

101 Endgame Masterclasses
Rooks and Material Imbalances

Alexander Galkin

101 Endgame Masterclasses: Rooks and Material Imbalances

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Introduction

This book aims to give you a wealth of self-study knowledge about handling different types of endings that occur frequently but on which there is not much literature analyzing recent games. Imbalanced material endgames involving rooks are a key focus of the book, covering three-fifths of the material, and all endings in the book feature at least one rook. The vast majority of games are taken from the last few years, including many from 2021-2022. Like my previous endgame book published with Elk and Ruby, *101 Endgame Crimes and Punishments*, this one is aimed at strong tournament players (1900-2300 Elo) and fast improving juniors.

Specifically, this book covers the following endings: rook vs. minor piece (chapter 1), rook vs. a pair of minor pieces (chapter 2), rook and minor piece vs. rook and minor piece, rook and minor piece vs. rook, rook and minor piece vs. two minor pieces, rook and minor piece vs. a pair of rooks, and rook and minor piece vs. queen (all in chapter 3).

The material arrangement principles applied for this book are largely consistent with those adopted for my books published earlier. I select examples only from games played over the board and in which at least one of the players is a grandmaster. I see this as their quality stamp. Eight of the 101 examples in this book come from my own games.

Nearly all of these examples are from games played in the last three years. Being a fan of cutting edge methods of learning chess, it makes sense to me to familiarize the reader with the creative achievements of modern grandmasters. New times give rise to new names. Technological innovations bring new resources to the training process. It's true that the games of earlier periods offer much interesting and instructive material as well. However, who wants to see the same old, famous games and positions migrating from one book to the next? Even if not with "borrowed" commentary, but readily recognizable by many readers nonetheless. In writing this book, I believe I filled it entirely with proprietary and unique material.

I have used all the examples from this book in my coaching work, both with groups of young chess players and in one-to-one lessons. In other words, I am offering you the reader proven materials with hands-on experience of using them. This is of no small importance for coaches. When using the book in the coaching process you already know that the material has passed the required practical testing.

Endgame positions have been selected so that a person studying the book can see the critical moments of play, such as a single or a series of errors that led to a loss or when one of the sides missed a winning move, with the reader challenged to find the correct continuation. At the same time, I have set a goal of not drowning the reader in an endless sea of lines. Therefore, you might have ideas of your own to add to the content of some examples.

I wish you pleasant and fruitful study of my latest book!

Grandmaster Alexander Galkin

October 2022

About the Author

Alexander Galkin was born in 1979 in Rostov-on-Don, Russia. Grandmaster (1997). Russian junior champion in his age-groups (1989 and 1993). Russian under-20 champion (1999). Second in the Soviet junior championship in his age-group (1991). Second in the European junior championship in his age-group (1991). Member of the winning Russian team in the world junior Olympiad (1994). World under 20 champion (1999). Member of the winning Khimik team in the Russian team championship (1999). Prize-winner in other Russian team championships for various teams (1996, 1998, 2003, and 2008). Participant in two FIDE world championships (2000 and 2004) and the FIDE world cup (2007). Member of the Russian team in the European team championship (1999). Outright winner or prize winner in a number of international tournaments.

His pupils include outright winners or prize winners in Russian, European and world championships among juniors and junior girls across the age-groups. He was named Children's Trainer of the Year in 2016 by the Russian Chess Federation. Possesses three university degrees. This is his third book for Elk and Ruby.



Chapter 1

ROOK VS. MINOR PIECE

The first rule to keep in mind for this type of endgame is that if there are no pawns left on the board then a king and rook defeat a king and minor piece in only a handful of cases. It happens either when the minor piece falls to a pin or a fork, or when the weaker side's king is cut off on the last rank or on the rook file while the king of the stronger side helps create mating threats. Moreover, we specifically highlight king and rook vs. king and knight endgames in which the weaker side's king has been pushed to the last rank and his knight is located by it, as defying such "rule of thumb" evaluation over the board.

The advent of strong computer programs and special endgame tablebases has opened up new horizons for the stronger side in terms of playing for a win in such endings. In the past, almost all such positions were considered to be a draw. At present, however, an engine can produce an exact chain of moves which in some positions sets a combination of mating threats to the king and threats to win the knight that force the weaker side's knight to move away from its king, resulting in the stronger side's successful hunt for the knight using the combined forces of his rook and king. However, to determine the point of no return between a drawn and a lost endgame of this type is a challenge even for a top chess player.

