



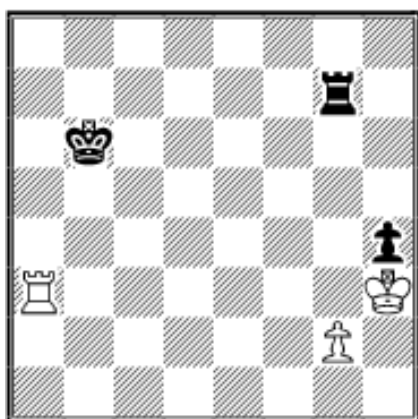
Control Work

The well-known Thompson Endgame database (popular known as the [Nalimov Tablebases](#)) is a great help in analyzing endgames. When there are no more than six pieces and pawns on the board, the computer instantly gives its evaluation of the position and any of your possible moves. The use of endgame tablebases has made our impressions of several theoretical endgames much more accurate, leading to new, interesting and instructive positions.

Some time ago, I gave a chess seminar in Arizona, USA, where one of the participants showed me an endgame he had played. After the class, I analyzed the endgame with the aid of my computer program, and saw that it contained some difficult and instructive tasks. In trying to solve them, a player can train his calculating technique, and also practice and expand his knowledge of rook endings.

As is usual in my publications, a question mark alongside the diagram means that the position is an exercise (whether easy or – in most cases – difficult) you should solve for yourself.

Casella – Anderson
Los Angeles, 2002



1.?

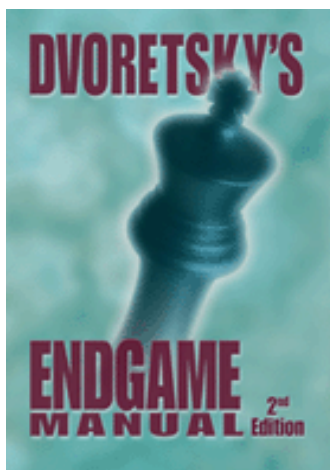
The h4-pawn will soon be lost. Black must defend by making use of the “head-on defense” (or the “frontal attack”). For those with a serious desire to brush up on their endgame mastery, I would recommend consulting the chapter on rook endgames in my [Endgame Manual](#); specifically, the section entitled, “The Pawn Hasn’t Crossed the Midline” (it’s only four and a half pages long). Without solid basic knowledge, you will find it hard to orient yourself in what follows.

On the other hand, even a good knowledge of theory is no guarantee of success when attempting to figure out a position over-the-board. There’s a great difference between “knowing” and “understanding.” It’s not enough to just soak up knowledge – it’s also important to train yourself in using that knowledge in a practical setting. Towards this end, honest trainers or book authors repeatedly

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present appropriate exercises.

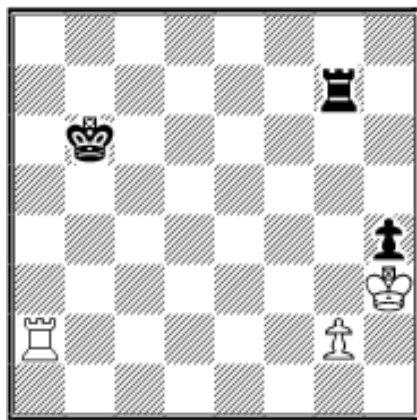
The complex of exercises contained in the endgame we are about to examine may be used as a “control task” for training in this area of rook endgames. I should add that these exercises are intended for high-rated players.

White has a choice to make among three possibilities:

- He can cut off the opposing king on the c-file by 57 Rc3;
- He can protect his pawn by 57 Ra2, threatening to take the h-pawn with his king;
- He can play 57 Ra4, intending to capture the pawn with his rook.

57 Rc3? is the easiest to dispose of: after 57...Kb5! (Black prevents White from attacking the pawn by Rc4) 58 Rc2 Rh7, I can't see how White can improve his position (the Rc2-f2-f4 maneuver involves a considerable loss of time, compared to the immediate attack on the pawn from our starting position).

