



## SKITTLES ROOM



In the fall of 2004, a slim volume on rook endgames appeared. Written by IM Nikolay Minev, its main objective was to help the average club player understand the ebb and flow of these common endings. It was received very well by the chessplaying public, and earlier this year a software version appeared. We thought it was time to give our readers a look at Minev's popular work. We hope you enjoy...

## Excerpt:

### A Practical Guide to Rook Endgames

by Nikolay Minev

*From pages 50-57:*

#### **7. Material and Positional Advantage**

In principle, having one, two, or three extra pawns is an advantage, when the opponent has no compensation in positional, strategic terms. In such cases, by playing correctly, the side with a material advantage should win. In practice, though, the material advantage of one, and sometimes even two pawns, is often difficult to exploit due to the rook's ability to create counterplay as a long-range and very mobile piece. Thus the famous saying: "All rook endgames are drawn," indicating the great defensive possibilities for the weaker side.

In any endgame position, favorable and unfavorable qualities never exist separately. They augment or oppose each other, they balance each other out or tip the balance in favor of one side or the other. Below are listed briefly the qualities we

have to keep in mind when evaluating each position.

## Favorable Qualities

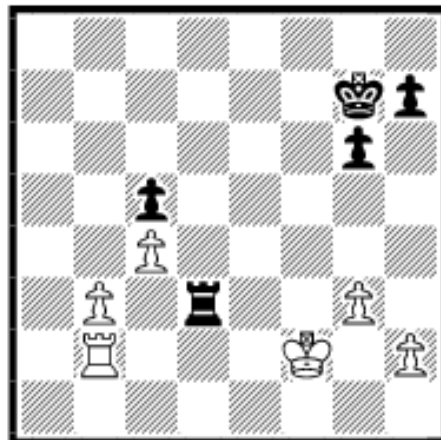
### On One's Own Side

1. Material Advantage
2. Better pawn structure
3. More space and maneuvering room for the pieces
4. Activity and coordination of forces
5. Possibility of creating a passed pawn
6. Effective blockade of opponent's passed pawn

### On the Opposing Side

1. Material disadvantage
2. Pawn structure with many weaknesses (many islands)
3. Limited space, pieces unable to maneuver well
4. Passive or uncoordinated forces
5. No possibility for counterplay or creation of a passed pawn
6. Rook forced into passive blockade of a passed pawn

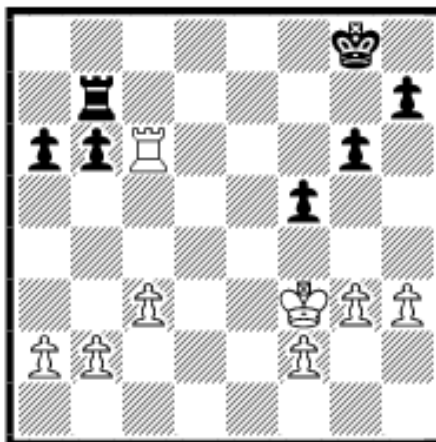
In practice, the struggle to achieve positional advantage is the struggle to create or enhance qualities favorable to us, and correspondingly to eliminate or diminish the same qualities for the opponent. The ability to foresee and evaluate such a favorable transformation is the basis for developing a plan for the game.



#79 White to move

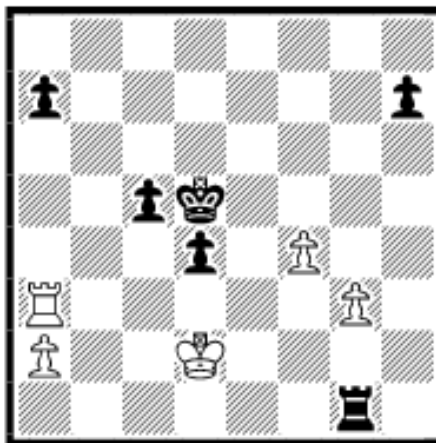
**Diagram #79:** *Sämisch-Unzicker, Lucerne 1948*. White has a material advantage of one pawn, but neither side has any positional advantage. The immediate attempt to create a passed pawn with 1.b4 cxb4 2.Rxb4 offers positional compensation to Black after 2....Rc3!, placing an active rook behind the pawn. In other words, the attempt to create a favorable quality for our position, will also create a countervailing favorable quality for the opponent; essentially we have not achieved anything. In the actual game, White choose the strategically correct plan – to defend the b-pawn with the king, then to activate his rook (a favorable quality) and to capture Black’s c-pawn, thus creating two very strong connected passed pawns. Even if it proves necessary to sacrifice two white pawns on the kingside for the c-pawn, the resulting position still would be advantageous to White, because White’s pawns would move ahead earlier (extra tempi = favorable quality). Here is the actual execution of this plan:

**1.Ke2 Rc3 2.Kd2 Rf3 3.Kc2 Kf6 4.Kb1 Ke5 5.Re2+ Kd4 6.Kc2 h5** Black also tries for counterplay by activating his king and pawns. **7.Rd2+ Ke4 8.Rd5! Rf2+ 9.Kc3 Rxc5 10.Rxc5 Rh3 11.Rg5 h4 12.Rg4+ Ke5 13.Rxh4 Rxg3+ 14.Kb4** This transformation leads to a simpler, basic endgame where the material advantage and favorable pawn structure are preserved. Black has no positional compensation – the activity and coordination of the forces are equivalent. Ultimately, the correct strategic plan results in a winning position. **14...g5 15.Rh6!** Black’s king is cut off at the sixth rank, preventing it from blockading the passed pawns. **15...g4 16.c5 Kd5 17.Rd6+ Ke5 18.Rd1 Rf3 19.c6 Rf8 20. Kc5 1-0.**



**#80** White to move

**Diagram #80:** *Tringov-Baretic, Belgrade 1979*. White has the advantage both materially (extra pawn) and positionally (active rook and king). All necessary qualities for a win are present. The realization is instructive: **1.h4 Kf7 2.h5 g5** Black does not win a pawn with **2...gxh5**, because after **3.Kf4** White not only regains the sacrificed material, but also further activates his king. **3.b4 a5 4.a3 a4** Better, but still not adequate, would have been **4...axb4. 5.g4! f4 6.Ke4** Activating the king, in order to coordinate an attack with the rook. **6...Re7+ 7.Kf5 Re2** Black makes his only try for active counterplay. **8.Kxg5 Rxf2 9.Kh6 f3 10.g5 Ra2 11.Kxh7 1-0**.

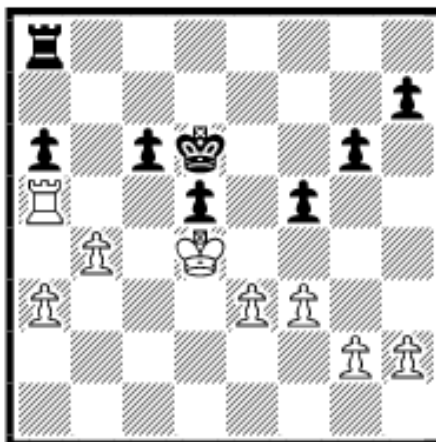


**#81** White to move

**Diagram #81:** *Bellon-Karpov, Las Palmas 1977*. The assessment here is also easy – Black has both a material and a tremendous positional advantage: active king and rook, and two connected and far advanced passed pawns. White does not have the coordination to create any significant counterplay, while the transformation **1.Rxa7 Rxc3 2.Rxh7 Rg2+ 3.Kd1 (3.Kd3?? c4#) 3...Rxa2** leads to a lost position similar to **Diagram #79. 1.f5 c4 2.Rf3** White positions his rook behind his own passed pawn, but there is no time for its advance. Black not only has a few extra tempi, but his advancing pawns create threats against White's king. **2...c3+ 3.Kc2 Kc4 4.Rf4** Otherwise **4...d3#. 4...Rg2+ 5.Kc1 Rxa2 0-1**.

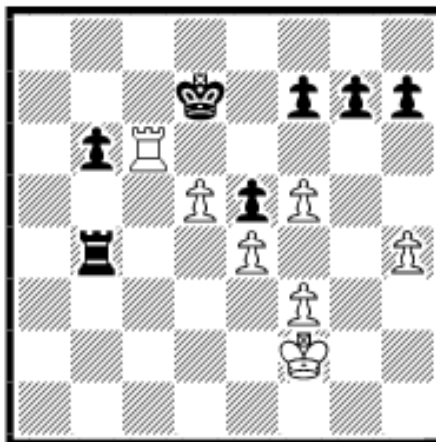
These two examples showed clear positions in which realizing the positional advantage was relatively easy. As we already know, in situations of no material advantage, with a positional advantage not so clear, the method of realization involves improving the favorable strategic qualities for our position, without neglecting the whole tactical arsenal.

