3 81. ♖d3† ♔g2 82. ♖d2† ♔f3 83. ♖d3† ♔e4 84. ♖h3 ♖h5 85. ♔b6 ♔f4 And Black wins.

81. ♖d3 ♖f5?

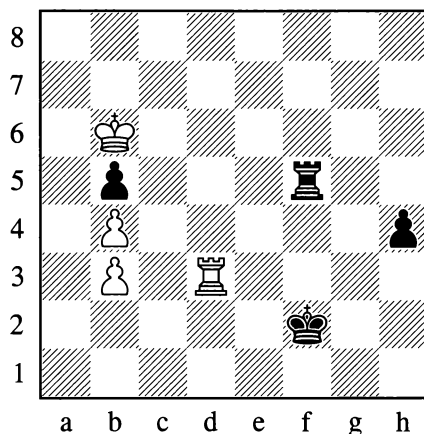
81...♖g3?! would not make progress. After 82. ♖d8, Black would have to play 82...♖g5 83. ♖d3 and then think again.

81...♔g4! would return to the right direction.

82. ♔b6 ♔g4 83. ♖d4† ♔g3 84. ♖d3† ♔f2

84...♔g2 looks winning, as 85. ♖d2† ♔f3! returns to the winning ways.

But White can play 85. ♖c3! h3 86. ♖c5 with a potential return to the miracle draw on move 77, or another draw after 86...h2!? 87. ♖xf5 h1=♚ 88. ♔xb5 and ♖f5-c5 with an established fortress.

**85. ♖d2†?**

White could draw with a theme we know well from the chapter on Rook vs pawns.

After 85. ♖h3 ♖h5 86. ♔c6 White is just waiting for Black to play 86...♔g2, when the king is finally far enough away for White to play 87. ♖xh4!, and make a draw.

85...♔e3 86. ♖h2 ♖h5 87. ♖h3† ♔e4

The king is on the other side of the 3rd rank and closer to the 8th rank, making it impossible for White to give up the rook for the h-pawn with the black king on g2 and the black rook having to do the recapture.

88. ♔a5 ♔f5 89. ♖h1 ♔g4 90. ♖g1† ♔f3 91. ♖h1 h3 92. ♖f1† ♔g2 93. ♖c1 h2 94. ♖c2† ♔h3 95. ♖c1 ♖f5

0-1

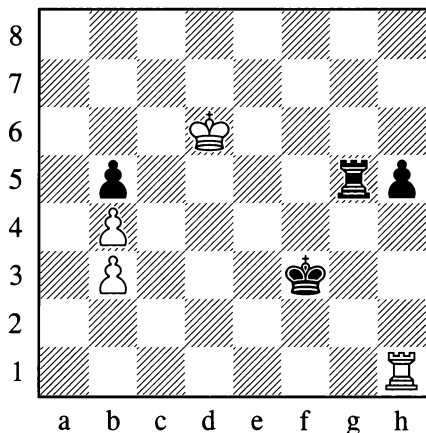
Returning to the starting position, White would have been able to hold with accurate play.

74. ♖h1!

Black is not allowed to advance his king or pawn without cost.

74...♔f3

The idea of ...♔e3-d4 is no longer in time. White can move the king to c6 and then defend against ...♔c3 by placing the rook on h3.

**75.♔d7!**

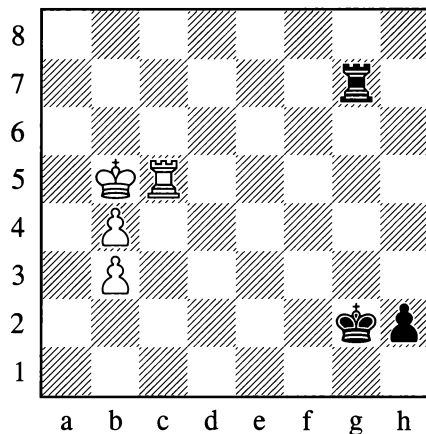
This was suggested by Sam Shankland. The king cannot be better placed for a potential queen ending.

75...♔g2 76.♖c1!

The main point of this example. White needs to queen a pawn to survive. He will never be able to prevent the h-pawn from being queened. So, the b4-pawn needs to get going.

76...h4 77.♖c5 ♖g7†

The queen ending this time around is not remotely dangerous. After 77...♖xc5 78.bxc5 h3 79.c6 h2 80.c7 h1=♔ 81.c8=♔ ♔h3† 82.♔c7 ♔xb3 83.♔b6 the draw is just around the corner.

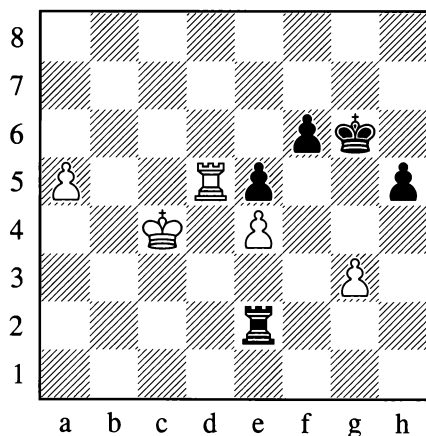
78.♔c6 h3 79.♔xb5 h2**80.♖h5**

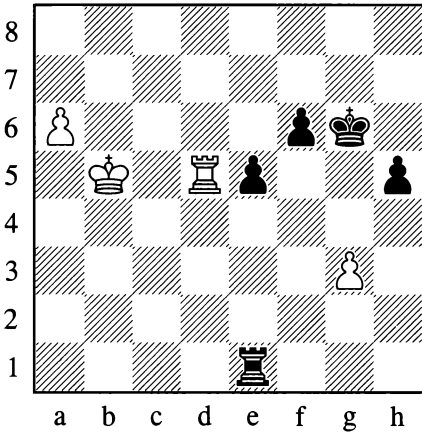
The black king is too far away. White draws.

The following game was a rapid game, but the ideas are useful to understand.

Evgeny Postny – Romain Edouard

Oscaro 2013

**60.a6! ♖xe4† 61.♔b5 ♖e1**

**62.a7?**

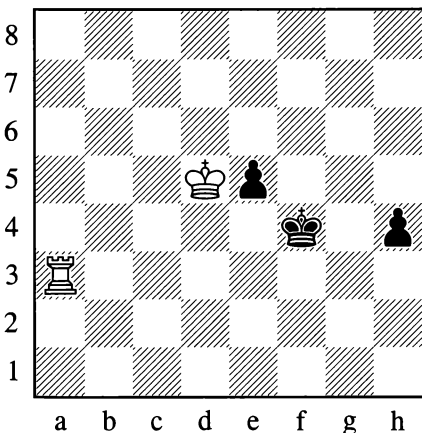
This natural move is a mistake. The white king comes too far away from the scene of action.

The winning idea is: 62.♔b6! threatening to push the pawn at a moment when White is ready to put the rook behind the pawn. 62...♞c1 63.a7 ♞c8 64.♞a5 ♞a8 65.♔b7 ♞xa7† 66.♞xa7! ♔f5 67.♔c6 and White wins.

62...♞a1 63.♔b6 ♞xa7 64.♔xa7 ♔f5 65.♔b6 ♔g4 66.♞d3 f5 67.♔c5 f4 68.gxf4 ♔xf4

Taking with the king or pawn does not matter. The black king is well placed to help the h-pawn either way.

69.♔d5 h4 70.♞a3



70...e4?

But the e-pawn has no value at all. Push the pawn with potential!

70...♔g4! drew.

71.♔d4 ♔g4 72.♔xe4?

White won on time, after having played a bad move. The beauty of rapid chess...

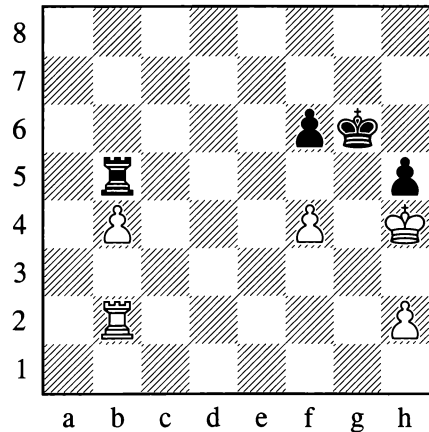
1-0

The correct move was 72.♔e3!, winning by shouldering. 72...♔g3 73.♔xe4† and the extra tempo is everything.

Again, the side with an extra pawn unsurprisingly has the advantage. Giri took a pawn in the opening, providing his opponent with plenty of compensation, but also the responsibility to prove that the material was invested soundly. Over time the compensation diminished and at the time where we come in, Black is down to only moves to stay in the game. When he makes a small mistake, Giri's iron technique takes him down.

Anish Giri – Maxime Vachier-Lagrave

Baku 2015



48...♔f5! 49.♔g3 ♔e4 50.♞b1 ♔d3?

The wrong plan.

Against 50...f5? 51.♖e1† and 52.♞e5! would win.

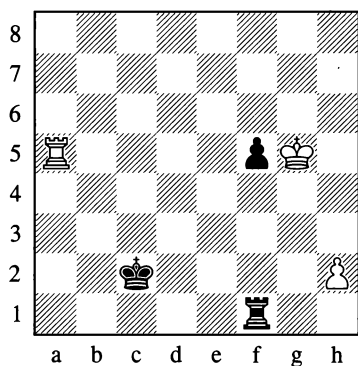
50...h4†? 51.♔g4 f5† 52.♔g5 ♞b8 is another unsuccessful try. The simplest way for White to play is: 53.b5 ♞g8† 54.♔f6! ♔xf4 55.♞b4† and after more moves, White will win.

Black could make a draw by restricting White's ability to improve his position. 50...♔e3! 51.♞b3† ♔e4 It is hard to see how White would make progress.

51.♔f3 ♔c2

An interesting position arises after:

51...f5 52.♔g3 ♔c2 53.♞a1 ♞xb4 54.♞a5 h4† 55.♔xh4 ♞xf4† 56.♔g5 ♞f1



Black looks close to making the draw. If White takes on f5, the black king will easily join the defence after the tempo-winning check on g1.

57.♞a4!!

White wins narrowly, but also in a beautiful way. The f-pawn is restricted, while the h-pawn is advanced. For example:

57...♔d3 58.♞f4 ♞g1† 59.♔xf5 ♔e3 60.h4 ♞a1 61.♞e4† ♔f3 62.♞e5!

And so on.

52.♞a1 ♞xb4 53.♞a5 ♞b3† 54.♔e4 h4?!

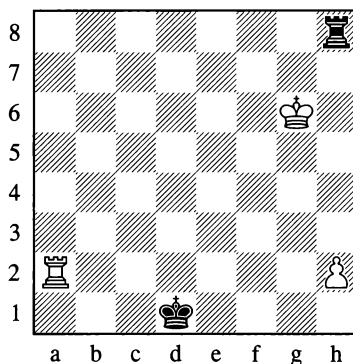
The second important position arises after this rather long analysis:

54...♞h3 55.♞a2† ♔d1 56.♔f5 ♞h4 57.♔xf6 ♞xf4† 58.♔g5 ♞f8 59.♔xh5 ♞h8† 60.♔g5 ♞g8† 61.♔f6 ♞h8 62.♔g7 ♞h3 63.♔g6

Played with the idea of ♔g5 on the next move, when Black's likely retreat of the rook will allow White to advance the h-pawn.

Black has to retreat straight away.

63...♞h8



64.♞a4!!

The key idea of this endgame. Black cannot take on h2, as the king is as poorly placed as can be. White will advance the h-pawn soon:

64...♞h3 65.♔g5 ♔e2 66.♔g4 ♞h8 67.h4

White wins.

55.♔f5 ♔d3 56.♔xf6 ♔e4 57.f5

White won.

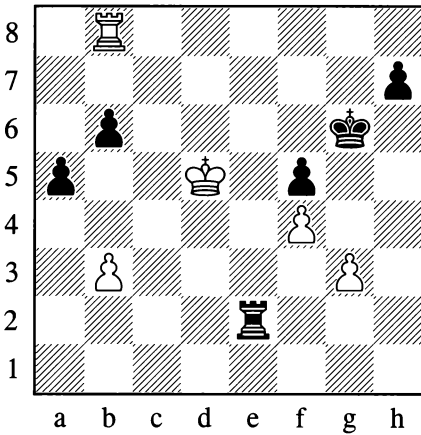
57...h3 58.♞a4† ♔f3 59.♔g5! ♞b5 60.♞a2 ♞b4 61.f6 ♞g4† 62.♔f5 ♞f4† 63.♔e6 ♞e4† 64.♔d6 ♞d4† 65.♔e7 ♞e4† 66.♔f8 ♞b4 67.f7 ♞f4 68.♞b2 ♞a4 69.♞b6

1-0

When the opponent is pinned to the bottom rank, it is far preferable to have a bishop's pawn, rather than a knight or rook pawn. Sam Shankland has written about this in *Theoretical Rook Endgames*, but here we shall see this principle in a more dynamic setting.

Koustav Chatterjee – Michal Krasenkow

Dhaka 2021



This game is from a tournament in Bangladesh, where White is playing strong active moves, but with the intention of holding the draw. At the same time Black is trying to win – a symptom of the rating difference more than the position on the board.

41. ♖g8† ♕h6 42. ♖g5 ♖e4 43. ♖xf5 ♖b4
44. ♕e6 ♖xb3 45. g4!

White has strong compensation for the pawn.

45... ♕g7 46. ♖f7† ♕g8 47. ♖a7 ♖e3† 48. ♕f6
♖e8 49. f5 ♖f8† 50. ♕e6 ♖e8† 51. ♕f6 ♖b8

Realism would be 51... ♖f8†! with an immediate draw.

52. g5 b5?

52... ♖f8† was still a draw.

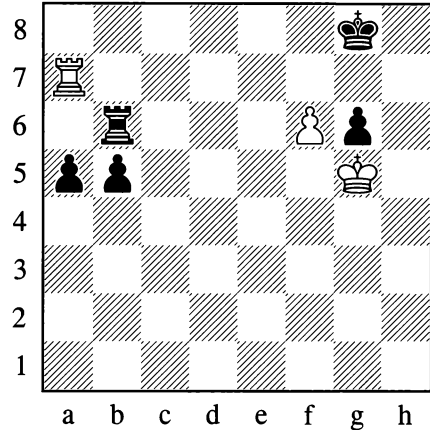
53. g6! ♖b6†

Black would also be lost after both 53... b4
54. ♖g7†! and 53... hxcg6 54. ♕xcg6!.

54. ♕g5 hxcg6

54... b4 55. ♖a8† ♕g7 56. f6† would win the rook.

55. f6!



At this moment White offered a draw. Krasenkow accepted.

1/2–1/2

This is a tragedy, not only because the position is winning for White, but also because no difficult decisions remain. For example: 55... ♖b8 56. ♕xcg6 b4 57. ♖g7† ♕f8 58. ♖h7 and Black can only resign.

Endgames are mainly about creating passed pawns and promoting them. In this chapter we have seen a lot of different angles of pawn promotion, yet we have clearly only scratched the surface. Still, the isolated ideas given will, when combined, give a decent feeling for the process of pawn promotion.

Chapter 7

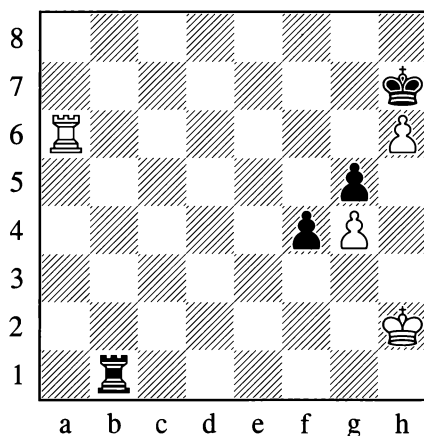
The Umbrella

The umbrella is when you use one of the opponent's pawns as a shield against checks from behind. Although simple, it can be a bit counterintuitive at first, as we often decide not to take the opponent's pawn. But remember: the goal of the endgame is not to have more pawns, but to promote pawns.

The first example sees White under some pressure. In principle the position is a draw, with equal material and many ways for White to play. But most of them lose a pawn and the draw is not too easy to hold thereafter. Especially since the pawn ending without the h6-pawn is lost.

Theo Gungl – Jakob Leon Pajeken

Magdeburg 2022

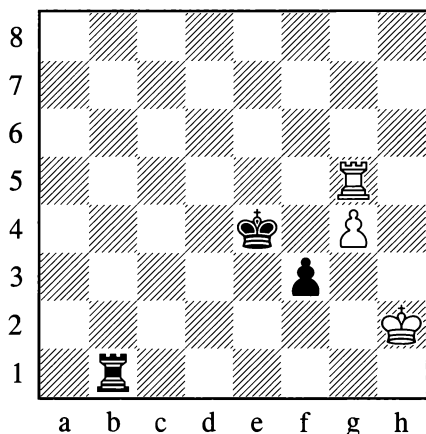


84. ♖a7†!?

White decided to give up the pawn immediately and to start to harass the black king.

84. ♔g2 is also interesting. The idea is to transfer the king to f5, when it would be impossible for Black to make serious progress. Black can also go after the g4-pawn, showing how marginal the draw can be. 84... ♜b3 85. ♜f6 ♜g3† 86. ♔f2 ♜xg4 87. ♔f3! ♜h4 88. ♜f8! ♜xh6 89. ♔g4 ♜g6 90. ♜a8 and Black cannot make progress against decent defence.

84...♔xh6 85.♖a6† ♕g7 86.♖a5 ♕f6
87.♖a6† ♕e5 88.♖a5† ♕e4 89.♖xg5 f3



90.♔g3?

This natural move is a mistake, as the king gets cut off along the 2nd rank.

White was still within the drawing margin, but had to find 90.♖f5! ♕e3 91.♖e5†!, when after 91...♕f2 92.g5 the draw should be easy.

90...♖g1† 91.♕f2 ♖g2† 92.♕f1 ♖a2 93.♖f5 ♕e3!

We now see that if the pawn on g4 was not there, the position would be a draw. White can check the black king whenever he goes to the 3rd rank and we do not end in the situation with the queening f-pawn, á la the last example in the previous chapter. But with the g4-pawn there, the black king can hide from the checks on g3, hence the name Umbrella.

94.♕g1

94.♖e5† ♕f4 95.♖f5† ♕g3! wins. (But not 95...♕xg4?? which would lead to a basic draw.

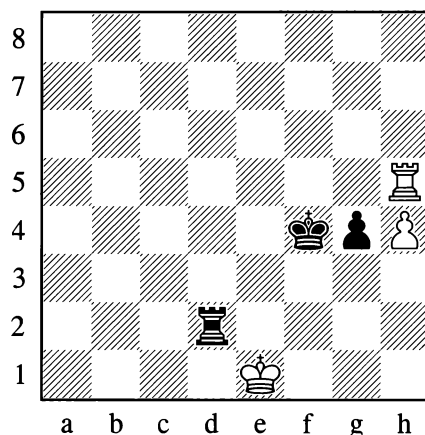
94...♖a1† 95.♕h2 f2

White resigned.

0-1

Xavier Vila Gazquez – Julio Granda Zuniga

Andorra 2012



66...♖a2?

An understandable move, which turns out to be a narrow mistake.

White also narrowly draws after 66...♖d6? 67.♕f1! ♕g3 68.♖a5 ♖d1† 69.♕e2 ♖h1 70.h5, when the h-pawn offers counterplay.

67.♖b5?

White fails to exploit the chance given.

67.♖g5? is also lost. After 67...g3 68.♕f1 ♕f3 69.♖f5† ♕g4 70.♖g5† ♕h3, we have the thematic umbrella scenario.

67...♕f3!

Preparing a check on the 1st rank, while aiming for the g2- and h2-squares.

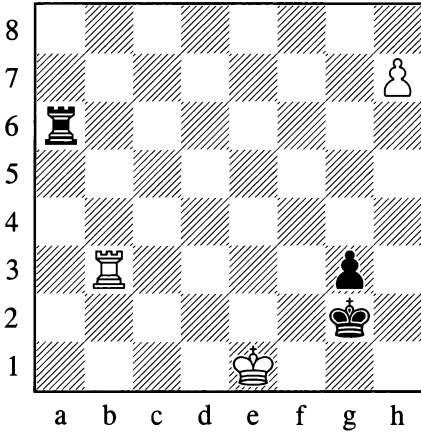
67...♕g3? fails to 68.h5!, when the h-pawn needs to be stopped.

67...g3? gives White a chance to defend along the back rank with 68.♕f1! ♕g4 69.♕g1 ♕h3 70.♖b1! and White draws, as this is a knight's pawn, not a bishop's pawn.

68.♖b3†

68.h5 this time loses to 68...g3!.

68...♙g2! 69.h5 g3 70.h6 ♖a6 71.h7



71...♖e6†!

It is always useful to kick the opponent's king away.

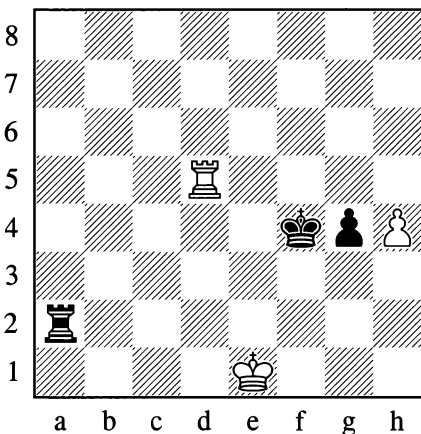
72.♙d2 ♖h6 73.♙e3

73.♖b7 ♙h2 and Black wins.

**73...♖xh7 74.♖b2† ♙h3 75.♖b3 g2
0–1**

White failed to see a very nice defence.

67.♖d5!!



67...♙f3

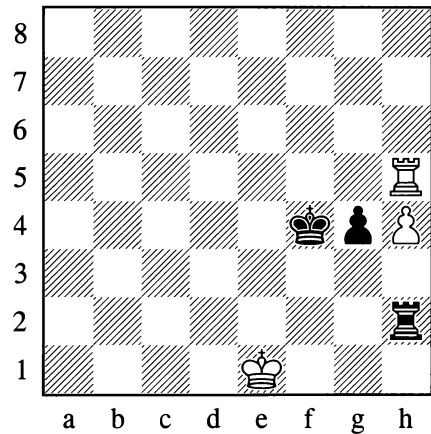
67...♙g3 also fails. After 68.h5 ♖a6 69.♙f1 ♙h2 70.♖d2†! ♙h1 71.♙f2 White draws.

68.♖d3† ♙g2 69.♖d2†!

The white pawn is in time.

For this reason, Black should have started with:

66...♖h2!



67.♖a5

67.♙f1 ♙g3! 68.♙g1 ♖a2 also wins for Black. After 69.♖f5 ♖a1†, Black wins the fight for the pawn's promotion squares: 70.♖f1 ♖xf1† 71.♙xf1 ♙h2!

67...♙f3!

Threatening the check on h1.

68.♖a3† ♙g2 69.♖a2† ♙h3

Exchanging the rooks does not work here, as the white king is on the 1st rank.

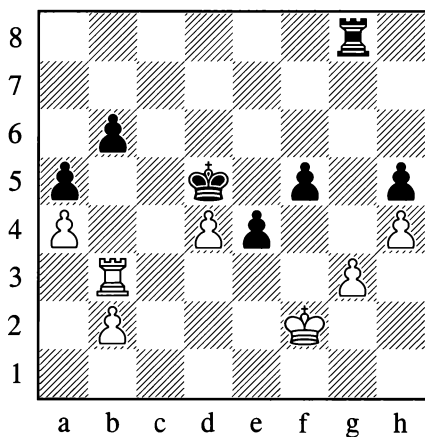
70.♖a3† g3 71.h5 ♙g2 72.♖a5 ♙h1

Black wins.

The umbrella is not too common a theme, but it occurs often enough to deserve a few examples. The following is fresh in my mind as I write this.

Abdulla Gadimbayli – Wang Hao

Baku 2022



Wang Hao played the automatic:

41...♔xd4?

And only won later (on move 78) because of a blunder by his opponent.

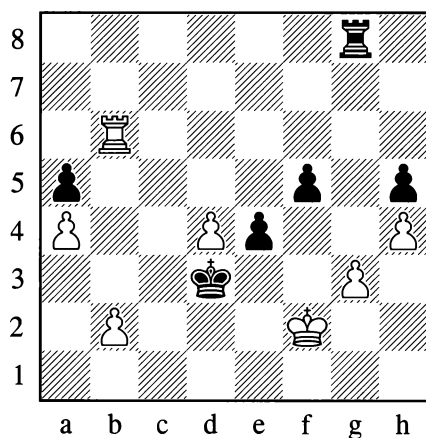
Instead, Black could have won instantly with:

41...♔c4!!

White will still take on b6, but now cannot check the king from behind.

42.♞xb6 ♔d3

Black is simply winning. The king goes to d2, when White cannot fight against the advance of the e-pawn without ridiculously passive manoeuvres.



43.♞b3† ♔d2 44.♞e3 ♞g4 45.♞e2† ♔d3
46.♞e3† ♔xd4

Only now, when the white rook cannot give checks from behind, the pawn is taken.

47.♞b3 f4

Black will soon have two passed pawns, and is clearly winning.

Chapter 8

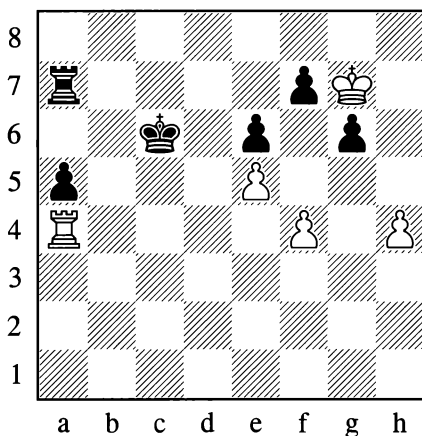
Breakthrough

The breakthrough is generally a theme from pawn endings, which at times spills over into rook endings. It is another variation on a recurring theme: pawns are not important; rather, passed pawns and promoting pawns are important.

In the first example, Lasker lost without a fight.

Emanuel Lasker – Grigory Levenfish

Moscow 1925



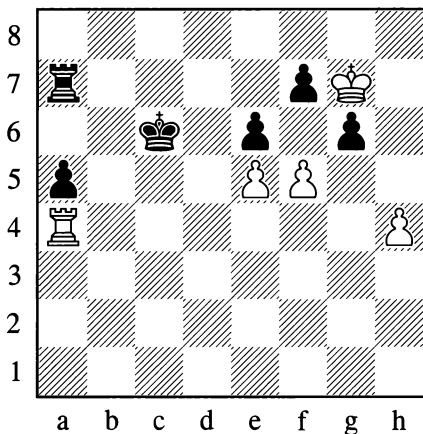
49.♔f6? ♕b5 50.♞a1 a4 51.f5!?

Too late.

51...exf5 52.e6 fxe6 53.♔xg6 f4 54.h5 f3 55.h6 e5 56.♞e1 a3 57.♞xe5† ♕c4 58.♞e1 a2
59.h7 ♞a8 60.♔g7 f2 61.♞a1 ♕b3 62.♞f1 a1=♚† 63.♞xa1 ♞xa1 64.h8=♚ ♞g1†
0–1

White could have drawn if he had urgently created a passed pawn.

49.f5!



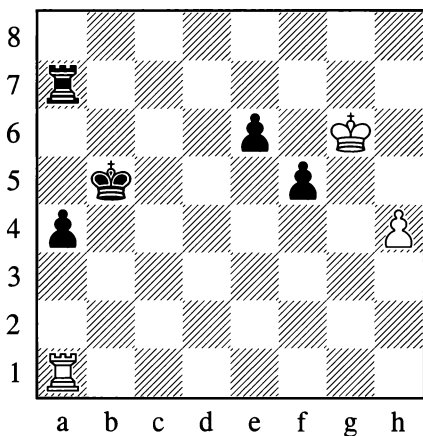
49...exf5

49...gxf5 50.h5 makes things even easier for White.

50.e6! fxe6† 51.♔xg6

White has counterplay.

51...♔b5 52.♞a1 a4

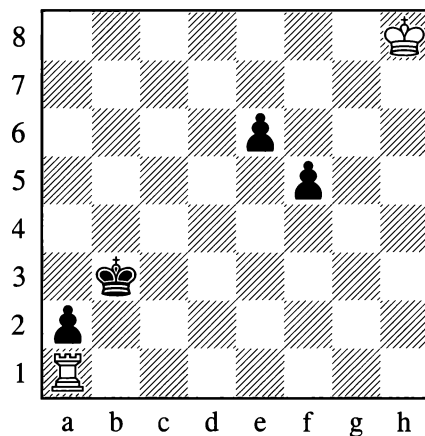


53.h5!

The point of everything is to get the passed pawn moving.

After 53.♔f6? f4 54.♔e5 f3 Black wins similarly to the game above.

53...♔b4 54.h6 a3 55.h7 ♞a8 56.♔g7 ♔b3
57.h8=♞ ♞xh8 58.♔xh8 a2



59.♞h1!

It is important to avoid the black pawns taking squares away from the rook. Therefore, this is the only square. Luckily it is also the square most people would choose without thinking.

59.♞g1? loses to 59...f4 60.♔g7 e5 61.♔f6 f3 62.♔xe5 ♔b2 and there is no check on g2. The same idea works with the e-pawn if the rook goes to f1.

59...e5 60.♔g7 e4 61.♔f6 e3 62.♔xf5 e2

62...♔b2 63.♞h2† is not a problem.

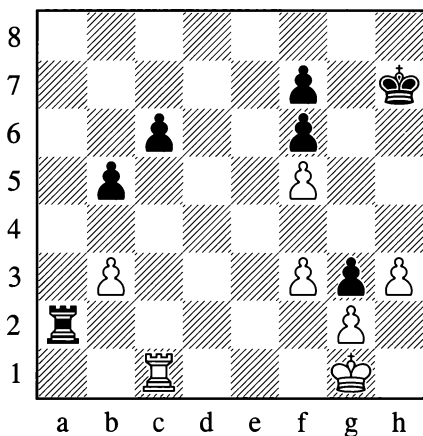
63.♔e4 ♔b2 64.♔d3

White draws by a tempo.

The following example probably looks more complicated than it is. In essence, Black is converting a pawn majority to a passed pawn. It does not matter that White gets a passed pawn of his own, as it is a bit further from promotion.

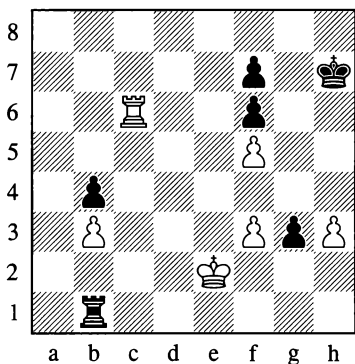
Yannick Pelletier – Vasyl Ivanchuk

Internet 2013

**43...c5!!**

The game went 43...♔g7? 44.♕f1 and White drew on move 72.

43...b4? would be a wrong move order, as White can play 44.♕f1 ♜f2† 45.♕e1! ♜xg2 46.♜xc6, when after 46...♜g1† 47.♕e2 ♜b1 he has a miraculous saving move:



48.♜c4!! Black cannot win.

44.♕f1 ♜f2†

The white king has to be pushed back into the corner.

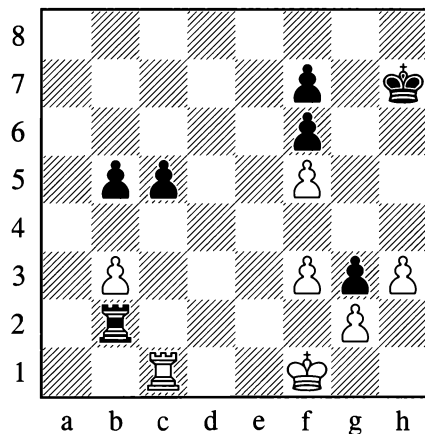
44...c4 would be rushed.

45.♕g1

45.♕e1 also does not work. 45...♜xg2 46.♜xc5 (46.♕f1 ♜f2† wins slowly and easily) 46...♜g1† 47.♕e2 ♜b1 The g-pawn is queening. It is important that the b-pawn is covering the c4-square.

45...♜b2!

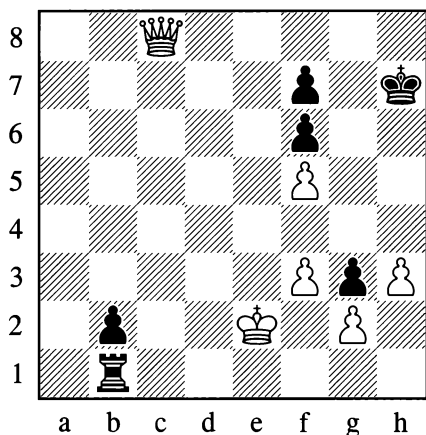
The rook is better placed here, as it prevents White from attacking the black b-pawn.

46.♕f1**46...c4!**

The break! The goal, as always, is to create a winning passed pawn. As the check on f2 is waiting, it does not cost a tempo to have the rook on b2.

46...♜xb3? is not the idea. Black needs to keep the white rook passive. 47.♜xc5 b4 48.♕e2 ♜b2† 49.♕e3 ♜xg2 50.♜c4 b3 51.♜b4 and White draws after either 51...♜b2 52.♜h4†, or 51...b2 52.♕f4.

47.bxc4 b4 48.c5 b3 49.c6 ♜c2! 50.♜b1 b2 51.c7 ♜c1† 52.♕e2 ♜xb1! 53.c8=♚



53...♖e1†!

The transition into the queen ending is necessary – and winning. White should not be allowed to play ♜c8-f8 with a perpetual in sight.

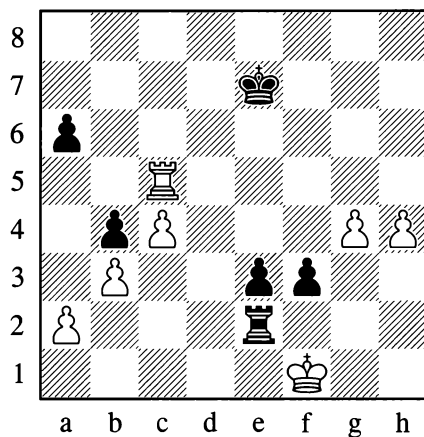
54.♙xe1 b1=♚† 55.♙d2 ♜g1

The queen ending is winning.

The following game is more advanced, but is at its core the same. A pawn is sacrificed to create a passed pawn. It is a small price to pay. Again, Black found the win only after the game. This time with no excuses beyond “chess is difficult”, as the game was played with a classical time control.

Javier González Sánchez – Christopher Chabris

Internet 2021



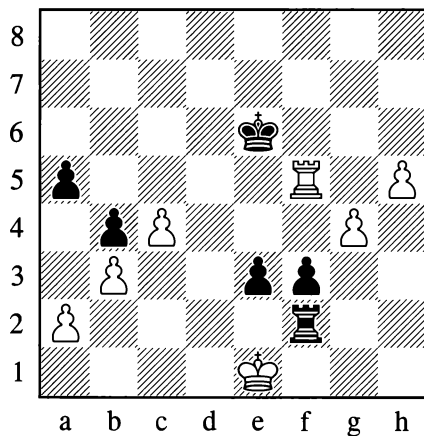
43...♙e6!

43...♙d6? would allow 44.♜f5! ♜f2† 45.♙e1 a5 46.c5†!, when White holds. The extra tempo is very useful.

44.♜f5 ♜f2† 45.♙e1 a5!

Christopher was not able to find the winning line and took the draw with: 45...♜e2†? 46.♙f1 ♜f2† 47.♙e1 ♜e2† 48.♙f1

46.h5



46...a4!

The correct timing.

It would be a disaster to go for the pawn ending with 46...♖e2† 47.♔f1 ♖xa2? 48.♖xf3 ♖f2†, as after 49.♖xf2 exf2 50.h6 ♔f7 51.c5 White wins by queening both his pawns with check.

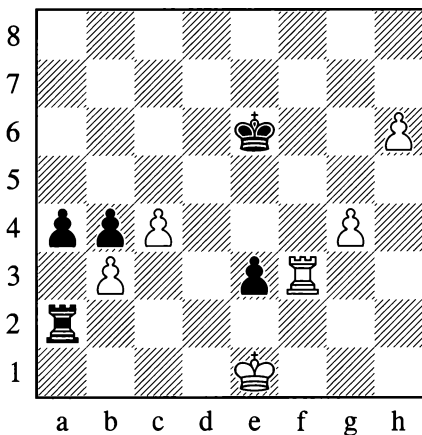
47.h6

But the pawn ending does work after 47.bxa4 ♖e2†! 48.♔f1 ♖xa2 49.♖xf3 ♖f2†!.

47...♖xa2!

Taking directly is strongest.

47...♖e2† 48.♔f1 ♖xa2? looks clever, but is anything but. The issue is that after 49.♖xf3 a3 50.♖xe3† ♔f7 51.h7 ♖h2 52.♖e2 Black cannot take on e2 with check, followed by ...♔g7. And after 52...♖xh7 53.♔g2, White will hold.

48.♖xf3**48...a3**

It is important to have a passed pawn. Promoting it is what it is all about.

49.♖xe3† ♔f7 50.♖h3 ♖b2

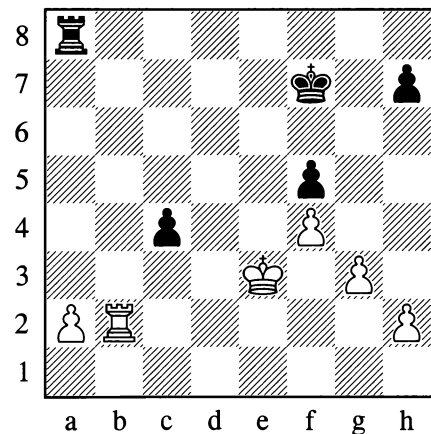
Not the only win, but by far the coolest.

51.h7 a2 52.h8=♖ a1=♖#

In the next example, White won without great happenings.

Lucas van Foreest – Andrey Orlov

Germany 2022

**41...♔g6?**

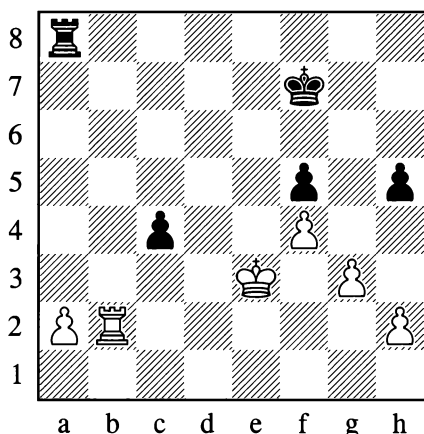
41...♔e6? 42.♔d4 ♖a4 43.♔c5 also wins for White.

42.♔d4 ♔h5 43.h3 ♖a3 44.♖g2 c3 45.♖c2 ♔g6 46.♔c4 h5 47.♔b4 ♖a8 48.a4 h4 49.♖xc3 ♖b8† 50.♔a3 ♖a8 51.gxh4 ♔h5 52.♔b4 ♖b8† 53.♔c4 ♖c8† 54.♔d4 ♖a8 55.♖a3

1–0

Black had a chance to activate the king by throwing the pawn at White first. This is not quite a breakthrough to create a passed pawn, but it is still breaking open the kingside.

41...h5!!



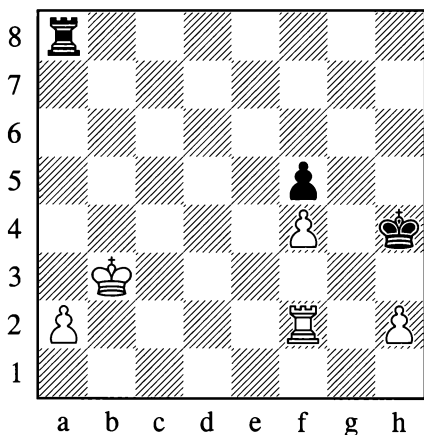
42.♔d4

42.h4 ♖a3† is also fine for Black.

42...h4 43.♔xc4 ♔g6!

White cannot keep the king out. Black holds. For example:

44.gxh4 ♔h5 45.♞f2 ♔xh4 46.♔b3



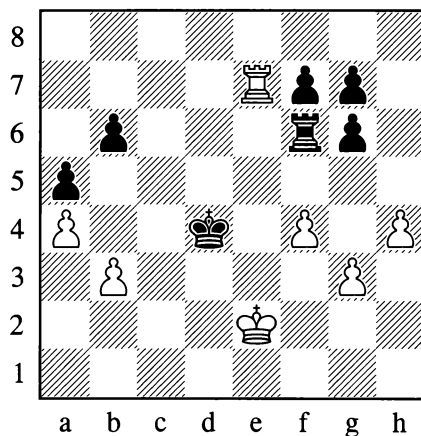
46...♞b8†!

White cannot easily make progress. The same happens if White goes for the f-pawn, when Black can keep the king on g4 and defend with ...♞a5†. Black draws.

The final example in this chapter is preceded by two wonderful examples, yet is by far superior. This time the breakthrough happens after a transition into a pawn ending – but only by tracking down and exchanging the opponent's rook by force, leading to a finish of study-like beauty.

Evgeny Levin – Daniil Golikov

St. Petersburg 2021



51.♔f3!!

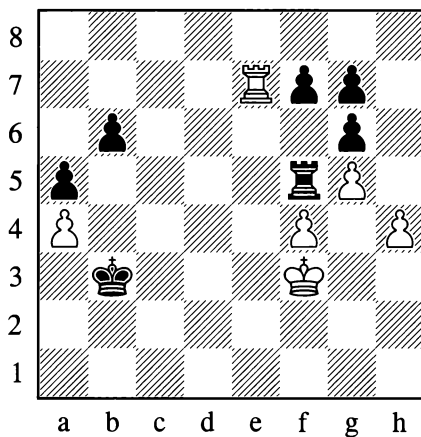
The game was drawn almost immediately, with 51.♔d2? ♞f5 52.♞b7 ♞f6 ½–½.

51...♔c3

Black does not have other reasonable ideas. Trying to activate the rook will lose all three pawns before anything gets going on the queenside.

52.g4 ♔xb3 53.g5 ♞f5

White also arrives first after 53...♞c6 54.♞xf7 ♔xa4 55.♞xg7 b5 56.f5!, when his strongly placed rook helps a lot.



54.♞e5!! ♞xe5

If White is allowed to take on f5, the h-pawn queens.

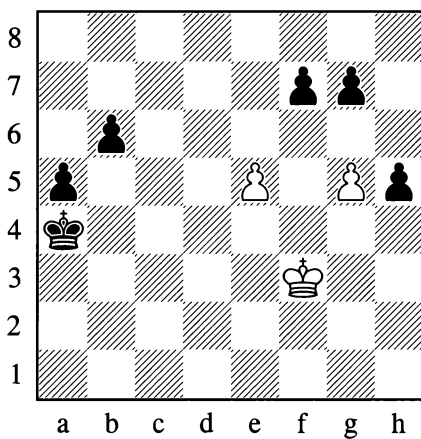
55.fxe5

There is no defence against the white break:

55...♙xa4 56.h5!

Threatening h5-h6.

56...gxh5



57.g6 fxg6 58.e6

White wins.

Chapter 9

Check the Checks!

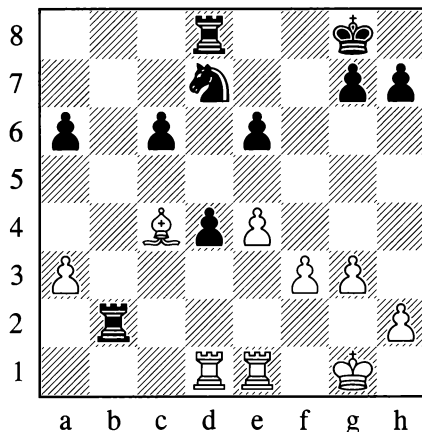
This is the simple mantra worth remembering. In rook endings, often the pieces are perfectly coordinated, but with a check, it is all ruined! Also, there are many times where checks can be used to reposition the rook to a better square. I was coaching a 2600+ grandmaster and had given him roughly 50 rook endings to solve. He had written “check!” on a piece of paper next to the board. Still, he missed a lot of checks! Of the concepts in this book, this is probably the most important new one.

All of this sounds terribly simple, but as with so many ideas in this book, it is powerful. A good example of this is the first decisive game of the 2018 World Championship match, which was also the first game of the rapid play-off.

Magnus Carlsen – Fabiano Caruana

London 2018

1.c4 e5 2.♘c3 ♘f6 3.g3 ♙b4 4.e4 0–0 5.♞ge2 c6 6.♙g2 a6 7.0–0 b5 8.d4 d6 9.a3 ♙xc3
10.♞xc3 bxc4 11.dxe5 dxe5 12.♞a4 ♙e6 13.♝xd8 ♞xd8 14.♙e3 ♞bd7 15.f3 ♞ab8 16.♞ac1
♞b3 17.♞fe1 ♞e8 18.♙f1 ♞d6 19.♞cd1 ♞b5 20.♞c5 ♞xb2 21.♞xe6 fxe6 22.♙xc4 ♞d4
23.♙xd4 exd4



The opening had gone well for the defending champion, but from here on it started to go awry.

24. ♖xe6†?

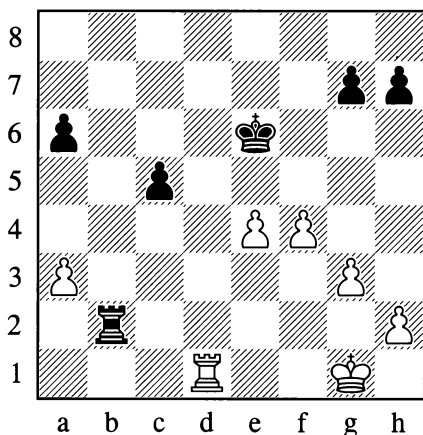
Carlsen overlooked a direct win with: 24. ♖xd4 ♖f7 25. ♖h1!, when Black is denied the trick ... ♖e5xf3†.

24... ♖f8 25. ♖xd4 ♖e7 26. ♖xd7†

White would have liked not to enter the rook ending, but it's all there was on offer.

26. ♖g4? ♖e5! would have allowed Black to solve all of his problems.

26... ♖xd7 27. ♖xd7 ♖xd7 28. ♖d1† ♖e6 29. f4 c5



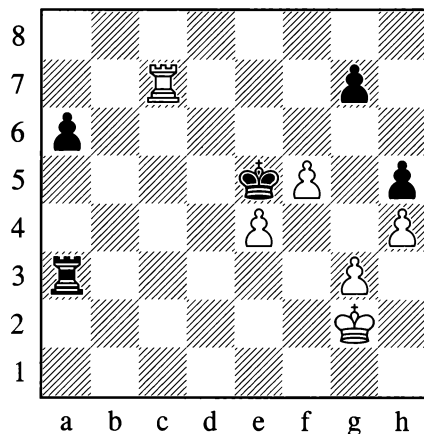
30. ♖d5?

30. ♖c1! was much stronger, but deep analysis suggests that Black might be able to hold with deep and accurate defensive play.

30... ♖c2 31. h4 c4 32. f5† ♖f6 33. ♖c5 h5 34. ♖f1 ♖c3!?

34... c3 feels more natural to me, but the text move was good enough.

35. ♖g2 ♖xa3 36. ♖xc4 ♖e5 37. ♖c7



The critical moment of the game, and by extension the match. If Caruana had held this game, he may still have lost the match, but in these short play-off matches, losing a game often brings about a level of desperation that does not make us play better.

37... ♖xe4?

Missing the check! After 37... ♖a2†! 38. ♖h3 ♖xe4 Black draws. Either 39. ♖xg7 ♖f2, or 39. ♖e7† ♖f3 40. ♖xg7 ♖a1 41. ♖h2 ♖a2† with a draw.

38. ♖e7†!

And Carlsen answers with a decisive check. The black king is sorely missing the f3-square.

38. ♖xg7? would allow Black to draw with 38... ♖a2† 39. ♖h3 ♖f2 again.

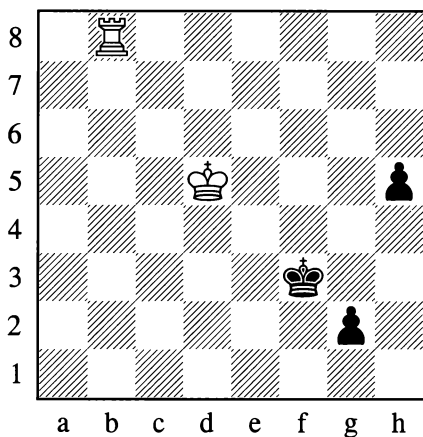
38... ♖xf5 39. ♖xg7 ♖f6 40. ♖g5 a5 41. ♖xh5 a4 42. ♖a5 ♖a1 43. ♖f3 a3 44. ♖a6† ♖g7 45. ♖g2 ♖a2† 46. ♖h3 ♖a1 47. h5 ♖h7 48. g4 ♖g7 49. ♖h4 a2 50. ♖g5 ♖f7 51. h6 ♖b1 52. ♖a7† ♖g8 53. ♖xa2 ♖b5† 54. ♖g6 ♖b6† 55. ♖h5

1–0

Carlsen successfully defended his title, winning the play-off 3–0.

Alireza Firouzja – Richard Rapport

Paris 2021



The next game is a random blitz game, but illustrates the point made excellently (as do plenty of other examples from other chapters). White is in danger. His king is shouldered, and if Black is able to play ...h4, the pawns will be impossible to stop.

82. ♖b3†? ♕f2!

Black could still have blundered with 82...♗f4 83. ♖b4† ♕f5?, when 84. ♖b8 narrowly saves the day.

83. ♖b2† ♕g3 84. ♖b3† ♕h2 85. ♖b2 ♕h1 86. ♕e4 h4 87. ♖b3 g1=♙ 88. ♖b2 ♙e1† 89. ♕f3 ♙g3† 90. ♕e4 ♙g2† 0–1

White could have held the draw with:

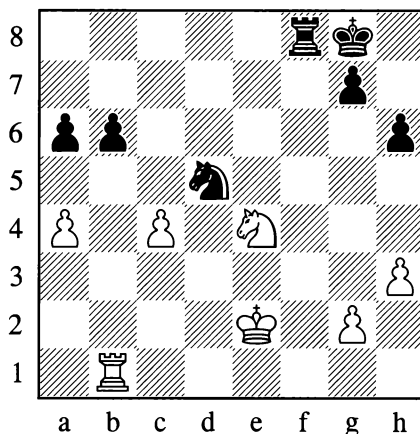
82. ♖f8†! ♕g3 83. ♖g8†, when the black king has to hide somewhere, either on g1 or h2. If on g1, White can go for the h-pawn. And **83...♕h2** is met with **84. ♖h8!** with a direct draw. (84. ♕e4!? also holds.)

Another game from Magnus Carlsen, showing the difficulty of rook endings and the power of the simple mantra “check the checks”! At

the start of the ending, Black is under slight pressure that quickly escalates to serious problems.

Magnus Carlsen – Santosh Gujrathi Vidit

Wijk aan Zee 2022



28...♖e8?!

Better was 28...♕f6! with the idea of entering the rook ending without giving White a passer, or defending the b-pawn with ...♕d7.

29. cxd5 ♖xe4† 30. ♕d3 ♖xa4?

Only this is a serious mistake according to the computer, but in reality, Vidit had already made this decision a while ago.

Stockfish tells us that 30...♖f4!, with the idea 31. ♖xb6 ♖xa4, would have held after a long series of unlikely moves. Instead 31.g3! is more dangerous. The main line goes 31...♖f6 32. ♕e4 ♕f7 33. ♖c1 ♖g6! 34.g4 ♖g5! and so on. Black is walking on a tightrope.

31.d6!

Carlsen knows the value of a passed pawn.

31. ♖f1? was weaker. Black can use checks to get the rook behind the d-pawn: 31...♖a3†! 32. ♕d4 ♖a2 and the lines are longer, but Black holds.

31...♙f7 32.♖e1

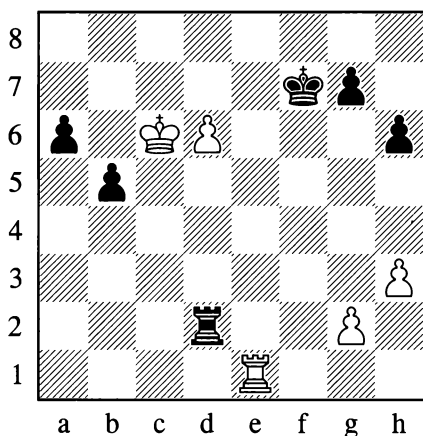
Cutting the king off at a more sustainable time. It is important that the d-pawn is close to the finish line before White spends time on other things.

32...♖a5 33.♙d4 ♖a2 34.♙d5 ♖d2†

34...♖xg2 loses to 35.d7 followed by ♖e1-e8 or ♙xb6.

35.♙c6 b5!

The only chance. Black needs to have something to play for.



We have arrived at the critical moment of the game. Carlsen had plenty of time and did not fully understand this, as he only spent 3 minutes on this decision, compared to 10 on move 40, which suggests that he was looking for the win there, but at this point was suffering a bit from tunnel vision and focused entirely on pushing the pawn.

36.d7?

To understand how White could have won, we first need to know that 36.♖e4? fails to 36...♖c2† 37.♙b6 b4!, when the b-pawn supplies counterplay.

The winning line was powered by checks!

36.♖e7†!

This intermediate move makes all the difference. The black king is well placed on f7, but now has to find a square that is inconvenient for one reason or another.

36...♙f6

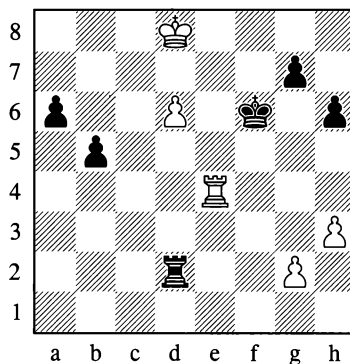
36...♙f8 loses directly to 37.♖c7 b4 38.♖c8†! and the d-pawn queens.

37.♖e4!

Stopping the b-pawn and threatening to advance the d-pawn.

37...♖c2† 38.♙b6 ♖d2

38...b4 no longer works, on account 39.♖d4!, when the pawn would queen with check.

39.♙c7 ♖c2† 40.♙d8 ♖d2**41.d7**

Threatening ♙d8-e8.

41...♙f7 42.♖e7†!

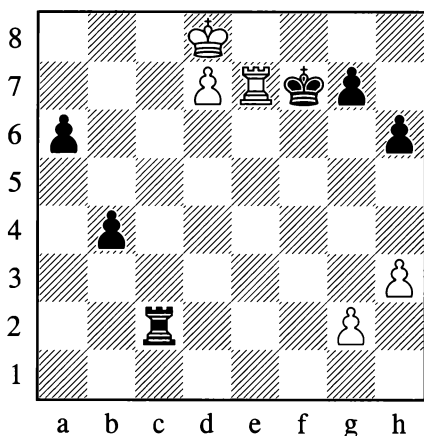
Not the only win, but the simplest.

42...♙f8 43.♖e8† ♙f7 44.♙c7

White wins.

36...♖c2† 37.♙b6 ♖d2 38.♙c7 ♖c2† 39.♙d8 b4 40.♖e7†

40.♖f1† ♙g6 41.♖f8 is now too slow. After 41...b3 42.♙e7 b2 43.♖b8 ♖e2† White has no advantage.



40...♙f8! 41.♞e3 ♙f7 42.♞e7+

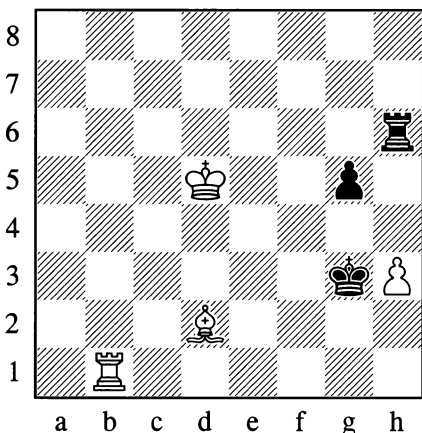
42...♞f3+ ♙g6! and the white king cannot hide from the checks.

42...♙f8 43.♞e5 ♙g6 44.♞e6 b3 45.♞f6+ ♙g7 46.♙e7 ♞e2+ 47.♞e6 ♞xe6+ 48.♙xe6 b2 49.d8=♞ b1=♞ 50.♞c7+ ♙g8 51.♞d8+ ♙g7
½–½

Next up we have a brilliant study from the greatest Danish composer, who at the time of writing has just won the World Championship in study composition and will thus be the World Champion in study composition from 2022 to 2025.

Steffen Nielsen

Original 2020



1.h4!

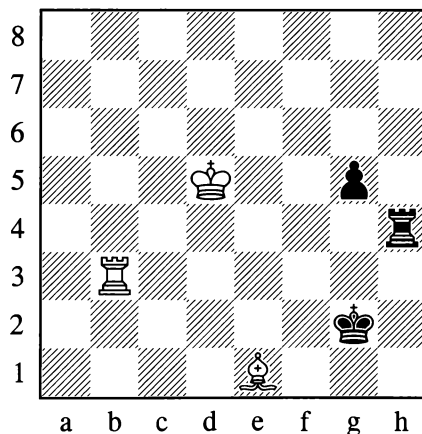
A typical prelude to the core idea of the study, which is about shouldering made possible by checks.

1...♞xh4 2.♙e1+ ♙f3 3.♞b3+!

An important intermediate move that removes the king from f3, the best square in what is to come.

3.♙xh4? gxf4 4.♞b3+ ♙g2 5.♞b2+ ♙g3! would allow Black to draw. But for now, this square is not available.

3...♙g2



4.♞b2+!!

Getting the rook to the 2nd rank, where it can temporarily block the pawn.

This draw is a common theoretical position: 4.♙xh4? gxf4 5.♙e4 (5.♞b2+ ♙g3 and again Black is in time.) 5...h3 6.♙f4 h2 7.♞b2+ ♙h3!

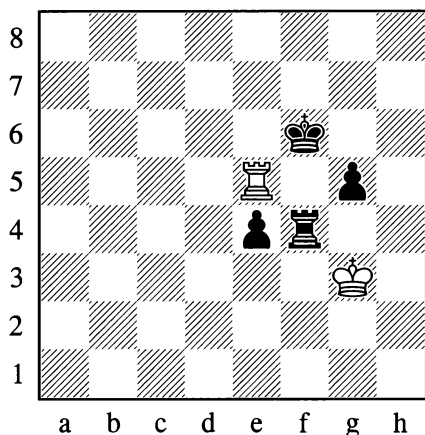
4...♙f3 5.♞xh4 gxf4 6.♙e5 h3 7.♙f5 ♙g3 8.♞b3+ ♙g2 9.♙g4

White wins.

Checks are a useful defensive resource in many positions. This is one of the reasons why both queen and rook endings have higher drawing percentages than other endings.

Praggnanandhaa Rameshbabu – Anish Giri

Internet 2022



In the following online rapid game, White had a surprising drawing resource, but instead played:

61. Rf5? ♔f5 62. Rf8† ♔e5 63. Ra8 ♖f3†!

Dislocating the white king from g3, where it controls both f2 and f4, important squares for Black.

64. ♔g4 ♖d3?

64...♖f7! was winning.

65. ♔xg5?

A sloppy mistake, which is what happens in rapid games.

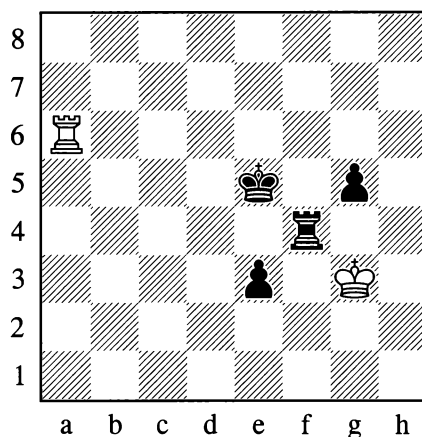
White had a surprising draw in 65. ♖g8! ♔d4 66. ♖xg5 ♖d1 67. ♖a5! and the checks from the side will hold.

65... ♖g3† 66. ♔h4 ♖g7

White could have resigned here, but this also sometimes happens later than needed in rapid. ...0–1

White could have made the draw by checking from the side.

61. ♖a5! e3 62. ♖a6† ♔e5

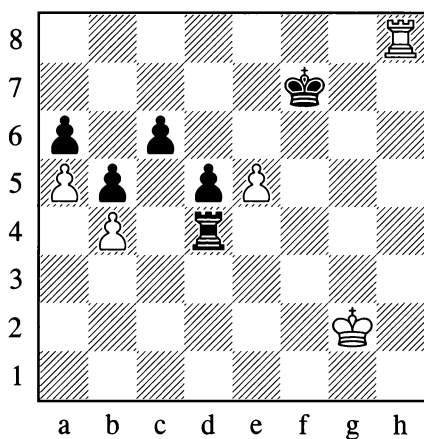


The king cannot hide on the g-file, as White will be able to get the rook behind the e-pawn and snatch it up. **63. ♖a5† ♔e4 64. ♖a4† ♔d3 65. ♖a3† ♔d2 66. ♖a2†** Eventually Black will have to do something to avoid the checks, but after **66... ♔c1**, White draws with **67. ♖e2 ♖e4 68. ♔f3** and **69. ♖xe3**.

I do not want to give the wrong impression. The old saying goes: “Patzner sees a check, patzner plays a check.” The idea is that we need to check the checks, not replace thinking with checking. Take the following example as a chance to get scared straight.

Lukas Vlasak – Tigran Petrosyan

Czech Republic 2021

**59. ♖h7?**

The idea of the strong checks is to force the king to go to a worse square. In this case the black king is chased in exactly the direction he wants to go.

59. ♖h6! cutting off the black king was the drawing move. 59... ♖xb4 The critical move. If Black does not take on b4, the rook can block everything from d6. 60. ♖xc6 ♖e4 61. ♖xa6 ♖xe5 62. ♖b6 The draw is near.

59... ♖e6 60. ♖h6† ♖xe5 61. ♖xc6 ♖xb4 62. ♖xa6 ♖a4

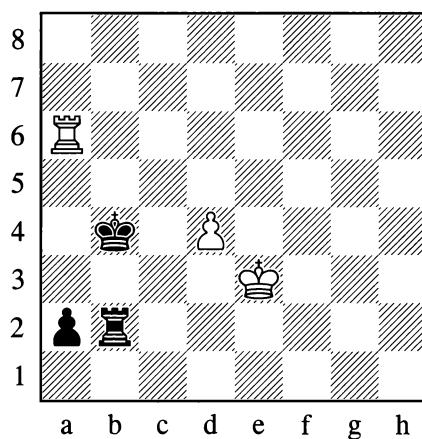
The black pawns are strong, but the decisive factor is the king.

63. ♖f3 ♖d4 64. ♖a8 ♖d3 65. a6 d4 66. a7 ♖a2
0-1

The following position arose first as a little exercise I gave to (now) GM Christopher Yoo, which became far more interesting from his suggestions. In this one, we shall see checks used as a way to transfer the rook across the board in nuanced and surprising ways.

Aagaard & Yoo

Original 2019



First of all, let's write off any ideas of building a fortress:

1. ♖b6†? ♖a5!

Winning a new queen is the way to go.

The hope for White is to force the black king further away, so he can draw with: 1... ♖a3? 2. ♖a6† ♖b3 3. d5 ♖b1 4. ♖xa2 ♖xa2 5. ♖d4! ♖b3 6. ♖c5 with typical shouldering tactics.

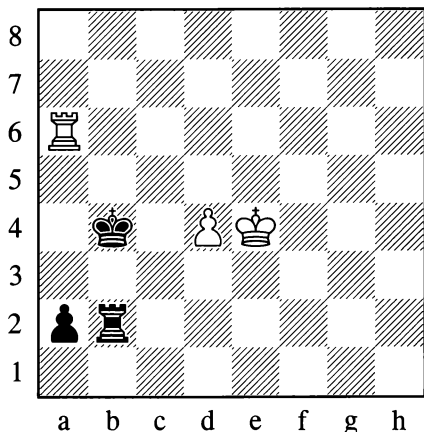
2. ♖xb2 a1=♚ 3. ♖c2 ♚e1† 4. ♖d3 ♚d1† 5. ♖c3 ♖b5

The black king comes and the d4-pawn eventually goes. It is fiddly to win these things, but winning it is.

When giving this exercise to students, almost everyone comes up with the same move, which is what makes the position interesting.

1. ♖e4?

What looks more natural than this? Yet it is a losing move.



1...♖h2!!

The refutation.

1...♞e2? looks strong, but White can play 2.♔f5! ♞h2 3.d5! and he manages to escape.

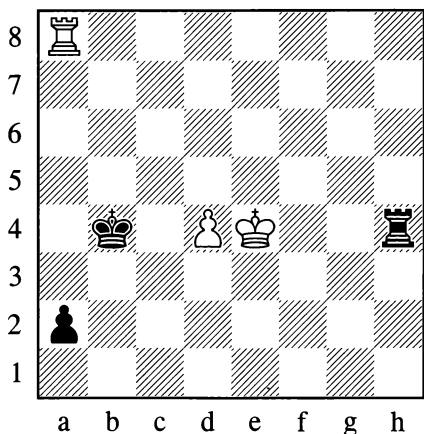
2.♞a8

White has no moves.

2.d5 loses to 2...♔b5! followed by ...♞h4† and ...♞a4.

2.♔f4 ♔b3 is also lost. 3.d5 loses to 3...♞h4†; or if 3.♔e3 ♞h1 there is no shouldering.

2...♞h4†!



Forcing the king to a worse rank.

3.♔e5 ♞h5† 4.♔e6 ♞a5

Black wins.

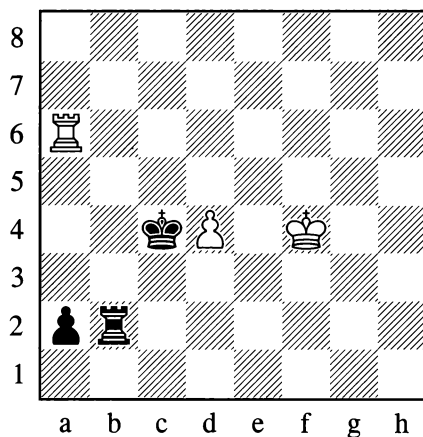
For this reason, through elimination and despair, we can find the only move:

1.♔f4!! ♔c4!

The most testing move, suggested by Christopher.

1...♔b3 2.♔e5 is an elementary draw.

The point to putting the king on f4 is that after 1...♞h2 2.♞a8 ♞h4†, the black rook is hanging after 3.♔g3, and the white king is too close for Black to give any checks.



2.♔e3!!

Again the only move is putting the king on the less anticipated square.

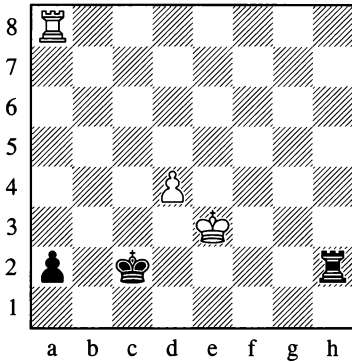
2.♔e4? would lose to: 2...♞e2†! 3.♔f3 ♞h2! and there is nothing White can do. Ironically 4.♔e4 is met with 4...♔b4! returning to the 1.♔e4? annotations above by a bizarre transposition.

2...♞h2 3.d5!

3.♞a8 ♔b3! 4.♞b8† ♔c2 5.♞a8

5.♞c8† ♔b1 6.♞a8 a1=♙ 7.♞xa1† ♔xa1 wins for Black through traditional shouldering. White cannot play 8.d5, as 8...♞h4! cuts off

the king at the 4th rank. So White has to try 8.♔e4 ♕b2 9.♔d5!?, but it is narrowly too slow: 9...♕c3 10.♕c5 ♜d2 11.d5 ♕d3! And the king appears on the other side of the pawn, winning.



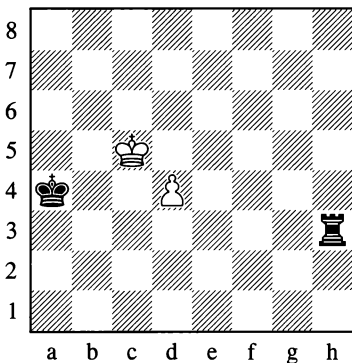
It looks as if White is making the draw, but Black has yet one more trump up his sleeve. 5...♜h3!+

The right moment to give the check, so that the rook can go to b3, shielding the king when it goes to b2.

6.♔e4 ♕b2 7.♜xa2† ♕xa2 8.♔d5!?

The only try, but still not enough.

8...♕b3 9.♕c5 ♕a4!

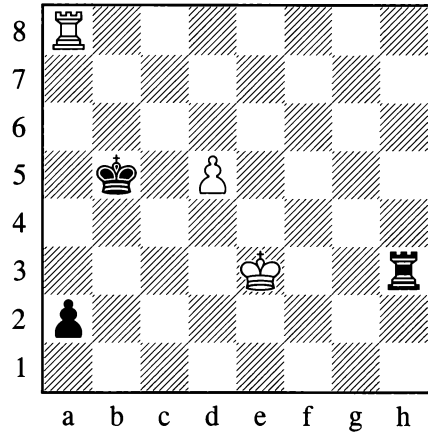


I could perhaps give the check on c3 and return to d3 with the rook, but in reality it is a transposition. The king comes around the white king, breaking the shouldering by a single tempo.

10.d5 ♕a5 11.♕c6 ♕a6 12.d6 ♜c3†

Black wins.

3...♔b5 4.♜a8 ♜h3†



5.♔d4!

5.♔d2 loses to 5...♜h1!, a well-known trick.

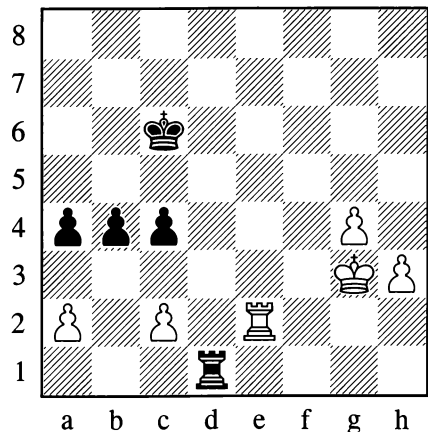
5...♜h4† 6.♔c3! ♜a4 7.♜xa4 ♕xa4 8.♔b2

White draws.

Played in the early stages of the 2023 Polish Knockout Championship and thus a rapid play-off game, I asked people on Twitter to guess which pawn White should advance. The wisdom of crowds (often highly unreliable) was strongly in favour of the move chosen by Licznarski.

Lukasz Licznarski – Grzegorz Gajewski

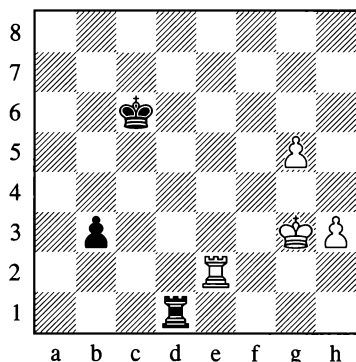
Warsaw 2023



56.g5? ♖d5?

Black missed the chance to draw the game with:

56...b3! 57.cxb3 cxb3 58.axb3 axb3

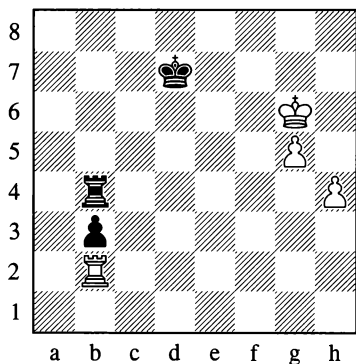


59.♖b2!?

The trickier try.

59.h4 ♖d3†! 60.♙g4 ♖d4† 61.♙h5 ♖b4 62.♖b2 ♙d7 63.♙g6 ♖b7!! holds in the same way, although Black has a slightly easier ride. 59...♖d3† 60.♙g4 ♙d7! 61.h4 ♖d4† 62.♙f5! ♖b4! 63.♙g6

63.h5 ♙e8! draws easily.



63...♖b7!! 64.♙f7 ♙d6† 65.♙f6 ♙d7 66.g6 ♙e8

The king comes in to block the pawns in time, with checks from the side keeping the white king away.

57.h4 c3 58.♙f4 ♖f1† 59.♙e3 ♖h1 60.♖g2! ♖h3†

60...♖xh4 61.g6 ♖h8 62.g7 ♖g8 63.♙d3 also wins for White.

61.♙e2 ♖xh4 62.g6 ♖e4† 63.♙f3 ♖e8 64.g7 ♖g8 65.♙e3 ♙c4 66.♖g4† ♙c5 67.♙d3 ♖d8† 68.♙e4 ♖g8 69.♙f5 b3 70.cxb3 axb3 71.axb3 ♙d5

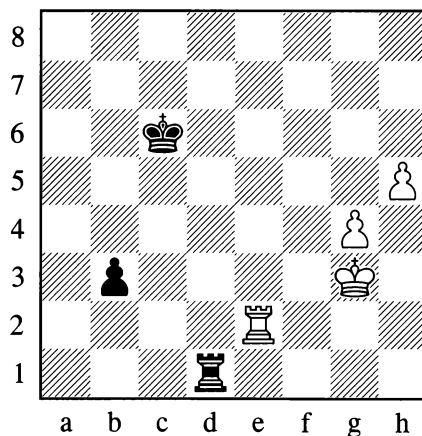
1-0

When we know the defensive idea, it is easy to understand why the h-pawn needs to be the spear of the campaign.

56.h4! b3

Black has no other ideas, as we saw in the game.

57.cxb3 cxb3 58.axb3 axb3 59.h5!

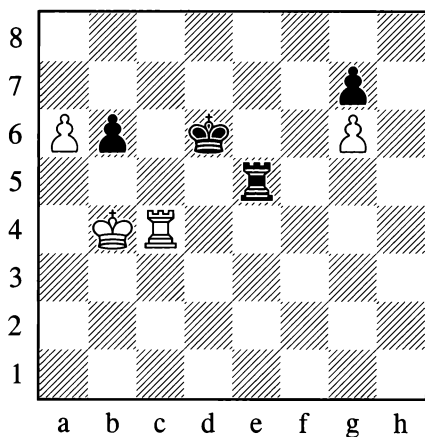


White wins. Black does not have the ability to quickly regroup the rook to b4.

The following is the end of a bad game. My opponent told me that I “was lucky to find counterplay every time I had blundered.” At this moment, I have recovered from a few blunders to regain the advantage. However, the conversion was anything but convincing.

Jacob Aagaard – Tim Jaksland

Odense 2009

**64.♖b3? ♜a5 65.♜a4 ♜b5??**

Black, short on time, falsely believes.

65...♙c7 was a simple draw.

66.♙a2 ♜f5 67.a7 ♜f8 68.a8=♚ ♜xa8
69.♜xa8 ♙c6 70.♜f8
1–0

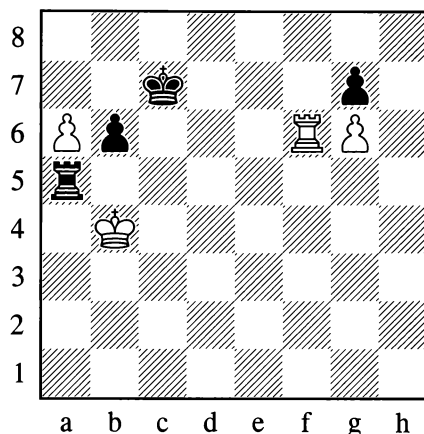
It was only when I got home and analysed the game that I realised that I had a nice winning line.

64.♜f4!! ♜a5 65.♜f6!

A wonderful tempo-gain.

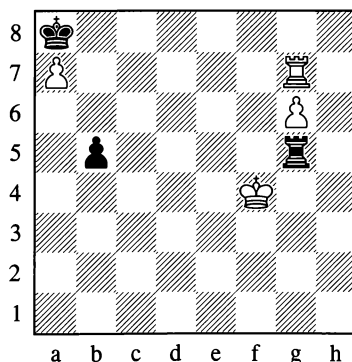
65...♙c7

65...gxf6!? 66.g7 ♜xa6 67.g8=♚ ♜a5 would be a decent practical chance, as breaking down that fortress is not at all easy. Although if you have read *Theoretical Rook Endgames*, you will be able to cause your opponent a lot of difficulties in the Queen vs Rook ending.

**66.♜f7!**

Not a difficult move, but overthinking was possible.

Back in 2009 I believed that 66.a7? was a winning line. The idea is 66...♜xa7 67.♜f7† ♙b8 68.♙b5! and White wins. But Black is not forced to take. 66...♙b7!! 67.♜f7† ♙a8 68.♜xg7 ♜g5! It is difficult for White to make progress, but Black will still have to find one accurate move to make the draw. 69.♙c4 ♜c5† 70.♙d4 ♜g5 71.♙c4 b5 72.♙f4



72...♜g2!! This is the key move. Black makes a draw on account of: 73.♙f5 b4 74.♜e7 b3 75.♜e8† ♙xa7 76.♜e3 b2, when the pawn is defended. See more in Chapter 20 on Anticipation (page 273).

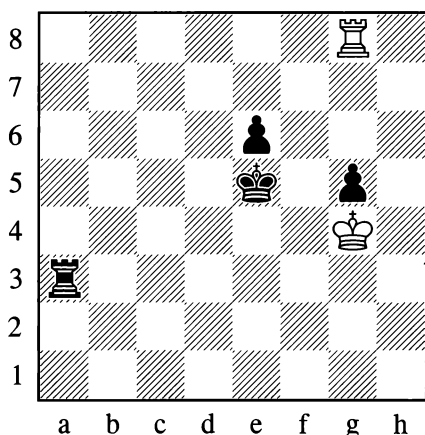
66...♖b8 67.♞xg7
Threatening 68.♞f7.

67...♞g5 68.♞b7†
White wins.

The next example looks deceptively easy for Black, but is anything but.

Adrian Gschnitzer – Bence Korpa

Biel 2021



Black gave his opponent a chance to save the game after:

57...♞a1? 58.♜f3?

White could have held after both 58.♞xg5†!? ♜e4 59.♜h3!! and 60.♜g2, or 58.♞d8!? ♜e4 59.♜xg5 e5 60.♞e8! and White has a theoretical draw.

58...♞f1† 59.♜e3 ♞f5 60.♞g6 ♜d6 61.♜e4 ♜e7 62.♜e3 ♜f7 63.♞h6 ♞f6 64.♞h8 ♜g7 65.♞h5 ♜g6 66.♞h8 g4 67.♜e4 ♜g5 68.♜e5 ♞f1 69.♞g8† ♜h4 70.♜xe6 g3 71.♜e5 ♜h3 72.♞h8† ♜g2 73.♞g8 ♜f3 74.♞f8† ♜e2 75.♞g8 ♞f3 76.♜e4 ♜f2 0-1

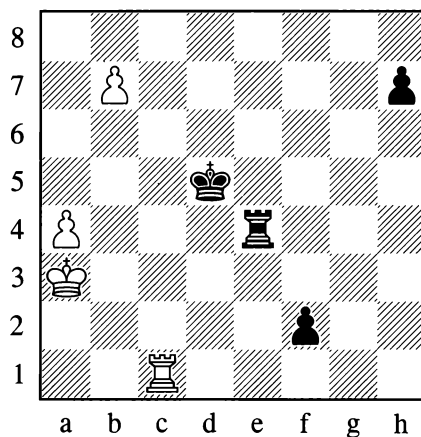
Black could have ruined the white drawing setup with:

57...♞a4†!! 58.♜xg5 ♞a1!, when the white king is misplaced. The check on g1 will force it to the h-file and keep it cut off. Black is winning.

In the next example, the usage of the check is advanced and surprising, taking a big page out of the chapter on anticipation also.

Javokhir Sindarov – Jakhongir Vakhidov

Uzbekistan 2021



57...♞e8

57...♞e3† 58.♜b4 is lost for Black. The white king will zigzag up the board, via a5-b6-a7.

58.a5

Otherwise Black will play ...♞b8xb7.

58...f1=♞?

Call it desperation. Or hope. Whatever you want; it does not work. Connected passed pawns, this far up the board, will win.

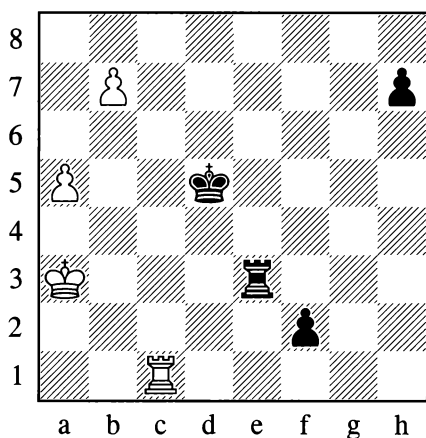
58...♜d6? looks close, but after 59.a6 ♜d7 60.♞f1! Black is lost, just like in the game. (60.a7? is a curious mistake, allowing Black to draw. 60...♞e3†! It does not take long to work

out that if the white king goes to the c-file or the 1st rank, Black will play ...♖e1, securing a drawn queen ending.)

59.♞xf1 ♔c6 60.a6 ♔b6 61.♞f6† ♔a7
62.♞c6 ♞b8 63.♞c8 h5 64.♔b4 h4 65.♔b5
h3 66.♞xb8 ♔xb8 67.♔b6 h2 68.a7#
1–0

Black could have held the draw by giving the check now:

58...♞e3†!!



The reason this works is that the white king can no longer hide on a5. It can go to b5, but then queening the pawn on f1 would come with check, changing the dynamics of this highly volatile 4th phase ending.

59.♔b4

There is no other path.

Black is also fine after 59.♔b2 ♞e2† 60.♔c3 ♞e1!, and 59.♔a4 ♞e4† 60.♔b5 ♞e1!, which transposes to our main line.

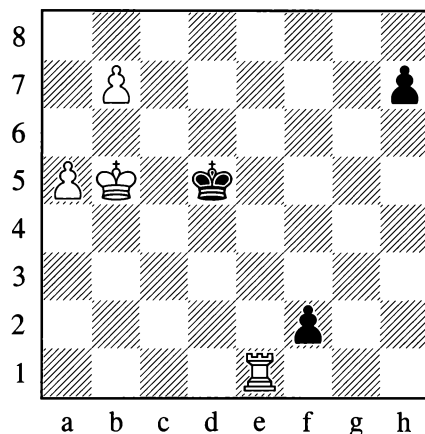
59...♞e4†

With the idea that the king cannot avoid the checks without going to a1, b1, c2, c3 or b5. All of which can be answered with ...♞e1!.

59...♞e2? makes no sense. 60.a6 and White wins.

60.♔b5 ♞e1 61.♞xe1!?

61.♞c5† ♔e6 would put White in a little danger. He would have to play accurately to draw by stalemating himself with: 62.♞c6†! ♔d7 63.♞f6! f1=♞† 64.♞xf1 ♞xf1 65.♔b6 ♞b1† 66.♔a7 ♔c7 67.a6 h5 68.b8=♞† ♞xb8 Stalemate.



We have arrived at a trap I placed for the students of Killer Chess Training. I did a poll and fourteen of them wanted to promote to a rook, while the remaining three wanted a queen. All three admitted to not having seen White's response to this superior promotion, while the fourteen others fell hard for my trick.

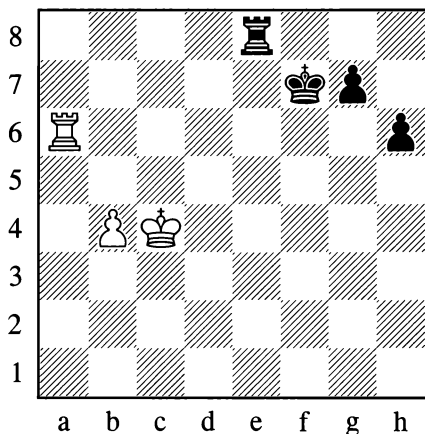
61...fxe1=♞? looks clever, but after 62.♔b6! the pawns win! 62...♞b1† 63.♔c7 ♞c1† 64.♔d7 ♞b1 65.a6 h5 66.♔c7 ♞c1† 67.♔d8 ♞b1 68.a7 and Black can only resign. A truly evil trap, accompanied by a truly evil laugh from yours truly. We put this small part of the lesson on YouTube and people have confided to me that they all fell for it, hard and fast.

61...fxe1=♞! 62.b8=♞! ♞b1† 63.♔a6 ♞xb8
Stalemate.

The following example of the effectiveness of checks is simple, yet brutal. It was played in a closed GM tournament and supplied one of the IM norms to one of the young members of Killer Chess Training.

Suat Atalik – Shahil Dey

Belgrade 2021



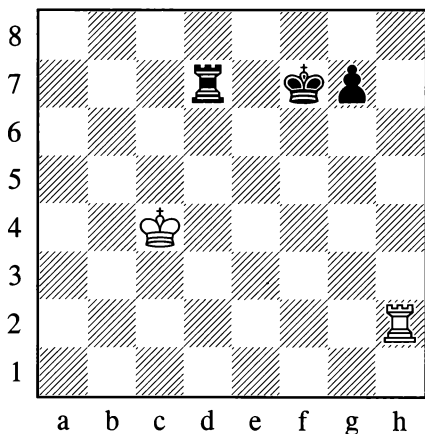
48...h5? 49.b5 h4 50.b6 h3

White draws without effort after: 50...g5 51.b7 ♖b8 52.♖b6 ♔g7 53.♔d3

51.♖a3

51.b7 ♖b8 52.♖a3 ♖xb7 53.♖xh3 ♖d7 would transpose to the game, more or less.

51...♖h8 52.b7 h2 53.♖a1! ♖b8 54.♖h1 ♖xb7 55.♖xh2 ♖d7!



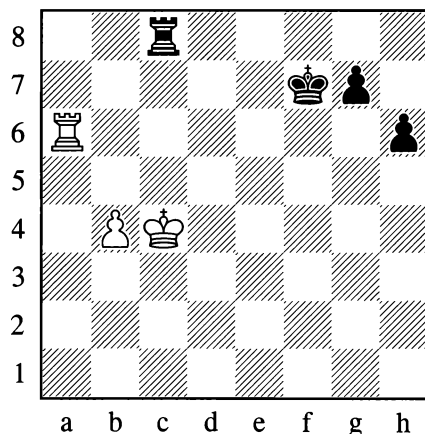
56.♔c5?

If you combine the knowledge of the chapters on Checking Distance (page 163) and Defence from the Front (page 171), you will see that White could have made a draw with: 56.♖h1! ♔f6 (It relies on tactics. After 56...g5 57.♖h7+! the pawn ending is a draw.) 57.♖f1+ ♔e5 58.♖g1 ♔f4 59.♖f1+ ♔g3 60.♖g1+ ♔f2 61.♖g6 ♔f3 62.♖g1! and Black cannot make progress.

56...♔f6 57.♖f2+ ♔e5 58.♔c6 ♖d6+ 59.♔c5 ♖d8 60.♖g2 ♖c8+ 61.♔b6 ♖g8 62.♔c7 g5 63.♔d7 ♖g7+ 64.♔e8 ♔f4 65.♔f8 ♖a7 0-1

Black could have won a vital tempo with:

48...♖c8+!!



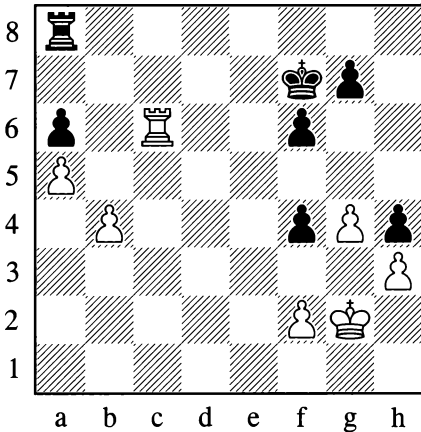
49.♔d5 ♖b8 50.♔c5, which would be useful before pushing the pawns. **50...h5 51.b5 h4 52.b6 g5 53.♔c6 h3** Black wins.

We enter the final example of this chapter just after the time control; the moment where the white advantage is at its peak and the position can be won with the most natural moves, with just a little sprinkle of imagination. But as so often happens when we have regained the right to think, nothing seems as simple as it does for

the guy with the computer and Bu managed to make things much harder for himself right away.

Bu Xiangzhi – Vasyl Ivanchuk

Sofia 2008



41.g5?

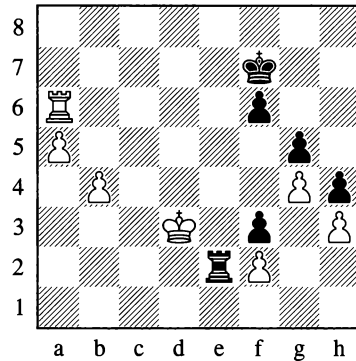
Overthinking. It is clear that there was something in the chain of natural moves that Bu did not like. There is no purpose in speculating what. What we can see is that the winning line did require finding a strong continuation a bit down the line, just outside the natural horizon of a human. The same can be said of the game, but apparently Bu felt it was a better chance.

The winning continuation goes like this:

41.♔f3 g5 42.♔e4 ♖e8† 43.♔d3! f3!

Black has to try something active. Passive play will see White convert his extra pawn on the queenside.

44.♖xa6 ♖e2



The critical moment where White has to find something extra. There are not one, but two ways to bring it home.

45.♖a7†

The alternative is 45.♖b6 ♖xf2 46.♖b5!! The rook transfers to f5 and the passed pawns will almost promote by themselves. Rook behind the passed pawn, dude.

45...♔g6 46.♖c7!

A clever manoeuvre.

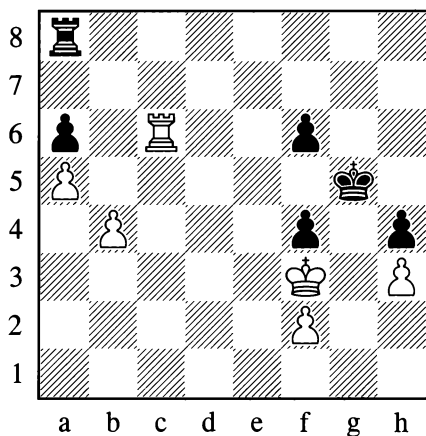
46...♖xf2 47.♖c1

The rook comes to the 1st rank to defend against the advance of the f-pawn and to support the white passed pawns. In both lines extra details can be added, but the outcome should be clear enough.

41...♔g6

White's idea was to play 41...fxg5 42.♔f3 ♔e7 43.♖b6, winning.

42.gxf6 gxf6 43.♔f3 ♔g5



It turns out that leaving Black with isolated doubled pawns was not an improvement for White. The counterplay from the active king is annoying and the win is harder to visualise now than it would have been, had White played natural moves all along.

44.♖c5†?

44.♖b6 f5 transposes to the position before White's 47th move. As Bu did not find the win there, we can imagine that this in itself was not appealing to him.

Black could also meet 44.♖b6 with:

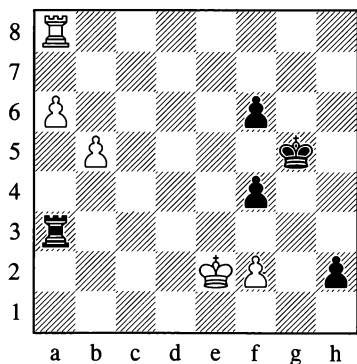
44...♖c8!

Although this narrowly loses too. The winning line goes:

45.♖xa6 ♖c3† 46.♔e2!

Keeping the king close to the action.

46...♖xh3 47.♖a8 ♖a3 48.b5 h3 49.a6 h2



50.♖g8†!!

This check is the only winning idea. But it is there!

50.♖h8 ♖a5! and Black holds.

50...♔f5 51.♖h8

White wins; first the h2-pawn, then the game, as the b5-pawn is now indirectly protected through the X-ray check on h5.

White had another win after natural play, again with a sprinkle of brilliance.

44.♔e4 ♖e8† 45.♔d3 f3 46.b5!!

Creating a passed pawn urgently, as we have covered in Chapter 5.

46.♖xa6? fails to 46...♖e2 47.♖a8 ♖xf2, planning ...♔f4 to support the pawn.

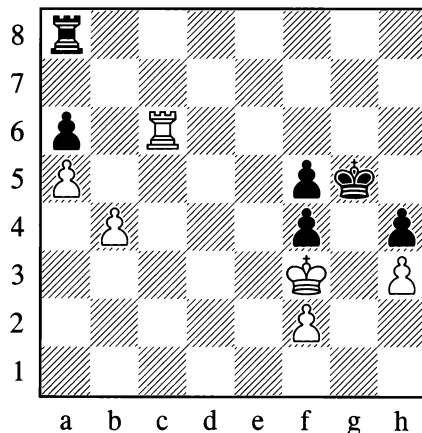
48.♔e3 ♖b2 Black holds.

46...axb5 47.♖c1! ♔f4 48.a6 ♖a8 49.♖a1 f5 50.♔d4

White wins. Black will not be able to give up the rook and take the f2-pawn quickly enough to make it.

44...f5 45.♖c6

45.b5 axb5 46.♖xb5 ♖a6 also makes it hard for White to make progress. The white king can attack the a6-square as much as the black king can attack the f2-pawn. But no more.



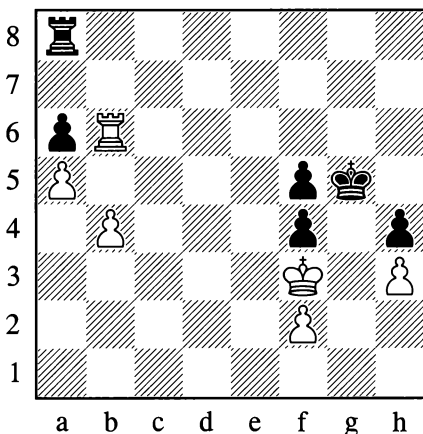
Black has been given a chance to take the initiative and orchestrate counterplay.

When we get this type of chance, we have to grab it with both hands, as it is not likely to come again.

45...♖b8! 46.♜b6 ♞a8?

An awful passive move, which deserved to lose on the spot (plus 35 moves for the execution of the winning idea).

It seems that Ivanchuk has not read Chapter 1. If anything in this book is true, the logical play for Black would be to give up the a-pawn and get the rook in behind the white queenside pawns, slowing them down, from where it can attack the white kingside pawns too. Well, would I lie to you? Black draws after: 46...♞c8! 47.♞xa6 ♞c3† 48.♔e2 f3† 49.♔d2 ♞b3 50.♞b6 ♞b2† 51.♔e3 ♞b3† 52.♔d4 ♞b2 53.♞c6 The last trick. 53...♞xf2 (53...♞xb4†? loses to 54.♞c4 and 55.♞a4.) 54.♞c1 ♞a2 55.♔e3 (55.♔c5? even loses to 55...♔f4.) 55...f2 A draw can be agreed soon.



47.♔e2?

The most natural move, but this time around this was the wrong choice. Black is so tied down that White had a chance to fix the structure before bringing out the king. This is a common theme in the endgame. Often it has two phases. In the first, the players are improving their position, often with one side in charge of when

the second phase starts. In the second phase we see a race of some sort. Both players are executing their ideas and plans. When we are the side in control and we have the chance to improve our position more than the opponent can his, we should do so. This is a slightly abstract version of this principle.

The winning move was:

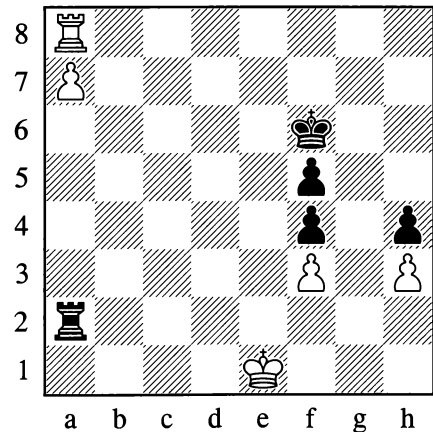
47.♔g2!!

The white king cannot be checked here, allowing White to play f2-f3 before going for the race.

47...♞a7 48.f3 ♔h5 49.♔f2 ♔g5 50.♞e6

Threatening to bring the king out, covered by the rook. Black has to enter the race.

50...♞b7 51.♞xa6 ♞xb4 52.♞a8 ♔f6 53.a6 ♞b2† 54.♔e1 ♞a2 55.a7!



White wins. The winning plan is simple, although it will take a lot of moves to execute. Using zugzwang, White will take all the black pawns with the king and advance the f-pawn. Arising on f6 or f7, it will force the black king to either go to the 6th rank, when the rook will come out of hiding with a check, or to f7, when ♞a8-h8-h7† wins.

47...♞e8† 48.♔d3 ♞e4!?

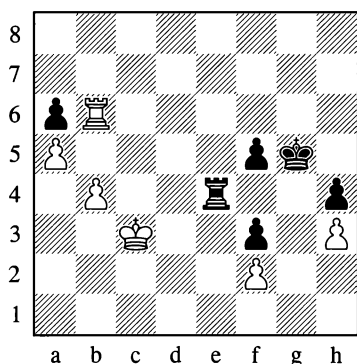
Quite playable, but it was more natural to seek counterplay with:

48...f3! 49.♖xa6 ♖e2 50.♖c6 ♖xf2 51.♖c1, when Black has 51...♖a2 when the draw should not be so easy to ruin.

49.♔c3 ♖e2?!

This is good enough to draw, but it is a tempo slower than the alternative and is therefore part of the story to how Black came to be lost a few moves later.

49...f3! is the move Black wants to play, but it has to be backed up with tactics:



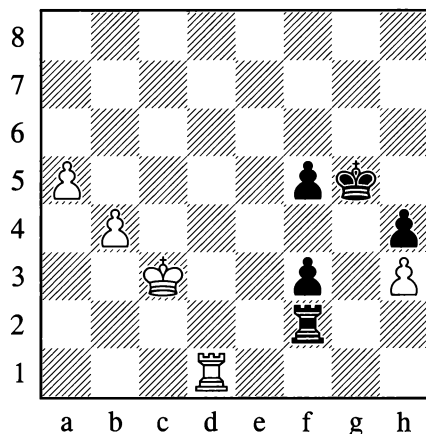
50.♖xa6 ♖e3†!! The key idea. 51.♔c4 ♖e4†! The simplest. (51...♖e2 draws narrowly, but could go wrong.) 52.♔c5 ♖e5† Keep checking till the king is far away. 53.♔d6 Only now it is time to go for the f2-pawn. 53...♖e2 54.♖c6 ♖xf2 55.♖c1 ♖b2 Black is by no means behind in the race and in many lines it is White who will have to take care to secure the draw.

50.♖xa6 ♖xf2 51.♖d6 f3!

When in doubt, push the passed pawn.

51...♖f1? looks logical, but remember it is usually better to push the pawn and keep flexibility for the rook. 52.♔c2!! f3 53.♖d1! is the refutation.

52.♖d1



Black has fought hard and is within a whisker of saving the game. He just has to find one more brilliant idea.

52...♔f4?

Logical – and losing.

52...f4? also fails, this time to brute force: 53.b5 ♖a2 54.b6 ♖xa5 55.b7 ♖b5 56.♖d5†!

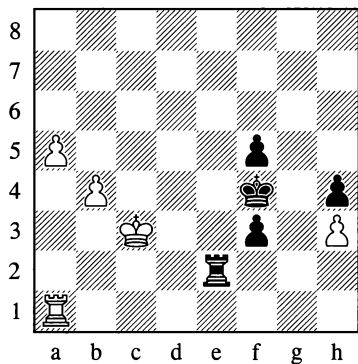
52...♖a2? obviously fails to 53.♔b3!, but this does not mean that the rook does not belong on a2!

52...♖e2! (52...♖h2 with the same idea, as well as some differences, also works) with the intention of meeting 53.b5 with 53...♖a2!! would have held. There are many complex lines that can be created from here, but essentially Black is no worse already. White has other ideas, but none better.

53.♔b3?

53.b5? and 53.a6? both fail to 53...♖a2, when the black rook is behind the pawns and the counterplay on the kingside is coming on quickly.

The winning idea is a stunning two-mover. 53.♖a1! ♖e2



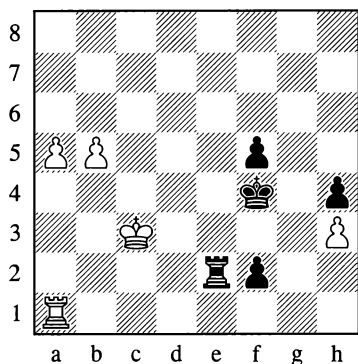
54.b5!!

The surprising move. The idea of pushing the b-pawn is not too difficult, as it would promote with check. It is the combination with putting the rook behind the a-pawn, which is surprising. It is not too hard to understand. Black should not be allowed to play ... $\text{Ra}2\text{x}a5\text{-b}5$, which is the drawing idea. So, he is prevented from playing ... $\text{Ra}2$ for just a moment.

54.a6 f2 55.a7 $\text{Re}1$ 56.a8= Q f1= Q does not give White an advantage and is the core problem of most of the variations looking for one.

54...f2

The only move that makes sense.



55.Re1!

It turns out that advancing the f-pawn is not without difficulties. The pawn is now hanging.

55... $\text{c}g3$

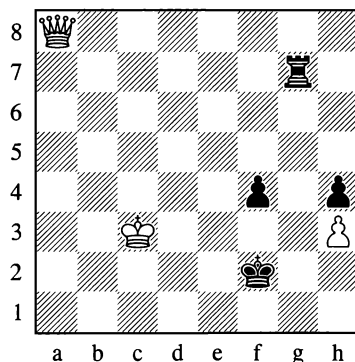
Black has to spend a tempo on this – a tempo he will sorely miss.

55... $\text{Ra}2$ loses to 56.b6! $\text{Rxa}5$ 57.b7 $\text{Rb}5$ 58. $\text{Rxf}2\uparrow$ and 59. $\text{Rb}2$.

56.b6 $\text{Re}1$

56... $\text{c}g2$ loses to 57. $\text{Rxf}2\uparrow$ followed by 58.a7.

57. $\text{Rxf}2$ $\text{c}g\text{x}f2$ 58.b7 $\text{Rb}1$ 59.a6 f4 60.a7 $\text{Rxb}7$ 61.a8= Q $\text{Rg}7$



There is still some play left. Given a tempo more, Black would make the draw. So, let's take this one till the end.

62. $\text{Qe}4$ $\text{Rg}3\uparrow$ 63. $\text{c}d2$ f3 64. $\text{Qxh}4$ $\text{c}g2$ 65. $\text{Qe}4$ $\text{Rhx}3$ 66. $\text{c}e3$ $\text{Rg}3$ 67. $\text{c}f4$ $\text{Rh}3$ 68. $\text{Qg}6\uparrow$ $\text{c}h2$ 69. $\text{c}e3$ $\text{Rg}3$ 70. $\text{Qc}2\uparrow$ $\text{c}h3$ 71. $\text{c}f4$

White wins.

