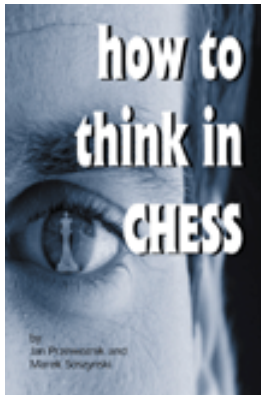




C O L U M N I S T S

The Instructor

Mark Dvoretsky

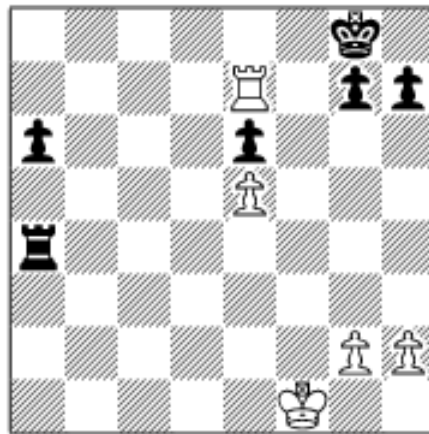


Discoveries in Rook Endgames

In my previous article, I introduced some analyses of minor-piece endgames, taken from my forthcoming endgame textbook. We spoke of well-known positions which had been poorly annotated in other books on the endgame. The existing theory of endgames is full of misdirection; I hope I have cleared up a little bit of it. On the other hand, it's more likely that I will also have helped to create more: after all, the very process of studying a huge number of complex positions makes it extremely difficult to avoid errors, even with a most serious and attentive attitude towards the analysis. So I will be grateful for anything my readers may contribute - while the book is still unpublished, it's not too late to make corrections.

Now let's talk about rook endgames. I remind you that one of my articles, with new analyses of two rook endgames already known to theory, has already been published, in ChessCafe.com, February 2001.

Yeliseyevich - Pytel Trstenik, 1979



Black to move

In order to select the best approach for Black, it is useful to keep in mind the famous rule formulated by Siegbert Tarrasch: *The rook belongs behind the passed pawn - yours, or your opponent's.* This is the most active place for the rook.

After 1...a5? 2. Rxe6 Re4 (intending Kf7) 3. Re7 Kf8 4. Ra7 Rxe5 5. Kf2, the extra pawn offers Black absolutely no winning chances. The only worthwhile try is to bring the rook behind the outside passed pawn.

1...Rf4+! **2. Kg1** (2. Ke2 Re4+ and 3...Rxe5) **2...Rf7!** (but not 2...Rf8 3. Ra7! =).

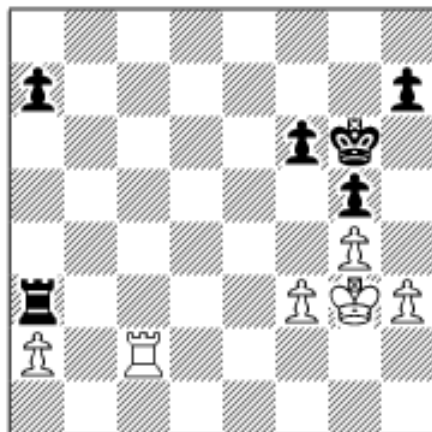
In the game, Black's plan was a complete success: 3. Rxe6 Ra7 4. Rd6 a5 5. e6 Kf8 6. Rd3 Ke7 7. Kf2 Kxe6 8. Ke3 a4 9. Ra3 Kd5 10. Kd3 Kc5 11. Kc3 Kb5 12. Kb2 Kc4 13. Rg3 a3+! 14. Ka2 Kd4 15. Rh3 h6 16. Rg3 g5, and White resigned. 17. h4 would be met by 17...Ra5, and if 18. Rb3, then 18...Ke4 19. Rb6 Kf4 20. Rxh6 g4, followed by 21...Kg3, and wins

According to Pytel's commentary in the Informant, his victory was fully deserved. The truth, however, is that White could have defended better. Before blockading the passed pawn with his rook, he could have first won one of the kingside pawns.



