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Introduction

The aim of this book is to give readers a better understanding of rook endgames and to emphasize the most important aspects of rook endgame theory for the practical player. The quality of the examples is high: all the games feature a world champion, or one of the greatest players of all time who did not quite achieve the highest title. This should ensure that the book is entertaining to read, and that any errors by the players are instructive.

Rather than categorizing rook endgames by themes or material, I have instead arranged the material by player. We start with the 17 world champions in order, then follow three short chapters featuring examples by players who were recognized as the strongest in the world before the official title appeared. Next come chapters on a number of outstanding players who were not destined to become champion (arranged by year of their birth), and the final chapter contains endings contested between our 'champions', in chronological order of the date the games were played. Obviously, there is some subjectivity involved in the choice of players to include in addition to the official champions, and being a long-term resident of Odesa and Ukraine, I could not help but include Geller and Ivanchuk among them. But I trust that readers will agree they are there on merit!

While many of the examples demonstrate outstanding and instructive endgame play, many of them also feature erroneous decisions, generally made in complex positions and especially when under pressure from the clock or in the stress of a critical game. This emphasizes how difficult it can be to play rook endgames. But in some cases the errors came in standard theoretical endgames, which also shows that we can gain many half-points and even full points by studying and practising the basics.

A full range of modern tools have been used to re-examine these endgames. These include a large set of relevant seven-man tablebases and powerful modern engines, most notably Stockfish, given that it is generally regarded as the

strongest general-purpose engine. But in all cases the assessments have been explained in human terms by your author: the engine's numerical assessment may convey the basic truth of a position but is unlikely to explain what lesson can be drawn from it, or which rule of thumb might have led to the correct decision. Similar considerations apply to the choice of variations to present, out of a multitude that the engine and tablebases can generate.

Many of the examples in this book have not appeared before in many endgame textbooks and should be new to most readers. But in some cases they are standard examples that have been examined over the decades by previous endgame writers, often without firm or reliable conclusions being reached. With the modern tools described above, it is in most cases possible to verify the earlier assessments – or to correct them. This also provides a further source of instructive points for the reader to absorb.

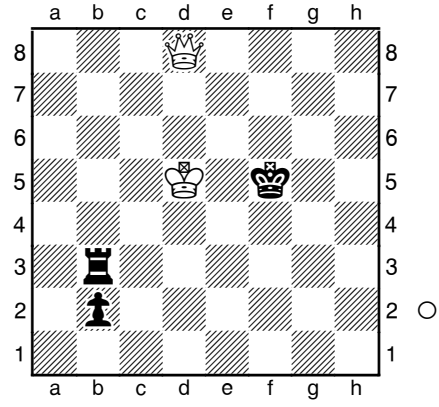
At the end of the book there are two indexes: a standard index of players, as well as a somewhat detailed index of themes. The latter will make it easier for those who wish to study specific aspects of rook endgames. Before the indexes is a set of 68 exercises, which are all positions taken from somewhere within this book. They are generally rather challenging, though if you tackle them seriously, you will probably learn more from the book than you would from simply playing through the examples. You may also view them as revision exercises, to be attempted after reading the book.

If you wish, you may simply read the book for entertainment. It is a stroll through chess history, and you may be surprised how many of the critical turning points have occurred in rook endgames, both in championship matches and in rivalries between some of the greatest players.

The book is intended to be useful for chess enthusiasts of a wide range of playing strengths, but is especially suitable for those of good club standard or higher who already have a basic knowledge of rook endgame theory.

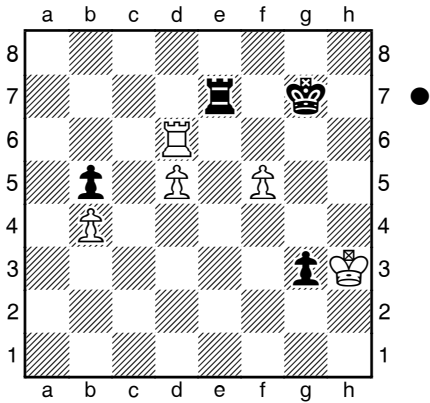
54...h6 55 h4! hxg5 56 hxg5! ♔f7

From this point on, the moves of the game given in Mega Database make little sense. There are either data errors, or blind panic with no time on the clock: they feature crude blunders by both sides, with *Black* even missing wins, before a draw was finally reached. In any case, there is little to be learned by studying these moves, so let's just note a logical winning line for White: 57 ♖c7+ ♔f8 (57...♙e6 58 ♖g7) 58 ♖c6 ♔f7 59 ♖b6 ♖b2 60 ♔g3 ♔g7 61 b5 and ♔f4-e5.



225) Wei Yi – Ding Liren

Baku 2015



In positions where both sides' structures consist only of isolated pawns, mass-liquidations are common.

57...♖e4 58 ♖g6+

This is no better or worse than other continuations; one pair of pawns leaves the board, and another is next in line. White seeks to gain some chances by placing the rook behind one of the remaining passed pawns.

58...♔f7 59 ♖xg3 ♖xb4 60 ♖d3 ♖c4 61 d6 ♖c8?

Allowing the enemy king a way in is enough to cost Black the game. It's a simple draw after 61...♔e8!.

62 ♔g4 ♔f6 63 ♔f4! b4 64 ♔e4! ♖b8 65 ♔d5?

White hands back the half-point, though this error is understandable since after he promotes it looks like the queen should 'somehow' pick up the rook. 65 ♖b3! leads to an easy victory.

65...b3! 66 d7 b2! 67 ♖b3 ♖xb3! 68 d8♖+! ♔xf5 (D)

Of course, ♖ vs ♖+♔ is a technical ending topic that lies outside the scope of the book, but this position is a tablebase draw. However, Black must manoeuvre his king accurately.

69 ♖d7+ ♔g5 70 ♖e7+ ♔g4 71 ♖e4+ ♔g3 72 ♖g6+ ♔h4?

This loses, because the rook will now have no safe squares along the b-file. 72...♔f4 (or 72...♔f3) is correct.

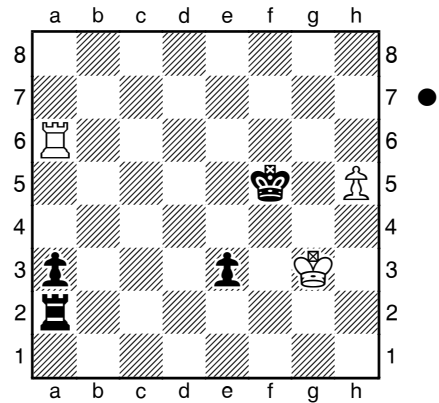
73 ♖b1! ♔g5 74 ♔c4!

Wherever the rook goes on the b-file, it will eventually be picked off by a double attack.

74...♖b8 75 ♖g1+ ♔f5 76 ♖c5+! ♔g4 77 ♖d4+! ♔f3 78 ♖f6+ ♔e4 79 ♖e6+ ♔f3 80 ♖f5+ 1-0

226) Ding Liren – Xu Zhihang

Chinese Team Ch 2017



Is the h-pawn capable of distracting Black from implementing the standard winning plan?

