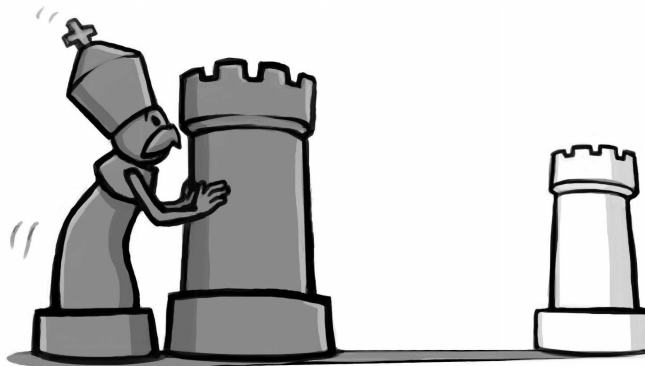


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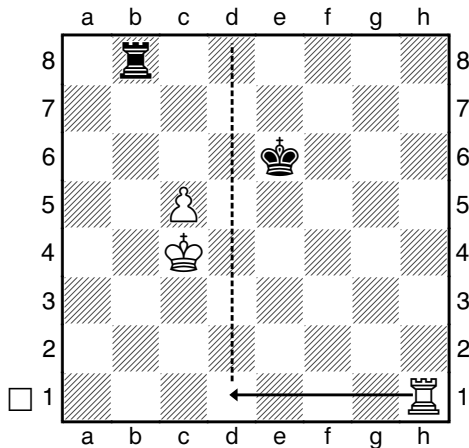
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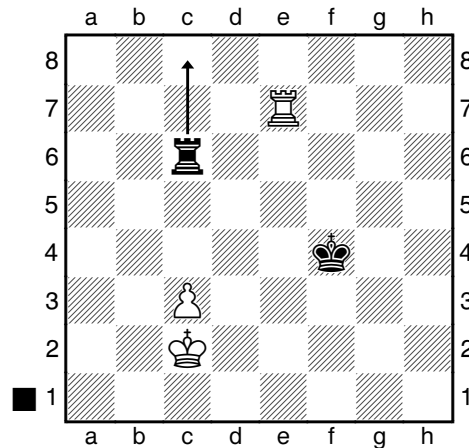
BUILDING A
BRIDGE

4 Rook Endings

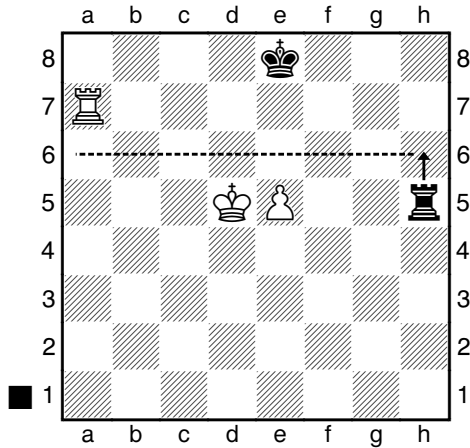
Rook endings occur more often than any other type of ending and are frequently misplayed, even by masters. Keeping a few important ideas in mind can avoid the mistakes that arise all too often in practical play.



The rook has the power to control an entire file or rank, creating a barrier that the opposing king cannot cross. Here White wins by **1 ♖d1!**, which prevents Black's king from helping in the fight against the c-pawn. It turns out that Black's rook cannot cope with the pawn by itself. The winning line runs **1...♜c8** (or else White plays c6 followed by ♔c5) **2 ♔b5** (again threatening c6) **2...♜b8+** **3 ♔a6 ♜c8** **4 ♔b6 ♜b8+** **5 ♔c7** (Black can no longer stop c6) **5...♜b2** **6 c6 ♜c2** **7 ♔b7 ♜b2+** **8 ♔c8 ♜c2** **9 c7** with a standard winning position (see Exercise 25 on page 58). The important point here is the way you can use your rook to cut the enemy king off from the main battle.

