



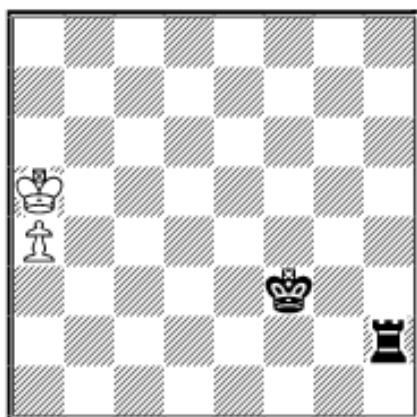
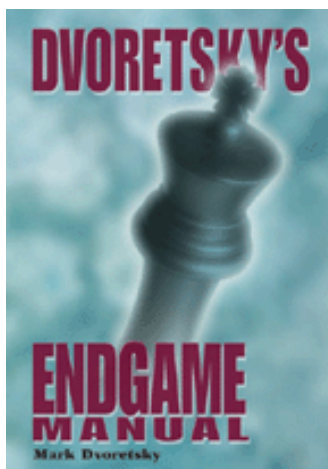
Paradox

In an article devoted to the “Rook vs. Pawns” endgame, from the book *Technique for the Tournament Player*, by M. Dvoretsky and A. Yusupov, and also in *Dvoretsky’s Endgame Manual*, I spoke of the most important techniques used in such endgames. Let’s review some of them.

COLUMNISTS

The Instructor

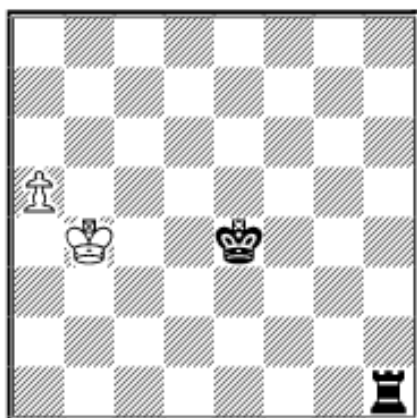
Mark Dvoretsky



1. Kb6!

The white king naturally moves forward, to support the advance of its pawn. But Black manages to push it back, employing the typical technique of *“inserting a check to gain tempo.”*

1...Rb2+! 2. Kc6 Ra2! 3. Kb5 Ke4 4. a5 Kd5 5. Kb6 Kd6 6. a6 Rb2+ and wins.



Here both 1. Kb5? Kd5 and 1. a6? Kd5 2. Kb5 Rb1+ lose. White must make use of the “shoulder block” to prevent the approach of the enemy king.

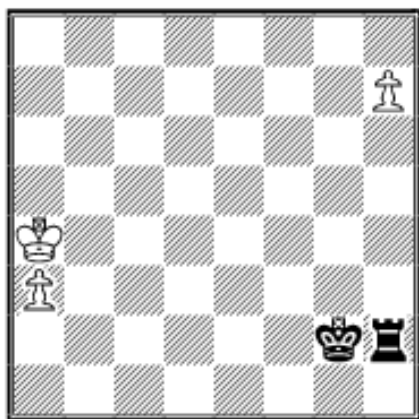
1. Kc5! Ra1 (1...Rh5+ 2. Kb6 Kd5 3. a6 Rh6+ 4. Kb7 Kc5 5. a7 Rh7+, and now not 6. Kb8? Kb6 7. a8N+ Kc6, winning, but 6. Ka6! =, once more “shoulder blocking.”) **2. Kb6 Kd5 3. a6 Kd6 4. Kb7!** (4. a7? Rb1+ 5. Ka6 Kc7 wins) **4...Rb1+ 5. Kc8! Ra1 6. Kb7 Kd7**

7. a7 Rb1+ 8. Ka8! =

Ignorance – or weak assimilation – of theory is usually costly to a player. A great many examples could be presented. One such is the position in the first diagram (after 1. Kb6), which occurred, with wings reversed, in the game **Hamdouchi – Topalov** (Cap d’Agde 1994). The Bulgarian GM played **1...Ke4??**, and after **2. a5 Kd5 3. a6 Kd6 4. Kb7! Rb2+ 5. Kc8 Rc2+ 6. Kb7 Rb2+**, was forced to accept the draw.

Experienced players who are well acquainted with these techniques employ them almost automatically. But only “almost” – we must always be ready to encounter exceptions to the rules. They may be rare; but it does happen on occasion that the road to victory requires a refusal to employ one of our well-known and approved methods, when new and none-too-obvious ideas are at work instead. Such cases generally leave a great esthetic impression.

Let me show you the position after the first three moves of a study by **H. van der Heijden** (2001). Before reading the text which follows, try to answer this question: Can White to move draw? I will warn you that the task is quite difficult.



The first move has to be 1. Kb5. It's easy to see that 1...Rxb7? 2. a4 draws without difficulty. So we must look at getting the king closer.

