

starting out:
rook endgames

CHRIS WARD



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Chris Ward

EVERYMAN CHESS

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Starting Out: Rook Endgames

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Introduction

When I was approached to write a book on rook and pawn endgames I was only too happy to oblige. Indeed, I was really pleased that I wasn't going to have to sort through thousands of recent games, and throughout the book I wouldn't even have to worry about long diagonals or 'L' shapes! Yes, there's no bishops, queens, or knights here (well, barring the odd cameo performance!), and generally speaking the fact is that endgame theory doesn't really change. Every now and then a computer analysis module working at a billion miles an hour and considering millions of positions in the blink of an eye overturns a conclusion of yesteryear, but in truth such occurrences are rare.

There have been plenty of books written on rook endings, so I hear you ask: 'What makes this one special?' Well, did I say it was special? Seriously, I like to think that in this book I have covered the most relevant theoretical positions and have used easy examples to illustrate the most important themes. I have a lot of experience in coaching and I think I that understand how lower-rated players (yes, I'm afraid I could be talking about you, but don't worry – I'm trying to work on that!) tend to think when it comes to endgames. Thus I have tried to gradually introduce the reader to each theme and idea and the result is *Starting Out: Rook Endgames*.

Actually, this is an appropriate title because it's fair to say that I don't exactly 'finish off' rook endgames. However, this book is certainly not completely written at a basic level and occasionally there is some pretty advanced stuff. If you can get your head around that, then you are well on your way to mastering the topic.

There is no doubt that rook and pawn endings are a useful part of the game for every player to get to grips with. I often criticize juniors for castling in the opening but then not bothering to activate their rooks in the middlegame. Their assumption always seems to be that the minor pieces will do battle early on, and if the game is still going, then the rooks will come out to play later. Of course they should be trying to create 'pawn breaks' from the opening onwards in order to activate the ten-points-worth of firepower, but sometimes it's like talking to a brick wall! Perhaps I'm being a bit harsh, but the fact still remains that at lower levels rooks are generally under-achievers in the middlegame and, with this non-confrontational approach, they

Starting Out: Rook Endgames

are naturally the survivors. Hence rook endings tend to be the most common endgame type to arise.

By the way, that's just single rook endings (or rook versus pawns). I haven't said much on double rook endgames, partly because they are so rare and partly because the same principles apply, but twofold! Joking aside, the one assumption I have made for this book is that the reader knows how to deliver checkmate with a king and rook against a bare king. With two rooks apiece the main difference is that the partnership is able to deliver checkmate without the aid of its monarch. They provide twice as much firepower and thus frequently enjoy doubling on the seventh rank and open files. Regarding the latter, that's where more typically one pair is exchanged off, thus returning to the realms of this book.

There is a famous saying that I have refrained from using in the main body of this book and that is that 'all rook endings are drawn'. This generalization is highly dubious, but as you work your way through the chapters you will begin to understand its basis. The fact is that, next to opposite-coloured bishop endings, your best chance for a share of the points when you are a pawn down is in a rook endgame. Indeed, that is reflected in the many examples that I use in which the defender salvages a draw thanks to active play and overall employment of the basic ideas I put forward. It's probably true that the majority of rook endings do finish as draws but it's one thing 'knowing that' and another 'knowing how to'!

And at this point I suggest that you 'get knowing'! Please work your way through the book and upon completion you will be armed with the required techniques to handle rook and pawn endgames. Then you can start out in something else!

Good luck!

Chris Ward,
Beckenham,
December 2004

The Basics

- *The 'Monster' King*
- *Every King Should Know its Limitations*
- *Rooks belong behind Passed Pawns*
- *Checking from the Side*
- *Shouldering off the Enemy King*
- *Pushing Passed Pawns*
- *Keeping your Distance*
- *Cutting off the King*
- *The Skewer Trick*

The 'Monster' King

'King and pawn endings, minor piece endings, rook endings, queen endings; what do they all have in common?' I once recall asking a class of juniors. I was prepared for the sarcastic answer 'They're all endings!' but not by the particularly witty response 'They're all boring!' Regarding the latter, some may think that way, but they are usually the individuals who throw away a lot of their hard opening and middlegame work by not making the most of the pieces that remain in the endgame.

The point I was really hoping to make is that all endgames involve kings. Although we spend the early part of the game tucking away our own king into safety and planning devious ways to attack the enemy monarch, there comes a stage in every game where one decides that checkmate is no longer a reality and it could be time for the king to start pulling its weight like every other piece.

Example 1

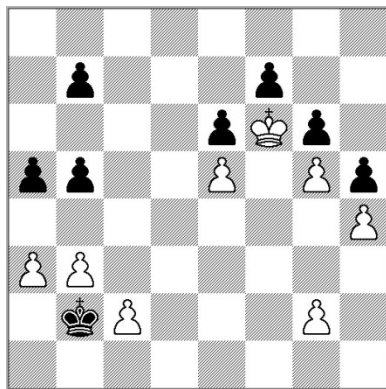


Diagram 1 (W)

Hungry kings in action!

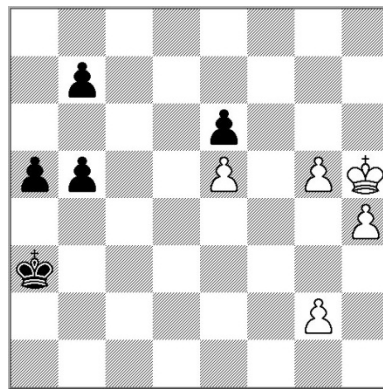


Diagram 2 (W)

Thirsty work!

(Diagram 1) Of course an art in itself is knowing exactly when that time is, but in this book on rook and pawn endgames I can safely say that it's all the time! See here how both kings are ready to have a field day with the enemy pawns.

1 Kxf7 Kxc2 2 Kxg6 Kxb3 3 Kxh5 Kxa3 (Diagram 2)

The pawns have dropped like flies as the kings captured them on light squares and dark squares alike. White will win the race to promote a passed pawn.

NOTE: Generally in endgames it is usually deemed a good idea to try and create a passed pawn as soon as possible.

The outcome of this particular position depended on the tempi situation and, specifically, whom it was to move. White started and was always favourite in the race to promote a pawn.

Note that in accordance with the previous note, Black would have had a better (but still not good!) practical chance with 3...b4 4 axb4 a4.

All that is 'king and pawn' endgame territory, where tempi are absolutely vital. Devoid of a rook or two this position is not of so much interest to this book but I just wanted to make the point that when a king is on the case there are few pieces that are as effective.

TIP: The king is a tremendous piece. Use it!

In all endgames it is advisable to get your king into the thick of the action rather than watching from the sidelines. However...

Every King Should Know its Limitations!

Just as every man must know his limitations (well according to Clint Eastwood), the same must be true of kings. Actually, I guess it is the man (or woman) operating the king that matters, but anyway take a look at the next example.

Example 2

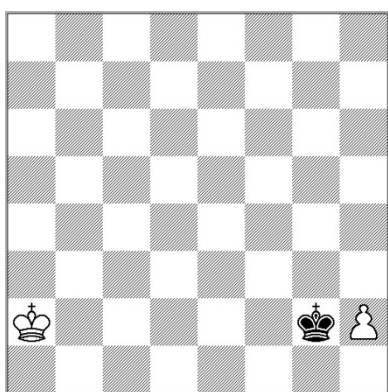


Diagram 3 (W)

Here today

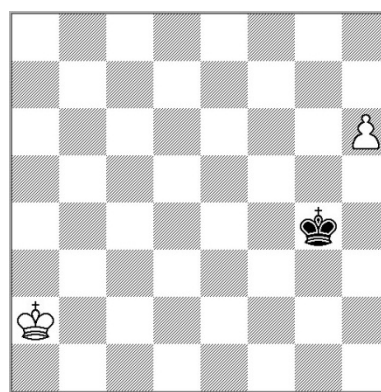


Diagram 4 (B)

Gone tomorrow

(Diagram 3) White has a passed pawn and advancing it immediately causes a big problem.

1 h4! Kg3 2 h5 Kg4 3 h6 (Diagram 4)

and White wins as the pawn promotes. In all fairness there was no point in chasing the pawn, as it is abundantly clear that unless it takes a breather, the black king will never catch the soon-to-be queen.

WARNING: The king is a great piece, but it is also a slow one.

Example 3

Regarding the king and pawn, here is a similar situation:

(Diagram 5) Kings really are awesome pieces. Only the queen can control every square within touching distance of itself (as a king does), and thus when it appears on the scene it has a massive impact. The problem invariably is getting it on the scene.

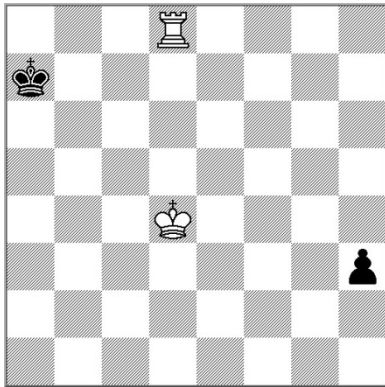


Diagram 5 (W)

So near yet so far!

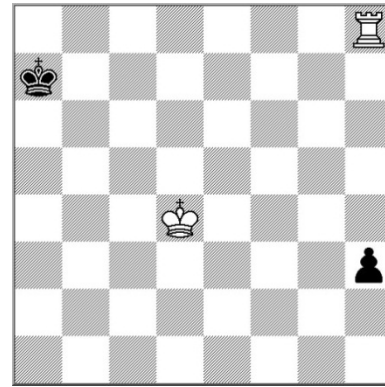


Diagram 6 (B)

Not so fast, bucko!

TIP: Centralize your king.

This tip is universal advice to all endgames based on the premise that the king can access any part of the board in the quickest time when positioned here. Returning to Example 3, though, that is still not going to be quick enough regarding halting the runaway black pawn. Fortunately, help is on hand!

1 Rh8! (Diagram 6)

The rook attacks the pawn from behind. It is ready to guzzle the pawn where it stands or should it advance one square further. The resulting ending is king and rook versus the lone king – an easy win for White.

TIP: Rooks belong behind passed pawns.

I offer this tip now but I can assure you that it will be a recurrent theme throughout this book.

Rooks belong behind Passed Pawns

There, I'm even repeating it now so as to help you commit it to memory!

Example 4

(Diagram 7) In this example there is a very dangerous black pawn that is ready to promote. Having spent a lot of time with juniors I notice that they place a lot of comfort value in blocking passed pawns. Here

1 Rg1? Kc3 2 Ra1 Kb2 (Diagram 8)

would ensure that the rook is able to give itself up for the pawn before (or as soon as) it turns into a queen, allowing White to draw.

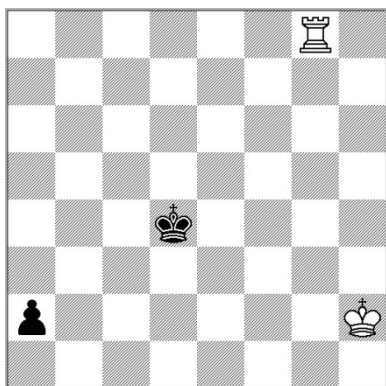


Diagram 7 (W)

Decisions, decisions!

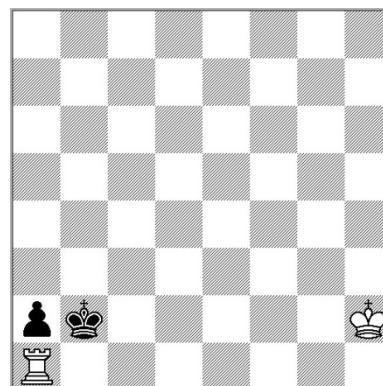


Diagram 8 (W)

Blocking is overrated!

It's true that White will not lose with 1 Rg1? but to say that 1 Ra8! is more effective is somewhat of an understatement. The rook is ready to take the pawn (or queen) on a2 or a1 and, most important of all, it has attacked the pawn before the black king is close enough to protect it. White wins easily.

NOTE: The underlying theme is that rooks like to be active and they can do that best from behind passed pawns.

Example 5

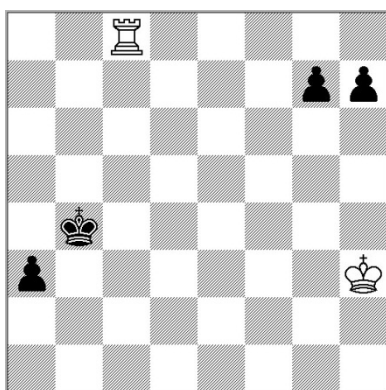


Diagram 9 (W)

How to stop that pawn?

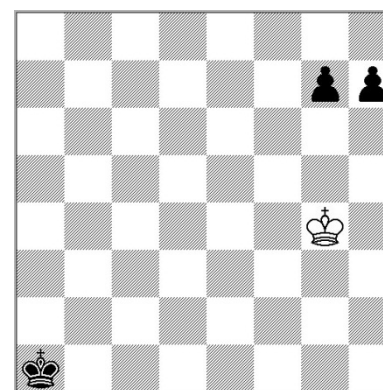


Diagram 10 (W)

Black Wins

(Diagram 9) Black has two passed and connected kingside pawns that are not troublesome yet but are certainly there for the future. At the moment the passed pawn on a3 is more of a concern and it is quite clear that the white king is too far away to offer any help in that department. However, the rook is on hand to help.

An example of extremely poor play would be

1 Rc1?! a2 2 Ra1 Kb3 3 Kg4?

I am hoping to convey the message that a blocking policy is rarely good in this type of situation, but the next example will demonstrate that White still has a defensive resource available.

3...Kb2 4 Rd1 a1Q 5 Rxa1 Kxa1 (Diagram 10)

The black king eventually reappears on the kingside in order to help escort his h- and g-pawns home.

NOTE: A draw is better than a loss!

Bearing in mind this rather obvious remark, in fact White has numerous ways in which to avoid defeat. Take, for example **(Diagram 9)**

1 Ra8 Kb3 2 Kh2

This is not a productive move in itself but I am merely using this to show how the rook can be extremely effective all by itself.

2...a2 3 Kg2 Kb2 4 Rb8+ Kc2 5 Ra8 Kb1 6 Rb8+ Kc2 7 Ra8

The reader should see a pattern emerging. White attacks the pawn (from behind of course!) and as soon as it threatens to promote due to the support from its king, the white rook checks the monarch away again. Black should accept a draw (either offered or by repetition) after

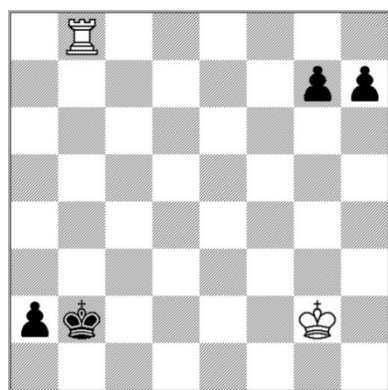


Diagram 11 (B)

Looking for cover

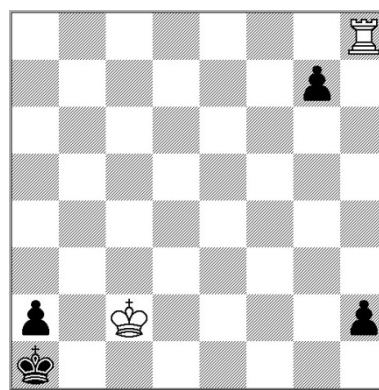


Diagram 12 (B)

Caught in a trap

7...Kb2 8 Rb8+ (Diagram 11)

and not walk into something like

8...Ka1? 9 Kf2 h5 10 Ke2 h4 11 Kd2 h3 12 Kc2 h2

Or 12...g5 13 Re8 g4 14 Re1 mate.

13 Rh8 (Diagram 12)

Black will lose his h-pawn and get mated.

Checking from the Side

Let's look at another important technique available to the rook.

Example 6

You should recall that two moves into our previous we reached the following position (**Diagram 13**)

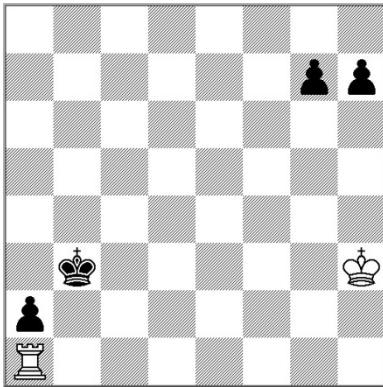


Diagram 13 (W)

Time to reactivate!

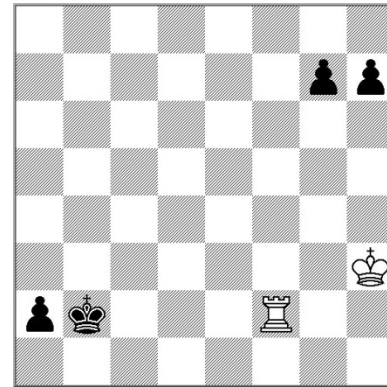


Diagram 14 (B)

Checking forever!

Having played passively and made the poor decision to block the pawn with the rook, White continued playing like a wet lettuce and capitulated via 3 Kg4? Kb2. In fact, even here he could have saved the day via

3 Rf1! Kb2 4 Rf2+ Kb1 5 Rf1+ Kb2 6 Rf2+ (Diagram 14) 6...Kb3 7 Rf3+ Kb4

And not 7...Kc4?!, after which the rook will take up its rightful place behind the pawn via 8 Ra3 and then it will be bagged!

8 Rf4+ Kb5 9 Rf5+ Kb6?

This is going too far. Black should accept that White can check forever and acquiesce to a draw.

10 Rf1

Ironically, now Ra1 followed by taking the pawn is unstoppable (and a good idea!), as the black king has strayed too far.

TIP: Whilst it is usually best to activate a rook from behind, occasionally consider sideways checks.

Shouldering off the Enemy King

This is a very important concept in any endgame and essentially refers to the simple idea of maximizing your own king whilst if possible simultaneously reducing the scope of the enemy king. Take the following very simple case.

Example 7

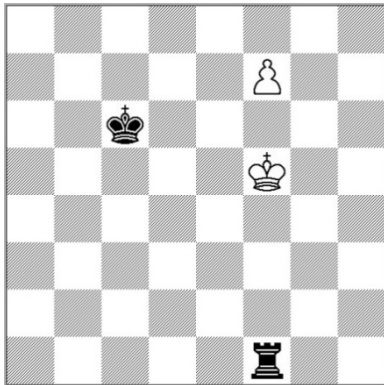


Diagram 15 (W)

Opt to shoulder!

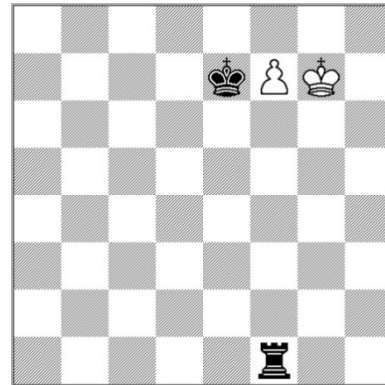


Diagram 16 (W)

The return of the black king

(Diagram 15) The white king is in check, and first and foremost he will obviously want to escape to a square that protects his passed pawn on the seventh rank. When deciding between e6 and g6, however, he shouldn't just toss a coin! Observe the failure of

1 Kg6? Kd7 2 Kg7 Ke7 (Diagram 16)

The black king has returned in time so as to combine forces with the rook to both stop and net the passed pawn. In contrast

1 Ke6! (Diagram 15)

'shoulders off' the black king. Now Black is unable to make progress because his king can't get to where it wants to be, i.e. the e7-square. Hence

1...Re1+ 2 Kf6 Rf1+ 3 Ke7

and a draw could be agreed.

Pushing Passed Pawns

So far we have seen passed pawns both succeeding and failing to make a nuisance of themselves. In order to compare passed pawns, take a look at the following extreme case.

Example 8

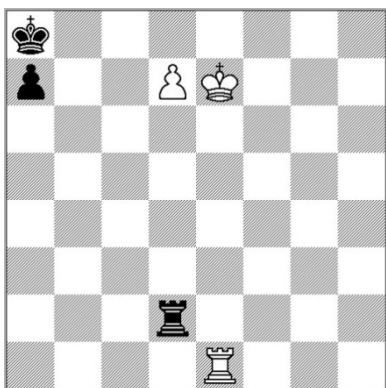


Diagram 17 (W)

The a-pawn has remained at home

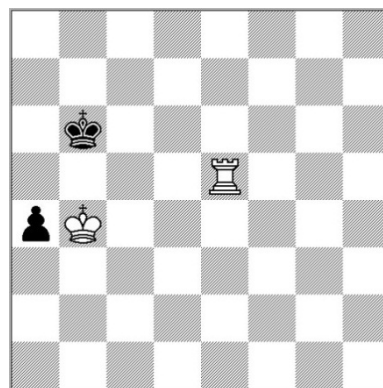


Diagram 18 (W)

Your time is up!

(Diagram 17) A dinky little move for White to play here is 1 Re6, preparing the Rd6 that would drive the black rook away. Here, though, that is unnecessary in view of the simple

1 d8Q+ Rxd8 2 Kxd8 Kb7

Clearly 2...a5 3 Ra1 nets the pawn immediately.

3 Kd7 Kb6 4 Kd6 a5

Alternatively 4...Kb5 5 Kd5 a5 6 Rb1+ Ka4 7 Kc4 Ka3 8 Kb5 a4 9 Rb4 or 9 Ra1+, also bagging that pawn.

5 Kd5 a4 6 Kc4 Ka5 7 Re5+ Kb6 8 Kb4 (Diagram 18)

and White wins. Whilst White's d-pawn cost Black his rook, Black's own passed pawn never really got out of the traps.

NOTE: A famous adage runs 'Passed pawns are meant to be pushed'.

Clearly the closer pawns are to promotion, the more dangerous and similarly the more valuable they become. As it would no doubt force your opponent to take note, it does follow that you should get on with pushing passed pawns. However...

WARNING: Each plan should be taken on its own merits. Forgoing a sensible king centralization, for example, in favour of pushing a doomed passed pawn would not be bright!

Keeping your Distance

Rooks really are superb pieces and I always maintain that the most common mistake amongst weaker players is that they just assume that they will appear in the endgame and consequently make little provision for them to play a significant role in the middlegame.

They are of course long-range pieces, which means that they are very capable of fulfilling the same duty from a distance as they are close up. Indeed, often being too near can be detrimental.

Example 9

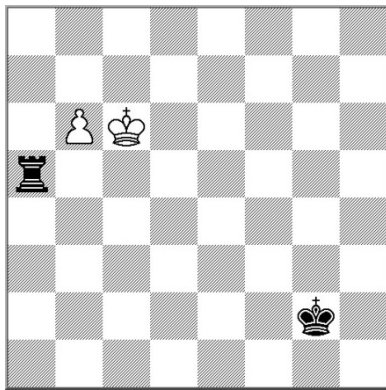


Diagram 19 (W)

How bad is that?

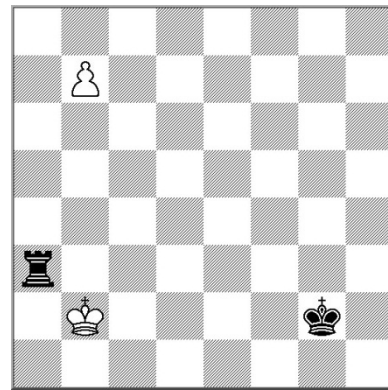


Diagram 20 (W)

Nowhere to go!

(Diagram 19) Here the move

1 b7

is extremely obvious because White is naturally very eager to increase his pawn's value from one point to nine points! It can now be noted that the black rook is on the worst possible square on the entire board. Placed on a7 at least it could give itself up for the pawn immediately, and from anywhere else it could get behind the pawn or to the back rank. Black can play on for a bit, but with careful play White will successfully achieve his goal.

1...Ra6+ 2 Kc5!

Upon 2 Kb5? Black can get himself off the hook via 2...Ra1. The rook will then be able to get behind the pawn, this being especially evident after 3 b8Q?? Rb1+. Note also that after 2 Kc7, the pin 2...Ra7! saves the day.

2...Ra5+ 3 Kc4 Ra4+ 4 Kc3 Ra3+ 5 Kb2 (Diagram 20)

That's the end of the line regarding checks for Black and there are no pins or skewers to help save the day either. Instead, he can either resign or knuckle down to the unenviable task of trying to defend king and queen versus king and rook.

TIP: Unless the rook is required for a particular reason such as offering cover, it is good to get into the habit of keeping the rook as far away as possible from the enemy king.

Cutting off the King

Example 10

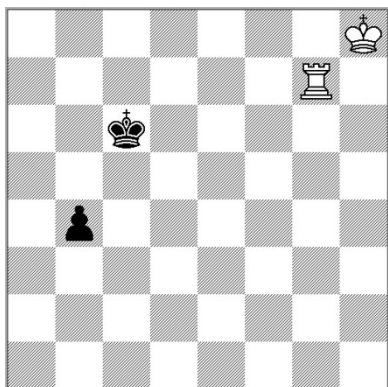


Diagram 21 (W)

Out of sight but not out of mind!

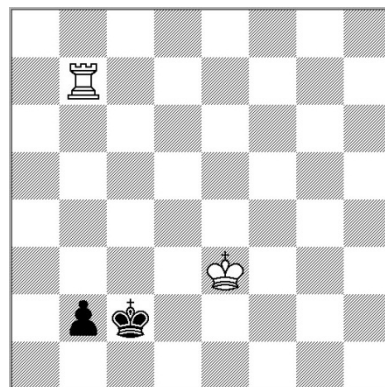


Diagram 22 (W)

Black's king is in time

(Diagram 21) Here White's king is as poorly placed as it could possibly be and Black has a very obvious plan of using his king to help escort his pawn to the end of the board. A very plausible continuation might be

1 Kh7 Kd5

The white king is not around yet, but this is still a good habit to get in to. The priority is to stay in touch with the pawn but if Black can engage in any 'shouldering', then all the better.

2 Rb7 Kc4 3 Kg6 b3 4 Kf5 Kc3 5 Ke4 b2 6 Ke3 Kc2 7 Rc7+ Kb3 8 Rb7+ Kc2 (Diagram 22)

and Black draws.

It should be said that this sort of race is not untypical in rook endings. Kings do end up on opposite sides of the board. One reason for this is that a king may need to travel a distance to eliminate enemy pawns in order to create a 'passer' of its own. Another possibility is that a king makes a decision to journey up the board in order to help promote a passed pawn. That is often necessary with an enemy rook behind the pawn, and a typical outcome is that the king forces the enemy rook to sacrifice itself for the pawn. This gain in material, however, leaves the king offside, and then the long trip back starts. The big question is whether the king gets back in time to halt the opponent's pawn without having to give up its own rook for it.

Clearly in this example it proved a bridge too far.

However, sometimes opportunities are missed and on move one the useful 'cut off' technique could have been employed in the form of 1 Rg5!.(**Diagram 23**)

Starting Out: Rook Endgames

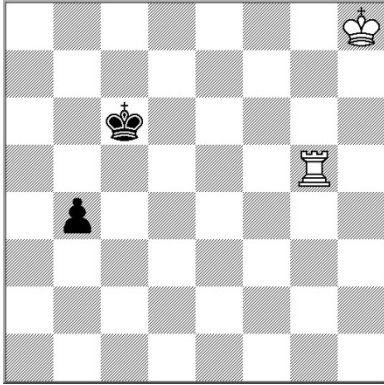


Diagram 23 (B)

Wait for me!

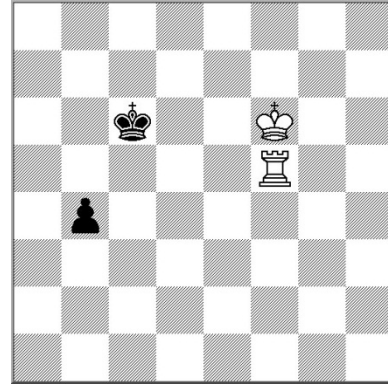


Diagram 24 (W)

What to play: 5 Ke5 or 5 Kg5?

This move cuts off the king in that an attempt to go beyond the third rank would be illegal! Specifically, White has prevented the king from getting close to its pawn.

1...Kb6

Hardly constructive but were the king and pawn any further apart then it would be the end of the road for the pawn. Observe both 1...Kd6 2 Rb5 and 1...b3 2 Rg3 b2 3 Rb3.

2 Kg7

The rook has everything under control but the white king is required to force the win of the pawn and secure victory.

2...Kc6 3 Rf5

Providing the white king with more room, although here it could easily approach via the h-file.

3...Kb6 4 Kf6 Kc6 (Diagram 24)

What to play: 5 Ke5 or 5 Kg5?

5 Kg5

Although 5 Ke5? brings the king back in the right direction, that is a bad move because it breaks the 'cut off' and thus allows the black king to advance with its pawn. With Black still unable to do anything useful, White has plenty of time to retrieve his king, but it just needs a bit of care.

5...Kb6 6 Kg4 Kc6 7 Kg3 Kb6 8 Kf2 b3

This is destined to fail but White's king was soon there anyway.

9 Rf3 b2 10 Rb3+

and White wins. Even if this weren't check, the pawn would drop off.

The Skewer Trick

TIP: Always watch out for checks.

This doesn't mean always play a check if you see one, but rather that less can go wrong and more right if you are always on the ball regarding checks that you can make in a given position or your opponent can make after your intended move.

Example 11

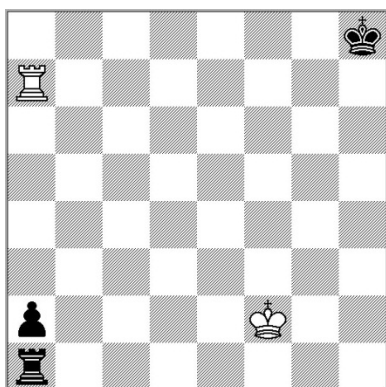


Diagram 25 (W)

Don't get complacent!

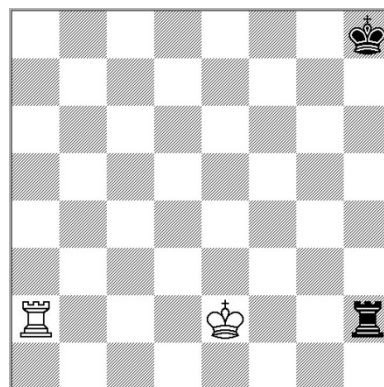


Diagram 26 (W)

Well and truly skewered

(Diagram 25) White seems to have done everything right (well, except being a pawn down in the first place!). He has his rook behind Black's passed pawn and, whilst the enemy king resides in a far corner, the white king is much nearer the threat on a2.

Without due care and attention, though, he could be in for a rude awakening.

1 Ke2?

White probably noticed that moving his king to the third rank enables Black to check and promote his pawn. 1 Ke2?, however, suffers a crueller fate!

1...Rh1! 2 Rxa2

White may have seen what's coming now but it is too late. As is nearly always the case, the checks run out as the enemy king approaches the rook, for example 2 Ra8+ Kg7 3 Ra7+ Kf8 4 Ra8+ Ke7 5 Ra7+ Kd8 6 Ra8+ Kc7 7 Ra7+ Kb6 and Black wins.

2...Rh2+ (Diagram 26)

Well and truly skewered

This cheeky skewer picks up the white rook on a2 and wins.

NOTE: Life isn't always fair!

Starting Out: Rook Endgames

Okay, I'm sure you didn't need me to tell you that and probably more relevant is my advice that White could have avoided this trap with

1 Kg2! (Diagram 27)

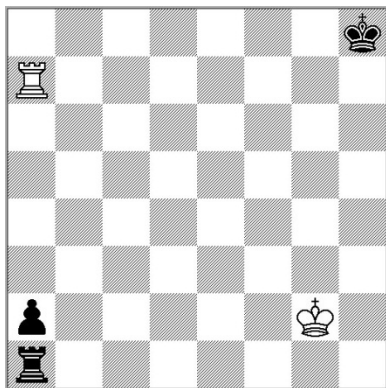


Diagram 27 (B)

Active rook versus passive rook!

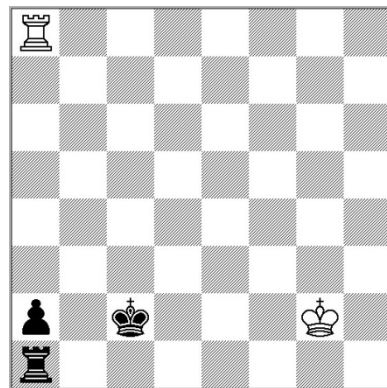


Diagram 28 (B)

It's a draw

Amazingly, this odd-looking move is the saviour because it becomes clear that unless the white king can make it to c2 (which it can't) then the only safe squares for it (i.e. ones that avoid immediate checks and the skewer) are g2 and h2.

Black doesn't deserve to win because his own rook is completely passive and thus in direct opposition to my 'activate the rook' and 'rooks belong behind passed pawns' tips.






The white rook must stay on the a-file barring temporary excursions to give checks. Play might continue with

1...Kg8 2 Ra8+ Kf7 3 Ra7+ Ke6 4 Ra6+ Kd5 5 Ra5+ Kc4 6 Ra8 Kb3 7 Rb8+ Kc2 8 Ra8 (Diagram 28)

before Black realizes that he can't realistically hope to make any progress. Every time the black king protects the pawn on a2, it is checked away by the white rook.

Chapter Two

Rook versus Pawn(s)

-  *Rook versus Split Pawns*
-  *Rook versus two connected Pawns*
-  *That Sixth Rank Myth*
-  *Rook versus more Pawns*
-  *Rook versus three connected Pawns*

Already Chapter One will have provided you with some of the basics regarding situations of a lone rook against pawns. Generally a rook does well to try and stop an enemy passed pawn from behind, but if the enemy king is in the vicinity, the rook can only realistically expect to win if its own king has an input.

Rook versus Split Pawns

Example 12

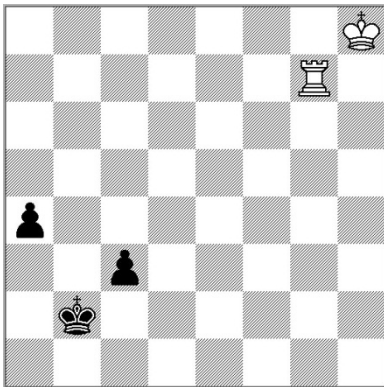


Diagram 1 (W)

The rook or bust!

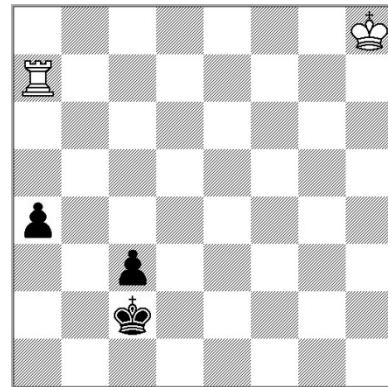


Diagram 2 (B)

Hassle those pawns!

(Diagram 1) It's White to play here, and as a defensive aid I think that we can pretty much write off the white king. What is therefore abundantly clear is that if White has to give his rook up for one of Black's pawns, then the other one will promote.

