



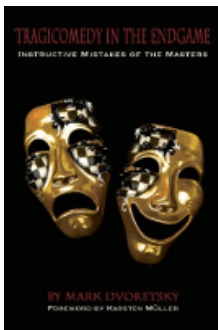
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The Instructor

Mark Dvoretsky

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The Process of Elimination

Part One

Sometimes accurately calculating the consequences of our intended move is difficult and even unnecessary. It is easier to convince ourselves that it makes sense, isn't refuted immediately, and all the other moves are bad or at least noticeably weaker. As a result we save time and simultaneously confirm the correctness of our choice. It is natural to call this approach to decision-making the process of elimination.

**Korchnoi – Gipslis**  
Zonal tournament, Tallinn, 1967



[FEN "r3qbk1/p4pp1/1p2p2p/2n1P3/1P6/5NP1/P1Q2PBP/3R2K1 b - - 0 24"]

1...?

The queen thrust to a4 that followed in the game was easily refuted by 25. Ne1!, with a double attack on his opponent's rook and knight. Which means the knight should have retreated, but to where?

In the case of 24...Nd7? the response 25.Ng5 hg 26.Bxa8 Nxe5+/- isn't bad, but 25.Qc7 Rd8 (nothing else works) 26.Bf1 is even stronger, with the unstoppable threat of 27.Bb5+/-.

Material losses are inevitable with 24...Na4? 25.Nd4 and 26.Bc6+/. And the miserable move 24...Nb7? isn't even worth considering.

Only 24...Na6! remains. The position that arises after 25.a3 Rc8 (or 25...Rd8 26.Rc1 Nb8) 26.Qd3 Nb8 is in White's favor, but it can be defended, Black isn't doomed to defeat.

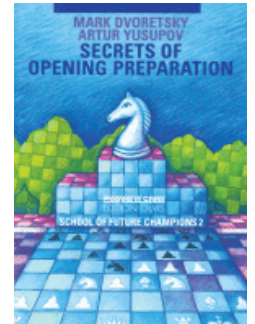
24...Qa4? 25.Nd4?

Viktor Korchnoi, in turn, doesn't cope with a small task that can easily be solved by the process of elimination. In the choice between two knight moves to defend the queen he should have concentrated on the search for his opponent's resources. And then the move in the game would have been rejected in favor of 25.Ne1!+/-.

25...Rd8! (now the advantage switches to Black) 26.Bf3 Qxc2 (26...Qxb4!? 27.Nc6 Rxd1+ 28.Qxd1 Qa3-/+ is no less strong) 27.Nxc2 Rxd1+ 28.Bxd1 Nd3 29.f4 Bxb4 30.Be2 Bc5+, and Black was left a pawn up.

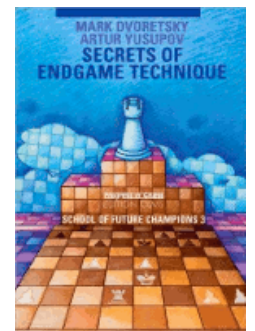
The situation White came up against when he was considering his twenty-fifth move was fairly typical. When you compare two continuations that are

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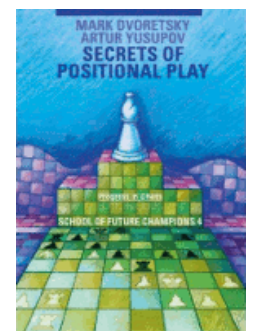
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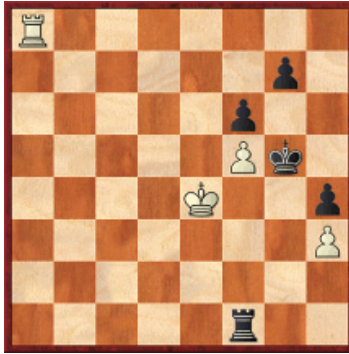
*Secrets of Positional Play*

by Mark Dvoretsky & Artur Yusupov

equally attractive at first sight, it often makes sense to try and refute one of them, to then choose the other by the process of elimination.

### Saidy – Popovych

Gausdal, 1982



[FEN "R7/6p1/5p2/5Pk1/4K2p/7P/8/5r2 w - - 0 66"]

1.?