In addition to activation and coordination, one of the most important techniques to understand is **the creation of weaknesses in the opponent's pawn structure**. Without such weaknesses there are no objects for attack. Very often, one weakness is not enough, because it is easily defended. In such cases, it is necessary to create another weakness, ideally on the flank opposite to where the opponent has concentrated his forces. The following two examples are instructive for this topic.



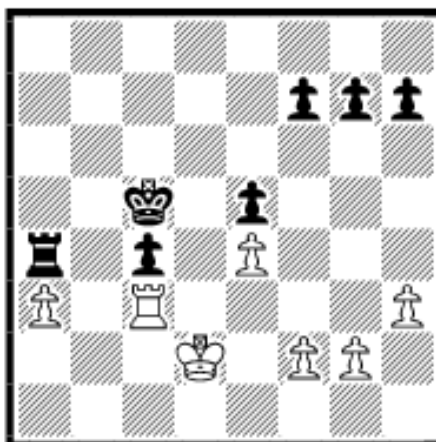
#82 White to move

**Diagram #82:** *Flohr-Vidmar, Nottingham 1936*. White has a positional advantage but must find the correct plan for its realization. The following annotations are based on those of Alekhine. **1.e4!** White profits by the fact that Black's rook is tied to defense of the a-pawn and is unable to threaten or defend on the kingside, forcing Black to weaken his position there in a decisive manner. What follows is a classic example of how to play such an endgame. **1...fxe4 2.fxe4 dxe4 3.Kxe4 Ra7 4.Kf4 h6 5.h4 Ke6 6.Kg4 Ra8 7.h5 g5** If **7...gxh5**, then **8.Kxh5 Rg8 9.g4** winning easily. **8.g3 Ra7 9.Kf3 Ra8 10. Ke4 Ra7 11.Kd4** White could also play immediately **11.Re5. 11...Kd6 12.Ke4 Ke6 13.Re5+!** Forcing entrance either for the rook at e8 or the king at f5. **13...Kd6 14.Re8 c5** Desperation! **15.Rd8+ Kc6** Or **15...Kc7 16.Rh8 cxb4 17.axb4** and wins. Averbakh shows an even more convincing variation: **17.Rh7+ Kb8 18.Rxa7 Kxa7 19.axb4** (transformation into a winning pawn endgame!) **19...Kb6 20. Kf5 Kb5 21.Kg6 Kxb4 22.Kxh6 a5 23.Kg6 a4 24.h6** etc. **16.Rc8+ Kb6 17.Rxc5 Rh7 18.Re5 Kc6 19.Re6+ Kb5 20. Kf5 Rf7+ 21.Rf6 1-0.**



#83 White to move

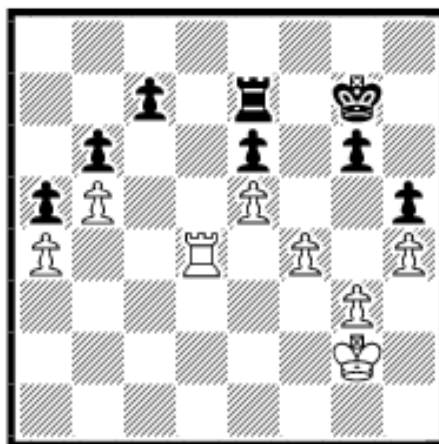
**Diagram #83:** *Karpov-Miles, Bugojno 1978.* **1.h5!** To create weaknesses in Black's kingside pawn structure. **1...Rb2+ 2.Kg3 Rb1** If **2...h6 3.f6!**. **3.h6 g6 4.fxg6 hxg6** If **4...fxg6**, then e6 is not protected, and White's rook could penetrate there: **5.Re6 b5 6.Rxe5 b4 7.Re6** and White wins. **5.Rc2 Rg1+ 6.Rg2 Ra1 7.Rh2!** Observing Tarrasch's rule of posting the rook behind the passed pawn. **7...Ra8 8.Kg4! f6 9.Rb2 Kc7 10.Rc2+ Kb7** The variation **10...Kd7 11.Rc6** demonstrates the results of the weaknesses provoked in Black's position – the weak pawns cannot be defended. **11.d6 b5 12.d7 1-0.** If **12...b4 13.Rc8** forces transformation into a won pawn endgame. There are four additional examples at the end of this chapter. The reader will be left to assess the positions on his own – who has the advantage, and how to exploit this advantage. Brief annotations will only highlight milestones and methods.



