Conceptual Rook Endgames Workbook

By

Jacob Aagaard
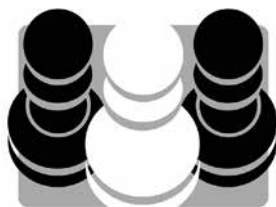
Contents

Preface

When I wrote *Conceptual Rook Endgames*, I knew that there were many positions that would make great exercises – but I wanted the book to be read, not mistaken for an exercise book. It was most important to me that the ideas came through, rather than the moves and variations.

I considered adding an exercise section to the book, but decided it was already taxing people's attention span significantly, and abandoned the idea. This did not mean that I did not have the positions ready, nor did finishing the book stop me from continuing to collect examples. As a result comes this little book, which would likely have found only a small audience, were it not for a combination of two compelling ideas...

The first came from a curious incident that happened to me at the beginning of 2024. For 20 years I have worked closely with GM John Shaw in Quality Chess, but his time was simply up. After a few conversations in the early part the year, he decided to retire. As the dominos fell with a surprising inevitability, I ended up taking over not just John's stake in Quality Chess, but also Everyman Chess and New in Chess, including the New in Chess Magazine.

Rather than seeing this as a career advancement, which was the natural first instinct, I came to realise that I had been given a great obligation and honour: to preserve and deepen the culture of chess literature, as well as my favourite chess magazine.

In conversation with the Chief Editor of the New in Chess Magazine, Remmelt Otten, we came up with the idea of providing readers of the magazine with a free eBook. All we needed was to find a poor author, who would be willing for his book to be gifted to a few thousand people, without remuneration. The case for this book grew stronger.

Then came a possibility to do a video recording of *Conceptual Rook Endgames* for Chessable – my first endeavour in this medium. I shared the idea of this book with the fine people at Chessable, and we decided to include it as a part of the course and the video, providing an expanded version.

It is only out of principle that the book is also made available in print.

After writing the 896-page *A Matter of Endgame Technique*, it feels refreshing to write a 160-page exercise book. I have been collecting rook-endgame material for a decade, but most of the best stuff was already included in *Conceptual Rook Endgames*, making this book fresh, with most of the examples stemming from the last two years.

As well as being smaller than *A Matter of Endgame Technique*, this book also has a much freer structure. I have written it as if the reader is already familiar with *Conceptual Rook Endgames*, well knowing that a majority might not be. This is not meant to be a sales push for perhaps my best book (that was it there), but is merely how the material makes most sense to me.

The exercises are presented in the style Steffen Nielsen and I chose for *Endgame Labyrinths*, with up to six exercises per page, followed by solutions overleaf. The intention is that a reasonably strong player, or group of players, can work on a page in a single training session of one to one-and-a-half hours.

Unlike *Endgame Labyrinths*, there is no thematic grouping of the material. The exercises can be approached in many ways; but in the solutions, I will be focusing on the themes from *Conceptual Rook Endgames*, so that the readers of that book can make the connections. At the same time, the themes should be perfectly understandable to those who have never read *Conceptual Rook Endgames*. To make sure of this, I have included a brief guide to the 24 themes in *Conceptual Rook Endgames*. I recommend skim-reading the guide (found on pages 9-12), and then returning to it if you find anything in the solutions that appears as if written in code.

For some 25 years, I disliked including ECO-style evaluation symbols in my books, finding words more sophisticated. However, recently I have changed my style somewhat, and I have now chosen to include these symbols when the words would have said the same, only using more words and space. I wanted this book to be compact, while still including up to six well-annotated solutions on a page. Using a symbol to indicate that one side is winning (for example) seemed like a sensible way to keep things concise, and I may well continue with a blend of words and symbols going forward. Most readers will surely be familiar with chess evaluation symbols, but we have naturally included a key on page 4.

A few notes on the solutions and the signage. If I give an exclamation mark, it does not mean that there are no other winning (or drawing) moves in the position. In general, I have strived to make it clear when there are multiple solutions, without necessarily giving all of them. Understanding the correct approach to each position is what we are looking for.

   You will also notice that some of the solutions are long. This is for the sake of illustration – it certainly does not mean you needed to see everything to solve the exercise. Your task rarely goes beyond finding the first few moves, unless it is obvious that the critical variation is a bit longer. The purpose of this book is not to evaluate the person going through it, but to help them play better in the future.

If you are a subscriber to New in Chess Magazine, I thank you for your support. It is a personal mission for me that the magazine I have read and loved since its initial English-language issues in the mid-1980s will continue to be a cultural force in the chess world for years to come. It can only be so if it is read.

   If you are a reader of the Chessable course, I thank you for trusting me with your hard-earned cash and hope you will find the slightly altered format of this book easy to work with. Digital platforms often serve exercise books well.

   Finally, if you have purchased a paper copy of this book, you and I belong to the same tribe, and you are recognized as a brother.

Whichever format you have chosen, I hope you find the book enjoyable. Remember that workbooks such as this one offer you an opportunity to learn from practice. An understanding of the underlying patterns and concepts in chess is useful; but it needs quite a bit of repetition before it sticks and becomes applicable in practice. In other words, you need training to develop the skills.

The magical thing about training is that it is not a test. If you do it earnestly, you are successful. You do not need to be competitive when you are solving exercises. Some players are good at solving exercises; others are not. It does not tell us much about the player, except whether they are good at solving exercises. But doing the training – that's a real success criterion! We improve from training – perhaps faster than in any other way possible, as Mark Dvoretsky claimed. Do the training, and you are a success.

I would like to thank Karthik Venkataraman, Sam Shankland and Christopher Yoo for solving a lot of the exercises within. Their ideas and perspectives certainly made this book better.

Good luck!
Jacob Aagaard, September 2024

The 24 Themes

In the manual *Conceptual Rook Endgames* (*CRE*), I presented a different way to view rook endgames, through typical ideas, rather than fixed positions. Not that there is anything wrong with that traditional approach; the two ways of looking at rook endgames supplement each other beautifully, which is why *CRE* was published alongside *Theoretical Rook Endgames* by Sam Shankland.

This workbook is meant to function both as accompanying to *CRE*, and as a small exercise book that can stand on its own feet. For this reason, I want to briefly run through the key ideas of *CRE* here, making it easier to understand the explanations later in the book.

To save trees, the explanations here will be an exercise in brevity. If you want to see examples, please go to *Conceptual Rook Endgames.* It is full of them.

