



Traps Part One

A conscious attempt to help your opponent make a mistake is known as a trap. We tempt him to choose an alluring or at least natural continuation, having foreseen a non-obvious retort in advance.

The topic of playing for traps is poorly reflected in chess literature. It usually focuses on how not to fall into a trap, how not to make a move with a hidden refutation. In my view this is a slightly different problem – my [July 2010](#), [August 2010](#), and [September 2010](#) articles were devoted to it. The majority of examples that train you to pay attention to your opponent's resources also develop your ability to avoid the traps we've set.

Here, though, we'll look at the art of setting traps, which is much more difficult. We not only have to determine our opponent's possible train of thought, what he's planning to play, but also simultaneously identify the vulnerable spot in his idea, which, of course, doesn't throw itself at us (otherwise there would be no basis to bank on a mistake). Clearly this is only achievable by players with sharp combinational vision.

I'll start with an ancient episode when a top player fell into a trap set by an amateur (true, the former was only taking his first steps in the international arena at the time).

Middleton – Rubinstein
Germany, 1905



[FEN "5r2/1p1r1k2/p2Pbpp1/2p1np2/4pN2/1P5P/P1PRBPP1/2K4R w - - 0 24"]

After Black's intended 24...Rfd8, the pawn must be defended by means of 25. Rhd1. So the move that was made in the game, **24.Re1!?**, looks strange, and it should have put the opponent on the alert. Rubinstein didn't sense the danger, though, and played according to his plan, which was what his resourceful partner was counting on.

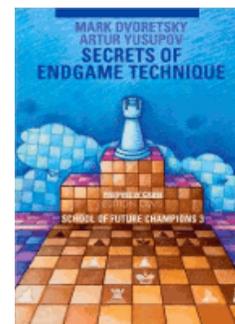
24...Rfd8?

24...b5! was necessary, and if 25.a4, then either 25...Rb8 with a subsequent Rb6, or 25...c4!?

25.Nxe6 Kxe6 26.f4!

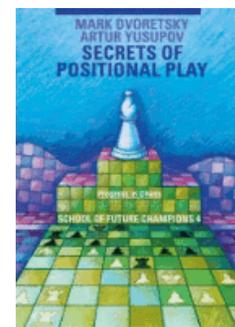
The idea behind the "mysterious" rook move becomes clear: 26...ef?? is impossible 27.Bc4# – the knight is pinned! After the forced **26...Rxd6 27. Rxd6+ Rxd6 28.fe Kxe5**, White is left a piece up (for two pawns). True,

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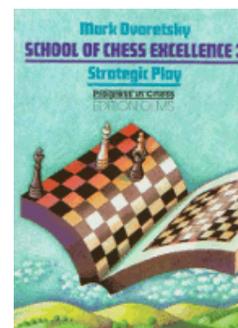
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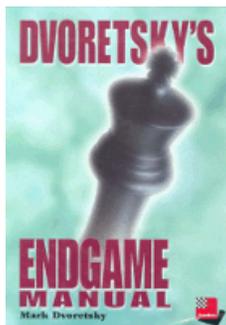
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making good on his advantage isn't that simple, and Akiva Rubinstein, whose technical skills were considerably superior to his partner's, managed to hold out.

Often to make your opponent blunder you need some "bait": an easy, and, at first glance, unpunished opportunity to obtain material or positional advantages.

The following game was played in school tournaments and the players' ratings weren't high.

Rubtsov – Dvoretzky

Moscow, 1963



[FEN "3r2k1/p3bpp1/1p2pn1p/4q3/2P5/
1P2BQN1/P4PPP/2R3K1 b - - 0 22"]

The black pieces are positioned more actively, but it isn't clear how to exploit this circumstance to achieve something substantial. Not much, for example, is promised by switching to an endgame after 22...Qb2!? 23.Qe2 Qxe2 24.Nxe2 Ng4 25.Bd4.

My attention was attracted by a trap idea: lure my opponent into winning the a7-pawn. The main variation quickly shot through my head, and I didn't try to resist the temptation.

