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Mastering basic rook endgames



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Mastering basic rook endgames
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Key to symbols	5
Introduction.....	7
Editorial preface.....	11
Chapter 1. Rook against pawns	13
Chapter 2. Basic Endings: Rooks with one pawn.....	43
Chapter 3. Useful manoeuvres.....	59
Chapter 4. Technical problems with the edge pawn.....	71
Chapter 5. Rook against two pawns.....	93
Chapter 6. Methods.....	117
Chapter 7. Activity of the pieces: The multifunctional rook	139
Chapter 8. Placement of the Rooks.....	159
Chapter 9. Exploitation of the weakness.....	167
Chapter 10. Different tactics	179
Chapter 11. Stalemate.....	193
Chapter 12. Zugzwang.....	201
Chapter 13. Transition into pawn endings.....	205
Chapter 14. Transition into rook endings.....	219
Chapter 15. Mistakes	231

KEY TO SYMBOLS

=	Equality or equal chances
±	White has a slight advantage
∓	Black has a slight advantage
±	White is better
∓	Black is better
+ -	White has a decisive advantage
- +	Black has a decisive advantage
∞	unclear
∞̄	with compensation
↔	with counterplay
↑	with initiative
→	with an attack
Δ	with the idea
□	only move
N	novelty
!	a good move
!!	an excellent move
?	a weak move
??	a blunder
!?	an interesting move
?!	a dubious move
+	check
#	mate

INTRODUCTION

Everybody knows that rook endings are the most frequently seen among all endgames. In fact, we can say that more than 60% of all endings are rook endings, and the reason is simple: rooks generally enter the game much later than other pieces.

In endgames we have two kinds of positions:

1. Theoretical or basic positions, which we must study from the basic books. This knowledge is essential; we simply must know them well. Of course, at different stages players have to know different amounts of basic positions. Let's say that in the early years it is enough to know the Philidor position and basic rook against pawn positions. Then, every year a player has to constantly add new material to his knowledge;
2. Complicated positions, from which we have to 'transfer' into basic positions using different methods such as exchanges, improvement of the king, using the power of the passed pawns and so on.

'Basics of Rook Endgames' is a useful book, as I'll try here to show the necessary mixture of basic positions and different important manoeuvres which are typical for rook endings.

We have a few great masters of rook endings to help us, in particular the likes of Akiba Rubinstein and Vasily Smyslov. Throughout chess history many top specialists have developed the theory of rook endings — the great Lucena, Philidor and Tarrasch, for example, all contributed to the 'basic' work. In the 20th Century, the specialists Andre Cheron, Nikolay Grigoryev and Nikolay Kopaev all made crucial researches to further their predecessors' work. And this work is not yet complete — we can mention great analyses of the most typical endings with 3 pawns against 3 on one flank, plus one passed pawn on the other side.

In this series it is planned to publish a few other books on rook endings. There will be more detailed analyses of rook endings with different pawn configurations, where we have special methods of both realization of the win, and

fighting for a draw. In our opinion, extremely interesting will be the book on the ‘Top Rook Ending Specialists’ best achievements. And the final book will be a selection of Great Rook Studies, which will include rook ending tests.

There have been some excellent books published on rook endgames already, the classic Smyslov & Levenfish book for example, or Kopaev’s book in the Averbakh series, and more recently Dvoretzky’s books. Plus we have the Encyclopaedia of Endgames, where rook endings are selected and divided scientifically.

So, here we will try not to repeat most of the material from other books, and instead try to concentrate on basic and practical knowledge. And we will try sometimes to entertain the reader with unusual and brilliant solutions. In this first book we will attempt to give the reader the basic ideas required to play rook endgames and also introduce the most classical methods of play.

But, there were a lot of mistakes committed even in the ‘classics’! And these mistakes are extremely instructive, as it is necessary to understand the difference between right and wrong decisions. In endgames we usually have two ways — correct and incorrect, and this is the main difference between the endgame and the middlegame.