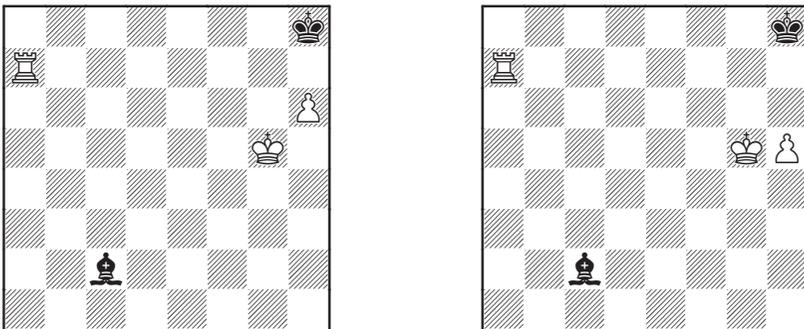
In this book we analyze endings in which the strongest grandmasters of our time prove in practice every conclusion stated above by the author. It is also important to note that, in the overwhelming majority of cases, the minor piece stops the stronger side's king and rook from edging the weaker side's king away from the center and to the edge of the board, unless the defending side commits grave errors. Therefore, when defending such endgames, it is of high importance to avoid making careless moves from the very beginning, so as not to find yourself in a position that can be saved with nothing but "only" moves. You may find this a tall order given the situation of an over-the-board game and the likelihood of finding yourself pressed for time by the time you reach the endgame. On the other hand, all the above points in reverse can apply in equal measure to the stronger side, especially if they lack belief in their ability to execute such endings. You absolutely need to test your opponents for mastery of such endings and exploit any errors they might commit.

It is only natural that the addition of pawns dramatically increases the winning chances of the stronger side, if, of course, we mean positions with an equal number of pawns and the weaker side doesn't have any dangerous passers. In this case, we can add at least two winning methods to those stated above: (i) transition to a winning pawn endgame, and (ii) grabbing a pawn (pawns) from the weaker side with the subsequent queening of the stronger side's pawn. Accordingly, the total number and location of pawns become important factors when it comes to evaluating such

endgames. All other things being equal, more often than not the presence of pawns on one flank only increases the defending side's chances. This has to do, among other things, with the rook being a more mobile piece and requiring less effort to swing between flanks to attack different enemy pawns. The chances are that, in positions with pawns on both flanks, a minor piece will simply not make it to help its pawns, which is especially true for a knight.

You clearly need to evaluate each specific position, taking into account not only the location of the pawns, rook and minor piece, but of both kings as well. We should never forget that the king becomes a key and independent piece in an endgame and that its active role has a huge influence on the evaluation of any ending, the only exceptions being some major- and many-piece endings in which the offensive potential of the remaining pieces is still capable of creating mating threats to the king. The side looking for ways to make its king active in an endgame cannot ignore this circumstance.

If the king and rook vs. king and minor piece endgame has pawns as well, you need to know at least the basic positions classified as theoretical draws.



Known theoretical draws

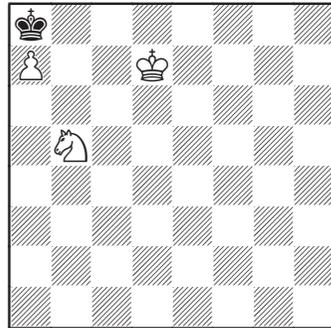
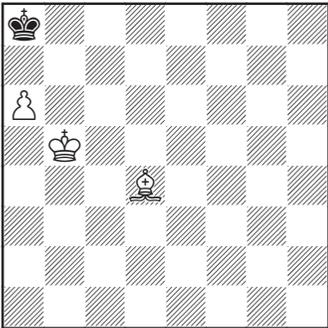
This knowledge will facilitate correct evaluation and decision-making in particular endgame positions. Moreover, this book will help you to see how strong grandmasters take advantage of their knowledge of drawn setups in this type of endgame. This knowledge is of vital importance and in no way inferior to that of opening lines.

Also important to note is that besides general knowledge of endgame handling, a strong chess player cannot do without the knowledge of techniques inherent to solving study positions. The vast majority of studies feature imbalanced-material endgames. Indeed, this book contains examples that show how knowledge of studies solving techniques allows grandmasters to create a work of art during actual play.

It goes without saying that being an exchange up in the type of endgames in question is not an automatic guarantee that the side having the rook can play for a win. The side lacking the exchange may have one, two or even three pawns by way of compensation. In this case, the tables may turn in favor of the side possessing a

minor piece. This book provides lots of examples to help you understand the inner workings of the struggle between the sides. Similarly to the cases described above, the ability to save a half-point in this type of endgame (where the side with the initiative is an exchange down but with extra pawns) largely depends on the activity of the defending side's rook and king, as well as on the number of squares between the opponent's extra passed pawns and the promotion square. Is there enough time to eliminate or stop them before they reach a critical square for getting promoted, after which saving the game is possible no longer?