53... $\text{Re}2$ 54.a6 $\text{Re}3\uparrow$ 55. $\text{c}c4$

This effectively forces a draw.

55. $\text{c}a4$ f2 56. $\text{Rf}1$ ends in a draw too, after some complications: 56... $\text{c}g3$ 57. $\text{Rxf}2$ $\text{c}g\text{x}f2$ 58.b5 $\text{Re}1$ 59.b6 f4 60.b7 f3 61.a7 $\text{c}g1$ 62.b8= Q $\text{Ra}1\uparrow$ 63. $\text{c}b3$ $\text{Rb}1\uparrow$ 64. $\text{c}c2$ $\text{Rxb}8$ 65. $\text{axb}8=\text{Q}$ f2 With a well-known fortress.

55...f2 56. $\text{Rf}1$ $\text{c}g3$ 57.b5 $\text{Ra}3$ 58. $\text{c}b4$ $\text{Ra}2$ 59. $\text{c}b3$ $\text{Ra}5$ 60. $\text{c}b4$ $\text{Ra}2$ 61. $\text{c}b3$ $\text{Ra}5$ $\frac{1}{2}\text{-}\frac{1}{2}$

Check the checks! The advice is as simple as that. In endgames in general, checks are a useful way to harass the opponent, but especially in rook (and queen) endings, they are effective and can be an extra weapon. We tend to give checks without mentally absorbing their dominating feature. Truly grasping the power of checks can provide the extra 10% that will elevate your rook endgame play to the next level.

Chapter 10

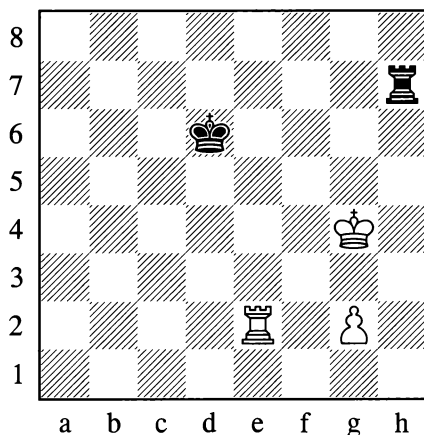
Checking Distance

When talking about checks, one subject cannot be avoided. Checking distance. The general idea is this: the greater the checking distance, the better for the side giving the checks. So, if you do not know what to do, increasing the checking distance is almost always a good idea.

The first example is from the 2020 US Championship, which was played online in a rapid format, which is probably why the game was unnecessarily long.

Hikaru Nakamura – Aleksandr Lenderman

US Championship 2020



51...♖g7†?

An understandable mistake, but also an instructive one.

51...♖h8!

This was the only drawing move. You can explain this with variations – and I shall – but don't lose sight of the reason why this is working: It extends the checking distance.

52.♔f5 ♖f8† 53.♔g6 ♔d5!!

Also an important move. The key idea is to avoid the ♖e6† followed by ♖g6 idea.

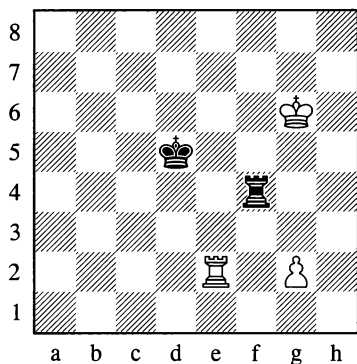
54.♔g7

54.♞a2 would allow the black king to come closer. After 54...♔e5! Black simply draws.

54...♞f4!

Preventing the g-pawn from advancing.

55.♔g6



55...♞f8!

And Black holds.

Notice that 55...♞g4? would lose to 56.♔f5 ♞g8 57.♞d2†.

52.♔f5 ♞g3?!

Not the strongest defence, even if it held the game. White would have to show great technique and the game would potentially have found its way into the “Slow Play” chapter, had Black given another check:

52...♞f7†

This still loses, but is tougher to grind down.

53.♔g5!

White can zigzag between threats of advancing the g-pawn and checking the black king away to the far queenside. The technique is important to understand, so you can use it in your own games.

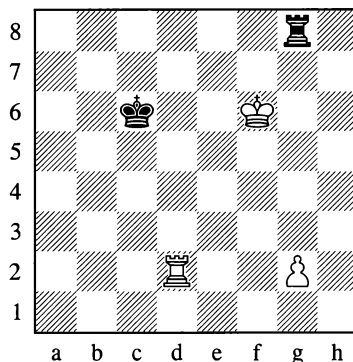
53...♞f8 54.♞a2! ♞g8†

54...♔e6 55.♞a6† ♔e7 56.♞a7† ♔e6 57.♞g7! is the key idea behind 52.♞a2!.

55.♔f6 ♔d7

A waiting move is necessary.

After 55...♞f8† 56.♔g7 ♞f4 57.♔g6 Black cannot prevent the g-pawn from advancing. 56.♔f7 ♞g5 57.♞d2† ♔c6 58.♔f6 ♞g8



59.♔f5! ♞f8† 60.♔e6

Black again has to choose between allowing the g-pawn to advance, or being checked away. Since allowing the g-pawn to advance loses without a fight, it is not much of a choice.

60...♞g8 61.♞c2† ♔b6 62.♔f6!?

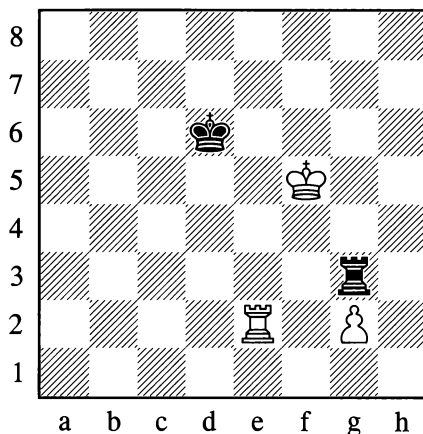
A tablebase move which is interesting to understand. Black's rook is stuck and White puts Black in a sort of mini-zugzwang, where he has to make an uncomfortable move with the king.

62...♔b7

62...♔b5 is inconvenient, as after 63.♔f5 ♞f8† 64.♔g6 ♞g8† 65.♔h7 ♞g3 66.♔h6 ♞g8 67.♞f2, the check on f5 with the idea ♞g5 is useful.

63.♔f5 ♞f8† 64.♔g5 ♞g8† 65.♔f4 ♞f8† 66.♔e3 ♞g8 67.♔f2 ♞f8† 68.♔g1 ♞g8 69.♞c4 ♞a8!?

This fails to 70.♔f2. But White should avoid 70.g4?, when 70...♞a2! would hold.



53.♔f4?

Missing the easy one! 53.♞e6†! ♔d7 54.♞g6 ♞a3 55.♔f6! and the pawn will advance.

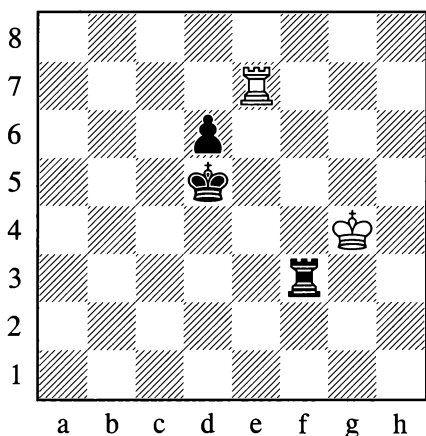
53...♞g8 54.g4 ♞f8†

Black has achieved a theoretically drawn position. Nakamura was hungry and tried for another 90 moves to win. Let's be kind and say that the last 65 of them were totally unnecessary...

The next example is covered at great depth in *Theoretical Rook Endgames* by Sam Shankland. We had both individually selected the game to show important points. As mine is simple, and different to his, we will have this one overlapping example.

Andrey Stukopin – Lazaro Bruzon Batista

San Francisco 2019



Black played the horrible:

54...♞f8?

54...♞f1! was the winning move. White is no longer able to get enough checking distance, when checking from the front (see Chapter 11 for more on this topic). Black simply wins.

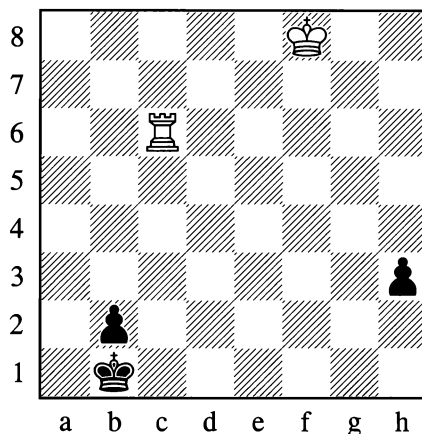
55.♞e1 ♞f6 56.♞d1†

White made the draw by move 81.

The next example led to a loss by one of Denmark's promising younger players.

Martin Percivaldi – Oleg Korneev

Køge 2015



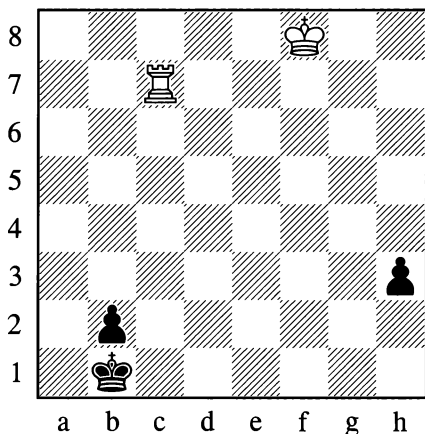
Despite being a rook up, White is obviously in trouble. Both the black pawns are close to promotion. Looking at lines such as 72.♞c8? h2, when the h-pawn queens, or 72.♞a6 ♔c2 73.♞c6† ♔d3 74.♞d6† ♔c3 75.♞c6† ♔d4 76.♞d6† ♔c4! (76...♔c5? 77.♞d1 and White would hold by a tempo) 77.♞d1 ♔b3 Percivaldi perceivably got desperate. Here Black makes it in time to the 3rd rank, before White makes it to h1 with the rook. Unable to take on h3 with check, White now loses.

For this reason, he decided to take his chances with rook vs queen, asking his opponent to show his technique. Sadly, for him, Korneev has plenty of technique.

72.♞h6? ♔c2 73.♞xh3 b1=♚ 74.♞h6 ♔d3 75.♞e6 ♔d4 76.♔e7 ♞f5 77.♞f6 ♞g5 78.♔f7 ♔e5 79.♞g6 ♞h5 80.♔g7 ♔f5 81.♞f6† ♔g5 82.♞a6 ♞e8 83.♞a5† ♔f4 84.♞a6 ♞d8 85.♞f6† ♔g5 86.♞f7 ♞d4† 87.♔h7 ♞e5 88.♞g7† ♔f6 89.♔g8 ♞h5 90.♞g1 ♞d5† 91.♔h7 ♞d3† 92.♔h8 ♞d8† 93.♞g8 ♞c7 0-1

This is a perfect example of paying attention to the checking distance. The tempo White is lacking in the critical variation, could have been won by increasing the checking distance.

72.♖c7!!



72...♔a2

72...h2 leads to a draw after 73.♖h7 ♔a1 74.♖a7† with a repetition.

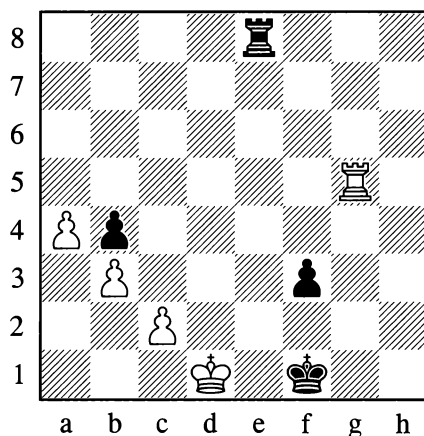
73.♖a7† ♔b3 74.♖b7† ♔c3 75.♖c7† ♔d4 76.♖d7† ♔c5 77.♖d1 ♔c4 78.♖h1

White makes the draw.

The next game was played in the club championship at Killer Chess Training, in the third heat, which was absolutely brutal. Michael Adams was third with 4/6...

Matthew Perrine – Jude Shearsby

Internet (rapid) 2023



59.♖d5?

White does not have the time to waste.

He could have made a draw with:

59.a5! f2 60.♖g6!!

A nice combination of checking distance and anticipation. White is ready to defend the a-pawn on a6, which means it would be close enough to the finish line to secure the draw. 60.a6? ♖d8† 61.♔c1 ♔e2 62.♖e5† ♔f3 63.♖f5† ♔e3 Black is threatening ...♖a8 and the elimination of the a-pawn. At the moment the white rook is too close to the f-pawn to give checks. 64.♖f6 (If 64.♖f7, Black has 64...♖d7! 65.♖f8 ♖a7! and the a-pawn is lost. White cannot give checks and return the rook to the 6th rank, as with the king on f1, Black would have ...♖f7! and the f-pawn cannot be controlled.) 64...♖d6! Now 64...♖a8? does not work, as White would give checks and answer ...♔f1 with ♖f6! to keep the f-pawn under control. 65.♖xd6 f1=♖† 66.♔b2 ♖f8!! Black wins. The threat is ...♖h8† and ...♔d2-c1, with checkmate. If there was no pawn on b3, White would be able to create a fortress with ♖d3-b3, but without the b3-square, he would end up

in zugzwang. 67.♖d3† ♔e2 68.♖d7 ♜f6†
69.♗b1 ♜xa6 This fortress is by no means
easy to break down, but a key reason why it
fails is that 70.♖d3? loses to 70...♜xd3!.

60...♖d8† 61.♔c1 ♔e2

61...♖f8 62.♔d1 would not allow the black
king to exit its prison, with the rook on f8.

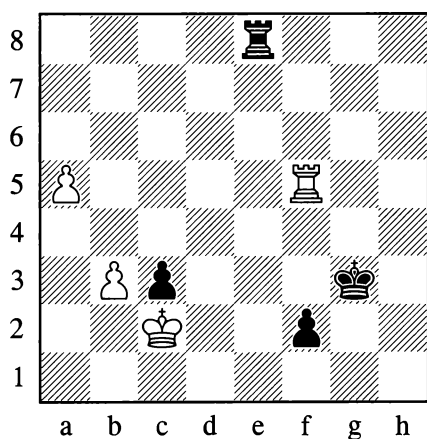
62.♖e6†

Black cannot make progress.

59...f2 60.a5 ♔g2 61.♖g5† ♔f3 62.♖f5†
♔g3 63.c3!

Matthew plays his chance.

63...bxc3 64.♔c2



64...♖e5?

Missing 64...♖e2†! with the idea 65.♔xc3
♖e3† and 66...♖f3, winning.

65.♖xf2

By far the simplest, but 65.♖xe5!? f1=♜
66.♖e3† ♔f4 67.♖xc3 would also hold.

65...♔xf2 66.b4 ♔e3 67.♔xc3 ♔e4 68.♔c4
♖e8

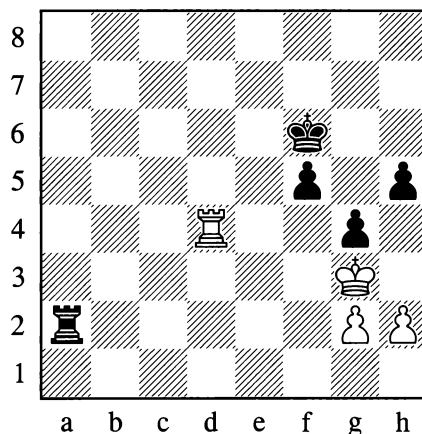
0–1

Matthew lost on time, in a clearly drawn
position. 69.a6 ♖c8† 70.♔b5 ♔d5 71.a7 and
the draw is near.

Before we move to the final advanced example
in the chapter, let's take another clear-cut one.

Quinten Ducarmon – Emil Powierski

Germany 2015



White lost after:

54.♖d3?

54.h4? ♔e5 and ...f4† is also completely
winning.

54...h4† 55.♔xh4 ♖xg2 56.h3 ♖h2 57.♔g3

The pawn ending after 57.♖a3 ♖xh3†
58.♖xh3 gxh3 59.♔xh3 ♔e5 loses elementarily.

57...♖xh3†

Black won on move 69. A key point is
that 58.♔f4 does not lead to stalemate after
58...♔e6.

White draws marginally by extending the
checking distance to the max.

54.♖b4!!

54.♖c4? is not far enough. After 54...h4†
55.♔xh4 ♖xg2 56.h3 ♖h2, the king is too
close to the rook: 57.♖c6† ♔e5 58.♖c5† ♔e4
59.♖c4† ♔d3 and Black wins.

54...h4†

Still the critical try.

White also survives after 54...♔g5 55.h4† and 54...♔e5 55.♖b5† ♔e4 56.♖b4† ♔e3 57.♖b3† ♔e2 58.♖b5!.

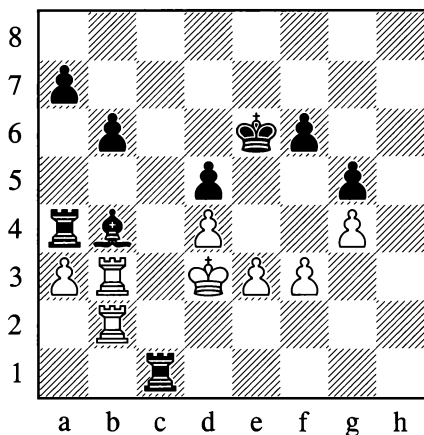
55.♔xh4 ♖xg2 56.♖b6† ♔e5 57.♖b5† ♔e4 58.♖b4† ♔d3

The black king has been kicked away from the black pawns, meaning that White can now draw with both **59.h3 ♖h2** 60.♔g5, and **59.♔g5 ♖xh2** 60.♔xf5, based on 60...g3 61.♖b3†.

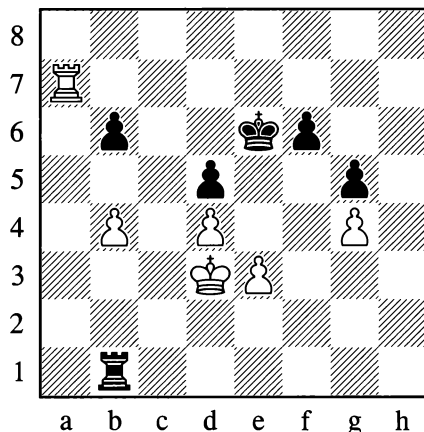
We shall start the final example just after the time control, where White is slightly worse, but well within the drawing margin.

Kassa Korley – Mads Andersen

Helsingør 2019



41.axb4 ♖a1 42.♖c2 ♖xc2 43.♔xc2 ♖f1 44.♖a3 ♖xf3 45.♔d3 ♖f1 46.♖xa7 ♖b1

**47.♖c7?**

An unnecessary pawn sacrifice. It is easy enough to follow Korley's thinking. By giving up the pawn, he activates his rook and leaves the black king passive, defending the f6-pawn. The problem with this thinking is that it loses a pawn – and the examples Korley will have seen where giving up a pawn to activate the rook is strong, are all examples where the rook was terrible. The white rook was already active, so in this case, all White achieves is dropping a pawn, while staying marginally within the drawing margin.

47.♔c3 ♖g1

It is also hard for Black to make progress after: 47...f5 48.gxf5† ♔xf5 49.♖g7! g4 50.♖g8 The white king will come to e2 and defend against the g-pawn if it advances to the 3rd rank. Black can take the b4-pawn, but would lose the g-pawn.

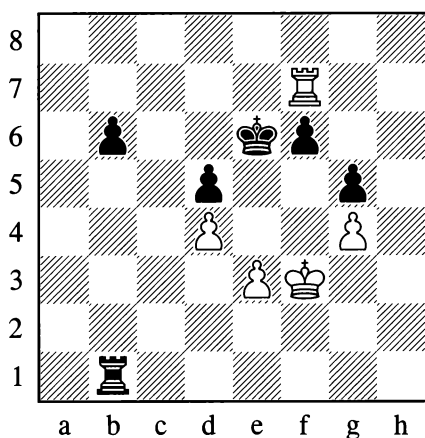
48.♖b7

White can hold in many ways, but as a principle, I prefer to do it actively in rook endings.

48...♖xg4 49.♖xb6† ♔f5 50.♖d6 ♖g1 51.♖xd5† ♔e4 52.♖d6 f5 53.♖e6† ♔f3 54.d5 ♖d1 55.♖e5

Having over-pushed (forced to do so by the author, admittedly), Black will now have to be a bit careful to avoid losing the game, as well as the illusion of an advantage.

47...♖b3† 48.♔e2 ♖xb4 49.♖c6† ♔e7
50.♔f3 ♖b1 51.♖c7† ♔d6 52.♖f7 ♔e6



53.♖b7?

The moment we have all been waiting for. White puts the rook in the seemingly natural spot behind the passed pawn, and loses. The drawing method relied on maximising the checking distance with a peculiar-looking move:

53.♖a7!!

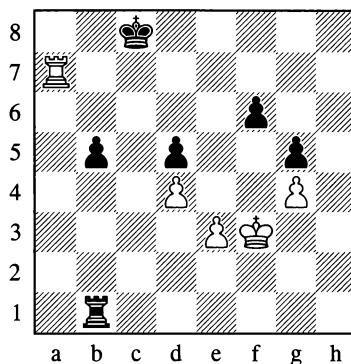
Checking distance!

53...b5 54.♖a6† ♔e7 55.♖a7† ♔e8 56.♖a8† ♔d7 57.♖a7†

This is the key point. The king cannot approach the white rook quick enough.

57...♔c8

57...♔c6 allows White to draw with: 58.♖a6†! If Black plays 58...♔b7, White has 59.♖d6!, which is the core advantage of the greater checking distance. 58...♔c7 59.♔e2! b4 60.♖xf6 b3 61.♔d3 and White is in time to stop the b-pawn. Black can try: 61...b2 62.♔c2 ♖g1 63.♔xb2 ♖xg4 But his king remains cut off, and White can draw in many different ways. 64.♔b3 ♖g1 65.♔b4 being the most logical to me.



58.♔e2!

It is important to bring the king over to stop the b-pawn. There is no better time than now, when the black king is cut off on the 8th rank.

58.♖a6? does not work. After 58...b4! 59.♖xf6? ♖f1† Black wins.

58.♖f7? is also poor. After 58...b4 59.♔g2 b3 60.♖xf6 ♔c7 61.♖f7† ♔c6 62.♖f8 ♔b5 the black king comes into the game, winning it. Black now cannot do anything without dropping the d-pawn.

58...♔b8

58...b4 59.♖a5! is similar.

59.♖d7

White will not lose when he has a passed pawn of his own.

53...b5 54.♖b6† ♔e7!!

Mads is a great endgame player.

54...♔f7? 55.♖d6 would allow White to make the draw.

55.♔e2 b4 56.♔d3

56.♖b7† ♔e6 57.♖b6† ♔f7 58.♖b7† ♔e8!

Eventually the king needs to go here. The king needs to go to e8/d7, not to d8, as White would have ♖b5, taking the d-pawn with check.

58...♔g6 59.e4! draws. White will be push the d-pawn and play ♖xb4 and ♖xe4, holding the two vs one endgame easily, as Black has

no passed pawn and the white king is ideally placed.

59.♖b5

The checks are running dry.

59...b3 60.♔d2

60.♞xd5 b2 61.♞b5 ♞h1 and Black wins.

60...b2 61.♔c3 ♔f7!

Black wins. White cannot take on b2, as Black exchanges the rooks and breaks with ...f5!, queening the g-pawn.

62.♞xd5

This also does not work.

62...♞e1 63.♔xb2 ♞xe3

Black will grab the g-pawn and push the connected passed pawns, winning easily.

White can also try passive defence, but will get stuck and Black will find it easy to make progress.

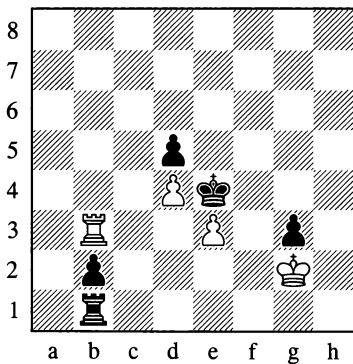
56.♔f2 b3 57.♔g2 b2 58.♔h2 f5 59.gxf5 g4 60.♔g2 ♔e8!

60...g3? would ironically throw away the advantage after 61.♞e6†! ♔f7 62.♞b6 and the players are caught in mutual zugzwang.

61.♔h2 g3† 62.♔g2 ♔f7

White is in zugzwang. Black will take the f5-pawn and enter the white position.

63.♞b7† ♔f6 64.♞b5 ♔g5 65.♞b6 ♔xf5 66.♞b5 ♔e4 67.♞b3



Black uses his advantage to transpose into a perfect version of the single pawn endgame.

67...♞d1! 68.♞xb2 ♔xe3 69.♔xg3 ♞xd4 70.♞b5 ♞d1 71.♞b3† ♞d3 72.♞b5 ♞a3!

Black wins, due to:

73.♞xd5 ♔e4†

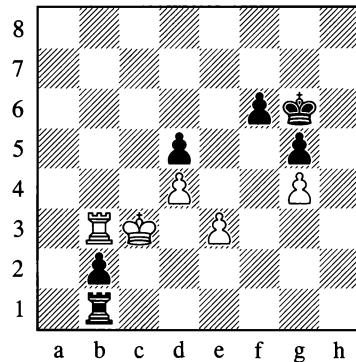
56...b3 57.♞b7† ♔e6 58.♞b6† ♔e7 59.♞b7† ♔e6 60.♞b6† ♔f7! 61.♞b7† ♔g6!

Again, this is where the king has to go.

62.♞e7

62.♔c3 b2 63.♞b3!?

If White takes on b2, Black will win with the ...f5! break again.



Black now wins by cutting off the king and putting the rook on the optimal square.

63...♞c1†! 64.♔xb2 ♞c6! 65.♞b5 ♞e6 66.♞b3 f5!

Black creates a passed pawn as far away as possible.

66...♞e4? 67.♔c2 ♞xg4 68.♞b5 would allow White to draw.

67.gxf5† ♔xf5 68.♔c2 g4 69.♔d3 g3 70.♞b1 ♞a6! 71.♞g1 ♔g4

Black wins.

62...b2 63.♔c2 ♞g1 64.♔xb2 ♞xg4 65.♔c2 ♞e4

0-1

The advice is simple. If you have nothing better to do, increase the checking distance. It could save your game.

Chapter 11

Defence from the Front

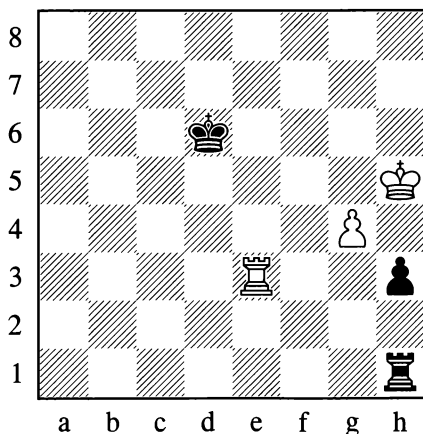
As a quick intermezzo chapter, let's have a look at a few scenarios where the best defence comes from the front. It is rarely something we would go for, but at times it is appropriate, if nothing else, then because everything else fails.

I want to underline that there are specific reasons why the defence from the front is appropriate in each of these games.

First off, the black king is cut off and there is still time to prevent the g-pawn from advancing to the 5th rank, where it would be unstoppable.

Magnus Carlsen – Maxime Vachier-Lagrave

London 2015



MVL lost this rapid game mainly due to time trouble. But it would have been good to have these sort of decisions on auto.

51...♖f1? 52.♗xh3 ♔e7

52...♗f8 loses most simply to 53.♗g3 and the g-pawn advances.

53.♔g6 ♖f6† 54.♔g7 ♖f7† 55.♔g6 ♖f6†
56.♔g5 ♖a6

56...♔f7 57.♖h7† ♔e6 58.♖h6 and White wins.

57.♖f3

1–0

Black could swing the rook at once, or after pushing the h-pawn first (which is more natural to me).

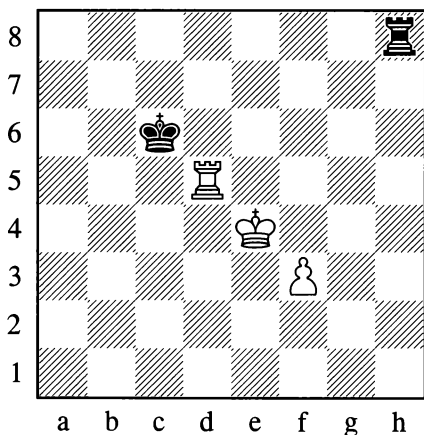
51...h2 52.♖e2 ♖a1! 53.♖xh2 ♖a8!

White cannot make progress. The checks from the front secure the draw.

Generally, this topic belongs in *Theoretical Rook Endgames*. But as checking is a big topic here, I wanted to at least show a few examples. The next one is not too dissimilar from the previous example, as it is all about advancing/stopping the f-pawn, in a situation where the black king is dangerously cut off.

Richard Palliser – David Howell

Torquay 2019



52.f4?

Sloppy.

52.♖d1? would also allow Black to successfully defend from the front. After 52...♖e8† 53.♔f4 ♖f8† 54.♔e3 ♖e8† 55.♔f2 ♖f8, White cannot make progress. For example: 56.♖d4 ♔c5!

52...♖e8† 53.♔d4

53.♖e5 ♔d7! also works. If nothing else, the king has come one file closer.

53...♖e6 54.f5 ♖d6!

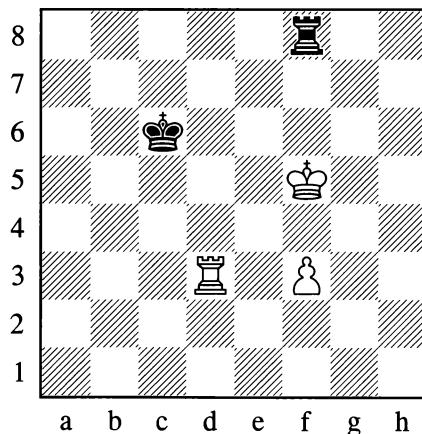
The simplest.

55.♖xd6† ♔xd6 56.f6 ♔e6 57.♔e4 ♔f7
58.♔d4 ♔xf6
½–½

52.♖d3!

This was the winning move. White defends the pawn and is now free to advance the king. If Black does not give checks, the pawn will start running.

52...♖e8† 53.♔f5 ♖f8†



54.♔e6!

Threatening to use a few checks on the black king to bring the rook to f5 or f7, winning.

54...♖e8† 55.♔f7 ♖e5 56.♔g6!

White is winning. The f-pawn will advance. For example:

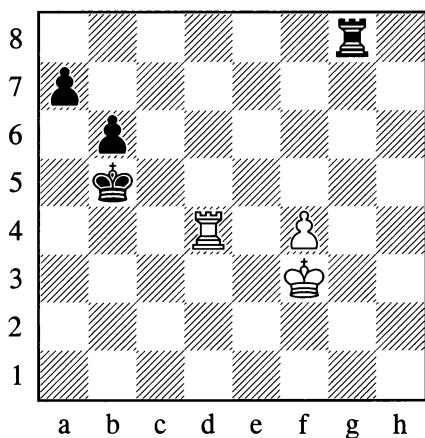
56...♖e6† 57.♔f5

White wins. The black king is too far away.

White lost the following game after playing a move he most likely did not even suspect was a mistake until the computer told him so.

Pekka Koykka – Elshan Moradiabadi

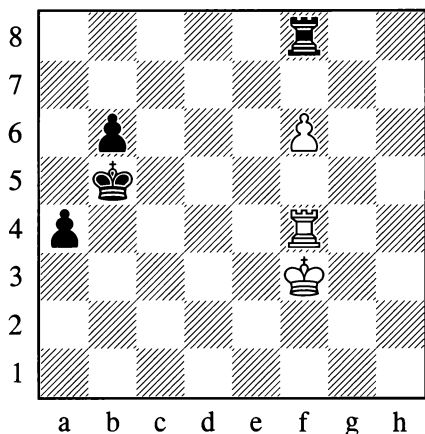
Stockholm 2019



49.f5? a5! 50.f6!

Pushing the pawn is likely to give the best chances. Slow play rarely works and indeed, with a stronger 52nd move, White could have made the win difficult to achieve for his opponent.

50...♖f8 51.♖f4 a4!



52.♔e3?

Koykka missed a chance to make the conversion incredibly difficult for Black with:

52.♔e4! a3 53.♔e5 a2 54.♖f1

The winning idea is just incredible.

54...♖e8†!

The common idea of forcing the white king to a worse square.

55.♔d6 ♖d8†! 56.♔e7

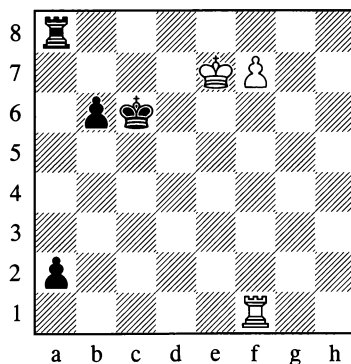
The white king has to run forward. It cannot remain on e5, as Black will manoeuvre the king to c2 and defend from the checks with the rook, after which the a-pawn will queen with check.

56...♖a8 57.f7 ♔c4

Freeing up the b-pawn.

58.♖f4† ♔d5 59.♖f5† ♔c6 60.♖f1

60.♖f6† ♔c7 61.♖f1 a1=♚ and Black wins.



60...♖a7†!! 61.♔e6

61.♔e8 a1=♚ wins.

61...a1=♚ 62.f8=♚!

62.♖xa1? ♖xa1 63.f8=♚ ♖e1† and White has to resign.

62...♚a2†! 63.♔f6 ♚b2† 64.♔g6 ♚g2†

65.♔h6 ♚h3† 66.♔g6 ♚h7† 67.♔f6

Black is winning, but there is still a lot of work remaining. For example: 67...♔b7?! intending to play on slowly.

52...a3 53.♔d3 a2 54.♖f1 ♖xf6

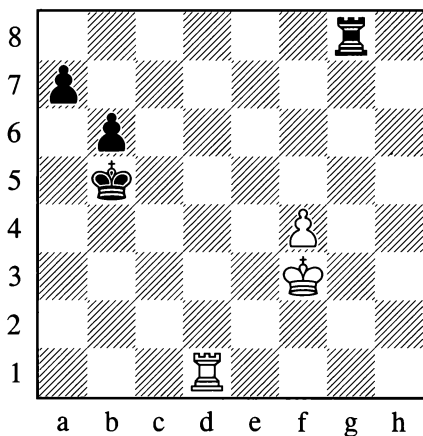
Black wins uneventfully.

55.♞a1 ♞f3† 56.♟c2 ♟b4 57.♞xa2 ♞f2†
 58.♟b1 ♞xa2 59.♟xa2 ♟c3 60.♟a3 b5
 61.♟a2 b4 62.♟b1 ♟b3
 0-1

A solid win for Elshan, who later went on to win the tournament.

White needed to buy time to organise the sort of setup that would make a draw (see more about this in the chapter on Connected Passed Pawns). This can only happen with a defence from the front.

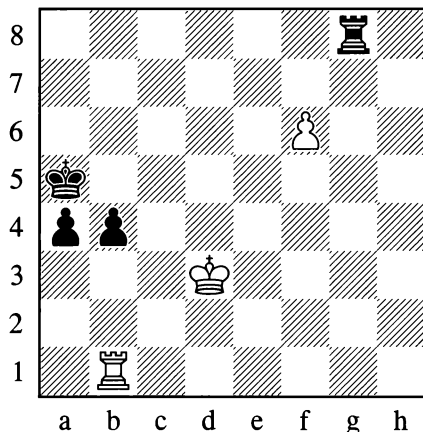
49.♞d1!!



49...a5 50.♞b1† ♟a6

Against 50...♟c5, White has to play 51.♞a1! to slow Black down. (51.♞c1†? would be a mistake, as 51...♟d4 would bring the king closer for no purpose.) 51...♞a8 52.♟e4 a4 53.♟d3 b5 54.f5 b4 55.f6 a3 56.f7 ♞f8 57.♞f1 And White makes the draw.

51.f5 b5 52.♟e4 a4 53.f6 ♟a5 54.♟d3 b4



55.♞f1! ♞f8 56.f7 ♟b5 57.♞f5†

Black will not be able to make progress. The key reason why these lines work is that the black king is unable to come in front of the pawns. When the king is behind the pawns, the white king is able to come in and control the pawns, making a draw.

I am sure that there are plenty of examples where defending from the front is better than defending from the back, although they are not found in this chapter. It is the poor man's defence; the last straw to cling to, when all other options have vanished. But sometimes it is enough.

Chapter 12

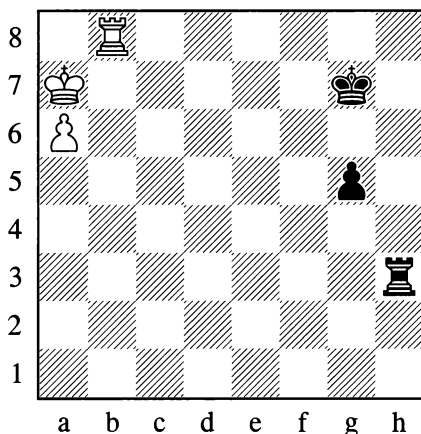
Cutting off the King

In rook endings, each side has only two pieces left. One of them is the rook, which is generally difficult to dominate, as it is the strongest remaining piece on the board. We have seen situations where passed pawns and other responsibilities can force a rook into passivity, but it always takes an army to hold it down. It is different with the king, which can be cut off completely by the rook. Sometimes it is worth using this higher-value piece to dominate the king, while at other times the rook can multitask.

The examples in this chapter will generally not be too difficult (the exception being the last), as the theme is quite basic. The first deals with a common theme of “the king cut off along the 5th rank”, which is based on the idea that the black king will not be able to come to the aid of the g-pawn when it reaches the 3rd rank and can be scooped up by the rook. (The same method would not work further up the board, as on the 2nd rank the pawn would threaten to promote).

Teimour Radjabov – Lázaro Bruzon Batista

Tromsø Olympiad 2014



51.♖b5! ♔f6

Another useful variation is: 51...♔g6 52.♔b6! (52.♔b7 ♔h5 53.a7 ♖a3 and Black draws) 52...♖a3 53.a7! White is threatening ♖b5-a5 and Black has to take. 53...♖xa7 54.♔xa7 ♔h5

Trying to get around the 5th rank, but because of the shouldering principle, this is hopeless. 55.♔b6 ♕g4 56.♔c5 White is in very good time.

52.♔b6 g4 53.a7 ♖h8 54.♔b7 ♖h7†

54...g3 55.a8=♖ ♖xa8 56.♔xa8 g2 57.♖b1 and the king is too far away to help the pawn.

55.♔a6 ♖h8 56.♖b8 ♖h1 57.♖b6†!

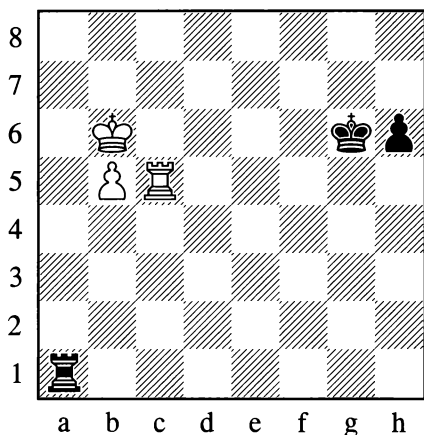
Cutting the king off on the 6th rank, which is almost cruel. If the king goes to the 5th rank, White will play 58.♖b5† and be a queen up. White is totally winning and Black resigned.

1–0

The next example is seemingly thematically identical, except there is a small difference.

Marie Sebag – Natalia Pogonina

Sochi 2015



80...h5 81.♔c7

White cannot afford to spare a tempo, as after 81.♔c6 h4 82.b6 ♖b1 83.b7 h3 84.♖c3 h2 85.♖h3 Black will play 85...♖c1† and make the draw.

81...h4?

Black only had a few seconds left and missed a chance to save the game.

81...♖a7†? 82.♔c6! also wins for White.

But Black had the surprising pinning idea of 81...♖a5!!, when she will make the draw after 82.♔c6 h4, or 82.♖c6† ♕g5 83.b6 ♖b5, as the king is no longer cut off.

82.b6 h3 83.b7 h2!?

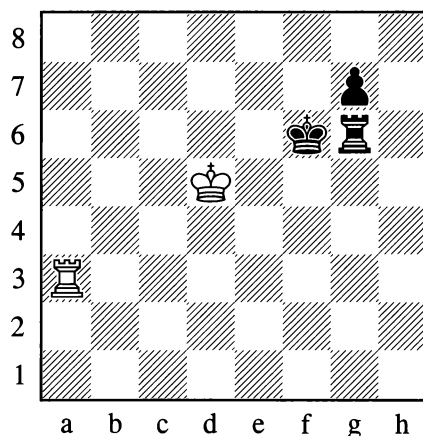
Black has to try something.

83...♖b1 84.b8=♖ ♖xb8 85.♔xb8 leaves Black cut off along the 5th rank with nowhere to go. 85...h2 86.♖c1 and White picks up the pawn.

84.b8=♖ h1=♖ 85.♖g8† ♔h6 86.♖c6† ♔h5 87.♖g6† ♔h4 88.♖c4† ♔h3 89.♖g4† 1–0

Ernesto J. Fernandez Guillen – Leo Crevatin

Sitges 2021



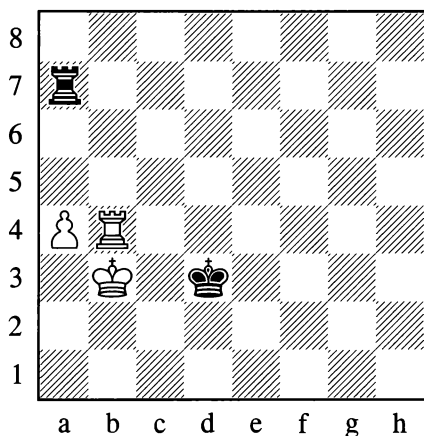
The king can also be cut off from going backwards. The following is a good example. After **65...♖g5†? 66.♔e4**, White drew effortlessly.

Instead, Black could have won with 65...♖g4!, when the white king is cut off and Black can improve his king before advancing the pawn. Black wins in 39 moves according to the tablebase.

The next example is a good deal more fiddly. White has cut off the black king, but also needs to make space for his own king to advance. This turns out to be a bit more complicated than it looks at first glance.

Francisco Vallejo Pons – Falko Bindrich

Germany 2018



67.♖b6?

67.♖b8? is also wrong. Black can play 67...♗d4 68.♗b4 ♗d5 69.♗b5 ♗d6 and 70...♗c7 with a draw.

After 67.♖h4?! ♜b7+, White is still winning, but has to come up with something else after 68.♖b4 ♖a7.

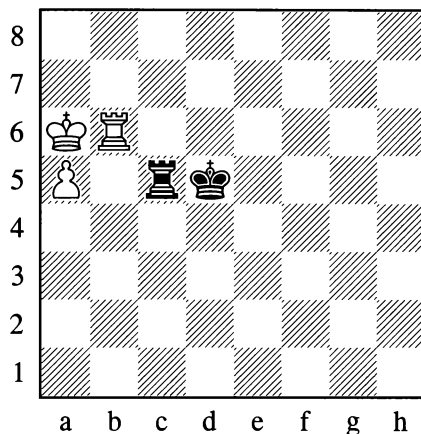
67...♗d4 68.♗b4 ♗d5 69.a5 ♜c7

The rook could also have gone round the back via other files. This one gives Black the additional possibility of a check on c5, not that it is needed.

70.♗b5

White can also make no progress after 70.a6 ♜c1 71.♖h6 ♖a1, due to 72.♗b5 ♜b1+ 73.♗a5 ♗c5! and the draw is near.

70...♜c5+ 71.♗a6



71...♗c4!

The white rook cannot keep the black king cut off.

72.♖h6

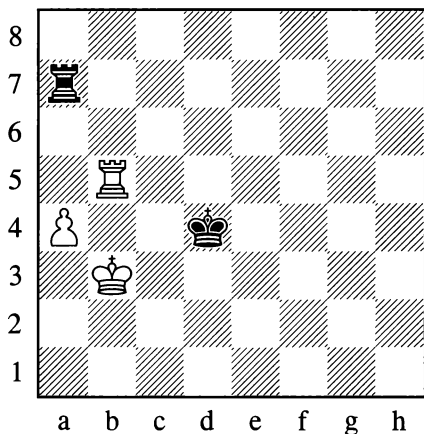
72.♖b1 ♖h5 and Black is ready to give lots of checks from the side.

72...♖g5 73.♗b6 ♖b5+ 74.♗a6 ♖g5 75.♖h1 ♖g6+ 76.♗b7 ♗b5 77.♖h5+ ♗a4 78.a6 ♖g7+ 79.♗b8 ♖g8+ 80.♗c7 ♖g7+ 81.♗c6 ♖g6+ 82.♗c5 ♖xa6 83.♖h1 ♖g6
½–½

White would have been winning with simple play, keeping control.

67.♖b5! ♗d4

After 67...♖h7 White can win with 68.a5, or the more human 68.♖d5+ ♗e4 69.♗c4 ♖h1 70.♖g5 when the black king is cut off.

**68.a5!**

68.♔b4? ♚h7 69.a5 ♚h1 70.a6 ♚a1 and Black draws. 71.♚b6 ♚b1† 72.♔a5 ♚a1† 73.♔b5 ♔d5 is a thematic line. 74.♚b7 ♔d6 White cannot make progress.

68...♚a8

68...♚h7 69.a6 ♚h1 70.a7 wins, because 70...♚a1 runs into 71.♚b4† and 72.♚a4.

69.♔b4 ♚a7 70.♚b8!

This is the key difference. In the game the rook was in the way on b6.

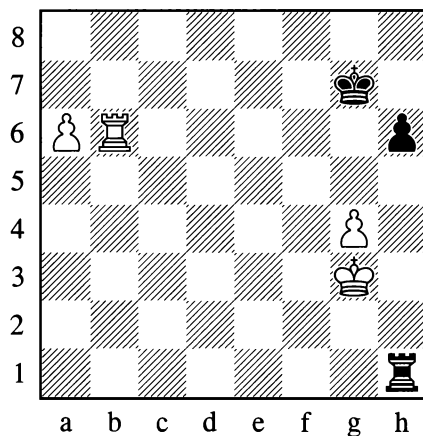
70...♔d5 71.♔b5

White wins. The king will advance and a check on d8 will drive the black king away.

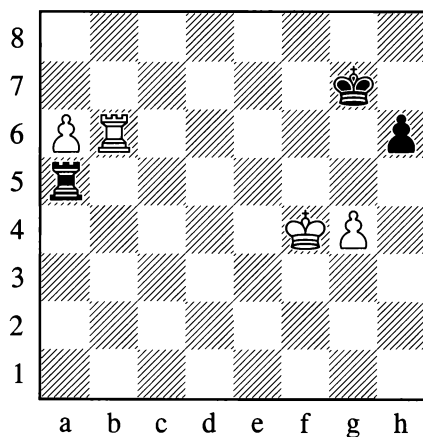
The next example takes a big step up in complexity. White has the advantage. He is a pawn up and his rook is well placed, defending the pawn and cutting off the black king. But still it was possible for Black to hold the draw, as his rook is the best piece on the board.

Ivan Popov – Evgeniy Solozhenkin

Sochi 2015

**56...♚a1?**

56...♚f1! was the drawing move, cutting off the white king. If White pushes the pawn to the 7th rank, he will have to let the black king re-join the fight, when it is easy to see that it will take the g4-pawn and the h-pawn will make the draw. But there are no other ways for White to improve his position.

57.♔f4 ♚a5**58.♚c6?**

The white rook is perfectly placed. It is time to bring the king.

58.♔e4!

Black will have to do something, as White will otherwise bring the king to b4-b5-c6 anyway.

58...h5

After 58...♖a4† 59.♕d5 ♜xg4 60.♕c6 White wins, as the black king is cut off far back.

59.gxh5 ♜xh5 60.♕d4

White is totally winning. The rook is ideally placed on b6. Almost any method will work.

For example:

60...♕f7 61.♕c4 ♖a5 62.♕b4 ♖a1 63.♜h6!? ♕e7 64.a7! ♕d7 65.♜h8 ♖xa7 66.♜h7†

58...♜g5?

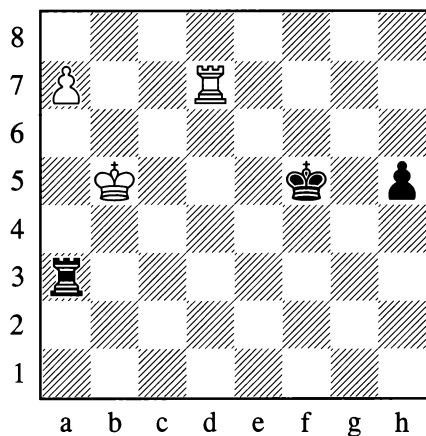
58...h5! held easily. The black king will race to the queenside after 59.gxh5 ♜xh5.

59.♞d6 ♕h7 60.♕e4! ♜xg4† 61.♕d5 ♖a4 62.♕c5 h5 63.♕b5?!

Although this wins a tempo on the rook to get to the b-file, it makes little sense.

The aim should be to advance the a-pawn, which is best done with: 63.♕b6! h4 64.a7 h3 and now 65.♞d3, or 65.♞d5 and White wins.

63...♖a3 64.♞d7† ♕g6 65.a7 ♕f5



66.♕b6?

I would assume that Popov believed that he was winning and that everything was going well.

Instead, 66.♞c7!! followed by a check on c5 and either c6 or c4, transferring the rook to the a-file, would have won.

66...♜b3† 67.♕a5 h4?

Black misses a similarly simple, yet difficult to spot possibility.

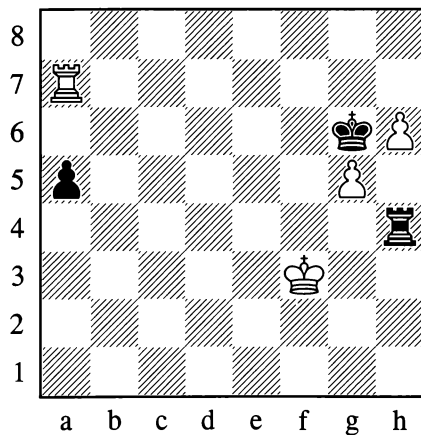
67...♖a3† 68.♕b4 ♖a6!! Delaying giving up the rook, as taught in the chapter on Rook vs Pawns. 69.♞d5† ♕g4 70.♖a5 ♖xa7 and Black draws.

68.♞d4
1–0

The next example is a surprising twist on the theme.

Rauf Mamedov – Hrant Melkumyan

Heraklion 2017



The game is terribly close to a theoretical draw, but White still has a chance.

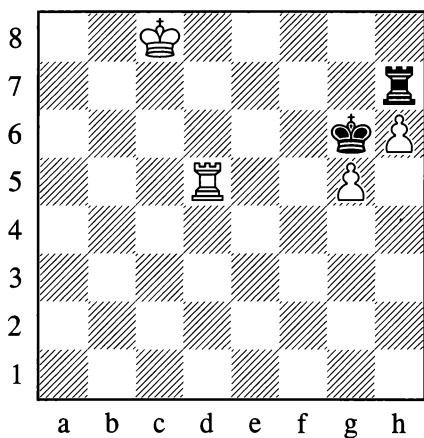
60.♕g3?

Not the right choice.

60...♖h1 61.♖xa5

This setup should be a draw, but it is still possible for Black to make a mistake.

61...♖g1† 62.♔f2 ♖g4 63.♔f3 ♖g1 64.♖e5
 ♖h1 65.♔e4 ♖d1 66.♖d5 ♖e1† 67.♔d4
 ♖c1 68.♖e5 ♖d1† 69.♔c5 ♖d8 70.♔c6
 ♖a8 71.♔d7 ♖a7† 72.♔e8 ♖a8† 73.♔e7
 ♖h8 74.♖d5 ♖h7† 75.♔d8 ♖a7 76.♔c8
 ♖a8† 77.♔b7 ♖f8 78.♔c7 ♖f1 79.♖b5
 ♖f7† 80.♔c6 ♖f8 81.♔d7 ♖a8 82.♖d5 ♖f8
 83.♔e7 ♖f7† 84.♔e8 ♖a7 85.♔d8 ♖h7
 86.♔c8

**86...♖a7?**

A blunder in perpetual time trouble.

After 86...♖h8† 87.♖d8 ♖h7 Black is holding.

87.♖d7 ♖a8† 88.♔b7 ♖g8 89.♔c7 ♖a8
 90.♖g7† ♔f5 91.♔b7 ♖e8 92.h7
 1–0

The winning option was all about ensuring that the white king is able to get to the a-pawn.

60.♖g7† ♔f5 61.♔e2!!

We will discuss this in more detail later. The white king belongs in front of the passed pawn, so it should seek backwards urgently.

After 61.♔e3? ♖h2! the king would be cut off from stopping the pawn and the rook would have to deal with it, allowing a draw.

61...a4 62.♔d1 a3 63.♔c2

63.♔c1?? would be a blunder on account of 63...♖h1†!, when Black even wins.

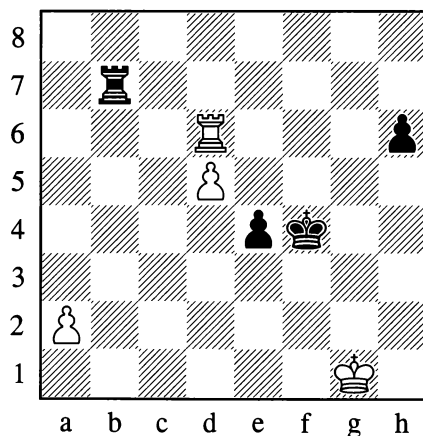
63...♖h2† 64.♔b1

White will be able to promote the pawns slowly.

The next game is a bit more complex. This was the long game in the first round that kept me in the playing hall of the 2018 Olympiad, which made it possible to spectate the game Aithmidou – Li Chao (see page 304). Earlier in the game Tania got into horrible difficulties, but had managed to fight her way back and was now dreaming of getting the most out of the game.

Tania Sachdev – Vyanla Punsalan

Batumi Olympiad 2018

**41.♖xh6?**

A bit careless, giving her opponent a final chance to win the game.

41.♖f6† ♔e3 42.d6! would have held the draw, but in all fairness to Tania, the game had turned so much that she was trying to win it by this point.

41...♔e3?

Black had an elegant win:

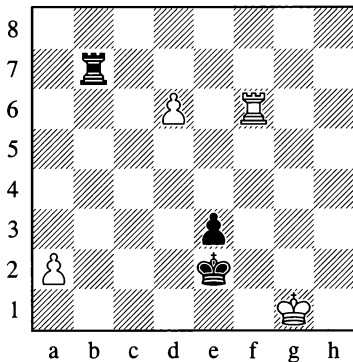
41...♔f3! 42.d6

42.♖f6† ♔e2 and ...♖g7† is not an improvement.

42...e3

The pawn is close to promotion. On top, the d6-pawn is in the way of the white rook.

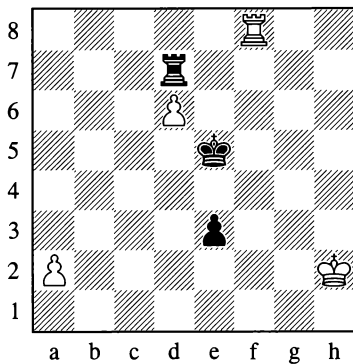
43.♖f6† ♔e2



44.♖f5

The best attempt to activate the rook, but it does not work.

44...♖g7† 45.♔h2 ♖d7 46.♖d5 ♔f3 47.♖f5† ♔e4 48.♖f6 ♔e5 49.♖f8



49...♔d4!

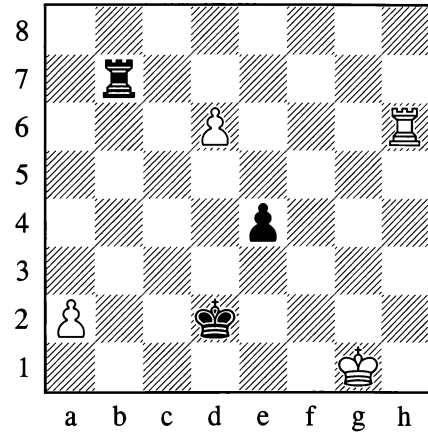
Exploiting that the white rook cannot be on f6 and check the black king on the d-file at the same time.

49...♖xd6? 50.♔g2 and White holds.

50.♔g1 ♔d3 51.♖f5 ♖xd6 52.♔f1 ♔d2

Black wins.

42.d6 ♔d2



43.♖h5!

The rook belongs behind the passed pawn.

43...♖d7?!

43...♖g7† 44.♔f1 ♖f7† would have forced a draw at once. But Punsalan was also hoping to win.

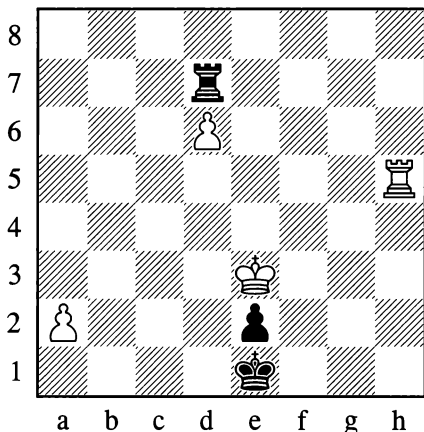
44.♖d5† ♔e2 45.♔g2 e3 46.♔g3 ♔e1 47.♔f3 e2 48.♔e3 ♔f1?!

48...♖f7! with the threat of ...♔f1, and the idea 49.♖d2 ♖f2! would have drawn effortlessly. 50.d7 ♔f1 51.♖xe2 ♖xe2† 52.♔d4 ♖d2† 53.♔c5 ♖xd7 54.a4 is a plausible end of the game.

49.♖f5† ♔e1!

Black would already be lost after 49...♔g2? 50.♔xe2 ♖xd6 51.a4!.

50.♖h5!



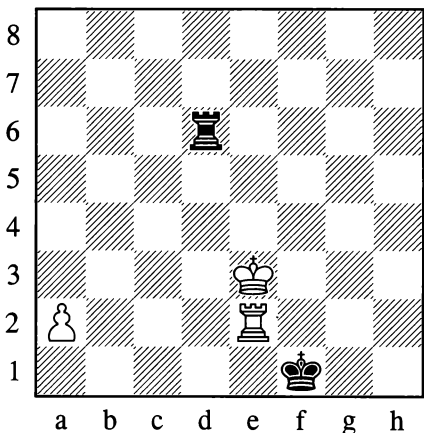
The critical moment of the game. The black king is in great danger of being cut off, leaving the three white chess men alone to decide the game.

50...♔d1?

The wrong choice.

50...♔f1! 51.♖h1† (51.♖f5† ♔e1 52.♖f2 ♖xd6 53.♖xe2† ♔d1 is a key point. The king is close to the pawn, which it will quickly eliminate.) 51...♔g2 52.♖e1 ♖xd6 53.♖xe2† ♔g3 The black king has escaped the back rank, giving Black a draw. 54.a4 ♖a6 55.♖a2 ♖a5! 56.♔d4 ♔f4 The black king is in time, heading for c7 with a draw.

51.♖d5† ♔e1 52.♖d2! ♔f1 53.♖xe2 ♖xd6



54.♖h2?

After the game I assured Tania that she had played the endgame brilliantly.

But it turns out that she was right and that she here should have played: 54.♖f2† and 55.♖f4, advancing the a-pawn. The black king is too far away.

54...♖a6 55.♔d3 ♔e1?

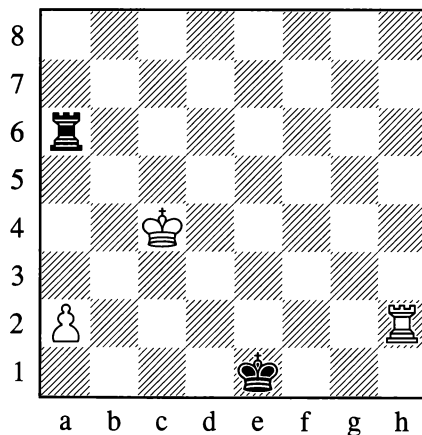
Although there were a few moves that drew for Black, it is safe to say that we have already encountered the correct way to play in such a position: 55...♖a8! and the checking distance is optimal, making all of White's tries fall short...

56.♔c4!?

This wins, but delays the moment where good moves will have to be played.

The strongest was 56.♔c3! ♖a8 57.♖h4!!, when the pawn advances and the black king is hopelessly cut off.

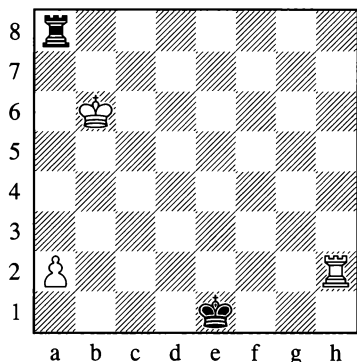
On the other hand, 56.♖h4? would fail to 56...♖a3†! with an immediate draw.



56...♔d1?!

A sign of hopelessness.

56...♖a8! would have made the win difficult for White. After 57.♗b5 ♜b8† 58.♗c6 ♖a8 59.♗b7 ♖a3 60.♗b6 ♖a8, Tania would have had to find:



61.♜h4!!, exploiting that the black king is cut off for tactical purposes. 61...♖a3 62.♗b5 ♗d1 63.♖a4 ♜h3 64.♞d4† ♗c2 65.a4 And White wins.

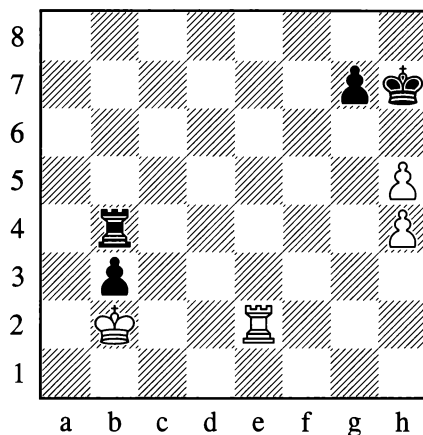
57.♗b5 ♖a3 58.♗b4 ♖a8 59.a4 ♜b8† 60.♗c5 ♖a8 61.♖a2 ♗c1 62.a5 ♗b1 63.♖a4 ♗b2 64.a6 ♗b3 65.♖a1 ♜h8 66.a7 ♜h5† 67.♗d6

1–0

Starting out, the next endgame should be harmless for White, but by misplacing the rook (which is not at all easy to see), he gave Black a big chance to win the game.

Anton Demchenko – Antoni Kozak

Piestany 2022



75.♜e8?

White could have drawn in a number of ways. I like the draw with checks from the front, so for this reason I would have chosen 75.♞g2 ♜xh4 76.♗xb3 ♜xh5 77.♗c4!. It is important to prevent ...♞d5, cutting off the king. It now comes to d4 and is close enough to make the draw.

75...♜xh4!

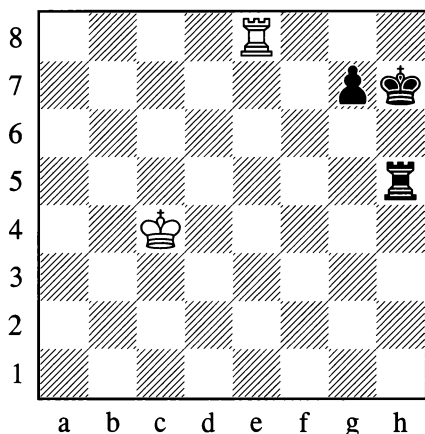
The game continued: 75...♜b5? 76.♖e4 ♗h6 77.♞g4 with a draw after so many extra moves, it might have been finished the next day...

76.♗xb3 ♜xh5

76...♗h6? would be a mistake. 77.♜h8† ♗g5 78.♜h7 with a draw.

77.♗c4

77.♗c3 loses to 77...♞d5! 78.♖e1, where Black can improve the position slowly and win. All he has to avoid is 78...g5? 79.♖e6!, when the king is cut off and it is not possible to make progress.



77...♖h3!!

The key move. The white king is cut off and will not be able to help in the defence.

78.♔d4 ♕g6! 79.♖g8

79.♔e4 ♕g5! is important. The white king is shouldered.

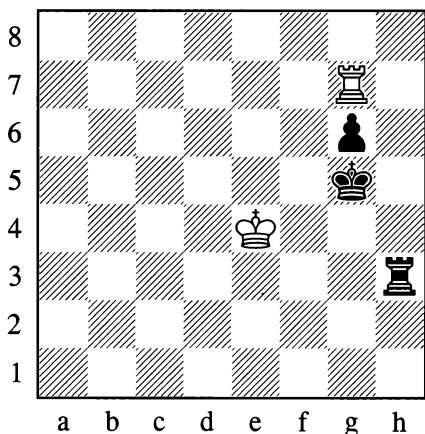
79...♔f7!

This triangulation with the king is important. It wins an important tempo to advance the g-pawn.

80.♖d8 ♔f6! 81.♖g8

81.♔e4 ♕g5! is an important detail. The black king is shouldering the white king – thus assisting in cutting it off.

81...♕g6 82.♔e4 ♕g5! 83.♖g7



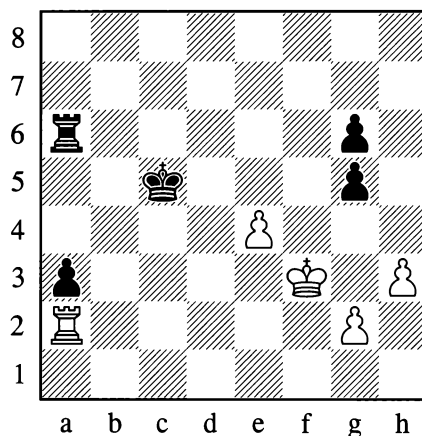
83...♖g3

Black is winning after either 84.♔e5 ♖e3†, or 84.♖g8 ♔h4.

The next example is rather deceptive. But whenever we see a race, we should look for ways to cut the king off. By now I hope you have realised that this can happen in all four directions.

Tomas Sosa – Dhulipalla Bala Chandra Prasa

Gibraltar 2019



Black won this game after mistakes from both sides:

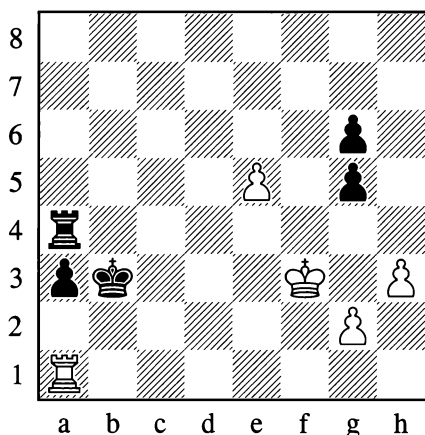
54...♔b4?

This was the most logical move in the world, but it allows White to get counterplay.

55.e5!

55.♕g4? would allow Black to cut off the king after 55...♖a5!.

55...♔b3 56.♖a1 ♖a4



57.g3?

This allows the king to be cut off and frankly loses a tempo for absolutely nothing.

White needed counterplay and could have drawn with: 57.e6! ♖f4† (57...a2 58.e7 ♖a8 59.♞e1 is a simple draw. The white rook will give lots of checks.) 58.♔g3 ♞e4 59.♞b1† ♔c2 60.♞b6 And the rook will give checks from the back.

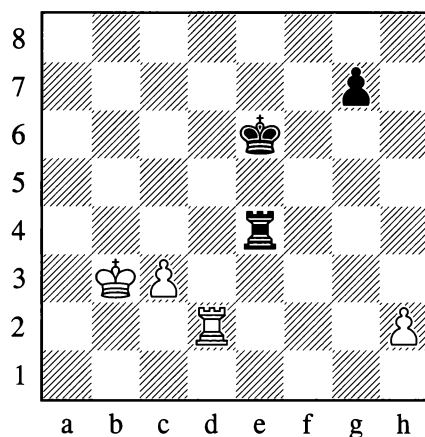
57...g4†!? 58.hxg4 a2 59.e6 ♖a6 60.♞e1 a1=♞ 61.♞xa1 ♞xa1 62.♔e4 ♔c4 63.♔e5 ♔c5 64.♔f6 ♔d6 65.g5 ♖a7 66.g4 ♞e7 67.♔xg6 ♔xe6 68.♔h6 ♔f7
0-1

Instead, Black could have won the game with 54...♞a5!!, which is threatening ...♔b4, winning. The key point is that after 55.e5, Black has 55...♞a4!, keeping the white king cut off, preparing to take the e-pawn with the king.

The final game is fantastic and no one would ever have noticed anything odd about the game, had computers not pointed out that Black missed a chance to hold. The finish was uneventful.

Alexander Donchenko – Ezra Kirk

France 2022



50...g5? 51.c4 ♔f5 52.♔b4 ♔f4 53.♔b5 ♔e3 54.♞g2 ♞e5† 55.c5 ♔d4 56.♔b6

And resistance is futile.

1-0

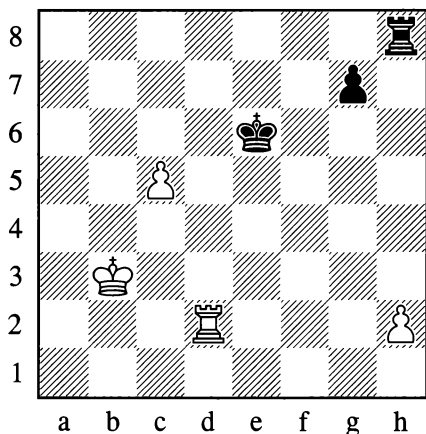
Black would have been able to draw with an unbelievable combination of giving checks from the front, as well as cutting off the white king.

50...♞h4!! 51.c4 ♞h8

Advancing with the king allows a frontal defence, with a few details, which we shall skip.

52.c5

The frontal defence is no longer possible when the pawn has crossed the middle of the board.



52...♖h4!!

The surprising defence. The white king is cut off.

53.c6 ♕e7

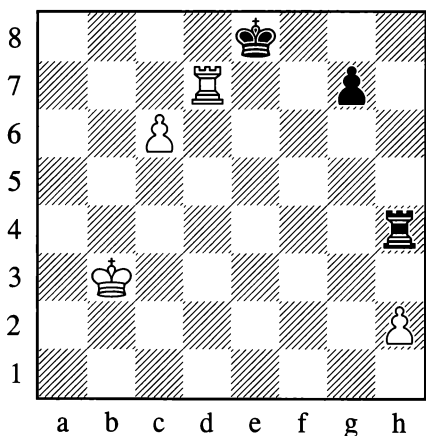
Defending against c6-c7 followed by ♖d8, as well as threatening ...♖h6 in some situations.

54.♖d7†

Advancing the pawn would see it lost.

54...♕e8!

The king is ready to block the pawn.



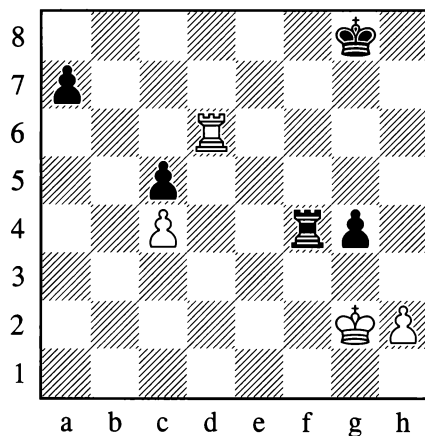
55.♖xg7 ♕d8 56.♖g2 ♕c7 57.♖c2 ♖h6

The simplest. Black draws.

The next game shows that the author is better at writing about than playing chess... Despite looking deeply into the ideas of rook endings the last few years, I still struggle with them in practice. In equal parts, overthinking and blundering were too strong for me to overcome. First off, I was confused if I should take on c4, or delay it one move. I got entirely confused and decided that I should play the simplest and take the pawn. But in reality, I should have played simply by removing options for the opponent.

Viktor Haarmark Nielsen – Jacob Aagaard

Svendborg 2023

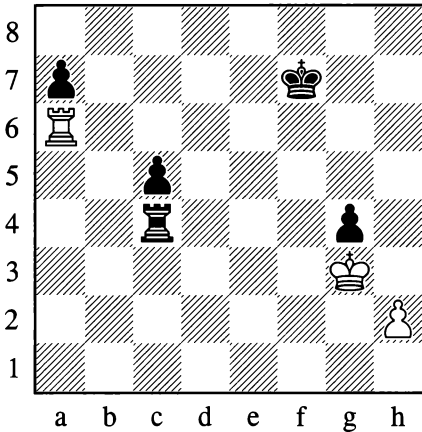


44...♖xc4?

44...♕f7! was the right move, transposing to the game.

Viktor now had a chance, but was thinking in the same way as me.

45.♖a6? ♕f7 46.♕g3



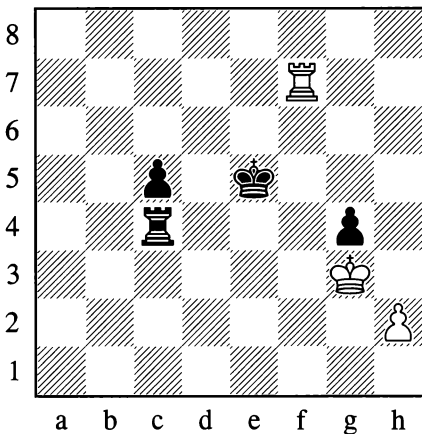
The new moment of overthinking. I wanted to play 46...♖d4, the most natural move in the world, but I was confused about the idea of ♔h4-g5-f5 and so on, with counterplay. I decided that I needed for the king to help the c-pawn first.

46...♔e7?

I had this idea that I was being really clever. In reality my brain had taken leave of its senses.

46...♖d4 would win easily. The king comes up and the pawn advances. I understood this, but being really rusty, I struggled with general decision making in the tournament.

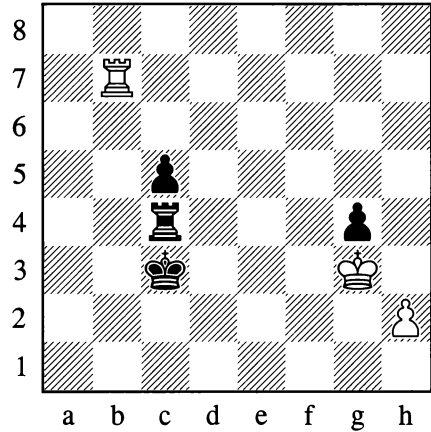
47.♞xa7† ♔e6 48.♞g7 ♔f5 49.♞f7† ♔e5



50.♞e7†!

50.♞g7 ♖e4 51.♞xg4 ♞xg4† 52.♔xg4 ♔e4! was my intention. But on move 47, not 46. From there I have nothing intelligent to share.

50...♔d5 51.♞d7† ♔c6 52.♞g7 ♔b5 53.♞b7† ♔a4 54.♞c7 ♔b4 55.♞b7† ♔c3

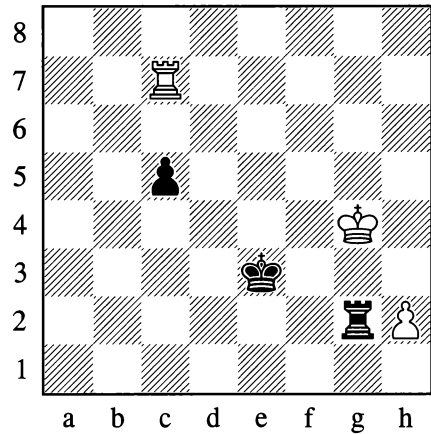


56.♞c7!

Black cannot make progress. As I refused to “take a draw”, I constructed a nice way for the game to end.

56...♔d3 57.♞c8 ♔e3 58.♞c7 ♞c2 59.♔xg4 ♞g2†

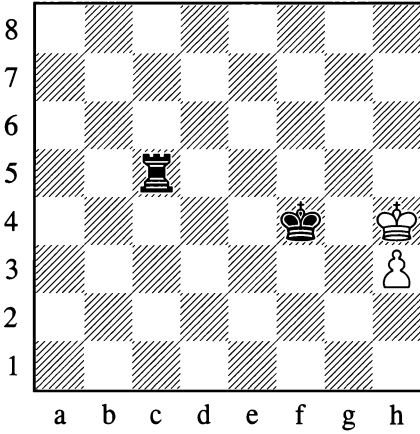
He had a sudden jump in the chair, when he realised my trick.



60.♔h3!

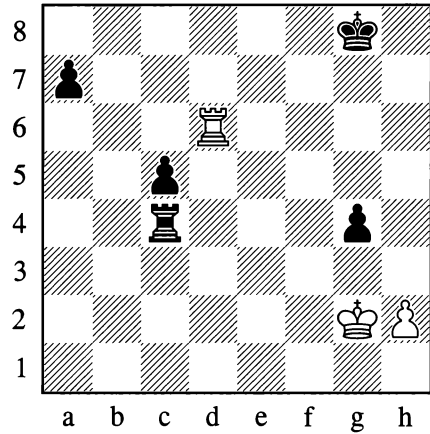
60.♔f5? ♖xh2 and Black wins. 61.♖xc5
♖h5†!

**60...♖g5 61.♔h4 ♔f4 62.h3 ♖f5 63.♖xc5
♖xc5**



Stalemate.

Let's return to the thematic moment.



The correct defensive idea was to keep the black king imprisoned. **45.♖d7!! a5 46.♖a7 a4 47.h3!** and White makes an easy draw.

Chapter 13

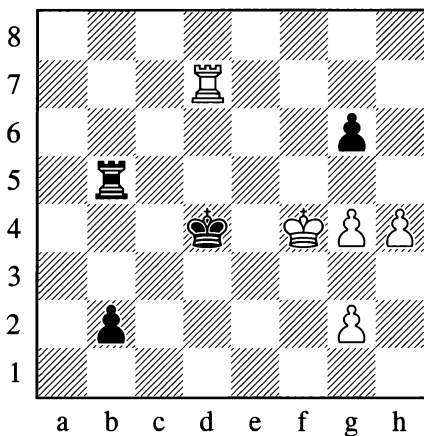
The King's Role

I have been working on this book for the last five years (with greater and greater intensity, which is why most of the examples are recent). Once the idea of it became clear in my mind, I talked to my colleague, GM John Shaw, to explain the ideas. One idea, which I thought was greater than all the others, was the answer to “what is the role of the king?” I had asked the great rook endgame specialist and enthusiast Boris Gelfand this question, and he said he did not know, and had never given any thought to this question. I said to John I had all these great ideas and concepts, and the book would be different to all previous books about rook endgames. “I have a useful observation too,” John said. “The role of the king is to deal with passed pawns.” He must have realised the horror in my face, as he fell silent. “Indeed,” I managed to push past my gritted teeth. “Indeed so...”

Joking aside, it is interesting that John and I, two people with wildly different thought processes, came up with the same key point. We all know what the role of the rook is in rook endgames. But with only two pieces each, it is rather careless to forget about the other piece entirely! When we say that the king has to deal with passed pawns, it should be understood like this. If we have the advantage, we should aim to have the king helping the pawns promote. This is the winning plan after all. If we are defending, the role of the king is most often to block or control the pawns. Obviously, there are scenarios where we have the advantage, but the king's role is defensive. As there are also positions where we are trying to hold, but the king's role is offensive. Below we will see a number of interesting examples that will hopefully make this far more tangible.

Viktor Haarmark Nielsen – Martin Haubro

Taastrup 2018

**53...♔c3??**

A move made out of pattern recognition. This seems to be the way the king is going in these positions. But that's because the rook usually is in time to block the b-pawn. Here, it is not, so the king belongs on the 8th rank, not the first.

53...♔c5! was winning easily.

54.♖d1 ♔c2

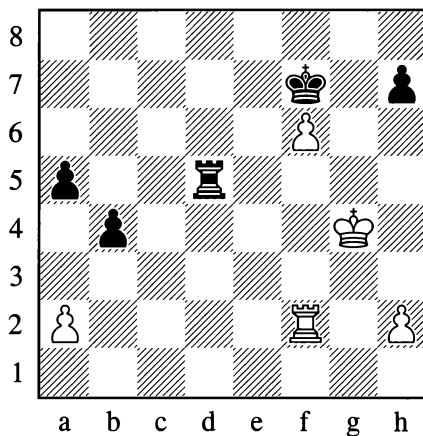
After 54...b1=♚ 55.♖xb1 ♖xb1 56.h5 we can spot that Black would win with king on c5 (and even c4), as it can race back. Instead, it will now get shouldered and White holds.

55.♖f1 b1=♚ 56.♖xb1 ♔xb1

You cannot get farther away from the action... The game ended a draw on move 67.

Evgeniya Doluhanova – Vitaliy Bernadskiy

Sitges 2023



Not knowing what to do, White missed the chance to improve the position of her king.

39.h3? a4

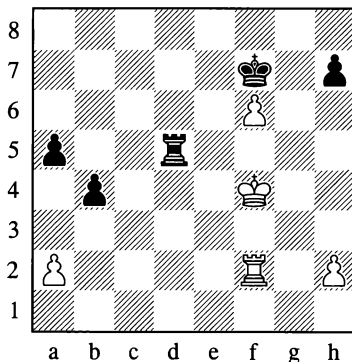
Black will win the f6-pawn anyway, as the rook is soon diverted.

**40.♖c2 ♖b5 41.♔f4 b3 42.axb3 axb3
43.♖b2 ♔xf6**

White resigned.

0-1

White could have drawn with: 39.♔f4!!



An easy move to miss for sure.

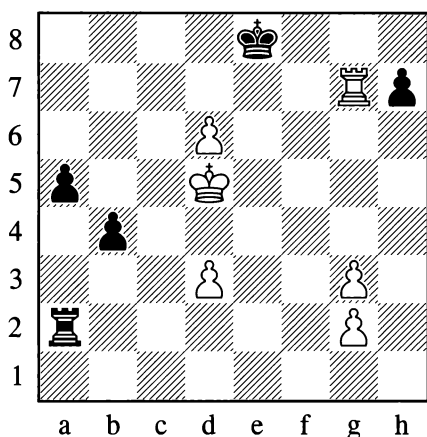
39...a4 40.♔e4 ♚b5 41.♔d4 and the draw is not far away.

And after 39...♔xf6, 40.♔e4† ♔e6 41.♚f6†! is an essential tactic. Both the a-pawn and the h-pawn will queen.

Improving on the next game should be automatic by the time you reach the end of this chapter, if not long before.

Austin Tang – Leo Lin

Internet (classical) 2021



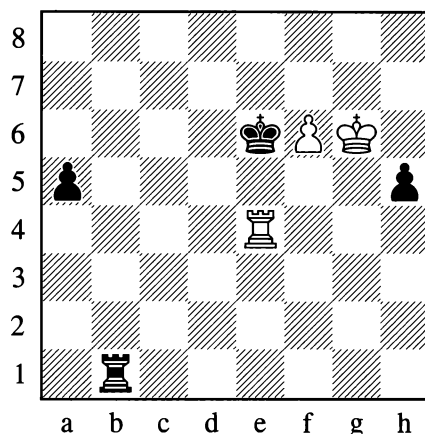
41...♚e2? 42.d7† ♔d8 43.♔d6 ♚e8
44.dxe8=♚† ♔xe8 45.♚b7 h5 46.♚b5 ♔f8
47.♚xa5 b3 48.♚b5
1-0

Instead, Black could have held the game with 41...♔d8!, when 42.d7 could be answered with 42...♔c7 and White would even have to be a bit careful.

The “simple but difficult” examples will keep coming till you find them easy... and perhaps way beyond that.

Jaime Santos Latasa – Lev Yankelevich

Sitges 2022



48...♔d5? 49.♚f4 h4 50.f7 ♚b6†

50...♚b8 could be tried, with the point that 51.f8=♚? ♚xf8 52.♚xf8 ♔c4! is a draw. But White wins after 51.♚f5†!, when the rook will capture whichever pawn the black king tries to go to defend.

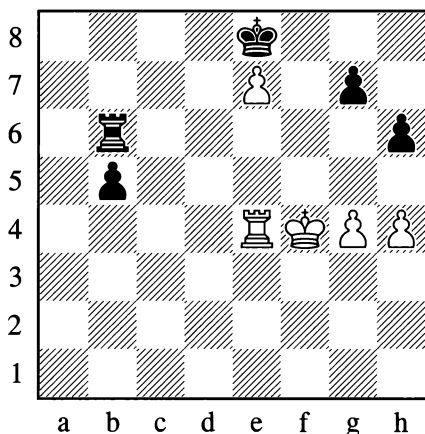
51.♔f5 ♚b8 52.♚a4 h3 53.♚xa5† ♔d6
54.♔f6 ♚h8 55.♚h5 h2 56.♚xh8 h1=♔
1-0

Black could have made the draw with 48...♔d7!. White cannot play 49.f7 without being harassed by endless checks. And on 49.♚f4, the king can run to f8 with 49...♔e8!. Put the king in front of the passed pawn if you can – it is that easy.

The next game ended in a draw after mutual mistakes.

Justin Tan – Nikola Nestorovic

Germany 2022



54. ♖b4? ♜xe7 55. ♕e5 ♝b8? 56. ♕d5! ♕f6
57. ♝f4! ♕g6 58. ♕c6! h5

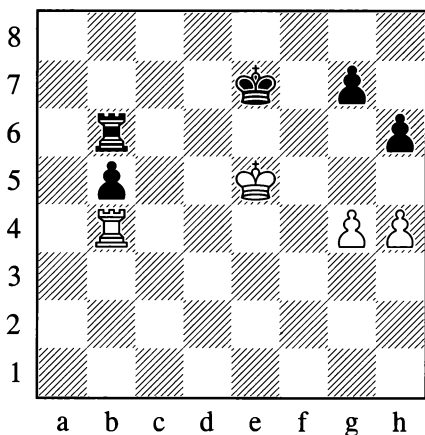
58...b4 59. ♕c7 ♝b5 60. ♕c6 is a common pattern, well worth paying attention to.

59. g5 ♝c8† 60. ♕xb5 ♝c3 61. ♝d4 ♝g3
62. ♕c5 ♝g4 63. ♝d6†

Not a difficult move. White draws.

63...♕f5 64. ♝d7 ♝xh4 65. ♝xg7 ♝g4 66. g6
h4 67. ♕d5 ♝g5 68. ♝g8 ♝xg6
½–½

Black overlooked a win with:



55...♕d7! 56. ♕d5 ♕c7

Black is preparing 57. ♕c5 ♝c6†!, where White cannot go for the pawn ending, so the king comes to b6. And if instead:

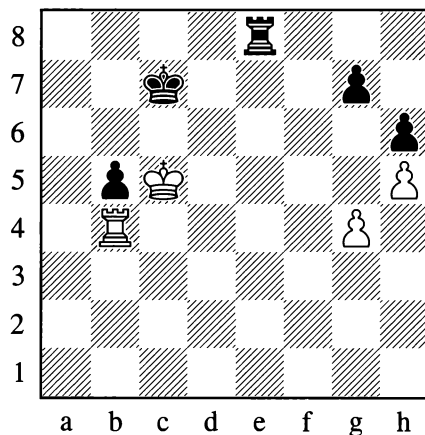
57. h5

Black would have to find:

57...♝b8!

57...♝d6† 58. ♕e5 ♝b6 59. ♕d5 only leads to repetition and the requirement to find the win again.

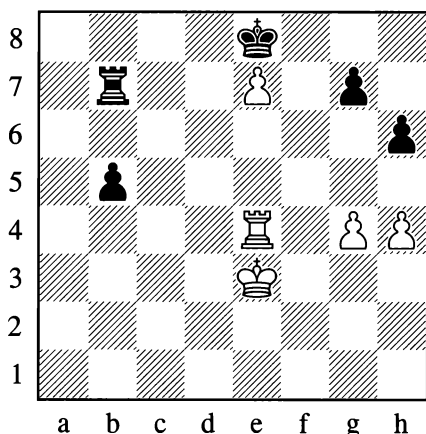
58. ♕c5 ♝e8!



Black is winning. The rook will give a check on the 5th rank, then the king comes to defend the b5-pawn and finally the rook will be free to manoeuvre, for example to a4, which will be deeply annoying for White, or g3, which is just mean.

White's defensive method is not surprising, even if his margin is slim.

54. ♕e3!! ♝b7



55.♔d3!

An important detail.

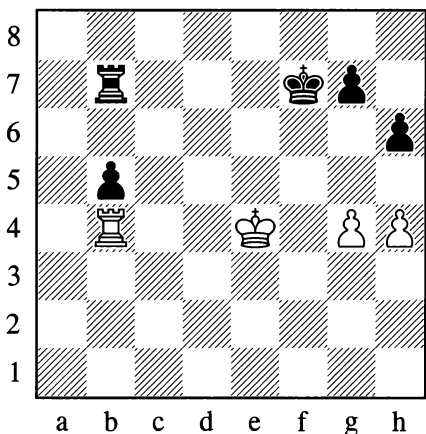
55.♔d2? would lose to 55...♞xe7 56.♞b4 ♞e5, where the rook is allowed to drop its anchor on e5 with enough time for the black king to provide support.

55...♞xe7 56.♞b4 ♞b7

Going to e5 no longer makes sense. White has 57.♔d4.

57.♔e4 ♔f7!?

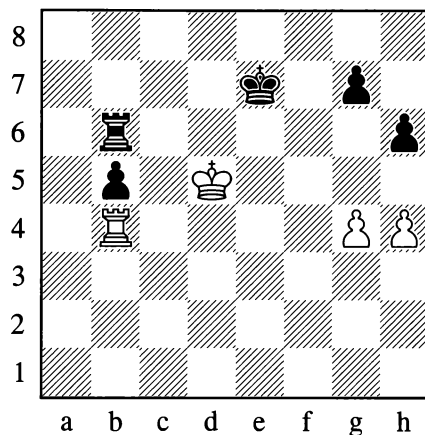
Trying to do something clever, as after 57...♔d7 58.♔d5! White makes the draw. Black is a tempo short and not able to reroute the rook to e8 as above.



58.♔f5!

The simplest.

58...♔e7 59.♔e5 ♞b6! 60.♔d5



60...♞b8!

60...♔d7 61.♔c5 ♔c7 62.♞f4 is an uneventful draw. For instance, 62...♞f6 63.♞e4 and Black gets nowhere.

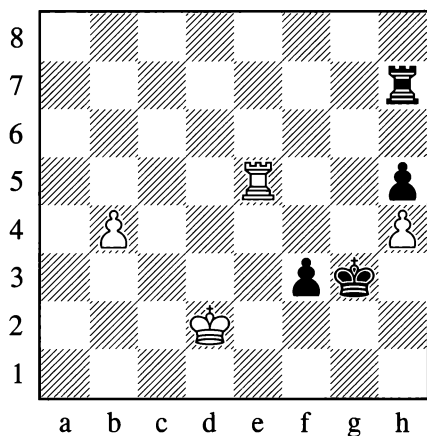
61.♞e4†! ♔d7 62.♞b4 ♞b7 63.♞f4 b4 64.♔c4 ♔e7 65.♔b3

White makes the draw, but not without a bit of discomfort...

The following position is clearly dangerous for White, but by following the program, he could have saved it.

Sergey Fedorchuk – Ivan Saric

Corsican 2013



White lost after:

54.♖g5? ♜xh4 55.♜g8 ♜e7!

The key move. The white king is cut off and Black is free to exploit his pawn advantage.

56.b5 f2 57.♜f8 ♜g3 58.♜g8 ♜h2 59.♜f8 ♜g1 60.♜g8 ♜f1 61.b6 ♜b7 62.♜g6 h4 63.♜h6 h3 64.♜e3 ♜e1 65.♜c6 ♜e7 † 66.♜d4 f1=♚ 0-1

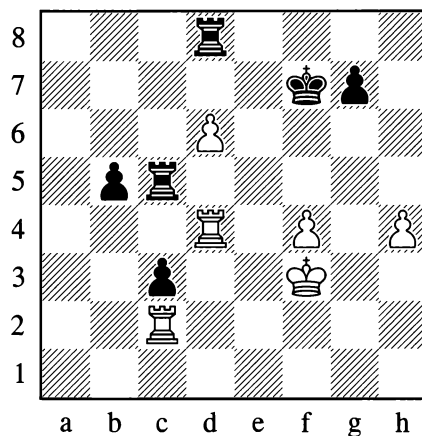
Hopefully it is not a great surprise that White had to play:

54.♜e1! To draw this endgame a pawn down relies partly on the common occurrence of draws with f- and h-pawn. **54...♜c7 55.♜g5 ♜xh4 56.♜g8 ♜c2** Trying to cut off the king, but the black king is also in trouble. **57.♜f1** Black cannot make serious progress. When he takes the b-pawn, the king comes to f2.

This theme is also decisive at the highest level.

Shakhriyar Mamedyarov – Levon Aronian

St. Louis (rapid) 2019



In this time scramble, Black gave White a chance to save the game.

43...♜e6? 44.♜e2?

A foolish check.

Instead, White could have played: **44.d7!** The game will end in a draw after either **44...♜c7 45.♜e2 ♜f7 46.♜c2**, or **44...♜xd7 45.♜e2 †**.

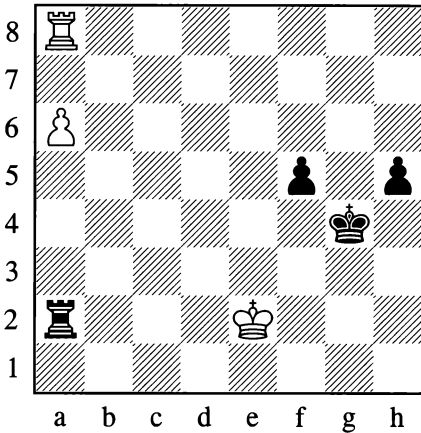
44...♜d7 45.♜d1 ♜c6 0-1

You will not be surprised that the winning move was: **43...♜e8!!**, when Black wants to play **...♜d7** and **...♜dc8**, and just wins.

The way for White to hold in the next example is not too complicated and should look familiar. But the winning lines after ineffective defence are spectacular.

Damian Lewtak – Ihor Samunenkov

Piestany 2022

**70.♔e1? f4 71.a7?!**

A hopeless defence. White could still make the win difficult for Black.

71.♕f1!

This would lose to the idea we saw above, but only after a lot of complications and accuracy.

71...♕g3!

71...♕f3? 72.♕g1 h4 73.a7 would allow White to escape with a draw. The rook is stuck on a8, but so is the king on f3. Black cannot make progress.

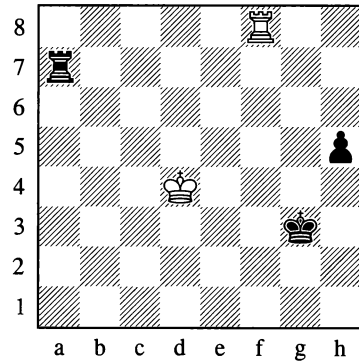
72.a7

The check is useless, as Black would play 72...♕f3! threatening mate, thus winning the a-pawn.

72...♖a1† 73.♕e2 f3† 74.♕e3 ♖a3†

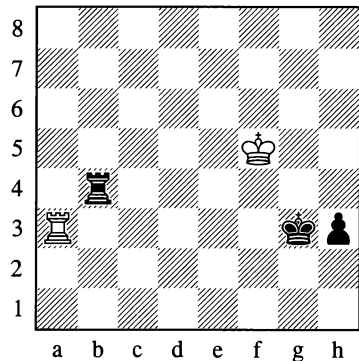
The f-pawn decides the game. White has to give checks all the way.

75.♕d4 f2 76.♖g8† ♕h2 77.♖f8 ♖xa7 78.♖xf2† ♕g3 79.♖f8

**79...♖a3!!**

The key move. In line with our theme, the white king is unable to participate in the fight and Black wins – if not easily, then at least slowly...

80.♖g8† ♕f3 81.♖f8† ♕g2 82.♖g8† ♖g3 83.♖h8 ♖g4†! 84.♕e5 h4 85.♖a8 h3 86.♕f5 ♖b4 87.♖a2† ♕g3 88.♖a3†

**88...♕h4! 89.♖a2 ♖g4 90.♖f2 ♖g2**

And things are going in the right direction...

71...♕f3!

This too should be familiar too.

72.♕d1 h4 73.♕e1 h3 74.♖h8 ♖xa7 75.♖xh3† ♕g2 76.♖h8 ♖e7†!

And it is time to resign...

77.♕d2 f3 78.♕d3 f2 79.♖g8† ♕f1 80.♖b8 ♖f7 81.♕e3 ♕g2

0-1

White needed to seek the right place to block the pawns. 76...f3

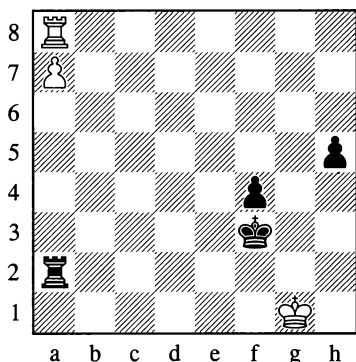
70.♔f1! f4 71.♔g1!

The only move. The king is perfectly placed on g1. Any ...♔f3 move would come without the threat of mate, which is the key point, but the king is also closer to the h-pawn, which is not insignificant.

71.♞g8†? ♔f3 we already know.

But we should take pleasure from the key points arising after:

71.a7? ♔f3 72.♔g1

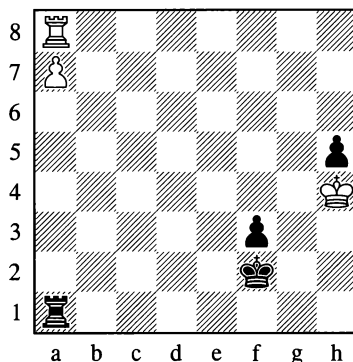


72...♞a4!

The rook can go anywhere on the a-file, with the exception of the corner:

72...♞a1†? 73.♔h2 is a position of mutual zugzwang. 73...h4 (It is too late for waiting moves. For example: 73...♞a5 74.♔h3! ♞a2 75.♞h8 ♞xa7 76.♞xh5 is a theoretical draw. But simpler is 75.♞b8! followed by a lot of checks from a distance.) 74.♞b8 ♞xa7 75.♔h3!! We now see the big difference from the main line. The h-pawn is hanging! Was it still on h5, Black would be winning. 73.♔h1 ♔f2 74.♔h2 ♞a2! 75.♔h3 ♞a1 76.♔h4

76.♔h2 ♔f3! would put White in zugzwang. The a-pawn is lost and the endgame with f- and h-pawn is lost too, as the king is misplaced on h2.



The astonishing thing is that this position is mutual zugzwang. Black is only winning because White cannot play 77.♔h3 due to mate.

Now he loses after:

77.♔xh5 ♞a4! 78.♔h6 ♞a5!

When the king either has to go to g6, when Black gets a free square for his king, or to h7, when the a-pawn would fall with check. The variation from here is longer than you would suspect. Black will have time to play ...♔f1 without losing the f-pawn. Then ...f2 and soon after be able to dominate the white king in the same way, as the king cannot occupy the e-, f- or g-files without providing cover for the black king. And on h7 there is the check on a7 if the rook moves.

79.♔h7 ♔f1 80.♔g7 f2 81.♔h8

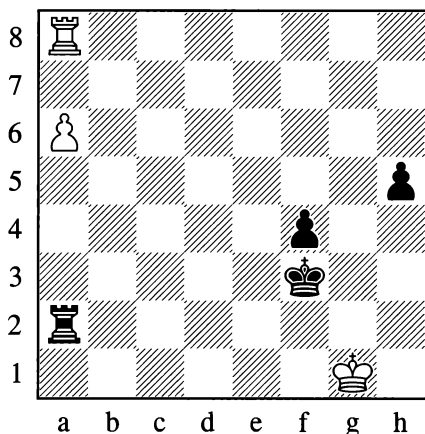
This was all I could come up with. But Black can lose a move, whereas White cannot.

81...♞a1

Zugzwang and wins.

71...♔f3

After 71...♔g3 72.♞g8† ♔f3, White would draw with both 73.♞g6 and 73.♞a8.



72.♖a7!!

It is important for White that he will not get into zugzwang. This specific move we will see often in the chapter on Anticipation (see page 273).

72...h4 73.♔h1

73.♖a8!? also holds.

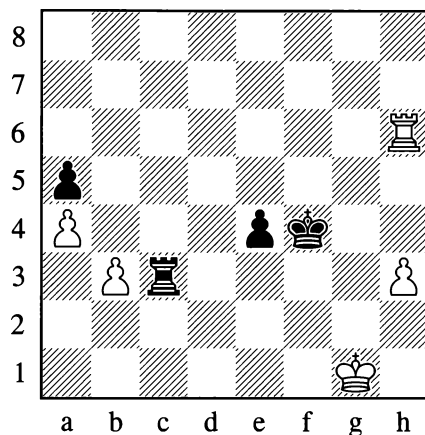
73...♔f2 74.♖f7 ♜f3 75.a7

White makes a draw, as the black rook is tied to preventing white from promoting the pawn.

The next example shall see the black king serve a double role of assisting the passer and doing a bit of shouldering. I don't think Black ever suspected that he was winning at the point where we join the next example, even if he was trying to create chances.

Jose Francisco Veiga – Dominik Horvath

Chennai Olympiad 2022



44...♖xb3?

44...♔g3? 45.♔f1 ♔f3 46.♖f6! ♔e3 47.h4 White would have enough counterplay to make the draw.

44...♔e3? 45.♖h5 ♔d3 46.♖d5! also holds. Either the black king has to block the pawn, or the white king will.

45.♖h5 ♔e3 46.♖d5 ♖d3 47.♖xa5 ♔d2 48.♖e5 e3 49.h4 ♖d4 50.h5 e2 51.♔f2 ♖f4† 52.♔g3 ♖f5 53.♖xe2!†

The usual escape route.

53...♔xe2 54.♔g4 ♖a5 55.h6 ♔e3 56.h7 ♖xa4† 57.♔f5 ♖a8 58.♔g6 ♔f4 59.♔g7 ½–½

The winning idea is often seen, but can be easy to miss (see also Sachdev – Punsalan, page 180). The idea is to get the king to where it longs to be (e2), while trying to win a tempo by pushing the opponent's king away.

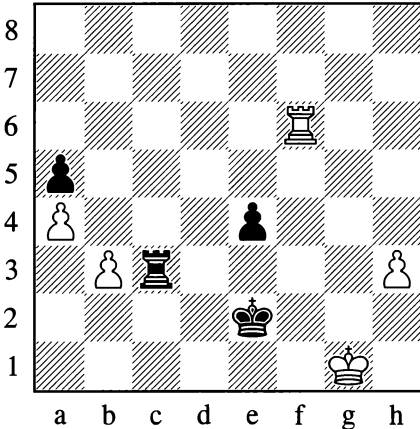
44...♔f3!