1. Activate the rook first
In the endgame, it is wise to make the most out of your strongest piece. In the rook endgame, this is the rook. Therefore, we should seek to activate the rook, rather than the king, when possible.

2. The Rook belongs behind the Passed Pawn
The most famous concept in the rook endgame, formulated by Dr Tarrasch. Both on the defence, and if seeking to convert an advantage, the rook is highly effective behind the passed pawns. Rarely is this goal achievable, yet undesirable.

3. Shouldering
A term borrowed from football, where you can keep an opponent away by means of a shoulder-to-shoulder block. Ice hockey fans prefer the term 'bodycheck', meaning the same thing. This most often occurs in positions with king and rook vs king and pawn(s). The side advancing a pawn is attempting to keep the opponent's king at a distance, as long as possible, by placing his own king in the way. That is frequently two files from the passed pawn, making it possible to always return to its protection.

4. Rook vs Pawns
There are a lot of scenarios where one or several pawns are equal to, or stronger than, a rook. And perhaps the most common defensive strategy in rook endgames is to give up the rook for a strong passed pawn, before or after queening, only to secure a draw with a pawn of our own. The most important topic within this category is that of *shouldering,* which can occasionally exist in positions with a rook each too. The topic could have had its own chapter in *Conceptual Rook Endgames*, but it did not work out that way.
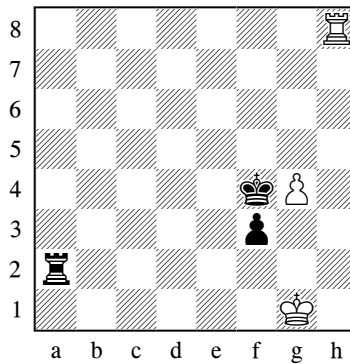
5. Passed Pawns
The endgame is all about passed pawns. Creating them and pushing them up the board. A passed pawn in our own half is at best a long-term asset; a passed pawn in the opponent's side of the board can be a tremendous asset. The further up the board the pawn is, the closer it is to dominating events.

6. Promoting Passed Pawns
A crucial skill in the endgame!

7. The Umbrella
The king often is unable to work together with the rook in promoting a pawn, because it can be checked from behind. Placing your king behind one of your opponent's pawns may be the secret sauce that wins the game.

Black wins with 1...♔g3!, using the g4-pawn as an umbrella.

8. Breakthrough
Another way to create a passed pawn is to sacrifice one pawn, in order to remove the blockade from another. Not a big topic in these books, but still an important one.

9. Check the Checks!
If I could only give a handful of themes, this one would still make the list. In rook endgames, the coordination between the limited amount of pieces we have can often be perfect, and ruining it with a check can be a good idea. Checks will force some sort of concession from the opponent, which may make a lot of difference.

10. Checking Distance
The rook is more powerful than the king in an open space, but not at close quarters. Therefore, it makes a lot of sense to ensure that you have a big checking distance.

11. Defence from the Front
In most situations, the best defensive setup is from behind. But at times this is not effective (for example, if there is an umbrella), not achievable or otherwise unavailable. In that case, defending from the front can be an effective technique.

12. Cutting off the King
With only two pieces on each side in the standard rook endgame, it can be highly effective to cut your opponent's effective fighting force in half.

13. The King's Role
This is perhaps the biggest addition to the understanding of rook endgames. The king's role is to deal with passed pawns. In a defensive position, the king needs to block the enemy pawns; in an advantageous position, the king needs to help its own pawns advance.

14. King Activity
Our preference is for the rook to be active. But at times, the king will need to do part of the heavy lifting as well. It is important to be able to recognise when this is.

15. Checkmate
Checkmate does not occur often in rook endgames, but it is a theme that needs to be covered anyway.

16. Stalemate
One stalemate pattern is far more important than all other stalemate patterns and should be known.

17. Zugzwang
There are a lot of beautiful zugzwang positions in rook endgames. Because of the limitations of both rooks and kings, they occur frequently. Being able to recognise them, as well as set them up, is highly valuable.

18. Mutual Zugzwang
Mutual zugzwangs are among the most beautiful positions in chess. They occur far more frequently in rook endgames than you would assume, so having a good grasp of them is important.

19. Tempo Wars
As long as passed pawns are sprinting towards the end rank, every tempo counts. If you can find a way to win time in the race, you are more likely to come out on top.

20. Anticipation
A subcategory of prophylaxis. In rook endgames, we often put the rook as far away as possible. But there are situations, where, because of what follows, the rook can be better placed on another file. Being able to calculate variations in rook endgames, and see that we should not automatically put the rook as far away as possible, is a valuable skill. There are other examples of anticipation, but this one is the clearest.

21. Connected Passed Pawns
Handling and obstructing connected passed pawns is a serious topic in rook endgames.

22. Active or Passive Defence

In rook endgames, you should choose active defence over passive four out of five times. Developing a feeling for when to go active, and especially when not to, is highly desirable.

23. Slow Play

There are situations where one must gradually eke out miniscule advantages to reach the desired result. It is not a common theme in this book and is placed towards the end of *Conceptual Rook Endgames* for its rarity appeal.

24. Lost Items

In this chapter I covered several themes briefly, and a few sneaked into this book. For example, is the rook better in front of or adjacent to a passed pawn? Unsurprisingly, the answer is: "it depends". These themes were necessary to include in the book, but did not offer themselves easily up to great advice.

Chapter 1

Iron Interrogation

Dvirnyy – Lopusiewicz, Warsaw (rapid) 2021

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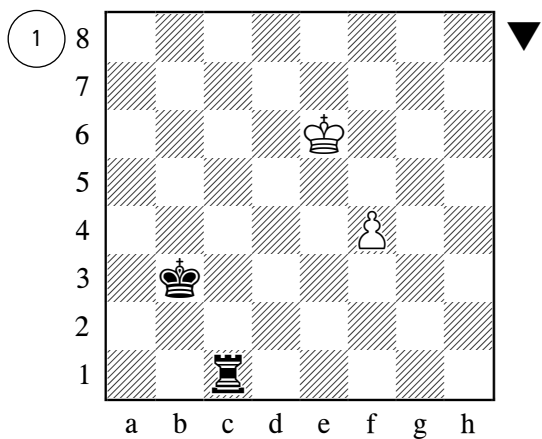
Sargissian – Sychev, Internet 2024

