

Adrian Mikhalchishin

Mastering practical rook endgames



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Mastering practical rook endgames
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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

In the first book we discussed basic positions and methods for playing both simple and complicated rook endings. Now, in this book, we will discuss typical positions — which means positions that frequently appear in practical play. Knowledge of such positions and the methods of handling them is a third key element of correct play in rook endgames.

Generally we will meet different pawn balances and constructions — there are more complicated cases and many simple ones — but in all cases we must use the knowledge gleaned from the first book — the knowledge of basic rook endings.

There have been many great books published on rook endings, and especially very useful in a practical way are many of the chapters from the great Mark Dvoretzky and his excellent book *Endgame University*.

Classic works are also still valid — including Smyslov and Levenfish's 'Rook Endings' plus studies by the greatest rook endgame specialist Nikolay Kopaev in Averbakh's endgame manuals.

A fantastic book about rook endings was written by Nikolay Minev, but for some reason it is not widely known.

I, together with my great friend GM Aleksander Beliavsky, wrote three books on different endgames and there are special chapters on rook endings, but in these there was no systematic knowledge, rather just some important issues that were discussed. Now, however, we will try to give our readers a much more complicated and complete picture of rook endgame theory and practice.

There are a few very important rook endings, ones which we see frequently in practical games.

Every player must know how to deal with these situations on the board, for both sides, so knowledge of basic positions and methods of handling complicated endgames are key. And the mistakes of the top players are also extremely instructive and serve as great lessons for improvement in the endgame.

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!

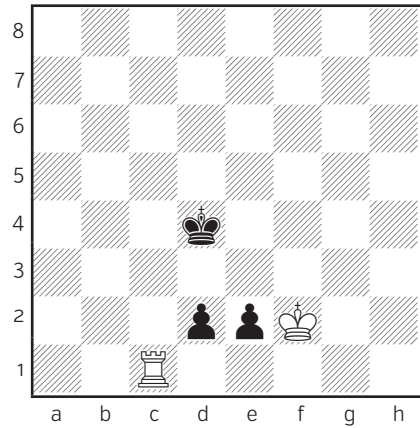
CHAPTER 1

ROOK AGAINST PAWNS

At the end of many rook endings we see the position transfer into an endgame of rook against pawn(s). There are many pretty, and typical, methods and manoeuvres mentioned in the first book and also many methods of fighting against the pawn(s). But on the other hand there are also different tactical ideas used by both sides. Here for example we can witness a great idea of the fantastic Czech study composer Ladislav Prokes. He introduced this theme, and afterwards this tactical motif appeared in practice with funny mistakes and instructive misunderstandings. Long calculations plus basic knowledge are the key elements to handling these positions.

1

L. Prokes, 1939



So we have a situation with very dangerous pawns on the 7th rank and only special tactics can save the situation.

1. ♖c4+

The first strike from Prokes...

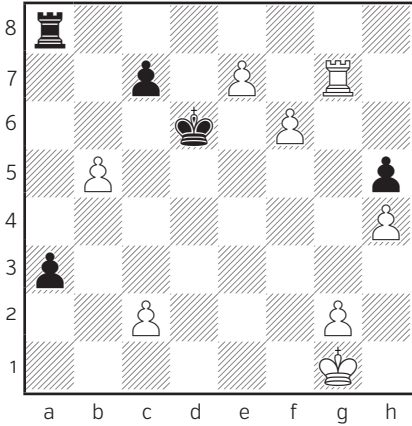
1... ♔d3 2. ♖d4+!

Now Prokes' second strike!

2... ♔xd4 3. ♔xe2 ♔c3 4. ♔d1 ♔d3=

2

▷ J. Timman
 ▶ B. Ivkov
 IBM Amsterdam, 1971



Black's pawn appears to be too far advanced to stop by normal means. White had prepared a tactical trick, however...

50. ♖g8??

Too beautiful to be true!

It was actually still possible to stop the pawn using normal measures: 50. ♖g3 a2 51. ♖d3+! ♕e6 52. e8 ♖+ ♖xe8 53. ♖a3 ♖b8 54. c4 (54. ♖xa2 ♖xb5 55. ♖a6+ ♕f7 56. ♖c6 was still easily winning.) 54...c6! 55. ♖xa2 cxb5 56. cxb5 ♖xb5 57. ♖f2 ♕f7 and it is not easy to make progress.