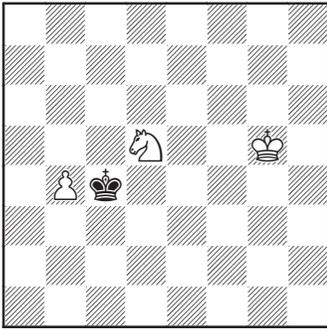
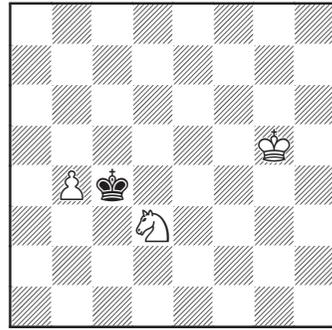
Yet another key factor in saving such endgames for the defending side with a rook is the ability to get rid of all the opponent's pawns even at the cost of the rook. This is because we know that a single minor piece cannot normally deliver checkmate, i.e. unless there is a blunder or in rare cases of a study-like win in a position with a rook's pawn on the board. Another way to reach a draw in such a situation would be to transpose into a position with a bishop and a rook's pawn for the stronger side, in which the lone king of the weaker side controls the promotion square of the opponent's pawn and the bishop is of the color opposite to this promotion square. To promote a pawn in this situation becomes impossible, and the extra bishop is useless.



Typical drawn positions

Positions with a knight and rook's pawn vs. a lone king when the pawn stands on the penultimate rank with the knight defending it also belong to this case, even if on a much less frequent basis. The weaker side's king controls the promotion square and any attempts to reassign pawn protection duties to the king result in stalemate.

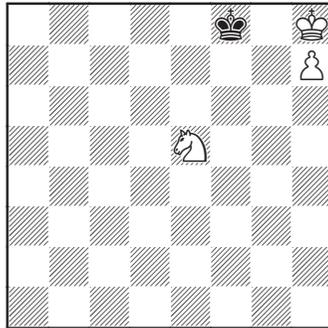
Finally, this type of position also includes the stronger side having a knight and any pawn other than a rook's pawn, but its king being far away and unable to help his pieces while the weaker side's king is well-placed to attack simultaneously both the only remaining pawn and the knight protecting it. This enables it to drive the knight away and capture the pawn, or, alternatively, to start by capturing the knight and then switch to dealing with the pawn.

**Draw****Win**

To meet this condition, it is crucial for the defending side that the opponent's knight be posted above the pawn in its custody. Otherwise, capturing the knight results in the weaker side's king stepping out of the square of the pawn and allowing it to queen.

We may continue adding to the list of potential positions with different material imbalances and some theoretically drawn positions that might happen along the way. However, that would exceed the scope of this book and they are better served as input material for other types of endgame.

We wrap up the introduction to this chapter by demonstrating yet another important theoretical endgame position that any chess player should know.



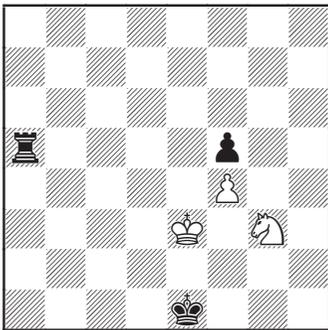
White wins easily with Black to move because the black king cannot avoid letting his white counterpart out of the corner with the subsequent queening of the pawn. However, it is a draw with White to move. The black king keeps his white counterpart boxed in by shuffling between the f7 and f8-squares. The white knight is unable to pass the turn to move to his opponent to take over control of the above squares in the starting position no matter the route chosen. This distinctive feature of a knight – an inability to pass the turn to move – is a crucial piece of knowledge for any chess player.

Rook vs. Minor Piece

We begin by reviewing example positions from grandmaster games in which the side having a minor piece against the rook attempts to make a draw by resorting to such factors as reaching a drawn position (a “positional draw”) or reaching a small number of pawns (allowing the game to reach a drawn rook vs. minor piece endgame without any pawns on the board), among others.

Example No. 1

Jung Min Seo – A. Rasmussen
Catez 2021



White to move

Which approach is better suited to saving the game – active counterplay or passive resistance? This dilemma is relevant to nearly every type of endgame, and the answer to this question is not always straightforward.

101. ♖xf5?

White errs in believing that his pawn, supported by the king, will make it to the queening square to secure him a draw.