The main idea of our book was to produce some sort of practical guide to rook endings, including some necessary basic knowledge. We want to stress that with basic positions, we don’t study all of them at the same time. In the first year or so, trainers usually just teach the Philidor method plus a few important positions with a single pawn, especially with rook-pawns (a- and h-pawns) as well as pawns on the fifth or sixth ranks. By the second year pupils have to know the Lucena position, as well as some rook against pawns manoeuvres. Then they have to study different methods, and especially activity. So, in practice just step-by-step, as it would be useless to study all the basic positions at the same time; it is necessary to study them on demand. And the most complicated methods, such as the Vancura method, can be studied by players around 1800 Elo strength.

I have to say that players don’t study endgames very well, because trainers don’t teach the endgame properly! It’s not just that they don’t care about the step-by-step method. As we know from school, from time-to-time it is necessary to refresh our knowledge and to repeat certain more difficult positions. However, players just endlessly repeat opening variations, leaving the endgame out completely — and this is punished terribly by the modern, shortened time

control, when players usually have just 30 seconds for a move come the endgame. The sheer quantity of mistakes, even among grandmasters, is constantly increasing — proportional to the smaller amount of time which players spend on studying the endgame books.

EDITORIAL PREFACE

In this series of eight endgame books, FIDE Senior Trainer Adrian Mikhalchishin, FIDE Senior Trainer Efstratios Grivas and IGM Csaba Balogh combine their experience as trainers and as practical players to create something very special.

The authors aim for very understandable explanations of every endgame position in each book.

The specification:

- ◆ 1st book — Queen and pawn endgames.
- ◆ 2–3 — Minor piece endgames (bishop and knight endgames).
- ◆ 4–5 — These will feature the fight between different material constellations.
- ◆ 6–8 — These books are going to focus on the most common endgames, which are of course rook endings.

The main concept of each book is to provide theoretical knowledge which can be used in practical games. It means the focus of the books will be on those positions which are most likely to occur — and the practical playing of them.

That's why you will firstly meet the theoretical part, and secondly the practical examples of how games actually continued in a particular endgame.

Yes, you're right, you won't find too many very complicated studies, stunning manoeuvres or rarely-appearing positions — and there is a simple reason why not!

How often do we see positions, for example two knights vs pawn where one knight is blocking the pawn and the other one tries to get the king to the corner before releasing the second knight for the mate? Or constellations with crazy material on the board? This might happen in one game out of 100! You could spend hundreds of hours working on something that might bring you “only” a single point more out of 100 games!

Our approach is quite different: let's make more points in the other 99 games! And who knows, we might also be lucky in the remaining one, but actually, statistically, it would almost not matter.

“The Modern Endgame Manual” will make an expert out of you in most of the endgames which are going to appear in your long career as a chess player!

CHAPTER 1

ROOK AGAINST PAWNS

To start talking about rook endings we must consider endgames where only one rook is on the board. The most typical rook endings are those with one passed pawn somewhere and an equal amount of pawns on the other flank. The stronger side tries to promote the passed pawn and sacrifices all the other pawns. He usually succeeds in promoting, and wins the opponent's rook, but during this time the opponent starts running with his own pawn or pawns. These endgames are very interesting and also extremely tricky.

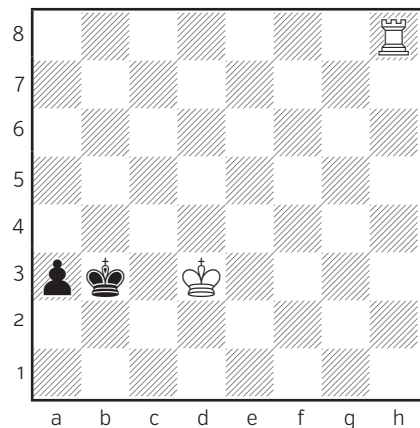
There are a few basic theoretical positions which everybody has to know. In these endings the basic positions are achieved after a few moves but still matters are not so easy or obvious, as we will see from the practical games in this book. The most important feature of this kind of endgame is the fight between the kings, and the so-called 'bodycheck' method. We can say that this method comes from pawn endings, and we can even find triangulations here among the rook endings. The most important approach to fighting in such instances is the route of the king around for-

bidden squares; those which are under the control of the opposing king.

