



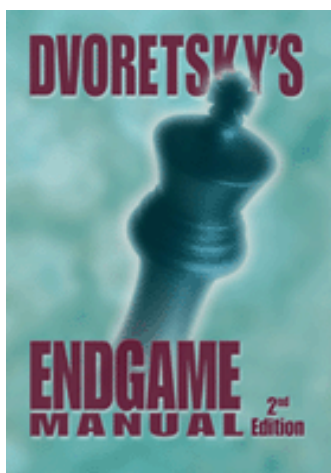
Chess Botany - "Variational Debris" Part Two

To those who found the training method recommended in my previous [article](#) interesting, I offer the following exercise. In contrast to the Simagin – Leonovich game we examined earlier, some variations here end in positions that are difficult to evaluate. Well, that's what happens most often in real life, too. No sense going round and round about it: just fix in your mind that this position's evaluation was "unclear" (that's an evaluation, after all!), and without wasting any more time on it, move on to studying the other lines.

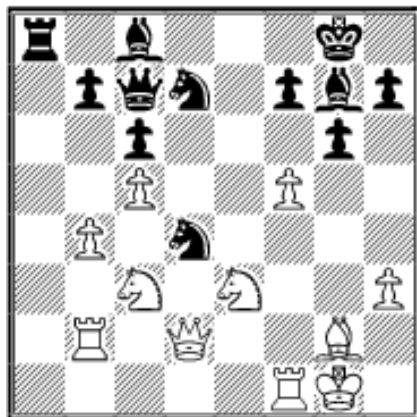
COLUMNISTS

The Instructor

Mark Dvoretsky



Portisch – Najdorf
Santa Monica 1966



1...?

Black is on move, with a pawn for the exchange, and control of the dark squares. But he needs to consider White's threat of 30 f6 – as well as 30 Nc4 and 30 Ne4.

The task is to calculate the sortie 29...Ra3, and evaluate its usefulness.

Before concentrating on the analysis of a problem variation, it's generally sensible to make some kind of assessment of the starting position. For example, if it favors White, and the move 29...Ra3 leads either to equality or to double-edged complications, such an outcome is desirable. On the other hand, if Black is better in the starting position, such an outcome would not be what we want.

Unfortunately, this position is very difficult to assess one way or the other. We may at least suppose that Black is bound to find sufficient resources to maintain dynamic equality. The course of the game supports this assessment.

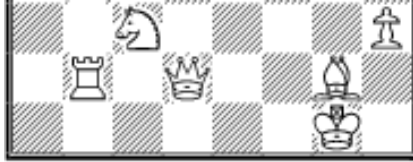
29...gf!? 30 Ra2

Najdorf's suggestion of 30 Nxf5?! Nxf5 31 Rxf5 Ne5 32 Rg5 is risky.



1...?

The grandmaster continued this variation as follows: 32...h6? 33 Rg3 Nc4 34 Rxc7+ Kxc7 35 Qd4+ Ne5 36 Ne4, intending 37 Nd6, when White clearly has the initiative. But 32...Ng6! is far stronger; for example, 33 Rb1?! h6 34 Rh5 Qf4!–+.



30...Rxa2 31 Qxa2 Nf8 32 Qf2 b6 33 Na4

Here, a draw was agreed. After 33...b5, Black's position is preferable.

Now let us consider a direct answer to the question we posed.

29...Ra8-a3!?

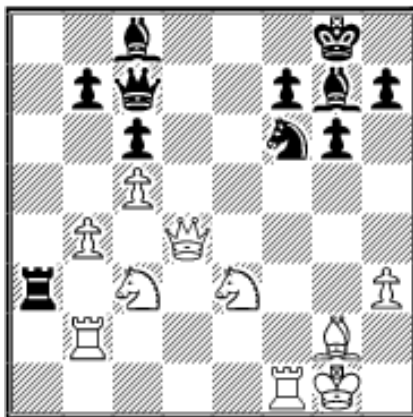
Najdorf believed this would give Black the advantage. Unfortunately, his analysis was inaccurate.

30 f5-f6!?

