

CHAPTER IV The Rooks

One of the most important strategical aims in exploiting open files is the penetration by heavy pieces to the seventh and eighth ranks. Heavy pieces on the seventh rank generally cripple the enemy position or force the win of pawns, which on this rank are a rewarding target. On the eighth rank, it is the enemy King which comes under fire – and it is not only beginners who have been surprised by many beautiful mating combinations based on the weakness of the back rank.

Of great importance is the use made of the seventh rank in the endgame, and great care is needed in assessing its value before transposing into a rook end game. In fact, it is often an important strategical aim to bring about an exchange that leaves a Rook with access to the seventh rank, for even where material is equal and much reduced, a Rook on the seventh rank can be a decisive factor. So, for example, the position in Diagram A

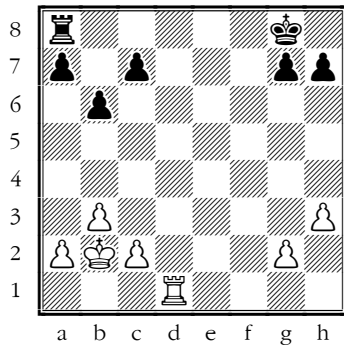


Diagram A

is won for White because his King, after **1.Rd7 Rc8** (if *1...c5* **2.Kc3**) **2.Kc3** marches untroubled into play; while Black's pieces are bound to the defense of pawns.

We now give five typical examples in which the Rook on the seventh rank proves decisive; the way in which victory is secured or a draw snatched in each case aptly illustrates the strategical meaning of the rook on the seventh. Then we follow with four others showing the two most important aims in controlling the eighth rank: the forcing of

mate and the pinning of enemy pieces to the back rank.

Example 1:

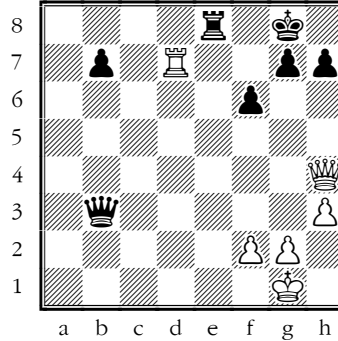


Diagram 1

White to play and win.

1.Qg4 **g6**
2.Qh4 **h5**
3.Qxf6 ...

and wins. Here White used the position of his Rook to work up a simple mating attack. It should be noted how important Black's weak pawn formation was; if his f-pawn had been on f7 instead of f6, White would have had a struggle even to draw.

Example 2:

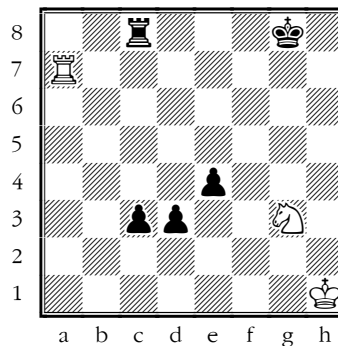


Diagram 2

White to play and draw.

1.Nxe4 **c2**
2.Nf6+ **Kf8** (If *2...Kh8??* **3.Rh7#**.)
3.Nh7+ **Ke8**
4.Nf6+ ...

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and White saved himself by perpetual check because *4...Kd8* is not possible owing to *5.Rd7#*. The result would have been the same if White's Rook had been on d7 and Black's Rook had been on b8; for then White's own Rook deprives the Black King of the flight-square d8. This cooperation of Rook on the seventh and Knight to force perpetual check is a frequent goal in positions that are materially or positionally unfavorable.

Example 3:

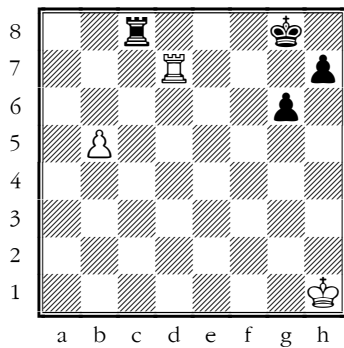


Diagram 3

White to play and win.