Threatening ...♖c1†.

45. ♖f6†

No other moves make sense.

45... ♕e2



46. h4 e3

46... ♖c5! would also win.

47. h5 ♕d2 48. ♖d6† ♖d3

Black wins, for instance:

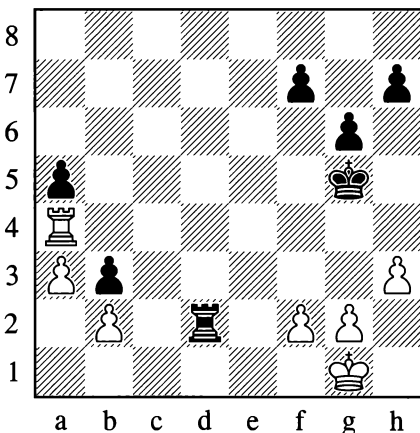
49. ♖e6 ♖d5! 50. h6 e2 51. h7 ♖d8

And it is all over.

The next example is surprisingly simple.

Hannes Stefansson – Ante Brkic

Chennai Olympiad 2022



The game was drawn after:

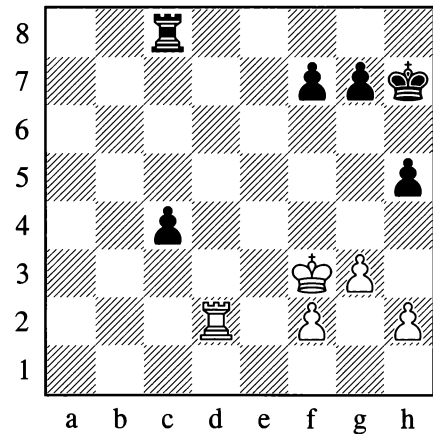
32... ♖xb2? 33. ♖xa5† ♕f4 34. ♖a4† ♕e5
35. ♖b4 h5 36. g4 hxg4 37. hxg4 f5 38. gxf5

Instead, Black could have played 32... ♕f5!! 33. ♖xa5† ♕e4, followed by eliminating the b2-pawn and winning the game. White does not have to take on a5, but Black will find it easier to improve his position until the moment when ... ♖xb2 is stronger, or White finds it impossible not to take on a5.

First principles. Use the lower value piece to block the pawn. Don't use the higher value piece.

Sandipan Chanda – Le Quang Liem

Xingtai 2019



40. ♖c2?

A passive move. The rook is a poor blockader and White loses the game without any chance.

40... ♕g6 41. ♕e4 ♕g5 42. h3

Sandipan is trying "something", but there is nothing.

42. f3 is what White would have liked to work, but after 42... h4! 43. ♕d4 hxg3 44. hxg3 f5 45. ♖xc4 ♖xc4† 46. ♕xc4 f4 Black wins.

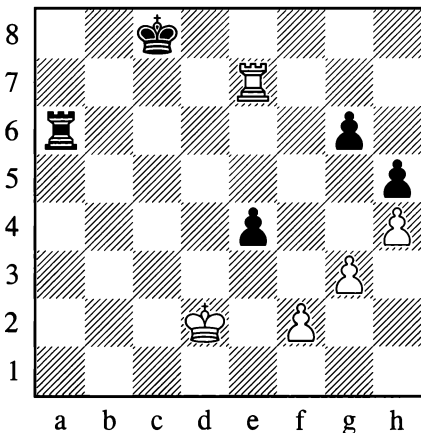
42...c3 43.♔e5 f6† 44.♔e6 h4 45.f4† ♔g6
 46.g4 ♖e8† 47.♔d5 ♖e3 48.♖h2 f5 49.♔d4
 ♖g3 50.g5 ♖f3 51.♔e5 ♖e3† 52.♔d5 ♖d3†
 53.♔e5 ♖d2 54.♖h1 ♖e2† 55.♔d6 ♖e4
 56.♖f1 c2 57.♖c1 ♖xf4 58.♖xc2 ♖f3 59.♔e5
 ♔xg5 60.♖h2 ♖e3† 61.♔d4 ♔f4
 0-1

40.♔e2! was the principled move. If the Black king comes to g6, White would give a check and put the king on d2. Otherwise, the white king will block the c-pawn, as well as attack it, trying down the black rook. 40...c3 is thus the critical try. But after 41.♖c2 ♔g6 42.♔d3 ♔f5 43.f3, the arising pawn ending is a draw.

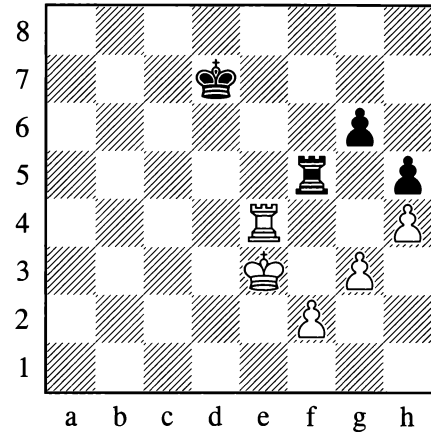
The next example can appear a bit more abstract at first glance, but the principle is the same. Aronian clearly seemed adrift and soon ended up in a lost position, showing the value of the idea presented in this chapter.

Anton Demchenko – Levon Aronian

Riga 2021



53...♖f6? 54.♔e2 ♔d8 55.♖xe4 ♔d7
 56.♔e3 ♖f5



57.g4??

Splitting pawns is as bad as it can get.

57.♖f4! ♖e5† 58.♔f3

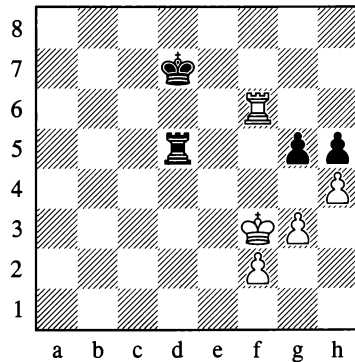
This was the most principled way to play. White is threatening ♖d4† followed by ♖e4, when the pawn ending is winning, as well as ♖f4-f6, attacking the g-pawn. Black has to allow something bad.

58...♖d5

58...g5 59.hxg5 ♖xg5 60.♔g2! wins without too many difficulties.

59.♖f6 g5

White is winning in more ways than one.



The most convincing is brutal:
 60.♔e4 ♖a5 61.hxg5 ♖xg5 62.♖f5 ♖g4†
 63.♔f3

The h-pawn falls and White wins.

57...hxc4 58.♖xc4

Black would even be drawing in the f- and h-pawn endgame, but Black does not have to let go of the g-pawn.

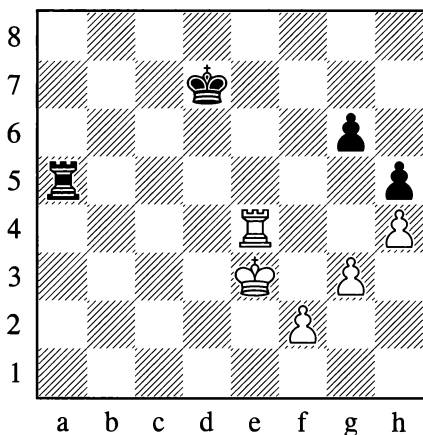
**58...♖h5 59.♖e4 ♔d6 60.f3 g5 61.hxc5
♖xc5 62.♔f4 ♖g8 63.♔f5 ♖f8† 64.♔g4
♔d5 65.♖e7 ♖g8† 66.♔f4 ♖f8† 67.♔e3
♔d6 68.♖e4 ♖f6 69.♖e8 ♔d7 70.♖e5 ♔d6
71.♖e4 ♖f7 72.♖e8 ♖e7† 73.♖xe7 ♔xe7
74.♔f4 ♔f6**

½–½

The drawing method is unsurprising.

53...♔d8! 54.♖xc4

Sooner or later White has to take the pawn.

54...♔d7 55.♔e3 ♖a5

White cannot improve his position without allowing ...♔e7, when Black equalises.

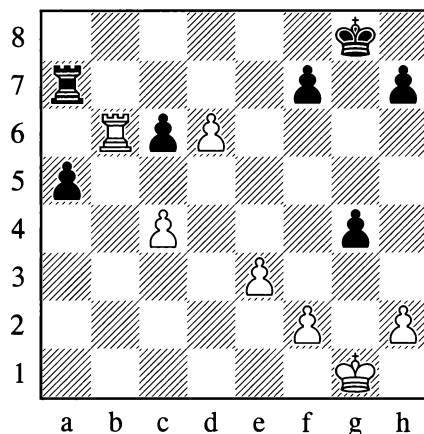
56.f3 ♖b5 57.g4 ♖a5 58.g5 ♖b5

This would not make serious progress for White either, but it is all I can think of.

The next example is equally formulaic.

Shant Sargsyan – Rinat Jumabayev

Moscow 2019



Black lost without any complications after:

31...a4? 32.♖xc6 a3 33.♖c7! ♖a8 34.d7

Black resigned.

1–0

We should also cover:

31...c5?

This loses in longer and more complicated lines. The following variation is rather fun, though not entirely forced.

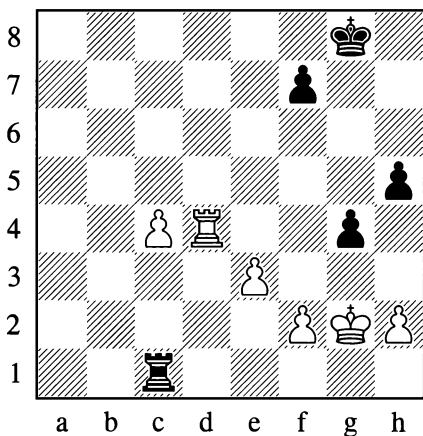
32.♖c6 ♖d7 33.♖xc5

33.♔g2!? also wins.

33...♖xd6 34.♖xa5 ♖d1† 35.♔g2

Black does not have time for ...♖c1, which would hold if there was not a check on g5.

35...h6!? 36.♖d5 ♖c1 37.♖d4 h5



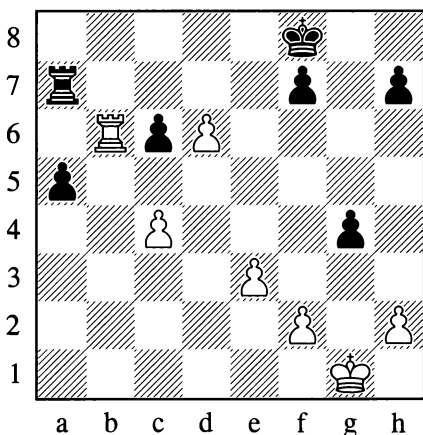
38.♖d5! ♖xc4 39.♖xc4 ♔g7 40.♔g7 ♖g6
41.♖h4 f5 42.♖h3! f4† 43.♖xf4

White is winning on account of:

43...gxh3 44.f5†!

The principled move is the same as always.

31...♔f8!

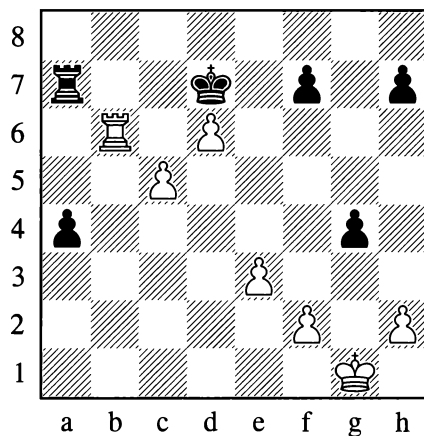


32.♖xc6

Black draws easily after 32.♖b8† ♔g7 33.♖c8 and now either 33...a4, or 33...♔f6 34.♖xc6 ♔e6 and only ten advancing the a-pawn.

32...♔e8! 33.♖b6 a4 34.c5 ♔d7!

34...a3? would lose to 35.c6.



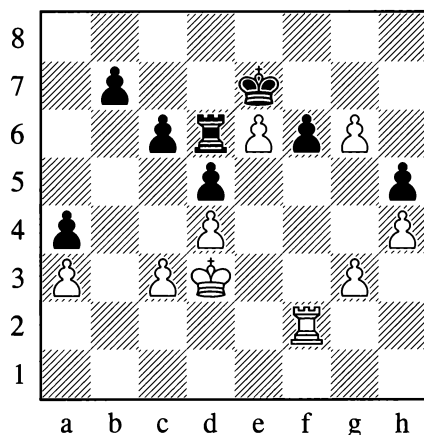
35.♖b1 ♔c6

Black draws.

The next example is more complicated, but at its core, it is no different.

Dion Krivenko – Lars Johan Brodtkorb

Fagernes 2020



Black lost after a continuation that seemed quite natural, but was simply bad.

41...♔xe6? 42.g4! hxg4 43.h5 f5 44.h6 ♔f6

The king is not good at controlling pawns from the side. This is not exception.

45.g7 ♖d8 46.♞xf5†!

Black resigned.

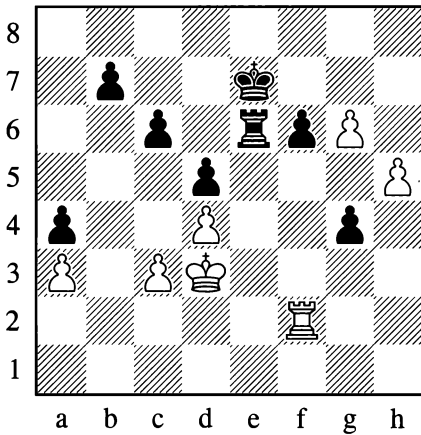
1–0

The drawing variation is nothing short of magical.

41...♞xe6! 42.g4!?

42.♞f5 forced Black to find 42...♔f8! 43.♞xh5 ♔g7! 44.♞h7† ♔xg6 45.♞xb7 ♞e1, with a counterattack on the g-pawn, when Black draws.

42...hxg4 43.h5



The white pawns are menacing. The solution is as beautiful as can be.

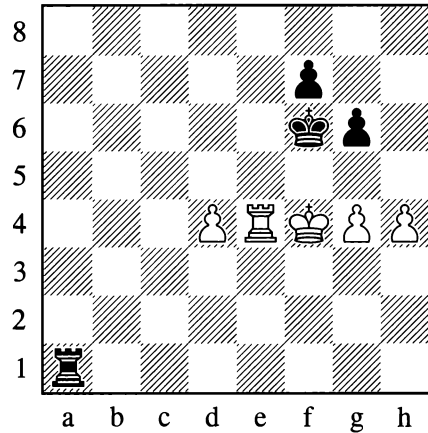
43...♔f8! 44.h6 ♔g8! 45.♞h2 ♔h8! 46.h7 ♞e8 47.♞h4 f5

Black holds after another few moves.

In the following example, the black rook is already active, but the king can be improved. Black did not sense this.

Sam Shankland – John Burke

St. Louis 2021



51...♞f1†? 52.♔e3 ♞e1† 53.♔d3 ♞a1 54.♔c4 ♔g7 55.g5!

Controlling the black king.

55...f5 56.♞e7† ♔f8 57.♞e6 ♞a4† 58.♔c5 ♔g7 59.d5!

The h-pawn is not that important.

59...♞xh4 60.d6 ♔f7 61.d7 ♞h8 62.♔d6 1–0

As said, Black needed to improve the king.

51...♔g7 52.d5

52.g5 ♔f8 53.d5 ♞d1 would also be OK for Black. White cannot play 54.♔e5 without allowing 54...♔e7, when Black survives.

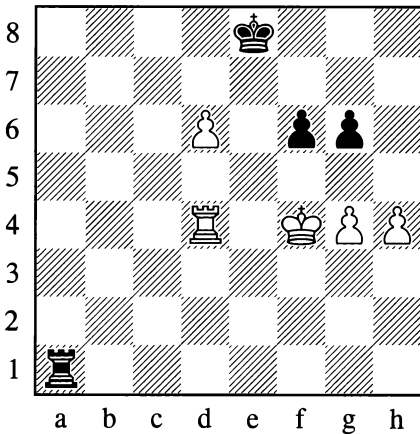
52...f6!

The king would be useless on f8, even inviting a winning check on e7 in some lines. But on f7, it is ready to jump into the action.

53.♞d4

53.d6 ♞d1 is also harmless. Another side-effect of 52...f6!.

53...♔f7 54.d6 ♕e8



Black holds.

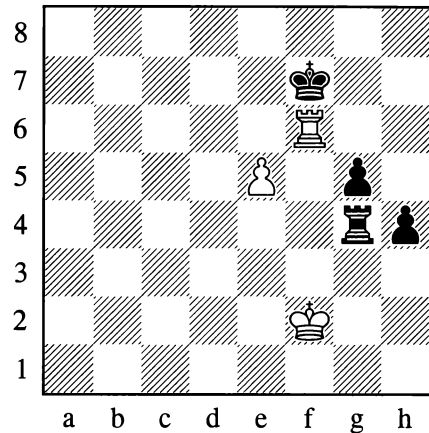
The king helping to win

Let's move on from the positions where the king has to keep the passed pawns under control in a defensive setting and look at positions where the side with the advantage is looking for a way to make the most out of his handling of the king.

In the first example, Black has an extra pawn and high hopes of winning with his connected passed pawns. But as we shall talk about in the chapter on Connected Passed Pawns, it is rare that the pawns can be promoted without the help of both the king and the rook.

Vladimir Malakhov – Mikhail Demidov

Sochi 2015



53...♔e7?

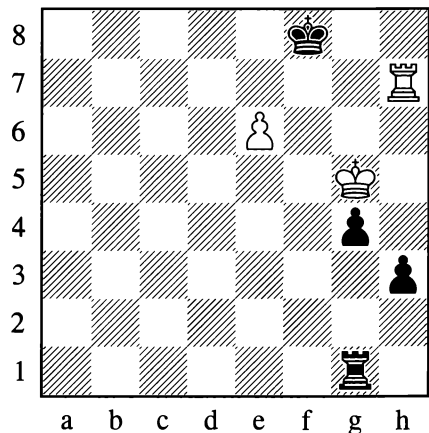
Passive, giving White a chance to hold. Which he did, although there was a little bump in the road.

54.♕f3 ♖a4

54...♖g3† 55.♕e4 h3 56.♖h6 followed by ♕f5 would give White sufficient counterplay to secure the draw.

55.♖g6 ♖a3† 56.♕g4 ♖g3† 57.♕f5 h3 58.♖h6 g4 59.♖h7† ♕f8 60.e6 ♖g1 61.♕g5?

61.e7† was the right way to go, 8 with a draw like the game.



61...♖g2?

Black had a surprising win.

After the accurate 61...♖e8! 62.e7 ♔d7! White is too late to create counterplay. For example, 63.♖f4 ♖g2 and the pawns will cruise to the bottom rank.

62.e7† ♖e8 63.♖f6 ♖f2† 64.♖e6 ♖e2†
65.♖d6 h2 66.♖h8† ♖f7 67.♖h7† ♖e8
68.♖h8† ♖f7 69.♖h7† ♖f6 70.♖h6† ♖f7
71.♖h7† ♖f6

½–½

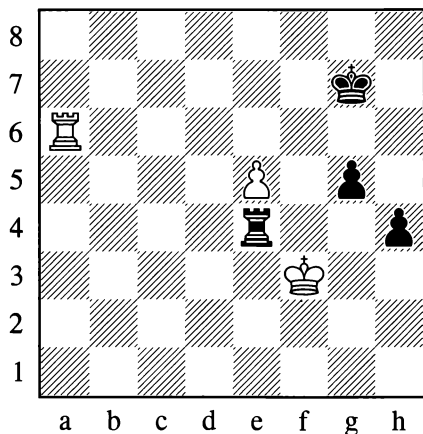
Black needed to involve the king in the support of the pawns in order to play for a win. We shall see this in many examples elsewhere in this book, for example in the chapter on Promoting Passed Pawns (page 115), so here we shall keep it to just this and the next example.

53...♖g7!

The points of this move are several.

54.♖a6

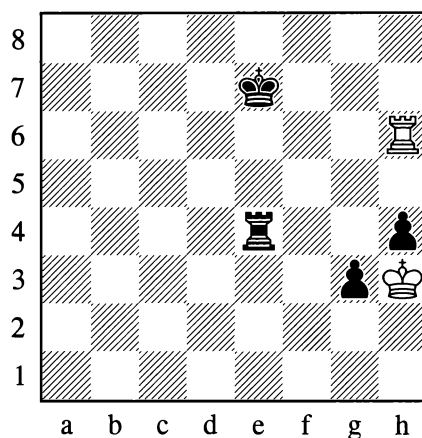
54.♖f3 would now lose to 54...♖g3†. A key point is that after 55.♖e4 h3, the white rook cannot get to h6. It may feel like a small way for the black king to help, but it is sufficient. 55.♖f2 ♖a3

54...♖e4 55.♖f3**55...♖f4†**

55...♖xe5? 56.♖g4 would allow the white king to smother the black pawns and paralyse Black. With the king out of play, it will not be possible for him to make progress.

56.♖g2 g4 57.♖d6 ♖e4 58.e6 ♖f6 59.e7†
♖xe7 60.♖h6 g3

60...h3†? 61.♖g3 is a draw again.

61.♖h3**61...♖g4!**

A nice trick. If the rook is taken, the g-pawn promotes.

62.♖g2 ♖f7

Black wins by a series of zugzwangs. The white rook cannot leave the h-file, as ...h3† would win on the spot.

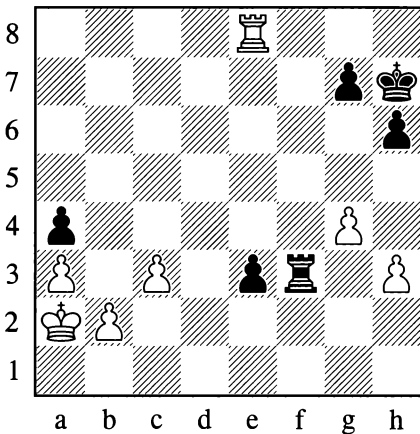
63.♖h8 ♖e6 64.♖h5 ♖f6 65.♖h8 ♖e5
66.♖h5† ♖d4

The king will come to assist the promotion of the pawns. Black wins.

The final example of this chapter is terribly complex. I believe that the key ideas from earlier are clearly visible, but I shall not point to them at every turn.

Ma Qun – Xu Yinglun

China 2022

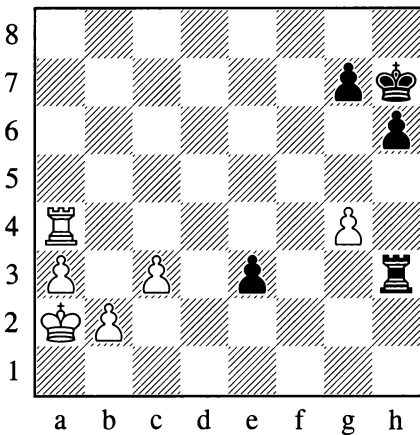


37.♖e4?

This looks entirely convincing, but offers Black a fantastic chance to save the game.

37.c4! was best, when the a-pawn becomes seriously weak. 37...♗g6 loses to 38.c5 ♗f7 39.♖e4. And 37...♖f4 38.c5 ♖c4 39.b4 axb3† 40.♗xb3 ♖xc5 41.♖xe3 also wins for White.

37...♖xh3 38.♖xa4



38...h5?

38...♗g6! 39.♖e4 h5

Threatening ...h4, which would give sufficient counterplay. It is hard to deal with two passed pawns...

40.gxh5†

As said, 40.a4 h4 41.a5 ♖f3! with the idea ...♖f6 gives Black enough counterplay.

40...♗f5!!

This is the surprising move. We have talked a lot about endgames being about promoting pawns. The e-pawn is the cornerstone of the black defensive action (which is offence), it does not matter if he is two or three pawns down.

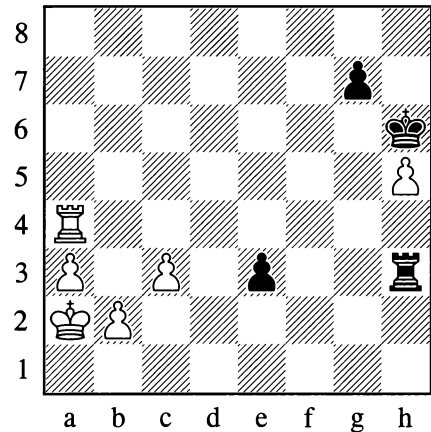
41.♖e7 ♗f4 42.a4

42.♖xg7 with the idea to give up the rook is perhaps the sensible choice. White will be able to set up the triple pawn fortress discussed on page 99.

42...♖xh5 43.b4 ♖e5 44.♖f7† ♗e4

White is the one who has to hold the draw. He can and he will. But this is still a success for Black.

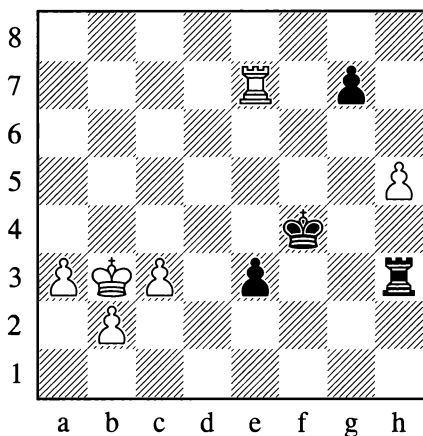
39.gxh5 ♗h6



40.♖e4

40.♖g4! ♖xh5 41.♖e4 ♖h3 42.a4 would have won a tempo and decided the game quickly. The h-pawn does not serve much as a barrier for the advance of the g-pawn, as the e-pawn is providing all of the counterplay. But at move 40 such finesses are hard to see and even harder to commit to.

40...♔g5 41.♔b3 ♕f5 42.♞e7 ♕f4



43.♞f7?

43.♔c4! would have won the game. White wins quickly after 43...♔f3 44.♔d3 and 43...♞xh5 44.♔d4. And after 43...♞h1 44.b4 ♕f3 45.a4 e2 46.a5 e1=♚ 47.♞xe1 ♞xe1 48.b5 the pawns are running away...

This was by no means easy to calculate, but the risks White is taking are small, so it should have been tried, even if Ma Qun did not feel in complete control.

43...♔e4 44.♞e7†

White is not really trying to win, but also seems to have problems letting go of hope. The game continued for 20 needless moves.

44.♔c4 ♞xh5 45.♞e7† ♕f3 46.♔d4 e2 White has to hurry up forcing a draw with 47.♞f7†, as he would lose after 47.a4? ♞h1.

44...♔d3 45.♞d7† ♕e4 46.♞xg7 ♞xh5 47.♔c4 e2 48.♞g1 ♞h8 49.a4 ♞c8† 50.♔b4 ♕d3 51.a5 ♞b8† 52.♔a3 ♞b5 53.b4 ♕xc3 54.♞c1† ♕d2 55.♞b1 ♕c3 56.♞c1† ♕d2 57.♞b1 ♕c3 58.♞c1† ♕d2 59.♞h1 ♕c3 60.♞h3† ♕d4 61.♞h4† ♕d3 62.♞h3† ♕d4 63.♞h4† ♕d3 64.♞h3† ♕d4 65.♞h4† 1/2-1/2

As we are progressing in this book, the examples are becoming more and more complex. I hope that at the same time you will see that the ideas remain simple and applicable. The king's role is often to make sure that the rook can be active. This means that the king will defend against dangerous passed pawns, often by blocking them, or helping the pawns advancing. Generally, the king is useful when the fight is local, while the rook is strongest when it is working from afar (Checking Distance, page 163) and when it can shift from one side to the other and thus often take split responsibilities, time permitting. Here we looked mainly at the defensive roles the king can play. In the next chapter, we will focus on the moments when we need to activate the king.

Chapter 14

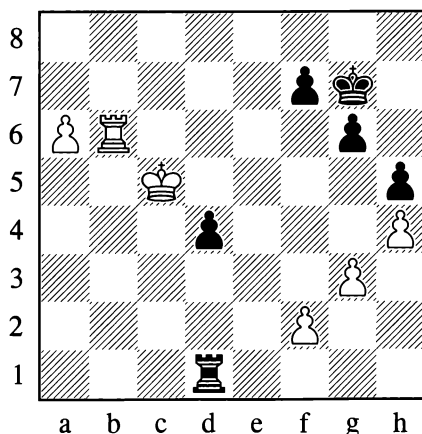
King Activity

Following up on a shadowy theme from the previous chapter, we shall now look at situations where the rook is already active and the chances can only be improved by activating the king. This may seem basic – and I want it to! Because the implementation of basic ideas in an exceedingly complex setting is what we are doing here.

The first example is glorious. Because it is funny.

**J. Deepan Chakkravarthy –
Balasubramani Sekar**

Kolkata 2018



45. ♖b2?

A decent-looking move, similar to many situations we have seen in this book.

45. ♖b3! was stronger. After 45... d3 46. ♔b6 White is winning. The key point is that the d-pawn is eliminated. After 46... d2 47. ♖b2, Black will have to move the rook and White simply wins.

45... ♜a1 46. ♔b6 d3 47. a7

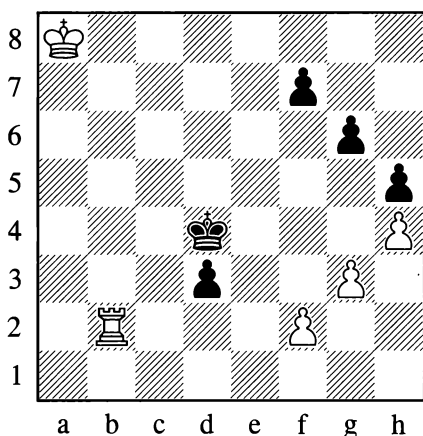
1-0

Black resigned, which is easy to understand. He is about to lose his rook and had been lost for a while, so the fact that the position is a draw is entirely surprising. If he had been forced to play on, he would have made the draw easily:

47...♔f6! 48.♔b7

48.♞d2 is met with continuous checks. If the white king hides on a8, White will even lose.

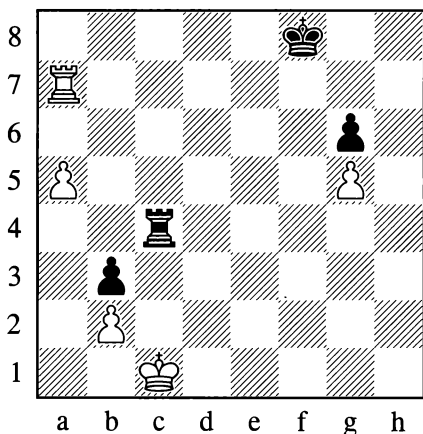
48...♔e5 49.a8=♞ ♞xa8 50.♔xa8 ♔d4



The black king arrives just in time to make a draw in the pawn ending. It helps that the white king is as far away as can be.

Petro Golubka – Witold Klepek

Krakow 2020



The game ended in a draw quickly.

50.♔d1? ♞c2 51.a6 ♞xb2 52.♞b7 ♞a2 53.a7 ♞a1† 54.♔d2 b2

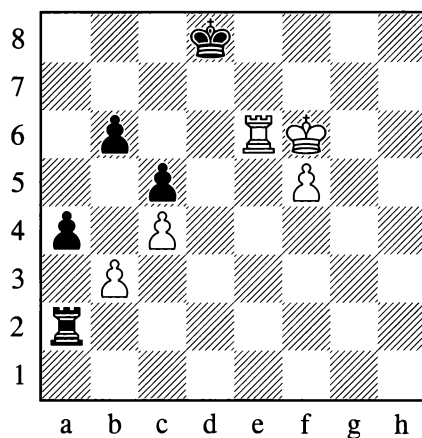
½–½

White would have won easily after 50.♔d2! ♞c2† 51.♔d3 ♞xb2 52.♔c3, when Black cannot both keep an eye on the a-pawn and defend the b-pawn. The main loser is of course the black king, which is entirely cut off.

In the next example, White goes for a pawn advantage, but this was not enough to win.

Alexander Ipatov – Levente Vajda

Golden Sands 2012



67.♞xb6 a3!

Creating a passed pawn, which is what will hold the game.

68.♞b5 ♞b2 69.♞xc5 ♞xb3 70.♞a5 ♔d7 71.♔g7 ♞g3† 72.♔f7 ♔c6

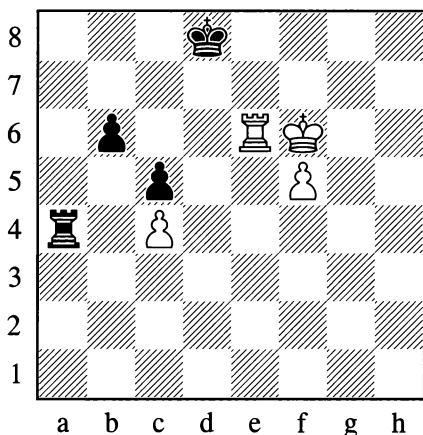
This position is a draw, though several mistakes were made before this was the result on move 109.

We have discussed all the aspects of the winning line earlier in this book. We need to make the

most out of our most important asset, which is the passed pawn. The rook belongs behind the passer, which also means we want to make it hard for the opponent's rook to get there. And we want to cut off the opponent's king, so it cannot help with the defence, as it would be the best piece to do so.

67.bxa4! ♖xa4

67...♔d7 68.♔f7 ♖xa4 69.♞e4 wins without too much trouble. White can always play ♞e7† at the right moment.



68.♔e5!!

The key point. Black cannot take on c4, as the f-pawn would sail straight to the end. And at the same time there is no time for ...♖a1, as White would take the b-pawn under much better circumstances.

68.♞e4 does not work now, because of 68...b5!.

68...♔d7 69.f6 ♖a1

Now forced. White is totally in control and can win in a lot of ways. The simplest would be to win a second pawn.

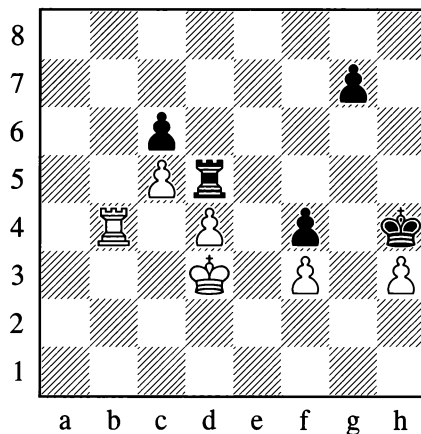
70.♞xb6 ♖f1 71.♞d6† ♔e8 72.♔d5 ♖f5† 73.♔e6 ♖f1 74.♞c6

Black can only resign.

Let's see a high-level example.

Levon Aronian – Maxim Matlakov

Tbilisi (3.5) 2017



Matlakov lost because he was trying to make the king do all the work.

50...♔g3? 51.♞b6 ♔xf3 52.♞xc6 g5 53.♞g6 1-0

Black could have supported the king by making something out of the rook: letting it take the defensive role...

50...♞d7!!

50...♞d8? would not work. After 51.♞b7, White wins.

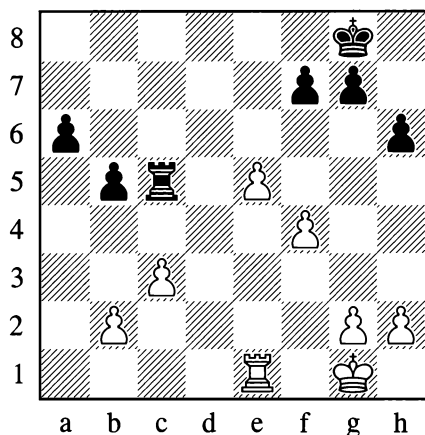
51.♞b6 ♞c7

Black is fine. He will win the h-pawn and the king will provide counterplay.

The key point of this chapter is that it is our instinct to focus on the possibilities of the rook. And we should! But when they are limited, it is important to look at the king as well. Or to say it in a different way: we should have a plan for all of our pieces.

Sergei Lobanov – Nikita Meshkovs

Riga 2019



30. ♖a1?

With this natural move, White probably expected to tie Black down. But Meshkovs saves the game with active play, which is more or less the only way to do it when you are a pawn down. (More about this discussion in Chapter 22, page 315).

30...b4! 31.cxb4 ♜c4 32.f5

Trying to obtain winning chances with four against three, but it leads nowhere.

32. ♖a4 ♜xf4 33.b3 ♖d4 34. ♖f2 ♖d3 Black also holds, as the rook is beautifully active.

32... ♜xb4 33. ♖xa6 ♜xb2 34. ♖a8† ♖h7 35.g4 ♖e2 36. ♖e8 h5 37.gxh5 ♖e4 38. ♖e7 ♖g4† 39. ♖h1 ♖g8 40.h6 gxh6 41. ♖e8† ♖h7 42. ♖e7 ♖g8 43.f6 h5 44.h3 ♖f4 45. ♖g2 h4

The white king is cut off.

46. ♖a7 ♖f5 47. ♖a4

½–½

The winning idea is thematically relevant, as well as prophylactic and beautiful.

30. ♖f2! b4!?

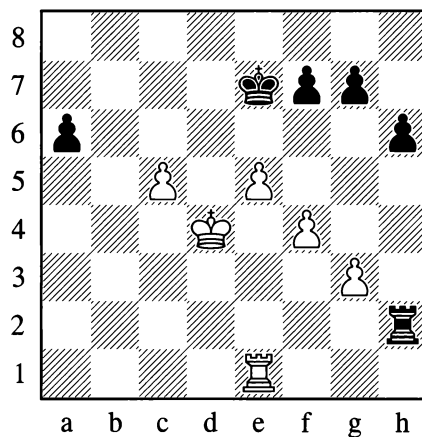
This idea still feels critical.

30...a5 is met with the powerful 31. ♖d1!, when the king is still aiming for d4, while 31...b4?! loses on the spot to 32.cxb4 axb4 33. ♖d8† ♖h7 34. ♖f8, where Black would be doomed to passive defence, and 34... ♖g6 35.g4 would lead to a straight descent into the abyss.

31. ♖e3 bxc3 32. ♖d4 ♜b5 33.bxc3 ♜b2 34.c4! ♖f8

34... ♖xg2 35.c5 ♜xh2 If Black does not remove this pawn, he will not have created a passed pawn, but White can win slowly with 36. ♖c1, exploiting the c-pawn.

35.g3 ♜xh2 36.c5 ♖e7



37. ♖b1!

White is winning. The focus on activating the rook should be consistent in our thinking, and here it happens last, but still it was always on the cards as the way to win the game. It was just that, in order to make the most out of the advantage, White needed to activate the king first. Play could continue:

37... ♖e6

37... ♖c2 38.f5 is the simplest.

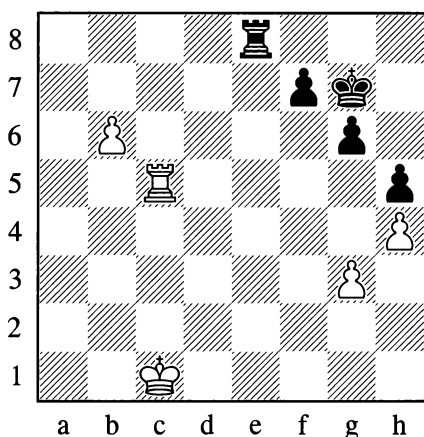
38.♖b6† ♔f5 39.c6 ♕g4 40.♔d5 ♝c2
41.♔d6 ♕xg3 42.c7

And it is all over.

White missed a win in the next example.

Robin van Kampen – Sergei Tiviakov

Canada 2014



Because the white king is so passive, it is difficult to have the b-pawn and the rook do all the work. Something extra is needed.

56.b7?

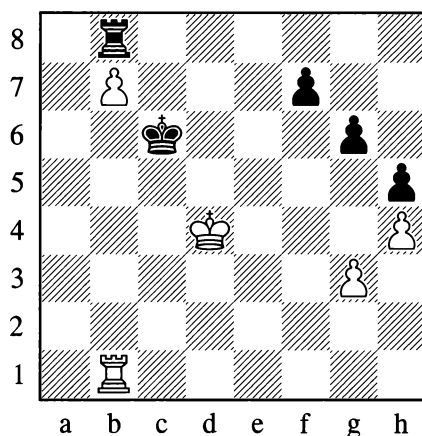
56.♖b5? is also poor. The issue is that Black will also be able to bring the king in after: 56...♕f6 57.♔d2 ♕e6 58.♔e3 (58.b7 ♖b8 would allow Black to bring the king over to eliminate the b-pawn.) There are a few draws available here. The thematically consistent would be: 58...♔d6† 59.♔f4 ♕c6 60.♖b3 ♕b7 Black is fine.

56...♖b8 57.♖b5

Trying to keep the black king a little under control, but it is already too late.

After 57.♖c7, Black will hold with 57...♕f6 58.♔d2 ♕f5! 59.♔e3 ♕g4 60.♔f2 f6, when White is tied down on the kingside.

57...♕f6 58.♔d2 ♕e6 59.♔e3 ♕d6 60.♔d4
♕c6 61.♖b1



61...f6!

The only move. But it is there and it holds. A key point is that ...g5 will lead to a pawn ending where White only has the h-pawn and will not have enough tempos to keep the black king away.

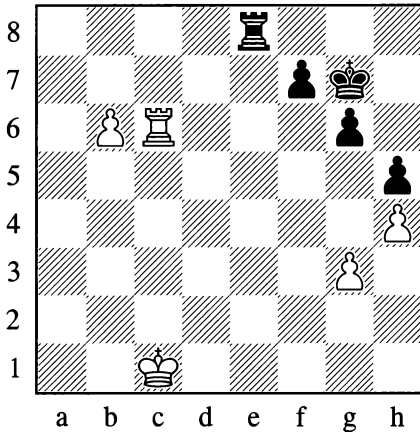
**62.♖f1 ♖d8† 63.♔c4 ♕xb7 64.♖xf6 ♖g8
65.♔d5 g5**

Black holds.

**66.♖h6 gxh4 67.gxh4 ♔c7 68.♔e6 ♔d8
69.♖xh5 ♔e8 70.♔f6 ♖f8† 71.♔g7 ♖f7†
72.♔g6 ♔f8 73.♖h8† ♔e7 74.h5 ♖f6†
75.♔g5 ♔f7 76.♖h7† ♔g8
½–½**

The winning path was based on defending the b-pawn and keeping the black king out of action for long enough for the white king to enter the game.

56. ♖c6!



56... ♖e4

Trying to put the rook behind the b-pawn, but it costs time.

The black king could be kept under control after: 56...f6 57.b7 ♖b8 58.♖c7† ♕h6 59.♕d2 g5 60.♕e3 ♕g6 61.♕e4 The black king is under control. White will win in various ways, depending on what Black tries.

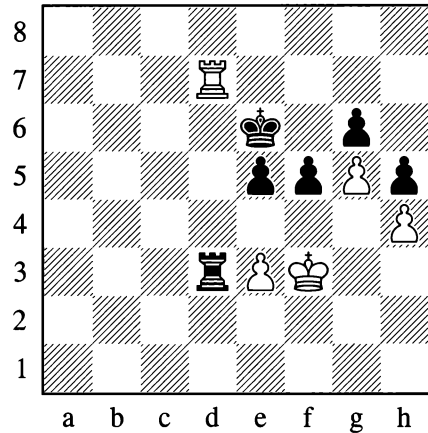
57.♕c2 ♖b4 58.♕c3 ♖b1 59.♕d4 f6 60.♕c5 g5 61.♕d6 ♕g6 62.♕c7 ♕f5 63.b7 ♖xb7† 64.♕xb7 ♕g4 65.♖xf6 gxf4 66.gxf4 ♕xf4 67.♖g6!

White wins.

The following example is from a game between two talented Indian GMs. White is clearly under pressure, but a route to salvation exists. It involves active play, using the king to keep an eye on the opponent's pawns from a surprising location, as well as using it to keep the black king out of the game. As so often, the rook and the pawns are slow, giving White enough time to create counterplay. But first, let's see a failed strategy, where the black king is allowed to get active.

Swapnil Dhopade – Abhijeet Gupta

New Delhi 2019



79. ♖g7?

79.♖xd3? is entirely hopeless and easy to discard. The pawn ending after 79...e4† wins easily for Black. The king steps forward and follows up with ...f4, winning.

79...f4 80.♖xg6† ♕d5 81.♖h6 ♖xe3† 82.♕f2 ♖g3 83.♖xh5 e4 84.♖h8 e3† 85.♕e2 ♕e4 86.♖e8† ♕f5 87.♖f8† ♕g4 88.g6 ♖g2† 89.♕d3 e2 90.♕d2 ♕f3 91.♖e8 ♖xg6 92.♖xe2 ♖h6?!

A horrible blunder in never-ending time trouble that allows White to escape.

The simplest of several winning moves was 92...♕g3! followed by advancing the pawns.

93. ♕e1 ♕g3 94. ♕f1

The game was drawn on move 144.

The drawing idea is based on a lot of things we have already seen: checks, checking distance, keeping the rook active and shouldering.

79. ♖a7!! f4

Obviously the critical line.

Black could keep the game going with 79...♖c3!? 80.♖a6† ♔d5 81.♖a5† ♖c5, but White should still hold with decent play. For example: 82.♖a6!?

80.♖a6† ♔d7

The pawn endings would hold this time.

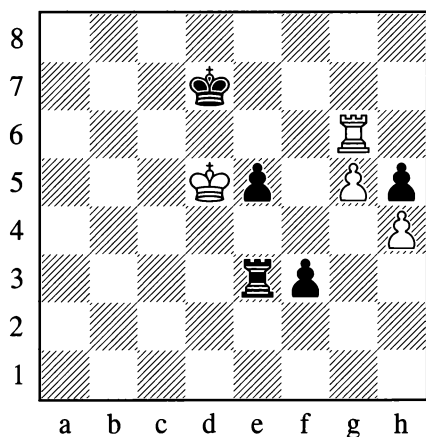
81.♔e4!!

The key idea. The king has to get active, in order to slow Black down.

It is not possible to check the black king to the other side of the board and hold. After 81.♖a7†? ♔c6 82.♖a6† ♔b5 83.♖xg6 ♖xe3† Black will bring the king to d3/e4 quickly and put the rook on g3. The important idea is to cut off the black king on the 6th rank.

81...♖xe3† 82.♔d5 ♔3 83.♖xg6

The idea is not to check the black king to the 8th rank, but just to keep it out of the game.



83...e4 84.♖f6 ♔e7

After 84...♖e2 85.g6 Black will have to abandon his pawns to stop the g-pawn.

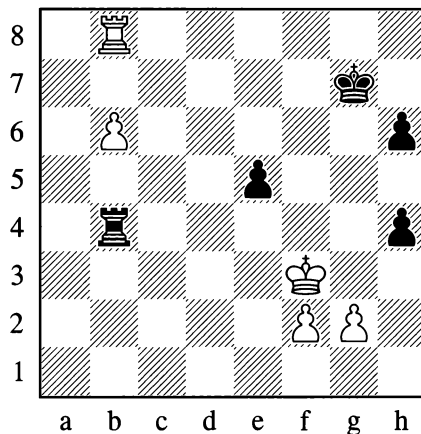
85.♔d4 ♖e2 86.♖f4 ♔2 87.g6

Black has to abandon all hopes of anything but a draw.

In the next example, from the Soviet Championship, Black lost in perhaps the most illustrative way, but also without any serious resistance.

Lev Polugaevsky – Evgeni Vasiukov

Tbilisi 1967



45...♔h7? 46.b7 ♔g7 47.♔e3 e4 48.♔f4 ♔h7 49.♔e5 ♔g7 50.♔d5

Threatening 51.♔c6!.

50...♖b2 51.♔xe4 ♖b4† 52.♔d3 ♖b3† 53.♔c4 ♖b1 54.f4 ♖c1† 55.♔d3 ♖b1 56.f5 ♖b6 57.f6†

1-0

Passive play is entirely hopeless.

45...h5?

White would often keep the pawn on b6, to give the king a place to hide from checks on b7, but in this case, there is no need.

46.b7 ♔h7 47.♔e3 ♔g7 48.♔d3 ♔h7 49.♔c3

The black rook cannot keep the white king cut off on the 4th rank.

49...♖b1 50.♔c4 e4

Black cannot afford to lose the e-pawn, or he would lose as in the game.

And after 50...♙g7 51.♙d5 ♖b5† 52.♙c6 White wins.

51.♙d5 ♖b4 52.♙c6

The simplest.

52...♖c4† 53.♙b5 ♖c2 54.♖f8

White wins.

Trying to activate the king is the only chance, but it should be done with some attention to detail.

45...♙g6? 46.b7 ♙h5

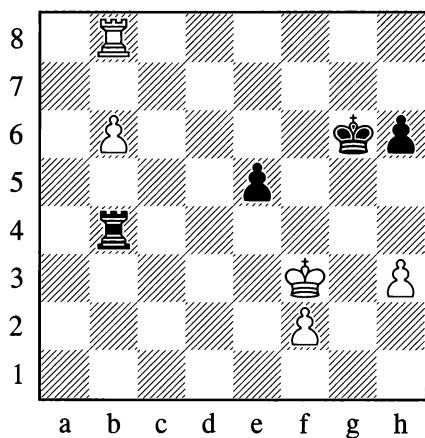
This looks natural, but after:

47.g4†! hxg3 48.fxg3 ♖b2 49.g4† ♙h4 50.g5!

White wins.

The way to activate the king is based on prophylaxis. Black has to prevent this g4† idea.

45...h3!! 46.gxh3 ♙g6



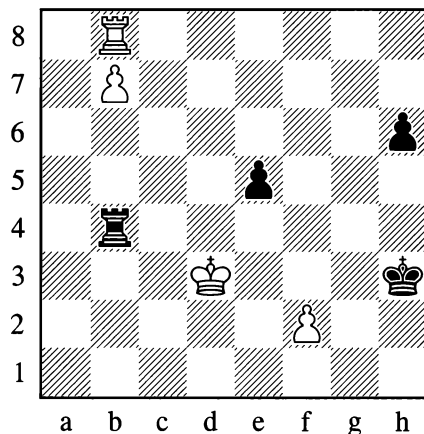
47.b7

Black also draws after: 47.♙e3 ♙h5 48.♙d3 ♙h4 49.♙c3 ♖b1 50.♙c4 ♙xh3 51.♙d5 h5 52.♙xe5 h4 53.f4 ♙g3 54.b7 ♖b5† 55.♙e4 ♖b4†

47...♙h5! 48.♙e3

White also cannot make progress after: 48.♙g3 ♖b3† 49.f3 ♖b2

48...♙h4 49.♙d3 ♙xh3

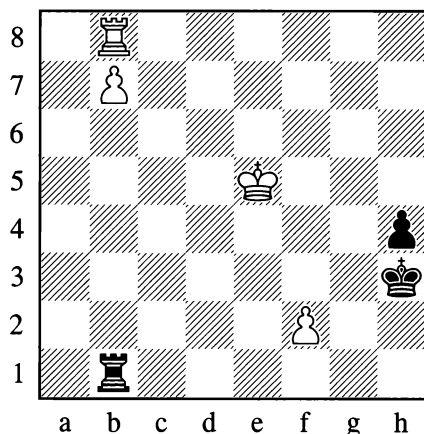


Despite being limited to one file; the black king is making headways.

50.♙c3 ♖b1 51.♙c4 h5

51...e4? would be a serious mistake. White wins after beautiful triangulation: 52.♙d4 ♖b4† 53.♙c5! ♖b1 54.♙d5 ♖b4 55.♙c6 and White wins.

52.♙d5 h4 53.♙xe5



53...♖b5†!

The key move. White cannot be allowed the keep the f-pawn.

54.♔e6

Or 54.♔d6 ♕g2 55.f4 ♕f3 56.f5 ♖xf5! 57.♖h8 ♖b5 58.♔c6 ♖xb7 with a draw.

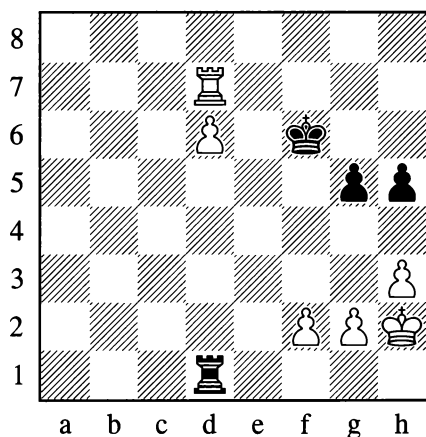
54...♔g2 55.f4 h3 56.♖g8† ♕f3 57.b8=♖ ♖xb8 58.♖xb8 ♕xf4

Black holds.

In the next example, a former World Champion was in desperate trouble.

Tamaz Giorgadze – Mihail Tal

Tbilisi 1978



Giorgadze was much better early on and had plenty of wins, giving his opponent only one chance to escape in the early middlegame. But with the transition into the endgame, Black's drawing chances increased all the time, until finally he was within drawing margins, where we come in.

47...♖d2? 48.♔g3?

Missing his chance to beat the hero.

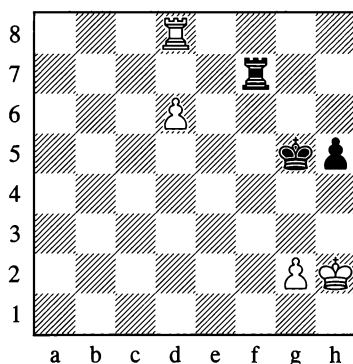
48.h4!! ♖xf2!?

Black has to try something. The king can escape after 48...g4 easily.

And the variation after 48...gxh4 49.♖d8 ♖d1 50.d7 ♕g7 51.f4 ♕h7 52.f5 ♕g7 53.f6† ♕f7 54.♖h8 ♖xd7 55.♖h7† ♕e6 56.♖xd7 ♕xd7 57.♔h3 appears to be quite straightforward. White wins.

49.hxg5† ♕xg5 50.♖d8! ♖f7

50...♖d2 51.d7 seems to go straight to the pawn ending, but 51...♔h4 would be a stalemate trick, hoping for 52.♖g8?? ♖xg2†!. However, after 52.♔g1 White will soon have a g2-g4 tactic to decide the game.



51.♖e8!

Cutting off the black king and threatening ♖e2-d2.

51...♖d7 52.♖e5†! ♕f4

52...♔f6 53.♖xh5! wins.

53.♖d5 ♕g4 54.♖d4† ♕f5 55.♔h3 ♕e5 56.♖d2

White wins. The rook is a poor blockader.

48.♖d8 h4! transposes.

48...♖d3† 49.f3 h4† 50.♔f2

50.♔g4 ♕g6! and White has to be ever so slightly careful.

50...♔e6 51.♖g7 ♕f5 52.♖d7 ♕e6 53.♔e2 ♖d5 54.♖d8 ♖a5 55.♔f2 ♖a2† 56.♔g1 ♖d2 57.♖e8† ♕f5 58.♖d8 ♕e6 59.d7 ♖xd7

60.♞xd7 ♔xd7 61.♕f2 ♔e6 62.♕e3 ♔e5
 63.♕f2 ♔f6 64.♕e2 ♔e6
 ½–½

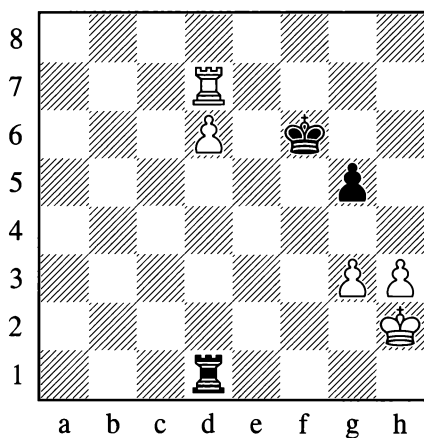
For this reason, Black should have restricted the white king immediately.

47...h4!

47...♕e6 followed by 48...h4 also worked.

48.g3 hxg3† 49.fxg3

49.♕xg3 is visually a draw. White will not be able to make any progress beyond exchanging the d-pawn for the g-pawn, ending up in a theoretical draw.



49...♕e6!

49...♞d2? would lose an important tempo. It does not matter if the king is on the 1st rank or second, but it does matter if it is on the h-file or g-file. 50.♕g1 ♔e6 51.♞d8! ♞xd6 Otherwise White will eventually swap the pawns and have two connected passers. 52.♞xd6† ♔xd6 53.♕f2 ♔e6 54.♕e2! White wins. Classic opposition.

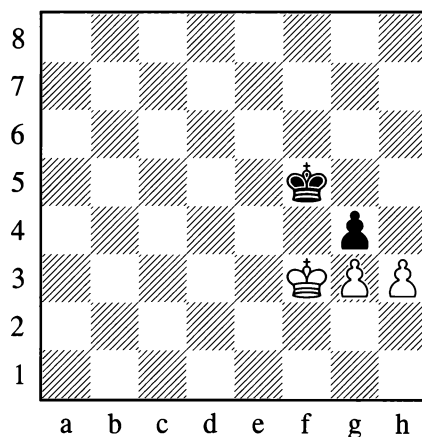
50.♞d8

50.♞g7 ♔f6 goes nowhere.

50...♞xd6! 51.♞xd6† ♔xd6 52.♕g2 ♔e5
 53.♕f2 ♔f5

53...♕f6 with opposition also works.

54.♕f3 g4†!



With a draw.

Chapter 15

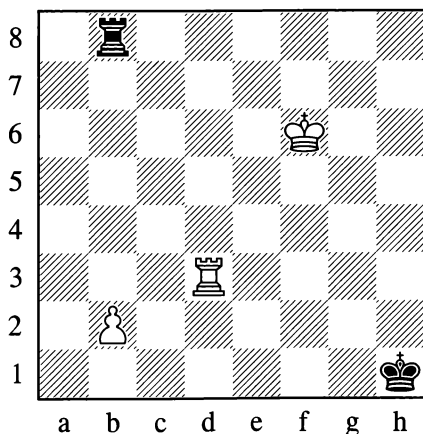
Checkmate

Checkmate is the only way to win a game of chess against a non-cooperative opponent. Therefore, we all play for mate, all the time, when we try to win a game of chess. The difference is if we take the direct path, or the scenic route. In this chapter, we shall look at situations where a shortcut to checkmate appears.

Checkmate is not a big topic in rook endings, although it does come up from time to time. I do not have any specific deep ideas about this theme, but I do have a few nice positions I want to show.

I. Krikheli

Suomen Shakki 1985



This study does not contain surprising moves or deep ideas, but it does have a nice, although a bit orthodox, finish.

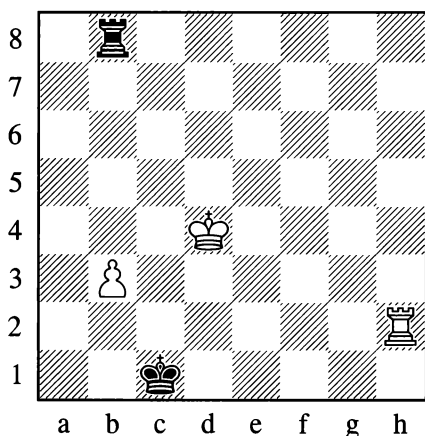
1.b3!

1.♞d2? could sort of make sense if you are focusing too much on keeping the black king dominated. But endgames are about pushing and promoting pawns, so the move is rather odd, besides just bad.

1...♔g2 2.♕e5 ♕f2 3.♕d4 ♕e2 4.♖h3 ♕d2
4...♞d8† 5.♕c3 would allow the king to come around the queenside way and help advance the pawn.

5.♞h2† ♕c1

5...♕d1 6.♕c3 ♞c8† 7.♕b2 and the rook and king together will push the pawn forward. The black king will remain cut off.



Black has managed to prevent the white king from hiding behind the pawn and thus protecting it. He is ready to harass the king endlessly, without allowing the advance of the pawn. But White has a simple trick to win.

6.b4!

The pawn will advance and the black king is cut off.

6...♞xb4†

Is this the critical line, but it loses immediately.

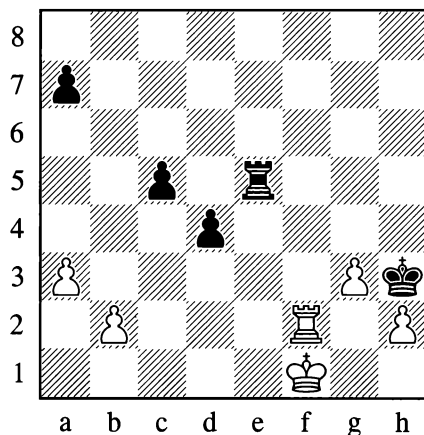
7.♕c3

Not a new trick, but still a checkmate trick.

The next example sees White dominate the opponent with a combination of mating threats and the creation of a passed pawn.

Kirill Alekseenko – Bilel Bellahcene

Warsaw (rapid Wch) 2021



45.♞f4! ♞h5

After 45...♕xh2 46.♕f2 ♞h5 47.♞h4†, the h-pawn runs away.

46.♕f2 a5

If 46...d3 47.♞h4† ♞xh4 48.gxh4 ♕xh4 49.b3! the pawn ending wins. (However, 49.♕e3? c4 50.b3 cxb3 leads to a long variation where Black draws by a tempo.)

47.b3

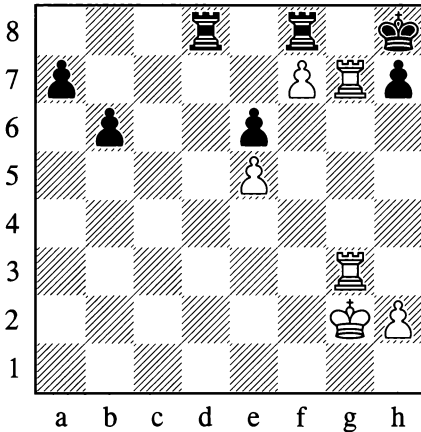
Controlling the black pawns. White now won a game with more only moves to win than he had needed to. But when you play them all, there is nothing to complain about.

47...♞h8 48.♕f3 ♞h7 49.a4 ♞h6 50.♞f5
♕xh2 51.♞xc5 ♞e6 52.♞h5† ♕g1 53.♞d5
♞e3† 54.♕f4 ♕f2 55.♞xd4 ♞f3† 56.♕e4
♞xb3 57.g4 ♕g3 58.♕f5 ♕h4 59.g5†
♕h5 60.♞d5 ♞f3† 61.♕e6 ♕g6 62.♞xa5
♞f4 63.♕d6 ♞c4 64.♕d5 ♞f4 65.♕c6 ♞b4
66.♕c5 ♞b1 67.♞b5 ♞a1 68.a5
1-0

The following position arrived in my analysis and it became a nice little prophylaxis exercise. Once you understand White's idea, you are able to choose the right pawn.

Vladimir Kramnik – Alexander Grischuk

Stavanger (analysis) 2014



39...b5!

If you choose the a-pawn, mate is inevitable.

40.♔h3 b4 41.♔h4 b3 42.♔h5 b2

The point. If Black is allowed to queen the pawn, h7 will be defended.

43.♞g1 b1=♚

Black has to defend against the renewed threat of mate. White now has to force a draw.

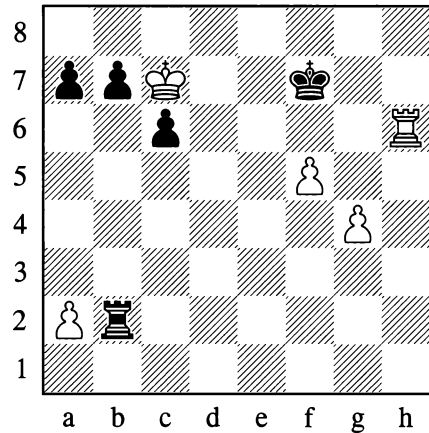
44.♞g8†! ♞xg8 45.fxg8=♚† ♞xg8 46.♞xb1

Black is a pawn up, but White is active and will make the draw.

The next position is completely winning, but White ruined his chances using the wrong strategy.

Sergey Fedorchuk – Sophie Milliet

Paris 2021



49.♔d6? ♞g2! 50.♔e5

50.♞g6 was a bit more dangerous, but Black can get counterplay with 50...c5! 51.♔xc5 ♞xa2 and Black has enough time to get the pawns going, as the white king is a bit offside.

50...♞xg4

The winning chances are gone, as the king is blocking the passed pawn.

51.♞d6 ♔e7 52.f6† ♔e8 53.♞e6† ♔f8 54.♞e7 ♞g2 55.♞xb7 ♞xa2 56.♞c7 ♞e2† 57.♔d6 ♞d2† 58.♔e6 ♞e2† 59.♔d6 ♞d2† 60.♔e6 ♞e2†

½–½

White would have won the game by making the most of the connected pawns.

49.g5! ♞xa2

This feels principled, but loses in a number of ways.

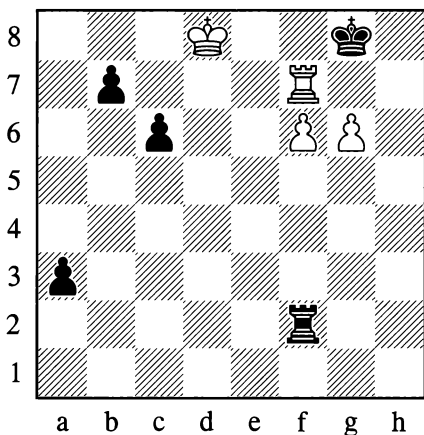
50.♞h7†

50.♔xb7? would be a distraction. After 50...♞a5! Black holds.

But also after 50.♔d7 ♖d2† 51.♖d6 ♖xd6† 52.♔xd6 a5 53.g6† ♔f6 54.g7! ♔xg7 55.♔e7 White wins.

And 50.f6 ♖g2 51.♖h7† ♔f8 52.♔d6 ♖xg5 53.♔e6 and 54.♖xb7 would also win. Again, the threat of mate is important.

50...♔g8 51.g6 ♖f2 52.♖f7 a5 53.f6 a4 54.♔d8 a3



55.♔e8!

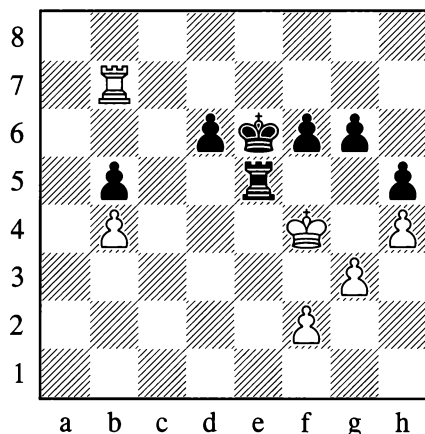
Threatening 56.♖f8#.

55...♖e2† 56.♖e7 ♖f2 57.f7† ♔h8 58.f8=♖† ♖xf8† 59.♔xf8 a2 60.♖h7#

The next game was only lost after a massive mistake by White.

Adriana Nikolova – Iva Videnova-Kuljasevic

Sofia 2023



40...d5? 41.♖b6†! ♔f7 42.♖b7† ♔e8 43.♖xb5??

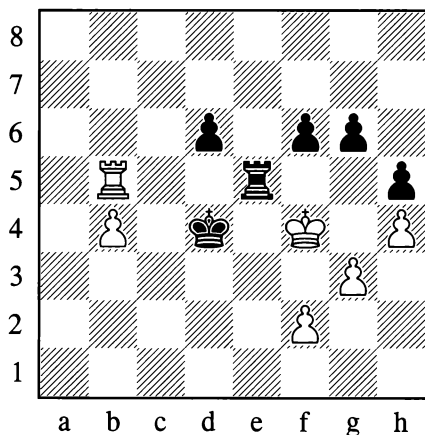
Blundering the rook. Instead 43.♖b6! would have held the game.

43...♖f5†

In view of 44.♔e3 d4†!, White resigned.
0-1

The winning idea was:

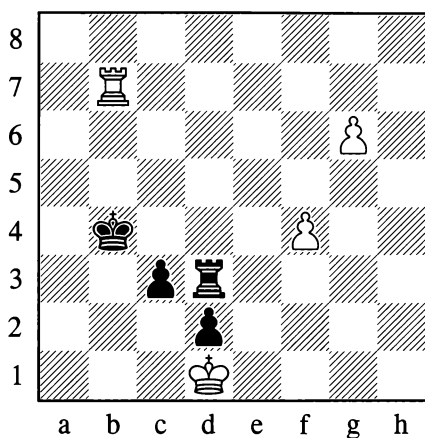
40...♔d5!! 41.♖xb5† ♔d4



The pawn ending is unavailable for White, and after 42.♖a5 d5! Black is winning. But the key point is of course: 42.♖b8 ♖f5#

Zeng Chongsheng – Zhao Jun

Xinghua 2015

**55...♔c4?**

55...♔a4? happened later in the game.

56.♖c7† ♕b3 57.♖b7†

White had a few ways to make a draw, but none of them were simple.

For example, 57.g7 ♖g3 58.♖b7† ♕a4 59.♕c2 ♖g1 60.♖a7†! ♕b5 61.♖d7! and Black will not make substantial progress.

57...♕a4 58.♖a7†?

58.♖b1! ♖e3 (58...♖g3 59.♕c2) 59.♕c2 ♖e1 60.♖d1 Black has to look for a way to make the draw: 60...♕a3 61.g7 ♖xd1 62.♕xd1 ♕b2 With a hoover draw on the near horizon.

58...♕b5?

Black would have won with: 58...♕b4 59.♖a1 ♖g3 60.♕c2 ♖xg6

59.♖c7?

59.♖a1 and 60.♕c2 would have made the draw once again.

59...♖g3 60.♖xc3

60.♕c2 ♖g1 and the pawn queens.

60...♖xc3 61.f5 ♖g3**0–1**

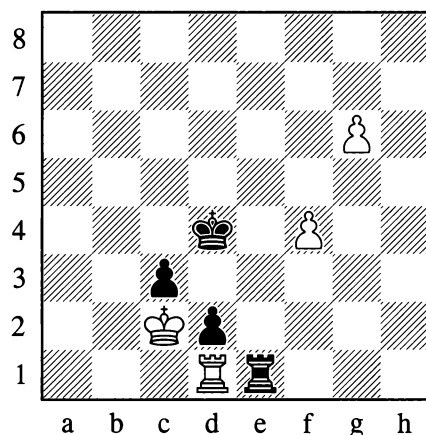
A pity. 61...♕c4 62.g7 ♕d3 63.g8=♖ ♖c1# would have been a thematic finish.

Black's winning plan relies on checkmate in the main line.

55...♕c5! 56.♖b1

White has to go back.

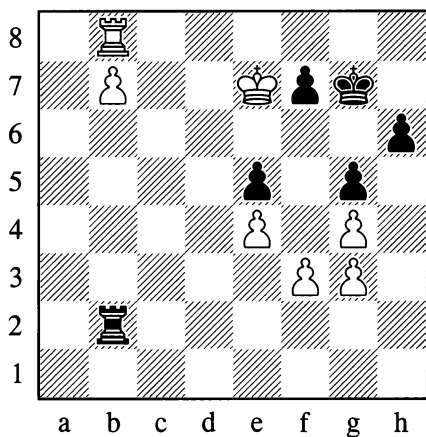
56.♖c7† ♕b6 (or 56...♕d6) 57.♖c8 ♖g3 would queen the d-pawn.

56...♖e3 57.♕c2 ♖e1 58.♖d1 ♕d4!**59.g7 ♖xd1 60.♕xd1 ♕d3 61.g8=♖ c2#****0–1**

A young Magnus Carlsen found a sensational mating pattern in the next game.

Magnus Carlsen – Zbynek Hracek

Germany 2007

**59.♔d6 ♕f6**

Forced.

Black would be lost in the pawn ending after 59...f6 60.♞e8!.

60.f4!! exf4

Black has to take twice. After 60...gxf4 61.gxf4 ♞d2† 62.♕c5 ♞b2, White has 63.fxe5† ♕g7 64.e6! fxe6 65.♔d6, winning.

61.gxf4 gxf4 62.♞g8!

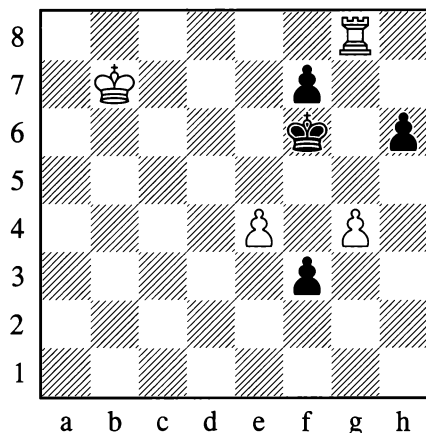
This is the key idea, without which White does not win. With it, he does.

62...♞b6†

62...♞xb7? 63.e5# is easy.

63.♕c7 ♞xb7† 64.♕xb7 f3

This is the only way to offer any resistance, but White can continue using mating threats to kill the counterplay.



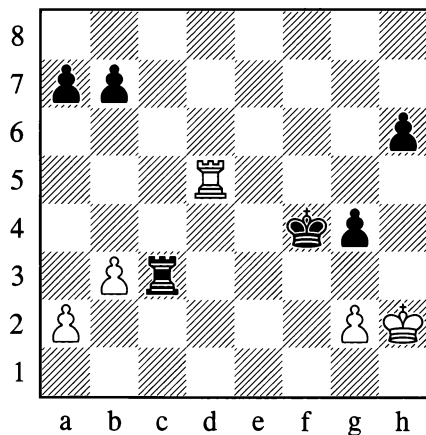
65.♕c6! ♕e5 66.♞e8† ♕f4 67.♕d5 f6 68.♞f8

1-0

In the next example, Black was winning right before the time control, but failed to find the way.

Husain Aziz – Mariya Muzychuk

Gibraltar 2022

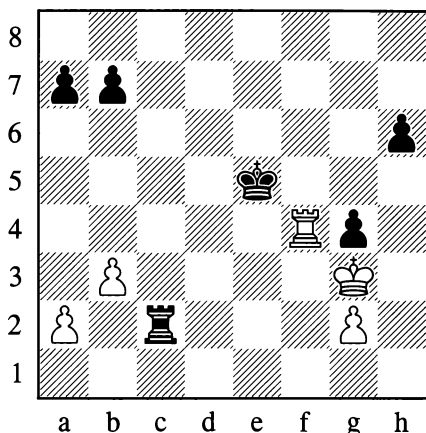
**35...♞c1?**

Also after 35...h5? 36.♞d7 h4 37.♞f7†, White would be out of the woods.

36.♞d4† ♕g5 37.♞d5† ♕f4

37...♕h4?? is worse now. 38.g3#

38.♞d4† ♚f5 39.♜g3 ♞c2 40.♞f4† ♚e5



Luckily for Black, after the time control, fortune swung back in her favour.

41.♞xg4?

41.♞a4 with the idea 41...a6 42.♞b4 b5 43.a4 and 41.♞f7!? would both have held. Black is not able to win on the kingside.

41...♞xa2 42.♞g7 b5 43.♜h4 ♚d4 44.♜h5 ♜c3 45.♞g3† ♜b4

In view of 46.♜xh6 ♜a3 47.♞g7 ♜xb3, White resigned.

0–1

The winning idea had all to do with luring the white rook to the 5th rank, where it would be unable to harass the black king from the back.

35...a6!

35...b6! 36.♞d7 a5 37.♞d6 b5 transposes.

36.♞d7

36.♞d4†! ♜g5! 37.♞d5† ♜h4 would bring White under a permanent threat of checkmate.

36...b5 37.♞d6 a5

Black is threatening to win the a-pawn with ...♞c2. The key point is that after:

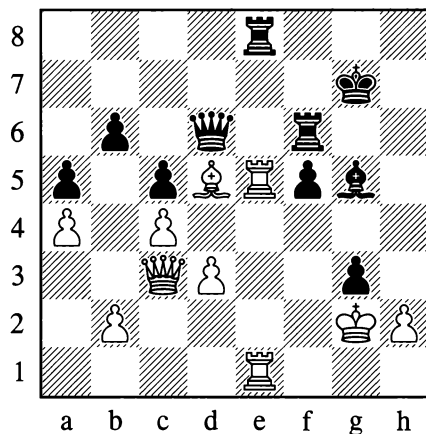
38.♞xh6 ♞c2! 39.a4 b4! 40.♞h5 ♞c3 41.♞xa5 g3†! 42.♜h3 ♞c1

White is checkmated. 38.♞d5 b4 39.♞xa5 g3† is similar.

For a change, we shall start in the middlegame, where Fier played a compelling combination.

Dmitriy Kushko – Alexandr Fier

Reykjavik 2023

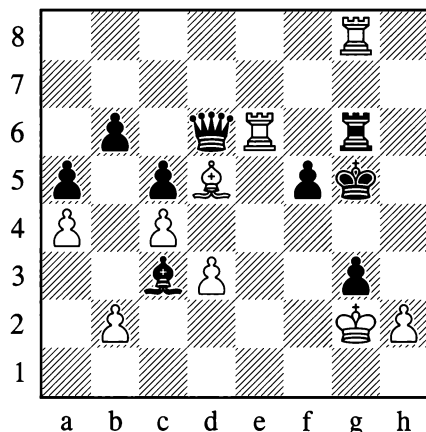


40...♞d2! 41.♞xe8!

This queen sacrifice is a strong practical chance that worked out well in the game.

41.♞xd2 ♞xe5 would have lost in short order.

41...♞xc3 42.♞1e7† ♜h6 43.♞h8† ♜g5 44.♞g8† ♞g6 45.♞e6!



45...♚xd5†!

Correctly returning the queen.

46.cxd5 ♖xg8 47.bxc3 gxh2 48.♔xh2 ♕f4!

The king often belongs in front of the pawn, as we know. Here the white king is cut off.

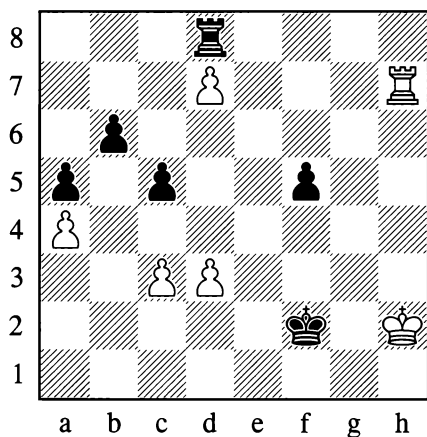
49.d6

49.♖xb6 ♔e3! would have won quickly for Black.

49...♔f3 50.d7 ♖d8 51.♖e7 ♕f2!

The mating net is established.

52.♖h7



52...♔e3?

Just when it was the time to shine, Fier loses his way.

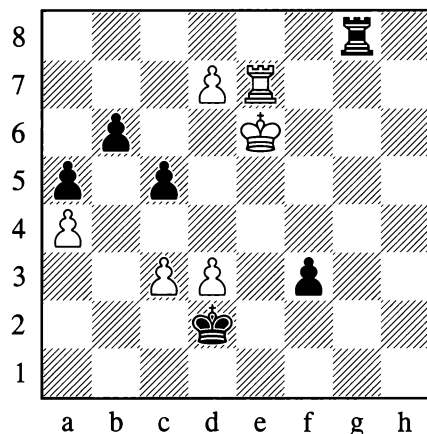
52...b5!! wins without too much hoopla. Black creates a passed pawn on the queenside and White cannot stop it, as his rook is busy defending against checkmate on the h-file.

53.♔g3 f4† 54.♔g4! ♖g8†?!

Fier has clearly lost his grip.

54...♔xd3 would make an effortless draw.

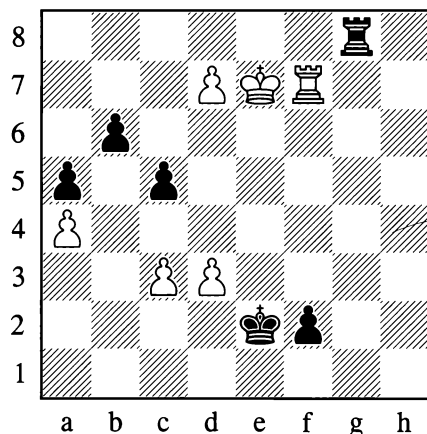
55.♔f5! f3 56.♖e7† ♔d2 57.♔e6



It was now the final chance for Black to make the draw.

57...♔xc3?

The drawing line goes: 57...f2! 58.♖f7 ♔e2 59.♔e7



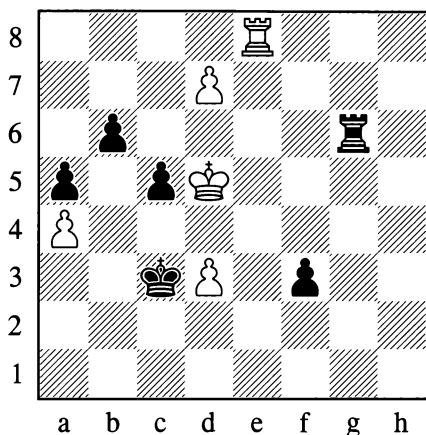
59...b5!! Creating much-needed counterplay. 60.axb5 a4 61.b6 a3 62.b7 a2 63.d8=♖ ♖xd8 64.♔xd8 a1=♖ 65.b8=♖ f1=♖ 66.♖xf1 ♖xf1 and the queen ending holds.

58.♖e8 ♖g6† 59.♔d5?

Giving Black a random chance.

59.♔e5! was correct: 59...♖g5† (59...f2 60.♖f8 wins.) 60.♔e4 f2 61.d8=♖! (But now 61.♖f8? does not work on account of 61...♖g4†

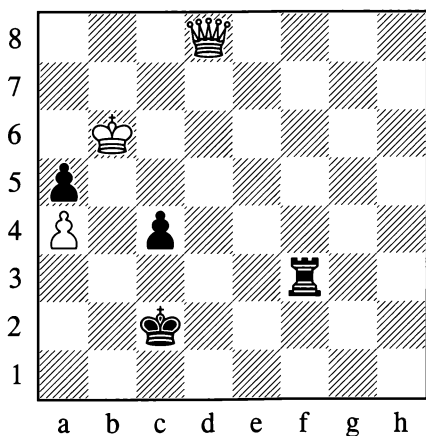
and the rook comes behind the d7-pawn.)
 61...f1=♚ 62.♚xg5! and wins after a lot of
 extra moves.



59...♖g5?

The chance was: 59...f2 60.♖f8 ♖g3! 61.♖xf2
 ♖xd3† 62.♙c6 ♙b4 Black would lose his rook,
 but easily make the draw.

60.♙c6 ♖f5 61.♖e1! ♖f6† 62.♙c7 ♖f7
 63.♖f1 ♙xd3 64.♖xf3† ♖xf3 65.d8=♚†
 ♙c2 66.♙xb6 c4



67.♚d5?

White stumbles on the finishing line.

67.♙b5! to bring the king back to deal with
 the c-pawn would have won after a few semi-
 accurate moves.

67...♖b3† 68.♙xa5 c3 69.♙a6 ♙b2 70.♚d4
 ♙b1

A miracle escape in a tumultuous game.

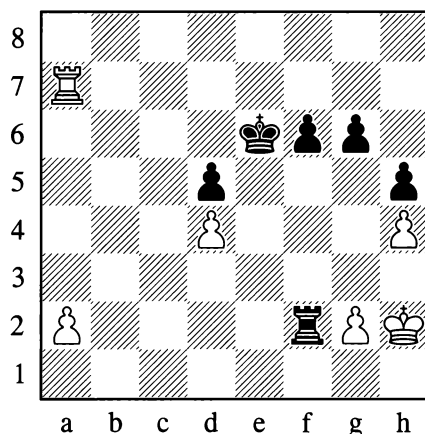
½–½

The next example is highly elaborate and I do
 not want to pretend I have it all under control.

White has managed not to lose a pawn in the
 short term, but his long-term prospects are dire.
 Inarkiev did not defend in the most energetic
 way (31.a4!), but instead decided that winning
 the g6-pawn was important. Remembering that
 endgames are almost always about queening
 pawns, it is hard to see why attacking the
 g6-pawn was what Inarkiev found important.
 I am being cheeky. This is a rapid game where
 White has already been defending for quite
 a while and had to make plenty of difficult
 decisions, so it is fair to presume he was short
 of time by now and making moves with the
 hand more than after reflection...

Ernesto Inarkiev – Boris Gelfand

Magas 2016

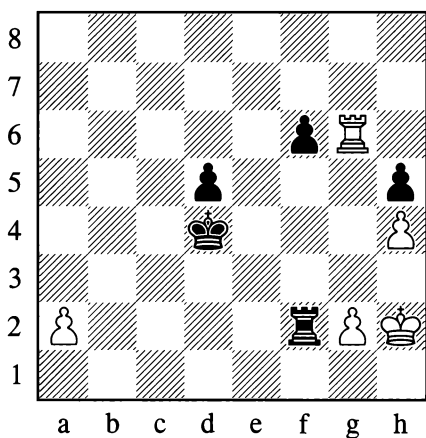


31.♞g7?

31.a4! would have fitted perfectly with the principles we have talked about up till now and is not surprisingly the drawing move. The a-pawn will eventually get exchanged for the d-pawn, with a drawable position. 31...♞f4 32.♜g3 ♞g4† 33.♜h3 ♞xd4 34.♞a8 ♜f5 35.a5 ♞a4 36.a6 d4 37.a7 and there is no way to avoid the exchange of pawns.

31...♜f5 32.♞d7 ♜e4 33.♞g7

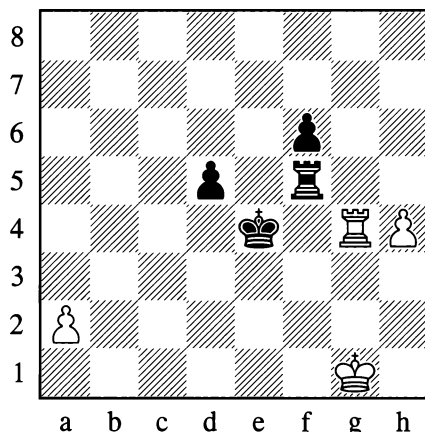
After winning a few tempos with the king, Black is happy to exchange the useless g-pawn for the d4-pawn, creating a passed pawn.

33...♜xd4 34.♞xg6

The most important position of this endgame. We will give it more attention below. Gelfand played a natural move, but gave White a chance to create counterplay.

34...♜e4? 35.♜g1?

White needs counterplay and could again have made the draw with 35.a4!, based on 35...d4 36.a5 ♞a2 37.♞xf6 ♞xa5 38.♜g3 d3 39.♜f2 ♞a2† 40.♜e1! ♞xg2 41.♞h6 with enough counterplay. For example, 41...♜e3 42.♞e6† ♜f4 43.♞d6 with a draw.

35...♞f5 36.g4 hxg4 37.♞xg4†**37...♜e3?**

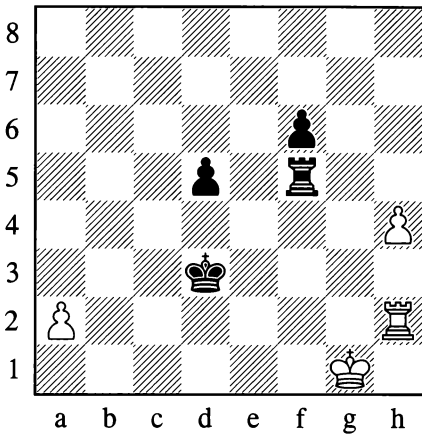
As Sam Shankland described in *Small Steps to Giant Improvement*, the king is often best placed in front of the passed pawn, as it is the best place to fight for all the squares in front of the pawn. It is a sort of shouldering, at times, but can also be basic flexibility, aimed at being able to support the pawn from either adjacent file. 37...♜d3! 38.♞g3† ♜c4 39.a4 d4 Black wins.

38.♞g3† ♜e2 39.♞g2† ♜d3!?

Black could have repeated with 39...♜e3! 40.♞g3† ♜e4 41.♞g4† and now found 41...♜d3!, which is unlikely to happen in a rapid game.

40.♞h2?

Under a lot of pressure, Inarkiev misses the last exit on the path to defeat. After 40.♞f2! ♞h5 41.♞xf6 ♞xh4 42.♞d6 White holds.



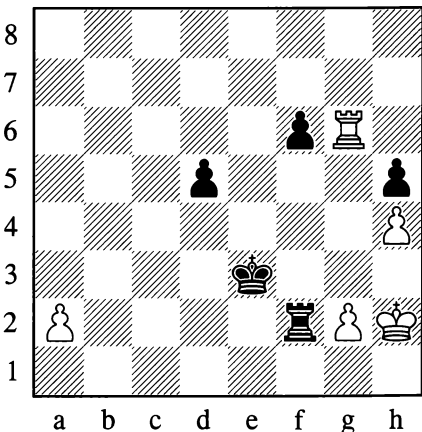
40...♖h5! 41.♔f2

After 41.a4 d4 42.♖a2 ♔c3 43.a5 d3 we can see White is too late.

41...d4 42.♔f3 ♔c3 43.♔g4 ♖d5 44.♖f2 f5† 45.♔g5 d3 46.h5 d2 47.♖f1 ♔c2 48.h6 d1=♖ 49.♖xd1 ♔xd1 50.h7 f4† 51.♔g4 ♖d8 0-1

Black has quite a number of ways to get to the same point, and probably a few others ways to win. As far as I can see, the following is the direct path and the one humans (like Sam Shankland) will find.

34...♔e3!

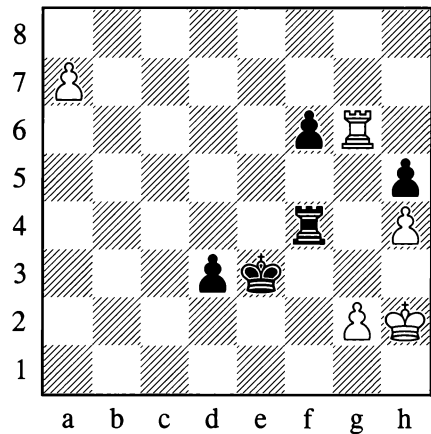


35.a4 d4 36.a5 d3 37.a6 ♖f4!

The rook is needed behind the pawns.

37...♖a2? 38.♖xf6 would allow the white rook to fight against the d-pawn from behind, making the draw.

38.a7



38...♖a4!!

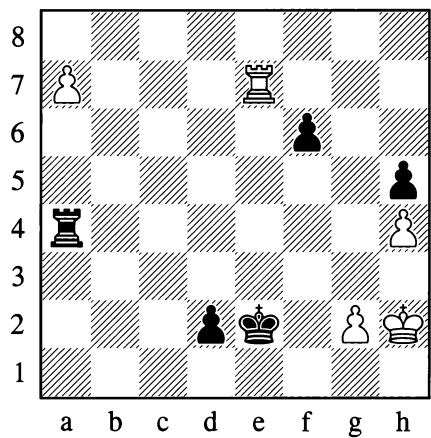
The difficult move. Black attacks the a7-pawn immediately, ignoring the free (and irrelevant) pawn on h4.

38...♖xh4† 39.♔g3 ♖a4 40.♖g7 would lead to a draw. Black does not have a way to push the pawn to the back rank and nowhere to hide the king.

39.♖g3†

39.♖xf6 ♖xa7 looks bad and does lose. Black is threatening ...♖a4, dominating the opponent entirely. 40.♖e6† ♔f2 41.♖d6 ♔e2 42.♖e6† ♔d1 43.♖d6 d2 44.g4!?! So, this has to be tried, but it does not work. 44...♖a4! is now simplest, although taking on g4 also works.

39...♔e2 40.♖g7 d2 41.♖e7†



41...♔f2!!

The reason Black did not take on h4 earlier.

42.♞d7 ♞xh4#

Chapter 16

Stalemate

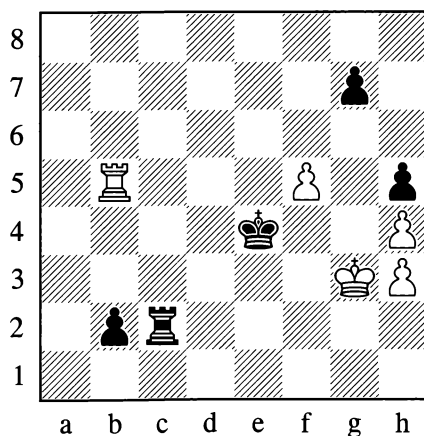
While promotion of pawns is the key aim of most endgames, there are some other elements we strongly associate with the endgame. The active role of the king is an obvious one, but fortresses, zugzwang and stalemate also stand out. Fortresses are quite rare in rook endings, while zugzwang is a big theme and stalemate is a medium-sized theme. A big part of the stalemates is based around one common pattern, while the rest are divided into two other themes, “random” and perpetual rook. Let’s start with a “random” stalemate.

The 2020 and 2021 British Championships were played online, with a classical time control. Peter Finn played remarkably in both tournaments and beat several GMs, despite being rated below 2000.

In this game Mark Hebden had a chance to escape with a trick.

Mark Hebden – Peter Finn

Internet 2020



56.♖b8?

56.f6! gxf6 57.♖xb2! would have drawn immediately, due to stalemate. Black can give the check on c3 and play some moves, but because of the g4-square being covered, White’s draw should be close to effortless.

56...♙xf5

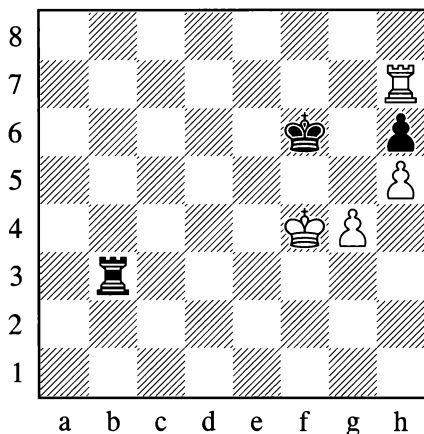
White is done. The last chance would have been a waiting move, hoping to get a second chance of ♖xb2! after 57...♙e4.

57.♙f3 ♙e5 58.♖b7 ♙d4 59.♙f4 ♖g2
60.♙f3 ♖d2 61.♙f4 ♙c3 62.♙g5 ♖d5†
63.♙g6 ♖d4 64.♖xb2 ♙xb2 65.♙xh5 ♖d6
66.♙g5 ♙c3
0-1

At the end of the chapter there will be some curious and unique stalemate scenarios, similar to the one above. But the key stalemate scenario we have to add to our image vocabulary consists of the king standing right in front of an enemy pawn, with the king cutting off the line behind. Let's see a few examples to really rub it in.

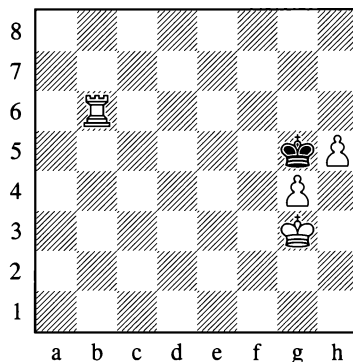
Rob Perez – Vincent Tsay

New York 2018



78...♖b4† 79.♙g3 ♖b6!! 80.♙h4

White cannot win, as 80.♖xh6† ♙g5
81.♖xb6



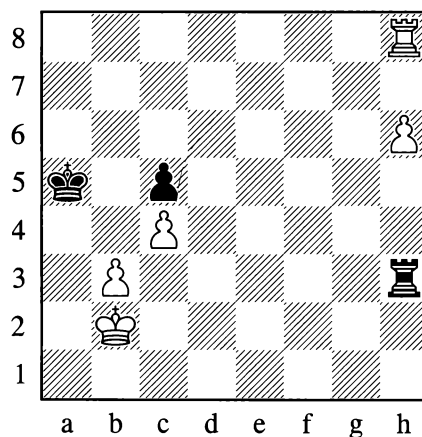
is stalemate.

80...♙e5 81.♖e7† ♙f6 82.♖a7 ♖c6 83.♙g3
♖c3† 84.♙h4 ♖c6 85.♖b7 ♖a6 86.♙g3
♖a3†
½-½

The following Armageddon game decided the 2018 French Championship. Black missed the chance to draw, which in this case would have won the tournament.

Tigran Gharamian – Romain Edouard

Nîmes 2018



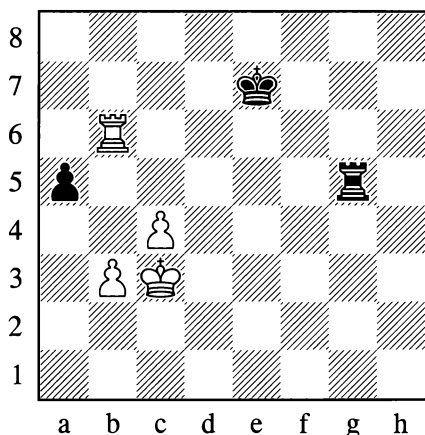
59...♙b4? 60.♖b8† ♙a5 61.♖b5† ♙a6
62.♖xc5 ♖xh6 63.♖g5 ♙b6 64.b4
1-0

59...♖h2†! 60.♔a3 (60.♔b1 ♕b4 61.h7 ♔c3 would also lead to a draw.) 60...♖xh6 and Black would have eliminated the dangerous passed pawn. White can try to push a bit, but even after 61.♖b8 ♖b6, Black is fine.

The following example is a bit more elaborate.

Javokhir Sindarov – Marat Dzhumayev

Uzbekistan 2021



75.♖b5?

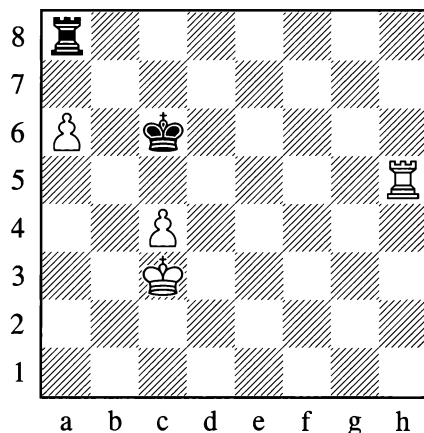
75.♔b2? with the idea ♔b2-a3-a4 looks attractive, but as in the game, Black has 75...a4!, when the a- and c-pawn ending is a theoretical draw, while 76.b4 ♖g3 is also impossible to win for White, with the king cut off entirely.

Thus, the winning idea was to reroute the king, without allowing ...a5-a4. White should have played: 75.♖a6! ♔d7 76.♔b2 ♔c7 77.♔a3 ♔b7 78.♖e6 and after ♔a3-a4, he will have either ♖a6 or ♖d6-d5, winning.

75...♖g3† 76.♔b2 a4! 77.bxa4 ♔d6 78.a5 ♔c6 79.a6 ♖g8 80.♔c3

Black is also making a draw after 80.♔b3 ♖a8 81.♖h5 ♖xa6 82.♖h6† ♔b7!.

80...♖a8 81.♖h5



81...♔b6?

The stalemate trick is the same as always. 81...♖xa6! and so on.

82.♔b4!

White wins.

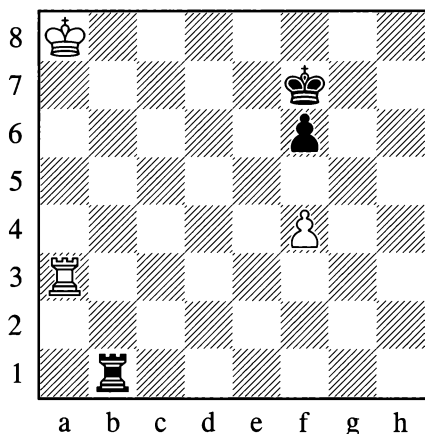
82...♖g8 83.♖h6† ♔a7 84.♔b5 ♖b8† 85.♔a5 ♖b1 86.♖h7† ♔a8 87.c5 ♔b8 88.♖d7 ♖a1† 89.♔b6 ♖b1† 90.♔c6 ♖h1 91.♖e7 ♖g1 92.♖h7 ♖d1 93.♖b7† ♔a8 94.♖d7 ♖h1 95.♔b6 ♖b1† 96.♔c7 ♔a7 97.♔c8† ♔a8 98.c6 ♖b8† 99.♔c7 ♖b1 100.♔d8 ♖h1 101.c7 ♖h8† 102.♔e7 1-0

The following study is based on the same idea (definite spoiler), with exceptional details on the way. This is one of my favourite studies of all time. I have used it with students for blindfold “guess the move” exercises, or as a straight playing position. It is suitable for this, as a lot of decisions can be made with the favourite defensive tool of elimination, without seeing the full outcome from the beginning. Especially as Black’s resources may come as a surprise a lot of the time.

Black is threatening ...♔g6-f5, which combined with an attack on the f-pawn would win quickly. There is only one try.

A. Gilboa & Y. Afek

1st prize Kalandadze MT 2019



1.f5!

The black king cannot escape, as something like 1...♔g7 is met with 2.♖g4† and 3.♖g6, when Black cannot make progress. So, he has to attack the pawn immediately.

1...♖b5!

Definitely the difficult move to deal with. The white king is kept cut off, while the pawn is attacked.

1...♖f1?! is less challenging, as after 2.♖a7† ♔g8 3.♔b7! the white king comes back in good time, after the black king has had to retreat.

2.♖a7†

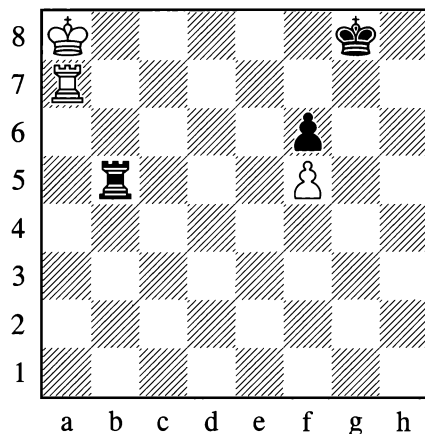
White has no choice but to seek to dominate the black king, at least for a moment, so he can get his own king back in the game.

2.♖f3 ♔e7! with the idea 3.♖e3† ♔d7 4.♖d3† ♔c6 would be hopeless.

2...♔g8!

A strong prophylactic move.

After 2...♔f8?!, the simplest way for White to secure the draw is 3.♖h7! ♖xf5 4.♔b7 and the white king joins the fight – something the black king cannot do.



White needs to bring the king out without letting the black king out, which requires that the rook moves a bit across the 7th rank. The b7-square is obviously needed for the king, leaving only three options. The right one can be found by elimination.

3.♖d7!!

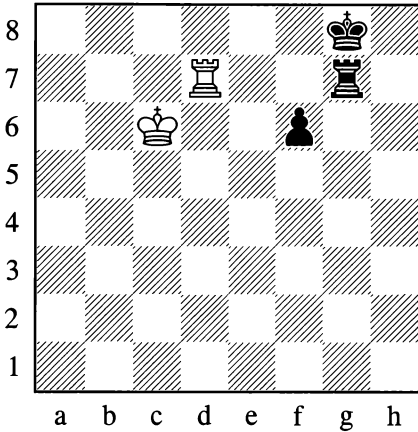
3.♖e7? is wrong, as after 3...♖xf5 4.♔b7 ♖e5! Black wins a tempo. 5.♖d7 ♖e6! The white king is cut off again and Black is ready to play ...f5 and ...♖f6, winning.