3. Re8+! Rf8 4. Rxe6 Ra8 5. Re7 (5. Rd6 Ra7!? is inferior) 5...a5 6. e6 a4 7. Rd7 Kf8 7...a3 8. e7) 8. Rf7+ Ke8 9. Rxf7 Ra5 10. Rc7 a3 11. Rc1 a2 12. Ra1 Ke7 13. Kf2 Kxe6 14. Ke3. Black still stands better; but in this case, a draw is the most likely outcome.

Ilivitsky - Taimanov USSR Championship, Moscow 1955



White to move

Many years ago, this endgame was adequately (though not exhaustively) commented upon by a well-known expert on rook endgames, GM Grigory Levenfish. Over time, this analysis has been reproduced in any number of endgame texts; but the authors at best only reprinted (more or less completely) Levenfish's variations. If they added anything of their own, it has usually been wrong.

Material is even; but Black stands better, because his rook is more active. *The rook's activity is the main criterion for the evaluation and play of rook endgames.*

It is vital to acknowledge the main problem confronting both sides in this position. Each would like to alter the kingside pawn structure in his favor by advancing the h-pawn. The difference is that Black is ready to play it, while White is not, as it would cost him the f-pawn.

As Levenfish correctly pointed out, White can sacrifice a pawn by 36. Rc6! Rxa2 (36...h5 37. gh+ Kxh5 38. Rxf6) 37. h4 gh+ 38. Kxh4, and solve both problems at once: the activation of his rook and the improvement of the kingside situation. This would have gotten him the draw without difficulty.

36. Rh2? h5! 37. Rc2

If 37. gh+ Kxh5 (intending f6-f5-f4+) 38. h4, then 38...g4. The logical continuation would be 37. h4; but Levenfish's analysis gives Black a great advantage after 37...hg 38. Kxg4 (38. hg f5 39. Rf2 Kxg5-) 38...f5+! (38...Ra4+? 39. Kg3 gh+ 40. Rxh4 Rxa2 is a draw) 39. Kg3 g4 40. Rf2 Kh5 41. Rf1 (41. Kf4 Ra4+ 42. Kxf5 g3-) 41...Ra4! (intending f4+) 42. fg+ Rxf4 43. Kf3 Kxh4! (on 43...Rxh4? 44. Rg1, the king is cut off on the edge of the board, since 44..Rg4 leads to a drawn pawn endgame) 44. Rc1 Kg5 45. a3 Ra4 46. Rc3 a5. Black has an extra pawn, his rook remains more active than its counterpart - so this position is probably won for him.

37...h4+

The pawn is very strong at h4, restricting the White king, and also fixing the weakness at h3. White now has a very difficult defensive task. True, Taimanov plays inaccurately later on; but his opponent fails to take advantage.

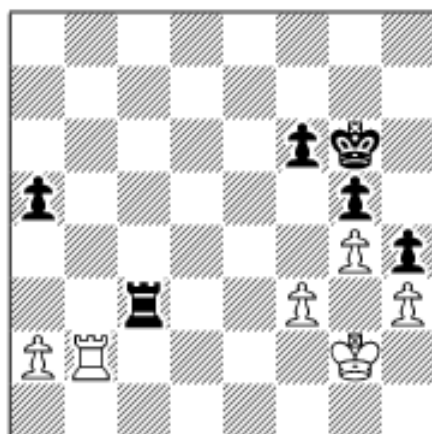
38. Kf2 a6 (a move I do not understand) **39. Rb2 Rc3?**

The rook should have been left at a3 until Black finished advancing the a-pawn

and improving his king position.

40. Kg2 a5?

Here 40...Ra3, followed by Kf7 was better.



41. Rf2?

White's passive strategy continues (by the way, the errors by both sides during this phase have gone unnoticed in numerous commentaries). Once again, White had to take his chance to activate the rook: 41. Rb7! Rc2+ 42. Kg1 Rxa2 43. Ra7. Rb7! Rc2+ 42. Kg1 Rxa2 43. Ra7.

GM Krogius' comments on this game consist of a considerably edited version of Levenfish's variations (without, of course, acknowledging their source). Here, however, he decides to add something of his

own. He rates this position as lost for White, "because of the bad position of White's pawns, and especially that of his king - cut off on the first rank." Well, what about the Black king? He can no longer take part in the game - since f6-f5 can always be met by Ra6+ and g4xf5. White will keep his rook on a7, and shuttle his king between g1 and h1. Black can advance his pawn to a3 - and then what?