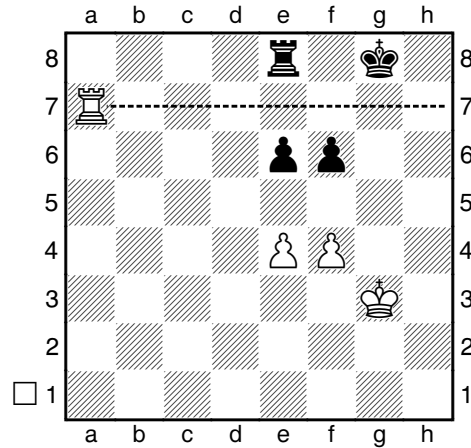


If you are defending by bombarding the enemy king with checks, it helps to have the rook as far away from the opposing king as possible. White is threatening to win by **1 ♔b3 ♜b6+** **2 ♔a4 ♜c6** **3 ♔b4 ♜b6+** **4 ♔c5** and now Black cannot prevent c4, which here leads to a win. The only move for Black to save the game is **1...♜c8!**, moving the rook as far as possible away from the enemy king. Now when the king emerges from behind the pawn to play c4, Black's checks are from longer range. After **2 ♔b3 ♜b8+** **3 ♔a4 ♜c8** **4 ♔b4 ♜b8+** **5 ♔c5** (or **5 ♔a5 ♜c8** and the king must return to b4) **5...♜c8+** **6 ♔d4 ♜d8+** there is no way White can escape the harassment by the enemy rook except by returning with his king to c2. This idea is called the *principle of maximum checking distance*.



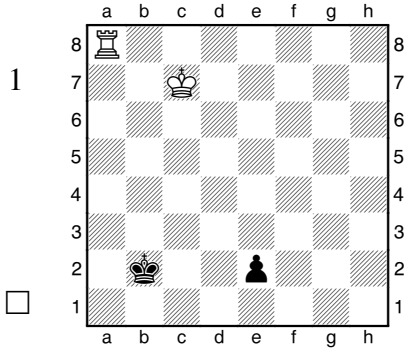
This should be a draw with Black to play, but positions of this type are often needlessly lost in practice. It looks bad for Black, as his king is cut off on the back rank and the white king and pawn are in an advanced position. Indeed, the natural 1...♖h1 2 ♔d6 ♜d1+? is wrong, since White can win by 3 ♕e6 ♕d8 4 ♜a8+ ♕c7 5 ♕f6 and the e-pawn will advance. This line wins because White's king can shelter from checks on e6.

Nevertheless, there's a simple plan of defence that enables Black to draw. He plays 1...♜h6! to prevent the white king from advancing any further. After 2 e6 (intending 3 ♕d6) 2...♜h1! Black is ready to give checks from the back rank. The white king no longer has any shelter since e6 is occupied by the pawn, and after 3 ♕d6 ♜d1+ 4 ♕e5 ♜e1+ 5 ♕f6 ♜f1+ White cannot win. The key point was the way the black rook set up a barrier along its third rank, and for that reason this idea is called the *third-rank defence*.

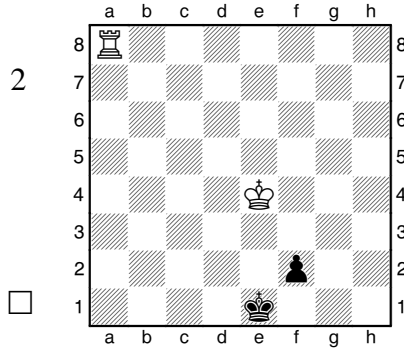


A rook on the seventh rank is often a major asset, especially in two cases. The first is when there are several enemy pawns on the seventh rank that can be attacked by the rook. The second is when the opposing king is cut off on the back rank. That's the case here, but to win White needs to bring his own king into the attack. 1 ♕h4! (not 1 ♕g4?, when Black draws by 1...f5+! 2 exf5 exf5+ 3 ♕xf5 ♜b8 4 ♕g5 ♜b6 with the third-rank defence from the previous position) 1...♜b8 (now 1...f5 can be met by 2 e5 followed by ♕g5) 2 ♕h5 ♜b4 (2...♜c8 3 ♕g6 ♜f8 4 ♜g7+ ♕h8 5 ♜f7 is hopeless for Black) 3 ♕g6 (an active king is very important in rook endings; now White is threatening mate by ♜a8+) 3...♕f8 4 ♕xf6 ♕e8 5 ♜e7+ ♕f8 6 ♜xe6 and White wins easily with his two extra pawns.