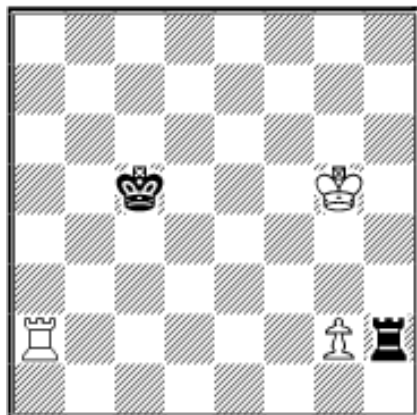
The only winning move is **57 Ra2!**



Now if 57...Rg8, the most exact move is 58 Rc2! (a **standard technique, cutting the king off along a file – it's important to keep the enemy king as far away from the pawn as possible**). Conversely, 58 Kxh4 doesn't throw the win away, either.

Here, as also in many other cases, I will omit the complex analysis needed to illustrate the computer's assessment of the position. We have no need to burden our text with a myriad of technical variations – especially when the reader can obtain them for himself, if he so desires, by consulting an [endgame database](#). We shall examine only the most important variations, discussing the ideas and techniques hidden therein.

57...Kc5 is hopeless: 58 Kxh4 Rh7+!? (58...Kd5 59 g4+–) 59 Kg5 Rh2 (59...Rg7+ 60 Kf5+–).



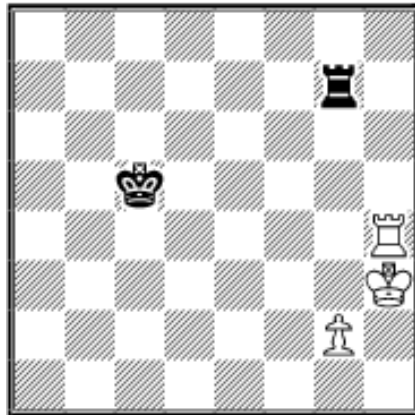
The g-pawn's advance may be secured in several different ways, such as: 60 Kf5 Kd6 61 Ra6+ Ke7 62 g4+–, or 60 Rf2 Kd4 61 Rf4 + Ke5 62 g4+–.

Here, it's a good idea to keep in mind the “Lucena position,” which White will be aiming for in this and in many other variations. **If you can keep the enemy king away from the squares in front of the knight's pawn, and get your own king**

there, usually the win is achieved without difficulty. Black's king prevents its own rook from bothering the opposing king from the flank. And the flank attack is in fact the main method of defense against a well-advanced passed pawn with its king beside it. With a central or a bishop's pawn, salvation is frequently achievable by placing the king on the "short side" and attacking with the rook from the "long side." You will find more on this subject in my [Endgame Manual](#), in the very first sections of the chapter on rook endings.

Black's most stubborn defense is **57...Rh7 58 Ra4 Kc6**

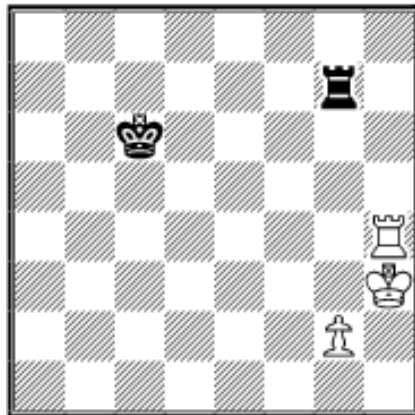
White's task would be easier after 58...Kc5 59 Rxb4 Rg7 (other rook retreats change nothing).



1.?

Cutting off the enemy king on a file is sometimes even more effective than cutting it off on a rank! Here the easiest path to our goal is 59 Rh6!, followed by 60 g4.