1

Basic

The most basic things we must consider are positions with one pawn against rook. The side with the rook must try to bring his king as close to the pawn as possible and the rook usually tries to cut-off the opponent's king, if it is possible. The weaker side must try to escape these dangers and to use a few important basic ideas, such as stalemate.



1...♔b2!

Losing is 1...a2? resulting in a basic lost position 2. ♖b8+ ♔a3 3. ♕c2 a1♗+ 4. ♕c3 ♕a2 5. ♖b7 ♕a3 6. ♖a7#

2. ♖b8+

2. ♖h2+ ♕b3 (2... ♕c1?? 3. ♕c3)

2... ♕c1 3. ♖a8 ♕b2 4. ♕d2 a2 5. ♖b8+ ♕a1!

Stalemate is the 'classical' defence here.

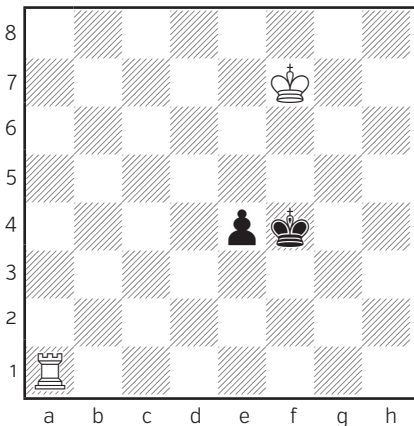
A loss results from entering the previously-seen basic

position: 5... ♕a3? 6. ♕c2 a1♗+ 7. ♕c3 ♕a2 8. ♖b7

6. ♕c2 1/2

2

M. Euwe, 1934



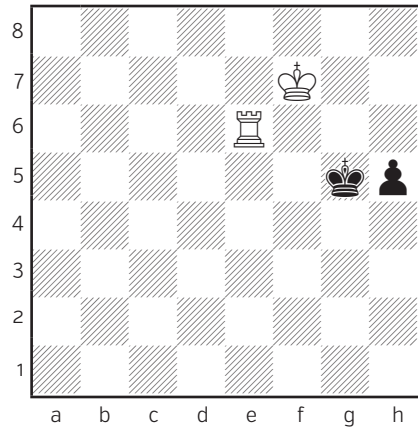
Here the king must run around the black king and pawn to avoid being

bodychecked. This manoeuvre of one king blocking the other's approach is known by the ice hockey term BODY-CHECK.

1. ♕e6! e3 2. ♕d5 e2 3. ♕d4 ♕f3 4. ♕d3 ♕f2 5. ♕d2 1-0

3

M. Euwe, 1934



Here White must establish coordination and cooperation between his king and rook to chase down the black king and pawn.

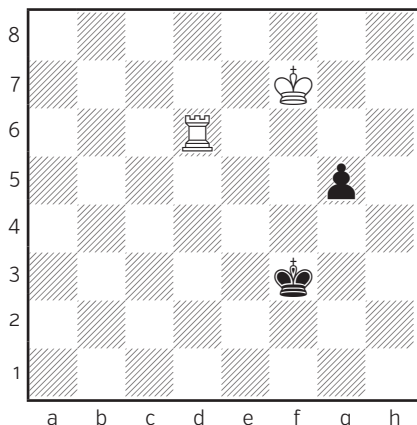
1. ♖e5+ ♕g4 2. ♕g6 h4 3. ♖e4+ ♕g3 4. ♕g5 h3 5. ♖e3+ ♕g2 6. ♕g4 h2 7. ♖e2+ ♕g1 8. ♕g3 h1♗+ 9. ♕f3

Once again we reach the now-known basic position.