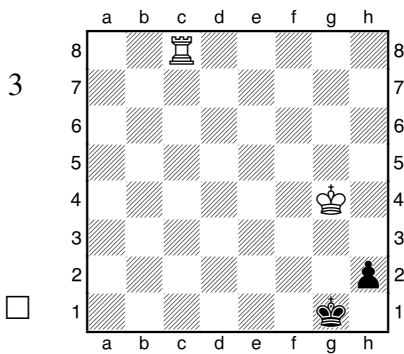
Exercises



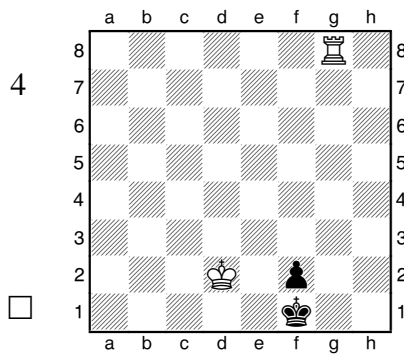
Can you find the only move to win for White?



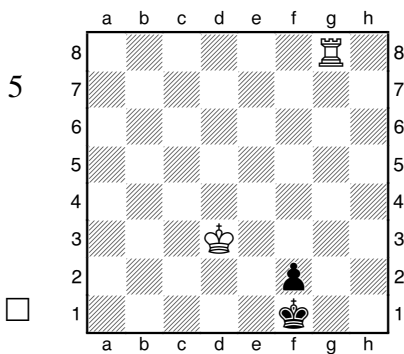
Can White (to play) win?



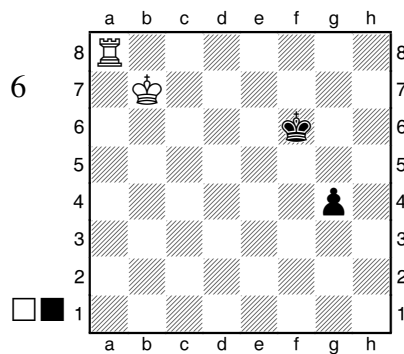
This is the previous exercise shifted two files to the right. Can White win now?



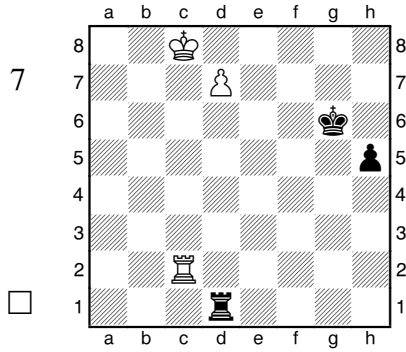
Which move wins for White?



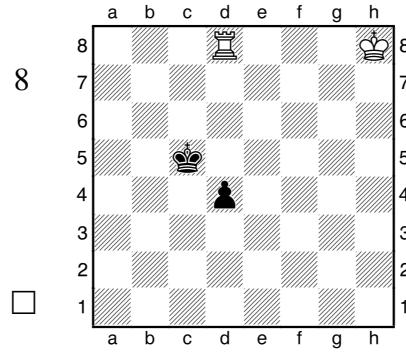
White's king is now on d3 instead of d2. Can he win here?



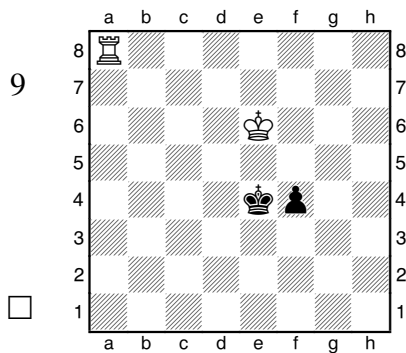
If White is to play, how does he win? What is the result with Black to move?



