Contents

2...d3 3 ♖f2+ ♔e3 4 ♖e2+ ♔d4 5 ♖e8 g3 6 ♖h8! g2 7 ♔f2 d2 8 ♖d8+ ♔c3 9 ♖c8+ is an easy draw.

3 ♔f1!

The only way to draw is to play for stalemate.

3...d3

3...g2+ 4 ♔g1 ♔xe2 is the first of two stalemates.

4 ♖f2+! ½-½

4 ♖a2 also draws, but playing for a second stalemate is more forcing. If Black declines the rook by 4...♔e3, White draws with 5 hxg3 fxg3 6 ♖f8 d2 7 ♖e8+.

Summary:

- Stalemate ideas occur occasionally in endings in which only one side has a rook. The trick we saw above (with w♔f1, ♖f2 vs b♔f3, ♙g3) is a typical stalemating idea which is also important in some positions with ♖+♙ vs ♖.

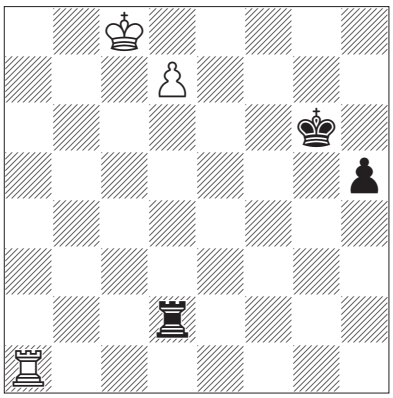
8.4 Rook and Pawns vs Rook and Pawns

We now move on to the main subject of this book: rook endings in which both sides have a rook. The traditional method of covering rook endings is to start with rook and pawn vs rook and then move on to positions with more pawns. However, the philosophy behind this book is not to repeat theoretical information which may be found in many other endgame books, but to move directly on to the practical implications of the theory. Accordingly, the first part of this section focuses on some ideas which you won't find in most theoretical books. Because these ideas are generally not spelt out explicitly, many players are unaware of how widespread they are and so they are often overlooked in over-the-board play. After exploring these general concepts, I shall move on to an examination of different material balances. However, even here I won't conduct a case-by-case study; instead, I shall focus on the tricky points and common oversights which often result in these endings being misplayed.

8.4.1 Fifth-Rank Cut-Off

This is one of the most important concepts in rook and pawn endings, yet in most books you will only find it in the section 'rook vs pawn', which conceals its wide application.

W



Here's the basic idea. If White plays 1 d8♕? ♖xd8+ 2 ♔xd8, then 2...♔g5 3 ♔e7 h4 4 ♔e6 h3 5 ♔e5 ♔g4 leads to a draw. It's almost a reflex to promote and win the enemy rook as soon as you can, but it's wrong here. Instead, White's only winning move is **1 ♖a5!**, with a *fifth-rank cut-off*. The first point is that 1...h4 2 d8♕ ♖xd8+ 3 ♔xd8 is now a win because if Black ever pushes his pawn with ...h3, then White wins it by ♖a3 and ♖h3. Thus White has time to bring his king back, with an easy win. The point of ♖a5 is to cut Black's king off and prevent it from supporting the h-pawn. Achieving this is White's priority and is more urgent than promoting White's own pawn.

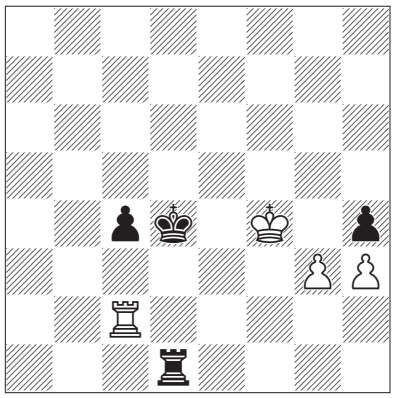
Black can also try meeting 1 ♖a5 by 1...♖c2+, but then 2 ♔b7 ♖d2 3 ♔c7 reveals a second key feature of the fifth-rank cut-off. If Black continues checking by 3...♖c2+ 4 ♔d6 ♖d2+, then White wins with 5 ♖d5. This is no accident, but an inevitable consequence of White's rook position.