42...e2?

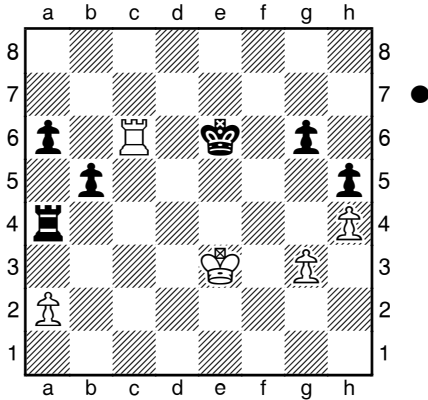
It turns out that in practice it was, though of course it shouldn't have been. This loss of time

lets White advance his pawn far enough to save the game. After 42...♖a1! White could resign.

43 ♖f2! ♖a1 44 ♖xe2! a2 45 h6! ♖h1 46 h7! ♖xh7 47 ♖d3 1/2-1/2

227) M. Kravtsiv – Ding Liren

Tbilisi rapid 2017



Black must decide whether to give up the g6-pawn in exchange for the a2-pawn to obtain a pair of connected passed pawns, or to preserve the existing structure for the time being.

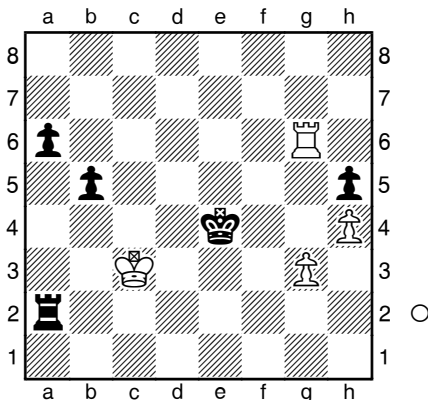
51...♖e5?

Computer analysis shows that this is wrong. Instead, Black should first hide from the checks on h6, obliging the white rook to return to c2. Then the black pawns will take a step forward and the black king will return to the centre.

52 ♖xg6! ♖a3+

This pushes the white king towards the passed pawns, but if Black immediately takes on a2, then White will get his own pair of connected passed pawns on the kingside.

53 ♖d2! ♖xa2+ 54 ♖c3! ♖e4 (D)



The passed pawns cannot advance yet, so Black makes progress with his king.

55 ♖g5?!

More convincing is 55 g4 hxg4 56 ♖xg4+! ♖f5 57 ♖g8 and h-pawn advances; White will be happy to trade it for either black pawn, with a clear draw.

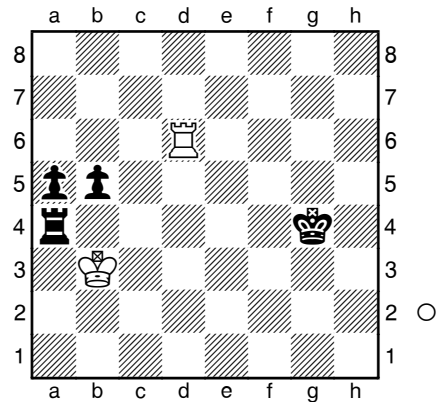
55...♖f3 56 ♖xh5 ♖xg3 57 ♖h8 ♖a4 58 h5 ♖g4

Now the black king can neutralize White's passed pawn, but the game is still within the drawing margin.

59 ♖b3 ♖g5 60 ♖b2

There are numerous positions where a rook and two connected passed pawns do not win, in particular when the rook stands in front of the pawns, interfering with their advance, and the pawns are under sufficient pressure that the rook cannot reposition itself. Kasparian in particular devoted a lot of work to such positions, and you can find his conclusions in the standard end-game textbooks.

Since White cannot hold onto his h-pawn, it was simplest to give it up immediately, while keeping the black rook tied to its pawns: 60 ♖c8 ♖xh5 61 ♖c6! ♖g4 62 ♖d6 and now there is nothing for Black to try apart from 62...a5 (D).

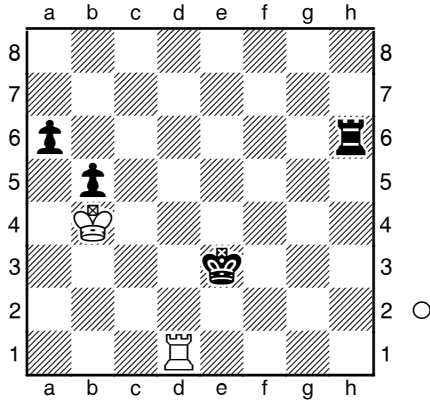


But then White occupies the fifth rank with 63 ♖d5! ♖b4+ 64 ♖a3, when the black king has no shelter against checks from the side.

60...♖h4 61 ♖a8! ♖b4+ 62 ♖c3 ♖c4+ 63 ♖b3 ♖c6 64 ♖h8 ♖h6 65 ♖d8 ♖xh5

Black has managed to extract his rook and win the pawn, but is still not winning.

66 ♖d5+ ♖g4 67 ♖b4 ♖f4 68 ♖d1 ♖e3 (D)

**69 ♖c5?**

Black was threatening to give the check ...♖h4+, and then answer ♖b3 with ...a5. White should have prevented this by playing 69 ♖a1 or 69 ♖a5. Instead, White voluntarily allows his king to be cut off horizontally.

69...♗e2?

After 69...♖h4! it is impossible to prevent the advance of the b-pawn.

70 ♙d4?

And here 70 ♖a1! was obligatory.

70...♖h1?

Neither player is getting to the heart of the issue. 70...♗e3! wins.

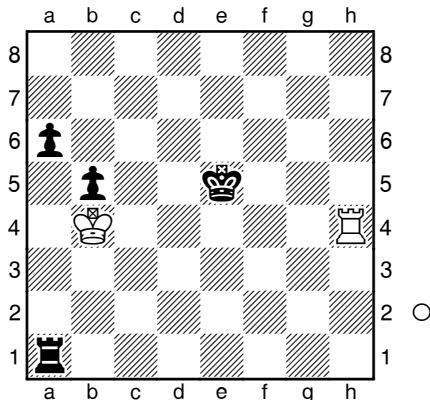
71 ♙d6! ♖a1 72 ♖h6?

White had to return to his camp with 72 ♖b4!. These positions are very hard to play if you don't know what your goals are!

72...♗d3?

Black should cut off the king with 72...♖a4!.

73 ♗b4! ♖b1+ 74 ♗a5! ♖a1+ 75 ♗b4! ♗d4 76 ♖h4+ ♗e5 (D)

**77 ♖h5+?**

Perhaps paradoxically, the king should not be allowed to move backwards into its own territory, as this opens up the possibility of it using the a5-square. The drawing move is 77 ♖h6!, limiting the king to the first five ranks of the board.