1-0

4

M. Euwe, Shakhmaty, 1934



1. ♖f6+!

A very important and typical check, which forces the opponent's king backwards and allows our own king to win enough time to come around the pawn.

Wrong was 1. ♔g6 g4 2. ♔h5 g3 3. ♔h4 g2 4. ♖f6+ ♔e2 5. ♖g6 ♔f2

1... ♔e3 2. ♖g6 ♔f4 3. ♔g7!

The king can enter the game only on the very narrow path of the h-file, once more avoiding the 'bodycheck' zone on the other side of the pawn.

3... g4 4. ♔h6 g3 5. ♔h5 ♔f3 6. ♔h4 g2 7. ♔h3 1-0

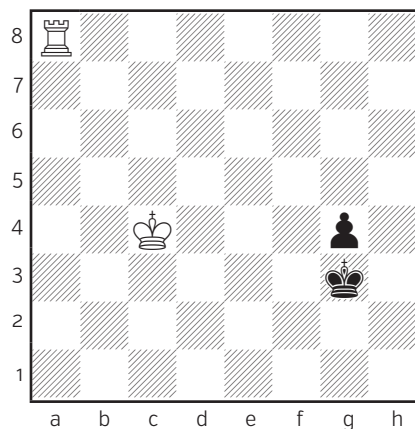
5

▷ V. Korchnoi

▶ E. Kengis

Bern, 1996

Now let us demonstrate how these basic positions are achieved in grand-master's games.



1... ♔f2 2. ♖f8+!

Again the check is a very important tool, winning a tempo to come closer with the king.

Leading only to a draw was 2. ♔d3? g3 3. ♖f8+ ♔e1=

2... ♔e2 3. ♖g8 ♔f3 4. ♔d3 g3 5. ♖f8+ ♔g2 6. ♔e2 ♔h2 7. ♔f3

A quicker win was 7. ♖g8 g2 8. ♔f2 ♔h1 9. ♖h8#

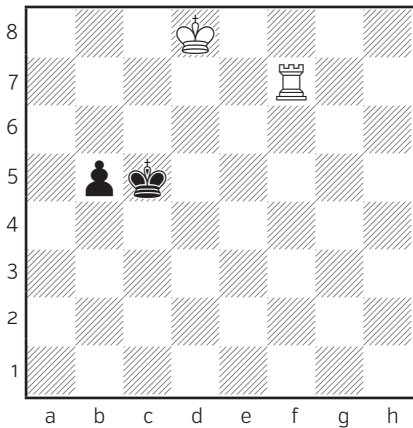
7... g2 8. ♖h8+ ♔g1 9. ♖g8 ♔h1 10. ♔f2!

Avoiding the stalemate option of
10. ♖xg2??

10... ♔h2 11. ♖xg2+ 1-0

6

M. Botvinnik, 1941



The main problem in such endings is finding a way for the king to help in the fight against the passed pawn.

1. ♖b7! b4 2. ♔c7

Now, because of the zugzwang, Black must allow the white king to come around the pawn, thereby avoiding the bodycheck defence.

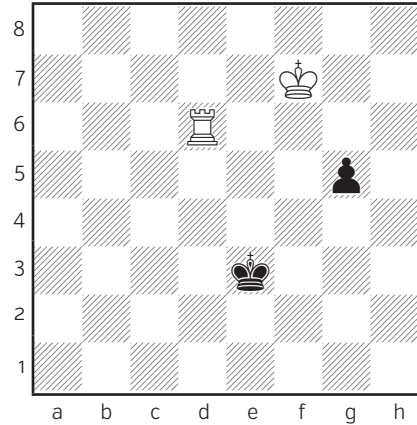
2... ♔c4 3. ♔b6

White successfully completed the mission and catches the pawn.

3... b3 4. ♔a5 ♔c3 5. ♔a4 b2 6. ♔a3
1-0

7

A. Eisenstadt, 1950



1. ♖g6!