22...Rd3!? 23.Qa8+? (23.Rd1) 23...Kh7

But not 23...Bf8, so as not to scare my partner. The bishop must stay under attack.

24.Qxa7?

The trap worked!

24...Rxe3! 25.Qxe7 Re1+ 26.Rxe1 Qxe1+ 27.Nf1 Ne4 28.Qxf7 Nd2

White loses a piece.

29.h4 Nxf1 30.h5 Ne3+ 31.Kh2 Ng4+ 32.Kg3 Nf6

The knight has succeeded in protecting the king from perpetual check. Black won easily.

A trap tactic isn't justified when it doesn't flow from the logic of the position and leads to a worsening of it if the idea is guessed by your opponent.

The following game was played in the early twentieth century. Both the opening setup and the players' subsequent actions were characteristic of the time.

Alekhine – Levitsky

St. Petersburg, 1913, Second match game

1.e4 e5 2.f4 ef 3.Bc4 Nf6 4.Nc3 Bb4 5.Nge2 d5 6.ed f3 7.gf 0-0 8.d4



[FEN "rnbq1rk1/ppp2ppp/5n2/3P4/1bBP4/2N2P2/PPP1N2P/R1BQK2R b KQ - 0 8"]

The simple 8...Nxd5!/=+ gave Black excellent play. Instead of that Stepan Levitsky chose **8...Bh3?** Having prevented castling and threatened the move 9...Bg2, he expected the natural reply 9.Nf4, on which he had prepared an interesting retort.

Alexander Alekhine didn't go along with his opponent's provocation, and after **9.Bg5!?** Bg2 **10.Rg1 Bxf3 11.Qd2** he seized the initiative. Black's subsequent blunders quickly led him to collapse: **11...Be7?** (11...Nbd7+/=) **12.0-0-0 Bh5?! 13.Rde1 Nbd7 14.Nf4 Bg6 15.h4**, and White won.

Incidentally, it made sense to fall into the trap! On 9.Nf4 Levitsky planned to reply 9...Re8+ 10.Kf2 Ng4+? (10...Bf5 unclear is better) 11.Kg3! (11.fg?? Qh4 +) 11...Nf2!? Alas, his idea has a serious flaw: by continuing 12.Qg1! Nxf1+ 13.Kxh3, White achieved a decisive advantage. I don't doubt that Mikhail Tal would have gone for this variation immediately (we'll acquaint ourselves later with a couple of examples where he deliberately fell into the trap his partner had prepared).

Although they say: "No one judges the victors!", I still think that playing for a trap by no means always deserves approval, even if it is crowned with success. I'll give a typical example which has already been investigated in my previous books.

Dvoretzky – Kupreichik

Soviet Championship, First League, Minsk, 1976



[FEN "8/r7/5pp1/3k4/P3R1PK/5P2/8/8 b - - 0 53"]

1...?

A few moves earlier the game was adjourned and both players examined this position in our home preparation.

I was counting only on a logical transfer of the rook to the rear of the passed pawn: 53...Rh7+! 54.Kg3 Rh1. True, after 55.Kf4 Ra1? 56.g5! fg+ 57.Kxg5 Ra3 58.Rf4 Black loses, but by playing 55...Rf1! he disrupts his opponent's plan and prepares g6-g5+ himself. The game would probably have concluded with a peaceful outcome.

Viktor Kupreichik was tempted a different move, strange at first glance, containing a clever trap.

53...Rb7?!

Now it's not his rook but mine that can go behind the pawn, and in two different ways: after 54.Re3 or 54.a5. The second path looks more attractive (in principle it's good to advance a pawn further). I did choose it, which was exactly what my opponent was counting on.

54.a5? Rb3! 55.Ra4 Rxf3 56.a6

It would seem that the pawn could only be stopped by means of 56...g5+ 57.Kh5 Rh3+ 58.Kg6 Rh8 59.a7 Ra8, which, of course, is completely hopeless.

56...Ke6!!

It becomes clear that after 57.a7? g5+ 58.Kh5 Kf7 the white king gets mated.

57.g5 fg+ 58.Kxg5 Rf8 Draw.