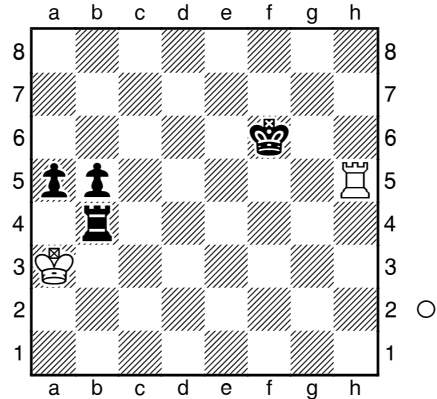
77...♗f6 78 ♖h6+ ♗g5?

As the previous note suggests, Black can win with 78...♗g7, followed by ...♖a4+, and after ♗b3 the black king will trek across to a5, its only shelter from checks.

79 ♙d6 ♖a4+ 80 ♗b3 ♗f5 81 ♖h6

We again have a drawn position; compare the note to White's 60th move.

81...♗e5 82 ♙g6 ♗d5 83 ♖f6 ♗c5 84 ♖h6 ♖a1 85 ♗b2! ♖a4 86 ♗b3! ♖b4+ 87 ♗a3! a5 88 ♖h5+! ♗d6 89 ♖h6+ ♗e5 90 ♖h5+! ♗f6 (D)

**91 ♖h6+?**

As observed in the note to White's 60th move, once a 'triangular' position of this type has been reached, the rook should be kept on the fifth rank (91 ♖c5 or 91 ♖d5), maintaining the pressure on the b5-pawn and thus tying down the black rook. After the mistaken check given, the black pawns will get the opportunity to advance.

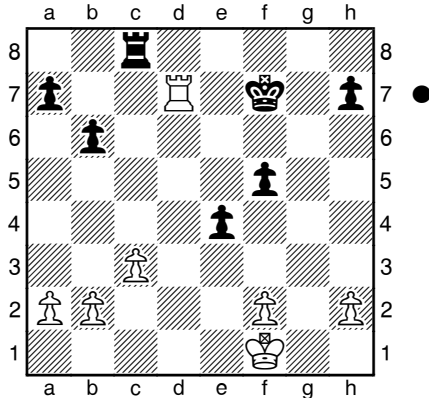
91...♗g5! 92 ♖a6 ♖a4+! 93 ♗b3 ♗f5 94 ♖h6 ♙g4 95 ♖b6 a4+ 96 ♗a2 ♖b4 97 ♖h6 ♖b3 98 ♖h4 ♗e5 99 ♙g4 ♗d5 100 ♖h4 ♗c5 101 ♖h5+ ♗b4 102 ♖h4+ ♗a5 103 ♖h5 ♖f3 104 ♙g5 a3 105 ♙g4 b4 106 ♖h4 ♖f2+ 107 ♗b3 ♖b2+ 108 ♗c4 a2 109 ♖h8 ♖c2+

Of course, the simple 109...b3 also wins, but the players decided to end the game with a pretty checkmate by underpromotion.

110 ♗b3 a1♘#! (0-1)

333) Tarrasch – Rubinstein

San Sebastian 1911



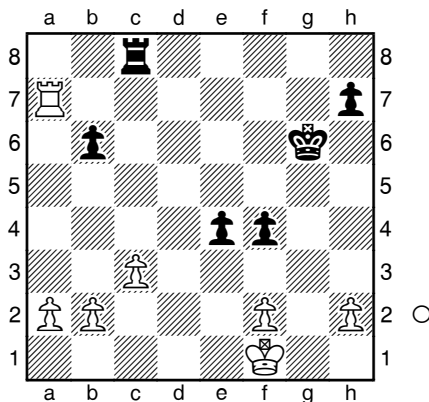
This is one of Rubinstein's more famous rook endgames, and often cited as an ideal example of active defence. Analysing it with modern engines reveals that a number of key points were misassessed (this is true for many 'classics'), but it nevertheless remains an instructive example; we just need to modify the lessons drawn from it a little.

31...♔g6

Black could very well play the more centralizing 31...♔f6!?, since the h7-pawn has limited value, though from a human perspective it is easy to understand the decision to defend it 'just in case'.

32 ♖xa7 ♜d8

This move was lavishly praised in the old annotations, but modern analysis suggests it is a viable but rather unnecessary finesse. Black can simply advance with 32...f4!?, (*D*), and now:



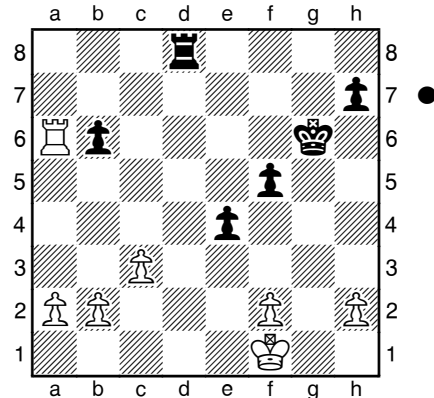
a) 33 ♜d7 (logically seizing the d-file that Black failed to occupy) 33...♔f5 (if the king

were on f6 – see the note to Black's 31st move – then it could move to e5 here, and there would be no check on d5) 34 ♜d5+ ♔g4! 35 ♔e2 ♜e8 36 a4 ♜e6 37 ♜b5 ♜h6 38 ♜e5 e3 39 f3+ (39 fxe3 f3+) 39...♔h3! 40 ♜f5 ♜h4! 41 b4 ♔xh2 with sufficient counterplay.

b) On 33 ♖a6 Black can temporarily hold on to the pawn with 33...♜b8 (compare the note to Black's 33rd move below), while 33...f3 34 ♜xb6+ ♔f5 is also good, planning to invade with the rook on the d- or g-file. After 35 ♜b4, to block the d-file if need be, there is time for the leisurely 35...♜g8 36 a4 ♜g2 37 a5 ♜xh2, when the most reasonable thing is to repeat moves with 38 ♔g1.

33 ♖a6 (*D*)

33 ♜b7 ♜d6! is OK for Black, as his rook is well-placed on the d-file, with ...f4 and ...♔f5 coming next in most cases.

**33...♜d2?**

33...♜b8! is correct. Then 34 a4 ♔g5! offers Black enough counterplay (35 b4 f4), while if White moves his rook from a6, the black rook is quickly reactivated, and 34 ♜a4 ♔g5 35 ♜b4 ♔f4 36 ♔e2 h5! 37 a4 ♜a8! 38 b3 ♜c8! 39 c4 ♜c6! 40 ♜b5 h4! gives White no advantage.

Putting the rook on b8 only looks passive. In fact, Black is biding his time to activate this rook to much better effect, and meanwhile by covering the b6-pawn, it keeps the white rook sidelined and ineffective.

34 ♜xb6+! ♔g5 35 ♔e1 ♜c2 36 ♜b5?