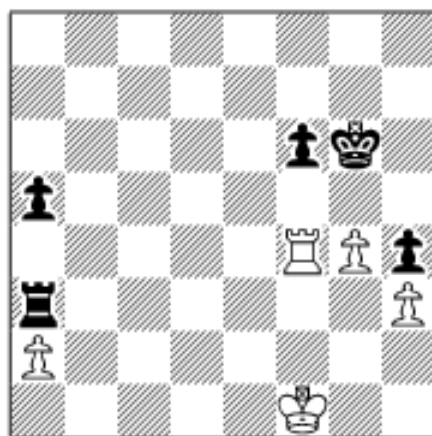
41...Ra3?!

41...Rc4! is more accurate, since White could now give serious consideration to the pawn sacrifice 42. f4!? gf 43. Rxf4.

42. Kf1 Kf7?

This error also escaped the commentators' attention. Black probably rejected 42...f5, fearing the reply 43. f4! But before bringing up his king, he should first have played 42...Ra4!, preventing the activation of White's kingside.

43. f4! gf 44. Rxf4 (intending 45. g5) 44...Kg6



45. Rf2??

After playing this passive move, White resigned, seeing that his position was completely hopeless after 45...Rxh3. 45. Rf5!, however, would have saved him. True, there's no time to win Black's h-pawn: 45...Rxa2 46. Rh5? a4 47. Rxh4 a3 48. Rh8 Rb2-+; and 47. Ra5 Kf7! 48. Ra6 a3 is also hopeless.

"*Venturi's Position*" is a vital defensive method when the stronger side has a rook pawn and his rook stands in front of it. The point is to attack the rook pawn from the side, not allowing the enemy rook to abandon its protection. If the king comes over to defend the pawn, you chase it

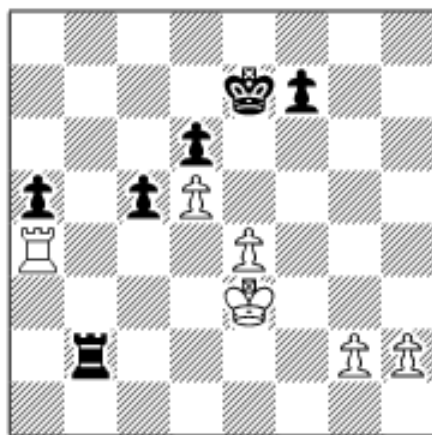
away with a series of checks (with a rook pawn, the king has no shelter from checks along the rank). Only after the pawn reaches the 2nd rank does your rook take up a position behind the pawn. The White king remains on the g2 and h2 squares; with Black's rook on the 2nd rank, it goes one rank higher or lower.

Venturi's defense is usually employed in "rook and rook-pawn vs. rook" endgames, or in endgames with both a- and h-pawns. But, as our present example shows, it may sometimes be employed with a larger number of pawns as well.

Thus, we answer 45...Rxa2 with 46. Kg1! a4 47. Rf4! Black's king may, in fact, escape the kingside by making use of zugzwang: 47...Ra3 48. Kh2! Kg7! (zugzwang - if 48...Kf7 49. g5) 49. Rb4 (49. Kg2? Rg3+ and 50...a3) 49...Kf7 50. Re4 Kf8! (zugzwang) 51. Rf4 Ke7; but that's all he can manage. The king has no shelter from checks along the rank allowing him to stay near his passed pawn; thus, his rook cannot escape the a-file.

The theme of our next endgame is: *activating the king*.

Flear - Legky Le Touquet 1991



Black to move

1...Kf6!

Activating the king is more important than winning material! 1...Rb5? is too passive: 2. Kf4 Kf6 3. g4; and on 1...Rxg2? 2. Rxa5 Rxh2 3. Ra7+ Kf6 4. Rd7 Ke5 5. Re7+, the game is drawn immediately.