After the correct 54.Re3! Ra7 55.Ra3 Ra5! 56.Kg3, Black's position remained difficult, and very probably lost. So was it worth taking a risk if he had a more reliable path at his disposal?

But if you are trying to save a hopeless position or win a completely drawn one, here a trap tactic makes sense, and what's more: sometimes it's the only thing that promises us any hope. "Traps are the last chance" (as I call them), and even very naive ones are successful surprisingly often. Probably because the opponent, not doubting the favorable outcome of the battle for himself, relaxes and loses his vigilance.

A. Petrosian – Hazai

Schilde, 1970



[FEN "2k5/q1p5/3p4/pPpPp1pp/
N1P1Pp2/P4PbP/KQ4P1/8 b - - 0 1"]

Black's position is strategically hopeless. He tries a final trap, which unexpectedly brings success.

1...Qb6!? 2.Nxb6+??

Unjustified greed. By continuing 2.Qd2!, and then, for example, Kb3, Nb2, Ka4, Nd3-c1-b3, White won the a5-pawn, and with it also the game.

2...cb (Black wants to close up the game conclusively with the move 3...h4=) 3.h4 gh 4.Qd2 h3! 5.gh h4.

Draw. Neither the king nor the queen is capable of surmounting the barrier.

Vyzhmanavin – Lerner

Soviet Championship, Lvov, 1984



[FEN "8/8/8/2k5/7R/6rp/2K5/8 b - - 0 74"]

In a drawn position Black tries his last chance.

74...Ra3!? **75.Kd2??**

Correct, of course, is **75.Kb2!** **Rf3** **76.Kc2** **Kd5** **77.Kd2=.**

75...h2! **76.Ke2** **Ra1!** White resigned.

For the two fragments we've just looked at, as well as some of the examples from the exercise section, the words of Charles Dickens are completely appropriate: *Don't leave a stone unturned. It's always something, to know you've done the most you could.*

You'll find a few more endgame "last chance traps" in my book [Tragicomedy in the Endgame](#).

Exercises

1) Chigorin – Schlechter

Ostend, 1905



[FEN "1k6/4qp2/5p2/KP3P1p/P2Q3P/8/8/8 b - - 0 44"]

1...?

2) Dvoretzky – Zlotnik

Blitz game, Moscow, 1989



[FEN "5r1k/pp5p/3q2b1/8/3N1ppR/8/"]

1.?

3) **Tukmakov – Karpov**

Interzonal tournament, Leningrad, 1973



[FEN "1R6/4rppk/2p2q1p/4pP2/8/1B4QP/
P3rPP1/6K1 w - - 0 33"]

1.?

4) **Pilskalnice – Berzins**

Riga, 1962



[FEN "8/p2rk3/R7/P3pp2/8/4KP2/8/8 b - - 0 1"]

1...?

5) **Jansa – Rublevsky**

Ostrava, 1992



[FEN "8/8/4R3/P1p2pp1/2P2k2/
2PK1P2/r7/8 w - - 0 50"]

1.?

6) **Lopez Martinez – Guseinov**

European Championship, Warsaw, 2005



[FEN "r4b1k/5pRp/3p1n1B/4pP1P/1p2P3/q2B1P2/2PQ4/1K4R1 w - - 0 28"]

1.?

Solutions

1) Chigorin – Schlechter

44...Qc7+!

The last trap in a completely hopeless position.

45.Qb6+??

After 45.b6 or 45.Kb4, there's nothing for Black but to resign.

45...Ka8!

Draw. If the queen is captured, it's stalemate, and if 46.Ka6, then 46...Qc8+ 47.Ka5 Qc7!=.

2) Dvoretzky – Zlotnik

The pin on the d-file should decide the outcome of the battle in Black's favor. I tried my only chance.

1.h3!

1.g3? is considerably weaker, on which there are various good replies; for example, 1...Qf6!? And in the variation 1...Rd8 2.Qxg4 Qxd4 3.Qxg6 Black also wins: 3...Qd1+ 4.Kg2 f3+ 5.Kh3 Qf1+ 6.Kg4 Qc4+ 7.Kxf3 Qxh4.



