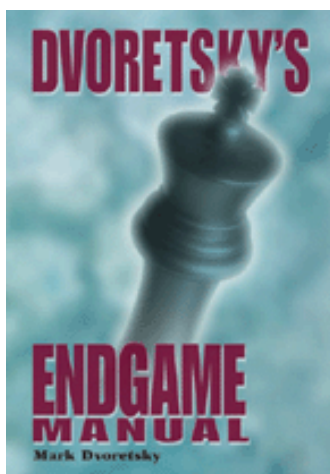




C O L U M N I S T S

The Instructor

Mark Dvoretsky

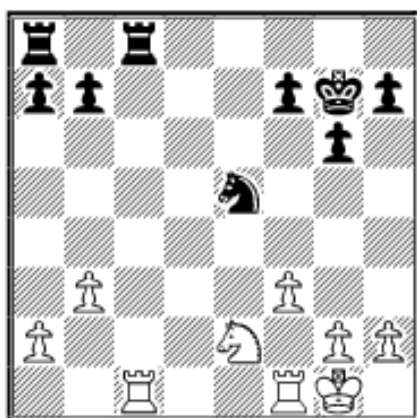


Grandmaster Technique, Part One

In August 2005, in my lecture at the London Chess Center, I offered the following position, taken from the magazine 64 – *Shakhmatnoye Obozrenie*, which had published the endgame with the comments of the winner, Evgeny Najer.

Yandemirov – Najer

Russian Club Championship
Dagomys 2004

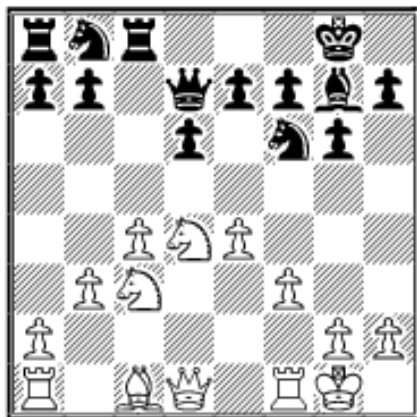


1...?

One of those in attendance, Grandmaster Jonathan Rowson noted, to my surprise, that this position comes about more or less by force at the end of a modern opening variation, and that in fact he himself had once played it.

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.Bb5+ Bd7 4.Bxd7+ Qxd7
5.c4 Nf6 6.Nc3 g6 7.0-0 Bg7 8.d4 cd 9.Nxd4

0-0 10.f3 Rc8 11.b3



1...?

11...d5!

A clever central blow, apparently first employed by Vassily Ivanchuk against Alexander Delchev, at the European Championship, 2003. By this means, Black solves his opening problems – in fact, it is now White who must play accurately to stay out of trouble.

12.ed (12.e5 Ne8 13.Nxd5 e6 14.Nc3 Bxe5 is dubious) 12...Nxd5 13.Nxd5 e6
14.Bh6 ed 15.Bxg7 Kxg7 16.cd (16.Nb5!?) 16...Qxd5 17.Ne2

Here a draw was agreed in the game Gdanski – Kempinski, Polish Championship 2004, and one move (and one year) earlier in Yandemirov – Biriukov. And on the whole, a look into my database reveals that the majority of games with this line went practically unplayed – a draw was agreed upon somewhere between moves 11 and 23.

In the summer of 2003, I published an [article](#), which can be found in the [ChessCafe Archives](#), suggesting a rule forbidding players from discussing and consequently agreeing to draws during play. Two years later, such a rule was successfully introduced in the Sofia super-tournament. Making such a rule universal would, I am certain, not only lead to longer games, but also increase the percentage of decisive games. Even in such a peaceful and seemingly lifeless situation, where a drawn outcome is in fact most likely, one can, as we shall soon see, find resources and create problems for the opponent.

17...Qe5 18.Qd4 Nc6 19.Qxe5+ Nxe5 20.Rac1

We have now reached the position in the first diagram. The move found by GM Najer might seem puzzling at first glance; but it is the strongest – it was precisely because of this move that he won the game.