Based on this example, the fifth-rank cut-off hardly looks like a difficult idea, but the above position is an idealized theoretical example, with all the pieces placed to make it as clear as possible. It's deceptive to look mainly at such theoretical examples, in which messy practical

details have been eliminated by careful construction. Ideas that seem obvious in such simplified positions can easily be overlooked in over-the-board play, where there are often confusing alternatives and complex sidelines to consider. It is for this reason that this book deals with practical examples, so that readers can gain experience in picking out the crucial elements from irrelevant distractions.

Due to its importance, we shall look at several examples in which the fifth-rank cut-off plays a crucial role. In the first position there is as yet no sign of a cut-off, but Black finds the winning idea and executes it precisely.

B



Yusupov – Tseshkovsky
Moscow (4 teams) 1981

Black has various ways to win White's rook for the c-pawn, but only one of these leads to a win. In order to find the correct path, Black must calculate the results of various endings with a rook against a pawn.

1...♖f1+!

The only winning move, which crucially prevents White from playing his own rook to the f-file. If Black plays 1...♔d3?, then White draws by 2 ♖f2! hxg3 3 ♔xg3 c3 4 h4 c2 5 ♖xc2 ♔xc2 6 ♔f4! (keeping Black's king at bay; 6 ♔g4? loses to 6...♔d3 7 h5 ♔e4) 6...♔d3 7 h5 ♖h1 8 ♔g5 ♔e4 9 ♔g6 ♔e5 10 h6 ♖g1+ 11 ♔f7!, reaching a standard drawn position. 1...hxg3? also fails to win after 2 ♔xg3 ♔d3 3 ♖f2, transposing to the above line.

2 ♔g4 hxg3 3 ♖d2+

White attempts to drive Black's king to an inferior position before surrendering his rook. After 3 ♔xg3 ♔d3 Black wins precisely because his rook occupies the f-file so that after 4 ♖a2 c3 5 h4 c2 6 ♖xc2 ♔xc2 White is unable to play his king to f4 as in the previous note. Then Black wins by means of 7 ♔g4 ♔d3 8 h5 ♔e4 9 ♔g5 ♔e5 10 ♔g6 ♔e6 11 h6 ♖g1+, etc.

3...♔e3

3...♔c3? 4 ♖g2 leads to a draw since Black must waste time before advancing his c-pawn.

4 ♖g2

The key line is 4 ♖c2 ♖f4+ 5 ♔xg3 (after 5 ♔g5 ♖f8 6 ♔g6 g2 Black wins at once) 5...♖d4! and Black wins because of the fifth-rank cut-off; for example, 6 h4 ♔d3 7 ♖f2 c3 8 ♖f3+ ♔c4 9 ♖f2 ♔b3 10 h5 c2 11 ♖f3+ ♔b2 12 ♖f2 ♔b1 13 ♖xc2 ♔xc2 and White cannot push his pawn as it is simply lost after 14 h6 ♖d6 15 h7 ♖h6. Therefore Black can just bring his king back to round up the h-pawn.

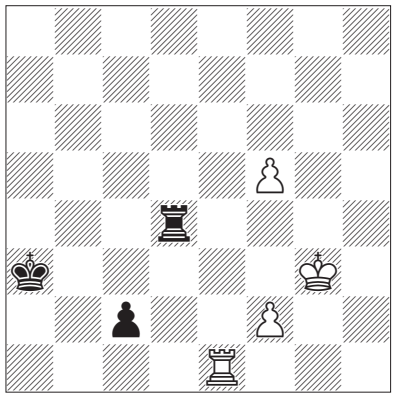
4...♖f4+! 5 ♔xg3 c3

The fifth-rank cut-off is decisive just as in the note to White's 4th move.

6 h4 ♖c4 7 ♖c2 ♔d3 8 ♖c1 c2 9 h5 ♔d2 10 ♖h1 c1♕ 11 ♖xc1 ♔xc1 0-1

The following example shows a more complex case in which Black overlooked the possibility of a fifth-rank cut-off.

W



Makovsky – K.D. Müller
e-mail 2000

In this position Black has a monster passed c-pawn and is threatening an immediate win by

...♖d1. White can use his front f-pawn to deflect Black's rook, but the power of the c-pawn is so great that Black has time to eliminate the far-advanced f-pawn and still win. However, a couple of good moves are required and Black was not up to the task, even in a correspondence game.