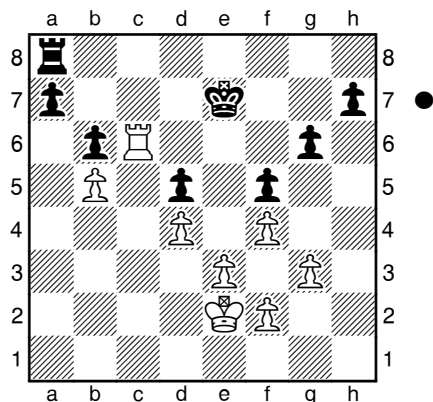
White can refute Black's famous plan with 36 a4! f4 37 a5! f3 38 a6! ♜e2+ 39 ♔d1 ♜xf2 (39...e3 40 fxe3 ♜xe3 41 a7 ♜e8 42 a8♖ ♜xa8 43 ♔e1!) 40 a7! ♜f1+ 41 ♔d2! ♜a1 42 ♜b7!,

winning. After the move chosen in the game, Black achieves a draw without problems.

36...♔g4! 37 h3+ ♕xh3! 38 ♖xf5 ♖xb2 39 ♜f4 ♜xa2 40 ♜xe4 h5 41 c4 ♔g2 42 ♜f4 ♜c2 43 ♜h4 ♕f3! 44 ♔d1 ♜xf2 45 c5 ♕e3 46 ♜xh5 ♕d4 1/2-1/2

334) Rubinstein – Alekhine

Karlovy Vary 1911



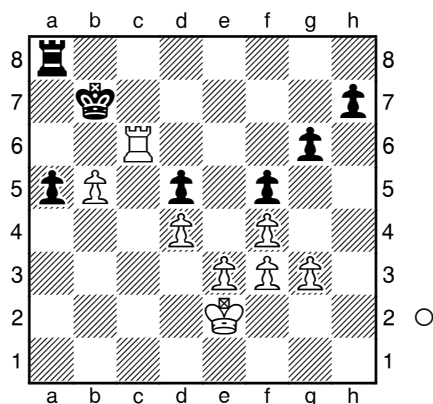
Despite White's slightly better structure, the chances are equal. The position is somewhat closed, and Black has active ideas of his own.

35...♔d7! 36 f3

White's plan is to advance with g4, while this move also rules out Black's idea of forcing a pawn ending, since now 36...♜c8? would lose to 37 ♜xc8! ♕xc8 38 e4.

36...♜e8?

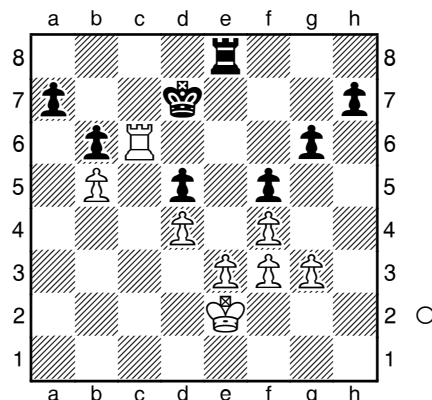
Black hopes to defend by passive means, but this should have failed. The weakening of the e3-pawn can only be exploited by active counterplay; e.g., 36...a5 37 ♜xb6 ♕c7 38 ♜c6+ ♕b7 (D) and now:



a) 39 ♔d2 a4 40 ♕c2 ♜e8 41 ♜c3 ♕b6.

b) 39 e4 a4 40 exd5 a3! 41 ♜c1! a2 42 ♜a1! ♕b6 43 d6 ♕xb5 44 d7! ♕c6 45 d8♗ ♜xd8! 46 ♜xa2 ♜xd4.

We now return to 36...♜e8? (D):



37 ♔d3?

The king has nothing useful to do on this flank. After the immediate 37 g4 Black no longer has time for queenside counterplay and White can continue to undermine the opponent's fortifications; e.g., 37...♜f8 38 gxf5 ♜xf5 39 ♕f2 ♜f8 40 ♔g3 ♜e8 41 ♜c3.

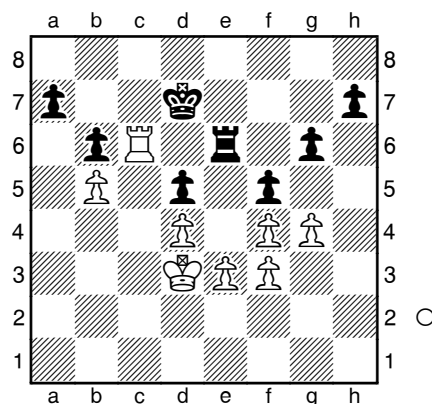
37...♜e7?

Still failing to create vital counterplay with 37...♜a8 or 37...♜b8 (which prepares ...a6 or ...a5).

38 g4

38 ♜f6 is even stronger.

38...♜e6 (D)



39 ♜c1!?

The pawn ending after 39 ♜xe6 ♕xe6 40 gxf5+! gxf5 41 e4! is just as lost for Black as it would have been a few moves earlier, but for

some reason Rubinstein chose to 'believe' his opponent at this point.

39...♙e7 40 ♖h1 ♚e6 41 ♜c1 ♚d7 42 ♙e1?

And this move should have thrown away the win, as it allows counterplay, but now from the other side: 42...h5! 43 ♖h1 ♖h7! 44 ♚e2 ♚e6 45 ♚f2 ♜c7 46 gxh5 ♜c2+ 47 ♚g3 gxh5! 48 ♜xh5 ♖b2! 49 ♖h6+ ♚e7 50 ♖h7+ ♚e6 51 ♜xa7 ♜xb5!. But Alekhine continued to defend passively:

42...♜f7? 43 ♖a1 ♚d6 44 ♜c1 ♚d7 45 ♜c6 ♜f8 46 ♚e2 ♜f7 47 ♚f2 ♜f8 48 ♚g3 ♙e8 49 ♜c3 ♙e7 50 ♚h4! h6 51 ♚g3 h5?! 52 ♚h4?! ♖h7?!

Both players are hesitant. Black had nothing better than first exchanging on g4: 52...hxg4 53 fxg4! ♖h7+ 54 ♚g5! fxg4, which transposes to the game but bypasses the simpler win mentioned in the next note.

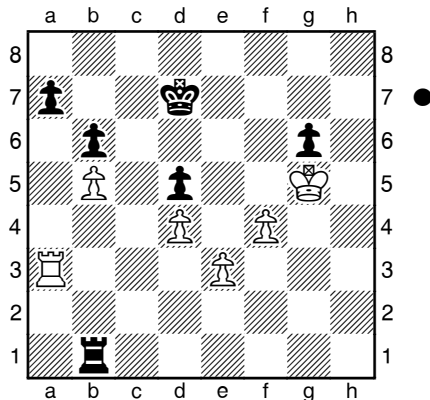
53 ♚g5?!

White wins easily after 53 gxh5!? gxh5 54 ♚g5 h4 55 ♚xf5 h3 56 ♜c1!.

53...fxg4 54 fxg4! hxg4 55 ♚xg4! ♖h1 56 ♚g5?

White should seek to take the g6-pawn with his other piece: 56 ♜c6!, and if 56...♜g1+, then 57 ♚f3! ♚e7 58 ♚f2 and Black must give up either the g6-pawn or the a7-pawn. Or: 56...♖b1 57 ♜xg6!; 56...a6 57 ♜xb6! axb5 58 ♜xb5! ♚e6 and White still has some work to do.