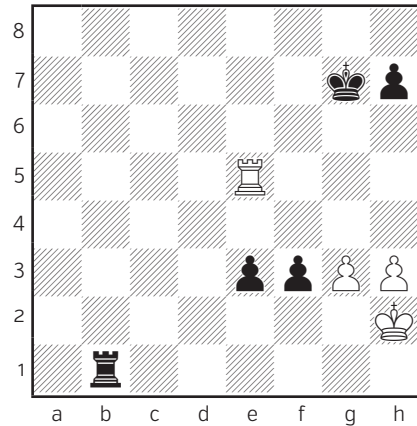
50... ♖xg8 51. f7 a2??

51... ♖xg2+!! Prokes' trick was at that time unknown to both world-class players!

52. fxg8 ♖ a1 ♖+ 53. ♖h2 ♖xe7
 54. ♖g5+ 1-0

3

▷ B. Sikora-Gizynska
 ▶ Z. Peng
 Novi Sad Ol, 1990



White simply resigned as she failed to see that the black king can't come to the f-file!

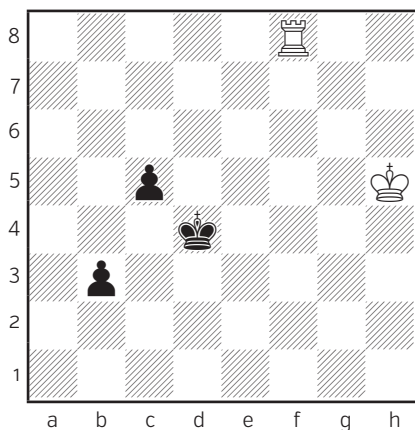
58. ♖e7+ ♖g6 59. ♖e6+ ♖g5 60. ♖e5+ ♕f6

It would be necessary to agree a draw after 60... ♕g6

61. ♖xe3 f2 62. ♖f3+ 0-1

4

▷ G. Fridstein
 ▶ A. Lutikov
 URS-chT Riga, 1954



Black's pawns are dangerous plus White's king is far from the action, but White has enough simple resources to keep the balance.

58. ♖b8 c4 59. ♔g4 c3

and White resigned here as he knew the usual development...

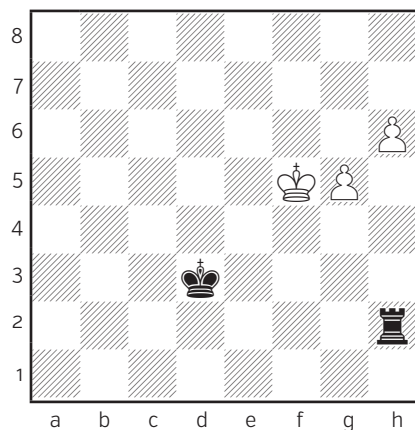
60. ♖xb3??

But the intermediate check was unknown even to a player of grandmaster level! 60. ♖b4+!=

60...c2 61. ♖b4+ ♔d5 62. ♖b5+ ♔d6
 63. ♖b6+ ♔c7 0-1

5

▷ V. Gunina
 ▶ T. Shadrina
 Gorodets, RUS, 2006



Now we will see the difference with modern players!

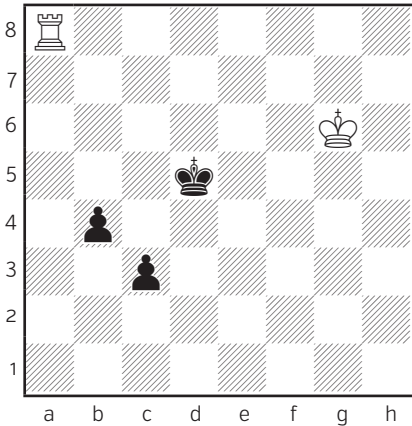
62.g6 ♖h5+!

Girls know the proper Prokes!

63. ♔f6 ♖xh6=

6

- ▷ A. Petrosian
 ▶ V. Tseshkovsky
 Minsk, 1976



Here the situation is clearly different as the far-advanced passed pawns can be supported by the king.