1 f6

This is the only way to meet the threat of ...♖d1, making use of the sole feature of the position that favours White: the fact that his f-pawn can promote with check.

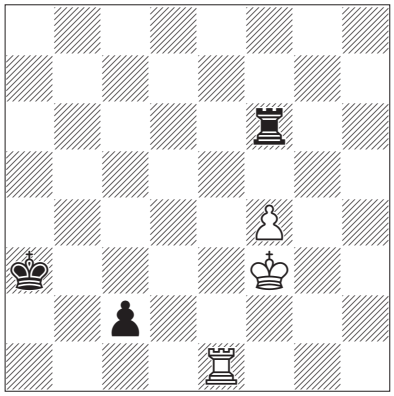
1...♖d6! 2 f4

After 2 f7 ♖f6 3 ♖e3+ ♔b2 4 ♖f3 c1♕ 5 ♖xf6 ♕g5+ Black picks up the rook and wins.

2...♖xf6 3 ♔f3 *(D)*

White tries to get his king to the other side of the pawn, so as to keep Black's king away from the f-pawn after he gives up his rook for the c-pawn. The alternative is 3 ♔g4, but then Black wins by 3...♖c6 4 ♔f5 (4 f5 c1♕ 5 ♖xc1 ♖xc1 6 ♔f4 ♔b4 7 ♔e5 ♔c5 8 ♔e6 ♔c6 9 f6 ♖e1+ and 4 ♖c1 ♔b2 5 ♖h1 c1♕ also win for Black) 4...c1♕ 5 ♖xc1 ♖xc1 6 ♔e6 ♖e1+! 7 ♔d6 ♖f1 8 ♔e5 ♔b4 9 f5 ♔c5 10 ♔e6 ♔c6 11 f6 ♖e1+ followed by ...♔d7.

B



This is the key moment. It's not obvious that Black can establish a fifth-rank cut-off, but without it he cannot win.

3...♔b2?

An automatic but wrong move. Black could have won by 3...♖c6! (threatening to promote) 4 f5 (after 4 ♖h1 or 4 ♔g4 Black just promotes, while 4 ♖c1 ♔b2 5 ♖h1 c1♕ 6 ♖xc1 ♖xc1 7 ♔e4 ♔c3 8 f5 ♔c4 9 ♔e5 ♔c5 10 ♔e6 ♔c6 is winning for Black as before) 4...♖c4!, followed by ...♔b2, and the fifth-rank cut-off is decisive.

4 ♖h1!

White cannot play ♔e4 at once due to the skewer, but by moving his rook away from the vulnerable e1-square he threatens to play his king to e4. Oddly, 4 ♔g4! draws as well since Black's king is in many ways worse placed on b2 than on a3, because it takes longer to reach f8; after 4...♖c6 5 f5 c1♕ 6 ♖xc1 ♖xc1 7 ♔g5 ♔c3 8 f6 ♔d4 9 f7 ♖f1 10 ♔g6 ♔e5 11 ♔g7 White is just in time to draw.

4...♖h6

4...c1♕ 5 ♖xc1 ♔xc1 6 ♔e4! ♔d2 7 ♔e5 ♖f8 8 f5 ♔e3 9 f6 is a draw.

5 ♖g1

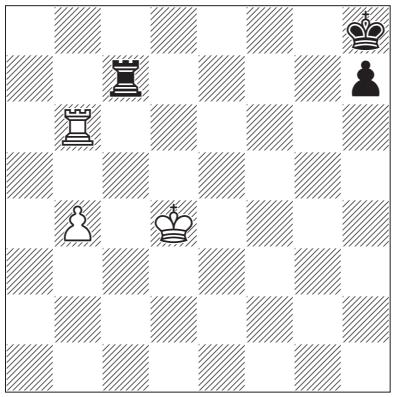
White is now out of danger.

5...♖h2 6 ♔e4 ♖e2+ 7 ♔d5 ♖f2 8 ♔e5 ♖d2 9 f5 ♖d1 ½-½

10 ♖g2 draws easily.