2. Rxa5?

As Legky pointed out, White could have prevented the Black king from reaching e5 by playing 2. Kf4!! Rf2+ 3. Ke3! (3. Kg3? Rf1! and 4...Ke5) 3...Rxg2 4. Rxa5, when after 4...Ke5 4. Ra7, Black has no third-rank check. And 4...Rxh2 is met by 5. Ra7 Rh6 6. Rd7 Kg7 7. e5!? de 8. Ke4, when the activity of the White pieces compensates for his two-pawn minus.

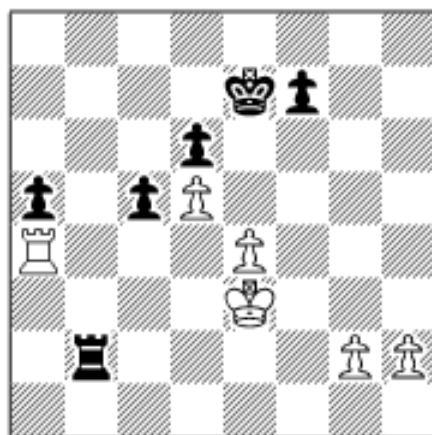
2...Ke5! 3. Ra7 Rb3+ 4. Kf2 Kxe4 5. Rxf7

White loses after 5. h4 Rb2+ 6. Kg3 c4 7. h5 c3 8. Rc7 Kd3! 9. h6 c2 10. h7 Rb8. But 5. g4!? f6 6. Rf7 was worth considering, to keep the king from blocking its own pawn after 6...Rb2+ 7. Kg3 .

5...Rb2+ 6. Kg3 c4!

There's no sense wasting time on the d5-pawn: advancing his own pawn quickly is more important.

7. Rc7



7...Kd3?! 8. h4?

The decisive error: 8. Rc6! was necessary. Legky gives the continuation 8...c3 9. Rxd6 Rb5! 10. Rc6 Rxd5 11. h4 c2 12. Kh3 Rd4 13. Rxc2 Kxc2-/+ . The concluding position is, in fact, won, in view of the unfortunate placement of the White king. But if White had moved forward instead, by 12. Rxc2! Kxc2 13. Kf4 (or 13. Kg4 Kd3 14. h5 Kd4 15. h6) 13...Kd3 14. g4, Flear would have gotten a draw.

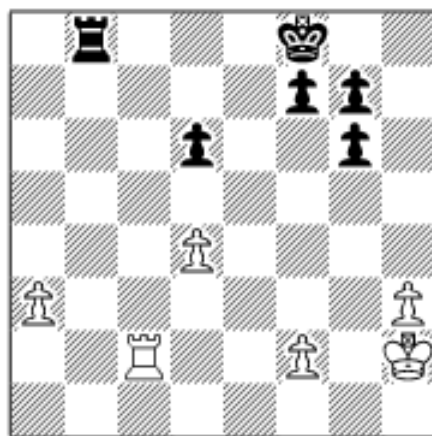
On his previous move, Black ought to have played 7...Kd4!!, to secure the d6-pawn (8. Rc6? c3 9. Rxd6 c2 10. Rc6 Rb3+ and 11...Rc3). After 8. h4 c3 9. h5, the inaccurate 9...c2? allows White to save himself by immediately activating his king: 10. Kf4! Kd3 11. Kf5 Rb1 12. Ke6, or 12. g4. The accurate move-order is: 9...Kd3! 10. h6 (10. Kf4 Rxc2 11. Kf5 Re2! 12. h6 c2 13. h7 Rh2 14. Kg6 Kd2-+) 10...c2 11. Kf4 Rb1 12. g4 (12. h7 Rh1 13. g4 Rxc2) 12...c1Q 13. Rxc1 Rxc1 14. Kf5 Kd4 15. g5 Rg1! 16. Kg6 (16. Ke6 Kc5-+) 16...Ke5!-+, and Black's king arrives in the nick of time!

8...c3-+ 9. h5 c2 10. h6 Rb1 11. Kf4 (11. h7 Rh1 12. Kg4 Rxc2-+) **11...c1Q+** **12. Rxc1 Rxc1 13. g4 Rf1+ 14. Kg5 Ke4 15. Kg6 Rg1**, and White resigned.