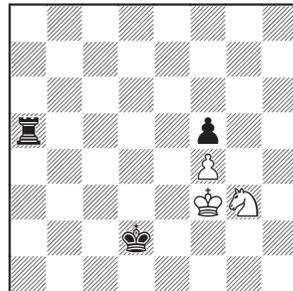
101. ♖d4? ♖f2–+ is bad, of course.

There is no allowing the black king a free run across the home rank: 101. ♖h5? ♖f1 102. ♖g3+ (102. ♖f3 ♖a3#) 102... ♖g2 103. ♖h5 ♖a3+ 104. ♖e2 (104. ♖d4 ♖f3 105. ♖e5 ♖a5+ 106. ♖e6 ♖g4–+) 104... ♖h3 105. ♖f6 (105. ♖g7 ♖g4 106. ♖e6 ♖a6 107. ♖c5 ♖a2+ 108. ♖e3 ♖a3+ 109. ♖d3 ♖xd3+ 110. ♖xd3

♖xf4–+ with a winning pawn ending) 105... ♖g3 106. ♖d5 ♖a5–+ and Black wins a pawn.

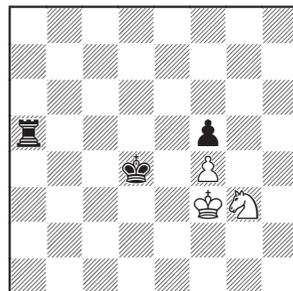
White should have maintained the drawn position by preventing the black king from encroaching on the f4-pawn: 101. ♖f3!

a) 101... ♖d2 (here and further in this book, “a”) is the main line if there is a main line, unless otherwise stated)



102. ♖h5. It is also fine for White to mark time with his king – 102. ♖f2 ♖d3 103. ♖f3=.

102... ♖d3 103. ♖g3 ♖d4

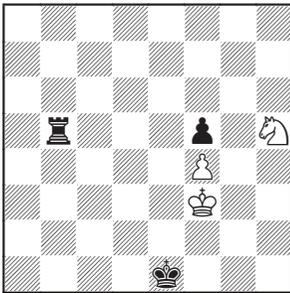


104. ♖e2+. 104. ♘h5? ♗a3+ 105. ♔f2 ♕e4 106. ♖g2 ♗b3 107. ♖h2 ♔f3 108. ♖h3 ♗b6 109. ♖h4 ♗h6 110. ♖g5 ♗xh5+ 111. ♖xh5 ♕xf4—+ would be a mistake landing White in a lost pawn ending.

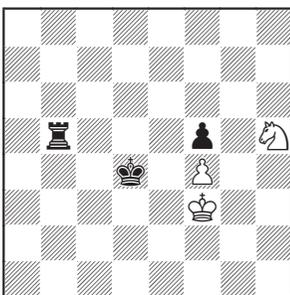
104... ♕d5 105. ♘g3 ♕e6 106. ♘h5=, holding the position.

b) 101... ♗a3+ 102. ♖g2 ♗a5 103. ♔f3 yields nothing;

c) Accordingly, the attempt to test the drawn position for viability by passing the turn to move 101... ♗b5 fails to 102. ♘h5!



c1) 102... ♗b3+ 103. ♕g2 ♕d2 (103... ♕e2? 104. ♘g3+) 104. ♘g7 ♗b5 (104... ♕e3 105. ♘xf5+ ♕xf4 106. ♘d4! = ♗d3 107. ♘e2+!) 105. ♖f3 ♕d3 106. ♘h5 ♕d4



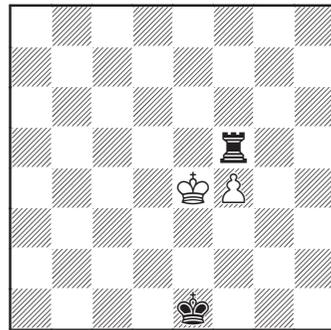
107. ♘g3! ♗a5 108. ♘e2+ ♕d5 109. ♘g3 ♕e6 110. ♘h5=. Black has

completed the king march to relieve the rook of its pawn defending duties. However, it has not become any clearer as to how to turn this into an asset in the struggle for victory;

c2) 102... ♕d2 103. ♘g7 ♗a5 104. ♘h5= is harmless;

c3) In case of 102... ♕f1 103. ♖g3! ♕g1 (103... ♕e2 104. ♖h4 ♕f3 105. ♖g5 ♗a5 106. ♘f6 ♕e3 107. ♘h5 ♕e4 108. ♘g3+=) 104. ♖h4! ♕f2 105. ♖g5 ♕f3 106. ♘f6 ♗a5 107. ♘h5 ♕e3 108. ♘f6= the active white king guarantees an easy draw.