#84 Black to move

**Diagram #84:** *Rellstab-Matanovic, Hamburg 1955.* 1...Kd4 2.Re3 g6 3.g4 Ra6 Having more space, Black has the greater opportunity for maneuvering. 4.Rf3 Ra7 5.Re3 h6 6.h4 Ra6 7.Rf3 Ra7 8.Re3 g5 9.h5 Opening another file is hardly in White's favor. The text may make possible later counterplay against the h6-pawn. 9...Ra6 10.Rf3 Kxe4 11.Rxf7 Rxa3 12.Rf6 Rf3 13.Rxh6 Rxf2+ 14.Kc3 Rg2 15.Rc6 Rg3+! 16.Kb4! Not 16.Kxc4? Rxc4 and wins. Now the g4-pawn is temporary defended indirectly (16...Rxc4?? 17.Rxc4+ Kf5 18.Rxc4 Kxc4 19.h6 etc.), and White gains a few tempi. 16...Kf4 17.Rxc4+ e4 18.Rc1 Kf3! 19.Kc4

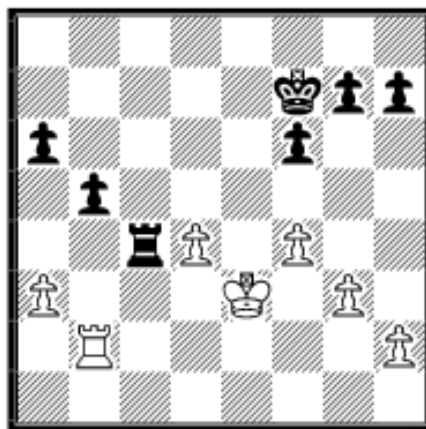
Rxc4 20.Rh1 The familiar support of a passed pawn by a rook behind it. 20...Kg2 21.Re1 Kf2 22.Rh1 Rf4 23.h6 Rf8 24.h7 Rh8 25.Kd4 According to Averbakh, White could have achieved a draw by 25.Rh2+ Kf3 26.Rh3+ Kf4 27.Kd4!, for example 27...g4 28.Rh6 g3 29.Rf6+ Kg4 30.Rg6+ Kf3 31.Rf6+ Ke2 32.Rg6 Kf2 33.Rf6+ Kg1 34.Rh6 g2 35.Kxe4=. However, this analysis is incorrect. Instead of 32...Kf2, Black wins by 32...Rxh7! 33.Rxc3 Kf2! 34.Ra3 (or 34.Re3 Rd7+!, or 34.Rg8 e3) 34...e3! 35.Rxe3 Rd7+ 36.Ke4 Re7+ and 37...Rxe3. 25...e3 26.Rh2+ Kf3 27.Rh3+ Kg2 28.Rh5 e2 White's position is already lost. 29.Rxc3+ Kf1 30.Rf5+ Ke1 31.Kc3 Or 31.Rf7 Kd1o. 31...Rxh7 32.Kc2 Rc7+ 33.Kb2 Kd2 34.Rd5+ Ke3 35.Re5+ Kf3 36.Rf5+ Ke4 37.Rf8+ Re7 0-1.



#85 White to move

**Diagram #85:** *Bukic-Matulovic, Vrsac 1975.* White has a number of positional advantages: an active rook controlling the only open file with an opportunity to penetrate deep into Black's position, while Black has weak pawns and passive pieces. Still, the win is not possible without the creation of a passed pawn. 1.Kf3 Rf7 2.g4 hxg4+ 3.Kxc4 Kh6 4.Rd2 Re7 5.Rd8 Zugzwang. If the rook moves, then 6.Re8. 5...Kh7 6.Kg5 Kg7 7.h5 gxh5 8.Kxh5 Kh7 9.Kg5 Kg7 10.Rc8 Rd7 11.f5 Kf7 Or 11...exf5 12.e6 Re7 13.Kxf5 when Black is again in zugzwang and has to play 13...Kh7 14.Kf6 and

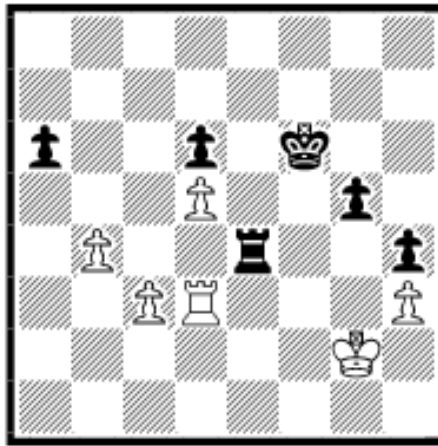
White wins. **12.f6 1-0**. Black resigned in view of 13.Rh8.