1...Kf3 2. a4 Ke4 3. a5 Kd5, and 4. a6 loses to 4...Rb2+! 5. Ka5 (5. Ka4 Kc4!) 5...Kc5! 6. Ka4 Rh2 (6...Rb8 is even simpler) 7. a7 Kb6! And on 4. Kb6, Black wins by 4...Kc4! (still another important technique: “*outflanking*”!) 5. a6 Rh6+ 6. Ka5 Rxb7 7. Kb6 Rh6+ 8. Kb7 (8. Ka5 Kc5) 8...Kb5 9. a7 Rh7+ 10. Kb8

Kb6 11. a8N+ Kc6.

So where does White improve? Aha – clearly, we have forgotten the “shoulder block.” Instead of 3. a5, we can play 3. Kc5!?, when Black's king does not have the d5-square.

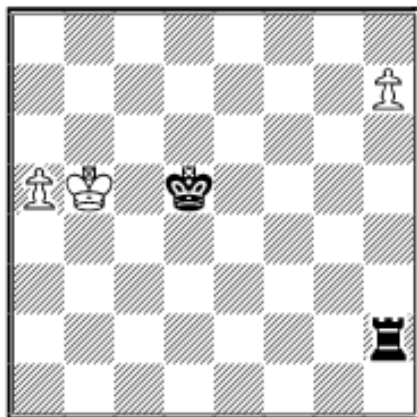
A tempting conclusion – but unfortunately, it's refuted by 3...Rh5+! 4. Kb6 Kd5 5. a5 Kc4! (outflanking again) 6. a6 Rh6+ – a position we've already seen. And 3. Kc6 Kd4 4. a5 Kc4 5. a6 Rh6+ 6. Kb7 Kb5 is no help, either.

So, that must mean the starting position is a loss – for surely, we've looked at all the possibilities?!

No, in fact, we have only examined the **natural** possibilities. We have acted in accordance with the rules laid out in the beginning of this article: bringing the king forward as quickly as possible and shouldering aside the enemy king. As it happens, in this concrete situation, both rules need to be broken.

The key to the riddle is the paradoxical fact that, with the kings on b5 and d5, the pawn at a5 and the rook at h2, we have a mutual zugzwang position. And in order to avoid falling into zugzwang, White must begin by losing a tempo.

1. Kb4!! Kf3 (1...Rxb7 2. a4 =) **2. a4 Ke4 3. a5!** (not the “shoulder block”: 3. Kc5? Rh5+!) **3...Kd5 4. Kb5**



White to move loses, as we have already seen: 5. a6 Rb2+! or 5. Kb6 Kc4! But here, it's Black's move – and what is he to do? As long as the a6-square is clear, he gets nothing from **4...Rb2+ 5. Ka6 Rb8 6. Ka7 Rh8 7. Kb6!** (here, the “shoulder block” is necessary) **7...Kd6 8. a6 Rb8+ 9. Ka7 Kc7 10. h8Q Rxh8** is stalemate. This is the main line of the study.

If 4...Kd6, then 5. Kb6 (the outflanking via c4 is not possible here) 5...Kd7 6. Kb7 Kd8 7. a6 Rxh7+ 8. Kb8! Rh1 9. a7 Rb1+ 10. Ka8 =.

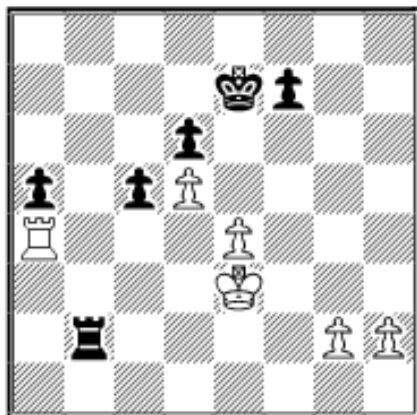
It's amazing that Black has no waiting move with the rook. On 4...Rh1 5. a6 Rb1+ 6. Ka5, he can't play 6...Kc5?!, because after 7.h8Q, the a1-square is covered. The drawback to the move 4...Rh3 is seen in the line 5. a6 Rb3+ 6. Ka4! (6...Kc4 is no longer available) 6...Rb8 7. a7 Ra8 8. Kb5 Kd6 9. Kb6 Rh8 10. Kb7 =. And finally, 4...Rxh7 leads to the final drawing position from the Hamdouchi – Topalov game: 5. a6 Kd6 6. Kb6 Rh1 7. Kb7!

The paradox of the position is certainly not that White must lose a tempo to avoid zugzwang himself and to put his opponent in zugzwang – we have seen this endgame technique fairly often. What's amazing is that zugzwang is even possible in an endgame with this kind of material. Such endgames **always** come down to just one question: who will win the race – who gets there first? Well, here's yet another illustration of the theme: never say “never” (or, in this case, never say “always”) – there are no absolute rules in chess!