101... ♗xf5 102. ♕e4



102... ♗f8!

This is the only correct move; it places the rook on an ideal square from which to combat the opponent's passed pawn.

103.f5

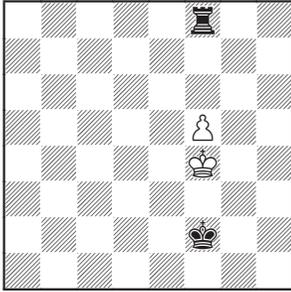
In case of 103. ♕e5 ♕f2 104.f5 ♕g3 105.f6 ♕g4 106. ♕e6 ♕g5 107.f7 ♕g6—+ Black is just in time to eliminate the passed pawn.

103... ♕e2!

White definitely overlooked this rejoinder. Now Black forces White to commit to a route for his king, choosing the opposite direction and bringing about the passed pawn's

liquidation at the doorstep of the queening square.

103...♔f2? 104.♔f4! is bad.



and there is no winning this position with Black to move:

a) 104...♔g2 105.♔g4! =;

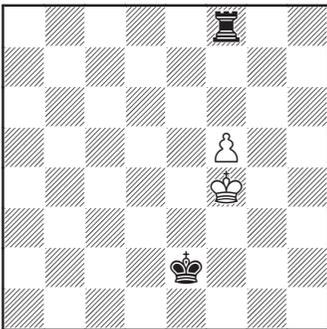
b) 104...♖a8 105.f6 =;

c) 104...♖f7 105.♔e5 ♔g3 106.♔e6 ♖f8 107.f6 =;

d) 104...♔e2 105.♔e4! ♔d2 106.♔e5 ♔e3 107.f6! ♔f3 108.♔e6 ♔g4 109.f7 ♔g5 110.♔e7 =.

104.♔f4

104.♔e5 ♔f3 105.f6 ♔g4 106.♔e6 ♔g5 107.f7 ♔g6-+ loses immediately.



104...♔f2!-+

And White is in zugzwang. 104...♔d3? fails to 105.♔e5! =.

105.♔e5

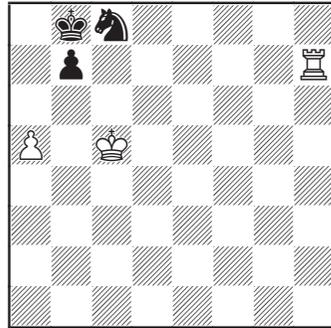
Or the other way around: 105.♔g5 ♔e3 106.f6 ♔e4 107.♔g6 ♔e5 108.f7 ♔e6-+.

105...♔g3 106.f6 ♔g4 107.♔e6 ♔g5 and White resigned.

Example No. 2

P. Eljanov – J. Arizmendi Martinez

Skopje, 2019



Black to move

Despite White's exchange superiority the position is a draw because there are too few pawns left. The white king cannot cross the road to the b7-pawn, while the only remaining white pawn is subject to attack from the black pieces at any moment. However, Black needs to demonstrate proper defensive accuracy.

81...♔a7?

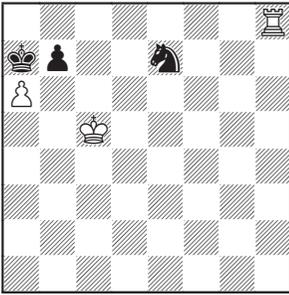
And Black failed to demonstrate it.

81...♖a7! 82.♖h8+ (82.♔b6 ♖c8+!; 82.♔d6 ♖b5+ 83.♔d7 ♖d4=; 82.♖g7 ♖c8!) 82...♔c7! 83.♖g8 ♖c8! was the only way to hold the game, since White cannot improve his position here.

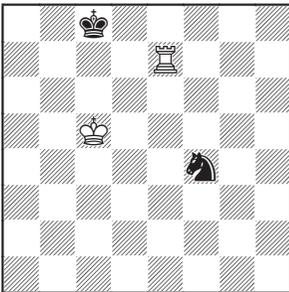
82.♖h8! ♔b8?

Black drops a piece and collapses quickly following 82...b6+? 83.axb6+ ♖xb6 84.♖h7+ ♔a6 85.♖h6-+.

