



Saving Combinations, Part One

Nothing inspires one, so much as the realization of the hopelessness of one's situation. – a quote from the French writer, Albert Camus.

When we no longer have anything to lose, we sometimes decide on desperate measures, examining lines which, under other circumstances, would not even enter our heads. And sometimes, it is exactly by this means that we find the hidden path to salvation.

In fact, I have just described only one of the possible ways a situation could develop. Unfortunately, matters more often follow quite a different path. Yes, there are some players who come alive in difficult situations; but there are others who do the opposite: letting their hands fall, they stop fighting, for all practical purposes. Sometimes, there are purely chessic shortcomings preventing us from finding a hidden defensive idea – for example, our combinative eye might be dim, or we may be unable to calculate a complex variation to the end. Sometimes, time pressure takes a hand. And finally, sometimes a player simply does not realize how difficult his position is, and doesn't sense that he must look for a radical solution.

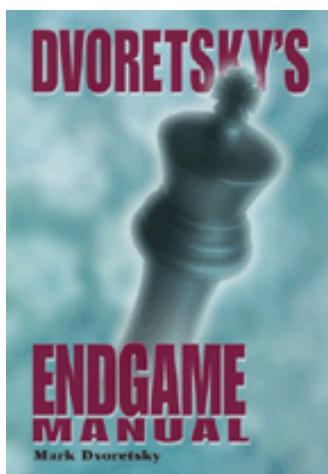
Among other things, even when the situation is objectively not yet hopeless – let's say it's just strategically dubious, or the way things are going, the game doesn't look good for us, as the position gradually gets worse and worse – in such situations, it also makes sense to try for a sharp change in the course of battle.

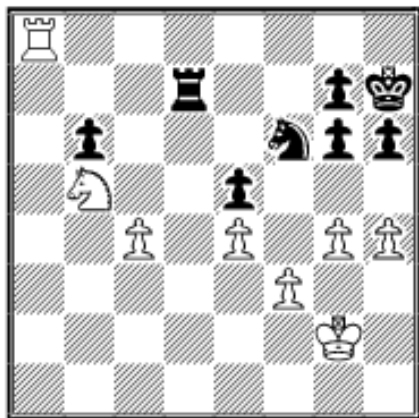
I have brought up the theme of active defense more than once. For example, it occupies the last quarter of my book: [School of Chess Excellence 2: Tactical Play](#) – there, among other things, we deal with various psychological aspects of such situations. The examples I bring herewith to your attention didn't make it into that book, but come, rather, from my notebook of exercises. You can train yourself in finding combinations which can alter the assessment of a difficult, or at least an inferior, position. I recommend that for each one, you first place yourself in the player's position: evaluate the prospects for each side, given a "normal" course of events; try to let just this sense of threatening danger provide you with a stimulus to find a tactical solution. This isn't so simple – in any event, none of those actually playing in these examples (the majority of them very strong players) were able to cope with the task.

Sosonko – Timman
Tilburg 1983

COLUMNISTS

The
Instructor
Mark Dvoretsky





B?

Black's position is much worse than it appears at first glance. His knight on f6 is doing nothing; his pawns at b6 and e5 are weak (White at least threatens 33 Rb8); and if the rook leaves d7, he has to consider White's knight marching to the kingside, creating mate threats.

Jan Timman could only have saved himself by finding the following stalemate

combination:

32...h6-h5!! 33 g4-g5

After 33 gh Nxh5, the knight is activated and Black obtains sufficient counterplay.

33...Nf6xe4! 34 f3xe4 Rd7-d2+ 35 Kg2-f3 Rd2-d3+ 36 Kf3-e2 Rd3-d2+

And the king can't hide from the "berserker" rook.

And now, let's see how matters went in the actual game.

32...Rd2+? 33 Kg3?

Neither side noticed the stalemating possibility. Otherwise, Gennady Sosonko would undoubtedly have preferred the more accurate king retreat 33 Kf1!. In that case, 33...h5 is met decisively by 34 Nc7! (34 g5? Nxe4 =) 34...hg 35 Ne6 (threatening mate) 35...g5 36 hg Nh5 (36...Nd7 37 Rd8+-) 37 Nf8+ Kg8 38 g6.