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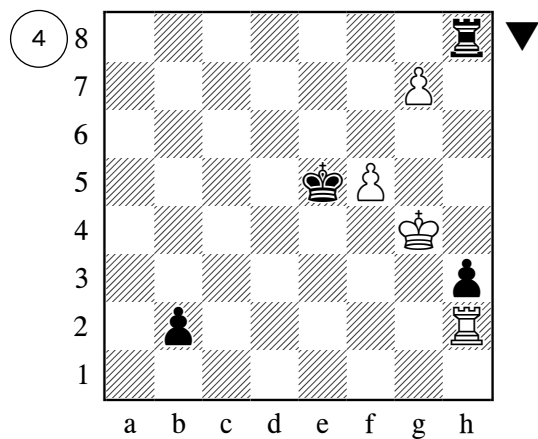
Hossain – Megaranto, Chennai (ol) 2022

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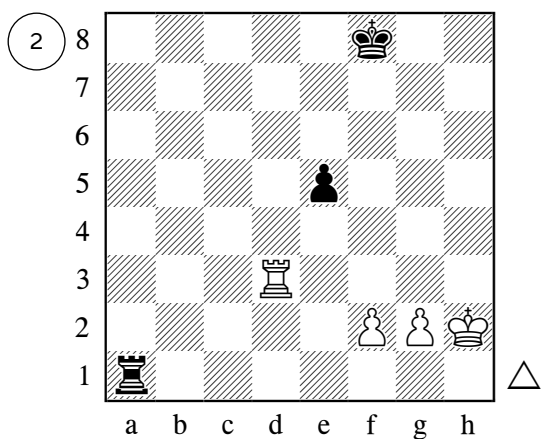
Zhukova – Chelushkina, Petrovac 2023

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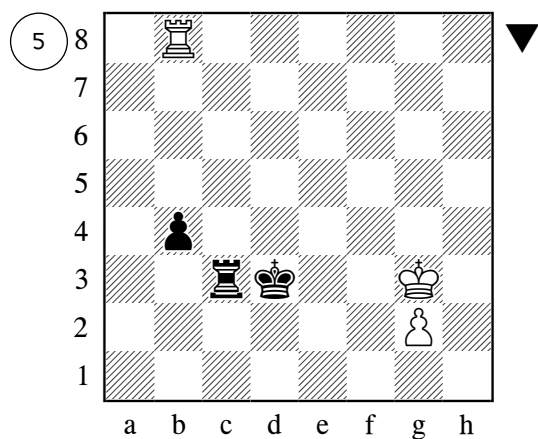
Kordzadze – Schroll, Austria 2023

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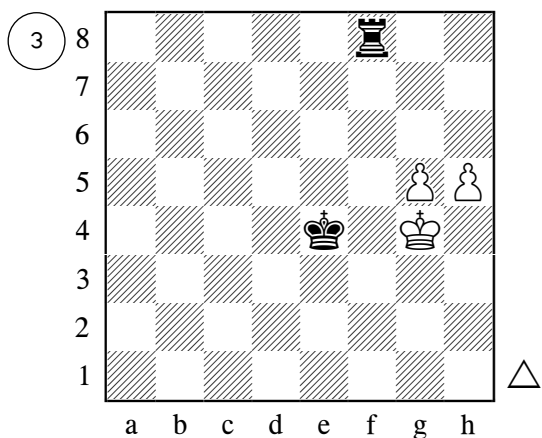
1. Danyyil Dvirnyy – Piotr Lopusiewicz, Warsaw (rapid) 2021, *Rook vs pawns*
The game ended in a draw after: 79...♔c4? 80.f5 ♔c5 81.f6 ♖e1 82.♔d7 ♖f1 83.♔e7 ♔c6 84.f7 ♖e1† 85.♔f6 ♔d7 86.f8=♕ ♖f1† 87.♔g7 ♖xf8 88.♔xf8 ½–½

   79...♖e1†! The typical way to win a tempo. **80.♔d6** The king has to keep shouldering the black king. **80...♖f1 81.♔e5 ♔c4 82.f5 ♔c5** White is one tempo too slow. **83.♔e6 ♔c6 84.f6 ♖e1†** Black wins.

2. Enamul Hossain – Susanto Megaranto, Chennai (ol) 2022, *Cutting off the king*
White already has an extra pawn, but to ensure victory White must take every type of advantage possible. In this case, it means cutting off the black king on the 8th rank.

   After 68.♔e3? Black played 68...♖a5 and had to defend all the way to move 115, before achieving the draw. The extra pawn is not enough to decide the game, but White was entirely right to ask Black to defend the position, of course. Black's secret weapon would be advancing the king to the sixth rank.

   68.♖d5? ♔e1 69.♔d7 would lose an important tempo. Black draws with 69...e4 and the pawn will soon be exchanged.

   68.♖d7! ♔e8 69.♖h7 Preparing to attack the e-pawn with ♖h5, among others. White is totally winning; the rest is just for illustration. **69...♖e1** 69...♖a2 70.f3 ♖a3 with the idea of harassing the white king, fails to 71.♖h5 ♔e3 72.♔g1 winning the e-pawn. **70.♔g3 ♖e2 71.♔f3 ♖a2 72.♖h5 ♖a5 73.♔e4** 73.f5 followed by ♔g4 also works. **73...♖a4† 74.♔f5 ♖a2 75.♔g6 ♖xf2** 75...♖a6† 76.♔g7 ♖a7† 77.♔g8 does not help Black. **76.♖xe5†** White either gets a winning position with the black king cut off, or a winning pawn endgame after: **76...♔f8 77.♖f5†**

3. Nino Kordzadze – Gerhard Schroll, Austria 2023, *Rook vs pawns*
White lost by pushing the wrong pawn. 60.g6? ♖f1 61.♔g5 ♔e5 62.♔h6 ♔f6 63.♔h7 ♖g1 64.♔g8 ♔g5 65.♔f8 ♔a5 66.♔g8 ♖xh5 67.g7 ♖g5 68.♔h8 ♔f7 0–1

   60.h6! The reason this is the right pawn is that the g5-pawn helps to keep the black king away. **60...♖f1 61.h7 ♖g1† 62.♔h5 ♔f5 63.♔h6** White makes the draw.

4. Gabriel Sargissian – Klementy Sychev, Internet 2024, *The rook belongs behind the passed pawn*
The game soon ended in a draw, presumably with the players out of time: 59...♖g8? 60.♖xb2 ♖xg7† 61.♔xh3 ♖xf5 62.♖f2† ♔g6 ½–½

   59...♖b8! A simple tactic, of course, but a pleasing illustration of the effectiveness of having the rook behind the passed pawns. **60.♖xb2 ♖xb2 61.g8=♕ ♖g2†** Black wins.