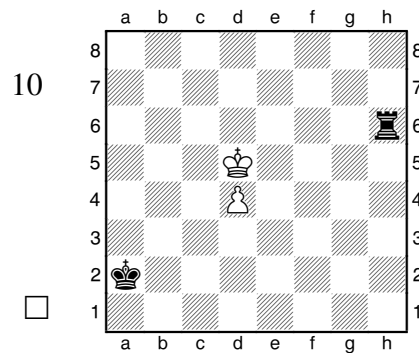
Should White play 1 d8♔, 1 ♖c5 or 1 ♖c4?



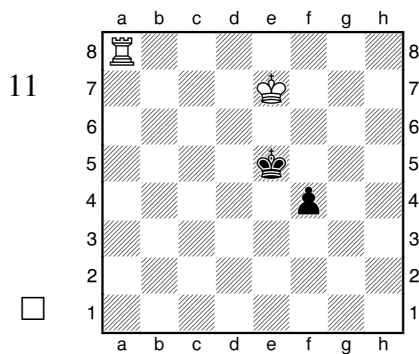
Is this a win for White?



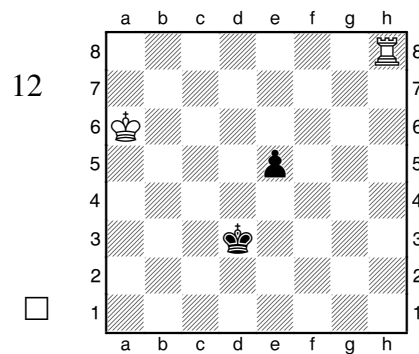
Can White win?



White should move his king to clear the way for the pawn. Is 1 ♔c5 or 1 ♔e5 correct?



Should White use his rook from the side by 1 ♖a5+, or from behind with 1 ♖f8?



Should White play 1 ♖d8+, 1 ♖e8 or 1 ♔b5?

Solutions to Rook Endings Exercises

1) **1 ♖e8!** wins the pawn, since the black king is too far away to defend it. **1 ♜b8+?** only chases Black's king nearer the pawn, and after **1...♙c2 2 ♜e8 ♙d2** White cannot win.

2) White cannot win. The best he can do is **1 ♜a1+ ♙e2 2 ♜a2+ ♙e1 3 ♙e3**. Then **3...f1♙?** is met by **4 ♜a1#**, but **3...f1♗+!** saves the game as the ending of ♜ vs ♗ is generally drawn. There are winning positions when the defender's king is stuck on the edge of the board, but this is not one of them. We shall consider this type of position in more detail later (Exercise 19 on page 77).

3) Now it is a win for White. After **1 ♙g3!** Black must again promote to a knight, but this time **1...h1♗+** (**1...h1♙ 2 ♜c1#**) **2 ♙f3** leaves the knight stuck in the corner. Then **2...♙h2** (**2...♗f2 3 ♜c1+ ♙h2 4 ♙xf2** is also winning for White) **3 ♜g8** wins for White as Black must give up his knight to avoid immediate mate.

4) **1 ♜f8! ♙g2 2 ♙e2** wins the black pawn and is the only way to win. **1 ♙d1?** is wrong as Black is stalemated, and **1 ♙e3? ♙e1 2 ♜a8** fails because of **2...f1♗+!**, as in Exercise 2.

5) White cannot win. After **1 ♜f8** (**1 ♙d2** is stalemate, and **1 ♙e3** is a draw as in the previous exercise) **1...♙e1! 2 ♜e8+** (or else Black promotes) **2...♙d1 3 ♜f8 ♙e1** White is only repeating the position.