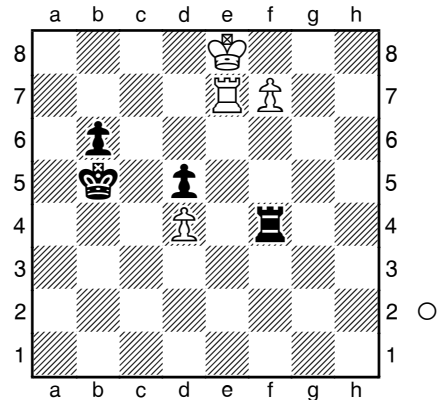
56...♖b1! 57 ♖a3 (D)



57...♜xb5?

Now Black is completely lost, whereas after 57...♚e6!, and pushing the enemy king to the edge of the board, Black is able to hold the draw with further accurate play.

58 ♜xa7+! ♚d6 59 ♚xg6 ♖b3 60 f5 ♜xe3 61 f6 ♜g3+ 62 ♚h7 ♜f3 63 f7 ♜f4 64 ♚g7 ♜g4+ 65 ♚f6 ♜f4+ 66 ♚g5 ♜f1 67 ♚g6 ♜g1+ 68 ♚f6 ♜f1+ 69 ♚g7 ♜g1+ 70 ♚f8 ♜d1 71 ♚e8 ♜e1+ 72 ♚d8 ♜f1 73 ♜d7+ ♚c6 74 ♚e8 ♜f4 75 ♜e7 ♚b5 (D)



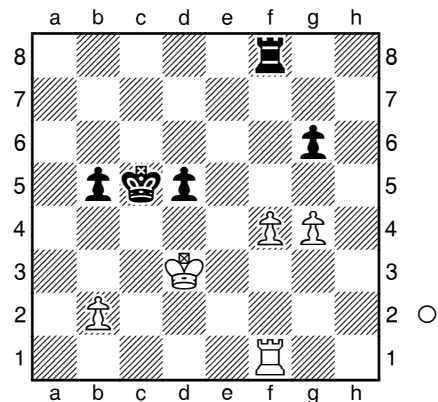
Now 76 f8♖ is good enough to win, but Rubinstein's actual choice showed better technique:

76 ♜c7 1-0

76...♙e4+ 77 ♚d7 ♜f4 78 ♚e6.

335) Lasker – Rubinstein

St Petersburg 1914



A classic example of the power of a rook placed behind its own passed pawn.

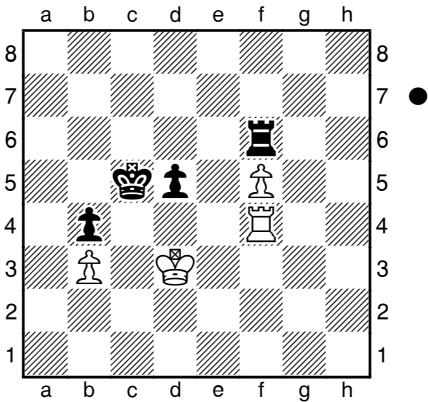
57 f5! gxh5 58 gxh5! ♜f6 59 ♜f4

White is able to pass the move to his opponent as many times as he wants, repeatedly putting him in zugzwang.

59...b4

Or 59...d4 60 ♚e4! ♜d6 61 ♜f3 ♚c4 62 f6! d3 63 f7! d2 64 f8♖! d1♖ 65 ♜c8+!, mating.

60 b3 (D)



60...♞f7

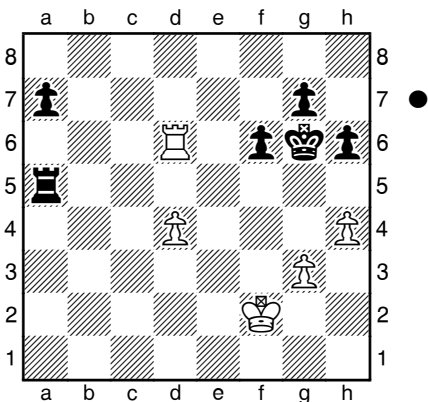
60...♞c6 61 ♔d4 ♔d6 62 ♞f3 ♞h6 63 f6 ♞h4+ 64 ♔d3 ♞h8 65 f7 ♔e7 66 ♔d4! ♞h4+ 67 ♔c5 ♔f8 68 ♔xd5 will lead to a won ♞+b♙ vs ♞ endgame with the opponent's king cut off.

61 f6 ♔d6 62 ♔d4! ♔e6 63 ♞f2 ♔d6 64 ♞a2 ♞c7 65 ♞a6+ ♔d7 66 ♞b6 1-0

In view of 66...♞c3 67 ♞xb4 ♞f3 68 ♔e5, followed by ♞f4, or 66...♞c1 67 ♔xd5 ♞f1 68 ♔e5 ♞e1+ 69 ♔f5.

336) Tarrasch – Lasker

Berlin 1918



In addition to the extra pawn, Black also has more active pieces, but if White manages to exchange his d-pawn for the black a-pawn, the remaining 3 vs 2 endgame will be very drawish as things stand.

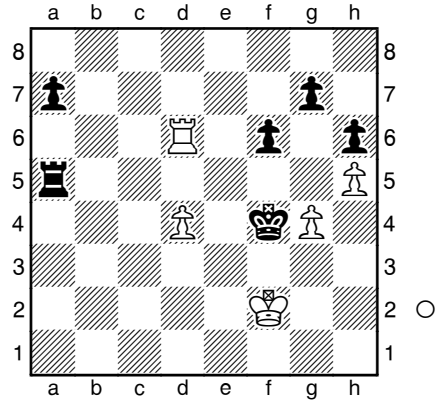
42...♔f5 43 h5?!

White decides to fix the g7-pawn before attacking it, but this is a waste of time. The

immediate 43 ♞d7 g6 44 d5 leaves White with an easier task.

43...♔e4 44 ♞d7?

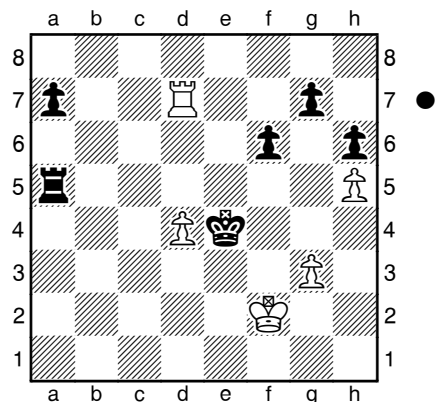
This loses. White should play 44 g4! ♔f4 (D), and then:



a) 45 ♞d7? is still no good. White is hoping for 45...♞a2+? 46 ♔e1! ♔xg4 47 ♞xg7+, with a ♞ vs ♞+f+h draw in prospect, but 45...♞g5! wins; e.g., 46 ♞xa7 ♔xg4! 47 d5 ♔xh5! 48 d6 ♔g6!.

b) 45 d5! is essential. This both advances the pawn on which White's counterchances are based and also cuts off the black rook from moving to g5, so White can achieve his goal of eliminating the black g-pawn. After 45...♞a2+ (45...♔xg4 46 ♞d7!) 46 ♔e1! Black cannot take White's kingside pawns while also keeping his g-pawn and halting the white d-pawn.