20...b7-b6!!

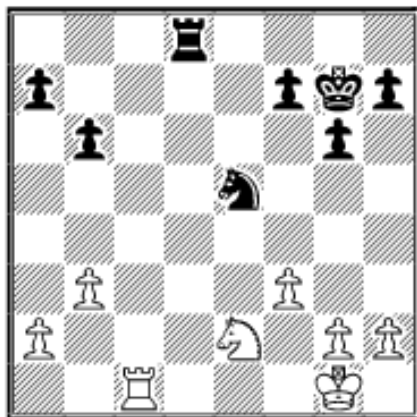
Let us reconstruct Black's logic. First of all, he probably looked at 20...Nd3, and saw that after 21.Rxc8 Rxc8 22.Rd1, the position is equal. After that, his attention was drawn to the possibility 20...Rxc1 21.Rxc1 Rd8, with the idea 22...Rd2. Najer is an experienced player, and knows that one must first examine the opponent's active replies – which in this case would be 22.Rc7. There doesn't seem to be anything better than 22...Rd2 23.Kf2 Rxa2 24.Rxb7, but here Black's advantage is strictly academic, with practically no hope of victory left – which was, in fact, supported by the outcome of the game Li Ruofan – Rowson, 2004.

But after ...b7-b6, this variation would end with Black a pawn up, since the rook on a2 can protect the a7-pawn.

21.Rf1-d1?!

After the game, Valery Yandemirov suggested that he should have played 21.f4. Of course, White doesn't really want to advance the f-pawn – it's a move one only chooses after doing some prophylactic thinking, leading to a clear recognition of the dangers confronting White.

21...Rc8xc1 22.Rd1xc1 Ra8-d8



1.?

Now, after 23.Rc7 Rd2, the only way to avoid losing a pawn, 24.Nc3 (24.Nc1?? Rd1+ 25 Kf2 Rxc1 would be very bad), allows the unpleasant pin 24...Rc2. The situation after 25.Nb5 Rxa2 26.Rxa7 Rb2 looks dangerous for White, with the b3-pawn under attack, and the maneuver Nd3-f4 (or -e1) to think about.

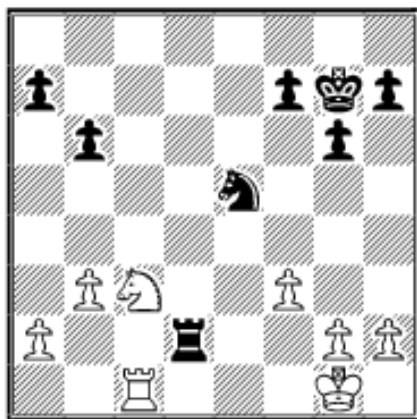
White should probably restrict himself to the accurate move 23.Rc2. But no one wants to station a rook passively – and besides, after 23...Rd1+ 24.Kf2 Nd3+, White has to play the crabwise retreat 25.Kg3, since 25.Ke3?! Ne1 26.Rc7 Nxcg2+ 27.Kf2 Rd2 28.Rxa7 Nf4 29.Ke3 Rxe2+ 30.Kxf4 Rxh2 leaves him down a pawn.

It is quite likely that 23.Rc2 and perhaps also 23.Rc7 leave the position objectively drawn. But it's one thing to analyze quietly at home, especially with the computer's help, and quite another to make your decision at the board. There's no forced draw in view, defending is a chore – in such a situation, one can easily lose one's bearings.

23.Ne2-c3?

A serious error! White wants to exchange rooks, but fails to take into account the fact that Black's king will be the first one into play. In a knight endgame, the more active king is a very important factor.

23...Rd8-d2



24.Rc1-e1?!