Tartakower once described Rubinstein as “the rook ending of a game of chess begun by the gods a thousand years ago”. I want to close this segment on rook endgames with an example from the work of the gifted Polish player. They say that after the conclusion of the game whose fragment we examine below, Rubinstein's opponent, Spielmann, was inspired to exclaim: “Akiba, if you were living in the Middle Ages, you would have been burned at the stake! What you do with rook endgames cannot be called anything but witchcraft!”

Both the rook activity and the king activity we have discussed above are basic leitmotifs of the endgame we shall examine now.

Spielmann - Rubinstein St. Petersburg 1909



Black to move

Sometimes, the disadvantage of a position consists of having too many “pawn islands”. White has four of them here, compared to two for his opponent; that means he has more weak pawns unable to defend one another. And that is why he stands worse here.

40...Ra8!

The first link in Black's plan is to attack the pawns, with the goal of tying the rook to their defense. It would have been a serious error to chase after material with 40...Rb3?, since after 41. Ra2 Rd3 42. a4 Rxd4 43. a5 Rc4 44. a6, the White rook would stand actively behind its passed pawn, while Black's rook would be

forced into a passive position on a8.

41. Rc3

Spielmann thinks that the rook would stand even worse on a2, illustrating with the following variation: 41. Ra2 Ra4 42. Kg3 Ke7 (42...Rxd4? 43. a4 is unclear) 43. Kf3 Ke6 44. Ke4 d5+ 45. Ke3 Kf5. But, for one thing, the concluding position of his variation is far from clear; and secondly, instead of 45. Ke3, White could play 45. Kd3!? Kf5 (45..Kd6 46. Kc3 Kc6 47. Kd3 Kb5 48. Rb2+) 46. Kc3 Ke4 47. Re2+. We see that the rook behind the pawn, even though passive, still has definite (though hidden) potential. Here, it restrains the enemy rook, which if it leaves the a4-square would allow the a-pawn to advance.

Levenfish and Smyslov also examine the more dangerous 44...g5!? (instead of 44...d5+). Their conclusion: here, too, White retains sufficient defensive resources. Here's their analysis: 45. Ra1 f6 42. Ra2 f5+ 47. Kd3 Kd5 48. Kc3 Rc4+ 49. Kb3 Rxd4 50. a4 Rd3+ (50...Kc6 51. a5 Kb7 52. a6+ Ka7 53. Ra5 Rf4 54. Rd5 Rxf2 55. Rxd6 Rf3+ 56. Kc4 Rxh3 57. Rg6 g4 58. Kb5 Rb3+ 59. Ka5=) 51. Kb4 Rxh3 52. a5 Rh8 53. a6 Ke4 54. a7 Ra8 55. Kb5 Kf3 56. Kb6=.

Actually, the rook on the 3rd rank has its advantages - which, however, Spielmann failed to make use of in the continuation.

41...Ra4 42. Rd3 Ke7

Stage two - centralizing the king.

43. Kg3

On 43. d5, Black plays 43...g5! (43...Kf6 44. Rf3+) 44. Kg2 Kf6 45. Rf3+ Kg6 (intending ...Rd4) 46. Rd3 f6!, followed by Kf5.

43...Ke6 44. Kf3?

To me, this looks like an obvious positional error, which for some reason has not attracted the commentators' attention. By allowing the enemy king to reach d5, White consigns himself to passive defense - which we know is hopeless in rook endgames. White had excellent drawing chances with 44. Re3+! Kd7 (44...Kd5 45. Re7), and now either 45. Rf3!? f6 46. d5 Rd4 47. Rb3, or 45. Rd3 Kc6 46. Rc3+! Kd5 47. Rc7 Rxa3+ 48. Kg2 Ke6 49. d5+ Kf6 50. Rd7 Ra6 51. h4.

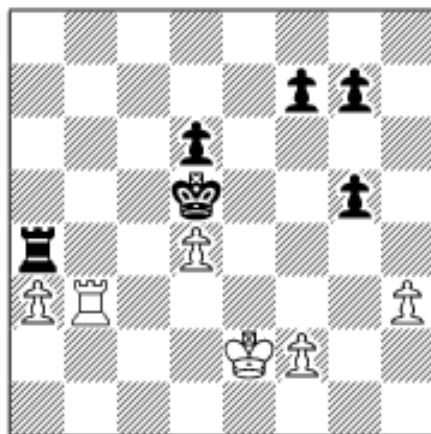
44...Kd5 45. Ke2?!