5. Natalia Zhukova – Irina Chelushkina, Petrovac 2023, *Cutting off the king*
The game ended in a draw quickly after: 62...b3? 63.♔f4 ♖c4† 64.♔f5 ♖c5† 65.♔f6 ♖c6† 66.♔f5 ½–½

   62...♖c4! 63.♔h3 ♔c3! 63...♔c2? would fail to win after 64.g4 b3 65.♔h4 b2 66.♔g5 followed by ♔f5 and advancing the g-pawn. **64.g4 b3 65.g5** 65.♔h4 ♖b4 66.♖c8† ♔d2 and White will have to lose the rook for the b-pawn. **65...b2 66.g6** Or 66.♖xb2 ♔xb2 67.g6 ♖c6 and Black wins. **66...♖b4** 66...♖c6 also wins. **67.♖xb4 ♔xb4 68.g7 b1=♕ 69.g8=♕ ♕h1† 70.♔g3 ♕g1†** Black wins.
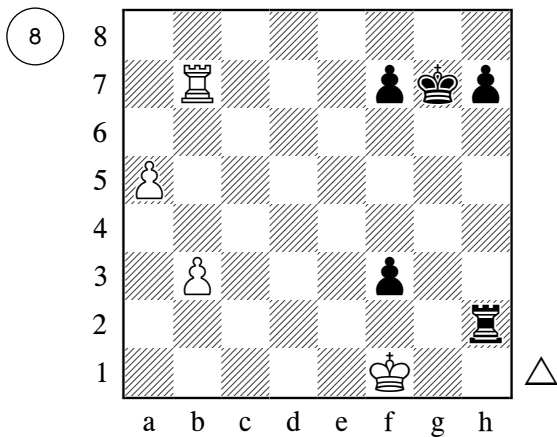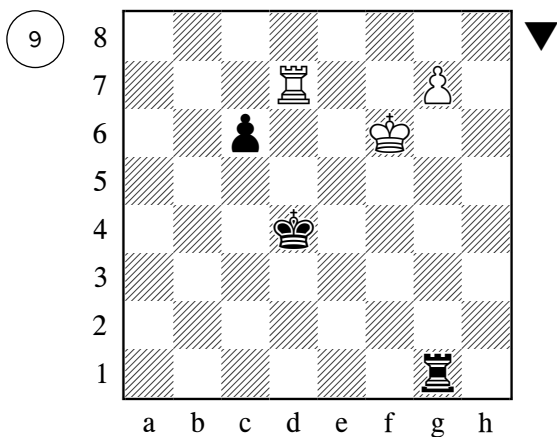
Rasulov – Bacrot, Internet 2023

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Svane – Pantsulaia, Almaty (blitz) 2022

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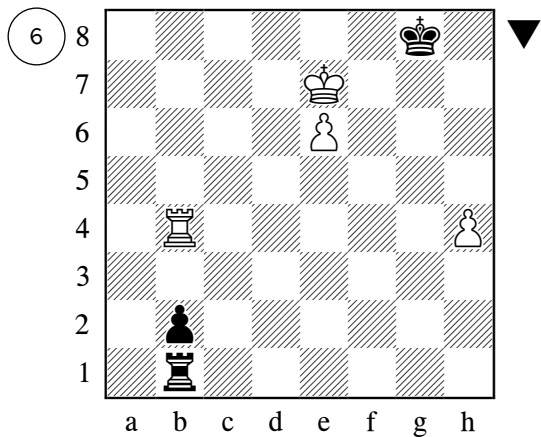
Jossien – Brunner, Chartres 2023

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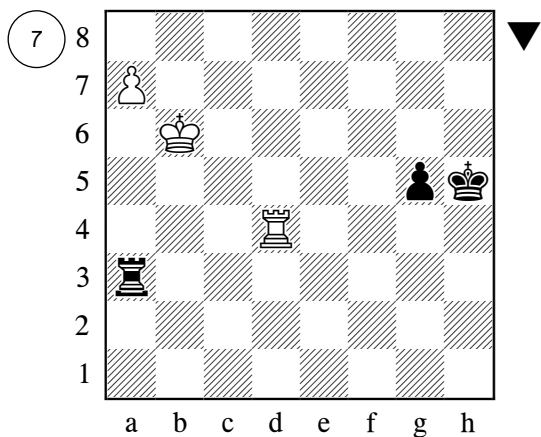
Adhiban – Zverev, Samarkand (blitz) 2023

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6. Vugar Rasulov – Etienne Bacrot, Internet 2023, *Anticipation*

48...♔g7? was a horrible mistake that allowed the white rook to relocate, so it could be both behind its own pawn (or on an adjacent file, covering for the king), while keeping an eye on the b2-pawn. 49.♖g4† ♔h7 50.♖g2 ♔h6 51.♖e2 ♔h7 52.♔e8 ♔h8 53.e7 ♔h7 54.♖d2 ♔g7 55.♔d8 ♖d1 56.♖xd1 1–0

48...♔h7! 49.♖b5 ♔h6! 50.h5 ♔h7 White cannot make progress, for instance: **51.♔e8 ♖e1** But even if White were given a free tempo for e6-e7, the position would still be a draw.

7. Arnaud Jossien – Nicolas Brunner, Chartres 2023, *Rook vs pawns*

53...♖a1? simply loses a tempo. 54.♖d8 ♔g4 Attempting to apply shouldering. 55.a8=♕ ♖xa8 56.♖xa8 ♔f3 57.♔c5? A basic mistake, allowing Black to get away with the previous error. (White should win a tempo with 57.♖f8†! ♔e3 58.♖g8 ♔f4 followed by 59.♔c5 g4 60.♔d4 ♔f3 61.♔d3 g3 62.♖f8† winning.) 57...g4 58.♔d4 g3 59.♖a3† ♔f2 60.♔e4 g2 61.♖a2† ♔g3 62.♖xg2† ½–½

Black will soon need to give up the rook for White's a-pawn, leading to a race on the kingside. In such cases, the general assumption is that the player with the advantage (White, in this case) will prefer to capture the enemy rook using their own rook, so that the king will not be lured too far away from the squares it needs to reach to halt the enemy pawn. The white rook, on the other hand, will be happy to swiftly swing around, especially if it includes getting behind Black's passed pawn.

