

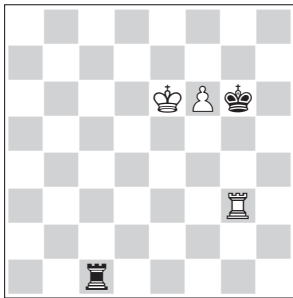
Chapter 2

Pure Rook Endgames

If you are familiar with my terminology, you know that we mean endgames with rooks and pawns only here, no other pieces on the board. I have warned you – these endgames can be very difficult already. So let's not beat about the bush and name the next paragraph:

A) Disappointment, despair and discontent

Or: the 'simple' endgame of rook + pawn(s) versus bare rook. You have guessed it already: we start with several examples where things go terribly wrong. The reader may be consoled by the fact that the victims were no amateurs. I shall add a little theory that is useful to take note of here and there.



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It's unbelievable, but in this position, from Sax-Tseshkovsky, Rovinj/Zagreb 1975, Black resigned. This must have caused him grief afterwards, as it is actually a draw after

1...♔h7!

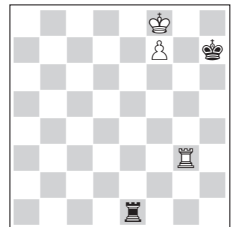
A move to keep in mind. Black probably knew that it's a draw with his rook on the a-file (as far away as possible), but he does not realise that this is not so hard to achieve. The theoretical way to draw is:

2.f7 ♖c8!

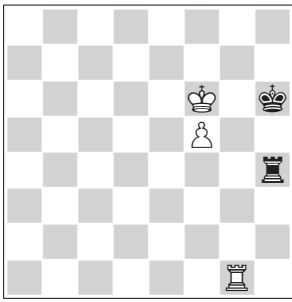
There's a venomous little snake in the grass here: 2...♞e1+? 3.♔d7 ♞d1+ 4.♔e7 ♞e1+ 5.♔f8 (see diagram) and White wins after 5...♞f1 6.♞g7+ ♔h8 7.♞g8+ ♔h7 8.♔e7 etcetera. An archaic piece of analysis by Lucena and Salvio in the 15th and 16th century. But after the text it is really a draw.

3.♔d7 ♞a8! 4.♔c6 ♞f8

and White cannot get through.



analysis after 5.♔f8



□

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Something similar happened in Miles-Benko, Sao Paulo 1977.

1. ♖e1 ♜h2 2. ♚f7 ♜a2! 3. ♜e6+

Or 3.f6 ♜a7+, but you had gathered that already.

3... ♚h7! 4. f6

and again the incredible happened: Black resigned.

Of course it's a draw after

4... ♜a7+ 5. ♜e7

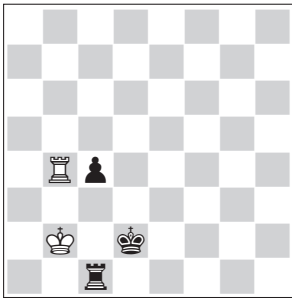
which had already appeared in a similar position in 1898 in Vienna (Steinitz-Blackburne).

There, the continuation was:

5... ♜a8 6. ♜d7 ♜b8 7. ♜d4 ♜b7+ 8. ♚e6 ♚g6 9. ♜g4+ ♚h7 10. f7 ♜b6+ 11. ♚e5 ♜b5+ 12. ♚d6 ♜b6+

Draw.

Those guys knew how to play the game!



□

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Another player who did not have this knowledge ready is at work in Matuskevich-Lein, Soviet Union 1968. As we know by now, White can draw here with 1. ♚a2!, but the unfortunate Matuskevich played

1. ♜b8?

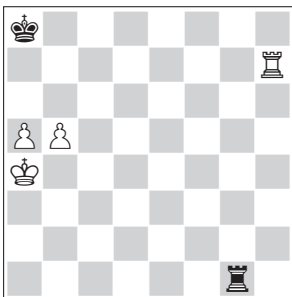
and was punished immediately and unrelentingly with

1... c3+ 2. ♚a2 ♜d1!

White cannot organise his defence anymore. The continuation was:

3. ♜d8+ ♚c1 4. ♜h8 c2 5. ♜h2 ♜d8 6. ♜h1+ ♚d2 7. ♜h2+ ♚c3

and White resigned.



□

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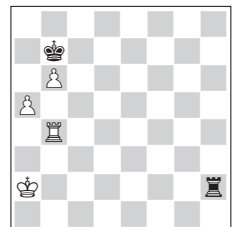
With two pawns it can be quite difficult, too. As a first example I will give a position from a game Dennis Dieks-Quist from the Dutch team championship. With 1.a6 White can win without trouble. But he played

1. b6?

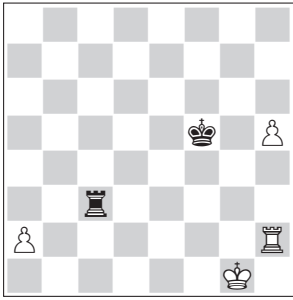
and now Black managed to reach a theoretical draw after

1... ♜b1! 2. ♜h4 ♚b7 3. ♜b4 ♜h1 4. ♚b3 ♜h3+ 5. ♚a2 ♜h2+

For the theoretical details I refer you to the manuals.



5... ♜h2+



□

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Also tricky was the position in diagram 288, from Biro-Liptay, Hungary 1987.

1.h6 ♔g5!