Of course, this counterstroke must be the first one considered. 30 Nc4? Rxc3 loses for White; on 30 Ne4?, 30...Bh6!-+ is a very strong reply. But 30 Nb1!? appears to have no refutation. However, this is unnecessary in any case, since Black risks nothing here: the knight moves far away from the theater of action, and the rook can retreat to almost any square it wishes – preferably to a1.

30...Nd7xf6

It turns out that taking the knight by 31 Qxd4? is not good for White.



1...?

True, the position after 31...Nh5 32 Qh4 Bxc3 33 Rbf2 remains unclear, but 31...Ng4! 32 Qf4 Qxf4 33 Rxf4 Nxe3 leads to an obvious advantage for Black.

31 Ne3-c4!



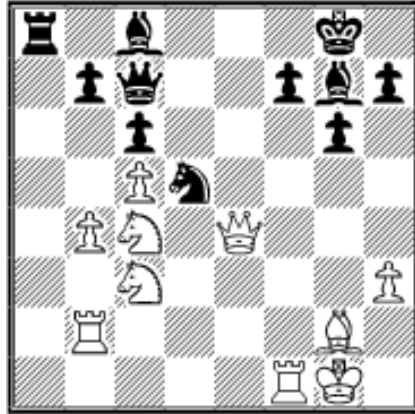
1...?

What can Black do here, with two pieces *en prise*?

We begin by examining, and refuting, the combination 31...Rxc3? 32 Qxc3 Ng4 33 hg (33 Nd6 Nf5! is much weaker) 33...Ne2+ 34 Rxe2 Bxc3, since after 35 Re8+ Kg7 36 Nd6 Bxb4 37 Rxf7+ Qxf7 48 Nxf7 Bxc5+ 39 Kh2, White wins.

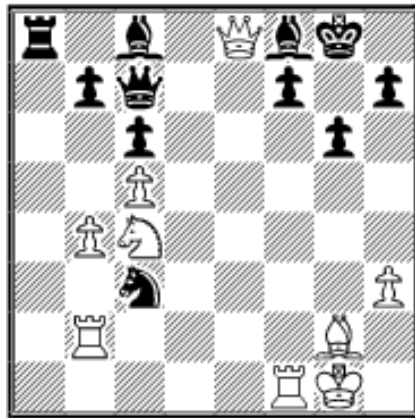
Najdorf analyzed **31...Ra8**. First, I will note that a variation he failed to consider – 32 Nb6 Rb8 33 Qxd4 Nd5 34 Qc4 (34 Qe4 Bxc3 is weaker) 34...Nxc3 35 Nxc8 Rxc8 – results in a position of rough material equality (two pawns for the exchange). For now, we will take this outcome as an acceptable one for us, and return to our study of the immediate capture of the knight.

32 Qxd4 Nd5 33 Qe4



1...?

The answer to the question of how best to capture on c3 is no longer so difficult to guess. The following supplementary question would be more interesting: what should White do after 33... Nxc3?! 34 Qe8+ Bf8?

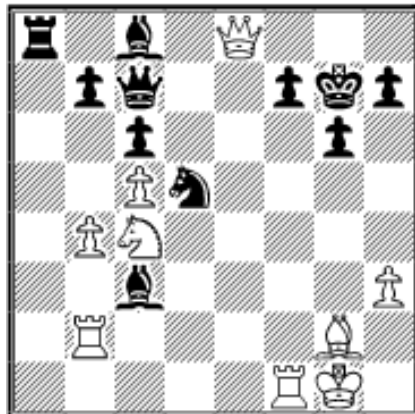


1.?

Najdorf gives 35 Nb6 Rb8 36 Nxc8 Rxc8 37 Rxf7. However, here Black unexpectedly saves himself by 37...Ne2+!! 38 Rxe2 Rxe8 39 Rxc7 Rxe2 40 Rxb7 Rb2 41 Bxc6 Rxb4!.

35 Rbf2! would be much stronger; for example, 35...f5 36 Nb6 Rb8 37 Rd2+-.

33...Bxc3 34 Qe8+ Kg7



1.?