Thus, the solution is not too surprising. **53...♖xa7!** You do not need to calculate anything; the logic is undeniable. The white rook is misplaced on d4, and will have to spend a tempo going to the eighth rank anyway. So, nothing is lost there. But it only costs Black one tempo to sacrifice the rook on a7 (compared to waiting for White to prepare promotion on a8), whereas the white king will lose two tempos: one to collect the rook on a7, and the second returning to b6. **54.♔xa7 g4 55.♔b6 g3** With an imminent draw.

8. Rasmus Svane – Levan Pantsulaia, Almaty (blitz) 2022, *The rook belongs behind the passed pawn*

41.b4? allowed Black to get behind the more dangerous passed pawn. After 41...♖a2 42.♖b6 h5 Black was fine. The game was drawn on move 70.

**41.♖b4!** followed by ♖a4 would have won the game easily.

9. Adhiban Baskaran – Lev Zverev, Samarkand (blitz) 2023, *Shouldering*

56...♔c4? not only missed the shouldering opportunity, but also left the king blocking the c-pawn. 57.♖d8 c5 58.g8=♕† ♖xg8 59.♖xg8 ♔d4 60.♖g4† ♔d3 61.♔e5 c4 62.♖g3† 1–0

56...♔e4! Elementary shouldering. Black is anticipating losing the rook for the g-pawn and the ensuring rook versus pawn endgame. **57.♖d8 c5 58.g8=♕ ♖xg8 59.♖xg8 c4** Black has reached a textbook draw.
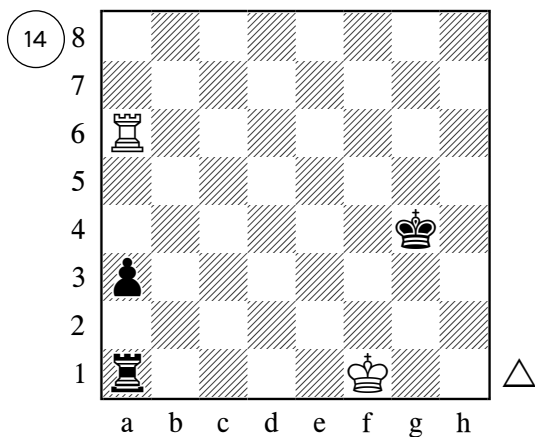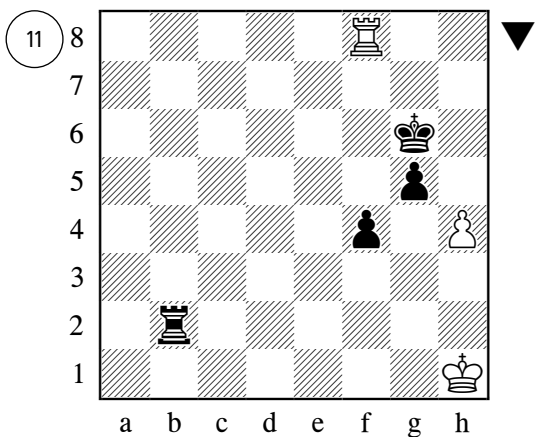
Van Foreest – Hovhannisyan, Warsaw (blitz) 2021
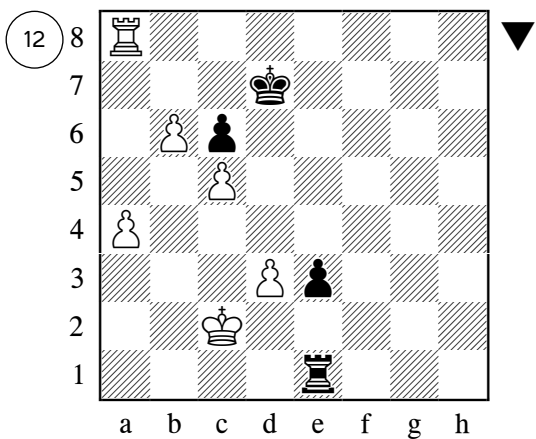
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Schnepp – Pilshofer, Vienna 2022

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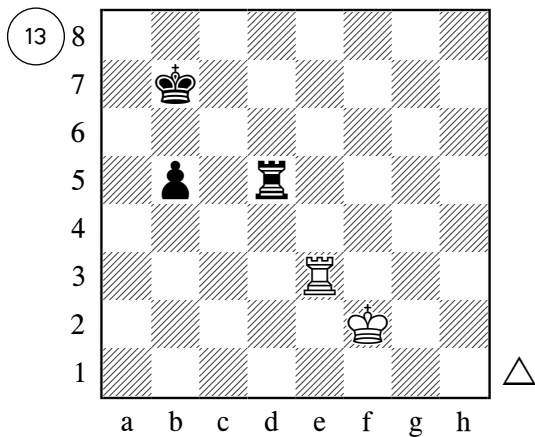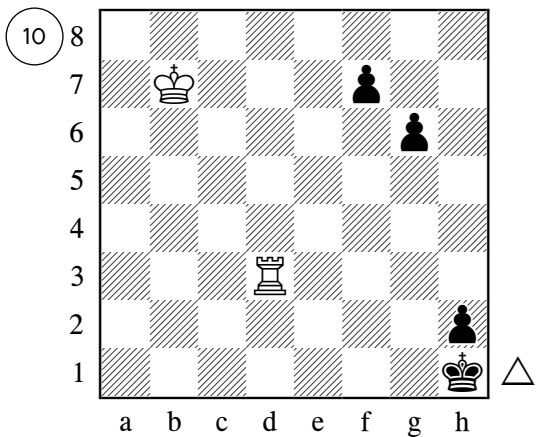
Gomez Barrera – Francisco Guecamburu, Baku 2023

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Zelcic – Amin, Germany 2024

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Pranav V. – Asadli, Internet 2023

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10. Jorden van Foreest – Robert Hovhannisyan, Warsaw (blitz) 2021, *Theoretical positions*
53.♖g3? loses to a cute trick, which is worth memorizing: 53...f5 54.♖xg6 f4 55.♖f6 f3! White cannot prevent Black from getting a queen. Black won on move 81.

   53.♔c6? f5 54.♔d5 ♔g2 also wins for Black, after some complications.

   53.♖d1†! Black will find it impossible to hide from the checks, without displacing the king to such an extent as to allow White to win the h-pawn and bring the king back in time to avoid losing. **53...♔g2 54.♖d2† ♔g3 55.♖d3† ♔f4 56.♖d4† ♔e3** It makes more sense to go here than h6, even though White would need an extra tempo to pick up the h2-pawn. **57.♖h4 g5 58.♖xh2 g4 59.♖h7 f5 60.♖g7 ♔f3 61.♔c6** White is in time to make the draw.