The rook has to attack the g7-pawn. The move **66.Rg8??** should be rejected in connection with **66...Re1+ 67.Kf3 Re7+**. Alas, that's exactly how Anthony Saidy played. Having convinced himself that the loss of a second pawn was inevitable, he ceased his resistance.

66.Ra7! Rf4+ 67.Ke3 gave an easy draw.

A variety of the same situation: we see a solid path, but there is also a sharper possibility. We carefully check it, and if it doesn't work then we have a back-up plan.

### Randviir – Bronstein

Parnu, 1947



[FEN "3rk1nr/1pp2pQp/1pn1b3/2p5/4q3/1N2B3/PP3PPP/R3KB1R b KQk - 0 14"]

1...?

The aggressive thrust 14...Nb4? (hoping for 15.Qxh8?? Nc2+ 16.Ke2 Bc4#) is refuted by 15.Bb5+! c6 16.0-0!+/- (but not 16.Qxh8?? Qxg2! 17.Rf1 Nc2+ 18.Ke2 Bg4#).

Which means you should simply play **14...Qe5!** (there's also 14...Ke7!?, intending 15.Qxh8? Nb4+, but after 15.Nd2 you still have to exchange queens with 15...Qe5) **15.Qxe5 Nxe5**+/-.

What is the standard procedure for using the process of elimination? We determine all the candidate moves that make sense, then carefully look for the strongest responses by our opponent, which forces us to throw out the majority of the candidate moves. If only one unrefuted possibility remains as a result, then we choose it. Which is why training exercises on the theme of the process of elimination simultaneously develop the skill of paying attention to your opponent's resources.

**Gruenfeld – Stepak**  
Israeli Championship, 1982



[FEN "3qr1k1/1pR2ppp/4r3/p1Qb1N2/8/P4P2/1PP3PP/1K5R w - - 0 1"]

1.?

You have to defend against 1...Re1+. But it's also important to bear in mind another, less obvious threat, 1...Re5. Thus 1.Rc1? Re5! with a double attack (2...Rxf5; 2...Ba2+) loses instantly.

For the same reason the natural move in the game 1.Qc3? is also a mistake. His opponent replied 1...Re5!, threatening not only 2...Rxf5, but also 2...Qxc7! After 2.Rd1 Rxf5, Black won.

The choice has narrowed down considerably: to the two pawn moves 1.b3 and 1.c4. It isn't possible to eliminate one of them conclusively, but it's easy to observe that in the case of 1.b3?! Re5! 2.Nd6 (on 2.Nd4? both 2...Bxf3 and 2...Bxb3 are strong) White's position is alarming. Besides the capture of one of the pawns with the bishop (on which the only playable reply to be found is 3.Qb6), 2...b6!? 3.Qxb6 R5e6 also looks strong. In the forced variation 4.Nxf7! Re1+ (4...Rxb6 5.Nxd8 Rxd8 6.Rd1 is weaker) 5.Rxe1 Rxe1+ 6.Kb2 Bxf7 7.Qxa5 Qd1 8.Rc8+ Be8 9.Kc3 you wouldn't envy White's king.

But with 1.c4! Black has no time for the dangerous move for us Re5, and 1...Bxf3? 2.gf Re5 is refuted by 3.Nh6+! gh 4.Rg1+. Which means 1...Bc6 is forced, on which we play 2.Qd4!, apparently keeping the extra pawn. Then again, by continuing 2...Qg5!, the opponent again poses a tricky problem for White.



[FEN "4r1k1/1pR2ppp/2b1r3/p4Nq1/2PQ4/P4P2/1P4PP/1K5R w - - 0 3"]

1.?

The knight and the g2-pawn are under attack. 3.Qg4? doesn't work because of the impressive blow 3...Be4+!! It's very difficult to see why the quiet 3.Ng3? is bad. A surprise pawn move on the other side follows, 3...a4!!-+, freeing the a5-square for the queen, and the c7-rook finds itself in a trap.

Which means that we have to part with the f3-pawn by playing 3.g4! Bxf3 4.Rg1 with a subsequent 5.h4 (4.Rf1 Bxg4 5.Qd5 h6 6.Ka2 also deserves attention).

