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In chess training groups $12 a8 \text{♞??} \text{♜b7\#!}$ is a popular joke.

Note that if Black is to move, he can play:

1...♜b3!? 2 ♜e2!? ♕f8!?

This forces White to win queen against rook.

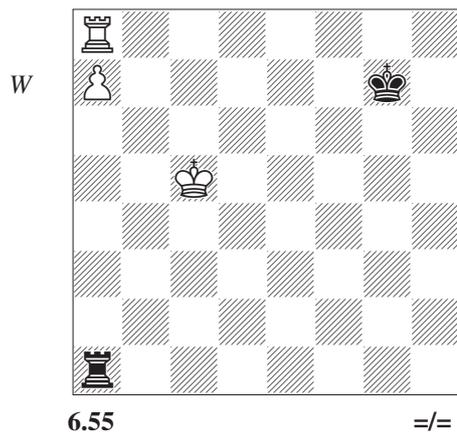
3 ♜c2 ♕e7 4 ♜c8! ♕d6 5 ♜b8! ♜a3 6 ♕b7! ♜b3+ 7 ♕c8! ♜c3+ 8 ♕d8! ♜h3 9 ♜b6+! ♕c5 10 ♜c6+ ♕xc6 11 a8♞+! ♕d6!?

Now White can't win the rook by just delivering checks and has to win the ending queen vs rook (see 10.03). This is the best practical chance to save the game. **11...♕c5?! 12 ♞c8+ ♕d4 13 ♞xh3** is not very tenacious of course.

12 ♞b8+ ♕d5 13 ♞b7+ ♕e5 14 ♞g7+ ♕f4 15 ♞d4+ +-

A1d2) Rook in Front of its Pawn

The following diagram shows the general draw with the pawn already on the seventh rank:



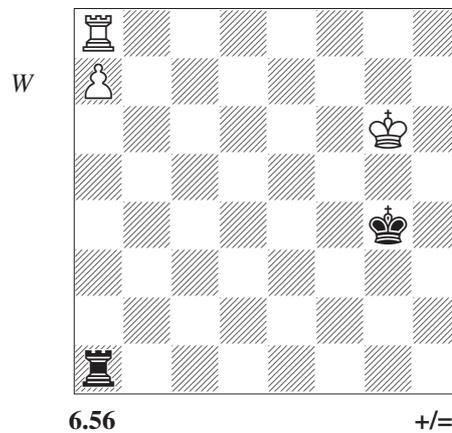
Black only needs to give a check when White threatens to free his rook:

1 ♕b6

1 ♕b4 ♜b1+ 2 ♕c3 ♜a1! (2...♜c1+? 3 ♕b2! ♜c7 4 ♜g8+ +-) **3 ♕b3 ♕h7 =** (moving the king closer to the pawn with **3...♕f7??** is fatal: **4 ♜h8 ♜xa7 5 ♜h7+! +-;** this skewer is an important motif, and so Black's king has to wait on g7 and h7).

1...♜b1+! 2 ♕a6 ♜a1+! 3 ♕b7 ♜b1+! 4 ♕c6 ♜a1 =

The defender can sometimes hide his king behind the opponent's king. The following position is critical:

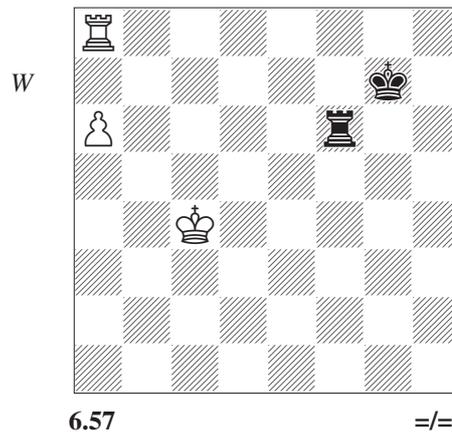


1 ♕f6! ♕f4 2 ♕e6! ♕e4 3 ♕d6! ♕d4 4 ♕c6!
But not **4 ♕c7? ♕c5! 5 ♜c8 ♜xa7+! 6 ♕b8+ ♕b6! =.**

4...♕c4
4...♜c1+ 5 ♕b5 ♜b1+ 6 ♕a4 ♜a1+ 7 ♕b3 ♕c5 8 ♜c8+ +-.