11. Javiera Belen Gomez Barrera – Candela Be Francisco Guecamburu, Baku 2023, *The umbrella*
Black wins by bringing in the king. **79...♔h5! 80.hxg5 ♔g4!** Using the g-pawn as an umbrella. Somehow Black played 80...♔xg5?? when 81.♖g8† ♔f5 82.♖g1 made Black realize that agreeing a draw was reasonable. ½–½ **81.♔g1 ♔g3 82.♔f1 f3** White can only resign.

12. Pranav Venkatesh – Vugar Asadli, Internet 2023, *The rook belongs behind the passed pawn*
The game's 47...♖a1? was horrible, and led to immediate disaster after: 48.b7 e2 49.♖d8† (The most natural, although 49.b8=♕!? ♖c1† 50.♔b2 ♖b1† 51.♔xb1 also works.) 49...♔e7 50.♖e8† ♔f7 51.♖xe2 1–0

   47...♖b1! In online rapid, it is easy to miss such resources. **48.♖a7†** The repetition is the most natural draw. 48.♔xb1 e2 49.b7 e1=♕† also leads to a draw, as long White does not allow ...♕b4†. **48...♔e6 49.♖a8 ♔d7** With a draw.

13. Gunnar Schnepp – Paul Pilshofer, Vienna 2022, *Cutting off the king*
67.♔e2? is a move, like so many others in this book, which looks natural enough, but fails to appreciate the underlying mechanics of how these positions work. The decision may be, also like so many others, a result of time pressure. Now **67...♔b6!** was the winning move. It is important for the black king to be able to go to a5, as well as c5. 67...♔c6? was played in the game, which continues in Exercise 45.

   Cutting off the black king would have secured the draw: **67.♖e6! b4** Or 67...♖c5 68.♔e3 ♖c6 69.♖xc6! ♔xc6 70.♔d3 with a draw. **68.♔e3 b3 69.♖h6** White is ready to reroute the rook to b1, forcing the black rook to let the white king approach the b-pawn.


14. Robert Zelcic – Bassem Amin, Germany 2024, *Theoretical positions*
61.♔f2? loses by a tempo: 61...♔f4 62.♖a4† (62.♔g2 ♔e4 and White is unable to put up the Vancura Defence.) 62...♔e5 63.♖c4 a2 64.♖a4 ♖h1! Black wins.

   61.♔g2! The king has to defend against ...♖h1 ideas. **61...♔f4 62.♖a4† ♔e3** The greater test. After 62...♔e5 63.♖c4 ♖b1 64.♖a4 ♖b2† 65.♔f3 a2 66.♔e3 White is easily in time. **63.♖h4!** 63.♖g4? ♖a2† **63...♔d2** 63...♖a2† 64.♔g1 and White would have the ♖h3† resource, and draw. **64.♖h3 ♔c2 65.♖f3!** White is in time to achieve the Vancura setup.
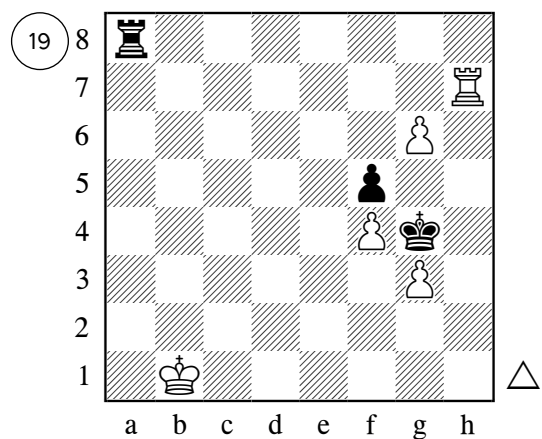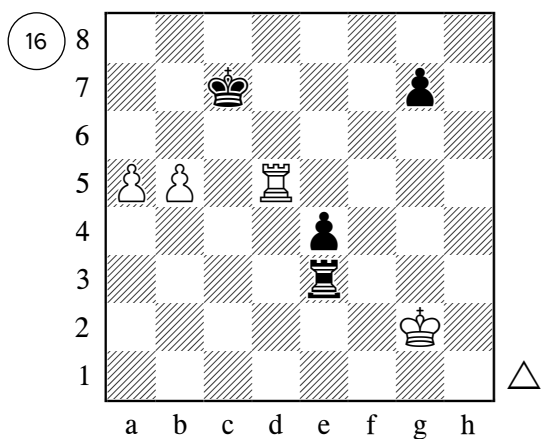
Davtyan – Vestby-Ellingsen, Cala Gonone 2022
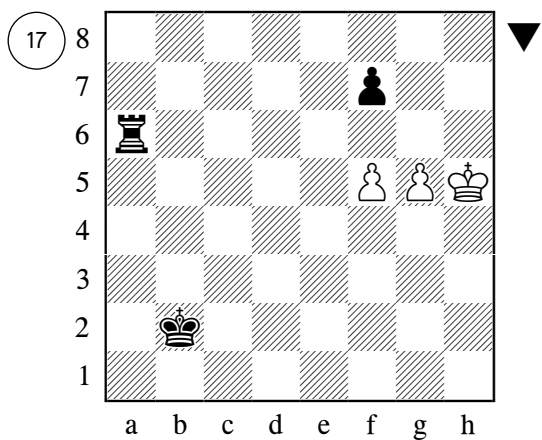
Burnett – Munshi, Dunfermline 2024
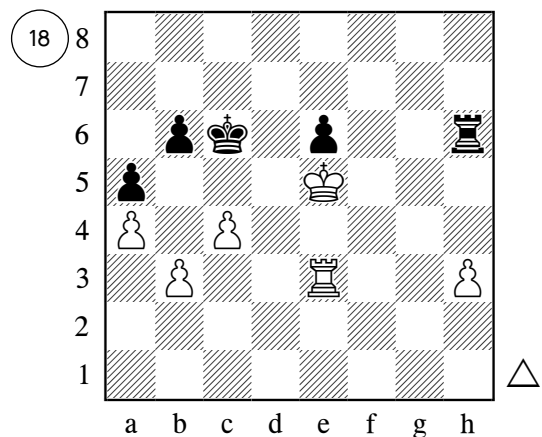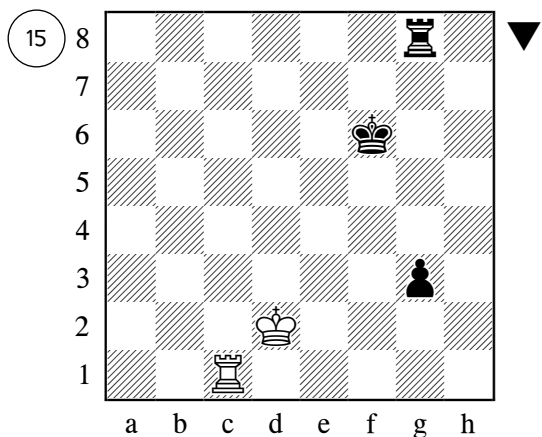
Keinanen – Milovic, Budva 2023