In view of that, obviously 1 Rg1? would be futile, as after 1...c2 the black a-pawn would soon join its compatriot in touching down. White must keep his rook as active as possible.

1 Rb7+! Ka2 2 Rc7!

The key is for White's rook to check the king in front of one of the pawns and then attack the other.

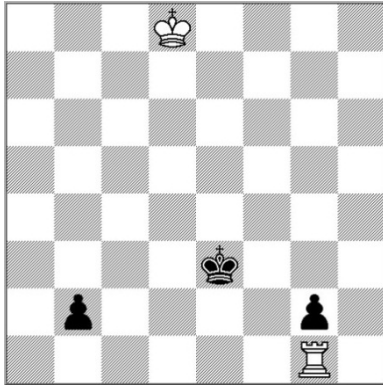
2...Kb3 3 Rb7+ Kc4 4 Rc7+ Kb4 5 Rb7+ Kc5 6 Rc7+ Kb4 7 Rb7+ Ka3 8 Rc7 Kb2 9 Rb7+ Kc2 10 Ra7 (Diagram 2) 10...Kb3 11 Rb7+

The rook is rightly relentless. Thanks to its constant buzzing about, White obtains a draw.

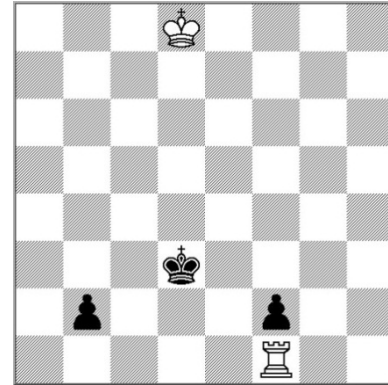
TIP: The rook should be kept flexible and active at all times.

Example 13

(Diagram 3) Here is another case of how the rook can work wonders by flitting around.

**Diagram 3 (W)**

Ducking and diving!

**Diagram 4 (W)**

The black king swoops

1 Rb1!

Black was threatening 1...Kf2, but now a trip down to White's second rank would allow the rook to pinch the pawn with check.

1...Kd3

Also note that after 1...Kf3 2 Ke7 Kg3 3 Kd6 Kh2, possible (and of course best!) is 4 Rxb2 as the remaining pawn is pinned.

2 Rg1!

Notice the symmetry here. 2 Kd7? would allow 2...Kc2 but the text prevents 2...Kc2 because of 3 Rxc2+. Black cannot make any progress and the game is drawn.

However, don't get too carried away, as a slight alteration to our starting position (**Diagram 4**) makes all the difference.

It is White to play but I can offer no good suggestions. That is, of course, because there aren't any! Black threatens 1...Ke2, but this time 1 Rb1 doesn't cut the mustard because of 1...Kc2.

NOTE: The closer together the split pawns are, the easier it is for the king to control them.

Frankly, the above note is obvious whereas the positions above are quite obscure. Nevertheless, the clear difference between the two is that in the latter the pawns are one file nearer to each other. The quicker accessibility for the black king to either pawn completely changes the assessment.

Rook versus two connected Pawns

NOTE: Generally connected pawns are superior to isolated pawns in rook endings.

Though I am obviously making quite a lot of them in this book, usually I am wary of making generalizations, as it is nearly always possible to find exceptions to the rule. Clearly, two

connected passed pawns on their home squares aren't going to be as worrying to someone as two isolanis on the seventh rank, and the above note refers to pawns of similar advancement.

I will return to the isolated versus connected pawns debate with rooks present in future chapters but for now let me talk about situations involving a rook against connected pawns.

Example 14

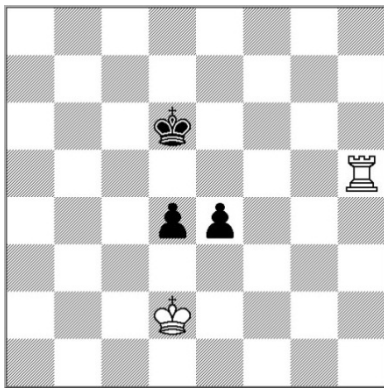


Diagram 5 (W)

Time to approach

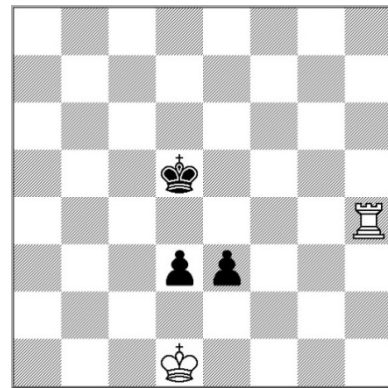


Diagram 6 (W)

Subtlety required

(Diagram 5) Nobody can deny that Black's pawns look like a tasty duo. It is amazing, though, how weaker players can overestimate their value in situations such as this.

WARNING: Never underestimate the value of pieces in endgames.

The white rook is cutting off the black king and the next stage is getting the king in on the act. Here a simple procedure is to approach the pawns from the side:

1 Kc2 Ke6

The pawn advances hold no future, for example 1...d3+ 2 Kd2 Ke6 3 Ke3 Kd6 4 Kxe4 d2 5 Rd5+.

2 Kb3 e3 3 Kc4 e2 4 Rh1 Ke5 5 Kd3

Now White picks off one pawn and the other follows shortly; for example:

5...Kd5 6 Kxe2 Kc4 7 Kd2 Kd5 8 Kd3 Ke5 9 Rh4

and White wins.

TIP: Pawns frequently become more relevant in endgames but never forget that a rook is worth five points.

If we shuffle everything up the board one rank then obviously the same procedure would be applicable. Bringing all the pieces down one rank, though, requires White to employ more subtlety.

Example 15

(Diagram 6) 1 Rh8

In case you were wondering, clearly there isn't enough time to bring the king round now, for example 1 Kc1 Ke5 2 Kb2?? e2 3 Rh1 d2 when a disaster has occurred!

1...Ke4 2 Rd8

White's aim is to force Black to advance one of his pawns. That would then enable his king to slip into the gap.

2...Kf3!? (Diagram 7)

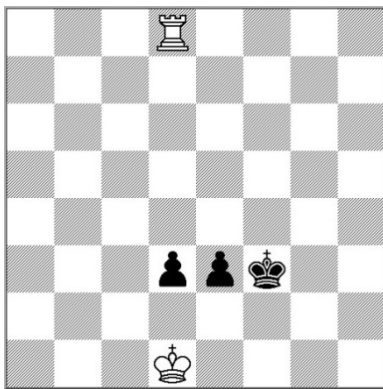


Diagram 7 (W)

Black sets a trap

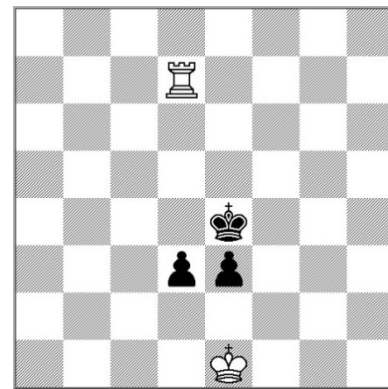


Diagram 8 (B)

Black doesn't want to move

Note how 2...e2+ 3 Kd2 Kf3 4 Rxd3+ Kf2 5 Re3 loses easily and that instead Black has one sneaky trap to set.

3 Ke1!

The simplest. Certainly White is advised to avoid 3 Rxd3? Kf2 when in view of ...e3-e2+-e1Q he must concede his rook.

3...Ke4

Again advancing the pawns is of no use, as 3...d2+ 4 Kd1 Kf2 5 Rf8+ Kg3 6 Ke2 Kg4 7 Rf1 demonstrates. Granted though, Black is soon going to be forced to do something like that anyhow.

4 Rd7! (Diagram 8)

Now Black would rather 'pass' but in the rules of chess, alas, such a 'move' is not allowed!

4...d2+ 5 Ke2 Kf4 6 Rd4+ Ke5 7 Kxe3

and the d-pawn is next – White wins easily.

That Sixth Rank Myth

We have just seen an example where a king and rook defeat a king and two connected pawns on the sixth rank. What then should we make of the frequently touted remark that 'two connected passed pawns on the sixth rank always defeat a rook'. Clearly that refers to instances where the defending king (i.e. the one paired with the rook) isn't on hand to help. Check out this following example.

Example 16

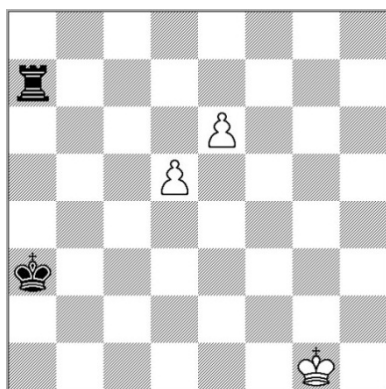


Diagram 9 (W)

Whoever is to move wins!

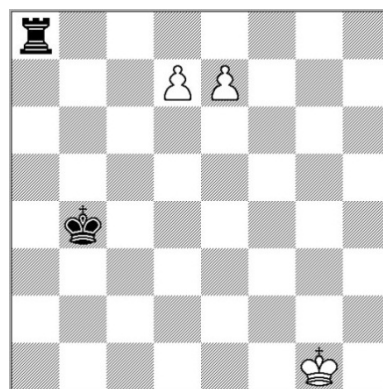


Diagram 10 (B)

Touchdown imminent!

(Diagram 9) With Black on the move he could hold up the pawns with 1...Re7, after which his king would return to clean up. Alas, the pawns get to go first.

1 d6 Kb4 2 e7

2 d7 would be equally successful here.

2...Ra8

If Black wants to try and play on, then 2...Ra1+ 3 Kf2 Rd1 4 e8Q Rxd6, or of course 2...Rd7 3 e8Q Rxd6, would survive longer. However, grovelling on with king and rook against king and queen is, as I've said before, no fun and should be a lost cause.

3 d7 (Diagram 10)

and White wins – either pawn is ready to promote. Having the white king up with the pawns will only help his cause, but irrespective of that we can conclude the following:

TIP: Two connected pawns on the sixth rank will defeat a rook provided the rook can't win one of the pawns immediately, the king partnering the rook can't have a significant input and the king with the pawns isn't detrimentally placed.

One would imagine that 'a significant input' would refer to the king being instantly active in the role of stopping the pawns. However, there is another way in which it can have an influence, as illustrated below.

Example 17

(Diagram 11) 1 Rd2+!

As our previous rule concluded, the pawns are too far advanced to deal with directly. For example, 1 Rb8 a2 or 1 Ra8 b2.

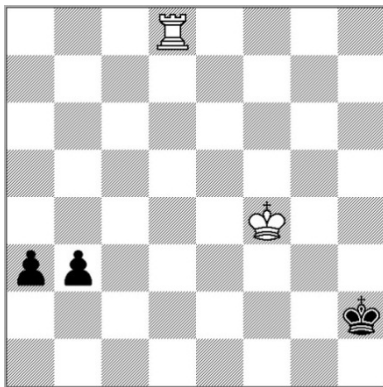


Diagram 11 (W)

Watch this space!

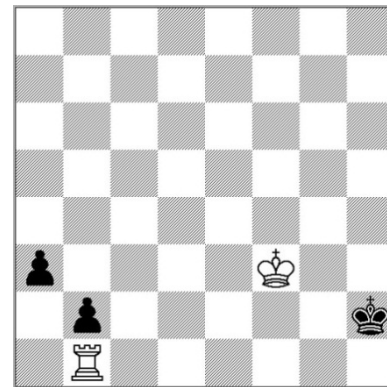


Diagram 12 (B)

Black doesn't want to move!

1...Kg1

If 1...Kh1 then 2 Kg3 and it's a forced back rank mate next turn. Clearly that is a significant input! And while I'm here, 1...Kh3 leaves the monarch detrimentally placed because of 2 Rd3+ Kh4 3 Rxb3 when the remaining pawn is stopped in the nick of time, i.e. 3...a2 4 Ra3.

2 Kf3! b2

2...Kf1 allows mate in one, while 2...Kh1 3 Kg3! is again decisive. The line 2...a2 3 Rd1+ Kh2 4 Ra1! is similar to the text.

3 Rd1+ Kh2 4 Rb1 (Diagram 12)

Now after 4...a2 5 Rxb2+ both pawns fall. Unfortunately, moving the king and being mated by 5 Rh1 is the only alternative!

Example 18

(Diagram 13) This example is very similar to the previous one. Here Black has the option of running his king to the queenside but, as seen in the note to Black's first move, this doesn't actually help his cause.

1 Ke3 Kf1

Starting Out: Rook Endgames

Or 1...Kd1 2 Kd3 Kc1 3 Kc3 and, having achieved this position due to the continuous back rank mate threats, the pawns are now ripe to be eaten!

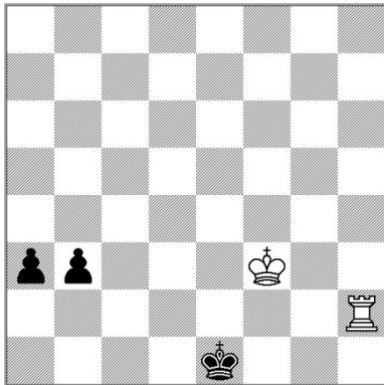


Diagram 13 (W)

White utilizes a mate threat

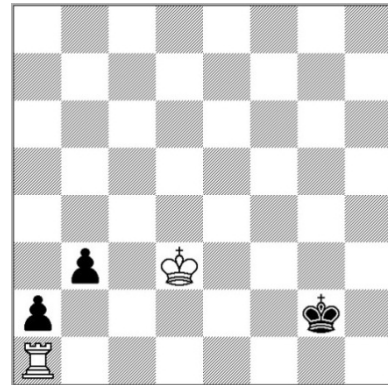


Diagram 14 (B)

Threatening Kc3

2 Kd3!

Now the white king is close enough to the pawns to offer assistance in halting them.

2...a2

2...Kg1 loses after 3 Rd2 Kf1 4 Kc3.

3 Rh1+ Kg2 4 Ra1! (Diagram 14) 4...b2

Or else 5 Kc3 and the pawns would drop in succession anyway.

5 Rxa2

Pinning and hence winning the b-pawn.

Rook versus more Pawns

The topics up for discussion in this section include situations in which the rook is up against several pawns. Of course there are millions of scenarios that could be dreamt up in this category, while factors such as how far advanced the pawns are and how strong they are in terms of whether they are connected or isolated certainly come into play. However, first up I'd have to observe that the title in itself is deceptive. One mustn't forget that we are really talking about king and rook versus king and pawns. The king with the rook must be able to have a major role if the rook is to triumph.

Example 19

TIP: The first step in these situations is to identify the 'danger' pawns.

Though they are passed, clearly the doubled a-pawns are of little concern to White right now. This is because they are isolated and could only prove to be a threat if:

- a) They (or one of them) get further up the board.
- b) The black king can assist in their advance so that they are not just picked off as soon as the white rook gets behind them.
- c) The white king is nowhere to be seen, i.e. on the other side of the board and unable to return in time to help out.

The d-pawn is also not much to worry about, but it is easy to envisage the connected h- and g-pawns having a big say. Hence the priority is to get the white king ready for action in that area.

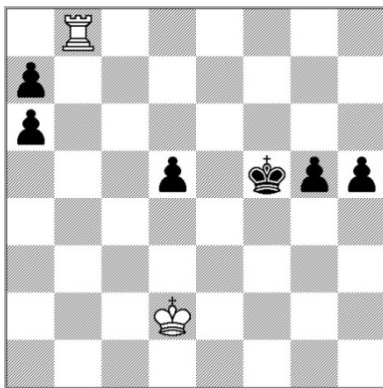


Diagram 15 (W)

Pawns don't mean queens!

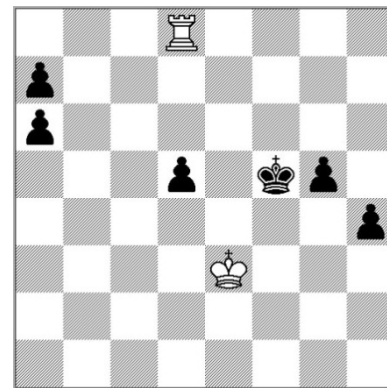


Diagram 16 (B)

The rook is the boss

(Diagram 15) 1 Ke3!

TIP: It is nearly always beneficial for the king partnering the rook to be in close proximity to its enemy number. This reduces the influence it can have in ushering the pawns forward.

Also sensible here is 1 Ke2!. Usually it makes more sense to centralize the king. On e3 the white king can get to the g- and h-files just as quickly as it can from e2 and on e3 obviously it has more 'shouldering' ability. The downside (not effective here) is that Black could try to distract the king by offering a pawn. Under different conditions ...d4+ could be a worthwhile sacrifice to gain time.

WARNING: You should always take care as one casual move could undo so much hard work.

Okay, again very obvious advice but let's see what could happen if White ignored king activation in favour of unnecessarily premature pawn grabbing: 1 Ra8?! h4 2 Rxa7 Kf4 3 Rxa6?! h3 4 Ke2?! h2 5 Rh6? (actually 5 Rf6+! Kg4 6 Rf1 Kg3 7 Rf3+ Kh4 8 Rf8 demonstrates how an active rook can seemingly work miracles; however, it's clear that after initial errors, accurate play is required just to hold the draw) 5...Kg3 (threatening ...Kg2 and ...h1Q) 6 Kf1? d4. With the white king and rook tied up there is no satisfactory way to halt this pawn and Black will win.

1...h4 2 Rd8

It's not so much the pawn that this rook is after but the chance to 'cut off' the black king.

2...Ke5 3 Re8+ Kf5 4 Rd8 (Diagram 16)

Showing who is boss! Of course this repetition is not necessary but it was useful to demonstrate that, in contrast to the belief of the majority of weaker players, it is White who is in the driving seat in this materially imbalanced situation.

4...Ke5 5 Kf3 d4

Please note that I'm not categorically stating that White is winning this example all along; I'm simply reiterating just how powerful rooks are in endgames. I'm also warning against over-valuing pawns when making a comparison with pieces, although here they can obviously make a nuisance of themselves. Specifically, it is quite possible that 5...a5!? may keep Black's chances alive. Indeed, 6 Kg4 d4 may draw as it looks difficult for White to monitor all of the passed pawns as well keeping his king close to its opposite number.

A useful exercise is to study this one yourself. Often such positions end in a race. Can a king get back to assist its rook in rounding up a dangerous passed pawn or does a draw have to be forced by the rook before the defending king can usher the pawn home? I can tell you that 5...a5!? offers some fascinating variations.

6 Re8+ Kf5

Upon 6...Kd5 7 Rg8 the h-and g-pawns drop quickly and the important thing is that the white king is still easily close enough to help out with the d-pawn and even the a-pawns.

7 Re4! (Diagram 17)

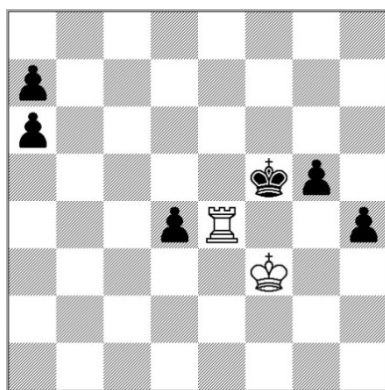


Diagram 17 (W)

Rook domination

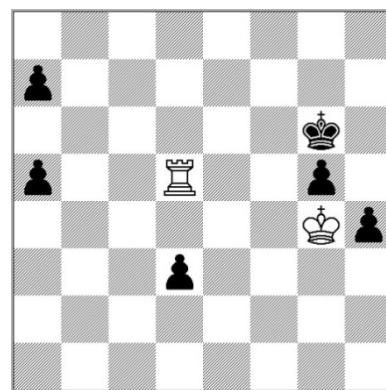


Diagram 18 (B)

Good technique

Excellent play. The rook is an absolute star.

7...d3

A different road would be 7...h3 8 Rxd4 h2 9 Kg2 Ke5 10 Ra4. White still has plenty of time here, and the only way that things could go wrong is if he were to dilly-dally and the black king made it over the help an a-pawn with the white king still languishing on the kingside. In this variation that is a highly unlikely outcome seeing as White is about to pick off the a-pawns in succession!

8 Rd4 a5

White has all the other pawns under lock and key and, as I stated earlier, without the black king offering support a solitary black a-pawn doesn't become a concern for some while.

9 Rd5+!

Forcing the king back – a good habit to get into.

TIP: Always look out for opportunities to force the opponent's king back and away from the action.

9...Kg6 10 Kg4! (Diagram 18)

To be honest, White can win pretty much however he likes now. Nevertheless, this shows good technique. The a- and d-pawns are going nowhere and all resistance will be broken when the g- and h-pawns are eliminated.

10...Kf6 11 Rxd3 a4 12 Ra3 Kg6 13 Rxa4 Kf6 14 Ra6+ Ke5 15 Kxg5 h3 16 Rxa7 h2 17 Rh7

and White wins. I told you the rook is a good piece. Unless Black resigns beforehand, all five black pawns will be successfully removed!

Example 20

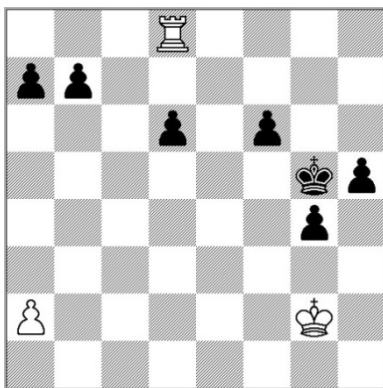


Diagram 19 (W)

White has a pawn!

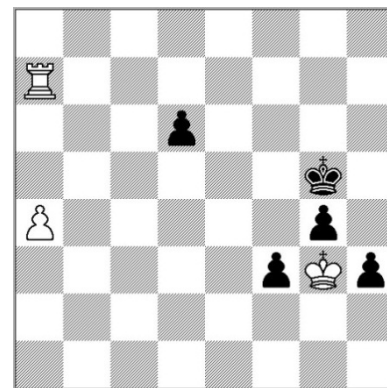


Diagram 20 (B)

Fulfilling its destiny!

In our previous example White was rightly favourite for the full point, but he did have to work quite hard. White has an easier plan in **Diagram 19** in which he is in the arguably more realistic situation of still having a pawn left himself.

1 Rd7!

Black currently has four passed pawns which White should be able to stop, and indeed he could have taken one immediately. However, a very early tip in this book was to try and create a passed pawn as soon as possible. Black's d-pawn is not a threat and so White gets straight on the case of removing Black's queenside pawns.

1...h4 2 Rxb7 f5 3 Rxa7 h3+ 4 Kh2 f4 5 a4 f3 6 Kg3 (Diagram 20)

White wins easily. The black pawns are blocked and White can concentrate on promoting his own pawn. The cumbersome black king is powerless to do anything about this. Even if it could get remotely close, the white rook would cut it off a file or two from its desired destination. White's task in this example was made infinitely easier thanks to the presence of a pawn of his own.

Rook versus three connected Pawns

Although it occurs relatively rarely in practice, as many seem intrigued by the prospect I will just say a few words about the fascinating scenario of a rook (and king!) versus king and three connected pawns.

Example 21

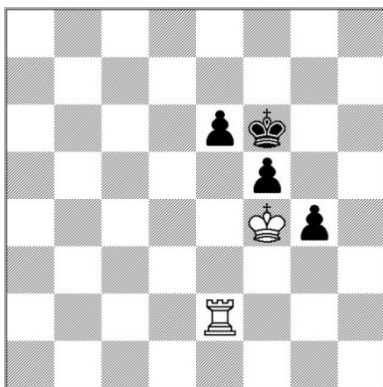


Diagram 21 (W)

Pawns under control

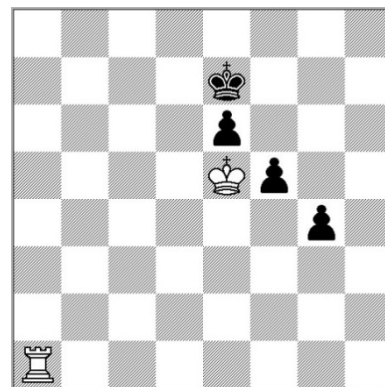


Diagram 22 (B)

Sitting pretty

(Diagram 21) Here the black pawns are in a nice chain, but it soon becomes clear that they are not yet far enough advanced to cause White any problems.

1 Re1!

TIP: Always be on the lookout for the time when a 'waiting move' is best.

Essentially the text 'freezes' White's position. Now Black must give way, thus allowing an infiltration.

1...Kf7 2 Ke5 Ke7

Upon 2...g3, the cheeky upstart is eliminated via 3 Rg1.

3 Ra1! (Diagram 22)

As usual, the rook makes a menace of itself. Now the black king is in danger of being trapped on the back rank.

3...Kf7 4 Ra7+ Kg6 5 Kxe6

This is perfectly acceptable. Black's pawns are three tempi away from being abreast on the sixth rank (the situation we know is required for the pawns to defeat the rook). That aside, the white king is not far from its black counterpart.

5...f4 6 Ke5 Kg5

6...f3 7 Kf4 f2 8 Ra1 Kh5 9 Kg3 is also to no avail.

7 Rg7+ Kh4 8 Kxf4

and the g-pawn is next – White wins.

Example 22

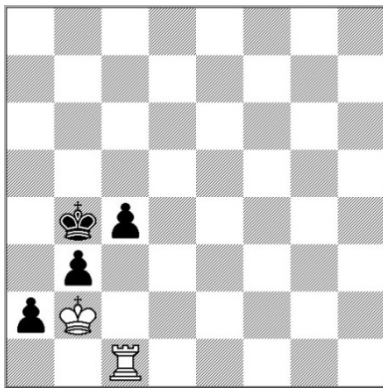


Diagram 23 (W)

White aims to draw

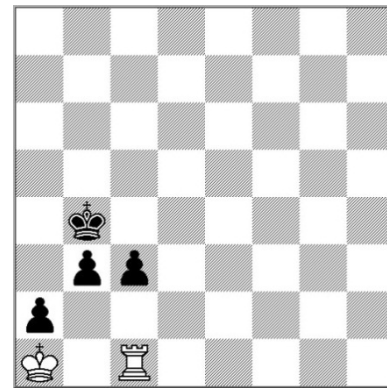


Diagram 24 (W)

Stalemate tricks?

(Diagram 23) In the first chapter it was asserted that 'passed pawns are meant to be pushed'. This position would certainly provide the unprepared with a headache!

1 Ka1!

This is the only move that saves White. Taking a look at the alternatives we have:

a) 1 Rc3 a1Q+! and the white king is overworked with 2 Kxa1 Kxc3.

b) 1 Rxc4+ Kxc4 2 Ka1 (White may feel that he has some stalemate chances but a little subtlety wins Black this king and pawn ending) 2...Kb4 3 Kb2 a1Q+! (were the a-pawn absent, White would have to choose 4 Kb1 here in order to be able to retain the 'opposition'; alas, he can't ignore the queen!) 4 Kxa1 Ka3 5 Kb1 b2 6 Kc2 Ka2 and the pawn will promote.

c) 1 Rh1 c3+ 2 Ka1 Ka3 and the devastating ...b3-b2+ is inevitable.

1...Ka3

Read on to see what becomes of 1...c3.

2 Rc3!

Pinning the b-pawn and thus preventing 2...b2+.

TIP: As a defensive resource, always look out for stalemate possibilities.

'Where did that come from' I hear you ask! Well, first note that 2 Rc2! was the other available defence. That would cover the b2-square and the major point is that the game could be stopped after stalemate with 2...bxc2.

2...Kb4 3 Rc1 c3 (Diagram 24) 4 Rxc3!

Totally justifying my last tip!

4...Kxc3

with stalemate.

Actually, I've just noticed something amusing. If we revisit the **Diagrams 23** and **24** but instead with Black to move (it was White in the example), then we can see that the first leads to the other. Yes, 1...c3+ is winning, because after 2 Rxc3 again there is that overloading 2...a1Q+!, as 3 Kxa1 Kxc3 4 Kb1 b2 is easy. Hence the better practical try for White is 2 Ka1 b2+ 3 Kxa2. Now when taking the rook Black must be careful what he promotes to as both a queen and a rook would leave it as stalemate. Hence he should bring into play a new knight or bishop when the win is trivial.

Don't worry, I'm not going to say...

WARNING: Beware of under-promotions!

Oops, sorry I just did!

Chapter Three

Rook and Pawn vs Rook

-  *Defending King on the Case*
-  *Defending King out of Town*

When learning rook and pawn endgames it is really a good idea to start with the absolute basics. By this I'm referring to scenarios in which both sides have a rook but one player has a pawn too. If only rooks were involved then a defender could adequately prevent a pawn from promoting simply by getting behind it. However, the presence of kings naturally complicates things. Essentially, I'm going to split this chapter into two parts: one in which the defending king is able to blockade the pawn and the other where it cannot.

Defending King on the Case

By this, I'm referring to the defending king being able to have an active role in blockading the enemy pawn. Within this category I want to discuss two types of pawn:

the outside pawn (a-, b-, g- and h-) and the central pawn (c-, d-, e- and f-).

The Outside Pawn

When blockaded, a rook's pawn provides fewer winning chances than any other pawn.

Example 23

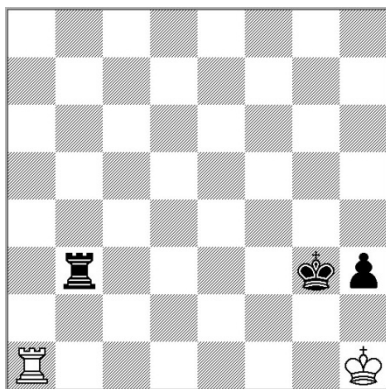


Diagram 1 (W)

Sit tight!

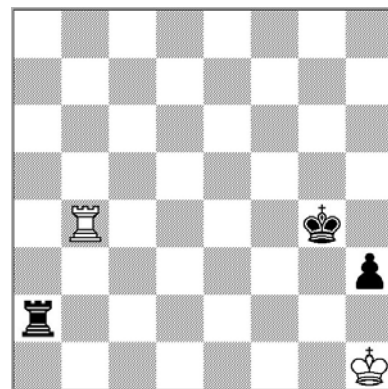


Diagram 2 (B)

Going nowhere!

(Diagram 1) Without the rooks it is a simple draw. The presence of rooks, though, doesn't enhance Black's winning chances one iota!

1 Rc1

Seeing as Black is threatening nothing, there is no reason whatsoever for White to alter his defensive formation. Hence the rook stays on the back rank, where of course it fulfils the important duty of preventing mate.

1...Ra3 2 Rb1 Ra2 3 Rb3+

In fact Black isn't threatening anything anyhow, so if he wants White could also sit tight, for example 3 Rc1 Rh2+ 4 Kg1 Rg2+ 5 Kh1 and Black can do nothing to make progress.

3...Kg4 4 Rb4+ Kg3 5 Rb3+ Kg4 6 Rb4+ (Diagram 2) 6...Kf5

The black king has nowhere to hide. It sets about eliminating the checks by reducing the distance between itself and the rook. Alas, that enables White to adhere to the golden rule (not that this is a remotely critical situation).

7 Rh4

Yes, it's 'rook behind passed pawn' time and now this one is doomed.

7...Ra3 8 Kh2

with a draw after Rxh3.

Example 24

(Diagram 3) The knight's pawn at least offers some cover for the attacking king, but providing the defender is sensible, the winning chances are still extremely limited.

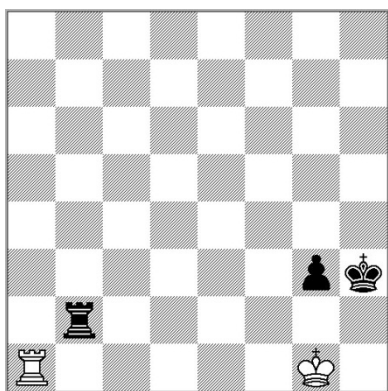


Diagram 3 (W)

Acceptably passive

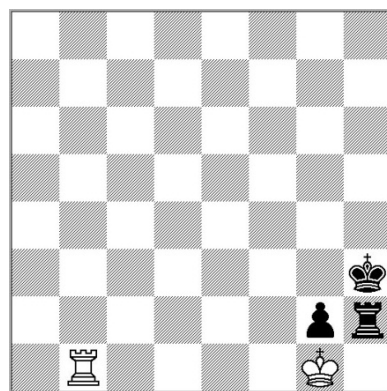


Diagram 4 (W)

A losing attempt!

1 Rc1

TIP: When defending against a rook's pawn or a knight's pawn, a perfectly acceptable defence is to keep the king on the 'queening square' and the rook 'passively' guarding the back rank.

We have already seen and will continue to see active rooks buzzing all around the board, checking the opponent's king, attacking pawns and all sorts. Here the white rook remains comparatively passive but under these conditions it is an adequate solution.

1...Ra2 2 Rb1 Rg2+ 3 Kh1 Rh2+ 4 Kg1 Ra2

Ironically the only serious winning attempt is a more-than-serious losing attempt! Check out

4...g2??. **(Diagram 4)** Now Black threatens ...Rh1+, but 5 Rb3+! Kg4 6 Kxh2 is not what he is looking for!

5 Rc1 g2 6 Rc3+ Kg4 7 Rb3

The other easy draw option was 7 Rc4+ Kh3 8 Rc3+ Kg4 9 Rc4+. The king has nowhere to hide and 9...Kf3 10 Rc3+ Kf4 11 Rc4+ Ke3 12 Rc3+ Kd4 13 Rg3 bags that pawn.

7...Rc2 8 Ra3

with a draw. The king is cut off from the pawn and hence there is no way for Black to make progress.

The Centre Pawn

Included in this category is the bishop's pawn. As examples with c- and f-pawns are essentially the same as ones with d- and e-pawns, this is where I will start.

Example 2

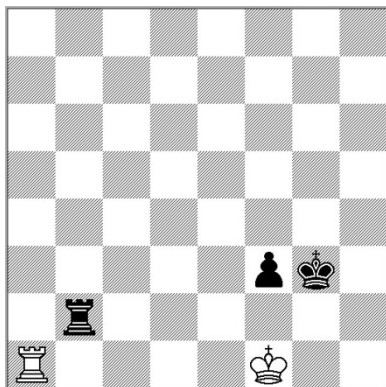


Diagram 5 (W)

Introducing the h-file!

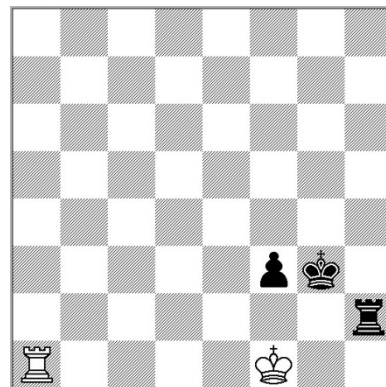


Diagram 6 (W)

The white rook can't help

(Diagram 5) 1 Kg1

The truth is that White is already lost in this position. It is clearly too late for the white rook to try and get active, i.e. 1 Ra8 (hoping to check the black king from behind) 1...Rb1 mate. Meanwhile, the consistently passive 1 Rc1 Rh2 is what 1 Kg1 attempts (unsuccessfully) to avoid.

1...Rg2+!