3.♖c7? is also a mistake, as it is clumsily placed after 3...♖xf5 4.♔b7 ♖g5! 5.♔c6 ♖g7, where Black wins an important tempo, forcing the white rook to the inconvenient back rank. 6.♖c8† ♔f7 7.♔d5 ♖g4! and the white king is cut off, leaving White lost.

3...♖xf5 4.♔b7 ♖g5

Still the most dangerous try.

5.♔c6 ♖g7



White is faced with the same threat as in the line with 3.♖c7? above. He has only one defence.

6.♞d4!!

The only way to prevent the black rook from cutting off the white king.

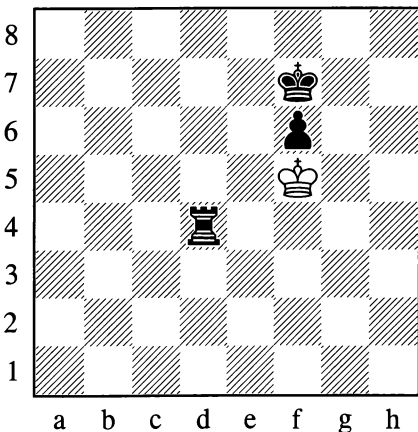
6...♔f7

6...♞g5 7.♞d7! also holds for White.

7.♔d5 ♞g5† 8.♔e4!

If 8.♔c4? then 8...♞g3! is the winning move. (My previous notes gave 8...♞e5? as winning for Black, but after 9.♞d1 ♔g6 10.♔d4 White will draw with defence from the front.

8...♞g4† 9.♔f5! ♞xd4

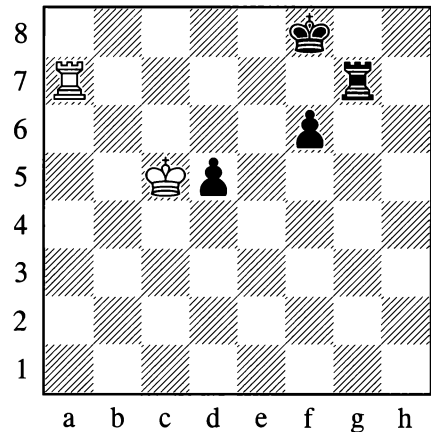


Something special

Sometimes life imitates art. And when that happens, it usually outperforms it. The following game is fantastic, at least in the analysis. Black is threatening to come out with the king, similar to the previous example.

Ernesto Real De Azua – Vitaly Sivuk

Lorca 2019



59.♞a8†?

59.♞a3? ♔f7 60.♔xd5 ♞g4! is another version of what we saw above.

59...♔f7 60.♞a7†

60.♔xd5 ♞g4! wins.

60...♔g6 61.♞a1 ♞d7

Black is winning.

62.♞g1† ♔f5 63.♔d4 ♞d6 64.♞f1† ♔g5

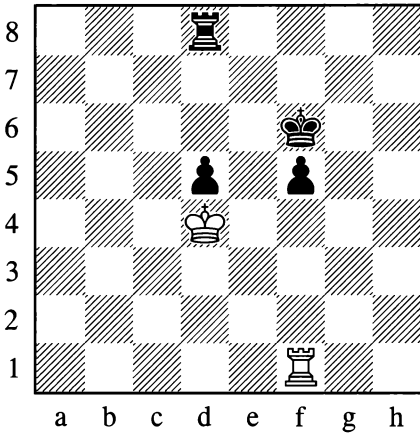
65.♞g1† ♔f4 66.♞f1† ♔g4 67.♔c5 ♞d8

68.♔d4

68.♞xf6 d4 and Black wins.

68...f5 69.♞g1† ♔f4 70.♞f1† ♔g5 71.♞g1†

♔f6 72.♞f1



72...♖a8! 73.♔xd5 ♖a4

The white king is cut off and he realised the futility of his position.

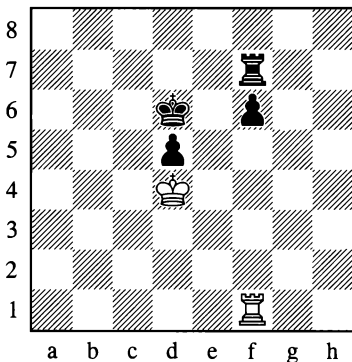
0-1

Instead, White can draw with:

59.♖a4!! ♔f7

The main line has to be the attempt to bank on the f-pawn. But Black can also try to hold on to the pawns, which requires a look.

59...♞d7 60.♔d4 ♔f7 61.♖a1 ♔e6 62.♞e1† ♔d6 63.♞f1 ♞f7



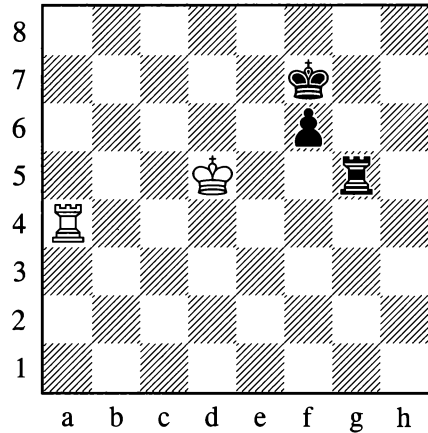
64.♞f5 White wins the d-pawn and secures the draw. For example, 64...♔e6 65.♞xd5 ♞d7 66.♞xd7 ♔xd7 67.♔e4 with the most basic of draws.

Black will also find it impossible to get the king out to help with the conversion after: 59...♞g5 60.♖a7! ♞e5 61.♔d4 and the king is cut off.

60.♔xd5

Taking the pawn luckily works, as otherwise Black would win with ...♞g5-e5.

60...♞g5†

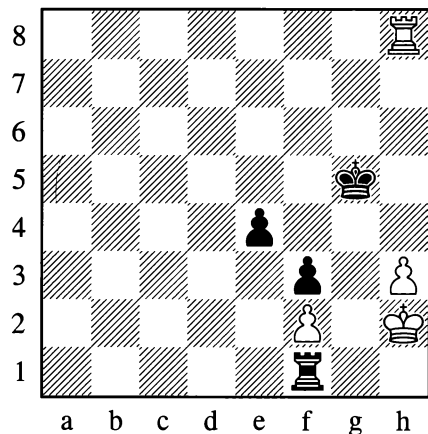


61.♔e4! ♞g4† 62.♔f5 ♖xa4

Having burned this image thoroughly into your retina, it is time to move on to a few random, yet delightful, examples.

S.L. Narayanan – Marcel Kanarek

Stockholm 2013



The Indian star lost without a chance after:
 74.♖g8†? ♜f6! 75.h4 ♜xf2† 76.♜g1 ♜d2
 77.h5 f2† 78.♜g2 e3 79.h6 ♜d1 80.♜f8† ♜g6
 0–1

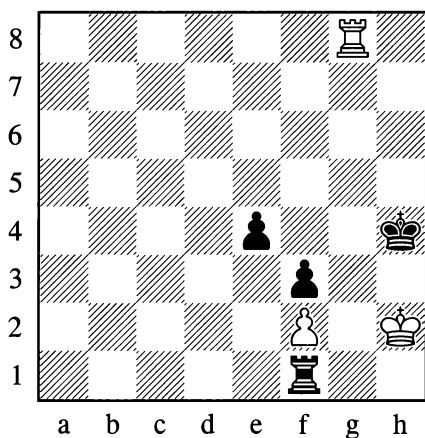
Instead, White could have saved the game with:

74.h4†! ♜g4

White will be able to bring out the king to attack the e4-pawn after both 74...♜g6 75.♜g3 and 74...♜f5 75.♜f8† ♜e5 76.♜e8† ♜d4 77.♜d8† ♜c3 78.♜g3. In both cases, White is making the draw.

75.♜g8† ♜xh4

The only try that is different from the lines above.



76.♜g4†!

76.♜h8† ♜g5 77.♜g3 ♜g1† 78.♜h3 ♜f4
 79.♜f8† ♜e5 and Black wins.

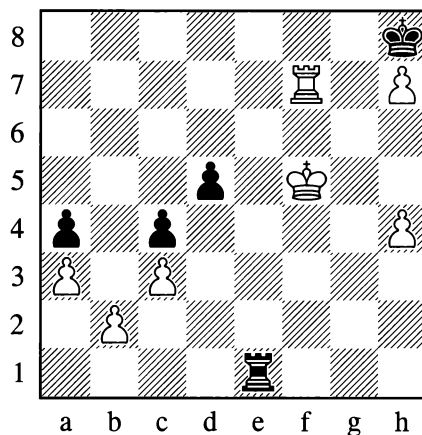
76...♜xg4

Stalemate.

Under a lot of pressure, the talented Jaime Santos missed an escape road.

Aryan Tari – Jaime Santos Latasa

Mayrhofen 2022

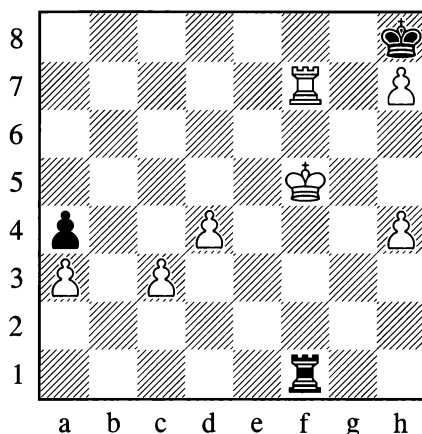


62...♜e8? 63.♜g6 ♜b8 64.♜f6 ♜e8 65.♜h6
 ♜b8 66.♜g6

1–0

Instead, Black could have used the stalemated situation of the king to achieve what is popularly referred to as “perpetual rook”, a special sub-section of the stalemate theme, with:

62...d4!! 63.cxd4 c3 64.bxc3 ♜f1†



The checks will only end with the capture of the rook and stalemate.

65.♔e6

65.♔g6 ♚f6†! draws immediately.

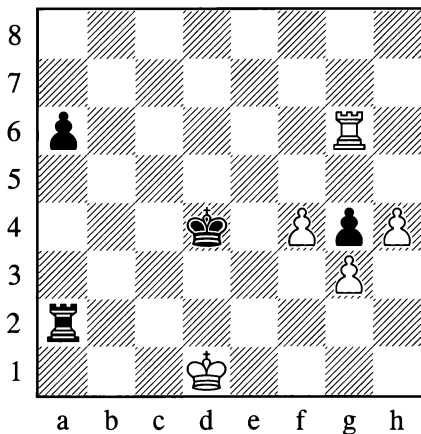
65...♚e1† 66.♔d5 ♚e5† 67.♔d6 ♚d5†

With a draw.

In the next example, the heavy underdog missed a chance to save the game with a beautiful stalemate trick.

Lars Hauge – Ludvig Carlsson

Oslo 2020

**52...a5! 53.♚xg4 a4?**

A natural move, but one that allows White to reroute the rook to the 3rd rank, after which it is game over.

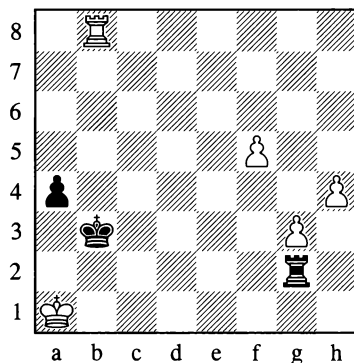
The most human drawing line is based on stalemate (they all are) and a lot of natural moves.

53...♔d3! 54.♔c1

White should be careful about running from the draw. 54.♔e1 ♔e3 55.♔f1? ♔f3 would be unfortunate.

54...♔c3 55.♔b1 ♚b2† 56.♔a1 ♚g2 57.♚g8

57.f5?? ♔b3 would lead to mate.

57...a4 58.f5 ♔b3 59.♚b8†

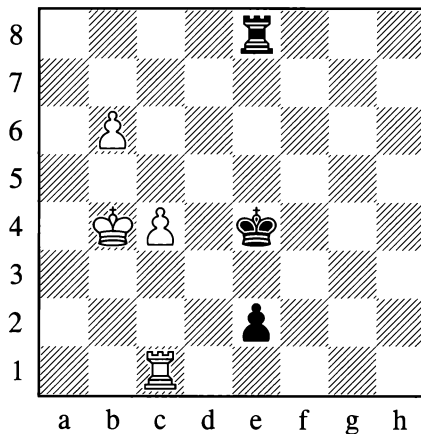
59...♔a3! 60.f6 ♚a2† 61.♔b1 ♚b2† 62.♚xb2 Stalemate.

54.f5† ♔d3 55.♔c1 a3 56.♔b1 ♚g2 57.♚f4 ♔c3 58.f6 ♔b3 59.♚f3† ♔a4 60.f7 ♚g1† 61.♔c2 ♚g2† 62.♔d3 1-0

Boris Gelfand found the next example in an old edition of *64* and allowed me to use it in this book, when we did not find an appropriate place to put it in our joint book *Decision Making in Major Piece Endings*. As I have not found it in any database or online, I am unsure if this is a variation or what was actually played, but the position is nice.

Shirokov – Rubin

Nordic Youth Championship 1984



White can try a lot of decent-looking moves. One by one, we can disregard them.

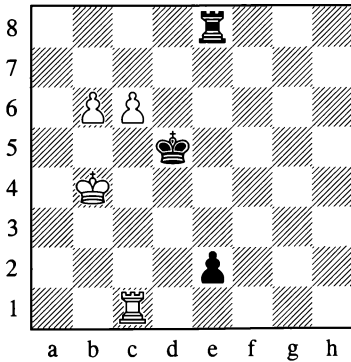
1.♔b5? fails to simple play: 1...♔d4 2.c5 Otherwise 2...♞e5† is coming. 2...e1=♞ 3.♞xe1 ♞xe1 4.c6 ♞b1† 5.♔a6 ♔c5 6.c7 ♞xb6† 7.♔a7 ♞c6 8.♔b7 with a draw.

After 1.♞e1? ♔d4 2.♔b5 (2.c5 ♔d5 and 3...♞e3 makes the draw easily.) 2...♞e5†! Black can draw in whichever way he chooses. 3.♔a6 could be met with 3...♔xc4 4.b7 ♞e8, when 5.♞xe2 ♞xe2 6.b8=♞ ♞a2† is another Hoover-variation.

The most important variation to calculate goes like this:

1.c5? ♔d5 2.c6

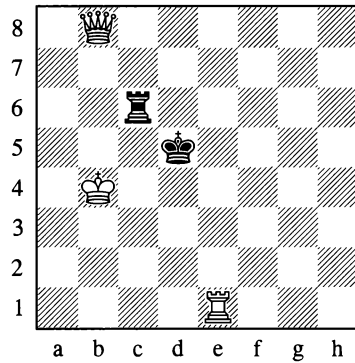
White is seemingly winning.



But an amazing resource exists: 2...♞e6!! 3.b7 ♞xc6 4.b8=♞ e1=♞†!!

The engine says that Black can also draw by promoting to a bishop, but honestly, in 1984 no machine would understand what was happening...

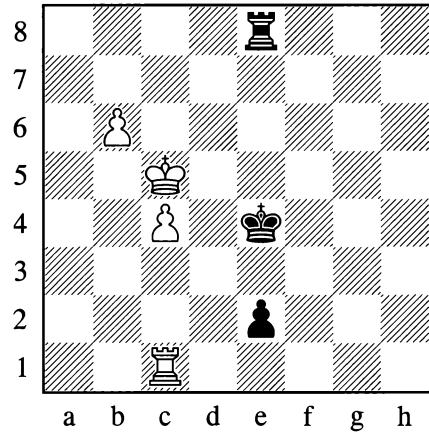
5.♞xe1



5...♞b6†! 6.♞xb6

Stalemate.

For this reason, the winning move is: 1.♔c5!!



1...♔d3 2.b7 White has managed to avoid all the traps and will win the game.

Chapter 17

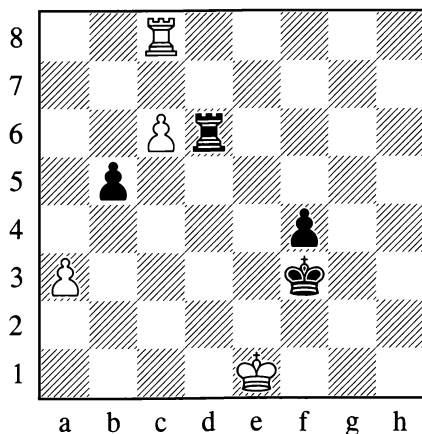
Zugzwang

The demand to move against your own interests is one of the features that makes chess a special game. This is not exclusively an endgame phenomenon, but when it arises in the middlegame, it always feels both sensational and misplaced, as all associations with this theme are from the endgame, where it is so entrenched that there are positions we don't even think of as zugzwang, but rather as opposition – which is zugzwang by another name. Zugzwang is not an uncommon phenomenon in rook endings either. There are many positions where the defender is suffering partly because of the inactivity and inflexibility of his rook's positioning. In the endgame we should always have a feeling of what the opponent is intending to do, or can do. If it is nothing, often we have the chance to strengthen our position before changing it, a theme akin to “evolution/revolution” known from attacking chess (see *Attacking Manual 1*, Chapter 7). At other times all moves would worsen his position, in which case it would be important to ask the opponent to move. This is what we call zugzwang.

The first example sees an experienced IM lose a drawn endgame against a strong GM, because he was unaware of the dangers of getting into zugzwang in this position.

Ali Farahat – Robert Hovhannisyan

Sharjah 2022



59.c7?

White would have been able to hold the game if he had just waited. 59.♖c7! may look strange, but the c-pawn is still defended and if the black king tries anything, the rook will come out from its awkward position with a check, leading to a situation where the c-pawn actually becomes useful on the 7th rank.

59...♜d7

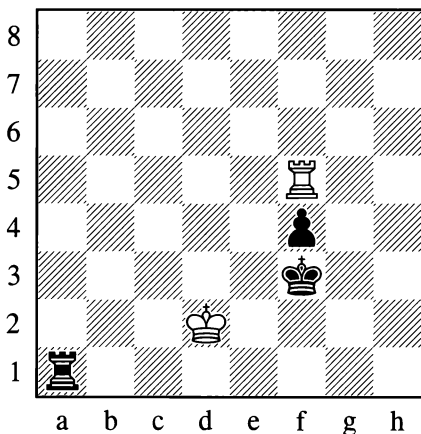
Black keeps the tension. White can only make a move with the rook, after which he loses his greatest asset.

60.♜b8 ♜e7†!

An important move that asks the white king if he would prefer to enter a mating net, or if he would prefer to make way for the opponent's king.

61.♕d2 ♜xc7 62.♜xb5 ♜a7 63.♕e1

White had to defend against the black king going forward and controlling all the squares in front of his passed pawn. Instead, he loses in a well-known way.

63...♜xa3 64.♜f5 ♜a1† 65.♕d2**65...♜f1!**

This setup is valuable to remember. In a similar situation (albeit with reversed colours

and a b-pawn), Gelfand resigned instantly against Anand in the play-off of their 2012 World Championship match.

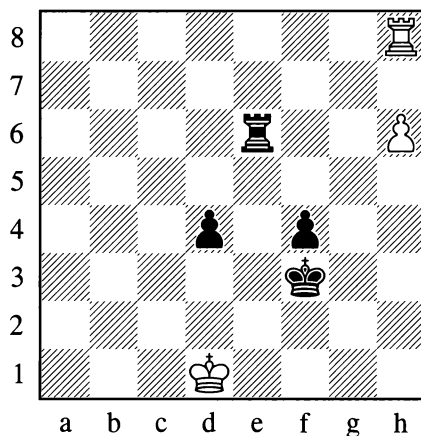
66.♜f8 ♕g2 67.♜g8† ♕f2

0-1

We should be careful with trapping our own rook in front of a passed pawn. It often needs a little bit of air...

Aleksey Goganov – Nikita Vitiugov

Nizhny Novgorod 2013

**48.h7?**

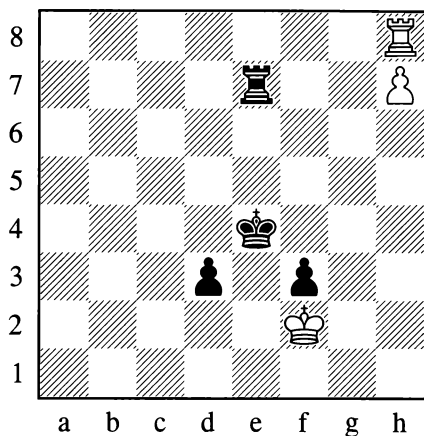
48.♜h7? was the remedy in the previous example, but is not a panacea. In this position it loses to: 48...♕e3 49.♕e1 d3 50.♜h8 f3 51.♜h7 (Or 51.h7 f2† 52.♕f1 ♜e7 with zugzwang.) 51...f2† 52.♕f1 d2 53.♜d7 And now the simplest is 53...d1=♚† 54.♜xd1 ♜xh6, winning.

48...♜e7! 49.♕d2 ♕e4! 50.♕e2 d3† 51.♕f2

It makes little difference if we mirror the situation with the king blocking the other pawn.

51...f3

Zugzwang.

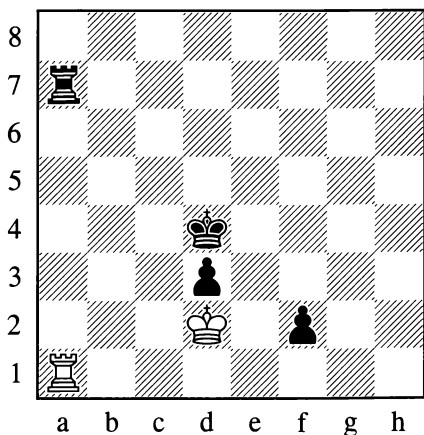


White cannot move the king, as allowing ...♔e3 would lead to lines similar to those given above.

52.♞a8 ♞xh7 53.♞a4† ♔d5 54.♔e3

54.♔xf3 ♞e7 would see the white king cut off.

54...♞f7 55.♞a1 f2 56.♞f1 ♔c4 57.♔d2 ♞a7 58.♞c1† ♔d4 59.♞a1



More a joke than a trap.

59...♞a2†

I like 59...f1=♔†!?, but some would argue this is playing with one's food...

0-1

White needed to prevent ...♔e3 more than anything.

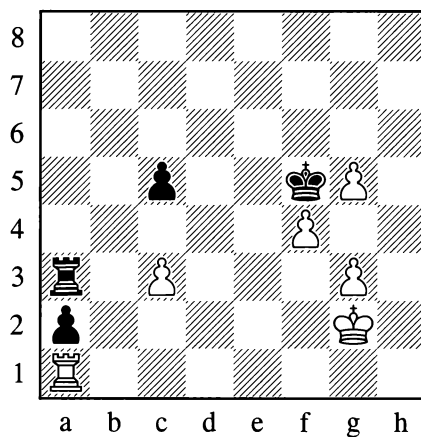
48.♔d2! ♔e4 49.♔e2 d3† 50.♔d2 f3 51.♞h7!

The needed waiting move. Black has no viable way to play for a win.

51.h7? ♞e7 would lead to zugzwang again. And all the attempts to activate the rook would lead to pawn-down, lost endings.

Aagaard

Original 2019



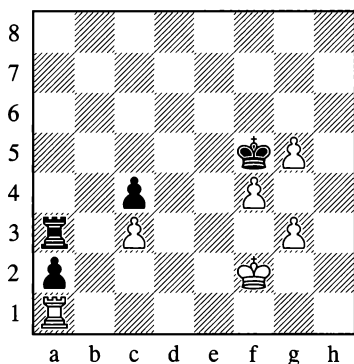
This composition came around through rubbish analysis of Levenfish – Rabinovich, Leningrad 1934, leading to an interesting situation where triangulation can force Black into zugzwang. It does not have great value as a study, as White has two ways to win. But it is a nice illustration of how it is possible with carefully refined finesses to put the opponent in zugzwang, without there ever being a zugzwang moment the other way (we will deal extensively with mutual zugzwang in the next chapter).

The starting point to solving this study is to realise that if it was Black to play in this position, he would lose. If the rook retreats,

2.♔f3 and 3.g4† just wins. Thus, Black is reduced to two attempts.

1...♔g4 2.g6 ♖xc3 3.♞xa2 ♞xg3† 4.♔f2 is winning for White. The key factor in this position is that the pawn is on c5, not c4, so that 4...♔xf4 loses on the spot to 5.♞a4†. 4...♞b3 loses a bit more elaborately after 5.♞a8! ♞b7 6.♞f8! and the connected passed pawns decide.

1...c4 2.♔f2 is a position of mutual zugzwang.



If White was to play, his advantage would dissipate. Black is perfectly set up to react against everything. If the king moves to the 3rd rank, the c-pawn is taken with check, and if to e2, the g3-pawn is undefended.

And after 3.♔g2 ♖xc3 4.♞xa2 ♔g4 the g3-pawn will fall with check. In this variation there is no check on a4, so Black can follow up with 6...♔xf4. Alas, it is Black to play and whatever he does, all these avenues of counterplay evaporate.

After 1.♔f2? c4! 2.♔g2 Black can play 2...♞xc3 and 3...♔g4, making the draw. With the pawn on c4, there is no check on a4, as already established.

And 1.♔f1? with the idea 1...c4? 2.♔f2! would allow Black to play 1...♞xc3 picking off the white pawns.

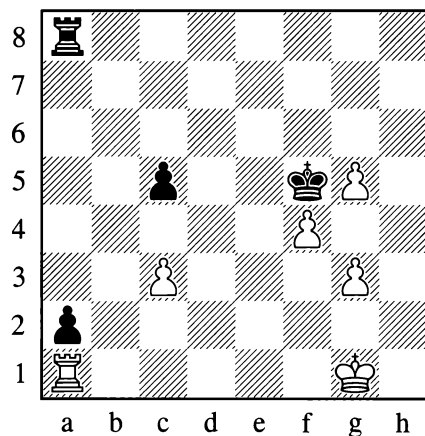
GM Rakhmanov and many other GMs solved this position, and all in the same way. They realised the theme was mutual zugzwang and gave the following variation:

1.♔h2 ♞a8

1...c4 2.♔h3! puts Black in zugzwang. The rook has to retreat. 2...♞a8 3.♔g2, when we have previously seen that White is winning on account of 3...♞a3 4.♔f2, although 3...♔e4! is a bit more complicated, as we shall see by transposition below.

2.♔g1!

White is in the middle of traditional triangulation. If Black plays 2...♞a3, 3.♔g2! would have passed the “right” to move to Black.



2...♞a6

So Black must try a waiting move.

3.♔f2

Threatening 4.♔f3.

3...♞a3

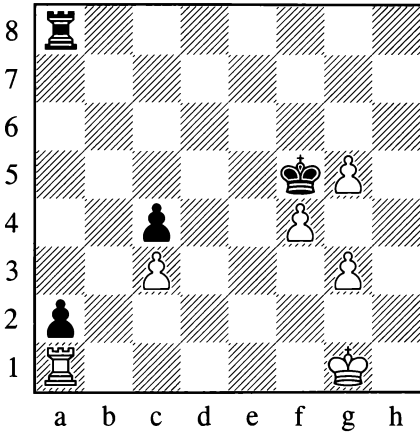
3...♔g4 4.g6 and White will soon be two pawns up without complications.

4.♔g2!

The move has been passed to Black, who is now in zugzwang.

But one variation is not fully satisfactory, although it wins. Black can seek active counterplay with:

2...c4!?



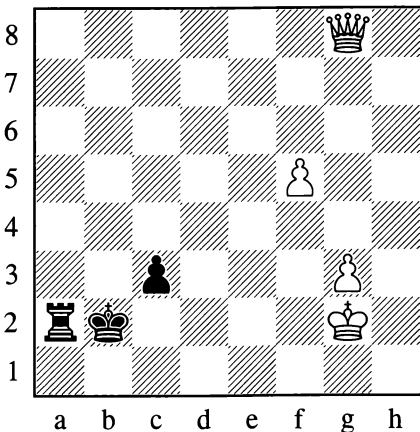
3.♔g2 ♕e4!?

This does not fully work, but does make the win long and in need of accuracy, something computers take for granted, but humans rarely deliver.

4.g6 ♔d3 5.g7 ♕xc3 6.f5!

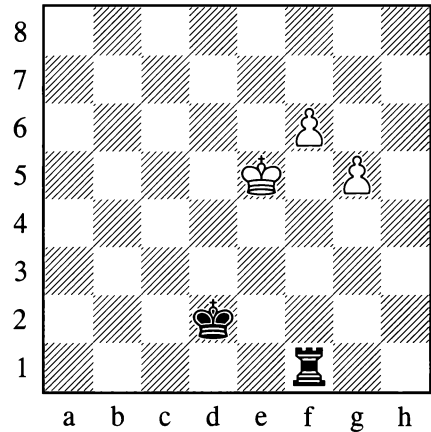
6.g8=♖? ♜xg8 7.♞xa2 ♔b3 would allow Black to draw by one tempo.

6...♔b2 7.♞xa2† ♞xa2 8.g8=♖ c3



The “simplest” winning method appears to be to give up the queen for the c-pawn and queen an additional pawn. If White only had one of his pawns, the position would be a simple draw.

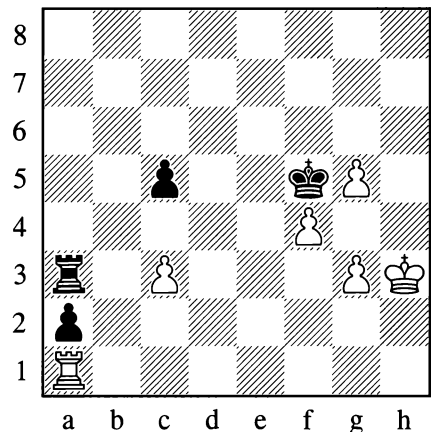
9.♔f3 c2 10.♞b8† ♔c3 11.♞c7† ♔b2 12.f6 c1=♖ 13.♞xc1† ♕xc1 14.g4 ♔d2 15.g5 ♞a1 16.♔e4 ♜f1 17.♔e5



White will eventually queen one of the pawns and then convert the queen vs rook endgame (at least in theory).

So, in order to avoid this long winning line with queen vs rook, the strongest way to play would be:

1.♔h3!



No one ever suggested this move. If the long variation above was leading to a draw, this would be a fantastic study. As it does not, it will have to do as a great illustrative position.

1...♖a8

1...c4 loses to: 2.♔h2! ♖a8 3.♔g2 ♖a3 4.♔f2 and we have another of our key positions. White wins.

2.♔h2! ♖a6 3.♔g1!

3.♔g2 ♖a3 would bring us back to where we started.

3...♖a7

3...c4 4.♔g2! ♖a3 5.♔f2 wins again.

4.♔f2

Finally, threatening 5.♔f3.

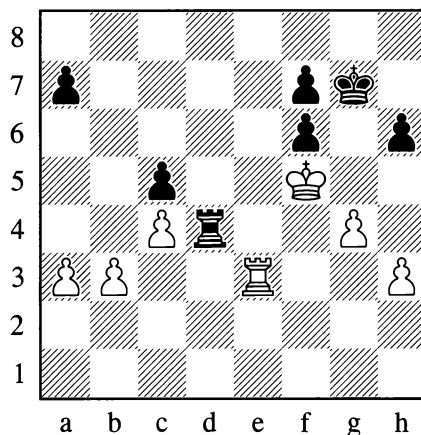
4...♖a3 5.♔g2!

We have returned to the starting position, with zugzwang. White wins.

The final example of this chapter was played in the Four Nations Chess League (4NCL) by a student of the Killer Chess Training academy. I had picked up on the game without paying attention to the names, as I often do, and it was only when it came to discussing the theme of zugzwang at the academy that I realised the coincidence.

Paul Dargan – Julien Shepley

England 2022



46.a4!

The pawn leaves the 3rd rank, making it less likely it will drop off later.

46...a5

There were other options, as so often, but nothing better.

47.♖e7?

A bit of foreshadowing to the next chapter occurs here.

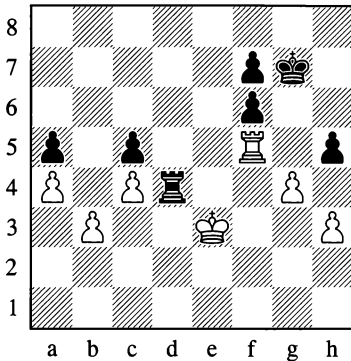
47.♖f3!!

This would prepare to put the rook on f5, which is the ideal position. From there the rook would attack the f6- and c5-pawns (as well as the a5-pawn down the line) and prevent Black's only pawn break, ...h5. But if it was White to play, he would have no way to get it there. His only "pass" move would be h3-h4, which would weaken the kingside and lose time in a later race, should the kingside fall apart. But since it is Black to play, and only the rook is realistically able to move, White will be able to move the king and vacate the f5-square.

47...♖d1

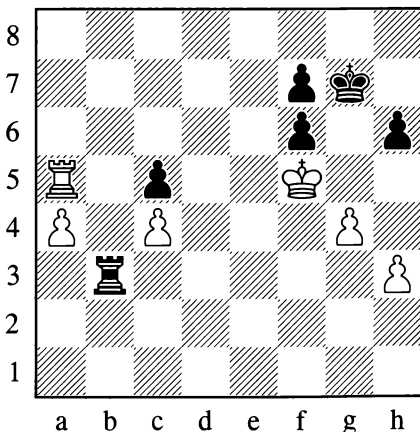
Other squares for the rook exist, but they all lead to similar outcomes.

48.♙e4 ♜d4† 49.♙e3 h5!? 50.♞f5!



Black will lose the pawns on the 5th rank, leaving White with the a- and c-pawns, which will perform spectacularly against the doubled f-pawns in a race.

47...♞d3 48.♞a7 ♞xb3 49.♞xa5



49...♞b4?

49...♞xh3 50.♞xc5 h5! would have created a passed pawn and secured enough counterplay to draw the game.

50.♞xc5 ♞xa4 51.h4?

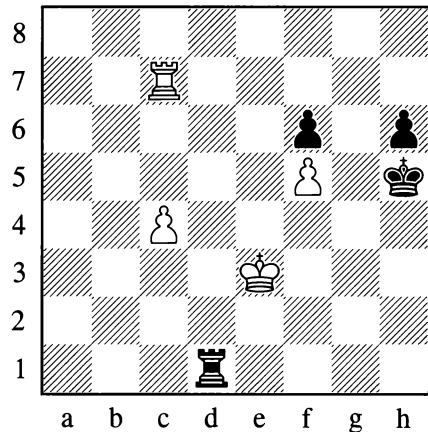
Paul missed a chance here. He could have played 51.♙e4! ♞a3 52.♞h5!, when the counterplay on the kingside will come much too late and the c-pawn wins effortlessly.

51...♞a1 52.h5 ♞f1† 53.♙e4 ♞g1 54.♙f3 ♞f1† 55.♙g2 ♞f4

55...♞c1! with the idea 56.♞c8 f5 57.gxf5 ♙f6 and Black will draw effortlessly.

56.♙g3 ♞d4 57.♞c8 f5 58.gxf5 ♙f6 59.♞c5 ♙g5 60.♙f3 ♙xh5 61.♙e3 ♞d1 62.♞c7 f6?!

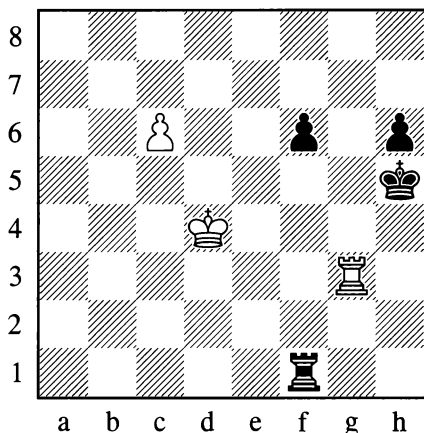
To me 62...♙g5! 63.♞xf7 h5 with active counterplay offered by the h-pawn feels like an easier way to draw, although a few more moves would have to be played.



63.♞g7!

Keeping the black king under control – the beginning of Black's later problems.

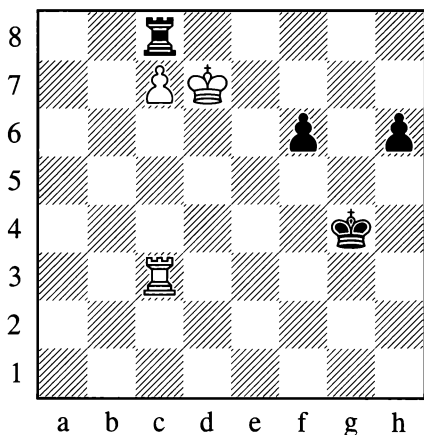
63...♞e1† 64.♙d4 ♞e5 65.c5 ♞xf5 66.c6 ♞f1 67.♞g3



67...♖a1?

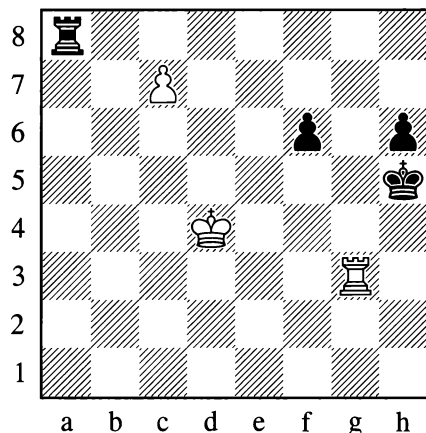
This could have lost to a fabulous idea.

Better was: 67...♞d1† 68.♞d3 ♞c1 69.♞c3 ♞d1† 70.♔c5 ♞d8 71.c7 ♞c8! 72.♔d6 ♔g4 73.♔d7



Black should play 73...♞xc7† and 74...h5!, making the draw. (Usually, we would look to have the pawn queened as far away as possible, but in this case, it would improve White's fortunes. After 73...♞g8?? 74.c8=♞ ♞xc8 75.♞xc8 h5 he has the additional option 76.♞g8†! ♔f3 77.♞h8, winning a crucial tempo in the race.)

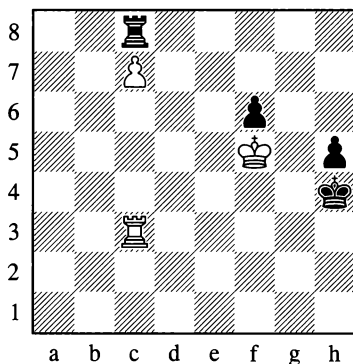
68.c7 ♞a8



69.♔d5?

Analysing the game afterwards with his teammates Paul found the following staircase zugzwang mechanism.

69.♔e4!! ♞c8 70.♔f5! ♔h4 71.♞c3 h5



72.♔f4

The first zugzwang.

72...f5 73.♞c1

A small waiting move, similar to the triangulation above, albeit simpler and more beautiful.

73.♞c2? ♔h3 would put White in zugzwang.

Black escapes.

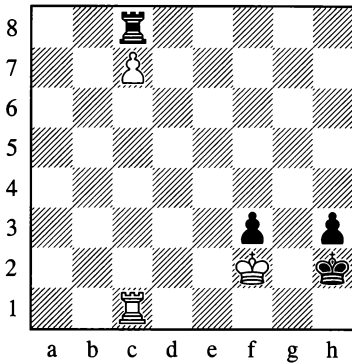
73...♔h3 74.♞c2!

The king is contained. Another zugzwang.

74...h4 75.♔f3 f4 76.♞c3 ♔h2 77.♞c1!

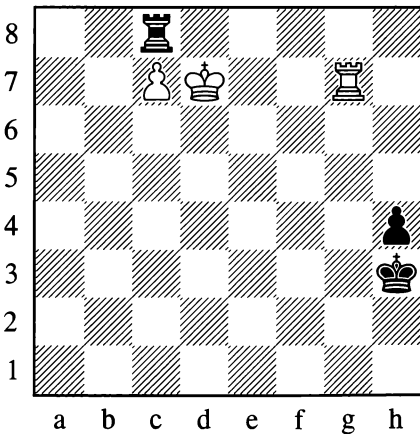
Another zugzwang.

77...h3 78.♔f2 f3 79.♖c4 ♕h1 80.♖c6 ♕h2
81.♖c1



The final zugzwang. White wins.

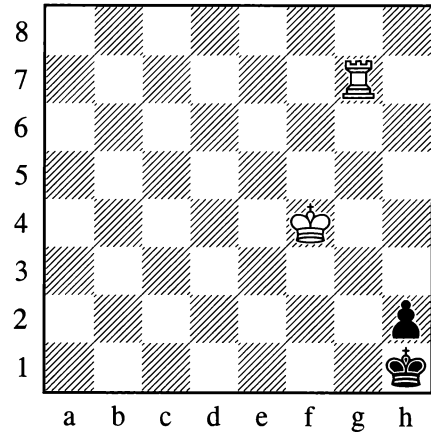
69...♖c8 70.♖g7 ♕h4 71.♕e6 h5 72.♕xf6
♕h3 73.♕e6 h4 74.♕d7



74...♖xc7?

This time 74...♖a8! was the right approach. After 75.c8=♖ ♖xc8 76.♕xc8, the white king is a move further away, allowing Black to draw by a tempo.

75.♕xc7 ♕h2 76.♕d6 h3 77.♕e5 ♕h1
78.♕f4 h2



79.♕g3

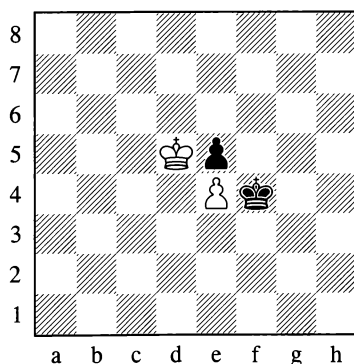
White wins.

79...♕g1 80.♖a7 h1=♕† 81.♕f3 ♕h2
82.♖g7
1-0

Chapter 18

Mutual Zugzwang

In my statistically unrepresentative database of interesting rook endgames, there are some zugzwang examples, but even more with mutual zugzwang. Even the final example of the previous chapter was not free from mutual zugzwang! Mutual zugzwang is used to describe a position where the side to play cannot avoid a deterioration of his position. In most cases, and all the examples in this chapter, the difference is between one side winning and the other side drawing. I cannot remember any positions with mutual zugzwang in rook endings, where the side to play loses, off the top of my head, but the following pawn ending springs to mind:



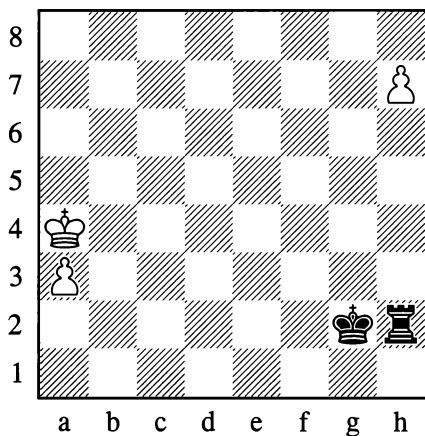
The side to play will lose.

The examples in this chapter will all start in a place of relative innocuousness, before leading to a surprising scenario of mutual zugzwang.

Mark Dvoretsky noticed the following example almost immediately after its publication and wrote a big article about it, calling it a paradox. Whether the first move of this obvious race of the a-pawn to the last rank is a contradiction to logic or simply to expectations I will leave up to others to decide. But it is true that the first time people encounter an idea like this, they are looking into a dimension of chess thinking that was previously hidden from them in plain sight.

Van der Heijden

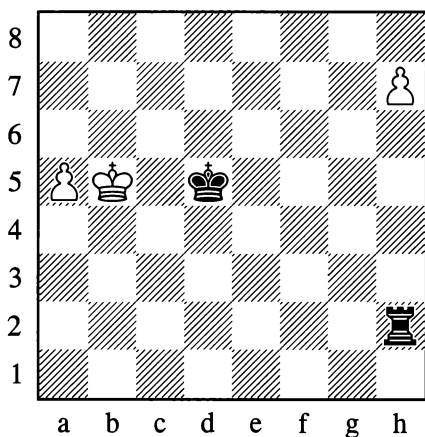
2001



1.♔b5? ♕f3 2.a4 ♔e4 3.a5

When showing this example to students at Killer Chess Training, 3.♔c6 was suggested. Within minutes, a student came up with the smoothest solution. 3...♔d4! 4.a5 ♕c4 5.a6 ♖h6† 6.♔b7 ♕b5! and Black wins.

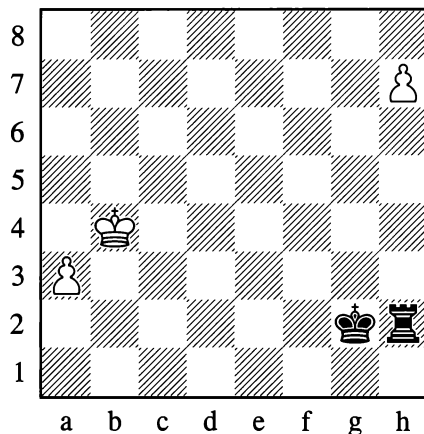
3...♔d5



This is the key position. As it is White to play, he is in zugzwang. After 4.♔b6, Black wins with 4...♕c4! 5.a6 ♖h6†. And after 4.a6, with 4...♖b2† 5.♔a4 ♕c4! 6.♔a5 ♕c5 7.♔a4 ♖b8 and both the white pawns are under control.

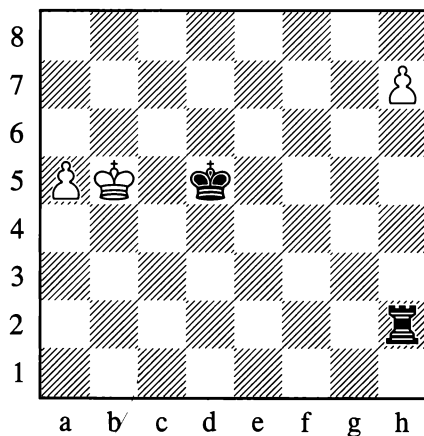
The surprising solution to this danger starts with one of the weirdest-looking moves you will ever have seen.

1.♔b4!!



While still making space for the a-pawn, the white king is seemingly losing a tempo for no good reason. As the rook remains occupied with looking after the h-pawn, the black king still has to rush off in a diagonal line towards the opposing corner to stop the a-pawn.

1...♕f3 2.a4 ♔e4 3.a5 ♔d5 4.♔b5



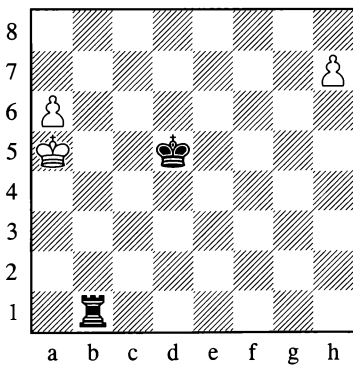
With White having lost a tempo, it is now Black to play. Without concessions from White, Black cannot win.

4...♖b2†

The greatest surprise is probably the lack of waiting moves.

4...♖h3 would bring the rook too close to the white king. 5.a6 ♖b3† 6.♔a4 is no longer the same. 6...♔c4? would not threaten mate. Instead, Black has to rush back with 6...♖b8, when White will make the draw after: 7.a7 ♖a8 8.♔b5.

And after 4...♖h1 we see the real point of the study. 5.a6 ♖b1† 6.♔a5



6...♔c5? no longer works, as 7.h8=♕ would see the queen covering the mating square on the a-file.

5.♔a6 ♖b8 6.♔a7 ♖h8

The final try. 7.a6? ♔c5! would lose.

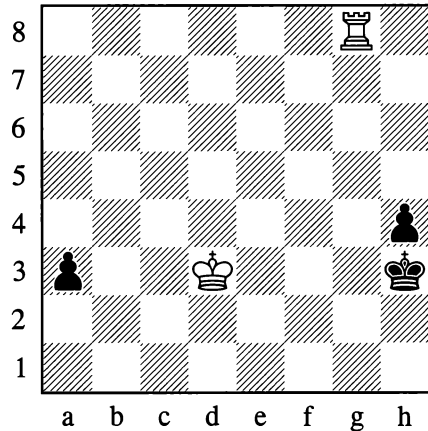
7.♔b6!

But this secures the draw.

Without noticing it, some doofus made what is called an “accidental recomposition” and had it published... I thought I had found something great, but the key point is entirely the position from above. I have removed the variations, which are all rather repetitive.

Jacob Aagaard

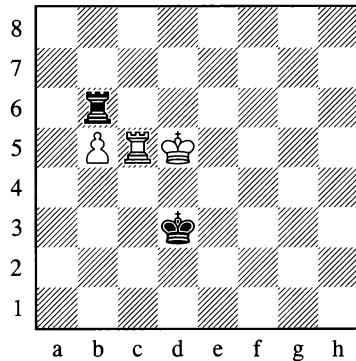
The Problemist (1983) 2008



1.♔e4! a2 2.♖a8 ♔g4 3.♖a7! h3 4.♖g7†
♔h4 5.♔f4! ♔h5 6.♖g1 ♔h4 7.♖h1

And White wins.

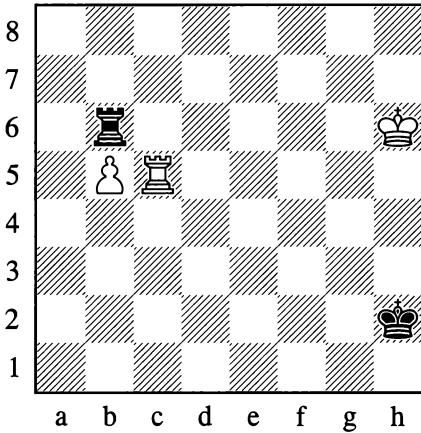
Let's see another mutual zugzwang.



White cannot make progress. If the rook moves, the pawn drops and the king can only move away. Black to play would make a concession. If his rook goes backwards, the white king comes to c6. And if his king moves, the white king can come to c4. Sideway rook moves like 1...♖h6, allows 2.♖c1!, with White untangling himself from the inconvenient sideways defence of the pawn. The rook would no longer be in the way of the white king, which will carry the pawn over the finish line.

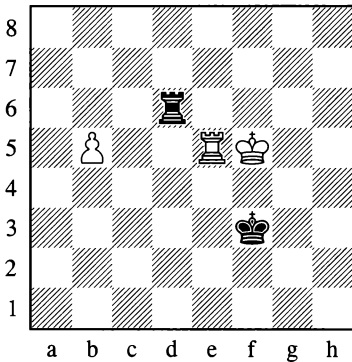
A. Mandler

Berliner Tageblatt 1954



Let's see how we got there. After **1.♔g5? ♕g3**, the direct path with **2.♕f5 ♕f3 3.♖e5 ♕e3 4.♕d5 ♕d3** would land White in zugzwang.

The path to the same position is a bit more elaborate after **2.♖f5**, where Black has to choose the right squares for the rook with care. After **2...♖d6! 3.♖e5 ♕f3 4.♕f5**

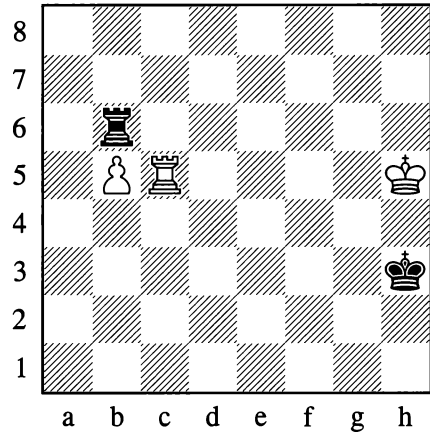


4...♖h6! 5.♖d5 ♕e3 6.♖e5 ♖g6 7.♖c5 ♕d3 8.♕d5 ♖b6, again, it is White to play.

Since this is a study, it is not a big surprise that the best move is:

1.♕h5! ♕h3

1...♕g3 2.♕g5 would see Black arriving first to the d-file, and soon thereafter in zugzwang.



2.♖g5!

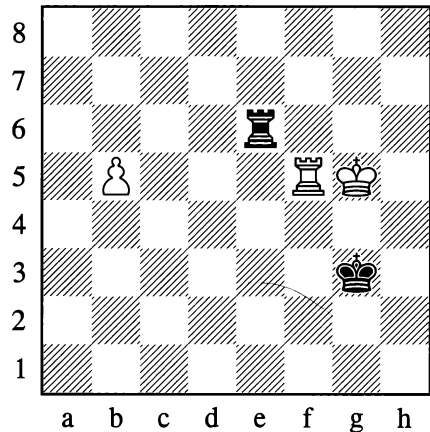
White still has to count the steps. **2.♖d5? ♕g3 3.♕g5 ♕f3 4.♕f5 ♕e3 5.♖e5 ♖h6! 6.♖c5 ♕d3 7.♕d5 ♖b6** would leave White to play.

2...♖d6

2...♕h2 3.♕g4 would see the black king entirely out of the game.

3.♖f5! ♕g3 4.♕g5 ♖e6

4...♖b6 is where Black wants to end up, but not too early. After the basic shuffling on the third and 5th ranks, starting with **5.♖c5** we can easily see Black arrives first and will be in zugzwang. And if he tries **5...♕f2!?**, White will follow with **6.♕f4**, making no difference.



5.♞d5! ♕f3 6.♕f5 ♞h6

Black is trying to lose a move, but this time White has a real threat ready.

Or 6...♞b6 7.♕e5 ♕e3 8.♞c5 ♕d3 9.♕d5, winning.

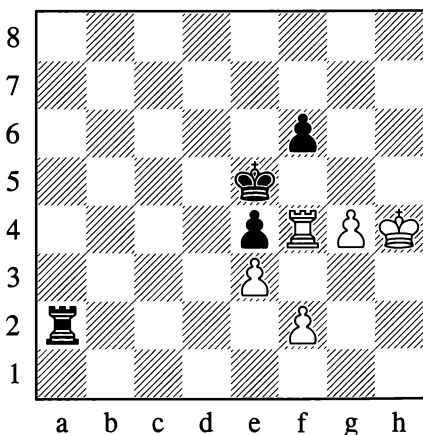
7.♞d3†! ♕e2 8.♞b3

The white rook has been rerouted and the obstacle to pushing the pawn has been overcome.

Usually, when you illustrate a theme with a study, you are presented with something mind blowing. Switching to examples from recent games, you would expect to be a turn to the mundane. In this chapter, this is not the case. The first example is from a Bundesliga game between two experienced grandmasters. Presumably tired and short of time, Black did not see the coming mutual zugzwang until it was up close and personal.

Pavel Eljanov – Jan-Christian Schroeder

Germany 2018



Black has to rely on a frontal defence to avoid White's major threat of ♕h5-g6, followed by ♞f5†. At the same time, he has to keep an eye on the f2-pawn, in case White wants to play ♞f5† and ♕g3-f4, attacking the e4-pawn, tying

the black rook down. Luckily the executions of these two plans are not situated close to each other geographically and Black will be able to swing the rook back and forwards. First it has to go back to limit the advance of the white king.

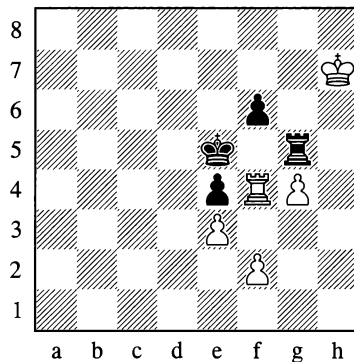
56...♞a8?

As with the paradox example, this move is certainly the natural move any human would make, if he did not have the foresight to think something out of the ordinary was on the way.

57.♕h5 ♞h8†

By now Schroeder must have realised the fate awaiting him, which explains his somewhat unexplainable moves.

57...♞g8 would have been the intention. White continues with 58.♕h6! ♞g5 and all looks good, until 59.♕h7! comes.



Black is in a terrible zugzwang. Quite an unusual one and the game is done. There is a small trick that can be tried. After 59...f5 60.♞xf5† ♞xf5 61.gxf5 ♕xf5, White should play 62.♕h6, when resignation is reasonable. But after 62.♕g7? ♕g5! Black would be able to take the opposition and keep the white king at bay.

58.♕g6 ♞g8†

Trying to urge the white king to h7.

59.♔h6! ♚a8

59...♚g5 60.♔g7 is covered above.

60.♔g7

Black loses the f-pawn and resigned.

1–0

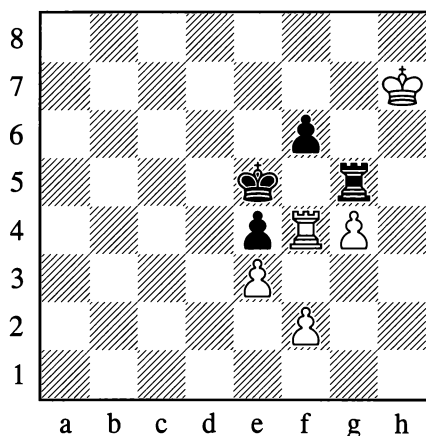
Black could have made a draw by the paradoxical-looking:

56...♚a7!! 57.♔h5

57.♚f5† ♔e6 58.♔g3 Black is in time to return with 58...♚a2!, diminishing the damage of ♔f4xe4 enough to secure the draw.

57...♚g7 58.♔h6

58.♚f5† ♔e6 59.♔h4 again shows Black to be in time with 59...♚a7 60.♔g3 ♚a2.

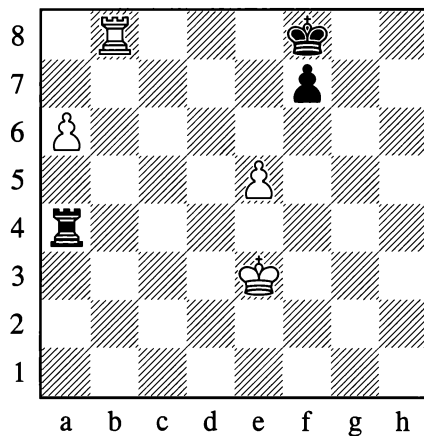
58...♚g8 59.♔h7 ♚g5

White is in zugzwang and cannot improve his position. There is no triangulation or waiting moves, leaving a friendly handshake as all that remains to be done.

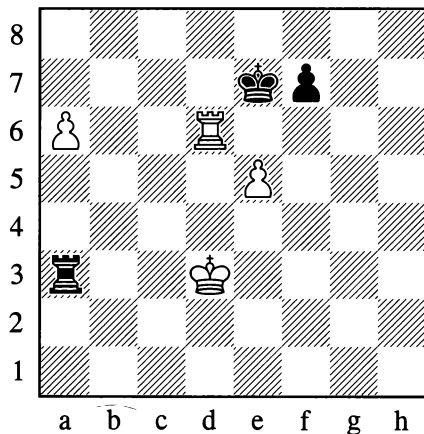
Black lost the following game after a few mistakes. On the surface the game seems to be nothing special, but looking under the hood, we see a lot of details that are quite surprising.

Kazybek Nogerbek – Artem Tyurin

Novi Sad 2022

**42...♔g7?**

Hoping to bring out the king via g6-f5, but this is too optimistic and loses an important tempo.

43.♚b6! ♔f8 44.♔d3 ♔e7 45.♚d6! ♚a3†**46.♔c4?**

This natural move is a simple blunder.

The winning method was 46.♔e4!! ♖a4† 47.♔d5 ♖a5† 48.♔c4 ♖xe5 49.♞d5! ♞e1 50.♖a5 ♞c1† 51.♔d5 ♞c8 52.a7 ♖a8 53.♔c6 and White wins, as the Black king is cut off on the 5th rank and would have to go to g5 to come out, which is both slow and on the wrong side of the pawn.

46...♖a5?

Both players missed 46...f5!!, which would have made a draw.

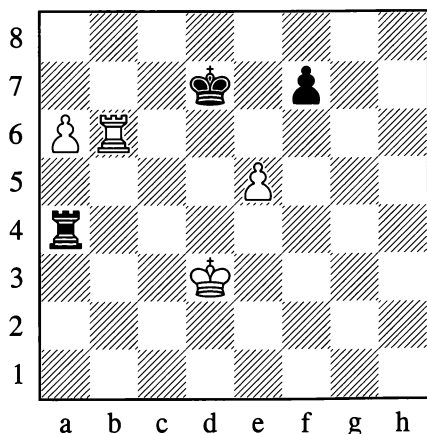
47.♔d4 ♖b5 48.♞d5 ♖b4† 49.♔c5 1–0

Black needed to keep the king active, ready to stop either of the white pawns.

42...♔e7! 43.♞b6 ♔d7

43...♔d8!? 44.♔d3 ♔d7!! works in the same way.

44.♔d3



Black is entering a minefield with mutual zugzwangs all over the place. For example, after 44...♔c7? 45.♞d6!, when the king has to go to c8, when 46.♞f6! is covered below.

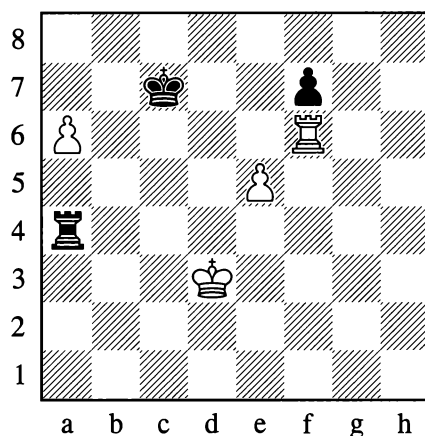
44...♔d8!! 45.♞d6†

45.♞f6 ♔c8! transposes to the main line below.

45...♔c7!

45...♔c8? 46.♞f6 Another mutual zugzwang position. If Black was to go with the king to the d-file, it would be too far away from the a-pawn. And after 46...♔b8 47.♞xf7 ♖xa6 48.♞f6! ♖a1 49.♞c6 the king gets cut off too far to the other side.

46.♞f6



46...♔c8!!

Mutual zugzwang. The black king will follow the white king. But if the black king would have to go first, the white king would go in the opposite direction.

47.♔c3

47.♔d2 ♖a3!? does not improve things for White. But Black could also go for the e-pawn.

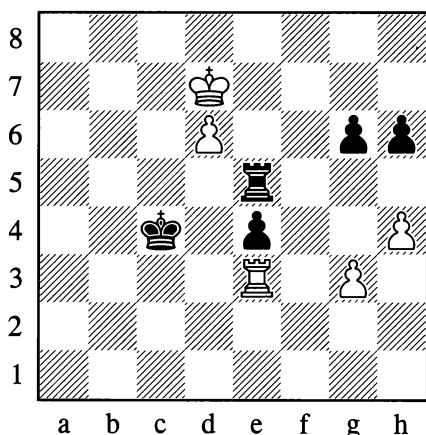
47...♔b8 48.♔b3 ♖a5

Black draws.

The next example is between two important people in British chess. Chapman is a successful businessman who has supported English chess in various ways over the years. Most recently as a supporter of the English over-50 national team, which has been greatly successful in the major events. His opponent is on the other end of the age spectrum. Freddy Gordon is the youngest ever player to play for the Scottish national team. He was selected at the age of 10 to play in the European Team Championship as reserve, where he drew against a grandmaster in the first round, became top scorer and had the second-best rating performance. This game was played only a few months before this selection.

Terry Chapman – Frederick Waldhausen Gordon

Internet 2021



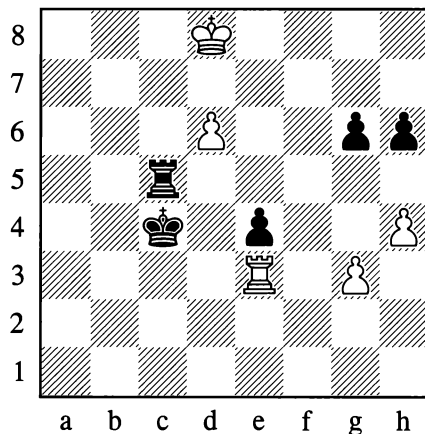
Chapman chose a natural continuation and won the game.

61.♔c7?

61.♔d8? would also have allowed Black to escape. After 61...♔d4 62.♞e1 e3 63.d7 ♕e4! Black would draw as seen below.

61...♞c5† 62.♔d8

For later we notice that 62.♔b6 ♞b5†! is an important resource for Black. After 63.♔a6 ♞d5 64.♞xc4† ♔c5 White should be a bit cautious.



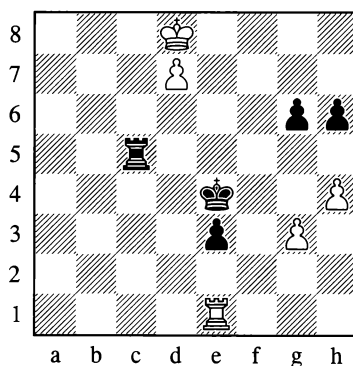
62...♔d5?

You can sense the inexperience of the young Scot. Chasing the d-pawn has no future and led to a relatively unsurprising and quick end.

Returning to move 62, Black would have been able to make a draw by going for the white pawns on the kingside with:

62...♔d4 63.♞e1 e3 64.d7 ♕e4!

64...♔d3? would set up a check on d1 after 65.♔e7.



65.♔e7

A somewhat more complicated attempt is 65.g4!, when White is close, but not close enough. 65...♞a5 66.♔c7 ♞c5† 67.♔d6 ♞d5† 68.♔c6 ♞d2 69.h5 g5! 70.♔c7 ♔f3 71.d8=♞ ♞xd8 72.♔xd8 ♔xg4! 73.♞xe3 ♔xh5 74.♔e7 ♔g4! 75.♔f6 ♔f4 76.♞a3 g4 77.♞a4† ♔f3 78.♔f5

g3 79.♖a3† ♕f2 80.♕f4 g2 81.♖a2† ♕f1
82.♕f3 g1=♖† Black makes the draw with
not a lot of margin.

65...♖e5† 66.♕d6 ♖d5† 67.♕c6 ♖d2 68.♕c7
Black cannot keep checking the white king.

But after:

68...♕f3 69.d8=♖ ♖xd8 70.♕xd8 ♕f2 71.♖a1
e2 72.♕e7 ♕xg3 73.♕f6 g5

Black is in more than good time.

63.d7 ♕d6 64.♖xe4 ♖d5 65.♕e8 ♕c7
66.♖c4† ♕b7
1–0

The win was pointed out by Keith Arkell. If
he found it, or his friend Chapman told him,
I don't know.

61.g4!

This is a waiting move, pure and simple.

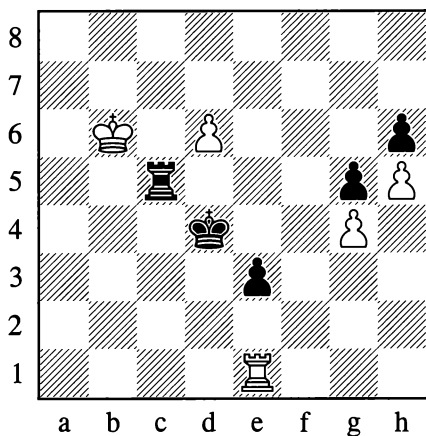
61...g5

61...h5 62.g5 is so similar it is almost
identical, while 61...♕d4 62.♖e1 runs adjacent
to the main line.

62.h5!

This is the position of mutual zugzwang.

62...♕d4 63.♖e1 e3 64.♕c6 ♖c5† 65.♕b6



This is the point. Above we saw that Black
had ...♖b5†. With this gone, lost in the
zugzwang, Black is done for.

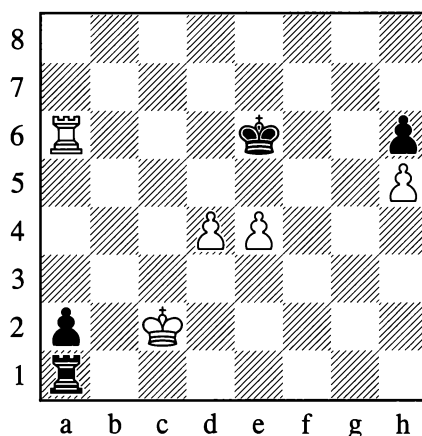
65...♖d5 66.♖d1† ♕e4 67.♖xd5 e2 68.d7

White wins.

In the usual time scramble we see at the end
of rapid games, Black had to choose between
three possible squares for his king.

Giga Quparadze – Manuel Petrosyan

Warsaw (rapid Wch) 2021



56...♕d7?

We will start by considering a losing option
which Black avoided in the game.

57.♕b2! ♖d1

57...♖e1 58.e5 ♖e2† 59.♕a1 also exposes
the downside of putting the king on d7.
59...♖d2 60.♖xh6 ♖xd4 61.♖d6† would see
White queen a pawn.

58.d5 ♖e1 59.♕xa2 ♖xe4 60.♖xh6 ♖d4
61.d6

White wins. Black cannot take the d-pawn
and White can bring the king in to help. It
may at first glance look as if it will be difficult
for White to make progress, once the black
rook is behind the h-pawn. But with the white

king on f6 or g7, he would give up the d-pawn and get the h-pawn going.

The game went:

56...♔e7? 57.e5

57.♔b2? does not work this time around. Because the king is not on d7, there will be no check on d6. 57...♞e1! 58.e5 ♞d1 59.♔xa2 ♞xd4 60.♞xh6 ♞e4 Black can take the e-pawn, as the king this time is within reach of the h-pawn.

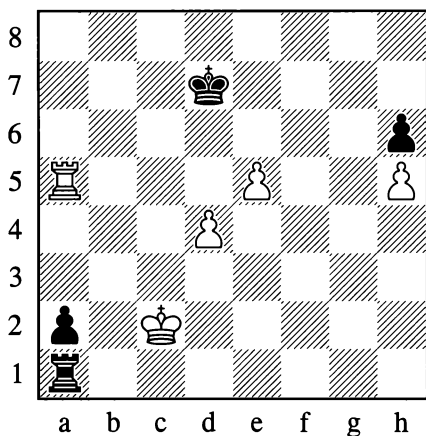
57...♔e8

If the king goes to f7, White has e5-e6†. If the king goes to d7, there is a check on d6.

58.♞a5

58.♞a7 ♔d8 59.♞a4 was also strong. The a-pawn falls quickly.

58...♔d7



59.♞a4?

A crude blunder.

White would have won instantly with 59.♔b2 ♞d1 60.♞d5†, with two extra pawns.

59...♔c6 60.e6 ♔d5 61.e7 ♞e1

The game was later drawn.

By method of elimination, I am sure all have realised that the right move was:

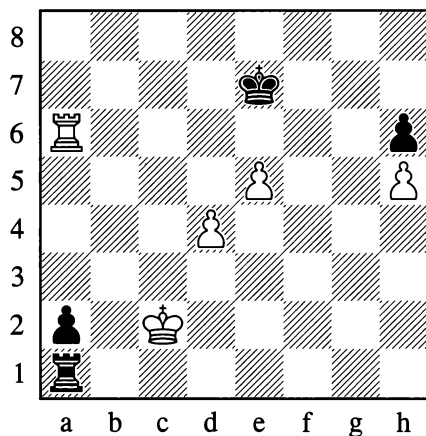
56...♔f7!

It is difficult for White to hang on to both the central pawns. Black is threatening ...♞e1, picking up the e-pawn.

57.e5

57.♔b2 shows Black's main idea: 57...♞d1 58.d5 ♞e1 59.♔xa2 ♞xe4 60.♞xh6 ♞e5 61.d6 ♔g7 62.♞g6† ♔f7 and White will soon have to yield.

57...♔e7!



We have reached the position of mutual zugzwang. If Black was to play, he would have to put his king into harm's way. Alas, he does not.

58.♞a4!?

A clever waiting move.

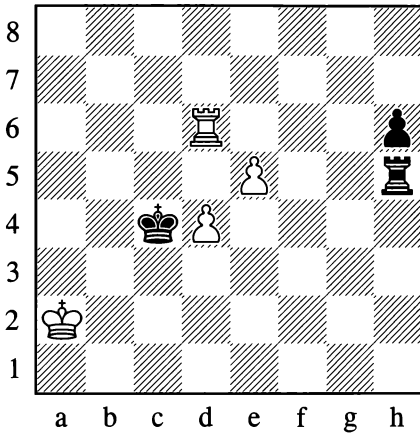
58.d5 ♞e1 picks up the e-pawn.

58...♔e6 59.♔b2 ♞h1 60.♞a6†!

The only challenge.

60.♔xa2 ♔d5 would cut the line short. White will not be able to put any challenges to Black.

60...♔d5 61.♞d6† ♕c4 62.♕xa2 ♞xh5



White has two connected passed pawns. But being under observation, they are slow to advance, whereas the h-pawn is poised to run unopposed down the board.

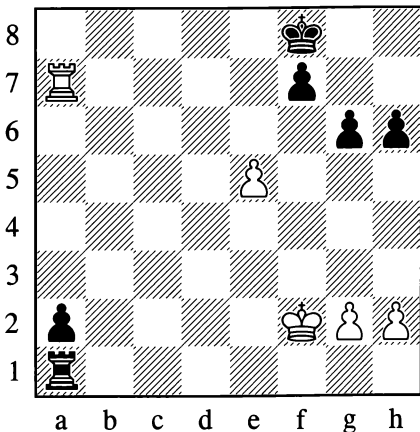
63.e6 ♞h2† 64.♕a3 ♞e2 65.d5 h5 66.♞d7 h4

White will have to eliminate the h-pawn sooner or later, giving up his two pawns on the way.

The following example is quite complicated, even if the game was not.

Sanan Sjugirov – Aleksey Goganov

Sochi 2020



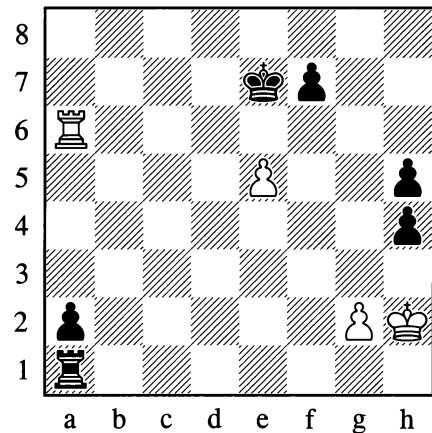
48.h3? g5 49.♕g3 h5

White is already in dire straits. If the king retreats, 50...h4 will put White in zugzwang. White will have to move the rook, after which the black king will surround the e5-pawn all by himself.

50.h4

Natural desperation.

50...gxh4† 51.♕h2 ♕e8 52.♞a3 ♕d7 53.♞a6 ♕e7



White will have to let the black king pass the 6th rank, but chose to resign instead. Then we come to a basic theme of theoretical rook endings. Black will play ...h3 at some point. White has to play gxh3, after which the f-pawn advances and will eventually have to be eliminated, when the black rook comes out to win the game.

0–1

White's defence had to start with:

48.♕g3! ♕e8

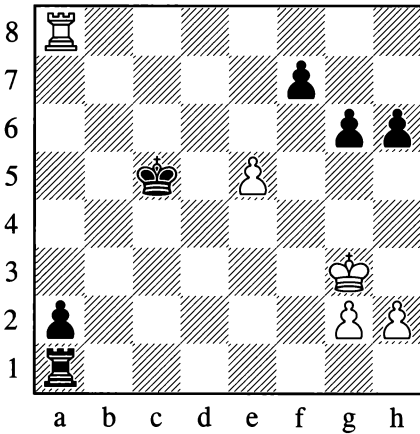
After both 48...g5 49.♕g4 and 48...h5 49.♕h4, White will hold.

White has to make a concession.

49. ♖a8†

There are other reasonable tries, which generally lead in the same direction.

49... ♔d7 50. ♖a6 ♕c7 51. ♖a7† ♕b6 52. ♖a8 ♕c5



We have reached a critical position. To understand how White can save it, we will first consider some losing options.

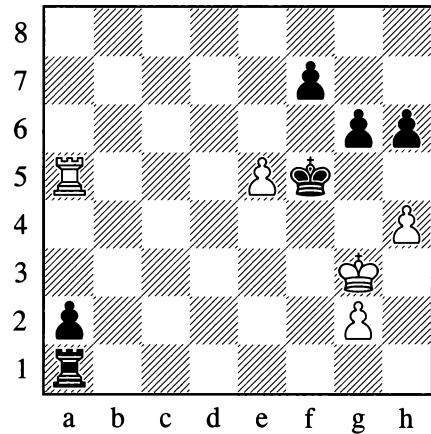
53. h4?

This would lead to a terrible weakening of the white position.

53. ♖a7? is also inadequate: 53... ♕d5 54. ♖a5† ♕e6 55. ♕g4 (After 55. ♕h3 h5 56. ♕g3 g5, the black king will soon arrive on f4, causing zugzwang.) 55... ♖h1 and Black wins.

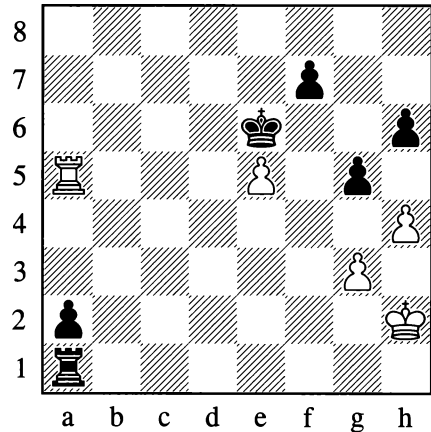
53. ♖a5†? ♕b4 54. ♖a8 ♕b3! is similar.

53... ♕d5 54. ♖a5† ♕d4 55. ♕h2 ♕e4 56. ♕g3 ♕f5



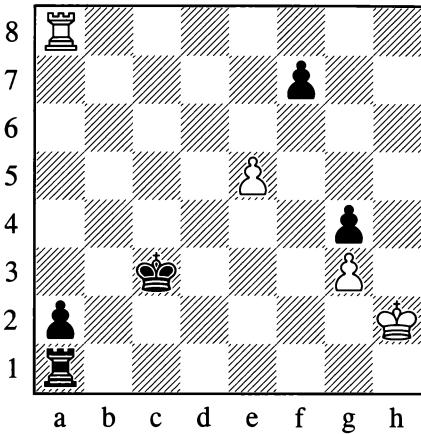
Either the h4-pawn will be lost, or White will have to weaken his position further.

57. ♕h2 ♕f4 58. g3† ♕f3 59. ♖a3† ♕e4 60. ♖a5 ♕f5 61. ♕g2 ♕e6 62. ♕h2 g5!



The purpose of this is to imprison the white king.

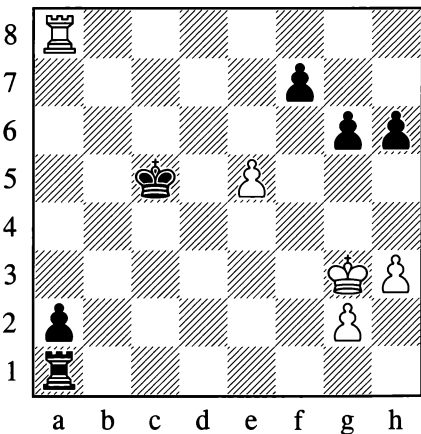
63. hxg5 hxg5 64. ♕g2 g4 65. ♕h2 ♕d7 66. ♖a6 ♕c7 67. ♖a8 ♕b6 68. ♕g2 ♕b5 69. ♕h2 ♕c4 70. ♕g2 ♕c3 71. ♕h2



71...♞d1! 72.♞xa2 ♞d2† 73.♞xd2 ♔xd2
The pawn ending wins.

White needs to defend against losing the h-pawn and should play:

53.h3!

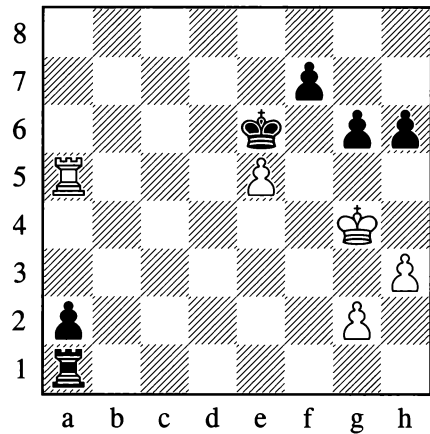


53...♔d5

The critical try.

White is also fine after both 53...h5 54.h4 and 53...g5 54.♔g4!.

54.♞a5† ♔e6 55.♔g4!



A necessary move. If the black king comes to f5 and later f4, White will end up in zugzwang and lose the e5-pawn. After the text move Black can circle around via the b- and c-files and get to e4, but White would wait with the king on g3, so ...♔e4 can be met by ♔g3-g4, and the black king cannot make it to f5.

I have not been able to put together a meaningful variation, as I cannot see a serious try for Black (virtually only the king is able to move). It is easier to show how White would lose, if White was to play; which makes sense, as White is able to put up a blockade here, but zugzwang would create a crack in the wall...

55...(pass) 56.h4

A minor concession, but enough to tip the balance.

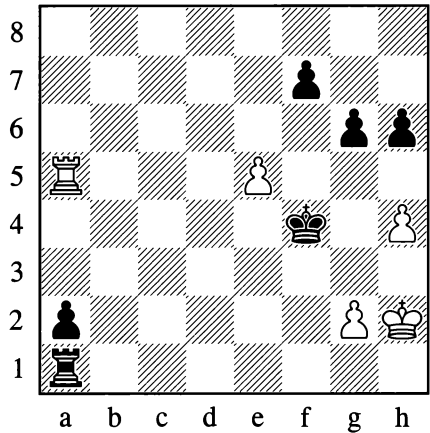
56.g3 loses on the spot, after 56...h5†, when 57.♔g5 ♞g1 wins pawns, and 57.♔h4 ♔f5 leads to zugzwang.

56...♔d7

The black king will circle around via the queenside. White can play in a lot of different ways, which all lead to the same place.

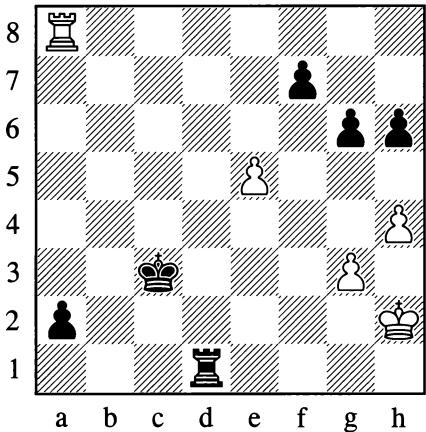
57.♔g3 ♕c6 58.♞a8 ♔d5 59.♞a5† ♕d4
The zugzwang train starts.

60.♕g4 ♕e4 61.♕g3 ♕f5 62.♕h2 ♕f4



This is the painful moment. White has to make more concessions.

63.g3† ♕e4 64.♕g2 ♕d4 65.♕h2 ♕c3
66.♞a8 ♞d1!



67.♞xa2 ♞d2†
Black wins the pawn ending.

Chapter 19

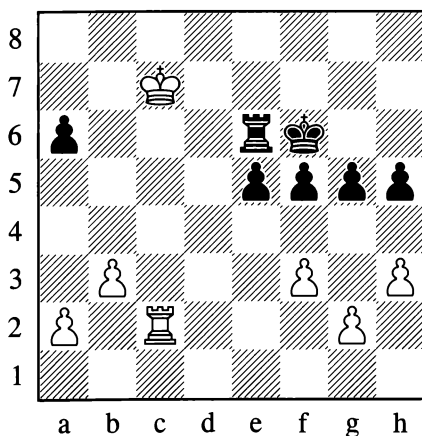
Tempo Wars

Endgames often go through two phases. In the first, manoeuvring is happening. Perhaps one player is in control and the other is preparing himself against the various ideas he can be faced with. But once an attempt to convert a positional advantage into a full point begins, it has an irreversible nature and the game goes from a period of preparation into a period of consequences. Often this happens with a pawn break or a pawn race. Endgames are mainly about queening pawns. Rook endings are no different. In this chapter we will look at situations where the players can utilize finesses to prepare for the race and shift the balance in their favour.

We know how these Internet rapid games go. The players run out of time and are presented with a meagre 10 seconds per move, which never adds up to much. Before you manage to have a second thought, you have to play your first one... Navara played everyone's first idea, running with the queenside, creating a passed pawn and then seeing it arriving too late.

David Navara – Loek van Wely

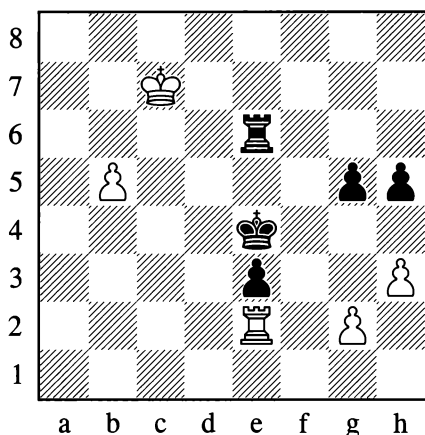
Internet 2021



48.b4? e4!

The e-pawn is well supported by the black rook.

49.fxe4 fxe4 50.a4 e3 51.♞e2 ♔f5 52.b5
axb5 53.axb5 ♕e4



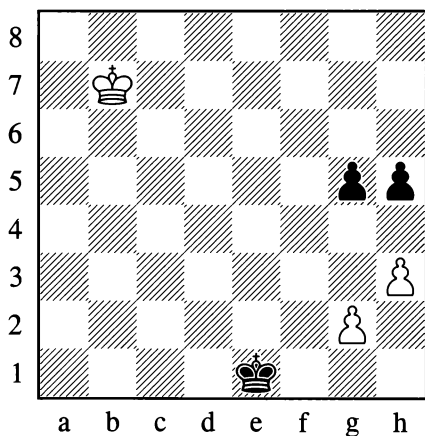
54.b6

54.♞a2 is an interesting idea in some positions, where White wants to get to the far side to harass the king. But after 54...♔d3 55.♞a3† ♕c4, the e-pawn looks formidable.

54...♔d3 55.♞e1 ♔d2 56.♞a1 e2 57.b7
♞e7† 58.♔c6 ♞xb7

The simplest.

59.♔xb7 e1=♚ 60.♞xe1 ♔xe1

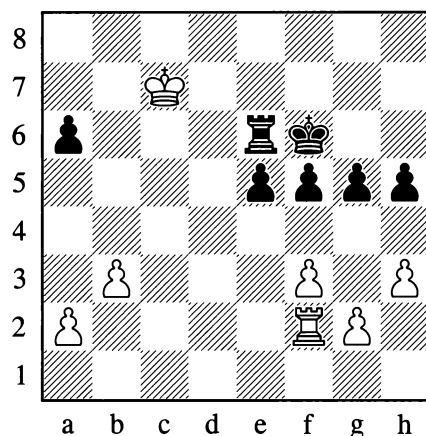


The white king is way offside for a pawn ending.

61.♔c6 ♔f2 62.g4 hxg4
0-1

White could have won a tempo by making it harder for Black to create a passed pawn.

48.♞f2!!



Obviously this looks artificial, but the natural line went straight to the mortuary, so it makes sense to look at something less obvious.

48...♔e7

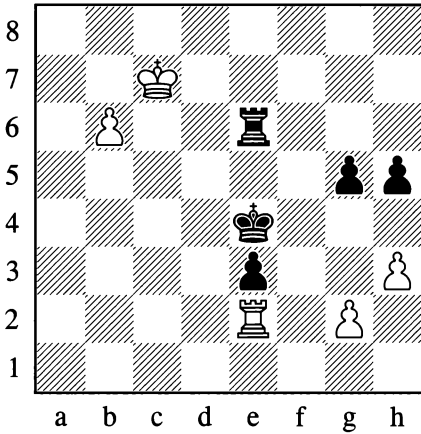
At the academy we tried hard to get other lines going for Black, but nothing was working.

Analysis of 48...♔g6 49.b4 e4 50.fxe4 fxe4 proved that here white has to play 51.g4!, to make use of the extra tempo. It draws uneventfully. Although 49.♔d7! is simpler and underlines the futility of the king move.

49.b4

White has won a tempo for the race. The rook will have to block the e-pawn no matter what, while the black king is farther away.

49...e4 50.fxe4 fxe4 51.a4 e3 52.♞e2 ♔f6
53.b5 axb5 54.axb5 ♔f5 55.b6 ♔e4

**56. Ra2!**

An important idea.

56... cxd3 57. Ra3+!

The most natural is to harass the black king.

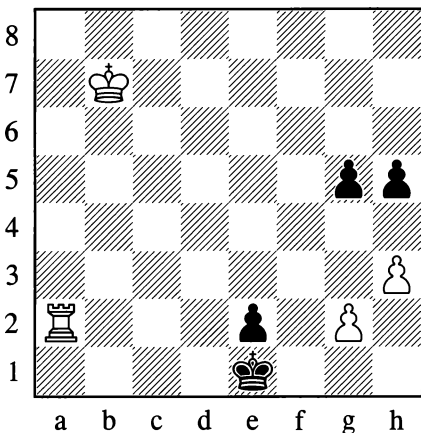
White can also opt for 57. b7!? Rxe7+ 58. c6 Rxb7, but would then have to play 59. Ra3+! cxd2 60. Ra2+! to make the draw.

57... cxd2 58. Ra2+ cxe1

Eventually the king has to go to an inconvenient square.

59. b7 Re7+

Black does not get more out of 59... Re8 60. Ra8, although 60... Re7+ would still hold.

60. cxc6 Rxb7 61. cxb7 e2**62. Ra5!**

Not an overly difficult move, but absolutely essential. The rook comes behind the passed pawn, and anticipates ... cxd2 which can now be met by Rxd2.

62... cxf1

62... g4? 63. Rxd5 g3 would be trying too hard. After 64. h4 the white pawn arrives so early that Black will lose.

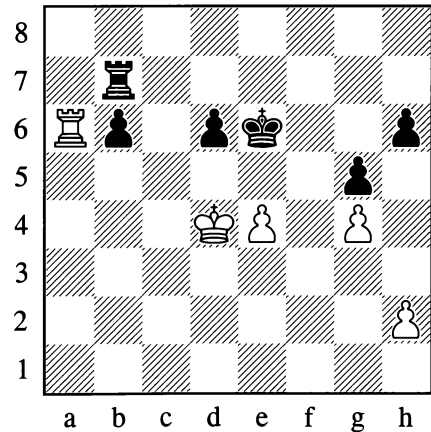
63. Rf5+ cgl 64. Ra5

White makes the draw.

The next position has many similarities with the previous example, except this time winning the tempo war means winning the game.

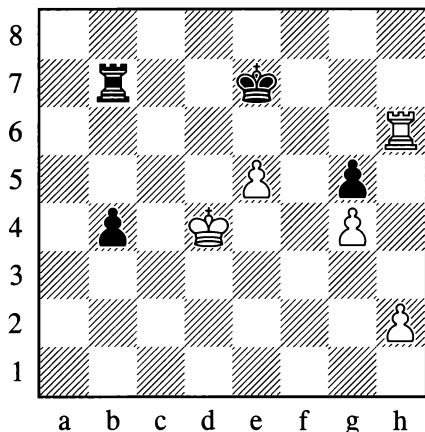
Denis Khismatullin – Ernesto Inarkiev

Minsk 2016



If Black plays with his hands, he will already have lost his head:

46... b5? 47. e5 b4 48. Rxd6+ cxe7 49. Rxd6



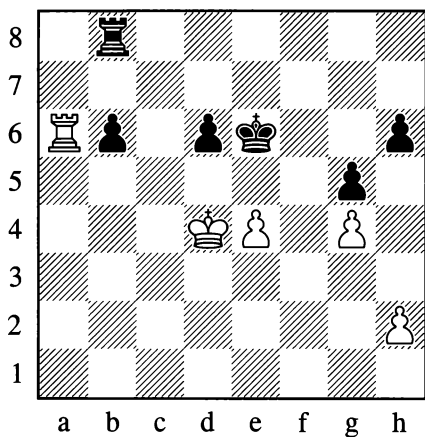
We see the issue. White is threatening 50.♖h7† and Black will have to lose a tempo to avoid losing the rook.

49...♖b8 50.♖a6 b3 51.♖a1 b2 52.♖b1

White is in time and the draw is not far away.

Inarkiev understood all of this well and for this reason played a beautiful preparation move, winning the tempo war.

46...♖b8!!



The idea is simple. In the line above, 50.♖h7† was a nuisance, but here it will not come into

play, as the rook is no longer hanging on the 7th rank. At the same time, it asks a pertinent question: what is White actually doing, besides waiting to meet ...b5 with e4-e5?

47.h3

Nothing, it seems.

47.♖c4 b5† 48.♖b4 ♖e5 would see Black switch to the kingside similarly to what happened in the game.

It is tempting to look at active defence for White. Usually this is what works, so it should be our first instinct.

But after 47.♖a7 b5 48.♖h7 b4 49.♖xh6† ♖d7 50.♖d5 Black can push the b-pawn, as White will not succeed in threatening mate. Although the 3-second human solution 50...♖b5† 51.♖c4 b3! is both simple and best.

47...b5

A number of our students wanted to play for zugzwang with 47...♖b7?, but the rook is poorly placed on b7, as we remember. After 48.♖a8 b5 49.♖h8 White has enough counterplay.

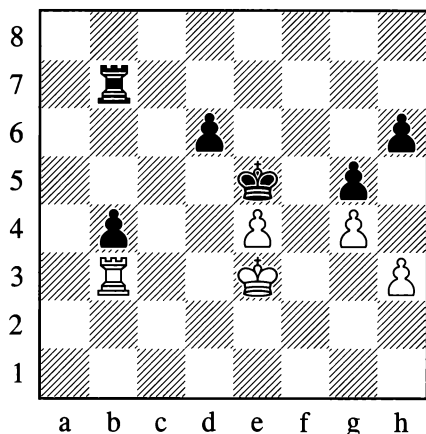
48.♖a3!?

Khismatullin plays passively out of need, rather than desire. He must have seen that 48.e5 b4 49.♖xd6† ♖e7 was hopeless for the reasons mentioned above, and decided to hope for his opponent to make a mistake down the line.

48...b4 49.♖b3 ♖b7

Putting White in zugzwang. No mistakes are forthcoming.

50.♖d3 ♖e5 51.♖e3



51...♖c7!

The simplest is to play actively.

52.♖xb4 ♜c3† 53.♙f2 ♜xh3

Black has too many threats. ...♙f4 and ...♞d3-d4 are the first to mention.

54.♙g2 ♞e3 55.♖b5† ♙f4 56.♞d5 ♙xg4 57.♞xd6 h5

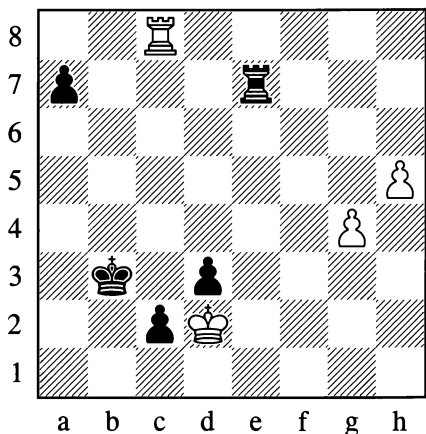
White resigned. Excellent technique from Inarkiev.

0–1

Carlsen did not believe that he had any winning chances and played a random move without serious engagement.

Fabiano Caruana – Magnus Carlsen

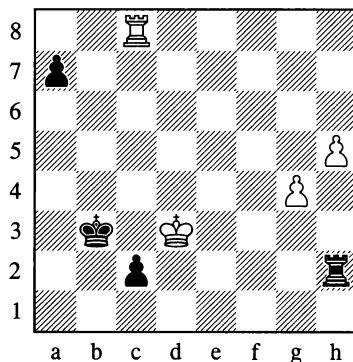
Karlsruhe 2018



54...a5? 55.h6 ♞e2† 56.♙xd3 ♞h2 57.g5 ♞h3† 58.♙d2 ♞h2† 59.♙d3

½–½

An interesting try was pointed out by Aradhya Garg: Black can play 54...♞e2†? 55.♙xd3 ♞h2, with the idea of controlling the white pawns from behind in classical style.

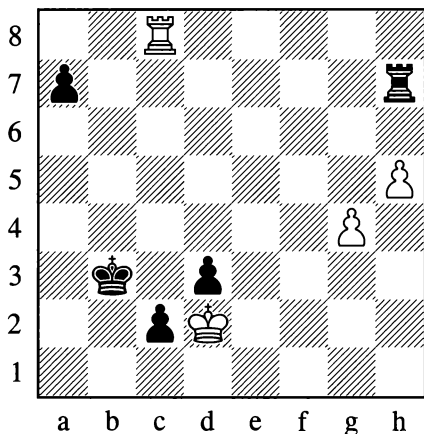


The problem is that Black is not actually threatening to take any of the pawns. White should now advance the pawn not controlled by the rook, which looks as if it would be a tempo up – and simply is a tempo up. 56.g5! ♙b2 57.g6 and White makes the draw.

However, it is also possible to lose to the following classical trick: 56.h6? ♙b2 57.g5 c1=♚ 58.♞xc1 ♙xc1 59.♙e4 a5 60.♙f5 a4 61.g6 ♞h5†!

The winning idea was unsurprisingly connected to slowing down the advance of the white pawns. In this position this is unusually happening from the front.

54...♞h7!



55.♔xd3!

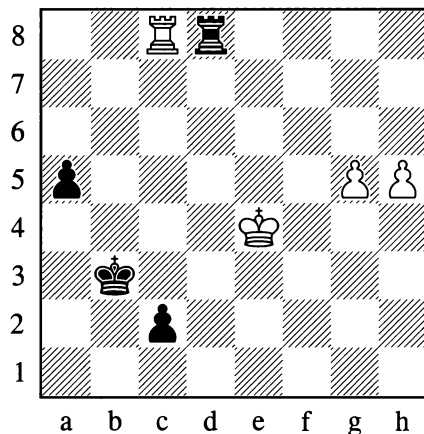
This is the only serious try.

The passive options all look the same, so we may as well choose the least embarrassing of them to illustrate why it does not work: 55.♔b8† ♕a2 56.♖c8 Forced, in order to prepare ♕xd3. 56...a5 57.♕xd3 ♕b1 The c-pawn is immune, which is part of the reason why the rook is so well placed on h7. 58.♖b8† ♕c1 59.♖f8 a4 Or something like that. Black wins in all the variations.

55...♖d7† 56.♕e4

56.♕e2 is not as silly as it looks. White is trying to take the d1-square away from the black king and trying to create a race between the pawns. This loses, but with the king placed passively, 56...♖d1! is simpler. Black arrives with lots of time to spare.

56...a5 57.g5 ♖d8!



Black will have to play this idea at some point to win the race. It makes more sense to do it earlier, when far advanced pawns would not provide White with a bit of a mess, if he chooses to take the rook.

58.♖c7

This move is forced, but it's a sad concession. Black has won another important tempo, as it will take one more move for the white pawns to be able to threaten to make it to the back rank (as both will have to make it to the 7th rank now). After:

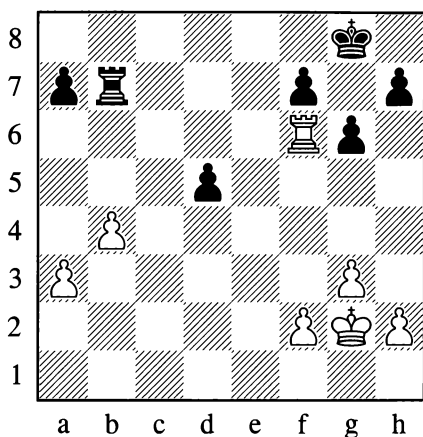
58...a4

The black pawns arrive first.

The last game in this chapter has loads of small tempo war manoeuvres. It is not a perfect game, but it has a lot of nice ideas in play from both players and should be highly instructive.

Aleksey Goganov – Maksim Schekachikhin

St. Petersburg 2021

**31...Ra6!**

The rook is perfectly placed here, ready to quickly create passed pawns, which is persistently the most successful strategy in the endgame.

31...♠g7 32.♠f3 h5 33.h4!?

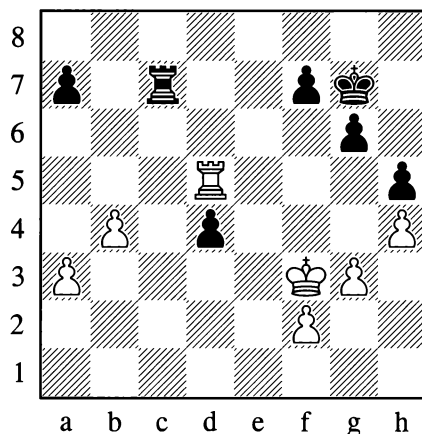
This move is fine and Goganov follows it up with a number of accurate moves that should have won easily, except in the end, he had to make more than he was able to do to win without “complications”.

I prefer 33.♠e3, quickly attacking the d-pawn, ready to meet 33...h4 with 34.gxh4!, when White is far ahead in a potential race between the two kings.

33...Rc7 34.Ra5!

An important tempo-winning move. The rook attacks the d-pawn, while at the same time keeping an eye on the a-pawns. One to defend and one to remove, given half the chance.

34.Rd6 Rc7 35.Ra6! would lead to a repetition.

34...d4 35.Rd5 Rc7**36.♠e4?!**

Goganov definitely considered 36.Rc5, but must have failed to notice that the d-pawn drops after 36...Rc7 37.Rc4!.

36...Rc2!

Black manages to create counterplay. Goganov now decided to go for the a-pawn, which creates the beautiful connected passed pawns.

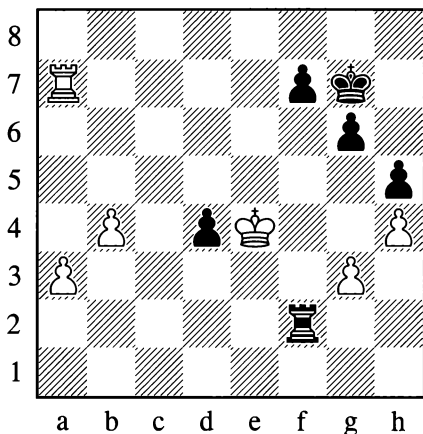
37.Ra5?

The problem with connected passed pawns is that they both have to move in order to exploit their combined power of 1+1=2. And meanwhile the white rook will be far away from the action on the rest of the board after taking on a7.

The core fault of going for the a-pawn is that White unnecessarily enters complications. It was possible for him to win a pawn and keep control. He would be far better placed for a future race, if he had already eliminated the d-pawn. Instead, he decided to provoke the race immediately. Both players now made mistakes and White won anyway, but it is worth noticing how this happened. Black was unable to act with energy in creating the one thing that would give him counter-chances: a passed pawn.

Correct was 37.f3! ♖g2 (37...♞e2†!? 38.♔f4! is similar) 38.♔f4 ♞a2 39.♞a5 and White wins a vital pawn.