5 ♜c8 ♜xa7 6 ♕b6+! +-
If Black is to move, he draws with **1...♜a6+! 2 ♕f7 ♕f5 3 ♕e7 ♕e5 4 ♕d7 ♕d5 5 ♕c7 ♕c5! 6 ♕b7 ♜b6+! =.**

The situation is more complex when the pawn is further back. The next position is of great practical and theoretical importance:



6.57
J. Vančura
28 Rijen, 1924

With the pawn still on the sixth rank, White's king has a possible shelter on a7. Black's rook is therefore much better placed to the side, from where it can deliver annoying checks, than

behind the pawn. The rook has to be on the same rank as White's pawn, since this forces White's rook to stay on the a-file. With the rook on the f-file, there is also the chance to give a defensive rook check on f7 if necessary. Thus with Black's rook on g6 or h6 White (to move) would win with ♖b5-b6-b7 and ♜c8. Black's king is happy on g7 since an advance of the pawn to a7 could be met by shifting the rook to the a-file (White has no ♜h8 tricks). Note that a set-up with the black king on h7 and the rook on g6 is equally successful.

1 ♖b5

White protects the pawn and threatens to win by ♜c8.

1...♜f5+! 2 ♖b6 ♜f6+! 3 ♖c5

3 ♖b7 ♜f7+! =.

3...♜f5+

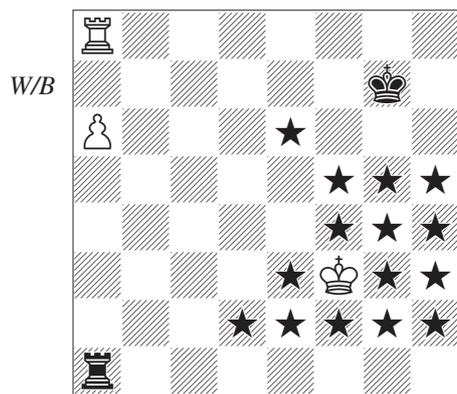
3...♖h7 = and **3...♜e6 =** also hold the draw. However, Black must avoid **3...♜g6? 4 ♖b5! ♜g5+ 5 ♖b6 ♜g6+ 6 ♖b7** (Black's king is in the way of his own rook, so the white king is now able to support the pawn) **6...♖h7 7 ♜c8 +-.**

4 ♖d4 ♜f6!!

4...♜f4+? 5 ♖e5! ♜a4 (5...♜f6 6 ♜g8+ +-) 6 ♖d5 +- is analysed in 6.58.

5 ♜a7+ ♖g6 6 ♖e5 ♜b6 7 ♜a8 ♖g7 8 ♖d5 ♜f6 9 a7 ♜a6 =

If the defender's rook is behind the pawn, he should immediately try to reach the Vančura set-up (6.57):



6.58 (f3 is also marked) **+/=**

After **P.Romanovsky**
Shakhmaty v SSSR, 1950

If Black is to move, he can only draw when the white king is on one of the marked squares.

Here **1...♜f1+ 2 ♖e4 ♜f6!** is sufficient to reach the Vančura draw.

When White is to move, he can leave the drawing zone:

1 ♖e4!

Not:

a) **1 ♖e2? ♜c1 (1...♜a5? 2 ♖d3! ♜d5+ 3 ♖c4! ♜d6 4 ♖b5 ♜d5+ 5 ♖c6 ♜a5 6 ♖b6 +-)**
2 ♜a7+ ♖g6! 3 ♜b7 ♜a1 4 a7 ♜a3 5 ♖d2 ♖f6 =.

b) **1 ♖f4? ♜a5 (1...♜f1+? 2 ♖e5! +-)** **2 ♖e4 ♜c5 3 ♜a7+** and now Black has to find **3...♖g6!! =** as **3...♖g8? 4 ♜b7 +-,** **3...♖f6? 4 ♖d4 ♜c6 (4...♜a5 5 ♜a8! +-)** **5 ♜h7 +-** and **3...♖h6? 4 ♜b7 ♜a5 5 a7 +-** all fail.