But now, 33...h5! would again have saved the game: 34 Nc7! Rd3! (34...hg? 35 Ne6+-) 35 Ne6 Nxe4+ 36 Kg2 Rd2+ 37 Kh3 Nf2+ (37...hg+) 38 Kg3 Nh1+, or 37 Kf1 Rf2+ 38 Ke1 Rxf3 39 g5 Nd6 40 Nf8+ Rxf8 41 Rxf8 Nxc4 =.

33...Rd3 34 Kf2 Rd2+?

The last mistake. Black could still have gotten the draw by 34...h5! 35 g5 Nxe4+ 36 Ke2 Rd7 or 36...Rb3.

35 Ke3 Rh2 36 Nd6 Rxh4 37 Nf7 g5 38 Rh8+ Black resigned.

Smejkal – Rogulj

Trencianske Teplice 1979



B?

In contrast to the preceding example, it looks as though all is in order for Black here: he's active on the kingside and his rook may invade at b2. I would not be surprised if he had a concrete method of obtaining the advantage. But if you cannot find such a plan, then at least you have to consider how to maintain equality. For Black's position does contain a few strategic defects: his pawn structure is pretty rickety and his light-squared bishop might eventually end up "bad."

The game continued **21...fg? 22 hg Rb2 23 Rc2 Rxc2?! (23...Bg4 was better, although after 24 Qd3, White has the preferable position) 24 Qxc2 Bg4 25 Re1 Rb8 26 Rb1 Rb6**, and now, the simple **27 Rb3** would have kept a noticeable advantage for White, and his opponent would have had to work very hard to save the game. Unfortunately, in time pressure, Jan Smejkal played a rank blunder: **27 Nb3? Na3.**

In his notes, Branko Rogulj indicates a combination that would have forced the draw:

21...Rb8-b2! 22 Rc1-c2 f4-f3!

Once again, anything but a forcing line would leave Black a little worse: **22...Rfb8 23. Nxe6 Rxc2 24 Qxc2+/=, or 22...Bg4 23 Qd3+/=.**

23 Bg2xf3 Rb2xc2 24 Qe2xc2 Qf7xf3 25 Nc5xe6 Nc4-e3! 26 f2xe3 Qf3xe3+ 27 Kg1-g2 Qe3-f3+

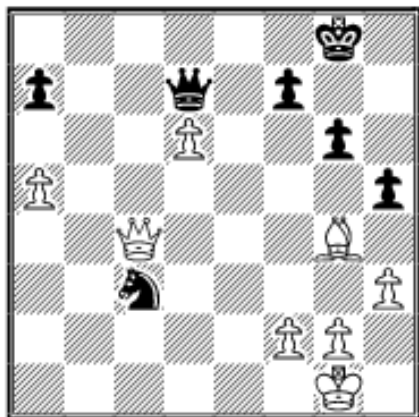
Perpetual check!

Black had a second solution here as well – perhaps even simpler:

21...f4-f3! 22 Qe2xf3 Qf7xf3 23 Bg2xf3 Rf8xf3 24 Nc5xe6 Rb8-b2

The position is even. For instance: **25 Rcb1 (25 ed Rxf2) 25...Rxf2 26 Rxb2 Rxb2 27 ed cd 28 Rf1 (28 Nxc5?! Nd2, with 29...h6 to follow) 28...h6 29 Rf2 = (29 Rf8+ Kh7 30 Rf7+ Kg6 31 Rxa7 Kf5 is worse).**

Voitsekhovsky – Kochiev
Sankt-Peterburg 1999



B?

A shortage of fighting spirit, coupled with an unwillingness to work at the board and calculate complex variations – these are the main reasons why such a talented grandmaster as Alexander Kochiev was unable to fully develop his gift. Here's an example: he chose the primitive **32...Qxd6?**, and after **33 Bxh5! Nd5 34 Bf3**, came out a pawn down and gradually lost.

He had to take the bishop.