Dong Bao Nghia – Volovich, Leicester 2023

Gacek – Klim, Warsaw 2024

15. Artur Davtyan – Mads Vestby-Ellingsen, Cala Gonone 2022, *King activity*
It is clear that Black will not win without the inclusion of the king. In this case, it is important to get the pieces to properly cooperate. Since the rook will need to cut off the white king down the f-file, the black king belongs on the g-file. **73...♔g5! 74.♔e2 ♖f8 75.♖f1 ♖f4!** Black missed his big chance with: 75...♖e8†? 76.♔f3 ♖f8† 77.♔g2 ½–½ White is unable to bring the king to the defence. For example: **76.♖f3 ♔g4! 77.♖xf4† ♔xf4 78.♔e1 ♔e3! 79.♔f1 ♔f3 80.♔g1 g2** Black wins.

16. Anastasia Keinanen – Aleksandra Milovic, Budva 2023, *Promoting passed pawns*
The game ended in a draw after: 47.♖g5? ♖a3 48.♖xg7† ♔b8 49.a6 ♖a5 ½–½ White will be unable to make progress. Still, I might have played a few more moves before agreeing to the point-splitting. 50.♖b7† ♔a8! The stalemate defence is needed. 51.♔f2 e3†!? 52.♔f3 e2 53.♔xe2 ♖xa6! 54.bxa6 Stalemate.

   47.b6†! White wins with a simple promotion tactic. **47...♔c6** 47...♔b7 48.♖d7† makes things simpler. **48.♖b5!! ♔xb5 49.b7 ♔xa5 50.b8=♕** Black does not have any fortresses available. Winning with queen versus rook is not entirely easy. I have seen strong IMs make no progress against the third-rank defence. The position is clearly winning though, and there was no other winning option available.

17. Waldemar Gacek – Filip Klim, Warsaw 2024, *Rook vs pawns*
The game ended in a draw after: 62...♖a1? 63.♔h6 ♖a5 64.f6! ♔c3 65.g6 fxg6 66.♔xg6 ♔d4 67.f7 ♖a8 68.♔g7 ½–½

   To win with rook against one or more pawns, you need to bring the king back as quickly as possible. Often material is a smaller part of the equation. **62...♔c3! 63.g6 ♔d4!** The key move. 63...fxg6†? 64.fxg6 ♔d4 65.g7 ♖a8 66.♔g6 and White makes the draw. **64.gxf7** 64.♔h6 f6 and Black soon wins the pawn ending. 64.g7 ♖a8 is also hopeless for White. **64...♖f6 65.♔g5 ♔e5** Black wins both pawns.

18. Andrew Burnett – Aryan Munshi, Dunfermline 2024, *Promoting passed pawns*
44.♖d3? would simply waste a tempo. Black improves his position with 44...♔c5 where something like 45.♔f4 ♖h8 46.♔g5 e5! gives sufficient counterplay.

   44.♔f4! To win the game, White must bring the king to support the h-pawn. **44...♔d6 45.♔g5 ♖h8 46.h4** White won smoothly. **46...♖g8†** 46...e5 47.h5 ♔e6 would have offered more resistance, although White should still win. **47.♔f6 ♖h8 48.♖xe6† ♔c5 49.♖e5† ♔b4 50.♖b5† ♔c3 51.h5 ♔d4 1–0**

19. Dong Bao Nghia – Julia Volovich, Leicester 2023, *Anticipation*
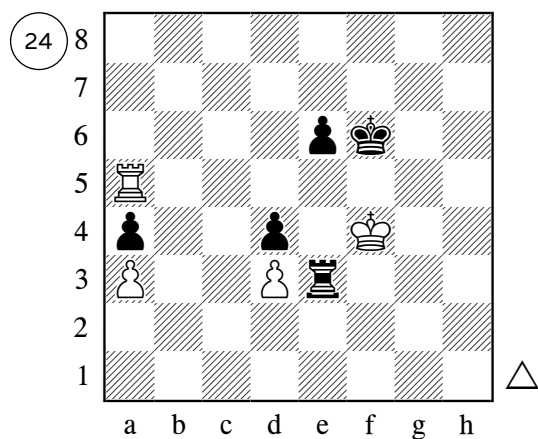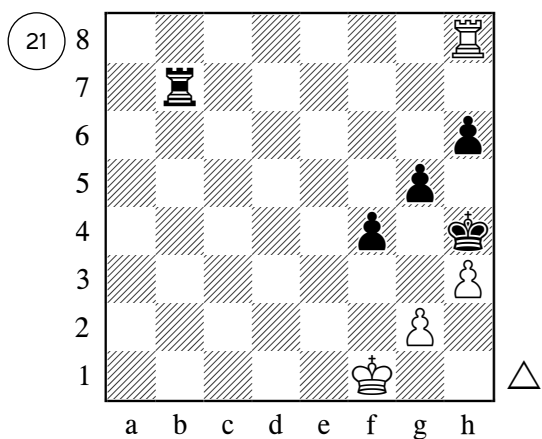**50.♖f7!** Black resigned. **50...♖g8 51.g7 ♔xg3 52.♖xf5 ♖xg7 53.♖g5†** is the important variation.

