



C O L U M N I S T S

The Instructor

Mark Dvoretsky

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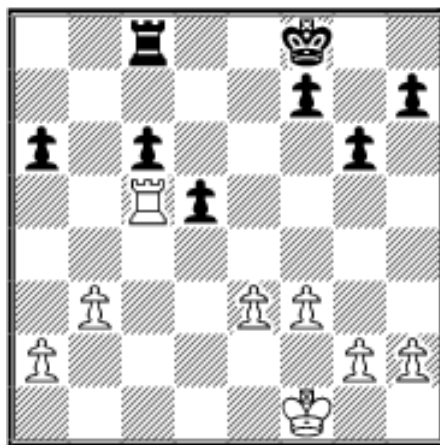
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Active Rooks

Rook activity is the cornerstone in the evaluation and play of rook endgames. This activity may take diverse forms: from attacking the enemy pawns, to the support of one's own passed pawns, to the interdiction or pursuit of the enemy king.

There are indeed times when the rook must remain passive, and implement purely defensive functions. But even then, *one must stubbornly seek out any possibility of activating the rook, not even stopping at sacrificing pawns, or making your own king's position worse.*

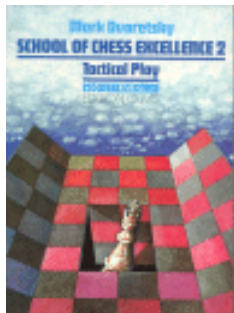
The following classic endgame serves as an excellent illustration.

Flohr – Vidmar Nottingham 1936**32. Kf1-e2**

King centralization is paramount. A mistake would be 32. Ra5?! c5! 33. Rxa6 c4 (Black sacrifices a pawn, activates his forces, and draws without trouble); or 32. b4?! Ke7 33. Ke2 Kd6 34. Kd3 Rb8! (34...Kc7!?)

35. a3 Rb5.

32...Kf8-e7 33. Ke2-d3 Ke7-d6 34. Rc5-a5!



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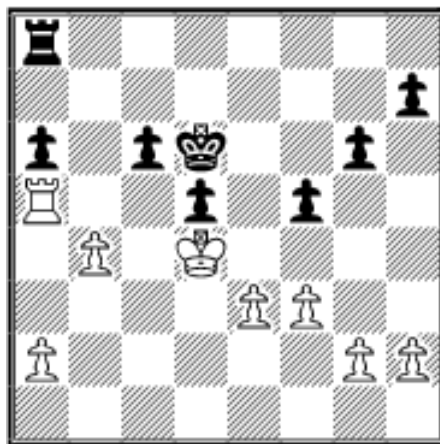


But not 34. Kd4?, in view of 34...Rb8 35. Ra5 c5+! 36. Kd3 Rb6.

34...Rc8-a8 35. Kd3-d4

Now Black must think about e3-e4.

35...f7-f5!?! 36. b3-b4



White improves his position, strengthening his control of the queenside dark squares. Now Black must choose a defensive plan.

36...Ra8-b8?

Too passive! On the next move, Black's rook will have to return to the unenviable role of defender of the a6-pawn.

The pawn had to be defended by the king: **36...Kc7!** (intending to continue ..Kb6). True, this would distance the king from the center, whereas the White king, could advance; but as compensation, the rook would be freed. And the activity of the rook in rook endgames - is paramount!

White would probably have replied **37. Kc5 Kb7 38. Kd6 Re8 39. Ra3** (intending Rc3). In response, Black should clear the road for his rook along the second rank.

A) 39...f4? is completely wrong, because of 40. ef Re2 41. g4, with f4-f5 to follow. Black cannot defend against the passed f-pawn, because the pawn at f3 shields it from the rear.

B) Levenfish and Smyslov recommend 39..d4!? 40. ed Re2 41. Rc3 Rxc6 (41...Rd2 42. Rc4) 42. Rxc6 Rxc6 43. a4 g5. Black prepares Rh6+ or g5-g4. However, by bringing his rook around behind the g-pawn - 44. Rc7+! Kb6 45. Rg7! - White retains the advantage, since his passed d-pawn is quite dangerous.

C) **39...g5!** This simple move has, for some reason, been overlooked in the endgame books.

40. Rc3 f4 41. ef gf, and Black keeps sufficient counterplay; for example: 42. Rxc6 Rd8+ 43. Kc5 d4 44. Re6 d3 45. Re1 Rg8, with a probable draw.