1.b6 Kf8
2.b7 Rb8
3.Rc7 ...

This is the simplest way of using a Rook on the seventh to assist in the promotion of a passed pawn. It is, however, only available when the enemy King has no nearby pawns on the second rank to break the power of the Rook; if there are such pawns, the outcome might well be different.

Suppose, for example, that Black's pawns on g6 and h7 were reversed and stood instead on g7 and h6; then, White could not win and in fact would have to struggle even to draw.

1.b6 Rc1+ 2.Kg2 Rb1 3.b7 Kh7 4.Kf3 h5, etc.

The contrasting results in these similar positions underline the care needed in

advancing pawns in front of the king when an opposing Rook has access to the seventh rank; a careless placing of pawns (e.g., f5, g6, h7) allows the King to be cut off and may lead to a quick loss. A King so cut off must be considered a serious disadvantage, which even material superiority might not outweigh; the Rook that does the cutting off, on the other hand, has its value enhanced. In the words of Nimzovitch, it possesses the "absolute seventh."

Example 4:

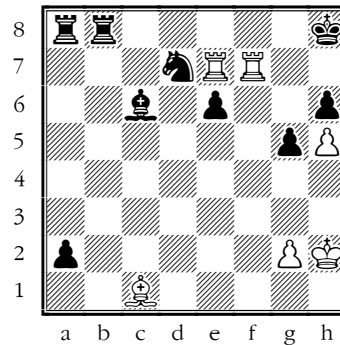


Diagram 4

White to play and win.

1.Rh7+ Kg8
2.Reg7+ Kf8
3.Bxg5! hxg5
4.h6 ...

White threatens *5.Rh8*.

4... Ke8
5.Rh8+ Nf8
6.h7 a1Q
7.Rxf8+ Kxf8
8.h8Q#.

The result is the same if Black deviates on move three with *3...a1Q 4.Be7+ Ke8 5.Rg8+ Nf8 6.Rxf8+ Kd7 7.Bc5+ Qg7 8.Rxg7#*; or *3...Be4 4.Be7+ Ke8 5.Rh8+ Nf8 6.Bd6!* followed by *Rxf8#*.

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Example 4 shows something of the power exerted by two Rooks united on the seventh rank. It is interesting to note the mating threats that arose once the Rook on g7 had been protected by the advance of the h-pawn; such mating positions are characteristic and are the basis of many a combination.

Here, the united Rooks brought victory. In some cases, however, they act as a saving factor when the material position is unfavorable.

If, for example, White were without his Bishop on c1, he could still have drawn by perpetual check: **1.Rh7+ Kg8 2.Rhg7+** (Not **2.Reg7+ Kf8** and the King escapes.) **2...Kf8 3.Rgf7+** etc.

Example 5:

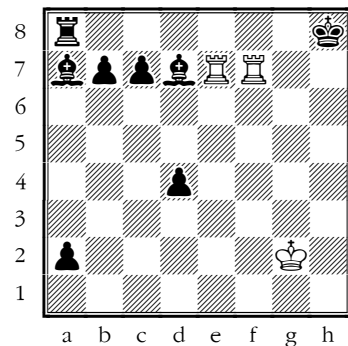


Diagram 5

White to play and win.

1.Rh7+ Kg8
2.Reg7+ Kf8
3.Rxd7 ...

White is threatening Rh8#.

3... Kg8
4.Rdg7+ Kf8
5.Rxc7 Kg8
6.Rcg7+ Kf8
7.Rxb7 Kg8!
8.Rbg7+ ...

If **8.Rxa7? a1Q!** =.

8... Kf8
9.Rxa7 ...

and wins. In this case, mate cannot be forced, for there is no way of protecting one Rook in g7 while the other gives mate at h8. White, instead, must resort to repeated threats of mate, and by so doing, win a decisive advantage in material.