In the following position, White can win by making the most of the rook's ability to operate along the ranks, but he went wrong almost immediately and let Black escape.

W



F. Schubert – U. Dietrich
e-mail 2001

The key to the position is the use of the white rook to cut off the enemy king along a rank. First the rook must be used along the seventh rank to confine Black's king to the back rank, but later the rook must be switched to create a fifth-rank cut-off.

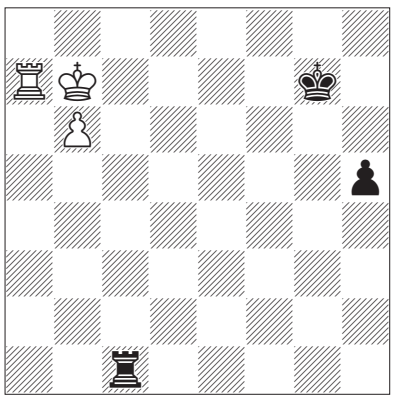
1 b5 ♖c1

There is nothing better. 1...♔g7 loses to 2 ♖c6! ♖d7+ 3 ♔c5 ♔f7 4 b6 ♔e7 5 ♔b5 ♖d5+ 6 ♔a6 ♔d7 7 ♖c7+ ♔d8 8 ♖c1 ♖d6 9 ♔a7 ♖d2 10 b7 ♖a2+ 11 ♔b6 ♖b2+ 12 ♔c6 ♔e7 13 ♖c5 ♔d8 14 ♖d5+ ♔e7 15 ♖b5 and the pawn promotes, while 1...h5 loses the pawn after 2 ♖h6+ ♔g7 3 ♖xh5, with a simple technical win for White.

2 ♖d6?

2 ♖c6? is also bad since Black draws by 2...♖b1 3 b6 h5 4 ♔c5 ♔g7 5 ♔d6 h4 6 ♔c7 h3 7 ♖c2 ♔g6. White had only one move to win, and that was 2 ♖b7!, keeping the enemy king confined to the back rank for the moment. After 2...h5 (2...♖b1 3 ♔c5 h5 4 ♖a7 transposes) 3 ♖a7! (the idea is to allow the rook to switch to the fifth rank later; 3 ♖e7! also wins, but not 3 b6? ♖b1 4 ♔c5 ♖c1+ 5 ♔d6 ♖b1 6 ♔c7 ♖c1+ 7 ♔d8 ♖b1! with a draw as White cannot free his rook, nor 3 ♖f7? ♖b1 4 ♔c5 ♔g8 5 ♖a7 h4 6 b6 h3 and Black draws since his king is now on g8, so White does not have the manoeuvre ♖a3 and ♖h3+) 3...♖b1 4 ♔c5 ♖c1+ (4...h4 5 b6 h3 6 ♖a3! and White wins) 5 ♔d6 ♖b1 6 ♔c6 ♖c1+ 7 ♔b7 (White's play is counter-intuitive, since he now blocks the rook's action along the seventh rank; however, the release of Black's king doesn't help the defence much, since White is ready to create a new cut-off by b6 and ♖a5) 7...♔g7 8 b6 *(D)* Black can try:

B



1) 8...♖b1 9 ♔c7! (the only move to win as White must cover all the squares the pawn needs to cross to reach the eighth rank; 9 ♔c6+? ♔g6 10 ♖a5 h4 11 b7 h3 gives Black an extra tempo which allows him to draw) 9...♔g6 10 ♖a5 h4 11 b7 and White wins since 11...♖c1+ 12 ♔b6 ♖b1+ may be met by 13 ♖b5.

2) 8...♔g6 9 ♖a5! (here comes the fifth-rank cut-off) 9...h4 10 ♔a7! (the only move to win; 10 ♔a8? is wrong because after 10...h3 Black will promote with check) 10...h3 11 b7 h2 12 b8♕ h1♕ (White gets the first check and this gives him a decisive attack) 13 ♕d6+ ♔h7 (if the rook can enter the attack by checking on f5 or g5, mate occurs within a few moves) 14 ♕d7+ ♔h8 15 ♕e8+ ♔h7 16 ♖h5+, winning the queen.