37...♞xf2 38.♞xa7

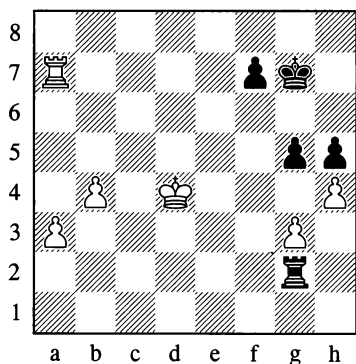


38...g5?

38...♞g2! 39.b5 (39.♔f3 ♞b2! would slow down the white pawns sufficiently.) 39...♞xg3 40.♔xd4 g5! Material is often a less important factor in endgames than people realise. Because endgames are centred around promoting pawns, creating passed pawns is a high priority in most situations. Black makes a draw with a small, but significant, margin.

39.hxg5?

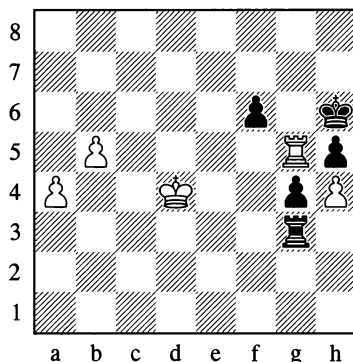
After 39.♔xd4! ♞g2, White would have a rather beautiful winning variation, with lots of small tempo-gains, at his disposal.



40.♞a5!! g4

Black cannot take on g3, as the white king is close enough to stop the h-pawn.

41.a4 ♞xg3 42.♞g5† ♔h6 43.b5 f6



44.♞g8!

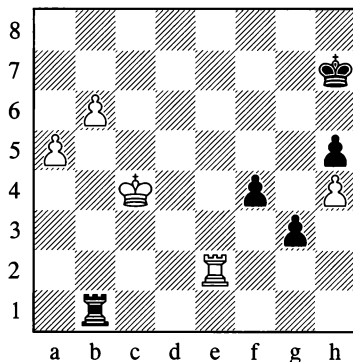
An important tempo move, as the rook is not anticipating assisting in promoting the b-pawn.

44.♞c5? ♞a3! would hold.

44...♞b3

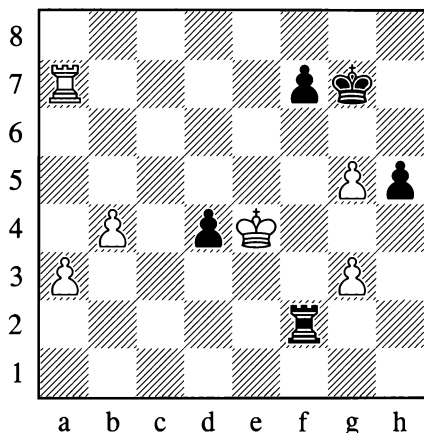
44...♔h7 45.♞c8 ♞a3 also loses spectacularly. White plays: 46.b6 ♞xa4† 47.♔c3! Avoiding a mess with two new queens on the board. 47...♞a3† 48.♔c4! White wins. For example, after queening first and picking up the new black queen with a check from behind.

45.♔c4 ♞b1 46.a5 ♔h7 47.♞e8 g3 48.♞e2 f5 49.b6 f4



50.♞e5!!

White wins additional time. The threat of ♞xh5† followed by ♞g5† is enough to slow Black down. And after 50...♙h6 51.♞g5! f3 52.♞xg3 f2 53.♞f3 f1=♚† 54.♞xf1 ♞xf1 55.b7 the white pawns sail through.

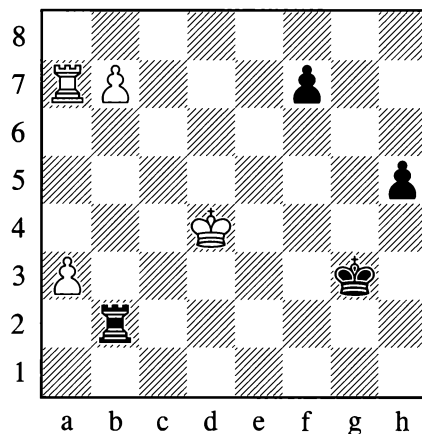


39...♙g6?

Using four moves with the black king to take the g3-pawn is an incompetent waste of time, only forgivable because of the lack of time Black had to make this decision. White won with a nice little tempo-gaining finesse.

39...♞g2! would drive the white king to a worse square. 40.♙f3 (40.b5 ♞xg3 and 41...♞b3 would leave the h-pawn to make the draw – which it would.) 40...♞b2! 41.♞a5 The connected pawns are really slow, when controlled. 41...♞b3† The simplest. 42.♙f4 d3 43.♙e3 d2† 44.♙xd2 ♞xg3 The h-pawn is hard to get to. Black makes the draw.

40.b5 ♙xg5 41.b6 ♞b2 42.b7 ♙g4 43.♙xd4 ♙xg3



44.♙c3!!

By kicking the rook with the king (which would be happy anywhere), White ensures that the a-pawn will win a tempo as it lunges up the board!

44...♞b1 45.♙c2 ♞b6 46.a4 h4 47.a5 ♞b5 48.a6 h3 49.♞a8 h2 50.♞h8

1–0

Chapter 20

Anticipation

One of the most basic tools I use to understand chess is that of The Three Questions:

Where are the weaknesses?

Which is the worst placed piece?

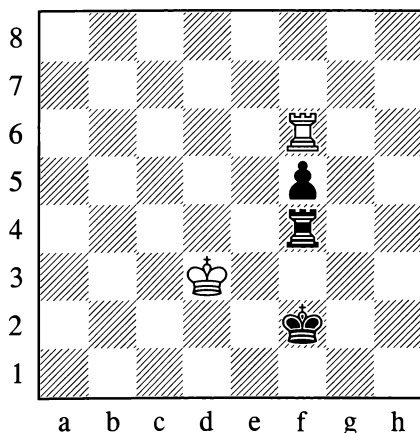
What is the opponent's idea?

The value of these questions is focus. Chess games are decided on weaknesses. We need to make the most out of our pieces. And we need to understand the opponent's ideas as well as find ideas for ourselves, yet we frequently forget.

Anticipation is a sub-section of prophylaxis, which is the understanding of the opponent's ideas, with various levels of reaction to them, scaling from full-on prevention to complete apathy. With anticipation, we are looking at small finesses, often deep into the variations. Understood as such, this is a deep and irrationally random way of looking at deep calculation – and as such, not really useful. But let's add one of the core pieces of advice I give students on decision making with the examples in this chapter, and a path to using this way of thinking constructively will appear.

Detlev Fischer – Ing. Ján Matúšek

email 2012



In our first example, White is in danger. He is a pawn down and has to fight for the draw. Using the three questions (which is easier to use when there are more pieces on the board), we get these observations. The f-pawn is a weakness for both sides. Its threat to promote is a disability for White, and Black wants to keep protecting it. White's king is cut off and the black rook on f4 is awkward and not as active as it should be. Thus, Black's idea is ...♖f3† and ...♔g3, followed by ...♔f4, or ...♖f1, ...f4 and other ways to advance the pawn without the rook getting stuck in front of it.

67.♖g6? would allow the rook to escape the awkward position. Simplest is 67...♗a4.

67.♔d2? fails similarly to 67...♗d4† 68.♔c3 ♗d5 69.♔c4 ♗a5.

But the most important point comes after everyone's first idea: 67.♖f8?, where Black plays 67...♖f3† 68.♔d4 ♔g3 as intended. If the king can come in front off the pawn, keeping the white king cut off, Black wins. Which he can, due to 69.♔e5 ♖e3†!

If we take the following practical advice to heart, we will have a real chance of finding the extra finesse in this position – and all others in this chapter: “Always try hard to find two serious ideas in all positions.” Moving the king and moving the rook sideways were not serious ideas, as we saw above. If these are the alternatives you find, you have not tried hard enough. Failing to consider the best option on move one is an obvious weakness for our play, but also a common one. Even among strong players. Here, it would lead to one alternative. We can then try to find the difference. This is commonly referred to as comparison – when we look at one variation, but have one piece that could be on either of two squares. We don't calculate it as different lines, but as one, with an alternative reality attached to it.

67.♖f7!

This is the alternative, and much preferable in reality. In a correspondence game this is perhaps not even noticed in this modern age, but it goes against the common instinct of extending the checking distance as much as possible.

67...♖f3† 68.♔d4

68.♔d2? would lose to 68...f4 69.♖f8 ♔g2.

68...f4

Sometimes it is hard to guess why a game is played out, in this case until stalemate. I am slowly coming round to the idea that all games should be played out, and the draw offer should be put in the bin of outdated artefacts.

The key point is that 68...♔g3 no longer works wonders. After 69.♔e5 ♖e3† 70.♔xf5 ♖f3† 71.♔g6 the rook is protected.

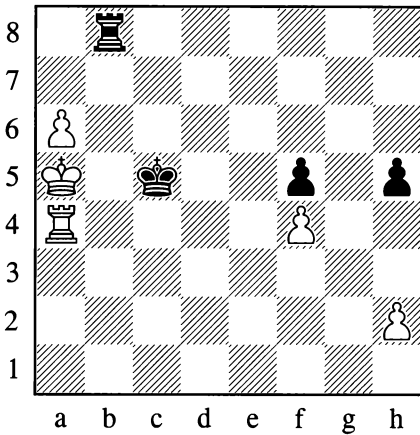
69.♖f5 ♔g3 70.♖g5† ♔h4 71.♔e4 ♔xg5
72.♔xf3 ♔f5 73.♔g2 ♔e4 74.♔f2 ♔f5
75.♔e2 ♔g4 76.♔f2 ♔f3 77.♔f1 ♔f4 78.♔f2
♔e4 79.♔f1 ♔e3 80.♔e1 ♔d4 81.♔f2 ♔e4
82.♔f1 ♔e3 83.♔e1 ♔f2† 84.♔f1 ♔f3

½–½

This idea is also surprising to players at the top level.

Viswanathan Anand – Nodirbek Abdusattorov

Internet 2020



Black is threatening mate in one, but more importantly, also to meet 59.a7? with a simple perpetual check. There are only two ways to avoid this, so Anand played the natural-looking 59.♖a1?, when after 59...♜b5† 60.♔a4 ♕b6, due to the threat of ...♜a5†, he had to abandon the a-pawn and soon after the hope of winning the game.

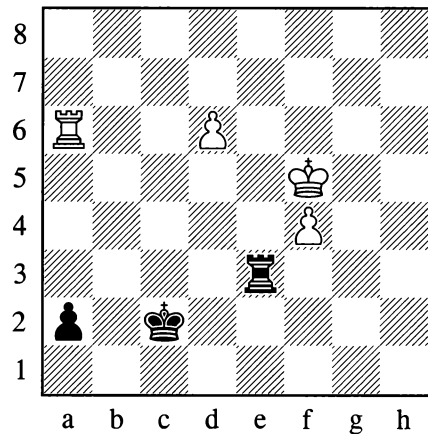
59.♜a2! would have won the game. After 59...♜b5† 60.♔a4 ♕b6, White has 61.a7!, when the rook is within reach. After 61...♜a5† 62.♕b3 ♜xa2 63.♕xa2 ♕xa7 64.♕b3 ♕b6 65.♕c4 ♕c6 66.♕d4 ♕d6 67.h4 the pawn ending wins trivially.

This principle can be applied to many positions. In the following, White is threatening to take the a2-pawn (with check), leaving Black with seemingly only one reasonable move, which will defend the pawn, help advance the pawn and prepare to block the access to the pawn with the rook. There is no such thing as a perfect way to calculate – and especially not one that is equally effective in all types of positions. But human reason and experience is

usually good at applying different approaches to different scenarios with success. In this case, noticing that there is a quirky alternative is enough as a start, meaning that there is a reason to think. We would then calculate the outcome.

Piotr Piesik – Sabina-Francesca Foisor

Stockholm 2019



The first line we would see would most likely be the way the game went:

58...♕b2 59.d7

We quickly see that going with the rook to a3 is not a serious option, because of a check on a8.

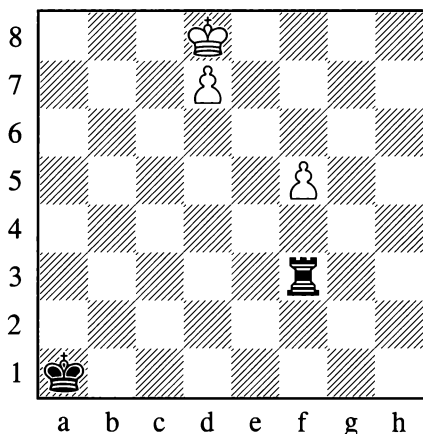
59...♜d3 60.♕e6 a1=♚ 61.♜xa1 ♕xa1 62.f5

White is threatening to put the pawns on the 7th rank and zigzag the king back in response to checks, never allowing the rook to make it to the 8th rank. Black thus has to start giving checks now.

62...♜e3† 63.♕f7 ♜d3 64.♕e7 ♜e3† 65.♕f8

Gaining time. The king belongs on d8.

65...♜d3 66.♕e8 ♜e3† 67.♕d8 ♜f3



Hopefully we would reach this position in our calculations without difficulty and carefully check if there is a way for White to progress. There is.

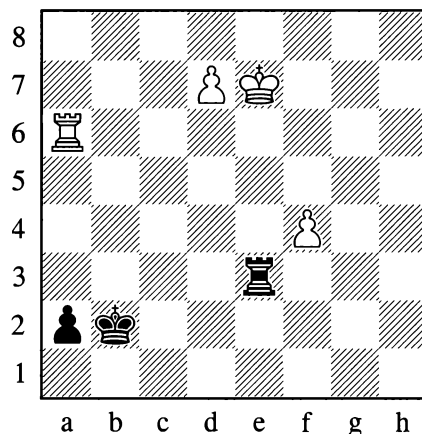
68.f6! ♖b2

68...♙xf6 69.♙e7 and the d-pawn queens.

69.♙c7 ♜c3† 70.♙b6 ♜b3† 71.♙c5 ♜c3†
 72.♙d4 ♙c2 73.f7 ♜d3† 74.♙e4 ♜xd7
 75.f8=♚ ♜d2 76.♚c5† ♙d1 77.♚c4 ♜e2†
 78.♙d3 ♜d2† 79.♙e3 ♜b2 80.♚d3† ♙c1
 81.♚c3† ♙b1 82.♙d3 ♙a2 83.♚d4 ♙b3
 84.♚c3† ♙a2 85.♚a5† ♙b1 86.♚a4 ♜h2
 87.♚b3† ♜b2 88.♚d1† ♙a2 89.♙c3 ♜h2
 90.♚a4† ♙b1 91.♚b5† ♙a1 92.♚a6† ♙b1
 93.♚b6† ♙a2 94.♚a7†
 1-0

Having gone through this variation, the natural thing to do would be to check if we missed something on the way. Having noticed the usefulness of the checks later in the variation (despite its failure), we may reasonably come up with the idea to give them earlier.

60...♜e3†! 61.♙f7 ♜d3 62.♙e7 ♜e3†



The point is that 63.♙d8 can be met with 63...♜f3!. Black has not spent a tempo winning the rook and the f-pawn is still on the 4th rank, a step too far from the f6-trick seen above. White can repeat with 64.♙e7 (and should), but can also choose to go down the drain with 64.♙c7 ♜c3† 65.♜c6? a1=♚! 66.d8=♚ ♚a5† and Black wins.

White thus has to find:

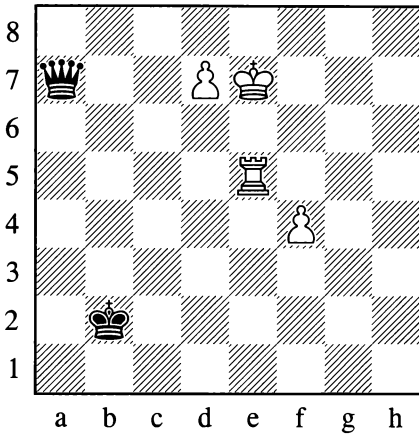
63.♜e6! a1=♚

The queen ending after 63...♜e6† 64.♙xe6 a1=♚ 65.d8=♚ is lost. “The further the pawn is from the centre, the better the drawing chances” is one oversimplification of when the endgame is holdable and when not. The bishop’s file is a not.

64.♜xe3

White is temporarily a queen down, but the pawn is getting close.

64...♚a7 65.♜e5!



The rook controls a lot of key squares from here.

65...♙c3 66.♙e8 ♖a4 67.f5 ♖d4

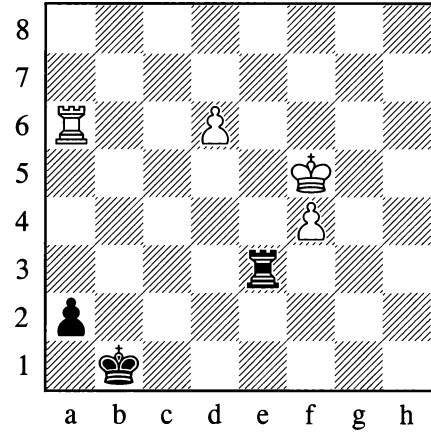
After 67...♙d4 68.♖e7, Black cannot stop the advancing f-pawn.

68.♖e6 ♖h8† 69.♙e7 ♖g7† 70.♙d6 ♖d4† 71.♙c7 ♖f4† 72.♖d6

White wins. During the game it would be difficult to say with certainty if Black has a draw or not in this line, something which may be hard to emotionally understand when we know he does not. But certainly, it looks like a better try, due to the lack of clarity. If nothing else, there is room for mistakes.

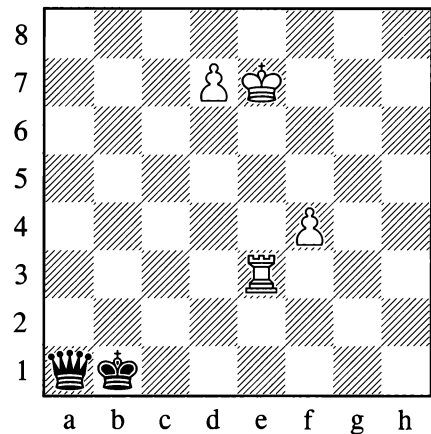
But we should not forget that there was a second option on move one.

58...♙b1!



Although this looks a bit odd and otherwise prone to transposition, we should not disregard the move without investigation. We already know that the key advantage of putting the king on b2, the ...♖a3 ideas, would not work anyway. And surely enough, after going through the same line with the king on b1 slowly, we notice one advantage:

59.d7 ♖d3 60.♙e6 ♖e3† 61.♙f7 ♖d3 62.♙e7 ♖e3† 63.♖e6 a1=♖! 64.♖xe3



64...♖g7†!

The king is not blocking the long diagonal and the queen comes into the game quickly, securing the draw. For example:

65.♔d8 ♖f8† 66.♞e8 ♜xf4

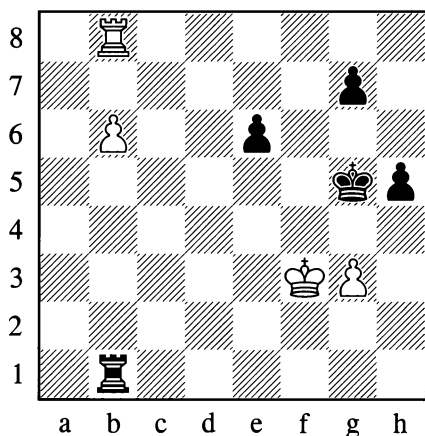
White cannot hide from the perpetual.

Noticing this type of small difference does not come easy. It takes experience to get a feeling for how minor differences can lead to vastly different outcomes. A student at the academy expressed how he desperately had tried to find options for the queen in the line with the king on b2, but never even considered that more options would occur with the king on b1.

In the next example, White seemingly only has one sensible move. Areshchenko played it and lost a tight race.

Alexander Areshchenko – Niclas Huschenbeth

Germany 2021



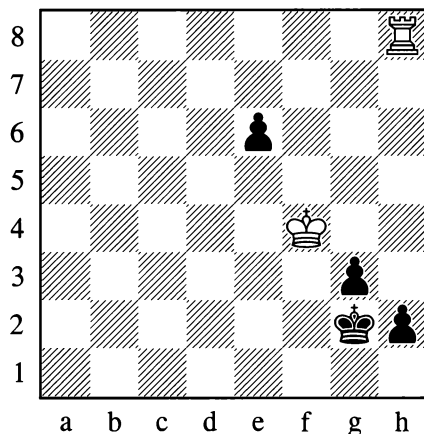
43.b7?

43.♞g8? g6 would make no progress at all.

43...♞b3† 44.♔e4

44.♔f2 ♔g4 followed by an opportune check on the 2nd rank was hopeless as well.

44...♔g4 45.♔e5 ♔xg3 46.♔d6 h4 47.♔c6 g5 48.♞g8 g4 49.b8=♞† ♞xb8 50.♞xb8 h3 51.♔d6 h2 52.♞h8 ♔g2 53.♔e5 g3! 54.♔f4



Without the e-pawn, Black would not win. But it is there.

54...e5†! 55.♔g4 ♔f2 56.♞h3

56.♞f8† ♔g1 57.♞h8 g2 wins.

56...e4

0–1

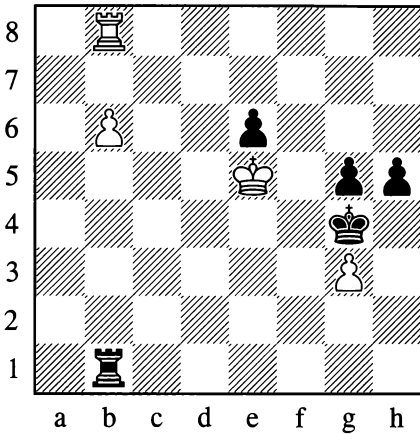
Let's imagine we had calculated the outcome of the race to a sufficient level of accuracy to be concerned about its outcome. This does not require us to see everything clearly to the end, only to recognise the feeling of "hope" related to how the line is functioning. This should inspire us to look for a different direction.

The first one that comes to mind would be to start the race with advancing the king. However, this does not work out well:

43.♔e4? ♔g4 44.♔e5

44.b7 ♔xg3 and 44.♞g8 g5 are both nonsensical options.

44...g5



45.b7

It is hard to find alternatives.

45.♔f6 loses to 45...e5! 46.♔xe5 ♕xg3.

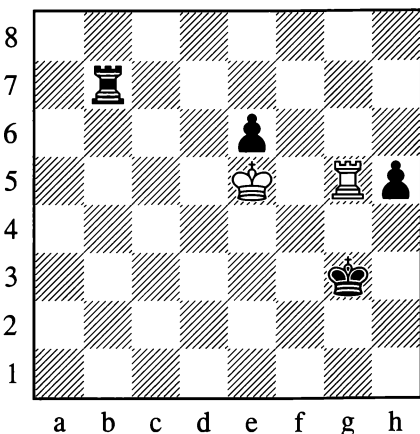
45.♔xe6 ♕xg3 is clearly dead lost.

And 45.♞g8 ♞xb6 is depressingly far from serious.

45...♔xg3 46.♞g8 ♞xb7

The difference from the previous line is that the white king is bang in the centre and Black cannot afford to lose the rook.

47.♞xg5†



47...♔f3!

Black wins on account of 48.♞xh5 ♞b5†. (47...♔h4 48.♞g1 ♞b6 also wins, but looks rather clumsy.)

0–1

All of this, and a persistent search for additional options, should lead us to a peculiar move, which like we have seen before.

43.♞b7!

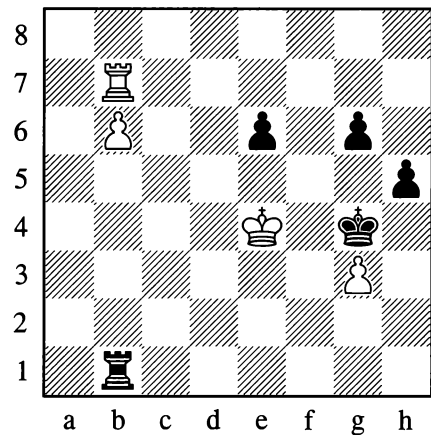
The rook is seeking to go behind the black pawns, but not on the 8th rank, where it has no secondary function.

43...g6

After 43...♔f6 44.♔e4 g5 45.♔d4, White would be able to use the many free tempos to make a draw in the race.

44.♔e4 ♔g4

Black can play waiting moves, but White is happy enough to play 45.♔d4, heading for the queenside.



45.♞g7!

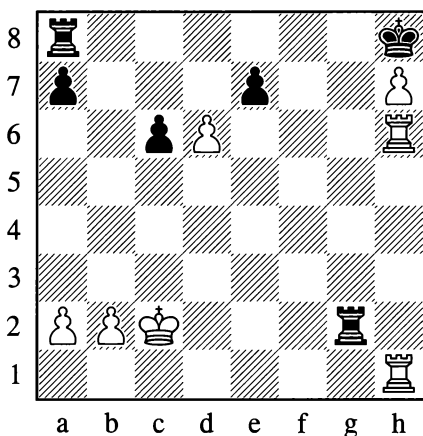
The point.

45...g5 46.b7

With the pawn on the 7th rank, White will make an effortless draw. The rook to the side of the pawn does not help advancing the pawn, but this is not too important, as the job of the pawn is not to advance, but to demand complete attention from the black rook.

Makan Rafiee – Armen Ar. Barseghyan

Germany 2022



White is in check and has to find the right space for the king. This requires calculation and anticipation of the opponent's intentions.

28.♔c3?

This looks natural, but failed.

28.♔c1? fails for the same reason.

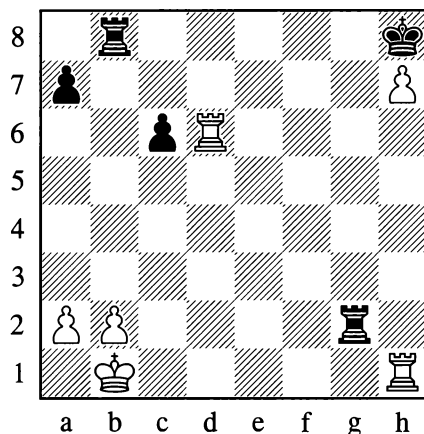
28...exd6 29.♟xd6 ♜b8 30.♟xc6

30.b3 ♟xa2! is a key point. So White tried something else and got nowhere.

30...♟gxb2 31.♟c8† ♟xc8† 32.♔xb2 ♜f8 33.♔b3 ♜f4

The game was drawn 20 moves later.

The lesson from the game was that White needed to defend the a-pawn:

28.♔b1!! exd6 29.♟xd6 ♜b8**30.b3**

White has a winning position. Although all can see this is a better version, it makes sense to show a plausible path towards the full point.

30...♟c8 31.♟c1 ♔xh7 32.♟dxc6 ♟xc6 33.♟xc6

The black king is too far away.

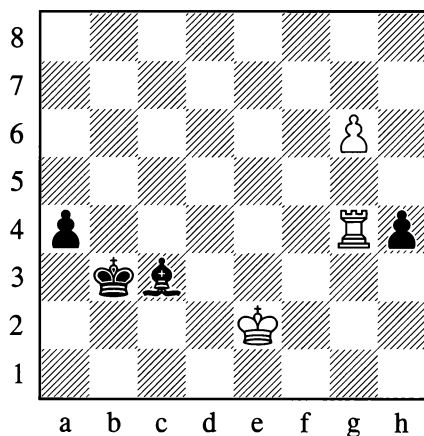
33...♟g7 34.♜f6 ♟c7 35.♔b2 ♔g7 36.♜f3 a5 37.♔a3 ♔g6 38.♔a4 ♟c5 39.a3

White wins.

The following example is quite deep.

Dmitry Bocharov – Vasily Usmanov

Sochi 2017



Failing to find a win in the rook vs pawn endgame, White settled for:

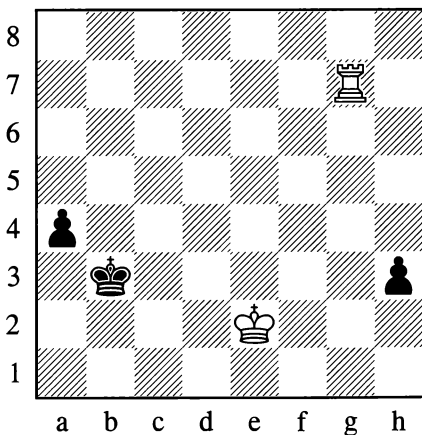
**64.♖xh4? a3 65.♞h3 a2 66.g7 a1=♞
67.g8=♞† ♔c2**

He tried to win this endgame for 52 moves without success.

You could argue that from a practical point of view, White should have won the bishop and see if he was able to find something later on that eluded him at this point. I often discuss this topic with top rated students. Although they have fantastic calculation skills, they often give up on variations they cannot completely close down and chose something they do not believe in, rather than allow intuition a larger say on which path to choose. Sometimes we should trust ourselves a bit more. As in this case.

64.g7 ♕xg7 65.♞xg7 h3

65...a3 is hopeless and loses to 66.♔d3 and 67.♞b7†.



66.♔d1!!

This surprising move is the only path to victory.

66.♔d2? h2 67.♞b7† (67.♞g3† ♔b2! would keep the white king at bay.) 67...♔a2 68.♞h7 (This is a nice trap, but Black does not have to fall for 68...a3?, with the idea that 69.♔c2? h1=♞! leads to stalemate, but also without a reply to 69.♔c1!.) 68...♔b2! Shouldering is almost always the answer. 69.♞xh2 a3 Black holds the draw.

Black also makes the draw after 66.♔d3? h2 67.♞b7† ♔a2 68.♞h7 ♔b3!, preventing the white king from coming to c4.

66...h2

66...a3 67.♔c1! and wins.

67.♞h7

We now see the key point. 67...♔b2 68.♞xh2† is a useful check.

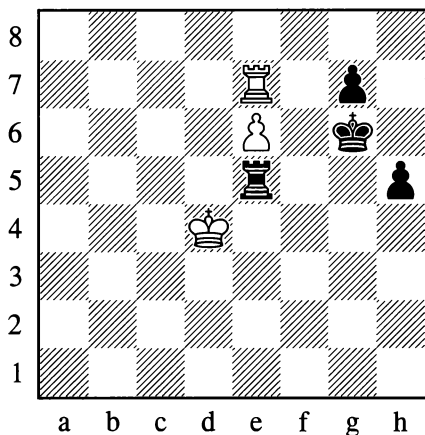
67...a3 68.♔c1! a2 69.♞h3†

White wins.

I am not sure to what extent Deac made the next move with the hand rather than the head in the next example. But it is easy to imagine that he never even considered the only winning move. It is not something you would consider without understanding the principle of anticipation and having seen examples such as this... which is always a problem: you only understand afterwards how to think in such a position, if you have not had the theme explained in advance. To make this a paradox: If Deac had read this book, his game would not have been in it...

Haik M. Martirosyan – Bogdan-Daniel Deac

Internet 2020

**65...♞e1?**

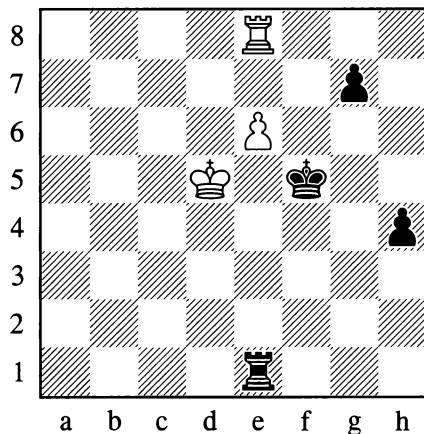
65...♞g5? would also be mistaken. After 66.♞f7!! the black king is cut off and White has counterplay. Curiously Black has to quickly get the e-pawn under control, as he would lose after 66...h4? 67.♞f8!.

Everything flows naturally from this point on.

66.♔d5 h4 67.♞e8 ♔f5

Black would be able to eliminate the e-pawn with 67...h3!?. 68.♞h8 ♔f5 69.♞xh3 ♞d1† 70.♔c4 ♔xe6, but the drawing method for White is well known to us. 71.♞g3 ♔f6 72.♞f3† ♔e5 73.♞g3 ♞d7 74.♞g1!! (See Chapter 10 on Checking Distance, page 163).

It is possible to argue that 67...♔h7!? was the best practical chance. After 68.♞f8! Black cannot play 68...h3, due to 69.♞f3!, but after 68...g5, White has to find 69.♞f5! ♔g6 70.♞e5 ♞xe5† 71.♔xe5 h3 72.♔d6, where he reaches a queen ending, which is really difficult to draw in practical play.

**68.e7??**

You feel the time trouble in this move. White was definitely in all types of other problems, but there was a way out.

After both 68.♔d6? ♞d1† 69.♔e7 g5! and 68.♞h8? ♞d1† 69.♔c4 ♔xe6 70.♞xh4 g5 White would have lost without a fight.

But he could have played: 68.♞f8† ♔g4 69.♔d6 h3 70.♞h8! (70.e7? h2 71.♞h8 ♔g3 wins for Black.) The key point is that 70...♔g3 is met with 71.♞g8!, with a draw. And after 70...g5, we see that this pawn move is far less helpful. White draws with: 71.e7 ♔g3 72.e8=♞ ♞xe8 73.♞xe8 g4 74.♔e5 And so on...

68...♔f6! 69.♔d6

69.♞h8 ♞xe7 is equally hopeless.

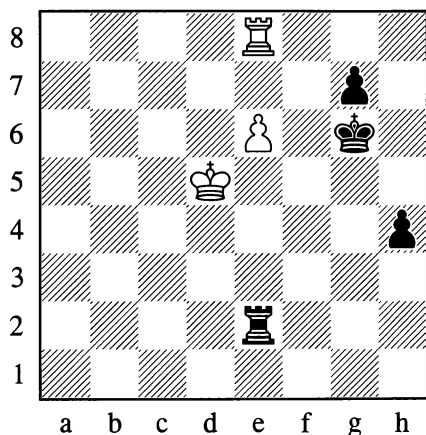
69...♞d1† 70.♔c6 ♔f7

The white king is cut off and Black wins.

71.♞d8 ♞e1 72.♞h8 g5 73.♔d6 ♞e6† 74.♔d5 ♞xe7 75.♞h7† ♔f6 76.♞h8 ♔f5
0-1

The winning move was simple to explain, but hard to anticipate – without the idea of anticipation.

65...♞e2!! 66.♔d5 h4 67.♞e8



Black now has a choice of three winning lines. In all three of them, the rook on e2 plays a crucial role in defending the pawn on h2:

67...h3 68.♞h8 h2 69.♔d6 After 69.e7 ♞xe7! 70.♞xh2 ♔f5 71.♞f2† ♔g4 72.♞g2† ♔f4! Black wins, because the white rook is on the 2nd rank and not the 1st. 73.♞g6 ♔f5 74.♞g1 g5 75.♞f1† ♔g6 76.♞g1 ♞h7 77.♔e4 ♞h3 is the concrete variation. 69...♔f6 70.♞f8† ♔g5 71.♞h8 ♔g4 72.e7 ♔g3 73.♞h5 g6! Black wins.

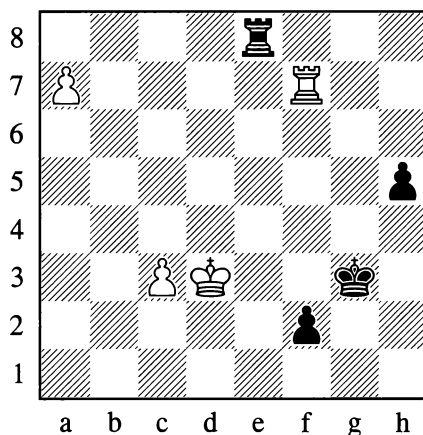
67...♔f5!? 68.♞f8† ♔g4 69.♔d6 h3 70.♞h8 h2! 71.e7 ♔g3 Black wins. The g-pawn is coming.

67...♔h7 68.♞f8 h3 69.♞f3 h2 also sees the pawn defended on h2. After 70.♞h3† ♔g6 71.♔d6 ♔f6! 72.♞f3† ♔g5 73.♞h3 ♔g4 Black wins again.

The following position came up in my analysis of Maxime Vachier-Lagrave – Wesley So, Internet 2020.

Aagaard

Original 2021



White seems to be unable to do anything. If he plays 1.c4?, Black will play 1...h4!, and we can easily see which of the pawns has the better prospects. Therefore, most would follow my hand and give checks.

1.♞g7† ♔h3 2.♞f7 ♔g2 3.♞g7† ♔f1 4.♞e7

The queen ending after 4.♞b7 h4 5.♞b8 ♔g1 6.a8=♞ f1=♞† 7.♔c2 ♞xb8 8.♞xb8 h3 is entirely hopeless, mainly due to the unfortunate placement of the white king. The c-pawn does nothing to help White.

4...♞d8† 5.♔c2 h4 6.♞h7 h3 7.♞xh3 ♔g2 8.♞d3 ♞a8

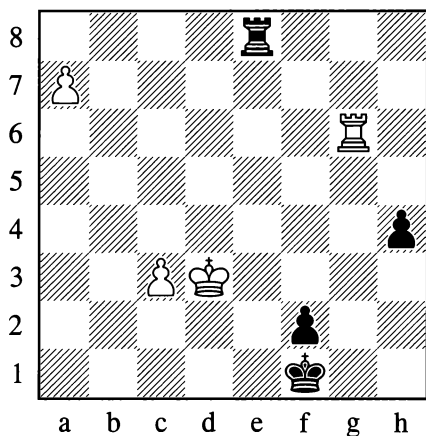
Black just has to avoid 8...f1=♞? 9.♞xd8 ♞f5† 10.♞d3, when White will build a fortress.

9.♞d1 ♞xa7

Black wins by cutting off the white king, or because it has to go to the b-file (no shouldering!) to avoid that.

White needs to deal with the manoeuvring of the king to e1, which is the winning idea.

1.♖f6!! h4 2.♞g6† ♔h3 3.♞f6 ♔g2 4.♞g6†
♔f1

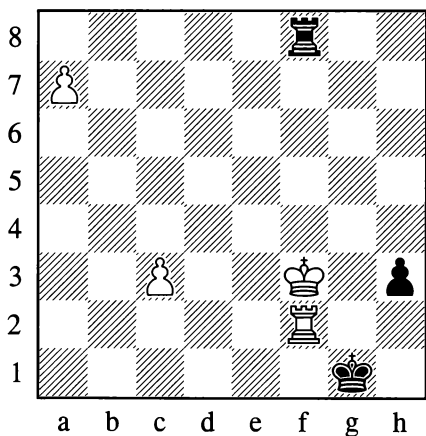


5.♞a6! ♞a8

5...♔e1?? is impossible due to: 6.♞a1#

6.♔e3! h3 7.♞a2 ♔g1 8.♞xf2 ♞e8† 9.♔f3!
♞f8†

9...h2?? would even lose: after 10.♞g2†
♔h1 11.♞a2 ♞f8† 12.♔e3 ♞a8 13.♔d4 ♔g1
14.♔c5 the king arrives on b6, in time to
defend the a-pawn and support the advance of
the c-pawn.



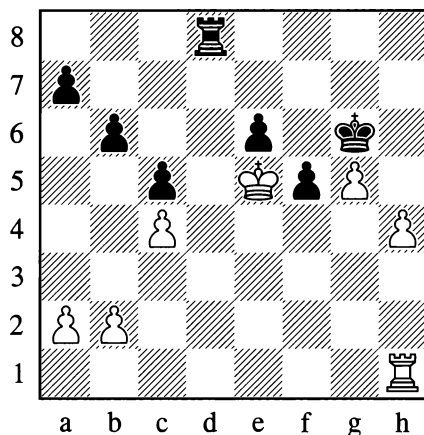
10.♔g3 ♞g8† 11.♔f3 h2 12.♞xh2 ♔xh2
13.♔e4!

The c-pawn secures the draw.

The next example is beautiful.

Nicolas Brunner – Francois Godart

France 2022



We enter this game where Black missed the
chance to force a draw by setting up a mating
net around the white king.

33...♞f8?

33...♔f7!! 34.h5 The king could retreat and
take all his hopes of an advantage with him.
34...♞d4 35.h6 ♔e7! Threatening ...♞e4#.
36.♞e1 ♞h4 37.b3 ♞h5 38.♔f4 ♞h4† 39.♔f3
♔f7 White has no advantage to speak of.

34.b3?

Lazy...

34.♞h3!! would have anticipated 34...f4, when
35.♞f3 is winning.

34...f4 35.♞f1 f3 36.♔e4

Paying the price.

36.♞f2 ♔h5 and Black draws by a tempo.

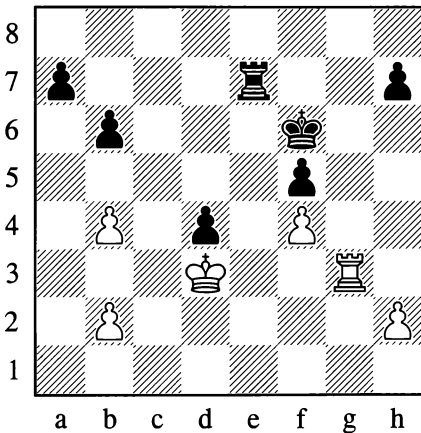
**36...f2 37.♔e3 ♞h8 38.♞xf2 ♞xh4 39.♞g2
♞d4**

Black holds.

Let's dive full into the other side of the looking glass... In the next example Black is a pawn up, but converting it into a full point proved difficult.

Evgenios Ioannidis – P. Iniyan

Plovdiv 2021



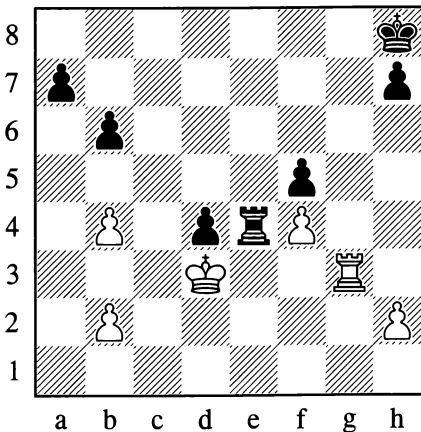
43...Rxe4? 44.Rh3! Qg7

44...Rxf4 45.Rxh7 also gives a lot of counterplay.

45.Rg3!

The checks are annoying.

45...Qf6 46.Rh3 Qg7 47.Rg3! Qh8



48.Rf3!?

I don't like passive rooks, although here it is good enough to draw.

48.Rg1! Rxf4 49.Ra1 was cleaner.

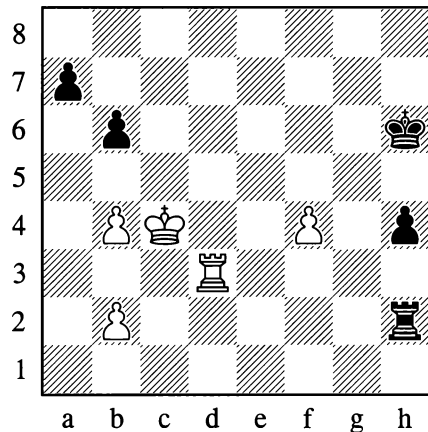
48...b5 49.Rf1 a6 50.Ra1 Re3+ 51.Qxd4 Re4+ 52.Qd5 Rxf4 53.Rxa6 Rxb4 54.Qe5 Qg7 55.Qxf5 Rxb2 56.h4 Rc2 57.h5 Rc5+ 58.Qg4 Rc4+ 59.Qf5 Rc5+ 60.Qg4 1/2-1/2

Let's have a look at the alternatives.

43...h5!?

This looks strong and would require an amazing degree of accuracy of White to hold the draw:

44.Rh3 Qg6 45.Rg3+ Qh6 46.Rg5 Re3+ 47.Qc4! h4 48.Rxf5 d3 49.Rd5 Rh3 50.Rxd3 Rxh2



51.Qd4!!

Another beautiful piece of anticipation.

51.Qd5? Qh5 52.Ra3 Rf2! and Black wins.

51...♔h5

51...♖xb2 52.♕e5 with a draw.

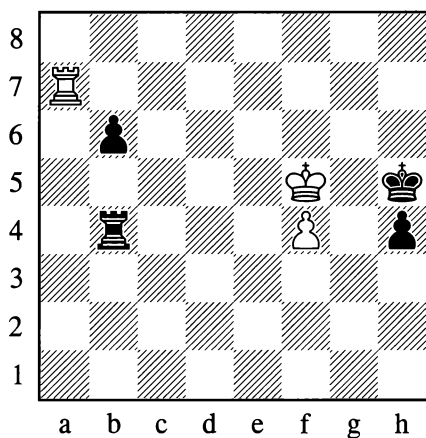
52.♖a3 ♜f2 53.♕e3!

Winning an important tempo.

53...♖xb2 54.♖xa7 ♜b3† 55.♕e4

But the king was always meant to go forward.

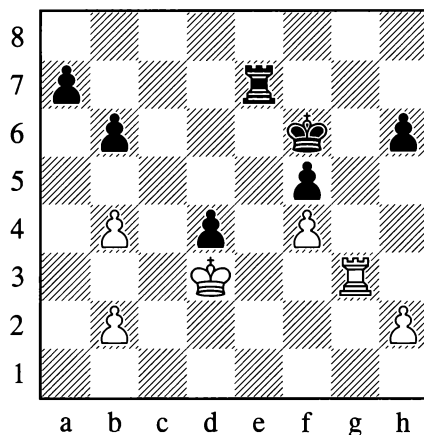
55...♖xb4† 56.♕f5



White holds. The threat of mate and the passed f-pawn offer enough counterplay.

The winning move was the cryptic:

43...h6!!



44.♖h3 ♕g6 45.♖g3† ♕h5

With no check on g5, Black wins.

46.♖h3† ♕g4 47.♖xh6 ♕xf4 48.h4

48.b5 ♖e5! wins.

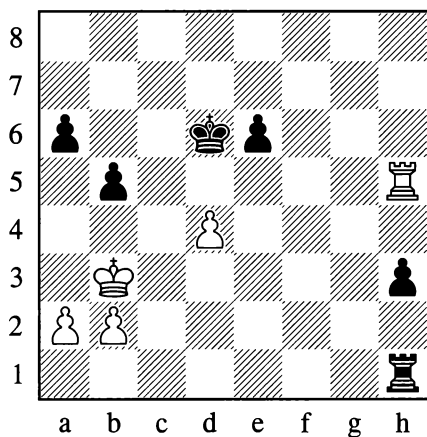
48...♖e3† 49.♕xd4 ♖e4† 50.♕c3 ♕e3

The f-pawn decides the game. Notice that, as in so many conversions of an extra pawn in the rook ending, the pawn is given up in order to have the rook and the king being able to help the stronger passed pawn race up the board.

In the next example, Black looks at first glance to be a big favourite. He is a pawn up and it is quite advanced. But the problem is that his king is cut off and the white king has potential counterplay with ♕b4-a5, attacking the black queenside pawns. So, is White close to making a draw after all? In the game he lost quickly.

Vladislav Krasikov – Sergei Lobanov

Moscow 2022

**45. ♖b4? ♜d1!**

Black has to switch strategy.

46. ♖c3

A key variation is 46. ♜xh3 ♜xd4† 47. ♖c3 ♖d5 48. ♜h8 e5 49. ♜a8 ♜a4, when Black is threatening both ...♜xa2 and ...♖e4.

46... ♜c1†!

Exploiting the odd positioning of the king.

47. ♖d2

47. ♖b3 ♜c4 48. ♜xh3 ♖d5 49. ♜h6 ♜xd4 also wins for Black.

47... ♜h1 48. ♖c3 a5 49. a3 h2!

Played the moment where White will get into zugzwang and lose the control of the 5th rank.

50. ♖c2 a4 51. ♜h3 ♖d5 52. ♜h4 ♖c4

Zugzwang.

53. b3† axb3† 54. ♖b2 ♖d3**0–1**

White's drawing move comes right out of the left field, but makes sense once you have seen the variations above.

45. a3!! ♜d1

Still the only try.

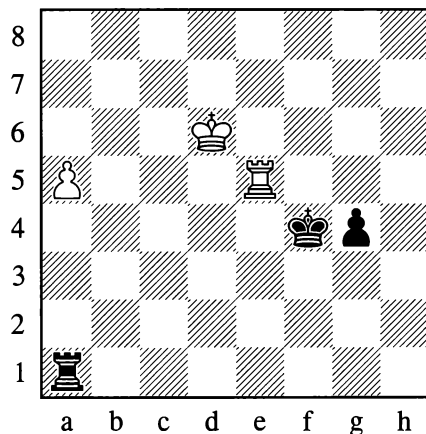
46. ♜xh3 ♜xd4 47. ♖c3 ♖d5 48. ♜h8 e5 49. ♜a8 ♜a4 50. ♖d3! e4† 51. ♖c3

White holds. Narrowly. More moves can definitely be tried.

In the game below, White is clearly fighting for a draw. The white rook is lacking a way to deal with stopping the g-pawn and defending the a-pawn. White lost quickly.

Danyil Dvirnyy – Nils Grandelius

Jerusalem 2015

**81. ♖e6?**

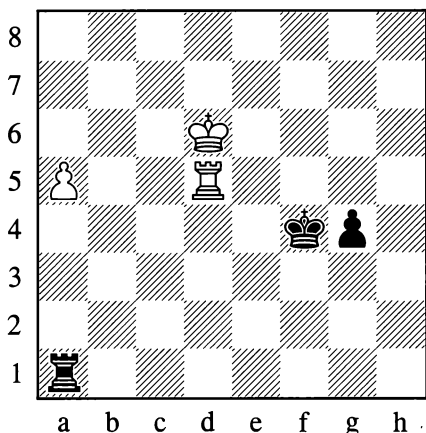
Looking for a long checking distance with 81. ♜b5? does not work. The king can hide on h3.

81... g3 82. ♜f5† ♖g4 83. ♖f6 g2 84. ♜g5† ♖f3

White resigned. The king is too far away to assist the a-pawn later.

The drawing line is nothing but sensational. White has to find a way to draw with the a-pawn after giving up the rook. And as no straightforward path exists, he has to find a crooked one.

81.♖d5!!



We shall soon see the reason for the rook belonging on the d-file.

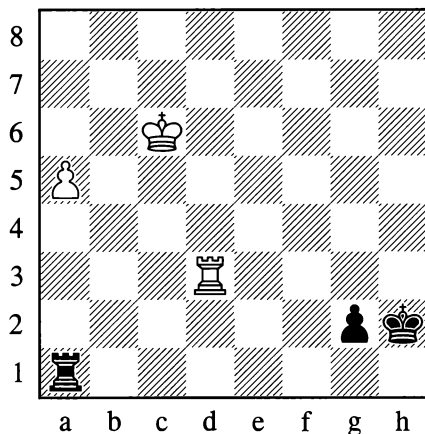
81...g3 82.♔c6! g2 83.♖d4† ♔g3

The critical try.

Both 83...♔e3 84.♖g4 and 83...♔g5 84.♖d8 lead to immediate draws. And going forward just leads to an extra check.

The reason the rook belongs in the d-file is that after 83...♔f5 84.♖d5† there is space for all the checks. Black will have no other idea than to hide on h2.

84.♖d3† ♔h2



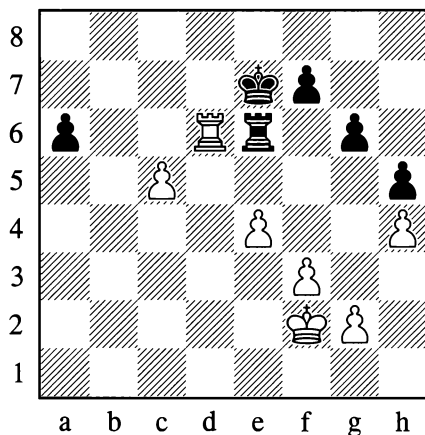
85.♖d5!!

The great moment of anticipation. The rook defends the a-pawn and stops the g-pawn. If the pawn is queened, White gives up the rook for it. But there is nothing else Black can try.

Move 40 is a terrible place to have to make the biggest decisions. White did not get this one right...

Yuval Yaniv – Ediz Gurel

Cala Gonone 2022



40.♖d2?

You flip a coin and it ends on its side...

40...a5?

Move 40 is equally difficult for Black!

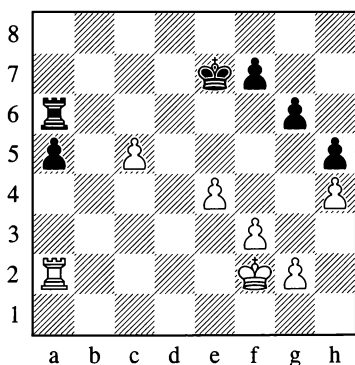
Black misses a chance to hold with: 40...♖c6!
 41.♖c2 a5 42.♕e3 a4 43.♗d4 a3 44.♗c4 ♖a6
 45.♖a2 ♗d7 46.♗b5 ♖a8

41.♕e3?

Move 41 is often another place for mistakes. Especially if you are White. The adrenaline from time trouble is clouding your mind and you cannot easily recompose.

White was winning after:

41.♖a2! ♖a6



42.♖a4!!

Blocking the pawn as early as possible, as we have previously discussed.

42...♗d7 43.♕e3 ♗c6 44.♗d4 ♗b5 45.♖a3

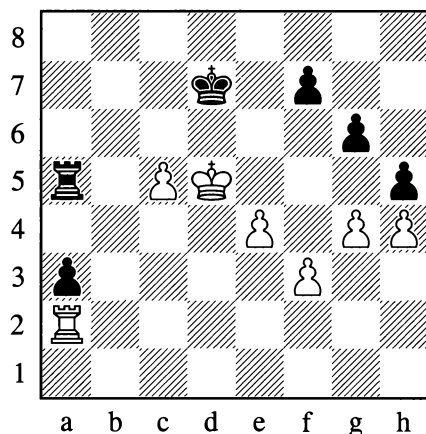
Luring the black king forward. White is ready to play ♗d5-d6-e7. Now after 45...♗b4, White wins with 46.♖a1 a4 47.♗d5! and the c-pawn will roll.

Passive play with 45...♗c6 loses to 46.g4 f6 47.g5 fxg5 48.hxg5 h4 49.f4 a4 50.f5 and White arrives first.

41...a4 42.♗d4 a3

Black's drawing chances have increased greatly by having a passed pawn on the 3rd rank.

43.♗d5 ♖a6 44.♖a2 ♗d7 45.g3 ♖a5 46.g4



46...hxg4?

A horrible mistake, giving White a distant passed pawn for no reason whatsoever.

46...f6 would have held and is not surprising at all.

If 47.g5, Black takes and pushes the h-pawn.

And after 47.gxh5 gxh5 48.f4 he needs to find 48...♖a6! when White is unable to make progress. But this is not so difficult, as White's only ideas are c5-c6† and e4-e5. Now after 49.c6† ♖xc6 50.♖xa3 ♖d6† 51.♗c4 ♖c6† 52.♗d3 ♖d6† 53.♕e3 ♖b6 Black will still have to find a few moves, but hold he will. 54.♖a7† ♕e8 55.♖h7 ♖b3† 56.♗d4 ♖f3 57.f5 ♗f8 58.♖xh5 ♗g7 is the most entertaining variation. The white rook is in house arrest. And after 59.e5 fxe5† 60.♗xe5 ♖e3† Black holds this often seen theoretical endgame, which you can read all about in *Theoretical Rook Endgames* by Sam Shankland.

47.fxg4 ♖a6 48.e5 ♖a4 49.h5! gxh5 50.gxh5 ♖a6 51.h6 ♖xh6 52.♖xa3 ♖h1 53.c6† ♗d8 54.♖a8† ♗c7 55.♖a7† ♗d8 56.♖xf7 ♖d1† 57.♗e6 ♖c1 58.♖d7† ♗c8 59.♗d6 ♖d1† 60.♗e7 ♖c1 61.c7 ♖h1 62.e6 ♖e1 63.♖d2 ♖f1 64.♖c2 ♖e1 65.♗f7 ♖f1† 66.♗e8 ♖e1 67.e7 ♖f1 68.♖c4 ♖f2 69.♖g4 ♗xc7 70.♖c4† ♗b7 71.♗d7 ♖d2† 72.♗e6 ♖e2† 73.♗d6 ♖e1 74.♖c5

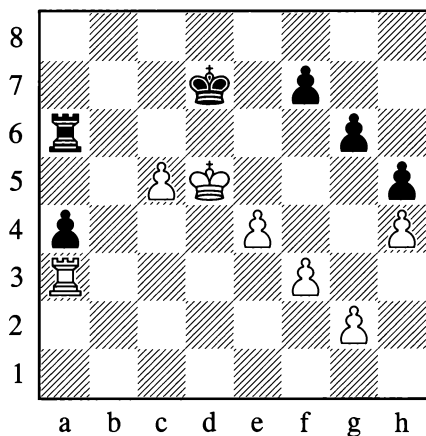
1-0

By knowing what is coming, we can find the right square for the rook:

40.♞d3!! ♜c6 41.♞c3 a5 42.♟e3 a4 43.♟d4 ♜a6 44.♞a3!

The rook is able to stop the a-pawn earlier and after:

44...♟d7 45.♟d5



White is winning.

45...♟c7 46.g4 f6 47.g5! fxg5 48.hxg5 h4 49.f4

And so on. The key point here is about time. And about passed pawns being a bigger influence the closer they are to the 8th rank. After:

49...h3

White is in time to play:

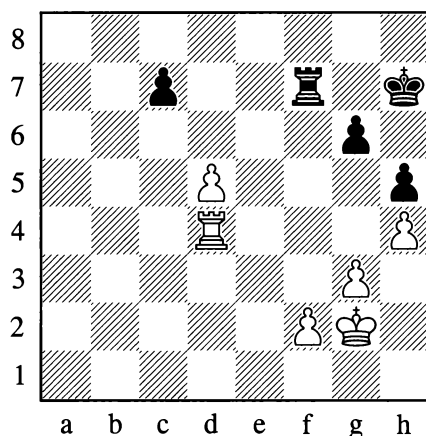
50.♞xh3 a3 51.♞h1 a2 52.♞a1

Winning.

I gave the final position of this chapter to Sam Shankland in a training session. He solved it by the method of elimination. Meaning, he tried everything... and I eliminated them.

Nico Zwirs – R. Ashwath

Hoogeveen 2022

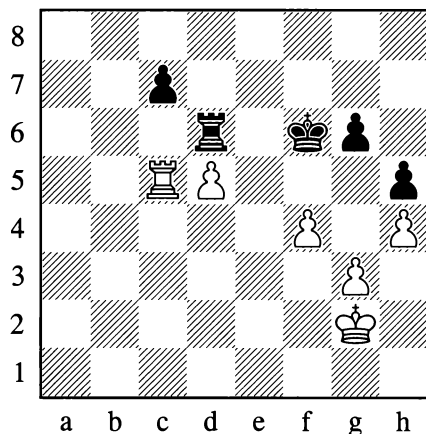


55...♟g7?

55...♞d7? loses to: 56.♟f3 ♟g7 57.♞d3! Preparing ♟e4, when the rook and the d-pawn are both defended. 57...c6 58.d6 ♟f6 59.♟f4! c5 (59...♟e6 60.♟g5 ♞xd6 61.♞xd6† ♟xd6 62.♟xg6 c5 63.♟f5! and White wins.) 60.♞d5! ♟e6 61.♞xc5 ♞xd6 62.♟g5 White wins, but after a good deal of moves. Yet, this was enough to convince Sam of the inevitable result.

56.♞c4 ♞d7 57.♞c5 ♟f6 58.f4 ♞d6

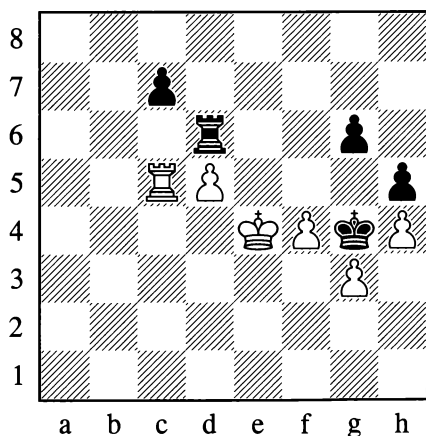
58...♟e7 59.♟f3 ♟d6 60.♞c6† and after White takes the g-pawn, the h-pawn is a great liability.



59.♔f3?

Giving Black an undeserved chance.

59.♞c6! won. 59...♞xc6 60.dxc6 ♔e6 61.♔f3 ♔d6 62.g4 hxg4† 63.♔xg4 ♔xc6 64.♔g5 ♔d6 65.♔xg6 c5 66.h5 c4 67.h6 c3 68.h7 c2 69.h8=♞ c1=♞ 70.♞d8† ♔e6 71.f5† ♔e5 72.f6 with a winning endgame. The guideline for these endgames objectively and practically is different. With the h-pawn it is a draw – and you may hold it in classical, but not likely in rapid chess. With a g-pawn it is a narrow draw and you will not hold it in practice. With the f- and e-pawns, it is a win. The long checks are too few.

59...♔f5 60.♔e3 ♔g4 61.♔e4**61...♔xg3?**

Black could have drawn with an exceptional manoeuvre, drawing on everything we have talked about throughout this book: 61...♞d7!! 62.♞c3 ♞e7† 63.♔d4 ♔h3! 64.♔c5 ♞e1 (64...♞d7!? is less natural to me, but works too.) 65.♔c6 ♞d1 and White has to give up the kingside to make progress.

62.♞xc7 ♞f6 63.♞c3† ♔xh4 64.♞c6!

The key move. White wins back the pawn and cuts off the king.

64...♞f8 65.♞xg6 ♔h3 66.d6 h4 67.f5 ♔h2 68.d7 h3 69.♞d6 ♞d8 70.♔f3

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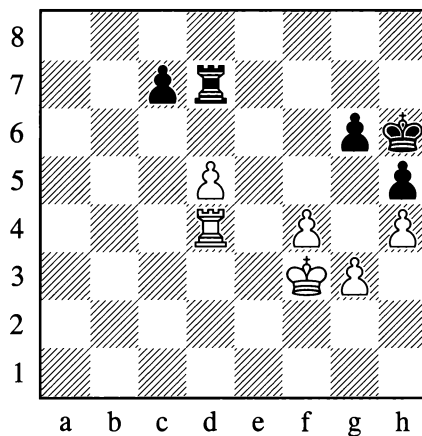
The drawing move borders to the land of the absurd:

55...♔h6!!

It turns out that ♞xc7 cannot come with a check, and that the g-pawn still needs defending. So, the king hides. Black's play is now ...♞d7-d6 followed by ...c6, eliminating his weakness.

56.f4

56.♞c4 can now be met with 56...♞f5! 57.♞c5 c6! and Black draws.

56...♞d7 57.♔f3**57...c6!**

57...♞d6? is too slow now. After 58.♔e4 c6 59.♔e5! White wins.

58.d6 ♔g7!

The black king returns at the right moment.

59.♔e4 ♔f6

Black holds.

The topic of anticipation is a difficult one and clearly builds on a lot of the knowledge and ideas from previous chapters. The most valuable idea you can take from this chapter is that the rook does not necessarily have to go to the end of the board in all situations. Look at what happens if it goes only part of the way too...

Chapter 21

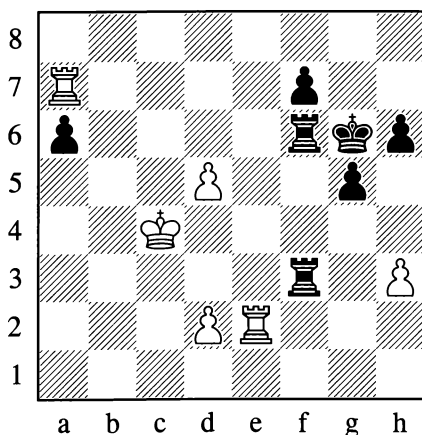
Connected Passed Pawns

As this book is nearing its end (don't check how many pages are left; I promise we will get there...), we get into more and more hazy topics. The following positions with connected passed pawns are not followed up with strong unique concepts, but rather deeply complicated positions, where you will see themes from previous chapters appear with a clarity you would not otherwise be able to see.

The first game comes with a bit of a story. Martin is a friend and in the mid-90s we were discussing a lot of chess and hung out. We both wanted to make it to the IM title at the time and were fairly clueless about how to go about it. The game in question was played in the Championship of Copenhagen and had gone to adjournment after a terrible first 40 moves for Martin. For some reason or another I became obsessed with analysing this position and found a lot of ideas. At the time I may have believed that I had managed to find a draw for White, which is obviously wrong. But the things I showed Martin were of great practical use once the game was resumed.

Martin Olesen – Jorgen Hvenekilde

Copenhagen 1996



41...♖xh3 42.♖c7

Focusing on my key idea, which worked wonders in the game.

42...♖h1 43.♔d4 ♜b1?

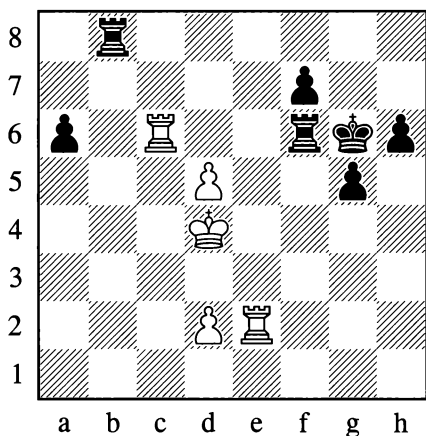
Push the passed pawns! For example: 43...h5 44.♜c6 ♜xc6!? 45.dxc6 ♜c1 46.♔d5 g4 and Black will arrive in very good time.

44.♜c6

Threatening to push the d-pawn, but this is not the main intention.

44...♜b8?

I guess Jorgen was heading for a8 to push the a-pawn, but this is a very time-consuming manoeuvre.



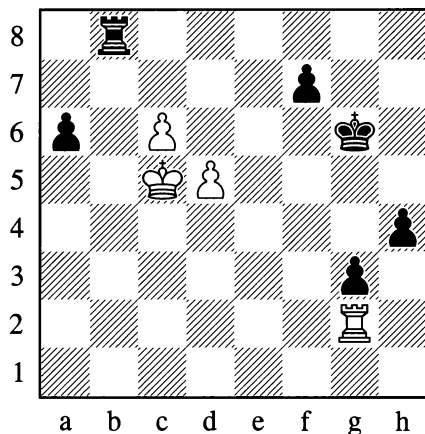
45.♜f2!

The key idea of my analysis. White suddenly has connected passed pawns. And as Black has graciously refrained from advancing his pawns, they are fairly dominating.

45...♜xc6 46.dxc6 g4

However, this does not mean that White is out of trouble.

47.♔c5 h5 48.d4 g3 49.♜g2 h4 50.d5

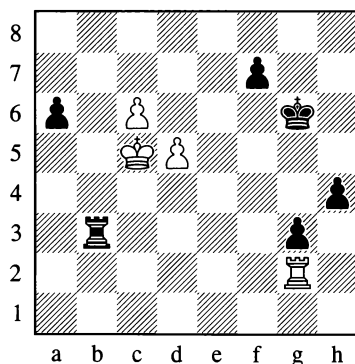


50...♜b1?

50...f5?! is tempting, but the white c-pawn will still reach the 7th rank with a tempo, making the tandem incredibly fast. 51.d6 f4 52.c7 ♜c8 53.♜d2! f3 54.♔c6 f2 55.d7 ♜xc7† 56.♔xc7 f1=♚ 57.♜d6†! ♔h5 58.d8=♚ should hold for Black, but there are a lot of pitfalls on the way to the coveted half point.

50...♜b3!

This was the strongest move, putting White under pressure. Only one move holds:



51.♔c4!

The idea is not to attack the rook, but to avoid being in check when the pawn reaches g1.

51.c7? ♜c3† would allow the black king to join in and decide the game.

51.♔d4? h3 52.♖xg3† ♖xg3 53.c7 h2
 54.c8=♚ h1=♚! (54...♕g7? 55.♚f5! and
 White holds.) 55.♚g8† ♕f6 56.♚xg3 Sadly
 for White, his pieces are unfortunately
 placed, and he will have to exchange queens
 (no!) or accept that after 56...♚a1†! 57.♕c5
 ♚a5† 58.♕c6 ♚b5† the d-pawn is lost and
 Black will win the queen ending.

51...h3

Black has nothing else.

52.c7! hxg2 53.c8=♚ g1=♚ 54.♚g4†

White gives a perpetual.

51.d6

And suddenly, the white pawns are
 unstoppable.

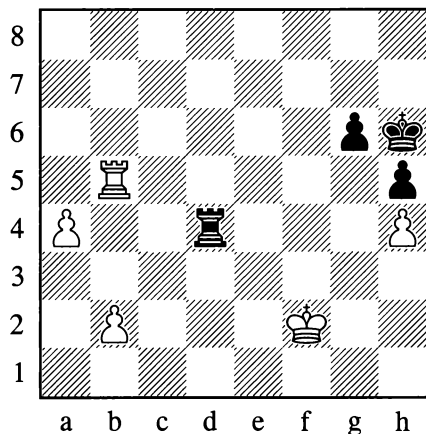
51...♖c1† 52.♕b6 ♖d1 53.d7

1–0

In the next example we shall see a number of
 things that are not new to us, as well as how
 poor the king is in front of connected passed
 pawns, assisted by a rook.

Mads Vestby-Ellingsen – Mahel Boyer

Cala Gonone 2022



54.b4?

A move any hand can make.

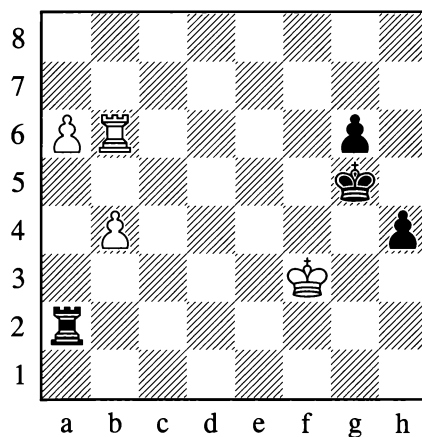
We have previously seen the idea 54.a5 ♖xh4
 55.♖b3!, which would have won on the spot.
 But even without this, you should consider
 pushing the furthest advanced passed pawn
 first anyway.

54...♖xh4 55.a5 ♖h2† 56.♕g3 ♖a2

Although the white pawns are further
 advanced, Black is already better. The white
 pawns will be clumsy to advance, while
 the black pawns will advance with check,
 supported by the rook from the side.

57.♖b6 ♕g5 58.a6 h4† 59.♕f3?

59.♕h3! would make the draw.



59...♖a3†?

59...h3 wins, as can be seen from move 63
 onwards.

60.♕f2 ♖a2† 61.♕f3?

61.♕g1! would hold.

61...♖a3†? 62.♕f2 ♖a2† 63.♕f3??

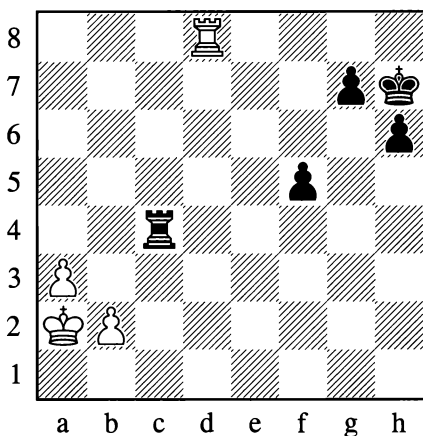
The error here is double. Not only is this a
 losing move, if the game continues, but White
 also missed the chance to claim a draw from
 three move repetition.

63...h3! 64.♖c6 h2 65.♖c1 ♕h4! 66.b5 g5
 67.♖b1 g4† 68.♕e3 g3 69.♖b4† ♕h3
 0–1

While the positions with connected passed pawns on both sides are certainly complicated, they are still governed by the simple principles, themes and concepts we have discussed so far. The most basic of them remains the need to make the most out of your passed pawns.

Manuel Apicella – Vladimir Hamitevici

Chalons-En-Champagne 2021

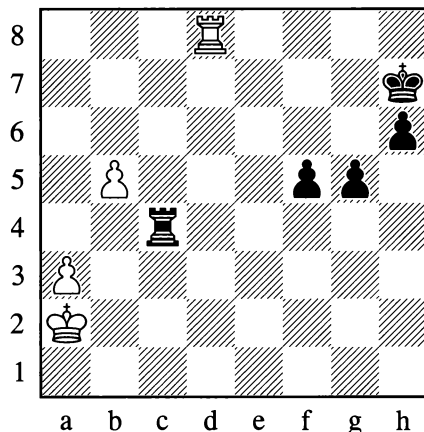


59.b4 g5?

How to distinguish between which pawn to push? Simple. If you cannot find anything wrong with it, you should push the most advanced pawn. Soon enough it will become a dominating presence.

59...f4! won without too many difficulties. But you had to see the key idea. 60.b5 ♖c7! (60...♙e4?! also wins, but is entirely absurd. The reason for it winning is beautiful though: 61.b6 ♙e2†!! and Black wins, on account of 62.♙b3 ♙e6!, or 62.♙a1 ♙e7 63.a4 ♙e4!.) The text move wins more straightforwardly after 61.a4 ♙f7! (rook behind the passed pawn... did I not see that somewhere?), or 61.b6 ♙b7 62.♙d6 f3.

60.b5



60...g4??

It is quite easy to follow Black's thinking. The white rook cannot get behind the g-pawn, so it makes sense to push it. But the b-pawn is ahead in the race and Black needed to respect that.

Black's winning method can be found in the chapter on Tempo Wars (see page 263).

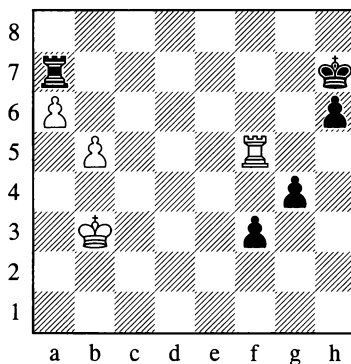
60...♙c7! 61.a4 ♙b7!!

Advancing the pawns now requires the support of either the white rook or king. The same is not the case for the Black pawns.

62.♙d5 f4 63.a5 f3 64.a6 ♙a7!

Tying down the pawns yet again.

65.♙b3 g4 66.♙f5



66...♙a8!!

A fantastic move, whose idea can be found in the chapter on anticipation. White will

put the king on a5 and play b5-b6. This now comes without a gain of tempo.

White makes a miraculous draw in the following line: 66...h5 67.♔b4 h4 68.♔a5 g3 (Black would even lose after 68...h3? 69.b6 ♖xa6† 70.♔xa6 h2 71.b7 h1=♚ 72.b8=♚ ♚a1† 73.♔b6!) 69.b6! ♖xa6† 70.♔xa6 g2 71.b7 f2 72.♖h5† (72.♖xf2 g1=♚ 73.♖f7† ♔g6 74.♖d7!! is also a draw. And a rather spectacular and confusing one. Let's move on!) 72...♔g6 73.b8=♚ f1=♚† (73...♔xh5 is another draw, but this is getting too absurd already!) 74.♖b5 g1=♚ 75.♚g8† With a perpetual, as the black king is unable to cross the 5th rank.

67.♔b4 ♔g6 68.♖f4 h5 69.♔a5 g3!

A theme we have touched upon frequently.

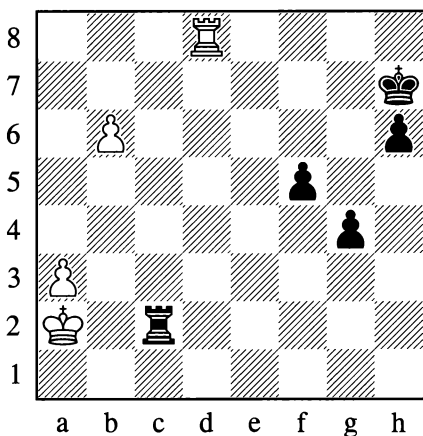
The goal is not to have most pawns, but to queen one of them.

70.♖xf3 h4 71.b6 g2 72.b7 ♖d8 73.a7 g1=♚ 74.b8=♚ ♚c5†

Black wins. On the next move a rook check follows.

61.b6 ♖c2†

After 61...♖c6 62.b7 ♖b6 63.♖d7†! ♔g6 64.a4 the a-pawn advances with a gain of tempo.



62.♔a1??

A move I find very hard to explain, since it draws after some difficulty, but the obvious alternative draws any which way you like, and on top of that wins with a bit of accuracy. White only had 45 seconds to decide, but this does not make it a less bizarre move.

62.♔b3! ♖c6 63.♖d7† ♔g6 64.b7 ♖b6† 65.♔c2! Not allowing ...♖b1. White is now threatening ♖d6† and Black cannot play 65...♖b5 due to 66.a4. And after 65...♔h5!? (otherwise ♖g7† is always there) 66.a4 g3 67.a5 g2 68.axb6 g1=♚ 69.b8=♚ there is no perpetual.

62...♖c6 63.b7 ♖b6 64.b8=♚ ♖xb8 65.♖xb8 g3 66.♖b1 f4 67.a4 g2 68.a5 f3 69.a6 f2 70.a7 g1=♚ 71.a8=♚ ♚xb1† 72.♔xb1 f1=♚†

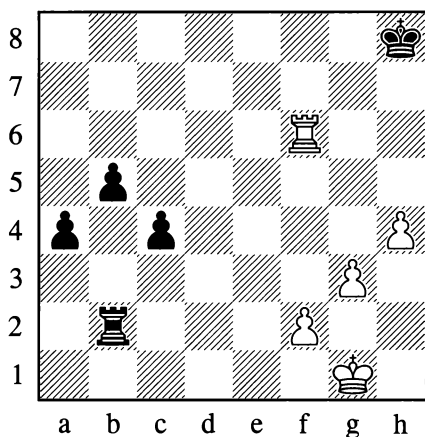
As said earlier, this endgame is very difficult to hold in rapid, but can be held in classical. Which is what happened here. A draw was agreed on move 98.

The last two examples in this chapter are both entirely bonkers, and recent top-level games played in the 2021 Champions Tour on Chess24. These are rapid internet games and the quality therefore weaker. But they are still fascinating fights with a lot of recurring themes for us to enjoy.

In the first, White is obviously dead lost. A quick glance at the pawns should assure us of this. But soon he was back in the game, when Abduşattorov showed some gaps in his technique.

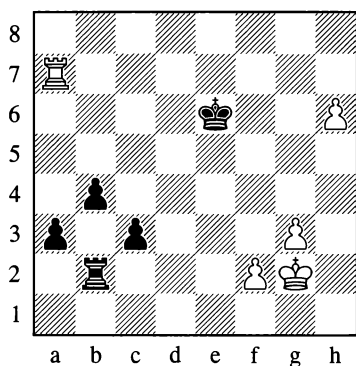
Dommaraju Gukesh – Nodirbek Abdusattorov

Internet 2021



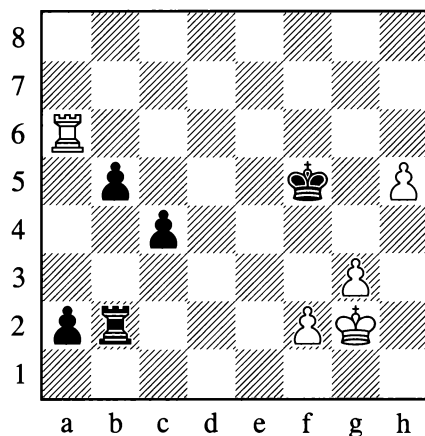
41. ♖g2 a3 42. ♜a6 a2?!

I strongly prefer keeping all the pawns independently defended. If Black had played 42...b4!, the win would not have been difficult. Take for example: 43. ♜a8† ♕g7 44. ♜a7† ♕f8 45. ♜a8† ♕f7 46. ♜a7† ♕e6 47. h5 c3 48. h6 and Black can reroute the rook to d8 without giving up a pawn, with an easy win.



It just so happens that at this point he also has the spectacular 48...♜xf2†!, when after both sides queen, Black will have ...♞b2†!, and the a-pawn will queen on b1.

43. ♜a8† ♕g7 44. ♜a7† ♕f6 45. ♜a6† ♕f7 46. ♜a7† ♕g6 47. ♜a6† ♕f5!? 48. h5



48...♕g5?

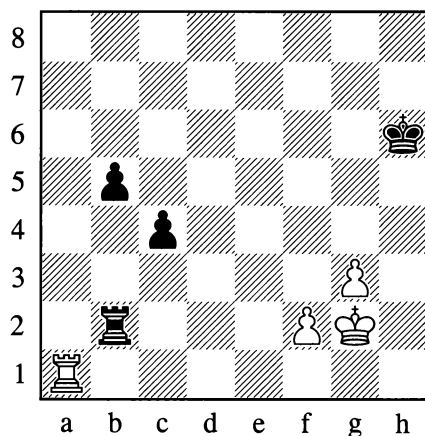
This is the move that feels most strange to criticise, but it is actually the move that throws away the win.

After 48...c3! 49. h6 ♜d2! 50. h7 ♜d8 51. ♜xa2 ♕e4 Black would win.

49. h6?!

49. g4! with the outside chance that you get to play 50. ♕g3 and deliver checkmate on the next move was my preference. After 49...♕xg4 50. h6 ♜d2 51. h7 ♜d8 52. ♜xa2 White will be able to pick up one of the remaining black pawns and make the draw without too much trouble.

49...a1=♞ 50. ♜xa1 ♕xh6



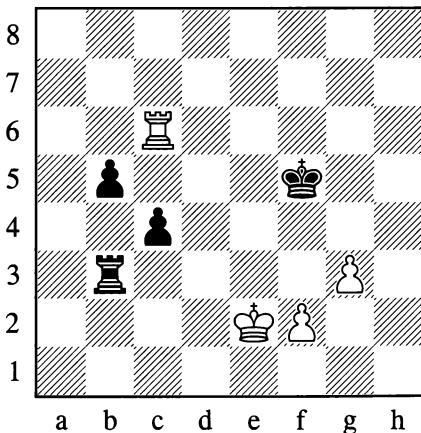
51.♖a6†?

The black pawns are too strong. The rook cannot control them alone and needed help from the king, as well as counterplay on the kingside.

51.♖c1!! with the idea ♔f3-e3 would have held. 51...♖b3 is the best try. Now White must play: 52.f4! ♔h5 (52...c3 53.♔f3 b4 54.♔e4 and the king will arrive in time.) 53.f5 ♔g4 54.♖f1! ♖xg3† 55.♔h2 The f-pawn creates enough counterplay to draw. (See more in the next chapter).

51...♔g5 52.♖c6 ♔f5!

The king comes to help.

53.♔f3 ♖b3† 54.♔e2**54...c3??**

Pushing the pawn way too early. Black needed to bring the king in.

54...♔e4! is completely in control, and winning.

55.♔d3 b4 56.♖c5†?

Missing another chance to draw.

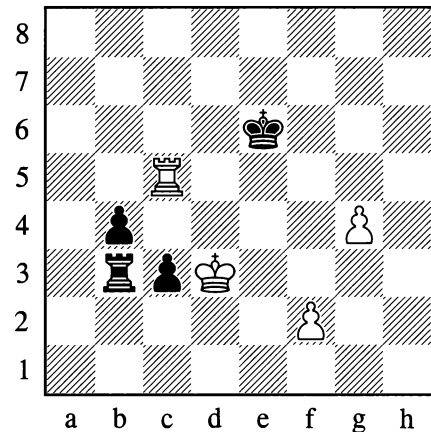
After 56.f4! the most dangerous idea would be 56...♖b1!, threatening ...b3!. (56...♖b2

57.♖c5† and the pawns will create counterplay) White has to play 57.♔c2! ♖b2† 58.♔d3, after which Black cannot make progress. 58...♖d2† 59.♔c4 White holds.

56...♔e6 57.g4

It feels wrong to leave the f-pawn hanging.

57.f4 ♔d6 58.♖c8 ♖b1! 59.♔c2 ♖b2† 60.♔d3 ♔d5 61.♖d8† ♔c5 62.♖c8† ♔b5 The black king will enter the position and help the pawns promote.

**57...♖b2?**

Thinking with the mouse, not the head.

57...♔d6! 58.♖c8 ♖b1!! was the key idea once again. White is done for. If 59.f4 b3! and a pawn promotes. Or 59.♔c2 ♖b2† and the f-pawn is lost.

58.♖c4??

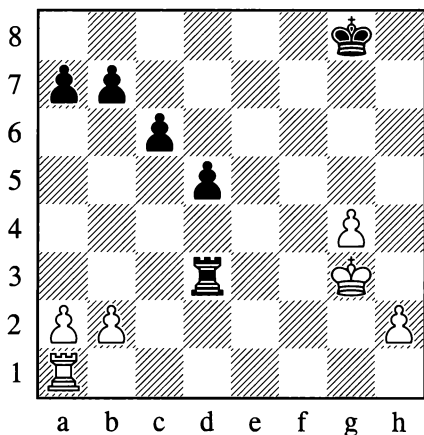
58.f4 would have held along the lines given above.

58...♔d5 59.♖d4† ♔c5 60.♖c4† ♔b5 61.♖f4 ♖d2† 62.♔e3 b3 63.♖f8 b2 64.♖b8† ♔c4 65.g5 ♖d5 66.g6 c2 67.♖c8† ♖c5
0-1

The final game is insane. Earlier White's position was overwhelming, which probably affected his mood. At this point Sam took the idea of placing the king in front of the passed pawns a bit too literally.

Sam Shankland – Levon Aronian

Internet 2021



33. ♖h4?

It was better to play for activity with: 33. ♖f4! ♜d2 (33... ♜h3 34. ♜h1 followed by g4-g5 and ♖g4 looks fine for White.) 34. h4 ♜xb2 35. ♜e1! Other moves are possible but this feels most logical. White has a lot of activity and does not stand worse at all.

33... ♜d2 34. h3?

First here the game falls into the lost category.

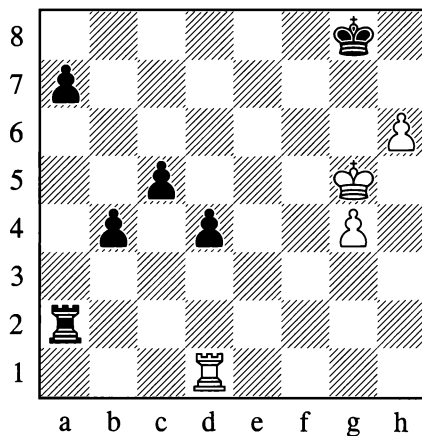
34. ♖g3! ♜xb2 35. h4 would have offered White enough counterplay, despite the loss of time compared to the previous note. Black cannot move all his pawns forward at once.

34... ♜xb2! 35. ♖g5 d4 36. ♜d1 c5 37. h4 ♜xa2 38. h5 b5?

Natural and sloppy. What is Black going to do with a third passed pawn? Moving arm-in-arm, these pawns are slow.

38... ♜a6! would have removed a lot of counterplay and placed the rook behind the passed pawns.

39. h6! b4



40. ♜e1

Arguably the most natural move. But I believe Black's task would have been even more difficult after:

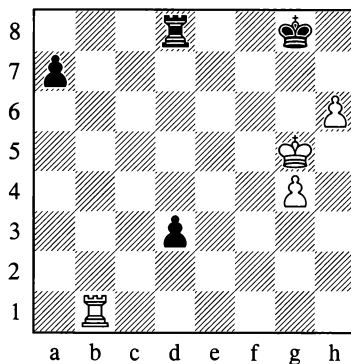
40. ♜c1!! d3!

There are many ways for Black to go wrong. Here we shall only give one. 40... ♜a5? 41. ♜e1 c4† 42. ♖g6 ♜a6† 43. ♖g5 Amusingly, Black cannot win. White will give perpetual check.

41. ♜xc5 ♜c2! 42. ♜b5

White would go down easy after 42. ♜d5 ♜c8! 43. ♖g6 b3 44. ♜d7 ♜c6†, and Black wins.

42... ♜c8! 43. ♜xb4 ♜d8 44. ♜b1



The most difficult moment.

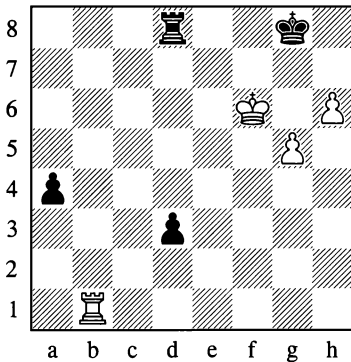
44...a5!!

It is important to advance the a-pawn first, as there are some lines where gaining a tempo with ...a2 is necessary to win.

44...d2? would not win: 45.♞d1 a5 46.♕f6 a4 47.♕e7! ♞d3 48.g5 a3 49.g6 a2 50.h7†! ♕g7 51.♞h1 ♞e3† 52.♕d7 ♞h3 53.♞xh3! d1=♚† 54.♕e7 and Black cannot get the queen past the 3rd rank defended by the rook after 54...♚e2† 55.♕d8!, or 54...♚e1† 55.♕d7!.

45.♕f6 a4 46.g5

The point behind the 44th move is seen in this line: 46.♕e7 ♞a8 47.g5 a3 48.g6 a2 49.♞a1 d2 and Black wins.



46...d2!

It is necessary to pacify the white rook and win a tempo doing so.

46...a3? would be a mistake now. 47.g6 and Black has to quickly play 47...♞d6†! to avoid losing. After 47...a2? White wins with: 48.h7† ♕h8 49.g7†! ♕xh7 50.♞h1† ♕g8 51.♞h8#

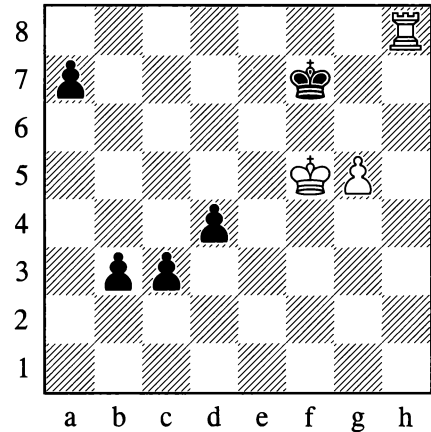
47.♞d1 a3 48.g6

48.♕e7 ♞a8! wins.

48...♞f8†! 49.♕e6 a2

Black will continue with 50...♞a8, winning.

40...b3! 41.♞e8† ♕f7! 42.h7 ♞h2! 43.h8=♚ ♞xh8! 44.♞xh8 c4! 45.♕f5 c3! 46.g5



Unlike the line after 40.♞c1, Black only has to make one difficult decision in this line. But this was still one too many.

46...b2?

This faulty move attracts the rook to b8, where it can take the checking piece later.

46...c2! is the right choice. You can easily explain it with long variations you would never calculate during a game, or we can try to understand it conceptually: the white rook will go behind the first advanced pawn. Also, White will want to give up the rook for the queen when it is promoted. So, we want the white rook on the c-file and queen the b-pawn first, so the c-pawn is promoted with a discovered check, rather than promoting the b-pawn with a check, where it is then captured, as in the game.

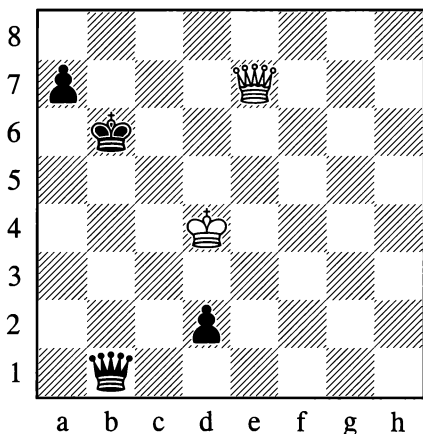
47.g6† ♕e7 48.♞b8 c2 49.g7 b1=♚ 50.g8=♚ c1=♚† 51.♞xb1 ♚xb1† 52.♕e5 d3

With little time on the clock, White lost this lottery.

53.♚e6†?!

53.♕d4! would have won the d-pawn instantly.

53...♔d8 54.♖d6† ♔c8 55.♗c6† ♔b8
56.♕d4 d2 57.♖d6† ♔b7 58.♗e7† ♔b6



59.♖d8†?

White could have given a perpetual with:
59.♖c5† ♔a6 60.♖a3† ♔b5 61.♖c5† ♔a4
62.♖xa7† ♔b3 63.♖b6† ♔c2 64.♖c6† ♔d1
65.♖f3† and so on.

59...♔a6 60.♖c8† ♔a5 61.♖c5† ♖b5!
62.♖xa7† ♔b4 63.♖e7† ♔a4! 64.♖a7†
♔b3 65.♖f7† ♔b2

Poor Sam... With this introduction to connected pawns, let's move on to the one area where these endings really stand out. The miracle draws had against them...

0-1

Drawing against Connected Passed Pawns

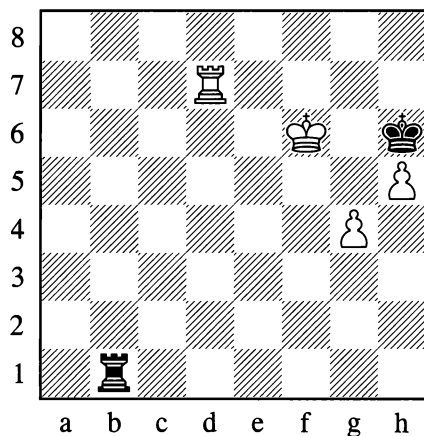
In this section we shall see two recurring drawing methods when fighting against connected passed pawns. The first is when the king is close to the pawns and it is not possible for the stronger side to bring in the king and make the pawns go forward. We shall see different versions of this. The second relies on a single passed pawn creating counterplay that will occupy the enemy rook or king.

Let's start by looking at situations where the king is controlling the passers.

Not that he is so in our first position. The white rook is heading for the ideal g6-square soon. But there is still a trick available.

Saha Neelash – Rinat Jumabayev

Novi Sad 2022



81...♖f1†?

A natural-looking mistake.

81...♖g1? loses to 82.♖d8!.

But Black could have made a draw in a sensational way. 81...♖b4!!, with the key point being that 82.♔f5 is met with 82...♖f4† or 82...♖xg4. Alternatively, after 82.g5† ♔xh5 83.♖h7† ♔g4 84.g6, the white pieces are misplaced and Black holds. 84...♖b6† 85.♔f7 ♖b7† 86.♔g8 ♖b8† 87.♔g7 ♔g5! With a draw.

82.♔e5 ♖e1† 83.♔d5 ♖d1† 84.♔e6?

84.♔c6 was the winning move, the key idea being 84...♖g1 85.♖d6†!, winning.

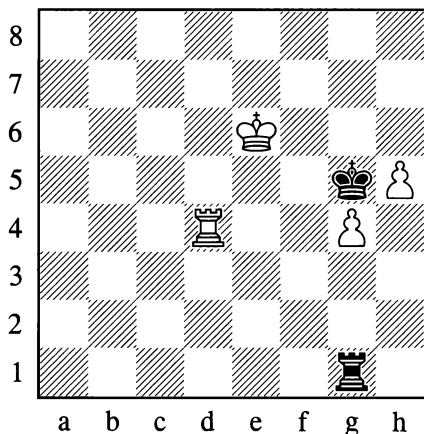
84...♖g1!

Shocker!

85.♖d4

Neelash obviously missed: 85.♔f5 ♖xg4! 86.♔xg4 Stalemate.

85...♔g5



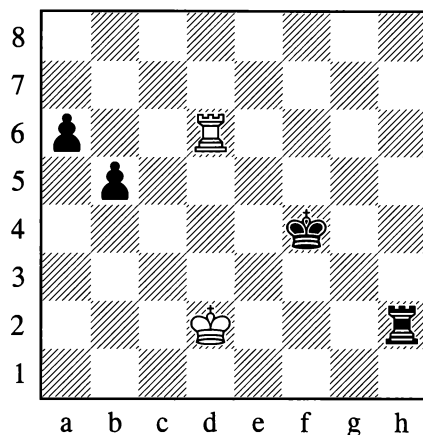
The stalemate stuff was fun, but this is the key image I want you to take with you. Black makes an easy draw. The black king is close to the white pawns, like a boxer hugging his opponent in the ring, avoiding getting hit. Because of shouldering, the white king cannot get close. The position is a prototype draw.

86.♕f7 ♖a1 87.♞d7 ♞a4 88.♔g7 ♞xg4
 89.h6 ♔h5† 90.♔h7 ♞g5 91.♞f7 ♖a5
 92.♞e7 ♞b5 93.♞d7 ♖a5 94.♞f7 ♞b5 95.♞f6
 ♞b7† 96.♔g8 ♞b8† 97.♔g7 ♞b7† 98.♞f7
 ♞xf7† 99.♔xf7 ♔xh6
 ½–½

In the next example, Black would be winning if the pawns were on a5 and b5, and the rook on a3. Or if the rook was on a4 and the king on the 7th or 8th ranks, where it would be possible for it to come to b7 and free the black rook from the responsibility of defending the a6-pawn.

Momchil Petkov – Vlad-Cristian Jianu

Hybrid 2021



42.♔c3?

Visually the most appealing square for the king to go to. But this is a serious mistake. The king should have gone to d3 or c1, when after 42...a5, White has 43.♞d5, with a draw.

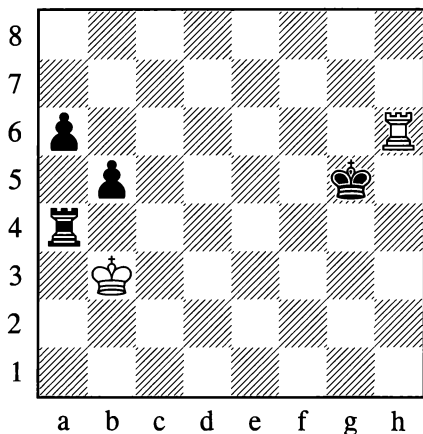
42...♞a2?

42...a5! is winning. After 43.♞d5 Black has 43...b4†! and the rook will make it to a3, giving him a winning position (explained below).

43.♔b3 ♖a4 44.♞h6 ♔e5 45.♞g6 ♔d5
 46.♞h6 ♔c5 47.♞g6 ♔d5 48.♞h6 ♔e5

An important point is that after 48...♔c5 49.♞g6 ♞d4 50.♞xa6 ♞d3†, White has time to regroup the rook. But if the pawn was a row further down, he would be lost. 51.♔c2 ♞h3 52.♞a8 ♔b4 53.♞b8 If the white king was on the back rank here, Black would have ...♞h1† and ...♞b1, winning. Now there is nothing. White holds.

49.♞g6 ♔f5 50.♞h6 ♔g5



51.♞d6!

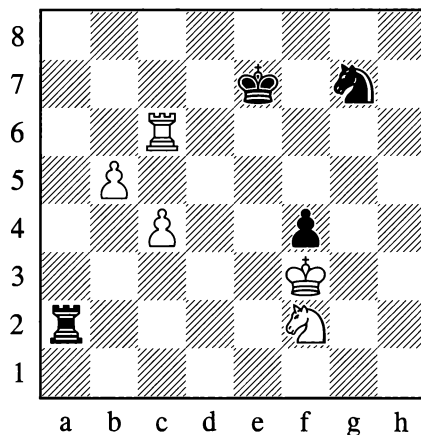
It is important for White to stay on the 6th rank. See more about this in Kravtsiv – Ding, (page 372).

51...♔f4 52.♞h6 ♔e3 53.♞h3† ♔f2
54.♞h2† ♔g3 55.♞h6 ♔g4 56.♞b6 ♔g5
57.♞c6 ♔f4 58.♞h6
½–½

The final example of this method was played in the first round of the 2018 Olympiad. I saw the position we start with live, as I was wondering around the playing hall, spectating the few remaining games, which included Tania Sachdev's game (I was the team captain of the Indian Women's Team). It is unusual for a player from Morocco to be winning against a player from China in the first round of the Olympiad, but this was indeed what was happening here. I calculated a few lines and was overwhelmed with the ways White could finish his opponent off.

Mohamed-Mehdi Aithmidou – Li Chao

Batumi Olympiad 2018



62.♞c7† ♔f6 63.♔e4† ♔e5

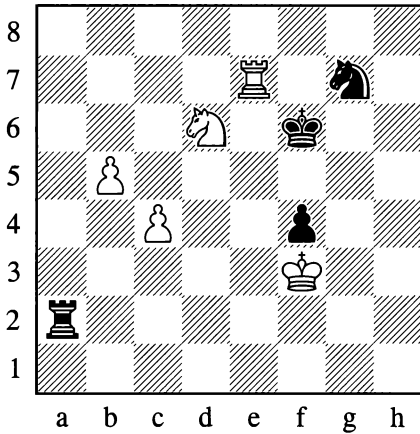
Li Chao (in the database referred to as Li Chao B – the B simple means that there is another one, if I am not mistaken) was enormously resilient in this game.

63...♔g6? would fail to 64.♞c6† ♔f7 65.b6 with the idea ♔d6(†)-b5.

64.♞e7†!

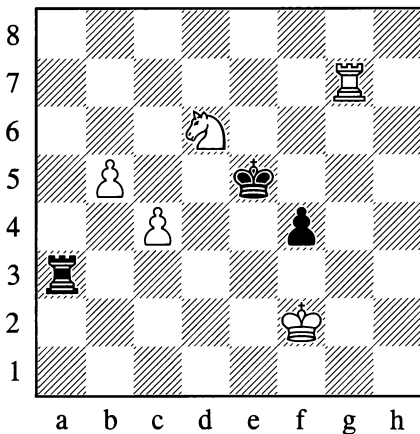
White avoids the trap. After 64.♞xg7? ♞a3† 65.♔g2 ♔xe4 66.c5 Black makes a fantastic draw. 66...♞b3! 67.b6 ♔e3 68.♞e7† ♔d4 69.♞c7 ♔e3 70.♔h3!? f3 71.♞f7 f2 72.♔g2 ♔d4! 73.♞f5 f1=♔ 74.♔xf1 ♞b2 and White is unable to win. After 75.♔e1 ♔c4 76.♔d1 ♔d4 77.♔c1 ♞b5 we see that there is nowhere for the white king to go. With the rook stuck on the 5th rank, progress is impossible.

64...♔f5 65.♔d6† ♔f6

**66.♖f7?**

After 66.b6?!, Black has a strong defensive resource: 66...♔xe7 67.b7 ♕xd6 68.b8=♖† ♕e7 69.♖c7† ♕f6 70.♖xf4† ♕e7 Although White is winning, it will still take 52 moves against the most resilient defence to break down the black fortress (knight on e6/e8, rook on c7), and in practice it may not be possible at all.

On the other hand, after 66.♖xg7! ♕xg7 67.b6 White would have won on the spot.

66...♕e5! 67.♖xg7 ♖a3† 68.♕f2**68...♕xd6?**

After having managed to create drawing chances, Li Chao takes back after only 12 seconds (half of it spent writing down the opponent's move and hitting the clock). I always preach to my students that they should aim to have two serious options on every move, seeing how often playing something instantly turns out to be a mistake. At this point, Li Chao might have realised that he could delay taking the knight and force the white king to a worse square by giving a series of checks first.