82...♖e7 83.a6! is correct.



a) 83...♖g6 84.♗e8! ♘f4 (84...b6+ 85.♖b5+-; 84...bxa6 85.♗e6 ♘f4 86.♗e7+ ♖b8 87.♗e4 ♘h5 88.♖c6+- ♘f6 89.♗f4 ♘h5 90.♗f7 a5 91.♗b7+ ♖a8 92.♗b5 ♘g7 93.♗g5 ♘e6 94.♗e5 ♘d8+ 95.♖c7 ♘b7 96.♗b5) 85.axb7 ♖xb7 86.♗e7+ ♖c8 (86...♖a6 87.♖c6 ♖a5 88.♗e5+ ♖a6 89.♗e4+-)



87.♖d6!+- and White succeeds thanks to a combination of two threats: checkmating the cutoff black king and trapping the knight. For example, 87...♘d3 88.♗f7! ♘b4 89.♗c7+! ♖b8 (89...♖d8 90.♗b7 ♘a6 91.♗b6+-) 90.♗c4 ♘a6 91.♖c6! ♘c7 (91...♖a7 92.♗a4+-) 92.♗e4 ♘a6 (92...♘a8 93.♗e7+-; 92...♖c8 93.♗e7+-) 93.♗h4 ♖a7 94.♗a4, and the game is over.

b) 83...♖xa6 84.♗a8#;

c) 83...bxa6 84.♗h7+-;

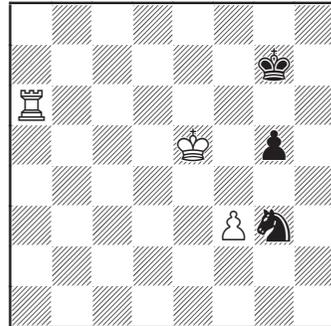
d) 83...♘c6 84.axb7 ♖xb7 85.♗h7+-;

e) 83...b6+ 84.♖b5+-;

f) 83...♘f5 84.♗h5 ♘g3 85.♗e5 bxa6 86.♖c6+-

83.a6! and Black resigned: 83...bxa6 (83...♖c7 84.♗xc8+! ♖xc8 85.a7+-) 84.♖c6 a5 85.♖d7.

Example No. 3 I. Rogers – D. Antic Adelaide 2007



White to move

As in the previous positions, there is every reason to believe that Black's defense should be impregnable. His king, knight and pawn guard the f-file squares against infiltration by his opponent's king. Is there any way for White to prevail?

61.♗b6!

The Australian grandmaster is spotted in skipping a move, giving Black an opportunity to find any move that keeps his fortress from falling apart. Yet there is no such move. The position is a zugzwang!

Hence, one important rule: *the proof of any drawn position is in the "passing the move" test*. This is when you should never forget to ask yourself the question as to whether skipping a move has any bearing on the position's evaluation.

61...♖h7

A king move in the opposite direction

loses as well: 61...♔f7 62.♖h6! ♔g7
63.♖h3 ♘e2 64.♔f5+-.

In case of 61...♘e2 62.♔f5 ♘d4+
63.♔g4! ♔f7 64.♖d6 ♘b5 65.♖d5+-
White wins the pawn anyway.

62.♔f6 ♔h6 63.♖b2

63.♖b8 ♘h5+ 64.♔f7 ♔h7
65.♖b2+- was also winning.

63...♘h5+

White checkmates after 63...♔h5
64.♖h2#.

64.♔f7 g4

64...♘f4 65.♖h2+ ♘h5 66.♖h1+-
lands Black in yet another deadly
zugzwang.

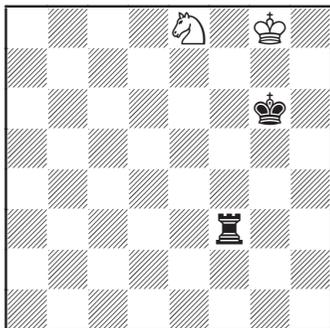
65.fxg4 ♘g3 66.♖b5 and Black
resigned.

The above examples serve to
highlight the significance of studying
pure rook versus knight endings without
any pawns. This ending is a rare guest in
grandmaster tournaments. The stronger
side takes its winning chances from one
of the two following circumstances or
their combination: a checkmate threat
to the weaker side's cutoff king or the
knight's misplaced position.

Example No. 4

V. Topalov – Ding Liren

Baku 2019



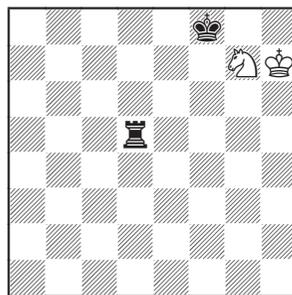
White to move

The white king is cut off on the last
rank, so Black should try to weave a
mating net. However, as long as the
knight is near the king, Black's plan
is extremely hard to execute. In fact,
such endings are nearly impossible for a
human player to evaluate. The thin line
between a routine draw and a winning
position with this material balance does
not lend itself to easy detection.

96.♘g7?

This natural move is an error.