40. g3 g4! (here too, 40...d4?! 41. ed Re2 is dubious, in view of 42. Ra5! [after 42. Rc3 Rxc6, the c6 pawn is taboo] 42...h6! 43. a4! [43. Rxf5 Rxa2 44. Rf7+ Kb6 45. Rc7 Rxc6+ Kb5] 43...Rb2 44. Rxf5 Rxb4 45. Kc5 Rxa4 46. Rf7+, and White has a great advantage] 41. f4 Re4 42. Rc3 Rc4, or 41. fg fg 42. Rc3 Rf8, and Black's position is not worse.

37. a2-a3 Rb8-a8

On b6, the rook might even stand worse than it does on a8.

38. e3-e4!

White has strengthened his queenside as much as he can; he can achieve no more here (38. a4? Rb8). Therefore, he executes a **standard technique: enlarging the battlefield!**

After exchanging the central pawns, White's king will attack the kingside, while the rook obtains complete control of the 5th rank.

38...f5xe4 39. f3xe4 d5xe4 40. Kd4xe4 Ra8-a7?

Black continues to wait and see. Here again, it was necessary to free the rook from the defense of the pawn, by sending the king over to b6: 40...Kc7!. In reply, White should not continue 41. Kf4? Rf8+! 42. Kg3 Kb6=. Levenfish and Smyslov give this continuation: 41. Re5!? Kb6 42. Re7 a5! 43. Rxh7 ab 44. ab Ra4 45. Rg7 Rxb4+ 46. Kf3 Rh4! 47. h3 Rh6 48. Kg4 c5 49. Kg5 Rh8 50. Rxc6+ Kb5 51. Rg7 c4, followed by ..Rc8.

Perhaps White should try the more restrained 41. h4!? Kb6 42. g4 (42. Kf4!?) 42...Rf8 43. h5, maintaining his advantage.

41. Ke4-f4 h7-h6

Otherwise, the king enters decisively at h6: 41...Ra8 42. Kg5 Ra7 43. Kh6 Ke6 44. g4 and 45. h5 (Levenfish and Smyslov).

42. h2-h4! Kd6-e6 43. Kf4-g4 Ra7-a8 44. h4-h5! g6-g5

44...gh+ 45. Kxh5 Rg8 46. g4 (Alekhine)

45. g2-g3!

White has created and fixed a new weakness - the h6 pawn. After returning his king to the center, he has taken the f4-square under control. 45. Kf3 would have been less accurate, considering 45...Rf8+ 46. Ke4 Rf4+.

45...Ra8-a7 46. Kg4-f3! Ra7-a8 47. Kf3-e4 Ra8-a7 48. Ke4-d4 Ke6-d6 49. Kd4-e4 Kd6-e6 50. Ra5-e5+! Ke6-d6

If 50...Kf6, then 51. Rc5 Rc7 52. Ra5 Ra7 53. Kd4 Ke6 54. Kc5 Rd7 55. Rxa6 Rd3 56. Rxc6+ Kf7 57. a4 Rxc3 58. Rxh6 and wins (Levenfish and Smyslov).

51. Re5-e8 c6-c5

The pawn endgame after 51...Re7+ 52. Rxe7 Kxe7 53. Ke5 is completely hopeless.

52. Re8-d8+!

Leads to a technical win. White had calculated the continuation 52...Kc7 53. Rh8 cb 54. Rh7+ (of course, 54. ab wins too) 54...Kb8 55. Rxa7 Kxa7 56. ab Kb6 57. Kf5 Kb5 58. Kg6 Kxb4 59. Kxh6 a5 60. Kxg5 a4 61. h6, winning. And other king retreats lose the c5 pawn.

52...Kd6-c6 53. Rd8-c8+ Kc6-b6 54. Rc8xc5 Ra7-h7

Black's rook exchanges one post for another; but this one is no less pathetic than the first.

55. Rc5-e5 Kb6-c6 56. Re5-e6+ Kc6-b5 57. Ke4-f5 Rh7-f7+ 58. Re6-f6

Black resigned.

A few years ago, a similar pawn structure occurred in a game played by one of my former students, Alexey Dreev.