**Geller – Gufeld**  
Soviet Championship, Tbilisi, 1959



[FEN "3r2k1/1p1r1pb1/p2P3p/P2R1Q2/  
3RN3/7p/4qPP1/6K1 w - - 0 35"]

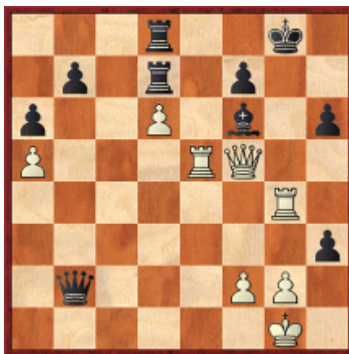
1.?

White's position is won. He can happily ignore the threat of 35...Bxd4, as then the black king will be left defenseless – which means that 35.gh is strong. He can also take the rook out from under attack with 35.Rd3.

Grandmaster Geller played **35.Re5??**. He created the threat of 36.Nf6+ (immediately this check didn't give him anything), underestimating the only defense, which isn't difficult to choose by the process of elimination.

**35...Qb2! 36.Nf6+ Bxf6 37.Rg4+**

The d4-rook is under fire, so he can't just take on f6 (37.Qxf6 Qxd4 38.Re8+ Rxe8 39.Qxd4 Re1+ 40.Kh2 hg 41.Kxg2 Re6+).



[FEN "3r2k1/1p1r1p2/p2P1b1p/P3RQ2/  
6R1/7p/1q3PP1/6K1 b - - 0 37"]

1...?

Black had to reject one of two possibilities: 37...Bg5 or 37...Bg7. In the game neither player turned out to be at their peak.

**37...Bg5? 38.Rxg5+? hg 39.Qxg5+ Kh7 40.Qh5+ Kg8 41.Qg5+** (41.Rg5+ Qg7=) 1/2-1/2

In reply to 38.Qxg5+! hg 39.Rxg5+ Eduard Gufeld envisioned the only defense against mate: 39...Qg7!! 40.Rxg7+ Kh8 41.R7g5 f6. But he evaluated the position that arose incorrectly: after 42.Rd5 hg 43.Kxg2 the d6-pawn is inviolable, and there is a clear advantage on White's side.

In the variation 37...Bg7! 38.Qf6 Qb1+ with a subsequent 39...Qh7 White's attack hits a brick wall. For example, 39.Re1 Qh7 40.Re7 Rxe7 41.Qxe7 Rf8 42.d7 Qd3-+ (not 43.Qf6?! Qd1+ 44.Kh2 Qxg4).

In the case of 39.Kh2 Qh7 40.Re7 the response 40...Rxe7? 41.Qxe7 Rf8? 42.d7 Qf5 (42...Qd3 43.Qf6+-) 43.Qxf8+! Kxf8 44.d8Q# no longer works (this variation was indicated by Gufeld – it seems he rejected the move 37...Bg7!

because of it). Or 41...Rb8 42.d7 Qf5 43.d8Q+ Rxd8 44.Qxd8+ Kh7, with roughly equal chances.

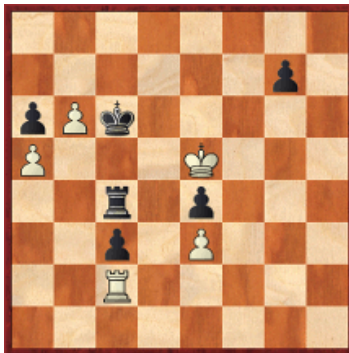
However, Black doesn't have to exchange rooks: with the king on h2 he can play 40...Kh8!-+, as 41.Qxf7 Be5+ doesn't work.

That fragment illustrates the difficulty of using the process of elimination in confusing situations. Sometimes we throw out one of the possibilities after calculating it carelessly without noticing a resource that changes its evaluation in our favor. As a result we choose another, weaker one.

Then again, sometimes an approximate, imprecise calculation of some of the variations nevertheless helps us to choose a good path, even if objectively it isn't the only possible one.

### Van der Wiel – Timman

Amsterdam, 1987



[FEN "8/6p1/pPk5/P3K3/2r1p3/2p1P3/2R5/8 w - - 0 47"]

1.?