Obviously White planned to continue Re1-e2 when making his previous move. Of course, the enemy rook on the 2nd rank cannot be tolerated; but he should have engineered the exchange of rooks a little more favorably: 24.Kf1 contains the same idea of Re1-e2, and then 24...Nd3 (24...f6? 25.Ne4) 25.Rd1 Rxd1+ 26.Nxd1 Kf6 27.Nc3 Ke5. In the game, the same position occurred, but with Black to move.

White could exploit the extra tempo by continuing 28.g3 (28.Ke2 Nf4+ 29.Kf2 a6 30.g3 Kd4! 31.Ne4 Nd5 looks weaker). But here, too, Black has a pleasant choice between 28...a6 29.Ke2 Kd4 30.Kd2 Ne5 31.Ne2+ Kc5 32.Ke3 Kb4 and 28...Kd4!? 29.Nb5+ Kc5 30.Nxa7 Nc1 31.Ke1 Nxa2 32.Kd2 Nb4 (and 33...Nd5), with a sizable advantage.

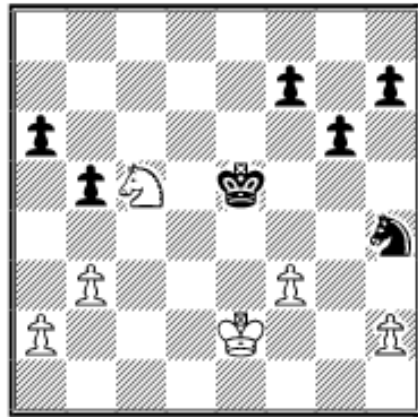
24...Ne5-d3 25.Re1-e2 Rd2xe2 26.Nc3xe2 Kg7-f6 27.Ne2-c3 Kf6-e5 28.Kg1-

f1 a7-a6

It follows from the previous annotation that 28...Kd4 was also possible; but in this situation, of course, the text move is more exact.

29.Kf1-e2 Nd3-f4+ 30.Ke2-d2

On 30.Kf2, both 30...Kd4 and Karsten Müller's suggestion 30...f5!? (meeting 31.g3? with 31...Kd4!) would be strong.

30...Nf4xg2 31.Nc3-a4 Ng2-h4 32.Kd2-e2 b6-b5 33.Na4-c5

1...?

33...a6-a5!

Najer didn't care for the variation 33...Kf4 34.Nxa6 Nxf3 35.Nc7 Nxh2 36.Nxb5, when the game becomes sharper. With the a-pawn's advance, he undoubtedly foresaw the tactical nuance of his next move, which makes the realization of his advantage considerably easier.

34.a2-a4 Ke5-d5!

In this way, Black secures the important a5-pawn.

35.Nc5-b7 Kd5-c6 36.Nb7-d8+

36.Nxa5+ Kb6 37.b4 ba would be completely hopeless.

36...Kc6-c5 37.Nd8xf7 b5xa4 38.b3xa4 Kc5-b4 39.Nf7-e5 Kb4xa4

Black has a healthy extra pawn. The outcome of the game is assured.

40.Kd3 Kb3 41.Nc4 a4 42.Na5+ Kb4 43.Nc6+ Kc5 44.Ne5 Kd5 45.Nc4 Nxf3 46.Nb6+ Ke5 47.Ke3 Nxh2 48.Nxa4 Kf5, and Black won.

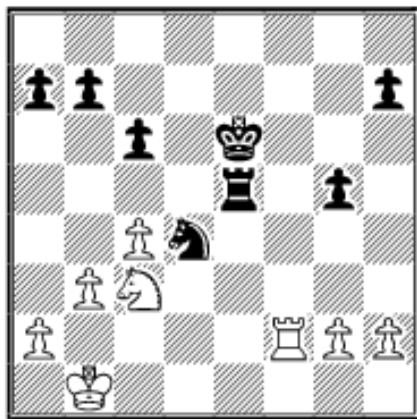
I was happy to read the following note by Najer to his 20...b6!!:

A useful move, by which one may spot a student, or at least an attentive reader, of the books of M. Dvoretsky.