Dreev – Chandler Hastings 1999/2000

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nf3 d5 4. Nc3 Be7 5. Bf4 0-0 6. e3 c5 7. dc Bxc5 8. a3 Nc6 9. cd Nxd5 10. Nxd5 ed 11. Bd3 Bb6 12. 0-0 Bg4 13. h3 Bh5 14. b4 a6

Black loses a pawn after 14...Qf6? 15. g4 Bg6 16. Bxg6 and 17. Qxd5; but 14...Re8!? was worth considering.

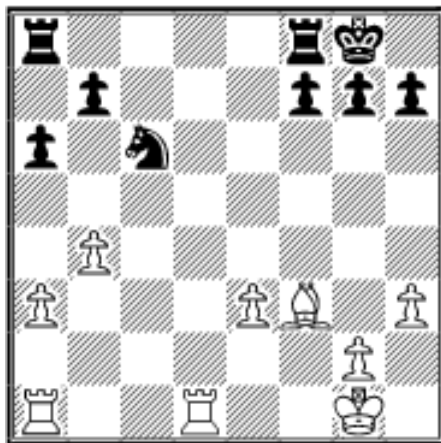
15. Be2!

After the older moves 15. Rc1 or 15. Ra2, Black would reply 15...d4.

15...d4

If 15...Re8, then 16. Ra2!, and Black no longer has 16...d4? because of 17. Nxd4.

16. ed (16. Nxd4? Bxd4) **16...Bxf3** (16...Qd5!?) **17. Bxf3 Qxd4 18. Be3! Qxd1 19. Rfxd1 Bxe3 20. fe**

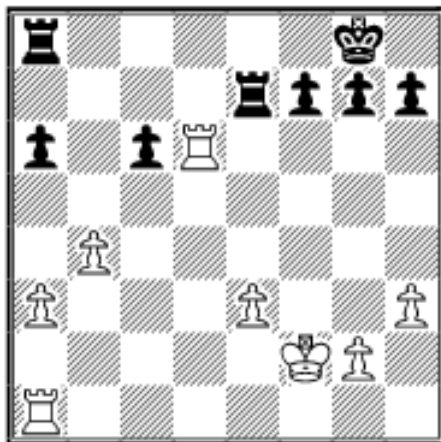
**20...Rfe8?**

“This first serious inaccuracy leads to serious consequences,” wrote Dreev. Instead, he recommends 20..Rfd8 21. Bxc6 (21. Kf2 Rxd1 22. Rxd1 Rd8) 21...bc 22. Rxd8+ Rxd8 23. Rc1 Rc8,

with slightly better chances for White (23...Rd6 is weaker, because of 24. Rc5 and 25. Ra5).

21. Kf2 Re7

“Again he should have put his rook on the d-file - 21...Rad8, regardless of the tempo loss.” (Dreev)

22. Bxc6 bc 23. Rd6 (23. Rac1? Re6)**23...Rc8?!**

“After the game, Murray acknowledged that he had intended 23...a5, and only saw here that he remains a pawn down after 24. Rxc6 ab 25. ab!

The best chance was 23...Rae8!: as M. Dvoretsky taught me, passivity in rook

endgames leads to no good.”

Dreev explains his thinking with the following variations:

24. Re1 Re6 25. Rxe6 Rxe6 26. Rc1 Kf8 27. Rc5 Rf6+
28. Ke2 Rg6 29. g4 Rh6; and

24. Rxc6 Rxe3 25. Rxa6 Re2+ 26. Kf1 Rb2! (26...h5 27.
Ra8!) 27. Re1 Rc8 28. Re2 Rb1+ 29. Kf2 h5.

“In either case, White would have definite problems converting his advantage.”

Now, White’s play could be strengthened in the second line with 28. Rc6! Ra8 29. Rec1, forcing the exchange of one pair of rooks, which leads to an easy win. Thus, Dreev’s recommendation would not save Black But still, it remains instructive: it shows what direction a top-class player follows to find the best defense.

24. Rc1 Rec7 25. Rc5 Kf8 26. e4 Ke7 27. e5 f6 28. Rd3 fe 29. Ke3 Kf6?

29...Rd7 30. Rxe5+ Kd8 holds out longer.