2...♔g7

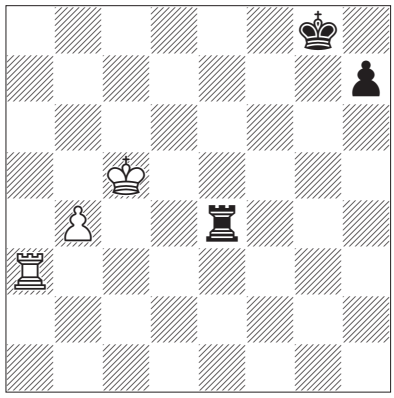
Now Black is safe as it takes White far too long to set the b-pawn in motion.

3 b6 h5 4 ♔d5 h4 5 b7 ♖b1 ½-½

After 6 ♔c6 h3 7 ♖d2 (7 ♖d3 h2 8 ♖h3 ♖c1+ is also a draw) 7...♔g6 8 ♖h2 ♖c1+ 9 ♔d7 ♖b1 10 ♔c7 ♖c1+ 11 ♔b8 ♖c3 Black's problems are solved.

The following position is an interesting example of how the half-point can be handed back and forth, even in a relatively recent correspondence game.

B



Callow – Petters
Chessfriend.com 2004

White's pawn is further advanced and his king is much better placed, but Black has chances of drawing with his h-pawn after he gives up his rook for the b-pawn. Indeed, if Black defends carefully, the result should be a draw, but it's a tough defensive challenge.

1...♖e5+!

The only move. After 1...♔g7? 2 b5 ♔g6 3 b6 ♔f5 (3...h5 4 b7 ♖e5+ 5 ♔b6 ♖e6+ 6 ♔a7 ♖e7 fails to the fifth-rank cut-off 7 ♖a5!) 4 b7 ♖e5+ 5 ♔c4 ♖e4+ 6 ♔c3 ♖e3+ 7 ♔d2! ♖xa3 8 b8♕ White wins thanks to Black's widely-separated forces; for example, 8...♖a2+ 9 ♔c3 ♖a3+ 10 ♔b4 ♖f3 11 ♕h2 ♖f4+ 12 ♔c5 and the h-pawn falls.

2 ♔d6

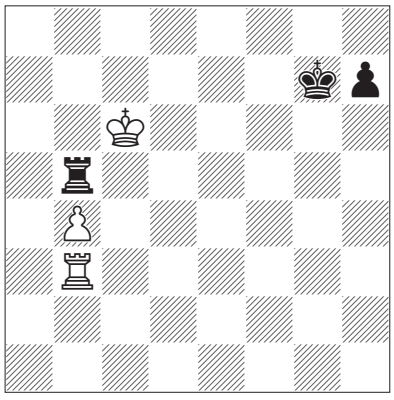
After 2 ♔c6 ♖e6+ Black just keeps checking until he can either switch his rook to the b-file or White retreats his king to the a-file: 3 ♔b7 ♖e7+ 4 ♔a6 ♔g7 (now Black can advance his king) 5 b5 ♔g6 6 b6 ♔g5 (not 6...h5? 7 ♖a5) 7 b7 ♖xb7 8 ♔xb7 h5 9 ♔c6 h4 10 ♔d5 ♔g4 11 ♔e4 h3 and Black draws.

2...♖b5!

A second 'only' move. 2...♖f5? loses in a surprising way: 3 ♔c6! ♖f6+ 4 ♔b7 ♖f7+ 5 ♔a6 (it isn't obvious why this is lost with Black's rook on the f-file, whereas it was drawn with the rook on the e-file) 5...♖f6+ 6 ♔a5 ♔g7 7 b5 ♔g6 8 ♖g3+! (this is the key point; Black's king cannot move to f5, so it either has to retreat to f7, or block the pawn by moving to the h-file) 8...♔h5 (8...♔f7 9 b6 ♖f1 10 ♖b3 ♖a1+ 11 ♔b5 ♖a8 12 b7 ♖b8 13 ♔b6 ♔g6 14 ♖b5 also wins for White) 9 b6 ♖f1 10 b7 ♖b1 11 ♔a6 ♖a1+ 12 ♔b6 ♖b1+ 13 ♔a7 ♖a1+ 14 ♔b8 ♖b1 15 ♖g8 ♔h4 16 ♔c7 ♖c1+ 17 ♔d6 and White wins.