1...♜a5

Or:

a) **1...♜f1 2 ♖e5 ♜a1 3 ♖d5 +-.**

b) **1...♜h1 2 ♜a7+! ♖f6 3 ♖d5 ♜d1+ 4 ♖c6 ♜c1+ 5 ♖d7 ♜d1+ 6 ♖c8 ♜a1 (6...♜d6 7 ♜h7 +-)** **7 ♜a8 ♖e7 8 ♖b7 ♜b1+ 9 ♖c6 (9 ♖a7? ♖d7 =)** **9...♜c1+ 10 ♖d5 ♜d1+ 11 ♖e4 ♜e1+ 12 ♖f3 ♜a1 13 a7! ♖f7 (13...♖f6 14 ♜f8+ +-)** **14 ♜h8! +-.**

2 ♖d4 ♜b5

2...♜f5 3 ♜a7+ ♖g6 4 ♜b7 ♜a5 5 a7 +-.

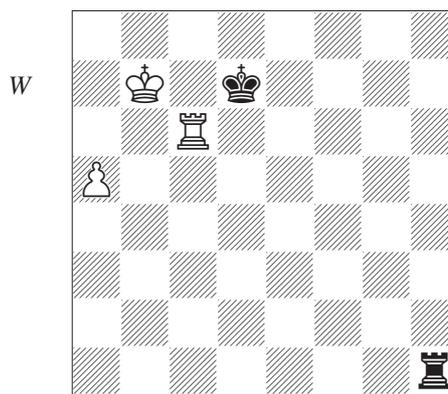
3 ♜a7+ ♖f6 4 ♜h7 ♜a5 5 a7 ♖e6 6 ♜h6+

Or **6 ♖c4 +-.**

6...♖d7 7 ♜h8 ♜xa7 8 ♜h7+! +-

A1d3) Other Situations

With the king and rook supporting the pawn, new motifs arise:



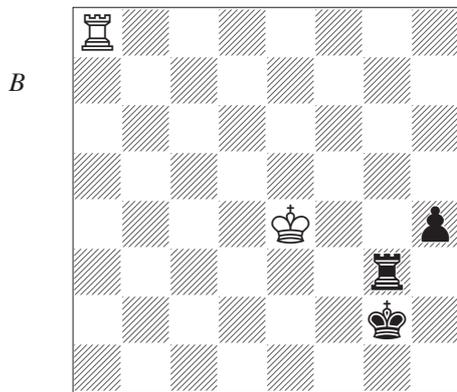
6.59 **+/=**

With White to move, he can use his well-placed rook as a shield to block Black's checks:

1 a6 ♖b1+ 2 ♜b6! ♜c1 3 a7 ♜c7+ 4 ♔a6! ♜c8 5 ♜b8 +-.

On the other hand, if Black is to move he has saving checks on the c-file: 1...♜b1+! 2 ♜b6! ♜c1! 3 a6 ♜c7+! 4 ♔b8 ♜c8+! 5 ♔a7 ♜c1 6 ♜b2 ♔c7 =.

Salov demonstrates the right way to handle the attacking rook with the defending king cut off vertically:



6.60

J.Lautier – V.Salov
Madrid 1993

1...♜f3!!

Now the rook can shield Black's king against checks from the side and from behind. Not 1...h3? 2 ♜a2+! ♔g1 3 ♔f4 ♜g2 4 ♜a1+ ♔h2 5 ♔f3 =.

2 ♜g8+ ♔f2! 3 ♜a8 h3! 4 ♜a7 ♔g2

4...h2?? 5 ♜a2+ ♔g3 6 ♜xh2! =.

5 ♜h7 ♜g3 0-1

We end the discussion of the rook's pawn with two very complicated cases:

In the following diagram, Black can save the draw with extremely accurate play.