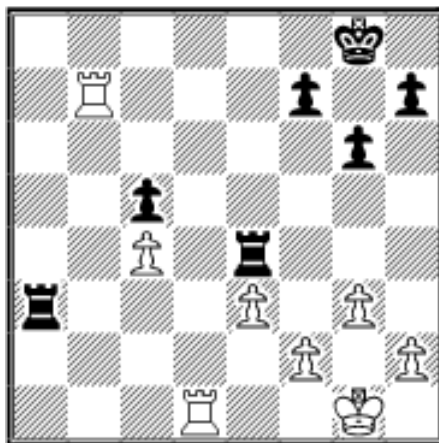
30. Ke4 g6 31. Rdc3!

“The game is practically decided, since Black’s king is now cut off from his weak pawns.” (Dreev)

31...Ke6 32. Rxe5+ Kf6 33. Rf3+ Kg7 34. Kd4 Rd7+ 35. Kc4 Rb8 36. Rc5 Rb6 37. Kb3 Rd6 38. Ka4 h5 39 h4 Rd7 40. Ka5 Rb8 41. Rxc6, and White soon won.

The same principle of “rook activity” operates not just in pure rook endings, but also in those cases where there are other pieces on the board.

***Petrosian – Balashov USSR Championship,
Leningrad 1977***



26...Ra8?

Of course not 26...Rxc4? 27. Rdd7; but the text is also a mistake. The rook should have been more actively placed: 26...Ra6! 27. Rdd7 Rf6, when Black draws without any particular difficulty.

27. Rdd7 Rf8 28. Rbc7 Rxc4 29. Kg2 h5 30. h3 (30. h4!?) 30...Kg7

It would have made sense to play 30...Ra4!? 31. Rxc5 Raa8 (intending Rad8). The “four pawns to three on the same side” single-rook ending is drawish; four rooks makes Black’s task considerably more difficult. Of course, the exchange of rooks is not hard to forestall: White simply puts both rooks on the same file. But then the defense is also made easier: White no longer threatens to double rooks on the 7th.

31. Kf3 Kf6

31...g5!? deserved consideration.

32. h4! Kg7 33. Rd5?!

point by easier means than plunging into tense calculations. And he gets it!

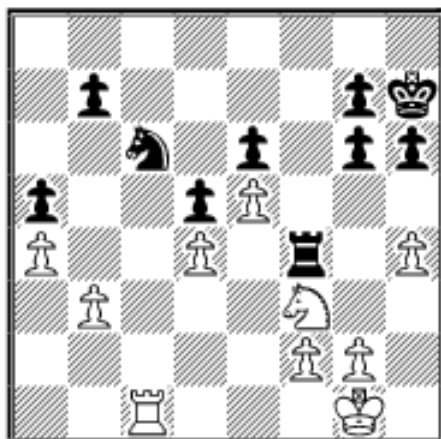
44...Kxe6 45. Rbe7+ Kd6 46. Re2 Raf8

46...g5!? is no help: 47. hg Rxc5 48. Rf6+ (also possible is 48. f4 Rgg8 49. Rf6+ Kd7 50. Kh3 Ra3 51. Rg2) 48...Kd7 49. Rb2! (threatening Rb7+) 49...Ke7?! (49...Kc7) 50. Rh6 and wins.

47. Ra7 Ra8 48. Rae7 Rac8 49. R2e6+ Kd5 50. Kh3

(apparently, White has understood that he can't do without f2-f4, and now prepares that advance) **50...Rc7?**
51. Rxc6! Black resigned.

Riazantsev - Ksenofontov Moscow 1997



28. Rd1?

This looks like a completely natural move - a central pawn is under attack, and White protects it. But the rook will now remain forever passive. This is a very serious positional minus, as his opponent demonstrates

convincingly.

28...Rg4! 29. Kf1?

White loses without a struggle. The prophylactic 29. Kh2! was necessary, preventing Black's intended g6-g5. In that case, Black would probably have transferred his king to e7.

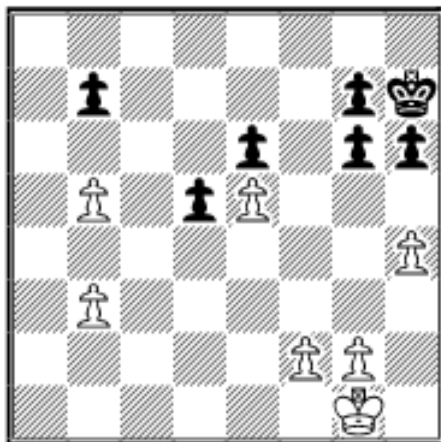
29...g5 (wins) 30. hg hg 31. g3 Kg6 32. Ke2 Re4+ 33. Kd3 g4 34. Nh4+ Kg5 35. Kc3 Re2 36. Kd3 (36. Rf1

Nb4 threatens mate on c2; 36. f4+ gf 37. Nxf3+ Kg4)
36...Rxf2, and Black won.