1 Kg1 constituted White's best try as after 1...Rh2 he could at least pin the f-pawn with 2 Ra3. Of course Black might only be teasing, or perhaps he might find the winning plan of 2...Rb2 3 Ra1 Rg2+ 4 Kf1 Rh2 next time round!

2 Kf1

2 Kh1 Rh2+ 3 Kg1 f2+ transposes to the main line and is curtains!

2...Rh2 (Diagram 6)

And here we see the critical difference between this situation and our previous two examples. The white rook is unable to cover the whole of the back rank as the black rook swings to the other side of the pawn in order to threaten mate on h1.

3 Kg1 f2+ 4 Kf1 Rh1+

and Black wins.

WARNING: Passive defence does not work against a centre pawn.

However, one must not panic and vow here and now never to be a pawn down. First of all, because you'll never be able to uphold this vow(!) and, secondly, because there are other defensive techniques available.

Example 26

(Diagram 7) In this position White can draw with careful play.

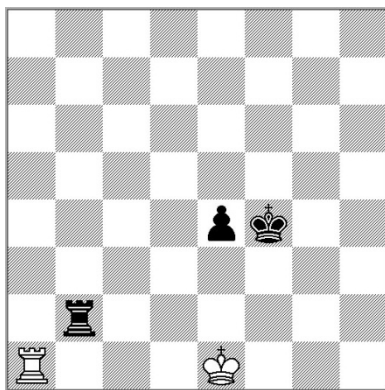


Diagram 7 (W)

Aiming for Philidor

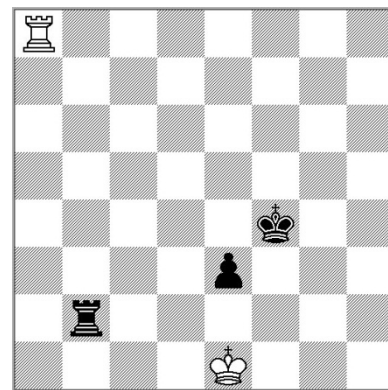


Diagram 8 (B)

Getting ready to check

1 Ra3!

NOTE: This is known as the 'Philidor technique'. Remembering this idea will save you many half-points.

The text prevents the enemy king from advancing. If it is allowed to do so then Black will win, for example 1 Rc1? (this passive defence will fail) 1...Kf3 2 Ra1 (it is too late for 2 Rc8 now: 2...Rb1+ 3 Kd2 e3+ 4 Kd3 Rd1+ 5 Kc2 e2 6 Rf8+ Kg4 7 Rg8+ Kf5 8 Rf8+ Kg6 9 Re8 e1Q) 2...e3 3 Rc1 Rh2 and, just as we saw with the f-pawn in the previous example, the white rook is powerless to help out.

1...e3

There is no other way for Black to try to progress. Where it is currently placed, the black rook stops the white king from advancing. Even if it could get to d3, White could (though he wouldn't

forced to) just swap rooks in order to enter a drawn king and pawn ending.

This text carries the threat of ...Kf3, after which the white rook is forced to retreat. However, whilst it can prevent the check on b1, the recurring theme is that it can do nothing about ...Rh2-h1.

2 Ra8! (Diagram 8)

White must continue actively. From here the white rook has fantastic hassling options.

2...Kf3

The white rook was able to venture away because (aside from ...Kf3) there was no immediate threat, for example 2...Rb1+ 3 Ke2 Rb2+ 4 Ke1 and nothing's doing.

3 Rf8+ Ke4 4 Re8+ Kd3 5 Rd8+

with an easy draw as there is no hiding place for the black king.

It is completely clear that understanding and being able to employ this third rank (Philidor's) technique could salvage you a draw or two, but occasionally you may not be able to reach our basic position (for example, if you have just captured to liquidate a pair of pawns, reducing the situation from 2 v 1 to 1 v 0).

Example 27

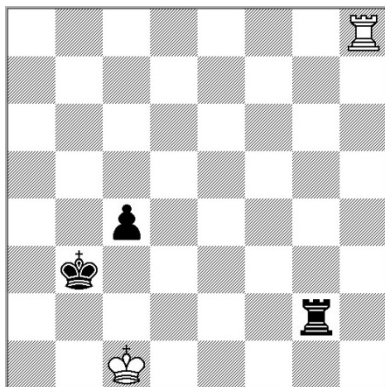


Diagram 9 (W)

Time for a 'short' story

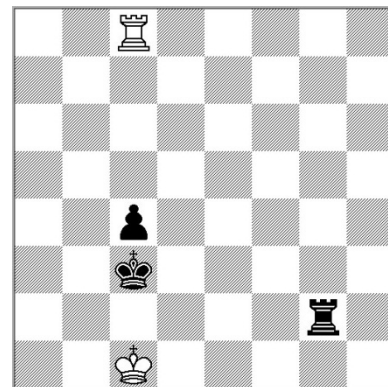


Diagram 10 (W)

A critical decision!

(Diagram 9) In this case White has to employ more subtlety in his defence.

1 Rc8!

It is important that White doesn't get confused with the 'Philidor' position here. The black king has already advanced to White's third rank and so 1 Rh3+? fails dismally to 1...c3. Black is threatening the back rank mate and 2 Rh1 Ra2 should by now be 'old hat'.

I will not confuse you further. 1 Rc8!, logically placing the rook behind the passed pawn, is the best move.

1...Kc3 (Diagram 10)

It should be clear to you that after 1...c3 the white rook can check forever (well, you know what I mean!). As for 1...Rg1+ 2 Kd2, well then White's king and rook combine to prevent the pawn advance. White threatens the checks again and so Black has nothing better than a repetition via 2...Rg2+ 3 Kc1.

2 Kb1!

White had a big decision to make here and this is absolutely the correct one. As 2 Rd8 Rg1+ 3 Rd1 Rxd1+ 4 Kxd1 Kb2 is of no use, White had to move his king.

WARNING: For a successful defence the king must go to the short side of the pawn.

The 'short' side is the side with the fewer files and the reason why soon becomes clear.

2...Rg1+ 3 Ka2 Rc1

This may look like a funny move until you observe that 3...Kd3 4 Kb2 Rg2+ 5 Kc1 Kc3 6 Kb1 is just going round in circles! The text prepares ...Kd2 and the chance to advance the pawn.

4 Rh8! (Diagram 11)

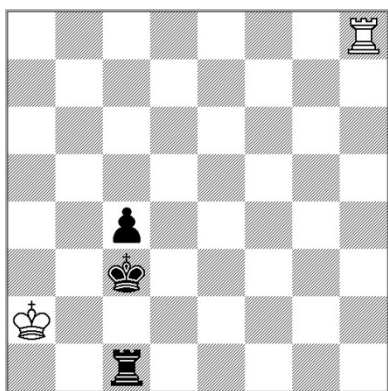


Diagram 11 (W)

Preparing to check

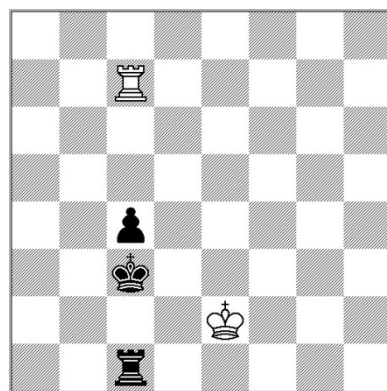


Diagram 12 (W)

No checking distance

Chapter One tendered the tip about bearing in mind the sideways check, and utilizing this concept here is the only way for White to achieve a draw.

4...Rd1

Preparing to block the checks that save the day as shown in the following variation: 4...Kd2 5 Rh2+ Kd3 6 Rh3+ Ke2 7 Kb2 Rd1 8 Kc3 Rc1+ 9 Kb2 Rg1 10 Kc3 Rg4 11 Rh8 Ke3 12 Rc8. What should be apparent there is that the white rook had plenty of 'checking distance'. In order for

the king to close the gap it had to come too far out of position. This is essentially the reason why the defending king must choose the 'short' side over the 'long' side.

NOTE: When the passed pawn in question is on the d- or e-file then there is just about enough checking distance if the king selects the 'long' side. However, I would recommend the defending king use the 'short' side every time.

5 Rc8! Kd3 6 Kb2 Rd2+ 7 Kc1 Rh2 8 Rc7!

White holds his ground, with the text just being a 'passing move'.

TIP: When not wanting to alter your defensive set-up, try to employ a minimalist rook move as a 'waiting' move.

8...Kc3 9 Kb1!

Once again correctly selecting the 'short' side of the enemy passed pawn. While we're here, though, let's take a look at the probable consequence of opting for the 'long' side instead: 9 Kd1? Rh1+ 10 Ke2 Rc1!. **(Diagram 12)** 10...Kb3? 11 Kd2 makes no progress and perhaps after 11...Rh2+ 12 Kc1 Kc3 White might see the light via 13 Kb1!. But 10...Rc1! wins after 11 Ra7 (the problem with 11 Rh7 now is that White's own king drastically reduces his ability to check the enemy monarch) 11...Kb2 12 Rb7+ Kc2 13 Ra7 c3 14 Ra8 Rb1 15 Rc8 Rb7 16 Rc6 Kb2 17 Kd3 Rd7+ 18 Kc4 c2 19 Rb6+ Kc1 20 Rh6 (or 20 Kc3 Kd1) 20...Rb7 (facilitating the black king's escape from in front of the pawn via the b-file) 21 Kc3 Kb1 and the pawn will promote next turn.

TIP: Whilst it may be vital to know the correct 'short side' drawing technique should it arise, it is equally as important (i.e. it's worth half-a-point) to know how to punish the incorrect 'long side' defender.

9...Rh1+ 10 Ka2 Rc1 11 Rh7

And here we are again!

11...Rd1 12 Rc7!

White has demonstrated that he has the required drawing technique.

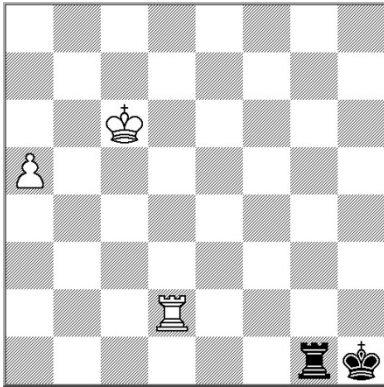
Defending King out of Town

Defending rooks can be a real nuisance to the attacker, but in the vast majority of cases the defending king is required to have an input in order to achieve a satisfactory defence. It couldn't be worse placed than in the following example.

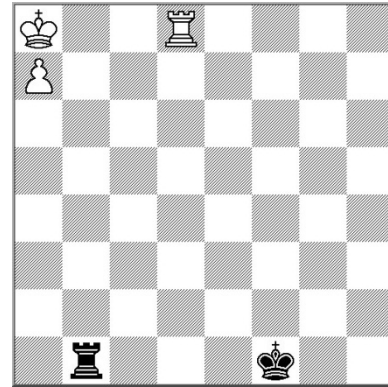
Example 28

(Diagram 13) 1 a6 Ra1

Checks from the side are short lived, as White's rook is on hand to interpose.

**Diagram 13 (W)**

The black king is off the pace

**Diagram 14 (B)**

Only temporarily trapped

TIP: Aside from cutting off the defending king, the attacking rook is often well placed somewhere where it can block or stop enemy checks.

2 Kb7 Rb1+ 3 Ka8 Kg1 4 a7 Kf1 5 Rd8 (Diagram 14)

Preparing to push the black rook away from the b-file with Rb8. In truth, with the black king so far away White has plenty of ways to convert the full point here. The line 5 Rd7 Rb2 6 Rb7 Rh2 7 Kb8 Rh8+ 8 Kc7 Rh7+ 9 Kb6 Rh6+ 10 Ka5 Rh5+ 11 Rb5 Rh8 12 Rb8 Rh5+ 13 Kb4 Rh4+ 14 Kc5 (and the white king will zigzag towards the rook) is a slightly more long-winded alternative.

5...Ke2 6 Rb8 Ra1 7 Kb7 Rb1+ 8 Kc6 Rc1+ 9 Kd5 Rd1+ 10 Ke4

White wins – there are no more checks and the pawn will queen next turn.

Example 29

Bring the black king nearer and the story is significantly different.

(Diagram 15) 1 Rd3 Rb2 2 Rd1 Ke8 3 Rh1

The white rook was preventing the black king from crossing the d-line, but in order for him to win he needs to push away the black rook from the b-file.

3...Kd7 4 Rh8 Kc7 (Diagram 16) 5 Rb8 Rh2

With the black king so well placed, actually any rook move apart from on the b-file would have been adequate.

6 Rb7+ Kc6

Or 6...Kc8 7 Rb1 Rc2, when it is impossible to budge the black king from either c7 and c8 and thus impossible to extract the white king.

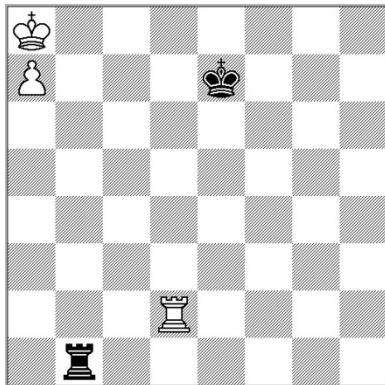


Diagram 15 (W)

'Cut off' kings!

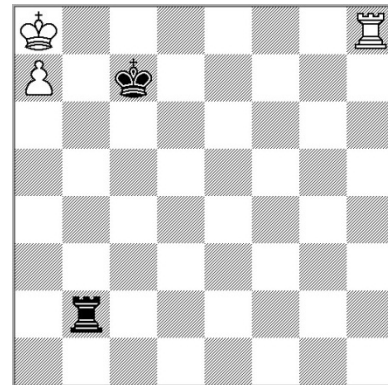


Diagram 16 (W)

Boxed in

7 Rb1 Rh8+

Or 7...Rh3 8 Rc1+ (absolutely not 8 Kb8?? Rh8 mate) 8...Kb6 9 Rb1+ Ka6 10 Ra1+ Kb6 11 Rb1+ Kc7. Yes, a6 or c7; with the white king so awkwardly placed Black can pretty much do whatever he wants!

8 Rb8 Rh7

Echoing my previous comments, there are now loads of ways to draw. For example, 8...Rh1 9 Rc8+ Kd7 10 Kb7 Rb1+ 11 Ka6 Ra1+ 12 Kb7 Rxa7+.

9 Rc8+ Kb6 10 Rb8+ Ka6

The game is drawn. The a-pawn drops and, as White has to make a move, it won't be with mate!

NOTE: For a defender, success or failure (in obtaining a draw) is usually dependent upon the proximity of his king to the pawn.

Example 30

(Diagram 17) If we move White's rook and Black's king one file to the right, White's rook reaches the b8-square in time to ensure victory, although the process is more complex than it first appears.

1 Rc2!

Immediately aiming for the b8-square.

1...Ke7 2 Rc8 Kd6!

The best try. After 2...Kd7 White wins more easily with 3 Rb8 Ra1 4 Kb7! Rb1+ 5 Ka6 Ra1+ 6 Kb6 Rb1+ 7 Kc5, when Black soon runs out of checks.

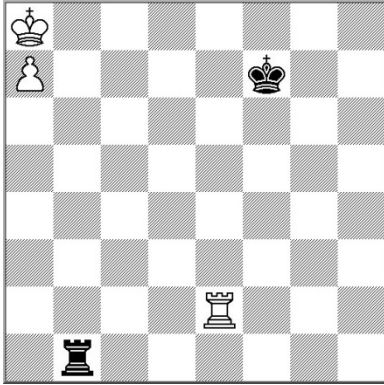


Diagram 17 (W)

White wins... just!

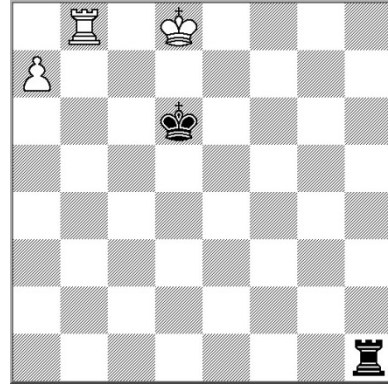


Diagram 18 (W)

Not so easy

3 Rb8 Rh1 4 Kb7 Rb1+ 5 Kc8!

White must go this way with the king. Note that 5 Ka6?! Ra1+ 6 Kb6 Rb1+ 7 Ka5 Ra1+! makes no progress.

5...Rc1+ 6 Kd8 Rh1 (Diagram 18)

Now White must be careful because mate is threatened, and 7 Ke8? loses the pawn after 7...Rh8+ 8 Kf7 Rh7+! and ...Rxa7. Fortunately for White, a neat trick ensures victory.

7 Rb6+! Kc5 8 Rc6+!

A clever idea. Black draws after 8 Ra6? Rh8+ 9 Kd7 Rh7+ 10 Ke8 Rh8+ 11 Kf7 Ra8 12 Ke7 Kb5 13 Ra1 Kb6 and ...Rxa7.

8...Kd5

8...Kb5 9 Rc8! also wins, for example 9...Rh8+ 10 Kc7 Rh7+ 11 Kb8! Kb6 12 a8Q.

9 Ra6 Rh8+ 10 Kc7 Rh7+ 11 Kb6 Rh6+ 12 Kb5

and Black can do nothing to prevent White from queening.

'That's all very well' I hear you ask, 'but what happens when neither king is close to the remaining pawn?'

It's true that this second section of the chapter is mainly focusing on situations in which the attacking king is up with the pawn, but it is worth an example to respond to this query.

Example 31

NOTE: If kings were not allowed to approach, a rook and pawn would not defeat a rook, but this is a hypothetical assertion. It's all about the relative position of the monarchs.

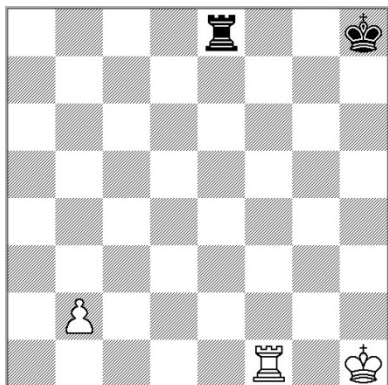


Diagram 19 (W)

This could happen

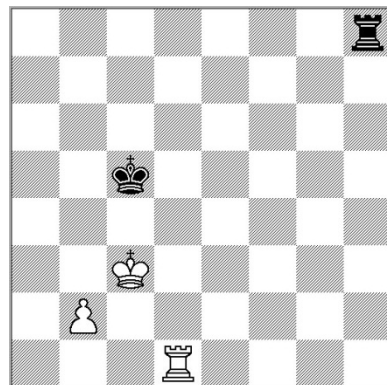


Diagram 20 (W)

Spoilt for choice

(Diagram 19) 1 b4

The obvious alternative is 1 Kg2, but after 1...Kg7 2 Kf3 Kf6 3 Rh1 Rb8 4 Rb1 Ke5 5 Ke3 Kd5 6 Kd3 Kc5 7 Kc3 Rh8 it's clear that the black king is able to keep pace with the white king. Example 24 demonstrated that even with the defender stuck on the back rank he has no problems drawing. Though it's obviously far from necessary, here he can make his stand further up the board. Note that 8 Rd1 (**Diagram 20**) 8...Rh3+ 9 Rd3 Rxd3+ (certainly not forced; read on!) 10 Kxd3 Kb4 is a simple drawn king and pawn ending. However...

TIP: Don't swap off rooks unless you are certain about the outcome of the resulting king and pawn ending.

NOTE: Though my own experiences dictate that they don't occur too frequently, it does pay to have a general knowledge of king and pawn endings.

WARNING: Once you have swapped off your last piece, there is no way back!

Well, okay, the last statement excluded promotions but I'm sure you understood what I was getting at with those three pieces of advice!

1...Kg7 2 b5 Rb8 3 Rf5

It is true to say that attacking rooks also like to be behind their passed pawns. This helps to advance them and of course prevents the enemy rook from achieving that same aim. Unfortunately, though, 3 Rb1 is of no use here as the black king wins the race to get there first. The black rook is happy to block only because it is rightly confident that the fall of the white b-pawn is imminent. For example, 3...Kf6 4 Kg2 Ke5 5 Kf3 Kd5 6 Ke3 Kc5.

3...Kg6 (Diagram 21)

Simultaneously protecting the pawn and cutting off the black king, the white rook was placed well on f5. Given time he would be able to win as his king could march over to help assist in the b-pawn's advance. Alas, 3...Kg6 makes it clear that the black king wants to escape its cage.

4 Rc5 Kf6 5 Kg2 Ke6 6 Kf3 Kd6 7 Rh5 Re8

Giving White a taste of his own 'cutting off' medicine, although in all fairness Black has several ways to hold this position.

8 Kf4 Re1 9 Rg5 Kc7 10 Rg6 Rb1 11 Rc6+ Kb7 12 Rc5 Kb6 (Diagram 22)

and the b-pawn will be bagged next turn, leaving a stone-cold draw.

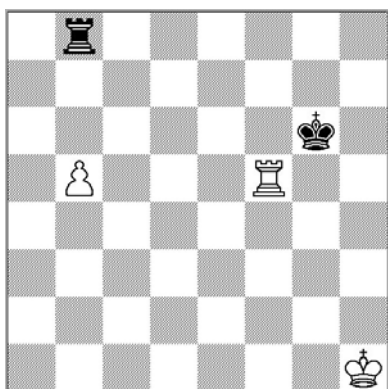


Diagram 21 (W)

Hassling the rook

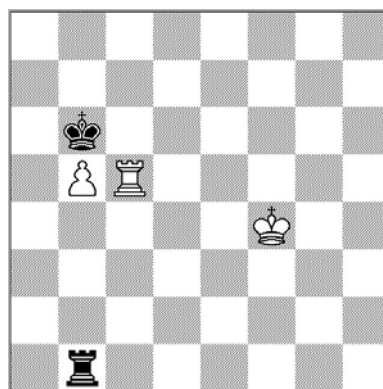


Diagram 22 (W)

Bagging the pawn

There are other simple situations that I would like to discuss, starting with the application of a little common sense (always useful in a game of chess!).

Example 32

(Diagram 23) White has got his pawn all the way to the seventh rank, but in order for it to be able to take that final step, he needs to be able to extract his king.

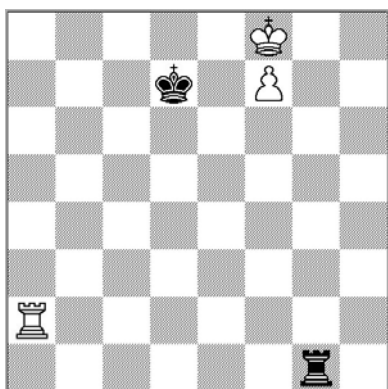


Diagram 23 (W)

A man with a plan?

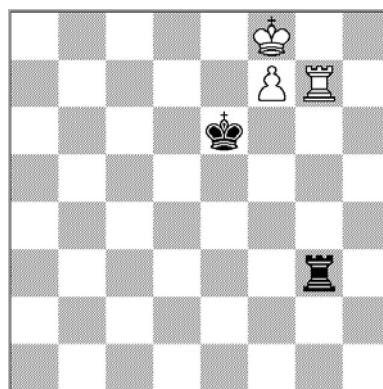


Diagram 24 (B)

Buzz off!

Clearly 1 Ra7+ Kd8 2 Ra8+ Kd7 is not going to budge the black king from the d-file, as from the side the white rook can't control both d7 and d8 at the same time.

Cover for the king is the one stumbling block that White must overcome as demonstrated by the variation 1 Rd2+ Kc7 2 Ke7 Re1+ 3 Kf6 Rf1+ 4 Kg6 Rg1+ 5 Kf5 Rf1+ 6 Ke6 Re1+ 7 Kf6 Rf1+ 8 Kg7 Rg1+ 9 Kf8 – coming out with the king too soon got White nowhere. There is a crafty solution to this outlined in the next example, but for now observe the simplicity of the text.

1 Rh2! Rg3 2 Rh7

This manoeuvre is not new to this chapter. The blatant idea is to force the black rook off of the g-file so that the white king can get out from in front of the pawn. Hence 2 Rh8 Rg1 3 Rg8 Rf1 4 Kg7 Rg1+ 5 Kh6 Rh1+ 6 Kg5 Rg1+ 7 Kh4 Rh1+ 8 Kg3 Rg1+ 9 Kh2 would be equally successful.

2...Ke6

Upon 2...Rg1 3 Rg7 Rf1 4 Kg8, alas (from Black's point of view!) 4...Ke7 5 f8Q+ is double check.

3 Rg7 (Diagram 24)

3 Ke8 also wins, although after 3...Ra3, in contemplating how to deal with the mate threat, White should turn to 4 Rh6+! rather than under-promoting to a knight (with check). Rook and knight versus rook is a theoretical draw (with I can tell you, *not* great practical winning chances either!).

3...Rf3 4 Kg8

and White wins. 4...Ke7 5 f8Q+ is again double check.

Example 33

(Diagram 25) Shifting everything one file to the right makes White work harder.

1 Re2+

As in our previous example, 1 Ri2-i7-h7 would be a simple manoeuvre were the board nine files wide! Due to the 8x8 width restriction, though, White has to find a clever winning idea.

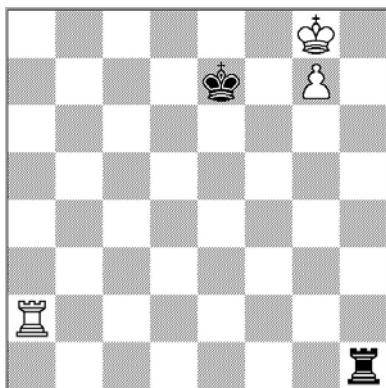


Diagram 25 (W)

What, no 'i' file?

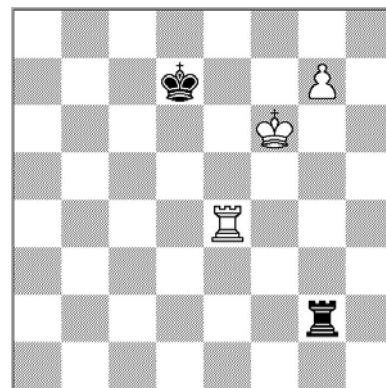


Diagram 26 (B)

Lucena and building bridges!

1...Kd7 2 Re4!

NOTE: This is known as the 'Lucena' technique, and Lucena's position is all about building a bridge for the white king (well, something like that!).

2...Rh2 3 Kf7 Rf2+ 4 Kg6 Rg2+ 5 Kf6 (Diagram 26) 5...Kd6

The immediate 5...Rg1 transposes to the main line after 6 Re5!, but at least with the text Black sets a trap. The subtlety behind White's second move is highlighted with the basic 5...Rf2+ 6 Kg5 Rg2+ 7 Rg4 – on the fourth rank the rook is available to block checks.

6 Re6+!

Black was hoping for 6 Re5? Rxg7!, when as long as the black king keeps tabs on the white rook (i.e. 7 Re6+ Kd7), the white king finds itself overworked.

WARNING: Be careful not to overwork or overload your king (or any piece for that matter!).

6...Kd7

6...Kd5 7 Re5+! is the same.

7 Re5! Rg1 8 Rg5 Rf1+ 9 Ke5

and White wins – promotion is imminent.

Example 34

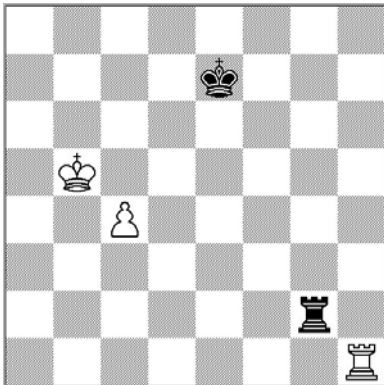


Diagram 27 (W)

One move wins

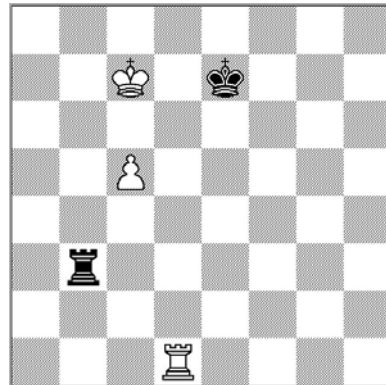


Diagram 28 (B)

Slowly but surely

(Diagram 27) 1 Rd1!

A powerful move, cutting off the black king. Now Black can do nothing to prevent White reaching a similar position to the one studied in Example 32.

Notice that 1 c5? allows the black king to blockade the pawn to reach a drawn position: 1...Kd7!

2 Rh7+ Kc8 3 Kb6 Rc2! 4 Kc6 Kb8! reaching the 'short side' – see Example 27.

1...Rb2+

1...Rg8 2 c5 Rb8+ 3 Ka6 Rc8 4 Kb6 Rb8+ 5 Kc7 Rb2 6 c6 doesn't help matters, but only because the white pawn was too far advanced to start with (see the next example for a case where checking from the front works).

2 Kc6 Rc2 3 c5 Rc3 4 Kb6 Rb3+ 5 Kc7 (Diagram 28)

Slowly but surely the white king and pawn advance up the board, with Black looking on helplessly.

5...Rc3 6 c6 Rb3 7 Kc8 Rb2 8 c7 Rb3 9 Ra1! Rb2 10 Ra7!

followed by Rb7, when White wins in a similar fashion to Example 32.

Generally it doesn't look good for the defender when his king is cut off, but the following case shows that all may be not lost.

Example 35

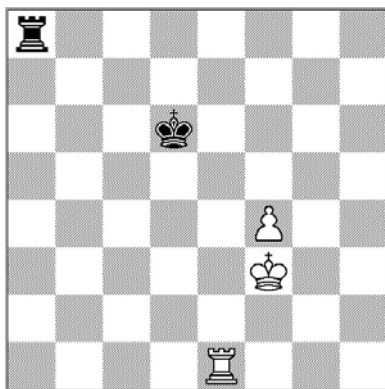


Diagram 29 (W)

Room for frontal checks

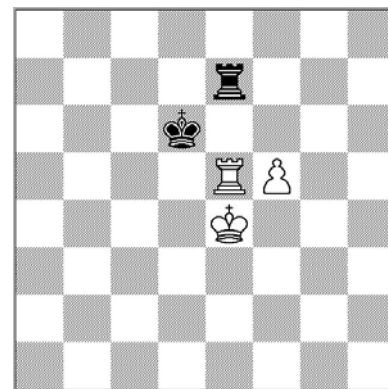


Diagram 30 (B)

The return of the king

(Diagram 29) 1 Kg4 Rg8+!

Introducing another resource in the form of 'frontal checks'. If allowed, the white king would just escort his f-pawn home as the black monarch is cut off and thus powerless to offer assistance.

2 Kh5 Rf8 3 Kg5 Rg8+ 4 Kh6 Rf8

This bugging routine is possible because the pawn is not too far advanced and thus the rook has adequate checking distance.

5 Re4

Or 5 Kg5 Rg8+ etc.

5...Kd5!

With the f-pawn guarded, the white king was threatening to close in with 6 Kg7. The text move crashes White's party.

6 Re5+ Kd6 7 Kg5 Rg8+ 8 Kf5

8 Kh4 Rf8 9 Kg4 Rg8+ 10 Rg5 is a little more tricky. It is essential that Black recognizes when he can and cannot afford to exchange rooks. Here he can't, but after 10...Ra8 11 Rg7 Ke6 12 Kg5 Ra5+ 13 Kg6 he can via 13...Rf5!, as 14 Re7+ Kxe7 15 Kxf5 Kf7 leaves him with the 'opposition'. Black to move here would be bad news, but as it is White to move, it's a draw.

NOTE: One has the 'opposition' when the two kings are opposed and it is the opponent's king that must give way. The concept is particularly relevant in king and pawn endgames, where to have the opposition or not is often the difference between a win and a draw (or a draw and a loss).

8...Rf8+ 9 Ke4 Rf7 10 f5 Re7! (Diagram 30)

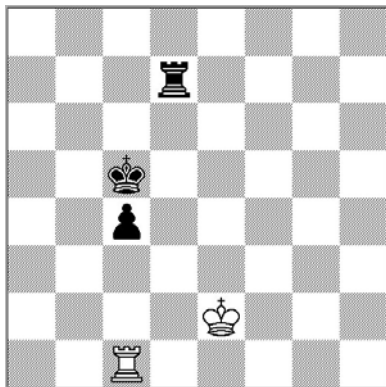
This effectively breaks the 'cut off' barrier. White can't legally avoid the swap of rooks here, but even if he could it would still mean the black king being able to traverse the e-file.

11 Rxe7 Kxe7 12 Ke5 Kf7 13 f6 Kf8!

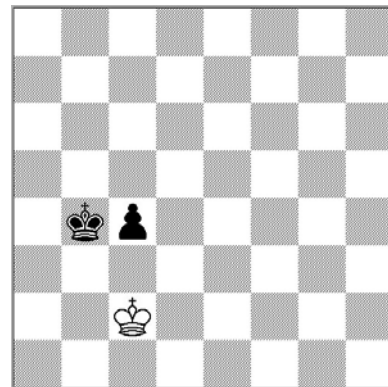
and Black draws. 13...Kf8 is the only move but also a well-known one (or at least one easily worked out over the board!).

Example 36

Here is a more simplistic example of 'breaking the barrier'.

**Diagram 31 (W)**

Time to break down a barrier!

**Diagram 32 (B)**

Stay back!

(Diagram 31) 1 Rd1! Rxd1

After 1...Rh7, 2 Kd2 will see White achieve his aim. With the defending king back on the case, it's no surprise that he holds, for example 2...Rh2+ 3 Kc3 Rh3+ 4 Kc2 Kb4 5 Rb1+ Kc5 6 Rb8.

2 Kxd1 Kb4 3 Kc2 (Diagram 32)

It's a draw: the black king can't get in front of his pawn and is thus unable to usher it home.

That's not the end of the story, though, as sometimes the attacker can be equally crafty.

Example 37

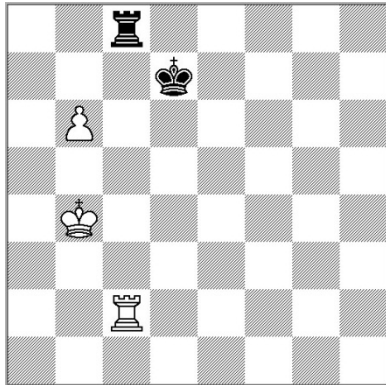


Diagram 33 (W)

Cat and mouse

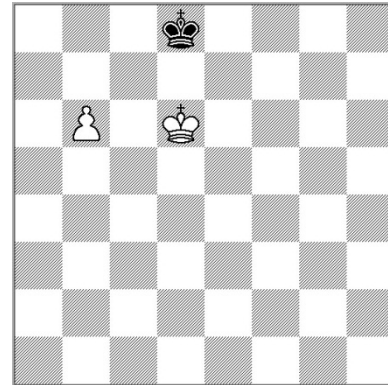


Diagram 34 (B)

White has the 'opposition'

(Diagram 33) 1 Rc5!

Black has just tried to break the 'cut off ' barrier with ...Rc8, but the text move maintains it. Note that 1 Rxc8 Kxc8 2 Kb5 Kb7 is drawn, whereas now it is Black who cannot afford to trade rooks.

1...Rc6 2 Kb5!