1...♜c1+! 2 ♔d7

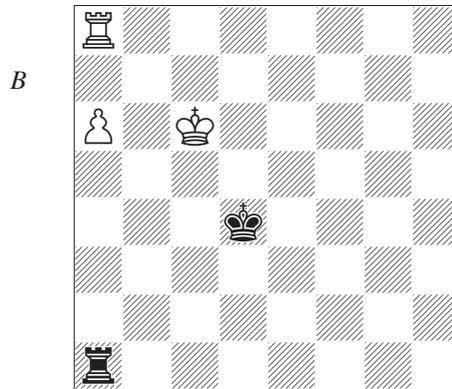
Or:

a) 2 ♔b5 ♜b1+! 3 ♔a4 ♔c5 4 ♜c8+ ♔d6 5 ♔a5 ♔d7 6 ♜c4 ♜a1+! =.

b) 2 ♔b7 ♜b1+! 3 ♔a7 ♔c5 4 ♜b8 ♜h1 5 ♔b7 ♜h7+ (5...♜b1+ 6 ♔c7 ♜h1 =) 6 ♔a8! ♔c6 7 a7 ♜h1 8 ♜c8+ ♔d7 =.

c) 2 ♔d6 ♜a1! 3 ♜a7 and now:

c1) 3...♜a3? 4 ♔c6! ♜c3+ 5 ♔b5! ♜b3+ 6 ♔a4! ♜b1 7 ♜c7 ♔d5 8 a7! ♔d6 (8...♜a1+ 9 ♔b5! ♔d6 10 ♜h7 ♜b1+ 11 ♔a6! ♜a1+ 12



6.61

A.Chéron, 1955

♔b7! ♜b1+ 13 ♔c8! ♜a1 14 ♔b8 ♜b1+ 15 ♜b7 +-) 9 ♜c3 ♜a1+ 10 ♜a3! +-.

c2) 3...♜a2!! 4 ♜a8 ♜a1! 5 a7 ♜a6+! =.

2...♜a1! 3 ♔d6!? ♜a2!! 4 ♔c6 ♜c2+! 5 ♔b5 ♜b2+! 6 ♔a4 ♔c4!!

Not 6...♜a2+?, when White wins by 7 ♔b3! ♜a1 8 a7 +-.

7 ♔a3

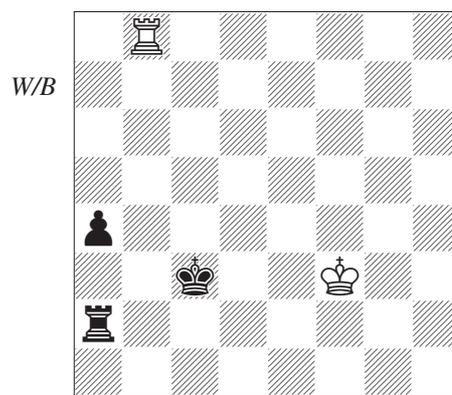
7 ♜c8+ ♔d5! 8 ♜c3 ♜a2+! 9 ♔b5 ♔d6! = (9...♜b2+? 10 ♔a5! ♜a2+ 11 ♔b6! ♜b2+ 12 ♔c7! ♜a2 13 ♜c6 +-).

7...♜b3+ 8 ♔a2 ♜b6 9 a7 ♜c6! 10 ♔a3 ♔c5

10...♜c7? 11 ♔a4! ♔c5 12 ♔a5! ♔c6 13 ♔a6! +-.

11 ♔a4 ♔b6 =

Even world champions are not immune to errors in such difficult endings:



6.62

M.Euwe – A.Alekhine

's Hertogenbosch Wch (16) 1935

If Black were to move, he would win quite easily with **1...♖b2 2 ♖a8 ♖b4 3 ♔e2 ♔b2 4 ♔d2 a3** —+.

In the game it was Euwe's move, and this enabled him to create more serious problems for his opponent:

1 ♔e3!?