Another inaccuracy. It would have made sense to restrict the kingside pawns with 45. h4! Note that here and later, White does not fear 45...Rxd4, since after 46. Ke3, he has the outside passed pawn in the pawn endgame.

45...g5!

Stage Three: It is important to improve his pawn structure on the kingside.

46. Rb3

**46...f6!**

46...Rxd4? is met by 47. Rb5+ or 47. Rd3. After 46...Kxd4!? 47. Rb7, White trades off a number of pawns. True, Garry Kasparov thinks the ending after 47...f6! (47...Rxa3? 48. Rxf7 Rxh3 49. Rxc7=+/+) 48. Rxc7 Rxa3 49. h4! gh 50. Rg4+ Kc3 51. Rxh4 Ra2+ is drawn; but that's not clear. And Black also has to think about 47. Rg3!? (intending Rg4+) 47...Ra5 9. a4.

Rubinstein's move is safer. Now 47. Rb7 is met by 47...Rxa3 48. Rxc7 Rxh3 (48...Kxd4 leads to the variation we just looked at) 49. Rg6 (49. Rf7 Ke6! 50. Rf8 f5 51. Re8+ Kd5 52. Rf8 Ke4 intending g4 and Rf3-+) 49...Ke6 50. Rg8 Rh4 51. Ke3 Kd5. This position Kasparov also considers won for Black; and here, I agree with him. When playing for the win, it's advisable to avoid pawn exchanges. And in this line, there's one more pair of pawns left than after 46...Kxd4.

47. Ke3 Kc4 48. Rd3

48. Rb7 Rxa3+ 49. Ke4 d5+ 50. Kf5 Rxh3 51. Rxc7 Rf3+ is also hopeless.

48...d5

With king and pawn position maximally improved, now comes the rook's turn. Having completed its task on a4, the rook rightly seeks a new sphere of activity.

49. Kd2 Ra8 50. Kc2

50. Ke2? Rb8 51. Kd2 Rb2+ 52. Ke3 Rxf2-+ (or 52...Ra2 - zugzwang)

50...Ra7!

On 50...Rb8, Black had to reckon with 51. Rc3+ Kxd4 52. Rc7.

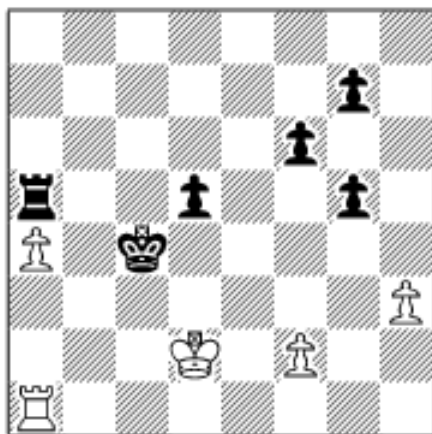
41. Kd2 Re7 (zugzwang) 52. Rc3+!

The last hope of activity. Continuing the waiting game would lead to an ignoble end: 52. Kc2 Re2+ 53. Rd2 Rxd2+ 54. Kxd2 Kb3!-+; or 52. Re3 Rxe3! (52...Rb7!) 53. fe (53. Kxe3 Kb3) 53...f5! 54. Kc2 g6 (zugzwang) 55. Kd2 (55. Kb2 g4) 55...Kb3-+.

52...Kxd4 53. a4! Ra7 54. Ra3 Ra5!

The passed pawn must be blockaded as far back as possible. Black intends to approach with his king, either to capture it, or to transfer the blockade, freeing the rook from its passive position.

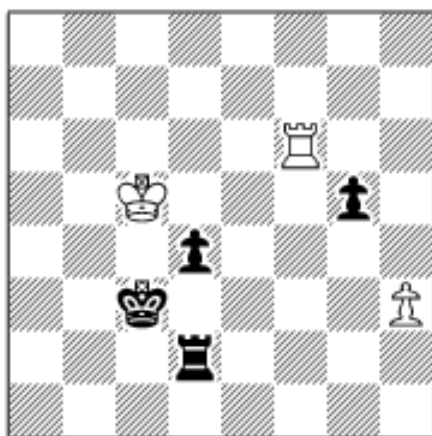
55. Ra1 Kc4

**56. Ke3?!**

White had to try 56. Rc1+! Kb4 57. Rb1+! Kxa4 58. Kd3 (58. Rb7 Rb5! is inferior). The Black king's position on the edge of the board offers definite practical chances. For example, after 58...Rb5? 59. Ra1+ Kb4 60. Kd4, it would be Black's turn to struggle for the draw.