Again 2 Rxc6 Kxc6 3 Ka5 Kb7 is in Black's favour. This is a real game of cat and mouse!

2...Rxc5+

This loses, but 2...Rh6 3 b7 Rh1 4 Kb6 Rb1+ 5 Ka7 Ra1+ 6 Kb8 reaching a standard 'Lucena' position is no better.

3 Kxc5 Kd8 4 Kd6! (Diagram 34)

Obtaining the opposition and it is because of this that the b-pawn will promote.

4...Kc8 5 Kc6 Kb8 6 b7 Ka7 7 Kc7

and White wins.

You are now armoured with the essentials of rook and pawn versus rook scenarios, but let me end this chapter with a position that incorporates several of our themes to date.

Example 38

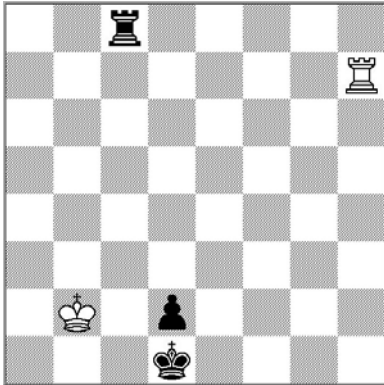


Diagram 35 (W)

Sideways on!

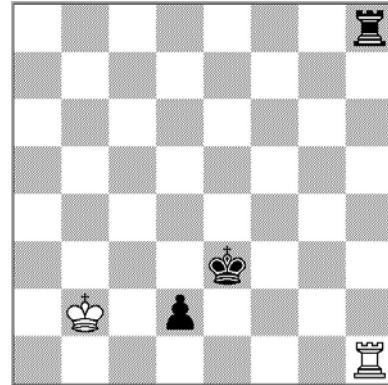


Diagram 36 (W)

A vital deflection.

(Diagram 35) This is an interesting situation because at first it seems like a trivial win for Black, as his king got to where it counts first. Indeed, with Black to play he could easily force wins with either 1...Rd8 (preparing to bring the king out) or 1...Rc2+, intending 2 Kb3 Kc1 or 2 Kb1 Rc1+ 3 Kb2 Ke2 when ...d1Q would shortly follow.

However, with White to play he has what should now to the reader be a familiar defensive resource.

1 Rh1+!

That's right, checking from the flank on the 'long' side of the pawn.

1...Ke2 2 Rh2+ Ke3 3 Rh3+

White must not relent. Upon the passive 3 Rh1?, Black has a tasty deflection in the form of 3...Rh8! **(Diagram 36)** If the bait is taken then the pawn promotes. On the other hand, after 4 Rg1 the defending rook is squeezed via 4...Kf2 5 Rd1 Ke2. Note that the white king can offer no assistance, for example 6 Kc2 Rc8+!.

3...Ke4 4 Rh4+! (Diagram 37)

There is still no need for 4 Rh1?. Indeed, as before (albeit a longer, cuter version) this passive retreat loses after 4...Rh8! 5 Rg1 Ke3 6 Kc2 Rc8+! 7 Kb2 Ke2 8 Rg2+ Ke1 9 Rg1+ Kf2 10 Rh1 Rh8!.

4...Kf3 5 Rh3+ Ke2 6 Rh2+

After 50 moves like this White would be able to claim a draw, although by then surely the 'three move repetition' rule could be implemented!

6...Ke1 7 Rh1+ Kf2 8 Rh2+ Ke3 9 Rh3+ Kf4 (Diagram 38)

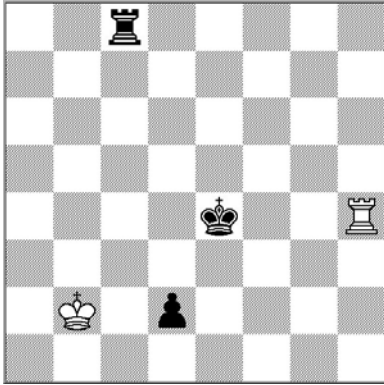


Diagram 37 (B)

Check again!

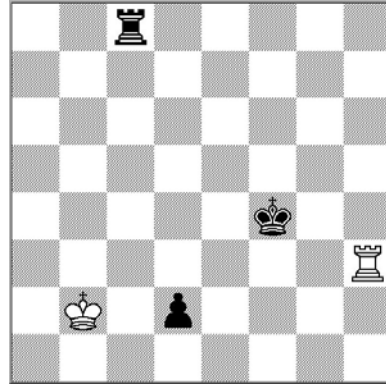


Diagram 38 (W)

Giving White an easy draw






The black king gets frustrated and tries to approach the rook, but now this gives White the opportunity that he has been looking for.

10 Rd3

with a draw. It transpires that the black pawn was so near yet so far!

Chapter Four

Introducing More Pawns

-  *Activating Rooks*
-  *The Extra Outside Passed Pawn*
-  *All Pawns on the Same Side*
-  *Pawn Types*
-  *Big Majorities*

The more pawns that are brought into play, the more the issue is clouded. However...

WARNING: Always bear in mind your general principles however complicated the situation may seem.

Yes, if anything, the more complex the position seems, the more important all those 'rooks behind passed pawns' and 'activate your king' type of principles become.

Invariably, with all other things (that is pawn structure, positioning of the kings, relative rook activity) being approximately equal, strong players will shake hands for a draw in level material rook and pawn endings, often without even making a move.

Activating Rooks

The next example wouldn't be such an occasion of an early handshake, with the relative rook activities being the key issue.

Example 39

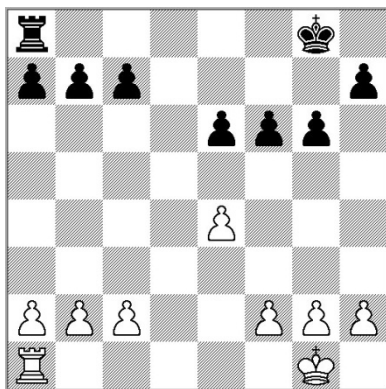


Diagram 1 (W)

Take the open file!

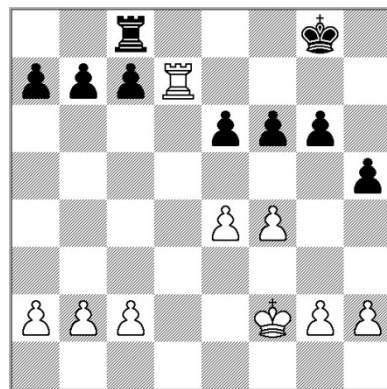


Diagram 2 (B)

The rook is in seventh heaven!

(Diagram 1) 1 Rd1!

NOTE: Rooks love open files.

1...Rc8?

Black is anticipating White's next move but this has a horribly passive feel about it.

WARNING: Rooks do not like defending pawns in this manner and such a move should only be employed as a last resort or if there is light at the end of the tunnel.

As Black would still have some untangling to do, White would still have the upper hand. However, 1...Rf8, intending to meet 2 Rd7 with 2...Rf7, was a much more satisfactory defensive try.

2 Rd7 (Diagram 2)

NOTE: Rooks love seventh ranks.

Placed here, the white rook cuts off the enemy king on the back rank and ties the black rook down to a grim role of defender. Were Black's f6-pawn on f7 instead then there would be some light at the end of that tunnel. The black king could rush to e8 in order to evict the white rook, after which his own rook would be free of its defensive shackles. Alas, that's not possible here as the h-pawn is hanging.

2...h5 3 f4 Kf8 4 Kf2 Kg8

I was intending to use this passive play as an extreme example, but in all fairness Black is already in serious trouble. Note that after 4...a5 5 Ke3 b5 6 e5 f5 7 Rh7 Kg8 8 Re7, in this situation the e6-pawn would be a very big catch.

5 Ke3!

TIP: As an attacker with a positional advantage, always try to keep control of the position.

Here White could net a pawn via 5 Re7 Kf8 6 Rxe6 Kf7 7 f5. However, then his rook is much less effective than it was before, whilst 7...Rd8 would leave Black's own rook seeking some action. At the very least, enemy rook activation offers the opponent a psychological boost.

TIP: Always consider sacrificing a pawn in order to activate a passive rook.

5...Kf8 6 e5 fxe5 7 fxe5 a6 8 Kf4 b6 9 Kg5 c5 10 Kxg6 h4 11 Kf6

White wins easily. Black's pawns will drop off and he will be lucky not to get mated soon too!

To lose in such a manner is a horrible experience that I hope I have prompted you to try to avoid. Regarding the concept of offloading a pawn in search of activity, this is essentially based on the premise that, assuming a reasonably placed king and an active rook, there are excellent chances to hold a draw.

The Extra Outside Passed Pawn

Let's move on to a very instructive case.

Example 40

(Diagram 3) 1 h4!

This isn't as important here as it is in Example 42, but nevertheless this is another good habit to get into.

TIP: When down on material, one should aim to swap off pawns and not pieces. Conversely, when up on material one should try to swap off pieces and not pawns.

The text buys White a bit of space on the kingside and suggests that if Black wants to advance his kingside pawns then some swaps will be made. Possibly even more relevant here is that

White wants Black to give some serious thought to just how dangerous White's kingside pawns could become should Black get too fruity on the queenside. 'Very dangerous' is the conclusion of this example!

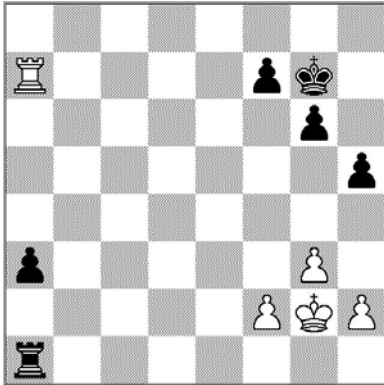


Diagram 3 (W)

Passed pawn under control

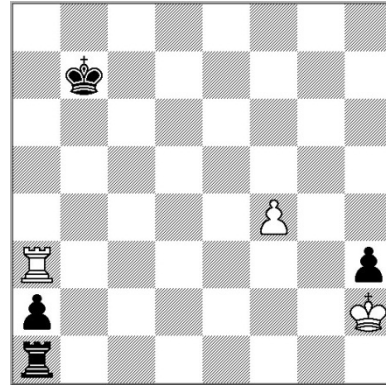


Diagram 4 (B)

A pawn? No thanks!

1...Kf6

With the rooks off of the board, the black win would be trivial even if the black pawn was further back and couldn't promote immediately (i.e. it could be used as a simple decoy). However, they are present and it is White who has the active one.

2 Kf3 Ke6

After 2...a2 it's true to say that White's rook is tied down to the a-pawn, but the drawback is that there will no longer be any shelter for the black king if it travels over there to offer assistance. White's king can confidently remain with his kingside pawns and play might continue along the lines of 3 Kg2 Ke5 4 Ra5+ Kd4 5 Ra4+ Kc3 6 Ra8 Kb2 7 Rb8+ (as previously mentioned, a2 is no longer available for the black monarch to escape the checks) 7...Kc3 8 Rc8+ Kb4 9 Rb8+ Kc5 10 Rc8+ Kb6 11 Ra8 Kb7 12 Ra3 f6. Black then attempts to get something going with his kingside pawns but so long as White applies a modicum of care then he will be fine. Specifically, he mustn't wander his king out into the open where it might fall foul of an embarrassing rook check, and he mustn't walk into the skewer trick detailed in Chapter One. For example, 13 Ra4 g5 14 hxg5 fxg5 15 Ra3 h4 16 gxh4 gxh4 17 f4 h3+ 18 Kh2!. **(Diagram 4)**. This is the safe square. Taking with the king would have run into 18...Rh1+, whilst any black rook move would have sufficed after 18 Rxh3?; the outcome in each case is a-pawn promotion.

An interesting exercise for the reader to do here is to play this one on for a while. You will observe that due to the concept of 'zugzwang', White will have to move when he would rather not. This will result in him losing his f-pawn but it won't matter. With his own rook as passive as it comes, Black will be unable to make any headway. Temporarily two pawns up, his only

practical chance will be to concede the a-pawn but the very first example of Chapter Three demonstrated why that would then be an easy draw.

NOTE: Zugzwang is a German word meaning 'obliged to move' even though it's definitely not in one's interest!

TIP: Be sure to apply your knowledge of rook and pawn versus rook to any situations where transpositions could become possible.

3 Kf4 Kd5 (Diagram 5)

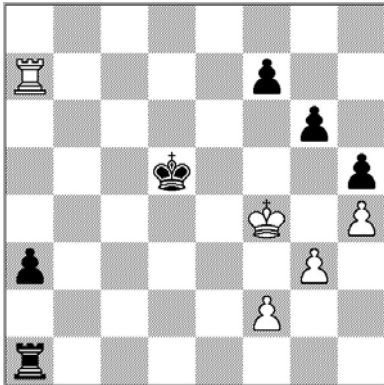


Diagram 5 (W)

Going for broke

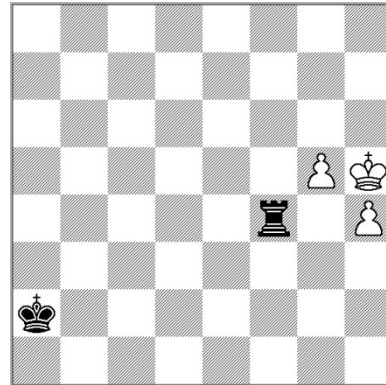


Diagram 6 (B)

King out of position

Given time, Black is able to usher home his a-pawn. The king shelters from white rook checks on a2, whilst the black rook repositions itself (for example, via b1 to b3) when ...Kb2 and ...a2-a1 follows. Nice in theory but the fly in the ointment is that while the pawn is only on a3, the white rook is free to move. I'm certainly not going to suggest that White is winning after this, but the following continuation, highlighting the risks, is now well within the realms of probability.

4 Rxf7 Kc4 5 Kg5 Rf1

5...Rb1!? 6 Ra7 Rb5+ 7 Kxg6 Kb4 8 f4 Ra5 demonstrates an alternative try, but 9 Rb7+ Kc3 10 Rb1 a2 is hardly convincing. For example, 11 Ra1 Kb2 12 Rf1 a1Q 13 Rxa1 and whichever way Black recaptures the white pawns will be of grave concern.

6 Ra7 Kb3 7 Kxg6 Rxf2 8 Kxh5 a2 9 g4 Rf4

Threatening the 10...Ra4 that would prohibit White's rook from preventing the promotion.

10 Rxa2 Kxa2 11 g5 (Diagram 6)

As the outcome of connected passed pawns versus a rook is rarely a draw, the adventurous black king policy was essentially 'do or die' stuff. Given that this monarch is so far away from

where the action is now, I'm afraid that in this instance it is the latter! Black's rook is unable to stop both pawns and White wins.

Reversing the position of the rooks significantly alters the assessment of the position.

Example 41

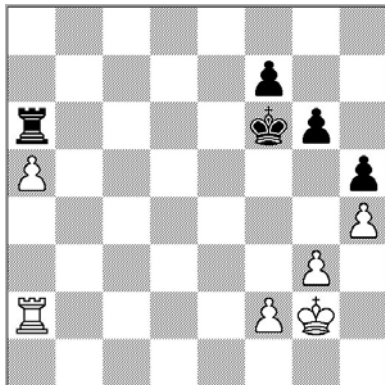


Diagram 7 (W)

Rook roles reversed

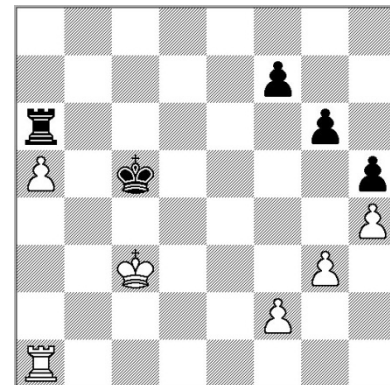


Diagram 8 (B)

It's your turn!

(Diagram 7) This is the black rook's worst nightmare. With the white passed pawn just three squares from the end, it must stay put. If the white king makes it to b5 then it's curtains!

1 Kf3 Kf5 2 Ke3 Ke5 3 Kd3 Kd5 4 Kc3 Kc5 5 Ra1! (Diagram 8)

White plays a clever waiting move that puts the ball into the opponent's court. If Black retreats his rook, the a-pawn will advance, and as the kingside pawns will run out of moves (whilst the white rook can just go to and fro), eventually the black king will have to give way.

5...Kb5

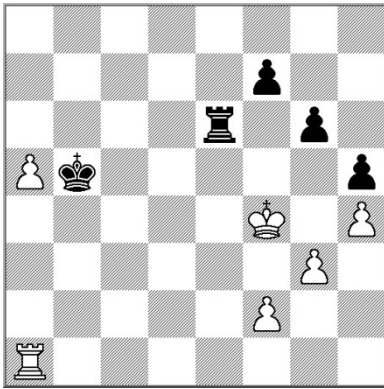
5...Kd5 6 Kb4 Kc6 7 Kc4 leaves Black with the same horrible dilemma: to allow the white king access to his kingside or his queenside.

6 Kd4

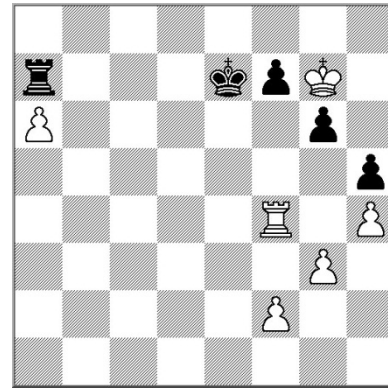
The black king couldn't allow its opposite number to hassle his rook but the ironic thing about travelling to the queenside is that Black can't take White's a-pawn anyhow – a rook trade would lead to a hopeless king and pawn endgame due to Black's out-of-position king.

6...Rd6+ 7 Ke5 Re6+ 8 Kf4 (Diagram 9) 8...Ra6

Something had to block the a-pawn, but although 8...Ka6 would have left the rook free for a more active role, actually there is nothing for it to attack. Added to this, 9 Kg5 Re5+ 10 Kh6 Rf5 11 Ra2 Rf3 12 Kg7 Rf5 13 f4 demonstrates that it struggles to defend the kingside on its own. Indeed, Black is in zugzwang here. He can't move his pawns or rook without losing pawns, whilst giving ground with the king only allows the a-pawn to advance.

**Diagram 9 (B)**

Your turn to block!?

**Diagram 10 (B)**

Kingside invasion

9 Kg5 Kc5 10 Kh6 Kd5 11 Kg7 Ra7 12 a6 Ke6 13 Ra4 Ke7 14 Rf4 (Diagram 10)

Though the a-pawn is massive, White can trade it for the f-pawn here because this black pawn is vital to the survival of its compatriots.

14...Rxa6 15 Rxf7+ Ke8 16 Rf6

and White wins – Black's g- and h-pawns will soon be history.

All Pawns on the Same Side

NOTE: With all other things being equal and all of the pawns on the same side of the board, one extra pawn is not enough to win.

Certainly the previous chapter showed how with careful defence, if the defending king is on the queening square then rook and pawn versus rook is a draw. With a liquidation to this simple ending usually being the aim, it also follows that 2 versus 1 and 3 versus 2 are also draws. The more pawns involved, however, the better the winning chances and the more active the defence needs to be.

Example 42

(Diagram 11) Here the white rook correctly acts the part of a real busy bee.

1 h4!

Black wants to create a passed pawn and as the extra e-pawn is the most likely candidate, he is forced to propose trades in order to achieve it.

1...h6

To get in ...e4-e3 Black needs ...f5-f4. To get in ...f5-f4 he needs ...g6-g5. Yes, you've guessed it, that's why 1 h4 has provoked 1...h6. Okay, it's not necessarily as straightforward as that, but

Starting Out: Rook Endgames

the principle of trying to swap off pawns is what White is adhering to.

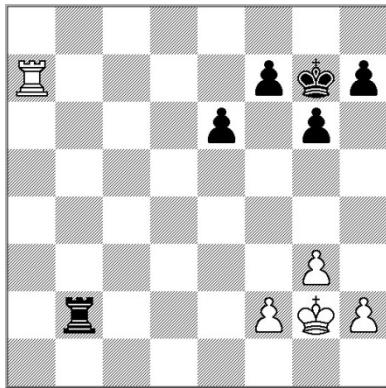


Diagram 11 (W)

A theoretical draw

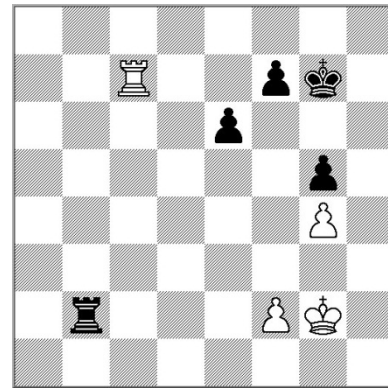


Diagram 12 (B)

The pawn count is reducing

2 Rc7 g5 3 hxg5 hxg5

What follows is a plausible, hypothetical continuation that I have made up!

4 g4 (Diagram 12)

This was not forced, but now in order to make progress Black will have to play ...f7-f5, after which White is getting closer and closer to the 1 pawn versus no pawns scenario that we know he can hold.

4...Kg6 5 Rc6

TIP: When defending, be sure that your rook becomes a nuisance!

5...Re2 6 Kf3 Re5 7 Kg3 Ra5 8 Rb6 Kf6 9 Rc6 Ke7 10 Rc7+ Kf6 11 Rb7 Kg6 12 Rb6 Ra3+ 13 f3 Re3 14 Kf2 Re5 15 Kg3 Kg7 16 Rb7 (Diagram 13)

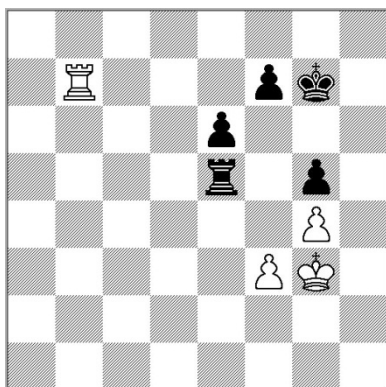


Diagram 13 (B)

Constantly pinning

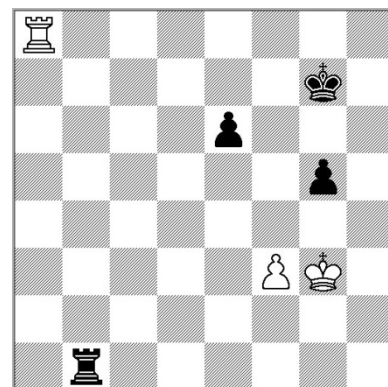


Diagram 14 (B)

The black pawns are split

Black is trying to play ...f7-f5 under the condition of at least being able to recapture with the e-pawn after a pawn swap. However, White's persistent pinning with his rook makes it very difficult for Black to advance and keep his pawns connected.

16...Kg6 17 Rb6 f5 18 gxf5+ Kxf5 19 Rb8

Again consistent with all the tips up to now. The rook maintains its distance from the black king and keeps its options open.

19...Re1 20 Rf8+ Ke5 21 Rg8 Kf6 22 Rf8+ Kg7 23 Ra8 Rg1+ 24 Kf2 Rb1 25 Kg3 (Diagram 14)

Black has no realistic winning chances. He is now even struggling to trade either of his pawns for White's f-pawn. And even if he could, that would be a dead draw anyhow!

Don't get me wrong, though. The defender must not get complacent, particularly if the attacker can keep his pawns together. Indeed, often a great deal of accuracy is required, as illustrated in this next case.

Example 43

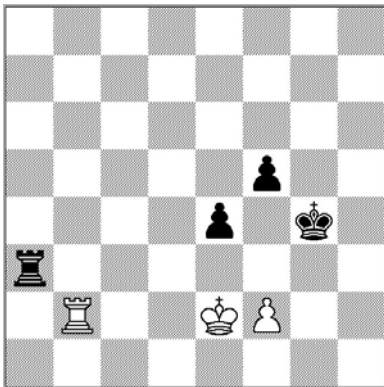


Diagram 15 (W)

Don't stay passive!

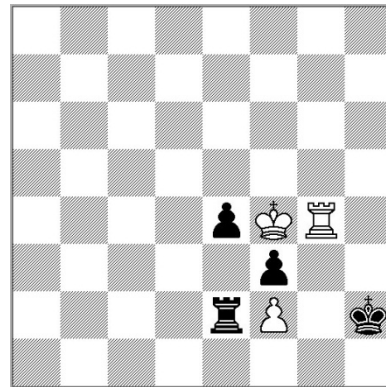


Diagram 16 (B)

Not easy!

(Diagram 15) 1 Rb4!

Pinning the e-pawn and stopping the f-pawn in its tracks. If White plays passively then he loses horribly, for example 1 Rc2? f4 2 Rb2 f3+ 3 Kd2 Kh3 4 Rc2 Kg2 5 Ke1 Ra1+ 6 Kd2 Kxf2.

1...Ra2+

Upon 1...Kh3, threatening to come to g2, White must continue actively: 2 Rb8! Ra2+ 3 Kf1 f4 4 Rg8 Ra1+ (4...f3 5 Ke1 Ra1+ 6 Kd2 Rf1 7 Ke3 Re1+ 8 Kf4 Re2 9 Rg3+ Kh2 10 Rg4! is a direct transposition) 5 Ke2 f3+ 6 Ke3 Re1+ 7 Kf4 Re2 8 Rg3+ Kh2 9 Rg4 **(Diagram 16)** 9...Rxf2 10 Kxe4 Rg2 (or 10...Rf1 11 Ke3; being cut off, the black king can do nothing to assist) 11 Kxf3. Let's not kid ourselves, if you hadn't seen a lot of this then it would have been hard to work it out over the board. Gee, this is meant to be 'starting out' in rook endings!

2 Kf1 f4

2...Kf3 3 Rb3+ Kg4 4 Rb4 gets Black nowhere.

3 Rxe4 Kf3 4 Re8 Rxf2+

After 4...Ra1+ 5 Re1 Rxe1+ 6 Kxe1 Kg2 7 Ke2 f3+?? (any other move is a draw) 8 Ke3 suddenly it is White who would be winning!

5 Kg1!

Going to the short side of the pawn which, as Chapter 3 demonstrated, is the only place to be!

5...Ra2

An additional resource is demonstrated in the variation 5...Rg2+ 6 Kh1 Kf2 7 Ra8 (offering up sideways checks) 7...f3 8 Rb8 (keeping the checking options open) 8...Rg7 9 Rb2+ Kg3 10 Kg1 Ra7 11 Rg2+! (**Diagram 17**)

Then again, I told you earlier to look out for defences based on stalemate so this shouldn't be such a big deal after all! Seriously though...

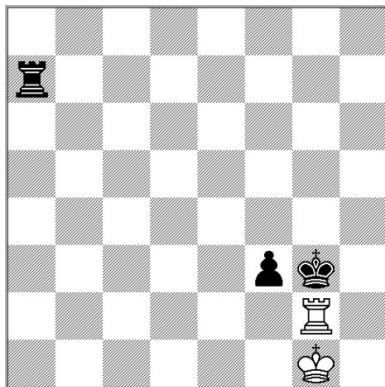


Diagram 17 (B)

The second rank defence

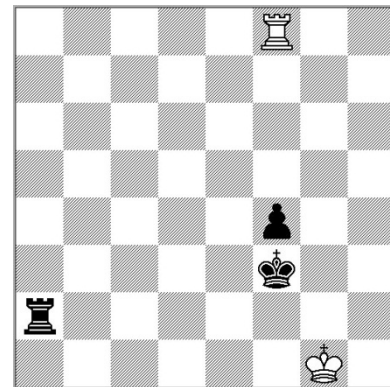


Diagram 18 (B)

King to the 'short' side

TIP: Remember this kamikaze second rank rook idea as one day it might just come in handy.

6 Rf8! (Diagram 18) 6...Ra1+ 7 Kh2 Rf1 8 Ra8!

and White draws. It's those checks from the flank again. Of course by now this should be familiar territory.

Pawn Types

Often it is not the quantity of the pawns involved that's important but the structure quality and the stage of advancement.

Example 44

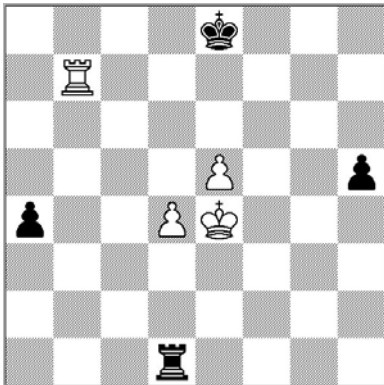


Diagram 19 (W)

Connected versus isolated

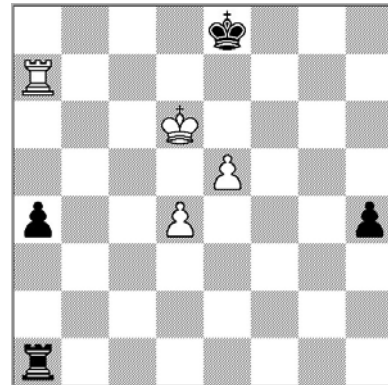


Diagram 20 (B)

We meet at last!

(Diagram 19) 1 Ra7

A sensible move, tying the black rook down to a defensive role.

1...Ra1 2 Kd5!

As we know only too well, once Black's a-pawn makes it down to a2, the white king will be vulnerable to a check.

TIP: Always be on the lookout for a possible king shelter when an enemy rook is in front of its passed pawn.

2...h4 3 Kd6 (Diagram 20)

NOTE: Centre pawns are often superior to outside pawns in rook endings.

Typically outside passed pawns are preferable in endgames. However, provided the defending rook can get behind the outside pawns, that is NOT the case in rook endings. The simple reason for this is that in all other types of ending the king must travel to the edge to stop and capture a passed pawn. In rook endings, however, a king must travel to the edge if it wants to make something out of its own passed pawn.

WARNING: Beware the throwaway remark that 'centre pawns are better than outside pawns in the opening but it's vice versa in the endgame'. The truth is that extra centre pawns are at least as important as outside ones in endgames in which rooks are involved.

In this example the presence of centre pawns has provided the white king with cover in which to help him advance through the middle. A key point is that between the centre pawns and the king, checkmate can be threatened.

TIP: Always at least give consideration to the concept of advancing the king before the pawns.

Returning to White's third move, because he has his own serious threats there is no need for White to engage in 3 Rh7 Rh1 4 Ra7 Ra1 5 Rh7. Like I said, there is absolutely no need for this repetitive to-ing and fro-ing, which by the way wouldn't work against connected pawns. However whilst I'm here, in the event of this irrelevant variation, observe how painful 5...a3 6 Rxh4 a2 7 Rh8+ Ke7 8 Ra8 Kd7 9 Ra7+ Ke8 10 Ke6 Kd8 11 d5 would be! **(Diagram 21)**

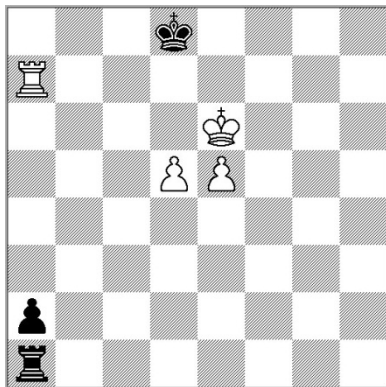


Diagram 21 (B)

Help!

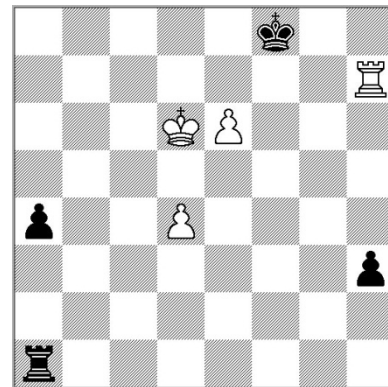


Diagram 22 (B)

Attacking and defending

3...h3 4 e6

4 Rh7 would win too, but the text demonstrates the tempi luxury White has despite the fact that both sides' pawns started off equally advanced.

4...Kf8 5 Rh7 (Diagram 22)

Certainly not the only way to convert the point, but definitely the cruellest!

5...Rh1 6 e7+ Ke8 7 Rh8+ Kf7 8 e8Q+

and White quickly delivers mate.

Big Majorities

This next case pitches two connected passed pawns against three.

Example 45

(Diagram 23) After playing over this example you will probably conclude that White would still be winning even if Black had extra pawns say on e7 and d6. The significant factor is how far advanced the pawns are and clearly White's pawns have already left their traps!

1 a5 h5 2 b5 f5

The 'problem' with having more pawns (admittedly not usually a problem!) is that it takes more time to push them all. Black may as well pick a couple of pawns and go with them, but here that wouldn't work either as the white pawns had a head start.

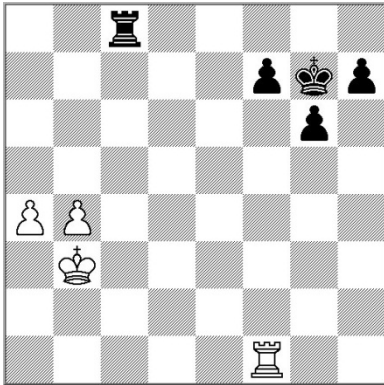


Diagram 23 (W)

The more, the merrier?

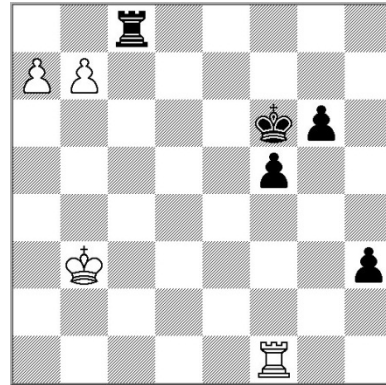


Diagram 24 (B)

Fast pawns!

3 a6 h4 4 a7 h3 5 b6 Kf6 6 b7 (Diagram 24)

and White wins.

If Black could have sacrificed his rook for the two pawns then his huge majority on the other side of the board would have won the day. The advantage of possessing connected pawns is that the defending rook is rarely able to give itself up for more than one of the pawns.

NOTE: This example hasn't really provided anything new. It has merely reiterated how strong connected pawns are in endgames and reminded us that passed pawns are meant to be pushed.

Example 46

Here's an example to illustrate a spot of practical advice that could easily win you points (hopefully just like all the other advice!).

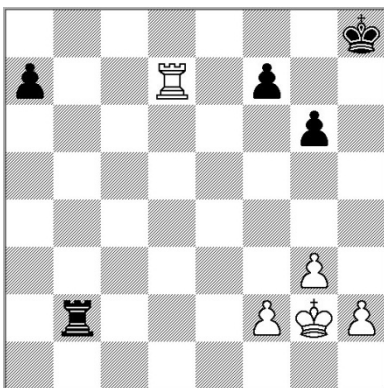


Diagram 25 (W)

The a-pawn is of limited concern

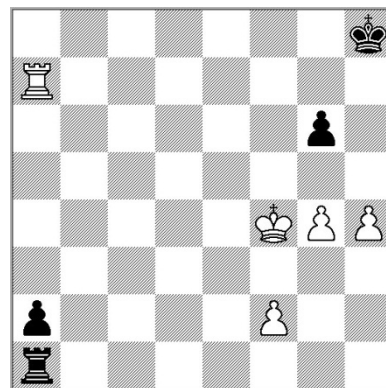


Diagram 26 (W)

That's your lot mate!