3 ♖b3 ♔g7 4 ♔c6 *(D)*

B



A critical moment. Black must choose the correct square for the rook.

4...♖e5?

This is wrong. The path to the draw lay in 4...♖b8! 5 b5 ♔g6 6 ♔c7 (or 6 b6 ♔g5), and now:

1) 6...♖a8? 7 b6 ♔f5 8 b7 ♖h8 (8...♖e8 9 ♖h3 ♔g6 10 ♖d3 ♖e7+ 11 ♖d7 ♖e8 12 ♖d5 again establishes a fifth-rank cut-off) 9 ♖b5+ ♔g4 10 ♖b6! h5 11 ♖g6+ ♔f4 12 ♖h6 ♖xh6 13 b8♕ is a win for White.

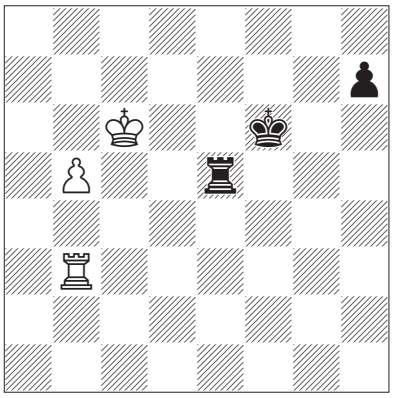
2) 6...♖f8? loses to 7 ♖g3+ ♔h6 8 b6 ♖f7+ 9 ♔b8 ♖f8+ 10 ♔a7 ♖f1 11 b7 ♖a1+ 12 ♔b8 ♖b1 13 ♖g8 followed by ♔c7.

3) 6...♖h8? 7 ♖d3! h5 (7...♔g5 8 ♖d8 and White wins) 8 ♖d5! (this idea should be familiar by now) 8...h4 9 b6 h3 10 b7 ♖h7+ (10...h2 11 ♖d1! ♔g5 12 ♖h1 is similar) 11 ♔c6 ♖h8 12 ♖d3 h2 13 ♖d1 followed by ♖h1 and ♖xh2, leading to a ♕ vs ♖ win.

4) 6...♖e8! (the only drawing square) 7 b6 ♔g5! 8 ♖g3+ (8 b7 h5 is also a draw) 8...♔f4 9 ♖h3 ♖h8! 10 b7 ♔g4 11 ♖h6 ♔g5 12 ♖d6 h5 13 ♖d8 ♖h7+ 14 ♔c6 ♖xb7 15 ♔xb7 h4 and Black is safe.

5 b5 ♔f6 *(D)*

W



6 b6?

This move appears natural but throws away the win. The only winning move is 6 ♖d3!, which has two functions: firstly, if Black moves his rook along the e-file then White can reply ♖d5, setting up the usual cut-off, and secondly, it nullifies the check on e6 because now White can simply interpose his rook. After 6...h5 (6...♖e1 7 ♖d5 ♔e6 8 ♖c5 and 6...♖e8 7 ♖d5 ♔e6 8 ♖h5 ♖c8+ 9 ♔b7 are both comfortably

winning for White) 7 b6 h4 (7...♖e8 8 ♖d5) 8 b7 ♖e8 9 ♖d5 the fifth-rank cut-off is decisive.

6...♖e6+!

Not 6...h5? 7 b7 ♖e8 8 ♖b5 and White wins as before.

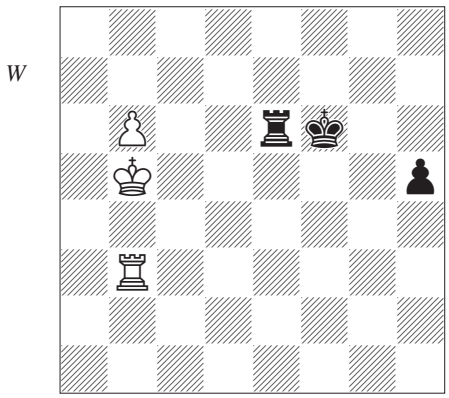
7 ♔b5

After 7 ♔c5 ♖e5+! (not 7...♔g5? 8 b7 ♖e8 9 b8♕ ♖xb8 10 ♖xb8 h5 11 ♔d4 h4 12 ♔e3 and White wins) White doesn't have a good square for his king; for example, 8 ♔c4 ♖e8 9 b7 ♖b8 10 ♔d5 h5 11 ♔c6 ♔g5 with a draw.