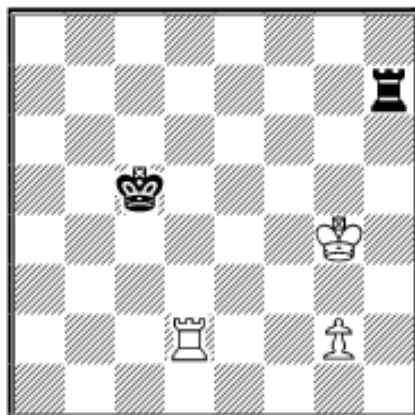
59 Rxb4 Rg7



60 Rd4! (cutting the king off on the rank)
60...Rh7+

After 60...Kc5, White's simplest approach is to return to the plan of cutting off on the file by 61 Rg4 Rh7+ 62 Rh4 Rg7 63 Rh6!+-.

61 Kg4 Kc5 62 Rd2



Here, 62...Rg7+ 63 Kf5 is useless for Black. The trickiest try would be **62...Rh8!?**. **The further the rook is from the enemy's pawn, the more chances of a successful frontal attack** (if it were Black's turn to move now, 63...Rg8+ would be a draw).

White in turn must bring the pawn closer to the enemy rook – if only by a little: the only winning move here is **63 g3!**; for example, 63...Rg8+ 64 Kf4 Rf8+ 65 Ke5 Re8+ 66 Kf6

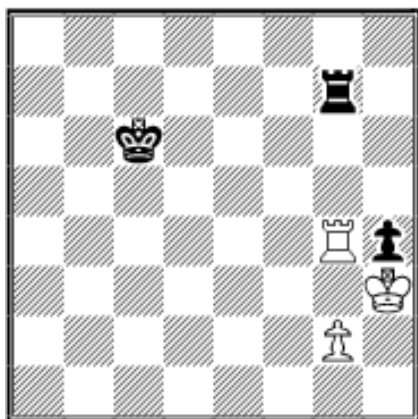
Rg8 67 Rg2!+-.

Of course, making this decision doesn't require the accurate calculation of all variations (nor would this be possible). It's enough to uncover the main lines, compare them with what would happen with a different try, and (with the understanding that one's analysis is not exhaustive and may contain errors) decide which path offers the best prospects.

57 Ra3-a4?

This was played in the game. Black has three replies, each sufficient to draw. Let's examine one of them.

57...Kc6!? 58 Rg4

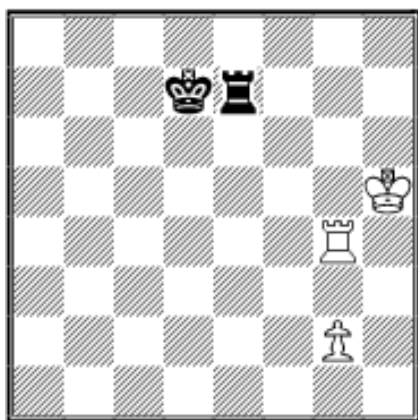


1...?

A rather difficult question: where should the rook retreat?

58...Ra7? is easily dismissed, owing to 59 Rg6+ Kd5 (the king cannot go to the seventh rank) 60 Kxh4+–, with a fatal horizontal cutoff of the enemy king. To prevent this, the rook must go either to e7 or to f7 – but which?

After 58...Re7? 59 Kxh4 Kd7, the only winning move is 60 Kh5!



60...Ke8 allows a decisive horizontal cutoff of the king by 61 Rf4, when the g-pawn marches swiftly forward. Meanwhile, 60 Kg5? Ke8! allows Black to save himself, since White no longer has 61 Rf4 Rg7+.