96.♘d6? ♔f6 97.♘e8+ ♔e7
98.♘g7 ♖h3 99.♘f5+ ♔f6 100.♘d6
♖d3! 101.♘e8+ ♔e7 102.♘g7 ♖d5!
103.♔h7 ♔f8! was losing as well.



104.♘e6+. The line 104.♔g6
♖d6+ 105.♔h7 ♖d7 106.♔h8 ♔f7!
107.♔h7 ♔f6 108.♔h8 ♖d1 109.♔h7
♖h1+! 110.♔g8 ♖g1 111.♔h8 ♔f7-+
produces the same result.

104...♔f7 105.♘g7 ♖g5 106.♔h8
♖g1-+, checkmating the white king
along the h-file.

The correct move is 96.♘c7! ♖c3 (96...
♖f2 97.♘e8!; 96...♖d3 97.♔f8!) 97.♘e8
maintaining the drawn position for White.

96...♔f6!

The underwhelming 96...♖d3? keeps
White in the game after 97.♘e8!.

97.♘h5+ ♔e6?

Engine precision is also not something
that Black is capable of maintaining.

Chapter 3

ROOK AND MINOR PIECE AGAINST DIFFERENT FORCES

We now move on to the most in-depth subject matter of this book. This chapter includes examples from over-the-board games both with and without pawns for one or both sides.

The majority of examples in this chapter cover battle with a rook and minor piece vs. an opposing rook and minor piece. There are also several instructive examples with a rook and minor piece fighting against a rook. Further examples feature a rook and a minor piece vs. two minor pieces. The follow-up to that is battle between a rook and minor piece vs. two rooks, and we wrap-up with battle between the tandem in question and a queen.

In a nutshell, rook and a bishop teamplay in the endgame is more effective than that of a rook and a knight. This is similar to having a queen and knight versus a queen and bishop, in which the former combination of pieces is generally considered more advantageous than the latter. There is no doubt, however, that correct evaluation of a particular endgame primarily depends on specific features of the position, such as activity of the rook and minor piece, the location of pawns, activity of the king, presence of weaknesses in one side or the other, and so on. The numerous examples offered for consideration confirm this. That is why the author believes it incorrect to come up with simplistic rules of thumb about one of the above material balances being superior to the other.

At the same time, the presence of a minor piece alongside a rook renders the rook more productive both in terms of developing an initiative against the enemy king and the opponent's pawn weaknesses, and in terms of assisting their own passed pawns' promotion to the queening square. We will see, among other things, how the combination of these two factors helps experienced grandmasters attain the necessary result.

We also consider material ratios that feature opposite-colored bishops. On the one hand, this increases the potential for one of the sides (usually the stronger one) to seize the initiative, primarily attacking the opponent's king. However, it also increases drawish tendencies in the position should the rooks be exchanged off.

Further, we analyze in more detail exchanges or transpositions from one endgame to another. We have already touched upon these aspects earlier. However, in the topic under review we deal with more material on the board. Thus, a possible exchange of minor pieces in a rook and minor piece vs. rook and minor piece ending gives us a rook ending. The exchange of rooks leaves us in a minor-piece ending. And, finally, when reviewing endgames that begin with a more standard material balance, we cannot avoid mentioning the potential transition into a pawn ending in case of the exchange of both minor pieces and rooks of both opponents. In doing so, a player will naturally face having to evaluate the arising ending correctly. A player's insight into similar endings, experience and precise calculation of possible lines should be

of help in this respect. In case of a rook sacrifice for a minor piece or when winning the exchange, a “rook versus minor piece” imbalance may arise that we covered in detail in chapter one.

A pawn promotion will naturally increase the number of pieces by one. It will obviously be a queen most of the time, unless, of course, such a promotion is impossible due to a stalemating idea set by the weaker side, or when the pawn is to be promoted with a check via underpromotion to a knight. In this case it will already be a multi-piece endgame, or even a middlegame, which is beyond our scope.

Besides possible transition into some type of standard endgame, the examples offered for studying may also lead to other endings with material imbalances. They include, for example, a minor piece vs. pawns or a queen vs. a rook and pawn. This once again highlights the multitude of situations that might arise on the chessboard.

The author has made what is intended to be a highly instructive selection of examples with rook and bishop vs. rook endings and rook and knight vs. rook endings. In his focus on such important aspects of handling this type of ending as location of the weaker side’s king, activity of the defending side’s rook, typical defensive drawn positions and, conversely, decisive rearrangement of pieces in already won positions, he also uses the selected examples to show that defending such types of endgame is a huge challenge in practice. We should also keep in mind that by the time this type of endgame appears on the board the defending side is likely to be experiencing a lack of thinking time as well as fatigue from the challenge of preceding defensive efforts. All these factors, coupled with tournament tension, largely interfere with successful defense of such endings.