[FEN "5r1k/pp5p/3q2b1/8/3N1ppR/7P/PP3PP1/3Q2K1 b - - 0 1"]

1...?

1...Rd8?

My opponent has fallen into the trap! In the case of 1...g3?! 2.fg fg the rook defends the knight and I can play 3.Qc1 unclear. I managed to win with one of two not completely obvious (especially in a blitz game) methods, united by a general idea: provoking a capture with the rook on g4.

1...Be4! 2.Rxg4 Rd8 3.Qc1 Qxd4 4.Qxf4 Re8-/+ (then again, even after calculating this variation at the board, a player would be right to doubt the evaluation of its consequences because of the exposed position of the black king and the pin on the fourth rank);

1...Rg8! 2.Rxg4 Rd8 3.Qf3 Qxd4 4.Qxb7 Re8-+.

2.Qxg4!+-

On 2...Qxd4, there follows 3.Qxg6. White won.

3) Tukmakov – Karpov

White has no compensation for the his insufficient material. Vladimir Tukmakov tried his last chance: **33.Kf1!**



[FEN "1R6/4rppk/2p2q1p/4pP2/8/1B4QP/P3rPP1/5K2 b - - 0 33"]

1...?

And after **33...Rd2!** – he resigned.

Against someone else White's trap would have had chances of success, but Anatoly Karpov is always attentive towards his opponent's resources. He made the only move with which Black's tactic doesn't work.

On 33...Rb2? there would have followed 34.Qg6+!! fg (34...Qxg6 35.fg+ Kxg6 36.Bxf7+ and 37.Rxb2=) 35.Bg8+ Kh8 36.Bb3+ with perpetual check. The same combination also worked with 33...Re4? – 34.Qg6+!! Qxg6 (34...fg 35.Bg8+) 35.fg+ Kxg6 36.Bc2=.

The move 33...Rd7? (counting on 34.Kxe2? Qd6-+) is refuted by 34.Bxf7! Rxf2+ (the best) 35.Qxf2=+. And 33...Qd6?? even lost because of 34.f6!

4) Pilskalniece – Berzins

The position is drawn, the extra pawn has no significance because of the activeness of the white rook.

1...f4+!? 2.Ke4??

Black's simple trap worked. Equality was preserved with 2.Ke2!

2...Rd6!



[FEN "8/p3k3/R2r4/P3p3/4Kp2/5P2/8/8 w - - 0 3"]

White resigned. In the case of 3.Rxa7+ Ke6 only a rook sacrifice saves him from the mate 4...Rd4#. A pawn endgame is also hopeless: 3.Rxd6 Kxd6 4.a6 Ke6 5.Kd3 Kd5 (*zugzwang*) 6.Kc3 (6.Ke2 Kc4) 6...e4.

5) Jansa – Rublevsky

White's position is hopeless: both 50...Kxf3 and 50...Rxa5 are threatened.

50.Re2! Rxa5?

The simplest way to win is 50...Ra4!? 51.Rg2 (51.Rf2 Kg3) 51...Ra1! with a decisive *zugzwang*.

51.Ra2! Draw.

6) Lopez Martinez – Guseinov

Before ending the battle with perpetual check (28.Rg8+ Nxc8 29.Rxc8+ Kxc8 30.Qg5+ Kh8 31.Qf6+), it makes sense to set a trap for the opponent.

28.Ba6!



[FEN "r4b1k/5pRp/B2p1n1B/4p1P/1p2P3/q4P2/2PQ4/1K4R1 b - - 0 28"]

1...?

In the case of 28...Rxa6? the affair finished with mate: 29.Rg8+! Nxc8 30.Rxc8+ Kxc8 31.Qg5+ Kh8 32.Bg7+! Bxc7 33.Qd8+ Bf8 34.Qxf8#. The move 28...b3? also loses because of 29.Qg2! Qa2+ 30.Kc1.

28...Qxa6!

The only correct response, forcing White to accept a peaceful outcome.

29.Rg8+! Nxc8 30.Rxc8+ Kxc8 31.Qg5+ Draw.

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