And on 60...Re2 61 Kg6 Ke7 62 Kg7!, Black's king is denied access to the saving corner, and after 62...Ke6, its mobility will be still further restricted by the rook: 63 Rg5!. There could follow 63...Ra2 64 g4 Rg2 65 Kh6 Rh2+ (65...Kf7 66 Rg7+! Kf8

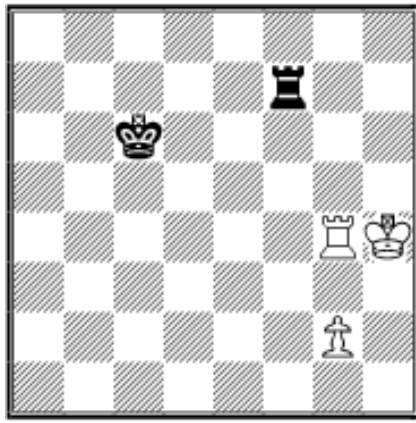
67 g5, followed by Ra7, Kg6 and Ra8+) 66 Rh5 Rg2 67 g5 Kf7 68 Rh1 (just not 68 Kh7? Rg1 =) 68...Kg8 69 Ra1+–, when the king is driven from its corner, leading to the winning Lucena position.

To gain the draw, Black must make two accurate moves in a row. We have already found the first of these through the method of exclusion.

58...Rf7!! 59 Kxh4



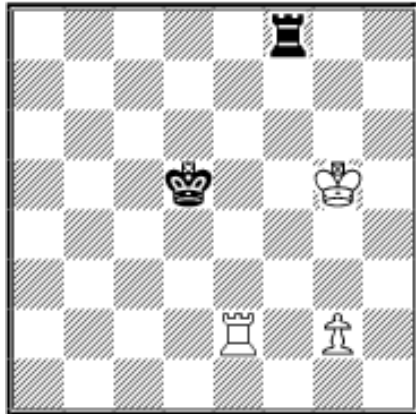
1...?



The king must be brought closer. We can rule out 59...Kd5?, because of 60 Rg6!+-. But making the correct choice between the two remaining moves is not the easiest of tasks.

It turns out that the “golden mean” is correct here. On 59...Kd7? 60 Kg5!, Black cannot save himself if White plays the best line; for example: 60...Rg7+ 61 Kh5 Rh7+ 62 Kg6 +- , or 60...Rf8 61 Kh6! Ke6 62 Rg7! Kf6 63

Kh7!+-, followed by g2-g4. The toughest line is 60...Ke6!? 61 Re4+! Kd5 62 Re2 Rf8!



1. ?

Black has resorted to a technique we have already seen, namely: maximizing the distance between his rook and the pawn. He sees that the careless 63 g4? Rg8+ leads to a well-known theoretically drawn position.

When a bishop's or a center pawn has reached the fourth rank, cutting off the black king two files away assures the win; with a knight's pawn; however, given the proper placement of Black's pieces (rook on the eighth, king at d5 or d6), it's a draw.

The only winning line is 63 Ra2! Rg8+ (everything else loses much more quickly) 64 Kf6+-. But I am unable to demonstrate the winning method here – it's far too complex. The computer gives a mate in 63!

So, how are we to see that **59...Kd6!** is the strongest move here in a practical game? By the comparison method! We need to see that it gives Black additional defensive resources that are not available after 59...Kd7.

Thus, on 60 Re4, Black has the attractive reply 60...Kd5 =. On the other hand, this isn't that important, since 60...Rh7+ is also sufficient to draw, regardless of whether the king is on d6 or d7.

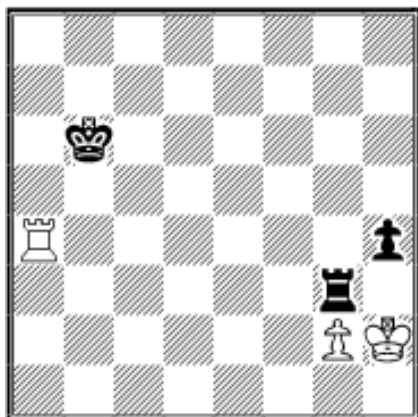
What is far more important is that, on **60 Kg5**, Black can forestall the rook transfer to e2 by **60...Ke5!** (60...Rf8 is also possible: 61 Kh6 Ke5! 62 Rg7 Kf4 63 g3+ Kf3! 64 g4 Rh8+! 65 Kg5 Kg3 =).