White should have sacrificed the pawn with 28. Rc5!
 Nxd4 29. Nxd4 Rxd4 30. Rxa5 (threatening 31. Rb5)
 30...Rb4 31. Ra8, followed by 32. Re8. White's rook is
 very active, and he retains excellent drawing chances.

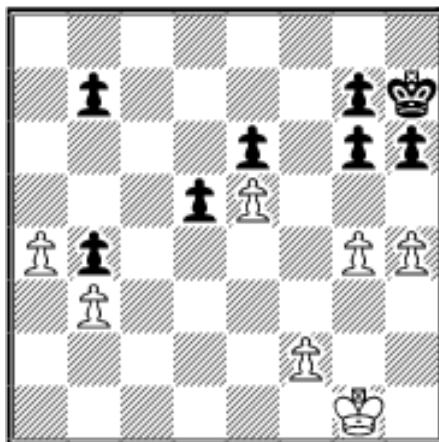
After 28. Rc5! Nxd4 29. Nxd4 Rxd4, White could also
 enter a pawn endgame, and attempt to set up a fortress
 there. Unfortunately, this plan fails, as Black can break
 the fortress down.

A) 30. Rxa5 Rb4 31. Rb5? (instead of 31. Ra8)
 31...Rxb5 32. ab



White intends g2-g4!,
 ensuring the closing of the
 kingside. And the queenside
 can always be kept closed
 with b5-b6 and b3-b4-b5.
 Unfortunately, he lacks a
 single tempo: 32...g5
 (32...h5!? 33. f4 g5! wins,
 too) 33. hg (33. h5 g4! 34. f3
 g3!, with 35...g6 to follow,
 wins - but not 34...gf? 35. g4! =) 33...Kg6! (33...hg? 34.
 g4! Kg6 35. b6 Kf7 36. b4 Ke7 37. b5=; 33...h5! and
 Black wins) 34. gh gh 35. f4 Kf5 36. g3 h5 and wins.

B) 30. Rb5? (instead of 30. Rxa5) 30...Rb4 31. Rxb4 ab
 32. g4



Now Black will never get through on the kingside; on the other hand, it's no longer possible to close up the queenside. Of course, Black must play accurately: before transferring his king, it's important to make the greatest possible improvement in the strategic

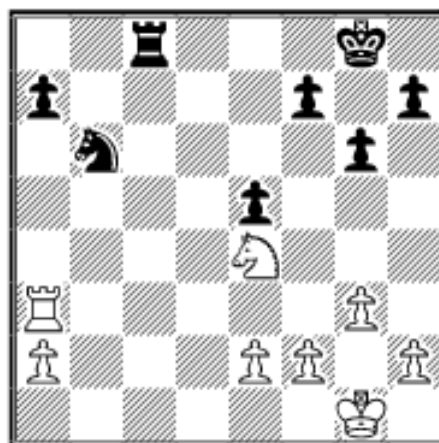
situation on the kingside:

32...g5! 33. h5 g6! (the immediate king march doesn't work: 33...Kg8 34. Kf1 Kf7 35. Ke2 Ke7 36. Ke3 Kd7 37. Kd4 Kc6 38. Kd3 Kc5 39. Ke3 d4+ 40. Ke4 b6 41. f3 d3 42. Kxd3 Kxe5 43. Ke3 Kd5 44. Kd3=)

34. f3 gh 35. gh Kg7 36. Kf2 Kf7 37. Ke3 Ke7 38. Kd4 b6 39. Kd3 (insufficient is 39. a5 ba 40. Kc5 Kd7 41. Kb5 d4 42. Kc4 Kc6 43. Kxd4 Kb5) 39...Kd7 40. Ke3 Kc6 41. Kd4 Kb7 42. Kd3 Ka6 43. Ke3 b5 44. ab+ Kxb5 45. Kd4 Kc6 46. Ke3 Kc5 47. Kd3 d4 48. Ke4 d3 49. Kxd3 Kd5, and wins.

A positional error which would be quite normal in a 12-year-old candidate master, is unforgivable when committed by an experienced grandmaster.