6) If White is to play he wins by **1 ♜a5!**, creating a barrier that prevents Black's king from supporting the pawn. After **1...♙g6** (**1...g3 2 ♜a3 g2 3 ♜g3** and White wins the pawn) **2 ♙c6 ♙f6 3 ♙d6 ♙g6 4 ♜e5** followed by **♙d5** and **♙e4** the pawn will soon fall. This idea is called the *fifth-rank cut-off*. With Black to play, **1...♙f5** (**1...g3?** loses to **2 ♜a3 g2 3 ♜g3**) draws, as the king can now usher the pawn forward. After **2 ♙c6 g3 3 ♙d5 ♙f4 4 ♙d4 g2 5 ♜g8 ♙f3 6 ♙d3 ♙f2 7 ♜f8+ ♙e1 8 ♜g8 ♙f2** White cannot win.

7) White must not rush to win the rook since **1 d8♙? ♜xd8+ 2 ♙xd8 ♙g5!** (**2...h4?** loses to **3 ♜c5!**) **3 ♙e7 h4 4 ♙e6 h3 5 ♙e5 ♙g4 6 ♙e4 ♙g3 7 ♙e3 h2 8 ♜c1 ♙g2** is only a draw. **1 ♜c4? ♙g5** is also bad as it just helps Black by giving him a free move. The winning move is **1 ♜c5!**, in order to establish a fifth-rank cut-off as in Exercise 6. After **1...h4 2 d8♙ ♜xd8+ 3 ♙xd8** White wins, as **3...h3** loses the pawn to **4 ♜c3 h2 5 ♜h3**, while otherwise Black can only wait while White brings his king back and eventually wins Black's pawn.

8) Black's king is supporting his pawn and to win White needs to use his own king. **1 ♙g7!** (White's king must take the shortest route to attack the enemy pawn) **1...♙c4 2 ♙f6 d3 3 ♙e5 ♙c3 4 ♙e4 d2 5 ♙e3** and the pawn falls.

9) White cannot win. He can chase the enemy pieces up the board, but he cannot do better than reach the draw of Exercise 2 after **1 ♜a4+ ♙e3 2 ♙e5** (or **2 ♙f5 f3 3 ♙g4 f2 4 ♜a1 ♙e2**, also with a draw) **2...f3 3 ♜a3+ ♙e2 4 ♙e4 f2 5 ♜a2+ ♙e1 6 ♙e3 f1♗+**. It follows that if this position is shifted two files to the right, so that Black's pawn is on the h-file, then White wins because the same manoeuvre leads to the win of Exercise 3.

10) As well as advancing his own pawn, White must shoulder away Black's king. Thus the white king must move to the same side of the pawn as Black's king: **1 ♙c5!** (**1 ♙c4!** also draws) **1...♙b3 2 d5 ♙a4 3 d6** draws easily, but **1 ♙e5? ♙b3 2 d5 ♙c4 3 d6 ♙c5 4 d7 ♜d6** loses.

11) The rook should operate from behind. **1 ♜a5+? ♙e4 2 ♙e6 f3 3 ♜a4+ ♙e3 4 ♙e5 f2 5 ♜a1 ♙e2** is only a draw, but **1 ♜f8! ♙e4 2 ♙f6!** (the key idea is for White to switch his king

to the g-file, so that he can attack the pawn without being obstructed by Black's king) **2...f3 3 ♖g5 ♖e3 4 ♖g4 f2 5 ♖g3** leads to the capture of Black's pawn.

12) White only draws after **1 ♖e8? e4 2 ♖b5 e3 3 ♖b4 e2 4 ♖b3 ♖d2 5 ♖d8+ ♖c1** or **1 ♖b5? e4 2 ♖b4 e3 3 ♖b3 e2**. The sole way to win is **1 ♖d8+!** (playing an *in-between check* gains a move for White) **1...♖c3** (or **1...♖e3 2 ♖b5 e4 3 ♖c4 ♖f2 4 ♖e8 e3 5 ♖d3**) **2 ♖e8** (the point of the check is that Black cannot immediately push his pawn) **2...♖d4** (White has transferred his rook from h8 to e8, effectively gaining a move) **3 ♖b5 e4 4 ♖b4 e3 5 ♖b3 ♖d3 6 ♖d8+ ♖e2 7 ♖c2 ♖f2 8 ♖e8 e2 9 ♖d2** and White wins.