32...h5xg4! 33 Qc4-c7!

33 Qxc3 Qxd6 34 Qc8+ Kg7 35 Qxg4 Qd2! leads to a draw. Black has two threats: 36...Qxa5 and 36...Qe1+ (but not 35...Qe5? 36 Qb4!±). White's queen invasion ensures that the pawn will queen, which is undoubtedly why Kochiev spurned 32...hg. In a desperate situation, however, you have to look at every chance – in this case, the attempted counterattack with queen and knight.

33...Nc3-e2+ 34 Kg1-h2

White gets nowhere with 34 Kf1 Qb5 =.

34...Qd7-a4!!

It has to be here! Everything else loses:

34...Qb5? 35 d7 Qb1 36 d8Q+ Kg7 37 Qe5+;

34...Qf5? 35 d7 Qxf2 36 d8Q+ Kh7 (36...Kg7 37 Qe5+) 37 hg (37 Qd1 gh 38 Qd5+- would be good, too) 37...Qg1+ 38 Kh3 Qh1+ 39 Qh2 Ng1+ 40 Kg3+ (with *check!*);

34...g3+? 35 fg Qe6 (35...Qf5 36 d7 Qf1 38.d8Q+ Kh7 38 Qh4+ Kg7 39 Qe5+) 36 d7 Qe3 37 d8Q+ Kg7 38 Qd1.

By the way, Black's moves could also have been transposed: 33...Qa4!! 34 d7 Qa1+ 35 Kh2 Ne2.

35 d6-d7 Qa4-a1 36 d7-d8Q+ Kg8-g7 37 h3xg4

37 Qxf7+ Kxf7 = is not dangerous.

37...Qa1-g1+ 38 Kh2-h3 Qg1-h1+ 39 Qc7-h2 Ne2-f4+

39...Ng1+ amounts to the same thing.

40 Kh3-g3 Nf4-e2+ 41 Kg3-f3 Qh1xh2 42 Kf3xe2 Qh2xg2

42...Qe5+ would also be sufficient.

43 Qd8-d4+ Kg7-g8 44 Qd4xa7

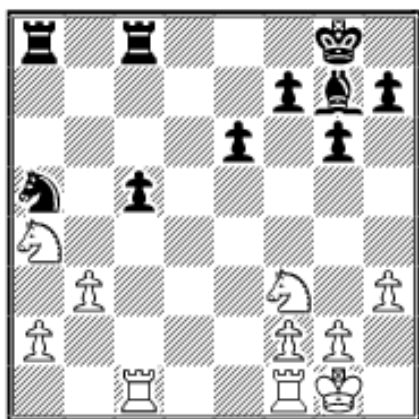
Nor does White have any realistic chances after 44 a6 Qa8+/-.

44...Qg2xg4+

The queen endgame is drawn.

Zlotnik – Vetemaa

Liepaja 1980



B?

After the loss of the c5-pawn, Black's position will become perilous. His best chance at a successful defense is a temporary rook sacrifice:

24...c5-c4!! 25 b3-b4!?

Black's task would be easier after 25 Nb6 cb 26 Nxc8 ba (threatening 27...Nb3) 27 Nb6 (27 Nd2 Bb2) 27...Rb8 (but not 27...Rd8? 28

Ra1+-) 28 Nd7 Rd8 =, or 28...Ra8 =.

25...Na5-c6 26 Na4-b6

26 Rxc4 Rxa4 27 Rfc1 Rca8 28 Rxc6 Rxb4 leads to equality.

26...Nc6xb4 27 Nb6xa8

After 27 Nxc8 Rxc8, Black has enough for the exchange.

27...Rc8xa8

After 27...Nd5! (threatening 28...c3) 28 Rfd1 Rxa8 29 Rxc4 Rxa2 30 Rc8+ Bf8+/-, we get a position of roughly the same kind as in the main variation. It's hard to say which continuation is the more accurate.