Romanishin – Benjamin Groningen 1993



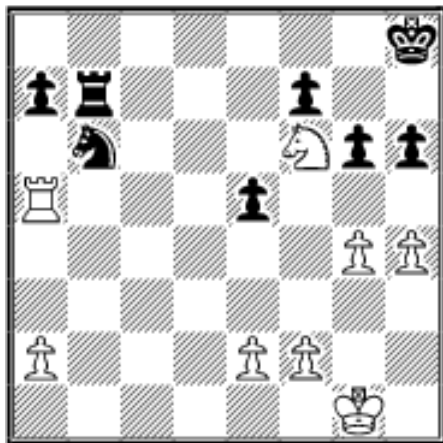
White's rook is active; therefore, it must be exchanged. Black has a simple draw with 28...Rc4! 29. f3 (White gets nothing from either 29. Nc3 a5 or 29. Nf6+ Kg7 30. Ne8+ Kf8) 29...Ra4.

28...Rc7? (another mistake would have been 28...Rc1+? 29. Kg2 Nc8 30. g4!, with advantage to White) **29.**

Nf6+! Kh8 30. g4! h6 31. h4

Black's rook is passive, and his king poorly placed; his situation is quite dangerous.

31...Rb7 (31...Nd7 32. Ne8 Rb7 33. Nd6 would be bad here) **32. Ra5!?**



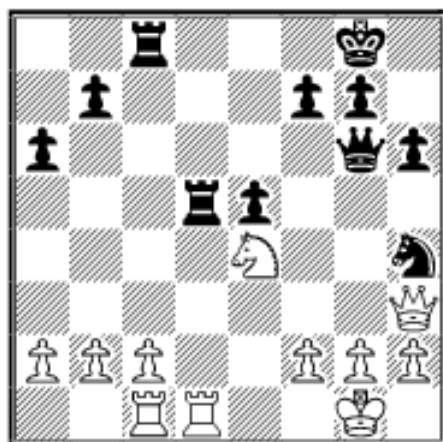
32...Re7?

It appears there was still a chance to get out relatively lightly from this difficult position, with 32...Nd7! 33. Ne8 (33. Nxd7 Rxd7 34. Rxe5 Rd4, followed by 35...Ra4=) 33...Kg8 34. Nd6 Rc7. Benjamin, however, continues his passive strategy.

33. g5 hg 34. hg Kg7 35.

Rc5 e4 36. a4 (White plays for mate - 37. a5 is threatened) **36...Rb7** (36...Nxa4 37. Rc8) **37. Rb5 a6 38. Rb4 a5 39. Rb5 Rb8 40. e3** (zugzwang). Black overstepped the time limit.

Evans – Rossolimo USA Ch, New York 1965/66



Here Rossolimo executed an elegant combination, winning a pawn and reaching a favorable endgame.

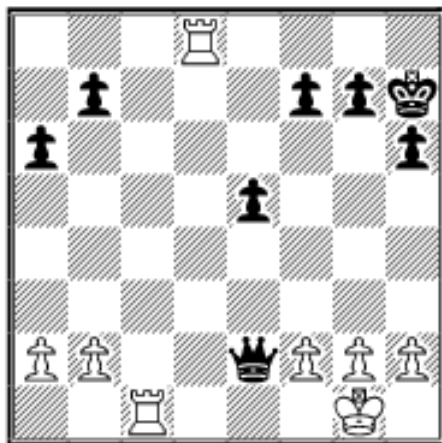
23...Rxc2!! 24. Qxh4 Rd4!

But not 24...Rxc1? 25. Rxc1 Rd4, in view of 26. f3! f5 27. Qg3!

25. Qd8+!

25. f3? here allows 25...Qxg2#.

25...Rxd8 26. Rxd8+ Kh7 27. Rxc2 Qxe4 28. Rc1 Qe2!



Here, not wanting to lose a pawn, Evans chose a passive strategy.

29. Rb1?!

The side with the two rooks should strive to have them attack the king or enemy pawns together. After the

text, the only place White can double rooks will be on the first rank.