7...h5? *(D)*

Black thinks it's time to push the pawn, but he is wrong. 7...♖e5+? is also bad and loses after 8 ♔a6 ♖e8 9 b7 ♔g5 10 b8♕ ♖xb8 11 ♖xb8 h5 12 ♔b5 h4 13 ♔c4 ♔g4 14 ♔d3 h3 15 ♔e2.

The drawing line was 7...♔g5! 8 ♖c3 (8 b7 ♖e8 9 ♖c3 ♖b8 is also a draw) 8...♖e8, when it's impossible for White to create a fifth-rank cut-off and so Black draws after 9 b7 ♖b8 10 ♔b6 h5 11 ♔c7 ♖xb7+ 12 ♔xb7 h4.



8 b7?

The fourth and last time the half-point is handed to the opponent. 8 ♖c3! is the only winning move, based on three ideas; the first is the familiar one of preparing a possible ♖c5, the second is the immediate threat of ♖c6, and the third is the idea of b7 followed by ♖c8, promoting the pawn. White wins after 8...♔g5 9 ♖c5+ ♔g4 10 b7 ♖e8 11 ♖c8 or 8...♖e8 9 ♖c5! h4 10 b7 h3 11 ♔b6 ♔g6 12 ♔a7 h2 13 ♖c1.

8...♖e8 9 ♔c6

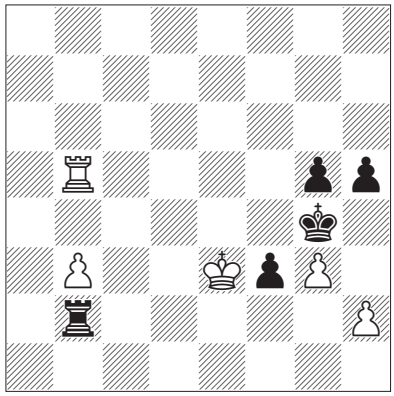
9 ♖c3 ♖b8! 10 ♔b6 ♔g5 is also a draw.

9...♔f5 10 b8♕ ♖xb8 11 ♖xb8 h4

Not 11...♔g4?, losing to 12 ♔d5 h4 13 ♔e4 ♔g3 14 ♔e3 h3 15 ♖g8+.

12 ♔d5 h3 13 ♔d4 ♔f4 14 ♔d3 h2 15 ♖h8 ♔g3 16 ♖xh2 ½-½

In the next example, Black can set up a fifth-rank cut-off easily enough, but actually winning proves more troublesome.



B. Balogh – Sosonko
Netherlands 1973

Material is equal, but Black has a clear advantage based on his active pieces, especially his king. If Black's king can penetrate into the kingside and liquidate the white pawns there, he will have winning chances provided he keeps at least one kingside pawn of his own. This is because his passed pawn will be supported by his king, whereas White's will not. Black's advantage is sufficient to win, but accurate play is required.

1 h3+

White finds the best defence, which involves liquidating as many enemy pawns as possible. The alternative 1 ♖b4+ ♔h3 2 ♔xf3 fails to 2...g4+! (but not 2...♔xh2? 3 g4! h4 4 ♖b5 h3 5 ♖xg5 ♖xb3+ 6 ♔f2! ♖b2+ 7 ♔f3! ♔g1 8 ♖a5 ♖b1 9 ♖a2! h2 10 ♖g2+ ♔h1 11 ♖a2 and White draws) 3 ♔f4 ♖xh2 4 ♖c4 ♖f2+ 5 ♔g5 ♔xg3 6 ♔xh5 ♖f5+ 7 ♔g6 ♖b5 8 b4 ♔h3 and the g-pawn is too quick.

1...♔xh3

Not 1...♔xg3? 2 ♖xg5+ ♔h4 3 ♖f5 ♖xb3+ 4 ♔f2 and White draws easily.

2 ♔xf3 g4+ 3 ♔f4 ♖f2+ 4 ♔e4