Najdorf's variation is 35 Bxd5? Qg3+! (not 35... cd? 36 Nd6+-) 36 Bg2 (36 Rg2? Bd4+) 36...Be6! 37 Qxa8 Bxc4, favoring Black. He's right there: I don't see a saving line for White:

38 Rc2 Bxf1-+.

38 Rbf2 Bd4! (threatening 39...Bxf1) 39 Qxb7 Bd5! 40 Kh1 Qxh3+.

38 Qe8 Bxf1 (38...Bxb2 39 Qe1μ is inferior) 39 Rf2 Bc4 40 Rf3 Bd4+ 41 Kh1 Qh4+-.

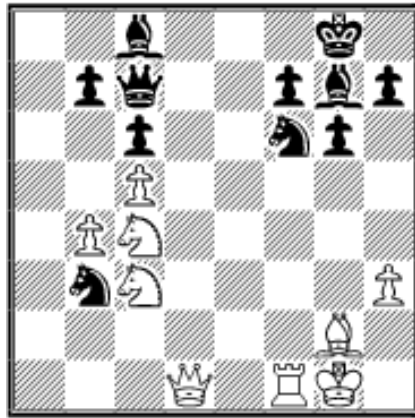
The grandmaster rejected **35 Nd6!**, because of the reply **35...Nf6**. But if we extend this variation by just one move – **36 Re2!** – and try to find a decent defense for Black, we will become convinced that he's in a bad way. Which in turn means, that not only does 31... Ra8 not give Black the advantage, it even places him at the brink of defeat. There's a definite logic to this: what's the point of zooming the rook up to a3, if it's only going to beat an inglorious retreat, one move later?

Now, let's try the more active

31...Ra3-b3!! 32 Rb2xb3

32 Nd6 Rxb2 33 Qxb2 Nf5 would give Black excellent counterplay. I admit that here, as also in some of the other lines, my evaluation is not too defined, but I truly don't know who stands better, or by how much.

32...Nd4xb3 33 Qd2-d1



1...?

Black's knight has wandered into a trap – however, the rest of his pieces now become extremely active.

33...Bc8-e6!!

The tempting 33...Bxh3? could be justified after 34 Bxh3 Qg3+ 35 Bg2 Qxc3 36 Qd8+ Bf8 37 Qxf6 Qxc4 38 Rf4 Be7!, with chances for both sides. But White has the cold-blooded response 34 Ne2! (from here, the knight controls the vital dark squares around its king) 34...Be6 35 Qxb3 Ng4 36 Rf4±.

Nor is 33...Nd4? satisfactory, after 34 Qxd4 Nd5 35 Qe4 Nxc3 36 Qe8+ Bf8 37 Nd6 Be6 38 Re1±, with the unpleasant threat 39 Rxe6.

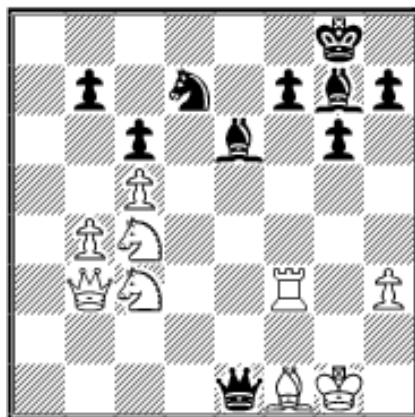
34 Qd1xb3 Qc7-g3 35 Rf1-f3

35 Qd1 could be answered, either by 35...Bxc4 unclear, or by 35...Qxc3!? 36 Qd8+ Bf8 37 Qxf6 Qxc4 with counterplay.

35...Qg3-e1+ 36 Bg2-f1

On 36 Rf1, Black could either repeat moves by 36...Qg3, or continue 36...Qh4!?

36...Nf6-d7!



An amazing position! White's a rook ahead (for just two pawns), yet the tied-down state of his pieces and Black's powerful threat of 37...Ne5 allow us to evaluate this position as being more in Black's favor, since he will probably win the knight back, having then two pawns for the exchange with all his pieces active.

Conclusion: Objectively, the move 29...Ra3!? is correct. However, from a practical standpoint, it's probably not the move Black should play. In my view, it gives Black more complex problems to solve than White, requiring extraordinary accuracy and resourcefulness; he's the one who's more at

risk. The move 29...gf!?, which he selected in the actual game, was safer.

Conversely, I will not insist on my conclusion – that wasn't the point here. The main thing is that we have had some training in complex calculation, learning something about hacking our way through the debris of variations.



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