57. ♔f5

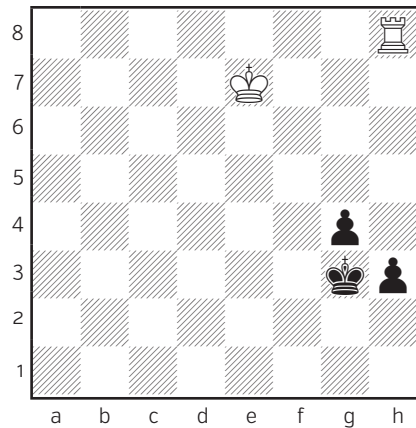
And the opponents agreed a draw, as they were unaware of the analysis of the great Tarrasch:

57. ♔f5 b3 58. ♖d8+ ♔c5 (58... ♔c4? is no good because of 59. ♔e4 b2 60. ♖c8+ ♔b3 61. ♖b8+ ♔c2 62. ♔d4) 59. ♖c8+ (Immediately losing is 59. ♔e4 b2 60. ♖c8+ ♔d6 61. ♖b8 c2) 59... ♔d4 60. ♖d8+ ♔e3 61. ♖b8 b2 (61... c2 62. ♖xb3+ ♔d4 63. ♖b4+ ♔d5 64. ♖b8 ♔d4 (64... c1 ♖ 65. ♖d8+-) 65. ♖b4+=) 62. ♔e5 ♔f3! (62... c2 63. ♖b3+ was White's last chance to save the game, which Black does not allow.) 63. ♔f5 ♔e2! 64. ♔e4 ♔d1

65. ♔d3 c2 and Black wins. This nice manoeuvre was discovered by Tarrasch and has to be known not only by GMs!

7

- ▷ A. Samaganov
 ▶ N. Zilberman
 USSR, 1970



The technique of moving a pair of pawns forward is not so simple. There are questions of which pawn advances first, and how.

1... ♔g2??

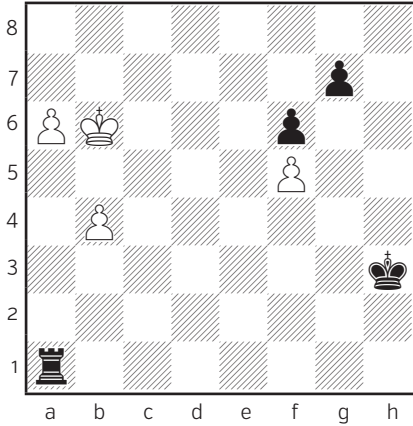
1... ♔h2 would allow Black to promote the g-pawn with an easy win. The opponent's king cannot catch what we call the 'tail' of the pawn duo.

2. ♔f6 g3 3. ♔f5 h2 4. ♔f4=

Mission completed!

8

▷ N. Tsereteli
 ▶ E. Epstein
 USSR, 1974



Here we have a similar situation (with an extra pawn configuration) on the other side.

1.a7??

Once again, it would be correct to push the other pawn: 1.b5 ♖g4 2.♔a7 ♕xf5 3.b6 g5 4.b7 ♖b1 5.b8♚ ♖xb8 6.♔xb8 g4 7.a7 g3 8.a8♚ and White queens much faster than Black.

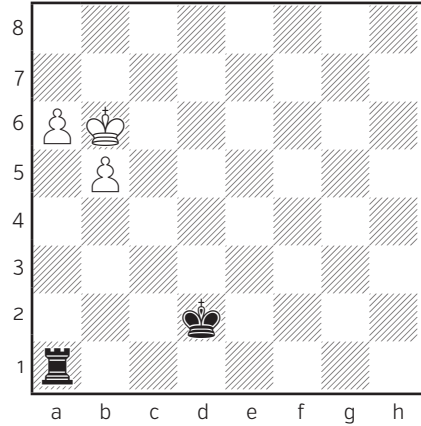
1...♔g4 2.♔b7 ♕xf5 3.b5 g5 4.b6 g4 5.a8♚ ♖xa8 6.♔xa8 g3 7.b7 g2 8.b8♚ g1♚

and White managed to save this position.

½-½

9

▷ V. Topalov
 ▶ A. Beliavsky
 Linares, 1995



In this example White showed the correct idea. It is strange, though, that such a top player as Beliavsky forgot it in the next game.

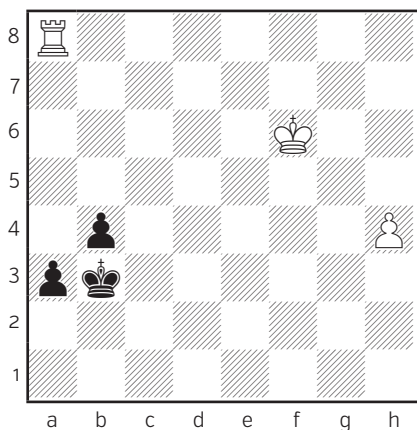
73.♔a7!

and as we saw above, the Black king cannot catch the pawn.