1 Rxf7!

TIP: When trying to convert a 'pawn up' rook ending, it is much better to reach a position with 'plus two' pawns on one side and 'minus one' pawn on the other rather than simply one pawn up on one side and level on the other.

Regarding 1 Rxa7 Kg7, it is of course a theoretical draw and yet many weaker players might opt to take the a-pawn rather than the f-pawn. Their logic might be that now they can try to win without having any losing chances whatsoever. The reality of the situation is that rook and three versus rook and two on the same side offers few winning chances, yet the main example shows there are even fewer losing chances by creating the big majority. However, these 'chances' commonly become inflated as players overestimate an opponent's passed pawn.

1...a5 2 Ra7 Ra2

TIP: Generally a rook is more actively placed defending a pawn from the side rather than from in front.

Regarding the above tip, that usually makes life easier for a king to advance and help usher the pawn through. In this particular instance, though, 2...Rb5 doesn't constitute much of an improvement as the black king is cut off on the back rank and miles from the queenside.

3 h4 a4

Referring to the initial a-pawn or f-pawn debate, the crux of the matter is that provided the white king remains sheltered from checks, Black's pawn is no threat whatsoever. I think it's fair to say that the chances of Black being able to wander his king over to b8 and down the b-file to aid in the a-pawn's promotion are slim! Even if it could (for example with White doing a Kf2-g2-f3-g2 hokey-cokey for a while!), White would concede his rook for the pawn and win on the kingside.

4 Kf3 a3 5 g4 Ra1 6 Kf4 a2 (Diagram 26) 7 Kg5

The whole idea of 7 h5 gxh5 8 gxh5? is a silly one. Aside from the fact that Black could liquidate to an easy rook and pawn versus rook draw with 8...Rh1 9 Rxa2 Rxh5, it goes against all the principles about keeping the pawns connected.

If truth be told, keeping the pawns together with 8 g5! (after 7 h5 gxh5) maintains a decisive advantage, as 8...h4 9 Kf5 h3 10 Kg6 h2 11 Ra8 mate proves! You've got to admit it though, that that was cutting things unnecessarily fine.

7...Rf1 8 Rxa2

Not that it's critical here, but note how the rook captures the pawn and immediately defends the pawn on the second rank.

TIP: When the opponent has his rook passively placed on the queening square in front of a pawn on the seventh rank, as an attacker, consider leaving one of your pawns on the

second rank. Often this makes it more difficult for your opponent to arrange a pawn trade that might switch the imbalance back to him being just one pawn down on one side.

8...Kg7 9 Ra7+ Kf8 10 Kxg6 Rxf2 11 h5

and White wins – the rest is a walk in the park!

Chapter Five

Tricky Situations and Advanced Techniques

- *Keeping things Simple*
- *The Perpetual Threat*
- *Detrimental King Positions*
- *Using the Opponent's Pawns*
- *Shouldering Prevention*
- *Defending against Two Isolated Pawns*
- *King Boxing*

Even if I say so myself, I'm quite happy with how the book has progressed up to now. At a low level there have been some very simple ideas that, employed sensibly, have led to some not-so-basic techniques. In this chapter I'd like to take a look at some more complex scenarios.

Keeping Things Simple

TIP: If possible keep things simple. A win is a win, however you obtain it, and nobody likes a show-off!

Example 47

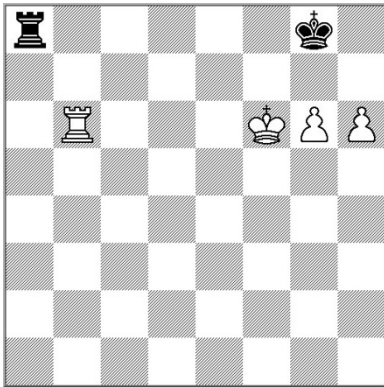


Diagram 1 (W)

A win is a win

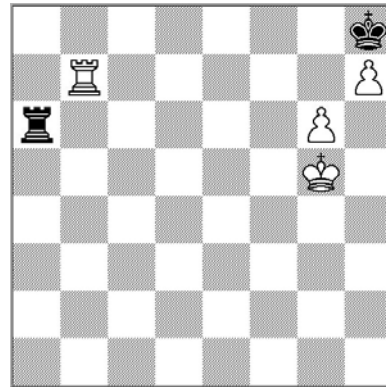


Diagram 2 (B)

Stalemate tricks!

(Diagram 1) Here the best way is to take no chances.

1 Rd6

White is still winning after 1 h7+ Kh8, but as 2 Rb7?? Ra6+ 3 Kg5 **(Diagram 2)** 3...Rxg6+! demonstrates, he then has to be more careful. By the way, 2 Re6 Rb8 3 Kf7 Rf8+ is another stalemate trick that admittedly still shouldn't save Black (4 Ke7!).

1...Rb8

Given that it is required to prevent mate on the back rank, the black rook has nothing better to do than move from side to side.

2 Ke7 Ra8

Or 2...Rb7+ 3 Rd7 (as advised earlier in the book, the attacker's rook comes closer to its king so as to be able to block checks) 3...Rb8 4 Rd8+.

3 Rd8+ (Diagram 3) 3...Rxd8 4 Kxd8

The king and pawn ending is trivial.

4...Kh8 5 Ke7 Kg8 6 g7 Kh7 7 Kf7 (Diagram 4)

and White wins.

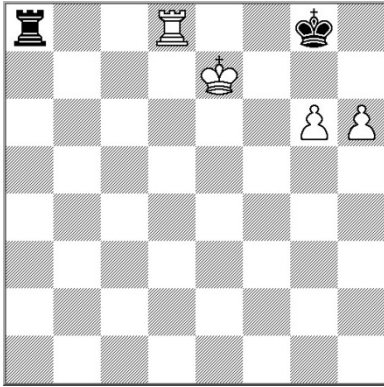


Diagram 3 (B)

No thrills or frills!

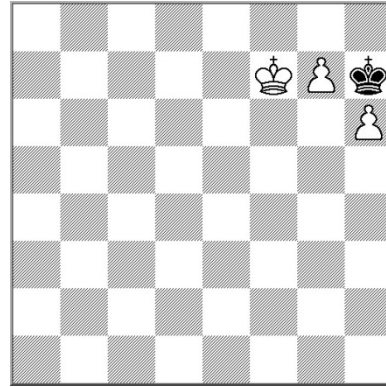


Diagram 4 (B)

Not stalemate!

The Perpetual Threat

Example 48

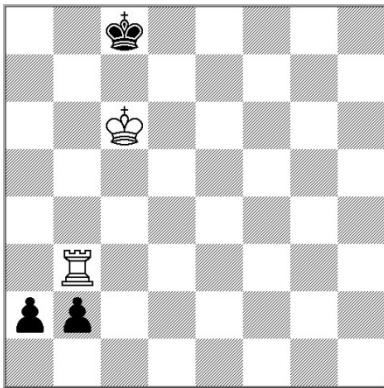


Diagram 5 (W)

Forget the pawns!

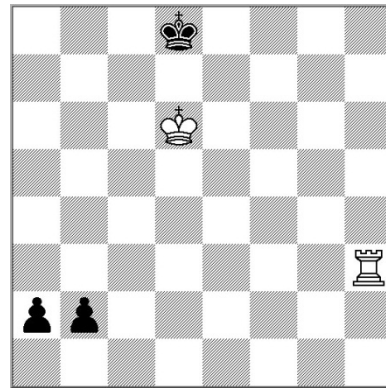


Diagram 6 (B)

Mate threatened!

(Diagram 5) 1 Rh3!

There is nothing that White can do to prevent at least one of the pawns from promoting directly and so instead he directs his counterplay against the black king. The text threatens mate and, as we soon see, not for the last time in this example.

1...Kb8 2 Rb3+ Ka7 3 Ra3+ Kb8

It is clear that the king cannot escape the checks along the a-file and so now it crosses to the kingside.

4 Rb3+ Kc8 5 Rh3 Kd8 6 Kd6! (Diagram 6)

Again forcing the black king to move.

NOTE: Often attack is the best form of defence.

6...Ke8 7 Ke6 Kf8 8 Kf6 Kg8 9 Rg3+!

First of all, 9 Kg6?? no longer threatens mate with h8-covered and, secondly, it allows Black to promote with check.

9...Kh7 10 Rh3+ Kg8 11 Rg3+ Kf8 12 Rh3

and so on – Black must concede the draw.

Detrimental King Positions

Example 49

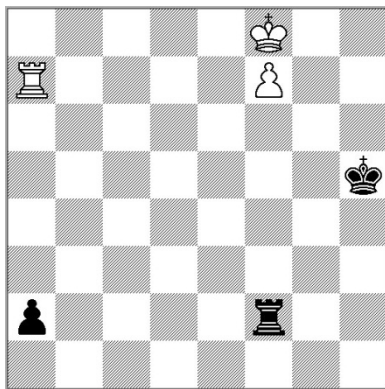


Diagram 7 (W)

White wins

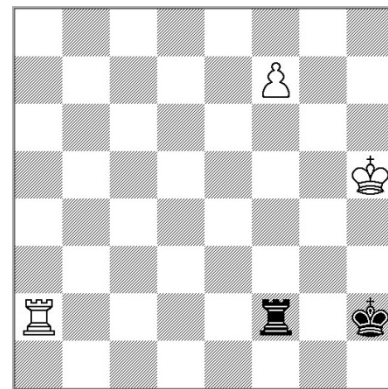


Diagram 8 (B)

A pinned rook!

(Diagram 7) Both rooks are well placed behind their opponents' pawns, but it is clear that the white king is significantly better off than its opposite number.

1 Kg7 Rg2+

Given that White is threatening to promote, this is the only move.

2 Kh7 Rf2 3 Ra5+ Kh4

3...Kg4 4 Kg7 shows why the black king must stay on the edge. The g-file has to be kept free for the black rook to give check.

4 Kg7 Rg2+ 5 Kh6 Rf2 6 Ra4+ Kh3 7 Kg6 Rg2+

White wasn't threatening to promote just at the moment, but without this Rxa2 would have deflected the black rook.

8 Kh5 Rf2 9 Ra3+ Kh2 10 Rxa2! (Diagram 8)

Quite beautiful! White will be left with a queen against a rook – a winning endgame.

TIP: Consider using your opponent's king position to your advantage.

The above tip was clearly utilized in that previous example. The black king would much rather have been on the queenside with its own pawn when the likely outcome would have been both sides conceding their rooks for the enemy passed pawns.

Example 50

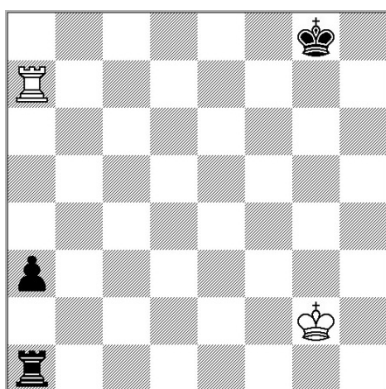


Diagram 9 (W)

How should White play it?

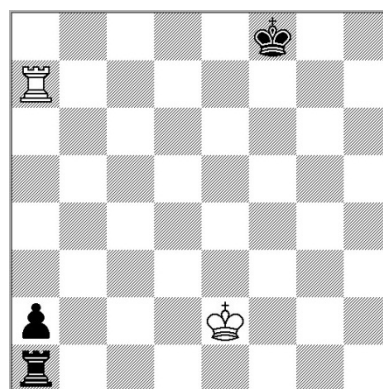


Diagram 10 (W)

Caught in no man's land

(Diagram 9) This example contains a few instances of kings being penalized for their positioning. The first familiar theme in this position is the 'skewer' trick. It is only natural for White to want to win the a-pawn but after 1 Kf2 Kf8 2 Ke2? a2! **(Diagram 10)**, the white king finds itself in 'no man's land'. It is too far gone to return to the safety of g2 and h2 but it is not close enough to c2 after 3 Kd2 Rh1!. It's clear then that the white king is on an extremely unfortunate square and Black has used that to his maximum advantage.

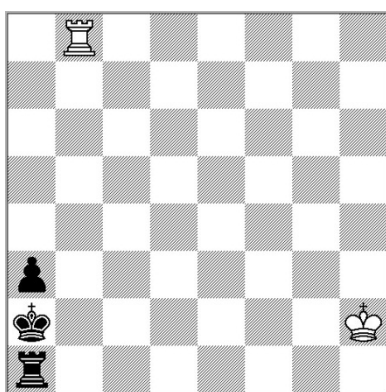


Diagram 11 (W)

Familiar shelter!

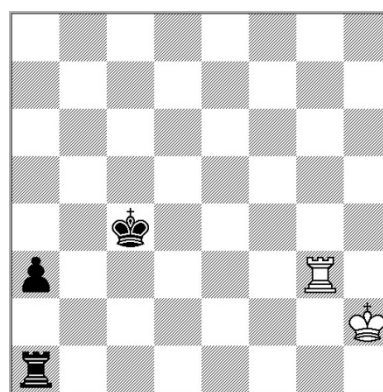


Diagram 12 (B)

The flank attack

Next up, we know that whilst the pawn is on a3, there is a square (a2) on which the black king can shelter from white rook checks. Hence waiting with the king on g2 and h2 doesn't work: 1

Kh2 Kf8 2 Kg2 Ke8 3 Kh2 Kd8 4 Kg2 Kc8 5 Kh2 Kb8 6 Ra4 Kb7 7 Kg2 Kb6 8 Kh2 Kb5 9 Ra8 Kb4 10 Rb8+ Kc3 11 Rc8+ Kb2 12 Rb8+ Ka2 **(Diagram 11)** won't see White checking forever and the black rook is free to reposition itself. For example, 13 Kg2 Rb1 14 Rf8 Rb4 15 Rf2+ Kb3 16 Rf3+ Ka4 17 Rf2 Rb2 and Black wins.

TIP: Be sure to make a plan!

The above seems obvious, but there would be no sympathy for this last fate befalling White as it was quite blatantly going to be the outcome of what effectively was a 'no action' policy.

1 Ra4! Kf7 2 Rf4+!

Note that this is check (White is using the black king's position to aid in switching his rook's defensive position) and so the black rook never gets the opportunity to come out from in front of the pawn.

2...Ke6 3 Rf3!

The rook attacks the pawn from the side, thus still preventing the black rook from escaping its shackles.

3...Kd5 4 Kh2 Kc4 5 Rg3 (Diagram 12) 5...Kb4 6 Rg4+

This is not the first time that we have seen the employment of the flank attack. There is plenty of checking distance and besides (though not really relevant), the white king protects the rook anyhow.

6...Kb3 7 Rg3+ Kc4 8 Rg4+ Kd5 9 Rg3

Or 9 Rg5+ first. The drawing pattern is simple. Check the king if it protects the pawn but otherwise keep the pawn attacked to prevent the relocation of the black rook. If the pawn advances to a2, then White can play Ra3!.

Using the Opponent's Pawns

Throughout this book we have seen plenty of examples in which a defender is able to salvage a draw by maximizing the activity of his rook and employing non-stop checks. Obviously it would be nice for the aggressor if he could hide from those checks by using his own pawns as cover but often he won't have that many left! The alternative is to try to use the opponent's pawns as shelter for the king.

Example 51

(Diagram 13) This is a very simple example of utilizing such a plan.

1 Kb6!

Actually, 1 c6 would also be successful. The key here is not to play the obvious 1 Kxb5?. In that

instance Black could draw using the more sophisticated method of 1...Rb2+ 2 Kc6 Rc2!, as effectively he has correctly moved his king to the 'short' side of the pawn. Much more straightforward, though, is the 'Philidor technique' of 1...Rg6!, which as we know prevents the attacking king from advancing. Indeed, then 2 c6 Rg1 (getting ready for 'check city Arizona!') would see Black having demonstrated all he needs for White to propose a draw.

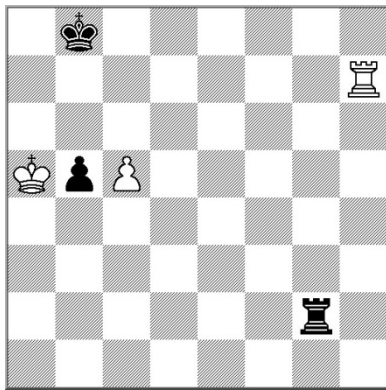


Diagram 13 (W)

The b-pawn hinders Black

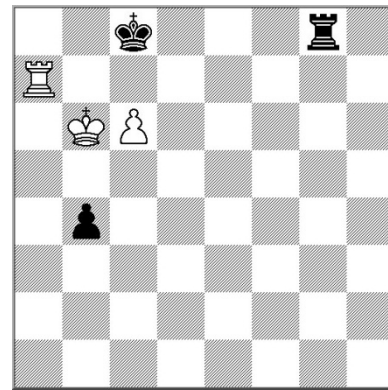


Diagram 14 (B)

White wins

1...Rg8

This is a passive retreat but Black has little in the way of alternatives. 1...Rg6+ 2 c6 is no better as the rook has to drop to the back rank anyway and it is at this point that the benefit of leaving the black pawn in existence is revealed. The black rook is unable to give any checks from behind because his own pawn is in the way.

TIP: Consider utilizing your opponent's pawns to provide shelter for your own king.

2 c6 b4 3 Rb7+ Kc8 4 Ra7 (Diagram 14)

We've seen all this before without Black's extra pawn. As it stands that addition doesn't affect the game's outcome.

4...Kb8 5 c7+ Kc8 6 Ra8+ Kd7 7 Rxc8

and White wins. The b-pawn is not sufficiently advanced to pose any problems.

Shouldering Prevention

The following simple but far from obvious technique was overlooked in favour of a more routine try in a game between two grandmasters.

Example 52

(Diagram 15) It would seem that getting to grips with the passed pawn and bringing the attacking king back into play would be a priority, but in fact a more subtle approach proves to

be a quicker way of achieving those same aims.

70 Rf6!

Obviously White is the one trying to win, but whilst he could always concede the rook for the pawn/queen at any stage, in order to win it for free he needs his king on the case.

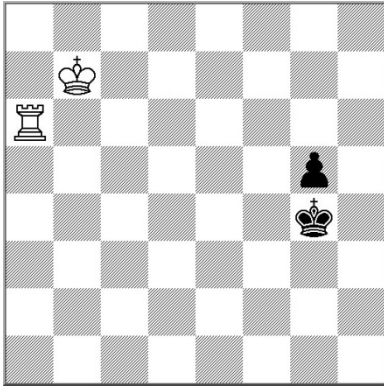


Diagram 15 (W)

Time is of the essence!

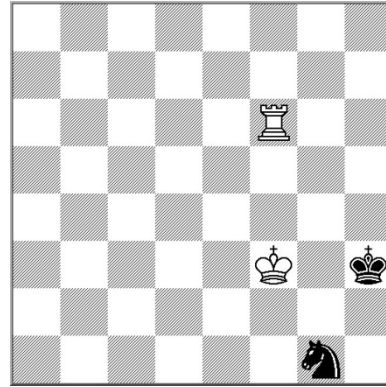


Diagram 16 (B)

Cornered!

The game actually continued quite naturally with 70 Kc6 Kf3 71 Kd5 g4 72 Rf6+ Ke3 73 Rg6 Kf3 74 Kd4 g3 75 Kd3 g2 76 Kd2 Kf2 77 Rf6+ Kg3 78 Rg6+ Kf2 79 Rxg2+ Kxg2, while 70 Rg6 Kf4 71 Kc6 g4 72 Kd5 g3 73 Kd4 Kf3 74 Kd3 g2 would be a similar outcome (i.e. a draw).

Whilst placing a rook behind a passed pawn is sensible and it seems harsh to criticize a king move, in fact absolute accuracy is required. Here the 'cut off' approach is the most exact.

70...Kh3 71 Kc6 g4 72 Kd5 g3 73 Ke4

At this juncture the point behind 70 Rf6! is revealed. The white king is able to have a free run in because the black king was unable to utilize the f-file in order to engage in some 'shouldering'.

73...g2

73...Kg4 74 Rg6+ Kh3 75 Kf3 is the end of the road for the pawn.

74 Kf3! g1N+ (Diagram 16)

White threatened Rh6 mate, but the under-promotion to a knight is doomed as the steed is so poorly placed.

After 74...Kh2 75 Rh6+ Kg1 76 Rg6 Kh1, careful to avoid the stalemate, surely White would find 77 Kf2!.

75 Kf2 Kh2 76 Rh6+ Nh3+ 77 Kf3

The knight is lost, leaving White with a winning position.

NOTE: Knights on the rim are dim!

I think that I've managed to work that phrase into all of the books I've written to date, but I never imagined that I would be able to include it one on rook endings!

Defending against Two Isolated Pawns

I must confess that when I took on this project I never envisaged discussing this advanced topic. This is after all a 'starting out' book, but nevertheless I've decided to give some of the basics in this complicated subject.

TIP: In a game of chess don't aim to be two pawns down in an endgame!

Let's assume that you have ignored the above advice or at least that's how things have turned out for reasons beyond your control! Okay, the point is that sometimes it is possible for a rook (and king!) to defend against a rook and two isolated pawns. Excluding the extremely complex (at least I think so!) f- and h- or a- and c-pawn combinations (which I'll move on to next), usually drawing chances arise against rook's pawns and knight's pawns (but not of the connected variety). Even then...

NOTE: A successful defence is only possible when the defender's king is positioned in the path of one of the pawns and the rook is preventing the advance of the other.

Example 53

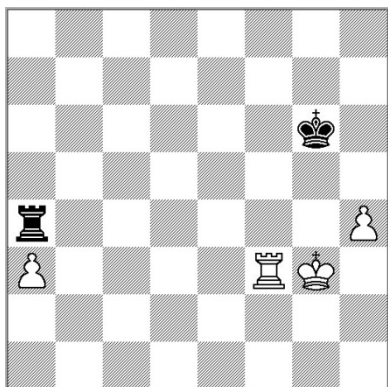


Diagram 17 (W)

More than just blocking

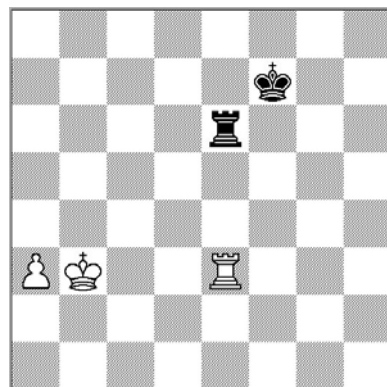


Diagram 18 (W)

Overcoming the cut off

(Diagram 17) White is two pawns up and they are both currently protected. However the black rook is posted on a superb square. It blocks (I know I've generally advised against such a positioning but note here that the white rook is defending from the side rather than from behind) the advance of one of the pawns whilst attacking the other. In order to make progress White must let one of them go. To concede the a-pawn would offer few winning chances, as we know how easy it is for the defender to stop a rook's pawn when his king is in the vicinity of the queening square. Hence the possible game continuation:

1 Kf2 Rxh4 2 Ke2 Ra4 3 Kd2 Ra6 4 Kc2 Rf6!

Black needs his king to help out and thus uses a familiar procedure of breaking the barrier.

5 Re3

Upon 5 Rxf6+ Kxf6 6 a4 (or 6 Kb3 Ke6 7 Kb4 Kd6 8 Kb5 Kc7) 6...Ke7, the black king makes it back in time.

5...Kf7 6 Kb3 Re6! (Diagram 18)

Sticking with the plan. Again a trade of rooks would lead to a drawn king and pawn ending.

7 Rd3 Ke7 8 Kb4 Rd6 9 Rc3 Kd7 10 a4 Rc6

Black has proved that he has the technique required to draw.

Regarding the tricky situation of rook, rook's pawn and bishop's pawn versus rook, I can tell you that even most grandmasters are terrified by the prospect of having to defend such a scenario in a real game. It hasn't happened to me yet and even though I think I understand such positions, frankly I'd rather it never did! I really don't want to go into great detail about this topic, but all the same I'm offering a few examples in order to reach some conclusions and to provide a useful basis for which to conduct further investigations.

Example 54

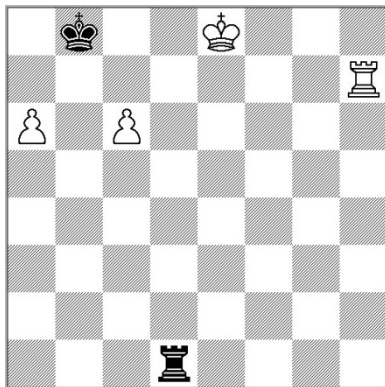


Diagram 19 (W)

Both pawns are on the sixth

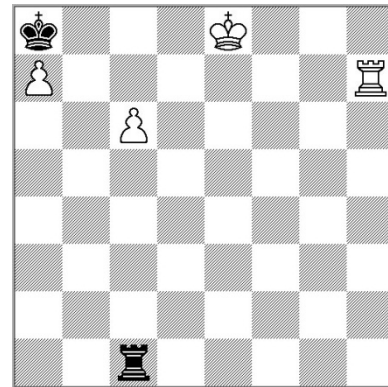


Diagram 20 (W)

Handle with care!

(Diagram 19) If both pawns are on the sixth rank, the win is usually simple.

1...Rc1

The rook has to try its luck behind one of the passed pawns, 1...Kc8 2 a7 Ra1 3 Rb7 (threatening 4 Rb8+) showing why.

2 a7+

2 Rb7+ Kc8 3 a7 with Rb8+ up next is very straightforward, but after 2...Ka8 White would have to be more careful (check out the next warning).

2...Ka8 (Diagram 20) 3 Kd7

Being careful not to fall for 3 c7? Rxc7!.

WARNING: Beware of stalemate tricks!

I'm sure we've had that warning somewhere else in this book, but it's worthwhile mentioning it again if it helps to eliminate all the humiliation that could come your way!

3...Rd1+

Or 3...Kxa7 4 Kc8+ Kb6 5 c7 Kc6 6 Rh6+ Kb5 7 Kb7 when touchdown is next!

4 Kc7 Rg1 5 Rh8+ Kxa7 6 Kc8 Kb6 7 c7 Kc6 8 Rh6+ Kc5 9 Kb7 Rb1+ 10 Ka7 Ra1+ 11 Ra6

and White wins.

Example 55

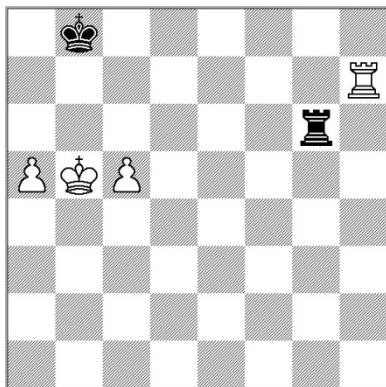


Diagram 21 (W)

Trapped on the back rank

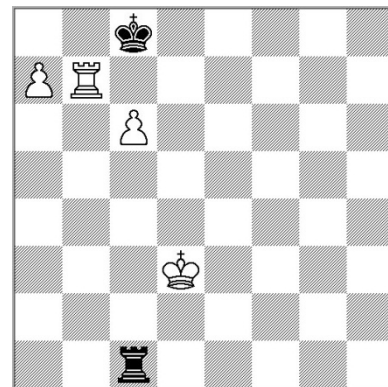


Diagram 22 (B)

I told you so!

(Diagram 21) Here is another disadvantageous scenario for the defender, who could only wish that he had removed White's a-pawn earlier in the game!

NOTE: Typically the defender is lost if his king is cut off on the back rank by the opponent's rook.

1 c6 Rg1

Necessary in view of the threat of 2 Kb6, leaving the a-pawn surplus to requirements and the black rook forced to go passive.

Black has employed the standard 'Philidor' technique but unfortunately it is NOT applicable when the opponent has an extra pawn.

2 Rb7+ Kc8

Alternatively 2...Ka8 loses to 3 Kb6 Rb1+ 4 Kc7 Rh1 5 Rb8+ Ka7 6 Rd8 Ka6 7 Kc8 Kxa5 8 c7 (but be sure to compare this with the next example).

3 a6 Rb1+ 4 Kc5 Rc1+ 5 Kd5 Rd1+ 6 Ke4

The white king is no longer required. When the checks dry up, White will get in a7 and Rb8+.

6...Re1+ 7 Kd3 Rc1 8 a7 (Diagram 22) 8...Ra1 9 Rb8+

There, just like I said!

9...Kc7 10 a8Q

and White wins.

All doom and gloom so far, but I did say that the defender could hold in theory with accurate defence, and the previous two starting positions are what the defender must avoid getting into. On top of that, some essential knowledge...

TIP: The position of the defender's rook is of the utmost importance. It should be deployed on squares where it is on call to deal with the opponent's threats. Specifically, it must have a response to pawn advances and a strategy for dealing with the enemy king's penetration of the seventh rank.

In the next case the defender adheres to this advice.

Example 56

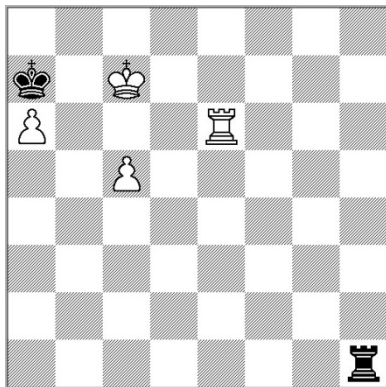


Diagram 23 (B)

The black rook is ready for action!

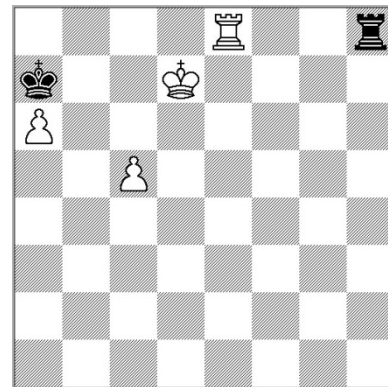


Diagram 24 (B)

Intricate stuff!

The defending king is blocking the rook's pawn and the rook remains active and available to check the white king.

1...Rh7+

The white king has penetrated the seventh rank and this is just the response that we are looking for!

2 Kd8 Rh8+ 3 Kd7

Upon the immediate block 3 Re8, Black would naturally play 3...Rh6 in order to prevent the advance of the c-pawn.

3...Rh7+ 4 Re7 Rh8 5 Re8 (Diagram 24)

It's all intricate stuff and the key seems to be recognizing the drawing positions when it gets down to rook and pawn versus rook. For example, 5 c6 Kxa6 6 c7 Kb7 is one of these as the white rook can't retreat because Black gets his sideways check in first.

TIP: The defender must find the right time to capture the rook's pawn with his king.

5...Rh7+ 6 Kc6 Rh1

Keeping the rook flexible.

7 Rd8 Rh2

As implied in the last tip, the defending king must spot the opportune moment to capture the rook's pawn. Note here that 7...Kxa6?? 8 Ra8 mate isn't the right time!

8 Kc7 Kxa6!

Taking the pawn when the rook is on the adjacent file to the attacking king is the right time.

9 c6 Rh7+ 10 Rd7 Rh8 11 Rd8

Certainly 11 Kd6 Rh6+ is an adequate defence. The white king has nowhere to hide and it can't come too far away from the pawn or else the black king will close in. Arguably the toughest line to spot and thus one well worth taking note of is 11 Re7 Ka7 12 Re1 (threatening mate) 12...Rh7+ 13 Kd6 Rh6+ 14 Kd7 Rh7+ 15 Re7 Rh8 16 c7 Kb7. **(Diagram 25)**

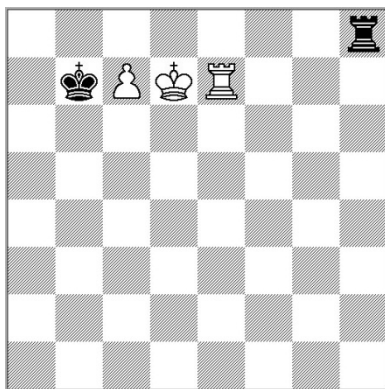


Diagram 25 (W)

A key drawing position

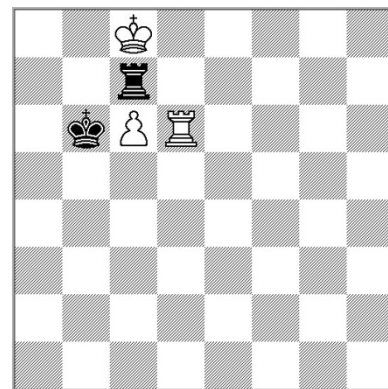


Diagram 26 (W)

Finally, a draw

Again the white rook must stay on its current rank to protect the king, but unfortunately that way White has no way to make progress.

11...Rh7+ 12 Kc8 Kb6 13 Rd6

Or 13 Rd7 Rh8+ when finally Black will be able to trade rooks to reach bare kings.

13...Rc7+ (Diagram 26)

and Black draws as the last pawn is won.

Example 57

To wrap up this section and in particular the discussion on rook with h- and f- (or a- and c-) pawns versus rook, here is another example in which the defender can draw if he takes the rook's pawn at the best moment.

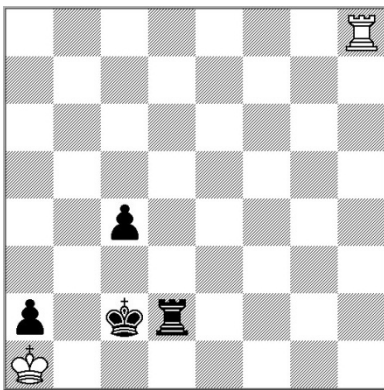


Diagram 27 (W)

To take or not to take?

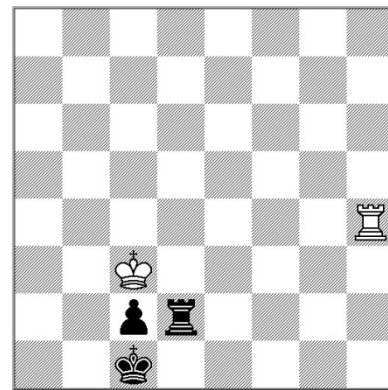


Diagram 28 (B)

Another key drawing position

(Diagram 27) 1 Rh4!

Observe the failure of 1 Kxa2? Kc1+ 2 Ka3 Rd3+ 3 Ka2 (or 3 Kb4 c3 4 Rh1+ Kb2 5 Rh2+ c2) 3...c3 4 Rh1+ Rd1 5 Rh2 c2 6 Kb3 (unlike the main game, the king doesn't make it to c3) 6...Rd3+ 7 Ka2 Rc3 8 Rh1+ Kd2 9 Rh2+ Kd3 10 Rh3+ Kd4 11 Rh4+ Ke5. The black king can approach the white rook and ...c1Q will follow.

1...c3 2 Kxa2! Kc1+ 3 Kb3

The white king was unable to use this square when the black pawn was on c4.

3...c2

3...Rd3 leaves the king vulnerable and hence the checks are back on the agenda: 4 Rh1+ Kd2 5 Rh2+ Ke1 6 Rh1+ Kf2 7 Kc2.

4 Kc3 (Diagram 28)

This is another important rook and pawn versus rook position.