Evgeny Najer has attended two of my training sessions, and studied my books – evidently, his labors were not in vain. I find that the grandmaster's commentaries show a deep inner concordance with an endgame he played over from one of the examples given in my book, *School of Chess Excellence 3 – Strategic Play*, which I shall now present for your perusal.

Stein – Hort

Biel 1981



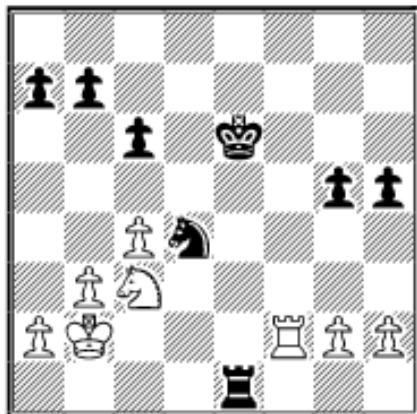
1...?

Black's positional advantage consists of the greater activity of his pieces. But it's a rather fragile one: the slightest inaccuracy, and it disappears. Which is, in fact, what happened in the game: **28...h5? 29.Kc1! Rf5 30.Rxf5 Nxf5 31.Ne4 g4 32.Nc5+ Ke5 33.Nxb7 Ne3** Draw.

A vital principle involved in the realization of one's advantage is to restrict the opponent's possibilities to the greatest degree possible – to prevent any counterplay or any useful operations he might undertake to improve his own position. In order to bring this principle successfully to life, it is necessary to use “prophylactic thinking.”

We ask ourselves: What would White wish to do here? His choices are few. Attacking the knight – **29.Rd2 Re1+ 30.Kb2 Ke5** – is useless. Clearly, the only operation that makes any sense is to bring his king to the center by **Kb1-c1-d2-d3**. This is what Black should prevent.

28...Re5-e1+! 29.Kb1-b2 h7-h5



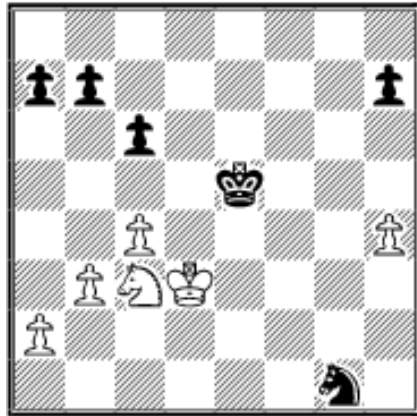
1.

Having forestalled our opponent's intentions, we can now quietly strengthen our own position. White finds his defense difficult. For example, **30.Rf8** is met by **30...Rg1 31.Rf2 Ke5 32.Ne2 Re1 33.Nxd4 Kxd4**, and the black king's domination of the position assures him a great advantage in the rook endgame.

But there is also a completely different, and also acceptable, treatment of this position. Black's king is much more active than its White opponent – a factor which would be most keenly felt in a pawn or knight endgame (Mikhail Botvinnik once said: *A knight endgame is a pawn endgame.*) Artur Yusupov suggested **28...Rf5!?** White would respond **29.Rxf5** (**29.Rd2 Rf1+ 30.Kb2 Ke5** would not be good for him).

Now, Black would like to recapture with the knight; but after **29...Nxf5 30.Ne4! g4 31.Nc5+!** (**31.Ng5+ Ke5 32.Nxh7 Ne3 33.Kc1 Nxg2 34.Kd2 Kf4 35.Ke2 Nh4** is weaker) **31...Ke5 32.Nxb7**, Black could hardly hope to win.

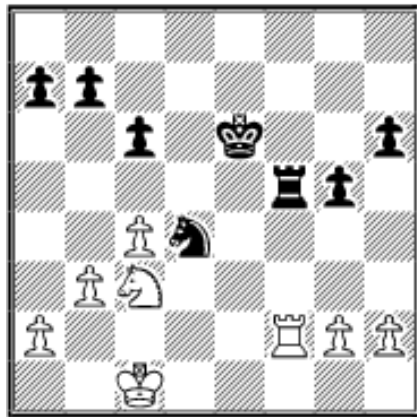
That means Black must play **29...Kxf5!**, intending 30...Ke5 and 31...Nf5. The game might proceed as follows: **30.Kc1 Ke5! 31.Kd2 Nf5 32.Kd3** (on 32.Ke2 or 32.g3, 32...Kd4 would be strong) **32...Nh4 33.g3 Nf3 34.h3 Ng1 35.h4 gh 36.gh**



1...