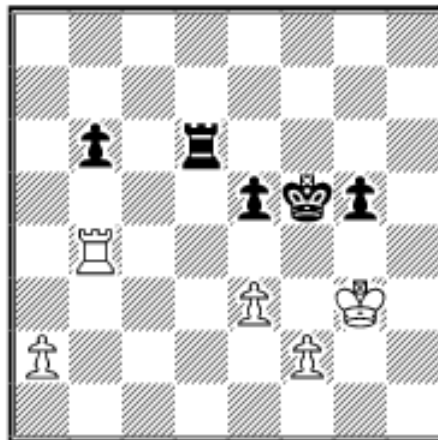
Where the rooks are separated or confined to passivity, either because they must hold enemy passed pawns or because they must protect their own, the queen is stronger than the two rooks. In the continuation, Rossolimo skillfully combines the strengthening of his own position with preventing the enemy rooks from activating, resulting in a well-earned win.

I have been unable to find any significant improvement in White's play from this point; therefore I believe that his decisive error (at least, from a practical standpoint) came right here. He should have tried his luck with active counterplay: 29. g3! Qxb2 30. Rc7 b5 (on 30...Qxa2 31. Rxb7, White easily stops the a-pawn by doubling rooks) 31. Rxf7 Qxa2 32. Rdd7 Qa1+ 33. Kg2 e4 34. Rb7 or 34. h4!?, and in some cases, White can even attack on the 8th rank, after playing h4-h5.

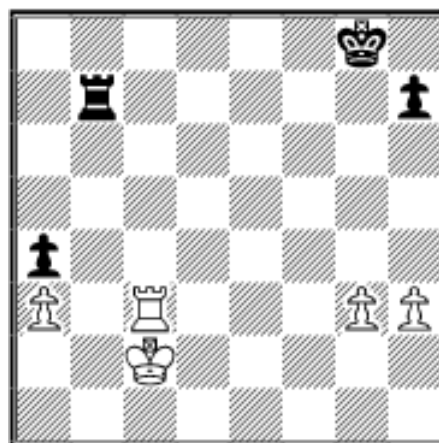
29...f5! 30. Rdd1 e4 31. Re1 Qc4 32. a3 Qa2! (keeping the White rooks pinned down) **33. g3 Kg6 34. Kg2 Qb3 35. Kg1 Qa2** (otherwise 36. Re2) **36. Kg2 Kf6 37. f3 Ke5 38. fe fe 39. h4 Qb3 40. Kh3 Qc2 41. Rec1 Qf2 42. Rf1 Qb6 43. Kg2 g6 44. Rf8 Qb5! 45. Rf2 e3 46. Re1 Ke4 47. a4 Qc5 48. Kh3 b5! 49. ab ab 50. Rf6 Qe5 51.**

**Rf8 Qe7 52. Rf4+ Kd3 53. Rf3 Kd2 54. Rfxe3 Qxe3
55. Rxe3 Kxe3 56. Kg4 Ke4 57. b4 Ke5! 58. Kf3 Kd5
59. Kf4 Kc4 60. g4 Kxb4 61. g5 h5 62. Ke5 Kc5 63.
Kf6 b4 64. Kxg6 b3 65. Kh6 b2 66. g6 b1Q 67. g7 Qb3
68. Kh7 Kd6 69. g8Q Qxg8+ 70. Kxg8 Ke5 71. Kf7
Kf5! White resigned.**

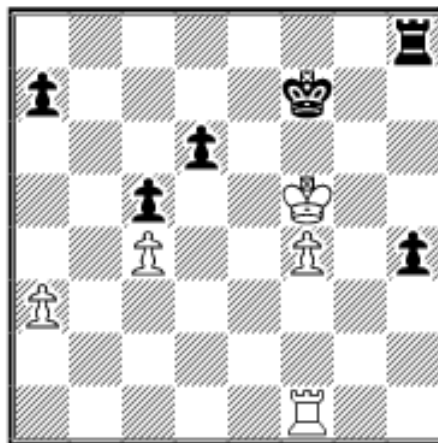
In conclusion - three exercises.



1 Black to move



2 White to move



3 Black to move

Answers

1) *Taimanov - Chekhov, Kishinev 1976*

White wants to play e3-e4+, and then gradually strengthen his position by a2-a4, f2-f3, Kg4, Rb5 etc. I don't know if his advantage would have been enough to win with, but passive defense of such a position is both difficult and unpleasant.

1...g4?! does not appear to lose: 2. Rxg4 (2. a4 Rg6 3. e4+ Kg5 4. Rb5 Re6) 2...e4 3. f3 ef 4. Kxf3 Rd3! 5. Rb4 Ra3 6. Rb5+ Ke6 7. Rxb6+ Ke5 8. Rb2 Kf5, and I don't see how White can capitalize on his two extra pawns.