13) On rare occasions, it can happen that a far-advanced pawn beats a rook. Here White can promote his pawn and win by **1 g7 ♖h6+ 2 ♖f5!** (Black draws after both **2 ♖f7? ♖h7** followed by **...♖xg7**, and **2 ♖g5? ♖h1**, when White must play **3 ♖f6** or **3 ♖g6** even to draw, since **3 g8♚?** loses to **3...♖g1+**) **2...♖h5+ 3 ♖f4** (**3 ♖g4?? ♖h1** is winning for Black) **3...♖h4+ 4 ♖f3** (**4 ♖g3 ♖h1 5 ♖g2** is equally good) **4...♖h3+ 5 ♖g2** and the pawn promotes, leading to the winning ending of ♚ vs ♖ (see Exercise 19 on page 87).

14) If the side with the rook has his king in front of two connected pawns, the rook almost always wins no matter how far advanced the pawns are. Here the simplest method is **1 ♖e8** (now Black must push a pawn or he loses the e3-pawn at once) **1...e2+ (or 1...d2 2 ♖e2 ♖c3 3 ♖xe3+ ♖c2 4 ♖d3) 2 ♖d2 ♖c4 3 ♖e4+ ♖d5 4 ♖xd3** and both pawns fall.

15) If White is to play then he wins by **1 g7! ♖d1+ 2 ♖b2 ♖g1 3 f6** followed by f7, promoting one of the pawns and leading to ♚ vs ♖. If Black is to play, he wins due to his extra move: **1...♖d1+! 2 ♖b2 ♖g1** (this stops both pawns from advancing and a subsequent **...♖g5** will win them) **3 ♖c3 ♖g5 4 ♖d4 ♖xf5 5 ♖e4 ♖g5**, winning the other pawn. Two connected passed pawns far away from the enemy king generally win against a rook if both can reach the sixth rank or (as here) one can reach the seventh while the other is on the fifth.

16) Pushing the g-pawn is correct, because Black's rook will be forced to take it, when White's king will be close enough to support the remaining pawn: **1 g6! ♖g4 2 ♖c7 ♖xg6 3 ♖d7 ♖b2 4 e6** with an easy draw. Doing it the other way around loses both pawns: **1 e6? ♖e4 2 g6 ♖xe6 3 g7 ♖g6** and Black wins.

17) White can win with **1 ♖d6** threatening **2 ♖e7** followed by f8♚. Black can only meet this by **1...♖b8** (to answer **2 ♖e7?** with **2...♖xb7+**), but then **2 ♖c7 ♖f8 3 b8♚ ♖xf7+** leads to the winning ending of ♚ vs ♖.

18) The extra file between the pawns guarantees a draw. After **1 ♖d6** White again threatens **2 ♖e7**, but now **1...♖a8!** is a good defence. Then **2 ♖e7 ♖xa7+** draws as before, while **2 ♖c6** (threatening **3 ♖b7**) is met by **2...♖f8** and White cannot make progress. When White threatens to support one pawn with his king, Black switches his rook in front of the other.

19) White, to play, can draw by attacking the rear pawn with his king: **1 ♖b6 ♖b2 2 ♖b5 b3 3 ♖b4 a2 4 ♖a7 a1♚** (there is nothing better) **5 ♖xa1 ♖xa1 6 ♖xb3**. If Black is to play, he wins with the clever idea **1...♖a2!** (the b-pawn is the dangerous one, because the white rook is not currently behind it; not **1...a2? 2 ♖b6 ♖b2 3 ♖b5 b3 4 ♖b4** with a draw as in the White-to-play line) **2 ♖b6 b3 3 ♖a5 b2 4 ♖b8 b1♚ 5 ♖xb1 ♖xb1** and White is one move too slow.

20) An ending with ♖+♜ vs ♜ is usually an easy win, since if the enemy pawn becomes dangerous you can almost always give up the rook for the pawn and win with your own