And here, either 36...Kf4, 36...Nf3, or 36...h5. The concluding position of this variation is most promising for Black. But is it a win? Could not White have played more accurately somewhat earlier? Clearly, everything hangs by a thread: the tiniest additional stroke to improve the defense, and the game will end in a draw.

Black's play can be improved. What is immediately obvious is that he did take a little extra time, in that his knight didn't immediately arrive on its proper square f5. This explains Vadim Zvjagintsev's recommendation: 28...h6!? (certainly a mysterious-looking move at first glance, isn't it?) 29.Kc1 Rf5



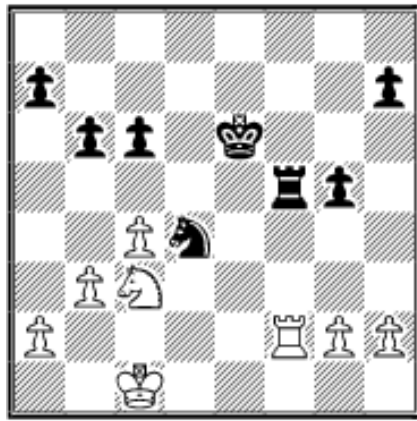
1.?

After 30.Rxf5 Nxf5 31.Kd2 (now 31.Ne4 would be useless, as the pawn on g5 is protected) 31...Nh4, Black must win.

However, the exchange on f5 is not forced: 30.Nd1! (but not 30.Ne4 Ke5) would be much more accurate for White. For example: 30...Rxf2 31.Nxf2 Nf5 32.Nd3, intending 33.Nc5+ or 33.Kd2 Nh4 34.Ne1. And nothing much is changed by 30...Ke5 31.Kd2 Rxf2+ 32.Nxf2 Nf5 33.Kd3, since 33...Nh4 can be met by 34.Ng4+ or 34.g3, with Ng4+ to follow. As we can see, the pawn on h6 is certainly not ideally placed.

And nevertheless, Zvjagintsev's idea is logical – we just have to bring it to life in a slightly different form. I suggest another mysterious move – which happens to be the very same one Najer played.

28...b7-b6!! 29.Kb1-c1 Re5-f5!



1.

White's position is difficult: 30.Rxf5 Nxf5, or 30.Nd1 Rxf2 31.Nxf2 Nf5 32.Ne4 h6, threatening either to attack the pawn (by 33...Nh4 or 33...Ne3), or to invade via the 4th rank with the king.

As you can see, the similarity between this endgame and Yandemirov – Najer is not limited to the fact that in both cases, the key to the position turned out to be an

insignificant pawn move. Here we also have an identical material balance and pawn structure, as well as the vital role played by king activity in a knight endgame – the leitmotiv of Black's play in both examples.

On the other hand, the Stean – Hort game allowed principally different approaches to the exploitation of the advantage. Which would you prefer? The first approach is purely technical (restricting the opponent's play, and quiet strengthening of the position); it does not require deep calculation, and thus allows you to save time and effort. The second approach – bringing about a knight endgame – is far more concrete, and requires careful testing. A quiet pawn move on the queenside, preparing the exchange of rooks under the most favorable circumstances, could only be found after deep immersion in the secrets of the position.

The process of realizing one's advantage is of a twofold character. On the one hand, accuracy and technical ability are required; conversely, one must also know when to end the maneuvering, to find and calculate a concrete path to the goal. It's not easy to sense which attitude is more correct at a given moment. In this example, both approaches seem equivalent to me; but that's not something that occurs very often.

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