Once more showing how important it is to turn the opponent's king back.

1... ♔f4 2. ♔g7!

To avoid the bodycheck it is necessary to choose a very long road. After this move the rest is easy.

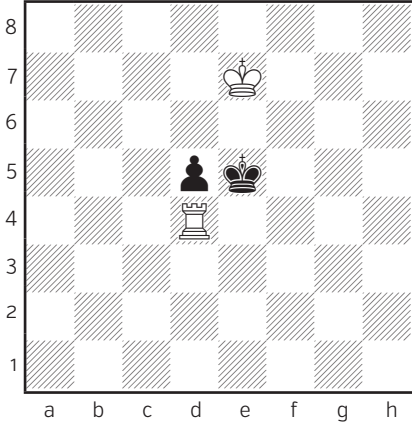
2... g4 3. ♔h6 g3 4. ♔h5 ♔f3 5. ♔h4
g2 6. ♔h3

and the pawn is finally caught.

1-0

8

R. Reti, 1928



Here it is necessary to see where Black's king will go, and then White's king will choose whichever route avoids the bodycheck.

1. ♖d2!

It was also possible to do it slightly differently: 1. ♖d3 d4 2. ♖d1.

1...d4 2. ♖d1!

White creates a decisive zugzwang.

2...♙e4

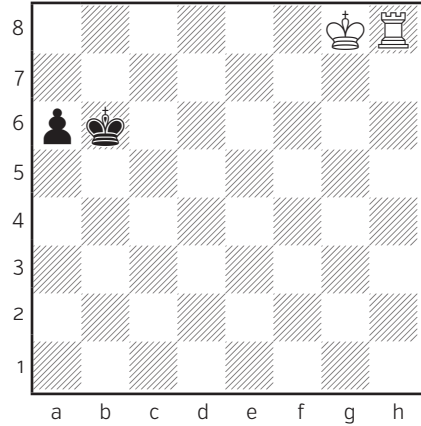
Heading to the other side does not work either:

2...♙d5 3. ♙d7 ♙c4 4. ♙e6 d3 5. ♙e5 ♙c3 6. ♙e4 d2 7. ♙e3

3. ♙d6+- 1-0

9

Basic



The main defensive idea is to avoid a bodycheck by the opponent's king, and also to avoid being cut-off by the rook!

1...♙c5

1...a5 2. ♖h5! The classical 'cutting' of the king:

1...♙b5 2. ♙f7 a5 3. ♙e6 a4 4. ♙d5 ♙b4 5. ♙d4 a3 6. ♖b8+ ♙a4 7. ♙c3

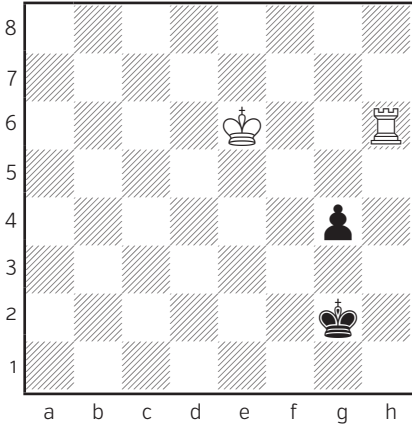
2. ♙f7 a5 3. ♙e6 a4 4. ♙e5 a3 5. ♖a8 ♙b4 6. ♙d4 ♙b3 7. ♙d3 ♙b2 8. ♖b8+

Stalemate helps out in the variation 8. ♙d2 a2 9. ♖b8+ ♙a1

8...♙c1! 9. ♙c3 a2 10. ♖a8 ♙b1 1/2

10

▷ A. Vaulin
 ▶ V. Gashimov
 Swidnica Open, 1999



70. ♖f5?