4...Kd1

4...Kb1 5 Rb4+ Kc1 6 Rh4 is a repetition.

5 Rh1+ Ke2 6 Rc1

6 Rh2+ would also obtain the draw, but this bags the pawn at once.

WARNING: Do NOT get too despondent if you are having difficulty getting to grips with this particular topic. There is a large body of theory about rook, f- and h- pawns versus rook and even very strong players have trouble defending such positions.

King Boxing

Finally, an amusing case of a king being trapped in a corner.

Example 58

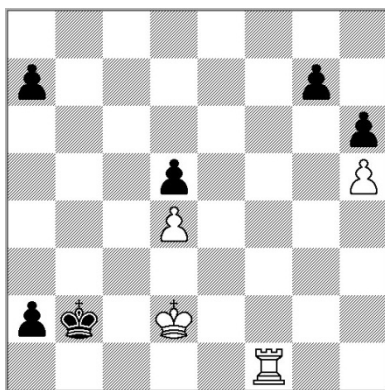


Diagram 29 (W)

Don't forget en passant!

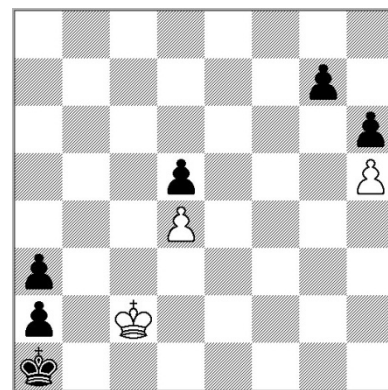


Diagram 30 (B)

A lack of desirable moves

(Diagram 29) Black is threatening to promote his most advanced a-pawn, after which he would enter an easily winning king and pawn ending.

1 Ra1!!

Out of the blue, though, comes an amazing offering.

1...Kb3

The rook is of course a kind of Greek gift (if not of the Bxh7+ variety!). Essentially, taking it now just accelerates the inevitable. For example, 1...Kxa1 2 Kc2 a5 3 Kc1 a4 4 Kc2 a3 5 Kc1.

2 Kc1 a5 3 Kd2 Kb2 4 Kd1 a4

Relinquishing the a2-pawn earlier was hopeless and 4...Kc3 5 Rxa2 Kxd4 6 Rxa5 Ke4 7 Ra7 shows that it still is.

5 Kd2 Kb3 6 Kc1 a3 7 Kd2 Kb2 8 Kd1 Kxa1

There are no more delaying tactics. Black has run out of pawn moves and 8...Kb3 9 Kc1 forces the win of the a2-pawn.

9 Kc2 (Diagram 30)

Finally we get to see the point behind 1 Ra1!!. The black king is boxed in, and in a quest to find legal moves he has to employ undesirable ones.

9...g5 10 hxg6

The pawn on h5 nicely fixed Black's two kingside pawns and this en passant capture is just what the doctor ordered!

10...h5 11 g7 h4 12 g8Q h3 13 Qg1 mate.

Chapter Six

Applying Principles to Practical Play



Introduction



Practical examples

Introduction

The main body of this book has introduced the reader to all the important (as well as some not-so-important!) themes that are required to tackle rook and pawn endings. The vast majority of the starting positions were created by me to illustrate specific points, although that is not to say that identical positions haven't occurred in practice somewhere before. Indeed, my intention was to select instructive but also realistic examples.

To justify the above, I wanted to use this chapter to provide some 'real life' practical examples of rook and pawn endings in which essential knowledge was applied to ultimately assist the attacker or defender to obtain the desired result, and to do this I have trawled through my own database of games. First up, I can tell you that there were a lot of rook endings! Furthermore, you will be pleased to hear that I have had numerous encounters in which the relevant techniques were applied just as instructed in the earlier chapters. By all means check out the following games, although in truth you should learn nothing new!

Practical Examples

Example 59 - M.Pein-C.Ward (British Championship, Hove 1997)

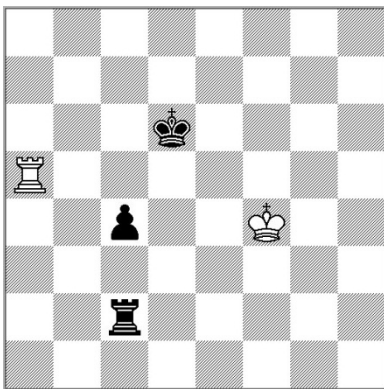


Diagram 1 (B)

Time to cut off!

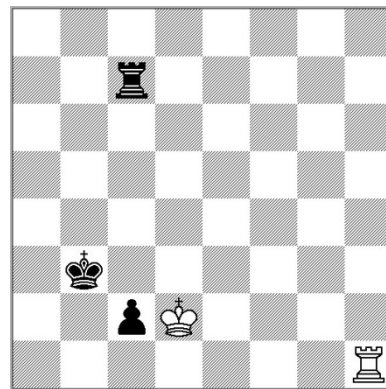


Diagram 2 (B)

Nearly there!

(Diagram 1) Material-wise (for rook and pawn endings!) it's as basic as could be. Black has one pawn remaining and is naturally looking to promote it. Having no pawns himself, White can have no winning aspirations but knows that he could draw if his king were able to have a defensive input. Alas, Black's next move ensures that it won't.

60...Re2!

Easily the most accurate continuation and this 'cutting off' procedure should be very familiar by now. Casual play such as 60...c3 61 Ke3 Rh2 62 Kd3 c2 will prove no problem whatsoever for White, who with a simple Ra1-c1 can pick up the pawn by force.

61 Kf3 Re7

Remaining on the e-file so as to keep the white king cut off.

62 Kf2 Kc6 63 Kf3

White is reluctant to move his own rook away from the fifth rank as that would allow the black king to wander up to support the pawn.

63...Kb6 64 Rd5 c3 65 Rh5

After 65 Rd3 Black should place his rook behind his pawn, and indeed 65...Rc7! (rather than 65...c2 66 Rb3+! Ka5 67 Rc3) 66 Ke2 c2 is game over!

65...c2 66 Rh1 Rc7 67 Rc1 Kb5 68 Ke2 Kb4 69 Kd2 Kb3 70 Rh1 (Diagram 2) 70...Kb2! 0-1

As Black is also eager to control the queening square, this is obviously the most natural move. Incidentally, 70...Rd7+? 71 Kc1 blows the win as Black is vulnerable to checks along the third rank.

After 70...Kb2 White resigned as there is no defence to 70...c1Q+ or 70...Rd7+ followed by ...c1Q.

Example 60 - C.Ward-K.Arkell (British Championship, Norwich 1994)

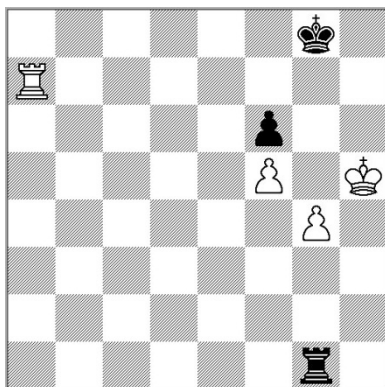


Diagram 3 (B)

Ready to stay put?

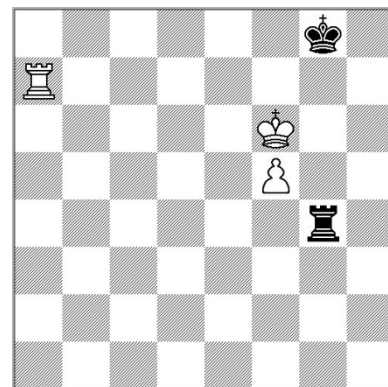


Diagram 4 (B)

No Philidor here

(Diagram 3) A cursory glance at this one suggests that White holds all the cards. Obviously he (by the way we're talking about me!) has a two to one pawn majority but he also has the better king and indeed the enemy monarch is cut off on the back rank. However, although the white rook looks well placed, the black one is too.

43...Rg2!

Not drastically changing the position of the active black rook and, most importantly, keeping tabs on the white g-pawn.

44 Kg6

It should go without saying (but I will do anyway!) that 44 g5? should be met by 44...Rxg5+ rather than 44...fxg5? 45 Kg6, which would resemble Example 51.

Vacating the seventh rank with the rook would only allow the black king to advance, so White takes the most critical road.

44...Rxg4+ 45 Kxf6 (Diagram 4) 45...Rf4!!

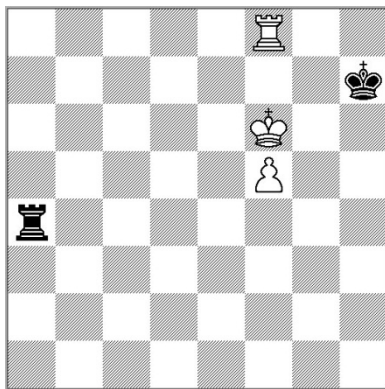
We are used to seeing the defending rook further away from the attacking king but that is not possible here as the absolute priority is to get behind White's passed pawn. Place the rook on f1 and this would be a very familiar situation. Effectively, Black has just budged his king from the queening square and here it has correctly opted for the 'short' side of the pawn. White is unable to take advantage of the closeness of the black rook.

46 Ra8+ Kh7 47 Ke6

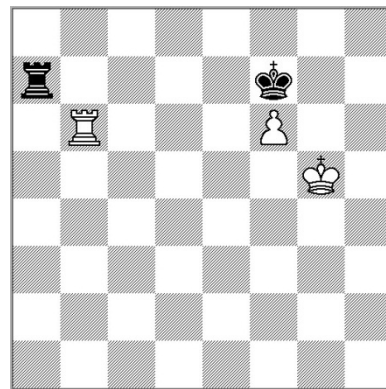
Testing Black's resistance but the English grandmaster is well up to the challenge.

47...Kg7 48 Ra7+ Kf8 49 Kf6 Kg8 50 Ra8+ Kh7 51 Rf8

51 Ke6 Kg7 would just be going round in circles; at least the text prepares to move the king out of the way in order to advance the pawn.

51...Ra4! (Diagram 5)**Diagram 5 (W)**

Good technique by Black

**Diagram 6 (W)**

A simple draw

Keith Arkell certainly knows his endgames. As we established earlier in this book, now sideways checks is the theme that Black needs to employ.

52 Rf7+

Upon 52 Re8, preparing to block the checks, the black rook should return with 52...Rf4 when again 53 Ke6 Kg7 gets White nowhere.

52...Kg8 53 Re7 Kf8 54 Re6

Upon 54 Rb7, 54...Ra6+ 55 Kg5 Rc6 would see Black switching to the simple Philidor technique. That is the easiest solution for the defender in situations of rook and pawn versus rook, but as I have said all along it is not always possible to set it up if it arrives from a position involving more pawns. Hence the necessity to know about the 'short' side defence as applied perfectly in this game.

54...Ra7 55 Rb6 Rf7+ 56 Kg5 Ra7 57 f6 Kf7 ½-½ (Diagram 6)

The pawn is blockaded and the white king has no cover from checks. The defence was excellent and with all practical winning chances gone, the draw is conceded.

Example 61 - C.Ward-J.Emms (British League 1997)

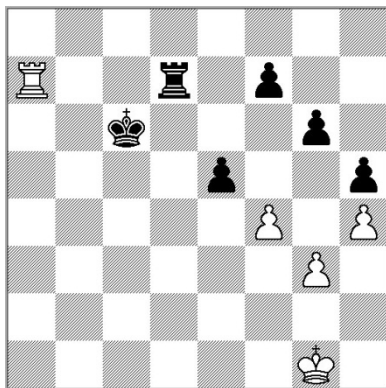


Diagram 7 (W)

Fancy a rook swap?

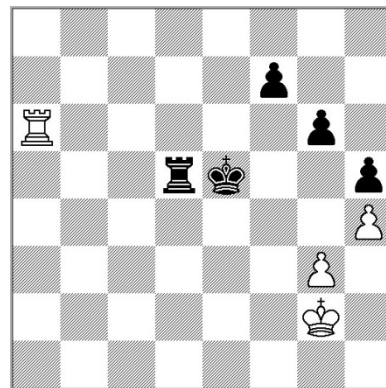


Diagram 8 (W)

The flexible rook

(Diagram 7) We start the action here with me being a pawn down in a four pawns against three situation, all the pawns being on the same side.

74 Ra6+

The reader should now understand that a rook and pawn endgame is the best chance for White to hold a draw (there's no opposite coloured bishops here!). Hence 74 Rxd7? Kxd7 75 fxe5 Ke6, leading to a losing king and pawn endgame, was not a consideration!

74...Kd5 75 fxe5

I really didn't fancy 75 Ra5+ Ke4 76 Rxe5+ Kf3, as all of a sudden the black king has become a monster and, on top of that, the pawns are possibly dropping off and White is in danger of being mated. Okay, so perhaps this is an exact science and after 77 Kh2 f5 78 Re6 Rd2+ 79 Kh3

Rg2 80 Rxc6 Kf2 (White must beware ...Kg1 and the mating ...Rh2) 81 Ra6 Rxc3+ 82 Kh2 Rg4 White can still hold the position. I guess the worst case scenario here is the theoretically drawn rook with rook's pawn and bishop's pawn against rook discussed in the previous chapter, but that seemed like a lot of work and the text is much simpler.

75...Kxe5 76 Kg2 Rd5 (Diagram 8) 77 Rb6

The white rook remains active and ready to make a nuisance of itself at the drop of a hat.

77...f6 78 Kf3 Rd3+ 79 Kf2 Kf5 80 Rb4

Preventing the black king from advancing further.

80...Rc3 81 Rf4+ Ke5 82 Ra4 Rd3 83 Kg2 Rd4 84 Ra5+ Ke4 85 Ra6

The rook hassles the black pawns. Black never gets a moment's rest!

85...Kf5 86 Kh3 Re4 87 Ra5+ Re5 88 Ra3 Re1 89 Ra5+ Re5 90 Ra3 g5

Throughout rook endings with pawns on the same side it is the defender's aim to swap off as many pawns as possible. Black has been reluctant to play this but feels that he has exhausted all other options.

91 hxg5 fxg5 (Diagram 9)

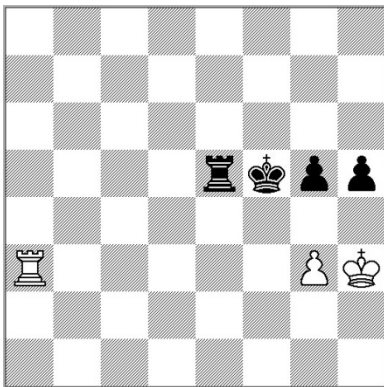


Diagram 9 (W)

Liquidation in progress

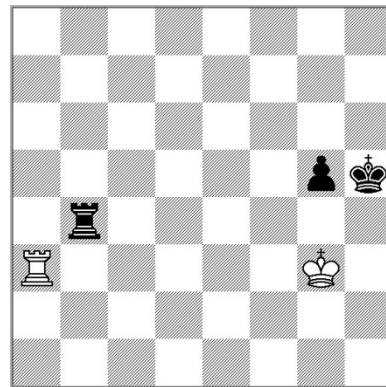


Diagram 10 (B)

Back for good!

92 g4+!

Not forced, but certainly the simplest in the quest to liquidate. Regarding the pawn count, it was 4 versus 3, then 3 versus 2 and now it's 2 versus 1. Guess what? Yes, White is after 1 versus 0 when the basic drawing technique can be employed.

92...hxc4+ 93 Kg3

Now the white king can sit like a rock on this square. Any attempt by Black to try and manoeuvre his rook to h3 will leave his king wide open to checks.

93...Rb5 94 Rc3 Kg6

Black's only try now is to park his king on h5 and then manoeuvre his rook to f3. Then a rook trade on f3 would give him the opposition and a winning king and pawn situation, but that is all hypothetical. White has plenty of drawing ideas to turn to and taking the pawn that en prise is one of them!

95 Kxg4 Rb4+ 96 Kg3 Kh5 97 Ra3 (Diagram 10)

The white rook has made its home on the third rank and quite rightly has no intention of leaving.

97...Rg4+ 98 Kh3 Rh4+ 99 Kg3 Rb4 100 Re3 Rb5 101 Ra3 g4 102 Rc3 Kg5 103 Ra3 Rc5 ½-½

Black can try no more as moving his own rook off of its present rank would allow a big check.

Example 62 - I.Ivanov-C.Ward (London Lloyds Bank 1992)

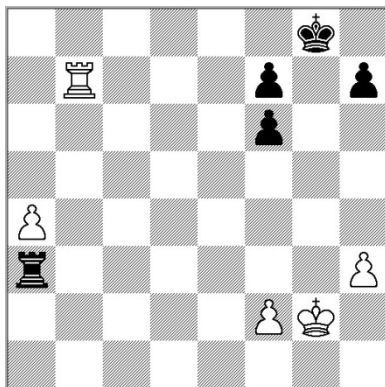


Diagram 11 (W)

In front or beside?

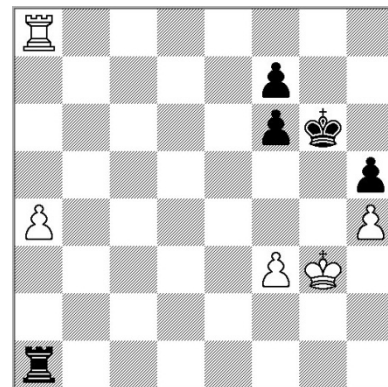


Diagram 12 (B)

Time on its hands!

(Diagram 11) I have talked (well okay, written!) a lot about situations in which one side has an extra passed pawn on the opposite side of the board from where the kings reside. I suppose White isn't quite a whole pawn up here as Black's second f-pawn should count for something. That aside, though, Black should be able to achieve the draw provided he plays sensibly.

31 Rb4

I've previously stated that usually there are more practical winning chances defending a passed pawn from the side than from in front. After 31 Ra7, one possible variation is 31...Kg7 32 a5 Kg6 33 a6 h5 34 Ra8 Kg5 35 a7 Kf4. The doubled f-pawns provide perfect cover for the black king and the white monarch is unable to get out into play without seriously risking defeat.

31...h5 32 f3 Kg7 33 Kg3 Kg6 34 h4 Kf5 35 Rb5+

In an ideal world the white king could travel over to b2 in order to expel the black rook. In the real world that's too risky because if white pawns get taken, Black gets serious action on the kingside.

35...Kg6 36 Ra5

Acquiescing to a more passive role.

36...Ra1 37 Ra8 (Diagram 12) 37...Rg1+ 38 Kf2 Rh1

Until the a-pawn reaches the seventh rank, the black rook is more or less a free agent.

39 Rg8+ Kf5 40 Rb8 Rxh4

And why not?

41 Rb5+ Kg6

It seems to me that White was putting all his eggs into one basket, namely the variation 41...Kf4?? 42 Rb4+ Kg5 43 Rxh4 Kxh4 44 a5, when the pawn will promote.

42 a5 Ra4

Though a draw was always the likely outcome, now of course White can't even claim to stand better.

43 Kg3 h4+ 44 Kh3 f5 45 Rc5 Kg5 46 Rb5 Ra3 47 Kg2 f6 48 Rc5 Kf4 49 Rb5 h3+ 50 Kh2 Kg5 51 Kg3 h2 52 Kxh2 Rxf3 53 a6 Ra3 54 Rb6 f4 55 Kg2 f5 56 Kf2 f3 57 Kg3 f4+ 58 Kf2 ½-½

Bearing in mind 58...Kg4 59 Rg6+, the fact is that nobody's pawns are going anywhere!

Example 63 - J.Balcerak-C.Ward (German League 1998)

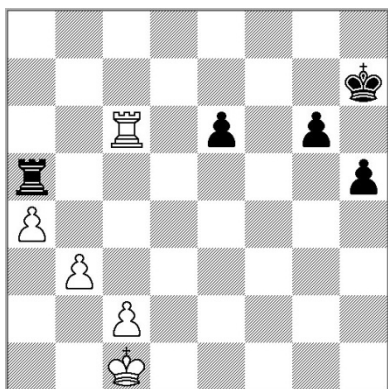


Diagram 13 (B)

The irrelevant pawn

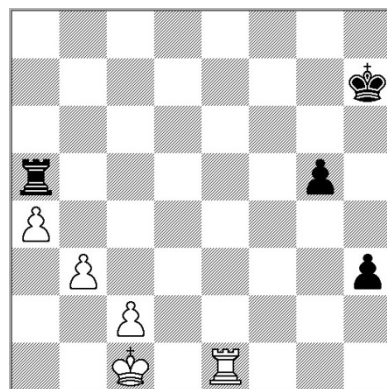


Diagram 14 (W)

Winning the race

(Diagram 13) At a glance this endgame looks a little random but upon closer inspection it begins to take shape. There are three pawns each but an incorrect opinion would be that 'White stands better because he has three connected passed pawns against Black's two

connected passed pawns and the e-pawn is isolated and weak'. Connected pawns are great, and earlier in the book I stated that often there is no difference between having three connected or two connected passed pawns, as pushing the third one takes time. The truth is that the e-pawn is of little relevance and it's all about the tempi involved in pushing the passed pawns. Black has a head start and so he holds the (what is frequently decisive) upper hand.

53...h4!

Pushing the pawns is a priority. Because the e-pawn is neither here nor there, the time-wasting 53...Re5? would be silly.

54 Rxe6 g5 55 Re1

You know that things are going wrong when a defensive move like this is played, but as Black's pawns got going first he is obviously going to win a straight race.

55...h3 (Diagram 14) 56 Rg1 Kh6 57 Rg3 g4! 58 Rxc4 h2 59 Rh4+ Rh5 60 Rxc2 Rxc2

Actually I think that White did well to net both of Black's pawns for his rook, but unfortunately for him the resulting situation is lost anyway!

61 Kb2 Kg5 (Diagram 15)

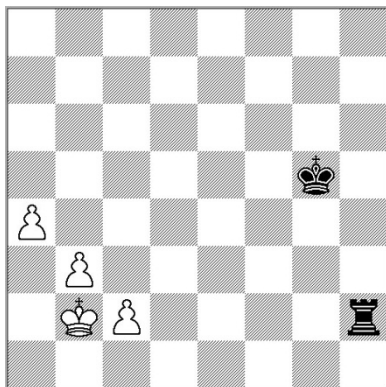


Diagram 15 (W)

Returning to duty

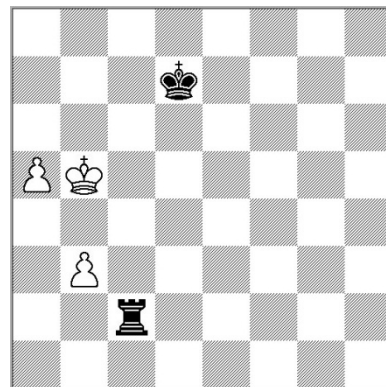


Diagram 16 (W)

I'm back!

Now of course the black king must motor over to the queenside.

62 Kc3

The main problem for White is as it was all along. His pawns aren't sufficiently advanced to cause a serious problem. Black has things under control as is shown by the variation 62 b4 Kf5 63 a5 Ke5 64 b5 Kd4 65 b6 Rh5 – the pawns are stopped in their tracks.

62...Kf6 63 Kb4

White wants to engage in some 'king shouldering' but unfortunately this involves having to let the c-pawn go.

63...Rxc2 64 Kb5 Ke6 65 a5 Kd7 (Diagram 16) 66 Kb6

Alternatively the game could end 66 b4 Kc7 67 Ka6 Kc6 68 b5+ Kc7 69 Ka7 Rb2 70 b6+ Kc6 71 Kb8 Rb5 72 Kc8 Rxa5 73 b7 Rb5.

66...Rb2 0-1

Example 64 - S.Dishman-C.Ward (British League 2001)

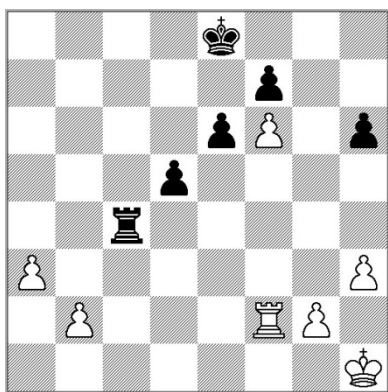


Diagram 17 (B)

Who stands better?

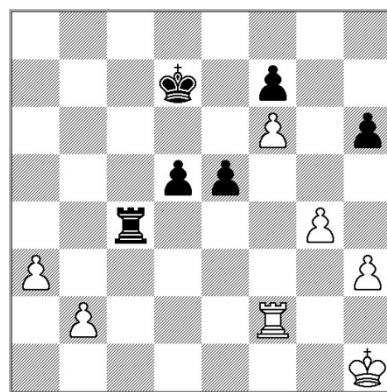


Diagram 18 (W)

Impressive central pawns

(Diagram 17) Black is a pawn down here, but there is nothing mundane about this endgame because the pawn structure is completely imbalanced. White has an extra pawn on the kingside and two connected passed pawns on the queenside. The materialistic assessor would place White in the driving seat but in fact it is Black's connected passed centre pawns that are the dominant factor.

35...Kd7!

A good place to start. As I explained earlier in the book, the reason why centre pawns are preferable in rook endgames is because it is easier for the king to aid in their advance. I am far from saying that White's a- and b-pawns are insignificant but clearly the white king will not be swift in offering them assistance.

36 g4

The f-pawn is quite far up the board and so White looks to make the most of that. As reiterated in the previous game, though, the problem with having three rather than two pawns to work with is that the tempi are split too many ways and so less progress can be made in an equal amount of time.

36...e5 (Diagram 18)

Now the centre pawns are on the fourth rank whilst the queenside ones lag behind on the second and third ranks.

37 Kg2 Ke6 38 Kg3 d4 39 h4 Rc8

I suspect that I rejected the immediate 39...e4 because of 40 Kf4, although looking at it now, 40...Kd5 41 g5 e3 still looks promising for Black. For example, 42 Rg2 e2! when 43 Rxe2 d3+ drops the rook.

40 g5 hxg5 41 hxg5 Rg8 42 Kg4 e4 43 Kf4 e3 44 Rg2 Kd5 45 Kf3

After 45 b4 Re8 46 Re2, both 46...Re6, keeping things under control, and 46...Kc4, intending to infiltrate, look good for a win.

45...Re8

The blatant plan is ...d4-d3 and ...e3-e2.

46 Ke2 Kc4 47 Rg4 (Diagram 19)

Pinning the d-pawn is the only way to prevent its advance. White's queenside pawns may not have got far but at least the one on b2 prevents ...Kc3.

47...Rh8 48 g6

This pawn and its compatriot on f6 do comprise a danger, but Black has his own agenda and his own pawns are faster.

48...Rh2+ 49 Kf1

49 Ke1 Kd3 50 Rg1 Rxb2 is a situation we've now seen on countless occasions. The passive white rook is only able to guard the back rank mate on one side of the king.

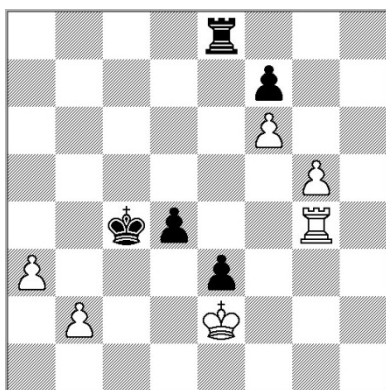


Diagram 19 (B)

Pinning the d-pawn

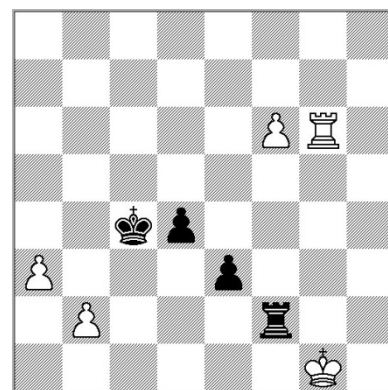


Diagram 20 (B)

Still a pawn up!

49...Rf2+ 50 Kg1 fxg6 51 Rxf2 (Diagram 20) 51...Rf5

Black's pawns always looked the more threatening but now he also has the superior rook too. It's behind White's passed pawn and it also cuts off the white king.

52 f7 Rxf7 0-1

Of course 52...e2 is also winning, but there's no hurry!

Example 65 - C.Ward-N.Berry (British League 2003)

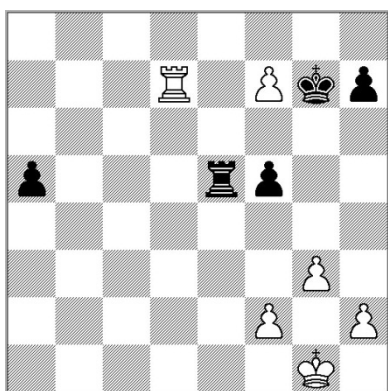


Diagram 21 (W)

Seeking a significant majority

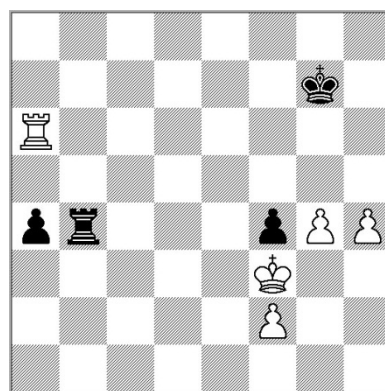


Diagram 22 (B)

Not hanging around

(Diagram 21) Black is only a pawn down and if he could liquidate to three versus two on the kingside then he should be able to hold the draw. Unfortunately, White is only too well aware of that and intends obtaining a more favourable pawn imbalance.

39 f8Q+! Kxf8 40 Rxh7

This (or the one on f5) was the pawn that White was after. Now he (well, me again!) has created a significant two-pawn majority on the kingside. As well as having something meaty to work with there, the white rook can always get behind Black's passed a-pawn.

40...Rc5 41 Kg2 a4 42 Ra7 Rc4 43 h4 Kg8 44 Kf3 Rb4 45 Ra5

If the black f-pawn remains on its current post, the white rook will have more than enough time to take it and return behind the a-pawn.

45...f4 46 g4

Eschewing the f-pawn in favour of keeping the majority connected.

46...Kg7 47 Ra6 1-0 (Diagram 22)

Black evidently wasn't too keen on hanging around for the likes of 47...Kh7 48 g5 Kg7 49 h5 Kh7 50 Ra7+ Kg8 51 h6 Kh8 52 g6 Rb8 53 Rxa4, and who can blame him?

Example 66 - T.Christensen-C.Ward (Copenhagen 1997)

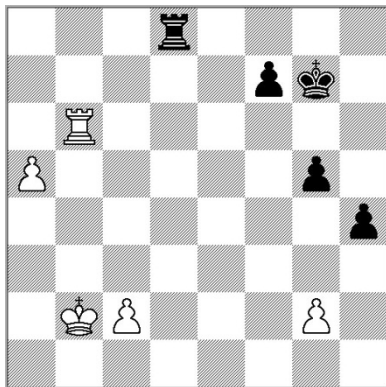


Diagram 23 (B)

Put your money on Black!

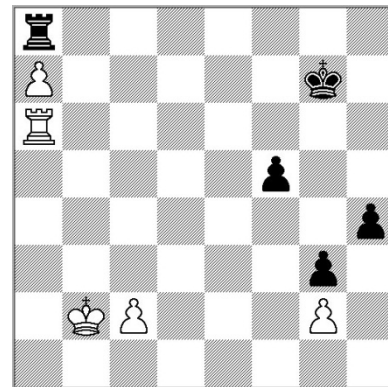


Diagram 24 (W)

Sticking together!

(Diagram 23) This is a fascinating one. White has two passed pawns but because they are isolated it is Black who has the superior pawn structure. Playing Black I knew that connected pawns would be the most dangerous type to have and it's on that basis that I built my game plan.

51...g4 52 a6 f5 53 a7 Ra8

The black rook is very passive here but White was threatening 54 Rb8. Besides, essentially I was detailing my rook to hold up White's isolated pawns, safe in the knowledge that the white rook wouldn't be able to do the same with my soon-to-be advanced connected pawns.

54 Ra6 g3! (Diagram 24)

I wasn't interested in 54...h3 55 gxh3 gxh3. I'm sounding like a broken record, but again the point is that I wanted connected passers!

55 Kc3 f4 56 Ra1

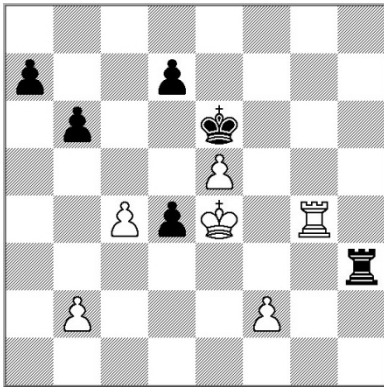
The reader should be well aware by now that 56 Kd3 f3 (not dissimilar to the game) 57 gxf3 h3 would be winning because two connected passed pawns on the sixth rank defeat a rook (provided there is no intervention from the kings).

56...f3 57 Kd3

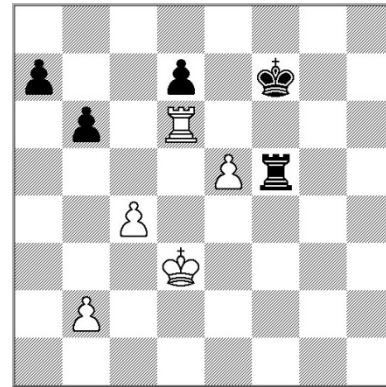
The white king makes an effort but, as 57 gxf3 h3 58 Rg1 g2 59 Kd2 Kf6 60 Ke2 h2 demonstrates, it is still too far away.

57...fxg2 58 Ke2 Rf8 0-1

Cutting off the king is the icing on the cake. White can't promote because his rook needs to guard g1, but on the other hand he is powerless to prevent ...h3-h2-h1Q!

Example 67 - C.Ward-P.Sowray (British Championship, Scarborough 2004)**Diagram 25 (W)**

White wants to win

**Diagram 26 (W)**

Liquidation on hold!

(Diagram 25) Currently the material situation is level, although that is a deceptive feature as Black's d4-pawn is destined to drop off. However, White ignores that to start with, instead placing the emphasis on advancing the f-pawn and creating threats against the black king.

37 f4!? d3 38 f5+ Kf7 39 Rg6!

The rook aims for the d6-square, from where it can attack both of the black d-pawns.

39...Rh4+ 40 Kxd3 Rf4 41 Rd6 Rxf5 (Diagram 26) 42 Ke4!

The reader should rest assured that even grandmasters can't look at every rook and pawn endgame and say with all certainty whether it is a win, a loss or a draw. Here I rejected 42 Rxd7+ Ke6 43 Rxa7 Kxe5 on principle. Perhaps White could still emerge triumphant but I preferred to keep more pawns on the board and to get my king active.

42...Rf2 43 Rxd7+ Ke6 44 Rd6+ Ke7 45 b4

The white rook cuts off the black king and there is a nice little gap in which the white king can make its approach.

45...Rb2 46 b5 Rc2 47 Kd5 (Diagram 27) 47...Rc1 48 Rh6

Threatening the check on h7 that would both net the a7-pawn and consign the black king to the back rank.