But with the king at d7, the only other choice, Ke8, is meaningless: after 59...Kd7? 60 Kg5! Ke8, 61 Re4+! decides: if then 61...Kf8, 62 Rf4.

Thus, we have dealt with 57...Kc6!?, more or less. It's easy to see that **57...Kc5!?** isn't bad either: we get the same **58 Rg4 Rf7!! 59 Kxh4** (on 59 Rg6, Black defends the pawn by either 59...Rh7 or 59...Rf4) **59...Kd6!** =.

The actual game featured a different defensive method – and a safer one, since Black did not need to find either study-like or “only” moves.

57...Rg7-g3+! 58 Kh3-h2



58...Rg3-d3!?

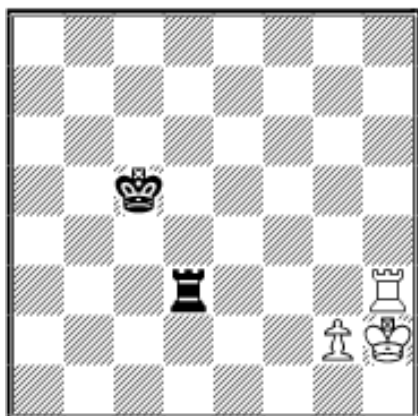
Curiously, other rook retreats along the rank lose. However, he could have played 58...Kc5 59 Rxh4 Rg8!? (59...Rd3!?), having in mind the variation 60 Rh6 Kd5 61 Kh3 Ke5 62 g4 Kf4! =.

50 Ra4xh4 Kb6-c6!?

Black didn't play **59...Kc5**, evidently fearing he would be cut off on the rank after 60 Rh6.

But if we continue this variation, we see that the draw isn't lost yet: 60...Kd5 61 g3 Ke5 62 Kh3 Kf5 63 Kh4 Rd4+! 64 Kh5 Rg4! 65 Rf6+ Kxf6 66 Kxg4 Kg6 =.

Black would have had an interesting problem to solve after **60 Rh3!?**



1...?

In order to choose the only correct square to retreat the rook, Black has to guess what the idea was behind White's last move. It turns out that he still wants to cut Black off on the rank, but in a rather more favorable situation: first, he gets the enemy rook off d3, where it restrains the advance of the white king and pawn.

60...Rd2? 61 Rh6! Kd5 62 Kh3 Ke5 63 g4

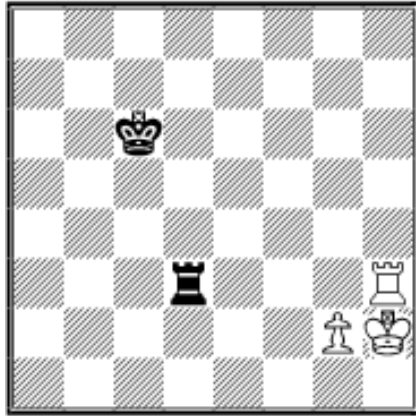
Kf4 64 Rh5!+-;

60...Rd8? 61 Rh6! Kd5 62 Kh3 Ke5 63 g4+-.

The only way to cross up the enemy's plan is by **60...Rd6!!**. After **61 Rh8** (61 g4 Rg6 62 Kg3 Kd6 =; 61 Re3 Rh6+ 62 Kg3 Kd5 =) **61...Kd5 62 Re8 Rh6+**, the distance between rook and pawn is just right for a successful frontal attack: three open ranks. Recall that with a knight's pawn, cutting off the black king by two ranks is insufficient to win.

60 Rh4-e4

Here White could also have tried 60 Rh3, but Black would have had a wide choice by comparison with the position where his king was on c5, since White would no longer be threatening to cut his king off on the rank.



Of course Black can't play 60...Rd8? (or 60...Rd7?), in view of 61 Rc3+!, when the king can't go to the d-file because of the rook exchange, while on b5 he would be too far away from the pawn.