We now return to 44 ♞d7? (D):



44...♞g5?

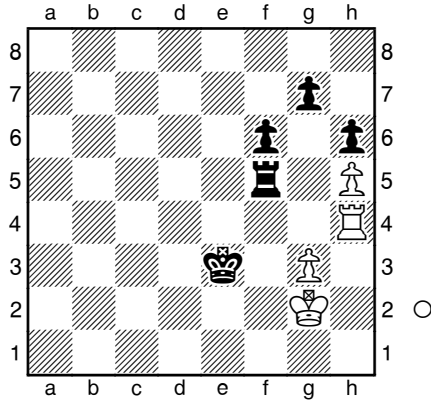
But here this is the wrong move. Black voluntarily transitions into the endgame desired by White, whereas he could win by means of either

44...♖xh5 45 ♖xg7 (after 45 ♖xa7 ♗g5 Black will create a pair of passed pawns) 45...a5 or 44...♖a2+ 45 ♖e1 a5! 46 ♖xg7 a4.

45 ♖xa7 ♖xd4 46 ♖a4+ ♖d3 47 ♖h4

This is good enough, but a clearer path to a draw is 47 g4 f5 48 gxf5 ♖xf5+ (48...♖xh5 49 ♖f4!) 49 ♖g3! ♖xh5 50 ♖g4! g5 51 ♖g2!?, ‘arresting’ the enemy rook.

47...♖f5+ 48 ♖g2 ♖e3 (D)



49 ♖g4?!

Activating the rook with 49 ♖h1 leads to a draw without any problems.

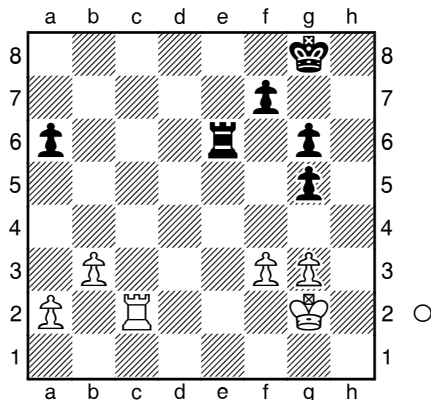
49...♖g5 50 ♖h4! f5 51 ♖h2?

By now there was only one saving continuation: 51 ♖h3! ♖e2 52 ♖g2! ♖g4 53 ♖h2! f4 54 ♖h3+! ♖f3 55 gxf4!

51...♖g4 52 ♖h3 ♖f3 0-1

337) Capablanca – Lasker

World Ch (1), Havana 1921



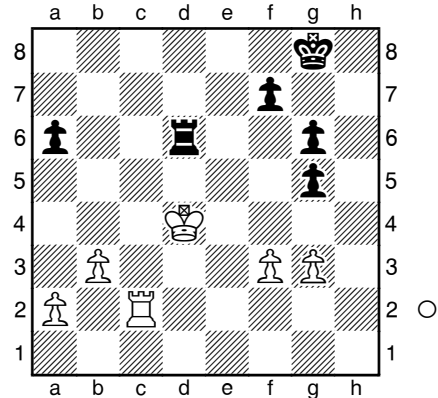
White has a slight advantage thanks to his better pawn-structure, but Black’s defensive resources are considerable.

39 ♖f2 ♖d6?!

Stopping the enemy rook coming to c5, but allowing White to activate his king. It is more promising to strive for counterplay on the king-side, where Black has an extra pawn, even if it is doubled: 39...♖g7 40 ♖c5 f5 41 g4 (or 41 ♖a5 ♖c6, entering the enemy camp) 41...♖f6.

40 ♖e3 ♖e6+ 41 ♖d4 ♖d6+? (D)

This should have landed Black in deep trouble. 41...f5 keeps sufficient counterchances.

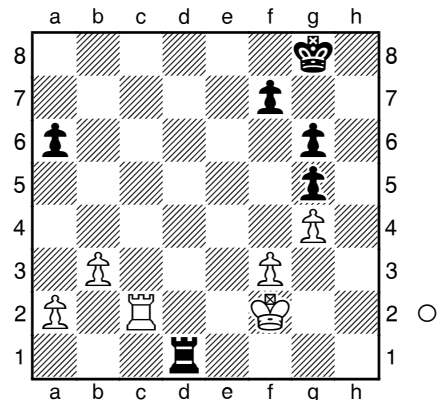


42 ♖e3?

Computer analysis confirms that 42 ♖c5! ♖d3 43 ♖f2! g4 44 fxg4! ♖xg3 45 ♖b6! ♖xg4 46 ♖xa6! is winning for White, but this would be virtually impossible for a human player to calculate. Intuitively, it looks unclear, and in the first game of the match Capablanca did not dare to go for it. He instead decided to retreat temporarily and include a useful g-pawn advance before reactivating his king.

42...♖e6+ 43 ♖f2 ♖d6 44 g4 ♖d1?! (D)

A risky moment to seek activity. The game remains equal after 44...♖g7.



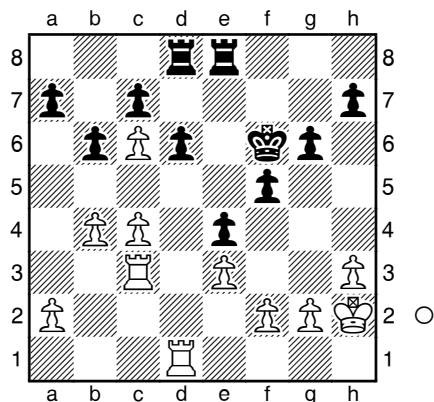
45 ♖e2

Too modest. 45 ♖e3!? gives Black more serious problems, though computer analysis suggests Black should hold after 45...♗d6!. Now the game quickly ended in a draw.

45...♗a1 46 ♖d3 ♖g7 47 b4 ♗f1 48 ♖e3 ♗b1 49 ♗c6 ♗xb4 50 ♗xa6 ♗b2 1/2-1/2

338) Rubinstein – Euwe

London 1922



Black currently has by far the more active king, and to stop this becoming a real problem, White needs to prevent the ...d5 advance.

30 ♗a3?!

White hopes to profit from the far-advanced c6-pawn, but this is too optimistic and should have given Black a slight advantage. 30 ♗c2 is more accurate.

30...a5 31 bxa5

31 b5?! will leave the a3-rook out of play for some time. After 31...d5!? White faces a difficult defence.

31...♗a8 32 ♗d5 ♗eb8?!

This hands the initiative to White. He should play 32...♗a6, taking aim at the c6-pawn, or 32...h5, ruling out the g4 advance.

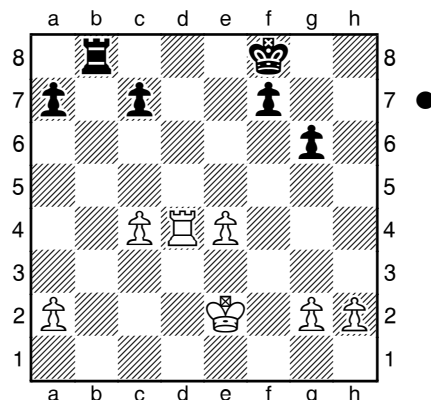
33 ♗b3 bxa5 34 ♗xb8 ♗xb8! 35 ♗b5 ♗xb5?