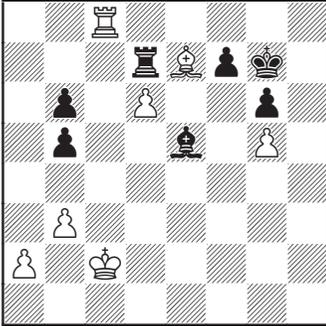
When analyzing examples with the rook and minor piece vs. two pieces imbalance, we looked at the Vallejo Pons – Carlsen game played in Germany, in which the world champion confidently managed to win the endgame despite the absence of pawns. Despite the seemingly drawn material balance, these positions do not lend themselves to easy understanding. I would even go as far as to claim that they are mind-bending for the human, and that there is no other way but carrying out much work on databases to gain insight into many secret aspects of this type of ending. The engine demonstrates which positions are mathematically won, or how the defending side could avoid losing them.

The positions with a rook and minor piece opposing two rooks are important to study as well. A side enjoying an advantage and playing for a win in a position the exchange down largely relies on his pawns, activity of pieces and position of the kings. It is not always the side with the pair of rooks who should win, which the examples here of modern grandmasters serve to confirm.

Coordinating a rook and a minor piece

We start with examples which begin with an identical material balance of rook and bishop vs. rook and bishop. In these examples, the bishops are of the same color.

Example No. 30
E. Najer – I. Saric
 Riga 2021



Black to move

Black's position produces a grim impression. His king is unsafe, he has weak doubled pawns on the queenside, and White has a far-advanced and dangerous passed pawn. The situation has become critical.

54...f5

Black undertakes a desperate attempt to free his king from the mating net.

54...♙xd6? 55.♙f6+ ♔h7 56.♖h8# is immediate failure.

Black is doomed after 54...b4 55.♖c6!? ♖b7 56.♙d3+-.

55.gxf6+?

An unfortunate slip. 55.♙f6+! was winning by force: 55...♙xf6 (55...♙f7 56.♙xe5+-) 56.♖c7!

a) 56...♖f7 57.gxf6+ ♙xf6 58.d7! ♖f8 (58...♙e7 59.d8=♖+ ♙xd8 60.♖xf7+-) 59.♖c8+-;

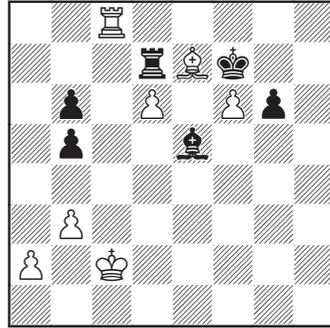
b) 56...♖xc7+ 57.dxc7+- and the pawn queens;

c) 56...♙xg5 57.♖xd7+ ♙f6 58.♖b7 ♙e3 59.♖b8+-.

55...♙f7

Black has improved significantly. The white pawns are under attack, and

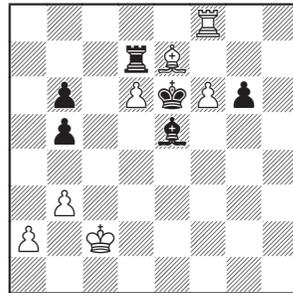
a rook ending that he can save is already looming.



56.♖c6

After 56.♖b8 ♙xd6 57.♖xb6 ♙xe7 58.fxe7 ♖xe7 59.♖xb5 ♖e2+ (Black also holds the ending arising after 59... ♙f6!? 60.a4 g5 61.a5 g4 62.a6 g3 63.♖a5 g2 64.♖a1 ♖g7 65.♖g1 [65.a7 ♖xa7!] 65...♙e5 66.♙c3 ♙d5=) 60.♙b1 ♙f6 61.a4 g5= a draw is obvious.

56.♖f8+! ♙e6 is stronger



57.♖g8

(Black also saves the ending in case of 57.♖b8 ♖a7!? 58.♙b1 [58.♖xb6 ♖xa2+ 59.♙d3 ♙xf6 60.♙xf6 ♙xf6 61.♖xb5 ♙e6=] 58...♙xf6 59.♖xb6 ♙xe7 60.dxe7+ ♙xe7 61.♖xg6 [61.♖xb5 ♙f6 62.a4 g5=] 61...♖a5!

a) 62.♖g5 ♙d6 63.b4 [63.a4 ♙c6 64.♙b2 ♙b6=] 63...♖a4 64.♖xb5 ♙c6

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