During a game we would just play the idea and see where it takes us. In the analysis we would confirm that it is indeed the difference between drawing and losing.

68...♖a2†! 69.♕f3 ♖a3† 70.♕g2

The white king is also misplaced after 70.♕e2 ♖a2† 71.♕d3 ♖a3† 72.♕d2 ♕xd6. 70...♖a2† 71.♕h3 ♖a3†! 72.♕h4 ♕xd6 73.♖f7 f3 74.♕g3 ♖c3

The black rook is perfectly placed. After: 75.♖f6† ♕c7 76.♖c6† ♕b7

White cannot make serious progress.

69.♖g6† ♕c5

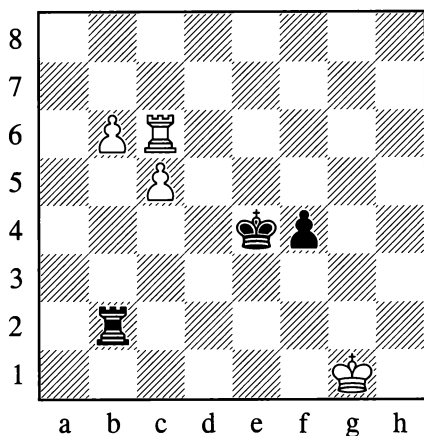
69...♕e5 70.c5 would win for White.

70.♖c6† ♕d4 71.b6 ♕e4 72.c5 ♖a2† 73.♕g1!

Preparing to escape via h2-h3-h4 with the king.

73...♖b2!

Dominating the white king and thus posing the opponent more practical problems. The strength of the move is reflected by the fact that White responded with an immediate mistake.



74. ♖c7?

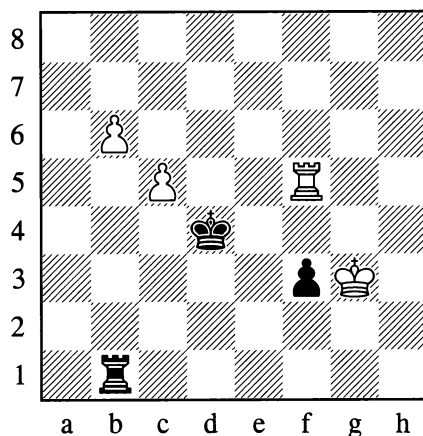
74. ♖c8! was the right idea. White is threatening to give a check and then push the c-pawn. Or push the c-pawn and then give a check. 74... ♖b1† Black is forced to try active play. (Against 74... ♗f3 and 74... ♔d5, White should play 75. ♖c7! to help the pawns advance. This manoeuvre may be short, but it is difficult to see.) 75. ♗h2 f3 76. ♗g3! White has to both prevent the f-pawn from advancing, and not be caught up in a checking net. This is how it is done. 76... ♗g1† 77. ♗f2 ♖g2† 78. ♗f1 White is winning. For example: 78... ♖b2 79. c6

74... ♖b1† 75. ♗f2 ♖b2† 76. ♗g1 ♖b1† 77. ♗h2 f3 78. ♗g3 ♗e3

There is nothing wrong with this move, except that finding the draw afterwards is difficult.

The same is also true for the following sequence: 78... ♗g1† 79. ♗f2 ♖g2† 80. ♗f1 ♖b2 (80... ♗g8? 81. b7 and White wins) 81. b7 ♖b1† 82. ♗f2 ♖b2† 83. ♗g3 ♖g2† 84. ♗h3 ♖g8! Only once the king is on h3, as it is both cut off and about to get checked in a nasty way. 85. c6 ♗d5! 86. ♖c8 f2 and White has to consider himself lucky that he has a draw with: 87. ♖xg8! f1=♖† 88. ♗h2 and all Black has is a perpetual check.

79. ♖f7 ♗d4! 80. ♖f5



80... ♗e4?

Li Chao missed a drawing idea for the ages.

80... f2!! 81. ♗xf2 ♖b3! would have reached the same position as in the note to White's 64th move. Although the white king can come to c2, there is no way to convert the two-pawn advantage. Black can put the rook on b5 and shuffle with the king between c4 and d4.

81. ♖f8

81. ♖xf3 also won.

81... ♗d5 82. ♖c8 ♖b3 83. ♖c7 ♗e4 84. b7 ♖b2 85. c6 ♖g2† 86. ♗h3 ♖g8

Almost the same position as in the variation to move 78. If the black king was on d5, Black would draw.

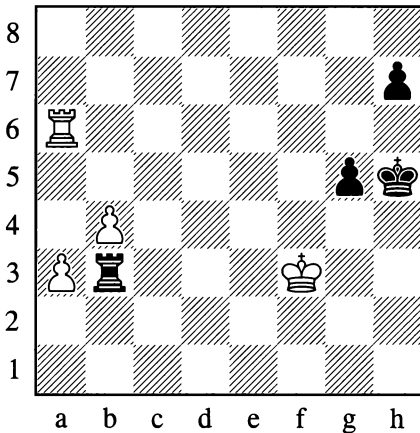
87. ♖f7

1-0

The second way to hold a draw is to get enough counterplay with a passed pawn that can push part of the opposing army onto the defensive. The following is a great example.

Luis Sousa Reis – Andre Ventura Sousa

Portugal 2020



After being dead lost, Andre Sousa managed to turn the game around and win not only the game, but also the 2020 Portuguese Championship.

44.♔g2?

White is also lost after 44.♔f2?, when the g-pawn will advance with check.

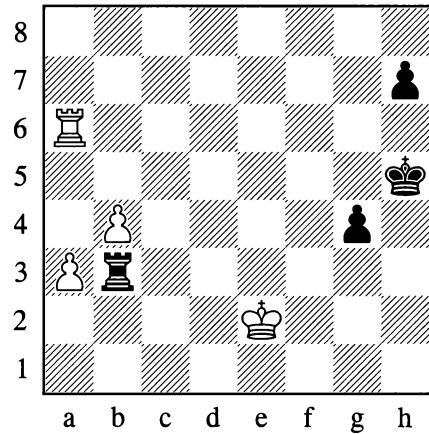
44.♔e4? g4 45.♞d6 g3 also sees the g-pawn sail through.

44...g4 45.a4

Desperation.

45...♞xb4 46.a5 ♞a4 47.♞a8 ♔h4 48.a6 ♞a2† 49.♔f1 g3 0-1

The drawing method required a nice manoeuvre to improve the white rook.

44.♔e2!! g4**45.♞d6!! ♞xa3**

After 45...♔g5 46.♞d3 ♞b1, White can either chase the rook or get a drawn pawn/queen ending with 47.♞d1, or play for activity in the rook ending with 47.a4!? ♞xb4 48.♞a3, with a draw similar to our main lines.

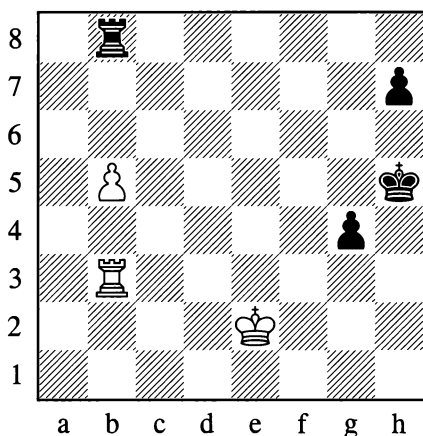
46.♞d3 ♞a8

Black would be able to force a queen ending after 46...♞a2† 47.♞d2 ♞xd2†!?, but in this case, White is well within the drawing margin. 48.♔xd2 g3 49.♔e2! Winning a vital tempo. Black will play ...♔g4-h3 and then promote the pawn, but White will be in time and should draw this queen ending without serious difficulties.

47.b5 ♞b8

Black's only serious try involves blocking the pawn immediately.

48.♞b3



48...♖b6

But Black will not be able to advance the pawns in a meaningful way.

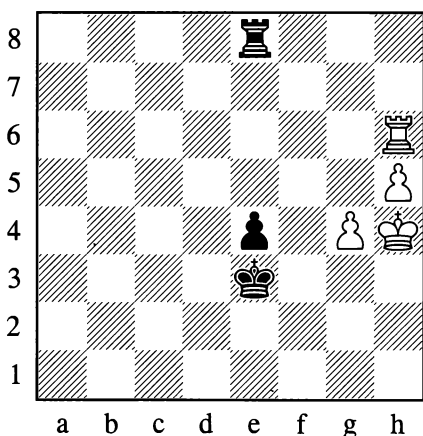
49.♔f2 ♔g5 50.♔g3 h5 51.♖b4 h4†
52.♔g2 ♖d6!? 53.b6 ♖d2† 54.♔g1 h3 55.b7
g3 56.♖b1

Black has to give perpetual check.

In the next example, Renier got a chance to save the game after a sloppy loss of tempo.

**Miguel Santos Ruiz –
Renier Castellanos Rodriguez**

Forni Di Sopra 2018

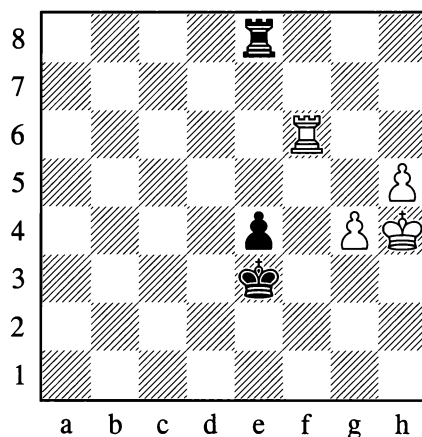


55.♖f6?

Yes, the rook is a bit better placed here, but not much.

The winning idea was: 55.g5! ♔f2 (55...♔d4 56.♖d6† with the idea 57.♖d1.) 56.♖f6† ♔g2 57.g6 e3 and White is winning after: 58.♖a6! (But not 58.g7? ♖e4†!! 59.♔g5 e2 and Black holds narrowly) 58...e2 59.♖a1! White wins. The pawns are too far advanced.

55.♔g3!? also wins, but feels a bit mysterious.



In order to draw, Black needs to keep his options open.

55...♔d4?

55...♔d2? also loses after 56.h6 e3 57.g5 e2 58.♖f2!, and the pawns win.

The saving move was 55...♔d3!!, when the king is ready to go back, as well as forward. 56.g5 (56.h6 e3 57.♖f3 is the same.) 56...e3 Play could continue: 57.♖f3 (After 57.♖d6† ♔e4! the king comes back to deal with the pawns; or if 57.♖f1 e2 58.♖e1 ♔d2 White has no more than a draw after giving up the rook.) 57...♔e4! 58.♖f1 e2 Black will get the king to f5 and create counterplay against the white king. 59.♖e1 ♔f5 60.h6 ♖e4† 61.♔h5 ♖e3 Black draws.

56.h6 e3 57.♖f1!

Exploiting that the king is too far back.

57...♗e4

A clear point is that 57...♗e5 58.♗g5!! wins for White. The king shoulders the black king away.

58.♗h5 e2 59.♖e1 ♗f4 60.h7!

Black is not in time.

60...♖e5† 61.♗g6 ♖e6† 62.♗f7

Black resigned.

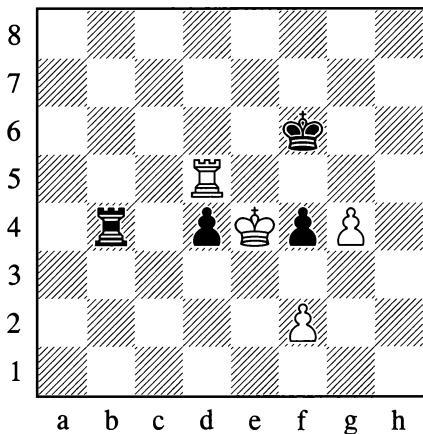
1–0

The next game is one of only two in this book from 2023, played in the yearly January super-tournament, sponsored by Tata Steel, dating the completion of this book perfectly.

White has the advantage. His pawns are safer and his king is attacking both the black pawns, meaning one of them will fall.

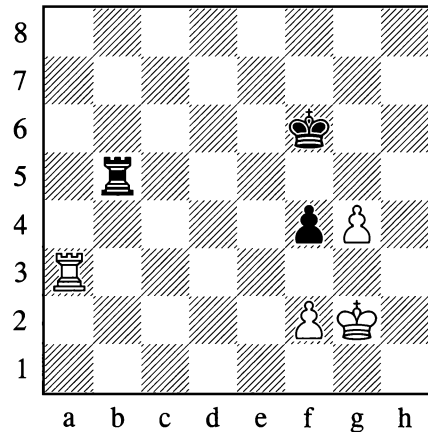
Vincent Keymer – Nodirbek Abdusattorov

Wijk aan Zee 2023

**62...d3†? 63.♗f3!**

Not a difficult move. White wants to win a pawn, but without giving counterplay. Keymer is a student of Yusupov and Leko, both known for their outstanding technique.

63.♗xd3 would be a mistake in view of 63...f3 64.g5† ♗g6 65.♗e3 ♖b3† 66.♗f4 ♗h5! when White cannot make real progress.

63...♗e6 64.♖xd3 ♗e5 65.♖a3 ♖b5 66.♗g2 ♗f6**67.♖a8?**

The winning continuation is: 67.♖h3!! ♗g6 68.♖h8 Followed by ♗f3xf4, or ♖h8-h5, depending on what Black does. Black cannot defend both the 5th rank and the f4-pawn. Against most moves, White puts the rook on h5. For example, 67...♖a5 68.♖h5 or 67...♖b2 68.♖h5, in both cases followed by ♖f5, ♗f3 and ♖xf4.

67...♖b3?

Missing a chance to draw with: 67...♗g5! 68.♖g8† (Against 68.f3, the simplest draw arrives after 68...♖b2† 69.♗h3 ♖f2, and White cannot make progress.) 68...♗h4 69.♗f3 ♖b3†! This is the key point. With the black king so excellently placed, Black does not need to hold on to the f4-pawn. He needs to harass the white king and pawns. 70.♗xf4 ♖b4† 71.♗f5 ♖b5† 72.♗e6 ♖b6† 73.♗e5 ♖b5† 74.♗d6 ♖b6† 75.♗d5 Black is running out of good checks. But he also has 75...♖f6! winning back a pawn, while cutting off the white king.

68.♖a5! ♜g6 69.♖f5 ♖a3 70.f3!

Another strong technical move. White is strengthening his structure before taking decisive action.

After 70.♖xf4? ♜g5 71.♖b4 ♜h4! Black would have taken control over the g3- and h3-squares, preventing White from advancing his king.

70...♖a4 71.♜h3 ♖b4 72.♜h4 ♖a4 73.♖f8 ♜g7 74.♖f5

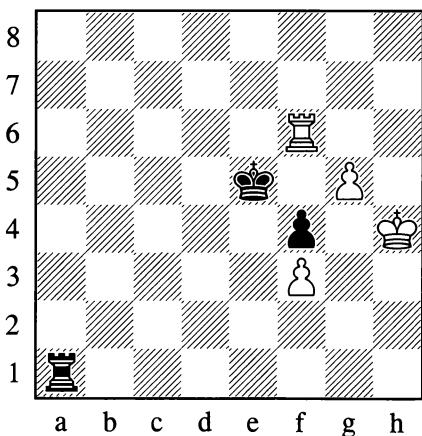
First thought is that Keymer is gaining time on the clock before proceeding with his plan. But reality was that he was running out of time and, as yet, without a plan.

74...♜g6 75.♖g5† ♜h7 76.♖h5† ♜g6 77.g5

But a plan emerges, in the lack of alternatives.

77...♖a1 78.♖h6† ♜f5 79.♖f6† ♜e5

After a series of quick moves, Keymer has accumulated a few minutes, which he correctly invested in this moment. Unfortunately, the problem was too difficult for him to solve.



80.♖b6?

You could ponder why Keymer chose this option after 3 minutes and 39 seconds of thought. The continuation coming in the game is not difficult to foresee and could have been discarded quickly. Even if the win seemed

illusive, at least there was greater complexity in the alternative.

80.♖f8!

This was winning. The difference from the game is that the white rook is keeping an eye on the f4-pawn, while at the same time cutting off the black king's access to the scene of the drama.

80...♖f1 81.♜g4 ♖g1† 82.♜h5 ♖g3 83.♜g6!

This is the key point. The king is best placed in front of the passed pawn, where it will not only be ideally placed to fight for the squares in front of the pawn, but also be able to assist the rook in harassing the black king.

It is possible Keymer had seen this far and rejected the direction on account of 83.g6? ♖xf3 84.g7 ♖h3†! and Black will make the draw. If this is the case, he would have been better off having only a minute to decide, rather than three-and-a-half.

83...♖xf3 84.♖e8† ♜d5 85.♜f5 ♖f1 86.♖e4 f3 87.♖f4!

The rook is perfectly placed, while the black rook is trapped.

87...♜d6 88.♜f6

White wins.

80...♖h1† 81.♜g4 ♖g1† 82.♜h5 ♖g3

Black has enough counterplay and the game soon ended in a draw.

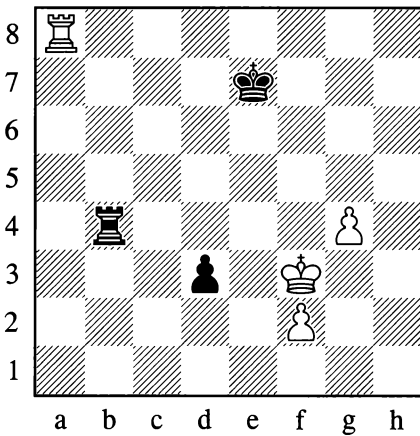
83.♖b3 ♜f5 84.♖b5† ♜e6 85.g6 ♖xf3 86.g7 ♖g3 87.♜h6 f3 88.♖b8 ♖h3† 89.♜g6
1/2–1/2

Black needed to create a passed pawn to create counterplay.

62...f3!! 63.♜xf3 ♜e6

The white rook is driven from the d-file, preparing the improvement of the black rook.

64.♖d8 ♜e7 65.♖a8 d3!



With ...Rd4 coming, White has no other way to play for a win than returning with the rook to block the pawn. This is what gives Black drawing chances.

66. Ra1 Rd4 67. Qg3 d2 68. Rd1 Qe6 69. f3 Qd5

69...Qe5 70. Qf2 Qf4 71. Qe2 Qg3 72. Rxd2 Rf4 is not the way to play, although it bizarrely also draws.

70. Qf2 Qc4 71. Qe3 Qc3

Black will win the white rook and make the draw in the following race. The conclusion of the line is for pleasure as much as anything.

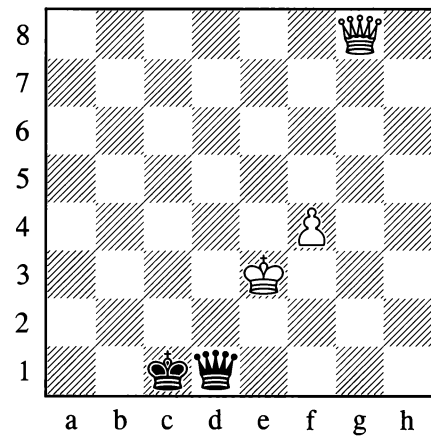
72. f4 Rd3† 73. Qe2 Qc2 74. g5 Rxe3†

A wholly unnecessary tactic.

75. Qxe3 Qxd1 76. g6 Qc1!

There are other draws, but none like this.

77. g7 d1=Q 78. g8=Q

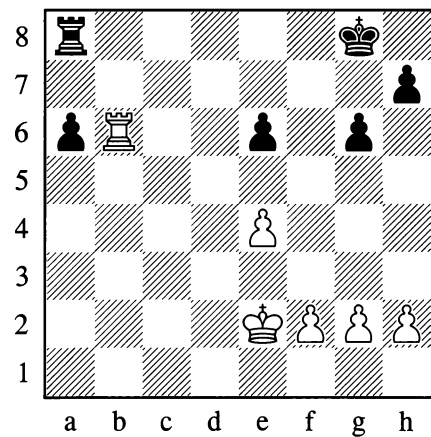


78... Qb3†! 79. Rxb3

The final game shows our theme in a slightly more complex scenario. There are more pawns. It starts out with a position that should draw easily for Black, after which things slowly get more dicey.

Yuri Anikaev – Vladimir Karasev

Severodonetsk 1982



29... a5!?

A natural choice, but not the only one.

30. Rxe6 a4 31. Rb6 a3 32. Rb1 a2 33. Ra1 Qf7 34. Qd3 Qe6 35. Qc3 Qe5 36. f3 g5

37.♔b3 ♚b8†!

Forcing the white king to the a-file.

38.♔xa2 g4 39.♚b1 ♚a8†

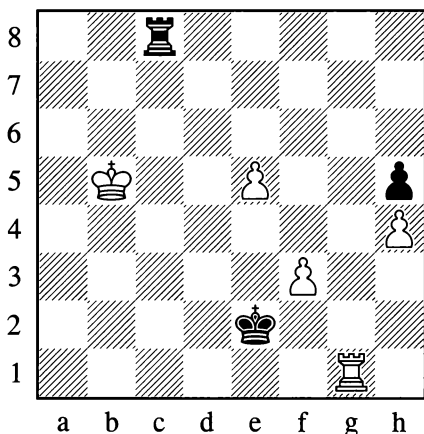
Black could also hold after 39...♚g8. For example: 40.♚b5† ♔f4 41.♚f5† ♔e3 42.e5 ♔f2! 43.fxg4† ♔xg2 44.h4 ♔g3 45.♚g5 ♚b8 and the draw is getting near. The white king is too far away.

40.♔b3 gxf3 41.gxf3 ♚f8

The simplest draw arises after 41...♔f4! 42.♚f1 ♔e3 and Black wins a pawn.

42.♚f1 ♚c8

42...♔d4! would have included shouldering and drawn easily.

43.♔b4 h5 44.h4 ♔f4 45.♔b5 ♔e3 46.e5 ♔e2 47.♚g1**47...♔xf3?**

The last chance to make the draw was 47...♔f2!! 48.♚g7 (or 48.♚g5 ♔xf3 49.♚xh5 ♔g4 50.♚h6 ♚e8) 48...♔xf3 49.e6 ♔f4 50.e7 ♔e5! and Black holds.

48.e6 ♚e8?!

More resistance would be offered by:

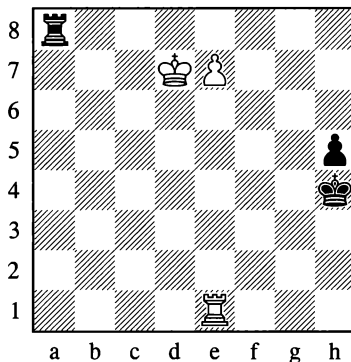
48...♔f4! 49.e7

49.♚e1 ♔g4 50.e7 transposes.

49...♚e8 50.♚e1 ♔g4 51.♔c6!

51.♚e4† ♔f5 is a direct draw.

51...♔xh4 52.♔d7 ♚a8

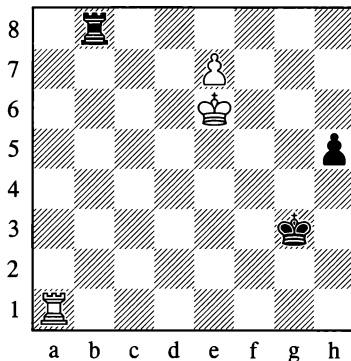
**53.♚a1!**

53.e8=♚? ♚xe8 54.♚xe8 ♔g4!! Shouldering. (54...♔g3 would allow the white king to march in and win.) 55.♔e6 h4 56.♔e5 h3 57.♔e4 ♔g3 58.♔e3 We have a theoretical draw: 58...♔g2! 59.♚g8† ♔f1! White also fails to win after: 53.♔e6? ♔g3 54.♚g1† ♔f3 55.♚f1† ♔g4!! (55...♔g3? 56.♚f8 loses as above.) 56.♚f8 ♚a6† Black gives checks until the white king goes somewhere it does not want to, then gives up the rook with a draw following.

53...♚b8 54.♔e6!!

With the idea of ♚d1-d8.

54...♔g3



55.♖g1†!

Black is ideally placed for ...♗e8 and a draw with king and pawn in a good position, so White needs to be clever.

55...♔f3

If the king goes to the h-file, 56.♗d1 wins.

And if it goes to f2, White will collect the h5-pawn after 56.♗h1!.

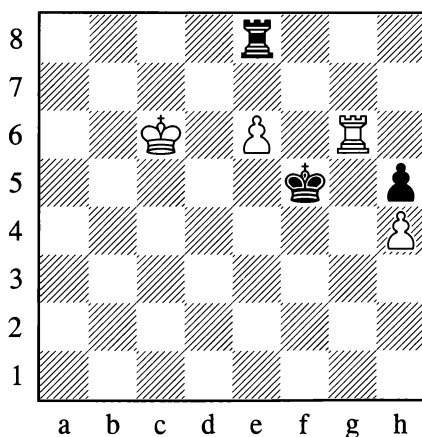
56.♗f1† ♔g4 57.♗f8 ♗b6† 58.♔d5 ♗b5†

59.♔c4 ♗e5 60.e8=♚ ♗xe8 61.♗xe8 h4

62.♔d3

White wins.

49.♗g6! ♔f4 50.♔c6 ♔f5



51.♔d7!

An important tempo-winner.

51...♗a8 52.♗h6 ♗a7† 53.♔e8 ♔g4 54.e7

♔xh4 55.♗g6 ♔h3 56.♔f8 ♗a8† 57.e8=♚

♗xe8† 58.♔xe8 h4 59.♔e7 ♔h2 60.♔f6 h3

61.♔f5 ♔h1 62.♔g4 h2 63.♔g3

1-0

Chapter 22

Active or Passive Defence

One of the big questions when we are defending a worse position in a rook endgame is: should we defend actively or passively? In general, the answer is “active” as you will have gathered already from reading the previous chapters.

But there are exceptions, and that will be the main factor in this chapter. Giving general advice on when to go passive (with the default position being active) is hard. The main reason to look at passive defence in the first place is if the active defence fails. But in general, I feel that with things that work rarely, developing the intuition through seeing quality examples is the best idea.

In the first example on this topic, we shall see a modern style game, where Black achieves a Stockfish-sanctioned equality, but still with practical problems in holding the draw (what we used to call an equal position, before machines were able to calculate everything till the end). This is the type of game where nine out of ten times, it will be a draw, with White winning the odd one out. Which is this one.

I wanted to talk to Sam about the chess mistakes in the game, but he rightly brushed me off, saying that it was a special case. He had felt foggy when he woke up and found it hard to concentrate during the game. Sam gets a lot of his results from being more present and focused than his opponent; thus, being less so was highly damaging to his chances. This does not change the illustrative chess points I want to make. In this game Black at times should seek desperate activity, and at times play more patiently. Sam did not do well in identifying these moments.

Emil Sutovsky – Sam Shankland

Batumi Olympiad 2018

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.♖c3 dxe4 4.♖xe4 ♙f5 5.♖g3 ♙g6 6.h4 h6 7.♖f3 e6 8.♖e5 ♙h7 9.♙d3 ♙xd3 10.♙xd3 ♖d7 11.♙f4 ♖xe5 12.♙xe5 ♙a5† 13.c3 ♖f6 14.0–0 ♖g4 15.♙ad1 ♖xe5 16.dxe5 ♙d8 17.♙xd8† ♙xd8 18.♙xd8† ♖xd8 19.♙d1† ♖c7!?

We are still within Sam’s preparation. Obviously, this is a bit dry. Heading for an endgame with the intention to draw it is usually not his style, but at the Olympiad, you hope your teammates win with White, while you hold the fort with Black.

19...♔e8!? 20.h5 ♕e7 21.♖e4 was better for White in Guseinov – Pantsulaia, Kigali 2017, even if Black later held the draw.

Honestly, I cannot tell if Sam's move is equal to that game, or slightly better. It is close.

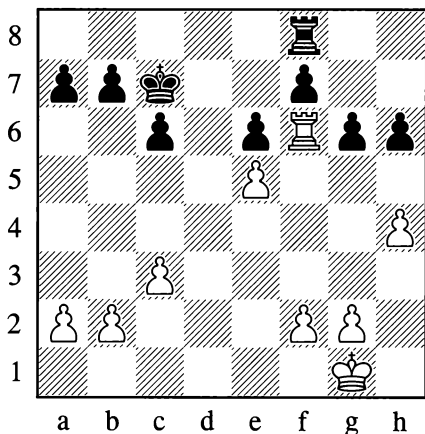
20.♖d3

Sutovsky goes for the active option, true to style. It was also possible to prepare for a minor piece ending.

20.h5 ♕e7 21.♖e4 ♖d8 22.♖xd8 ♔xd8 23.♔f1 would also give White an advantage, but is still within a drawing margin.

Personally, this would be my choice, but to Stockfish everything is 0.00...

20...♕e7 21.♖f3 ♖f8 22.♖h5 g6 23.♖f6 ♕xf6 24.♖xf6



We have arrived at the rook ending, finally. White is better. The rook is active, Black's rook is passive, and there are real weaknesses in the black position. Black already has to choose between an active and a passive approach.

24...♔d7!?

I believe this is not only the right attitude, but also that Sam was still within the margins of his preparation; at least in a conceptual sense.

Objectively it may not be worse to play 24...h5, when after 25.♔h2 ♔d7 26.♖f3 ♔e7 27.♖d3 White is a little better, as Black cannot contest the d-file. But I believe this position is much harder to play for Black. That he lost in the game does not challenge that opinion. Rather, the fact that that he made so many small mistakes strengthens that impression.

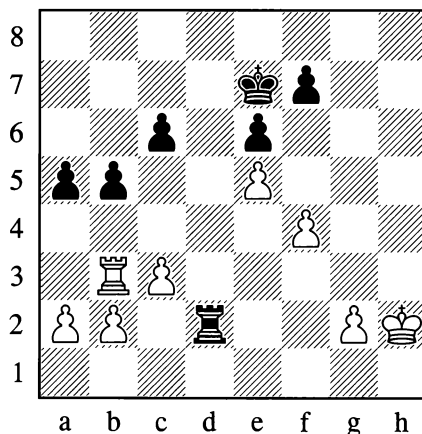
25.h5 g6 26.♖xh6 ♔e7 27.♖xh5

White has to take the pawn immediately. If he tried to play prophylactically with 27.♔f1 ♖d8 28.♔e2, Black would have 28...♖g8 with active counterplay and an easy draw.

27...♖d8 28.♖h4

The b-pawn has to be defended.

28...♖d1† 29.♔h2 ♖d2 30.♖b4 b5 31.f4 a5 32.♖b3



We have reached this position almost by force from the opening. It is rare that so many pieces fall directly off the board into the woodchipper, and usually it is the death of the variation as a try for White. This should have been so too – but if you have a bad day, you can lose almost any position.

Black has obvious compensation for the pawn. The white rook has gone from active to passive, and the black rook the other way. But White has also won a pawn, giving him a healthy cushion for later. What is interesting to me is that Black already is active, and his positional compensation is so convincing that he does not have to prove anything. It will not disappear easily. Thus, we should look at this as a decent position for Black, where he should solve his main problem. As we learned earlier, when the rook is as active as it can be, it is a good moment to activate the king. Instead, Sam tried to force matters.

32...a4?!

I do not like this decision. Although all roads leads to a draw, there is no reason to go through the swamp.

32...f6! would either weaken and undermine the e5-pawn, or allow the Black king to become active. It is easy to prove with variations that this works. But honestly, this would be a misunderstanding of the decision-making process. Realising what problem needs to be solved, as well as the best tool to do so, relies on either logic or a conceptual approach. Brute force calculation is what leads to the need to force a draw, when you go from drawing any which way, to needing to be accurate, as you are not executing the counterplay from a position of optimal strength.

33.♖b4 a3!?

33...f6! was still the best move. After 34.exf6† ♕xf6 35.a3 e5 Black would bring

the king into the game too. The white rook is doing a bit better than it was, but the draw is still within reach.

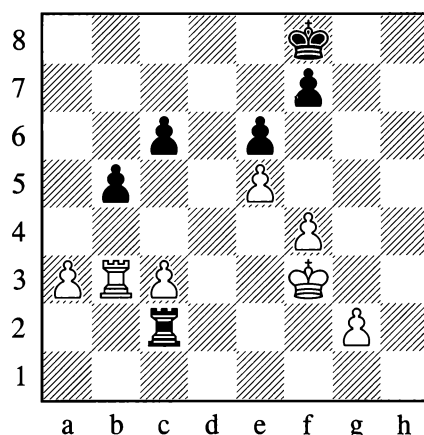
34.bxa3 ♜xa2 35.♞b3

35.c4 leads to exchanges and a draw.

35...♞c2 36.♔g3 ♕f8

36...f6! was still best.

37.♕f3



Sam was clearly having an off day. The black king stands worse on f8 than e7, yet now Sam chooses this moment to “strike”. If he had returned with the king to e7 and played ...f6, Black would still be fine, even though the time lost on strange activities could have been better used to activate the king.

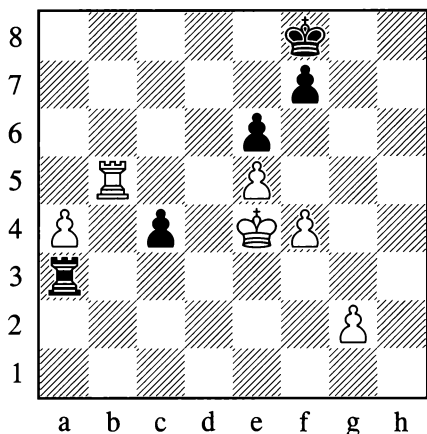
37...c5? 38.♕e4!

A pre-emptive move. There will be no check on c3.

38...c4

Analysis reveals that 38...♕e7 loses to 39.♕d3 ♞f2 40.♞xb5 ♞xf4 41.c4!, but in a practical sense, this is not a surprise, even if you cannot see how in advance.

39.♞xb5 ♞xc3 40.a4 ♞a3



Move 41, where the gods gave Sutovsky extra time to think, which is ironic, as Sutovsky as Director in FIDE has contributed to a further reduction of thinking time, removing all elements of thinking from the third phase of the game.

Later in the book we will discuss the 2nd best placement of the rook. The best is behind the passed pawn (a3). But is the rook better to the side or in front of the pawn? Spoiler alert: if you need to advance the passed pawn, and the king cannot help, it is in front of the pawn. Which is the case here.

41.a5?

This is therefore a conceptual mistake.

White was winning after 41.♖a5! with similar lines to what we will see later in the game.

41...c3 42.♔d3 ♕g7 43.g4 ♕g6 44.♔c2 ♕h6?

Leaving the pawn undefended, preparing for f4-f5, which is entirely harmless. Black would always be able to play ...♕h6!, if it happened.

44...♕g7! would leave White without a way to proceed, and could be argued to be a passive defence. Or at least a sort of hedgehog defence, where Black is waiting for White to make the first move, lifting part of his armour,

before acting. This is a common strategy for defending such positions in the endgame. Often the stronger side is in control, but has no obvious way to improve his position. While the weaker side should absolutely refrain from doing anything, as it would be a risky gamble. But there is a lot of psychological pressure associated with being worse. The need to force a draw can be strong, but should be resisted. Whether this is exactly a perfect example of this, or if that would be 32...a4?!, is open to debate. To me it is more important that the general idea is understood.

45.♖b7!

Winning a tempo to undo his mistake on move 41.

45...♕g6

45...♖xa5 46.♖xf7 would be winning for White.

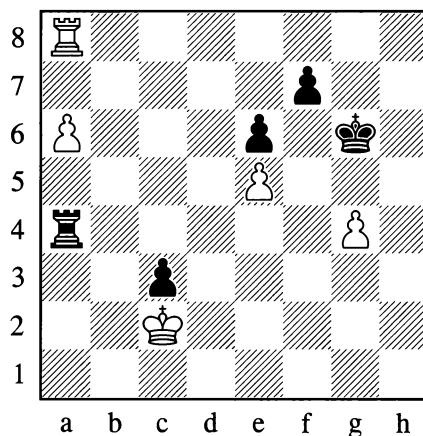
46.♖b5?

Repeating moves. This is a bit hard to understand. White had the chance to play 46.♖a7!, which he did not deserve to get again.

46...♕h6?

46...♕g7! would have corrected the previous error.

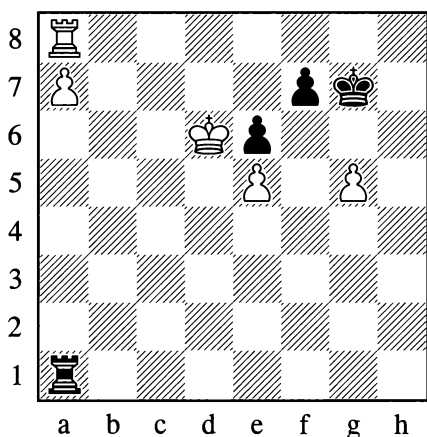
47.♖b7! ♕g6 48.♖a7! ♖a4 49.a6 ♖xf4 50.♖a8 ♖a4



51.a7!

Often we want to leave a space for the king on a7, while at other times it is important to force the rook to stay behind the pawn, so it does not have time to snatch any pawns. Sutovsky spent 11 minutes finding the winning method before executing this move.

51...♔g7 52.♔xc3 ♖a1 53.g5 ♔h7 54.♔c4 ♖a2 55.♔c5 ♖a6 56.♔b5 ♖a1 57.♔b6 ♖b1† 58.♔c6 ♖a1 59.♔d6 ♔g7



Sutovsky had seen the winning method in advance and now carried it out.

60.♔d7

60.g6!? also works. 60...♖a6† 61.♔c7 ♖a1 (61...fxg6 62.♔b7 ♖a1 63.♖b8 wins.) 62.gxf7 ♔xf7 63.♔d6 ♖a6† 64.♔c5 ♔g7 65.♔b5 ♖a1 66.♔c6 Black has no defence against 67.♖d8, with a transition to a winning pawn ending.

60...♖a2

60...♖a6 61.♔e7 ♖a1 62.g6! wins in the same way.

61.g6 ♔xg6

Black has to try something...

61...fxg6 62.♔xe6 and the e-pawn wins the game easily.

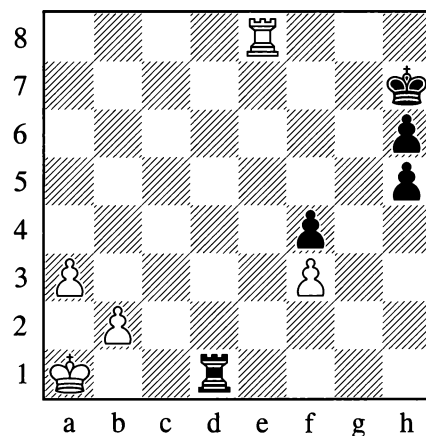
62.♖g8† ♔f5 63.a8=♖ ♖xa8 64.♖xa8 ♔xe5 65.♖a5† ♔e4 66.♔d6 f5 67.♖a4† 1–0

Seeking counterplay

The next game is a good example of a situation where White, the weaker side, has to play with great activity in order to distract the black pieces, while at the same time trying to control the passed pawn. It was contested by two of Ukraine's greatest current stars, of which Kovalenko at the time of writing is fighting to defend his homeland, while Shevchenko has transferred to Romania, to get the most out of his talent while he is still young. I admire both men for their character and resilience in a difficult situation.

Igor Kovalenko – Kirill Shevchenko

Belgrade 2021



It is difficult for White to deal with the h5-pawn, which is why he needs to find active counterplay. This means pushing the queenside pawns, while at the same time trying to keep the h-pawn under control.

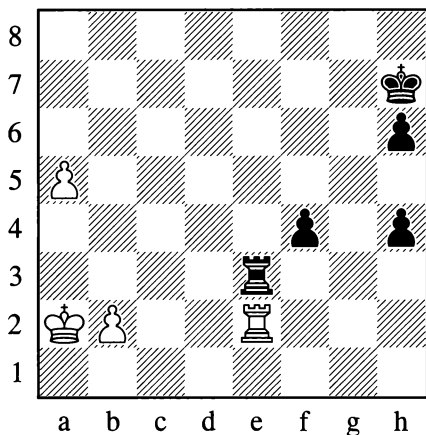
65.♔a2 h4 66.♖c2 ♖f1

Black has to eliminate the f-pawn, partly in order to create a second passed pawn, but also to create an entry point on g4 for the black king.

67.a4!?

67.b4! ♖xf3 68.b5 makes more sense to me, as the white rook fits perfectly in the newly created hole on b2. Still the variation is non-obvious. 68...h3 69.b6 ♜g3 70.♞e7†! (70.b7 ♜g8 would rely on finding 71.♞f2! to make the draw.) Now 70...♜g7 is forced, and 71.♜xg7† ♔xg7 72.b7 is a trivial draw.

67...♜xf3 68.a5! ♞e3



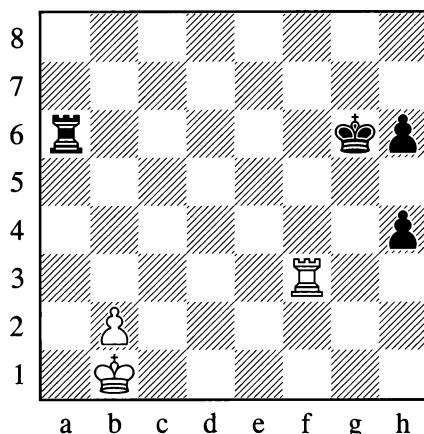
69.♞f2

69.♞h2!? was a bit more accurate in view of 69...h3 70.♞f2! and the pawn will be hanging on h3, which will be highly convenient. Often missing such small details is the first step towards losing control.

69...f3 70.a6 ♞e6 71.♜xf3 ♜xa6† 72.♔b1

72.♔b3!? ♔g6 73.♞c3! would also hold. A lot of checks are coming. 73...♞f6 74.♔a4 ♔g5 75.b4 ♔g4 76.♞c4†! and for example: 76...♞f4 77.♜xf4† ♔xf4 78.b5 ♔e5 79.♔a5 ♔d6 80.b6 The queen ending is a draw – and one of the ones you can hold...

72...♔g6!



73.♞c3?

This attempt to set up a Vancura defence does not work.

Bringing the king to the battle also fails: after 73.♔c2? ♔g5, the rook needs to give checks, which now cannot happen from the c-file. And after 74.♞d3 ♞c6†! the white king has to go to a bad square.

White's last chance to draw involved throwing the b-pawn forward to distract the black rook. 73.b4! ♞b6 (73...♔g5 74.♞c3! gives White a better version of the game, and Black cannot win.) 74.♔c2 ♞xb4 75.♔d2 ♞e4 76.♞e3! The white king approaches the kingside in time.

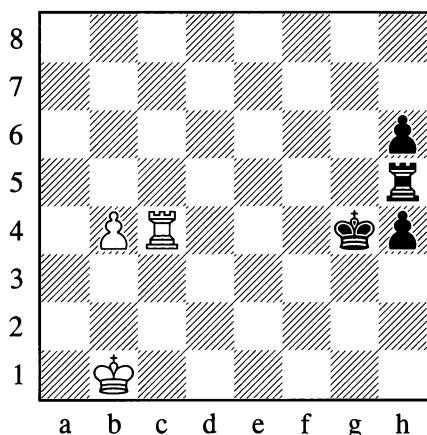
73...♞a5!

Taking control of the 5th rank.

74.b4

White has no choice but to seek counterplay. Passivity after 74.♔c2 ♞h5! would be devastating.

74...♞h5 75.♞c6† ♔f5 76.♞c5† ♔g4 77.♞c4†

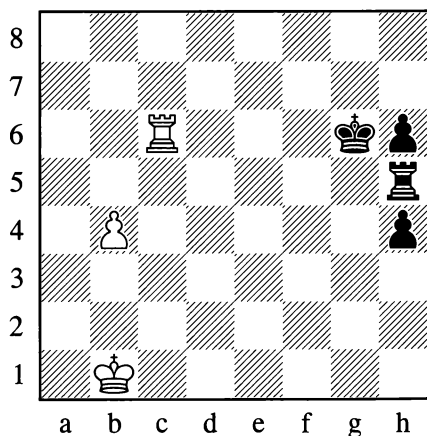


77...♔f5

Showing a lack of direction.

The winning idea was to keep the king active. 77...♔f3! 78.♞c3† ♕e2 79.♞c2† ♕d3 The black king is far closer to g3 here than it was on f7 in the game. It also does a bit of shouldering. 80.♞h2 h3 81.♕c1 ♕e3 Black wins.

78.♞c5† ♕g6 79.♞c6†



79...♕f7?

79...♕g5! and a return to the winning path on move 77 was still possible.

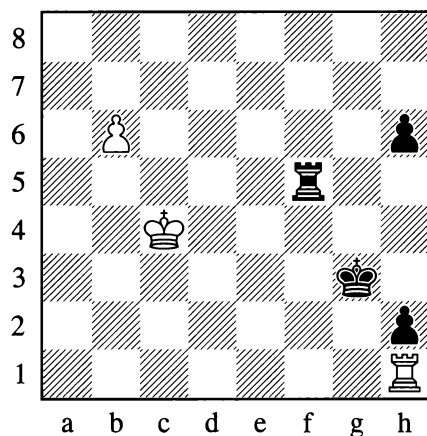
80.♞c1! h3 81.♕c2 ♕f6 82.♕d3 ♕f5 83.b5 ♕g4 84.♕c4!

After 84.♕e3? h2 85.♞h1 ♕g3 Black would win.

84...h2 85.♞h1! ♕g3 86.b6!

The b-pawn is able to give enough counterplay to secure a draw, if played accurately.

86...♞f5



87.♞b1?

White could have made the draw with:

87.b7! ♞f8 88.♞d1!!

The difficult move. The rook needs to be able to move all the way up the board, but also stay as far away from the black king as possible.

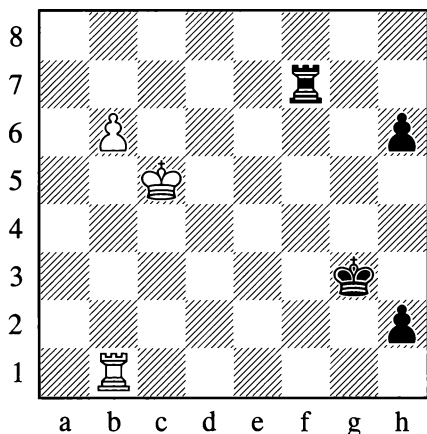
88...♞b8 89.♞d3† ♕g4 90.♞d4† ♕g5 91.♞d5† ♕g6 92.♞d6† ♕g7 93.♞d7†

93.♞d1? would be too soon! The black king needs to be pushed all the way to the back rank.

93...♕g8 94.♞d1!

White gets to the h-pawn first.

87...♞f7! 88.♕c5



88...♔g2?

Missing the chance to win the game.

88...♖g7!! was the winning idea (see the section on Rooks on the Adjacent File in the Lost Items Chapter). 89.♔c6 ♕g2! 90.♖b2† ♕h3 91.♖b3† ♖g3 92.♖b1 ♖g1 Black wins.

89.♖b2† ♕g1 90.♖b1† ♕g2 91.♖b2† ♖f2 92.♖xf2† ♕xf2 93.b7 h1=♔ 94.b8=♔ ♖h5† 95.♕d4

Kovalenko held the game. The two Ukrainians played till bare kings on move 164.

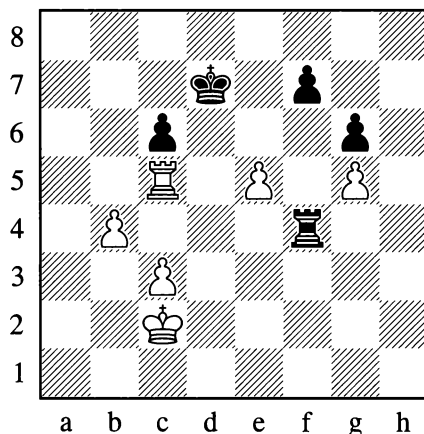
Giving up material to become active

The next game was played in the Danish League. Both players are friends of mine going back decades, but in this situation I was hoping for a draw, as Aabling-Thomsen and I play for the same team.

It is difficult for Black to deal with the threat of c3-c4 and b4-b5. The black king would be cut off and there are additional targets on the kingside, looking suspiciously as the second of the famous “two weaknesses”.

Jacob Sylvan – Jakob Aabling-Thomsen

Ballerup 2020



49...♖g4?

49...♔c7!! was the holding move. The idea is ...♕b6, after which Black can go for the g5-pawn without running into an e6† trick.

50.e6 is a decent try, but Black can play 50...♔d6! and keep everything under control. (But not 50...fxe6? 51.b5! when all the black pawns will fall.)

50.b5 is the other critical move, when 50...♕b6! is the idea. Black is holding after either 51.bxc6 ♕c7!!, or 51.♖xc6† ♕xb5 52.♖f6 ♖g4.

50.♕b3

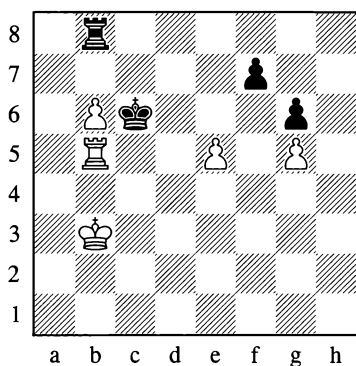
50.c4! followed by 51.b5 was winning. See the comments to move 51.

50...♖g1?

50...♔c7! worked again.

51.♖a5?

As stated above, White has a clear path forward. One of the key reasons for this working is that the g-pawn is indirectly defended. 51.c4! ♖b1† 52.♕c3 ♖c1† 53.♕b2 ♖g1 54.b5 cxb5 55.cxb5 ♖h1 56.b6 ♖h8 57.♕b3 ♖b8 58.♖b5 ♕c6



59.♔c4 White is winning, as the pawn ending is lost for Black after ♔c4-d5 and the e6-break. And 59...♖b7 60.♝c5! would end the game instantly.

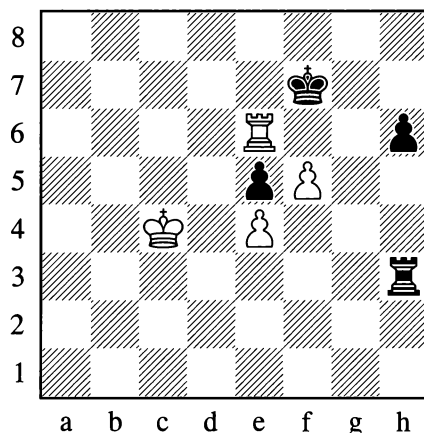
51...♞g4 52.♞a7† ♔d8 53.♞xf7 ♞xg5 54.♞f6 ♔d7 55.c4 ♞xe5 56.♞xg6 ♞e3† 57.♔a4 ♞e4 58.c5 ♞e7 59.♔a5 ♔c7 60.♔a6 ♞h7 61.♞g8 ♞f7 62.♞a8 ♞f4 63.♞a7† ♔b8 64.♞b7† ♔c8 65.b5 cxb5 66.♔b6 b4 67.♞h7 b3 68.♞h8† ½–½

Different types of activity

There are a few types of counterplay. A rook can harass the stronger side's king, so he cannot find solace. Both rook and king can attack the opponent's pawns, hoping to win material while passers are advanced, usually with the hope of drawing with king and pawn vs rook and pawn, as so often in this book. Finally, there is the pushing of a passed pawn. In this position, this is where Black's only chance lies. But achieving a way to do this is difficult.

Pavel Ponkratov – Dmitry Kryakvin

Obninsk 2022



58...h5? 59.♔d5 h4 60.♔xe5 ♞f3 61.♞h6 h3 62.♞h4

White is in control. The black king being passive, while both the white king and rook are active, is too much to handle.

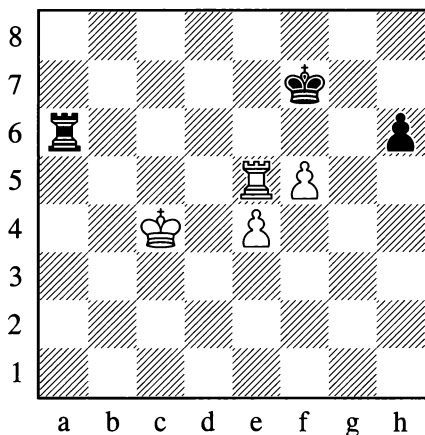
62...♞g3 63.♔f4 ♞a3 64.♞h5 ♔g7 65.e5 ♞b3 66.f6† ♔f7 67.♔f5 ♞f3† 68.♔e4 ♞a3 69.♞h7† ♔g6 70.♞g7† ♔h6 71.♞g8 ♞a7 72.♞h8† ♔g6 73.♞xh3 ♞a4† 74.♔d5 ♞a5† 75.♔d6 ♞a6† 76.♔c7 ♞e6 77.♞g3† ♔f7 78.♞g7† ♔e8 79.♞g5 ♞a6 80.♞g8† ♔f7 81.♞g7† ♔f8 82.♞e7 ♞a7† 83.♔d8 ♞a6 84.♔d7 ♞b6 85.e6 ♞b7† 86.♔d8 ♞b8† 87.♔c7 ♞a8 88.♞d7 1–0

The solution is to free the king and the h-pawn to become active, by preventing the white king from taking the e5-pawn, and the white rook from returning to e6.

58...♞a3! 59.♞xe5 ♞a6!!

The rook goes defensive, so the king goes active. This is unusual, but is the only way for Black to create active play.

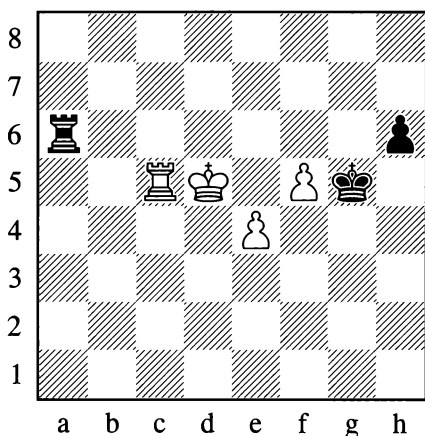
Black is holding even if pushed a row backwards. Obviously that makes no sense for Black to allow, but it is curious nonetheless: 59...♔f6 60.♖e6† ♔g5 61.f6 ♔g6 62.e5 ♖a7! and bizarrely, Black holds.



60.♖c5

White does not have a better way of regrouping. Black's next move is forced.

60...♔f6! 61.♔d5 ♔g5



62.♖c1

The most ambitious try.

62.♖c6 ♖xc6 63.♔xc6 h5 leads directly to a draw.

62...♖a5†!

Being no longer needed on the 6th rank, the rook harasses the white king.

63.♔d4 ♖a4† 64.♖c4 ♖a6

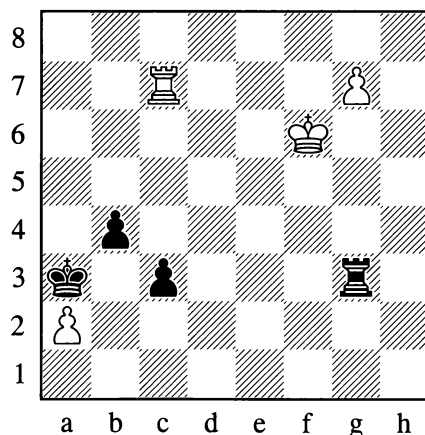
Despite the thin margin, Black makes the draw.

Passive defence

Let's turn our attention to passivity. Which is not really total passivity in the examples I have come across, but more a prophylactic patience. The defender understands that he cannot prevent the stronger side from advancing. He also cannot do something active himself at this very moment. But he can prepare for the opponent's advances, as in the following series of examples.

Hans Askov Jensen – Leo Nielsen

Helsingor 2017



White lost after:

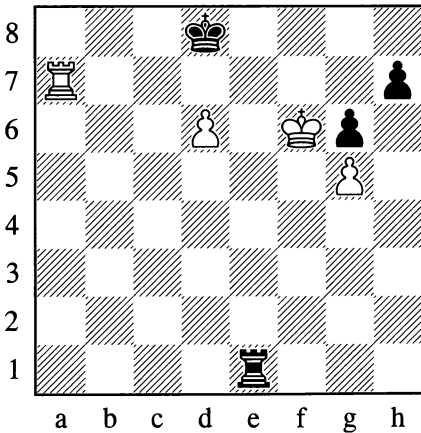
58.♖c8? ♔xa2 59.g8=♖† ♖xg8 60.♖xg8 ♔b2 61.♖b8 b3 62.♖g8 c2 63.♖g2 ♔b1 0-1

58.♖c4! would have made it impossible for Black to make any progress. The a2-pawn cannot be saved, but White would be able to win a pawn back and make the draw instead.

The following example is quite similar. My friend Iain lost after White successfully gave up his useless passed pawn on the 6th rank and eliminated the black pawns that were blocking the true candidate, the pawn not blocked by the enemy king.

Daniel Howard Fernandez – Iain Gourlay

Crawley 2016



52...♖f1†? 53.♔g7 ♖g1 54.♖a5 ♖h1 55.♖a8† ♕d7 56.♖h8 ♖g1 57.♖xh7 ♕xd6

57...♖xg5 58.♕h6† would be unfortunate, but might also have cut the pain short.

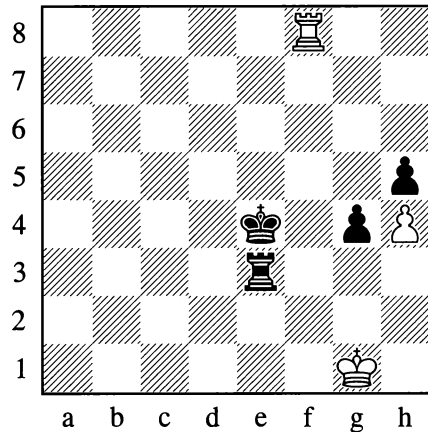
58.♕xg6 ♕e6 59.♖a7 ♖g2 60.♕h6 ♖h2† 61.♕g7 ♖g2 62.g6 1–0

Iain could have defended with the passive **52...♖h1!** **53.♕g7 ♖h5**, and White cannot make progress. If the white king comes to e6, Black will check him away. The distance between e6 and g7 is exactly enough for Black to oscillate between the two defensive positions on e1 and h5.

The next example is not about winning back a pawn, but simply on preventing the opponent from advancing further.

Alexander Baburin – Mark Hebden

Birmingham 2014



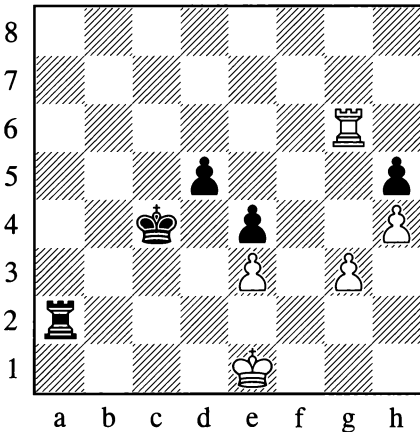
Baburin lost on time, only to realise that the position is a simple draw.

67.♔g2! ♖h3 68.♖a8 ♖xh4 69.♖a3! and Black cannot make progress.

The great Sethuraman won the next game using the umbrella technique, discussed on page 131. But before this, Black could have set up a passive defence, this time combining defence of the weaknesses with counterplay against the opponent's weaknesses.

J. Sai Agni Jeevitesh – S.P. Sethuraman

Biel 2021

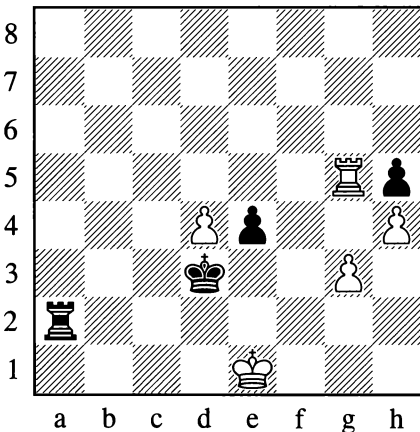
**57.♞g5?**

After the semi-passive defence 57.♞f1!, avoiding mate, but otherwise just waiting, White would have drawn. The idea is: 57...♞d3 58.♞d6 ♞a5 59.♞f2! and Black cannot win.

57...d4!

The umbrella.

57...♞d3? would allow White to harass the king from behind, leading to a draw.

58.exd4 ♞d3

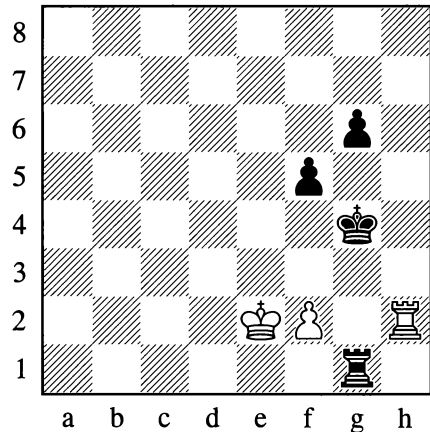
There are no checks from behind and the king can support the e-pawn in peace.

59.♞xh5 e3 60.♞f1 ♞a1† 61.♞g2 e2 62.♞e5 e1=♞ 63.♞xe1 ♞xe1 64.♞f3 ♞xd4 65.♞f4 ♞f1† 66.♞g5 ♞e5 67.g4 ♞g1 68.♞h5 ♞f6 69.g5† ♞g7 70.g6 ♞a1 0-1

Black won the following game after mutual mistakes in time trouble. I always feel a bit guilty showing players I respect making mistakes, but when it comes to endgame positions, it is almost inevitable, as there are rarely any events where the players are not in time trouble in the endgame.

Miguel Angel Soto – P. Iniyan

Internet 2020



In this example, White needs to keep Black from either playing ...f3†, or answering f2-f3† with ...♞g3.

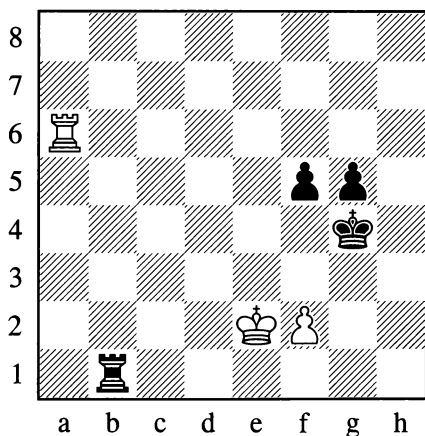
77.♞h6! g5 78.♞a6?

78.♞g6! was the only move. After 78...♞a1 79.f3† ♞f4 80.♞f2, White survives with a passive defence, leading to a theoretical position: 80...♞a2† 81.♞g1! Avoiding mating threats. Now play could continue: 81...♞xf3

82.♖xg5 ♖a1† 83.♔h2 f4 84.♖g8 ♔f2 85.♖g2†
♔e3 86.♖b2 with sufficient checking distance
to secure the draw.

78...♖b1?

78...f4 was winning. After 79.♖a3 ♖b1,
Black's threats are too strong. The same is the
case after 79.f3† ♔g3.



79.♖a3?

This time White could play 79.♖a5!!, when
after 79...f4 80.f3†, Black again does not have
80...♔g3. Instead after 80...♔h4, White needs
to play 81.♖f5!, to prevent the threat of ...g4,
using the umbrella trick once again. 81...♖b2†
82.♔f1 ♔g3 83.♖xg5† ♔xf3 84.♔g1! leads to
the same theoretical position as above. White
draws by checking from the side.

79...f4

Black wins.

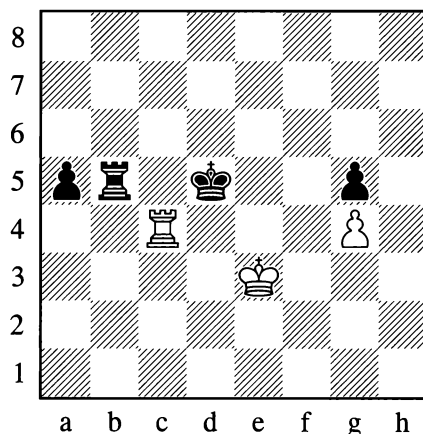
80.♖a4 ♔h3 81.♖a3† ♔g2 82.♖a2 ♖f1
0–1

The next example is played in the resurgent
US Senior Championship. Rumour has it
that Rex Sinquefeld was told what the prize
fund was for the US Senior Championship
and was offended on behalf of the greats of
yesteryear, leading to a larger prize fund and

excellent event. Like in the previous examples,
active play does not work. White has to wait
patiently, for now.

Alexander Shabalov – Leonid Sokolin

St. Louis 2021



White lost after:

49.♖d4†? ♔c6 50.♖e4 ♖d5!

Cutting off the white king. It is also too late
to prevent ...♔b5 and ...a4.

51.♖e8 ♔b5 52.♔e4 ♖c5 53.♔d3 a4
54.♖b8† ♔a5 55.♔d4 ♖b5 56.♖c8 ♔b4
57.♔d3 ♖d5†

Pushing the white king further away. Black
wins.

58.♔e4 ♖c5
0–1

The patient defence looks like this:

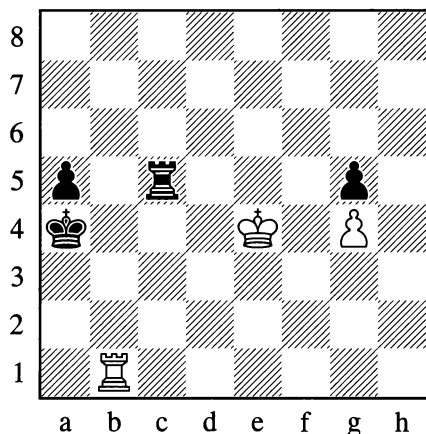
49.♖a4! ♔c5 50.♖a1! ♔b6 51.♔e4

It would be impossible for Black to make
progress. The following variation is not the
only drawing line, but it is quite instructive in
the way White combines patience with active
counterplay, the moment Black goes for it.

51...♞c5 52.♞b1†

52.♟d4! is technically my preference.

52...♟c6 53.♞a1 ♟b5 54.♞b1† ♟a4



55.♟d4!

Eventually White needs to harass the black rook so it cannot find stability on the 5th rank.

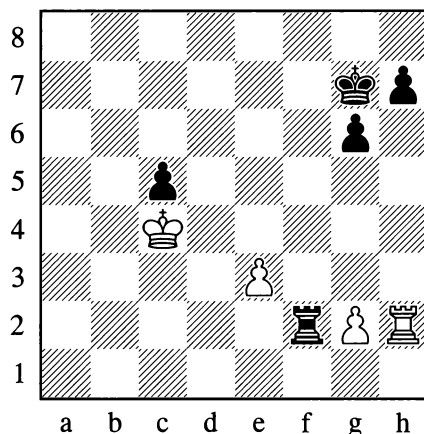
55...♞c2 56.♞a1† ♟b4 57.♞b1†

White draws, as after 57...♟a3 he has 58.♞b5.

The last two examples of the chapter are more complicated, but at their heart they are built on ideas we have already seen. In the first, Black is winning to start with, but the way to prove the advantage is far from straightforward.

Tigran Nazaretyan – Bogdan Belyakov

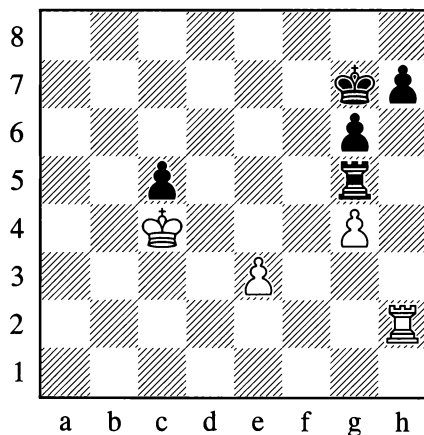
Sochi 2020



40...♞c2?! 41.♟d3 ♞f2 42.♟c4 ♞f5?

The way to win was: 42...♞c2†! 43.♟d3 ♞c1, when the rook is changing to g1. As in previous examples, the passed pawn blocked by the enemy king is not the candidate; the far away pawns are. Black could win after something like: 44.♟d2 ♞g1 45.♟d3 h5 46.♟c4 ♟f6 47.♟xc5 ♟e5 and the white pieces are entirely cut out of the action.

43.g4 ♞g5



This is the position where if not straight out passive, then at least strikingly odd, defence comes into play.

44.♖f2?

Hoping for counterplay, but Black is too well placed.

The strange 44.♖h4!! would have held the draw. After 44...h6 45.♕d3 ♜d5† 46.♕c4 ♜e5 47.♕d3 it is difficult for Black to make progress. The best try is 47...♜e6!?, when after 48.♖h2 ♜c6 49.♖f2! White is holding.

44...♜xg4† 45.♕xc5 h5

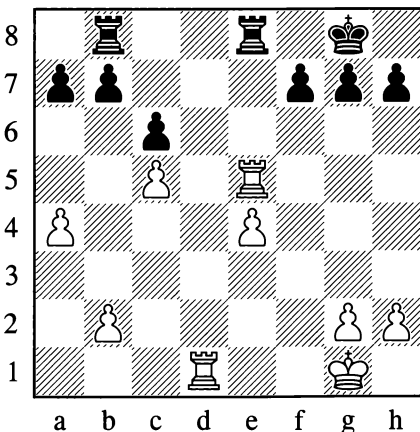
Black is simply faster.

46.♕d5 h4 47.e4 h3 48.e5 ♜h4 49.♖h2 g5
50.♖h1 g4 51.♕e4 g3† 52.♕f3 g2 53.♜e1
♜g4! 54.♜g1 h2 55.♜xg2 h1=♚
0–1

The final example sees Black under pressure, but with lots of defensive resources. Some active, some less so.

Marc Andria Maurizzi – Gerard Ayats Llobera

Barcelona 2021

**24.♜xe8† ♜xe8 25.♞d7 b6?**

25...h5? (or any other pawn move on the kingside) is met with 26.a5!, with the idea of 26...♜xe4 27.♜xb7, where Black is in serious trouble.

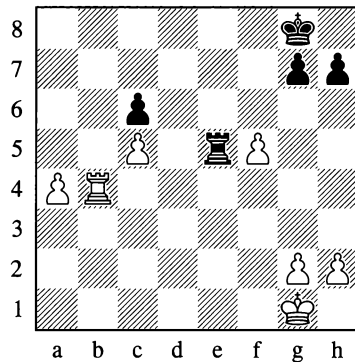
25...♜b8? is also met with 26.a5!, when the queenside is paralysed. This is not passive defence, as there is no defensive element to what Black is doing, beyond preventing the short term loss of a pawn, at the cost of the entire position.

25...♕f8! holds narrowly in a longer, boring, variation.

Much more convincing is: 25...a5!! Preparing to take on e4, now the a-pawn is no longer vulnerable and 27.♜b4 has been prevented. After 26.♜xb7 Black can choose between two equally good-looking options:

26...g5! and the black king will head for e5 after White plays b2-b4 to get things going.

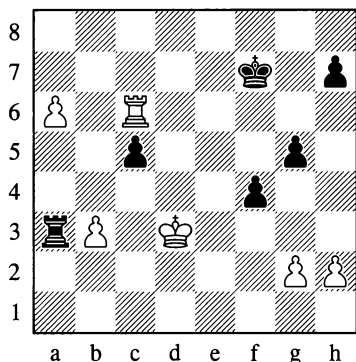
There is also the provocative 26...f5!?, when Black gets active play. For example: 27.exf5 ♜e5 28.b4 axb4 29.♜xb4



29...♜xc5 Play could continue 30.g4 h5! 31.h3 hxg4 32.hxg4 ♜c2! and Black will be able to bring out the king, which is more than can be said of the white position.

26.♜xa7 bxc5 27.a5 g6?!

For a while I believed that Black was holding after 27...g5!?. But eventually I found a winning line for White. 28.♜a6! ♜xe4 29.♜xc6 ♜b4 30.a6 ♜a4 31.♕f2 f5 32.♕e3 ♕f7 33.b3! ♜a3 34.♕d3 f4



Preparing to create a passed pawn. Otherwise, White plays ♟c4xc5 . 35.h3! An important move, coaxing the black h-pawn forward. 35...h5 (Otherwise White continues 36.♟c4 and 37.♞xc5, winning a pawn.) 36.♟e4 ♞a5 37.♞c7† ♟f6 38.a7 White's next two moves are 39.♞c6† and 40.♞xc5, eventually leading to a winning position. A long and not entirely relevant variation.

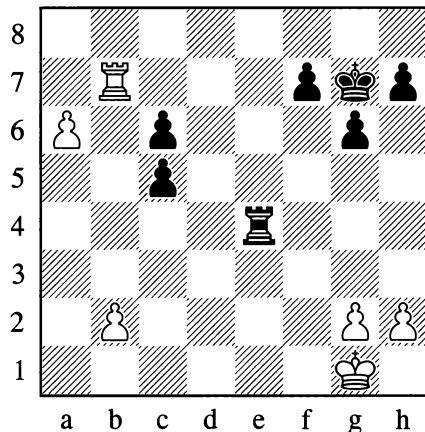
28.a6?

White would have been better off going for the c-pawn. The reason for this is not at all obvious – not even later, where the players did not spot it.

28.♞a6! ♞xe4 29.♞xc6 ♞b4 30.a6! ♞a4 Otherwise White puts the rook behind the passer, but now the king comes to the queenside via f2-e3-d3-c3-b3-c4xc5, and White wins.

28...♞xe4 29.♞b7 ♟g7?

Correct was 29...♞a4 30.a7 ♟g7, with a transposition to the game. Notice that 30.♞b6 is not clever. After 30...f5 the king comes to the queenside and White will lose his pawns there.



30.a7?

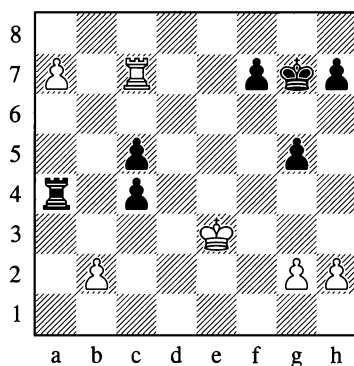
White missed the chance to aim for our number one idea, to put the rook behind the passed pawn with: 30.♞b3! ♞e7 Here the accurate move is: 31.♟f2! (31.♞a3? would be premature. After 31...♞a7 32.♟f2 ♟f6 33.♟e3 ♟e5 Black arrives in time to keep the white king out.) And White wins after 31...♞a7 32.♞b6 or 31...♟f6 32.♞b6!, with the idea 33.♞b7 on the next move.

30...♞a4 31.♟f2 g5

The idea on the next move was already available here.

32.♞c7 h5?

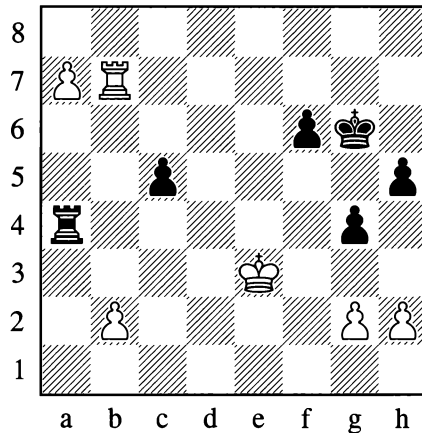
Black would have been able to set up a remarkable fortress (a rarity in rook endings), unlike anything I have ever seen. 32...c4!! 33.♟e3 c5!



There is only one way for White to make progress. 34.♔d2 g4 35.♕c3 ♔f6 36.b3, but after 36...cxb3 37.♕xb3 ♖a5! 38.♕c4 ♕e6 White cannot make progress.

33.♕e3 ♕g6 34.♖xc6† f6 35.♖c7 g4

Another important variation goes like this: 35...f5 36.b3 ♖a3 37.♕d3 ♖xb3† (37...h4 38.♕c4 h3!? 39.gxh3 f4 40.♖d7! f3 41.♖d3 White picks up the f-pawn and wins in the long run.) 38.♕c4 ♖a3 39.♕b5! Black cannot prevent ♖c6† followed by ♖a6.



36.b3 ♖a1 37.♕f4?!

37.♕e4! was cleaner.

37...♖a2?!

37...f5!? would have given more resistance, although White still wins after: 38.♕e5! h4 39.♖d7, where White keeps control.

38.♕e4 ♖a5 39.♕d5 f5 40.♕c6 ♖a3 41.♕xc5 ♕g5 42.b4 f4 43.b5 f3 44.gxf3 gxf3 45.b6 ♖c3† 46.♕d4 ♖xc7 47.a8=♖

Active defence is almost always preferable; but in some situations, a degree of patience is better.

1–0

Chapter 23

Slow Play

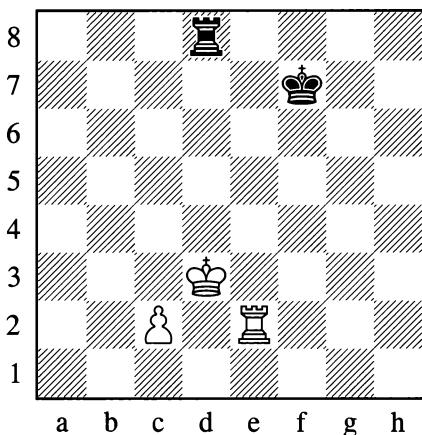
As already talked about, there are positions where one side holds the advantage and the other side can only wait. The technique I was taught by Dvoretzky and Yusupov is reliant on the idea of first improving your position to the maximum, before you take active decisions that cannot be reversed. This is specifically relating to this type of position (which is more frequent than you may think). You will never know with certainty the scope of your advantage. Is the position winning any which way, or only in the most accurate way? Why find out the hard way; aim to play as patiently and accurately as you can each time. Not only to avoid being sloppy in the particular game, but to create a habit of accuracy.

In this chapter we shall see some examples with slow, careful manoeuvres over many moves achieving small gains.

I came across the first position in my analysis and found that it had great instructional value. White's advantage is obvious. He has an extra pawn and the black king is cut off from its defensive duties of stopping the pawn. But this does not make the win automatic. There are some negatives that have to be overcome. First of all, the white king is in check and will be harassed endlessly with checks. There are only two ways to hide. On the 7th rank or on c1. Once White is not in check he will need a plan for how to advance the pawn. There are additional problems. Sometimes the pawn endgame is a draw. At the moment, if White goes to the e-line, Black will exchange the rooks and play ...♙e6, taking the opposition. And if White managed to somehow hide the king and advance the pawn to c4, ...♞e8! is often a critical resource. An important point to understand about the annotations to this example is that White can go down a lot of false paths that do not crack the defence, but without ruining the chance to go back and find the narrow path to victory. There are also some alternative paths at certain points, making it unusable for study competitions. I will in general ignore those here, but focus on the key instructional points.

Aagaard

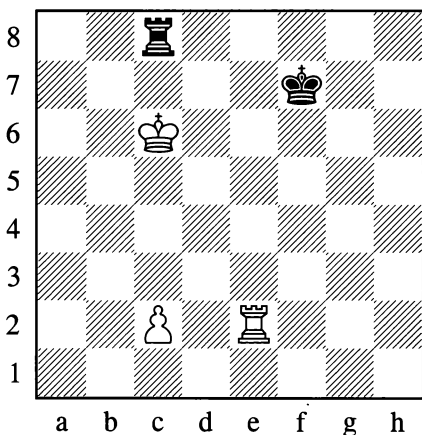
Original 2020



1.♔c4

We can quickly see that 1.♔c3 ♚c8† 2.♔b2 ♚b8† 3.♔c1? is way too slow. Black will play 3...♕f6! 4.c3 ♕f5 5.♔c2 ♚c8 and we can see that the black king will quickly become a strong actor. The white rook cannot both prevent the black king from entering the game and help the white king, which would be done by either defending the pawn or by acting as a shield for the checks.

1...♚c8† 2.♔d5 ♚d8† 3.♔c6 ♚c8†



An important moment. White obviously want to advance the pawn, but good technique is to collect as many advantages as possible before committing. In this case, this is also the only way to win.

4.♔d7!

Preparing to push the black king further away.

4.♔b7 ♚c4 5.♔b6 ♚c8 does not make any progress.

4.♔d6 ♔f6! 5.♔d7

5.♚f2† ♔g5 6.♔d5 ♚d8† 7.♔e5 does not work as well as in the main line for two reasons. First of all, and simplest, Black can play ...♚e8† without White getting to hit the rook with ♔d7. Secondly, after 7...♚c8 8.♚g2† ♔h4! the black king has won a tempo compared to our main lines.

5...♚c3 6.♚e6†?

6.♔d6 amusingly still wins. But after 6...♚c8 White has to find the unfathomable 7.♚e6†! ♔f7 8.♚e7† ♔f6 9.♚e2!, where he is exploiting a mutual zugzwang of sorts. He can also get there in other ways. But passing the move is the key point. 9...♚d8† 10.♔c7 ♚d4 11.♔b6 White is winning.

6...♔f5 7.♚c6 ♚a3!

7...♚h3? would be wrong due to 8.♔d6 ♔e4 9.♚c4†! and the black king is kicked back.

8.♔d6 ♔e4 9.c4 ♔d4 10.c5 ♚h3

Black escapes with a draw, as after 11.♚b6 ♚h6† 12.♔c7 ♚h7† 13.♔c6 ♔c4 he will simply take White's extra pawn from him.

4...♚c5

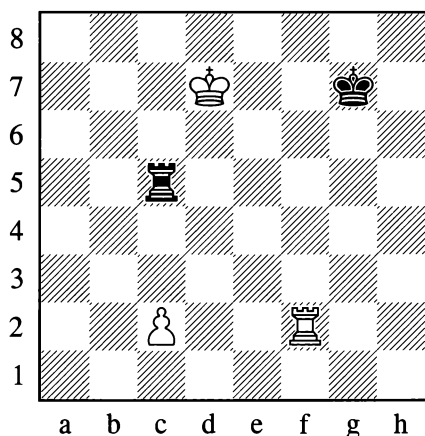
4...♚c4 lasts a few more moves according to the tablebase. But there is not really a different idea needed for White. 5.♚f2† ♔g7 6.♔d6 ♚c8 is not progress. 7.♔d5! ♚d8† 8.♔c6 ♚c8† 9.♔d6! Again we have this zugzwang position. Here with the king on d6 instead of e6. Black

has to play 9...♔g6 (as after 9...♞d8†?! 10.♔c7! ♞d4 11.♕b6 the king will manage to help the c-pawn advance on its own, leaving the black king stranded), when after 10.♔d5, we have reached move 8 of our main line.

5.♞f2† ♔g7!

Forcing White to show some additional accuracy.

5...♔g6 6.♔d6! (6.♔e6? ♔g5! would allow the black king to enter the game via g3.) 6...♞c8 7.♔d5! is a transposition to our main line. But easier to find.



6.♔e6!!

6.♔d6 ♞c8 is not progress. 7.♔d5 ♞d8† 8.♔e6 ♞c8 9.♞g2† ♔f8 with a draw.

6...♞c8

The rook has to return immediately to the 8th rank, as Black has to make a move. The king would be checked if on g6 and be poorly placed at the edge of the board.

The rook cannot find other spaces either, as Black would have to be able to meet ♔d5 with ...♞d8† and especially not get hit with a tempo that would allow White to advance the c-pawn quickly.

7.♔d6!

Again, we have this zugzwang position. Here with the king on d6 instead of e6.

7.♔d5 ♞d8† 8.♔c6 ♞c8† 9.♕b7 ♞c3 10.♕b6 ♞c8 and White has not made any progress. The main point being: 11.♞d2? ♔f6 12.♞d6† ♔e5 13.♞c6 ♞xc6† 14.♔xc6 ♔d4 and Black makes the draw.

Black has to play:

7...♔g6!

As after 7...♞d8† 8.♔c7 ♞d4 9.♕b6! wins rather trivially for White. The c-pawn will start moving in a moment. The king will manage to help the c-pawn advance on its own, leaving the black king stranded.

8.♔d5!

Threatening c2-c4.

8.♔e5? is an attempt to be subtle. But rather than achieving it, it gifts a tempo that Black will use to activate the king. After 8...♔g5! 9.♞g2† ♔h4 Black will make the draw by a tempo. The black king has won a tempo compared to our main lines.

8...♞d8† 9.♔e6!

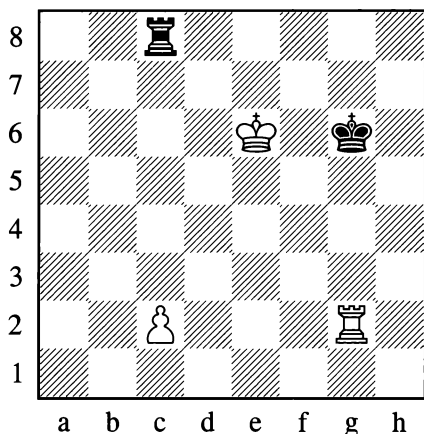
This is a key move. White is threatening c2-c4, so Black will have to return to the c-line.

9...♞c8

9...♞e8† 10.♔d7 ♞e4 11.♔d6! and the white pawn will start rolling in a moment.

10.♞g2†

At this point Black has two different defensive ideas. The king can go to h5 with the idea to go to h3. Or he can go to h6 (h7 is a worse version), which has its own point, as we shall see below.

**10...♔h6!?**

The alternative is:

10...♔h5 11.♔d5!

11.♔f5 makes little sense. Black will play 11...♔h4 and circle his way around to the scene of action, kicking the white rook away on the way.

11.♞d2 also does not work. The black king arrives way too early. 11...♔g4 12.♞d4† ♔f3 13.c4 ♔e3 with an imminent draw.

11...♞d8† 12.♔c6

White could also rush to the c1-square, but at this point it does not work, as the black king will rush to h3 to kick the rook and then run across the board to stop the pawn. It does not even feel close. For this reason, the white king is heading for the ideal b6-square. But in order to make this idea work, it is important to gain time with a finesse.

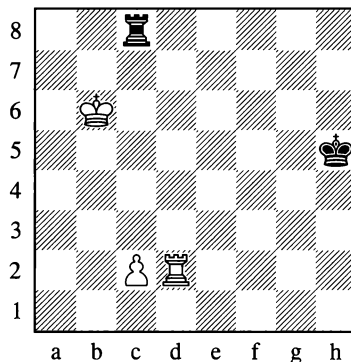
12...♞c8† 13.♔b7!

13.♔b6? would lose an important tempo. 13...♔h4! 14.♞d2 ♔g3! and White cannot get in the check on the 4th rank he so badly needs.

13...♞c4 14.♔b6 ♞c8

White has successfully improved his position as much as humanly possible. It is now time to press on.

15.♞d2!

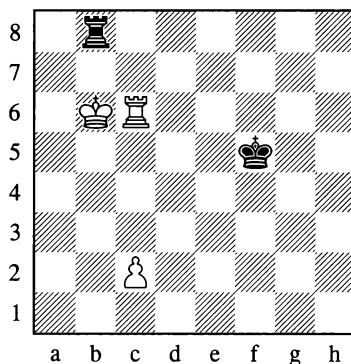


With the king on the 5th rank, White will be able to follow up with a strong check on the 4th, 5th or 6th rank.

a) 15...♔g6 16.♞d6†

There is still one last trick ready for White in this line.

16...♔f5 17.♞c6 ♞b8†



The important detail here is that the white king has to follow the black king. It is an advanced example of shouldering. The white king has to keep the black king at bay. So, if the black king had gone to f7, White would now win with 18.♔c7! only. While in this position, it would be a mistake.

18.♔c5!

18.♔c7? ♞b2 would allow Black to escape. The black king can interfere after either 19.♔d6 ♔e4! or 19.c4 ♔e5 20.c5 ♞b5! and White loses the pawn.

18...♔e5 19.c4

White wins. For example:

19...♞a8

Waiting with 19...♞b1 20.♞b6 ♞c1 21.♔b5 is not really different. White plays ♞d6 and c4-c5, or c4-c5 and ♞d6, winning.

20.♔b5!

And it is over. Notice that it is useful for the king to defend the c-pawn, as 20...♔d4 needs to be answered with 21.♞d6†.

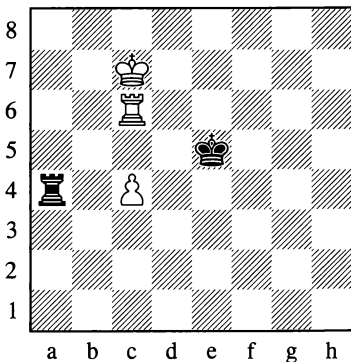
b) 15...♔g4?! 16.♞d4† ♔f5 17.c4 ♔e5 18.♞h4 wins trivially. The black king may seem close, but the coordination between the black pieces is very unfortunate. 18...♞b8† loses to 19.♔c7 and 18...♔d6 19.c5† ♞xc5 20.♞h6† wins on the spot.

c) 15...♔g5

This is the more serious alternative.

16.♞d5† ♔f4

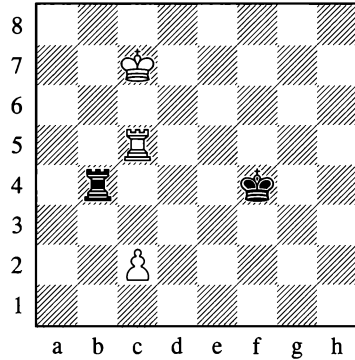
16...♔f6 also offers real resistance. White has to squeeze everything out of every move. 17.♞c5 ♞b8† 18.♔c7 Winning an important tempo. 18...♞b4 19.c3 The most accurate, but also 19.♔d6 looks natural. 19...♞a4 20.c4 ♔e6 21.♞c6† ♔e5



It is time for a last accuracy. 22.♔b6! Threatening c4-c5 and ♞d6 as always. 22...♞b4† 23.♔c5! Once again shouldering. 23...♞a4 24.♔b5 ♞a1 25.♞h6 White has managed to untangle himself and with the

black king cut off on the 5th rank, White will now advance the pawn slowly to the 8th rank.

17.♞c5 ♞b8† 18.♔c7 ♞b4



White has to win an extra tempo in order to make it.

19.c3!

19.♔c6? ♔e4 would be too slow. After 20.c3 ♞b1 Black is in time.

19...♞a4

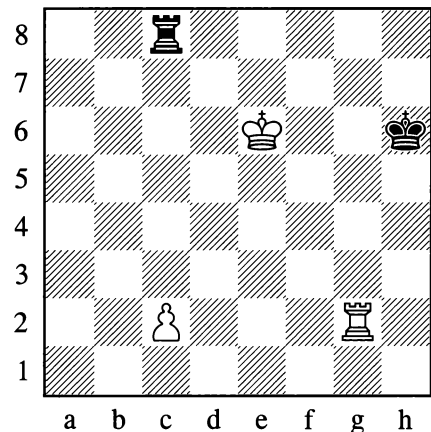
Now after 19...♞b1 20.c4 ♔e4 21.♞h5 White is in time. Black is not.

20.♔c6 ♔e4 21.♔b5 ♞a8 22.♔b4

22.c4? would be a blunder due to 22...♞b8† 23.♔c6 ♞b4.

22...♞b8† 23.♞b5 ♞d8 24.c4 ♔d4 25.♞b7

White wins.



We have reached the key point of the study.

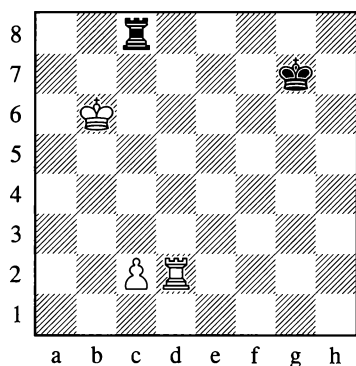
11.♔e5!

The fastest way to win. The logic will become clear in a moment.

First of all, let's look at the point of leaving the king back on h6 (or h7, which is just an inferior version). If White progresses in the same way as before, he will be disappointed:

11.♔d5?! ♚d8† 12.♕c6 ♚c8† 13.♕b7 ♚c4
14.♕b6 ♚c8 15.♚d2 ♕g7!

This is the trick.

**16.♚d7†?**

Technically this is the point where the advantage is spent. White could still play 16.♚f2!, when he would still be able to backtrack and return to the winning path after move 5 in our main line.

16...♕f6 17.♚c7 ♚xc7 18.♕xc7

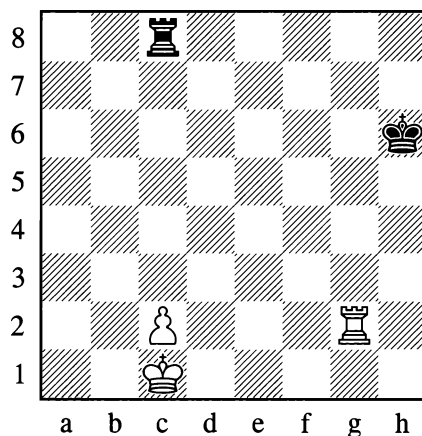
The white king has been side-tracked and Black will be able to play:

18...♕e5

And simply pick up the pawn.

**11...♚e8† 12.♕d4 ♚d8† 13.♕e3 ♚c8
14.♕d2 ♚d8† 15.♕c1 ♚c8**

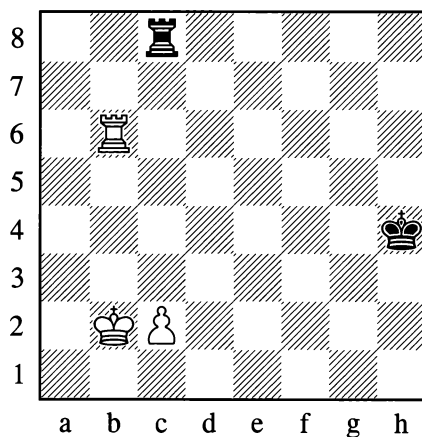
White has opted for plan no. 2. The king is protecting the pawn and the rook is freed to improve its position. This is only possible because the black king is too far away on h6.

**16.♚g3 ♕h5 17.♕b2**

17.c3? ♕h4 18.♚d3 ♕g5 19.♕c2 ♕f5 only leads to a draw.

17...♕h4 18.♚c3 ♚b8† 19.♚b3

19.♕a3? seems a bit aimless. Where does the king think it is going? It is still nice to see that 19...♕g5! is the only move that holds, as after (19...♕g4 20.♚c5! ♕f4 21.c4 ♕e4 22.♚d5 the black king is cut off.)

19...♚c8 20.♚b6

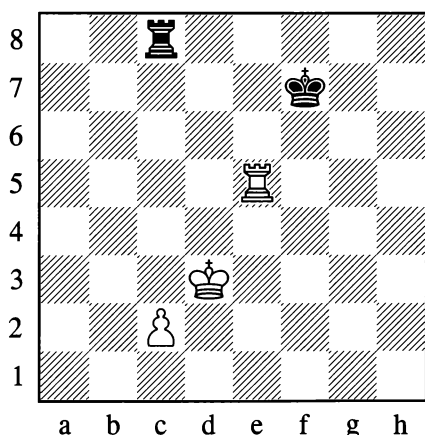
This choice of square could look a bit random if you are unfamiliar with the themes we have seen above. But when you recognise the pattern of having the pawn on c5, protecting the rook on d6, all becomes clear.

20...♔g5 21.♕b3 ♖f5 22.c4 ♕e5 23.♕b4
 ♜h8 24.c5 ♜h1 25.♕b5 ♜h2 26.♞d6
 1–0

The previous example was deeply inspired by the following endgame, where Ehlvest showed excellent technique. I am not sure, but this could easily have been after an adjournment.

Jaen Ehlvest – Ljubomir Ljubojevic

Rotterdam 1989



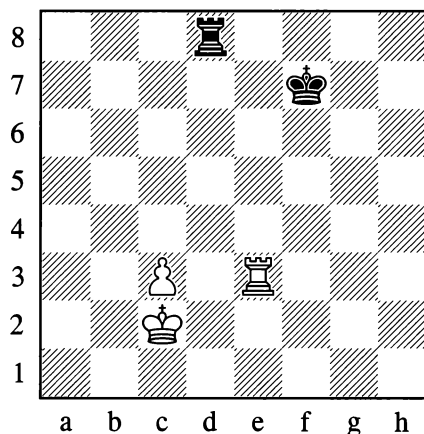
46.c3!!

46.c4? would allow 46...♞e8!, with a drawn pawn ending. The pawn ending is not drawn now, as the king can get in front of the pawn.

46...♕f6 47.♞e3 ♞d8† 48.♕c2 ♕f7

Going for a trap.

48...♞c8 was also possible. The winning manoeuvre is the same as in the game.



49.♕b3!

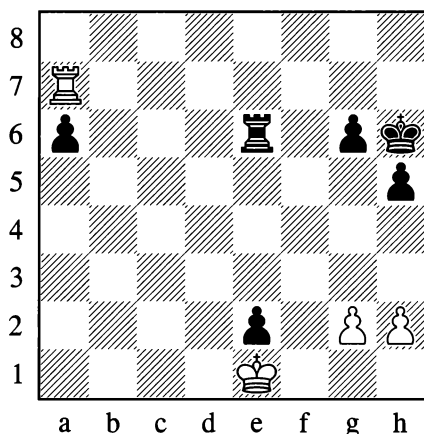
49.c4? would fail to 49...♞e8! again.

**49...♞b8† 50.♕c4 ♞c8† 51.♕b5 ♞b8†
 52.♕c6 ♞c8† 53.♕d7 ♞c4 54.♕d6 ♞c8
 55.♞e7† ♕f6 56.♞c7 ♞d8† 57.♕c6 ♕e6
 58.c4 ♕e5 59.c5 ♕d4 60.♕b7 ♞d5 61.♕b6
 1–0**

The next example has an interesting origin story. Walton here resigned against the famous endgame specialist GM Keith Arkell. Keith put the position on Facebook, saying that he did not find the path to the win to be altogether obvious.

Alan Walton – Keith Arkell

England 2019

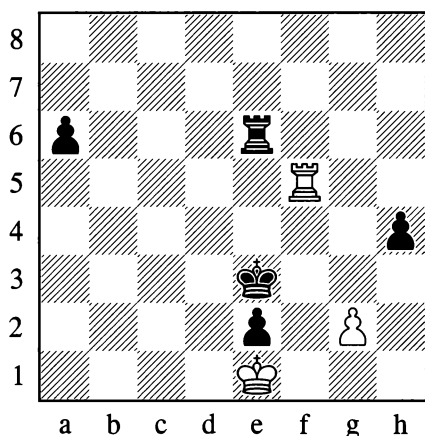


I analysed the position a bit and found that the engine was not much use, as it gave similar scores to the moves that made progress, as it did to those that were regressive. Eventually, I realised what the winning method would be: to queen the a-pawn. And the king needs to assist. The winning line thus looks like this:

49.h4 g5!

Black needs to make use of the king. He could go for the g2-pawn, but White would be able to play Bxe2 in reply, when the pawn ending is drawn.

50.hxg5† Kxg5 51.Bg7† Kf4 52.Bf7† Ke3
53.Bf5 h4



54.Bh5

Also after 54.Ba5 Kd3 55.Ba1 Bc6 56.Ba3† Bc3 57.Ba1 Ke3 Black wins. The a-pawn will advance to a2, followed by ...Bb3-b1 .

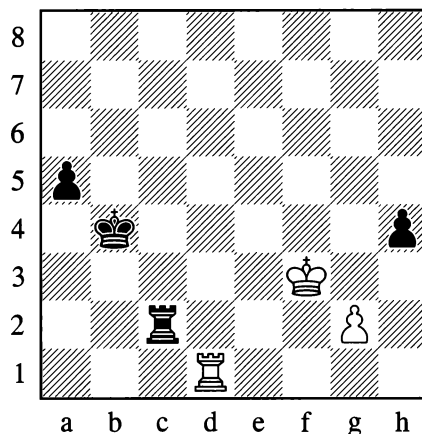
54...Bc6

Stockfish 15 now finds additional wins, but I like the one I found.

55.Be5† Kd3 56.Bd5† Kc3 57. Kxe2 Kb4!

Helping the a-pawn.

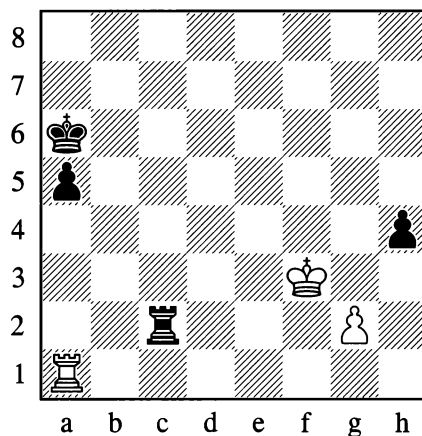
58.Bd1 Bc2† 59. Kf3 a5



60.Bb1†

After 60.Bb1, Black can defend the h-pawn, but also win with logical play: 60...a4! 61.Bxh4† Kb3 62.Bh8 Bc4! , when the white king is cut off at the 4th rank.

60...Kc5 61.Ba1 Kb5 62.Bb1† Ka6 63.Ba1



63...Bb2!

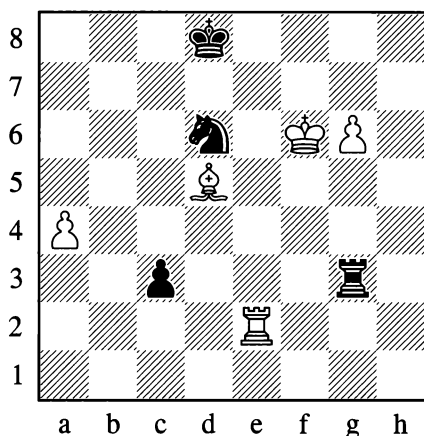
Black wins.

63...Bc4? would however be a mistake, as after 64.g4!, White has time to recapture on g3 and still make it back to the queenside by teatime.

The following difficult endgame, played between two top-50 grandmasters, was a true rollercoaster ride.

Nils Grandelius – Le Quang Liem

Gibraltar 2019



61. ♔f7?

Giving Black a chance to save the game.

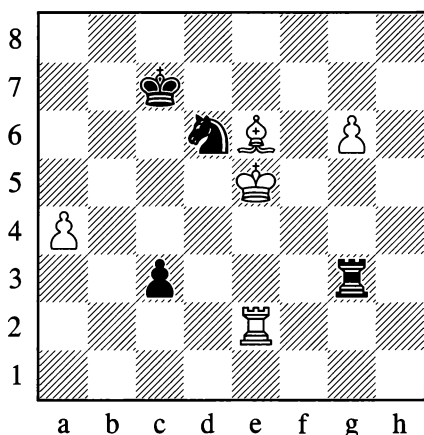
61... ♕d7?

Missing 61... ♖f3! 62. ♖e6 ♖f5 63. ♖g2 ♖d4† 64. ♖d5 c2 65. ♖g1 ♖f5 66. ♖c1 ♖f2 and Black holds.

62. ♖e6† ♕d8 63. ♖e5

63.a5! was stronger, but the text move is still winning.

63... ♖c7



64. ♕f7?

