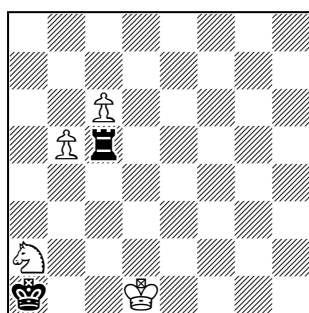


## **Test Tube Chess (2016 reissue of 1981 edition)**

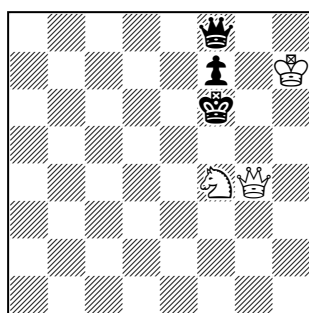
**The Chess Endgame Study** by A. J. Roycroft, Dover, ISBN 978-0-486-24186-9, 370 pages, 433 diagrams, £11.99 from my local bookshop in November 2017.

John Rpycroft's *Test Tube Chess*, "A Comprehensive Introduction to the Chess Endgame Study", was published in 1972, and Dover published a revised edition as *The Chess Endgame Study* in 1981. Dover reissued this in 2016 without apparent change, and having only the 1972 original I thought it appropriate to obtain a copy.

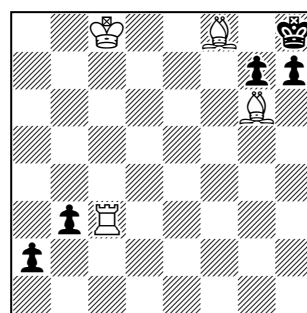
This splendid book contains over 350 studies, and if a few have proved unsound or were chosen to illustrate bad features, the quality of the vast majority varies from the good to the sublime. Here are three examples.



1 - win



2 - win



3 - win

**1** (M. S. Liburkin, 2Pr *Shakhmaty v SSSR* 1931) is a classic, but one of which it is always good to be reminded. **1 Nc1 Rxb5 2 c7** is straightforward, and 2...Rc5 will be met by 3 Nb3+. But Black can play **2...Rd5+**, and after 3 Kc2 the move ...Rc5 will be check; alternatively, 3 Ke- Re5+ and 4 Re8. The answer: **3 Nd3!** The square c5 is now covered, so Black has nothing better than **3...Rxd3+**, and after **4 Kc2** we have the Saavedra finish: **4...Rd4!** (to meet 5 c8Q with 5...Rc4+ and stalemate) **5 c8R!! Ra4 6 Kb3** and wins the rook.

And there is more. Black can also play **1...Rd5+**. Now 2 Nd3 fails (2...Rzd3+ with either 3 Kc2 Rd5 4 b6/c7 Rc5+ or 4 Ke- Rc3 5 Kd2 Kb2), but White can play **2 Kc2**. If now 2...Rxb5 then 3 Nb3+ controlling c5, hence **2...Rc5+**, and if 3 Kd2 then 3...Rxb5 4 c7 Rb2+ and 5...Rc2 since 6 Kxc2 will be stalemate. However, **3 Kd3** wins. Black still has nothing better than **3...Rxb5**, and **4 c7** forces promotion (4...Rc5 5 Nb3+). Black has one last throw, **5...Rb8** trying again for stalemate, but we all know the answer to this: **5 cxb8B!**

John describes **2** (A. A. Troitzky, *Deutsche Schachzeitung* 1911) as one of his permanent favourites, **1 Nd5+** forces **1...Ke5**, and now **2 Nb6** threatens the fork **3 Nd7+**. **2...Kf6** allows the same fork, and **2...Kd6** allows the diagonal spear check **3 Qb4+**. Eleven of the Black queen's fourteen moves are met by an immediate capture or knight fork; the exceptions are **2...Qd8**, met by **3 Nc4+** with a vertical or a second diagonal spear check, **2...Qe8**, met with a second vertical spear check, and **2...Qe7** with the same spear check followed by a knight fork. There remains **2...f5** hoping for a tit-for-tat capture NxQ PxQ, but after **3 Nd7+ Ke6** the capture **4 Nxf8** is check, and if Black plays **3...Kd-** instead White will rescue his queen by **4 Qd1+** before taking Black's.

In **3** (E. Převorovský, 1 Pr *Šach* 1942) an immediate **1 Rc7** is met by 1...a1Q guarding g7, but after **1 Rc1** the threat of **2 Ba3** forces **1...b2** and now the line from a1 to g7 is blocked. So White can play **2 Rc7** threatening **3 Bxg7+** and **4 Bxb2**, and Black might as well promote while he can. However, **2...b1Q** allows **3 Bxg7+ Kg8 4 Bf7+ Kxg7 5 Bxa2+**, and **2...a1Q** is met by the lovely echo **3 Bxg7+ Kg8 4 Bxh7+! Kxh7 5 Bxb2+**.

As for the text, John's approach to endgame study exposition is quite different from mine, and he goes at length into several matters which I find of very little interest. Rereading the book after 45 years, admittedly with the limited attention span of a 77-year-old whose eyesight is not what it was, I found myself skipping great swathes of the text and just playing through the studies. Three sections that I did reread, and with pleasure, were those on endgame study history (pages 65-117), on endgame theory as at mid-1970 (pages 195-219, which will surely be of value to future chess historians), and on the Barnes composition experiment (pages 319-29). But others will find interest where I have not, and even as just a collection of studies the book is well worth having.

Sadly, I have one criticism. Many of the diagrams in my copy are far from clear, and all too often I had to look at the solution in order to locate the Black men on dark squares. I hope this copy is not typical.

This is one of the classic books on chess endgame studies, and Dover have done us a great service by bringing it back into print. But I hope that in any future printing, something will be done to improve the diagrams.