1-0

10

▷ R. Slobodjan
▶ A. Beliavsky
Germany, 2000



A more complicated case now, in which the h4-pawn is ready for a quick run.

50...♔c4??

As in similar cases, the correct method is a different king move making way for his own pawn: 50...♔a2 51.h5 b3 52.h6 b2 53.h7 b1♙ 54.h8♙ ♙b2+ 55.♔f5 ♙xh8 56.♖xh8 ♔b2 57.♔e4 a2=

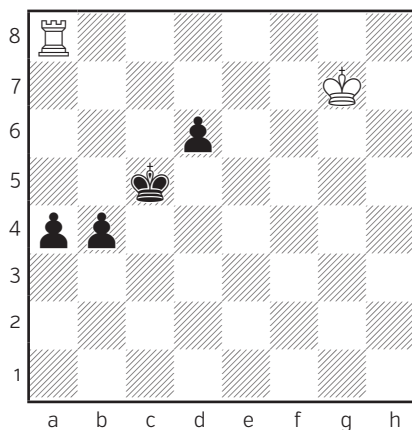
51.h5 b3 52.♖a4+!

And here is the move which Grandmaster Lutikov didn't see.

1-0

11

▷ S. Gligoric
▶ P. Popovic
Belgrade, 1998



69...a3?

The game-winner was 69...b3 70.♖xa4 b2 71.♖a5+ ♔c6 72.♖a6+ ♔b7

70.♔f6 ♔c4 71.♔e6 b3

71...♔b3 now does not help 72.♔xd6 ♔a2 73.♔c5 b3 74.♔b4 with a draw;

71...d5 72.♔e5 is also=

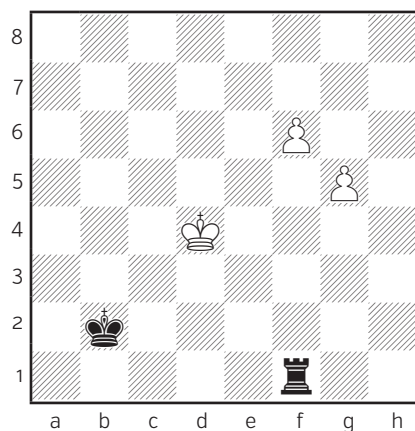
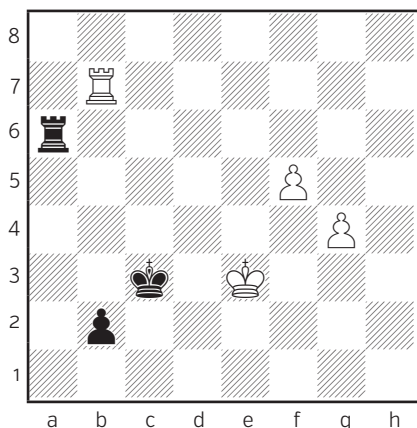
72.♖a4+

Gligoric is not Lutikov, or perhaps he simply studied the mistakes of the others.

½-½

12

▷ S. Tarrasch
 ▶ D. Janowski
 Ostend, 1907



A very important ‘shouldering’, preventing the black king from fighting the passed pawns.

82...♔b3

Let us now examine cases in which the rook has not yet been sacrificed and it is possible to avoid some of these unpleasant developments.

We would see a known basic win after 82...♖f5 83.♔e4 ♖xg5 84.f7 ♖g4+ 85.♔f3 ♖g1 86.♔f2

78...♖a4?

83.♔e5

Correct was 78...♖a3! 79.♖xb2 ♔xb2+ 80.♔f4 ♔c3 81.f6 ♖a1 82.g5 ♔d4 83.g6 ♖f1+ 84.♔g5 ♔e5 85.f7 ♔e6 86.♔h6 ♖xf7; or even 78...♖a1.

83.♔d5 ♖f5+ 84.♔e6 ♖xg5 85.f7 was simpler.

79.♖xb2

83...♔c4 84.g6

The threat was to cut off the b-file defence with ...♖b4.