John Van der Wiel justifiably rejected 47.b7? Kxb7 48.Kd5 Rc6 49.Kxe4 g5! 50.Kd3 (50.Kf3 Rc5 51.e4 Kc6+) 50...g4, and White is defenseless.

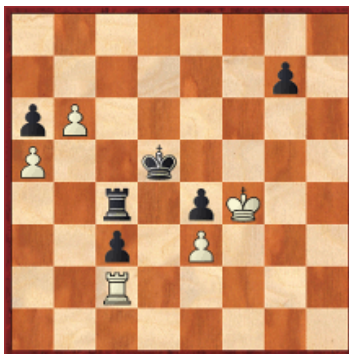
He didn't like the waiting move 47.Kf4 because of 47...Kd5 48.b7 Rb4 49.Rxc3 Rxb7 – Black intends 50...Rf7+ and 51...Rf3(f2).

### 47.Rc1!

This move was found by process of elimination (Van der Wiel). The idea of it is that after 47...c2 48.Kf4 Kd5 49.b7 Rb4 50.Rxc2 Rxb7 he manages to force a draw with 51.Rd2+.

In the game there followed **47...g5 48.Kf5 Rc5+** (48...Kd5 49.Rd1+ Kc5 50.Rd8) **49.Kxe4 Rxa5 50.Rxc3+ Kxb6 51.Rc8 Rc5 52.Rb8+ Ka7!?** (52...Kc6 53.Kd4 Rd5+ 54.Kc4=) **53.Rf8** (53.Rg8!? a5 54.Kd4 Rb5 55.Kc4 Rb4+ 56.Kc5=) **53...a5 54.Kd4 Rb5 55.e4 a4 56.e5 a3 57.Rf1**, and soon (true, after a few adventures) a peace treaty was signed.

And now let's go back to the position that arises after 47.Kf4 Kd5.



[FEN "8/6p1/pP6/P2k4/2r1pK2/2p1P3/

White has an interesting path to a draw: 48.Rg2! c2 (48...Rb4 49.Rxg7 Kc4 50.Kxe4 isn't dangerous) 49.b7 c1Q 50.Rg5+! Ke6 51.b8Q Qf1+ 52.Kg4 Qf3 + 53.Kh4, and his opponent has to settle for perpetual check.

Moreover, even the variation calculated by Van der Wiel, 48.b7 Rb4 49.Rxc3 Rxb7, doesn't promise Black any real winning chances after 50.Rc8 Rf7+ 51.Kg4 Rf3 52.Ra8 Rxe3 53.Rxa6 Ra3 54.Ra8.

It turns out that the subtle rook retreat to c1 wasn't compulsory at all. But it didn't worsen White's position an iota and even offered him a good additional opportunity in one of the variations. Which means that the attempt to use the process of elimination, if not all that accurate, still produced a good result.

I offer you a few comparatively simple exercises, in the solving of which you'll use the process of elimination.

## Exercises

### 1. Ragozin – Boleslavsky

Soviet Championship, Moscow, 1945



[FEN "6k1/4P2p/6p1/1r6/8/5N2/2B2PPP/b5K1 b - - 0 35"]

1...?

### 2. Feldmus – V. Nikitin

Correspondence, 1983



[FEN "1rr2k2/pp1bpp2/3p2pp/3P2P1/3R3P/P2B1P2/1PP5/2K1R3 b - - 0 20"]

1...?

### 3. Timoshchenko – Kuzmin

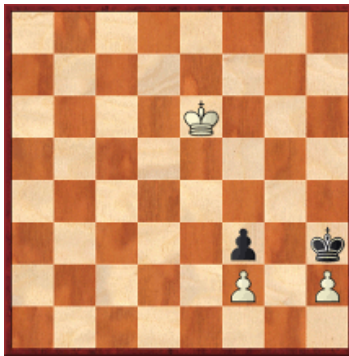
USSR, 1980



[FEN "5k1R/2r2p2/4b3/8/1p6/3B4/r1PK2PP/4R3 b - - 0 1"]

1...?