Kollars – Hossain, Baku 2023
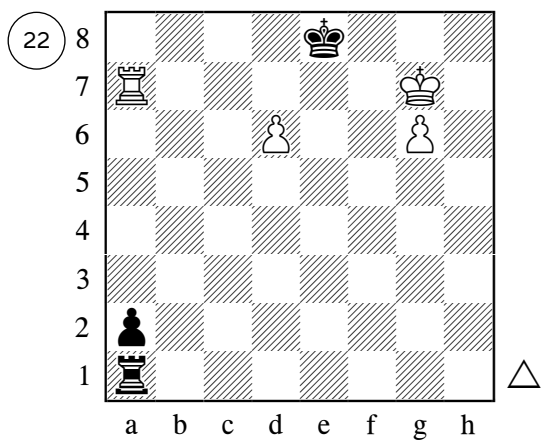
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Mitrabha – Garg, Nashik (rapid) 2024

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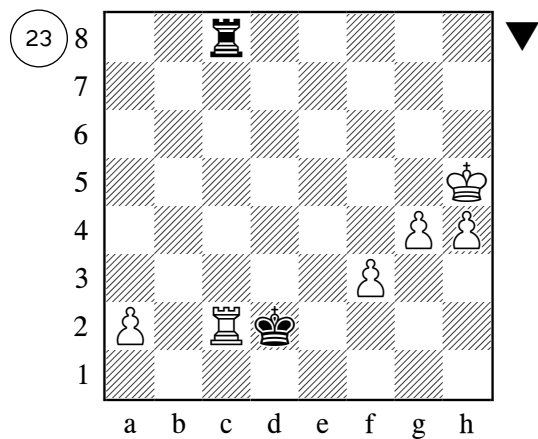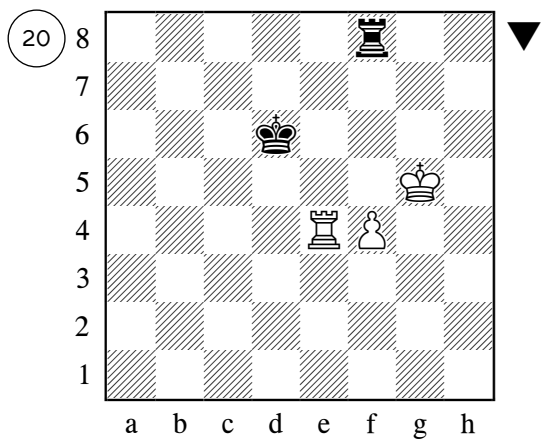
Prusikin – Donchenko, Rosenheim 2023

(21) △

De Balmann – Degraeve, Chartres 2024

(24) △

Macovei – Schitco, Charlotte 2022

(22) △

20. Dmitrij Kollars – Enamul Hossain, Baku 2023, *Defence from the front*
89...♖g8†? lost quickly. 90.♔f6 ♔d5 91.♖e5† ♔d4 92.♖a5 The black king is cut off. 92...♖f8†
93.♔g5 ♖g8† 94.♔h6 ♔e4 95.f5 ♖h8† 96.♔g7 ♖h1 97.f6 ♖g1† 98.♔f8 ♔d4 99.f7 ♖g2 100.♔e7
♖e2† 101.♔f6 1–0

   89...♔d5! is an important move to understand. **90.♖e1** 90.♖e5† gets nowhere after 90...♔d6
when White finds it impossible to advance the f-pawn. After the text move, Black will be able to
execute his main drawing idea: **90...♖g8† 91.♔h6 ♖f8!** White is unable to make progress against
the frontal defence.

21. Michael Prusikin – Alexander Donchenko, Rosenheim 2023, *King activity*
54.♔f2! 54.♖xh6†? restored material equality but allowed the black king to become too active:
54...♔g3 55.♖g6 ♖b1† 56.♔e2 ♖b2† 57.♔f1 ♖f2† 58.♔e1 ♖xg2 59.♖xg5† ♔f3! Material is
equal, but White is totally lost. 60.h4 ♖h2 61.h5 ♖h1† 62.♔d2 ♔f2 63.♔d3 f3 64.♔d2 ♔f1
65.♔e3 f2 66.♖f5 ♖h3† 67.♔f4 ♔g2 0–1 **54...♖b2† 55.♔f3 h5 56.♖h7** White holds easily.

22. Andrei Macovei – Ivan Schitco, Charlotte 2022, *Promoting passed pawns*
White wins by relocating the rook to being behind the white pawns, while still keeping an eye on
the black pawn, as well as shielding the white king. The rook is happiest when it performs many
functions at the same time. **66.♖e7† ♔d8 67.♖e2!** The game continued: 67.♖a7?! ♔e8 68.♖a8†?
(68.♖e7†! wins as in the main line.) 68...♔d7 69.♖a6 ♔d8? (69...♔e8! 70.♖a7 ♔d8 guarantees
a draw by placing White in zugzwang.) 70.♖a7 ♔e8 The players agreed a draw, even though our
initial position has been reached, where White has a winning continuation. **67...♔d7 68.♖f2!?**
68.♖d2 ♔d8 69.d7 is the more natural winning continuation, placing Black in zugzwang.
68...♔xd6 69.♔f7 White wins. Black has to give up the a-pawn just to delay the queening of the
white pawn by a few moves.

23. Guha Mitrabha – Aradhya Garg, Nashik (rapid) 2024, *The rook belongs behind the passed pawn*
49...♔xc2? was a losing mistake. 50.g5 ♔d3 51.g6 ♔e3 52.g7 ♔xf3 53.♔g5 ♖c5† 54.♔g6 ♖c6†
55.♔h7 ♖c7 56.a4 ♖a7 57.h5 ♔g4 58.♔h8 ♔xh5 59.g8=♕ White soon won.

   49...♖xc2! You should almost always take with the rook in this type of situation. The rook
will be most effective behind the pawns, while the king needs to remain as close as possible to
the action. **50.g5 ♔e3 51.g6 ♔xf3** 51...♖xa2? would waste time on an unimportant pawn.
52.g7 ♖a8 53.♔g6 ♔xf3 54.h5 ♔g4 55.h6 ♖a6† 56.♔f7 ♖a7† 57.♔e6 and White gets a queen.
52.♔h6 ♖xa2 Black is easily in time to make the draw.

24. Marc De Balmann – Remy Degraeve, Chartres 2024, *Stalemate*
White lost quickly after: 49.♖xa4? e5† 50.♔g4 ♖xd3 0–1

   49.♖f5†! was the drawing move. **49...♔e7** 49...exf5 with stalemate determined the category,
although it also fits in Check the checks! **50.♖a5 ♔d6** 50...♔f6 51.♖f5† repeats. 50...♖xd3
51.♖xa4 followed by ♔e4 would have made the draw. **51.♖a6†! ♔c5 52.♖a5†!** 52.♖xa4? ♖xd3
53.♖a5† ♔c4 would win for Black. **52...♔c6 53.♖xa4 e5† 54.♔f5** White makes a draw.