Black opts for a pawn ending, but it is hopeless for him in view of White's ability to create a far-advanced passed pawn at any moment. There was no reason to panic, as Black can retain adequate defensive resources after 35...♗a8 36 ♗b7 ♗c8; e.g., 37 ♗a7 ♖e6 38 ♗xa5 ♗b8 39 ♗a7 ♗c8 40 a4 d5 41 c5 d4 42 exd4! ♖d5.

36 cxb5! ♖e6 37 a4! d5 38 h4 h6 39 ♖g1 g5 40 hxg5 hxg5 41 g4 f4 42 exf4 1-0

339) Capablanca – Alekhine

New York 1924



This endgame had major historical significance, in view of the fact that Alekhine defeated Capablanca three years later for the World Championship, and following his detailed analysis of the game, he adjusted his approach when facing his great rival. He called into question the impeccability of Capablanca's technique and became more willing to face him in endgame battles and simple positions. There can be no doubt that this increased confidence was of great value, but it is not clear this game truly supported his conclusions. Modern computers can in fact affirm that this position is objectively drawn, and that remained the assessment throughout the entire ending all the way to the final move of the game. Capablanca may not have made the most of his practical chances, but it certainly wasn't a case of him failing in a technically winning position.

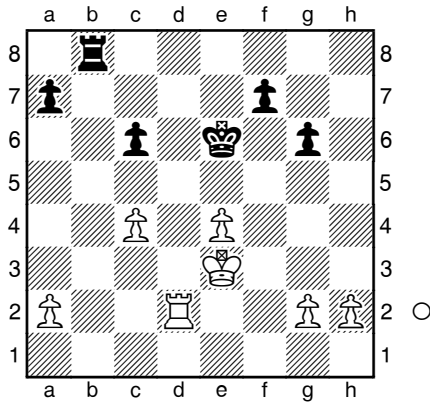
36...♖e7

It seems that Alekhine considered this move self-evident, but there is a more forcing computer-approved option: 36...♗b4 37 ♖d3 ♗a4 38 ♗d7 c5 39 ♗c7 ♗a3+ 40 ♖e2 ♗xa2+ 41 ♖f3 and here Black should not put the rook in a passive location on a5 for the sake of maintaining material equality, but complete the liquidation of the queenside pawns by 41...♗c2 42 ♗xc5 a5.

37 ♗d2 ♖e6 38 ♖e3 c6?! (D)

Alekhine felt this was a good move, and necessary to transfer his rook to its fourth rank.

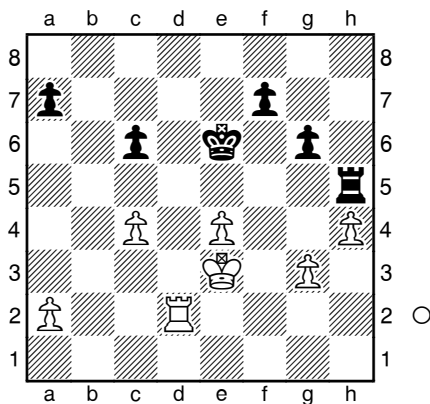
However, it leads to some practical difficulties for Black that could have been avoided with the computer suggestion 38...c5, with similar ideas to the previous note.



39 h4

This move has been criticized, but the question of which move gives the best practical chances in an objectively drawn position tends to be a subjective matter. Alekhine considered 39 c5 premature in view of 39...♖b5 40 ♗d6+ ♕e5! 41 ♗xc6 ♗a5! and proposed 39 h3. If White first transfers his king to the queenside with 39 ♔d4!? ♗d8+! 40 ♕c3 ♗b8 (or 40...♗h8!?) 41 c5 (a computer idea), Black must avoid 41...♗b5? 42 ♗d6+! ♕e7 43 ♗xc6 ♔d7 44 a4, and instead play 41...♕e5! 42 ♗d6 ♕xe4! 43 ♗xc6 ♔d5!; e.g., 44 ♗c7 f5 45 ♗xa7 ♗h8 46 h3 ♗e8 with a drawable ending.

39...♗h8! 40 g3 ♗h5! (D)

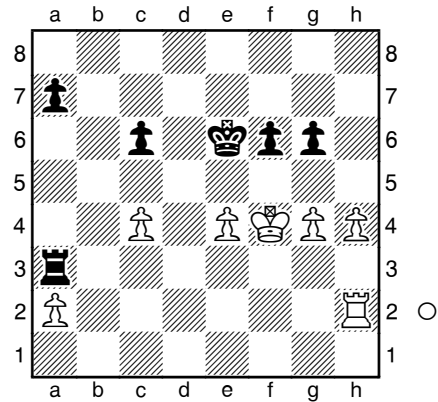


The rook has reached its fourth rank and a confrontation begins over White's attempts to create a passed h-pawn.

41 ♗h2 ♗a5 42 ♕f4 f6

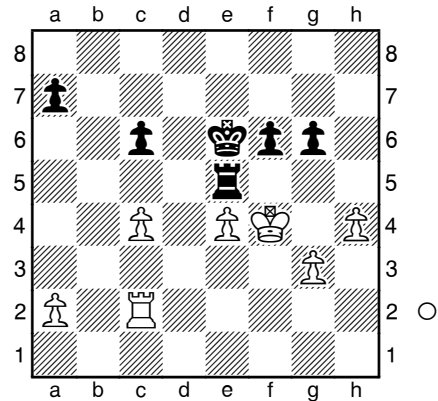
The point of this move is to counter 43 g4 with 43...g5+.

A computer proposal is to play 42...♗a3 first, and wait for 43 g4 before playing 43...f6! (D), as this stops White's h-pawn dead in its tracks due to Black's mating idea.



Perhaps Alekhine didn't like 44 e5 ♗c3! 45 exf6 ♕xf6! 46 g5+, but this position can be held.

43 ♗c2 ♗e5 (D)



44 c5

No way to strengthen White's game is apparent, so White makes a committal move, tying both rooks to the c5-pawn.

44...♗h5

The forcing 44...g5+ 45 ♕f3 (45 hxg5 ♗xg5!) 45...gxh4 46 gxh4 f5 47 ♗c4 ♕f6 may be a cleaner solution.

45 ♗c3 a5 46 ♗c2 ♗e5 47 ♗c3 ♗h5 48 ♕f3 ♕e7 49 ♕g4 ♕f7 50 ♗c4

50 ♕h3 must be answered with 50...g5 51 ♕g4 ♕g6!.