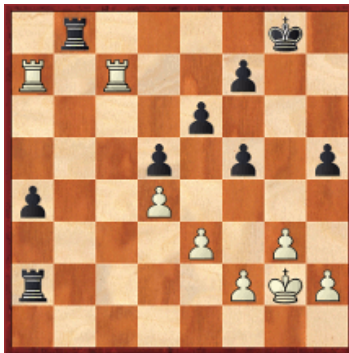
4. J. Moravec, 1925



[FEN "8/8/4K3/8/8/5p1k/5P1P/8 w - - 0 1"]

1.?

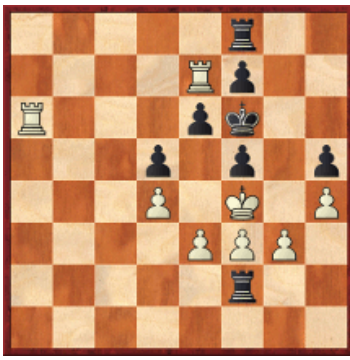
5. Miles – Hort  
Amsterdam, 1982



[FEN "1r4k1/R1R2p2/4p3/3p1p1p/p2P4/4P1P1/r4PKP/8 b - - 0 33"]

1...?

6. Miles – Hort  
Amsterdam, 1982



[FEN "5r2/4Rp2/R3pk2/3p1p1p/3P1K1P/4PPP1/5r2/8 w - - 0 42"]

1.?

## Solutions

### 1. Ragozin – Boleslavsky

Isaac Boleslavsky carelessly played 35...Kf7?!, and after 36.e8Q+! he resigned because of 36...Kxe8 37.Ba4.

By continuing **35...Rb8!** (with the idea of 36...Re8), Black retained winning chances.

### 2. Feldmus – V. Nikitin

Exchange on g5 or advance the h-pawn? The question should be answered not based on positional considerations, but purely concrete ones. In the game there followed 20...h5? 21.Rf4! (threatening 22.Bxg6). Black resigned, as he inevitably loses a pawn and his position is hopeless.

**20...hg! 21.hg Re8+!** was necessary. Black has a difficult ending, but there's still nothing better for him.

### 3. Timoshchenko – Kuzmin

Where should the king retreat to? Gennady Kuzmin "didn't guess right": 29...Ke7? 30.Rb8 Ra4 (if 30...b3, then 31.Rxb3) 31.Re4 Ra1 32.Rxb4, and being two pawns up, White won easily.

Only **29...Kg7!** is correct. Now 30.Rb8 b3 is useless, and on **30.Rh7+**, there is **30...Kf6!** (but not 30...Kf8? 31.Rxe6). Thanks to the threat of b4-b3 Black should get a draw.

### 4. J. Moravec

You have to get close to the pawns so that your opponent doesn't have time to take on h2.

In the variation 1.Kf5? Kg2! 2.h4 Kxf2 the black pawn promotes to a queen with check: 3.h5 Kg3 4.h6 f2 5.h7 f1Q+.

1.Ke5? Kg2! 2.h4 Kxf2 is also bad, as the white queen that appears on the board will immediately be lost: 3.h5 Ke3 4.h6 f2 5.h7 f1Q 6.h8Q Qa1+.

All that remains is **1.Kd5!! Kg2** (1...Kxh2? 2.Ke4 Kg2 3.Ke3+- – Black is in zugzwang) **2.h4 Kxf2 3.h5=.**

### 5. Miles – Hort

Black rejected the "active" defense 33...Rbb2? because of 34.Kh3! Rxf2 35.Kh4! Rxh2+ 36.Kg5+-. He simply defended the f7-pawn: **33...Rf8!** =.

There then followed 34.Re7 (White prevents the move 34...Kg7) 34...a3 35.Kf3 Ra1 36.h3 Ra2 37.h4 Ra1 38.Kf4 Ra2 39.f3 Rf2 40.Rxa3 Kg7 41.Ra6



Kf6, and the position in the next exercise came about.

## 6. Miles – Hort

Tony Miles probably realized that he had no chance of success, but he nevertheless pretended to fight for a win, not suspecting that the dangers might not only threaten his opponent.

After 42.Rd7?? Rg8!, it became clear that there was no satisfactory defense against 43...Rg4#. White played 43.e4, and immediately resigned.

The threat had to be parried by means of **42.Raa7!**=.

To be continued next month.

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