48...Rd1+ 49 Kc6 Ra1

49...Rc1 50 Kb7 Rxc4 51 Kxa7 Rc5 52 Kxb6 Rxe5 would ultimately lead to the good old 'Lucena' position. For example, 53 Kc6 Re1 54 b6 Rc1+ 55 Kb7 Kd7 56 Kb8 Rb1 57 b7 Ra1. Now 58 Rh4 prepares to build the bridge and 58...Ra2 59 Rd4+ Ke7 60 Kc7 Rc2+ 61 Kb6 Rb2+ 62 Kc6 Rc2+ 63 Kb5 Rb2+ 64 Rb4 sees the king successfully escaping from in front of the pawn.

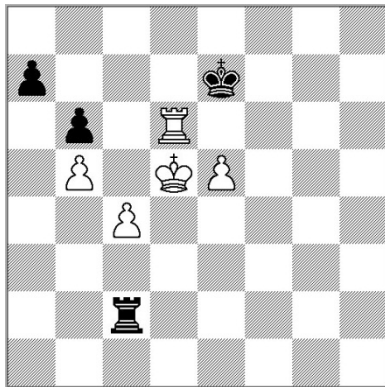


Diagram 27 (B)

Here I come!

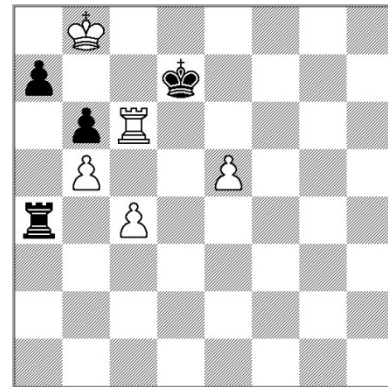


Diagram 28 (B)

Lucena approaching?

50 Kb7 Ra4 51 Rc6 Kd7 52 Kb8 (Diagram 28)

Pretty much as demonstrated in my previous note, White's plan is basically to win Black's a- and b-pawns even at the expense of his own c- and e-pawns. As his own king monitors the b-pawn's queening square, the application of the 'Lucena technique' would then reap the full point.

52...a5

Black decides not to hang around for Rc7+xa7 but White is not going to lose much sleep over a passed a-pawn.

53 Kb7 Ra1 54 Kxb6 a4 55 Rc7+ Kd8 56 Ra7

Just to be sure though!

56...a3 57 c5 1-0

The white king is more than adequately sheltered and so ...a3-a2 won't even carry the threat of a check.

Example 68 - D.Palo-C.Ward (Copenhagen 2001)

(Diagram 29) As we have discovered, the defender always has reasonable chances to draw when he has his rook behind the opponent's extra passed pawn, as is the case here. Unfortunately in this particular position White's e-pawn (which would much rather be on the f- or g-file) is a big weak point and Black has just the plan to exploit it.

42...a2!

The rook is stuck on a1 for a while, although that is of course only true if the white king remains on the safe squares g2 and h2.

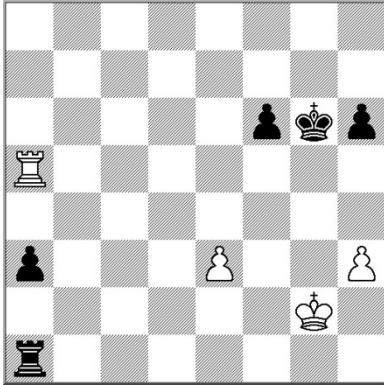


Diagram 29 (B)

The e-pawn is a target

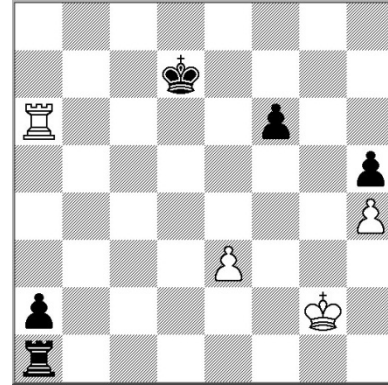


Diagram 30 (W)

Foretelling the future!

43 Kh2 Kf7 44 Ra6 Ke7 45 Kg2 Kd7 46 h4 h5 0-1 (Diagram 30)

This may look premature but White could see what was going to happen. The black king was intending advance and win the white e-pawn thanks to 'zugzwang'. Following that the f-pawn could waltz home to glory. Remember that the white king can't move to the f-file whilst the white rook must stay on the a-file.

I hope that you've understood all of that but just in case, let's view a possible finish: 46...h5 47 Kh2 Kc7 48 Kg2 Kb7 **(Diagram 31)**

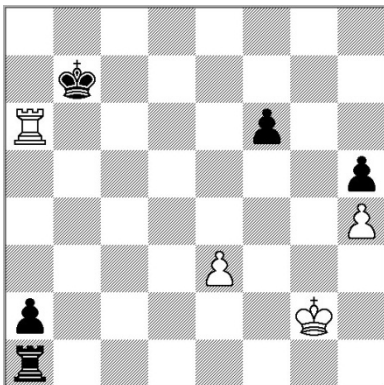


Diagram 31 (W)

Breaking the barrier

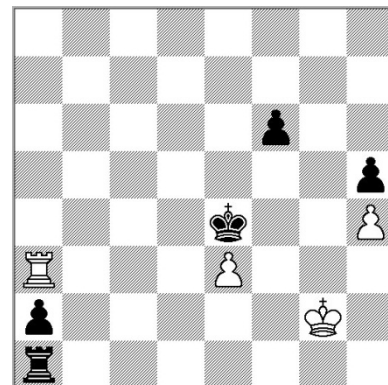


Diagram 32 (W)

Zugzwang!

The white rook is forced to move and thus Black breaks the barrier. 49 Ra3 Kb6 50 Ra4 Kb5 51 Ra3 Kb4 52 Ra8 Kc3 53 Ra7 Kd3 54 Ra3+ Ke4 **(Diagram 32)** 55 Ra8 (or 55 Kh2 Kf3, the outcome being the same; it's 'zugzwang' as White doesn't want to move and indeed can't do so without losing something) 55...Kxe3 56 Ra3+ Kd4 57 Ra4+ Kc5 58 Ra5+ Kb6 59 Ra8 f5 60 Ra4 f4 61 Ra3 (61 Rxf4 Rb1 followed by the inevitable promotion shows why the rook can't leave the a-file) 61...f3+ 62 Kf2 (62 Kxf3 Rf1+ is one reason why the white king can't hit the f-file, the main line being the other!) 62...Rh1! 63 Rxa2 Rh2+ 64 Kxf3 Rxa2.

Example 69 - C.Ward-A.Webster (Wrexham 1998)

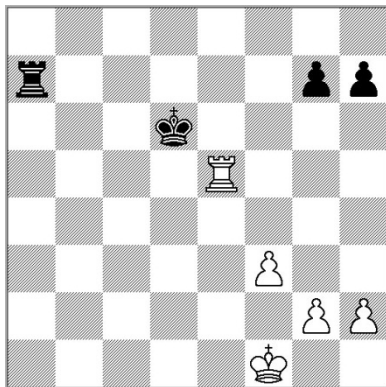


Diagram 33 (W)

Opt to cut off

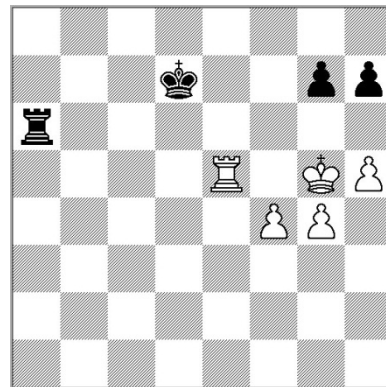


Diagram 34 (W)

Onwards and upwards!

(Diagram 33) 56 Re2!

By guarding the second rank, this enables the white king to advance up the board. As the emphasis here should be on keeping the rook on the e-file, also obvious was 56 f4. However, after 56...Ra4 57 g3 Ra2 the white rook would be forced to retreat anyway.

56...Ra1+ 57 Kf2 Ra4 58 Kg3 Rb4 59 f4 Kd7 60 Kg4 Rb5 61 g3 Ra5 62 Re5 Ra2

As is common in this example a rook swap is out of the question. For example, 62...Rxe5 63 fxe5 Ke6 64 Kf4 Ke7 65 Kf5 Kf7 66 e6+ Ke7 67 Ke5 Ke8 68 Kd6 Kd8 69 e7+ Ke8 70 Ke6 h6 71 h3 h5 72 h4 g6 73 Kf6 Kd7 when White is spoilt for choice between taking Black's kingside pawns or ushering home his e-pawn!

63 h4 Ra8 64 Kg5 Ra3 65 g4 Ra4 66 h5 Ra6 (Diagram 34)

White has made progress but at some point there must come a big push.

67 Kf5 Rb6 68 Ke4 Rf6?

For me this is too passive for Black. He should prefer the more active 68...Rb4+!, leaving White still to produce the killing plan.

69 Rf5 Re6+ 70 Kf3 Re7 71 Rd5+! (Diagram 35)

A strong move and a really annoying one for Black. Moving the king to the e-file as in the game allows White to trade rooks, but trapped on the c-file it would be it even further from the action.

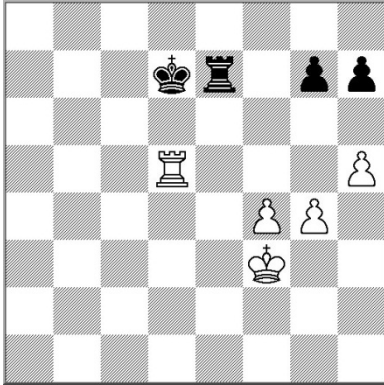


Diagram 35 (B)

Seeking a rook trade

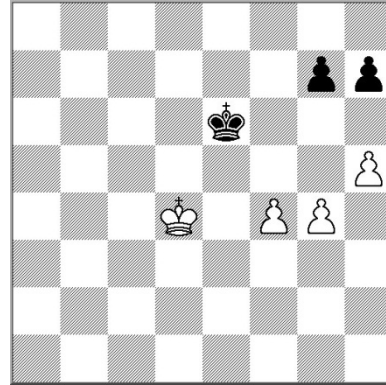


Diagram 36 (B)

What, no rooks?

71...Ke8

White has numerous ways to win after 71...Kc7 with one possible route to victory being 72 g5 Rf7 73 f5 Kc6 74 Ke4 Re7+ 75 Re5 Rf7 76 g6 hxg6 77 hxg6 Ra7 78 f6 gxf6 79 Re6+ Kd7 80 g7 Ra8 81 Kf5 Rg8 82 Ra6 Ke7 83 Ra7+ Ke8 84 Ra8+ Kf7 85 Rxg8 Kxg8 86 Kxf6 Kh7 87 Kf7.

72 Re5! Kf7

Black wants his opponent to have to work for the win. 72...Rxe5 73 fxe5 is comparatively easy, for example 73...Kf7 74 Ke4 Ke6 75 Kd4 Ke7 76 Kd5 Kd7 77 e6+ Ke7 78 Ke5 Ke8 79 Kd6 Kd8 80 h6! gxh6 81 e7+ Ke8 82 Ke6 h5 83 gxh5 h6 84 Kf6 and wins.

73 Rxe7+ Kxe7 74 Ke4 Ke6 75 Kd4 (Diagram 36) 75...g6

Black was hoping to avoid the likes of 75...Kd6 76 f5 h6 77 g5! hxg5 78 f6!, but now simple play allows an infiltration.

76 hxg6 hxg6 77 Kc5 Ke7 78 Kd5 Kd7 79 Ke5 Ke7 80 g5! 1-0

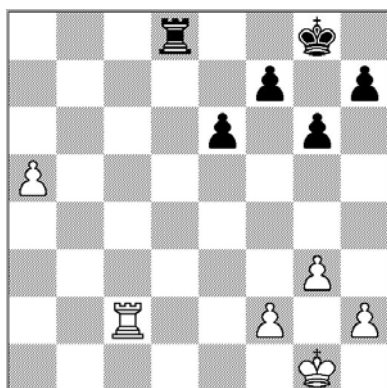
Returning the move to the black king, which soon will be shouldered away, e.g. 80...Kf7 81 Kd6 Kg7 82 Ke7 Kh7 83 Kf7 Kh8 84 Kxg6.

Chapter Seven

Twenty Questions

To round off the book I've added 20 multiple choice questions based on lessons (hopefully) learned throughout this book. All you have to do is select the correct option out of the four provided and upon completing the test, check your answers in the next chapter. In all honesty I believe that most of the questions should be like a walk in the park to those that have thoroughly worked their way through the book. This is where we discover how much has been taken on board and frankly I'm optimistic for 100%!

Exercise 01

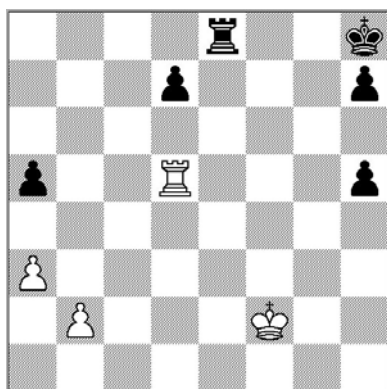


Black to play

How should Black kick off this 4 versus 4 situation?

- A) With 1...Ra8. He should attack and block White's passed pawn ASAP.
- B) With 1...Rd5, attacking the pawn from the side with the option of swinging behind it later.
- C) With 1...Rd1+, intending 2 Kg2 Ra1. Rooks belong behind passed pawns.
- D) With 1...Kg7. The king should be centralized in endgames and the black monarch is going to have an integral part to play in this one.

Exercise 02

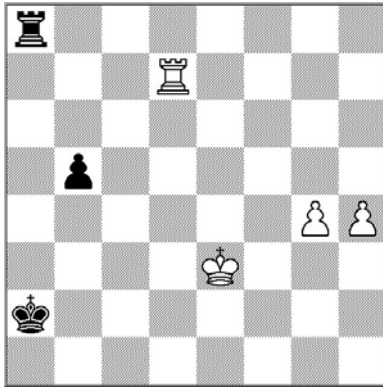


White to play

Which of the black pawns should the white rook opt to take?

- A) The a-pawn as it leaves White with a dangerous queenside majority.
- B) The d-pawn as it simultaneously leaves the white rook on the seventh rank.
- C) The h5-pawn as it is the most threatening of the lot.
- D) None of them! Time is of the essence and White should give priority to the swift creation of a passed pawn of his own via 1 b4.

Exercise 03

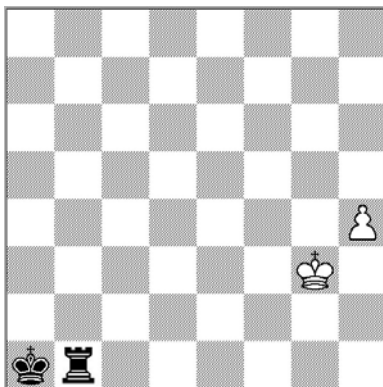


White to play

Out of the selection below, what is the worst move that White could select?

- A) 1 h5, i.e. pushing a passed pawn!
- B) 1 g5, bringing a pawn nearer promotion.
- C) 1 Rb7, monitoring Black's passed pawn.
- D) 1 Kd2. The rook won't win the pawn on its own and needs the support of the king.

Exercise 04

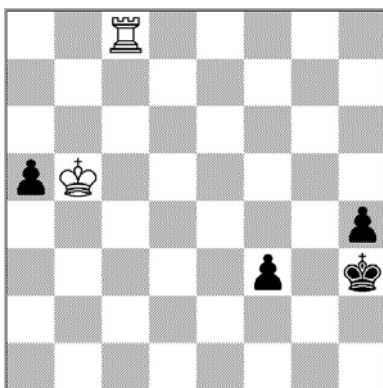


Black to play

How should Black go about halting the white pawn?

- A) With 1...Rb5, stopping it in its tracks.
- B) Via 1...Rb4, cutting off the king.
- C) Through 1...Rh1, wasting no time in getting behind it.
- D) Calmly with 1...Kb2, initiating the necessary return of the king.

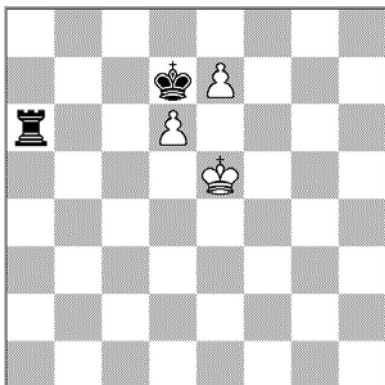
Exercise 05



White to play

Does White have any realistic chances of holding this endgame?

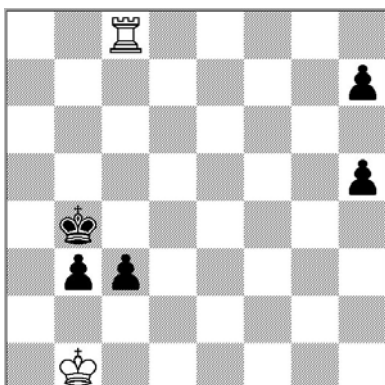
- A) Yes, as long as his king grabs that a-pawn immediately.
- B) Yes, provided his rook cuts off the black king with 1 Rg8.
- C) Yes, but only if he starts with 1 Rf8.
- D) Not if Black plays sensibly.

Exercise 06

White to play/Black to play

Assuming best play as always, what's the story about this rook versus two pawns scenario?

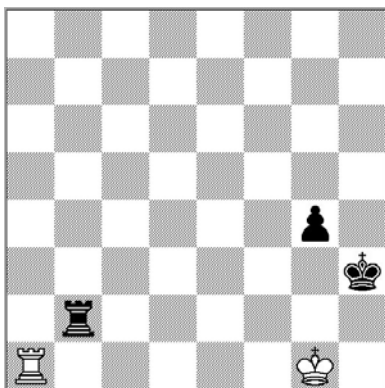
- A) Whoever is to move, Black is easily winning.
- B) Whoever is to move, it's a draw.
- C) Whoever is to move, White is winning.
- D) With White to play it's a black win but with Black to play it's a draw.

Exercise 07

White to play

How should the pawns fare against the rook?

- A) Very well – connected pawns on the sixth rank always defeat a rook. The h-pawns are irrelevant.
- B) Very well. Without the h-pawns Black would be lost but with them he is winning.
- C) Alright if one is happy with a share of the spoils. The position is a draw.
- D) Badly! The rook will pick off the stragglers and then return to help deal with the sixth rank duo.

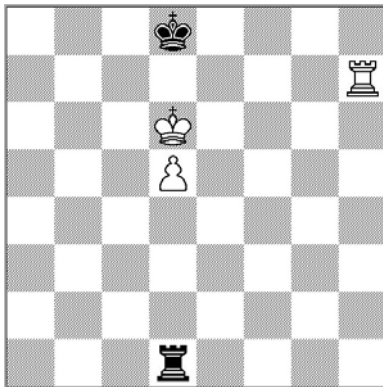
Exercise 08

White to play

Which of the following options is the only losing move for White?

- A) 1 Rc1
- B) 1 Ra3+
- C) 1 Ra8
- D) 1 Kh1.

Exercise 09

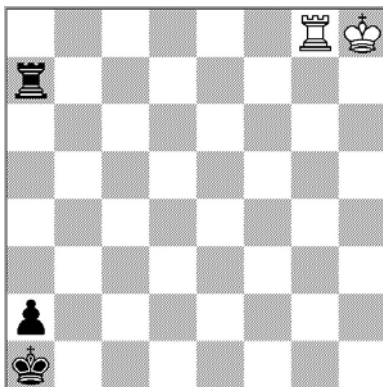


Black to play

Regarding this position, what is the truth?

- A) Black is losing.
- B) Black can draw but only with 1...Kc8.
- C) Black can draw but only with 1...Ke8.
- D) Black can draw with either 1...Kc8 or 1...Ke8.

Exercise 10

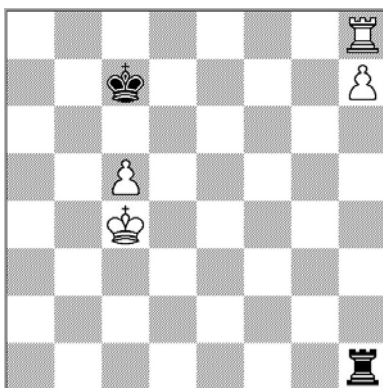


White to play

Does White have any chance of scrounging a draw?

- A) Absolutely not. He is dead lost!
- B) Yes, if he cuts off the enemy king with 1 Rb8.
- C) Yes, if he traps the king on the back with 1 Rg2.
- D) Yes, but he must start checking now. 1 Rg1+ hits the mark.

Exercise 11

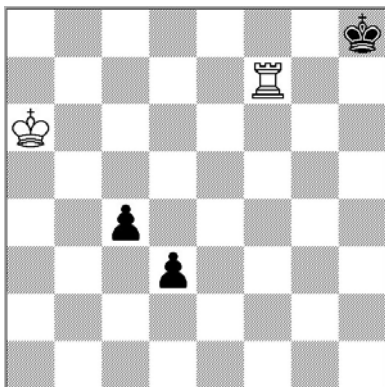


White to play

Can you detect the only true statement out of the four that follow?

- A) White is winning after 1 Rg8.
- B) White is winning after 1 Ra8.
- C) 1 Kd3 is a sensible and progressive move.
- D) With best play Black draws.

Exercise 12

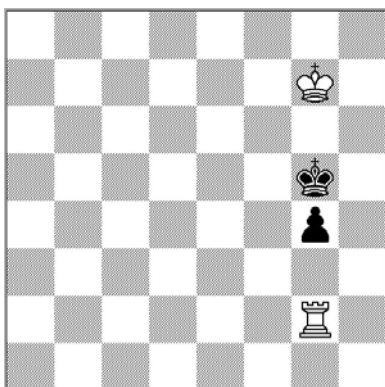


White to play

How does the rook fare against Black's connected passed pawns?

- A) Well, provided it attacks the root pawn. 1 Rc7 is best.
- B) Well, so long as White plays 1 Rd7.
- C) White is winning but he should start with 1 Kb5.
- D) Not great! In fact, White is losing.

Exercise 13

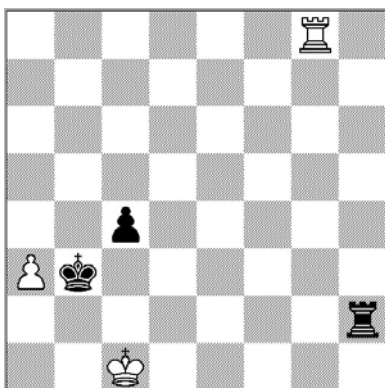


White to play

White to move can win by...

- A) Centralizing his king via 1 Kf7.
- B) Cutting off the black king through 1 Rf2.
- C) Seeking out the opposition with 1 Rg1.
- D) Preparing checks from the side with 1 Ra2.

Exercise 14

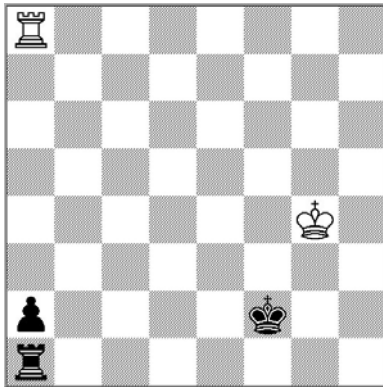


White to play

Can White defend this dangerous situation?

- A) Yes, by employing the 'Philidor' technique via 1 Rg3+.
- B) Yes, by playing 1 a4 and using the a-pawn as a decoy.
- C) Yes, by placing his rook behind the pawn now – 1 Rc8 is vital.
- D) No, I'm afraid it is a little late for that now.

Exercise 15

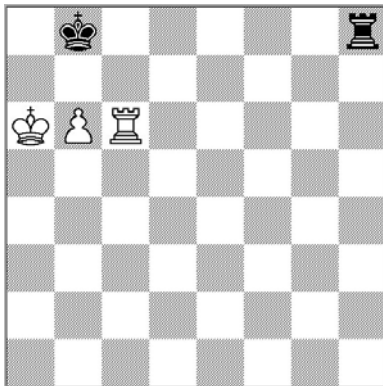


White to play

Is there any way that White can draw this one?

- A) Nope!
- B) Yes. The 'safe' squares for the white king are h2 and g2 and thus 1 Kh3 sets that ball rolling.
- C) Yes. The black king has no cover and so White must keep checking it. 1 Rf8+ is best.
- D) Yes but the white king must 'shadow' its opposite number to avoid being exploited. 1 Kf4 is a good move.

Exercise 16

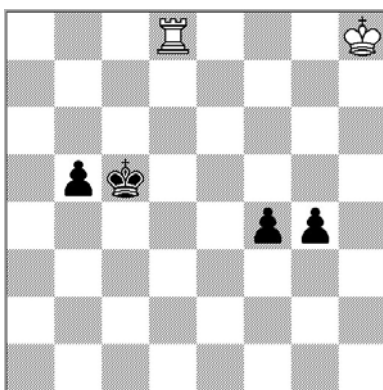


White to play

Can you detect the only true statement about this position and the same one but with a second white pawn on b5.

- A) Both positions are drawn.
- B) Both positions are winning for White.
- C) This one is winning for White but an extra pawn on b5 makes it drawn.
- D) This one is drawn but the additional pawn would tip the balance to a win.

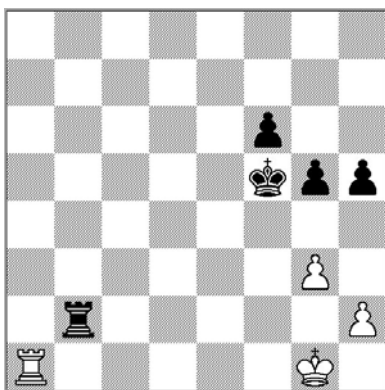
Exercise 17



White to play

What's the story about this position?

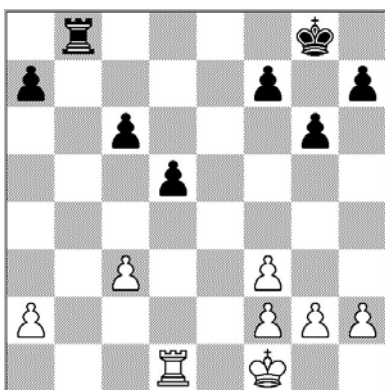
- A) White is winning.
- B) Black is winning.
- C) It's a draw.
- D) It's a lot harder than any of the other positions in this quiz!

Exercise 18

White to play

Regarding the three pawns versus two pawns position above, only one of the following is factually correct. Which is it?

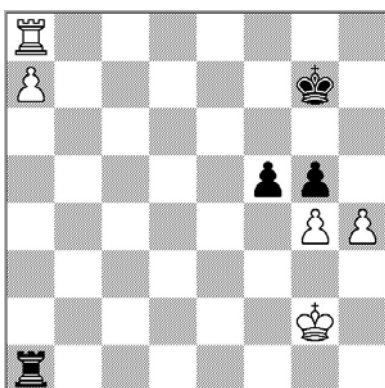
- A) White is winning.
- B) As the white king is trapped on the back rank, Black is winning.
- C) White should easily draw and 1 Rc1 is a sensible way to start.
- D) White should play actively. 1 Ra4 is a good move, when it should be drawn.

Exercise 19

White to play

How would you recommend White to start to defend this endgame?

- A) With 1 Rd2 to guard the second rank.
- B) With 1 g4 to get the majority going and give Black something to think about.
- C) With 1 Ke2 to centralize the king.
- D) With 1 c4 to try and activate the rook.

Exercise 20

White to play

What is the correct move for White in this intriguing little number?

- A) 1 Rb8
- B) 1 hxg5
- C) 1 gxf5
- D) 1 h5.

Chapter Eight

Solutions

Exercise 1

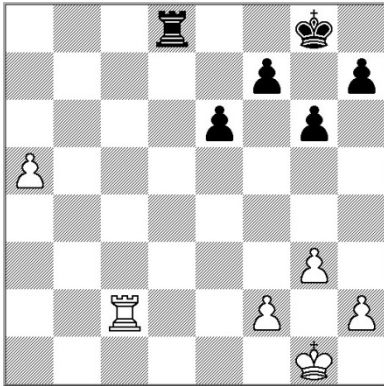


Diagram 1 (B)

In front, behind or beside?

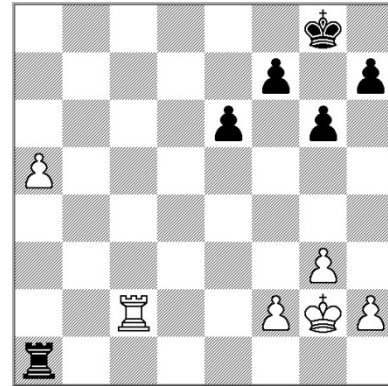


Diagram 2 (W)

The right decision!

(Diagram 1) Please tell me that you selected **C**, because **1...Rd1+ 2 Kg2 Ra1 (Diagram 2)** must be the correct way to go. In a different type of test I would deduct marks for 'A', trying to block the pawn with the rook! Whilst I have sympathy for the selection of 'D', the fact is that getting the rook behind the pawn is the only way to prevent White from doing exactly the same thing. If the white rook makes it to a2 then he would be the one with the winning chances but with the black rook active, most grandmasters would prefer Black.

Exercise 2

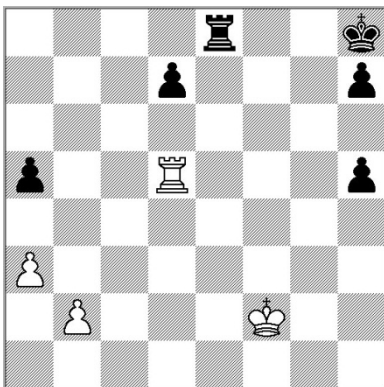


Diagram 3 (W)

Which pawn?

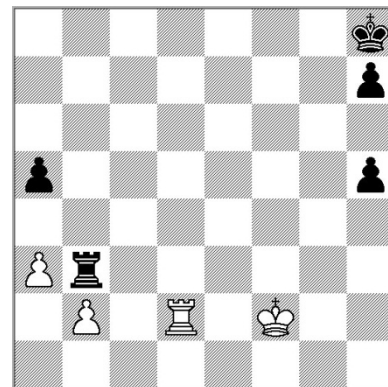


Diagram 4 (W)

Seventh ranks and second ranks!

(Diagram 3) Hopefully you have learnt that connected passed pawns are the best type in rook endgames and thus **1 Rxa5 (A)** is correct.

Often it is a good idea for a rook to occupy the seventh rank but in this example 1 Rxd7?! Rb8 forces the white rook to retreat to a more passive role. After 2 Rd2 Rb3!, (**Diagram 4**) White will still be able to draw but that is the best that he can realistically hope for.

Exercise 3

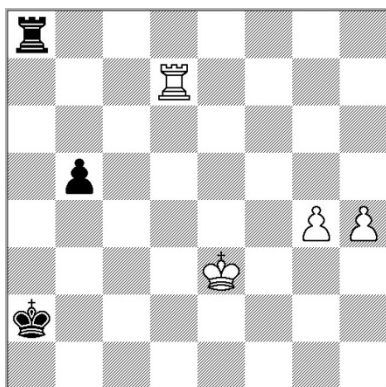


Diagram 5 (W)

Now for a BAD idea!

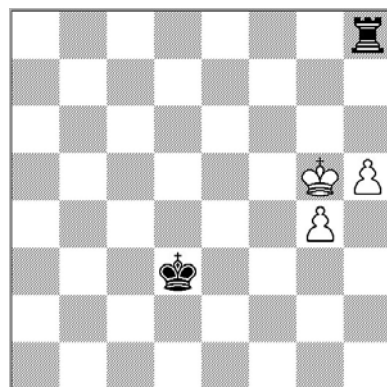


Diagram 6 (W)

Time has been wasted

(Diagram 5) The answer is **D** as by far and away the WORST idea is bringing the king back. The easy winning plan is to advance the connected passed pawns and if required the white king should be used to aid in their promotion. Easily hitting the mark is 1 h5 b4 2 g5 b3 3 h6 b2 4 Rd2 (not 4 Rb7? Ra3+! and ...Rb3) 4...Ka1 5 Rxb2 Kxb2 6 g6, while 1 g5 Rh8 2 Rd2+ Ka3 3 Rh2 b4 4 h5 b3 5 g6 b2 6 Rxb2 Rxh5 7 Rg2 Rh8 8 g7 Rg8 9 Kd4 (White may as well shoulder off the black king although it is not necessary as it easily beats the enemy monarch to f7) also obtains the desired result.

The immediate 1 Rb7 is also obviously good as the rook can be detailed to ultimately sacrifice itself for the black pawn.

The white king belongs with its own pawns and thus 1 Kd2? b4 2 Kc1 b3 3 Rb7 Rc8+ 4 Kd2 b2 5 Ra7+ Kb3 6 Rb7+ Ka2 7 h5 b1Q 8 Rxb1 Kxb1 9 Ke3 Rh8 10 Kf4 Kc2 11 Kg5 Kd3 (**Diagram 6**) 12 Kg6 Rg8+ 13 Kf5 Rh8 14 Kg6 with a draw would be a ridiculous idea. White can't win the black pawn for nothing and as the king is a short-range piece, retreating it is obviously a time-wasting plan.

Exercise 4

(Diagram 7) By now this question should have been bread and butter to you. Often races come down to counting tempi. When it comes to deciding whether or not to enter races in the first place, nothing beats concrete analysis. It should be clear that 'A' is foolish, as 2 Kg4 would ready the pawn for further advance. I don't like to criticize placing rooks behind passed pawns or centralizing kings but alas both 1...Rh1 2 Kg4 Kb2 3 h5 Kc3 4 Kg5 Kd4 5 h6 Ke5 6 Kg6 Ke6 7 Kg7!

(rather than 7 h7? Rg1+ 8 Kh6 Kf7! when a promoted queen falls immediately to the check on h1, but after 9 h8N+ Kf6 10 Kh7 Rg2 the knight is lost anyway); and 1...Kb2 2 h5 Kc3 3 Kf4 Kd4 4 h6 Kd5 5 Kf5 Rf1+ 6 Kg6 Ke6 7 Kg7 lead to the same drawn situation.

Yes, in both 'C' and 'D' Black is one tempo off of winning, but by employing **1...Rb4!** (**Diagram 8**)

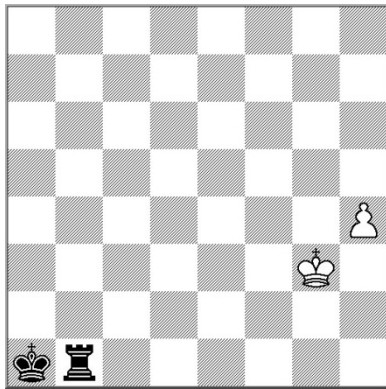


Diagram 7 (B)

How to stop and win that pawn?

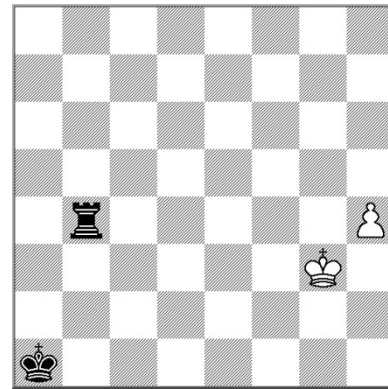


Diagram 8 (W)

Oh yes, cutting off!