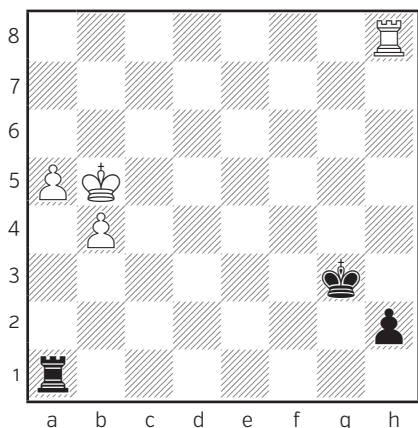
84.♔e6 ♖e1+ 85.♔f7 ♔d5 86.g6 ♔e5 87.♔g7 ♔e6 88.f7 was also winning, but a bit more complicated.

79...♔xb2 80.f6 ♖a1 81.g5 ♖f1 82.♔d4!

84...♖e1+ 85.♔d6 ♖d1+ 86.♔e6 ♖e1+ 87.♔f7 1-0

13

▷ G. Maroczy
 ▶ S. Tarrasch
 San Sebastian, 1911



The great classics had some serious problems in positions close to basic ones

44. ♖c6??

It was possible to transfer into a classic winning rook ending with 44. ♖a6 ♜a4 45. ♜xh2! (45.b5?? ♜h4) 45... ♜xb4 46. ♜h6 ♖f4 47. ♜b6 ♜a4 48. ♖b5 ♜a1 49. a6 ♖e5 50. ♖c6 or to sacrifice the rook immediately with 44. ♜xh2 ♖xh2 45. ♖a6 ♖g3 46. b5 ♖f4 47. b6 ♖e5 48. b7 ♜b1 49. ♖a7 ♖d6 50. b8 ♜+ ♜xb8 51. ♖xb8 ♖c6 52. a6 winning but not 44. a6 h1 ♜ 45. ♜xh1 ♜xh1 46. a7 ♜a1 47. ♖b6 ♖f4 48. ♖b7 ♖e5 49. a8 ♜ ♜xa8 50. ♖xa8 ♖d5=

44... ♜c1+ 45. ♖b6

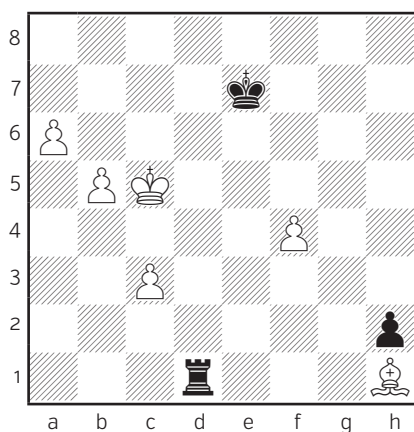
Now it was too late to try to return, as is possible in some endgames. ‘Chess is Timing’, as the great Robert Fischer used to say: 45. ♖b5 h1 ♜ 46. ♜xh1 ♜xh1 47. a6 ♖f4 48. a7 ♜a1 49. ♖b6 ♖e5 50. ♖b7 ♖d5

45... ♜c4 46. ♜xh2 ♜xb4+ 47. ♖c5 ♜a4

½–½

14

▷ I. Glek
 ▶ S. Lputian
 Dortmund, 1992



58. a7??

Correct would be to keep the bishop and not transfer into rook against pawn. 58. ♙e4! ♜e1 (58... h1 ♜ 59. ♙xh1 ♜xh1 60. a7+-) 59. ♙b7! ♜a1 60. ♖b6 a7+-

58... ♜xh1 59. a8 ♜ ♜d1!=

Strange, but there is no longer a win!

Or 71.c7 ♖d7

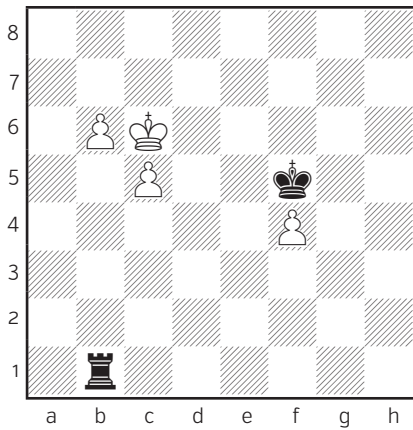
60. ♖e4+ ♔d8! 61. ♖a8+ ♔e7
62. ♖b7+ ♔f6 63. c4 h1 ♖ 64. ♖xh1
♜xh1 65. b6 ♜b1

71... ♔d5 72. b7 ♜b1

½–½

It was possible to play a different
move order: 65... ♔f5! =

66. ♔c6 ♔f5 67. c5



67... ♔e4

It is necessary to catch the pawn pair
and materialism is not important
here.