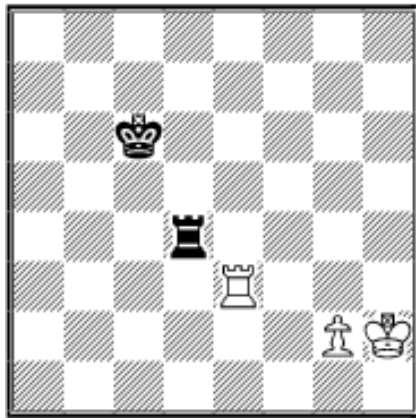
60...Rd2? would be a mistake: 61 Re3 Kd6 (61...Kd5 62 Kh3+-) 62 Kh3 Ra2 63 g4 Ra8 64 g5! (64 Kh4? Rh8+) 64...Ra4!? (once the pawn has crossed midboard, a frontal attack is useless) 65 g6 Kd7 66 g7 Ra8 67 Kh4 Rg8 68 Rg3 Ke7 69 Kh5 Kf7 70 Kh6+-.

the horizontal cutoff of the stronger side's king from its pawn, although it was of no use in this case, nevertheless is an important defensive resource, and should always be kept in mind.

Perhaps the simplest draw is by 60...Rd6! 61 Re3 Kd7 or 61...Rh6+.

60...Rd5! 61 Re3 Kd6 is also sturdy enough; for example, 62 Kh3 Rh5+ 63 Kg4 Rh8 =, or 62 g4 Rg5 (62...Re5 63 Rf3 Rg5 64 Kg3 Rg8! = is equivalent) 63 Kg3 Rg8! =.

But 60...Rd4!? is less accurate: after 61 Re3:



1...?

Here 61...Kd6? no longer works: 62 Kh3 and 63 g4+-.

61...Rg4? also loses, to 62 Rd3 Rg8 63 g3.

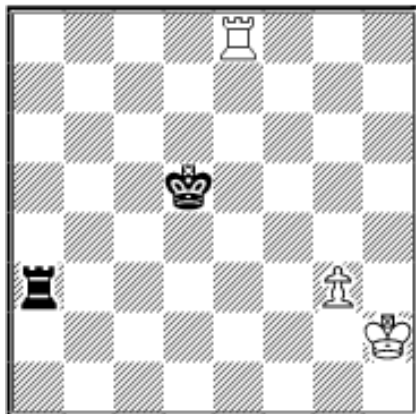
61...Rh4+! is necessary: 62 Kg3 Rh8 63 Rd3 Kc5! =.

White's pawn is stuck on its starting square, and so cutting off the enemy king by three ranks is not enough to win.

60...Kc6-d5

Certainly not the only move here. Another decent line was 60...Rd8!?

61 Re4-e8 Rd3-a3 62 g2-g3



1...?

This is the last time Black will have to be accurate in his defense. He cannot quietly wait for the king and pawn to advance, but must go over to the frontal attack at once.

62...Ra3-a7!



But not 62...Kd6? 63 Kh3 Kd7 (here the king stands poorly, since it can't return to d5 in time) 64 Re4 Kd6 65 Kh4 Ra8 66 g4+-. This is a theoretically won position. It's very important that the rook defends the pawn, since this deprives the rook checks of their force. Kd5 can always be met by Re7. And you can learn the details if you go over the endgame Tal – Zaitsev in my [Endgame Manual](#).

63 g3-g4

Otherwise, Black will prevent the advance of the pawn by a frontal attack.

63...Ra7-a3!

The horizontal cutoff of the king from the pawn, which failed to work in the previously examined variation, here spells salvation for Black. The rest is simple.

64 Kg2 (64 g5 Rb3 65 g6 Rb6 =) 64...Kd6 65 Kf2 Kd7 66 Re4 Rb3 67 g5 Rb5 68 Rg4 Ke7 69 Kg3 Kf7 70 g6+ Kg7 71 Kh4 Rb6 72 Kh5 Rb5+ 73 Rg5 Rb1 1/2-1/2

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