Black has all the time in the world. This is very similar to Example 10 earlier in the book, with this 'cutting off' technique ensuring that the white pawn can't advance beyond h5 without becoming detached from its king and thus easily hunted down. As the white king can't negotiate the fourth rank, the black king can take all the time it needs to return to active duty (i.e. the bagging of the h-pawn). So the answer is **B**.

Exercise 5

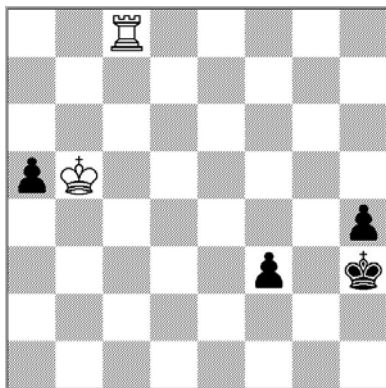


Diagram 9 (W)

White must not dither!

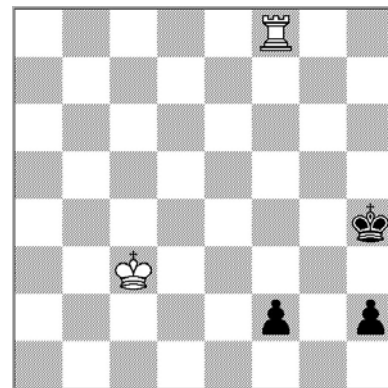


Diagram 10 (B)

One last trick!

(Diagram 5) If you can recall the contents of an earlier page then you will notice a big similarity with this question and Example 12. The answer is **C** as White can draw providing he hassles the dangerous pawns immediately. The black pawns are already a long way down the board but

provided White wastes no more time, the rook can still hold them off. It is vital that Black doesn't get a chance to advance his h-pawn and that is why **1 Rf8! Kg3 2 Rg8+ Kf2 3 Rh8 Kg3 4 Rg8+ Kf4 5 Rf8+ Ke3 6 Re8+ Kd2 7 Rf8 Ke2 8 Re8+ Kf1 9 Rh8** is correct. Eventually Black will have to relent with something like **9...f2 10 Rxh4 Kg2 11 Rf4 f1Q+ 12 Rxf1 Kxf1 13 Kxa5**.

Now observe the failure of **1 Kxa5? f2 2 Rf8 Kg2 3 Rg8+ Kf1 4 Rh8** (or **4 Kb4 h3**) **4...h3! 5 Kb4** (the justification behind Black's last move was that **5 Rxh3 Kg2** would leave the white rook on the worst square on the board!) **5...Kg2 6 Rg8+ Kf3 7 Rf8+ Kg3 8 Rg8+** (White continues checking but they will soon run out, after which the pawn not attacked will advance; hence **8 Kc3 h2**) **8...Kh4 9 Rf8 h2 10 Kc3 (Diagram 10) 10...Kg5** and White is lost, as a successful promotion is inevitable. Obviously this is infinitely better than **10...h1Q?? 11 Rh8+ Kg3 12 Rxh1**.

Exercise 6

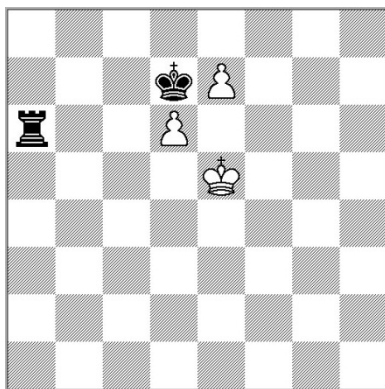


Diagram 11 (B)

A walk in the park!

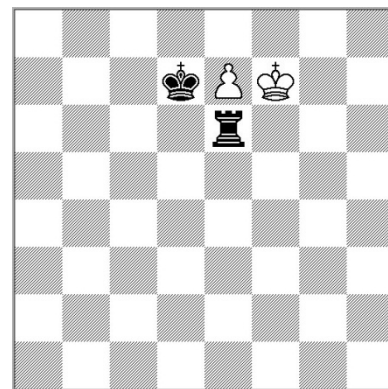


Diagram 12 (W)

I'll have that one too!

(Diagram 11) Shame on you if you picked anything other than **A** here. With his king on the scene, Black has the pawns well blocked and can pick them off with just a little care. Specifically, with Black to move he must avoid overloading his king via **1...Rxd6?? 2 e8Q+!**.

The most straightforward win is with the initial waiting move...

1...Rb6

Indeed, 'D' is a ridiculous premise as Black can 'pass' any time that he wants. White would rather not move but he has no choice.

2 Kf6

Upon **2 Kd5 Rxd6** this time it is of course check!

2...Rxd6+ 3 Kf7 Re6 (Diagram 12)

Well would you believe it, another case of a rook behind a pawn!

Exercise 7

(Diagram 13) If you have read this book thoroughly then you should recognize 'A' as being a load of twaddle! That is not applicable when the rook-partnered king is in the vicinity as it is here. As they are too far from the black king, the h-pawns are pretty irrelevant and D is the correct answer. Play might continue

1 Rc7 h6 2 Rc6 h4 3 Rxh6 Kc4

Upon 3...Ka3 4 Rxh4 Black must commit one of his pawns and then lose it, for example 4...c2+ 5 Kc1 b2+ (note 5...Ka2 6 Ra4 mate!) 6 Kxc2.

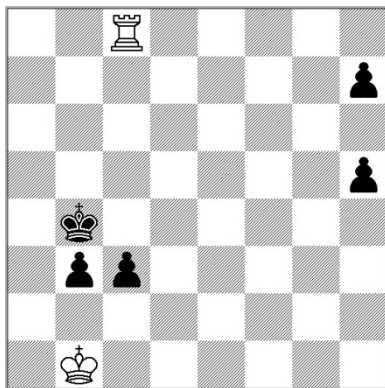


Diagram 13 (W)

Irrelevant h-pawns

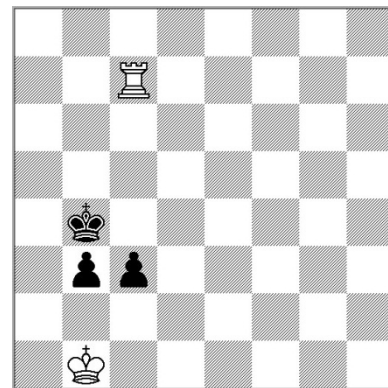


Diagram 14 (B)

Have another go!

4 Rxh4+ Kb5 5 Rh8 Kc5 6 Rc8+ Kb4 7 Rc7! (Diagram 14)

The key of course is forcing one of the pawns to advance. This waiting move effectively lets the white king in.

7...c2+ 8 Kb2 Ka4 9 Rc4+ Kb5 10 Kxb3

and White wins.

Exercise 8

(Diagram 15) Chapter Three explained that when dealing with a rook's or knight's pawn (i.e. on the a-, b-, g- or h-files) then the defending king and rook can happily remain 'passive' on the back rank. It is the back rank check in particular that the White needs to guard against and after 1 Ra3+ g3, so long as there is an immediate return in 2 Ra1, Black can make no progress.

From our starting position, there is no time to get active anyway.

1 Ra8?? Rb1+ 2 Kf2 g3+ 3 Kf3 Rf1+ 4 Ke2 g2 5 Rh8+ Kg3 6 Rg8+ Kh2

After 6...Kh3 7 Rh8+ Kg4 8 Rg8+ Black is unable to zigzag back without dropping his pawn.

Starting Out: Rook Endgames

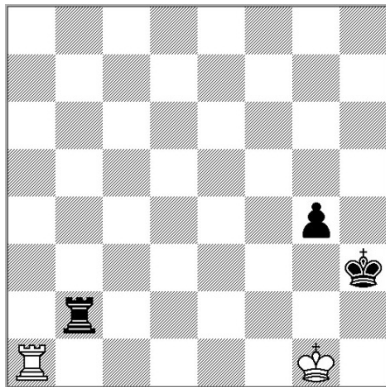


Diagram 15 (W)

How not to draw?

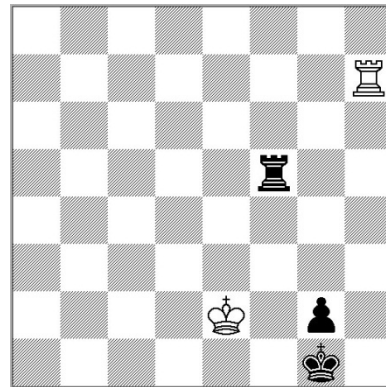


Diagram 16 (W)

Lucena

7 Rh8+ Kg1 8 Rh7 Rf5! (Diagram 16) 9 Rh8 Re5+ 10 Kd2

The black king is stuck in front of its pawn but now the famous 'Lucena' technique is being employed to help extract it.

10...Kf2 11 Rf8+ Kg3 12 Rg8+ Kf3 13 Kd3

The point behind Black's fourth rank rook lift is demonstrated in 13 Rf8+ Kg4 14 Rg8+ Rg5.

13...Re3+ 14 Kd2 Re4 0-1

Next is ...Rg4.

The worst move is 1 Ra8, making the correct answer **C**.

Exercise 9

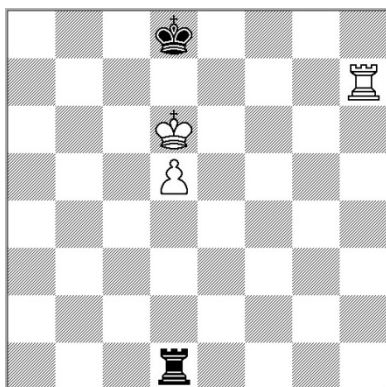


Diagram 17 (B)

The long or short of it!?

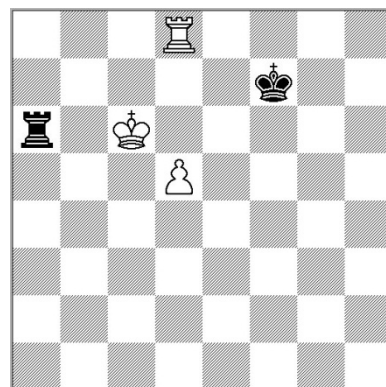


Diagram 18 (W)

Adequate checking distance... just!

(Diagram 17) Hopefully it should be obvious to the reader that the threat was 2 Rh8 mate and, as 1...Re1 2 Rh8+ Re8 leads to a lost king and pawn ending, I didn't even include that as an option.

I'm not going to come down too hard on those who selected 'B' because I would always recommend moving to the short side of the pawn. That is an absolute necessity when the pawn is on the c- or f-files, but here also adequate is

1...Ke8 2 Rh8+ Kf7 3 Rd8 Ra1 4 Kc7

If White readies his rook to block the checks then 4 Rc8 Rd1! 5 Kc6 Ke7 is necessary but nevertheless quite simple.

4...Ra7+ 5 Kc6 Ra6+ (Diagram 18)

The black rook is nearer to the white king than it would like to be but that is still far enough away!

6 Kb7 Ke7! 7 Kxa6 Kxd8 8 Kb6 Kd7 9 Kc5 Kc7 10 d6+ Kd7 11 Kd5 Kd8 12 Kc6 Kc8 13 d7+ Kd8 14 Kd6 ½-½

The correct answer then is **D**.

Exercise 10

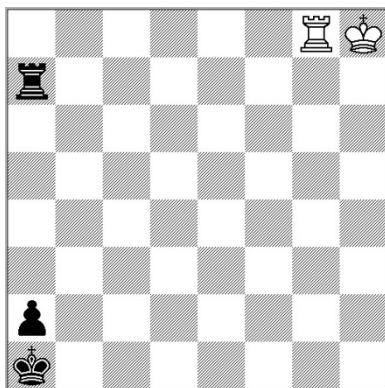


Diagram 19 (W)

Living on borrowed time!

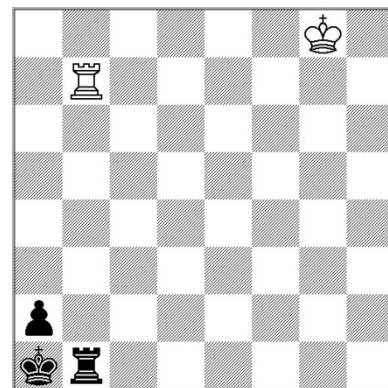


Diagram 20 (W)

An easy plan for an easy win!

(Diagram 19) Did you start doubting yourself on this one, because you needn't have! Black intends extracting his king from a1 and promoting his pawn, and in the long-term (well not even that long!) there is little that White can do about it. After 1 Rg2 Kb1 White must start the sideways checks, but following 2 Rg1+ Kb2 3 Rg2+ Kc3 the black king will approach the white rook until there are no more checks. I guess the best practical chance is to try and cut off the king on the b-file.

1 Rb8 Rf7

The black rook starts its journey to a destination that will 'push' the white rook off the b-file.

2 Kg8 Rf1 3 Rb7 Rb1 (Diagram 20)

Forcing the defending rook off the b-file and thus enabling the king to escape from in front of the pawn. Note that manoeuvring the rook to b2 would have been equally as effective.

4 Ra7 Kb2 5 Rb7+ Kc3 6 Rc7+ Kd4 7 Rd7+ Kc5 8 Rc7+ Kd6 0-1

The checks have run out and ...a1Q is inevitable. **A** was correct.

Exercise 11

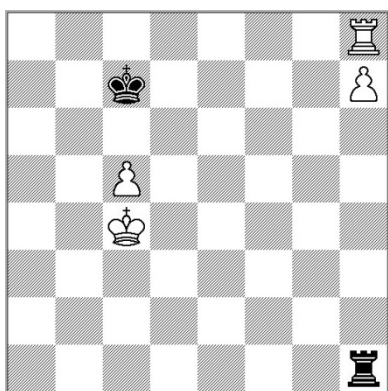


Diagram 21 (W)

Don't blow it!

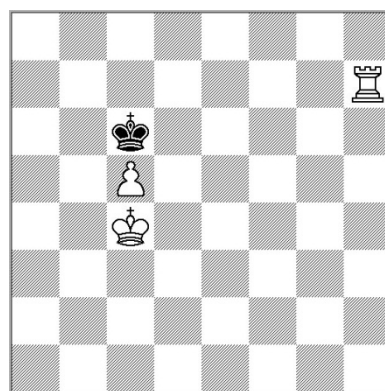


Diagram 22 (B)

Oops!

(Diagram 21) You may well have wondered what option C was all about, until you realized that it is in fact the correct answer! White cannot afford to lose his h-pawn for nothing as in a worst-case scenario Black can easily employ the 'Philidor' technique. This rules out 1 Rg8, whilst the impetuous reader would have fallen for

1 Ra8?

1 Kd3 is in fact a progressive move because approaching the black rook may become necessary to eliminate spite checks. More to the point, of course, it avoids the stalemate trick whilst bringing back the skewer into play. The pawns and rook can win the game on their own, for example 1...Kb7 2 c6+ Kxc6 (the c-pawn was intent on marching home and now 2...Kc7 3 Ra8! does work) 3 Rc8+ with 4 h8Q up next.

1...Rxh7 2 Ra7+ Kc6 3 Rxh7 stalemate (Diagram 22)

Oops!

Exercise 12

(Diagram 23) This is a fairly straightforward question. If both pawns make it to the sixth rank then, because the white king isn't up with the pace, Black will be victorious.

Once the line 1 Rc7? d2 2 Rd7 c3 (with ...c2 up next) is observed, it should be clear that **1 Rd7!**

(Diagram 24) is the only way to go. This rear attack paralyses the pawns and provided the king

partnering the rook arrives on the scene before its opposite number (as it does here) then the passers can be easily picked off. The continuation **1...Kg8 2 Kb5** justifies the correct answer of **B**.

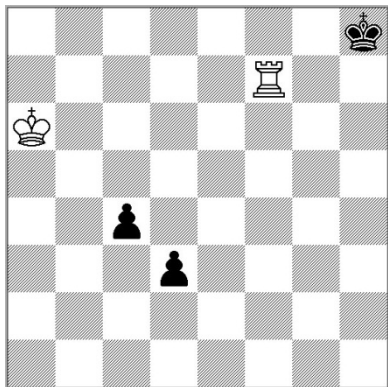


Diagram 23 (W)

Attack the correct pawn!

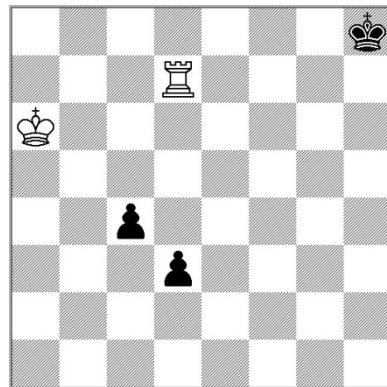


Diagram 24 (B)

Paralysed pawns!

Exercise 13

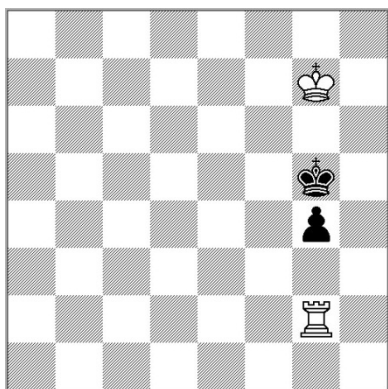


Diagram 25 (W)

Time to finesse!

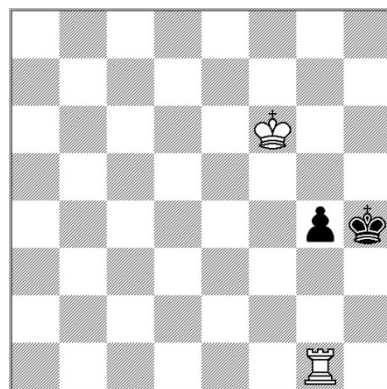


Diagram 26 (B)

Hot on the trail!

(Diagram 25) Analysing the variation 1 Kf7 Kf4 2 Kg6 g3 3 Kh5 Kf3 4 Rg1 g2 5 Kh4 Kf2 demonstrates that something special is required and that comes in the form of the 'tempo finesse'

1 Rg1!

White does not commit his king before seeing where Black's is going.

1...Kh4

Upon 1...Kf4 White goes the other way, i.e. 2 Kh6! Kf3 3 Kg5 g3 4 Kh4 g2 5 Kh3 Kf2 6 Rxd2+.

2 Kf6! (Diagram 26) 2...g3 3 Kf5 Kh3 4 Kf4 g2 5 Kf3 Kh2 6 Rxd2+

The correct answer is **C** as it is clear that 1 Rg1 gains that vital tempo. It is important that the reader doesn't get too confused by terms such as 'cut off', 'triangulation', 'opposition' etc. Though all are important concepts, at the end of the day one shouldn't get sidetracked by definitions when over-the-board analysis is what counts. Take, for example, 'sideways checks'. Worth bearing in mind, but in this example they are never useful for achieving more than a draw.

Exercise 14

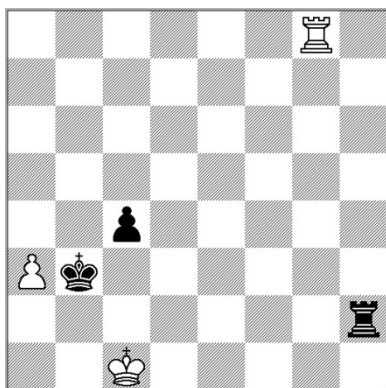


Diagram 27 (W)

Forget the a-pawn!

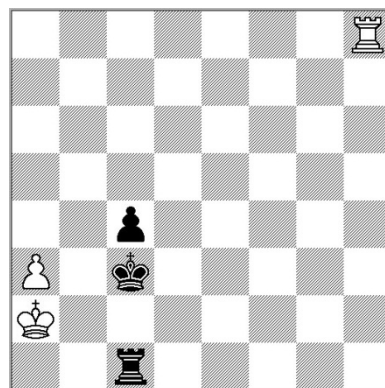


Diagram 28 (B)

Those sideways checks!

(Diagram 27) The a-pawn is a red herring and White must forget about it if he is to conduct a successful defence. It poses no problems for Black in the line 1 a4 Rh1+ 2 Kd2 c3+ 3 Kd3 Rd1+ 4 Ke4 c2 5 Rc8 c1Q 6 Rxc1 Rxc1 7 a5 Ra1. Also, without the a-pawn a passive defence would fail and so it is no surprise that 1 Rg1 c3 2 Kb1 Rb2+ 3 Kc1 Ra2 4 Kb1 c2+ 5 Kc1 Ra1+ is of no use either.

As the black king is already on White's third rank, 1 Rg3+ c3 2 Rg1 Ra2 flops too and while I'm on option 'A', of course it has nothing to do with the Philidor technique!

The correct answer, which I'm hoping you all knew by now, is **C**:

1 Rc8! Kc3 2 Kb1 Rh1+ 3 Ka2 Rc1 4 Rh8! (Diagram 28)

This switch is necessary with the defensive resource being the checks from the side.

4...Rd1 5 Rc8!

with a draw.

Exercise 15

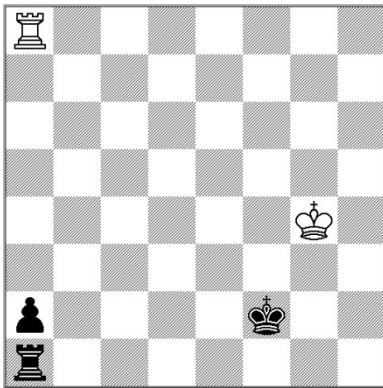


Diagram 29 (W)

King cover required

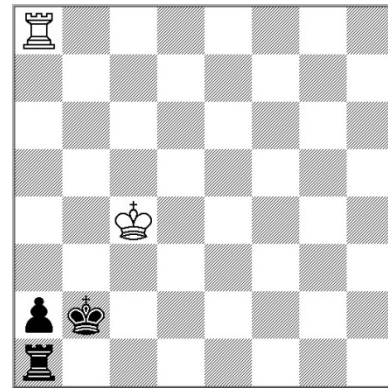


Diagram 30 (W)

Hide and seek!

(Diagram 29) The good old 'skewer' trick has appeared on several occasions throughout this book and the reader should acknowledge that in this starting position the squares h2 and g2 are indeed 'safe'. Unfortunately, 1 Kh3? won't get the white king to either of them quick enough, with 1...Rh1+ 2 Kg4 a1Q being proof of that.

Regarding 'C', alas the checks will dry up and after 1 Rf8+? Ke3 2 Re8+ Kd4 3 Rd8+ Kc5 4 Rc8+ Kd6 5 Rd8+ Kc7 6 Ra8 the white king is left exposed and vulnerable to 6...Rg1+.

The key to obtaining the draw is to hide from the checks **(D)**.

1 Kf4 Ke2 2 Ke4 Kd2 3 Kd4 Kc2 4 Kc4 Kb2 (Diagram 30) 5 Rb8+!

Not 5 Kb4?, when the black rook can escape from in front of its pawn and a promotion is inevitable.

5...Ka3 6 Ra8+ Kb2 7 Rb8+ Kc2 8 Ra8

White must check the black king when it is on the a- or b-files but elsewhere the white king must stick to it like glue!

Exercise 16

(Diagram 31) There is really no excuse for you not knowing that the above diagram is a basic draw. For example **1 Rg6 Rf8 2 Rg7 Rh8 3 Rb7+ Ka8 4 Ra7+ Kb8**. The defender's rook can satisfactorily remain passive unless White tries 5 b7?!, when 5...Rh6+! is a nice bonus!

Things do change, though, when a second b-pawn is added as shown in the next **diagram 32**

Indeed, now White has a very simple winning plan.

1 b7 Rg8 2 Rc8+

Yes, White can just exchange off the rooks.

Starting Out: Rook Endgames

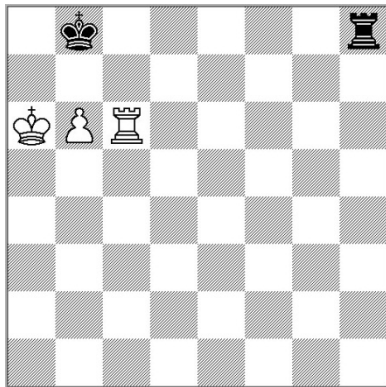


Diagram 31 (W)

A basic draw

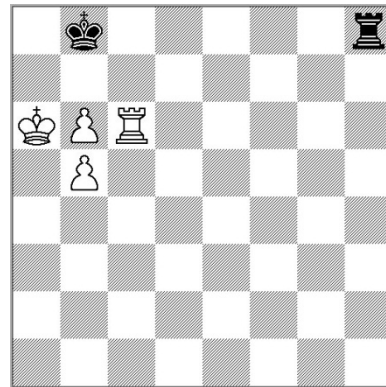


Diagram 32 (W)

From rook and pawn to king and pawn!

2...Rxc8 3 bxc8Q+ Kxc8 4 Ka7 and White wins.

The correct answer is **D**. This was a rather basic one but it does pay to know your king and pawn endgames.

Exercise 17

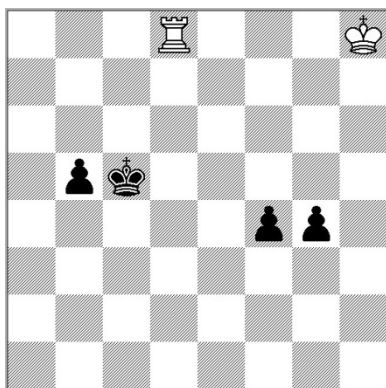


Diagram 33 (W)

Réti's rook!

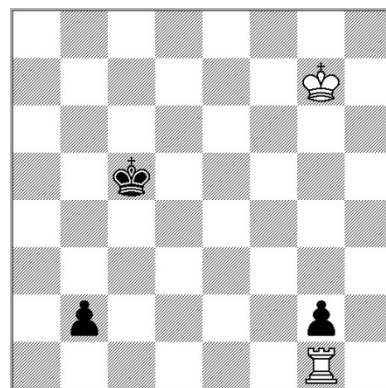


Diagram 34 (B)

Ring any bells?

(Diagram 33) Actually, this was originally a 1929 study of Réti's, but the key idea involved is not new to this book. I suppose I should accept 'D' but the answer I was really after was **C**.

1 Rg8! g3

The best practical chance as 1...f3 2 Rxg4 f2 3 Rf4 halts the f-pawn, as does 1...Kd4 2 Rxg4 Ke3 3 Rg5 f3 4 Rxb5 f2 5 Rf5.

2 Rg4 b4

Or 2...Kd4 3 Rxf4+ Ke3 4 Rg4 Kf3 5 Rg6 g2 6 Kg7 Kf2 7 Rf6+ Kg3 8 Rg6+ Kf2 9 Rf6+ Ke2 10 Rg6 Kf1 11 Rf6+ etc.

3 Rxf4 b3 4 Rf1!

Both 4 Rg4 b2 and 4 Rf8 g2 5 Rg8 b2 are too slow, but White has a defensive resource previously detailed in Example 13!

4...g2 5 Rg1 b2 6 Kg7 (Diagram 34) 6...Kd4

A key point behind White's idea is that after 6...Kc4 7 Kf6 Kb3 8 Ke5 Ka2 White can play 9 Rxb2 as the b-pawn is pinned.

7 Kf6 Ke3 8 Rb1!

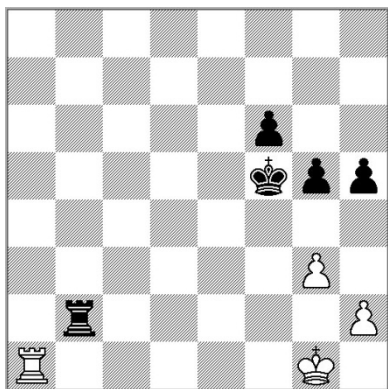
Designed to guard against ...Kf2.

8...Kd3

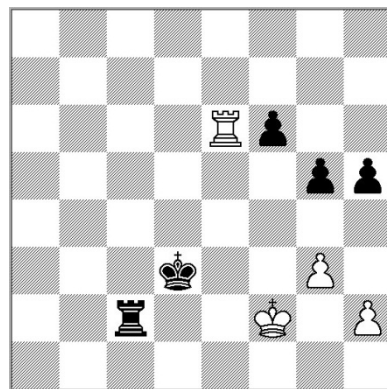
8...Kf2 allows White to take the b-pawn with check.

9 Rg1!

Now with a prepared defence to ...Kc2, White draws.

Exercise 18**Diagram 35 (W)**

Same side: 3 versus 2

**Diagram 36 (W)**

Defence in progress

(Diagram 35) Earlier in the book I discussed how the defender can usually hold pawn-down scenarios when they are all on the same side, three pawns versus two being the classic. Switch the pawns from g3 and h2 to g2 and h3 and the defending king can park itself comfortably on h2. The position here is still a draw – although, because his king is trapped on the back rank, White must play carefully.

1 Ra4!

This prevents the enemy king from advancing to the dangerous post utilized in the following more passive variation: 1 Rc1 Kg4 2 Rc6 Kh3 3 Rxf6 Rg2+ 4 Kf1 Kxh2 5 Rh6 Kxg3 6 Rxh5 g4 7 Ra5

Rb2 8 Ra1 Kh2 9 Ra8 Rb1+ 10 Ke2 g3 11 Rh8+ Kg2, when a losing Lucena position is the best White can hope for.

1...Rd2 2 Rb4 Ke5 3 Ra4 Rd4 4 Ra2 Ke4 5 Kf2 Rc4 6 Re2+ Kd3 7 Re6 Rc2+ (Diagram 36) 8 Kg1

Here 8 Kf3?? spectacularly fails to 8...g4+ 9 Kf4 Rf2 mate.

8...f5 9 Re5 f4 10 Rxf5

and White draws – Black has no threats. Hence the answer is D.

Exercise 19

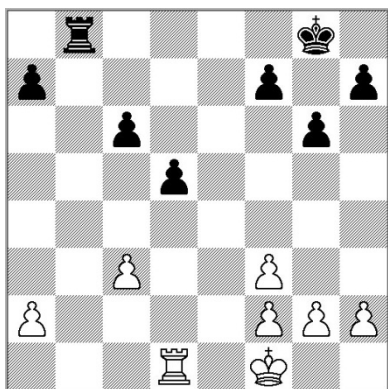


Diagram 37 (W)

A pawn for some activity!?

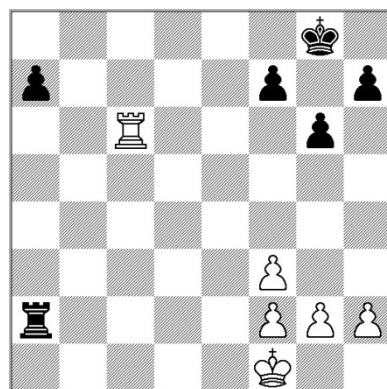


Diagram 38 (B)

Attacking rather than defending

(Diagram 37) We can rule out 22 Ke2 and 22 g4 as Black's threat of bringing his rook to the seventh rank should not be ignored.

The game Fuster-Bronstein, Budapest 1949, continued with 22 Rd2 Kf8 23 Ke2 Ke7 24 Kd3 c5 25 Kc2 Kd6 26 Re2 a5 27 Kc1 a4 28 Rd2 a3 29 c4 d4 30 Kc2 g5 31 Kd3 f5 32 Kc2 h5 33 Kd3 h4 34 h3 Rb1 35 g4 Rc1 36 gxf5 Ke5 37 Rc2 Rxc2 38 Kxc2 Kxf5 39 Kd3 Kf4 40 Ke2 d3+ and Black had won because of White's passive play.

A much better (and certainly less painful!) defence would be to sacrifice a pawn for activity and that's why I like

22 c4!

In accordance with the recurrent theme throughout this book, White should want to get his rook active.

22...dxc4 23 Rc1 Rb2

23...Rb4!? 24 Rc2 Ra4 is a better practical try, but as he can centralize his king and later activate the rook, White has fair drawing chances.

24 Rxc4 Rxa2 25 Rxc6 (Diagram 38)

In contrast to how the original game panned out, White's rook gets to do more than just defend. It has no problems getting behind Black's passed a-pawn and he should comfortably draw.

So the correct answer is **D**.

Exercise 20

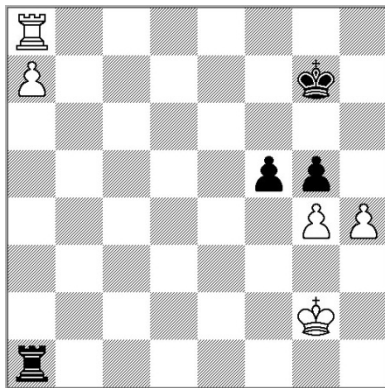


Diagram 39 (W)

Which is best?

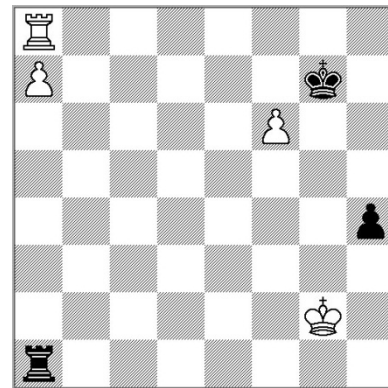


Diagram 40 (B)

Immune to capture

The answer is **C**, reproducing a very familiar theme. Please tell me you finished on a high!

(Diagram 39) White's rook is as passively placed as it gets, but clearly 1 Rb8 Rxa7 is of no use. White needs to be able to extract his rook with check and that involves luring away the black king from the relative safety of g7 and h7. Neither 1 hxg5 fxg4, nor 1 h5 has the ability to do that, but that remaining option does.

1 gxf5 gxh4 2 f6+ (Diagram 40) 2...Kf7

Alternatively 2...Kxf6 3 Rf8+ or 2...Kh7 3 f7.

3 Rh8 Rxa7 4 Rh7+

and White wins.

starting out: rook endgames

Endgames with kings, rooks and pawns are by far the most common type – it is estimated that rook endgames are reached in nearly one in five of all chess games. It's clear that a firm understanding of them is required in order to become self-assured in this typical phase of the game. And yet it is exactly this area in which many players drop precious points or half-points through a lack of either technique or understanding.

In this easy-to-read guide, Grandmaster and well-known endgames expert Chris Ward begins with the absolute fundamentals of rook endgames. He gradually arms the reader with the indispensable knowledge and confidence needed to move onto slightly trickier positions. Using examples from practical play, Ward highlights the correct plans as well as the typical mistakes made by both attacker and defender. As is commonplace with the renowned Starting Out series, there are an abundance of notes, tips and warnings throughout the book to help the improving player. Starting Out: Rook Endgames is perfect for those who have previously honed their chess skills with the earlier books Starting Out in Chess, Tips for Young Players and Improve Your Endgame Play.

- Covers all crucial rook endings
- Easy step-by-step guide to better endgame play
- Ideal for the improving player
- User-friendly layout to help readers absorb the key ideas

Chris Ward is a Grandmaster and a former British Champion. He is also a highly successful coach and a popular author thanks to his attractive and humorous style. His earlier works for Everyman include *Starting Out: The Nimzo-Indian* and the very popular *It's Your Move* series.

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