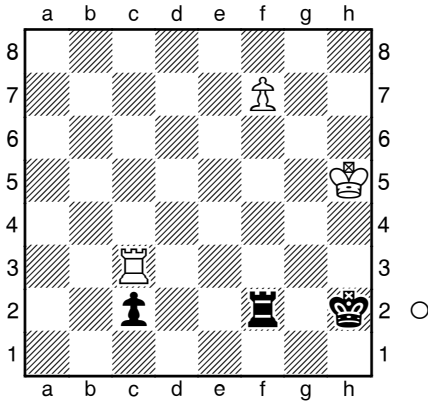
50...♕g7 51 ♗d4

Exercise Positions

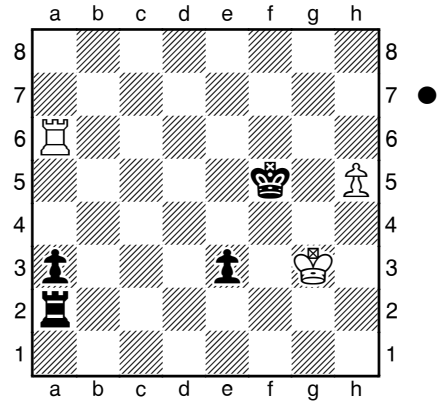
There follow 68 exercise positions, in roughly ascending order of difficulty. These are all taken from earlier in the book. In each case you are told who is to move, given an indication of the difficulty level (1, 2, 3 or 4 stars) and a reference to the page in the book where the position occurs (always as a diagram) and analysis is given. It is for you to determine whether you are looking for a win or a draw, though this is clear in most cases. Analyse as deeply as you feel is appropriate, and at least decide what move you would play.

None of the exercises are completely trivial, and the 3- and 4-star positions should prove challenging even for titled players who have a good knowledge of rook endgame theory. Sometimes the difficulty is due to the need for detailed, accurate analysis, while in other cases there are hard-to-see moves and tricky concepts. The 4-star positions in particular may well offer all of those challenges.

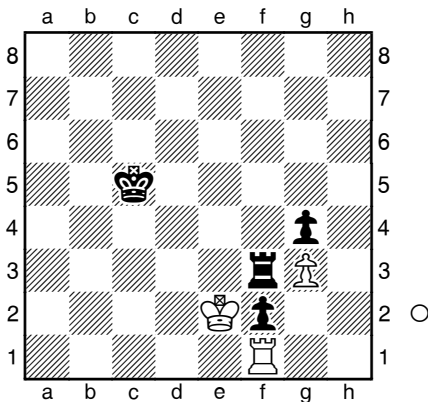
Note that you may also view these positions as revision exercises, to be examined after you have read the book. In that case, they should prove a good deal easier, if you have studied carefully.



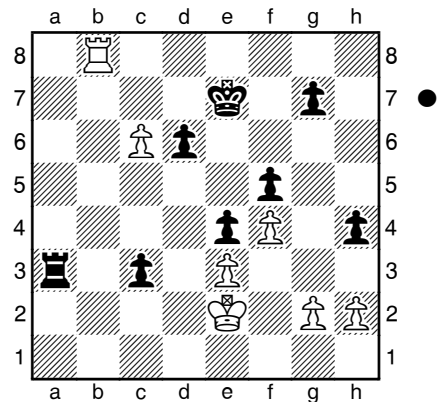
1) White to play * *answer on page 221*



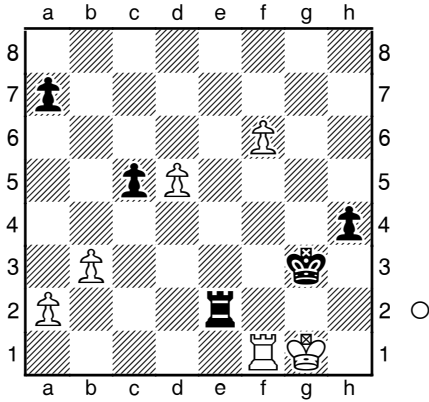
3) Black to play * *answer on page 168*



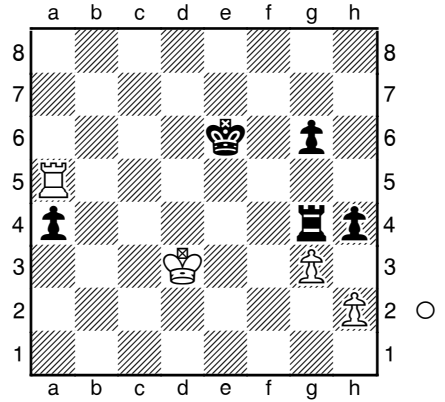
2) White to play * *answer on page 178*



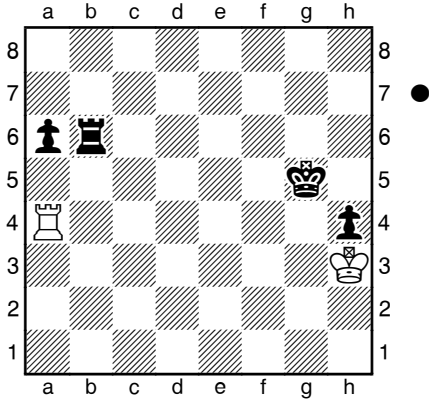
4) Black to play * *answer on page 177*



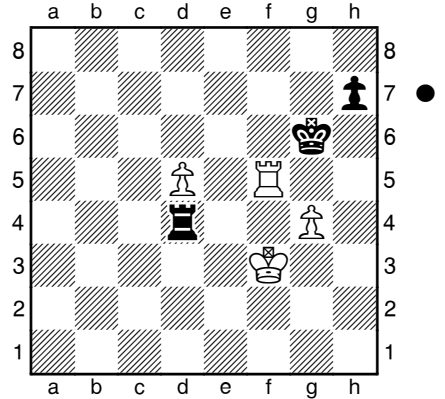
5) White to play * *answer on page 39*



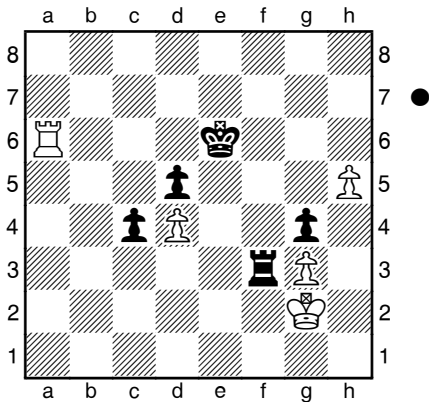
8) White to play ** *answer on page 34*



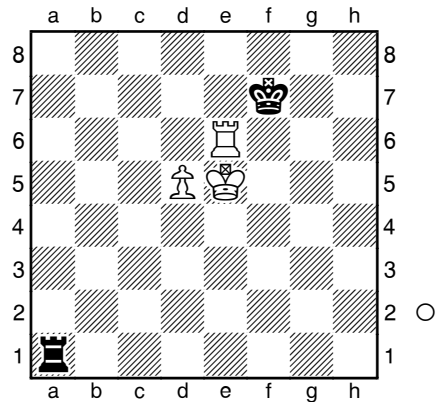
6) Black to play * *answer on page 7*



9) Black to play ** *answer on page 41*



7) Black to play ** *answer on page 25*



10) White to play ** *answer on page 42*

Index of Themes

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