#86 Black to move

**Diagram #86:** *Marshall-Chigorin, Barmen 1905*. Black has several advantages: a queenside pawn majority, control of the open c-file, and the weakness of White's a- and d-pawns.

**1...Ke6!** Excellent! Black rejects 1...Rc3+ 2.Ke4 Rxa3 even though this wins a pawn and creates two connected passed pawns, because White, by coordinating the efforts of his king, rook and passed d-pawn, would organize strong counterplay. It is doubtful that Black could win in this line. After the text Black does seriously threaten 2...Rc3+, because if then 3.Ke4?? f5 mate! **2.Rb3 Kd5 3.Rd3 f5!** White is in zugzwang. After exhausting his pawn moves, White is forced to lose a pawn. **4.h3 h5 5.Ke2** Or 5.Rd2 (5.h4 g6 makes no difference) 5...Rc3+ 6.Rd3 Rxd3+ 7.Kxd3 a5 with an easily won pawn endgame because of Black's outside passed pawn. **5...Rxd4 6.Rc3 Re4+ 7.Kd2** After 7.Kf3 Black's queenside pawns decide the game quickly because White's king is cut off. **7...h4 8.Rc7 hxg3 9.Rxg7 Rxf4 10.Rxg3 Ke5 11.Ke2 Rc4 12.Rg6 Ra4 13.Rg3 f4 14.Rb3 Rc4 15.Kd1** If 15.h4 this pawn will perish quickly. White's situation is hopeless. **15...Ke4 16.h4 f3 17.Ke1 Kf4 18.h5 Rc1 19.Kf2 Rc2 20.Ke1 Kg3 21.h6 Re2+ 22.Kd1 Rh2 23.a4 b4 24.h7 Rxh7 25.Rxb4 Rh1+ 26.Kd2 f2 27.Rb8 f1=Q 0-1**. This classic endgame combines almost all methods for realization of positional advantage.



#87 Black to move

**Diagram #87:** *Gheorghiu-Portisch, Monte Carlo 1969.*  
**1...Ke5 2.Kf3 Rf4+ 3.Kg2** Or **3.Ke2 g4 4.hxg4 Rxc4 5.Kf2 Rg3!** and according to Maric and Karpov, Black has a winning position. **3...g4** Again, the important thematic method: the creation of a passed pawn. **4.hxg4 Rxc4+ 5.Kh3 Rxc4** Now the transformation **5...Rg3+ 6.Rxc4 hxg3** would be a mistake, because capture of the g-pawn is without check, and after **7.c4! Kd4 8.c5 Kxd5 9.cxd6 Kxd6 10.Kxc3** White's king is able to reach the critical square c1. **6.Rd1 Rxc3+ 7.Kxh4 Rxc4+ 8.Kg3 Rxb4** The positional advantage is transformed into a material one, without White gaining any compensating strategic benefits. **9.Ra1 Rb6!** The possible variation **9...Kxd5 10.Rxa6 Re4 11.Kf3 Re8 12.Ra1** introduces us to the subject of the next chapter, "Basic rook-and-pawn endgames," specifically rook and pawn against rook. Portisch avoids this, because if this specific position is correctly played, White achieves a draw. **10.Ra5 Kd4 11.Kf4 Kc4 12.Kf5 Kb4 13.Ra1 a5 14.Rb1+ Kc5 15.Ra1 Ra6!** The most active position for the rook. **16.Ke6 a4 17.Rc1+ Kb4 18.Rb1+ Ka5! 19.Ra1 Rb6** A regrouping of the pieces to assure optimum coordination. **20.Ra2 Kb5 21.Ra1** Or **21.Rb2+ Kc5 22.Rc2+ Kd4 23.Ra2 Ra6 24.Ra3 Kc4!** followed by **Kb4. 21...Kb4! 0-1.** After **22.Rb1+ Ka5 23.Ra1 Ra6! 24.Ra2 Kb4 25.Ra1 a3**, the advance of the black passed pawn, supported by rook and king, is irresistible.

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by Nikolay Minev

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