Black found a simpler solution:

1...Rd3! 2. Rxb6

White could have tried putting his opponent in zugzwang with 2. a4!? Ra3 3. Kf3. However, after 3...g4+! 4. Rxg4 b5! 5. ab Rb3, we will have reached a drawn endgame with two pawns to one.

2...Ra3

Now it's the White rook that must take up a passive position. After **3. Rb2 Ra4**, the draw was agreed.

I was Valery Chekhov's trainer from 1973 to 1975, and our work together was crowned by his victory in the World Junior Championship. All my students were solidly grounded in the most important principles of endgame play; thus, Chekhov's use of a pawn sacrifice for his rook's activity was, for him, merely a simple piece of technique.

2) *Larsen - Kavalek, Solingen 1970, 7th match game*

White intends to continue 40. Rc4. Since Black cannot reply 40...Rb3 41. Rxa4 Rxc3 42. Rg4+, he will have to settle for 40...Ra7. With his rook so passive, Black's in a bad way - White will simply advance his king (Kc3-b4-b5).

Which is precisely what happened in the game:

39...Kg7?? 40. Rc4 Ra7 41. Kc3 h5 42. Kb4 Kg6 43. Rc6+ Kg7 44. Rc5 Kh6 45. Kb5 (threatening 46. Rc4) **45...Re7 46. Kxa4 Re3 47. g4 hg 48. hg Re4+ 49. Kb5 Rxc4 50. a4 Rg1 51. a5 Rb1+ 52. Kc6 Ra1 53. Kb6 Rb1+ 54. Rb5 Rf1 55. a6 Rf6+ 56. Ka5 Rf7 57. Rb6+ Kg5 58. Rb7 Rf1 59. a7 Kh6 60. Rb6+ Kg7 61. Ra6**
Black resigned.

Black had to keep his rook in an active position, meeting 40. Rc4 with the counterattacking 40...Rb3!; for this purpose, Black must make some provision against the rook check at g4.

39...Kf7 suggests itself; it also brings the king closer to the center. White would reply 40. g4!, aiming to continue

with 41. h4 and 42. Rc4. If 40...Ke6 41. h4 Kd5, then 42. g5!, followed by 43. Rg3. He might continue with either 44. Rg4 (attacking the a4 pawn) or 44. h5 (when the White rook would be behind its passed pawn).

39...h5!!

The only defense, but sufficient. Now 40. Rc4 Rb3! 41. Rxa4 Rxg3= is useless. On 40. h4, there follows 40...Rg7! and then Rg4 - from g4, the rook attacks the g3 pawn, defends the a4 pawn, and prevents the White king from getting in via the 4th rank.

On 40. g4 the simplest answer is 40...h4!, fixing a target for counterattack on the 3rd rank - the pawn at h3 (41. Rc4 Rb3). But Black also will not lose after 40...hg 41. hg Kg7 42. Rc4 Rb3! (activity at any price!) 43. Rxa4 Rg3 44. Kb2 Rg2+ 45. Kc3 Rg3+.

Conclusion: after 39...h5! Black's rook remains active in all lines, which should allow him to avoid defeat.

3) Obukhov - Ibragimov, USSR 1991

The passive 1. Rh1? led to rapid defeat: 1...h3 2. Rh2 a6 3. Kg4 (if 3. Kg5, then either 3...Rg8+ 4. Kf5 Rg3, or 3...d5!) 3...Kf6 4. Rxh3 Rxh3 5. Kxh3 d5! White resigned.

The only salvation is to activate the rook!

1. Rb1! h3 2. Rb7+ Kf8 (the only move)

White undoubtedly looked at this variation, but couldn't find the continuation. In fact, 3. Rb8+? Kg7 4. Rb7+ Kh6 fails, as does 3. Kf6? Rh6+ 4. Kg5 h2; and on 3. Kg6? Rh4! 4. f5 h2 5. Rb8+ (5. f6 Rg4+) 5...Ke7 6. f6+ Kd7 7. f7 h1Q decides.

There is, however, another possibility.

3. Kg5!! h2 (3...Rg8+?? 4. Kf6 wins) **4. Rb8+ Kg7 5. Rb7+**, with perpetual check.

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Translated by Jim Marfia

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