67... ♔xf4? 68. ♔b7! ♔e5 69. c6 ♔d6
70. c7 ♜c1 and as usual Black is one
tempo short!

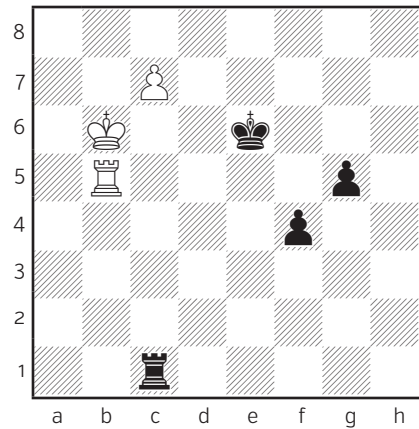
68. f5 ♔xf5 69. ♔b7

A similar idea is seen after 69.b7 ♔e5
70. ♔c7 ♔d5

69... ♔e6 70. c6 ♜c1! 71. ♔c7

15

▷ A. Naiditsch
▶ Y. Kuzubov
Warsaw, 2005



54... g4?

Correct was to immediately push
his farthest-advanced pawn: 54... f3!
55. ♜xg5 (55. ♜c5 ♜xc5 56. ♔xc5 ♔d7
57. ♔b6 ♔c8–+) 55... ♜xc7 (Even pos-
sible was 55... f2 56. ♜c5 ♜xc5 57. ♔xc5
♔d7) 56. ♔xc7 f2 57. ♜g6+ ♔f7–+
winning as in the first example.

55. ♜g5! =

Forcing the pawns to advance, when
they will become ‘stuck’, while his
king will support his own passed
pawn on the other side.

55...g3 56.♔b7 ♖b1+ 57.♕c6 ♜c1+
58.♕b7 ♕f6 59.♞g8 ♖e5 60.c8♞
♞xc8 61.♕xc8 ♖e4 62.♕d7 f3

Other manoeuvres do not help here, e.g. 62...♕f3 63.♕e6 g2 (63...♕g2 64.♕e5 f3 65.♕f4 f2 66.♞xg3+) 64.♕e5 and the king is in time.

63.♞g4+!

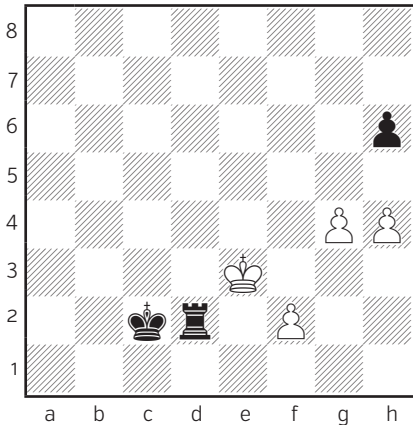
This Prokes' check saves the game.

63...♕e3 64.♞xg3

½–½

16

- ▷ E. Gerstenfeld
▶ M. Stolberg
Kiev, 1940



There exist even more complicated positions, which after some moves come close to the basic situations which we have previously analyzed.

60.g5

Of no help is 60.f4 ♞h2! (60...♕c3? 61.f5 ♞g2 (61...♞d8? 62.f6 ♞e8+ 63.♕f4 ♕d4 64.g5 (64.♕f5) 64...hxg5+ 65.hxg5 ♕d5 66.♕f5 ♞e5+ 67.♕g6 ♕e6 68.♕h7) 62.f6 ♞g1 63.g5! hxg5 64.hxg5 ♞xg5 65.♕f4 ♞g1 66.♕e5 ♞f1 67.♕e6)

60...hxg5?

Winning instead was the typical refusal to exchange pawns: 60...h5 61.f4 ♞d3+ (Both players calculated 61...♞h2 62.f5 ♞h3+ 63.♕e2 ♞h2+ (63...♞xh4 64.f6 ♞f4 65.♕e3 ♞f1 66.♕e4 h4 67.♕e5 h3 68.g6 h2 69.g7 h1♞ 70.g8♞ ♞h5+ winning) 64.♕f3 ♞h3+ with a draw.) 62.♕e4 ♞h3 63.f5 ♞xh4+ 64.♕e5 ♞g4 65.g6 h4 66.f6 ♞g5+! Prokes!

61.hxg5 ♕c3 62.f4 ♞d8

62...♞g2 is simpler. 63.♕e4 ♕c4 64.♕e5 ♞g1 65.♕f6 ♕d5 66.g6 ♕e4

63.♕e4 ♕c4