64. ♖f6! ♖e8† 65. ♖f7 ♖d6† 66. ♖g7! ♖e8† 67. ♖h6 and White wins in the long run.

64... ♖xf7† 65. gxf7 ♖f3 66. ♖e6 ♖b6 67. ♖e4 c2 68. ♖c4 ♖e3† 69. ♖d7 ♖d3† 70. ♖e7 ♖e3† 71. ♖f6 ♖f3† 72. ♖g7 ♖g3† 73. ♖f8 ♖g2 74. ♖c3

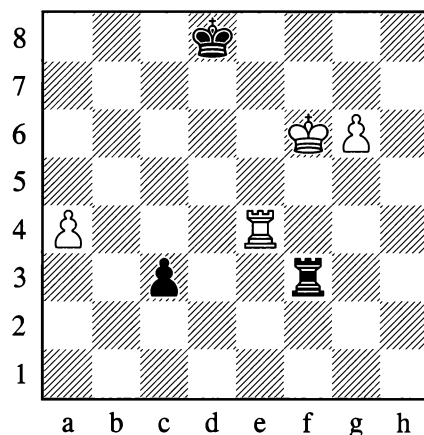
1/2–1/2

White had a fantastic winning manoeuvre, where slow play allows him to set up the position in perfect detail, so he can win on a small detail.

61. ♕e4!

Threatening to put the bishop on c2, forcing Black to take.

61... ♖xe4† 62. ♖xe4 ♖f3†



63. ♖g5!!

This is the difficult move to understand.

63. ♖g7? ♖c7! and Black draws similarly to the game: 64. ♖b4 ♖c6 65. a5 ♖c5 66. ♖b8 ♖f1 67. ♖h6 ♖f6 and White cannot win.

63... ♖g3† 64. ♖h6 ♖h3†

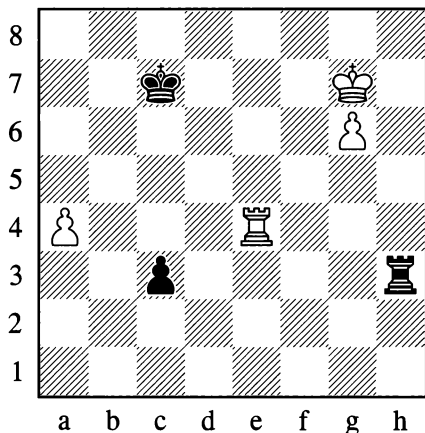
64... ♖c7 65. ♖b4! is similar.

65.♔g7!

Now that the black rook is on h3 and not f3, White is happy to step in front of the g-pawn. All eyes are now on the queenside.

65...♕c7

65...c2 66.♖c4 followed by an advance of the a-pawn.

**66.♖b4!!**

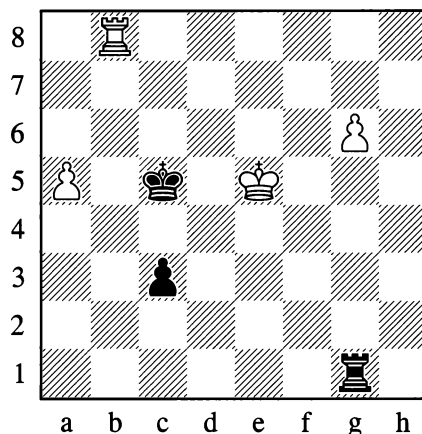
Cutting off the black king from dealing with the a-pawn. Black is in trouble.

66...♕c6 67.a5 ♕c5 68.♖b8 ♖h1 69.♔f6 ♖f1† 70.♔e5!

The king does not want to be on the 6th or 7th rank when Black takes the g-pawn.

70...♖g1

70...♖e1† 71.♔f5 ♖f1† 72.♔e4 and the king goes for the c-pawn. Black will not be in time to stop both the white pawns.

**71.a6!**

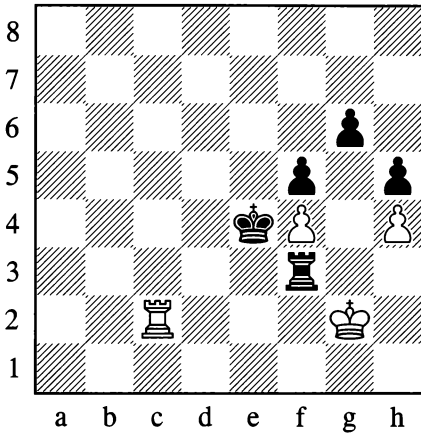
White wins. The pawn queens and the c-pawn is not offering counterplay. For example:

71...c2 72.a7!

I have chosen to present the final example without analysis. It was played on my birthday by my close friend Sagar, of ChessBase India fame. He published it on his website, stating that he was not at all sure if it was winning. I put the endgame in the free software FinalGen (which does not appear to work as well on modern Windows machines, sadly), which found a win by slow play. I sent it to Sagar, who later asked for permission for Karsten Müller to write a large article about it (*ChessBase Magazine* 179). So, as this has already been dissected in detail by Karsten, and as I have already taken you through other slow games, I just wanted to give the example here, so you could get a feeling of how difficult it can be to win such positions.

Andreea Cristiana Navrotescu – Sagar Shah

Charleroi 2017

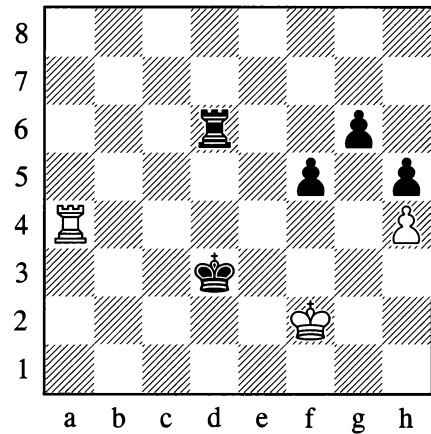
**64...♞xf4****0-1**

Sagar's opponent did save herself a lot of trouble by resigning here, presumably thinking that the two-pawn deficit was unconquerable. But as the most likely endgame to arise from this is an endgame with f- and h-pawns, White has real drawing chances. Only careful play wins.

65.♞a2 ♔d5 66.♞a5† ♔c6 67.♔h3 ♞b4 68.♞a1 ♞b6

The first goalpost has been achieved.

69.♔g3 ♔d5 70.♔f3 ♔e6 71.♞e1† ♔d7 72.♞a1 ♞b3† 73.♔f2 ♞d3 74.♞g1 ♞d6 75.♔f3 ♔e7 76.♞a1 ♞d3† 77.♔f2 ♔e6 78.♞a4 ♔e5 79.♞a5† ♞d5 80.♞a6 ♞d6 81.♞a5† ♔e4 82.♞a4† ♔d3

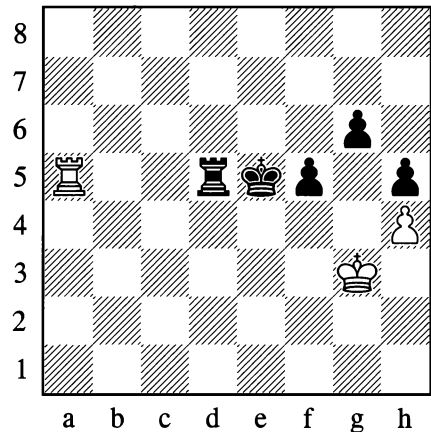


The second goalpost has been achieved. The king has crossed the middle of the board.

83.♞a3† ♔c2 84.♞g3 ♔d2 85.♞g2 ♔d3 86.♔f3 ♔d4 87.♞a2 ♔c3 88.♞a3† ♔b4 89.♞a1 ♞d4

With the king kicking the white rook off the 4th row, Black has the chance to take over. However briefly. Making progress from here is hard.

90.♔g3 ♔c4 91.♔h3 ♞d6 92.♔g2 ♔c3 93.♞a3† ♔d2 94.♞a2† ♔e3 95.♞a3† ♞d3 96.♞a6 ♞d4 97.♞a3† ♔e2 98.♞a2† ♔d3 99.♔g3 ♔e4 100.♞e2† ♔d5 101.♞a2 ♔e5 102.♞a5† ♞d5

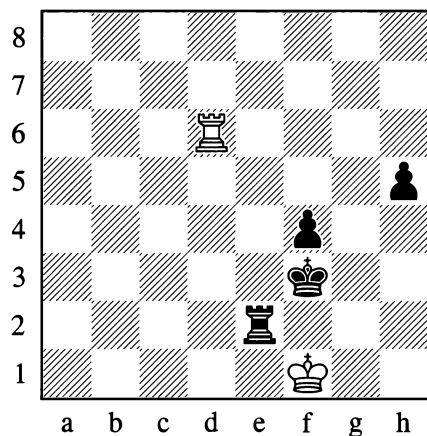


Black has finally, after almost 40 moves, managed to achieve his goal. Next up comes ...f4†.

103.♖a8 f4† 104.♔f2 ♕f5 105.♞g8 ♞d3
106.♔g2 ♞g3† 107.♔h2 ♔g4 108.♞xg6†
♔xh4

So we wound up in the rook vs these two anyway; but in a situation that is favourable for Black.

109.♞a6 ♔g4 110.♞d6 ♞e3 111.♔g2 ♞e2†
112.♔f1 ♔f3



113.♞a6 h4 114.♞a3† ♞e3 115.♞a8 ♞d3
116.♔g1 ♞d1† 117.♔h2 ♔e2 118.♞e8†
♔f2 119.♞e4 f3 120.♞f4 ♞a1 121.♞f8 ♔e2
122.♞e8† ♔f1

Black wins.

Chapter 24

Lost Items

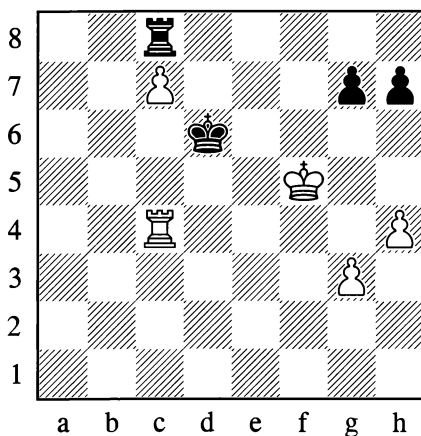
In this penultimate chapter we shall discuss various topics that did not manage to get a full chapter of their own, but deserve at least a few moments in the spotlight. Several of them have already arisen earlier in the book, either in the games or in sidelines. Still, it is valuable to discuss them separately, if only briefly.

Transition to a pawn ending

Many rook endings transpose into pawn or queen endings. The general theme for these is to understand queen endings, to understand that the tablebases and books give the defending side a draw in some theoretical endgames, which is virtually impossible to achieve for a human player under time pressure. And otherwise, it is mainly a matter of calculation and imagination. As with this example:

Ding Liren – Etienne Bacrot

Biel (var) 2013

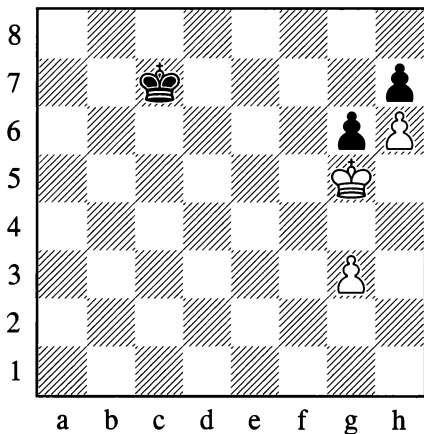


If White had tried 42.h4, Black would have had to find this not-at-all-easy draw.

42...♖f8†!

42...♔d5? 43.♖c1 ♔d6 44.h5! wins for White.

43.♔g5 ♖c8 44.h5 ♖xc7 45.♖xc7 ♔xc7
46.h6 g6!!



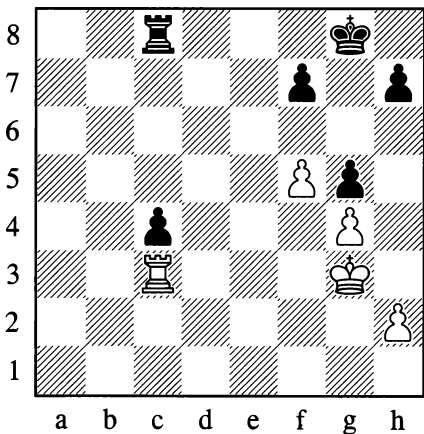
The point.

47.♔f6 ♔d7 48.♔g7 ♔e7 49.♔xh7 ♔f7!
50.g4 g5

With a fortress/stalemate.

Andrey Orlov – Uwe Boensch

Germany 2022



Black has an extra pawn, but making something out of it is far from easy.

35...♔g7? 36.♔f3 ♔f6 37.♔e4 ♖c7 38.h3
♖c8 39.♔d5 h5 40.♔e4 ♖e8† 41.♔f3 ♖c8
42.♔e4 h4 43.♔d5 ♖d8† 44.♔e4 ♖d3
45.♖xd3 cxd3 46.♔xd3 ♔e5 47.♔e3 f6

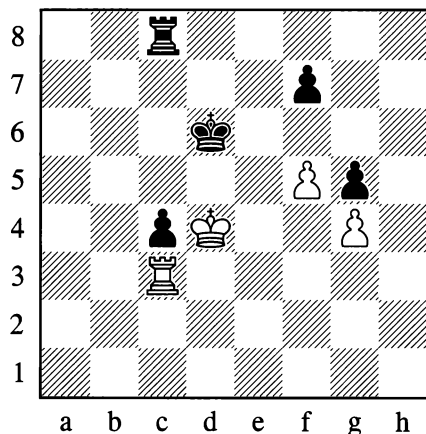
The white king has to retreat, but Black does not get the opposition.

48.♔f3 ♔d4 49.♔f2! ♔e4

½-½

In order to win the pawn ending, Black needs to make a weakness out of the g4-pawn. This can be done by:

35...♖c5!! 36.♔f3 h5! 37.h3 hxg4† 38.hxg4
♔f8! 39.♔e4 ♔e7 40.♔d4 ♔d6 41.♔e4
♖c7 42.♔d4 ♖c8

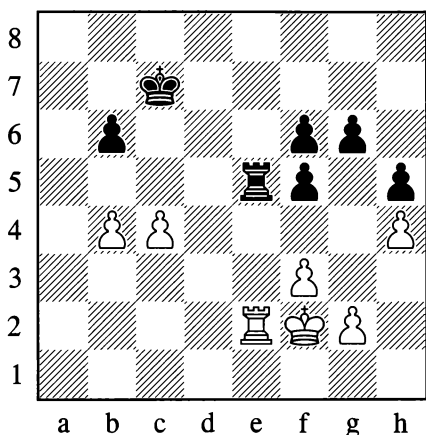


Zugzwang. Black wins. For example:

43.♔e4 ♔c5 44.♔e5 ♖c6 45.f6 ♖e6†
46.♔f5 ♔d4 47.♖c1 ♖e5#

Mathias Womacka – Giso Jahncke

Gmund am Tegernsee 2022



White won after:

45.♖e3? f4? 46.♖xe5 fxe5 47.♔e2
1–0

45...f4 was a horrible mistake, easy to identify. But finding the way to hold for Black is far less obvious.

Black had to play 45...b5!!, when after both 46.♖xe5 fxe5 47.c5 and 46.c5 ♖d5 47.♖e6 ♖d4 Black will hold.

Instead, White needed to activate the king.

45.♔e1!!

With the idea ♔d2-d3 with further improvement. Only then comes f3-f4, with a winning pawn ending.

45...b5!?

This is the way to “do something”, but after:

46.♖xe5 fxe5 47.cxb5 ♔b6 48.♔d2 ♔xb5
49.♔c3

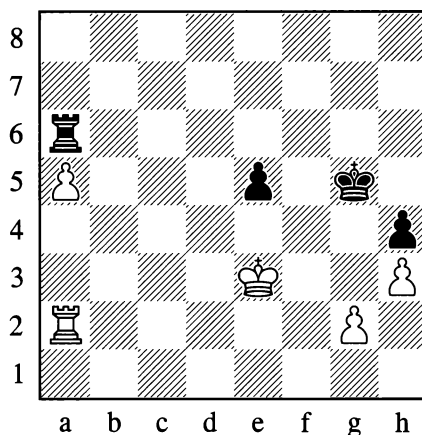
White is winning due to the distant passed pawn.

Triangulation

Triangulation is a common theme in all types of minor piece endings – especially bishop endings. It is also an important feature of queen vs rook endings. But triangulation is not too common in rook endings, and only a few of my 1200 examples actually featured this theme. The following game starts with a little detail, which is worth including, before we get to the triangulation moment.

Gawain Jones – Uffe Vinter-Schou

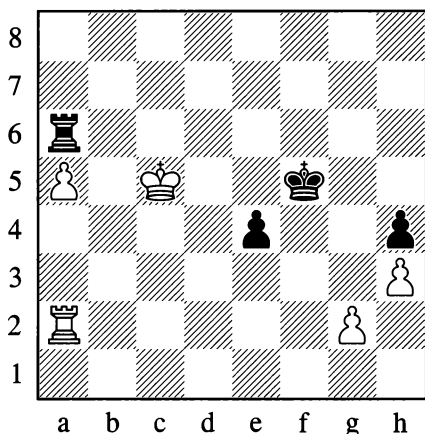
Ulcinj 2019



43.♔e4

White had a nice winning method. 43.♖a4! Prophylaxis against ...e4 ideas. 43...♔f5 44.♔f3 ♔g5 45.g4! Black either has to take or will find it impossible to hold the line after White gets the king to e4. But after 45...hxg3 46.♔xg3, the h-pawn is a deadly distraction. Black cannot hold two fronts. We have not talked too much of the themes of distant pawns, as rooks can travel by the speed of light, and not too much of the rule of two weaknesses. Mainly because I consider them general endgame themes and covered them well in *A Matter of Endgame Technique*.

43...♙f6 44.♙d5 ♙f5 45.♙c5 e4



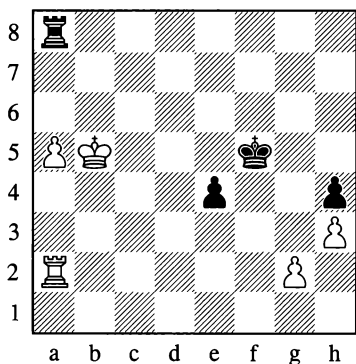
Black has managed to create counterplay and it is now not easy for White to win.

46.♙d4?

White also cannot win after: 46.♙d5? ♙f4 47.♙d4 (47.♙a4 ♙f5!) 47...♙d6† 48.♙c3 e3! 49.a6 e2 and Black holds.

The winning method included a nice triangulation manoeuvre.

46.♙b5! ♙a8



47.♙c4!!

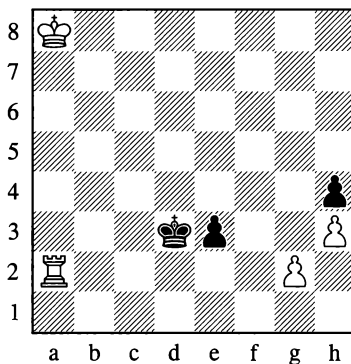
47.a6 e3 48.♙b6 ♙e4! would give Black enough counterplay.

47...♙e5!?

Black has to try something.

After 47...♙a6 48.♙c3! the black king has lost a valuable tempo and White wins. The king will get to e3 and decide.

48.a6 ♙a7 49.♙c5 e3 50.♙b6 ♙a8 51.♙b7 ♙e8 52.a7 ♙e4 53.a8=♙ ♙xa8 54.♙xa8 ♙d3



55.g4!! hxg3 56.♙g2

White wins.

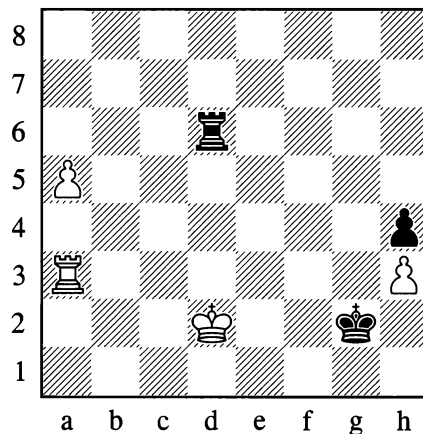
46...♙f4 47.♙a4

Now after 47.♙c3 ♙g3, there is no time for 48.♙d2, and after 48.♙d4 ♙f4 Black is fine.

47...e3 48.♙d3† ♙g3 49.♙a2 e2! 50.♙xe2 ♙xg2 51.♙a3 ♙e6† 52.♙d1 ♙d6† 53.♙c2 ♙a6 54.♙d2 ♙d6†??

Losing two tempos.

54...♙h2 was holding.



55.♔e3!

White is surprisingly aiming for f4.

55...♙h3!?

Desperation.

55...♞a6 56.♙f4 and the h-pawn is lost.

56.a6 ♞d8 57.a7 ♙g2

57...♞a8 loses to 58.♙f3 ♙h2 59.♙g4.

58.♞a2† ♙g1 59.a8=♚ ♞xa8 60.♞xa8 h3
61.♙f3

1–0

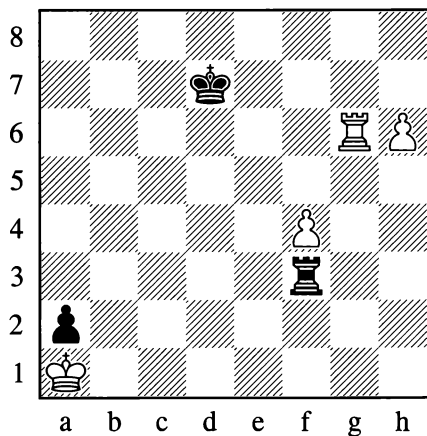
Typical tricks

Let's look at a few typical tricks. We could have looked at them up front, as they can appear at any point. But I wanted a less tactical and more conceptual narrative this time around.

In the first game Black is on the way to making the draw.

Roman Grib – Mateusz Bartel

Suwalki 2017



59...♞h3 would have been fine. But I would strongly prefer 59...♙e7!, to get the king over to deal with the pawns.

59...♞xf4?

Looking natural, but loses on the spot.

60.h7 ♞h4 61.♞a6!

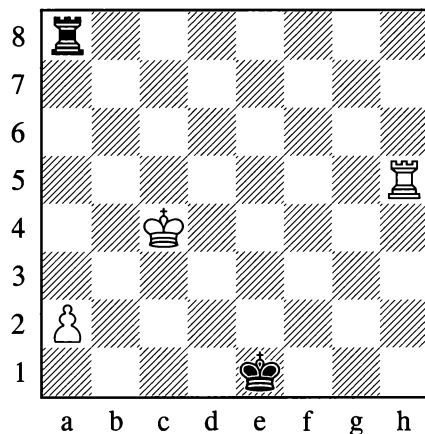
White wins. His next move is 62.♞a8!, forcing Black to take on h7.

1–0

Returning to the next game from page 180 with a sideline that was not important for the result in the game, but which was highly instructive. The position could have arisen if Black had deviated from the game with 56...♞a8 and White tried 57.♞h5?, which was originally suggested by Christopher Yoo.

Tania Sachdev – Vyanla Punsalan

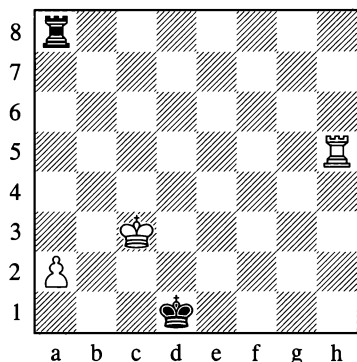
Batumi (variation) 2018



57...♙f1!!

The only move! It looks odd for the king to run away from the pawn, but threatening to take it is what matters. The king can get back on track as soon as the white pieces have gone to inferior squares.

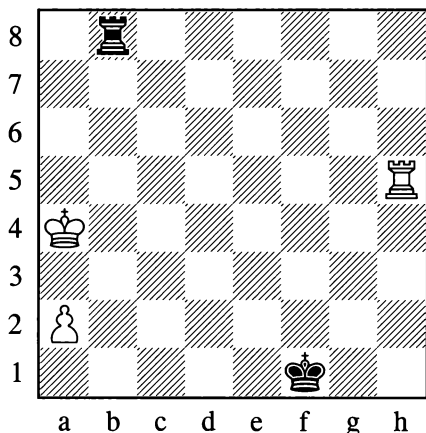
57...♙d1? loses to our favourite trick after:
58.♙b3 ♞b8† 59.♙c3 ♞a8



60.♖h4!! and the a-pawn will advance.
60...♖a3† 61.♔b2! is an important detail.

58.♔b3 ♖b8† 59.♔a4

Usually in situations like the one after 59.♔c3, we give the check. But chess is a details game – and here the check is inferior to 59...♖a8!, holding. (59...♖c8†? 60.♔b4 allows White to advance the a-pawn without wasting a tempo.)



59...♔e2!

59...♖a8†? makes no sense as long as White has 60.♖a5.

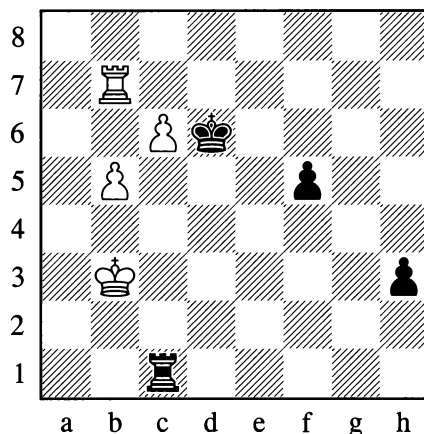
60.♖b5 ♖h8 61.♔b4 ♔d3 62.a4 ♔d4 63.a5 ♖h1! 64.♖b6 ♖b1† 65.♔a4 ♖a1† 66.♔b5 ♔d5 67.♖b7 ♔d6 68.♔b6 ♖b1† 69.♔a7 ♖a1 70.a6 ♔c6

White cannot make progress.

The following trick is pretty too.

Ante Brkic – Sofio Gvetadze

Vysoke Tatry 2018



55.♖d7†

55.♖h7? ♔c5 would allow Black to hold.

55...♔c5

If the king goes to the e-file, White wins with 56.♖h7!. Now this would be met with ...♔xb5. But White has another trick!

56.♖d1!! ♖xd1 57.c7

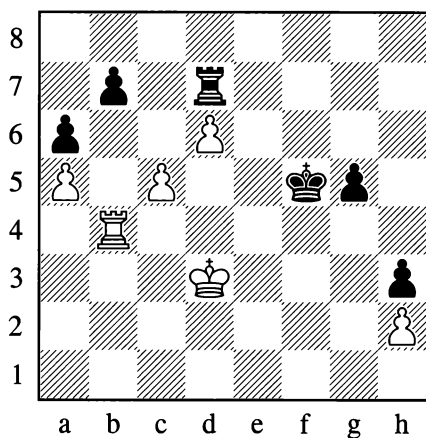
Black resigned. I would probably have played on for a few miserable moves. You can always blunder more pieces instead of resigning...

1–0

I first saw the following trick in an article by Jan Timman *New in Chess* in the 1980s.

Aleksander Mista – Shankar Gauri

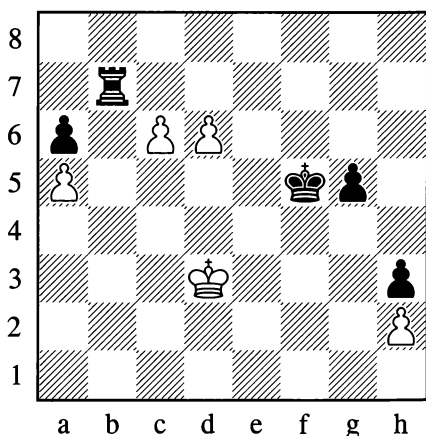
Charlotte 2020



White is completely winning. For example, 49. Re4 followed by $\text{c}4\text{-d}5$ and then $\text{Re}4\text{-e}7$ (or with $\text{Re}6\text{†}$ first, if the black king is on f6).

Instead, White tried to be flashy.

49. $\text{Rxb}7\text{??}$ $\text{Rxb}7!$ 50. c6



If the rook moves to safety, a pawn will promote. This was obviously the idea. But Black has an instructive way to deal with this issue.

50... $\text{Rb}3\text{†}$ 51. $\text{c}4$ $\text{c}6!$

Instead of saving the rook, Black uses the tempo to stop the pawns.

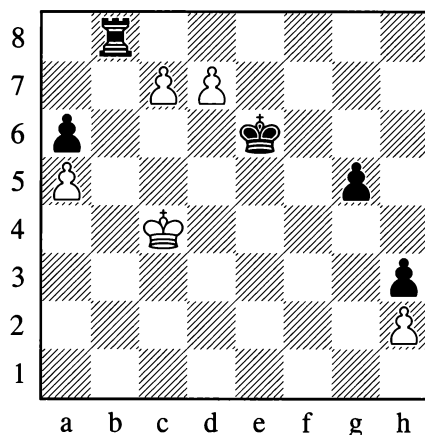
52. d7

52. c7 $\text{c}d7$ and the g-pawn will advance and win the game.

52... $\text{Rb}8!?$

52... $\text{c}e7$ also won, but it is a nice theme...

53. c7



Now in its purest form. The one I remember seeing in the New in Chess article...

53... $\text{Rb}4\text{†}$! 54. $\text{cxb}4$ $\text{cxd}7$
0-1

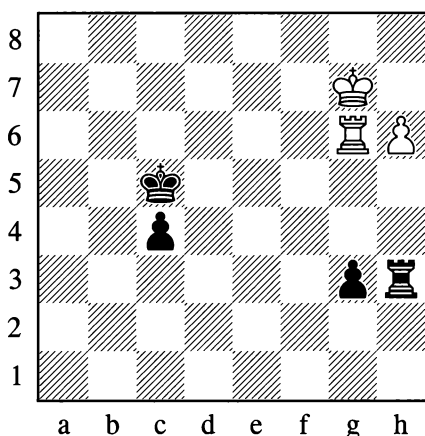
Intermediate move

This is usually a middlegame theme, but is certainly also present in the endgame. The following is my favourite example.

Playing the game was painful all the way and ended in a strange way:

Jacob Aagaard – Adam Ashton

Birmingham 2016



64.♖g5†? ♔d6 65.♖g6† ♕e5?

I don't have full control of all endgame theory to the degree I would wish, but I do know that for the rook to make a draw on the 1st rank, the pawns need to have four clear ranks between them. Not three as here.

Black wins after: 65...♔d7! 66.♖g4 c3 67.♖d4† ♕e6 68.♖d1 g2 69.h7 c2 70.♖e1† ♕d5 71.h8=♖ ♖xh8 72.♕xh8 ♔d4 73.♕g7 ♔d3 74.♖g1 ♕e3 Heading for the queen vs rook endgame.

66.♖g5†?

66.h7! draws – and if Black tries 66...c3? 67.♖h6! g2 68.h8=♖ g1=♖† 69.♕f7† White would even win.

66...♔d6

I was about to give the check on g6 again, fully realising that I was lost, when to my surprise my opponent offered a draw. Thank you very much!

½–½

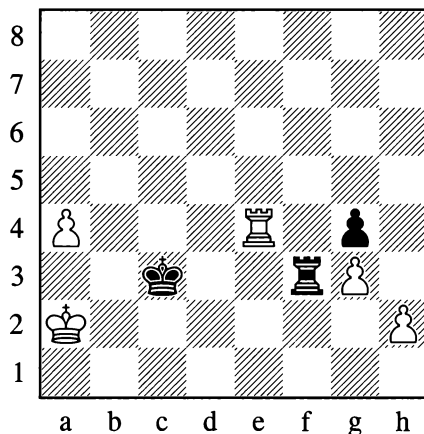
I was never close to seeing 64.h7! c3 65.h8=♖ ♖xh8 66.♖xg3!! with an immediate draw.

Perpetual Check

We have seen a few cases of perpetual check on the 7th rank – and they all felt a bit odd. The same is the case with the next example, but I wanted to include it all the same. After a reckless mistake by White, Hector suddenly had a chance to force a draw.

Loek van Wely – Jonny Hector

Germany 2020



60.a5?

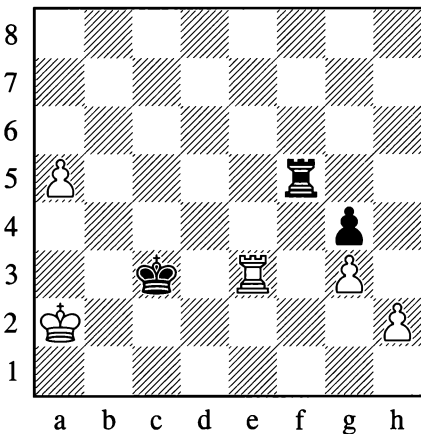
White had a lot of ways to win. For example, 60.♖e8 ♖f2† 61.♕a3 ♖xh2 62.♖c8† ♔d4 63.♖g8 and the rest is easy.

60...♖f5! 61.♗e3†

61.♗xg4 ♖xa5† 62.♕b1 ♖h5! 63.h4 ♖b5†
64.♕c1 ♖a5 Black draws. There is no reason
for the white king to flee along the 1st rank,
...♕f3 will come...

61.a6 ♖a5† 62.♕b1 ♖xa6 works in the
same way, the black rook is on the 6th
rank, which makes no difference at all.

61.♖a4 leads to an immediate draw after
61...♖f2† 62.♕a3 ♖f1!.

**61...♕b4?**

I think Johnny had no idea of the chance he
missed until after the game, if at all...

The draw arises after: 61...♕c2! 62.a6 ♖a5†
63.♖a3 ♖b5 (The same position could arise
after 61...♕d2 62.♖a3 ♕c2 63.a6 ♖b5!)
64.♖a4 ♖b2† with a perpetual.

62.a6 ♖a5†

Black also loses after: 62...♖f2† 63.♕b1
♖xh2 64.♖e6 ♕b5 65.a7 ♖h8 66.♖g6 ♖a8
67.♖g7 White remains in full control.

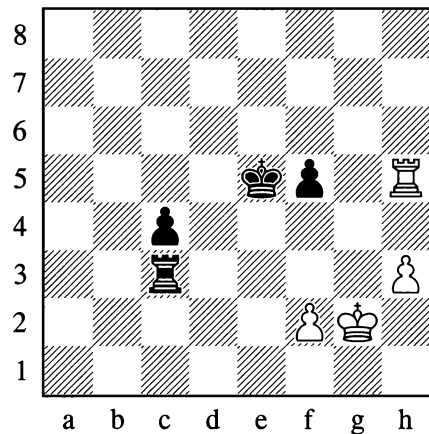
63.♕b2 ♖xa6 64.♖e4† ♕c5 65.♗xg4 ♕d5
66.h4 ♕e5 67.♕c3 ♕f5 68.♖g5† ♕e4 69.h5
♖d6 70.g4 ♖d3† 71.♕c4 ♖h3 72.♕c5
1–0

Rook on the adjacent file

The following example is winning for Black,
but as so often in rook endings, the drawing
tendency is great and the win relies on accuracy
and a single tempo, making it easy to botch
things up.

Filip Haring – Pierre Laurent-Paoli

Corti 2022

**55...♖d3?**

The black king will have to come in via
e4-d3 to help the pawn. Thus, the rook will
obstruct the king here.

55...♖a3? also fails, because it does not shield
the king. 56.♖h8 c3 57.♖c8 ♕d4 58.h4 ♕d3
59.h5 c2 60.h6 ♖a8 61.♖c7 ♕d2 62.♖d7†
♕c3 63.♖c7† ♕b2 64.♖b7†! With a draw.

56.♖h8 c3

56...♕d4 This manoeuvre is thematic, but
also slow. White draws by a tempo. 57.h4 ♕c3
While we often are willing to step in front
of the passed pawn, it can at times be slow.
This is one of those times. 58.h5 ♕d2 59.h6
c3 60.♖c8 ♖d7 61.♕f3 c2 62.♕f4 White is in
time.

57.♖c8

We can now see clearly that there is no easy path for the black king to control the c2-square.

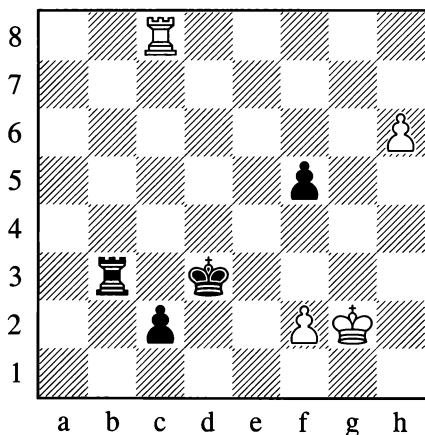
57...♙f4 58.♞c4† ♕g5 59.h4† ♕h5 60.♙f1 f4 61.♙e2 ♞d2† 62.♙e1 ♞a2 63.♞xc3 ♕xh4 64.♙f1 ♕g4 65.♙g2 ♞b2 66.♞a3 ♞b7 67.♞a4 ♞b3 68.♞c4 ♕f5 69.♞c5† ♕e4 70.♞c4† ♕e5 71.♞a4
½-½

For Black to win this position, he needs to meet three objectives. The first two are simple to understand: the king needs to be able to help the c-pawn advance; and the rook needs to shield the king from checks from behind. The third objective is to win time, which can be done with a simple tactic.

55...♞b3!

This is the right square. The rook is not in the way of the king, but it is on an adjacent file to the passed pawn, ready to shield the king from checks from behind.

56.♞h8 c3 57.♞c8 ♕d4 58.h4 ♕d3 59.h5 c2 60.h6

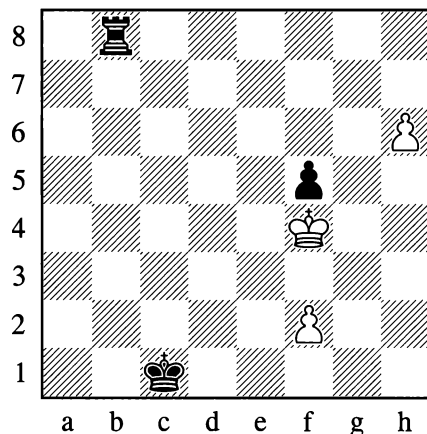
**60...♞b8!**

This is an important tempo-gain and a tactic we have not seen for the last time in this book.

61.♞c7

61.♞c6?! ♞b6 and the h-pawn falls.

61...♕d2 62.♞d7† ♕c3 63.♞c7† ♕b2 64.♕g3 c1=♞ 65.♞xc1 ♕xc1 66.♕f4

**66...♞f8!**

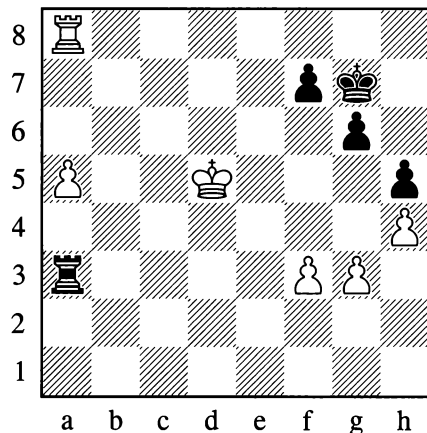
The only winning move, but an easy one.

67.h7 ♕d2 68.h8=♞ ♞xh8 69.♕xf5 ♞f8†
I trust you can take it from here...

The next example was winning by the same thinking.

Chitumbo Mwali – Jesper Thybo

Chennai Olympiad 2022



53.a6!

53.♔e4 ♖a4† 54.♔d5 ♖a3 55.♔e4 ½–½
secured the match victory and cannot be called a mistake.

53...♖xf3 54.♖b8!

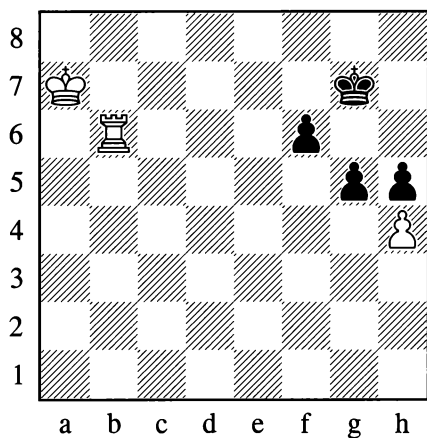
The key move. The rook is needed on b6, where it shields the king, defends the pawn and cuts off the black king along the 6th rank.

54...♖a3 55.♖b6 ♖xg3

Black has to try something.

56.♔c6 f6 57.a7 ♖a3 58.♔b7

Threatening 59.♖a6.

58...♖xa7† 59.♔xa7 g5**60.♔b7!**

Same same.

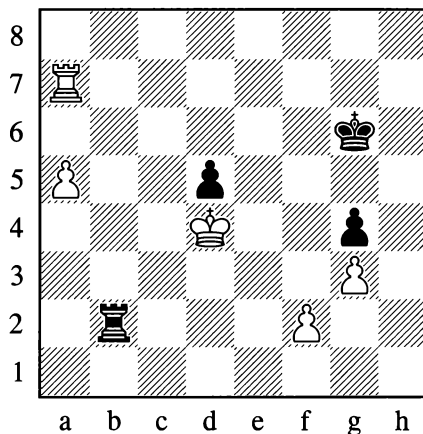
60...gxh4 61.♔c6 ♔g6 62.♔d5

White is in good time.

The next game ended in a draw in what seemed to be an entirely natural way.

Sanan Sjugirov – Krishnan Sasikiran

Moscow 2016

**60.a6? ♖xf2 61.♖d7 ♖a2 62.a7 ♖a5!**

The rook is perfectly placed.

**63.♔c3 ♔f6 64.♔b4 ♖a1 65.♔c5 ♔e5
66.♖xd5† ♔e4 67.♖d7 ♔f3 68.♔b4**

68.♖d3† ♔g2 69.♔b6 ♖b1† is also a draw.

68...♔g2 69.♖c7 ♔h3

69...♔xg3?? 70.♖c3† is all Black has to avoid.

70.♖e7 ♔g2

½–½

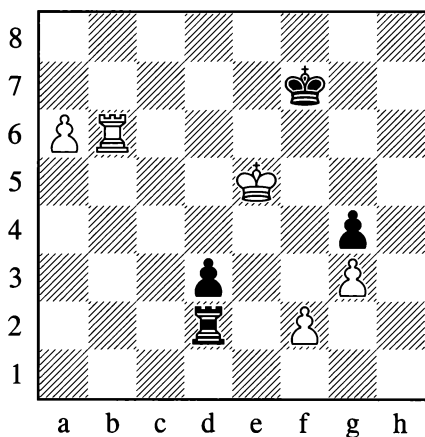
The winning line is astonishing – if you have not seen this theme before.

60.♖a6†! ♔f7

The first point of the check is that if the black king goes to the 5th rank, White can throw the rook to the back rank and advance the a-pawn. It will take Black a tempo to get the king back close to the 7th rank (where it has to be if White plays a6-a7), a tempo he can ill afford to lose. Therefore, it goes to the 7th rank now.

61.♖b6 ♜d2†

White also wins after 61...♞xf2 62.a6 ♞g2 63.♕xd5 ♞xg3 64.♕c6 ♞a3 65.♕b7, as the black king is cut off along the 6th rank. And after 65...g3 66.a7 g2 67.♞b1 the king is too far away to help the g-pawn, which thus has to be sacrificed. 67...g1=♞ 68.♞xg1 ♞b3† We are heading for a well-known theory position. 69.♕c6 ♞c3† 70.♕b5 ♞a3 71.♞h1! The position is winning without this trick, but it certainly helps. 71...♕g7 72.♕b6 White wins by putting the king in the corner and transferring the rook to b8.

62.♕e5 d4 63.a6 d3**64.♞b7†!!**

There are several reasons why this is the only winning move.

One of them is that 64.♞d6? can be met by 64...♞e2† 65.♕d4 ♞e6!! with a draw, on account of: 66.♞xe6? d2! and White probably has a fortress, but has certainly made things difficult for himself.

64...♕g6 65.♕e4

65.♞d7!? also works. 65...♞a2 66.♞xd3 ♞a5† 67.♞d5 ♞xa6 68.♞d6†! with a winning pawn ending.

65...♞xf2

The point of the 64th move is that White can respond to 65...♞a2 with 66.♞b6†!, winning a tempo and the d-pawn.

66.♕xd3 ♞f3† 67.♕c2 ♞xg3 68.♕b2 ♞g2† 69.♕a3 ♞g1 70.♕a2 ♞g2† 71.♞b2

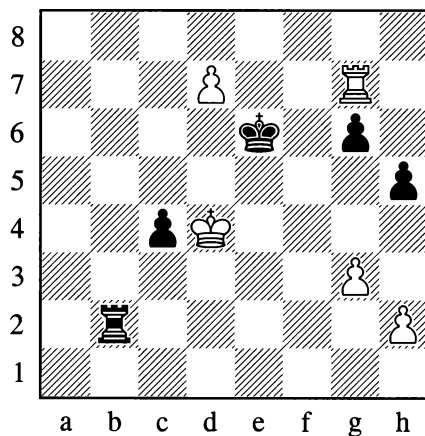
White wins.

Domination

Domination is generally a theme from endgames with minor pieces, or endgames with uneven material. It is rare we see it in rook endings, as the pieces are at the same time agile, able to travel the board quickly, as well as blunt instruments, which do not have the ability to do other types of domination than cutting pieces off; a theme we have already covered. But this shall not prevent us from seeing a few examples of domination in the rook ending as a finish to this chapter. White was winning, but not as he played the position:

Levon Babujian – Hovik Hayrapetyan

Yerevan 2021

**43.d8=♖†?**

Black would also have held after: 43.h4? ♞d2† 44.♕xc4 ♞xd7 45.♞xg6† ♕f5 46.♞g5† ♕e4 47.♞xh5 ♞g7!

White also has no advantage after 43.♖xg6†? ♕xd7 44.h4 ♖b8 45.♕xc4 ♕e7 46.♖g5 ♖h8, when White cannot attack the h5-pawn in an effective way. Black holds with passive play, as long as the white king is cut off.

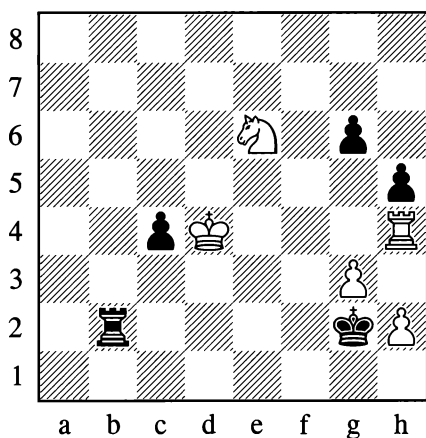
43...♕f5

Running for the kingside pawns, seeking the rook and knight vs rook draw.

44.♖f7†

The king cannot get there in time either. Once the h2-pawn falls, the g3-pawn does not have long for this world.

44...♕g4 45.♖f4† ♕h3 46.♖h4† ♕g2 47.♖e6



47...♕h1!

Avoiding 47...♕g1?, where White would gain a serious tempo with 48.♖g5!, and win the game.

48.♕xc4 ♖xh2 49.♖f4 ♕g1! 50.♖xg6 ♕g2

The g3-pawn is toast.

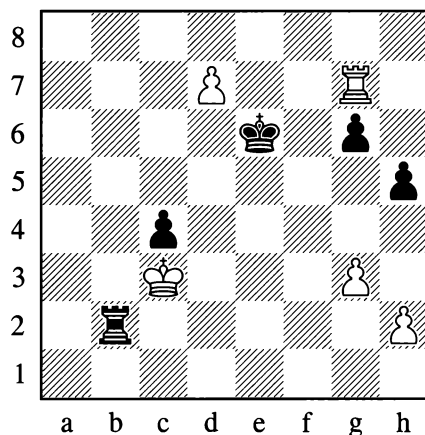
51.g4 hxg4 52.♖xg4† ♕f3

The game was drawn on move 104.

The winning method included putting the black rook in its place.

43.♕c3!

The rook has to retreat.



43...♖b8 44.♕xc4

Only now.

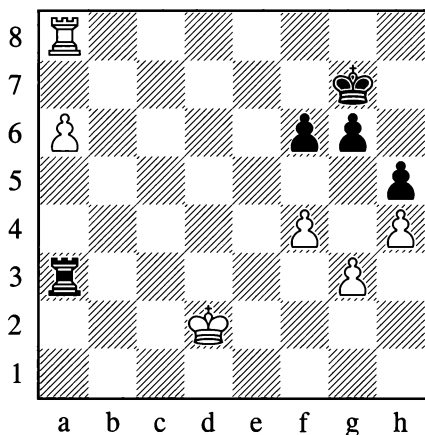
44...♖d8 45.♖xg6† ♕xd7 46.♖h6

White wins the h-pawn too.

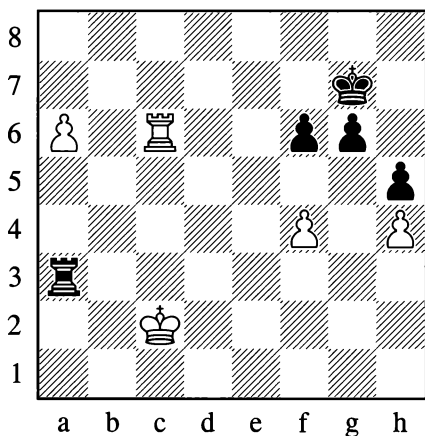
The next game is yet another example from these horrible hybrid tournaments played in 2021, as a qualification to the World Cup. Black was fortunate to draw after:

Alexander Moiseenko – Frederik Svane

Hybrid 2021



54...♖xg3? 55.♖c8? ♖a3 56.♖c7† ♔h6
57.♖c6 ♔g7 58.♔c2



58...g5!

The simplest.

59.fxg5 fxg5 60.hxg5 h4 61.♔b2 ♖a5
62.♔b3 h3 63.♔b4 h2 64.♖h6 ♖xa6

Why a draw had not been agreed earlier, or at least now, I cannot say.

65.♖xh2 ♖c6 66.♖h4 ♖c8 67.♖h6 ♖c7
68.♔b5 ♖c1 69.♔b4 ♖c2 70.♔b3 ♖c5

71.♔b4 ♖xg5 72.♖c6 ♖g6 73.♖c7† ♔f6
74.♖c6†
½–½

Moiseenko missed a beautiful idea, which is the domination part. After:

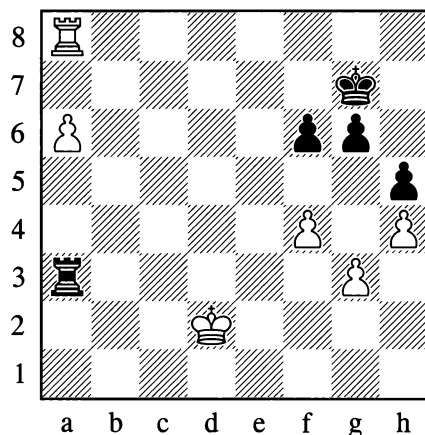
55.♖a7†!!

The black king has to go to h6, where it will be dominated entirely.

55...♔h6 56.♖f7 f5 57.a7 ♖a3 58.♔e2!?

Black is in zugzwang and will have to either let the king advance, or play the desperate ...g5. Thus, the king stays near the centre. White wins.

Black should have played actively to start with. Simplest was:



54...g5! 55.f5!?

55.fxg5 fxg5 56.hxg5 ♖xg3 with a draw.

55...gxh4

55...g4 also holds.

56.gxh4 ♖a4!

The h4-pawn is eliminated and Black makes the draw. Especially as the king gets the g5-square. And with that, we are ready for something spectacular...

Chapter 25

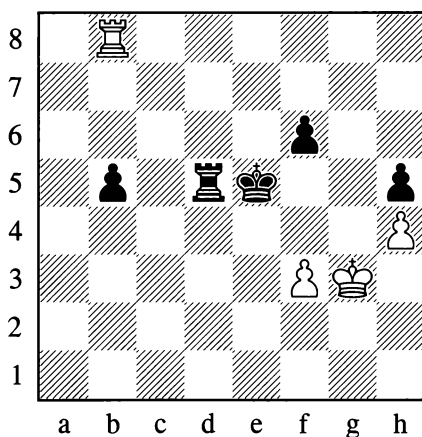
Unbelievable

Final chapter of the book! Let's make it a good one. On the following pages, we shall look at some remarkable endgames, where we will see lots of the ideas we have been discussing in this book, but also where the aesthetics and the complexities will go beyond concepts, and become conceptual art. A lot of the examples in this chapter are extracted from long and deep analysis, but I have tried to cut away as much detail as possible, to leave you with the core of the story each game tries to tell.

The first game is one of my own. Not because I played well – I did not – but because we can learn from my mistakes too...

Steffen Pedersen – Jacob Aagaard

London 1997



42...♖c5?!

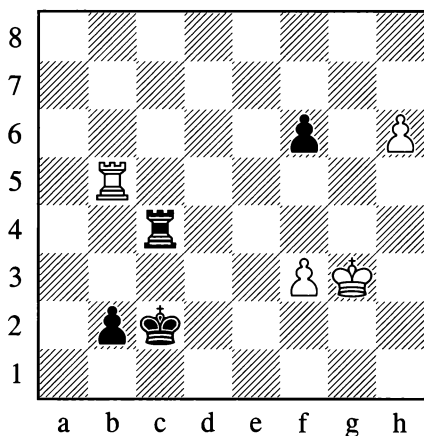
We know what the role of the king is in a position where we are better: to help the passed pawn. Here this meant 42...♖d4! 43.♗f4 ♖c4 44.♝b6 b4, when Black is winning. 45.♝xf6 b3 46.♝b6 ♝b5 And the pawn queens.

43. ♖d8 b4?

A completely unnecessary pawn sacrifice. At this time, I tried to solve all problems with brute force. And giving up the h-pawn to force the b-pawn forward is certainly the brute force option. Long lines to calculate. All entirely senseless; but you can calculate them...

43... ♖d5! would still return to the previous note, but I was on a different path.

**44. ♖b8 ♖c4 45. ♖b5† ♔d4 46. ♖xh5 b3
47. ♖b5 ♔c3 48. h5 b2 49. h6 ♔c2**

**50. h7?!**

It turned out that White could have offered more resistance with:

50. f4 ♖c3† 51. ♔g4 f5†!!

Check! The only winning move.

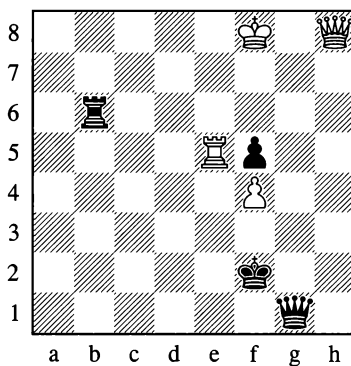
52. ♔g5

The pawn is immune, or the b-pawn would queen with check.

52... ♖g3† 53. ♔f6 ♖b3 54. ♖c5† ♔d2 55. ♖d5† ♔e2 56. ♖e5†

White is also lost after: 56. h7 ♖b6†! 57. ♔f7 (57. ♔g5 b1=♖ 58. h8=♖ ♖g1† leads to a winning attack.) 57... ♖b8 58. h8=♖ ♖xh8 59. ♖b5 ♔f3 60. ♖b4 ♖h1! Preventing a defence from the front. Black wins the f4-pawn and the game.

56... ♔f2 57. h7 b1=♖ 58. h8=♖ ♖b6† 59. ♔g7 ♖g1† 60. ♔f8



A mesmerising position. With the kings in the open, we are definitely in the 4th phase. Black needs to defend the king and give the queen a path to attack the white king too.

60... ♖g3!!

There is a sneaky checking opportunity on a3.

61. ♖h5

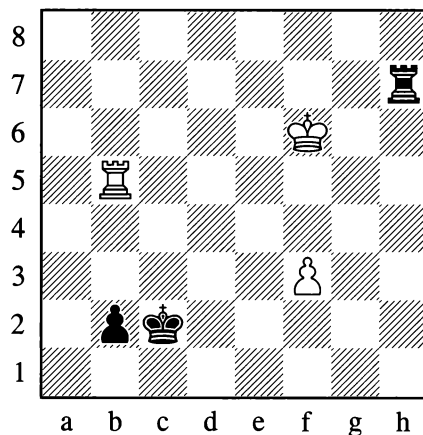
Or 61. ♖e8 ♖xf4 and Black wins.

61... ♖b8† 62. ♖e8 ♖xe8† 63. ♔xe8 ♖xf4

This queen ending is hopeless for White.

It should be said that the challenges in the game were sufficient for me...

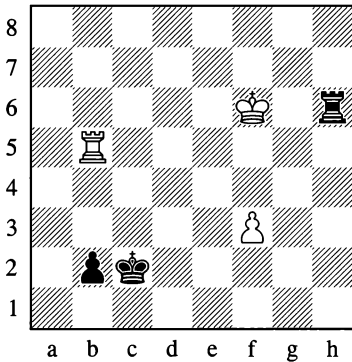
50... ♖c8 51. ♔g4 ♖h8 52. ♔f5 ♖xh7 53. ♔xf6



53...♖h3?

53...♖h4? looks natural too. Especially as it cuts off the white pawn. But after 54.♞xb2† ♕xb2 55.♔e5!!, we have shouldering 101 in effect.

The winning move was the stunning:
53...♞h6†!!



Check! The white king is forced to go to a worse square and Black wins.

54.♔g5

Forced. If the king goes to the 7th rank, Black will play 54...♞h4!, this time simply winning the f3-pawn.

54...♞h3!

The point. The white king is now on the wrong side of the pawn.

54...♞a6? 55.f4 ♞a5 does “win”, but feels really shaky in practice.

55.♞c5† ♕b3 56.♞b5† ♕a3!

Black has to keep the option of ...♞b3 alive.

57.♔g4

The pawn cannot advance, so needs defending.

57...♞h1

Black wins. The white king is misplaced.

54.♞xb2†!

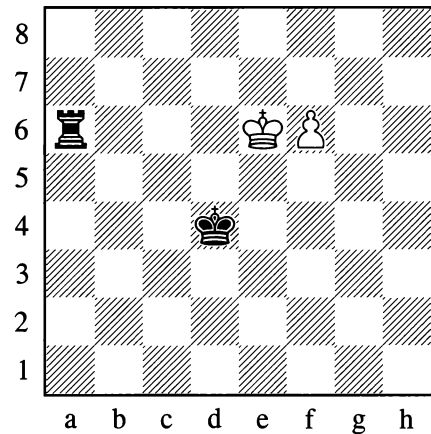
Confession: I had not seen this move at all...

54...♔xb2 55.f4 ♕c3 56.f5

I of course understood that this was a draw. So, I tried to shuffle around to see if I could confuse him. I still cannot believe that it worked...

56...♞e3! 57.♔g7 ♞g3† 58.♔f7 ♕d4 59.♔e6

59.f6! would have drawn easily.

59...♞e3† 60.♔d6 ♞f3 61.♔e6 ♞e3† 62.♔d6 ♞a3 63.f6 ♞a7! 64.♔e6 ♞a6†**65.♔f5??**

A blunder.

White holds after: 65.♔e7 ♕e5 66.f7 ♞a7† 67.♔e8 ♕e6 68.f8=♖† in traditional fashion.

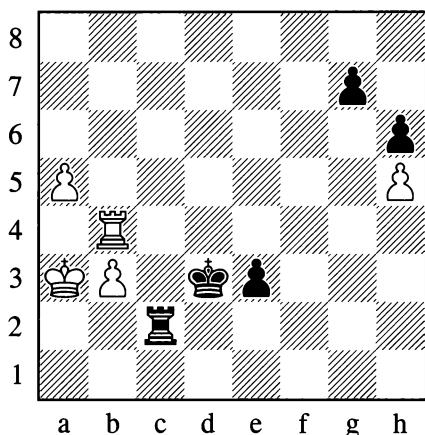
65...♔d5 66.f7 ♞a8

Lots of instructive mistakes and missed opportunities.

0-1

Pontus Carlsson – Evgeny Tomashevsky

Doha 2014



White is in obvious difficulties, and lost quickly.

61.♖h4? ♜c1 62.♖h3 ♔d2 63.♔b4 ♞e2
64.♖h2 ♔d3 65.♖xe2 ♔xe2 66.a6 ♜a1
67.♔b5 ♔d3 68.b4 ♔c3 69.♔c5 ♜xa6
70.b5 ♜a5 71.♔c6 ♔b4 72.b6 ♜xh5
0–1

I would have been tempted to say that it is nearly impossible to hold this position for a human, if I had not seen one do it.

61.♖b7!

Putting the rook on the 7th rank is essential. It is ready both to defend the a-pawn and to eliminate the g-pawn.

61...♜c5!

The dangerous try. Pushing the pawn too early is not without venom, but less of a danger. Not because it does not look close; but because White's moves are all without serious alternatives.

61...e2

This would allow White to force the black king to block the e-pawn and give White time to roll his own pawn up the board.

62.♜d7† ♔e3 63.♜e7† ♔d2 64.♜d7† ♔e1

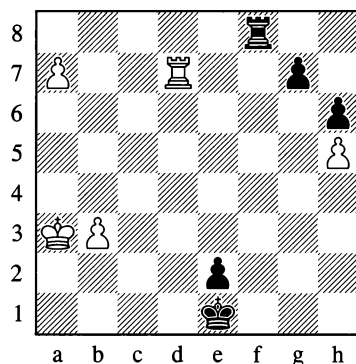
64...♔c1 65.♜e7 ♔d1 66.b4! and the pawns ensure the draw. The black king is too far away.

65.a6!

As so often, we need to make the most out of our greatest assets.

65...♜c8 66.a7 ♜f8!

The dangerous winning attempt. The black e-pawn will queen.

**67.♜f7!!**

A small tactical nuance, which would be possible to miss, is 67.b4 ♔f2 68.♜e7 ♜a8! when Black wins.

67...♜xf7 68.a8=♚ ♔f2

White cannot prevent Black from making a queen, but there is one defensive resource left.

69.♚e4!

The simplest of many drawing moves.

69...e1=♚ 70.♚h4†!

Followed by 71.♚c4†, winning the black rook.

62.b4!!

The first difficult move, as it seems brute force would hold.

The majority of training games I have had from this position ended with Black winning because of a specific detail.

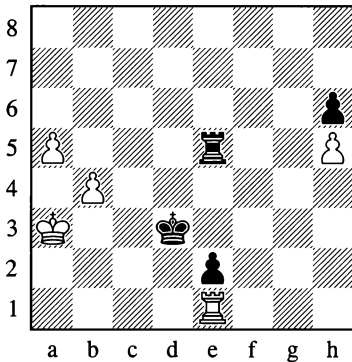
62.♞d7? ♔e4 63.b4

63.♙b4 ♞e5! and Black wins.

63...♞d5!

Winning an important tempo.

64.♞e7† ♞e5 65.♞xg7 e2 66.♞g1 ♔d3 67.♞e1



It appears that White is doing OK. The connected passed pawns are powerful and Black will have to get the king to the 2nd rank to win the white rook. But there is an idea we have seen before (page 52), which wins the day.

67...♞e3!! 68.♔a2!

The best try.

After 68.♔a4 the rook will find a sweet spot on a2.

68.♙b2 is a worse variation of the main line, as the b-pawn would fall with check, making Black's task easier.

68...♔d2 69.♞b1 ♔c2 70.♞e1

70.a6 ♞a3† and White may be able to queen the pawn, but Black will give two checks with his, the second being ...♞a1†, skewering the white king and queen.

70...♔d2 71.♞b1 e1=♚ 72.♞xe1 ♞xe1 73.a6 ♞e8! 74.b5 ♞a8

A strong GM resigned as White in a training game here. Black wins after:

75.♙b3 ♔d3 76.♙b4 ♔d4 77.♙a5 ♔c5 78.b6 ♔c6

The pawns are under control.

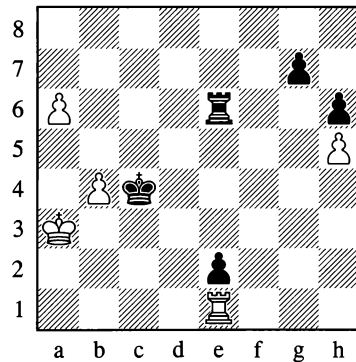
62...e2

Another serious try would be:

62...♞e5 63.♞d7† ♔c4

63...♔c2 would win the rook, but after 64.♞c7† ♔b1 65.♞xg7!, the black king is at the wrong end of the board and the connected passers are enough to secure White a draw. Notice that this line would not work for White if he had put the rook on the 8th rank. Black would simply win.

64.♞d1 e2 65.♞e1 ♞e4 66.a6 ♞e6



But White draws with:

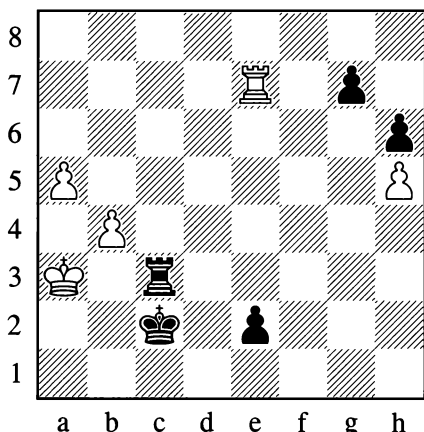
67.b5! ♔xb5 68.a7

White will make the draw. Black cannot win the h5-pawn without losing the g7-pawn in return.

63.♞d7†

White has to win this tempo, as usual.

63...♔c2 64.♞e7 ♞c3†



65.♔a2!!

I would have loved it if the point here was shouldering, but it is all about preventing the black rook from getting behind the white pawns.

65.♔a4? ♕d2 66.♖xe2† (After 66.a6 ♖e3 there is also the queen check on a1 to consider.) 66...♕xe2 67.a6 ♖c1 and Black wins.

65...♕d2 66.a6 ♖e3

The only try. White is already comfortably holding.

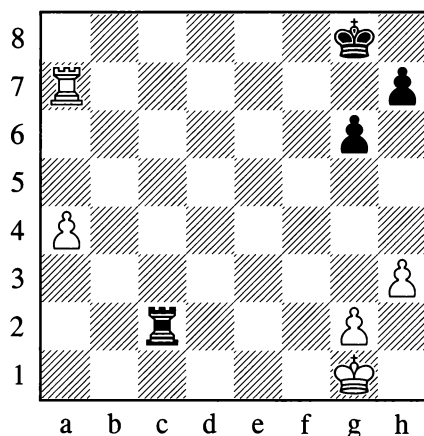
67.♖xe3 ♕xe3 68.a7 e1=♖ 69.a8=♖ ♖xb4

It may appear that Black has practical chances here, but the fabulous GM Adhiban held easily in a training game in 2019.

The following endgame was played in the 2022 European Rapid Championship. It contains many basic ideas, and at the same time is immensely complicated.

David Navara – Mateusz Bartel

Katowice (rapid) 2022



44.♕h2?

This is a mistake, as the king does not escape the corner this easily.

44.a5! g5

The attempt to set up a Vancura-like defence with 44...♖c5 45.♕f2 ♖e5 is too slow to succeed. If Black had time to play both ...g5 and ...h5, it would resemble a practical chance, and White would need to take care to play h3-h4 at the right moment. But as things stand, after 46.♕f3 Black cannot stop the king from marching forwards, with a clear win. Interestingly though, if White moved the g-pawn either one or two squares forward, he would lose a vital square for the king, and the fortress would hold.

44...♖a2 45.a6 g5 46.♕f1 h5 loses to 47.g3!, as seen in the main line. (47.♕e1 h4 48.♕d1 g4! followed by ...♖xg2 creates a strong passed pawn that will secure the draw.)

45.♕f1!

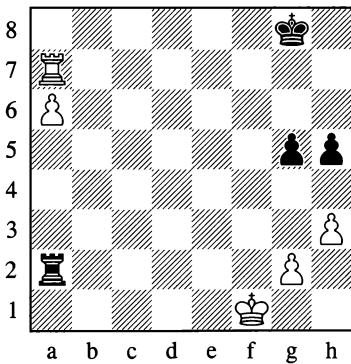
The greatest shock to the system is that 45.a6? turns out to be a draw with an advanced version of a basic theme, the Vancura Defence. 45...♖c6! 46.♕f1 ♖e6! and the white king cannot get out of the cage. White

can try a few tricks and traps, but they don't succeed past the blitz test... The moment the white king comes to g4, Black plays ... Rf6 , making the cage even smaller.

45... Ra2

Since 45... Rc6? allows 46. Ke2 before the rook can cut the king off from e6, Black must give up the idea of the Vancura defence here.

46.a6 h5



It is important to understand that White does not just need to untangle himself on the queenside to win such an ending, he also needs to create a scenario on the kingside where Black cannot make the draw after losing the rook. The key idea is not to exchange pawns. Currently Black is threatening ...h4, followed by g4 and later ... Rxg2 , creating a passed pawn.

47.g3! g4 48.h4!

White is threatening to win by slowly bringing the king to the queenside. Black can only try to follow along with his king, but after 48... Kf8 49. Kh7! White will win the h5-pawn and slowly manoeuvre into position to win the g4-pawn as well. Notice that if there were no h-pawns, White would only win the g4-pawn, which would be insufficient to win the game.

44... Rc3

The most natural-looking move, and enough for a draw.

But it is worth noticing another idea: 44... Rf2!? with the idea 45. Kg3 Rf1! , when the white king is caught in the cage and there is no way to play for a win. If he tries to get the rook manoeuvred to the 4th rank, the black rook will find an ideal square on a2, ready to strike at the kingside, before the a-pawn will be able to become dangerous.

45.a5 Ra3 46.h4 h5?

A move that feels right in the hand, yet it is a crucial mistake, opening up the idea of Kf4-h6 to White, ruining the Vancura-ideas for good.

46... Rb3!

This would have held the draw. There are a few important reasons why this works.

47. Kg1

47.a6 would once again allow Black to rely on the advanced Vancura setup after 47... Rb6! 48. Kg3 Rf6 49. Kg4 h6, and White cannot make meaningful progress.

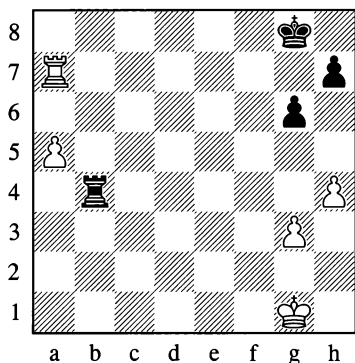
47.g4 creates weaknesses and Black can hold in many ways. Simplest is 47...h5 48.g5 Rb4 , when Black is both ready to take on h4, and to set up the Vancura defence, if White advances the a-pawn.

For this reason, 47. Kf1 seems the most testing. But Black can hold by bringing the king to the queenside to look after the passed pawn, just as it says in the textbooks!

47... Rb4!

Creating a weakness, relying on 48.a6 Rb6! still being a draw, as the rook can make it to e6 in time.

48.g3



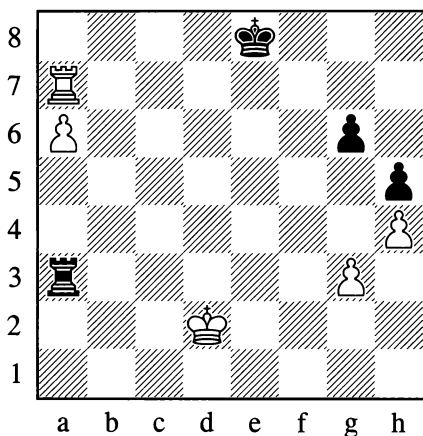
48...♖b2! 49.♗f1 ♞a2 50.♗e1 ♗f8 51.♗d1

It is tempting to try to get behind the black king after advancing the a-pawn, but there is a strong defensive idea: 51.a6 ♗e8 52.♞a8† ♗f7! 53.♗d1 ♗f6 and the draw is not too far away.

51...♗e8 52.♗c1 ♗d8 53.♗b1 ♞a3 54.a6 ♗c8

Black makes the draw after another few moves.

47.g3 ♗h8 48.♗g2 ♗g8 49.♗f2 ♗h8 50.a6 ♗g8 51.♗e2 ♗f8 52.♗d2 ♗e8



53.♞a8†?

Quite a horrific decision, based on an understandable miscalculation. The problem for Navara in this position is that he is planning to win on the queenside, rather than using the a-pawn as a powerful distraction that can lead

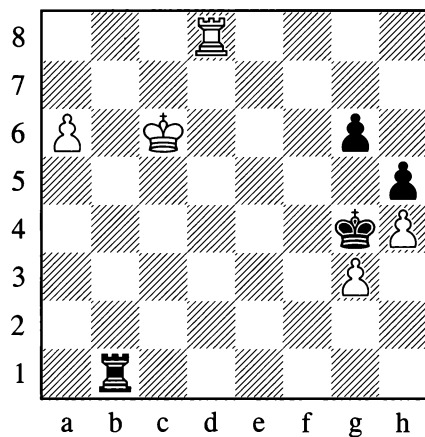
to him winning both pawns on the kingside.

53.♗c2 ♗d8 54.♞a8† ♗c7 55.a7! was the most natural win. White will take the g6-pawn and his king will be faster to get to the kingside, defending the g3-pawn, after which Black will not be able to defend the h5-pawn in the long term.

53...♗f7 54.♗c2 ♗f6 55.♗b2 ♞a5 56.♗b3 ♗f5 57.♗b4 ♞a1 58.♗b5 ♗g4 59.♞d8 ♞b1†!

Navara clearly relied on 59...♗xg3? 60.♞d4! for the last half-dozen moves.

60.♗c6



60...♞a1?

This is a common mistake. Black returns with the rook to its ideal place without getting the most possible out of the checking. I am not sure why this mistake is so common (I am sure I have fallen prey to it myself at some point), but it could be that the “rook behind the passed pawn” is the only concept most players (including GMs) know about, while the knowledge of checks in rook endings is essentially nil.

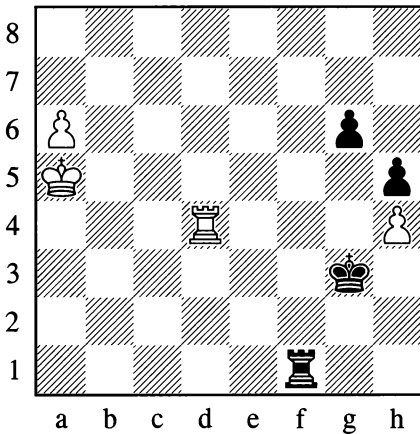
60...♞c1† 61.♗b7 ♞b1† drew without a fuss. White has to put the king on the odd square in front of the pawn, giving Black a chance to

take on g3, put his rook on the 5th rank and play ...g5, before White will get anywhere on advancing the a-pawn.

61.♞d4† ♔xg3 62.♕b5!

Navara is allowed to execute his plan of bringing the rook to the a-file after all.

62...♞b1† 63.♕a5 ♞f1



64.a7?

This should have failed. Those unfamiliar with the power of checks in rook endings, as well as the importance of a significant checking distance, might find this surprising. But by now hopefully you find this somewhat elementary.

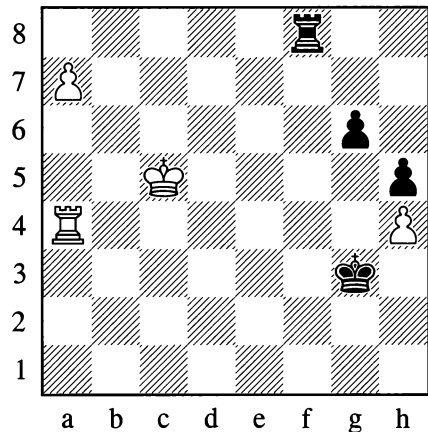
64.♞a4! was the only winning move and one that does not need variations. The black rook can give a few checks, but will eventually have to go to a8. White can then win by either bringing in the king to help promoting the a-pawn, or by bringing it to the kingside to eliminate the black pawns. The latter plan may look risky, as Black has the ...g5-break, but if the white king has made it to e6, he still wins by a tempo.

64...♞f5† 65.♕b6 ♞f8?

Never miss a check in a rook ending (although don't always play them either...).

Bartel could have held the game with: 65...♞f6†! either kicking the white king out of the winning zone, or forcing the white rook to get involved in the queening of the a-pawn. A draw is achieved after 66.♕c7 ♞f7†! 67.♞d7 ♞f8 68.♞d8 ♞f7† 69.♕b8 ♞xa7 70.♕xa7 ♕xh4 and the white king is as far away as can be, giving Black an extra tempo to the draw, as long as he is focusing on advancing the h-pawn, shouldering with the king on the g-file.

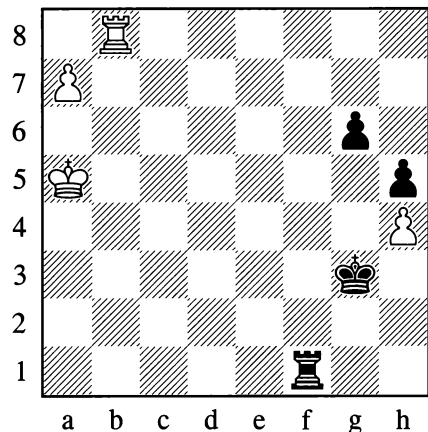
66.♞a4 ♞f6† 67.♕c5 ♞f8



68.♞b4

Navara is keen to keep control, although queening the pawn at this point would obviously work too.

68...♞f5† 69.♕b6 ♞f8 70.♕b7 ♞f7† 71.♕a6 ♞f6† 72.♕a5 ♞f8 73.♞b8 ♞f1



74.♖b3†!

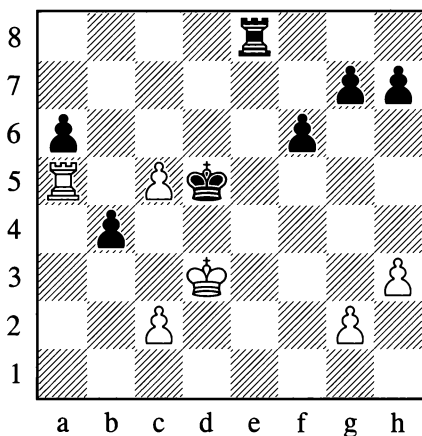
The black king is cut off on the 3rd rank, as otherwise a check on the 4th would help queen the a-pawn.

74...♙h2 75.♙a6 ♜f8 76.♖a3 ♜f6† 77.♙b5 ♜f8 78.a8=♔

1-0

Eric Hansen – Ju Wenjun

Internet 2022



Another internet rapid game, where two strong players show why good moves require good thinking time. Chess history is not a list of results, but a series of highlights we like to think of as a game. Classical chess is considered a mixture of science, sport and art. If you reduce the time control too much, you remove the deep thinking that makes chess accurate (scientific) and creative (art) and are left with a competitive sport without the depth and soul that makes chess the best game in the world.

By analysing this game, we shall try to inject some intelligence into the game, as well as try to make art out of a muddy mess... All of this is not a criticism of the players, nor of the format. It is just whining, in hope that classical chess will continue to exist as long as I am able to recognise the world around me.

39...♖a8?

A bad move for basic reasons. The rook should not be passive.

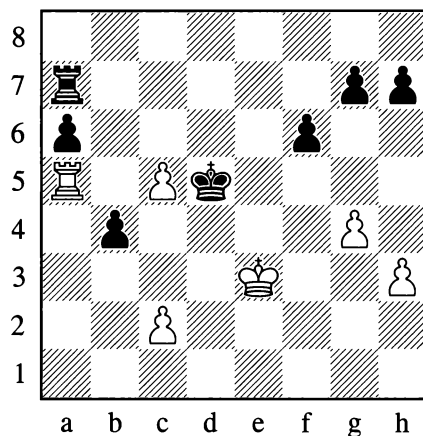
After 39...♖c8! 40.♖xa6 ♜xc5 41.♙d2 ♜c3, the black rook is destined for g3.

40.g4

I like 40.c4†! bxc3 41.♙xc3, when White has improved his position and should hold easily.

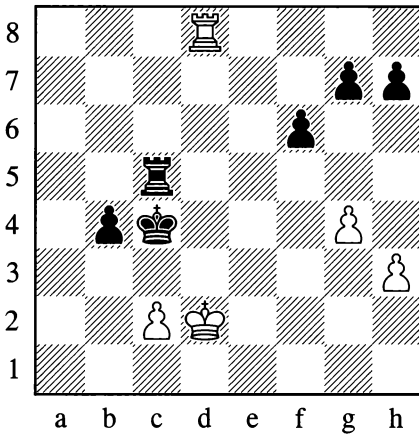
40...♖a7 41.♙e3?

41.c4†! was still holding.

**41...♙c4?**

The computer comes up with the fancy 41...h6!, with the idea 42.♙d3 ♜c7, when Black wins. Activating the rook is the core idea.

42.c6 ♜c7 43.♖xa6 ♙b5 44.♖a8 ♜xc6 45.♖b8† ♙c4 46.♙d2 ♜c7 47.♖d8 ♜c5

**48.♔c1?**

A passive move, while a pawn down. This should feel bad.

It was necessary to drag the black rook away from the 5th rank and prevent the ...h5! idea: 48.♖h8 h6 49.♗g8! ♖c7 50.♖b8 Black is a pawn up, but without a clear plan to exploit it.

48...h5!

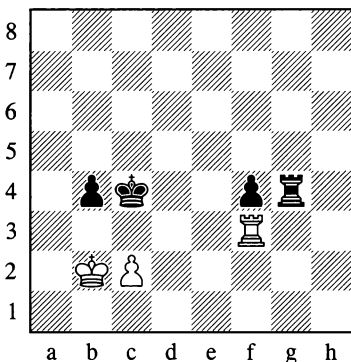
Getting rid of a weakness and creating weaknesses in the white position.

49.gxh5 ♖xh5 50.♖d3 ♖f5!?

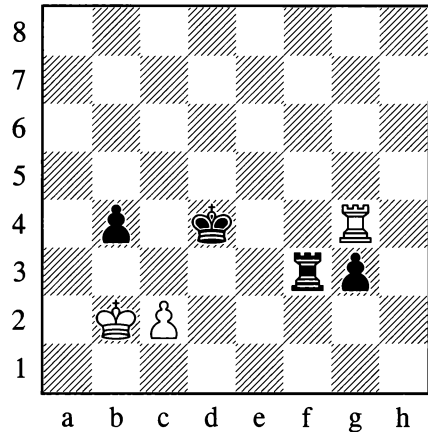
Reorganising the rook is natural, although 50...f5 followed by ...g5 was strong too.

51.♗g3 g5 52.♔b2 ♖f4 53.♖d3 f5 54.♗g3 g4 55.hxg4 fxg4

55...♗xg4? would be a serious mistake. After: 56.♖f3! f4



57.♖f1 the black rook is suddenly out of play on g4. 57...b3! is a funny try, but after 58.♖f3!, White holds the balance. And after 57...♔d4 58.♔b3 ♔e3 59.♔xb4 f3† 60.c4 f2 61.♔b5 White is in time.

56.♖d3 ♖f3 57.♖d8 g3 58.♗g8 ♔d4 59.♗g4†**59...♔c5?**

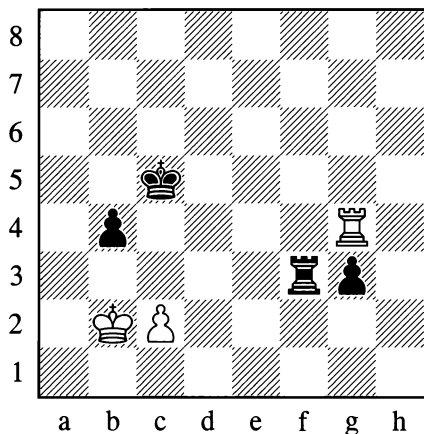
The type of mistake you see a lot of in rapid. The b4-pawn is hanging, so Black defends it without really thinking.

After 59...♔e3! Black would have won on the spot.

60.♔a2?

White missed the idea to play 60.♔c1! ♔b5 61.♔d2, placing the king on a much better square. Black cannot make progress. For example, 61...♔a4 62.♗g8 ♔a3 63.♗g7 ♔b2 64.♗g4! and White holds.

While a lot of this game is about basic ideas we have discussed a lot in this book, we suddenly enter a phase in which everything becomes incredibly deep, with themes such as mutual zugzwang, corresponding squares and triangulation.

**60...♔b5?**

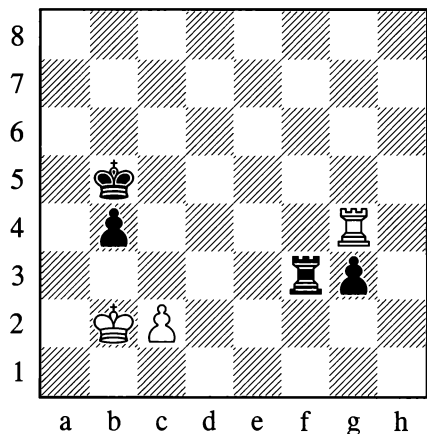
Black could have exploited the poor placement of the king on a2.

60...♔d5! 61.♙xb4 ♕e5 62.♖g4 ♔f5 63.♖g8 ♔f4 Black is winning. For example: 64.c4 ♖c3!; or 64.♔b2 ♖f2 65.♔b3 g2 66.c3 ♔f3 67.♔c4 ♖f1 68.♔d5 g1=♙ 69.♖xg1 ♖xg1 70.c4 ♔f4 and Black wins with the usual single-tempo margin.

61.♔b2?

61.♔b1! (or even 61.♔a1) would have been correct. 61...♔c5 62.♔b2 ♖c3 63.♔b1 ♔d5 64.♔b2 This is the key position. White does not want to play ♔b1, and Black does not want to play 64...♔e5, when White draws with 65.♙xb4 ♖f3 66.♖g4 ♔f5 67.♖g8 and the c-pawn is ready to fly.

After the text move, White should end up in zugzwang.

**61...♖e3?**

61...♖c3!!

This would be a position of mutual zugzwang.

62.♔b1 ♔c5 63.♔b2 ♔d5

The next mutual zugzwang – and the one that hurts.

64.♖xb4

White has to take the pawn, as only Black can improve her position.

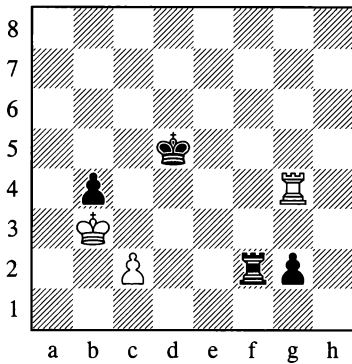
And after 64.♔b1 ♔e5 65.♙xb4, the rook on c3 would not be hanging!

64...♖c4! 65.♖b5† ♔e4 66.♔b3 ♖d4 67.c4 g2 68.♖g5 ♔f3

Black wins, as after 69.♖xg2 ♔xg2 the white king is misplaced.

62.♔a2

White could also try to bring out the king with 62.♔c1 ♖f3 63.♔d2 ♖f2†, when he would have to play accurately to hold the draw: 64.♔c1! (64.♔d3? would lose to 64...g2, when the black king is threatening both to go to a4-a3-b2, to attack the c2-pawn, and to come to the kingside quicker than White can eliminate the b4-pawn.) 64...g2 65.♔b2 ♔c5 66.♔b3 ♔d5



67.c3 White is in time to make the draw:
67...bxc3 68.♔xc3 ♔e5 69.♔d3 ♕f5 70.♔e3!

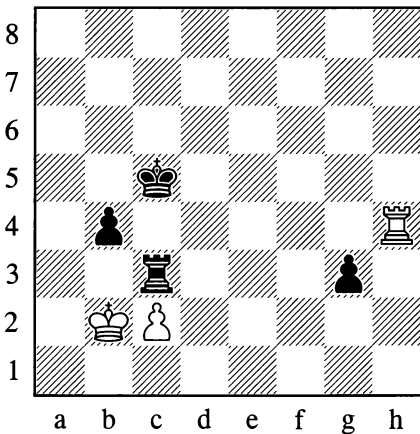
62...♖c3

62...♖a3† 63.♔b1! and White holds.

63.♔b2 ♕c5 64.♖h4?

The window of opportunity for greatness died for White with this peculiar move.

White's defence is still 64.♔b1! ♔d5 65.♔b2! ♕e5 66.♖xb4, drawing.



64...♖f3?

And here it ended for Black.

Black wins after the exceptionally elegant 64...♖c4!! 65.♖h5† ♔d4 66.♖g5 (66.♖h4† is met with 66...♔d5! 67.♖h5† ♕e6, winning) 66...♖c3 67.♖g4† ♔d5! 68.♖xb4 ♖c4! and we have returned to known territory.

65.♖g4 ♔d5 66.♖xb4 ♕e5 67.♖g4 ♕f5 68.♖g8 ♕f4 69.c3?

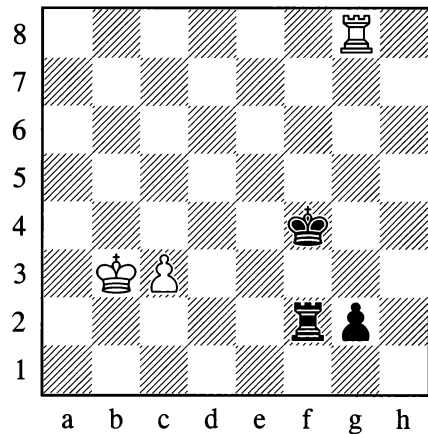
White was holding after 69.c4!, creating the needed counterplay with the c-pawn.

69...♖f2†?

Gifting a tempo away.

Black was winning after 69...♔e3 70.♔b3 ♕f2 71.♔c4 g2 and White is a tempo short.

70.♔b3 g2



71.♔b4??

A terrible way to lose the game, but fitting for the exhaustion that must have kicked in around here.

The standard shouldering manoeuvre 71.♔c4! ♕f3 72.♔d5 holds the draw effortlessly.

71...♕f3 72.♔c5 ♖f1 73.c4 g1=♖† 74.♖xg1 ♖xg1

Black is in good time. White resigned.

0–1

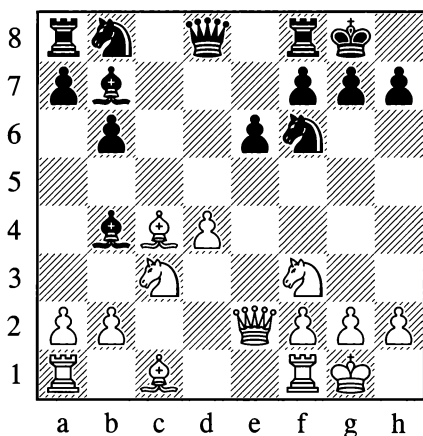
The next game is a rapid play-off game from the 2017 World Cup, where Ding Liren performed excellently and reached the final. In my opinion this was his greatest result, up until he became World Champion in 2023.

Kravtsiv comes poorly out of the opening and will have to defend a worse rook endgame. A lot of the themes we have discussed in this book are present in the game.

Martyn Kravtsiv – Ding Liren

Tbilisi 2017

1.c4 ♘f6 2.♘c3 e6 3.d4 ♙b4 4.e3 0–0 5.♙d3 d5 6.♘f3 dxc4 7.♙xc4 c5 8.0–0 cxd4 9.exd4 b6 10.♞e2 ♙b7



11.♙d1?!

Probably trying to make things up on the spot, but not a likely replacement of 11.♙g5, which is the theoretical move.

11...♙xc3 12.bxc3 ♞c7 13.♘e5

13.♙d2 looks ugly, but is not bad, although Black can force a draw with an amusing combination: 13...♙xf3?! (13...♘e4 is a decent alternative.) 14.♞xf3 ♞xc4 15.♞xa8 ♘c6 16.♞b7 ♘d5 17.♙ac1 ♙b8 18.♞d7 ♙d8.

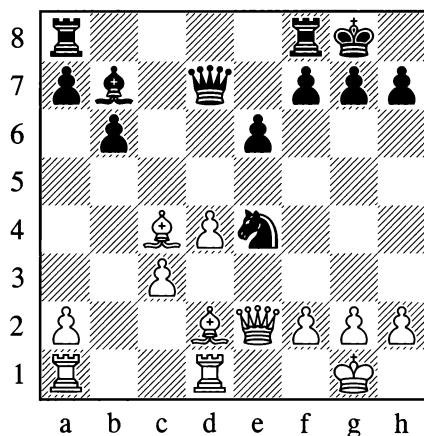
13...♘bd7 14.♘d7 ♞xd7 15.♙d2?!

Already White's task has become one of answering questions.

15.♙d3? ♞c6! would drop a pawn.

15.♙b5!? ♞c7 16.♙b2 might have been the right way to play. Chances are equal.

15...♘e4!



16.f3?

This is a sad positional admission.

White has many ways to be uncomfortable. I am sure that lengthy analysis will reveal a way to defend his position, but in a rapid game, those are not available. 16.♙e1 ♙ac8 17.♙ac1 ♞c6 18.♙d3 ♘c5! 19.f3 ♘xd3 20.♞xd3 ♞a4 is another way for White to face prolonged suffering. 21.c4 ♙a6! is a key point.

16.♙d3 ♘xd2 17.♞xd2 ♙ac8 18.c4 would give White different problems. The pawns in the centre are soft spots.

16...♘xd2 17.♞xd2 ♙ac8 18.♙b3 ♙d5

Black has taken control of the c4-square and is perpetually better.

19.♞d3 ♞c6 20.♙ac1 ♙c4 21.♙xc4 ♞xc4 22.♙c2

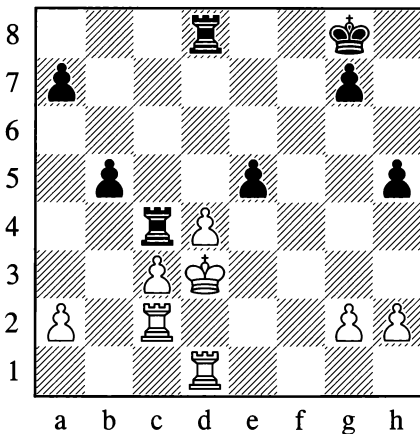
22.♞xc4 ♙xc4 23.d5 e5! is just worse, like every other possibility for White. Finding a draw in a position like this is hard, when you have no activity.

22...♖fd8 23.♔f2 h5 24.♗xc4 ♜xc4 25.♕e2 b5 26.f4 f6 27.♕d3?!

This walks straight into a pin, but in poor positions, there are no easy choices.

27.♖b2! would still give reasonable drawing chances, although White is still worse.

27...e5! 28.fxe5 fxe5

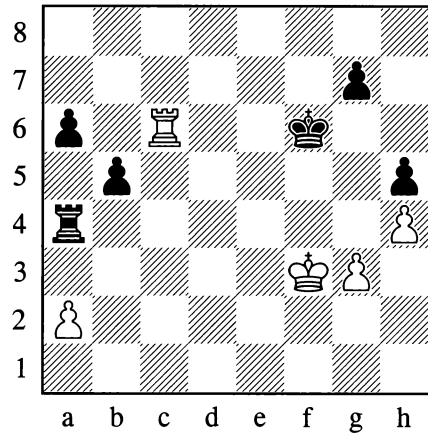


29.♖b1?

White had a last chance to make the draw: 29.♖b2! exd4 (29...a6 30.♕e4! is one of the key points.) 30.♖xb5 ♜xc3† 31.♕e2 ♖e3† 32.♕f2 ♖f8† 33.♕g1 ♖e2 34.h4 and his rooks will stay active and he should make a draw. This book does not cover double rook endgames; mainly due to space concerns. But a key point made by Gelfand is that double rook endings have a higher drawing tendency than rook endings, which are all drawn anyway (according to Dr Tarrasch). The main reason is that it is difficult to involve the king, as two rooks will be able to harass it immensely. The second reason is that a passed pawn can be blocked with one rook, while attacked by an active rook from the side, tying up both of the stronger side's rooks.

29...a6 30.♖bb2 exd4 31.cxd4 ♜dxd4† 32.♕e3 ♖e4† 33.♕f3 ♖f4† 34.♕e3 ♕h7 35.g3 ♖fe4† 36.♕f3 ♜xc2 37.♜xc2 ♖a4

38.h4 ♕g6 39.♜c6† ♕f7 40.♜c7† ♕f6 41.♜c6†



Black has played with a smooth efficiency and won a pawn. But from this point onwards we see a lack of intuition from the Chinese number one, regarding the rook endgame, based on sensible thinking for other types of positions, but a thinking that shows lack of understanding in rook endings. This is somewhat surprising, as with many Chinese players, excellent technique has traditionally been a big strength. But the new generation seems to be more tactically adept and less technical.

41...♕e5 42.♜c5†

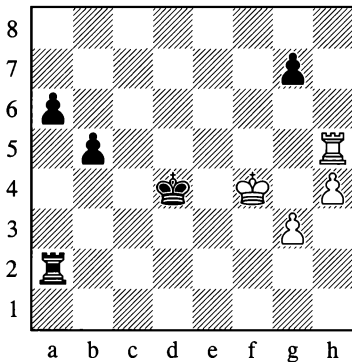
Ding Liren calculates quickly and accurately. There would be no problem seeing the winning continuation if he looked in the right direction. I should maybe mention that he spent 38 seconds on the previous move and just over a minute on this move. It would be very interesting to know what his thoughts were and why he chose to do what he did. All we can do is to look at the logic of the decisions and analyse the position to a clear conclusion.

42...♕f6!?

The right decision based on general grounds should be the first thing that springs to mind:

to bring the king down to assist the passed pawns. But why should it not be used to fight the white passed pawns; you may ask. There are a few reasons, mainly that the black pawns are farther advanced and Black is playing to win. But we should be careful not to create overly complicated strategic concepts that have limited scope. The basic idea of having the king dealing with the passed pawns is simple and useful and would have been enough here, if understood through the lens of multiple examples. With our few examples, we already have a good chance of understanding that the king belongs in front of the black pawns on the queenside.

42...♔d4! 43.♞xh5 ♞a3†! A strong intermediate move, although Black would also be winning after taking the a-pawn directly. 44.♕f4 ♞xa2



45.♞h7 b4 Black is quite clearly a few tempos ahead. A visual inspection cannot be trusted entirely, but it weighs heavily here.

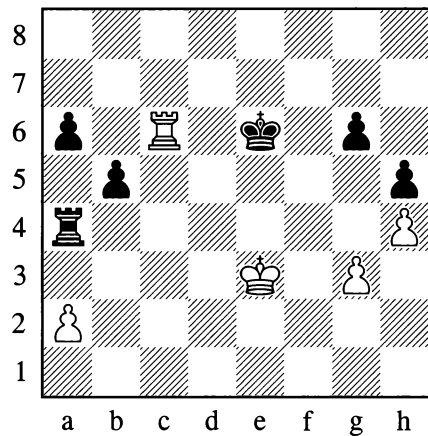
43.♞c6† ♕f7 44.♞c7† ♕g6 45.♞c6† ♕h7 46.♞c2 g6

Black is playing his concept. There were other ways to try to convert the extra pawn, but let us stay with Ding Liren's concept, as it is the one many of the players I have shown the position have gone for.

In two training games (played simultaneously), Indian GMs Aravindh and Karthikeyan Murali found a way to win the game without giving up the kingside pawns. 46...♕h6 47.♞c6† g6 48.♞c2 a5 49.♕e3 ♞g4 50.♕f3 ♞c4 51.♞d2 b4 Black is in control and Karthikeyan won the training game in Chennai Training Camp 2019.

47.♕e3 ♕g7 48.♞c7† ♕f6 49.♞c6† ♕f5 50.♞c5† ♕e6 51.♞c6†

Ten moves later and Ding Liren is still facing the same dilemma. Where should the king go?



51...♕e5?

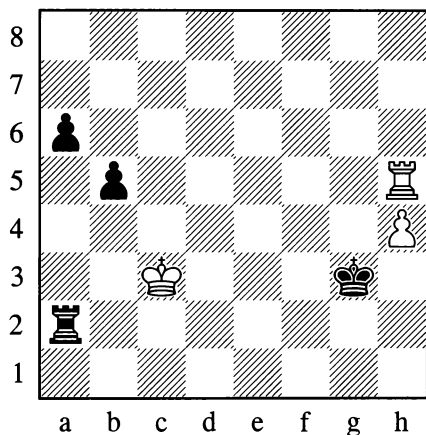
The same mistake as ten moves earlier. The black king belongs on the queenside, as does the white king. With this move Black wins another pawn, but ends up in a drawn endgame.

51...♕d5! was the right choice (similar to the 42...♕d4! line noted earlier). After 52.♞xg6 the "best" win is: 52...♞xa2 53.♞g5† ♕c4 54.♞xh5 b4! Pushing the passed pawns. 55.♞h8 a5 (Keeping the pawns together, although 55...b3 also looked good.) 56.h5 a4 57.g4 a3 It is clear that Black is arriving first.

52.♖xg6 ♖a3† 53.♗d2 ♖xa2†

53...♗d4 54.♗c2! and White is within the drawing margin.

54.♗c3 ♗e4 55.♖g5 ♗f3 56.♖xh5 ♗xg3

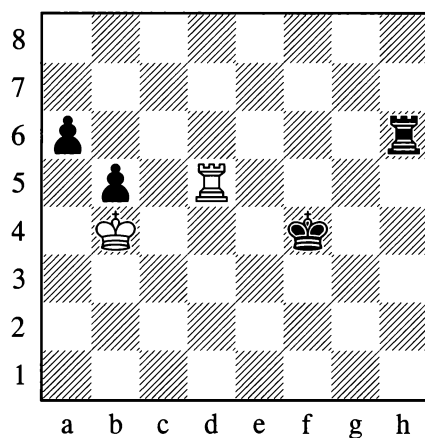


White has managed to eliminate the h5-pawn and Black's passed pawns are currently under control. The endgame can be held for White, but it is far from easy to play.

57.♖h8 ♖a4 58.h5 ♗g4 59.♗b3 ♗g5
60.♗b2 ♖h4 61.♖a8 ♖b4† 62.♗c3 ♖c4†
63.♗b3 ♖c6 64.♖h8 ♖h6

With nice play Ding Liren has managed to win a second pawn, but the white rook is active, the white king is dealing excellently with the passed pawns and the black pieces are entirely cut off.

65.♖d8 ♗xh5 66.♖d5† ♗g4 67.♗b4 ♗f4



We have reached a deeply interesting endgame with rook and two pawns vs rook, where the objective evaluation is that White should make a draw, due to his well-placed king. Below we shall see various reasons why one position is a draw and another lost. It is all about White restricting Black's possibility for untangling himself.

68.♖d1 ♗e3 69.♗c5?

An innocent-looking move, but actually a mistake.

69.♖a1! would be a natural move. Black will not be able to bring the king to b7, as there would always be ♖xa6 at some point.

69...♗e2?

69...♖h4! would have cut off the white king and ensured a win. For example, after 70.♖a1 ♗d3! Black is winning. The b-pawn will run off soon.

70.♖d4?

After 70.♖a1! ♗d3 71.♗b4 Black cannot improve his position in a meaningful way, as above.