Examples of such an unexpected loss of tempo in the endgame are still quite rare. I shall therefore allow myself to reproduce one more sharply drawn example, which I have used previously in my **ChessCafe** column [Discoveries in Rook Endgames](#) and also included in *Dvoretsky's Endgame Manual*.

Flear – Legky

Le Touquet 1991



44...Kf6!

King activity is more important than material! 44...Rb5? 45. Kf4 Kf6 46. g4 would be too passive; and after 44...Rxg2? 45. Rxa5 Rxh2 46. Ra7+ Kf6 47. Rd7 Ke5 48. Re7+, the game is drawn at once.

45. Rxa5?

As noted by Nikolai Legky, White could prevent the enemy king from getting to e5 by playing 45. Kf4!! Rf2+ 46. Ke3! (46. Kg3? Rf1! and 47...Ke5) 46...Rxg2 47.

Rxa5 – after 47...Ke5 48. Ra7, there is no third-rank check. And on 47...Rxh2 White plays 48. Ra7 Rh6 49. Rd7 Kg7 50. e5!? de 51. Ke4, when the activity of White's pieces compensates for the two pawns minus.

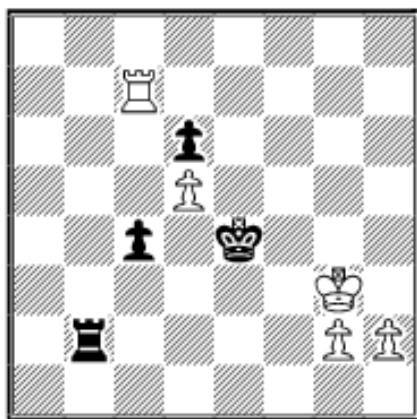
45...Ke5! 46. Ra7 Rb3+ 47. Kf2 Kxe4 48. Rxf7

48. h4 Rb2+ 49. Kg3 c4 50. h5 c3 51. Rc7 Kd3! 52. h6 c2 53. h7 Rb8 is a loss for White. But he should have considered 48. g4!? f6 49. Rf7, so that after 49...Rb2+ 50 Kg3, the king would not block the path of his passed pawn.

48...Rb2+ 49. Kg3 c4!

There's no sense wasting time on the d5-pawn: it's more important to advance his own pawn.

50. Rc7



50...Kd3?! 51. h4?

The decisive error. 51. Rc6! was necessary. Legky gives the line 51...c3 52. Rxd6 Rb5! 53. Rc6 Rxd5 54. h4 c2 55. Kh3 Rd4 56. Rxc2 Kxc2, evaluating it as "advantage to Black." The concluding position is in fact won, because of the white king's unfortunate position. But if Glenn Flear were to bring him forward by 55. Rxc2! Kxc2 56. Kf4 (or 56. Kg4 Kd3 57. h5 Ke4 58. h6) 56...Kd3 57. g4, he would have gotten his draw.

On the previous move, Black should have played 50...Kd4!! instead, securing the d6-pawn (51. Rc6? c3 52. Rxd6 c2 53. Rc6 Rb3+ and 54...Rc3). After 51. h4 c3 52. h5 Kd3! (the inaccurate 52...c2? allows White to save himself by immediately activating his king: 53. Kf4! Kd3 54. Kf5) 53. h6 (White's hopelessly behind in the variation 53. Kf4 Rxc2 54. Kf5 Re2! 55. h6 c2 56. h7 Rh2 57. Kg6 Kd2, and wins) 53...c2 54. Kf4 Rb1 55. g4 (55. h7 Rh1 56. g4 Rxh7) 55...c1Q+ 56. Rxc1 Rxc1 57. Kf5 Kd4 58. g5 Rh1! 59. Kg6 (59. Ke6 Kc5 wins) 59...Ke5!, when the black king gets back just in time to win!

Nevertheless, as pointed out by Karsten Müller, White could save himself by choosing 52. Kf3!! (instead of 52. h5?) 52...c2 (52...Kd3 53. g4 c2 54. g5 =) 53. Kf4! Kd3 54. Kf5, for instance: 54...Rb5 55. Rxc2 Kxc2 56. Ke6 Kd3 57. g4 Ke4 58. g5 Rxd5 59. g6 Re5+ 60. Kf6 Rf5+ 61. Ke6 =.

A strange endgame, isn't it? In a sharp position, White had two occasions where it was better to lose a tempo (45. Kf4!! and 52. Kf3!!); and Black's best try also involved a loss of tempo (50...Kd4!!).

51...c3 (Black wins) **52. h5 c2 53. h6 Rb1 54. Kf4** (54. h7 Rh1 55. Kg4 Rxh7) **54...c1Q+** **55. Rxc1 Rxc1 56. g4 Rf1+** **57. Kg5 Ke4 58. Kg6 Rg1** White

resigned.



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