The only way to win was to prevent Black's king coming to the f-file:

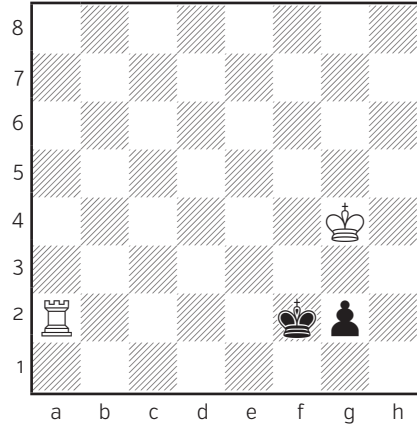
70. ♖f6!! g3 71. ♖e5 ♖h2 72. ♖f4 g2
 73. ♖h6+ ♖g1 74. ♖g3 ♖f1 75. ♖f6+
 ♖g1 76. ♖f8 ♖h1 77. ♖h8+ ♖g1
 78. ♖h2

70... ♖f3!

Bodycheck!

But not 70...g3?? 71. ♖g4 ♖f2 72. ♖f6+

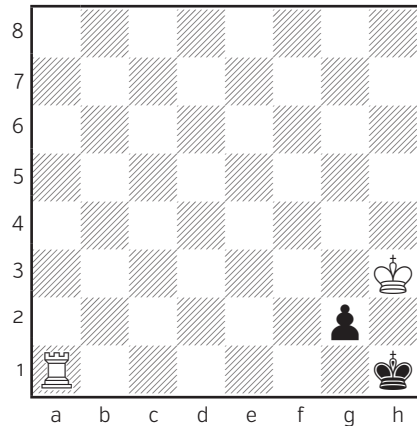
71. ♖a6 g3 72. ♖a3+ ♖f2 73. ♖g4 g2
 74. ♖a2+



74... ♖g1!

Gashimov correctly does not want to suffer the rook against knight ending: 74... ♖f1 75. ♖f3 g1 ♖+ 76. ♖e3 ♖h3 and instead correctly plays for stalemate.

75. ♖a6 ♖f2 76. ♖a2+ ♖g1 77. ♖h3
 ♖h1 78. ♖a1+

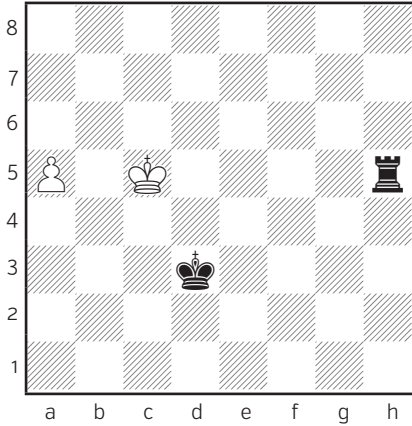


78. ♖xg2

78...g1 ♖ 79. ♖xg1+ 1/2

11

▷ Urmancheev
 ▶ Podolsky
 USSR, 1972



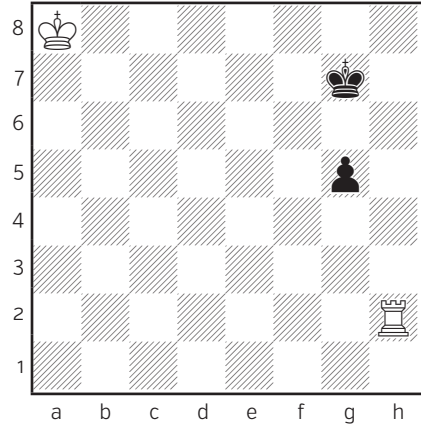
1. ♔b6?

Automatic... and wrong! This allows his opponent's king to come closer. The correct way was to block it with 1. ♔b4!! Blocking the Black King and winning time to advance his pawn. 1... ♕d4 2.a6 ♕d5 3.a7 ♖h8 4. ♔b5=

1... ♕c4 2.a6 ♖h6+ 3. ♔b7 ♔b5 4.a7 ♖h7+ 5. ♔b8 ♔b6 6.a8 ♗+ ♔c6 7. ♔c8 ♖h8# 0-1

12

▷ K. Lerner
 ▶ J. Dorfman
 Tashkent, 1980



The winning move is in reality a prophylactic — preventing the bodycheck from his opponent's king.