70...♖h1?

70...♔e3! 71.♞d1 ♞h4! still wins.

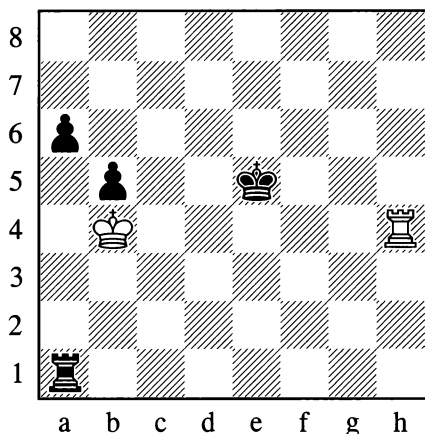
71.♞d6 ♞a1 72.♞h6?

72.♔b4! ♞a4† 73.♔b3 with a draw.

72...♔d3?

72...♞a4! would cut off the white king once again.

73.♔b4 ♞b1† 74.♔a5 ♞a1† 75.♔b4 ♔d4
76.♞h4† ♔e5



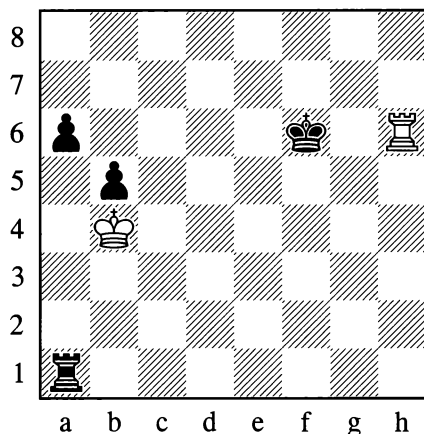
Black is threatening 77...♞a4†, so White has to abandon the 4th rank.

77.♞h5†?

77.♔c5? would lose, but the path is long.
77...♔f5 78.♞b4 ♞c1† 79.♔d5 ♞e1 80.♔c5
♞e4 81.♞b1 ♞a4 82.♞b2 ♔e6 83.♞b3 ♔d7
Black is slowly making progress; but there is a long way to go.

77.♞h6!! would set up the fortress that arises in the game.

77...♔f6 78.♞h6†



78...♔g5?

If Black had played 78...♔g7!, he would have been able to remove the white king and bring his own king to the queenside. For example: 79.♞b6 (After 79.♞h2 ♞a4† 80.♔b3 there is a hole on a5 for the black king for later. After the black king comes to b7, White cannot prevent ...♔b6-a5 without allowing ...♞c4-c6, which will untangle the black forces and get the pawns going.) 79...♞a4† 80.♔b3 ♔f7 Again the king goes to b7 and eventually hides on a5.

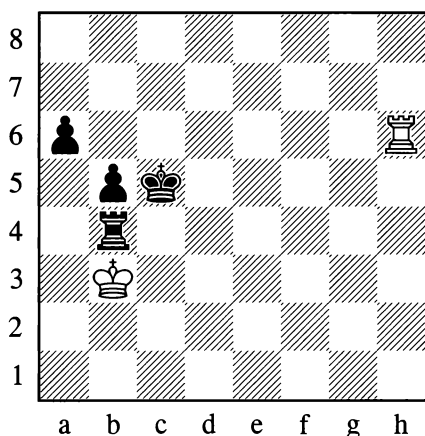
79.♞d6 ♞a4† 80.♔b3

The black king is on the wrong side of the 6th rank. It cannot reach the b7-square, which means that the black rook is tied down to the a6-pawn.

80...♔f5 81.♞h6 ♔e5 82.♞g6 ♔d5 83.♞f6
♔c5 84.♞h6 ♞a1 85.♔b2

Not giving Black any breathing room.

85...♞a4 86.♔b3 ♞b4†



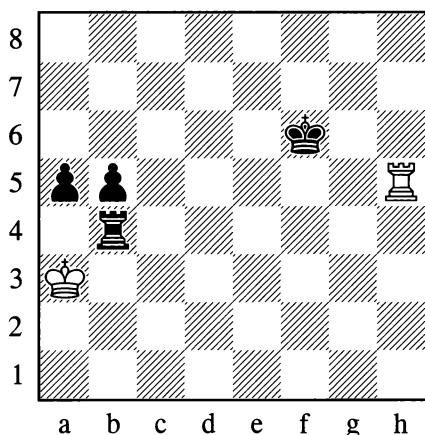
87.♔a3!

87.♔c3? would allow 87...♖c4†! 88.♔b3 a5 when Black is making real progress.

87...a5 88.♖h5† ♔d6 89.♖h6† ♔e5 90.♖h5†!

Again, 90.♖a6? would lose to 90...♖a4† 91.♔b3 ♔d4 followed by ...♖c4. Black will eventually be able to put the king on b6 and block checks with ...♖c6, when he is winning slowly.

90...♔f6



91.♖h6†?

The final mistake. If the white rook had kept the king cut off along the 5th rank, the draw was still there. The key point is that White

should not start giving checks until Black would be unable to get to g4 in response to a check on h5.

So, after 91.♖c5 ♔e6 92.♖g5 ♔d6 93.♖h5 ♔c6 White can give checks: 94.♖h6† ♔d5 95.♖h5† with a draw.

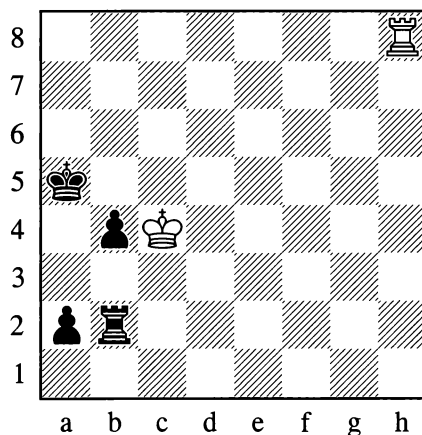
91...♔g5 92.♖a6 ♖a4† 93.♔b3 ♔f5 94.♖h6 ♖g4 95.♖b6 a4† 96.♔a2

96.♔a3 ♖g3† 97.♔a2 ♖b3 and wins.

96...♖b4 97.♖h6 ♖b3

Black is in complete control, but the end is worth including.

98.♖h4 ♔e5 99.♖g4 ♔d5 100.♖h4 ♔c5 101.♖h5† ♔b4 102.♖h4† ♔a5 103.♖h5 ♖f3 104.♖g5 a3 105.♖g4 b4 106.♖h4 ♖f2† 107.♔b3 ♖b2† 108.♔c4 a2 109.♖h8



109...♖c2† 110.♔b3 a1=♘#!

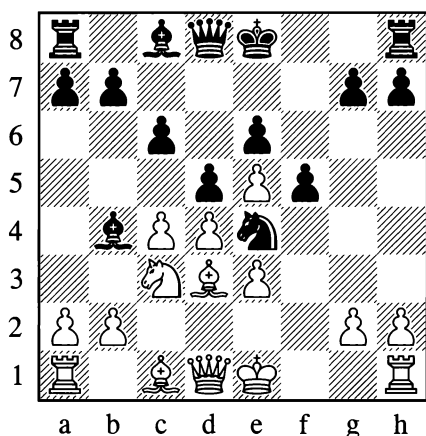
0-1

The following game, also given in its entirety, is not as deep as some of the others. I could not locate the right chapter to put it in; but on the other hand, I did not want it not to be in the book. Mostly because of the cool zugzwang on move 33 – but also because it's a great game overall (from the Swedish Championship).

Isak Storme – Tiger Hillarp Persson

Helsingborg 2021

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 c6 4.e3 f5 5.♘c3 ♘f6
6.♘e5 ♘bd7 7.f4 ♘b4 8.♘d3 ♘xe5 9.fxe5
♘e4



10.♘e4?!

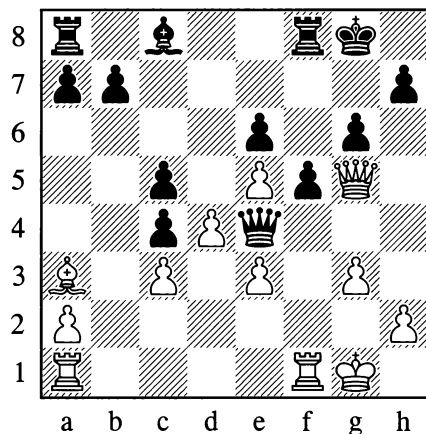
10.0–0! with a slight edge was stronger. The key strategic point is that if Black starts grabbing material with 10...♘xc3?! 11.bxc3 ♘xc3, then 12.♖h5†! g6 13.♖h6 gives White a strong initiative, the tactical point being that 13...♘xa1? 14.♖g7 ♖f8 15.♘a3 wins on the spot.

10...♖h4† 11.g3 ♘xc3† 12.bxc3 ♖xe4

Black is surprisingly a bit better. The weaknesses of the light squares is substantial.

13.0–0 dxc4 14.♖h5† g6 15.♖g5 0–0
16.♘a3 c5!

It is more important to open the long diagonal for the bishop than to count pawns.



17.♖f4!

White is back to being OK.

17.♘xc5? would lose immediately to 17...b6!
18.♘xf8 ♘b7.

17...♖xf4 18.exf4 cxd4?

Tiger is one of the most creative players I know; and I know him well, as we often sit next to each other in the Danish League. But this exchange sac is just nuts. I asked Tiger about it and he said he was trying to bring the game out of balance. Taking these chances was not sensible and could have lost the game.

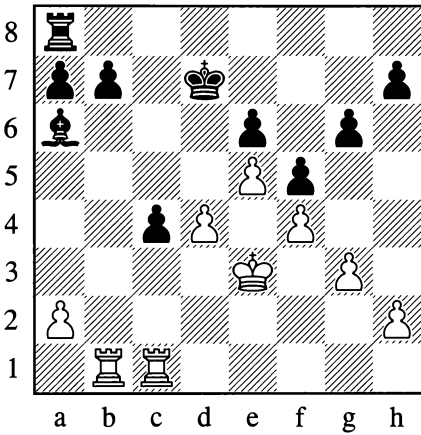
18...♘d7 with even play was prudent.

19.♘xf8 ♖xf8 20.cxd4 ♘d7 21.♖fc1 ♘b5!?

Practically a good decision.

21...b5 22.a4 would split the black pawns.

22.♖ab1 ♘a6 23.♖f2 ♖e7 24.♖e3 ♖d7



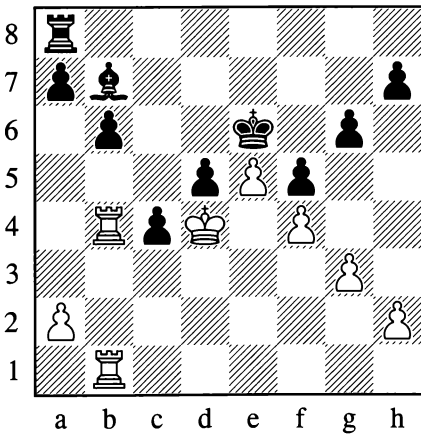
25.d5!?

Not the only idea, but activating the king makes good sense.

25...exd5 26.♔d4 ♕e6 27.♞b4?

27.♞c3! with the idea of ♞a3-a5-c5 would have won the game quickly, I think.

27...b6 28.♞cb1 ♙b7

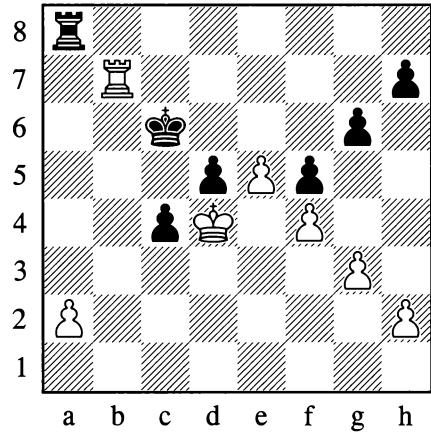


29.♞xb6†?

Returning the exchange and in practice going from playing for a win to playing for a draw.

29.♞a4!! was White's last chance to win the game. The rook will end up on a3, tying down the black pieces, making it possible for White to open a second front on the kingside.

29...axb6 30.♞xb6† ♔d7 31.♞xb7† ♕c6



32.♞b2?

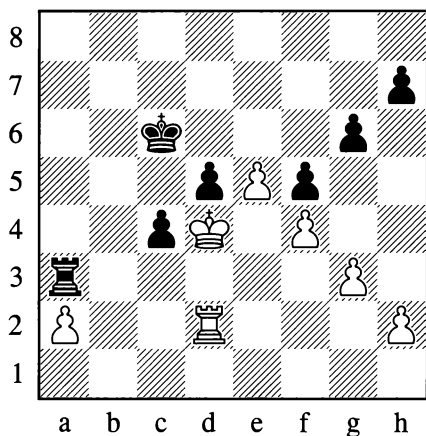
32.♞f7! was the only move. The key line is: 32...♞xa2 33.♞f6† ♔d7 34.♔xd5 c3 35.♞f7†, when White either keeps giving checks or is allowed to come in behind the c-pawn.

32...♞a3!

Threatening mate and forcing White into passivity.

33.♞d2

White also loses after 33.e6 ♞d3† 34.♔e5 ♞e3†!, followed either by 35.♔d4 ♞e4† and 36...♔c5, or by 35.♔f6 c3, when the pawns are too strong.

**33...♖f3?**

33...h5! would have put White into zugzwang. The key variation is not too deep: 34.e6 ♕d6 35.e7 ♕xe7, with the idea 36.♕xd5 ♖d3† and the pawn promotes.

34.♖d1?

White misses a chance to make the draw after 34.e6! ♕d6 35.a4! ♕xe6 (or 35...♖a3 36.e7!) 36.♕c5! ♖d3 37.♖a2 with sufficient counterplay.

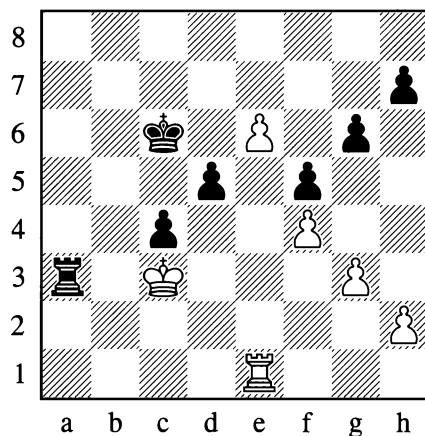
34...♖f2?

34...♖a3! 35.♖d2 h5 was winning again.

35.♖e1!?

35.a4! was more principled, to create the most possible counterplay, using the assets. 35...♖a2 36.♖e1 ♖a3 37.♖d1 ♖xa4 38.e6! ♕d6 39.e7 ♕xe7 40.♕xd5 White draws.

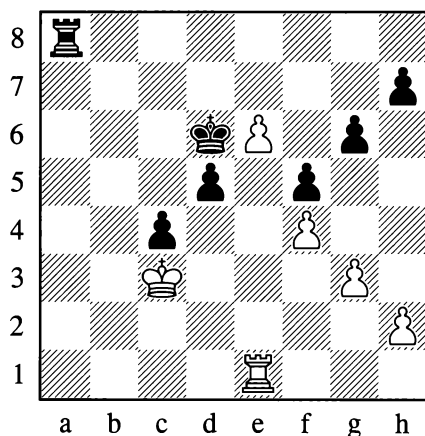
35...♖d2† 36.♕c3 ♖xa2 37.e6 ♖a3†

**38.♕d2?**

White was still drawing after 38.♕b2 ♖b3† 39.♕c2 ♖b8 40.♕c3 ♕c5 41.♖e5! ♖e8 42.e7 and Black cannot make progress. He has to move the king soon and White gets in ♕c3-d4, drawing.

38...♖a8?

38...d4! just won. 39.e7 ♖a2† is the key point. It may seem elementary by now, but this is a grandmaster missing “checks in rook endings”. It’s a common mistake. 40.♕d1 ♖a1† 41.♕e2 ♖xe1† 42.♕xe1 ♕d7 White can resign.

39.♕c3 ♕d6

40.e7?

An unfortunate “move 40 mistake” from White, blundering away the e-pawn.

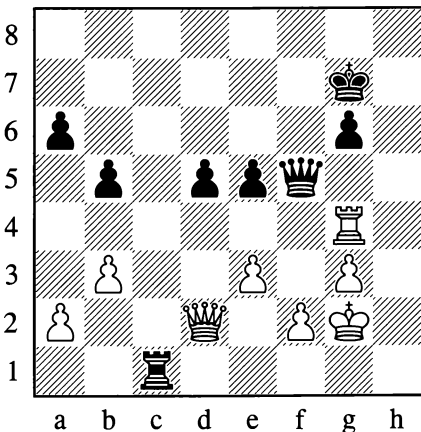
40.♖e5! would have held. The e-pawn will go forward. The key idea is 40...♖e8 41.♔d4! and the draw is near.

40...♖e8 41.♖a1 ♖xe7 42.♖a6† ♔c5 43.♖a5† ♔c6 44.♖a8 ♖e3† 45.♔d4 ♖d3† 46.♔e5 c3 0–1

The following game was not well played, but has proven to be a fantastic resource for me to teach the principles of rook endings over the years. While completely winning for Black, many players have failed to overcome the decent defensive effort I have been able to present them with in training games, with only a handful managing to win. I have deep analysis going in many directions, all of them interesting, but we shall focus on the main points, to keep the percentage of pure gold instruction high.

Viktor Laznicka – Arkadij Naiditsch

Linares 2017

**33...♖c2!?**

The most natural move.

34.e4 ♖xe4†!

The rook ending is more promising than the queen ending.

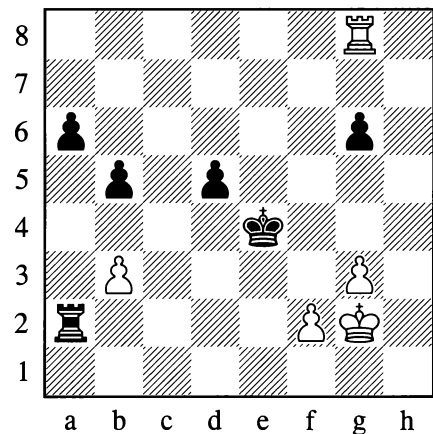
34...♖xg4? 35.♖xc2 ♖xe4† 36.♖xe4 dxe4 37.b4!

37.♔f1? would give Black the chance to play 37...b4! winning. The idea is that Black has an extra pawn, which is doubled, but will take a tempo to capture, as well as an extra tempo with ...a6-a5 at the time of mutual zugzwang.

37...♔f6 38.♔f1 ♔e6 39.♔e2 ♔d5 40.♔e3 ♔c4 41.♔xe4 ♔xb4 42.♔xe5 ♔a3 43.f4 ♔xa2 44.g4 b4 45.f5 gxf5 46.gxf5 b3 47.f6 b2 48.f7 b1=♖ 49.f8=♖

This queen ending was reached in three training games with kids playing each other in teams in Kolkata 2017. They all missed the accurate move order on move 37 – and Black won the queen ending in all three cases. As repeated throughout the book, this ending is difficult to hold in rapid, but should be held in classical.

35.♖xe4 ♖xd2 36.♖xe5 ♔f6 37.♖e8 ♖xa2 38.♖d8 ♔e5 39.♖g8 ♔f5?! 40.♖d8 ♔e4? 41.♖g8



We have passed the time control and Black has a completely winning rook ending, despite a few inaccuracies. With his next two moves, which lose a heavy amount of time that could be spent focusing on what is good about the Black position, the win slipped away.

41...b4? 42.♞xg6 a5? 43.g4!

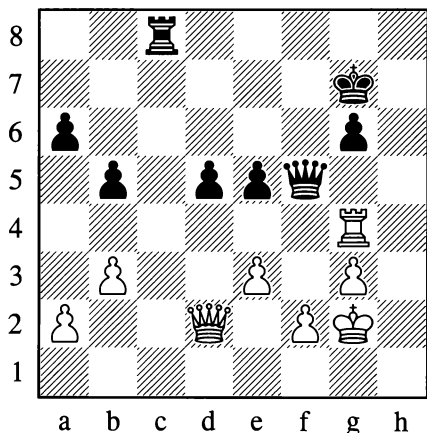
Creating counterplay and making the draw.

43...d4 44.g5 a4 45.bxa4 ♞xa4 46.♞b6 d3 47.g6 d2 48.♞d6 ♞a6 49.♞xd2 ♞xg6† 50.♔f1 b3 51.♔e2 ♞b6 52.♞d1 b2 53.♞b1 ♔d4 54.♔d2 ♞f6 55.♞xb2 ♞xf2† 56.♔c1 ♞xb2 57.♔xb2

½–½

To start off with. There was nothing objectively wrong with the starting move, but Black had a surprising alternative that would have won the game quickly.

33...♞c8!!



The rook gets out of harm's way, making the threat of ...♞xg4 real.

34.♞e2

It is difficult finding ideas for White.

Only after 34.♞h4 would Black play 34...♞c2!. One of the main reasons is that after 35.e4 ♞xd2 36.exf5 the g6-pawn is no longer pinned and can recapture.

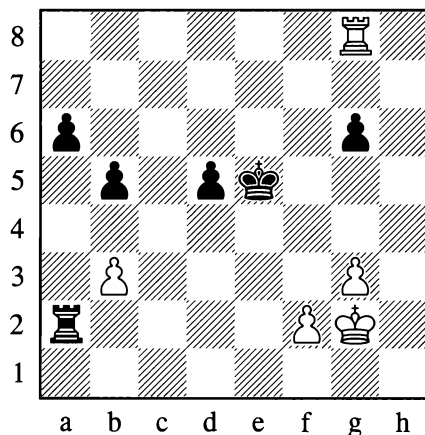
34...♞h5!

Pinning the rook on g4 and preparing an invasion along the h-file.

35.♞d1 ♞h8 36.♔f1 ♞h3† 37.♔e1 ♞g2

Black has a winning attack.

The first mistake Black made was to play:



39...♔f5?!

We have discussed at length the core principles of rook endgames, the most central being the ubiquitous endgame theme of promoting pawns. This can only happen if we push them. The main reason Naiditsch squandered his advantage is that he never pushed the d-pawn.

39...d4!

This may not be the most natural move to those using middlegame intuition; but for those with a developed sense of the endgame, it is.

40.♞xg6

The only critical move.

40...d3

We can see, compared to the game, that the

king is better on e5 than on e4. White's rook cannot easily get behind the d-pawn.

41.♔f3 ♕d4!?

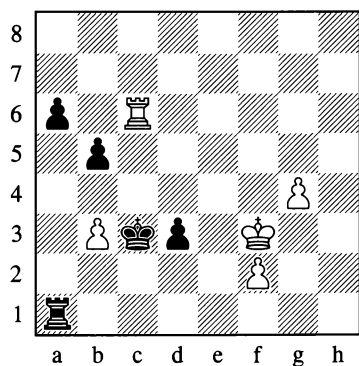
The most natural move. The king comes in to help the pawn promote. It would be wrong to push the d-pawn too far, as the white king could get close.

But Black also has 41...♞e2!!, cutting off the white king. The few times this has happened in training games, I have resigned as White.

42.♞d6† ♕c3 43.g4 ♖a1!

Black is winning with a margin of about two tempos, so there are many winning moves here, wasting between a half and a full tempo. The text move is a natural and strong choice, preparing to promote the d-pawn and to get behind the white pawns.

44.♞c6†

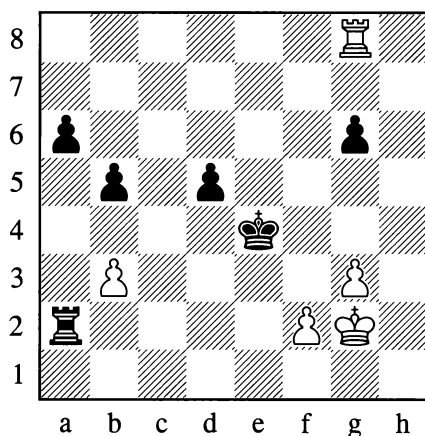


Black can take on b3, but can also win with: 44...♕d2!? 45.b4 ♕d1!

The most accurate, after which the d-pawn cannot be stopped.

I managed to win a training game with White after: 45...♕e1?! 46.♞h6! ♞a3? (46...♕d2! would return to where we just were.) 47.♞h1† ♕d2 48.g5 ♞c3 49.g6 ♕c2 50.♕g4 d2 51.f4 d1=♚†? (Black could still hold with something like: 51...♞e3 52.f5 ♞e1 53.♞h2 ♞f1 with some complications remaining.) 52.♞xd1 ♕xd1 53.g7 ♞c2 54.♕g3 ♞c8 55.f5 and I queened one of the pawns.

40.♞d8 ♕e4 41.♞g8



Remember in the game, Naiditsch played: 41...b4? and the advantage was gone.

Ivan Salgado Lopez found the best continuation in his rapid game attempt. After 41...♕f5! 42.♞d8 ♕e5! 43.♞g8 d4! he had managed to transition back to the main winning line above, which he duly followed.

41...d4!?

Black was also still winning by pushing the passed pawn, although the variation is a lot more complicated now. The win perhaps has a margin of something like one-and-a-half tempo, which may not make a lot of sense logically, but makes sense if you have an emotional interpretation of the freedom to make an extra lax move, which is not an outright mistake, before blowing it all.

42.♞xg6 d3 43.♞d6 ♞a3

This was tried by GM Rakhmanov in a training game.

The talented Tania Sachdev found 43...a5!? 44.g4 b4 45.g5 ♞c2! with the idea of ...♞c7. Black wins here too.

44.g4 ♞xb3 45.g5 ♞c3 46.g6 ♞c7 47.♕f1 b4 48.♕e1 a5!

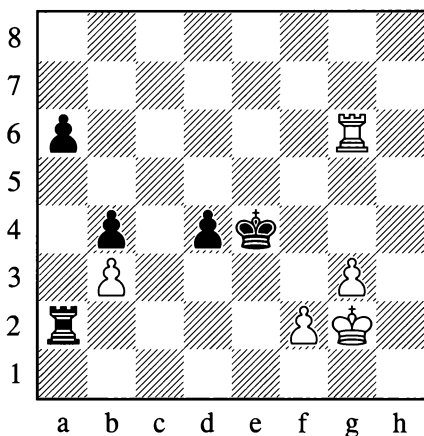
A key move. The pawns do not win after a brute force sprint, but have to stick together. 48...b3? 49.♞b6 and the win had slipped out of Alexander's hands.

49.♖b6 ♔d4

Black remains in control and wins.

The final point is that although it was not winning, Black should definitely have played:

42...d4!



The drawing line from here is fabulous and I have given this position as a playing position to many grandmasters (always with an hour on the clock). Only two of them managed to hold the draw.

43.g4!

White desperately needs counterplay.

Some training games went: 43.♖e6† ♔d3 44.g4 ♖e2! 45.♖c6 ♖e8 46.f4 a5 47.f5 a4 48.bxa4 ♖b8!! and Black wins.

43...d3 44.g5!

The most flexible approach is to delay decisions to follow circumstances.

Checking the black king would mainly force it to go to a better square. 44.♖e6†? ♔d4 45.♖d6† (45.g5 ♖e2! wins an important tempo for Black.) 45...♔c3 46.g5 ♖e2 Black is winning. For example: 47.♖xa6 d2 48.♖d6 ♔c2 and either the pawn queens, or the b3-pawn goes. Or both.

44.♖d6? has been tried a number of times too. Danish GM Jesper Thybo came up with a stronger win than I did in 44...a5! 45.g5 ♖c2 46.g6 ♖c7 and White cannot defend against two passed pawns from behind.

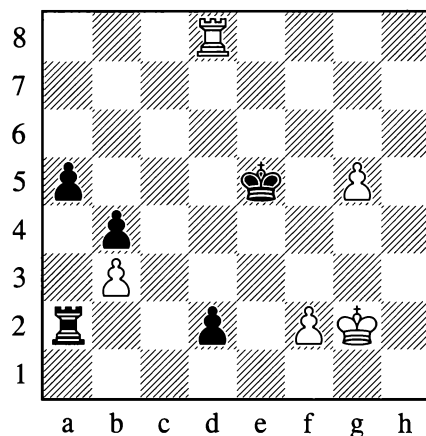
44...d2 45.♖d6 ♔e5!

An important tempo-gainer that almost wins the game.

46.♖d8

46.♖d7 transposes.

46...a5



Black's pawns are coming quick. It is surprising that White can make the draw.

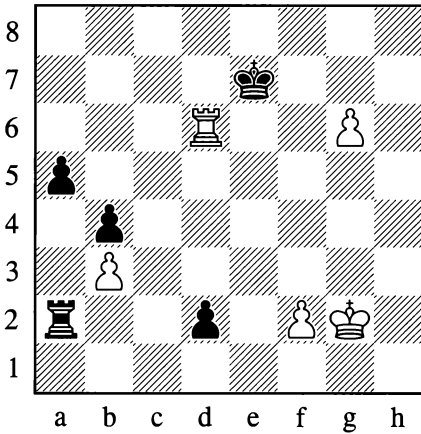
47.g6!

White needs to be hyperactive in order to hold.

47.♔g3? is too slow. After 47...a4 48.f4† ♔f5! 49.♔f3 ♖c2! Black is on his way to winning.

47...♔f6 48.♖d6† ♔e7!?

Worth trying.



49.♞d8!!

An important move from the tricks department.

49...♟f6

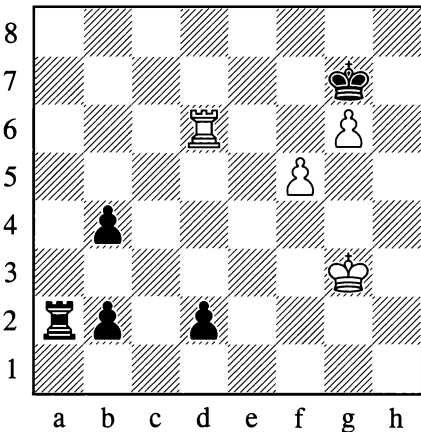
OK, that did not work out, so we return to the main line.

49...♟xd8 50.g7 d1=♞ 51.g8=♞† allows White to make a draw by perpetual. The black heavy pieces are not able to help the black king find a safe haven.

50.♞d6† ♟g7 51.♟g3 a4 52.f4!

White has no time to waste.

52...axb3 53.f5 b2



54.♞d7†!

Those beautiful checks.

54...♟f8

54...♟f6?? 55.♟f4 and Black is mated.

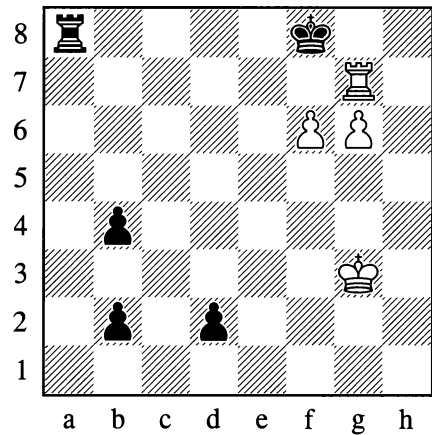
55.f6

Threatening mate also.

55...♞a8 56.♞f7†

56.♞h7 ♟e8 57.♞e7† works in the same way.

56...♟g8 57.♞g7† ♟f8



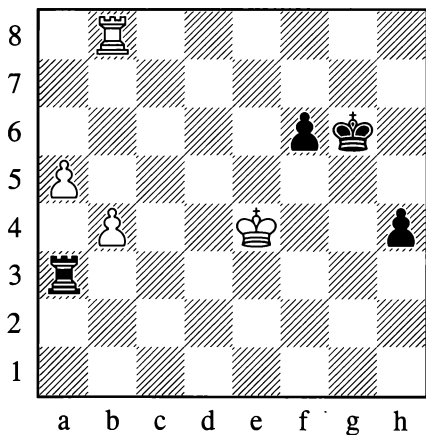
58.♞f7† ♟e8 59.♞e7†

With a draw, achieved by Aravindh in 2019 and Sam Shankland in 2020. Black has to return to the kingside not to see the g-pawn promote with mate.

The following endgame is one of my favourite pieces of chess art ever. Analysing this endgame for close to 100 hours, alone and with students, I have found so many interesting points and variations that presenting them here over just a few pages is intensely unsatisfactory. The game was played in a rapid play-off at the earlier stages of the World Cup and was most likely ignored by all but me. The players made a lot of the important decisions in this game within 1-2 seconds and perhaps never looked back at them either. When we enter the game, it is clear that White has the advantage, as his king is better placed and the connected passed pawns are stronger than the split pawns. But the position should still be within a drawing margin for Black, as the h-pawn is well advanced. As elsewhere in this book, the annotations do not correspond perfectly with computer evaluations, but presumes that chess is played between two humans without access to assistance and thus the difficulty of the decisions each player will have to make weighs in heavily on the evaluation of the quality of the moves.

Hrant Melkumyan – Boris Grachev

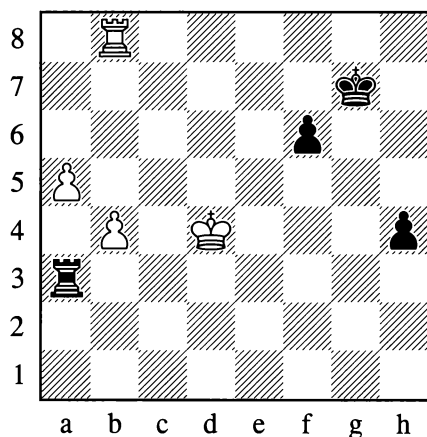
Tbilisi 2017



50.♔d4 ♕g7?! 51.♖b7† ♕g6 52.♖b8 ♕g7?!

Black is happy to repeat, but should perhaps have pondered if the white rook really is so glorious behind the h-pawn.

A better idea was to advance his king with 52...♔g5!, making the draw with ease. As we shall see below, Black will always have to advance the king anyway, so he cannot feasibly prevent White from playing ♖h8, should he want to.



53.♖c8?!

Logic will tell you that the white rook does not belong in the c-file, where it will lose flexibility between going to c1 and c2, a decision that has to be made in advance, so he can continue with ♕c5-b6. The rook also does not belong in the e-file, as the advancing f-pawn will win a tempo, vital in any race. So, the rook belongs in the d-file, meaning that White should play the move that will always be the same first.

We will analyse 53.♕c5! below. First we will see some of the amazing variations that could have arisen in the game.

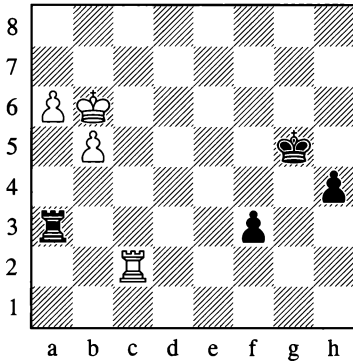
53...h3!

The correct move. Advance the best passed pawn, as long as you stay in control of it.

53...f5!?

This is less natural, but still within the drawing range.

54.♖c2 ♔f6 55.♕c5 f4 56.♕b6 ♔g5 57.b5 f3 58.a6



Black's only drawing idea is something from out of space.

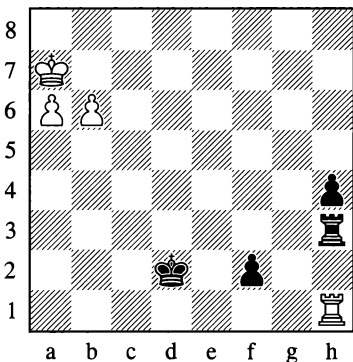
58...♕f4!!

58...♕g4?! looks natural and loses. 59.♕a7 ♕g3 60.b6 f2 61.♖c1! Delaying giving up the rook until the last moment. (61.b7? ♖xa6†! does not win for Black, but with such a gross blunder, White does deserve to lose. After 62.♕xa6 f1=♖† 63.♕a7 ♖a1† 64.♕b6 ♖b1† 65.♕a7 ♖xc2 66.b8=♖† he would still have to redeem himself in this not entirely trivial, but still theoretically drawn, ending.) 61...♕g2 62.b7 White wins by a tempo.

59.♕a7 ♕e3 60.b6 f2 61.♖c1 ♕d2!

Winning an important tempo.

62.♖h1 ♖h3!!



Black draws by chasing the rook along the 1st rank.

63.♖xh3!? can be tried, but as we shall see in several places in the analysis to this game, this does not win. 63...f1=♖ 64.♖xh4 ♖f2 White cannot make progress.

White is now prematurely forced to choose between the 1st and the 2nd rank. Melkumyan felt it was natural to stop the black pawns as early as possible.

54.♖c2

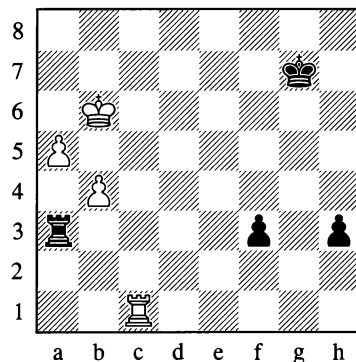
54.♖c1!?

A tricky move, as 54...h2? would lose (see 53.♕c5! analysed below on page 389; the points are the same). But Black has other possibilities.

54...f5!?

54...♕g6 also draws, but a lot less entertainingly.

55.♕c5 f4 56.♕b6 f3



White has two strong tries:

a) 57.♖c2

Blocking the pawns from advancing, forcing Black to find a few accurate moves.

57...♖e3!!

Activating the rook and allowing the a-pawn to run is the only way for Black to proceed.

58.a6

Another difficult moment.

58...♖e6†!

Check the checks! The white king cannot hide from them further up the board and will have to retreat. This tempo is highly useful for Black.

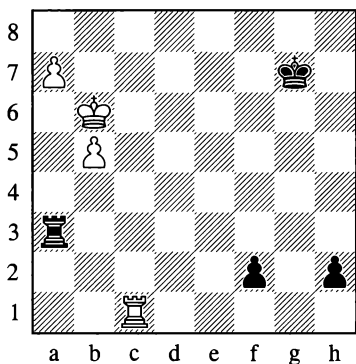
58...♞e2? 59.a7 ♞xc2 60.a8=♞ f2 61.♞f3 h2 62.b5 ♜g6 (62...♞c1? 63.♞g2†! wins both pawns) 63.♞d3† ♜g5 64.♞xc2 f1=♞ 65.♞xh2 This endgame is objectively drawn, but practically almost impossible to hold. In a classical game, it may be possible to draw against the a-pawn, but in rapid even this is difficult, as a recent high-level game showed. One mistake and you are lost. With the b-pawn, people don't draw in practical games. One example is Deac – Shankland, Douglas 2019.

59.♜a5 ♞e2 60.♞c1 h2 61.b5 ♜g6 62.b6 ♞a2† 63.♜b5 ♞b2†

Black makes the draw. White can try to “sacrifice” by allowing Black to play ...♞c2†, but it is silly. White should still make the draw, but the risk is not worth it.

More natural is:

b) 57.b5! f2 58.a6 h2 59.a7



Black is seemingly lost. The attempt to be creative with 59...♞c3 loses to 60.a8=♞ ♞xc1 61.♞g2†!. But we can quickly see that the king is perfectly placed in all variations. If it goes to h7, White will eventually play ♞h1 and threaten take the h2-pawn with check. 59...♜h7? 60.♜b7! ♞c3 61.♞h1!. The same would be the case if the king goes to f7, only now it will be ♞xf2† that wins the

game for White. And if the king goes to g6, White will play 60.♜b7! and after 60...♞h3 61.a8=♞ h1=♞ 62.♞xh1 ♞xh1, he will have 63.♞g8†, winning. So, seemingly Black is lost. Whatever he does, White plays ♜b7 on the next move, promoting the pawn. But it is now time to talk about the downsides of 60.♜b7. After this move, the queen on a8 is temporarily out of play. The diagonal a8-h1(g2) is blocked and there are no useful checks. This downside means that if Black could only keep status quo, he would make the draw. And he can:

59...♞a4!! 60.♜b7 ♞h4!

The rook can also go to c4 first, but not f4, as there is a dangerous check on a1. With the white rook on h1, this is not dangerous, as Black would have ...♞xa1.

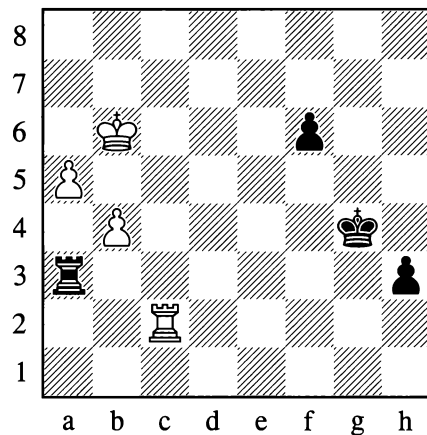
61.♞h1

61.a8=♞ h1=♞† 62.♞xh1 ♞xh1 draws.

61...♞f4 62.♞f1 ♞h4

Black holds.

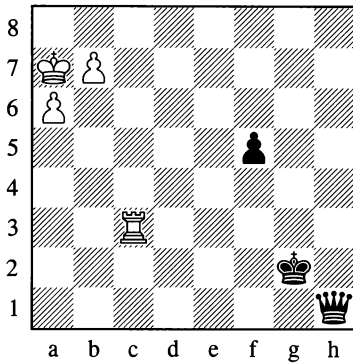
54...♜g6 55.♜c5 ♜g5 56.♜b6 ♜g4



57.a6?!

After this Black draws effortlessly.

White could have caused more practical problems for Black with: 57.b5! f5 58.a6 ♜g3 59.♜a7 h2 60.♞c1 ♜g2 61.b6 ♞c3! 62.♞xc3 h1=♞ 63.b7



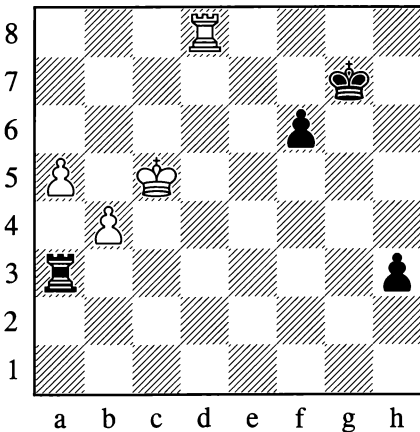
63...♔d1!! 64.♖c7 ♔d4† 65.♕a8 ♔d5 Black draws. White will never be able to get the king out and promote the pawns. There are too many checks.

57...♔g3 58.a7 h2 59.♖c1 ♔g2 60.♕b7 h1=♔ 61.♖xh1 ♕xh1 62.b5 f5 63.b6 f4 64.♕c8 f3 65.b7 ♖xa7 66.b8=♔ f2 67.♔xa7 ½–½

As entertaining as this may be, the most instructive part is looking at the best play.

53.♕c5!

53.♖d8! h3 54.♕c5 is a transposition, but also really weird.



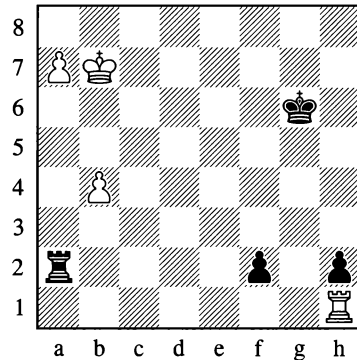
For a long time, I had this as a playing exercise, which was solved only by the amazing Adhiban Baskaran from Chennai. It was around this time that I came to understand that despite his hellraiser personality, Adhiban's greatest strength is perhaps his endgame play. Quite an unusual thing for such a brilliantly original and dynamic player.

53...h3

This appears to be the most logical move.

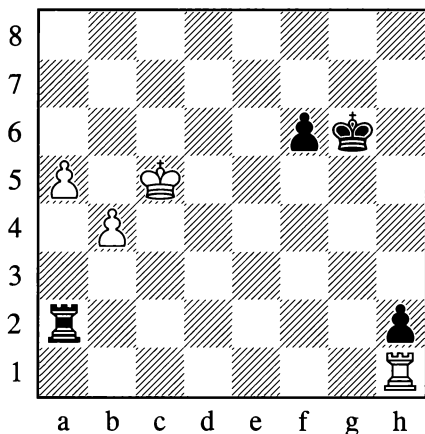
54.♖d8! h2

54...f5 also fails. 55.♕b6 h2 (55...f4 56.♖d2! shows the value of keeping the flexibility. White wins with the normal moves 57.b5, 58.a6 and 59.♕a7!.) 56.♖d1 f4 57.♖h1! ♖a2 58.a6 f3 59.a7! A little unusual. (The usual method, 59.b5? f2 60.♕a7? loses half a point per move, as after 60...♖e2! Black will queen a pawn first.) 59...f2 60.♕b7 ♔g6



61.b5!! This is the brilliant move. White needs to queen the right pawn in the end; and in this game, it is always the b-pawn. 61...♔g5 62.b6 ♕g4 63.♕c6 ♔g3 64.b7 ♕g2 65.♖xh2†! ♕xh2 66.b8=♔ ♔g2 67.♔g8† White wins.

55.♖d1 ♕g6 56.♖h1! ♖a2



57.♔c4!!

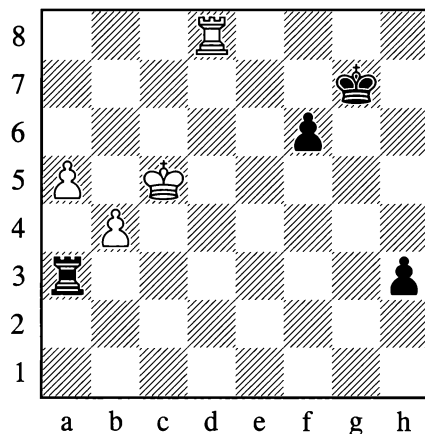
This is the surprising move. White has not advanced his pawns too far. It is still possible to kick the black rook away from its perfect place on a2.

57.♔b6? would allow Black to draw by a tempo. 57...♔g5 58.a6 ♔g4 59.b5 ♔g3 60.♔a7 ♔g2 61.♙xh2† ♔xh2 62.b6 f5 63.b7 ♙b2 64.♔a8 f4 65.a7 ♙xb7! 66.♔xb7 f3 67.a8=♙ f2 With a draw.

57...♔f5 58.♔b3 ♙g2 59.a6 ♙g3† 60.♔c4 ♙a3 61.b5 ♙a2 62.♙xh2! ♙xh2 63.b6

I resigned in the training game against Adhiban.

It would be years before I realised there was a serious mistake in my analysis. In the lines given above, White wins an important tempo when he plays 56.♙h1!, as defending it with the rook serves no additional purpose for Black. If Black was able to defend the pawn with the king, he would advance the king and defend the pawn at the same time, making up the one tempo needed to secure the draw. This may all sound simple, when explained, but no one ever came up with this logic before Stockfish 15 suddenly reversed previous evaluations of the position with a glaring 0.00 evaluation, which I immediately investigated.



54...♔g6!!

The king can also go to h6, but it looks weird. I should add that this is an excellent example of pushing the pawn too far being a downside. Here it does not lose the pawn, but it does lose a tempo, and thus the game.

55.♔b6

What Black is looking for is the following variation: 55.♙h8 ♔g5 56.♔b6 ♔g4 57.b5 ♔g3 58.a6 ♔g2 Yes, the pawn could have been pushed too, but this beautifully illustrates the point. 59.a7 h2 60.♔b7 h1=♙ 61.♙xh1 ♔xh1 62.a8=♙ ♙xa8 63.♔xa8 f5 64.b6 f4 65.b7 f3 66.b8=♙ f2 With a theoretical draw based on stalemate.

55...♔g5 56.a6 h2!?

A little unnecessary, as 56...♔g4 draws too. But I have a point to make.

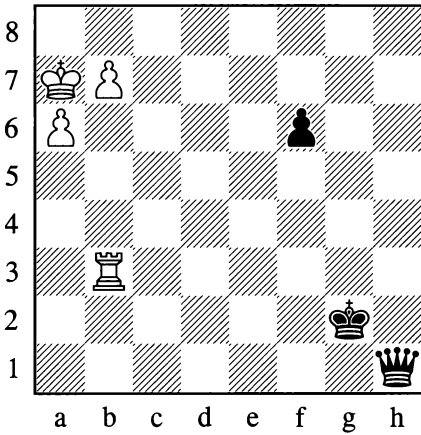
57.♙d1

57.♙h8 looks strong, but Black has 57...♙a4!!, making 58.♔b5 the only sensible move. After 58...♙a2 Black is by no means worse. You could even imagine 59.♔b6 being a repetition, although, having won a tempo, Black can also draw with 59...♔g4.

57...♔g4 58.b5 ♔g3 59.♔a7 ♔g2 60.b6

White is arriving first it seems. But Black has one trick left up his sleeve.

60...♖d3! 61.♖b1 ♖b3! 62.♖xb3!? h1=♔
63.b7



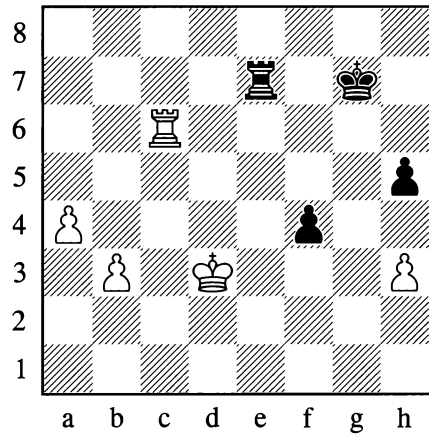
Black draws these lines. White will not be able to escape the pin after:

63...♔h7!! 64.♕a8 ♔e4! 65.a7 ♖d5
With a draw.

We join the next game at the moment where the players received an additional 30 minutes towards the rest of the game, with the custom 30 seconds per move. White's advantage is obvious, but it is still a moment too early to give up on the former Women's World Champion.

Florent Samoun – Antoaneta Stefanova

Sitges 2021



41.b4?

Organising the pieces was a convincing way to win. 41.♖c1! White is ready to advance the pawns. And after 41...♖e3† 42.♕c4 ♖xh3 43.a5 the win is trivial.

41...♖e3† 42.♕d4 ♖xh3 43.a5 ♖a3 44.♖c3!?

It looked promising to try:

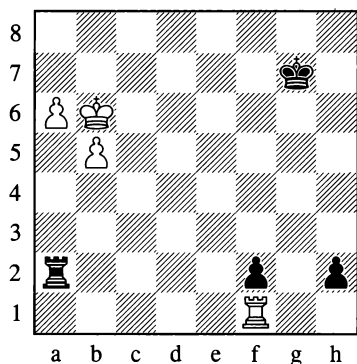
44.a6

Play continues:

44...f3 45.b5 f2 46.♖c1 h4

White's position looks tremendous. The curious thing is that after:

47.♖f1 ♖a2 48.♕c5 h3 49.♕b6 h2



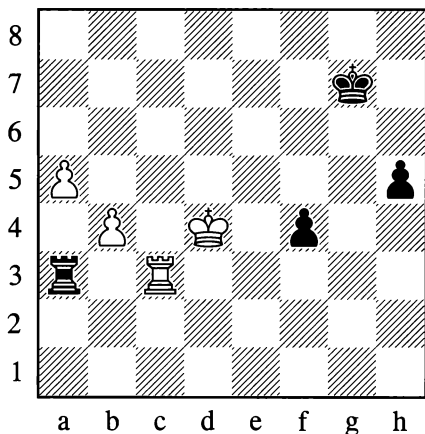
We have gone through a portal in time and space, and entered the analysis to Melkumyan – Grachev above.

50.a7!

50.♔a7? still loses to 50...♞e2!.

50...♞a4!! 51.♔b7 ♞h4 52.♞h1 ♞f4

Black draws.



44...♞a4?

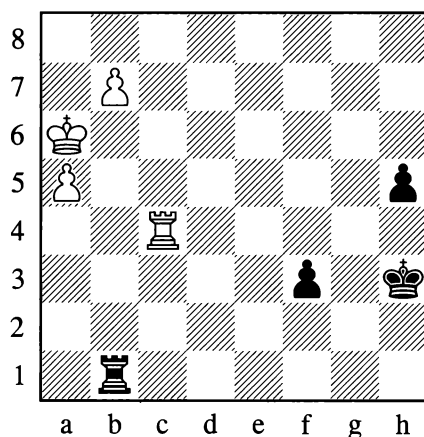
Black missed a simple but elegant drawing variation.

44...♞xc3 45.♔xc3 h4! The advance of the pawns has to be accurately timed. 46.a6 f3! 47.♔d3 h3 With the f-pawn blocking the long diagonal, Black will get a queen too and draw.

45.♔c5 ♔g6 46.♔b5 ♞a1 47.♔a6 ♔g5 48.b5 ♔g4 49.b6 f3 50.♞c4† ♔h3!

Clever. Black does not want to walk into b8=♞†.

51.b7 ♞b1

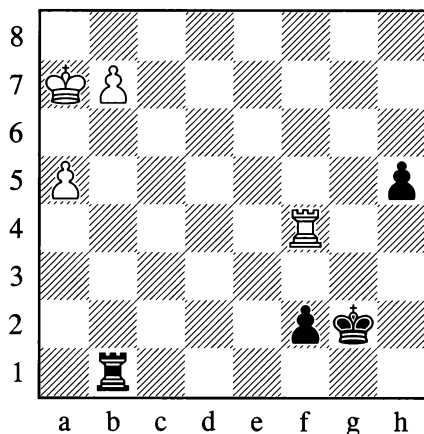


52.♔a7?

52.♞c2! was winning. Black had to walk into the check with 52...♔g3 to make progress. Now White wins another tempo with: 53.♞c1!!, when he either wins a tempo to queen the pawns, or forces Black to go for: 53...♞xc1 54.b8=♞† ♔g2 55.♞e5! White is winning, although there may be a few difficult problems to solve before we get that far.

52...f2 53.♞f4 ♔g2?

53...♔g3! 54.♞f7 h4 was drawing. The Hoover variation is near.



54.♖f6??

This is a truly confusing mistake. I think White was expecting 53...♔g3 and in time trouble was unsure about the difference, which is that the white rook was hanging. Now it was not and it did not have to be moved.

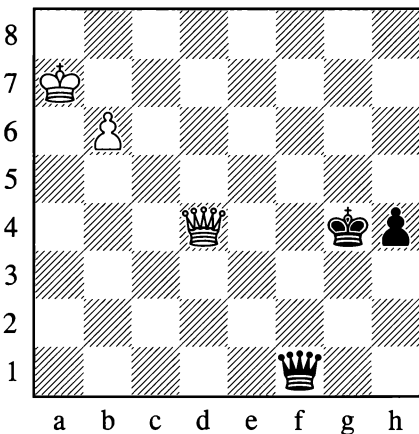
54.b8=♞ just won.

**54...h4 55.♖b6 ♖xb6 56.axb6 f1=♞
57.b8=♞ ♔h3 58.♞c8† ♔g3 59.♞c3† ♔g4?**

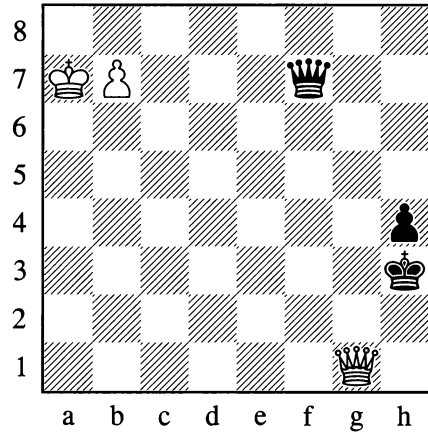
Black was holding after something like:
59...♔g2! 60.b7 ♖f7 and one or two accurate extra moves.

60.♞d4†?

White was winning after pushing the pawn: 60.b7 ♖f2† 61.♔a6 Starting a nice circle manoeuvre around the pawn to end up on a8. 61...♞f1† 62.♔b6 ♞b1† 63.♔c7 ♞h7† 64.♔b8 Black is out of checks. 64...h3 65.♞d4† ♔f3 66.♔a8 White wins.

**60...♔g3?**

Black missed a fantastic defensive resource: 60...♔h3!! 61.b7 ♖g1!! with stalemate after 62.♞xg1, and a draw also after 62.♞b6 ♞a1† 63.♞a6 ♞d4† 64.♔a8 ♞e4 and it is hard for White to do anything quickly, while Black's h-pawn is not to be disregarded either.

61.b7 ♖f7 62.♞g1† ♔h3

White had a last chance to win the game.

63.♞e3†?

The silent winning move was:

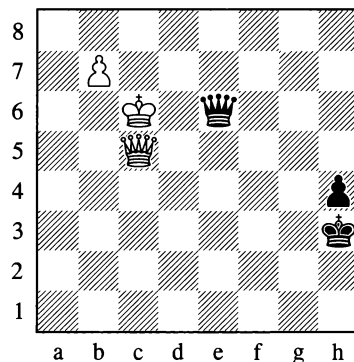
63.♞g5!!

The queen is dominating a lot of important squares. White wins in a way typical for queen endings, where the king goes down the board, to make it possible to block a check with the queen, giving check back.

63...♞a2†

White is also winning after 63...♞f2† 64.♔a6!, or 63...♞h7 64.♞e3† and 65.♔a8. There is an interesting trap with 63...♞e6!?, where White should not promote to a queen due to stalemate tricks. Instead 64.♞c5 is the shortest win (38 moves).

64.♔b6 ♞b3† 65.♔c6 ♞c4† 66.♞c5 ♞e6†



67.♔b5! ♖b3† 68.♗b4 ♗d5† 69.♕a4 ♗c6†
70.♗b5 ♗e4† 71.♕a3

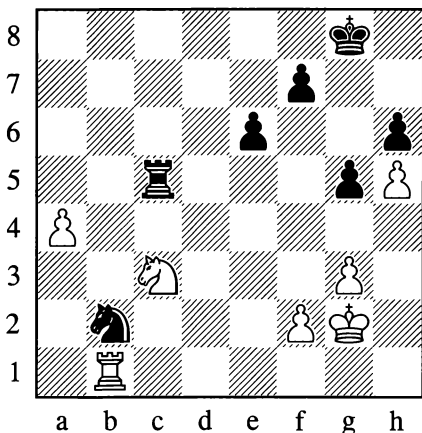
White wins.

63...♕g2 64.♗d2† ♕g3 65.♕a8 ♗f3
66.♗e1† ♕h3 67.♗e6† ♕g2 68.♗a2† ♕g3
69.♕a7 ♗e3† 70.♕a8 ♗f3 71.♗g8† ♕h2
72.♗g5 h3 73.♕a7 ♗a3† 74.♕b6 ♗b3†
75.♕a7 ♗a3† 76.♕b6 ♗b3† 77.♕a7
½-½

The following game from the Spanish Team Championship offered the players a chance to play incredibly deep chess, based on fine nuances that had to be worked out in the narrowest detail. If this is too much for human beings to do, we shall ponder another day. On this day it was...

David Anton Guijarro – Alexei Shirov

Linares 2020



41.♖xb2 ♖xc3 42.♖a2 ♖c6!

The rook has to block the pawn as early as possible, if it will ever have a chance to come out again. When the rook moves away to allow the king to take over the responsibility, the pawn has to be a few steps from the 8th rank to make the transition possible.

43.a5 ♖a6 44.♕f3 ♕f8

A poorer try would be 44...♕g7 45.♕e4 ♕f6, even though it is not without merit. White is of course headed for b5 with the king, but the best path to get there looks like this: 46.♕d3! ♕f5 47.♖a4!, when White is winning as both g3-g4† and ♕c4-b5(†) are on the horizon.

45.♕e4 ♕e7?

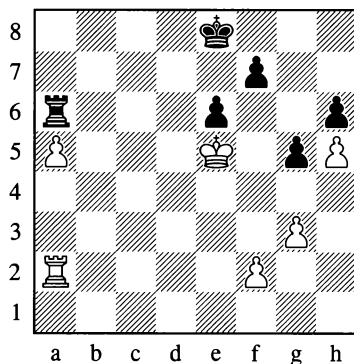
This allowed White to put Black in zugzwang (even though he missed it).

For this reason, we can go back and find that Black could have saved the game with:

45...♕e8!!

If White plays 46.♕d4, Black will play 46...♕d7 with a likely transposition to the analysis below. And after:

46.♕e5



46...♕e7!

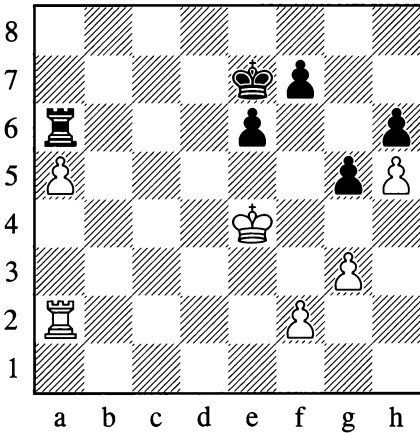
It is White who is in zugzwang! This may seem like an extreme statement, but it is quite clear that any White move would worsen his position. The same is the case for Black, as already established. If White was to move the pawns on the kingside, Black would, as a minimum, win time by attacking them.

The same is the case after:

47.♖a3 f6† 48.♕d4 ♕d6 49.♕c4 ♕c7!

When both 50.♕b5 and 50.♕b4 can be met with 50...♖d6!, where the rook will win an

important tempo attacking the f-pawn. Black simply draws.



46.♔d4?

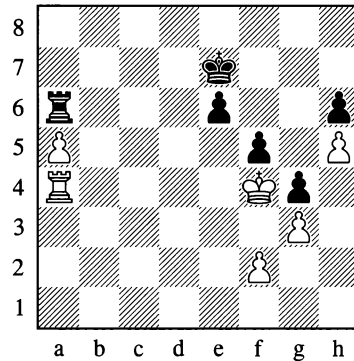
This is an easy mistake to make with only seconds on the clock. But if you use those seconds to look for more options, you can see that there is a serious alternative. And probably there would also be enough time to realise that it would cause the opponent to make concessions. What would be impossible to predict in half a minute, would be that this is enough to make the difference of half a point. The following analysis is the proof of this assertion. Going through the variations will be helpful for recognising patterns in the future in your rook endgame playing. But please do not confuse these long lines with the decision making process. White is not trying to win the position. He is choosing what to play on the next move. When you make sure you have options on every move, this becomes quite possible. Down the line you can make decisions the same way. Only rarely will you have to calculate deep and difficult variations. Later, in analysis, we will then try to understand the mechanics of chess by going deep – and then writing about it. This should never be confused with the decision making process during the game.

46.♔e5!

This is not a difficult move to understand once you see it. Black can only move four of the pieces and none of them want to move. He is in zugzwang.

46...f6†

With certainty, this would have been played in the game. The king and rook simply cannot move, 46...f5? is obviously bad. And after 46...g4 47.♞a4 f6† 48.♔f4 f5

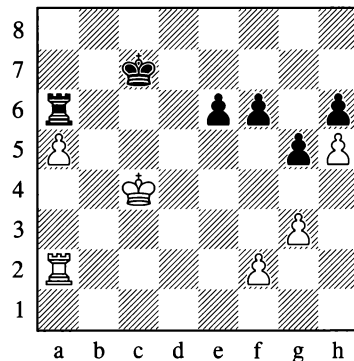


49.♔e3! ♔d6 50.♔d4 e5† 51.♔c4 ♔c6 52.♞a2 Black is in zugzwang and will have to allow the white king to enter his position one way or the other.

47.♔d4 ♔d6 48.♔c4

This continuation is very similar to what would have happened in the game. Except there the f6-pawn would be back on f7. The difference is immense.

48...♔c7



49.♔b4!

The importance of this move has already been explained. The black rook should not be allowed to occupy the 5th rank with a tempo.

49...♞d6

49...♔b7 50.♞d2 ♔c7 51.♔b5 and White breaks through.

50.a6 ♔b8

After 50...♞d4† 51.♔c3! is important. Now the rook has to go back to a8 and Black loses.

51.♔c5 ♞d3

51...♞d5† 52.♔c6 is not an improvement for Black.

52.♞e2!

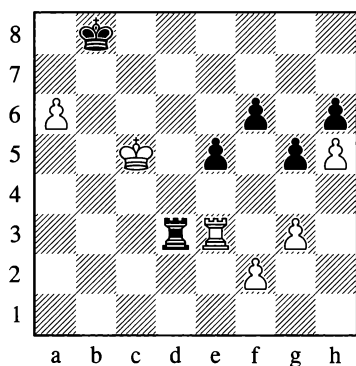
Making use of the extra tempo.

52.♞b2† ♔a8 53.♞b7 is a more complicated path to victory.

52...e5

52...♞f3 53.♔d6 will see the king aim for the h6-pawn. Once again we see the damage ...g5 did to the black position.

53.♞e3!



White wins. The pawn ending is hopeless for Black and if White is allowed to play ♞f3, he will win as well.

46...♔d6 47.f3!

47.♔c4?! ♔c7! 48.♔b4 ♞d6! would allow Black to activate the rook and leave the king to block the a-pawn.

47...f5?

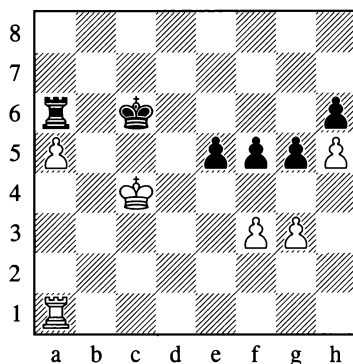
A horrible move, leaving the e6-pawn unnecessarily frail.

47...f6!? would hold; but the best move would have been 47...♔d7!, making no concessions.

48.f4!

48.♔c4 ♔c6 49.f4!, would transpose.

But an important little trick is revealed after 49.♞a3? e5 50.♞a1



50...f4!! 51.g4 ♔d6 Black holds – but only just. After 52.♔b5 ♞a8 53.a6 e4! 54.fxe4 ♔e5 Black has managed to create enough counterplay on the kingside.

48...gxf4 49.gxf4 ♔d7!

49...♔c6 50.♔e5 ♔d7 51.♔f6 ♔d6 52.♞d2† ♔c7 53.♔g7 ♞xa5 54.♔xh6 and White wins.

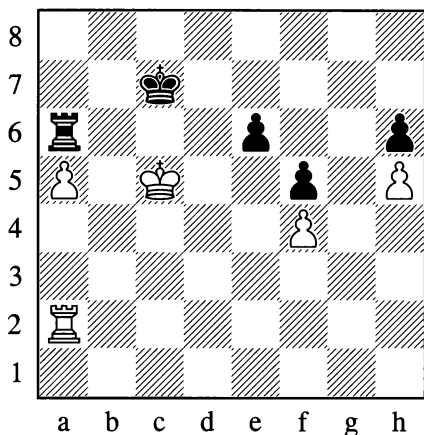
50.♔c5?

A big step in the wrong direction.

The same can be said of 50.♔e5, although after 50...♔e7 it is easier to play 51.♔d4, as 51.♞a4 ♞d6 52.♞d4 ♞a6 53.♞a4 ♞d6 would be an immediate draw.

As we shall see below, the right move was 50.♔c4!.

50...♔c7



51.♔b5?

This very natural move is a surprising mistake. Black is now able to save the game. The check on d5, which will either push the white king backwards or to the ugly a6-square, is the main issue.

White has many other moves he could try, but only one worked. Whereas most squandered the chances, it is important to have a quick look at 51.♞a4?!, when Black has a great defensive try in 51...♔c8! and now:

52.♔b5? makes no sense, as Black replies with the stable ...♞d6.

52.♞b4?! is close to working, but Black survives by a hair's breadth after 52...♞xa5† 53.♔d6 ♞a1 54.♔xe6 ♞h1 55.♔xf5 ♞xh5† 56.♔g6 ♞h4!! and there is just enough time to bring the king over.

White actually needs to wait with something like 52.♞a1!, when after 52...♔c7 53.♔d4 ♔d7 54.♔c4! we are on the way back to the winning path.

The right path was the road back to where we were before.

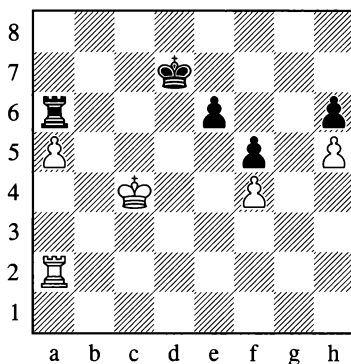
51.♔d4! ♔d7

51...♔d6 52.♞a3 makes no negative difference for White this time around.

51...♞d6† 52.♔e5 ♞a6 53.♔f6 also offers White no troubles.

Back to where we were two moves ago.

52.♔c4!!

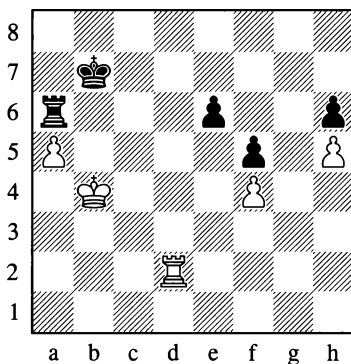


We need to check out three different defensive tries: a) 52...♔c6, b) 52...♔c8 and c) 52...♔c7.

a) 52...♔c6

This is rather cooperative, but is important to understand first.

53.♔b4 ♔c7 54.♞c2†! ♔b7 55.♞d2

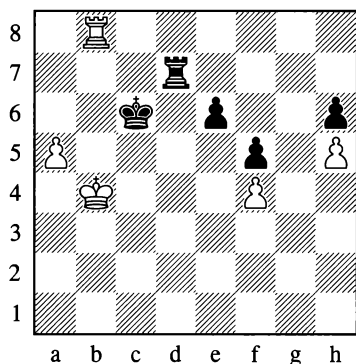


55...♔c6

55...♔c7 56.♔b5 ♞c6 does not put up a lot of resistance. The key difference from other lines where Black activates the rook is that the king is not dislocated from b5. 57.a6 is most straightforward. The following line is long, but not difficult. 57...♞b6† 58.♔a5 ♞c6 59.♞b2! ♞c5† 60.♞b5 ♞c1 61.♞b7† ♔c6 62.♞b6† ♔d5 (62...♔c5 63.♞b5† ♔c6 64.♞e5! leaves Black lacking good options.) 63.♞b4 ♔c6 64.a7 ♞a1†

65.♖a4 ♜xa4† 66.♙xa4 ♜b7 67.♙b5 ♙xa7
68.♙c6 And White wins.
56.♞d8 ♞a7 57.♞b8 ♞d7

Trying to activate the rook is the sensible try. After 57...♙d5 58.♙b5 ♙e4 59.♙b6 Black will soon have to give up the rook. The white king arrives in good time to deal with the black pawns. Black's problem is that he also has to avoid losing the h6-pawn under bad circumstances.



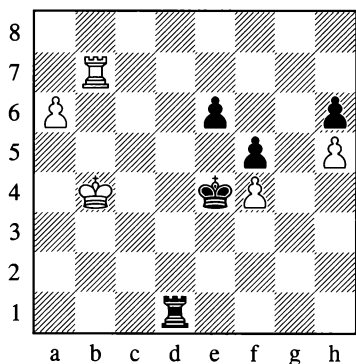
58.♞b6†!

An important check. Without it, White would not be able to win.

58...♙d5 59.a6 ♙e4 60.♞b7

60.♞xe6† ♙xf4 61.♞g6! ♙e4 62.♞g1! f4
63.♞a1 wins by a tempo and is rather flashy,
but also appears somewhat unnecessary.

60...♞d1



61.♞b5! ♞d8 62.♙a5!

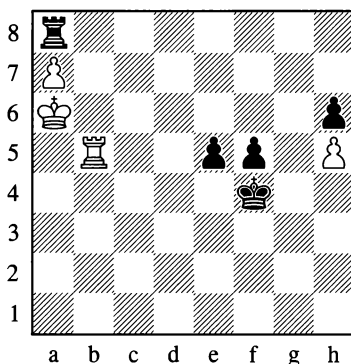
This line also only wins by a single tempo, but it is only here that any kind of finesse is

needed, and hopefully it is not so difficult for most.

62...♙xf4 63.a7 ♞a8 64.♙a6

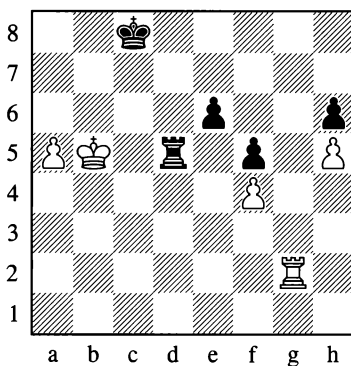
This is why the king went to a5 rather than c5. Had it gone to b6, it would have blocked the rook from reaching b8.

64...e5



65.♞b8 ♞xa7† 66.♙xa7 e4 67.♙b6
White wins.

b) 52...♙c8 53.♙b5 ♞d6 54.♞g2! ♞d5†



55.♙c6!

It is always nice to threaten mate.

55...♙b8 56.♞g8† ♙a7 57.♞h8 ♞d4 58.♞xh6 ♙a6

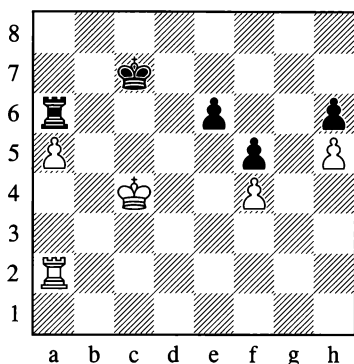
58...♞xf4 59.♙b5! ♞h4 60.♞h7† ♙b8 61.h6
and Black cannot deal effectively with the
two wing pawns.

59.♞xe6 ♞xf4 60.♙d5† ♙xa5 61.♞f6 ♙b5
62.♙e5

White wins. The black king is far too far away.

c) 52...♔c7

This is the trickiest try.



53.♖a3!

Necessary prophylaxis. Now after 53...♗d6, White has 54.♗d3!.

53...♕c6

53...♕c8 54.♕b5 ♗d6 55.♗g3 ♗d4 56.♗g6 ♗xf4 57.♗xh6! This is the only winning move, but it should be an easy one to find. If White was to take the pawn on e6 first, the rook would then block the h-pawn afterwards. Not very meaningful. 57...♗f1 58.♗xe6 f4 59.h6 ♗h1 60.a6 ♕b8 61.♗e8† ♕a7 62.♗e7† ♕b8 63.h7 White wins.

54.♕b4 ♕c7 55.♗c3† ♕b7 56.♗d3

The most natural is to not allow the black rook to get activity through the d-file, although 56.♗g3 ♗d6 57.♕c4! also wins.

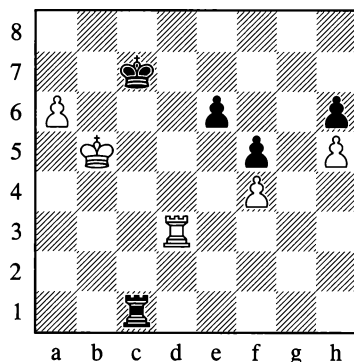
56...♕c7

56...♗c6 57.♗d7† ♕a6 58.♗d8 leaves Black without a decent move.

57.♕b5 ♗c6 58.a6

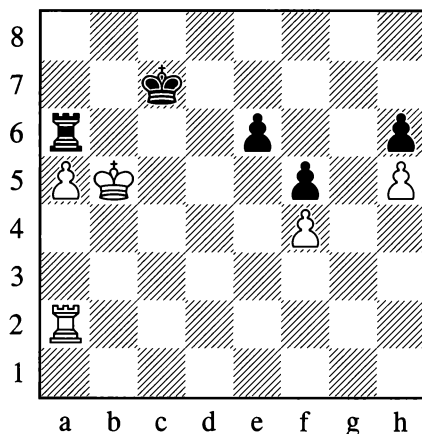
58.♗g3!? ♗c1 59.♗g6 also wins. And maybe by a bigger margin.

58...♗c1



59.♗e3!

Surprisingly, only this move wins. The idea is simple. Either White is allowed to take on e6 (black checks to the white king matter not), or 59...♕d7 is met with 60.♖a3, when Black will have to use the rook to block the pawn, losing on the spot.



51...♗d6!

Black manages to activate the rook and create enough counterplay to hold the game.

52.a6

52.♗g2 ♗d5† 53.♕a6 e5 and Black draws.

52...♕b8 53.a7† ♕a8 54.♖a4

54.♗g2 ♕xa7 55.♗g6 ♗d4 also holds.

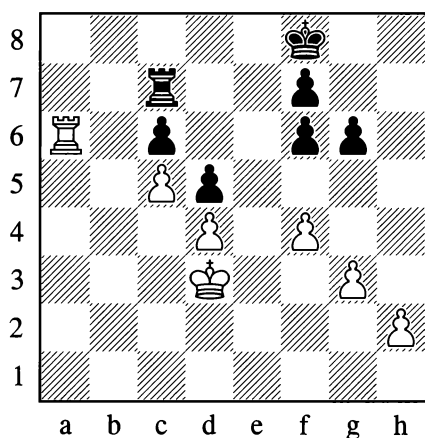
54...♗d1 55.♕c4 ♗e1 56.♕d3 ♗h1 57.♖a6 ♗e1 58.♖a4 ♗h1 59.♖a6 ♗e1 60.♖a4

½–½

The next game is from the Chinese Championship, played in the period where China looked as if they had escaped the worst of the pandemic, but were living under severe restrictions. At this point, playing such a tournament must have been a relief to the players.

Yu Yangyi – Liu Yan

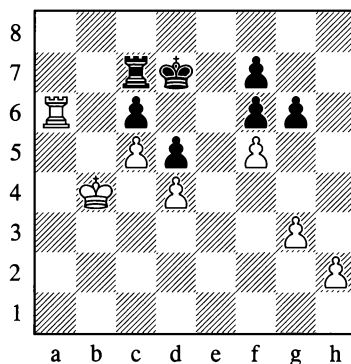
Xinghua Jiangsu 2021



What is characteristic for this game is that Yu Yangyi missed or misevaluated a key idea for quite a number of moves (including the last few moves), where he could have played it at any moment. In the beginning it makes sense not to play it too early, but then it becomes late, and finally too late. Only then does Yu play it!

35.♕c3 ♕e7 36.♖b4 ♔d7 37.♔a5

To me this was the perfect moment to play 37.f5!, as it is not possible to create a passed pawn on the kingside by advancing the g- or h-pawn.



Now this cannot be prevented. For this reason, Black may as well take the pawn. 37...gxf5 38.h4 ♖b7† Tricky. 39.♕a4! The best square. White wants the king to go to a5, but he also does not want Black to play ...♖b3. 39...♖b1 40.♖a7† White wins after 40...♕e8 41.♕a5, or 40...♕e6 41.♖c7!, where we can see another advantage of giving up the f-pawn.

37...♖b7 38.♖a8

38.f5! was still strong. This was the last chance without Black accepting a repetition. White is still winning without it, but only because Black is trying to avoid it.

38...♖b5†?

A check meant to create counterplay.

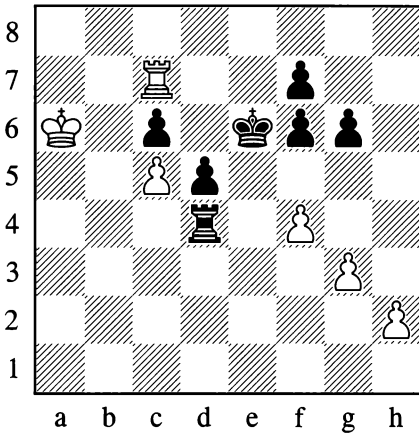
38...♕e6! was tempting too, when White would have to find 39.♖a6 ♕d7 40.f5!.

39.♕a6!

In this phase of the game Yu Yangyi plays fantastic chess.

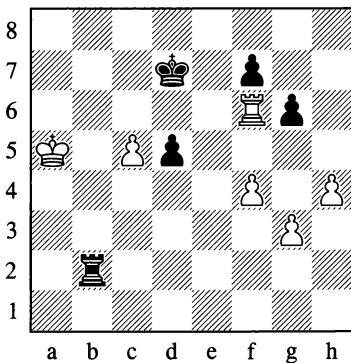
39.♕a4? ♖b1! would give Black counterplay.

39...♖b4 40.♖a7† ♕e6 41.♖c7 ♖xd4

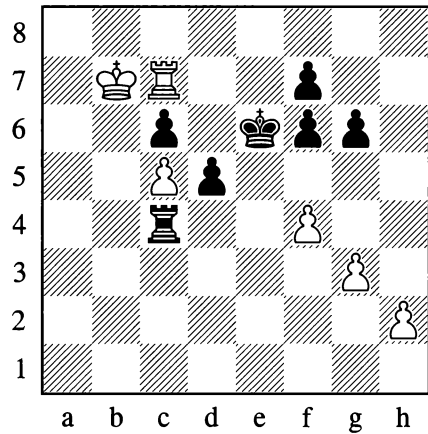
**42.♔b7!**

Excellent play by Yu Yangyi. The king needs to enter the game in order to keeping the Black king at bay.

42.♞xc6†? ♕d7! 43.♞xf6 looks natural, but 43...♞d2 gives Black enough counterplay. The critical variation is quite instructive. 44.h4 ♞a2† 45.♕b5 ♞b2† 46.♕a5



46...♕c7! Prophylaxis, avoiding a check on d6. (46...d4? loses to the surprising 47.♞d6† ♕c7 48.♞b6!, when the white king gets out of the corner, or where White wins after 48...♞xb6 49.cxb6† ♕b7 50.♕b4! and the extra pawn decides the game.) 47.♞d6 ♞g2! Black is on his way to making a draw.

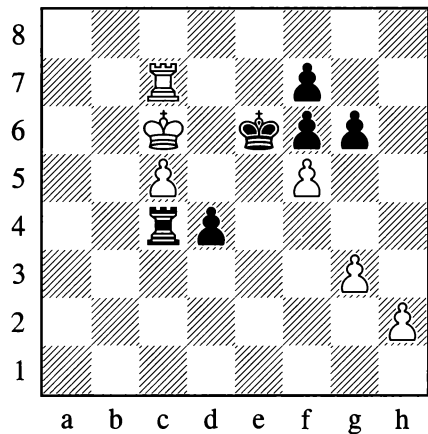
42...♞c4**43.♕xc6?**

The natural follow-up, but also a significant mistake.

What was difficult to see was that 43.♞xc6†! was stronger, as it forces the black king away. 43...♕f5 44.♞c7 d4 45.c6 The white pieces are perfectly coordinated. White wins. 45...♞b4† 46.♕a6 d3 47.♞d7 ♕e4 48.c7 ♞c4 49.♕b7 ♞b4† 50.♕c8 for example...

43...d4 44.♞c8 ♕e7 45.♞c7† ♕e6 46.f5†?

Finally, Yu plays this idea. But at this point it is little more than a tricky try.

**46...gxh5?**

Black would not have found difficulties in holding the draw after 46...♙xf5! 47.♙d5 ♖c2 and he will end up with a passed pawn of his own on the kingside.

47.♞d7! ♜xc5†

A final instructive variation goes: 47...♞c2 48.h4 ♖c3 49.♞xd4 ♜xg3 and White is only winning after 50.♙b5! ♞g4 51.♙c4!, when Black is unable to deal with the two split passed pawns.

48.♙xc5 ♙xd7 49.♙xd4 ♙e6 50.♙e3 ♙e5

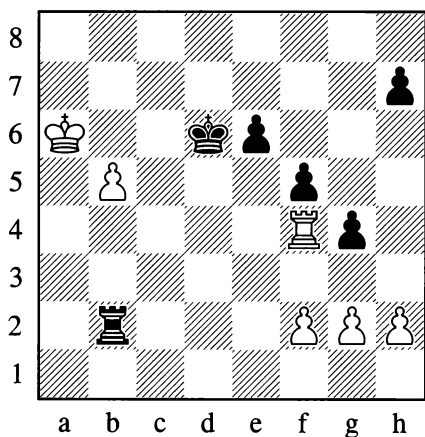
Black resigned. Yu Yangyi later shared first place on 7/11 with Wei Yi.

1–0

The next game from the Danish Championship displays themes on shouldering and rook vs pawns. But starting out, the endgame is terribly complicated.

Mads Smith Hansen – Poul Rewitz

Svendborg 2018



35.♞c4?

The drawing line is rather sensational.

35.♙b6!!

The only move. Black's threat of 35...♙c5 is dealt with, without giving up all of the kingside.

35...h5

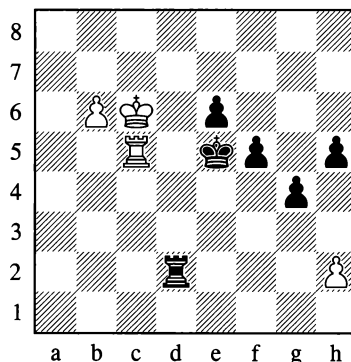
Seeking to exchange a weakness. White has two options:

a) A wrong direction would be:

36.♞d4? ♙e5 37.♞c4 ♞xf2 38.♙c6

The king is better placed on c6, assisting the idea of ♞c5† followed by b6-b7.

38...♞xg2 39.b6 ♞d2 40.♞c5†



The critical moment of the variation. The key move is challenging to find, even for grandmasters.

40...♙e4!!

40...♙f4? fails to 41.b7 ♞d8 42.♙c7 ♞g8 43.♙d6! and White draws on account of 43...♞b8 44.♙xe6.

41.b7 ♞d8 42.♙c7 ♞f8 43.♙d6 ♞b8! 44.♙c7 44.♙xe6 can now be met with 44...f4, winning.

44...♞xb7† 45.♙xb7 h4!

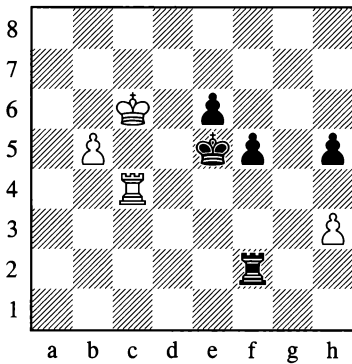
The pawns are too much for the rook to handle.

b) 36.h3! gxh3

Creating weaknesses is the most natural.

After 36...♙d5 White holds with 37.hxg4 hxg4 38.g3 with the idea of f2-f3.

37.gxh3 ♙e5 38.♞c4 ♞xf2 39.♙c6



White is ahead in the race, which eventually will lead to a draw with a comfortable margin in both directions.

35...♞xf2 36.b6 ♞a2†

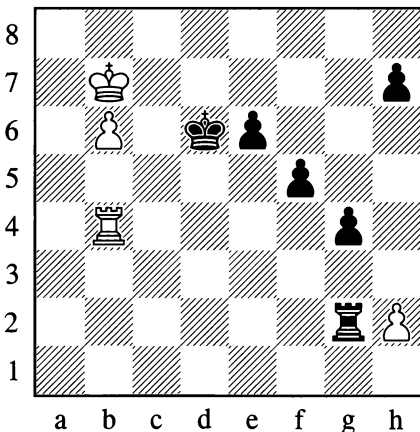
A sensible check in time trouble, which mainly seeks to repeat moves.

36...♞xg2! was simpler.

37.♕b7

I am confident that after 37.♕b5 Black would have played: 37...♞b2† 38.♕a6 ♞xg2! 39.b7 ♞a2† 40.♕b6 ♞b2† followed by advancing the pawns on the kingside.

37...♞xg2 38.♞b4

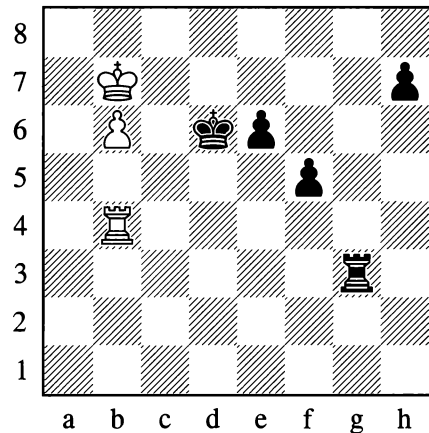


38...g3?

A terrible move. Black is seeking a way to bring the rook back, but it's not the right way to exchange the most advanced pawn; the asset Black should seek to win with later.

38...♞xh2! was the move Black would want to play. And should have played. White will not be able to promote the b-pawn without Black being able to give up the rook along the way. For example: 39.♕b8 g3 40.b7 ♞c2, winning.

39.hxg3 ♞xg3



40.♕a6?

The more natural and stronger option was: 40.♕a7!

If Black gives a check on a3, the white king goes to b8, when Black would have to waste a tempo to play ...♞g3-g8 to stop the b-pawn eventually.

40...e5

40...♕c5 41.b7 is also fine for White. A small point is that after 41...♞a3† 42.♕b8 ♕xb4?! 43.♕c8 White will queen, although Black still draws with the plan of ...♞e3-e4. 41.b7 ♞g8 42.b8=♞† ♞xb8 43.♞xb8 e4

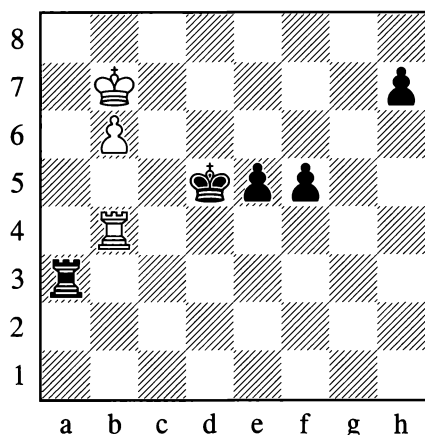
Black can draw in quite a few different ways. To focus on one over the others makes little sense.

40...♔c5?

40...♔c5! would have won. After 41.♖b5† ♔c6, White is lacking a good move. And after 41.♖b1 f4 White has to waste another tempo. For example: 42.♔a7 e5 43.b7 ♖g7 and the connected passed pawns will win the game.

41.♖c4†?

41.♔a7! would have held again.

41...♔d5 42.♖h4 ♖a3† 43.♔b7 e5 44.♖b4**44...f4?**

An understandable mistake. Rewitz missed the check on b5 on move 47.

Black could have won with a difficult anticipation move: 44...♔c5!! 45.♖b1 f4 The pawns are unstoppable, and the b-pawn is not queening, due to 46.♔c7 f3 47.b7 ♖a7!.

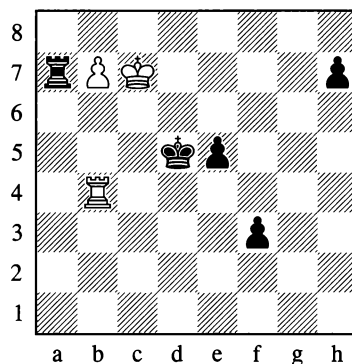
45.♔b8?

An odd decision. I am not sure what Mads got confused about.

White could play a lot better with the most natural move.

45.♔c7 f3

I have analysed a lot of other moves here, but the variations overlap so much it did not make a lot of sense to include them.

46.b7 ♖a7**47.♖b5†!**

An important check. Without it, White is lost.

47...♔d4

After 47...♔e6, 48.♖b6† ♔f5 49.♔d6! also draws. The white king is close enough.

48.♔d6! ♖xb7 49.♖xb7 e4 50.♖xh7

Not the only way, but clean.

50...f2 51.♖f7 e3 52.♖f4† ♔c3 53.♔c5! ♔d3 54.♔d5 e2 55.♖f3†

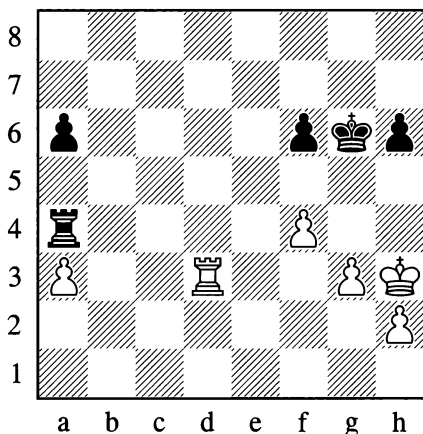
With a draw.

45...♖g3 46.♖b5† ♔d4 0-1

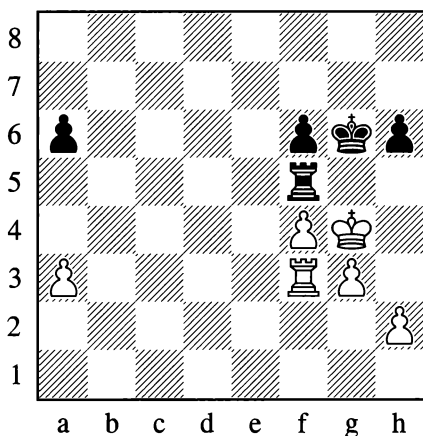
Let's finish the book with the most ridiculous idea I have seen. When the engine showed me the drawing variation, I was flabbergasted. I did not know how to explain it to Liu, who was in a training camp I did for the Danish Federation just after the game was played. I was pleased to return to the following session and tell the kids that after spending 10 minutes analysing the position with Boris Gelfand, we now understood why it holds... Black played normal moves and should have lost.

Casper Yukun Liu – Elias Keso

Fredericia 2020



35...♞c4? 36.♔g4 ♞c5 37.♞f3 ♞f5



38.♔h3?

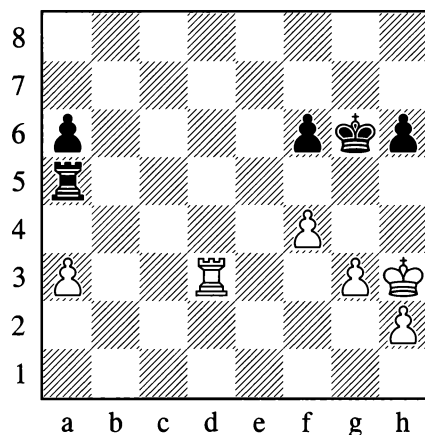
38.h3 h5† (If Black moves the rook immediately, White can win with 39.f5†.)
 39.♔h4 ♞b5 40.♞d3 ♞f5 41.♞d4 ♞a5 42.a4
 ♞c5 43.g4 hxg4 44.hxg4 ♞a5 45.f5† ♔g7
 46.♞d7† ♔f8 47.♔h5 ♞xa4 48.g5! Using the
 umbrella technique. 48...fxg5 49.♔g6 and
 50.f6, winning.

38...♞h5† 39.♔g2 ♞c5 40.g4 h5 41.h3
 h4 42.♞d3 ♞c4 43.♔f3 ♞a4 44.♞b3 ♔h6
 45.♞b6 ♞xa3† 46.♔e4 ♔g7 47.♔f5 ♞a5†
 48.♔e6 ♞a3 49.♞b7† ♔g6 50.f5† ♔g5

51.♞g7† ♔f4 52.♔xf6 ♞xh3 53.g5 ♞b3
 54.♞e7 ♞b5 55.g6 ♞xf5† 56.♔e6 ♞g5 57.g7
 h3 58.♔f7 h2 59.♞e1 ♔f3 60.g8=♞ ♞xg8
 61.♔xg8 ♔g2
 ½–½

The drawing variation is:

35...♞a5!!



36.♔g4

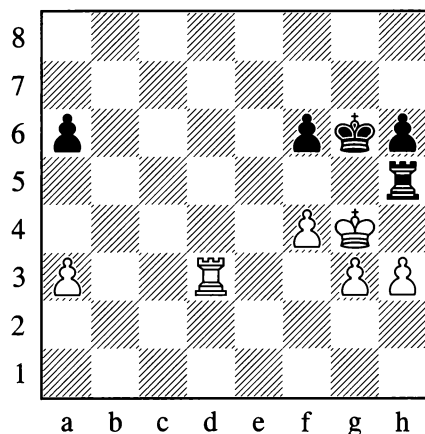
36.g4 h5 and Black is OK. The h2-pawn is
 not a great asset.

36...♞h5!!

Provoking h2-h3.

37.h3

37.♞d2 ♞a5! would just repeat. White does
 not want to put the rook on a2.



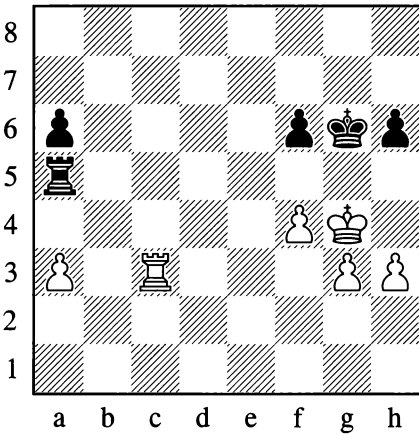
37...♖a5!!

Mission accomplished. The rook is returning to the ideal post on a4.

37...♖c5 would lose to 38.♞d4!, as the Black rook needs to take the a-pawn on the third rank and the black rook would get stuck on a5 in a sort of zugzwang.

38.♞c3

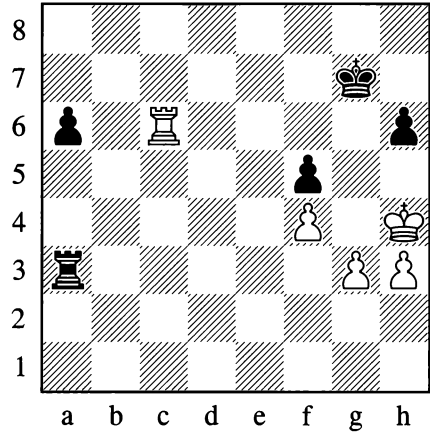
38.♞d8 ♠ goes the same way, but would deprive us of seeing the rook returning to a4.



38...♖a4!!

Black holds. The rook maintains position on the a-file, and sooner or later White has to try:

39.♞c8 ♠ 40.♞h4 ♖xa3 41.♞c6† ♞g7



Finally, we can all see why h2-h3 had to be provoked: the g3-pawn is loose, and Black would be able to capture it if the white king were to advance.

Epilogue

Concepts to Live by

All of these recurring concepts are presented to you in short and sharp wording. This is done with intelligence implied. I presume you are intelligent, and you will show me the courtesy of returning the favour. These concepts are not rules to mindlessly follow, but recurring themes of powerful value, if understood properly and implemented intelligently. In other words, without reading the book first, this will seem like a senseless list of platitudes.

This is an (incomplete) list of the most important general observations (concepts):

Always have at least two serious options on every move (not endgame-specific).

Don't make mechanical "normal-looking" moves without thinking. Chess is a rich game with stunning surprises possible on every move.

When you can, keep your options open.

Learn the theoretical positions (read *Theoretical Rook Endgames* by Sam Shankland).

Endgames are mainly about promoting passed pawns.

Rook endings have a reasonably large drawing margin – but are not all drawn...

Passed pawns become more important as they advance up the board.

Passed pawns must be pushed.

In rook endings we should seek to activate the rook first.

The rook is strong when placed behind passed pawns.

The king naturally belongs on the side of the pawn where the opponent's king is approaching (shouldering).

The rook vs pawn endgame is, at its core, a race; and for this reason we need to use every finesse to win time.

Often we need to delay giving up the rook for the opponent's passer to draw the opponent's king as far as possible away from the finish line.

If your opponent is waiting for you to initiate the race, strengthen your position to the maximum before you fire the starting gun.

Usually, when the weaker side gives up the rook for a passed/promoted pawn, we should recapture with the rook, to get the rook behind other passed pawns, and to keep the king closer to the other end of the board.

The defending side often draws in a race, if the stronger side's king has to go to the opponent's back rank to collect the loot.

It is less important to win pawns, than to make the most out of passed pawns.

A race is often decided by small tricks.

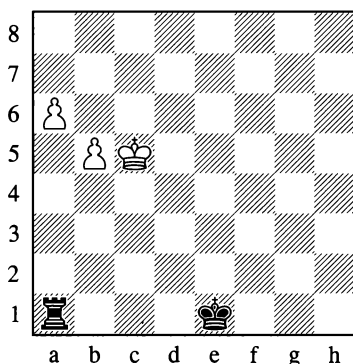
Pawns were born to be free! Help them become passed pawns. Consider breaking them out!

Cut off the king's access to your passed pawn, so your opponent has to let his rook go passive.

Passed pawns should be pushed, as long as it is not beyond your sphere of influence.

The king often belongs in front of the passed pawn, where it will find it easier to fight for important squares in the pawn's path.

Know the Stairmaster zig zag manoeuvre.



1. ♖b6!

Promoting a passed pawn is not necessarily the end of the struggle.

If your rook pins the opponent's king to the back rank, it is generally better to have one of the four central pawns, than one of the four flank pawns.

Umbrellas can be handy if it is raining checks.

Pawns can also shield the king from checks from the side.

Check the checks!

With only two pieces, their coordination can be fragile.

The longer the checking distance, the better (almost always). So, if you don't know what to do, increase the checking distance.

If you don't have time to get the rook behind the enemy's pawn, try the frontal defence. (This rarely holds when the pawn has crossed the middle.)

It can be terminal for the king to be cut off on the 5th rank.

A king can be cut off in all four directions. Excluding half the opponent's army can be highly effective.

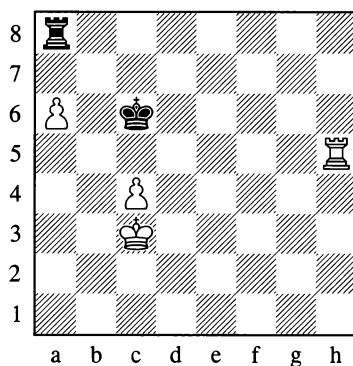
The king's role is to deal with passed pawns. To support or promote them if on the stronger side, and to block them if on the weaker side.

Block passed pawns, don't try to control them from the side.

If possible, activate the king.

Don't miss checkmate tricks.

Learn the standard stalemate trick:



A rook can be trapped in front of its own pawn. Be careful of pushing the pawn to the 7th rank. You may end up in zugzwang.

Be mentally alert to mutual zugzwang.

Stay aware of finesses that can win one or more tempos.

Use anticipation to guide your decision making and open up your mind to less obvious options.

Connected passed pawns operate differently to single passers, but often need support to promote.

Drawing against passed pawns can happen either by dominating the pawns, or by creating counterplay.

In rook endings active defence is the go-to option, but at times passive defence is required.

Giving up material to defend actively is commonly used to hold.

Because rook endings have a big drawing margin, we often have to squeeze every small advantage out of a position to win. Having a good feeling for small differences is thus valuable.

The rook is best placed behind the passed pawn. If that option is not available, in front is better if the pawn needs to be pushed, while if the pawn is already far advanced; to the side is best.

The rook on the side is often best placed on the adjacent file to the passed pawn.

Rook endings can offer a beautiful journey into a universe of magical logic and opportunity, which can bring great joy.

This list will read as meaningless, empty, and silly, out of context. Chess is a concrete game and is played by moves. These moves contain ideas, and can be found and understood through comparison with past positions and choices. Having a conceptual library is not a replacement for thinking, but a strong foundation for thinking. Each position is different and requires a different approach; but at the same time, the same pieces, rules and geometry will be present.

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I hope you enjoyed this book. I put my heart and soul into it. I strongly recommend that you look at the other side of the coin, Sam Shankland's *Theoretical Rook Endgames*. The books were written as a pair. We hope you like them both.

GAMES/CHESS

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