Example 6:

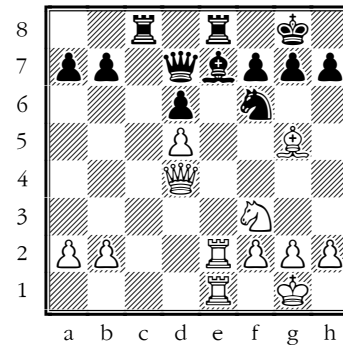


Diagram 6

White to play and win.

1.Bxf6! Bxf6

After **1...gxf6** it would be a mistake to play **2.Rxe7?** because **2...Qxe7! 3.Rxe7? Rc1+** and White gets mated.

However, retaking with the pawn does not quite save Black, for, as a result of his weakened King-side and bad Bishop, his position still gives White sufficient opportunity to force a decision. **2.h3** (Now threatening **Rxe7**.) **2...Ra8 3.Qg4+ Qxg4 4.hxg4 Kf8 5.Nd4** etc.

2.Qg4! Qb5
3.Qc4!! Qd7
4.Qc7!! Qb5
5.a4! ...

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Not 5. *Qxb7?* *Qxe2!* 6. *Rxe2 Rc1+* when White suffers the same fate as in the note to Black's first move.

5... **Qxa4**
6. **Re4** **Qb5**
7. **Qxb7** ...

Black must give up his Queen to prevent mate on the back rank. This is perhaps the most famous of all combinations* directed towards mate on the eighth rank; but the theme is one that occurs again and again under various guises.

(*From the game Adams-Torre, New Orleans 1920, which may be fictitious. Still, it is a remarkable combination! -rw)

Example 7:

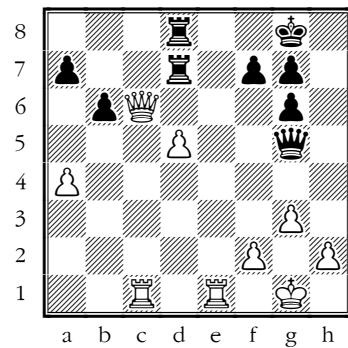


Diagram 7

White to play and win.

1. **Qxd7!** **Rxd7**
2. **Re8+** **Kh7**
3. **Rcc8** ...

Black can not avoid mate. This combination hinges on the unfortunate placement of Black's Queen, which blocks the freeing move 3...g5. (From a game won by Alekhine.)

Example 8:

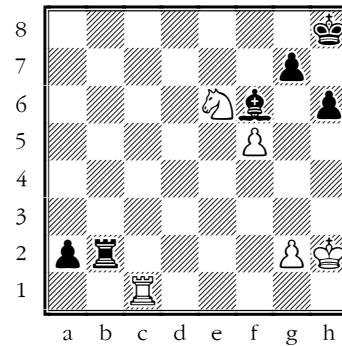


Diagram 8

White to play and win.

1. **Rc8+** **Kh7**
2. **Nf8+** **Kg8**
3. **Ng6+** **Bd8**
4. **Rxd8+** **Kh7** (If 4...*Kf7* 5. *Rf8#*.)
5. **Rh8#.**

A similar mating combination occurs if White's Knight on e6 is replaced by a Bishop; for example, 1. **Rc8+** **Kh7** 2. **Bg8+** **Kh8** 3. **Bf7+** **Bd8** 4. **Rxd8+** **Kh7** 5. **Bg6#.**

Example 9:

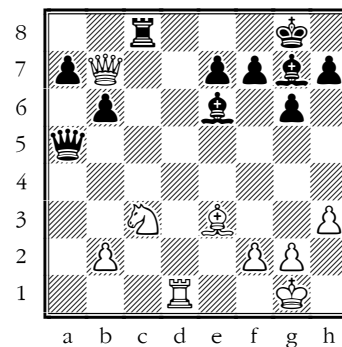


Diagram 9

White to play and win.

1. **Qxc8+!** **Bxc8** 2. **Rd8+** **Bf8** 3. **Bh6** and Black has no defense against the threat 4. **Rxf8#.**

This is a typical example of a piece that is pinned on the back rank leading to an immediate mate.