19. ♖f2!!

Wrong was immediately bringing the king back with 19. ♔b7 ♔f6 20. ♔c6 ♔e5! with bodycheck and a theoretical draw. (20...g4? 21. ♔d5 ♔f5 22. ♖f2+ ♔g5 23. ♔e4 g3 24. ♖f8) 21. ♖e2+ ♔f4 22. ♔d5 g4 23. ♔d4 g3 24. ♔d3 (24. ♖e8 g2) 24... ♔f3 25. ♖e8 g2

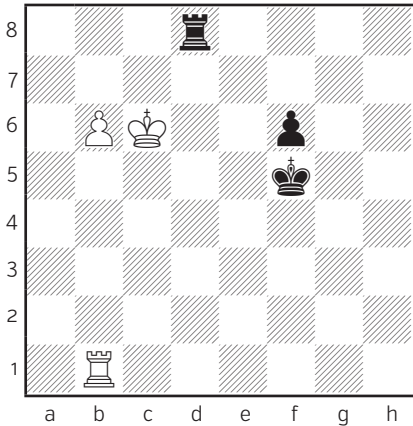
19... ♔g6 20. ♔b7 g4

Heading around the pawn is useless as White's king travels very quickly: 20... ♔h5 21. ♔c6 ♔h4 22. ♔d5 g4 23. ♖f8 g3 24. ♖g8 ♔h3 25. ♔e4 g2 26. ♔f3

21. ♖c6 ♔g5 22. ♖d5 g3 23. ♜f8 ♔g4
24. ♖e4 g2 25. ♜g8+ ♔h3 26. ♖f3 1-0

13

▷ A. Alekhine
▶ E. Bogoljubow
Wch-GER\NLD, 1929



Even the greats from the 'classics' did not perform the bodycheck correctly!

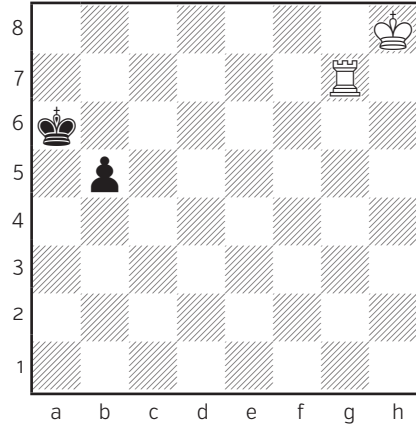
70... ♔g4?

The only drawing path was 70... ♔e4!
Black prepares for the bodycheck
71. b7 f5 72. b8 ♚ ♜xb8 73. ♜xb8 f4
74. ♜e8+ ♔d4 75. ♜f8 ♔e3 76. ♔d5 f3
77. ♖c4 f2 78. ♖c3 ♔e2=

71. b7 f5 72. b8 ♚ ♜xb8 73. ♜xb8 f4
74. ♔d5 f3 75. ♖e4 f2 76. ♜f8 ♔g3
77. ♖e3 1-0

14

▷ I. Sipos
▶ M. Stankovic
TCh-Hungary, 2017



55. ♜g5??

White had two winning options and one drawing approach; unfortunately he chose the last of these!

One route to victory was to perform a 'cutting' as we have seen previously:
55. ♜c7 ♔b6 56. ♜c8 b4 57. ♔g7 ♔b5
58. ♖f6 b3 59. ♖e5 ♔b4 60. ♔d4. The second was to start running with the king: 55. ♔h7 ♔a5 56. ♔g6 b4 57. ♖f5 ♔a4 58. ♖e4 b3 59. ♔d3 ♔a3 60. ♜b7 b2 61. ♖c2

55... ♔a5

After the huge mistake 55...b4?? Black's king will be cut off forever.