Levenfish and Smyslov examined 58...Rc5! 59. Kd4 (59. Rb7? Rc4 60. Rxc7 Kb5) 61...Rc2 62. Rb7 Rxf2 63. Rxc7, with chances to draw for White. Kasparov

continued the line with 63...Rd2+! 64. Kc5 Kb3 65. Rg6 Kc3 66. Rxf6 d4, and called this a winning position.



Here, I believe he is wrong: White saves himself after 67. Ra6! Kd3 (67...d3 68. Ra3+ Kb2 69. Kb4 Rd1 70. Rb3+ Kc2 71. Kc4=) 68. Kd5 Ke3 69. Re6+ Kf4 70. Rf6+ Kg3 71. Rg6=. Thus it seems that, despite his earlier inaccuracies, Spielmann's position was still defensible.

56...d4+ 57. Kd2 Rf5!

Thanks to his accurate 54th move, Black's rook is able to leave the blockading square. On 58. a5 there follows 58...Rxf2+ 59. Ke1 Rb2! (not 59...Rh2? 60. Ra4+ Kb5 61. a6!)

60. a6 Rb8 61. a7 Ra8 62. Kd2 Kc5 63. Kd3 Kb6 64. Kxd4 Rxa7+- (Spielmann).

58. Ke1 Kb4!

A standard role-reversal: now the king will blockade the pawn, while the rook goes after the weak enemy pawns.

59. Ke2 Ka5 60. Ra3

On 60. Rb1 Kxa4 61. Rb7, Kasparov suggests 61...d3+ 62. Kxd3 Rxf2 63. Rxc7 Rf3+ 64. Ke4 Rxc3+- . This variation is faulty: White can save himself by playing 64. Kc4! Ka3 (64...Rf4+ 65. Kd5 Kb3 66. Ke6) 65. Rg6 Kb2 66. Kd5 Kc3 67. Ke6. However, 61...g6!+- is far stronger.

60...Rf4 61. Ra2

61. Kf1 Rh4 62. Kg2 Kb4! 63. Ra1 d3 64. a5 d2 65. a6 Rh8 66. a7 (66. Kf1 Kc3) 66...Ra8 67. Kf3 Rxa7+- (Spielmann).

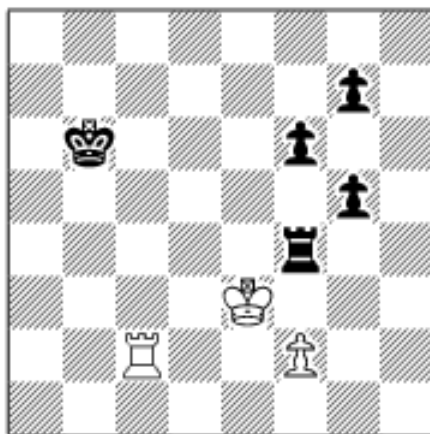
61...Rh4 62. Kd3 (62. Ra3 Kb4) 62...Rxc3+ 63. Kxd4 Rh4+ 64. Kd3

64. Ke3 Rxa4 65. Rd2 Kb6!, and on 66. Rd7, Black has 66...Ra7.

64...Rxa4 65. Re2 (intending 66. Re7) 65...Rf4!

Not 65...Kb6? 66. Re6+! and 67. Re7.

66. Ke3 Kb6 67. Rc2



67...Kb7!

Exact to the end! Black prevents the maneuver Rc8-g8, and prepares to cross the c-file with his king, after Ra4-a6-c6.

68. Rc1 Ra4 69. Rh1 Kc6 70. Rh7 Ra7 71. Ke4 Kd6 72. Kf5 g6+! 73. Kxg6 Rxh7 74. Kxh7 Ke5 75. Kg6 g4. White resigned.

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Translated by Jim Marfia

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