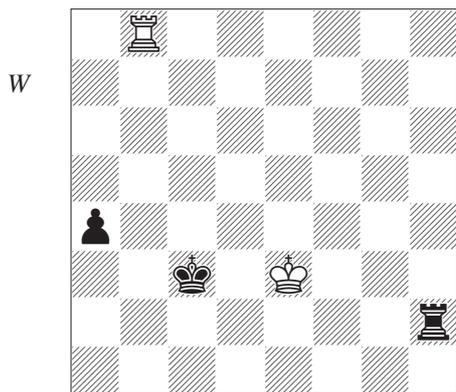
Black's task is easier after other moves: **1 ♖a8 a3** —+; **1 ♖c8+ ♔d2 2 ♖d8+ ♔c2 3 ♖c8+ ♔d1 4 ♖a8 a3 5 ♔e3 ♖h2** —+.

1...♖h2? (D)

A year after the match Grigoriev showed the correct winning method: **1...a3**, and now:

a) **2 ♖c8+ ♔b2! 3 ♔d2 ♔b1+! 4 ♔d1 ♖h2 5 ♖b8+ ♖b2! 6 ♖c8 ♖b4 7 ♖c1+ ♔b2! 8 ♖c2+ ♔b3!** —+.

b) **2 ♖a8 ♖a1 3 ♖c8+ (3 ♔f2 ♔b2 4 ♖b8+ ♔a2 5 ♔e2 ♖b1! 6 ♖a8 ♖b4 7 ♔d2 ♔b2 —+) 3...♔b4 4 ♖b8+ ♔c5 5 ♖c8+ ♔b6 6 ♖a8 a2 7 ♔f2 ♖h1** —+.



6.62A =/+

2 ♖c8+?

Returning the favour. Instead **2 ♖a8! ♖h4 3 ♖c8+ ♔b3 4 ♔d3 ♖b4 (4...a3 5 ♖b8+! ♖b4 6 ♖xb4+! =) 5 ♔d2 a3 6 ♖c3+! ♔a4 7 ♔c2 ♖b2+ 8 ♔c1! ♖b5 9 ♖c2! ♔b3 10 ♔b1!** draws for White.

2...♔b2!

Euwe gets no second chance.

3 ♖b8+ ♔c1 4 ♖c8+

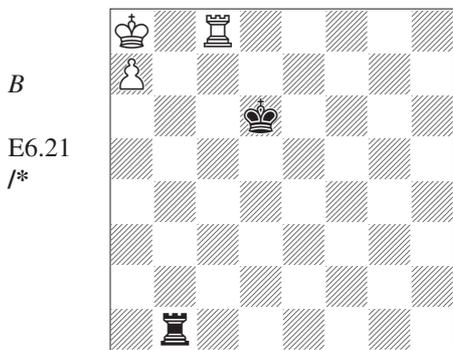
4 ♖a8 a3 —+.

4...♔b1 5 ♖b8+ ♖b2 6 ♖a8 ♖b3+ 7 ♔d4 a3 8 ♔c4 ♔b2 9 ♖h8 ♖c3+ 0-1

Reference work

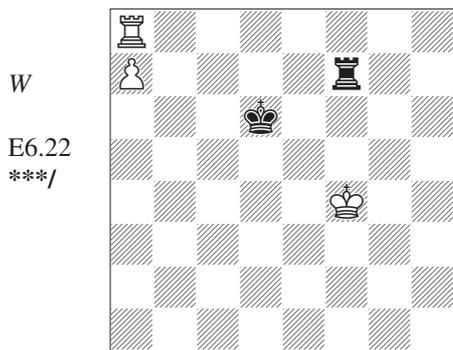
Secrets of Rook Endings, Nunn, Batsford 1992 (second edition, Gambit 1999)

Exercises (Solutions on pages 379-80)



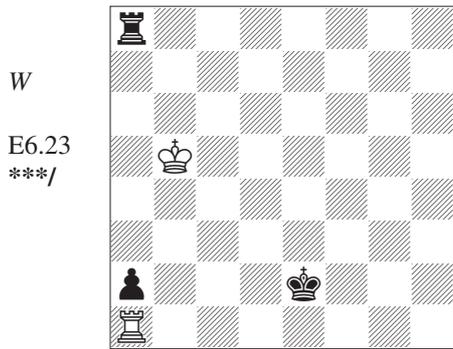
B
E6.21
/*

Can Black draw?



W
E6.22
***/*

White to play and win.



W
E6.23
***/*

White to play and draw.