28 Rc1xc4 Nb4xa2 29 Rf1-d1

29 Rb1!? Nc3 30 Rb7 Nd5 31 Ng5 Rf8+/-, followed by 32...h6, is about the same.

29...Na2-c3 30 Rd1-d7 Nc3-d5 +/-

Black has a pawn for the exchange and his knight sits beautifully on d5. The position is most likely drawn.

And now, let's see how the game actually went:

24...Rd8? 25 Rxc5

25 Nxc5! was stronger. On 25...Nc6, White could choose between 26 Nxe6 and 26 a4.

25...Nb7 26 Rc7 Nd6 27 Rd1?!

Probably White should have preferred the prophylactic 27 Re1!, preventing the activation of the enemy pawns.

27...e5 28 Re1 e4 29 Nh2 f5 30 Nf1 Nf7 (30...Nb5!?) 31 Rec1 Ne5 32 Ne3 Nd3 33 R1c4 Bd4 34 Re7

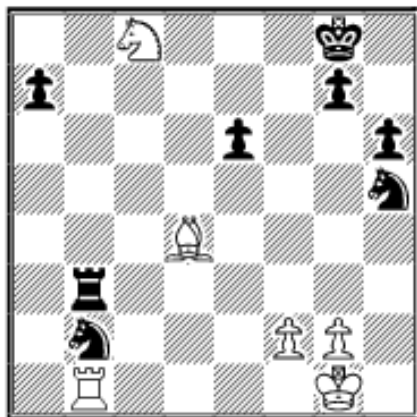
As a result of his opponent's inaccuracies, Black has significantly activated his forces; after 34...Rac8, he would have had good compensation for his pawn minus. In time pressure, however, he lost the thread of the game and his position instantly fell apart.

34...h5 35 Kf1 Bf6?! (35...Nf4; 35...Rac8!) 36 Re6 Rf8?

36...Kf7 37 Rcc6 Be7 was necessary, and if 38 Rxc6? Ne5.

37 Rcc6 Bg7 38 Nd5+. Black overstepped the time-limit.

Leko – Bareev
Dortmund 2002



B?

The knight at b2 is lost, but Black's defensive resources are not yet exhausted. First he must force White to take that knight with his bishop, so that he can then exploit the b-file pin.

34...Rb3-b4! 35 Bd4xb2

If 35 Ne7+ Kh7! 36 Bxb2, and now it's important to stop the knight from getting

away: 36...Rb6! =.

35...Rb4-b7!!

Black must play this to prevent the knight from getting to c6 via e7 (or a7).

36 Nc8-d6 Rb7-b4!!

Once again the knight is hobbled, while Black threatens 37...a5 or 37...Nf4. White has nothing better than to repeat moves by 37 Nc8 Rb7!! =.

Evgeny Bareev did not find this fine domination ploy and made the natural move: 35...Nf4?. After 36 Ne7+ Kh7 37 Nc6 Rb3 38 Ne5! it became clear that he would not be getting the piece back: 38...Ne2+ 39 Kf1 Nc3 40 Rc1!.

38...a5 39 g3 Nd5 40 Nc4 Nb6 41 Nd2 Rb4 42 Bc3 Rxb1+ 43 Nxb1

White has untangled himself and kept his extra piece. Peter Leko does a nice technical job of realizing his material advantage.

43...a4 44 Na3 Nd5 45 Bb2 g5 46 Nc4 h5 47 Ne5 Nb4 48 Kf1 Nc2 49 Ke2 Kh6

49...a3 doesn't help: 50 Kd2 ab 51 Kxc2 Kg7 52 Kxb2 Kf6 53 Nf3 Kf5 54 Nh2! Ke4 55 Kc2+-.

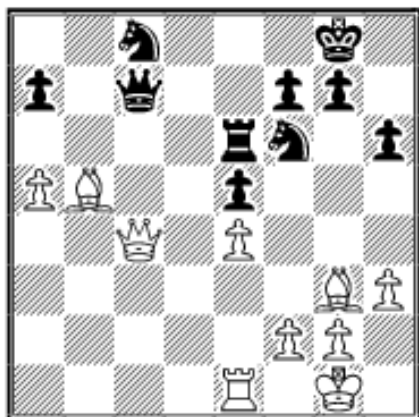
50 Kd3 Nb4+ 51 Kc4 Nd5 52 Bc1 Nf6 53 Kd3

Everyone chooses the winning method that most appeals to him. Another possibility was 53 Nf7+ Kg6 54 Nxf5, or 53 f3!.