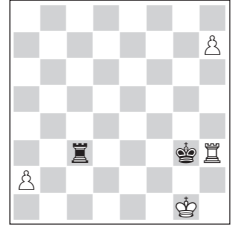
and White has to take care already, for if he continues rashly with 2.h7, it's already a draw with ♜c1-c2-c3 etcetera. Therefore:

2.♜h1! ♔f4 3.h7 ♜c1+

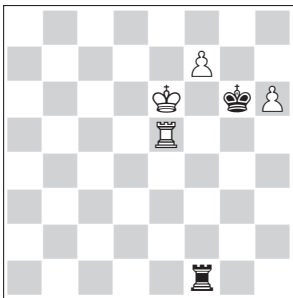
In case of 3...♔g3 White has a nice trick: 4.♜h3+! (see diagram). But 3...♜c1+ does not save Black either. The conclusion was:

4.♔g2 ♜c2+ 5.♔h3

Black resigned.



analysis after 4.♜h3+!



□

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And what would you think of Alexander Ivanov-Vitolinsh, Frunze 1979? Here we have the notorious endgame rook with f- and h-pawn versus rook, which is often impossible to win.

Do you see the tactical possibility with which White can still decide the game with a single blow?

1.♜g5+!!

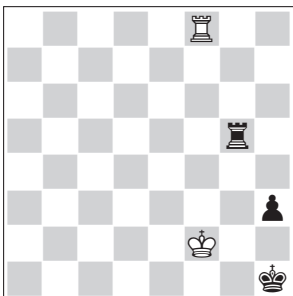
What a disillusionment this must have been for Black! The rook cannot be captured due to h6-h7 and 1...♔xh6 is met by 2.♜g8. So, instead of a draw, there was terrible bafflement and sorrow.

Next, we shall illustrate another great source of misery, of which we have often spoken already:

B) Stalemate tricks

Again? you may ask. But there is no way to avoid them. I guarantee that you will see quite a few tragicomic scenes and that there is much fun to be had.

Initially, we shall keep it simple and, with reference to the previous subject, blaze away with a few positions with rook + 1 pawn versus rook.



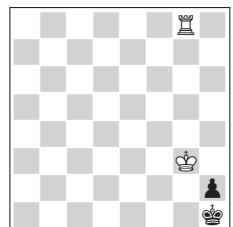
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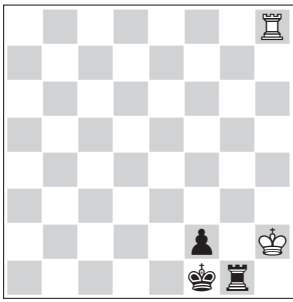
We start with Drimer-Ciocaltea, Romania 1955. To his deep regret, Black saw that the win was gone. So, to please the crowd he decided to play

1...♜g8??

and offered a draw with a smile, to which the first player immediately agreed. Still in the heat of the preceding battle, maybe struck by chess blindness, both had missed that after 2.♜xg8 h2 the stalemate can easily be evaded with 3.♔g3! (see diagram) ♔g1 4.♔h3+ ♔h1 5.♜a8.



analysis after 3.♔g3!



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We elaborate on this theme with Badestein-Otto, Wernigerode 1952. Here also, things look simple and conveniently arranged. So Black merrily set off with:

1...♔e2 2.♖e8+ ♔d3

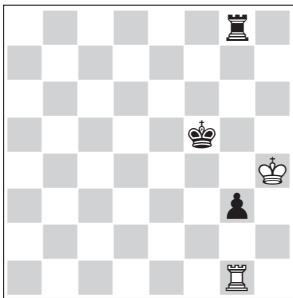
The ascent of the ladder, a well-known theme in endgame theory!

3.♖d8+ ♔e4 4.♖e8+ ♔d5 5.♖d8+ ♔e6 6.♖f8

Now pay attention. After the triumphant 6...f1♖ it is actually perpetual check or a long king walk to try and avoid stalemate. Black saw this and avoided the trap with an underpromotion, always funny:

6...f1♗

and there the fairy tale ended for White.



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A combination of stalemate, mate and underpromotion we see in Gufeld-Gulko, Soviet Union 1984.

1...♔f4 2.♔h3

Of course not 2.♖xg3 ♖h8 mate, just to let you know.

2...g2 3.♔h2 ♔f3!

It does not look good for White, so he tries

4.♖f1+

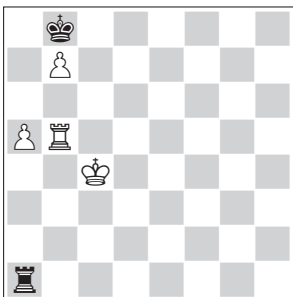
Unfortunately, Gulko found

4...gxf1♗

to seal White's fate.

By the way, any other underpromotion would also have sufficed.

That's how hard it can be with only one pawn on the board. Now, let's have a look at positions with bare rook versus rook plus two pawns.



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If these two pawns are connected, it is almost always won, but take a look at Heilman-Bernstein, Berlin 1901.

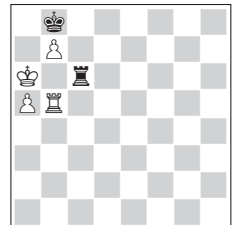
Black managed to draw this as follows:

**1...♖c1+ 2.♔d5 ♖d1+ 3.♔c6
♖c1+ 4.♔b6 ♖c7! 5.♔a6**

Or 5.a6 ♖xb7+!, but now there follows

5...♖c6+

and White cannot escape stalemate again.



5...♖c6+