53...Nh7 54 Ke2 Kg7 55 Nd7 Kg6 56 Nc5 Kf5 57 Kf3 Nf6 58 Nxa4 h4 59 gh gh 60 Nc3 Ng4 61 Ne2 Ne5+ 62 Kg2 Nd3 63 Be3 Kg4 64 f3+ Kf5 65 Nc3 e5 66 Ne4 Ne1+ 67 Kf2 Nc2 68 Ke2 Nd4+ 69 Bxd4 ed 70 Kf2 Ke5 (if 70...Kf4 71 Nc5) 71 Nc5 Kd5 72 Nd3 Kc4 73 Ne5+ Kc5 (73...Kd5 74 Ng6) 74 Kg2 Kd5 75 Ng6 d3 76 Kf2 d2 77 Ke2 Kd4 78 Nxf4 Black resigned.

Kasparov – Kramnik

Linares 1997



B?

The two bishops are a powerful force in such positions. Sooner or later, White must get to Black's main weakness: the a7-pawn. This assessment is valid, both in the middlegame and after the exchange of queens.

On 29...Qxc4? 30 Bxc4 Rc6, White could reply 31 Rc1!? Kf8 32 Bxe5 Nxe4 33 Bb2±.

Black did not have it any easier in the game after 29...Qb8? 30 Qc5. What follows is generally understandable: Garry

Kasparov gradually consolidated his forces, prepared the transfer of his bishop to the f2-a7 diagonal, and invaded the enemy position with his heavy pieces.

30...Nd6 31 Bd3 Nd7 32 Qa3 Nf8 33 Rb1 Qc7 34 Rc1 Qd8 35 a6 Ng6 36 Qc5 Re7 37 f3 Ne8 38 Bf1 Rc7 39 Qe3 Rd7 40 Kh2 Re7 41 Rc6 (41 Rb1!) 41...Kh7 42 Qc1 Nc7 43 Qc3! Qd7 44 Rc5 Qd6 45 Bf2 Ne6 46 Rd5 Qb8 47 Rb5! Qd6 48 Rb7 Nd4 49 Qb4 Qf6 50 Qc5 Nc6 51 Be3 Re6 42 Bc4 Re7 43 Bd5 (53 Bxf7 Rxf7 54 Rxf7 Qxf7 55 Qxc6 was good too) 53...Nd4 54 Rxa7 Rxa7 55 Qxa7 Ne7 56 Bc4 h5 57 Qc5 Black resigned.

Black had to exploit his unexpected opportunity to get rid of the dangerous a5-pawn immediately.

29...Qc7xa5! 30 Qc4xc8+ Kg8-h7

Two white pieces are *en prise*, so the rook has to pin itself.

31 Re1-b1 Re6-b6

The bishop is going to be recovered (32 Qc4 a6); the only question will be whether White can whip up threats on the kingside in the meantime.

32 Qc8-f5+ Kh7-g8 33 Qf5xe5

33 Rc1 Qxb5 34 Rc8+ Ne8 35 Qxe5 Qxe5 36 Bxe5 Re6 is not dangerous – it leads to complete equality.

33...a7-a6 34 Bg3-h4

34. Qc7 Rxb5 = would be useless.

34...Rb6xb5

Black loses after 34...ab? 35 Ra1 Qd2 36 Ra8+ Kh7 37 Qf5+ g6 38 Qc5 Qd1+ (38...Qd6 39 Qc8+-) 39 Kh2 Qd6+ 40 Qxd6 Rxd6 41 e5.

35 Rb1xb5 a6xb5

35...Qxb5 36 Bxf6 gf = is possible too.

36 Bh4xf6 g7xf6 37 Qe5xf6 Qa5-e1+ 38 Kg1-h2 Qe1xe4 39 Qf6xh6 b5-b4=.

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